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978-0-521-58214-8 - The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800

Jonathan P. Berkey

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The Formation of Islam

Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800

Jonathan Berkey's book surveys the religious history of the peoples of the Near East from roughly 600 to 1800 CE. The opening chapter examines the religious scene in the Near East in late antiquity, and the religious traditions which preceded Islam. Subsequent chapters investigate Islam's first century and the beginnings of its own traditions, the 'classical' period from the accession of the 'Abbasids to the rise of the Buyid amirs, and thereafter the emergence of new forms of Islam in the middle period. Throughout, close attention is paid to the experiences of Jews and Christians, as well as Muslims. The book stresses that Islam did not appear all at once, but emerged slowly, as part of a prolonged process whereby it was differentiated from other religious traditions and, indeed, that much that we take as characteristic of Islam is in fact the product of the medieval period. This book has been written for students and for all those with an interest in the emergence and evolution of Islam.

Jonathan P. Berkey is Associate Professor of History at Davidson College. His publications include *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (2001).

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JONATHAN P. BERKEY

Davidson College



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Preface

This book constitutes an attempt to describe and understand the slow emergence of a distinctively Islamic tradition over the centuries which followed the death of that tradition's founder, Muhammad ibn ʿAbdallah, in 632 CE. It is not a narrative history, although its analytical approach is (I hope) historical. I have cast the central questions as those of religious identity and authority. The question of what it means to be a Muslim requires, I believe, a dynamic answer. Had the question been posed to Muhammad, his answer (if indeed he would have understood the question) would have been quite different than that of a jurist in Baghdad in the ninth century, or of a Sufi mystic in Cairo in the fifteenth. From a historical perspective, no answer is better than any other, and none has any value except against the background of the larger historical factors that produced it. In the multicultural Near East, those factors have always included faith traditions other than Islam, and so I have tried throughout to give some account of the complexities which, from the very first, have bound Muslim identities to those of Jews, Christians, and others.

The target audience for this book is quite broad, and therefore the target is, paradoxically, perhaps more difficult to strike squarely than with, say, a scholarly monograph of the usual sort, or a conventional introduction to "Islam". It is hoped that the book will serve students, both graduates and undergraduates, and also an interested lay public, as an introduction to the historical origins and development of the Islamic tradition. At the same time, I have tried to write it in such a way that specialists may also find it of use. I have, therefore, made decisions regarding editorial matters such as transliteration and footnoting with an eye on the whole target rather than any one portion of it. I have not shied away from using foreign (mostly Arabic) terms; on the other hand, those terms are transliterated in a simplified fashion, omitting most of the diacritical marks that are standard in scholarly writing, and a glossary is provided for the convenience of non-Arabic speakers. For non-specialists, this may remove a source of visual distraction and confusion; specialists, by contrast, should have no difficulty recognizing the indicated Arabic terms. The footnotes I have used for disparate purposes: both to indicate the particular sources from which I have taken information or ideas, and also to suggest to the interested reader places where she or he might be able to pick

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x Preface

up and pursue further the thread of an argument touched on necessarily briefly here. The scope of this book's topic is enormous, and so it has been impractical to cite every relevant work; the notes should be viewed as a launching pad for further investigation. With (again) an eye on the audience, I have in citations privileged secondary literature over primary sources, and tried to cite material in English wherever possible. For the sake of simplicity and familiarity, I have throughout the book given dates according to the Western rather than the Islamic calendar.

Finally I come to the matter of thanks. Over the course, not simply of writing this book, but of two decades of thinking seriously about the Islamic world, I have incurred a variety of purely scholarly debts, to individuals I have known and with whom I have studied, and to others whom I have never met. Some of those will be apparent from the notes – the curious will easily discern there the names of those scholars whose writings on various topics of Islamic history have most significantly influenced my own. More immediately, I have the privilege of thanking those who contributed directly and (not always) knowingly to the writing of this book, by reading portions of it, answering queries, offering suggestions, passing on publications of their own. They include Robert Berkey, Sonja Brentjes, David Frankfurter, Matthew Gordon, Oleg Grabar, Emil Homerin, Lawrence Fine, Keith Lewinstein, Christopher Melchert, Megan Reid, Daniella Talmon-Heller, Christopher Taylor, and Cynthia Villagomez. Joe Gutekanst, of the Interlibrary Loan department at the Davidson College library, was as central a figure in the writing of this book as Ibn 'Abbas was to the transmission of prophetic traditions – the cognoscenti will be able to appreciate fully my debt to him. I don't know whether it is a good thing to say of editors that they are patient, but Marigold Acland of the Cambridge University Press has been not only patient but helpful and encouraging, which is far more important. A number of people read and commented upon the entire manuscript, including my Davidson colleagues Robert Williams and Scott Denham, and also a perceptive anonymous reader for the Cambridge University Press. Patricia Crone began her association with this manuscript as an anonymous reader, but eventually I learned her name, and from her I have learned more about Islamic history than an Associate Professor would normally care to admit. Paul Cobb owed me nothing beyond a friendship cultivated on long car rides over to a seminar in Chapel Hill, but repaid that meager debt generously with his time, constructive comments, and unflinching enthusiasm.

To my family, whose patience and understanding and support have been essential during the five years in which I have been actively working on this project, I will simply paraphrase the old spiritual: "Done at last! Done at last! Thank God Almighty, I'm done at last!"

Glossary

This glossary is provided for the convenience of readers unfamiliar with Arabic. Many of these terms or phrases have complex or multiple meanings; those stressed here correspond to the sense in which they are used in this book. Fuller definitions of most of these terms can be found in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition (*EI*²).

ahbar: a Koranic term used in conjunction with *rabbaniyun*, indicating Jewish religious authorities (i.e., rabbis)

ahl al-bayt: literally, “the people of the house,” i.e., the family of the Prophet

ahl al-dhimma: see *dhimmi*

‘alim: scholar, the singular of *‘ulama’*

amir: literally, “commander”; a title commonly used among the military rulers of the Middle Period

ashab al-hadith: the partisans of hadith, i.e., those who stressed hadith as a source of juristic authority

ashab al-ra’y: those who championed the use of human reason in fashioning the law

ashraf: see *sharif*

atabeg: a military tutor or guardian, a title common among the military regimes of the Middle Period

baba: a Turkish and Persian honorific meaning father, and sometimes used to refer to respected Sufi dervishes

bakka’un: literally, “those who weep,” used especially for a group of early Muslim ascetics and penitents

baraka: blessing, and more particularly a spiritual power commonly associated with certain pious individuals or activities

bid‘a: innovation, the opposite of *sunna*

da‘wa: a call or summoning, used to refer to the missionary activity of various religio-political movements

dawla: literally, a “turning,” including a turn or change of rulers, which by extension came to refer to a dynasty such as the ‘Abbasids

xii Glossary

dhikr: remembrance, as in the act of remembering the name of God, used to refer to one of the most common Sufi activities

dhimmi: one of the *ahl al-dhimma*, the “people of the covenant of protection,” i.e., non-Muslims living under the protection of Muslim regimes

diwan: a list or register, as of names; specifically, a list of those in the early Islamic polity entitled to a share of the wealth taken as booty during the early conquests

fana^ʿ: annihilation, a term used by the Sufis to describe their ecstatic spiritual state

faqih (pl. *fuqaha*^ʿ): a jurist, a scholar of the law

faqir (pl. *fuqara*^ʿ): poor, a term used to identify a Sufi

fard ʿayn: a legal obligation incumbent on individual Muslims

fard kifaya: a legal obligation incumbent on the community of Muslims as a whole

fatwa: a legal opinion issued by a competent jurist

fiqh: the science of Islamic jurisprudence

fitna: literally, a “temptation,” used to refer to a series of civil wars which threatened the unity of the Islamic polity in its early years

futuwwa: literally, “the qualities of young men,” used to refer to a variety of mostly urban fraternal organizations

ghazi: a holy warrior

ghazw: a military expedition or raid

ghulat: literally, “extremists,” used especially of those Shiʿis accused of espousing heretical doctrines

hadith: reports about the words or deeds of Muhammad and his companions

hajj: the Muslim pilgrimage to holy sites in and around Mecca

hakam: an arbiter of disputes in pre-Islamic Arabia

halqa (pl. *halaq*): literally, a “circle,” as in a teaching circle, consisting of a teacher and his students

hanif (pl. *hunafa*^ʿ): one who follows the true monotheistic religion, sometimes used to refer to pre-Islamic Arabian monotheists

hanifiyya: the religion of the *hunafa*^ʿ

hijra: the “flight” of Muhammad and his companions from Mecca to Yathrib/Medina, which event marks the founding of the first Muslim community and the start of the Muslim calendar

hisba: either (1) the Koranic injunction to “order what is good and forbid what is wrong,” or (2) the office of the *muhtasib*

hiyal: “tricks” developed by the jurists to circumvent some of the more restrictive doctrines of Islamic law, especially in the area of commercial practice

hujja: literally “proof,” used by Ismaʿilis to refer to an authoritative figure in the religious hierarchy

ijaza: the authorization issued by an author or scholar to a pupil allowing the pupil to transmit a text on his authority

ijma^c: the consensus of the community, or of the scholars of the law, one of the principal foundations or sources of Islamic law

ijtihād: literally “exertion,” used by the jurists to refer to the process of determining valid legal judgments from the various sources of the law, and thus the opposite of *taqlid*

‘ilm: knowledge, and especially religious knowledge, that is, the content of the religious sciences

imam: a prayer leader; but also a term for the leader of the community, used especially by the Shi‘is to refer to those members of the Prophet’s family whom they recognize as their rightful leader

isnad: a chains of authorities, linking a student through his teacher and his teacher’s teachers back to the author or source of a text (especially a hadith)

isra‘iliyyat: stories and traditions concerning Biblical figures who are mentioned in the Koran which supplemented and contextualized the sparse Koranic narratives, but which many ulama later looked upon with suspicion

ittihād: a complex theological term which some Sufis used to indicate spiritual “union” with God

jahiliyya: the “time of ignorance” before the coming of Islam

jama‘a: “group,” that is, the collectivity of Muslims

jihād: struggle, that is, in the path of God, including a particular form of that struggle, “holy war”

jinn: a category of daemonic beings or spirits, mentioned by the Koran

jizya: a head tax or poll tax, to which non-Muslims living under Muslim rule are normally subject

Ka‘ba: the pre-Islamic shrine at Mecca, which Muslim tradition associates with Abraham

khalifa: the caliph, or leader of the Sunni Muslim community; more precisely, the *khalifat rasul allah*, or “deputy of the prophet of God” or in more controversial language, as the holder of the office has been called at certain times, the *khalifat allah*, the “deputy of God”

khanqah: a Sufi convent or monastery

khariji: literally, “one who goes out”; the term refers to a member of the earliest major Islamic sectarian group

khirqā: the patched and tattered cloak symbolizing the Sufi mystic’s poverty

khushdashiyya: the special bond of loyalty among the Mamluk soldiers and their patrons

khutba: a formal sermon delivered to Muslim congregations at noon on Fridays

ma‘rifa: knowledge, and specifically the intuitive knowledge of mystical insight, and distinct therefore from *‘ilm*

madhhab (pl. *madhahib*): literally, “way,” that is, one of the recognized Sunni schools of law

madrasa: a college or school in which Islamic law was the principal subject of instruction

mahdi: literally “one who is rightly-guided [by God],” the term came to have messianic overtones and referred to the awaited savior who would restore justice and return the community to the proper path

xiv Glossary

mamluk: a slave, more particularly a slave trained to serve as a soldier

mawla (pl. *mawali*): a term of complex meaning, it is used here primarily to indicate a “client,” a dependent legal status required of early non-Arab converts

mawlid: birthday, especially that of the Prophet

mihna: a “testing,” and more specifically that instituted by the caliph al-Maʿmun ostensibly to enforce the view that the Koran was created

millet: the Turkish form of the Arabic *milla*, meaning “religion” and by extension a religious community; by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was used specifically for the political structure of the non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire

mishna: the collection of Jewish oral laws and tradition, given final form in the early third century CE

mudarris: teacher, especially a teacher of law or one of its ancillary subjects in a *madrassa*

mufti: a jurist qualified to issue a legal opinion (*fatwa*)

muhaddith: a transmitter of hadith

muhtasib: an officer implementing the *hisba*, especially in the urban markets, hence a “market inspector”

mujahid: one who wages *jihad*

mukhtasar: an abridged legal handbook

mulid: see *mawlid*

mulk: royal power or authority, used sometimes to refer to a pre- or un-Islamic notion of political power distinct from that of a proper *khalifa*

nass: designation, specifically, the action by which one (Shiʿi) designated his successor

pir: a Persian term corresponding to the Arabic *shaykh*, meaning literally “old man,” and used especially by Sufis to indicate a recognized spiritual guide

qadi: a judge of an Islamic law court

qaʿim: “one who rises,” that is, against an illegitimate regime, a popular term among Shiʿis to refer to the messianic restorer of God’s justice

qibla: the direction a Muslim faces when praying

rabb: literally, “lord,” a common Koranic term for God

rabbaniyun: see *ahbar*

rafidi: “one who rejects,” used to refer to those who rejected the authority of the first three caliphs: hence a Shiʿi, a partisan of ʿAli

rajʿa: literally, “return,” as in the return (to life) of a hero or other figure who has disappeared (or died)

ribat: a term used to refer both to a frontier fortress, and later to one type of Sufi hospice

ridda: literally, “return,” and by extension, “apostasy,” referring especially to the efforts of Arab converts to Islam who sought to renounce their allegiance after Muhammad’s death

- sama*^c: literally “hearing,” and by extension the hearing of music, or spiritual concert of the Sufis
- shafa*^c*a*: intercession, especially with God
- shahid*: a martyr
- sharaf*: nobility, the quality of a *sharif*
- sharif* (pl. *ashraf*): a “noble” person; in the Islamic context, those who claimed membership or descent in the family of Muhammad
- shaykh*: literally, “old man,” a term used to refer to a Sufi master, a teacher, or any other figure of religious authority
- shi*^c*a*: the “party” of ‘Ali, that is, the Shi^cis who believed that leadership of the community should have passed from Muhammad to ‘Ali and thence to his descendants
- silsila*: a Sufi *shaykh*’s chain of spiritual authority, or spiritual genealogy
- sira*: a biographical account of the Prophet’s life
- sofia*: lower-ranking students in the *madrasas* of Ottoman Istanbul
- subha*: “companionship” or “discipleship,” a term used to describe the relationship between a teacher and his closest pupils
- sultan*: one who wields (political) authority, and a common term for a Muslim ruler in the Middle Period
- sunna*: the normative practice of the Prophet and his companions, as known through hadith
- sunni*: a Muslim who accepts the legitimacy and authority of the historical caliphate
- sura*: a chapter of the Koran
- taqlid*: “imitation,” and more specifically in the legal sphere, being bound by a previous juristic consensus on a particular point of law
- tariqa* (pl. *turuq*): a recognized Sufi “way” or “path” of spiritual discipline, and by extension the various orders of mystics
- tassawwuf*: Sufism
- ‘ulama*^r: those who know, i.e., the scholars of the Islamic religious sciences
- umma*: the community of Muslims
- ‘urf*: custom
- usul*: the “principles” or “foundations,” especially of Islamic jurisprudence
- wali* (pl. *awliya*^r): one who is “close” to God, i.e., a saint or “friend” of God
- waqf* (pl. *awqaf*): a charitable endowment established according to Islamic law, for the benefit of a family, or a religious institution, or for some other pious purpose
- wilaya*: a complex term which can indicate sovereign power or authority (as in that which Shi^cis believe is invested in the Imam), and also (more properly as *walaya*) the status of sainthood, especially in Sufi discourse
- zandaqa*: heretical unbelief generally, and also more particularly Manichaeism
- zawiya*: a usually small religious institution established by or for the benefit of a Sufi *shaykh*
- zuhd*: renunciation, i.e., of worldly temptations
- zindiq*: a freethinker or non-believer, or more specifically a Manichaean

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