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Al-Ḥasan Al-Baṣrī (21–110H/642–728CE), one of the eminent figures of early Islam, has been a highly controversial personality and a man of contradictions. He is claimed by medieval sources to be both, the founder of mysticism, as well as, an ordinary pious man or even an appreciator of worldly pleasures, a predestinarian and a believer in free will (Qadarite), a pacifist and a revolutionary, and the founder of Mu'tazilites. These contradictions seem to have made modern scholars like Helmut Ritter, Louis Massignon and Josef van Ess to base their studies of al-Ḥasan on selective and partial use of sources and rendering the contradictory accounts into what appear to be sweeping narratives (1–2). Dealing with these two accounts, Suleiman A. Mourad tries in his monograph to show the process transforming al-Ḥasan's image by his disciples and in later scholarship into a legend, and to explain how the motivations and biases of various groups with different theological and political agenda influenced this process. M. also shows how the medieval interpretations of al-Ḥasan inform modern scholarship on his personality. For that purpose, M. reevaluates al-Ḥasan's literary remains such as treatises, letters, and sayings and examines critically the reception of his legacy by medieval scholars.

This process of transformation of al-Ḥasan's image in M.'s work can be summarized thus: 1) Al-Ḥasan was both a charismatic and a poly-dimensional figure of early Islam. 2) His charisma and authority tempted many Islamic movements to claim him as their founding father for legitimation purposes and trace their lineage through him as one of *al-tābi'ūn* (the successors of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad) to the Prophet and his companions. 3) Al-Ḥasan's poly-dimensional character allows various groups find aspects which correspond to their own ideas. 4) These groups and movements glorified and sanctified al-Ḥasan to increase and stabilize his authority, and dismissed his other aspects to attribute to him a large number of apocryphal anecdotes, sermons, and letters. 5) As a result of these efforts, al-Ḥasan's image changed during centuries, historical accounts and myths were mixed, and reports of his teachings and life became confusing and contradictory. 6) This legendary and distorted image of al-Ḥasan dominated both medieval and modern scholarship.

In his study, M. explains this process in three areas: al-Ḥasan's life and career (chapter 1), his piety, asceticism, and mysticism (chapters 2–4), and his theology (chapters 5–6). After introducing the field of transmission of knowledge in early Islam and the process of legitimization and Islamization, chapter 1 investigates the presentation of al-Ḥasan's life in medieval scholarship, and verifies what can be authentically reconstructed and what can be determined to reflect later projections. Chapter 2, which can be regarded as the core of the book, shows the process of constructing al-Ḥasan's image during the medieval period in mystical scholarship, and discusses the motivation behind such construction. Beginning from 2nd/8th century, it demonstrates as to how from the two early images of al-Ḥasan, namely the highly pious and ascetic, as well as, the sociable world-affirming, he was welcomed and emphasized by mystical scholars, so that by late 4th/10th century was transformed by the mystics of Basra to the founder of mysticism, while in the 5th/11th century he had become a mystical master, and later was projected as the cornerstone of Sufism. For instance, when Abū Talib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) composed his renowned book *Qūt al-qulūb* in order to answer severe attacks by rival mystical groups and theological schools, he tried to show that mysticism started in Basra and his townsman al-Ḥasan was its founder (98–99). In chapters 3 and 4 the authenticity of some works on piety, asceticism, and mysticism attributed to al-Ḥasan is examined: his famous *Risālat al-Zuhd* (*Treatise on Asceticism*) is confirmed as the most probable case of pseudepigraphy. In the theological section of the book, chapter 5 explains that though both the proponents of predestination doctrine (the proto-Sunnites and Sunnites) and the advocates of free-will theory (the Qadarites, Mu'tazilites, and Shi'ites) try to present al-Ḥasan as their defender, one can come to a conclusive proof that he belongs to the latter's camp, mainly resulting from attempts of the former to free him from any Qadarite affinity. Finally, the last chapter examines the authenticity of the only surviving theological letter of al-Ḥasan, *Epistle to Caliph 'Abd al-Mālik*, which is generally regarded by modern scholarship as a fundamental document on religious and political thought in the first century of Islam (189), and concludes that this epistle is most likely drafted by a Mu'tazilite theologian in the late 4th/10th century.

Surveying original Arabic and Persian sources, M. uses historical analysis and textual criticism methods to examine the authenticity of historical material, by examining manuscripts and their writers, the time and place of producing texts, cases of anachronism, authorship of texts and cases of transfer of authorship and pseudepigraphy, affiliation and motivation of transmitters and authors, consistency of texts with other texts attributed to the same author, language of texts, the authenticity of texts or claims in various periods, context of texts and events, etc. The organization of the book is clear and M.'s conclusions at the end of every chapter are useful. Mentioning the original Arabic and Persian texts used in appendices and presenting a relatively unknown manuscript of *Epistle to Caliph 'Abd al-Mālik* (Tehran manuscript) are among the noticeable features of this study. M. seems to have succeeded in showing the gradual process of the transformation of al-Ḥasan's image, how the motivations and biases of various groups shaped his image, and how the medieval image of al-Ḥasan has influenced the way modern scholarship thinks of him.

Although M. justifies in many cases his preference of certain historical accounts *vis-à-vis* their adversaries, in some cases, he quotes merely two opposing sayings or anecdotes attributed to al-Ḥasan and mentions the possible motivation of their reporters but leaves the reader confused by two contradictory accounts (e. g. in 43–47). In such a case, the various techniques used in the other parts of the book could have been employed to explain more persuasively. Moreover, some works of al-Ḥasan are not taken into account such as his Qur'an commentaries, because – according to M. – they do not directly fit under either category of piety, asceticism, and mysticism or theology (17). Yet, many of al-Ḥasan's commentaries are directly related to these categories, and even M. has become compelled to use a number of them in his study (214–218). Similarly, the term »mysticism« is used in this book in an ambiguous manner, since it is not clear in which definition of the term »mysticism« is used in this study. Without such a clarification, some expressions like »there is little asceticism and spiritualism, and no mysticism whatsoever« (70) or »the *Risāla* has a clearly mystical language« (140) are extremely equivocal. The same could be said about the terms »asceticism« and »spiritualism«.

M.'s monograph, in any case, is a fine and readable piece of scholarship on studying al-Ḥasan in the English language. It is an unmatched study with respect to its raising doubts about the authenticity of a number of essential sources generally accepted by modern scholarship as al-Ḥasan's works. This could lead not only to rebuild al-Ḥasan's image, but also to the reconstitution of particular aspects of the history of early Islam.