

Abu'l-Qāsim al-Ka'bī

ABU'L-QĀSEM AL-BALĶĪ AL-KA'BĪ, 'ABDALLĀH B. AḤMAD B. MAḤMŪD (d. Ša'bān, 319/February, 931), administrator and intellectual of Persian descent. Ḥanafite jurist and foremost representative of the Mo'tazela in Khorasan. His father had known 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher (d. 230/844) personally. Abu'l-Qāsem seems to have stood in a long *kottāb* tradition (see *Ta'riḳ Baġdād* XII, p. 340.10 ff.). In his youth he had been secretary to Moḥammad b. Zayd Dā'ī, the Zaidite ruler of Ṭabarestān (d. 287/900; cf. W. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*, Berlin, 1965, p. 159). Two decades later he was nominated vizier by Aḥmad b. Sahl b. Hešām Marvazī, the governor of Khorasan for the Samanid Našr b. Aḥmad II, who had installed himself at Balḳ (Yāqūt, *Odabā'* I, p. 147.6 ff.). When Aḥmad b. Sahl rebelled against his sovereign and was defeated in 307/919, Abu'l-Qāsem was put into prison. He was released shortly afterward on the initiative of 'Alī b. 'Isā, who at that time was the deputy of Moqtader's nominal vizier Ḥāmed b. al-'Abbās and exercised the real power in Baghdad (see Ebn al-Nadīm, *Fehrest*, [Tehran], p. 219, n., lines 6 ff.).

Abu'l-Qāsem's prestige in Baghdad dated from the time he studied there under the Mu'tazilite Kayyāt (d. ca. 300/913) and the grammarian Mobarrad (d. 285/898). In those days he had been admitted to the salon (*maġles*) of the well-known Persian litterateur and Mu'tazilite Abū Aḥmad Yaḥyā b. 'Alī Monajjem Nadīm (d. 300/913), who considered him an authority in *kalām* (*ibid.*, lines 8 ff.). After leaving the capital he corresponded with Kayyāt and with the father of the grammarian Marzobānī (d. 384/994; cf. *Ta'riḳ Baġdād* IX, p. 384.16 ff.). In his later years he stayed in Khorasan, where he was regarded as uncrowned king of the theologians (*emām ahl ul-arz*; see Mātorīdī, *Ketāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. Kholeif, Beirut, 1970, p. 49.17). In Balḳ his prestige was matched only by that of his contemporary and friend, Abū Zayd Balḳī (d. 322/934), whom, however, he had to defend against accusations | outside his home country (cf. Yāqūt, *Odabā'* I, p. 147.6 ff.; Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mofasserīn*, ed. 'A.M. 'Omar, Cairo, 1392/1972, I, p. 42.14 ff.). In Nasaf he was received with honor and given a teaching position (*'oqeda laho maġles*; cf. the *Ta'riḳ Nasaf* by Ja'far b. Moḥammad Mostaġferī, 350–432/961–1041, quoted by Sam'ānī, *Ansāb* [Leiden], fol. 485a.7ff.). The local tradition claimed that even in Mecca his name aroused public interest (cf. the same source, quoted by Ebn Šāker Kotobī in his unpublished *'Oyūn al-tawārīḳ*).

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While Abu'l-Qāsem's theological works were indeed read in Iraq, his influ-

ence was more extensive in Khorasan. He wrote, for example, a *Ketāb maḥāsen Āl Ṭāher* which shows his special attachment to the Taherids (*Kašf al-ẓonūn* [Istanbul], p. 1608). In addition there is his *Ketāb maḥāsen Ḳorāsān* (or *Fazāʿel Ḳorāsān*) which was used by Ebn al-Nadīm for the biography of Ebn al-Rēwandī (*Fehrest*, p. 216.13); the Moʿtazela did not see a need for a biography of Ebn al-Rēwandī. In contrast to his teacher Ḳayyāt, Abuʿl-Qāsem did not attack Ebn al-Rēwandī’s famous “heretical” books: he only refuted his criticism of Jāhez’s thesis that the Koran is free from additions and omissions (quotations in Qāzī ‘Abd-al-Jabbār, *Taṭbīt dalāʿel al-nobūwa*, Beirut, 1966, pp. 62.12 ff., 548) and his doctrine of *tawallod* (he quotes the book in his *Ketāb al-maqālāt*). He also corrected some errors in Ebn al-Rēwandī’s *Adab al-Jadal* (Ebn ‘Asāker, *Tabyīn kadeb al-moftarī*, Damascus, 1347/1929, p. 131.15 ff.). The title of his *Ketāb al-sonna wa ʿl-ĵamāʿa* (see *Fehrest*, p. 219, n., line 15) shows that he did not see a contradiction between his Muʿtazelite ideas and the Ḥanafite terminology of his eastern surroundings. In two of his works he polemicized against Moḥammad b. ʿĪsā Borġūṭ from Sīrāf (d. 240/854 or 241/855), who represented the predestinarian wing of the Ḥanafite tradition. With Abū Jaʿfar Moḥammad b. ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān b. ‘Omar Ebn Qeba from Ray (who, according to Ebn Abīʿl-Ḥadīd, had been his pupil but then went over to the Emāmīya) he carried on a long exchange of views on the problem of *emāma* which resulted in two publications from his hand, both of them refutations of books written by Ebn Qeba (see Najāšī, *Rejāl*, Bombay, 1397/1899, p. 191). Whether he met the famous physician Moḥammad b. Zakarīyāʾ Rāzī (d. 313/925) in Ray, Baghdad, or somewhere else on their respective journeys is not clear. They discussed the concept of time and engaged in an extensive written dispute on several topics in Rāzī’s *Ketāb al-ʿelm al-elāhī* (cf. Rāzī, *Opera philosophica*, ed. P. Kraus, Cairo, 1939, pp. 167 f.). Abuʿl-Qāsem certainly kept a greater distance from Rāzī’s ideas than did his contemporary Abū Zayd Balkī, with whom Rāzī seems to have studied (see *GAS* III, p. 275). Of the Iraq *motakallemūn* he disagreed mainly with Jobbāʿī (d. 303/915), head of the competing Baṣra branch of the Moʿtazela – e.g., on his doctrine of divine will and of the most fitting (*aṣlaḥ*; cf. his *Naqṣ ketāb Abī ʿAlī al-Jobbāʿī fiʿl-erāda* and his *Nehāya fiʿl-aṣlaḥ ʿalā Abī ʿAlī*, quotations of which may be found in Qāzī ‘Abd-al-Jabbār, *Moġnī*, Cairo, 1960–1965, XIV, pp. 55-14, 61.9 ff.).

His most important works have a systematic and summarizing character. He wrote a twelve volume *Tafsīr* (*Kašf al-ẓonūn* [Istanbul], p. 448) of which quotations survive in the *Amālī* of Šarīf Mortazā (Cairo, 1954, I, p. 468.10 ff.; I, p. 514, bottom; II, p. 364.16 ff.) and perhaps in Mātorīdī’s *Ketāb al-tawḥīd*. His *Ketāb awāʿel al-adella fi oṣūl al-dīn* is quoted by Maqdesī (*Badʿ* I, p. 135.5 f.); its chapter on the Christians was refuted by the Christian philosopher Ebn

Zor'a (331–398/943–1008; P. Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens*, Cairo, 1929, pp. 52 ff.). His *'Oyūn al-masā'el* which comprised three volumes was used by Abū Rašīd Nisābūrī (d. 460/1068) in his *Masā'el al-ḵelāf bayn al-bašrīyīn wa'l-baḡdādīyīn* (GAS I, pp. 626 f.). The late stage of theological development inside the Mo'tazela is reflected in a number of further *masā'el* and *maǰāles* works in which Ka'bī seems to have discussed scattered questions of detail. Most important for later generations were his *Maqālāt al-eslāmīyīn*, which were extensively used by Aš'arī in his *Maqālāt*, Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār in his *Faẓl al-e'tezāl* and *Moḡnī*, Baḡdādī and Šahraštānī, Našwān Ḥemyarī in his *Ketāb al-ḥūr al-'in*, Ebn Abī'l-Ḥadīd in his *Šarḥ nahǰ al-balāḡa*, and Ḥoǰūrī in his *Ketāb rawzat al-aḵbār* (GAL S. I, p. 587). A manuscript of the work has been found in Yemen by Fo'ād Sayyed and was partly edited by him (*Faẓl al-e'tezāl wa ṭabaqāt al-mo'tazela*, Tunis, 1974, pp. 63 ff.). The book seems to have undergone several recensions. Ka'bī used material which he had received from Ḳayyāṭ, and he corresponded with him from Khorasan in order to clarify unresolved questions (*ibid.*, p. 297.3 ff.). Later he seems to have combined the book with his *'Oyūn al-masā'el* (*Fehrest*, p. 219, n., lines 13 ff.). This might explain why he says in the introduction to the text preserved in the Yemenite manuscript that he began writing it after 290/903, while Ḥāǰǰī Ḳalīfa gives the date 279/892 (*Kašf al-zonūn* [Istanbul], p. 1782), and why the manuscript differs sometimes from the quotations found in Našwān Ḥemyarī and elsewhere.

Ka'bī was greatly interested in methodology and hermeneutics. He wrote at least two books on *ǰadal* and one on inference by analogy (*estedlāl be'l-šāhed 'ala'l-ǰā'eb*). In his *Naqz al-Sīrǰānī*, a refutation of the Hanbalite Ḥarb b. Esmā'īl b. Ḳalaf Kermānī Sīrǰānī (d. 288/901; cf. Ḍahabī, *Ḥoffāz* II, Hyderabad, 1388/1968, p. 613, no. 638; and Ebn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābela*, Cairo, 1371/1952, I, p. 145, no. 189), he discussed the relevance of isolated Traditions (*aḥād*, i.e., the vast majority of *aḥādīṭ* according to the Mo'tazela) for human acting (Qāzī 'Abd-al-Jabbār, *Faẓl al-e'tezāl*, p. 195.1 ff.). In his *Ketāb al-ḡorar wa'l-nawāder* he defended the inevitability of *eǰtehād* (quotation in Mofīd, *al-Foṣūl al-moḵtāra*, 2nd ed., Najaf, n.d., I, p. 66). Most interesting for us is, however, his *Ketāb qabūl al-aḵbār wa-ma'refat al-reǰāl*, which presents a thorough and sometimes sarcastic criticism | of many early authorities on Hadith; it is preserved in the ms. Cairo, *moṣṭalaḥ* 14m (GAS I, p. 623). Nevertheless, Ka'bī is quoted as an authority on Hadith by a Khorasani *moḥaddet* as renowned as Moḥammad b. Zakarīyā' Nasafī (d. 344/955; cf. Sam'ānī, *Ansāb* [Leiden], p. 485a.9; and Ḍahabī, *Ḥoffāz*, p. 930, no. 883).

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Any attempt to reconstruct Ka'bī's system would be premature at the present stage of research. This is not so much due to a lack of information, as is the case

for the earlier Mu‘tazilites, but rather to a lack of perspective. The texts we have do not present broad outlines and main ideas, but concentrate on refinement of proofs and other questions of detail. With Ka‘bī in Baghdad and Jobbāī in Baṣra, Mu‘tazilite thought had reached the point of an overall systematization. We would be able to appreciate its full spectrum if we possessed complete, original works and knew more about the earlier phases. We can only assume that Ka‘bī’s ideas corresponded more or less to those of the Baghdad school and that they prepared the way for its astonishing influence during at least the next century and a half. Yet we are unable to determine the extent of his originality. We get most of our material from systematic works such as Mātorīdī’s *Ketāb al-tawḥīd* and Abū Rašīd Nīsābūrī’s *Masāʾel al-keḷāf* (ed. M. Zīāda and R. Sayyed, Beirut, 1979; cf. M. Horten, *Die Philosophie des Abu Raschid*, Bonn, 1910; and A. Biram, *Die atomistische Substanzenlehre aus dem Buch der Streitfragen zwischen Basrensern und Bagdadensern*, Berlin, 1902) and to a lesser extent in Qāzī ‘Abd-al-Jabbār’s *Moḡnī* and in Imamite treatises such as the *Awāʾel al-maqālāt* by Shaikh Mofīd (d. 413/1022; tr. D. Sourdel in *REI* 40, 1972, pp. 217 ff.). Future research will have to start here. As matters stand, even the brief summary which follows may well be seriously out of focus.

The Baghdad tradition taken over from Ḳayyāṭ is characterized by respect for the laws of nature and a cautious handling of the concept of God’s omnipotence. Ka‘bī believed in the existence of natural qualities (*ṭabāʿe’*) which determine the functioning of bodies and guarantee the preservation of the species (cf. Horten, pp. 100 ff.). For example, life depends on the *ṭabāʿe’* of food (*ibid.*, p. 149). Ka‘bī followed the Greek view of the elements. Thus he proved that air can be changed into water through the condensation of vapor (Biram, *Substanzenlehre*, p. 45). Man can produce heat and dryness (Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 92, 149). Correspondingly, God does not have the power to let a heavy object float in the air (*ibid.*, p. 140), and pain is not possible in a dead substance (*ibid.*, p. 129). On most of these points he was attacked by the Baṣra school, i.e., the followers of Jobbāī, who stressed instead God’s power to hold the world together and to change its laws against habit (*āda*). On this point Jobbāī took up ideas of Abu’l-Ḥoḍayl, while Ka‘bī came closer to Nazzām. But in contrast to Nazzām he was an atomist, although again with opinions which differ from those of the Basrans. He did not believe in the existence of a void; to defend this standpoint he engaged in a number of experiments with appropriate explanations (*ibid.*, pp. 37 f.; Biram, *Substanzenlehre*, pp. 37 ff.; also the corresponding passage in Abū Rašīd, *Fi’l-tawḥīd* [identical with *Zīādāt šarḥ al-oṣūl?*], ed. M.‘A. Abū Rīda, Cairo, 1385/1965, p. 419.14 ff.). No two substances can be separated without something between them (Biram, pp. 36 ff.). An isolated atom has neither dimension nor direction; it does not move, nor can it be seen. All these qualities

occur only through combination with at least one other atom (*ibid.*, pp. 15 ff., 46, 49; Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 37, 139). This does not mean that two or more atoms without dimension form a body with dimension; it is rather the accidental combination (*ta'tīf*) which makes the difference (cf. S. Pines, *Beiträge zur islamischen Atomenlehre*, Berlin, 1936, pp. 6f.). Accidents, however, do not exist continuously; they last only for a moment (Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 79 ff., 134; Aš'arī, *Maqālāt al-eslāmīyīn*, Istanbul, 1929, p. 358.2 ff.). Therefore, colors and elementary qualities such as heat or dryness are not permanent. On the other hand, substances cannot exist without them (Biram, *Substanzenlehre*, text, p. 43, bottom, cf. tr., p. 56; and Baġdādī, *Oṣūl al-dīn*, Istanbul, 1346/1948, p. 56.15 f.). They last only through the accident of endurance (*baqā'*), and vanish if God does not create this accident (Biram, *Substanzenlehre*, pp. 63, 70).

Ka'bī's anthropology was not as elaborate. He seems to have focused only on theologically relevant points, especially the discussion of capability (*esteṭā'a*). As an accident, capability cannot last for two moments. It exists before the act, but not during it (Aš'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 230.5 ff.). Capability is related to an organ; e.g., capability to speak cannot be used for seeing, etc. (Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 154 f.). Incapability (*'aǰz*), on the other hand, is universal; it is the contrary of the positive and of the negative action alike, e.g., of both belief and unbelief. It is not identical with an external hindrance (*māne'*), for an external hindrance is contrary to an action. Incapability, however, is contrary to the capability to act (*ibid.* pp. 155 ff.). Death is an entity in itself (*ma'nā*), not just the absence of life (*ibid.*, pp. 150 ff.).

Ka'bī's ideas about God diverge little from those of other Mu'tazilites, especially his teacher Ḳayyāt. In agreement with most of his earlier colleagues, with some opposition among his later contemporaries, he believed that God is everywhere, though only in the sense that He knows and preserves all (cf. Mātorīdī, *Tawḥīd*, Beirut, 1970, p. 75.3 ff.; Madelung, *Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*, p. 115). God's will is not an independent attribute, as the Basrans believed in agreement with Abu'l-Hoḍayl, but either identical with producing what He wills or with His order to produce it (when what He wills is an action to be performed by man). This idea was taken over from Naẓẓām (Madelung, *Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*, pp. 165 ff.). Ka'bī added the psychological explanation that the human will functions in connection with man's ignorance or imperfect knowledge of the realizability of his intention. God's omniscience and omnipotence | thus make His will superfluous (cf. Šahrastānī, *Nehāyat al-eqdām*, ed. A. Guillaume, Oxford, 1931, p. 240.2 ff.). Similarly God's seeing and hearing are nothing other than His knowing (cf. Baġdādī, *Farq bayn al-feraq*, ed. M. Badr, p. 166.4 ff.; ed. M.M. 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, p. 181.6 ff.). Ka'bī evidently tried to reduce the number of attributes to a few basic ones. This is perhaps why he did not define the

ṣefāt al-fe‘l in the usual way, as those attributes whose opposites can equally well be attributed to God, but rather subsumed them under His omnipotence. Thus in the beginning God was not creating, compassionate, etc., but He had the power to make His essence so (cf. Mātoridī, *Tawḥīd*, p. 53.3 ff.). Like Naẓẓām, Ka‘bī thought that God must do the best (*aṣlah*; cf. Qāzī ‘Abd-al-Jabbār, *Moğnī* XIV, p. 55.14. ff.; and Brunschwig in *Stud. Isl.* 35, 1974, p. 11). Theoretically speaking, He can do wrong; but if this really happened all our established categories would be shattered. It would not be against reason, but all the proofs on which reason bases itself would have to be changed to their opposites (i.e., God would have to change the order of the universe; cf. Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 557.12 ff.).

In the domain of epistemology Ka‘bī’s conceptual refinement seems to have exerted considerable influence. The standard definitions of both knowledge (*‘elm*) and thinking (*naẓar*) seem to stem from him (J. van Ess, *Erkenntnislehre des ‘Aḍudaddīn al-Īcī*, Wiesbaden, 1965, pp. 72, 244). He advocated a less intellectualist outlook than his Basran colleagues; in contrast with them he allowed the unquestioning acceptance of a statement by an accepted authority (*taqlīd*), provided that this statement is true. The common people are not obliged to reflect on a given dogmatic issue, especially as some of them are unable to do so; a general knowledge is sufficient (the doctrine of the so-called *aṣḥāb al-ḥamal*; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 73 and 46; Horten, *Philosophie*, pp. 178, 193). Knowledge of God is meritorious, but even more so the contemplation which leads to it; although God cannot be the object of this contemplation since He is still unknown (*ibid.* p. 182). Since human nature does not change, contemplation continues in the hereafter. The problem that there can be no reward for a meritorious act performed in paradise was solved by the assumption that contemplation then originates merely through recollection of former contemplation and therefore does not cause any effort (van Ess, *Erkenntnislehre*, p. 123).

In his political views Ka‘bī supported the right of the Qorayš to leadership of the community. He would acknowledge, however, a non-Qorayšī sovereign in case of imminent civil war (Bağdādī, *Oṣūl al-dīn*, p. 275.10 f.). He had strong Zaydī sympathies (Madelung, *Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*, pp. 77 f.), and in correspondence with Zaydī doctrine he stressed that the early Šī‘a did not reject Abū Bakr and ‘Omar (cf. Qāzī ‘Abd-al-Jabbār, *Tatbīt dalā‘el al-nobūwa*, p. 62, bottom, and p. 548, bottom).

Bibliography

See also *ET*² I, pp. 1002–1003, with additional references. He is mentioned several times in Brockelmann, *GAL*, with some confusion; cf. s. I, p. 343, and 2nd ed. II, p. 665 (ad

206); versus 2nd ed., I, p. 447, and s. I, p. 619. He is quoted twice in Kaḥḥāla, I, p. 286; VI, p. 31. Sezgin, *GAS* I, pp. 622 f. Zereklī, *A'lām*² IV, p. 189. A.S. Tritton, *Muslim Theology*, London, 1947, pp. 157 ff. W.M. Watt, *Free Will and Predestination*, London, 1948, pp. 80 f. A.N. Nader, *Le système philosophique des Mu'tazila*, index. M. Moḥaqqueq, *Filsūf-e Ray Moḥammad b. Zakarīyā-ye Rāzī*, Tehran, 1349 š./1970, pp. 31 ff. W.M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, Edinburgh, 1973, index. F. Sayyed, intro. to his ed. of part of Ka'bī's *Maqālāt al-eslāmīyīn*, Tunis, 1974, pp. 43 ff.