CHAPTER 3

The State of Theology during Al-Māturīdi’s Lifetime

3.1 Abū Muṭīʿ Makḥūl al-Nasafī (d. 318/930) and the Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā ahl al-bidaʿ wa-l-ahwāʾ

Abū Muṭīʿ Makḥūl b. Faḍl al-Nasafī (d. 318/930) was a prolific author and also the progenitor of a scholarly family of intellectual distinction. His son, Muḥammad b. Makḥūl, did not reach the prominence of his father, but still possessed enough standing among the Ḥanafites to be dignified by his own entry in Ibn Abī l-Wafāʾ’s biographical dictionary. The same was true of Aḥmad al-Makḥūlī, a grandson, as well as Aḥmad’s nephew Abū l-Maʿālī Muʿtamad, who also bore the nisba al-Nasafī al-Makḥūlī. Three generations later, Abū l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī himself emerged from this family, a scholar who could certainly be described as the most brilliant and influential theologian of the early Māturīdiya.

Makḥūl himself, however, despite this key position, hardly left a trace in the biographical literature. We know that he died in the year 318/930, and we also find the name of one of his teachers, who is otherwise unknown. The pertinent sources tell us no more, and do not do justice to the prominence that he is supposed to have enjoyed in the religious development of northeastern Iran.

Makḥūl was certainly influential, as may be demonstrated by a look at the works that have been transmitted under his name. Two of them are extant in

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2 Ibid., vol. 1, 121, no. 239. He died in 379/989 in Bukhārā.
3 Ibid., vol. 2, 177, no. 543.
4 The genealogy of the family is compiled by van Ess in Ungeachtete Texte, 56f.
5 Ḥājjī Khalīfa, 1430 (see title K. al-Shuʿāʾ) and 1571 (see title K. al-Luʿūṭyā: has a typo here); cf. Flügel, 295.
7 Ibn Abī l-Wafāʾ, vol. 2, 180, nos. 552 and 553, is confined to a short description of works. Further documentation (for example, al-Kaḥḥāla, vol. 12, 319, or Sezgin, GAS, vol. 1, 601f.) does not mention or contain additional material. However, we do find from Makḥūl himself in his Radd (Bernand, "Le Kitāb," Annales Islamologiques 16 (1980): 92f. [hereafter referred to as Radd]), that he was active in the city of Balkh. Based on this statement, Bernand (ibid., 41) apparently decided that he was also originally from there.
complete form. Although the third is considered lost, enough information is known about it that we may incorporate it into our image of the author.

It is immediately apparent that these texts differ greatly in subject, being dedicated respectively to different disciplines of religious study. The *K. al-Shuʿāʿ*, for which we do not currently possess a manuscript, belongs to the discipline of Ḥanafite law. In this text, Makḫūl is supposed to have said that one’s prayer is invalid if one raises one’s hands during or while rising from *rukūʿ*. With this statement, he touched on a delicate topic of contention among the legal schools, and spurred on a discussion that would continue on into the eighth/fourteenth century.

In contrast, the *K. al-Luʾluʾīyāt*, still extant in manuscript, has a more paracastic nature. It deals with piety and asceticism, and gives advice on how a pious life ought to be led.

This finally brings us to a work of theology; the third of Makḫūl’s works, and certainly the most well-known of them as well: the *Radd ʿalā ahl al-bidaʿ*. This is an exceedingly valuable source for our subject inquiry, but aside from our own particular interests, the *Radd* is also in and of itself an important heresiographical text, occupying a conspicuous position in the theological literature of Islam.

Chronologically speaking, it ought to be placed immediately beside al-Ashʿarī’s *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn*. Both are supposed to have been composed at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century and describe in detail the theological ideas and trends of Islam at that time. Thus the *Radd* is one of the earliest sources of its type which has remained extant in its entirety.

In regard to content and geographical orientation, however, it presents no competition to the *Maqālāt*, but rather serves as a useful and informative complement. Makḫūl al-Nasafī reports almost nothing about theology in Iraq, but instead describes those teachings that were dominant in his eastern homeland. Developments had run a different course there, as we have previously discussed, and were not as multi-layered and complex as they had long been in Basra and Baghdad. Thus it is also not surprising that the *Radd* is constructed more simply and does not possess the abundance of information and precision of detail that one finds again and again in the *Maqālāt*.

10 *Uṣūl*, 241.10; Ibn Abī l-Wafāʾ, vol. 2, 180.8 (see also vol. 1, 121.-6); Ḥājjī Khalīfa, 1572; Flügel, 295; for the manuscripts see Sezgin, *C...gas*, vol. 1, 602.
12 On the dating of the *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn* in detail, see Allard, 58ff.