

Ibn al-Malāḥimī

Rukn al-dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad
al-Malāḥimī al-Khwārazmī

DATE OF BIRTH Before 1090
PLACE OF BIRTH Khwārazm, Khorezm
DATE OF DEATH 19 October 1141
PLACE OF DEATH Khwārazm

BIOGRAPHY

Ibn al-Malāḥimī was the most prominent Muʿtazilī theologian in Khwārazm in the early 12th century. Muʿtazilī theology still prevailed among the Ḥanafī community in Khwārazm during this period, while it was suppressed as heretical in most of the Islamic world. Little is known about his life. He initially belonged to the Muʿtazilī school of the famous Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025) (q.v.), known as the Bahshamiyya. Later, he adopted the theological thought of Abu l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Baṣrī (d. 1044) (q.v.), which was introduced in Khwārazm at this time by the grammarian and physician Abū Muḍar al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1114).

Abu l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī had been a physician well versed in the philosophical sciences, who criticized some of the doctrine of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, his teacher in Muʿtazilī theology. Through the teaching efforts of Ibn al-Malāḥimī, the school of Abū l-Ḥusayn became a serious rival of the Bahshamiyya school. Ibn al-Malāḥimī gave lessons in theology to the renowned Qurʾan commentator al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), who in turn instructed him in Qurʾan exegesis. This was probably in Jurjāniyya (Gurganj), then the capital of Khwārazm. A major concern in his teaching was his opposition to the rapid spread of philosophical metaphysics among Muslim religious scholars in his time. He strove in particular to refute the theological thought of Ibn Sīnā and his school, which he saw as undermining the true prophetic teaching of Islam. He viewed Christianity as a prime example of a prophetic religion that was distorted by the adoption of Greek philosophical thought in order to buttress superstitious beliefs, such as the Trinity and the divinity of Christ.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī's works include the following. *Al-mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn* ('The reliable book on the principles of religion') is a voluminous sum of Mu'tazilī theology based on the teaching of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī. Only the first part containing most of the section on divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) and the beginning of the section on Justice (*'adl*) are known to be extant in manuscript. A greatly abridged version of this work, *Al-fā'iq fī l-uṣūl* ('The excellent book on the principles of religion'), was finished by the author in December 1137. This is extant, and contains a brief critical discussion of Christianity. A third work, *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn fī l-radd 'alā l-falāsifa* ('The gift to the theologians concerning the refutation of the philosophers'), is a comprehensive refutation of the theological doctrine of Muslim philosophers, in particular of Ibn Sīnā and his school. The book was partly written at the same time as *Al-fā'iq* and was completed between 1137 and 1141. In the introduction, Ibn al-Malāḥimī expresses his fear that the Muslim community, by accepting the theories of the philosophers, might follow the path of the Christians, whose leaders had adopted Greek philosophy to justify false beliefs, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation and the divinity of Christ.

Al-tajrīd ('The abstract') is an abridgment of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-fiqh* on legal methodology. In the single extant manuscript of this book, MS Oxford, Bodleian Arab. e 103, the beginning is missing and there is a gap. A reading of the text with the author was completed in June 1140.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

Al-Andarasbānī, *Sīrat al-Zamakhsharī*, in 'Abd al-Karīm al-Yāfī, 'Fī sīrat al-Zamakhsharī Jār Allāh', *Majallat Majma' al-Lughā al-'Arabiyya bi-Dimashq* 57 (1982) 365-82 (on the basis of the first edition by A.B. Khalidov, Leningrad, 1979)

Secondary

Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn fī l-radd 'alā l-falāsifa by *Rukn al-Dīn b. al-Malāḥimī al-Khwārazmī*, ed. H. Ansari and W. Madelung, Tehran, 2008, introduction

Kitāb al-fā'iq fī uṣūl al-dīn by *Rukn al-Dīn b. al-Malāḥimī al-Khwārazmī*, ed. W. Madelung and M. McDermott, Tehran, 2007, introduction

W. Madelung, 'Ibn al-Malāḥimī's refutation of the philosophers', in C. Adang, S. Schmidtke and D. Sklare (eds), *A common rationality. Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism*, Würzburg, 2007, 331-36

Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī al-Khuwārazmī, *Kitāb al-mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. M. McDermott and W. Madelung, London, 1991, introduction

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Kitāb al-mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn, 'The reliable book on the principles of religion'

DATE Before 1137

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

Ibn al-Malāḥimī introduces his critical discussion of Christianity by quoting from the work he refers to as *Kitāb al-diyānāt* of 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Nāshī' al-Akbar (d. 906) (q.v.), who describes various religions, including Christianity, as essentially based on ancient Greek philosophy, in contrast to the pure monotheism of the prophets. Ibn al-Malāḥimī concurs with this judgment, adding that the doctrines of the Dahriyya (materialists) and the Bāṭiniyya (Ismā'īlīs) should also be included among these philosophical religions.

His description of Christianity focuses on the Trinitarian theology of the Melkites, Jacobites and Nestorians, and his main sources of information are Abū 'Īsā l-Warrāq (q.v.), al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī's *Kitāb al-ārā' wa-l-diyānāt* (q.v.), and the Christian philosopher Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (q.v.). His refutation is arranged in four chapters: on divine substance and hypostases; on the hypostases and whether they are properties, attributes, or essences; on the union of the divine and human natures in Christ; on the manner in which the two natures in Christ united. At the end, Ibn al-Malāḥimī quotes the Nicene Creed in order to argue that it does not support any of the philosophical interpretations of Trinitarian theology. He suggests that the most acceptable Christian theology is the Adoptionist doctrine of Paul of Samosata and his school. He again quotes al-Nāshī' al-Akbar, who states in his *Kitāb al-diyānāt* that the Christians have no textual evidence in their scripture and prophetic tradition that God expressly calls Christ his Son.

SIGNIFICANCE

Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critical discussion of Christianity contains many elements familiar from earlier refutations. It reflects the sharp reaction

of Mu'tazilī theology to the rapid spread of Aristotelian metaphysics as set forth by Ibn Sīnā and his school among Muslim religious scholars. Its long-term impact was limited, as Mu'tazilī theology came to be suppressed in Sunnī Islam, and philosophical thought, partly under the guise of Sufism, was widely accepted by later Muslim theologians.

MANUSCRIPTS

The only known manuscript of the third part (*al-juz' al-thālith*) of the book, which contains the section on Christianity, was written for the library of the Yemeni Zaydī Imam al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamza (1328-49), 173 fols (end missing). The section on Christianity is on fols 142-49. A photocopy of the manuscript is available at the Zayd ibn 'Alī Foundation in Sanaa.

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS —

STUDIES —

Wilferd Madelung