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**Al-Ġāḥiẓ and ‘Abd al-Ġabbār on the Necessity of Imamate.
A Note on the Fate of Mu‘tazilite Political Ideas**

Abstract

The article is devoted to some aspects of the political theory of the eminent Arab thinker Al-Ġāḥiẓ (d. 869), especially in the context of his influence on later generations of religious and political thinkers, in this case on Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Ġabbār (d. 1025).

The political ideas of Al-Ġāḥiẓ were analysed from many different angles. In one of her very recent studies Asma Afsaruddin has pointed to the importance of these ideas for later Islamic political thought, and suggested that it might be worthwhile to ask to what extent Al-Ġāḥiẓ’s ideas influenced later generations of religious and political thinkers.¹ Being a Mu‘tazilite Al-Ġāḥiẓ is listed within the group representing the theological current in Muslim political thought, which, to some extent, is true, especially when he discusses one of the major political disputes of early Islam – the first *fitna*, i.e. the strife concerning ‘Uṭmān and ‘Alī. But because of his Mu‘tazilite background it could not be excluded that some of his ideas reveal Hellenistic origin.

Of utmost interest his impact on political thought. And it seems that ‘Abd al-Ġabbār who is one of the late Mu‘tazilites would be the best candidate for such an analysis since his monumental *Kitāb fi al-imāma* has not yet been studied. It might be worthwhile to check whether the ideas present in Al-Ġāḥiẓ’s works found their way to ‘Abd al-Ġabbār. The Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Ġabbār (d. 1025) is an unquestionable authority in the late

¹ Asma Afsaruddin, *Lessons from the Past: Piety, Leadership, and Good Governance in the Risālat al-‘Uthmāniyya* (in: *Al-Jāḥiẓ: A Muslim Humanist for our Time*, ed. By A. Heinemann, J.L. Meloy, T. Khalidi, M. Kropp, Beirut 2009, pp. 175–196) where she discusses the later fate of these ideas and terms used by him.

generation of Mu'tazili thinkers. An encyclopedic mind, a great scholar, author of numerous theological and philosophical works. His political ideas are distinctly Mu'tazili and are a continuation and development of earlier Mu'tazili political thinking. These ideas are preserved in his major work *Al-Muġnī fī abwāb al-'adl wa-at-tawhīd* in a special volume devoted to the imamate – the *Kitāb fī al-imāma*² and partly also in his *Šarḥ al-uṣūl*. In later literature, however, the authority of A l - Ğ ā ḥ i z seems to be forgotten. In this paper, I attempt to show the impact of A l - Ğ ā ḥ i z's political ideas on Qāḍī ' A b d a l - Ğ a b b ā r and particularly his *Kitāb fī al-imāma*, classified as the 20th volume of *Al-Muġnī fī abwāb al-'adl wa-at-tawhīd*.

Although A l - Ğ ā ḥ i z is mentioned in *Al-Imāma* only a couple of times – II, 113 and II, 139 – it seems that his ideas could be traced in the whole work. It is also possible that A l - Ğ ā ḥ i z influenced ' A b d a l - Ğ a b b ā r undirectly first of all through A l - Ğ u b b ā ' ī s: Abū 'Alī – the father and Abū Hāšim – the son who are for ' A b d a l - Ğ a b b ā r unquestionable authorities.³

It was Charles Pellat who gave the first and most complete overview of A l - Ğ ā ḥ i z's political ideas.⁴ His starting point were the main political issues of that time: the succession to the Prophet Muḥammad, the murder of 'Uṯmān and succession after him, the Battle of the Camel and Šifīn and lastly the Abbasid dynasty. The questions asked were manifold. How should the community establish the imam? Who are those to elect him? How should the election be conducted? Could be the ruler be overthrown?⁵

But there are also theoretical questions which, in their turn, arose from the discussion of historical events. These questions pertained to the necessity of the imamate and caliph, what are the qualities of the candidate, ways of establishing the imam, replacing or deposing the imam.

This is not yet a systematical analysis. I envisage here only to pinpoint some of the salient problems which might prove interesting in further analysis.

In the political discourse of the Muslim scholars, one of the essential questions posed was whether political power, that is the imamate, as such was necessary at all. This question was particularly interesting to the Mu'tazilites since it offered an ample ground for discussion and scholastic argumentation of all sorts. Moreover, within this group there were thinkers who openly contested the necessity of political power. The idea that an imam was essentially not necessary can be thus labeled as a Mu'tazilite invention. It was discussed by the A l - A ṣ a m m (816/817), A n - N a z z ā m (835/845), Hišām a l - F u w a ṭ ī (ca. 840), 'Abbād I b n S u l a y m ā n (ca. 870) and the so-called

² Al-Qāḍī ' A b d a l - Ğ a b b ā r *Muġnī fī abwāb al-'adl wa-at-tawhīd. Fi al-imāma*, pt. I-II, ed. by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Qāsim, Al-Qāhira n.d. His edition is here referred to as *Imāma*.

³ On them: 'Alī Fahmī Ḥ u ṣ a y m, *Al-Ġubba' iyyāni. Abū 'Alī wa-Abū Hāšim*, Ṭarābulus 1967.

⁴ Ch. Pellat, *L'Imamat dans la doctrine de Ġāḥiż*, "Studia Islamica" 15, 1961, pp. 23–52.

⁵ J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, Band IV, Berlin 1997, p. 700.

Mu‘tazilite ascetics (*ṣūfiyyat al-mu‘tazila*).⁶ They all contended that the imamate was a human convention which could be dropped if its utility was lost.⁷

The political ideas of Al-Aṣamm were reconstructed by Josef van Ess in his monumental *Theologie und Gesellschaft*.⁸ For Al-Aṣamm an absolute agreement of the community was necessary to establish the imam.⁹ Still, he was rather flexible in his ideas, and even argued that a number of rulers could exist in one time, just to guarantee safety.

From his theory of social consensus Al-Aṣamm drew the conclusion that human society could well do without a ruler, if it renounced any form of aggression and people would treat others with respect.¹⁰ We know that the idea of the necessity of the imamate might have been ascribed to Greek philosophers and it appears Aristotle’s letter to Alexander preserved only in Arabic version: “A number of people thought that a ruler is needed only to conduct wars. And when the wars end the ruler is not needed any more” (وقد ظن كثير من الناس أنه إنما يحتاج إلى المدبر القائم بالسنة في الحرب فإذا انقضت الحرب) (واستفاض الأمن والسكون استغنى عنه).¹¹ From such a statement it of course does not follow that the idea originated in Greece, but it is not impossible.

Similarly to Al-Aṣamm, An-Nazzām was certain that people can do without an imam if they keep the laws of God, which meant for him following the *Qur’ān* and Sunna. He accepted the existence of a ruler, but such a ruler should be the most pious person.¹²

In Al-Ġāhīz’s opinion a ruler is absolutely necessary, since without him greed and avidity would lead people to treat each other tyrannically: ويتظالم الناس فيما بينهم وبالشره والحرص المركب في أخلاقهم، فلذلك احتاجوا إلى الحكام (Al-Ġāhīz uses the Mu‘tazilite terms *tagwīr* and *ta’dīl*). Rulers are therefore needed not only to keep people apart but also to teach them proper ways of life. He points to the affinity between rulers and prophets in this regard and distinguishes three types of rulers: messengers who are prophets and rulers, prophets who are rulers and rulers proper.¹⁴ The views of Al-Aṣamm and his followers do not bother him in the least even though An-Nazzām was his venerated teacher.

⁶ Followers of Biṣr Ibn Mu‘tamir. About them: Van Ess, *Theologie...*, vol. III, pp. 130–133, and V, p. 329. P. Crone calls them all anarchists, cf. P. Crone, *Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists*, “Past & Present”, no. 167 (May, 2000), pp. 3–28.

⁷ P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh 2005, p. 66.

⁸ J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, Berlin 1992, Band II, pp. 408–414.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 408–409.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

¹¹ J. Bielawski, M. Plezia, *Lettre d’Aristote à Alexandre sur la politique envers les cités*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1970, p. 30.

¹² J. van Ess, *op. cit.*, vol. III, Berlin 1992, p. 416.

¹³ Al-Ġāhīz, *Kitmān as-sirr wa-ḥifẓ al-lisān*, in: *Rasā’il*, ed. ‘A.M. Hārūn, vol. I, Al-Qāhira 1964, p. 161.

¹⁴ Al-Ġāhīz, *Maqāla az-zaydiyya wa-ar-rāfiḍa*, in: *Rasā’il*, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 321.

If we take then the writings of ‘Abd al-Ġabbār the points of discussion on political power are in some problems discussed similar to those found in Al-Ġāhiz’s work and different in other. ‘Abd al-Ġabbār agrees that political power is indispensable for humanity. The starting point for the discussion is of course the very idea of political power and its necessity. Here, ‘Abd al-Ġabbār turns to Al-Aṣamm’s position and his idea of consensus (*iġmā’*): if consensus reigned people would not need a ruler. Quoting his beloved teacher Abū ‘Alī al-Ġubbā’ī he states: if people were just, did not treat each other tyrannically and *hudūd* were applied, no imam would be needed (لو أنصف الناس بعضهم بعضا وزال التظالم وما يوجب إقامة) لاستغنى الناس عن الإمام (Imāma I, 48). Unfortunately, this is not the case and people are never ready to agree with each another: والمعلوم من حال الناس خلاف ذلك (Imāma I, 48). Hence the ruler is necessary. In both texts the technical term *taḏālum* – reciprocal tyrannical treatment – is used.

In his argumentation, Al-Ġāhiz never touches upon yet another subject very important in later discussion namely that of the nature of power and whether it is necessitated by reason or by mind. In classical Islamic political literature this was always an important point of discussion. For ‘Abd al-Ġabbār this is not only an important subject, but also an occasion to use all the vast Mu‘tazilite concepts and terminology.

‘Abd al-Ġabbār discusses the problem on the basis of differences in approach to the very problem. He speaks of different attitudes towards the necessity of the existence of imam: some maintained that it is necessary by itself (*aṣlan*), and others maintained that reason (*‘aql*) necessitates it, still other groups pointed out to revelation (*sam’*) (Imāma I, 16). In a lengthy exposition (Imāma I, 17-40), he rejects the idea that political power is necessitated by reason. Here the Mu‘tazilite concept of *taklīf* – preordained divine obligation – plays essential role. If imamate was necessary because of reason it should have some aspect of necessity because that in which there is not an aspect necessitating it from the point of view of reason can be divided only into two types (لو وجبت من جهة العقل، لو جبت أن يكون لها وجه وجوب، لأن ما لا وجه فيه يجب لأجله من جهة العقل، لا يخرج عن قسمين).¹⁵

If not by reason, then it is necessitated by revelation: ما يدل على أن الإمامة تجب من جهة العقل أن الإمام إنما يراد لأمر سمعية كإقامة الحدود وتنفيذ الأحكام وما شاكلها (Imāma I, 39). The argumentation is typical of late Mu‘tazilite scholastic method. A number of detailed arguments are added. The *Qur’ān* speaks of *hudūd* – argues ‘Abd al-Ġabbār – and somebody has to implement them: it is the imam (Imāma I, 41). Such an imam is established by God, his messenger or the people.

The imam however should be characterized by a number of traits by which he differs from the rest of mankind:

¹⁵ In other words if something is not rationally justified it must be ordained by God (*mukallaḥ*).

قد اعتمد شيخانا على ما ورد به الكتاب من إقامة الحدود ... وقد ثبت أن ذلك من واجبات الإمام دون سائر الناس، فلا بد من إمام يقوم به، فإذا لم يمكن كون الإمام إلا بإقامة الله تعالى ورسوله أو بإقامتنا بعد معرفة الصفة، فلا بد من حصوله ببعض هذه الوجوه، فإذا فقد النص، فليس إلا وجوب إقامتنا.

Since the implementation of *hudūd* is the essential reason for establishing an imam, there always must be an imam: if the ruling one is vanquished and it is impossible to rescue him (إذا كان مغلوبا لا يمكن استنقاذه), people should choose another (*Imāma* I, 45).

Qualities of the imam

The first question in the discussion over the legitimacy of power is: who is the best possible – *al-afdāl* – candidate for the office of imam/caliph?

Al-Ġāhiz exposes his evaluation in the following way:

وإن قالوا: فما صفة أفضلهم قلنا: أن يكون أقوى طبائعه عقله ثم يصل قوة عقله بشدة الفحص وكثرة السماع ثم يصل شدة فحصه وكثرة سماعه بحسن العادة فإذا جمع إلى قوة عقله علماً وإلى علمه حزمًا وإلى حزمه عزمًا فذلك لذي لا بعده.

“If we were asked: what is the description of the best? We would reply: The strongest trait of his character should be his intelligence paired with intellectual curiosity and wide erudition and intellectual curiosity and wide erudition should be associated with good habits. Then when intellect is allied to learning, and learning to energy, and energy to decisiveness, there is no need for anything else.”¹⁶

Charles Pellat has already noted that Al-Ġāhiz theoretically at least rejects the *mafḍūl* – a less meritorious candidate.¹⁷

In this matter, ‘Abd al-Ġabbār is very meticulous. He points out to different views: those who do not accept imamate of *al-afdāl*, those who accept *al-mafḍūl*.

His discussion concentrates on the choice of Abū Bakr. And he says: إنما عقد لأبي بكر لأنه وإن لم يكن هو الأفضل عندهم، فهو كالأفضل، وربما عقدوا له وإن رأوا أن غيره أفضل منه لعذر اقتضى العدول إلى المفضل. ولا بد عندهم من هذين الوجهين في العاقدين (Abū Bakr was elected imam – even though he was not the most meritorious for them, but was like the most meritorious. It often happens that an imam is established even if it is clear that somebody else is better when for some reason it is necessary to turn to a less meritorious (*al-mafḍūl*). Surely these two points of view were considered by those who established Abū Bakr.

‘Abd al-Ġabbār uses two terms: similar to the most meritorious (or: almost the best: (*ka-al-afdāl*) and less meritorious (*al-mafḍūl*), clearly accepting that a less meritorious

¹⁶ Ch. Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jāhiz*, p. 65; Al-Ġāhiz, *Al-Ġawābāt fi al-imāma*, in: *Rasā’il*, ed. ‘A.M. Hārūn, vol. I, Al-Qāhira 1964, p. 305.

¹⁷ Ch. Pellat, *L’Imamat dans la doctrine de Ġāhiz*, p. 43.

person might become the imam if the situation requires it. He credits with this opinion Abū ‘Abd Allāh (a1-Baṣrī)¹⁸, who regarded ‘Alī as the best.¹⁹

For A1-Ġāḥiẓ such an attitude is unacceptable. He is all against the rafidites, i.e. extreme Shi‘ites who denied the lawfulness of the first three caliphs. He would rather accept the Zaydis.²⁰ Hence his questioning the precedence of ‘Alī over Abū Bakr.

A1-Ġāḥiẓ’s argument must have been strong, since ‘Abd a1-Ġabbār repeats it quoting A1-Ġāḥiẓ:

وقال شيخنا ابو عثمان الجاحظ في ذلك لا فرق بين من يخبر الراوي بأن إسلامه كان إسلام صغير وبين الخبر بأن سنه في وقت إسلامه ما لم تجر العادة بأن الإسلام يصح معه. قال ومنى قيل: إنه يختص بكمال العقل مع صغر سنه فذلك – إما نقضن عادة كالمعجز – وإما أمر نادر وإن لم يبلغ المعجز وكلا الوجهين كان يجب أن ينقل ويظهر، والذي قدمناه يمنع ذلك، لأنه لو ثبت أنه عليه السلام أنه قال: "علي أول من آمن بي" وجب حمله على الإيمان الصحيح، وكذلك إذا قال لفاطمة: زوجتك أقدمهم إسلاماً" والروايات في ذلك كثيرة. (Imāma II, 139)

Here, ‘Abd a1-Ġabbār repeats the argument of A1-Ġāḥiẓ adding however his own commentary, and showing the incompatibility with other reports in which the Prophet is said to maintain that Fāṭima was the first to embrace Islam.

It has been noted that the most meritorious person has to possess a number of exclusive qualities. A1-Ġāḥiẓ singled a number of them, such as: intelligence (عقله قوة), intellectual curiosity (شدة الفحص), wide erudition (كثرة السماع), good habits (حسن العادة), energy (حزم) and decisiveness (عزم).

‘Abd a1-Ġabbār marshals a number of qualities (*awṣāf*) calling them canonical – *ṣar‘iyya*, since imamate is founded on the law (إثبات الإمامة شرعي). He starts with the ability to perform what has been entrusted to him: متمكن من القيام بما فوض إليه مع السلامة فيما يتصل بالقدرة والتمكين وزوال الأوقات وثبات القلب يدخل في ذلك (Imāma I, 198). Knowledge is as well important though first of all it concerns his duties as a ruler: عالم بكيفية ما فوض إليه ليفعله على ما يجوز، في حكم العالم بذلك.

For A1-Ġāḥiẓ knowledge and learning belong to the essential qualities of an imam. Typically for him, he states that “knowledge gained from books is better: it better reaches people (*ablaḡ*) than entertaining them since meetings strengthen artificiality, improper treatment, avoidance of help and creates excessive zeal” وإعلم أن قراءة الكتب أبلغ في

¹⁸ Abū ‘Abd Allāh a1-Baṣrī as a Basran Mu‘tazilite, whom ‘Abd a1-Ġabbār calls his ṣayḥ. He was the author of *Kitāb at-tafḍīl*, therefore called *Al-Mufaḍḍīl*.

¹⁹ ‘Abd a1-Ġabbār, *Ṣarḥ al-uṣūl*, p. 767, cf. also ‘Alī Fahmī Ḥuṣaym, *Al-Ġubbā‘iyyāni*. Abū ‘Alī wa-Abū Ḥāṣim, Ṭarābulus 1967, p. 290.

²⁰ J. van Ess, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 96.

higher than theirs, he must be Muslim by all means. A l-Ġāḥiẓ does not pay much attention to the piety of the candidate, at least in this theoretical exposition. In which he differs essentially from other Mu'tazilite authors who seem to be influenced by Ḥārīġite movement. In *Al-'Utmāniyya* the question of piety as one of the essential merits of Abū Bakr is widely discussed.²³ On the other hand, 'A b d a l-Ġ a b b ā r juxtaposes piety to *fusq* (moral depravity) and goes as far as to state that by general agreement such a ruler should be deposed: فقد ثبت بإجماع أن الإمام يجب أن يخلع بحدث يجري مجرى الفسق (*Imāma* I, 202).

For 'A b d a l-Ġ a b b ā r piety is he first and essential trait to be considered. A whole chapter of *Al-Imāma* is devoted to discussion of the problem whether a *fāsiq* can become an imam (وأن إمامة لا بد من أن يكون عدلا وأن إمامة) فصل في أن من يصلح للإمامة لا بد من أن يكون عدلا وأن إمامة – *Imāma* I, 201).

The same reasoning is applied to justice: since witnesses and rulers must be just, so the ruler or imam, occupying a higher position, cannot be impious – *fāsiq*. An impious person cannot be trusted in just application of laws. And application of laws – *ḥuqūq*, *ḥudūd* and *aḥkam* – is the essential prerogative of the ruler. Since it requires justice – *inṣāf*, the ruler must be just.

Also disputed was the Quraṣī origin of the imam. It is interesting that A l-Ġāḥiẓ does not stress that the imam should belong to the tribe of Quraysh though if there are two equal candidates a Qurayṣite should be preferred.²⁴ This is a typical attitude of the early Mu'tazilites. One could remind the opposite view of Ḍirār Ibn 'A m r (end of 8th c.), who maintained that in such case a non-Qurayṣite should be elected since it is less dangerous for the integrity of the *umma*. If he is deposed there would be no danger of civil war.²⁵

'A b d a l-Ġ a b b ā r position is in this case unequivocally on the side of the Qurayṣi origin of the imam. He devotes a whole chapter to the question quoting at first the hadith: الأئمة من قريش "imams are from the Qurayṣ" and then the affair of the Saqīfa (portico) of Banū Sā'ida (*Imāma* II, 234ff.). He only agrees with A l-Ġāḥiẓ that in case there are two equal candidates a Qurayṣi should be the imam (*Imāma* I, 235). Curiously, he does only cite the authority of his shaykhs, meaning generally the Mu'tazilites (not only both A l-Ġ u b b ā 'ī s). So he may well refer to A l-Ġāḥiẓ, though a couple of times he does it explicitly. As a scholastic dialectician he proceeds to refute a plethora of arguments against this fundamental, in his view truth, problem. Such as the fact that the traditionists were of the opinion that the literal understanding of this particular hadith does not exclude a non-Qurayshi imam.

²³ Afsaruddin, op. cit., pp. 180–181.

²⁴ Pellat, *L'Imamat...*, p. 43.

²⁵ Van Ess, op. cit., vol. III, p. 55.

Only if there would be no Qurayšī suitable for the imamate, someone from other tribe can become the imam. Elsewhere (*Imāma* I, 240), he concedes, similarly to A1-Ġāḥiẓ, that if there is not a Qurayšī suitable for the office, somebody else may be elected: فإذا عدم فيهم من يصلح لذلك، وقد ثبت بالكتاب وجوب نصب من يقيم إذا عدم فيهم من يصلح لذلك، فلا بد عند ذلك من نصب من يصلح لذلك. It is the history of Sālim, a pious mawlā of Abū Ḥudayfa, who is quoted as an example of a non-Qurayšī who could have become a caliph if he was alive at the time of the caliph ‘Umar’s death (لو كان سالم حيا ما تخالجنى الشكوك) – *Imāma* I, 235–236).²⁶

In this particular question he again resorts to arguments on the difference between revelation and reason: since revelation is unequivocal, there is no discussion and the matter is settled – *faṣl al-maqāl*.

Several times ‘Abd al-Ġabbār refutes in a general way the argument about close relatives, saying that such a kinship (*qarāba*) has nothing to do with imamate (*Imāma* I, 237). A1-Ġāḥiẓ is more flexible admitting that kinship is an argument in favour of a candidate, but again his merits based on religious knowledge are essential.²⁷

How many imams there should be?

For A1-Ġāḥiẓ the number of reigning imams is open. In *Ġawābāt* he says that it is reasonable that there is more than one imam, ‘Abd al-Ġabbār concedes to this idea, and postulates that according to reason there should be no obstacle to have more than one, since there were more prophets than one, there are many qāḍīs. But it is the revelation – *sam’* – which dictates only one (*Imāma* I, 243). A1-Ġāḥiẓ has however reservations and as usual he resorts to reason: when there are many rulers they might be tempted to rivalry and this leads to chaos:

ومتى كانت الدواعي أقوى كانت النفس إلى الفساد أميل والعزم أضعف وموضع الروية أشعل والشيطان فيهم أطمع وكان الخوف عليهم أشد وكانوا بموافقة المفسد أحرى وإليه أقرب.

وإذا كان ذلك كذلك فأصلح الأمور للحكام والقادة إذا كانت النفوس ودواعيها ومجرى أفعالها على ما وصفنا أن ترفع عنهم أسباب التحاسد والتغالب وإن ذلك أدعى إلى صلاح ذات البين وأمن البيضة وحفظ الأطراف.

وإذا كان الله تبارك وتعالى قد كلف الناس النظر لأنفسهم واستيفاء النعمة عليهم وترك الخطار بالهلاكة والتغريب بالأمة وليس عليهم مما يمكنهم أكثر من الحيطة والتباعد من التغريب.

ولا فصل منه فلما كان ذلك كذلك علمنا أنه إذا كان القائم بأمر المسلمين بائن الأمر متفرداً بالغاية من الفضل كانت دواعي الناس إلى مسابقتهم ومجارانته أقل والمباهاة والمنافسة.

²⁶ The story of Sālim, a mawlā of Abū Ḥudayfa is recorded by Aṭ-Ṭabarī (*Tārīḥ*, p. 1204) and classical political literature.

²⁷ Pellat, *L’Imamat...*, p. 43; Afsaruddin, op. cit., p. 177.

“The stronger they motives, the more their souls are prone to confusion; the more their strength falters, the less scope there is for mature reflection; and the more Satan lusts for dominion over them, the graver is the danger that threatens them and the closer are they to fomenters of chaos. This being so, the best thing for rulers and chieftainsmen’s souls, their motives and the nature of human behaviour being as we have said-is for all scope for envy and rivalry, all desire to outshine and gain the ascendancy, to be removed, so that harmony may reign and peace be assured at the heart of the empire and in the outlying provinces. (...) If God so designed the world and its inhabitants, if he made them such that they are better off with a single imam, it is so that the latter may exist when they want him and seek him; for it is only common sense that God cannot compel human beings to set up that which does not exist or to raise up that which they do not know.”²⁸

‘Abd al-Ġabbār seems to be less shrewd in his reasoning although much more explicit in his argumentation bringing a number of arguments in favour of only one ruler. Quoting Abū Hāšim al-Ġubbā’ī that the existence of two imams could bring problems of loyalty to the people, he nevertheless cites arguments of his opponents that this is hardly acceptable (*ba’īd*) since there can be many prophets أيضا (أبو هاشم) واستدل على ذلك بأنه لو جاز كون إمامين في وقت واحد، ما كان يجب طاعة أحدهما على الناس، لجاز أن يخالفه على بعض الوجوه، وهذا بعيد، لأن إثبات إمامين لا يمنع من وجوب طاعتهما على الكل، كما كان بعثة نبيين إلى كل الخلق لا يمنع ذلك. – *Imāma* I, 244. And so on goes his argumentation with different opinions in support of the revelation.

Who is to elect the imam. The electorate: *al-‘āqidūn*

Al-Ġāhiz sticks to his primary division of the society into the elite and the common people. It is the elite who should elect an imam because of their knowledge. The *‘amma* might be led astray and elect an usurper.²⁹

‘Abd al-Ġabbār follows this argument but without opposing *hāṣṣa* and *‘amma*. The electorate should consist of pious people whose advice can be trusted: فأما صفة العقادين فإن يكونوا من أهل الستر والدين ومن يوثق بنصيحته وسعيه في المصالح، وأن يكون عالما لحمل الدين حتى يصح أن يعرف ذلك. Moreover, they should be judicious, knowledgeable and meritorious: كانوا من أهل الرأي والفضل (*Imāma* I, 252).

Ways of establishing an imam

Al-Ġāhiz justifies the right of the community to choose the imam. Since the prophet did not nominate a successor, he deemed it best for the community to choose one

²⁸ Ch. Pellat, *The Life and Works...*, p. 65; Al-Ġāhiz, *Al-Ġawābat fi al-imāma*, op. cit., pp. 303–304.

²⁹ *‘Utmāniyya*, p. 262; Pellat, *The Life and Works...*, p. 80.

to distill from this historical background their theoretical prescription for the choice of the imams.

‘A b d a l - Ğ a b b ā r’s knowledge though sometimes reflecting that of A l - Ğ ā ḥ i ẓ is yet consistent with much later theories and discussion with opponents.