

Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong? Al-Tabari's Representation of Al-Walid b. 'Uqba as Criticism of the Hanbalis

I-Wen Su (Corresponding author)
isu@nccu.edu.tw

Department of Arabic Language and Culture
National Chengchi University

Abstract

In his account of al-Walid b. 'Uqba's (d. 680) Kufan governorship, al-Tabari (839-923) presents al-Walid b. 'Uqba as an ideal Muslim governor, whose rule was highly celebrated by Kufans of different social strata. He was dismissed in disgrace, however, due to the conspiracy of some Kufans, who maliciously accused him of drinking. It seems that the *Tarikh* is the only existing early compilation that ever presents al-Walid b. 'Uqba in this light, whereas other early compilers more or less agree on the opposite version of the story — al-Walid b. 'Uqba was truly an alcoholic. This paper addresses al-Tabari's purpose in favouring Sayf b. 'Umar's positive account about al-Walid by first establishing that the other version of the story, on 'Umar b. Shabba's authority, was indeed available to al-Tabari, but was not used in the *Tarikh*. Then, the narrative of al-Walid b. 'Uqba's governorship is studied in connection with al-Tabari's conflicts with the Hanbalis and the social turmoil they caused. This article argues that this unusual portrayal of al-Walid b. 'Uqba can be read as al-Tabari's criticism of the Hanbalis' abuse of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong' (*al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*).

Keywords: *al-Tabari, editorial selection, al-Walid b. 'Uqba, Sayf b. 'Umar, commanding right and forbidding wrong*

INTRODUCTION

It has been long established that *akhbar* compilations (plural of *khbar*, report), which feature in early Islamic historiography, constitute more than the mere reproduction of earlier sources. Chroniclers like al-Tabari (839-923) 'impressed their vision upon the material not merely by selecting and arranging pre-existing *akhbar*, but by breaking them up, by rephrasing, supplementing and composing anew' (Humphreys, 1991: 72–74; Robinson, 2003: 36)¹. By virtue of the editorial process, compilers insert their authorial voices. This paper presents an example of how analysis of the editorial hand, specifically, the selection of material, may reveal an insightful reading of early Arabic historiography by examining al-Tabari's treatment of al-Walid b. 'Uqba's Kufan governorship (from 645-6 to 649-50) in his monumental chronicle, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-l-Muluk*.

Abu Wahb al-Walid b. 'Uqba b. Abi Mu'ayt (d. 680; hereafter, al-Walid) was a Qurashi poet, known for his generosity and chivalry (al-Isfahani, 2000: 89). He was the half-brother of 'Uthman on the maternal side. He only converted to Islam on the Day of Fath, in 630; later, he was sent by the Prophet as the *sadaqa* (tax) collector to Banu Mustaliq and by 'Umar b. al-Khattab to Banu Taghlib (Bosworth, 2012). During 'Uthman's caliphate (r. 644–656), he also led the expedition in Azerbaijan and Armenia in 644-5 (al-Tabari, 1990: 7–10). Later in 645, he was appointed by the caliph to the governorship of Kufa, where he ruled until 649, when he was accused of drinking, flogged, and deposed. He did not take part in the first *fitna*, but he may have incited Mu'awiya to take revenge for 'Uthman. He died in al-Raqqa (al-Zirikli, 2002: 122).

al-Walid does not play a prominent role in Islamic history. However, his Companion status and misbehaviour (drinking wine) may have posed an awkward problem for the Sunnis in the ninth and tenth centuries, who had gradually and still incompletely coalesced into a

¹ The quotation is taken from Robinson.

community defined by a set of core doctrines, including the mutual probity of the Companions². Furthermore, al-Walid's appointment by 'Uthman, his half-brother, to Kufa also implies 'Uthman's nepotism — which is intrinsically related to the judgment on 'Uthman in particular and the subsequent first *fitna* in general (al-Nashi' al-Akbar, 1971: 15 & 53; Keaney, 2013). al-Tabari is engaged in this significant discourse through the section on al-Walid's governorship in his *Tarikh*, but his take is unconventional, for he reproduces Sayf b. 'Umar's (d. 815; hereafter, Sayf) reports, which portray al-Walid as a paragon of Companionship without any drinking habit³. al-Tabari's preference for Sayf at this point is not easily comprehensible, as nearly all compilers before and after him acknowledge that al-Walid indeed drank wine⁴. al-Tabari's peculiar choice of material in his *Tarikh*, as the present study will establish, is a deliberate one, because other non-Sayf accounts are very likely to have been available to him. The reason behind this selection may have been the references in Sayf's reports to the abuse of the principle of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong (*amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*'). Sayf's accounts present al-Walid as a victim of the mobs who wrongly practiced the commanding of right. For al-Tabari, such an episode may have embodied an irony that could be employed as a tacit criticism of his contemporary Hanbalis.

In what follows, this article first starts with a review of the studies on al-Tabari's editorial craft in shaping the narrative of the *Tarikh*, with regard to his use of Sayf's narrations. The second section outlines Sayf's accounts of al-Walid's governorship, which are unique, as none of the early sources portray al-Walid in such a positive light. Then, in the third section, this paper identifies the sources that were very likely to have been available to al-Tabari in order to establish that al-Tabari's use of Sayf b. 'Umar's accounts was indeed the product of deliberate selection. Finally, this article situates al-Tabari's choice in the context of his conflicts with the Hanbalis contemporary with him. As this paper shows, his deliberate selection of Sayf's account in the case of al-Walid's governorship is likely to amount to a criticism of Hanbalis' abuse of commanding right and forbidding wrong.

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since the pioneering study by Hodgson (1974), studies on *akhbar* compilations of various genres have investigated the arrangement and juxtaposition of the *akhbar* in search of the authorial voice of compilers (Burge, 2011; Donner, 2001; Kilpatrick, 2003; Malti-Douglas, 1981; Newman, 2000; Sallum, 1985). As one of the most important historical sources, al-Tabari's *Tarikh* has received notable scholarly attention. Studies on al-Tabari's editorial hand and its implications take different approaches. Hodgson and Humphreys examine al-Tabari's arrangement of sources (namely, reports narrated by Sayf and al-Waqidi) in the account of 'Uthman's murder but focus on different aspects. While Hodgson (1974: 350–358) tries to discern the influence of what he terms 'Shari'ah-minded methods' on the historiography, and thus sets al-Tabari's *Tarikh* as a piecemeal test, Humphreys (1989: 271–290) seeks to establish an interpretive framework — the myth of Covenant, Betrayal and Redemption. Khalidi (1994: 78), concerned with the overarching structure and interpretative modes of the *Tarikh*, argues that the pre-Islamic part of the *Tarikh* is moulded to the paradigm of the Qur'anic conflict between prophets and kings — so al-Tabari tried to 'reshape history in order to

² Before the view of the collective probity (*'adala*) of the Companions became the consensus of Sunni Islam, it is possible to question a Companion's Companionship based on his or her deeds. Abu al-Husayn al-Qattan (d. 1024-5) believed that al-Walid b. 'Uqba should not be considered a Companion because of his evil deed (Jabali, 2003: 77). Thus, al-Walid's qualification as a Companion and his narration of the Prophetic traditions can be debatable. The collective probity as a result of the Sunni harmonization came into being in the ninth century (Lucas, 2004: 255–285; Osman, 2013).

³ El-Hibri noticed al-Tabari's peculiar use of Sayf's accounts on the part of al-Walid's governorship, but he did not further pursue why al-Tabari favours these reports (El-Hibri, 2010: 127–128).

⁴ With some exceptions, see page 7.

conform with both the form and the substance of the Qur'anic view⁵, while the Islamic part does not present an explicit pattern but leaves judgment to its readers. Tayob (1989) compares the works of al-Ya'qubi, al-Tabari, al-Mas'udi and Ibn Kathir on the accounts of the Saqifa and the Battle of the Camel. Judd (2005) looks at the use of al-Mada'ini's reports by al-Baladuri and al-Tabari in shaping the reign of al-Walid b. Yazid and the downfall of the Umayyad Caliphate. El-Hibri (1999: 216–217) argues that the historical accounts were meant to be read for their allusive power, rather than as facts; as such, there is no need for historians like al-Tabari to voice their views, because the message is encoded in the symbolism, allusion, innuendo, symmetry and intertextuality of the historical reports. He (El-Hibri, 2010) takes a similar approach to the history of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (*al-Khulafa' al-Rashidun*)⁶.

Among the studies on al-Tabari's work and its embodiment of his *Weltanschauung*, his reliance on Sayf's accounts provokes much scholarly curiosity. al-Tabari's peculiar use of Sayf — a corrupt source, according to the medieval *hadith* critics and some of the modern historians (Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, n.d.: 144; Petersen, 1964: 150) — poses a conundrum to the scholars who regard al-Tabari as a meticulous and authentic scholar (al-Duri, 2000: 69–71). Indeed, it appears that no one uses Sayf's reports as extensively as al-Tabari, whose *Tarikh* is a main repository of the former's narrations (Robinson, 2003: 32). In addition to the question of the authenticity of Sayf's information, the question of why al-Tabari favours him at the expense of other sound sources has been raised (Donner, 1998; Duri, 1983: 46–47; Hinds, 1979; Khalidi, 1994: 244–245; Landau-Tasserou, 1990). It seems that Sayf makes his way into the *Tarikh* because his sources contain the religious and political perspectives his dependent wanted to convey⁷.

This paper, by examining a hitherto unexplored episode in al-Tabari's *Tarikh*, that is, al-Walid b. 'Uqba's appointment to and removal from the governorship of Kufa, investigates al-Tabari's authorial voice in his *magnum opus*, the *Tarikh*. In agreement with the conclusions of the above-mentioned studies on al-Tabari's representation of the past and his predilection for Sayf b. 'Umar's reports, that is, that al-Tabari's perspective on the past should be read in the light of his life, the present study further suggests a plausible close connection between al-Tabari's work and his disgruntlement with the abuse of the principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong of his time. The following section gives an outline of Sayf's accounts of al-Walid's governorship and illustrates their differences from the normative narratives on the same subject.

⁵ The italic in the quotation is by Khalidi.

⁶ Shoshan (2004) disagrees with El-Hibri's claim that the historical works are seen as fictions and identifies distinct modes, tropes and strategies by which the narrators endeavor to present an authentic picture of the past.

⁷ Hodgson (1974: 353) sees al-Tabari's juxtaposition of Sayf's sources with al-Waqidi's in the event of 'Uthman's murder as the compiler's attempt to please a wide audience, whom he describes as 'the zealously *hadith*-minded faction'; this certainly includes the Hanbalis. Also looking at 'Uthman's caliphate, Humphreys (1990: xvi–xvii) accounts for Sayf's appeal by his 'Sunday school' interpretation, which deters accusations of sectarianism, while confirming the hope of remaining faithful to God's covenant. In his survey of the conflicts between 'Ali and Mu'awiya, Petersen (1964: 157) suggests that al-Tabari uses Sayf's account with its assertion of a greater justification for 'Ali as an attack on the views prevalent amongst the Hanbalis — a conclusion with which Tayob (1999) concurs.

WRONG REPRESENTATION OF A WRONG-DOER

According to Sayf b. 'Umar, the reason why 'Uthman dismissed the previous governor, Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas (d. 675), was a dispute between the latter and the treasurer of Kufa, 'Abdallah b. Mas'ud (d. 653)⁸.

The first satanically inspired event among the inhabitants of Kufa — which was the first garrison town in Islam where Satan instigated evil among its people — happened in this way. Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas sought a loan from the public treasury from 'Abdallah b. Mas'ud, and he issued it to him. But when Ibn Mas'ud demanded he repay it, Sa'd was unable to do so. Words arose between the two of them, to the point that 'Abdallah sought help from one part of the people in getting the money repaid, while Sa'd asked the assistance of another part in gaining a deferral. Thus, the people split up into wrangling factions, with one group blaming Sa'd and the other 'Abdallah (al-Tabari, 1990: 15–16).

The result of the 'wrangling' by 'factions' was the anger of the caliph, 'Uthman. The caliph ordered Sa'd to pay his debt and replaced him with al-Walid b. 'Uqba, who had previously been appointed as the one in charge of the Arabs of the Jazira by 'Umar b. al-Khattab (al-Tabari, 1990: 17). In other words, to avoid strife between Kufans, a new governor was employed. This decision seems fully justified, as al-Walid had already been appointed to a post by the second rightly guided caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khattab. Thus, according to Sayf b. 'Umar's account, the appointment of al-Walid has nothing to do with the nepotism of which 'Uthman was often accused. Rather, 'Uthman's decision was highly appreciated, as the governor al-Walid 'was the most beloved of men among the people and the most courteous in dealing with them. Matters continued thus for five years; there was no door on his residence' (al-Tabari, 1990: 17). The lack of door on al-Walid's residence implies his popularity amongst his subjects, who visited the governor so frequently that installing a door would have been superfluous. This decision (not to install a door) also emphasizes al-Walid's accessibility to the people he governed. This harmonious scene lasted throughout al-Walid's governorship, until some troublemakers sought to depose him out of personal resentment, according to Sayf.

The murder of Ibn Haysuman by a number of Kufan young men opened the door to sedition. The murderers were caught and brought to al-Walid, who put them to death at the gate of the Official Palace after consulting the caliph. Among the executed were the sons of Jundub al-Azdi, Abu Muwarri' al-Asadi and Ubayy al-Azdi (al-Tabari, 1990: 45–46). In the meantime, Abu Zubayd — a former Christian who began his association with al-Walid when the latter helped him with a debt which his relatives deliberately refused to pay back — converted to Islam and was invited by al-Walid to join his entourage. As retaliation, Jundub and his fellows tried to find fault with the governor by spreading the rumour that al-Walid and Abu Zubayd were devotees of wine. Then, with the Kufan notables, they stormed into al-Walid's house, without asking permission. Taken by surprise, al-Walid hid something away. It turned out to be 'a platter of grape seeds and stems, which al-Walid had pushed aside only out of embarrassment, for they would see on his platter nothing but these leavings.' (al-Tabari, 1990: 48–49) After Jundub, Abu Muwarri' and other intruders left, the Kufan people split into two groups: some reprimanded their deeds saying: 'May God be angry with the intruders', while others said, "*The Book of God compelled him (namely, the intruder who examined the platter hidden away by al-Walid) to do this, and it called upon them to examine al-Walid's doings thoroughly*" (al-Tabari, 1990: 49). However, al-Walid did not take any action in response to this offensive intrusion. Rather, he forgave them for the claim that the intruders were acting in accordance with God's Book and did not inform 'Uthman of this, for he 'disliked arousing dissension among them, so he kept silent about it and bore it patiently' (al-Tabari, 1990: 49).

⁸ The quotations from al-Tabari's *Tarikh* are translation by S. Humphreys, except for the italicised passages, which are my renderings. I deleted brackets and changed the transliteration, here and below, in order to eliminate potential confusion.

Following this account is a report illustrating the merits of al-Walid's rule: surplus revenues benefited every slave in Kufa, without affecting the stipends of their masters (al-Tabari, 1990: 50). Sayf's account then proceeds to the conspiracy of Jundub and his accomplices. While spreading the rumour about al-Walid's addiction to drinking, Jundub and others reported to Ibn Mas'ud, the treasurer and the highly respected Companion, their suspicion that the governor drank wine. Ibn Mas'ud replied, "*If a man hides something from us, we do not pursue his flaws nor tear open his veil*" (al-Tabari, 1990: 50). al-Walid was not satisfied with Ibn Mas'ud's response, but this did not induce further conflict between the two (al-Tabari, 1990: 51).

At this juncture, another incident took place. A sorcerer was brought before al-Walid, who consulted Ibn Mas'ud about the right punishment. During the adjudication, his old enemies seized the opportunity and claimed that al-Walid had a sorcerer guest in his residence. Jundub also took action and killed the sorcerer. Ibn Mas'ud and al-Walid agreed to imprison Jundub. However, following 'Uthman's instructions, al-Walid released him after obtaining his statement under oath that he did not know that al-Walid was about to execute the sorcerer and that he truly thought that the penalty against him had been neglected. Enjoined by 'Uthman, al-Walid admonished people not to 'act on the basis of personal suppositions nor to carry out the divinely ordained penalties without the government' (al-Tabari, 1990: 51). Jundub's accomplices were angry about his imprisonment and went to Medina, seeking the dismissal of al-Walid. Their ambition was shattered by the caliph's prudence, "*You are acting on the basis of personal supposition; you are in error about Islam, and you are coming here without permission, so go back*" (al-Tabari, 1990: 52). After returning to Kufa, this band attracted others who bore some grievances. Together, they agreed on the next move. Taking advantage of al-Walid's courteous manner and accessibility, Abu Zaynab al-Azdi and Abu Muwarri' entered his house and stole his signet ring. With a few supporters, they came to 'Uthman to testify against al-Walid for drinking wine. Upon this, 'Uthman summoned al-Walid back to Medina and sent Sa'id b. al-'As to be in charge of Kufa (al-Tabari, 1990: 52).

This account is followed by details on how Abu Zaynab and Abu Muwarri' took the ring. Then, in the presence of the caliph, Abu Zaynab and Abu Muwarri' testified to have seen al-Walid vomiting wine. Although al-Walid swore he was innocent the caliph ordered al-Walid to be flogged. The executor was either Sa'id b. al-'As or 'Ali b. Abi Talib. There then follows a similar report relating how the ring was taken and how al-Walid's enemies testified in front of 'Uthman. Al-Walid's dismissal gave rise to division among Kufans: the ordinary folk were on his side, while the elite were against him. This division continued until the Battle of Siffin (al-Tabari, 1990: 54–55). The last reports illustrate the regret of the Kufans about al-Walid's dismissal (al-Tabari, 1990: 55–56).

By extensive use of Sayf's accounts, al-Tabari presents a rosy picture of the governorship of al-Walid, in which people regardless of social standing benefit from the successful expansion of Islam, with a surplus of revenues distributed to all. The protagonist, al-Walid, is portrayed as the virtuous governor, who welcomed his subjects at any time, to the extent that no door was installed in his residence. He acted with justice, generosity, prudence, and discretion (as illustrated in the case of Abu Zubayd's relatives' debt and in his seeking advice from Ibn Mas'ud and 'Uthman with regard to the sorcerer and Jundub). He tolerated and forgave the misbehaviour of the mobs, who intruded into his house, for the sake of the Book of God and the harmony of the community. Despite all these merits, the vice of the Kufans eventually led to his removal and the dishonest testimonies to his ignominy.

Just like any story, Sayf's account seems to make sense. However, Sayf is the only source that presents al-Walid's gubernatorial career in this light. The version widely accepted by al-Tabari's predecessors and contemporaries attributes al-Walid's dismissal to the fact that he was so addicted to wine that he led the prayers in a drunken state; for this very reason, he was flogged. The aforementioned sorcerer was invited to al-Walid's residence to entertain him, while Abu Zubayd, the Christian, who had not converted, was his drinking companion. The troublemakers, Jundub, Abu Muwarri' and Abu Zaynab, had no personal hatred for the governor but acted in accordance with the divinely ordained laws (al-Isfahani, 2000: 89–110;

al-Baladuri, 1996: 138–146)⁹. The other early sources¹⁰ — including *hadith* collections, chronicles, and biographical sources — do not necessarily mention all the elements featuring in Sayf's narrative, which absolves al-Walid of moral defaults, but they all agree on one thing: he did drink wine¹¹. This divergence is also spotted by later compilers, who reject al-Tabari's account due to Sayf's poor reputation, "*This (namely, al-Tabari's account) is from the transmission of the people of reports, incorrect to the people of hadith and baseless to the people of knowledge*" (Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, 2006: 335)¹².

In other words, there exist reports that are more authentic according to the criteria of the *ahl al-hadith*, and widely quoted by other compilers, with a less innocent al-Walid. This version, however, was not adopted by al-Tabari. The biographical sources hardly fail to mention his encyclopaedic knowledge, his extensive travel in search of knowledge, and the numerous *shaykhs* with whom he studied. His incomplete work, *Tahdhib al-Athar*, best attests to his proficiency in the science of *hadith*, which entails the branch of the *'ilm al-rijal* — knowing who is reliable and who is not in the chain of transmission (al-Dhahabi, 1958: 713; 2004: 3366–3367; al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, 2001: 550; Ibn al-Nadim, 1988: 291–291; Ibn Khallikan, 1994: 191). His monumental Qur'anic exegesis, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, unlike his *Tarikh*, only uses sources generally considered reliable in *hadith* circles and avoids authorities considered dubious (Yaqt, 1936: 64–65). As a renowned *hadith* scholar, al-Tabari would presumably have known about the reliability of Sayf b. 'Umar — "*one copper coin is better than him (fals khayr minhu)*", according to Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, n.d.: 144).

That said, it must be asked whether al-Tabari indeed selected a less-approved account or if he simply did not have access to the version accepted by *ahl al-hadith*. In what follows, this paper addresses this question by evaluating the availability of the narrations of Muhammad b. Sa'd (785–845) and 'Umar b. Shabba (789–878) to al-Tabari and examining the relevant passages in al-Tabari's Qur'anic exegesis, in order to establish what al-Tabari may have included and excluded in his *Tarikh*.

A DELIBERATE SELECTION

Muhammad b. Sa'd mentions nothing about the reason for al-Walid's removal from Kufa in the entries on al-Walid in the *Tabaqat* (Ibn Sa'd, 2001a: 37–38; 2001b: 147; 2001c: 481). However, through the quotations of al-Baladhuri in his *Ansab al-Ashraf*, we have Ibn Sa'd's

⁹ See also footnote 15.

¹⁰ Here I mean the compilations before the tenth century, as some later compilers reproduce al-Tabari's *Tarikh* for the earlier period, such as Ibn al-Athir (1987: 3–5) and Ibn 'Asakir (1995b: 242–245).

¹¹ Both Sunni and Shi'i sources acknowledge that al-Walid drank wine, but they differ in certain details. Among the Sunni compilations, some narrations are less explicit, but imply that al-Walid was not innocent and thus deserved the penalty (al-Bukhari, 1998: 3696 & 3872). Others explicitly say that al-Walid was flogged for drinking (Ahmad, 2008: 1196 & 1243; al-Mus'ab b. 'Abdallah al-Zubayri, 1953: 138; Ibn Qutayba, n.d.: 318–319). Shi'i sources too agree on the fact that al-Walid was punished for drinking wine, but tend to accentuate 'Ali's role as 'Uthman's consultant regarding this issue or as the executor of the penalty regardless of al-Walid's kinship with 'Uthman (al-Ya'qubi, 2010: 59; al-Mas'udi, 2005: 263–264; Ibn A'tham, 1991: 381–382). Besides the drinking event, al-Walid's vice is also noted by the sources. In the *Musnad* of Ahmad b. Hanbal, the eponym of the Hanbali school, two *hadiths* relate that the wife of al-Walid came to the Prophet complaining of al-Walid's abusive beating. The Prophet said: "*Tell him that I already gave you my protection*". Yet the prophetic protection had no effect. The wife kept coming back to the Prophet with the same grievance. In the end, the Prophet had to resort to his Lord with the following invocation, "*My Lord! You must punish al-Walid; he committed sin against me*" (Ahmad, 2008: 1317–1318).

¹² Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's criticism is followed by Ibn al-Athir (1996: 421) and Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (2008: 343).

accounts about this event. Taken together, the reports narrated by Ibn Sa'd provide the following narrative.

'Uthman's appointment of al-Walid at the expense of Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas was not a decision welcomed by the Kufans or the Companions, "*Horrendous is 'Uthman's choice of replacement (bi'sama ibtadalana bi-hi 'Uthman). He dismissed Abu Ishaq (agnomen of Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas), the easy-going, lenient, pious Companion of the Prophet, and, in his stead, appointed his immoral, libertine, stupid, debauched brother*" (al-Baladhuri, 1996: 139). al-Walid remained there for five years, known for his drinking habit. His drinking companion, Abu Zubayd, was invited to Kufa as his guest. He led the Morning Prayer when drunk. He did two *rak'a* and turned to the crowd, "*Should I do one more?*". A *sharif* from Banu 'Uwafa b. Sa'd took a handful of pebbles to throw at him, and the rest followed suit (al-Baladhuri, 1996: 142). Then, Abu Zaynab and Jundub — the villains in Sayf's narration — entered his residence while he was drunk. They took away al-Walid's signet ring from his hand without awakening him, as he was too drunk. Under the pressure from the leading Companions, including 'A'isha, 'Uthman deposed al-Walid and ordered flogging as the penalty. Yet, due to al-Walid's relationship to the caliph (his half-brother), no one dared to execute the order except for 'Ali (al-Baladhuri, 1996: 138–145).

Clearly, Ibn Sa'd's accounts are fundamentally different from Sayf's. 'Uthman's decision to appoint al-Walid was criticised. al-Walid indeed drank wine and the Kufans, in accordance with divine law rather than personal resentment, testified against him and executed justice. al-Walid was punished as a consequence. Ibn Sa'd is al-Tabari's source for the pre-Islamic period, the biography of the Prophet (*sira*), and the history up till the reign of the 'Abbasid caliph, al-Hadi (r. 785–786) ('Ali, 2012: 245, 282–283 & 307)¹³. More importantly, his narrations are used for 'Uthman's caliphate (al-Tabari, 1968b: 242 & 414–415).

Nonetheless, to determine what may have been at al-Tabari's disposal, it is important to take into account al-Tabari's intermediary informant. For the reports about the reign of 'Uthman, the intermediary link between al-Tabari and Ibn Sa'd is al-Harith b. Muhammad b. Abi Usama (802–896; hereafter, Ibn Abi Usama) (al-Tabari, 1968b: 193–198, 200, 208–212, 414 & 431)¹⁴. Ibn Abi Usama is also present in the *riwaya*-chain of the printed edition (Maktabat al-Khanji) of Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqat* (2001d: 3). It is questionable whether Ibn Sa'd's reports about al-Walid, as quoted by al-Baladhuri, were ever available to al-Tabari through this intermediary (Ghada, 2001). As noted above, these accounts are not found in the printed edition of *Tabaqat*, which is based on Ibn Abi Usama's *riwaya*. This may suggest that Ibn Abi Usama, deliberately or not, did not disseminate these reports, which present al-Walid, and, indirectly, 'Uthman, in a negative light. Meanwhile, al-Baladhuri had the direct narration from Ibn Sa'd, who was one of his teachers (Ibn 'Asakir, 1995a: 74). In other words, it is not implausible that al-Tabari's access to Ibn Sa'd's corpus, as determined by Ibn Abi Usama, did not include what was available to al-Baladhuri, that is, the negative accounts about al-Walid. Thus, in this case, it cannot be established that al-Tabari chose Sayf's narrative at the expense of Ibn Sa'd's.

As for 'Umar b. Shabba (789–878), al-Tabari cites a number of his narrations about 'Uthman's caliphate (al-Tabari, 1968b: 404–405, 451–454, 468, 474–478 & 480; 'Ali, 2012: 308). 'Umar b. Shabba was the author of numerous works, which, though extensively quoted by later sources, do not survive except for one — *Kitab Akhbar al-Madina al-Nabawiyya* (Leder, 2012). That said, the extant *Kitab Akhbar al-Madina al-Nabawiyya* does preserve the controversy surrounding al-Walid. According to 'Umar b. Shabba, for an unspecified reason, Abu Zaynab al-Azdi and Abu Muwarri' — the Kufan troublemakers in Sayf's accounts — tried to find fault with al-Walid. One day, they noticed al-Walid's absence during prayers. They asked about it and broke into his house, in which they found him vomiting and falling unconscious. They took his signet ring away and, with other companies, went to Medina to file accusations of wine-drinking against him in the presence of the caliph. After consulting with

¹³ The reference to the Caliphate of al-Hadi seems to be al-Tabari's last citation from Ibn Sa'd in the *Tarikh* (al-Tabari, 1968a: 223).

¹⁴ For the biography of Ibn Abi Usama, see the accounts given by al-Dhahabi (1995: 178–179; 2004: 1352–1354) and by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (2002: 527–528).

'Ali, 'Uthman ordered al-Walid to be brought to the court. The Kufans testified against al-Walid, who was then flogged as his punishment. After al-Walid was deposed, 'Uthman sent Sa'id b. al-'As as the new governor, in al-Walid's stead, with a letter, which, addressing the Kufans, accentuated his half-brother's generosity and rectitude as a governor and condemned them for probing into his private life (as they had done when they entered al-Walid's residence without permission) in order to bring about charges against him ('Umar b. Shabba, n.d.: 188–191). Like Ibn Sa'd's narrations, as well as those from others, 'Umar b. Shabba's account also acknowledges al-Walid's indulgence in wine, but not without questioning the integrity of the Kufans, who took action against their governor.¹⁵

To sum up, there is an utterly different version of al-Walid's governorship, besides that presented by al-Tabari. This version is transmitted on the authority of Ibn Sa'd and 'Umar b. Shabba, both of whom are al-Tabari's sources for the period in question. In addition, the reports that present the similar narrative are preserved in the Sunni *hadith* compilations¹⁶. To ascertain al-Tabari's deliberate selection of Sayf's accounts, we have examined the availability of the reports of Ibn Sa'd and 'Umar b. Shabba to him. While the case of Ibn Sa'd should be treated with caution, as the recension of Ibn Abi Usama might have not included the negative story about al-Walid, the corpus of 'Umar b. Shabba was very likely to have lain at al-Tabari's disposal.

Why might al-Tabari have deliberately selected Sayf's account, which contradicts the mainstream narrative? At first glance, it seems that such editorial intervention concerns the dignity of the Companions. In order to keep the Prophet and his Companions within a sacralised aura, al-Walid, as a Companion, is better depicted as an ideal governor. However, this is not really the case, as al-Tabari not only shows that he knows of al-Walid's immorality but also confirms his wickedness through the Qur'anic verdict without compunction. When commenting on the Qur'anic verse, "*Is, then, the man who believes no better than the man who is rebellious and wicked? Not equal are they*" (32:18). al-Tabari identifies the 'rebellious and wicked' with al-Walid b. 'Uqba (al-Tabari, 2001a: 624–625)¹⁷. He does a similar thing in relation to another verse, "*O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done*" (49:6). The 'wicked person' here again refers to al-Walid b. 'Uqba, who was sent by the Prophet to the newly-converted tribe, Banu al-Mustaliq, to collect taxes but reported falsely about their apostasy (al-Tabari, 2001b: 348–353). Needless to say, al-Tabari was aware of the problematic character of al-Walid — the wicked man condemned by God. In contrast to his *Tarikh*, in his *Jami' al-Bayan*, he makes little attempt to apologise for al-Walid. This mismatch clearly illustrates how unusual al-Tabari's selection of material and representation of this Companion in the *Tarikh* are.

WHEN MOBS COMMAND RIGHT AND FORBID WRONG

Hodgson, Petersen, and Humphreys all link al-Tabari's peculiar preference for Sayf's accounts to his caution against or attack on the Hanbalis among his contemporaries.¹⁸ The biographical

¹⁵ 'Umar b. Shabba's narrations concerning al-Walid's career as the Kufan governor are also quoted by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, who died in early 960s (Su, 2016: 61–62). The biography of al-Walid b. 'Uqba in the *Kitab al-Aghani* consists of 31 reports on the authority of 'Umar b. Shabba, all transmitted via the intermediary informant Ahmad b. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Jawhari (d. 935). Like Ibn Sa'd's accounts, 'Umar b. Shabba's corpus, quoted by al-Isfahani, exposes al-Walid's ignominious behaviour in an explicit manner. Furthermore, the *Aghani* also presents 'Uthman in a less favourable light, as his rectitude is marred by his favouritism towards his half-brother — he failed to take action in accordance with the divinely ordained laws and mistreated the plaintiff (al-Isfahani, 2000: 89–110).

¹⁶ See pp. 7 above.

¹⁷ Here I follow the translation of Abdullah Y. Ali.

¹⁸ See footnote 7.

sources are not congruous as to the reason for al-Tabari's conflicts with the Hanbalis of his time, which at times descended into physical violence. According to some reports, the brawl seems to have been related to al-Tabari's view on Ahmad b. Hanbal (780–855) — al-Tabari did not regard him as a jurist (Yaqut, 1936: 58). Others suggest that the Hanbalis disagreed with al-Tabari on the interpretation of the 'Station of Praise and Glory (*maqaman mahmudan*)', referred to in *Surat al-Isra'* (17:79). When asked by a group of Hanbalis about the verse, al-Tabari rejected Mujahid's view. As he states in his Qur'anic exegesis, the *maqaman mahmudan* means the intercession of the Prophet at the Day of Final Judgment, not an actual throne, as Mujahid claims (al-Tabari, 2001c: 43–47). Enraged by al-Tabari's denial of their *madhhab*'s tenet, which was tenaciously upheld by Ibn Hanbal's principal successor, Abu Bakr al-Marrudhi (d. 888), and his activist student, al-Barbahari (d. 941), they stoned al-Tabari's house (Rosenthal, 1989: 72). The disturbances caused by the Hanbali mobs also interrupted al-Tabari's intellectual activities. It is mentioned that students were hindered from his lectures (al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, 2001: 551), although the credibility this account was later questioned by al-Subki (1327-1370) (al-Subki, 1964: 125). On al-Tabari's death, some reports say that his funeral was held at night due to the Hanbalis, although a contradictory account mentions a huge crowd present at his funeral (Rosenthal, 1989: 77–78). Although the details on the antagonism between al-Tabari and his Hanbali contemporaries are by no means consistent, the harassment which the former suffered at the latter's hand is hard to dismiss, as it is widely reported, to the extent that the later Hanbali historian, Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1200), was obliged to mention it, albeit less explicitly (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1992: 217). Thus, it comes as no surprise that al-Tabari may have been critical of the Hanbali practice of commanding right and forbidding wrong, especially when it was aggressively and unlawfully executed.

al-Tabari's *Tarikh* stops at the year 915 and he died in 923. This period overlaps with the surge of the Hanbali movement under al-Barbahari's leadership. Although the way that the politically quietist inclination of Ahmad b. Hanbal transformed into a violent powerful group remains unclear (Cook, 2006: 121–124; Hurvitz, 2003), al-Barbahari, with his popular support in Baghdad, became 'a powerful man; the caliph himself was appalled at the number of his followers, brought to his notice by their lusty response to their leader's sneeze.' (Cook, 2006: 117).

The Hanbali followers, who consisted of miscellaneous groups, may have easily gone astray from the original instructions of Ahmad b. Hanbal on commanding right. Based on Ahmad b. Hanbal's legal *responsa*, collected by Abu Bakr al-Khallal, there are three main contra-indications of performing commanding right and forbidding wrong. First, fear for one's safety; one should not execute it, if the situation may jeopardize one's own life. Second, if the offender perpetually refuses the advice, warning, or exhortation, it is better to leave him or her alone. Third, the demands of privacy can overturn the duty. If an offender, or offensive object, such as a musical instrument, wine, or a chessboard, is hidden from the public eye, no action should be taken (Cook, 2006, pp. 98–100). The followers of al-Barbahari apparently ignored these principles, when "they plundered shops, raided the homes of military leaders and others to search for liquor, singing-girls or musical instruments, challenged men and women walking together in public, and fomented ugly assaults on Shafi'ites" (Cook, 2006: 117; Heilman, 1978; Su, 2016: 292–308). An account found in the biographical entry of al-Barbahari illustrates the 'perversion' of some Hanbali followers,

A lower-class follower of Barbahari once happened to pass by a heretic after drinking too much. The heretic was unwise enough to exclaim in disgust, "These Hanbalites!". The drunk then turned back and explained to the heretic that there were three classes of Hanbalites: ascetics; scholars; and a third class, who slapped opponents like the heretic. He then proceeded to demonstrate his membership of the third class (Ibn Abi Ya'la, 1999: 76)¹⁹.

¹⁹ The translation is Cook's (2006: 122).

What is al-Tabari's take on the unbridled Hanbali movement of his time? As his *Tarikh* stops at 915, and its last part tends to be succinct, his view on these Hanbalis is not clear. Nonetheless, he does define commanding right and forbidding wrong as a religious duty in his exegesis: commanding right should be restricted to what God and His Prophet command and forbid²⁰. Accordingly, no one has the right to enter others' houses without permission (24:27²¹) or to spy and pry others' private life (49:12²²; Cook, 2006: 24 & 80)²³.

In the context of the violence of al-Barbahari's followers and al-Tabari's understanding of commanding right, the unusually positive representation of al-Walid and al-Tabari's penchant for Sayf's unreliable reports are explicable. In the above quoted passages,²⁴ Jundub, Abu Muwarri', and other intruders broke into al-Walid's residence without permission; their action parallels the Hanbalis' aggressive inspection of private abode. In Sayf's account, the intrusion causes opposite views among Kufans: some of them hold it in conformity with the Book of God, while others see it as inciting His anger²⁵. The fact that al-Walid was victimised by the troublemakers, whom he did not punish because he naively believed in their claim of adherence to God's command, accentuates the falsehood of the mobs and their interpretation of the Book of God. That is, their action — breaking into private residence without permission to uphold the morality of the community — is by no means sanctioned by God.

In response to the intrusion of the Kufans, Ibn Mas'ud commented, "*If a man hides something from us, we do not pursue his flaws nor tear open his veil*"²⁶. This comment echoes the third contra-indication against commanding right and forbidding wrong: the demands of privacy. After killing the sorcerer, Jundub as well as other Kufans was warned not to 'act on the basis of personal suppositions (*zunun*; sing. *zann*)'²⁷. Similarly, the Kufans seeking to depose al-Walid were described by 'Uthman as 'acting on the basis of personal suppositions (*zunun*).²⁸ Since commanding right, as al-Tabari defines it, would be overridden by the Qur'anic injunction — "*Avoid suspicion (*zann*) as much (as possible), for suspicion in some cases is a sin. And spy not on each other behind their backs (49:12)*" — the Hanbalis were acting 'on the basis of personal suppositions' as wrongfully as the mobs of Kufa. That is, the Hanbalis' self-proclaimed 'commanding right and forbidding wrong' was, as a matter of fact, contravening God's divinely ordained law.

The appeal of reports of the unreliable Sayf to al-Tabari may have been related to the reports' inclusion of these references to the principle and contraindication of commanding right and forbidding wrong. The denouement of al-Walid's career — a virtuous man punished for false accusation by those who unduly pried and probed into the private domain in the name of the Book of God — subtly points out the peril of the malpractice of commanding right. al-Tabari's preposterously positive presentation of al-Walid on Sayf's authority may have been dismissed by his educated readers who were aware of al-Walid's wickedness and Sayf's poor reputation, but, for those who understood the principle of commanding right, or, *par*

²⁰ While most of the Qur'anic references to commanding right are linked to the context of belief and disbelief in God (3:104; 3:110; 3:114; 5:79; 7:199; 9:67; 9:71; 22:41; 31:17), al-Tabari states explicitly in his comment on the verse 9:112 that commanding right goes beyond the *iman* and *kufr bi-Allah* (al-Tabari, 2001d: 16–17).

²¹ The verse, 24:27, states, "*O ye who believe! enter not houses other than your own, until ye have asked permission and saluted those in them: that is best for you, in order that ye may heed (what is seemly)*".

²² The verse, 49:12, states, "*O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it...But fear Allah. For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful*".

²³ The privacy in the Islamic law is discussed by Alshech (2004).

²⁴ See page 5.

²⁵ See page 5.

²⁶ See page 6.

²⁷ See page 6.

²⁸ See page 6.

excellence, those who lived in Baghdad in the late ninth and tenth centuries, the moral embodied by the story could hardly have been missed.

CONCLUSION

This article considers the agenda of the *akhbar*-compiler in the shaping of the text. Specifically, it examines al-Tabari's treatment of al-Walid's governorship in his *Tarikh*, which depends on Sayf's accounts, on the whole. It first outlines Sayf's accounts and notes their differences from non-Sayf reports. Sayf presents al-Walid in a very positive way, while other sources portray him almost in an opposite way. This paper argues that al-Tabari deliberately selects the reports of Sayf, who is a notoriously unreliable informant in the circle of *hadith* scholars. This peculiar choice can be established as deliberate on al-Tabari's part. An analysis of the transmission history of al-Tabari's sources shows that, although Ibn Sa'd's negative reports about al-Walid might have never come to al-Tabari, probably due to the redaction of Ibn Abi Usama, 'Umar b. Shabba's reports were very likely at his disposal. Thus, al-Tabari did prefer Sayf's accounts to other sources. This preference seems less explicable, as al-Tabari apparently does mention al-Walid's wickedness in his Qur'anic exegesis. However, Sayf's accounts, with the references to commanding right, might have appealed to al-Tabari, who suffered from the social disturbances caused by al-Barbahari's zealous followers in Baghdad. By presenting al-Walid as the victim of the abuse of commanding right, al-Tabari tacitly questioned the deviant practice of the Hanbalis of his own day.

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