

Introduction

In 2003 two Arabic manuscripts containing previously unknown early Ibāḍī theological and legal works were discovered in a private library in Wādī Mzāb in Algeria. Six of the texts could definitely be identified as either written by the renowned Kūfan Ibāḍī scholar Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Fazārī or as his responses to questions posed to him by some anonymous Maghribī Ibāḍīs.¹ The questions and issues discussed in the texts cover the whole range of subjects controversially debated in *kalām* theology around the middle of the 2nd/8th century. Collectively they provide a unique authentic source for the teaching of a prominent early Ibāḍī *mutakallim* as well as a partisan portrayal of Islamic theological thought at an early stage of its development.

The religious movement of the Ibāḍīyya originated and was at first centred in Baṣra where its widely recognized spiritual leader Abū ‘Ubayda Muslim b. Abī Karīma resided and taught in the first half of the 2nd/8th century. The great majority of the Ibāḍīyya in the Maghrib at the time looked to him for religious guidance. The teaching activity of ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Fazārī among the Maghribīs probably began soon after the death of Abū ‘Ubayda sometime between 150/767 and 158/775.² His upbringing and religious education evidently was Kūfan. It is doubtful whether he ever was a pupil of Abū ‘Ubayda in Baṣra, although he acknowledged his authority as the head of the Ibāḍī community. There is no evidence that al-Fazārī at any time visited the Maghrib. He corresponded with those Maghribīs who sought his theological guidance by letter and answered their questions if they visited him in Kūfa.

In Baṣra, al-Rabīʿ b. Ḥabīb al-Farāhīdī had succeeded to the leadership after Abū ‘Ubayda. His authority was mostly accepted in the Maghrib, but not as unconditionally as had been Abū ‘Ubayda’s. He was known primarily as an expert in legal *ḥadīth* and evidently had little training and interest in *kalām* theology. The Maghribī Ibāḍīs concerned about theological questions and engaged in *kalām* debates turned to al-Fazārī and to his Kūfan rival theologian ‘Īsā b. ‘Umayr for guidance.

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- 1 On the life and teaching of ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Fazārī, see in general W. Madelung, *Streitschrift des Zaiditenimams Aḥmad al-Nāsir wider die ibaditische Prädestinationslehre*, Wiesbaden 1985, Einleitung pp. 4–12, and J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert der Hidschra*, Berlin 1991–97, I 408–414.
 - 2 Concerning the death date of Abū ‘Ubayda, see P. Crone and F.W. Zimmermann, *The Epistle of Sālim ibn Dhakwān*, Oxford 2001, p. 304.

The discord among the Ibāḍiyya in the Maghrib became patent in 168/785 when the Ibāḍī Imam ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rustam died and the succession of his son ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was disputed. The Maghribīs consulted al-Rabī‘ b. Ḥabīb, who confirmed the legitimacy of the imamate of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. A substantial minority of Maghribī Ibāḍīs, however, dissented under the leadership of Yazīd b. Fandīn and became known the Nukkār (Deniers). In the Ibāḍī sources, the Nukkār are described as the followers of ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Fazārī in theology and of a group of legal scholars who deviated from the teaching of al-Rabī‘ b. Ḥabīb in some points of the religious law. There are no reports as to whether the Nukkār at the time consulted al-Fazārī about the legitimacy of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s imamate.

Soon after the accession of the ‘Abbāsīd Hārūn al-Rashīd to the caliphate in 169/786, al-Fazārī moved from Kūfa to Baghdad, where he participated in the debates to which the Barmakid Yaḥyā b. Khālīd invited prominent *kalām* theologians and religious leaders. It is uncertain if he still continued his correspondence with his followers in the Maghrib. In 179/795 al-Rashīd began to persecute the *kalām* theologians in Baghdad, and al-Fazārī fled to the Yemen where he found shelter among the local Ibāḍī community. There he came to be known by the *nisba* al-Baghdādī and composed some theological works, among them a polemical treatise against the Qadariyya which is extant embedded in a refutation by the Zaydī Imam Aḥmad al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (d. 322/934).³ The Ibāḍiyya in the Maghrib evidently lost all contact with him, and none of his works written in the Yemen became known among them. The Nukkār, however, have survived as an Ibāḍī sect until the present and continued to adhere to the theological doctrine of ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd al-Fazārī.

The Texts

1. *Kitāb al-Qadar*, a treatise in support of divine determinism against the Mu‘tazilī doctrine of human free will. The treatise provides a more systematic treatment of the relevant controversial issues than ‘Abd Allāh b. Yazīd’s later refutation of the Qadariyya written in the Yemen, which is a collection of polemical arguments. His basic thesis is that God, as the creator of everything, may arbitrarily prefer some of His creatures by gifts and favours He withholds from others. No one can assert a just claim against God if he has been less favoured. In contrast to the more radical opponents of the Mu‘tazila, however, he limits the arbitrariness of God by maintaining that God does not punish

³ Edited by W. Madelung in *Streitschrift*.