

“GOD WILL NEVER DISGRACE THEE”

(THE INTERPRETATION OF AN EARLY ḤADĪTH)

By M. J. KISTER

THE WELL KNOWN TRADITION in al-Bukhārī, told on the authority of al-Zuhri—‘Urwa—‘Ā’isha, about the conversation between the Prophet and Khadija after he received his first revelation¹ contains at the end a phrase variously interpreted by Muslim scholars and translated in modern times in various manners.

The contents of the ḥadīth are as follows: After the Prophet had heard the call to prophecy, he came to Khadija with a trembling heart, asking her to cover him. He informed her about his experience and told her of his anxiety for himself. Khadija encouraged him and assured him, that God would not disgrace him because of his good qualities. “Nay, by God” she said, “God will never disgrace you; you do good unto the kindred, bear the burden of the infirm, bestow alms on the poor, entertain the guest.” The last phrase of this ḥadīth is: *wa-tu’īnu ‘alā nawā’ibi ‘l-ḥaqqi*. An attempt is here made to elucidate the meaning of this obscure phrase, and the problem of the originality of the ḥadīth is briefly discussed.

I

To start with, there are two interesting variants of this phrase. Al-Maqrīzī’s version is: *wa-tu’īnu ‘alā nawā’ibi ‘l-dahri*,² you help against the misfortunes of time, whereas Ibn Kathīr quotes a version *nawā’ibu ‘l-khairi*³ and interprets it: “If a misfortune befalls somebody in a righteous case (*idhā waqa‘at na‘ibatun li-ahadin fi khairin*), you extend your help and aid him till he finds means of living or sustenance.”

Al-Qaṣṭallānī⁴ does not quote the version *tu’īnu ‘alā nawā’ibi ‘l-khairi* but interprets the saying in a corresponding manner by giving to the word *ḥaqq* a meaning similar to that of *khair*: “*Nawā’ib* means vicissitudes (*ḥawādīth*); she (i.e. Khadija) said *nawā’ibu ‘l-ḥaqqi* because vicissitudes affect the righteous and unrighteous (*li-annahā takūnu fi ‘l-ḥaqqi wa-l-bāṭili*). Labid said: *Nawā’ibu min khairin wa-sharrin kilāhumā: fa-lā ‘l-khairu mamūdun wa-lā ‘l-sharru lāzibu*.”

Al-Qaṣṭallānī thus contrasts *ḥaqq* with *bāṭil*; the phrase according to him would mean: you help in vicissitudes of a righteous case (as opposed to *bāṭil*, an unrighteous one). The verse of Labid, quoted as *shāhid*, does not, however, confirm this interpretation. Labid wanted to say: Vicissitudes of good and evil both (exist), the good is not prolonged, nor the evil lasting—and not “vicissitudes in a good or an evil cause”. Labid’s verse can be compared with the one by al-Nābigha al-Dhubaynī.⁵

Wa-lā yaḥsabūna ‘l-khaira lā sharra ba’dahu:

Wa-lā yaḥsabūna ‘l-sharra ḍarбата lāzibi

¹ Al-Bukhārī: *Ṣaḥīh*, Bāb kaifa kāna bad’u l-waḥyi, I, 3 (ed. Cairo, A.H. 1286); Muslim: *Ṣaḥīh*, I, 97 (ed. Cairo, A.H. 1334); comp.: Ibn Sa’d: *Ṭabaqāt*, I, 195 (ed. Beirut, 1960); al-Balādhurī: *Ansāb al-ashraf*, I, 106 (ed. M. Hamidullah); Abū Nu’aim: *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, p. 68 (ed. Hyderabad A.H. 1320); *al-Sira al-ḥalabiyya*, I, 277 (ed. Cairo, A.H. 1351).

² *Imtā’ al-asmā’*, I, 13, inf. (ed. Cairo, 1941).

³ *Al-bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, III, 7 (ed. Cairo, 1932); and see W. Sakakīnī: *Ummahāt al-mu’minin*, p. 16 (Cairo, n.d.).

⁴ *Irshād al-sāri*, I, 65 (ed. Būlāq, A.H. 1323).

⁵ *Diwān*, p. 12 (ed. Muh. Jamāl, Beirut, 1929).

which conveys the same idea of changes in the conditions of the tribe. The idea of *ḥaqq* and *bāṭil* cannot be traced in the verses of either Labid or al-Nābigha.

Al-Qaṣṭallānī's interpretation was copied by al-Zurqānī¹; al-Sira al-Ḥalabiyya only comments on the word *nawā'ib* rendering it *ḥawādith*.² A quite different interpretation of the phrase is given by al-Kashmiri in his "Faiḍ al-bārī"³: *Tu'īnu 'alā nawā'ibi 'l-ḥaqqi* is a comprehensive expression for (qualities) mentioned (in this ḥadīth) and not mentioned. The Banū Hāshim gained fame by these features of character. (*awṣāf*). . . .

II

Let us turn to the translators: Houdas-Marçais translate⁴: . . . "et tu secours les victimes des vicissitudes du droit": the words "victims of the vicissitudes of right" are not, however, found in the text: *nawā'ibu 'l-ḥaqqi*. Sprenger translates⁵: "und unterstütztest Leute in unverdientem Unglück," which again can hardly be deduced from the text. Mirza Bashīr al-Dīn Maḥmūd Aḥmad's translation reads⁶: "and you help those who are in distress," which corresponds to the version of al-Maqrizī mentioned above.⁷ An unusual rendering is given by W. M. Watt⁸: "you succour the agents of the truth." This translation (although followed by a question mark) is erroneous and was probably caused by confusing *nawwāb* with *nawā'ib*. R. V. C. Bodley's translation⁹: "Hast thou not been loving to thy kinsfolk . . . faithful to thy word and ever a defender of the truth" . . . merely glosses over the difficulty.

III

For the elucidation of the phrase under discussion early poetry and prose have to be consulted.

A remarkable verse of 'Urwa b. al-Ward runs as follows¹⁰:

Atahza'u minnī an saminta wa-qad tarā
Bi-jismiya massa¹¹ 'l-ḥaqqi wa-l-ḥaqqu jāhidu

The verse is rendered by Nöldēke¹²: "Spottest Du über mich dass Du fett geworden. Während Du an meinen Leibe den Eindruck der Pflicht (welche Andern zuerst Nahrung giebt und mir nichts lässt) siehst? Denn die Pflicht greift an." Nöldēke's rendering is based on the commentary on the words: "Duty is exhausting"; "this means that duties (obligations) come upon him (*yaṭruquhu*) and he prefers the fulfilment of duties to his own interest (*yu'thiruhu 'alā nafsihi*) and to the interest of his family; he is enduring hunger and drinks cold water. The *ḥaqq* mentioned means doing good to kindred, bestowing upon the beggar and the kinsman; everybody who practices it is exhausted by it."

This meaning of *ḥaqq* as a social obligation of the noble member of a tribe towards

¹ *Sharḥ al-mawāhib*, I, 212-13 (ed. Cairo, A.H. 1325).

² Op. cit., ib.

³ I, 28-29 (ed. Cairo, 1938).

⁴ El-Bokhārī: *Les traditions islamiques*, I, 3 (Paris, 1903).

⁵ *Die Lehre des Mohammad*, I, 333 (Berlin, 1869).

⁶ *Introduction to the Study of the Holy Quran*, p. 144 (London, 1949).

⁷ Vide above, n. 2, p. 27.

⁸ *Muhammad at Mecca*, p. 40 (Oxford, 1953).

⁹ *The Messenger*, p. 52 (Lahore, 1954).

¹⁰ Th. Nöldēke: *Die Gedichte des 'Urwa b. al-Ward*, p. 41 (Göttingen, 1863).

¹¹ In Ḥamāsa: *shuhūba 'l-ḥaqqi* (Freytag, p. 723).

¹² Op. cit., p. 78.

the poor, the needy and the kinsfolk in the *Jāhiliyya* is further elucidated by the response of Qays b. Zuhayr, quoted by al-Bakrī¹:

Lā tashtumanni yā 'bna Wardin fa-innani
Ta'ūdu 'alā māli 'l-ḥuqūqu 'l-'awā'idu
Fa-man yu'thiri 'l-ḥaqqu 'l-na'ūba² takun bihi
Khuṣāṣatu jismin wa-hwa ṭayyānu mājidu

“Do not revile me, O son of Ward for obligations which come up again and again are turning upon my property;
 and whoever prefers to fulfil the recurring obligation, his body will turn hollow shaped; he is hungry but noble.”

We have here the expression *al-ḥaqqu al-na'ūbu*, “the recurring obligation” which explains the phrase of the ḥadīth. The same expression is found in a verse of Mu'āwiya b. Mālik, the “Mu'awwidu l-Ḥukamā”³; he gained his sobriquet by this verse³:

U'awwidu mithlahā 'l-ḥukamā'a ba'dī:
Idhā mā 'l-ḥaqqu fī 'l-ashyā'i nābā

“I accustom the wise men after me to do the like
 Whenever obligations come upon the tribal groups”

Al-Anbārī gives a pertinent explanation of the word *ḥaqq* as understood by the Beduins, in which obligations like paying the bloodwit for men, who have no means to pay it, and entertaining guests are included. The translation of *ḥaqq* by Lyall as “just claims” seems not to be justified. A similar explanation of *ḥaqq* by al-Anbārī is found in this commentary on the verse *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* IV, 9, where a herd is described which has been diminished by changes of time and fulfilment of social obligations. Mu'āwiya b. Mālik mentions the idea of recurring obligations in another verse⁴:

Qālat Zunaybatu qad ghawaita li-an rā'at
Ḥaqqan yunāwibu mālana wa-wufūdu

“Zunayba said: you err, as she saw that obligations keep recurring upon our property, and deputations (asking our help)”

An anonymous verse⁵ conveys the same idea of the obligations of a noble man:

Wa-lā arba'u 'l-māla min ḥubbihi, wa-lā li-l-fikhāri
wa-lā li-l-bakhal
Wa-lākin li-ḥaqqin idhā nābanī, wa-ikrāmi ḍayfin
idhā mā nazal

“I do not care for property for the love of it or for the sake of boasting, or because of avarice; but only for fulfilling obligations when they come upon me, and to honour a guest should he alight.”

¹ *Simt al-La'ālī*, p. 822 (ed. al-Maimanī).

² Al-Qāfi: *Amālī*, II, 204: *al-nadūba* (ed. al-Maimanī).

³ *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, CV, 15 (ed. Lyall); al-Bakrī: *Simt* 190 (*idhā mu'dīlu l-ḥadathāni nāba*); Ibn Ḥabīb: *Alqābu 'l-shu'arā*, *Nawādir al-makhṭū'āt*, VII, 313 (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn).

⁴ Abū Zaid: *Nawādir*, p. 148 (ed. al-Shartūnī, Beirut, 1894).

⁵ I, 68—T. 'A.

An Umayyad poet, Shabīb b. al-Barṣā' uses the expression in a reverse order¹:

*Wa-aḥbisu fī 'l-ḥaqqi 'l-karīmata, innamā
Yaqūmu biḥaqqi 'l-nā'ibāti ṣabūruhā*

"And I reserve for obligations the valuable (property); for it is only he who endures that can fulfil the duty of recurring obligations"

The same poet mentions this idea in another verse²:

*Wa-li-l-ḥaqqi min māli idhā huwa ḍāfani
Naṣibun wa-li-l-nafsi 'l-sha'ā'i naṣibu
Wa-lā khayra fīman lā yuwaṭṭinu nafsahu
'Alā nāi'bāti 'l-dahri ḥina tanūbu*

"A share of my property is for an obligation should it come to me; and a share for the unsettled soul. And no good is in a man who cannot train himself to bear the misfortunes of time when they come (upon him)"

The word *ḥaqq* is joined by another verb (*alamma*) in a verse the *mukhaḍram* poet 'Amr b. al-Ahtam³:

*Wa-l-badhlu min mu'dimiha in alamma bihā
Ḥaqqun wa-lā yashtakihā man yunādihā*

"And its poor (of the tribe) give freely when an obligation draws near, and he who calls on them (for help) does not complain of them."

In another poem by 'Amr⁴ obligations are mentioned together with misfortunes⁵:

*Wa-inni karīmun dhū 'iyālin tuhimmuni
Nawā'ibu yaḡhshā ruz'uhā wa-ḥuqūqu*

"I am a noble man, with a household to look after; I take care of misfortunes (entailing) losses, and of obligations."

The translation by Lyall of *huqūq* as: "calls for brotherly help" seems to be inaccurate.

Poets sometimes boast that the noble men of their tribe fulfil their social obligations towards the poor and the needy, holding lightly their property in their generosity. Rabī'a b. Maqrūm, one of the warriors and poets of Ḍabba, says⁶:

*Yuhinūna fī-l-ḥaqqi amwālahum
Idhā 'l-lazibātu iltahayna 'l-musīma*

"They hold lightly their property in fulfilment of their obligations; when barren years wear away the (herds) of the owner of the cattle." Lyall translates: "claims on them."

The commentary of al-Anbārī repeats the explanation of "*ḥaqq*" quoted above as including

¹ *Aghāni* (3rd ed.), 12, 275.

² Al-Āmidī: *al-Mu'talif*, p. 68 (ed. Krenkow).

³ Ibn al-Shajārī, *Ḥamāsa*, p. 50 (ed. Krenkow).

⁴ *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, XXIII, 6.

⁵ Comp. op. cit., IV, 9, mentioned above.

⁶ *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, XXXVIII, 26; T. 'A., I, 470; comp. the verse of Miskīn al-Dārimī: *wa-in ḥaqqun 'arāni ahantuhā* al-'Askarī: *Diwān al-Ma'āni*, I, 29 (ed. A.H. 1352).

the expenditure in order to help in cases of bloodwit, bestowing camels, and entertaining guests. The Umayyad Ibn Rumma says¹:

Wa-innā lakhushnun fī 'l-liqā'i a'izzatun

Wa-fī 'l-ḥaqqi waḍḍāḥūna, biḍun, qalāmīsu

“We are harsh and mighty in battle, and in fulfilling obligations bright, shining and generous.”

In all these cases *ḥaqq* means obligation, duty. The verbs attached such as *'arā, alamma, ṭaraqa, 'āda, ḍāfa, nazala*,² denote the appearing of the obligation, and are synonymous with *nāba*, mentioned in the *ḥadīth* of 'Ā'isha. It is clear, then, that the phrase *Nawā'ibu 'l-ḥaqq* like *'awā'idu 'l-ḥaqq* means cases of obligations coming upon the tribe, or the community. The expression “*tu'īnu 'alā nawā'ibi 'l-ḥaqqi*” is a *Jāhiliyya* term used in praise of tribe and its leaders and was adopted in Islam. It can now be seen that the commentators and translators did not grasp its correct meaning.

IV

It may be remarked, that the qualities enumerated by Khadija in the tradition discussed here are not attributed to the Prophet alone; we find a similar tradition also about Abū Bakr. When the leader of the Aḥābīsh, Ibn al-Dughunna met Abū Bakr, who was intending to leave Mecca, he laid stress on his behaviour in his clan and mentioned his qualities. He said³: “You are the splendour of your people, you help them (to overcome) the misfortunes (*tu'īnu 'alā 'l-nawā'ibi*), you act righteously, you bestow upon the poor. Return . . . etc.”

There is however another version of this story; and it is striking to find that the text is almost identical to the *ḥadīth* of 'Ā'isha discussed here. This version is recorded by al-Bukhārī⁴ on the authority of al-Zuhri—'Urwa—'Ā'isha: Ibn al-Dughunna says addressing Abū Bakr: “A man like you should not be driven out. You bestow on the poor, you do good to your kindred, you bear the burden (of the poor, forlorn or needy), you entertain the guest, you help in the fulfilment of obligations (*tu'īnu 'alā nawā'ibi l-ḥaqqi*). I am your protector. Return etc. . . .”

The similarity of the *ḥadīth* about the conversation between Khadija and the Prophet, and the story of the conversation between Ibn al-Dughunna and Abū Bakr in the version of al-Bukhārī, suggests that this kind of address was a coined formula of praise, current at that period. We find for instance a description of Hāshim⁵ written in a similar style. Many other descriptions of noble men of the *Jāhiliyya* emphasize exactly these qualities.

In later times, even a *mawlā* could be addressed in the same way. When Jarīr came with a group of Yarbū'ites asking the help of Fayrūz Ḥuṣayn (a *mawlā* of Tamīm) because the people were driven away by drought, he said: “you are the splendour of the people, you help (to overcome) the misfortune (*tu'īnu 'alā 'l-nā'ibati*), you bear the burden (of the

¹ Ibn al-Shajārī: *Ḥamāsa*, p. 54.

² Comp. Al-Balādhuri: *Ansāb*, MS. 1025a: *wa-lā yadfa'u l-ḥaqqa idhā nazala bihi*.

³ Ibn Hishām: *Sīra*, II, 12; and see Suhaili: *al-Raud al-Unuf*, I, 231 (ed. Cairo, 1917).

⁴ *Ṣaḥīh*, II, 268; and see: Al-Dhahabī: *Ta'rīkh*, I, 190; Ibn Kathīr: *al-Bidāya*, III, 173. It is obvious, that the mention of these qualities is more relevant in the case of Abū Bakr; here his social activity is rightly stressed.

⁵ *Wa-kāna yaḥmilu 'bna 'l-sabīli wa-yu'addi 'l-ḥaqq'īqa* . . . al-Zurqāni: *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib*, I, 73.

needy and the poor)."¹ Fayrūz handed over 1,000 dirhems to Jarir. Here the praise used in honour of the Prophet and Abū Bakr is applied to a *mawlā*!

In conclusion it may be said, that the phrase *tu'īnu 'alā nawā'ibi 'l-ḥaqqi* is closely connected with the *Jāhiliyya* social ideal about the fulfilment of duties towards the poor and the needy and it tallies well in the ḥadīth about the Prophet with the other qualities mentioned in it. The phrase has to be translated: "and thou helpst in cases of recurring obligations."

The ḥadīth on the conversation between the Prophet and Khadija shows a striking similarity to the tradition about the conversation between Abū Bakr and Ibn al-Dughunna; this seems to suggest that we have here a current panegyric formula.

¹ Al-Balādhuri: *Ansāb*, MS. 1012b.