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The Shifting Ontology of the Qur'ān in Ḥanafism: Debates on Reciting the Qur'ān in Persian

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Abstract: A review of the works of the most authoritative Ḥanafī theologians and jurists shows that the later *madhhab* taught that its eponym, Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), held the Qur'ān to be the uncreated and eternal speech of God. According to this understanding, he and his followers believed the linguistic composition of the Qur'ān in Arabic to be a component of its miraculous nature. However, a closer examination of Ḥanafī sources leads one to conclude that the claim that Abū Ḥanīfah believed Arabic to be integral to the Qur'ān's composition is not without contention. Abū Ḥanīfah permitted recitation of the Qur'ān within ritual prayer in Persian, which later Ḥanafī jurists used as a basis to argue that the Qur'ān, for Abū Ḥanīfah, consisted only of its meaning, not its expression in Arabic. After the Miḥnah, Abū Ḥanīfah's permissive position became associated with the newly heterodox view of the “Created Qur'ān,” placing pressure on later Ḥanafī jurists to ensure that Abū Ḥanīfah was not associated with heresy. Whereas earlier Ḥanafīs contended that the Qur'ān was miraculous solely in its meaning and guiding capacities, later Ḥanafīs, when faced with scandal, condemned the earlier view and reinterpreted Abū Ḥanīfah's views. The characterization of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān as inhering in its canonized Arabic expression allowed the Qur'ān to serve as evidence of the prophethood of Muḥammad. This article traces the shift within Ḥanafism on the connection between language and the ontology of the Qur'ān to align with the Sunnī orthodoxy of the uncreated and fully inimitable *Arabic* Qur'ān. Although some aspects of the roles of Abū Ḥanīfah and Ḥanafism in this evolution have been studied by other scholars, I focus here on an overlooked figure, the proto-Ḥanafī Abū 'Iṣmah Nūḥ b. Abī Maryam (d. 173/789). This case study on the recitation of the Qur'ān in Persian examines and explores the impact of the understudied aspects of this evolution.

Keywords: Abū Ḥanīfah, translation, recitation of the Qur'ān, Ḥanafism, the Created Qur'ān

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1 Introduction

A review of the works of the most authoritative theologians and jurists of the Ḥanafī legal school shows that the later *madhhab* taught that its eponym, Abū Ḥanīfah b. al-Nu'mān b. Thābit (d. 150/767), held the Qur'an to be the uncreated, eternal speech of God and that he believed its linguistic composition to be a component of its miraculous nature.¹ However, a closer examination of Ḥanafī sources in the centuries following Abū Ḥanīfah's death leads one to conclude that this claim is not without contention. The original Kufan approach to the nature of the Qur'an that Abū Ḥanīfah inherited was not yet definitively articulated and placed more emphasis on the Qur'an's meaning rather than unyielding fidelity to the Arabic textual expression. Abū Ḥanīfah even permitted recitation of the Qur'an within ritual prayer in Persian, in what will be termed his "Persian Qur'an" position. This would later be developed by Ḥanafī jurists who argued that the Qur'an, for Abū Ḥanīfah, consisted only of its meaning, not its Arabic expression.²

Throughout the fourth/tenth century, the Persian Qur'an position began to be associated with the newly heterodox view of the "Created Qur'an," placing pressure on Ḥanafī jurists to ensure that the eponym of their *madhhab* was not associated with heresy.³ By the fifth/eleventh century, Ḥanafīs felt compelled to depart from their predecessors and identify the miraculous nature of the Qur'an as inhering in its canonized Arabic expression in order to prove the prophethood of Muḥammad.⁴ This conflicted with Abū Ḥanīfah's reported emphasis on meaning over expression with respect to the essential nature of the Qur'an. This article traces the shift undertaken by Ḥanafism on the ontology of the Qur'an in order

1 For the claim that Abū Ḥanīfah held the Qur'an to be uncreated, see Bābartī (d. 786/1384), *Sharḥ waṣīyyat al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfah*, 103; 'Alī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1605), *Mīnah al-rawḍ*, 94. For authoritative texts of Māturīdī theology that articulate that orthodox Sunnism holds that the Qur'an is a linguistic miracle indicating the divine origin of Muḥammad's revelation, see Nasafī (d. 710/1310), *Sharḥ al-'umdaḥ*, 248; Ibn al-Humām (d. 861/1457), *al-Musāmarah*, 2:93. More pointedly, the most authoritative early-modern Ḥanafī, Muḥammad Amīn b. 'Ābidīn, contends that Abū Ḥanīfah held that the Qur'an's miracle includes its Arabic expression (*ibārah 'arabiyyah*) along with its meaning (*ma'nā*). He denies that Abū Ḥanīfah held the Qur'an's miracle to extend only to its meaning; see Ibn 'Ābidīn, *Ḥāshiyat Nasamāt al-ashār*, 48. The attribution of some of Abū Ḥanīfah's theological works has been challenged in modern scholarship; see the overviews in Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 1:221–41 and Rudolf, "Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism."

2 Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'an and its implications for Ḥanafī law have been investigated by Reynolds, "God Has Spoken Before" and Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'an*, 53–91.

3 The Shāfi'ī scholar Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) relates this view from Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Ṣaghīr (d. 417/1026); see Zarkashī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 1:186. This dynamic is further explicated in section 2.

4 This position will be referred to hereinafter as the "Unified Qur'an."

to maintain the *madhhab*'s position within Sunnī orthodoxy regarding the uncreated and fully inimitable *Arabic* Qur'ān, which evolved after the Miḥnah, and as a consequence of debates on the evidence for Muḥammad's prophethood.⁵ This shift involved attempts by Ḥanafis to reinterpret Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'ān position and its derivatives, relying on a controversial yet captivating character, one Abū 'Iṣmah (d. 173/789), to align the Ḥanafī view of the Qur'ān with the emerging Sunnī consensus.⁶ Although some aspects of the roles of Abū Ḥanīfah and Ḥanafism in this evolution have been studied, there are significant aspects of Abū 'Iṣmah's historical role and his influence on Ḥanafī views of the Qur'ān that have been overlooked.

As a Kufan, the intellectual genealogy of Abū Ḥanīfah can be traced back to the Prophet through Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/652–653), an eminent companion of Muḥammad. The Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23–24/644) dispatched Ibn Mas'ūd to Kufa as a teacher, where he spent several years.⁷ Ibn Mas'ūd, as reported in the biographical literature, had converted to Islam early during the Prophet's mission and was known to be a proficient reciter of the Qur'ān. Muḥammad himself was once moved to tears after he asked Ibn Mas'ūd to recite to him, according to one report.⁸ Thus, as

5 My use of orthodoxy in this study acknowledges that the term "orthodoxy" is a multifaceted construct that has evolved within diverse historical constraints. According to El Shamsy, orthodoxy is a process that involves the establishment of theological doctrines in the constantly changing web of social relations and institutions that make up society. This process is reciprocal, as ideas can reshape these relations and institutions, while the social context actively receives, guides, and/or restrains ideas. Therefore, El Shamsy argues that the history of orthodoxy cannot be reduced to a history of ideas but, rather, must be a history of how claims to truth were institutionalized as orthodox in specific contexts. In the case of the Ḥanafī commentators, Sunnism was conceived as an orthodoxy, and there was a keen awareness of the need to ensure that Abū Ḥanīfah's views on the Qur'ān remained within Sunnī boundaries. See El Shamsy, "The Social Construction of Orthodoxy," 97.

6 The remaking of Abū Ḥanīfah to accord with traditionalist (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) sensibilities following the Miḥnah has been discussed by Christopher Melchert and Erik Dickinson. Melchert has noted that Abū Ḥanīfah's legal views, such as his approval of *nabīdh* – a drink made from fermented dates – were later rejected in accordance with the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* prohibition. He also shows how Ḥanafī loyalists re-imagined history to disassociate Abū Ḥanīfah from the accusation that he held the Qur'ān to be created – a position considered blasphemous by the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. Dickinson has also shown how Ḥanafī jurists confronted the accusation that Abū Ḥanīfah neglected *ḥadīth* by writing biographies and *musnad ḥadīth* collections for Abū Ḥanīfah; they, in effect, re-imagined the eponym as a *muḥaddith*. See Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law*, 2 and Dickinson, "Aḥmad b. al-Ṣalt and His Biography of Abū Ḥanīfah."

7 Abū 'Ubayd (d. 224/838), *al-Amwāl*, 1:639.

8 The full account is reported as follows: "Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd said: The Prophet asked me to recite the Qur'ān for him. I said, 'Shall I recite the Qur'ān to you, whereas it has been revealed to you?' The Prophet said, 'Yes.' I then recited Sūrat al-Nisā' until I reached this *āyah* (Q 4:41), 'How shall it

one of the most authoritative scholars with direct ties to the Prophet, Ibn Mas'ūd's students eagerly gathered his opinions and used them as precedents to extrapolate new solutions for hypotheticals and novel cases for which there were no explicitly transmitted opinions from earlier authorities.⁹ Abū Ḥanīfah adopted Ibn Mas'ūd's precedents in law as well as some aspects of his approach to the Qur'ān.

In his *Kitāb al-Āthār*,¹⁰ Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798), Abū Ḥanīfah's colleague and scribe who documented the latter's positions, narrates that Abū Ḥanīfah related to him a story in which Ibn Mas'ūd instructed a non-Arab he was teaching to read the verse in Q Dukhān 44:44, ending in “*ṭa'ām al-athīm*” (“food for the sinful”); the man repeatedly mispronounced it as “*ṭa'ām al-yatīm*” (“food for the orphan”). Ibn Mas'ūd then instructed him to recite the verse instead as “*ṭa'ām al-fājir*” (“food for the wicked”), which, though departing from the canonical Qur'ānic text, is nonetheless comparable to the original. Ibn Mas'ūd explained that this was not blasphemous because it was not an error to replace synonyms such as “The Most Forgiving” with “The Most Merciful,” or “The Mighty” with “The Wise” in a qur'ānic verse; it was only an error to replace a word that changes the intended meaning, such as a verse describing mercy in place of a verse describing punishment or “to add to God's scripture something it did not contain.” Thus, Ibn Mas'ūd's approach, at least as documented in this narrative, distinguished between the expression (*lafz*) and meaning (*ma'nā*); the expressions were interchangeable so long as the meaning was maintained.¹¹

Abū Ḥanīfah is known to have lionized Ibn Mas'ūd,¹² and he was seemingly inspired by the latter's “comparable approach,” which Abū Ḥanīfah further devel-

be when We shall call forth from each nation a witness, and We shall bring you against these as a witness ...' The Prophet then said, 'That is enough.' When I turned and saw the face of the Prophet, lo, tears streamed from his eyes.” See Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3:351 (k. *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, no. 5050).

⁹ The process of extrapolation is referred to as *takhrīj* or *qiyās*. For more on the development of this concept, see Dihlawī, *Inṣāf*, 39.

¹⁰ Abū Yūsuf, *Āthār*, 44. The chain of transmission in full is Abū Yūsuf from Abū Ḥanīfah, from Ḥammād b. Sulaymān, from Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, to 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd. This transmission is also documented from Ibn Mas'ūd in Ibn Wahb (d. 197/812), *Jāmi'*, 3:54–55. Al-Ṭabarī also narrates an identical report from Abū Dardā' instead of Ibn Mas'ūd; Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Jāmi'*, 21:54.

¹¹ Though this narration is from the *Āthār* of Abū Yūsuf, the authenticity of the *Āthār* of al-Shaybānī has been established by Sadeghi, “The Authenticity of Two 2nd/8th Century Ḥanafī Legal Texts.”

¹² Abū Ḥanīfah's exaltation of Ibn Mas'ūd is reflected in an anecdote that al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad al-Makkī narrates in his *Manāqib*: In a debate with the jurist al-Awzā'ī, Abū Ḥanīfah argued that Ibn Mas'ūd was the preeminent companion who should be followed, and his rationale was that Ibn Mas'ūd's reputation was obvious, requiring no further clarification; see Makkī, *Manāqib*, 1:113. For more on Ibn Mas'ūd's influence on Iraqi jurists, see Dihlawī, *Inṣāf*, 37.

oped in consideration of his own distinct Abbasid Iraqi socio-political context.¹³ During Abū Ḥanīfah's time, in the second/eighth century, the demographic ratio of Muslims to non-Muslims in Abbasid Iraq stood at about ten percent, with Muslims in the numerical minority.¹⁴ Given that the majority were non-Arabic speakers, the Kufans were seemingly interested in making Islam more appealing to the majority by translating the Qur'ān into the local vernacular. Amidst this environment, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805), another one of Abū Ḥanīfah's primary disciples and scribes, asked him, "What is your opinion regarding (*a-ra'ayta*) a man who recites [the Qur'ān] in Persian during his prayer while capable of [reciting] in Arabic?" Abū Ḥanīfah replied, "His prayer is valid." Abū Ḥanīfah thus opined that it was permissible for anyone (even an Arab) to recite the Qur'ān in Persian instead of Arabic (i. e., the "Persian Qur'ān" position).¹⁵ Likely extrapolating from Ibn Mas'ūd's comparable approach that allowed for substituting words in Arabic, Abū Ḥanīfah now opined that the entire language could be substituted as long as the meaning was not altered. Interestingly, Abū Yūsuf and al-Shaybānī differed from Abū Ḥanīfah and held that anyone capable of reciting the Qur'ān in Arabic must do so in prayer, and only made an exception for non-Arabic speakers to pray in Persian.¹⁶

Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'ān position has been interpreted in two ways. The first is that he was offering a practical concession for Persian speakers. Allowing worshippers to recite the Qur'ān in Persian instead of Arabic would incentivize conversion to Islam for individuals who might not have been inclined to learn a different language in order to perform ritual prayer.¹⁷ Hence, it is plau-

13 This does not conclusively negate that Abū Ḥanīfah's position was influenced by a general trajectory in Kufa, rather than his affinity for Ibn Mas'ūd.

14 Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*, 44.

15 See Shaybānī, *Aṣl*, 1:219. For more on the history of the documentation of Ḥanafism, see Dihlawī, *Inṣāf*, 39. Norman Calder (*Early Muslim Jurisprudence*, 40) has questioned the provenance of *Aṣl* and contended that it is a later compilation, not al-Shaybānī's. Other texts of al-Shaybānī have also been investigated and determined to be authentic. See Sadeghi, "The Authenticity of Two 2nd/8th Century Ḥanafī Legal Texts," 291–319. Abū Ḥanīfah is not known to have written any legal texts; thus, his views on reciting the Qur'ān were preserved by al-Shaybānī.

16 Shaybānī, *Aṣl*, 1:16.

17 A similar phenomenon occurs concerning Abū Ḥanīfah's view of faith (*imān*), which, he asserts, excludes actions. Madelung ("The Spread of Māturīdism") has observed that this doctrine of Abū Ḥanīfah facilitated the spread of Islam in Central Asia. Such pragmatism is how the majority of Ḥanafīs have understood Abū Ḥanīfah's rationale for the Persian Qur'ān, asserting that his flexibility has been reversed with an increase in Arabic literacy. For example, Abū Ja'far al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933) explains that the comparable approach of Ibn Mas'ūd, which undergirds Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'ān, was merely a dispensation due to the difficulty many found in pronouncing the Qur'ān accurately. This dispensation was contingent on their inability and, thus, it lapsed when Ara-

sible that Abū Ḥanīfah was addressing a practical issue in the community of Iraq.¹⁸

The second interpretation is that Abū Ḥanīfah was articulating his view on the nature of the Qurʾān itself.¹⁹ This can be inferred from al-Shaybānī's question, beginning with the interrogative *a-raʾayta*, which may be rendered as, "What is your opinion (*raʾy*)?" Queries employing this expression in the Iraqi milieu often signaled a hypothetical case used to extrapolate and generalize, making it a teaching exercise. For instance, when a member of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth of Basra, Qatādah b. Dīʾamah al-Sadūsī (d. 117/735), visited Kufa, Abū Ḥanīfah directed a hypothetical dowry case to him. Qatādah censured him, "Damn you (*wayḥak*)! Why would you ask me about something that has not occurred (*mā lam yaqa*)?"²⁰ Given Abū Ḥanīfah's penchant for such hypothetical inquiries, it is reasonable to conclude that al-Shaybānī's question itself may have been regarding the ontology of the Qurʾān and not in response to the social circumstances of his era.

The second interpretation is also supported by the fact that Abū Ḥanīfah allowed even proficient Arabic speakers to recite in Persian, unlike Abū Yūsuf and al-Shaybānī, who permitted only non-Arabic speakers to recite as an exception.²¹ Given that there is limited practical need to permit a fluent Arabic speaker to pray in Persian, Abū Ḥanīfah's concession to allow it seems to address a larger question of the nature of the Qurʾān; it implies that the meaning of the text is more determinative of its ontological identity than the expression. Later Ḥanafīs who upheld this opinion – the "Semantic Qurʾān" position – separated the Qurʾān in terms of its meaning and linguistic expression, focusing on the former as its essence and relegating its expression to the periphery.

bic literacy increased. For more, see Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 1:68. The Ḥanafī ʿUthmān al-Zaylaʿī (d. 743/1343) also explains, in a similar vein, that Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qurʾān was an exemption afforded only to reciters as needed; see Zaylaʿī, *Tabyin al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1:110.

18 Ḥanafī sources claim that Abū Ḥanīfah relied on a report of Muḥammad's companion Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 35/656) for his Persian Qurʾān. In the report, Salmān, originally from Persia, translates the first chapter of the Qurʾān into Persian and thereafter secures the Prophet's approval. Although the report is seemingly apocryphal, portions of the Qurʾān had likely been translated by this time – particularly those that were most often recited in prayers; see Sarakhsī, *Mabsūṭ*, 1:37.

19 This is how a minority of Ḥanafīs have understood the Persian Qurʾān: for instance, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Qudūrī (d. 428/1036), Muḥammad al-Sarakhsī (d. 490/1097), and ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Kāsānī (d. 587/1191); they are also referred to as the Semantic Qurʾān Ḥanafīs hereinafter.

20 Abū Ḥanīfah's response to the Baṣran traditionst Qatādah is instructive: "We're preparing for a crisis before its occurrence; if it occurs, we'll know how to negotiate it." For more, see Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, 15:473.

21 Shaybānī, *Aṣl*, 1:16.

Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'ān view would also be contrasted with the Arabic-only Qur'ān position in the following generation by Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) and his followers, who argued, based on Q Yūsuf 12:2, that the Qur'ān is revealed exclusively in Arabic: "We have certainly revealed this as an Arabic Qur'ān that you might reflect [thereon]." Later Shāfi'īs explicitly declared the Persian Qur'ān position invalid based on this reference²² and would later claim that Abū Ḥanīfah retracted his original view and adopted Abū Yūsuf and al-Shaybānī's view, with an exception for non-Arabic speakers. Nonetheless, Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'ān view was not the subject of major controversy and would not be branded heterodox until centuries later.

2 Emergent Orthodoxies on the Qur'ān

Although Abū Ḥanīfah was maligned during his lifetime, anathematization of him intensified after his death in the changing social and cultural environment of the third/ninth century. During this time, following the Miḥnah, the Ḥanafī school began coalescing around two major orthodoxies: 1) that the Qur'ān is uncreated; and 2) that it is a linguistic miracle. The first orthodoxy emerged after the Miḥnah instituted in 218/833 by the Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 197–218/813–33), who, along with his successors, attempted and failed to force the Created Qur'ān view into Sunnī orthodoxy.²³ The notion that the Qur'ān was created was contrary to the view of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 290/903), who maintained that the Qur'ān consists of the uncreated, divine speech of God.²⁴ The Ahl al-Ḥadīth held their ground, and the uncreated doctrine settled into Sunnī orthodoxy in the aftermath of the conclusion of the Miḥnah during the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47/847–61).

Although sources are conflicted on Abū Ḥanīfah's explicit position on the creation of the Qur'ān, he became a target of criticism from later Ahl al-Ḥadīth because he and his *madhhab* had become associated with the doctrine that the Qur'ān was created.²⁵ Some of his contemporary adversaries asserted that he was even asked

²² See Sam'ānī, *Iṣṭilām*, 1:236–39.

²³ For more on the Miḥnah and the implications of the Created Qur'ān, see Nimrod Hurvitz, "Al-Ma'mūn (r. 198/813–218/833) and the Miḥna."

²⁴ For more on Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's biography, see Melchert, *Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal*. For the Created Qur'ān controversy, see Madelung, "The Creation of the Koran," 504–25.

²⁵ In the third/ninth century, these criticisms were gathered by 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in a section of his *Kitāb al-Sunnah* entitled, "What I memorized from my father and other scholars (*mashāyikh*) about Abī Ḥanīfah." The criticisms included the following accusations: Abū Ḥanīfah disregarded *ḥadīth* in favor of personal opinion (*ra'y*), he encouraged rebellion against the political

to repent for holding that the Qur'ān was created.²⁶ Unfortunately, the veracity of these reports on Abū Ḥanīfah's stance is difficult to ascertain because his adversaries were known for their animosity towards him, rendering their criticisms suspect.²⁷ Further, even if a reliable report is located regarding this opinion, it is curious that Abū Ḥanīfah would have been so assertive on what would have been only a mundane discussion during his lifetime. The Created Qur'ān only became a major controversy in the following century and, therefore, would not have necessitated extensive commentary from Abū Ḥanīfah himself.

Abū Yūsuf, in some sources, maintained that Abū Ḥanīfah was of the view that the Qur'ān is uncreated.²⁸ This is corroborated in a report from a student of Abū Yūsuf and another of al-Shaybānī, wherein they assert that only two of their colleagues – Bishr al-Marīsī (d. 218–219/833–834) and Aḥmad b. Abī Du'ād (d. 240/854) – had held the Qur'ān to be created.²⁹ However, because al-Marīsī and Ibn Abī Du'ād were the intellectual forces behind the Miḥnah, Abū Ḥanīfah and his *madhhab* had been besmirched unjustly.³⁰ Nonetheless, by the fifth/eleventh century, the author of the definitive work on the early history of Baghdad, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 469/1071), documented that by his time, it was commonly accepted (*mashhūr*) that Abū Ḥanīfah considered the Qur'ān to be created.³¹

During al-Khaṭīb's time, when Ḥanafīs and Shāfi'īs competed fiercely for political patronage and social legitimacy, Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'ān view came under the most severe criticism. Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl al-Ṣaghīr, a well-known Shāfi'ī, was the first to explicitly document the prevalent belief among the broader community that Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'ān emanated from the Created Qur'ān doctrine.³² He contended that “the basis (*ma'khadh*) of the disagreement over the [permissibility of

ruler, and his conception of faith did not include one's outward actions (*Sunnah*, 1:182); cf. Khan, *Heresy*, 95–98.

²⁶ One report states that he was expelled from the court of the Abbasid prince 'Īsā b. Mūsā (d. 168/784) in Kufa for holding the Qur'ān to be created, and a repentance was demanded from him; see Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, 15:516, 520.

²⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr – and other historians after him – cite this when dismissing accusations that Abū Ḥanīfah viewed the Qur'ān to be created; see Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi'*, 2:1113.

²⁸ Melchert (*Formation*, 55) maintains that reports that Abū Ḥanīfah adopted the Uncreated Qur'ān were disseminated by propagandists.

²⁹ The two students who made this claim were Mu'allā b. Maṣṣūr al-Rāzī, who studied with Abū Yūsuf, and Sulaymān al-Jawzjānī, who studied with al-Shaybānī, see Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, 15:516.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Zarkashī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 1:186. For al-Qaffāl al-Ṣaghīr's biography, see Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īyyah al-kubrā*, 3:53.

reciting in Persian] is the view that the Qurʾān is created.”³³ Abū Ḥanīfah’s Persian Qurʾān was thus now considered heretical, and repeated association with the heterodox Created Qurʾān view became detrimental to the *madhhab*’s reputation.

The Persian Qurʾān would also plainly contradict the second emerging orthodoxy of the time, that of the Qurʾān’s Arabic being a miracle of the Prophet, which developed as a consequence of dialogue between Muslim theologians and Jewish and Christian theologians living under Muslim rule. Muslims were challenged during such debates to prove Muḥammad’s prophethood and the veracity of his scripture with a miracle, as the Jews argued that Moses had split the Red Sea and the Christians maintained that Jesus had raised the dead.³⁴ Taking a cue from the verses in which the Qurʾān challenges its audience to produce verses rivaling it (*āyāt al-taḥaddī*), Muslim theologians contended that the Qurʾān itself was Muḥammad’s miracle (*muʿjizah*) and proved his prophethood.³⁵ Alongside its content, they argued that its miraculous nature included its literary style, reflected in its linguistic sophistication (*faṣāḥah*), eloquence (*balāghah*), and composition of words (*naẓm*) that could not be imitated by any human and, therefore, was divine.³⁶ This doctrine of the Qurʾān’s inimitability (*iʿjāz*), as it would come to be known, emerged as an incontrovertible tenet of Sunnī Islamic orthodoxy.³⁷ As a miracle of God, it was now widely regarded as a “Unified Qurʾān,” i. e., one that encompassed both expression and meaning.³⁸ Since the proof of the Prophet was now inextricably tied to the Qurʾān’s language, theologians began to reject the suggestion that it was possible to separate the literary component of the Qurʾān from its meaning. By claiming this, one would be challenging the foundational proof of Muḥammad’s prophethood. Thus, it was simply untenable to be on that side of history for the eponym of the orthodox Ḥanafī tradition.³⁹

33 Zarkashī, *al-Bahr al-muḥīṭ*, 1:186.

34 EQ, art. “Inimitability” (R. Martin).

35 Vasalou, “The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qurʾān.”

36 For example, Ḥamd b. Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998) emphasizes in his *Bayān iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* (27–28) that it is miraculously inimitable because it is composed in the most eloquent possible composition, as everything is placed with perfection, leaving no room for anything to be added or substituted; cf. Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz*, 25–27.

37 For instance, see Āmidī, *Abkār al-afkār*, 4:69, who argues from an Ashʿarī theological framework that Muḥammad’s prophecy is proven through the linguistic miracle of the Qurʾān.

38 This is indicated by the title of a text that is no longer extant, *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān fī nazmihī wa-taʿlīfihī*, attributed to the Muʿtazilī Muḥammad al-Wāṣiṭī (d. 306/918) in Ibn Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:58.

39 The ninth-century theologian Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 221/835), for instance, rejected that the Qurʾān was a linguistic miracle (“[*ankara*] *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān fī nazmihī*”), and was considered heterodox by Sunnī heresiographers; see ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Bagdādī, *al-Farq bayna l-firaq*, 131.

Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qurʾān was now in direct conflict with these two distinct, yet related, emergent orthodoxies. The influence of these developments concerning the Qurʾān would result in a dispute between Ḥanafī scholars on the nature of the Qurʾān.⁴⁰

3 The Persian Qurʾān

In spite of the criticisms it faced, Abū Ḥanīfah's school continued to grow through the fifth/eleventh centuries, especially in the regions of Central Asia and Iran.⁴¹ A mutually beneficial arrangement with the ruling Seljuks resulted in a blossoming of the *madhhab*, with Samarkand and Bukhara becoming hubs for Ḥanafī scholarship.⁴² The rise of Ḥanafism in Central Asia prompted a reaction from local Shāfiʿīs, who attempted to intellectually discredit Ḥanafism, particularly through its adoption of the Persian Qurʾān.

Among these Shāfiʿīs was Abū l-Muẓaffar al-Samʿānī (d. 489/1095), an ex-Ḥanafī convert to Shāfiʿism who had made it his mission to dismantle Ḥanafism, and defended al-Shāfiʿī's stance that the Qurʾān is meant to be recited only in Arabic.⁴³ He alleged that, by consensus of the *ʿulamāʾ*, the recitation of the Qurʾān in prayer must agree with the ʿUthmānic codex established by the third Caliph, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, (d. 35/656) as the standardized Qurʾān; if it did not agree with that codex, the prayer would be invalid.⁴⁴ Reciting in another language, then, was even more improper as in addition to departing from the consonantal skeleton of the ʿUthmānic codex, the miraculous nature of the Qurʾān would be lost because its composition is inextrica-

⁴⁰ This schism is noted by the Ḥanafī scholar al-Qudūrī (*Tajrīd*, 2:513–16), who observes that within the Ḥanafī school, there are two camps: one which holds that the miracle of the Qurʾān includes its literary component (*ibārah*), and one which holds that the miracle extends only to its sequencing (*tartīb*), composition (*naẓm*), concision (*ijāz*), and its ability to inform its readers of the unseen (*ghayb*).

⁴¹ Dihlawī, *Inṣāf*, 40.

⁴² Madelung, “The Spread of Māturīdism.”

⁴³ On Abū l-Muẓaffar Maṣūʿ b. Muḥammad al-Samʿānī, see Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyyah al-kubrā*, 5:335. He was born in 426 AH in Merv and descended from a family of Ḥanafī *ʿulamāʾ*. In 461 AH, he went to Baghdad, and after witnessing the debates between Shāfiʿīs and Ḥanafīs, he decided to adopt Shāfiʿism. He was ostracized in his hometown, so he sought refuge elsewhere, and wrote a detailed critique of Ḥanafism entitled *al-Istilām fi khilāf bayna l-imāmayni l-Shāfiʿī wa-Abī Ḥanīfah* (Eng. *The Elimination of any debate between Imams al-Shāfiʿī and Abū Ḥanīfah*). The work quickly grew in popularity, and he continued to author systematic critiques that chronicled his shift away from Ḥanafism. See Samʿānī, *Iṣṭilām*, 1:236–39.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:236–39.

bly comprised of both its language and meaning.⁴⁵ To ensure Ḥanafism's survival against the Shāfi'i critiques, the Ḥanafis would have to defend more robustly, or adapt, or jettison the views of Abū Ḥanīfah as necessary, because Ḥanafism could not be associated with two heterodoxies while maintaining its institutional and religious authority.

The foremost defense took place as a natural extension of Ibn Mas'ūd's Comparable Qur'ān (wherein the words are interchangeable with their Arabic synonyms) and Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'ān (where the language could be changed to Persian) to the Semantic Qur'ān view, in which the Qur'ān's inimitability existed only in its meaning, not its Arabic composition.⁴⁶ Among the more elaborate defenses of Abū Ḥanīfah's position was the celebrated early-fifth/tenth-century authority of Baghdad, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Qudūrī (d. 428/1036), whose works became influential in the later *madhhab*.⁴⁷ Al-Qudūrī's favored approach was to give preference to the practice of the first generations of Muslims (*salaf*).⁴⁸ To defend Abū Ḥanīfah, he similarly began by demonstrating that Ibn Mas'ūd's approach was common among the companions of the Prophet. He cited a narration in which another companion of the Prophet, Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712), recited a verse of the Qur'ān having slightly altered the Arabic text, ending with *aṣwab qilā* ("more appropriate for recitation") instead of the 'Uthmānic *aqwam qilā* ("more suitable for recitation") in Q Muzammil 73:6. In response to an objection, he replied that the two words Anas had switched, *aṣwab* and *aqwam*, were similar in meaning and, therefore, he had not changed the overall meaning of the verse.⁴⁹ Thus, like Ibn Mas'ūd, Anas's authoritative view as a companion of the Prophet, as presented in al-Qudūrī's narration, was that the vocabulary of the Qur'ān was interchangeable.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1:236.

⁴⁶ The Ḥanafī theologian Abū Maṣ'ūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) provides an early defense of Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'ān by asserting that the Qur'ān is not limited to the Arabic language (*Ta'wīlāt*, 9:90), and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981) also offers a pithy defense for the Semantic Qur'ān and argues that its inimitability excludes its expression (*Aḥkām*, 3:270).

⁴⁷ For more on his biography, see Ibn Abī l-Wafā', *Jawāhir*, 1:93.

⁴⁸ Al-Qudūrī debated the leading Shāfi'īs of his era, such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 406/1016), and transmitted *ḥadīth* to the historian Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. It is important to note that he and other Ḥanafīs defending the Semantic Qur'ān were not merely a fringe group, but rather, some of the most celebrated jurists in the *madhhab*. Al-Qudūrī's *Mukhtaṣar* enjoys such renown that it is widely referred to as, "the Book" (*al-Kitāb*), because it requires no clarification to know which book a Ḥanafī might be referring to. His other well-known work, *al-Tajrīd*, is a strong defense of Abū Ḥanīfah and a response to Shāfi'i critics.

⁴⁹ Qudūrī, *Tajrīd*, 2:513. The full account is as follows: al-A'mash reported from Anas b. Mālik that he recited Q 73:6 as "*aṣwab qilā*" (instead of the correct *aqwam qilā*). He was corrected and replied that the two words he had switched, *aṣwab* and *aqwam*, were similar.

To further show the incidental nature of the Arabic of the Qurʾān, al-Qudūrī quotes a verse in which the Quraysh’s presumption that the Qurʾān’s response to the Quraysh’s question, was exclusively Arabic is referenced, “Why are its verses not explained [in another language]?” (Q Fuṣṣilat 41:44).⁵⁰ Al-Qudūrī further quotes the, “[Should we have sent] a foreign [revelation] to an Arab [messenger]?” (Q. 41:44). Further, al-Qudūrī relates from a Successor of the Prophet (*tābīʿī*), Saʿīd b. Jubayr (d. 95/714), that following this verse, the revelation began to incorporate foreign vocabulary (*bi-kulli lisān*).⁵¹ Abū Ḥanīfah’s Persian Qurʾān was thus vindicated because it could be inferred from the Qurʾān itself that the Arabic language of the Qurʾān is not as essential as its meaning. Al-Qudūrī then assembled the opinions of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās, (d. 68/687), the Prophet’s cousin and one of the leading Qurʾānic authorities of the early Companions, and his students. He cited various reports from them that, in *sūrahs* that chronologically follow the revelation of this verse, vocabulary from various other languages can be found, including Persian and Ethiopian. This also proved that the Qurʾān was not exclusively tied to the Arabic language.⁵²

The presence of foreign vocabulary indicated to al-Qudūrī that whether a word is revealed or recited in another language is of no consequence to the Qurʾān’s meaning and message. If it was permissible in some passages of the Qurʾān to recite a foreign word – as it was revealed – then it would also be permissible, al-Qudūrī argued, to recite a foreign word in place of a revealed Arabic word, as long as it does not alter the meaning. Although tenuous, al-Qudūrī’s conflation of Arabicized words of foreign origin with words belonging entirely to a foreign language allowed him to promote Abū Ḥanīfah’s Persian Qurʾān, laying a foundation for the next generation of Ḥanafīs. The simplicity of al-Qudūrī’s defense suggests that he was unaware of some of the arguments with which the Shāfiʿīs criticized Abū Ḥanīfah’s Persian Qurʾān. Towards the latter end of the fifth/eleventh century, however, the Ḥanafī scholar Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sarakhsī (d. ca. 490/1097) grappled with these criticisms of Abū Ḥanīfah’s Persian Qurʾān emerging from Central Asia. Al-Sarakhsī’s staunch defense of the Qurʾān-as-meaning thus led to an ever-widening intra-*madhhab* division, as the majority of Ḥanafīs of al-Sarakhsī’s

50 Qudūrī, *Tajrīd*, 2:513. Al-Māturīdī (*Taʾwīlāt*, 9:90) also argues this point, interpreting the request of the Quraysh, “explained [in another language]” (Q 41:44) as referring to translations of the Qurʾān.

51 Qudūrī, *Tajrīd*, 2:513.

52 Al-Qudūrī reports this from Ibn ‘Abbās and his direct students, including Saʿīd b. Jubayr and Mujāhid b. Jabr, recounting nine examples of the Qurʾān containing foreign words. For example, he reports that the words *sijjil* and *kuwwirat* are from the Persian language, while the words *tūbā*, *nāshīʾah*, *qaṣwarah*, *kiflayn*, *ṭāhā*, *sinīn*, and *mishkāt* are Ethiopian (Qudūrī, *Tajrīd*, 2:513). On this exegetical current more broadly see, Rippin, “The Designation of ‘Foreign’ Languages.”

time began to view the inimitability (*iʿjāz*) of the Qurʾān as consisting of both its linguistic features and its meanings (*fi l-naẓm wa-fi l-maʿnā*) – a Unified Qurʾān.⁵³ Unlike al-Qudūrī’s defense, which was based on narrations sourced from earlier generations and which depended largely on authoritative scriptural interpretations (*āthār*), al-Sarakhsī’s defense consisted of a derivation of the underlying rationale behind the Persian Qurʾān and further theorizing a doctrine on the nature of the Qurʾān.⁵⁴

Al-Sarakhsī began his argument by cautioning that no explicit statement on the nature of the Qurʾān and its inimitability can be traced to Abū Ḥanīfah, and that both the Semantic and Unified Qurʾān positions derive their conclusions through inference.⁵⁵ This is in contrast with later Ḥanafīs who presented Abū Ḥanīfah as having an explicit position on this debate – that of the Unified Qurʾān.⁵⁶ Al-Sarakhsī reasoned that language could not be included in the doctrine of inimitability because language is created and the speech of God is uncreated – languages were only created by humans to express the speech of God in a comprehensible way. Thus, the Shāfiʿī argument that the Arabic language is part of the miracle of the revelation inappropriately linked a created language with the eternal, Uncreated Qurʾān and would subsequently render the Qurʾān itself as created. In making this claim, al-Sarakhsī turned his interlocutors’ Arabic Qurʾān argument on its head and explained that their position, in fact, led to the Created Qurʾān position and diminished the miracle of the Qurʾān.⁵⁷ In order to uphold the Qurʾān as a miracle (*muʿjiz*) and uncreated, al-Sarakhsī thus disqualifies the inclusion of its literary composition (*naẓm*) in its miracle.

Furthermore, if one specific language is included as part of the miracle of the Qurʾān, Muḥammad could not legitimately be a universal prophet – as was the commonly held belief among Sunnīs. For his Prophethood to be universal, his miracle (the Qurʾān) must be perceivable by all people in their own languages, which could only be achieved by translating the Qurʾān’s meaning. For al-Sarakhsī, a non-Arab would be just as incapable (*ʿajiz*) of imitating the Qurʾān’s linguistic qualities as he would be of producing poetry imitating Imru’ al-Qays, the most eloquent pre-Is-

53 Sarakhsī, *Uṣūl*, 1:281.

54 It is noteworthy that al-Sarakhsī chose to discuss this issue not only in his legal work *Kitāb al-Mabsūt*, but also in his manual on legal theory. *Al-Mabsūt* is often described as a book which, if memorized, qualifies one as an expert jurist (*mujtahid*). Al-Sarakhsī also enjoys great renown in the *madhhab*, being declared a master jurist (*mujtahid fi l-madhhab*), as noted by Laknawī, *Fawāʿid*, 157. Cf. Sarakhsī, *Mabsūt*, 1:37.

55 This refers to statements from Abū Ḥanīfah, Abū Yūsuf, or al-Shaybānī.

56 As will be discussed in further detail below, al-Bazdawī (d. 482/1089), al-Marghīnānī (d. 593/1197), and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bukhārī (d. 730/1330) are among such later scholars.

57 Sarakhsī, *Uṣūl*, 1:281.

lamic poet. He asserted that the true challenge lies in attempting to imitate the Qurʾān in each person's own language without losing the meaning. Clearly, for al-Sarakhsī, inimitability (*iʿjāz*) inheres only in the Qurʾān's meaning, not its literary composition. Therefore, even a translated Qurʾān that preserves the meaning of the revelation manifests inimitability and, consequently, retains its divine, uncreated origin.

In the next century, the last Ḥanafīs defending the Persian Qurʾān extended the attendant Semantic Qurʾān position even further. The preeminent Central Asian Ḥanafī, Abū Bakr al-Kāsānī (d. 587/1191),⁵⁸ the primary source for this era, argued that the Qurʾān is broader than the scripture canonized in the Arabic language and that divine speech is not restricted to Arabic. Citing the verses, “[the Qurʾān] is indeed found in the writings of the ancestors (*innahū la-fī zuburī al-awwalīn*)” (Q Shuʿarāʾ 26:196), and, “This is certainly found in the first scrolls (*al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*), the scrolls of Abraham and Moses” (Q Aʿlā 87:18–19), al-Kāsānī argued that the message of the qurʾānic revelation is not confined to the Arabic language as the previous scriptures referenced in the Qurʾān itself were not revealed in Arabic.⁵⁹ Reiterating and building upon al-Qudūrī's earlier argument that the Qurʾān itself would have been the speech of God even if it had been revealed in another language,⁶⁰ al-Kāsānī extrapolated to a hypothetical legal situation regarding one who recites verses from the Torah, Gospel, or Psalms in his ritual prayer. He opined that this would be permissible based on extending Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qurʾān, which allowed prayer to be recited in Persian as long as the meaning was expressed accurately.⁶¹ This opinion also allowed for recitation in any language and, therefore, if a reciter is certain that the verses of the earlier scriptures are unaltered and of divine origin, he would be allowed to recite them in ritual prayer in their original language.⁶²

Thus, Ḥanafīs of this era defended the tradition that originated in Kufa, developed into Ibn Maʿūd's Comparable Qurʾān, evolved into Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qurʾān, and then transitioned into the Semantic Qurʾān. Notably, the Shāfiʿīs at this time criticized Abū Ḥanīfah specifically for holding the Persian Qurʾān opinion, and

58 Al-Kāsānī's argument and its implications have been discussed thoroughly by Travis Zadeh (*Vernacular Qurʾān*, 114–15) and Gabriel Reynolds (“God Has Spoken Before,” 573–91). For al-Kāsānī's biography, see Ibn Abī l-Wafāʾ, *Jawāhir*; 2:244.

59 For the full argument, see Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʾ*, 1:112.

60 Al-Kāsānī, like fellow Mātūrīdī Ḥanafīs, distinguished between the expression (*lafẓ*) of the Qurʾān, which they viewed as created, and God's attribute of speech, which coexists with him in eternity. For such theologians (*mutakallimīn*), the speech of God is not limited to letters and sounds. For more, see Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʾ*, 1:113.

61 Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʾ*, 1:113.

62 Later Ḥanafīs further developed this to permit reciting Syriac (*suryāniyyah*) or Hebrew (*ʿibrāniyyah*) scriptures; Zaylāʾī, *Tabyīn*, 109–10.

the scholars defending him likewise defended the Persian Qur'ān, with no reference to any other view of Abū Ḥanīfah. Neither group referenced any sort of retraction by Abū Ḥanīfah.

4 Unified Qur'ān

Other Ḥanafīs, however, were less enthusiastic about such extensions of Ibn Mas'ūd's and Abū Ḥanīfah's legacy. In the same era that al-Sarakhsī was writing in defense of the Semantic Qur'ān, his colleague 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Bazdawī (d. 482/1089) was criticizing it, portending its eventual decline and the rise of a broad *Ḥanafī* consensus around the Unified Qur'ān.⁶³ In his text on legal theory, known as *Uṣūl al-Bazdawī*, al-Bazdawī stressed that the Qur'ān and its miracle, according to the majority of scholars, consist of both its Arabic composition and meaning.⁶⁴ Unlike al-Sarakhsī, who contended that any position attributed to Abū Ḥanīfah regarding the nature of the Qur'ān was only an inference from his Persian Qur'ān, al-Bazdawī claimed that it was authentically reported (*saḥḥa*) that Abū Ḥanīfah explicitly propounded a Unified Qur'ān. Al-Bazdawī's intention in attributing the Unified Qur'ān to Abū Ḥanīfah was to distance Abū Ḥanīfah from the Semantic Qur'ān, which by this time had been severely criticized and associated with the heterodox Created Qur'ān doctrine and was thought to diminish the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. Additionally, attributing the Unified Qur'ān to Abū Ḥanīfah would imbue this emerging doctrine with authority, garner majority support, and, therefore, help elevate it to Ḥanafism's official position. However, al-Bazdawī did not directly mention in any of his extant texts which student of Abū Ḥanīfah ascribed the Unified Qur'ān view to him, or in which text the report was found.

The first Ḥanafī to explicitly claim that Abū Ḥanīfah retracted the Persian Qur'ān and held a different opinion was also from Central Asia. The prominent Ḥanafī jurist 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Marghinānī (d. 593/1197) compiled the opinions of

⁶³ Some Ḥanafīs preceding al-Bazdawī also argued that the Qur'ān's miracle included its composition, but only in passing, and without fully articulating the view, as later Ḥanafīs would. For instance, al-Dabūsī (d. 432/1041) asserts the view but refrains from attributing it to Abū Ḥanīfah directly; Dabūsī, *Taqwīm al-adillah*, 20.

⁶⁴ Al-Bazdawī is better-known by his moniker Fakhr al-Islām ("The Pride of Islam"), reflecting his reputation among scholars. His treatise on *uṣūl* is considered the template for all subsequent Ḥanafī *uṣūl* works, and though he built a formidable case against al-Sarakhsī, both shared a teacher in common: Shams al-A'immah 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ḥalwānī (d. 456/1064). For al-Bazdawī's biography, see Ibn Abī l-Wafā', *Jawāhir*; 1:372. For his arguments against the Semantic Qur'ān, see Bazdawī, *Kanz al-wuṣūl*, 67.

Abū Ḥanīfah and his colleagues regarding the Persian Qur'an in his legal compendium, *al-Hidāyah fī sharḥ Bidāyat al-mubtadī*, which serves as a reference for Ḥanafī judges and *muftīs*. He claimed that Abū Ḥanīfah had retracted his position that even a fluent Arabic speaker could recite the Qur'an in Persian in prayer and adopted the position of his colleagues, Abū Yūsuf and al-Shaybānī, that only non-Arabic speakers had an exception to recite prayers in Persian.⁶⁵ Much like al-Bazdawī, however, al-Marghīnānī provided few details about the alleged retraction or the report's source. Throughout his text, *al-Marghīnānī* relates uncorroborated opinions on various issues in the passive form using, for example, "it is reported" (*yurwā*) instead of "he reported" (*rawā*), suggesting he may have been skeptical of the narrator in that particular instance.⁶⁶ He used this same language to obscure the narrator reporting Abū Ḥanīfah's retraction. Despite this, al-Marghīnānī disqualifies the Persian Qur'an and concludes that Ḥanafīs must adhere to the Arabic Qur'an *fatwā* that prayer must be recited in Arabic, in accordance with the characterization of the Qur'an as the Unified Qur'an, which includes both meaning and Arabic form.⁶⁷ This marks a significant shift from the works of previous Ḥanafīs who had asserted that the only reasonable extension of Abū Ḥanīfah's Persian Qur'an position was the Semantic Qur'an position. By disqualifying the Persian Qur'an position, al-Marghīnānī weakened the Semantic Qur'an position as well. Over a century would pass before additional details regarding Abū Ḥanīfah's retraction would be discovered in the works of another Central Asian Ḥanafī from Bukhara.

By the eighth/fourteenth century, Ḥanafīs had exclusively accepted the Unified Qur'an position which held that the linguistic composition of the Qur'an was the Prophet's miracle.⁶⁸ This shift in Ḥanafī orthodoxy is documented by Abū l-Bar-

65 Marghīnānī, *Hidāyah*, 1:49.

66 In other places in his text, al-Marghīnānī uses this convention to relate opinions that diverge from confirmed doctrine. For instance, while citing the well-known position of al-Shaybānī on a legal question, he uses the preposition *'an* to convey "Muḥammad's reported view is ..." But to relate an uncorroborated report from al-Shaybānī, he uses the passive verb *yurwā*, that is, "it is narrated from ..." (Marghīnānī, *Hidāyah*, 1:49). Al-Marghīnānī's younger contemporary, the Shāfi'ī Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245), notes in his influential handbook on *ḥadīth* methodology that the use of the passive verb is a standard convention to indicate unsubstantiated reports. If a report is reliably transmitted, however, *ḥadīth* scholars employ the active verb along with the narrator's name (e. g., "Zayd reports ..."). See Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ma'rīfah*, 1:211.

67 Marghīnānī, *Hidāyah*, 1:49.

68 That this orthodoxy crossed *madhhab* lines is evident, given the discussions on this subject found in non-Ḥanafī scholars' works. The Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Qudāmah (d. 620/1223), for instance, contends that the Qur'an is inimitable in both its expression and its meaning. If the linguistic form were to be changed, he argues, it would not be the Qur'an; see Ibn Qudāmah, *Mughnī*, 1:351. The Shāfi'ī scholar al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) likewise declares that a translation does not constitute the Qur'an, because the latter is miraculous in its composition, while a translation removes the inca-

akāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310), a prominent Central Asian Ḥanafī theologian of the time whose works were commented on by dozens of scholars. His works became the standard curriculum texts for several subjects, including *tafsīr*, theology, law, and legal theory across the Muslim world. Al-Nasafī reaffirms the “wondrous composition” of the Qur’ān (*nazmuhu l-‘ajīb*), including both its meaning and Arabic text, and justified using the scripture as the evidence of Muḥammad’s prophecy because it was a rationally perceptible proof (*āyah ‘aqliyyah*) that remained after the passing of Muḥammad, unlike the miracles brought by Moses and Jesus, which were demonstrable only during their lifetimes.⁶⁹

In this context, one Ḥanafī involved in promoting Abū Ḥanīfah as having held the Unified Qur’ān position was ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Bukhārī (d. 730/1330), whose forceful distancing from both the Persian Qur’ān and Semantic Qur’ān positions reflects how entrenched the Unified Qur’ān view had become by his time, rendering the Semantic Qur’ān position blasphemous. In *Kashf al-asrār*, his commentary on al-Bazdawī’s *Uṣūl*, he expressed incredulity that some of his fellow Ḥanafīs believed the Qur’ān to comprise only its meaning and not its expression. He emphatically asserted that the Semantic Qur’ān is unfounded and is erroneously attributed to Abū Ḥanīfah due to a misinterpretation of Abū Ḥanīfah’s view on reciting the Qur’ān in Persian during ritual prayer. In his view, although Abū Ḥanīfah initially espoused the Persian Qur’ān, he retracted this view and later settled on the Unified Qur’ān. Furthermore, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Bukhārī applauded al-Bazdawī for his “refutation” (*radd*) of the Semantic Qur’ān position three centuries earlier.⁷⁰ As mentioned, however, al-Bazdawī’s treatment did not include a refutation thereof, as he merely claimed that Abū Ḥanīfah propounded the Unified Qur’ān without citing any evidence. Still, al-Bukhārī implies that by declaring the Unified Qur’ān to be the verified opinion of Abū Ḥanīfah, al-Bazdawī had effected a refutation.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Bukhārī explains that, in fact, Abū Ḥanīfah had retracted the Persian Qur’ān and reports that “it is verified” (“*sahḥa*”) by a man named Abū ‘Iṣmah Nūḥ Abū ‘Iṣmah al-Qurashī.⁷¹ By using the verb *sahḥa*, which originated in *ḥadīth* studies to denote a reliably sourced report, al-Bukhārī suggests Abū ‘Iṣmah’s

pacitation facing anyone who might attempt to rival it; therefore, it is impermissible. If poetry is translated, he asserts, it no longer remains the original poem – so, too, the Qur’ān’s words are not interchangeable. He further notes that ritual prayer exemplifies devotion and obedience to God’s command, instead of what one might personally prefer (i. e., the ease of praying in one’s native language). See Nawawī, *Majmū’*, 3:379–80.

69 Al-Nasafī (*Umdah*, 132) discusses the miraculous nature of the Qur’ān in a section tellingly entitled, “Establishing the Messengership of Muḥammad.”

70 Bukhārī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:25.

71 *Ibid.*

reliability.⁷² Unlike al-Marghīnānī – who used the passive to obscure the narrator – al-Bukhārī used the active verb “he reported” (*rawā*) when mentioning Abū ‘Iṣmah, to provide a reliable report distancing Abū Ḥanīfah from the Persian Qur’ān and rendering the Semantic Qur’ān untenable.⁷³ As for his source for Abū ‘Iṣmah’s retraction report, al-Bukhārī refers the reader to a different work of al-Bazdawī, which is not presently extant.⁷⁴

5 Abandoning the Persian Qur’ān: Abū ‘Iṣmah Nūḥ b. Abī Maryam

The presence of this mysterious narrator, Abū ‘Iṣmah, raises questions including who he was, why he was alone in narrating the retraction, why Ḥanafīs defending the Semantic Qur’ān were unaware of the retraction, and why al-Marghīnānī was suspicious of the retraction when it was being reported with confidence by later Ḥanafīs like ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Bukhārī, who embraced Abū ‘Iṣmah. A thorough investigation of his background highlights why Abū ‘Iṣmah Nūḥ b. Abī Maryam became an important piece in the puzzle for understanding the Ḥanafī reception of the Qur’ān’s nature. Despite a dubious reputation among the Ahl al-Ḥadīth who cataloged narrators, it appears that he was lionized by later Ḥanafīs because his retraction report was useful in facilitating Ḥanafism’s alignment with the emergent orthodoxy on the nature of the Qur’ān, particularly its uncreatedness and its inimitability.⁷⁵

Abū ‘Iṣmah was a well-known polymath who began studying with his stepfather, the renowned exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767).⁷⁶ Little is known about Abū

72 For the definition of a verified (*ṣaḥīḥ*) report according to the criterion of the *muhaddithūn*, see Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ma’rifah*, 79. One of the conditions he lists for a verified report is that the narrator be truthful, which is ascertained, among other methods, by seeking corroboration for the narrator’s transmission from the same source.

73 Bukhārī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:25.

74 Though al-Bukhārī notes that his source for the name of the narrator reporting the retraction is al-Bazdawī’s commentary on al-Shaybānī’s *Mabsūṭ*, no confirmed manuscripts are available for examination. The Beyazıt Kütüphanesi in Istanbul houses a partial copy of a work called *al-Mabsūṭ li-l-fatāwā* attributed to al-Bazdawī. Mehmet Boynukalın, the editor of al-Shaybānī’s *Aṣl*, notes the manuscript is early but doubts the attribution to al-Bazdawī because its style is at odds with his better known *Uṣūl* (Shaybānī, *Aṣl*, 1:118). If al-Bukhārī’s attribution is accurate, however, Abū Ḥanīfah’s alleged retraction would have been known by al-Bazdawī in the fifth/eleventh century to have been reported by Abū ‘Iṣmah Nūḥ b. Abī Maryam.

75 For Abū ‘Iṣmah’s biography, see Ibn Abī Ḥatīm, *Jarḥ*, 4(1):484; Makkī, *Manāqib*, 2:137; Ibn ‘Adī, *Kāmil*, 8:292; Mizzi, *Tahdhīb*, 30:56.

76 Abū ‘Iṣmah transmitted Muqātil’s *tafsīr* after studying it with him; see Ibn Ḥajar, *‘Ujāb*, 1:218.

‘Iṣmah’s family, but his father is rumored to have been a Zoroastrian (*majūsi*) from Hurmuz.⁷⁷ Over the course of his life, he studied with teachers and taught students in various locations, including Mecca, Medina, Nishapur, Basra, and in Kufa in Abū Ḥanīfah’s circle.⁷⁸ He earned the moniker “Nūh the Polymath (*al-jāmi*)” because of his proficiency in multiple disciplines, his thorough knowledge of worldly affairs (*umūr al-dunyā*), and for being the first to compile, disseminate, and convene sessions on the opinions (*aqāwīl*) of Abū Ḥanīfah in his hometown Merv.⁷⁹ This was emblematic of his adherence to Abū Ḥanīfah’s legacy and *madhhab* and his pivotal role in its spread.⁸⁰ During the reign of al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75), Abū ‘Iṣmah was appointed as a judge in Merv, and Abū Yūsuf, Abū Ḥanīfah’s student, used to assist him (*yu’nuhu*) in his duties.⁸¹ Medieval Muslim historians also record at least one correspondence from Abū Ḥanīfah to Abū ‘Iṣmah, an exhortatory letter (*maw’izah*) that is claimed to have been circulating in Merv as late as the fourth/tenth century.⁸² This letter intimates the presence of a teacher-student relationship between them, which is upheld in Ḥanafī biographical dictionaries, and bolsters Abū ‘Iṣmah’s authority as a prodigious polymath devoted to Abū Ḥanīfah.⁸³ His extended tenure as a judge in Merv elevated him to prominence, and when he died, the city’s governor led the funeral services for him in reflection of his societal standing.⁸⁴

This laudatory depiction of Abū ‘Iṣmah is specific to later Ḥanafī sources. In earlier sources, scholars from the Ahl al-Ḥadīth denounce Abū ‘Iṣmah as a flagrant

77 Van Ess (*Theology and Society*, 2:617–18) regards this claim regarding his father as “possibly only local slander.” Al-Sam’ānī (*Ansāb*, 3:176) records an Arab name, *Ja’awnah*, for his grandfather. 78 Ibn ‘Adī (*Kāmil*, 8:292) highlights that Abū ‘Iṣmah “learned juridical reasoning (*ra’y*) from Abū Ḥanīfah and Ibn Abī Laylā (d. 148/765), *ḥadīth* from Ḥajjāj b. Arṭā’ah (d. 149/766) and his generation, prophetic biography (*maghāzī*) from Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/767), *tafsīr* from al-Kalbī (d. 146/763) and Muqātil, and he also possessed knowledge of worldly matters.”

79 Mizzi, *Tahdhīb*, 30:58. Abū ‘Iṣmah conducted four teaching sessions (*majālis*): for relating reports (*āthār*), the opinions of Abū Ḥanīfah (*aqāwīl Abī Ḥanīfah*), grammar (*naḥw*), and poetry (*ash’ar*). For more, see Sam’ānī, *Ansāb*, 3:175.

80 Melchert, “The Spread of Ḥanafism,” 15.

81 Mizzi, *Tahdhīb*, 30:58. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) states that Abū Yūsuf was known for only promoting to judgeship “his associates and members of his *madhhab*” (*Rasā’il*, 2:229).

82 Mizzi, *Tahdhīb*, 30:57; Ibn ‘Adī, *Kāmil*, 8:292. The advice and admonition of Abū Ḥanīfah is recorded in Makkī, *Manāqib*, 2:111.

83 Although devoted to Abū Ḥanīfah’s legal doctrine, Abū ‘Iṣmah’s commitment is not comparable to the *taqlīd* of post-second century Ḥanafīs to Abū Ḥanīfah. Nurit Tsafrir (“Semi-Ḥanafis,” 77) notes that later allegiance entailed not only shared legal doctrine but also dogmatic beliefs, political concerns, and loyalty to the school and its head.

84 Ibn Mandah, *Mustakhrāj*, 3:469. During the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd, Shu’ayb b. Ḥāzim (d. 187/803) was the governor (*walī*) of Merv and later, Damascus. See Fasawī, *Marīfah*, 1:62; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Dimashq*, 23:77.

liar (*kadhhabūhu*) and associate him with deceptive and fabricated *ḥadīth*. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), a stalwart leader of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, condemned him for reporting deviant narrations (*aḥādīth manākīr*) and declared him incompetent as a *ḥadīth* narrator (*laysa bi-dhāk*).⁸⁵ One critic, Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), even claimed, “It is not permissible for [Abū ‘Iṣmah] to be cited in argumentation (*ihtijāj*) at all.”⁸⁶ His moniker *al-Jāmi‘*, which can also mean “the compiler,” was used against him; one scholar wrote that he was merely proficient in compiling “error and falsehood” (*al-khaṭa’ wa-l-kadhib*),⁸⁷ and another declared that he “amassed everything except the truth (*jama’a kulla shay’in illā l-ṣidq*).”⁸⁸

Abū ‘Iṣmah’s faults were also recorded in handbooks of *ḥadīth* methodology. In a foundational work on *ḥadīth* methodology, al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1013) cites Abū ‘Iṣmah as an example of a transmitter who personally admitted to forgery.⁸⁹ Abū ‘Iṣmah often appears in the chains of *ḥadīths* promising extravagant rewards for the recitation of specific *sūrahs*, such as those found in several classical *tafsīrs*, including those of al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076), al-Tha’labī (d. 427/1035), and al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144). Examples of such reports include the following: “Whoever recites Sūrat al-Jinn will receive the reward of manumitting a number of slaves equivalent to the number of jinns who affirmed and rejected Muḥammad”; “Whoever recites *li-ḫāfi Quraysh* [Sūrat Quraysh] will be given the reward of ten virtuous deeds for every individual who circumambulates (*tawāf*) around the Ka’bah or secludes himself in worship (*i’tikāf*);” and “Whoever recites Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt, God will reward him ten times for every gust of wind that blows and flows on the earth.”⁹⁰ When confronted by a student who was unable to corroborate a report on the merits of the Qur’an that Abū ‘Iṣmah had attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, Abū ‘Iṣmah responded, “I saw that the people had turned away from studying the Qur’an and preoccupied themselves with the jurisprudence (*fiqh*) of Abū Ḥanīfah and prophetic biography (*maghāzī*) of Muḥammad b. Isḥāq, so I fabricated this *ḥadīth* hoping for a heavenly reward (*fa-waḍa’tu hādihā l-ḥadīth ḥisbatan*).”⁹¹ The word *ḥisbatan*, defined by lexicogra-

85 Mizzi, *Tahdhīb*, 30:59.

86 Ibid., 30:61.

87 Abū Nu’aym, *Du’afā’*, 1:151.

88 Mizzi, *Tahdhīb*, 30:61, quoting al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405/1013).

89 Ḥākim, *Madkhal*, 54. This work serves as a template for subsequent treatises on *ḥadīth* methodology, as can be seen in the discussions of Abū ‘Iṣmah by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ma’rifah*, 1:207 and Suyūfī, *Tadrib al-rāwī*, 1:333.

90 E.g., see Tha’labī, *Kashf*, 30:303.

91 Ḥākim, *Madkhal*, 54. Al-Ḥākim’s report is attributed to Abū ‘Ammār al-Marwazī (d. 244/858). A modern Ḥanafī scholar, Abdur Rasheed Nomani (d. 1999), argues that the exchange must be fabricated because Abū ‘Ammār al-Marwazī, who died in 244/858, never met Abū ‘Iṣmah, who died in 173/790. Nomani defends Abū ‘Iṣmah as a decorated scholar who was erroneously associated

phers as “seeking reward from God (*ṭalab al-ajr ‘alā Allāh*),” reveals Abū ‘Iṣmah’s reasoning in fabricating a report.⁹² He readily admitted to fabricating a *ḥadīth* and being unafraid of the consequences of lying, as well as to his expectation of a reward from God for his noble intention of doing so to encourage people to recite the Qur’ān. Despite the strong criticism from the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, who considered him unreliable, Abū ‘Iṣmah earned some respect from them due to his favorable theological views.

In the same biographical dictionaries that criticize his reliability, the Ahl al-Ḥadīth described Abū ‘Iṣmah as a loyal adherent to their favored theological approach to the nature of the Qur’ān as uncreated. Abū ‘Iṣmah was seemingly influenced by his stepfather Muqātil b. Sulaymān, a loyal member of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth and an earnest adversary of the views of Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745–746). Jahm, who was an early proponent of the Created Qur’ān, debated Muqātil in Merv during Abū ‘Iṣmah’s youth.⁹³ Raised in this environment, Abū ‘Iṣmah wholeheartedly adopted the Ahl al-Ḥadīth’s doctrine of the Uncreated Qur’ān.⁹⁴ Even Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), who had previously criticized Abū ‘Iṣmah for deviant *ḥadīth* (*manākīr*), spoke approvingly of him for being “severe (*shadīdan*) [in his treatment of] the Jahmīs and refuting (*radd*) them.”⁹⁵ Ibn Ḥanbal noted that Nu’aym b. Ḥammād (d. 228/843), Abū ‘Iṣmah’s disciple and scribe, learned to “refute the Jahmīs (*al-radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyyah*)” from Abū ‘Iṣmah.⁹⁶ Even during the Miḥnah, when Nu’aym was jailed for refusing to adopt the state-backed doctrine of the Created Qur’ān, he upheld the Ahl al-Ḥadīth approach and resiliently endured captivity until he died in 228/843.⁹⁷ By vehemently advocating for and teaching the Ahl al-Ḥadīth doctrine of the Uncreated Qur’ān, that was considered broadly orthodox by Sunnīs in the post-Miḥnah environment, Abū ‘Iṣmah thus earned the respect of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth despite his reputation as an unreliable narrator.⁹⁸

with this incident, and that it actually involved Maysarah b. ‘Abd Rabbihī, another accused *ḥadīth* forger who was asked where he sourced narrations that assigned particular rewards for specific *sūrah*s. He responded, “I forged them to entice people.” See Ghilani and Saifee, “al-Imām Nūḥ b. Abī Maryam al-Jāmi’.”

92 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 1:341.

93 For the biography of Jahm b. Ṣafwān, see Schöck, “Jahm B. Ṣafwān,” 55–80. For Muqātil, see *EF*, art. “Mukatil b. Sulaiman,” 3:711 (1936) (Plessner). Since Ibn Ṣafwān died in 128/746, Abū ‘Iṣmah would have observed this debate relatively young and in a formative period of his life.

94 Mun’im Sirry, “Muqātil b. Sulaymān and Anthropomorphism,” 53.

95 Rāzī, *Jarḥ*, 8:484.

96 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Ṭal*, 3:437. Ibn Ḥanbal was born in Merv in 164/781, when Abū ‘Iṣmah would have been the city’s judge.

97 See Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 2:618, 810–13, 844.

98 The Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Baṭṭāh (d. 387/997) records a report from Abū ‘Iṣmah who, when asked how God spoke to Moses, replied, “God spoke to Moses face-to-face (*mushāfahatan*),” characterizing Moses’ encounter with God in anthropomorphic terms. Cf. Ibn Baṭṭāh, *Ibānah*, 6:318; Van

By the sixth/twelfth century, a noticeable shift began in how Abū 'Iṣmah's character and legacy were viewed, even by non-Ḥanafis.⁹⁹ In the eighth/fourteenth century, the biographical note by the widely esteemed historian, *ḥadīth* expert, and biographer Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) on Abū 'Iṣmah reflects his rising scholarly credentials among Sunnīs. Overlooking all the criticisms that had earlier been directed against him, al-Dhahabī noted that Abū 'Iṣmah was a celebrated scholar whose role in transmitting *ḥadīths* about the Qur'ān was significant.¹⁰⁰ Al-Dhahabī related that Abū 'Iṣmah transmitted a *ḥadīth* which promises that the supplication of anyone who completes a full recitation of the Qur'ān will be accepted. He recognized that the *ḥadīth's* veracity is questionable (*ḥadīth gharīb*) because the chain of narrators includes Abū 'Iṣmah, but he argued that for a *ḥadīth* that encourages virtue, critics should reconsider their hesitancy arising from its weak narrators.¹⁰¹ He asked, "How many *imāms* are proficient in one discipline but deficient in others?" Al-Dhahabī specifically used al-Shaybānī, Abū Ḥanīfah's colleague and a well-established authoritative figure in Sunnism, as an example of an *imām* proficient in the study of the law (*fiqh*) but incompetent in Qur'ānic recitation. This implies that Abū 'Iṣmah should be treated with similar generosity in spite of his weaknesses and suggests that Abū 'Iṣmah should be considered as authoritative as

Ess, *Theology and Society*, 618 n37. Abū 'Iṣmah is also the narrator of a report that establishes the Ahl al-Ḥadīth doctrine on the location of God, wherein an enslaved woman is manumitted by the Prophet because she affirmed that God is located in the heavens, and thus, was a believer. Other reports with Abū 'Iṣmah playing a role are also found in various other theological books; e. g., see 'Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad, *Sunnah*, 2:337; Bayhaqī, *Asmā'*, 2:337; and Dhahabī, *Arsh*, 1:218, 2:224.

99 For instance, consider the anecdote of an "influential and prominent judge in Merv," named Nūḥ b. [Abī] Maryam found in the second part of the Persian "mirror for princes" work, *Naṣīhat al-mulūk* attributed to the Shāfi'ī polymath Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). (On the controversy concerning its authenticity, see Marlow, *Medieval Muslim Mirrors for Princes*, 66–70.) Nūḥ was said to have once asked his gardener of Indian origin to bring him some grapes. The gardener brought him sour grapes, so the judge requested sweet grapes. The gardener continued to bring only sour grapes, so the exasperated judge scolded him for not knowing the difference between sweet and sour grapes. The gardener then explained that he had been entrusted only to cultivate the grapes – not to eat them – so he had never tasted one, and thus, never learned the difference between sweet and sour grapes. The judge was astounded by his integrity and gave his daughter in marriage to the gardener. This marriage is said to have produced 'Abd Allāh b. Mubārak (d. 181/797), a scholar well-known for his piety. This anecdote is apocryphal, however, because Ibn Mubārak was born in 118/736, when Abū 'Iṣmah would have been eighteen years old – far too young to be a grandfather. Ghazālī, *Counsel for Kings*, 158–89. It is curious that authors like al-Ghazālī did not find it outrageous to portray Abū 'Iṣmah as someone who valued integrity and sincerity – qualities that earlier Ahl al-Ḥadīth biographers claimed he lacked.

100 Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 4:757.

101 Dhahabī, *Tadhkirah*, 3:157. The *ḥadīth* al-Dhahabī seeks to strengthen is also recorded from Anas b. Mālik, though bypassing Abū 'Iṣmah, in Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, 7:260.

al-Shaybānī in those areas in which he truly is proficient.¹⁰² Therefore, setting aside Abū 'Iṣmah's deficiency in *ḥadīth*, al-Dhahabī emphasized his distinction in Islamic knowledge and argued that his other achievements should not be disregarded. The tone and length of al-Dhahabī's defense of Abū 'Iṣmah suggest that disapproval of Abū 'Iṣmah was widespread among the *'ulamā'* of his era.¹⁰³ Curiously, al-Dhahabī summarily dismissed Ibn Ḥanbal's third-century critique of Abū 'Iṣmah's weakness in *ḥadīth* narration (*lam yakun fī l-ḥadīth bi-dhāk*) and interpreted it as a critique of his memorization of the Qur'ān (*lā yujayyidu ḥifẓ al-qur'ān*) instead.¹⁰⁴

Ḥanafī biographies in the centuries following al-Dhahabī's vigorous defense and exoneration of Abū 'Iṣmah provide only laudatory descriptions of him, failing to mention any weaknesses as a transmitter of *ḥadīth*, and suggest that the broader tradition became more willing to accept Abū 'Iṣmah and his narrations.¹⁰⁵ For instance, whereas the earliest biographies of Abū Ḥanīfah seldom mention Abū 'Iṣmah at all as a student or list him insignificantly, the Ḥanafī biographical (*ṭabaqāt*) literature of the later period portrays Abū 'Iṣmah as a significant authority.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the high status accorded to *Abū 'Iṣmah* was not limited to the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* and was reinforced by later *Ḥanafīs*, who allowed his weakness as a *ḥadīth* narrator to be overlooked.

Abū 'Iṣmah, given his *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* leanings and opposition to the Created Qur'ān, was the ideal candidate to report a retraction from Abū Ḥanīfah and, thereby, distance Abū Ḥanīfah from the Created Qur'ān heterodoxy. To lend Abū 'Iṣmah more authority and discount his weakness as a transmitter of *ḥadīth*, later

102 The full passage is as follows: "How many *imāms* are proficient in one discipline but deficient in others? Sibawayh (d. 796/1394) for example, was an expert in grammar but he wasn't adept with *ḥadīths*; and Wakī' (d. 812/1409), though brilliant in *ḥadīth*, knew nothing about the Arabic language; and Abū Nuwās (d. 813/1410), though a champion of poetry, was incompetent in everything else; and 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī (d. 198/813), a pioneer in *ḥadīth*, but he knew naught of medicine; and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, foremost in *fiqh* though he knew nothing about the *qirā'āt*; and Ḥafṣ (d. 179/796), a leader in *qirā'āt*, but poor in *ḥadīth*" (Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 3:157).

103 Nomani observes al-Dhahabī's optimism regarding Abū 'Iṣmah and likewise vindicates him. For more on his reasoning, see Ghilani, "Dirāsah," 69–77.

104 Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, 4:757.

105 These accounts of Abū 'Iṣmah's life mention only his accolades and curiously expunge any criticism, and thus, they distance him from the criticism of earlier *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. This indicates his newfound position as an authoritative transmitter in the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. E.g., Ibn Quṭlūbughā (d. 879/1474), *Tāj al-tarājīm*, 146. Laknawī, *Fawā'id*, 176–77 provides a solitary exception, remarking that even though Abū 'Iṣmah was a great jurist, he was criticized by the scholars of *ḥadīth*, to the extent that some accused him of forgery.

106 An example of such an undignified mention is that of Ibn Abī l-'Awwām (d. 335/947), who merely notes that Abū 'Iṣmah was the twentieth student of Abū Ḥanīfah from Khorasan; see Ibn Abī l-'Awwām, *Faḍā'il Abī Ḥanīfah*, 224.

Sunnī historians and biographers exalted him to a level not reflected in the earliest sources. It is worth repeating that Abū 'Iṣmah's report of *Abū Ḥanīfah's* retraction was undocumented in the first three centuries of Ḥanafism, raising questions about its provenance. Despite this questionable background, his report had the significant function of absolving Abū Ḥanīfah from accusations of heresy, and allowing members of his school to construct a narrative that associated him with the emerging orthodoxy on the Unified Qur'ān. Whereas the Semantic Qur'ān Ḥanafīs contended that the Qur'ān was miraculous solely in its meaning and guiding capacities, later Unified Qur'ān Ḥanafīs, when faced with scandal, condemned this view and reinterpreted Abū Ḥanīfah, absolving him of accusations of heterodoxy.

6 Conclusion

Sunnī Islam acquired distinctive characteristics by the fifth/eleventh century, including a definitive belief that the four eponyms of the schools of law were constitutive of Sunnī orthodoxy. This paper explores the evolution of the Sunnī orthodoxy on the Qur'ān by examining the changing perception of Abū Ḥanīfah, the eponym of the Ḥanafī school, which cemented his authority in Sunnī Islam. As noted by recent scholarship, the consolidation of Sunnī orthodoxy was bidirectional, with proto-Sunnī Ahl al-Ḥadīth initially constructing a particular version of orthodoxy and seeking to frame Abū Ḥanīfah as a heretic.¹⁰⁷ However, their criticisms ultimately led to a response from later Ḥanafīs, who rehabilitated Abū Ḥanīfah as a paradigmatic representative of Sunnī orthodoxy. Key to Abū Ḥanīfah's rehabilitation was distancing him from the heresy of the Created Qur'ān by use of the curious figure Abū 'Iṣmah. His hitherto underexplored report is a crucial piece in the puzzle of the shifting ontology of the Qur'ān – that is, from considering the Qur'ān's Arabic expression as nonessential towards regarding the Arabic as indispensable to the Qur'ān as a miracle.¹⁰⁸ This study, thus, exemplifies how Sunnī Muslims negotiated theological and legal disagreements to create a stable regime of consensus and accommodation, which were crucial to an ecumenical understanding of Sunnism in medieval societies.

¹⁰⁷ Khan, preface to *Heresy*, x.

¹⁰⁸ Although Zadeh's important work covers the general contours of the debate on the shifting ontology of the Qur'ān, he only briefly mentions Abū 'Iṣmah in a footnote and suggests that the supposed recantation of Abū Ḥanīfah was ascribed to Abū 'Iṣmah to give it more authenticity. However, Zadeh does not explore Abū 'Iṣmah's background nor explain why the ascription to Abū 'Iṣmah was advantageous for the Ḥanafīs. See Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'an*, 141 n124.

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