



## JAHM B. ŞAFWĀN

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**JAHM B. ŞAFWĀN**, ABU MOḤREZ, Islamic theologian of the Umayyad period (d. Marv 128/746). Documentation about him is scarce and not entirely reliable. He was a client (of the Banu Rāseb), but probably not of Persian descent, for his name seems to indicate that he, as well as his father, grew up in an Arabic speaking environment. Ebn Ḥanbal connected him with Ḥarrān in Upper Mesopotamia. He may have been trained there as an administrator for later on, in Khorasan, he was responsible among other things for collecting the bridge-toll at Termed where traders used to cross the Oxus.

During the period of anarchy that preceded the Abbasid revolution, he came into conflict with the last Umayyad governor, NasĀr b. Sayyār. At a certain moment, probably around 126/744, he sided with al-Ḥāreṭ b. Sorayj who had been leading a rebellion since 116/734 and who, though an Arab himself, propagated ideas that had appeared at the turn of the century concerning a just treatment of the *mawālī* and the neophytes. We hear that he had to read Ebn Sorayj's political "program" (*sira*) to the latter's adherents in his army and elsewhere (Ṭabari II, p. 1918; tr. XXVII, p. 29); Jahm seems to have been his scribe (*kāteb*), and he may have composed this text. At that time, i.e. in the year 128 A.H., he was so influential (and the Umayyad government so weak), that when it came to negotiations, he could propose a *şurā*, i.e. a referendum by the population, which would have placed Ebn Sorayj and the Umayyads on an equal footing (Ṭabari II, p. 1919; tr. XXVII, p. 31). The plan failed, not simply because NasĀr b. Sayyār refused to accept it, but more significantly because Ebn Sorayj became involved in an inter-tribal dispute with Joday' al-Kermāni



who ultimately killed him in battle. Deprived of his protector, Jahm fell into the hands of Salm b. Aḥwaz al-Māzini al-Tamimi, the chief of NasĀr b. Sayyār's police force and a hard-liner on the government's side. In spite of his personal attachment to Salm's son, he was executed at once (Ṭabari II, p. 1924; tr. XXVII, p. 35).

Ebn Sorayj's plea for equality between the Arabs and the neophytes, Iranian as well as Turkish, was perceived as Murji'ism (cf. NasĀr b. Sayyār's poem from the year 117, in Ṭabari II, p. 1576; tr. XXV, p. 114). This implied that the very act of belief undertaken by a convert entitled him to all the benefits enjoyed by a Muslim. Jahm is said to have developed the most minimal definition for this purpose: Belief is already achieved by knowing God in one's heart, without *eqrār*, i.e. without expressing it in correct Arabic speech. He may have done so out of political necessity; Ebn Sorayj had to collaborate with Soghdian or Turkish allies who were not able to pray in the language of the Qur'ān. In Ebn Sorayj's army he may have played the same role as did the *motakallemun* mentioned in connection with Abu Moslem's conquest of Marv (*Aḵbār al-dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, p. 310); people like him were obviously expected to explain how Ebn Sorayj's beliefs accorded with the Qur'ān and the Sunnah (Ṭabari II, p. 1567, tr. XXV, p. 105; p. 1571, tr. p. 109). His contemporaries, on the other hand, might have identified him as a popular story-teller and preacher (*qāsĀs*); significantly, his opponent on the side of NasĀr b. Sayyār was Moqātel b. Solaymān, the famous Qur'ānic exegete (Ṭabari II, p. 1921; cf. *Ta'riḵ Baġdād* XIII, p. 162). The authors of later doxographical works (e.g., Aš'ari, *Maqā-lāt*, p. 279 f.) present him as a systematic thinker who upheld a rigid determinism: God being the absolute Other directs everything, even the forces of nature and human will. This is why man's belief in God cannot be the result of a personal decision but is created and given by God himself. Since God is beyond all Being (*šay'*) He cannot be defined or recognized, and He has no attributes. If He reveals Himself to man in the Qur'ān He does so only in time, and if He knows all things and events He does so only insofar as He comes to know them when He creates them. This amounted to saying that God has no foreknowledge; but He is eternal: He is "the First and the Last" (Q. 57:3). The Creation is therefore only an interlude, and Paradise as well as Hell will not last forever.

Positioning this "system" in the development of Islamic theology presents considerable problems. We know of no earlier synthesis of this kind, and we are far from sure that anything that was later on subsumed under the term



“Jahmiyya” derived from it. Jahm’s concept of God could have been neo-Platonic; this would fit in well with Ḥarrān and the ideas of the Ṣābiāns who were living there. But it is also possible to explain him through Indian parallels. In a widespread though probably apocryphal report he is said to have had discussions with Buddhist monks (Sumaniyya); but everything that has been reported about him is refracted through later interpretations. The only original text we have from his hand, a quotation in Jāḥiẓ’s *Manāqeb al-Tork (Rasā’el*, ed. Hārūn I, p. 82), deals with the relationship between Turks, Persians, and Byzantines; it attests to his interest in the history of the area where he lived. At Termed, his doctrine survived for centuries (cf. Moqaddasi, *Aḥsan al-taqāsim* p. 323, and Esfarā’eni, *al-TabsĀir fi’l-din*, ed. Kawṭari p. 97).

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