Chapter Four

Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī

The third text comes from Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyīb al-Bāqillānī, the first important theologian of the Ashʿarī school whose works have survived in quantity. He lived during the fourth/tenth century, but apart from the date of his death in 403/1013, not much is certain about his life.1

The sources agree that, like al-Ashʿarī before him, al-Bāqillānī was born in Baṣra. On the computation that he must have been at least forty when he was sent on an official embassy to Constantinople in 371/981, M. Allard suggests he was born in about 330/941–942.2 This would be about six years after the death of al-Ashʿarī in 324/935, among whose disciples al-Bāqillānī is regarded as head, and during the latter years of al-Māturīdī who died in 333/944. He was educated by immediate disciples of al-Ashʿarī, and must have shown exceptional promise because he became sufficiently well-known to be summoned to the court of the Buyid amīr ʿAṣūd al-Dawla in Shīrāz to represent the doctrines of Sunnī Islam among Shīʿā and Muʿtazīlīs. He remained with the amīr as tutor to his son, possibly until the court moved from Shīrāz to Baghdad in 364/975.

In Baghdad al-Bāqillānī became a popular lecturer,3 and took part in debates with well-known scholars of the day.4 He was also known as a leading Mālikī jurisprudent, and served as qādī in a provincial town for some years. An indication of his intellectual standing is that when

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3 Ibish, Political Doctrine, pp. 18–19, names 16 of his pupils.

Adud al-Dawla entered into negotiations with the Byzantine Emperor Basil II over border fortresses, he sent al-Baqillānī in an embassy to Constantinople in 371/981.\(^5\)

Y. Ibish lists from early sources fifty-five titles of works written by al-Baqillānī,\(^6\) the great majority on legal and theological matters, and many written against Muslim and other opponents. Among these, the titles of K. al-ibāna ‘an ībtāl madhāhib ahl al-kufr wa-al-dalāla, (The Exposition of the Falsifying of the Doctrine of the People of Unbelief and Error) (I in the list), and Fī al-mu‘jīzāt, (On Miracles) (XXI), give hints that they may have been directed at non-Muslims. Neither of these has survived, and of the six works that have, the most important are the Ijāz al-Qurān, (The Inimitability of the Qur’ān) (XLVII), and the Kitāb al-tamhīd, (The Introduction) (LIII), which is one of the first surviving treatises of Islamic theology.\(^7\)

There can be little doubt that this work was composed by al-Baqillānī himself, since not only does the author refer in it to other works known to be written by him, but all the early Muslims who mention the work attribute it to him.\(^8\) However, its full title is uncertain. It is universally referred to as Al-tamhīd or K. al-tamhīd, while the three MSS in which it is preserved name it as K. al-tamhīd fī al-radd ‘alā al-Mulhida wa-al-Mu‘āṭtîla wa-al-Rāfîda wa-al-Khawārîj wa-al-Mu‘tazîla (Paris arabe 6090); Kitāb fīhi tamhīd al-dalā‘îl wa-talkhīs al-dalā‘îl (Istanbul, Aya Sophia 2201); Kitāb tamhīd al-awā‘îl wa-talkhīs al-dalā‘îl (Istanbul ‘Aṭif Afandî 1223).\(^9\) The editors of the first edition, which is based only on the Paris MS, understandably give it the full title found there,\(^10\) while

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\(^5\) Kraemer, Philosophy, pp. 78f. tells how while the mission failed because the emperor was not interested in the negotiations, al-Baqillānī nevertheless made his mark by not only debating with Christian theologians but also refusing to kiss the floor before the emperor, and when Basil had the entrance door lowered so that al-Baqillānī would at least have to give the appearance of bowing as he came in, entering into the imperial presence backwards. Cf. W.Z. Haddad, ‘A Tenth-Century Speculative Theologian’s refutation of the Basic Doctrines of Christianity: Al-Baqillānī (d. A.D. 1013)’, in Y.Y. Haddad and W.Z. Haddad, Muslim-Christian Encounters, Gainsville, 1995, p. 85, where other details of his life and reputation are included.

\(^6\) Ibish, Political Doctrine, pp. 7–16.

\(^7\) McCarthy in his EI\(^2\) article says that it is ‘the earliest example that we have of a complete manual of theological polemic’, though this was before the publication of al-Māturīdī’s K. al-tawḥīd.


\(^9\) Ibid., p. 28.