



JA'FAR B. MOḤAMMAD B. ḤARB

JA'FAR B. MOḤAMMAD B. ḤARB, ABU'L-FAẒL AL-HAMDĀNI (d. 236/850 at the age of 59), also called al-Ašajj ('scar-face' or 'skull-broken'), Mu'tazilite theologian who lived in Baghdad. His family was of Yemeni descent, as is shown by the *nesba* (cf. Mas'udi, *Moruj*, ed. Pellat, V, p. 21), and the reading *Hamadāni*, which would turn him into a Persian (Nader, p. 373; Sezgin, *GAS* I, p. 619), has to be abandoned. The ancestral relations of Ja'far b. Ḥarb are difficult to reconstruct. His name is normally shortened to Ja'far b. Ḥarb, but Ḥarb was, in fact, the name of his grandfather or great-grandfather (cf. Tawḥidi, IV, p. 215, no. 783), who seems to have been a person of some renown and was possibly identical with an Abbasid general who died in 147/764 (Mas'udi, *Moruj*, ed. Pellat, V, p. 21; cf. van Ess, 1991-97, III, p. 12). His father, a certain Moḥammad b. Ḥarb, may have been the chief of police in Basra for some time, and this would, at least, best explain why, in his youth, Ja'far b. Ḥarb studied with Abu'l-Ḥodayl 'Affāf (ca. 135-227/752-841; q.v.), who lived there, and not with Bešr b. al-Mo'tamer (for him see van Ess, 1991-97, III, pp. 107-30), the head of the Mu'tazilite movement in Baghdad. At a later date, the Abbasid governor Qoṭam b. Ja'far invited Ja'far b. Ḥarb to Basra again for a disputation with his former teacher, when Abu'l-Ḥodayl was already at a rather advanced age (van Ess, 1994, pp. 14 f.). For some time Ja'far b. Ḥarb had a position in the army, and the scar on his forehead may have been the trace of a wound, which he had got in battle. However, the Mu'tazilite tradition avoids the nickname Ašajj and rather presents him as somebody who, because



of his piety, was invited to the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Wāteq (r. 227-32/842-47) and had discussions there with the Ibadite (*Ebāzi*; see Lewicki, pp. 648-60) scholar Yaḥyā b. Kāmel, the contents of which seem to have been subsequently published as *al-Masā'el al-jalila* ('The Important Questions'; see Ebn al-Nadim, ed. Tajaddod, pp. 213, 233). Both theologians are said to have been friends, which would be all the more plausible, if we can assume that Ja'far's father was identical with Moḥammad b. Ḥarb, who is mentioned as an Ibadite theologian by Aš'ari (pp. 108, 120, line 7). But this suggestion, again, necessarily remains highly hypothetical (van Ess, 1991-97, IV, pp. 173 ff.). Before al-Wāteq came to power, however, Ja'far b. Ḥarb had already passed through a religious crisis which had made him renounce his military job (and perhaps his pecuniary security too). He had passed under the influence of Abu Musā Mordār (q.v.; see van Ess, 1991-97, III, pp. 134-35 and 138 f.), a Mu'tazilite with a Persian nickname (*mordār* means 'carrion'), who had strong ascetic leanings and died in 226/841. Mordār called on him to do penance for his former life, and by diving into the river Tigris Ja'far b. Ḥarb washed off his sins; afterwards he put on new clothes offered to him by Mordār ('Abd-al-Jabbār, p. 278). These may have been Sufi garments, because the group of Baghdadi intellectuals, whom he joined, was named *Ṣufiyat al-mo'tazela* at that time (van Ess, 1991-97, III, pp. 130 ff.). The main sin, however, from which he wanted to be absolved was probably that of having worked for the government, and in the army at that.

The crisis affected Ja'far b. Ḥarb's theological outlook. Trained by Abu'l-Hoḍayl, he had started as an atomist; unlike his contemporary Jāḥeẓ (q.v.), he did not feel tempted by the "naturalist" approach of Abu Eshāq Naẓẓām (q.v.). Yet he had attacked Abu'l-Hoḍayl because of the latter's idea that even in paradise all human actions will come to an end, and, therefore, the blessed have to remain in eternal immobility. This may have been the subject of his *Ketāb towbiḳ Abi'l-Hoḍayl* (van Ess, 1991-97, III, pp. 260 f.). In Baghdad, Ja'far b. Ḥarb had to take notice of Bešr b. al-Mo'tamer's theory of benevolence, which purported that, since the Mu'tazilites could not uphold God's "creating" belief or unbelief, they had to explain the difference between Muslims and pagans by an act of God's benevolence (*loṭf*) being accorded to those who have the true faith (van Ess, 1991-97, III, pp. 121 f.). This, however, seemed to contradict the Mu'tazilite idea that God always acts in the most salutary (*aṣlah*) way for everybody, that is, even for unbelievers. The geographical expansion of the Mu'tazilites had resulted in a certain incongruity of the "system," which expressed itself in the rise of two different schools of Basra and Baghdad, and



Ja'far b. Ḥarb may therefore have felt reduced to merely adding footnotes to insolvable problems. In any case, the sources confirm that, after his "conversion," he did not deal with doctrinal niceties any more, but rather decided to write about broad subjects for a large audience. Mordār had taken the same step before him.

The titles of a few books which belong to this late period are quoted, via Ebn Yazdād, the early historian of the Mu'tazilite school, by Qāzi 'Abd-al-Jabbār (p. 282): *Naṣiḥat al-āmma*, *al-Izāḥ*, *al-Mostaršed*, *al-ta'lim*, and *al-Diāna*. Furthermore, he lists a *Ketāb al-oṣul* which, however, may have pertained to a different literary genre, for it seems highly probable that, as W. Madelung has suggested (pp. 220-36), the *Ketāb oṣul al-neḥal*, edited under the name of a relatively well-known later Mu'tazilite al-Nāši' al-Akbar, was in reality written by Ja'far b. Ḥarb. This book would then be, to date, the oldest specimen, at least partially preserved, of Islamic heresiography, and the fact that it is the only work where the *Ṣufiyat al-mo'tazela* are mentioned under this expression and are extensively treated as a separate group would be of special significance. In another treatise entitled *Ketāb motašābeh al-Qor'ān*, Ja'far b. Ḥarb seems to have commented upon the predestinarian verses of the Qur'ān; the text was still known to the Mu'tazilite Ebn al-Ḳallāl (Sezgin, *GAS* I, 624) when, more than one century later, he wrote his *Radd 'alā al-jabriya*.

As the head of the Baghdad school, Ja'far b. Ḥarb was followed by Eskāfi (q.v.) who, however, survived him by a few years only. He remained a provocative figure for Shi'ite and Sunnite theologians alike. Ḥasan b. Musā Nowbakṭi (q.v. at www.iranica.com) and Mofid criticized him because of his concept of leadership (*emāmat*), for, in spite of having high respect for Imam 'Alī (whom he seems to have regarded as the founder of Islamic theological thinking), he did not believe in the prerogatives of the imams. He was also attacked by 'Abd-al-'Aziz b. Moḥammad b. Eshāq Ṭabari, known as Dommāl, a pupil of Aš'ari (Ebn 'Asāker, XLIII, pp. 7, 16 f.), and by 'Abd-al-Qāher Baḡdādi (q.v.) in his *Ketāb al-ḥarb 'alā Ebn Ḥarb*, but we do not know for what reasons (for more details on books and refutations, see van Ess, 1991-97, VI, pp. 288-90; for doxographical material, see VI, pp. 290-300).



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