

**Early Muslim Traditionalism:
A Critical Study of the Works and Political
Theology of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal**

Submitted by

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to the University of Exeter

as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies

September 2011

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Abstract

The political theology of Ah^{mad} Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855) is analysed through comprehensive examination of the authenticity of theological and juridical books attributed to him. The eponym of the Ḥanbalī school (*madhhab*) of law and theology, Ah^{mad}'s importance lies in his teaching as a jurisprudent and his practices as a *zāhid* (renunciant), which attracted many students to his circle. However, he is best known for his reputation as a defender of correct belief, and for firmly resisting the doctrine of three 'Abbāsid caliphs that the Qur'ān was created, although he was imprisoned and beaten during the Inquisition known as *al-Mihnah* (between 218/833 and c. 232/847).

As a result of Ah^{mad}'s importance, a variety of different opinions and epistles were ascribed to him. Theologically, the most important among these are the Six Creeds and *al-Radd 'alā al-Zanādiqah wa-al-Jahmīyah* which is a polemical epistle. In jurisprudence there were response collections from Ah^{mad}'s students called *al-Masā'il*, eight of which are still extant, either partly or completely. These works are examined in this thesis.

Ah^{mad}'s theo-political ideas are critical to understanding the political thought of Sunnism in general, and the study analyses his doctrines on the importance of the *Jamā'ah* (Community), *Tā'ah* (Obedience) and *al-Amr bi-al-ma'rūf wa-al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding right and forbidding wrong). Ah^{mad} was a quietist thinker, but the main purpose of his quietism was in fact to save the unity of the Muslim community from internal fighting and protect the common people who always lacked security and suffered from threats of looting of their shops and houses. Though a quietist, Ah^{mad} was not in favour of the rulers and avoided all kinds of connections to them, including not accepting their gifts or working with them. He became angry with his family when they accepted the caliph's money.

Acknowledgements

Many friends and mentors have helped and advised me over the last few years and without them this thesis would not have seen the light of day.

First, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Professor Robert Gleave, at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, for his constant guidance and support, and for all his corrections and comments on my work. I would also like to thank Professor Bernard Haykel of Princeton University for his support and for reading and commenting on several chapters of the thesis. In addition, I offer my gratitude to Professor Clifford Edmund Bosworth, my second supervisor, for his help and support. I thank the staff at the Old Library, University of Exeter, and am especially appreciative of the help given by Mr Paul Auchterlonie, the Middle East Librarian.

In Lebanon, Professor Ridwan al-Sayyid of the Lebanese University has been a good friend and mentor and I thank him for all his support over many years. Mr. Ābah al-Mukhtār helped me better understand certain French texts and studies.

Many of my friends in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East have discussed and debated my ideas and they are too numerous to list here, but they know who they are and for all their help and friendship I am grateful. My thanks are also extended to several individuals who have been a great support in helping to polish the language of this work.

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge and thank my family for all their support and patience with my scholarly ways. My parents, my wife Sitah and my children Omar, Farah and Talal have been wonderful and kind companions on this long journey.

NOTE ON CONVENTIONS

Translations, apart from the Qur'ān, are my own except where a specific one is cited. Some place names are transliterated, but place names familiar in English are given their usual English spelling (for example Mecca and Baghdad). For reasons of clarity and consistency, dating throughout this thesis is according to the Christian Era. When the Islamic lunar Hijrī dates are also given they usually appear in the format 241/855, otherwise, they will be followed by the short reference A.H. I mainly follow the Library of Congress system of transliteration, but with some changes. For example: I use b. for the Arabic بن when the name is followed by the name of the immediate father (for example Mālik b. Anas), but I use Ibn for the Arabic ابن when the name is not followed by the name of the immediate father (such as Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal), or is followed by a *kunyah* (e.g., Ibn Abī Ya'lā), or when the individual is known by the Ibn's name more than by his own name (e.g., Ibn Ḥāmid). Another difference from the Library of Congress System is that of *tanwīn*; for ؓ I use an, un and in. However, I use superscript for the *tanwīn* to distinguish it from the normal letters.

Full names and titles are given at first place of citation, then short referencing is applied. Full bibliographic details are found in the bibliography, preceded by a list of abbreviations.

”إنِي رأَيْتُ أَنَّهُ لَا يَكْتُبُ أَحَدٌ كِتَابًا فِي يَوْمِهِ إِلَّا قَالَ فِي غَيْرِهِ :
 لَوْغُيْرِ هَذَا لَكَانَ أَحْسَنَ وَلَوْ زِيَّدَ هَذَا لَكَانَ يُسْتَحْسَنَ وَلَوْ
 قُدْمٌ هَذَا لَكَانَ أَفْضَلَ وَلَوْ ثَرِكَ هَذَا لَكَانَ أَجْمَلَ . وَهَذَا أَعْظَمُ
 الْعَبَرِ وَهُوَ دَلِيلٌ عَلَى اسْتِيلَاءِ النَّقْصِ عَلَى جَمْلَةِ الْبَشَرِ .“
 القاضي الفاضل عبد الرحيم البيساني

“I am not a theologian (*sāhib kalām*) and I do not agree to discuss anything, unless it exists in the Book of God, or in *hadīth* from the Prophet, or from his Companions or from their Successors. Apart from these things, any discussion [of an issue] is not praiseworthy (*māḥmūd*)”.

Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal

”لَا يَزَالَ الْمَرءُ فِي فُسْحَةٍ مِّنْ عَقْلِهِ حَتَّى يُؤَلِّفَ
 كِتَابًا يَعْرُضُ عَلَى النَّاسِ مَكْنُونًا جَهْلَهُ، وَيُتَصَفَّحَ
 بِهِ إِنْ أَخْطَأُ مَبْلُغَ عَقْلِهِ.“

عمرو بن جبر الجاحظ

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Introduction

There are currently more than 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, the vast majority of whom are Sunnīs. The Sunnīs include followers of the four schools of law (Hanafīs, Mālikīs, Shāfi'īs and Ḥanbalīs), as well as adherents of different theological parties such as the Salafīs, *Ash'arīs*, and *Māturīdīs*. Although there is disagreement among the Sunnīs on most religious issues, they have found common ground on important religio-political matters such as the respect due to the Prophet's Companions and the general doctrines of the Imamate. Sunnī political theology developed over several centuries before taking its final shape among traditionalist circles in the late third and early fourth A.H./ninth and tenth centuries. Among the eponymous Sunnī schools, only that of Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal had a direct influence on making political quietism a formal Sunnī doctrine.

After the Inquisition, Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal became a beacon of correct religious beliefs, and his importance among traditionalists was preeminent.¹ For this reason, some people ascribed their own opinions to him so as to acquire more legitimacy for them. Meanwhile, others attributed to him views which they thought he should have had, in place of those which in fact he did have. These attempts to alter Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal's legacy led to disagreements among his followers and to the circulation of conflicting reports about his legal and theological views.

Understanding Ahmad's political theology is crucial to understanding Sunnī political theology in general. However, as noted, there are different and at times contradictory reports about Ahmad's legal and theological teachings. Accordingly, this study makes a close examination of these various reports. Importantly, differences and conflicts between them are not treated as technical errors, but rather are regarded as traces of disputes among traditionalists and Ḥanbalīs, both in Ahmad's time and afterwards.

The first part of this dissertation deals with the authenticity of the theological works attributed to Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal and his *responsa*. Thus, Chapter One examines six

¹ The traditionalist Abū Zur'ah al-Rāzī stated that Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal was not particularly famous before the Inquisition. Yet after the Inquisition he became legendary everywhere. *لَمْ أَزِلْ أَسْمَعَ النَّاسَ بِذِكْرِهِنَّ* *أَحْمَدُ بْنُ حَنْبَلٍ بَخْيَرٌ وَيَقْدِمُونَهُ عَلَى يَحْيَى بْنِ مَعْنَى وَأَبِي خَيْثَمَةَ، غَيْرَ أَنَّهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنْ ذَكْرِهِ مَا صَارَ بَعْدَ أَنْ اُمْتَحِنَّ. فَلَمَّا أُمْتَحِنَّ ارْتَفَعَ ذَكْرُهُ* 'Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *Maṇāqib al-imām Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 456. *فِي الْأَفَاقِ*

creeds which have been ascribed to Ah^mad and a polemical book against unbelievers and the *Jahmīs* (*al-Radd ʻalā al-Zanādiqah wa-al-Jahmīyah*), and Chapter Two is devoted to the study of eight of Ah^mad's *Masā'il*. The first part of the study concludes by demonstrating how the early Ḥanbalīs attempted to resolve the differences and contradictions contained within reports of Ahmad's theological and legal doctrines.

The second part is concerned with Ah^mad's political theology. It should be emphasised that in order to understand Ah^mad's political opinions, one must be aware of the corresponding views of other traditionalists. Accordingly, this aspect of Ah^mad's teachings is studied here within the broader framework of political theology among the traditionalists. It is also important to examine Ahmad's posthumous influence on the development of the doctrines of the early Ḥanbalīs and Sunnīs in the third and fourth A.H/ninth and tenth centuries.

Islamic political theology does not deal only with the legitimacy of current rulers. One of its essential purposes is the evaluation of the early history of Islam, the caliphate after the Prophet's death, and the Umayyad and ʻAbbāsid dynasties. Accordingly, Chapter Three looks at how Ah^mad saw the legitimacy of early Islamic rulers, and his views on the preference between the Companions and his judgement about the conflicts that broke out between them. Chapter Four concerns the necessity of the *imāmah* and the legitimate methods for selecting or appointing the imāms (i.e., political leaders).

Chapter Five then explores the political quietism of Ah^mad and other Sunnīs by pointing out the importance of certain religio-political concepts such as the *jamā'ah* (community) and *tā'ah* (obedience). Finally, Chapter Six focuses on the relationship between the *ʻulamā'* and the rulers, especially Ah^mad and the ʻAbbāsid caliph, al-Mutawakkil. This chapter also examines the relationship between Ah^mad's family and students with the state, and the relationship between later Ḥanbalīs and the caliphs in Baghdad.

Literature review

George Makdisi (d. 2002) labelled the nineteenth century as “the great enemy of the Ḥanbalī[sm] studies”, pointing to various reasons why Orientalists at that time did not view Ḥanbalism studies in a favourable light: (1) the Ḥanbalīs were seen as anthropomorphists and conservative traditionalists who were against rational theologians (*mutakallimūn*); (2) the Ḥanbalī school of law was neither as large nor significant as other schools of law; and (3) Ḥanbalism was negatively portrayed in the works of Goldziher (d. 1921) and Macdonald (d. 1943) who followed Goldziher very closely. According to Makdisi, Goldziher and his followers played a major role in driving scholars away from Ḥanbalism studies.²

By the end of the nineteenth century two significant works had been published about Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and his school. On the basis of considerable study of previously little-known manuscripts for his doctoral research on the *Miḥnah*, the American scholar Walter Patton (d. 1925) published *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥnah* (Leiden, 1897), which can be recognised as the first work on Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal in modern Western studies. Patton admired Aḥmad as “a great saint and a defender of orthodoxy”,³ and as “the most remarkable figure of the camp of [Muslim] orthodoxy.”⁴ He also noted the important influence that Aḥmad’s personality had on his students and after his death in the Muslim world.⁵

Ignac Goldziher, the great Hungarian orientalist, subsequently wrote two important works about Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Ḥanbalism, in addition to his study of *al-Musnad*,⁶ and the entry on Aḥmad in *EI*.⁷ These two works are his review of Patton’s book,⁷ and his article on the Ḥanbalī movements. Since Goldziher was more positive towards the rationalist trends in Muslim theology and law of rationalism, he showed little love for the Ḥanbalīs. However, despite paying little attention to Ḥanbalism, he did note three important points about the early Ḥanbalīs. The first was that they

² George Makdisi, “Hanbalite Islam”, 219–20.

³ Walter Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna: a biography of the imām including an account of the Mohammedan Inquisition called the Miḥna*, 218–234 A. H., 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁶ Ignac Goldziher, “Neue materialien zur literatur des Ueberlieferungswesens bei den Muhammedanern”. I owe this reference to Christopher Melchert, *Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 133.

⁷ *Idem*, “Review of Walter Patton, *Aḥmed Ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*”.

connected with the common people. Second, he identified the existence of several movements within Ḥanbalism which he wrote about in his study entitled *Hanbalitischen Bewegungen* [Ḥanbalī Movements] (published in 1908).⁸ Third, he pointed out changes in the socio-political relationship between the Ḥanbalīs on one side and the state and other parties on the other, during the fifth and sixth A.H./eleventh and twelfth centuries, that led to the Ḥanbalīs shifting from being a “repressed church” towards becoming a “militant church”.⁹ Goldziher’s opinions of Ḥanbalism, as Makdisi asserts, did discourage other scholars from studying the Ḥanbalī school.¹⁰

However, from the early 1940s on, Orientalists came to view Ḥanbalism in a more positive light and since then have produced significant studies on the school. This change in attitudes was encouraged by Henri Laoust (d. 1983) and Makdisi, both of whom provided great service to the study of Ḥanbalism. First, they produced academic studies about the school and its scholars. Second, they edited many Ḥanbalī manuscripts and published them for the first time. Third, they defended Ḥanbalism against its nineteenth-century critics, and argued in favour of the “rational” features of the school. For them, Ḥanbalīs were not against *kalām* and Sūfism, but instead “accommodated representatives of both within [their] ranks.”¹¹ Fourth, they encouraged their students to write about Ḥanbalism, thereby producing a real shift in Ḥanbalī studies. However, in their quest for “rational” Ḥanbalism, Laoust, Makdisi, and their students focused on the later Ḥanbalīs and paid relatively little attention to Ahmad himself and his early followers.

Even so, Laoust wrote and edited some important texts from the early period. In particular, he edited the theological work of Ibn Baṭṭah al-‘Ukbarī (d. 387/997) entitled *al-Sharḥ wa-al-ibānah*,¹² and also wrote an article (published 1959) on the Ḥanbalīs under the caliphate in Baghdad (241-656/855-1258).¹³ He divided this article into eight parts, the first four of which dealt with the early Ḥanbalīs between 241-

⁸ Idem, “Zur Geschichte der Hanbalitischen bewegungen”.

⁹ Makdisi, “Hanbalite”, 224-25.

¹⁰ Ibid., 222.

¹¹ Merlin Swartz, “Hanbalite Madhab”, in *EIr*; Laoust, “Hanābila”, in *EP*; Makdisi, “Hanbalite”.

¹² Henri Laoust, *al-Sharḥ wa-al-ibānah ‘alā ṣusūl al-Sunnah wa-al-diyānah = La Profession de foi d’ibn Baṭṭa*, (ed. and tr.).

¹³ Henri Laoust, “Le Hanbalisme sous le califat de Bagdad (241/855-656/1258)”.

403/855-1013, while the remaining four concerned the Ḥanbalīs in Baghdad around 403-656/1013-1258.

The first part of Laoust's article focused on Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and his works with the aim of demonstrating that he was both a *faqīh* and a *muhaddith* (*i.e.*, not only a *faqīh*). Laoust also attempted to prove that Aḥmad and Sunnism were friendly towards, rather than enemies of, the Ṣūfis and Ṣūfism. By contrast, he argued that Aḥmad rejected only some of the new teachings espoused by certain Ṣūfis, regarding them as innovations, rather than the movement as a whole. The second part of the article focused on Aḥmad's students up to the death of ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad in 290/904, since Laoust suggested that the Ḥanbalī school was a collective work by Aḥmad's pupils. The third part covered the period between 290-334/904-945 which Laoust described as the time of the spread of the Ḥanbalī school. The fourth part examined the period between 334-403/945-1013, during which time the Ḥanbalī school was developing in Baghdad while the city was under Buyid control. The remaining parts of Laoust's article are not of concern to this study since they dealt with the later Ḥanbalīs.¹⁴

Although Laoust relied on biographical dictionaries for his article on Ḥanbalism, his work was advanced for the time it was published. Furthermore, he wrote several important entries about early Ḥanbalīsm for *EP*: for example, “Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal”, “Ḥanbalīa”, “al-Marwāzī” (*i.e.*, al-Marrūdhī: Laoust spelled his name wrongly), “al-Barbahārī”, “al-Khallāl”, “Ghulām al-Khallāl”, “al-Khiraqī”, and “Ibn Ḥāmid”.

As mentioned above, the crucial point about this “revolution” in Ḥanbalī studies is that little attention was paid to the early Ḥanbalīs. Laoust, Makdisi, and their students were enthusiastic about establishing “rationalism” as an essential element of Ḥanbalism, and accordingly, they focused on rational or semi-rational Ḥanbalīs such as Ibn ‘Aqīl, Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū Ya‘lā and Ibn Taymīyah. Christopher Melchert has pointed out that another reason why the Orientalists avoided studying the traditionalists and the early Ḥanbalīs was that they found the nature and methodology of the books of the traditionalists unattractive. As Melchert notes:

¹⁴ Laoust, “Le Hanbalisme”.

The attractiveness of a systematic work like the *Risāla[h]* of Shāfi‘ī is undeniable, and scholars are not to be blamed for spending time with it. Neither should we be surprised if the taste that relishes the *Risāla[h]* should be repelled by an unsystematic work like *al-Ilal wa-ma‘rifat al-rijāl* of [‘Abd Allāh b.] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. But scholars should not go from reading the *Risāla[h]* and similar works because they are attractive to dismissing the *Ilal* and the movement behind it as unimportant.¹⁵

The 1990s witnessed the indisputable establishment of academic studies on early Ḥanbalism. Christopher Melchert wrote his PhD dissertation in 1992 on “*The Formation of the Sunnī schools of law, 9th-10th centuries C.E.*” (under George Makdisi's supervision), in which he devoted a chapter to the early Ḥanbalīs, and especially to the importance of Abū Bakr al-Khallāl as a central figure in the formation of the Ḥanbalī school. This was followed by Nimrod Hurvitz's PhD dissertation on *Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and the formation of Islamic orthodoxy* (1994). The works of these two scholars are discussed in detail as follows.

Christopher Melchert has written several very important studies on early Ḥanbalism. His book on Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (2006) is more than a biography. While it starts with a biography of Aḥmad, the following chapters deal with different aspects of his doctrines. One chapter focuses on Aḥmad as a learned traditionist (*muḥaddith*) and expert on traditional criticism, another chapter is devoted to Aḥmad's jurisprudence and gives an account of the formation of the Ḥanbalī school, and a further chapter presents Aḥmad as a Sunnī theologian; here Melchert, drawing on six creeds attributed to Ahmad, presents Aḥmad's views against those of other Muslim parties, and ends the chapter with a discussion of Sunnī theology after Aḥmad. The concluding chapter concerns Aḥmad's piety. Melchert has also devoted several articles to the study of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. Two of these articles deal with two of Aḥmad's works, *al-Musnad* (2005) and *al-Zuhd* (2011).¹⁶ In another article concerning Aḥmad's adversaries (1997), Melchert indicates that although Aḥmad was against various groups of Muslims such as the *Jahmīyah*, the *Mu‘tazilah*, the *Shī‘ah* and the

¹⁵ Christopher Melchert, “Traditionist-jurisprudents and the framing of Islamic law”, 384.

¹⁶ Idem, “The *Musnad* of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal: how it was composed and what distinguishes it from the Six Books”; idem, “Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s Book of Renunciation”.

Rationalists, his main struggle was with the semi-rationalist middle party.¹⁷ In yet another article on Ahmād and the Qur’ān (2004), Melchert notes that Ahmād relied heavily on the traditions to devise Islamic law. He argues that in this way the importance of the Qur’ān to Ahmād did not come from it being a principle of lawmaking, but rather from its importance for purposes of worship and piety.¹⁸

Melchert has produced other studies about early Ḥanbalīsm. He has written about the Ḥanbalīs and the early Ṣūfīs in the third and fourth A.H./ninth and tenth centuries (2001), and as well as studying the connections between the Ḥanbalīs and the early Ṣūfīs in Baghdad at that time, has also studied Ghulām Khalīl (d. 275/888) and his inquisition of the Ṣūfīs, and the conflict between the Ḥanbalīs and al-Ṭabarī.¹⁹ He has studied al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941), the leader of the Ḥanbalīs at this time, and has discussed the authenticity of the book, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, which was attributed to Ghulām Khalīl and al-Barbahārī. He suggests that it was most probably written by al-Barbahārī.²⁰

Melchert has proposed that the Ḥanbalī school went through two stages in its formation: first, Ahmād’s juridical answers were gathered together by his students; secondly, Abū Bakr al-Khallāl compiled Ahmād’s responses in his *al-Jāmi’*, and also wrote a biographical dictionary of the Ḥanbalīs. The formation of the school was completed by al-Khiraqī (d. 334/945-6) who wrote the first short handbook (*mukhtaṣar*) of the school.²¹ Melchert’s studies have certainly advanced our knowledge of Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal and early Ḥanbalīsm. However, he has so far devoted only a few pages to Ahmād’s political theology. Furthermore, despite challenging the attribution of *al-Radd ‘ala al-Zanādiqah wa-al-Jahmīyah* to Ahmād, and of Ṣāliḥ’s version of *al-Zuhd*, Melchert has not questioned the authenticity of other works and the *Masā’il* that have been attributed to Ahmād.

Nimrod Hurvitz has also written some significant studies on Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal and early Ḥanbalīsm. His book, *The Formation of Ḥanbalīsm: Piety into Power* (2002), is divided into three parts. The first concerns Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal’s life, family,

¹⁷ Idem, “The Adversaries of Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal”.

¹⁸ Idem, “Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal and the Qur’ān”.

¹⁹ Idem, “The Ḥanābilīs and the early Sufis”.

²⁰ Ibid., 360-62; idem, “al-Barbahārī”, in *EF*.

²¹ Melchert, *The Formation*, 137, 148.

education, and piety (which latter he describes as mild-asceticism, a concept to which he has devoted an article²² with a special focus on Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal). The second part deals with the formation of the Ḥanbalī school; according to Hurvitz, Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal gathered students around him by sharing his moral standards and mild-asceticism. In turn, these students went on to transmit his doctrines through “collection” books called *Masā’il*. Thus, for Hurvitz “the Ḥanbalīs were not merely a group of lawyers whose sole preoccupation was legal doctrine, but rather members of a social movement that maintained distinct moral and theological positions.”²³ Hurvitz has expanded his opinions about the formation of the Ḥanbalī school and Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal in various articles, and has stated that Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal’s legal opinions “...served as the main source for the later development of Ḥanbalī doctrine”²⁴ and also that “the most creative development in the formation of the Ḥanbalī doctrine (other than Ibn Ḥanbal’s legal opinions) is the creation of a *Mukhtaṣar* based on al-Khiraqī’s editorial policies and opinions.”²⁵ Based on this he has written on al-Khiraqī and the importance of his *Mukhtaṣar* in the formation of the Ḥanbalī school (2007).²⁶ The third part of Hurvitz’s book deals largely with the *Mīhnah* of Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal, to which he has also devoted an article (2001).

Hurvitz has made some significant comments and pointed out some important issues regarding the Ḥanbalī school, especially with regard to Ahmād’s mild-asceticism and his social circle. However, there are also some major problems with his writings. First, he does not make sufficient use of primary sources. For example, as indicated in Chapter II below, Hurvitz acknowledged only three of the *Masā’il* collections attributed to Ahmād and used them infrequently in his book. He acknowledged two other *Masā’il* in later articles, but also made it clear that he had not seen them and had therefore not used them. By contrast, eight of the *Masā’il* are examined in the present study. Furthermore, Hurvitz has made judgements on the importance of al-Khallāl’s works without even mentioning any of them. Other examples of the limited use that Hurvitz makes of primary sources are listed in the following chapters.

²² Nimrod Hurvitz, “Biographies and mild asceticism: a study of Islamic moral imagination”.

²³ Hurvitz, *The Formation*, 73.

²⁴ Hurvitz, “The *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Khiraqī and its place in the formation of Ḥanbalī legal doctrines”, 15.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

The second issue with Hurvitz's work is that he does not seem fully to understand the nature of some early texts, which has led him to make erroneous assumptions about them. For example, he claims that "almost all of Ibn Ḥanbal's confidants and early disciples were known for their loyalty to him and their moral uprightness, but none excelled as [a] transmitter of traditions, and therefore nearly all were ignored by compilers of Traditionist biographical dictionaries."²⁷ Moreover, Hurvitz has wrongly assumed that Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī's book, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, is concerned with including the entries of transmitters of tradition whose dates of death span the period from 256 to 275 A.H.²⁸ However, the *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* only records transmitters of tradition who appeared in the traditional chain of the Six Books. The authors of these books were approximately the same age as Ahmad's students, so it would not have been acceptable for them to transmit the traditions of their peers. On the other hand, they would have been able to transmit the traditions of older generations.

Three of the authors of the Six Books transmitted traditions directly from Ahmad: namely al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875) and Abū Dāwūd al-Sijstānī (d. 275/889). Meanwhile, the other three authors transmitted Ahmad's traditions through his students: that is, al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) through Abū Dāwūd, Ahmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Tirmidhī, and al-Kawsaj; al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915) through his son ‘Abd Allāh, and his students al-Kawsaj, al-Husayn b. Manṣūr al-Naysābūrī, ‘Abd al-Malik al-Maymūnī, ‘Amr b. Manṣūr al-Nasā'ī, Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Tirmidhī, Muḥammad b. Dāwūd al-Miṣṣīṣī and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Dhuhlī; and Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887) through ‘Abbās al-‘Anbarī and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Dhuhlī.²⁹ Thus, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* is not the right book for examining the identities of those among Ahmad's students who transmitted traditions.

Hurvitz also misinterprets some Arabic texts as will be seen in later chapters. Furthermore, he misspells the names of some of Ahmad's close pupils: for example, he writes al-Marwadhī instead of al-Marrūdhī and Fawzān instead of Fūrān.

A number of other scholars have written important studies on Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal and the early Ḥanbalīs. For instance, in her *Chapters on marriage and divorce: responses*

²⁷ Hurvitz, *The Formation*, 77-8.

²⁸ Ibid., 180 fn. 24.

²⁹ Yūsuf b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī asmā’ al-rijāl*, 1: 440-42.

of *Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Rāh[a]wayh* (1993), Susan Spectorsky has translated and edited the legal answers of Aḥmad and Ibn Rāhawayh on marriage and divorce from three of the *Masā'il* collections. Her work covers the *Masā'il* of Abū Dāwūd, al-Kawsaj and ‘Abd Allāh and includes short introductions on each of them. Furthermore, she devotes some of the introduction to her book to studying the central issues of marriage and divorce in Islamic law. Despite her translations of these chapters, the book does not tell us much about Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Masā'il*. However, Spectorsky has built upon this work in a short article on Aḥmad’s *fiqh* which she summarises as follows:

Ibn Ḥanbal readily answers questions on non-controversial matters, but whenever he knows of conflicting traditions or conflicting opinions, he refuses to risk allowing his own answer to become authoritative. In fact, he answers all questions in terms of traditional criticism. If he cannot answer a question satisfactorily within the framework of traditions, he prefers not to answer at all.³⁰

Other scholars who have devoted chapters in their books to Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and the doctrines of the early Ḥanbalīs include Michael Cooperson and Michael Cook.

Cooperson has presented the biographies of four individuals who claimed to be the “heirs of the prophets” in his book, *Classical Arabic biography: the heirs of the prophets in the age of al-Ma’mūn* (2000). He devotes the fourth chapter to Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal who is cited as an exemplar of the *hadīth*-scholars, and discusses Aḥmad's piety and Inquisition with an emphasis on whether he capitulated to the caliph as to whether the Qur'ān was created. Although Cooperson relies on early sources to explore Aḥmad's piety (e.g., *Kitāb al-Wara'*), his life, and Inquisition (Ṣalīḥ and Ḥanbal's accounts), he has also benefited from modern studies such as the works of Melchert and Joseph Van Ess. The most important part of Cooperson's study, from my point of view, is his work on the relationship between Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Bishr b. al-Ḥārith al-Ḥāfi. He also devotes an article to the relationship between these two outstanding figures (1997).³¹

³⁰ Susan Spectorsky, “Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s fiqh”, 461.

³¹ Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 178-87; idem, “Ibn Ḥanbal and Bishr al-Ḥāfi: a case study of biographical traditions”.

Meanwhile, Michael Cook has devoted fours chapters of his book, *Commanding right and forbidding wrong in Islamic thought* (2001), to the study of the Ḥanbalīs. Of chief concern here are the two initial chapters, the first of which focuses on Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal while the second deals with the Ḥanbalīs in Baghdad. In addition to examining the theoretical doctrines of Aḥmad and his early followers on commanding right and forbidding wrong, these chapters also explore many of the Ḥanbalī practices of *al-amr bi-al-ma'rūf wa-nahy 'an al-munkar*. In addition they examine the relationship between Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and the early Ḥanbalīs, and the state and general population of Baghdad. Cook's ideas are presented and discussed in more detail in Chapters V and VI of this study.

As has been said above, Aḥmad's entries in *EI^r* and *EI^f* were written by Goldziher and Laoust respectively. In *EI^f*, which has not yet been printed, Aḥmad's entry is written by Livnat Holtzman and is less significant than the earlier entries. Holtzman's writing shows no familiarity with Aḥmad's works. For example, she attributes to Aḥmad a book called *al-Wara'* (as can be found in other sources such as Sezgin and Laoust); however, this book is by Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī (whose name is wrongly spelled several times in Holtzman's article as al-Marwazī). Another example is Holtzman's claim that Aḥmad "allow[ed] himself a certain degree of reasoning", and then cites Abrahamaov to support this claim. Abrahamov based his claim on *al-Radd 'alā al-Zanādiqah wa-al-Jahmīyah*, a book that is wrongly attributed to Aḥmad and whose authenticity is doubted by Holtzman in the same article.

It is not possible to make a thorough study of the political theology of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and the early Ḥanbalīs without referring to the works of Ira Lapidus and especially his article on "The separation of state and religion in the development of early Islamic society" (1975). Lapidus saw the formation of Ḥanbalism as "the third step in the separation of state and religious and communal life",³² and in this regard commented that:

Ḥanbalism fused the tradition of autonomous religious activity with the heritage of political activism and rebellion borne by the *ahl-Khurāsān* – a fusion with explosive implications for the

³² Lapidus, "The Separation of state and religion in the development of early Islamic society", 370.

religious authority of the Caliphate and for the relations between state and religion.³³

He linked the formation of Ḥanbalism to the people of Khurāsānī origin who were living in al-Harbīyah in Baghdad during the tenth century (fourth A.H.).³⁴ Thus, according to Lapidus, first the *Muttawwi‘ah* movement and then the Ḥanbalīs emerged from among these people. In reply, Wilferd Madelung wrote an article (1990) refuting the views of Lapidus on the formation of Ḥanbalism, demonstrating in particular that Sahl b. Salāmah, a leader of the *Muttawwi‘ah* movement, was a *Mu‘tazilī* rather than a proto-Ḥanbalī. Accordingly, he was of the opinion that the followers of Sahl b. Salāmah could not be Ḥanbalīs since, in his words, they consisted largely “of the very elements against whom Sahl b. Salāmah and his supporters had sought to protect themselves.”³⁵ The differing views of Lapidus and Madelung, and Ahmād’s attitudes towards Sahl b. Salāmah and the *Muttawwi‘ah* movement are all discussed further in Chapter V of this study.

There are a number of other books that must be mentioned here. The most important modern Arabic work on Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal up till now is Muḥammad Abū Zahrah’s *Ibn Ḥanbal: ḥayātuh^u wa-‘aṣruh, ārā’uh^u wa-fiqhuh* [Ibn Ḥanbal: his life and times, his doctrines and jurisprudence] (1947). As its title indicates, Abū Zahrah’s book was divided into two parts. The first concerned Ahmād’s life, education, knowledge, and his objectives as a scholar. Abū Zahrah’s main argument in this section of the book was that Ahmād was a *faqīh* and a *muhaddith* (as opposed to just a *faqīh* as some scholars suggest). In the first part, Abū Zahrah also considered Ahmād’s piety and way of life, and the Inquisition, and ended by providing an overview of the politics of the period in which Ahmād lived and of the juridical and theological conflicts in which he became involved. For his knowledge of Ahmād, Abū Zahrah relied heavily on Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Manāqib al-imām Ahmad*, Abū Nu‘aym’s *Hilyah al-awliyā’*, and various other books including those by al-Dhahabī.

The second part of Abū Zahrah’s book concerned Ahmād’s doctrines and jurisprudence. It started by examining Ahmād’s theology. Importantly, Abū Zahrah

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 382.

³⁵ Wilferd Madelung, “The Vigilante Movement of Sahl b. Salāma al-Khurāsānī and the origins of Ḥanbalism reconsidered”, 336.

argued that although Ah^mad followed the Qur^ān and the Sunnah, he was not an anthropomorphist. Abū Zahrah used the works of Ibn Taymīyah and Ibn Qutaybah for this section, as well as the creeds attributed to Ah^mad in *Manāqib Ah^mad*. The second part also dealt with Ah^mad's political opinions. Here Abū Zahrah used only Ah^mad's creeds as reported in the *Manāqib*. The rest of the book was then devoted to the transmission of the Ḥanbalī school, its development, and its principles, with certain legal issues being studied from a Ḥanbalī perspective in the process. In this part of his book Abū Zahrah used only later sources, especially books by Ibn Taymīyah and Ibn al-Qayyim. Therefore, in summary, although Abū Zahrah used some late and doubtful sources, his book is still highly important for current scholars of the Ḥanbalī school.

Another modern Arabic work is 'Abd Allāh al-Turkī's *Uṣūl madhab al-imām Ah^mad Ibn Hanbal: dirāsah uṣūlīyah muqāranah* [The Principles of Ah^mad Ibn Ḥanbal's School: a comparative *uṣūlī* study] (1974). However, because the author relied on later sources to study the Ḥanbalī school this book does not provide a very good understanding of Ah^mad's principles: hence scholars wanting to study later Ḥanbalism would find it more useful.

Some scholars wrote introductory studies on the Ḥanbalī school of law to provide guidance to its scholars, books, and terminologies, etc. The Ḥanbalī Syrian scholar, 'Abd al-Qādir Ibn Badrān (d. 1927), wrote the posthumously-published work *al-Madkhāl ilā madhab al-imām Ah^mad Ibn Hanbal* [Introduction to the School of Imām Ah^mad Ibn Ḥanbal]. Ibn Badrān divides his book into eight chapters that cover the theological and juridical principals of the school. He also relays and comments on Ah^mad's creeds, which are mainly found in *Tabqāt al-Hanābilah*, and *Manāqib al-Imām Ah^mad*. For the principles of the Ḥanbalī school, it is clear that Ibn Badrān depends on later Ḥanbalī scholars such as Ibn Muflīḥ (d. 763/1363), Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) and al-Mardāwī (d. 885/1480). He devotes a chapter to the famous Ḥanbalī books with a short introductory essay for each, while Ḥanbalī terms are dealt with in another chapter. More recently, Bakr Abū Zayd has published a major work on Ḥanbalism entitled, *al-Madkhāl al-mufaṣṣal ilā fiqh al-imām Ah^mad Ibn Hanbal wa-takhrījāt al-ashhāb* [A Comprehensive introduction to Ah^mad Ibn Ḥanbal's jurisprudence and the expositions of the Ḥanbalīs] (1997). This book is a useful tool for those who are interested in studying the Ḥanbalī school since it gives an overview

of the school's development, key Ḥanbalī scholars and books, special Ḥanbalī legal terms, and a wide range of other information relevant to the school. Furthermore, Abū Zayd makes his enmity and lack of respect for Orientalism clear throughout the book.³⁶

There are some books that treat Aḥmad as a critic of *hadīth*. Although these books are important for studying Aḥmad's method of criticising traditions, they do not add anything of major significance to the subject of this thesis.³⁷

Scholars have produced a great deal of work on Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Ḥanbalism; however, little attention has been given to examining the authenticity of his works and his political theology. This thesis is an attempt to provide a detailed examination of Aḥmad's works in theology and jurisprudence, and to apply the outcome of this scrutiny to a study of his political theology and its impact on the evaluation of the political theology of early Sunnism in general.

³⁶ Bakr Abū Zayd, *al-Madkhal al-mufaṣṣal ilā fiqh al-imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal wa-takhrījāt al-aṣḥāb*, 1: 431.

³⁷ For example: Bashīr ‘Alī ‘Umar, *Manhaj al-imām Aḥmad fī ‘ilal al-hadīth*; Abū Bakr Laṭīf Kāfi, *Manhaj al-imām fī ta‘līl al-ta‘līl wa-ahtarhū fī al-jarh wa-al-ta‘dīl*.

Part One

Aḥmad's works

Primary sources and methodology

Only in recent decades have the authentic works of the eponymous Sunnī schools of law been closely scrutinised. In his *Studies in early Islamic jurisprudence* (1993), Norman Calder provided an important examination of some of the early texts of these schools, including those of Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik and al-Shāfi‘ī. Applying a hermeneutical method and stressing the contradictions, Calder re-dated the majority of these works, maintaining that the books were not attributable to the eponyms of these schools of law, and that they were delivered over time by circles of scholars who studied questions of law, and listed them in these books.

Calder’s work prompted wide debates among the academic community, but it was the “authentic” nature of the eponymous works that became a fundamental question in the later texts. Only Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s works stayed largely untouched. Apart from the book attributed to Aḥmad, *al-Radd ‘alā al-Zanādiqah wa-al-Jahmiyah*,³⁸ other works were accepted as having been written by Aḥmad himself, or, at least, as having presented his doctrine.

There are, of course, some exceptions. In his article on Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s *al-Zuhd*,³⁹ Christopher Melchert examined two versions of the book; the first of which was narrated by Aḥmad through his son ‘Abd Allāh, while the second was narrated by another son, Ṣāliḥ. Melchert concludes that the latter version was mistakenly attributed to Ṣāliḥ; rather it constituted a selection of extracts from an early manuscript of ‘Abd Allāh’s version, although the author’s name was omitted and someone instead ascribed the book to Ṣāliḥ.

Nimrod Hurvitz has devised a way of examining the reports surrounding Aḥmad’s biography. He divides the early sources into two groups: ‘family members’ and ‘anonymous contemporaries’. On the one hand, Hurvitz notes that the family members’ reports are within the bounds of possibility. There are no miracles or exaggerations relating to Aḥmad’s moral life. In general, there is nothing in these

³⁸ Melchert, *Aḥmad*, 101; Cooperson, *Classical Arabic biography*, 125; Holtzman, “Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal”, in *EP*.

³⁹ Melchert, “Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s Book of Renunciation”, 348-49.

reports that is obviously unbelievable. On the other hand, Hurvitz points out some problems about this group of narrators. He notes that these family members were ideologically motivated. In order to repair Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s image, the family members probably omitted, rather than invented, unrealistic and unsuitable aspects of Aḥmad’s biography. However, Hurvitz concludes that “each specific anecdote seems reliable.”

The exaggerations of Aḥmad’s morality, his miracles and the stories about his supernatural feats come from anonymous contemporaries: therefore their reports should be “analysed carefully and used selectively”.⁴⁰

Several problematic questions can challenge Hurvitz’ methodology.

1- There are limitations in dividing the reports from Aḥmad into two groups only. In fact, there are other groups that should be mentioned. The first is Aḥmad’s close disciples, such as al-Marrūdhī, Fūrān, Ibn Hāni’ and Abū Dāwūd. The reports from this group are very important in understanding both Aḥmad’s life and juridical opinions. The second are students who collected *ḥadīths* or maybe some juridical opinions from Aḥmad but they were not necessarily followers of his doctrines. This group make up the vast majority of Aḥmad’s 500 students that were included in Ibn Abī Ya‘lā al-Farrā’’s *Tabaqāt al-Hanābilah*.

2- Hurvitz calls the people who narrated exaggerated reports from Aḥmad, such as his neighbour al-Warkānī, ‘anonymous contemporaries’; however, this is an inaccurate label as some of their names are known to us. Moreover, being unknown to us these days does not mean that they were not known to people during their time.

3- Not all exaggerated reports were merely being narrated through those “anonymous contemporaries”. Hurvitz gives an example of one such implausible miracle, which was narrated by an unknown contemporary of Aḥmad. While Aḥmad was being flogged, his trousers threatened to fall to the ground, but Aḥmad prayed to God to keep them; thus the trousers were restored and fastened securely. This story was additionally narrated by Aḥmad’s pupil Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Hurvitz, *the Formation*, 6-7.

⁴¹ ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad al-Balkhī, *Qabūl al-akhbār wa-ma‘rifat al-rijāl*, 2: 153.

4- Hurvitz does not pay attention to the differences between the reports of Ahmād's family members and those reports which appear in later sources. It seems he accepts both reports, and presumably this is why he accepts the authenticity of Ahmād's attributed book *al-Radd 'alā al-Zanādiqah wa-al-Jahmīyah* as it was related from Ahmād on his son 'Abd Allāh's authority. However, evidently, many reports were attributed to Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal in later sources through his family members, as will be shown in this study. 5- Hurvitz also ignores the contradictions between the reports from Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal which were told by his family such as the differences between different versions of Ṣāliḥ's *Sīrah* or between Ṣāliḥ's *Sīrah* and his cousin Ḥanbal's *Mīhnah*. Some of these differences will be presented in the last chapter of this study.

The most important methodological questions concern the authenticity of the books, and the opinions attributed to Ahmād by his immediate followers. The first part of this thesis is devoted to a close examination of both the theological and jurisprudential works attributed to Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal. The first chapter of this study scrutinises Ahmād's creeds and *al-Radd*, while the second chapter explores his *Masā'il*. This study argues that the contradictions between different reports attributed to Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal suggest that these reports do not present Ahmād's own views; rather they reflect the disagreements among Ahmād's students or, in wider circles, among the traditionalists in the third and early-fourth AH/ninth and tenth centuries.

Another method is to look for quotations of the reports attributed elsewhere in the literature to Ahmād, and to seize on those that were not attributed to him. This way of reading the texts is based on the assumption that, when faced with two readings that are equally acceptable, we should choose the more difficult text, supposing that a careless scribe will be more likely to have substituted a familiar word for an unfamiliar one. For the purposes of this study, this mode of reasoning encourages the view that scribes would have been more inclined to ascribe texts authored by people of unexceptional or modest fame to Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal than to assign his texts to lesser names.

A third method focuses on the purported transmitters of Ahmād's reports. This method is used to support other evidence, rather than as a means of independent

argument. To this end, and in order to support other arguments, I have mainly paid attention to two things: namely, the weaknesses of the transmitters, and breaks (*inqṭā*) in the chains of transmission. Choosing Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal as a central figure in Sunnī theology, and the religio-political subject that is the *imāmah*, will shed light on the development of traditionalist political theology in the formation period of Islamic ideology.

Four categories of Ḥanbalī literature are used here. The first includes theological books and creeds attributed to Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal, which will be studied in the first chapter of the thesis. Second are the works of Ahmad's immediate followers, such as the *Masā'il* collections, his opinions on theology, and his critique of the transmitters of the traditions, which are all examined in Chapter Two. The third is al-Khallāl's work *al-Jāmi'*, which is the most insightful contribution when examining Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal's legal opinions. One can use al-Khallāl as a reliable source since at times he included variant reports, and at other times contradictory reports from the *Masā'il* of Ahmad's students. He did not exclude reports that he did not like or agree with; we now see that the reports he related to the *Masā'il* match other reports in other sources. One should be careful about reports that al-Khallāl did not transmit directly from the *Masā'il*; however, he might have transmitted them indirectly. It could even be suggested that those reports that al-Khallāl did not directly transmit from the *Masā'il* collectors should be treated as a fourth group. This fourth group or category consist of reports which were found in later sources (from the fourth A.H./tenth century and afterwards). One should be careful not to relate these reports to Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal, but also to the student who claimed to hear them from Ahmad. These reports need to be examined carefully and used selectively.

Chapter I

Ahmad's theology

1.1. Ahmad's creeds

1.1.1. Introduction

Watt glosses the term creed (*'aqidah*) as “dogma” or “articles of faith”,¹ a definition which has been expanded by Wensinck:

A creed may take various forms: it may consist only of a few words or may be a whole treatise; it may be a doxology, a short phrase, or a work on dogmatics. This is as true of Islam as it is of Christianity; moreover, in both religions the short formula is anterior to the creed, which in its turn is anterior to the treatise on dogmatics²

Wensinck notices that creeds represent the faith of the community in opposition to that of the sects. This means creeds reflect the struggle of the community;³ their elements are mostly geared to proselytism and polemic. There are always two parties: “We” the community who hold the correct belief; and “They” the sects (heresiarchs) who hold the false belief.

Riḍwān al-Sayyid indicates that the purpose of the traditionalists’ creeds is to prove their identity through denying the beliefs of others.⁴ This means that the attitude of “Us” is explored with respect to the attitudes of “Them”. On one occasion, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal was asked:

قال أبو داود السجستاني: سمعت أحمد سئل: هل لهم رخصة أن يقول الرجل: كلام الله ثم يسكت
قال: ولم يسكت؟

لولا ما وقع الناس فيه كان يسعه السكوت، ولكن حيث نكلموا لأي شيء لا يتكلمون؟

“Is it acceptable for someone to say ‘[the Qur’ān] is God’s words’ and remains silent [without adding ‘and uncreated’]? ” Ahmad answered: “Why do they become silent? If there had not been [disagreement on the Qur’ān]

¹ Montgomery Watt, “Akīda”, in *EF*.

² A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim creed: its genesis and historical development*, 1.

³ Ibid., 102.

⁴ Riḍwān al-Sayyid, “Ahlu al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah: dirāsah fī al-takawwun al-‘aqadī wa al-siyasī”, 234.

between the people, he might have been silent. But when they have discussed [the Qur'ān] theologically (*yatakallamūn*) for what reason do they not discuss (*yatakallamūn*) [i.e., and add ‘uncreated’]?”⁵

The same idea can be found in a report narrated from Aḥmad by ʻUthmān al-Dārimī (d. 289/893), who quotes Aḥmad saying

كنا نرى السكوت عن هذا قبل أن يخوض فيه هؤلاء، فلما أظهروه لم نجد بدًّا من مخالفتهم والرد
عليهم

We used to choose keeping silent on this [matter] before they had talked about it. However, when they expressed [their belief], we had no alternative but to differ from them and to refute them⁶

Al-Sayyid considers the traditionalists’ creeds in the third A.H./ninth century to have appeared in a “completed system”, aimed at answering the rationalists’ questions, and protecting the belief of the common people (*al-āmmah*) by giving them a reliable and coherent text. Furthermore, they did not claim these creeds as their own, but rather they attributed them to the *salaf* (the early Muslims). The aim of this attribution was to approve their own legitimacy on the one hand; and to assert the ‘real identity’ of the Muslims (which continues and has not been disrupted) on the other.⁷ One can note that the traditionalists’ creeds start with a sentence that claims this is the “Belief of Ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-Jamā‘ah”, or “These are the principles of the Sunnah, on which the leaders of the pious early Muslims and the foundational jurisprudents have reached a consensus” or “Ahl al-Sunnah reached a consensus on ...”, or “I found the scholars (*‘ulamā*) in the East and the West believe ...”.

The remarkable point is that, in some later traditionalists’ creeds, the authority of the *salaf* was merged or supplanted with an assertion of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s belief, and it was common to say: “This is what Aḥmad believes” instead of “This is what the *salaf* or the traditionalists believe”. Ibrāhīm al-Harbī (d. 285/899), for example, states

كل شيء أقول لكم: هذا قول أصحاب الحديث؛ فهو قول أحمد ابن حنبل، هو ألقى في قلوبنا –
منذ كنا غلمناً اتباع حديث رسول الله ... وأقوابيل الصحابة، والاقداء بالتابعين

⁵ (Abū Dāwūd) Sulaymān b. al-Ash‘ath al-Sijistānī (hereafter: Abū Dāwūd), *Masā'il al-imām Aḥmad*, 355.

⁶ ʻUthmān b. Sa‘īd al-Dārimī, *Naqd al-imām Abī Sa‘īd ʻUthmān b. Sa‘īd ʻalā al-Marīsī al-Jahmī al-‘anīd fīmā iftarā ‘alā Allāh ‘azz wajal’ min al-tawhīd*, 1: 538.

⁷ al-Sayyid, “Ahl^u al-Sunnah wa-al-Jamā‘ah”, 258.

Whatever I tell you this is the traditionalists' view (*ahl al-hadīth*), it is Ahmād's view, who had taught us since we were young to follow the traditions of God's Messenger ..., the Companions' sayings and to model ourselves after the Successors⁸

Some others used to say: "I believe what Ahmād believes" to confirm that their belief was correct. The famous example of this is the preeminent Sunnī theologian Abū al-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936) who states in his book *al-Ibānah* that he follows the doctrines of the Book, the Sunnah, the Companions, the Successors and the traditionalists; then he insists on his adherence to Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal.⁹

Moreover, some people submitted their creeds to Ahmād in order to obtain his agreement and thereby give the creed more authority. Ibn Hāni' recounts the following anecdote

حضرت رجلاً عند أبي عبد الله وهو يسأله، فجعل الرجل يقول: يا أبو عبد الله، رأس الأمر وإجماع المسلمين على: أن الإيمان بالقدر خيره وشره حلوه ومره والتسليم لأمره والرضا بقضائه؟
 فقال أبو عبد الله: نعم.
 ثم قال له: والإيمان قول وعمل، يزيد وينقص؟
 فقال: نعم.
 ثم قال: والصلوة خلف كل بر وفاجر؟
 قال: نعم.
 قال: والجهاد مع السلطان والصبر تحت لوائه، ولا يخرج على السلطان بسيف ولا عصا. وألا يكفر أحداً إلا بذنب؟
 قال أبو عبد الله: اسكت، من ترك الصلاة فقد كفر.
 قال: والقرآن كلام الله غير مخلوق. ومن قال: إنه مخلوق فهو كافر؟
 فقال: نعم.
 قال: وأن الله، عز وجل، يرى في الآخرة؟
 قال: نعم.
 قال: وعذاب القبر ومنكر ونكير؟
 قال أبو عبد الله: نؤمن بهذا كله، ومن أنكر واحدة من هذه فهو جهمي.

I came upon a man with Abū 'Abd Allāh [Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal] as he was asking him, saying: "O Abū 'Abd Allāh, 'The head of the matter [i.e., Islam] and the consensus of the Muslims [is]: to believe in the *qadar* (predestination), good or bad, sweet or bitter [all are coming from God] and to surrender to His order and contentment in His *qaḍā'*"
 Abū 'Abd Allāh said: yes.
 Then [the man] said to him: 'And the faith (*īmān*) comprises speech and action. And it increases and decreases'.

⁸ Muḥammad b. (Abī Ya'lā) Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn Ibn al-Farrā' (hereafter: Ibn Abī Ya'lā), *Tabaqāt al-Hanābilah*, 1: 234.

⁹ 'Alī b. Ismā'il al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah 'an uṣūl a-diyīnah*, 20-21.

[Ahmad] said: yes.

Then [the man] said: ‘And praying behind anyone, pious or sinful’.

[Ahmad] said: yes.

[The man] said: ‘And performing *Jihād* with the *sultān* and standing under his flag, and not rebelling against the *sultān* by sword or stick, and not calling any one an infidel (*kāfir*) on account of a sin’.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ahmad] said: ‘Be silent! Whoever does not pray is an infidel’.

[The man] said: ‘And the Qur’ān is God’s words uncreated; and whoever says it is created is an infidel’.

[Ahmad] said: yes.

[The man] said: ‘And God will be seen in the Hereafter’.

[Ahmad] said: yes.

[The man] said: ‘And the chastisement of the grave, and Munkar and Nakīr’.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ahmad] said: ‘We believe in all of these, and whoever rejects one of them is a *Jahmī*.¹⁰

Another remarkable point of the traditionalists’ creeds is their similarity. In their main articles, the traditionalist creeds agree with each other not only in their articles of belief, but even in their use of the same words to present these beliefs. These similarities were taken by some traditionalists as proof of the correctness of their beliefs. Abū al-Muzaffar al-Sam‘ānī (d. 489/1096) claims that if the traditionalists’ creeds are examined closely, all of them (even when there are differences in place and time) exhibit the same belief “as if it had come from one heart and one tongue”. This similarity, according to al-Sam‘ānī, proves that the traditionalists hold the correct beliefs. They are not like the other sects who have internal disagreements. Al-Sam‘ānī attributes this similarity to the fact that the traditionalists derive their beliefs from the Qur’ān and the Sunnah and the traditional way of transmission (*tariq al-naql*). In contrast, the innovators derive their beliefs from rational methods and opinions (*al-ma‘qūlāt wa-al-ārā*) which leads them to dissension and disagreement.¹¹

The earliest traditionalists’ creeds are claimed to go back to the second half of the second/eighth century, attributed to al-Awzā‘ī (d.157/774)¹² and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d.161/777).¹³ However, the authorship of these creeds can be doubted; they were

¹⁰ Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Hāni’, *Masā’il al-imām Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*, 2: 156.

¹¹ By: Ismā‘il b. Muhammad al-Asbahānī, *al-Hujjah fī bayān al-mahajjah wa-sharḥ ‘aqīdat ahl al-Sunnah*, 1: 224-27.

¹² Hibat Allāh b. al-Ḥasan al-Lālakā‘ī, *Sharḥ uṣūl i’tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-jamā‘ah: min al-kitāb wa al-Sunnah wa ijmā‘ al-Sahābah wa al-Tabi‘īn min ba‘dihum*, 1: 174.

¹³ Ibid., 1: 170-73.

probably attributed at a later date. Reliably dateable creeds only go back to the second quarter of the third/ninth century. These include the creeds of al-Ḥumaydī (d.219/834)¹⁴ and Muḥammad b. ‘Ukkāshah al-Kirmānī (d. after 225/840).¹⁵

Turning to the creeds of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Laoust has identified and numbered six creeds related to Aḥmad, all of which are found in Ibn Abī Ya‘lā’s book *Tabaqāt al-Hanābilah*.¹⁶ Western scholars have accepted them as genuine and used them to study Aḥmad’s theological views, even though some have considered these creeds to be a collation of Aḥmad’s doctrines by members of his school rather than his own words.¹⁷ In the following section these creeds will be examined and an attempt will be made to delineate their relationship to Aḥmad himself.

1.1.2. Creed I:

This is known as ‘Aqīdat al-Iṣṭakhrī referring to Aḥmad b. Ja‘far al-Iṣṭakhrī al-Fārisī (d.?)¹⁸ who, allegedly, transmitted it from Aḥmad.¹⁹ Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’ quotes from this creed and names it *Kitāb al-Risālah li-Aḥmad*.²⁰ A late manuscript entitled *I‘tiqād ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-Jamā‘ah* includes this creed, but in the chain of transmission it is called *Kitāb al-Sunnah*.²¹

Presumably, the creed first appeared in Damascus at the end of the tenth century, with all its transmissions going back to ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Nihāwandī al-Mālikī (d.?),²² who transmitted it in Damascus. At the time when the creed appeared,

¹⁴ ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr al-Ḥumaydī, *Uṣūl al-Sunnah*.

¹⁵ See Creed II.

¹⁶ Laoust, *La Profession de foi d’ibn Baṭṭa*, xv-xvi.

¹⁷ See: Laoust, in Ibid.; and Melchert, *Aḥmad*, 83. In addition to Laoust and Melchert, these creeds are used widely by Western scholars. For instance, See: Montgomery Watt, *the Formative period of Islamic thought.*, 292-95; Idem, Islamic creeds, 29-40; Wilferd Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qasim ibn Ibrahim und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*, 225-8; Idem, *Religious trends in early Islamic Iran*, 22-25; Wesley Williams, “Aspects of the creed of imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal: a study of Anthropomorphism in early Islamic discourse”, 441-63; Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and belief in late Antiquity: militant devotion in Christianity and Islam*, 235. Only Michael Cook in his book (*Commanding right and forbidding wrong in Islamic thought*, 110-11 fn. 232) doubts the authenticity of Creed I according to al-Dhababī’s criticism.

¹⁸ We do not have much information about him. See: Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 54.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1: 54-74.

²⁰ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn Ibn al-Farrā’, (hereafter: Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’), *al-‘Uddah fi uṣūl al-fiqh*, 2:94.

²¹ Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (attrib.), *I‘tiqād ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*, fols. 1A- 2A.

²² See: ‘Alī b. al-Ḥasan Ibn ‘Asākir al-Dimashqī (hereafter: Ibn ‘Asākir), *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 21: 310-12; 32: 175.

Damascus was under Fātimid control.²³ Subsequently, the creed spread from Damascus and became known to the Ḥanbalīs in Baghdad and Aṣfahān.²⁴

The relevant points here are that this creed was attributed to Ahmad by a Mālikī follower, not a Ḥanbalī, under the authority of the Shī‘ī Fātimids, not the Sunnī ‘Abbāsids and in Damascus not in Baghdad, where the school of Ḥanbalīs was based. These facts alone should cause immediate concern over the accuracy of the attribution.

The creed deals with a number of theological issues:²⁵

- 1- The *īmān* (faith) comprises speech, actions, intention and adherence to the Sunnah. *īmān* increases and decreases; and it is permitted to insert conditionality in one’s statement of faith (called *istithnā’* concerning *īmān* in the creed), providing this does not express doubt on the part of the believer. For example one might say: *anā mu’mīn in shā’ Allāh*, and this *istithnā’* is a path followed by the pious ‘early Muslims’ (*al-salaf*). He said: “And if a man is asked: ‘Are you a believer?’ He would reply: ‘I am a believer, God willing (*in shā’ Allāh*)’, or ‘I hope that I am a believer’, or he would say: ‘I believe in God (Allāh), His angels, His books and His Messengers’.”
- 2- All of the *qadar* (predestination), good or bad, sweet or bitter, comes from *Allāh*; and all sins are due to the *qadar*.
- 3- The community should not declare anyone of the people of *al-Qiblah* (i.e., those who pray towards the *Ka’bah* in Mecca) to be put in Paradise or unless that is recorded in a tradition (*hadīth*) from the Prophet.
- 4- The caliphate belongs to the *Quraysh*, which means that the caliphs come only from the *Quraysh* tribe; and people should obey their caliphs. The creed then presents the rights of the caliphs and the rights of the Muslims community including the demand to avoid *fitnah* (sedition) and the prohibition on calling any member of the people of *Qiblah* an infidel (*kāfir*) on account of a sin, unless that is reported in a Prophetic tradition.

²³ See the entry of al-Nahāwadī in Ibid., 32: 174-75.

²⁴ Several traditionists transmitted this creed from al-Nahāwadī, and took it out of Damascus to Baghdad and Iṣfahān. See: Abū Ya’lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *Ibtāl al-ta’wīlāt li-akhbār al-sifāt*, 1: 45-46, and Ibn Abī Ya’lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 54-74.

²⁵ For a translation of this creed, see: Watt, *Islamic creeds*, 29-40, and for a summary of it, see: idem, *The Formative period of Islamic thought*, 292-95.

- 5- The creed, also, includes the belief in the emergence of *al-Dajjāl*, and the affliction in the grave, and all things that will happen after death and in the Hereafter, such as *al-Hawd* (the pool), *al-Širāt* (a broad way), *al-nafkh fī al-Ṣūr* (trumpet) and *al-Shafā‘ah* (intercession). These things are known in later Islamic theology as *Sam‘iyāt* (items of belief based on the transmitted texts only).
- 6- The attributes of God: the creed lists a large number of God’s attributes. It even includes some extreme attributes, which may be considered for most Muslims as constituting anthropomorphism, such as God’s moving (*harakah*) and laughing, his limit (*hadd*), his having fingers and a mouth.
- 7- The command to assert the good qualities of the Companions, and to be silent concerning their faults. Furthermore, anyone who criticises them is an innovator and a *Rāfiḍī*, and should be asked to retract. If he does not, then he shall be jailed until death or until he repents.
- 8- The creed is hostile towards rational jurisprudents (*aṣḥāb al-ra‘y*) who rely on their common sense and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). The creed also declares anyone using *ra‘y* and *qiyās* to be an innovator and one who has strayed; whilst at the same time, supporting the traditionalists and *taqlīd*.
- 9- There is a list of parties of innovation (*bid‘ah*). In this creed, more than twelve theological parties are listed and rejected. These include the *Murji‘ah*, *Qadariyah*, *Mutazilah*, *Rāfiḍah*, *Zaydiyah*, *Khawārij*, *Manṣūriyah* and *Hasanīyah*.²⁶
- 10- The creed mentions some other points, such as a preference for Arabs over non-Arabs, and declares that profit and trade are licit.

The authenticity of this creed that is its attribution to Aḥmad is in doubt. It is probably the creed of Ḥarb b. Ismā‘īl al-Kirmānī (d.280/893) a student of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, and one of the *Masā‘il* collectors from Aḥmad and others. This creed is included in his *Masā‘il*, in which Ḥarb summarises his understanding of correct belief on the authority of his traditionalist masters. As he says:

²⁶ Melchert studied these parties and the creed’s attitude towards them. See: Melchert, *Aḥmad ibn Hanbal*, 89-93; and idem, “the Adversaries of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal”, 236-37.

هذا مذهب أئمة العلم وأصحاب الأثر وأهل السنة المتمسكون بعروقها المعروفيـن بها، المقتدى بهم فيها، وأدركت منْ أدركت من علماء أهل العراق والـحجاز والشـام وغيرـهم عليها، فمن خالـف شيئاً من هذه المذاهـب أو طعنـ فيها أو عابـ قائلـها فهو مـبتـدـع خارـج من الجـمـاعـة زـائـل عن منـهج السـنة وسـبـيلـ الحقـ. وهو مذهبـ أـحمد وـإـسـحـاقـ بنـ مـخـلـدـ وـعـبـدـ اللهـ بنـ الزـبـيرـ وـسـعـيـدـ بنـ مـصـوـرـ وـغـيرـهـمـ منـ جـالـسـناـ وأـخـذـنـاـ عـنـهـمـ الـعـلـمـ

This is the *madhab* of the people of knowledge, the people of the transmissions, and the people of Sunnah, those who hold fast to its (i.e., the Sunnah's) roots, are known by it, and by whom, one can follow [the Sunna]; and I have known the scholars of 'Irāq, Ḥijāz and Shām and others to be in support of it. Hence, whosoever opposes any part of these doctrines, or refutes it or finds fault with anyone who endorses it, is an innovator and outside the community (*jamā'ah*), a deviant from the way of Sunnah and the true path. Moreover, this is the *madhab* of Ah̄mad [Ibn Ḥanbal], Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Makhlad [Ibn Rāhawayh], 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr [al-Humaydī] and Sa'īd b. Mansūr, and others, with whom we sat and from whom we took knowledge²⁷

In his *Masā'il* work, Ḥarb writes the creed under the title: *Bāb^u al-qawī fī al-madhab*,²⁸ and then he writes approximately thirty-three chapters presenting his evidence and the authority for this creed. From these chapters we can distinguish the various roots of the creed, which can be illustrated by the following examples:

1- In his creed Ḥarb declares this:

الله، تبارك وتعالى، على العرش، فوق السماء السابعة العليا، يعلم ذلك كلـهـ، وهو باـئـنـ منـ خـالـقـهـ لاـيـخلـوـ منـ عـلـمـهـ مـكـانـ. وـالـلهـ عـرـشـ، وـلـلـعـرـشـ حـمـلةـ يـحـمـلـونـ، وـلـهـ حدـ، اللهـ أـعـلـمـ بـحـدـهـ God, the most high, is on the throne, upon the seventh highest heaven, and knows all [things]. He is separate from his creation, and no place is free from his knowledge. God has a throne, and this throne has carriers to carry it; and He [i.e., God] has a *ḥadd* (limit), God is the most aware of his own *ḥadd*²⁹

In later chapters, Ḥarb makes clear the sources of his belief in the *ḥadd*. He states “I asked Ishāq [Ibn Rāhawayh], ‘Is [God on] the throne with a *ḥadd*?’ He answered, ‘Yes, with a *ḥadd*.’ And he related it to Ibn al-Mubārak: ‘He [God] on his own throne,

²⁷ Ḥarb b. Ismā'īl al-Kirmānī, *Masā'il al-Imām Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal wa-Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh*, (hereafter: Ḥarb, *Masā'il*), 355.

²⁸ Ibid., 355-66.

²⁹ Ibid., 359.

separated from his creation, with *hadd'*. After that, Ḥarb reported Ibn al-Mubārak's comment with his own transmission (*isnād*).³⁰

2- Of the preference among the Companions, Ḥarb states:

وَخَيْرُ الْأُمَّةِ بَعْدَ النَّبِيِّ، ...، أَبُو بَكْرٍ وَخَيْرُهُمْ بَعْدَ أَبِي بَكْرٍ عَمَرٌ، وَخَيْرُهُمْ بَعْدَ عَمَرٍ عُثْمَانٌ. وَقَالَ
قَوْمٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْعِلْمِ وَالسُّنْنَةِ: وَخَيْرُهُمْ بَعْدَ عُثْمَانَ عَلِيٌّ. وَوَقَفَ قَوْمٌ عَلَى عُثْمَانَ

The best of the nation (*ummah*), after the Prophet, ... is Abū Bakr; and the best of them after Abū Bakr is ‘Umar; and the best of them after ‘Umar is ‘Uthmān. Some other Sunnī scholars (*ahl al-‘ilm wa-ahl al-Sunnah*) say: and the best of them, after ‘Uthmān, is ‘Alī. Some others end at ‘Uthmān³¹

The details of this disagreement among the people of the *Sunnah* are found in the later chapters of Ḥarb's *Masā'il*, where Ḥarb claims that he asked Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal about the Companions, and the latter answered: “The best of the nation is Abū Bakr, followed by ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān; and ‘Alī is one of the caliphs”. Similarly, some of the traditionalists whom Ḥarb had asked had ended with ‘Uthmān, and did not count ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion, as Ibn Ḥanbal does. These include Ibn al-Madīnī, Abū al-Rabī‘ al-Zahrānī and Mu‘ādh b. Mu‘ādh. Abū Thawr was quoted as saying: “Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān, then the five, who are: ‘Alī, Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr, Sa‘d [Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ] and ‘Abd al-Rahmān [b. ‘Awf]”. On the other hand, Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh and Hudbah b. Khālid state that ‘Alī is the fourth best of the Companions.³² It was from the authority of these figures named above that Ḥarb designed his creed, and because of the disagreement among them about counting ‘Alī as the fourth best of the Companions he makes his creed explicit about this matter.

3- In his definition of some sects (*Rāfiḍah*, *Manṣūriyah* and *Hasanīyah*³³), Ḥarb was apparently relying on Yūsuf b. Asbāt's (d.195/811) definition which he narrated in his *Masā'il*.³⁴ However, Ḥarb does not always present his sources, especially in some extreme points of his creed. For instance, in his *Masā'il*, he states: “God spoke to Musā and handed him the Torah from God's hand to his hand”,³⁵ and in al-

³⁰ Ibid., 412.

³¹ Ibid., 361.

³² Ibid., 439.

³³The name of this party was written differently in different places. In some resources it is termed al-*Hasanīyah* and at others *al-Khashabīyah*. But as Ibn Asbāt and Ḥarb are talking about a *Zaydī* group, it is, probably, *al-Hasanīyah* referring to al-Ḥasan b. Ṣalīḥ Ibn Ḥay (d.168/785), a *Zaydī* scholar.

³⁴ Ḥarb, *Masā'il*, 437-38.

³⁵ Ibid., 360.

İşṭakhrī's version "God spoke to Musā with his mouth".³⁶ Ḥarb does not give his source for the handing (and probably for the attribution of the mouth to God). Other examples include one when Ḥarb says: "Whoever rejects *al-taqlīd*, and claims that he does not rely, in his belief, on another's authority is impious, an innovator and an enemy of God and his Prophet".³⁷ He, also, claims that God moves, laughs and He created Ādam after His own image.³⁸ Yet, Ḥarb did not quote any one in support of these points.

Apparently, the creed of Ḥarb b. Ismā'īl was widely known by the title *al-Sunnah wa-al-Jamā'ah* in the tenth-century Eastern Islamic world; and because this creed includes a list of "innovator" parties, and because of its statement of extreme anthropomorphism, the creed became an object of refutation and criticism by some *Mu'tazilīs* and also by some Sunnīs. The *Mu'tazilī* scholar Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d.319/931) wrote a book to refute Ḥarb's creed and to criticise traditionists and traditionalists.³⁹ In response, al-Ḥusayn al-Rāmahurmuzī (d.360/970-1) wrote his book *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil bayn^a al-rāwī wa-al-wāī* to defend the traditionalists' method and to refute al-Balkhī. However, he also criticised Ḥarb because he valued transmission without understanding the meaning (*akthař^a min al-riwāyah wa-aghfaf^a al-istibṣār*).⁴⁰

We can now address how far this creed accurately represents Aḥmad's theology (*‘aqīdah*). As has been shown above, Ḥarb not only declares Aḥmad's beliefs, but he declares the traditionalists' view in the third A.H./ninth century in which Aḥmad was one among these traditionalists. Although this creed, in general, coincides with Aḥmad's general beliefs, we cannot, with complete certainty, attribute it to Aḥmad. This is because it has other origins besides him, and apparently the words are not Aḥmad's but Ḥarb's.⁴¹ In the eighth A.H./fourteenth century, the Muslim historian, al-Dhahabī, strongly criticised this creed, and said that it was erroneously attributed to

³⁶ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 62.

³⁷ Ḥarb, *Masā'il*, 362.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 360.

³⁹ Yaqūt b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Hamawī, *Muṣjam al-buldān*, 3: 296.

⁴⁰ al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Rāmahurmuzī, *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil bayn^a al-rāwī wa-al-wāī*, 309-11.

⁴¹ See: Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah, *al-Istiqaṭah*, 1: 73.

Aḥmad.⁴² Furthermore, he criticised the traditionists, who transmitted the creed without subjecting it to criticism.⁴³ This is the same with Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840/1436) who presents a lengthy criticism designed to prove the falsity of this “disapproved creed” (*al-‘aqīdah al-munkarah*).⁴⁴ These two scholars rejected attribution of the creed to Aḥmad because it contains extreme views that are impossible for Aḥmad to believe in; in addition, the creed was transmitted through untrust-worthy individuals.

Ibn Taymīyah demonstrates his own suspicions of this creed.⁴⁵ On the one hand, he knows Ḥarb’s creed and quotes from it.⁴⁶ On the other hand, he talks in some places, about the two creeds (Ḥarb’s and al-İṣṭakhrī’s) as one creed and criticises some of its articles, stating that the transmitters of this creed are unknown people (*majāhīl*). Also, he argues that it did not appear in the books of those who were concerned with the collation of Aḥmad’s words. These included al-Khallāl (in his book *al-Sunnah*) and other Irāqīs who knew Aḥmad’s books⁴⁷ or those who were well-known for narrating Aḥmad’s words. His pupil Ibn al-Qayyim quotes most of the creed and relates it to Ḥarb not to al-İṣṭakhrī.⁴⁸

In addition, another version of the creed was related to Muḥammad b. Wahb al-Qurashī (?), who is claimed to have heard it from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal.⁴⁹ However, it is obvious that this is an edition of much later version of the creed since its extreme anthropomorphic imagery of divine attributes (such as the mouth, edge and moving) were removed.

1.1.3. Creed II

This creed is related to Aḥmad by al-Ḥasan b. Ismā‘īl al-Raba‘ī,⁵⁰ who claims that

قال لي أَحْمَدُ بْنُ حَنْبَلَ، إِمَامُ أَهْلِ السَّنَةِ وَالصَّابِرِ تَحْتَ الْمَحْنَةِ: أَجْمَعَ تَسْعُونَ رَجُلًا مِّنَ التَّابِعِينَ
وَأَئِمَّةِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَأَئِمَّةِ السَّلْفِ وَفَقِيَهَاءِ الْأَمْصَارِ عَلَىٰ أَنَّ السَّنَةَ الَّتِي تَوَفَّىٰ عَلَيْهَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

⁴² Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, 11: 286; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-al-a‘lām*, 18: 136.

⁴³ al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 11: 302-3.

⁴⁴ Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Wazīr, *al-‘Awāsim wa-al-qawāsim fī al-dhabb ‘an sunnah Abī al-Qāsim*, 3: 311-17.

⁴⁵ Ibn Taymīyah, *Iqtidā’ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqqīm li-mukhālafah aṣḥāb al-jahīm*, 1: 376.

⁴⁶ Ibn Taymīyah, *Dar’ ta‘āruḍ al-‘aql wa-al-naql*, 2: 7, 22-23.

⁴⁷ But as was shown above, Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’ quoted this creed.

⁴⁸ Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Hādī al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrāh*, 2: 826-42.

⁴⁹ Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (attrib.), *I‘tiqād ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-jamā‘ah*, MS.

⁵⁰ Another unknown person, see: Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 349.

Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, the leader of the people of the Sunnah and the one who was patient during the Inquisition, said to me, “Ninety men of the Successors, the leaders of Muslims, the leaders of the early Muslims and the jurisprudents of the regions have reached a consensus on the *Sunnah* on which the Prophet died⁵¹

This creed is the shortest creed among those attributed to Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal consisting of brief comments on *qadar*, *īmān*, and the belief that the Qur’ān is uncreated. Amongst the various theological issues discussed in the creed are the obedience to the caliphs and the requirement to be patient under their rule, going to *Jihād* with them and not fighting against them. The creed also deals with the preference between the Companions, and lists them in this order: Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī.

The creed was narrated in Baghdad in the late fifth A.H./eleventh century. Ibn Abī Ya‘lā (d. 526/1132) and Abū Tāhir al-Silafī (d. 576/1180), both narrated it from al-Mubārak b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 500/1107) who narrated it with his own *isnād* up to al-Ḥasan al-Rabāṭī.⁵² However, before that, the creed had been known for long time and in many places as the creed was declared in 225/840 by Muḥammad b. ‘Ukkāshah al-Kirmānī (d. after 225/840) who aimed to represent the traditionalists’ view of theology. Al- Kirmānī’s creed can be found in the works of al-Malaṭī (d. in ‘Asqalān 377/987), Naṣr al-Maqdisī (d. Damascus 490/1096), Ibn al-Bannā’ (d. Baghdad 471/1087) and Ibn ‘Asākir (d. Damascus 571/1176).⁵³

However, al-Kirmānī claimed that the people of the *Sunnah wa-al-Jamā‘ah* have reached a consensus on the articles of this creed, and after that he names more than thirty traditionalists who had vouched for the authority of the creed. The significant point in al-Kirmānī’s list is that he counts Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh, Ibn Ḥanbal’s friend

⁵¹Ibid., 1: 349-50.

⁵²Ibid.; and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Silafī, *al-Mashyakhah al-Baghdādīyah*, fol. 71-B. In al-Silafī’s version it is “seventy men” instead of “ninety” as in Ibn Ab Ya‘lā. However, it is quite easy in Arabic writing to mix up between ninety and seventy.

⁵³ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbīh wa-al-radd ‘alā ahl al-ahwā’ wa-al-bida'*, 14-17; al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad Ibn al-Bannā’, *al-Mukhtār fī uṣūl al-sunnah*, 103-6; Naṣr b. Ibrāhīm al-Maqdisī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Hujjah ‘alā tārikh al-mahajjah*, 2: 381-88; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārikh Madīnat Dimashq*, 9: 299-302. There are two significant studies of al-Kirmānī’s creed by Fahmī Jad‘ān and Riḍwān al-Sayyid, even though both of them named it as Umayyah b. ‘Uthmān al-Damrī’s creed. See: Fahmī Jad‘ān, *Riyāḥ al-‘asr: qadāyā markazīyah wa-hīwārāt kāshifah*, 219-76; al-Sayyid, “Ahl^u al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah”, 252-68.

and contemporary, as one of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* leaders, but Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl himself was unmentioned. In addition, and in order to confirm his creed, al-Kirmānī asserted that he presented it three times, in his dream, before the Prophet Muḥammad, who agreed with the whole creed, with particular emphasis on two points: the preference of ‘Uthmān over ‘Alī and abstention from debating the differences that arose among the Companions. However, some traditionalists accused al-Kirmānī of being a fabricator, one who lies to support the Sunnah and to make people display moral behaviour.⁵⁴ Abū Zur‘ah al-Rāzī, a famous traditionalist and a student of Ahmād, met him and described him as a “liar who does not know how to lie”,⁵⁵ and Abū Zur‘ah, and others use the above-mentioned dream to illustrate al-Kirmānī’s lying tendencies.

In sum, this creed is not Ahmād’s but was attributed to him at a later date. An interesting story shows that some traditionalists found it is necessary to have Ahmād’s agreement on this creed. Al-Malāṭī reports that the caliph al-Mutawakkil asked Ahmād to present to him the Sunnah and al-Jamā‘ah which Ahmād learned from the traditionalists, who learned it from the Successors, who had learned it from the Companions who learned it from the Prophet. Ahmād, according to the story, narrated to him this creed with the dream.⁵⁶ This fabricated story illustrates how much Ahmād’s approval is important to give legitimacy to the traditionalists’ creeds.

1.1.4. Creed III

This is attributed to Ahmād through ‘Abdūs b. Mālik al-‘Aṭṭār (d.?). ‘Abdūs was a Baghdadi traditionalist and one of Ahmād’s pupils, and studied with other traditionalists in Baghdad, such as Ibn Ma‘īn.⁵⁷ According to al-Khallāl, Ahmād respected him, and they remained on very friendly terms;⁵⁸ he was “one whom Ahmād trusted”.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ahmād b. ‘Alī b. Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Lisān al-Mīzān*, 7: 351–53.

⁵⁵ (Abū Zur‘ah) ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Rāzī, “su’ālāt al-Bardha‘ī”, 2: 539.

⁵⁶ al-Malāṭī, *al-Tanbīh*, 17.

⁵⁷ Ahmād b. ‘Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadī, *Tarīkh Baghdād*, 12: 417.

⁵⁸ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 166.

⁵⁹ See: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 11: 268. A story in Ḥanbāl b. Ishāq b. Ḥanbāl’s (hereafter: Ḥanbāl) book *Dhikr miḥnat al-imām Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl*, 86, supports this claim.

The creed was transmitted by Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jawharī (al-Minqarī) from ‘Abdūs, and by the first decade of the tenth century (the last decade of the third *Hijrī* century) this creed was known in Iraq and Egypt on account of the efforts of al-Jawharī, who transmitted it in Egypt and presumably in Iraq, Syria and *al-Thughūr* (Anṭākiyah and al-Miṣṣīshah) also.⁶⁰ However, al-Jawharī was also accused as one who confuses the reports of the authentic narrators, and reports dubious narrations from weak authorities.⁶¹

This creed is mainly an attack on *Mu’tazilī* doctrine. It starts with the importance and the authority of the Sunnah, and the demand that people should adhere to it. After that, the creed refers to belief in *qadar*, *ru’yah* (the believers will see God in the Hereafter) and the uncreated nature of the Qur’ān. Next the creed contains the doctrines of the *Sam’iyāt*, such as *Hawd*, *Mizān* (scales) and *Shafā’ah*. Concerning the preference between the Companions, the creed, as with Creed I above, lists them in the following order: Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar and then ‘Uthmān, after that Aṣhāb al-shūrā, ‘Alī, Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Awf and Sa‘d Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ. Then the creed talks about the caliphs’ rights. After that it declares that whoever dies of the people of the *Qiblah* who profess belief in one God should be prayed over and His forgiveness will be requested. One must not, says the creed, refuse to pray over him on account of any sin he has committed. Moreover, no one from the people of the *Qiblah* can be placed in Hell or Paradise by his actions. The creed ends by stating the meaning of *kufr*, *fusūq* and *nifāq*.

Interestingly this creed was related in three different transmission chains to different authorities:

- 1- To Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, as was presented above.
- 2- To ‘Alī Ibn al-Madīnī, one of Aḥmad’s teachers, later one of his adversaries because of his cooperation with Aḥmad Ibn Abī Du’ād during the time of Inquisition.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ahmad b. Harūn al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 172, 174; Al-Lālakā’ī, *Sharh*, 1: 175-85; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadī, *al-Kifāyah fī ‘ilm al-riwāyah*, 51; Ibn Abī Ya’lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 166-74. al-Maqdisī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Hujjah*, 1:235.

⁶¹ Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-majrūhīn min al-muḥaddithīn*, 2: 328. يقْبِلُ الْأَخْبَارُ عَلَى الثَّقَاتِ، وَيَأْتِيُ عَنِ الْمُسْعَفَاءِ بِالْمُلَزَّقَاتِ

⁶² al-Lālakā’ī, *Sharh*, 1: 185-192.

3- To Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal who transmitted it from ‘Alī Ibn al-Madīnī.⁶³

Between Ah̄mad’s and Ibn al-Madīnī’s versions there are some differences, the most significant being:

- 1- In the version that was related to Ah̄mad (AV) *ru’ya*⁶⁴ *Allāh* is discussed in two places; these two places are not found in the version related to Ibn al-Madīnī (MV). Ibn al-Madīnī, at the time of Inquisition, was known for his relationship with Ibn Abī Du’ād, and was accused by Ah̄mad of helping Ibn Abī Du’ād to show him the weakness of the transmissions of *ahādīth al-ru’yah*.⁶⁴
- 2- In the end of MV there is a list of people, the love of whom is a sign of being a Sunnī, including Abū Hurayrah and ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and others. By contrast, it is a bad sign if one loves Abū Ḥanīfah and his *ra’y*. This list is not found in AV.

Another significant aspect is that this creed is similar, in many points, to *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, the creed which is attributed to Ghulām Khalīl (a Basran like Ibn al-Madīnī) or al-Barbahārī. The similarity between the two creeds does not come only from the resemblance of the details in the opinions but goes further to the use of the same words.

It may be more likely that this creed is from Ibn al-Madīnī. It was then related to Ah̄mad; this is more likely than its being Ah̄mad’s creed which was then related to Ibn al-Madīnī. The reason for this is that, when the creed first appeared, it was normal for traditionalists to use Ah̄mad as a normative marker of the correct belief, and to relate their belief to Ah̄mad not to Ibn al-Madīnī. Moreover, it is more logical that if this creed were attributed to Ibn al-Madīnī, the parts on *ru’yah* would not have been removed. Since this belief of *ru’yah* is not added in MV, it is hard to believe that it was Ah̄mad’s creed which was then attributed to Ibn al-Madīnī. Another possibility is that one of Ibn al-Madīnī and Ah̄mad’s students wrote this creed based on the authority of his traditionalist masters (the same as the Creed from Ḥarb b. Ismā‘īl);

⁶³ al-Maqdisī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Ḥujjah*, 1: 235.

⁶⁴ Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 69; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, 21: 22.

Aḥmad and Ibn al-Madīnī are among them. After that this creed is attributed once to Aḥmad and another time to Ibn al-Madīnī.

1.1.5. Creed IV

The fourth creed was related to Aḥmad through Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd al-Andarābī (d.?).⁶⁵

This creed is transmitted from Aḥmad in three different ways:

- 1- By al-Andarābī; in Ibn Abī Ya'lā's *Tabaqāt* this creed is related to al-Andarābī without an *isnād*.⁶⁶
- 2- Muḥammad b. Yūnus al-Sarakhsī (d.?), narrated in Ibn Abī Ya'lā's *Tabaqāt*.⁶⁷
- 3- al-Sarakhsī < al-Andarābī < Aḥmad, narrated in Ibn al-Jawzī's *Manāqib*.⁶⁸

However, both of these transmitters, al-Andarābī and al-Sarakhsī are unknown.

This creed is one of the shortest, and deals mainly with the *qadar*, the *īmān*, the preference between the Companions and the belief that the Qur'ān is uncreated. Additionally, the creed mentions the rights of caliphs and emirs, *Samīyāt* and some practices not involving belief (*praxy* not *doxy*), such as trade and that the *takbīr* (declaring God's greatness, the *Allāh^u Akbar* passage) should be performed four times at funerals.

However, as one has come to expect with these creeds, the creed is related, in some early sources, to another traditionalist, not to Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. In this case, the creed was attributed to al-'Abbās b. Mūsā b. Miskawayh (d.?), who, it is said, declared it to the caliph al-Wāthiq (r. 227-32/842-47) during the Inquisition. Al-'Abbās claimed that the caliph punished him, and after he had declared the creed, the caliph pulled out four of al-'Abbās's teeth and released him. Al-'Abbās, then, met with Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, who thanked him for his patience under the Inquisition. Aḥmad, al-'Abbās claimed, said that: "We should write it [i.e., the creed] on our

⁶⁵ Laoust reads his name as Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb al-Andarānī, and that is what is in the old edition of *Tabaqāt* (al-Fiqī's edition), 1:294, but the editor of the new and more accurate edition (al-'Uthaymīn) reads it Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd al-Andarābī, which is prevalent in other Ḥanbalī discourses.

⁶⁶ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 293-95.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2: 392-94.

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 222-24.

mosques' doors and teach it to our children and family". He then ordered his son Ṣāliḥ to write al-‘Abbās's story on a white parchment (*raqq*) and keep it. In this way, Ah̄mad said, it is one of the best reports he will ever write; and will, thereby, meet God on the path of the people of the Sunnah and the Jamā‘ah.⁶⁹ It is obvious that this story is one of the traditionalists' myths about the Inquisition. Moreover, we have a third version of this creed which is related to Bishr b. al-Hārith al-Hāfi (d. 227/841).⁷⁰ Altogether, this indicates that the authenticity of this creed can be seriously questioned.

1.1.6. Creed V

This creed is thought to be related to Ah̄mad by Muḥammad b. ‘Awf al-Ḥimṣī (d. 272/885). Ibn Abī Ya‘lā claims that he found this creed written by Ah̄mad al-Sinjī (d. after 400/1009) who narrated it by his own transmission (*isnād*) from Ah̄mad Ibn Hanbal (Ibn Abī Ya‘lā did not mention the *isnād* of the creed).⁷¹ However, this creed is more likely to be a combination of two creeds: the first is similar to Creed III, which is placed as the first part of this creed; and the second represents a very extreme traditionalist theology. This excessiveness can be illustrated by the following examples:

1- In his preference between the Companions, and by contrast to all other *riwāyāt* from Ah̄mad, Ibn ‘Awf asserts that Ah̄mad said:

وَخِيرُ النَّاسِ بَعْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ... أَبُو بَكْرَ ثُمَّ عُثْمَانَ ثُمَّ عَلَيْ. فَقَالَ لَهُ: يَا أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، فَإِنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ: إِنَّكَ وَقَتَ عَلَى عُثْمَانَ؟ قَالَ: كَذَبُوا وَاللَّهُ عَلَيْ، إِنَّمَا حَدَّثَنِي بَحْدِيثٍ أَبْنَ عَمْرٍ: كَنَا نَفَاضِلُ بَيْنَ أَصْحَابِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ...، كَنَا نَقُولُ: أَبُو بَكْرَ ثُمَّ عُثْمَانَ، فَيَبْلُغُ ذَلِكَ النَّبِيُّ ... فَلَا يَنْكِرُهُ، وَلَمْ يَقُلْ النَّبِيُّ ...: لَا تَخَايِرُوا بَعْدَ هُؤُلَاءِ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ، لَيْسَ لِأَحَدٍ فِي ذَلِكَ حِجَةٍ، فَمَنْ وَقَفَ عَلَى عُثْمَانَ وَلَمْ يَرْبِعْ بَعْلِيٍّ فَهُوَ عَلَى غَيْرِ السَّنَةِ

"The best person after the Messenger of the God is Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān and then ‘Alī".

Then I [Ibn ‘Awf] said: "O Abū ‘Abd Allāh, they claim that you end at ‘Uthmān."

Ah̄mad replied: "They falsely attributed these to me. I have only related to them the *hadīth* of Ibn ‘Umar:

⁶⁹ Ubayd Allāh b. Muḥammad Ibn Battah, *al-Ibānah ‘an sharī‘at al-fīrqah al-nājiyah wa-mujāhabat al-fīraq al-madhmūmah*, 6: 284-86. The story, without the creed, is reported in al-Maqdisī, *Mukhtaṣar*, 2: 325-29.

⁷⁰ al-Maqdisī, *Mukhtaṣar*, 2: 394-96.

⁷¹ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 339.

‘We used to establish a preference among the Companions of the Messenger of God, saying: Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān. The Prophet heard this and did not reject it’.

Yet, Ahmād added, “the Prophet did not order one not to prefer [among the Companions] after those. Nobody has evidence of [the demand to end at ‘Uthmān]; and hence, whoever ends at ‘Uthmān and does not say ‘Alī is the fourth (*yurabbi’ bi ‘Alī*), is not [speaking in accordance with] the Sunnah.”

This condemnation of those who end at ‘Uthmān and do not say ‘Alī is the fourth best of the Companions is not found in any other sources relating to Ahmād. The majority of sources, including the oldest, relate that Ahmād ended at ‘Uthmān; some other sources claim that Ahmād accepts ‘Alī as being the fourth. However, no source, in my knowledge, except this creed, ascribes to Ahmād the view that anyone who does not say ‘Alī is the fourth best Companion is not “on the Sunnah”.⁷² Furthermore, al-Khallāl and then Abū Ya‘lā collected different *riwāyāt* from Ahmād on this issue, and none of them referred to Ibn ‘Awf’s version.⁷³ It is more likely that this creed which was not known to them (but became known through Ibn Abī Ya‘lā who found it) was written by Ahmād al-Sinjī (after 400/1009).

2- The manner in which *hadīths* (traditions) are used differs between the first and the second halves of the creed. While the first half, which is similar to creed III, uses very well-known and sound *hadīths*, the second half uses unknown and unsound *hadīths*. It is not possible that all these were used by Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal, who is famous for his critique of *hadīths*. One of these questionable *hadīths* is that the Prophet forbade people to pray behind *Qadariyah*, *Murjiyah*, *Rāfidah* and *Jahmiyah*, and to pray at their funerals. And, yet, all of these parties were established after the Prophet’s death. In sum, this creed combines two creeds, the first part was probably influenced by creed III and the second part seems to be extracted from a (currently unknown) very extreme creed.

1.1.7 Creed VI

This creed is a letter from Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal to Musaddad b. Musarhad (d. 228/842-43), who had asked him about the Inquisition (*mīhnah*) and the disagreements

⁷² For the different *riwāyāt* related to Ahmād regarding Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, see below (3.2.3).

⁷³ See: al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 404-11; and Abū Ya‘lā al-Farrā’, *al-Masā’il al-‘aqadīyah min kitāb al-Riwāyatayn wa-al-wajhayn: masā’il min uṣūl al-diyānāt*, 41-51.

amongst the people concerning *qadar*, *rafḍ*, *i'tizāl*, the creation of the Qur'ān and *irjā*?⁷⁴

The first part of this creed is dedicated to rejecting the doctrines of the *Jahmīyah*, *Mu'tazilah* and *Rāfidah*. The second part deals with the *sam'iyyāt*, some practices which are not concerned with belief (more than those mentioned in Creed IV) and expressing a preference among the Companions.

Regarding this creed, two points need to be made:

- 1- In Ibn Abī Ya'lā's and al-Maqdisī's versions, the preference between the Companions went as follows: Abū Bakr, then 'Umar, then 'Uthmān, then 'Alī; whereas in Ibn al-Jawzī's version this preference ended at 'Uthmān, without including 'Alī as the fourth best of the Companions. In this version, Ahmad relied on Ibn 'Umar's *hadīth* of preferring among the Companions (see above in Creed V).
- 2- In this creed, Ahmad mentioned his disagreement with al-Shāfi'i over the *takbīr* (declaring *Allāh^u Akbar*) at funerals. Ahmad said that the *takbīr* should be performed at a funeral four times, but if the imām adds a fifth, one should add it with him. Then he mentioned his disagreement with al-Shāfi'i who said if the imām adds the fifth, one should perform the prayer again.

The preference among the Companions is not the only difference which can be found in the various versions of this creed. For instance, in Abū Sa'īd al-Naqqāsh's (d.414/1023) version,⁷⁵ which was presumably that used by Abū Ya'lā,⁷⁶ the creed states "God comes down, every night, to the lowest heaven, and His throne is not unoccupied by him". This sentence is not found in either of the versions we have now.

However, at some points of this creed, Ahmad's doctrine can be identified as it is found in other *riwāyāt*. For example in this creed the *Jahmīyah* are divided into three groups:

⁷⁴ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 426-32 ; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 224-29; al-Maqdisī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Hujjah*, 2: 366-79.

⁷⁵ Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' fatāwā shaykh al-Islām Ahmad Ibn Taymīyah*, 5: 380-82.

⁷⁶ Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā', *Ibtāl*, 1: 261.

the first who say the Qur'ān is created; the second who say the Qur'ān is God's word and do not say if it is created or uncreated (*wāqifah*); and the third who say the pronunciation of the Qur'ān (*lafz*) is created. This division is found in this creed and in that of his son Ṣāliḥ, though not in his *Masā'il* work.⁷⁷ On the other hand some points can be contrasted with the mainstream of Ahmād's *riwāyāt*. For example, in this creed Ahmād defined the *Rāfiḍah* as those who prefer 'Alī to Abū Bakr and say 'Alī was converted to Islam before Abū Bakr. In other *riwāyāt*, Ahmād defined the *Rāfiḍah* as those who not only prefer 'Alī over them, but also curse Abū Bakr and 'Umar.⁷⁸

The outstanding figure among the Ḥanbalīs in Asfahān in the fifth A.H./eleventh century, 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad Ibn Mandah (d.470/1078) rejects the supposed authenticity of this letter, on the basis that Ahmād b. Muḥammad al-Bardha'ī, who transmitted it from Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal, is unknown.⁷⁹ Ibn Taymīyah argues against Ibn Mandah saying that this letter was well-known among Ḥanbalīs and *Ahl al-Sunnah*, and they all accept it. Moreover, Ibn Taymīyah adds, Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā' relied upon it and included it in his notes in his own handwriting.⁸⁰

However, Ahmād b. Muḥammad al-Bardha'ī, as Ibn Mandah suggests, is an unknown person, and his name is spelled differently in different sources. In some sources he is Ahmād b. Muḥammad al-Bardha'ī al-Tamīmī,⁸¹ and in others he is al-Tamīmī al-Zarandī,⁸² and in yet others sources he is al-Hafiz Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Bardha'ī.⁸³ Although Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā' relied on this creed, it was not known to al-Khallāl and other Ḥanbalīs before Ibn al-Farrā'. To conclude, the contradictions between the different versions of the creed reflect the conflicts among the traditionalists on some aspects of theology, and each group modifies the creed to support their position.

⁷⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 213-4.

⁷⁸ For these *riwāyāt* see: 'Abd al-Ilāh b. Sulaymān al-Aḥmadī, *al-Masā'il wa-al-rasā'il al-marwīyah 'an al-imām Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal fī al-'aqīdah*, 2: 357- 61.

⁷⁹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' fatāwā*, 5: 396.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 224.

⁸² Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 426.

⁸³ al-Maqdīsī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Hujjah*, 2: 366.

1.2. *al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmīyah wa-al-Zanādiqah* (Refutation of the *Jahmīyah* and Unbelievers)

This is a polemical book attributed to Ahмad Ibn Hanbal. However, the authenticity of the work has been questioned. Some historians and scholars, such as al-Dhahabī, Ibn al-Wazīr, and then Christopher Melchert,⁸⁴ Michael Cooperson⁸⁵ and Livnat Holtzman,⁸⁶ regard it as having been fabricated. On the other hand, there are some who believe it to be a credible work; this group includes some Ḥanbalī scholars, Binyamin Abrahamov⁸⁷ and Nimrod Hurvitz.⁸⁸ In this section the veracity of this book will be examined.

Three versions of *al-Radd* can be identified:

1-The first version of the book can be dated to the second half of the third A.H./the late-ninth and early-tenth centuries: Transmitted by Ahмad's son, 'Abd Allāh (d. 290/903), in his *Kitāb al-Sunnah*,⁸⁹ and by Ahмad's pupil al-Marrūdhī (d. 275/888).⁹⁰ Both separately claimed to have found the book among Ahмad's possessions after his death, and identified the handwriting as being Ahмad's. In this recension of the book Ahмad lists verses, which could be used to prove the attributes of God and to refute the claims of the *Jahmīs* who doubted them. No marginal comments or asides from Ahмad or anyone else are added.

2-The second and longer version of the book was included in al-Khallāl's (d. 311/923) book *al-Sunnah*, which was related to Ahмad through his son 'Abd Allāh alone.⁹¹ The chain of narrators was as follows: al-Khallāl < al-Khaḍir b. al-Muthannā al-Kindī < 'Abd Allāh. In this version, more verses are included and the ninety-nine names of God are added. However, the book still does not contain any authorial comments or any rational arguments.

⁸⁴ Melchert, *Aḥmad*, 101.

⁸⁵ Cooperson, *Classical Arabic biography*, 125.

⁸⁶ Holtzman, "Ahмad Ibn Hanbal", in *EF*.

⁸⁷ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic theology: traditionalism and rationalism*, 14, 77 fn. 21.

⁸⁸ Hurvitz, *the Formation*, 4, 130, 142.

⁸⁹ 'Abd Allāh b. Ahмad Ibn Hanbal (hereafter: 'Abd Allāh), *Kitāb al-Sunnah*, 2: 512- 20.

⁹⁰ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 6: 48

⁹¹ Ibid., 6: 49.

Very little is known about al-Kindī. Our only access to his life is through al-Khallāl's citation which provides few details and does not even indicate where or when he had met him.⁹² The full name of al-Kindī is cited differently within the available sources; in some he is referred to as al-Khaqir b. al-Muthannā al-Kindī⁹³ and in others he is known as al-Khaqir b. Aḥmad.⁹⁴ Al-Khaqir b. Aḥmad b. al-Muthannā appears in yet other sources.⁹⁵ In the late eighth A.H./fourteenth century, the outstanding Ḥanbalī scholar, Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (d. 795/1393), showed his suspicions concerning al-Khaqir. Ibn Rajab described al-Khaqir as an unknown person (*majhūl*) who transmits disapproved reports from ‘Abd Allāh.⁹⁶ However, both the first and the second editions do concur with Aḥmad's doctrine, which rejects using human opinions (*ra'y*) or any rational processes of argumentation. ‘Abd Allāh and al-Marrūdhī⁹⁷ named the epistle as “*Hādhā mā-aḥtajj^a bihⁱ Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal] ‘alā al-Jahmīyah fī al-Qur’ān*” (This is what Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal] invoked from the Qur’ān to refute the *Jahmīyah*).

Evidently, the book clearly underwent developments. It was more than a century after Aḥmad's death that a third, quite different, version of *al-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmīyah* appeared. This version of *al-Radd*, which is completely different from the first two editions, both in subject and style, appeared in Baghdad in the fifth A.H./eleventh century.⁹⁸

In this version, the book is divided into two main parts:

1. Clarification of how Unbelievers (*al-Zanādiqah*) stray by using the Qur’ān's ambiguous verses (*al-mutashābih*).⁹⁹ It is not obvious who Aḥmad is claimed to refute in this chapter of the book.
2. The second chapter of the book was devoted to contesting al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745-46) and *al-Jahmīyah*'s doctrines. This chapter deals with several theological issues, such as: i) refutation of al-Jahm's doctrine that the Qur’ān

⁹² Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 86.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 6: 48.

⁹⁵ ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 512.

⁹⁶ ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Aḥmad Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Taqrīr al-Qawā'id wa-taḥrīr al-fawā'id*, 2: 405.

⁹⁷ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 6: 48.

⁹⁸ See: Melchert, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, 101

⁹⁹ *al-Radd*, 175. "بيان ما ضللت فيه الزنادقة من متشابه القرآن."

was created; ii) to prove that God sits on His throne (*istiwā' Allāh 'alā al-'arsh*); iii) God's conjoining with His creatures (*ma'iyatⁱⁱ Allāh ma'a khalqih*) is only by His knowledge not physically; iv) to prove, also, that God spoke with Moses; v) the book supports the idea of the beatific vision (*ru'yah*), namely that believers will see God in the hereafter; vi) to refute the *Jahmī*'s doctrine that Heaven and Hell will vanish.

The most important point relating to this version is that Ahmad is presented as a semi-rationalist¹⁰⁰ or as a *Sunnī mutakallim*, whose argument relies upon linguistics and rational evidence. Yet, he rarely depends on the Prophet's sayings (*hadith*) or on those of his Companions and Successors (*āthār*).

Presumably, this version of *al-Radd* first appeared in Baghdad, in the fifth A.H./eleventh century. Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā' (d. 458/1065) was the first person (to my knowledge)¹⁰¹ to have quoted from this version of *al-Radd*. For example, Ibn al-Farrā' cited this version of *al-Radd* in his books: *Ibtāl al-ta'wīlāt*,¹⁰² *al-Uddah fī uṣūl al-fiqh*¹⁰³ and his other books. However, in the eighth/fourteenth century Damascus there was a debate as to whether this book was fabricated or reliable. Ibn Taymīyah¹⁰⁴ (d. 728/1328) and his disciple Ibn al-Qayyim¹⁰⁵ (d. 751/1350) asserted its authenticity; the latter was especially vociferous in defending the book against those who criticised it, presumably the famous historian al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348).¹⁰⁶ The most remarkable feature in Ibn al-Qayyim's defence, which demonstrates its weakness, is that he mixes up the three versions of the book. Hence his defence applies to the first and second versions, but not to the third.

¹⁰⁰ For an excellent study of semi-rationalists and Ahmad's hostility towards them, see: Melchert, "the Adversaries of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal", 234-253. Ibn Taymīyah uses the terms *mutakallimat ahl al-sunnah*, or *mutakallimat ahl al-hadīth*, to describe the semi-rationalists.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Taymīyah claims that 'Abd al-Wāhid al-Tamīmī (d. 410/1019) quoted from the book, but it is not clear which version al-Tamīmī himself cited. See: Ibn Taymīyah, *Dar' ta'ārud al-aql wa-al-naql*, 1: 221.

¹⁰² See for example: 1: 184, 230, 233; 2: 298, 299, 300, 396, 444, 447, 448.

¹⁰³ See for example: 2: 548, 595, 684, 693, 695; 4: 1273-75.

¹⁰⁴ For example see: Ibn Taymīyah, *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmīyah fī ta'sīs bida'i him al-kalāmīyah*, index 10: 25.

¹⁰⁵ Muḥammad Ibñ Abī Bakr Ibñ Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *Ijtima' al-Juyūsh al-Islāmīyah 'alā ghazw al-Mu'attilah wa-al-Jahmīyah*, 160-61.

¹⁰⁶ al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 11: 286-87.

Moreover, studying the book's chain of transmission (*isnād*) exposes more areas of doubt concerning the work's authenticity. Although Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā' did not transmit *al-Radd* by an *isnād* in his books, his son narrated it in his book *Tabaqāt al-Hanābilah*. The chain is therefore:

Ibn Abī Ya'lā < al-Mubārak b. 'Abd al-Jabbār Ibn al-Tuyūrī (d. 500/1107) < Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar al-Barmakī (d. 445/1053- 4) < Abū Bakr 'Abd al-Azīz Ghulām al-Khallāl < al-Khallāl < Khadīr b. al-Muthannā al-Kindī < 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad¹⁰⁷

Ibrāhīm al-Barmakī was born in 361/972, only two years before Ghulām al-Khallāl's death (who died in 363/974). Although the Ḥanbalī sources claim that al-Barmakī was given authorization (*ijāzah*) from Ghulām al-Khallāl, it is impossible for him to have heard it from the latter.

Another *isnād* of *al-Radd* is found in some manuscripts:

Abū al-Ṭahir al-Mubārk b. al-Mubārk b. al-Maṭūsh (d. 599/1203) < Abū al-Ghanā'yim Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Muhtadī bi-Allah (d. 517/1123) < Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Azīz b. 'Alī al-Azjī (d. 444/1052) < Abū Bakr Ghulām al-Khallāl (d. 363/974) < al-Khadīr b. al-Muthannā al-Kindī < 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad¹⁰⁸

In this chain of transmitters, there are two breaks (*inqṭā').* The first, and most important of which, is that Ibn al-Muhtadī could not have studied the book under al-Azjī, because when al-Azjī died in 444/1052 , Ibn al-Muhtadī was only about eight years old (he was born in 436/1044- 5). Secondly, al-Azjī could not have studied the book under Ghulām al-Khallāl, because he was born in 356/967 and Ghulām al-Khallāl died in 363/974 when al-Azjī was only seven years old. It is interesting to note that all the chains of transmission (*asānīd*) of *al-Radd* broke at approximately the same period in the eleventh century. This is the same time that the book was quoted by Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā'. The other interesting point is that all those who transmitted the book were Baghdadis; hence this book was probably composed in Baghdad in the fifth A.H./eleventh century.

¹⁰⁷ This *isnād* appears in some manuscripts, see the editor's introduction of: Aḥmad, *al-Radd*, 142-43. There are some mistakes in the version of the *isnād* in *Tabaqāt*, 3: 86.

¹⁰⁸ *al-Radd*, 143.

Interestingly, *al-Radd* was not the only book in this period to be attributed to Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal, nor to present him as a semi-rationalist (*sunnī mutakallim*). Abū Naṣr al-Sijzī (d. 404/1014) claimed that he had seen an epistle (*risālah*) written by the Shāfi‘ī Ash‘arī scholar, Ibn al-Labbān (d. 446/1054), with the title "*Sharḥ maqālat al-imām al-awḥad Abī ‘Abd Allāh Ah̄mad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal*". In this book al-Sijzī notes that Ibn al-Labbān represented Ah̄mad's doctrine as that of al-Ash‘arī. Al-Sijzī alleged that Ibn al-Labbān had written this epistle to deceive the common people to make them believe *Ash‘arī* doctrine.¹⁰⁹ Despite the fact that both *al-Radd* and *Sharḥ* are erroneously attributed to Ah̄mad, the aims of the two attributions are different; The aim of *Sharḥ* was to justify *Ash‘arī* doctrines by relating them to Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal. However, the aim in *al-Radd* is quite different; Ah̄mad was presented as one who applies rational evidence to support the traditionalists' belief and to refute other sects. This method fits with the need of the Ḥanbalīs in the fifth A.H./eleventh century, who, unable to argue with other sects, relied only on the texts (i.e., the Qur’ān and the Sunnah) and the authority of early Muslims (*al-salaf*). Ḥanbalīs who support applying rational evidence in theology rely on *al-Radd* to approve their methods. Some examples illustrate this; Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’ invoked this book to support the use of rational evidence to prove religious issues. He stated that

وقد احتاج أَحْمَد ... بِدَلَائِلِ الْعُقُولِ فِيمَا خَرَجَ فِي الرَّدِّ عَلَى الزَّنَادِقَةِ وَالْجَهَمِيَّةِ
Ah̄mad ... applied rational evidence in the book he wrote to refute
the *Zanādiqah* and the *Jahmīs*¹¹⁰

After that it became common for semi-rational Ḥanbalīs to invoke the book to prove that “Ah̄mad ... applied rational evidence”.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ubayd Allāh b. Sa‘īd al-Sijzī, *Risālat al-Sijzī ilā ahl Zabīd fī al-radd ‘alā man ankar⁹ al-harf wa-al-sawt*, 231-32. "ولقد وقفت على رسالة عملها رجل من أهل أصبهان يعرف بابن اللبان، وهو حيٌّ بعدَ فيما يلغني، وسمها بـشرح مقالة الإمام الأوحد أبي عبد الله أَحْمَد بن محمد بن حنبل (وذكر فيها مذهب الأشاعري المخالف لأحمد، أعطى نسخاً منها إلى جماعة يطوفون بها في البلاد ويقولون هذا إمام من أئمة أصحاب أَحْمَد، رحمة الله عليه، قد شرح مقالته ليكتبها العوام ويظنووا صدق الناقل فيتعوا في الضلاله. وأخرج هذا الرجل من بغداد بهذا السبب وعاد إلى أصبهان، وهو من أصحاب أبي بكر بن الباقلاني".

¹¹⁰ Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Uddah*, 4: 1273-75.

¹¹¹ Alī b. ‘Aqīl b. Muḥammad Ibn ‘Aqīl, *al-Wāḍih fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, 5: 270; Ah̄mad b. Ḥamdān al-Harrānī, *Nihāyah al-mubtadi‘īn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, 72; ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Ibn Muflīh, *al-Ādāb al-shar‘iyah wa-al-minah al-mar‘iyah*, 1: 227; Ah̄mad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Qādī al-Jabal in Muḥammad b. Ah̄mad Ibn al-Najjār, *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-munīr*, 4: 536.

Two points can be concluded: 1- there are two titles of the third version of *al-Radd*: a short and a long. The short is the most well-known “*al-Radd ‘alā al-Zanādiqah wa-al-Jahmīyah*”; the long title, which is found in some manuscripts, is “*al-Radd ‘alā al-Zanādiqah wa-al-Jahmīyah fīmā shakkat fīhī min mushābih al-Qur’ān wa-ta’wwalath ‘alā ghayrī ta’wīlīhī*”.¹¹² 2 - Some of the semi-rational doctrines attributed to Ahmād in *al-Radd* were not completely fabricated or attributed to him in the eleventh century. Yet, in a few instances, the doctrines found in *al-Radd* have their roots in early reports from Ahmād, such as those which came from Ahmād’s cousin Ḥanbal b. Ishāq (d. 273/886). For example, in *al-Radd*, Ahmād says that the meaning of “*al-Qur’ān* is coming is only that its reward is coming”.¹¹³ This opinion is related to Ahmād through Ḥanbal.¹¹⁴

1.3. Conclusion

The above analysis indicates that within these creeds, all attributed to Ahmād, there is a predominance of ninth-century theological concerns. One concludes, therefore, that these creeds are more likely to present traditionalist theology in the third and the fourth A.H./ninth and tenth centuries than Ahmād’s own beliefs. Even though Ahmād’s views, to the extent that they are known, agree with the general views expressed in these creeds, it is difficult to attribute the wording or any single point within each creed to him unless we find it in other reliable sources. This particularly applies to the more extreme statements. A noteworthy point is that these creeds epitomise how the authority of the *salaf* was united with that of Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal, who himself became the unique authority for correct belief. This means that the *salaf* and Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal were used equally and reciprocally by later traditionalists as sources of doctrinal verification and authority.

¹¹² *al-Radd*, 83-84.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 322. ”وإنما معنى أن القرآن يجيء، إنما يجيء ثواب القرآن“

¹¹⁴ Abū Ya’lā al-Farrā’, *Ibtāl*, 2: 396; idem, *al-Masā’il al-‘aqadīyah min kitāb al-Riwāyatayn wa-al-wajhayn: masā’il min uṣūl al-diyānāt*, 48. This quotation from Ḥanbal was attributed to his book *Dhikr mīhnat al-imām Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal*; this quotation, however, is not found in the printed version of *Dhikr*.

The third version of *al-Radd 'alā al-Zanādiqah*, was probably composed in the fifth A.H./eleventh century for two purposes: to present Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl as an intellectual theologian, and to justify using rational evidence to prove religious issues.

However, one of the reliable sources is Ahmād's letter in reply the caliph's question about the Qur'ān.¹¹⁵ In this "letter-creed", according to al-Dhahabī,¹¹⁶ we can find the most authoritative presentation of Ahmād's belief, and his method of writing it. In the "letter-creed", Ahmād was asked to present his theological views concerning the creation of the Qur'ān, after the caliph al-Mutawakkil had ended the Inquisition. Ahmād started with an assertion that the Qur'ān should not be the subject of *jidāl* (argument); hence, he quotes from the Prophet and his Companions, and their Successors in which *khuṣūmāt* (arguments) with innovators are disallowed. His main evidence that the Qur'ān is uncreated is that the Qur'ān has the following characteristics:

- 1- The Qur'ān is a part of God's knowledge (*'ilmu' Allāh*), and God's knowledge is uncreated; hence, the Qur'ān is uncreated.
- 2- There is a difference between God's creation and his order (*al-khalq wa-al-amr*), and the Qur'ān is a part of God's order; and hence, the Qur'ān is uncreated.
- 3- Ahmād, also, states that he follows the doctrine of the *Salaf* that the Qur'ān is uncreated.

Ahmād ended his letter by declaring his method of belief, and said:

لست بصاحب كلام، ولا أرى الكلام في شيء إلا ما كان في كتاب الله أو حديث عن النبي ... أو عن أصحابه ... أو عن التابعين. فاما غير ذلك فالكلام فيه غير محمود

I am not a theologian (*sāhib kalām*) and I do not agree to discuss [in a theological way] anything, unless it exists in the Book of God, or in *ḥadīth* from the Prophet ..., or from his Companions ... or from their Successors. Apart from these things, any discussion [of an issue] is not praiseworthy (*māḥmūd*).

¹¹⁵ This letter was transmitted by Ahmād's sons Ṣāliḥ and 'Abd Allāh, and his disciple al-Marrūdhī, all of whom were with Ahmād in Sāmarrā' when he wrote the letter. See: Ṣāliḥ, b. Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl (hereafter: Ṣāliḥ), *Sīrat al-imām Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl*, 106-9; idem, *Masā'il al-imām Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl*, 238-53; 'Abd Allāh b. Ahmād, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 134-40; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 6: 101-8; Ahmād b. 'Abd Allāh al-Asfahānī (hereafter: Abū Nu'aym al-Asfahānī), *Hilyah al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*, 9: 116-19.

¹¹⁶ al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 11: 286.

Chapter II

Aḥmad's *Masā'il*

2.1. Introduction

‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī (d. 198/814) distinguishes between three types of scholars (*‘ulamā’*): some are imāms (religious leaders) in the Sunnah and the *ḥadīth*; others are imāms in the Sunnah but not in the *ḥadīth*; a third group are imāms in the *ḥadīth* but not in the Sunnah. An example of a scholar who is imām in the Sunnah and the *ḥadīth* is Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 166/778).¹ Ibn Mahdī represents the traditionalists' view of themselves, and their distinction between *riwāyah* (transmission) and *dirāyah* (intellectual appreciation). The *dirāyah* is not only the understanding of the meaning (*fīqh*) of *ḥadīths*, but also the ability to criticise transmitters (*rījāl*) and to identify the sound *ḥadīths* from the unsound. Those who combine *riwāyah* to *dirāyah*, as al-Thawrī does, are called *Fuqahā’ aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* or *Fuqahā’ ahl al-ḥadīth*, which I will call jurisprudent-traditionalists.²

The period of the formation of jurisprudent-traditionalists is controversial among western scholars.³ However, this matter will not be examined here, since my purpose is to present how traditionalists in the late eighth-early ninth century distinguished themselves and their jurisprudence from the jurisprudent-rationalists (*fuqahā’ ahl al-rā'y*). ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī gives al-Thawrī, Mālik (d. 179/795) Ḥammād b. Zayd (d. 179/795) and al-Awzā’ī (d. 157/774) as examples of imāms,⁴ which means that he dates the formation of jurisprudent-traditionalists, as a definable grouping, to

¹ ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Taqdimah al-ma‘rifah li-Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa-al-ta‘dīl*, 118.

² Some scholars whom I follow make a distinction between traditionist and traditionalist. George Makdisi suggests that a traditionist means a *muḥaddith*, or one who transmits ḥadāth. A traditionalist means one of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* who adheres to the tradition authority in dogma, as against the claim of rationalists (*ahl al-kalām*). See: George Makdisi, “Ash‘arī and the Ash‘rites in Islamic religious history I”, 49; Melchert, *The Formation*, 2-3.

³ See: Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan jurisprudence*, 140-51; Melchert, *The Formation*, 3. For a comprehensive survey see: Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan fīqh before the classical schools*.

⁴ Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Taqdimah*, 11.

the last quarter of the eighth century. This view of self-awareness is extended by his disciple ‘Alī Ibn al-Madīnī⁵ (d. 234/849) and later by Ibn Abī Ḥātim.⁶

Ibn al-Madīnī gives two hierarchies of *‘ulamā’*. In the first hierarchy he lists the main figures of transmitters of *ḥadīth*; in the second, he lists the *fuqahā’* (i.e., *fuqahā’ aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*). In his first hierarchy, Ibn al-Madīnī claims that in the first stage, transmission (*isnād*) centred on six persons: al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741-42) in Medina, ‘Amr b. Dīnār (d. 126/743-44) in Mecca, Qatādah (d. 118/736) and Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr in Basra, and Abū Ishāq and al-A‘mash in Kufa. The knowledge of these six was passed on to the next stage, i.e., scholars who wrote books, including Mālik and Muḥammad b. Ishāq in Medina, Ibn Jurayj and Ibn ‘Uyaynah in Mecca, and Sa‘īd b. Abī ‘Arūbah, Ḥammād b. Salmah, Abū ‘Awānah, and Shu‘bah and Ma‘mar in Basra. There were also al-Thawrī in Kufa, al-Awzā‘ī in al-Shām and Hushaym in Wāsit. In the last stage, six scholars inherited the knowledge of all these eighteen scholars. These six were: Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qatṭān, Yaḥyā b. Zakarīyā b. Abī Zā‘idah, Wakī‘ b. al-Jarrāḥ, ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī and Yaḥyā b. Ādām. In the *ḥadīth* it is clear that Ibn al-Madīnī gives a single chain of transmitters: every generation inherits from the generation before.

We do not find this unity in the hierarchy of *fīqh*, although Ibn al-Madīnī divides schools of *fīqh* into three categories. He claims that there were only three Companions who had disciples who followed them in *fīqh* and *fatwā*. These three are: ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās and Zayd b. Thābit.

First: the followers of ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd were ‘Alqamah b. Qays, al-Aswad b. Yazīd, Masrūq, ‘Abīdah al-Salmānī, al-Ḥārith b. Qays and ‘Amr b. Shurahbīl. Four scholars followed these six Successors: Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī, al-Sha‘bī, al-A‘mash and Abū Ishāq. Sufyān al-Thawrī came after them and followed their *madhhab*. Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qatṭān came after Sufyān.

⁵ ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Madīnī, *al-Ilāl*, 36-47.

⁶ Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī. *Taqdīmah*, 10-11; and see: Erik Dickinson, *The Development of Early Sunnite Hadith Criticism: the Taqdīma of Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi (240/854-327/938)*, 47-52.

Second: those who followed Ibn ‘Abbās included ‘Atā’, Tāwūs, Mujāhid, Jābir b. Zayd, ‘Ikrimah and Sa‘īd b. Jubayr. After this came ‘Amr b. Dīnār, and then there were Ibn Jurayj and Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah.

Third: Zayd b. Thābit had twelve followers: Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab, ‘Urwah b. al-Zubayr, Qabīṣah b. Dhu’ayb, Khārijah b. Zayd, Sulaymān b. Zayd, Sulaymān b. Yasār, Abān b. ‘Uthmān, ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Abd Allāh, al-Qāsim b. Muhammad, Sālim b. ‘Abd Allāh, Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān, Abū Salamah b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān, Talḥah b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Awf, and Nāfi‘ b. Jubayr b. Muṭ‘im (there are in fact thirteen, not twelve). Subsequently there were four others: al-Zuhrī, Yahyā b. Sa‘īd [al-Anṣārī], Abū al-Zinād and Bukayr b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ashajj. Then Mālik b. Anas followed them. After this came ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī.⁷

This list indicates how traditionalists in the third A.H./ninth century understood the formation of their *fīqh* (*fīqh aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*). Over the centuries, this view was held by traditionalists. Even in the fourth and fifth A.H./tenth and eleventh centuries it was accepted by Ibn Abī Ḥātim⁸ and al-Rāmahurmuzī.⁹ Notwithstanding this acceptance, Ibn Abī Ḥātim constructed his own list of *ḥadīth* critics, which in general matches that of Ibn al-Madīnī.¹⁰ The noticeable point from Ibn al-Madīnī’s and Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s lists is the omission of al-Shāfi‘ī’s name from both the *fuqahā’* and the *ḥadīth* critics lists. From the authority of the above names, and from some others added by Ibn Abī Ḥātim, it is hoped that the sources of Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s theology, jurisprudence and piety can be found.

The early jurisprudent-traditionalists used *ḥadīths* (traditions) or *āthār* (the sayings of the Companions and the Successors) to give their juridical answers. However, if they did not find any *ḥadīth* or *āthār* related to the jurisprudential issue, they asked their teachers and recorded their answers. Subsequently they transmitted these answers to their students. These responses are called *Masā’il*. In the third A.H./eighth century some models of responses (*Masā’il*) were well-known and popular among traditionalists. These included the *Masā’il* of Mālik, al-Awzā‘ī, al-Thawrī, Ibn Abī

⁷Ibn al-Madīnī, *al-Ilal*, 36-47.

⁸Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Taqdimah*, 234-35.

⁹al-Rāmahurmuzī, *al-Muḥaddith al-fāṣil*, 614- 20

¹⁰Dickinson, *The Development*, 47- 52.

Dhi'b (d. 159/775-6) and Ibn Abī Laylā (d. 148/765). Abū Ayyūb Sulaymān b. Iṣhāq asked Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī (d. 285/898) about writing down Mālik's responsa:

أريد أن أكتب مسائل مالك، فأيما أعجب إليك مسائل ابن وهب، أو ابن القاسم؟ فقال لي: اكتب مسائل الواقدي، في الدنيا أحد يقول سألت [مالكًا و[الثوري وابن أبي ذئب ويعقوب [غيره؟]

I want to write down Mālik's *Masā'il*, which one do you prefer, Ibn Wahb's *Masā'il* or Ibn al-Qāsim's?" Al-Ḥarbī replied "Write down al-Wāqidī's [d. 207/823] *Masā'il*. Is there anyone in the world who says: 'I asked [Mālik], al-Thawrī, Ibn Abī Dhi'b and Ya'qūb' [i.e., Abū Yūsuf al-Qādī d. 182/798] except him?¹¹

Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb Al-Asamm (d. 346/957) went to Beirut to hear al-Awzā'ī's responses from al-‘Abbās b. al-Walīd b. Mazyad (d. 270-71/884)¹² who transmitted it from his father < al-Awzā'ī.¹³ Al-Awzā'ī's *Masā'il*, which was also transmitted by Abū Iṣhāq al-Fazārī (d. 185-6/801-2) from al-Awzā'ī, was known in Iraq at the time of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal.¹⁴ Aḥmad himself wrote a letter of recommendation for Bishr b. Mūsā al-Asadī to al-Ḥumaydī (d. 219/834) in Mecca. Hence Bishr was able to write the *Masā'il*¹⁵ and a great number of *ḥadīths* from al-Ḥumaydī.¹⁶ These responses probably developed from older responses which go back to various Successors and their followers, such as Ibrāhīm al-Nakhā'ī (d. 96/714-15), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), and ‘Atā’ (d. 114-5/732-33). However, some traditionalists believe that *Masā'il* are not a sort of reasoning (*ra'y*) because their origin can be traced to the Prophet Muhammad's sayings (*ḥadīth*). In his letter to the people of Mecca, Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 275/889) says:

أما هذه المسائل مسائل الثوري ومالك والشافعي فهذه الأحاديث أصولها
As for those responses (*Masā'il*): responses of al-Thawrī, Mālik and al-Shāfi'ī [(d. 204/820)], these Prophet's sayings (*ḥadīth*) are their sources¹⁷

¹¹ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadī, *Tarikh Baghdaḍ*, 4: 10.

¹² ثم دخل الشام فسمع بعسقلان من أَحْمَدَ بْنَ الْفَضْلِ، “^{وَبِبَيْرُوتِ مِنْ الْعَبَّاسِ بْنِ الْوَلِيدِ بْنِ مَزِيدِ أَقْامَ عَلَيْهِ حَتَّى سَمِعَ مِنْهُ مَسَائِلَ الْأَوْزَاعِيِّ}” Abd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad al-Samā'ī, *al-Ansāb*, 1: 296.

¹³ حدثنا عبد الله قال سألت أبي عن شيخ بصرى يقال له “

¹⁴ عباد بن جويرية فقال كذاب أفالك أتيته أنا وعلي بن المديني وإبراهيم بن عرعرة فقلنا له أخرج إلينا كتاب الأوزاعي فأخرجه فإذا فيه مسائل الأوزاعي عن أبي إسحاق الغزاروي سألت الغزاروي سألت الأوزاعي وإذا هو قد جعلها عن الزهري

¹⁵ Presumably these *Masā'il* are from Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah or al-Shāfi'ī.

¹⁶ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1:328.

¹⁷ Sulaymān b. Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Risālat Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī fī waṣf Sunanīh*, 28. Also see: Melchert, “Traditionist-Jurisprudents and the framing of Islamic law”, 396.

In the third A.H./ninth century, it was quite common among traditionalists to take one or more of these responses (*Masā'il*) to one or more of the jurisprudent-traditionalists and record the answers, thereby producing a new *Masā'il*. Sometimes students created questions, and then asked their teachers (*shuyūkh*) about them. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal himself asked his teacher ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī (d. 198/814) but he rarely wrote down his teacher's answers.¹⁸

However, in some cases the *Masā'il* of Aḥmad were built on the models of previous *Masā'il*. Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (d. 795/1393) indicate the root of Aḥmad's *Masā'il*; they point out that:

- 1- al-Kawsaj (d. 251/865) and others asked Aḥmad about the *Masā'il* of al-Thawrī and others.
- 2- Ḥanbal b. Ishāq (d. 273/886) and Aḥmad b. al-Faraj (d. 271/884-85) asked him about the *Masā'il* of Mālik and the people of Medina.
- 3- Al-Maymūnī (d. 274/887-88) and Muḥannā al-Shāmī (d. ?) asked him about al-Awzā‘ī's *Masā'il*.
- 4- Ismā‘il b. Sa‘id al-Shālanjī (d. 230/844-45) asked him about the *Masā'il* of Abū Ḥanīfah and his followers.¹⁹ Al-Jūwzajānī (d. 256/870) then produced a commentary on this *Masā'il*.

The noteworthy characteristic of Aḥmad's *Masā'il* is their enormous number. Apparently most of them were collected by Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923), who includes them in his book *al-Jāmi‘ li-‘ulūm al-imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Relying on

¹⁸ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 95. يسيراً عن عبد الرحمن، ربما كتبت المسألة

¹⁹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmu‘ fatawā*, 34: 114. قال ابن تيمية: "وحنبل وأحمد بن الفرج كانا يسألان الإمام أحمد عن مسائل مالك وأهل المدينة، كما كان يسأله إسحاق بن منصور وغيره عن مسائل سفيان الثوري وغيره، وكما كان يسأله الميموني عن مسائل الأوزاعي، وكما كان يسأله اسماعيل بن سعيد الشاذلي عن مسائل أبي حنيفة وأصحابه، فإنه كان قد تلقى على مذهب أبي حنيفة، واجتهد في مسائل كثيرة رجح فيها مذهب أهل الحديث، وسأل عن تلك المسائل أحمد وغيره، وشرحها إبراهيم بن بعقرub الجوزجاني إمام مسجد دمشق".

‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Aḥmad Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, "al-Radd ‘alā man ittaba‘ ghayr al-madhāhib al-arba‘ah", 2: 631.

قال ابن رجب "وكل ذلك كلام عامة فقهاء الأمصار وأئمة البلاد - كما يحيط به معرفته - كمالك والأوزاعي والثوري وغيرهم وقد عرض عليه عامة علم هؤلاء الأئمة وفتاويهم، فأجاب عنها بالموافقة نارة وبالمخالفة

فإن مهناً بن يحيى الشامي عرض عليه عامة مسائل الأوزاعي وأصحابه، فأجاب عنها

وجماعة عرضوا عليه مسائل مالك وفتاويه من الموطأ وغيره فأجاب عنها، وقد نقل ذلك عنه حنبل وغيره وإسحاق بن منصور عرض عليه عامة مسائل الثوري فأجاب عنها".

al-Khallāl's book, al-Mardāwī (d. 885/1480) in his book *al-Inṣāf*²⁰ counted 131 *Masā'il* works related to Aḥmad. Subsequently, Bakr Abū Zayd added 40 more by using a part of al-Khallāl's book *Tabaqāt Aṣḥāb al-Imām Aḥmad* that currently remains in manuscript, as well as other works.²¹ However, about 56 of them were unknown, and we only know about them through al-Khallāl. Moreover, some others are from almost unknown or untrustworthy people and around three names are repeated.

In the following pages eight of Aḥmad's *Masā'il* will be examined. These *Masā'il* are in existence (completely or partly) and have been published:

- 1- Al-Kawsaj's *Masā'il*: three copies of this book still survive in manuscripts. The oldest was written in the fourth A.H./tenth century and preserved in al-Zāhirīyah Library (in al-Asadiyah). This manuscript lost about 21 lines from its beginning because of exposure to damp. The second manuscript is saved in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah; it was copied in 1362/1943, and it is most likely this copy was made from the manuscript in al-Zāhirīyah. The last and most complete manuscript was written in 787/1385 and is preserved in al-Umarīyah Library (in al-Asadiyah). Al-Umarīyah and al-Zāhirīyah have some differences in the order in which the content of the book is organised, and there are some *Masā'il* found in al-Umarīyah's manuscript which are not found in al-Zāhirīyah's and vice versa. The title of the book given in al-Zāhirīyah's manuscript is “*Kitāb al-Masā'il ‘an iṁāmay ahl al-hadīth wa-faqīhay ahl al-Sunnah Abī ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī wa-Abī Ya‘qūb Ishāq b. Ya‘qūb Ibn Rāhawayh al-Hanzalī, radi’ Allāh ‘anhū. Allafah” wa -rawāh” ‘anhuma Ishāq b. Mansūr al-Marwazī al-Ḥāfiẓ, rahimah” Allāh wa-jazāh” Khayra”*”. According to these manuscripts the *Masā'il* were published several times, and there are no significant differences between these editions in the manner of reading the manuscripts.²²

²⁰ ‘Alī b. Sulaymān al-Mardāwī, *al-Inṣāf fī ma‘rifat al-rājih min al-khilāf ‘alā madhhab al-imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 30:399-419.

²¹ Abū Zayd, *al-Madkhāl al-muṭaṣṣal*, 2: 647-51.

²² In this study I am using the ten-volume edition from the Islamic University (in Saudi Arabia), but, in this study, I am referring to the numbers of the questions rather than to volumes and pages.

- 2- Al-Athram's *Masā'il*: only a small part of the book survives in a manuscript that is saved in al-Zāhirīyah Library (in al-Asadīyah). This part contains 22 chapters, all of which are concerned with *al-wuḍū'* (ablutions). The date of this manuscript is unknown. The manuscript is problematic, because it contains quotations from later scholars, such as Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938). These quotations presumably were found in the early version on which the copier relied, because he wrote the simple (—) above every quotation to indicate that these had been found in the original script from which he himself had copied. The editor of the published work has not made any effort to study the problem. He only mentions it in passing and has ignored all the later quotations.²³
- 3- Ṣāliḥ's *Masā'il*: about half of this work still exists in a manuscript that was found in Mecca. The manuscript contains the second half of the book, from the eighth *juz'* to the sixteenth; it was presumably written in the tenth A.H./sixteenth century. Relying on this manuscript, the book was published twice, the first edition in India, and the second, more accurate edition, in Saudi Arabia.²⁴
- 4- Abū Dāwūd's *Masā'il*: Three manuscripts of this *Masā'il* are known to us. The earliest was written in 266/879-80 during the lifetime of Abū Dāwūd; and it is kept in al-Zāhirīyah Library (in al-Asadīyah). The second, which was written in the seventh A.H./thirteenth century, is kept in the Library of El Escorial, northwest of Madrid. The third manuscript is housed in al-Maḥmūdīyah Library (in King 'Abd al-'Azīz Library) in Medina. Ṭāriq 'Awad (editor of the second edition of *Masā'il*) claims that this manuscript is unreliable and assumes that it was copied from al-Zāhirīyah's copy. However, the *Masā'il* was published twice; the first time was in Cairo in 1353/1934, when its editor relied on the third manuscript and sometimes used the first as well. The second and more accurate edition, published in 1999, relied on the first and second manuscripts.
- 5- Ibn Ḥāni's *Masā'il*: Two copies of the book were obtained by Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh who edited them. Al-Shāwīsh dates the first manuscript to the first half of the sixth A.H./twelfth century. However, the last two fascicles (*kurrās*) had been spoiled; hence Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Mirdāwī copied these two

²³ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Athram, "Sunan Abī Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥāni' al-Athram".

²⁴ The references in this thesis are to this edition.

fascicles in 849/1445, thereby making the second manuscript of the book. The book, edited by Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh, was published in Beirut.²⁵ Other editions were printed but were based on al-Shāwīsh's edition.

- 6- Ḥarb's *Masā'il*: part of the book still survives in manuscript in the Yūsuf Aghā Library in Istanbul. This starts from the chapters on marriage until the end of the book, which presumably makes up the half of the book that is described by al-Dhahabī as two volumes.²⁶ The manuscript is clear and the writer re-read it in its original version to make sure of his writing. This *Masā'il* was published in 2004; however, the editor published only the text, without any study related to it or to the manuscript.²⁷ Another part of the book that was found in a private library contains some chapters from the books on *tahārah*, *hayd* and *salāt*. This fragment was edited, and the editor added a chapter on *raḍā'* from the Yūsuf Aghā manuscript; publication was due in 1431/2010.²⁸
- 7- 'Abd Allāh's *Masā'il*: the book was first published in 1981, relying on a complete manuscript that still survives in al-Zāhirīyah Library (in al-Asadīyah); another manuscript was written in 773/1371-72, and is preserved in the Taymūriyah Library (Cairo). Subsequently, it was published in 1986 as the subject of a PhD thesis at al-Azhar University; the editor of this edition used the two previous manuscripts as well as a very recent and unimportant one written in 1362 A.H./1943.
- 8- Al-Baghawī's *Masā'il*: this is a small book, the manuscript of which is saved in al-Zāhirīyah Library (in al-Asadīyah); the manuscript's title is “*Juz' fīhī Masā'il an Abī 'Abd Allāh Ahmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī, rahmat Allāh 'alayh*”. The book contains one hundred and two reports, only sixty-five of which are from Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, while the others are traditions narrated from his grandmother and Ibn Abī Shaybah. Several editions of the book have been published, all of which are based on the same manuscript.

²⁵ The references in this thesis are to this edition.

²⁶ al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 13:245.

²⁷ Ḥarb, *Masā'il*.

²⁸ Ḥarb b. Ismā'il al-Kirmānī, *Masā'il Ḥarb al-Kirmānī 'an al-imām Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal wa-Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh*, ed. al-Walīd al-Furayyān, 1st edition, (al-Riyād: Dār Ibn al-Athīr, 2010). (hereafter: Ḥarb, *Masā'il*).

My main aim in this chapter is to provide an analytical description of these *Masā'il* and to show how Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl was presented in each *Masā'il*. The second part of the chapter deals with disagreements among these *Masā'il* over the presentation of Ahmād's opinions: I use these contradictions to argue that in many cases, especially with regard to controversial issues among the traditionalists, it is difficult to distinguish between Ahmād's own opinions and those attributed to him by his students and the *Masā'il* collectors.

2.2. Al-Kawsaj's *Masā'il* (d. 251/865)

Abū Ya'qūb Iṣhāq b. Maṇṣūr al-Kawsaj was a student of both Iṣhāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853) and Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl, and was likely to have been a follower of Iṣhāq rather than a Ḥanbālī as such.²⁹ He lived and died in Khurāsān, the place where Iṣhāq and his school of law were situated.³⁰ The book of *Masā'il* includes approximately 3,600 questions. Al-Kawsaj's method is mainly that of asking Ahmād, then submitting Ahmād's answers to Iṣhāq b. Rāhawayh and finally recording the two answers together. In some cases, al-Kawsaj asks Ahmād alone or Iṣhāq alone. Ahmād was asked 190 questions individually, while Iṣhāq on his own was asked 230.

It is evident that this *Masā'il* was designed on the model of that of Sufyān al-Thawrī. In about 722 of the questions in the *Masā'il*, al-Kawsaj does the following: he asks Ahmād a question that was previously put to al-Thawrī,³¹ and then lets Ahmād know what al-Thawrī answered. Then, after recording Ahmād's answer to this question, he gives us Iṣhāq's answer or comment. In many cases Iṣhāq would simply agree with both (if Ahmād had agreed with al-Thawrī) or with one of them (Iṣhāq mainly agrees with Ahmād). Occasionally he might say something different. For example:

قلت: قال سفيان في الثيب إذا زوجت فضحتك أو بكت أو سكت؟ قال: لا يجزئ حتى
تنتكلم بإذن.

²⁹ This is opposite to Spectorsky, *Chapters*, 4.

³⁰ For Iṣhāq b. Rāhawayh and his school of law see: Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥajwī, *al-Fikr al-sāmī fī tārīkh al-fiqh al- Islāmī*, 3: 12-13; Jamāl Muḥammad Bājillān, *Iṣhāq b. Rāhawayh wa-atharuhū fī al-fiqh al-Islāmī*, Susan Spectorsky, "Hadith in the Responses of Iṣhāq b. Rāhawayh".

³¹ Spectorsky identifies Sufyān as being Sufyān b. 'Uyaynah (see: Spectorsky, *Chapter 3*). However it is indeed Sufyān al-Thawrī here. Furthermore, when Sufyān b. 'Uyaynah is mentioned, al-Kawsaj refers to him as "Ibn 'Uyaynah, not "Sufyān".

قال أَحْمَدُ: نَعَمْ، حَتَّى تَكُلُّمَ بِإِذْنِهِ.
قال إِسْحَاقُ: هُوَ كَمَا قَالَ.. إِنْ كَانَ ضَحْكُهَا عَلَى مِذْهَبِ الرَّضِيِّ فَهُوَ كَالْسَّكُوتِ فِي الْبَكْرِ
إِذَا عُلِمَ ذَلِكَ

I [al-Kawsaj] said, “Sufyān said [the following] about the *thayyib* (previously married [e.g., a widow or a divorcee]) when she is given in marriage, she laughs or cries or is silent: he said: It is not [a] valid [marriage] until she speaks her permission”.

Aḥmad said, “Yes, [not] until she speaks her permission”.

Ishāq said, “It is as he said...Further, if it is known that her laughter is her manner of consenting, then it is like the silence of the *bikr* (virgin)³²

The question on marriage within the forbidden degrees is an example of Aḥmad’s disagreement with al-Thawrī. Al-Kawsaj says:

قلت: قيل له يعني سفيان:- رجل تزوج امرأة ذات محرم وهو يعلم؟
قال: لا أرى عليه حداً، لكن يعزز.
قال أَحْمَدُ: قبح الله هذا القول.
قلت: أليس نقول [تقول] يقتل؟
قال: يقتل إذا كان على العمد.
قال إِسْحَاقُ: كَمَا قَالَ سَوَاءَ

Sufyān was asked about a man who knowingly marries a woman within the forbidden degrees, and Sufyān answers: “I do not think such a man receives a *hadd* punishment; rather a *ta’zīr* punishment”. Aḥmad said: “How repulsive this doctrine must be to God!”

I said: “Do we not say he should be killed?”

Aḥmad said: “He is killed if he did it intentionally.”

Ishāq said: “It is the same as [Aḥmad] said”³³

As has been remarked before, Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh mostly agrees with Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal although he sometimes disagrees. Al-Kawsaj notes:

قلت: إذا أقرَ الرجل لوارثَ عند الموت أو غير الوارث؟
قال [أَحْمَدٌ]: أما إقراراه لوارث لا يجوز إلا ببيته، ولا يجوز لغير وارث.
قال إِسْحَاقُ: كلما أقرَ لوارث في المرض بدين أو لغير وارث جاز ذلك، إلا أن يعلم أنه أراد أن يلجمي
لوارث تلجمة.
قلت لأَحْمَدٍ وإذا أقرَ لامرأة بدين في مرضه ثم تزوجها ثم مات وهي وارثته، لم يجز؟
قال: هذا أقرَ بها وهي ليست له بامرأة، يجوز ذلك إلا أن يكون تلجمة، فإذا كان تلجمة ردت.
قال إِسْحَاقُ: أَجَادَ، وَأَخْطَأَ فِي الْأُولَىِ.
قال أبو يعقوب [الكوسج]: ما كان أشد على إِسْحَاقَ أَن يخالفه، ولكن أشد تعظيمه له

I said to Aḥmad: “If a man admitted [having a debt] to an inheritor or a non-inheritor, [is that accepted from him]?”

He said: “As for his admitting to an inheritor, it is not permitted unless there is evidence, while it is not permitted to a non-inheritor”.

³² Ishāq b. Mansūr al-Kawsaj, *Masā’il al-imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal wa-Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh*, q. 865. (The translation is by Spectorsky in *Chapters*, 147 with some changes).

³³ Ibid, q. 915. (The translation is by Spectorsky in *Chapters*, 156-57).

Ishāq said: “Whenever he admits having a debt to an inheritor or a non-inheritor, whilst sick [unto death], it is permitted, unless he was forced to admit to an inheritor”.

I said to Ahmād: “If he [a man], sick [unto death], admitted having a debt to a woman [and] after that, he married her, then he died and she is an inheritor from him; is it [i.e. his admission] not permitted?”

He said: “he admitted having that [i.e., the debt] when she was not his wife, unless he was forced [to do so] and if he was forced into it [his admission] is rejected”.

Ishāq said: “He did excellently, but he was wrong in the former [answer].”

Abū Ya‘qūb [al-Kawsaj] said: “It was so difficult for Ishāq to disagree with him. And he highly respected him.”³⁴

Ishāq was once surprised when Ahmād said that the minor pilgrimage (*al-‘umrah*) was a duty (*wājib*) and Ishāq comments that:

قال إسحاق: هو كما قال وأجاد، ظنت أن أحداً لا يتابعني عليه

It is as he said, and he did excellently. I thought there was no one who agreed with me on this opinion!³⁵

However, al-Kawsaj presumably uses other *Masā’il*, such as those of al-Zuhrī (d. 125/742-43), Ibn Abī Laylā (d. 148/765), al-Awzā‘ī (d. 157/774), and Mālik (d. 179/795). In addition, al-Kawsaj sometimes creates new questions, or takes the conversation further by building questions on his masters’ answers or by asking them for their evidence.

Al-Kawsaj exploits his *Masā’il* to show how Ahmād admires him and counts him as a scholar, not just as a normal student. Al-Kawsaj states that

قال لي أحمـد: ما تقول في رجل وجد كنزاً إسلامياً وجاهلياً في مكان واحد؟

قلت: هذه إسلامي.

قال: فما تقول إذا وجدها متفرقة؟

قلت: الجاهلي ركاز، والآخر لقطة.

قال: ما أحسن ما قلت.

Ahmād asked me: “what do you say if a man finds an Islamic and Ignorant (pre-Islamic) treasure altogether in same place?”

I [i.e., al-Kawsaj] said: “this is an Islamic.”

³⁴ Ibid., q. 3223-24.

³⁵ Ibid., q. 1366.

قلت لأبي عبد الله أحمـد بن محمد بن حنبل: العرة واجبة هي؟

قال: هي واجبة.

قلت: و يقضـي منها المتعـة؟

قال: نعم.

قال إسحاق: هو كما قال وأجاد، ظنت أن أحداً لا يتابعني عليه.

He [i.e., Ahmād] said: “so, what do you say if he finds them in different places?”

I said: “the Ignorant is *rikāz* (ore); and the other [i.e., the Islamic] is *luqātah* (property found by chance).”

[Ahmād] said: “how excellent is what you have said.”³⁶

Al-Kawsaj, as a professional teacher, asked for money from students who wanted to copy and study his book of the *Masā'il*. When Ṣāliḥ b. Ahmād told his father that al-Kawsaj in Khurāṣān narrated these responses (*Masā'il*) which he had asked him about them and that he was taking money (*darāhim*) for it, Ahmād became angry and grieved. He then said: “They came and asked me for these responses then transmitted them and took [money] for them?” After this, Ṣāliḥ said: “al-Kawsaj came to Baghdad and visited my father, but Ahmād did not say anything to him about that”.³⁷ This story is likely to be reliable because it does not exaggerate Ahmād’s reaction, although less reliable stories and rumours about Ahmād’s attitude towards al-Kawsaj’s *Masā'il* were known. In one of them it is related that:

قال أَحْمَدُ بْنُ إِسْحَاقَ بْنَ مُنْصُورَ الْكُوسْجَ يَرْوِيُّ عَنِي مَسَائِلَ بَخْرَاسَانَ اشْهَدُوا أَنِّي قَدْ
رَجَعْتُ عَنْ ذَلِكَ كُلَّهِ

Ahmād states: ‘I have heard that Ishāq b. Manṣūr al-Kawsaj, in Khurāṣān, narrates responses (*Masā'il*) from me; witness that I retracted all of my answers I had given to him.’³⁸

This story, which was rejected by Ṣāliḥ b. Ahmād, was transmitted by a person called Ahmād b. al-Rabī‘ b. Dīnār. This person is unknown, despite having been described as a friend of Ahmād. We only know of him through this quotation. In contrast, another unknown person, Ḥassān b. Muḥammad, who obviously supported al-Kawsaj, says:

أَنِّي إِسْحَاقُ بْنُ مُنْصُورٍ بَلَغَهُ أَنَّ أَحْمَدَ بْنَ حَنْبَلَ رَجَعَ عَنْ بَعْضِ تَلْكَ الْمَسَائِلِ الَّتِي عَلَقَهَا قَالَ
فَجَمَعَ إِسْحَاقُ بْنُ مُنْصُورٍ تَلْكَ الْمَسَائِلِ فِي جَرَابٍ وَحَمَلَهَا عَلَى ظَهَرِهِ وَخَرَجَ رَاجِلًا إِلَى
بَغْدَادٍ وَهِيَ عَلَى ظَهَرِهِ وَعَرَضَ خَطُوطَ أَحْمَدَ عَلَيْهَا فِي كُلِّ مَسَأَةٍ اسْتَفْتَاهُ فِيهَا فَاقْرَأَ لَهُ بِهَا
ثَانِيًّا وَأَعْجَبَ بِذَلِكَ أَحْمَدَ مِنْ شَأنِهِ

When al-Kawsaj heard about Ahmād’s retraction, he took his *Masā'il* in a bag (*jīrāb*), put it on his back and travelled to Baghdad on foot. He met with Ahmād and showed him his hand-writing on every

³⁶ Ibid., q 1934.

³⁷ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 7: 386. قال أبو نعيم ابن عدي الحافظ قلت: صالح بن أحمد بن حنبل عندنا. شيخ يروي حكاية عن أبي عبد الله أنه قال قد رجعت عما رواه إسحاق الكوسج عنه وذكرت له هذه الحكاية فقال لي صالح ابن بلغني إن إسحاق بن منصور يعني الكوسج يروي بخراسان هذه المسائل التي سألك عنها ويأخذ عليها التراهم فغضب أبي من ذلك واغتنم ما أعلمه فقال يسألوني عن المسائل ثم يحدثون بها ويأخذون عليها وأذكر إنكارا شديدا قلت: له إن أبي نعيم الفضل بن دكين كان يأخذ على الحديث قال لو علمت هذا ما روית عنه شيئا قال صالح ثم إن إسحاق بن منصور قدم بعد ذلك بغداد فصار إلى أبي فأعلمه أنه على الباب فاذن له ولم يتكلم معه بشيء من ذلك.

³⁸ Ibid., 7: 386.

single response (*mas'alah*). Hence Ahmād agreed to them [i.e., his responses] again, and admired him³⁹

As a result of the rumour that Ahmād had retracted al-Kawsaj's *Masā'il*, some jurisprudents (likely to have been Ḥanbalīs) had doubts about the work. However, the leader of the Ḥanbalīs, al-Ḥasan ibn Ḥāmid (d. 403/1012) made a lengthy defence of its reliability.⁴⁰

Al-Kawsaj died in 251/865, ten years after Ahmād's death. He had started transmitting Ishāq's and Ahmād's responses (*Masā'il*) during Ahmād's lifetime, meaning that his *Masā'il* was widely known during Ahmād's life and during the period immediately after his death. Presumably, al-Kawsaj's *Masā'il* was the main source of Ahmād's juridical opinions in the second half of the ninth century. This was before al-Khallāl wrote his book *al-Jāmi' li-ṣulūm al-Imām Ahmād*, and before al-Khallāl and his book(s) became the main authority on Ahmād's theological and juridical opinions. Muḥammad b. ʿIsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) in his book *al-Jāmi' al-Sahīh* (known as *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*) relies on al-Kawsaj's *Masā'il* when presenting Ishāq's and Ahmād's opinions.⁴¹ In Egypt the book was also known in the early period, and it was used to present Ahmād's and Ishāq's opinions by ʿUbayd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Barqī (d. 291/904), in his commentary on *Mukhtaṣar Ibn ʿAbd al-Hakam*.⁴² Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ājurri (d. 360/970) also used it.⁴³ Last, but not least, ʿUmar b. Ahmad al-Barmakī (d. 387/999) wrote a commentary on al-Kawsaj's *Masā'il*. This has apparently not survived, although it is referred to by Ibn Abī Ya'la' ibn al-Farrā'.⁴⁴

³⁹ قال حسان بن محمد سمعت مشايخنا يذكرون أن إسحاق بن منصور بلغه أن أَحْمَدَ بْنَ حَنْبَلَ رَجَعَ عَنْ بَعْضِ ثَالِثٍ. Ibid., 7: 386-87.

⁴⁰ Ibn Abī Ya'la', *Tabaqāt*, 3: 316-19.

⁴¹ al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-sahīh*, Kitāb al-Ilal, 1176-67.

⁴² ʿUbayd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Barqī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar al-Ṣaghīr*. manuscript. For this book see: Jonathan Brockopp, *Early Mālikī Law: Ibn ʿAbd al-Hakam and his major compendium of jurisprudence*, 56-57.

⁴³ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ājurri, *Tahrīm al-nard wa-al-shitrānji wa al-malāhi*, 161.

⁴⁴ Ibn Abī Ya'la', *Tabaqāt*, 3: 273.

2.3. Al-Athram's *Masā'il* (d. after 260/875)

Al-Athram is Ah̄mad b. Muḥammad b. Hāni'. He was an outstanding transmitter and jurisprudent, and was one of the disciples of both Ah̄mad and Ibn Abī Shaybah.

Some of Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal's students quoted him as saying that he had forbidden people to write anything emanating from al-Athram. Al-Marrūdhī, who seems to have been on good terms with al-Athram, claims that:

وَسَأَلْتَهُ [أَحْمَدَ بْنَ حَنْبَلَ] عَنْ أَبِي بَكْرِ الْأَثْرَمِ، قَالَ: نَهَيْتُ عَنِ الْكِتَابَةِ عَنْهُ؟ قَالَ:
لَمْ أَقُلْ إِنَّهُ لَا يُكْتَبُ عَنْهُ الْحَدِيثُ، إِنَّمَا أَكْرَهَ هَذِهِ الْمَسَائِلَ

I asked him [Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal] about al-Athram: “did you forbid [people] to write from him?” He said: “I did not say do not write the *hadīth* from him, I only hate these *Masā'il*.⁴⁵

Another report gives more details about the story. It is said that Ah̄mad was angry with al-Athram and seems to have forbidden him to come to his house until al-Athram had shown his repentance. Al-Athram arranged for one of Ah̄mad's disciples to intercede on his behalf in order to propitiate Ah̄mad.⁴⁶ Why was Ah̄mad angry with al-Athram? And what did al-Athram repent about? We do not have exact answers to these questions, but I will attempt to unearth something from the available materials that might help to answer them. Fortunately, the Ḥanbalī literature provides some important but incomplete information about the relationship between Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Athram, and between al-Athram and other traditionalists. One important story recounts that one of Ah̄mad's students took the chapter on *al-tahārah* (purification) from al-Athram's *Masā'il*, and showed it to Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal. Ah̄mad agreed on some of its points and said “Yes, this is from my words”, but on some of other issues he said “No, this is not from my words”. Then al-Athram handed on Ah̄mad's answers, saying, “I only extend his position by analogy”,⁴⁷ therefore attributing them to Ah̄mad. Other jurisprudents may have agreed to al-Athram's action, but Ah̄mad was unlikely to accept this, which is probably why he forbade people to copy al-Athram's *Masā'il*. Fortunately however, the traditionalists did not comply with Ah̄mad's proscription, and transmitted this *Masā'il* from al-Athram.

⁴⁵ al-Marrūdhī and others, *al-Ilal wa-ma'rifat al-rijāl 'an al-imām Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal rahimah*⁴⁶ Allāh, 174.

⁴⁶ al-Ḥasan Ibn Ḥāmid al-Baghdādī al-Ḥanbalī (hereafter: Ibn Ḥāmid), *Tahdhīb al-ajwibah*, 36-37.

⁴⁷Ibid., 37

Some Ḥanbalī sources provide a different explanation about al-Athram. In these sources, al-Athram is described as one who knows and memorises *ḥadīths*, and who knows chapters (*abwāb*) and *musnad*. Subsequently, it is said, he left all of this to become a disciple of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and devoted himself to Aḥmad's *madhhab*. Al-Khallāl claims that he had heard from al-Marrūdhī who heard al-Athram saying: "I used to memorise the *fīqh* and *ikhtilāf* [the jurisprudence and the disagreement between jurisprudents] and when I accompanied Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, I left all of that".⁴⁸ This statement indicates that al-Athram did not become a disciple of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal until he had become a scholar (*‘ālim*) himself, which means that al-Athram converted to follow Aḥmad's *madhhab*. It is difficult to believe the Ḥanbalī statement that al-Athram left his work in *fīqh* to devote himself to Aḥmad's *madhhab* in jurisprudence, since he wrote books on *fīqh* and *ikhtilāf* after becoming a disciple.

In his book, *Nāsikh al-ḥadīth wa-mansūkhuh* [The Abrogator of *ḥadīth* and the abrogated] al-Athram appears as an independent scholar who uses his individual views to study *ḥadīth*. However, he quotes Aḥmad in this book three times in order to show the weakness of some *ḥadīths*.⁴⁹ In addition, he quotes Shu‘bah⁵⁰ and Sulaymān b. Dāwūd al-Hāshimī⁵¹ for the same reason. Nevertheless, he does not quote anyone when he discusses jurisprudential matters,⁵² and he uses expressions, such as "al-ladhī

⁴⁸ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 173-74.

⁴⁹ al-Athram, *Nāsikh al-ḥadīth wa-mansūkhuh*, 70-1, 207, 209.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 207.

⁵¹ Ibid., 208.

⁵² This does not mean he was completely independent. He may have relied on other scholars but he did not quote them. For example al-Athram identified the irregular ḥadīth (*al-shādhah*) as one which was reported by a trustworthy person but goes against the narration of a person more reliable than he is reliable. It does not include a ḥadīth which is unique in its contents and is not narrated by someone else. However, al-Athram presents it as his own saying. This meaning of *al-shādhah* is exactly what was reported from al-Shāfi‘ī regarding this matter. See: al-Athram, *Nāsikh*, 181; Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Hākim al-Naysābūrī, *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, 119.

الاثرم: "فالشاذ عدنا: هو الذي يجيء بخلاف ما جاء به غيره، وليس الشاذ الذي يجيء وحده بشيء لم يجيء أحد بمنتهه ولم يخالفه فيه غيره".

الحاكم: سمعت أبا بكر محمد بن محمد المتكلم الأشقر، يقول: سمعت أبا بكر محمد بن إسحاق يقول: سمعت يونس بن عبد الأعلى يقول: قال لي الشافعى: "ليس الشاذ من الحديث أن يروي الثقة ما لا يرويه غيره، هذا ليس بشاذ. إنما الشاذ أن يروي الثقة حديثاً يخالف فيه الناس هذا الشاذ من الحديث".

*nakhtār*⁵³ (what we choose is), “*nara*”⁵⁴ (we see), “*al-ikhiyār*” *‘indanā’*⁵⁵ (the choice of us is) and “*‘indanā’*⁵⁶ (on our side), to present his independent view.

If al-Athram did not leave his work on jurisprudence and *hadīth* transmission as shown above, what did he mean by following Aḥmad’s *madhab*? It is likely that the *madhab* here does not refer to the school of law; rather it refers to Aḥmad’s doctrine of theology and piety. However, in his letter to *ahl al-thaghr* (people of the fortified border city) Al-Athram refers to Aḥmad’s *madhab* as a theological one and not as being jurisprudential.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, in the biography of al-Athram we discover how he was converted to Aḥmad’s doctrines in theology and piety. Al-Athram was presumably a follower of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857-8), who was not on good terms with Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal.⁵⁸ Subsequently, and as a result of being influenced by Aḥmad, al-Athram left al-Ḥārith and became his enemy. This statement can be supported by two stories: in the first story al-Athram said that he went to a river to have a *ghusul* for the Friday prayer and was nearly drowned. He begged God, saying: “O God, if you let me live today, I will repent of the company of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī”.⁵⁹ This means he was a companion of al-Muḥāsibī. The second story describes his hostility towards al-Muḥāsibī. Al-Athram claimed that, while al-Muḥāsibī was at a wedding, he put his head between the railings in order to stare at the women at the wedding but his head got stuck. When people saw him in this predicament, they asked him “Why are you staring at the women?” Al-Ḥārith answered “To remember *al-hūr al-īn* in Paradise”.⁶⁰

In his letter to *ahl al-thaghr*, al-Athram criticised some mystics (presumably including al-Muḥāsibī), saying:

⁵³ al-Athram, *Nāsikh*, 71, 261.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 185.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 232.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁵⁷ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 166-72.

⁵⁸ About Aḥmad’s hostility against al-Muḥāsibī see: Melchert, “The Adversaries of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal”, 241-44; ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah, in his editing of: al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *Risalah al-mustarshidīn*, 19- 24; Gavin Picken, *The Concept of tazkiyat al-nafs in Islam in the light of the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī*, 157-83.

⁵⁹ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 165.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1: 166.

من العلم؛ رأيت قوماً في حياة أبي عبد الله كانوا لزمواً البيت على أسباب من النسك وقلة وقد العلم فكان لا يزال أحدهم فأكملهم الناس ببعض ما ظهر لهم من جبهم للخير فخلتهم العجب مع قلة جزاء الله أفضل ما جزى من تعلمنا منه، ولا يكون يتكلّم بالأمر العجيب فيدفع الله ذلك بقول الشیخ كان سبب فضيحته وهتك ما مضى من ستره فأنا حافظ من ذلك من أحد منهم من ذلك شيء إلا أنت أنت ومن مثلك، فقل قد قال: هذا من مكاييد إيليس مع جنوده، يقول لأحدهم لأشياء كثيرة، وإنما ليشمت به، وإن كل غيرك. ثم يلقى في قلبه الشيء. ليس هناك سعة في علم فيزيون عنده أن بيتدئه محدثة بدعة وكل بدعة ضلاله وكل ضلاله في النار

During the life of Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal], I have seen some people who remain at home in the name of asceticism while they lack knowledge. People honoured them for the apparent goodness they displayed, which resulted in them becoming proud and arrogant in addition to the fact that they were lacking in knowledge. This pride led some of them to dare to speak of strange and unbelievable matters that were always refuted by the *shaykh* [i.e., Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal] Therefore, every time they speak out they are exposed and embarrassed and there are plenty of stories that I know by heart about them which show how Satan tricks his soldiers. He [Satan] would keep praising someone by saying: “You are such and you are such so go out and speak”. Then he puts something in his heart and then fixes it for him to speak it out so that Satan can mock him. Indeed, every new matter is innovation and every innovation is a misguidance and every misguidance is in Hell.⁶¹

We can gather from all of this that al-Athram withdrew gradually from some of his thinking after his relation with Ahmad and especially his connection with al-Muḥāsibī. Nevertheless, al-Athram did not withdraw from applying some rational aspects when he wrote his books; these were rejected by Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal but, interestingly, were accepted by the later Ḥanbalīs.

Al-Athram is well-known for his book *al-Sunan*, which is quoted in leading books in Islamic law (both in jurisprudence and *ḥadīth*) by Mālikī, Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanbalī scholars.⁶² In his book *al-Fihrist*, al-Nadīm describes *al-Sunan* as following “*Kitāb al-Sunan*, in the fiqh, [based] on Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s *madhāhib* and his evidence from *ḥadīth*”.⁶³ This *Sunan* is presumably al-Athram’s *Masā’il*, which has another name, because he quotes Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal in nearly every chapter. Furthermore, the quotations from *al-Sunan* in later sources match other quotations from the *Masā’il*.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid., 1: 167.

⁶² For some examples of them, see the editor’s introduction to: al-Athram, “Sunan”, 217-19.

⁶³ Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 285. It is clear that the title of the book is *al-Sunan*, and the rest of al-Nadīm’s words are a description of the book. However, Bakr Abū Zayd thought mistakenly that the title of the book was (*al-Sunan fī al-fiqh ‘alā madhhab Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl wa-shawāhidih min al-ḥadīth*), see: Abū Zayd, *al-Madkhal al-mufaṣṣal*, 2: 627, 807.

⁶⁴ For example, compare Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 162-64, with al-Athram, “Sunan”, 228-9, 237, 248-49, 261-62.

Moreover, al-Khallāl's description of al-Athram's *Masā'il* resembles *al-Sunan* that we have now,⁶⁵ which means that *al-Sunan* and the *Masā'il* are the same book.

To our knowledge, only 22 chapters of the book still survive; all of them are about *al-wuḍū'* (ablutions). However, there are several quotations from the book in later sources which can help us in general to identify the method used in the book.

Al-Athram organised his books as jurisprudence books, and begins every chapter with some relevant *hadīths* (traditions), as well as traditions from the Companions and the Successors. Subsequently, he asked Ahmād about this matter. As a disciple of Ibn Abī Shaybah, al-Athram was highly influenced by his master's book *al-Muṣannaf* when he organised the chapters in his own book.⁶⁶ In his questions, al-Athram frequently says: "I said to Abū 'Abd Allāh", and "was said to Abū 'Abd Allāh". On some rare occasions he says "Ahmād was asked and I was hearing",⁶⁷ or "al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-'Azīz told us (*ḥaddathanā*) that he asked Abū 'Abd Allāh Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal."⁶⁸

Al-Khallāl admired the quality of and satisfaction with the *Masā'il*.⁶⁹ This satisfaction came from al-Athram's deep analyses when he questioned Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal. For example, al-Athram says:

قلت لأبي عبد الله: يتمضمض الرجل ويستنشق من غرفة واحدة؟ قال: نعم، فعادته. قال:
، وذكر حديث عبد الله بن زيد... قلت: وفي حديث علي، شريك... نعم، لحديث النبي،
يقوله؟ قال: زائدة جوّده.
قال: وسمعت أبي عبد الله مرتة أخرى يسأل: أيماء أعجب إليك المضمضة والاستنشاق
بغرفة واحدة أم كل منهما على حدة؟ فقال: بغرفة واحدة.

I asked Abū 'Abd Allāh [Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal]: "Does a man have to rinse his mouth (*yatamadma'*) and sniff up and blow out water (*yastanshiq'*) from the same handful (*gharfah*)?" He said: "Yes". Then I asked him again. He said: "Yes, according to the *hadīth* of the Prophet ..."; and he [i.e., Ahmād] invoked 'Abd Allāh b. Zayd's *hadīth*... I [i.e., al-Athram] said: "and Sharīk said that in 'Alī's *hadīth*." He [i.e., Ahmād] replied: 'Zā'idah (*jawaddah*)'."⁷⁰

⁶⁵ See: Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 162, 384.

⁶⁶ See: al-Manṣūr in his introduction to al-Athram, *Nāsikh al-hadīth*, 10-11.

⁶⁷ By: Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istidhkār al-jāmi'* *li-madhāhib fuqahā'* *al-amṣār wa-'ulamā'* *al-aqṭār fīmā taḍammanah*^u *al-Muwatṭa'* *min ma 'ānī al-ra'y wa-al-āthār wa-sharḥ dhālik*^a *bi-al-ijāz wa-al-ikhtīṣār*, 5: 234.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 7: 34.

⁶⁹ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 384.

⁷⁰ al-Athram provides 'Alī's *hadīth* in his *Masā'il* from both Zā'idah and Sharīk's transmissions.(Al-Athram, "Sunan", 237-8). Sharīk in his version of transmission said that 'Alī rinsed his mouth and sniffed up and blew out water from the same handful, while Zā'idah did not say that was from the same

[al-Athram] said: I heard Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal] on another occasion was asked: “What do you prefer doing, rinsing mouth and sniffing up and blowing out water from the same handful, or separating them?” He answered: “From the same handful.”⁷¹

Another example illustrating the importance of al-Athram's *Masā'il* is when al-Athram says:

سمعتُ أَحْمَدَ بْنَ حَنْبَلَ وَقِيلَ لَهُ: مَا تَقُولُ فِيمَا رُوِيَّ عَنْ أَبِي هَرِيرَةَ وَأَبِي أَيُوبَ وَعَائِشَةَ فِي إِنْكَارِ الْمَسْحِ عَلَى الْخَفَّيْنِ؟ قَالَ: إِنَّمَا رُوِيَّ عَنْ أَبِي أَيُوبَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ: حُبِّبَ إِلَيَّ الْغَسْلُ. فَإِنْ ذَهَبَ ذَاهِبٌ إِلَى قَوْلِ أَبِي أَيُوبَ الْأَنْصَارِيِّ: حُبِّبَ إِلَيَّ الْغَسْلُ؛ لَمْ أَعْبُهُ قَالَ: إِلَّا أَنْ يُتَرَكَ رَجُلُ الْمَسْحِ وَلَا يُرَاهُ كَمَا صَنَعَ أَهْلُ الْبَدْعِ، فَهَذَا لَا يُصْلِي خَلْفَهُ. ثُمَّ قَالَ: نَحْنُ لَا نَذَهَبُ إِلَى قَوْلِ أَبِي أَيُوبَ، وَنَرِي الْمَسْحُ أَفْضَلُ. ثُمَّ قَالَ: وَمَنْ تَأْوِلُ تَأْوِيلًا سَائِنَغًا لَا يَخْالِفُ فِيهِ السَّلْفُ صَلَبِنَا خَلْفَهُ وَإِنْ كَنَّا نَرِي غَيْرَهُ. ثُمَّ قَالَ: لَوْ أَنَّ رَجُلًا لَمْ يَرِدْ الْوَضْوَءَ مِنَ الدَّمِ وَنَرِي نَرَاهُ، لَمْ نَصْلِ خَلْفَهُ؛ إِذْنَ كَنَّا لَا نَصْلِي خَلْفَ سَعِيدِ بْنِ الْمُسَيْبِ وَمَالِكَ وَمَنْ سَهَّلَ فِي الْوَضْوَءِ مِنَ الدَّمِ.

I heard Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal and it was said to him: “What do you say about [the reports] which were narrated from Abū Hurayrah and Abū Ayyūb and Āishah concerning the denial of making *mash* [wiping] upon *khuffayn* [leather socks]?” He said: “It has been narrated from Abū Ayyūb that he said: ‘Washing [the feet instead of making *mash* on the *khuffayn*] is more preferred by me’. So if a person goes to follow the saying of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī ‘washing is more preferred by me’, I will not censure him”. Then he [i.e., Ahmad] said: “Unless a person renounces making *mash* [on the *khuffayn*] and does not accept it as the people of innovation do, so this person will not be prayed behind”.

Then he said: “We do not take the view of Abū Ayyūb, but we believe *mash* is better”.

Then he said: “and whoever makes an acceptable interpretation that does not contradict the [view of the] *salaf*, we will pray behind this person if even we hold a different view.”

Then he said: “If a person holds the opinion that bleeding does not break *wudū'*, and we hold that view [that it breaks *wudū'*], then we would not pray behind him, therefore we will not pray behind Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab and Mālik and those who lighten *wudū'* [by saying bleeding does not break it]”⁷²

In another example, al-Athram explained how Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal stuck to the doctrines of the *ḥadīth* and changed his juridical opinions regarding them. Al-Athram says:

handful. However, it is clear from al-Athram's question that Ahmad preferred Zā'idah's transmission to Sharik's.

⁷¹ al-Athram, “Sunan”, 239.

⁷² Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istidhkār*, 2: 240-41.

سمعتُ أَحْمَدَ بْنَ حَنْبَلَ يُسَأَّلُ عَنِ الْمَعْتَكَفِ فِي أَيِّ وَقْتٍ يَدْخُلُ مَعْتَكَفَهُ؟ فَقَالَ: يَدْخُلُ قَبْلَ غَرْوَبِ الشَّمْسِ فَيَكُونُ بِيَتْدَى لِيلَتِهِ فَقَدْ رَوَى يَحْيَى بْنُ سَعِيدٍ عَنْ عُمَرَ "أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ ... كَانَ يَصْلِي الْفَجْرَ ثُمَّ يَدْخُلُ مَعْتَكَفَهُ". فَسَكَتَ.

وَسَمِعْتُهُ مَرَةً أُخْرَى يُسَأَّلُ عَنِ الْمَعْتَكَفِ فِي أَيِّ وَقْتٍ يَدْخُلُ مَعْتَكَفَهُ؟ فَقَالَ: قَدْ كُنْتُ أَحْبَبُ لَهُ أَنْ يَدْخُلُ مَعْتَكَفَهُ فِي أَوَّلِ اللَّيلِ حَتَّى يَبْيَطَ فِيهِ وَيَبْتَدَىءَ، وَلَكِنَّ حَدِيثَ يَحْيَى بْنِ سَعِيدٍ عَنْ عُمَرَ عَنْ عَائِشَةَ "أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانَ يَدْخُلُ مَعْتَكَفَهُ إِذَا صَلَّى الْغَدَاءَ".

I heard Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl being asked about the place of *i'tikāf*, what time must one enter his place of *i'tikāf*?

Then he said: “He will enter before the setting of the sun, and then it will be the beginning of his night.” Then it was said to him that Yāḥyā b. Sa‘īd narrated from ‘Amrah that “the Prophet used to pray the dawn prayer and then enter his place of *i'tikāf*.” Then he [i.e., Ahmād] kept quiet.

And I heard him, on another occasion, being asked that same question. Then he answered: “It used to be preferred to me that he will enter [his place of *i'tikāf*] during the beginning part of the night and that he stays in [his place of *i'tikāf*] and starts [his *i'tikāf*] in it. However the *hadīth* of Yāḥyā b. Sa‘īd from ‘Amrah from ‘Ā’ishah is that the Prophet used to enter his place of *i'tikāf* after he prayed the dawn prayer.⁷³

Despite the *hadīths* and *āthār* from the Companions and the Successors that were included in al-Athram’s *Masā'il*, this *Masā'il* was not devoted solely to Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl’s juridical opinions. It also contained juridical opinions from some of other traditionalists⁷⁴ such as Muṣaddad b. Muṣarḥad,⁷⁵ ‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim al-Qaṣnabī,⁷⁶ Sulaymān b. Ḥarb,⁷⁷ Abū ‘Ubayd,⁷⁸ Ibn al-Madīnī⁷⁹ and Yāḥyā b. Maṣīn.⁸⁰

In addition to *al-Sunan*, in which al-Athram included Ahmād’s juridical opinions, he assembled another book for the critics of the transmitters of *hadīth*. This book is known as *Kitāb al-Iḥl*, and part of it still survives under the title *Min su'ālāt Abī Bakr Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Ḥāni' al-Athram Abā 'Abd Allāh Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbāl*.⁸¹ This *juz'* is only 92 responses and is apparently not the complete book but only a portion of it. This can be proved by comparing this *juz'* with other sources

⁷³ Ibid., 10: 309-10.

⁷⁴ Melchert has already noted this (*The Formation*, 141). However, he claims that al-Athram’s *Masā'il* includes juridical opinions from Ishāq b. Rāhawayh. I cannot confirm this claim, and it may be incorrect since Ishāq was not mentioned among al-Athram’s teachers. See: al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, 1: 467-67.

⁷⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Iṣtidhkār*, 4: 340.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 6: 38.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 3: 117.

⁷⁸ 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Ahmad b. Rajab al-Ḥanbālī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4: 382.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ According to Melchert, *The Formation*, 141.

⁸¹ Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Ḥāni' al-Athram, “*Min su'ālāt Abī Bakr Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Ḥāni' al-Athram Abā 'Abd Allāh Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Ḥanbāl*”.

quoted from al-Athram, such as al-'Uqaylī (d. 322/934), Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn 'Adī (d. 365/976). The rest of the book was probably lost a long time ago.⁸² However, it seems some traditionalists were not satisfied with this book, and Ṣāliḥ b. Muḥammad (known as Ṣāliḥ Jazarah, d. 293/906) claimed that his companions (i.e., his traditionalist friends) condemned al-Athram for his book of *al-Ilal* from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal.⁸³ It is difficult to accept Ṣāliḥ Jazarah's claim, since the book was accepted and quoted in some traditionalist books, such as those of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn 'Adī and others. However, it is evident that some traditionalists were not on good terms with al-Athram and criticised both his *Masā'il* and *al-Ilal*.

Ibn Taymīyah attributed a theological book called *Kitāb al-Sunnah* to him,⁸⁴ some quotations from which can be found in al-Khallāl's *al-Sunnah*.⁸⁵ These quotations confirm that al-Athram did not devote his books to narrating Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal's doctrines only; rather he quoted other traditionalists, such as Yazīd b. Zuray', al-A' mash, Qatādah, Sa'īd b. 'Amr b. Sa'īd, and 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Umayr.⁸⁶

2.4. Ṣāliḥ's *Masā'il* (d. 266/880)

Ṣāliḥ was the oldest son of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, who relied on him for many matters during his life. However, Aḥmad was anxious to make him a pious and ascetic person, and warned him to accept neither money and nor gifts from the rulers nor to work for them. Yet, as a result of his poverty and his big family, Ṣāliḥ could not tolerate his father's doctrine and worked with the state as a judge.⁸⁷

About half of Ṣāliḥ's *Masā'il* were published and contain about 1400 responses. Most of these *Masā'il* concern jurisprudence (*fiqh*); some others are about theology or are commentaries on the Qur'ān. There is also a critique of the *hadīth* transmitters. The remarkable point about these *Masā'il* is that they are not organised according to

⁸² See the editor's notes in *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁸³ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 6: 298.

⁸⁴ Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah, *al-Fatwā al-Hamawīyah al-kubrā*. 258.

⁸⁵ See: al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*. Nos: 108, 125, 217, 367, 485, 588, 619, 655, 656, 667, 668, 685, 668, 809, 838, 946, 948, 982, 991, 1041, 1005, 1087, 1095, 1727, 1761, 1804.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ For more details see Chapter VI of this study.

subject, but appear to be random. However, this is probably because (according to al-Khallāl) people from Khurāsān and other regions used to address their questions to Ṣāliḥ so that he would ask his father about them. Ṣāliḥ, after asking his father, then sent back the answers to these people.⁸⁸ Thus these *Masā'il* were presumably put in the order in which the questions were received, meaning that they were organised chronologically: question number one, for example, was asked before question number ten. For instance, in question number 631, Ahmād transmitted from ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and others that the *diyah* (blood-money for taking life) of Jews and Christians was 4,000 *dirhams*, and that he (Ahmād) followed this statement. Subsequently, in question number 1256, Ahmād withdrew from this juridical opinion. He stated:

كنت أذهب إلى: دية اليهودي والنصراني أربعة آلاف. فأنا اليوم أذهب إلى نصف دية المسلم
I used to hold the opinion that the *diyah* of Jews and Christians was four thousands. Today, I state that, it is the half of the Muslim's *diyah* [i.e. 6,000 *dirhams*].⁸⁹

Ṣāliḥ used a variety of methods to present his father's answers. He often says: “I asked him.... And he said”. In others he says: “I said.... And he said”. On some rare occasions he says: “my father was asked and I was witness”; or “a man wrote to my father to ask him”. In some others he transmits only *hadīths* and *āthār* (narratives from the Companions and Successors) on his father's authority.

Ṣāliḥ asked only his father: he did not ask any other scholar. This is probably because this *Masā'il* was not a personal initiative on Ṣāliḥ's part. Rather, he asked his father questions that people had sent to him, and recorded some *hadīths* or *āthār* or *fatāwā* which he had heard from his father.

In this book Ahmād was less hostile to other scholars. He invoked al-Shāfi‘ī,⁹⁰ Mālik and, unexpectedly, Abū Ḥanīfah and his followers,⁹¹ in order to support his juridical opinions. Furthermore, this *Masā'il* contains some of Ahmād's principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). For instance, Ṣāliḥ asked him about al-Sha‘bī and al-

⁸⁸ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 462-63.

⁸⁹ Ṣāliḥ, *Masā'il*, 327; 185-88, 290.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 136,

⁹¹ Ibid., 144-45,

Zuhrī: which of them would he prefer to follow if they had a disagreement on a juridical matter? And which was most knowledgeable? Ahmād answered;

لَا أَدْرِي، لَا أَحْدُ هَذَا، كَلاهُمَا عَالَمٌ. قَدْ يَكُونُ الزَّهْرِيُّ سَمِعَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ... الْحَدِيثِ، فَيَذَهَّبُ إِلَيْهِ،
فَهُوَ أَعْجَبُ إِلَيْنَا. أَوْ يَكُونُ الشَّعْبِيُّ قدْ سَمِعَ الْحَدِيثَ وَلَمْ يَسْمَعْ الزَّهْرِيُّ، وَهُوَ أَعْجَبُ إِلَيْنَا

I do not know. I do not restrict this. Both of them are scholars; maybe al-Zuhrī heard a prophetical tradition, and he followed it. That is preferred for us. Or, maybe al-Sha'bī heard the tradition, and al-Zuhrī did not hear it [and he followed it]. That is preferred for us⁹²

The implication of this quotation suggests that one should follow the prophetical traditions, not the scholars. Ahmād also argues against those who only follow the Companions if they reach a consensus on some juridical matters; although people can choose another statement if they have a disagreement on a juridical issue, Ahmād refutes this claim, and insists that if the Companions have a disagreement on some matters, no one can choose another statement; he only will be allowed to choose from among their statements.⁹³ This means that, for Ahmād, following the Companions is compulsory.

This book was narrated from Ṣāliḥ in Baghdad and Aṣfahān. In Baghdad it was narrated by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Bashshār (d. 313/925)⁹⁴ and by al-Khallāl, who narrated Ṣāliḥ’s *Masā’il* in different ways. Frequently, he narrated it from Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Warrāq (d. 272/885)⁹⁵ < Ṣāliḥ. On some other occasions he narrated it directly from Ṣāliḥ,⁹⁶ or from his son Zuhayr b. Ṣāliḥ⁹⁷ < Ṣāliḥ. This probably means that al-Khallāl only heard a part of Ṣāliḥ’s *Masā’il* from him directly; and yet he heard it completely from Ṣāliḥ’s students. In Aṣfahān, Ṣāliḥ narrated the *Masā’il* from his

⁹² Ibid., 53-54.

⁹³ Ibid., 162-63.

⁹⁴ Ibn Abī Ya’lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 111.

⁹⁵ For his entry see: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdaḍād*, 4: 102-3, in which al-Warrāq was described as a one of Ahmād’s noble followers. Michael Cook could not identify him (Cook, *Commanding*, 89. Fn. 8) Some writers identify him as Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Simsār (for his entry see: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdaḍād*, 4: 11), but that is incorrect, because al-Khallāl described him, in some places, as al-Warrāq not al-Simsār. For al-Khallāl’s transmissions from al-Warrāq, see, for example: Ahmād b. Muḥammad al-Khallāl, *Aḥkām ahl al-milal min al-jāmi‘ li-Masā’il al-imām Ahmād Ibni Hanbal*, 7, 52, 59, 62, 64, 65, 68, 72, 76, 79, 91, 94, 96, 105, 131, 135, 164, 172, 175, 185, 189, 197, 206, 235, 238, 244, 268, 270, 277, 280, 287, 288, 294, 304, 306, 307, 313, 318, 325, 328, 335, 343, 363, 368, 374, 380, 391, 395, 416, 417, 427, 450, 451, 456, 462, 474, 467.

⁹⁶ For example, see: al-Khallāl, *Aḥkām ahl al-milal*, 164, 215, 377, 399, 405.

⁹⁷ For example, see: Ibid., 246, 325, 369, 385, 435.

father, and *al-Tārīkh*⁹⁸ from ‘Alī Ibn al-Madīnī.⁹⁹ These books were narrated from Șāliḥ by Ibn Abī Ḥātim and others.¹⁰⁰

2.5. Abū Dāwūd’s *Masā’il* (d. 275/889):

Abū Dāwūd, Sulaymān b. al-Ash‘ath al-Sijistānī is a famous traditionalist. After the Qur’ān, his book *al-Sunan* is one of the six most important books for Sunnī Muslims. He was a close traditionalist disciple to Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. In his *Sunan*, Abū Dāwūd transmits about 231 narrated on the authority of Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal, out of the 4,000 *ḥadīths* contained in the *Sunan*. He also reported 21 legal opinions of Aḥmad's as well as the latter's critic of certain traditions and traditionists. Interestingly enough, Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal wrote one *ḥadīth* from his student Abū Dāwūd; which of course, made Abū Dāwūd very proud.¹⁰¹

This *Masā’il* includes about 2,071 responses. Abū Dāwūd used various methods to present Aḥmad's opinions. Sometimes he says: “I said to Aḥmad...and he said”, or “I asked Aḥmad”, or “Aḥmad was asked”, or “I saw Aḥmad”. When Aḥmad concealed himself from the caliph, Abū Dāwūd used to send his questions to him on paper, and Aḥmad would write down his answers to send back to him.¹⁰² Also, Abū Dāwūd rarely narrated Aḥmad's theological opinions indirectly; he often narrated them through Aḥmad's other students.¹⁰³ As well as jurisprudential issues, which constituted the major part of the book, Abū Dāwūd's *Masā’il* included theological matters and *ḥadīths*, and Aḥmad's critique of transmitters.

In his *Masā’il*, Abū Dāwūd includes details showing that he took long time to collect the *Masā’il* from Aḥmad. For instance, he says, “I heard Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn

⁹⁸ *al-Tārīkh* is a book written by Ibn al-Madīnī; it deals with a critique of the *ḥadīth* transmitters. For this book see: Ikrām Allāh Imdād al-Haqq, *al-Imām ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī wa-manhajuh fī naqd al-rijāl*, 271-72.

⁹⁹ See: ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Abū al-Shaykh al-Anṣārī, *Tabaqāt al-muḥaddithīn bi-Asbahān wa-al-wāridīn ‘alayhā*, 3: 141; Dickinson, *The Development*, 25.

¹⁰⁰ For example, see: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Taqdimah*, 235- 42. In these pages Ibn Abī Ḥātim transmitted from *al-Tārīkh*, and in Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa-al-ta‘dīl*, 2: 184; 3: 155; 6: 152; 9: 173. He transmitted from the *masā’il*.

¹⁰¹ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, 10: 79-80.

¹⁰² Abū Dāwūd, *Masā’il*, 356.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 363, 365, 370.

Ḩanbal [when] al-Warkānī asked him...”.¹⁰⁴ In other places he describes how Ahmād b. Ḥanbal carried out al-Warkānī’s funeral.¹⁰⁵ In another example, he said:

سمعت أَحْمَدَ وسُئِلَ عَنِ الرَّكْعَتَيْنِ قَبْلَ الْمَغْرِبِ؟ قَالَ: أَنَا لَا أَفْعُلُهُ، فَإِنْ فَعَلَهُ رَجُلٌ لَمْ يَكُنْ بِهِ بَأْسٌ.
وَقَدْ سَمِعْتُهُ قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ بِزَمَانٍ يَسْتَحْسِنُهُ وَيَرَاهُ

I heard Ahmād was asked about the two prostrations (*rak’ahs*) before the Sunset prayer (*al-Maghrib*). He said “I do not do it, but if someone does it, it is acceptable.” Abū Dāwūd commented: “I had heard him some while before this, approve it and agree with it”.¹⁰⁶

Abū Dāwūd asked Ahmād in Baghdad and beyond Baghdad. For example, he says: “I said to Ahmād in Tarsūs”.¹⁰⁷ In some cases in the *Masā’il* Ahmād used the authority of jurisprudents who came after the Companions and the Successors. For example, he relied on the juridical opinions of Mālik, Ibn ‘Uyaynah, Hushaym and Ibn ‘Ulayyah.¹⁰⁸

In this *Masā’il* Ahmād shows his disagreement with certain former scholars on various issues of jurisprudence. For example: the people of Medina, the rationalists (*ahl al-raqṣ*), Abū Ḥanifah, Mālik, al-Awzā‘ī, al-Thawrī and Ishāq b. Rāhawayh.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Abū Dāwūd asked Ahmād if al-Awzā‘ī was more accurate in following the Prophet than Mālik. Ahmād answered:

لَا تَقْدِيرَ دِينِكَ أَحَدًا مِنْ هُؤُلَاءِ. مَا جَاءَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ... وَأَصْحَابِهِ فَخَذْ بِهِ، ثُمَّ التَّابِعُونَ بَعْدَ الرَّجُلِ فِيهِ مُخِيرٌ.

Do not take your authority for your religion from any one of these [people]. You must follow what comes from the Prophet ... and his Companions. However, a man has the choice [whether to follow] what comes from the Successors¹¹⁰

For more details about the authority of the Successors, Abū Dāwūd claimed that:

سَمِعْتُهُ سُئِلَ: إِذَا جَاءَ الشَّيْءُ عَنْ رَجُلٍ مِنَ التَّابِعِينَ لَا يَوْجِدُ فِيهِ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ... يُلَزِّمُ الرَّجُلَ أَنْ يَأْخُذَ بِهِ؟ قَالَ: لَا؛ وَلَكِنْ لَا يَكُادُ يَجِيِّءُ الشَّيْءُ عَنِ التَّابِعِينَ إِلَّا وَيَوْجِدُ فِيهِ عَنِ أَصْحَابِ النَّبِيِّ

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 215. al-Warkānī is Muhammad b. Ja‘far b. Ziyād, a neighbour of Ahmād b. Ḥanbal who died in 228/842-43. See: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, 2: 480-82.

Significantly, in later sources al-Warkānī was quoted as saying that when Ahmād b. Ḥanbal died twenty thousand Jews, Christians and Magi converted to Islam. See: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Taqdimah*, 312.

¹⁰⁶ Abū Dāwūd, *Masā’il*, 104.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 102, 120, 173, 267, 305.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 231, 235, 245, 268, 295.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 369.

I heard him [i.e., Ah̄mad] asked: “If something [i.e., legal opinion] comes from one of the Successors, and we do not find any [rule] about it from the Prophet … does a man have to accept it?” He answered: “No, but it is very rare that something [i.e., legal opinion] comes from the Successors and you cannot find anything about it from the Companions of the Prophet.”¹¹¹

However, this *Masā'il* is not entirely dedicated to Ah̄mad's authority. Despite tens of *āthār* from the Companions, the Successors¹¹² and the traditionalists-jurisprudents (such as Mālik, al-Awzā'ī, Waki', al-Thawrī, and Ibn al-Mubārak),¹¹³ Abū Dāwūd also asked some of his teachers (such as Sulaymān b. Ḥarb,¹¹⁴ Ibn Rāhawayh, Abū Thawr and Muṣ'ab al-Zubayrī) and included their answers in the book.¹¹⁵

Significantly, in some manuscripts of the *Masā'il*, all of Abū Dawūd's quotations from his teachers (except those of Ah̄mad) were removed. These manuscripts were written in the seventh A.H./thirteen century and later.¹¹⁶ This was probably done because the writer wanted to dedicate the book to Ah̄mad's responses only. Hence, the same sort of thing may be expected with certain other *Masā'il*.

2.6. Ibn Hāni's *Masā'il* (d. 275/889)

Ibn Hāni' is Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Hāni' al-Naysābūrī. He and his father were very close to Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal. When Ah̄mad was hiding from the caliph al-Wāthiq, he stayed for three nights in Ibrāhīm Ibn Hāni's house, and Ishāq, who was nine years old, served him.¹¹⁷ His service to Ah̄mad continued after this, and he became like one of Ah̄mad's own family. This is reflected in his *Masā'il*. Al-Khallāl described this *Masā'il* as six fascicles (*ajzā'*),¹¹⁸ and al-Dhahabī described it as a one volume (*mujallad*).¹¹⁹ This probably means that it was one physical volume containing six individual books or parts. However, this *Masā'il* also contains about 2,400 responses,

¹¹¹ Ibid., 368-69.

¹¹² Ibid., 151-70, 181-82, 196-201, 211-12, 283.

¹¹³ Ibid., 9, 218-19, 324.

¹¹⁴ Although Sulaymān was a teacher of Abū Dāwūd, the latter narrated his judicial opinion indirectly. See: Ibid., 201-11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 259, 357-63.

¹¹⁶ see: Ibid., ٣٩.

¹¹⁷ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 252, 285.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 1:285.

¹¹⁹ al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 13: 19.

which is bigger than Abū Dāwūd’s by about 300 responses, and bigger than ‘Abd Allāh’s *Masā’il* by about 750 responses.¹²⁰ Ibn Hāni’¹²¹’s *Masā’il* covers various topics. While the main part of the book is dedicated to legal issues, there are critical chapters on theological, historical, behavioural (*adab*) and traditions (*hadīth*) matters.

Ibn Hāni’ presents Aḥmad’s answers by saying that “I asked him ... and he said”, or “I heard Abū ‘Abd Allāh saying ...”, or “he was asked ... and then he said”. Ibn Hāni’ identified the questioners several times; one of them was his father Ishāq Ibn Hāni’.¹²¹ Others included Ibn Zanjawayh,¹²² Dallawayh b. Kāmil,¹²³ Hārūn al-Dīk,¹²⁴ and a man of the pilgrims (*rajūl” min al-hajj*).¹²⁵ A man submitted his creed to Aḥmad then Aḥmad gave his comments on it.¹²⁶ On some occasions Ibn Hāni’ narrated *Masā’il* from Aḥmad indirectly, rather through Aḥmad’s other students.¹²⁷

Ibn Hāni’ did not confine himself to record only Aḥmad’s legal opinions; on many occasions he also recorded Aḥmad’s actions. Furthermore, Ibn Hāni’ transmitted *ḥadīths* (traditions) and *āthār* (Companions’ and Successors’ sayings) with Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal in the chain of transmission.¹²⁸ It is likely that Ibn Hāni’ did not revise his book; therefore, there are some repeated questions with slight differences in the answers. These differences are mainly in providing more details or transmission traditions to support Aḥmad’s views or giving more evidence.¹²⁹

Since Ibn Hāni’ was very close to Aḥmad, sometimes he was sent by Aḥmad to buy something from a market.¹³⁰ A story is told of how close Ibn Hāni’ was to Aḥmad and his family: a young son of Aḥmad asked Ibn Hāni’ to give him beer (*fuqqā‘a*). Ibn Hāni’ asked Aḥmad for his permission to do so, but Aḥmad refused, as he did not

¹²⁰ Spectorsky wrongly states that this *Masā’il* is shorter than Abū Dāwūd’s and ‘Abd Allāh’s *Masā’ils*. See: Spectorsky, *Chapters*, 1 ft. 1.

¹²¹ Ibn Hāni’, *Masā’il*, 1: 28, 103, 113; 2: 14, 155.

¹²² Ibid., 1: 102; 2: 234.

¹²³ Ibid., 1: 114; 2: 153.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 1: 57, 233; 2: 155.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 2: 179.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 2: 156.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 2: 22.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 1: 107-8; 2: 1662-63.

¹²⁹ For instances, see: Ibid., 1: (12-13), 48, (71-72), (153-54), (203-4), 230; 2: (14-15), 32, (168, 235-36).

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2: 132.

want his son to become accustomed to drinking it.¹³¹ Another story is that Ibn Hāni' claimed that he entered Ah̄mad's place, and that someone called Muthannā was with Ah̄mad with a book (letter). When Muthannā saw Ibn Hāni' he hid the book from him. Ah̄mad told the man: "Abū Ya'qūb [Ibn Hāni'] is not one whom we hide things from."¹³² This kind of relationship allowed Ibn Hāni' to record many significant details of Ah̄mad's life, and he provides information about when Ah̄mad started studying *ḥadīth*,¹³³ where and when he travelled to collect *ḥadīth*, his first pilgrimage and his memories of prison.¹³⁴ Furthermore, he gives important information about how Ah̄mad behaved with his family, his friends and his enemies. There are also details of how he bought, took and gave gifts, his patrimony, and even how he cooked.¹³⁵

Spectorsky doubts the importance of this *Masā'il* and its assistance in understanding Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal's jurisprudence.¹³⁶ Spectorsky's claim is not correct and can be challenged by a close examination of Ibn Hāni's *Masā'il*. As well as hundreds of jurisprudential responses, this *Masā'il* provides materials regarding Ah̄mad's principles of jurisprudence. For example, Ibn Hāni' presents Ah̄mad as one who relies heavily on the Companions' opinions, and uses them as an authority.¹³⁷ Ibn Hāni' asked him:

إذا غلبت الخوارج على قوم فأخذوا زكاة أموالهم، هي يجزى عنهم؟ قال: يروى فيه عن ابن عمر أنه قال: يجزى عنهم. قلت له: تذهب إليه؟ قال: أقول لك فيه عن ابن عمر ونقول لي: تذهب إليه!

If *Khārijīs* triumphed over some people and took their almsgiving money (*zakāt^a amwālihim*) would it accomplish [their duty]? Ah̄mad answered: "It is related of Ibn 'Umar that he said it would accomplish this". I [i.e., Ibn Hāni'] said: 'Do you agree with it?' Ah̄mad replied: "I say to you it is related to Ibn 'Umar, and then you ask me do agree with it!"¹³⁸

¹³¹ Ibid., 2: 138.

¹³² Ibid., 2: 183-4.

¹³³ Ibid., 2: 205.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 1: 61; 2: 195-97.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2: 133, 138, 153, 176-78, 180, 184-85.

¹³⁶ Spectorsky, *Chapters*, 1. ft. 1.

¹³⁷ For example see: Ibid., 1: 31, 34, 48, 55-56, 68, 77, 83-84, 94, 185.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 1: 115.

However, when there is a disagreement between the Companions, Ah̄mad chooses from among their opinions.¹³⁹ The matter with the Successors is different. Ah̄mad sometimes takes them as his authority,¹⁴⁰ and sometimes not.¹⁴¹ Ibn Hāni' said:

تعجب أبو عبد الله من قول سعيد بن المسيب: لا نفل إلا من الْحُمْس. وقال: مثل سعيد بن المسيب وعلمه كيف ذهب عليه هذا؟ وكان مالك يقول أيضاً هكذا.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ah̄mad] was wondering about Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab’s statement that there was no booty (*nafl*) except from the one-fifth; and he said “One such as Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab and his knowledge, how could he miss that? And Mālik was also saying the same!”¹⁴²

When Ibn Hāni' asked Ah̄mad:

حديث عن رسول الله ... مرسل ب الرجال ثبت، أحب إليك أو حديث عن الصحابة أو عن التابعين متصل ب الرجال ثبت؟

a *hadīth* transmitted from the Prophet ... by trustworthy transmitters, but it is *mursal*.¹⁴³ Do you like it more than a *hadīth* from the Companions or from the Successors that is transmitted through trustworthy transmitters?

Ah̄mad answered “From the Companions is more preferable to me.”¹⁴⁴

Ibn Hāni' also presents Ah̄mad’s disagreement with other jurists such as rationalists, the people of Medina, Mālik and Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, Ah̄mad sometimes answers by invoking statements from former jurists, such as Shu‘bah, al-Awzā‘ī, Ibn ‘Uyaynah, Ibn Mahdī and Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qattān.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Ibid., 1: 220, 231.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 1: 19, 25, 27, 58, 115, 146, 151.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 1: 21, 28, 142, 185; 2: 71, 106.

¹⁴² Ibid., 2: 106. In the Islamic law booty is “movable goods taken by force from unbelievers during actual warfare, [and] must be divided among the army and the imām (as head of state) once the army has returned to Islamic territory. The head of state is entitled to one-fifth (to be distributed to the leader, the Prophet's relatives, the orphans, the needy and travelers) and the remainder is to be divided among the soldiers ... The head of state may reward certain warriors by giving them larger shares (*nafl*, pl. *anfāl*, cf. q 8:1). Opinions differ on whether this reward is to be paid from the one-fifth portion of the state or at the expense of the other soldiers”. See: Rudolph Peters, “Booty”, in *IE*².

¹⁴³ *Mursal* is a technical term used in *hadīth* science to describe an *isnād* in which the link between the Successor and the Prophet became missing. However, it seems that Ibn Hāni' means missing a link in any place in the *isnād*.

¹⁴⁴ Ibn Hāni', *Masā'il*, 2: 165.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 1: 12, 56, 173, 201, 204; 2: 25, 64, 87, 106.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 1: 112, 120, 153, 173, 2: 31, 95, 129, 174.

This *Masā'il* gives significant details of his attitude towards other scholars' books. According to Ibn Hāni', Ahmād forbids reading the rationalists' books and even sitting with them.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Ahmād says that:

ترکنا أصحاب الرأي وكان عندهم حديث كثير فلم نكتب عنهم؛ لأنهم معاندون للحديث لا يفتح
منهم أحد.

We have left *ahl al-ra'y* and they have a huge number of *hadīths*, and we did not transmit [*hadīths*] from them because they are resistant to *hadīth*. None of them will ever prosper (*lā yuflīhū minhum aḥad*)¹⁴⁸

However, he considered Abū Yūsuf as one of the best among them in *hadīth*, whereas Mu'allā b. Mansūr was one of the worst of them. It was not permitted, Ahmad said, for anyone to transmit [*hadīth*] from him.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, Ibn Hāni' frequently quotes Ahmād's hostility towards writing books. According to Ibn Hāni', Ahmād did not like writing books, and anyone who wrote a book was an innovator, because none of the Companions and the Successors had done so.¹⁵⁰ For this reason, Ahmād rejected the books of Abū Thawr, Mālik, Abū 'Ubayd and Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh. On the other hand, he accepted the *munāẓarah* (disputation), in which one says what he knows and what he heard of the *fatwā*. Moreover, he accepted Abū 'Ubayd's book *Gharīb al-hadīth*, because he had transmitted it from Bedouins (*qawm in A'rāb*).¹⁵¹

2.7. Ḥarb b. Ismā'il's *Masā'il* (d. 280/893):

This is the Ḥarb b. Ismā'il al-Kirmānī who was ascribed to Kirmān, an area in Naysābūr.¹⁵² Ḥarb was about ninety years old when he died, which means he was born in late second A.H/early ninth century.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 2: 166.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 2: 168.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 2: 166.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 2: 165.

¹⁵¹ Ibn Hāni', *Masā'il*, 2: 167. For the meaning and the description of *munāẓarah*, see: George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, 109-11, 133-40. For the history of *munāẓarah*, see: E. Wagner, "Munāẓara", in *EF*.

¹⁵² According to al-Sam'ānī, Ḥarb is from an area in Naysābūr called Kirmān not from the Persian province and its present capital of Kirmān. See: al-Sam'ānī, *al-Ansāb*, 10: 403-4.

Ḩarb was described as being on good terms with al-Marūdhī, one of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal's famous disciples. Al-Khallāl describes Ḥarb by saying that:

رجل جليل، حتى أبو بكر المروذى على الخروج إليه، وقال لي: نزل هاهنا عندي في غرفة،
لما قدم على أبي عبد الله، وكان يكتب لي بخطه مسائل سمعها من أبي عبد الله

He is a great man. Abū Bakr al-Marūdhī encouraged me to travel to him, and [al-Marūdhī] said: “When he [i.e., Ḥarb] came to Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Aḥmad], he stayed here in a room [in my house]; and he used to write to me *Masā’il* that he had heard from Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Aḥmad].”¹⁵³

Al-Khallāl adds:

وكتب لي إليه أبو بكر كتاباً وعلامات كان حرب يعرفها. فقدمت بكتابه إليه فسرّ به وأظهره
لأهل بلده وأكرمني، وسمعت منه هذه المسائل

Abū Bakr [al-Marūdhī] wrote to him a [recommendation] letter for me, with signs which Ḥarb knows. After I came to [Ḥarb] with [al-Marūdhī’s] letter, he was happy and showed the letter to his city citizens. He was generous to me, and I heard these *Masā’il* from him.¹⁵⁴

Al-Khallāl describes Ḥarb as the jurisprudent of the city, who had been appointed by the sultān the superior of the jurists and of others in the city.¹⁵⁵ Ḥarb indicated that his *Masā’il* consisted of 4,000 responses from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh, but he revised this statement by saying that he had not counted them.¹⁵⁶ This number (4000) is not the total of the responses in the *Masā’il*, because Ḥarb included a large number of responses from other traditionalists in addition to Aḥmad and Ibn Rāhawayh. Not only this, but he included traditionalist responses from previous generations, as well as the Prophet’s *hadīth* and the Companions and the Successors’ sayings (*āthār*). This makes this *Masā’il* a warehouse of all traditionalist doctrines in jurisprudence, theology, history, the interpretation of *hadīth*, and transmitters’ critiques and behaviour (*ādāb*).

Ḩarb includes various responses from his masters, such as Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh, ‘Alī Ibn al-Madīnī, Abū Thawr, ‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīm, Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, Sawwār b. ‘Abd Allāh, Aḥmad b. Yūnus, and others. From previous traditionalist generations he includes Mālik b. ’Anas, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī,

¹⁵³ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 388-89.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 1:389.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Sufyān al-Thawrī, al-Awzā‘ī, Ibn al-Mubārak, ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, al-Zuhrī, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Zubaydī, Abū al-Zinād, Abū Ishāq al-Fazārī, al-Layth b. Sa‘d, Ibn Abī Laylā, Khārijah b. Muṣ‘ab and others.

Ḥarb presumably started collecting for his book before the Inquisition, and he continued writing it after the Inquisition had ended, which probably explains why he included the opinions of some traditionalists such as Ibn al-Madīnī and Abū Thawr, towards whom Aḥmad had become inimical after the Inquisition. Ḥarb was aware of this, so when he transmitted a tradition from Aḥmad < Ibn al-Madīnī < Mu‘ādh b. Hishām < his father < Qatādah < Sharīk b. Khalīfah < Ibn ‘Umar, Ḥarb stated: “Aḥmad narrated to us (*haddathanā*) from ‘Alī [Ibn al-Madīnī] before the Inquisition”.¹⁵⁷ He also provided information about the traditionalists who, under the Inquisition, complied with the doctrine of the Qur’ān being created.¹⁵⁸

In this *Masā’il*, Ḥarb often asked Aḥmad directly, but on some occasions he narrated Aḥmad’s answers indirectly through others. For example, he narrated through Abū Dawūd < Aḥmad;¹⁵⁹ and, more interestingly, through < Abū Dawūd < Ya‘qūb b. Ibrāhīm < Aḥmad.¹⁶⁰ Although this *Masā’il* provides significant information about traditionalist jurisprudence, especially that of Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh, Abū Thawr and Ibn al-Madīnī, we cannot examine it here because this study is concerned only with Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal.

The most controversial part of this *Masā’il* is the theological section, especially Ḥarb’s creed, which was afterwards attributed to Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Ḥarb, *Masā’il*, 458.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 492.

¹⁵⁹ Ḥarb, *Masā’il*, 426. This response is available in Abū Dawūd’s *Masā’il* as well. See: Abū Dāwūd, *Masā’il*, 64.

¹⁶⁰ Ḥarb, *Masā’il*, 423. This response also is available in Abū Dawūd *Masā’il*, see: Abū Dāwūd, *Masā’il*, 363.

¹⁶¹ See: Aḥmad’s creed I.

2.8. 'Abd Allāh's *Masā'il* (d. 290/903)

'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad narrated his collection of *Masā'il* from his father in Baghdad, in 285-86/898-99; the collection includes about 1635 responses. This *Masā'il* was intended to outline Aḥmad's opinions of jurisprudence matters, and his commentaries on the meaning of some *ḥadīths*.

'Abd Allāh uses various ways to present his father's opinions. Sometimes he says "I asked my father ... and he said", "I heard my father saying", "I saw my father", or in some cases he consults his father, then his father asks him to write down his answer.¹⁶² On other rare occasions, 'Abd Allāh uses responses that he did not hear from his father, although he has found them in his father's book (compilation),¹⁶³ or else has narrated them from another person who had heard them from Aḥmad.¹⁶⁴

The *Masā'il* provides some details about the life of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, his relationship with his son 'Abd Allāh,¹⁶⁵ his five pilgrimages and his becoming lost during one of them.¹⁶⁶ 'Abd Allāh provides further details about his father's practices with ordinary religious folk: he wrote incantations for people suffering from such tribulations as difficulties in childbirth, fever, and even baldness.¹⁶⁷

In his *Masā'il*, 'Abd Allāh transmitted *ḥadīths* from teachers other than his father.¹⁶⁸ In addition, he recorded some details of his *ḥadīth* studies under those teachers, such as Ibn Abī Shaybah and Sūwayd b. Sa'īd.¹⁶⁹ However, he also included many responses that indicated Aḥmad's principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*):

1. **The Qur'ān:** Aḥmad distinguishes between *al-‘āmm* (general word) and *al-khāṣṣ* (particular proof). The understanding of *al-‘āmm* takes three forms. First, the *‘āmm* can be understood by the Sunnah. If there is no Sunnah on the meaning of this verse (*āyah*) then we look in the practices of the Companions for the meaning of the *āyah*.

¹⁶² 'Abd Allāh, *Masā'il*, 42, 150, 363.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 166, 173.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 399.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 30, 55, 74, 76, 199.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 245.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 447.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 93, 179, 263, 276, 280, 295, 303.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 41, 253, 261.

Finally, when there is neither a Sunnah nor a practice of the Companions, we look for which meaning is closer to the Sunnah [i.e., *qiyās*] and use it to understand the *āyah*.¹⁷⁰

2. The Sunnah: this *Masā'il* shows how the Sunnah becomes the central principle for Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, as illustrated by the following examples:

- The authority of the Sunnah: ‘Abd Allāh ended his *Masā'il* by quoting his father, saying: “God, be blessed and exalted, requires the adherence to his messenger ... in numerous places in the Qur’ān”. Then Aḥmad read them [i.e., the verses] all or most of them.¹⁷¹ This means that Aḥmad derives the authority of the Sunnah from the Qur’ān. However, ‘Abd Allāh does not recall the verses (*āyāt*) that his father had read. Subsequently, ‘Abd Allāh himself obtained these verses from the Qur’ān and included them in his *Masā'il*.¹⁷²
- Does the Sunnah clarify and identify or does it demonstrate the meaning of the Qur’ān? ‘Abd Allāh asked his father:

ما تقول في "السنة تقضي على الكتاب؟" قال: قال ذلك قوم منهم مكحول والزهري. قلت: فما تقول أنت؟ قال: أقول: السنة تدل على معنى الكتاب.

What do you say about “The Sunnah rules the book [i.e., the Qur’ān]”? Aḥmad answered: “some people say that, such as Makhūl and al-Zuhri”. ‘Abd Allāh asked again: “What do you say?” Aḥmad answered: “I say the Sunnah leads to the meaning of the book [i.e., the Qur’ān]”¹⁷³

3. The consensus (*al-ijmā'*): ‘Abd Allāh claims that his father stated:

ما يدعي فيه الرجل الإجماع كذب. من ادعى بالإجماع فهو كذب، لعل الناس قد اختلفوا. هذا دعوى بشر المريسي والأصم، ولكن يقول: لا يعلم الناس يختلفون، أو لم يبلغه ذلك، أو لم ينته إليه. فيقول: لا يعلم الناس اختلفوا.

Whatever a man claims to be a consensus, it is an untruth. Whoever claims consensus is a liar; maybe people have had disagreements [on it]. This is the allegation of Bishr al-Marīṣī and al-Asamm. However, they should claim that as far as they know, people did not have any disagreement on it, or the disagreement did not come to his attention.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 442.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 450.

¹⁷² Ibid., 450-55

¹⁷³ Ibid., 438.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 438-39.

‘Abd Allāh is not the only one to have narrated this opinion from Ahmād; it was also narrated by other disciples such as al-Marrūdhī, Abū Ṭālib and Abū al-Hārith.¹⁷⁵ This may not mean that Ahmād rejected the authority of the consensus (*ijmā*). Rather, he sometimes relied on the authority of the consensus of the Companions to prove his opinions. This probably means that he rejected a part of the consensus, but not all of it.

Ahmād’s hostility towards rationalists also appears in this *Masā’il*. According to ‘Abd Allāh, Ahmad says, “A weak *hadīth* is better than Abū Hanīfah’s opinion (*ra'y*).”¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, Ahmād was against writing books of jurisprudence that contained personal reasoning. When he was asked about writing books, he answered

أكرهها، هذا أبو حنيفة وضع كتاباً وجاء أبو يوسف ووضع كتاباً وجاء محمد بن الحسن فوضع كتاباً، فهذا لا انقضاء له، كلما جاء رجل وضع كتاباً وهذا مالك وضع كتاباً وجاء الشافعي أيضاً وجاء هذا يعني أبا ثور. وهذه الكتب وضعها بدعة، كلما جاء رجل وضع كتاباً، ويترك حديث رسول الله ... وأصحابه... واعب وضع الكتب وكرهها كراهة شديدة. وكان أبي يكره "جامع سفيان" وينكره، ويكره كراهة شديدة.

I hate it. Look Abū Hanīfah wrote a book, then Abū Yusūf came along and wrote a book, then Muḥammad b. al-Hasan [al-Shaybānī] came and wrote a book; there is no end to this. Whenever a man comes along, he writes a book! And look Mālik wrote a book, and al-Shāfi‘ī came [and wrote a book] too, and this man (meaning Abū Thawr) has come and written a book. These books that have been written are an innovation. Whenever a man comes along, he writes a book and abandons the *hadīth* of the Messenger of God! ... and his Companions. Ahmād condemned writing books and hated it strongly. My father [i.e., Ahmād] also hates the “*Jāmi*” of Sufyān, and rejects it, and he hates it strongly.¹⁷⁷

• *Kitāb al-Sunnah*

Concerning theology, ‘Abd Allāh wrote his book *Kitāb al-Sunnah*, also known as *Kitāb al-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmīyah*.¹⁷⁸ Although he frequently relied on his father’s authority, he did not devote his book solely to his father’s doctrine. Rather, he only narrated from his father in 660 out of the 1551 reports, which accounts for about 42 percent of the book.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Uddah fi uṣūl al-fiqh*, 2: 182.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Abd Allāh, *Masā’il*, 438.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 437.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 57-58.

¹⁷⁹ See the editor’s introduction, 61

In general, *Kitāb al-Sunnah* presents the beliefs of traditionalists in the second half of the ninth and the early tenth centuries. The book deals with matters such as:

1. The Qur'ān: 'Abd Allāh makes a lengthy defence of the Qur'ān as God's word (*kalām^u Allāh*). It is therefore uncreated, and those who believe in the creation of the Qur'ān are unbelievers (*kuffār*). Relying on the authority of the traditionalists, 'Abd Allāh wrote several chapters in support of the idea that the *Jahmīs* were unbelievers. He devoted a chapter to the reports from 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak, who claimed that the *Jahmīs* worshipped nothing (*lā shay'*) and so were unbelievers. Another chapter was from Sufyān b. 'Uyaynah, who said that those who believed in the creation of the Qur'ān were unbelievers and deserved to be killed. The same ideas were repeated in the other chapters from 'Abd Allāh b. Idrīs, Wakī' b. al-Jarrāḥ, Ḥammād b. Zayd, Mu'tamir b. Sulaymān, 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī and Yazīd b. Hārūn. In another chapter, these ideas were attributed to a "group of scholars" (*jamā'ah min al-'ulamā'*).

A further chapter contained the statements of the scholars (i.e., the traditionalists) who state that: the Qur'ān is God's word and uncreated. A further chapter condemned those who said: "My pronunciation of the Qur'ān is created". 'Abd Allāh quoted his father, among other traditionalists, to prove that this statement was an innovation and was the same as the creed of al-Jahm and the *Jahmīs*. 'Abd Allāh then devoted a chapter to attacking Jahm b. Ṣafwān and al-Jaḍ b. Dirham and their followers. As one would expect, all the statements in this chapter are hostile, describing them as unbelievers and libertines (*Zanādiqah*).

In addition, and more importantly, 'Abd Allāh wrote a chapter condemning Abū Ḥanīfah, under the title "What I have memorised from my father and other mashāyikh regarding Abū Ḥanīfah". Abū Ḥanīfah is described in this chapter as a *Jahmī* who believes that the Qur'ān is created, and a *Murji'i* who believes in the sword (i.e., he holds a revolutionary view) and that repentance for having been an unbeliever is sought twice (rather than once), such is the depth of his heresy. Subsequently, 'Abd Allāh presents the scholars who have attacked Abū Ḥanīfah, including rationalists such as Ḥammād b. Abī Sulaymān (Abū Ḥanīfah's teacher) and Abū Yūsuf al-Qādī (Abū Ḥanīfah's disciple).

Another two chapters were written refuting respectively those who did not state whether the Qur'ān was created or uncreated; and those who did state that God did not speak (*lā yatakallam*).

2. Belief in *ru'yah*. 'Abd Allāh included traditions and statements from the Companions, the Successors and the traditionalist leaders, stating that the believers would see God in the Hereafter.

3. The matter of *īmān* (faith). The book also dealt with questions of *īmān*. It refuted the *Murji'is*, and confirmed that *īmān* increases and decreases.

4. Belief in *Qadar* and refutation of the *Qadarīs*. In this part, 'Abd Allāh devoted more than 30 statements to attacking 'Amr b. 'Ubayd, the early *Mu'tazilī* and *Qadarī*.

5. The caliphate: a section in which 'Abd Allāh approved of the caliphate of Abū Bakr, then 'Umar, then 'Uthmān, then 'Alī, and refuted the Shī'is and the *Rāfiḍah*.

6. *Sam'iyyāt*, such as punishment in graves, the Dajjāl and the signs of the Hereafter (*'alamāt al-Sā'ah*).

7. Refutation of the Khārijīs: the last part of the book was devoted to repudiating the Khārijīs and insulting them as the dogs of Hell (*Kilāb al-Nār*).

The chapter attacking Abū Ḥanīfah was removed from some manuscripts of the book, whereas it can be found in others.¹⁸⁰ However, the book was the subject of criticism by some *Ash'arīs* and *Māturīdīs*,¹⁸¹ who argued that the book was attributed to 'Abd Allāh because in the chain of the transmitters on the manuscripts of the book there were two unknown people (*majāhib*), namely Abū al-Naṣr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Simsār and Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Khālid al-Harawī. Moreover, "it contains some of the most hard-core anthropomorphism found anywhere."¹⁸² The book is therefore attributed to 'Abd Allāh, and was probably written by an anthropomorphist who tried to support his innovation (*bid'ah*) through attributing it to Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal or his son 'Abd Allāh. Others have argued that

¹⁸⁰ See the editor's notes in 84-86, 180.

¹⁸¹ See: Maḥmūd Sa'īd Mamdūh, "al-Asānīd ansāb al-kutub", Nūḥ Ḥā Mīm Keller, *the Reformer of Islam: the Mas'ūd questions*, q. 5.

¹⁸² Ibid.

even though the book is correctly attributed to ‘Abd Allāh, they do not give credence to the statements narrated from Aḥmad in the book because Aḥmad was an *imām* and therefore cannot believe in anthropomorphism.¹⁸³

It can, however, be argued that although al-Simsār and al-Harawī are unknown individuals,¹⁸⁴ this does not prove that the book is unreliable, since there are other sources which quote from it through other transmissions (*asānīd*). For example: al-Khallāl narrates many statements of the *Sunnah* directly from ‘Abd Allāh,¹⁸⁵ and other quotations can be found in al-‘Uqaylī, who narrates directly from ‘Abd Allāh, and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, who narrated from ‘Abd Allāh with a different transmission chain.¹⁸⁶

The reliability of *Kitāb al-Sunnah* is at the same level as ‘Abd Allāh’s *Masā’il*, and it is self-contradictory for those who accept ‘Abd Allāh’s reports from his father in his *Masā’il* to disregard them in his *Sunnah*.

- *Kitāb al-Ilal wa ma’rifat al rijāl*

‘Abd Allāh devoted a third book to a critique of *hadīth* and the *hadīth* transmitters. The book is called *al-Ilal wa ma’rifat al rijāl*, and is also known as *al-Ilal* or *al-Tārīkh*. The extant manuscript is divided into eight tomes that were published in four volumes containing about 6160 reports. The book is not organised into chapters. Despite putting some items on the same subject together, it seems to be compiled randomly. This disorganisation results in significant repetitions in the book.¹⁸⁷

The predominant subject in *al-Ilal* is the critique of the transmitters (*rūwāt*), their reliability, when they were born, and their dates of death. This is known as *tārīkh* and *jarḥ wa ta’dīl*. The problem concerning some transmissions and *hadīths* is known as *īlal*. In this book, ‘Abd Allāh asks his father and then writes his answers using the

¹⁸³ Muhammd Zāhid al-Kawtharī, *al-Maqālāt*, 296-302.

¹⁸⁴ The position of these two men will not be studied here, because this does not affect my main argument.

¹⁸⁵ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*. For example, see numbers: 579, 580, 592, 610, 640, 647, 860, 862, 1044, 1127, 1781, 1786, 1788, 1824, 1834, 1836, 1840, 1862, 1863, 1873, 1901, 1945, 1949, 1950, 1963, 1982, 2010, 2111, 2112, 2113, 2114, 2119, 2127.

¹⁸⁶ For example, see the entry of Abū Ḥanīfah in: al-‘Uqaylī, *al-Du’afā’*, 4: 1408-12; and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, 15: 525, 527, 537, 551-2, 569, 574.

¹⁸⁷ For the repetitions in the book, see the editor’s introduction, 1:110.

format “I asked my father... and he said...”. On many occasions he writes what he has heard from his father, by saying “I heard my father saying ...”, or “my father narrated to me...”. On other occasions he writes when he has found something in his father’s notes.¹⁸⁸ ‘Abd Allāh claims that: “Whenever I say ‘my father said...’, I have heard it from him twice or three times or at least once”.¹⁸⁹ The book also contains some reports that were added by Abū ‘Alī al-Šawwāf, the student of ‘Abd Allāh and the one who transmitted the manuscript of the book from him.¹⁹⁰

‘Abd Allāh also includes opinions from other traditionalists in his book, such as Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn who was asked questions on more than 250 occasions. Apparently, the book was re-edited by ‘Abd Allāh several times. The early editions included items from some traditionalists such as ‘Alī Ibn al-Madīnī, but it seems that ‘Abd Allāh (ordered by his father) removed them in the period following the Inquisition. According to al-‘Uqaylī:

وَقَرَأْتُ عَلَى عَبْدِ اللَّهِ كِتَابَ الْعَلَلِ عَنْ أَبِيهِ، فَرَأَيْتُ فِيهِ حَكَایَاتٍ كَثِيرَةٍ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ عَلَى بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ [ابنِ الْمَدِينِيِّ]، ثُمَّ قَدْ ضُرِبَ عَلَى اسْمِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ فَوْقَهُ: "حَدَّثَنَا رَجُلٌ"، ثُمَّ ضُرِبَ عَلَى الْحَدِيثِ كُلُّهُ.
فَسَأَلْتُ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ، فَقَالَ: كَانَ أَبِي حَدَّثَنَا عَنْهُ، ثُمَّ أَمْسَكَ عَنْ اسْمِهِ وَكَانَ يَقُولُ: "حَدَّثَنَا رَجُلٌ"، ثُمَّ
نَرَكَ حَدِيثَهُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ.

I have read ‘Abd Allāh’s *kitāb al-‘Ilal* [that he narrated] from his father; and I saw in it a large number of stories from his father, from ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh [Ibn al-Madīnī]. Then his name was crossed out and had written upon it “*haddathanā rajul*”. After that, all of these stories were crossed out. Subsequently, I asked ‘Abd Allāh [about this] and he answered: “My father [used to] narrate [reports] from him. But subsequently he stopped pronouncing his name, and instead started saying ‘*haddathanā rajul*’, and then he dismissed [all of] his [Ibn al-Madīnī’s] *hadīths*.¹⁹¹”¹⁹¹

In addition to its main subject, the book provides significant information on Aḥmad’s studying of *hadīth*, his teachers,¹⁹² where he met his colleagues for the first time,¹⁹³ and his trips to Basra¹⁹⁴ and to Mecca.¹⁹⁵ More importantly, the book includes material

¹⁸⁸ For example see: ‘Abd Allāh, *al-‘Ilal*, 1: 273, 275, 276.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 3: 157.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 2: 393; 3: 179.

¹⁹¹ Al-‘Uqaylī, *al-Du’afā’*, 3: 962

¹⁹² For example see: ‘Abd Allāh, *al-‘Ilal*, 1: 174, 438, for his Başran teachers especially Huahaym. 2: 188, for his early studying *hadīth* with Mūsā b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd and Abū Yūsuf al-Qādī (2: 188), Marwān b. Shujā‘ (3: 193-4), ‘Ammār b. Muḥammad (3: 197), ‘Abbād b. ‘Abbād (3: 206), al-Ṭufāwī (3: 207), from all of whom he had heard *hadīth* between 179-81 A.H.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 3: 256-57, 275.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 1: 174;

on the development of Ahmād's intellectual life. For example, we are told that Ahmād inherited from his Madīnān teacher, Ibrāhīm b. Sa‘d, and the Kufan ‘Abd Allāh b. Idrīs the belief that date-wine (*nabīdh*) was forbidden.¹⁹⁶ Another example indicates that his position in relation to the *Qadarīs* and other sects was more hostile and stringent than his attitude towards the transmissions from ‘Alī b. al-Madīnī presented above. Another story is that ‘Abd Allāh claimed that his father used to transmit [*hadīths*] through ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd, a Basran *Mu’tazilī*, then he transmitted from him but without pronouncing his name, simply saying “From a man”. Subsequently, he disregarded him and stopped transmitting through him altogether.¹⁹⁷

However, Ahmād's hostility towards the rationalists, especially Abū Ḥanīfah and his students such as Abū Yūsuf al-Qādī and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī,¹⁹⁸ appears clearly in this book. He is quoted as saying that “[*hadīth*] should not be transmitted from rationalists”.¹⁹⁹ ‘Abd Allāh also narrated a harsh attack on Abū Ḥanīfah from his father and other traditionalists.²⁰⁰ The attack reached Ahmād's early teacher Abū Yūsuf al-Qādī, and although Ahmād narrated from Abū Yūsuf,²⁰¹ he is quoted in this book as stating that: “Abū Yūsuf is truthful (*sadūq*), but it is inappropriate to transmit anything from the companions of Abū Ḥanīfah.”²⁰²

This is different from Ahmād's attitude towards al-Shāfi‘ī in this book. Ahmād appreciated al-Shāfi‘ī's eloquence, and described him as one of the most eloquent people.²⁰³ On the other hand, ‘Abd Allāh narrates from his father that “[al-Shāfi‘ī] gained from us more than what we gained from him.”²⁰⁴ This gain is illustrated by the following examples: ‘Abd Allāh narrated from his father that al-Shāfi‘ī had asked of him: “You are more knowledgeable about *hadīth* than me; so, if the *hadīth* is sound, inform me of it, even if it is [transmitted by a] Kufan or Basran or Shāmian, in order to

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 3: 139, 187, 191, 194.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 2: 351.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 2: 371.

¹⁹⁸ For al-Shaybānī see: Ibid., 3: 299.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 2: 102. For another example, see: 2: 178.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 2: 545-47.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 3: 372; 2: 102.

²⁰² Ibid., 3: 300.

²⁰³ ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Ilal*, 1: 461, 462.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 1: 469.

apply it (*hattā adhab ilayh*) if it is sound.”²⁰⁵ Another story is that ‘Abd Allāh claims to have found in his father’s book, written in his handwriting:

حدثني محمد بن إدريس الشافعي، قال: قد روى شريك حديث مجاهد عن أيمان بن أم أيمن، أخي
أسامة لأمه. قلنا: لا علم لك بأصحابنا. أيمن آخر أسامة قتل مع رسول الله ... يوم حنين قبل أن
يولد مجاهد، ولم يبق بعد رسول الله حتى يحدث عنه

Muhammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī told me: “Sharīk transmitted Mujāhid’s *hadīth* < Ayman b. Umm Ayman, the brother of Usāmah from his mother”. We said: ‘You do not know our companions (*ashābunā*). Ayman, the brother of Usāmah, was killed in the company of the messenger of God... in [the battle of] Hunayn, prior to Mujāhid’s birth; and he did not stay alive after the messenger of God to transmit from him.’²⁰⁶

Moreover, ‘Abd Allāh claims that when al-Shāfi‘ī narrated in his books that “A trustworthy narrated to me from Hushaym and others”, he means by ‘the trustworthy’, Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal.²⁰⁷ This statement is hard to believe, since no report is to be found in al-Shāfi‘ī’s *Musnad*,²⁰⁸ where al-Shāfi‘ī says, “A trustworthy narrated to me from Hushaym”; while the other reports that al-Shāfi‘ī transmitted from his “trustworthy” cannot be Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal as al-Subkī supported,²⁰⁹ since the “trustworthy” in these reports was transmitted from transmitters (*shuyūkh*) from whom Ahmad did not collect *hadīths*. There are three statements which were transmitted from al-Shāfi‘ī < the trustworthy < Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah²¹⁰ (who was one of Ahmad’s teachers), but these three statements are not to be found in Ahmad’s *Musnad*. Which means probably that this “trustworthy” was not Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal. While Hurvitz accepts ‘Abd Allāh’s statement, and rejects al-Subkī’s criticism of it, because this statement was accepted by most of al-Shāfi‘ī’s biographers,²¹¹ I do not believe there is sufficient evidence to challenge al-Subkī’s statement, since no report can be singled out as being a report that al-Shāfi‘ī narrated from Ahmad.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 1: 462.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 2: 383.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 1: 469.

²⁰⁸ Abū al-‘Abbās al-Asamm collected al-Shāfi‘ī’s *hadīths* from the latter’s (attributed?) books (*al-Umm* and others), and then included them in a book called *Musnad al-Shāfi‘ī*. I refer here to al-Sindī’s organisation of the book which is known as *Tartib Musnad al-imām al-Shāfi‘ī*.

²⁰⁹ Tāj al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Alī al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyah al-kubrā*, 2: 30.

²¹⁰ Muhammad ‘Abid al-Sindī, *Tartib Musnad al-imām al-Shāfi‘ī*, 1: 176, 358; 2: 175.

²¹¹ Hurvitz, *The Formation*, 54

Even so, the book is important for studying the intellectual life of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, and it shows how ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad understood the importance of his father in confronting the rationalists (Abū Ḥanīfah and his followers) and al-Shāfi‘ī. This reflects the competition within the traditionalist camp (between the followers of al-Shāfi‘ī and Ibn Ḥanbal) concerning who was the more important of the two, and the leader of the camp with whom to stand in opposition to the rationalists.

2.9. Al-Baghawī’s *Masā’il* (d. 317/929)

‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Baghawī was one of the youngest students of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, and this *Masā’il* is one of the shortest, consisting of around 100 responses and traditions only. About half are *Masā’il* narrated from Aḥmad. The rest are traditions from the Prophet and the Successors.²¹²

Al-Baghawī did not question Aḥmad about his opinions, but recorded Aḥmad’s sayings, and other people’s questions. He even recorded how Aḥmad prayed. Al-Baghawī probably did not pose questions to Aḥmad himself because he was quite young. He claimed to have asked Aḥmad only one question in 218,²¹³ when he was just fourteen years old.

2.10. The Disagreements between Aḥmad’s *riwāyahs*, and the Ḥanbalīs’ works on his *Masā’ik*.

Aḥmad’s juridical opinions are claimed to have been recorded in more than 140 books. Some of these books were intended for Aḥmad only, while others recorded Aḥmad’s opinions among various jurisprudent-traditionalists (*fūqahā’ aṣhāb al-hadīth*). These questioners varied as to the time when they questioned Aḥmad. Furthermore, they were different with regard to their countries, honesty, knowledge, cultural background and political views. All of these differences, as well as other elements, affected Aḥmad’s recorded *Masā’il*. In the Ḥanbalīs’ literature, the juridical opinion that was narrated from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal is called a *riwāyah* (plural: *riwāyāt*).

²¹² ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Baghawī, *Juz’ fī Masā’il ‘an Abī ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī*.

²¹³ Ibid., 32.

The problems concerning Ahmād's *Masā'il* were known to his contemporaries. For example, in the case of a theological problem, such as whether the pronunciation of the Qur'ān (*lafż*) was created or uncreated, contradictory opinions were narrated from Ahmād. Some people claimed that Ahmād said it was uncreated; others narrated that he rejected both opinions (that it was either created or uncreated); and others claimed that he had forbidden people to say that it was uncreated.²¹⁴ This conflict caused two prominent traditionalists to disregard Ahmād's doctrine on this issue.

The first, al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) said that:

فَمَا مَا احْتَاجَ بِهِ الْفَرِيقَانُ لِمَذَهَبِ أَحْمَدَ وَيَدْعُيهِ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ؛ فَلَيْسَ بِثَابِتٍ كَثِيرٌ مِنْ أَخْبَارِهِمْ، وَرَبِّمَا لَمْ يَفْهَمُوا دَقَّةً مِنْ مَذَهَبِهِ

Whatever the two groups attribute to Ahmād's doctrine, and each group arrogates him to their side, most of their reports are not reliable and they probably did not understand the subtlety of his doctrine.²¹⁵

The second was the famous traditionalist Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) who commented:

وَاحْتَلَفَتْ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدَ بْنِ حَنْبَلِ الرِّوَايَاتِ، وَرَأَيْنَا كُلَّ فَرِيقٍ مِنْهُمْ يَدْعُيهِ وَيَحْكِي
عَنْهُ قَوْلًا، فَإِذَا كَثُرَ الْاِخْتِلَافُ فِي شَيْءٍ وَوَقَعَ التَّهَاوِرُ فِي الشَّهَادَاتِ بِهِ أَرْجَانَاهُ مِثْلُ أَنَّ الْغَيْنَاهُ.
عَجِيبٌ مَا حُكِيَ عَنْهُ مَا لَا يُشَكُّ أَنَّهُ كَذَبٌ عَلَيْهِ ... أَنَّهُ قَالَ: "مَنْ زَعَمَ أَنَّ الْقِرَاءَةَ مُخْلُوفَةٌ فَهُوَ
جَهْمِيٌّ، وَالْجَهْمِيٌّ كَافِرٌ. وَمَنْ زَعَمَ أَنَّهَا غَيْرُ مُخْلُوفَةٍ فَهُوَ مُبْتَدِعٌ، وَكُلُّ بَدْعَةٍ ضَلَالٌ". فَكَيْفَ يُتَوَهَّمُ
عَلَى أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ مِثْلَ هَذَا القَوْلِ وَأَنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ الْحَقَّ لَا يَخْلُو مِنْ أَنْ يَكُونَ فِي أَحَدِ الْأَمْرَيْنِ

There was a disagreement in the narratives (*riwāyāt*) from Abū 'Abd Allāh Ahmād b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal. We see, in addition, every group attributes to him, and narrates from him, an opinion. However, when disagreements on something become large, and there are contradictions among the witnesses to it, we defer it as we abrogate it. One of the bizarre statements that was narrated from him, which is undoubtedly false, ..., is that he said: "Whoever claims that pronunciation [of the Qurā'n] is created, he is a *Jahmī*, and the *Jahmī* is an unbeliever. And whoever claims that it is uncreated, he is an innovator, and every innovation is an error." How is it supposed that Abū 'Abd Allāh [Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal] can say that? And you know that the truth has to be one of these two!²¹⁶

Al-Bukhārī attributes the disagreement regarding Ahmād's *Masā'il* to the misunderstanding of his opinions by his students, or to the unreality of their narratives; and this is almost the same as Ibn Qutaybah's opinion. However, this may

²¹⁴ Abū Ya'la' Ibn al-Farrā', *al-Masā'il al-'aqadīyah*, 77-81.

²¹⁵ Muḥammad b. Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Khalq af'al al-'ibād: wa al-radd 'alā al-Jahmīyah wa-ashab al-ta'if*, 43.

²¹⁶ 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Ikhtilāf fī al-lafż wa-al-radd 'alā al-jahmīyah wa-al-mushabbihah*, 45-47.

lead us to think that these disagreements reflected the differences among Ahmād's students, and not his own views. Presumably, this consequence is correct, and it will therefore be examined in this study by taking the political theory as a case study. During Ahmād's life, he was asked by his disciples about some opinions that were attributed to him, and he rejected them. We have some examples of these wrongly attributed responses in the *Masā'il* of Ṣāliḥ, Ibn Hāni' and 'Abd Allāh.²¹⁷

The difficulty of identifying what Ahmād had really said remained the biggest barrier to Ahmād's followers in establishing his school of law (*madhhab*) up to the beginning of the fourth A.H./tenth century. At this point al-Khallāl (d. 311/923) completed the first and most significant phase when he started composing Ahmād's *Masā'il*. He collected what Ahmād had said from his numerous students in Iraq (Baghdad, 'Ukbarā', etc.), and subsequently travelled to Fāris (Iran), Khurāsān, Egypt, Syria and al-Jazīrah (Mesopotamia).²¹⁸ It is evident that the initiative to compose Ahmād's opinions was not merely that of al-Khallāl, since al-Marrūdhī, and probably some of Ahmād's disciples, also encouraged al-Khallāl to travel for this purpose. In addition, they wrote letters of recommendation for him so that he was able to hear the *Masā'il* from other students who had written them from Ahmād.²¹⁹

Al-Khallāl succeeded in meeting about a hundred of Ahmād's students. Sometimes, when he could not narrated some of Ahmād's opinions directly from his students, he narrated other opinions in indirect way, up to three men in his transmission chain between him and Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal.²²⁰ Not only this, but al-Khallāl also collected some responses from his students, for example narrating about twenty of Ahmād's responses from his student Abū Bakr 'Abd al-'Azīz (Ghulām al-Khallāl) (d. 363/974).²²¹

Finally, al-Khallāl composed the *Masā'il* that he collected into his book *al-Jāmi'* *ii-'**ulūm al-imām Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal*. The book consists of about two hundred fascicles contained within twenty volumes. Some of these volumes are still extant, and include *Aḥkām ahl al-milal*, *al-Wuqūf*, *al-Tarajjul*, *Aḥkām al-nisā'*, *al-Amr bi-al-ma'rūf wa-*

²¹⁷ See: Ṣāliḥ, *Masā'il*, 21; 'Abd Allāh, *Masā'il*, 104, 432.

²¹⁸ al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 14: 297; Melchert, *The Formation*, 143.

²¹⁹ For example, see: Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 389.

²²⁰ al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 11: 331.

²²¹ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 225.

*al-nahy ‘an al-munkar, al-Farā’id, al-Hathth ‘alā al-tijārah wa-al-ṣinā‘ah wa-al-‘amal wa-al-inkār ‘alā man yadda T al-tawakkul fī tark al-‘amal wa-al-hujjat²²² ‘alayhim fī dhālik, and al-Qirā’ah ‘alā al-qubūr, while Kitāb al-‘Ilal, which is presumably a part of *al-Jāmi‘*, was described as being in three volumes.²²³ Only a part of its summary, which was selected by Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī (d. 620/1223), has survived, and this summary was published in a single volume.²²⁴*

There is also *Kitāb al-Sunnah*, which is described as being in more than twenty *juz’* in three volumes.²²⁵ Only one volume of these three is extant and has been published twice.²²⁶ This book not only contains Ahmād’s opinion; a portion also includes prophetic traditions, and sayings from the Companions, the Successors and later traditionalists. However, al-Dhahabī²²⁷ and others such as Michael Cook²²⁸ and Ziauddin Ahmed²²⁹ distinguish between *al-Jāmi‘* and *al-Sunnah* and consider them as two separate books. Others such as Henri Laoust,²³⁰ Brockelmann,²³¹ and Sezgin,²³² regard *al-Sunnah* as a part of *al-Jāmi‘*. Perhaps *al-Sunnah* is a part of *al-Jāmi‘*, because the title of the manuscript of *al-Sunnah* is ‘*al-Musnad min Masā‘il Abī ‘Abd Allāh Ahmād b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal ... riwāyat Abī Bakr Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Hārūn b. Yazīd b. Shīrī al-Khallāl ...*'.²³³ However, some parts of *al-Jāmi‘* were probably used as individual books, and *al-Jāmi‘* (as its name indicates) was like an encyclopaedia that contained all the other books. A part of al-Khallāl’s biography on Ḥanbalīs (11 folios) still survives in manuscript.²³⁴ However, probably most of the material in this book is included in Ibn Abī Ya‘lā’s book.

²²² Hishām Yusrī al-‘Arabī, *Abū Bakr al-Khallāl wa-atharuhu fī al-fiqh al-Ḥanbalī: ma‘ dirāsat ikhtiyārātihī al-fiqhiyah wa-muqāranatihā bi-al-madhāhib al-thamāniyah*, 1: 95–96.

²²³ Muḥammad b. Ahmād Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Muntakhab min al-‘Ilal lil-al-Khallāl*.

²²⁴ al-‘Arabī, *Abū Bakr al-Khallāl*, 1: 86.

²²⁵ The first was edited by Ziauddin Ahmed, and published under the manuscript’s title: *al-Musnad min Masā‘il Abī ‘Abd Allāh Ahmād b. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanbal*. The second edition was edited by ‘Atīyah al-Zahrānī and published under the title: *al-Sunnah*.

²²⁶ al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 14: 298.

²²⁷ Cook, *Commanding*, 88, ft 2.

²²⁸ In his introduction of: al-Khallāl, *al-Musnad*, 6–9.

²²⁹ Laoust, “Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal”, in *EP*.

²³⁰ Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, 1: 311.

²³¹ Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*, 1: 512.

²³² Al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 59.

²³³ Yāsīn Muḥammad al-Sawwās, *Fihris majāmī‘ al-Madrasah al-Umarīyah fī Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhirīyah bi-Dimashq*, 566.

The works of al-Khallāl and his teachings at the Mosque of al-Mahdī in Baghdad probably established the legal teaching of Aḥmad's juridical opinions. Al-Dhahabī states that:

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ قَبْلَهُ لِإِلَامٍ مَذْهَبٌ مُسْتَقْلٌ حَتَّى تَتَبعَ هُوَ نَصْوَصُ أَحْمَدَ وَدُونَهَا وَبِرَهْنَاهَا بَعْدَ الْثَلَاثَ مِنْهُ

Before him, there was no independent school of law (*madhhab mustaqill*) of the imām [Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal], not until he followed up Aḥmad's texts, collected them, and checked their proofs (*barhanahā*) after 300 [A.H].²³⁴

The importance of al-Khallāl and his works was acknowledged among Muslim scholars. Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Shahrayār states that “We [i.e., the Ḥanbalīs] all follow al-Khallāl, because there was no other who preceded him in his collection and his knowledge”.²³⁵ According to ‘Abd al-Qādir Badrān (d. 1346/1927), his books were the very root of the Ḥanbalī school, from which sprang all later books of Ḥanbalī jurisprudence.²³⁶ This was similar to the statement of Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) that “All the followers of this *madhhab* [i.e., the Ḥanbalī school] take from his book”.²³⁷ For this reason, some Ḥanbalīs named al-Khallāl “The little Ibn Ḥanbal” (*Ibn Ḥanbal al-ṣaghīr*).²³⁸ Christopher Melchert concurs with this view, indicating that al-Khallāl was the founder of the Ḥanbalī school of law,²³⁹ and it has also been accepted by other scholars such as Patricia Crone²⁴⁰ and Wael Hallaq.²⁴¹ Nimrod Hurvitz, on the other hand, argues against this opinion by presenting two problems, firstly that:

his contribution to the Ḥanbalī legal tradition was of little consequence. Al-Khallāl was no more than a strongly driven and thorough collector of Ibn Ḥanbal's *Masā'il*.... He never took the additional, creative step to put together a document that shows any independence of mind.²⁴²

The second problem is that, “although al-Khallāl's *Masā'il* collection was preserved for several centuries, it did not generate commentaries (or, considering its size,

²³⁴ al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 14: 298. Translated in Melchert, *the formation*, 143.

²³⁵ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadī, *Tarikh*, 5: 319.

²³⁶ Ibn Badrān, *al-Madkhal*, 47.

²³⁷ ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tārīkh al-mulūk wa-al-‘umam*, 13: 221.

²³⁸ Abu Zayd, *al-Madkhal*, 2:670.

²³⁹ Melchert, *The Formation*, 137.

²⁴⁰ Patricia Crone, (review) *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law, 9th-10th Centuries CE.*, 3.

²⁴¹ Wael Hallaq, *Authority, continuity, and change in Islamic law*, 39-42.

²⁴² Nimrod Hurvitz, “The *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Khiraqī”, 2.

abridgements)".²⁴³ Then Hurvitz concludes that al-Khallāl's "compendium was not a basic component of the Ḥanbalī curriculum".²⁴⁴

In fact, Hurvitz's conclusion is not based on a study of al-Khallāl's works (he does not refer to any of them), and furthermore his claims can be challenged on the grounds of the importance of al-Khallāl's works, as indicated by the following:

1. He collected Ah̄mad's *Masā'il* from a great number of countries,²⁴⁵ and many of these *Masā'il* would not have survived if he had not collected them;
2. He evaluated the *Masā'il* when there was a disagreement, stating which one of them was right or wrong, what was Ah̄mad's former opinion (*mansūkh*) and what was his new opinion (*nāsikh*), and which was preferable (*rājiḥ*) or (*marjūḥ*). Furthermore, al-Khallāl insisted that those who wanted to follow Ah̄mad's *madhhab* (*yuqallid*⁴ *madhhabah*⁴) had to compare his different narratives as that would help to identify Ah̄mad's correct opinion.²⁴⁶ Al-Khallāl also claimed that some of Ah̄mad's followers had mistakenly ascribed some legal opinions to Ah̄mad because they knew only one narrative (*riwāyah*) from him and did not know about other narratives (*riwāyāt*).²⁴⁷
3. Al-Khallāl derived some of Ah̄mad's principles from Ah̄mad's own answers. He stated that

- 4.

كان أبو عبد الله رجلاً لا يذهب إلا في الكتاب والسنة وقول الصحابة والتابعين، وكان يحب السلامة والتثبت مما يقول، ويدفع الجواب؛ فإذا أجاب لم يجب إلا بما قد صرحت به

Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal] was a man who does not answer (*yadhhab*⁴) unless [on something that exists] in the book [i.e., the Qur’ān] the Sunnah and the narrative of the Companions and the Successors. He prefers safety (*al-salāmah*) and certainty about what he says, and thus he refuses to answer. However, when he answers he only answers by what is sound and firm (*thābit*) to him²⁴⁸

In addition, al-Khallāl used these principles to decide between the contradictions among Ah̄mad's narratives (*riwāyāt*), for example, when he discussed the matter of whether judges could apply the testimony given by Christians and Jews (*ahl al-*

²⁴³ Ibid., 3.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ For al-Khallāl's trips collecting Ah̄mad's *Masā'il*s see: Melchert, *The Formation*, 143-44.

²⁴⁶ al-Khallāl, *Aḥkām ahl al-milal*, 133.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 134.

dhimmah) for or against each other? Al-Khallāl narrated from about twenty persons who narrated from Aḥmad that such evidence between Christians and Jews was not acceptable. On the other hand, Ḥanbal b. Ishāq narrated from Aḥmad that it was accepted. Al-Khallāl stated that Ḥanbal was wrong in his report from Aḥmad. To make sure of the source of the mistake, al-Khallāl claimed he had read the original book (*asl*) of Ḥanbal and had found the mistake there. However, to prove that this *riwāyah* (narrative) was wrong, al-Khallāl used two methods: the first was that Ḥanbal was wrong because the majority of students in his *riwāyah* (about twenty persons) had narrated a different juridical opinion from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. The second was that al-Khallāl transmitted *āthār* (sayings) from the Successors to prove the narratives of the majority.

The remarkable point is that al-Khallāl aimed to indicate how Ḥanbal had misunderstood Aḥmad's opinion by using the same methods (other *riwāyahs* from Aḥmad, and the Successors' sayings). He stated that Aḥmad accepted testimony between Christians and Jews for or against each other or towards Muslims only when they were called to witness someone approaching death while he was travelling, provided no Muslim was attending.²⁴⁹ For al-Khallāl, Ḥanbal went wrong because he generalised Aḥmad's juridical opinion while it occurred only in the case of death in travelling when no Muslim was attending;

5. The jurisprudential work of al-Khallāl does not stop at the comparisons between the narratives from Aḥmad. He was also able to make his own choices. Hishām Yusrī al-‘Arabī identified 91 juridical matters (*mas’alah*) where al-Khallāl had stated his own preferences, which may or may not have agreed with those of the other Ḥanbalī jurists.²⁵⁰

It is now clear that al-Khallāl was not only a collector of Aḥmad's *Masā'il*, but that his works show his independence of mind. In the case of the Ḥanbalī works based on al-Khallāl's *al-Jāmi'*, despite the summary by Ibn Qudāmah of al-Khallāl's *al-‘Ilal*, *al-Jāmi'* is not the kind of book which allows written commentaries or abridgements. The purpose of the book was to be a comprehensive guide to Ahmad's knowledge;

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 126-42.

²⁵⁰ al-‘Arabī, *Abū Bakr al-Khallāl*, 1: 200.

and this is exactly what happened. As noted by Ibn al-Jawzī and ‘Abd al-Qādir Ibn Badrān note, al-Khallāl’s *Jāmi’* was the root for Ḥanbalī jurisprudents to study Aḥmad’s *madhab*. This claim can easily be confirmed by reading various Ḥanbalī books on jurisprudence, such as those of Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisī, and Ibn Muflīḥ (d. 763/1363), all of whom relied heavily on al-Khallāl’s work.

Al-Khallāl established Ḥanbalī legal teaching in Baghdad through his teaching circle at the Mosque of al-Mahdī. This circle brought forth two of the most important Ḥanbalī jurists, Abū al-Qāsim al-Khiraqī (d. 334/945-46) and Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Ja‘far (known as Ghulām al-Khallāl, d. 363/974).²⁵¹ There were wide disagreements between al-Khiraqī and Ghulām al-Khallāl on certain juridical issues,²⁵² and Melchert suggests that these disagreements were presumably between al-Khiraqī and al-Khallāl himself.²⁵³ On the other hand, Ibn Abī Ya‘lā indicates that Ghulām al-Khallāl disagreed with his teacher al-Khallāl on nine juridical issues.²⁵⁴

Although al-Khallāl composed most of Aḥmad’s responses and his significant work on them, these *Masā’il* and responses are still rare, and it is hard to treat them as a legal text. This is due both to the language and to the contradictions among Aḥmad’s *Masā’il*. In many cases, Aḥmad used equivocal language to push his juridical opinions. It is not clear whether he meant *wājib* (religious duty) or *mustahabb* (recommended), *makrūh* (discouraged) or *ḥarām* (prohibited), and sometimes he used expressions that we do not find being used by any other jurists. For instance, in his answers, he may say أَجِبْ عَنْهُ “I tremble to say that”,²⁵⁵ هذا يُشْنَعُ عَنِ النَّاسِ “this is atrocious for the people”,²⁵⁶ بَعْضُ النَّاسِ يَقُولُ هَذَا “some people say that”,²⁵⁷ or قد اخْتَلَفُوا فِي

²⁵¹ For their study under al-Khallāl, see: Melchert, *The Formation*, 147-8; Abū Zahrah, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, 170-1; Khālid Anas, *The Mukhtaṣar of al-Khiraqī: a tenth century work of Islamic jurisprudence*, 15-16.

²⁵² According to Ibn Ḥāmid, a student of Ghulām al-Khallāl, there are 17 juridical questions over whose solutions Ghulām al-Khallāl disagreed with al-Khiraqī. (*Tahdhīb*, 210). Ibn Abī Ya‘lā claims that he identified from Ghulām al-Khallāl’s handwriting that there were 60 of these juridical questions. However, Ibn Abī Ya‘lā indicates 98 juridical questions in which Ghulām al-Khallāl and al-Khiraqī disagreed on their solutions (*Tabaqāt*, 3: 149-209).

²⁵³ Melchert, *The Formation*, 149-50.

²⁵⁴ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 216-17.

²⁵⁵ Ibn Ḥāmid, *Tahdhīb*, 146-47.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 149-50.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 186.

هذا “people have disagreements on it”.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, his answers may be various (and sometimes contradictory) so the question arises: which one presents Ahmād’s real opinion? These and other problems were the subjects of debates amongst the Ḥanbalīs themselves and between Ḥanbalīs and Shāfi’īs in early Islamic centuries. The disagreements between al-Khiraqī, on one hand, and Ghulām al-Khallāl and his teacher al-Khallāl on the other, were mainly based on these problems. Ghulām al-Khallāl, like his teacher and the early Ḥanbalīs at that time, concentrated more on Ahmād’s words, whereas al-Khiraqī used Ahmād’s words quite loosely. This is because he was influenced by the Shāfi’ī school of law, and indeed wrote his short handbook (*mukhtaṣar*) on the type of al-Muzanī’s *Mukhtaṣar* in Shāfi’ī law.²⁵⁹

However, the problems related to the nature of Ahmād’s answers were resolved or, more accurately, codified by a student of Ghulām al-Khallāl and the leader of the Ḥanbalīs at this period, al-Ḥasan b. Ḥāmid b. ‘Alī al-Baghdādī (d. 403/1013) (usually known as Ibn Ḥāmid). Ibn Ḥāmid was “إمام الحنبلية في زمانه ومدرسه ومفتيهم”²⁶⁰ “The leader of the Ḥanbalīs in his time, the teacher and their *muftī*”,²⁶⁰ and his death signalled the end of the earliest generation (*al-Muqaddimūn*) of Ḥanbalī jurists.²⁶¹ Ibn Ḥāmid devoted a book, *Tahdhīb al-ajwibah* (The Refinement and the correction of the Responses), to inferring Ahmād’s *madhhab* from his *Masā’il*. By “the Responses” (*al-Ajwibah*) Ibn Ḥāmid meant Ahmād’s *Masā’il*. Ibn Ḥāmid’s aim in his book was to indicate the principles that would help with understanding Ahmād’s answers, and to elucidate the juridical meaning of Ahmād’s words. For this reason, some Ḥanbalīs identify this book as the first book on the principles of Ḥanbalī jurisprudence.²⁶²

The book is divided into four main sections. The first asks how Ahmād’s madhhab can be identified and which principles can be used for this purpose? This part contains eighteen chapters. The second elucidates the juridical meaning of Ahmād’s words, and this part contains 23 chapters. The third part concerns the way the Ḥanbalī jurists dealt with the disagreements between Ahmād’s *Masā’il*. Ibn Ḥāmid includes only two

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 82.

²⁵⁹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū‘ fatāwā*, 4: 450.

²⁶⁰ Ibn Abī Ya’lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 309.

²⁶¹ The Ḥanbalīs divide themselves into three generations: (1) The earliest (*al-Mutaqaddimūn*): from Ahmād until Ibn Hamid’s death (in 403/1012). (2) the middle (*al-Mutwassītūn*): from 404/1013 until Burhān al-Dīn Ibn Muflīḥ’s death (in 884/1479); and (3) the latest (*al-Muta’akhkhirūn*): from 885/1480 until the present. See: Abū Zayd. *al-Madkhāl al-mufaṣṣal*, 1: 455-75.

²⁶² Ibid., 1: 17, 227-28.

chapters for this part. Finally, the fourth part of the book is devoted to defending the *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Khiraqī.

The importance of the book attracts the attention not only of jurists; it is also important for historians. This is because the chapters of the book and its arguments reflect the dialogue about Ḥanbalī jurisprudence among Ḥanbalīs themselves, and between them and Shāfi‘īs. Hence, the historian is able to follow the lines of the development of the Ḥanbalī school of law, as the following examples illustrate:

1. The debates among the Ḥanbalīs

Ibn Ḥāmid provided very important details about the disagreement among the Ḥanbalīs, especially between his teacher Ghulām al-Khallāl and al-Khiraqī. These disagreements were mainly about how Aḥmad’s *madḥhab* could be identified. For example, sometimes when Aḥmad was asked a juridical question, he answered by recalling a verse (*āyah*) narrating a tradition (*ḥadīth*) or a narrative (*athar*) from a Companion, without indicating his own opinion. So, does this mean this verse, tradition or narrative is his own *madḥhab*? Ibn Ḥāmid claimed that this was Aḥmad’s *madḥhab*, although some Ḥanbalīs and some Shāfi‘īs said these could not be counted as such.²⁶³

Another example presents the disagreement between al-Khiraqī and other Ḥanbalī scholars in his time. This question is: is it permitted to use reasoning in Aḥmad’s answers? Ibn Ḥāmid stated that his masters (*shuyūkhunā*) al-Khallāl, Ghulām al-Khallāl, Abū ‘Alī Ibn al-Ṣawwāf (d. 359/970), Ibrāhīm Ibn Shāqqillā (d. 369/979), and all of those (Ḥanbalī scholars) he had seen (*wa sā’ir^u man shāhadnāh*), did not agree with using reasoning to attribute statements to Aḥmad. They criticised al-Khiraqī because he used this method to state Aḥmad’s *madḥhab*. On the other hand, Ibn Ḥāmid claimed that al-Athram and al-Khiraqī accepted this. Interestingly, Ibn Ḥāmid supported al-Athram and al-Khiraqī and refuted the view of his teachers.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Ibn Ḥāmid, *Tahdhīb*, 19-28.

²⁶⁴Ibid., 36-40.

Another instance provides information about the disagreements between al-Khallāl and his pupil Ghulām al-Khallāl,²⁶⁵ and between Ghulām al-Khallāl and al-Khiraqī.²⁶⁶ The remarkable point of Ibn Ḥāmid's work is that he put divergences down to disagreements about principles, and always chose al-Khiraqī's opinions. After choosing al-Khiraqī's principles, Ibn Ḥāmid wrote a chapter to defend the *Mukhtaṣar* of al-Khiraqī in front of some Ḥanbalīs, Ghulām al-Khallāl and others.²⁶⁷

2. The debates between Ḥanbalīs and Shāfi‘īs

The dialogue about Aḥmad's *Masā’il* and his jurisprudence was significant in the fourth A.H./tenth century in Baghdad among Ḥanbalīs and other scholars from other *madhhabs*. Many jurists did not accept Aḥmad as a jurist, and they used his answers in the *Masā’il* to confirm their suspicions. Ibn Ḥāmid argued with them and refuted their objections to Aḥmad's *Masā’il*. For example, the Shāfi‘īs use the contradictions in Aḥmad's answers to prove that he was not a jurist, and they asked the Ḥanbalīs which answer they would take, and how they would choose among them? Ibn Ḥāmid's answer was simple: he said that the Ḥanbalīs would use the same rule that they used when there was a disagreement between two traditions (*hadīths*) or two narratives from the Companions (*āthār*); they would choose between them, or one of them was an abrogator (*nāsikh*) and the other an abrogated (*mansūkh*).²⁶⁸

Sometimes when he was asked, Aḥmad gave his answer by presenting the disagreement between the jurists, especially the Companions, without giving his own opinion, but the Shāfi‘īs said that this was not a *mujtahid* answer; rather it was a *muqallid* answer. Ibn Ḥāmid provided some answers to this problem. One of these answers was that when Aḥmad answered some questions by presenting the disagreement over its solution without presenting his own opinion, it was mostly found that this opinion was clarified in other *Masā’il*. Another answer was that Aḥmad gave his response according to the question; he did not aim to write a book on jurisprudence. However, Ibn Ḥāmid added, al-Shāfi‘ī was interested in writing books about jurisprudence, and would sometimes give two or three (and up to eight)

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 200.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 198.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 210-13.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 102-7.

opinions for one juridical issue.²⁶⁹ For Ibn Ḥāmid, this criticism was likely to be aimed at al-Shāfi‘ī, not at Aḥmad.

It is clear that Ibn Ḥāmid completed the work of al-Khallāl to use Aḥmad’s *Masā’il* as the root of the Ḥanbalī School of law. He also proved the work of al-Khiraqī, which uses more human reasoning (*ra'y*) to codify the principles of using and understanding Aḥmad’s *Masā’il*. This is probably why the Ḥanbalīs regard his as the end of the earliest generation (*al-Mutaqaddimūn*) of Ḥanbalī jurists.

2.11. Conclusion

Apparently, Aḥmad’s *Masā’il* represent the continuation of an old method of recording scholars’ answers regarding religious matters. From the eight *Masā’il* that have been presented above, several significant conclusions can be drawn here.

1- Not all of the *Masā’il* writers devoted their books to Aḥmad’s legal opinions. Only three of them did so; however, none of them, and this includes Aḥmad’s sons (i.e., Ṣāliḥ and ‘Abd Allāh) and Aḥmad’s pupil Ibn Ḥāni’ was known as a jurisprudent. Furthermore, when it comes to theology, the transmitters critiqued neither ‘Abd Allāh nor Ṣāliḥ who limited themselves to their father’s authority only, but relied on the authority of other traditionalists. For the rest of the *Masā’ils* of two of them (i.e., Abū Dāwūd and al-Athram), and a smaller portion of those of two others (i.e., Ḥarb and al-Kawsaj). Half of the last *Masā’il* (i.e., by al-Baghawī) contains Aḥmad’s opinions, the other half prophetic traditions.

2-For the contents of these *Masā’ils*, all of the *Masā’il* collectors (apart from al-Baghawī) narrated jurisprudential and theological answers from Aḥmad and his opinions about the transmitters of traditions. Thus, Hurvitz is wrong in his claim that

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 60-62.

‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad is the only person to have collected Aḥmad’s polemical writings (in theology) and criticism of traditions’ transmitters.²⁷⁰

3- Some scholars broadly accept the credibility of Aḥmad’s *Masā’il* and regard them to be “much truer to life than books from other schools.”²⁷¹ In fact, there are some problems that may challenge the credibility of the *Masā’il*. The main problem is the contradictions between these *Masā’il*, that reflect the disagreement between Aḥmad’s students (or later Ḥanbalī or Sunnī generations) more than they reflect Aḥmad’s opinions. The other problem is that some of Aḥmad’s students used rational analogy to present Aḥmad’s views, which means that they ascribed to Aḥmad what they thought he should have said rather than what he did actually say. In the following chapters I will deal directly and extensively with these problems.

²⁷⁰ Hurvitz, *The Formation*, 4. In addition to the *Masā’il* collectors named above, there is a collection that compiled Aḥmad’s opinions on the transmitters of the traditions. The collection contains the works of al-Marrūdhī and al-Maymūnī (in addition to Ṣāliḥ whose name was also mentioned above). See: al-Marrūdhī and others, *al-Ilāl wa-ma’rifat al-rijāl ‘an al-imām Aḥmad b. Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal*.

²⁷¹ Melchert, *Aḥmad*, 69.

Part Two

The Political theology of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal

Chapter III

Historical Background

3.1. Introduction

The political theory of Muslim jurisprudents (including the Sunnīs and the Shī'is) cannot be understood without studying the early period of Islam, a period that is likely to be considered the ground marker for jurisprudential political theology. Crone notes that the period of “the first four Caliphs, the first civil war, and its aftermath form part of the elementary vocabulary without which one cannot even begin to understand what medieval Muslims said about government.”¹

This part of the research is aimed at examining the effects of the historical elements on the political theology (or view) of the traditionalists, with a specific focus on Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.

3.2. *Al-Rāshidūn* (the rightly guided/patriarchs):

3.2.1. 'Alī's Caliphate

After the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632), Abū Bakr (d. 13/634) became the first caliph of the Muslim community. On his deathbed he designated 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (killed. 23/644) as his successor. 'Umar was the second caliph until he was assassinated. Shortly before he died, 'Umar called for a council (*shūrā*) of six individuals including, among others, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, who would choose his successor from among themselves. After discussion the choice fell on 'Uthmān. Twelve years later, 'Uthmān was murdered by rebels, who duly installed 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as the new caliph. But because he had been chosen by the rebels, 'Alī was not

¹ Ibid, 17.

able to free himself from association with them.² In addition, a number of the important Companions (including ‘Ā’ishah, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr) would not accept ‘Alī’s rule. They criticised him for not avenging ‘Uthmān’s murder and this led to the first civil war 35-41/656-661. ‘Alī was murdered by a *Khārijī* assassin in 40/661.

The period from the death of the Prophet Muḥammad until the murder of ‘Alī lasted for about 30 years, and is known as the *Khilāfah* period. According to Sunnī belief, since the second half of the third A.H./late ninth century, these four caliphs were regarded as Rāshidūn or Rightly Guided Caliphs.³ The name ‘Rāshidūn’ was derived from a tradition related to Muḥammad, who is claimed to have said:

عليكم بسنتي وسنة الخلفاء الراشدين المهديين من بعدي، عضوا عليها بالنواجد
You must take hold of my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly guided
(*rāshidūn*) deputies (*khulāfiā*) who take the right way (*mahdīyūn*) after me.
Bite on it with the molar teeth⁴

Significantly, the tradition was reported through Shāmī (Syrian) transmitters. All of the transmitters in the first three stages of the chain of this tradition were from Ḥimṣ a city in the centre of Syria. Abū Ismā‘īl al-Harawī (d. 481/1089) who apparently liked this tradition described it as “من أجود حديث في أهل الشام وأحسنه” “One of the finest and best traditions [reported] from the people of Syria”.⁵

It is hard to believe that such Shāmīs would include ‘Alī among the Rightly Guided Caliphs.⁶ Thumāmah b. ‘Adī, a Companion and a governor of ‘Uthmān in a city in Syria, said after the murder of ‘Uthmān: هذا حين انتزعت الخلافة من أمة محمد... فصار ملكاً وجبرية “Now, the Caliphate has been removed; and it has become a kingship and a dictatorship”.⁷ However, the debate among traditionalists in the second A.H./eighth century as to whether ‘Alī can be considered a caliph was highly controversial. Those who rejected ‘Alī’s caliphate became a minority among Sunnism by the third

² Stephen Humphreys, *Mu‘awiya ibn Abi Sufyan: from Arabia to empire*, 73-74.

³ ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 2:533-91; Ahmād b. ‘Amr b. al-Daḥḥāk Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 760-801; al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 455.

⁴ This tradition is available in: Ahmād, *al-Musnad*, 4: 126-27, Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, kitāb al-Sunnah, Bāb fi luzūm al-Sunnah, no. 4607; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘*; Abwāb al-‘ilm, Bāb mā jā’ fi al-akhadh bi-al-Sunnah wa-ijtināb al-bida‘, no.2676; Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn Mājah, *al-Sunan*, al-Muqaddimah, Bāb ittibā‘ sunnat al-khulafā‘ al-Rashidīn al-Mahdiyyīn, nos. 42-44.

⁵ ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Harawī, *Dhamm al-kalām wa-ahlih*, 3: 122.

⁶ The tradition was transmitted by people of Ḥimṣ, who were known to disparage ‘Alī until the time of Ismā‘īl b. ‘Ayyāsh (d. 182/798). See: Ahmād b. ‘Alī Ibn Hajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tadhib*, 8: 464.

⁷ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 39: 482; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 334.

A.H./ninth century at the time of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. Subsequently, and probably by virtue of Aḥmad's attitude, the acceptance of 'Alī as a caliph became an orthodox belief of Sunnism.⁸

Those who did not accept his caliphate stated that there was no consensus (*ijmā'*) among the Companions on his caliphate. Some Companions rejected it, including 'Ā'ishah, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr and their group, and Mu'āwiyah and his group. They did not pledge their allegiance to 'Alī and, if we believe that 'Alī was a caliph, this means we have to criticise them and insult them as *Khawārij* or *Bughāh* (rebels). So, the safest way is to count this period as a time of *fitnah*, when there was neither *ijmā'* nor *jamā'ah*. The other reason given for rejecting 'Alī's caliphate is that allegiance was given to 'Alī in the wrong way; there was no *shūrā* or *'ahd* (testament) and no publicly-declared allegiance (*bay'ah*). Therefore it was disregarded. Moreover, those who gave 'Alī allegiance were the rebels who had killed 'Uthmān.

This disagreement among the traditionalists on 'Alī's position was noticed in the second half of third A.H./ninth century,⁹ by a *Mu'tazilī* author who claimed that the Hashwīyah (the name with which he insults the traditionalists) had different positions towards 'Alī's caliphate. The first position was presented by those who accepted 'Alī as a caliph. This group can be divided into two. One was presented by most of the traditionalists in Kufa, such as Waki'b. al-Jarrāḥ, 'Abd Allāh b. Idrīs,¹⁰ and al-Fadl b. Dukayn. This group ranked 'Alī higher than 'Uthmān, but they accepted both their caliphates. The second group was presented by the traditionalists in Basra and Wāṣiṭ, such as Hammād b. Zayd, Hammād b. Salamah, Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Qatṭān, Hushaym b. Bashīr and 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī. These preferred 'Uthmān to 'Alī, but they considered 'Alī a caliph.

The other position towards 'Alī's caliphate was taken by the traditionalists in Baghdad, such as Ibn Ma'īn, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Khaythamah, and Ismā'il al-

⁸ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and politics under the early Abbāsids: the emergence of the proto-Sunni élite*, 52.

⁹ Josef Van Ess, the editor of the book, published it as the *Masā'il al-imāmah* by 'Abd Allāh b. Muhammad al-Nāshi' al-Akbar (d. 293/906). However, Madelung, believes that the book is *Kitāb al-Uṣūl* by Ja'far b. Ḥarb (d. 236/850). See: Wilferd Madelung, "Frühe Mu'tazilitisch Häresiographic: das *Kitāb al-Uṣūl* des Ḥaḍar b. Ḥarb?", 220-36. Madelung's argument was accepted by most western scholars; for example see: Michael Cook, "Reviewed work(s): *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* by Wilferd Madelung", 132-133; Patricia Crone, *God's Rule*, 439.

¹⁰ Aḥmad rejects 'Abd Allāh b. Idrīs preferring 'Alī over 'Uthmān. See: al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 395.

Jawzī. These traditionalists disregarded ‘Alī as a caliph, and stated that ‘Alī’s time was not that of a caliphate; rather it was a period of *fītnah*.¹¹

This last description was written by a *Mu'tazilī* in the third A.H./late ninth century, and in comparison with the contemporary traditionalists' sources, this triple division is generally acceptable. But there are some questions with regard to the real views of some of those named above. In the following, this statement will be examined in the light of the traditionalists' resources in the third and early fourth A.H./ninth and early tenth century.

Regarding the Kufan group of traditionalists, Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal agrees that they prefer ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān. However, Ahmad mentions that “Only two men in Kufa prefer ‘Uthmān to ‘Alī”. These two are Ṭalḥah b. Muṣarrif and ‘Abd Allāh b. Idrīs.¹² Apparently, the disagreement between Ahmad and the *Mu’tazilī* author concerns whether Ibn Idrīs prefers ‘Alī or ‘Uthmān.

Ahmad confirms that the traditionalists in Basra prefer ‘Uthmān to ‘Alī and narrates from the Basran Sa‘īd Ibn Abī ‘Arūbah (d. 156/773), that the early scholars (*mashyakhah*) like it if one is a ‘Uthmānī [i.e., preferring ‘Uthmān to ‘Alī].¹³ Qatādah, another Basran traditionalist, became angry when he heard someone preferring ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān and stated that the early Basrans did not hold this belief.¹⁴

The case of Wāṣīt is different. Ahmād claims that the majority of the people of Wāṣīt were *shī'ah* (*yatashayya ʻūn* i.e., preferring ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān). He quotes his Wāṣītī teacher Yazīd b. Hārūn (d. 206/821) who stated: ﴿أَلْتَبَلِي مِنْ قَدْمَتِ عَلَى عُثْمَانَ، أَوْ عَلَى عَلِيٍّ﴾ (Ali على عثمان، أو علی على) “You should not care whether you prefer ‘Uthmān to ‘Alī or ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān”.¹⁵

In the Baghdadi group, the author of *Masā'il al-imāmah* mentions a Baghdadi traditionalist called Ismā'il al-Jawzī, who disregards 'Alī as a caliph and counts his period as a time of *fitnah*. We do not know much about him except that he was one of

¹¹ al-Nāshi' al-Akbar (attrib.), *Masā'il al-imāmah*, 65-66.

¹² al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 395.

¹³ Ibid, 2: 324.

¹⁴ كان المشيخة الأولى إذا مر بهم الرجل قالوا: هذا عثمانى. يعجبهم ذلك *Ibn Asâkir, Târikh Dimashq*, 39: 505. قال قادة وسمعوا فما يفضلون عليه على عثمان، فغضب، فقال: «ما كان على هذا أولئك يعني أهل البصرة».

¹⁵ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 394.

the seven traditionalists who were asked by al-Ma'mūn to state that the Qur'ān was created. Under threat all of these seven acknowledged the statement.¹⁶ However, al-Jawzī's statement can be confirmed from the Ḥanbalī literatures. Al-Khallāl narrates from Ishāq al-Baghawī that Aḥmad was told about a statement by some people claiming that if 'Alī was a just ruler (*imām 'adl*) that would mean dismissing of the blood of Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr. Aḥmad's answer was that: هذا الحوري يعني أنه هو قال ذا - فقل ما كان بصيراً بالحديث ولا بالرأي "this is al-Jawzi [i.e., who says that]."^[17] He was not insightful (*baṣīr*) about ḥadīth or reasoning (*ra'y18*

In addition, the author of *Masā'il al-imāmah* claims that traditionalists in Bagdad, such as Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Yahyā b. Ma'īn disregard 'Alī's caliphate. Traditionalist sources give a different interpretation of Ibn Ma'īn. In these sources Ibn Ma'īn regards 'Alī as the fourth caliph.¹⁹

The narratives from Aḥmad are various and sometimes contradictory. These narratives cover all possible attitudes, from disregarding 'Alī as a caliph to accusing those who do not regard him as a caliph of being wicked people who shall not be talked to or married with. Aḥmad's position regarding 'Alī's caliphate can be divided into two issues.

3.2.2. The legitimacy of 'Alī's caliphate

There are two different reports from Aḥmad regarding this matter. The first is that 'Alī was not a caliph. This report can be found neither in Ḥanbalī nor in traditionalist sources, but is in the *Mu'tazilī* book *Masā'il al-imāmah*. The other reports state that Aḥmad considers 'Alī as a legitimate caliph. A large number of Aḥmad's students narrate from him that أبو بكر و عمر و عثمان و علي في الخلافة In the preference between the Companions: [the best] is Abū Bakr, then 'Umar, then

¹⁶ Aḥmad Ibn Abī Tāhir Tayfūr, *Kitāb Bagdad*, 183; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 8: 634; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Maṇaqib*, 519. For Ismā'īl al-Jawzī's biography, see: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Bagdad*, 7: 221; Josef Van Ess, *Frühe Mu'tazilitisch Häresiographie: Zwei Werke des Nāšī' al-Akbar (gest. 293 H.)*, 66; Madelung, "Frühe Mu'tazilitisch Häresiographie: das *kitāb al-Uṣūl* des Ča'far b. Ḥarb?", 223-224. However, neither Van Ess nor Madelung notice that al-Jawzī in *Masā'il al-imāmah* is the same person who had been questioned in the Miḥnah.

¹⁷ In the manuscript and the printed versions of *al-Sunnah*, al-Jawzī's name is written as al-Ḥūrī, which is similar in Arabic writing to al-Jawzī.

¹⁸ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 425-26.

¹⁹ al-Dūrī, *al-Tārīkh*, 3:18, 359, 4: 8, 46, 48; al-Lālakā'ī, *Sharḥ uṣūl i'tiqād ahl al-Sunnah*, 8: 1392; Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 39: 509.

‘Uthmān. However in the caliphate they are Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī’. That means Aḥmad regards ‘Alī as the fourth caliph but not the fourth best Companion. This view was narrated from Aḥmad by his sons Ṣalih²⁰ and ‘Abd Allāh,²¹ his cousin Ḥanbal b. Ishāq,²² and his pupils such as Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī,²³ ‘Abd al-Malik al-Maymūnī,²⁴ Abū Dawūd al-Sijistānī,²⁵ Ḥarb al-Kirmānī,²⁶ Abū Bakr al-Athram,²⁷ and Abū Bakr al-Aḥwal,²⁸ among others.²⁹ Western scholars resolve the contradiction between the two statements by stating that Aḥmad’s position developed over time, and at the end of his life he believed that ‘Alī was the fourth rightly guided caliph.³⁰

This argument contains two claims: the evolution of Aḥmad’s position, and that it took place at the end of his life. The first claim seems to be proved, as will be shown below; the second claim seems to be unsupported.

The change in Aḥmad’s position can be traced through two stories. In the first story, Maymūnī, the Syrian disciple of Aḥmad, said to Aḥmad that: فَأَنَا وَبَعْضُ إِخْرَانِي هُوَ ذَا نَعْجَبٍ! “I and some of my companions are surprised by your including ‘Alī among the [legitimate] Caliphate”; Aḥmad, according to al-Maymūnī, defended the legitimacy of ‘Alī’s caliphate. Al-Maymūnī dates this conversation to 227/842.³¹ This story supports the idea that it was not known to Aḥmad’s students that he included ‘Alī among the legitimate caliphs, so they were surprised when they knew about it.

A further story was narrated by another Syrian named Warīzah b. Muḥammad al-Ḥimṣī (d. 262/875-76), who claimed to have gone to Aḥmad when the latter came out with the *tarbī* [declaring ‘Alī as the fourth legitimate caliph] and said to him:

²⁰ Ṣalih, *Masā’il*, 98-99; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 411-12, 423-23.

²¹ ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 573-4; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 411, 424.

²² al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 413.

²³ Ibid., 2: 411, 419.

²⁴ Ibid., 2: 411, 426-7.

²⁵ Abū Dawūd, *Masā’il*, 370; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 411.

²⁶ Ḥarb, *Masā’il*, 439; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 411, 426.

²⁷ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 412-13.

²⁸ Ibid., 2: 428.

²⁹ al-Khallāl narrates this statement from some of Aḥmad’s other students. See: *al-Sunnah*, 2: 411- 28.

³⁰ Madelung, *Der Imam Qasim*, 225; Idem, *Religious trends in early Islamic Iran*, 24; Josef Van Ess,

“Political ideas in early Islamic religious thought”, 153; Zaman, *Religion and politics*, 51.

³¹ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 3: 426.

دخلت على أبي عبد الله أحمد بن حنبل حين أظهر التربيع يعني... فقلت له: يا أبا عبد الله إن هذا لطعن على طلحة والزبير. فقال: بئسما ما قلت، وما نحن وحرب القوم وذكرها؟ فقلت: أصلحك الله إنما ذكرناها حين ربعت يعني وأوجبت له الخلافة وما يجب للأئمة قبله. فقال لي: وما يمنعني من ذلك؟ قال: قلت: حديث ابن عمر. فقال لي: عمر خير من ابنه وقد رضي علياً للخلافة على المسلمين وأدخله في الشورى، وعلى بن أبي طالب ... قد سمي نفسه أمير المؤمنين؛ فأقول أنا ليس للمؤمنين بأمير! فانصرفت عنه

“O Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal], this [statement] slanders Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr [who fought ‘Alī]”. Ahmād replied “How badly you did speak! We should not take a part in their [the Companions’] war against each other nor talk about it”. Warīzah replied “God forgive you, I only mentioned it [i.e., the war] because you placed ‘Alī as the fourth, and claimed him a [legitimate] caliphate ...”. Ahmād said: “What prevents me from this?” and Warīzah replied “Ibn ‘Umar’s statement”. Ahmād then said: “‘Umar is better than his son, and he accepted ‘Alī being a caliph when he included him in the *shūra*”. He then added: “‘Alī claims himself as the Commander of the Faithful. How can I say he was not such?”³²

This story is hard to believe. It is not to be found in the early traditionalist literature (such as al-Khallāl’s works), and it mixes the *Tafḍīl* and the *Khilāfah*, whereas Ahmād, as will be shown, clearly distinguishes between the two. As a result of this mixture, Ahmād was quoted as rejecting Ibn ‘Umar’s statement on the *Tafḍīl*. In contrast, this tradition was accepted in most of the other reports narrated from Ahmād.

However, there is a strong possibility that Ahmād originally did not regard ‘Alī as a legitimate caliph and then changed his position. The point now is, when did he change his attitude towards ‘Alī’s caliphate? Western scholars (such as Madelung, Van Ess and Zaman) date this to approximately the time around the end of his life. This claim is doubtful; there is no evidence for it, and it runs contrary to other reports such as that of al-Maymūnī, who dates the change to 227/842, which is about fourteen years before Ahmād’s death. Another report that Ahmād approved ‘Alī’s position was narrated by Abū Bakr al-Mishkānī,³³ who died in 223/838-9. This date, which is between 222-227/238-242, is likely to be true since we do not have any report from Ahmād that he disregarded ‘Alī as a legitimate caliph. So, if such a statement existed, it was a long time before Ahmād’s death and not when his opinions were frequently recorded.

³² al-Lālakā’ī, *Sharḥ uṣūl i’tiqād ahl al-Sunnah*, 8: 1392; Ibn Abī Ya’lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 501-2.

³³ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 3: 428.

Aḥmad uses various arguments to approve ‘Alī’s caliphate and to include him in the Rāshidūn:

A. The first argument Aḥmad applies is a tradition transmitted from the Prophet Muḥammad through his servant Safīnah. In this tradition the Prophet is claimed as saying: “الخلافة بعدي ثلثون سنة” “The caliphate will last for thirty years after me”. Aḥmad justifies this by counting thirty years after the prophet’s death, saying, “Abū Bakr ruled two years and something, ‘Umar ten years, ‘Uthmān twelve years and ‘Alī six years”.³⁴ The total is 30 years as the tradition stated.

This argument was transmitted by a large number of Aḥmad’s students.³⁵ Presumably, some traditionalists were not convinced about including ‘Alī in the Rāshidūn and acknowledging him as a legitimate caliph. This group did not think that the *ḥadīth* was an authentic report. Aḥmad refutes this claim and defends the authenticity of the *ḥadīth*. The reactions reported from Aḥmad regarding those who criticised Safīnah’s *ḥadīth* are various. Al-Marrūdhī informed Aḥmad that those who disregarded Safīnah’s *ḥadīth* relied on Yaḥyā b. Sa‘īd al-Qatṭān’s judgement that he regarded Sa‘īd b. Jumhān (one of the tradition’s transmitters) as a weak transmitter (*da‘īf*). Aḥmad became angry and said “This is *bātil* (false), I have never heard Yaḥyā criticise him [i.e., Sa‘īd b. Juhmān].”³⁶ Two other accounts provide more aggressive reports from Aḥmad towards those who rejected Safīnah’s *ḥadīth*. The first, narrated by Abū al-Hārith (d. ?) said that when Aḥmad was asked about those who disregard this tradition, Aḥmad answered هذا كلام سوء رديء، يجانبون هؤلاء القوم، ولا يجالسون، ويبين أمرهم للناس “This is an evil and useless statement. Those people should be shunned and boycotted, and people are to be warned against them”.³⁷ This statement is too exaggerated to be believed. It is too aggressive and contradicts other reports from Aḥmad.³⁸

³⁴ Ṣāliḥ, *Masā’il*, 99; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 424.

³⁵ See: ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 591-92; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 412, 419-24; al-Lālakā’ī, *Sharḥ uṣūl i‘tiqād ahl al-Sunnah*, 8: 1371, 1392.

³⁶ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 419.

³⁷ Ibid., 2: 423.

³⁸ There will be further discussion of this point in the next section.

The second report is that Ahmād removed a man from his *majlis* as a result of his expressing a doubt about the reliability of Sa‘īd b. Jumhān.³⁹ This statement was only known in Baghdad in the fourth A.H./early tenth century.⁴⁰ Possibly Ahmād’s various reports towards those who criticised Safinah’s ḥadīth reflect the conflict among traditionalists in the late third A.H./ninth century on the legitimacy of ‘Alī’s caliphate.

B. The second argument that Ahmād applied to approve the legitimacy of ‘Alī’s caliphate is that ‘Alī claimed himself to be a caliph and duly acted as a caliph. He conducted the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage), he implemented the *hudūd* (the fixed punishment), and he led the prayers and the *jihad*; he also gave out the *ghanā’im* (the spoils of war).⁴¹

C. The third argument is that the Companions addressed ‘Alī as a caliph, accepted his caliphate and named him as the Commander of the Faithful. Among these Companions, according to Ahmād, were ‘Ammār b. Yāsir and [Abū] Mas‘ūd.⁴²

These two latter arguments are based on the fact that ‘Alī claimed himself as a caliph and the Companions addressed him as such. Consequently, those who rejected or doubted it imputed lies to ‘Alī and other Companions.⁴³

As presented above, Ahmād regarded ‘Alī as a legitimate caliph and included him in the Rāshidūn. However, many contradictory reports were narrated from him about those who did not regard ‘Alī as a caliph. These included some traditionalists in his time. The following reports are organised in order of aggressiveness:

a) Şālih b. ‘Alī (d.?) narrated from Ahmād that “I do not like whoever doubts ‘Alī’s caliphate”.⁴⁴ ‘Alī b. Zakariyā al-Tammār (d. 267/881) claimed that Ahmād was surprised at those who did not say ‘Alī was the Commander of the Faithful.⁴⁵

³⁹ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 422-23.

⁴⁰ al-Khallāl heard it from Abū Bakr Ibn Şadaqah, who had heard it from his companions from Ahmād.

⁴¹ For ‘Abd Allāh’s report, see his book: *al-Sunnah*, p. 2: 590; “al-Marrūdhī, Hanbal b. Ishāq, Abū Bakr al-Athram and Muhammād b. Yahyā” in (al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 412-15).

⁴² al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 411-15. In the published copies and the manuscript: the name of the Companion was Ibn Mas‘ūd which could not have been meant here as Ibn Mas‘ūd died in 32/652-53 three years before ‘Alī claimed the office of the caliphate. It is clear that the person who is mentioned here is Abū Mas‘ūd al-Badrī (d. after 40/661) another Companion and one of ‘Alī’s men.

⁴³ Ibid., 2: 419.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2: 412.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 2: 420.

- b) Abū Bakr al-Mishkānī narrated from Ahmād, “How bad this statement is”, but he did not remove him from the Sunnah because he made a wrong interpretation.⁴⁶
- c) In ‘Abd Allāh’s report, Ahmād describes disregarding ‘Alī as a caliph as قوله سوءٌ رديءٌ “An evil dreadful statement”.⁴⁷ And in Ḥarb’s report, Ahmād describes it as a “severely appalling [statement]”.⁴⁸ In Ḥanbal’s report, Ahmād said: أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ هَذَا الْمَقَالَةِ “God forbid this statement!”⁴⁹ Al-Marrūdhī claims that Ahmād harshly attacked those who did not accept ‘Alī’s caliphate.⁵⁰
- d) When Ahmād’s uncle insulted those who rejected ‘Alī’s caliphate as being الفساق الفجار “sinful, perverted”, Ahmād kept silent and smiled.⁵¹
- e) Later sources include even more aggressive reports, one being that Ahmād b. Zurārah (d. ?) narrated from Ahmād that: مَنْ لَمْ يَرْبِعْ بِعَلِيٍّ بْنَ أَبِي طَالِبٍ فِي الْخِلَافَةِ فَلَا تَكَلَّمُوهُ وَلَا تَنَاهُوهُ “Whoever does not regard ‘Alī as the fourth [rightly guided] caliph, does not sit with him or talk to him”.⁵² Another report, transmitted by Hishām b. Mānṣūr (d. ?) claimed to have heard Ahmād saying: مَنْ لَمْ يَثْبِتْ إِلَمَامَةَ لَعْلَى فَهُوَ أَضَلُّ مِنْ حَمَارٍ أَهْلِهِ “Whoever does not approve ‘Alī’s caliphate is more wayward than his family’s donkey”.⁵³

This disagreement between the reports is more likely to reflect the conflict between the traditionalists in the late third and early fourth A.H./tenth century on the position of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib than it is to represent Ahmād’s own view.

The reports that were narrated by Ahmād’s pupils and sons, which can be found in the early sources (the last quarter of the ninth century), indicate that Ahmād regarded ‘Alī as the fourth rightly guided caliph and refuted those who disregarded him. Nevertheless, he does not attack them harshly, nor does he remove them from the path of the Sunnah. The more confrontational reports (for example point (e) in the preceding paragraph) were, on the other hand, narrated by students who were not even

⁴⁶ Ibid., 2: 428. قلت: يكون من أهل السنة؟ قال ما أجري أخرجه من السنة، تأول فأخطأ.

⁴⁷ ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 590.

⁴⁸ Ḥarb, *Masā’il*, 439. فإن قلت ليس ب الخليفة، ففيه شناعة شديدة.

⁴⁹ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 413.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2: 419. وجعل أبو عبد الله يفحش على من لم يقل إنه خليفة.

⁵¹ Ibid., 2: 427.

⁵² Ibn Abī Ya’lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 99-100.

⁵³ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 220.

close to Ah^mad. These reports can only be found in later sources (in the tenth century and afterwards). However, there is no doubt that Ah^mad played a great role in rehabilitating ‘Alī among the traditionalists, and under the authority of his name the mission was completed. ‘Alī is regarded as the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph by all the traditionalist creeds from the fourth A.H./tenth century onwards.⁵⁴

Here a significant question arises: why did Ah^mad change his position towards ‘Alī’s caliphate and rehabilitate him? There is no clear answer to this question. However, it may be useful to look at the evolution of the traditionalists’ view of the history of Islam and the Jamā‘ah (community). In the second A.H./eighth century, traditionalists started to be aware of themselves. A new trend established a project to narrow the differences among the traditionalists themselves, in order to have one traditionalist school (*madhab ashāb al-hadīth*), rather than several traditionalist schools (*madhāhib ashāb al-hadīth*), and one of their strategies was to modify their theology towards a middle way (*wasatīyah*). This was in order to maintain the community by absorbing the history of early Islam and accepting it all. And this could be applied by approving the rules of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān (the ‘Uthmānīyah’s view), ‘Alī’s rule (the Sunnī-Shī‘ī view), and Mu‘awiyah’s rule (the Shāmī view). Furthermore, this trend regarded the fight between the Companions as a form of *ijtihād*. Thus they could secure the dignity of the Companions: ‘Alī, Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr and his son ‘Abd Allāh, ‘Āishah, Mu‘awiyah and ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ,⁵⁵ none of whom were to be blamed for his own *ijtihād*.

3.2.3. The *Tafḍīl* (the preference among the Companions)

The question of “Who is the best” (*tafḍīl*) has been related to Muslim political theory since the first A.H./seventh century.⁵⁶ It was used as a justification for choosing the caliph. For example, when Abū Bakr asked ‘Uthmān about his decision to choose

⁵⁴ See: ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 2:533-91; Ibn Abī ‘Āsim, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 760-801; al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 455.

⁵⁵ See another example of applying “absorption” in traditionalist theology: al-Sayyid, “Ahl^u al-Sunnah”, 238-41.

⁵⁶ Afsaruddin dates the *Manāqib* literature, which reflects the discussion on *tafḍīl*, at around the end of the seventh century. See: Asma Afsaruddin, “In praise of the caliph: re-creating history from the manāqib literature”, 229.

'Umar as his successor, the latter's reply was "There is no one like him among us",⁵⁷ and Abū Bakr declared that 'Umar was the best among the Companions.⁵⁸ On another occasion, he declared that 'Umar was the best of God's people.⁵⁹ It is difficult to accept that *Tafḍīl* was the only element to be taken into account in choosing a caliph. It is more convincing to state that on the basis of the absence of an effective mechanism to choose the caliph,⁶⁰ *Tafḍīl* was a good excuse for choosing him. Therefore, the question of *Tafḍīl* has never been raised in the discussion on choosing the caliph; it has only been declared after the decision has been made.

Aḥmad's position on comparing the Companions is indicated in two issues:

3.2.3.1. Who is the best?

All the statements that were narrated from Aḥmad regarding this issue state that "The best of the nation after the Prophet is Abū Bakr; and the best of them after Abū Bakr is 'Umar; and the best of them after 'Umar is 'Uthmān". There is no disagreement on Aḥmad's position up to this point. Disagreements arise concerning the question 'Who is the best after 'Uthmān?'

The majority of traditionalists in Aḥmad's time agreed on the position of these three but disagreed on the position of 'Alī and the other Companions. Reflecting these disagreements, five opinions were narrated from Aḥmad regarding the answer to this question.

I. To end at 'Uthmān (*al-waqf 'alā 'Uthmān*): this meant preferring Abū Bakr, then 'Umar, then 'Uthmān, then not preferring any Companion to any other. This opinion was narrated by the majority of Aḥmad's students. In addition to those who were named above,⁶¹ there is Yahyā b. Maṣīn,⁶² al-Kawsaj,⁶³ Ibn Ḥāni',⁶⁴ and Aḥmad

⁵⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3: 428.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3: 429, 433; Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: a study of the early caliphate*, 55.

⁶⁰ Hishām Ju'ayṭ, *al-Fitnah: jadaliyat al-dīn wa-al-siyāsah fī al-Islam al-mubakkir*, 120.

⁶¹ See above (3.2.3.1). These names are: those of his sons Sāliḥ and 'Abd Allāh, his cousin Ḥanbal b. Ishāq, and his pupils such as Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī, 'Abd al-Malik al-Maymūnī, Abū Dawūd al-Sijistānī, Ḥarb al-Kirmānī, Abū Bakr al-Athram and Abū Bakr al-Aḥwal, among others.

⁶² al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 397.

⁶³ al-Kawsaj, *Masā'il*, q 3413.

⁶⁴ Ibn Ḥāni', *Masā'il*, 2: 169.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥawārī,⁶⁵ among others.⁶⁶ According to their reports, Aḥmad based his opinion on Ibn ‘Umar who is claimed to have said:

We used to prefer among the Companions of the Messenger of God, and we were saying: Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān. The Prophet hears that and does not reject it⁶⁷

II. Some of Aḥmad’s students narrated that even though Aḥmad ends at ‘Uthmān, he neither accuses nor rejects those who regard ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion. ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad, al-Marrūdhī, Ibn Hāni’, Abū al-Ḥārith and al-Faḍl b. Ziyād (among others) narrated this opinion from Aḥmad.⁶⁸

III. Ending at ‘Uthmān or regarding ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion: either is correct. This opinion was narrated from Aḥmad by al-Ḥasan b. Thawāb (d. 268/881) and Hārūn al-Dīk.⁶⁹

IV. ‘Alī is the fourth best Companion. This opinion was given by al-Faḍl b. Ziyād who narrated from Aḥmad that ما يرَدْ هذَا شَيْءٌ “Nothing rejects this”.⁷⁰ Al-Maymūnī narrated from him that أَرْجُو أَنْ لَا يَكُونَ بِهِ بَأْسٌ “I hope this [statement] is accepted”.⁷¹ Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Baghawī reported from him that “Whoever regards ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion is *Sāhib Sunnah*”.⁷² This opinion can also be found in the narratives of Aḥmad Ibn Abī al-Ḥawārī and Salamah b. Shabīb. These two claim that Aḥmad based his opinion on Safinah’s tradition.⁷³ Even though these reports regard ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion, they do not show any enthusiasm for supporting this opinion. However, only in one report is Aḥmad presented as fanatical about ‘Alī’s position. In Creed V, Muḥammad b. ‘Awf is claimed to report from Aḥmad:

The best person after the messenger of God is Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān and then ‘Alī’. Then I [i.e., Ibn ‘Awf] said: “O Abū ‘Abd Allāh, they claim that you end at ‘Uthmān.” Aḥmad replied: “They lied, in the name of God, to me. I have only transmitted from Ibn ‘Umar’s *hadīth*:

⁶⁵ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 408.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2: 396-97.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2: 306.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2: 404-6.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2: 407-8.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2: 404-5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 2: 406.

⁷² Ibid., 2: 407.

⁷³ Ibid., 2: 409.

‘We used to establish a preference between the Companions of the messenger of God, saying: Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān. The Prophet heard this and did not reject it’.

“Yet,” Ahmād said, “the Prophet did not order one, nor did he prefer [among the Companions] after those. Nobody has evidence of [the demand to end at ‘Uthmān]; and hence, whoever ends at ‘Uthmān and does not say ‘Alī is the fourth (*yurabbi^a bi-‘Alī*), is not [speaking in accordance with] the Sunnah”.

The outlandishness of this creed lies not in regarding ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion. Rather, it is to my knowledge the only report that accuses anyone who does not regard ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion of being outside of the Sunnah. Another aspect of this creed is his rejection of any reliance on Ibn ‘Umar’s tradition that was narrated by the close circle of Ahmād’s family and students.⁷⁴

V. The best of the Companions is Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān, then Aṣḥāb al-Shūrā (five Companions of whom ‘Alī was one). After this, the people of the battle of Badr contested for preference (the Muhājirūn first, then the Ansār). This opinion can be found in creed III.

However, in the early period of the Ḥanbalīs, al-Khallāl noticed inconsistencies in the reports from Ahmād regarding his attitude towards whether ‘Alī was the fourth best Companion. Al-Khallāl tried to resolve this problem by stating that by taking all of these reports (I- IV) into account, Ahmād’s doctrine was Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān. This is what was applied by his followers (*wa-hu^a alladhi ‘alyhⁱ al-‘amal*). Those who say: Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān, then ‘Alī, are correct and accepted.⁷⁵ This view accepts the majority of reports and it adheres more to traditions (i.e., Ibn ‘Umar’s tradition),⁷⁶ as al-Khallāl points out. Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’ presents these different views from Ahmād but he does not decide between them.⁷⁷ Significantly, neither al-Khallāl nor Abū Ya‘lā (and the other Ḥanbalīs) takes into

⁷⁴ Christopher Melchert criticises this point, based on the existence of other accounts from Ahmād that he regarded ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion (Melchert, “Comment on Saud al-Sarhan, ‘The Creeds of Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal’”, 3-4). However, as presented above, this is not the case. The difference in this creed (i.e., Creed V) is that it accuses those who do not regard ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion of not being in the Sunnah.

⁷⁵ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 409-10.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2: 410.

⁷⁷ Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Masā’il al-‘aqadīyah*, 41-47.

account the opinions attributed to Aḥmad in Creeds III and V. This is probably because these creeds were either unknown to the early Ḥanbalīs, or else they did not regard them as authentic sources of Aḥmad's belief.

Al-Khallāl identifies an interesting point: the reports from Aḥmad on the *tafdīl* of ‘Alī as being the fourth best Companion were from Aḥmad's Syrian students. Aḥmad, according to al-Khallāl, did this deliberately as the people of Syria were melodramatic in their love for ‘Uthmān in the same way that the people of Kufa (the Shī‘īs) were melodramatic in their support of ‘Alī. Therefore, Aḥmad aimed to mediate between these errant groups.⁷⁸ So, when the people of Syria asked him about ‘Alī he said that he regarded him highly as being the fourth best Companion, even though he did not believe it. Although some of the narrators of this view from Aḥmad were from Syria, some others, such as Salamah b. Shabīb and al-Baghawī, were not.

3.2.3.2. Preferring ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān

There is no disagreement in the reports from Aḥmad that whoever prefers ‘Alī to Abū Bakr or ‘Umar is an innovator. Disagreements among his *riwāyāt* (the reports from him) concern the matter of who prefers ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān. Different reports relating to this issue are found:

I. Whoever prefers ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān is likely to be an innovator and his statement is an evil statement. This opinion was reported by his sons Ṣāliḥ and ‘Abd Allāh, and his cousin Ḥanbal and his students Ibn Hāni’ and Zakariyā al-Nāqid.⁷⁹ Hārūn al-Dīk, another of Aḥmad's students, narrated from him that “Who prefers ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān is a Rāfiḍī” or as he said “an innovator”.⁸⁰

II. Another narrative from Aḥmad, also by Hārūn al-Dīk, can be understood as Aḥmad's accepting both ways of preference between ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī in the past. This statement, however, would have been hard to accept in his time.⁸¹

⁷⁸ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 410.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2: 378, 380-81.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 2: 381.

⁸¹ Ibid., 2: 408. قلت: فمن قال: أبو بكر وعمر وعلي؟ قال: هذا الآن شديد، هذا الآن شديد.

III. The third opinion narrated from Ahmād is that he does not like preferring ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān, but he does not insult it as an innovation, and those who hold this belief are better than the Rāfiḍīs. This was narrated by Ḥanbal.⁸²

However, the conclusion arrived at by al-Khallāl is strong enough to be accepted. Al-Khallāl concludes that فاسقر القول من أبي عبد الله: أنه يكره هذا القول، ولم يجزم في تبديعه. وإن قال قائل: هو مبتدع؛ لم ينكر عليه “Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ahmād b. Ḥanbal] hated this statement [preferring ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān], but he was not confident in pronouncing it an innovation. However, if someone says: ‘He [i.e., the person who believes in this statement] is an innovator’, [Ahmād] will not reject his saying”.⁸³ It is clear that Ahmād hated this statement, but it was difficult for him to regard those who believed it as innovators, since a large number of traditionalists (especially in the early period in Iraq) preferred ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān.

From the above, we have two contradictory reports from Ahmād regarding who is a Rāfiḍī. The first is an uncertain narrative from Hārūn al-Dīk that the Rāfiḍī (or, he said, an annotator) prefers ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān (the uncertainty stems from al-Dīk’s transmitter). The other report is that those who prefer ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān are better than the Rāfiḍīs. Some other reports are found from Ahmād about who constitutes a Rāfiḍī. These can be categorised as follows:

1. The ones who prefer ‘Alī to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar are likely to be Rāfiḍīs.⁸⁴
2. Other reports from Ahmād require the insulting of the Companions (*shatm al-sahābah*) especially the insulting of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, for regarding someone as a Rāfiḍī. This definition was reported from Ahmād by Ṣāliḥ,⁸⁵ ‘Abd Allāh,⁸⁶ al-Maymūnī,⁸⁷ Abū Ṭālib al-Mishkānī,⁸⁸ and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Kaḥḥāl.⁸⁹ It is also found in Creed I.

Apparently, Ahmād required the insulting of the Companions as an indication that someone was a Rāfiḍī. Yet, if someone prefers ‘Alī to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar Ahmād

⁸² Ibid., 2: 380.

⁸³ Ibid., 2: 382.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 2: 489. أَخْشَى أَنْ يَكُونْ رَافِضِيًّا.

⁸⁵ Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah al-imām Ahmād b. Ḥanbal*, 75.

⁸⁶ ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 548.

⁸⁷ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 493.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

does not consider him a Rāfiḍī, but he is close to the *Rāfiḍah* doctrine. This may be because Aḥmad might think the preference will lead to insulting. The case of preferring ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān is probably misreported by al-Dīk, and regarding him in this report as an innovator is more accurate, because al-Dīk was not certain whether Aḥmad said “Rāfiḍī” or “innovator”.

In conclusion, as shown above, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal succeeded in including ‘Alī in the Rāshidūn. The matter of preference between the Companions is slightly different concerning two points.

First: orthodox Sunnī belief has settled on regarding ‘Alī as the fourth best Companion. All other opinions among traditionalists, including those of Aḥmad himself, were ignored or modified to the benefit of ‘Alī. In his book *Fadā’īl al-Sahābah* (Virtues of the Companions), ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad lists ‘Alī as the fourth, after Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān, even though, he narrated from his father to end at ‘Uthmān. However, ‘Alī has remained the fourth best Companion in all Sunnī creeds since the fourth A.H./tenth century. Therefore, some Ḥanbalīs in the early fifth A.H./eleventh century had to modify Aḥmad’s views to match this doctrine. ‘Abd al-Wāhid al-Tamīmī (d. 410/1019-20) who was described as the leader of the Ḥanbalīs at this time, wrote a book in which he summarised Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s theology; he included in this book the comment that Aḥmad regarded ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib as the fourth best Companion.⁹⁰

Second: Aḥmad did not approve of the one who prefers ‘Alī to ‘Uthmān and may have considered him to be an innovator. Orthodox Sunnī belief after Aḥmad’s time has in general accepted this claim by remaining equivocal on the status of the one who favors ‘Alī over ‘Uthmān.⁹¹

⁹⁰ ‘Abd al-Wāhid b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Tamīmī, *I’tiqād al-imām al-munabbal Abī ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 72-73.

⁹¹ See: Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah, *al-‘Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyah*, 24 ; Muhammad b. Ṣāliḥ Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqādah al-Wāsiṭiyah*, 2: 270-72; Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Lisān al-Mīzān*, 1: 113-14.

3.3. The *Fitnah*:

Mālik b. Anas was recalling ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr when he said: أَنْ مَالِكَ بْنَ أَنَسَ كَانَ يَذْكُرُ عُثْمَانَ وَعَلِيًّا وَطَلْحَةَ وَالْزُّبَيْرَ، فَيَقُولُ: وَاللَّهِ مَا افْتَنُوكُمْ إِلَّا عَلَى التَّرِيدِ الْأَعْفَرِ “By God, they fought only on off-white gruel”.⁹²

This statement asserts the temporality of the conflicts, starting from the rebellion against ‘Uthmān and the battles between ‘Alī and his adversaries. Mālik b. Anas (among others) does not believe that any religious issue was raised in these battles: the Qurashīs were simply fighting to commandeer kingship, as the poet Ayman b. Khuraym al-Asadī (d. 80/699) said.⁹³

Taking this view into account, we cannot ignore the fact that this period (known as the time of the *Fitnah*, from the assassination of ‘Uthmān in 35/656 until ‘Alī’s murder in 40/661) generated the main Muslim sects. Maymūn b. Muhrān, a Syrian Successor (d. 117?/735), gives a very comprehensive analysis of the emergence of the sects as a consequence of the *Fitnah*. He claims that after the murder of ‘Uthmān people divided into four parties on the basis of their attitude towards the death of ‘Uthmān. Subsequently, a fifth party was formed. These four parties are the Shī‘ah of ‘Uthmān (‘Uthmāniyah) in Basra (the party of al-Zubayr, Ṭalḥah and ‘Ā’ishah) and in Syria (Mu‘awiyah’s party); the second party is ‘Alī and his Shī‘ah in Kufa. These two fought each other later on. The other two parties did not become involved in the fight and were neutral. They are the *Murji‘is* and the people of the *Jamā‘ah*. The difference

⁹² Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn al-Mubarrid, *al-Kāmil*, 3: 1137; ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd b. Hibat Allāh Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-Balāghah*, 5: 76. Mālik wishes to indicate that they fought only for wealth and power, since only rich people were able to provide expensive food such as off-white gruel.

⁹³ Ayman b. Khuraym al-Asadī refused to join Marwān I in his war against Ibn al-Zubayr. His father and uncle took similar actions in refusing to join ‘Alī’s fights because these were fights between Muslims and the *fitnah*. Ayman gives a clear reason for his *i’tizāl* (or refusing to join this *fitnah*): it was merely fighting between the Qurashīs for kingship. He said: “I will never kill a man who prays for the benefit of another man from the Quraysh. [The latter] will have his kingship and I will get my sin, God forbid, from ineptitude and foolishness” (Muḥammad Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 6: 25; ‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Shi‘r wa-al-shu‘arā’*, 1: 542).

وَلَسْتُ بِقَاتِلٍ رِجَالًا يَصْلِيُ عَلَى سُلْطَانٍ أَخْرَى مِنْ قَرِيشٍ
لَهُ سُلْطَانٌهُ وَعَلَيَّ إِنْهِيٌّ
مَعَادُ اللَّهِ مِنْ حَمْقٍ وَطِيشٍ

Ayman gives pragmatic advice on how one should deal with the *fitnah*’s leaders. He states that, basically, if there is money-giving you should go to them to have your share. But if there is a fight, you should stand away from them (Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Shi‘r*, 1: 541-42).

إِنَّ لِلْفَتَنَةِ مِيَطًا بَيْنَ فَرْوَيْدَ الْمِيَطِ مِنْهَا تَعْتَدُ
فَإِذَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ فَاتِّهِمْ وَإِذَا كَانَ قَتْلَنَ فَاعْتَزَلْ
إِنَّمَا يَسْعِرُهَا جَهَالُهَا حَطَبَ النَّارِ فَدَعَاهَا تَشْتَعِلْ

between these neutral parties is in their attitude towards the combatants: the *Murji'īs*, who, according to Maymūn b. Muhrān, were mainly from the Muslim army that did not observe the early conflicts and did not return to Medina until the death of 'Uthmān. Thus the *Murji'īs* stood apart from supporting any party as they did not know whether it was right and they suspended judgment of the two groups to the Hereafter.

The people of *Jamā'ah* also stood apart from the fight, accepting both 'Uthmān's and 'Alī's parties. Maymūn claims that this party included more than ten thousand Companions and Successors such as Sa'd Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar.

The neutrality of the *Murji'īs* was negative. They rejected an undefined group of the fighters. On the other hand, the people of the *Jamā'ah* accepted the two groups of the fighters and granted the faith (*īmān*) to them both.

The last and fifth party is the *Khārijīs*, who were among 'Alī's army but then changed allegiance because of his decision to accept the adjudication (*tahkīm*) of Mu'āwiya and his party.

Ibn Muhrān stated that this was the first conflict among the Muslim community, but now (i.e., during his time) there were more than seventy parties. Ibn Muhrān strongly supported the position of the people of the *Jamā'ah*, who stood apart during the *Fitnah* and were then included in the *Jamā'ah* (under Mu'āwiya's rule after the death of 'Alī).⁹⁴ The importance of Ibn Muhrān's view is that the view of huge group of traditionalists, among them being Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal.

It is evident that Aḥmad supported the attitude of the fourth group, the people of the *Jamā'ah*, since in order to protect the unity of the *Jamā'ah*, they did not become involved in the *Fitnah*. Aḥmad's attitude can be illustrated by the following examples: ابن عمر وسعد، ومن كف عن تلك الفتنة، أليس هو عند بعض الناس أَحْمَد؟ هَذَا عَلَيْ ... Once Aḥmad said: "Are not Ibn 'Umar and Sa'd [Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ], and those who stood away from that *Fitnah*, more preferred for some people [than those

⁹⁴ Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 39: 495-97.

involved in the *Fitnah*? This is ‘Alī ... [who] could not control the people... I do not like the Sword [i.e., fighting between Muslims]’.⁹⁵

The implication of *i’tizāl al-fitnah wa-luzūm al-jamā‘ah* (standing away from the *fitnah* and commitment to the community) is that it is not merely applied by practising the *fitnah*. It is also by not becoming involved in the *fitnah*, even by recalling its history. Aḥmad recalls the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, saying when he was asked about the *Fitnah*: أَمْرٌ أَخْرَجَ اللَّهُ يَدِي مِنْهُ، لَا أُدْخِلَ لِسَانِي فِيهِ “A matter from which God saved my hand, I have to save my tongue from [being involved in] it”.⁹⁶ Hence, Aḥmad insists on not making a judgment between the Companions in their fight against each other. For example, when Aḥmad was in Sāmarrā’ at the court of al-Mutawakkil (after the Inquisition), the caliph sent a messenger to him asking: ما تقول فيما كان من علي و معاوية؟ “What do you say about what happened between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiyah?” Aḥmad answered: ما أقول فيهما إِلَّا الْحَسْنَى، رَحْمَهُمُ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا “I only say good about them, God have mercy on them all”.⁹⁷ On another occasion, he was asked his opinion of the fights between Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr, ‘Alī, ‘Ā’ishah and Mu‘āwiyah. His answer fully respected them all: مَنْ أَنَا أَقُولُ فِي أَصْحَابِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ... كَانَ بَيْنَهُمْ شَيْءٌ؟ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ “Who am I [to] talk about the Companions of the Messenger of God ... [and what] happened between them? God knows best”.⁹⁸ When one of the descendants of Hāshim (i.e., the Banū Hāshim) asked Aḥmad about the war between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiyah, Aḥmad answered by reciting a Qur’ānic verse:

Those are a people who have passed away; theirs is that which they earned and yours that which ye earn. And ye will not be asked of what they used to do [2: 134, 141].

Furthermore, he forbade his students either to read or to write books that chronicled the *Fitnah*. His cousin Ḥanbal b. Ishāq wanted to write down a book on the *Fitnah* called *Siffīn wa-al-Jamāl* produced by Khalaf b. Sālim (d. 231/846) but Aḥmad forbade him to write it down. Ḥanbal ignored Aḥmad’s structure and wrote down Khalaf’s book. When Aḥmad heard about this, he asked Ḥanbal’s father to hide the

⁹⁵ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 140-41.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2: 461-62.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2: 460

⁹⁸ Ibid.

book and not to let Ḥanbal read it.⁹⁹ Although Khalaf was a friend of Aḥmad's, the latter (among other traditionalists) criticised him for collecting the *Fitnah* reports.¹⁰⁰

To minimise the harmful effect of the *Fitnah* on the pure image of the Companions and the Successors that was held by traditionalists, Aḥmad and other traditionalists set out to reduce the number of Companions who had taken part in it. This was in order to save the purity of their image and to prove that the mainstream of the Companions stood away from the *Fitnah* and was committed to the community. Aḥmad reported from Ibn Sirīn that: هاجت الفتنة وأصحاب رسول الله ... عشرة آلاف، فما حضر فيها مائة بل لم يبلغوا: “ثلاثين”¹⁰¹ “The *Fitnah* broke out when the Companions of the Messenger of God ... [at that time] numbered ten thousand, but fewer than a hundred attended it, even fewer than thirty”.¹⁰² Al-Sha'bī reduced this number to four only. Aḥmad reports that al-Sha'bī said لم يشهد الجمل من أصحاب النبي غير علي وعمار وطلحة والزبير، فإن جاؤوا بخامس فأنا كاذب “Only ‘Alī, ‘Ammār, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr attended the Camel [battle] of the Companions of the Prophet. If they could name a fifth, I would be a liar”.¹⁰³ In the memory of *Ahl al-Sunnah*, the people of the battle of Badr were the best among the Companions. This image of the people in this battle led traditionalists to assert that they did not take any part in the *Fitnah*. Aḥmad reports that Shu‘bah was told that someone claimed: “Seventy of the people of [the battle of] Badr took part in Ḫiffīn”. Shu‘bah rejected this and said that it was only Khuzaymah b. Thābit from among the people of the battle of Badr who took part in Ḫiffīn.¹⁰⁴

In the case of the Successors, Aḥmad rejects the idea that Masrūq (d. 62-3/682-83) and Murrah (d. 76?/695-96) attended the battle of the Camel. In answer to the people of Kufa (= the Shī‘īs), who claimed that these two attended the battle (on ‘Alī’s side), Aḥmad rejects this and responds very critically. He says: أما أهل الكوفة فلو قدروا يلطفون ^أ كل أحد لفعلوا ما ^أ كل أحد لفعلوا ما ^أ If they could besmirch (*yulattikhū*) every one of the people of Kufa would do so.”¹⁰⁵ Aḥmad criticises the people of Kufa for their exaggeration in naming the people who attended ‘Alī’s fights against the other Companions. A remarkable point

⁹⁹ Ibid., 2: 464.

¹⁰⁰ سأله عن خلف المخرمي، قال: نعموا عليه تتبعه هذه الأحاديث al-Marrūdhī and others, *al-Ilal wa-ma'rifat al-rijāl*, 164.

¹⁰¹ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 466.

¹⁰² ‘Abd Allāh, *Ilal*, 1:432; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 446; Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Muntakhab min Ilal al-Khallāl*, 226.

¹⁰³ Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Muntakhab*, 225.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Hāni’, *Masā’il*, 2: 201; Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Muntakhab*, 226.

is that Ahmād uses the verb *yulattikhūn*, which reflects his unfavourable memory of these battles and his support of *al-i'tizāl wa-luzūm al-jamā'ah*. Another word that reflects Ahmād's attitude is the word *fītnah*. In jurisprudential terms a *fītnah* occurs when there is no legitimate imām. But as has been shown above, Ahmād names 'Alī as a legitimate imām. So, why does he use the term *fītnah* to describe his reign? Presumably, Ahmād inherited this term from the early traditionalists who did not recognise 'Alī as a legitimate caliph at the time when Ahmād himself did not accept the 'Alī caliphate. And when he did, he was already using this term. Another reason may be that Ahmād wanted to call this period a *fītnah* to assert that there was no legitimacy in the fighting with or against 'Alī. This, perhaps, was done so that if the fighting with 'Alī was legitimate he might prevent 'Ā'ishah, Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr and Mu'awiyah and other Companions who fought 'Alī from being labelled *bughāh* (rebels).

If Ahmād does not label those who fought against 'Alī as being *bughāh*, how would he answer the ḥadīth that related to the Prophet? This was said to 'Ammār b. Yāsir: تَقْتَلُكُ الْفَتَّةُ الْبَاغِيَةُ "The rebellious group will kill you". 'Ammār was killed during the fighting in 'Alī's camp against Mu'awiyah and his group in the battle of Shiffīn.

We have here three different (or rather contradictory) types of answers from Ahmād: the first was narrated by Ya'qūb b. Shaybah. It states that Ahmād approved the sound of the ḥadīth, but he did not like to talk further about it.¹⁰⁵ This means that Ahmād approved the ḥadīth but he did not like to interpret it in order to avoid accusing Mu'awiyah and his group of being *bughāh*.

The second answer from Ahmād is that he refused to talk about the ḥadīth at all, and said: لَا أَنْتَلُمُ فِيهِ، وَتَرَكَهُ أَسْلَمٌ "I do not talk about it, and not taking any notice of it is safer". This was narrated from Ahmād by his student al-Kawsaj.¹⁰⁶

The third answer is more fundamental. A traditionalist, 'Abd Allāh b. Ibrāhīm claims that he heard Ahmād to say that there are twenty-eight ḥadīths (i.e., *isnāds*) in this

¹⁰⁵ سمعت أَحْمَدَ بْنَ حَنْبَلَ سَئَلَ عَنْ حَدِيثٍ . . . النَّبِيُّ . . . فِي عَمَارٍ: "تَقْتَلُكُ الْفَتَّةُ الْبَاغِيَةُ". قَالَ أَحْمَدٌ: كَمَا قَالَ النَّبِيُّ . . . قَتَلَنَا الْفَتَّةُ الْبَاغِيَةُ. وَقَالَ: فِي هَذَا غَيْرُ حَدِيثٍ صَحِيحٍ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ . . . وَكَرِهَ أَنْ يَنْتَلِمُ فِي هَذَا بِأَكْثَرِ مِنْ هَذَا

¹⁰⁶ al-Kawsaj. *Masā'il*, q 3591; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 462.

ḥadīth but none of them is sound.¹⁰⁷ Another traditionalist¹⁰⁸ claimed that he was sitting in a class (*halqah*) with Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Yaḥyā Ibn Maṭīn, Abū Khaythamah and al-Mu‘aytī when they recalled the ḥadīth “The rebellious group will kill ‘Ammār”. All of them stated that there was no sound ḥadīth (= *isnād*) for it.¹⁰⁹ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī rejected this report because its transmitters were unknown and he preferred al-Kawsaj’s narration.¹¹⁰

Ibn Taymīyah provides another answer in an attempt to solve the contradictions between these reports. He claims that Aḥmad used to declare this ḥadīth as unsound, but later approved it as a sound ḥadīth.¹¹¹ None of these answers is convincing, and this disagreement probably reflects the disagreement among the traditionalists around Aḥmad’s time regarding this ḥadīth.

Even though Aḥmad, among other traditionalists, did not like to talk about the *Fitnah*, it is a matter of fact that two groups fought each other. If one party was right, what should we call the wrong party? We do not have any report from Aḥmad regarding this question. His position can be understood since he does not like to talk about the conflicts between the Companions. However, Ibn Taymīyah attributed to him (and to the majority of the traditionalists and jurisprudents) the nation that not fighting was the better alternative; however, ‘Alī was closer to rightness than Mu‘awiyah.¹¹² Despite Ibn Taymīyah’s exaggeration in his attribution to the majority of the traditionalists and jurisprudents, this is what he understands from Aḥmad’s method rather than Aḥmad’s own view. Indeed, Aḥmad believed that not fighting was better, but his stated belief that ‘Alī was closer to rightness than Mu‘awiyah is unproven.

Ibn Taymīyah added another three positions of those of the Sunnīs (and also the Ḥanbalīs) regarding this matter:

¹⁰⁷ سمعت أَحْمَدَ يَقُولُ: رُوِيَ فِي تَقْلِيلِ عَمَارِ الْفَتَّةِ الْبَاعِيْهَ ثَمَانِيَّةٍ وَعَشْرُونَ حَدِيْثًا، لِيُسَفِّهَ حَدِيثَ صَحِيحٍ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 463; Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdīsī, *al-Muntakhab*, 222.

¹⁰⁸ In *al-Muntakhab* his name is Ibrāhīm, while in the *Sunnah* his name is Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Ibn Rajab, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 3: 309-11.

¹¹¹ Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymīyah, *Mihāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawīyah fī naqd kalām al-Shī‘ah wa-al-Qadarīyah*, 4: 414

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 4: 448.

1. Both ‘Alī and Mu‘awiyah were *mujtahid* and right (*muṣīb*). Ibn Taymīyah attributed this position to some *Ash‘arīs* and *Karrāmīs*, as well as to some followers of Abū Ḥanīfah, al-Shāfi‘ī and Aḥmad.
2. One group is right, but it is a non-defining group.
3. ‘Alī was the right and Mu‘awiyah was the wrong *mujtahid*. He attributed this position to a certain number (*tawā’if*) of theologians and the followers of the four schools of law.¹¹³

‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), an *Ash‘arī* theologian, claims that: “The jurisprudents in Hijāz and Iraq, from both traditionalists and rationalists, such as Mālik, Abū Ḥanīfah, al-Shāfi‘ī and al-Awzā‘ī and the majority of theologians, have reached a consensus on ‘Alī being right in his fight in Ṣiffīn as well as his fight with the people of the Camel.”¹¹⁴

It is not the intention here to determine who is right in his claim, Ibn Taymīyah or al-Baghdādī. The important point is that this disagreement reflects the fact that the Sunnī School has failed to create an orthodox doctrine concerning who was right in the dispute between the Companions.

To conclude, the image of ‘Alī was gradually accepted in Sunnī orthodox doctrine. In the third A.H./ninth century, the legitimacy of ‘Alī’s caliphate was accepted and he was included among the rightly guided caliphs in the mainstream of Sunnī belief. All the disagreements regarding his position were ended by the efforts of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. Furthermore, from the fourth A.H./tenth century ‘Alī was regarded as the fourth best Companion and the competition between him and ‘Uthmān has been accepted into Sunnī belief, even though these contradicted Aḥmad’s doctrine. However, Aḥmad’s view was modified to accept, or at least not to reject, ‘Alī’s new position. Although Sunnī beliefs have become friendlier towards ‘Alī, it has continued as a divisive issue as regards his disputes with the other Companions.

¹¹³ Ibid., 4: 447-48.

¹¹⁴ ‘Umar b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Dihyah al-Kalbī, *A ṣlām al-nasr al-mubīn fī al-mufādalah bayn^a ahlay Ṣiffīn*, 83-84.

3.4. The Umayyads

3.4.1 Mu‘āwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān

Al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-69) criticises the traditionalists of his time for their support of Mu‘āwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān. He states that the *Nābitah*¹¹⁵ of the time (i.e., the traditionalists)¹¹⁶ refused to abuse Mu‘āwiyah because he was a Companion. Abusing him, they added, was an innovation, and whoever hated him contradicted the Sunnah.¹¹⁷ This view was related to the traditionalists by another *Mu‘tazilī*, around the time of al-Jāḥiẓ, who claimed that the Ḥashwīyah (i.e., the traditionalists) gave their loyalty to Mu‘āwiyah and did not disavow him.¹¹⁸

Evidentially, these claims were proved correct. Although the early *salaf* disagreed over Mu‘āwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān, traditionalists since the second half of the second A.H./last quarter of the eighth century have been defenders of Mu‘āwiyah’s reputation. In Iraq and Khurāsān, Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) rejected insulting Mu‘āwiyah.¹¹⁹ His students, such as Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) and al-Mu‘afā b. ‘Imrān (d. about 185/801), asserted that Mu‘āwiyah ranked higher than ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz since he was a Companion and nobody could be compared with the Companions of the Prophet.¹²⁰ In Mecca, al-Fudayl b. ‘Iyād (d. 187/803) كَانَ يَتْرَحِمُ عَلَى مَعَاوِيَةٍ، وَيَقُولُ: كَانَ مِنَ الْعُلَمَاءِ الْكَبَارِ، كَانَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّبِيِّ... وَلَكِنْ ابْنَتِي بِحُبِ الدِّينِ Prayed for mercy on Mu‘āwiyah, and said: he was one of the great scholars, a Companion of the Prophet... However, he was plagued by loving the world.”¹²¹ In Medina, Mālik b. Anas is claimed to have said: من شتم أحداً من أصحاب النبي ... أبا بكر أو عمر أو عثمان أو معاوية أو عمرو ابن العاص؛ فإن قال: كانوا على ضلال أو كفر قُتل، وإن شتمهم بغير هذا من مشاتمة الناس نكل نكلاً

¹¹⁵ For the meaning of the *Nābitah* see: Charles Pellat, “Nabita”, in *EF*; Edmund Bosworth, *al-Maqrīzī’s “Book of Contention and Strife between the Banū Umayya and the Banū Hāshim”*, 38-40; Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim*, 223-27; Watt, *The Formative period* 40-41, 62-63; Fahmī Jad‘ān, *al-Miḥnāh*, 77-78; Wadad al-Qādī, “the Earliest “Nābita” and the Paradigmatic “Nawābit””, 27-61.

¹¹⁶ Pellat mistakenly identifies the *Nābitah* in al-Jāḥiẓ’s with the Ḥanbalis. Apparently, al-Jāḥiẓ meant the traditionalists, of whom Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal was one, whereas al-Jāḥiẓ had died several decades before the term Ḥanbalī came into use.

¹¹⁷ ‘Uthmān b. Bahr l-Jāḥiẓ, “Risālah fi al-Nābitah”, 12. وقد أربت عليهم نابتة عصرنا ومبتدعة دهرنا، فقالوا: لا تسبوه [معاوية] فإن له صحبة. وسب معاوية بدعة، ومن يبغضه فقد خالف السنة.

¹¹⁸ al-Nāshi’ al-Akbar (attrib.), *Masā’il al-imāmah*, 65; A. S. Halkin, “The Ḥashwīyya”, 4-14.

¹¹⁹ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 59: 209.

¹²⁰ Muḥammad b. al-Husayn l-Ājurī, *al-Sharī‘ah*, 3: 520-21; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 59: 207-8.

¹²¹ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 59: 213.

شديداً“Whoever insults one of the Companions of the Prophet ... (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Mu‘āwiyah or ‘Amr b. al-Āṣ) [should be punished]. If he says they were wayward or infidels, he [deserves to be] killed. However, if he [only] abuses them [in any other way], similar to how people abuse each other, he [deserves] a hard retribution.”¹²²

Presumably, the principal objective for traditionalists was to defend the authority of the Sunnah, and this required protecting the reputations of all the Companions, who transmitted the Sunnah from the Prophet to the people. Abū Zur‘ah al-Rāzī (d. 264/878) states that whoever abuses the Companions is an unbeliever (*zindiq*) since his aim is to cancel the Book and the Sunnah by criticising the Companions, who transmitted them to us.¹²³

Mu‘āwiyah was a Companion; abusing him means abusing the Companions’ position, or will lead to abuse of other Companions. Ibn al-Mubārak points out that معاوية عندنا محنۃ، فمن رأيَه ينظر إليه شرراً اتهمناه على القوم، يعني الصحابة (*mihnah*); whoever looks at him askance, we will accuse him of [criticising] the people (i.e., the Companions).¹²⁴

In the third A.H./ninth century, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal followed these views, and defended Mu‘āwiyah’s position. In his defence of Mu‘āwiyah, Aḥmad, taking into account the high position of the Companions, asserted that no one could reach their position of excellence, even ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.¹²⁵ Aḥmad criticised those who refused to acknowledge Mu‘āwiyah as an uncle (*khāl*) of the Faithful and a writer of the revelation; he was angry and said it was an evil and useless claim, that those people should be shunned and boycotted, and that people were to be warned against them, unless they repented.¹²⁶ Furthermore, Aḥmad banned a man from eating with

¹²² Iyād b. Mūsā al-Sibṭī, *al-Shifā’ bi-ta‘rīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, 2: 1108.

¹²³ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadi, *al-Kifāyah*, 49. إذا رأيت الرجل ينتقص أحداً من أصحاب رسول الله ... فاعلم أنه زنديق ، وذلك أن الرسول عندنا حق ، والقرآن حق ، وإنما أدى إلينا هذا القرآن والسنة أصحاب رسول الله - صلى الله عليه وسلم - وإنما يريدون أن يحرموا شهودنا لبيطوا الكتاب والسنة ، والجح بهم أولى وهم زنادقة

¹²⁴ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 59: 209. This meaning was also narrated from other traditionalists such as al-Rabī‘ b. Nāfi‘ and Abū Tawbah al-Ḥalabī. See: Ibid.

¹²⁵ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 435-37.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 2: 434; Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *Tabri‘at khāl al-Mu‘minīn Mu‘āwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān ... min al-zulm wa-al-‘udwān fi muṭālabatihī bi-dam Amīr al-Mu‘minīn Uthmān*, 106-7. هذا قول سوء رديء، يجانبون هؤلاء القوم ولا يجالسون ونبيين أمرهم للناس.

his uncle (*khāl*) since the latter frequently criticised Mu‘āwiyah.¹²⁷ Ahmād banned another student from narrating ḥadīths from someone who had declared that Mu‘āwiyah died as a non-Muslim or that he was an infidel.¹²⁸ Prayers must not to be offered behind a man who slanders Mu‘āwiyah.¹²⁹ Ahmād also was asked وسئل عن رجل انتقص معاوية وعمرو بن أبي العاص، أيقال له راضي؟ فقال: إنه لم يجرئ عليهما إلا ولو خبيئة سوء. ما“If someone derogates (yantaqis) from Mu‘āwiyah and ‘Amr b. Abī al-‘Āṣ, can he be called a Rāfiḍī?” Ahmād replied, “He would not dare unless he had a hidden evil [belief]. No one derogates from a member of the Companions of the Messenger of God..., unless he has a hidden evil [belief].”¹³⁰

Traditionalists, including Ahmād ibn Ḥanbal, regard Mu‘āwiyah as a legitimate caliph only after he had made peace with al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī when the community of Muslims reached a consensus on him (as the traditionalists believe), which became known as the year of the community (‘ām al-Jamā‘ah).¹³¹

Even though Ahmād narrated a few incidents showing the generosity and the *zuhd* of Mu‘āwiyah, he did not assert Mu‘āwiyah’s excellence, as other traditionalists did in the third A.H./ninth century and afterwards.¹³² Ahmād’s adherence to Mu‘āwiyah seems not to have been greater than his adherence to any of the other Companions. He does not prefer Mu‘āwiyah to any other Companion, nor does he guarantee Paradise for him. Furthermore, the label “*Khāl al-Mu’mīnīn*” is not purely for Mu‘āwiyah, but includes the brothers of the Prophet’s wives. When Ahmād was asked if he agreed to call both Mu‘āwiyah and Ibn ‘Umar “*khāl al-Mu’mīnīn*”, he answered, “Yes, Mu‘āwiyah is a brother of Umm Ḥabībah Bint Abī Sufyān the wife of the Prophet ... and Ibn ‘Umar is a brother of Ḥafṣah, the wife of the Prophet”.¹³³

However, the attitude towards Mu‘āwiyah was a point of dispute. Most of the Muslim sects, such as *Jahmīs*,¹³⁴ *Mu’tazilīs*,¹³⁵ and of course, *Shī‘īs* and *Khārijīs*, slander

¹²⁷ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 448.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 2: 447-48.

¹²⁹ Ibn Hāni‘, *Masā’il*, 1: 60.

¹³⁰ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 447.

¹³¹ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Amr al-Naṣrī (hereafter: Abū Zur‘ah al-Dimashqī), *Tārīkh Abī Zur‘ah al-Dimashqī*, 1: 190.

¹³² al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 437-45.

¹³³ Ibid., 2: 433; Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *Tanzīh*, 107.

¹³⁴ al-Dārimī, *Naqd Uthmān b. Sa‘īd*, 2: 632-34.

Mu‘āwiyah and disregard his caliphate, while traditionalists accept his caliphate and save his reputation. For this reason, many traditionalists have become greater supporters and adherents of Mu‘āwiyah. When the caliph al-Ma’mūn announced his intention to decree a public cursing of Mu‘āwiyah, the people of Baghdad were startled (*jafal al-nās*) and his Sunnī advisor Yaḥyā b. Aktham warned him that the common people and particularly the Khurāsānīs (that is, the sons of the revolution) would not stand for it. The caliph accepted this advice and decided not to announce his decree.¹³⁶ Instead, he ordered a herald to proclaim بِرَئْتُ النَّمَةَ مِنْ ذِكْرِ مَعَاوِيَةَ بَخِيرٍ، أَوْ فَضْلَهُ عَلَى أَحَدٍ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ “No protection for anyone who mentions the name of Mu‘āwiyah favourably or who prefers him over any one of the Messenger of God’s Companions.”¹³⁷ This means that the commoners of Baghdad supported the doctrine of the traditionalists (the *Nābitah* in al-Jāhiẓ) in defending Mu‘āwiyah’s reputation.

The conflict about Mu‘āwiyah in Baghdad did not end with the advent of al-Ma’mūn’s time; rather, this was when it started. In 321/933, a rumour spread through Baghdad that the governor and his vizier planned to curse Mu‘āwiyah on the *manābir* [during Friday prayer]. The commoners and the Ḥanbalīs were upset; the authority searched for the Ḥanbalī leader al-Barbaharī, but he succeeded in hiding himself from the police. However, some of his companions were arrested and exiled to Basra.¹³⁸ The historians of Baghdad have recorded several instances of public disorder when rulers attempted to curse Mu‘āwiyah publicly or to write it on the mosques.¹³⁹ There was also the well-known and lengthy history of enmity among the commoners in Baghdad between the Sunnīs (mainly Ḥanbalīs) and the Shī‘īs. Presumably, therefore, some Ḥanbalīs and traditionalists exaggerated the excellence and the importance of Mu‘āwiyah. The Andalusī Mālikī jurisprudent Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī, claimed that when he arrived at Baghdad in 489/1096, it was written on its mosques that: “The best of the nation after the Prophet of God is Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān, then

¹³⁵ ‘Abd al-Rahīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt, *al-Intiṣār wa-al-radd ‘alā Ibn al-Rāwandī al-Mulḥid mā qaṣad’ bih i min al-kadhib ‘alā al-Muslimīn wa-al-ṭā’n ‘alayhūm*, 74; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-Balāghah*, 1: 340.

¹³⁶ al-Zubayr Ibn Bakkār, *al-Akhbār al-Muwaffaqīyāt*, 46–7; Ibn Abī Tayfūr, *Kitāb Baghdad*, 54.

¹³⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 8: 618; translated in Bosworth, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXXII: 175.

¹³⁸ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam*, 13: 316–7.

¹³⁹ Such as in the years 284/897, 351/962. See: Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam*, 12: 371–72; 14: 140.

‘Alī and then Mu‘āwiyah, the uncle (*khāl*) of the faithful, may Allāh be pleased with him.”¹⁴⁰

Many other stories illustrate the evaluation of Mu‘āwiyah’s position among Ḥanbalīs. The Ḥanbalī ‘Umar b. Ibrāhīm al-‘Ukbarī (d. 378/988-89) claimed that Paradise was guaranteed for Mu‘āwiyah; then he related, on Ibn ‘Abbās’s authority, that Mu‘āwiyah was similar to Mūsā b. ‘Imrān in being strong and trustworthy. Al-‘Ukbarī related this view to his Ḥanbalī teacher Ibn Baṭṭah, and to Ibrāhīm al-Harbī, the disciple of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, and to a traditionalist, Muḥammad b. Sahl Ibn ‘Askar (d. 251/865).¹⁴¹ but not to Aḥmad himself.

Another Ḥanbalī, the linguist Ghulām Tha‘lab (d. 345/956), wrote a *juz’* on Mu‘āwiyah’s excellence, and did not allow anyone to study under him until they had first studied this book.¹⁴² Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’ also wrote a book, entitled *Tabri’at khāl al-Mu’mīnīn Mu‘āwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān ... min al-zulm wa-al-‘udwān fī muṭālabatih bi-dam Amīr al-Mu’mīnīn ‘Uthmān* [the Acquittal of the uncle of the Faithful Mu‘āwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān of injustice and immorality by his demand of the blood of the Commander of the Faithful ‘Uthmān].

To sum up, Aḥmad is reported as defending the reputation of Mu‘āwiyah as he was a Companion of the Prophet, and regards him as a legitimate caliph. However, Aḥmad did not make any assertions regarding Mu‘āwiyah’s excellence or give him more importance than any other Companion; nor did he guarantee Paradise for him. Even so, some other traditionalists and Ḥanbalīs assert the excellence of Mu‘āwiyah, for instance, Abū Bakr al-Athram,¹⁴³ a disciple of Aḥmad; al-Khallāl, and his student Ghulām al-Khallāl; and Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’. This was not only a Ḥanbalī creed; traditionalists from other schools of law were followers of Mu‘āwiyah, such as al-Ājurrī¹⁴⁴ and al-Lālkā’ī al-Shāfi’ī.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāṣim min al-qawāṣim*, 362.

¹⁴¹ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 294-95.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 3: 129.

¹⁴³ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 437-38.

¹⁴⁴ al-Ājurrī, *al-Shari‘ah*, 3: 496- 530.

¹⁴⁵ al-Lālkā’ī, *Sharḥ*, 8: 1524-36.

3.4.2. Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiyaḥ

For the early Muslims, the image of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiyaḥ (Yazīd I) was of someone depraved. He was named a deputy of his father without consultation (*shūrā*) with, or the agreement of, the Muslim community. He ruled for three years; in the first year al-Husayn and his family were killed in Karbalā’ in 61/680. In 63/683, he sent his army to fight the people of Medina and after overcoming them gave his army licence to pillage the city for three days. He died in 64/683 while his army was besieging Mecca after they had burned the Ka‘bah. For these reasons, he was hated by the earliest Muslims in Hijāz and Iraq.

Several narratives were reported from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal regarding Yazīd I. None of these reports was in favour of him. Rather, they criticised him or were silent about him.

Up to al-Khallāl’s time, two reports from Aḥmad about Yazīd I were known. In the first, Aḥmad was asked by his student Muḥannā about Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiyaḥ. Aḥmad عن مهنا قال: سأله أَحْمَدُ عَنْ يَزِيدَ بْنِ مَعَاوِيَةَ ابْنَ أَبِي سَفِيَّانَ. فَقَالَ: هُوَ مَنْ فَعَلَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ مَا فَعَلَ. answered, قلت: وما فعل؟ قال: قتل بالمدينة من أصحاب النبي... فعل. قلت: وما فعل؟ قال: نبهها. قلت: فيذكر عنه الحديث؟ قال: لا يذكر عنه الحديث، ولا ينبغي لأحد أن يكتب عنه حديثاً “He did in Madīnah what he did” Muḥannā asked, “What did he do?” Aḥmad replied, “He killed [some] of the Companions of the Prophet ... in Madīnah, and did [something else]”. “What did he do?” Muḥannā asked again. Aḥmad answered, “Looted it.” Then Muḥannā asked, “[Is he worth] to report ḥadīth from?” Aḥmad replied, “No ḥadīth should be related on his authority, nor is it meet for anyone to write down hadīth that come on his authority.”¹⁴⁶ The same report was also narrated from Ibn Ḥanbal by Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim.¹⁴⁷

The other report was given by Abū Ṭālib al-Miškānī, who asked Aḥmad his opinion about someone who said “God curse Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiyaḥ.” Aḥmad refused to give his opinion on this matter. Abū Ṭālib insisted, and then Aḥmad said

¹⁴⁶ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 3: 520; Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Masā’il al-‘aqadīyah*, 93-94; Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 435; ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Radd ‘alā al-muta‘assib al-‘anīd al-māni‘ min dhimmī Yazīd*, 40. I owe this translation to Christopher Melchert.

¹⁴⁷ Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Masā’il al-‘aqadīyah*, 93-94

قال النبي: "لعن المؤمن كقتله"، وقال: "خير الناس قرني ثم الذين يلونهم" وقد صار يزيد فيهم. وقال: "من لعنته أو سببته فاجعلها له رحمة" فأرى الإمساك أحب إلى.

The Prophet said, 'Cursing a Muslim is similar to killing him' and he said, 'The best of mankind is my generation, then those that come after them' and Yazīd was among them. And [the Prophet] said '[O God] whoever I curse or abuse, convert it into mercy to him [instead]' So, being silent [about Yazīd] is preferable to me¹⁴⁸

Al-Khallāl claims that the doctrine of Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal and some outstanding Successors, such as Ibn Sīrīn and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, whom al-Khallāl follows, is that they do not name a person when they curse. However, they have two methods. The first is that if they recall a story when a Companion has been murdered, they say, "God curses his killer", such as "God curses the killer of 'Uthmān or al-Ḥusayn". However, if they recall one of the people of *fītan* (sing. *fītnah*) such as Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya and al-Hajjāj b. Yūsuf, they say, "God curses oppressors" rather than saying "God curses al-Hajjāj" for example.¹⁴⁹

According to al-Khallāl's interpretation, even though Ahmād did not like Yazīd I, and did not allow people to transmit ḥadīth from him, he did not curse him by name, but generalised.

This position of generalising a curse and not identifying the cursed man led some people to accuse traditionalists (especially the Ḥanbalīs) of being loyal to Yazīd I. Therefore, some traditionalists aimed to change this image. The following report illustrates this.

صالح بن أحمد بن حنبل ... قال: قلت لأبي: إن قوماً ينسبوننا إلى تولي يزيد. فقال: يا بني وهل يتولى يزيد أحد يؤمن بالله، ولم لا يلعن من لعنه الله تعالى في كتابه؟ فقلت: في أي آية؟ قال: في قوله تعالى: (فَهُلْ عَسِيْتُمْ إِنْ تُولِّيْتُمْ أَنْ تَقْسُدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَتَقْطُعُوا أَرْحَامَكُمْ) فهو يكون فساد أعظم من القتل؟

Şāliḥ b. Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal told his father, "Some people attribute to us loyalty to Yazīd." Ahmād replied, "Is there any believer in God who is loyal to Yazīd?" Then Şāliḥ asked his father, "Why do you not curse him?" Ahmād said, "When have you heard me cursing anything?" Then Ahmād added, "Why do you do not curse those whom God curses in His book?" Şāliḥ asked again, "Where did God curse Yazīd in His book?" Ahmād recalled a Qur'ānic verse [Would ye then, if ye were given the command, work corruption in the land

¹⁴⁸ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 3: 521; Abū Ya'la' Ibn al-Farrā', *al-Masā'il al-'aqadīyah*, 95-6; Ibn Abī Ya'la', *Tabaqāt*, 2: 435; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Radd*, 73.

¹⁴⁹ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 3: 522.

and sever your ties of kinship? Such are they whom Allah curseth so that He deafeneth them and maketh blind their eyes]. Ahmād added, “Is severing the ties of kinship worse than killing?”¹⁵⁰

This report provides us with two statements; the first apologises for Ahmād’s not having cursed Yazīd I; this was because Ahmād was a very pious man and never cursed anything. The second statement gives approval for cursing Yazīd I relying on the authority of the Qur’ān, and Ahmād asking his son why he did not curse whom God curses in His book (the pious man should follow God’s doctrine). This paradox in the report reveals how a new trend of Ḥanbalīs in the late fourth A.H./tenth century attempted to legitimise their enmity towards Yazīd I.¹⁵¹ However, this trend of cursing Yazīd I continued among the Ḥanbalīs for about two centuries, and included Abū Ya’lā Ibn al-Farrā’,¹⁵² Ibn ‘Aqīl,¹⁵³ and Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201); all were Baghdadīs. However, this trend seems to have disappeared among the Ḥanbalīs after the time of Ibn al-Jawzī. Furthermore, the correct position towards Yazīd I was a subject of conflict between the Ḥanbalīs in Baghdad at the end of the sixth A.H./twelfth century. The famous Ḥanbalī Ibn al-Jawzī was asked, in one of his popular classes of *wāzīz*,¹⁵⁴ about Yazīd I: “Does he deserve to be cursed?” Ibn al-Jawzī’s answer was, “Being silent is better”. The audience insisted on hearing his answer. Ibn al-Jawzī gave in to their insistence and said, أجازها العلماء الورعون، منهم أحمد أبا حنبل “[Cursing Yazīd I] was allowed by the scrupulous scholars; Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal is one of them.”¹⁵⁵

‘Abd al-Mughīth al-Ḥarbī (d. 583/1187), another Ḥanbalī in Baghdaḍ during that era, wrote a book refuting Ibn al-Jawzī’s statement and defending Yazīd I’s reputation. Furthermore, he also insisted on Yazīd I’s excellence and claimed that some people

¹⁵⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Radd*, 41-42.

¹⁵¹ This report only appears in Abū Ya’lā Ibn al-Farrā’, who claimed to find it written in the handwriting of Abū Ḥafṣ al-‘Ukbarī (d. 387/997).

¹⁵² Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Radd*, 42-43.

¹⁵³ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkirat al-khawāṣṣ*, 290. George Makdisi was mistaken in his quotation from Ibn ‘Aqīl censuring Yazīd I since he confused Ibn ‘Aqīl’s statement with Ibn al-Jawzī’s. The one who criticised Yazīd I in Makdisi’s quotation is Ibn al-Jawzī, not Ibn ‘Aqīl. See: Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl*, 174-75.

¹⁵⁴ For Ibn al-Jawzī’s *wāzīz* see: Bernd Radtke and Clifford John Jansen, “Wā‘iz”, in *EF*.

¹⁵⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Radd*, 33-34; and see: Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkirat khawāṣṣ*, 287.

believed that al-Ḥusayn was a *Khārijī*.¹⁵⁶ Ibn al-Jawzī replied by producing a harsh polemical book called *al-Radd ‘alā al-muta‘ashib al-‘anīd al-māni‘ min dhammī Yazīd*.

However, it seems there were three trends among the Ḥanbalīs regarding Yazīd I.¹⁵⁷ The older trend was that of al-Khallāl and his followers, who did not like Yazīd I, but would not curse an identified Muslim even if he was sinner (*fāsiq*). The second trend included those who hated Yazīd I, regarded him as a sinful and allowed people to curse him. The third trend rejected all the reports about Yazīd’s sin, and justified his actions. Supporters of this last trend included Ibn al-Bannā’ (d. 471/1079)¹⁵⁸ and ‘Abd al-Mughīth al-Ḥarbī (d. 583/1187), among other Ḥanbalīs.

The latter two trends continued among the Ḥanbalīs both inside and outside Baghdad. In Syria, the famous Ḥanbalī and the traditionalist ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī (d. 600/1203) issued a *fatwā* regarding Yazīd I, declaring that

خلافه صحيحة. قال: وقال بعض العلماء: بايده ستون من أصحاب رسول الله...، منهم ابن عمر. وأما محبته: فمن أحبه فلا ينكر عليه، ومن لم يحبه فلا يلزمه ذلك؛ لأنه ليس من الصحابة الذين صحبوا رسول الله...، فيلزم محبتهم إكراهاً لصحابهم وليس ثمَّ أمر يمتاز به عن غيره من خلفاء التابعين، كعبد الملك وبنيه. وإنما يمنع من التعرض للوقوع فيه، خوفاً من التسلق إلى أبيه، وسدًا لباب الفتنة

His caliphate is legitimate; some scholars said, “Sixty Companions paid him their allegiance; among them was Ibn ‘Umar”. However, regarding the matter of loving him: loving him is not forbidden. And who does not love him? It was not compulsory, because he is not a Companion of God’s Messenger, who has to be loved... and there is nothing in him to distinguish him from other Successor caliphs, such as ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. However, it is forbidden to criticise him since that may lead one to [criticise] his father, and to close the door of the *fitnah*.¹⁵⁹

It is clear from this *fatwā* that al-Maqdisī prohibited attacking Yazīd I, not because of his excellence but to defend his father’s position as a Companion of the Prophet and to close the door of *fitnah*. This *fatwā* was issued on the basis of the well-known Ḥanbalī principle *sadd^d al-dharā‘y^c*(blocking the means).

¹⁵⁶ It seems that counting al-Ḥusayn as being wrong and a *Khārijī* in his rebellion against Yazīd I was a common belief among the ordinary people in Baghdad. See: Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Radd*, 86-87. For al-Ḥarbī’s conflicts with Ibn al-Jawzī see Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Dhayl Tabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah*, 2: 348-51.

¹⁵⁷ The Ḥanbalī Rizq Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Tamīmī (d. 488/1095) noted these different views among the Ḥanbalīs. See: Rizq Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Tamīmī, “Aqīdat al-imām al-Mubajjal Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal”, 2: 273.

¹⁵⁸ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Dhayl*, 2: 349.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 3: 55.

Ibn Taymīyah rejected most of what Yazīd I was accused of. For example, he claimed that Yazīd I did not seek to kill al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī; rather his aim was to honour and venerate al-Ḥusayn,¹⁶⁰ and that he was angry and sad after al-Ḥusayn’s death.¹⁶¹ However, Ibn Taymīyah concluded that Yazīd I was neither a saint nor an infidel; he was a Muslim and while he may have been a *fāsiq* (sinner), cursing an identified *fāsiq* Muslim is forbidden.¹⁶² On the other hand, the disagreement about cursing Yazīd I can be found among other Sunnī schools of law as well.¹⁶³ This means that there is no orthodox Sunnī belief regarding the correct attitude towards Yazīd I.

There are likely to be three motives behind those who defend Yazīd I. The first is that abusing Yazīd I may lead to abusing his father; therefore, it is forbidden. This motive can be found in ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī’s *fatwā* and in al-Ḥarbī’s book. The second is that the dispute with the Shī‘īs has led to defending Yazīd I in order to prove the correctness and purity of Sunnism. The third is that Yazīd I was a caliph, and the orthodox Sunnī decided not to abuse the rulers. Again, this motive can be found in al-Ḥarbī’s book. In addition, there is an interesting story relating to al-Ḥarbī with regard to this matter. It was that said after al-Ḥarbī had written his book to defend Yazīd I, the ‘Abbāsid caliph at that era, al-Nāṣir (r. 575-622/1180-225), met with him and asked him, *أنه كان يوماً في زيارة قبر الإمام أحمد - يعني الشيخ عبد المغيث - وأن الخليفة الناصر، وفاه في ذلك اليوم عند قبر الإمام أحمد، فقال له: أنت عبد المغيث الذي صنف مناقب يزيد. فقال: معاذ الله أن أقول: إن له مناقب، ولكن من مذهبني: أن الذي هو خليفة المسلمين إذا طرأ عليه فسق لا يوجب خلعه. فقال: أحسنت يا حنبل!* “Are you ‘Abd al-Mu‘ghīth [al-Ḥarbī] who wrote a book on Yazīd’s excellence?” Al-Ḥarbī replied “God forbids seeing any excellence in him. But my *madhab* is that if the caliph became a *fāsiq*, he did not have to be deposed.” The caliph liked his answer and said, “O Ḥanbālī, you did excellently.”¹⁶⁴

In another version of the story, his answer was that his aim was only to prevent the tongues from cursing the caliphs. Yet, if we examine this, the caliph at the time (i.e., al-Nāṣir himself) deserved the curse more than did Yazīd.¹⁶⁵ This story, despite the

¹⁶⁰ Ibn Taymīyah, *Minḥāj*, 4: 557-59.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ For some of their *fatāwā* see: Ibn Tūlūn, *Qayd al-sharīd fī akhbār Yazīd*, 113-30.

¹⁶⁴ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbālī, *Dhayl*, 2: 350.

¹⁶⁵ وقد قيل إن الخليفة الناصر لما بلغه نهي الشيخ عبد المغيث عن ذلك فصده وسأله عن ذلك، وعرف عبد المغيث أنه الخليفة ولم يظهر أنه يعلم، فقال: يا هذا أنا قصدي كف السنة الناس عن لعنة خلفاء المسلمين ولاتهم،

question of its credibility, illustrates the change in the image of the later caliphs and rulers from being the best of the Muslims (*al-afqal*) to being *fāsiq*. In this case, the defence of Yazīd I can be understood as a defence of the current caliph because both are *fussāq*; those who allowed Yazīd I to be cursed for his sin will curse their caliph for the same reason. In other words, the defence of Yazīd I reflects the defence of the caliphs.

وإلا فلو فتحنا هذا الباب لكان خليفة وقتنا أحق باللعن فإنه يفعل أموراً منكرة أعظم مما فعله يزيد، فإن هذا يفعل كذا ويفعل كذا، وجعل عدد مظالم الخليفة حتى قال: له ادع لي يا شيخ. وذهب.

Chapter IV

The *Imāmah*

4.1. Introduction

In Baghdad during the late second and early third A.H./early ninth century, theologians discussed the question of the necessity of rulership. Some *Mu'tazilīs* such as al-Aṣamm (d. 200-1/816-17) and al-Nazzām (d. between 220-30/835-45) doubted the necessity of the *imāmah*, and argued as to whether or not it was an option for Muslims to appoint a leader (*imām*, caliph).¹ Van Ess relates this idea to the time of civil war between al-Amīn and his brother al-Ma'mūn. After al-Amīn was killed in 198/813, Baghdad descended into chaos for a few years until the arrival of the new caliph in the city in 204/819. During this era of chaos, according to Van Ess, the *Mu'tazilī* theologians formulated the idea that “the community does not need a sovereign, an *imām*, except in case of emergency, for instance, during a war”,² a claim that is difficult to prove; indeed, Van Ess is aware of some of the problems involved.³ His statement can be challenged on both historical and geographical grounds, since this idea was acknowledged outside Baghdad; for example, in Basra where Hishām al-Fuwaṭī (d. 210/825) and his student 'Abbād b. Sulaymān (d. 260/874), the Basran *Mu'tazilīs*, held the same belief.⁴ The Najdāt (a sect of the *Khārijīs*) also denied the obligatory nature of the Imamate in 73/692, long before the time of the civil war between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn.⁵

Therefore, it is necessary to note that Van Ess overlooked the distinction between a person (i.e., the *imām*) and the institution (i.e., the government) in his argument. Nonetheless, the question of the necessity of the *imāmah* in early Muslim times went

¹ Al-Nāshi' (Attrib.), *Masā'il al-imāmah*, 49-50; Van Ess, “Political ideas in early Islamic religious thought”, 159-61; Patricia Crone, “Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists”.

² Van Ess, “Political ideas”, 160.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Crone, *God's rule*, 66-67; idem, “Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists”, 3.

⁵ Crone, “a Statement by the Najdiyya Khārijites on the dispensability of the Imamate”, 3-4.

along with the need for a leader rather than the necessity of a state or a government, as Crone correctly observes.⁶ This facilitates an improved understanding of the debate concerning the necessity of the *imāmah* during the first two centuries of Islam. However, the impact of the civil war and associated chaos on both *Mu'tazilīs* and Traditionalists, including Ahmād ibn Ḥanbal, cannot be ignored as it had an impact on Ahmād ibn Ḥanbal and affected his political theology, as is discussed in the next chapter of this study.

Interestingly, Ahmād ibn Ḥanbal did not discuss the question of the necessity of the *imām* probably because it was a hypothetical issue.⁷ In reality, there has always been an *imām*, or an individual who claims himself to be an *imām*; therefore, the most pertinent question for Ahmād concerns the legitimacy of the *imām*, in addition to the necessary requirements that he must possess. Ahmād understood the necessity of the community to an *imām* because his absence constituted *fitnah*. He stated to one of his students that “الفتنة إذا لم يكن إمام يقوم بأمر الناس” “The *fitnah* is when there is no *imām* who stands up for the affairs of the people.”⁸ Therefore, the *imām* was required for temporal issues, not for religious duties also as the Shī‘īs believed. Ahmād approved of practising the Friday prayer without an *imām* during the time of a *fitnah*.⁹ Although he recognised the tradition that “من مات وليس في عنقه بيعة مات ميتة جاهلية” “One who dies without having sworn an oath will die the death of one who died in the days of ignorance”, Ahmād did not take this tradition to require that there be an *imām*, but rather as meaning that allegiance had to be paid to the *imām*.¹⁰ It appears that, unlike the later Ḥanbalīs¹¹ and the rest of the Sunnīs, Ahmād’s thinking was based on reason rather than revelation in order to approve the necessity of rulership. Nevertheless, his position is different from the Shī‘īs and the Baghdādī *Mu’tazilīs* who believe that the

⁶ Crone, *God's rule*, 3.

⁷ Evidently, Ahmād ibn Ḥanbal and other traditionalists do not like hypothetical legal questions. They criticise rationalists for discussing legal issues that have not yet happened. For the traditionalists’ position see: Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi‘ bayān al-‘ilm wa-faḍlīh wa-mā yanbaghī min riwāyatih‘ wa-ḥamlih*, 2: 1037-86; Ahmād b. ‘Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Faqīh wa-al-mutafaqqih*, 2: 11-35.

⁸ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 81; Abū Ya‘lā ibn al-Farrā‘, *al-Ahkām al-sultāniyah*, 19. In another report from Ahmād he said, أَنْذِهْ بِحُقُوقِ النَّاسِ؟ لَا بِدَ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ حَاكِمٍ، [otherwise] people will lose their rights”. (Abū Ya‘lā, *al-Ahkām*, 24). Here the term *ḥākim* means judge, not ruler.

⁹ Abū Ya‘lā, *al-Ahkām*, 22.

¹⁰ Ibn Hāni‘, *Masā'il*, 2: 185; Al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 81; Abū Ya‘lā ibn al-Farrā‘, *al-Ahkām*, 23

¹¹ Abū Ya‘lā ibn al-Farrā‘, *al-Ahkām*, 19; Ahmād b. ‘Abd al-Halīm ibn Taymīyah, *al-Husbah*, 7-11.

imamate was compelled by reason (*wājib bi-al-‘aql*).¹² Ahmad mentions only social necessity towards rulers, rather than their religious needs. At that time the social needs related to rulership were also well known to *Mutazilīs* in Baghdad,¹³ and probably to other sects as well.

The following section examines Ahmad's opinion on the legitimacy of the *imām*, the characteristics he must possess, and the requirements he must meet.

4.2. Determining the legitimacy of the *imām*

This question constitutes a significant point of disagreement among all Muslim sects. With regard to the legitimacy of the *imām*, early Sunnīs did not derive their method from the Qur'ān or the Sunnah, this question having been answered for them through the practice of the Companions. This means they had accommodated the history of the early period of Islam and from it had derived their theory with regard to the Caliphate. For the Sunnīs, who were wider than Traditionalists, there were some methods for the caliph to be legitimate.

4.2.1 Designation (*al-Nass*)

Nass is when the caliph was chosen by God or the Prophet, and this was declared in the Qur'ān or in the Sunnah. For *Imāmīs*, *nass* was the only method of designating the *imāms*,¹⁴ which was different from the Sunnīs who did not believe in designation in order to recognise the *imāms*. Apart from the Ḥanbalīs, the question of whether Abū Bakr was designated, implicitly or explicitly, by the Prophet to be his deputy or whether he was chosen by the Companions, was discussed by a small number of Sunnīs only.¹⁵ Most Sunnī theologians have stated that Abū Bakr was chosen by the Companions and that the Prophet neither appointed, nor even mentioned who was to

¹² Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsah*, 758-59; idem, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-‘adl wa-altawhīd*, 20/1: 16-197; Mahmūd b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *al-Fā’iq fī uṣūl al-dīn*, 548-51.

¹³ Ibn Abī al-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-balāghah*, 2: 308.

¹⁴ For the Twelvers see: al-Hasan b. Yūsuf al-Ḥillī, *Manāhij al-yaqīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, 452-53; and for the Ismā‘īlīs see: Ahmad Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *al-Maṣābiḥ fī ithbāt al-imāmah*, 51-53.

¹⁵ For the Ḥanbalīs see the next two footnotes (fns. 16 and 17). For other Sunnīs, see: al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 455-56; Ahmad b. ‘Alī Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fī al-milal wa-al-ahwā’ wa-al-nihāl*, 4: 176-79; Ahmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Hajar al-Haytamī, *al-Šawā’iq al-muhrīqah fī al-radd ‘alā ahl al-bida’ wa-al-zandaqah*, 26-29.

be, his successor. Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal supports the view that Abū Bakr's resignation was approved through an implicit *nass*. According to some reports Ahmād applied two texts at the same time in order to prove his idea. The first text stated that the Prophet on his deathbed had ordered the Muslims of Medina to pray behind Abū Bakr instead of the Prophet who was unable to lead the prayers. According to the second text the Prophet said “يُؤْمِنُ الْقَوْمُ أَقْرَأُوهُمْ لِكِتَابِ اللَّهِ” “Lead the people [in prayers] is the greater memorising of the Qur'ānic verses”, while Abū Bakr had not memorised as many Qur'ānic verses as other Companions. Hence the Prophet meant the imamate (*al-khilāfah*).¹⁶ Ahmād was aware that the textual evidence was absent from the al-Saqīfah event; nevertheless, this evidence was probably used by Ahmād to refute the Shī'is who had disregarded Abū Bakr's caliphate.

Later, the Ḥanbalīs divided into two groups according to the principles enshrined in the establishment of Abū Bakr's caliphate, the first of these being that the caliphate was established through an implicit text. The second, which was the view of most of the Ḥanbalīs, such as Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā' and Ibn al-Zāghūnī, is that Abū Bakr's allegiance was through the election of the Muslim community (i.e., the Companions).¹⁷ Ibn Ḥāmid al-Ḥanbalī regarded the latest opinion as a *riwāyah* (narrative) from Ahmād; however, it is more likely to have been a *takhrīj* on Ahmād's *madhhab* rather than his own opinion.¹⁸

Ibn Taymīyah arrived at the conclusion that Ahmād's words (*kalām["] Ahmād*) indicated that the Prophet had informed the Companions with agreement and satisfaction about Abū Bakr's caliphate and ordered them to obey him, so that the Prophet had guided them (*arshadahum*) to pay him allegiance. However, Ibn Taymīyah added that Abū Bakr's caliphate was validated by the Companions'

¹⁶ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 301-3, Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā', *al-Masā'il al-'aqadīyah*, 88-89.

¹⁷ Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā', *al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, 226-28, Idem, *al-Masā'il al-'aqadīyah*, 88-93, Ibn al-Zāghūnī, *al-Idāh fī uṣūl al-dīn*, 489-92; Ibn Taymīyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah*, 1: 488-93.

¹⁸ One of the *takhrīj* meanings that was applied by later jurisprudents is when they use the principles of the eponymous schools to attribute to an eponym what the jurisprudents believe by applying these principles, even though the eponym did not say it. For the role in *takhrīj* in Islamic law, see: Wael Hallaq, “*Takhrīj* and the Construction of Juristic Authority”, 317-35. For the *takhrīj* in Ḥanbalī school see: Ibn Ḥāmid, *Tahdhīb*, 36- 44; Abū Zayd, *al-Madkhal*, 1: 265-86, Melchert, “Comment on Saud al-Sarhan”, 6-7.

agreeing on his person and to pay allegiance to him.¹⁹ It is clear that this was Ibn Taymīyah's opinion rather than that of Ahmad himself.

4.2.2. *Election (ikhtiyār)*

Election as a method for selection of caliphs and the related *shūrā* institution was associated with ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattāb.²⁰ ‘Umar was aware that there were some people who had ambitions to rule after him, and in consequence, there would possibly be fierce competition among them that would threaten the unity of the Muslim community (the *jamā‘ah*). In addition, he was aware of the significant precedent of Abū Bakr's sudden election (*faltah*), which means it had been done in hurry without consulting with some important figures among the Companions, such as ‘Alī, al-Zubayr and the Banū Hāshim. Therefore, ‘Umar was concerned that someone would appropriate the allegiance and proclaim himself a caliph immediately after his death, which would ignite a civil war amongst Muslims. In his last pilgrimage, about three weeks before he was assassinated, a man came to him and said:

لو رأيت رجالاً أتى أمير المؤمنين اليوم فقال يا أمير المؤمنين هل لك في فلان يقول: لو قد مات عمر
لقد بايعت فلاناً، فواه ما كانت بيعة أبي بكر إلا فلتة فتمت. غضب عمر ثم قال: إنني إن شاء الله لقائم
العشية في الناس فمحذرهم هؤلاء الذين يريدون أن يغصبوهم أمورهم

O commander of the Faithful! What do you think about so-and-so who says, 'If ‘Umar should die, I will give the pledge of allegiance to such-and-such person, since, by Allāh, the pledge of allegiance to Abū Bakr was nothing but coup which got established afterwards.' ‘Umar became angry and then said, 'Allāh willing, I will stand before the people tonight and warn them against those people who want to deprive the others of their rights [of choosing their rulers]²¹

However, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Awf advised him to wait until he returned to Medina, and ‘Umar obeyed. In a Friday prayer in Medina ‘Umar stated:

إنه بلغني أن قائلًا منكم يقول: والله لو قد مات عمر بايعت فلاناً، فلا يغترن أمرؤ أن يقول: إنما كانت
بيعة أبي بكر فلتة وتمت. لا وإنها قد كانت كذلك ولكن الله وفى شرها، وليس منكم من تقطع الأعناق
إليه مثل أبي بكر. من بايع رجالاً عن غير مشورة من المسلمين فلا يبايع، هو ولا الذي بايعه تغرة أن
يقتلا

I have been informed that a speaker amongst you says, 'By God, if ‘Umar should die, I will give the pledge of allegiance to such-and-such person.' One should not deceive oneself by saying that the pledge of allegiance given

¹⁹ Ibn Taymīyah, *Fatāwā*, 35: 48; Idem, *Minhāj al-Sunnah*, 1: 524.

²⁰ Crone, "Shūrā as an elective institution", 3.

²¹ al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Sahīh*, Kitāb al-hudūd, Bāb rajm al-hublā idhā uḥṣinat, no. 6830.

to Abū Bakr was a coup which got established afterwards. No doubt, it was like that, but God saved [the people] from its evil, and there is none among you who has the qualities of Abū Bakr. Remember that whoever gives the pledge of allegiance to anybody among you without consulting the other Muslims, neither that person, nor the person to whom the pledge of allegiance was given, are to be supported, They both should be killed.²²

On his deathbed, ‘Umar named six Companions, all of whom were from the tribe of the Quraysh, to choose a caliph from among themselves. The candidates for this council, which was known as *shūrā*, were chiefs and leading men who were ambitious to succeed ‘Umar, which would possibly lead to armed conflict among themselves.²³ They were ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān, ‘Alī Ibn Abī Tālib, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Awf, al-Zubayr b. al-‘Awwām, Ṭalḥah b. ‘Ubayd Allāh and Sa‘d Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ. After three days of negotiations, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Awf stepped back and acted as sole elector. In the first round of consultations Ibn ‘Awf succeeded in convincing Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr and Sa‘d Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ. Ṭalḥah duly stepped down in favour of ‘Uthmān, al-Zubayr in favour of ‘Alī, and Sa‘d Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ stepped down in favour of Ibn ‘Awf himself, who was not eligible; therefore ‘Alī and ‘Uthmān were the only candidates. Ibn ‘Awf consulted the Muhājirūn, the Anṣār and the rational people (*dhawī al-ra'y*) in Medina,²⁴ as well as the commanders and the leaders of people who happened to be in Medina at that time.²⁵ Subsequently, Ibn ‘Awf was able to announce his decision to elect ‘Uthmān as the new caliph.²⁶

Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal regards ‘Uthmān’s allegiance as the most legitimate, assured and accurate (*asāḥḥ*, *awthaq*, *awkad*) amongst all the other caliphs.²⁷ According to Aḥmad, the perfection of ‘Uthmān’s allegiance emanated from the consensus involved.²⁸ In all probability, Aḥmad is referring to the fact that allegiance was paid to ‘Uthmān after consultations among the *shūrā* council and with other Companions. Subsequently, a consensus emerged with regard to ‘Uthmān, as Ahmad narrated from Ibn Mas‘ūd إِنما

²² Ibid.

²³ ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, 5: 480-81. ‘Umar was reported to have said to these six individuals . إِنِّي نَظَرْتُ فِي أَمْرِ النَّاسِ فَلَمْ أَرْعَدْهُمْ شُقَاقًا، فَلَمْ يَكُنْ شُقَاقٌ فَهُوَ فِيهِمْ. See: Patricia Crone, “Shūrā”, 5; idem, *God's rule*, 19.

²⁴ قال المسور: فما رأيت مثل عبد الرحمن، والله ما ترك أحداً من المهاجرين والأنصار، ولا غيرهم من ذوي الرأي إلا استشارهم

²⁵ ودار عبد الرحمن لياليه يلقى أصحاب رسول الله، ...، ومن وافى المدينة من أمراء الأجناد وأشراف الناس يشاورهم al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 4: 231.

²⁶ Crone, “Shūrā”, 4-8.

²⁷ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 320-21.

²⁸ Ibid.

فَأَمْرَنَا عَلَيْنَا أَصْحَابُ مُحَمَّدٍ... “We, the Companions of Muḥammad..., have met and reached a consensus on ‘Uthmān Ibn ‘Affān and chosen him as an Amīr”.²⁹

As demonstrated above, Ah̄mad considered the *shūrā* the most legitimate, accurate and assured method of selecting caliphs. However, he did not make the decision to discuss its form and content. To the author’s knowledge, no report exists that originates from Ah̄mad regarding the workings of the *shūrā* council, in addition to the requirements demanded of candidates, similar to those found in the Sunnī texts in the fifth A.H./eleventh century and afterward.³⁰ In all probability, this is because the *shūrā* as a method of selecting caliphs died out immediately after ‘Uthmān’s murder. Since that time, the idea of *shūrā* has been the stance of opponents, dissidents and rebels,³¹ in addition to being discussed theoretically in the *kalām* books.

On the other hand, those in charge have always found an excuse to reject this stance. Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr rejected ‘Alī’s caliphate because it emerged without consent or consultation, and demanded the making of the caliphate *shūrā* among Muslims.³² ‘Alī did not listen to their call, and they were killed after the Battle of the Camel in 36/656. Mu‘awiyah also called for the *shūrā* in his conflict with ‘Alī, but ‘Alī rejected Mu‘awiyah’s right to *shūrā* because ‘Alī had received allegiance from the same people and with the same conditions according to which Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān had become caliphs. However, ‘Alī added that *shūrā* constituted a sole right for the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār, Mu‘awiyah being neither a *muhājir* nor *anṣārī*,³³ when the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār agreed on a candidate, naming and designating him an *imām* that was acceptable to God.³⁴ Subsequently, when al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī concluded his peace treaty with Mu‘awiyah, one of the treaty conditions was that Mu‘awiyah would not be entitled to appoint his successor, but that the succession should instead be left

²⁹ ‘Abd Allāh, *Faḍā’ il al-Saḥābah*, 1: 363.

³⁰ ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyah*, 4, 6; Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’ *al-Aḥkām*, 19; ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Juwaynī, *Ghiyāth al-umam fi iltiyāth al-żulam*, 46-59.

³¹ C. Edmund Bosworth, “Shūrā”, in *EI*.

³² Ah̄mad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 2: 223-26.

³³ Crone argues that Mu‘awiyah was a *muhājir* thus: “this looks like an argument meant for use against Khārijites rather than him” (Crone, “Shūra”, 16 fn.59). However, Mu‘awiyah was not a *muhājir* since he converted to Islam after the Hudaybiyah treaty, and in the same letter ‘Alī is claimed to have said, واعلم أنك من الطفقاء الذين لا تحل لهم الخلافة، ولا تعرض فيهم الشورى “You know, you are from the Tulaqā” [i.e., the people of Quraysh who converted to Islam after the conquest of Mecca] who are not eligible for the caliphate and not included in the *shūrā*.”

³⁴ Naṣr b. Muzāḥim al-Minqarī, *Waq’at Siffīn*, 29-30, 63, 82.

to the *shūrā*.³⁵ Mu‘awiyah agreed with this condition, although he subsequently, and predictably, did not adhere to its conditions and appointed his son Yazīd I as his successor. This move was objected to by some Companions who called for the *shūrā*; these included Ibn al-Zubayr and ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Abī Bakr. Nevertheless, Yazīd I became the next caliph.

However, the Umayyads revoked the *shūrā* and established their own dynastic succession. The Umayyad ideology disregarded the *shūrā* based on the notion that the people (the Muhājirūn and Ansār) had lost their rights, both to *shūrā* and to selecting the caliph, since they had abandoned ‘Uthmān to his fate without coming to his assistance. The poet ‘Abd Allāh b. Hammām al-Salūlī (d. 72/691-92) encouraged Yazīd I to appoint his son Mu‘awiyah II as his successor. But, what should the caliph tell those individuals who called for the *shūrā*? Al-Salūlī stated that they lost their right of the *shūrā* since they did not support ‘Uthmān and let him be killed. Al-Salūlī said:

وَلَا لِمَن سَالَكَ الشُّورَى مَسَاعِلَةً *** إِلَّا بِضَرْبٍ وَطَعْنٍ صَائِبٍ خَذْمٍ
أَئِ تَكُونُ لَهُمْ شُورَى وَقَدْ قَتَلُوا *** عُثْمَانَ، ضَحَوْا بِهِ فِي الْأَشْهُرِ الْحَرَمِ
There is no answer for those who asking for the *shūrā*,
but a sharp stabbing and a precise arrow
What right they have to a *shūrā* when they already
killed ‘Uthmān, sacrificed him in the holy months³⁶

Patricia Crone lists thirteen examples of calling for the *shūrā* in the period following ‘Uthmān’s murder and leading up to the ‘Abbāsid revolution (from 35/656 to 132/700). During this century, the *shūrā* had been a rallying point for rebels, opponents and dissidents; only Mu‘awiyah II refused to appoint a successor and allowed people to determine the succession for themselves. However, the *ikhtiyār/shūrā* remained the formal process of the *Khārijīs* for electing their leader.³⁷ In summary, during Ahmad’s time the *shūrā* was consigned to history, having had no impact or effect in real political institutions. The normal way, at that time, of appointing caliphs was *wilāyat al-‘ahd*.

³⁵ Ahmād b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 3: 286-88; Ahmād b. A‘tham al-Kūfī, *al-Futūh*, 4: 159-60; Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāghah*, 1: 248; Madelung, *The Succession*, 323.

³⁶ Muḥammad b. Sallām al-Jumāhī, *Tabaqāt fuṣūl al-shu‘arā’*, 2: 630-31.

³⁷ Crone, “Shūrā”, 9-14.

4.2.3. The previous imām's designation (*Wilāyat al-‘ahd*)

This process is also known as *al-‘ahd* and *al-nass*, when a caliph names another individual as his successor. The first example was Abū Bakr who designated ‘Umar as caliph after his death. Another example was when Mu‘awiyah designated his son Yazīd I as his successor. Mu‘awiyah and his followers relied on the precedent of Abū Bakr when he chose ‘Umar as his successor. The opposition rejected this comparison and condemned this method for being non-Islamic. ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Abī Bakr described it as being Khosrauvian (*kisrawīyah*) after the Sassanid King of Persia, or Heracliusian (after Heraclius the Roman (Byzantine) emperor, often referred to in early Arabic literature).³⁸ When Khosrau or Heraclius died he was succeeded by other Khosrau and Heraclius. The most dangerous opposition against Mu‘awiyah’s decision originated from four individuals, all of whom were from the Quraysh. Three were sons of previous caliphs and the fourth was a son of a member of the *shūrā* council. They were ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Abī Bakr, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar, al-Husayn b. ‘Alī and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr.³⁹

A story was told that Mu‘awiyah invited these four people⁴⁰ to convince them to pay allegiance to his son, Yazīd I, after his death. Mu‘awiyah’s arguments with these four individuals, even though they may not be authentic, show how four trends dealt with appointing Yazīd I as successor to his father. ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Abī Bakr rejected the decision and called for the *shūrā*.⁴¹ Al-Husayn b. ‘Alī relied on his family’s relation to the Prophet to prove his eligibility as caliph, as the descendant of the Prophet through his daughter Fātimah. Although Ibn ‘Umar did not agree with Yazīd I and the policy of Mu‘awiyah, he insisted that he would observe the *jamā‘ah* and would not spilt the community. The most interesting story was Ibn al-Zubayr’s argument with Mu‘awiyah. It was claimed that Mu‘awiyah used the precedents of the Prophet, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar against Mu‘awiyah’s decision. According to Ibn al-Zubayr, the

³⁸ (Abū al-Faraj) ‘Alī b. Al-Husayn al-Asfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 16: 90; Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Iṣrāb fī ma‘rifat al-Asḥāb*, 466.

³⁹ al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5: 322-23.

⁴⁰ Some reports added ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās, to make them five; but most probably his name was not inserted as he was not mentioned in the story afterwards.

⁴¹ ‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutaybah (Attrib.), *al-Imāmah wa-al-siyāsah*, 1: 295.

Prophet did not designate the next caliph and allowed the people to select an appropriate individual themselves according to the book of God. Accordingly, the people chose Abū Bakr. Subsequently, Abū Bakr named his successor, but he was not his own son or even a close relative; instead, he chose the best of the community. When ‘Umar was on his deathbed, he selected six people to elect the caliph from among themselves, but he did not include his son. Therefore, Ibn al-Zubayr asked Mu‘āwiyah to follow one of these methods, emphasising that he must not designate his son as his successor.⁴²

The most noteworthy points in this argument are the differences between Abū Bakr and Mu‘āwiyah: firstly, Abū Bakr named ‘Umar on his death bed, but Mu‘āwiyah named Yazīd I long before his death. Secondly, ‘Umar was not a close relative of Abū Bakr, while Yazīd I was Mu‘āwiyah’s son. The last point concerns the character of the successor. ‘Umar was an outstanding person in the Muslim community of his era, but the propriety of Yazīd I was in doubt. In other words, the questions surrounding ‘Umar relate to whether he was the best amongst equals, but in the case of Yazīd I the question was the validity of a sinner’s rule (*fāsiq*). The example of Yazīd I’s appointment was replicated in Muslim history rather than that of ‘Umar; the only exception being Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik who chose ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz to be his successor despite the fact that the latter being a family relation.

Although this story, in all its details, is probably false, it nevertheless reflects how those people who rejected allegiance to Yazīd I developed their argument. The first argument concerns the authority of the *shūrā*, which can be located in the theories of the *Khārijīs* and the *Mutazilīs*, as well as some Sunnīs. The second argument concerns the right of the Prophet’s family to rule after him. This is the position of the Shi‘īs. The third argument accepts the principle of *wilāyat al-‘ahd* but not with regard to a close relative. The final argument concerns the political quietists who did not support Yazīd I, but at the same time would do nothing to divide the unity of the community since they regarded the *Fitnah* (as applied to the first civil war) as more harmful than the rule of Yazīd I.

⁴² Ibid., 1: 293-99.

Although no report exists from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal regarding this matter, it is clear that Aḥmad and the traditionalists accepted this method of appointing a successor because they approved the caliphate of ‘Umar, the Umayyads and the ‘Abbāsīds. However, since the fifth A.H./eleventh century, there have been brief discussions of the Ḥanbalī literature of *al-‘ahd*, which was approved according to consensus. Abū Bakr entrusted ‘Umar with the caliphate and this was upheld by the Muslims. In addition, ‘Umar entrusted the caliphate to a council, and this too was accepted by the community.⁴³

4.2.4. The Usurper (*al-Mutaghallib*)

It is well-known that traditionalists approved the rule of usurpers,⁴⁴ and that they traced this opinion back to the Companion ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar. As Sufyān al-Thawrī stated, “نأخذ بقول عمر في الجماعة وبقول ابنه في الفرقة” “We adhere to ‘Umar’s doctrines in the time of unity, and his son in the time of division.”⁴⁵ Ibn ‘Umar was described that, during the time of the *fitnah* he prayed behind every *amīr* and paid him his *zakāt*.⁴⁶ Moreover, Ibn ‘Umar is quoted as saying, أقاتل في الفتنة، وأصلني وراء من غالب “I do not fight in [times of] *fitnah*, and I pray behind whoever wins.”⁴⁷ At the time of the second civil war, Ibn ‘Umar’s position fell between those of Ibn al-Zubayr and the Umayyads. It is evident that the doctrine of approving the usurpers’ rule was a direct consequence of remaining neutral during the time of *fitnah*.

The Shī‘ī theologian al-Nawbakhtī dates this idea of supporting whoever usurps a reign and paying him allegiance to the period of Mu‘āwiyah, and claims that after the assassination of ‘Alī, his followers, except for a few individuals among his Shī‘īs who believed in his imamate, joined the sect of Ṭalḥah, al-Zubayr and ‘Ā’ishah and became a united group under Mu‘āwiyah’s rule. Those who joined Mu‘āwiyah, along with the people of *hashw* as well as the followers of kings and supporters of the victors, made

⁴³ Abū Ya‘lā’ Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Mu‘tamad*, 251–52; Idem., *al-Aḥkām*, 25; ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Umar al-Baṣrī (hereafter: Abū Ṭālib al-Darīr), *al-Wādīh fī sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Khiraqī*, 4: 372; Maṇṣūr b. Yūnus al-Buhūtī, *Sharḥ Muntahā al-irādāt*, 6: 274.

⁴⁴ al-Nāshī’ al-Akbar (attrib.), *Masā’il al-imāmah*, 66.

⁴⁵ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 138.

⁴⁶ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Tabaqāt al-kubrā*, 4: 139.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

up the vast majority (*al-sawād al-a‘zam*); all of these people were named *Murji‘īs*.⁴⁸ On the other hand, some Shāmīs (Syrians) claimed that ‘Alī’s caliphate represented the rule of a usurper.⁴⁹

The traditionalists do not agree with al-Nawbakhtī’s stance regarding Mu‘awiyah as a usurper. According to them, his rule was a result of an agreement by the Muslim community; hence the year of his rule is called the *Year of the Community* (*‘Ām al-Jamā‘ah*)⁵⁰. According to the traditionalists, the first reign of a usurper was the rule of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 65-86/685-705). The famous traditionalist Yahyā b. Yahyā (d. 226/840) was asked:

أَنْ يُحِيِّيْ بْنَ يُحِيِّيْ قِيلَ لَهُ: الْبَيْعَةُ مَكْرُوهَةٌ؟ قَالَ: لَا. قِيلَ لَهُ: فَإِنْ كَانُوا أَمْمَةً جُورٌ؟ قَالَ: قَدْ بَاعُوا إِنْ عَمِّرَ لِعَبْدِ الْمَلِكِ بْنِ مَرْوَانَ وَبِالسِيفِ أَخْذَ الْمَلَكَ، أَخْبَرْنِي بِذَلِكَ مَالِكُ عَنْهُ، أَنَّهُ كَتَبَ إِلَيْهِ: أَفَرَّ لَهُ بِالسَّمْعِ وَالطَّاعَةِ عَلَى كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَسَنَّةِ نَبِيِّهِ. قَالَ يُحِيِّيْ بْنَ يُحِيِّيْ: وَالْبَيْعَةُ خَيْرٌ مِّنَ الْفَرَقَةِ

“Is paying allegiance unpleasant (*makrūhah*)?” He answered “No”. The man asked again “Even if they were unjust rulers?” Yahyā replied, “Ibn ‘Umar paid allegiance to ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, who took power by the sword. Mālik [b. Anas] told me that [Ibn ‘Umar] wrote to [‘Abd al-Malik accepting his rule] and giving him his loyalty and obedience according to the Book of God and the Sunnah of his Prophet.” Yahyā then said “Paying allegiance is better than disagreement.”⁵¹

Al-Shāfi‘ī also accepted the rule of the usurpers, and it is claimed that he stated كل من غلب على الخلافة بالسيف حتى يسمى خليفة، ويجمع الناس عليه، فهو خليفة Whoever usurps the caliphate by the sword until he is called a caliph and until people have formed a consensus about him, he is a [legitimate] caliph.”⁵² Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal followed the same doctrine. He was asked behind whom one should perform the Friday prayer if the people were divided into two groups (i.e., between the legitimate *imām* and the rebels)? Aḥmad answered, “Behind the one who wins”.⁵³ Creed III, attributed to Aḥmad, states that ومن غلبه بالسيف حتى صار خليفة، وسمي أمير المؤمنين؛ فلا يحل لأحد يؤمن بالله وباليوم الآخر أن يبيت ولا يراه إماماً عليه، برأً كان أو فاجرًا. فهو أمير المؤمنين Whoever overcomes them by the sword until becoming caliph and being named the Commander of the Faithful, it is not permitted for anyone who believes in God and the Hereafter, to pass

⁴⁸ al-Nawbakhtī, *Fīraq al-Shī‘ah*, 6.

⁴⁹ See Thumāmah b. ‘Adī’s saying in above (3.2.1).

⁵⁰ See below (5.2).

⁵¹ Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā al-Shāṭibī, *al-Itiṣām*, 3: 46.

⁵² Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Maṇāqib al-Shāfi‘ī*, 1: 448.

⁵³ Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Aḥkām*, 22.

the night without regarding him as a [legitimate] *imām*, whether he [i.e., this *imām*] be a pious man or a sinner. He is the Commander of the Faithful". As a third A.H./ninth century *Mu'tazilī* historian noted, the view of approving the legitimacy of the usurpers' caliphate characterized the traditionalists at that time.⁵⁴ Among later Sunnīs, there was a consensus regarding this matter, as stated by the Mamlūkī scholar Ibn Ḥajar.⁵⁵ It should be noted that the legitimacy of the usurpers represents the legitimacy of the 'Abbāsīds' caliphate since they usurped power from the Umayyads and, of course, the legitimacy of the Mamlūk sultans, such usurping being their favourite way to seize power.

The most noteworthy point of this evaluation of Sunnī theory concerning the rule of usurpers is the correct identification of a specific usurper and how this usurper was able to seize power. In the early history of Islam the usurpers originated from the Quraysh tribe and their aim was to claim the caliphate for themselves. Nonetheless, in the later 'Abbāsid period the usurpers assumed an additional feature. They were not Qurashīs, or even Arabs, and were therefore not eligible for the position of the Imamate/Caliphate in the Sunnī and Shī'ī doctrines. Hence, they called themselves Sultans and accepted the nominal power of the caliphs. The later Sunnīs approved this new *modus operandi* since the sultans did not claim the caliphate as their own.⁵⁶

4.2.5. Conclusion

The remarkable fact of Ahmād's theory regarding the legitimacy of the caliph is that he was not dependent on the Qur'ān or the Sunnah. Nonetheless, the key principle of his theory centred on the community (*al-jamā'ah*), its unity and its safety. This rulership was necessary for the people's benefit. While Ahmād did not focus greatly on the methods utilized for appointing the caliphs he accepted them all, from the electoral methods to the usurping ones. In all probability, this was because these methods were approved by the Companions, or at least some of them. There was disagreement among the Companions regarding the usurpers' rule, for instance

⁵⁴ al-Nāshi' al-Akbar (attrib.), *Masā'il al-imāmah*, 66.

⁵⁵ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī*, 13: 7.

⁵⁶ al-Juwainī, *Ghiyāth*, 240-60; al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyah*, 40-46.

between Ibn ‘Umar (who accepted it) and Ibn al-Zubayr (who rejected it); however, Ah̄mad supported the method of quietism. The theory of political quietism of Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal and other Sunnīs should not be understood solely as acknowledging the rulers or this *fait accompli*; rather the priority was for the benefit of the common people and to accommodate early Islam. This matter is examined more comprehensively in the next two chapters in this study.

This pragmatic theory of accepting the present rulers did not constitute an exaggerated adherence to them, as Ah̄mad required neither their presence in order to carry out ritual duties nor the appointment of an *imām* as a religious duty. Nevertheless, at the time of Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal, some traditionalists espoused Sunnī theology; subsequently greater credit was given to the rulers at the expense of the common people.

An additional key principle of the Sunnī theory is its polemics with other sects, especially Shi‘īs and *Khārijīs*. For example, designation (*al-naṣṣ*) is a Shi‘ī claim made in order to prove that ‘Alī was the legitimate caliph following the Prophet’s death, whereas the Sunnīs relied on elections directed by the Companions or on transferring allegiance from them to Abū Bakr in order to approve his caliphate. However, Ah̄mad utilized the Shi‘ī method, i.e., the designation (the implicit text), in order to approve Abū Bakr’s caliphate.

It is interesting to note that paradoxes can be identified inside the Sunnī theory regarding the potential legitimacy of the caliph. Firstly, the *shūrā* did not constitute a viable method of appointing caliphs; rather it was an excuse for rebels and dissidents to challenge the incumbent authority. Secondly, legitimacy with regard to delegating by the previous *imām* was diverted away from the practices of Abū Bakr when he nominated ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as his successor. However, the most successful practice was the method of Mu‘awiyah when he chose his son Yazīd I as his successor.

4.3. *The Requirements of the imām*

4.3.1. *From the tribe of Quraysh*

Although the events following the Prophet's death are central in the dispute between the Sunnīs and Shī'is, it is not certain what exactly occurred. However, it is more than likely that the question of the succession to Muḥammad was a matter of the greatest priority for the Muslim community, even more than the actual burial of the Prophet, since he was not buried until after Abū Bakr had been elected.

However, one should be very careful with the sources relating to that period since all of them invoked one perspective or another.⁵⁷ The assembly at the *saqīfah* (meeting place) of the Banū Sā'īdah, at which Abū Bakr was elected, is the principal key to the birth of the first Islamic state (*al-Khilāfah al-Rāshidah*) after Muḥammad's rule. Ibn 'Abbās⁵⁸ claimed to have heard 'Umar Ibn al-Khattāb saying that after the death of Muḥammad, 'Alī, al-Zubayr and those with them, opposed "us" (i.e., the group associated with Abū Bakr), and gathered at Fātimah's house. The entire Anṣār disagreed with "us", and gathered in the *saqīfah* of the Banū Sā'īdah. The Muhājirūn (i.e., the Qurashī emigrants to Medina) joined Abū Bakr, and 'Umar suggested that they go to their brethren, the Anṣār. The Muhājirūn went to the Anṣār at the *saqīfah* and there was a dialogue between the two groups as to who had the right to rule the Muslim nation. One of the Anṣār stood up and addressed the Muhājirūn: "We are the Helpers (*anṣār Allāh*) and the legion of Islam, and you, the Muhājirūn are a small group (*raḥīt*)⁵⁹ and a few people among you came with the intention of cutting us off from our roots and to usurp this matter [i.e., the rule] from us."

To which Abū Bakr replied by saying: "O group of Anṣār, every virtue you mention of yourselves you are worthy of, yet the Arabs will not recognise the rule of anyone but this tribe of the Quraysh. They are the most central of the Arabs in lineage and

⁵⁷ Robert Gleave, "'Alī Ibn Abī Tālib", in *EF*.

⁵⁸ al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣahīh*, Kitāb al-Ḥudūd, Bāb rajm al-ḥublā idhā uḥśinat, no. 6830. Madelung regards this report from Ibn 'Abbās as the fundamental account of the *Saqīfah* assembly, and sees no reason to doubt the reliability of the chain of transmitters (*the Succession*, 28).

⁵⁹ Madelung mistakenly translates (*raḥīt*) as "The clan of our Prophet" (*the Succession*, 30). In fact this is not correct; the word *raḥīt* means a small group of people. If the Anṣār meant what Madelung thinks, he should have said "You are the *raḥīt* of our Prophet".

abode.” Abū Bakr then nominated either ‘Umar or Abū ‘Ubaydah for election. Although the Anṣār, especially the Khazrajīs, did not accept this suggestion, they became more flexible, and al-Ḥubāb b. al-Mundhir suggested that the Anṣār and the Quraysh should each choose their emir. However, the situation worsened, tempers flared, and voices were raised. It was clear that Muslim unity was threatened, and this dispute would probably lead to a military conflict between the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār. ‘Umar therefore said to Abū Bakr: “Stretch out your hand” and shook his hand as the pledge of allegiance. The Muhājirūn and the Anṣār followed him.

This story seems to suggest that Abū Bakr and the Muhājirūn understood the succession to Muhammad would be in all but its prophetic aspects; this later became known as the office of the Caliphate. On the other hand, the Anṣār and many of the Arab tribes who were involved in the *riddah*, considered that their allegiance to the Prophet expired with his death. Thus, when the Anṣār gathered at the *saqīfah* they were probably discussing how to restore their control over their own city. As indicated by al-Ḥubāb b. al-Mundhir, they were worried that the emigrants from Mecca would usurp their right to rule their city.⁶⁰

However, the Anṣār were not sufficiently convinced by Abū Bakr’s argument, and the situation became tense, until ‘Umar asked Abū Bakr to shake hands as a promise of allegiance. The Muhājirūn and presumably also the Banū ‘Abd al-Ashhal, a clan of the Anṣār, followed him.⁶¹ The following day Abū Bakr received the general oath of loyalty from the people of Madīnah, and his allegiance was secured by the arrival of the Banū Aslam, a branch of Khuzā‘ah, the most strongly connected of the tribes of the Quraysh. According to some reports, they came “in full number such that the streets became narrow through them. They then swore allegiance to Abū Bakr, and ‘Umar said: ‘It was only when I saw the Aslam that I was certain of victory’.”⁶² Even after the general allegiance received by Abū Bakr, some of the Anṣār, led by Sa‘d b. ‘Ubādah, continued to refuse Abū Bakr’s rule. Abū Bakr was advised by Bashīr b. Sa‘d not to press Sa‘d b. ‘Ubādah, since all of Khazraj and Aws would stand in

⁶⁰ Madelung, *The Succession*, 31; Elias Shoufani, *al-Riddah and the Muslim conquest of Arabia*, 51-52.

⁶¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3: 221-22; Madelung, *The Succession*, 33.

⁶² al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3: 222. أن أسلم أقبلت بجماعتها حتى تضيق بهم السكك؛ فبایعوا أبا بكر. فكان عمر يقول: ما أن رأيت

For the great role that was played by Aslam to secure Abū Bakr’s allegiance see: Ju‘ayt, *al-Fitnah*, 36; Madelung, *The Succession*, 34; Zuhayr Hawwārī, *al-Sultah wa-al-mu‘āraḍah fī al-Islam*, 97-100.

solidarity with Ibn ‘Ubādah even if they were to be killed. Abū Bakr took due note,⁶³ but found another way to punish those who refused to give him their allegiance by, among other things, hindering them from claiming their booty (*fay*), as can be found in the poetry of Hassān b. Thābit.⁶⁴

The second group who doubted Abū Bakr’s rule were the Qurashīs, who were gathering around ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib in the house of Fātimah; they came mainly from the Banū Hāshim, the Prophet’s family, including ‘Alī and al-‘Abbās; from the Banū Asad, such as al-Zubayr; and from the wealthiest clan of the Quraysh the Banū ‘Abd Shams, including Abū Sufyān Ibn Ḥarb.⁶⁵ This group represented an alliance between the Prophet’s family (the Banū Hāshim) and the Quraysh aristocracy (such as the Banū ‘Abd Shams, the Banū Asad and others), while Abū Bakr and the Muhājirūn around him were mainly from clans that were less wealthy and lower in numbers, such as the Banū Taym, the Banū ‘Adī (‘Umar), and the Banū al-Naḍr (Abū ‘Ubaydah).⁶⁶

Abū Bakr succeeded in isolating the Banū Hāshim. ‘Umar went to Fātimah’s house and threatened those who were gathering there that he would set it on fire unless they came out and swore allegiance to Abū Bakr. As he left the house, al-Zubayr drew his sword but dropped it and ‘Umar’s men jumped on him and carried him off. This successfully stopped people gathering at Fātimah’s house.⁶⁷ Moreover, Abū Bakr mounted an economic siege of the Banū Hāshim by refusing to give them their inheritance from Muḥammad’s lands in Fadak and Khaybar. Abū Bakr claimed to have heard the Prophet saying: لَا نُورثُ، مَا ترکنا صدقةً “We do not have heirs. Whatever we leave is alms”.⁶⁸ Not only that, but Abū Bakr also succeeded in winning over the Quraysh aristocracy to his side and making them abandon ‘Alī and the Banū Hāshim. He relied on the Quraysh aristocracy for their leadership of the Muslim commanders in his fight against the tribes of the *riddah* and the beginning of the conquests outside Arabia. In particular the richest and most powerful clans, the Banū ‘Abd Shams and

⁶³ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3: 222-23.

⁶⁴ ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah*, 2: 666-76; Madelung, *the Succession*, 35.

⁶⁵ See Ibn ‘Abbās’s report above; and al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3: 209-10; Madelung, *The Succession*, 40-41.

⁶⁶ For the importance and the wealth of the clans of al-Quraysh see: Ḥayāt ‘Amāmū, *Aṣḥāb Muḥammad wa-dawruhum fī nash’at al-Islam*, 88-106.

⁶⁷ Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf*, 7: 432; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3: 202; Madelung, *The Succession*, 43.

⁶⁸ al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Farā’id, Bāb qawl al-Nabī ...: Lā nūrath mā taraknāh ṣadaqah, no. 6726.

the Banū Makhzūm, were given preference.⁶⁹ Abū Bakr's policy was entirely successful; only six months after the Prophet's death his daughter Fātimah died and ‘Alī lost his supporters, who turned away from him.⁷⁰ Subsequently, ‘Alī and the Banū Hāshim pledged allegiance to Abū Bakr.⁷¹

The third group consisted of some of the Arab tribes. In his argument with the Anṣār, Abū Bakr insisted that the Arabs accepted only the rule of the Quraysh. In fact this was not quite accurate, the major part of Arabia rejected Abū Bakr's rule. Some of these tribes had accepted Islam, but considered that their allegiance the Prophet had lapsed on his death and therefore did not accept Abū Bakr's rule, while other tribes left Islam completely. Abū Bakr declared a holy war to destroy them all; both groups were lumped together and labelled as apostates without any distinction between them.

In sum, Abū Bakr was successful in imposing the rule of the Quraysh over the Anṣār and the Arab tribes. A noteworthy point in Abū Bakr's argument with the Anṣār was his emphasis on the Quraysh's excellence over other Arabs; they were “the most central of the Arabs in lineage and abode.” Among the Quraysh itself, the supremacy of the Prophet's blood relatives was superseded by that of his religious relatives (i.e., the Muḥājirūn), “They were the only kinsmen that the Prophet had left after cutting his ties with Mecca (where many genealogically closer relatives of his remained), and they were the men with whom he had come to Madīnah.”⁷² Therefore the caliph had to be chosen from within this group.

After Abū Bakr's reign, the rule of the Quraysh was not in doubt; yet the Shī‘is restricted it to some Qurashīs who were from the Prophet's family. Other Muslims, except the *Khārijīs* and some *Mu‘tazilīs*, accepted the principle of the rule of the Quraysh. Mālik b. Hubayrah al-Sakūnī, a Syrian chief, claimed that they could easily replace Mu‘awiyah with someone of his tribe (*fī qawmihi*).⁷³ The same individual

⁶⁹ When Abū Bakr became a caliph, Abū Sufyān was angry and assaulted Abū Bakr, claiming that the caliphate should be in the Banū Manāf only (this clan includes the Banū Hāshim and the Banū ‘Abd Shams). But when he was told “He has appointed your son [as a leader of the army]”, Abū Sufyān changed his position completely; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3: 209. Also see: Shoufani, *al-Riddah*, 61-64; Madelung, *The Succession*, 45.

⁷⁰ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3: 208; al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, Bāb Ghazwat Khaybar, nos. 4240, 4241. وَكَانَ لِعَلِيٍّ مِنَ النَّاسِ وَجْهٌ حَيَا فَاطِمَةُ، فَلَمَّا تَوَفَّتْ اسْتَنَكَ عَلِيٌّ وَجْهَ النَّاسِ، فَالْتَّمَسَ مَصَالِحَةً أَبِي بَكْرٍ وَمَبَارِعَتَهُ.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Crone, *God's Rule*, 38.

⁷³ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5: 278.

warned Marwān b. al-Hakam to accept his requirements or he and his tribe would change him since all the people of the Quraysh were the same at his tribe.⁷⁴ In 77/696 the *Khārijīs* offered to ally themselves with Muṭarrif b. al-Mughīrah in fighting the oppressors (i.e., the Umayyad), but the proposal was declined as Muṭarrif insisted on restricting the caliphate to the Quraysh.⁷⁵

The *Khārijīs* were known for not limiting the caliphate to the Quraysh. In fact, they believed that any free male adult Muslim was eligible for the caliphate, and that it did not matter whether or not they were from the Quraysh, or whether or not they were Arab (some *Khārijīs* limited the caliphate to the Arabs only).⁷⁶ Indeed, this was a famous Kharijī doctrine; and was without limits after it had been formulated.

However, it is evident that by the late Umayyad and early ‘Abbāsid periods some *Qadarī-Murjiīs*, such as Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (killed. 125/744),⁷⁷ and *Mu’tazilīs* believed that all Muslims were eligible for the caliphate. Furthermore, some *Mu’tazilīs* limited the caliphate to the Arabs only; others restricted it to the Quraysh.⁷⁸ Despite the fact that the ‘Abbāsids gave their revolution the title of *al-Riḍā min Āl Muḥammad* (i.e., someone from Muḥammad’s family who is acceptable and agreed on),⁷⁹ they came, overtime, closer to the Sunnī idea of the right of the Quraysh to rule, in order to refute the claim of their cousins, the ‘Alīds, that they were worthier of the caliphate because they were the sons of Fāṭimah (the Prophet’s daughter).⁸⁰

By the late second and early third A.H./eighth and ninth centuries, the Sunnīs, both rationalists and traditionalists and including Abū Ḥanīfah,⁸¹ Mālik,⁸² and al-Shāfi‘ī,⁸³ were unanimous that the caliphate was a sole right of the Quraysh.

⁷⁴ ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas‘ūdī, *Muṛūj al-dhahab wa-ma‘ādin al-jawhar*, 5: 200-1, فو الله ما قریش عندنا إلا سوء

⁷⁵ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 6: 286-88.

⁷⁶ See their debate with Muṭarrif b. al-Mughīrah in ibid, 6: 288; Patricia Crone, “Even an Ethiopian slave’ the transformation of a Sunnī tradition”.

⁷⁷ Josef Van Ess, “Ghaylān al-Dimashqī: the isolation of a heretic in Islamic historiography”, 172.

⁷⁸ Probably the majority of early *Mu’tazilīs* did not require the caliph to be from the tribe of the Quraysh; yet the majority of later *Mu’tazilīs* did require him to be from the Quraysh. See: Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, 4: 152; Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Sharafī, *Sharḥ ṣudūr al-nās bi-sharḥ al-Asās*, fol. 429 (MS); Saud al-Sarhan, *Arbāb al-Kalām: Ibn Hazm yujādīf’ al-Mu’tazilah*, 350-52.

⁷⁹ For the meaning of this slogan, see: Patricia Crone, “On the meaning of the ‘Abbāsid call to *al-Riḍā*”, 89-94.

⁸⁰ Van Ess, “Political ideas”, 159.

⁸¹ Al-Nashi’ al-Akbar (attrib.), *Masā’il al-imāmah*, 62

Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal defended this doctrine and insisted that the caliphs must be from the Quraysh and could not be from the *mawālī*.⁸⁴ In Creed I, Aḥmad is claimed to have said, والخلافة في قريش ما بقي من الناس إثنان ليس لأحد من الناس أن يناظر عهتم فيها ولا يخرج عليهم“ ولا يقر لغيرهم بها إلى قيام الساعة” “The caliphate is in the Quraysh so long as two people remain [alive]. It is not [right] for any people to contend with them about it, nor to rebel against them, nor to acknowledge the caliphate of any other than [the Quraysh] until the coming of the Hour.”⁸⁵

4.3.2. Why the Quraysh?

In his speech at the *saqīfah*, Abū Bakr argued for the right of the Quraysh to rule since the Arabs would not recognise the rule of anyone but this tribe. Two points arise with regard to his argument. The first is that it was not built on the supremacy of the tribe of the Quraysh because it was the Prophet’s tribe, nor on a *nass* from the Prophet as Abū Bakr claimed in connection with the matter of the Prophet’s heritage. The second and more interesting point is that the Arabs did not accept the rule of the Quraysh.

However, since the Umayyad era and later, a considerable number of traditions took shape with regard to the position of the tribe of Quraysh and its rule. Some traditions favoured the Quraysh, limiting the caliphate to them, and regarding them above other people. These traditions were challenged by other traditions from the opposing side, accusing some young boys of the Quraysh of destroying the religion (i.e., Islam), or threatening and cursing them if they were not just or allow people to rebel against them if they were unjust.⁸⁶

Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal was well aware of all of these traditions. Although he relied on traditions for recognising the supremacy of the Quraysh, he rejected some that he thought were not sound. The following points present Aḥmad’s evaluation of the dignity of the Quraysh and the traditions against them:

⁸² Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 4: 153; Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfi, *al-Dhakhīrah*, 13: 233-34.

⁸³ Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm*, 2: 309-13.

⁸⁴ Al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 94-97; Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Aḥkām*, 20.

⁸⁵ Translated in: Watt, *Islamic Creeds*, 34.

⁸⁶ See: ‘Abd Allāh al-Dumayjī, *al-Imāmah al-‘uzmā*, 285-87.

A. Retracting the caliphate in the Quraysh

Aḥmad restricted the caliphate to the Quraysh, relying on the traditions which stated that الخلافة في قريش “The Imāms are [only] from the Quraysh”, or that لا يكون في غير قريش خليفة “The Caliphate is [merely] in the Quraysh”.⁸⁷ Aḥmad also stated that One who is not from the Quraysh cannot be a caliph”.⁸⁸

B. A preference for the Quraysh over other people

Aḥmad considered the world as a hierarchy; the Quraysh were above other Muslims, then the Arabs were above non-Arabs but below the Qurashīs, and finally all other Muslims. This view can be illustrated by his juridical opinion of equality (*kafā'ah*) as a requirement for a valid marriage.⁸⁹

i. *The Banū Hāshim*

Some reports were narrated from Aḥmad stating that the Banū Hāshim, the Prophet’s clan, was above all other Muslims, even those of the Quraysh. ‘Abd Allāh is claimed من أفضل الناس بعد رسول الله...؟ قال: أبو بكر. قلت: يا أبتي ثم من؟ قال: عمر. قلت: يا أبتي ثم من؟ قال عثمان. قلت: يا أبتي فعلي؟ قال: يابني، علي من أهل بيتي لا يُفاس بهم أحد “Who is the best among people after the Prophet...?” Aḥmad said “Abū Bakr”. ‘Abd Allāh said “My father! Then who is next?” Aḥmad answered “Umar”. ‘Abd Allāh asked again “My father! Then who comes next?” Aḥmad answered “Uthmān”. ‘Abd Allāh said “My father! What about ‘Alī?” Aḥmad then said “Son! ‘Alī is of the people of a house whom no one can be compared.”⁹⁰ In another report, ‘Abd Allāh asked his father about Ibn ‘Umar’s tradition that when the Companions discussed their preferences among themselves, they named Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān. ‘Abd Allāh asked in surprise, “Where is ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib?” His father said “Son! He

⁸⁷ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 94-7. Although Aḥmad criticised some chains of transmission of the tradition “The Imāms are [only] from Quraysh”, in general he accepted it. See: Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Muntakhab*, 195, and al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 96.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 1: 96.

⁸⁹ For the *kafā'ah* in Islamic law see: Farhat Ziadeh, “Equality (*kafā'ah*) in the Muslim law of marriage”. For *kafā'ah* in the Ḥanbalī school, see: Spectorsky, *Chapters*, 14-16; Nimrod Hurvitz, “(Review) Ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad *Chapters on Marriage and Divorce: Responses of Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Rāhwayh* trans. Susan Spectorsky”; idem, *The Formation*, 31-33.

⁹⁰ Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Riwāyatayn wa-al-wajhayn*, 2: 93.

did not say ‘From the Prophet’s house’ thus he [Ibn ‘Umar] did not include him [‘Alī].”⁹¹

These two reports probably appeared in the fifth A.H./eleventh century in order to adjust Ahmād’s position to be more friendly to ‘Alī. As has been shown above, the majority of Ahmād’s pupils, including his son ‘Abd Allāh, considered that the best of the Companions was Abū Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthmān. Moreover, Ahmād was fully aware of marriages between the Banū Hāshim and other Qurashīs, and stated that the people from the Quraysh were equal to each other.⁹²

ii. The Quraysh

Ahmād recognised the dignity of the Qurashīs above that of all other Arabs, but they were equal to each other. He was asked, هل يزوج العربي القرشية؟ قال: لا. قيل: فإن تزوج؟ قال: لا. قيل: فإنها بنتها؟ قال: يفرق فيما بينهما. وقال: الأفاء: قريش لقریش، والعرب للعرب “Does [it allow] a [male] Arab to marry a [female] Qurashī?” Ahmād answered “No!” He was asked again, “So, if he did marry [her]?” He replied, “They [must be] separated.” Ahmād then insisted “As for equality: the Quraysh are for the Quraysh, and the Arabs [equal] the Arabs”.⁹³

The matter was worse, according to Ahmād, if a client (*mawla*) married a Hāshimī woman. He said disapprovingly, يجيء رجل أسلم أبوه بالأمس فيزوج بهاشمية، يقول: أنا لها كفء! “A man, whose father just converted to Islam yesterday, marries a Hāshimī woman and says ‘I am equal to her!’” Abū Dāwūd reminded Ahmād that the Prophet had ordered Fātimah bt. Qays, a divorced Qurashī, to marry his free man Usāmah b. Zayd b. Hārithah, which meant that the Prophet had allowed a *mawlā* to marry a Hāshimī woman. Ahmād answered by pointing out that Usāmah was an Arab man but then he [his father] had become a slave.⁹⁴ However, even with Ahmād’s explanation, Usāmah

⁹¹ سأله أبي عن حديث ابن عمر: كنا إذا فاضلنا بين أصحاب رسول الله ... قلنا: أبو بكر وعمر وعثمان. قال: هو كما قال. قلت: فإن علي بن أبي طالب؟ قال: يابني، لم يقل من أهل بيته رسول الله، فلذلك لم يذكره

⁹² Şâlih, *Masā'il*, 194.

⁹³ Ibid. For other reports from Ahmād to support this idea, see: Abū Ya'la al-Farrā', *al-Riwayatayn wa-al-wajhayn*, 2: 93.

⁹⁴ Abū Dāwūd, *Masā'il*, 227. This is Ahmād’s answer to his student Abū Tālib who asked him about Usāmah’s marriage to Fātimah bt. Qays. Abū Ya'la al-Farrā', *al-Riwayatayn wa-al-wajhayn*, 2: 94.

remained a non-Qurashī and unequal to a Qurashī woman according to Ahmād's doctrine.

Equality in marriage is not the only way Ahmād showed his high esteem for the Quraysh. His son ‘Abd Allāh noticed that when an older man or a young man from the Quraysh or other nobilities came to visit his father at his mosque, Ahmād did not step out of the door before them; rather they went out before him.⁹⁵ Abū Dāwūd witnessed that a son of Muṣṭab al-Zubayrī (a Qurashī) had visited Ahmād at the mosque, and when they were about to leave, Ahmād said to him “You are first.” The man refused and swore that Ahmād must go first. Then Ahmād walked before him.⁹⁶ This respect for the Quraysh was derived from traditions attributed to the Prophet. One example of such a tradition in Ahmād's *al-Musnad* that he reported from ‘Ubayd Allāh b. ‘Amr b. Mūsā was the following:

كنت عند سليمان بن علي ...؛ فدخل شيخ من قريش؛ فقال سليمان: انظر إلى الشيخ فأقعده مقعداً صالحًا فان لقريش حقاً. فقلت: أيها الأمير، لا أحدثك حديثاً بلغني عن رسول الله ...؟ قال: بلـي. قال: قلت له: بلغني أن رسول الله ... قال: من أهان قريشاً أهانه الله. قال: سبحان الله ما أحسن هذا، من حدثك هذا؟ قال: قلت: حدثنيه ربعة بن أبي عبد الرحمن، عن سعيد بن المسيب، عن عمرو بن عثمان بن عفان، ... قال: قال لي أبي: يا بني إن وليت من أمر الناس شيئاً، فأكرم قريشاً، فاني سمعت رسول الله ... يقول: من أهان قريشاً أهانه الله

I was with Sulaymān b. ‘Alī [the uncle of the caliph al-Manṣūr] ... when an elder of the Quraysh entered. Sulaymān said “Treat this elder with respect and seat him where it befits [a man of his rank to sit], for the Quraysh have a right [to be so honoured]”. I said “O Amīr, may I relate to you a tradition which has reached me from the Prophet of God?” “Indeed”, he said. I said “It has reached me that the Prophet of God said ‘He who despises the Quraysh is despised by God’.” He said “God be praised! How wonderful is this [hadīth]! Who reported it to you?” I said “Rabī‘ah b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān reported it to me from Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab from ‘Amr b. ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān [from his father, who heard it from the Prophet].”⁹⁷

iii. The Arabs

In Creed I (attributed to Ahmād) it was said that

⁹⁵ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-ādāb al-rāwī wa-akhlāq al-sāmi‘*, 1: 546-47; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Qal‘a‘ abd allāh: Rāyit abī iñā ja‘e al-shaykh aū hadīth mān qari‘ish aū ibrīhām mān al-aṣrāf la yakhrij min bāb al-masjid hātī Manāqib*, 370. يخرجهم، فيكونوا هم يتقدمونه، ثم يخرج بعدهم.

⁹⁶ Abū Dāwūd, *Masa‘il*, 377. رأيت أَحْمَدَ جَاءَهُ ابْنُ مَصْبَعَ الزَّبِيرِيِّ، فَأَرَادَ أَحْمَدٌ أَنْ يَخْرُجَ مِنَ الْمَسْجِدِ فَقَالَ لَابْنِ مَصْبَعٍ: تَقْدِمْ. فَأَبَى وَحَلَفَ لَابْنِ مَصْبَعٍ. فَتَقْدِمَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنَ يَدِيهِ فِي الْمَشِيِّ

⁹⁷ Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 1: 64. Translated in: Zaman, *Religion*, 123.

ويعرف للعرب حقها وفضلها وسابقتها، ويحبهم لحديث رسول الله، قال: (حُبُّهم إيمان، وبغضهم نفاق)، ولا يقول بقول الشعوبية وأراذل الموالى، الذين لا يحبون العرب، ولا يقررون لهم بفضل، فإن لهم بدعة ونفاقاً وخلافاً

[The true believer] recognises that the Arabs have rights and excellence and precedence, and he loves them. [This is based] on a hadīth from the Messenger of God. He said “We love them in faith, and hate them in hypocrisy.” We do not follow the view of the Shu‘ubīyah, or the corrupt clients who do not confess their excellence. Such [persons] are innovators, hypocrites and opponents.⁹⁸

As has been shown above, this creed is probably not Ahmād’s words; it was the creed of Ḥarb al-Kirmānī, who aimed to summarise the articles of faith of the traditionalists in the third A.H./ninth century. After declaring this article, Ḥarb listed six traditions from the Prophet in favour of the Arabs,⁹⁹ and three traditions in favour of the clients.¹⁰⁰

Ahmād, as may be expected, regarded the clients to be below the Arabs, and thus the client man was not equal for marrying an Arab woman. All the reports we have from Ahmād agree on this. However, what happened if a client man did get married to an Arab woman? Both Ḥarb and Ibn Hāni’ narrated that they must be separated.¹⁰¹ However, when Abū Dāwūd asked him about this matter, he did not give an answer.¹⁰²

The point worth noting here is that while Ahmād was an Arab and believed in the excellence of the Arabs above other people, he was a humble man and did not show off. His son Ṣalīḥ wrote down his lineage from Dūhl b. Shaybān. When Ahmād saw this he acknowledged it, but queried, “وَمَا يصْنَعُ هَذَا النَّسْبُ؟” “What does this lineage do?”¹⁰³ According to his client friend, the famous traditionalist Yāḥyā b. Ma‘īn, Ahmād would never stand on his dignity in front of his client’s companions.¹⁰⁴ Another client traditionalist, hearing that Ahmād was an Arab, asked him about this,

⁹⁸ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 64. Translated in: Watt, *Islamic creeds*, 38-39.

⁹⁹ Ḥarb, *Masā'il*, 442-43.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 444.

¹⁰¹ Ḥarb, *Masā'il*, 38; Ibn Hāni’, *Masā'il*, 204.

¹⁰² Abū Dāwūd, *Masā'il*, 226.

¹⁰³ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 5: 256.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 5: 257. There are other reports with the same meaning. See: *Ibid.*, 5: 257-58. ما افتخر علينا قط. بالعربية ولا ذكرها. And see: Hurvitz, *the Formation*, 28-29.

but Ahmād did not answer. When he insisted, Ahmād said, “We are poor people.”¹⁰⁵

C. Criticising the Quraysh and fighting them

Not all traditions were favourable to the Quraysh; there were also some anti-Quraysh traditions in circulation during the late Umayyad and the early ‘Abbāsīd periods.¹⁰⁶ One of these traditions was, فَإِنْ لَمْ يُسْتَقِيمُوا لَكُمْ فَلَا يُفْعَمُوكُمْ عَلَىٰ “Obey the Quraysh while they are even-handed to you. If they are not, put your swords on your shoulders and annihilate them.” Ahmād rejected the authority of this tradition and said it was “غير صحيح، منكر” “Not sound; it is denounced”.¹⁰⁷ One of Ahmād’s reasons for rejecting this tradition was that allowing people to fight the Quraysh [i.e., the rulers] was in direct contradiction with other traditions supporting the view of political quietism.¹⁰⁸

Another example is that Ahmād was asked about a tradition in which the Prophet said هَلَّا كَمْ أَمْتَى عَلَىٰ يَدِي أَغْيَلَةٌ مِّنْ قَرِيشٍ “The destruction of my community will be at the hands of the youths of the Quraysh”. Ahmād said “It is a well-known (*ma’rūf* [tradition])”,¹⁰⁹ but presumably he altered his view of this tradition. According to his son ‘Abd Allāh, when his father was on his death bed, he asked ‘Abd Allāh to cross out this tradition since it contradicted other traditions that favoured political quietism.¹¹⁰ Clearly, Ahmād understood the traditions criticising the Quraysh as supporting revolutionary ideas. Al-Marrūdhī narrated from Ahmād that he sharply criticised the late tradition as, حَدِيثٌ رَدِيءٌ، يَحْتَجُ بِهِ الْمَعْتَزِلَةُ فِي تَرْكِ الْجَمَعَةِ “A bad tradition, invoked by the *Mu’tazilīs* to abjure the Friday prayer [with the rulers].”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 367; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 5: 258. Hurvitz (*The Formation*, 28) mistakenly, understands it as being from a poor family (i.e., poverty). However, it is clear that Ahmād only showed humbleness.

¹⁰⁶ Zaman, *Religion*, 122.

¹⁰⁷ al-Khallāl, *Sunnah*, 1: 127-28; Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Muntakhab*, 160-63.

¹⁰⁸ al-Khallāl, *Sunnah*, 1: 128-29.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Muntakhab*, 160.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 162. قال أبي في مرضه الذي مات فيه: اضرب على هذا الحديث؛ فإنه خلاف الأحاديث عن النبي.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

4.3.3. Conclusion

Aḥmad based his doctrine on the supremacy of the Quraysh and on restricting the caliphate to them with regard to the Sunnah (traditions). However, he had to reject some traditions that were used by *Mu'tazilīs* and other sects to abjure Friday prayers with the rulers, since such action threatened the unity of the Muslim community (the *Jamā'ah*).

Considering the caliphate as a sole right of the Quraysh demonstrated the views of Sunnī theologians up to the fifth A.H./eleventh century when the caliphs weakened and were controlled by emirs or sultans who were not the Qurashīs and indeed were not even Arabs. In the eleventh century the Sunnī doctrine began to change. One can find three different positions emanating from the famous *Ash'arī* theologian, Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwainī (d. 478/1085), concerning this issue. The first position can be found in his book *Luma' al-adillah* where he bases the Quraysh's right to the caliphate on a tradition that is the same as Aḥmad's position. However, in his book *Ghiyāth al-umam*, while he supports the notion that the caliphs had to be only from the Quraysh, he bases this view on consensus and not the traditions because they were reports of *āḥād* (solitary traditions) not *mutawātir* (recurrent traditions).¹¹² However, in his third book, *al-Irshād* he does not make membership of the Quraysh obligatory for the caliphate.¹¹³ And although the caliphate of the Quraysh weakened and eventually disappeared, Sunnī jurisprudence continued to support it in theory, despite its removal from their real life. Indeed, some modern Sunnī scholars have re-evaluated this requirement.

¹¹² al-Juwainī, *Ghiyāth*, 62-4; Hallaq, "the Political thought of Juwayni", 38-39.

¹¹³ al-Juwainī, *al-Irshād ilā qawāṭī' al-adillah fī uṣūl al-i'tiqād*, 426-27; A. K. S. Lambton, *State and government in medieval Islam*, 106.

Chapter V

Political Quietism

5.1. Introduction

Scholars note that political quietism lies at the heart of Sunnī political doctrine and particularly that of the Ḥanbalīs.¹ This chapter will argue for two conclusions: a) that both activism and quietism were trends among the people of the Sunnah, and it was thanks to Aḥmad that quietism became the formal doctrine of the Sunnīs; and b) the concept of the *Jamā‘ah* led to the formulation of the doctrines both of obedience and political quietism. This chapter examines the development of these doctrines and their importance within early Hanbalism.

5.2. The *Jamā‘ah*

The idea of conforming to the Muslim community (*luzūm jamā‘at al-Muslimīn*) is of critical importance in understanding the Sunnī school as a whole. It goes back to the early time of Islam, probably to the beginning of the Umayyad period after the first civil war (i.e., *the Fitnah*) when al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī made the treaty with Mu‘āwiyah in 41/661, thereby restoring Muslim unity under the rule of Mu‘āwiyah. Because of the importance of this event, this year became known as the Year of the Community (*Ām al-Jamā‘ah*).²

The impact of the *Fitnah* on the Muslim collective consciousness was great, since this was the first time that the Muslim community had been divided and that Muslims had fought and killed each other. The unfortunate consequences of the first and second civil wars led a large number of Muslims to believe that الجماعة رحمة والفرقة عذاب “Community is mercy and dividing is torment”,³ a phrase attributed to the Prophet in

¹ Michael Cook, “Activism and Quietism in Islam”, 22; Crone, *God’s rule*, 135-39; Zaman, *Religion, 73*

² Abū Zur‘ah al-Dimashqī, *Tārīkh*, 1: 190; Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf*, 10: 355; Khalīfah b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh*, 203; ‘Amr b. Bahr al-Jāhiz, “Risālah fī al-Nābitah”, 1: 10-12.

³ Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnād*, 4: 278.

a tradition. Hence, it is a Muslim's duty to restore the *Jamā'ah*, and this cannot be achieved without an *imām* around whom all Muslims gather. The Umayyad caliphs insisted on the importance of conforming to the Muslim community and this was always associated with the call of obedience to the caliphs (*al-tā'ah*).⁴

Riḍwān al-Sayyid duly noted this Syrian influence on the traditions and quotations outlining the *Jamā'ah* and the *tā'ah*, as attributed to the Prophet and his Companions,⁵ but it becomes evident that later on this doctrine was largely accepted in Iraq and Khurāsān, especially after the rebellion of Ibn al-Ash'ath (81-3/699-701). Thābit b. 'Ajlān (d. ?), a Syrian Successor, moved to Bāb al-Abwāb, the capital city of Dagestan, and while there claimed that "I met with Anas b. Mālik, Ibn al-Musayyab, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Sa'īd b. Jubayr, al-Sha'bī, Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, 'Atā' Ibn Abī Rabāḥ, Tāwūs, Mujāhid, 'Abd Allāh Ibn Abī Mulaykah, al-Zuhrī, Makhlūf, al-Qāsim Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān, 'Atā' al-Khurāsānī, Thābit al-Bunānī, al-Ḥakam b. 'Utbah, Ayyūb al-Sukhiyānī, Ḥammād, Muḥammad b. Sīrīn, Abū 'Āmir ... , Yazīd al-Raqāshī and Sulaymān b. Mūsā; all of them ordered me to [follow] the community"^[6] and to avoid the people of prejudice."⁷ Presumably, by naming all of these outstanding figures of the *Salaf*, Ibn 'Ajlān intended to claim that following the *Jamā'ah* was the formal doctrine of the Successors and their adherents, to which the people of the Sunnah should stick. However, it is evident that some of the individuals he named, such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, al-Sha'bī and Sa'īd b. Jubayr, were among about five hundred of the *qurrā'* who fought alongside Ibn al-Ash'ath in his revolt;⁸ therefore they were not true political quietists as Ibn 'Ajlān had stated.

However, some traditionalists formulate these two doctrines (the *Jamā'ah* and the *tā'ah*) as orthodox Islamic doctrines, and regard these two principles as being on a par with praying and belief. It was narrated that 'Atā' al-Khurāsānī, who lived in Palestine (d. 135/753), said: "ثلاث لا تنفع اشتتان دون الثالثة: الإيمان والصلوة والجماعة" ("Three [principles],

⁴ Riḍwān al-Sayyid, "al-Khilāfah wa-al-mulk: dirāsah fī al-ru'yah al-Umawīyah lil-sultāh", 90-97.

⁵ al-Sayyid, "al-Khilāfah wa-al-mulk"; idem, "al-Kātib wa-al-sultān: dirāsah fī zūhūr kātib al-dīwān fī al-dawlah al-Islāmiyah", 135-38; idem, "al-Jihad wa-al-Jamā'ah", 218-23.

⁶ Ibn 'Asākir's version of this saying is "to pray in congregation". Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārikh Dimashq*, 10: 133-34.

⁷ al-Lālakā'ī, *Sharh uṣūl i'tiqād*, 1: 132-33.

⁸ Khalīfah b. Khayyāt, *Tārikh*, 216-22.

two [of them] do not work without the third: belief, praying and *Jamā'ah*.⁹ Another Syrian traditionalist, al-Awzā'ī stated: كَانَ يُقَالُ خَمْسٌ كَانَ عَلَيْهَا أَصْحَابُ مُحَمَّدٍ... وَالتابعُونَ“ It was said, five [principles were observed regularly] by the Companions of Muhammad... and the honourable Successors [*al-Tābi'ūn bi-iḥsān*]: conforming to the community, following the Sunnah, building mosques, reciting Qur'ān and [performing] the jihād in following God's way.”¹⁰

In addition, traditions attributed to the Prophet during the Umayyad period appeared to support the *Jamā'ah* and the *tā'ah*. One of these traditions held that the Prophet was claimed to have said: أَنَا أَمْرَكُمْ بِخَمْسٍ كَلِمَاتٍ أَمْرَنِي اللَّهُ بِهِنْ: السَّمْعُ، وَالطَّاعَةُ، وَالجَمَاعَةُ، وَالهِجْرَةُ، وَالجَهَادُ“ I command you to [obey] five words that God commanded of me: listening, obedience, community, emigration and jihād.”¹¹ Other traditions warned people against dividing the community and disobeying the rulers. In one tradition, the Prophet was claimed to have said: “مَنْ خَرَجَ مِنَ الطَّاعَةِ وَفَارَقَ الْجَمَاعَةَ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً“ One who rebels against obedience and leaves the community will die the death of one who died in the days of ignorance.”¹² Another tradition said that: ثَلَاثَةٌ لَا تَسْأَلُ عَنْهُمْ، رَجُلٌ فَارَقَ الْجَمَاعَةَ وَعَصَى إِمَامَهُ وَمَاتَ آثَمًا“ Do not ask about three [people]: one who has left the community, disobeyed his *imām* and died in sin.”¹³

The Khurāṣānian traditionalist, Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), wrote a very important poem on the principal beliefs of traditionalists. In one of his verses he indicated that إِنَّ الْجَمَاعَةَ حِبْلَ اللَّهِ فَاعْتَصِمُوا... مِنْهُ بِعِرْوَتِهِ الْوَثْقَى لِمَنْ دَانَا“ The community is God's rope, thus hold fast to its strongest bond.”¹⁴ Although the *Jamā'ah* is not a Qur'ānic term, Ibn al-Mubārak cited two Qur'ānic terms to describe its importance. The first is “God's rope” (*habl' Allāh*), which is derived from the verse: [You shall hold fast to the rope of God, all of you, and do not be divided] (3: 103). The second term is “the strongest bond” (*al-'urwah al-wuthqā*), which was used twice in the Qur'ān. Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal

⁹ Ibn Bāttah, *al-Ibānah*, 1: 323.

¹⁰ Ibid. 1: 64.

¹¹ Ibn Abī 'Āsim, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 703.

¹² Muslim, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣahīḥ*, Kitāb al-imārah, no. 1848

¹³ Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnād*, 5: 275; Ibn Abī 'Āsim, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 715.

¹⁴ Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 32: 451.

followed this doctrine; he strongly encouraged people to observe Sunnah, *Jamā'ah*, listening (*sam'*), and obedience.¹⁵

It is obvious that for the people who believed in the *Jamā'ah* and the *tā'ah*, preserving Muslim unity was more important than insuring that the rulers were just. Thus, in terms of lives, property and safety, obedience to unjust rulers was a lesser evil than internal fighting for the community.¹⁶

This was probably the first use of the concept *Jamā'ah* in the political arena, in which the leaders of the *Jamā'ah* were only the caliphs. However, the *Jamā'ah* was also applied in religious fields, in theology and jurisprudence, and its leaders were the '*ulamā'*? This second use may go back to the late Umayyad period when the religious scholars (i.e., the '*ulamā'*) became an identified class and regarded themselves as a part of the *ulī al-amr* establishment. In the Qur'ānic verse: [O ye who believe! Obey God, obey the Messenger, and those in command among you], the phrase "Those in command among you" was interpreted to cover both the rulers and the scholars (*al-umarā' wa-al-*ulamā'**). In the jurisprudential use of the *Jamā'ah*, al-Shāfi'i derived the authority of consensus (*ijmā'*) from the authority of the *Jamā'ah*. He stated that the command to conform to the Muslim community meant following and obeying the community in both permission and prohibition (*tahlīl wa-tahrīm*).

When Muslims reach a consensus on a legal issue it is impossible for them to omit evidence from the Book, the Sunnah or analogical deduction, but in the case of disagreement, there is the possibility of missing this evidence.¹⁷ This means that a person who follows the *Jamā'ah* must obey the '*ulamā'*, since they know the shari'ah law and are able to distinguish the permitted from the forbidden (*al-halāl min al-harām*).¹⁸ For this reason, many scholars define the *Jamā'ah* as equating to the '*ulamā'*.¹⁹ Therefore, obedience to rulers is limited to politics, but in religion, authority comes from the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Al-Shāfi'i stated that believers were ordered to obey those in authority, the ones whom the Prophet appointed, within a

¹⁵ Al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 73-75.

¹⁶ Crone, *God's rule*, 135.

¹⁷ al-Shāfi'i, *al-Risālah*, 475-76.

¹⁸ Ahmad b. 'Alī al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 3: 177-78.

¹⁹ al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-sahīḥ*, Kitāb al-i'tiṣām bi-al-kitāb wa-al-Sunnah, Bāb qawlihi ta'ālā: {wa kadhālik ja'lnākum ummat^{an} wasatā}.

conditional but not absolute obedience. Thus, if they disagreed with their rulers, both parties were subject to submitting their dispute to what God and the Prophet had said (i.e., the Qur'ān and the Sunnah).²⁰

For the traditionalists, the Companions were the root of their understanding of the *Jamā'ah*, since they represented the coherent Muslim community. They lived and practised the first *Jamā'ah*, in political as well as in religious terms, during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad and his caliphs, when all Muslims lived as one community until the murder of 'Uthmān. At this point, the community became divided and the *Jamā'ah* was replaced with the *Fitnah*. The division between Muslims at the time of the *Fitnah* was due not simply to politics, but to also religion. It began when the sects (*fīraq*) first appeared with the *Khārijīs* and the *Shī'īs*, and thereafter never stopped.²¹ However, Mu'āwiyah was successful in restoring the Muslim community in politics, though not in religion, and thus, until the murder of 'Uthmān, the Companions were the model of the *Jamā'ah* for the traditionalists in both politics and religion.²²

5.3. *Al-Tā'ah* (Obedience)

The question of the extent of the obedience owed to rulers was important in early Islamic thought. Should obedience to a ruler include both religious and political matters? Or was it required in politics only? What if the ruler's orders contradicted the shari'ah rules?

The Umayyad caliphs asked people for unconditional obedience, and this was probably the view accepted by the people of Syria. The Madīnan Sulaymān b. Yasār stated that the people of Syria emphasised the concepts of obedience and *jihād*, while the people of Iraq were merely sceptical and pedantic, asking vague questions such as: "How does that happen?" and "How is that?"²³ It is obvious that Sulaymān b. Yasār favoured the Syrians over the Iraqis. This unconditional obedience was called at that

²⁰ al-Shāfi'i, *al-Risālah*, 79-82.

²¹ al-Barbahārī (attrib.), *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, 67.

²² Ibid., 97.

²³ Ya'qūb b. Sufyān al-Fasawī, *al-Ma'rifah wa-al-tārīkh*, 2: 372. لو أنزل أخوان من حصن، فسكن أحدهما الشام، ثم لقيت الشامي، لوجته يذكر الطاعة وأمر الطاعة والجهاد، ولو لقيت الآخر؛ لوجته يسأل عن الشبهة؛ يقول: وسكن الآخر العراق، ثم لقيت الشامي، لوجته يذكر الطاعة وأمر الطاعة والجهاد، ولو لقيت الآخر؛ لوجته يسأل عن الشبهة؛ يقول: كيف شيء كذا وكذا؟ وكيف الأمر في كذا وكذا؟

time a Syrian Obedience (*Tā'ah Shāmīyah*).²⁴ The Syrian Successor, who was the *muftī* of Damascus at his time, Sulaymān b. Mūsā (d. 119/737) claimed that the perfect man is someone who combines the Ḥijāzī knowledge, the Iraqi behaviour and the Shāmī obedience.²⁵ A Ḥimṣī tradition supported this unconditional obedience: even when one's obedience contravened the Sharī'ah, people should obey their rulers and God would forgive their sins. The Prophet is said to have stated:

أطِيعُوا أَمْرَاءَكُمْ مَهْمَا كَانَ فَإِنْ أَمْرُوكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مَا لَمْ آتَكُمْ بِهِ فَهُوَ عَلَيْهِمْ، وَأَنْتُمْ مِنْهُ بَرَاءُ، وَأَنْ أَمْرُوكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مَا جَنَّتُكُمْ بِهِ، فَإِنَّهُمْ يَؤْجُرُونَ عَلَيْهِ وَتَؤْجِرُونَ عَلَيْهِ، وَذَلِكَ بِأَنَّكُمْ إِذَا لَقِيتُمْ رِبَّكُمْ قَاتِلُمْ: رَبُّنَا لَا ظُلْمٌ، فَيَقُولُونَ: لَا ظُلْمٌ. فَيَقُولُونَ: رَبُّنَا أَرْسَلَنَا إِلَيْنَا رَسُولاً، فَاطَّعُنَاهُمْ، وَاسْتَخْلَفْتُ عَلَيْنَا خَلْفَاءَ فَاطَّعُنَاهُمْ وَأَمْرَتُ عَلَيْنَا أَمْرَاءَ فَاطَّعُنَاهُمْ، فَيَقُولُونَ: صَدِقْتُمْ، وَهُوَ عَلَيْهِمْ، وَأَنْتُمْ مِنْهُ بَرَاءُ

Obey your rulers whatever happens. If they command you [to do] something which I did not bring to you [in the Sharī'ah], [the sin] is on them and you are blameless. And if they command you [to do] something that I brought to you [in the Sharī'ah], they will be requited and you be requited. Therefore, when you meet your God, say to Him: 'Our God, no injustice', He will say: 'No injustice'. Then you say: 'Our God, you have sent to us Messengers, we obeyed them. Then you appointed caliphs, so we obeyed them, and then you appointed emirs, so we obeyed them'. God, then, says: 'You said the truth, [the sin] is on them and you are blameless.'²⁶

This Syrian obedience was a subject of criticism and exaggeration among their opponents, especially the Shī'is. One story tells that Mu'āwiya ordered the people of Syria to pray the Friday prayer on Wednesdays, and that they obeyed.²⁷ Another story is that, when the Syrian army besieged Ibn al-Zubayr in Mecca in 64/683, the Ka'bah was burned as a result of using ballista to attack Ibn al-Zubayr's army. To justify their action, the Syrians said that: "إن الحرماء والطاعة اجتمعنا فغلبت الطاعة الحرماء" Inviolability contradicted obedience, thus obedience overpowered forbiddance."²⁸ In addition, there is sufficient evidence to prove that ideas of unconditional obedience to the 'Abbasid caliphs were widespread amongst the Khurāsanian army at the time of the caliph al-Mansūr.²⁹ Al-Jāhiẓ, unlike Ibn Yasār, related the obedience exhibited among the people of Syria to their stupidity, languidness and imitation (*taqlīd*), whereas the people of Iraq challenged their rulers because they were people of intelligence and

²⁴ Ṣalih, *Masā'il*, 247; and see: Ibn Taymiyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah*, 6: 430.

²⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi' bayān al-'ilm*, 2: 824-25. [كُل]

²⁶ Ibn Abī 'Āsim, *al-Sunnah*, 2: 708.

²⁷ al-Mas'ūdī, *Mu'rüj al-dhahab*, 3: 32.

²⁸ Ahmad b. Ishāq al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārikh*, 2: 251-52.

²⁹ 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-Muqaffa', "al-Risālah fī al-Šahābah", 122-23.

determination, and were thus able to discover the faults of their rulers and criticise them.³⁰

Perhaps, as some modern scholars have suggested, the Syrians unconditional obedience, was not because they were stupid, but because of the nature of the Muslim community at the time of the Umayyads, when Muslims in Syria were a minority and under threat and were thus a military community; therefore, *jihād* and obedience were essential elements for their survival.³¹ For them, obedience had to be given, to avoid the greater evils of sedition and disorder.³²

However, it is evident that in Ḥijāz and Iraq during the Umayyad era, many people among the *Salaf*, not to mention *Khārijīs* and *Qadarīs*,³³ did not accept this doctrine of unconditional obedience. Instead they insisted that obedience to the rulers must be conditioned by being in goodness (*ma'rūf*), not in sin, which meant that the orders of the Sharī'ah were given precedence over the orders of the rulers. Some traditions arose at that time to support this view. One of these stated that: لا طاعة في معصية الله، إنما الطاعة في المعروف “No obedience in disobedience to God; obedience is required only in what is good.”³⁴ Another tradition said that: مالم يؤمر بمعصية، فإذا أمر بمعصية، فلا سمع ولا طاعة على المرء المسلم فيما أحب أو كره؛ A Muslim has to listen to and obey [the orders of his ruler] whether he likes it or not, as long as these orders do not involve one in disobedience [to God]; but if an act of disobedience [to God] is imposed, one should not listen to it or obey it.”³⁵

The Companion ‘Ubādah b. al-Ṣāmit was asked: “What do you think if I obey my emir in all that he orders me?” ‘Ubādah answered: “Then you will be taken by your

³⁰ Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāghah*, 1: 343. العلة في عصيان أهل العراق على الأمراء وطاعة أهل الشام أن أهل العراق أهل نظر وذوق فطن ثاقبة ومع الفطنة والنظر يكون التتقيب والبحث، ومع التتقىب والبحث يكون الطعن والقدح والترجيح بين الرجال والتمييز بين الرؤساء وإظهار عيوب الأمراء. وأهل الشام ذوق بلادة وتقليد وجمود على رأي واحد لا يرون النظر ولا يسألون عن مغيب الأحوال. وما زال العراق موصوفاً أهله بفترة الطاعة وبالشاقق على أولي الرئاسة

³¹ Riḍwān al-Sayyid, “al-Jihād wa-al-jamā‘ah: dirāsah fī dawr ‘ulamā’ al-Shām fī takawwn madhhab Ahl al-Sunnah”, 207-30.

³² Bernard Lewis, “On the Quietist and Activist traditions in Islamic political writing”, 142.

³³ As has been shown above during the Umayyad era the slogan “No obedience to the creature in disobedience of the Creator” was accepted among various Muslim groups, not only the *Khārijīs*. Therefore, Lapidus was mistaken in his claim that “No obedience to the creature in disobedience of the Creator” is a *Khārijī* slogan that was only accepted in other circles at the beginning of the ‘Abbāsīd age. See “The Separation of state and religion”, 375.

³⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣahīh*, kitāb Akhbār al-āhād, No. 7257; Muslim, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣahīh*, kitāb al-Imārah wa-al-maghāzī, No. 1840.

³⁵ al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣahīh*, kitāb al-Aḥkām, No. 7199; Muslim, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣahīh*, kitāb al-Imārah wa-al-maghāzī, No. 1843.

legs (*qawā'īmuk*) and you will be thrown into Hell.”³⁶ Shaddād b. Aws, another Companion, once covered his head and wept. When was asked about the reason for his crying, Shaddād said: إِنَّمَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُم مِّنْ قَبْلِ رُؤْسَانِكُمْ، الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَمْرُوا بِطَاعَةِ اللَّهِ أَطْبَعُوا، وَإِذَا أَمْرُوا بِمُعْصِيَةِ اللَّهِ أَطْبَعُوا “I am only worried about you because of your leaders. If they commanded in obedience of God, they will be obeyed; and if they command evil deeds, they will be obeyed.”³⁷ Other reports rejecting this unconditional obedience were to be found among the Iraqi Successors, such as al-Hasan al-Baṣrī, al-Sha'bī and Yūnus b. ‘Ubayd.³⁸ More interestingly, some Umayyad caliphs such as ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Yazīd III stated in their speech immediately after becoming caliphs: أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، إِنَّهُ لَا طَاعَةَ لِمُخلوقٍ فِي مُعْصِيَةِ اللَّهِ “O people, no obedience to the creature in disobedience of God.”³⁹

However, at the beginning of the ‘Abbāsid period, Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, the author and secretary (*kātib*) of Persian origin, rejected both the previous doctrines of obedience to rulers. In a memorandum to the caliph al-Manṣūr, he stated that the idea of unconditional obedience was leading people to commit forbidden things (*muharramāt*) and to consider them lawful, and that those people who said: “No obedience to the creature in disobedience to the Creator. Obedience is required only in what is good” were also wrong, because all creatures had to be obeyed when they commanded what was right and disobeyed when they command what was wrong; thus all people would be equal and no credit would be given to the rulers. According to Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, the correct opinion was that no obedience was due to the ruler in disobedience to God, but this did not cancel the obligation to obedience in general. Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ distinguished between two kinds of obedience: religious and political. There was no obedience to the ruler in violation of what was strictly obligatory (*‘azā’im al-farā’iq*) and fixed punishments (*hudūd*), but the rulers must still be obeyed in other matters (and no one else should be obeyed in such matters), such as politics (*tadbīr*), governing the state, warfare, economic policy, law enforcement and applying analogy

³⁶ Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istidhkār*, 14: 37.

³⁷ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *al-Bayān wa-al-tahṣīl*, 16: 362.

³⁸ Ibn Baṭṭah, *al-Ībānah*, 171; for a different view narrated from al-Sha'bī, see: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 45: 376.

³⁹ ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, *Sīrah ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, 42-43; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 45: 171-72; al-Jāḥid, *al-Bayān wa-al-tabyīn*, 2: 142.

in the absence of the evidence from the Book and the Sunnah.⁴⁰ Neither al-Manṣūr nor the ‘ulamā’ considered his opinion to be valid, and so the advanced theory of Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ disappeared with his unfortunate execution.

From the third A.H./second part of the ninth century, the traditionalists included in their creeds an article on obedience to rulers. It was common for them to write in their creeds that one of the principles of the people of the Sunnah was “Listen and be obedient to the *imāms* and the commanders of the faithful, regardless of their being pious or sinner.”⁴¹ Ahmad Ibn Hanbal insisted on the importance of obedience to the rulers, and commanded it.⁴² When he was asked about obedience to the sultan (i.e., caliph), he was surprised and said: “God keep the sultan in good health! It is required. Glory to God! [Obedience to] the sultan [can be questioned]?”⁴³ A few years before his death, Ahmad was accused of giving refuge to an ‘Alawī (i.e., someone of ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib’s lineage), who was leading a rebellion against the ‘Abbāsī caliph al-Mutawakkil. Ahmad said to the caliph’s messengers, who were investigating the accusation: أرى طاعته في العسر واليسر، والمنشط والمكره وأثرة على “I believe in obeying him [i.e., the caliph] in difficult times and in ease, and when I am active and at the time when I am constrained, and [even if the caliph] disfavours me.”⁴⁴ It is worth noting that in his answer Ahmad used the exact words that had been narrated in traditions about obedience to rulers.⁴⁵

Evidently, the concept of obedience to the rulers was not a point of disagreement among the people of the Sunnah, but presumably, up to the time of the Inquisition, Sunnīs held different views about the limits of the obedience that was due to them. In

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Muqaffa‘, “Risālah fī al-Šahābah”, 122-23; and, see: Lapidus, “The Separation of State and Religion”, 376-77; Heck Paul, “Law in ‘Abbāsid political thought from Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (d. 139/756) to Qudāma b. Ja‘far (d. 337/948)”, 94-99.

⁴¹ See for example: Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (attrib.) Creed III; Abū Zur‘ah and Abū Ḥātim, *Creed*, in al-Lālakā‘ī, *Sharḥ uṣūl i‘tiqād ahl al-Sunnah*, 1: 199, 204 (this creed was translated in Abrahamov, *Islamic theology*, 54-57); al-Tahāwī, *Bayān i‘tiqād ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*; al-Barbahārī (attrib.), *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, 77; Ibn Baṭṭah, *al-Sharḥ wa-al-ibānah*, 307.

⁴² al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 74-75.

⁴³ Ibid, 1:75-76.

⁴⁴ Hanbal, *Dhikr*, 75, 83-84; Ṣāliḥ, *Sirat*, 89-90; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 82; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Maṇāqib*, 4787.

⁴⁵ An example of this is the tradition that Ahmad narrated in *al-Musnad*, 5: 322, on the authority of ‘Ubādah b. al-Ṣāmit, who claimed that the Prophet said: “It is obligatory for you to listen to the ruler and obey him in adversity and prosperity, in pleasure and displeasure, and even when another person is given preference over you.”

other words, were people required to obey rulers in religious matters as well as in politics? And did rulers have the right to decide the correct religious belief? And if they do so, were people required to obey them? The *Mihnah* shows two trends among the traditionalists regarding this matter. When al-Ma'mūn sent the *Mihnah*'s letter to Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm, his governor in Baghdad, in 218/833, he asked his subjects to obey their caliph because the special knowledge of God inspired his caliphs. In addition to those who took cover under *taqīyah* (compliance with a demand under duress), two trends could be identified among the traditionalists who were interrogated. The first group made it clear that if the Commander of the Faithful ordered them to say the Qur'ān was created, then it was a matter of *al-sam' wa-al-tā'ah* (to listen and obey).⁴⁶ However, it is not clear whether this group believed that the caliph had the right to identify the correct belief because he was more knowledgeable than his subjects,⁴⁷ or whether one had to obey him even if his belief was false.⁴⁸

The second group, including Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, refused to accept the caliph's doctrine. For this group the caliphs did not have the right to decide which belief was correct. The caliphs and the *'ulamā'* had to submit their disagreement to the authority of the Book and the Sunnah. But as has been shown above, the *'ulamā'* alone had the right to interpret the Book and the Sunnah; which meant that the people with knowledge of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah could decide on the correct belief. Those knowledgeable people were the traditionalists, who knew the Book and the Sunnah better than anyone else. As noted, Aḥmad strongly supported the idea of obedience to the rulers; yet he insisted that obedience should not be given in cases of disobedience to God.⁴⁹ Furthermore he applied this doctrine at the time of the Inquisition, when he refused to accept the caliphs' orders to declare that the Qur'ān was created.

Not only did Aḥmad refuse to accept the false doctrine of the caliphs, but he also abandoned the traditionalists who obeyed the caliphs in this matter, even though some of them used *taqīyah* (dissembling of faith). Until he died, Aḥmad did not talk to, or attend the funerals of, traditionalists who had answered at the Inquisition.

⁴⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 8: 638.

⁴⁷ This is what was understood from Abū Ḥassān al-Ziyādī's statement (*Ibid.*, 8: 638) and al-Ma'mūn's statement on 'Alī Ibn Abī Muqātil (*Ibid.*, 8: 641).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, (8: 638).

⁴⁹ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 75; and Creed I.

Traditionalists who had been his close friends, such as Yahyā b. Ma‘īn, Abū Naṣr al-Tammār and Abū Khaythamah, were repudiated by Aḥmad as a result of their acceptance of a false belief, even though they had done so under threat.⁵⁰ Perhaps as a result of Aḥmad’s strong opposition to the caliphs’ interpretations and his hostility towards traditionalists who had complied in the Inquisition, the idea of unconditional obedience to the rulers diminished in popularity. Hence, from the second half of the third A.H./ninth century Sunnī creeds took care to indicate that obedience to the rulers must not result in disobedience to God.⁵¹

5.4. Performing religious duties behind or with the rulers

Some religious duties, such as praying behind the rulers, giving them alms, and going to *jihād* with them were signs of an individual’s attitude towards the legitimacy of these rulers. Shī‘īs, *Khārijīs*, *Qadarīs* and *Mutazilīs* did not perform these duties with unjust, sinful or illegitimate rulers. On the other hand, the traditionalists insisted on undertaking these duties with the rulers, regardless of their being pious or sinful, in order to preserve the unity of the Muslims. The Umayyad caliphs and emirs used to delay performing the Friday prayer, until the time for it had passed, and demanded that people not previously perform the prayer at home.⁵² This was evidently a major issue during the Umayyad era.⁵³

However, for the early traditionalists, two trends were identified: the first included the Iraqis(the Kufans and the majority of Basrans) all of whom used to pray at home on time, and then attend the later prayer with the rulers, and when they testified they equivocated as a *taqīyah*. As one might expect, this trend narrated traditions from the Prophet to support its view.⁵⁴ The second trend was the *Hijāzīs* and a minority of Basrans, who prayed behind the rulers even though the time of the prayer had expired.

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 512-29.

⁵¹ al-Ṭahāwī, *Bayān i’tiqād ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*; Ismā‘īl b. Yahyā al-Muzanī, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, 85; al-Barbahārī (attrib.), *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, 79; ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *Lum‘ah al-i’tiqād*,

⁵² Abū Zur‘ah al-Dimashqī, *Tārīkh*, 681; Yūsuf b. ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd li imā fī al-Muwaṭṭā’ min al-ma‘nī wa-al-asānīd*, 8: 62-63.

⁵³ Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwazī, *Ta‘zīm qadr al-ṣalāh*, 2: 971-72; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd*, 8: 62.

⁵⁴ Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf*, 3: 374-77; al-Marwazī, *Ta‘zīm qadr al-ṣalāh*, 2: 973-75; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd*, 8: 63-66.

For them, this obedience was because people had to preserve the Muslim community (*al-Jamā'ah*), and they needed to fulfil their pledge of loyalty to the rulers. But what was the sin in delaying the time of prayer? The answer was that it was a sin on the part of the rulers not of the people.⁵⁵ However, it should be noted that both trends believe that praying behind the rulers was an obligation, and those who did not pray behind them were innovators.⁵⁶

The traditionalists related *hadiths* on the authority of the Companions to prove this doctrine. Ibn ‘Umar prayed behind al-Hajjāj b. Yūsuf and behind the *Khārijī* Najdah al-Ḥarūrī,⁵⁷ while Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī went to *jihād* with Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiyah.⁵⁸ The Successors, students of Ibn Mas‘ūd, prayed behind al-Mukhtār b. ‘Ubayd’s Friday prayers.⁵⁹ Hence, it is clear that since the third A.H./ninth century, the traditionalists had included the article of performing religious duties behind or with the rulers in their creeds.⁶⁰

For the traditionalists, Friday prayer, the prayer of Two Feasts (*salāt al-Idayn*) and Pilgrimage were performed for the whole community in one place (whether people prayed on Fridays and Feast days in one place in each city, or whether all Muslims went on Pilgrimage together in one place at the same time). Hence, a Muslim should not abandon the duty, nor divide the community, and hence he must fulfil these duties with the rulers. And yet, with respect to other prayers, such as everyday prayers, one should perform them behind a pious *imām*.⁶¹ In a creed attributed to Sufyān al-Thawrī, he was claimed to have said to his disciple:

يا شعيب، لا ينفعك ما كتب حتى ترى الصلاة خلف كل برج وفاجر. قال شعيب: فقلت لسفيان: يا أبا عبد الله، الصلاة كلها؟ قال: لا؛ ولكن صلاة الجمعة والعيدين صلٌّ خلف من أدركـتـ، وأما سائر ذلك فانت مخـيـرـ، لا تصلـ إلا خـلـفـ من تـقـنـ بهـ وـتـعـلـمـ أنهـ منـ أـهـلـ السـنـةـ وـالـجـمـاعـةـ

⁵⁵ This meaning was indicated in two traditions attributed the Prophet, one is a *Hijāzī* and the other is a *Baṣrī* tradition. See: Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-ṣalāt, Bāb idhā akhkhar al-imām al-ṣalāt ‘an al-waqt, Nos. 431-34; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd*, 8: 64-65; And see al-Marwazī, *Ta’zīm qadr al-ṣalāh*, 2: 972.

⁵⁶ See: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 7: 363, 364.

⁵⁷ Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Abī Zamanayn, *Uṣūl al-Sunnah*, 284; Ahmād b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 3: 122.

⁵⁸ al-Asfahānī, *al-Hujjah fī bayān al-mahajjah*, 2: 392.

⁵⁹ Ibn Abī Zamanayn, *Uṣūl al-Sunnah*, 284.

⁶⁰ Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal (attrib.), Creed I, II, III, IV, V and VI; Abū Ḥātim and Abū Zur‘ah, “I’tiqād”, in al-Lālakā’ī, *Sharḥ uṣūl i’tiqād ahl al-Sunnah*, 1: 199, 204.

⁶¹ For the traditionalists’ doctrine see: Ibrāhīm al-Ruhaylī, *Mawqif ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-jamā‘ah min ahl al-ahwā’ wa-albida’*, 1: 343-72.

O Shu‘ayb, what you have written [of the principles of the Sunnah] will not do you good unless you hold the correct opinion as to pray behind every [Muslim regardless of him being] pious or sinful. Shu‘ayb asked his master: “O Abū ‘Abd Allāh [i.e., Sufyān]: all the prayers?” Sufyān answered: “No, only the prayers for the Two Feasts and the Friday prayer, you must pray [behind whoever leads them]. In all other prayers, you are in a position of choice: do not pray but behind whom you trust, and know him to be from the people of the Sunnah.”⁶²

An important issue regarding praying behind sinful or innovator rulers should be noted here: is it lawful to repeat the prayers that have been recited behind a sinful or an innovator ruler? Three different reports were narrated from Aḥmad, reflecting the disagreement among the traditionalists regarding this issue.⁶³ The first is that, one should pray behind them and re-perform this prayer again after that. This idea was narrated from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal through his son ‘Abd Allāh,⁶⁴ his cousin Ḥanbal,⁶⁵ and his students ‘Abbās al-‘Anbarī,⁶⁶ Abū al-Ḥārith,⁶⁷ and Abū Dāwūd.⁶⁸ This view was also narrated from other traditionalists such as Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn, Mu‘ādh b. Mu‘ādh,⁶⁹ and the author of *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*.⁷⁰

Some other reports from Aḥmad insist on performing prayers behind the sinful and innovator rulers without mentioning re-performing the prayers afterwards. This was narrated by Ḥarb b. Ismā‘īl,⁷¹ Yūsuf b. Mūsā,⁷² Creeds I, II, IV and VI. The third position narrated from Aḥmad is found in Creed III: وصلات الجمعة خلفه وخلف من ولاه جائزه. من أعادها فهو مبتدع تارك للآثار مخالف للسنة “Tāmāra Rukūtīn. From those who have repeated them, he is a mālik of innovation, and behind whomsoever he appoints is accepted and completed, two-bows. Whoever re-performs it is an innovator, forsaking the traditions and contravening the

⁶² al-Lālakā’ī, *Sharḥ uṣūl i‘tiqād ahl al-Sunnah*, 1: 154.

⁶³ For these different reports see: Abū Ya‘lā, *al-Masā’il al-fiqhiyah min Kitāb al-Riwāyatayn wa-al-wajhayn*, 1: 172-73; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Abī Mūsā al-Hāshimī, *al-Irshād ilā sabīl ar-rashād*, 65-6; Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Sāmarrī, *al-Mustaw‘ab*, 1: 233-35; Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdīsī, *al-Mughnī*, 3: 22, 169-70.

⁶⁴ ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 103, 130.

⁶⁵ Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 69-70.

⁶⁶ Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdīsī, *al-Mughnī*, 3: 169.

⁶⁷ Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Masā’il al-fiqhiyah*, 1: 172.

⁶⁸ Abū Dawūd, *Masā’il*, 64.

⁶⁹ ‘Abd Allāh, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 130; 2: 386.

⁷⁰ al-Barbahārī (attrib.), *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, 113.

⁷¹ Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Masā’il al-fiqhiyah*, 1: 172.

⁷² al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 77; Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 2: 568.

Sunnah.”⁷³ This report is probably an exaggeration of some ‘pro-ruler’ traditionalists since it contradicts what Ah̄mad’s close disciples reported from him. In addition, it also contradicts what was reported about the practice of Ah̄mad himself. Hanbal b. Ishāq states that in the reign of al-Wāthiq, Ah̄mad used to pray the Friday prayers behind *imāms* who declared that the Qur’ān was created, and re-prayed when he returned home. Hanbal narrated from Ah̄mad that: الجمعة تؤتى لفضلها، والصلوة تعاد خلف من قال بهذه المقالة “The Friday [prayer] must be attended due to its merit; and the prayer behind him who believes in this doctrine [i.e., the creation of the Qur’ān], must be re-performed.”⁷⁴ Hanbal also noted that, at the time of al-Wāthiq, Ah̄mad used to pray the Friday prayer, and then re-pray it when he went home, but during the era of al-Mutawakkil he performed the Friday prayer and counted it.⁷⁵

However, there was a story that when Ah̄mad was under interrogation at the caliph’s court, he prayed behind the *Jahmī* judge Muḥammad Ibn Samā‘ah (d. 233/837-38), one of Ah̄mad’s interrogators, and it was not reported that he re-performed this prayer. Interestingly, the early Hanbalī sources were confused and embarrassed about this story. Ibn al-Jawzī narrated from Ṣāliḥ, in his biography of Ah̄mad, that the latter prayed behind Ibn Samā‘ah. The story did not reveal whether he re-performed the prayer afterwards.⁷⁶ This story was modified in other versions of Ṣāliḥ’s biography, and in Hanbal. In these versions it was said that Ah̄mad prayed at Ishāq’s house without mentioning who led the prayer.⁷⁷

Regarding almsgiving, it was normally to be given to the collectors of taxes even though they were unjust. A report that is claimed to be narrated from Ibn ‘Umar says: ادفعوا زكاة أموالكم إلى من وله الله أمركم، فمن برّ فلنفسه ومن أثم فعليها “Pay your alms to your rulers; whoever was pious, it is for him; and whoever was sinful, it is against himself.”⁷⁸ Ah̄mad supported giving the *zakāt* to the rulers, as can be found also in Creed I. For Ah̄mad, giving the *zakāt* to the rulers, regardless of whether they were sinful or unjust, was completing the religious duty. To support his opinion, Ah̄mad reported

⁷³ Apparently, Creed II was mixed with Creed III in: Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 229-39. Thus, this sentence was a part from Creed II instead of Creed III.

⁷⁴ Hanbal, *Dhikr*, 69.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁷⁶ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 444.

⁷⁷ Hanbal, *Dhikr*, 60; Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 63.

⁷⁸ Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf*, 4: 253, and see ibid., 4: 252-57.

قَيْلٌ لَابْنِ عُمَرَ: إِنَّهُمْ يَقْلُدُونَ بِهَا الْكَلَابَ، وَيَشْرِبُونَ بِهَا الْخَمْرَ. قَالَ: إِذْفَهَا إِلَيْهِمْ “[The rulers] spent [the *zakāt*] on decorating dogs and drinking alcohol.” Ibn ‘Umar answered: “Give [the *zakāt*] to them.”⁷⁹

The Sunnī position about going to *jihād* with the rulers was more definitive. A large number of traditions from the Prophet, his Companions and their Successors insisted on the importance of performing *jihād* with the rulers, regardless of their being pious or sinful.⁸⁰ Therefore, saving the Muslim nation from its distant enemy was more important than the religiosity of the rulers. When Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Nakha‘ī asked his father about the legitimacy of fighting with al-Hajjāj, his father answered: “O my son, I have seen people hate al-Hajjāj more than you do [i.e., the Companions and the Successors] but they did not give up going to *jihād* anyway.”⁸¹ Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī (d. 96/714) states that the idea of not going to *jihād* with the rulers came from the Devil,⁸² whose aim, apparently, was to save the infidels by discouraging people from going to *jihād* with unjust rulers. Creeds I, II, III, IV and VI included articles insisting on performing the *jihād* with the rulers, regardless of their being pious or sinner. Other reports from Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal supported this view. The following story illustrates Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal's position:

سَأَلْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَنْ قَوْمٍ يَكُونُونَ بَطَرْسُوسَ فَيَقْعُدُونَ وَلَا يَغْزُونَ، وَيَحْتَجُونَ يَقُولُونَ: مَتَى مَا غَزَوْنَا إِنَّمَا نُوفِرُ الْفَيْءَ عَلَى وَلَدِ الْعَبَاسِ. قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ: هُؤُلَاءِ قَوْمٌ سُوءٌ، هُؤُلَاءِ الْقَعْدَةُ، هُؤُلَاءِ جَهَنَّمُ، وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُونُوا يَعْلَمُونَ وَلَا لَهُمْ عِلْمٌ بِالْعِلْمِ. فَيَقُولُ لَهُمْ: أَرَيْتُ لَوْ أَنْ طَرْسُوسَ وَأَهْلَ التَّغْوِيرِ جَلَسُوا عَمَّا جَلَسُوا عَنْهُ هُؤُلَاءِ أَلِيَّسْ كَانَ قَدْ ذَهَبَ إِلَيْسَمْ؟ هُؤُلَاءِ قَوْمٌ سُوءٌ

I asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal] about some people in Ṭarsūs who sat down and did not go to fight. They said, “We only gain the *fay’* to the sons of al-‘Abbās.” Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal] said: “These are bad people. These are the sitters (*Qa’adah*). These are ignorant ... if the people of Ṭarsūs and the people of al-Thughur leave what they have left [i.e., do not go to *jihād* with the rulers], will it not lead to the destruction of Islām? They are bad people.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Mughnī*, 4: 92-93. And see Ibid., 4: 92-95; Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 336.

⁸⁰ Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Mughnī*, 11: 429-31,

⁸¹ Ibid., 11: 430.

⁸² Ibid.; Ibn Abī Zamanayn, *Uṣūl al-Sunnah*, 290.

⁸³ Ibn Hāni’, *Masā’il*, 2: 102-3; Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Mughnī*, 14: 14.

5.5. For patience and against rebellion

Until the second half of the third A.H./ninth century, both trends, activism and quietism, could be found in early Islamic traditionalists. In his well-known *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, al-Nadīm states that أكثر علماء المحدثين زيدية، وكذلك قوم من الفقهاء المحدثين، مثل سفيان بن عيينة وسفيان الثوري، وجلة المحدثين“⁸⁴ The majority of the traditionalists were *Zaydīs*, as were also some of the traditionalist-jurisprudents such as Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah, Sufyān al-Thawrī^[84] and the outstanding traditionalists.”⁸⁵ This means that the majority of the traditionalists in Iraq and Hijāz in the late second and early third A.H./eighth and ninth century were activists, since the *Zaydīs* were well-known for supporting revolts against unjust or sinful rulers. However, it is evident that, among traditionalists, the idea of activism dwindled away in favour of quietism; by the second half of the third A.H./second half of the ninth century, quietism had become the formal doctrine of Sunnism. The outstanding traditionalist al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) states that he met with over one thousand traditionalists in Hijāz, Iraq, Syria (Shām), Egypt and Khurāsān who had reached a consensus on the articles of belief. One of these articles was “وَلَا نرِى السيف فِي أُمَّةِ مُحَمَّدٍ”⁸⁶ “We do not accept the sword’s coercive power against the [Prophet] Muhammad’s community”, which means they were quietists. Al-Bukhārī’s contemporaries, Abū Zur’ah (d. 264/878) and Abū Ḥātim (d. 277/890), claimed in their creeds that they had met with scholars in all regions, Hijāz, Iraq, Shām and Yemen, who “وَلَا نرِى الخروج عَلَى الْأَئمَّةِ”⁸⁷ “do not accept rebellion against the *imāms*”.⁸⁸

Presumably there were several individuals behind this shift in the Sunnī position. The first was the Companion Ibn ‘Umar, whose view on quietism was essential to understanding the Sunnī doctrine; as Sufyān al-Thawrī states نَخَذْ بِقُولِ عُمَرِ فِي الْجَمَاعَةِ وَبِقُولِ ابْنِهِ فِي الْفَرَقَةِ“⁸⁹ “We adhere to ‘Umar’s opinion in the time of unity, and to his son’s in the time of division.”⁹⁰ Not involving oneself in internal fights between Muslims

⁸⁴ Here Sufyān al-Thawrī appeared to have been an activist, but Ahmad Ibn Hanbal recalled him as a leader of the quietists. See: al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 135-39. For having two different images of Sufyān al-Thawrī and other ‘ulamā’, see: Cook, *Commanding*, 66-67.

⁸⁵ Muhammad b. Ishāq al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 227 (I owe this reference to Christopher Melchert).

⁸⁶ al-Lālakā’ī, *Sharḥ*, 1: 176.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 1: 177.

⁸⁸ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 138.

was a fundamental aspect of Ibn ‘Umar’s thought; when al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī and Ibn al-Zubayr left Medina after their refusal to give allegiance to Yazīd I in 60/680, they met with Ibn ‘Umar who warned them not to divide the Muslim community.⁸⁹ Ibn ‘Umar also warned people against fighting on either side of the civil war, as neither the rebels nor the rulers fought for religious reasons.⁹⁰ At the time of war between Ibn al-Zubayr and al-Hajjāj, a man asked Ibn ‘Umar which party he should fight with. Ibn ‘Umar answered: “مع أي الفريقين قاتلت فقتلت ففي لطى” If you fought and killed, you would be burning in Hell (*Lazā*), regardless of which party you fought with.”⁹¹

Another example concerns the people of Medina, when they broke off their allegiance to Yazīd I and appointed Ibn Muṭī‘ to govern the city. Ibn ‘Umar went to the latter and told him: إنما جئت لأخبرك كلمتين سمعتهما من رسول الله ... ، سمعت رسول الله ... يقول: من نزع يدأ من طاعة لم تكن له حجة يوم القيمة، ومن مات مفارقاً للجماعة فإنه يموت ميتة الجاهلية I only came to you to inform you about a tradition I have heard from the Messenger of God... I heard him saying: ‘One who withdraws his hand from obedience [to the caliph] will find no argument [in his defence] when he stands before God on the Day of Resurrection, and one who dies after leaving the Community, will die the death of one belonging to the days of ignorance’.⁹² When the people of Medina insisted on their rebellion, Ibn ‘Umar gathered his family and sons to warn them against joining the rebels since they had given their allegiance to Yazīd I. Ibn ‘Umar then reported to his family that he had heard that the Prophet had said: “Every betrayer will have a flag which will be fixed on the Day of Resurrection, to say: ‘This is the betrayal of so and so’.” However, Ibn ‘Umar added, after polytheism, “the worst betrayal... is someone pledging allegiance to a man [i.e., caliph]... then abandoning it.”⁹³ Unlike those who had not been involved in the first civil war, such as Sa‘d Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and Muḥammad b. Maslamah, Ibn ‘Umar not only avoided the *Fitnah*, but also warned strongly against it.

⁸⁹ Ibn Sa‘d, *Tabaqāt*, 5: 360; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5: 343.

⁹⁰ al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣ‘ud al-Baghawī, *Ma ḥalim al-tanzil*, 1: 214. [ابن عمر]: هل تدری ما الفتنة؟ كان محمد ... يقاتل المشركين، وكان الدخول عليهم فتنه، وليس بقتالكم على الملك.

⁹¹ Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Hākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Muṣṭadrak ‘alā al-Saḥīḥayn*, 4: 471.

⁹² Ahmad, *al-Musnad*, 2: 98.

⁹³ Ibid., 2: 49. لما خلع أهل المدينة يزيد بن معاوية جمع ابن عمر حشمه وولده وقال: إني سمعت رسول الله ... يقول: “يُنصب لكل

غادر لواء يوم القيمة، ويقال: هذه غدرة فلان بن فلان”: وإنما بايعنا هذا الرجل على بيعة الله ورسوله، وإنما لا أعلم غدرًا أعظم من أن يبايع رجل على بيعة الله ورسوله ثم ينصب له القتال

After Ibn ‘Umar came the Basran Successor, Muṭarrif Ibn al-Shikhkhīr (d. 95/713-14), who played an important role at the time of the rebellion of Ibn al-Ash‘ath (81-83/700-2). According to al-‘Ijlī (d. 261/874-75), all the men of Basra and Kufa joined the camp of Ibn al-Ash‘ath in his *fitnah*; Muṭarrif Ibn al-Shikhkhīr and Muḥammad b. Sīrīn from Basra, and Khaythamah al-Ju‘fī and Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaī from Kufa were the only individuals who did not get involved in this revolt.⁹⁴ This means that most of *al-salaf* of the Sunnīs in Iraq during that era were activists, not quietists. However, Muṭarrif vociferously warned the people against rebellion,⁹⁵ and in addition to seeking communal unity and warning against the harmful consequences of the *fitnah*, noted that rebellion was without merit for the people, regardless of who might win. It was reported that when Muṭarrif was informed about Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s revolt, he said: “If he [Ibn al-Ash‘ath] was victorious, he would not stand with the doctrine of God’s religion. And if he was defeated, they [Ibn al-Ash‘ath and his army], would be servile [under the Umayyad’s control] until the Day of Resurrection.”⁹⁶

The Umayyad governor of Iraq, al-Hajjāj, took revenge on those who had joined Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s troops or supported him; he killed hundreds of the Successors and humiliated some of the Companions such as Anas b. Mālik. After the disastrous end to Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s rebellion, the balance shifted from Sunnī activism to quietism. However, while the majority of Sunnīs became quietists, activism continued among others. Some of the Sunnīs took part in, or at least supported the rebellions of, Muḥammad b. al-Hasan (al-Nafs al-Zakīyah) and his brother Ibrāhīm. Among them were Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik b. Anas and some of Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s teachers, such as Yazīd b. Hārūn and Hushaym b. Sa‘īd.⁹⁷ Al-Shāfi‘ī was also reported to be an activist.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Ijlī, *Ma‘rifat al-thiqāt*, 2: 282.

⁹⁵ For Mutarrif’s position against Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s revolt, see: ‘Alī al-Šayyāh, *Min siyar ‘ulamā’ al-salaf ‘ind al-fitān: Muṭarrif b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Shikhkhīr namūdhajā’*.

⁹⁶ والله لقد رأبني أمران: لئن ظهر [ابن الأشعث] لا يقوم الله دين. ولئن ظهرَ عليه لا يُرَأَونَ أَذْلَةً إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ

⁹⁷ For a list of people who joined or supported these rebellions see: (Abū al-Faraj) ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Asbahānī, *Maqātil al-Tālibīyīn*, 244-61, 304-29. Also see: Amikam Elad, “The Rebellion of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Hasan”, 147-99; Zaman, *Religion*, 73-74.

⁹⁸ al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 263, and see: Zaman, *Religion*, 78 fn 32.

It was probably with Ahmād ibn Ḥanbāl that the final position in making quietism the formal Sunnī doctrine was established. In doing so, he employed a variety of methods to formulate this doctrine. For example:

1. Ahmād strongly supported the doctrines of quietism. His pupil al-Marrūdhī reported that Ahmād demanded that bloodshed and rebellion be halted,⁹⁹ since such civil unrest was not safe for the people. Thus, being patiently subordinate to one's rulers was better for one's religion and security.¹⁰⁰
2. By the beginning of the third A.H./ninth century, there existed among traditionalists two types of Prophetic traditions, some of which supported the doctrines of quietism while the others supported activism. Ahmād ibn Ḥanbāl's method, as noted by al-Khallāl,¹⁰¹ was to accept the traditions of condemning rebellion and the traditions calling for the saving of Muslims' blood; and to reject the other traditions that called for revolutions against unjust or sinful rulers. Ahmād was asked about a tradition attributed to the Prophet which said: اسْتَقِمُوا لِقَرِيبٍ مَا اسْتَقَامُوا لِكُمْ. “فَإِنْ لَمْ يَفْعُلُوْا؛ فَضَعُوْا سِيوفَكُمْ عَلَى عَوَاتِقِكُمْ وَأَبْدِيُوْا خَضْرَاءِهِمْ” Stand upright before the Quraysh as long as they stand up to you. If they do not, then you [have to] put your swords upon your shoulders and exterminate them all.” According to several reports, Ahmād rejected this tradition since it contradicted other sound traditions such as, “Listen and obey, even if it was a black slave”; “Listening and obeying”; and “Unless they perform prayers”.¹⁰²

Another example was that a tradition accepted as sound by many traditionalists (including al-Bukhārī and Muslim) stated that the Prophet had said: “This people of Quraysh will destroy my nation.” The Companions asked him: “What, then, do you order us to do?” The Prophet replied: “People should retreat from them.”¹⁰³ Al-Marrūdhī claimed that Ahmād stated: “This is a bad tradition”, then adding, as suggested by al-Marrūdhī, “These *Mu'tazilīs* rely on it” for not attending Friday

⁹⁹ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 133, 140.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1: 140.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² al-Khallāl, *Sunnah*, 1: 126-30; Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-Muntakhab*,

¹⁰³ al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi'* *al-sahīh*, Kitab al-Fitan Bāb Qaul al-nabī...: “Halāk^u ummatī ‘alā yadaī ughaylimah sufahā’, No. 6649; Muslim, *al-Jāmi'* *al-sahīh*, Kitab al-Fitan wa-ashrāt al-sā’ah, Taqtūl^u ‘Ammār^{an} al-fī’at al-bāghiyah, No. 2917.

prayers.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, this tradition was included in the *Musnad* of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal,¹⁰⁵ but ‘Abd Allāh b. Ahmad claimed that: قال أبي في مرضه الذي مات فيه: اضرب على هذا الحديث، فإنه خلاف الأحاديث عن النبي ... يعني قوله: اسمعوا وأطعوها واصبروا على هذا الحديث، فإنه خلاف الأحاديث عن النبي ... يعني قوله: اسْمَعُوهَا وَأَطِيعُوهَا وَاصْبِرُوهَا على هذا الحديث، فإنه خلاف الأحاديث عن النبي ... يعني قوله: اسْمَعُوهَا وَأَطِيعُوهَا وَاصْبِرُوهَا deathbed, my father ordered me ‘[to] get rid of this tradition, because it contradicts other Prophetic traditions.’ He meant [the Prophet’s] saying: ‘Listen, obey and stand patient’.”¹⁰⁶ Apparently, ‘Abd Allāh did not follow his father’s demand.

3. Ahmad also criticised activist *salaf* and traditionalists. He disagreed with Sa‘id b. Jubayr (d. 95/714), as the latter was a famous activist Successor who was executed as a result of his involvement in Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s revolt.¹⁰⁷ When Ahmad was asked about a *Zaydī* activist, al-Hasan Ibn Ḥayy (d. 167/783), He said: ﴿كَانَ يُرِي السِّيفَ، وَلَا يَرْضَى مِذْهَبَهُ، وَسَفِيَانُ أَحَبَ إِلَيْنَا مِنْهُ﴾ [He [i.e., Ibn Ḥayy] believes in [using] the sword [against unjust rulers], and this is not accepted. However, Sufyān [al-Thawrī] is more to be preferred than he is.]¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, it became a commonplace for quietist traditionalists to criticise activists by accusing them of “believing in [using] the sword.”¹⁰⁹

4. In addition Ahmet aimed to rewrite the revolutionary history of the Sunnis by hiding or at least minimising it. As indicated above, Ahmet, along with other quietist traditionalists, attempted to reduce the number of the Companions and Successors who were involved in the first civil war;¹¹⁰ at the same time he criticised traditionalists, recalled the events of the *fitnah*, and named the Companions and the Successors who had been involved in these events.¹¹¹ In Ahmet's time, the famous (Shafī'i?) jurisprudent, al-Husayn al-Karabīsī (d. 248/862) wrote his book *al-Mudallisūn* (Distorters), in which he attacked al-A'mash and defended al-Hasan ibn Ḥayy. When he was asked about this book, especially the part on Ibn Ḥayy, in which al-Karabīsī had written: "If you say al-Hasan b. Ṣāliḥ [Ibn Ḥayy] believed in the *Khārijī* doctrine, [we will say] here is Ibn al-Zubayr who revolted", Ahmet

¹⁰⁴ al-Marrūdhī, *al-Wara'*, 42-43. أراه حديث رديء. قال: هو حديث رديء. أراه حديث رديء. قال: هو أن الناس اعتزلوهم".

¹⁰⁵ Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, 2: 391.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.; and see: Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Muntakhāb*, 163.

¹⁰⁷ al-Khallāj, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 131;

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 1: 135–36; Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 142. For al-Hasan Ibn Ḥayy and his activism opinion, see: Cook, *Commanding right*, 51.

¹⁰⁹ For example see: 'Abd Allāh b. Ahmad, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 182.

¹¹⁰ See: Chapter III.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

commented that: “This [man] collects for our adversaries what they cannot do for themselves. Warn [people] against this [book].”¹¹² Interestingly, some quietist traditionalists used another method to deal with activist history amongst the *Salaf*. For instance, Ayyūb al-Sukhtuyānī recalled the *qurrā'* who had joined Ibn al-Ash'ath in his rebellion, and stated that those who joined him and survived the revolt regretted their involvement in the insurgency.¹¹³

Another example can be found in the works of the famous traditionalist Nu‘aym b. Hammād al-Marwazī (d. 228/843), whose book *al-Fitan* included a chapter about باب ما يذكر من ندامة القوم من أصحاب النبي ... وغيرهم في الفتنة وبعد انتصاراتها “What is narrated regarding the regret of the Companions and others at the time of the *fitnah* and after it.”¹¹⁴ In this chapter, Nu‘aym b. Hammād narrated a number of reports from preeminent Companions, such as ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, ‘Ā’ishah, Ṭalhah, al-Zubayr and ‘Ammār b. Yāsir which stated that they regretted their involvement in the *Fitnah*. One of these reports claimed that al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī told Sulaymān b. Ḝurad: لقد رأيت علياً حين اشتدت القتال يلوذ بي ويقول: يا حسن! لوددت أن مت قبل هذا بعشرين سنة during the fighting; he came to me and said: ‘O Ḥasan! I wish I had died twenty years earlier than this’.¹¹⁵

5. In practice, Ahmād himself refused to join the revolutionaries. In 231/846, during the Inquisition in the reign of al-Wāthiq, some of the Sunnīs in Baghdad led by Ahmād b. Naṣr al-Khuza‘ī (killed 231/846), one of the leaders of *al-Muṭṭawwi‘ah* movement,¹¹⁶ planned to take over the city. Some of the scholars (*fuqahā'*) who joined the rebels visited Ahmād in order to convince him to join the revolt. They told him: “O Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ahmād], this issue [i.e., the belief in the creation of the Qur’ān] spread and was exacerbated”. Another report gave a more detailed account of what

¹¹² قال المروذى: مضيّت إلى الكرايسي، وهو إذ ذاك مستور يذب عن 7-2: 806. Ibn Rajab, *Sharḥ Ḥal al-Tirmidhī*, 2: 806.

السنة، وبظاهر نصرة أبي عبد الله، فقلت له: إن كتاب المسلمين يريدون أن يعرضوه على أبي عبد الله، فأظهره أنك قد ندمت حتى أخبر أبي عبد الله. فقال لي: إن أبي عبد الله رجل صالح منه يوفق لإصابة الحق، وقد رضيتك أن يعرض كتابي عليه، وقال: قد سألكني أبو ثور وأين عقيل، وحيث أن أضرب على هذا الكتاب فأبيت عليهم، وقلت: بل أزيد فيه. ولج في ذلك، وأبى أن يرجع عنه، فجيء بالكتاب إلى أبي عبد الله وهو لا يدرى من وضع الكتاب، وكان في الكتاب الطعن على الأعمش، والنصرة للحسن بن صالح، وكان في الكتاب إن قلت: إن الحسن بن صالح كان برئاً من خوارج، فهذا ابن الزبير قد خرج! فلما قرئ على أبي عبد الله قال: قد هذا جمع للمخالفين ما لم يحسنوا أن يتحجروا به حذروا عن هذا، ونهى عنه

¹¹³ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Tabaqāt*, 7: 187; al-Fasawī, *al-Ma‘rifah wa-al-tārīkh*, 2: 52.

¹¹⁴ Nu‘aym b. Hammād al-Marwazī, *al-Fitan*, 78-94.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 80.

¹¹⁶ About this movement, see: Lapidus, “the Separation of State and Religion”, 372-4; Madelung, “The Vigilante Movement of Sahl b. Salāma”, 331-37; Van Ess, *Theologie*, 3:173-75, 448.

worried them most: the state's proposal to force the doctrine of the Qur'ān being taught to schoolchildren. Ah̄mad said: "So, what do you want to do?" They replied: "We would like to consult you as we do not accept his [i.e., al-Wāthiq's] rule or sovereignty." Ah̄mad then argued with them for a while, and said: "You would rather condemn [this heresy] in your hearts, but do not remove your hand from obedience, divide the unity of Muslims, or shed your blood and Muslim blood with yours. Look at the consequence of your action! You should wait until the pious rest [by their death] or the sinful [i.e., the caliph] are rested."¹¹⁷

Others among them warned Ah̄mad, saying that: "We are concerned about our children, as they will only know this [false doctrine of the created Qur'ān], consequently, Islam will be expunged." Ah̄mad objected saying: "No, God is supporting his religion, and this matter has God to support it, and Islam remains influential and impregnable." Obviously, both sides could not convince each other, and the rebels left Ah̄mad, who then relayed his disagreement with the rebels to his family. Ah̄mad stated that rebellion was wrong because it was against the traditions that commanded people to be patient in response to unjust rulers, and quoted the Prophet's sayings: "If he [i.e., the ruler] beats you, you should remain patient; if he deprives you, you should remain patient...."¹¹⁸

Ah̄mad also advised one of his students against joining these rebels and said: "Glory to God; [shedding] blood! [shedding] blood! I do not consent nor do I command it; to observe patience in our situation is better than sedition (*fītnah*) that causes the shedding of blood, the plundering of wealth, and violations of prohibitions (i.e., raping women)." Ah̄mad then asked his student: "Do you remember what people were [suffering from] at the time of the *fītnah* (i.e., in Baghdad after al-Amīn was killed and until al-Ma'mūn's arrival)?" His student asked again: "[But what about] people now, are they not in *fītnah*?" Obviously, the student meant the Inquisition and its threat to people's beliefs. Ah̄mad explained to him that the Inquisition was a *fītnah* in a specific matter, but when violence was used, the *fītnah* would become generalised

¹¹⁷ Hanbal, *Dhikr*, 70-72; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 133-4.

¹¹⁸ This story was narrated by Hanbal b. Ishāq who was an eyewitness. However, we have two versions of Hanbal's report. Hanbal, *Dhikr*, 70-72, al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 133-34;

and collective security would be lost. Ahmād concluded by recommending that the student be patient for the good of his religion.¹¹⁹

Perhaps the move of Ahmād b. Naṣr al-Khuzaī reflects the religious concerns of the Sunnī upper-classes in Baghdad at the third A.H./ninth century. Al-Khuzaī came from the ‘Abbāsid aristocracy; his grandfather was one of the leaders (*du’āh*) of the ‘Abbāsid mission, and he and his family were very wealthy. His assistants, who were supposed to lead the uprising in east and west Baghdad, were also rich.¹²⁰ On the other hand, the maintenance of people’s security was what really concerned the middle and lower classes (Ahmād himself came from the lower-middle class) because these were the people who suffer from a lack of security; their shops and houses were in danger of being looted. Thus, Ahmād gave the highest priority to the safety of people above all. This idea was generally well accepted among traditionalists and Sunnīs, and was promoted by the saying: “An unjust ruler is better than continued sedition” (*Sultān^{un} għashūm khayr^{un} min fitnatⁱⁿ tadūm*).¹²¹

All in all, for the quietists, even under an unjust or sinful ruler, it was still possible to secure Muslim lands, borders and roads, and to enforce the law. Muslims were able to live safely and perform their religious obligations. If rulers acted well, they deserved to be rewarded by God and thanked by their people; but if they disobeyed God’s rulings, people should not rebel against them nor insult them but should remain patient; only God had the right to judge them.¹²²

Two important points should be made here: first, that the security of the common people was obviously the crucial factor behind the Sunnī doctrine of quietism, which was very clear in the case of Ahmād b. Ḥanbal. It is surprising that Ahmād rejected or modified some Prophetic traditions that supported activism. He also aimed to hide the history of the activist Companions, Successors and traditionalists, thus suggesting that the safety of the Muslim community was more important than

¹¹⁹ سأله أبا عبد الله في أمر كان حدث ببغداد، وهم قوم بالخروج، فقالت: يا أبا عبد الله، ما تقول في الخروج مع هؤلاء القوم؟ فأنكر ذلك عليهم، وجعل يقول: سبحان الله! الدماء الدماء! لا أرى ذلك، ولا أمر به. الصبر على ما نحن فيه خير من الفتنة، يسفك فيها الدماء، ويستباح فيها الأموال، وينتهك فيها المحارم. أما علمت ما كان الناس فيه -يعني: أيام الفتنة؟-. قلت: والناس اليوم، أليس هم في فتنة يا أبا عبد الله؟ قال: وإن كان، فإنما هي فتنة خاصة، فإذا وقع السيف عمت وانقطعت السبل الصبر على هذا ويسلم لك دينك خير لك

¹²⁰ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdad*, 6: 397, 400-2.

¹²¹ For this saying see: Waleek Herman, “Wāliⁿ għasūm khayr^{un} min fitna^{tin} tadūm”, 95-102.

¹²² See: Fritz Steppat, “Der Mushin in die Obrigkeit”, 319-32. Translated into Arabic in *al-Ijtihād*, 12, (1991), 76-77.

following *al-Salaf al-Šāliḥ*. Secondly, not only did the doctrines of quietism promote obedience to rulers, but they also encouraged people not to focus on politics that rose up between the rulers and the people. The authority of the ‘*ulamā’* therefore existed between the people and the state.

5.6. Commanding right and forbidding wrong

Commanding right and forbidding wrong appears in some Qur’ānic verses and Prophetic traditions as a religious duty that should be observed by believers. However, this principle was practised in the Muslim community in various fields: in one’s social life, in *jihād*, and in one’s relationship with the state. This chapter has focused on using *al-amr bi-al-ma’rūf wa-al-nahy ‘an al-munkar* as a slogan employed by rebels against the state.¹²³ Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), the outstanding Andalusian scholar, named around one hundred of the Companions, Successors, and their followers who supported, or already practised, rebellion against unjust rulers under the cause of commanding right and forbidding wrong.¹²⁴ However, as has been shown above, quietism was intrinsic to Sunnī doctrine, and the aim of this section is to indicate how the quietists combined their doctrine with the duty of commanding right and forbidding wrong against unjust rulers.

من رأى منكم منكراً فليغيره بيده، فإن لم يستطع فبلسانه، فإن لم“فبقلبه وذلك أضعف الإيمان يستطع Whosoever of you sees a wrong, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart; and that is the weakest of faith.”¹²⁵ This tradition gives three methods of commanding wrong; one should not use the second method if he is able to do the first, or the third if he is able to do the second, and there is no excuse not to command wrong in his heart. Therefore, can one command the wrong of the rulers by each method?

¹²³ For some examples see: Saud al-Sarhan, *al-Murhijūn*, 5-7.

¹²⁴ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fīsal*, 5: 20-23.

¹²⁵ Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3: 10; Muslim, *al-Jāmi‘ al-sahīh*, Kitāb al-Īmān, No. 49.

a. By hand

The activists believed that people should command the rulers' oppression by their hands, which means rebelling against them. However, the quietists were not convinced by this approach. As Michael Cook notes, they insisted that rebellion was not an option for those who would forbid wrong.¹²⁶ The Companion Ḥudhayfah b. al-Yamān (d. 36/656) said: "Commanding right and forbidding wrong is indeed a fine thing, but it is not part of the Sunnah to take up arms against your ruler."¹²⁷ Al-Hasan al-Baṣrī also stated that forbidding wrong should not be done with the sword.¹²⁸ The Kufan Ibn Shubrumah (d. 144/761) wrote a poem to indicate that commanding right and forbidding wrong was not to be carried out by unsheathing the sword against one's rulers.¹²⁹ Even Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal declared that among common people, not rulers, Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal declared that one was not allowed to forbid their wrongdoing using sword or weapon; he could use only his naked hand.¹³⁰

b. By tongue:

If people were forbidden to use their hands in order to forbid the wrong of the rulers, would they be allowed to forbid that wrong with their tongues? One notes that some traditions praised those who faced unjust rulers and condemned their wrong. A well-known tradition states that the Prophet was asked, "What is the finest form of *jihād*?" The Prophet answered "Speaking out in the presence of an unjust ruler, being killed for it."¹³¹ Interestingly, this and similar traditions reflected the conflict between the 'ulamā' and their rulers, and indicated not only that the rulers were not listening to the advice of the 'ulamā', but also that they were becoming angry and punishing anyone who tried to correct them. History has preserved several examples of poor but enthusiastic religious people who were punished or even executed for speaking out against unjust rulers.¹³² Thus, there was an issue which presumably circulated among the 'ulamā'; principally this was that there was little hope of correcting the rulers and anyone who tried to do so would be under threat.

¹²⁶ Cook, *Commanding Right*, 53.

¹²⁷ Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 99; and see Cook, *Commanding Right*, 52.

¹²⁸ Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, *al-Fitan*, ; and see Cook, *Commanding Right*, 52.

¹²⁹ al-Khallāl, *al-Amr bi-al-Ma'rūf wa-al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, 22.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³¹ Ahmad, *Musnad*, 31:1 24-26.

¹³² For example see the story of the goldsmith of Marw, see: Cook, *Commanding right*, 3-7.

Is it therefore still a religious duty to condemn the wrongdoings of rulers? Michael Cook traces two trends regarding this matter. First there were those who were against going to the rulers to command and forbid them; secondly, there was verbal admonition of the rulers.¹³³ For various reasons Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal obviously supported the first view. First, the one who commanded or forbade the rulers was likely to be a victim of the rulers' anger and might be punished or killed. Ah̄mad warned his student about being exposed to the ruler, since his sword was unsheathed.¹³⁴ Second, and more interestingly, Ah̄mad and the other traditionalists were not against commanding and forbidding the rulers against certain actions, believing that the rulers should not be commanded or forbidden from taking such actions. In fact they were either concerned about being weak when they faced the rulers and thus were unable to command or forbid them so that they could not complete their mission; or they might have been worse and flattered the rulers or eaten at their table. Ah̄mad Ibn Shabbawayh (d. 229/843) arrived in Baghdad from Marw in order to go to the caliph to command and forbid him. Ibn Shabbawayh consulted with Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal about his aim, and was discouraged by Ah̄mad because he might not have been able to complete his mission.¹³⁵

In other reports, Ah̄mad himself was urged by his uncle Ishāq b. Ḥanbal (d. 253/867) to take advantage of his involuntary presence at the court of al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47/847–61) and to go to the caliph and command and forbid him, because the caliph would accept his advice; Ah̄mad refused to do so. Ishāq then invoked the example of Ishāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853), whom he described as acting in this manner at Ibn Ṭahir's court; however, Ah̄mad refused to recognise his conduct as normative, and said: "تحتاج على بأسحاق؟ فأننا غير راض بفعاليه، ما له في روئتي خير، ولا لي في روئته خير" You invoke Ishāq? I do not agree with him. There is no good for him [i.e. the caliph] to see me, nor for me to see him."¹³⁶ Ah̄mad was afraid of being weak in front of the caliph and could not confront him with the truth. When Ibn al-Mubārak's cousin encouraged

¹³³ Ibid., 53–67.

¹³⁴ al-Khallāl, *al-Amr*, 20.

¹³⁵ Ibn Abī Ya'�ā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 109–11. Ah̄mad was claimed to have told Ibn Shabbawayh: *innī akhāf 'alayk an lā taqūm² bi-dhālik*. It is clear that Ah̄mad was worried that Ibn Shabbawayh might not be able to complete his mission. However, Cook (*Commanding*, 101) reads this as having discouraged him on the grounds of the risks he would be running. I believe this is a mistranslation.

¹³⁶ al-Marrūdhī, *Akhbār al-shuyūkh wa-akhlāquhum*, 41–42; Ibn Abī Ya'�ā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 299; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 504–5.

قد قال خالك، يعني ابن المبارك، لا تأتهم، فإن أتيتهم فـ“Your uncle [meaning Ibn al-Mubārak] said ‘Do not go to them; but if you go, you have to tell them the truth.’ And I am afraid I will not be [strong enough to] tell them the truth.”¹³⁷

History tells us that forbidding and commanding rulers rarely went well. Rulers usually did not accept such advice, and they would possibly attack those who commanded or forbade them. In addition, some of the ‘ulamā’ went to the rulers to forbid them, yet when they saw the caliphs, they found themselves unable to accomplish their mission, and might have needed to support their unjust actions or share their food with them. Thus, it was best for one’s safety and religion to stay away from such rulers.

The final point that needs to be mentioned about Ahmād’s opinion of commanding right and forbidding wrong is that it was very important to avoid shedding Muslim blood, and probably even more important than the obligation of commanding right and forbidding wrong. Ahmād revealed his disagreement with Sahl b. Salāmah, the most prominent figure among the public leaders of the popular movement back to 201/817. Ahmād disapproved of Sahl’s enterprise, and reproved one of his own followers, who was also one of his old friends.¹³⁸ Al-Khallāl regarded Ahmād’s disagreement with Sahl as an example of his doctrine against rebellions,¹³⁹ while Michael Cook also thought it must be connected to Sahl’s *Mutazilī* background.¹⁴⁰ However, it is most likely that what concerned Ahmād about Sahl b. Salāmah was shedding blood, even under the cause of commanding right and forbidding wrong. When told about a dream which was interrupted when he was promised Heaven, Ahmād replied: يا أخي، إن سهل بن سلامة كان الناس يخبرونه بمثل هذا. وخرج سهل إلى سفك الدماء. “O brother, this is Sahl b. Salāmah; people used to tell him

¹³⁷ al-Marrūdhī, *Akhbār al-shuyūkh*, 42; Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 280; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 505.

¹³⁸ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 140.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 1: 130.

¹⁴⁰ Cook, *Commanding*, 104.

something like that, but he went on to shed blood! Dreams (*ru'yā*) please the believer but do not deceive him.”¹⁴¹

5.7. Conclusion

Several points can be raised here:

1. The first remark of note is that the historical experience of the Muslim nation and the interest of the common people had more influence than traditions on Sunnī political doctrines, and especially on Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl. Ahmād, among other traditionalists, rejected or modified Prophetic traditions as well as the practices of the Companions and early pious Muslims that did not conform to the doctrine of quietism. Ahmād also warned against sedition and the harm it might cause to the safety and property of Muslims; yet traditions which supported quietism came second in shaping Ahmād’s political quietism.
2. For the quietists, safety was given priority over justice. However, this probably reflected the view of the common people, who suffered at times of sedition much more than during the reigns of unjust rulers. Interestingly, Ahmād came from a lower-middle class background, and, as some scholars have noted, he presented the concerns of these people.¹⁴²
3. It is evident that the Umayyad caliphs supported quietism for their own benefit and this was the opinion of most Syrian scholars during the Umayyad era, since they were supporting rulers who believed that caliphs should be unconditionally obeyed. Not all quietists were in favour of rulers; yet, for many quietists, and Ahmād b. Ḥanbāl was among this group, quietism and withdrawing from involvement in politics or relationships with the rulers was their way of expressing their dissatisfaction with the impious and unjust rulers. Moreover, as Michael Cook points out,

The Muslim masses – large numbers of Muslims who lived their lives with no part in the exercise of political power and no realistic expectation of achieving it. Under such conditions it is not surprising

¹⁴¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 283–84. Neither Van Ess nor Cook quotes this story to explain Ahmād’s attitude towards Sahl b. Salāmah.

¹⁴² Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 111; Cook, *Commanding*, 107–12.

that it should increasingly be pointed out that, if politics is none of your business, you had best keep out of it.¹⁴³

Cook also notes that in the second century, many of these people circulated with the traditionalists.¹⁴⁴ In other words, while the Muslim masses had no hope of having a role in politics, they paid the price at the time of *fītnah* when politicians were fighting for power. Thus, it was preferable for them to not take part in this kind of fighting; it was better to lock their doors and sit quietly at home.

4. It seems that Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal had the last word in formulating Sunnī belief regarding the religious authority of the caliphs and the limitations of obedience to the rulers. On the one hand, Ahmād stood against those who gave the caliphs unconditional obedience and insisted that there was no obedience in disobedience to God. Ahmād believed that the caliphs did not have the right to decide correct belief. The Inquisition represented Ahmād's position; he refused to obey the false belief of the caliphs and criticised traditionalists who accepted this doctrine under the integration of the Inquisition; they either did that as *taqīyah* or else believed in unconditional obedience to the caliphs. However, it can be seen that after Ahmād, all religious Sunnī literature asserted that there was "No obedience to the creature in disobedience of the Creator."

On the other hand, Ahmād also stood against the activists, which was another trend among the traditionalists at that time. As shown above, Ahmād applied several methods to refuting the doctrines of activism. Presumably, he was successful in cancelling both unconditional obedience to the rulers and the views of activists. Thanks to Ahmād, Sunnī doctrine has remained as the following:

we do not recognise rebellion against our *imāms* or those in charge of our affairs even if they are unjust, nor do we wish evil on them, nor do we withdraw from following them. We hold that obedience to them is part of obedience to God, ... and therefore obligatory as long as they do not order us to commit sins¹⁴⁵

Some Sunnī scholars, such as Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Nawawī, Ibn Ḥajar, al-Qādī ‘Iyād and others, noted that the Sunnīs had reached a consensus on following a doctrine of

¹⁴³ Cook, "Activism and quietism in Islam", 21-22.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ al-Tahāwī, *Bayān i’tiqād ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*,

quietism, stating that among some Sunnīs the doctrine of activism was an old opinion that should no longer be followed.¹⁴⁶ Yet, even with this claimed consensus, after the time of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, very few Sunnī scholars continued to believe in rebellion against unjust rulers; among these activists. Ibn Ḥazm was the most important figure.¹⁴⁷

5. There is a point that should be mentioned here. For the early quietists (such as Ibn ‘Umar and Ṭalḥah b. al-Shikkhīr), the main argument against rebellion was the need to save the Muslim community (i.e., the ‘unity versus division’ paradigm). For Aḥmad, although he insisted on the importance of sticking to the Muslim community, the main argument he used was the community’s need for safety (i.e., safety vs. the lack of safety model). This shift of priorities probably reflects the fact that the concern of Aḥmad, as well as of the people who followed him, was more social than political; and it perhaps shows that Aḥmad and the people around him had lost their faith in restoring the true Muslim state, with the result that their concern was focused on the needs of the peoples rather than on the state.

¹⁴⁶ Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Sahīḥ Muslim*, 12: 229; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 5:

148; Ibn Taymīyah, *Mihāj al-Sunnah*, 4: 529-30; al-Sarhan, *Arbāb al-kalām*, 371-72.

¹⁴⁷ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, 5: 20-23.

Chapter VI

The Relationship with the State

6.1. Introduction

In Chapter Five the political quietism of the people of the Sunnah was addressed. In this chapter the relationship of Ah̄mad Ibn Ḥanbal and the early Ḥanbalīs with the state in the fourth A.H./tenth century will be examined; the discussion will show that the early Ḥanbalīs had different views and practices regarding their relationship with their rulers. Subsequently, in the fifth A.H./eleventh century, they became supporters of the caliphs in Baghdad. This chapter is divided into four main parts: (1) Ah̄mad's association with the rulers in his time; (2) the position of Ah̄mad's sons, family and close disciples; (3) the positions of subsequent Ḥanbalī generations in Baghdad until the fifth A.H./eleventh century; and (4) Ah̄mad's legal opinions concerning their relationship with their national rulers.

6.2. Ah̄mad's practices

A striking feature of the socio-political history of early Islam is that it was the norm for pious scholars not to work for, or to assist, or even to have any kind of connection with their rulers. Some scholars see these doctrines as a mark of the influence of Jewish, Christian and pre-Islamic tribal customs on Islamic thought.¹ Others see a Shī‘ī influence.² However, it is more logical to regard this practice as a natural action on the part of pious people to condemn the acts of an impious government. Goldziher pointed out that this kind of resistance started during the Umayyad dynasty;³ other scholars also noticed that pious people refused to associate themselves with the

¹ Wensinck, “The Refusedl dignity”, 491-95; Goitein, “Attitudes towards government in Judaism and Islam”, 210

² Van Ess, , *Theologie*, 1: 224.

³ Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 2: 47.

government in the ‘Abbāsid era.⁴ Throughout his life, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal was strict about ensuring that he stayed away from the rulers as far as he possibly could.

Three early sources recorded Aḥmad’s relationship with the state. The authors of these were eyewitnesses, or heard these stories from eyewitnesses. These three sources are Aḥmad’s son, Ṣāliḥ, his cousin Ḥanbal b. Ishāq, and his disciple Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī. Besides these contemporary sources, there are some later sources which will be considered here as well.

Ḥanbal and Ṣāliḥ provide (from the Ḥanbalī perspective) full details of the Inquisition and Aḥmad’s attitude towards the caliphs. Although the two agree on most of the details, they disagree on some points, some examples of which are listed below.

After Aḥmad’s rejection of the caliph’s doctrine of the creation of the Qur’ān, al-Ma’mūn ordered Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm, his governor in Baghdad, to send Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Muḥammad b. Nūḥ in chains to his camp in Ṭarsūs. When the two prisoners arrived in Adhanah (Adana)⁵ on their way to the caliph’s court, they met a man who told them that the caliph had died. Aḥmad commented that this was wonderful news and that he had been begging God not to make him see al-Ma’mūn. On this point Ṣāliḥ and Ḥanbal provide two different explanations as to why Aḥmad did not want to see al-Ma’mūn. Ṣāliḥ quotes his father, reporting on the authority of Maymūn b. Muḥāran, that ثلث لا تبلون نفسك بهن: لا تدخل على السلطان، وإن قلت: أمره بطاعة الله “Three [things] do not test yourself with. Do not go to a sultān, even though you say ‘I will command him to obey God’...”.⁶ This means that Aḥmad did not want to see al-Ma’mūn because he was a sultān.

However, Ḥanbal b. Ishāq gives another account of the story, that Aḥmad was afraid to see al-Ma’mūn because the latter had promised that once he saw Aḥmad he would cut him into pieces (*Ia-uqattī annah^u irba^u irba^u*).⁷ Another interesting tale is that the caliph al-Mu’taṣim appointed two men to debate with Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal for three days; during this time the caliph sent food and drink to them. Ṣāliḥ reported his

⁴ : N.J. Coulson, “Doctrine and practice in Islamic law”, 212.

⁵ This is Ṣāliḥ’s narrative; in Ḥanbal’s account, Aḥmad knew about al-Ma’mūn’s death when he arrived in Ṭarsūs.

⁶ Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 49-50.

⁷ Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 39.

father's claims that he did not eat with them during these three days and tried to occupy himself (*yata'alla*) with something else.⁸ But Ḥanbal reported differently, that Aḥmad ate only what saved his soul from dying and regarded himself as one who was impelled (*muḍṭarr*).⁹ The last story from the Inquisition took place after Aḥmad had been flogged, when al-Mu'taṣim gave him clothes before releasing him. When he arrived home, Aḥmad took off these garments, sold them and distributed the wealth he made from their sale to the poor.¹⁰

These actions reflected Aḥmad's practices when he was hated by the caliphs. Yet, his conviction about avoiding rulers did not change when he became a favourite of the caliph. At the end of the Inquisition, the caliph al-Mutawwakil enticed certain traditionalists to stay in Sāmarrā' and expelled other parties, such as *Jahmīs* and *Mu'tazilīs*, from his court.¹¹ The caliph then invited Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal to visit his camp and gave him ten thousand *dirhams* as a gift. Aḥmad refused at first to take the money, but was warned that the caliph might become suspicious of him if he refused to take the offering. Aḥmad then accepted the amount but, it was reported, he did not even look at the coins but instead covered the money with a basin.¹² That night, Aḥmad woke his family (sons, uncle, and cousin) and informed them that his night was a sleepless one; accepting the money from the caliph had troubled him greatly. Weeping, he told his son Ṣāliḥ that سلمت من هولاء حتى إذا كان في آخر عمري بلبت بهم “I have successfully preserved myself from these [i.e., the caliphs] for so long a time, and at the end of my life I have been troubled by them.”¹³ Aḥmad decided not to spend the sum, but instead gave it as alms. In the early dawn, he gathered his family and some of his friends, and distributed the money to the descendants of the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār, poor scholars, and to the general poor people in Baghdad, until the whole sum

⁸ Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 57, 59, 62, 64.

⁹ Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 48.

¹⁰ Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 60.

¹¹ Christopher Melchert, “Religious policies of the caliphs from al-Mutawakkil to al-Muqtadir, A H 232-295/A D 847-908”, 322-26.

¹² Interestingly, Ṣāliḥ claimed that his father asked him to cover the money with the basin. (*Sīrat*, 92), and Ḥanbal claimed he was the one who covered the money with the basin (*Dhikr*, 85). Also, there are other differences between Ṣāliḥ's and Ḥanbal's accounts of the story.

¹³ Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 92.

he received had been given away, including even the bag in which the money had been kept.¹⁴

Aḥmad was then taken to Sāmarrā', along with his uncle Ishāq, his sons Ṣalīḥ and ‘Abd Allāh, and his disciple al-Marrūdhī. His life in Sāmarrā' was a legend of pain, or, as he said:

لقد تمنيت الموت في الأمر الذي كان، وإنني لأتمني الموت في هذا وذاك، إن هذا فتنـة الدنيا وكان
ذاك فتنـة الدين. ثم جعل يضم أصابعه ويقول: لو كانت نفسي في بيدي لأرسلتها. ثم يفتح أصابعه
“I wished to die at [the time of Inquisition], and I wish to die now. This is
an earthly test and that was a religious test (*hādhā fitnat al-dunyā wa-dhāk^a
fitnat al-dīn*).” Aḥmad then clenched his hand and said “If my soul were in
my hand, I would release it” and then extended his fingers¹⁵

It would be difficult to reconstruct all the details of Aḥmad's life in Sāmarrā' under the care of al-Mutawakkil, but some aspects can be listed here. For example, al-Mutawakkil sent food to him every day, but Aḥmad steadfastly refused it, making do with a few loaves of bread. The caliph used to send money to Aḥmad, but he did not accept the caliph's generosity. He also declined the caliph's project to tutor his son and heir, the future caliph al-Mu'tazz. In addition, he refused to narrate traditions either to al-Mu'tazz or to other princes, and would not even narrate traditions in Sāmmirā'. Nor did he attend public prayers, presumably held on Fridays. When asked by his student, al-Marrūdhī, on whose authority he relied in not attending the prayers حجـي الحسن وإبراهيم التـيمي، تخـوا أن يـفتـنـهم الحـاجـ، وأـنا أـخـافـ أن يـفتـنـي هـذا بـدـنيـاهـ. Aḥmad replied: “My authority is al-Hasan [al-Baṣrī] and Ibrāhīm al-Taymī who were afraid to be tested by al-Hajjāj [b. Yūsuf, and they did not pray behind him].” Aḥmad added, “I am frightened that this [caliph] is going to seduce me by his earthly wealth (*dunyāh*).”¹⁶

Finally, when al-Mutawakkil asked Aḥmad to visit him, Aḥmad refused because he was not well. Aḥmad did not suffer from a disease, but his body was very weak due to fasting continuously and eating scarcely anything. However, despite his efforts to save himself from having to deal with the nation's rulers, he had to obey some of the caliph's requests. He visited the caliph's son, and allowed the caliph's messengers to

¹⁴ Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 85–86; Ṣalīḥ, *Sīrah*, 92–93.

¹⁵ Ṣalīḥ, *Sīrah*, 101.

¹⁶ al-Marrūdhī, *al-Wara'*, 84.

dress him according to the customs of the court (Patton supposed that Ahmād would not have put on the garments himself),¹⁷ but when he returned home, he took the clothes off and asked his son Ṣalīḥ to send them to Baghdad to be sold, and the profits given to the poor. Ahmād also regretted that he had not been able to save himself from this visit.¹⁸

Two issues regarding this visit should be addressed here. The first concerns whether or not Ahmād wore black (the ‘Abbāsid costume). As suggested above, the Ḥanbālī literature agreed that Ahmād wore the customary dress of the court when he visited al-Mu‘tazz. However, some sources tried to edit this, claiming that Ahmād had been allowed not to wear black and instead was permitted to wear any other colour. The two possible versions can be found in Ṣalīḥ’s *Sīrah*, where one account states “It was said they will NOT dress him in the black [costume]”,¹⁹ and in the other version the sentence was differently written, thus: “It was said they will fit him in the black costume”.²⁰ The other issue regarding the visit is whether Ahmād kissed al-Mu‘tazz’s hand? Ṣalīḥ reports that the caliph’s messenger warned Ahmād not to touch the prince.²¹ However, a different and awkward narrative was reported by al-Marrūdhī who claimed that the prince’s chamberlain asked Ahmād قال لي سعيد الحاج: ألا تقبل يد ولي عهد المسلمين؟ قال: فقلت بيدي هكذا. ولم يفعل ‘Would you not kiss the hand of the crown prince of the Muslims?’ Ahmād said, ‘I kissed his hand with my hand. I did with my hand like this’ and he did not do it [i.e., kiss the prince’s hand]”²² What can be understood from this quotation is that he did not physically kiss the prince’s hand because he was not allowed to touch him; instead he used his hand to show his respect.

In sum, Ahmād tried hard to keep himself away from the rulers; however, sometimes he had to deal with them, even though he tried to make his interaction with them as infrequent as possible. In addition, the differences between the reports about Ahmād’s

¹⁷ Walter Patton, *Ahmād Ibn Hanbal and the miḥna*, 143.

¹⁸ Ṣalīḥ, *Sīrah*, 97–98; Patton, *Ahmād*, 143–44.

¹⁹ Abū Nu‘aym al-Asfahānī, *Hilyah*, 9: 210.

²⁰ Ṣalīḥ, *Sīrah*, 98.

²¹ Ibid., 97.

²² al-Marrūdhī, *al-Wara'*, 148; Hurvitz, *The Formation*, 94.

practice in Sāmarrā' prove that the Ḥanbalī literature sought to edit Ah̄mad's actions to make them stronger and purer.²³

Aḥmad also criticised his friends and traditionalist colleagues who had relationships with the state or accepted money from their rulers. In one account it was reported that Aḥmad stopped writing to Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh after the latter had shown Aḥmad's letter to Ibn Tāhir, the governor of Khurāsān.²⁴ While Aḥmad was in Sāmarrā', his uncle Ishāq tried to convince him to visit the caliph who was sending messengers to request a visit. Ishāq tried to encourage Aḥmad to go and see the caliph since it would be a good opportunity for him to command and forbid the caliph, but Aḥmad refused. Then his uncle said: "This is Ishāq Ibn Rāhawayh who goes to Ibn Tāhir and commands and forbids him". Aḥmad replied: "Do you invoke Ibn Rāhawayh? I do not approve his actions [of visiting the rulers]".²⁵ Clearly Aḥmad also disagreed with the traditionalists' move to Sāmarrā' to transmit traditions there under the caliph's patronage.²⁶ To avoid their fate, Aḥmad, before he left Baghdad, promised that he would stop transmitting traditions.²⁷ Thus he had an excuse not to narrate traditions in Sāmarrā', or to the caliph's sons, or any other princes.²⁸

Finally, some Shāfi'i sources claim that the caliph Ḥārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170- 193/786-809) asked al-Shāfi'i to elect someone to the position of judge of Yemen. Al-Shāfi'i offered the position to Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, but the latter tossed a sharp and insulting reply at him; "I visit you only to learn asceticism (*al-ilm al-muzahhid fī al-dunya*), and you bid me to take the [position of] a judge? If it were not for knowledge I would not speak to you after today"; this embarrassed al-Shāfi'i.²⁹ Although Hurvitz trusts the story's authenticity, Melchert rightly doubts the authenticity of the narrative, suggesting that it is less likely to have been an actual incident in Aḥmad's life than a later fiction intended to illustrate his piety and al-Shāfi'i's respect for him.³⁰ This is

²³ Hurvitz, *the Formation*, 6.

²⁴ Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 42.

²⁵ al-Marrūdhī, *Akhbār*, 41-42; Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 299; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 458.

²⁶ For those traditionalists see: Melchert, "Religious politics", 322. For Aḥmad's disagreement with them see: Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 45, 101.

²⁷ Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 101.

²⁸ See: Ibid., 96; al-Marrūdhī, *Akhbār*, 139.

²⁹ al-Bayhaqī, *Manāqib al-Shāfi'i*, 1: 154; Ibn Abī 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*, 5: 273-74; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-al-nihāyah*, 14: 387. Ibn Kathīr took the story from al-Bayhaqī, presumably from the latter's book *Manāqib Aḥmad*. And see: Hurvitz, *The Formation*, 85.

³⁰ Melchert, *Aḥmad*, 4.

because al-Shāfi‘ī visited Baghdad in 184/800³¹ when Aḥmad was only twenty years old, and there is no evidence that Aḥmad met him then. However, al-Shāfi‘ī visited Baghdad again in 195/810-11, during the rulership of al-Amīn,³² at a period when Aḥmad was busy seeking traditions and travelling to study with traditionalists; on that occasion he and al-Shāfi‘ī did meet in Baghdad. The story was recalled in later Ḥanbalī sources, but the caliph was al-Amīn, not Ḥārūn al-Rashīd.³³ Even so, there is no evidence for al-Shāfi‘ī’s relationship with al-Amīn, and at that time Baghdad was about to experience a civil war. Strangely, the Ḥanbalī Rizq Allāh al-Tamīmī (d. 488/1095) claims that Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal was flogged to make him accept the position of judge, but he refused.³⁴ This story reflects how the later Ḥanbalīs exaggerate the piety of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal.

6.3. Aḥmad’s family and disciples

Aḥmad’s personality was of great importance to his followers,³⁵ who regarded him as a leader in theology, piety, and jurisprudence. And while his students saw Aḥmad as a model of piety and asceticism, with some of them following his style of life, others admired his piety but did not comply with it. However, it seems that for Aḥmad piety was more important than the knowledge of jurisprudence; for him, being careful about sources of income would lead one to produce correct judicial opinions. On his deathbed, Aḥmad was asked, regarding succession:

من نسأل بعذك؟ فقال: سل عبد الوهاب. وأخبرني من كان حاضرًا أنه قال له: إنه ليس له اتساع في العلم. فقال أبو عبد الله: إنه رجل صالح، مثله يوفق لإصابة الحق

“Whom should we ask after you [i.e., your death] ?” Aḥmad thereupon suggested ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Warrāq [d. 250-1/865-6]. When some of his disciples objected on the grounds that “‘Abd al-Wahhāb does not have a wide knowledge”, Aḥmad replied, “He is a pious man; the likes of him will succeed in attaining what is proper.”³⁶

³¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah*, 14: 133.

³² al-Khaṭīb *al-Baghdādī*, *Tārīkh*, 2: 409.

³³ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 361-62.

³⁴ al-Tamīmī, “Aqīdat al-imām al-Mubajjal Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal”, 2: 276.

³⁵ Patton, *Aḥmed*, 194; George Makdisi, “Hanbalite Islam”, 216; Cooperson, *Classical*, 112-17, 138-51. Sizgorich, *Violence*, 235-58.

³⁶ al-Marrūdhī, *al-Wara'*, 7.

Interestingly, these two trends among Ahmād's close students can be observed in their relationships with the nation's rulers. The first group, which included Ahmād's sons Ṣāliḥ and 'Abd Allāh, and his uncle Ishāq, failed to succeed in following Ahmād's model of piety, despite pressure from Ahmād that they should replicate his piety. Also Ahmād's family took money from the caliph (it was said to be an amount of 4,000 *dirhams* monthly), even though he repeatedly asked them not to accept it. On occasions, he would take the donation away from his family and either send it back to the caliph or give it as alms to the poor.³⁷ He also wrote to the caliph asking him not to send money to his family, but the caliph refused this request.³⁸ Ahmād reprimanded his family every time they accepted money from the caliph, and to compensate for his family's receipt of the donation, he would fast all day and night.³⁹ He stopped taking money from his sons,⁴⁰ eating their food, and even using their oven.

An interesting story illustrates how, after his sons had begun to accept money from the caliph, Ahmād steadfastly refused to eat anything at his sons' houses, or food that had been prepared in their houses. It is said that Ahmād got into a difficult financial situation and as a result he and his household went without food for three days. At that point he borrowed some flour from a friend. The flour was processed and baked, and when the bread was placed in Ahmād's hands he asked: "How did you do it? [How] did you bake it so quickly?" He was informed that the oven of Ṣāliḥ's house was already heated and that they had hastened to bake the bread. Whereupon Ahmād said: "Remove it", and he did not eat it.⁴¹ Another story described how, when Ahmād was on his deathbed, a doctor who came to see him prescribed roast pumpkin, and instructed him to drink its juice. Ahmād insisted that this should not be prepared in the house of either of his sons Ṣāliḥ and 'Abd Allāh.⁴² Prior to that, Ahmād had stopped talking to his sons and uncle, blocked up the doorways between his own and his sons'

³⁷ Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 109; al-Marrūdhī, *al-Wara'*, 66.

³⁸ Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 110-11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁰ al-Marrūdhī, *al-Wara'*, 46.

⁴¹ Abū Nu‘aym al-Aṣfahānī, *Hilyah*, 9: 177. In another account the bread was baked in the house of 'Abd Allāh (Ahmād's other son), see: Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 302; Hurvitz, *The Formation*, 69.

⁴² Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 121; Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 95.

houses, and stopped praying with his uncle, the *imām* of the neighbourhood mosque, choosing instead to walk to a mosque much further away.⁴³

However, after Ahmād's death two of his sons, Ṣalīḥ and ‘Abd Allāh, became judges.⁴⁴ Ṣalīḥ was the judge in Tarsūs, and then in Aṣfahān.⁴⁵ He was also trusted by the caliph al-Mu‘tamid (r. 256- 79/870-92) and his brother Prince al-Muwaffaq (d. 278/891), and acted as al-Muwaffaq's messenger to Egypt's governor Ahmād b. Ṭūlūn (d. 270/884).⁴⁶ Some reports, however, show that Ṣalīḥ did not like to participate in affairs of state, but was obliged to do so because he was in debt and short of money.⁴⁷ Regarding ‘Abd Allāh, he was a judge in an area in Khurāsān at the time of al-Muktafi's reign (r. 289- 95/902-8).⁴⁸

Ibn Abī Ya‘lā's book *Tabaqāt al-Hanābilah* mentions, in addition to Ibn Ḥanbal's sons, several figures from the first generation of Ahmād's disciples who had a relationship with the state. He includes one of al-Mutawakkil's men, Yahyā b. Khāqān (d. ??), and two of his sons, ‘Ubayd Allāh (d. 263/876-77) and ‘Abd al-Rahmān (d. ??), as well as the caliph's poet ‘Alī b. al-Jahm (d. 249/863). These four men could hardly be counted as students of Ahmād. Early Ḥanbālī literature reports that Yahyā b. Khāqān asked Ahmād to narrate some traditions to his son, but Ahmād refused.⁴⁹

The other trend among Ahmād's students was that they had a tendency to aspire to high degrees of morality and piousness. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Warrāq, who was known for his strong piety, was an outstanding figure among them. He warned his son not to go to Sāmirrā at the time of al-Mutawakkil's reign. When his son said: “I am only

⁴³ Ṣalīḥ, *Sīrah*, 108.

⁴⁴ Some sources claim that Ahmād's youngest son Sa‘īd became a judge in Kufa until he died there in 303/915-16. Hurvitz wrongly accepts this claim (*The Formation*, 35) since, as Ibn al-Jawzī suggests, it is more than likely incorrect; Sa‘īd died earlier than that date as he died before Ibrāhīm al-Harbī (d. 285/898) (*Manāqib*, 414). Hurvitz mistakenly reads Sa‘īd's birth as two months after Ahmād's death. Whereas in fact, he was born fifty days before Ahmād's death. See: Ḥanbal, *Dhikr*, 92; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 414.

⁴⁵ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 466.

⁴⁶ Muhammad b. al-Fayd al-Ghassānī, *Akhbār wa-hikāyāt*, 41.

⁴⁷ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 464.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Hurvitz (in *The Formation*, 85-86) notes that Ibn Abī Ya‘lā included ten *qādīs* in the first Ḥanbālī generation. Hurvitz correctly found out that most of these *qādīs* were not students of Ahmād, identifying only two who were – Ṣalīḥ b. Ahmād and Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Khālid. Obviously he overlooked ‘Abd Allāh b. Ahmād's entry; as for Ahmād b. Muḥammad b. Khālid, he probably did not study under Ahmād because he died in 304/916, more than sixty years after Ahmād's death.

⁴⁹ Ṣalīḥ, *Sīrah*, 101; al-Marrūdhī, *Akhbār*, 139.

going for trade”, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb replied: “If you go, I will never talk to you again.”⁵⁰ Abū Bakr al-Marrūdhī, one of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s closest disciples, followed this doctrine. In his book *al-Wara'*, he included some reports that supported the idea of not becoming involved with the rulers, and not taking money from them. Al-Marrūdhī deals with this issue in considerably greater detail in his other book *Akhbār al-shuyūkh wa-akhlāquhum* (which has yet to be used by Western scholars). Two thirds of the book, dealing with different topics, was published a few years ago, with most of it being devoted to exploring how the pious people should not interact with their nation’s rulers.

First, and relying on the authority of the *shuyūkh* (*al-salaf al-Sāliḥ*), including Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Marrūdhī includes reports to warn pious people, especially the scholars (*‘ulamā’*), against having any kind of relationship with their rulers. They are advised not to visit them, or to work for them, especially as judges, or to accept gifts or money from them. They are even advised not to recite a Qur’ānic verse or a Prophetic tradition to them. Second, the book indicated that if someone had to visit a ruler, he must provide him with moral advice, and condemn his unjust and impious actions. Thirdly, the book praises the morality of the traditionalists, including Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, Sufyān al-Thawrī and ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak. Aḥmad is quoted as having praised Sufyān al-Thawrī. According to al-Marrūdhī he said: “ما يتقنه أحد في قلبي”⁵¹ “No one comes before him in my heart”. Al-Marrūdhī also included some reports attacking rationalists. Finally, the book contained reports which reflected the piety of the traditionalists’ doctrines, and in particular their avoidance of food and drink that was brought from lands seized by force (*maghsūbah*).

Presumably, the high piety and morality of these students of Aḥmad made them popular religious leaders in Baghdad,⁵² and this may help to explain how the Ḥanbalīs

⁵⁰ al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, 12: 284.

⁵¹ al-Marrūdhī, *Akhbār*, 157.

⁵² On the importance of the piety and scholarship for building reputations of social influence, see: Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and leadership in an early Islamic society*, 135-50. And for a Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal see: Hurvitz, *the Formation*, 91-101. For a Ḥanbalī example, see: Daniella Talmon-Heller, “The Shaykh and the community: popular Ḥanbalite Islam in the 12th- 13th century: Jabal Nābilus and Jabal Qāsyūn”.

became the majority of Baghdad's common people (*āmmah*) in the fourth A.H./tenth century.⁵³

6.4. The subsequent Ḥanbalī generations

When we look at the second generation of Ḥanbalīs, we find that their idea of piousness closely resembled that of the Ḥanbalīs of Baghdad. This generation, which included the students of Aḥmad's students, was led by four figures: Abū Bakr al-Najjād (d. 348/960), Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923), al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Barbahārī (d. 329/940) and ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Bashshār (d. 311/923). What these four have in common is their devotion to Aḥmad's doctrines and their aggressiveness towards rationalists. Nor were any of them involved in any kind of relationship with the nation's rulers. Al-Barbahārī was well-known for his bad relationship with the caliphs al-Qāhir (r. 320–2/932–3) and al-Rāḍī (r. 322–9/933–40). Indeed, al-Barbahārī died while hiding from the caliph's police chief. Meanwhile, al-Khallāl presumably explains, at least theoretically, the nature of one's relationship with one's rulers. He starts his book *al-Sunnah* with chapters on the importance of obedience towards the rulers and condemns rebellions against them. Included also is a chapter on the virtues of al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the grandfather of the ‘Abbāsid caliphs.⁵⁴ We also have some fragments from al-Khallāl's other book, *al-Siyar*, in which he appears to have gathered multiple reports from Aḥmad regarding his pious opinions about how relationships with rulers should be conducted.⁵⁵ Interestingly, among the Ḥanbalīs in this generation, Ibn Abī Ya‘lā did not include any judgements; and no-one was close to the state except for Abū Bakr al-Anbārī (d. 328/940) who was a teacher of al-Rāḍī's sons; but al-Anbārī was a linguist and grammarian, not a religious scholar.⁵⁶

The relationship between the Ḥanbalīs and the state had changed greatly after Baghdad had begun to be controlled by the Shī‘ī Buyaids (during the period 334–447/945–1055), and then by the Sunnī *Ash‘arī* Seljuqs (from 447–590/1055–1194).

⁵³ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan al-taqāṣīm fī ma‘rifat al-aqālīm*, 126; Cook, *Commanding*, 121.

⁵⁴ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 89–92.

⁵⁵ For some of these fragments see: Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 300; 2: 348, 575. And see: al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, 1: 155.

⁵⁶ For his entry see: Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 133–42.

During this period (which lasted for about two and a half centuries), the ‘Abbāsid caliphs had little beyond their titular authority in Baghdad. For example, the Ḥanbalī literature of Abū Bakr b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (well-known as Ghulām al-Khallāl d. 363/974) claims that he had a good relationship with the caliph al-Muṭī‘ (r. 334-63/946-74), who was the first ‘Abbāsid caliph under the control of the Buyids.⁵⁷

It is possible to identify some reasons as to why this shift in the relationship with the state had occurred. One was that the ‘Arab Sunnī ‘Abbāsid caliphs had lost their power to the Daylamān Shī‘ī Buyids, then to the Turk *Ash’arī* Seljuqs. The Ḥanbalīs in Baghdad saw the ‘Abbāsid caliphs as representatives of the political authority of Baghdad and the Sunnī identity of the city’s people.⁵⁸ Thus it was the duty of the Ḥanbalīs to support the ‘Abbāsid caliphs.⁵⁹ Another reason was the development of Sunnī schools of law in the fifth A.H./eleventh century, when these schools became what Makdisi labelled ‘guilds’. Their *madāris* (singular: *madrasah*) were based on the *waqf*, or charitable trust. *Madāris* and *waqfs* were usually under the patronage of a caliph, emir or a high-ranking official.⁶⁰ Goitein points out that these changes in the nature of the relationship between the *‘ulamā’* and the state led to subservience to the rulers.⁶¹ One example of this change was the great jurisprudent Ḥanbalī Ibn Hāmid (d. 403/1012) who used to go to the caliph’s court and debate religious matters with scholars from other schools of law.⁶²

However, some Ḥanbalīs played an important role in uniting Ḥanbalīs and the caliphate office. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Hāshimī (d. 428/1037) was a Ḥanbalī judge and was very close to the caliphs al-Qādir (r. 381-422/991-1031) and al-Qā’im (r. 422-67/1031-75).⁶³ Interestingly, both caliphs declared two creeds supporting the beliefs of the traditionalists.⁶⁴ The Ḥanbalīs thus became the caliphs’ men, and it was therefore normal to find Ḥanbalī judges. The most famous example was Abū Ya‘lā

⁵⁷ Ibid., 3: 218, 222.

⁵⁸ For the common people in Baghdad who identified themselves as Sunnīs, see: Ibn Tāhir Tayfūr, *Kitāb Baghdad*, 110; Wadād Qādī, “The Earliest ‘Nābita’ and the paradigmatic ‘Nawābit’”, 39-41.

⁵⁹ See Ibn al-Baqqāl’s saying below.

⁶⁰ See: George Makdisi, “The Significance of the Sunni schools of law in Islamic religious history”. 8.

⁶¹ Goitein, “Attitudes”, 212.

⁶² Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 319-20.

⁶³ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 335.

⁶⁴ For these creeds, see: George Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl*, 8-16.

Ibn al-Farrā' (d. 458/1066) who was the judge of the caliph's courts Ḥarrān and Ḥūrān. Subsequently, some of his sons and students became judges.⁶⁵

The Ḥanbalī scholar, Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Baqqāl (d. 440/1048-9) described the relationship between the Ḥanbalīs and the caliphate office during a meeting at the caliph's court by saying:

الخلافة بيضة، والحنبليون أحضانها، ولئن انفشت البيضة لتفقش عن مح فاسد. الخلافة خيمة
والحنبليون أطبابها، ولئن سقطت الأطباب لتهوين الخيمة

The caliphate is [like] an egg, and the Ḥanbalīs are its incubator. Yet, if the egg is broken, it will reveal a damaged yolk. The caliphate is a tent and the Ḥanbalīs are its columns. Yet, if the columns fall down, the tent will collapse.⁶⁶

Ibn al-Baqqāl was saying that the Ḥanbalīs were the protectors and the saviours of the caliphate, and were the Ḥanbalīs to be destroyed, the caliphate would suffer the same fate.

6.5. Ahmad's juridical opinions

It may be thought more suitable to list Ahmad's juridical opinions regarding the individual's relationship with the state after discussion of his own practice in this regard, or even before that. However, in this section I argue that most of these juridical opinions represented the views of the later Ḥanbalīs more than Ahmad's own opinion. Some of these issues are listed below:

i- Shortening the prayers during the travel to Sāmarrā':

It is well-known that in Islamic law the four prostrations of prayer should be reduced to two during travel. However, the majority of the jurisprudents require that such travel must not be for a sinful purpose. If one travels to commit sinful actions, he will not be allowed to shorten his prayer. Taking this into account, Ahmad was asked if somebody would be permitted to shorten their prayers while heading to Sāmarrā'?

⁶⁵ For example, Abū Ya‘lā Ibn al-Farrā' appointed some of his students to the position of judges; see: Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 374-75; his son, Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, the author of *Tabaqāt*, was also a judge.

⁶⁶ Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 350.

Aḥmad smiled and said: “إِنَّمَا التَّقْصِيرُ فِي سَفَرٍ طَاعَةً” Only shortening [prayers is allowed] in [the purpose of] obedience [to God].⁶⁷ The implication of this answer was that one was not allowed to shorten his prayers in a journey to Sāmarrā’ because the purpose of such a journey would not be to obey God. Presumably, Aḥmad did not support travelling to Sāmarrā’ because it was the home of the caliph, his men, and his army. However, a different report can be found regarding this issue. Ṣāliḥ claimed that his father shortened his prayers during his journey to Sāmarrā’.⁶⁸

ii- Visiting the rulers

In addition to the reports listed above about Aḥmad’s resistance about not visiting the rulers, there were others to support this idea. One of Aḥmad’s students claimed that Aḥmad wrote to him: الدنيا داء، والسلطان داء، والعالم طبيب؛ فإذا رأيت الطبيب يجر الداء إلى نفسه فاحذره “This life is a disease, the ruler is a disease, and the scholar is a physician. Hence, if you see the physician pulling the disease to himself, you must beware of him.”⁶⁹

iii- Working for the rulers

The Ḥanbalī literature confirms that Aḥmad neither worked for the rulers nor accepted any request to do so. However, one can track different reports concerning whether one was allowed to work for them. These are listed here according to those individuals who were most resistant, and those who agreed to work for the state’s rulers. In one account a friend of Aḥmad’s asked him: يا أبا عبد الله ركبني الدين، فترى لي أن أعمل لهؤلاء بقدر ما أفضي ديني؟ قال قال لي: قل له: لا. يموت بيده ولا يعمل معهم “I am in debt, do you recommend me to work with these [rulers] until my debt is paid?” Aḥmad refused this idea, and suggested that he should die in debt rather than working with the caliphs.⁷⁰ In another report Aḥmad agreed that whoever worked with the rulers would inevitably be involved in bloodshed.⁷¹ It was also reported that Aḥmad had said: لا يعجبني أن يدخل الرجل في القضاء “I do not like someone to [work] in the judiciary.”⁷²

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2: 348.

⁶⁸ Ṣāliḥ, *Sīrah*, 95.

⁶⁹ Ibn Abī Ya’lā, *Tabaqāt*, 1: 446-47.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2, 123-24.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1: 355.

⁷² Abū Ya’lā Ibn al-Farrā’, *al-Aḥkām*, 70.

Aḥmad's attitude towards working for the rulers altered dramatically in the last report, in which he was presented as a supporter of the notion of working as a judge, and argued: "Muslims must have a *ḥākim* [judge], [otherwise] people will lose their rights."⁷³ A point must be raised regarding this last report. It was related to al-Marrūdhī who claimed to have heard it from Aḥmad. It contradicts what al-Marrūdhī narrated in his surviving writings and, to my knowledge, is not available in any of these books. The exact report was found in al-Marrūdhī's book *Akhbār al-shuyūkh*, but was not related to the authority of Ahmad Ibn Ḥanbal; instead it was ascribed to Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth,⁷⁴ which perhaps suggests that this report might have been attributed to Aḥmad in order to justify the involvement of the later Ḥanbalīs in working at the office of the judge.

iv- Accepting gifts and money from the rulers

Aḥmad's biographers insist that he refused to accept any money or gifts from the caliph and other officials. However, on one occasion he had to accept the money in order to avoid angering the caliph; and yet, he gave the sum to the poor and did not keep any for himself. Aḥmad was also vociferous in his condemnation of those who took the caliph's money, including his own family. On the other hand, another report was narrated from Aḥmad. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān, the son of one of the caliph's men who was his messenger, claimed to have heard Aḥmad say: أَنْزَهَ نَفْسِي عَنْ مَالِ السُّلْطَانِ، وَلَيْسَ بِحَرَامٍ "I keep myself away from the rulers' money, but it is not prohibited."⁷⁵

v- Officials and soldiers

Aḥmad was reported as having had some unfriendly opinions regarding dealing with soldiers and other official employees. His pupil Furān (d. 256/870) asked if he could repair his shoes under the light of a lamp on the door of Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm's house. Aḥmad's answer was "No".⁷⁶ The answer does not indicate why Aḥmad did not allow Furān to make use of the light; was this due to Ishāq's position as a governor of Baghdad? or because of his involvement in the Inquisition? Other reports present

⁷³ Ibid., 71.

⁷⁴ al-Marrūdhī, *Akhbār*, 116

⁷⁵ Ibid., 2: 67; Cook, *Commanding*, 112 fn. 245.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2: 45-46.

Aḥmad's aggressiveness towards the soldiers. According to one account two soldiers asked Aḥmad about his juridical opinion on some matters. He refused to answer.⁷⁷ However, according to another account, Aḥmad approved trading with soldiers. One of Aḥmad's students asked him: “[Is it lawful to] sell to the soldiers?” Aḥmad, according to the report, smiled and said: “Where was the dirham stamped? Is it not in their house?”⁷⁸

6.6. Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from this short chapter:

- 1- Avoiding all kinds of connections to the rulers proved that not all political quietists were supporters of the rulers, or “the kings’ followers”;⁷⁹ a great number of them, including Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, were not friendly with the state and tried hard to keep themselves away from its rulers. Their quietism can be understood as a negative way of resisting the rulers’ corruption.
- 2- Ahmad was not so extreme in his way of avoiding the rulers. He had to deal with them on occasion; even though he did not like to do so. He visited the crown prince, accepted his gift, and accepted a gift from the caliph himself. However, he distributed the money to the poor.
- 3- After Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal’s death, two trends can be noted among the Ḥanbalīs, regarding the relationship between the ‘ulamā’ and the state. One collective kept themselves away, while the other group had a relationship with the state, worked for it, attended the caliphs’ courts, and accepted money from the rulers. However, from the fifth A.H./eleventh century, the majority of Ḥanbalīs became the defenders and supporters of the office of the Caliphate; and the caliphs presented themselves as the defenders of the Sunnī faith. Their version of Sunnism was the traditional-Ḥanbalī one, which was hostile to Shī‘īs (i.e., Buyids) and *Ash‘arīs* (i.e. the Seljuqs).

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1: 300.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1: 125.

⁷⁹ al-Nawbakhtī, *Fīraq al-Shī‘ah*, 6.

4- One should be careful with the juridical opinions reported from Aḥmad regarding relations with the state, as these most probably present these two trends more than Aḥmad himself.

5- There is a point which should be mentioned here. Hurvitz claims that there were different positions among the jurisprudents regarding working for the state, and indicated two extreme groups, "...the Ḥanbalīs, who prided themselves on avoiding state employment, and the Ḥanafīs, who generally accepted it."⁸⁰ Hurvitz's conclusion is an over-generalization without enough observation. The view on working for the state was not related to a particular school of law, to be with or against, but was more related to an individual's piety and his view of the state. Some Ḥanbalīs worked for the state, and some Ḥanafīs refused to do so. The most famous example among the Ḥanafīs was Abū Ḥanīfah who was jailed and flogged as a way of forcing him to accept the position of judge, which he refused. Interestingly, the Ḥanbalī literature records that some Ḥanafīs were offered positions as judges but turned them down.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Hurvitz, *The Formation*, 85.

⁸¹ Such as Khālid b. Ṣabīḥ (al-Marrūdhī, *Akhbār*, 110), and Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā's father (Ibn Ibī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt*, 3: 363-64).

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored two major features of Islamic tradition. The first is the authenticity of the works of one of the eponymous of the Sunnī schools; the second is Sunnī political theology during the third A.H./ninth century as manifested in the doctrines and works of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. The study therefore started by examining the reliability of Aḥmad's works. The first chapter studied the theological works attributed to Aḥmad; I argued that none of the six creeds or *al-Radd ʿalā al-Zanādiqah wa-al-Jahmīyah* to have been attributed to Aḥmad are authentic works. Some of these works can be accredited to their real authors (creeds I and II); the authenticity of others was doubted by historical and textual critics. This study suggests that by the fourth A.H./tenth century Aḥmad had become an ideal symbol of correct beliefs. Hence, it is not surprising to find that different opinions were attributed to Aḥmad in the hope that they would thereby gain authority. However, as has been observed, these attributed opinions did not end up giving Aḥmad one image but instead left him with a highly diverse collection of opinions ranging from rationalism to extreme anthropomorphism.

The second chapter argued that the opinions attributed to Aḥmad were not found merely in theology, but were also in jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence. These conclusions were drawn from examining eight extant *Masā'il* from Aḥmad's students. The early traditionalists (such as Aḥmad's contemporaries, al-Bukhārī and Ibn Qutaybah) were aware of this problem. Therefore the early Ḥanbalīs (especially al-Khallāl and Ibn Ḥāmid) attempted to resolve these contradictions by proposing a method for dealing with the disparities. However, this study suggests that the contradictions among Aḥmad's reports have led us to assume that in many cases it is difficult to distinguish Aḥmad's own legal and theological opinions from what has been attributed to him. These contradicted reports thus reflect disagreements among the traditionalists and students who were part of the circle around Aḥmad or who claimed to be his followers.

The recognition of early Muslim rulers provided an essential platform for the political theology of Muslim sects. Sunnīs, Shī'īs and *Khārijīs*, among other sects, can be distinguished on the basis of their acceptance of these rulers. Therefore, Chapter Three of this thesis was devoted to the historical background of Ahmād's political theology and his opinions about the early Islamic governments (namely, the Rāshidūn and the Umayyads). Ahmād, of course, recognised the first three caliphs as legitimate caliphs; later he included 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalib among the Rāshidūn and accepted his rule. He also succeeded in getting 'Alī, the fourth Rāshidī caliph, to be regarded as part of formal Sunnī doctrine.

Regarding partiality among the Companions, Ahmād preferred Abū Bakr, followed by 'Umar, then 'Uthmān. There are contradictory reports as to whether he counted 'Alī as the fourth-best Companion; however, from the fourth A.H/tenth century the later Sunnī orthodox scholars accepted 'Alī as the fourth best Companion. Although reports from Ahmād show his disagreement with those who preferred 'Alī to 'Uthmān, and that he may regard the one who believes this to be an innovator, the later Sunnīs do not exclude the one who prefer 'Alī to 'Uthmān from the Sunnah. Ahmād also accepted the rule of Mu'āwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān, defended his reputation, and attacked those who criticised him. Yet he did not prefer Mu'āwiyah to any other Companion, nor did he pay attention to reports of his virtue as some other Sunnīs did. The case of Yazīd I was different and it is not easy to identify Ahmād's attitude towards him, due to the contradictions in Ahmād's own reports. These differences, as I argued, reflected the difference of opinion among both traditionalists and Ḥanbalīs towards Yazīd I.

On the other hand, Ahmād's opinion about the fights that took place among the Companions (known as the first civil war, or the *Fitnah*) was clearly defined. All reports from him insisted on his defence of the reputations of all the Companions; he refused to judge between the fighters, and even condemned recollection of the *Fitnah*. Indeed, Ahmād preferred the position of avoiding the *Fitnah*, so that he considered the Companions who had refused to take part in the internal fighting were to be preferred, and found that following them was the rightful method. These Companions, whose follower Ahmād became, can be considered the most significant part of the formative period of political quietism in Islamic history.

Chapter Four focused on the imamate, the legitimate methods of electing caliphs, and the requirement of the legitimate caliph. Interestingly, Aḥmad accepted all the methods used in Islamic history to seize the rulership. He accepted election (*ikhtiyār*), designation by the previous caliph, and even usurpation. Notably, the main factor behind Aḥmad's position was neither the Qur'ān nor the Sunnah, but was in fact the unity and safety of the Muslim community (the *Jamā'ah*); he built his position on the practices of quietist Companions and the social benefits of common people.

Furthermore, according to Aḥmad, the caliph had to come from the tribe of Quraysh. Aḥmad believed in the supremacy of the Quraysh, so that for him, this tribe was above other Muslims; then came the Arabs who were above non-Arabs but below the Qurashīs; and finally there were all the other Muslims.

Chapters Five and Six examined Aḥmad's political quietism. In these chapters I argued that both activism and quietism were trends among the people of the Sunnah, and that it was thanks to Aḥmad that quietism became the formal doctrine of the Sunnīs. Two political concepts demonstrate the political theology of the quietists: the Community (the *Jamā'ah*) and Obedience (*tā'ah*). For the people who believed in the *Jamā'ah* and the *tā'ah*, preserving Muslim unity was more important than ensuring that the rulers were just. Thus, in terms of lives, property and safety, obedience to unjust rulers was a lesser evil than internal fighting for the community.

Aḥmad strongly defended the position of quietism. As part of his method of dealing with different traditions regarding rebellion against unjust rulers, Aḥmad accepted the traditions condemning rebellion and the traditions calling for saving the blood of Muslims, and rejected the other traditions that called for revolutions against unjust or sinful rulers. He also criticised activist *salaf*, and traditionalists such as Sa'īd b. Jubayr and al-Ḥasan b. Ṣalīḥ Ibn Ḥayy. In addition Aḥmad attempted to adapt the history of early Islam to justify the doctrine of quietism. For example, he tried to reduce the number of the Companions and Successors who had been involved in the first civil war; at the same time he criticised the traditionalists, recalled the events of the *fitnah*, and named the Companions and the Successors who had been involved in these events. In practice, Aḥmad refused to join the rebels against the Caliph al-Wāthiq at the time of the Inquisition.

Several points should be observed with regard to Ahmād's political quietism. First, Ahmād's main reasons for supporting quietism were to preserve the unity of Muslims and protect the common people, who always suffered from a lack of security, and whose shops and houses were in danger of being looted. The changing of rulers did not mean anything to these people; thus, Ahmād made the people's safety his highest priority. Secondly, the historical experience of the Muslim nation and the interest of the common people had more influence than traditions did on Ahmād Ibn Ḥanbal, who rejected or modified customs as well as the practices of the Companions and early pious Muslims that did not conform to the doctrine of quietism. Ahmād also warned against sedition and the harm it might cause to the safety and property of Muslims; yet traditions which supported quietism came second in shaping his political quietism.

Third, Ahmād's political quietism did not mean he always favoured the current ruler. In fact, it revealed his distrust of the rulers, and can be seen as a form of silent resistance to the rulers in his time, as the following points illustrate:

- i) In the case of obedience to rulers, Ahmād insisted on obedience as a religious duty; yet he also insisted that must not to be obedience to a creature in disobedience to God; obedience was required only in what was good. He paid the price for this belief when he was jailed and flogged because of his resistance to the caliphs' doctrine that the Qur'ān was created.
- ii) Concerning the *Jamā'ah*, Ahmād argued strongly that one should not divide the Muslim community. However, in Ahmād's thinking, the *Jamā'ah* was headed by the caliph in political issues, but as caliphs had no authority in religious matters, people should obey the *'ulamā'* who knew the meaning of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah.
- iii) Ahmād also persuaded people not to go to the rulers to command them to do right or to forbid them from doing wrong. Ahmād did so, not because he was a supporter of the ruler, but rather because he had lost faith in the rulers. According to him, anyone who commanded or forbade rulers was very likely to be punished. Or else he might become weak when he faced the rulers and thus be unable to command or forbid them so that he could not complete his mission; or he might have been worse and flattered the rulers or eaten at their table.

iv) Ahмad avoided all kinds of connections to the rulers including not accepting their gifts or working with them. He became angry with his family when they accepted the Caliph's money.

All of these points prove that not all political quietists were supportive of rulers or “the king's followers”, but that a great number of them, including Ahмad Ibn Hanbal, were in fact not friendly with the state and tried hard to keep themselves away from its rulers. Their quietism can be understood as a negative way of resistance to the corruption of the rulers.

Abbreviations

- EI¹** *First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 9 vols., ed. M.Th.Houtsma, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993 (reprint of the first edition published in Leiden, 1913-36)
- EI²** *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New edition (= Second edition), 13 vols., ed. Bernard Lewis, Leiden: E. J. Brill; London: Luzac, 1960-2009.
- EI³** *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*, eds. Gudrun Krämer; Denis Matringe; John Nawas; Everett Rowson, Brill, 2011; Brill Online.
- EIr.** *Encyclopaedia of Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982 - present.

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