



‘ABDALLĀH B. MOBĀRAK

‘**ABDALLĀH B. MOBĀRAK**, ABŪ ‘ABD-AL-RAḤMĀN, 118-81/736-97, traditionist. The earliest notices of him date from the 4th/10th century, and their vivid depiction of his personality indicate how alive his memory remained in the Muslim community.

‘Abdallāh was born at Marv of a Khwarazmian mother and a Turk father. Of forceful disposition, he frequently went on pilgrimage to the holy places or engaged in holy war, according to his biographers (his preference being for Syria’s northwest frontier). He would spend his fortune in charity for the pilgrims going between Marv and Mecca and to finance the prosecution of holy war or his own journeys in pursuit of learning. This last activity took him already at the age of thirteen to Baghdad, where he must have returned often (*Ta’rīk Baġdād* X, p. 153). He also visited Baṣra, Kūfa, and Damascus; and in all these cities he would bestow generous stipends on the religious scholars concerned with the preservation of Hadith. He himself soon became famous in that discipline. Some biographers contrast him with the scholars of the West (i.e., Iraq and Syria), and especially with Sofyān al-Ṭawrī (see, e.g., *Ta’rīk Baġdād* X, p. 162). ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān b. Maḥdī (d. 198/813), who was “one of the pillars of Hadith in Iraq” (Ebn al-‘Emād, *Šaḍarāt al-ḍahab*, Cairo, 1350-51/1932, I, p. 355), allegedly said: “Ebn al-Mobārak was more learned than Sofyān al-Ṭawrī.” When it was pointed out to him that people were of the opposite opinion, he replied: “People have not researched this; I, however, do not know any equal to Ebn al-Mobārak.” Is this anecdote an indication of some rivalry between the Iraqi and the Khorasani doctors? At least there is a clear



awareness of two different intellectual milieus. The Baghdadis would say of ‘Abdallāh, “he has an elegant tongue, but his speech is of the East.” Their greatest praise was that “although a Khorasani, he is a reliable source and authority in Hadith.”

Absorbed in the science of tradition, ‘Abdallāh accumulated a fine library; and when chided for being unsociable, he answered that he preferred the company of the Prophet and the Companions. He preferred Tradition even to the reading of the Qur’ān (a tendency which would eventually develop into a school). For instance, he advised: “If you know the Qur’ān enough to be able to say your prayers, devote your free time to the study of the science (of Hadith), thanks to which one understands the Qur’ān” (Abū No‘mān, *Ḥelyat al-awlīā’*, Cairo, 1932-38, VIII, p. 165). Yet he wrote a Qur’ān commentary (*Ketāb al-tafsīr*) according to Ebn al-Nadīm, who also mentions four other works by him (*Fehrest*, p. 228): *Ketāb al-sonan* on law, *Ketāb al-ta’rīk* (probably the same as the *Ayyām al-nās* mentioned in *Ta’rīk Baġdād* X, p. 155); *Ketāb al-berr wa’l-ṣela* on piety and communal feeling; and *Ketāb al-zohd* on asceticism. The last has survived, as has a *Ketāb al-jehād* not mentioned by Ebn al-Nadīm (Beirut, 1971; see R. G. Khoury in *Stud. Isl.* 42, 1975, pp. 127-29). *Ketāb al-zohd* (Maligaun, India, 1966) is a collection of traditions bearing on social and religious ethics. Its axiology of renunciation would be imitated by all sections on *zohd* in later collections of Hadith (see L. Massignon, *Essai*, pp. 173, 236; H. Laoust, *La Profession de foi d’Ibn Baṭṭa*, Damascus, 1958, p. 159). The first and larger part of the text reports the witness (*revāya*) of Ḥosayn b. Ḥasan Marvazī (564 pp.); the second part is a supplementary transmission from Ebn Ḥammād Marvazī (131 pp.). Considerable importance is attached to Ḥasan Baṣrī, who is depicted as the great spiritual master; the style of the relators (*qoṣṣāṣ*) is much attended to, and a prominent role given to reflections on heaven and hell. The full title of the work (often shortened by those who refer to it, but attested in the manuscripts) is markedly original: *Ketāb al-zohd wa’l-raqā’eq*. *Raqīqa* is attested in ‘Abdallāh’s time with the meaning of “an exhortation which stirs its hearers” (R. Dozy, *Supplement aux dictionnaires arabes*, Leiden, 1881, s.v.). It was subsequently replaced by *laṭīfa* (plur. *laṭā’ef*) until the time of Ebn al-‘Arabī (7th/13th cent.), when it is used as a technical term for whatever descends from God to man or assists man to ascend to God. Thus there occur phrases like *raqīqat al-nozūl* and *raqīqat al-erteqā’*.

Because of this work on “asceticism and moving exhortations” ‘Abdallāh is included among the founders of Sufism. Sufi literature, inevitably, introduces



fantastic elements into his biography (e.g., 'Aṭṭār's account of his conversion experience, *Taḍkerat al-awliā'* I, pp. 179-88). More significantly, after his death (at Hīt on the Euphrates), his tomb was venerated as late as 1080/1670 (Ebn al-'Emād, op. cit., I, p. 279).

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