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Hisham Ibn Al-Hakam some aspects of his personality

Abu Muhammad, Hisham ibn al-Hakam al-Kindi (their client) al-Kufi, then al-Baghdadi (c 105/723–189/805), shaykh of the Imami theologians and their leader, was born in Kufah, and grew up in Wasit – both cities in Iraq – and then returned to Kufah and lived there. He had a business there, and one in Baghdad, and then he moved to Baghdad in the year 179/796, and lived there without interruption. Hisham met the Imams as- Sadiq and al-Kazim, peace be upon them, and outlived al-Kazim, but was unable to meet ar-Rida, peace be upon them.

The scholars of the Imamiyyah said of him: "He was a trust- worthy source of hadith, of excellent scholarship in his school, a faqih, and a theologian . . . well versed in the art of theology, ready to answer. Praises of him are related on the authority of the Imams as-Sadiq, al-Kazim, ar-Rida, and al-Jawad, peace be upon them . . . and they extolled him with abundant commendations."¹ Ibnu 'n-Nadim described him similarly.²

The Shaykh al-Mufid said: "Of his rank and stature, it was reported by Abu 'Abdillah Ja'far ibn Muhammad, peace be upon them, that he came to him in Mina while he was a boy, his beard just beginning to grow. There were Shi'i shaykhs like Humran ibn A'yan, Qays al-Masir, Yunus ibn Ya'qub, Abu Ja'far al-Ahwal [Mu'minu't-Taq], and Hisham ibn Salim in his company, and he elevated him above all of them. All the others were older than him, and when Abu 'Abdillah, peace be upon him, noticed what he had done was unbearable to his followers, he said: 'He assists us with his heart, his tongue, and his hand.' "³

Ibn Shahrashub states the equivalent and adds:

[as-Sadiq], peace be upon him, said: 'Hisham ibn al-Hakam is a pioneer of our truth, the driving force of our doctrine, the bulwark of our sincerity, the defender against the falsehood of our enemies; he who follows him follows us, and he who is opposed to him and deviates from him is our enemy and deviates from us.'⁴

Hisham ibn al-Hakam was a theologian, strong in theology, proficient in argument and debate, quick-witted, with a strong memory, a deep knowledge, extensive education, multi-faceted, highly active and a competitor in debate. He was in contact with all those who developed opinions and were theologians of Muslim and non-Muslim sects; he argued with them, discussed with them, and moreover, befriended them, to the point where he set an example with his friendship and friendliness towards whoever befriended him, even if their views were opposed to his.

This aspect of the character of Hisham is of vital importance in understanding his personality. One of the people he befriended, and for whom his friendship set an example, was 'Abdullah ibn Yazid al-Fazari al-Kufi, the Ibadi theologian. He and his followers were of the Khariji sect, which came closest to the Ahlu's- Sunnah.⁵ The Ibadiyyah were a Khariji sect who took their teachings from them.⁶ He was one of the greatest Khariji theologians and writers; they cite his books as: Kitabu't-Tawhid, Kitab 'ala 'l-Mu'tazilah, and Kitabu 'r-radd 'ala 'r-Rafidah.⁷

'Abdullah ibn Yazid al-Ibadi was one of the best friends of Hisham ibn al-Hakam, and was a business partner with him.⁸ Al-Jahiz makes them out to have been the best of opponents, between whom there was no severity, no harshness, and no enmity . . . and they ended up as companions after associating and sharing company . . . They were improved in their adversity by what came of their cooperation in all their trading.⁹

'Abdullah ibn Yazid al-Ibadi was in Kufah, where his companions debated with him and learned from him. He was a cobbler in partnership with Hisham ibn al-Hakam, who was his senior . . . and his Rafidi companions debated with him and learned from him. Both of them were in the same shop, as we say of opposition in schools of at-Tasharri [the belief of ash-Shurat, i.e. the Khawarij] and ar-Rafd. There never passed between them any abuse or offense, as knowledge, the judgment of reason, the requirements of the religious law, and the rules of debate and procedure require.¹⁰

This special characteristic of Hisham induced most of those who differed with him in belief to associate with him immediately, since those connected with him were not exposed to dangers, nor did they fear any discourtesy or betrayal from him, or any infringement of companionable behaviour or the proprieties of debate. Ibn Qutaybah relates:

A heretic came to Hisham, and said to him: 'I will say two things: I am aware of your impartiality and I am not afraid of your dissention.' Then he began to dispute with him, and Hisham interrupted him quickly, and gave him a satisfactory answer.¹¹

What we have presented about the character of Hisham demands that we reinterpret the relationship of Abu Shakir ad-Daysani – a renowned atheist – with Hisham to one of friendship and companionship between them based on a relationship of controversy, inquiry, and discussion of their differences of opinion and belief. Perhaps Abu Shakir asked him to seek permission for him to visit the Imam as-Sadiq, peace be upon him,¹² and perhaps they quarreled, and the discussion wound up at a point where

Hisham no longer had an answer, as Hisham tells us, when he says that he met with as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, in Madinah, and learnt the answer from him, and then met Abu Shakir in Kufah and told it to him, and the latter said: "This came from the Hijaz." [13](#)

Nevertheless, this high character was transformed by his adversaries into slander and defamation. Al-Khayyat says, in reply to those who accused the Mu'tazilah of taking some of their ideas from ad-Daysani:

Rather, the one accused of the doctrine of the Daysaniyyah is the shaykh of the Rafidah, their scholar, Hisham ibn al-Hakam, a known companion of Abu Shakir ad-Daysani. . [14](#)

His theological personality and intellectual activities

Hisham's connections with theologians and leaders of sects increased after he took over leadership of the Barmakid debating group. After the caliph Harun arrested the Imam Musa ibn Ja'far in the year 179/795, Hisham was forced to emigrate to Baghdad for an indefinite time and to take refuge with Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki (120/738–190/805), the famous 'Abbasid minister, and seek his protection. He eventually became, as the biographers state, 'devoted to Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki, and led his sessions in theology and inquiry.' [15](#)

Yahya ibn Khalid had a majlis in his home, which was attended by theologians from all the religious sects and creeds on Sunday, and they argued with one another about their beliefs, and raised objections against each other. [16](#)

It was natural that this theological debating group, which convened weekly in the presence of the most powerful man in the state after the Caliph, should have been organized and presided over by Hisham. This is the meaning of their statement 'and he led his sessions in theology and inquiry.' It enabled him to come into contact with the majority of those whose normal circumstances would not have permitted them to meet a distinguished theologian like Hisham, who would listen to their views and arguments, let them debate with one another, and then supervise the procedure of inquiry, and evaluate the arguments and give the correct view. al-Mas'udi tells of one such session:

Yahya ibn Khalid ibn Barmak, a man of knowledge and discernment, and upholder of discussion and the giving of opinion, used to bring together many discussants and holders of opinion from the mutakallims of Islam and other thinkers and sectarians. Yahya said to them one day when they had gathered at his house: 'You have had many discussions about latency (kumun), manifestation (zuhur), and eternity and beginning in time (al-qadam wa 'l-huduth), refutation and assertion, motion and rest, conjunction and separation, existence and non-existence, bodies and accidents (jism wa'arad), confirming and refuting, denying and affirming God's attributes, capacity and action, substance, quantity, quality, relation, generation and corruption. [You have discussed] whether the Imamate is by divine delegation (nass) or by election (ikhtiyar), and the rest of the things brought up in kalam in its principles and derived matters. So now start your discussions about love.'

There are similar descriptions of many subjects of discussion, and then Mas'udi mentions the names of those who participated: "Ali ibn al-Haytham who was an Imami among the famous Shi'i mutakallims." He is the first that he mentions, and the second is "Abu Malik al-Hadrami, who was a Kharijite", but this person was an Imami mutakallim.¹⁷ The third person is "Muhammad ibn al-Hudhayl al-'Allaf, who was the leader of the Basran Mu'tazilah", and the fourth is "Hisham ibn al-Hakam al-Kufi, the leader of the Imamiyyah in his time, a master of the science [of kalam] in his age."

The fifth is "Ibrahim ibn Sayyar al-Nazzam, a Mu'tazili who was one of those who held opinions among the Basrans of his age". The sixth is "Ali ibn Mansur, an Imami who was one of those Shi'i who held opinions, and was a companion of Hisham ibn al-Hakam." The seventh is "Mu'tamir ibn Sulayman, a Mu'tazili, one of the leaders whom they followed." The eighth is "Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir, a Mu'tazili, the leader of the Baghdadis, the teacher of those who held opinions and were mutakallims among them, like Ja'far ibn Harb, Ja'far ibn Mubashshir [in Maynard's edition: Muntashshir], and other mutakallims of Baghdad." The ninth is "Thumamah ibn Ashras, a Mu'tazili." The tenth is "as-Sakkal [read: Sakkak], an Imami, and a companion of Hisham ibn al-Hakam." And more are mentioned.¹⁸

I will restrict myself here to pointing out specifically those Mu'tazilis who mentioned that Hisham met with them, and not others.

1. Abu 'Uthman, 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd al-Taymi al-Basri (80/699–144/761), the second of the two pioneers and propagandists of the Mu'tazilah. Hisham met him in the mosque at Basrah, and disputed with him on the subject of the Imamate. The victory in this dispute went to Hisham who 'ripped him apart', as they put it.¹⁹

2. 'Abdu'r-Rahman ibn Kaysan, Abu Bakr al-Asam al-Basri (d. 200/816), a distinguished Mu'tazili, who held a high position among them. But al-Asam was a nasibi Mu'tazili who detested the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him: 'and he rejected his Imamate',²⁰ and in him there was a hatred of 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, and for this reason he is disgraced.²¹

His motives in rejecting 'Ali's Imamate – he meant that 'Ali was not the fourth caliph, not that he was not the imam in the Imami sense of the term²² – and in holding his opinion about who had murdered 'Ali²³ demonstrate his hostile attitude towards him. 'Regarding 'Ali and Mu'awiyah, he maintained beliefs, which placed Mu'awiyah in a better position than 'Ali.'²⁴ al-Qadi 'Abdu'l-Jabbar al-Mu'tazili and Ibnu'l-Murtada az-Zaydi state that 'what our followers detest about him . . . is his aversion to 'Ali, peace be upon him.' From Ibnu'l-Murtada: 'He displayed a great prejudice against the Commander of the Faithful, and, our followers say, he was put to the test in an argument with Hisham ibn al-Hakam, and he exaggerated this and that.'²⁵

To understand his stance concerning the Imamate of the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, one would have to consult what is contained in Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamar (d. 210/825), a distinguished Mu'tazili: Kitabu'r-radd 'ala'l-Asam fi'l-imamah, and al-Asam: Kitabu'r-radd 'ala Hisham fi't-tashbih

and Kitabu 'l-jami' 'ala 'r- Rafidah.[26](#) Regarding someone who is overcome with adversity and stubbornness to the point where what he says about 'Ali, peace be upon him, is not approved of by his co-sectarians, should one suppose that he would stick to truth and fairness in what he says about Hisham and the Rafidah?

3. Muhammad ibn al-Hudhayl al-'Abdi, their client, Abu 'l-Hudhayl al-'Allaf al-Basri (135/753–235/850). Ash-Shahristani said:

Debates between [Hisham] and Abu 'l-Hudhayl took place on theology, some of them concerned anthropomorphism, and some the attachment of God's knowledge.[27](#) Al-Mas'udi recounts one of the discussions, and says at the end of it: "Abu 'l-Hudhayl fell silent, and did not come forth with an answer."[28](#)

But Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani distorted the words of al-Mas'udi – and I would be surprised if it were unintentional – when he said in his biography of Abu 'l-Hudhayl: "al-Mas'udi mentions an argument between him and Hisham ibn al-Hakam, the Rafidi, and that Abu 'l-Hudhayl defeated Hisham in it."[29](#)

4. Ibrahim ibn Sayyar, Abu Ishaq an-Nazzam al-Basri (c 160/776–231/845). His Mu'tazili biographers say: "When an-Nazzam had left for hajj, on his return he set out for Kufah, where he met Hisham ibn al-Hakam and others, and they discussed the fine points of theology."[30](#)

The history of this meeting leaves no doubt that it took place prior to the year 179/796, in which Hisham emigrated from Kufah to Baghdad and took up residence there. An-Nazzam was then not more than twenty, and, if the story is true, no doubt he wanted to discuss questions and controversies along the lines of those, which pass between a teacher and a student.

The young an-Nazzam, when he met Hisham, questioned him on the fine points of theology, and this is proof of an-Nazzam's intelligence and his ability to deduce questions on theological details and his understanding of the complicated answers given by prominent theologians like Hisham and others. Perhaps one of these discussions is what al-Maqdisi relates,[31](#) that is, that it was not a discussion or argument in the precise meaning of these words, but rather that an-Nazzam only put forth questions as any student would, and, moreover, did not raise objections concerning what he heard, except at the level of a student questioning a teacher, and that Hisham answered, without receiving any objections or arguments.

Nevertheless, an argument took place between him and Hisham surrounding the immortality of the People of Paradise (ahlu 'l-jannah) in Paradise, and the everlasting nature of their felicity, since an-Nazzam denied this; and Hisham defeated him in it.[32](#)

However, what I must point out is that Hisham ibn al-Hakam was not a master of philosophical ideas, especially those of the Greeks, which had recently reached the Islamic lands, and which aroused great concern among those on whom authority and power had been conferred, especially the Barmakids and

after them those who continued the 'Abbasid caliphate. The biographers of Hisham relate that Yahya al-Barmaki loved Hisham, sheltered him as his own, and that his care for him knew no bounds, because 'Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki had enjoined Hisham to attack the philosophers . . . ' [33](#) They say that this is one of the reasons which induced al-Barmaki to induce the caliph Harun ar-Rashid to support Hisham.[34](#)

His pupils inherited this trait of Hisham's after him. Indeed, we find in an index of books, which was written by the famous Imami theologian and scholar al-Fadl ibn Shadhan al-Azdi an- Naysaburi (c 195/811–260/873) books which refute the philos- ophers, and al-Fadl traces their authorship back to the point where they reach Hisham ibn al-Hakam.[35](#)

- [1.](#) al-Mufid, al-Fusulu 'l-mukhtarah, vol. 1, p.28; at-Tusi, al-Fihrist, pp.203–4;an-Najashi, pp.304–5; Ibn Shahrashub, Ma'alimu 'l-'ulama', p. 115; al-'Allamah al-Hilli, Khulasatu 'l-aqwal, p. 178; and concerning the authority of all those who wrote biographies of him, see: Mu'jam rijali 'l-hadith, vol. 19, p.331.
- [2.](#) al-Fihrist, pp.203–4.
- [3.](#) al-Fusulu 'l-mukhtarah, vol. 1, p.28; al-Bihar, vol. 10, pp.295–6; see the hadith in al-Kafi, vol.I, pp. 171–3, nos.433/4, and in many other sources of hadith.
- [4.](#) Ma'alimu 'l-'ulama', p. 115; Mu'jam rijali 'l-hadith, vol. 19, p.334.
- [5.](#) Ibn Hazm, al-Fisal, vol.2, p. 112.
- [6.](#) Ibn Hajar, Lisanu 'l-mizan, vol.3, p.378.
- [7.](#) al-Ash'ari, Maqalatu 'l-Islamiyyin, vol. 1, p. 186; Ibnu 'n-Nadim, al-Fihrist, p.233; ash-Shahristani, al-Milal wa 'n-nihal, vol. 1, p. 137; al-Baghdadi, Hadiyyatu 'l-'arifin, vol. 1, p.446.
- [8.](#) Kamalu 'd-din, vol.2, p.363; al-Bihar, vol.48, p. 198.
- [9.](#) al-Jahiz, al-Bayan wa 't-tabyin, vol.I, pp.46–47; ar-Raghib, Muhadaratu 'l- udaba', vol.2, p.7.
- [10.](#) Muruju 'dh-dhahab, Paris offset, vo1.5, pp.443–11.
- [11.](#) Uyunu 'l-akhbar, vol.2, p. 154.
- [12.](#) at-Tawhid, p.290; al-Bihar, vol.3, p.50.
- [13.](#) al-Kafi, vol. 1, pp. 128–9, nos.266/9; at-Tawhid, p. 133.
- [14.](#) al-Intisar wa 'r-radd 'ala lbni 'r-Rawandi al-mulhid, p.37.
- [15.](#) at-Tusi, al-Fihrist, p.204; Ibnu 'n-Nadim, al-Fihrist, pp.223, 224;Majma'u 'r-rijal, vol.6, p.233; Lisanu 'l-mizan, vol.6, p. 194.
- [16.](#) Kamalu 'd-din, vol.2, p.362; al-Bihar, vol.48, p. 179.
- [17.](#) See Usulu 'l-Kafi, "Kitabu 't-Tawhid", Introduction, no. 19.
- [18.](#) Muruju 'dh-dhahab, Livre des prairies d'or, vol.6, pp.368–76, Beirut ed., vol.3, pp.370–2.
- [19.](#) al-Kafi, vol. 1, pp. 169–71, nos.432/3; al-Kishshi, pp.271–3; al-Murtada, al- Amali, vol. 1, pp. 176–7; al-Mas'udi, Muruju 'dh-dhahab, Paris edition, vol.7, pp.234–6; and many other sources.
- [20.](#) ash-Shahristani, vo1.1, p.31.
- [21.](#) Ibnu 'n-Nadim, p.214.
- [22.](#) Maqalatu 'l-Islamiyyin, vol.2, p. 133; ash-Shahristani, vol. 1, pp.31, 72–73.
- [23.](#) Maqalatu 'l-Islamiyyin, vol.2, pp. 130–1.
- [24.](#) al-Baghdadi, Usulu 'd-din, pp.270, 287, 291.
- [25.](#) al-Qadi 'Abdu 'l-Jabbar, Fadlu 'l-i'tizal wa tabaqati 'l-Mu'tazilah, p.267; Ibnu 'l-Murtada, al-Munyah wa 'l-amal, p. 156. The only explanation I can find for these words is that the escalation of enmity between them forced each of them to exaggerate their opinion and forsake his school.
- [26.](#) See, respectively, Ibnu 'n-Nadim, pp. 185 and 214.
- [27.](#) al-Milal wa 'n-nihal, vol. 1, pp.30, 184.
- [28.](#) 90 Muruju 'dh-dhahab, vol.7, pp.232–3.

[29.](#) Lisanu 'l-mizan, vol.5, p.414.

[30.](#) al-Qadi 'Abdu 'l-Jabbar, Fadlu 'l-i'tizal wa dhikru 'l-Mu'tazilah, p.254; Ibnu 'l-Murtada, al-Munyah wa 'l-amal, p.149; Dr. 'Abdu 'r-Rahman Badawi, Madhahibu 'l-Is1amiyyin, vol.1, p.127, but he has misunderstood the words of Ibnu 'l-Murtada which he has quoted.

[31.](#) al-Bad' wa 't-tarikh, vol.2, pp.123-4.

[32.](#) al-Kishshi, pp.274-5; Majma'u 'r-rijal, vol.6, p.228.

[33.](#) al-Kishshi, p.258; Majma'u 'r-rijal, vol.6, p.218; al-Bihar, vol.48, p.189.

[34.](#) 96 Hisham wrote a Kitabu 'r-radd 'ala Aristatalis fi 't-tawhid (Refutation of Aristotle on Unicity); see at-Tusi, al-Fihrist, p.204; an-Najashi, p.305; Ibnu 'n-Nadim, p.224; Ma'alimu 'l-'ulama', p.115; Majma'u 'r-rijal, vol.6, pp.233,234; adh-Dhari'ah, vol.10, p.183.

[35.](#) See the biography of al-Fadl ibn Shadhan in the forward to the English translation of "Kitabu 't-Tawhid" of al-Kafi.

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