



## ABŪ MŪSĀ MORDĀR

**ABŪ MŪSĀ** ʾISĀ B. ŠOBAYḤ (or ŠABĪḤ) **AL-MORDĀR**, theologian and ascetic, early representative of the Baghdad branch of the Moʿtazela (d. 226/840-41). His surname al-Mordār is frequently transmitted in a corrupt form: Mozdār (Ḥākem al-Jošamī, *Šarḥ ʾoyūn al-masāʾel*; cf. Qāzī ʾAbd-al-Jabbār, *Faḏl al-eʿteḏāl*, ed. F. Sayyed, Tunis, 1974, p. 227, n. 511); Mordād (Baġdādī, *Farq* [Cairo<sup>1</sup>], p. 102.8); Morād (Jāḥeẓ, *Ketāb al-boršān waʾl-orjān*, ed. M. Morsī al-Ḳūlī, Cairo, 1392/1972, p. 89, n. 3); Medrār (*Lesān al-mīzān* IV, p. 398.4); Farrāʾ (Masʾūdī, *Morūj* VII, p. 233, bottom). But “Mordār” is well attested in Ḳayyātʾs *Ketāb al-entešār* (manuscript of the year 311/923-24; ed. Nader, Beirut, 1957, pp. 53.15 and 54.17) and in Samʾānīʾs *Ansāb* ([Leiden], fol. 521a6ff.). The name evidently derived from Persian *mordār* “carrion.” Baġdādī alludes to its derogatory meaning (*Farq* [Cairo<sup>1</sup>], p. 151.7ff.; [Cairo<sup>2</sup>], pp. 165.2ff.; cf. I. Goldziher in *ZDMG* 65, 1911, p. 363). Abū Mūsā was apparently of Iranian origin.

In contrast to other Muʿtazilites of his time (e.g., [Abuʾl-Hoḏayl ʾAllāf](#) or [Abū Eshāq Naẓẓām](#)), Abū Mūsā Mordār kept contact with the lower classes (Ḳayyāt, *Entešār*, p. 72, bottom). When his later pupil Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb was still a soldier, he used to make fun of Mordārʾs followers (Qāzī ʾAbd-al-Jabbār, *Faḏl*, p. 278.7f.). This explains Mordārʾs abhorrence of government service (Baġdādī, *Farq* [Cairo<sup>1</sup>], p. 151.15f.; [Cairo<sup>2</sup>], p. 165.9ff.) and his ascetic tendencies (see anecdote, Ḳayyāt, *Entešār*, p. 55.17ff., from which may derive the designation “monk of the Moʿtazela” found in some later sources). He seems to have tried to make *kalām* acceptable to the common people by presenting it in the form of anecdotes (*qeṣaṣ*)—e.g., by comparing Godʾs mercy with human wickedness.



Abu'l-Hoḍayl felt reminded, in this respect, of the direct approach of the founding fathers Wāṣel b. 'Aṭā' and 'Amr b. 'Obayd (Ḳayyāṭ, *Enteṣār*, p. 54.10ff.; Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, *Faẓl*, p. 227.22ff.). Like his fellow Mu'tazilites, Abū Mūsā detested the *taqlīd* of the simple people (cf. Jāḥeẓ, *Damm aklāq al-kottāb* in *Rasā'el*, ed. 'A. M. Hārūn, Cairo, 1964-65, II, p. 196.1ff.); but in contrast, he attempted to win them over by an active mission. This is why Mu'tazilite influence expanded in Baghdad more through his efforts than those of the founder of the Baghdad branch, Beṣr b. al-Mo'tamer (cf. *Fehrest* [Tehran<sup>1</sup>], p. 206, bottom). Mordār had been the latter's pupil (ibid.; Ka'bī, *Maqālāt al-eslāmīyīn*, ed. F. Sayyed, Tunis, 1974, p. 74.1f.); but he also knew Abu'l-Hoḍayl and Ṭomāma b. al-Ašras, whom he visited at the latter's house (Ḳayyāṭ, *Enteṣār*, p. 20.3). Jāḥeẓ mentions him only rarely (*Boṣrān*, p. 89.4). Wealthy state officials such as Ebrāhīm b. al-Sendī did not like his style (cf. Šahrestānī, p. 48, bottom; Jāḥeẓ, *Ketāb al-boḳalā'*, ed. Ṭ. Ḥājerī, Cairo, 1958, pp. 289f.). But in his old age his reputation had become so high that Ebrāhīm b. Yaḥyā Yazidī, a foster-brother of the caliph Ma'mūn with Mu'tazilite leanings (cf. M. Fleischhammer in *ZDMG* 112, 1962, pp. 304ff.), mentioned in a poem one of Mordār's pupils as the most suitable counter-candidate to Beṣr b. al-Walīd Kendī, who had just been nominated *qāzī* (year 213/828-29; cf. Sīrāfī, *Ṭabaqāt al-noḥāt al-baṣrīyīn*, ed. F. Krenkow, Algiers, 1936, p. 46, bottom, and ff.; and for the most complete version of the poem, Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, *Faẓl*, p. 278, bottom, and ff.). Among his disciples were Ja'far b. Mobaššer and Ja'far b. Ḥarb, but also 'Isā b. al-Hayṭam al-Šūfī, the teacher of [Ebn al-Rēvandī](#) (*Fehrest* [Tehran<sup>1</sup>], p. 216.5). Through him and through Ja'far b. Mobaššer, the ascetic and anti-government tendencies were carried into the next generation, when the movement became known by the term *šūfiyat al-mo'tazela* (Ḳayyāṭ, *Enteṣār*, pp. 63.4f., 72, bottom; Nāše', *Oṣūl al-neḥal*, ed. van Ess in *Frühe mu'tazilitische Häresiographie*, Beirut, 1971, secs. 82f., etc.). Mordār's pupil Abū Zofar (cf. Ka'bī, *Maqālāt*, p. 74.11f.) brought his ideas to Nišāpūr (ibid., p. 74.17; Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, *Faẓl*, p. 303, bottom; Ḳayyāṭ, *Enteṣār*, p. 54.1f.).

Mordār was a prolific writer; Ebn al-Nadīm provides thirty-four titles of books, none of which is preserved (*Fehrest* [Tehran<sup>1</sup>], p. 207.5ff.). In accordance with his popularizing activities and his consciousness, he did not deal with subtle side issues, but only with the clear lines of Mu'tazilite doctrine (Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, *Faẓl*, p. 278.1; Ḳayyāṭ, *Enteṣār*, p. 53.16f.). He did not shun polemics. He anathematized non-Mu'tazilites who defended an anthropomorphic or predestinarian concept of God (Ḳayyāṭ, *Enteṣār*, p. 54.19ff.), and he disagreed with his own Basran colleagues (see *Fehrest*, title no. 22). He attacked explicitly



Nazzām (on the problem of God’s omnipotence, see title no. 21), Ṭomāma b. Ašras and Šaḥḥām (on questions of epistemology, see titles no. 18 and 19), Abu’l-Hoḍayl (on his doctrine concerning the finiteness of movements in paradise; see Baġdādī, *Farq* [Cairo<sup>1</sup>], pp. 102.8f., 152, bottom; [Cairo<sup>2</sup>], pp. 122.3f., 166.17f.), Naǧǧār (on predestination, see titles no. 13 and 17), and the Christian Theodor Abū Qorra (d. ca. 820; see title no. 7). Besides the Christians (see also title no. 6), he criticized the Jews and the Magians (on theodicy, title no. 10).

His teaching was almost completely forgotten in later generations. In contrast to thinkers such as Abu’l-Hoḍayl and Nazzām he was not interested in the philosophical foundations of Mu’tazilite thought, especially not in atomism. He concentrated, as many titles of his books show, on the problems of God’s justice and omnipotence. Against Abu’l-Hoḍayl he insisted that God’s omnipotence is not limited by the finite number of contingent things to be realized in the future (*maqḍūrāt*), because it is an inalienable quality (a point Abu’l-Hoḍayl would not have denied) and because this assumption leads to ridiculous consequences (cf. Ḳayyāṭ, *Enteṣār*, p. 19.17ff. and Baġdādī, *Farq*, [Cairo<sup>1</sup>], pp. 103.6ff.; [Cairo<sup>2</sup>], pp. 122f.; R. M. Frank, “The Divine Attributes according to Abu’l-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf,” *Muséon* 82, 1969, pp. 473ff.). God can even do justice and lie, because His freedom of decision implies that His power comprises both contraries. But as His perfection is at stake here, this can only be affirmed theoretically; in reality we can prove that He will never do evil. If He did, He would have to be called unjust; but since we do not have any proofs for that, we should avoid such unseemly speculations (cf. Ḳayyāṭ, *Enteṣār*, p. 53.15ff.; Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 555.9ff.). The only limit imposed on God’s omnipotence is His own essence. He can (theoretically) perform ignorant actions, but He can not be essentially ignorant (Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 556.1ff.). He does not even perform any injustice which could be compensated for afterwards; he would, e.g., never punish children for the sins they might have committed in the future, as Bešr b. al-Mo‘tamer had said in order to solve the problem of theodicy (Ḳayyāṭ, *Enteṣār*, p. 53.15).

God wills the sins of man only insofar as He does not prevent them (cf. D. Gimaret in *Stud. Isl.* 40, 1974, p. 11). He creates sins; creation, however, is not the thing created itself, but something else (probably an accident of the thing), which is itself in turn created. This does not lead to an infinite regress (cf. Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 190.8ff., 541.16f.). Man sins through his capacity; this capacity is, however, not identical with health, Bešr b. al-Mo‘tamer had



believed (ibid., p. 229.13f.). From him Abū Mūsā took over the idea that man may generate actions in another person through *tawlīd*. If, for example, somebody beats somebody else, the latter becomes aware of the blow. But whereas Bešr had claimed that this awareness is “done” by the first person (ibid., p. 401.15), Mordār seems to have believed that, in this case, one action proceeds from two agents (Ḳayyāt, *Entešār*, p. 54.1f.). Furthermore, he does not accept Bešr’s theory that the sense perceptions are generated (e.g., vision, by lifting one’s lids), or even the perceptible accidents, colors, odors, etc. In this case he may have sided with Abu’l-Hodayl (cf. Aš’arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 401.14ff.; Baġdādī, *Farq* [Cairo<sup>1</sup>], p. 152, bottom; [Cairo<sup>2</sup>], p. 166.18f.; van Ess, *Erkenntnislehre des ‘Aḏudaddīn al Īcī*, Wiesbaden, 1966, p. 167ff.). Man may obey God without being aware of it, immediately after he had reached mental maturity, during his first attempts at speculation (*naẓar*) which lead him to the knowledge of God; but in all other cases obedience presupposes this knowledge (Ḳayyāt, op. cit., p. 59.10ff.). This is derived from an epistemological theory developed by Bešr b. al-Mo’tamer (van Ess, *Erkenntnislehre*, pp. 349f.) and probably meant that non-Muslims too could acquire recompense in the hereafter.

The spirit of the *mehḌčna*, which was initiated when Mordār was at the peak of his prestige, manifests itself in his uncompromising standpoint about the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān is created, and whoever thinks otherwise believes in the existence of two eternal entities (i.e., in something eternal besides God, like the dualists) and has to be considered an unbeliever. Abū Mūsā did not, however, uphold the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur’ān (*eÑ—Ḍřāz*; cf. Baġdādī, *Farq* [Cairo<sup>1</sup>], p. 151.11f.; [Cairo<sup>2</sup>], p. 165.4f.; Šahrestānī, p. 48.15ff.). This attitude, still quite natural in his time, when the *eÑ—Ḍřāz* dogma was being conceived by NazḌčzḌčām, seems to have discredited his later followers among the *sḌčūfiyat al-moÑ—tazela*.

Politically he kept himself at a distance from Sunnite as well as ShiÑ—ite views. He abstained from any judgment about Ñ—OtḌšmān; but he condemned Ñ—OtḌšmān’s murderers, because murder is not exculpated by great sin in the victim. He dissassociated himself from MoÑ—āwīa (cf. KḌāyātḌč, *EntesḌčār*, p. 74.6ff.; Baġdādī, *OsḌčūl al-dīn*, Istanbul, 1346/1928, p. 288.15f.). In jurisprudence, he did not agree with the *asḌčhḌčāb eḌřtehād al-raÑšy*, i.e., especially the Hanafites (see *Fehrest*, title no. 20). Like NazḌčzḌčām, he rejected *qīās*, the conclusion from analogy, probably for the same reason; it was not reliable enough (cf. Ebn Ḥazm, *al-EhḌčkām le osḌčūl*



*al-ahĎĉkām*, Cairo, 1345/1926-27, VII, p. 203.17ff.; van Ess, *Das Kitab an-NaktĎĜ des NazĎĉzĎĉm* [*Abh. Ak. Wiss. GŃtt.*, Phil.-Hist. Kl., III. Folge, 79, 1972], pp. 137ff.).

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