DEBATE OVER THE KARĀMAH OF ALLAH’S FRIENDS

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INTRODUCTION

The karāmah (miracle) of Allah’s friends has been an important issue among Muslim theologians from the medieval period up to modern times. The word karāmah is the verbal noun of the verb karuma meaning literally “honour”. This word also translates as “miracle”. However, the actual Arabic word for miracle is kharaq al-‘ādah. If a miracle occurs in the hand of a prophet, it is called mu’jizah for the meaning of challenge, while if it comes from a pious person or friend (wāli) of Allah it is called karāmah because it is an honour for him.1 As a theological term, karāmah is Allah’s revealing of something on behalf of a wāli (friend of Him) or a righteous believer by means of kharaq al-‘ādah (an extraordinary happening that breaks the customary happening of things), but it is not in any way connected with a claim of prophethood.2 Karāmah has become a part of the creed shared among most Muslims. Like many other faith-related issues, the issue of karāmah has been disputed among Muslim theologians. Some theologians have denied the karāmah, but the majority of them have affirmed it. In his article “Karāma”, a western scholar, L. Gardet, has briefly discussed different views about karāmah, but he has not elaborated upon all different types of arguments used by its opponents and supporters. He has also not tried to compare the views and give preference to one

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Arab Law Quarterly, [2003]
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of them over others. The purpose of this article is to discuss on what basis some scholars have denied the occurrence of karāmah, and on the basis of what arguments a majority of scholars have affirmed it. This research also analyses these two views and gives preference to the stronger view.

The most famous opponents of karāmah are Mu'tazilites. Two other small groups, Qadrites and Juhamites; Abū ʿIsḥāq al-Isfārāʾīnīʾ, an Ashʿarī theologian, and a few Ṣāḥīḥī and Ṣāliḥī scholars have also denied karāmah.4 Most Ashʿarī theologians and most Sunni and Shiʿī scholars have affirmed karāmah.5 Some supporters of karāmah include Māzm al-Dīn al-Naṣaʾī, ʿAḍ-dīn al-Taḍżānt, al-Rāzi, Ibn ʿAṭīma, Ṣuhrawardī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿAbūṣrī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad bin ʿIsḥāq al-Bukhārī al-Kalābādhī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, Abū Bakr bin Ṣaf, Abū Bakr al-Baqillānī, al-Baghḍādī, Ibn al-Munīr, al-Nabīn, Ṣāḥīḥī, al-Shīhīnī, al-Maydānī, al-Ṣādiq and others.

ARGUMENTS AND COUNTER-ARGUMENTS OF THE OPPONENTS OF KARĀMAH

Opponents of karāmah have denied its occurrence through a number of Qur'ānic, Sunnaʿic and rational arguments.

Qurʿānic arguments

A Qurʾānic argument of the opponents is the verse: “He (alone) knows the Unseen, nor does He make anyone acquainted with His Mysterious except a messenger whom He has chosen”.6 A well-known Muʿtazilite theologian and Qurʾānic commentator, Zamakhshārī, has remarked that this verse invalidates karāmah because this verse means Allah distinguished only the prophets among His chosen people for the knowledge of the Unseen. Those people to whom karāmah is attributed are also chosen people of Allah, but they are not prophets. Rather, they are simple friends of Him.7 In his book al-Intṣāf, Ibn al-Munir has replied that Zamakhshārī has wanted to invalidate all kinds of miracles, but he has cited a verse that invalidates only the knowledge of a saint about the Unseen. The performance of miracles other than the knowledge of the Unseen, therefore, is possible by a saint.8 Additionally, according to al-Shīhīnī and al-Maydānī, some other Qurʾānic

5 Ṣaḥīḥī, 2:199; al-Sawāḥiḥī, 153; Ṣaḥīḥī, ʿAbd al-Salām, 124; al-Ṣādiq, 22-19.
8 Al-Ṣādiq, 17.