



## ABŪ 'OBAYDA MA'MAR

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**ABŪ 'OBAYDA MA'MAR** B. AL-MOTĀNNĀ, Arabic philologist and grammarian (probably 110-209/728-824, but the sources have other, slightly different dates). His father and grandfather came from Bājarvān, but he himself was born in Baṣra, a *mawlā* of the clan of Taym of Qorayš. The assertion that his family was of Jewish origin is probably a calumny of his enemies; more probably it was of Mesopotamian or Persian stock, since the *Fehrest* applies to him the Persian nickname Saḡt, “the powerful, overbearing one”. He studied under the leading philologists of the Basran school, but made his life’s work an investigation of the history, culture, and literature of the early Arabs, collecting and classifying materials on them from diverse sources. The titles of many of his numerous works—said to total something like 200—have been preserved in the biographical notices of him by Ebn al-Nadīm, Kaṭīb Baġdādī, Yāqūt, and others; these show the immense range of his erudition, including Arabic grammar, theology, tribal history, and the animals and plants of the Arabs.

Many of his investigations revealed the vices and the sordid side of early Arab life, as well as its virtues and laudable achievements. He also was careful to point to the truism that there were non-Arabs, e.g., Persian and Greek, elements in the fabric of Islamic civilization. Hence Abū 'Obayda’s researches were eagerly utilized by the anti-Arab party in the literary debates of the Šo‘ūbīya (q.v.) partisans, who cited his writings on the *maṭāleb* or defects of the Arabs, and this gave Abū 'Obayda himself a reputation for being anti-Arab. Thus an older generation of philologists followed I. Goldziher



(*Muhammedanische Studien*, Halle, 1888-89, I, pp. 194-206; Eng. tr., *Muslim Studies*, London, 1967-71, I, pp. 179-80) and regarded Abū 'Obayda as a protagonist of the Šo'ūbīya. Yet it is by no means certain that his basic attitude was pro-Šo'ūbī, as H. A. R. Gibb subsequently pointed out. There is nothing to show, he asserted, that Abū 'Obayda was more interested in the *maṭāleb* than the *mafāker* (glories) of the Arabs, or that he misinterpreted in any way their history; rather, he stands out as a disinterested scholar, some of whose results were, however, selectively used by the pro-Persian Šo'ūbīs in the later 3rd/9th century, well after his death. If he made light of certain Arab pretensions to nobility, it was more as an adherent of the equalitarian Kārejis than as an anti-Arab pure and simple (Gibb, "The Social Significance of the Šu'ūbiyya," *Studia orientalia Ioanni Pedersen dicata*, Copenhagen, 1953, pp. 105-14; also in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, Boston, 1962, pp. 62-73). His composition of works on Qur'ān interpretation and on the rare words in Tradition hardly show him as anti-Muslim in any way; his *Ketāb ġarīb al-ḥadīṭ* seems to have been a pioneer work in this genre. Certainly, much of later generations' knowledge of early Arabic poetry stemmed from Abū 'Obayda's work, seen at its best in the compilation of the *Naqā'eż* of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq.

Abū 'Obayda's personal habits and character were apparently not very attractive, and it is said that when he died, no one attended the funeral, because all had suffered from his barbed tongue; whether or not he was guilty of practicing unnatural vice, as certain sources (e.g., Ebn Kallekān) state, can not be proven, but accusations of this were of course as common as accusations of Jewish origins for disliked and unpopular persons.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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See also Zereklī, *A'lām*<sup>2</sup> VIII, p. 191.

H. A. R. Gibb in *EI*<sup>2</sup> I, p. 158.

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Many references to Abū 'Obayda are scattered through works on biography or *adab*, such as *Aḡānī* and *'Eqd al-farīd*. For his extant works, see Brockelmann, *GAL* I<sup>2</sup>, p. 102-03; S. I, p. 162. Sezgin, *GAS* I, pp. 36, 43, 48; II, see index.