# Theological Rationalism in the Medieval World of Islam

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## I.

Rationalism has been a salient feature of Muslim theological thought from the earliest times. The disputed issue of authenticity notwithstanding, a small corpus of texts is extant in which doctrinal issues such as free will versus determinism are dealt with in a dilemmatic dialogue pattern. The display of the dialectical technique in these texts testifies to the use of reason in the formulation of and argumentation for doctrinal issues from a very early period onwards (Cook 1980; 1981; van Ess 1975; 1977). Despite the fact that rationalism had its opponents throughout Islamic history, it continued to be one of the mainstays of Muslim theological thought, and it is only in the wake of modern Islamic fundamentalism that rationalism has become marginalized and threatened as never before.

The Mu'tazila was the earliest "school" of rationalist Islamic theology, known as *kalām*, and one of the most important and influential currents of Islamic thought. Mu'tazilites stressed the primacy of reason and free will (as opposed to predestination) and developed an epistemology, ontology and psychology which provided a basis for explaining the nature of the world, God, man and the phenomena of religion such as revelation and divine law. In their ethics, Mu'tazilites maintained that good and evil can be known solely through human reason. With their characteristic epistemology, they were also largely responsible for the development of the highly sophisticated discipline of legal methodology.

The Mu'tazila had its beginnings in the 8th century and its classical period of development was from the latter part of the 9th until the middle of the 11th century CE. While it briefly enjoyed the status of an "official" theology under the Abbasid caliphs in the 9th century, the movement had coalesced into two main schools by the turn of the 10th century: the school of Baghdad and that of Basra. The dominant figures of the Basran school were Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 916) and his son Abū Hāshim (d. 933). The followers of Abū Hāshim formed an important sub-school known as the Bahshamiyya. Of the various members of this school, one can mention the following: Abū Hāshim's disciple, Abū 'Alī b. Khallād (d. ca. 961), Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī (d. 980) and Abū Isḥāq b. 'Ayyāsh, who were students of Ibn Khallād. The chief judge 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 1025) was a student of Abū 'Abd Allāh and Abū Isḥāq and a very prolific author. One of 'Abd al-Jabbār's own students, Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 1044), established what seems to have been the

last creative school of thought among the Mu'tazila. The movement gradually fell out of favor in Sunni Islam and had largely disappeared by the 14th century. Its impact, however, continued to be felt in Shī'ī Islam where its influence subsisted through the centuries and can be seen even today. Moreover, modern research on the Mu'tazila from the beginning of the 20th century onwards gave rise to a renaissance of the Mu'tazilite notion of rationalism finding its expression in the so-called "Neo- Mu'tazila", a vague term designating various strands of contemporary Muslim thinkers who lean on the Mu'tazilite heritage to substantiate the significance of rationalism in modern Muslim discourse (Hildebrandt 2007; al-Mas'ūdī 2008).

Second in importance in the use of rationalism was the theological movement of the so-called Ash'ariyya, named thus after its eponymous founder, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 935), a former student of the Mu'tazilite master Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī. At the age of about forty, Ash'arī abandoned the teachings of Mu'tazilism and set out to formulate his own doctrinal system. Ash'arī and his followers aimed at formulating a *via media* between the two dominant opposing strands of the time, Mu'tazilism and traditionalist Islam (in the brand of Ḥanbalism). Methodologically, they applied rationalism in their theological thought and writings as was characteristic for the Mu'tazila while still maintaining the primacy of revelation over that of reason. Doctrinally, they upheld the notion of ethical subjectivism as against the ethical objectivism of Mu'tazilism, and they elaborated the notion of man's "acquisition" (*kasb*) of his acts as a way to mediate between the Mu'tazilite notion of free will and the traditionalist position of predestination. On this basis, they developed their own theological doctrines. As is characteristic for the development of Islamic theological thought, Ash'arī adopted various concepts into his doctrinal system that had been formulated by earlier thinkers (Perler/Rudolph 2000). For example, the first to attempt to combine the rational methodology of the Mu'tazilites with the doctrinal positions of the traditionalists had in fact been Ibn Kullāb (d. 855 ?), and the notion of man's "acquisition" of his acts had first been formulated by Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. 796). However, due to the subsequent success of the Ash'ariyya as a theological school these earlier predecessors soon sank into oblivion.

By the end of the 10th century, Ash'arism had established itself as one of the prevalent theological movements in the central lands of Islam mainly thanks to the prominent theologian and Malikite judge Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) who enjoyed the patronage of the Būyid vizier al-Ṣāḥib b. 'Abbād (d. 995), as had been the case with his Mu'tazilite contemporary 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī. Moreover, it was through Bāqillānī's students Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Fūrak (d. 1015) and Abū Isḥāq al-Isfarā'īnī (d. 1020) who both taught in Rayy and Nishapur that Ash'arism soon also spread into Persia, where some of the most prominent Ash'arite theologians of the following generations emerged. Thanks to the spread of the Malikite school of law in North Africa, Bāqillānī's theological writings became also popular in this region and it is here that fragments of his *opus magnum*, *Kitāb hidāyat al-mustarshidīn*, have been preserved in manuscript. Ash'arism reached a further peak during the early Seljuk period when it enjoyed the official support of the vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1099) and became a central component within the curriculum of the Niẓāmiyya network of educational institutions; the main Ash'arite theologians of the time were Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Fūrakī (d. 1085) and the famous Imām al-Ḥaramayn Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 1085). As was the case with Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī among the Mu'tazilites, Juwaynī was the first to integrate philosophical methods and notions into Ash'arite *kalām*, and there is in fact evidence that Juwaynī had intensively studied and was deeply influenced by Abū l-Ḥusayn's writings (Madelung 2006). With Juwaynī the early phase of Ash'arism comes to an end, and the next phase is characterized by an increasing integration of philosophy and logic

into theological methodology and thought. This phase was opened by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) and among its most significant authors are Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209). In the Eastern lands of Islam, Ash'arism remained one of the most salient strands of thought until the end of the 16th century. Within the Sunni realm at least, Ash'arism proved more successful and enjoyed a longer life than Mu'tazilism, yet, like Mu'tazilism, Ash'arism was constantly challenged by traditionalist opponents rejecting any kind of rationalism.

The various strands of rational Muslim theological thought within Islam are closely related to each other as they were shaped and re-shaped in a continuous process of close interaction between its respective representatives. This also holds true for other theological schools that were less prominent in the central areas of the Islamic world, such as the Māturīdiyya (named thus after its eponym Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, d. 944) which was heavily indebted to traditional Ḥanafite positions and to Mu'tazilite thought alike, but whose centre was in the North-East of Iran (Transoxania) so that it has made relatively little impact (with the exception of the central Ottoman lands) (Rudolph 1997; Badeen 2008).

## II.

What has been stated about the close interaction between the various strands of thought

**The first page from an autograph manuscript from Yemen of volume 2 of the Kitāb al-Shāmil bi-ḥaqā'iq al-adilla al-'aqliyya wa-uṣūl al-masā'il al-dīniyya by al-Imām al-Mu'ayyad bi-llāh Yaḥyā b. Ḥamza (d. 749/1348-49). Courtesy of the Zayd b. Alī Foundation.**

within Islam equally applies to the relations of Islam with other religions that were prominently represented in the medieval world of Islam, namely Judaism and Christianity. Here, similar phenomena of reciprocity can be observed. Jews, Christians, and Muslims, educated as well as uneducated, had Arabic (and, at times, Persian) as their common language and therefore naturally shared a similar cultural background. Often reading the same books and all speaking and writing in the same language, they created a unique intellectual commonality in which an ongoing, constant exchange of ideas, texts, and forms of discourse was the norm rather than the exception. This characteristic of the medieval world of Islam – which has aptly been described as a "crosspollination" (Goodman 1995; 1999; Montgomery 2007) or a "whirlpool effect" (Stroumsa 2008) – requires that any study of theological rationalism disregard religious borders. The one-dimensional perspective that still prevails in modern research should be replaced by true multi-dimensionalism.

There is a near-consensus among contemporary scholars that the Muslim dialectical technique of *kalām* can be traced back to similar patterns of dilemmatic dialogue that were characteristic of late antique Christological controversies, particularly those raging in sixth century Alexandria and, more importantly, seventh century Syria (Cook 1980; Zimmermann 1985; Brock 1986; Hoyland 1997; Reynolds 2004). Moreover, Muslim theologians devoted much thought and energy to a critical examination and refutation of the views of Christianity and (to a lesser extent) Judaism, as is evident from the numerous polemical tracts written by them against these religions. While the majority of refutations of Christianity by early Muslim theologians are lost, there are a few extant anti-Christian texts from the 9th century that give a good impression of the arguments that were employed (Thomas 2004). Extant examples of such works from the 10th century are the comprehensive *Kitāb tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa* by the Mu'tazilite 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (Reynolds 2004) and, within the Ash'arite camp, the *Shifā' al-ghalīl* by Juwaynī or the *Radd al-jamīl li-ilāhiyyāt 'Īsā bi-ṣarīḥ al-injīl* which is attributed to Ghazālī and may indeed be by him (El-Kaisy Friemuth 2007; Thomas 2007).

Moreover, many of the earliest treatises in Arabic in defense of Christianity are preserved. These were written by theologians representing the three main Christian groups in the Middle East during the first Abbasid century: the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurra (d. c. 830), the Nestorian 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (d. c. 845), and the Jacobite Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'iṭa (d. c. 855). We know from Muslim sources that these three Christian theologians were in dialogue with Muslim rational theologians. Moreover, from their respective defenses of those Christian doctrines that became the standard focus of Muslim/Christian controversies – that is, the Trinity, Incarnation, Baptism, Eucharist, veneration of the cross, and the direction to be faced in prayer – it is evident that they were well acquainted with Muslim *kalām* techniques and terminologies (Griffith 2002). Given the basic disagreements between Muslim and Christian theological positions, such as the Muslim notion of divine unicity (*tawḥīd*), which is incompatible with the Christian understanding of trinity and incarnation, it was out of the question that Christian theologians would adopt much from Muslim school doctrines. The most extensive reception of Muslim *kalām* can be observed among Coptic writers. While the first major Coptic author writing in Arabic appeared relatively late in the person of Severus (Sawīrus) ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. after 987), the Copts produced in subsequent centuries a corpus of Christian literature in Arabic whose size exceeds by far what was written by all other Arab Christian communities taken together (Graf 1947:294ff; Sidarus 1993). As has been shown in detail for Abū Shākir Ibn al-Rāhib and al-Mu'taman Ibn al-'Assāl (both 13th c.), Coptic writers of this epoch were particularly influenced by the writings of the Ash'arite theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (Sidarus 1975; Wadi 1997; Schwarb [forthcoming]).

Judaism proved much more receptive to basic Muslim doctrinal notions such as divine unicity than Christianity, and it was Mu'tazilism in particular that was adopted to varying degrees from the 9th century onwards by both Rabbanite and Karaite authors, so that by the turn of the 11th century a "Jewish Mu'tazila" had emerged. Jewish scholars both composed original works along Mu'tazilite lines and produced copies of Muslim Mu'tazilite books, often transcribed into Hebrew characters. Prime examples of original Jewish Mu'tazilite works are the Karaite Yūsuf al-Baṣīr's (d. ca. 1040) *al-Kitāb al-muḥtawī* and his shorter *Kitāb al-tamyīz* (Vajda 1985; Sklare 1995; von Abel 2005; Madelung & Schmidtke 2006), the *Kitāb al-ni'ma* of his older contemporary Levi ben Yefet (Sklare 2007), or the *Kitāb al-tawriya* of Baṣīr's student Yeshu'a ben Yehudah. The influence of the Mu'tazila found its way to the very centers of Jewish religious and intellectual life in the East. Several of the Heads of the ancient Rabbanite academies (Yeshivot) of Sura and Pumbedita (relocated by the 10th century to Baghdad) adopted the Mu'tazilite worldview. One of them, Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon (d. 1013), was closely familiar with the works of Ibn Khallād and personally acquainted with Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī (Sklare 1996). Moreover, as had been the case with Christian writers, the Mu'tazilite doctrines and terminology provided a basis for discussion and polemical exchanges between Jewish and Muslim scholars (Sklare 1999). By contrast, Ash'arite works and authors had been received among Jewish scholars to a significantly lesser degree and in a predominantly critical way (Sinai 2005).

Mu'tazilism had also left its mark on the theological thought of the Samaritans, for example the 11th century author Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ṣūrī. It is not clear whether Samaritans (whose intellectual centres between the 9th to the 11th centuries were mainly Nablus and Damascus) had studied Muslim Mu'tazilite writings directly or whether they became acquainted with them through Jewish adaptations of Mu'tazilism. The majority of Samaritan theological writings composed in Arabic still await a close analysis, but a cursory investigation of the extant manuscript material confirms that Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ṣūrī was by no means an exception (Wedel 2007).

There are many other examples of the intellectual whirlpool process in the medieval world of Islam across the denominational borders. The following two should suffice to demonstrate that a truly multi-dimensional approach is needed to grasp these processes. The earliest extant systematic *kalām* treatise was authored by Dāwūd b. Marwān al-Muqammaṣ, a former Jew who converted to Christianity and later re-converted to Judaism. Al-Muqammaṣ was a student of the Jacobite theologian Nonnus of Nisibis (d. c. 870) and his work, *'Ishrūn maqāla*, shows characteristics of Muslim *kalām* as well as of Christian doctrines, while the overall outlook of the book is Jewish (Stroumsa 1989; 2007). The second example concerns the towering Jewish thinker Mūsā b. Maymūn al-Qurṭubī ("Maimonides", d. 1204) who was well-read in Muslim literature and widely received among Muslim and Christian medieval readers alike as is indicated by the many traces of his *Guide of the Perplexed* that are left in the later Muslim and Christian literature (Schwarb 2007).

## III.

Within the field of Islamic studies, scientific research on Muslim rational theology is a comparatively young discipline, as a critical mass of primary sources became accessible only at a relatively late stage. Mu'tazilite works were evidently not widely copied and relatively few manuscripts have survived. So little authentic Mu'tazilite literature was available that until the publication of some significant texts in the 1960's, Mu'tazilite doctrine was mostly known through the works of its opponents. The study of Mu'tazilite thought did, however, make slow but steady

progress throughout the 20th century. Because Mu'tazilite thinking was virtually banned from the center of the Sunni world from about the end of the 11th century, it was not considered an integral part of Islamic intellectual history by earlier Western scholars. Given the rationalistic approach of the Mu'tazila towards theological issues, 19th century historians of thought generally considered the Mu'tazilites as "freethinkers" within Islam who had been influenced by Greek philosophical thought and thus constituted an anomaly within Islamic intellectual history (e.g. Steiner 1865).

This evaluation, which was based almost exclusively on heresiographies written by non-Mu'tazilites, was proven to be wrong at the beginning of the 20th century as a result of the publication of several significant texts. In 1925 the Swedish scholar H.S. Nyberg edited the *Kitāb al-intiṣār* of the Baghdādī Mu'tazilite Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāṭ (d. ca. 913), a refutation of the polemical treatise of the sceptic Ibn al-Rawandī (d. 860 or 912 ?), *Faḍīḥat al-mu'tazila*, which in turn was directed against Jāḥīẓ's (d. 868) pro-Mu'tazilite *Kitāb faḍīlat al-mu'tazila* (Nyberg 1925). Although Khayyāṭ's work does not contain extensive information on the views of the Mu'tazilites due to its apologetical character, it was the first work authored by a Mu'tazilite available in print. Of much greater significance for the study of Mu'tazilism was Hellmut Ritter's edition of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī's doxography, *Maqālāt al-islamiyyin*, published in 1929-30 (Ritter 1929-30). This work provided reliable insights into the positions of the Mu'tazilites, as the author had originally been a follower of this movement and was familiar with the Mu'tazilite writings of his time.

The next decisive step in the study of Mu'tazilite thought occurred when in the early 1950's a number of manuscripts were discovered in Yemen during an expedition of a group of Egyptian scholars. These manuscripts contained mostly works of various representatives of the Bahshamiyya. They included fourteen out of the original twenty volumes of the encyclopaedic *Kitāb al-mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-'adl* of 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, which were subsequently edited in Egypt (1961-65). Further writings of adherents of the Bahshamiyya that were found in the library of the Great Mosque in Ṣan'ā' were also edited during the 1960's. Among them mention should be made of *Ta'līq sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, a recension of the *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa* of 'Abd al-Jabbār by one of his followers, the Zaydī Imām Mānakdīm (d. 1034) (Mānakdīm 1965), as well as *Kitāb al-majmū' fī l-muḥīṭ bi-l-taklīf*, a recension of 'Abd al-Jabbār's *al-Kitāb al-muḥīṭ bi-l-taklīf* by another follower of his, namely Ibn Mattawayh (Ibn Mattawayh 1965-99).

However, despite these rich finds, numerous lacunae remain. On the one hand, only few texts by thinkers prior to 'Abd al-Jabbār were discovered in Yemen. The same applies to rival groups to the Bahshamiyya such as the Ikhshīdiyya, or the school of Baghdad. Furthermore, quite significant parts of works by adherents of the Bahshamiyya were still unaccounted for. For example, volumes 1-3, 10 and 18-19 of the *Mughnī* were not found, nor were other works by 'Abd al-Jabbār, such as the original version of *al-Kitāb al-muḥīṭ* or his *Sharḥ kashf al-a'rāḍ*. Moreover, the finds of the 1950's suggested that the Bahshamiyya had constituted the last innovative and dynamic school within Mu'tazilism. This impression was proven to be incorrect only some decades later, when Wilferd Madelung and Martin McDermott discovered and edited the extant fragments of Rukn al-Din Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī's (d. 1141) *Kitāb al-mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn* and his shorter *Kitāb al-fā'iq fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 1991; 2007). Ibn al-Malāḥimī was a follower of the teachings of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, the founder of what seems to have been the last innovative school within the Mu'tazila. From his writings it is evident that Abū l-Ḥusayn's views differed significantly from those of his teacher 'Abd al-Jabbār and that he formulated novel positions on a number of central issues. Not found in Yemen, however, were theological writings by Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī himself. Nor were any contemporary texts by adversaries of Abū l-Ḥusayn

discovered; these might have given evidence of the vehement disputations that took place between the adherents of the Bahshamiyya on the one hand and Abū l-Ḥusayn on the other. It is only from later sources that we know that the animosities between the two groups must have been very strong indeed.

The study of Jewish Mu'tazilism began a century ago with the works of Salomo Munk (1859) and Martin Schreiner (1895). Schreiner and Munk, however, were not aware of the primary sources found among the various Geniza materials that were discovered and retrieved during the second half of the 19th century in Cairo by a number of scholars and manuscript collectors. Thirteen of the Mu'tazilite manuscripts found in the Abraham Firkovitch collection (taken from the Geniza, or storeroom, of the Karaite Synagogue in Cairo) were described in detail by Andreij J. Borisov in an article published in 1935. Between 1939 and 1943, Leon Nemoy published *Kitāb al-anwār wa-l-marāqib* by the Karaite Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī (fl. early 10th c. in Baghdad). Additional landmarks in the study of Jewish Mu'tazilism were Harry A. Wolfson's *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy* (1979) and Georges Vajda's works on Yūsuf al-Baṣīr, particularly his edition of Baṣīr's *al-Kitāb al-muḥtawī* on the basis of a manuscript from the Kaufmann collection in Budapest (Vajda 1985). Haggai Ben-Shammai has studied Mu'tazilite elements in the works of early Karaite authors of the 10th century, Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī and Yefet ben Eli (Ben-Shammai 1978). On the basis of Borisov's descriptions of the Firkovitch Mu'tazilite manuscripts and from fragments in the British Library, Ben-Shammai was moreover able to draw additional conclusions regarding the identity of some of the Mu'tazilite materials preserved by the Karaites, showing in particular that the Karaites had preserved the original version of 'Abd al-Jabbār's *al-Kitāb al-muḥīṭ* (Ben-Shammai 1974). Sarah Stroumsa has published the *'Ishrūn maqāla* of Dāwūd b. Marwān al-Muqammaṣ (Stroumsa 1989; 2007), and David Sklare has reconstructed some of the Mu'tazilite writings of Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon (Sklare 1996) and investigated the impact of Mu'tazilite thought on the legal writings of Yūsuf al-Baṣīr (Sklare 1995).

In 2003, the "Mu'tazilite Manuscripts Project Group" was founded by the present author together with David Sklare in order to assemble and identify as many Mu'tazilite manuscript materials as possible from Jewish as well as Shī'ī repositories. One of the most spectacular recent findings by members of the group are three extensive fragments of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb taṣaffuḥ al-adilla*, which was believed to be completely lost (Madelung & Schmidtke 2006a), as well as fragments of two refutations of the doctrine of Abū l-Ḥusayn, authored by his contemporary, the Karaite Yūsuf al-Baṣīr (Madelung & Schmidtke 2006; 2007). In addition, portions of 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Mughnī* from volumes that had not been found among the Yemeni manuscripts have been discovered and edited (Schmidtke 2007; Hamdan & Schmidtke [in press]; Schwarb [in press]). Moreover, an anonymous commentary on Ibn Mattawayh's *Kitāb al-tadhkira*, which is preserved in an apparently unique manuscript copy housed at the Aṣghar Mahdawī Library in Tehran, has been made available in a facsimile publication (Schmidtke 2006). In addition, numerous Mu'tazilite writings that were presumed lost were recently found in Yemen and India, including Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique of Peripatetic philosophy, *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn fī l-radd 'alā l-falāsifa* (Anṣārī 2001) that is now available in critical edition (eds. H. Anṣārī & W. Madelung, Tehran 2008).

Although much has been achieved over the past years, many Mu'tazilite textual materials still remain unexplored. Among the documents to be found in the various Geniza collections, the material that originated in the Ben Ezra Geniza (Cairo) and is nowadays mostly preserved in the Taylor-Schechter collection at Cambridge University Library (and other libraries in Europe and the

USA) is until now still largely unidentified and only rudimentarily catalogued (Baker & Polliack 2001; Shivtiel & Niessen 2006). It is to be expected that a systematic study of all Mu'tazilite fragments will render possible the reconstruction of many more hitherto lost Mu'tazilite (Muslim and Jewish) writings. As such, this Geniza material would significantly supplement the extensive findings of the Geniza material found in the Firkovitch Collection (St. Petersburg), which likewise has so far only partly been explored (Schmidtke 2007). Moreover, it is only during the last years that the vast holdings of the various private and smaller public libraries of Yemen are being made available to the scholarly community, mainly through the efforts of the Zayd b. Ali Cultural Foundation (IZBACF) (see <www.izbacf.org>). While some of these materials have been used for various publications by members of the "Mu'tazilite Manuscripts Project Group", the majority still awaits close study. This also applies to the development of Mu'tazilite thought among the Zaydites from the 12th century onwards.

The study of Samaritan literary activities in Arabic in general and of Samaritan Mu'tazilism in particular is still very much at the beginning. The only relevant text which has been partly edited and studied is the *Kitāb al-ṭubākh* by the 11th century author Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ṣūrī, who clearly shares the Mu'tazilite doctrinal outlook (Wedel 1987; 2007). This deplorable state of research is all the more astonishing as the conditions for a systematic investigation of Samaritan theological thought are ideal. A microfilm collection containing virtually the entire extant literary legacy of the Samaritans written in Arabic (not including, however, the materials of the Firkovitch collection) is owned by the library of the Institute of Arabic and Semitic Studies of the Freie Universität Berlin (see <www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/semiarab/>).

While modern research on the Mu'tazila began relatively late, research on Ash'arism started already in the 19th century, as more manuscripts of Ash'arite texts are preserved in European libraries than is the case with Mu'tazilite texts. In 1876 Wilhelm Spitta published a first monograph on the eponymous founder of the movement, and in 1889 Martin Schreiner published a first extended historical survey of the Ash'ariyya. Juwaynī's *Kitāb al-irshād* was first published in 1938 in a critical edition by Jean D. Luciani, together with a translation into French. Major landmarks in the 20th century were the publications of Richard J. McCarthy. In 1953, he published a monograph containing critical editions and translations of most of Ash'arī's extant writings, and in 1957 he published a critical edition of Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-tamhīd*. An in-depth historical study of the development of the school up to the time of Juwaynī was made by Michel Allard (Allard 1965), who had also published critical editions of two texts by Juwaynī, *Shifā' al-ghalīl* and *Luma' fī qawā'id ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā'a* (Allard 1968). Additional advances in recent decades were made by the numerous studies of Richard M. Frank (e.g., Frank 1994; 2007) and Daniel Gimaret (Gimaret 1985; 1987; 1990). In addition to the efforts by Western scholars, many scholars in the Islamic world have also contributed significantly to the research of this movement (e.g., al-Bukhtī 2005).

This progress notwithstanding, many desiderata in the scholarly investigation of the Ash'ariyya still remain, particularly with respect to the earlier phase of the movement, prior to Ghazālī. Of the two most prominent theologians of that period, Bāqillānī and Juwaynī, we possess so far only a very limited number of writings, and in both cases the respective major work – *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn* of Bāqillānī and *Kitāb al-shāmil* of Juwaynī – is only partly extant (as far as is known so far at least). Moreover, many other theologians of this period whose writings contain highly valuable information on the doctrinal outlooks of the various representatives of the

earliest phase still remain unedited and unstudied. To what extent these texts can revolutionize research can be learned from Ibn Fūrak's *Mujarrad maqālāt al-Ash'arī*. It was published in 1987 by Daniel Gimaret on the basis of a single extant manuscript preserved in Medina (Gimaret 1987), and on the basis of it he was able to write his so far unsurpassed study on the doctrinal thought of the founder of the movement (Gimaret 1990). Moreover, Juwaynī's *Kitāb al-irshād*, a summary of his larger *Kitāb al-shāmil*, gave rise to a number of commentaries by some of his students and later followers, as is evident, e.g., from the partially extant commentary by Abū l-Qāsim Salmān b. Nāṣir al-Nīsābūrī al-Anṣārī (d. 1118), *al-Ghunya fī l-kalām* (MS III Ahmet 1916). Juwaynī's otherwise mostly lost *Kitāb al-shāmil* (eds. Klopfer 1959; Nashshār [et al.] 1969; Frank 1981; 'Umar 1999) was frequently used and often paraphrased by the authors of those commentaries. We also possess a manuscript containing a summary of the text by an anonymous author entitled *al-Kāmil fī ikhtiṣār al-shāmil* (MS III Ahmet 1322). The *Kitāb al-shāmil* is also frequently cited in the theological *summa* by another student of his, Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Kiyā' Harrāsī (d. 1110), which is likewise extant in manuscript (MS Cairo, Dār al-kutub, *'ilm al-kalām* 290). An in-depth search of all catalogued (Arabic) manuscript collections will no doubt bring to light a considerable amount of new material.

Nearly all extant writings of the first generation of Christian *mutakallimūn* writing in Arabic have been edited, and many have been translated (Bacha 1904; Graf 1910; 1951; Hayek 1977; Lamoreaux 2005), and modern scholars, such as Sidney H. Griffith and David Thomas, have studied them in detail. Likewise, all of the few extant anti-Christian writings by Muslim rational theologians have been published in critical editions (di Matteo 1921-22; Finkel 1926; Thomas 2002). By contrast, much work still needs to be done on the vast corpus of Coptic Christian writings, few of which have so far been published in critical editions, let alone studied. It is this corpus that still needs to be made available in critical editions and to be studied in order to locate them within the whirlpool of intellectual history in the medieval world of Islam.

## IV.

What should be the next step in research is a focus on theological rationalism in the medieval world of Islam *beyond and across* denominational borders. A continuous, reciprocal exchange of ideas, texts, and forms of discourse was the norm among the followers of the three monotheistic denominations rather than the exception. This widely accepted historical reality notwithstanding, scholars still usually opt for a one-dimensional approach with a focus (often exclusive) on either Muslim, Jewish or Christian authors and their writings along the established boundaries between three main disciplines of academia and research, viz. Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies and the study of Eastern Christianity. This pattern should be replaced with a multi-dimensional interdisciplinarity that is justified by the historical reality of the periods and regions under investigation. Moreover, in such an endeavor one should also seek to connect between the leading researchers in the field who are not only separated by the established disciplinary boundaries but also by political ones. Closer cooperation should be sought among researchers from the West (including Israel) and the Islamic world so as to create a new quality within research. Intellectual history characteristically disregards any national, religious, cultural and economic borders and intellectual symbiosis was often the norm rather than the exception in medieval and pre-modern time, and this holds particularly true in one of today's hottest conflict areas, the Middle East.

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