



ABŪ SAHL NAWBAQTĪ

ABŪ SAHL ESMĀ'ĪL B. 'ALĪ B. ESHĀQ B. ABĪ SAHL NAWBAQTĪ, also called **EBN NAWBAQT** (b. 237/851-52 in Baghdad, d. 311/924), a prominent member of the Nawbaqtī family and noted Imamite leader and scholar. Nothing is known about his father or about his own upbringing and early career. His philosophical interests brought him into contact with the Sabian philosopher, logician, and mathematician, Tābet b. Qorra (d. 288/834); he published his debates with him as *Majāles Tābet b. Qorra*. The Mu'tazilite theologian Abu'l-Ḥosayn Ṣāleḥī participated in disputations in his house (Ḥākem al-Joṣamī, *Ṣarḥ 'oyūn al-masā'el* I, ms. Leiden Or. 2584a, fol. 101a). Abū Sahl patronized the Shi'ite poet Ebn al-Rūmī (d. 283/896), who eulogized the Banū Nawbaqt. The poet's avidity and greed seem to have ruffled their friendly ties at times; according to Mas'ūdī (*Morūj* VIII, p. 233), there were anecdotes about this aspect of their relationship. His relations with the poet Boḥtorī, who also panegyricized the Banū Nawbaqt, do not appear to have been as close. A poem in Boḥtorī's *Dīvān* (ed. Ḥ. K. al-Ṣayrafī, Cairo, 1973-74, pp. 1838-41), in which he had been thought to eulogize Abū Sahl, is definitely addressed to the latter's uncle, Eshāq b. Esmā'īl b. Abī Sahl; and Boḥtorī expressed himself negatively about the quality of Abū Sahl's poetry (*Agānī*¹ XVIII, p. 170). During much of his life he seems to have held high secretarial positions. It is likely that he is the Abū Sahl who lampooned the secretary Aḥmad b. Moḥammad b. Tawāba (d. 277/890-91) in a poem addressed to 'Obaydallāh b. Solaymān, then chief secretary to Mowaffaq, the powerful brother of the caliph Mo'tamed (Yāqūt, *Odabā'* II, p. 44). There may have been more to his hostility toward Ebn Tawāba than professional rivalry; after the death of Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī in



260/874, Ebn Ṭawāba's son Moḥammad, a Shi'ite like Abū Sahl, seems to have furthered the pretensions of Ḥasan's brother Ja'far to the imamite, while Abū Sahl supported the belief in the existence of a son of the Imam entitled to the succession. According to Marzobānī (*Moḡam al-šo'arā'*, ed. F. Krenkow, Cairo, 1354/1935, p. 461), Abū Sahl himself was denounced and imprisoned under the vizierate of 'Obaydallāh b. Solaymān's son Qāsem (288-91/901-04), no doubt in connection with the vizier's efforts to purge the government of Shi'ite officials. His influence thereafter rose under the vizierate of the Shi'ite Banu'l-Forāt. He was now generally recognized as the leader of the Imamite community in Baghdad. Supporting the regular line of *safīrs* of the hidden Twelfth Imam, he became involved in the opposition to the Sufī Ḥallāj in his claim to represent the Imam. After his arrival in Baghdad, Ḥallāj is reported to have addressed letters to him trying to gain his support, but Abū Sahl silenced him by ridiculing his alleged miraculous powers. Another incident in which Abū Sahl is reported to have uncovered the speciousness of the miracles of Ḥallāj evidently took place in or near Ahvāz. This encounter has been dated by L. Massignon ca. 280/893 and by 'A. Eqbāl between 298/910 and 301/913. That Abū Sahl stayed for some time in Ahvāz is confirmed by the fact that he debated there with the Mu'tazilite theologian Abū 'Alī Jobbā'ī (d. 303/916). The reports on his dealings with Ḥallāj were widely publicized, evidently with the aim of discrediting the latter. According to Ebn al-Nadīm, Abū Sahl in a similar manner disgraced the extremist Shi'ite Šalmaḡānī (d. 322/944), but this account seems to be based on a confusion with Ḥallāj. It has been assumed that Abū Sahl actively furthered the trial and condemnation of Ḥallāj in 308-09/921-22 under the anti-Shi'ite vizier, Ḥāmed b. al-'Abbās. This is not unlikely, though there is no positive information about his role in the sources. After the fall of Ḥāmed, the vizier Ebn al-Forāt sent Abū Sahl and another official to Wāseṭ in Rabī' II, 311/August, 923 to confiscate Ḥāmed's illegal property. Abū Sahl, in contrast to his colleague, is reported to have treated the disgraced vizier most leniently, perhaps, as has been suggested, because they had cooperated in the persecution of Ḥallāj. Half a year later, in Šawwāl, 311/January-February, 924, Abū Sahl died. His grave is said to be in the sanctuary of Kāḡemayn in Baghdad.

As a scholar and author, Abū Sahl, supported by his nephew (sister's son) Ḥasan b. Mūsā and his brother Abū Ja'far Moḥammad, was the founder of the doctrinal school of the Banū Nawbaḡt within the Emāmīya. Since none of the doctrinal works of Abū Sahl and his school are extant, his views are known only summarily from the titles of his books and statements of later authors.



Abū Sahl supported Muʿtazilite doctrine concerning the attributes and justice of God, denying the beatific vision of God and upholding human free will. On the other hand, he held, against the common Muʿtazilite view, that the reality of man consists in an unspatial, live soul governing the dead body. In agreement with general Imamite doctrine, he rejected the Muʿtazilite thesis of the unconditional punishment (*waʿid*) of the unrepentant sinner, affirming the effective intercession of the Prophet and the Imams for the sinners among their followers. He generally upheld the Imamite doctrine about the imamate and participated in the early formulation of the doctrine concerning the occultation (*ḡayba*) of the Twelfth Imam. Ebn al-Nadīm's statement that he held that the Twelfth Imam had died in occultation and had been succeeded by his son does not appear reliable. It is likely, however, that he did not definitely affirm that the Twelfth Imam was both the last Imam and the Mahdī, leaving open the possibility that the imamate would continue after him. A fragment of his *Ketāb al-tanbīh* about the imamate and the occultation is quoted by Ebn Bābūya in his *Kamāl al-dīn* (ed. 'A. A. al-Ġaffārī, Tehran, 1395 Š./1975, pp. 88-94). A report about his seeing the later Twelfth Imam as a child in the presence of his father, quoted by Shaikh Ṭūsī (*al-Ġayba*, Najaf, 1385/1965, pp. 164f.), may be taken from his *Ketāb al-anwār fī tawārīk al-a'emma*. Abū Sahl wrote refutations of several works by the arch-heretic Ebn Rāwandī. In legal methodology he supported the common Imamite position of his time, rejecting individual reasoning (*ejtehād*) and analogy (*qīās*), and composing a refutation of the *Resāla* of Šāfe'ī. He appears occasionally as a transmitter of reports about the poets Abū Nowās and Boḥtorī.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

'Arīb, *Şela*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1897, pp. 93f., 105.

Fehrest, pp. 176f.

Tanūkī, *Neşwār al-moḥāzara*, ed. 'A. al-Şāleġī, Beirut, 1971-73, I, p. 161.

Helāl al-Şābī, *al-Wozarā'*, ed. H. F. Amedroz, Leiden, 1904, pp. 34ff.



Ṭūsī, *Fehrest kotob al-šī'a*, ed. A. Sprenger, Calcutta, 1953-55, pp. 57ff.

Naǰāšī, *al-Reǰāl*, Tehran, n.d., p. 25.

Ta'riḳ Baǧdād VIII, pp. 124ff.

Hamadānī, *Takmelat ta'riḳ al-Ṭabarī*, ed. A. Y. Kaṇ'ān, Beirut, 1961, p. 33.

Ebn Šahrāšūb, *Ma'ālem al-'olamā'*, ed. 'A. Eǧbāl, Tehran, 1353/1934, pp. 6ff.

Ebn Ḥaǰar, *Lesān al-mizān*, Hyderabad, 1331/1913, I, p. 424.

Šafadī, *al-Wāfi* IX, ed. J. van Ess, Beirut, 1394/1974, pp. 171ff.

L. Massignon, *La passion de Ḥusayn b. Manšūr Ḥallāj*, second ed., Paris, 1975, I, pp. 359-62 and index.

'A. Eǧbāl, *Kāndān-e Nawbaktī*, second ed., Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, pp. 96-124 and index.

Mohsen al-Amīn, *A'yān al-šī'a*, Damascus, 1935, XII, pp. 33-61.

W. Madelung, "Imamism and Mu'tazilite Theology" in *Le Shīisme Imāmite*, Paris, 1970, pp. 15ff.

Search terms:

ابوسهل نوبختی	abousahl nobakhti	abousahl nobakhty	abousahl nobakhtey
abousahl nawbakhty	aboosahl nubakhti	abosahl nobakhti	abosahl nobakhty