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Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra

A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam

VOLUME 1

By

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Translated from German by

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John O'Kane

Preface

Theologians come up with some strange ideas. This gives them their charm even today. Islamic theologians are no exception. However, the epoch that I wish to deal with had two further advantages to offer them: they stood in the openness of the beginning, and the society they lived in made extensive use of theological categories in interpreting its existence. The grace of recent birth predisposed them to a multiplicity of undertakings and a freedom from axioms that they would never again attain at a later time. The willingness of society to listen to them put them at the centre not only of shaping everyday life but of high-level politics as well. For this reason, in what follows there will be talk of caliphs and heretics, as well as of rent or of sexuality; "theology" is understood in the widest sense as religiously determined discourse about reality, which took its direction from a revelation that was still young.

But it is difficult for us to grasp clearly the two poles of this interrelationship; society and theology were still searching for their identity. The history of their effect on one another is likewise a description of the emergence of "orthodoxy"; because only a fundamentalist can be deceived by the picture our sources sketch for us from a later perspective: namely, that from its inception Islam had always been what it was later. One found oneself by making choices from numerous models and suggestions that were laid out in revelation and in tradition. But this process of *trial and error* which every religion goes through, was played out in Islam in a truly complex manner, given that its followers, during the wars of conquest, were dispersed over vast territories of the old world and there, as a class of overlords, dominated the substrata of the old population; this led to special provincial developments which, only with the passage of time, were levelled out by a general Muslim consciousness. One will have to examine the process, more than has previously been the case, by focusing on separate individual regions and cities.

The present study has been carried out with this priority in mind. In the first part, an attempt is made to reconstruct the religious situation in the individual cultural provinces; only later, in the second part, is attention more narrowly focused on a centre, namely on the caliph's court in Baghdād. When one surveys the provinces, phenomena enter the picture that until now, in compliance with the viewpoint of the Islamic sources, have for the most part been described as sectarian; on the other hand, in each particular locality they were often what one considered to be "orthodox" at the time. Only when, due to the attraction of the newly-founded capital, intellectual forces were increasingly lured from the old centres and met one another in Baghdād, did a theology arise among the Muʿtazila which laid claim to being generally binding. We wish to observe this process over approximately a century and a half, from the end of the Umayyad period until the second half of the 3rd century *hijrī*. Several chapters of the first part will indeed reach back to the 1st century; but this century will only be treated coherently in a brief overview at the beginning. In the final sections of the second part, one or another of the thinkers will be dealt with who only reached the high point of their creative work in the later decades of the 3rd century; but basically the description breaks off before the Muʿtazila entered into their first scholastic phase with Jubbāʾī among the Baṣrans, and Khayyāṭ and Kaʿbī among the inhabitants of Baghdād.

This chronological delimitation, as unusual as it may at first seem, is explained by the nature of the transmitted sources and the present state of research. Everything we learn about the 1st century in Islamic texts is under the suspicion of projection; Western scholarship, as far as the reliability of the sources and the method of their interpretation are concerned, is more disunited than ever. Only if one sees more clearly what occurred later, may one gain firmer ground under one's feet for judging the first beginnings. The present work aims to provide the prerequisites for that goal but without being able to reach the goal itself; no one could be more aware than I of how much that which I have set in motion with earlier studies (*Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie*, Berlin 1975; *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie*, Beirut 1977) is in need of precise proof. By comparison, the chronological end point of this study may appear much more justified by the parameters of the problem itself. But here as well the findings in the sources have played their part; because in the case of Jubbāʾī and Kaʿbī the materials increase so greatly and attain such subtlety that, given the lack of preliminary studies, one cannot yet assume responsibility for undertaking a summary. The reconstruction of theological systems completely depends on establishing the correct emphasis; it is a matter of recognizing the *nervus rerum*. But this is scarcely possible on the basis of intuition when scholastic thought loses itself ever further in details – or only such details are graspable in the later tradition.

Of course, the same problem also arises for the era dealt with by us. Original texts in this period are almost equally scarce as in the 1st century; the doxographical reports on which we mostly must rely are incoherent and only single out particular points. On the other hand, doxographical reporting leads us to hope that these points, notwithstanding the distortion that can never be ruled out, were perceived to be typical and most of the time indicate the essential deviation concerning the thinker, which can also be a possible entrance into his "system". The crux of the matter is whether these points can be effectively combined so that despite all the lacunae a convincing overall picture results.

One is often scarcely able to gauge how much in this game of mosaic building one is working with hidden hypotheses; only when a new piece of evidence emerges, does one become aware of one's own subjectivity. The less material one has, the more quickly the hermeneutic circle fails.

Greater certainty, for the time being, can only be gained here by surveying the tradition as completely as possible. But this is easier said than done. Up to now the relevant texts have neither been collected nor philologically made accessible. For this reason, it seemed advisable first of all to collect them and to present them separately in translation with a concise commentary.[1] In this way, the body of footnotes in the work could be generally relieved of purely philological problems; moreover, the non-specialist reader also acquires the possibility of forming a picture of the state of the transmitted sources for himself and of critically examining the overall view offered in the present study. But it is likewise assumed that the user of the book regularly compares the accompanying texts while reading the work and ideally has previously looked through them; they could not be cited in the work over again *in extenso* without repetitions being introduced. Likewise, the question why in each case they were combined one way and not another could not always be explicitly raised and answered. Basically, an attempt has been made only sparingly to fill in gaps in the tradition with speculation, and as much as possible to help each source to play its due part. This may have led to occasional sections appearing somewhat incoherent or, in contrast to tracking down problems and contradictions, an impression of a certain harmonization is given. But here too the reader is advised to form a picture for himself on the basis of the texts.

These last remarks apply chiefly to the second part; it is there that systems are first reconstructed on a larger scale. The first part deals with implicit rather than explicit theology; from the sources there drawn upon – the biographical literature, the *Ḥadīth*, Koranic exegesis – the religious or theological views of a scholar often can only be gauged in very general terms. Hence a structural decision ensued which has given the whole work its profile: we have not divided the materials according to subject matter but have proceeded prosopographically. This research technique, compared with other methods more recently applied in Islamic Studies, is relatively conventional and rather unassuming. However, it has the advantage of corresponding to the nature of the Arabic sources; it thus offers the best guarantee, in the beginning stage in which we still find ourselves, of mastering the unmanageable and disordered mass of source materials. Meanwhile, in the first part of the book, by sifting through "collective biography" (as one sometimes calls the prosopographical method) insight will be gained into the significance that religious movements of the early period, i.e. "the sects", had in each of the different regions. By contrast, in the second part, for which we disposed over considerably more systematic materials, we have attempted, in accordance with the scheme "life and works", to sketch the profile of individual personalities.

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[1] These Texts are referred to especially in the footnotes and can only be consulted in Vols. V and VI of the German original of this work. Likewise, in the footnotes the word Werkliste appears a few times which refers to a list of the known works by the author under discussion which is also only to be found in Vols. V and VI.

Of course, this method is also known to have its drawbacks. What one arrives at through it is a history of scholars; the religion of the simple people can scarcely be grasped this way. The biographical literature which here provides the basis conveys a static picture; it generalizes very broadly and offers little possibility of grasping developments. Relationships based on practicalities are torn apart by the progression from name to name. It is not clear in every case where certain persons belong geographically; as is well known, the *nisba*, which is often one's only clue, is anything but unambiguous. Yet what one can especially reproach us with is that beyond all the Qadarites, Murji'ites, etc., whom we have discovered following the sources, "normal" figures, who perhaps actually make up the majority, have been forgotten. These objections cannot be entirely eliminated; we can only affirm that we have tried to take them into account as much as possible. At the end of the work, a short summary structured according to specific topics is intended to provide an opportunity to restore to view some of what has been left aside due to the method's constraints. In any case, may the reader throughout bear in mind it was not our intention to write a general intellectual history of the regions dealt with and the time period in question. Our subject is the relationship between theology and society, nothing more and nothing less.

One will have to ask oneself whether this as well is not too pretentious for the century and a half that we have chosen. The work as it now stands comprises four volumes; and two volumes with translations of texts have been added. This betrays a certain recklessness and is surely out of keeping with the times. People who think in terms of aeons will ask whether it would not have been better to publish the collection of texts and let matters rest there; this would have been useful and could have been carried out in the rather mechanical manner which nowadays has become usual for projects. In effect, the danger is great that I have overextended myself. Whoever tears down the fences between the garden allotments of the specialists will hardly escape with impunity. Only how fortunate that in the case of early Islamic theology these garden allotments have scarcely been laid out yet; in several places the ground has still to be divided into plots. Thus, when making many statements, one cannot avoid walking on tiptoe and employing the subjunctive mood; but for precisely this reason one can permit oneself to perform a little ballet.

Consequently, what is here presented is not a "synthesis"; the overview stands at the beginning and not at the end. The general picture, for the most part, is not put together on the basis of results of earlier research but is a sketch intended to serve as a means of orientation for later monograph works. Perhaps in the future someone will dispense a great sum of money to tackle this subject with a group of willing hands – through team-work. I have no wish to spoil the fun for him by my solo effort. However, it seems to me of capital importance that work of this kind, given out in assignments, is in need of a concept. Yet up to now that is exactly what we have not had concerning Islamic theology of the period dealt with here. What has served as a guiding principle up to now, without our always being aware of it, has been the scheme of divisions used by the Islamic heresiographers. If one wishes to break free from this, one must first know the source materials precisely. It is not useful to confine oneself to one particular corner; one then remains conservative with regard to the larger picture and, again without being aware of it, tends to orient one's individual knowledge accordingly. It will never be possible to achieve a synthesis solely on the basis of individual studies; the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The general sketch, each time and at every stage, has the double function of offering a guideline and inviting criticism.

My adopting this perspective makes it easier to come to terms with the fact that there will be numerous errors regarding detail; in a work of this scope it cannot be avoided. If we associate a hope with this work, it is that the time may be coming to an end when only a few found their bearings in the sources of early Islamic theology and when academic dialogue was sometimes limited to occasions when scholars argued against one another on the basis of random findings. But it would be a shame if instead an era began in which glib speculators confined themselves exclusively to the two volumes of translations accompanying this work. The path should not be laid open for the patter-merchants. What one would wish for is that a broadening of informed discourse would take hold in the field.

It will not come as a surprise to anyone to learn that individual chapters, especially those of the first part, were originally written separately; nor were they composed in the sequence in which they now appear. Only in a second round of writing did they acquire their coherence. The structural ordering has been indicated by a system of numbering which in several chapters of the first volume becomes confusing through a plethora of digits. But one is free to ignore it; its sole function is to facilitate advance references to the later volumes. The reader should not forget that the system was only added subsequently; in the case of several subheadings, no doubt it is still noticeable that originally the flow of the presentation was not meant to be interrupted there. A multi-volume work brings with it problems that are not posed in a monograph. Repetitions or inconsistencies in the style of citations cannot be wholly avoided; in the course of time contradictions will perhaps also turn up. Presumably they will first be exposed through the Indices and Bibliography. But I must ask the reader's indulgence regarding both of these; they will have their place at the end of the work, i.e. in volume IV. For the time being, it will not be easy to find one's way; here my only advise is to do what one did in times past with a scholarly book: to read it.

I am proud to have been able to do without the apparatus of a modern high-status scholar. I have not called upon the aid of research assistants throughout the decisive phase; all the while relevant materials had to be located and processed, I was solely dependent on myself. Only once the manuscript existed, did I delegate work with regard to checking the text, in preparing the Bibliography, etc.; I will have more to say about this at the conclusion of the work. For the time being, it remains for me to thank those who offered me advice on areas I am less familiar with: my late friend Konrad Gaiser and my colleagues Böhlig, Gerö, Rex, Rüger, Schramm and Ullmann. Wadād al-Qāḍī, in Chicago, and Heinz Gaube, in Tübingen, read the introductory chapter (Part A) with critical eyes; H. Jaouiche for a while checked quotations from Arabic sources. M. Behnstedt, the secretary of the Orientalische Seminar, in a devoted manner over the last ten years, and along with her regular duties, wrote out the whole of the first, and large parts of the second version of the work; A. Harwazinski, in cooperation with her, produced a computer-manuscript of a large part of the second version of the first and second volumes. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Volkswagenstiftung awarded me sabbatical leave for the years 1984/85 and 1987/88. The president of the University of Tübingen in the years 1987 and 1988 made possible the production of the fair copy through special funds. H. Gaube and St. Gerö, by their agreement to a rotating take-over of the Seminar directorship made valuable free time available to me. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft has supported the present volume with a subsidy to defray the printing costs. The thirteen-month period for editing which preceded their approval again demonstrated to me with what wisdom the Orient recognizes that haste is the devil's work; during this interim I had the opportunity to weed out errors and to add supplementary information. I wish to express my heart-felt thanks to all the above-mentioned here at the start of a conclusion which under the current circumstances will still require several years to be completed.

Josef van Ess
Tübingen, 1990

CHAPTER 1

Setting the Seal on Prophecy

The death of the Prophet was "the greatest misfortune", so one frequently reads on Muslim tombstones.[1] For a little more than two decades heaven had opened; by means of His Messenger God had spoken directly to His new chosen people and, as it was soon to be believed, to human beings throughout the world. He was now no longer simply "the Merciful" (*al-Raḥmān*), as the Jews of South Arabia had already described Him,[2] but had manifested Himself in a special manner as "the Lord of Muḥammad".[3] One was, however, obliged to acknowledge that the occurrence of prophets had come to an end; all that remained of the Word was Scripture, and the charisma of God's Messenger had to be "accommodated in everyday reality".[4] The liberating interpretation,

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[1] *aʿẓam al-maṣāʾib*; apparently found for the first time in an inscription from the year 71/691 (cf. El-Hawary in: JRAS 1932, p. 290). Additional material in Masssignon: BIFAO 59/1960/260 ff. (= *Opera minora* III, 303 ff.) and in Meier: *Der Islam* 62/1985/25, ftn. 21. The formula and the idea come to be expressed in a *ḥadīth* (*Conc.* III, 432a).

[2] J. Rijkmans in: *L'Oriente cristiano nella storia della civiltà*, 436 ff.

[3] *rabb Muḥammad*, appears thus in early Islamic poetry (O. Farrukh, *Bild des Frühislams*, 21 f.), for instance by analogy with *rabb Mūsā wa-Hārūn* in the Koran (surahs 7/122 and 26/48). – One may speculate concerning to what extent this special relation already existed in pre-Islamic times. Occupying a key position in this regard is a late Sabaean rock inscription Ja 1028 from the year 518 , at the end of which the formula *rbhd* / *bmḥmd* is found (A. Jamme, *Sabaean and Hasaean Inscriptions from Saudi Arabia*, pp. 40 and 55, l. 12). Following on the invocation of "the Lord of the Jews", i.e. Raḥmānān, is the invocation of a *mḥmd*; the lack of mimation appears to show it is a personal name. If one may translate this as "by Muḥammad", it might be assumed that among Jews of South Arabia there were those who were waiting for the Messiah as "the Praised One"; and that the Prophet had laid claim to this epithet for himself. The compilers of the *Dictionnaire Sabéen* (A. F. L. Beeston, M. A. Ghul, W. W. Müller and J. Rijkmans) have not included the form and thereby indicate that they consider it a personal name. However, Beeston in his most recent treatment of the inscription to date (in: BSOAS 48/1985/42 ff.) has now judged otherwise; for him *mḥmd* is an epithet of Raḥmānān (Jamme also agrees, op. cit. 55, and similarly Rodinson in: BO 26/1969/28). Moreover, the question as to whether the Prophet subsequently adopted the name Muḥammad is generally answered in the negative (cf. F. Buhl, *Leben Muhammeds*, 112, ftn. 7, with additional literature). I must thank W. W. Müller, Marburg, for information on this question.

[4] The expression "accommodation in everyday reality" (Veralltäglichung) comes from Max Weber (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, ^{5}Tübingen 1976, pp. 142 ff., also 661 ff.). On the process itself cf. T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat*, 23 ff., who in this connection works with

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as it came to be viewed later, was expressed by Abū Bakr: "Whoever honoured Muḥammad – Muḥammad is now dead; but whoever honoured God – God lives and will not die".[5] God had spoken through Muḥammad; but in fact Muḥammad was "nothing more than a messenger", like other prophets before him.[6] The message, however, which was sent to all those who understood "the Arabic Koran", would last for eternity.

This is a topos; the optimism of the first caliph sprang from the hindsight of the transmitters. Abū Bakr's faith may have been strong; but the breaking away of the bedouin tribes must have shown him that their loyalty was to the person of Muḥammad and not to the message. The thought which was put in his mouth occurs several times in the reports about the Ridda.[7] Only with the wars of conquest did kerygma demonstrate its power;[8] the criterion that confirmed the young religion was success. Only thus did the attempts to repeat the occurrence of prophets lose their appeal. In fact in Kūfa, up to the time of ʿUthmān, Musaylima still found followers from among the Banū Ḥanīfa in whose midst he had emerged; they possessed their own mosque in the city.[9] But this was scarcely anything more than an exotic epilogue. Perhaps there were efforts to describe Abū Bakr and ʿUmar as prophets; yet this was soon toned down to the effect that they were *muḥaddath*, "partners in conversation" with God, i.e. inspired but no longer mouthpieces of the divine Word. The old model only retained its force for a while where, as among the Shīʿites in Kūfa, it was believed that the development of the early years was fundamentally wrong, or in places like Damascus where expectation of the Messiah had hung on for a long time; there during the days of ʿAbd al-Malik a certain Ḥārith b. Saʿīd had passed himself off as a prophet and enjoyed some popularity among the native population until he was executed in the year 79/698. Otherwise, by this period even in chiliastic movements no one spoke of a prophet after Muḥammad but rather of the Mahdī who as a worldly ruler would restore the justice of early

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the concept "replacement institution" (Ersatzinstitution); W. A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, 9 ff.; Abdelfattah Kilito, *L'Auteur et ses doubles*, 42 ff.

[5] IS II$_2$, 56, ll. 12 f., and Ṭabarī I, 1816, ll. 12 ff.; also cited in Shahrastānī 11, ll. 14 ff./19, ll. 14 ff. (cf. transl. by Gimaret, *Livre des Religions*, 127, with additional material).

[6] Surah 3/144. The passage is cited by Abū Bakr.

[7] Evidence in Meier, *Abū Saʿīd* 313 f., from the *K. al-Ridda* of Wathīma.

[8] Dealing with this fundamentally and in detail, now F. M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton 1981).

[9] Cf. the traditions in the *Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shayba, vol. XII, 268 f., no. 12788–9, and 272, no. 12799; similarly also Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* ^{2}V, 231, no. 3837 (already noted in Lammens, *Etudes sur le siècle des Omayyades* 120). On Musaylima cf. E. Shoufani, *Al-Ridda and the Muslim conquest of Arabia* 154 f. and above all D. Eickelman in: JESHO 10/1967/17 ff.

times. For the sober majority the model of the caliphate was the only sensible alternative.

The idea that Abū Bakr and ʿUmar were prophets is combated in the old Ibāḍite *ʿaqīda* that Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar b. Jumayʿ, around the turn of the 9th/15th century, translated from a Berber dialect into Arabic under the title *Muqaddimat al-tawḥīd* (ed. Ibrāhīm Aṭfiyāsh, Cairo 1353/1934, cf. p. 112, l. 1; on the work in general cf. EI^2 I, 121, and Cuperly, *Introduction à l'étude de l'Ibāḍisme*, 47 ff.). The information is isolated; the commentators of the text, Shammākhī (d. 428/1521–22) and Dāwūd b. Ibrāhīm al-Tallātī (d. 967/1560), have no idea what to make of it (ibid. 112, ll. 5 ff.). However, it could be precisely here that the age of this idea reveals itself. Muqaddasī came across it in the 4th century in Iṣfahān (see below Chpt. B 3.2.3.1). One must ask oneself whether a widely disseminated *ḥadīth* is not already addressing this issue: "The Israelites were ruled over by prophets; when one of them died, the next one always followed. After me, however, no other prophet will come. Instead there will be caliphs and many of them indeed…" (Muslim, *Imāra* 44 = no. 1842; for further instances cf. *Conc.* III, 24a). The concept *muḥaddath* is likewise already used in a *ḥadīth*, though only in connection with ʿUmar (*Conc.* I, 434a). On this in general Y. Friedmann in: JSAI 7/1986/202 ff. And M. Takeshita, *Ibn ʿArabī's Theory of the Perfect Man*, 135 ff.; see also below p. 324.

On the Kūfan "prophets" see below p. 269. They were not directly linked with Muḥammad; but their emergence shows that the concept in certain circles was not looked upon as inappropriate. The authoritative textual sources have been translated by H. Halm, *Islamische Gnosis*, 55 ff.; the relevant dissertation by W. F. Tucker, *Revolutionary Chiliasm in Omayyad Iraq* (PhD Bloomington, 1971) has unfortunately only been made accessible in some sections (*Arabica* 22/1975/33 ff., MW 65/1975/241 ff., and *Der Islam* 54/1976/66 ff.). The Mahdī model already existed at this time. Mukhtār, as is known, applied it to Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya; in the same period it is found – even if not with the exact term – in Baṣra and under ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr in the Ḥijāz (see Madelung in: EI^2 V, 1230 ff., and in: JNES 11/1981/291 ff.; as well as ʿA. Dūrī in: *Festschrift ʿAbbās*, Arabic Part, pp. 123 ff.).

Damascus, in the pre-Christian-Jewish conception, was the place where one expected the Messiah; for this reason it was there that Paul underwent his experience (cf. N. Wieder, *The Judaean Scrolls and Karaism*, 1 ff.). The Muslim idea that at the end of time Jesus will descend there on "the white minaret" to fight the Anti-Christ could also be explained on the basis of this. Ḥārith b. Saʿīd whom the Muslim sources call al-Kadhdhāb, "the Arch-Liar", emerged in Damascus but was crucified alive in Jerusalem; at the same time he had his side pierced with a lance. It appears that his followers stylized the account of his arrest and death in accordance with Christ's Passion. One must ask oneself whether they did not in part originate from Christian or Judaeo-Christian circles. On the limited information that we possess about this event, cf. D. M. Dunlop in: *Studies in Islam* (New Delhi) 1/1964/12 ff. and my own *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie*, 228 ff. Dunlop goes back to Ibn ʿAsākir and Dhahabī; other sources to mention are Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, 364, ll. 5 ff. from bot., and Ṣafadī, *Wāfī* XI, 254, no. 373. Everywhere the chief informant is the Damascene historian Walīd b. Muslim al-Umawī (d. 195/810); on him see GAS I/293). That the tradition is old is shown by the fact that Mālik b. Anas refers to it: for him this was absolutely the only case of a crucifixion in Islam. As Saḥnūn explains, what was meant was in fact the crucifixion of a living person (*Mudawwana* VI, 299, ll. 5 ff.; on the form of crucifixion in Islam cf. O. Spies in: *Festschrift Mensching*, 143 ff.). In Balādhurī something similar is briefly narrated about a certain Khālid; he also is said to have been crucified alive (*Anonyme Chronik*, ed. Ahlwardt, 253, ll. 4 ff.). The report may be referring to the same person; however, it is characteristic that here ʿAbd al-Malik already justifies the execution with a reference to surah 33/40 where Muḥammad is described as "the Seal of the Prophets" (more on this below pp. 34 f.).

The attitude towards life among the Christians in Syria at this time is reflected in an apocalypse which was apparently composed in Jazīra in the region of Sinjār but later attributed to the Byzantine Church Father, Methodius of Patara. It was deciphered for the first time by M. Kmosko and correctly localized (in: *Byzantion*, 6/1931/273 ff.). Upon his results P. J. Alexander then built further, having occupied himself several times with the text (cf. his posthumously published book *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, ed. D. deF. Abrahamse, University of California Press 1985, but also his assembled articles in the collective volume *Religious and Political History and Thought in the Byzantine Empire*, Variorum Reprints 1978, nos. XI–XIII). Recently H. Suermann in his dissertation *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn 1984) has once more printed the Syriac original and translated it (pp. 129 ff.; cf. also the translation by Alexander, 36 ff., and the edition of the Greek versions by A. Lolos, *Die Apokalypse des Ps.-Methodius*, Meisenheim 1976, Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 83). Since Kmosko, one has been accustomed to date the text before ʿAbd al-Malik (Suermann as well, 161); Alexander even considers whether one should go back to the time before the First Civil War. However, the period between 73/692 and 85/704 as the earliest *terminus ante quem* is obligatory. Consequently, S. Brock for good reasons has suggested the first half of ʿAbd al-Malik's rule as the date of composition; at that time the caliph's power was limited to Syria and he was forced to pay tribute to the Byzantines. This would seem the likeliest moment for the hope expressed in the Methodius Apocalypse that the last "Roman" emperor would conquer Jerusalem and set down his crown on the cross of Christ ("Syrian Views of Emergent Islam" in: *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. Juynboll, pp. 18 f.; similarly also Reinink in: Byz. Zs. 75/1982/339, ftn. 19. On the figure of the final emperor now see Suermann in: OC 71/1987/140 ff.). It is interesting how much Jewish and Christian ideas are mixed with one another in the text; Alexander, who has drawn attention to this in his last work which appeared just after his death, wishes to attribute responsibility for this, among other factors, to a Judaeo-Christian environment in Upper Mesopotamia (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Insitute* 41/1978/1 ff.). Brock, however, takes the author of the Apocalypse to be a Melkite (in: BO 44/1987/415).

To the time of ʿAbd al-Malik also probably belongs the case of Yazīd b. Unaysa which is unique in the history of Islamic sects. He was a Khārijite who was awaiting the arrival of a new prophet; but he was active in Iran. For more about him see below Chpt. B 3.2.1.1.

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CHAPTER 2

The Awareness of Being Chosen and Identity Formation

There have continuously been chiliastic movements in Islam; frequently they were simply a form of expression through which a religious age reacted to political oppression and economic crisis. But they remained marginal phenomena; in its great majority Islam abandoned expectation of the imminent end of the world more quickly than did Christianity. Nonetheless, even when the Last Judgement was already no longer central in his preaching, the Prophet had believed so strongly in an impending end of time that when he dealt with the construction of the first mosque, he only thought it necessary for it to be "a hut like that of Moses" (*ʿarīsh ka-ʿarīsh Mūsā*).[1] However, events developed in such a linear manner and with such unexpected acceleration that later even magic dates like the year 100,[2] "the Year of the Donkey",[3] scarcely interrupted the course of history in the consciousness of contemporaries. The Abbasid

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[1] On this *ḥadīth* cf. Kister in BSOAS 25/1962/150 ff.; also the *ḥadīth*s in Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* I, 10, ll. 3 ff. should also be consulted here.

[2] *Ḥadīth*s on this in Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* 119, ll. 4 ff. = 99, ll. 1 ff./transl. Lecomte 111 f. § 139–140. Expectations were focused on the caliph Sulaymān and, after the latter's surprisingly premature death, on ʿUmar II (on this cf. together with what Madelung has to say in EI^{2} V, 1231, the evidence in Watt in: "Iran and Islam", *Festschrift Minorsky* 569; also my *Anfänge* 125). Sulaymān's expedition against Constantinople for a time attracted them to himself (on this summarizing, now R. Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion* 129 ff., whose scepticism on this point I do not entirely share). Especially typical for the time of ʿUmar II are the animal idylls in IS V, 285, ll. 16 ff.

[3] "The Year of the donkey" took its name from surah 2/259. By this is also meant the year 100; but looking back in this way the beginning of the Abbasid movement was designated (*Akhbār al-ʿAbbās wa-wuldih* 193, ll. 10 ff., and Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh* II, 357, ll. 9 f.; on this Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des abbasidischen Kalifats* 57 f. and Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory* 65 ff.). On the Umayyad side, one shifted the calculation and steered the expectation at the last minute to Marwān II; this is probably how he acquired his nickname al-Ḥimār (Thaʿālabī, *Thimār al-qulūb* 372, no. 673 and *Laṭāʾif al-maʿārif* 43, ll. 6 ff./transl. Bosworth 61; following this source, H. von Mžik in: WZKM 20/1906/310 ff.). Ruʾba spoke of Marwān as the one who "rode past on his donkey" (Ahlwardt, *Sammlungen alter arabischer Dichter* 174, last l.). Cf. also the passage in Sharon, *Black Banners* 188, ftn. 97.

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revolution had chiliastic roots;[4] but even it would only usher in a temporal change (*dawla*).[5] Calling to the faith and early political success had created within the community of Muslims an awareness of being chosen and having a mission, which proved to be enduring beyond all the crises.

Moreover, the most grave crisis had come early on, and one had experienced it painfully enough. Yet it had not arisen because of the delay of the Parousia,[6] but because of the split within the community during the First Civil War. What was lost in the split was unity, not the sense of being different. A number of Muslims at the time did abandon their faith for Christianity;[7] but most reacted in conformity with the system: they held onto the collective experiences such as the public prayers or attempted, in small social groups in which it was easy to maintain control over orthodoxy, to realize the ideal of Islam. The Khārijites saw in this retreat within themselves a second *hijra*; while one left behind the mass of former comrades in the faith as "unbelievers", one could hope to lead the life of a community of saints.[8] Among the early Shīʿa, the feeling of being the only chosen ones was at least as strong;[9] but they were confident that a member of the Prophet's family, through his charisma, would show them the path to salvation.[10] The Murji'a, which once more attempted to patch up the breach with an ecumenical compromise, to begin with was locally confined and, in emphasizing faith over works, counted on the general Muslim awareness of being chosen.[11] However one came to a decision, membership in the community, *ecclesia* as Wansbrough has called it,[12] is the oldest form of expression of Islamic soteriology. The single individual completely merged in the community; an individual sense of sin did not yet exist, and individual destinies, even when they were potentially so symbolically pregnant as the murder of three of the four caliphs who later became known as "the rightly guided", remained without influence on the image of history.

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[4] Saffāḥ describes himself as Mahdī in an inscription that has been found in the chief mosque of Ṣanʿāʾ (text in Dūrī in: *Festschrift ʿAbbās* 124, and Serjeant-Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ* 348, but where on p. 324 in a remarkable slip *al-mahdī* is interpreted as the caliph al-Mahdī). The epithet Saffāḥ itself is a chiliastic attribute; the caliph had applied it to himself during his "accession-to-the-throne speech" in Kūfa (Ṭabarī III, 30, l. 2 from bot.; on this T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat* 91 ff. and *Untersuchungen* 93 ff., there pp. 101 f. also in argument with B. Lewis in: *Zakir Husain Presentation Volume = Studies in Classical and Ottoman Islam*, Variorum Reprints, no. II, pp. 16 f.).

[5] On this now M. Sharon, *Black Banners from the East*, passim; on the term *dawla* cf. also Lewis, *Political Language* 35 f.

[6] Delay in the Parousia only occurs again in the Shīʿa in connection with Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya and already in connection with ʿAlī (cf. Halm, *Gnosis* 33 ff. and 48 ff.). One never expected the return of Muḥammad ; after all one had the Koran.

[7] Thus at least in the First Civil War (Wellhausen, *Arabisches Reich* 55 and 63).

[8] I here and in what follows adopt categories that were developed by W. M. Watt. For the Khārijites cf. his article in: *Der Islam* 36/1961/215 ff. and his explanations in: *Islam and the Integration of Society* 94 ff.; critical of this, Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* 54. On the social background cf. also E. Ashtor, *Social and Economic History* 30 ff., as well as now H. Dabashi, *Authority in Islam* 121 ff. On the highly complex semantic history of the word *hijra* cf. R. Serjeant in: Serjeant-Lewcock, *Ṣanʿāʾ* 40 ff. and Chelhod, *L'Arabie du Sud* III, 28 and 170; ʿAthamina in: SI 66/1987/225 ff.; Zafarul Islam Khan, *The Origins and Development of the Concept of Hijrah or Migration in Islam* (PhD Manchester 1987); Madelung in: REI 24/1986/225 ff. (*Festschrift Sourdel*, not yet published); Bosworth in JSS 34/1989/355 ff.

[9] On this also below p. 318 f.

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[10] Watt, *Integration* 104 ff.

[11] On them see below pp. 222 ff. Watt emphasizes the common intention among the Khārijites and the Murji'ites in his article "The Charismatic Community in Islam" in: *Numen* 7/1960/77 ff.

[12] *The Sectarian Milieu* 132; cf. also the remarks ibid. 87 ff.

2.1 Symbols of Islamic Identity in the Caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik

It was easier for "the opposition parties" when it came to safeguarding internal solidarity; they remained within fixed boundaries, and they already found unity and identity in protest. The authorities, on the other hand, the Umayyad caliphs and their governors, first had to create unity and identity; they made use of religion as a binding tie within an area of rule that had expanded too rapidly, one in which the awareness of being chosen frequently only expressed itself in the "colonialist" attitude of superiority of the Arab settlers. At this point the intellectual achievement of ʿAbd al-Malik reveals itself; formed by the experience of the second great civil war, he undertook to create a stronger consciousness of the distinctive character of the Islamic community as a whole. He did not do this with manifestos but with symbols. This was not something completely new; ʿUmar by introducing the new calendar had already established such a marker. But during the two generations that had since elapsed a development had taken place; one now sees how theological thinking based on Koranic statements finds expression in these symbols.

There was first the reform of the administration. Its symbolic power was undoubtedly felt most strongly by the non-Muslim. Everyone now had to communicate with the chancellery in Arabic, in a language which many of the subject people still regarded as the odd gibberish of uneducated bedouins; a whole class of arrogant functionaries were thereby deprived of office and income or had to transform themselves most rapidly.[1] Along with the language also changed the repertoire of phraseology; unfortunately we no longer know much about this. Here the religious dimension of the measures revealed itself. It would have been more noticeable to an Arab and a Muslim; the language as such would already remind him of the victory of his revelation. For us the process becomes most clearly visible in the currency reform; here it is possible to demonstrate which texts were turned into symbols, and we also know the transitional stages that were followed. As with the reform of the administration, one must distinguish between the Iranian and the Greek sphere of influence. The traditional Sassanian coins were at first struck with an additional *bismi'llāh*;[2] later the image of the fire-altar framed by two attendants was replaced by the *shahāda* (still in Pahlavi),[3] and then with the reform the coins acquired an Arabic legend[4] on both sides. In the same way, early on, the cross was made unrecognizable in the images adopted from Byzantine coinage until, in the year 77/697, striking genuine Islamic images on coins became the norm.[5] On the reverse side, the coins bore as an inscription the text of surah 112.[6] This now likewise occurs as a watermark on the papyrus that was obtained from Egypt; until then it had borne a formula to do with the Trinity. The same occurred with textiles, glass weights, ceramics, etc.[7] Even signposts and milestones were Arabicized and Islamicized.[8]

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[1] On this cf. M. Sprengling, "From Persian to Arabic" in: AJSL 56/1939/175 ff. and 325 ff.; summarizing, now L. Goodman in: CHAL I, 474 ff.

[2] H. Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik*, illustration 1 and pp. 18 ff.

[3] Thus on an Arabo-Sassanian dirham from the year 72, i.e. shortly before the beginning of the reform (Mochiri in: JRAS 1981, pp. 168 ff.).

Nowhere, however, is the raising of awareness illustrated more clearly than on the Dome of the Rock. Contrary to what was previously assumed, the construction does not appear to belong to the period of the civil war but was only begun in the year 72/692 when, after the end of the campaign against Muṣʿab b. al-Zubayr, resources started to flow more abundantly.[9] The Dome of the Rock is a demonstration of power *vis-à-vis* Byzantium. For that reason it is located in Jerusalem, as a counterpart to the Anastasis Church (partly in ruin since the Persian invasion) and – perhaps – the Church of the Ascension. It is in fact not a mosque but an edifice built for pomp and prestige.[10] The building's inscriptions underline its importance; their number and length show how much it mattered to the authorities who, after some time, were once more victorious and wished to proclaim their "ideology". Once again surah 112 stands in the foreground; it makes up part of three out of the four inscriptions we possess.[11] But in one place[12] it is supplemented by the closing verse of surah 17 which in a similar manner was understood to be anti-Trinitarian.[13] Jesus is mentioned but in the way the Koran understood him, as "a bondsman of God",[14] and on the north gate the prophetic mission of Muḥammad is emphasized with surah 9/33;[15] the same Koranic passage is also found once again on coins.[16] Muḥammad is above all also the one who will undertake intercession for his community at the Last Judgement;[17] in this way all doubts about being chosen are set to rest. Moreover, this fact is already clearly expressed on earth; because God gives rule to whom He will and removes it from whom He will.[18]

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[4] On the development in detail cf. also Morony, *Iraq* 38 ff.

[5] On the beginnings of Arabic coinage cf. M. L. Bates, *Islamic Coins* (New York 1982), pp. 6 ff. and now in greater detail in: *Revue Suisse de Numismatique* 65/1986/231 ff.; concerning ʿAbd a-Malik's reform of the coinage, with special emphasis on the metrological aspect, Ph. Grierson in: JESHO 3/1960/241 ff. On the iconography cf. Miles in: *Ars Orientalis* 3/1959/210 ff. and in: *Amer. Numism. Soc., Museum Notes* 13/1967/ 205 ff.; also A. Grabar, *L'Iconoclasme byzantin: dossier archéologique* (Paris 1957), pp. 67 ff. with illustrations 62–66 and now in general R. J. Herbert in: *Proceedings Bilād al-Shām* IV$_2$, vol. I, 133 ff. On the religious significance of the coinage reform cf. Paret in: *Kunst des Orients* 11/1977/177 f. (= *Schriften zum Islam* 267 f.). A general critical overview of the literature in Bates in: MESA Bulletin 13/1979/3 ff.

[6] On this in detail Walker, *Catalogue* II, 84 ff.

[7] Cf. the report of Kisāʾī in R. Sergeant, *Islamic Textiles* 12 f.; also Goodman in CHAL I, 475. On glass weights cf. Morton in: BSOAS 49/1986/177 ff.

[8] Sharon in: BSOAS 29/1984/117 f.; on this see the illustrations in Grohmann, *Arabische Paläographie* II, 83.

[9] Thus Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der Zweite Bürgerkrieg* 227 ff.

[10] On this H. Busse in: JSAI 5/1984/117 f.; also already O. Grabar in *Ars Orientalis* 3/1959/ 55 ff., but still with the old early dating.

What is here clearly an effort at image promotion, in the end transforms itself into fanaticism. ʿAbd al-Malik orders crosses to be forbidden throughout the whole empire;[19] in Egypt at the command of his brother ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who was the local governor, churches had ribbons attached to them, upon which was inscribed surah 112 and where Jesus was described as a prophet of God.[20]

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[11] One finds this best in M. Van Berchem, CIA, *Jérusalem "Ḥaram"* II, 228 ff.; in RCEA I, 8 ff., nos. 9–11, the commentary is left out, and the Koranic quotations are not given in full. A German translation now in H. Busse in: *Das Heilige Land* 109/1977/8 ff., there nos. I–IV (in CIA and RCEA both inscriptions, which follow inside and outside under the moulding of the entire curve of the cupola, are dealt with as one). On the political significance already Grabar, op. cit., 52 ff.; now also G. R. D. King in: BSOAS 48/1985/274 and E. C. Dodd and Sh. Khairallah, *The Image of the Word. A Study of Quranic Verse in Islamic Architecture* I, 19 ff. Busse gives the most detailed interpretation in: *Theol. Quartalschrift* 161/1981/168 ff.; but I cannot follow his view that the inscriptions are "to be understood as a running commentary on the opening surah of the Koran". In his most recent work on the subject ("Tempel, Grabeskirche und Ḥaram aš-šarīf", in: H. Busse – G. Kretschmar, *Jerusalemer Heiligtumstraditionen in altkirchlicher und frühislamischer Zeit*, pp. 1 ff.) he seems to distance himself from this interpretation (there p. 20). On my own view of the problem cf. *The Youthful God. Anthropomorphism in Early Islam* 1 f.; for more on the subject see below Chpt. D 1.2.1.3.

[12] RCEA no. 9; Busse no. III.

[13] That it was not necessarily meant this way originally is another matter (cf. Paret, *Kommentar* 26 f. on surah 2/116 f.).

[14] Following surah 4/172 (RCEA no. 9; Busse no. IV).

[15] RCEA no. 11; Busse no. II.

[16] Walker, *Catalogue* II, 84 ff.

[17] RCEA no. 10; Busse no. I.

[18] Ibid., as a quotation of surah 3/26; on this Sharon in: IOS 10/1980/123.

[19] Hage, *Syrisch-jakobitische Kirche* 70 f.; in detail now R. Schick, *The Fate of the Christians in Palestine* (see below p. 77, ftn. 23) 266 f.

[20] Severus b. al-Muqaffaʿ in: PO 5/1910/25, 3 ff.; following him, King in: BSOAS 48/1985/274.

The Taghlib tribe, which until then had remained Christian, was persecuted.[21] One year before the caliph's death, all pigs in Syria are supposed to have been killed.[22] Due to its long rule, Christianity had become accustomed to promote itself aggressively: with musical and ornamental splendour. That was now over; the new "barbarians" showed they were not to be won over in such a manner. The Jews, who had long since adapted themselves to concealing their religion, remained unperturbed.

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[21] Hage, ibid. 72; for more see below pp. 76 f.

[22] *Chronica minora* 232, ll. 22 f., Chabot. On all this cf. also the important collection of materials by S. Griffith in: JAOS 105/1985/62 ff. (on the coinage reform) and 68 ff. (on the iconoclastic measures).

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The Middle East

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LAST 2,000 YEARS

Bernard Lewis

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CHAPTER 3

ORIGINS

The advent of Islam and the story of the founder and his first companions and disciples are known only from the Muslim scriptures, traditions, and historical memories. It was not until some time later that these events came to the attention of the outside world and drew the testimony of independent or external observers. In this Islam resembles Judaism, Christianity, and other great religions of humankind, and presents a similar problem to the historian. Already in medieval times, some pious Muslim scholars, more rigorous than others, questioned the accuracy or even the authenticity of individual biographical and historical traditions, while still accepting without reservation the validity and perfection of the religious message. Modern critical scholarship, subject to no such constraints, has raised many more questions, and until independent evidence in the form of contemporary inscriptions or other documents and records becomes known, much of the traditional narrative of early Islamic history must remain problematic, while the critical history is at best tentative.

For Muslims, the essentials of the story are clear and certain. The mission, struggles and final triumph of the Prophet, the foundation of the Muslim community, the vicissitudes of his followers and successors, are known from scripture and from the transmitted recollections of participants; these form the central core of historical awareness of Muslims everywhere. According to the tradition, the call to Prophethood first came to Muḥammad, the son of ʿAbdallah, when he was approaching his fortieth year. On a night in the month of Ramaḍān, it is related, the Angel Gabriel came to Muḥammad as he slept in solitude on Mount Ḥirāʾ and said, 'Recite!' Muḥammad hesitated, and three times the Angel nearly stifled him until Muḥammad asked, 'What shall I recite?' Then the Angel said, 'Recite in the name of thy Lord who created all things, who created man from clots of blood. Recite, for thy Lord is the most generous, who taught by the pen, who taught man what he did not know.' These words form the first four verses of the ninety-sixth chapter of the Muslim scripture, known as the Qur'ān. This is an Arabic word which combines the meanings of 'reading' and 'recitation'. It denotes the book containing the revelations which, according to Muslim belief, were vouchsafed to Muḥammad by God. After this first message, there were many more which the Prophet brought to the people of his birthplace, urging them to give up their idolatrous beliefs and practices and to worship one single, universal God.

Muḥammad was born, according to tradition, in about 571 CE to a family of the Arab tribe of Quraysh, in the small oasis town of Mecca in the region known as the Ḥijāz, in western Arabia. The greater part of the peninsula at that time consisted of empty desert, broken by a few scattered oases and crossed by a few caravan routes. Most of its people were nomads, who gained their livelihood by raising sheep, goats, and camels, and from time to time by raiding rival tribes, the people of the oases, and those of the borderlands. Some lived by tilling the soil in the few places where this was possible; some by commerce, when events in the outside world brought traders back to the trans-Arabian routes. The renewal of warfare between Rome and Persia in the sixth century was such a time, and a number of small towns along the caravan route between the Mediterranean and the East were able, briefly, to flourish. One of these towns was Mecca.

During the early years of his mission, Muḥammad gained a number of converts, first among members of his own family, and then in wider circles. In time, these new ideas and the new movement inspired by them aroused suspicion and opposition among the leading families of Mecca, who saw the Prophet and his teaching as a threat to the existing order, both religious and material, and to their own pre-eminence. The traditional biography speaks of pressures and even of persecution to the point that some of the converts left home and took refuge on the other side of the Red Sea, in Ethiopia. In the year 622 CE, about thirteen years after the traditional date of the first Call, the Prophet entered into an agreement with emissaries from a small town called Yathrib, in another oasis some 218 miles north of Mecca. The people of Yathrib welcomed Muḥammad and his followers to their town, and offered to make him arbitrator in their disputes and to defend him and those converts who would accompany him from Mecca as they would defend their own people. Muḥammad sent some sixty families of his followers ahead of him, and finally joined them himself in the autumn of the same year. This migration of the Prophet and his followers from Mecca to Yathrib is known in Arabic as the *Hijra*, literally the migration, and is regarded by Muslims as the decisive moment in Muḥammad's apostolate. Later, when a Muslim calendar was established, it was reckoned from the beginning of the Arabian year in which the Hijra took place. Yathrib became the centre of the Muslim faith and community and in time came to be known simply as Al-Madīna – the City. The community was called the *Umma*, a word the meaning of which evolved as did the community itself.

In Mecca, Muḥammad had been a private individual struggling against first the indifference and then the hostility of the rulers of the place. In Medina he himself became ruler, wielding political and military as well as religious authority. Before long, the new Muslim polity in Medina became involved in warfare with the pagan rulers of Mecca. After a struggle which lasted eight years, he crowned his career by conquering Mecca and establishing the Islamic faith in place of the now abrogated idol-worship of his fellow townsmen.

There is thus a crucial difference between the career of Muḥammad and those of his predecessors, Moses and Jesus, as portrayed in the writings of their followers. Moses was not permitted to enter the promised land, and died while his people went forward. Jesus was crucified, and Christianity remained a persecuted minority religion for centuries, until a Roman emperor, Constantine, embraced the faith and empowered those who upheld it. Muḥammad conquered his promised land, and during his lifetime achieved victory and power in this world, exercising political as well as prophetic authority. As the Apostle of God, he brought and taught a religious revelation. But at the same time, as the head of the Muslim *Umma*, he promulgated laws, dispensed justice, collected taxes, conducted diplomacy, made war, and made peace. The *Umma*, which began as a community, had become a state. It would soon become an empire.

When the Prophet died, according to tradition on 8 June 632, his prophetic mission was completed. The purpose of his apostolate, for Muslims, had been to restore the true monotheism which had been taught by the earlier prophets and had been abandoned or distorted; to abolish idolatry, and to bring God's final revelation, embodying the true faith and the holy law. According to Muslim belief, he was the last – the Seal – of the Prophets. At his death the revelation of God's purpose for humankind had been completed. After him, there would be no more prophets and no further revelations.

The spiritual task was thus completed and the spiritual function at an end. The religious function, however, remained – that of maintaining and defending the Divine Law and bringing it to the rest of the world. The effective discharge of this function required the continued exercise of political and military power – in a word, of sovereignty – in a state.

Muḥammad himself had never claimed to be more than a mortal man, the Apostle of God and the leader of God's people, but himself neither divine nor immortal. 'Muḥammad', says the Qur'ān, 'is no more than an Apostle, and Apostles before him have passed away. If then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels?' (3:138).

The Prophet was dead, and there would be no more prophets. The head of the Muslim community and state was dead, and had to be replaced. In this emergency, the inner circle of the Prophet's followers chose one of their own number, Abū Bakr, one of the earliest and most respected of the converts. The title he used as leader, according to the historiographic tradition, was *Khalīfa*, an Arabic word which, by a fortunate ambiguity, combines the notions of successor and deputy. According to one tradition, he was *Khalīfatu Rasūl Allāh*, the successor of the Prophet of God; according to another, he was *Khalīfat Allāh*, the Deputy of God – a claim of far-reaching implications. At the time of Abū Bakr's accession, it is unlikely that he or his electors had any such notions. But from their act of improvisation came the great institution of the caliphate – the supreme sovereign office of the Islamic world.

The early history of the Muslim caliphate, like that of the Prophet himself, is known principally from Muslim sources, and it is not until some time later that historians of other lands begin to report on the rise and progress of the new state and the new faith. Muslim accounts were orally transmitted for generations before being committed to writing. They are vitiated not only by the fallibility of human memory, less of a problem in a pre-literate society than it would be now, but also, and more significantly, by the many personal, familial, tribal, sectarian, and party disputes that divided the early Muslims and that consequently coloured the different historiographic versions that have come down to us. Even some of the most basic facts, such as the sequence and outcome of battles, may be different in competing versions.

At the Prophet's death, according to the Muslim historians, the religion that he had brought was still confined to parts of the Arabian peninsula. The Arabs, to whom he had brought it, were similarly restricted, with perhaps some extension in the borderlands of the

missing

seems to have denoted a frontier or limit, and hence a frontier zone or province. The same term incidentally provided the name of Egypt in biblical Hebrew, in Aramaic, and in Arabic. The *amṣār* were of central importance in the government and eventual Arabization of the provinces. In the early days, the Arabs were a small, isolated, dominant minority in the empire which they had created. In the *amṣār* the Arab frontiersmen and their language predominated. The core of each of the *amsār* consisted of military cantonments, in which the Arab fighter-colonists were settled in their tribal formations. Around that core there grew up an outer town of artisans, shopkeepers and others, drawn from the native population, who ministered to the various needs of the Arab rulers, soldiers and their families. These outer towns grew in size, wealth and importance, and came to include increasing numbers of native civil servants retained in the service of the Arab state. All these perforce learned the Arabic language and were influenced by Arab tastes, attitudes and ideas.

It is sometimes said that the Islamic religion was spread by conquest. The statement is misleading, though the spread of Islam was to a large extent made possible by the parallel processes of conquest and colonization. The primary war aim of the conquerors was not to impose the Islamic faith by force. The Qur'ān is explicit on this point: 'There is no compulsion in religion' (2:256). This was usually interpreted to mean that those who profess a monotheist religion and revere scriptures recognized by Islam as earlier stages of divine revelation may be permitted to practise their religions under the conditions imposed by the Islamic state and law. For those who were not monotheists and possessed no recognized scriptures, the alternatives were harsher, but there were few if any such in the regions ruled by the early Arab conquerors. The conquered peoples were given various inducements, such as lower rates of taxation, to adopt Islam, but they were not compelled to do so. Still less did the Arab state try to assimilate the subject peoples and turn them into Arabs. On the contrary, the early generations of the conquerors maintained strict social barriers between Arab and non-Arab, even when the latter embraced Islam and adopted the Arabic language. They discouraged marriages between Arab women and non-Arab men – though not the converse – and did not admit the new Muslims to full social, economic and political equality with themselves until the revolutionary changes of the second century of Islam put an end to Arab privilege and thereby greatly accelerated the processes of Arabization.

It is the Arabization and Islamization of the peoples of the conquered provinces, rather than the actual military conquest itself, that is the true wonder of the Arab empire. The period of Arab political and military supremacy was very brief, and soon the Arabs were compelled to relinquish the control of the empire, and even the leadership of the civilization which they had created, to other peoples. But their language, their faith, and their law remained – and still remain – as an enduring monument of their rule.

The great change was accomplished, in the main, by the parallel processes of colonization and assimilation. According to a widely accepted view, one of the driving forces of the Arab conquests was the pressure of over-population in the barren Arabian peninsula, and in the early years of the Arab kingdom many Arabs migrated past the fallen defences of the ancient empires into the fertile lands that they had conquered. At first they came only as a ruling minority – an army of occupation with a dominant class of soldiers, senior officials, and landowners. The Arab state took over the state lands of the previous regimes, and also the lands of the enemies of the new order and of refugees who had fled before the conquerors. The Arab government thus disposed of extensive domains, many of which were granted or leased on favourable terms to Arabs. These paid a much lower rate of taxation than the local landowners who remained. The great Arab landowners generally cultivated their estates through native labour and resided in the garrison towns.

It was from these towns that Arab influence radiated into the surrounding countryside, both directly and through the rapidly growing population of native converts, many of whom served in the army. Though the claims of the native converts to economic and social equality were haughtily rejected by those who could claim pure Arabian descent, more and more of these converts accepted the faith of the conquerors and with it their language.

The prestige of the idiom of an aristocracy of conquerors, the practical value of the language of government and commerce, the richness and diversity of an imperial civilization, and perhaps most of all the immense reverence accorded to the sacred language in which the new revelation was written, all helped to further the assimilation by the Arabs of their subject peoples.

The far-ranging military and political changes of the first century of Islamic rule also brought important economic and social changes. The Arab conquests – as is the way of conquests – restored to circulation vast accumulated riches frozen in private, public and Church possession. The early Arab historians tell many stories of rich booty and extravagant expenditure. The tenth-century writer al-Masʿūdī describes some of the great fortunes accumulated by the conquerors. On the day that the caliph ʿUthmān was killed, according to Masʿūdī, his personal fortune in cash in the hands of his treasurer was 100,000 dinars (Roman or Byzantine gold coins) and a million dirhams (Persian silver coins). His estates were also valued at 100,000 dinars, 'and he also left many horses and camels'. Al-Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwwām, one of the first converts to Islam and an important figure in early Islamic history, owned houses in Basra and Kūfā in Iraq and in Fusṭāṭ and Alexandria in Egypt. His house in Basra, says Masʿūdī, at the present time (332 AH/943–4 CE) still provides lodgings for merchants, commerce, seagoing traders and the like. His property at his death was valued at 50,000 dinars cash, as well as 'a thousand horses, a thousand slaves, male and female, and lands in the cities already mentioned'. Another of the Prophet's Companions, Ṭalḥa ibn ʿUbaydallāh al-Taymī, according to the same source, had a great house in Kūfa and an income from his estates in Iraq that 'amounted to a thousand dinars a day, and some say more; from his estates in the region of al Sharāh, he received more than that. He built himself a house in Medina made with plaster, bricks and teak.' Another early Muslim, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf, had stables in which 'were tethered a hundred horses, and he owned a thousand camels and ten thousand sheep. At his death, a quarter of his property was worth 84,000 dinars'. When Zayd ibn Thābit died, 'he left ingots of gold and silver that were broken up with axes, in addition to property and estates to the value of a hundred thousand dinars ... When Yaʿlā ibn Munya died, he left half a million dinars, as well as debts owed to him by people, landed property and other assets, to the value of 300,000 dinars.'[1]

These and other accounts of the enormous fortunes acquired by the conquerors are no doubt exaggerated, but they paint a persuasive picture of a conqueror aristocracy possessing immense riches, enjoying the opportunities and delights of the advanced countries in which they found themselves, and spending their wealth with abandon.

There were surely many besides Arabs who profited and prospered in the new order. But there were many – including Arabs – who did not, and even among those who prospered, their progress did not always keep pace with their claims and expectations. The historical narratives, the literature, and especially the contemporary poetry reflect the social and political and thus indirectly the economic tensions of the period and the grievances of both individuals and social groups. A conquest and a new regime inevitably displace important groups that have previously enjoyed a monopoly of wealth and power. The impact of this change must surely have been far greater in the eastern, ex-Persian, than in the western, ex-Byzantine provinces. From Syria and Egypt the defeated and dispossessed Byzantine magnates could withdraw to the Byzantine capital and central provinces, leaving their former subject lands and peoples to new masters. No such escape was available to the magnates of the Persian empire, whose imperial capital was in Arab hands and who, with few exceptions, had to stay where they were and find their place as best they could under the new regime. It was therefore natural that the former Persian privileged and governing elements, with their recent memories of imperial domination and their continuing experience of imperial administration, should have contributed significantly to the development of Islamic government and culture – far more so than the residue of population in the long-subject Byzantine cities.

At first the Persian governing classes seem to have made their accommodation with the new regime, and to have retained most of their functions and some of their privileges. But with the consolidation of Arab power, the massive settlement of Arab tribes in Iran, the growth of a population of Iranian Muslims claiming equality as a right with the Arabs, and perhaps most of all the growth of cities, new alignments and therefore new conflicts appeared. In the former Byzantine lands, where city life was old and familiar, change was relatively slight. In the former Persian Empire, much less urbanized, the swift and sudden rise of the Muslim cities brought tension and struggle.

In the early Islamic period, the most dangerous conflicts, offering the most serious threat to the stability of the Arab state and the cohesion of the Islamic community, arose not from the differences between Arab and non-Arab Muslims, still less between Muslims and others, but from the rivalries between Arabs and Arabs – between tribes of northern Arabian and southern Arabian origin; between those who had come early and those who came later; between those who had done well and those who had done less well; between those who were the sons of a free Arab man and wife and those who were the sons of a free Arab father and a foreign concubine. The exercise of the immemorial rights of the victors over the vanquished rapidly increased the numbers of these half-Arabs.

The Arab historiographic tradition presents these conflicts mostly in tribal, in personal, or sometimes in religious terms. All these were no doubt important, but other issues were clearly involved. Continuing and often bitter hostility between different groups of Arabs led to a series of civil wars in which, in time, the growing non-Arab Muslim population became involved, and in which the different factions found religious expressions for their grievances and claims.

The establishment of the Arab empire finally ended the long conflict between Rome and Persia across the Middle Eastern trade routes, and, for the first time since Alexander the Great, joined the entire Middle Eastern region, from Central Asia to the Mediterranean, in a single imperial and commercial system. For some time, both Byzantine gold and Persian silver coins continued to circulate. As a result, exchange rates between the two currencies become an important topic in early Islamic law, and the money-changer a prominent figure in Islamic markets. The new unity and the emergence of a new ruling class disposing of large sums in ready cash surely favoured the growth of both industry and trade. Like the Vikings in medieval Europe, the Arab conquerors in the Middle East spent their money on high-grade textiles, for which the court and aristocracy showed a particular interest. The building of royal palaces and sumptuous private homes, as well as of mosques and other public buildings, in addition to many and varied needs of the well-paid soldiers and settlers, must surely have contributed greatly to this economic development. The discontent in the rapidly growing cities seems to have been due more to resentment than to actual hardship. The half-Arabs, including a fair proportion of men of talent, wealth, and even power, resented their exclusion from the highest levels of society and government. The non-Arab converts, especially the Persians, were offended by the inferior status accorded to them, and demanded the equality which the universalist message of their new faith had led them to expect. If, as in both earlier and later times, the population grew more rapidly than the means of sustaining it, there would also have been a precariously surviving populace of runaway peasants, unskilled labourers, vagabonds, paupers, and semi-criminals. The Arabic sources present a vivid portrayal of this world on the margins of urban society.

All these differences and conflicts, added to the natural strains arising from the vast and swift expansion of the Muslim domains, greatly complicated the task of maintaining and governing the state and empire, and confronted the early caliphs with difficult and, in the event, insuperable problems.