

Religious and Sectarian Diversity in the Early Islamic Period. A Study of Ḍirār b. ‘Amr al-Ghaṭafānī’s (d. ca. 200/815) “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” (“The Book of Instigation”)¹

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Abstract

This article is a study and analysis of Ḍirār b. ‘Amr’s “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*”, focusing on the religious and sectarian diversity as well as the differences among Muslims in the second century after Hijrah. The article examines the author’s method in presenting the disagreements of his age and analyses his position towards these disagreements. It also sheds light on the aspects this text, which had been lost, presents across a wide array of topics in various fields of Islamic sciences. It further provides an analysis of the method used in the author’s evaluation of the contemporary disagreements and his attempt to establish a standard by which to evaluate the differences between the sects. The article concludes that “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” narrates historical truths most of today’s Muslims are oblivious to, although there is an urgent need to reflect on and revitalise them in their present day lives. The most important of these truths is that the perceived image of a harmonised, unified Muslim vision in the early centuries has in fact no foundation. The differences prevalent at the time and continuing to remain stem from scientific reasons. At the same time, there are also external reasons for these differences which go back to the exploitation of religion by ‘religious’ scholars for their personal gain and the acquisition of wealth, authority, and prestige.

Keywords

al-taḥrīsh, Ḍirār b. ‘Amr, Muslim sects, Mu‘tazilah, difference, second century after Hijrah

Introduction: The Second Century and the Diversity of Muslim Sects

The second / eighth century is considered to be one of the most opulent periods in Islamic history in its wealth of religious, sectarian, and ideological diversity, a

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plethora of differences existing between Muslims. A study of historical sources would bolster this argument, especially the historical works on sects and creeds. The most important attestation to this diversity lies in the sources we have from this period, insofar as these differences developed into a variety of different disciplines each with their own methods and rules. The “*Kitāb al-Risālah*” by al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 205/820) for instance was composed in the context of his search for measures and standards to evaluate disagreement between the people of opinion (Ahl al-Ra’y) and those of hadith (Ahl al-Ḥadīth), while “*al-Kitāb*” by Sibawayh (d. 180/796) was concerned with systematizing Arabic grammar and “*al-‘Ayn*” by Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 170/786) with systematizing language. A long time has passed without finding works dating back to the second century which clearly depict the different doctrinal and *kalām* disagreements during this historical period. This is due to the extinction of many books from this period, especially those written by al-Mu‘tazilah. The recently discovered² manuscript of “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*” by Ḍirār b. ‘Amr al-Ghaṭafānī (d. ca. 200/815) is considered to enhance the stock of sources dating back to the second century, specifically those relating to sects and creeds, for it attests to the broad array of terminology on sects, ideologies, ideas and concepts being used at the time. Even though not the main topic of the book, the author’s desire to establish some sort of systematization concerning sects emerges through his writing style. His presentation of the discord among the sects, the reasons behind this discordance as well as the conclusion he reaches, unequivocally demonstrate his obsession with establishing a method. Keen to describe the fluidity of the religious disagreement of his time and identify its reasons, Ḍirār (the *mutakallim*) draws on the evidence that was probably used by the disagreeing sects, analysed the evidence they agreed on, and then named other possible reasons for the dispute relevant to the disagreeing parties.

1 Ḍirār b. Amr and His Book “*al-Tahrīsh*”

Ḍirār b. ‘Amr grew up in Kufa. He moved to Baghdad during the 170s/786s. There is no agreement on when he died, but it is estimated to have been between 193/809 and 230/845. He was a student of Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ (d. 748/1347) before distancing himself from the Mu‘tazilah due to his diverging opinions, which ultimately saw them refuse to consider him one of their own. Nevertheless, he held on to some Mu‘tazili opinions such as the intermediate position (*al-manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn*).³ Biographies as well as doxographies considered him one of the Mu‘tazilah, while recognising his deviation from some of their doctrines.

2 “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*” by Ḍirār b. ‘Amr was discovered around 2008, one of the manuscripts found in a mosque in the town of Shahārah, west of Sanaa. This is the only remaining manuscript of the book dating back to 540/1145. It is part of a collection which includes the “*Kitāb al-Maqālāt*” by Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā‘ī.

3 Ibn al-Nadīm attributes a book to Ḍirār bearing the same name “*al-Manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn*”.

Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 384/994) mentions him in “*al-Fihrist*”, specifically in a chapter entitled “Dissenting and unique opinions among al-Mu‘tazilah”,⁴ wherein the “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh wa-l-ighrā’*” – the book to be examined in this article – is referred to. Ibn al-Nadīm further mentions tens of books attributed to Ḍirār, most of them discussing the interreligious and sectarian polemics of the time, as well as works offering interpretations of the Qur’an (*ta’wīl al-qur’ān*), considering contradictions in Hadīth (*tanāquḍ al-ḥadīth*) and disagreement between persons and the establishment of proof (*ikhtilāf al-nās wa-ithbāt al-ḥujjah*). Still, his uniqueness is evident in his wide-ranging criticism of the different sects of his time. Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d. 319/931) attested to this when he refused to count Ḍirār to the al-Mu‘tazilah, refuted the acceptance of the Mu‘tazilah of Ḍirār⁵ and referred to the followers of Ḍirār as al-Ḍirāriyyah.⁶ This designation was also used by Abū l-Ḥassan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935), who counts al-Ḍirāriyyah as one of the ten main Islamic sects⁷ and opened his definition of the Ḍirāriyyah by referring to Ḍirār b. ‘Amr’s disagreement with the al-Mu‘tazilah.⁸

As pointed out by Raḍwān al-Sayyid, most books written by Ḍirār and all the other early *mutakallimūn* were lost till the fourth century after Hijrah.⁹ The opinions and positions of Ḍirār, as well as the Mu‘tazilah of the first three centuries after Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’, have reached us through historical works such as “*Ṭabaqāt al-Mu‘tazilah*” by al-Ka‘bī, the books of al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), “*Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*” by al-Ash‘arī and “*al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*” by Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Shahristānī (d. 548/1153). A lot of evidence points to the authenticity of this attribution of the book to Ḍirār, for example references to his book in early scholarly works and the direct quotes ascribed to Ḍirār in “*Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*” and “*al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*”, which match those to be found in the book.

The German Orientalist Joseph van Ess was the first to emphasise the importance of Ḍirār b. ‘Amr for the development of early *kalām* in articles he published in the late 1960s. He also studied Ḍirār’s opinions in his encyclopaedic about theology and society in the 2nd and 3rd century after Hijrah and the history of early Islamic religious thinking.¹⁰ Further interest in Ḍirār was generated upon the discovery of his book and its first edition by Huseyin Hansu and Mehmet Keskin, published in

4 See Ibn al-Nadīm, “*al-Fihrist*”, ed. Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid, London 2009, pp. 596ff.

5 See Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī al-Balkhī, “*Dhikr al-Mu‘tazilah*” (chapter of al-Balkhī’s book “*Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*”), in: id. et al., *Kitāb Faḍl al-i‘tizāl wa ṭabaqāt al-Mu‘tazilah*, ed. Fu’ād Sayyid, Tunis 1974, p. 75.

6 See al-Balkhī, “*Kitāb al-Maqālāt*”, folio 37 (introduction to the edition of “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*”), p. 8.

7 See Abū l-Ḥassan al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-khtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. Na‘īm Zarzūr, vol. I, Sayda/Beirut 2005, p. 25.

8 See *ibid.*, p. 220.

9 Cf. Raḍwān al-Sayyid, “*al-Mu‘tazilah wa ta’thīruhum fi-l-lāhūt al-yāhūdī*” (*al-Mu‘tazilah and Their Influence on Jewish Theology*), in: *Ṣaḥīfat al-Ḥayah* (2008).

10 Cf. Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, vol. III, Berlin/New York 1997, pp. 32–63.

Istanbul and Beirut in 2014.¹¹ The editors of the Arabic edition also published a Turkish translation¹², while van Ess published three articles¹³ and a host of other publications about “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*” are to be found.¹⁴

Among the most important aspects of Ḍirār’s legacy are his idiosyncratic views on: a) the term *kasb*, which was later adopted by al-Ash‘arī, and b) the belief that God possesses a hidden essence, one humans are able to comprehend (grasp) through a sixth sense in the Hereafter.¹⁵ The name of Ḍirār is present in both the

11 See Ḍirār b. ‘Amr al-Ghaṭafānī, “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*”, ed. Hüseyin Hansu and Mehmet Kaskin, Istanbul/Beirut 2014, p. 153. Note: Due to many references to this book, I will later place the page numbers for this book within the text in parentheses and not in the footnotes.

12 See idem, *Kitābu ṭ-Tahrīṣ. İlk Dönem Siyasî ve İtikadî İhtilâflarında Hadîs Kullanımı*, ed. Hüseyin Hansu and Mehmet Keskin, Istanbul 2014.

13 See the articles “*Das K. at-Tahrīs des Ḍirār b. ‘Amr. Einige Bemerkungen zu Ort und Anlaß seiner Abfassung*” (pp. 2461–2500), “*Schicksal und selbstbestimmtes Handeln aus der Sicht von Ḍirār b. ‘Amr’s K. at-Tahrīs*” (pp. 2501–2533) and “*Das Bild der Ḥārīgiten im K. at-Tahrīs des Ḍirār b. ‘Amr*” (pp. 2534–2601) in: Josef van Ess, *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 1, Leiden/Boston 2018.

14 Raḍwān al-Sayyid has also published extensively on the “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*”, and he has furthermore announced his plan to complete his own edition of the book, cf. al-Sayyid, “*al-Mu’tazilah wa ta’tihūrum fi-l-lāhūt al-yāhūdī*”. In this and other articles, al-Sayyid points out that he is working on an edition of “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*”. On his website (<http://www.ridwanalsayyid.com/cv2.aspx>), al-Sayyid has declared his intention to publish an edition of the book by 2011; it has however yet to materialise as far as I know, although he has since verbally informed me that publication is imminent. See also Ḥaṣan Anṣārī, who has studied the “*Kitāb al-Maqālāt*” by al-Jubbā’ī, which was found within the same collection of manuscripts including “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*”. Anṣārī has quoted an unknown author who wrote about the manuscript and referred to Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī’s (d. 303/916) book “*al-Maqālāt*” in which he attributed “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*” to Ḍirār b. ‘Amr: “(Ḍirār) had written ‘*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*’ at the time. He was a Kufan and a staunch anti-Shiite (*nāṣibī*). In a long statement about him, he finally narrates that he repented with the help of ‘Alī al-Aswārī”, cf. Ḥaṣan Anṣārī, “*Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī wa-Kitāb al-Maqālāt*”, available: URL: <http://ansari.kateban.com/post/2789> (accessed September 8, 2020). He has also published about “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*” in Persian, cf. Anṣārī, “*Kitābi Kalāmi az Ḍirār b. ‘Amr, Kitāb-i Māh-i Dīn*”, in: Bararsy Hay Tārīḫy 89–90 (1383–1384/2004–2005), pp. 4–13, available: URL: <http://ansari.kateban.com/print/1464> (accessed September 8, 2020). Another publication of the same author on “*Kitāb al-Maqālāt*” based on a related manuscript to that of “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*” was published in French: see Anṣārī, “*Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī et son livre al-Maqālāt*”, in: C. Adang et al. (eds.), *A Common Rationality. Mu’tazilism in Islam and Judaism*, Würzburg 2016, pp. 21–37. Other related works to be mentioned are: Sean W. Anthony, “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh. By Ḍirār b. ‘Amr al-Ghaṭafānī (Review)*”, in: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 76 (2017) 1, pp. 199–203; Mehmetcan Akpınar, “*Kharijism in Kufa: Accounts on Abu Bakr and ‘Ali according to Ḍirār b. ‘Amr’s (d. ca. 200/815) Kitab al-Tahrish*”, conference paper presentation at the XXXIII. Deutscher Orientalistentag, Jena 18–22 September 2017; Ramy Mahmoud, “*A Reading into Kitāb al-Tahrīs by Ḍirār b. ‘Amr al-Gaṭafānī (d. 200/815) (an Arabic revision)*”, in: *Istanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 35 (2016), pp. 281–292.

15 See al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmīyyīn*, vol. 1, p. 221; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, pp. 45ff.

history of religions¹⁶ as well as in polemic topics prominent in philosophy and important to humankind.¹⁷

2 “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*”: The Title, the Language, and the Relevance

“*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” may be the earliest manuscript that has reached us related to the early Mu‘tazilah and the earliest book addressing the difference between the sects and creeds in the second century. The author presents the opinions of the different *kalām* sects of his time in Kufa and its surrounding areas in a unique literary manner, combining imagination, metaphors, and symbols. The literary dimension of the work is evident in the title, “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” (“The Book of Instigation”). Here, instigation refers to provoking discord amongst people or – in the case of soldiers – incitement. The word *al-taḥrīsh* is also used to mean instigating animals to turn against each other,¹⁸ an act prohibited in Islam (in Hadith) which proscribes fighting between animals¹⁹ for the purpose of human amusement. By referring to this tradition, Ḍirār implies that he has used this term in the title to criticise the instigation of sects against each other;²⁰ moreover, with its tone of ridicule, the instigators are presented as debased, treating humans like animals.

“*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” is considered a rare Arabic text of this early period because of its use of a literary style for a theological issue. Although Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (d. 142/759) may have used a similar style in “*Kalilah wa-dimnah*”, it was a different topic and a translated work.²¹ Ḍirār employs a fictional character he calls al-Faqīh.²² While the term *al-faqīh* is used in a general metaphorical sense, it is not hard to guess who is meant within the context of the book.²³ Al-Faqīh here functions as a reference person, one all sects refer their disagreements to; at the same time, al-Faqīh does not mean a specialization in the fields of *fiqh* or jurisprudence, but rather is to be understood in broader terms, as a scholar of religion. Given this

16 See David Thomas et al. (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1 (600–900), Leiden/Boston 2009, pp. 371–374.

17 See Cornelia Schöck, “*Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745–6) and the ‘Jahmiyya’ and Ḍirār b. ‘Amr (d. 200/815)*”, in: Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford 2016, pp. 55–86.

18 “[...] *al-taḥrīshu bayna al-nāsi iḡhrā’u ba’ ḍihim bi-ba’ ḍin wa-l-iḡsādu baynahum. Wa-harrasha bayna l-mutaqātilīna aḡsada wa-aḡhrā ba’ ḍahum bi-ba’ ḍin wa-hayyajahum ‘alā ba’ ḍ.*”, cf. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Beirut 1414/1993, vol. 6, Beirut n.y. (3rd edition), pp. 279f.

19 See Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dawūd*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt and Muḥammad Kāmil Qurrah Bilalī, vol. 4, Beirut 1430/2009, Hadith no. 2562, p. 209.

20 Cf. Ḍirār b. ‘Amr, “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*”, p. 41.

21 See van Ess, “*Das K. at-Taḥrīsh des Ḍirār b. ‘Amr*”, pp. 2473.

22 The term *al-faqīh* has been established in the tradition of Islamic legal scholarship to mean “the jurist”. Yet, as will be elaborated further in the present article, Ḍirār does not seem to use this word with the same connotation it holds today; he uses it to refer to the general scholar who ought to be knowledgeable about a wide variety of disciplines.

23 See Van Ess, “*Das K. at-Taḥrīsh des Ḍirār b. ‘Amr*”, pp. 2478f.

use of this term, it is clearly necessary to recover its specific connotations during this historical phase and compare it to similar terms.

The book revolves around al-Faqīh, who receives a group keen to ask him about a certain matter or seek his opinion on one of the sects. Al-Faqīh then concurs with their opinion and cites a host of traditions and narrations ascribed to the prophet, the companions and their successors (al-Tābi‘ūn) in support of his questioners’ standpoint. Afterwards, al-Faqīh then receives another group who disagrees with the first group and thus criticises him for expressing his agreement with the former, to which he replies: “the first group told lies on my behalf. The correct opinion is ...”. He then goes on to cite tens of hadiths and traditions bolstering the second position. This is followed by a third group who inquires about a different topic, followed by yet a fourth group with an opposite standpoint. He lists evidence (sometimes qur’anic verses) for every given position in the same manner. This method is employed throughout the book on various topics, the majority of which are *kalām* matters prevalent among the sects in the second century, as well as a few jurisprudential subjects.

Despite the fact that Ḍirār rarely comments on what is cited by al-Faqīh, he provides a few aggressively ridiculing comments towards him and the proofs he cites. Describing the role of al-Faqīh in the disagreement among the Muslims, Ḍirār says “he [al-Faqīh] instigated, while being naked, uncovered”, (p. 41) actions deemed to be a shameful violation of the prophetic tradition prohibiting the inciting fights between animals. Ḍirār finds the arguments cited by al-Faqīh to be shameful and an overt danger, for they can now be adopted by the people. In another passage Ḍirār assumes that al-Faqīh is motivated by bad intentions and describes his position and shallow religiosity as follows: “he [al-Faqīh] did not spare a beloved king or a messenger of God from blame with slander and falsehoods with the intention of destroying the religion of God” (p. 101). Ḍirār ridicules him again – in his representation of the adherents of the Sunnah and community (Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā‘ah) –, depicting him as a greedy subordinate of kings (p. 101). In another passage: “the King said: ‘O boy, give al-Faqīh a thousand *dīnār* (for) he is an adherent of the sunnah, and community and I got to know that he has debts to pay.’” (p. 104) And in yet another context: “the King told him [al-Faqīh]: ‘you are from the adherents to sunnah and community. I got to know that you have debts to pay. O boy, give him five thousand *Dīnār* so he may pay his debts and a hundred special robes so he may dress his children.’ The king appointed him as a judge in one of the important territories.” (p. 130) In reference to the evidence cited by al-Faqīh about the virtues of certain regions over the others, Ḍirār comments that “there were no virtues left for the cities of Mecca and Medina (al-Ḥaramayn).” (p. 120) He also imprecates him and denies the validity of the anthropomorphic traditions cited by al-Faqīh, arguing for the resemblance of God to humans. “And he [al-Faqīh] – may he be cursed – said: ‘God looked into the water and created Adam in His picture’ [...] and he [al-Faqīh] – may he be cursed – said: ‘indeed God descends on the day of ‘Arafah [...]’” (p. 136) These quotes are from the few

passages in which Ḍirār unequivocally declares his opinions with respect to issues and topics, whereas in other passages his views may be deduced from the context. This reflects the vehemence of his own positions with respect to some topics and his leniency in others, which he addressed within the framework of his presentation of the differences in the positions prevalent at the time.

This is the mainstay and primary focus of “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*”; it presents the oldest, broadest and detailed map of the Muslim sects in Kufa in the second century after Hijrah. As al-Sayyid has pointed out, the topics referred to in the book are the chief factional polemics in Kufa and other Islamic cities at the time.²⁴ It is the oldest book in which the term “sunnah and community” (Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā‘ah) occurs, along with the names of the other Muslim sects. The Shi‘ites are referred to by Ḍirār as al-Shi‘ah and he differentiates between them and al-Rawāfiḍ (resp. al-Rāfiḍah). While some sects are clearly mentioned by name, such as al-Jahmiyyah, al-Mu‘tazilah, al-Ibāḍiyyah and al-Murji‘ah, others can only be inferred through their quoted opinions. The author does not identify himself with any of the mentioned sects, criticising almost all of them.

Ḍirār’s position towards sunnah is obscure. His book contains a number of Hadith narrated by people considered by some to falsify the content (*muḥtawā*) of their narrations, while others consider these narrations authentic. Some traditions cited by al-Faqīh to bolster the argument of his addressees are regarded – by the standards of later Hadith scholarship – to be inauthentic, yet Ḍirār leaves them un-commented. In some passages, he directly quotes prophetic traditions such as the Hadith about instigation and yet other traditions about disagreement (within the Muslim communities). For a tradition to be admissible evidence – as Ḍirār later declares – it has to have become the consensus of the community. In a book about Hadith under the title “*Tanāquḍ al-ḥadīth*”, attributed to Ḍirār, he does not deny the authority of Hadith.²⁵ There are however preconditions and qualifications needing to be met before a narration can be accepted as binding evidence. Joseph van Ess, however, argues that Ḍirār only demonstrates the contradictions in Hadith in order to give priority to the Qur’an,²⁶ which he frequently cites, especially in the context of the positions he adopts.

24 Cf. al-Sayyid, “*al-Mu‘tazilah wa ta‘thīruhum fī-l-lāhūt al-yahūdī*”.

25 For further readings on his position regarding Hadith see Mahmoud, “*A Reading into Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*”. In “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” nearly 311 Hadiths are cited, in most cases to demonstrate their misuse. Also see Anas Sermini, “*Ta‘ammulāt fī Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh li-mu‘allifihī Ḍirār b. ‘Amr al-Ghaṭafānī (Contemplations on Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh by Ḍirār b. Amr al-Ghaṭafānī)*”, available: URL: <http://anassarmini.blogspot.com/2017/06/blog-post.html> (accessed September 8, 2020). It is noteworthy that the reconstruction of the book contains mistakes in the verification of the prophetic traditions as well as in the vowels and diacritics of several words.

26 Cf. van Ess, “*Das K. al-Taḥrīsh des Ḍirār b. ‘Amr*”, pp. 2464f.

3 Religions in Light of “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*”. An Early Attestation of the Different Legal Status of Non-Muslims

Ḍirār’s purpose in writing “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*” was not to point out the diversity of religions at the time, but rather to demonstrate the differences within the Muslims. Nonetheless, the very nature of the subject matter led him to touch upon the different sects within Christianity at the time, as well as the different types of polytheists (al-Mushrikūn) prevalent in history.

He thus discusses Christianity in light of its internal differences and the reasons for these differences (pp. 42f.) in order to compare it to what happened among the Muslims. According to Ḍirār, the crux of disagreement dates back to the time after Jesus, the son of Mary, and is attributed to the impact of scholars (the rabbis and monks). He then assigns the names of these sects to the Qur’anic description of Christian religious doctrines which disagreed regarding Christ and his mother, Mary. These sects are:

- Al-Malkāniyyah: they say “Behold, God is the third of a trinity” (Qur’an 4/171; 5/73)
- The Jacobites (al-Ya’qūbiyyah): they say “Behold, God is the Christ, son of Mary” (Qur’an 5/17)
- The Nestorians (al-Nasṭūriyyah): they say, “The Christ is God’s son” (Qur’an 9/30)
- The Jews: Mary is a loose woman and Jesus is a magician and priest (*sāḥir wa-kāhin*)
- The believers: they are but a few and believe that Jesus is a human being and his mother is a pure and righteous woman (Qur’an 5/65)

Ḍirār does not link the doctrines referred to in the Qur’an and their names to the Christian sects of his time, which indicates that he was only citing them for the purpose of comparison. The differences within the Christian sects are narrated based on a tradition that is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās; Ḍirār is hence adopting the prevalent understanding about the divisions and their names. As pointed out by Joseph van Ess,²⁷ these divisions had already been cited by the historian Sayf b. ‘Umar al-Tamīmī (d. 200/815)²⁸.

In addition to the classification of the people of the book (Ahl al-Kitāb), Ḍirār classifies the polytheists (al-Mushrikūn) through the questions addressed to al-Faqīh about hypocrisy.²⁹ In contrast to the polytheists, a hypocrite is “quelled and hides

27 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 2466.

28 In an indirectly related context, al-Faqīh points to the Christian doctrine about paradise and the belief that it does not contain food or drink, see al-Ghaṭafānī, “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*”, p. 82.

29 As he expresses it: “Then came another group of people [to al-Faqīh] and said: ‘What do you say of hypocrisy towards Muhammad (peace be upon him) from the hypocrites and the polytheists? For the hypocrite is quelled and hides his hypocrisy, while the polytheists are different categories: some agree to pay the exemption tax with a willing hand, after having been humbled in war, some

his hypocrisy”. He then goes on to list the categories of polytheists in light of their relation to the Muslims under conditions of peace and war (p. 82).

The first category: Some “agree to pay the exemption tax with a willing hand, after having been humbled [in war or having been defeated]”; these are the ones who are peaceful or have been defeated in war. Ḍirār presents this category as a historical fact; this is of vital importance for it supports the jurisprudential argument, which claims that the polytheists are like the people of the book in terms of accepting the exemption tax (*jizyah*). This opinion is adopted by one school (*madhhab*), the Mālikiyyah. The term al-Mushrikūn – in this context – cannot possibly refer to the people of the book: while some early scholars attributed the people of the book to polytheists (Mushrikūn), this occurred within the context of a discussion about their doctrines, their exclusion from the rules and the regulations to be applied to the polytheists. It was not a discussion as to whether or not accept the exemption tax from them.

The second category of polytheists are those who wage war against the Muslims; they are to be considered enemies on the battlefield and in the state of war. This, in turn, inevitably means that any polytheist not fighting against the Muslims ought to be classified in a different category and given a peaceful status.

The third category of polytheists (Mushrikūn) pertains to the apostates (*murtadd*) who are law abiding and not criminals. Four aspects define this category of polytheists: 1. They have reverted to their polytheism after having been Muslims; 2. Their subordination, for they have submitted to the status quo of the authority and the community, and thus do not pose any sort of threat; 3. They are subjects under the authority of the *imām*; and 4. They demonstrate no signs of disobedience, meaning that they are not aggressors or thugs and did not join the ranks of soldiers, so they are neither backed by an army, use a fortress, possess weapons nor form an alliance with the enemy. These four aspects all point to this third category of polytheists, the apostates present in societies at the time. They changed their religion without becoming engaged in fighting or leaving the land of the Muslims; nor were they compelled into hypocrisy; they simply choose to revert to polytheism, while maintaining their obedience to the rulers and remained peaceful.

It seems that it was quite common at the time to distinguish between fighters and civilians (who pay the exemption tax) acquiescing to Muslim rule. This third category of polytheists evidently contradicts the jurisprudential speculations of the majority of Muslim jurists, who legitimated the killing of the apostate for the mere reason of his apostasy, irrespective of whether or not his conduct is peaceful. Historical realities seem to confirm what Ḍirār b. ‘Amr mentions with respect to the group of apostates, who continued to exist through the ages.³⁰

are at war with the Muslims and others are subservient apostates that are law abiding and not fortified (can be captured at any time)”, see al-Ghaṭāfānī, “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*”, p. 82.

30 This phenomenon needs further observation and study in historical and legal sources, for it seems that the historical practice of deeming an apostate depends on the extent of his aggression and

That this classification of polytheists was adhered to from the early centuries without any further discussion of related judgements implies that it was a prevailing phenomenon in Muslim societies. This finding contradicts what the *jumhūr* (majority) of jurists had finally settled on as the right way to deal with the polytheists (either accept Islam or fight) and apostates (repentance or death sentence), irrespective of whether the polytheists have been paying the tax. This means that, as a historic account, “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” supports contemporary opinions on the freedom of belief, insofar as any change in belief is performed and completed in a peaceful manner.

4 Muslim Sects in the Second Century: Ḍirār and the Problematic Issues of the Time

According to Ḍirār b. Amr, disagreement and dissension amongst the members of the same religion is one and the same in all religions and stems from, in the first instance, a pivotal incident that necessitates the taking of a “religious” position. This inevitably gives rise to a second aspect, precisely the position the scholars take towards this incident and their role in sowing division amongst the adherents. What occurred among the Muslims is thus the same as that which occurred within the Jewish and Christian communities: “So the people of Moses were led to perdition by al-Sāmīrīy and the people of Jesus by Paul and those who came after him.” (p. 41) The equivalent of al-Sāmīrīy and Paul in Islam is this metaphorical character Ḍirār calls al-Faqīh and the first incident that caused disagreement and dissension among the people of prayer (Ahl aṣ-Ṣalāh) revolved around the status given to the companions of the prophet (aṣ-Ṣaḥāba). Ḍirār thus opens his work by addressing the disagreements related to the positions of the companions and follows this with the theological disagreements on the attributes of God, faith and actions, the Hereafter, political discord, and other jurisprudential topics. It seems conceivable that the order of the discourses is based on the historical sequence of events.

Due to how they overlap, I shall designate the different orientations addressed in the book based on the topics discussed and not the internal order. It is noteworthy that Ḍirār presents the issues in the form of dichotomies even if there is a third or fourth opinion on the matter in question. Furthermore, he only mentions the members of a sect when it is certain that they adopted the opinion he is presenting. These opinions are accurately attributable, to the extent that he singles out

active fighting against Muslims. As long as an apostate was peaceful and subordinate to the ruling authority, then he was not killed. This, in turn, explains the existence of minorities who were declared apostates throughout Muslim history. Some legal works have pointed to the practical ruling in regard to the peaceful sects classified as non-Muslim to which the verdict of apostasy may apply, see Mu‘taz al-Khaṭīb, “*al-Aqallīyyāt al-dīniyyah fī l-wa‘y al-fiqhī. Al-Nizām al-fiqhī wa-ma‘zāq al-dawlah*”, in: Muḥammad Jamāl (eds.), *al-Mas‘alah al-ṭā‘ifiyya wa-ṣinā‘at al-aqallīyyāt fī l-waṭan al-‘arabī*, Beirut/Doha 2018, p. 443.

members of a certain sect for adopting a dissenting opinion within the sect. Up to forty mainstays are identifiable and I have classified them based on the following subject areas: doctrine (*'aqīdah*), political affairs, jurisprudential branches (*furū' al-aḥkām*), and different approaches to attaining the truth. Within the framework of this present article, it is not possible to elaborate on the thread connecting the topics and their disagreements; our prime concern here is to firstly describe the work and present its content. A deeper consideration reveals a host of theological issues revolving around the understanding of faith, its relation to human actions, the attributes of God, the liability of a responsible (*mukallaḥ*) person, declaring a person a non-believer, and the unity of the community. Thus, a considerable array of topics related to theology are directly or indirectly linked to political affairs (for everything that concerns the community has a political dimension). As for the purely political topics, they concern the position towards the companions and their disagreement, and, in turn, the position towards *imāmah* (leadership of the Muslim community) and hence issues related to dealing with the ruler and the use of prophetic traditions to bolster each argument. As for the subsidiary topics, they occur at the peripheries between the religious and political discourses, followed by a dispute on defining the topic of disagreement. What crucially emerges from this structure is that the quest to attain the truth in relation to the core of these disagreements is the distinction between religious and political matters. In other words, the disagreement ignites on the diagnosis of the current issue and its connection to a text, to religion, to scholarly *ijtihād*, or to the community. Thus, Ḍirār sees the optimum solution in accepting both authorities: the religious references and the authority over social conduct, i.e. narrated traditions with unanimous communal consensus (*al-khabar al-mujma' 'alayh*). The topics of the different orientations set out by Ḍirār are:

4.1 Disagreements on Doctrinal Issues: The Theological Questions

4.1.1 Faith and the Attributes of God

- Disagreement in attributing faith (*imān*) (pp. 72ff.): al-Ḥashū and al-Shukkāk (those who doubt their own faith) are cautious not to attribute faith to anyone; they defer it completely to God and depend on Him for salvation. Al-Murji'ah, al-Khawārij, and al-Shia', on the other hand, are assertive of their attribution of faith to the believers.
- The issue of human actions in accordance with God's will and His contentment (pp. 94–101): al-Qadariyyah, who are from all categories of Ahl al-Qiblah, declare those who disagree with them from among Ahl al-Qiblah as disbelievers. They say: "when a person from Ahl al-Qiblah does a good deed or commits a sin, it is actually done to him." Ḍirār's comment on their view reflects his own opinion, which concurs with that of al-Mu'tazilah: "through their interpretations, they have revoked the implications of many verses in regards to

the rewards for human actions.”³¹ The following groups disagreed with this opinion: al-Maymūniyyah, al-Azāriqah and al-Faḍīliyyah, from among al-Khawārij, al-Ghaylāniyyah, and al-Samriyyah from among al-Murji’ah and the majority of al-Ḥashū from all types of people who pray towards *al-qiblah*; they say, faith is an attestation with no action.

- Ḍirār mentions the opinion of al-Rāfiḍah concerning *badā’* (revelation after concealing or altering of the divine will) and comments: “Allah is exalted above that what they’re saying.” (pp. 106f.)
- The disagreement about the possibility to see God (*ru’yatallāh*) and the opinions about His attributes. Here Ḍirār aggressively attacks al-Faqīh and curses him for the traditions he cites, which confirm the possibility of being able to see God, of His similarity to humans, and His incarnation. These traditions are viewed as indications of disbelief, idol worship, and falsehoods about God, and whoever believes in them is a polytheist worshipping images (p. 135ff.). With respect to this, Ḍirār took a third different view, believing in the possibility of seeing God in the Hereafter through a sixth sense, which God creates then for the humans.
- As for hypocrisy, some have said there is no hypocrisy after the death of the prophet, while others cite the attributes of the hypocrites, which are still present, and whoever committed a major sin (*kabīrah*) is to be considered a hypocrite (pp. 137ff.).

4.1.2 Faith and Human Action (pp. 74–82)

This is the most elaborately addressed disagreement in the book, with nine different directions presented. Some of these are similar to one another, while others are a branch of another position.

- Al-Jamā’ah, al-Murji’ah, some of al-Khawārij, the masses of Ahl al-Tawḥīd, except al-Shukkāk, and al-Mutazammitūn, have refused to declare the people of the *qiblah* as disbelievers.
- Al-Ghaylāniyyah (a sub-sect of the Levantine Murji’ah) say knowledge of God is part of the human instinct; it is neither a religion, nor an obligation, nor an obtainment (*iktisāb*). In this regard, all creation is equal; Iblis, angels, and believers are all equal.
- Al-Jahmiyyah (a sub-sect of the Chorasani Murji’ah, the core of al-Murji’ah) *imān* (faith) and *islām* (accepting Islam) are only what is internalized and concealed, not what is evident on the surface. Any statement, action or knowledge that is concealed or presented on the surface other than the knowledge of God, the creator, is neither to be considered an element of faith nor of religion, nor of worship.

31 “*Wa-abṭalū bi-ta’wīlihim dilālata ’āyātīn kathīratan ’alā jazā’i l-’amal*”.

- Al-Murji'ah of Kufa (an-Nu'māniyyah, aṣ-Ṣabāhiyyah, al-Waddāhiyyah, Qays al-Māḍir³², and al-Raddiyah) and of Basra (al-Samwuiyah) say: whoever declares his faith has fulfilled his obligation; for what is said is in concurrence with the state of the heart.
- Al-Azāriqah and an-Najdāt from among al-Khawārij say: faith is a verbal declaration and actions are generally neither part of religion, nor faith, nor worship, and people of religion will not claim their superiority to others.
- Al-Khawārij, al-Shia', al-Mu'tazilah, and all of those who disagreed with al-Murji'ah: actions are part of religion.
- Faith is part of accepting Islam, and *imān* and *islām* are two names for religion.
- Faith (*imān*) has its mainstays and Islam has its mainstays as stated in the Hadiths.
- Al-Mu'tazilah: the licentious (*fujjār*) among the people of *al-qiblah* are in the intermediate position; they are neither polytheistic disbelievers, nor among the righteous, for they are immoral and obscene. Ḍirār cites a variety of verses in support of his argument and goes into length when describing the status of the licentious, labelling them the losers of all, for they have broken their bond with God after it has been established. According to Ḍirār, the hypocrites were only during the time of the prophet. These are among those issues in which Ḍirār's opinion matches that of the Mu'tazilah.

4.1.3 Judgement and the Hereafter

The question of intercession (*al-shafā'ah*) and the destiny of sinners is addressed in this section. Ḍirār states his opinion, which also concurs with that of the Mu'tazilah, believing in promise and warning (*al-wa'd wa-l-wa'id*), and goes on to declare those who believe the traditions claiming forgiveness for sinners as unbelievers. This is one of the most unequivocal positions he demonstrates in the book. He also conveys the opinion held by the adherents of sunnah and community (Aṣḥāb al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā'ah), who argue in favour of salvation for the sinners in the Hereafter and the possibility of intercession.

Another issue related to the Hereafter is the matter of the return of Jesus, son of Mary. Al-Ḥashū and al-Mutazammitūn support the view that Jesus, son of Mary, will return based on a prophetic tradition; Jesus will return and pray behind a man from this *ummah* and break the cross. On the other hand, others refused this position based on the premise that there are no prophets after Muḥammad (pp. 108f.). As for the destiny of souls after death, Ḍirār presents the disagreement about the attribute of life after the death (p. 114f.), mentioning those who believe in reincarnation, saying that this view is taken from the Zoroastrians, declaring it to be an opinion of disbelief (*kufir*) (pp. 123f.). With respect to the matter of punishment of the grave (*'adhāb al-qabr*): it is denied by all of al-Khawārij, the majority of al-

32 It was written so by the editors of the book. Perhaps it is al-Māṣir.

Shia', al-Mu'tazilah, the majority of al-Murji'ah, while it is accepted by al-Ḥashū and al-Muqallidūn (pp. 112ff.). He also mentions the disagreement about the status of a deceased person in debt (pp. 89f.).

4.1.4 Prophecy and the Qur'an

Ḍirār mentions the disagreement about the preference of (certain) prophets (over others); some have declared this preferentiality permissible, while others refused it (pp. 115ff.). He also mentions the position of al-Qadariyyah, which says that the wives of the prophets may be wrongdoers, again refused by others (p. 101). Regarding the life of Muḥammad before revelation, al-Ḥashū, along with some others, say he only believed after reaching the age of forty, while others refused this and asserted his belief and his righteousness before receiving revelation (pp. 118ff.).

He also addresses the disagreement about reading different versions of the Qur'an (*al-khilāf fi qirā'at al-qur'ān bi-ḥurūf ukhrā*). While 'Alī, Ibn Mas'ūd, and 'Umar used to read the Quran in diverse versions, many of which are now unrecoverable and we cannot know of, al-Khawārij and the likes rejected these variations (pp. 107f.). Within the controversies related to the Qur'an, Ḍirār alludes to the disagreement on whether disbelieving one qur'anic verse would be akin to disbelieving the entire Qur'an. This matter is exemplified by the example of the final two chapters of the Qur'an (*al-mu'awwadhatān*). According to the attestation of al-Muhājirūn (the emigrants) and al-Anṣār (the supporters), along with the consensus of the *ummah*, these two chapters (*al-mu'awwadhatān*) are indeed written on the guarded tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*); on the other hand, al-Ḥashū and al-Ḥaṣībīyyah from among al-Shia' and al-Qadariyyah from among al-Murji'ah, do not regard them as part of the Qur'an (pp. 109ff.).

4.2 Disagreements with Political Dimensions: The Political Questions

Political disagreements are the first matter Ḍirār addresses. The dispute regarding the companions, their positions, and their conflicts is the issue discussed in most detail in the book. Here he considers those positions most debated amongst the companions and the positions taken by the sects to each one of them:

1. The positions towards the companions: Ḍirār starts off with the disagreement about 'Uthmān (the third caliph) (pp. 45ff.). While the Umayyads (al-Umawīyyūn) and their followers praised 'Uthmān and declared his murderers and those who supported his murder to be disbelievers, al-Khawārij, al-Rawāfiq, and al-Shia' criticised 'Uthmān, declaring him and his supporters disbelievers. Mu'āwīyah b. Abī Sufyān (pp. 48ff.) and his followers, on the other hand, were disavowed by the majority of the population, while the followers of the kings of Banū Ummayah, Ahl al-'Aṭā', Ahl al-Qiblah, al-Marghaniyyah, and Ahl al-Sasār from Ahl al-Ra'y pledged their allegiance to

- Mu'āwiyah. As for the positions towards 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (the fourth caliph) (pp. 50–53), he was highly praised by al-Rāfiḍah and al-Shia', who saw in him the prophet's rightful successor and believed that the prophet had shared with him the secrets to the revelation and religion. They also believe the *ummah* had reverted to apostasy after the prophet, except for four individuals, and a further two repented later. After going through these opinions, indirectly through the statements of al-Faqīh, Ḍirār comments: "and he [al-Faqīh] went on misleading with his misled and fabricated talk [...]" (p. 52).³³ Al-Khawārij, on the other hand, disavowed 'Alī and everyone who pledged allegiance to him, and declared them disbelievers. In regard to the positions towards Abū Bakr and 'Umar (pp. 53–56), Ḍirār mentions narrated traditions that oppose the position of al-Rāfiḍah and al-Shia' and comments: "these opinions have been agreed upon by the first infallible generation and was also accepted by al-Khawārij" (p. 56). His statement here is a clear indication of his position and his rationalization of this position. As for Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr (p. 56ff.), they were praised by al-Ḥashū and Atbā' al-Mulūk min Ṭullāb al-Fitan and disparaged by al-Khawārij and al-Shia'. Al-Jalsiyyah,³⁴ al-Ṣamtiyyah, al-Ḥashawiyyah and al-Mutazammitūn refrained from any mentioning of the companions that was in any way negative, even going so far as to declare slurring them a sinful act.
2. The position towards rebellion and usurpation of the Muslim ruler (p. 57–68): Ḍirār points out three positions towards al-Khawārij. The first denigrated them to the extent of inciting their murder; the second is that of al-Ḥilsīyyah from among al-Ḥashū and al-Mutazammitūn, whereby al-Khawārij are criticised for rebelling against and usurping the righteous ruler, but there is restraint from killing even in the face of injustice; and thirdly, there is the position of al-Khawārij, al-Shia', and al-Khannāqūn, who generally permitted bloodshed and dispossession. The latter called for the usurpation of an unjust ruler and the killing of whoever sinned publicly. Ḍirār mentions in the statements of al-Faqīh a panoply of narrations to support al-Khawārij in declaring the sinners as unbelievers, going as far as to even declare their families as unbelievers who ought to be killed and have their wealth confiscated.

33 "Wa-ḥi nahwi hadhā mina l-ḥadīthi l-dālli l-muḍilli l-mufta'ali".

34 Al-Jalsiyyah (with *jīm*) is the use of diacritics in the edition. Yet it seems what is meant are al-Ḥilsīyyah (with *hā*) as they are mentioned in other sources. The term is taken from *al-hils* (translator's note: in "*Qāmūs al-ma'ānī*" the translation of *hils* is "cushion" and of *ḥalas* is "saddlecloth"): "a rug that is laid out in the house." This is said to be mentioned in the Hadīth "*kun ḥilsa baytik*" ("stay in your house"), meaning one should stay at home during a time of turbulence and disorder, just as a rug or a cushion belongs at home. Those who hold this position at the time of disorder are called al-Ḥilsīyyah, see Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, ed. 'Abdallāh al-Jabūrī, vol. 1, Bagdad 1397/1977, p. 562. Al-Jāḥiẓ refuted their affiliation to the companion 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar and their claim that he is the head of al-Ḥilsīyyah, cf. al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn, vol. 3, Cairo 1988, p. 130. Joseph van Ess notes that al-Ḥilsīyyah is the oldest name of an Islamic sect, but the term is no longer used in later references by theologians, cf. van Ess, "*Das K. at-Taḥrīṣ des Ḍirār b. 'Amr*", pp. 2481f.

3. The position towards the rule of the transgressor, the unjust and the question of the permissibility of praying behind them (p. 84–88): al-Ḥilsīyyah, aṣ-Ṣamtiyyah, al-Ḥashawiyyah, and al-Mutazammitūn all accept the authority of an immoral ruler, would follow him in prayer and allow closer cooperation with the governing authorities. In contrast, al-Khawārij, al-Shiʿa, and al-Muʿtazilah refused to acknowledge the Imamate of an immoral, unjust ruler. Ḍirār mentions through al-Faqīh that the adherents of sunnah and community would accept a strong immoral ruler taking over power, while Ahl al-Ṣalāh refuse such an authority and call for violent rebellion whenever the ruler demonstrated his transgressions publicly (p. 129f.).
4. Preference of the tribe Quraysh and the Imamate ought to remain within them: this opinion was rejected however by al-Khawārij (p. 117f.). As for the disagreement about *al-taqiyyah* (prudence/fear), it was rejected by al-Azāriqah and accepted by others from among al-Khawārij and al-Shiʿa. Ḍirār comments on their standpoint that they came to be content with *al-taqiyyah*, albeit as a way of disguising their desires and greed, whereby they were not genuinely afraid nor living under threat (pp. 91ff.). Through the voice of al-Faqīh he also conveys the merits of Syria and its people, then commenting on him that “he has left no merits for al-Ḥaramayn (the holy mosques of Mecca and Medina)”.³⁵ He also narrates the praise of the Easterners (Ahl al-Mashriq) till they were contented (pp. 121f.) and through al-Faqīh praises the people of the black flags (Ahl al-Rāyāt al-Sūd/Banū al-ʿAbbās) and pledges allegiance to them, while still mentioning other narrations criticising them. Ḍirār also mentions some other disagreements on secondary matters such as warning the enemy before invading and inviting them to accept Islam, killing women and children on the battlefield, positions of wealth and poverty, and issues related to witness, divorce, and sexual relations with women (p. 90, 93f., 102ff., 132–135, 104ff., 111f., 126–129, 131f.).

5 Disagreements and the Methods to Attain the Truth

After presenting the different positions and orientations of the sects in the various doctrinal and political matters at the time, Ḍirār presents the standpoint of the main sects towards disagreements, which he calls “the ordeal within the community” (*al-balāʾ bayn al-ummah*) (p. 139f.), stating: “When the ordeal occurred within the ummah and he [al-Faqīh] instigated them against one another and narrated to each sect whatever they wanted to hear and concurred with their opinions, the people were divided into six types” (p. 139).³⁶ The first type: al-Ṣafariyyah and al-Murjiʿah see the disagreement similar to those that had occurred during the

35 “*Lam yubqi li-l-ḥaramayni shayʿan*”.

36 “*Fa-lammā waqaʿa l-balāʾu bayna l-ummati wa-ḥarasha [al-Faqīh] baʿḍahum ʿalā baʿḍin wa rawā li-kulli ṣifin minhum mā wāfaqa hawāhu wa-taʿwīlah ṣāra l-nāsu ʿalā sittati aṣnāfin*”.

time of the prophet, even if some aspects varied. Hence, there is no other way out of the situation except to follow the guidance of the prophet. The second type are al-Ibādiyyah, who adhere to the view that the book (the Qur'an) contains the solution to the hardship the community is dealing with at the time and if the prophet was tried with the afflictions suffered in hardship as we are today, then he would deal with it in the same way we (al-Ibādiyyah) are dealing with it. The third type, al-Najdāt, consider the hardships the ummah is facing as a new set of incidents and people thus need to use their rationale to deal with them. The prophet did not face the same type of hardship as they are and the book (the Qur'an) does not address these matters. The fourth and fifth type are al-Shi'a' and Atbā' al-Mulūk (the followers of kings), who have submitted their affairs to a few men and guidance may only be attained by following them. The sixth type are some of al-Ḥashū, who entirely neglect the matter and declare it a heresy to even look into it.

Ḍirār comments about these types: "They all agreed that truth and guidance are to be attained through the adherence to the prophet and misguidance lies in disobeying him. Innovation in matters of religion is a heresy and every heresy is led astray. Whoever holds a dissenting opinion to the consensus of the ummah has repealed the agreement" (p. 140).³⁷ He then goes on to summarize their points of view in light of their methods to attain the truth. He counts some 15 different methods adopted by the different sects (pp. 141–145).³⁸ These methods primarily revolve around narrated accounts, whether qur'anic accounts, prophetic narrations, *ijtihād*, the unanimity of the communal consensus, or a combination of all the above. Ḍirār then narrates a discussion of all the different standpoints after having rejected or criticised all of them. He concludes that the ultimate admissible evidence (*hujjah*) lies in the unanimity of the communal consensus in the narrated tradi-

37 "Ijtama' ū jamī'an anna l-ḥaḡga wa-l-hudā fi ttibā'i l-nabīyi wa-anna al-bāṭila fi-khilāfihi. Wa-l-ibtidā' ū bid'atun wa-kullu bid'atin ḡalālatun. Fa-naḡaḡa mā jtama' ū 'alayhi mā nḡarada bihi kullu munḡaridin minhum".

38 Methods of attaining the truth mentioned by Ḍirār are: 1. al-Bayhasiyyah: evidence holds its truth within it and does not need further witness to its truthfulness. 2. The majority of al-Khawārij aṣ-Ṣafriyyah: a proof of the truthfulness of something is true if it previously came with truthful evidence. 3. al-Ibādiyyah: truth is the evidence of truth. 4. Some have said: the prophet is the evidence of truth. 5. al-Najdāt: the evidence of truth is the belief of our sect in it. 6. al-Ḥasaniyyah: the evidence of truth is the statement of a man contradicting the prophet and then no truth may be proven to someone else. 7. al-Azāriqah and al-Bid'iyyah: truth lies in everything that is recited in the book, all that is not recited in the book is misguidance. 8. Some of al-Ḥasaniyyah: narrations are the evidence of truth. 9. al-Rāfiḡah, al-Mu'tazilah, and al-Ḥashū: whoever has practiced *ijtihād* (made scholarly effort) to attain the truth and found an opinion to be agreeable, yet, did not find approval and was not given knowledge shall be excused. 10. al-Riqāshiyah: the evidence of truth lies in the knowledge of religious people of it. 11. al-Murji'ah: evidence of truth is that it is unanimously said by the entire community. 12. al-Ḥashū: the fact that God did not set an example of the people who follow their desires is the evidence of truth. 13. Some of al-Ḥashū: there is no need for evidence in the matters that are disagreed upon, but evidence lies in the matters that were not disagreed upon. 14. A sect: evidence for truth is the community. 15. A sect: evidence of truth is similar to all those evidences mentioned; two or three of them shall attain the truth.

tions, which cannot be revoked by other traditions.³⁹ Within this consensus resides the revocation of the dissenter; for he has agreed to the consensus and did not deny its authenticity, then went on to disagree to it through another narration or a dissenting interpretation, after having accepted it. Ḍirār calls upon the sects to stick to the evidence provided: “If guidance is only to be attained through the consensus of the ummah, then it is less likely to be attained by single opinions” (p. 145). “Abandoning the consensus of the ummah revokes all of religion” (p. 145). Despite the fact that he affirms the vital role of evidence, he does not deny disagreement and confirms that it holds some truth, with no possibility of finding an ultimate remedy.

6 Conclusion

Having presented the content and method of the book, we can now draw a number of basic conclusions about its messages. Firstly, the author vilifies and disparages those who cause divisions within the religious community for personal reasons, driven by greed and aspiration for power and prestige. This is exemplified by the figure of al-Faqīh, who represents a person of fake religiosity and who indulges in instigating people. Secondly, Ḍirār disparages a disagreement without a solid basis that would in fact deem this same disagreement necessary; on the other hand, he acknowledges that in certain matters disagreements are inevitable due to the nature of the presented evidence in most matters and the impact of interpretation in understanding the given texts. The second message is to be seen clearly in the conclusion of the book, where he confirms that truth lies in disagreements and there is no possibility of redress. This message is also indirectly implied in Ḍirār’s silence on a whole spectrum of issues, where al-Faqīh presents contradictory narrations and opinions depending on his addressees, especially when quoting qur’anic verses. The third message is the laying of the foundation of disagreement, to which the different sects may resort to in order to settle their discords. Accordingly, one would be able to differentiate between a true disagreement, which the available evidence would allow for, from disagreements mostly based on the ignorance of al-Faqīh, where he resorts to hypocrisy and lies for the purpose of accumulating wealth and bolstering his prestige.

After having presented this ambiguous image of religious and ideological diversity as well as the huge diversions in the opinions of his time, Ḍirār b. ‘Amr was eager to find common ground for establishing standards among the disagreeing parties to attain the truth. Hence, the standard he sets for the provided evidence are the narrations (*khbar*, pl. *akhbār*) which have attained unanimous communal consensus and cannot be revoked by other narrations. His affirmation of this

39 “The community has unanimously consented on narrations, which cannot be revoked by other narrations, because they have consented upon them, such as their agreement upon the *qiblah* and *zakat* and other similar matters. Hence, their consensus proves the invalidity of the one who disagreed.”, cf. Ḍirār b. ‘Amr, “*Kitāb al-Tahrīsh*”, p. 144.

standard implies his endorsement of transmitted traditions, provided that the community has agreed on their authenticity. Any discord in the interpretation of an established tradition is, in Ḍirār's view, not problematic. This reasoning becomes evident in his response to the position of al-Shia' and al-Rāfiḍah towards Abū Bakr and 'Umar, where namely he comments on the mentioned traditions as follows: "these opinions have been agreed upon by the first infallible generation and was also accepted by al-Khawārij" (p. 56). Hence, his acceptance of communal consensus grounded in the authenticity of the tradition implies that he refuses to resort to a tradition with a single narrator (*khabar 'āḥād*), which are narrations admissible for the adherents of Hadīth (Ahl al-Ḥadīth). While this method was further systematised in the norm derivation theories developed by al-Shāfi'ī, this leaves two relevant questions open. Firstly: did Ḍirār set the condition of the unanimous communal consensus of the *akhbār* for theological and doctrinal matters or does it also apply to the secondary matters (*furū' al-aḥkām*)? Secondly: is this method only to be applied for the cognizance and substantiation of the truth, or to win an argument among the disagreeing parties and to settle their discords? No definitive answer may be provided in light of the book; these questions are open for further research and require close examination of Ḍirār's other works. However, by taking a closer look at the present book we can at least deduce the following: his method applies for the large overarching matters of disagreement within the community, but is not suitable for attaining the ultimate truth as such. Accordingly, he links this message to the consensus (*ijmā'*) and the infallible community (*al-jamā'ah al-ma'sūmah*), namely whatever was agreed upon by the conflicting parties. The possible intention behind this method is to settle an argument in a dispute rather than to resolve a conflict arising from seeking to attain the truth as such. Consequently, he argues provocatively when he comes to confirm the opinions that he adopts, even if they were not shared by the others. This is evident in his presentation of matters of promise and warning, the intermediary position or his disparagement of traditions implying anthropomorphism. He would collect a host of qur'anic verses – presented through the voice of al-Faqīh – in support of the opinion he prefers. On the other hand, he would criticise the opposing opinion as blind belief in an opinion or in a tradition, i.e. one that implies or evokes disbelief. This, in turn, is mental evidence.

This was Ḍirār's position for limiting the use of transmitted traditions as evidence to that which is consented upon by the disputing parties. Evidently, his presentation is a reflection of the tense debate going on at the time on matters of communal consensus (*ijmā'*) and the admissibility of transmitted traditions (*ḥujjiyyat al-khabar*). His method combines both as a standard to which the disputing parties ought to resort if they were following different interpretations. These two aspects undoubtedly require further research however, and demand detailed consideration of the sources of the time, for the transmitted traditions were precisely the fuel al-Faqīh used to instigate and spark dispute. These traditions encompass both authentic and false traditions. As for the matter of *ijmā'* – as per "*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*" – it

ought to be an attestation of the admissibility of a transmitted tradition. Accordingly, a true disagreement occurs only after the establishment of the consensus on the tradition. Yet, the role of consensus becomes conflated with consensus on matters entailing mental reasoning (*qaḍāya ijtihādiyyah*). This also needs further study and analysis.

In addition to the above, “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” provides a diverse array of questions for further examination and scrutiny, all of which would shed the light on various perceptions of the historical truth of the second century after Hijrah. It also provides a critical standpoint with respect to a large number of matters and opinions which are evident later but are believed to have existed long before. Three of these issues are considered here in conclusion.

Firstly, the names of Muslim sects and creeds. Many of the names of the sects mentioned in the book were later collected in the discipline of sects and creeds and are to be found in later works such as al-Mu‘tazilah, al-Khawārij, and al-Murji‘ah. However, “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” addresses types and sub-types of the same sect; for instance, there are sub-categories of al-Khawārij and al-Murji‘ah. Some orientations are labelled al-Qadariyyah, which exist as an orientation within a larger sect. In turn, some terms seem to be synonymous, such as al-Rawāfiḍ and al-Shia‘, while others appear to be ambiguous, intertwined or of a political nature, or are perhaps the name of an orientation or a sect such as: al-Ḥashū, al-‘Awām (the general public), Atbā‘ al-Mulūk (the followers of kings), al-Ḥilsīyyah, al-Ṣamtiyyah, al-Bid‘iyyah, Ahl al-Bida‘ (the people of innovations), Ahl al-Tawḥīd (the people of *tawḥīd* [belief in the oneness of God]), Ahl al-Qiblah (the people of qiblah), Ahl al-Ṣalāḥ (the people of guidance), Ahl al-Ra’y (there is no mention of the expression “Ahl al-Ḥadīth”), al-Mutazammitūn bi-l-Riwāyah (the people who stick to transmitted traditions), Ṭullāb al-Fitan. The most significant among these terms is “al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā‘ah” – “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” is the oldest reference to utilise this term. The expression is predominantly used in the context of disparagement and often in contexts related to political dimensions. Yet, questions remain: What are the connotations of this expression? What are the differences and similarities between this expression and other expressions? And which aspects are unique to each expression?

Secondly, the concepts and terms mentioned in the book. In spite of the imaginary literary style used to address a theological topic, the book contains terms and concepts that belong to the different disciplines of the second century after Hijrah. Many of these terms are still confusing, wrongly connoted or have been established in the disciplines to mean something else. For instance, the term *al-faqīh* has a much broader meaning in “*Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*” than that which came to prevail later, specifically in the field of branches of Islamic law (*aḥkām al-furū‘*). A myriad of expressions is used in the book which later came to be established within the disciplines of Hadīth, norm derivation, and *kalām*. For instance: the understanding of a tradition with communal consensus, *al-ḥadīth*, *al-riwayah* (narration), *al-riwayah al-shādhah* (odd narration), joining different narrations

together (*al-tawfiq bayn al-riwāyāt*), a singled out position / opinion, “narrations which may not be revoked by other narrations”,⁴⁰ attaining the truth (*idrāk al-ḥaqq*), the infallible community, evidence, binding / admissible argument (*ḥujjah*), interpretation (*al-ta`wīl*), *al-ijmā`*. There are many other terms used for the first time in “*Kitab al-Taḥrīsh*”. The connotations and exact meanings of these terms within their historical context also represents a broad spectrum requiring further research.

Thirdly, the description of the categories of disbelievers and their position towards the ruling authorities, whereby apostates are considered a peaceful part of this category. This calls for a re-examination of the historical sources pertaining to the types and status of the apostates; how they were treated by the political and legal authorities as well as the standards they referred to at the time. Further study here should reveal a different legal stance, one based on this manner of dealing with non-Muslims during this period, which is different to that which later prevailed in the schools of jurisprudence.

To conclude, “*Kitab al-Taḥrīsh*” mentions, points to, and touches on an impressive array of historical facts to which many Muslims are oblivious, although they are in dire need of knowing and reviving them. Most importantly is the perception of a harmonised unity of a Muslim community in the first centuries in fact baseless. The discords that were and shall remain have both their scientific rationales as well as external causes, which primarily go back to the conduct of the clergy and their exploitation of religion for their own personal gain of wealth, power, and prestige.

40 “*Al-akhbāru l-latī lā yadfā`uhā akhbāru mithlihā*”.