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The Caliphate Dispute at the Times of the Downfall of the Ottoman Empire in Arab Political Thought

Summary

At the turn of XIX/XX centuries, intensive discussions were taking place in the Arab World on the subject-matter of the caliphate. It was motivated by the evident weakness of the Ottoman Empire, which became unable to defend its Arab provinces in the face of dangers forthcoming from rising European powers. Weakened, and being penetrated by the existing powers, successive provinces of the Empire were lost. Moreover, the Ottoman state collapsed as a result of World War I, and the new Turkish state abolished the caliphate. That was the background for the rise of political thought dealing with the doctrine of caliphate. Among the thinkers in this field were: ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī, Muḥammad Rašīd Riḍā and ‘Alī ‘Abd ar-Rāziq. Contemporary Islamic radicals returned to the issue of caliphate and its sources. The entire dispute is relevant in contemporary Arab and Islamic political thought.

Keywords: doctrine of caliphate, Arab-Islamic political thought, 20th century Middle East

Since late 19th Century until the 1920’s an intensive discussions was taking place in the Arab World on the subject matter of the caliphate. It was motivated by the evident weakness of the Ottoman Empire (“the sick man of Europe”), which became unable to defend and ensure the security of its Arab provinces in the face of dangers forthcoming from European powers. Weakened, and for a long time being penetrated by the then-existing powers, the mentioned Empire kept on existing – as it could be assumed – only thanks to the lack of agreement among the major powers on the mode of its partition. In spite of such a state of “equilibrium”, successive provinces of the state of Ottoman Turks were lost. Hence, Austro-Hungary, Great Britain, France and Italy conquered areas in the Balkans and North Africa (including: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Tunis, Morocco, Egypt, Cyrenaika).

Such historical background was used by Arab thinkers as the justification for dealing with the problem of caliphate. The second justification was the Young Turk revolution and activities of the organization called Unity and Progress (*Ittihad wa-at-Taraqqi*), which essentially put on the agenda the question of caliphate and boundaries of the sultan-caliph. The question found its final solution after World War I and the establishment of yet another center of power in Ankara focuses around Mustafa Kemal, who had his own vision of state authority in the shape of separating the sultanate from the caliphate (1922), with the liquidation of the sultanate function, followed by the liquidation of the caliphate itself (1924).

Obviously, it is difficult to separate political aspects from doctrinal ones, connected to Islam and religious law (*šarī'a*). Also, we cannot ignore the relevant ambitions of Egyptian rulers. It is worthwhile in this field to mention Muḥammad 'Alī (1805–1848), who after consolidating his power in Egypt, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt (1798), as an Ottoman ruler of the province conquered Al-Hijaz (in the Arabian Peninsula), next Palestine and Syria, while at the turn of the 1830's and 1840's was approaching Istanbul. The result was that European powers intervened and forced Muḥammad 'Alī to retreat to Egypt and accept the role of Egyptian viceroy (*khediv*) with the right of keeping the title on a hereditary basis. In the circumstances dominating in the world as well as in the region during the first decades of the 20th century (Entente Cordiale, Sykes-Picot, the Balfour Declaration), Egyptian rulers (kings since 1922) cherished the concept of caliphate as an institution, alongside the need to occupy the post by themselves.

In the general current of thought and thinkers, we have 'Abd ar-Raḥman al-Kawākibī (1854–1903)¹. At the turn of 19th and 20th centuries, when Al-Kawākibī (likewise many other Syrian thinkers) was residing in Egypt, the viceroy continued the ambitious traditions of his own dynasty, i.e. intended to undertake the function of Muslims' Caliph. In line with this, Al-Kawākibī had to prepare the path to this noble end. To perform this role, the Arab thinker had to direct his attention towards winning over Arab and Muslim sheiks, emirs and notables for the idea. Authors of Al-Kawākibī biography write that he accepted the viceroy's offer and in 1901 made a trip to the countries of the Orient and Africa. He visited the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Sudan, Zanzibar, Ethiopia, and the shores of the Indian Ocean together with the Persian Gulf. After returning from this six-months trip, gathering ample information on the mentioned countries, he prepared himself for visiting the Arab West. However, after returning back to Egypt, he shortly died².

So, after his departure from Aleppo to Cairo, Al-Kawākibī published his treatise *The Nature of Despotism and the Struggle Against Servitude* (*Ṭabā'i' al-istibdād wa-mašāri'*

¹ Details of the life and activity of al-Kawakibi could be traced, among others, in the following publications: Ahmad Amin, *Zu 'amā' al-iṣlāḥ fi al-'asr al-ḥadīṭ*, Al-Qāhira 1948; 'Abbās M. al-'Aqqād, *Ar-Raḥḥāla "Kaf": Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī*, Al-Qāhira 1959; Muḥammad 'Amāra, *Al-A'māl al-kāmila li-'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī ma' dirāsa 'an ḥayātihī wa-ātāriḥihī*, Al-Qāhira 1970; Sami ad-Dahhān, *Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī 1854–1902*, Al-Qāhira 1980; *Al-A'māl al-kāmila li-al-Kawākibī*, Bayrūt 1995.

² Details in: 'A.M. al-'Aqqād, *Ar-Raḥḥāla "Kaf"*, pp. 106–108.

al-isti'bād)³, treating despotism as the major question and simultaneously obstacle to the advancement of the East. In accordance with this vision despotism had a cumulative negative impact upon eastern lands and nations. The regressive process lasted for many centuries, with the danger of covering the heart of Islam – i.e., the Arab Peninsula. In order to reverse that negative tendency, it is necessary to strengthen the integrative movement of Arabs and Muslims to the elimination of doctrinal differences and return to the statements of the Koran and the Prophet's tradition (*sunna*). In his analysis of the causes of the weakness of successive Islamic states, he classifies them as: religious, political and moral causes – ending with formulating the concept of caliphate with Arabs at its head, and Arabic language as the compulsory (official) language of the future integrated Islamic world.

Religious causes included⁴:

- the determinist mentality of the community (*umma*),
- accumulation of riches in disregard for religious teaching,
- the negative impact of often sharp doctrinal-religious disputes,
- the practice of neglecting general and particular intelligence in favor of blind imitation,
- disregard for religious freedom, which has positive impact upon the society.

In turn, political causes cover such spheres as:

- the absolutist political order accompanied by the absence on control or responsibility, the absolutist attitude of rulers and their corruption,
- depriving the nation of the freedom of expression, action, security and hope for a better future, the elimination of the influence of public opinion upon public affairs, lack of justice and equality of social strata before the law, suppression of independently-minded people including high-ranking theologians,
- the disintegration of the community and the dominance of group and party-political allegiance.

The moral causes include the following⁵:

- general self-satisfaction together with ignorance,
- the extinction of the spirit of competition and attainment of success, the lack of free enterprise and the limiting of employment in state administration and army,
- the lack of consultation with the society, absence of transparency in public life,
- the low level of education, including religious teaching and ethics, and the negative attitude towards sciences.

Al-Kawāḳibī attached a number of reasons directly with the Ottoman state⁶, and above all:

- the introduction of a unified administrative and penal law without taking into consideration for ethnic and customary differences of the population,

³ *Al-A'māl al-kāmila li-al-Kawāḳibī*, op. cit., pp. 413–535.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 360–361.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 361–363.

- administrative centralism of a territorially great state, accompanied by the absolute powers of governors and heads of local administrations.

The accomplishment of such an ambitious programme of revitalizing the caliphate as the state of Islam, of *umma*, has to be the work of Arabs. They in the first place are called to bring about the innovation of the civilization of Islam, which is justified – according to him – by the following considerations⁷:

- the language of Arabs is the richest among the languages of Muslim countries'
- Arabic is the language of Qur'ān and Islamic creed, its also the ritual language of Muslims all over the world,
- Arabs possess natural tendency to respecting both equality of peoples' rights and established social gradation; they acknowledge the principle of consultation (*šūrā*) within the community,
- Arabs have the competence to resolve issues related to faith interpretation.

In this task of the innovation of the Islamic civilization, a prominent role has to be played by the Arab Peninsula due to the following considerations⁸:

- the Peninsula is the cradle of Islam, where the Shrine of Al-Ka'ba exists,
- the inhabitants of the Arab Peninsula are characterized by ethnic and religious homogeneity,
- the area is far from foreign influences in addition to lacking (at the time) natural riches that usually attract alien powers,
- the preservation of pure, intrinsic form of the Islamic faith among the Peninsula inhabitants.

In his work *Umm al-Qurā (The Mother of Towns, i.e., Mecca)* he continues, as a core principle for the Islamic revivalist vision, the reintroduction of the caliphate. It should take place with the appointment of an Arab caliph of Qurayš affinity with his headquarters at Mecca and a political authority limited to region of Hijaz, where Mecca and Medina are sited. The caliph had to be assisted by a consultative board composed of some hundred members – delegates of all Muslim sultans and emirs, with the task of undertaking only supervision of general religious policies.

The authority of both the caliph and the consultative board could not collide with the competences of existing rulers. The board performs the duty of electing the caliph and undertake resolutions on religious questions. These resolutions would have further to be passed by the caliph to different authorities and later supervise their accomplishment. The caliph had to have the power of approving the attainment by sultans and emirs of their functions, which always should take place with due respect for Islamic law and principles of hereditary succession.

At the terrain of his political authority in the Ottoman province of Hijaz, the caliph would have at his disposal a small armed force, counting some two to three thousand soldiers sent by caliphate member countries, while its commander would come from

⁷ Ibid., pp. 391–392.

⁸ Ibid., p. 390.

a tiny emirate and subjected to the board. The caliph would have no military power, none the less preserves a great moral prestige, whereas his name would have to be mentioned during sermons before the names of local rulers.

In this presented concept of the shape of the political system, based on the caliphate, which is elaborated in *Umm al-Qurā*, Al-Kawākibī emerges essentially as an advocate of the unity of the Arab world headed by an Arab caliph. He therefore is pointed out as a vanguard of pan-Arab ideology, as opposed to pan-Islamic option advocated by Ġamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī (1838–1897). However in his earlier work *Ṭabā'i' al-istbdād*, Al-Kawakibi seemed to be devoted to the idea of the emancipation of the Muslims in general and Arabs in particular. In his call for fighting despotism, he was bearing in mind the human being – equally as an individual, as well as a member of the society or the state.

Placing the dispute in its historical context, it should be stated that after World War I the Ottoman Empire, fighting on the losing side of Central States, became partitioned (in accordance with the Treaty of Sevres signed on 10th August 1920, which was renegotiated on somewhat better conditions at Lausanne on 24th July 1923), while the very existence of post-war Turkey became precarious. After a short period of dual power: with the sultan at Istanbul and Mustafa Kemal at Ankara, in 1922 the sultan Mehmed VI Vahideddin was dethroned, the sultanate abolished, with the caliphate preserved as the spiritual leadership of Muslims, having the sole task of caring for religious matters – a task delivered to Abdülmecid II, who performed his post only until 1924. Then the authorities of the Republic of Turkey, founded in 1923, declared the abolition of the caliphate.

In the post-World War I Middle East, nation states emerged on the one hand, while on the other – liberal conceptions (among others, of Luṭfī as-Sayyid) became disseminated among Arab educated strata. Simultaneously, we observe the ebb of the Islamic-revivalist current of thought that was characteristic for 19th century. In this way, the renewal of the discussion about the caliphate became an impulse for a new search for justifications of the idea on the grounds of the *ṣarī'a*. The caliphate doctrine, in the version of the then author it's Muḥammad Rašīd Riḍā (1865–1935), a disciple and aide as well as – in many directions – continuator of Muḥammad 'Abduh (1865–1935) in the field of reform and innovation, appeared to be of tremendous consequences. It constitutes a regressive step on the path of reformist thought, oriented towards the transformation of the nation state, a regressive step in favor of the conservative innovation of the caliphate. The Riḍā vision, in its later versions conceptualized by Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906–1949) and other thinkers and activists of the Muslim Brothers, leads ultimately to the questioning of the doctrinal justifications – and in consequence, the destabilization – of the nation state.

M.R. Riḍā belonged to the later generation of reformist thinkers (*nahḍawiyyūn*). He was the closest disciple of Muḥammad 'Abduh, when the latter established the periodical "Al-Manār" in 1898. After the death of 'Abduh in 1905, he continued to be an advocate of innovation of Islamic thought. At the time of the Young Turk revolution, he defended the constitution and the democratic-representative system of governance in the Ottoman Empire, and continued likewise after the dethronement of the sultan Abdülamid II and

the seizure of power by the society Unity and Progress. At first, before revising his position in favor of his own pattern of the caliphate in compliance with traditional *šarī'a*, Riḍā rendered support to politicians of that organization, as well as the concept of decentralization, which meant that he opposed the dismemberment of the Empire. In the same line of thought, he supported the political program of the Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal. Hence, although he acknowledged the rationality of the emergence of the Arab nation state from the ethnic and religious points of view, he regarded that end as unrealistic, and vehemently supported the unity of the Ottoman State, because “Muslims have no other state”⁹.

Similarly to many outstanding authorities in the field of Islamic jurisprudence, Muḥammad Rašīd Riḍā undertakes the task of defending the caliphate-imamate idea, acknowledging this institution as obligatory from the religious point of view¹⁰. “Those who well know the tradition of the community (*umma*), authorities in the field of the Prophet’s teaching and deeds (*sunna*), in addition to numerous other members of the society are unanimous in accepting that the appointment of the imam, i.e. his guardianship upon the *umma*, constitutes the duty of Muslims according to the *šarī'a*”¹¹.

The general line of Riḍā’s arguments in favor of the caliphate were formulated against the background of Middle Eastern and international events of the first decades of the 20th century in the following manner: the Islamic state is disoriented in questions of faith and religious rules, it is subjected to rulers belonging to various beliefs and orientations as well as to convictions of spiritual leaders of different religious schools. Furthermore, it must seek compromise with its rivals in faith and in questions of earthly life, whereas whenever a reformer emerges people of bad will stand solidly against him and spread doubts about the sincerity of his faith. The only remedy for this should be the revival of the caliphate, the appointment of an imam in compliance with the requirements of *šarī'a*, whom every Muslim would agree to be subjected.

Sultan Abdülhamid – according to M. Rašīd Riḍā – had neither the attributes of caliph nor performed his functions. He was not recognized by the Muslims of Egypt, the Far Maghreb (Al-Mağrib al-Aqṣā), Central Arabia (Nağd)¹². The Turks, in turn, overthrew the state of Ottomans and instead established their own republic, separated religion from politics – appointing one of the successors of former sultans as a caliph of Muslims. This dilemma is resolved by Riḍā by referring to an idea known in Islamic thought, namely “caliphate of necessity” (*ḥilāfat aḍ-ḍarūra*). In this way he assessed the benefits incurred by the existence of the caliphate against the losses generated by the lack of this institution. Rejecting decisively the separation of religion from politics¹³, he was suspicious about the intentions of Mustafa Kemal with respect to the abolition of the caliphate, also appeared

⁹ “Al-Manār”, 1917, vol. XX, 1; “Al-Manār” 1909, vol. XI, 12.

¹⁰ ‘Abd al-Ilāh Balqazīz, *Ad-Dawla fī-al-fikr al-islāmī al-mu’āšir*, Bayrūt 2002, p. 83.

¹¹ *Al-Ḥilāfa aw al-imāma ‘uẓmā*, in: *Ad-Dawla wa-al-ḥilāfa fī-al-ḥiṭāb al-‘arabī ibāna aṭ-ṭawra al-kamāliyya*, Rašīd Riḍā – ‘Alī ‘Abd ar-Rāziq – ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān aš-Šābandīr: *Dirāsa wa-nuṣūṣ*, Bayrūt 1996, p. 54.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹³ *Ibid.*

undecided about the choice of a Turkish town as the caliphate headquarter¹⁴, while the same could be said about the choice of Hijaz for the caliphate center¹⁵. He furthermore postulated the foundation of a party under the name of the Reform Party, beside deciding to work out the project of the system of governance of the future caliphate¹⁶. In general terms, Riḍā took into consideration various possibilities of the development of events. Having this background in mind, it is worthwhile to proceed to the doctrinal components of M. Rašīd Riḍā's thought on the caliphate.

Already, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (972–1058) had defined the imamte-caliphate as a function “created to supercede prophecy in the field of guardianship upon religion and earthly politics”¹⁷. Later, other authorities followed that path. Hence, M.R. Riḍā defined this notion and its synonyms as follows: “The caliphate, great imamate and leadership of the faithful (*imārat al-mu'minīn*) are three words of the same meaning – namely, leadership of the Islamic government that combines the interests of faith and earthly life¹⁸. Since the idea of caliphate is connected with prophecy, then the caliphate possesses a dualist meaning, in the sense of the dualism of what is temporal and eternal. The Prophet was the messenger of God, the caliph replaces the Prophet – which means that the caliphate, due to the requirements of the *šarī'a*, is a political system, while the installment of the caliph is the task of the notables (*ahl al-ḥall wa-al-'aqd*) of the community. According to the rules of *šarī'a* this is a compulsory duty¹⁹. None the less, neither he nor any of his predecessors introduce justifications derived from tradition on the subject of the compulsory character of the establishment of the caliphate.

We are neither presented with original concepts based on cases of caliph appointments by the notables through the traditional acknowledgement of loyalty (*bay'a*), nor with attributes of the candidate for such a post. In the latter issue, Riḍā follows the path of Al-Māwardī and Ibn Ḥaldūn. The first recognized – as conditions indispensable for the selection and performance of function of caliph – justice, competence (*kaḥā'a*) and Qurayši affinity. In a similar manner Ibn Ḥaldūn listed the requirements towards the caliph nominee, with the difference of regarding Qurayši affinity as questionable.

Riḍā's concept foresees the possibility of electing a person without the choice of the notables on condition of securing the mentioned requirements²⁰. Dealing more closely with the notion of notables, he defines them as widely-understood leaders of the nation and declares that the noble manners of the nation depends on the noble manners of this category of people. In his view, they are those, to whom Qur'ān refers as being worth obedience on the side of the public, as well as those, whom rulers should obey. This category

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 102–103.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 100–101.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 103–105.

¹⁷ Al-Māwardī, *Al-Aḥkām as-sulṭāniyya wa-al-wilāyāt ad-dīniyya*, Bayrūt (n.d.), p. 5.

¹⁸ M.R. Riḍā, op. cit., p. 53. The term *imamate* has nothing in common with shi'a thought and is fully connected with sunni jurisprudence, i.e., *imamate* is understood as the synonym of the caliphate.

¹⁹ M.R. Riḍā, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁰ Ibid., op. cit., p. 71.

(notables) is assigned – in conformity with religious law – with the task of implementing *šarī'a* rulings and controlling their implementation²¹. He declares dissatisfaction for the failure of the Muslim spiritual leaders ('*ulamā'*) to perform that task. In this respect, he was more critical of sunni spiritual leaders than the shi'a, who managed to join religious with political leadership²².

Riḍā's vision had conceptualized the pattern of *ahl al-hall wa-al-'aqd*, which did not exist any more at his times, i.e., the pattern of spiritual leaders capable to make the sultan accountable – above all, appoint and dismiss him in compliance with the rulings of the *šarī'a*. Moreover, he sees for this category a substantial role in the vivid life of Egypt and Turkey, since contemporarily to him there were charismatic leaders in the persons of S'ad Zaghloul and Mustafa Kemal²³. The establishment of the caliphate, for Riḍā, would create a unifying ramification as the remaining barrier in the face of the expansion of European powers, which conquered one Muslim country after the other.

Bearing in mind the realities of his times, the thought of M. Rašīd Riḍā was focused on finding a religious justification for the existing caliphate, which lacked support in the *šarī'a*. The dilemma was solved by him through referring to the category of necessity. On the one hand, the candidate to the function of caliph should meet the requirements of justice, intellectual competence and Qurayši affinity, on the other – in the circumstance of the lack of one or more of these traits – the matter is reduced to the category of rules of necessity (*ḍarūra*). Then, the person who possesses most of the mentioned traits is elected. Thereafter, he should strive as much as possible to attain the remaining qualifications²⁴. Riḍā points out to the examples of Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, to whom both religious leaders and subjects showed obedience, in spite of the lack of the traits of justice and knowledge on the part of these caliphs.

Riḍā proceeds then to another moment in his theory by the introduction of a distinction between the caliphate-imamate, being endorsed – with reservations, but voluntarily – by the notables, and the caliphate imposed by the victor. In the second case, obedience was imposed, however in both cases we have a caliphate by necessity. The justification of such a caliphate could be questionable, never the less – in his opinion – the caliph cannot be deprived of legality on the ground of the *šarī'a*²⁵. At this point, he rejects the multiplicity of caliphs ruling in various Muslim countries at the same time. For Riḍā, the unity of imamate appears to be an unquestionable rule, since the source of *šarī'a* requires the assignment of government to a single person, being an imam, because for such a government the preservation of order and avoidance of chaos are among the most important tasks. In the circumstances of creed and ethnic divergences, Riḍā upholds the unity of imamate as a consequence of the cohesion of the *umma*²⁶.

²¹ M.R. Riḍā, op. cit., pp. 56–57.

²² Ibid., p. 90.

²³ 'Abd al-Ilāh Balqazīz, op. cit., pp. 95–96.

²⁴ M.R. Riḍā, op. cit., p. 73.

²⁵ M.R. Riḍā, op. cit., p. 74.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

These theoretical considerations lead Riḍā to the conclusion, which assumes that the Ottoman “caliph of necessity”, based on the conquest of the Muslim world, was not a real caliph uniting all Muslims. Therefore, there was no need for its restoration²⁷. Furthermore, the caliphate, introduced by Mustafa Kemal after the abolition of the sultanate, was categorically rejected by Riḍā, because “[...] if it comes to be a caliphate of a spiritual character without authority in the field of politics and governance of the *umma*, then it would surpass the ramification of the imamate, whose rules we have established”²⁸.

Summing up the thought of Riḍā in the subject matter of the caliphate, it is worthwhile to point out to three elements. Firstly, it is a repetition and orderly presentation of the Islamic doctrine in this field; secondly – it departs in its message and concept of caliphate-imamate from the revivalist thought, to which his attainments in other fields are counted; thirdly – he initiated a new attempt, and later orientation of political thought, about the Islamic system of government, more precisely – about the idea of the Islamic state, formulated after him – among others – by the Muslim Brothers²⁹.

In this presentation of the dispute about the caliphate, it is worthwhile to have also a serious consideration of the relevant thought of ‘Alī ‘Abd ar-Rāziq, published in his book *Al-Islām wa-uṣūl al-ḥukm* (“Islam and the Fundamentals of Governance”). As mentioned above, when the Ottoman caliphate was abolished after four centuries of existence, the world of sunni Islam became deprived of a spiritual leader bearing the title of caliph. Many political centers and their leaders were preparing to occupy the vacancy. One year after the abolition of the caliphate, ‘Alī ‘Abd ar-Rāziq published his mentioned book. In it, against the background of Islamic tradition and history, he investigated the question of caliphate-imamate, reaching to the conclusion that such a model of governance is alien to Islam and there are no religiously acknowledged fundamentals or texts (in The Book – Qur’ān, *sunna* – path of the Prophet Muḥammad, or *iğmā’* – unanimity) that justify the establishment of this institution. The pattern of Muslim caliphate governance, as defined by ‘Abd ar-Rāziq, was tantamount to the discouragement of the intellectuals of the time to conceive the revival of this institution³⁰. The work of ‘Abd ar-Rāziq was not a mere academic attempt, but appeared to be also a serious endeavor directed towards foiling the plan of the Egyptian King Fu’ād in that respect. At that time (1924–1925) the ambitious monarch was campaigning in favor of his own candidacy. Hence, *Al-Islām wa-uṣūl al-ḥukm* was an obvious challenge against both the Egyptian crown and conservative forces of the Islamic world. In 1924 a General Islamic Congress on the Issue of Caliphate was convened to Cairo, and a periodical entitled “Al-Ḥilāfa al-Islāmiyya” (“The Islamic Caliphate”) was inaugurated with the intention of gathering support and loyalty for one of the kings or emirs in order to appoint him the caliph of Muslims. Often these efforts were organized behind the scene by King Fu’ād³¹.

²⁷ ‘Abd al-Ilāh Balqazīz, op. cit., p. 99.

²⁸ M.R. Riḍā, op. cit., p. 87.

²⁹ ‘Abd al-Ilāh Balqazīz, op. cit., pp. 100–101.

³⁰ M. ‘Amāra, introduction in: ‘A. ‘Abd ar-Rāziq, *Al-Islām wa-uṣūl al-ḥukm...*, p. 7.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 8–9.

‘Abd ar-Rāziq, in the mentioned book expressed the opinion that Islam “is a message and not authority (power), a religion and not a state”. He decisively rejected the concept of Islamic spiritual leaders that declared the religious imperative of the caliphate and imamate. He presented them as the advocates of the divine right of governing the Islamic community (*umma*). For such spiritual leaders, according to Rāziq, the caliph acquired the rank of Prophet Muḥammad, while the caliph’s guardianship was treated as analogical to that of God or the Prophet. However, in reality – even at the time of Just Caliphs (*Al-Hulaḫfā’ ar-Rāšidūn*) – the guardianship was solely based upon excessive, despotic force.

To elaborate, the major themes of *Al-Islām wa-uṣūl al-hukm* were: the meaning of the caliphate; the character of absolute authority comprising the essence of the caliphate; the inadmissibility, baseless nature, and illegality of this system from the Islamic point of view; the political character of authority (power) in Islam. During the two former centuries, the relationship between what is political and what is religious (*what is Caesar’s and what is God’s*) was the subject of incessant disputes and numerous publications in Islamic political thought. To resolve the issue, Rāziq refers to Islamic tradition.

‘Alī ‘Abd ar-Rāziq starts from the statement, that Muslim spiritual leaders were rather unanimous about the religiously justified obligation of electing a caliph, while we cannot find in the *ṣarī’a* any whatever proof in support of such an assumption. This legal vacuum is filled by the spiritual leaders by deriving arguments from the fields of logical criteria and rational rules, which however do not possess the status of religious law. If there was any proof in support of their opinion, the spiritual ulamas would not have hesitated to attach them. The Prophet’s message was solely a religious message; it was in no way political, i.e., related to state leadership as it is evident the verses of Qur’ān quoted by ‘Abd ar-Rāziq³². In accordance with his perception of the Qur’ān, Muḥammad was a Prophet in the lineage of prophets, and he had to convey to people God’s message³³. Not only this; even in the hadises of the Prophet (statements of him and about him), we do not find any proof of the mentioned concept of political governance. We do not find them too in the category of issues covered by the concept of general agreement (*iğmā’*) of the community of spiritual leaders³⁴. Hence, the matter does not belong to the sphere of spirituals, but – of interests and benefits (*maṣlaḫa wa-manfa’a*). It is related to the interests and benefits of people, who need the caliphate system, in order to acquire benefits for themselves, while Muslims do not need such a caliphate. It has nothing in common with the faith of Islam, moreover “[...] the caliphate was and remains to be the mischief (*nakba*) of Islam and Muslims, and a source of vice and corruption [...]”³⁵. ‘Abd ar-Rāziq sees the Islamic caliphate as a force based on coercion

³² ‘Abd ar-Rāziq, *Al-Islām wa-uṣūl al-hukm*, pp. 158–159. He refers to the following named verses of Sūras: *Al-Aḫzāb*: 6, 26; *An-Nisā’*: 80; *Al-An’ām*: 66, 107; *Jūnus*: 99, 108; *Al-Isrā’*: 54; *Al-Furqān*: 43; *Az-Zummar*: 41; *Aṣ-Ṣūrā*: 48; *Qāf*: 45; and *Al-Gāšiya*: 21–22.

³³ ‘Abd ar-Rāziq, op. cit., p. 160. The author points out, among others, to the Sūra of *Al-Mā’ida*: 99 and *An-Nahl*: 64.

³⁴ ‘Abd ar-Rāziq, op. cit., p. 131.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

– upon sword, arrow and well-armed forces. Force and domination were the sole ways of legalizing its own existence.

The views of ‘Alī ‘Abd ar-Rāziq subsequently led to the failure of the ambitious plans of Egypt’s ruling family to undertake the leadership of the Islamic world. ‘Abd ar-Rāziq himself became the object of attacks on the part of conservative forces, headed by the spiritual hierarchy of the Cairo religious academy Al-Azhar. The result was also the calming down of the discussion about the question of caliphate for some period of time. However, contemporary Islamic radicals returned to the issue, referring selectively to the tradition of Islam and forerunners among Islamic doctrine interpreters. If somehow accidentally they refer to ‘Abd ar-Rāziq, they do so only to subject his ideas to severe criticism and negative assessment. None the less, his ideas – and the entire dispute – are relevant in contemporary Arab and Islamic political thought.