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HANBALITE MAḌHAB

HANBALITE MAḌHAB, a school of Sunni law and theology named after Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) which was founded largely under his influence in Baghdad in the 3rd/9th century. Due in part to the discovery and publication of new sources bearing on the history of the school and, in part, to advances in scholarship, our understanding of Hanbalism has undergone a virtual revolution since the early 1940s. In contrast to the older view of Hanbalism, which had been established by 19th-century scholarship and was based to a large extent on non-Hanbalite and frequently anti-Hanbalite sources, recent scholarship has appreciated the school's diversity and dynamism. Rather than being an implacable foe of dialectical theology (*kalām*) and Sufism, as was once thought to be the case, it is now clear that the school, in fact, accommodated representatives of both within its ranks (cf. Makdisi, tr. Swartz, pp. 240 ff.; and Gimaret, pp. 161 ff.).

The Formative Period (241-334/855-945). The school initially took as the basis of its doctrine the teachings of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal which, in the century following his death, were gradually collected by his disciples in various regions and organized into quasi-authoritative sources of instruction. His sons Ṣāleḥ (d. 266/880) and ʿAbd-Allāh (d. 290/903) played a decisive role in the establishment of the literary basis of the school's teaching. From a very early period, however, a number of other scholars also made important contributions to the systemization and interpretation of Aḥmad's teachings, including Abu Ḥātem Rāzi (d. 277/890; not to be confused with the Ismaʿili Abu Ḥātem Rāzi, q.v.), Abu Bakr Ḵallāl (d. 311/923-24) and Abu Bakr Sejestāni (d. 316/928). Along with

the early efforts at codification, a serious attempt was made to elaborate a juridical system which enshrined those values and doctrines that were deemed to be central to the teachings of Aḥmad. Abu'l-Qāsem Ḵeraqi (d. 334/945-46) produced one of the earliest manuals of Hanbalite jurisprudence, known as the *Moḵtaṣar*, a work that was to remain the standard text on Hanbalite law well into the 7th/13th century. It also attracted numerous commentaries by leading judicial authorities of the school. Indicative of the growing diversity within the school is the significant number of Hanbalite activists who through their preaching and dedication to moral reform cemented the school's ties with important elements of the wider public. Typical of this populist stance was the preacher Barbahāri (d. 329/940-41) who, though controversial, directed much of his energies to combating Shiʿism and Muʿtazilism.

While Baghdad remained the school's vital center until well into the 7th/13th century, Hanbalism soon spread to the major cities of Persia, especially Isfahan and Herat (Laoust, *EI*2 III, p. 161). As early as the 4th/10th century, the school was also established in Palestine and Syria, and eventually in northern Mesopotamia (especially at Ḥarrān) as well.

Despite the differences that existed within the school from a relatively early period, it came to represent a more or less coherent body of doctrine. Theologically, Hanbalism was traditionalist in orientation and tended to be in accord on major points of doctrine with traditionalist circles in the other Sunni schools. In *oṣul al-feqh* (principles of jurisprudence), following the example of its eponymous founder, Hanbalism emphasized the primacy of the Qurʾān and Sunna as sources. While a role was allowed for consensus (*ejmāʿ*), that consensus was, for most Hanbalites, restricted to the Ṣaḥāba (the Companions of the Prophet). In general, early Hanbalites had little use for the principle of *qiās* (analogical reason), though that resistance did eventually give way to a qualified acceptance of the concept as can be seen, for example, in the work of Ebn Taymiya. The same evolution can be seen in the Hanbalite position on *raʾy* (the free exercise of personal opinion); early Hanbalites, following Aḥmad, tended to be sharply critical of raʾy, but by the 11th century these traditional objections had begun to give way to a qualified acceptance of raʾy, as can be seen in the increased importance attached to further legal principles, such as *esteṣḥāb* (the relative claims of established practice), *ḏarāʾeʿ* (implications inherent in the divine commands), *maṣlaḥa* (public interest) and *ejtehād* (independent juristic reasoning, q.v.; see further Laoust, "Aḥmad b.

Ḥanbal," *EI*2I, pp. 275-76). As Laoust has pointed out, one of the defining features of Hanbalite jurisprudence was an emphasis on strict adherence to the divine commands contained in the Qurʾān and the Sunna while at the same time allowing for the greatest possible latitude in those areas not covered by the divine commands (Laoust, 1939, pp. 444). It was this tension, built into the structure of the Hanbalite system, that gave Hanbalite law a significant degree of flexibility and made possible necessary adjustments as circumstances changed and new situations presented themselves. In spite of this evolution, however, one finds throughout that history an extraordinary attachment to the example and the teaching of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, greater than the attachment of other comparable schools to their respective founding figures.

The Buyid period (334-447/945-1061). Building on the achievements of the preceding period, Hanbalites adopted a twofold policy vis-à-vis the expanding Buyid state. On the one hand, in so far as the Buyids supported Shiʿite and Muʿtazilite causes, Hanbalites took a firm, and on the whole, disciplined stand against them; on the other, Hanbalites vigorously promoted the traditionalist cause both through their teaching and through public action. Hanbalite efforts came to partial fruition in 433/1041-42 with the public proclamation, supported by the ʿAbbasid caliph al-Qāder, of a creed that was thoroughly traditionalist in both spirit and substance (cf. Ebn al-Jawzi, *Montaẓam* VIII, p. 109). This achievement together with the enhanced public profile of the school was in no small measure a result of their remarkable intellectual leaders during this period, including the scholars Ebn Baṭṭa, Ebn Ḥāmed and Abu Yaʿlā Ebn al-Farrāʾ. The writings of Ibn Baṭṭa (d. 387/997), especially his two *Ebāna*s, were to remain for centuries a source of inspiration and guidance for Hanbalites on questions of doctrine (cf. Laoust, 1958). Through his teachings and his writings, especially in the area of *oṣul al-din* (the principles of religion) and the *ṣefāt* (divine attributes), Ebn Ḥāmed (d. 403/1012-13) made important contributions to the further evolution of Hanbalite doctrine. It is in the writings of Abu Yaʿlā (458/1066), however, that one can see most clearly the signs of Hanbalite openness to diverse intellectual currents, including Ashʿarite theology (*kalām*), to which Hanbalites had traditionally been opposed. Abu Yaʿlā's *Moʿtamad* was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of the many works touching on *kalām* to be produced in the school. In the case of the *Moʿtamad*, the influence of kalām can be seen at several distinct levels: (1) the structure of the work, that is its divisions (chapters and sections), follows to a striking degree those of the standard Ashʿarite manuals on kalām;(2) a number of characteristically Ashʿarite doctrines, including the idea of "acquisition"

(*kasb* or *ektesāb*), are taken over and integrated into the work; and (3) there is considerable reliance on conceptual distinctions that had become common in Ashʿarite kalām (e.g., the distinction between attributes of essence, *ṣefāt al-ḏāt*, and attributes of action, *ṣefāt al-feʿāl*). From beginning to end, the work is suffused with the spirit of kalām and informed by its methods and procedures (see Ebn al-Farrāʾ, Arabic text, esp. pp. 19-93, English intro., pp. 27-28; Laoust, in *EI*2 III, pp. 765-66; cf. also Gimaret, pp. 157-62).

Hanbalism under the later ʿAbbasid caliphs (447-656/1061-1258). Although Hanbalism had made important strides in extending its influence during the preceding period, it was in the period marked by the arrival of the Saljuqs that the Hanbalite school of Baghdad was to achieve its greatest success. Having established a popular base of support over the preceding two centuries, the school was destined to become a significant force in the political and religious life of Baghdad, especially during the 6th/12th century. Several of the most influential viziersof the ʿAbbasid court during this century, most notably Ebn Hobayra (d. 560/1165) and Ebn Yunos (d. 593/1196), were Hanbalites. Ebn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1200), one of the most gifted and influential Hanbalites of the century, served as the favored preacher of the ʿAbbasid court during the reign of al-Mostaẓiʾ (566-74/1171-79) and the early years of al-Nāṣer's reign (575-622/1179-1225). There was also a remarkable growth in the number of Hanbalite *madrasa*s. As an indication of the school's growing prestige and influence, the caliph al-Mustaẓiʾ, in a highly symbolic move, redecorated the tomb of Aḥmad in 574/1178.

Among the leading scholars and intellectual leaders during the heyday of Hanbalism in Baghdad, special mention must be made of the following: Kalwaḏāni (d. 510/1117), author of the *Hedāya*, a highly esteemed manual of Hanbalite jurisprudence; Ebn ʿAqil (d. 513/1119), a seminal thinker whose works in both theology and jurisprudence (among them, his *Ketāb al-eršād fi oṣul al-din* and his *Ketāb al-wāżeḥ fi oṣul al-feqh*) reflect a sensitive and subtle mind, and an openness to diverse perspectives; ʿAbd-Allāh Anṣāri Heravi (d. 481/1089), a Hanbalite mystic based in Herat, whose writings, especially his *Manāzel al-sāʾerin*, were to become classics of Sufism (Brocklemann, *GAL* I, p. 433; Suppl. I, p. 774; see further De Beaurecueil and Ravan Farhadi); ʿAbd-al-Qāder Jilāni (q.v.; d. 561/1166), a mystic, jurist and preacher from Persia whose influence has continued to be felt for centuries after his death among mystics, both within as well as beyond the Hanbalite school (Braune); Ebn al-Jawzi, a jurist, historian and, above all, preacher whose mastery of the art of *waʿẓ*

(preaching) and many compositions in that genre made him one of the most celebrated Hanbalites of his time; and Ebn Qodāma (d. 620/1223), author of the *Moḡni*, a major compendium of law which continued to be the object of careful study well into the Ottoman period.

The influence of the school of Baghdad was not destined to last indefinitely, however. Partly as a result of internal divisions, and partly as a result of the rapidly evolving politics of the late 6th/12th and early 7th/13th centuries, Hanbalites found themselves slowly but progressively marginalized. With the arrival of the Mongols and the destruction of Baghdad in 656/1258, Hanbalism was severely weakened. The school of Baghdad certainly survived, but with greatly diminished influence. Long before the arrival of the Mongols, however, the center of gravity within the school had already begun to shift to Damascus.

Hanbalism in the post-ʿAbbasid era (13th-20th century). Under the early Mamluks, Syria and Palestine quickly became the center of the school's activities and influence. Three names dominate the history of Hanbalism during the early Mamluk period: Taqi-al-Din Ebn Taymiya (d. 728/1328) his chief disciple, Ebn Qayyem Jawziya (d. 751/1350-1) and the latter's pupil Ebn Rajab (d. 795/1393). Ebn Taymiya, though frequently at the center of controversy in his lifetime, was one of the most original thinkers in the history of the school, and one whose influence has grown in the last few centuries. Although he has often been portrayed by critics as uncompromisingly hostile to Sufism and kalām, Ebn Taymiya was actually influenced by both to a degree, as careful readings of his writings have shown (cf., Laoust, 1939, index; Makdisi, tr. Swartz, pp. 240-51; Gimaret, pp. 165 ff.). A relentless critic of monist (*etteḥādi*) Sufism, Ebn Taymiya was him-self none the less an active member of the Qāderiya order, and beyond the traditional disciplines on which he wrote extensively, his interests also included Islamic Philosophy (*falsafa*). Ebn Taymiya's critique of Aristotelian logic, arguably the most significant to have been produced in the Middle Ages, has recently been the object of an illuminating study (Hallaq).

Given the interests of his teacher, it is hardly surprising that Ebn Qayyem should have also pursued an interest in Sufism, as reflected in a number of his writings, most obviously in his commentary on Anṣāri's *Manāzel al-sāʾerin*. However, like his teacher, he was a severe critic of monist Sufism (cf. especially his *Nuniya*). Ebn Rajab, his student and friend, is known primarily for his history of Ḥanbalism (*Ḏayl ʿalā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābela*, a continuation of the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābela* of Abu'l-Ḥosayn b. Abi Yaʿlā, d. 526/1131).

In spite of the school's gradual decline during the later Mamluk and Ottoman periods, Ḥanbalism continued to be represented by a line of highly respected scholars, including ʿOlaymi (d. 927/1521), Ebn Mofleḥ (d. 884/1480), Musā Ḥojāwi (d. 958/1560), Ebn al-ʿEmād (d. 1089/1679), whose biographies may be found in ʿOlaymi's *al-Menhaj al-Aḥmad* and Šaṭṭi's *Moḵtaṣar Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābela* (Damascus, 1330/1921). It is most notably through the Wahhābis that Hanbalism has influenced a number of reformist movements in the modern period.

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