CHAPTER 2

Development in the Third/Ninth Century

2.1 Stagnation in Theology and a Lack of Sources: Abū Bakr al-Samarqandī (d. 268/881–2)

In the works described above we may observe a unity of creedal expression that laid the groundwork for a self-sufficient and internally coherent Ḥanafite theology. They evoke numerous themes of theological import and discuss them in detail, with some convictions so deeply ingrained that we encounter them regularly in these texts in the same classical formulations. If one were to ask about the essence of belief, the createdness of actions, or the consequences of sins, one would get the same characteristic Ḥanafite answer, and if later thinkers aimed at further elucidation on these central themes, they would find useful conceptual bases for their own considerations. In this sense, one may speak of the emergence of a distinct theological profile for eastern Ḥanafites as early as the beginning of the third/ninth century, and as such it only required the sustained elaboration of its doctrines for an autonomous and distinct school of kalām to come into existence.

This development, as we know, transpired in an impressive manner. But its first steps were rather unsure and faltering, since for the entire third/ninth century, which we must first account for before proceeding, one cannot say that theological disputation in northeastern Iran progressed to any notable extent. The period naturally had its share of Ḥanafite scholars of prestige and rank devoted to the tradition: the isnāds of the aforementioned works name an entire series of them;¹ and Abū l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī later—in part by citing these same names—would reconstruct a proper school of Samarqand, in which the tradition between Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Māturīdī apparently went uninterrupted.² Among them he names renowned Ḥanafites such as Abū Sulaymān al-Jūzjānī, Abū Bakr al-Jūzjānī, and Abū Naṣr al-ʿIyāḍī, who were al-Māturīdī’s immediate teachers. However, they apparently did not develop the science of kalām very considerably, since we find no theological works written by them. What is more, even the Māturīdites of later centuries barely mention the texts from

¹ In particular the isnād of K. al-ʿĀlim, but also the isnāds of the first Risāla and the Fiqh absaṭ.
this period, referring instead either to earlier texts (from the correspondence with ʿUthmān al-Battī up to the *Fiqh absaṭ*) or those works written after 900 CE.

Thus the theology of Transoxania can hardly have been influenced by any decisive factors from the middle to late third/ninth century, which also means that a certain development was delayed there which elsewhere had taken place rather quickly. This was, after all, the same century during which Iraq experienced enormous developments in *kalām*. Heated theological discussions were commonplace there, and even led—especially in the aftermath of the *miḥna⁴*—into the arena of political dispute. Points of intellectual dispute became more distinct and each group came to know more precisely where its boundaries were to be drawn. By comparison, the theological topics that dominated Baghdad only arose with comparable virulence in Transoxania more than fifty years later; no issues seem to have arisen in the region which necessitated a resolution through theological discourse.

This may not be all that surprising and is similarly true of other remote regions of the Islamic world. However, it instructively illustrates what a difference existed between the sociopolitical center of Baghdad and the periphery. This temporal lag between the two is also an important consideration for our understanding of the respective decisions taken by al-Ashʿarī and al-Māturīdī in the fourth/tenth century. In Iraq, al-Ashʿarī could look back at an entire century of dispute, dealing with systems of thought developed in detail and sharpened into numerous points of contention. Al-Māturīdī, by contrast, found himself in a theological milieu which was still only on the verge of establishing its borders and definitions.

The impression of a relative stagnation of eastern theology does not indicate, however, that the influence of the Ḥanafites had declined at that time. On the contrary, the Ḥanafiya were probably established there without any rivals, with no need to develop and defend their doctrines. All the important *qāḍī* positions of the region were occupied by Ḥanafites.⁵ This dominance in judicial administration brought along with it many discussions on topics of *fiqh* and was likely yet another reason for not being held up with problems of

---

3 This assessment applies only to the narrower area of *kalām*. Other forms of religious expression such as mysticism and Qurʾānic exegesis went separate ways, so that their development in northeastern Iran is characterized by different phases and other regional emphases. For more detail on this, see van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 2, 509ff. and 544ff.

4 On this see Martin Hinds, “Miḥna,” *EI²*, vol. 7, 2–6.