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Executive Agency



Department B: Scientific Department

Project No: 229460

Project Acronym: Rationalism

Project Full Title: Rediscovering Theological Rationalism in the Medieval World of Islam

ERC GRANT

Mid-Term Activity Report

Period covered: from 12/08 to 06/11

Start date of project: 1/12/2008

Principal Investigator name:

Sabine Schmidtke

Host Institution name:

Freie Universität Berlin

Date of preparation:

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(SESAM): 30/7/2011

Duration:

60 months

Grant Mid-Term Activity Report

GENERAL INFORMATION

Project No:	229460
Project acronym:	Rationalism
Project full name:	Rediscovering Theological Rationalism in the Medieval World of Islam
Period number:	
Period covered - start date:	1 December 2008
Period covered - end date:	30 June 2011
Project start date:	1 December 2008
Project duration [months]:	60
Principal Investigator name:	Sabine Schmidtke
Host Institution name:	Freie Universität Berlin
Date of submission:	30 July 2011

SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE THE START OF THE PROJECT (2 pages)

In the work description of the ERC project, the following domains have been envisaged:

I “The European Geniza Project” (20 %, overlapping with II)

II Critical Editions of Mu'tazilite Key Texts (40 %, partly overlapping with I)

III Samaritan Mu'tazilism (15 %)

IV Handbook of Ash'arite Works and Manuscripts (40 %, partly overlapping with V)

V Critical Editions and Facsimile Publications of Ash'arite Works (30 %, partly overlapping with IV)

VI Coptic Theological Literature (10 %)

At the beginning of the period covered by this report, about 60 subprojects were defined within the above-mentioned six domains of the ERC project. Most of these subprojects are being executed by several (2-3) members of the team, some are individual projects. While a number of subprojects have already been completed and published by now or in press, others are either at an advanced stage or in progress.

In all six domains the first major task has been to locate/identify and collect the relevant manuscript materials. The manuscript collections that are most important for the ERC Project are located in St. Petersburg (I, II, III, IV, V), in Yemen (II), in Istanbul (II, IV, V), in Tashkent (IV, V), in the various libraries of Iran (II, IV, V), in Europe, most importantly London, Milan, Paris, Leiden, Munich and Berlin (II, III, IV, V, VI) and in the US (Princeton). Both the principal investigator and the members of her team spent extended periods in most of the named places and countries to inspect the relevant collections (some of which have only rudimentarily been catalogued) and identify the manuscripts relevant for the various subprojects. To the extent possible digital images of the relevant manuscripts have been purchased or photographed (e.g., Şan'ā, Leiden). For the domains of II (Mu'tazilism) and V (Ash'arism) the texts to be edited have been identified and detailed palaeographical and codicological descriptions have been made. Draft editions of all texts singled out for critical edition have by now been produced. For Mu'tazilism (Muslim and Jewish) (= Domains I/II), the following texts have been singled out for critical edition: *Ziyādāt Kitāb al-Uṣūl* of the Zaydī Imām al-Nāṭiq bi-l-ḥaqq (d. 1033) (already published); *Nukat Kitāb al-Mughnī* of 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 1024), being a Karaite recension of the *Kitāb al-Mughnī* (currently in press); *al-Kitāb al-Muḥīṭ* of 'Abd al-Jabbār on the basis of Genizah fragments; *Sharḥ 'Uyūn al-masā'il* of al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī (d. 1101); *Kitāb al-Masā'il fī l-uṣūl* of Abū Rashīd al-Nīsābūrī; Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī's (d. 915-16) *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*; Ḍirār b. 'Amr's (d. ca. 815) *Kitāb al-Taḥrīsh*; an anonymous early Bahshamite theological *summa* (preserved in MS Milano, Ambrosiana, ar. X 96 sup.); *al-Kitāb al-Muḥtawī* and *Kitāb al-Tamyīz* of the Karaite theologian Yūsuf al-Baṣīr; *Ḥaqqā'iq al-ashyā'* of the Zaydī theologian Ibn Sharwīn; all theological writings of the Yemeni Zaydī theologian al-Ḥasan al-Raṣṣāṣ (d. 1188). For Ash'arism (= V), the following works have been singled out for critical edition: *Nihāyat al-uqūl fī dirāyat al-uṣūl* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1206); *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn* of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013); and the *Kitāb al-Shāmīl fī uṣūl al-dīn* of al-Juwaynī (d. 1085). In a number of cases, particularly precious manuscripts have been selected for facsimile publication, as is the case with the unique (partial) copy of Sulaymān al-Khurāshī's commentary on al-Ḥasan al-Raṣṣāṣ' *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* (already published) or with a number of valuable and unique Ash'arite manuscripts. Moreover, while searching for texts relevant to the study of Mu'tazilism and Ash'arism, various new materials have been discovered which have added additional aspects to the ongoing research. These have resulted in several newly defined subprojects. Among the most important are the developments of Mu'tazilism in the post-'Abd al-Jabbār phase within the Zaydī communities both in Iran and in Yemen. For example, a so far completely unknown manuscript containing a supercommentary on Ibn Khallād's *Kitāb al-Uṣūl* has been found in one of the libraries of Shīrāz, composed or copied by a certain Abū Ṭāhir al-Ṣaffār, which sheds new light on the later development of Zaydī Mu'tazilism in Iran. Moreover, many additional documents providing entirely new information on the intellectual and bibliographical history of later Zaydī Mu'tazilism have been discovered which will result in two monographs: one entitled *Mu'tazilism after 'Abd al-Jabbār* and another *Iranian Zaydism during the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries*. As for the development of Mu'tazilism in Yemen since the 7th/13th century, a number of publications on al-Ḥasan al-Raṣṣāṣ have already been completed, and a monograph on 'Abd Allāh b. Zayd al-'Ansī (d. 1268) is currently being prepared. In addition, several particularly precious manuscripts have been found that shed new light on the reception of the thought of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 1085) among the Zaydīs in Yemen. These will result in a number of article-length studies that are currently being prepared. In addition to the rich findings relating to the Zaydī reception of Mu'tazilism, several Twelver Shī'ī theological texts have been found that shed new light on the development of Mu'tazilism in this realm during the 11th and 12th centuries.

During several trips to St. Petersburg, several members of the team have gone through the relevant parts of the Abraham Firkovitch collections in search for Mu'tazilite materials (Domain I). Instead of creating a database that would include information on each single fragment of (Muslim or Jewish) Mu'tazilite texts (as was outlined in the original proposal), it was decided to focus on a number of comprehensive theological texts whose authors can be identified, to collect all extant fragments of these and to prepare them for critical edition. The texts that have been identified and singled out for critical edition are the *Nukat al-Kitāb al-Mughnī* (currently under press), the *Kitāb al-Muḥīṭ* of 'Abd al-Jabbār, a comprehensive theological *summa* by the Būyid vizier al-Şāḥib b. 'Abbād (d. 995), a theological *summa* of 'Abd al-Jabbār's student Qāḍī Labbād, Faḍl al-Tustarī's *al-Risāla al-Muhadhdhabīyya*, Sahl b. Faḍl al-Tustarī's *Kitāb al-Īmā*, and fragments of a commentary by 'Abd al-Jabbār on a work devoted to the subtleties of rational theology (*latīf al-kalām*) by Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 933). All said editions are in an advanced stage and will be completed either by the end of 2011 or during the first half of 2012.

With relation to Samaritan Mu'tazilism (III), a detailed inventory has been prepared of the theological fragments of Samaritan texts that are part of the Firkovitch Collections in St. Petersburg. In addition, an analytical inventory of the microfilm collection of Samaritan texts held in the library of the Institute of Arabic Studies of Freie Universität Berlin has been prepared. Both inventories will be published at a later stage (2012 or 2013) and will serve as major reference works for future Samaritan studies in Arabic. In addition, one subproject focuses on the most significant Samaritan theological text written in Arabic, the *Kitāb al-Ṭubākh* of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ṣūrī (5th/11th century) while another project investigates the relations between Samaritans and Karaites in Syria during the 11th century.

With relation to Ash'arism (IV and V), the libraries of Morocco, Istanbul, Tashkent, St. Petersburg and Iran (as well as most libraries in the West) have been searched for so far undiscovered Ash'arite texts, and significant finds have been made. Among the most important discoveries, mention should be made of two hitherto completely unknown fragments of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī's *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn* in St. Petersburg and in Tashkent (one of the two volumes covered his famous notion of "states" (*aḥwāl*) that was so far known only on the basis of later doxographical works), of a complete copy of Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī's (d. 1118) commentary on Juwaynī's *Kitāb al-Irshād*, and of a so far completely unknown commentary on Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*. Facsimiles of all mentioned manuscripts are currently being prepared, together with a critical edition of all four extant volumes of Bāqillānī's *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn*. In addition to this, all available manuscripts of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Nihāyat al-uqūl fī dirāyat al-uṣūl* have been collected. These are not only used for a critical edition of the work that is currently being prepared, a detailed investigation of these copies has also allowed to revise long-held views about the chronology of the writings of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (the relevant study is currently in press). Another subproject that has been formulated on the basis of recent manuscript discoveries by a member of the ERC team is dedicated to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's student Afḍal al-Dīn al-Khūnajī and, in more general terms, the reception of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's work in Tabrīz.

With respect to Coptic Theological Literature (VI), two major studies are currently being prepared, the first relating to Ibn al-Rāhib's *Kitāb al-Burhān*, containing an edition and analysis of the sections relating to the divine attributes and comparing the text with possible sources from Christian and non-Christian Arabic theological literature, and the second being a comprehensive study relating to the reception of Maimonides (d. 1204) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) in Christian (mostly Coptic) Arabic literature. In addition, the following texts by Rashīd Abū l-Khayr Ibn al-Ṭayyib have been singled out for critical edition: *Tiryāq al-uqūl fī 'ilm al-uṣūl* and *Khulāṣat al-īmān al-masīhī*.

In all above-mentioned fields it has already been possible to overthrow established knowledge and to revise the "state of the art" significantly. The main reason for this is that the project has been able to draw at the same time on all relevant manuscript collections of the world, while earlier scholars as a rule only had partial access to the collections either in the West or in the Islamic world. Moreover, the cataloguing of most relevant collections is still at a rudimentary stage so that the systematic consultation of the various collections on the spot and for an extended period has allowed for the above-mentioned discoveries.

In addition, it has been a particular advantage of the project that it simultaneously addresses Muslim, Jewish, Samaritan and Christian intellectual developments with particular attention to their close interrelatedness. This has allowed for major discoveries (for example in the field of preserved Mu'tazilite materials) that have completely escaped the attention of earlier scholarship.

As for knowledge and technology transfer, all members of the ERC Team have made major efforts to present the results of the project not only at scholarly conferences around the world, but also through invited lectures in places such as Bahrain, Tashkent, Sanaa, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and through publications in a variety of languages both for a strictly academic readership and for a wider public (see, e.g., the Persian blog publications of Hassan Ansari on <http://ansari.kateban.com> with more than thirty new contributions since the start of the project). In addition, the Principal Investigator has established excellent contacts with the press in Germany and beyond, which has resulted in the publication of several press articles about the ongoing research project in Germany, the Arab world and in Iran. Moreover, in November 2010 she was invited to participate in the prestigious Falling Walls Conference in Berlin, where she presented the project's major methodological guidelines and considerations to a larger audience (<http://falling-walls.com/lectures/sabine-schmidtke/>). Due to the success of the ERC project and its hitherto published results, the Principal Investigator was also invited by Oxford University Press to edit the *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology* (to be submitted by the end of 2012). Among other leading international scholars within the field of Islamic theology, all team members of the ERC project have been commissioned to contribute to the *Handbook* which will thus also include all the most recent results of the research project.

Two conferences have so far been organized in the framework of the current ERC project. In June 2009 a conference on "Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism" took place in Jerusalem (hosted by the Institute of Advanced Study of the Hebrew University) and in June 2010 an international conference entitled "Theological Rationalism in Medieval Islam: New Texts and Perspectives" was held in Istanbul, hosted by the German Orient Institute. A proceedings volume for the Istanbul conference is currently being prepared.

PUBLISHABLE BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROJECT (1 page)

The summary should be a stand-alone description of the project and its outcomes. This text should be as concise as possible and suitable for dissemination to non specialist audiences.

The project focusses on theological rationalism in the medieval world of Islam between the 10th and the 13th centuries beyond and across denominational borders. Within this field, all major desiderata have been identified and the following domains have been envisaged: (i) “The European Geniza Project”; (ii) Critical Editions of Mu‘tazilite Key Texts; (iii) Samaritan Mu‘tazilism; (iv) *Handbook of Ash‘arite Works and Manuscripts*; (v) Critical Editions and Facsimile Publications of Ash‘arite Works; (vi) Coptic Theological Literature. About 60 subprojects were defined within the above-mentioned domains. Most of these subprojects are being executed by several members of the team, some are individual projects.

The first major task has been to locate/identify and collect the relevant manuscript materials, specifically in St. Petersburg, in Yemen, in Istanbul, in Tashkent, in the various libraries of Iran, in Europe, most importantly London, Milan, Paris, Leiden, Munich and Berlin and in the US. Both the principal investigator and the members of her team spent extended periods in most of the named places and countries to inspect the relevant collections and identify the manuscripts relevant for the various subprojects. To the extent possible digital images of the relevant manuscripts have been purchased or photographed. For the domains of II (Mu‘tazilism) and V (Ash‘arism) the texts to be edited have been identified and detailed palaeographical and codicological descriptions have been made. Draft editions of all texts singled out for critical edition have by now been produced. In a number of cases, particularly precious manuscripts have been selected for facsimile publication. Moreover, while searching for texts relevant to the study of Mu‘tazilism and Ash‘arism, various new materials have been discovered which have added additional aspects to the ongoing research. These have resulted in several newly defined subprojects. Among the most important are the developments of Mu‘tazilism in the post-‘Abd al-Jabbār phase within the Zaydī communities both in Iran and in Yemen. Moreover, many additional documents providing entirely new information on the intellectual and bibliographical history of later Zaydī Mu‘tazilism have been discovered which will result in several monographs. As for the development of Mu‘tazilism in Yemen since the 7th/13th century, a number of publications on al-Ḥasan al-Raṣṣās have already been completed, and a monograph on ‘Abd Allāh b. Zayd al-‘Ansī (d. 1268) is currently being prepared. During several trips to St. Petersburg, several members of the team have gone through the relevant parts of the Abraham Firkovitch collections in search for Mu‘tazilite materials. A number of texts have been identified and singled out for critical edition, among them a theological *summa* of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s student Qāḍī Labbād. With relation to Samaritan Mu‘tazilism (III), a detailed inventory has been prepared of the theological fragments of Samaritan texts that are part of the Firkovitch Collections in St. Petersburg. In addition, an analytical inventory of the microfilm collection of Samaritan texts held in the library of the Institute of Arabic Studies of Freie Universität Berlin has been prepared. Both inventories will be published at a later stage (2012 or 2013) and will serve as major reference works for future Samaritan studies in Arabic. With relation to Ash‘arism (IV and V), the libraries of Morocco, Istanbul, Tashkent, St. Petersburg and Iran (as well as most libraries in the West) have been searched for so far undiscovered Ash‘arite texts, and significant finds have been made. Among the most important discoveries, mention should be made of two hitherto completely unknown fragments of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī’s *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn* in St. Petersburg and in Tashkent. With respect to Coptic Theological Literature (VI), two major studies are currently being prepared, the first relating to Ibn al-Rāhib’s *Kitāb al-Burhān*, containing an edition and analysis of the sections relating to the divine attributes and comparing the text with possible sources from Christian and non-Christian Arabic theological literature, and the second being a comprehensive study relating to the reception of Maimonides (d. 1204) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) in Christian (mostly Coptic) Arabic literature.

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* Please, notice that this summary will be published

Project No.
Period number: _____
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MAJOR PROBLEMS/DIFFICULTIES (1 page)

Please specify any major problems/difficulties you may have encountered until now or may anticipate in the near future. Please, suggest possible corrective actions

Scientific problems

Technical problems

Support provided by the Host Institution (Start-up facilities, working space, access to labs, equipments, resources, etc)

Others

As this is the first ERC project hosted by Freie Universität Berlin (FUB) it took some time to set up the administrative framework at the beginning of the project. Most of the difficulties that proved particularly time-consuming for the Principal Investigator could eventually be solved thanks to the firm support of the Research Authorities of the FUB for the project and its team. Apart from this, the host institution provided all support necessary for the project, and particularly provided sufficient and perfectly located working space and all other start-up facilities that were necessary. The IT support was less efficient, which is why the most important web-based presentation of the project is currently found on networks like Facebook and academia.edu rather than being readily available on the internet.

Another difficulty is the current volatile political situation in Yemen, which prevents the Principal Investigator and the members of her team from personally inspecting the valuable public and private manuscript collections in Yemen. However, the implications of this are by no means endangering any of the defined subprojects within the domains indicated: over the past two and a half years the team was able to photograph and collect most of the relevant materials from Yemen.

The Principal Investigator and her team had different experiences with the various libraries, some of which are very efficient in providing digital copies of manuscript while others are less so (e.g. Ambrosiana library).

None of the said difficulties was a major one and the work on the ERC project has so far developed as anticipated.

LIST OF KEYWORDS

Christian-Arabic literature, Critical Text Edition, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, Firkovitch Collections, Genizah, Judaeo-Arabic, Kalām, Theological Rationalism; Maimonides, Manuscripts, Mu‘tazila, Ash‘ariyya, Legal Hermeneutics and Methodology (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), Karaites, Zaydiyya, Yemen, Northern Iran