
‘Aqīl b. Abī Ṭālib

Keywords

‘Aqīl b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 50/670 or 63/683) was the elder full brother of ‘Alī (d. 40/661), ‘Aqīl being twenty years his senior. He fought at Badr (2/624) against Muḥammad but subsequently converted to Islam and allegedly took part in a number of Islamic campaigns. He was an expert on genealogy, on account of which he was summoned by the caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13-23/634-44) to record the members of the Quraysh in the *ḍīwān* and assist in arbitration of disputes concerning matters of genealogy. He later attended the court of the caliph Mu‘āwiya b. Sufyān (r. 41-60/661-80) in Damascus. ‘Aqīl reportedly died in Medina in the year 50/670, at the age of 93, or according to another report, at the beginning of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya’s (r. 60-4/680-3) reign, shortly before the battle of al-Ḥarra (63/683)

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‘Aqīl b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 50/670 or 63/683) was the elder full brother of ‘Alī (d. 40/661). Their mother was Fāṭima bt. Asad of the Banū Hāshim. Ten years before ‘Aqīl was born she had given birth to Ṭālib, Abū Ṭālib’s (d. c.619 C.E.) first son. Ten years after ‘Aqīl was born she gave birth to Ja‘far (d. 8/629), and a further ten years later to ‘Alī. After Abū Ṭālib’s death, his sons Ṭālib and ‘Aqīl are said to have inherited his possessions and wealth. ‘Aqīl had several sons and daughters—his *kunya* (patronymic) being Abū Yazīd—among whom the most prominent was Muslim b. ‘Aqīl. Five, six, or nine of ‘Aqīl’s sons were killed with al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī in Karbalā’ (61/680). ‘Aqīl’s descendents (all of whom trace their lineage through his son Muḥammad) are usually referred to as “al-‘Aqīlī.” They were sometimes included in the category of *ahl al-bayt*, along with the descendents of ‘Aqīl’s brothers Alī and Ja‘far, and his uncle al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. c.32/653).

‘Aqīl is mentioned among the Hāshimīs who, along with Muḥammad, were besieged by the Quraysh in the *shīb* (quarter) of Abū Ṭālib. Later on he was reportedly forced by the Quraysh to take part in the battle of Badr (2/624) against Muḥammad, and was subsequently taken prisoner, and ransomed by his uncle al-‘Abbās, also a prisoner at the time (see commentaries on Q 8:70). He went back to Mecca—allegedly, to attend to the affairs of the Ka‘ba with al-‘Abbās following the death of Abū Lahab shortly after the battle of Badr—and returned to Medina as a Muslim at an uncertain date, either before al-Ḥudaybiyya (6/629), or before the conquest of Mecca (8/630), or after it. It is equally uncertain in which of the Islamic campaigns he took part. It is said that the

Comment [ap2]: Do these various dates reflect different opinions from various sources? If so, please state explicitly. Otherwise, this is redundant and should be changed to “possibly around the time of al-Ḥudaybiyya (6/29) or the campaign of Mecca (8/630).”

Prophet allotted to him a share in the spoils of Khaybar (7/628), and that he participated in the raid of Mu'ta (8/629). Some reports indicate that he also took part in the battle of Hunayn (8/630).

Later on he lived in Basra and then moved on to Kufa, and eventually to Syria. He arrived there after abandoning his brother 'Alī, and joined Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān's (r. 41-60/661-80) court in Damascus. He reportedly declared that while 'Alī was valuable to him for the next world, Mu'āwiya was valuable to him in this world. More specifically, it is related that Mu'āwiya paid his debts for him, which 'Alī was reluctant to do. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to defend 'Alī in the caliph's presence and to criticise the caliph whenever he denounced his brother. The reported debates between 'Aqīl and the caliph revolve around the well-known rivalry between Hāshimīs and Umayyads. Some claim that he joined Mu'āwiya only after 'Alī's death.

In his old age, 'Aqīl lost his sight. He died in Medina during the reign of Mu'āwiya, reportedly in the year 50/670, at the age of 93. According to another report he died at the beginning of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya's (r. 60-4/680-3) reign, shortly before the battle of al-Ḥarra (63/683).

Some traditions of the Prophet were circulated on 'Aqīl's authority, and the Prophet himself is said to have had a twofold love for him, both as close relation and as Abū Ṭālib's most beloved son.

In addition to the *Ayyām al-'Arab* epics ("Days of the Arabs," tales of battles between pre-Islamic Arab tribes) epics, 'Aqīl was also an expert on Qurashī genealogy, on account of which he was summoned by the caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13-23/634-44) to assist in recording the members of the Quraysh in the *dīwān*. He was also approached for assistance in arbitrating disputes concerning matters of genealogy.

'Aqīl was eloquent and sharp, and his expertise in genealogy gave him comprehensive knowledge of the virtues and vices of the Qurashī ancestors, as a result of which he made quite a few enemies. Al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869) reports that 'Aqīl's foes adduced him and 'Alī as an example of two full brothers, one ('Alī) being born clever, and another ('Aqīl) stupid. Sources contain several anecdotes featuring his wife (Fāṭima bt. 'Utba), as well as Mu'āwiya, which demonstrate 'Aqīl's sharp tongue. There are also some records of the letters exchanged between him and 'Alī.

Although al-'Abbās paid 'Aqīl's ransom in Badr, it seems that 'Aqīl was once a very prosperous man once who had bought numerous estates in Mecca before he became a Muslim. It is reported that he bought all the houses of the Hāshimīs who had migrated to Medina as Muslims, including Muḥammad's house. He subsequently sold the latter to the caliph Mu'āwiya, who turned it into a mosque (see al-Azraqī). He also dug a well in Mecca. 'Aqīl also had a property in Medina which he sold to the caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (r. 23-55/644-56). He had another large estate in Medina known as Dār 'Aqīl, which was adjacent to the *dār* of 'Alī, and situated near Medina's cemetery (in al-Baqī'). He once dug a well there and reportedly excavated the tombstone of Umm Ḥabība (d. 46/666), one of Muḥammad's wives. Various prominent Hāshimīs, including Muḥammad's

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daughter Fāṭima, as well as other Muslims, are said to have been buried in the vicinity of Dār ‘Aqīl.

[873 words, ceap]

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