

T a h r i f

Investigating Distortions in Islamic Texts

The *Kitab al-Ma'arif* of Ibn Qutaybah and the account of Imam 'Ali's imprecation for Anas b. Malik

Synopsis:

Towards the end of Ibn Qutaybah's *Kitab al-Ma'arif*, there is a section on "*al-Baras*" where he lists notable people who contracted leprosy or leukoderma during their lifetime. The first entry is for Anas b. Malik, the Companion of the Prophet (s), and the author notes an incident showing that the reason for this disease was a curse by Imam 'Ali (a).

According to the published Egyptian edition, there is a sentence at the end of the anecdote where Ibn Qutaybah casts doubt on the authenticity of the incident. This sentence cannot be found in a 700 year old manuscript of the book held in the British Library!



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Source of the Allegation

[*Al-Ghadir fi al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah wa al-Adab*, Allamah al-'Amini, Beirut edition, volume 1, p. 235]

Analysis and Evidence

Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawari lived between the years 213 AH and 276 AH and was a famous early Sunni scholar with many important books on Qur'anic and *hadith* sciences to his credit. His book *Kitab al-Ma'arif* lists anecdotes and biographical information about various Muslims of preceding centuries.

The incident, as published in the Egyptian edition, can be seen in the extract below:

Kitab al-Ma'arif, Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawari (d. 276 AH), p. 251

Cairo: Matba'at al-Islamiyyah, 1353 AH / 1935 CE

[\[Harvard\]](#)

[\[London\]](#)

[\[Ohio State\]](#)

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البرص

(أنس بن مالك) كان يوجه برص وذكر قوم أن عليا رضي الله عنه سأله عن قول رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم اللهم وال من والاه وعاد من عاداه فقال كبرت سنني ونسيت فقال علي إن كنت كاذبا فضربك الله بيضاء لا تورىها العمامة قال أبو محمد ليس لهذا أصل
(بلعام بن قيس) كان أبرص وكان يقول سيف الله جلاء . جذيمة الأبرش
وكنى عن الأبرص بالأبرش

Al-Baras (Leprosy or Leukoderma)

Anas bin Malik had *al-baras* [evident] in his face. Some people mentioned that 'Ali, may Allah be pleased with him (*radi Allah 'anhu*), asked him regarding the saying of the Messenger of Allah, prayers and peace of Allah be upon him: "Oh Allah, Lead [be the Guide of] the one who accepts his leadership and be the enemy of the one who towards him has animosity." He [Anas] said: "I have grown old in age and I forgot!" So 'Ali said to him: "If you were lying, then may Allah strike you with whiteness that shall not be hidden by a turban."

Abu Muhammad said: There is no basis for this.

It should be noted that 'Abu Muhammad' is the patronym or *kunyah* of Ibn Qutaybah himself. It would therefore seem that Ibn Qutaybah included the anecdote but then commented that he didn't really think it had any truth in it.

So what's the problem with this statement?

There are three problems:

Firstly: Allamah al-'Amini, in *Al-Ghadir*, volume 1, page 236, points out that from the beginning to the end of *Kitab al-Ma'arif*, there is no other place where Ibn Qutaybah mentions something and then casts doubt on it! The style of the book clearly indicates that the author has only written in the book what he believes to be true.

Secondly: The famous Mu'tazilite Sunni scholar, Ibn Abi al-Hadid (d. 656 AH), has written:

Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Ibn Abi al-Hadid al-Mu'tazili (d. 656 AH), [volume 3, p. 388](#)

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(الشرح) المشهور ان عليا عليه السلام ناشد الناس الله في الرحبة بالكوفة فقال أنشدكم الله رجلا سمع رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله يقول لي وهو منصرف من حجة الوداع من كنت مولاه فعلي مولاه اللهم وال من والاه وعاد من عاداه فقام رجال فشهدوا بذلك فقال عليه السلام لانس بن مالك لقد حضرتهما فبالك فقال يا أمير المؤمنين كبرت سني وصار ما أنساء أكثر مما أذكركه فقال له ان كنت كاذبا فضر بك الله بهابيهضاء لانوارها العمامة فماتت حتى أصابه البرص فأما ما ذكره الرضى من انه بعث أنسالي طلحة والزبير فغير معروف ولو كان قد بعثه ليدكرهما بكلام يختص بهما من رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله لما أمكنه أن يرجع فيقول اني أنسيت له لأنه ما فارقته متوجها نحوهما الا وقد أقر بعرفته وذكركه فكيف يرجع بعساعة أو يوم فيقول اني أنسيت له فينكر بعد الاقرار هذا مما لا يقع وقد ذكر ابن قتيبة حديث البرص والسعوة التي دعا بها أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام على أنس بن مالك في كتاب المعارف في باب البرص من أعيان الرجال وابن قتيبة غيرتهم في حق علي عليه السلام على المشهور من انحرافه عنه

... Ibn Qutaybah has mentioned the narration of leprosy/leukoderma (*hadith al-baras*) and the imprecation that the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (a) prayed against Anas b. Malik, in *Kitab al-Ma'arif* in the chapter '*bab al-baras min a'yan al-rijal*'. And Ibn Qutaybah cannot be accused of being partial towards 'Ali (a), indeed he was famous for being inclined away from him.

It would seem that the copy of *Kitab al-Ma'arif* that Ibn Abi al-Hadid was looking at did not contain that last sentence that appears in the Egyptian edition above.

Finally: There exists a version of *Kitab al-Ma'arif* in the form of a manuscript dating back around 700 years, that confirms our suspicion.

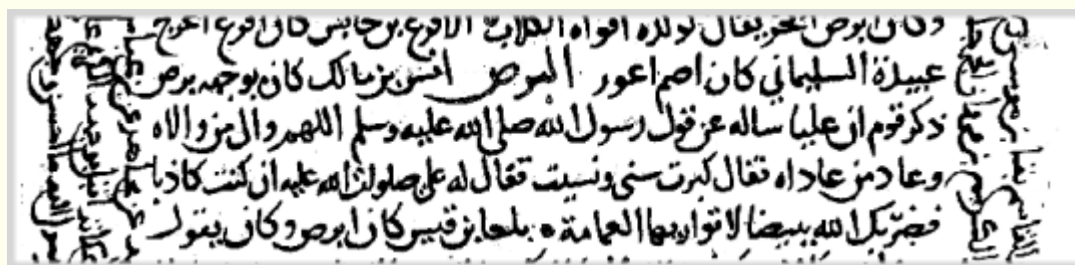
Kitab al-Ma'arif, Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawari (d. 276 AH), folio 118r

Manuscript: British Library catalogue reference Or. 1491

Dated last day of Sha'ban, 710 AH (1310 CE)

[Foll. 136; 9.75 in. by 7.25; 25 lines, 5.5 in. long]

[[British Library](#)]



Al-Baras (Leprosy or Leukoderma)

Anas bin Malik had *al-baras* [evident] in his face. Some people mentioned that 'Ali asked him regarding the saying of the Messenger of Allah, prayers and peace of Allah be upon him: "Oh Allah, Lead [be the Guide of] the one who accepts his leadership and be the

enemy of the one who towards him has animosity." He [Anas] said: "I have grown old in age and I forgot!" So 'Ali, prayers of Allah be upon him (*salawatu Allah 'alayh*) said to him: "If you were lying, then may Allah strike you with whiteness that shall not be hidden by a turban."

Compare the text of this extract carefully with the Egyptian extract above. Although this page from the manuscript has the full incident of Imam 'Ali's (a) imprecation for Anas b. Malik and his disease, there is **no sign** of the alleged comment: "Abu Muhammad said: There is no basis for this." !

Also notice the honorific *salawatu Allah 'alayh* used for Imam 'Ali which is not to be found in the printed Egyptian edition.

But without a full chain of narration (*isnad*) how can you trust such a report?

The *Kitab al-Ma'arif* is not a book that quotes full chains of narrations for its contents. The fact that Ibn Qutaybah, a person who was famous for his disillusionment towards Imam 'Ali (a), would quote the anecdote implies that he must have felt there was truth in it.

Are there any other sources for this incident?

There are several places where we can find this account of Imam 'Ali's imprecation with full and reliable chains of narration. These have been researched in detail by Allamah al-'Amini and can be seen in *Al-Ghadir*, (Beirut edition), volume 1, pp. 207-238

When did the Prophet (s) say for 'Ali, "O God, be a friend of one who befriends him... "?

This was a part of the incident of Ghadir Khumm when Imam 'Ali (a) was clearly designated as successor by the Prophet (s) over the Muslims.