

Al-Bājī

Abū l-Walīd Sulaymān ibn Khalaf ibn Sa'd al-Tujībī
l-Bājī l-Qurtubī l-Dhahabī

DATE OF BIRTH 28 May 1013
PLACE OF BIRTH Badajoz
DATE OF DEATH 21 December 1081
PLACE OF DEATH Almería

BIOGRAPHY

Al-Bājī was one of the most important scholars of al-Andalus, a jurist, theologian and poet. As a jurist, he may be considered as one of the renovators of Andalusī Mālikism in the 11th century.

Both his parents came from families of legal experts. He himself spent 13 years travelling in the East, where he came to know the foremost scholars of his time. When he returned to al-Andalus, he became known for his legal and theological knowledge and for his writings, and he was sought by many, including rulers of the day, at several of whose courts he worked as special ambassador and counsellor, as well as judge. He appears to have established a special relationship with the king of Saragossa, al-Muqtadir bi-llāh, for whom he wrote his famous reply to the letter of the 'Monk of France' (q.v.).

Al-Bājī championed the Mālikī *madhhab* and, thanks to his learning, placed it on a sound intellectual footing. His reputation was such that he was chosen as the champion of Mālikī principles in debate against the formidable Ibn Ḥazm (q.v.), whom he was able to defeat.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

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Secondary

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- J. García Domínguez, *A obra jurídica e teológica de Abi'l-Walid al-Baji en Portugal eo Al-Andalus*, Lisbon, 1997, pp. 193-210
- A. Alves, *Um humanista árabe do século XI. Abū l-Walīd al-Bāji*, Beja, 1991
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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Jawāb al-qāḍī Abū l-Walīd al-Bāji ilā risālat rāhib Faransā ilā al-Muslimīn, 'The Qāḍī Abū l-Walīd al-Bāji's reply to the Monk of France's letter to the Muslims'

DATE Uncertain; before 1081

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

Although its title says that this was a letter sent by an anonymous Monk of France to al-Muqtadir, king of Saragossa, and al-Bāji's reply, it is more likely to have been entirely composed by al-Bāji himself in the form of a written dialogue or exchange of correspondence. While the monk's letter is short and straightforward, al-Bāji's reply is a more elaborate theological treatise.

In the letter, the monk invites al-Muqtadir to convert to Christianity, referring to a previous embassy sent to his kingdom. He offers the king eternal salvation, and explains the divine nature and mission of Christ.

Al-Bāji is critical of these claims, and shows indignation at the monk's assumption that Muslims would allow impossibilities and

accept 'what is the extreme of absurdity'. He rejects the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, asserting that he was no more than a prophet, and, with the help of the Qur'an, denies that he was crucified. He goes on to complain about the monk's incorrect use of language and concepts, his contradictory arguments and incompetence, and the feebleness of his claim about earlier ambassadors coming to Saragossa. He repeatedly insists that, in contrast to Christian theologians with their disagreements, Muslim theologians are superior, with greater clarity of expression and systematic argumentation.

Finally, al-Bājī presents Islamic teachings about the power and mercy of God, the mission of Muḥammad and his message in the Qur'an. He also refers to the discrepancies and contradictions in the four Gospels, which are multiple accounts, as opposed to the consistency and coherence of the single text of the Qur'an.

SIGNIFICANCE

Al-Bājī covers the main topics of Muslim anti-Christian works, such as the Trinity, corruption of scripture and defense of Muḥammad. His reply shows that, by the 11th century, Muslims in the West had already developed lines of argument against Christianity. While this reply is not the earliest example, it shows the extent of Muslim knowledge of Christianity: they evidently knew Arabic translations of the Gospels.

Even if the letter from the 'Monk of France' (which might refer to Catalonia) was never actually written by a Christian author, there was knowledge of Arabic and Muslim texts in Europe at this time and the correspondence therefore reflects plausible contacts and likely exchanges that may or may not have taken place.

MANUSCRIPTS

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EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

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