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# Islamic Theology

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Alessandro Cancian

## Islamic Theology

### A. General Definition

Islamic theology, which is one of the branches of Islamic religious sciences, is mostly referred to as *‘ilm al-kalām* (the science of *kalām*), and in short *kalām*. *Kalām* is usually translated as “theology,” although this rendering does not express well its scholastic methods. The term “speculative theology” conveys in a better way the nature of the theological discussions of the *mutakallimūn* (doctors of *Kalām*), who used logical argumentation in order to prove some of the principles of religion (Georges C. ANAWATI, “kalām,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, XIII [1987], 231–42). *Kalām* is only one of the two major trends in Islamic theology. The other trend is that of traditionalist theology (*‘ilm al-uṣūl*, the science of theological principles). Since the scholastic methods of *kalām* had a tremendous impact on medieval thinkers within the circles of traditionalist Islam, and also on Jewish and Christian thinkers (Harry Austryn WOLFSON, *Repercussions of the Kalām in Jewish Philosophy*, 1979) this survey dedicates its lion’s share to *kalām*. Nevertheless, the difference between *kalām* and Islamic traditionalist theology is also addressed here, since the boundaries between these two trends were never definite, especially after the emergence of the Ash‘arī school in the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The terms *kalām* and traditionalist Islam refer to Sunnī Islam, which is the main body of opinion in Islamic thought. Unless otherwise stated, the schools of *kalām* and the main thinkers mentioned in this survey are Sunnīs (Louis GARDET, “ilm al-kalām,” *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. III [1971], 1141–50).

The use of discursive arguments is *Kalām*’s salient feature, which is mostly reflected in the discussions on the existence of God and the creation of

the world. In these questions the *kalām* uses the proof from accidents, which is based on the doctrine of atoms (the major works on these questions are Shlomo PINES, *Beiträge zur islamischen Atomenlehre*, 1936; ID., trans. Michael SCHWARZ, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, 1997; Herbert A. DAVIDSON, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, 1987). *Kalām* has also a lot to do with apologetics. Influenced by Hellenistic philosophical and theological thought, it uses various rationalistic tools in order to defend Islamic doctrines and uproot what it perceives as heretical concepts, infiltrated Islamic thought (D. D. de Lacy O'LEARY, *Arabic Thought and Its Place in History*, 1939). Thus, it is tightly connected to the term *ʿaqīda* (pl. *ʿaqāʾid*), which stands for belief, creed or article of faith (William Montgomery WATT, *Islamic Creeds*, 1994).

The goals of *kalām*, as the *mutakallimūn* themselves define it in a report given by the Ashʿarī theologian Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), are “to grasp the unity of God, and study the essence of God and His attributes” (*Ihyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* [The Revival of Religious Sciences], I [n.d.], 25). The theologian al-Jurjānī (d. 1413) expands *kalām*'s definition to dealing with divine justice and eschatology (*Kitāb al-Taʾrīfāt*, [The Book of Definitions], ed. Gustav FLÜGEL, 1969 [photocopy of the Leipzig 1845 ed.], 194). Thus, *kalām* aims to back up various articles of faith, whose origins are to be found in the *Qurʾān* and *ḥadīth* (i.e. prophetic traditions), by using analytical methods.

## B. The Origins of *Kalām*

The common use in the Arabic language of the word *kalām* is word, words, or speech. How this term came to indicate Islamic speculative theology is an issue not fully revealed or discovered. There is an almost general agreement within the ranks of modern scholarship, that the dialectical technique of *kalām* was borrowed from early Christian theology (Carl Heinrich BECKER, “Christliche Polemik und islamische Dogmenbildung,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 27 [1912]: 175–95; rpt. in: ID., *Islamstudien*, 1924–1932, 432–49, trans. Mark MUELHAEUSLER, “Christian Polemic and the Formation of Islamic Dogma,” *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, ed. Robert HOYLAND, 2004, 241–58; Josef VAN ESS, *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie: zwei antiqadaritische Traktate aus dem ersten Jahrhundert der Hīġra*, 1977; ID., “The Beginnings of Islamic Theology,” *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. J. E. MURDOCH and E. D. SYLLA, 1975), while pointing out Greek (Josef VAN ESS, “The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology,” *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, ed. Gustav E. VON GRUNEBaum, 1970; Ibrahim MADKOUR, “La Logique d’Aristote chez les *mutakallimūn*,” *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, ed. Parviz MOREWEDGE, 1979, 58–70) and Syriac (Michael A.

COOK, "The Origins of *Kalām*," BSOAS 43 [1980]: 32–43) texts as possible sources of inspiration (Francis Edward PETERS, "The Origins of Islamic Platonism: the School Tradition," *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, ed. Parviz MOREWEDGE, 1979, 14–45; Louis GARDET, "Aux débuts de la réflexion théologique de l'islam," *ibid.*, 46–59). In the same vein, it has been suggested that *kalām* was used to translate into Arabic the different meanings of the Greek terms *logos* or *dialexis* (Harry Austryn WOLFSON, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 1976) or the Syriac *memrā* (Frithiof RUNDGREN, "Über den griechischen Einfluß auf die arabische Nationalgrammatik," *AUO* 2.5 [1976]: 119–44).

### C. The Exponents of *Kalām*

The exponent of *kalām* was called *mutakallim* (lit. speaker, pl. *mutakallimūn*). The *mutakallimūn* are described by both Latin and Hebrew medieval thinkers. The Hebrew designation *ha-medabberim* and the Latin *loquentes* were derived from the literal meaning of *mutakallim* (Lawrence V. BERMAN, "kalām," *EJ*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. X [1971]: 701–03). The *mutakallimūn* were engaged not only in articulating the fundamentals of Islam in an analytic language, but also in polemics of both political and religious nature (Shlomo PINES, "A Note on an Early Meaning of the Term *Mutakallim*" *IOS* 1 [1971]: 224–40; rpt. in: ID., *Studies in the History of Arabic Philosophy*, 1996). The first *mutakallimūn* did not belong to a specific school. Their teachings, if they had ever been written, did not survive, and only fragments of their views have been preserved, mostly in the rich Arabic heresiographical literature written from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onward. The early *mutakallimūn* were very cautious in not revealing the foreign sources of their doctrines. Later *mutakallimūn*, when citing the views of their predecessors, did not actually know the foreign roots of their doctrines (Richard M. FRANK, "Remarks on the Early Development of the *Kalām*," *Atti del terzo congresso di studi arabi e islamici, Ravello 1–6 settembre 1966* [1967], 315–29).

### D. The Schools of *Kalām*

In the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century emerged a group of *mutakallimūn*, who were adherents of the principle of free will, as opposed to the strict predestinarian view, which was held by traditionalist theologians. This group, the Qadariyya (Carlo Alfonso NALLINO, "Sul nome dei Qadariti," *RSO* 7 [1918]: 461–66), was the forerunner of the Muʿtazila, which is the most known *kalām* school (Joseph VAN ESS, "Qadariyya," *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., IV [1974]: 368–72; Henri LAOUST, *Les Schismes dans l'Islam*, 1965).

The Muʿtazila (Carlo Alfonso NALLINO, "Sull'origine del nome dei Muʿtaziliti," *RSO* 7 [1918]: 429–54) flourished as two separate schools in

Basra and Baghdad from the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century until the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Louis GARDET and M. M. ANAWATI, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane*, 1948). The Mu'tazilī theses survived in Zaydī-Shī'ī Islam until the present day, but not in Sunnī Islam (Wilferd MADELUNG, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*, 1965).

The rival school of the Mu'tazila is the Ash'ariyya, founded in Basra in the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The eponym of the Ash'ariyya, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 935) was a former Mu'tazilī, who used the rationalistic tools of the Mu'tazila in order to defend the doctrines of traditional Islam and to defeat the Mu'tazila (Aḥmad AMĪN, *Ḍuḥā al-Islām* [The Forenoon of Islam], I–III, 1952; ID., *Fajr al-Islām* [The Dawn of Islam], 1978; William Montgomery WATT, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 1973).

Another important theological school is the Māturīdiyya-Ḥanafīyya, established as a definite school in central Asia in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Its eponym is Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944) from Samarqand (Wilferd MADELUNG, "al-Māturīdī," *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., VI [1991]: 846–47).

The heresiographic literature, written from the 11<sup>th</sup> century mainly by Ash'arī theologians, mentions a great number of other *kalām* schools, whose existence is questionable (Michael SCHWARZ, "Can We Rely on Later Authorities for the Views of Earlier Thinkers?" *IOS* 1 [1971]: 241–48).

### E. *Kalām* and Traditional Theology

Most of the activity of the *mutakallimūn* was in the inner circles of Islam, mainly against Sunnī traditionalist theologians. *Kalām's* dialectical discourse, which gives precedence to human reason in the process of perceiving God and the world, is supposedly antithetical to Islamic traditional theology, which declares to draw its authority solely from Divine revelation, prophetic traditions and the teachings of the ancestors of the Muslim community. These epistemological questions were discussed by both the *mutakallimūn* and the traditionalist theologians. Further points of dispute between the two trends were the question of God's unity, the nature of Divine attributes, anthropomorphism, predestination and free will (William Montgomery WATT, *Predestination and Free Will in Early Islam*, 1948; Daniel GIMARET, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane*, 1980), theodicy (Eric L. ORMSBY, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 1984), eschatology, the status of prophecy and the essence of the Qur'ān as God's uncreated speech (Jan R. T. M. PETERS, *God's Created Speech*, 1976).

The division between *mutakallimūn* and traditionalist theologians never was clear-cut, since *kalām's* methods had a huge impact upon traditionalist theologians. Consequently, the latter embraced rationalistic argumen-

tations in their works and public debates (Binyamin ABRAHAMOV, *Islamic Theology- Traditionalism and Rationalism*, 1998). Among traditionalist theologians, the group called Ḥanābila after their eponym Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) is the most conspicuous (Henri LAOUST, “Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal,” *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., I [1960]: 272–7; ID., “Ḥanābila,” *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., III [1971], 158–62).

#### F. Theology and the Qurʾān

The Qurʾānic text inspired the molding and refining of theological notions and formulae elaborated not only in theological treatises and *kalām* manuals but also in Qurʾān exegeses (*tafsīr* pl. *tafāsīr*), written by prominent theologians such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240). The Qurʾān exegete Ibn Kathīr (d. 1372) based his *tafsīr* on the theological and jurisprudential teachings of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). The main theological themes in the Qurʾān are surveyed and discussed in research on Qurʾānic studies (Fazlur RAHMAN, *Major Themes of the Quran*, 1980; Tilman NAGEL, “Theology and the Qurʾān,” *EQ* V [2006]: 256–75; Binyamin ABRAHAMOV, “Theology,” *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾān*, ed. Andrew RIPPIN, 2006, 420–33). Among the theological concepts refined from the Qurʾānic text are predestination and free will (Toshihiko IZUTSU, *God and Man in the Koran-Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, 1964), human responsibility (Andrew RIPPIN, “Desiring the Face of God,” *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qurʾān*, ed. Issa BOULLATA, 2000), creation (Husam Muhi Eldin AL-ALOUSI, *The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought – Qurʾān, Hadīth, Commentaries and Kalām*, 1968), anthropomorphism (Binyamin ABRAHAMOV, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qurʾān in the Theology of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, Kitāb al-Mustashrid*, 1996), and ethics (Daud RAHBAR, *God of Justice: a Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qurʾān*, 1960).

#### G. Theology and Hadīth

*Hadīth* literature, which is the narrative of the Prophet Muḥammad’s life and practices, contains numerous statements of Muḥammad and some of his Companions (*ṣaḥāba*), serving as a starting point for theological debates. While traditionalist theologians used *hadīth* literature as a locus of their religious thought (Livnat HOLTZMAN, “Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the Fiṭra Tradition – The Use of Ḥadīth in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya,” *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef RAPOPORT and Shahab AHMED (2010), the credibility of this literature was questioned by rationally inclined theologians who tended to discredit this literature (Roger ARNALDEZ, *Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordoue*, 1956). *Hadīth* literature covers almost every topic in theological thought,

such as God's transcendence and anthropomorphic depictions of God (Daniel GIMARET, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme: les anthropomorphismes de la sunna et leur interprétation par les théologiens*, 1997), predestination and free will (Joseph VAN ESS, *Zwischen Hadīṭ und Theologie: Studien zum Entstehen prädestinarianischer Überlieferung*, 1975; Louis GARDET, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme*, 1967; Geneviève GOBILLOT, *La Fitra – La Conception originelle – ses interprétations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans*, 2000; Helmer RINGGREN, *Studies in Arabian Fatalism*, 1955), ethics (Majid FAKHRY, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, 1991), creation (Ernst BEHLER, *Die Ewigkeit der Welt – Problemgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den Kontroversen um Weltanfang und Weltunendlichkeit im Mittelalter*, 1965; Iysa BELLO, *The Medieval Islamic Controversy Between Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, 1989), eschatology (David COOK, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 2002) and the nature of the Qur'ān (Wilfred MADELUNG, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran," *Orientalia Hispanica* 1 [1974]: 504–25).

#### H. *Kalām* and Philosophy

*Kalām* is not based on philosophical speculation *per se*, in spite of the resemblance of *kalām*'s set of conceptions and areas of interest to that of Muslim philosophy (*falsafa*). It has been claimed, however, that *kalām* should not be disregarded as an apologetic discipline, since it shares areas of interest with Islamic philosophy (Richard M. FRANK, "Kalām and Philosophy: A Perspective from One Problem," *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, ed. Parviz MOREWEDGE, 1979, 71–95). *Kalām* accepts the Islamic dogma. Thus, the *mutakallimūn* challenged the philosophers, among other groups within Islam, and labeled them as heretics. The most famous attempt to attack philosophy is the Ash'arī theologian al-Ghazālī's (Algazel, d. 1111) *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, ed., trans. and annot. Michael MARMURA, 2000). A rebuttal of al-Ghazālī's argumentation is Ibn Rushd's (Averroes, d. 1198) *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, ed., trans. and annot. Simon VAN DEN BERGH, 1978).

#### I. History of Research

The history of research in the field of Islamic theology is in many senses similar to the history of Islamic studies in general. The study of *kalām* is a sub-discipline of the studies of Islamic history and philology. The interest of European scholars in Islamic theology dates as early as the establishing of the University of Leiden in 1575. The earliest scholarly efforts at studying Islam were characterized by comparing and judging Islamic doctrines in the light of Christian doctrines (Robert CASPAR, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology*, 1998). In other words, the study of Islam was not perceived as a scholarly

field in its own right. The change occurred in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century along with the scholarly efforts taken by European and Muslim scholars in cataloguing, classifying, and publishing Arabic manuscripts in critical and uncritical editions. As the publication of manuscripts of heresiographical works and theological treatises advanced, *kalām* was dealt not only in general surveys on Islam (Ignaz GOLDZIHNER, *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1925, trans. Andras and Ruth HAMORI, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 1981; Alfred VON KREMER, *Geschichte der herrschenden Ideen des Islams*, 1868), but also in the frame of monographs, thus shaping the study of Islamic theology as an independent discipline.

Research on Islamic theology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is characterized by a reliance on heresiographic literature, whose nature (see “sources”) dictates a descriptive historical approach. The European researchers, trained for the most part in philology and history and not in philosophy and theology as such, tended to deal more with the history of theological trends and less with the teachings of Islamic theologians. The historical approach is well reflected, for example, in the works of Julius WELLHAUSEN (*Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz*, 1902, trans. Margraet GRAHAM WEIR, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, 1927; *Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam*, 1901, trans. R. C. OSTLE and S. M. WALZER, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, 1975). All the relevant entries of the first edition of *the Encyclopaedia of Islam*, published between 1913–1936, reflect the historical approach, which dominated Western research in the field of Islamic theology (Duncan Black MACDONALD, “Ḳadarīya”; ID., “kalām”; ID., “al-Māturīdī”; Arent Jan WENSINCK, “al-Ash‘arī”; Ignaz GOLDZIHNER, “Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal”; Henrik Samuel NYBERG, “Mu‘tazila” – all available in the convenient version: *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H. A. R. GIBB and J. H. KRAMERS, 1995). The relevance of these early studies is defied time and again, although their importance as introductory works to the study of the history of Islamic theology still exists.

Research approaches still relevant today are those focusing on a methodological close reading of theological texts. A representative example is Harry Austryn WOLFSON’s comprehensive work on the origins of *kalām* (Harry Austryn WOLFSON, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 1976). Wolfson’s method of conjecture and verification, which he called “a hypothetico-deductive method,” paved the way to researches concentrating on the theological texts, in which references to political developments, if they exist at all, are provided merely as an aid of understanding the developments in theology. The definitive study of the early phase of the formation of Islamic theology is Josef VAN ESS, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert*



*Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 1991–1995 (6 vols.). All the relevant entries of the second edition of *EI*, published between 1960–2004 (also as an online electronic version), reflect a close reading of a wider variety of published manuscripts than was available to the contributors of the first version.

It has been claimed that the lion's share of studies of Islamic theology from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was dedicated to the earliest period of *kalām*, while fewer studies were dedicated to theologians of the 11<sup>th</sup> century onward, with the one exception of the thought of the Ash'arī theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (Algazel, d. 1111), whose works have been studied by Western scholarship for more than a century (Daniel GIMARET, "Pour un Rééquilibrage des études de la théologie musulmane," *Arabica* 38 [1991]: 11–18). Nevertheless, from the 1980s, the tendency in research is to focus on the thought of theologians of the 11<sup>th</sup> century onward.

The work of researchers of Islamic theology, although not specifically subjected to the harsh criticism pointed to Orientalists in general (Edward E. SAID, *Orientalism*, 1978), should be understood and evaluated within the frame of European Orientalism with its faults and virtues (Jean Jacques WAARDENBURG, "Mustashrikūn," *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., VII [1993]: 783–93).

## J. Sources

The study of Islamic theology, as other branches of the Islamic religious sciences, depends upon the publication of original manuscripts in critical and uncritical editions. The two fundamental works in this area (Carl BROCKELMANN, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, 1902–1942; Fuat SEZGIN, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 1967) list manuscripts of Islamic Arabic works, theological works included, while providing essential biographical details on the authors of these works. Even today the task of publishing manuscripts of theological works is a major feature of research. Every newly published theological work often incites the interest of scholars to pursue the investigation in the direction which that work offers, while it sheds light on unknown aspects, trends, and ideas in Islamic theology. For example, in 1962 William Montgomery WATT wrote: "the earliest extant works of Sunnite theology in the strict sense are those of al-Ash'arī (d. 935)" (*Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, xii). Two years later, in 1964, Morris SEALE published the first translation of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's (d. 855) *al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa-'l-zanādiqa* (*Responsa* to two heretic sects), a theological work which precedes the works of al-Ash'arī in a century, thus contradicting Watt's categorical statement quoted above (Morris S. SEALE, *Muslim Theology*, 1964). This example demonstrates that the field of Islamic theology is far from being exhausted.

Until the discovery of several original Muʿtazilī works, heresiographic works dated as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century were the main source for researchers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to study the earlier trends of *kalām* and traditional theology. The major overviews on Islamic theology and particularly Muʿtazili theology written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were based solely on heresiographic literature (for example, Israel FRIEDLAENDER, “The Heterodoxies of the Shiʿites in the presentation of Ibn Hazm,” *JAOS* 28 [1907]: 1–80; 29 [1909]: 1–183).

The heresiographers, mostly Muʿtazilī and Ashʿarī *mutakallimūn*, organized their works so that they were compatible with a tradition attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, in which he prophesied that the Muslim community would be divided into seventy-three sects, seventy-two of them inheriting Hell, and the surviving group going to Heaven. The heresiographers strove in finding seventy-three Islamic sects, thus counting as separate sects groups of people whose views differed only slightly from one another (Hellmut RITTER, “Philologika III: Muhammedanische Häresio-graphen,” *Der Islam* 18 [1929]: 34–59).

A recognition of the mishaps of heresiography, a literature which provides only a partial picture of the teachings of theological trends as well as of their historical development, led to a pioneering attempt to study the molding of traditionalist theology based on the first Sunnī *ʿaqāʿid* (creeds, articles of faith), dated from the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Arent Jan WENSINCK, *The Muslim Creed*, 1932, re-ed. 1965). Nevertheless, only the discovery of original theological works or the reconstruction of such works based on later sources, enabled Western research to validate the biased descriptions of trends and thinkers as they appear in heresiographical literature (See the above-mentioned works of M. COOK and J. VAN ESS; Richard M. FRANK, “The Neoplatonism of Ḡahm b. Ṣafwān,” *Museon* 78 [1965]: 395–424)

While numerous extant texts of the two major *kalām* trends in Islam, the Muʿtazila and the Ashʿariyya, enable scholars to depict Islamic scholastic tradition during the period of the Abbasid caliphate (750–1258 C.E.), the beginnings of that tradition during the Umayyad age (661–750 C.E.) are much harder to establish. The authenticity of a few epistolary texts and fragments belonging to the reign of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (685–705 C.E.) (Joseph VAN ESS, “The Beginnings of Islamic Theology,” J. E. MURDOCH and E. D. SYLLA, eds. *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, [1975], 87–111), has been challenged. It has been argued that these writings were pseudepigrapha from the late Umayyad times, some fifty years after the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik (Michael COOK, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 1981).

### K. Muʿtazila

Many researchers were drawn to deal with the Muʿtazila from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is by all means the most studied theological school in Western research. The attraction to the Muʿtazila can be explained by the fact that several European scholars favored some of the views of this school. In 1865, Heinrich STEINER spoke of them as “the free-thinkers of Islam” (Heinrich STEINER, *Die Muʿtaziliten oder die Freidenker im Islam*, 1865). This concept, enhanced by the views of prominent scholars like Ignaz GOLDZIHNER, and duplicated in dozens of works (for example, Henri GALLAND, *Essai sur les Moʿtazélites: Les rationalistes de l’Islam*, 1906; George Fadlo HOURANI, *Islamic Rationalism: the Ethics of ʿAbd al-Jabbār*, 1971), has dominated Western scholarship for decades. The image of Muʿtazilīs as free-thinkers was mainly based on heresiographic literature. Nevertheless, in the late 1920s Henrik Samuel NYBERG, who discovered and edited *Kitāb al-Intiṣār* (The Book of Triumph) by the Muʿtazilī al-Khāyyāṭ (d. 912) a genuine Muʿtazilī work, which remained the solely-known Muʿtazilī work for decades, challenged this concept (Henrik Samuel NYBERG, “Zum Kampf zwischen Islam und Manichäismus,” *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 32 [1929]: 425–41). Henceforth, Muʿtazilīs were portrayed as theologians and not as philosophers. Furthermore, the discovery of a large quantity of Muʿtazilī sources in the 1960s, contributed to a considerable progress in studies relating the Muʿtazila. Nevertheless, studies written before that time and previously considered as corner-stones in the field, are now considered as outdated (for example, Albert N. NADER, *Le système philosophique des Muʿtazila*, 1956). The entry in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* indeed provides an excellent overview of the updated approaches in research (Daniel GIMARET, “Muʿtazila,” *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., VII [1993]: 783–93)

### L. Ashʿariyya

Although the Ashʿariyya (or Ashāʿira) is the most important orthodox theological school, its history and origins have been little studied. This lacuna in research is opposed to the numerous published writings of Ashʿarī theologians and the Ashʿarī rich heresiographical literature. Researches based on Ashʿarī material, mainly focus on themes and doctrines rather than on the history of the school. An indication to the little known on the history of the Ashʿarī school is the very short entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (William Montgomery WATT, “Ashʿariyya,” *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., I [1960]: 696). In this entry Watt summarizes the dominating view in Western research, according to which the Ashʿariyya was the dominant, if not the official, theological school in the 8<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries. This view appeared in a number of studies (Duncan

Black MACDONALD, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory*, 1903; Arthur Stanley TRITTON, *Muslim Theology*, 1947; Louis GARDET and M. M. ANAWATI, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane*, 1948; W. Montgomery WATT, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 1973), and was contested in the works of George MAKDISI (“Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh-Century Baghdad,” *BSOAS* 24 [1961]: 1–56; ID., “Ash‘arī and the Ash‘arites in Islamic Religious History,” *SI* 17 [1962]: 37–80; 18 [1963]: 19–39; *The Rise of Colleges*, 1981).

### M. Māturīdiyya- Ḥanafīyya

Not much was known on the Māturīdiyya-Ḥanafīyya before the discovery of Abū Maṣū‘ al-Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* (The Book of Unity) (by Joseph SCHACHT, “New Sources for the History of Muhammadan Theology,” *SI* 1 [1953]: 23–42; the manuscript was published by Faṭḥallah KHOLEIF in 1970, and the authenticity of the manuscript was challenged by Daniel GIMARET, *Théories de l’acte humain en théologie musulmane*, 1980 and discussed by M. Sait ÖZREVALI, “The Authenticity of the Manuscript of Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*,” *Turkish Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 [1997]: 19–29). Western research perceived this school as parallel to the Ash‘ariyya (Ignaz GOLDZIEHER, *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, 1925; Arthur Stanley TRITTON, *Muslim Theology*, 1947; Louis GARDET and M. M. ANAWATI, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane*, 1948), however without sufficient collaborating textual evidences. Different aspects in al-Māturīdī’s thought are discussed in several researches (J. Meric PESSAGNO, “Intellect and Religious Assent: the view of Abū Maṣū‘ al-Māturīdī,” *MW* 69 [1979]: 18–27; ID., “Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb – The View of Abū Maṣū‘ al-Māturīdī,” *JAOS* 104,1 [1984]: 177–91; ID., “The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought,” *SI* 60 [1984]: 59–82).

### N. Ḥanābila

The traditionalist Ḥanbalī school has been neglected for years by western research, although the life and personality of its eponym, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, were discussed in length for more than a century (Walter Melvil PATTON, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna*, 1897; Michael COOPERSON, *Classical Arabic biography. The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma‘mūn*, 2000; Nimrod HURVITZ, *The Formation of Ḥanbalism: Piety into Power*, 2002; Chistopher MELCHERT, “The Adversaries of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal,” *Arabica* 44 [1997]: 234–53). The Ḥanābila who, according to their own avowal in numerous writings, had given precedence to the Quranic text and the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad, and rejected the excessive use of rationalistic methods, were perceived by Western scholarship as ultra-conservative or worse, as a

mob (GOLDZIHNER, op. cit.; MACDONALD, op. cit.; Henri LAMMENS, *L'islam: croyances et institutions*, 1926; trans. E. DENISON ROSS, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, 1968). An insufficient treatment of Ḥanbalī manuscripts and an exclusive reliance on Ash'arī heresiography contributed to that unjustified image. The pioneering work of Henri LAOUST (*Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Takī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taimīya*, 1939) has paved the way for researches on the Ḥanabila, revealing a theological system combining logical *kalām* argumentations with the traditional sources (George MAKDISI, "Ḥanbalite Islam," Merlin L. SWARTZ ed., *Studies on Islam*, 216–274, Daniel Gimaret, "Theories de l'acte humain dans l'école Ḥanbalite," *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales* 29 [1977]: 157–78; Binyamin ABRAHAMOV, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Agreement of Reason with Tradition," *MW* 82.3–4 [1992]: 256–73; Wesley WILLIAMS, "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse," *IJMES* 34 [2002]: 441–63; Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, 2007).

### O. The Thought of Prominent Thinkers

The most conspicuous developments in the field of Islamic theology are in reevaluation and reassessment of the thought of prominent theologians. It is far beyond the scope of this entry to introduce the entire research done on dozens of medieval Islamic theologians, and we shall have to do with three examples demonstrating the progress made in research with regard to the thought of prominent thinkers.

Research on the Ash'arī theologian Abū al-Ma'ālī AL-JUWAYNĪ (d. 1085), known primarily as the teacher of Abū Ḥāmid AL-GHAZĀLĪ (d. 1111), has progressed immensely with the publication of critical editions of his works (Abū al-Ma'ālī AL-JUWAYNĪ, *al-Irshād*, trans. Jean-Dominique LUCIANI, 1938), translations (Léon BERCHER, trans., *Les Fondements du Fiqh*, 1995; Paul WALKER [trans.], *A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief*, 2000) and researches (Helmut KLOPFER, *Das Dogma des Imām al-Ḥaramain al-Djuwainī und sein Werk al-Aqīda al-nizāmīya*, 1958; Tilman NAGEL, *Die Festung des Glaubens*, 1988; Mohammed Moslem Adel SAFLO, *Al-Juwaynī's Thought and Methodology*, 2000). These and other works established al-Juwaynī's unique contribution to the field of rational argumentations.

In the case of Abū Ḥasan AL-ASH'ARĪ (d. 935), the eponym of the Ash'arī school of theology, whose works have been studied for more than a century (Wilhelm SPITTA, *Zur Geschichte Abu'l Hasan al-Aš'arī's*, 1876; Duncan Black MACDONALD, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory*, 1903; Arthur Stanley TRITTON, *Muslim Theology*, 1947; Louis GARDET and M. M. ANAWATI, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane*, 1948),

the whole scope of his thought and its repercussions is far from being fully revealed (Binyamin ABRAHAMOV, "A Re-examination of al-Ash'arī's Theory of Kasb according to Kitāb al-Luma'," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1–2 [1989]: 210–21; Daniel GIMARET, *La doctrine d'al-Ash'arī*, 1990; Richard M. FRANK, "Bodies and Atoms: the Ash'arite Analysis," *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Michael E. MARMURA, 1984, 39–53, 287–293, just to mention a few.

Al-Ḥasan AL-BAṢRĪ (d. 728), an ascetic whose views on free will were investigated at length (Hans Heinrich SCHÄDER, "Ḥasan al-Baṣrī- Studien zur Frühgeschichte des Islam," *Der Islam* 14 [1925]: 1–75; Hellmut RITTER, "Studien zur Geschichte der islamischen Frömmigkeit: I. Hasan el-Basri," *Der Islam* 21 [1933]: 1–83; Julian OBERMANN, "Political Theology in Early Islam: Hasan al-Basri's Treatise on Qadar," *JAOS* 55 [1935]: 138–62; Michael SCHWARZ, "The Letter of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī," *Oriens* 22 [1967]: 15–30), is considered to be a mile stone in Islamic theology, although the authenticity of teachings attributed to him has been questioned recently (Suleiman Ali MOURAD, *Early Islam between Myth and History: al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and the Formation of his Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship*, 2006).

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