



## EBN ṬĀWŪS, RAŽĪ-AL-DĪN ‘ALĪ

**EBN ṬĀWŪS, RAŽĪ-AL-DĪN ‘ALĪ** b. Mūsā b. Ja‘far (b. Ḥella, 15 Moḥarram 589/21 January 1193; d. Baghdad, 5 Ḍu‘l-qa‘da 664/8 August 1266), Imami author, scholar, and bibliophile, called *Du‘l-ḥasabayn* “possessing two distinctions” because he was descended from both Ḥasan and Ḥosayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb.

Ebn Ṭāwūs grew up in Ḥella, studying with his maternal grandfather Warrām b. Abī Ferās Naḳa‘ī (d. 605/1208), and his father Sa‘d-al-Dīn Mūsā, whose mother was a daughter (or granddaughter) of Abū Ja‘far Moḥammad Ṭūsī. Following his marriage to Zahrā’ Kātūn, daughter of the Shi‘ite vizier Nāṣer b. Mahdī (d. 617/1220), he lived in Baghdad for at least fifteen years. The caliph al-Mostaṣṣer (r. 623-40/1226-42) tried to draw him into politics, offering him the post of *naqīb* (chief) and asking him to act as his emissary to the Mongol ruler; but Ebn Ṭāwūs declined (Ebn Ṭāwūs, 1950, pp. 112-14). al-Mostaṣṣer also failed to persuade him to issue *fatwās*. He performed the pilgrimage in 627/1230 (Ebn Ṭāwūs, 1965, pp. 68-69, 248), perhaps the only time he left Iraq. By 641/1243-44 he had returned to Ḥella, later living about three years each in Najaf and Karbalā’. He had hoped to spend three years in Samarra, which he describes as an isolated spot, “like a monastery in the wilderness” (1950, p. 118), but returned to Baghdad in 652/1254.

He was still there when the Mongols captured the city, but he came to no harm. After a brief stay in Ḥella, he returned to Baghdad in 656/1258 following his appointment by Hülegü (Holākū) as *naqīb* of the ‘Alids. (The report that he was appointed *naqīb al-noqabā’* of Iraq in 661/1262 perhaps refers to a later



appointment as *naqīb* of all the 'Alids of Iraq; pseudo- Ebn al-Fowaṭī, p. 350) It is hard to tell what Ebn Ṭāwūs' attitude to the Mongols was. In his *Ketāb al-eqbāl* (Tehran, 1320/1902, pp. 588, 600) he expresses his gratitude to the Mongol ruler; he also sent him one of his works. In contrast, Ebn 'Enaba (d. 828/1424) says that Ebn Ṭāwūs originally intended to turn down the appointment as *naqīb* but was warned by Naṣīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī that refusal would be suicidal (*Nāma-ye dānešvarān* I, pp. 176-77; cf. Ebn 'Enaba, 1984, pp. 131-32). Once installed in office, Ebn Ṭāwūs came to believe that under the new circumstances it was his duty to hold a position of leadership. As he reports in the *Eqbāl* (pp. 599-600), he read in the eschatological work *al-Malāḥem* of Baṭā'enī (3rd/9th century) that Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq had said that after the destruction of the 'Abbasid empire Moḥammad's community would be ruled by a just and honest person from the *ahl-al-bayt*, who in turn would be succeeded by the Qā'em. Ebn Ṭāwūs believed—and fervently hoped—that he was that just and honest person. Ebn 'Enaba says that Ebn Ṭāwūs held the position of *naqīb* for three years and eleven months and died in office (*Nāma-ye dānešvarān* I, p. 177), but Tāj-al-Dīn b. Zohra (p. 58) reports that Ebn Ṭāwūs was removed from office near the end of his life. If so, it is likely that this removal gave rise to the report that both he and his brother Aḥmad died as martyrs (Baḥrānī, I, p. 307). He was buried in Najaf.

Ebn Ṭāwūs was apparently quite well off, having purchased real estate over the years. To posterity he is known as *šāheb al-karāmāt* (doer of miracles); he relates a number of such incidents and is also reported to have been in direct contact with the Twelfth Imam.

Ebn Ṭāwūs had three brothers: Šaraf-al-Dīn Moḥammad, killed during the sack of Baghdad; 'Ezz-al-Dīn Ḥasan, who had died two years earlier; and the well-known author and poet Jamāl-al-Dīn Aḥmad (d. 673/1274-5 or 677/1278-9), father of Ġiāṭ-al-Dīn 'Abd-al-Karīm (d. 693/1294), who himself wrote a number of books. In his writings Ebn Ṭāwūs mentions two sons and four daughters; both the eldest son Moḥammad (643-80/1245-82) and the younger son Abu'l-Qāsem 'Alī (647-711/1249-1312) were *naqībs* of Baghdad and Najaf.

Strothmann juxtaposes Naṣīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī, the scholar, statesman, and man of action with Ebn Ṭāwūs, “a modest unknown figure” and “the embodiment of Shī'i quietism” who led a “lonely, uneventful life” (pp. 7, 88, 110). Though overstated, this is an apt description for the pre-Mongol period; Ebn Ṭāwūs advised his son Moḥammad that mixing in society is an intractable malady which distracts one's mind from God and should therefore be reduced to a



bare minimum (Ebn Ṭāwūs, 1950, pp. 101-02).

In his *Ejāzāt* (cited in Majlesī, CVII, p. 42), Ebn Ṭāwūs says that he shied away from *feqh* and wrote only one work on legal matters (*Ġiāt solṭān al-warā*; excerpt published as *Qabas men ketāb Ġiāt solṭān al-warā*, Qom, 1408/1987). He explains that he does not wish to provide answers to legal questions since the correct answers are a matter of dispute among Shi'ite scholars. He did go on to write another legal treatise, *al-Mowāsa'a wa'l-możāyaqa* (ed. M.-'A. Ṭabāṭabā'i Marāġī as "Resālat 'adam możāyaqat al-fawā'et," *Torātonā* 2, 1407/1986-87, pp. 331-59); both works dealt with prayer, a subject close to his heart. He avoided writing on *kalām* and was critical of the Mu'tazilites, whom he accused of turning self-evident truths into abstruse matters and of introducing doubt and confusion into the hearts of the believers (Ebn Ṭāwūs, 1950, pp. 17-22).

Although Ebn Ṭāwūs nowhere offers a systematic exposition of his beliefs, his writings show that he had clear views on all important issues in Twelver Shi'ite thought. For example, he held that prophets and imams were fully immune from major and minor sins and interpreted accordingly texts that seemed to conflict with this view. His belief that traditions of the imams are the main source of religious knowledge is characteristic of the Akbārī position. His emphasis on visits to the graves of the Imams, on the Shi'ite days of commemoration, and on supererogatory prayers and other acts of devotion highlight the popular elements in his thought. Particularly striking is his defense of such practices as *esteḳāra* (see [DIVINATION](#)) by casting lots (*Faḥ al-abwāb ... fi'l-esteḳārāt*, ed. Ḥāmed al-Ḳaffāf, Beirut, 1409/1989, pp. 271-79, 286-93) and the use of talismans as remedies for illness (*al-Amān men aḳṭār al-asfār wa'l-azmān*, Qom, 1409/1988, p. 91), as well as his occasional resort to astrology.

Ebn Ṭāwūs left behind an impressive number of writings on such subjects as Hadith, supplications (*da'awāt*), history, biography, polemics, and astrology. Of some sixty works whose titles are known, more than a third have come down in their entirety, while several others are partly preserved. Particularly popular was his *Ketāb al-loḥūf 'alā qatla'l-ṭofūf* (Tehran, 1321/1904; Baghdad, 1929; Tehran, 1348 Š./1979) on the Karbalā' tragedy. The *Kašf al-maḥajja* is an important source of information on Ebn Ṭāwūs' life and thought, while the *Faraj al-mahmūm* has rich material on astrology and astrologers. A number of works of supplication, known collectively as *al-Mohemmāt wa'l-tatemmāt*, were conceived as a supplement to Ṭūsī's *Meşbāḥ al-motahajjed al-kabīr*; six of



the original ten volumes are extant. To Ebn Ṭāwūs's polemical anti-Sunni works belong *al-Yaqīn be'ktešāš mawlānā 'Alī be emrat al-mo'menīn* (ed. M.-B. Anṣārī and M.-Ş. Anṣārī, Beirut, 1410/1989) and *al-Ṭarā'ef fī ma'refat maḏāheb al-ṭawā'ef* (Qom, 1400/1980). The *Ṭarā'ef* is unique among Ebn Ṭāwūs's writings in that it appeared under a pseudonym: 'Abd-al-Maḥmūd b. Dāwūd Możarī, a member of the *ahl al-ḍemma* (i.e., a non-Muslim). The reason for this unusual procedure may have been *taqīya*; the book expresses strongly anti-Sunni sentiments and could have caused trouble with the 'Abbasid authorities. Many of Ebn Ṭāwūs's works were translated into Persian in the Safavid period.

Ebn Ṭāwūs's works afford us a unique glimpse into his impressive library. According to his own testimony, it contained numerous works on the principles of religion (*oṣūl*), on prophecy and the imamate, on *zohd*, *feqh*, history, Qur'ān exegesis, supplications, genealogy, medicine, grammar, poetry, alchemy, talismans, geomancy, and astrology (Ebn Ṭāwūs, 1950, pp. 128-37). The library is said to have held about 1,500 titles in 650/1252. At an unknown date Ebn Ṭāwūs wrote a catalogue of his library, *al-Ebāna fī ma'refat kotob al-kezāna*. It has not survived. Later he decided to embark on a much more ambitious project by writing a work which would have the same chapter headings as the *Ebāna*, but in which each item in his library would not only be mentioned, but would also be discussed and its significance explained. This book, the *Sa'd al-so'ūd*, was begun in Ḍu'l-qa'da 651/December 1253-January 1254. As we have it, the work consists of one volume divided into two chapters: the first on *maṣāḥef* (manuscripts of the Qur'ān), the second on Qur'ān commentary. Ebn Ṭāwūs apparently never went beyond this volume.

Ebn Ṭāwūs was inordinately interested in technical details of the manuscripts such as their format and date, and often noted the quire, folio, and, occasionally, even the line number of passages he quoted. In his extant works there are references to, or citations from, some 670 works, most of which were probably in his library. About a third of these works (both Sunni and Shi'ite) have not survived, and even the existence of some of them is only known thanks to Ebn Ṭāwūs. His writings thus considerably enhance our knowledge of medieval Arabic literature.



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