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Theological Polemics at Qayrawān during the 3rd/9th Century

The Theological School of Qayrawān

Everyone admits easily that Qayrawān has been during the Middle Ages a brilliant centre of *fiqh* studies. Its reputation in this field is based on many famous scholars and on a series of very important books among them the *Mudawwana* of S a ḥ n ū n (160–240/777–854) occupied the first place. The role played by Qayrawān as a centre of theological reflections and disputes is much less known. The reason why of this ignorance is to be looked for in the fact that in Ifrīqiya, as well as in the whole Islamic World, theology has been always considered with suspicion. Theology, that is to say strictly speaking a human talk on God, was thought of as something impossible, irreverent, and heretical. Consequently those who devoted their efforts to the theological reflexion have been as a rule considered as heretics.

On the contrary everywhere in the Islamic world, and especially at Qayrawān, the *fiqh* has been always thought of as a necessary science, a science absolutely indispensable to organize the relations of man with God on one side, and with the other men on the other one. Consequently the *fiqh* has been cherished and cultivated beyond all bounds, and his men have been carefully classified in big volumes of *Ṭabaqāt*.

The result of this situation, when the orthodoxy in its Mālikite shape definitely triumphed in Ifrīqiya, was the gradual and complete destruction of the books written by the adversaries. We know for instance with an absolute certainty that the Ḥanafites have been prédominant¹ at Qayrawān till the middle of the 3rd/9th century at least, and that they have written a lot of books. However we have not a single line of their works, some leaves of the *Asadiyya* excepted. What wonder in these conditions if every direct evidence of the theological reflexion at Qayrawān had disappeared!

Therefore we have no issue other than relying on the works of the Mālikites to try to get an idea, as accurate as theses sources make it possible, of the theological activities and polemics at Qayrawān during the 3rd/9th centuries. Let us begin with the

¹ M. Talbi, *L'Émirat aghlabide*, Paris 1966, pp. 233–235.

hitherto known and printed books. Thanks to these sources we know already that the struggle has been hard between the *ahl al-ahwā'* or *ahl al-Bida'*, who were the "modernists" of the time, and the *ahl al-sunna*, who were the supporters of the Tradition, and can be called the "integrist" of the moment. It was of course among the so-called *ahl al-ahwā'* that the theological elaboration took essentially place. And it happens that through the books of the mālikite *Ṭabaqāt* we see some of their champions fighting not only intellectually but even physically against the heroes of the Sunna. Let us quote for instance this amusing and significant anecdote where were opposed the head of the Mu'tazila, Sulaymān al-Farrā', and Asad b. al-Furāt (d. 213/828), the leading figure of the ahl al-sunna of his time:

قال يحيى بن سلام : حدثت أسد يوما بحديث الرؤية وسليمان الفراء المعتزلي في مؤخر المجلس فأفكر ذلك . فسمعه أسد فقام إليه وجمع بين طوقيه ولحيته واستقبله بتعلمه فضربه حتى إدمام وطرده من مجلسه . وقيل بل كان يقرأ عليه في تفسير المسيب بن شريك : «وجه يومئذ ناضرة الى ربها ناظرة» وسليمان حاضر فقال : من الانتظار يا أبا عبد الله ! فأخذ أسد بتلييه ونعلا غليظا بيده الآخرة وقال : يا زنديق لتقولنّها أولاً بتض بها عيني . فقال سليمان : نعم ، ننظر . 2

As you have seen the beating argument used by Asad to convince his opponent has been fully and immediately efficient. Correctly beaten, Sulaymān agreed, contrary to the teaching of his Mu'tazilite school, that God can be seen in the future life after death. This highly colored scene is very interesting to recreate for us the atmosphere of the debates that opposed the Sunnites to the Mu'tazilites at Qayrawān during the beginning of the 3rd/9th centuries.

A few decades later, a new step has been made to root out the heresy. When Saḥnūn, the most famous figure of the Ifrīqiyan Mālikism, became cadi, namely between 234/849 and 240/854, he decided to strike more heavily. The Great Cadi, over and above his judicial functions, was in the same time a kind of chancellor of the University. Thus he had to keep an eye on the teaching. Saḥnūn, considering that the Great Mosque, that is to say the University of Qayrawān, was dominated by the supporters of the heretical ideas, essentially by the Mu'tazilites, Ibādites and Ṣufrītes, decided to put an end to their prejudicial activities. He ordered a radical purge. Let us quote 'Iyād

² 'I y ā ḍ, *Biographies aghlabides extraites des Madārik de 'Iyād*, éd. M. T a l b i, Tunis 1968, p. 63. This is the translation of the text: "Yaḥyā b. Sallām relates: One day Asad b. al-Furāt reported the *ḥadīth* concerning the vision of God in the future life. Sulaymān al-Farrā' al-Mu'tazilī was there sitting at the end of the circle. He expressed his disagreement. Asad heard him. He stood up, seized him by the collar and beard, beat him with his shoe to blood and threw him out. According to another version, Asad was explaining the verse: 'Some faces on that day will be bright (*nāḍira*), looking (*nāẓira*) towards their Lord' (LXXV, 22) from the exegesis of al-Musayyab b. Ṣarīk. Sulaymān, who was there, protested loudly: 'O Abū 'Abd Allāh! The meaning must be derived from «to wait for» (*min al-intizār*)'. Immediately Asad seized him by the scruff of his neck, in the other hand he took a big shoe and said to him: 'You heretic! You are going to agree that God can be seen, if not I am going to deprive you of your eyes!' At once Sulaymān admitted: 'Yes, He can be seen!'"

See also A b ū a l - ' A r a b, *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. B e n C h e n e b, Paris 1915, p. 82.

وأول القضاة فرق خلق أهل البدع من الجامع وشرد أهل الأهواء منه — وكانوا فيه حلقة من الصفرية ، والاباضية والمعتزلية وكانوا فيه حلقة يتناظرون ويظهرون زيغهم — وعزلهم أن يكونوا أئمة للناس أو معلمين لصبيانهم أو مؤدبين . وأمرهم ألا يجتمعوا وآدب جماعة منهم . بعد هذا خالفوا أمره وأطافهم . ونوب جماعة منهم فكان يقيم من أظهر التوبة منهم على المنبر وغيره ، فيعلن بتوبتهم عن بدعتهم³.

These legal proceedings against the adversaries of the Sunna did not put an end to their activities. Indeed if the major part of the population was Sunnite, the Court and to a great extent undoubtedly the *hāṣṣa*, the elite, were Mu'tazilite. In these conditions the Aghlabid Emirs, till the fall of their dynasty, balanced the appointments of Mu'tazilite and Sunnite cadis, and as a rule each cadi favoured its own school to the detriment of the opposite one. We have many instances that confirm this fact. Saḥnūn's predecessor, Ibn Abi al-Ġawād who held his office 18 years, was Mu'tazilite, and his successor, Sulaymān b. 'Imrān, was Ḥanafite. Thus we have many a reason to think that after Sahnun's death the Great Mosque became, as it was before, a forum where different ideologies were violently confronted.

In fact the struggle was going to continue for more than a half of a century, more precisely till the Fāṭimid rule (296–909) at least. Of course, and for the reasons I stressed before, we have no Mu'tazilite or other heretical evidences. But we know that some leading figures of the Sunnisme composed many refutations of the heretical ideas, such as the *Kitāb al-ḥuġġa 'alā al-Qadariyya*, the *Kitāb al-īmān wa-l-radd 'alā ahl al-širk*, and the *Kitāb al-radd 'alā ahl al-bida' of Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn*⁴ (202–256/817–870); the *Risāla fī al-īmān* of 'Abd Allah b. Ġāfiq⁵ (184–275?/800–888); and the *Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-murġi'a* of Yaḥyā b. 'Umar⁶ (213–289/828–902). Till now none of these books has been discovered, and I do not think that they are going likely to be found. Anyhow, unless we admit that all these distinguished Sunnites were tilting at windmills, we have to conclude that the theological polemics remained violent till the end of the 3rd/9th century. Now if we had to rely only on the printed and hitherto known sources, it would be almost impossible to go much more further in our investigations.

Happily I had the chance to discover two new manuscripts, and owing to this discovery it is possible to-day to go further, and to know more about the ideas discussed, the arguments exchanged, as also about the atmosphere that dominated the debates. The first ms. is the *Kitāb fīhi aḥādīṭ fī al-sunna wa-l-nahy 'an al-bid'a*, and it is the work of Aḥmad b. Yazīd al-Quraṣī al-Mu'allim. The second one, whose title is *Kitāb al-ḥuġġa*, is due to the pen of Yaḥyā b. 'Awn al-Ḥuzā'i. We have short biographies of these two authors. Neither of them was an eminent and leading figure. The first one, Aḥmad b. Yazīd⁷, was a modest *muḥaddiṭ*. He died in 284/897 at the age of 90 years. The other one, Yaḥyā b. 'Awn⁸, was a popular *faqīh* who died in

³ 'Iyād, op. cit., p. 104.

⁴ Ibid., p. 173.

⁵ Ibid., p. 311.

⁶ Ibid., p. 263.

⁷ A b ū a l - ' A r a b , op. cit., p. 172; 'I y ā ḍ , op. cit., p. 321; I b n N ā ḡ ī , *Ma'ālīm al-īmān*, Tunis 1902, II, p. 133, 178.

⁸ A b ū a l - ' A r a b , op. cit., pp. 11, 104; 105; 'I y ā ḍ , op. cit., p. 313; I b n

298/911. Their works, written in the second half of the 3rd/9th century, may be counted among the most ancient of the kind. So their interest goes further than the frontiers of Ifrīqiya or the Maghrib.

As we have said, the first ms. is the work of a *muḥaddit*. Consequently his author does not discuss, and he never gives his own opinion. His role was limited to affirm strongly the truth of some statements ascribed to not less than 250 Sunnite authorities among them we can quote the famous names of: Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712), al-Awzā'i (d. 179/795), 'Abd Allah b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), al-Fuḍayl b. 'Iyād (d. 187/803), Wakī' b. al-Ġarrāh (d. 197/812), Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (d. 189/813), Ibn Abī Uways (d. 202?/817) etc... Let us take notice of the absence in this series of a famous name, that of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, who fought strongly for the triumph of the Sunna under the banner of the *ḥadīth*. But this absence must not surprise us beyond measure. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal has not had any disciple in Ifrīqiya. However what is called the Ḥanbalite spirit is present in every page of Aḥmad b. Yazīd's booklet.

The second short treatise bears obviously the stamp of the *fiqh*. As we might expect his author uses scriptural arguments borrowed from the *Qur'ān* and the Sunna. But significantly the number of the *muḥaddit* quoted is reduced to no more than thirty authorities. And above all Yaḥyā b. 'Awn does not fear to provoke his adversaries on their own field, that of the *Kalām*. He reveals himself to be a redoubtable duellist decided to fight the quarrel out with the heretics, hitting if necessary below the belt. Thus the Ahl al-Sunna began to use rational arguments in Ifrīqiya. To understand this evolution we have to recollect that Yaḥyā wrote his pamphlet by the time when the Al-Aš'arī's (260–324/874–935) *Ibāna* was in elaboration.

Let us add now that our two treatises do not refute the *firaq*, the sects, each one after the other. There is no classification. The Mu'tazila are not even called by their name, and their most famous scholars are not quoted. The refutation is focused on some heretical opinions considered as particularly misleading and dangerous. These opinions are essentially related to the nature of God, to the nature of his speech and the thorny problem of *ḥalq al-Qur'ān*, to the nature of faith and the problem of *al-irḡā'*, and of course to the largely debated question of free will and predestination. We are going to limit our concern here to this later problem.

But beforehand it is not useless to give some precisions about the Ifrīqiyan school of I'tizāl. Yaḥyā b. 'Awn helps us to throw more light on its background. We read in his *Kitāb al-ḥuḡḡa*⁹: "Two men shared out equally between them the heresy (*zandaqa*). One of them is oriental. He is called Bišr b. Ġiyāt, the Jewish dyer (*al-yahūdī al-ṣabbāḡ*). That's he who spread the heresy throughout the Orient. The heresy extended too to the whole Maghreb and flooded all his towns. There it has been spread (*naqala dālika*) by Sulaymān al-Farrā' b. Urbān b. Martīnih al-Mannānī, whose father and grand-father were originally Manichaeans (*aṣlu aẓwālayhi fi al-Mannāniya*)"¹⁰.

⁹ I d ā r ī, *Bayān*, ed. G. S. Colin et E. Lévi-Provençal, Leiden 1948, I, p. 162; I b n N ā ḡ ī, op. cit., pp. 165–166.

¹⁰ Ms. of the National Library of Tunis, fol. 1714.

¹⁰ al-Aš'arī, *Maqālāt*, ed. H. Ritter, Wiesbaden 1963, p. 332, 336, where we read: "*al-mannāniya* is a dualist sect" (*ṭā'ifa min al-tanāwiya*).

Bišr b. Ġiyāt al-Marīsī is known enough. As for Sulaymān al-Farrā', he deserves to be known better. We can glean about him some supplementary informations from the printed and hitherto known books. We have already seen how Asad b. al-Furāt corrected his ideas about the vision of God in the future life. He must be by this time a young student following the famous master's courses. It is probably after having been corrected that he left Asad and called him a *ṭawr*, a bull¹¹. This hypothesis seems to be plausible. Anyhow, longtime after, we meet him engaged in polemics with Abū 'Utmān al-Ḥaddād (217?–302/832?–915), who was the most famous Sunnite of his epoch. Sulaymān was then qualified to be the "head of the Mu'tazila at Qayrawān" (*Šayḥ al-Mu'tazila bi-l-Qayrawān*)¹². We are informed also that not Sulaymān only, but his family too, were sent to coventry by the Sunnites¹³. These informations are quoted from the *Ṭabaqāt* books. The historians bring us some more valuable elements. We read in the Ibn 'Idārī's *Bayān*¹⁴: "In 269 [882–3] died Sulaymān b. Ḥafs al-Farrā'. He was a Ġahmite. He professed the dogma of the created *Qur'ān* and he called the people to embrace this doctrine. He narrowly missed being lynched." And Ibn al-Aṭīr, in his *Kāmil*¹⁵, adds some more accurate details: "In 269 — he said — died Sulaymān b. Ḥafs b. Abī 'Uṣfūr al-Ifriqī. He was a Mu'tazilite professing the dogma of the created *Qur'ān*. He had followed the courses of Bišr al-Marīsī, Abū-l-Hudayl, and other Mu'tazilites."

Let us now try to make a synthesis of all these materials gathered from our ms. and printed sources. First it appears clearly that Sulaymān was originated from a *dimmi* family. What is the name of his father? Yaḥyā b. 'Awn calls him Urbān, which is undoubtedly a Christian name. But we read in the printed sources: Ḥafs. We have the same divergence about the name of his grandfather, called Martīnih — that is to say Martin — by Ibn 'Awn, and Abū 'Uṣfūr, by the other texts. In fact these divergences are only apparent. We know perfectly well that it was current among the *dimmi*s to bear two names: one Christian given at baptism, and the other Arabic.

So, thanks to our ms., that is to say to the testimony of an eye-witness, Yaḥyā b. 'Awn, who conserved for us the Christian names of the ancestors of his contemporaneous Sulaymān, we can reach a very important conclusion: the head of the Mu'tazila of Qayrawān was the son of a *dimmi*. His case is not without resembling that of his master Bišr al-Marīsī.

A most important question must now be elucidated. What was exactly the religion professed by Sulaymān's parents. The single source that answers our question is once more Ibn 'Awn's *Kitāb al-ḥuġġa* where it is clearly asserted that Sulaymān was issued from a Manichean social sphere, and that his parents belonged actually to the Mannāniya sect. At first sight this piece of information is puzzling, and we can be inclined

¹¹ A b ū a l - 'A r a b, op. cit., p. 83.

¹² 'I y ā ḍ, op. cit., p. 357.

¹³ A b ū a l - 'A r a b, op. cit., pp. 123–124.

¹⁴ Ibn 'Idārī, op. cit., I, p. 119.

¹⁵ I b n a l - A ṭ ī r, *Al-Kāmil*, Beyrouth 1965, VII, 398.

to reject it as highly improbable. But if we think it over it appears to us perfectly acceptable.

There is another information that till now, because isolated, did not attract the scholars' attention. We read in the Ibn al-Nadīm's (d. 438/1047) *Fihrist*¹⁶ that under the caliphate of Abū Ġa'far al-Manṣūr (136–158/754–775), a certain "Abū Milāl al-Dayhūrī, coming from Ifrīqiya where he has been chosen as the leader of the Manichaeans", succeeded to restore the religion's harmony among the members of the Manichaean Miqlāṣiya sect. This piece of information is completely independent from the one given by Ibn 'Awn. As they reinforce each other by their cross-checking, we can conclude that the existence of Manichaeism in medieval Ifrīqiya, at least till the end of 3rd/9th century, is fully attested.

We can too add that this medieval Ifrīqiyan Manichaeism derived directly from the antiquity. A recent book written by F. D e c r e t, *Aspects du Manicheisme dans l'Afrique Romaine* (Paris 1970), shows us how St. Augustinus (354–430), after being a hearer in the sect, entered into polemics with his former friends and strove to root out the heresy from Africa. Of course he did not succeed, and the Manichaeism maintained its organization till our period. But undoubtedly it remained as it was before, that is to say the religion of a limited elite. We know that its history was quite different in Orient. There, connected with the Persian *Shu'ūbiya*, it became a redoubtable political force. Nothing of this kind in Ifrīqiya. Limited to a narrow circle, and recruiting its members essentially among the intellectuals, the Ifrīqiyan Manichaeism did not provide the historians with a large amount of data to narrate and to comment. In a word it did not trouble the public life, and then passed unnoticed.

But it is interesting to notice that in Orient as well in Ifrīqiya the heads of the so-called heretical doctrines — such as Ġaylān al-Dimašqī, Ġahm b. Ṣafwān, Biṣr al-Marīsī, and our Sulaymān al-Farrā' — were very often recruited among the newly converted people to Islam, entering their new religion with their ancient cultural background. What wonder in this case if they asked the same questions that were debated in their former faith, and if they proposed more or less similar solutions?

The Qadar

What we have said is enough to have an idea of the atmosphere that was prevailing at Qayrawān during the 3rd/9th century. We know now the main features of the opponents. So it is time to give an example of the polemics. The best one is the eternal problem of free will and predestination, or the *qadar* that has a central position in the Mu'tazilite doctrine. It will be of course too long, and useless too, to open the folder of the *qadar* origins. Let us just say that I exposed my own opinions in a paper published in the "Cahiers de Tunisie" (April 1975), and that we can read usefully in "Studia Islamica" (XLIV, 1976) an article where Daniel G i m a r e t criticizes Montgomery W a t t ' s hypothesis.

¹⁶ I b n a n - N a d ī m, *Fihrist*, Cairo n. d., p. 467. The *Fihrist* has been translated into English by B. D o d g e in two volumes in 1971, however we were unable to use this translation.

At Qayrawān the polemics against the *qadar* followed two ways: that of *ahl al-ḥadīth*, represented by Aḥmad b. Yazīd al-Mu'allim; and that of *ahl al-Kalām* among them, with some reservation, we may classify Ibn 'Awn. To be brief let us pass over Aḥ. b. Yazīd's argumentation, and from Ibn 'Awn we are going to borrow only two examples, one scriptural and the other rational. Let us add too that to understand correctly Ibn 'Awn's reasoning we have to remember that he was not only a *mutakallim*, but also, and maybe above all a popular *faqīh*.

The condemned Qadarite theses are exposed in these words by Ibn 'Awn: "The renegades (*al-māriqūn min al-dīn*) Qadarites — he says — claim that God created the Good (*al-ḥayr*) only and recommended it, and that he did not create the Evil (*al-šarr*). It is so because to create the Evil is in fact to recommend it (*wa-law ḥalaqahu la-amara bihi*). Thus they claim that there is a God for the Good, and an another one for the Evil. Now this thesis is just that professed by the Manicheans (*al-Zanādiqa*). For us God is the unique judge and the unique arbiter. Every thing proceeds from him, the Good as well as the Evil. He wanted (*qaddara*) all that. Anyone who asserts the contrary has no place inside the Islam"¹⁷. In an another passage Ibn 'Awn blames the Qadarites for denying the divine prescience, and for professing that God has no knowledge of things before they are actually realized.

So we see that the Mu'tazilite doctrine about the *qadar* was essentially reproached with ending fatally in a form of dualism, and that is of course the ruin of monotheism. Ibn 'Awn emphasizes deliberately the link existing between the *qadar*, as professed by the Mu'tazila, and the Manichaeism based on the existence of two struggling principles, the Light that symbolizes the Good, and the Darkness, that corresponds to the Evil. To understand the accurate implications of this statement we have to remember that Sulaymān al-Farrā', the head of the Mu'tazila of Qayrawān, had, behind him, as we have seen, a Manichaean cultural background. Thus in a way the fight engaged by St. Augustinus against the Manichaens of his time continued, during the 3rd/9th century, under an another form. In the centre of the debates we find, coated with new formulations, the same thorny and eternal problem of Good and Evil. If we accept that the two of them proceed from one and single Supreme Being, we accept logically that this Being is accountable for the Evil, then wicked and unjust. On the other hand if we state that the Good and the Evil proceed from two different principles, we fall fatally in dualism. As we see the debates revolved in a vicious circle.

Considered as a form of dualism, the *qadar* is very severely condemned. Let us quote this *ḥadīth* ascribed by Ibn 'Awn to the Prophet under the authority of a certain al-A'šā Muḥammed b. 'Alī: "Anyone who denys the predestination (*qadar Allāh*), even if he would earn all the wealth of the world permissibly and would spend it in good works; even if he would go on the pilgrimage, devote himself to the *ḡihād*, and go into retreat (*i'tamara*) at Mekka; even if after all that he would have his throat cut inside the holy sanctuary of Mekka, and thus his blood spilt wrongfully, well, all that would be useless for him, and in spite of all that God would throw him down into the

¹⁷ *Kitāb al-ḥuḡḡa*, ms. of the National Library in Tunis, fol. 1968.

Hell-fire, as it is said in these verses: ... Taste ye the touch of Hell (*dūqū massa Saqar*); Verily We have created every thing by *qadar* (LIV, 48–49). Indeed it was in order to pour ridicule on the followers of the *qadar* that God revealed these verses: Surely, the guilty are in manifest error and gone mad; on the day when they will be dragged into the Fire on their faces, [and it will be said to them]: Taste ye the touch of Hell” (LIV, 48–49)¹⁸.

I think it is unnecessary to stress the popular character of this *ḥadīṭ*. It is clear that Ibn ‘Awn’s aim was to frighten the simple souls out of yielding to the temptation of the *qadar*. And to reach his aim he does not fear, for the good cause sake of course, to report an undoubtedly forged *ḥadīṭ* where the Quranic verses were clearly and unduly distorted from their true meaning. It is obvious that in the verses quoted it is not question at all of the upholders of the *qadar* doctrine. The term “*qadar*” is only used with the meaning of God’s power, or perhaps with that of “due measure”.

Anyhow here are the Qadarits definitely condemned from the beginning — we can say before they were born — by the highest authority of Islam: the Prophet. And that in itself was fully satisfactory for the simple minded people that composed the major part of Ibn ‘Awn’s customers. But Ibn ‘Awn was a conscientious debater. He did not limit his purpose and task to condemn. He wanted to refute the false theories of his adversaries. As we have said he used two types of arguments.

Let us begin with the first one, the scriptural type based on the resort to the *ḥadīṭ* and the *Qur’ān*. Here is a typical example. Yaḥyā under the authority of his father ‘Awn reports: “‘Awn narrated to me that, according to certain learned men, one day a qadarit payed a visit to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. ‘Alī addressed him with these words: You qadarits are at variance (*laqad ḥālaftum*) with God; at variance with the angels; at variance with the people of Paradise; at variance with the people of Hell; and at variance with Satan. — Prince of the Faithful! said the qadarit, are we really at variance with all these ones?! — Yes, retorted ‘Alī, and I am going to show the proofs from God’s Book. You are at variance with God who addressing the Prophet says: Surely you will not convert (*lā tahdī*) whom you like; it is God Who converts Whomsoever He pleases (XXVIII, 56). You are at variance with the angels who acknowledge: Our Lord! No knowledge have we, except what You have taught us. You are at variance with the prophets. Indeed Noah said to his people: And my advice will profit you not, even though I desire to advice you, if God intends to misguide you (*yugʿwiyakum*); He is your Lord, and to Him shall you be made to return (XI, 34). You are at variance with the people of Paradise who, at the moment to be admitted in, they will say: All praise belongs to God Who has guided us to this. And we could not have found guidance, if God had not guided us (VII, 43). You are at variance with the people of Hell who, at the moment to be thrown in, they will say: Our Lord! our misfortune (*ṣiqwatunā*) prevailed against us (XXIII, 106). As for your variance with Satan, it appears from these words that he will pronounce when precipitated into the fire: My Lord! since you misled me...¹⁹” (XV, 39).

¹⁸ Ibid., fol. 1699.

¹⁹ Ibid., loc. cit.

It is clear that this tradition, ascribed to 'Alī to give it more weight, summarizes the main scriptural arguments opposed by the Sunnites of Qayrawān to their adversaries among the *qadar* followers. The staging is intentionally dramatic. Once more the aim looked for was to frighten the simple-minded people and to divert them from the *qadar*. Of course we are ignorant of the Qadarites answer, but we can easily imagine it.

As a matter of fact there is not a single verse cited by Ibn 'Awn that can resist a careful examination. It is not even necessary to resort to *al-ta'wīl* to refute his argumentation. In fact all the verses he quoted are, for the polemics sake, either truncated or distorted from their plain meaning, and if someone likes really to stand up for the predestination he can find in the *Qur'ān* much better texts to rely on (XVI, 108; XLVII, 23; XIV, 4; XXXV, 8; LXXVI, 30; LXXXI, 29 ...). It is not difficult for any Mu'tazilite to observe for instance that the first verse produced continues in these terms: "... and He knows best those who are apt to be converted" (*wa Huwa a'lamu bi-l-muhtadīn*). So it is not said that the preaching is vain and completely without effect. In this case the *Qur'ān* would be a nonsense, and the mission with what the Prophet was entrusted would be absurd. It is only stated that, in spite of the Prophet's efforts to convince, there is no conversion possible without God's help. And if after all the persons called cannot hear equally the call, only God knows the reason of that tragical situation. The second verse has nothing to do with the predestination. In the third verse it is only stressed, once more, that without God's help the Prophets' calls cannot be heard. But it does not follow that men are congenitally deaf, and that the Prophets' calls are aimless. The fourth verse is curtailed. It is asserted, to be sure, in its first part, that cited by Ibn 'Awn, that there is no salvation without God's help. But the verse continues so: "The Messengers of our Lord did indeed bring the truth. And then they will hear a voice proclaiming: here is the Paradise which you^s have been given for an inheritance as a reward for what you used to do". This means that salvation is deserved and earned too.

The fifth verse is also cut down. It ends so: "... and we were an erring people" (*wa kunnā qawman dāllīn*). The sixth and last verse used by Ibn 'Awn against the Qadarites is the one which has been the much distorted. In the *Qur'ān* this verse is not put into Satan's mouth when thrown down into the Fire. It is rather a cry of threat uttered by Satan when, refusing to prostrate before Adam, he has been expelled from the Paradise. Here is the whole verse: "My Lord! since you misled me, I shall submit [all the men] on the earth to my seduction, and surely mislead all of them". Except the God's faithful servants who will escape Satan's power, it is asserted in the following verse. As we have seen the *Qur'anic* verses are not submitted to an objective reflexion in order to grasp the real meaning of God's speech. Ibn 'Awn was not really a theologian trying to explore with objectivity and humbleness God's mystery. He was first and foremost a polemist having a cast-iron belief that he was right and his adversaries wrong. He shows this same spirit when he used rational arguments too. Let us quote, among others, this typical text where we see Ibn 'Awn at Sousse speaking in front of the Ribāt to the people crowding round him. He relates:

"Two qadarites from the tribe of Banū Nağrān ... when I was speaking to a big crowd round me, put me some questions. The first one asked: How is it possible that God makes us suffer because of the deeds that He has decreed from time immemorial that we have to perform (*kayfa yu'addibunā 'alā mā qaddara 'alaynā*)? — I answered: Is there for the man something more useful than reason? — No, he admitted. — Then I asked: This reason, is it acquired by our own effort (*muktasab*), or is it given to us by The Creator (*mahlūq*)? — He remained silent and he did not know what to answer. Then I observed: You have just two solutions: either you admit that it is given by the Creator, and you lose the cause; or you assert that it is acquired, and you had better then to acquire what it makes you worthy of great praise and indispensable for the caliphs, the cadis, and the governors, instead of being in rags. — My second contradictor, when seeing his fellow reduced to silence, interrupted me saying: Bless your soul! Let us see, our friends say: How is it possible that God makes us suffer because of the deeds that He has decreed from immemorial time that we have to perform?! — I retorted: You, tell me, the man sexually inverted (*al-ma'būnu fī duburihi*), has it chosen his state, or this state has it been imposed on him by his fate (*a-šay'un arādahu binafsihi aw ša'yun quḍiya 'alayh*)? — He did not answer. — Then I observed: To assert that he has chosen his state, is to assert something impossible, because everyone afflicted with such a calamity would sacrifice his wealth and his children to escape it. Who would he dare to say in these conditions that the man sexually inverted has chosen his state, when he is ready to get rid of it at the price of all what he owns and all the goods given to him by God! If, on the contrary, you admit that his state has been imposed on him by his fate, you lose the cause. — He retorted: The sexual inversion is nothing else than a disease among many others. — I replied: Every patient hopes that God will reward him because of the illness suffered: tell me, who is going to reward the man sexually inverted?! — My contradictor turned aside from me, dived into the crowd, and disappeared"²⁰.

To conclude, we can say that Qayrawān has not been only a brilliant centre of *fiqh* studies, but also an area of violent theological polemics. Unhappily the Mu'tazilite texts are lost, and there is very little hope to discover some of them. But thanks to the two Sunnite manuscripts discovered and used here²¹, it is possible to rise the curtain a little and to have a better sight of the Ifriqiyan scene. Let us especially emphasize that the people were interested in the debates, and that these debates were often held in public and popular meetings. The atmosphere of these meetings, the promptness and the warmth of the retorts exchanged are not without resembling our political assemblies, or some gatherings during the antiquity, like that described by Tertullian and held at Carthage, about religious problems too, opposing Christians and Jews²².

²⁰ Ibid., fol. 1701.

²¹ We hope to publish it in the near future.

²² P. Monceaux, *Les colonies juives*, "Cahiers de Tunisie", 1970, pp. 174–175