



ABU'L-QĀSEM KA'BĪ

ABU'L-QĀSEM AL-BALKĪ AL-KA'BĪ, 'ABDALLĀH B. AḤMAD B. MAḤMŪD (d. Ša'bān, 319/February, 931), administrator and intellectual of Persian descent, Hanafite jurist and foremost representative of the Mo'tazela in Khorasan. His father had known 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher (d. 230/844) personally. Abu'l-Qāsem seems to have stood in a long *kottāb* tradition (see *Ta'riḳ Baġdād* XII, p. 340.10f.). In his youth he had been secretary to Moḥammad b. Zayd Dā'ī, the Zaidite ruler of Ṭabarestān (d. 287/900; cf. W. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*, Berlin, 1965, p. 159). Two decades later he was nominated vizier by Aḥmad b. Sahl b. Hešām Marvazī, the governor of Khorasan for the Samanid Naṣr b. Aḥmad II, who had installed himself at Balk (Yāqūt, *Odabā' I*, p. 147.6f.). When Aḥmad b. Sahl rebelled against his sovereign and was defeated in 307/919, Abu'l-Qāsem was put into prison. He was released shortly afterward on the initiative of 'Alī b. 'Isā, who at that time was the deputy of Moqtader's nominal vizier Ḥāmed b. al-'Abbās and exercised the real power in Baghdad (see Ebn al-Nadīm, *Fehrest* [Tehran], p. 219, n., lines 6f.).

Abu'l-Qāsem's prestige in Baghdad dated from the time he studied there under the Mu'tazilite Ḳayyāṭ (d. ca. 300/913) and the grammarian Mobarrad (d. 285/898). In those days he had been admitted to the salon (*majles*) of the well-known Persian litterateur and Mu'tazilite Abū Aḥmad Yaḥyā b. 'Alī Monaḡjem Nadīm (d. 300/913), who considered him an authority in *kalām* (ibid., lines 8f.). After leaving capital he corresponded with Ḳayyāṭ and with the father of the grammarian Marzobānī (d. 384/994; cf. *Ta'riḳ Baġdād* IX, p. 384.16ff.). In his later years he stayed in Khorasan, where he was regarded as uncrowned king



of theologians (*emām ahl al-arz*; see Mātorīdī, *Ketāb al-tawhīd*, ed. Kholeif, Beirut, 1970, p. 49.17). In Balk his prestige was matched only by that of his contemporary and friend, Abū Zayd Balkī (d. 322/934), whom, however, he had to defend against accusations outside his home country (cf. Yāqūt, *Odabā'* I, p. 147.6f.; Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mofasserīn*, ed. 'A. M. 'Omar, Cairo, 1392/1972, I, p. 42.14ff.). In Nasaf he was received with honor and given a teaching position (*'oqeda laho maḥles*; cf. the *Ta'riḳ Nasaf* by Ja'far b. Moḥammad Mostaḡferī, 350-432/961-1041, quoted by Sam'ānī, *Ansāb* [Leiden], fol. 485a.7f.). The local tradition claimed that even in Mecca his name aroused public interest (cf. the same source, quoted by Ebn Šāker Kotobī in his unpublished *'Oyūn al-tawārīḳ*).

While Abu'l-Qāsem's theological works were indeed read in Iraq, his influence was more extensive in Khorasan. He wrote, for example, a *Ketāb maḥāsen Āl Ṭāher* which shows his special attachment to the Taherids (*Kašf al-zonūn* [Istanbul], p. 1608). In addition there is his *Ketāb maḥāsen Ḳorāsān* (or *Faḏā'el Ḳorāsān*) which was used by Ebn al-Nadīm for the biography of Ebn al-Rēwandī (*Fehrest*, p. 216.13); the Mo'tazela did not see a need for a biography of Ebn al-Rēwandī. In contrast to his teacher Ḳayyāṭ, Abu'l-Qāsem did not attack Ebn al-Rēwandī's famous "heretical" books; he only refuted his criticism of Jāḥeẓ's thesis that the Qur'ān is free from additions and omissions (quotations in Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, *Taṭbīt dalā'el al-nobūwa*, Beirut, 1966, pp. 62.12ff., 548) and his doctrine of *tawallod* (he quotes the book in his *Ketāb al-maḳālāt*). He also corrected some errors in Ebn al-Rēwandī's *Adab al-ḵadal* (Ebn 'Asāker, *Tabyīn kaḏeb al-moftarī*, Damascus, 1347/1929, p. 131.15ff.). The title of his *Ketāb al-sonna wa'l-ḵamā'a* (see *Fehrest*, p. 219, n., line 15) shows that he did not see a contradiction between his Mu'tazilite ideas and the Hanafite terminology of his eastern surroundings. In two of his works he polemicized against Moḥammad b. 'Īsā Borḡūṭ from Sīrāf (d. 240/854 or 241/855), who represented the predestinarian wing of the Hanafite tradition. With Abū Ja'far Moḥammad b. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān b. 'Omar Ebn Qobba from Ray (who, according to Ebn Abī'l-Ḥadīd, had been his pupil but then went over to the Emāmīya) he carried on a long exchange of views on the problem of *emāma* which resulted in two publications from his hand, both of them refutations of books written by Ebn Qobba (see Najāšī, *Rejāl*, Bombay, 1397/1899, p. 191). Whether he met the famous physician Moḥammad b. Zakarīyā' Rāzī (d. 313/925) in Ray, Baghdad, or somewhere else on their respective journeys is not clear. They discussed the concept of time and engaged in an extensive written dispute on several topics in Rāzī's *Ketāb al-elm al-elāhī* (cf. Rāzī, *Opera philosophica*, ed. P. Kraus, Cairo, 1939, pp. 167f.).



Abu'l-Qāsem certainly kept a greater distance from Rāzī's ideas than did his contemporary Abū Zayd Balkī, with whom Rāzī seems to have studied (see GAS III, p. 275). Of the Iraq *motakallemūn* he disagreed mainly with Jobbā'ī (d. 303/915), head of the competing Baṣra branch of the Mo'tazela—e.g., on his doctrine of divine will and of the most fitting (*aṣlah*; cf. his *Naqz ketāb Abī 'Alī al-Jobbā'ī fī'l-erāda* and his *Nehāya fī'l-aṣlah 'alā Abī 'Alī*, quotations of which may be found in Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, *Mog̃nī*, Cairo, 1960-65, XIV, pp. 55.14, 61.9ff.).

His most important works have a systematic and summarizing character. He wrote a twelve volume *Tafsīr (Kaṣf al-ḡonūn* [Istanbul], p. 448) of which quotations survive in the *Amālī* of Šarīf Mortazā (Cairo, 1954, I, pp. 468.10ff., 514, bottom; II, p. 364.16ff.) and perhaps in Mātorīdī's *Ketāb al-tawḥīd*. His *Ketāb awā'el al-adella fī oṣūl al-dīn* is quoted by Maqdesī (*Bad'* I, p. 135.5f.); its chapter on the Christians was refuted by the Christian philosopher Ebn Zoṛ'a (331-98/943-1008; P. Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens*, Cairo, 1929, pp. 52f.). His *'Oyūn al-masā'el* which comprised three volumes was used by Abū Rašīd Nīsābūrī (d. 460/1068) in his *Masā'el al-ḡelāf bayn al-baṣrīyīn wa'l-baḡdādīyīn* (GAS I, pp. 626f.). The late stage of theological development inside the Mo'tazela is reflected in a number of further *masā'el* and *majāles* works in which Ka'bī seems to have discussed scattered questions of detail. Most important for later generations were his *Maqālāt al-eslāmīyīn*, which were extensively used by Aš'arī in his *Maqālāt*, Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār in his *Faḡl al-e'tezāl* and *Mog̃nī*, Baḡdādī and Šahrastānī, Našwān Ḥemyarī in his *Ketāb al-ḡūr al-īn*, Ebn Abī'l-Ḥadīd in his *Šarḡ nahī al-balāḡa*, and Ḥojūrī in his *Ketāb rawḡat al-aḡbār* (GAL S. I, p. 587). A manuscript of the work has been found in Yemen by Fo'ād Sayyed and was partly edited by him (*Faḡl al-e'tezāl wa ṡabaqāt al-mo'tazela*, Tunis, 1974, pp. 63f.). The book seems to have undergone several recensions. Ka'bī used material which he had received from Ḳayyāṡ, and he corresponded with him from Khorasan in order to clarify unresolved questions (*ibid.*, p. 297.3ff.). Later he seems to have combined the book with his *'Oyūn al-masā'el* (*Fehrest*, p. 219, n., lines 13ff.). This might explain why he says in the introduction to the text preserved in the Yemenite manuscript that he began writing it after 290/903, while Ḥājjī Ḳalīfa gives the date 279/892 (*Kaṣf al-ḡonūn* [Istanbul], p. 1782), and why the manuscript differs sometimes from the quotations found in Našwān Ḥemyarī and elsewhere.

Ka'bī was greatly interested in methodology and hermeneutics. He wrote at



least two books on *jadāl* and one on inference by analogy (*estedlāl be'l-šāhed 'ala'l-ḡā'eb*). In his *Naqẓ al-Sīrjānī*, a refutation of the Hanbalite Ḥarb b. Esmā'īl b. Ḳalaf Kermānī Sīrjānī (d. 288/901; cf. Ḍahabī, *Ḥoffāz* II, Hyderabad, 1388/1968, p. 613, no. 638; and Ebn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābela*, Cairo, 1371/1952, I, p. 145, no. 189), he discussed the relevance of isolated Traditions (*āḥād*, i.e., the vast majority of *aḥādīṭ* according to the Mo'tazela) for human acting (Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, *Faẓl al-e'tezāl*, p. 195.1ff.). In his *Ketāb al-ḡorar wa'l-nawāder* he defended the inevitability of *ejtehād* (quotation in Mofid, *al-Foṣūl al-moḳtāra*, 2nd ed., Naḵaf, n.d., I, p. 66). Most interesting for us is, however, his *Ketāb qabūl al-aḳbār wa ma'refat al-rejāl*, which presents a thorough and sometimes sarcastic criticism of many early authorities on Hadith; it is preserved in the ms. Cairo, *moṣṭalaḥ* 14m (*GAS* I, p. 623). Nevertheless, Ka'bī is quoted as an authority on Hadith by a Khorasani *moḥaddeṭ* as renowned as Moḥammad b. Zakarīyā' Nasafī (d. 344/955; cf. Sam'ānī, *Ansāb* [Leiden], p. 485a.9; and Ḍahabī, *Ḥoffāz*, p. 930, no. 833).

Any attempt to reconstruct Ka'bī's system would be premature at the present stage of research. This is not so much due to a lack of information, as is the case for the earlier Mu'tazilites, but rather to a lack of perspective. The texts we have do not present broad outlines and main ideas, but concentrate on refinement of proofs and other questions of detail. With Ka'bī in Baghdad and Jobbā'ī in Baṣra, Mu'tazilite thought had reached the point of an overall systematization. We would be able to appreciate its full spectrum if we possessed complete, original works and knew more about the earlier phases. We can only assume that Ka'bī's ideas corresponded more or less to those of the Baghdad school and that they prepared the way for its astonishing influence during at least the next century and a half. Yet we are unable to determine the extent of his originality. We get most of our material from systematic works such as Mātorīdī's *Ketāb al-tawḥīd* and Abū Rašīd Nīsābūrī's *Masā'el al-ḳelāf* (ed. M. Zīāda and R. Sayyed, Beirut, 1979; cf. M. Horten, *Die Philosophie des Abu Raschid*, Bonn, 1910; and A. Biram, *Die atomistische Substanzlehre aus dem Buch der Streitfragen zwischen Basrensern und Baghdadensern*, Berlin, 1902) and to a lesser extent in Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār's *Moḡnī* and in Imamite treatises such as the *Awā'el al-maqālāt* by Shaikh Mofid (d. 413/1022; tr. D. Sourdél in *REI* 40, 1972, pp. 217ff.). Future research will have to start here. As matters stand, even the brief summary which follows may well be seriously out of focus.

The Baghdad tradition taken over from Ḳayyāṭ is characterized by respect for



the laws of nature and a cautious handling of the concept of God's omnipotence. Ka'bī believed in the existence of natural qualities (*ṭabā'e*) which determine the functioning of bodies and guarantee the preservation of the species (cf. Horten, pp. 100ff.). For example, life depends on the *ṭabā'e* of food (ibid., p. 149). Ka'bī followed the Greek view of the elements. Thus he proved that air can be changed into water through the condensation of vapor (Biram, *Substanzlehre*, p. 45). Man can produce heat and dryness (Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 92, 149). Correspondingly, God does not have the power to let a heavy object float in the air (ibid., p. 140), and pain is not possible in dead substance (ibid., p. 129). On most of these points he was attacked by the Baṣra school, i.e., the followers of Jobbā'ī, who stressed instead God's power to hold the world together and to change its laws against habit (*'āda*). On this point Jobbā'ī took up ideas of Abu'l-Hoḍayl, while Ka'bī came closer to Naẓẓām. But in contrast to Naẓẓām he was an atomist, although again with opinions which differ from those of the Basrans. He did not believe in the existence of a void; to defend this standpoint he engaged in a number of experiments with appropriate explanations (ibid., pp. 37f.; Biram, *Substanzlehre*, pp. 37ff.; also the corresponding passage in Abū Rašīd, *Fi'l-tawḥīd* [identical with *Ziādāt šarḥ al-oṣūl?*], ed. M. 'A. Abū Rīda, Cairo, 1385/1965, p. 419.14ff.). No two substances can be separated without something between them (Biram, pp. 36f.). An isolated atom has neither dimension nor direction; it does not move, nor can it be seen. All these qualities occur only through combination with at least one other atom (ibid., pp. 15ff., 46, 49; Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 37, 139). This does not mean that two or more atoms without dimension form a body with dimension; it is rather the accidental combination (*ta'līf*) which makes the difference (cf. S. Pines, *Beiträge zur islamischen Atomlehre*, Berlin, 1936, pp. 6f.). Accidents, however, do not exist continuously; they last only for a moment (Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 79ff., 134; Aš'arī, *Maqālāt al-eslāmīyīn*, Istanbul, 1929, p. 358.2ff.). Therefore, colors and elementary qualities such as heat or dryness are not permanent. On the other hand, substances can not exist without them (Biram, *Substanzlehre*, text, p. 43, bottom, cf. tr., p. 56; and Baḡdādī, *Oṣūl al-dīn*, Istanbul, 1346/1948, p. 56.15f.). They last only through the accident of endurance (*baqā'*), and vanish if God does not create this accident (Biram, *Substanzlehre*, pp. 63, 70).

Ka'bī's anthropology was not as elaborate. He seems to have focused only on theologically relevant points, especially the discussion of capability (*esteṭā'a*). As an accident, capability can not last for two moments. It exists before the act, but not during it (Aš'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 230.5ff.). Capability is related to an organ;



e.g., capability to speak can not be used for seeing, etc. (Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 154f.). Incapability (*'ajz*), on the other hand, is universal; it is the contrary of the positive and of the negative action alike, e.g., of both belief and unbelief. It is not identical with an external hindrance (*māne'*), for an external hindrance is contrary to an action. Incapability, however, is contrary to the capability to act (*ibid.*, pp. 155ff.). Death is an entity in itself (*ma'nā*), not just the absence of life (*ibid.*, pp. 150f.).

Ka'bī's ideas about God diverge little from those of other Mu'tazilites, especially his teacher Kāyṣāṭ. In agreement with most of his earlier colleagues, with some opposition among his later contemporaries, he believed that God is everywhere, though only in the sense that He knows and preserves all (cf. Mātorīdī, *Tawḥīd*, Beirut, 1970, pp. 75.3ff.; Madelung, *Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*, p. 115). God's will is not an independent attribute, as the Basrans believed in agreement with Abu'l-Ḥoḍayl, but either identical with producing what He wills or with His order to produce it (when what He wills is an action to be performed by man). This idea was taken over from Naẓẓām (Madelung, *Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*, pp. 165ff.). Ka'bī added the psychological explanation that the human will functions in connection with man's ignorance or imperfect knowledge of the realizability of his intention. God's omniscience and omnipotence thus make His will superfluous (cf. Šahrastānī, *Nehāyat al-eqlām*, ed. A. Guillaume, Oxford, 1931, p. 240.2ff.). Similarly God's seeing and hearing are nothing other than His knowing (cf. Baġdādī, *Farq bayn al-feraq*, ed. M. Badr, p. 166.4ff.; ed. M. M. 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, p. 181.6ff.). Ka'bī evidently tried to reduce the number of attributes to a few basic ones. This is perhaps why he did not define the *ṣefāt al-fe'l* in the usual way, as those attributes whose opposites can equally well be attributed to God, but rather subsumed them under His omnipotence. Thus in the beginning God was not creating, compassionate, etc., but He had the power to make His essence so (cf. Mātorīdī, *Tawḥīd*, p. 53.3f.). Like Naẓẓām, Ka'bī thought that God must do the best (*aṣlah*; cf. Qāẓī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, *Moġnī* XIV, p. 55.14ff.; and Brunshwig in *Stud. Isl.* 35, 1974, p. 11). Theoretically speaking, He can do wrong; but if this really happened all our established categories would be shattered. It would not be against reason, but all the proofs on which reason bases itself would have to be changed to their opposites (i.e., God would have to change the order of the universe; cf. Aš'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 557.12ff.).

In the domain of epistemology Ka'bī's conceptual refinement seems to have exerted considerable influence. The standard definitions of both knowledge



(*ʿelm*) and thinking (*naẓar*) seem to stem from him (J. van Ess, *Erkenntnislehre des ʿAḍudaddīn al-Īcī*, Wiesbaden, 1965, pp. 72, 244). He advocated a less intellectual outlook than his Basran colleagues; in contrast with them he allowed the unquestioning acceptance of a statement by an accepted authority (*taqlīd*), provided that this statement is true. The common people are not obliged to reflect on a given dogmatic issue, especially as some of them are unable to do so; a general knowledge is sufficient (the doctrine of the so-called *aṣḥāb al-ǧomal*; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 73, 46 ; Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 178, 193). Knowledge of God is meritorious, but even more so the contemplation which leads to it; although God can not be the object of this contemplation since He is still unknown (*ibid.*, p. 182). Since human nature does not change, contemplation continues in the hereafter. The problem that there can be no reward for a meritorious act performed in paradise was solved by the assumption that contemplation then originates merely through recollection of former contemplation and therefore does not cause any effort (van Ess, *Erkenntnislehre*, p. 123).

In his political views Kaʿbī supported the right of the Qorayš to leadership of the community. He would acknowledge, however, a non-Qorayši sovereign in case of imminent civil war (Baġdādī, *Oṣūl al-dīn*, p. 275.10f.). He had strong Zaydī sympathies (Madelung, *Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*, pp. 77f.), and in correspondence with Zaydī doctrine he stressed that the early Šīʿa did not reject Abū Bakr and ʿOmar (cf. Qāzī ʿAbd-al-Jabbār, *Tatbīt dalāʿel al-nobūwa*, p. 62, bottom, and p. 548, bottom).

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See also *EI*² I, pp. 1102-03, with additional references.

He is mentioned several times in Brockelmann, *GAL*, with some confusion; cf. S. I, p. 343, and 2nd ed., II, p. 665 (ad 206); versus 2nd ed., I, p. 447, and S. I, p. 619.

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