



EBN QEBA, ABŪ JA'FAR MOḤAMMAD

EBN QEBA, ABŪ JA'FAR MOḤAMMAD b. 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Rāzī (d. Ray, before 319/931), one of the most prominent and active Imami theologians. He had a major role in the development of Shi'ite Islam in its formative period during the first century of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam. Little biographical information is available about Ebn Qeba. Starting out as a Mu'tazilite master of theology (*kalām*), he converted to Shi'ism and contributed to an early stage of Mu'tazilite influence in Imami theology. Ebn Qeba was actively engaged in continuous oral and written debates with scholars belonging to other schools of Shi'ism, particularly Zaydis. His writings, three of them now in print, dealt with the imamate. The most important of them was the *Ketāb al-enṣāf fi'l-emāma*, from which some quotations survived in later works. He also wrote the *Ketāb al-radd 'alā Abī 'Alī Jobbā'i* and *al-Mas'ala al-mofradafī emāma* (Najāšī, p. 290; the three works were printed in 1390/1970 as parts of Ebn Bābawayh's *Kamāl al-dīn*; for translation of selections of the above treatises see Modarressi, pp. 109-244).

Ebn Qeba's most important and lasting contribution to Shi'ism was a refined and powerful theory of Imamate, the main point of which is that not lineage but merit is the sole criterion for the succession to the Prophet and Imams. The successor must be the most pious and learned male member of the Prophet's family. It is, however, the obligation of the Prophet and the Imams to designate explicitly the most qualified member of the family to the position, because



people are not able to determine who is the most qualified and pious one. He also developed a theory rationalizing the occultation of the Twelfth Imam as a natural development in Shi'ite doctrine (Modarressi, pp. 109-70).

Against the Zaydite position he wrote *al-Ta'rīf fī mad'hab al-emāmīya wa fasād mad'hab al-Zaydīya* (Ebn Šahrāšūb, p. 95), which Ṭūsī calls the *Ketāb al-ta'rīf 'ala'l-zaydīya* and Najāšī refers to as the *Ketāb al-radd 'ala'l-Zaydīya*. Ebn Qeba also wrote a refutation to the *Ketāb al-ašhād* of Abū Zayd 'Alawī, now available in print (in Ebn Šahrāšūb, pp. 169-244). Toward the end of his life he had a running controversy about the imamate with the leading Mu'tazilite Abu'l-Qāsem Balkī (d. 319/931). A pupil of Abū Sahl Nowbaktī named Abu'l-Ḥosayn Moḥammad b. Bešr Sūsānjerdī, after a visit to the Imam 'Alī al-Rezā's tomb in Ṭūs, passed on to Balkī and showed Abu'l-Qāsem the copy of the *Ketāb al-enšāf* which he had with him. Abu'l-Qāsem read it and wrote a refutation called *al-Mostaršed fī'l-emāma*, which the disciple then took to Ebn Qeba in Ray. Ebn Qeba answered it in a book of his own called *al-Mostaṭba fī'l-emāma*, which the same messenger then brought back to Balkī, where Abu'l-Qāsem, in turn, rebutted it in the *Naqz al-mostaṭbat*. Returning to Ray with this latest rejoinder, he found that Ebn Qeba had died (Modarressi, pp. 133-143).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(For cited works not given in detail, see "Short References.")

A'yān al-šī'a IX, 2nd ed., Beirut, 1406/1987, p. 380.

al-Darī'a II, p. 196.

Ebn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, *Šarḥ Nahj al-balāḡa* I, Cairo, 1959, p. 206.

Ebn Bābawayh, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ne'ma fī eṭbāt al-ḡayba wa kašf al-ḡayra*, ed. 'A.-A. Ġaffārī, Tehran, 1390/1970, which contains three major works of Ebn Qeba.

Ebn Šahrāšūb, *Ma'ālem al-'olamā'*, Najaf, 1380/1961, p. 95, no. 660.



‘A. Eqbāl, *Kānadān-e Nowbaktī*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, pp. 94-95, 133.

N. Godašta, “Ebn-e Qeba” in *DMBE IV*, p. 446.

H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi‘ite Islam. Abū Ja‘far Ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Shi‘ite Thought*, Princeton, 1993.

Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Najāšī, *al-Rejāl*, Tehran, n.d., p. 290.

Abū Ja‘far Moḥammad b. Ḥasan Ṭūsī, *al-Fehrest*, 2nd ed., Najaf, 1380/1961, p. 158.