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## Death, funeral processions, and the articulation of religious authority in early Islam

### Introduction

It is said that when Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn, a scholar who had devoted his life to the study of ḥadīth and to evaluating the credentials of its transmitters, died in Medina in the days of the Ḥajj in 233/847, the Prophet's bedstead (sarīr) was brought out and his body was carried on it. (1) "A large number of people attended his funeral. A man [went about] saying, 'This is the funeral of Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn, who used to guard the Prophet against lies,' and people wept." (2) That a distinguished scholar should have been honoured for a lifetime of devotion to Prophetic traditions by being transported to his grave on what was believed to be the Prophet's bedstead is not implausible, any more than is the large popular turnout at his funeral. The mere fact that the funeral of a prominent person should have been a noteworthy public event is, indeed, not especially remarkable in itself. Reports about a funeral such as Ibn Maʿīn's do, however, acquire a new significance and become worthy of serious attention when we read them alongside accounts of other early Islamic funerals and when we ask if these accounts might shed some light on evolving trends in the articulation of religious identities in the first centuries of Islam. As often conspicuous public events, what role did funerals have as markers of conflicts and controversies in the community? How

**Author's Note:** I would like to thank Professor Michael Cook for his valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I am also very grateful to Professor Susan Ashbrook Harvey for her advice and encouragement.

(1) Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/847), al-Taʾriḫ, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Nūr Sayf, published as vols. III-IV of his Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn wa kitābuhu al-taʾriḫ (Mecca: Markaz al-baḥth al-ʿilmī, 1979), III, 68. (The source of this report is Abu'l-Faḍl al-Abbās b. Muḥammad b. Ḥātim al-Dūrī, the transmitter and compiler of Ibn Maʿīn's Taʾriḫ.) For other accounts, see Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), Kitāb al-majrūhīn, ed. Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm Zā'id (Aleppo: Dār al-wa'y, 1396 A.H.), I, 56; Ibn Abi Ya'la (d. 526/1131), Tabaqāt al-Hanābila (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1997), I, 364 (no. 530). Also see note 2, below.

(2) Ibn Abi Ḥātim (d. 327/938), Taqdimat al-maʿrifā li-kitāb al-jarḥ wa'l-ta'dīl (Haydarabad: Maṭba'at majlis dā'irat al-ma'ārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1952), 317.

was religious authority articulated, put on display, or contested through them? What traces might we find of some of these contestations in the corpus of ḥadīth? What evolving conceptions of the community do the early discussions about funerals point to? These are among the questions which this preliminary inquiry into the social and religious meaning of funerals in early Islam seeks to address. (3)

## Funerals as markers of controversy

Numerous traditions attributed to the Prophet enjoin participation in funerals. (4) Such participation is one of the “rights” the deceased has over other Muslims. (5) It is a *ḥard kifāya*, an obligation that at least some Muslims must discharge on behalf of the community as a whole. (6) A tradition reported by Abū Hurayra maintained that one who followed a funeral procession and prayed over the deceased merited one “*qirāt*” (of reward); and he who stayed on until the burial had been completed was to be rewarded in the hereafter with two *qirāts*. Asked what a *qirāt* meant, the Prophet is said to have likened it to a mountain. (7) Another tradition enjoins upon

(3) Topics which will not be discussed in this preliminary paper, but which I hope to address in separate studies include: the ritual aspects of death, funeral, and burial in early Islam; the articulation of a Muslim religious identity in terms of discourses on how to distinguish appropriate “Islamic” practices relating to death and burial from Jewish, Christian, and Jāhili ones; and constructions of gender through rituals of death and funerals. For a pioneering (but largely descriptive) study of death and funeral rituals in early Islam, see Irene Grütter, “Arabische Bestattungsbräuche in frühislamischer Zeit (nach Ibn Sa’d und Bukhārī)”, *Der Islam*, 31/2-3 (1954): 147-73; *ibid.*, 32/1 (1955): 79-104; *ibid.*, 32/2 (1956): 168-94. Also cf. A. S. Tritton, “Muslim Funeral Customs,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, IX (1937), 653-61; *idem*, “Djanāza”, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960- [hereafter *El*(2)]. On certain aspects of continuity from pre-Islamic to Islamic times, so far as such rituals are concerned, cf. Michael G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 453-58. Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), does not concern itself with the history of death and funeral rituals in early Islam (or in any other historical and social context). For a “modern” account which is attentive to both the ritual and (to a lesser extent to) the social aspects of a funeral, see E. W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (New York: Dover Publications, 1973; first published in 1836), 511-28. Important ethnographic discussions of rituals pertaining to death and funerals among modern Muslims include Clifford Geertz, “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example,” in *idem*, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 142-69; John Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 251-72; Lila Abu-Lughod, “Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25 (1993): 187-205.

(4) See, for example, al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1862-1908), I, 313f. (*Janā’iz*, 2); `Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan’ānī (d. 211/827), *al-Musannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A`zamī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983), III, 449-51 (nos. 6268-6274); Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849), *al-Musannaf*, ed. `Amīr al-`Umārī al-A`zamī (Bombay: Al-Dār al-salafiyya, n.d. [1979]), III, 235f. (Here and elsewhere in this paper, my references to relevant traditions in early collections of ḥadīth are meant to be illustrative but they are by no means exhaustive.)

(5) Al-Bukhārī, I: 313f. (*Janā’iz*, 2).

(6) Al-Shāfi`ī (d. 204/820), *al-Risāla*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabī, 1940), 367; on *ḥard kifāya* in general, of which al-Shāfi`ī’s primary example is the obligation to participate in *jihād*, see *ibid.*, 362-69; also cf. *idem*, *al-Umm* (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1980), I, 312f.

believers to “pray behind anyone who says ‘there is no god but Allāh’, and to pray over anyone who is among those (min ahl) professing that ‘there is no god by Allāh.’”<sup>(8)</sup> A tradition about the noted Kūfan scholar Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) has him hurrying, with face concealed, behind the funeral procession of male and female slaves.<sup>(9)</sup> The primary point of this tradition apparently is to illustrate Sufyān’s piety, in his seeking to honor the lowly while himself remaining anonymous.<sup>(10)</sup>

But while participating in funeral processions for Muslims was thus a virtuous act – and a necessary one for at least some who would stand for the rest (fard kifāya) –, the case of those who were perceived as having been at odds with the community and its norms while yet being “Muslims” was less certain. Perhaps the classic instance of this uncertainty is the funeral of `Abdallāh b. Ubayy, the leader of the munāfiqūn (“hypocrites”). The munāfiqūn are presented in the Islamic tradition as having become Muslims in the Prophet’s Medina only to undermine the nascent community from within, and are roundly condemned in the Qur’ān for their machinations.<sup>(11)</sup> When Ibn Ubayy was on his death bed, he requested that Muḥammad clothe him in his shirt and lead the funeral prayer over him.<sup>(12)</sup> According to other reports, it was Ibn Ubayy’s son, `Abdallāh, who made this request for his father.<sup>(13)</sup> Despite the strenuous objections of `Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, Muḥammad did pray

(7) Al-Bukhārī, I, 332f. (Janā’iz, 58f.). A “qirāt” normally designated the twentieth or the twenty fourth part of a dirham; hence, the term might be used to signify something which was of little value. The use of this to denote something as big and imposing as a “mountain” represents, then, an interesting inversion of meaning. For a discussion of Abū Hurayra’s remark about the use of the qirāt in this context, which seems to have caused some perplexity to the exegetes, see Ibn Hajar (852/1448), Fath al-bārī (Cairo: n.p.: n.d. [1319-20 A.H.]), III, 126-29. For other versions of this hadīth in the major Sunnī collections of hadīth, see A. J. Wensinck, Concordances et indices de la tradition musulmane (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1934-69), V, 365f.; also see al-Ṣan’āni, al-Musannaf, III, 449-51 (nos. 6268-6272); Ibn Abi Shayba, al-Musannaf, III: 320f.; `Ali b. al-Ja’d (230/845), Musnad Ibn al-Ja’d, ed., `Amir Aḥmad Ḥaydar (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-`ilmīyya, 1996), 416, no. 2845.; Abū Nu’aym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038), Hilyat al-awliyā’ wa tabaqāt al-asfiyā’ (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-`ilmīyya, 1997), IX, 64 (para 13118); al-Balādhurī (279/892), Ansāb al-ashraf, V, ed. Iḥsān `Abbās (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996), 507 (no. 15/553). Also cf. the following prophetic tradition which posits the equation between a “qirāt” and the Uhud mountain, though not in the context of funerals: “He who recites one hundred verses [from the Qur’ān] will not be reckoned among the heedless (ghāfilūn); [the name of one] who recites two hundred will be written among the devout (qānitūn); one who recites three hundred will be written among the upright (qā’imūn); and for one who recites four hundred, there will be a qintār - a qintār is one hundred mithqāl, a mithqāl is twenty qirāt, and a qirāt is like Uhud.” Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadī (d. 463/1071), Ta’riḫ Baghdad, ed. Muṣṭafā `Abd al-Qādir `Atā’ (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-`ilmīyya, 1997 [hereafter TB], VIII, 198 (no. 4316).

(8) TB, XI, 282 (no. 6053), emphasis added; also cf. ibid., XI, 292 (no. 6070); Abū Nu’aym al-Iṣbahānī, Dhīkr akhbār al-Iṣbahān (Delhi: Dār al-`ilmīyya, 1985), II, 317.

(9) Ibn Abi Ḥatīm, Taqdīm, 102f. On Sufyān al-Thawrī, see below.

(10) The report also evokes the Prophet Muḥammad’s own practice; he too was reputed to have attended the funerals of the Medinese poor (fugarā’ ahl al-madīna): Ibn Abi Shayba, al-Musannaf, III, 276f.

(11) For an introduction to the topic and some relevant literature on it, see EI(2), s.v. “al-Munāfiqūn” (A. Brockett).

(12) Al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823) Kitāb al-maghāzī, ed. Marsden Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), III, 1057; `Umar b. Shabba (d. 264/873), Ta’riḫ al-Madīna al-munawwara, ed. Fahim Maḥmūd Shaltūt (Qumm: Dār al-fīkr, 1410 A.H.), I, 369f.; al-Ṣan’āni, al-Musannaf, III, 538f. (no. 6627).

(13) `Umar b. Shabba, Ta’riḫ, I, 370f.

over Ibn `Ubayy and did clothe the deceased in his shirt. <sup>(14)</sup> But Allāh disapproved. Though Q. 9:84 names no names, it is interpreted by the exegetes as a rebuke of Muḥammad's action: "And pray thou never over any of them when he is dead, nor stand over his grave; they disbelieved in God and His Messenger, and died while they were ungodly (*fāsiqūn*)."<sup>(15)</sup>

While the Qur`ān had rebuked the Prophet for having prayed over Ibn Ubayy, the jurists were careful to restrict the legal implications of this episode to the Prophet himself. The criterion of membership in the Muslim community was formal profession of the faith, and by this criterion even the *munāfiqūn* were Muslims. According to al-Shāfi`ī, it was only the Prophet who had been commanded not to pray over them, but neither God nor the Prophet forbade others from doing so. <sup>(16)</sup> Conversely, because it was not obligatory for everyone to participate in Muslim funerals so long as some Muslims were doing so, there was room for an individual boycott of a "hypocrite's" funeral. Thus the caliph `Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb "sat away from" the funerals of those he knew to have been "hypocrites" as long as others were available to pray over the deceased. <sup>(17)</sup>

Yet, instances in which a proper burial was in fact denied to the deceased, or at least an effort to do so made, are also recorded in the Arabic historical tradition. As in the Jewish tradition, the lack of a proper burial was among the greatest of humiliations imaginable, the ultimate marker of exclusion

(14) For reports pertaining to the death and burial of Ibn Ubayy, see al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, III, 1057-60; `Umar b. Shabba, *Ta`riḫ*, I, 369-73. For another report regarding the practice of burial in the Prophet's shirt, see Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1904-17), IV, pt. ii, 33 (ʿAbdallāh b. al-Ḥārith b. `Abd al-Muṭṭalib). Mu`āwīya b. Abi Sufyān, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, was also buried in the Prophet's shirt and with the Prophet's nails. (Al-Ṭabarī [d. 310/923], *Ta`riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879-1901], 201. I owe this reference to Prof. Michael Cook.) The Umayyad caliph `Umar b. `Abd al-`Aziz (r. 99/717-101/720) too was buried with the Prophet's hair and nails: Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, V, 300.

(15) `Umar b. Shabba, *Ta`riḫ*, I, 369ff.; al-Bukhārī, I, 343f.; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi` al-bayān `an ta`wīl āy al-Qur`ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-ma`ārif, 1958), XIV, 405-10. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from the Qur`ān follow A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Also cf. Q. 9:80: "Ask pardon for them, or ask not pardon for them; if thou askest pardon for them seventy times, God will not pardon them; that, because they disbelieved in God and His Messenger: God guides not the people of the ungodly." According to certain accounts, the latter verse, which had already been revealed before Ibn Ubayy's death, was taken by Muḥammad as giving him a choice about whether or not to pray for/over the "hypocrites," a choice he decided to exercise until rebuked by Q.9:84 (ʿUmar b. Shabba, *Ta`riḫ*, 372f.). Another account claims that Muḥammad decided to pray seventy-seven times for Ibn Ubayy in the hope of circumventing the Qur`ān's assertion that praying for him "seventy times" would do him no good! (ʿUmar b. Shabba, *Ta`riḫ*, I, 371). A number of traditions attribute Muḥammad's interest in praying for Ibn Ubayy/enshrining him in his shirt to his wish to win over the deceased's clansmen (*ibid.*, I, 370f.).

(16) Al-Shāfi`ī, *al-Umm*, I, 296. Likewise, individuals who had received the capital punishment for adultery, or the offspring of an adulterous union (*walad zinā`*), were to be given a Muslim funeral: Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwattā`* (in the transmission of Yahyā b. Yahyā al-Laythi), ed. Muḥammad Fu`ād `Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo: `Isā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabī, n.d. [1951]), 230; Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, III, 254; al-Ṣan`āni, *al-Musannaf*, III, 534ff. For contrary opinions, according to which prayer over one stoned to death is not to be performed, see *ibid.*, III, 535 [no. 6616, 6618]; opinions likewise differed on one who had committed suicide: *ibid.*, 535f. [nos. 6619f.].

(17) Al-Shāfi`ī, *al-Umm*, I, 297.

from the community. (18) A poignant early example of such humiliation concerns none other than `Uthmān b. `Affān, Muḥammad's third successor as caliph. `Uthmān was widely accused of having violated the prescriptions of the Qur'ān and the *sunna*, of injustice, and bad faith. Though it was disgruntled inhabitants of the garrisons of Irāq and Egypt who eventually murdered him, many among the companions of Muḥammad in Medina were themselves hostile to him and seem to have had little interest in trying to mitigate the crisis. Al-Ṭabarī gives several accounts of the burial of the murdered caliph, the first and most striking of which is worth quoting here:

`Uthmān[’s body] was thrown aside and left unburied for three days. Then [two people] ... spoke to `Ali [b. Abī Ṭālib] about his burial, seeking his permission for [Uthmān’s] family to see to that. `Ali granted them his permission, but when news of this spread, people lay in wait for [Uthmān’s body] by the road, armed with stones. A few members of his family set out with [his body], intending to take him to an enclosure in Medina named Ḥashsh Kawkab, where the Jews used to bury their dead. Now when his body was brought out before the people, they stoned his bier (*sarīr*) and were bent on throwing him to the ground. When `Ali heard that, he sent and demanded that they leave him alone. They did so, and [Uthmān’s body] was hurried along and interred in Ḥashsh Kawkab. When Mu`āwīya b. Abī Sufyān gained supremacy over the Muslims, he ordered that enclosure to be razed and transferred [Uthmān’s body] to al-Baqī'. Then he commanded the people to bury their dead around his grave, until ultimately [those graves] adjoined the cemetery of the Muslims (*maqābir al-muslimīn*). (19)

That `Uthmān was buried, according to this report, in the cemetery of the Jews rather than that of the Muslims is a pointed assertion of the fact, of course, that the rebels did not consider him to be any longer a member of the Muslim community. (20) Some, indeed, had also objected to the performance

(18) Cf. Jon Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 99.

(19) Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 3046; translation as in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XV, trans. R. S. Humphreys (with minor modifications). The *ismād* of this account is as follows: Ja'far b. `Abdallāh al-Muḥammadi - `Amr b. Ḥammād and `Ali b. Ḥusayn - Ḥusayn b. `Isā - his father - Abū Maymūna - Abū Bashīr al-`Abdī. For other accounts of `Uthmān's burial, see *ibid.*, 3046-50.

(20) As for the two slaves of `Uthmān who had been killed along with him, their bodies were, according to one account, thrown out to be devoured by the dogs. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 3049; Sayf b. `Umar, *Kitāb al-ridḍa wa'l-futūḥ wa kitāb al-jamal wa masīr `A'isha wa `Ali*, ed. Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'i (Leiden: Smitskamp Oriental Antiquarium, 1995), 209f. (For some reflections with reference to the Hebrew Bible on the role dogs play in heightening the sense of disgrace in an offender's death, cf. Calum Carmichael, *The Spirit of Biblical Law* [Athens: University Press of Georgia, 1996], 115ff.) Two other early Islamic examples where a proper funeral/burial was contested or denied are worth citing here: After the Battle of Siffīn (37/657), fought between troops loyal to `Ali and those to Mu`āwīya, a supporter of the latter asked Mu`āwīya's permission to bury a cousin of his killed fighting on Ali's side, to which Mu`āwīya replied: "Do not bury him - they do not deserve that. By God, we were not able to bury [Uthmān] Ibn `Affān except in secrecy." Al-Ṭabarī, I, 3303 (the kinsman did, however, have his way after all). When `Ali himself was assassinated by a Khārījite in 40/661, his son Hasan executed the assassin whereupon "the people took him [scil. the assassin], wrapped him in mats, and burnt him": al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 3464; other accounts report extensive torture of this Khārījite before he was killed: see al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, II (volume dealing with `Ali and his sons), ed. Maḥmūd al-Firdaws al-`Azm (Damascus: Dār al-yaqza al-`arabiyya, 1996), 361f.

of the funeral prayers over him, <sup>(21)</sup> though they later relented. Other reports do, however, try to give a view of the funeral which is in accord with `Uthmān's later status, among the Sunnis, as one of the "rightly guided caliphs." Thus, an account reported by Sayf b. `Umar maintains that `Uthmān's funeral was attended by "most of the Companions who were present [in Medina]. Meantime boys and women assembled in the place set aside for funerals.... Afterwards they took him to al-Baqi' and buried him there, in the part adjacent to Ḥashsh Kawkab." <sup>(22)</sup> That "most of the Companions" prayed over him is meant to suggest, of course, that they were supporting `Uthmān rather than the rebels, who alone are to be held responsible for this tragic turn of events; and the report makes clear that the caliph was buried in the Baqi', that is, within the Muslim graveyard, for all that the burial spot may have been adjacent to the Jewish cemetery.

While the funerals of those deemed to have been wayward in their belief or practice were usually allowed to take place, instances of individual boycotts of such funerals were not uncommon. Boycotting funerals was, of course, part of a more general boycott of such wayward individuals: their company was shunned, their ḥadīth was not written (or if already written, the notebooks containing the materials in question might be erased or otherwise destroyed), and their bad credentials made known to others. Many such individuals are characterized in our sources as the people of bid`a or ahwā`, of wayward beliefs and mere "whims". <sup>(23)</sup> Given that "one who walks towards an adherent of bid`a (ṣāhib bid`a) walks in aiding the demolition of Islam", as one ḥadīth puts it, <sup>(24)</sup> the boycott of such individuals was deemed necessary. Specifically in the context of funerals, a tradition such as the foregoing would probably have meant that to be part of the ahl al-bid`a's funeral was to abet their unacceptable innovations.

Thus, on seeing the approaching funeral of one `Amr b. Thābit b. Abi'l-Miqdām al-Kūfi, the noted Khurāsānī traditionist and ascetic `Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) ran into the mosque, shut its door, and stayed there until the procession had passed. <sup>(25)</sup> The deceased, it is explained, had the reputation of reviling the pious forbears (salaf) <sup>(26)</sup> – a familiar polemical motif which usually signals a strong Shī'i proclivity on the part of

(21) `Umar b. Shabba, Ta'rikh, IV, 1306f.; al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rikh, I, 3048.

(22) Al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rikh, I, 3049 (emphasis added); Sayf b. `Umar, Kitāb al-riḍḍa wa'l- futūh, 208f. For an interpretation of Sayf b. `Umar's work as representing the ideas of the ashāb al-ḥadīth, see R. Stephen Humphreys, "Qur'anic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography", in F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys, eds., Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 271-90, esp. 280.

(23) Cf. Qur'ān 45.18 for an admonition against following "the whims of those who do not know."

(24) Muḥammad b. Waddāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 286/899), Kitāb al-bida`, ed. and tr. M. Isabel Fierro (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Arabes, 1988), 159 (no. I, 7); also cf. *ibid.*, 192-97 (nos. IX, 1-25).

(25) al-'Uqayli (d. 322/934), Kitāb al-du'afā' al-kabīr, ed. `Abd al-Mu'ṭi Amin Qal'aji, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1984), III, 261 (no. 1268). On Ibn al-Mubārak, see Fuat Sezgin, Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967- [hereafter GAS]), I, 95.

(26) Al-'Uqayli, al-Du'afā', III, 261.

the accused. Ibn al-Mubāarak used to instruct people not to narrate traditions from this individual, <sup>(27)</sup> and the boycott of his funeral was clearly meant to underscore the same point. His boycott was apparently also meant to show others how to deal with such individuals. It is reported that Ḥibbān b. `Alī (d. 171/787-8), a Kūfan jurist, would “feign sleep” in order to avoid rebuking this same `Amr for his views on the pious forbears. <sup>(28)</sup> It was such negligence that Ibn al-Mubāarak apparently sought to remedy by his conspicuous boycott of `Amr’s funeral.

Such boycotts may well have carried other implications as well. Ibn al-Mubāarak was well-known for his extensive monetary patronage, <sup>(29)</sup> and it is conceivable that boycotting the funeral of someone deemed to be wayward would have brought home the message to those hoping for a share of the patronage that an espousal of certain beliefs would entail their exclusion from the scholar’s favour, in life as in death. The same may have been true of a younger Khurāsāni contemporary of Ibn al-Mubāarak, al-Ḥusayn b. al-Walid al-Naysābūrī (d. 202 or 203/817-18), who was also well-known for his generous patronage (*kāna yujzil al-`atiyya li’l-nās*). <sup>(30)</sup> Though we do not know anything about how he conducted himself at particular funerals, a tradition he transmitted gives us a fair inkling of where he would have drawn the limits of his circle of patronage: «The Prophet said, ‘Do not revile my companions. Towards the end of time, there will come about a people who will revile my companions; if they [sc. the revilers] are sick, do not visit them; if they die, do not witness [their death]; do not marry with them; do not mutually inherit from them; do not greet them; and do not pray [sc. funeral prayers] over them.’” <sup>(31)</sup>

The funerals of those known to have had Murji’ite leanings are reported to have been boycotted by many among the *ahl al-sunna* and the *ashāb al-hadīth*. The Murji`a held that it was faith alone, irrespective of the quality of one’s acts, which defined one as a believer. Though this position was to be largely accepted by the Sunnis of later times, in the late second and third centuries it was the cause of bitter opposition against the Murji`a on the part of the *ashāb al-hadīth*. <sup>(32)</sup> The latter defined themselves not only in spirited opposition to all groups they saw as falling into erroneous and wayward beliefs – such as the Murji`a, for instance, or the rationalist theologians, or the extremist Shi`a – but also, from the late 2nd/8th century onwards, in

(27) *Ibid.*, III, 262.

(28) *Ibid.*, III, 261. On Ḥibbān b. `Alī, see *TB*, VIII, 249-51 (no. 4357).

(29) Cf. *TB*, X, 156ff. (no. 5306).

(30) *Ibid.*, VIII, 138-40 (no. 4240), esp. p. 139.

(31) *Ibid.*, VIII, 139.

(32) On the Murji`a, see A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932); M. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); W. Madelung, “The Early Murji`a in Khurāsān and Transoxania and the Spread of Hanafism”, *Der Islam*, 59 (1982): 32-39; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft in 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991-97 [hereafter *TG*]), I, 152-233; *ibid.*, II, 164-86, 493-544, 659-63, etc; *EI*(2), s.v. (W. Madelung).

terms of a firm, uncompromising adherence to precise traditions (hadith) attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad. (33) Not all traditionists were opposed equally vehemently to the Murji'a, even in Kūfa (34) – where the Murji'a were prominent – although there were those who considered such leanings to be a sufficient basis to boycott their funerals. The Kūfan traditionist Sufyān al-Thawrī was especially virulent in his opposition to the Murji'a, considering them, as he put it, to be the farthest of all from the “Book of God.” (35) He and a fellow traditionist, Sāliḥ b. Hayy, did not therefore attend the funeral of the prominent Kūfan Murji'ite Miṣ'ar b. Kidām. (36) On another occasion, just as the funeral prayers over one `Abd al-`Aziz b. Abi Rawwād were about to be performed, and the people were already standing in rows in preparation for the prayers, Sufyān's sudden appearance caused some excitement. The presence of such a noted scholar would surely have lent great posthumous prestige to the dead man. But Sufyān was apparently there only to emphasize his lack of respect for the deceased, who was a Murji'ite; as people made room for him so he could stand beside them in prayer, he merely walked past the gathering making his refusal to pray all the more conspicuous. (37) Waki` b. al-Jarrāh, who succeeded Sufyān al-Thawrī as the leading traditionist of Kūfa, (38) continued the practice of boycotting the Murji'a's funerals. (39) A variety of statements attributed to Ibn Hanbal urge the boycott of the Murji'a's funerals, (40) and, indeed, of any prayers led by a person of Murji'ite leanings. (41)

The theological controversy between the ahl al-kalām and the ashāb al-hadīth over whether the Qur'ān was the “created” or the “uncreated” word of God has also left its residue in what we can reconstruct of the history of early Islamic funerals. In 218/833, the caliph al-Ma'mūn decided to enforce the doctrine that the Qur'ān was God's “created” word, and had judges and

(33) That juristic thought and legal practice could be based on what Joseph Schacht characterized as the “living tradition” of the ancient schools of law rather than on specific reports from the Prophet was completely unacceptable to them; and luminaries of the ashāb al-hadīth were known to have spent their entire lives collecting, sifting through, and building repertoires of traditions which were to serve as the basis of the community's religious life and practice. On the contest between the ancient schools of law, the ashāb al-ra'y and the ashāb al-hadīth, see Joseph Schacht, The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

(34) Cf. Wilferd Madelung, “Early Sunni Doctrine Concerning Faith as Reflected in the Kitāb al-imān of Abū `Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839),” Studia Islamica, XXXII (1970), 241.

(35) Abū Nu'aym, Hilya, VII, 31 (para 9457). For other reports about Sufyān's views on those he regarded as the people of wayward opinions, see *ibid.*, VII, 27f. ([para 9432]: those denying predestination not to be followed in prayer); *ibid.*, 31 (paras 9456-58) and 35 (para 9480) (Murji'a); *ibid.*, 30 ([para 9450]: general admonitions against wayward opinions).

(36) Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqāt, VI, 254.

(37) Abū Nu'aym, Hilya, VII, 31 (no. 387; para 9458).

(38) IB, XIII, 474 (no. 7332).

(39) He is reported not to have participated in the funeral prayers for the noted Murji'i, Abū Mu'āwīya al-Darir (d. 195). Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqāt, VI, 274.

(40) Cf. al-Khallāl (d. 311/923), al-Musnad min masā'il Abi `Abdallāh Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal, ed. Diyā' al-din Ahmad (Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1975), 319.

(41) *Ibid.*, 318. Certain statements attributed to him specify that one is not to accept a Murji'ite as prayer leader only if the latter is an active propagandist for his cause: *ibid.*, 319.

traditionists summoned to have them examined on this matter. Anyone not subscribing to this doctrine was to be barred from narrating ḥadīth or testifying before the judge as a credible witness. (42) One's credentials as a scholar and even one's probity and hence social standing were made contingent, during this Inquisition – the *Mihna* – on assent to the Qur'ān's createdness. (43) But in some cases the punishment for nonconformity was harsher. Many recalcitrant scholars were transported from the provincial centers to the capital, or to the caliph's camp at Ṭarsūs; and several were imprisoned, tortured, and a few killed during the reign of the two immediate successors of al-Ma'mūn under whom the *Mihna* remained in effect. When Nu'aym b. Ḥammād, a traditionist who had refused to accept the caliph's position on the Qur'ān, died in prison (228/844), "he was dragged with his chains and thrown in a pit; [his body was] not covered with a shroud, and it was not prayed over." (44) The body of another member of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*, Aḥmad b. Naṣr al-Khuzā'i, accused of plotting against the caliph though actually executed for non-conformity to the caliphal position on the createdness of the Qur'ān, was put on public display in the same enclosure as had the body of the notorious Iranian rebel Bābak, and a note was attached to his ear proclaiming him, *inter alia*, to be an "infidel" (*kāfir*), a "polytheist" (*mushrik*), and one who was utterly misguided (*dāll*). (45)

Given the treatment of many among the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* during the *Mihna*, it is not surprising to see the latter striking back with a vengeance as soon as they had the opportunity. According to views attributed to Ibn Ḥanbal, one was not to perform funeral prayers over those who espoused the Qur'ān's createdness – often characterized, for this and other beliefs as the "Jahmiyya". (46) Asked who was to perform funeral prayers over a "Jahmi" who died in a village where only Christians were to be found, Ibn Ḥanbal is said to have responded, "I would [still] not pray over him. Let him who wants to, pray over him." (47) Ibn Ḥanbal's boycott even extended to those erstwhile colleagues of his who, under official pressure, had given in during

(42) See al-Ma'mūn's letters to his governor of Baghdād in al-Ṭabari, *Ta'rikh*, III, 1112-1121, 1125-32.

(43) For modern accounts and interpretations of the *Mihna*, see W. M. Patton, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Mihna* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1897); W. Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy concerning the Creation of the Koran", in *Orientalia hispanica sive studia F. M. Pareja octogenario dicata*, ed. J. M. Barral, I (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 504-25; *EI*(2), s.v. "Mihna" (M. Hinds); van Ess, *TG*, III, 446-80; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbasids* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 106-118; Michael Coopers, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 34-40, 117-38.

(44) Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1201), *Manāqib al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānī, n.d.), 397. On Nu'aym, *GAS*, I, 104f.

(45) Al-Ṭabari, *Ta'rikh*, III, 1343-50; on him, also see *TB*, V, 382-88 (no. 2939).

(46) Al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, 428. Eventually, not only those who held the Qur'ān to be created, but also those who held the *pronunciation* of the Qur'ān to be created came to be denounced in the circles of Ibn Ḥanbal and his followers as the "Jahmiyya", though the latter characterization could also refer to other doctrines which Ibn Ḥanbal and/or his followers saw as reprehensible. On the Jahmiyya, see *EI*(2), s.v. (W. M. Watt); Madelung, "Origins of the Controversy."

(47) Al-Khallāl, *Masā'il*, 428.

the Mihna. It is said that he refused to transmit ḥadīth on the authority of these scholars, <sup>(48)</sup> and he did not even participate in the funerals of some of them. <sup>(49)</sup>

### Funeral as markers of authority

A variety of traditions record the instructions allegedly left by the dying man about how his funeral was to be conducted. <sup>(50)</sup> It was not uncommon to specify that one's death was not to be publicly announced (*adhān/īdhān*). <sup>(51)</sup> There are also occasional reports pointing to a certain struggle over who would lead the funeral prayers. In particular, when the deceased was a distinguished "orthodox" scholar, the governor or the local representative of the state was often eager to lead the funeral in order, evidently, to publicly emphasize the state's patronage of widely respected individuals. <sup>(52)</sup> On the death of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, for instance, it was

(48) *TB*, X, 419 (no. 5578); Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 388.

(49) For instance, he is reported to have boycotted, on these grounds, the funeral of the ascetic Abū Naṣr al-Tammār (d. 228/842): *TB*, X, 420 (no. 5578). On this, see below.

(50) See, for instance, the caliph al-Ma'mūn's instructions regarding his funeral and burial: al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III, 1136f. Though many early Muslim religious scholars left behind guidelines about how their funerals were to be handled (cf. the following note), such instructions are unusual for the caliphs. In view of al-Ma'mūn's extraordinary interest in ancient Greek learning, it is tempting to speculate whether he was self-consciously trying to model himself on the example of the Greek philosophers (even though the content of his dying instructions does not reveal any extra-Islamic influences). As Shaye Cohen observes, "Burial and memorial services are common topics in the wills of the philosophers. Aristotle, Theophrastus, Strato and Lyco instruct their heirs/executors how they must be buried." Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Patriarchs and Scholars," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, XLVIII (1981), 67.

(51) *Adhān/īdhān* in the context of death and funerals does not refer to the public call to ritual prayers but is rather to be understood as the act of making a death in question publicly known. On this basic sense of the term, see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab* (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1956), XIII, s.v. "A-DH-N". For instances in which various individuals left behind instructions against this practice, see Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, V, 106 (Sa'īd b. al-Musayyib); *ibid.*, V, 163 (ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Ṭālib); *ibid.*, VI, 61f. (ʿAlqama b. Qays); VI, 73f. (ʿAmr b. Shurayḥ); VI, 99 (Shurayḥ the qāḍī). For characterizations of *adhān/īdhān* as a pre-Islamic, Jāhili practice, see al-Ṣanʿānī, *Musannaf*, III, 390 (nos. 6053); also cf. Ibn Sa'd, VI, 73f. (where it is characterized as "jāhiliyya aw da'wa al-jāhiliyya" and is also related to the pre-Islamic Arab tradition of wailing over the dead). But for traditions which allow *adhān/īdhān*, with reference to Muhammad's own practice, see al-Ṣanʿānī, *Musannaf*, III, 390f. (no. 6056f.) Also cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* IV, pt. i, 21, on the announcement of the death of al-ʿAbbas, the Prophet's uncle, by his clan, the Banu Hashim. The procedure was to send out a "mu'addhin" to announce the death; Grütter, "Arabische Bestattungsbräuche," *Der Islam*, XXXI, 152.

It is worth considering if the funeral *adhān* also had any relation with the Jewish practice of sounding the shofar to announce a death. Among the Jews, this use of the shofar is attested for Babylonia ca. 400 C.E. Cf. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem and New York: Macmillan, 1971), XIV, s.v. "Shofar"; Davies, 105. Conversely, late antique rabbinic sages sometimes also left behind instructions against being mourned or eulogized: Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Press, 1989), 63. (Rabbi Judah, who instructed his companions "not [to] eulogize me in the towns" also laid down however that "he who attended me during my lifetime will attend me at my death." Quoted in Levine, 63; for this and other traditions on the death of Rabbi Judah, also see Cohen, "Patriarchs and Scholars," 60ff.)

(52) Cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, IV, pt. i, 138 (the funeral of ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar led by the notorious Umayyad governor, al-Ḥajjāj, against the wishes of the deceased).

Muḥammad b. `Abdallāh b. Tāhir, the governor of Baghdād, who led the funeral prayers for him, despite the wishes to the contrary of Ibn Ḥanbal's own family. (53) Sometimes, a person might not be invited to join, or be allowed to lead, a funeral on account of his strained relations with the deceased. (54) I have not, however, come across any instances where those perceived as wayward were actually prevented, on account of such a perception, from attending a funeral. That is, while the funeral of someone viewed as espousing wayward doctrines was often boycotted, as seen in the preceding section, there seems to be no evidence that the ahl al-bida` were also prevented from attending the funeral of a distinguished scholar. (55) Rather, wide attendance at funerals, and, as will be seen later, even the attendance of non-Muslims, was usually a mark of the deceased's authority. Muslim participation in the funeral of non-Muslims is usually not mentioned, and for perhaps understandable reasons. (56)

In general, the information about funerals in biographical dictionaries and other classical Arabic sources remains extremely sketchy. While the date and place of a scholar's death are almost invariably reported, as often is much other incidental information about him, reports about the funeral itself

(53) Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 265/878), *Sirat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Fu`ād `Abd al-Mun`im Aḥmad (Alexandria: Mu`assasat shabāb al-jāmi`a, 1981), 137f.; Ḥanbal b. Ishāq b. Ḥanbal (d. 273/886), *Dhikr miḥnat al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Muḥammad Naghsh (Cairo: N.p., 1977), 112. Note that while the jurists assign to the ruler the authority to lead or to deputize someone for the Friday and other communal prayers (e.g., the prayers on occasion of `id, solar and lunar eclipse, and in a time of drought), they do not talk about funeral prayers in this context at all; the implication is that such prayer is to be left to the people, just as the daily prayers in "private" (as opposed to "state") mosques is to be left to them. Cf., for instance, al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), *al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyya* (Cairo: Matba`at al-watan, 1298 A.H.), 96-103; Abū Ya`lā b. al-Farrā` (d. 458/1065), *al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyya*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamid al-Fiḳī (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabi, 1357 A.H.), 78-90. For a sample of some early views on who is most fit to lead a funeral prayer, see al-Ṣan`āni, *al-Musannaf*, III, 471-73. Also cf. al-Shāfi`i, *al-Umm*, I, 313, where he states his own preference for "the kinsman (wālī) as more entitled [to lead the prayer] than the governor (wālī)", but he also notes the opposite view.

(54) The relations between Muḥammad's first successor, Abū Bakr, and Muḥammad's daughter, Fāṭima were strained, for instance, and when she died six months after her father, Abū Bakr was not invited to join her funeral. `Umar b. Shabba, *Ta`riḥ*, I, 196f. Also see *ibid.*, III, 1050, for the instructions left behind by `Abdallāh b. Mas`ūd, a famous companion of the Prophet, that the caliph `Uthmān, with whom he was on bad terms, was not to preside over his funeral. Cf. `Uthmān's reaction (in *ibid.*): "Were it not that this would become a sunna, I would have pulled him out (of his grave) in order to pray over him!"

(55) Ḥanbalī sources testify to the presence of unnamed "innovators" (ashāb bida`) at Ibn Ḥanbal's funeral. Appearing in a dream after his death, Ibn Ḥanbal reported that those who had prayed over him had been forgiven. When reminded that there had been innovators among them, he stated that the latter had been "rewarded" (presumably in a way which amounted to something less than salvation). Ibn Abi Ya`lā, *Tabaqāt al-Hanābila*, I, 103. This report does not, however, say anything about the non-Muslims who are also supposed to have participated in his funeral. Ibn Ḥanbal's funeral will be discussed later in this paper.

(56) There are exceptions, however. See Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, III, 347f. on the discussion of whether it was appropriate for a person to participate in the funeral of his non-Muslim relative (the instances adduced refer to Arabian polytheists and Christians, and the answer is a qualified 'yes'). Other examples: the funeral of the chief of the Rabī'a tribe, who was a Christian, included Muslims as well. See Henri Lammens, *Études sur le règne du calife omayyade Mo`āwia Ier* (Paris, 1908), 436, cited in Elizabeth Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, A Gateway to Paradise: The North African Response to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 93; also cf. al-Tabari, *Ta`riḥ*, I, 3460, cited in Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 455, for yet another instance.

are uncommon at best. Such is often the case with even some of the most prominent religious scholars of their time. (57) We must bear in mind, therefore, that the lack of information on a funeral does not necessarily suggest that it was poorly attended; after all, the fact of poor attendance itself was sometimes commented on. (58) On the other hand, it may not always be possible to know why the funeral of a particular individual was well-attended, or what, if anything that might mean for the broader social and religious history of the time. Such questions are nevertheless worth asking for those individuals, from the first centuries of Islam, who are in fact described in biographical dictionaries as having had well-attended funerals.

In what follows, I shall provide brief notes on a number of late second and early to middle-third century scholars whose funerals are mentioned in the biographical dictionaries. Though we know something about the funerals of certain earlier figures as well (59), it is only from the late second century that we begin to be learn about a number of roughly contemporary or near contemporary figures. That is, it is only from this time onward that one can begin to perceive the contours of certain evolving religious trends in the light of the reports about the funerals of particular individuals. My notes on these scholars are not intended to go beyond identifying them in terms of reports which may shed some light on the significance of their funerals. And in the interest of economy, I have adopted the famous funeral of Ibn Hanbal as the cutoff point of this sample.

**Al-Awzā`ī** (d. 157/774): Among the foremost legal scholars of his age (60), al-Awzā`ī also left behind a considerable reputation for his active role as a local patron and protector of the interests of the people, Muslims as well as non-Mus-

(57) Random examples would include such prominent scholars of hadīth as the Basran Shu`ba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776; on him, *TB*, IX, 255-66 [no. 4830]; the Kūfan Sufyān b. `Uyayna (d. 196/811, in Mecca: on him: *TB*, IX, 173-83 [no. 4764]); the Basran `Affān b. Muṣlim al-Saffār (d. 220/935, in Baghdad; on him: *TB*, XII, 264-72 [no. 6715]; see *ibid.*, 272 where one person even mentions being present at `Affān's funeral, but says nothing about the character of the funeral itself.

(58) Cf. the case of al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī, who earned Ibn Ḥanbal's disapproval on account of his indulgence in *kalām*: "So Ḥamad b. Ḥanbal parted company with him, and [al-Muḥāsibī] hid himself in his house in Baghdad, and died there. No more than four people prayed over him..." *TB*, VIII, 211 (no. 4330).

(59) For example: the funeral of al-`Abbās, from which "no man, woman, or child stayed back": Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, IV, pt. i, 22. (Note that Muḥammad b. `Umar al-Wāqidi, Ibn Sa'd's immediate source for this report, was a qādi in the service of the `Abbāsids, the descendants of al-`Abbās - hence a possible interest in glorifying accounts of the funeral.) For other reports on al-`Abbās' funeral, see *ibid.*, IV, pt. i, 21f. *Ibid.*, V, 148: the funeral of Sālim b. `Abdallāh, a grandson of the caliph `Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. The Umayyad caliph Hishām b. `Abd al-Malik was in Medina at this time and led the funeral prayers over Sālim. Seeing the number of people present, the caliph is said to have increased the number of military conscripts from Medina to 4000, and this year (106) itself came to be remembered as "the year of the four thousand." *Ibid.*, VII, pt. i, 129: Hasan b. Abi'l-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), the noted ascetic and theologian. Ibn Sa'd reports that Hasan's body "was taken out [for burial] only after the people had departed", which presumably means that too many people had wanted to participate in his funeral.

(60) On al-Awzā`ī, see *GAS*, 516f.; Schacht, *Origins*, 34f., 70-73, 119, 277, 285ff.; Gerhard Conrad, *Die Qudāt Dimasq und der madhāb al-Auzā`ī: Materialien zur syrischen Rechtsgeschichte* (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994), *passim*.

lims, interceding for those who were imprisoned, imploring the authorities to try to avoid a possible famine striking the inhabitants of a city, requesting a raise in stipends for the people, and, in general, reminding the powerful of their obligations. <sup>(61)</sup> This role of acting as a protector and patron of the populace, in the city and beyond, has strong parallels with the role of the bishop and holy man in late antiquity <sup>(62)</sup>, and there is no reason to suppose that Muslim holy men and scholars would not have adapted well to what the inhabitants of a city expected of them. This role provides at least some of the context in which traditions about his funeral are to be seen. One Sālim b. al-Mundhir reported: “Hearing the cry regarding the death of al-Awzā`ī, I came out and the first thing I saw was a Christian who had poured ashes on his head. (The Muslims of Beirut would continue to recognize him for this.) Four communities (umam) came out for the funeral, though none was with the other (laysa minhā wāhida ma`a sāhibatihā): we, the Muslims, came out carrying him, and the Jews came out [and remained?] on one side, the Christians (al-naṣāra) on one side, and the Copts (al-qibt) on one side.” <sup>(63)</sup>

This account is as remarkable for noting the presence of non-Muslims in the funeral procession, as it is for emphasizing the presence of each as a distinct “community”, self-consciously keeping away from other confessional communities. <sup>(64)</sup> The insistence that the communities kept away from each other may, perhaps, be taken to indicate a certain ambivalence in this report about exactly what to make of the non-Muslim presence: on the one hand, it is, of course, a mark of the dead man’s stature that everybody wants to join in; but, on the other hand, and from the perspective of later Muslims at least, such participation also threatens to blur religious boundaries. Hence, perhaps, the need to underline that it was “we”, the Muslims, who were carrying the body, and the other communities, while participating, remained at a safe distance.

Traditions about the participation of members of different confessional communities in a funeral are common motifs in descriptions of late antique Christian saints. We shall briefly return to such traditions later in this essay.

**Sufyān al-Thawrī** (d. 161/778): Sufyān was one of the most distinguished Kūfan traditionists, jurists, and ascetics of his time, and one who left a

(61) See the text of these letters in Ibn Abi Hätim, *Taqdima*, 187-202.

(62) See, for instance, Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), esp. 71-117; idem, *Society and the Holy*, 115ff. and esp. 126ff., 153ff.; Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), esp. 158ff.

(63) Ibn Abi Hätim, *Taqdima*, 202. The *isnād* for this account is as follows: `Abd al-Rahmān (Ibn Abi Hätim) - al-`Abbās b. al-Walid b. Mazyad - Sālim b. al-Mundhir, who was himself a participant in the funeral. Quoted in Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 211 n. 30. As Josef van Ess has observed, the “Christians” from whom the Copts are distinguished in this report are presumably the Melkites: van Ess, *TG*, I, 74 n. 6. (I am grateful to Prof. Michael Cook for this reference.)

(64) Cf. the four communities identified in the funeral of Ibn Ḥanbal, below.

very considerable influence on later generations of the ashāb al-ḥadīth.<sup>(65)</sup> A number of reports suggest the eagerness of the `Abbāsids to have him accept some form of royal patronage which was equally matched by the scholar's refusal to oblige. Sufyān's vocal opposition to the ruling house eventually forced him into hiding, a state of affairs which was to continue till the end of his life.<sup>(66)</sup>

Given these circumstances of his life and death, it is not surprising that traditions about his funeral in Baṣra, where he had died, are conflicting. According to a report in the Tabaqāt of Ibn Sa`d, "his bier was brought forward suddenly (fujā'atan) before the people of Basra; [even so] people heard about his death and a large number attended [his funeral (wa-shahidahu khalq)]."<sup>(67)</sup> A report in Ta'rikh Baghdād notes, on the other hand, that he was buried at night, implying that many people were therefore unable to attend the funeral.<sup>(68)</sup> Other traditions are more dramatic in effect. According to one report, when Sufyān died, his body was placed at the door of the congregational mosque. Thereupon, "the official ([or governor?] sultān) came, removed the covering from his [scil. Sufyān's] face, and immersed him in camphor. Then he wrote to the ruler (al-sultān al-a`zam): 'I found Sufyān on a bedstead, already washed and shrouded; I have covered him with (literally: immersed him in) camphor and await your orders regarding him.' A thousand boats (samāri) then departed to his funeral, and he was buried after a few days."<sup>(69)</sup>

This last account is plainly hagiographical, but it is not without interest for reflecting the concern of the ruling elite to associate themselves with Sufyān (or his memory) at least in death, after they had failed to do so in life. It is also worth noting that certain elements which comprise this account are attested for other funerals too, and need not be mere topoi. For instance, governors are often known to have insisted on leading the funeral prayer, especially if the deceased was a prominent man. Of the noted Kūfan traditionist, Abū Nu`aym al-Faḍl b. Dukayn (d. 219/834)<sup>(70)</sup>, it is reported for instance that because his funeral took place very early in the morning many people had remained unaware of his death. His son had asked someone from the family of Ja`far b. Abī Ṭālib to preside over the funeral. This might be taken as an indication of the deceased's pro-Shī`ī proclivities and was possibly also meant (or at least perceived) as an affront to the ruling `Abbāsīd house, which saw this and other Shī`ī families as a threat to their own legitimist claims. The governor, displeased at what had transpired, went so far as to remove the dead man from the grave (thumma tanahha bihi `an al-qabr) and prayed over him again, along with the people who had come to join him

(65) Cf. EI(2), s.v. (H. P. Raddatz).

(66) On some of these traditions, see Zaman, Religion and Politics, 79f., 165f.

(67) Ibn Sa`d, Tabaqāt, 260.

(68) TB, IX, 171 (no. 4763).

(69) Abū Nu`aym, Hilya, VII, 55 (no. 387; para 9581).

(70) On him, see GAS, I, 101.

by that time. <sup>(71)</sup> Leading the funeral prayer was thus fraught with symbolic significance, and it is not unlikely that by associating himself with Sufyān's funeral the governor might similarly have sought to dampen the edge of the dead scholar's opposition to the ruling house.

**Dāwūd b. Nuṣayr al-Ṭā'i** (d. 165/781-82): A Kūfan who began his career by studying *fiqh* with Abū Ḥanifa <sup>(72)</sup>, Dāwūd later became an ascetic (*ta'abbada*) and "sat in his house" for nearly twenty years. <sup>(73)</sup> He is said to have given away his considerable inheritance to the needy <sup>(74)</sup>, while himself practising extreme acts of self-deprivation which included fasting for forty years. <sup>(75)</sup> Indeed, he is said to have counselled "fasting through the world (*al-dunyā*) and making death the occasion to break the fast." <sup>(76)</sup> While suggesting that one "flee from the people as you would flee from a wild beast," he, paradoxically, also insisted that one not abandon the Community (*jamā'a*). <sup>(77)</sup> His funeral was attended by "an enormous crowd," according to the aforementioned Kūfan traditionist Abū Nu'aym al-Faḍl b. Dukayn - who himself was prevented from approaching the bier because of the crowd. <sup>(78)</sup> The *Ta'rikh Baghdād* gives two versions of an oration which the ascetic Ibn al-Sammāk is said to have delivered at Dāwūd's graveside after the latter had been buried <sup>(79)</sup>:

... you heard ḥadīth but you left it to others to narrate it; you developed an understanding in the religion of God (*tafahhamta fī dīn Allāh*), but you left it to them to give legal opinions. <sup>(80)</sup> Covetousness did not degrade you...; you did not accept a present from the ruler, nor a gift from the "brothers" [scil. companions on the ascetic path]. You imprisoned yourself in your house, with no one to converse with you (*fa-la muhaddith laka*), no curtain on your

(71) Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, VI, 280. Another well-attested motif in the last mentioned report on Sufyān's funeral relates to the provision of items to be used in preparing the body for burial (in this case, the governor's use of camphor). Reports about the funeral of Ibn Ḥanbal relate that when the governor learnt of the death, he sent a shroud and balms to Ibn Ḥanbal's sons, but the gift was declined. Ḥanbal b. Ishāq, *Dhikr mihnat al-imām*, 111f.; Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sirat al-imām*, 137.

(72) *TB*, VIII, 344f. (no. 4455).

(73) Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, VI, 255.

(74) *TB*, VIII, 348.

(75) *Ibid.*, VIII, 346.

(76) *Ibid.*, VIII, 347.

(77) *Ibid.*, VIII, 347.

(78) Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, VI, 255.

(79) This "Ibn al-Sammāk" must be the Kūfan ascetic Muḥammad b. Sabīh Ibn al-Sammāk, who died in 183/799. On him, see *TB*, II, 445-49 (no. 967); Abū Nu'aym, *Hilya*, VIII, 222-38 (no. 401). Ibn al-Sammāk's reputation as a holy man and preacher is attested to by his having been invited to visit Baghdād and preach before the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. The ascetic obliged, and the caliph is reported to have wept profusely at his admonitions (*TB*, II, 448f.).

(80) The implication here is that narrating traditions and giving legal opinions had become a path to worldly success and to assertions of religious authority. Hence, despite his scholarly stature, Dāwūd al-Ṭā'i would have nothing to do with such vocations. See below for a similar motif in reports about the ascetic Bishr b. al-Ḥārith.

door, no pitcher to keep your water cool, no bowl from which to eat. [But] if you saw your own funeral and the number of those following you [scil. in the funeral procession], you would have known that He (*annahu*) has ennobled and honored you, and has clothed you in the robe of your acts. If the servant did not incline towards asceticism in the world for anything but love of such beautiful gathering, and [such] a vast following, it would be a justified effort...<sup>(81)</sup>

The second version of Ibn al-Sammāk's funeral oration depicts the gathered crowd in a more interactive mode:

When Dāwūd al-Tā'i died, people followed his *janāza*; and when he was buried, Ibn al-Sammāk stood up on his grave and said: "O Dāwūd, you used to stay awake during the night while the people slept" – whereupon all the people said, "true!"; "you used to reap profits while people suffered loss" – and the people said, "true!"; "you remained blameless (*kunta taslamu*) when the people were engrossed [in error? (*yakhūdūn*)]" – and the people said, "true!"; [and he went on] until he had enumerated all his virtues...<sup>(82)</sup>

**Abū Mushir `Abd al-A'lā al-Ghassānī** (d. 218/833): One of the most eminent traditionists and scholars of his time, his stature in his native Damascus was such that "when he went to the mosque, people would line up on the right and on the left, greeting him and kissing his hand."<sup>(83)</sup> He was transported to al-Ma'mūn's camp in al-Raqqā to be interrogated by the caliph about his stance on the Qur'ān. Under threat of execution, he acknowledged the createdness of the Qur'ān, but the caliph failed to be impressed by the sincerity of his conviction. He was consequently imprisoned in Baghdād where he died shortly afterwards. It is reported that when his body was brought out of prison for burial, "a large number of people from among the inhabitants of Baghdād witnessed" the funeral.<sup>(84)</sup>

**Bishr b. al-Ḥārith** (d. 227/841): Bishr, a leading ascetic, belonged to the *abnā' ahl Khurāsān*, i.e., the descendants of those who, as members of

(81) *TB*, VIII, 350. Compare the more elaborate version given in Abū Nu'aym, *Hilya*, VII, 393f. (no. 393; para 10971).

(82) *TB*, VIII, 351; cf. Abū Nu'aym, *Hilya*, VII, 395f. (para 10976). That the audience of a funeral oration would often "join in" was expected, for instance, in classical Roman eulogies: cf. Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 147.

For another example of a funeral oration, though without the audience joining in this time, cf. Abū Nu'aym, *Hilya*, VII, 65 (no. 387; para 9635): eulogy for Sufyān al-Thawrī, as he was being buried, by an unknown man (thought by some to be the legendary prophet, Khidr).

(83) This purports to be an eyewitness account reported in Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Taqdīmā*, 291 on the authority of his father. Also see *TB*, XI, 73 (no. 5750). *Ibid.*, XI, 73, for Ibn Hanbal's opinion of him as one of only three *ashāb al-hadīth* in Damascus. On Abū Mushir, also see Conrad, *Die Qudāt Dimashq*, 251-55 and index, s. v.

(84) Ibn Sa'd, VII, pt. ii, 174; *TB*, XI, 73 (no. 5750).

the `Abbāsīd army from Khurāsān, had participated in the overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty. <sup>(85)</sup> He heard traditions from leading ashāb al-ḥadīth (including `Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak and Hushaym b. Bashīr) <sup>(86)</sup>, but did not narrate ḥadīth for he felt, as an ascetic, that ḥadīth scholarship had itself become a path to worldly success. <sup>(87)</sup> The scholars of ḥadīth nevertheless respected him greatly. When he died, “people rallied for his funeral” (hashar al-nās li-janāzatihi). Yaḥyā b. `Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥimmānī reported seeing the traditionists “Abū Naṣr al-Tammār and `Alī b. al-Madīnī shouting at Bishr b. al-Ḥārith’s funeral: ‘This, by God, is the glory (sharaf) of this world, before the glory of the other world.’ [Yaḥyā explained this remark by noting that it referred to the fact] that Bishr b. al-Ḥārith’s funeral procession was brought out after the morning prayers, but it did not reach his grave until nightfall [because of the throngs of people]...” <sup>(88)</sup>

**Zuhayr b. Ḥarb, Abū Khaythama** (d. 234/849): Zuhayr was a traditionist from Nasā’ in Transoxiana, who transmitted traditions from prominent contemporary scholars such as Hushaym b. Bashīr, Sufyān b. `Uyayna, `Abdallāh b. Wahb, and al-Walīd b. Muslim. He himself also compiled a collection of ḥadīth (ṣannafa al-musnad wa kataba sinfaha). His funeral in Baghdād was “attended by a large number of people.” <sup>(89)</sup>

**Shujā` b. Makhlad** (d. 235/849): Shujā`, a reliable (thiqa, thabat) traditionist, belonged to the abnā’ ahl Khurāsān and lived in Baghdād. <sup>(90)</sup> He was remembered as the transmitter of all the books of the prominent Wāsiṭī traditionist Hushaym b. Bashīr (āmmat kutubih). <sup>(91)</sup> He was apparently also a Qur’ānic exegete, for the Ta’rīkh Baghdād cites his commentary on the Qur’ān for an anthropomorphic tradition purporting to explain Q. 2.255. <sup>(92)</sup> The same report refers to him as “al-fallās” – “the penniless” – which may well suggest a certain ascetic orientation on his part. <sup>(93)</sup> His funeral in Baghdād was “attended by a large number of people” (wa hadarahu bashar kathīr). <sup>(94)</sup>

(85) On the abnā’, see below.

(86) Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 83.

(87) Cf. TB, VII, 74 (no. 3517).

(88) *Ibid.*, VII, 82. On Bishr, also see Abū Nu’aym, Hilya, VIII, 378-403 (no. 437), though this report about his funeral does not occur there. For Bishr’s persona in the classical Arabic biographical tradition, see Cooperson, Classical Arabic Biography, 154-87.

(89) Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 92. On him, also see TB, VIII, 484f. (no. 4597), where his funeral is not mentioned, however. Also see Sezgin, GAS, I, 107.

(90) Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 90.

(91) *Ibid.*, VII, pt. ii, 90.

(92) TB, IX, 252 (no. 4828).

(93) *Ibid.*, IX, 252. Note that an anecdote presents him as being in contact with the ascetic Bishr b. al-Ḥārith (*ibid.*, IX, 253); and among the transmitters of traditions from Shujā` was Ahmad b. al-Hasan b. `Abd al-Jabbār, characterized as “the sūfi”: *ibid.*, IX, 252.

(94) Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 90; TB, IX, 254 (no. 4828).

**ʿUbaydallāh b. ʿUmar b. Maysara al-Qawāriri** (d. 235/850): Al-Qawāriri was a Basran by origin who had come to settle in Baghdād. He was among the most highly regarded of Basran traditionists, and narrated ḥadīth from many of the leading ashāb al-ḥadīth of the day. <sup>(95)</sup> Ibn Ḥibbān counted him among those “who are followed in āthār, and among the leaders (aʿimma) whose path is followed in the akhbār.” <sup>(96)</sup> On his death in Baghdād, al-Qawāriri’s funeral was attended by “a large number” (wa ḥadara-hu khalq kathir). <sup>(97)</sup>

**Ismāʿil b. Ibrāhīm b. Bassām** (d. 236/850): A reliable traditionist living in Baghdād, he was a contemporary of Ibn Ḥanbal and, like the latter, also belonged to the abnaʿ of Khurāsān. Ibn Saʿd characterizes him as a “sāhib sunna wa fadl wa khayr”. <sup>(98)</sup> His funeral was attended by “a large number of people” (shahidahu nas kathir).” <sup>(99)</sup>

**Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal** (d. 241/855): The most celebrated funeral of early Islam was doubtless that of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, a noted traditionist, ascetic, and, above all, the hero of the Mihna. The Tabaqāt of Ibn Saʿd concludes its brief notice on him simply by observing that “he was buried after the ʿasr [prayers] and a vast number (khalq kathir) from among the inhabitants of Baghdād and elsewhere attended [the funeral].” <sup>(100)</sup> According to the biography of Ibn Ḥanbal written by his son, Ṣāliḥ, when Ibn Ḥanbal died and “people gathered in the streets, I sent a message to them announcing the death and [informing them] that it [scil. the bier] would be brought out after the ʿasr [prayers].” <sup>(101)</sup> The account in Ibn Abī Ḥātim adds, on the authority of Ṣāliḥ himself: “But the people were not satisfied with the messenger, so I came to them myself [to make the announcement].” <sup>(102)</sup> The preparations for burial were made by members of the family, with around a hundred Hāshimites – the lineage of the Prophet Muḥammad and of the ruling

(95) Ibn Saʿd, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 89; TB, X, 319-22 (no. 5464). Those he transmitted traditions from included: Ḥammād b. Zayd, Yazid b. Zurayʿ, ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī, Sufyān b. ʿUyayna, Yahya b. Saʿid al-Qaṭṭān, Abū Zurʿa, and Hushaym b. Bashīr.

(96) Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Majrūhin, I, 54.

(97) Ibn Saʿd, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 89. On his funeral, also see TB, X, 321.

(98) Ibn Saʿd, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 95. For Ibn Ḥanbal’s admiration of his ḥadīth, see TB, VI, 261f. (no. 3297). On the term “sāhib sunna,” see G. H. A. Juynboll, “Some New Ideas on the Development of Sunna as a Technical Term in Early Islam,” Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam, X (1987), 97-118; idem, “An Excursus on the Ahl al-Sunna in Connection with Van Ess, Theologie und Gesellschaft, vol. IV,” Der Islam, LXXV (1998): 318-30.

(99) Ibn Saʿd, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 95. Note that Ismāʿil’s biographical notice must have been added to Ibn Saʿd’s work after the latter’s death, for the said individual is reported to have died in 236 whereas Ibn Saʿd had died in 230/845. His funeral is not mentioned in the notice devoted to him in TB, VI, 261-63.

(100) Ibn Saʿd, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 92. For evolving facets of Ibn Hanbal’s life as represented in the classical biographical tradition, see Cooper, Classical Arabic Biography, 107-53.

(101) Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, Sirat al-imām, 137. The account of Ibn Hanbal’s nephew, Ḥanbal b. Iṣḥāq, only says that “after we had performed the Friday prayers, the people gathered [for the funeral prayer].” Dhikr mihnat al-imām, 111.

(102) Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Taqdima, 312.

ʿAbbāsīd house – in attendance, kissing his forehead as his body was placed on the bedstead. <sup>(103)</sup> Many came by boats to attend the funeral, and streets and lanes were filled with people (*al-nās qad akhadhū fi'l-shawārī wa'l-durūb*). <sup>(104)</sup> The funeral prayer was led by the governor of Baghdād, whose keenness to do so is especially emphasized in the early sources. <sup>(105)</sup>

The son and nephew of Ibn Ḥanbal say nothing about the number of people who actually attended the funeral, but the fantastic figures cited by later scholars make clear that there was much public curiosity that needed to be satisfied on this account. Ibn Abi Ḥātim cites a report according to which the caliph al-Mutawakkil, in whose reign Ibn Ḥanbal had died, ordered that the area where people had gathered for the funeral be measured, whereupon it was found to be able to accommodate a million and a half people. <sup>(106)</sup> Many accounts assert, indeed, that there had never been a greater Muslim funeral procession than Ibn Hanbal's; it was rivalled only by funerals "among the Children of Israel." <sup>(107)</sup> Other traditions spoke of large numbers of Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians (10,000 according to one claim, 20,000 according to another) converting to Islam on the day of his death. <sup>(108)</sup> In reports reminiscent of al-Awzā'i's funerals, the mourning for him is said, furthermore, not to have been confined to Muslims but to have also extended to the Jews, the Christians, and the Zoroastrians (*majūs*) – who, together with the Muslims, here constitute "four categories of people" (*arba a asnaf min al-nās*). <sup>(109)</sup>

### The rhetoric of funerals: questions of historicity

How should the reports about the funerals of the individuals discussed above be evaluated and interpreted? Precisely what did large attendance at a

(103) Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sirat al-imām*, 137; Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Taqdima*, 312.

(104) Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Taqdima*, 312. Though Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad is Ibn Abi Ḥātim's source for this account, it doesn't occur in the former's own biography of Ibn Ḥanbal.

(105) Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Sirat al-imām*, 138. Ṣāliḥ's account adds that "the people did not know this. The following day, they learnt of this, and began to come and pray over the grave. And they continued, as long as God willed, to come and pray over the grave." From Ṣāliḥ's own account it is not clear whether "the people" did not know at the time that Ibn Ḥanbal had died, or that his son, Ṣāliḥ, had been prevented from leading the prayers over him. Ḥanbal b. Ishāq's account does specify, however, that it was the latter (*Dhikr miḥnat al-imām*, 112).

(106) Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Taqdima*, 312 (on the authority of Abū Zur'a al-Dimashqī). Also cf. the report in Abu Nu'aym according to which the caliph had sent twenty men to estimate the number of people who had prayed over Ibn Hanbal, and the number was found to be in excess of 1.3 million. Abū Nu'aym, *Hilya*, IX, 192 (no. 443; para 13653). *TB*, V, 188 (no. 2632), gives the figure of 800,000 men and 60,000 women.

(107) *TB*, V, 188; Ibn Abi Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt al-Hanābila*, I, 20.

(108) 10,000 converts: Abū Nu'aym, *Hilya*, IX, 192 (para 13654); 20,000 converts: *TB*, V, 188 (no. 2632); Ibn Abi Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt al-Hanābila*, I, 20. Later commentators, such as al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) dismissed such reports with relish. See *Ta'rikh Islām*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmuri (Beirut, 1987-89), XI: 321; idem, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, ed. S. al-Arna'ūt (Beirut, 1982), 343f.; cf. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 148f.

(109) Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Taqdima*, 313; Abū Nu'aym, *Hilya*, IX, 192 (no. 13654); *TB*, V, 188; Ibn Abi Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt al-Hanābila*, I, 20f.

funeral signify? A number of traditions attributed to the Prophet suggest a specific connection between the way the dead person was remembered and his salvation; indeed, such factors were recognized to influence the deceased's prospects in the other world. Consider the following two hadiths, both of clearly Basran provenance, which comprise al-Bukhārī's section "On the praise of people for the deceased" in his "Book of Funerals":

Ādam <sup>(110)</sup> – Shu`ba <sup>(111)</sup> – `Abd al-`Aziz b. Şuhayb <sup>(112)</sup> – Anas b. Mālik: <sup>(113)</sup> They passed by a janāza and they said good things about [the deceased], whereupon the Prophet said, 'It has become incumbent (wajabat)'; and then they passed by another [janaza] and said bad things about [the deceased], whereupon the Prophet said, 'It has become incumbent'. `Umar asked, 'What has become incumbent?' The Prophet answered, 'Of this one, you said good things, so paradise became incumbent for him; and of that one, you said bad things, so hell became incumbent on him; you are the witnesses of God on earth.' <sup>(114)</sup>

`Affān b. Muslim al-Şaffār <sup>(115)</sup> – Dāwūd b. Abi'l-Furāt <sup>(116)</sup> – `Abdallāh b. Burayda <sup>(117)</sup> – Abu'l-Aswad <sup>(118)</sup>, who said: I came to Medina, and there was disease there. I was sitting with `Umar, when a funeral procession passed by. The deceased was praised, whereupon `Umar said, 'It has become incumbent.' Then there passed by another funeral procession, and the deceased was praised, whereupon `Umar said, 'it has become incumbent.' Then a third

The presence of non-Muslims at a funeral was, in case of both Ibn Hanbal and al-Awzā'i, a mark of their religious stature; but for others, it could also be intended as an insult. Thus, in case of Abū Hanīfa, the eponymous founder of the Hanafī school of law, who was opposed by many ashāb al-hadīth for his Murji'i leanings, someone dreamed that his funeral was surrounded by Christian priests (qissīn). The implication obviously is that it was to among the Christians rather than in the Muslim community that he belonged. See TB, XIII, 425f. (no. 7298; isnād: Ya`qūb b. Sufyān [al-Fasawī] - `Abd al-Rahmān - `Alī b. al-Madīnī - Bishr b. Abi'l-Azhar al-Naysābūrī. (Other reports do, however, report an impressive funeral for Abū Hanīfa: *ibid.* XIII, 425.); al-Fasawī' (d. 277/890) al-Ma'rifa wa'l-Ta'rikh, ed. Akram Diyā' al-`Umārī (Medīna: Maktabat al-dār, 1410 AH), II, 784.

(110) Ādam b. Abi Iyās al-`Asqalānī (d. 220/835). Of Khurāsānī origin, he was born in Baghdād and later settled in `Asqalān, hence his nīsba; on him, see TB, VII, 29-32 (no. 3492); GAS, I, 102.

(111) On this famous 2nd/eighth century Basran traditionist, see TB, IX, 255-66 (no. 4830); Ibn Hajar, Tahdhib al-tahdhib (Haydarābād: Dār al-ma`ārif al-`Uthmāniyya, 1325), IV, 338-46 (no. 580); GAS, I, 92. Also see G. H. A. Juynboll, "Shu`ba b. al-Hajjāj (d. 160/776) and his Position among the Traditionists of Basra," Le Muséon, CXI/1-2 (1998): 187-226.

(112) Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. ii, 13 (he was a mawlā of Anas b. Mālik).

(113) On Anas, the servant of the Prophet and reputedly the last of his companions to die in Basra (d. 93/712), see Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. i, 10-16.

(114) Al-Bukhārī, I, 344 (Janā'iz, 86); also see Ibn Balabān al-Fārisī, al-Ihsān bi-tartīb ṣahīh ibn Hibbān, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Hūt (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-`ilmiyya, 1987), V, 11 (no. 3012); `Alī b. al-Ja'd (d. 230/845), Musnad Ibn al-Ja'd, ed. `Amīr Aḥmad Ḥaydar (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-`ilmiyya, 1996), 217 (no. 1442).

(115) On this Basran traditionist (d. 220/835), see TB, XII, 264-72 (no. 6715); GAS, I, 102.

(116) On Dāwūd (d. 167/783-4), a Basran traditionist, see Ibn Hajar, Tahdhib, III, 197 (no. 376).

(117) Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. i, 160f.; Ibn Hajar, Tahdhib, 157f. (no. 270).

(118) On Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ali, the famous grammarian from Basra, see Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqāt, VII, pt. i, 70.

[funeral procession] passed by, and the deceased was reviled, whereupon `Umar said, 'it has become incumbent'. I [Abu'l-Aswad] then said to him, 'What has become incumbent, O commander of the faithful?' [Umar] answered: 'I said as the Prophet had said, 'If four people testify to the goodness of a Muslim, Allāh has him enter paradise.' We asked, 'And [likewise] if three [people say so]?; and he said, 'three'; and we asked, 'and [likewise] if two?; and he said, 'two'; but we did not ask him about [the testimony of] a single person.'" (119)

If people are the "witnesses" of God on earth, and, indeed, if only a few people's good opinion of the deceased was enough to assure his salvation, then, *a fortiori*, the presence of large numbers was manifest demonstration of his rectitude. At least some scholars may have had misgivings about the implications of such traditions, as we shall see; but for many others, such funerals were a mark not just of public reverence for the said individuals but also of divine approbation. By the third/ninth century, the evidence of funerals would have fitted well with the emergent Sunni doctrine that support of the common people signified the truth of a doctrine. This idea is strikingly expressed in a remark attributed to Ibn Ḥanbal: "Say to the people of innovators: 'Let there be between us and you the day of the funerals!'" (120)

What we know of funerals such as those discussed above comes, of course, from biographical dictionaries devoted primarily to scholars of ḥadīth and law. Works such as the *Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa`d, where a number of these funerals are noted, were products of the same milieu and expressed much the same worldview as did the aforementioned scholars themselves (121). There is, then, a

(119) Al-Bukhārī, I, 344. For a slightly different text of this tradition but with the same *isnād*, see Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, III, 368. Also see Ibn Balabān, *al-Ihsān*, V, 13 (no. 3017).

(120) "Qūlū li-ahl al-bida' baynanā wa-baynakum al-janā'iz." Ibn al-Jawzī, *Manāqib*, 417. The *isnād* of this account features a reference to another *janāza*, which indeed was the occasion for Ibn Ḥanbal's challenge to be recalled: Abū `Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī said: "I attended the funeral of Abū 'l-Faḥ al-Qawwās the ascetic, along with Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Dāraqutnī. When he [scil. al-Dāraqutnī] looked at the crowd, he said: 'I heard Abū Sahl b. Ziyād al-Qaṭṭān reporting that he heard `Abdallāh b. Ahmad b. Hanbal, who said that he heard his father say: Say to the innovators, let there be between us and you the day of funerals.'" On the famous mystic al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), see *GAS*, I, 671-74; on al-Dāraqutnī (d. 385/995), *ibid.*, I, 206-09; on Abū Sahl al-Qaṭṭān (d. 350/961), *ibid.*, I, 187f.; on `Abdallāh, the son of Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 290/903), *ibid.*, I, 511. On Abū 'l-Faḥ al-Qawwās (Yūsuf b. `Umar b. Masrūr [d. 385/995]), the person whose funeral occasioned this remark, see *TB*, XIV, 326-28 (no. 7650); this biographical notice does not, however, say anything about his funeral.

(121) Some of the scholars whose funerals are mentioned in the *Tabaqāt* died after Ibn Sa`d (d. 230/845), so their notices must have been added, or completed, by the *Tabaqāt*'s later transmitters. Many of these individuals were, in any case, not just contemporaries of Ibn Sa`d but also people who often frequented the same circles and were otherwise in contact with each other. For example, Ibn Sa`d had heard ḥadīth from al-Qawāriri (cf. *TB*, II, 369 (no. 876)), the traditionist whose funeral is mentioned in the *Tabaqāt*; and of Ibn Ḥanbal, it is mentioned that he used to send his cousin Ḥanbal b. Iṣḥāq every Friday to borrow two parts of the ḥadīth corpus of al-Wāqidi from Ibn Sa`d, and to return them by next Friday and borrow two more. (*TB*, II, 369f. [no. 876].) Though Ibn Sa`d may himself have attended some of the funerals he speaks of, just as others may have been attended by those responsible for "completing" the notices in the *Tabaqāt* after his death, this is not mentioned in any of the biographical notices of the scholars in question.

plainly self-interested motive in presenting these scholars as authoritative and popularly revered figures of their age, and reports about their funerals are but one element in the presentation of such an image.

Yet, despite the vested interest, and, indeed, despite the wildly fanciful figures quoted in later works for the funeral of Ibn Ḥanbal as well as for certain other third/ninth century scholars<sup>(122)</sup>, there are good reasons why reports asserting large popular attendance at particular funerals need not be dismissed out of hand.<sup>(123)</sup> The foregoing sample of funerals reveals at least three, overlapping bases for social distinction for the individuals in question: a number of them are recognizable as “holy men”, several are explicitly mentioned as *abnāʾ*, and most of them were associated with the movement of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*. Each of these helps place the reports about funerals in a social and religious context and helps us evaluate at least certain aspects of such reports.

### a) Late Antique Holy Men and their Funerals

Sufyān al-Thawrī, Dāwūd al-Ṭāʾi, Bishr b. al-Hārith, Shujāʾ b. al-Makhlad, and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal all had ascetic tendencies. There is much in the teachings and practices attributed to Dāwūd b. Nuṣayr al-Ṭāʾi and Bishr b. al-Hārith, in particular, which fits nicely with the styles of piety and asceticism characteristic of late antique holy men.<sup>(124)</sup> There are, moreover, instructive parallels between the role of many a late antique bishop and holy man and prominent Muslim scholars of Islam’s second and third centuries, as already noted with reference to al-Awzāʾi. The protection of the weak,

(122) Examples from the third century include: Muḥammad b. Aslam al-Ṭūsī (d. 242/856), a noted holy man (*Hilya*, 252f. [no. 445], on him, see below); the famed Egyptian Sūfī Dhūʾn-Nūn Thawbān b. Ibrāhīm ([d. 246/859] *TB*, VIII, 393f. [no. 4497]); al-Faḥ b. Abīʾl-Faḥ Shukhruf b. Dāwūd b. Muzāḥim (d. 273/887), a Ḥanbalī traditionist and ascetic (Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, I, 240 [no. 361]); ʿAbdallāh, the son of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal ([d. 290/903] *ibid.*, I, 181 [no. 249]); the Ḥanbalī al-Husayn b. ʿAbdallāh Abū ʿAlī al-Khiraqī ([d. 299/912], *ibid.*, II, 40 [no. 589]).

Fourth century examples include: Abū Bakr b. Abī Dāwūd (d. 316/929), the son of the noted traditionist Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (*ibid.*, II, 47 [no. 595]); the Sūfī Ghulam al-Khallāl ([d. 363/974], *ibid.*, II, 110 [no. 611]); Ibrāhīm b. Thābit al-Ḥanbalī ([d. 376/986-7], *ibid.*, II, 121 [no. 615]).

(123) Further, though certain late 3rd/9th century scholars are said to have received impressive funerals, there seems to me to be no compelling reason to suppose that descriptions of early or mid-3rd/9th century funerals are either *topoi* or mere backward projections from a time when the Ḥanbalīs controlled the streets of Baghdad and often appeared in force at particular funerals. Such an excessively sceptical view would have to explain why only a few people from the early 3rd/9th or indeed the 2nd/8th century are said to have had memorable funerals, and, conversely, if large funerals should have been a *topos*, why should nothing have been said of the funerals of most of the late 3rd/9th century scholars (of any persuasion).

(124) On the “holy man” of late antiquity, see, *inter alia*: Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” in *idem*, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 103-52; *idem*, “Town, Village and Holy Man: The Case of Syria,” *ibid.*, 153-65; *idem*, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). On the emergence of the Muslim “holy man” from the earlier, late antique cultural and religious context, see Fred Donner, “The Holy Man in Late Antiquity and Early Islam,” a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Washington, D.C., December 1995. (I am grateful to Prof. Donner for providing me with a copy of this paper.)

mediating between the populace and the political elite, and acting as local patrons are among roles well-attested for Muslim scholars just as they are for the Christian bishops. It would be very much in keeping with the veneration for such holy men if one wanted to partake of the “saint’s” blessings by being present at his funeral as well. <sup>(125)</sup>

The *Syriac Life of Saint Simeon Stylites*, for instance, gives an extended account of the funeral of the saint (who died in 459 C.E.), with his body, laid on a chariot, “surrounded by commanders, princes, city prefects, many soldiers and a crowd no one could remember or estimate. Villages came out with great diligence - men and women, old and young, unmarried youths and virgins, slaves and free-born – to greet him and be blessed by him as they burnt incense and lit candles.” <sup>(126)</sup> Of the funeral of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus claimed in his oration that “squares, porticoes, houses of two and three stories were filled with people escorting him, preceding, following, accompanying and treading upon one another, many thousands of every race and age, a sight unknown before that day.... A contest arose between our people and outsiders, pagans, Jews, strangers, as to who should lament the more and thereby gain the greater benefit. In short, the calamity became a source of danger. Many souls departed along with him as a result of violent pushing and tumult.” <sup>(127)</sup> In late antique Alexandria, to cite yet another instance, funerals afforded important “opportunities for ceremonial processions. During the early Byzantine period, the typical pattern was for the deceased to be honored in such a way that ‘the whole city made a procession for him, including the bishop, with lights and incense.’” <sup>(128)</sup>

Despite their obviously schematic character and their many topoi (crowds no one could remember having seen before; every race and age represented; competition between different religious communities to venerate the dead saint; “our people” and “outsiders”, etc.) the basic contention of these

(125) It was reported by one Sā'id (whom I have been unable to identify) that when `Abdallāh b. al-Faraj, a friend of Bishr b. al-Hārith and an ascetic in his own right, died “I attended his funeral and after I had buried him I saw him, in a dream that night, sitting at the edge of his grave, looking at a scroll (*sahifa*) which was with him. I said to him: How did God treat you?. He said, “He forgave me, and He forgave everyone who accompanied my funeral. I said, I was among them. He said, Here’s your name in the scroll.” *TB*, X, 44 (no. 5169). See a somewhat similar tradition regarding the *janāza* of the *ṣūfi* al-Sari al-Saqāṭi (d. 253/867): *TB*, IX, 191 (no. 4769). Also cf. *ibid.*, X, 421 (no. 5578): God’s promise to the ascetic Bishr that everyone who participated in his funeral was forgiven.

(126) *The Syriac Life of Saint Simeon Stylites*, translated by Robert Doran, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 192f. The *Syriac Life* was completed in 473 CE (Doran, *ibid.*, 36).

(127) Gregory of Nazianzus’ funeral oration for Basil, in *Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose*, trans. Leo P. McCauley, et al. (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1953), 96f. On Basil, see Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Also see the account of the funeral of Macrina, Basil’s sister, in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of St. Macrina* (Gregory of Nyssa was the brother of Basil and Macrina). English translation in *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, tr. V. W. Callahan (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 186f. (I owe this reference to Prof. Susan Ashbrook Harvey.)

(128) Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 86, 396 n. 91.

accounts, viz. that the holy man's death was widely and very conspicuously mourned in a city where, after all, he had a very considerable presence, continues to be credible. <sup>(129)</sup> Mobilization of large crowds was central to the construction and display of the holy man's or bishop's authority in late antique cities, as Peter Brown and others have shown <sup>(130)</sup>; and large funerals were no doubt among the markers of such authority. There were many and important differences between the institutional position of the late antique bishop and prominent Muslim religious scholars or holy men, of course. But so far as popular veneration for the deceased at the time of the funeral is concerned, what is true of the Christian late antiquity seems mutatis mutandis, to hold for the first centuries of Islam as well. <sup>(131)</sup>

Parallels between late antique Christian funerals continue to be instructive not only when the funerals were impressive but also when they were not. Precisely because an impressive funeral was a mark of one's social standing, there were holy men who wished to be buried in anonymity. Thus, the mid-seventh century Life of Symeon the Fool by Leontius of Neopolis notes that the saint, "not wanting to obtain human honor after his death", hid himself in his hut and died there. The two men who found his body two days later "lifted him up without washing him, and they went out without psalm singing, candles, or incense, and buried him in the place where strangers are buried." Yet this unceremonious funeral was meant to be the occasion for Symeon's true stature as a saint to come to light: for as he was being taken to the cemetery, a former Jew, whom Symeon had converted to Christianity,

(129) For accounts of or observations regarding late antique funerals, in addition to those already noted, see Hans J. W. Drijvers, "Jews and Christians at Edessa," Journal of Jewish Studies, XXXVI (1985), 95, 102; Theodoret of Cyrhus, A History of the Monks of Syria, tr. R. M. Price (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 123f. (Abraham, bishop of Carrhae in Mesopotamia [d. ca. 420, in Constantinople]); Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies translated from the Greek by E. Dawes and N. H. Baynes (London: Mowbrays, 1977), 69f. (Daniel the Stylite [d. 493, in Constantinople]). (I am grateful to Prof. Susan Ashbrook Harvey for these references.) For some further examples, see Alfred C. Rush, Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1941), 193ff.

(130) On the late antique bishop as "controller of crowds," see Brown, Power and Persuasion, 103ff. Cf. *ibid.*, 84f.: "The citizen body was no abstraction in late antiquity. It became a reality by assembling on frequent occasions in the great theaters and hippodromes that remained an enduring feature of late Roman urban life. The hippodrome of Antioch had room for 80,000 people, the theater of Ephesus, for 24,000." Also cf. *idem*, Society and the Holy, 247ff. on the rhetoric and "rituals of consensus." On the use of late antique crowds in constructions of authority and in doctrinal disputes, also see Ramsay MacMullen, "The Historical Role of the Masses in Late Antiquity," in *idem*, Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 250-76.

(131) Popular veneration at the time of the funeral is worth stressing here. So far as the relics of the dead saint are concerned, while his shrine might of course continue to be much visited and venerated, the idea of dismembering and transporting various parts of his body as relics (as in late antique and medieval Christianity), would have horrified most Muslims. Cf. Christopher S. Taylor, In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyāra and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 54f. On the late antique Christian veneration of relics, see Peter Brown, The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); on the processions and crowds often accompanying such relics, *ibid.*, 7, citing Julian the Apostate's condemnation of the practice of "... the carrying of the corpses of the dead through a great assembly of people, in the midst of dense crowds, staining the eyesight of all with ill-omened sights of the dead. What day so touched with death could be lucky?"

heard invisible music “such as human lips could not sing, and a crowd such as all humanity could not gather.” This he promptly reported to the deacon, whereupon “all came to their senses” about who Symeon “the fool” really was. <sup>(132)</sup> The instructions attributed to a number of early Muslim figures that their death not be announced can probably be interpreted similarly: “do not inform anyone of my death, take me and throw me in my grave,” an instruction attributed to the Kūfan scholar al-A`mash (d. 148/765), may have more than a passing resemblance to an attitude such as Symeon’s. <sup>(133)</sup>

### b) The *Abnā`*

As noted earlier, a number of individuals from the early third century whose funerals are singled out for comment in the *Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa`d belonged to the *abnā`*, the descendants of the members of the `Abbāsīd army from Khurāsān. From the foregoing sample of scholars, such individuals include Bishr b. al-Ḥārith, Shujā` b. al-Makhlad, Ismā`il b. Ibrāhīm b. Bassām, and Ibn Ḥanbal. As the core supporters of the `Abbāsīd dynasty, the *ahl Khurāsān* and their descendants, the *abnā`*, had enjoyed great political importance during much of the first century of `Abbāsīd rule. <sup>(134)</sup> Though scattered widely in the `Abbāsīd realm, it was with Baghdād that they were primarily associated, for it was there that they were at their strongest. <sup>(135)</sup> In the civil war between the caliph al-Amin and his brother al-Ma`mūn, they had largely sided with the former, but that turned out to be the losing side. The *abnā`*’s political importance gradually declined after the fall of al-Amin, but they continued to be a very considerable social presence in Baghdād, where they spearheaded the opposition to the pro-Shi`i and other measures adopted by al-Ma`mūn. The “traditionalist” movement of Ibn Hanbal found much support among the *abnā`*, as indeed, did the vigilante activities of the early Ḥanbalis of Baghdād. <sup>(136)</sup>

(132) *The Life of Symeon the Fool* by Leontius of Neapolis, translated in Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius’s Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 169f. Leontius was the bishop of Neapolis on the Cyprus. Symeon is believed to have lived in Emesa, in Syria, during the sixth century. The motif of angels praying over the dead because there was no one else to do so also occurs in Ibn Abi Ya`lā’s account of the funeral of al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941), the notorious leader of the Ḥanbalī vigilantes of Baghdād. He died while in hiding from the authorities, and the only person who prayed over him, besides the angels, was the man hired to ritually bathe his body before burial: Ibn Abi Ya`lā, *Tabaqāt al-Hanābila*, II, 38 (no. 588).

(133) Abū Nu`aym, *Hilya*, V, 59 (no. 288; para 6320), cited (and translated somewhat differently) in Donner, “The Holy Man in Late Antiquity and Early Islam,” n. 39. On al-A`mash, also see TB, IX, 4-14 (no. 4611), where he is characterized, *inter alia*, as a “*sāhib sunna*” as well as “*min al-nussāk*” (IX: 9).

(134) On the *abnā`*, see Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 66f., 70, 73ff.; idem, “The `Abbāsīd *Abnā`* and Sāsānīd Cavalrymen,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, ser. iii, VIII/1 (1998): 1-19; J. Lassner, *The Shaping of `Abbāsīd Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 129ff.

(135) Crone, “The `Abbāsīd *Abnā`* and Sāsānīd Cavalrymen,” 9. Cf. *ibid.*, 13: “Collectively, they were *abnā` khurāsān al-muwalladin*, people of Khurāsānī descent born ‘here’, i.e. in the capital, not ordinary Khurāsānīs, let alone ordinary Arabs or Iranians devoid of special ties with the `Abbāsīd house.”

(136) Wilferd Madelung, “The Vigilante Movement of Sahl b. Salāma al-Khurāsānī and the Origins of Hanbalism Reconsidered,” *Journal of Turkish Studies*, XIV (1991): 331-37; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 70.

Given their prominence in Baghdād, then, it is not surprising that the funerals of leading abnā', or those supported by them, may have been important public events. By the same token, not only were the lives of those whom Baghdād's Ḥanbalīs did not reckon among themselves made difficult, their death too might be turned into an occasion for ignominy. Thus the great exegete and jurist al-Ṭabarī, whose views on Ibn Ḥanbal's stature as a jurist and on certain theological issues were offensive to Ḥanbalīs, had to be buried in his own home, and at night for fear of Ḥanbali vigilantes. <sup>(137)</sup>

### c) The Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth

If some of the individuals whose funerals were commented on were ascetics and holy men and some were from among the abnā', most were also known for their association with the movement of the aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth. Already in the early third/ninth century, the caliph al-Ma'mūn's denunciation of those reluctant to acknowledge the createdness of the Qur'ān, among whom there were many aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth, had grudgingly acknowledged their popular appeal:

The Commander of the Faithful has realized that the broad mass and the overwhelming concentration of the base elements of the ordinary people (hashw al-ra'iyya) and the lower strata of the commonality are those who, in all regions and far horizons of the world, have no farsightedness, or vision.... They consider themselves adherents of the sunna, whereas in every section of the Book of God there is an account related by Him which invalidates their words... Despite all this, they go on to make an outward show of being people of divine truth, the religion and the community of Muslims (ahl al-haqq wa'l-dīn wa'l-jamā'a), and assert that all others are people of false beliefs, infidelity and schism. <sup>(138)</sup>

To al-Ma'mūn, there is clearly no equation between popular appeal and the rectitude of the position enjoying such appeal; rather, he accuses the opponents of the Qur'ān's createdness to be mere rabble-rousers, seeking

<sup>(137)</sup> For al-Ṭabarī's difficulties with the Ḥanbalīs, see Franz Rosenthal, "General Introduction" in The History of al-Ṭabarī, I (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 69ff.; on the necessity to bury him in his own home, *ibid.*, 77f. (Rosenthal is sceptical about these reports, but doesn't show why they ought to be rejected).

An interesting contrast to al-Ṭabarī's burial is offered by the case of a prominent Ḥanbali Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Sam'ūn. When he died in Baghdād in 387/997, the funeral prayer was performed over him at his doorstep and he was buried in his house. "But the people became agitated, and it was said: 'why was he prayed over at his doorstep, as is done with the innovators, whereas he was a righteous leader?' Thereupon, he was taken out of his grave ... and carried to the congregational mosque; and a large number followed the funeral procession." Ibn Abi Ya'lā, Ṭabaqāt, II, 138 (no. 624). The theme of the "public" vs. the "private" in funerals, as illustrated by the traditions pertaining to al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Sam'ūn (as well as by some of the other accounts considered in this paper), is a potentially fruitful line of inquiry which I hope to explore in a separate study. (I am grateful to Prof. Michael Cook for suggesting the idea for such a study to me.)

<sup>(138)</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rikh, III, 1112-14; translation as in The History of al-Ṭabarī, XXXII, tr. C. E. Bosworth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 200-02 (with some modifications).

little more than to assert their own leadership over the populace. But however the meaning and significance of the popular support might be interpreted, even al-Ma'mūn did not deny the fact such popular support was enjoyed (or being targeted) by his opponents.

Some of this popular interest was evident at the large crowds certain scholars were able to attract. The figures which are sometimes quoted for such crowds are, again, wildly exaggerated<sup>(139)</sup> but it is scarcely implausible that the scholarly stature of a particular individual who was, say, visiting Baghdād, or his eloquence, or his patronage might have attracted considerable audiences. About one al-Hayyāj b. Bisṭām (d. 177/793-4), visiting from Herāt in Central Asia, it was said that “there did not gather around anyone in Baghdād [numbers] that gathered around him.” It is noteworthy that he was not only remembered for his eloquence, but also for his patronage: no one could hear ḥadīth from him without also being made to eat with him! Reports about al-Hayyāj’s popularity become somewhat more credible when it is noted that prominent scholars such as Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn had a poor opinion of his ḥadīth, and he was not alone among the ashāb al-ḥadīth in a caustic attitude towards him.<sup>(140)</sup> In other words, such reports about him could not have originated among the ashāb al-ḥadīth of Baghdād. We do not know anything about al-Hayyāj’s funeral (he did not die in Baghdād), but the point is that if large crowds could attend upon a scholar in his life it is likely that they would also want to attend upon him in death. The same might be said of certain other ḥadīth scholars who are also reported to have had large audiences in their sessions.<sup>(141)</sup>

For the various reasons surveyed above, there seems nothing implausible, then, in a number of prominent scholars and ascetics having had very large and memorable funerals in the second and third centuries of Islam. Indeed, the funerals of prominent ashāb al-ḥadīth of Baghdād may be taken as hitherto unnoticed evidence for the popular appeal of this trend from the late second century onward. Conversely, it is likely that such funerals (and not just the later reports or traditions about them) may have been mobilized in the first place to demonstrate the social standing of this trend and to intimidate the opponents (though more conventional ways of intimidating the opponents were used as well). Even if the words attributed to Ibn Hanbal about funerals being a mark of differentiation between “us” and “them” are of a later provenance, the sentiment they express may very well be genuine.

(139) Cf. G. H. A. Juynboll, Muslim Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 6.

(140) On al-Hayyāj, his patronage, his audience, and Ibn Maʿīn’s view of him, see TB, XIV, 81-86 (no. 7435).

(141) E.g., ʿĀsim b. ʿAlī (d. 221/836), the scholar from Wāsit: TB, XII, 241-44 (no. 6696); the Baṣran Sulaymān b. Ḥarb (d. 224/839), who later served as qāḍī of Mecca: TB, IX, 35 (no. 4622); for Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) and other traditionists narrating ḥadīth in Baghdād by command of the caliph al-Mutawakkil and drawing large audiences, see TB, X, 67f. (no. 5185).

## The rhetoric of funerals: aspects of ambivalence?

The large funerals of certain scholars and holy men may be thought to have served, then, as a mark of their religious authority and, indeed, of the rectitude of the doctrines they represented. The actual or recommended boycott of particular funerals (or of the funerals of those associated with certain theological tendencies) equally underscored not just the heretical views of the deceased, but also – once again – the authority of the scholar advocating or exemplifying such a boycott. Yet the evidence of funerals, and more broadly, the rhetoric of popular support, seems to have inspired mixed feelings among certain scholars. Sufyān al-Thawrī is said to have remarked, though apparently not with specific reference to funerals, that “when all the neighbours of a person praise him, he is surely an evil man.” People asked how that was, whereupon Sufyān responded that “he sees them acting in sin [ya`malūn bi`l-ma`āsī] but he does not [do anything to] change that and meets them with a cheerful countenance.”<sup>(142)</sup> To Sufyān is also attributed the more specific admonition that “when a deceased person is mentioned, do not look to the opinion of the common people (qawl al-`amma), but rather look to the view of the people of knowledge and reason (ahl al-`ilm wa`l-`aql).”<sup>(143)</sup>

Such remarks may well be directed at instances of local, popular support for the religious trends of which scholars like Sufyān disapproved. For instance, as Madelung has shown, Murji`ism had begun to enjoy widespread support in eastern Khurāsān not long after the time of Abū Ḥanīfa, who was himself associated with it<sup>(144)</sup>; Sufyān, for his part, was virulently opposed to both Abū Ḥanīfa and the Murji`a. Statements such as the foregoing may then represent an effort to temper the view that the support of large numbers necessarily implied moral rectitude, or that that alone did so. It is also possible that, by the time of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, two generations after Sufyān, and in Ibn Ḥanbal’s Baghdād rather than in Sufyān’s Kūfa (where, moreover, Shi`i trends continued to be important in their various forms), the ashāb al-ḥadīth could rely on the argument from vast numbers much more comfortably than one might have been able to in Sufyān’s day and age.<sup>(145)</sup>

(142) Abū Nu`aym, Hilya, VII, 32 (para. 9461).

(143) *Ibid.*, VII, 28 (para 9436). Also cf. al-Ṣan`āni, al-Musannaf, III, 528 (no. 6582): “Abd al-Razzāq [al-Ṣan`āni] - al-Thawrī - Ismā`il - a man, who reported: A man came to `Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and said to him: ‘Wouldn’t you pray over this funeral?’ He [‘Alī] replied: ‘We are [merely] the ones who stand up [in prayers], but it is really his actions which will pray for/over him.’”

(144) Madelung, “The Early Murji`a,” 32-39, esp. 36f.

(145) A rather remarkable attitude of hostility towards the common people is also attributed to Sufyān’s older contemporary, the Kūfan ḥadīth scholar al-A`mash (d. 148/765): Sa`īd b. Yahyā Abū Sufyān al-Ḥadhdhā` said: “al-A`mash took up [residence in] one part of the Sawād, so the people from there came to him and asked him to narrate [traditions] to them. But he refused. One of his companions said: ‘O Abū Muhammad, why didn’t you narrate [traditions] to these poor folk (masākin)?’ al-A`mash replied: ‘Who would adorn swine with pearls!’» (Abū Nu`aym, Hilya, V, 60 (no. 288; para 6325; cf. *ibid.*, para 6326.)

## DEATH, FUNERAL PROCESSIONS

That the evidence of vast numbers was not sufficient in itself is also reflected in the trend among third century ashāb al-hadīth, and the early Sunnis generally, to precisely name the scholars whose teachings one professed to follow. It was these named scholars who were the repositories of true guidance, and it was their followers who comprised the righteous “community”:

Ishāq b. Rāhawayh <sup>(146)</sup> said: “A man asked [ʿAbdallāh] Ibn al-Mubārak, ‘O Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, what/who is al-sawād al-a`zam?’ [Ibn al-Mubārak] responded: ‘It is Abū Ḥamza al-Sakūnī.’ Ishāq then said, ‘As for that time, it was Abū Hamza; and in our own time, it is Muḥammad b. Aslam and those who follow him.’ Ishāq then added: ‘If you asked the ignorant ones what/who is al-sawād al-a`zam, they would say, “the community of the people (jamāʿat al-nās).” What they do not know is that the “community” is [comprised of] the scholar who adheres to the tradition (athar) of the Prophet and his path; he who follows him [scil. such a scholar] is [in] the community, and he who opposes him in such adherence has abandoned the community.’ <sup>(147)</sup>

Read in the context of funerals, we are to take it, presumably, that one’s opinion of the deceased ought to be guided by what an “orthodox” scholar thought of him, not by the number of people who showed up at his funeral. <sup>(148)</sup> If this is a fair reading of this tradition, then the position it represents stands in marked tension with the view, cited earlier, that the people (read: common people) are the witnesses of God on earth, so that if they have good things to say of the deceased then God’s judgement on him follows suit. On this view, the attitude of a prominent scholar, his presence or absence at funerals, did not matter as long as there were some people who would stand by the dead person. “When a Muslim dies and four people from the neighbouring households nearest to him testify that they do not know anything but good of him, God [responds by]

(146) On Ishāq b. Rāhawayh (d. 238/853), see TB, VI, 343-52 (no. 3381); GAS, I, 109f.

(147) Abū Nuʿaym, Hilya, IX, 251 (no. 445; para 13803). On Muḥammad b. Aslam (d. 242/856), a Khurāsānī ascetic from Tūs, see *ibid.*, IX, 250-66. Cf. Ibn Ḥibbān, Kitāb al-thiqāt (Haydarābād: Dāʿirat al-maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1983), IX, 97: “he was one of those who worshipped in harsh conditions (min al-`ubbād al-khushn) and had devoted himself exclusively to [such] worship. He was assiduous in upholding the sunna, exerting himself to act in accordance with it, and renouncing the world entirely. He would deliberately preach without having recourse to his knowledge, and he would bear witness [to the truth?] without [having to] articulate it.” Despite a certain disdain for intellectual matters that this statement seems to imply, he is said to have been the author of a “Radd ʿalaʾl-Jahmiyya” (see Hilya, IX, 256 [para 13803], 257 [para 13804], 258 [para 13805]), though this work or its author is not mentioned in Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist (ed. R. Tajaddud [Beirut: Dār al-masīra, 1988]) nor, for that matter, in GAS; on him, also cf. van Ess, TG, II, 609.

(148) Even with a number of people showing up, there seems to have been some effort to define just whose testimony mattered: consider a tradition which agrees that “forty men” can intercede with God for the deceased, but specifies that the men in question are those “who do not associate anyone with Allāh (lā yush-rikūn biʾllāh shayʿan).” Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Musnad, ed. Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif, 1949-58), IV, 174 (no. 2509). This tradition (whose isnād indicates its origins in Medina: ʿAbdallāh b. Wahb - Abū Sakhr Ḥumayd b. Ziyād b. Abīʾl-Mukhāriq al-Madānī - Sharīk b. ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Namir - Kurayb, the mawlā of Ibn ʿAbbās - ʿAbdallāb b. ʿAbbās - the Prophet) would exclude the non-Muslims; but might it also be used against those “Muslims” whose beliefs could be accused of veering too close to shirk?

saying: 'I have accepted what you know in regard to him, and forgiven him for what you do not know [of his actions].'" (149)

It is tempting to consider this "populist" position as a response to disagreements within the ranks of the ashāb al-hadīth. While the ashāb al-hadīth might, with relish, boycott the funeral of a notorious qadari or a proselytising Murji'ite, troubling questions could arise when disagreements in their own circles came to the surface, at funerals as on other occasions. (150) Such conflicts were especially in evidence during and after the Mihna, for instance, when some of the most prominent scholars of hadīth did, in fact, come to acknowledge the caliphal position on the createdness of the Qur'ān. As noted earlier, Ibn Ḥanbal, who himself had remained steadfast during the Mihna, did not transmit hadīth on the authority of those who had failed the test. It was apparently for the same reason that he did not participate in the funeral of his erstwhile colleague, the ascetic and traditionist Abū Naṣr al-Tammār (d. 228/842). (151) Yet some were clearly troubled by this boycott, for, as a fellow scholar, Abū Naṣr's memory may have been too precious for many among the ashāb al-hadīth to be easily damned by Ibn Ḥanbal's attitude towards him. This tension is reflected in traditions which have the ascetic Bishr b. al-Hārith appear in a dream to someone after Bishr, Abū Naṣr, and Ibn Ḥanbal had all died, to report that Abū Naṣr's station in the other world was actually higher than Ibn Ḥanbal's as well as Bishr's own. (152)

But this would probably be too narrow a view of the emergence of what I have called the "populist" position, viz., the idea that it is the (common) people's views of the deceased which really matter in indicating his salvation. More importantly, this position also accords well with the nascent worldview of the ashāb al-hadīth – which itself recognized popular support as a sign of rectitude – much more so than do the aforementioned remarks attributed to

(149) Ibn Balabān, al-Ihsān, V, 12 (no. 3015). The isnād of this report is as follows: Abū Ya'la - Aḥmad b. `Umar al-Wakī'ī - Mu'ammal b. Ismā'il - Ḥammād b. Salama - Thābit - Anas b. Mālik - the Prophet. Like many other traditions on this theme, the early part of this isnād (up to and including Mu'ammal) is solidly Baṣran. (On Mu'ammal [d. 206/822], see Ibn Ḥajar, Tahdhīb, X, 380f. [no. 682].) Aḥmad b. `Umar al-Wakī'ī (d. 235/849-50), the next link in the chain was, however, a Kūfan who had settled in Baghdād and went on to serve as a mazālim judge in Marw, Khurāsān, for twelve years. On him, see TB, V, 40f. (no. 2354). That this tradition is to be seen as a pointed response to Sufyān's view, cited earlier ("when all the neighbours of a man praise him, he is surely an evil man") rather than the other way round, is suggested by the fact that a Prophetical tradition with an impressive isnād is deployed in rebuttal, whereas Sufyān's statement goes no further than, and carries only the authority of, his own name.

(150) Note, for example, the sharp response of Yaḥyā b. Ma`īn (d. 233/848) when told that some people preferred `Abd al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī (d. 198/813), a noted Baṣran scholar of hadīth, over the well-respected Kūfan scholar, Wakī' b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812): "May the curse of God, the angels, and of all humans be on he who gives precedence to `Abd al-Raḥmān over Wakī'!" On the sometimes sharp disagreements within and between the inhabitants of different Islamic cities on those who were to be regarded as their preeminent religious authorities, see al-Shāfi'ī, "Kitāb jīmā' al-'ilm," in al-Umm, VII, 294f.

(151) TB, X, 420 (no. 5578). On Abū Naṣr during the Mihna, cf. al-Ṭabarī, Ta'rikh, III, 1121, 1128, 1132. Like Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Naṣr too was one of the abnā' (TB, X, 420).

(152) TB, X, 421. Bishr went on to explain that Abū Naṣr's position was higher than either his own or even Ibn Ḥanbal's because of his having willingly lived in poverty (faqr) and as a recompense for his patience on the death of his sons.

Sufyān al-Thawrī. This position should also be seen in relation to the emerging juristic notion that the agreement of the community is an indication of divine approval. The Ḥanafī jurist al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805) <sup>(153)</sup> attributes to the Prophet the view that “everything of which the Muslims approve or disapprove is good or bad in the sight of Allāh,” <sup>(154)</sup> an idea which, in various formulations, was to become a major characteristic of Sunni juristic thought. The “populist” view on funerals is different from the evolving Sunnī doctrine of consensus (*ijmāʿ*), of course, in that that consensus refers, for al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), at least, to the entire community; and in the “classical” juristic formulations (as well as in many pre-Shāfiʿī ones), it refers to the agreement of the scholars. <sup>(155)</sup> The traditions on participation in funerals stipulate, for their part, the efficacy of even a few people’s – and not necessarily scholars’ – good opinion. Despite this obvious difference, however, the “populist” stance on funerals still seems to rest on the significance of a *local* “consensus” as regards the deceased, and, in that sense, is likely to be a product of the same milieu as that in which the authority of *ijmāʿ* was crystallizing. <sup>(156)</sup>

The “populist” stance is also the favored one in major early collections of Sunnī *ḥadīth* on the subject of funerals. Traditions to this effect are noteworthy for featuring important figures from the ranks of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* in their *isnāds*. <sup>(157)</sup> Yet, as indicated earlier, this position continued to be characterised by a certain degree of ambiguity. While the good things people said about the deceased, and the fact that the funeral was a large and impres-

(153) On him, see *GAS*, I, 421-33.

(154) “*Mā raʾā-hu al-muslimūn hasanan fa-huwa ʿind Allāh hasan wa mā raʾā-hu al-muslimūn qabihan fa-huwa ʿind Allāh qabih.*” *Muwattāʾ* ʿimām Mālik, in the version transmitted by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī, ed. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAbd al-Latīf (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-ʿilmiyya, 1979), 91 (the context of the report is the discussion of the caliph ʿUmar’s institution of special evening prayers during the month of Ramaḍān [*bāb qiyām shahr ramadān wa mā fīhi min al-fadl*]). Cited (from a different edition) in Schacht, *Origins*, 86 (I follow Schacht’s translation of this report).

(155) For al-Shāfiʿī’s views cf., *Risāla*, 471ff., esp. 475f.; Schacht, *Origins*, 88ff.; on the pre-Shāfiʿī history of consensus and the post-Shāfiʿī doctrine, see *ibid.*, 82ff., 94f.

(156) The juristic interest of this “populist” position is evident in other ways as well. Thus, al-Bukhārī cites versions of the *ḥadīth* on people being the witnesses of God not only in his «Book of Funerals» but also in the “Book of Witnesses,” where these traditions are adduced to answer the question of how many witnesses ought to suffice in attesting to a person’s good character (Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīh*, II, 148f. [*kitāb al-shahādāt* 6]). For what it is worth, it may also be noted that at least some of the individuals who feature in various traditions which present people as the witnesses of God on earth were actively involved in the judicial administration: the Basran traditionist ʿAffān b. Muslim al-Ṣaffār, for instance, was in charge of investigating the credentials of witnesses for the Basran judge Muʾadh b. Muʾadh (d. 196/812), (*TB*, XII, 265 [no. 6715]). ʿAlī b. Mushir, who narrated a tradition about the significance of people’s testimony at funerals, was al-Mahdī’s judge in Mawsil (Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, III, 368. On this judge, see Muḥammad b. Khalaf Wakiʿ [d. 306/918], *Akhbār al-quḍāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī [Cairo, 1947-1950], III, 219f.); and Aḥmad b. ʿUmar al-Wakiʿī (d. 235/849-50), who transmitted the foregoing tradition about God forgiving a person’s sins if his neighbours testified to his goodness, was himself a judge of a *mazālīm* court in Khurāsān for twelve years.

(157) For example: ʿAffān b. Muslim al-Ṣaffār (cf. Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, III, 368; also cf. the preceding note); Hushaym b. Bashīr (Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Musannaf*, III, 367; on Hushaym [d. 183/799], see *TB*, XIV, 86-95 [no. 7436]); Shuʿba b. al-Ḥajjāj (al-Bukhārī, I, 344); Ḥammād b. Salama (Ibn Balabān, *al-Isṣān*, V, 12; on Ḥammād [d. 167/783], see Ibn Saʿd, *Tabaqāt*, VII, pt. ii, 39f.).

sive one, were marks of authority and divine favour for the dead person, a prominent scholar's boycott could have scarcely been easy to disregard. The status of the funeral prayer as *fard kifāya* allowed one to sit back, of course, as long as there were others at hand to participate; but an influential scholar's boycott was not merely a matter of sitting back. It was also a potentially memorable occasion to define the locus of religious authority, to distinguish between "us" and "them." The view is attributed to Ibn Hanbal that "the imām should not pray over one who has committed suicide, nor over an extremist (*ghālin*), but the people (*al-nās*) are to pray over him." <sup>(158)</sup> The "imām" refers here primarily to the political authority, but this term was also used for leading religious scholars of the late second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, including Ibn Hanbal himself. <sup>(159)</sup> If, for all its attractions, the "populist" position could lend itself to ambiguity – with the people perhaps turning out in large numbers at the funeral of the wrong man, or with not enough showing up to mark the death of every "orthodox" scholar – it was for the scholar as "imām" or exemplar to continue to clarify the religious landscape on this occasion. And to do so not only helped differentiate "orthodox" beliefs from the wayward; it would have served equally to distinguish the religious elite from the often unpredictable masses. Much, then, was at stake on the day of the funeral.

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(158) Ibn Shāhin (d. 385/995), *Nāsikh al-hadīth wa mansūkhuh*, ed. Samīr b. Amīn al-Zuhri (Maktabat al-manār, 1988), 315, 318.

(159) On the use of the term "imām" for scholars, which seems to have become common in the third/ninth century though it is sometimes used for (and by) late-second/eighth century scholars too, see for example: Ibn Abi Hātim, *Taqdīm*, 118 (ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī [198/813] said: "The imāms of the people in their time are four: Sufyān al-Thawri in Kūfa, Mālik in the Hijāz, al-Awzāʿi in Syria, and Hammād b. Zayd in Baṣra"); *ibid.*, 295 (Ahmad b. Hanbal); *TB*, X, 159, 161, 165 (no. 5306 [Ibn al-Mubārak]), etc. Also cf. M. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1996), 118f.