“GOD WILL NEVER DISGRACE THEE”
THE INTERPRETATION OF AN EARLY ḤADĪTH
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The well known tradition in al-Bukhārī, told on the authority of al-Zuhri—‘Urwa—‘Ā’isha, about the conversation between the Prophet and Khadija after he received his first revelation1 contains at the end a phrase variously interpreted by Muslim scholars and translated in modern times in various manners.

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

To start with, there are two interesting variants of this phrase. Al-Maqrizi’s version is: wa-tu’īnu ‘alā nawā’ibī l-dahri,2 you help against the misfortunes of time, whereas Ibn Kathir quotes a version nawā’ibu l-khairī3 and interprets it: “If a misfortune befalls somebody in a righteous case (idhā waqa’at nā’ibatu li-ḥadīn fī khairin), you extend your help and aid him till he finds means of living or sustenance.”

Al-Qaṣṭallānī4 does not quote the version tu’īnu ‘alā nawā’ibī l-khairī but interprets the saying in a corresponding manner by giving to the word ḥaqq a meaning similar to that of khair: “Nawā’ib means vicissitudes (ḥawārdith); she (i.e. Khadija) said nawā’ibu l-ḥaqqi because vicissitudes affect the righteous and unrighteous (lī-annā’hā takīmūn fī l-ḥaqqī wa-l-bāṭīlī). Labid said: Nawā’ibu min khairin wa-sharrin kilahumā: fa-lā l-ḥairīr mamdūdun wa-lā l-sharrū lāzību.”

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

Wa-lā yahsabūna ‘l-khaira lā sharra ba’dahu:  
Wa-lā yahsabūna ‘l-sharra ḍarbata lāzībi

3 Al-bidāya wa-l-nihāya, III, 7 (ed. Cairo, 1932); and see W. Sakakini: Ummahat al-mumīnīn, p. 16 (Cairo, n.d.).
which conveys the same idea of changes in the conditions of the tribe. The idea of haqq and bāṭīl cannot be traced in the verses of either Labid or al-Nābigha.

Al-Qaṣṭallānī’s interpretation was copied by al-Zurqānī; al-Sīra al-Ḥalabiyya only comments on the word nawa’ib rendering it ḥawādīth. A quite different interpretation of the phrase is given by al-Kashmirī in his “Faiḍ al-bārī”: Tu’īnu ‘alā nawa’ībi ’l-haqqi is a comprehensive expression for (qualities) mentioned (in this ḥadīth) and not mentioned. The Banū Ḥāshim gained fame by these features of character. (awṣāf).

II

Let us turn to the translators: Houdas-Marçais translate: “et tu secours les victimes des vicissitudes du droit”: the words “victims of the vicissitudes of right” are not, however, found in the text: nawa’ibu ’l-haqqi. Sprenger translates: “und unterstützest Leute in unverdientem Unglück,” which again can hardly be deduced from the text. Mirza Bashir al-Dīn Maḥmūd Āḥmad's translation reads: “and you help those who are in distress,” which corresponds to the version of al-Maqrīzī mentioned above. An unusual rendering is given by W. M. Watt: “you succour the agents of the truth.” This translation (although followed by a question mark) is erroneous and was probably caused by confusing nuwwāb with nawa’ib. R. V. C. Bodley’s translation: “Hast thou not been loving to thy kinsfolk . . . faithful to thy word and ever a defender of the truth” . . . merely glosses over the difficulty.

III

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

A remarkable verse of ’Urwa b. al-Ward runs as follows:

\[
\text{Atahza’u minni an saminta wa-qad tarā}
\]
\[
\text{Bi-jismiya massa }^11 \text{ ’l-haqqi wa-l-ḥaqqq }^1 \text{jāhidu}
\]

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

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

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1 Sharḥ al-mawāhib, I, 212–13 (ed. Cairo, A.H. 1325).
3 I, 28–29 (ed. Cairo, 1938).
5 Die Lehre des Mohammad, I, 333 (Berlin, 1869).
7 Vide above, n. 2, p. 27.
9 The Messenger, p. 52 (Lahore, 1954).
11 In Ḥamāsa: shuḥūba ’l-haqqi (Freytag, p. 723).
the poor, the needy and the kinsfolk in the Jāhiliyya is further elucidated by the response of Qays b. Zuhayr, quoted by al-Bakri1:

Lā tashtumanni yā 'bna Wardin fa-innani
Ta'ūdu 'alā mālī l-ḥuqūqu l-ʿawā'īdu
Fa-man yuʾthiri ʿl-ḥaqqa ʿl-naʿāba takun bihi
Khūṣāsatimu jismin wa-hwa fayyānu mājīdu

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

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

U'awwidu mitlalahā ʿl-ḥukamāʾa ba'dī:
Idhā mā ʿl-ḥaqqu fī ʿl-ashyāʾi nābā

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

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

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

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

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

Wa-lā arba'u ʿl-māla min ḥubbīhi, wa-lā li-l-fikhāri
wa-lā li-l-bakhāl
Wa-lākin li-ḥaqqin idhā nābanī, wa-iqrāmi ḍayfīn
idhā mā nazal

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

1 Simt al-La'ālī, p. 822 (ed. al-Maimani).
5 I, 68—T. 'A.
An Umayyad poet, Shabib b. al-Barsa, uses the expression in a reverse order¹:

\[ \text{Wa-aḥbīsū fī 'l-ḥaqqī 'l-καριμάτα, in-nāmā} \]
\[ \text{Yaqīmu biḥaqqī 'l-nāʿibātī sabūrūḥā} \]

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

The same poet mentions this idea in another verse²:

\[ \text{Wa-lī-ḥaqqī min māli idhā huwa dāfānī} \]
\[ \text{Naṣībūn wa-lī-nafṣī 'l-sha'dī naṣībū} \]
\[ \text{Wa-lā khayra fīman lā yuwaṭṭīnu nafsahu} \]
\[ 'Alā nā'ī'bātī 'l-dahrī ḥīna tanūbū \]

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

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

\[ \text{Wa-l-baḍhlu min mu'dimihā in alamma bihā} \]
\[ Ḥaqqun wa-lā yashtakīhā man yunādīhā \]

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

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

\[ \text{Wa-innī karīmūn dhu 'iyālīn tuhimmūnī} \]
\[ Nawā'ibu yaghshā ruz'uhā wa-ḥuqūqu \]

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

The translation by Lyall of ḥuqūq as: “calls for brotherly help” seems to be inaccurate.

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

\[ \text{Yuhīnūna fī-l-ḥaqqī amwālahum} \]
\[ Idhā 'l-lasībātū itlahaynā 'l-musīmā \]

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

The commentary of al-Anbārī repeats the explanation of “ḥaqq” quoted above as including

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¹ Aghānī, (3rd ed.), 12, 275.
⁴ Muṣaffāḍīyāt, XXIII, 6.
⁵ Comp. op. cit., IV, 9, mentioned above.
the expenditure in order to help in cases of bloodwit, bestowing camels, and entertaining guests. The Umayyad Ibn Rumma says:

Wa-innā lakhushmun fī 'l-liqā'ī a'izzatun
Wa-fī 'l-haqqi waḍḍāḥūna, bīdūn, qalāmīsū

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

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

IV

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

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

The similarity of the hadith about the conversation between Khadija and the Prophet, and the story of the conversation between Ibn al-Dughunna and Abū Bakr in the version of al-Bukhārī, suggests that this kind of address was a coined formula of praise, current at that period. We find for instance a description of Hāshim6 written in a similar style. Many other descriptions of noble men of the Jāhiliyya emphasize exactly these qualities.

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

1 Ibn al-Shajarī: Ḥamāsā, p. 54.
4 Šāfi‘ī, II, 268; and see: Al-Dhahabī: Taʿrīkh, I, 190; Ibn Kathīr: al-Bidāya, III, 173. It is obvious, that the mention of these qualities is more relevant in the case of Abū Bakr; here his social activity is rightly stressed.
Fayrūz handed over 1,000 dirhems to Jarir. Here the praise used in honour of the Prophet and Abū Bakr is applied to a mawlā.

In conclusion it may be said, that the phrase tuʿīnu ʿalā nawaʿibi ʿl-ḥaqiq is closely connected with the Jāhiliyya social ideal about the fulfilment of duties towards the poor and the needy and it tallies well in the ḥadīth about the Prophet with the other qualities mentioned in it. The phrase has to be translated: “and thou helpest in cases of recurring obligations.”

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

1 Al-Balādhurī: Ansāb, MS. 1012b.