

ITALIAN SCHOLARS ON IBADISM

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SUNTO. – Il contributo è incentrato sull’apporto che studiosi italiani del secolo scorso hanno dato ad una migliore comprensione dell’Ibadismo. Laura Veccia Vaglieri, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Mario Martino Moreno, Roberto Rubinacci, insieme a Vanna Cremonesi e Generosa Crupi La Rosa sono stati tra i primi a sottolineare l’importante contributo degli Ibaditi al pensiero islamico e, più in generale, alla formazione della cultura islamica. I risultati da essi raggiunti - al di là delle conclusioni di ciascuno studioso – sono di fondamentale importanza poiché attraggono l’attenzione su questioni cruciali come il passaggio di idee e dottrine all’interno della comunità musulmana.

Nonostante la sua antichità, l’Islam Ibadita continua ad essere poco conosciuto e mal compreso. Spesso si riducono le sue peculiarità ad alcune dottrine politiche e ad un certo “puritanesimo” religioso. Ma il quadro è molto più complesso. La scuola ibadita ebbe fin dalle origini uno sviluppo parallelo ma autonomo rispetto alle scuole sunnite, basato sull’apporto di proprie autorità e giuristi. Gli Ibaditi hanno un ricco patrimonio letterario che risale fino alle origini dell’Islam, il cui studio è di grande potenzialità per una migliore comprensione sia dell’Islam in generale sia dell’apporto Ibadita in particolare.

ABSTRACT. – The paper focuses mainly on the contribution of the last century Italian scholars to a better understanding of Ibadism. Laura Veccia Vaglieri, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Mario Martino Moreno and Roberto Rubinacci, together with Vanna Cremonesi and Generosa Crupi La Rosa were among the first scholars to underline that the Ibadis made an important contribution to Islamic thought and to the whole formation of Islamic culture. Their conclusions are crucial as they have drawn scholarly attention to the fundamental question of the passage of ideas and doctrines within the Muslim community, whatever the answers proposed.

Despite its antiquity, Ibadi Islam remains little known and has often been misunderstood. Its distinctive nature seems to consist first of all in its political doctrine and secondly in its religious puritanism. However, the picture is slightly different. Ibadis

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took from the start an independent line from the Sunni schools, with independent authorities and jurists. They have a rich literary heritage stretching back to the formative period, which is of great potential importance. Further research on Ibadism would contribute to a better understanding of their legacy.

INTRODUCTION

According to tradition, the Ibādī movement derives its name from ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Ibād, who broke away from the Khārījī extremists over the stance to be adopted towards the other Muslims in circa 65/684-85. Theological disputation among the parties of Mu‘āwiya, ‘Alī and the Kharijites centred basically on Prophet’s succession, including also the concepts of sin, authority and freedom. The split forced the competing scholars and groups to seek legitimation. Each group realized the importance of demonstrating that their religious and political foundations were based on the teachings of as many leading early Muslim figures as possible.

The proto-Ibādīs were part of the Muḥakkima movement of the early Khawārij, sharing with them the principles that rule on earth belongs to God alone (*lā ḥukm illā li-llāh*) and that the authority of leaders is annulled by sin.

However, the Ibādīs are very distant from them on other political as well religious matters. In theology, the Ibādīs share several points of their dogma with the Mu‘tazila.

On the other hand, the Ibādīs strongly opposed some basic views of the Mu‘tazilites, i.e. the concepts of Divine decree and Divine will, and the notion of an intermediate position between faith and misbelief (*al-manzila bayna ‘l-manzilatayn*). They distinguished between different types of misbelief, drawing a sharp division between *kufr al-ni‘ma* (ingratitude for God’s blessing) and *kufr al-shirk* (unfaithfulness of unbelief). The Ibādī attitude toward *kuffār al-ni‘ma* was that one should practice ‘dissociation’ (*barā’a*) toward them. This ‘dissociation’ means the internal behaviour of withholding ‘friendship’ (*wilāya*), rather than outright hostility or enmity. Non-Ibādī Muslims are not considered idolaters. They may be *kuffār*, but not in the sense of misbelief, only in the sense of *kufr al-ni‘ma*.

The righteous imamate is a further topic of great importance in Ibādī religious and legal literature. The *imām* should be elected for his knowledge and piety, without any regard to race or lineage. He should

be chosen by the elders of the community, who are also obliged to depose him if he acts unjustly.

After the Prophet's death, conflicts emerged in order to debate the relationship between sin and authority; it was on this crucial issue that the first theological schools in the Islamic community were formed. The Ibādī distinction from orthodox or Sunnī Islam may rather be conceived in terms of internal Islamic diversity of doctrinal belief than in terms of their affiliation to Kharijism. In such, the Ibādīs are not a sect but rather a 'school' (*madhhab*), which kept in close contact with the Sunnī community and contributed to the general debate from which Islamic law and theology began to develop, during the first two centuries of *hijra*, in the heartland of the Muslim world, namely in Baṣra and Kūfa, but also in Ḥijāz.

The first centuries of Islam are probably the most problematic era for researchers in Islamic history. The lack of sources that can be dated with precision to this period hinders the efforts to modern scholars to reconstruct the history and the early development of various Islamic doctrines and movements.

Ibadism attracted the attention of European scholars thanks to the pioneering studies by Emile Masqueray, who translated the *Sīyar* by Abū Zakariyyā' al-Warjlānī (d. after 504/1110–11; Alger 1878), and also by A. de C. Motylinski, who presented the translation of the Ibādī creed by 'Amr b. Jumay to the 14th Congress of the Orientalists in Algiers in 1905.

The last century Italian academics, based mainly at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" (Laura Veccia Vaglieri, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Mario Martino Moreno and Roberto Rubinacci, together with Vanna Cremonesi and Generosa Crupi La Rosa), were among the first scholars to underline the crucial role the Ibādīs had in the formation of Islamic thought and culture.

Moreover, Rubinacci states in his work on ritual purity among the Ibadis that they had a dominant role in developing both the Law and the Dogma, as they were driven by a particularly strict ethical code that was inflamed by an intense religiosity.

Laura Veccia Vaglieri and the beginning of Kharijism

The political and religious role of the early Khawarij was analyzed by LVV in her fundamental work on the conflict 'Alī vs Mu'āwiya according to some Ibādī sources.

The study of sectarianism is strongly influenced by the medieval heresiography whose problems – late dates, rigorous classification schemes, polemics and Asha'rite-Mu'tazilite inclinations – are well known. Laura Vecchia Vaglieri was among the first scholars who tried to bypass the standard texts using material from inside the Khariji movement. Indeed, she based her pioneering study on the struggle between 'Alī and Mu'āwiya on the *Kitab al-Jawahir* by Abu 'l-Fadl Abu 'l-Qasim b. Ibrahim al-Barradi (14th-15th century) (“Il conflitto 'Alī Mu'āwiya e la secessione kharijita riesaminati alla luce di fonti ibadite”, in AIUO, Naples 1952, 1-94).

Rubinacci also emphasises the importance of this work because of the information it provides on various books and *siyar* most of which are known only from the extracts conserved in the *Jawahir*. (Rubinacci, *Il Kitab al-Jawahir di al-Barradi*, in AIUON, Naples 1952, pp. 95-110).

Laura Vecchia Vaglieri focuses also on the *Kitab al-Siyar di al-Shammakhi* (second half of 15th – beginning of 16th cent.) and the *Kash al-ghumma* by an Omani scholar from the 18th century. The sources she used referred to ancient materials, in particular a *Kitab al-Nabrawan* whose main bearer seems to have been 'Abdallah b. Yazid al-Fazari (pp. 14-15).

The khariji movement was born as a protest against the acceptance of anything other than a divine settlement for the differences that had evolved around the question of leadership between the followers of 'Alī and the supporters of Mu'āwiya after the murder of 'Uthman. Once 'Alī accepted Mu'āwiya's proposal to settle the war through arbitration, which finally ended in Mu'āwiya's favour, a group of extremist supporters of 'Alī broke away, shouting the slogan “*la hukm illa li-Allah*” (the Judgement belongs to God alone). This formula could be applied not only to 'Uthman but also to every other ruler who deviated from the right path. The Khawarij used it against 'Alī to withdraw from his party. Their argument was not weak: 'Alī had made an unjust pact with Mu'āwiya and then was unwilling to break it. He had surrendered God's right which had caused the struggle against 'Uthman and Mu'āwiya and had signed a treaty with men who did not recognise that right.

LVV poses the following questions: What were the Kharijites' intentions? Did they want to fight 'Alī or Mu'āwiya? Did they want to proclaim independence and elect a new Caliph?

Was the battle of Nahrawan before or after the meeting between the two arbiters?

LVV also exposes the childish reconstruction that the sources make of the arbitration and its immediate consequences. Was Mu'āwiya

really proclaimed Caliph given that until that time he had advanced no claims?

LVV excludes the possibility that the first Kharijīs wanted to act against Mu‘āwiya. The Syrians represented the rebel party against the power base led by ‘Alī. Once this was judged to have been forfeited, there was no longer any duty to fight Mu‘āwiya, at least not until he again rebelled against a new ruler.

‘Alī judged the Kharijīs to be dangerous, but did they really have hostile intentions towards him? LVV excludes it and considers the sources that relate violence, bloody and barbaric acts, depredation and arson committed by the Kharijīs to have exaggerated.

LVV (p. 65) provides a political interpretation to the Kharijī secession: their idea since the time of Harura had been that it was possible to be without a Caliph for a period of time, while waiting for a committee of the wise to choose the most suitable person. It is probable – she maintains – that from that very time the theory that any Muslim could become Caliph if he had the right qualities was first mooted, which would later become a firm Khawarij principle.

According to LVV (p. 67) the Kharijīs did not intend to attack ‘Alī, but were rather sickened by his behaviour and, hoping for a ruler who respected divine right, distanced themselves from him.

The rise of the Kharijīs forced the Muslim community to define its own position: who is Muslim and who is an infedel? (p. 71).

The last century Italian scholars underline as the early definitions of the Kharijīs and the points they brought up for discussion may have provided the first impulse for the formation of the oldest juridical schools as well as spurred the debate from which the Mu‘tazili dogma originated.

What is certain is that in the field of dogma as well as in the legal field, the Ibadīs elaborated a system of their own

The question of the relations between the Ibadī and the Mu‘tazili theology is central in the works by Nallino, Moreno, Rubinacci and Cremonesi focusing on North African Ibadism.

As is well known, the Ibadī theological doctrine shared a number of features with the Mu‘tazilite theology, as in the case of the anti-anthropomorphism and the theory of creation of the Qur’an. The core of the theological teaching of the Ibadīs was the conception of a righteous God who demands righteousness from his subjects.

The Qur’anic precept of “promoting good and preventing evil” to

which the Ibadis, like the Mu'tazilis, attach great importance, implies in particular the obligation to defend the true faith and ensure the reign of God on earth. It could be fully realized only if there were one head to guide the community. Thus the Ibadi community was under the obligation to elect an Imam.

As regards the religious conception of the relationship between faith and works, in the case of the Ibadis, anyone who had committed capital sins was *kafir* and as such was expelled from the Ibadi community. He was not, however, held to be *mushrik* and hence no longer a Muslim, unlike the position held by the Khariji extremists, such as the Azariqa. On the other hand, contrary to the Mu'tazila, the Ibadis did not recognize the intermedium stage (*manzila bayna al-mazilatayn*) between the *kafir* (infidel) and the *mu'min*.

It is not easy to establish a logical or chronological sequence of the various points which arose, and our scholars could only say that in the days of al-Ash'ari (d. 935) all the principles of the Ibadi doctrine were already firmly established. In contrast with orthodox teaching, it maintained: a) the essential character of the divine attribute; b) the creation of the Qur'an; c) the eternity of punishment in hell for the reprobate Muslim as well as for the others; d) the inadmissibility of the vision of God in the life to come; e) the principle of intercession f) the symbolic value of certain eschatological details; g) the rejection of all forms of anthropomorphism.

All these points are (as Goldziher had already noted see RHR, LII, 1905, 232) of Mu'tazili origin, but when and where this influence made itself felt is a question which was not clearly settled in the works by the last century Italian scholars. Was it a result of a parallel development, since the centre of Ibadism was still Basra at the time when the founders of Mu'tazilism were active there? Might it have originated among the eastern Ibadis and have been transmitted thence to the West as result of the intellectual contact between eastern and western Ibadis? Or might the Maghribi Ibadis have learnt of the Mu'tazili dogma in North Africa where it had penetrated towards the end of the eight century thanks to the Idrisi Shi'ites?

This hypothesis is suggested by Nallino (Scritti, p. 460)¹ and accepted by Rubinacci (*La professione di fede*, p. 576).

¹ Carlo Alfonso Nallino, "Rapporti tra la dogmatica mu'tazilita e quella degli Ibaditi dell'Africa Settentrionale", in *Raccolta di scritti editi e inediti*. Vol. II L'Islam.

Nallino concludes that the theory of the created Qur'an had already been accepted by the Rustamid ruler Aflah b. 'Abd al-Wahhab (ruled 208-258/823-871) and that the dogma of the Maghribi Ibadis was already fixed by the beginning of the 6th/12th century as Motylinski also stated (see L' 'aqida des Abadhites).

Mario Martino Moreno returns to Nallino's work in his "Note di teologia ibadita" (pp. 299-313)

He clarifies the question of the freedom of human actions: this is fully affirmed by the Mu'tazila while the Ibadis accept it only in the form of Asha'ari *kasb* or *iktisab*.

Kasb or *iktisab* - he states - are not inventions of al-Ash'ari, but are Qur'anic conceptions. Furthermore, the question of free will was debated at Basra at the time of the first Ibadis, Jabir b. Zayd and Abu 'Ubayda. Moreno concludes (p. 310): 1. from the earliest times, the Ibadis had recognised *qada' wa 'l-qadar* and denied *jabr*, defining human action as *kasb*; 2. once this dogma was in place, its content was analysed with the ideas that existed in the Sunnite context; 3. they knew the Asharite literature but this did not provide any exclusive or definitive formulas. In general terms, the Ibadis place *qada'* and *qadar* as part of the prescience of God, while the Ashariti link it to will.

In conclusion, Moreno does not find substantial differences between Eastern and North-African Ibadis which leads him to reply to Nallino's question of whether there was a common basis in dogma for the Mu'tazilites and Eastern Ibadis. According to Nallino the Maghribi Ibadis would then add new Mu'tazilite elements in Africa, through contacts with the Sciites and Mu'tazilites.

Moreno excludes this. The common elements come from the shared centre of Basra. The coincidences between Ibadite and Mu'tazilite doctrines do not indicate dependence, but just an affinity of tendencies.

On the contrary, as Michelangelo Guida had already stated (Storia della Religione dell'Islam, in Storia delle Religioni ed. by Pietro Tacchi Venturi, Milan 1939, vol. II, p. 308) it was precisely the Khawarij who would provide the impulse for Mu'tazilite school, which would then exercise such a great influence on the whole theological movement.

Dogmatica – Sufismo – Confraternite, ed. Maria Nallino, Romed 1940, pp. 170-175 (also published in Rivista degli Studi Orientali, vol. VII, Rome 1916-18, pp. 455-60).

Vanna Cremonesi excluded also (p.160) the possibility that the Ibadis knew the doctrine of the created Qu'ran (or more in general the Mu'tazilite dogma) in their contacts with the Idrisite Sciites from North Africa. The relations between the two communities, although frequent, were rarely friendly and so there was not an appropriate environment to create the deep knowledge that the Ibadis had of the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the created Qu'ran. The Ibadis' adherence to the Mu'tazilism of Basra could, however, be explained by the fact that the city would never cease to be the spiritual centre of Ibadism, even after the death of Abu 'Ubayda (p. 161).

This link, which was also symbolic, between Eastern and Western Ibadis is clear in the study of the "chains" of transmission of the faith (*silsilat* or *tariqat al-din*), which bears witness to the relations between the teacher and his disciples, by Generosa Crupi La Rosa (I trasmettitori della dottrina ibadita, AIUON, Napoli 1954, pp. 125-139). Indeed, the "chains" testify to a true missionary teacher line down to one of the famous "Bearers of learning" (*hamalat al-'ilm*): 'Abd al-Rahman b. Rustam, Abu 'l-Qasim al-Sadrati, 'Abd al-A'lab, Al-Samh al-Ma'afiri, Dawud al-Qibli and Isma'il b. Darrar al-Ghadamsi. (p. 137).

The Ibadi sources recognize the crucial role of these scholars in the expansion of the Ibadi doctrine in North Africa. They were trained by Abu 'Ubayda himself for five years until he was satisfied with the standard they had acquired. Their activities prove that the final form of the Ibadi doctrine was established in Basra and brought to North Africa through these missionary students.

The Italian scholars based their research mainly on late Maghribi sources: Nallino focuses on the 9th/15th century summary of faith ('*aqida*) by 'Amr b. Jami'. Rubinacci (*La professione di fede di al-Jannawuni*), on his turn, focuses on the '*aqida* by Abu Zakariya' al-Jannawuni (first half of the 6th/12th century).

Nonetheless, their conclusions are crucial as they have drawn scholarly attention to the fundamental question of the passage of ideas and doctrines within the Muslim community, whatever the answers proposed.

Rubinacci considers the '*aqida*, or profession of faith, by al-Jannawuni one of the first and organic treatises on Ibadi religious doctrine. It is an elaboration of an earlier work dating from the 2nd/8th century. He compares the '*aqida* of al-Jannawuni with that of 'Amr b. Jami', both deriving from the same earlier text.

The Ibadi quietism

As early as 1952 Rubinacci underlined the Ibadi policy of looking for alliances in his study on relations between the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan and the Ibadis (*Il califfo ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan e gli Ibaditi*, in AIUON, Napoli 1952, pp. 99-121).

According to Rubinacci, the significance of the Ibadi split from the Khariji extremists did not escape ‘Abd al-Malik; a lasting neutrality would have highly benefited the Omayyade cause. Ibadi chronicles (Rubinacci consulted the *siyar* of al-Shammakhi) agree on the good relations between Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan and ‘Abdallah b. Ibad.

Rubinacci based his research on the letters from Ibn Ibad to ‘Abd al-Malik (preserved in *Kash al-Ghumma* and in *Kitab al-Jawahir* by al-Barradi).

He touches on the fundamental issues which all scholars making use of the early Islamic religious epistles must face: the question of authenticity and date.

The second letter is undoubtedly spurious (see also Cook, *The letters of Ibn Ibad*, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 1981, p. 53), but Rubinacci endorses Sachau’s judgement on the authenticity of the first letter. In addition to his reference to Sachau, he deduces two arguments. One is a circumstantial detail, the fact that the bearer of Abd al-Malik’s original letter is named (Sinan b. ‘Asim). The second and most important argument is that Ibn Ibad’s position with regard to the Kharijis reflects a specific historical fact. Several other scholars hold the first letter to be authentic (Schacht, Lewincki, van Ess). Against all this there is the dissenting opinion by Wilkinson and Cook.

The last point I want to discuss is Rubinacci’s contribution in the understanding of the Ibadi role in the development of Islamic law.

Roberto Rubinacci, in his study on Ibadi ritual purity, based on *Kitab al-wad‘ fi ‘l-furu‘* by *shaykh* Abu Zakariyya’ Yahya b. al-Khayr al-Jannawuni, who lived in Jabal Nafusa in the first half of the 6th/11th cent., contests the assumption that the Ibadis merely adopted the legal system of the orthodox schools².

² “La purità rituale secondo gli Ibaditi”, in *Annali dell’Istituto Universitario*

Rather there was a development of Ibadi doctrine in parallel to the Sunni doctrine, and the same questions were discussed by both sides, as the Ibadis were in contact with the orthodox community for a long period in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Evidence of Rubinacci's theory can be found in the fact that the Ibadis had their own scholars in Basra at the time of the ancient schools of law, like Jabir b. Zayd, who died in circa 100 H., and Abu 'Ubayda al-Tamimi, his pupil and successor at the leadership of the Ibadi community, who continued writing political and doctrinal works.

Rubinacci's studies on the Ibadi *madhhab* demonstrate that the Ibadis took a detached line from the beginning.

Given that the early schools of law were driven by the deep spiritual requirements of Muslim law and the need to define ritual norms, and that in this context Ibadi behaviour is more significant, he provides several examples of divergence between Ibadis and Sunnis on ablution. Other elements are shared with orthodoxy, but they agree with one or other of the schools at varying moments; Rubinacci concludes that these are the result of original thought, rather than the passive acceptance of principles drawn up elsewhere. However, the decisive argument against the late derivation of the Ibadi legal system from the Sunni system is, according to Rubinacci, the fact that had the Ibadis adopted a system already defined by the schools of law at the end of the 2nd cent., they would have reproduced it along the lines of the Sunni books of the time. This can be excluded given the specific structure of the *K. al-wad'*, where the chapter on the *tawhid*, the summary of beliefs, precedes the *'ibadat*. The characteristic structure is reaffirmed during the work through the emphasis given to the spiritual content of the rite, in particular the prayers that accompany the single gestures, intended to exalt the concept of reward and divine punishment. The efforts in *K. al-wad'* to weave ethical elements in the law lead Rubinacci to conclude that they resemble a unitary conception of dogma, law and ethics, like that inspiring the first learned scholars of Islam. The *K. al-wad'* should not be considered a reflection of the period of al-Jannawuni, but rather the codification of a long oral tradition, which can be traced back through the *silsilat al-din*, to Abu 'l-Zajir Isma'il b. Darrar al-Ghadamsi,

Oriente, N.S., VI, Naples 1957, pp. 1-41. See also A. Cilardo, *Teorie sulle origini del diritto islamico*, IPO, Rome 1990, pp.119-134.

one of the five scholars who were trained in Basra at the school of the famous Abu 'Ubayda al-Tamimi, and then transferred to the Magreb in the first half of the 2nd /8th cent³.

The Ibadis demanded purity of conscience as an indispensable complement to bodily purity for the validity of acts of worship (cfr also Levi Della Vida 1978, Kharidjites, in EI IV)

Rubinacci's conclusions on ritual purity are confirmed by his research on the invitation to prayer, in use among the Ibadis of western Africa, in which he points out similarities of Ibadi doctrine with one of other of the orthodox schools as well as some divergences⁴.

Rubinacci's theories can be further confirmed by the Agostino Cilardo's research on heritance law and by my study on early Ibadi law, which show the Ibadis developed an organic legal doctrine to the extent that, given the points of agreement with the Sunni schools of law, would tend to the hypothesis of a parallel development of doctrine rather than a derivation.

³ "La purità rituale secondo gli Ibaditi", pp. 40-41. See also G. Crupi La Rosa, "I trasmettitori della dottrina ibadita", in *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, V, 1954, pp. 123-139.

⁴ "L'adhan presso gl'Ibaditi", in *Folia Orientalia*, XII, 1970.