

MU'TAZILA IN WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP: THEIR ORIGIN, ORIGINALITY, AND LEGACY

Ayub

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta
ayub@uin-suka.ac.id

Abstract

Mu'tazila is one of the schools of kalam that appears in Islamic intellectual history. Although considered a heresy, the Mu'tazilite scholars played an important role in the development of various traditional Islamic disciplines. Initially, Western historians considered Mu'tazila rationalism as an anomaly in Islamic history. However, various studies show that they are not only an integral part of the Islamic intellectual tradition, but they have also even influenced Islamic scholars from various Islamic schools of thought in the next generation. This article will focus on the narrative of the Mu'tazila in Western scholarship by focusing on the history of its early emergence and development, the originality of the theological and philosophical ideas they developed, and their intellectual legacy in Islamic intellectual history. This research is library research with content analysis approach. This article shows that despite their adoption of foreign concepts and methods, especially from Greek philosophers, Mu'tazilite thinkers had developed their own original ideas. Furthermore, this paper will also discuss Mu'tazila's influence on scholars who came after them, not only in Islamic theology, but also in other fields of Islamic sciences.

Keyword: Islamic intellectual history, Mu'tazila, Mu'tazilites, Western Scholarship,

Abstrak

Mu'tazilah merupakan salah satu mazhab kalam yang muncul dalam sejarah intelektual Islam. Meski dianggap sesat, para ulama Mu'tazilah memainkan peran penting dalam pengembangan berbagai disiplin ilmu tradisional Islam. Awalnya, sejarawan Barat menganggap rasionalisme Mu'tazilah sebagai sebuah anomali dalam sejarah Islam. Namun, berbagai penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mereka tidak hanya menjadi bagian integral dari tradisi intelektual Islam, tetapi mereka bahkan telah mempengaruhi para ulama Islam dari berbagai mazhab pemikiran Islam pada generasi berikutnya. Artikel ini akan fokus pada narasi Mu'tazilah dalam keilmuan Barat dengan menitikberatkan pada sejarah awal kemunculan dan perkembangannya, orisinalitas ide-ide teologis dan filosofis yang mereka kembangkan, dan warisan intelektual mereka dalam sejarah intelektual Islam. Penelitian ini merupakan library research dengan content analysis approach. Artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun mereka mengadopsi konsep dan metode asing, terutama dari para filosof Yunani, para pemikir Mu'tazilah telah mengembangkan ide-ide orisinal mereka sendiri. Selanjutnya tulisan ini juga akan membahas pengaruh Mu'tazilah terhadap ulama-ulama yang datang setelah mereka, tidak hanya dalam bidang teologi Islam, tetapi juga dalam bidang ilmu-ilmu keislaman lainnya.

Kata kunci: Sejarah intelektual Islam, Mu'tazilah, Mu'tazilah, Ilmu Barat

Introduction

Mu'tazila is one of the earliest schools in the history of Islamic theology. Founded at Basra in the first half of the second/eighth century and reaching the peak of its development between the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, it was one of the most important Islamic intellectual movements. In its later development, Mu'tazila bifurcated into two branches, namely the Baghdad and Basra schools. As intellectuals who were active in cosmopolitan cities of Abbasid caliphate, where the legacy of previous civilizations was rediscovered and studied extensively, it is natural that the Mu'tazilites were influenced by foreign ideas. However, several studies have demonstrated that despite their adoption of foreign concepts and methods, especially from Greek philosophers, Mu'tazilite thinkers had developed their own original ideas. Furthermore, this essay will also discuss Mu'tazila's influence on scholars who came after them, not only in Islamic theology, but also in other fields of Islamic sciences.

Unlike other actors and movements in Islamic intellectual history, the Mu'tazila did not initially receive much scholarly attention from Western researchers. There are two reasons why the study of the Mu'tazila was relatively late. The first factor was related to sources, not many authentic texts by Mu'tazila authors have reached our time. As an intellectual movement that is considered heretical, the texts of the Mu'tazila clerics are not widely copied. More information about their thoughts is obtained from the polemical works of opponents who criticize their teachings than from their own works.¹ This contributes to the second factor, namely the emergence of the assumption from Western researchers that the Mu'tazilites are an anomaly who are not part of the Islamic intellectual tradition. This trend was quite dominant among nineteenth century historians who considered the Mu'tazila as freethinkers in Islamic culture who were more influenced by Greek philosophy than Islam.²

The study of Mu'tazilism began to gain momentum with the discovery of the original texts of Mu'tazila authors. The first text is the *Kitāb al-Intishār* by the Baghdadi Mu'tazilite Abū al-Husayn al-Khayyāt (d. ca. 913), discovered and published in 1925 by the Swedish

¹ Alena Kulinich, "Rethinking Mutazilite Tafsir: From Essence to History," *종교와 문화 (Religion and Culture)* 29 (2015).

² Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Sabine Schmidtke, "Rationalism and Theology in the Medieval Muslim World: A Brief Overview," *Revue de Lhistoire Des Religions* 226, no. 4 (2009): 613–38.

scholar, Henrik Samuel Nyberg. In the 1950s and 1960s various Mu'tzilite texts were discovered in Yemen, among them *Kitāb al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawhīd wa l-'adl*, by Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, *Ta'līq Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, *Kitāb al-Majmū' fī l-Muḥīṭ bi-l-taklīf*, both are recensions of the works of Abd al-Jabbār. In the following period Wilferd Madelung and Martin McDermott's discovery and edition of the *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad Fī uṣūl al-dīn* and the *Kitāb al-Fā'iq fī uṣūl al-dīn* by Rukn al-Dīn Muhammad b. Mahmūd al-Malāhimī (d. 1141). The most important developments in the search for the Mutazila manuscripts began in 2003 in a project the Mu'tazilite Manuscripts Project Group was founded by Sabine Schmidtke and David Sklare. The results of this project include the discovery of texts previously thought to have been lost, such as from *Kitāb Taṣaffuḥ al-adilla* by *Abūl-Husayn al-Basrī*, an anonymous commentary on the *Kitāb al-Tadhkira* by Ibn Mattawayh, *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn fī radd 'alā l-falāsifa* of Ibn al-Malāhimī.³

These discoveries have proved the wrong assumption of historians who consider Mu'tazila only as an anomaly in Islamic intellectual history. On the contrary, it was revealed that the works of the Mu'tazilite scholars had roots in Islamic teachings and had an important influence on the work of scholars outside the Mu'tazilites, even outside of Islam. This article will describe the narrative of the Mu'tazilims in Islamic intellectual history based on the works of modern researchers. This article will specifically review various theses on the origin, originality, and intellectual heritage of the Mu'tazila scholars.

The Origins of Mu'tazilism

Mu'tazila was originally founded by Wasil ibn 'Ata, a student of al-Hasan al-Bashri who withdrew from his master's circle due to their different opinion on the status of grave sinner. In his *al-Milal wa an-Nihal*, al-Sharastani reports that someone asked al-Hasan al-Bashri about the status of grave sinners, whether he was regarded as a believer or an unbeliever. Al-Hasan did not answer it immediately, while he contemplated on it, Wasil ibn Ata burst into discussion with his assertion that a grave sinner was neither believer nor unbeliever and puts them in an intermediate position called *al-manzila bain al-manzilatain* (a station between two stations). He then withdrew from al-Hasan's study circle, followed by several other students to which al-Hasan said "Wasil has withdrawn (*i'tazala*) from us." Al-Hasan's remark is said to be the origin of Mu'tazila's name.

³ Amir-Moezzi and Schmidtke.

The abovementioned story is the widely accepted account among Muslim and even some Western scholars about the origin of Mu'tazila. However, this account has been object of criticism by modern scholars. Montgomery Watt finds this story problematic for several reasons. Firstly, the existence of different variations of the story; in another account reported by Ibn al-Qutayba, it was not Wasil who withdrew from al-Hasan's study circle, but Amr bin Ubaid. Moreover, Ibn al-Nadim reported a completely different story where Amr ibn Ubaid is said to propagate the doctrine of *al-qadar* and withdrew from Qatada's circle. Secondly, in early sources such as the works of Ibn Sa'ad, Ibn Qutayba and Ibn Batta, it is Amr who is mentioned as a Mu'tazilite and Wasil is not mentioned whatsoever. Thirdly, there is no evidence that Wasil or Amr were familiar with Greek conceptions or method of argumentation which were distinctive feature of Mu'tazila theology⁴. Campanini regards this story only as a legend, citing Van Ess, he writes that even if it has an element of fact, the reason behind Wasil's withdrawal from al-Hasan was not the disputation over the status of grave sinners but more because of disagreements about terminology.⁵

Rejecting the traditional account, Western scholars have proposed several theories on the origin of Mu'tazila. In the first edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam, Nyberg (1938) argues that Mu'tazilites were supporters and missionaries of Abbasid movement in their revolution against the Umayyad.⁶ They provided theological justification for Abbasid claims. This theory was rejected by Gimaret in the second edition of the encyclopaedia pointing out the historical fact that Mu'tazila participated in the insurrection of Ibrahim ibn Abdullah against al-Mansur, the second ruler of Abbasid caliphate.⁷ However, Gimaret accepts another theory proposed by Alfonso Nallino that links the origin of Mu'tazila to a political motivation. Nallino traces back the origin of political Mu'tazila to the period of civil war between Ali and Mu'awiyah. According to him, the famous Mu'tazila doctrine, namely the "a position between two positions" refers to a neutral position during the civil war. Watt also links Mu'tazila to the political debate following the civil war, he argues that Mu'tazila was originally a kind of moderate Kharijite. He further explains that Wasil and Amr were actually moderate Kharijites.

⁴ William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1973), 209–11.

⁵ Massimo Campanini, "The Mu 'tazila in Islamic History and Thought," *Religion Compass* 6, no. 1 (2012): 42.

⁶ Hendrik Samuel Nyberg, "Mu'tazila," in *Encyclopedie de l'Islam* (Brill, 1938).

⁷ D Gimaret, "Mu'tazila," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill, 2017), 784.

There was no significant difference between Mu'tazila and Kharijite until the time of Abu al-Hudhail al-Allaf and his contemporaries⁸

Clearly, modern scholars' historical reconstructions that were discussed above tend to link the rise of Mu'tazila with some political motivations. However, Mu'tazila's role as an intellectual movement should not be undermined. In her article, *The Beginnings of the Mu'tazila Reconsidered*, Sarah Stroumsa mentions the weakness of the political understanding of the rise of Mu'tazila. She argues that the theory fails to provide a satisfying explanation for the transition of Mu'tazila from a supposedly politically centred movement to a *kalam* movement. Moreover, early Mu'tazilites did not belong to a unified political platform, they were "a miniature replica of political disagreement in Islam." Stroumsa emphasizes that Wasil and Amr were *mutakallimun* scholars who founded Mu'tazila.⁹

In the next generation after Wasil and Amr, Mu'tazila bifurcated into Baghdad and Basra branches. The prominent thinker of Mu'tazila Basra was Abu al-Hudhail al-Allaf who systematised five cardinal doctrines of Mu'tazila, whereas Baghdad branch was founded by Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir. Later on, Qadi Abd al-Jabbar became a prolific Mu'tazila scholar whose career marked the decline of Mu'tazila.¹⁰ In this argument, the Mu'tazilites are seen as a group of intellectuals who engaged in theological disputations to defend Islamic doctrines against atheist scholars (*mulhid*), missionaries of other religions or even Muslim scholars from different school of thought.

Foreign Influences and Originality in Mu'tazilite Ideas

In their attempt to defend Islamic belief with a more sophisticated and systematic theology, Mu'tazilite intellectuals had adopted foreign concepts and methods. In a brief survey on foreign influence in Islamic theology, Tritton brings out Christian and Greek origins of some theological ideas proposed by Mu'tazilite thinkers such as an-Nazzām, Abū al-Hudhayl, al-Jubbāi and others.¹¹ Majid Fakhry further asserts that theological discussion that requires high degree of sophistication, in which Mu'tazilite thinkers were involved, was rather difficult if not impossible to do without adopting Greek philosophy and logic.¹² In fact, Greek impact on

⁸ W Montgomery Watt, "Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey" (Eidenburgh: Press, 2009), 214.

⁹ Sarah Stroumsa, "The Beginnings of the Mu'tazila Reconsidered," *Islamic Theology in Context-Gestation and Synthesis*, 2020, 293.

¹⁰ Richard C Martin, Mark Woodward, and Dwi S Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Simon and Schuster, 2016), 26–30.

¹¹ Arthur S Tritton, "Foreign Influences on Muslim Theology," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 10, no. 4 (1942): 837–42.

¹² Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (Columbia University Press, 2004), xxi.

philosophical abstraction and methods of argumentation developed by the Mu'tazilites is assumed to be axiomatic by many scholars.¹³

Nonetheless, the influence of foreign ideas especially Greek philosophy on Mu'tazila should not be overstated. Speaking about Muslim theologians in general, Oliver Leaman argues that although the development of interest in Greek philosophy would likely have led Muslim theologians to import new logical instruments or philosophical concepts, yet this did not happen.¹⁴ As for Mu'tazila in particular, Van Ess argues that despite Mu'tazila participation in the Hellenization of Arabo-Islamic thought, early scholars of the school such as an-Nazzām and Abū al-Hudhayl developed their ideas when most Greek texts were not yet available in Arabic or were just being translated, therefore neither Aristotle nor the Neoplatonists exerted any impact on their thought. In an article that carefully examines various un-Islamic influence on Mu'tazila, Hourani concludes that Greek philosophy was not unknown to the early Mu'tazilites, yet their reception to the ancient legacy was not so warm.¹⁵

Indeed, Mu'tazila far from rejecting Greek philosophy completely, they accepted it selectively and utilized it to serve their need. As Hourani says in his article, Mu'tazilites chose whatever doctrines suits their position in Islam, but they "were never overwhelmed by any non-Muslim system, however impressive it might be on an intellectual level" for they had rooted in the *Weltstanchaung* of the Qur'an.¹⁶ Watt appreciates this assimilation of Greek concepts into Islamic system of thought as their main contribution to Islamic theology.¹⁷ Van Ess describes Mu'tazila's relation to Greek philosophers as heirs who displayed originality and unique approach.¹⁸

One good example of Mu'tazila's creative adoption of Greek legacy was the theory of atomism. Discussions on atomism appear to have been started by Dirar ibn Amr, then developed by other Mu'tazilite figures, including Muammar ibn Abbad and Bishr ibn Mu'tamir, but it was Abu al-Hudyal who elaborated it more clearly to solve the problem of

¹³ Mustafa Shah, "Trajectories in the Development of Islamic Theological Thought: The Synthesis of Kalām," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 4 (2007): 438.

¹⁴ Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 9.

¹⁵ George F Hourani, "Islamic and Non-Islamic Origins of Mu'tazilite Ethical Rationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7, no. 1 (1976): 59–87.

¹⁶ Hourani, 87.

¹⁷ Watt, "Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey," 294.

¹⁸ Josef Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 79.

relationship between God and His creations.¹⁹ In the hand of Greek philosophers such as Democritus and Epicurus, atomism was employed to explain nature by the principle of change, a materialist view that was rejected by church fathers. Whereas in the Mu'tazilites' theology, especially Abu al-Hudhayl's system, atomism is used to justify the divine omnipotence, because the process of assemblage and disintegration of atoms is totally under the will of God. Thus, Abu al-Hudhayl changed atomism from a materialist model into an instrument of monotheism²⁰. To Van Ess, Mu'tazila's theory of atomism is "a case in point" to prove the originality of their approach, "they took Greek *spolia* but used them for an edifice that was entirely theirs."²¹

The Intellectual Legacy of The Mu'tazilites

Following the failure of al-Ma'mun's *mihna*, Mu'tazila lost their political support from the Abbasid caliphate and were discredited by Muslim community. This fateful historical event marked the beginning of their decline. By the end of Abbasid period in thirteenth century, Mu'tazila was no longer a major intellectual force in Muslim world.²² Despite the lack of political support, Mu'tazilite scholars continue to produce important and influential works on virtually all topics in traditional Islamic sciences. Nevertheless, Mu'tazila's influence tend to be more apparent in the topics that have intersections with theology or philosophy. In addition to theology or *kalam*, this section will also discuss the doctrine of *i'jaz al-Qur'an* (the inimitability of the Qur'an) and philosophy of Islamic law (*ushul al-fiqh*).

In the field of *kalam*, some important ideas of Mu'tazila were absorbed into the teachings of other theological schools. The main recipient of the Mu'tazila's theology was Zaydi branch of Shi'ism in Yemen. Dominique Sourdel, as cited by Campanini, argues that there is an undoubted link between Shi'ism and Mu'tazila, the latter being one and the same as Zaydi.²³ Madelung points out that the Zaydis scholars accepted all five principles of Mu'tazila, while Shi'ite theologians among the Imamite rejected two of them, namely the unconditional punishment of the sinners and the intermediate position. However, the Imamite scholars, especially the Banu Nawbakht eventually adopted the important doctrine of Mu'tazila, i.e

¹⁹ Mustafa Shah, "Kalām: Rational Expressions of Medieval Theological Thought," *Encyclopedia of Mediterranean Humanism [Encyclopédie de l'humanisme Méditerranéen]*, 2015, 13.

²⁰ Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, 87.

²¹ Josef Van Ess, "Mu 'Tazilah," *Encyclopedia of Religion, Edited by M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan)* 10 (1987): 220–29.

²² Martin, Woodward, and Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*, 41.

²³ Campanini, "The Mu 'tazila in Islamic History and Thought," 43.

fundamentals of religion are to be derived from reason alone. They also accepted Mu'tazila's position on God's attributes and justice, opposed any anthropomorphic conception of God, and championed human freewill.²⁴

Regarding Sunni *kalam*, it is possible to say that Mu'tazila played an important role in the emergence of Ash'arism, the largest theological school that often portrayed as the representative of Sunni *kalam*. It is well known that Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari, the eponym of the school, was a student of al-Jubba'i, a great Mu'tazilite thinker. Moreover, Schacht indicates the existence of "orthodox Mu'tazila" among contemporaries of al-Ash'ari to whom he refers as "our companions" (*ashābunā*) in his *Kitāb al-Luma'*.²⁵ The presence of "orthodox Mu'tazila" among the forerunners of Sunni *mutakallimun*, according to Schacht not only apparent in al-Ash'ari's work but also in al-Maturidi's *Kitāb at-Tauhīd*. Later on, Watt identifies them as al-Kullabiyah, the followers of Ibn Kullab.²⁶ Although al-Ash'ari was not the most prominent scholar among them, this school was eventually absorbed into the Ash'arism.²⁷

Schacht also affirms the Mu'tazila origin of certain methods employed by the late Ash'arites. For instance, *tanzih* (abstraction), which used by Ash'arites in their interpretation of the anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'an, according to him is essentially no more than a variant of the method of interpretation by metaphor used by the Mu'tazila.²⁸ The influence of Mu'tazilite ideas on the systematic theology developed by the Ash'arites may have contributed to its rejection by some traditionalist scholars among the Hanbalites. To them, Ash'arism is no more than a form of Mu'tazilism masquerading as orthodoxy.²⁹ Makdisi emphasizes this rejection and argues that in contrast to the widely accepted narrative, Ash'arism did not managed to gain recognition as a part of Sunni orthodoxy in the middle age. Therefore, the real motive behind as-Subki and Ibn Asakir biographical works was to convince the traditionalists of their time to acknowledge Ash'arism as part of Sunni orthodoxy.³⁰ Richard Frank criticised Makdisi's thesis stating that Ash'arism was in fact accepted by significant number of

²⁴ Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (Variorum Repr., 1985), 16–29.

²⁵ Joseph Schacht, "New Sources for the History of Muhammadan Theology," *Studia Islamica*, no. 1 (1953): 34–36.

²⁶ Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 85.

²⁷ Watt, "Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey," 311.

²⁸ Schacht, "New Sources for the History of Muhammadan Theology," 34.

²⁹ Shah, "Trajectories in the Development of Islamic Theological Thought: The Synthesis of Kalām," 442.

³⁰ George Makdisi, "Ash'arī and the Ash'arites in Islamic Religious History I," *Studia Islamica*, 1962, 60.

traditionalist scholars, especially those who belong to the Maliki and Shafi'i school of law. As for the Hanbalites, they have been traumatized by the *mihnah* and because of that they will reject any system of *kalam*.³¹ Nonetheless, one may argue that the traditionalists, especially Hanbalites scholars, actually noticed some kind of Mu'tazila's influence in Ash'arism, so they decided to reject it altogether. Thus, one may say that to some extent Mu'tazilism does influence Sunni theologians, especially the Ash'arites.

As mentioned earlier, original contributions of Mu'tazila to Islamic thought were not only in theology but also in other field of Islamic sciences, especially in the topics that have intersections with theology. For instance, the discussion on the doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur'an (*I'jāz al-Qur'an*) which is the combination of theology, Qur'anic exegesis, and Arabic rhetoric. Mu'tazilite scholars have engaged in this discussion since its early period. One of the earliest systematic treaties on *i'jaz* is Abu al-Hasan al-Rummani's *al-Nukāt fi I'jāz al-Qur'an* (Rippin et. al, 1988: 143).³² In this treaty, al-Rummani lists seven aspects of Qur'anic inimitability. As a Mu'tazila scholar, he incorporated the theory of *sarfa* in the list. *Sarfa* is the notion that God prevents people from imitating the Qur'an by turning them away from that potentiality and taking away their motivation, competence, and knowledge. *Sarfa* was introduced by Ibrahim an-Nazzam, another great Mu'tazilite.³³ Al-Rummani also developed the theory of *balāghah* to proof the inimitable quality of the Qur'an. Along with works of al-Zamakhsyari and Qadi Abd al-Jabbar, al-Rummani's treaty is still considered as the standard work on *i'jāz*.³⁴

Mu'tazilites thinkers also left influential works on *ushul al-fiqh*. The first systematic work on *ushul al-fiqh* was al-Shafi'i's *al-Risala*, therefore he is considered as the founder of *ushul al-fiqh*. According to Makdisi, al-Shafi'i's chief motivation was to create for traditionalism a science which could be used as an antidote to *kalam*, another already well-established science associated with the rationalist Mu'tazila.³⁵ Notwithstanding this initial purpose, many of the works on *ushul al-fiqh* that are considered as milestones were wrote by

³¹ Richard M Frank, "Elements in the Development of the Teaching of Al-Ash'arī," *Le Muséon* 104, no. 1-2 (1991): 190.

³² Andrew Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Clarendon Press Oxford, 1988), 143.

³³ Sophia Vasalou, "The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qur'an: General Trajectories and Individual Approaches," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2002): 30.

³⁴ M K A Ahmad et al., *Three Treatises on the I'jāz of the Qur'ān: Qur'anic Studies and Literary Criticism*, Great Books of Islamic Civilisation (Garnett Publishing, 2014), xi.

³⁵ George Makdisi, "The Juridical Theology of Shāfi'i: Origins and Significance of Uṣūl Al-Fiqh," *Studia Islamica*, 1984, 5-47.

Mu'tazilite scholars. For instance, one of the earliest comprehensive works on *ushul al-fiqh* after al-Shafi'i was Qadi Abd al-Jabbar's *Kitab al-Umad*, therefore Makdisi considers this to be a deviation from true aspiration of al-Shafi'i. Later on, Abu Husain al-Basri, one of Abd al-Jabbar's students also composed an important work entitled *Kitab al-Mu'tamad fi Ushul al-Fiqh*. This book enjoys warm reception not only among Mu'tazilite but also among Sunni and Zaydi jurists, it is so important that Ibn Khaldun considers it to be one of "the basic works and pillars of this discipline".³⁶ Furthermore, in an analysis on a manuscript of Abu Bakar al-Jasash, Bernard concludes that al-Jasash treaty marked a new stage in the rational explanation of *ushul al-fiqh*; the Mut'azili scholar introduced "a new outlook providing a methodological breakthrough and new basic rules in the evolution of the theory of *qiyas*."³⁷

Conclusion

Mu'tazila is one of the oldest schools of thought in the history of Islamic theology. Despite the political undertones surrounding the rise of the school, it was their intellectual achievements that continued to influence generation after generation of Muslim scholars. They were the defenders of Islam in its early confrontation against unbelievers and other Muslim sects whom they considered as heretics. They armed Islam with a body of sophisticated and systematic theology by creatively adopting some ideas and methods of argument from Greek philosophy. Nevertheless, it must be constantly noted that while accepting those foreign ideas and methods, Mu'tazilite scholars also developed many original theories, for instance their unique conception of the atomism that different from those of Greek philosophers. Notwithstanding their status as pioneer apologists, Mu'tazila is seen as a heretic group by the Sunnis. Consequently, the ideas of Mu'tazilites as the fruits of their creative assimilation of Greek philosophy into Islamic thought, could not be directly incorporated into the main body of Sunnism. Unlike the Sunnis, Shi'ite theologians more ready to accept Mu'tazila's doctrines. However, thanks to the influential works of great Mu'tazilite scholars, the movement's influence is apparent in two important disciplines of traditional Islamic sciences, namely *kalam* or *ushul ad-din* and *ushul al-fiqh* which are sometimes referred to as *ushulayni* (two principles).

³⁶ Hassan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke, "The Mu'tazilī and Zaydī Reception of Abū L-Ḥusayn Al-Baṣrī's Kitāb Al-Mu'tamad Fī Uṣūl Al-Fiqh: A Bibliographical Note," *Islamic Law and Society* 20 (2013): 96.

³⁷ Marie Bernand, "Hanafī Uṣūl Al-Fiqh through a Manuscript of Al-Ḡaṣṣāṣ," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1985, 623.

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