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Although scholars continue to unearth evidence for a vibrant exchange of ideas between Muʿtazilites and Imami theologians from the 9th Century CE onwards, there seems to be some ambivalence about the ease with which representatives of these traditions originally comingled. Madelung, for instance, now takes it as settled that an “original... close affinity” between the early Muʿtazilites and the proponents of the Imams can no longer be asserted, despite having devoted much influential research to demonstrations of the cross-fertilization of theological positions between them.¹

My analysis will centre on a more methodological concern: What are we studying when we read the Imami disagreements preserved in mainstream kalam? There are sufficient reasons to doubt the general authenticity of these opinions—and even if their authenticity is presumed, they cannot be an accurate record of scholastic disputes in some formal setting. An account of Shiʿite theology must perforce begin with more than testimony, least of all, testimony in a hostile source. At least when it comes to the presentation of a theological system, it ought to begin with a systematic text by an acknowledged “author.” A doxographer perforce brings his own preoccupations, imposes his own structure to a highly selective body of data. Yet insofar as kalam is in constant dialogue with itself and adjacent disciplines, a reading of doxographical material can prove enlightening. In the text I will examine closely, al-Ashʿari’s *Maqalat*, “Rafīḍi disagreements” are presented in a deliberate arrangement which adheres to current (late 9th Century) theoretical taxonomies, thus providing a snapshot of a developing scholasticism. If the source cannot be trusted to provide a sympathetic account

¹ For his latest analysis, see Introduction, *Study of Shiʿi Islam*, London 2014.

of Imami theology, he has nevertheless, however inadvertently, shown that the technical apparatus required for the appropriation of an Imami kalam is already functioning in high gear.