

MU‘TAZILISM IN ISLAM AND JUDAISM

- (1) Project Coordinators
- (2) Background
- (3) Political Significance of the Project
- (4) Achievements and publications since the formation of the Mu‘tazilite Manuscripts Project
- (5) Goals and Work Plan of the Project

(1) Project Coordinators:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Sabine Schmidtke (sabineschmidtke@yahoo.de), Freie Universität Berlin, Institut für Islamwissenschaft, Altensteinstr. 40, 14195 Berlin, Germany (until August 2006: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute for Advanced Studies, Edmond Safra Campus, Givat Ram, Jerusalem 91904, Israel)

Dr. David Sklare (sklare@mscc.huji.ac.il), Director of Research, Center for the Study of Judeo-Arabic Culture, Ben Tzvi Institute, P.O. Box 7660, Jerusalem 91076, Israel (until August 2006: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Institute for Advanced Studies, Edmond Safra Campus, Givat Ram, Jerusalem 91904, Israel)

(2) Background:

The Mu‘tazila was a rationalist school of Islamic theology and one of the important streams of Islamic thought. Its beginnings were in the eighth century and its “classic” period of development was from the latter part of the ninth century until the middle of the eleventh. During these four centuries, the theological movement of the Mu‘tazila played a major role in the Islamic intellectual scene. Over time it fell out of favor in Sunni Islam and had largely disappeared by the fourteenth century. It is mainly due to the reception of Mu‘tazili thought by the Imamis and the Zaydis within Shi‘ism, as well as by Rabbanite and particularly Karaite Jews, that we are relatively well informed today about Mu‘tazili doctrines and even have access to a significant quantity of authentic textual materials. The literary activities of the Zaydis and the Karaites were particularly important for the preservation of primary textual materials of the Mu‘tazilis. Not only did they adopt Mu‘tazili doctrines to a large extent in their own respective theological thinking; they also copied significant amounts of original Sunni Muslim Mu‘tazili texts.

Mu‘tazili manuscripts have survived largely in two sources: in Yemenite public and private manuscript collections housing manuscripts of Zaydi provenance, and in the Abraham Firkovitch collection in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg which came mostly from the manuscript storeroom of the Karaite synagogue in Cairo.

In the the early 1950’s a number of manuscripts were discovered in Yemen which contained works of various representatives of the Mu‘tazili school of Abu Hashim al-Jubba’i (d. 933), the Bahshamiyya. These included most of the twenty-volume *Kitab al-Mughni fi abwab al-tawhid wa-l-‘adl* of ‘Abd al-Jabbar al-Hamadani (d. 1025) which was subsequently edited in Egypt between 1960 and 1969. It was also in Yemen that important writings were discovered of Rukn al-Din Mahmud b. al-Malahimi al-Khwarazmi (d. 1141), a follower of the teachings of Abu l-Husayn al-Basri (d. 1044), the founder of the last innovative school within the Mu‘tazila. Ibn al-Malahimi’s *Kitab al-Mu‘tamad fi usul al-din* was published in 1991 and the shorter *Kitab al-Fa‘iq fi usul al-din* is about to be published (both edited by W. Madelung and M.D. McDermott). All these

manuscripts are housed at the Library of the Great Mosque in Sanaa. By contrast, the holdings of the numerous private and smaller public libraries of Yemen remain unexploited until today. Thirteen of the Mu‘tazili manuscripts found in the Firkovitch collection were described in detail in 1935 by Y.A. Borisov (in *Bibliografiya Vostoka* 8-9 (1935), pp. 69-95). On the basis of Borisov’s descriptions of the Firkovitch Mu‘tazili manuscripts comparing them with fragments from the British Library, Haggai Ben-Shammai was able to draw further conclusions regarding the identity of some of the Mu‘tazili materials preserved by the Karaites, showing in particular that the Karaites had preserved the original version of ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s *Kitab al-Muhit* which we now possess only in the shortened version by Ibn Mattawayh. (Haggai Ben-Shammai, “A note on some Karaite copies of Mu‘tazilite writings,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37 (1974), pp. 295-304.). Until the early 1990s the Russian materials were basically inaccessible to Western scholars.

Much of the material which has survived has not yet been utilized or published. In 2003, the applicants founded the Mu‘tazilite Manuscripts Project, an international group of fifteen scholars (so far), setting out to collect, record and prepare critical editions of all unpublished material of Mu‘tazili provenance. Initial funding for the project was provided by grants from the Thyssen Foundation (Germany) and the Ben-Tzvi Institute (Israel) for a period of two years (10/2004-10/2006). The Gerda Henkel Foundation (Germany) provided a grant for the organization of an international workshop on the Mu‘tazila held in Istanbul (July 2005) that was hosted by the German Orient-Institut, and a second international workshop, again held in Istanbul (May 2006), was funded by Yad ha-Nadiv. During the current academic year (2005-2006), the Institute for Advanced Studies at The Hebrew University (Jerusalem) is hosting a research group (“Mu‘tazilism in Islam and Judaism”) enabling a number of the members of the Mu‘tazilite Manuscripts Project to work together on Mu‘tazilite texts. In addition to work on the texts themselves, a *Handbook of Mu‘tazilite Works and Manuscripts* is being prepared which has been accepted for publication by Brill, Leiden.

(3) Political Significance of the Project:

Apart from being an interdisciplinary project in which scholars from the fields of Islamic and Jewish studies closely cooperate on an international level, the project has a wider political dimension in two respects. First, it sheds light on an important aspect of Jewish-Muslim intellectual interaction that stretched over a period of some three centuries and occurred in the center of the Islamic world (Baghdad, Basra, Cairo). As such “the story of the Mu‘tazila” is as important, if not more so, as the well-known intellectual symbiosis of the two religions in Islamic Spain. A thorough scholarly investigation of Mu‘tazilism in Islam and Judaism and the publication of its results – not only in the West but also in the Islamic world – can therefore constitute a contribution conducive to a more peaceful future. This is particularly so given the significance “the heritage” has for contemporary Muslims and given the re-evaluation of Mu‘tazili thought in 20th century Sunni Islam (so-called “Neo-Mu‘tazila”).

Moreover, among the fifteen members of the Mu‘tazilite Manuscripts Project are scholars not only from the West (Europe and the US), but also from Israel and the Islamic world (Iran, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia). Against all odds we have been successful so far in collaborating closely, publishing the results of our work in the West, in Israel, in Lebanon, and in Iran; in meeting for two very productive conferences in Istanbul in July 2005 and in May 2006.

(4) Achievements and publications since the formation of the Mu‘tazilite Manuscripts Project:

(i) Catalogues and Handbooks:

Gregor Schwarb: “Un projet international: le manuel des œuvres et manuscrits mu‘tazilites.” *Chronique du manuscrit au Yémen* 2 (Juni 2006) [<http://cy.revues.org/document198.html>]

Handbook of Mu'tazilite Works and Manuscripts. General Editors: Sabine Schmidtke, Gregor Schwarb, David Sklare. Leiden: Brill (Handbuch der Orientalistik) (forthcoming).

Sabine Schmidtke: "Catalogue of the Mu'tazili Manuscripts in the Abraham Firkovitch Collection (Arabski-Arabski), St. Petersburg." *A Common Rationality. Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism*. Eds. Camilla Adang, Sabine Schmidtke & David Sklare. Würzburg: Ergon (forthcoming).

(ii) Editions:

Abu l-Qasim al-Busti: *Kitab al-Babth 'an adillat al-takfir wa l-tafsiq (Investigation of the evidence for charging with kufr and fisq)*. Edited with an Introduction by Wilferd Madelung & Sabine Schmidtke. Tehran: Iran University Press, 1382/2004.

Sabine Schmidtke: "Re-Edition of al-Minhaj fi usul al-din by Jar Allah al-Zamakhshari." [Persian] *Ma'arif* 20 iii (1382/2004), pp. 107-148

Yusuf al-Basir: *Das Buch der Unterscheidung*. Judäo-arabisch – Deutsch. Übersetzt und eingeleitet von Wolfgang von Abel. Freiburg: Herder, 2005.

Abu l-Husayn al-Basri: *Tasaffuh al-adilla*. The extant parts introduced and edited by Wilferd Madelung & Sabine Schmidtke. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006.

An Anonymous Commentary on Kitab al-Tadhkira by Ibn Mattawayh. Facsimile Edition of Mahdavi Codex 514 (6th/12th Century). Introduction and Indices by Sabine Schmidtke. Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy & Institute of Islamic Studies, Free University of Berlin, 2006. (Series on Islamic Philosophy and Theology. Texts and Studies; 1)

Khulasat al-naẓar. An Anonymous Imami-Mu'tazili Treatise (late 6th/12th or early 7th/13th century). Edited with an Introduction by Sabine Schmidtke and Hasan Ansari. Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy & Institute of Islamic Studies, Free University of Berlin, 2006. (Series on Islamic Philosophy and Theology. Texts and Studies; 2)

Omar Hamdan & Sabine Schmidtke: "Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar al-Hamadani (d. 415/1025) on the Promise and Threat. An Edition of a Fragment of his *Kitab al-Mughni fi abwab al-tahid wa l-'adl* preserved in the Firkovitch-Collection, St. Petersburg (II Firk. Arab. 105, ff. 14-92)." *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'Études orientales* 27 (2006) (in press).

Rukn al-Din Ibn al-Malahimi al-Khwarazmi: *Kitab al-Fa'iq fi usul al-din*. Edited with an Introduction by Wilferd Madelung and Martin McDermott. Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy & Institute of Islamic Studies, Free University of Berlin (in press)

Rukn al-Din Ibn al-Malahimi al-Khwarazmi: *Tuhfat al-mutakallimin fi l-radd ala l-falasifa*. Edited with an Introduction by Wilferd Madelung, Hasan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke. Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy & Institute of Islamic Studies, Free University of Berlin (forthcoming)

Rukn al-Din Ibn al-Malahimi al-Khwarazmi: *Kitab al-Mu'tamad fi usul al-din*. Revised and enlarged edition by Wilferd Madelung. Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy & Institute of Islamic Studies, Free University of Berlin (forthcoming)

(iii) Studies:

Sabine Schmidtke: "II Firk. Arab. 111 – A copy of al-Sharif al-Murtada's *Kitab al-Dbakbira* completed in 472/1079-80 in the Firkovitch-Collection, St. Petersburg." [Persian] *Ma'arif* 20 ii (1382/2003), pp. 68-84.

Margaretha T. Heemskerk: „A Mu'tazilite Refutation of Christianity and Judaism. Two Fragments from 'Abd al-Jabbar's *al-Mughni fi abwab al-tahid wa-l-'adl*." In: *The Three Rings. Textual Studies in the Historical Trialogue of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Eds. B. Roggema, M. Poorthuis and P. Valkenberg. Leuven 2005, pp. 183-201.

- Wilferd Madelung: "Abu l-Husayn al-Basri's proof of the existence of God." *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy, from the Many to the One. Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*. Ed. James Montgomery. Leuven 2006, pp. 273-80.
- Wilferd Madelung & Sabine Schmidtke: *Rational Theology in Interfaith Communication. Abu l-Husayn al-Basri's Mu'tazili Theology among the Karaites in the Fatimid Age*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Sabine Schmidtke: "The Karaites' Encounter with the Thought of Abu l-Husayn al-Basri (d. 436/1044). A Survey of the Relevant Materials in the Firkovitch-Collection, St. Petersburg." *Arabica* 53 (2006), pp. 108-42.
- A Common Rationality. Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism*. Eds. Camilla Adang, Sabine Schmidtke & David Sklare. Würzburg: Ergon (Istanbul Texts and Studies) (forthcoming)
- Gregor Schwarb: "Découverte d'un nouveau fragment du Kitab al-mughni fi abwab al-tawhid wa-l-adl du Qadi Abd al-Jabbar al-Hamadani dans une collection karaïte de la British Library." *Mélanges de l'Institut d'Etudes Orientales* 27 (2006) (forthcoming)
- Gregor Schwarb: "Sahl b. al-Fadl al-Tustari's K. al-ima." *Ginzei Qedem* 2 (2006) (forthcoming)
- Thomas Hildebrandt: *Neo-Mu'tazilismus? Intention und Kontext im modernen arabischen Umgang mit dem wiederentdeckten rationalistisch-theologischen Erbe des Islam*. Leiden: Brill (forthcoming)