SOME ASPECTS OF THE QADAR–CONTROVERSY IN EARLY ISLAM

GYÖRGY FODOR

It is a well-knovn fact that the Qur'ān as the medium of Revelation constitutes a basic and decisive position in Muslim theological thought and civilization. At the same time it is also manifest, thatthe Holy Book of Islam does not give full and unequivocal answers to important problems in theology. We can perceive this in connection with the predestination – free will controversy, which of course poses a problem in the other religions as well[1]. It is known that the Qur'ān contains some verses that emphasize predestination and conversely there are some others which state the freedom of will in man, and his responsibility for his acts.

This duality in the Qur'ān may be understood by a familiarity with the historical background. It is obvious, that in Mecca, the Prophet would not expand on savage determinism since his aim was to convert – appealing to the responsibility of the individual – those Meccans who were adhering to their positions which was resting upon the very concept of fatalism. The aya-s stressing the idea of *servum arbitrium* with the strongest emphasis, have their origins in Medina, where the solid and strong umma had already come into being and its members had to be governed by apodictic Holy Laws[2]. We have to underline the fact that all this process was not premeditated, however it may well be understood within the scope of history.

The word *qadar* meaning predestination derives from the *qdr* root, which is used most frequently to signify the omnipotence of Allah. Although the Holy Book left the question open, we have to keep in mind that the determinism of the ǧahiliya period had already set the field for the acceptance of the Qur'anic qadar[3].

The early hadīṯs regarded as authentic do not clarify this duality in the Qur'ān. Both the defenders and refutors of predestination quote various

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hadīṯs in supporting their views. We have to note here, that the tendency of tradition itself points to the strengthening and spreading of deterministic doctrine[4]. We can see that the canonical hadīṯs collectors themselves devote separate chapters to the theme of *qadar*, and this proves the importance of the issue[5].

The Umayyad Caliphs played a significant role in the process of the strengthening of deterministic doctrines, for they used the *qadar* to legalize their rule and their – quite often scandalous – life-style. The concept of predestination was also backed by the pietistic folk religion, which was represented by the largest Arab masses (of course all this was reflected in the hadits as well).

The first protest against severe predestination in Islam came from among pious believers[6]. Shortly after, this was followed by theoretical support, and Syria – a former part of the Byzantine Empire – was the province where it came to be formulated. Muslim thought met with systematical Christian theology first in Damascus, while Baghdad was the site for encountering Greek philosophy[7]. With a few exceptions, the great Christian thinkers of Damascus worked under Arab rule: St. Sophronios, St. Andrew of Crete, St. John of Damascus[8]. This was the period when the extremely violent monenergic and monothelete controversy marred the Byzantine faith, and this polemic centered around the very question of creatures' free will in Byzantine dogmatic history. It has been proved also that "contacts between Christians and Muslims were not limited solely to trade and administration; there were also religious and intellectual exchanges. There were literary borrowings (theological and ascetic terms), structural analogues (meditators on hell and paradise, methods for the examination of conscience), fruitful graftings. Muslim mystics used to consult the Christian hermits on religious questions"[9]. The Christian-Muslim intellectual relations were marked in the 8th centrury by the figures of St. John of Damascus and his disciple Theodore Abu Qurra[10]. We knov from their works that came down to us, that both of them discussed the problem of free will[11].

The non-Arab born neo-Muslims, the mawālī were the first to join the early "pietistic" Qadarites. Many of them – Jews, Christians or any adherents of the dualistic religions in Persia – were well trained in the theology of their former religion. Their economic influence was great, but on the other hand they were excluded from political life by the ruling Arab circles. Consequently the qadariya movement received a political color. The demands

of the mawali included justice and equality in government – in which they too would have their part –, and to be treated as equals with the other Muslims in the field of burdens (taxes)[12]. In response to this the Umayyad Caliphs declared, that they have no power to do anything since "our deeds are determined by *qadar*[13]. Consequently, they were those who formed the radical opponent wing to the qadarites, and this movement which emphasized predestination was later comprehensively termed *ğabarīya* by later theologians[14].

By the second part of the 7th century, both the Byzantine and the Muslim Empire were shaken by a number of crises, even thought these had their origins in different circumstances. Just to mention a few from the problems of the Umayyad Caliphate: by the sloving down of the conquests booty became less and less; the Arabian penninsula and the Eastern territories demanded rights for self-government in the form of various revolts; the mawālī strived for more share in the ruling power, the whole economy was calling for a stable establishment, etc.[15].

The Byzantine Empire had been totally exhausted in the Persian wars, and had to face a new disaster: the "Christian Empire" flowing into God's kingdom was decisively shaken by the Arab and Slav attacks, and all the attempts of the Heraclian dynasty proved to be in vain – the overall historical picture remained apocalyptically dark[16]. The prolonged Christological debates reached a new phase: after the establishment of the Chalcedonian dogma (451), the new issue was whether Christ had one or two energies and wills corresponding to the two natures united in Him. The Emperors of the 7th century tried to win the Monophysites who had broken away from Constantinople after the Synod at Chalcedon by their act that they tried to interfer in theological issues: they declared one, the Divine will for Christ. This issue was the theme for discussion all throughout the East.

Beyond the fact, that this controversy influenced the thinkers of the Syria-centered Umayyad Caliphate and that certain problems may occur in the same phase of thinking, we may discover a surprising analogy in the maintaining of power and its theological references in the two opposing Empires. According to the teaching of Orthodox Islam, the right of the ruler may be sanctioned only by the *iğmāᶜ al-'umma*[17]. The famous caliphelecting council of the early times, the sura, which represents the community – including the Muslim army as well –, is a very good example for the mode of exercising power coming from below in Orthodox Islam, and this fact was

emphasized throughout by Orthodox scholars. According to Kremer, the origins of this theory may be found in the tribal society of the ancient Arabs[18].

It is a surprising fact that the Byzantine Empire, which had its institutions based on the Roman Empire, had to face the very same problem as Islam in the concept of exercising power: the ruling power was determined legal again by the "consensus omnium", which was jointly realized by the Senate, the people and the army in the Christian Empire[19]. It is worth noting that the concept of dynasty, namely the legitimacy of a certain family, was realized for a relatively longer period first by the Heraclean dynasty during the 7 th centruy (up till 711). This term is more or less identical with the period of the Umayyad Caliphate[20].

As regards the religious power of the Caliph and the Emperor: the Caliph is the existing leader of the Muslim Community (umma), the is the governor of the Prophet (*halīfat rasūl Allah*), who unites in his hands all religious and political power[21]. The Emperor is similarly acclaimed by the community, and after the coronation ceremony he sits on his throne as one who is chosen by God, who is the plenipotentiary owner of power, who may refer to God at any need, the charismatic ruler, the governor of Christ, the equal of the Apostles (isapostolos), who is the specially loved son of God (theophilés)[22]. He is the one who has the right to summon the oecumenical councils, who has the power to realize their proclaimed decrees. He has the right to de-throne patriarchs and bishops in case of their disobedience.

On the basis of the above said, it seems logical that both the Emperor and the Caliphs begin to interfer more intensively in religious problems, and accordingly they strive to strengthen the air of the sacred around themselves[23].

Beyond the phenotypical resemblences we may discover the regular occurances in two theocratical empires existing in a relatively simultaneous period, which two empires not only meet on a common border, but which mutually amplify each other's problems arising from the principle of power.

Let us examine the direction to which the Muslim society turned in order to find an answer to this problem: it is very difficult to formulate the concrete principles for the earliest period of the qadarite movement. Their views are known only from the *Risāla* of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and from the works of later mu^{c}tazilite theologians, who embraced and developed the qadarite teaching[24].

The *Risāla* of Hasan al-Basrī (+728) is the earliest document to our knowledge dealing with Qur'anic *qadar* systematically and exposing the moral responsibility of man[25]. On this basis, we may think that the qadariya movement made its first appearance in Basra besides Syria.

We may comprehensively characterize Hasan al-Basrī's Qur'ān-exegetic work by the fact, that he delicately subdued those āyā-s, which his opponents cited as evidences for predestination, and at the same time effectively accentuated those which attested the freedom of will[26]. Nevertheless, he did not reject the use of reason in his argumentation and so the muᶜtazilites could deservedly see in him one of their forerunners[27].

It is debatable to what line of the qadarīya Ḥasan al-Baṣrī may be ranked, for he did not join the militant branches, nevertheless he played an active role in society and tried to teach by a pious and sincere way of life piety and observance of Law to those who grouped around him.

As a consequence, the attitude of the defenders of free will was not at all homogeneous. The most militant trend was the Syrian qadarīya, while the qadarite principle of Basra and Medina was more pietistical and more moralistic natured[28].

The largest part of the Syrian qadarites came from among the ranks of those mawālī, whose majority being formerly Christian, and because of the theological debates of the recent past, were very sensitive to the *qadar* proclaimed by the Umayyads. Besides, they did not forget the very favorable decrees ordained in connection with them by Umar II., which were later withdrawn.

The basic problem of course was constituted by the worsening of taxing conditions (with the exception of ᶜUmar II.), and by the fact that the mawālī were excluded from the governing power exercised by the Umayyads, during which all privileges were centered in the hands of the Qurayšite caliphal family.

The qadariya groups debating on the issue of *qadar* found their radical political program in the teaching of Ǧaylān al-Dimašqī, who was executed for his views by Caliph Hišam ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (724–743). Though Ǧaylăn was a qadarite, his views strongly trespassed the concrete religious problem. The muᶜtazilite heresiograph Muḥammad al-Nās (+906) in his *Kitāb al-uṣūl* al-nihal says the following about the teaching of Ǧaylān[29]: according to him, the leader of the community (imām), may be a Qurayšite, but may be of any other origin, and what is more, he may even be a non-Arab *(ʿuǧam)*, since not

the origin is important, but the fact that this person should be a pious, deeply religiouus Muslim, who has a profound knowledge of the Qur'ān and the Sunna, consequently he should be the most excellent candidate for leadership *(afdal al-nās)*, in the eyes of those who have the right to vote. We may also assert that the Syrian adarite- aylāniyya movement had many elements of the later ucubiyya.

It follows logically from the gaylaniya teaching that the leader who does not correspond to these qualities of the ideal leader, may be expelled from power[30].

Yazīd ibn al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik searched for those forces which would unite the wide masses, to attain his aims. The qadarites were at hand ideologically, as for a political program – although he was a Quraysite and Umayyad – he embraced Ǧaylān's radical teachings. Consequently, the qadarīya -ǧaylā-niyya rallied around him, and Yazīd III. ascended the throne with their support. The Arab supporters of Yazīd III. were the Kalbites, who were not only put out of the way, but were also exterminated by Walid II. as well as by many of his predecessors.

The Kalbites killed Walīd II., and Yazīd III. ascended the throne with the support of the qadarites.. But hopes quickly vanished, since the seriously ill Yazīd III. died after a brief six month long reign (744).

Before his death, Yazīd III. had designated this brother, Ibrāhīm as his successor, but the Qaysites, as well as a significant part of the ruling Arabs did not acknowledge this. In 744 Marwān ibn Muhammad (Marwan II) defeated the army of Ibrāhīm at ʿAyn al-Gār.

The qadarites were forced to flee after their being on the high point of their power. The majority went to Basṛa, and here the polemic on *qadar* continues, but only on a religious and moral level.

The qadariyya as a political movement had come to an end, because the igmaᶜ of the community – which kept on existing, even though formally – did not acknowledge the legitimacy of the movement[31]. The political murder performed by the Kalbites repudiated the office of the caliph. The winning of the Qaysites could not be achieved by Yazīd III., and this was prevented also by his untimely death. We have to take into consideration the aforesaid again: it was much more traditional and simpler for the wide masses to embrace predestination, *qadar*.

The debate over qadar did not cease with the downfall of the qadariya in Syria, in fact free-will becomes the offical dogma with the muᶜtazilite

Caliphs. This vogue however, is not due to Christian dogma any more, but primarily to Greek rational philosophy, and to the new muslim sciences (*kalām*, grammar, etc.)[32].

The Byzantine Empire was innvolved by this time in enduring Iconoclastic controversies, which are again in a certain way connected with Arab-Islam antecendents and influences, and these are again related to the problem of exercising of power[33].

NOTES

1. I. Goldziher, *Előadások az iszlámról* (=*Vorlesungen über den Islam)* Budapest, 1912, p. 95.
2. *ibid,* pp. 95–96
3. H. Ringgren, *Studies in Arabian Fatalism.* Uppsala-Wiesbaden, 1955.
4. See the 40 Hadīṯs , the most well-known from the canonical collections: al-Qashani, *Traité sur la Prédestination et le libre arbitre, précédé de quarante hadits* , Paris. 1978. pp. 39–59.
5. See e.g. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḫārī.* Cairo, 1958. vol VIII. pp. 152-154.
6. I. Goldziher, *op.cit.*, pp. 95–96.
7. L. Gardet – Anawati, *Introduction a la théologie musulmane,* Paris, 1948. pr
8. Anawati, "Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism". In: *The Legacy of Islam* (ed. J. Schacht), Oxford 1979. pp. 352–353.
9. *ibid* p. 353.
10. The activity of the latter belongs already to the ᶜAbbāsid age. The fact that the influence of Christian theology is rather strong at times with the mu'tazilites is mainly due to the works of Theodore Abu Qurra.
11. *Patrologia Graeca,* vol. XXV, pp. 94–97.
12. J. Fück, *Arabische Kultur und Islam im Mittelalter.* Weimar, 1981. pp. 182–184.,
13. Ibn Qutayba, *Maᶜarif.* In: I. Goldziher, *op. cit*, p. 225.

14. See: e.g. Sahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa'lnihal.* (Translated by Th. Haarbrücke). Hildesheim 1969. pp. 88–89.
M. Watt points out in his basic work (*Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam,* London 1984.) the compound nature of the name *ğabriya* among others when he discusses that although the ascarites made a much finer and defenable doctrine for *kasb,* according to which the individual "receives" his deeds in such a manner, that while he is responsible for them, he leaves all power in the hand of God. But they could not convince with this the mu'tazilites, and they said that this was nothing else but *ğabr.*
15. C. Cahen, *L'Islam,* Paris 1973. pp. 31–42.
16. For a description of the historical situation see: H.–G. Beck, *Geschichte der orthodoxen Kirche im Byzantinischen Reich,* Göttingen 1974. pp. 57. and G. Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates.*
17. I. Goldziher. *op.cit.,* p. 96.
18. J. Kremer (see in Goldziher, *op.cit.,* p. 409)
19. H.–G. Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend.* München, 1982. p. 52.
20. They could not decisively settle and stabilize the right for legitimacy (up till the fall of 1453), and neither could the caliphate achieve this aim.
21. The excercising of power on a dynastical basis came to be accepted in a manner, that the successor named by the Caliph was acknovledged by an oath of allegiance *(bayᶜa)* on the part of the representatives of the Muslim community.
22. H.–G. Beck, op. cit. p. 78–79. and many others point out Hellenistic origins.
23. In Baghdad the Caliph is already the shadow of Allah on this globe. The basileus(θειος) becomes a god-like figure, whose duty is to imitate God (μιμήσις του θεου)
H.–G.Beck op. cit p. 79.
24. As e.g. ᶜAbd al-Ğabbār from among the mu'tazilite theologians, whose works came down to us.
25. H. Ritter, "Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's Risāla to the Caliph ᶜAbd al-Malik", *Islam.* 21(1933).
26. H. Ritter thoroughly examines the "letter".
27. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī explains, that those persons get into a contradiction who beleive that Allah is demanding good things from the people and at the same time prevents them to realize these.
The rationalistic ethics is brought to a level of perfection in the works of the above mentioned ᶜAbd al-Ğabbār.

28. It would be a mistake to state that all anti-Umayyad powers were qadarite. Gahm ibn Safwān who was persecuted by the Umayyads among others, was a great qadarite opponent, and he proclaimed deterministic teachings.
29. J. van Ess, "Les qadarites et la gailaniyya de Yazīd III". *Studia Islamica* 31(1970). 279.
30. Later Yazīd III. himself interprets these in a similar way. Van Ess, op. cit 278–279.
31. The allied leaders of Yazīd III. pledged their oath of allegiance, but this was neither backed by practice nor by the approval of the wide masses.
32. G. Anawati, *op.cit* 353.
33. According to the results of recent research, we have to see the problem of exercising imperial power in the Iconoclastic controversy.