

denomination got its name;<sup>3</sup> recollection of the past had been lost. Modern scholarship has not been able to provide clarity in this matter, either. We must not avoid the problem, but it would seem advisable, as we have done so far, to consider the biographies of the most important protagonists first.

#### 2.2.6.1 Wâsîl b. 'A'tâ

The image of history mentioned above usually assigns two founders to the Mu'tazila: Wâsîl b. 'A'tâ and 'Amr b. 'Ubayd. This, however, is only true to a degree, as it is a secondary combination like "Marx and Engels" or "Goethe and Schiller". The two were contemporaries, but 'Amr b. 'Ubayd had heard the call to the cause later, "converted" by Wâsîl. Thus according to later Mu'tazilite narrative; but in reality, matters were probably rather more complicated.<sup>1</sup> Not only the name of the organisation, but its entire early period is shrouded in mystery. This did not prevent biographers writing about Wâsîl, and sometimes about 'Amr as well, again and again; after all, they were both famous men. But the information available was sparse, and the material was usually simply re-arranged. Above all, tradition started far too late. The doxographers, on the other hand, were noticeably reticent; Ash'arî mentioned Wâsîl only once in his *Maqâlât*, and in the context of a problem that was hardly characteristic of the Mu'tazila.<sup>2</sup> Shahrastânî built him up as a "church father", but his work is most scholarly and exceedingly problematic.<sup>3</sup> Bibliographical tradition relies entirely on Ibn al-Nadîm; it, too, presents cause for concern.<sup>4</sup> Anything else *Fihrist* contains in the way of biographical material is also known to us from other sources.

The earliest information we have about Wâsîl is at the beginning of Jâhîz' *K. al-bayân wal-tabyîn*, but he is described as a *khaṭīb* rather than a *mutakallim*. It is difficult to determine whether he merely adhered to the intention of his book, or whether he really did not see Wâsîl as a Mu'tazilite in the later sense. The material he collected under this aspect was barely expanded later; Mubarrad, our next witness, did not provide anything new in this respect, but included some additional anecdotes (*Kāmil* 921, pu. ff.; also 891, apu. ff.). Ka'bî's *K. al-Maqâlât* was the first instance of

3 See p. 382 below.

1 See p. 292ff. below.

2 As Strothmann observed already (*Der Islam* 19/1931/231).

3 See p. 31f. below.

4 Cf. Catalogue of Works IX.