Substance and Things

Dualism and Unity in the Early Islamic Cultural Field

Submitted by Ghazoan Ali to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies

In January 2012

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: ............................................................
**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to sample a number of disparate texts from the early Islamic cultural field to explore the shared grounds or themes that bind them together. The focus of the sampled texts and their analysis is the different relations between God and the real things of this world.

The method that is applied in the selection of the texts of this research relies on Pierre Bourdieu’s approach to the study of cultural production. It assumes a relational and dynamic intellectual field which creates interlinked differences and similarities. This is the reason for sampling texts which are assumed to be reasonably marginal to the main cultural establishment.

The *kalām* of the early stage, exemplified by the texts of the Zaydī al-Qāsim al-Rassī and the eastern Ibādīs, is found to emphasise the radical separation between the creator and the created. The development of this relation, which is explored through an intertextual reading of Qur’ānic exegesis, bridges the fissure, between creator and created, through the process of re-interpreting the terms of creation. The act of creation itself becomes an act of transformation, and the objects of creation become eternal ‘non-existent things’ that acquire the quality of existence. In the philosophical works of Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān, the things of this world are also reduced to transformations within the one substance that encompasses the intelligible and the material world.

The results of this research show that there is a great degree of diffusion of ideas in this early stage of Islamic culture, from an assumed centre to the margins, and vice versa. The general tendencies in the texts considered reflect, on the one hand, a critique of multiplicity of principles, particularly dualism, and an emphasis on God’s unity, through different interpretations of *tawḥīd*. On the other hand, the sought unity itself established God’s radical transcendence from the real world, thus leading to another form of dualism dividing the world and the absolute other. The process of opposition to dualism seems to have eventually produced two forms of affirming and defining unity. Both forms define the existent things in terms of substance (*jawhar*), however, the *kalām* model expresses it in atomistic terms whilst the alchemical model of Jābir expresses it in terms of a hylomorphic model. One of these redefines the meanings of the existent and the non-existent things in term of subsistence, and the other, develops the idea of a single substance with different gradation in being.
Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Sajjad Rizvi for all his support, advice and directions throughout the last few years. I also wish to thank Professor Peter Adamson and Professor Ian Netton for their valuable suggestions and recommendations. I would also like to thank Adam Green, for helping me with the proof reading process, and Estelle Rosenfeld for her great support and help in finalising this work. Thank you also to Mu’assasat Kāshif al-Ghiṭā’ al-‘Āmma for providing me with some manuscripts and to the British Library, SOAS library, UCL library and Warburg library for allowing me to use their materials. Finally, I would like to thank my parents and my brother for their patience and unconditional support.
## Contents

**Introduction** 8

1. **Theoretical and methodological grounds** 10
   1.1 Ringer and sampling 12

2. **Research organisation and structure** 15

### Chapter One:

**Al-Qāsim al-Rassī** 20

1. **Introduction** 21

   1. **Response to a naturalist** 26
      1.1 The Principle of existence 33
      1.2 Theory of latency 37
      1.3 Generation and Corruption 42

   2. **Response to the Christians** 46
      3. **Response to Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ al-zindīq** 56

   4. **Kitāb al-Mustarshid** 68

**Conclusion** 76

### Chapter Two:

**Ibādī Theology** 83

1. **Introduction** 84

   1. **Human knowledge** 88
   2. **The created and the creator** 92
   3. **The foundation of the material world** 97

   3.1 Composition and separation 97
   3.2 Atoms and accidents 100
   3.2.1 The text 102
   3.2.2 Commentary 105

   4. **God’s thingness** 124
   5. **Names and attributes** 130

**Conclusion** 146

### Chapter Three:

**Qurʾānic commentaries: thingness and subsistence** 149
Introduction

I. Creation: The different meanings
   I.1 Transformation: Creation from a thing
   I.2 Life Giving
   I.3 The problem: Thingness of the non-existent

II. Addressing the non-existent

III. Knowledge, potentials and will
   III.1 Al-Ma'lūmāt
   III.2 The Possibles
   III.3 Al-Irāda

IV. Hiddenness
   IV.1 Al-Ṭūsī and the different classes of absence
   IV.2 Al-Qushayrī and the Sufi journey

V. Al-Mithāq
   V.i Al-Qushayrī
   V.ii Al-Sulamī

VI. Al-Thubūt

Conclusion

Chapter Four:

Jābirian Philosophy

Introduction

I. Jābir’s Cosmology
   I.1 The beginnings of a multilayered cosmology
   I.2 The cosmology of k. al-Taṣrīf
      I.2.i The First Circle (First Cause)
      I.2.ii The Second Circle (Intellect)
      I.2.iii The Third Circle (Soul)
      I.2.iv The Fourth Circle (Substance)
      I.2.v The Fifth Circle (world of the natures)
   I.2.vi Other considerations
   I.2.vii Substance in k. al-Taṣrīf

II. The Four Elementary Qualities
   II.1.i Soul/Substance in Maydān al-ʿAql
   II.1.ii Yearning and Balance
   II.2 The natures in k. al-Sabʿīn
   II.3 Substance and accidents in the 44th book (the principles)
   II.4 The Eternal substance and its accidents (attributes)

III. Jābir’s Categories
   III.1 The Categories of k. al-Tajmīr
III.2 Synthesis and Analysis (matter becoming stuff)
III.3 Refutation of dualism

**IV. The Eternal**
IV.1 Radical opposition in *k. al-Qādîm*
IV.2 Similitude
IV.3 Substance intercourse
IV.4 The natural world
IV.5 Desire and the guiding path

**V. From multiplicity to unity (light, fire and heat)**

Conclusion

Synthesis and Conclusion

Appendix:

Theoretical grounds for the sampling method

**I. Approaches in the study of the history of ideas**
I.1 Centrality of ideas
I.2 Formalism and Structuralism
I.3 Foucault's archaeology

**II. Bourdieu and cultural production**

Glossary of Terms & Expressions

Bibliography

Primary texts
Secondary texts