



‘ĀMERĪ NĪŠĀPŪRĪ

‘ĀMERĪ NĪŠĀPŪRĪ, ABU’L-ḤASAN MOḤAMMAD B. YŪSOF (d. 381/992), important philosopher from Khorasan between Fārābī and Avicenna. Though he was praised by his contemporaries and later figures (e.g., Tawḥīdī, Moskūya, Šahrestānī, Šahrazūrī, Kalābādī, little is known about his life. Born at Nīšāpūr, he studied with Abū Yazīd Aḥmad b. Sahl Balkī (d. 322/933) and soon became known as “the philosopher of Nīšāpūr.” He lived in Baghdad on two occasions, once before 360/970 and the second time in 364/974, but seems to have been rather ill at ease there, especially because of the snobbish disdain of Baghdadis for people from Khorasan. He taught and wrote at Ray for five years, and in Bukhara wrote several books, including *al-Amad ‘ala ’l-abad* (completed in 375/985) and *Manāqeb al-eslām*. He was able to utilize the Samanid library—the same that Avicenna would later use—and was influenced by his contact with the Samanid court in the area of his religious and political conceptions. He returned to Nīšāpūr, where he died on 27 Šawwāl 381/6 January 992. Among ‘Āmerī’s acquaintances were Moskūya (Meskawayh), who met him in Baghdad at the house of Abu’l-Faḥr b. al-‘Amīd. In the same city, at the *majāles* of Abu’l-Faḥr b. al-‘Amīd, he disputed with the grammarian Abū Sa’īd Šayrafī concerning the *bā’* of the *basmala*, in which the theosophers discerned much that the grammarians were incapable of seeing. His relations with Abū Ḥayyān Tawḥīdī (d. 399/1009) allowed the latter to record a number of ‘Āmerī’s statements and conversations, invaluable for our knowledge of him. He also knew Abu’l-Qāsem Kāteb, who was closely connected with Ebn Hendū, and Avicenna, with whom he carried on a philosophical correspondence and who mentions him in *Ketāb al-*



naġāt—although not without showing some reservations as to his philosophical abilities.

‘Āmerī wrote some thirty books, a number of which he lists in *al-Amad ‘ala ‘l-abad*. Some of these are still in manuscript, while others have not survived (see the preface to the edition of his *Manāqeb*, pp. 19f.). They covered almost all the philosophical sciences inherited from Hellenism (logic, physics, metaphysics, and ethics) and the Islamic sciences (Sufism, *kalām*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, law, etc.). *Ketāb al-sa‘āda wa’l-es‘ād* (ed. M. Mīnovī, Wiesbaden and Tehran, 1957-58) deals with ethics; *Ketāb al-foṣūl* deals with such metaphysical questions as the unity of the intellect, the intelligible, and the act of intellection in terms which seem to have inspired the later thinker Afżal Kāšānī (7th/13th cent.). In other works ‘Āmerī treated optical perception (*ebṣār*), the concept of eternity (*abad*), the merits of Islam (*manāqeb al-eslām*), and predestination and free will (*ġabr* and *qadar*). He took an interest in medicine, mathematics, and alchemy. He had a strong interest in ancient Persia and composed one of his works in Persian (*Farrōk-nāma*). It would be rash to try to reconstruct the system of a philosopher whose works are so diverse without at least studying all of his surviving books; nevertheless his thought can be grasped through the guidance of citations by Mollā Ṣadrā Šīrāzī, records of his discussions set down by Tawḥīdī, and his own book on the merits of Islam.

In *al-Ḥekmat al-‘aršīya* (litho. Tehran, p. 142; tr. J. Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne*, Princeton, 1981, p. 150) Mollā Ṣadrā mentions the questions which ‘Āmerī had asked of Avicenna and the difficulty which Avicenna had in answering them; he refers to the same questions in *al-Asfār*. In an excursus amplifying one of his comments on the “Oriental Theosophy” of Sohrawardī (*Ḥekmat al-ešrāq*, ed. Corbin, par. 134), he refers to *al-Amad ‘ala ‘l-abad*, at the point where ‘Āmerī attributes to Empedocles the doctrine that if one says of the Creator that He is generosity, strength, power, and the like, this does not mean that the faculties ordinarily designated by these names actually exist within Him.

Tawḥīdī’s *Moqābasāt* shows the great esteem in which ‘Āmerī was held by his contemporaries and reflects philosophic sessions in the cultivated circles of Baghdad. In particular, there is a long conversation between ‘Āmerī and a man called Mānī the “Mazdean” (Maġūsī, hence in no way a Manichean, despite his first name), whose knowledge of philosophy is attested by Tawḥīdī. Nothing in this passage would justify a certain recent interpretation which sought to view it as a “diatribe” against “Manichean anarchism” employing Aristotelian logic



and providing an apology for Sunni Islam (J. C. Vadet, “Une défense philosophique de la Sunna: Les *Manāqib al-Islām* d’al-‘Āmirī,” *REI* 42, 1974, pp. 245f.; 43, 1975, pp. 77f.). Mānī the Mazdean simply states that speculation on the posthumous fate of the soul is just as futile as speculating about the state which preceded our appearance in this world. Beyond the limits of birth and death, our knowledge cannot reach anything other than non-being (‘*adam*), about which nothing can be known. To this ‘Āmerī replies that the soul is not a secretion of nature; rather, nature is an activity of the soul and is dominated by it. Through knowledge and awareness man grows in wisdom in a way that is different from his physical growth. When the soul becomes separated from the body, it is totally independent of physical nature. Thus the inquiry into the posthumous fate of the soul does not concern the negativity of pure non-being. ‘Āmerī expresses himself as a true Platonist, not as a polemicist or apologist: “In every sensible thing there is a shadow of the intelligible, without there being any shadow of the sensible in the intelligible itself. Thus, whenever we find something in our sensible perception, that thing also has a certain trace in the Intelligence, through which there exists this correspondence (*tašbīh*), and towards which rises our ardent desire. So long as a man has not purified himself of the traces of the sensible, he will not be able to adorn himself with the garments of the intelligible.” ‘Āmerī agrees that this question is a “stern maiden, mute and enigmatic,” but in the end “the intellect, which is God’s viceroy (caliph) in this world,” can overcome all obstacles, opening up thresholds without which men’s minds would be overcome by despair and the world would be reduced to an illusory game.

Tawḥīdī mentions that ‘Āmerī was involved in other discussions, e.g., on the theme that the philosopher can see with his eyes closed what the non-philosopher can not see with his eyes open, or that the physician is the true brother of the astronomer, and he gives information on a number of propositions taken from ‘Āmerī’s book *al-Nask al-‘aqlī* (something like “The piety of the philosopher”). Tawḥīdī’s anthology provides a key to reading ‘Āmerī’s work on the merits of Islam (*Manāqeb al-eslām*), composed of ten chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. From the beginning the work is a defense of philosophy, as should be expected from its dedication to the Samanid minister Abū Naṣr b. Abī Zayd. ‘Āmerī deplors the fact that, although philosophy is the highest form of knowledge, “The mass of men oppose it and refuse to pay attention to it, not because it is forbidden to them, but because with respect to philosophy they are like bleary-eyed persons facing the sun.” He regrets that a certain school of philosophers, and a group



of the Bāṭenīs (the esotericists, or the Isma‘īlis), claim that the acquisition of knowledge liberates the philosopher from every religious obligation except directing men on the right path, since—so they claim—the purpose of knowledge is not to lead men to good works, but to deliver them from the desert of their ignorance, which is all there is to evil; he states that “this is to commit a grave mistake, since knowledge is also the principle of action, and action is the final perfection of knowledge.” An important chapter at the end of the book provides an amount of Islamic prophetology. A response to the fourth in a series of doubts mentioned in the conclusion, it begins with lines that could easily have been written by a Shi‘ite or Isma‘ili or esotericist. Then ‘Āmerī sets forth (*Manāqeb*, pp. 201f.), with philosophical rigor, a scriptural argument to justify the four qualifications conferred on the prophet Moḥammad, based on the verses of Deuteronomy (18:15-18 and 33:2) and John (14:26, 15:26) which announce the coming of the Paraclete. These pages demonstrate the basis of prophetic philosophy in Islam; the argument was later taken up by Aḥmad ‘Alawī.

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(H. Corbin)