

Mu‘tazilī Theory in Practice: The Repentance (*tawba*) of Government Officials in the 4th/10th century*

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Repentance is the act of seeking atonement for one’s misdeeds or shortcomings. Shared across a broad range of the world’s cultures and religious traditions, it is believed by many to be essentially connected to the conduct of a moral life.¹ In the religion of Islam, as in Judaism and Christianity, repentance is also a central religious concept.² Mentioned frequently in the Qur’ān, repentance is primarily designated by the word *tawba* and its derivatives, connoting a “return to God.”³ Numerous Qur’ānic verses urge believers to desist from sin and pursue the act of penitence prior to their final days.⁴ Similarly, many Prophetic traditions (*ahādīth*) address the importance of contrition and repentance in the life of the believer.⁵

Of vital concern to the piety of the early Muslim community, repentance has remained a central focus in both the thought and practice of many believers. Scholars of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and mysticism have created over the centuries a rich theoretical literature in their debates concerning the concept of repentance.⁶ Likewise, many ritual practices of both individuals and groups have

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1 David E. Aune, “Repentance,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, pp. 337-42; Samuel McComb, “Repentance,” in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 10, pp. 731-35.

2 Amitai Etzioni and David E. Carney (eds.), *Repentance. A Comparative Perspective*, Lanham 1997; Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce (eds.), *Rituals and Ethics. Patterns of Repentance – Judaism, Christianity, Islam*. Second International Conference of *Mediterraneum*, Paris / Leuven 2004.

3 Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Beirut 1955 [repr. 1992], vol. 1, p. 233: *al-tawba al-rujū‘ ilā Allāh*.

4 Uri Rubin, “Repentance and Penance,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. 4, pp. 426-30; Frederick M. Denny, “The Qur’anic Vocabulary of Repentance. Orientations and Attitudes,” in *Studies in Qur’an and Tafsir. Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Issue* 47 (1979), pp. 649-64; Mahmoud Ayoub, “Repentance in the Islamic Tradition,” in *Repentance. A Comparative Perspective*, eds. Amitai Etzioni and David E. Carney, Lanham 1997, pp. 60-75.

5 See Ibn Māja al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan Ibn Māja*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Bāqī, Cairo 1972, vol. 2, pp. 1419-22; Book 49 of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* concerns *tawba*, see with commentary by Qāḍī ‘Iyād, *Ikmāl mu‘lim bi-fawā'id Muslim*, ed. Yaḥyā Ismā‘īl, al-Manṣūra (Egypt) 1998, vol. 8, p. 240-305; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Kitāb al-Tawba*, ed. Ṣābir al-Baṭāwī, Beirut 1992; Ayoub, “Repentance in the Islamic Tradition.”

6 For jurisprudence, see ‘Alī Jaffāl, *al-Tawba wa-atharuhā fi isqāt al-ḥudūd fi l-fiqh al-islāmī*, Beirut 1989; Ayoub, “Repentance in the Islamic Tradition.” For theology, see Josef van Ess,

focused upon penitence and contrition.⁷ Often involving the relationship between the outward performance of a particular speech act or action in confirmation of the innermost thoughts and feelings of the actor, expressions of contrition have been powerful moments of individual transformation as well as important occasions for groups to reflect upon the shared bases of collective life.

I. Accounts of repentance by government officials in the 4th/10th century

Historical accounts relating to the 4th/10th century report that several officials repented at the end of their service for the government. Their acts of penitence appear to have involved various aspects of Mu‘tazilī theory and were, at times, undertaken in the presence of prominent scholars from the school. In this study, we shall examine seven individual cases of repentance by government officials and consider their relation to Mu‘tazilī doctrine on the subject of *taṭwba*. We will argue that the repentance by government officials was motivated by theological concerns and offers proof of their commitment to Mu‘tazilī doctrine.

The first and most detailed account of repentance by a government official in the 4th/10th century is related by Abū ‘Alī al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994). He describes the repentance of his maternal grandfather, a local administrator (*kātib dīwān*) in Ahwāz, Abu l-Qāsim b. Abī ‘Allān (d. first half of the 4th/10th c.), at the urging of the famed Mu‘tazilī scholar, Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā‘ī (d. 303/915).⁸

Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam 1-6, Berlin 1991-97, vol. 4, pp. 579-90; Mokdad Arfa Mensia, “Théories du repentir chez les théologiens musulmans classiques,” in *Rituals and Ethics. Patterns of Repentance – Judaism, Christianity, Islam*. Second International Conference of *Mediterraneum*, eds. Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, Paris / Leuven 2004, pp. 107-23. For discussions of repentance in mysticism, see Josef van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī anhand von Übersetzungen aus seinen Schriften dargestellt und erläutert*, Bonn 1961, pp. 63-64 and p. 130; Susanna Wilzer, “Untersuchungen zu Gazzālīs Kitāb al-Tauba,” *Der Islam* 32 (1957), pp. 237-309; 33 (1958), pp. 51-120; M[artin] S[tanley] Stern, “Notes on the Theology of Al-Ghazzālī’s Concept of Repentance,” *The Islamic Quarterly* 23 ii (1979), pp. 82-98; idem, *Al-Ghazzālī on Repentance*, New Delhi 1990; Richard Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums*, Wiesbaden 1995, vol. 1, pp. 173, 44143; vol. 2, pp. 109, 235, 240, 386, and 427; Ayoub, “Repentance in the Islamic Tradition.”

⁷ For prayers of repentance, see Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions. A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use*, London 1961, pp. 173-98; For repentance in Shī‘ī thought and piety, see Ayoub, “Repentance in the Islamic Tradition;” Gerald R. Hawting, “The *taṭwābīn*, atonement and ‘*āshūrā*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994), pp. 166-81. For repentance in a literary/courtly context, see Philip F. Kennedy, *The Wine Song in Classical Arabic Poetry. Abū Nuwās and the Literary Tradition*, Oxford 1997, pp. 194-240.

⁸ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-mubāḍara wa-akbbār al-mudbākara* 1-8, ed. ‘Abbūd al-Shālī, Beirut 1971-73, vol. 1, pp. 221-24. For Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī, see L. Gardet, “al-Djubbā‘ī,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, vol. 2, p. 569. For further discussion of this passage, see Julia Bray, “Practical Mu‘tazilism. The Case of al-Tanūkhī,” in *Abbasid Studies. Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies Cambridge 6-10 July 2002*, ed. James E. Montgomery,

According to Tanūkhī, Ibn Abī ‘Allān spoke with al-Jubbā’ī one evening and asked him for his opinion regarding his own work on behalf of the government, stating, “Oh Abū ‘Alī, do you not fear for me on account of the affair with which I am involved?”⁹ Al-Jubbā’ī replied, “Oh Abu l-Qāsim, how can I not fear for you! By God, if you were to die in this state, you would not smell the odor of paradise!”¹⁰ To this statement, Ibn Abī ‘Allān responded with incredulity:

Why and wherefore? Indeed I work as an accountant and I go about my affairs like a copyist. I take my salary from the *bayt al-māl* or when a person comes to me who has a grievance and has been obliged to pay a wrongful excess of tax (*kharāj*), I reduce it for him and rectify it in his accounts, so perhaps he gives me a present from the goodness of his heart; or I receive some benefit from the ruler’s property (*artaḥīqu min māl al-sultān*) which represents only my share of the general property of the Muslims (*ḥaḥ* *al-muslimīn*).¹¹

Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī then responded:

Abu l-Qāsim, God cannot be deceived! Tell me, do you not choose the surveyors of land (*mussāb*) and send them out to do their work and advise them to examine carefully? So they leave and they increase by pen one or two in ten [of the survey] and they come to you with these falsifications (*tazāwīr*) and you reduce them. Then you make up the payment registers (*jarā’id*) and you give them to the tax collector (*mustakbrīj*) and you say to him, “I wish that the money be paid in full on such and such a day with the assessor (*jahbadh*). If it is not so, I will nail your hands to your feet.”¹²

After Ibn Abī ‘Allān agreed to this description, al-Jubbā’ī continued, stating:

Then the tax collector (*mustakbrīj*) leaves and he dispatches the cavalry and the infantry, the messengers and those who urge payment. He beats, strikes and fetters [people] acting according to your orders. If you said, “Release a man, or postpone that which he owes,” he [the tax collector] would accept your command. If you did not grant him pardon, he [the tax collector] would pursue him [the man] until he delivered the money.¹³

Ibn Abī ‘Allān again agreed. Thus Abū ‘Alī continued:

And the money is received by the assessor and you put forth the contracts (*ḥikāk*) from your *dirwān* with your distinguishing marks (*‘alāmāt*) upon them.¹⁴

Leuven 2004, pp. 116-17. For a complete translation, see D.S. Margoliouth, *The Table-Talk of a Mesopotamian Judge*. Translated from the original Arabic, London 1922, pp. 117-20. I would like to thank Dr. Bray for alerting me to the presence of this passage.

⁹ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, p. 222: *yā Abā ‘Alī atakhāfu ‘alayya mim mā anā fībi shay’an?*

¹⁰ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, p. 222. For the various scents associated with paradise in the Qur’ān, see Qur’ān 76:5, “camphor” (*kāfir*), Qur’ān 76:18, “ginger” (*zanjabīl*), and the more general (*rayḥān*) of Qur’ān 56:89. See Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton 1987, pp. 76-77 (ginger) and p. 255 (camphor). See also Devin J. Stewart, “Smell,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. 4, pp. 62-64.

¹¹ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, p. 222.

¹² Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, pp. 222-23.

¹³ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, pp. 222-23.

¹⁴ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, p. 223.

Finally, al-Jubbāʿī stated:

So what part remains of this action (*ʿamal*) for which you did not bear responsibility, were [not] liable for its damage, and did [not] take upon your own self as sin? Repent to God (*tub ilā Allāh*) for if you do not, you shall [surely be] destroyed! Give up the work on behalf of the government (*taṣarruf*) and take care of the concern for the hereafter!¹⁵

After this stern warning, Ibn Abī ʿAllān reported how al-Jubbāʿī began to exhort and preach to him until he broke down in tears. In his preaching to Ibn Abī ʿAllān, al-Jubbāʿī recalled the story of the repentance of the earlier Muʿtazilī scholar Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb (d. 236/850) who had similarly worked on behalf of the government and attained a wealth “which came close to that of the viziers” and then repented.¹⁶

Having heard this account of the actions of Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb, Ibn Abī ʿAllān was convinced. He stated:

His speech influenced me and I worked toward repentance and renouncing work on behalf of the government (*ʿamiltu ʿalā al-tawba wa-tark al-taṣarruf*). I continued rectifying my affair on account of that for a while until it was possible for me to remove [myself] from the [service of the] government. Then, I repented, and I no longer returned to such work.¹⁷

Another intriguing case of repentance from the 4th/10th century is that of the Būyid *amīr* of Baghdad, Muʿizz al-Dawla (d. 356/966).¹⁸ According to two reports, one related by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Hamdānī (d. 520/1127) in the *Takmilat tāriḫ al-Ṭabarī*, and another by al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101) in the *Sharḥ ʿUyūn al-masāʿil*, the *amīr* repented at the end of his life in the presence of the famed Baṣran Muʿtazilī scholar, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī (d. 369/979).¹⁹

Al-Hamdānī stated that in the year 356/966, when Muʿizz al-Dawla was on campaign against the ruler of the Marsh (*baṭīḥa*), Imrān b. Shāhīn (d. 369/979), he suddenly fell ill with an infection. After entrusting his troops to his Turkish chamberlain, Subuktaḡin (d. 364/974), the *amīr* rushed back to Baghdad where

¹⁵ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nisbawār*, vol. 1, p. 223.

¹⁶ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nisbawār*, vol. 1, p. 223: *kāna yataqalladu kibār aʿmāl al-sulṭān wa-kānat niʿmatuhū tuqārību niʿmat al-wuzarāʾ*. For a detailed analysis of the story of the repentance of Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb, see Appendix I below.

¹⁷ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nisbawār*, vol. 1, p. 224.

¹⁸ See K.V. Zetterstēen and H. Busse, “Muʿizz al-Dawla,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, vol. 7, p. 484.

¹⁹ Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Hamdānī, *Takmilat tāriḫ al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Yūsuf Kanʿān, Beirut 1961, pp. 192-93; al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ʿUyūn al-masāʿil*, MS Ṣanʿā, al-Maktaba al-Gharbiyya, *ilm al-kalām* no. 99, f. 90a. For Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī, see Josef van Ess, “Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, Supplement, Fascicules 1-2, p. 12. The repentance is also mentioned in two other sources without reference to Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī, see Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi l-tāriḫ* 1-15, ed. C.J. Tornberg, Leiden 1867-76 [repr. Beirut 1995], vol. 8, p. 575, and Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam wa-taʿāqub al-himam*, ed. Sayyid Kasrawī Ḥasan, Beirut 2003, vol. 5, p. 350.

he appointed his son, ‘Izz al-Dawla Bakhtiyār (d. 367/978), as ruler. Realizing that his final days were upon him, he summoned Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī to his palace.

Both al-Jishumī and al-Hamdānī report that the purpose of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī’s being summoned to the palace was the repentance of Mu‘izz al-Dawla. Al-Hamdānī states that the *amīr* both “manifested repentance” (*aḏhara al-tawba*) and “repented at his [Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī’s] hand.”²⁰ However, al-Jishumī states, more precisely, that Mu‘izz al-Dawla summoned the shaykh Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī in order “to dictate to him the conditions of repentance.”²¹

Al-Hamdānī describes the circumstances surrounding the *amīr*’s repentance. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī was accompanied by another Mu‘tazilī scholar, Abu l-Qāsim al-Wāsiṭī.²² The two men entered the palace of Mu‘izz al-Dawla and stayed with the *amīr* during his final hours.²³ However, neither scholar desired to pray in the *amīr*’s residence and went to a mosque which was located outside its gates. When queried by the *amīr* about the reasons for this action, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī answered, “prayer in a place which has been unlawfully taken is not valid for me.”²⁴

Mu‘izz al-Dawla was also reported to have asked the *shaykh* Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī for his opinion of the caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) and the companions (*ṣaḥāba*). Abū ‘Abd Allāh mentioned their early merit (*dhakara sābiqatuhum*) and the historical tradition that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/660) had offered his daughter Umm Kulthūm to ‘Umar in marriage.²⁵ According to al-Hamdānī’s account the *amīr* was amazed by this (*ista‘zama dhālika*) stating, “I have never heard that before.”²⁶ As part of his repentance, Mu‘izz al-Dawla then

²⁰ Al-Hamdānī, *Takmila*, p. 192: *tāba ‘alā yadibī*.

²¹ Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-masā’il*, f. 89b: *laqqanabu sharā’it al-tawba*. Cf. Miskawayh, *Tajārīb al-umam*, vol. 5, p. 351, “He [Mu‘izz al-Dawla] summoned the most important theologians and jurists (*wujūh al-mutakallimīn wa-l-fuqahā’*) and asked them about the validity of repentance (*ḥaqīqat al-tawba*) and whether or not it would be correct for him. They gave him the opinion of its correctness, and instructed him in that which he should say and do” (*aftawbu bi-ṣiḥhatihī wa-laqqanūhu mā yajib an yaqūla wa-yaf‘ala*).

²² Abu l-Qāsim al-Wāsiṭī was a known associate and student of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī, see al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ṭanjī, Beirut 1992, p. 201; van Ess, “Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī,” p. 12.

²³ Al-Hamdānī, *Takmila*, p. 193.

²⁴ Al-Hamdānī, *Takmila*, p. 193: *al-ṣalāt fī l-dār al-maghṣūba ‘indī lā taṣiḥḥu*. Cf. Abu l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-Mu‘tamad fī uṣūl al-fiqh* 1-2, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamid Allāh, Damascus 1965, vol. 1, pp. 195-200, where the prohibition is discussed for the later Mu‘tazilī and Zaydī Shī‘ites.

²⁵ See Wilferd Madelung, *The succession to Muḥammad. A study of the early Caliphate*, Cambridge 1995, p. 67, citing Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* 1-9, ed. Eduard Sachau [et al.], Leiden 1905-40, vol. 8, pp. 339-40, and p. 79, citing al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* 1-15, ed. M.J. de Goeje [et al.], Leiden 1879-1901, vol. 1, p. 2732.

²⁶ Al-Hamdānī, *Takmila*, p. 193: *mā samī‘tu ḥādīthā qaṭṭu*.

gave away the majority of his money as alms, manumitted his slaves and resolved outstanding complaints against the government.²⁷

The historian Abū Shujāʿ al-Rūdhrawārī (d. 488/1095), in his account of the events of the year 373/983, described the repentance of the nephew of Muʿizz al-Dawla, Muʿayyid al-Dawla (d. 373/984), the *amīr* of Rayy since 366/976.²⁸ Recognizing that the *amīr* was suffering from the symptoms of diphtheria (*khawānīq*) and did not have much longer to live, his vizier, the famed Muʿtazilī scholar and patron, al-Ṣāhib Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbbād al-Ṭalaqānī (d. 385/995) came to his bedside to counsel him.

Considering the future of the Būyid dynasty, Ibn ʿAbbād hoped to make sure that the transfer of power in Rayy occurred without incident. He advised Muʿayyid al-Dawla to “delegate his command to one whom he believed would be trusted by the army, until such a time as God would grant his recovery and his return to the supervision of the affairs of his kingdom.”²⁹ The vizier explained his rationale stating that if Muʿayyid al-Dawla acted in this way, when he recovered from this disease, his action would be considered an “appeal for aid which had no harm attached to it.”³⁰ Muʿayyid al-Dawla answered his vizier curtly, “I am not concerned with that. Kingship has no value [when compared to] the end of a man[’s life] in such a state as I am. Do whatever occurs to you [to be right]!”³¹

As he came to the “brink of death” (*ashfā*), Ibn ʿAbbād then advised him:

My Lord, repent for all that you have entered into! Disavow the funds of whose lawfulness and licit provenance you are uncertain. When God raises you up and grants pardon to you, certify their expenditure for the [appropriate] expense. Resolve every [complaint of] injustice (*zulāma*) you know of and are capable of resolving.³²

Of similar detail and interest are multiple reports surrounding the penitence of Ibn ʿAbbād, the Būyid vizier of Rayy referred to above. During his first vizierate

²⁷ Al-Hamdānī, *Takmila*, p. 193: *tasaddaqa Muʿizz al-Dawla bi-akthar mālibī wa-aʿtaqa mamālikahū wa-radda shayʿan kathīran min al-mazālim*. Muʿizz al-Dawla died on 17 Rabiʿ II 356/1 April 967 and was buried in his palace. His body was exhumed two years later and reburied in the *maqābir Quraysh* [al-Kāzimayn] upon the orders of his son ʿIzz al-Dawla Bakhtiyār, see al-Hamdānī, *Takmila*, p. 203; John J. Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334 H./945 to 403H./1012. Shaping Institutions for the Future*, Leiden 2003, p. 50.

²⁸ Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, vol. 6 of Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam wa-taʿāqub al-himam*, ed. Sayyid Kasrawī Ḥasan, Beirut 2003, p. 57.

²⁹ Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, p. 58: *law ʿahida amīr al-umarāʾ ʿahdan ilā man yarāhu yaskun ilayhi al-jund ilā an yatafaddala llāh bi-ʿāfīyatihī wa-qiyāmihī ilā tadbīr mamlakatihī*.

³⁰ Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, p. 58: *li-kāna dhālika min al-istizhār alladhī lā ḍarar fihi*.

³¹ Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, p. 58: *anā fi shughl ʿan hādihā wa-mā li-l-mulk qadr māʾa nthāʾ al-insān ilā mithl mā anā fībi fa-ifʾalū mā badā lakum*.

³² Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, p. 58: *tub yā mawlānā min kull mā dakhalta fībi wa-tabarraʾ min hādhibī l-amwāl allatī lasta ʿalā ibīqa min ʿibihā wa-ḥuṣūlibā min ḥillihā wa-ʿataqid matā aqāmaka llāh wa-ʿāfāka ṣarfahā fi wujūbihā wa-rudda kull zulāma taʾrifuhā wa-taqdiru ʿalā raddihā*.

to the *amīr* Mu'ayyid al-Dawla from 366-373/976-983, Ibn 'Abbād, on at least one occasion, not only repented but also constructed what he termed his "house of repentance."³³ According to a statement related by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī on the authority of the courtier al-Khath'amī, Ibn 'Abbād "built a house, which he called the 'house of repentance' in derision, mockery and sarcasm."³⁴

Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1228), and al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) provide a more detailed report concerning Ibn 'Abbād's "house of repentance."³⁵ According to this account, related by a certain Zayd b. Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥanafī, when Ibn 'Abbād "desired to dictate *ḥadīth* during his vizierate," (*'azama 'alā l-implā' wa-kāna ḥīna'idhin fi l-wizāra*), "he went out one day wearing a long robe and with a turban wrapped beneath his neck in accordance with the dress of the learned men."³⁶ Al-Ṣāḥib then said: "You have learned of my long standing in knowledge." They conceded this. Then he said:

You have learned that I am involved in this affair. All that I have spent from my youth until now has been from the money of my father and my grandfather. Despite all of this, I do not forsake the consequences. Bear witness to me just as I call God to witness and I call you to witness that I am repentant to God from every sin that I have committed.³⁷

After this, the report continues:

Ibn 'Abbād took for himself a house, which he called the house of repentance, in which he remained for a week in that [condition] and then took the signatures of the jurists as to the validity of his repentance.³⁸

Thereafter, Ibn 'Abbād exited the house and sat in order to recite *ḥadīth*. The report concludes by stating that "many people attended such that for every person

³³ Al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, p. 169: *dār al-tawba; bayt al-tawba*. The term *dār al-tawba* may refer to this world where repentance is possible in contrast to the afterlife.

³⁴ Al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, p. 169: *thumma yabnī dāran yusammihā dār al-tawba isti-hzā'an sukhrīyatan wa-sukhnata 'ayn*. Al-Khath'amī, the scribe of the *amīr* and *ṣāhib al-jaysb* 'Alī b. Kāma (d. 374/984), provided much of al-Tawḥīdī's information on events in Rayy prior to his own arrival in 367/977, see al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, p. 142. Given that al-Tawḥīdī came to Rayy in 367/977 and relied upon al-Khath'amī for this report, the event can, most likely, be dated to the beginning of Ibn 'Abbād's rule in Rayy in 366/976.

³⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam fi tārikh al-umam wa-l-mulūk* ed. Na'im Zarzūr, Beirut 1992, vol. 14, p. 376; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, Beirut 2002, vol. 2, p. 694; al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, ed. Hellmut Ritter [et al.], Wiesbaden 1973, vol. 9, p. 128. The report is also found in a slightly different form in Ibn al-Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, Cairo 1929-32, vol. 11, p. 315.

³⁶ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntazam*, vol. 14, p. 376: *wa-kharaja yawman mutahannikan mutaṭallisan bi-ziyy ahl al-'ilm*.

³⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntazam*, vol. 14, p. 376: *qad 'alimtum qidamī fi l-'ilm fa-aqarrū labu bi-dhālika, wa-anā mutalabbis bi-hādihā l-amr wa-jamī mā anfaqtuhu min ṣighari ilā waqt hādihā min mā al wa-jaddī, wa-mā'a hādihā lā akhlū min tab'iyyāt isbbadū 'alayya wa-ushhidu llāha wa-ushhidukum annī tā'ibun min kull dhanb adhnabtuhu*.

³⁸ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntazam*, vol. 14, p. 376: *ittakhadha baytan wa-sammāhu bayt al-tawba wa-labitha usbū'an 'alā dhālika thumma akhadha kbuṭūṭ al-fuqahā' bi-ṣiḥbat tawbatihī*.

taking dictation, six others were joined to him, each one informing the other and the people wrote down [the traditions], even the *qāḍī* ‘Abd al-Jabbār.”³⁹

The most curious report about Ibn ‘Abbād’s repentance, one that has drawn much attention from modern scholarship, concerns *qāḍī* ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Asadābādī’s (d. 415/1025) famous refusal to pronounce funeral prayers upon the vizier.⁴⁰ According to the version of events recorded by al-Rūdhrawārī, the *qāḍī* would not pronounce the funeral prayers upon al-Šāhib b. ‘Abbād because the vizier did not repent prior to his death stating, “I do not believe it fit that I pronounce the funeral prayers for him because he died without a repentance manifest for him.”⁴¹

In the *Faḍl al-‘itizāl wa-ṭabaqāt al-Mu‘tazila* the *qāḍī* ‘Abd al-Jabbār likewise relates several accounts of the repentance of government officials. According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the famed Mu‘tazilī scholar Abu l-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Ka‘bī (d. 319/931) who had been employed for a time in the Sāmānid administration as vizier for Aḥmad b. Sahl b. Hishām al-Marwazī, the governor of Khurāsān for the Sāmānid *amīr* Naṣr b. Aḥmad II (r. 301-331/913-942) eventually repented of his service on behalf of the government.⁴² ‘Abd al-Jabbār stated that, “at the beginning of his service for the government he [viz., Abu l-Qāsim al-Balkhī] would write contracts and [...] month after month and year after year. When he desisted from that [viz. government service] and repented, he followed it up and rectified it [viz. his affair]”⁴³

³⁹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntazam*, vol. 14, p. 376: *ḥaḍara l-khalq al-kathīr, wa-kānā l-mustamli l-wāḥid yandāf ilayhi sitta kull yuballighu ṣāhibahu fa-kataba l-nās hattā l-qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār.*

⁴⁰ For the most recent attempt to solve the problem of the relationship between Ibn ‘Abbād and *qāḍī* ‘Abd al-Jabbār with references to much of the literature on the topic, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, “The Rise and Fall of Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37 (2005), pp. 3-18. According to Reynolds, the repentance of Ibn ‘Abbād cited by Ibn al-Jawzī, Yāqūt, and al-Šafādī, occurred at the “end of the vizier’s life” [p. 10]. However, he adduces no evidence for his claim, other than to cite Ibn al-Jawzī who gives no indication of the date except that it occurred during his vizierate in Rayy [i.e., from 366/976-385/995]. Since the *dār al-tawba* is referred to as well by al-Tawḥīdī on the authority of al-Khath‘amī in the *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn*, p. 169, the report most likely dates to the year 366/976 and can in any event be no later than 371/981 when al-Tawḥīdī departed from Rayy. Assuming both reports concern the same event, which is probable given the peculiarity of the “house of repentance”, it is more plausible to suggest an early date in Ibn ‘Abbād’s vizierate for both.

⁴¹ Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, p. 158: *lā arā l-tarabḥum ‘alayhi li-annahu māta ‘an ghayr tawba zaharat ‘alayhi.* Cf. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi l-tārīkh*, vol. 9, p. 110; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-udabā’*, Beirut 1991, vol. 2, p. 282; Ibn al-Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, vol. 11, p. 315.

⁴² See Josef van Ess, “Abū’l-Qasem al-Balkī al-Ka‘bī, ‘Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. Maḥmūd,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, pp. 359-62.

⁴³ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-‘itizāl wa-ṭabaqāt al-Mu‘tazila,” in *Faḍl al-‘itizāl wa-ṭabaqāt al-Mu‘tazila*, ed. Fu‘ād Sayyid, Tunis [1974], p. 297: *fi qbāl tawliyat al-sultān kāna yaktubu l-bay‘āt wa ... shabran shabran wa-sanatan sanatan fa-lammā ‘adala ‘an dhālika wa-tāba tatabba‘a dhālika fa-aṣlahahu.* The editor, Fu‘ād Sayyid, noted that the word following *al-bay‘āt* was corrupt. Cf. al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-masā’il*, ff. 64b-65a.

Similarly, ‘Abd al-Jabbār notes in his account of the famed Qur’ānic exegete and scholar Abū Muslim Muḥammad b. Baḥr al-İşfahānī (d. 322/933) that he had also repented. According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Abū Muslim al-İşfahānī “used to work for the government time and again” (*wa-qaḍ kāna yataşarrafu lil-sultān ḥālan ba‘da ḥāl*) until prior to his death when “he left government service and repented.”⁴⁴

Finally, ‘Abd al-Jabbār relates how Abū ‘Alī (d. 345/956), the son of the İşfahānī Mu‘tazilī Abū Muḥammad b. Ḥamdān, had come to him seeking repentance.⁴⁵ According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Abū ‘Alī “was similar to his father in the practice of the doctrine but used to work on behalf of the government.”⁴⁶ ‘Abd al-Jabbār reports that Abū ‘Alī “then came to me in the end [of life/work?] and asked me to dictate the papers of repentance, so I did.”⁴⁷

II. Comparative analysis of the cases of repentance

The eleven historical reports recount seven cases of repentance occurring within the span of approximately seventy years. The penitent officials included *amīrs*, viziers, as well as lower-ranking members of the local administration of cities. Those who repented had worked on behalf of the ‘Abbāsīd, Sāmānīd, and Būyīd dynasties. In several cases, the penitent individual was widely esteemed for his knowledge of Mu‘tazilī thought prior to repentance. In other cases, it is possible that the official’s reputation for Mu‘tazilī thought was enhanced by his repentance. In two cases, the official’s adherence to Mu‘tazilī doctrine was not known specifically from other sources or otherwise remained unclear.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-i‘tizāl,” p. 323: *wa-māta wa-huwa tārik li-l-taşarruf tā‘ib*. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 299, where details of Abū Muslim al-İşfahānī’s biography were first listed. For Abū Muslim al-İşfahānī, see Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, p. 250. See also Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-udabā’*, vol. 5, pp. 239-41. Abū Muslim was an official in the province of Fārs. He served in the *dīwān al-kharāj wa-l-ḍīyā’* during the caliphate of al-Muqtadir (r. 295-320/908-932). He also acted for approximately one month in 321/933 as the chief administrator of İşfahān, before losing his position with the seizure of the city by ‘Alī b. Būya (the future Būyīd *amīr* ‘Imād al-Dawla (d. 338/949) in Dhu l-Qa‘da/ October-November of that year.

⁴⁵ The repentance probably occurred during the year 345-6/956-7 when ‘Abd al-Jabbār was in İşfahān, see Wilferd Madelung, “‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Asadābādī,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, pp. 116-18.

⁴⁶ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-i‘tizāl,” p. 322: *kāna ... ‘alā miṭhl ṭariqatibi fi l-madbbah lākinnahu kāna yataşarrafu ma‘a l-sultān*.

⁴⁷ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-i‘tizāl,” p. 322: *thumma jā’anī ākhiran wa-sa‘alanī imlā’ awrāq fi l-tawba fa-fa‘altu*. Cf. al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-masā’il*, f. 71b.

⁴⁸ Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-masā’il*, f. 90a, reported that Mu‘izz al-Dawla had during his life promoted the dialecticians and had inclined towards Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī in particular. However, the *amīr*’s own adherence to Mu‘tazilī tenets does not appear to be documented in other sources. Likewise the *amīr* Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla is not stated to have specifically followed Mu‘tazilī doctrine, despite his known association with Mu‘tazilī scholars such as al-

Historical accounts of the repentance of government officials in the 4th/10th century were written both by scholars familiar with the school's doctrines and in reports of scholars without such connections.⁴⁹ While it is possible that in some of the cases, the act of repentance itself or significant details of the repentances were products of attempts either to enhance a scholar's posthumous reputation or to locate a precedent for the practice of repentance in the past, the diverse nature and quantity of the source materials argues against such an explanation for all cases.

It is possible to gain a sense of their shared features by comparing the seven cases. Table 1, "Repentances of Government Officials in the 4th/10th century", summarizes relevant details of each case. The succeeding four sections comment upon the information presented in tabular form.

Reasons for repentance

Of the seven cases of repentance, four implicitly suggest or explicitly state that the reason for the official's repentance was related to the service that had been previously performed on behalf of the government. Three of the four cases identify the act of repentance with the phrase *al-taṣarruf ma'a l-sulṭān*, "work on behalf of the government authority."⁵⁰ Indeed al-Tanūkhī's report relating to the repentance of Ibn Abī 'Allān specifies that government service was not in itself wrong; rather it was the possible coercive and corrupt actions involved in the assessment and collection of taxes that was sinful.⁵¹

Monetary issues likewise appear to have been important in two cases. In the report concerning Mu'ayyid al-Dawla's repentance, Ibn 'Abbād urges the *amīr* to repent generally for "all that he had entered into," imploring him to disavow the funds of whose lawfulness and licit provenance he was uncertain.⁵² Likewise, at the time of his own repentance, Ibn 'Abbād went out of his way to declare that

Sāhib b. 'Abbād and 'Abd al-Jabbār. However, as Prof. Madelung suggests, the early Būyid *amīrs* inclined to Zaydī beliefs which implied Mu'tazilī doctrine in theology (Wilferd Madelung, personal communication, February 2006).

⁴⁹ Three of the scholars who related reports of repentance were known to have studied Mu'tazilī doctrine: 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Hākim al-Jishumī, and Abū 'Alī al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī. For a recent assessment of the nature of the Mu'tazilī beliefs of al-Tanūkhī, see Bray, "Practical Mu'tazilism. The Case of al-Tanūkhī," pp. 122-24.

⁵⁰ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, p. 224 [Ibn Abī 'Allān]: *al-taṣarruf*; 'Abd al-Jabbār, "Faḍl al-i'tizāl," p. 322 [Abū 'Alī b. Ḥamdān]: *kāna yataṣarrufu ma'a l-sulṭān*; p. 323 [Abū Muslim al-Ḥafḥānī]: *wa-māta wa-hwāwa tārik al-taṣarruf tā'ib*. For a similar expression, see Wilferd Madelung, "A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on the Legality of Working for the Government (*Mas'ala fi 'l-amal ma'a 'l-sulṭān*)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980), pp. 18-31.

⁵¹ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, p. 223.

⁵² Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, p. 58.

Table 1: *Repentances of Government Officials in the 4th/10th Century*

<i>Penitent official and Date of death</i>	<i>Date of Repentance</i>	<i>Reason for repentance [stated or implied]</i>	<i>Time of repentance</i>	<i>Scholars associated with repentance</i>	<i>Documented acts of repentance</i>
1. Ibn Abi ‘Allān (d. ca. 340/950)	Prior to 303/915	Work on behalf of the government	End of work	Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī	None
2. Abu l-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d. 319/931)	ca. 310/922	Work on behalf of the government	End of work	None	None
3. Abū Muslim al-Īṣfahānī (d. 322/933)	ca. 322/933	Work on behalf of the government	End of life	None	None
4. Abū ‘Alī b. Ḥamdān (d. ca. 345/956)	ca. 345/956	Work on behalf of the government	End of work/life?	‘Abd al-Jabbār	Document
5. Mu‘izz al-Dawla (d. 356/966)	356/966	Beliefs, Monetary concerns	End of life	Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī	Document, resolution of complaints, the donation of charity and the manumission of slaves
6. Al-Šāḥib b. ‘Abbād (d. 385/995)	366/976	Monetary concerns	End of neither life nor work	Unnamed jurists (<i>fuqahā’</i>) [‘Abd al-Jabbār]	Document
7. Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla (d. 373/983)	373/983	Monetary concerns	End of life	Al-Šāḥib b. ‘Abbād	Resolution of complaints

all of the money that he had spent on the scholars (*abl al-‘ilm*) was from funds he had “inherited from his father and grandfather.”⁵³

In contrast to the other six cases, the repentance of Mu‘izz al-Dawla appears to have had some relation to his beliefs. In the account given by al-Hamdānī, Mu‘izz al-Dawla queries Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī on questions of doctrine such as the early merit of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and other Companions of the Prophet.⁵⁴ This question was related to the Shī‘ite beliefs of Mu‘izz al-Dawla, for

⁵³ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam*, vol. 14, p. 376.

⁵⁴ The account of al-Hamdānī reported that the *amīr* asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī about the early merit (*sābiqa*) of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and the Companions (*al-ṣaḥāba*). It is un-

the *amīr* was known to have displayed a personal regard for the future Zaydī *imām* Ibn al-Dāʿī (d. 360/970).⁵⁵ By contrast, al-Jishumī implies that the *amīr*'s repentance was evidence of his belief in Muʿtazilī doctrine stating that Muʿizz al-Dawla had promoted the dialecticians (*abl al-kalām*) – Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī in particular – earlier in his life.⁵⁶

Time of repentance

Four of the seven acts of repentance were made by an official as he realized that the end of his life was near. Two more officials, Ibn Abī ʿAllān and Abu l-Qāsim al-Balkhī, repented at the termination of their work on behalf of the government and neither individual was reported to have returned to administrative service after his repentance. One individual, Ibn ʿAbbād, repented prior to the end of his life yet continued to work on behalf of the government.

Muʿtazilī scholars associated with the cases of repentance

The seven cases of repentance all involve at least one scholar generally known as an adherent to Muʿtazilī doctrine. In four, prominent Muʿtazilī scholars are described by the reports as being involved in the act of repentance itself. In the account of the repentance of Muʿizz al-Dawla related by al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī “dictated to the *amīr* the conditions of repentance.”⁵⁷ According to al-Hamdānī, Muʿizz al-Dawla is said to have “repented at the hand” of al-Baṣrī.⁵⁸ Similarly, Abū ʿAlī b. Ḥamdān asked ʿAbd al-Jabbār, “to dictate a few folios concerning *taṭwba*.”⁵⁹ In contrast, Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʿī and Ibn ʿAbbād appear to have exhorted others to repent, but are not reported to have actually aided in the process of repentance. Finally, in the case of the repentance of Ibn ʿAbbād, unnamed scholars (*fuqahāʾ*) signed a document certifying the validity of his repentance. Although ʿAbd al-Jabbār is identified as being present during Ibn

clear from the report exactly what were the beliefs of the *amīr*, for they were left unstated. See van Ess, “Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī,” p. 12, where al-Baṣrī is stated to have endorsed moderate Zaydī positions but to have repudiated *rafʿ*. On the issue of the status of the Companions of the Prophet in Zaydī thought generally, see Etan Kohlberg, “Some Zaydī Views on the Companions of the Prophet,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976), pp. 91-98.

⁵⁵ Wilferd Madelung, “Abū Ishāq al-Ṣābi on the Alids of Ṭabaristān and Gilān,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 26 (1967), p. 48, stated that Muʿizz al-Dawla had received Abū ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Dāʿī and kissed his hand during an illness in the hope of a recovery.

⁵⁶ Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ʿUyūn al-masāʾil*, f. 89b: *kāna yuqaddimu abl al-kalām wa-kāna yamūlu ilā l-shaykh Abī ʿAbd Allāh*.

⁵⁷ Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ʿUyūn al-masāʾil*, f. 89b: *laqqanahu sharāʾit al-tawba*.

⁵⁸ Al-Hamdānī, *Takmilat tārikh al-Ṭabari*, p. 192: *tāba ʿalā yadihi*.

⁵⁹ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-iʿtizāl,” p. 322: *imlāʾ awrāq fi l-tawba*.

‘Abbād’s recitation of *ḥadīth* after his repentance, his role in the actual repentance of Ibn ‘Abbād is not specified.⁶⁰

Documented acts of repentance

Historical accounts describe three actions undertaken by officials at the time of their repentance: the dictation and display of documents, the redress of grievances (*radd al-mazālim*), the donation of charity and the manumission of slaves.

Dictation and display of documents of repentance

In three of the cases, namely those of Mu‘izz al-Dawla, Abū ‘Alī b. Ḥamdān and Ibn ‘Abbād, historical accounts refer to the preparation of documents at the time of their repentance. For Mu‘izz al-Dawla and Abū ‘Alī b. Ḥamdān, a Mu‘tazilī scholar dictated the text of the repentance documents to them.⁶¹ Indeed al-Jishumī describes how the scholar Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī aided Mu‘izz al-Dawla by relating the *sharā’iṭ al-tawba* “conditions of repentance,” determining the exact statements and actions necessary for his proper penitence.⁶² Ibn ‘Abbād, however, appears to have written the text of his repentance document without guidance.

In addition to the preparation of documents, several of the cases of repentance appear to have been made publicly known. In the account of the repentance of Mu‘izz al-Dawla related by al-Hamdānī, the *amīr* is reported to have “manifested repentance” (*azhara l-tawba*).⁶³ Similarly, in the famed incident of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s refusal to state the formula of *tarabḥḥum* at the funeral of Ibn ‘Abbād, the *qāḍī*’s complaint was that Ibn ‘Abbād died without a repentance “manifest for him.”⁶⁴ The repentance of Ibn ‘Abbād was reportedly part of a public ceremony, one in which the vizier read aloud a text of repentance that he had written to a large audience, after which a document testifying to his repentance was signed by a group of jurists.⁶⁵

Redress of grievances (mazālim)

Two of the cases mentioned the “redress of grievances” (*radd al-mazālim*) against the government. In the account of Mu‘izz al-Dawla, he was said to have “re-

⁶⁰ Reynolds, “The Rise and Fall of Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar,” p. 10.

⁶¹ Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-masā’il*, f. 89b; ‘Abd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-‘tizāl,” p. 322.

⁶² Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-masā’il*, f. 89b.

⁶³ Al-Hamdānī, *Takmila*, p. 192. In al-Hamdānī’s account the display of repentance comes prior to the summons of the scholar Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī.

⁶⁴ Al-Rūdhrawarī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, p. 157: *min ghayr tawba zaharat ‘alayhi*.

⁶⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam*, vol. 14, p. 376.

solved a great amount of grievances (*mazālim*)” at the time of his repentance.⁶⁶ Similarly Ibn ‘Abbād urges Mu‘ayyid al-Dawla to “Resolve every [complaint of] injustice (*zulāma*) which you know of and are capable of resolving.”⁶⁷ In both cases, the implied action appears to be the restitution of property unjustly seized by the government.

Giving of charity (ṣadaqa) and manumission of slaves

Upon his repentance, Mu‘izz al-Dawla is reported to have given away the majority of his money as charity and to have manumitted his slaves.⁶⁸

III. The Mu‘tazilī doctrine of Repentance (tawba) in the 4th/10th century

Early discussions concerning *tawba* amongst the Mu‘tazila issued from a variety of pietistic, legal and theological concerns. The origins of the doctrine date from the first half of the 2nd/8th century with Wāṣil b. ‘Atā’ (d. ca. 131/748-9).⁶⁹ Attempts at systematization of the doctrine can be seen in statements attributed to the Mu‘tazilī scholar Bishr b. al-Mu‘tamir (d. 210/825) in the works of Abu l-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt (d. ca. 300/912) and Abu l-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Ka‘bī (d. 319/931).⁷⁰ Influenced by the followers of the Baṣran pietist Bakr b. Ukht ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd (d. ca. end of the 2nd/8th c.) who made repentance an important part of their teachings on piety (*zuhd*), Bishr b. al-Mu‘tamir articulated a particular theory that gave a rational direction to the specific Mu‘tazilī doctrine.⁷¹ This theologian is said to have believed that if an individual again committed a major sin (*kabīra*) for which he had earlier made repentance, he would be held accountable for both the prior and current act.⁷²

During the 3rd/9th century several other Mu‘tazilī scholars further refined thinking on the topic of repentance. Abu l-Hudhayl b. al-‘Allāf (d. 227/841) dis-

⁶⁶ Al-Hamdāni, *Takmila*, p. 193: *wa-radda shay’an kathīran min al-mazālim*.

⁶⁷ Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajārib al-umam*, p. 58: *wa-rudd kull zulāma ta’rifuhā wa-taqdiru ‘alā raddihā*. For the meaning of *mazālim* generally, see J.S. Nielsen, “Mazālim,” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*. New Edition, vol. 6, p. 933.

⁶⁸ Al-Hamdāni, *Takmila*, p. 193: *wa-taṣaddaqa Mu‘izz al-Dawla bi-akthar mālibī wa-a’taqa mamālīkabhū*.

⁶⁹ Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, pp. 579-90; For the doctrine of Wāṣil b. ‘Atā’ on repentance, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 267. Wāṣil b. ‘Atā’ was also alleged to have written a work on repentance, entitled *Fi l-tawba*, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 263.

⁷⁰ Al-Khayyāt, *al-Intiṣār wa-l-radd ‘alā Ibn al-Rāwandī l-mulhid*, Cairo n.d., p. 114.; cf. Abu l-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī al-Balkhī, “Bāb dhikr al-Mu‘tazila min Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin,” in *Faḍl al-‘itizāl wa-tabaqāt al-Mu‘tazila*, ed. Fu‘ād Sayyid, Tunis [1974], pp. 72-73.

⁷¹ Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, pp. 108-11.

⁷² Al-Khayyāt, *Intiṣār*, p. 114: *qawḥ Bishr al-ma’rif inna l-‘abd idhā atā kabīratan fa-qad istabaqqa l-wa’d mā lam yatub, fa-idhā huwa tāba fa-qad istabaqqa l-wa’d bi-l-janna mā lam yu’awwid dhanban kabīran, fa-in huwa ‘āwada dhanban kabīran ukhidha bi-l-awwal wa-l-ākhir*.

tinguished between the intention to repent and the importance of demonstrating one’s change of heart. He also taught that it was not necessary to repent of lesser sins (*ṣaghā’ir*), so long as major sins (*kabā’ir*) are avoided.⁷³ Ja‘far b. al-Mubashshir (d. 234/849) introduced the concept of “annulment” (*iḥbāt*) whereby one’s sins annulled one’s good deeds.⁷⁴ By contrast, ‘Abbād b. Sulaymān (d. after 260/874) taught that one’s good deeds would not be beneficial so long as one did not repent for a particular sin.⁷⁵

While it is difficult to trace the systematic development of the doctrines, by the early 4th/10th century, the Mu‘tazilī scholars Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī (d. 303/915) and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī (d. 321/933) both devoted lengthy discussions to the subject of repentance.⁷⁶ ‘Abd al-Jabbār discussed the doctrines of repentance in volume 14 of his *summa* of Mu‘tazilī doctrine, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl*, written after 360/970. Mānakdīm Aḥmad b. Abī Hāshim al-Qazwīnī (d. 425/1035) in his commentary on the *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa* of ‘Abd al-Jabbār provided further elaboration of certain salient points of the doctrine.⁷⁷ An anonymous letter falsely attributed to al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (d. 246/860) similarly describes the doctrine of *tawba*.⁷⁸

Definition of Repentance

Repentance is defined by ‘Abd al-Jabbār as “the name of the action which removes punishment and deserved blame.”⁷⁹ While repentance differs in name from an apology (*i’tidhār*) both words are considered by him to belong to the

⁷³ Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 3, p. 289.

⁷⁴ Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, p. 64.

⁷⁵ Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, p. 39.

⁷⁶ See Daniel Gimaret, “Matériaux pour une bibliographie des Ğubbā’ī,” *Journal Asiatique* 264 (1976), pp. 277-332, see esp. p. 303 [*Kitāb al-Abwāb* of Abū Hāshim], and p. 313 [*Kitāb al-Tawba*]. Both titles are cited in ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl*, ed. Muṣṭafā Hilmī [et al.], vol. 14, pp. 325 and 366, respectively. Abū Mūsā ‘Isā b. Ṣabiḥ al-Murdār (d. 226/841) was also said to have authored a work entitled *Kitāb al-Tawba*, but there is no indication of its contents; see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud, Tehran 1973, p. 207.

⁷⁷ Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān [as a work by ‘Abd al-Jabbār], Cairo 1965, pp. 789-800.

⁷⁸ [Pseudo] al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī, “Kitāb Uṣūl al-‘adl wa-l-tawḥīd,” in *Rasā’il al-‘adl wa-l-tawḥīd* 1-2, ed. Muḥammad ‘Imāra, Cairo 1971, vol. 1, pp. 102-40; and in *Majmū‘ kutub wa-rasā’il al-Imām al-Qasim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī*, ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm Jadabān [Jadbān], Ṣan‘ā’ 2001, vol. 1, pp. 583-628. On the false attribution of this letter to al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, see Wilferd Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qasim b. Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*, Berlin 1965, pp. 97-98. On the question of *tawba*, see pp. 618-28 in the Ṣan‘ā’ edition. The content of the letter appears to reveal knowledge and development of certain *formulae* used by the later Mu‘tazilī and ‘Abd al-Jabbār in particular.

⁷⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 311: *al-tawba: ism li-l-fi’l alladhī yuzil al-‘iqāb wa-l-dhamm al-mustaḥaqq.*

same class of action.⁸⁰ According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, following Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī, repentance is considered a rational obligation only for those guilty of “grave sins” (*kabā’ir*).⁸¹ For those guilty of lesser sins, repentance is imposed only by revelation, since without repentance, one guilty of a minor sin would only suffer a diminution in reward (*taqlīl al-thawāb*), but no punishment (*‘uqūba*).⁸² On rational grounds as well, ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues that a correct repentance would be accepted by God.⁸³

Essential to correct repentance according to Mu‘tazilī doctrine are two basic conditions: (1) remorse (*nadam*) for the act of disobedience and (2) the firm intention (*‘azm*) not to repeat the act of disobedience.⁸⁴

Remorse (*nadam*) is a term found in the Qur’ān.⁸⁵ Mānakdīm defines remorse as an “intelligible condition which every man finds [issuing] from himself.”⁸⁶ Although remorse is important for repentance, it alone is not sufficient for repentance.⁸⁷ Rather, in order for the repentance to be correct, remorse should be felt for one specific reason: that the act itself was intrinsically bad (*qabīḥ li-qubḥihī*).⁸⁸

Firm intention (*‘azm*) not to repeat the action is the second essential condition for a correct repentance.⁸⁹ The reason for this intention should be connected with the reason for regret.⁹⁰ Furthermore, extending the logic of Bishr b. al-Mu‘tamir, the penitent individual is required to intend to desist from all acts

⁸⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 311: *wa-humā fi l-jins wāḥid*.

⁸¹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 335-37; Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 789. Abū ‘Alī, by contrast, believed it obligatory by both reason and revelation. Cf. Arfa Mensia, “Théories du repentir,” pp. 116-17.

⁸² Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 789.

⁸³ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 337-44. Cf. Arfa Mensia, “Théories du repentir,” p. 117, where this point is said to have been contested by the Mu‘tazilī of Baghdad who argued that God was free to either refuse or to grant pardon to the repentant individual. On these ideas, see Josef van Ess, “al-Khayyāṭ, Abū ‘l-Ḥusayn,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, vol. 4, pp. 1162f.

⁸⁴ Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 791. See Arfa Mensia, “Théories du repentir,” pp. 108-11. Cf. [pseudo] al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, “Kitāb Uṣūl al-‘adl wa-l-tawḥīd,” p. 619, where the author states that repentance is “remorse over what has passed, seeking pardon with the heart and tongue without persistence (*istighfār bi-l-qalb wa-l-lisān bi-lā isrār*) and the intention (*‘azm*) not to return to any of that [action] ever again, whether it be small or large.”

⁸⁵ Qur’ān 5:52; 23:40; 26:157 and 49:6.

⁸⁶ Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 792: *innahū amr ma‘qūl yajiduhū kull aḥad min nafsibī*.

⁸⁷ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 344. ‘Abd al-Jabbār explains that if the *ḥadīth* “Remorse is repentance” (*al-nadam tauba*) was correct, it would mean that remorse was only essential to repentance, but is not sufficient for repentance. By contrast, the Mu‘tazilī Ibn al-Ikshīd (d. 326/938) believes that remorse alone is repentance, see Wilzer, “Untersuchungen,” p. 85, citing Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb al-Fiṣal fi l-milal*, Cairo 1903, vol. 4, p. 61.

⁸⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 350; Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 789.

⁸⁹ Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 379. The term *‘azm* as intention is found in the Qur’ān (2:227; 2:235; 3:159). It is associated with the character of apostles and prophets, see Qur’ān 20:115; 46:35.

⁹⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 370-73.

(*tark al-af‘āl*) believed to be intrinsically bad in the future.⁹¹ This is deemed a necessary condition, for the reason that it is inconsistent for a man to abstain from one action which is known to be intrinsically bad (*qabīḥ li-qubḥihī*), while at the same time persisting in another act known to be the equivalent of it.⁹²

The repentant individual’s knowledge of his actions is also an area of important consideration and complication in doctrine. ‘Abd al-Jabbār allows repentance to be both general and specific in scope.⁹³ In the rare case in which a person is completely knowledgeable of his bad deeds, he is permitted to repent for all of these deeds generally. However if a person only surmises that he has committed some bad deeds, he may repent for the specific known deeds individually and then repent generally for the remainder that are unknown to him. Finally, in the case of one who repents of some bad deeds while believing that other bad deeds committed by him are in fact good deeds, his repentance is correct so long as he does not doubt himself. If, however, he later doubts some of his actions (e.g., on account of his increased knowledge), repentance for these deeds becomes obligatory for him.⁹⁴

As mentioned, the doctrine of annulment (*ihbāt/ taḥābut*) introduced by Ja‘far b. al-Mubashshir states that one’s bad deeds cancel one’s good deeds. This doctrine figures in the later teaching of the school. By the time of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī, the thesis was extended to cover the converse: good deeds may annul bad deeds.⁹⁵ Thus the situation for the person wishing to repent could be described by Mānakdīm in terms of a comparison between quantities of bad and good deeds: “Either his acts of obedience are greater than his acts of disobedience or his acts of disobedience are greater than his acts of obedience or they are equal to one another.”⁹⁶

Considerations concerning a general repentance and annulment appear to have affected thought on the appropriate time of repentance for the Mu‘tazila.⁹⁷ By the end of the 4th/10th century, a general repentance of sins at the end of one’s life had reached such a status that Mānakdīm stated it as the reason why the *qāḍī* ‘Abd al-Jabbār had “delayed this chapter [concerning *taṭawba*] and ended

⁹¹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 376. This concern relates to the problem of whether or not one may repent of some major sins while at the same time persisting in the commission of others, see Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, pp. 794-95. Cf. Sabine Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölfschichtischen Islam des 9./15. Jahrhunderts. Die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abī Gumbūr al-Aḥsā‘ī (um 838/1434-35–nach 906/1501)*, Leiden 2000, pp. 258-59. See also al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ramaḍān, Beirut 1994, pp. 177-78.

⁹² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 388.

⁹³ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 389.

⁹⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 389.

⁹⁵ See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, p. 65; Louis Gardet, “al-Ḥisāb,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition, vol. 3, p. 465.

⁹⁶ Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 789: *immā takūnu ṭā‘ātubū akthar min ma‘āshīhi aw ma‘āsiyuhu akthar min ṭā‘ātibi aw yakūnā mutasāwiyayn.*

⁹⁷ See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, p. 589.

his book [*Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*] with it in the desire that repentance be the result of his own affair and the conclusion of his works (*khātimat aʿmālīhī*) and in encouragement of us as well in that [act].⁹⁸

Reparation (talāfi)

While repentance in accord with the first two conditions of remorse and firm intention suffices for offences against God, in cases where another person was injured, there is the need to “expend effort in reparation (*badhl al-majhūd fī l-talāfi*) for the bad deeds (*qabāʾih*) committed.⁹⁹ For offences that resulted in the creation of objects with permanence, such as the copying of a book of illicit doctrine, it is necessary either to destroy such things, if this is possible, or to create something else to stand in their place.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, if the object or act which was created is known to have itself intentionally caused another, similarly harmful act, it is necessary for the penitent individual to repent of the secondary act and to attempt to repair its harm as well.¹⁰¹ Since the essential condition of remorse may not by definition include the anticipation of future actions, repentance is limited only to actions which occurred in the past.¹⁰²

Reparation is an essential duty, though difficult to determine and execute correctly in practice. It includes such important acts as the return of stolen goods, the payment of the blood price, and even the rationale behind the deliverance of oneself to the authorities for punishment.¹⁰³ The act of reparation may also prove necessary in cases where a person either authors, states, or promulgates corrupt belief (*madhhab fāsīd*).¹⁰⁴ In these cases either the manifestation (*izhār*) of his turning to the truth or the destruction of the harmful writings may be required.¹⁰⁵

Closely connected with the matter of returning stolen goods is the more basic problem of determining the legal status of one’s own possessions. For it is incumbent upon the penitent individual to examine that which he possesses.¹⁰⁶ If

⁹⁸ Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 789: *innamā akhbāra bādḥā l-faṣl wa-khatama bihī l-kitāb raḡbbatan fī an takūna ʿāqibat amrihī wa-khātimat aʿmālīhī l-tawba wa-tarḡiban lanā ayḏān fī dhālika*. Cf. [pseudo] al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, “Kitāb Uṣūl al-ʿadl wa-l-tawḥīd,” pp. 618-28, where the section on *tawba* is also the last section of the letter.

⁹⁹ Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 791. See Arfa Mensia, “Théories du repentir,” pp. 115-16. Cf. [pseudo] al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, “Kitāb Uṣūl al-ʿadl wa-l-tawḥīd,” p. 619.

¹⁰⁰ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 409-10.

¹⁰¹ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 416-17.

¹⁰² ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 427-28.

¹⁰³ Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 799, for the return of stolen goods; ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 435-43, for the payment of the blood price and deliverance of one’s self to the authorities for punishment.

¹⁰⁴ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 424-26.

¹⁰⁵ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 426: *innamā yalzamuhu izhār ʿudūlibī ilā l-ḥaqq*.

¹⁰⁶ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 451: *fa-l-wājib ʿalā al-tāʾib an yanzura fimā ḥazabu*.

what he possesses is among that which is “licit for him to hold and dispose of freely,” then his repentance would be valid.¹⁰⁷ However if his possessions include that which is “necessary to be removed or restored,” he is obliged to do so before his repentance will be considered valid.¹⁰⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār notes that while this last area is not, properly speaking, an act of penitence, its necessity is closely linked with the act of proper reparation.

In order to ascertain the status of his possessions, it is necessary for the penitent individual to examine the cause of ownership (*sabab al-milk*) for each individual item in his possession. The cause of ownership for each one of his possessions is knowable either through tradition (*bi-l-sam‘*), such as that acquired through inheritance (*mīrāth*), booty (*ghanā‘im*) and the like, or through rational means (*bi-l-‘aql*) such as that gained through *takassub*, the partaking of lawful property and its tenure (*tanāwul al-mubāḥāt wa-ḥiyāzatuhā*). That which has not been acquired by either of these two methods is then considered not to have been obtained through legal ownership (*milk*).¹⁰⁹

It is also necessary for one who acquires something (*tamallaka shay‘an*) from another person to inquire into the manner in which the possession was originally obtained by an examination of that which is manifest (*‘tibār al-zāhir*) concerning the person from whom he acquired it.¹¹⁰ If this inquiry reveals that what is in the second person’s possession was lawfully acquired and may be disposed of freely (*thubūt yadibī ‘alaybi wa-taṣarrufuhū fihī*), and is not illicit or suspected of being so, then acquisition from this person is valid.¹¹¹ However, if the property is known to be originally acquired by theft or an otherwise illicit action by the second person, the acquisition is not considered licit and the property ought to be taken from the second person to be returned to its rightful owner, in accordance with the doctrine of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (*al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*).¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 451: *mimmā yuḥillu labu an yamsikahu wa-yataṣarrafa fihī*.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 451: *mimmā yajibu fihī izāla aw talāfin fa-l-wājib an yaf‘alahu*.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 451. ‘Abd al-Jabbār also discusses the question of ownership through contract (*‘uqūd*) and the necessity of examining the validity of contractual conditions against one another.

¹¹⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 451. ‘Abd al-Jabbār explains that if the conditions are examined it would be possible to acquire the thing obtained either through a harmful action to another (*qubḥ al-taṣarruf ma‘a l-ghayr*) or an exchange with him (*mu‘āwada ma‘abū*).

¹¹¹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 451.

¹¹² See Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 212-15 for the Mu‘tazilī doctrine concerning the prohibition of theft. The first person is to hold the illicit property except in the case in which the second person repents of the act, and initiates the process of the property’s return to its rightful owner. In that case, the second person is entitled to return the property before the first by his priority of possession (*mazīyat al-yad*). If the first person however is a judge (*ḥākīm*), then he has the priority in holding the stolen property by virtue of his authority (*wilāya*). The process of returning any possessions to their rightful owners or otherwise disposing of property not

IV. *Between theory and practice*

Having reviewed the historical cases of repentance (section I), compared their shared features (section II), and discussed salient features of the Muʿtazilī doctrines of repentance (section III), it is now possible to examine the relationship between historical cases of repentance by government officials and the theory of repentance as defined by Muʿtazilī scholars.

Reasons for Repentance

In section II, we designated three chief reasons offered by the historical accounts for the repentance of government officials: (1) work on behalf of the government (*taṣarruf maʿa l-sulṭān*), (2) monetary concerns of rulers, and (3) beliefs.

From the standpoint of Muʿtazilī doctrine (or for that matter many other moral systems), work on behalf of the government had the potential to be sinful from a variety of different perspectives. Scholars who choose such positions may find themselves knowingly or unknowingly entangled in actions of corruption, coercion and violence. However, the later Muʿtazilī doctrines of *tawba* suggest that the most common problem for scholars was the problematic nature of the money that they received in the course of government service.

Even in the situations in which officials believed that the funds they received came from legitimate sources, it was difficult to be certain whether or not this was the case. Indeed, when Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī declared that Ibn Abī ʿAllān would not “smell the odor of paradise” if he did not repent, the latter stated, at first incredulously, that he took his money from the *bayt al-māl*, gifts from taxpayers he had served, and benefits from the *sulṭān* which were equivalent to his rightful share in the general property of the Muslims.¹¹³ In other words, Ibn Abī ʿAllān insisted that the funds he received through government work were from sources which were both known and licit. On the face of the matter, he may have been correct. However, as the account of the tax regime given by al-Jubbāʾī well demonstrates, taxes were not always gathered through legitimate means. How could one be certain that the money that was received as a salary from the *bayt al-māl* or as a gift from the *sulṭān* was licit?

In theory, then, the problem of working on behalf of the government (*sulṭān*) was transformed into the question of whether or not one could lawfully acquire property from a person, such as the ruler, whose possessions were known to be a mixture of licit and illicit goods. While ʿAbd al-Jabbār did not address the question of salaries from the *bayt al-māl*, which remained perhaps in theory a legiti-

rightfully owned is discussed in greater detail by ʿAbd al-Jabbār in the final section of the discussion on repentance, see *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 457-61.

¹¹³ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, p. 222.

mate source of income, he did address the status of acquisition (*tamalluk*) by either gift or sales of what one knew was not illicit, from one who was known in general to be “in possession of both licit and illicit property” (*yaduhū mushtamila ‘alā l-ḥarām wa-l-ḥalāl*). Although it is not explicitly stated by ‘Abd al-Jabbār, such questions would necessarily involve the receipt of gifts from the *sultān*.¹¹⁴

Given the importance of this issue for scholars who worked on behalf of the government, ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s explanation of this point is therefore particularly detailed. He describes how the ‘*ulamā’* had expressed four different opinions on this very question.¹¹⁵ According to him, following Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī, it is necessary to inquire further into the circumstances of the possession before the gift could be accepted from such an individual.

The second reason for the repentance, the monetary concerns of rulers, follows a similar course of reasoning. For if the possessions of the *sultān* were known to contain both licit and illicit property, then if the *sultān* desires to repent, he too would be obliged to examine the nature of his own goods and distinguish that part which he would be obliged to return to its proper owners, if this were possible.¹¹⁶ As Ibn ‘Abbād counseled Mu’ayyid al-Dawla, he should “disavow the funds” (*tabarra’ min ḥādhibī l-amwāl*) of which he was “uncertain of their goodness and their acquisition from licit [sources]” in order for his repentance to be considered valid.¹¹⁷

According to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, if the ruler had obtained power through conquest (*kāna sultānan mutagħhalliban*) and had taken from the people land tax, tithes, and mandatory alms (*kharāj wa-l-‘ushūr wa-l-zakawāt*) by virtue of force to be diverted for his own purposes, he is obliged to return the money to whom ever he had so coerced.¹¹⁸ Conversely, if he had attained this property with consent (*bi-l-riḍā*) in order to spend for the reasons appropriate to which it had been taken, he was then considered the agent (*wakīl*) of those from whom he had taken money and could legally spend this money on their behalf.¹¹⁹

As for the public repentance of Ibn ‘Abbād, its status falls between these two cases of scholars wishing to determine the licit status of money which they received from rulers and rulers wishing to disavow illicit funds in their possession.

¹¹⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 452-53.

¹¹⁵ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 452-53. The four opinions are: (1) Acquisition in this situation is always licit, (2) Acquisition in this case is always illicit, (3) It is possible to acquire the property with the condition to further inquire into the previous owner’s statement and to ask how he acquired the questionable property, (4) One should act according to the preponderance of suspicion (*ghalabat al-zann*). ‘Abd al-Jabbār states that (3) was the opinion of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī, while (4) was the opinion of Abū Ḥāshim al-Jubbā’ī.

¹¹⁶ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 456. Cf. [pseudo] al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, “Kitāb Uṣūl al-‘adl wa-l-tawḥīd,” p. 621.

¹¹⁷ Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajrīb al-umam*, p. 58: *tub yā mawlānā min kull mā dakhalta fihī wa-tabarra’ min ḥādhibī l-amwāl allatī lasta ‘alā thiqa min ṭibihā wa-ḥuṣūlihā min ḥillihā*.

¹¹⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 456.

¹¹⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 456.

Ibn ‘Abbād declared during the time of his repentance that “all of the money that he had spent on the *ahl al-‘ilm*” was from funds he had “inherited from his father and grandfather.”¹²⁰ By specifying the source of the money that he had given the scholars, Ibn ‘Abbād was stating that his patronage was licit for them to have accepted in the past and presumably for them to receive in the future.

Finally, in the account of the repentance of Mu‘izz al-Dawla, the *amīr* asks the scholar Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī several questions of doctrine at the time of his repentance, specifically about the status of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and the Companions of the Prophet.¹²¹ While the evidence in this particular case is not sufficient to determine how in fact these questions related to Mu‘izz al-Dawla’s repentance, ‘Abd al-Jabbār did describe the obligation to openly demonstrate repentance from the perpetuation of wrong beliefs.¹²²

Time of repentance

In section II we stated that four of the repentances occurred at the end of life, two at the conclusion of employment, and in one case during work on behalf of the government. In theory, the act of repentance is valid at any time so long as the person does not persist in committing the sins for which he had initially repented. In practice, however, scholars came to realize in the course of the fourth/tenth century that, for most individuals, a general repentance just prior to the end of life is the surest option in rational terms.

For only at the end of one’s life could one finally tally one’s good deeds against the bad deeds with clarity. It was perhaps for this reason that ‘Abd al-Jabbār, according to Mānakdīm, urged repentance to be expressed in one’s final hours.¹²³

Even though the expression of repentance at the last possible moment of life makes the most sense in accordance with rational principles, the act creates some doctrinal problems. For the practice appears to be in conflict with Qur’ān 4:17-18, which on the surface denies the possibility of a “deathbed” repentance.¹²⁴ Commentators on these verses nevertheless found solutions which met their requirements.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, vol. 14, p. 376.

¹²¹ Al-Hamdānī, *Takmilat tārikh al-Ṭabarī*, pp. 192-93.

¹²² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 424-27.

¹²³ Mānakdīm, *Sharḥ*, p. 789.

¹²⁴ Qur’ān 4:17-18 [trans. A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, New York 1955, p. 103]: “God shall turn only towards those who do evil in ignorance, then shortly repent; God is All-knowing, All-wise. But God shall not turn towards those who do evil deeds until, when one of them is visited by death, he says, ‘indeed now I repent,’ neither to those who die disbelieving; for them We have prepared a painful chastisement.”

¹²⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-kashshāf*, ed. Muḥammad Shāhin, Beirut 1995, vol. 1, pp. 478-79. For those allowing the deathbed repentance, the problematic phrase in Qur’ān 4:17 was

Mu‘tazilī scholars associated with the cases of repentance

All seven of the historical accounts indicate that the acts of repentance were carried out either by government officials who were themselves scholars of Mu‘tazilī doctrine or by officials in the presence of a Mu‘tazilī scholar. The apparent reason for this was again related by ‘Abd al-Jabbār in his exposition of the Mu‘tazilī doctrine of *tawba*. According to him, it is necessary for one who wishes to renounce illicit goods to use his independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) to establish a proper solution. However, if the penitent individual was not himself a *mujtabid* then it was necessary for him to seek an expert opinion (*yastaftī*) from a scholar whom he trusted for both his knowledge and piety.¹²⁶

Documented acts of repentance

As we noted in section II, three actions are known to have been undertaken by four of the penitent officials: (1) the dictation and display of documents of repentance, (2) the rectification of complaints of injustice, and (3) the giving of charity and the manumission of slaves.

In three cases, our sources mention the preparation of documents. Mu‘tazilī doctrine did not specify whether the dictation of a document was necessary for repentance. However, given the complexity of the act of repentance, it proved a useful expedient. In one instance, a term used in a historical account “conditions of repentance” (*sharā’iṭ al-tawba*) was borrowed from the theoretical literature on the doctrine.¹²⁷

Three reports describe the public display of repentance. According to Mu‘tazilī doctrine, except in those situations relating to wrong belief, public display (*iḡhār*) is not a necessary condition for the validity of one’s repentance.¹²⁸ The report of Ibn ‘Abbād’s public repentance, which describes his drafting of a document of repentance to be signed by jurists resembles accounts of the repentances of those accused of heresy in the fourth/tenth century in accordance with

the apparent time indication *min qarīb* translated by A.J. Arberry as “then shortly repent”. This phrase seemed to imply that repentance should take place shortly after a sin was recognized. However, al-Zamakhsharī interpreted the phrase *min qarīb* to mean “that which occurs prior to the presence of death” (*mā qabl ḥadrat al-marwī*). He also placed the actual limit for repentance at the time of the “death rattle” in accordance with the *ḥadīth* “indeed God accepts the repentance of a man until the last gurgle of death” (*inna Allāh ta‘ālā yaqbalu tawbat al-‘abd mā lam yugharḡir*). Cf. Wilzer, “Untersuchungen,” p. 113, describing al-Ghazālī’s opposition to the deathbed repentance on the grounds that it was useless. By contrast, al-Ghazālī read the time indication *min qarīb* as proscribing the urgency for a repentance soon after sin, see *ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

¹²⁶ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 454.

¹²⁷ Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-masā’il*, f. 89b; Mānakdim, *Sharḥ*, p. 791: *shurūṭ al-tawba*.

¹²⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, pp. 424-26.

the practice of “the summons to repentance” (*istitāba*).¹²⁹ In such cases, the accused individual was compelled to write a document certifying repentance to be read in the presence of the ruler and signed by witnesses and scholars.¹³⁰

The redress of grievances (*radd al-mazālim; radd al-zulāma*) is mentioned in two cases of repentance.¹³¹ Since such complaints concerned the unjust treatment of the populace and often involved the unlawful collection of taxes, this action came under the heading of reparation for evil acts (*talāfi*) in Mu‘tazili theory. In his discussion of this obligation, ‘Abd al-Jabbār states explicitly that the penitent individual would have to submit himself to a full disclosure (*isti‘māl al-istizhār ‘alā l-nafs*).¹³² Those portions of his belongings that are determined to have been obtained through illegal means would have to be returned to their rightful owners if possible. So long as any claims against the ruler or official remain unresolved, his repentance is considered invalid.¹³³

The giving of charity and the manumission of slaves is mentioned in one case. While such acts of beneficence were practiced by rulers during their reigns as a means of legitimation, Mu‘izz al-Dawla’s display of charity in the moments prior to his death was uncommon.¹³⁴ According to the theory of repentance described by ‘Abd al-Jabbār, the *mujtahid* consulted during the repentance could stipulate “expiations, alms and tithes” (*kaffārāt wa-zakawāt wa-‘ushūr*) which were to be paid by the repentant individual for his repentance to be considered valid.¹³⁵ According to manuals of *fiqh*, both the giving of charity and the manumission of slaves were acts commonly carried out in expiation for sins.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, pp. 586-87; for an analysis of the development of legal doctrine concerning *istitāba*, see Frank Griffel, *Apostasie und Toleranz im Islam. Die Entwicklung zu al-Ġazālī’s Urteil gegen die Philosophie und die Reaktionen der Philosophen*, Leiden 2000, pp. 67-99 *passim*.

¹³⁰ George Makdissi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl et la résurgence de l’Islam traditionaliste au XI^e siècle (V^e siècle de l’Hégire)*, Damascus 1963, p. 429, cited Ibn Shannabūdh (d. 323/934) and Abū Bakr al-‘Aṭṭār [Ibn Miqṣam] (d. 352/963) as having written documents of repentance. Both were accused of spreading Qur’ānic readings at variance with consensus. For Ibn Shannabūdh, see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād aw madīnat al-salām*, Beirut 1931, vol. 1, pp. 270-71; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-udabā’*, vol. 5, pp. 114-17 [The purported text of Ibn Shannabūdh’s confession is on p. 116]. For Abū Bakr al-‘Aṭṭār, see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, vol. 2, pp. 206-8; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-udabā’*, vol. 5, pp. 310-12. For a further analysis of these cases, see Christopher Melchert, “Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qur’ānic Readings,” *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000), pp. 5-22.

¹³¹ Al-Rūdhrawārī, *Dhayl tajrīb al-umam*, p. 58; al-Hamdānī, *Takmila*, p. 193.

¹³² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 455.

¹³³ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 456.

¹³⁴ Yaacov Lev, “Charity and Social Practice. Egypt and Syria in the Ninth-Twelfth Centuries,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), pp. 472-507, cited no cases of the donation of charity in the moments prior to a ruler’s death.

¹³⁵ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 14, p. 455.

¹³⁶ J. Chelhod, “Kaffāra,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*, vol. 4, p. 406; Mongia Arfa Mensia, “L’Acte expiatoire en Islam. «Al Kaffāra»,” in *Rituals and Ethics. Patterns of re-*

Conclusion

In his recent work, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Michael Cook has argued that Mu‘tazilism “tended to become a tradition of socially and politically disembodied intellection.”¹³⁷ While this statement is true for most periods, the examples of theologically-motivated repentance from the 4th/10th century discussed in this article should serve to remind us of the important, albeit difficult to discern, place that Mu‘tazilī theology had in the lives of many government officials. For without government support for Mu‘tazilī scholars, Mu‘tazilī theology probably would not have been as central to either the Zaydī or the Imāmī Shī‘ī traditions. The contexts, circumstances, and conditions of this support remain topics for further inquiry.

Appendix I: The Repentance of Ja‘far b. Ḥarb (236/857)?

In the first case of repentance which we described above, the scholar Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī exhorts Ibn Abī ‘Allān to repent by recounting to him a story concerning the ascetic practice of the third/ninth century Mu‘tazilī scholar Ja‘far b. Ḥarb (d. 236/857).¹³⁸

According to the account related by al-Tanūkhī, Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī told Ibn Abī ‘Allān:

You are not of a more exalted grace or higher rank than Ja‘far b. Ḥarb. For he used to take upon himself the great affairs of the ruling authority (*kāna yataqalladu kibār a‘māl al-sultān*), his wealth approached that of the viziers (*kānat ni‘matubu tuqāribu ni‘mat al-wuzarā‘*), he believed in the truth (*kāna ya‘taqīdu l-ḥaqq*) and his position in knowledge was famous, such that he wrote more books than those which remain today in the hands of the people, while at the time he worked on behalf of the government (*wa-kāna yataṣarrafu ma‘a l-sultān*).¹³⁹

Al-Jubbā‘ī continued his story by stating that one day when Ja‘far was riding “in a great procession, his material comfort was at its greatest extent, and his position was in a condition of magnificence,” (*rākiban fī marwākib labū ‘azīm wa-*

pentance – Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Second International Conference of *Mediterraneum*, eds. Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, Paris / Leuven 2004, pp. 125-39.

¹³⁷ Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, p. 195.

¹³⁸ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nisbawār*, vol. 1, p. 223. An abridged version of this story is also related on the authority of the son of the author of the *Nisbawār*, Abu l-Qāsim ‘Alī b. al-Muḥassin b. ‘Alī al-Tanūkhī (d. 447/1055) by Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-tawwābīn*, ed. George Makdisi, Damascus 1961, p. 157, and Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-safwa*, eds. Ibrāhīm Ramaḍān and Sa‘īd al-Laḥḥām, Beirut 1989, vol. 2, p. 303 [reading al-Tanūkhī for al-Masūhī]. Cf. Josef van Ess, “Abu l-Hudhayl in Contact. The Genesis of an Anecdote,” in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy. Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. Michael E. Marmura, Albany / New York 1984, p. 17; idem, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, pp. 70 and 763.

¹³⁹ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nisbawār*, vol. 1, p. 223.

niʿmatubū ʿalā ghāyat al-wuḥūr wa-manzilatubū bi-ḥālibā min al-jalāla) he apparently heard a man reciting the first half of Qurʾān 57:16, “Is it not time that the hearts of those who believe should be humbled to the Remembrance of God and the Truth which He has sent down?”¹⁴⁰

After a moment of recognition followed by tears, the scholar dismounted his horse, took off his clothes and waded into the Tigris where he immersed himself up to his neck in the water. According to al-Jubbāʾī’s account, Jaʿfar did not exit the water until he had “divided up all of his money in order to resolve complaints against him and redressed them, pledged a portion as a bequest, and gave the rest away as charity” (*farrāqa jamīʿ mālibī fī l-mazālim allatī kānat ʿalaybi wa-waṣṣā fihā wa-taṣaddāqa bi-l-bāqī*).¹⁴¹ Eventually a man saw him standing in the water and learned of his affair. He gave Jaʿfar a long shirt (*qamīṣ*) and covering for his lower body (*mīʿzar*) whereupon Jaʿfar emerged from the river, clothed in these garments. Jaʿfar then devoted the rest of his life to scholarship.

By the 4th/10th century this was not the only account of Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb’s famed submersion in water. Indeed ʿAbd al-Jabbār in his *Faḍl al-iʿtizāl wa-ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazila* described Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb’s act on two separate occasions. His first mention of Jaʿfar’s act is located in his biographical notice for the Baghdādī Muʿtazilī, Abū Mūsā ʿĪsā b. Ṣabīḥ al-Murdār (d. 226/841).¹⁴² ʿAbd al-Jabbār stated that Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb had been in the army. During this period of his life, Jaʿfar had occasion to pass by the followers of al-Murdār whom he would both mock and harass. Angered at Jaʿfar’s action, the followers complained to their *shaykh*, who asked them to persuade Jaʿfar to come to one of his study circles. When Jaʿfar came and heard the arguments and exhortation of al-Murdār, he left and then “entered the water” (*dakhala l-māʾ*) after removing his clothing.¹⁴³ Standing naked in the water, Jaʿfar sent word to al-Murdār that he deliver clothes to him so that he could wear them. After returning from the water, he remained the companion of al-Murdār for some time until he achieved the mastery of knowledge for which he later became known.

The second account included by ʿAbd al-Jabbār occurs in his biographical notice of Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb himself, where it is reported that the event occurred at the end of his life.¹⁴⁴ At that time, Jaʿfar disavowed all that he owned, took off his clothing and sat in the water until some of his disciples came and covered him.¹⁴⁵ In this account, we are told that Jaʿfar’s father used to be one of the companions of the ruler and that Jaʿfar gave up the inheritance that his father

¹⁴⁰ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, p. 224; Qurʾān 57:16 [trans. A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, p. 259].

¹⁴¹ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār*, vol. 1, p. 224.

¹⁴² ʿAbd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-iʿtizāl,” p. 278. See Wilferd Madelung, “Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie. Das *Kitāb al-Uṣūl* des Ġaʿfar b. Ḥarb?” *Der Islam* 57 (1980), p. 231.

¹⁴³ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-iʿtizāl,” p. 278.

¹⁴⁴ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-iʿtizāl,” p. 282.

¹⁴⁵ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-iʿtizāl,” p. 282.

had bequeathed to him. At the same time Ja‘far was also said to have abandoned the unessential subtleties of theology (*daqīq al-kalām*) and devoted himself to more basic problems of theology.¹⁴⁶

Submersion in water as an act of penitence had a long history in the religions of the Near East prior to Ja‘far b. Ḥarb.¹⁴⁷ Thus while the three accounts provided different reasons for Ja‘far’s practice, all three are united in understanding his act as penitential. Readers of each of these accounts could also identify among Ja‘far’s actions, certain rationales associated with the formal practice of *tawba* in the 4th/10th century: leaving the service on behalf of the government, the disavowal of illicit funds, and changes in religious belief. Indeed the account of al-Tanūkhī even ascribed actions to Ja‘far that would later become central to the doctrinal concept of repentance among the Mu‘tazila in the 4th/10th century such as the redress of grievances (*radd al-mazālim*), and the giving of charity (*sadaqa*) which Ja‘far undertook *while still in the river*.

Yet however many details about this event were similar to those surrounding the later practice of repentance in the 4th/10th century, none of the accounts described the obviously penitential act of Ja‘far standing naked in the waters of the Tigris with the term *tawba*. ‘Abd al-Jabbār was careful to describe the actions of Ja‘far b. Ḥarb as an act of piety (*zuhd*).¹⁴⁸ For by the time that each of these stories was recorded in the 4th/10th century, *tawba* had already acquired a circumscribed and specific theological meaning amongst the Mu‘tazila.

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¹⁴⁶ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-i‘tizāl,” p. 282.

¹⁴⁷ Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, p. 69, citing the parallel to the first century C.E. *Vita Adae et Evae* which recounted that Adam stood forty days in the Jordan river and Eve eighteen days in the Tigris with water up to their necks after their expulsion from Paradise. Significantly, it is only the account of al-Tanūkhī that mentions the level of the water.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl al-i‘tizāl,” p. 282.

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