The History of Islamic Political Thought

From the Prophet to the Present

Second Edition

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Contents

Introduction

Islam comprises a distinct and self-contained cultural unit. Political thought is the study of the exercise of power, of who should exercise it, and how much power they should have; it is about justice in relationships between people, especially between those in power and those they rule, and the just distribution of goods in society. It enquires why states exist and what they should try to achieve.

Islamic political thought forms a significant part of the intellectual history of homo sapiens. It comprises a coherent, ongoing tradition, separate from the West and with a logic of its own. Within it are an array of sub-stories. The sources and data examined in this book are, therefore, an intrinsic part of human experience and achievement; the words and thoughts of generous spirits remain as vital as if they were still alive. Yet the history of Islamic political thought has been neglected by Western historians and political theorists alike.

In studying a subject like this, one is able to recognise and enjoy the diversity of human undertakings, the excitement of discovery, the kinship of the different. Since we are all members of one species, we should be able to understand each other's cultures, and recognise in them things which have some relevance to ourselves. Love of what is different is natural to an enquiring mind. The 'other' does not have to be an enemy; and indeed Edward Said's famed critique of the Western historiography of Islam[1] pales before the centuries of Islamic cultural imperialism, not only directed against Christendom and the West. In any case, history, insofar as it keeps alive the memory of past wrongs, is not helpful for the future. World history and comparative history are not tastes acquired from colonialism or globalisation. To reject them is to lock everyone into their own backyard.

Western political thought has been studied in great detail. Particular aspects of Islamic political thought have been studied, though there remains much scope for research. Attempts have been made to trace a continuous story for Western political thought, usually from the early Greeks to the present day; this 'history of political thought' has entered university curricula. Yet hardly any attempt has been made to look at Islamic political thought as a whole, to present its history from the origins to the present day. The only comprehensive study is Nagel (1981) (see Bibliography), but this is not very analytical and does not explore historical relationships. Erwin Rosenthal (1958) and Lambton

(1981) survey wide ranges of thinkers; but neither seeks to be comprehensive or presents thinkers in their historical contexts. And what Islam achieved in this field has gone almost entirely unnoticed by pundits in political philosophy. How much better we would know Ibn Sina and Mawardi if they had written in Europe! This is particularly surprising in view of the recent surge of interest in political Islam.

A history of Western political thought can only claim to be 'the history of political thought' if we assume that what matters in history is what has led to the views we now hold and the consensus of which we approve (mostly, liberal democracy). In fact, some thinkers and movements in the present canon might not qualify on this ground, for example Thomas More or Karl Marx. Regardless of that, such an approach obviously omits much, perhaps most, of intellectual history. It prejudges the relevance that other thinkers or ideas may later be thought to have had to this development. Perhaps more seriously, it prejudges the relevance which other ideas in the past may have to some future consensus. (One may of course wish the present consensus to remain undisturbed, but that is unlikely and, in my view, undesirable.) Above all, ideas should not necessarily be treated in this teleological manner at all. It results in edited history. No botanist would dream of presenting a survey of flora based on what grows, or could grow, in a particular climate. Partial histories lead to a partial understanding of our species.

Further, I do not see how one can claim to understand the history of ideas even *in any single culture* without some awareness of what was going on in other cultures. One cannot explain any sequence of phenomena without reference to things outside it. This is generally acknowledged where there is interaction, as in the case of the histories of England and France, or of Rome and the Germans; though the need to know not only that an outside force made an impact, but also the mentality of those propelling it, is less often acknowledged, at least in practice.

But my point is, rather, that one can best isolate the causes of a phenomenon by examining different phenomena of the same class (in this case, different traditions of political thought) side by side. Comparison can be especially useful for causal explanation when one is able to examine two different sets of phenomena which emerged from the same or a similar starting point. One can then ask what it was that was present in the one but absent from the other, so that one can explain the differences. Comparison is as near as history gets to repeatable experiments. This was what first inspired the present study.

Thus an understanding of the history of Islamic political ideas may promote an understanding of the history of European political ideas. For it so happens that in their earlier phases the Islamic and European political cultures (as also the Byzantine) had more in common with each other than either had with other cultures: namely Abrahamic monotheism, the belief in a unique and final revelation by God to humankind, largely or wholly in textual form, and governing most or all of human conduct; plus the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Islamdom and Christendom were moreover both part of a common Mediterranean world. Islamic intellectual history was the closest to Europe

both geographically and in content. Any attempt to explain the uniqueness of Europe must therefore involve comparison with the Islamic world.

This is as true with regard to political institutions and ideology as it is with regard to economic life. What was it that caused modern states of the European type, and modern political ideas like sovereignty and representation, to develop here but not there? One can go some way towards explaining what it was that made European states and ideologies tick, by comparing them with states and ideologies in another political culture with a different outcome. One can best perceive both the historical and the human importance of an Aquinas or a Hobbes by considering how their counterparts elsewhere fared. The Islamic world offers the paradigmatic alternative to Europe.

The outcome of the impact of the Abrahamic and Platonic legacies upon the two cultures was indeed different in almost every respect. Moreover, we will find that, while there are some amazing similarities on certain points, the overall conceptual patterns were markedly different. This might make one reassess the importance sometimes attached to these traditions in histories of Western political thought. It may suggest that other factors (for example, the legacies of Rome and Iran) were of equal or greater importance.

In this book, I suggest some of the main similarities and differences between political ideas in the Islamic and European worlds; but, since this is a history of solely Islamic ideas, I do so only as a means of clarifying Islamic concepts. This may indicate where a systematic study of similarities and differences might go; and I would like to return to this on another occasion. I have not considered here the *influence* of Islamic thinkers upon the great European awakening from 1050; though I have of course considered the influence of European upon Islamic thought, especially from around 1800.

The importance of such comparison was clearly perceived by Max Weber (1864–1920), but it was lost sight of progressively during the twentieth century. This is partly because comparison is extraordinarily difficult. It requires mastery of two fields. Weber's understanding of the Islamic world was in some ways defective;[2] and the increase in knowledge since then makes the initial task much harder. One can see this in unsuccessful attempts by two outstanding Islamicists, Hodgson and Makdisi, both clearly out of their depth when speaking of the West.[3] Crone and Cook make a more convincing comparison between early Islam and early Calvinism.[4]

Another type of comparison could be conducted between intellectual traditions regardless of whether they came into contact or had similar origins. The purpose of this might be to discover, for example, whether these, or perhaps all, intellectual traditions share certain features and go through similar paths of change, or whether (equally illuminatingly) they have little or nothing in common. For this purpose, one could compare histories of political thought in China, India, Islam and Europe. While this is obviously far beyond the scope of the present study, I would be glad if this study helped provide the groundwork for such further comparison.

The ultimate point of all history (when it is not an expression of chauvinism) is to promote understanding of ourselves and our species. We cannot achieve

this by looking only at one sub-species. Yet the history of Western political thought is taught and studied as if it were the only history of political thought.

Such imbalance is all the more surprising in an age (supposedly) of globalisation, and in a civilisation that professes belief in multi-cultural societies (of which Islamic history, as it happens, provides prototypes), and indeed in a multi-cultural international society. Is this because Islam (like other religions) is regarded as a personal creed, idiosyncratic perhaps (though with admittedly important social and political side-effects) rather than as a serious attempt to understand the universe? Yet even 'unbelieving' historians will not get far unless we appreciate that this is exactly what it is (and, still more, was); unless we recognise and respect the questions to which religions profess to be answers.

Turning to the history of Islam itself, I would suggest that one can only grasp the meaning, in either human or scientific terms, of *any one* tradition by seeing that tradition itself *as a whole* and at least trying to get all its parts into focus. In order to understand any topic or thinker within Islamic culture itself, it is necessary to have some grasp of the rest and be aware of the whole of which these are parts. It is heuristically necessary to correlate each object of historical study with what came before; and, if we are to grasp its long-term cultural function and influence, with what came after. Thus, for example, to understand what Ibn Khaldun was doing, you have to take account (as he certainly did) of Aristotle; and to grasp his historical significance you have to consider Durkheim.

In this way, one can begin to see how the various possible meanings of a belief-system have up to now been put into practice, developed, modified, reformulated or changed. One may, or may not, conclude that, after a given time, all the potentialities of a given belief-system have been expressed. History enables one to avoid misunderstandings which certain miscreants, inside or outside the Islamic world, have foisted on the world in order to obtain their moment in the clouds; here, readers must judge for themselves. In any case, the human story will only be known when we know, among other things, the Islamic story; and the Islamic story can only be known if we view it from the start to the present.

Nowadays the division of intellectual labour in the sciences has been taken to absurd lengths. History suffers especially from this because it is relatively easy to chop a bit off (the life of an individual, a period, a fashion) and make a story of it; these are the most marketable products of history. But it means that quite precisely more and more is known about less and less. This is encouraged by natural human possessiveness ('my subject'), shyness and the fear of making mistakes ('that's not my period'), and public policy (the British 'Research Assessment Exercise'). Large-scale topics take longer to complete, increase the likelihood of error, and are always contentious in their interpretation. But surely one of the joys of science is knowing when you are wrong. Such enterprises usually take one outside the tutelage of an academic patron into an area that is unlikely to be on today's curricula. Unless undertaken (as in the present case) late in life, they diminish the prospect of a career slot.

'Political thought' here refers not just to what is expressed in philosophical

and legal treatises, but also to the way people and rulers thought, to the political convictions of individuals and groups, commoners and elites – that is, political culture. It includes systematic treatises, occasional writings, official rhetoric, popular slogans and other evidence of the way people thought about authority and order (Black 1984: 244–51). Ideas and attitudes may often be inferred from casual statements, from political practice itself, from policies and institutions – the types of solution people sought to political problems. This remains, nonetheless, a study of ideas and beliefs, not of institutions and regimes. Yet the two interact; you cannot understand one without the other.

There is no clear demarcation, either in pre-modern or modern times, in Islamdom or Christendom, between the political and the social. Moreover, in the Islamic world, as in pre-modern Europe, politics and the state were not conceived as a category separate from other forms of activity, but as an integral part of religion, morality, law or clan values. Thus our discussion will sometimes include what the participants themselves conceived of as religion, law, ethics and statecraft. In particular, under Islam even more than under Christianity, a great deal of political ideology was conducted in terms of *Religionspolitik*.

There were of course, as in all cultures, immense gaps between practice and theory, in this case the ideas of religious Jurists (fuqaha), ʿulama (the Learned), Falasifa (Philosophers), or the Persianate 'Advice to Kings (nasihat al-muluk)' mode. To treat Ibn Sina, Ibn Khaldun and so on as 'Islamic political thought' would be like treating Hobbes, Rousseau and so on as 'European political thought' (as is often done), or (more absurd but more commonplace) Plato and Aristotle as 'Greek political thought'. One would have a study of only exceptional innovators. In fact, in the case of Islam, the (to us) famous 'Philosophers' turned out to be even more than elsewhere a sideshow; hardly anyone read them after 1300, and few before then.

Knowledge of another culture, and comparison with it, may make us see our own ideas in a new, more relative light, making us more aware how much they owe to specific historical conjunctures; and perhaps how fragmentary and even arbitrary they are. This does not compel us to conclude that all outcomes are of equally dubious value. Moral philosophy is a separate subject. Standing where I do, I prefer the Western outcome, but I would not have done so were I a Jew in Germany in the 1930s. If the Western outcome is 'better', it is better by very little. Both traditions have a lamentable record on poverty and the environment. Comparative history may give one empirical reasons for thinking new thoughts.

NOTES

1. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).
2. See Hodgson (1974: vol. 2, pp. 93–4).
3. Ibid., pp. 340–62; Makdisi (1981: 224–90); Makdisi (1990).
4. Crone and Cook (1977: 139–48).

1 The Mission of Muhammad

PROPHET AND THE TRIBE

It began with the Qur'an, the 'recitation' by God to Muhammad (d.632). After early opposition and the Flight to Madina (hijra: 622, from which the Islamic calendar is dated), the new revelation fused the tribes of Arabia into a new unity. Nothing prepared Persia and East Rome for the explosion that followed. Between 634 and 656 Arab armies destroyed the one and dismembered the other. The heartlands of Eurasia – Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Persia and beyond the Oxus – fell to them. Fifty years later they had reached the Atlantic and the Indus. There were no reconquests. Such was the force of religion.[1]

This was based on a new religion and new ideas which uniquely combined faith and force. The Muslims organised the large societies fallen prey to them according to a programme, partly premeditated, partly worked out over time. The unique character of Muhammad's venture has amazed Muslims and Islamicists alike. However little we know of the Prophet himself and his original teaching, this was, compared with most revolutions, a success.

It was also a new beginning in the history of ideas; political thought under Islam was different to anything that had gone before. Muhammad was a *prophet* (rasul: messenger), claiming to recite whatever God told him to recite, with no human intermediary. Although he was influenced by Arab tribal custom, Judaism and Christianity, he rebelled against these, and recast their patterns in the furnace of his own revelation.

Thus, the foundation of Islam was a decisive break in human thinking about politics and society. When Muhammad and his followers forged a new 'umma (People, nation), they brought into being at once a sense of Arab nationhood and a new kind of international community. For the first and only time in human history, the nation was transcended at the moment it was created. At the heart of the project was the transfer of power from empire to Prophet (and, later, religious community). The new community was to be based upon the Shari'a (Religious Law, or Code), which was designed to determine morals, law, religious belief and ritual, marriage, sex, trade and society.

What happened can be explained only by seeing it as something that was at the same time (in our language) spiritual and political. Muhammad's point was precisely that earlier theism, though humanitarian in principle, had failed

to come to terms with the problem of power. The first conflicts within Islam, about who should lead and how the leader should be appointed, were about the exercise of power in a religious community.

It is clear from the Constitution of Medina and the earliest phase of Muhammad's teaching there, that his purpose was to construct out of tribal confederacies a new people driven by his own sense of moral mission.[2] Judaism had preached an all-embracing (ethnic) law, while Christianity had preached spiritual (universal) brotherhood. But neither seriously addressed the problem of military power and political authority; both had accepted life under alien, pagan rule. First, Islam preached spiritual brotherhood *plus* an all-embracing law, *and* universal political control to be achieved, if necessary, by military power. Or at least he acted as if this was what he believed: for the irony was that the Muslims had little in the way of political theory to inform what they were doing.

The rise of Islam, and the subsequent shape of Islamic culture, can best be understood if we regard religion, whatever else it may do, as fulfilling identifiable social needs.[3] Muhammad created a new monotheism fitted to the contemporary needs of tribal society, *if* that society was to make something more of itself. To this end he adapted ideas current in the Middle East. He gave a rationale for seeing the Arabs as the chosen people, *and* giving them a mission to convert or conquer the world. He enabled them to achieve the transition simultaneously from polytheism to monotheism, and from tribalism to nationhood to internationalism.

Thus, Muhammad's teaching was applied by people whose way of thinking was suffused by a recent tribal past. Despite the claim to unmediated contact with the divine, Islam intertwined itself with traditional local cultures, especially, for most of its history, with Arab-bedouin tribalism and Iranian patrimonial monarchy. Tribes and tribal societies continued to exist and to flourish under Islamic rule; in mountainous and desert regions, they have persisted into the twenty-first century. And we can see several ways in which tribal patterns, by a series of social–ethical mutations, moulded the new society. In revolt against the étatiste Roman and Persian empires, Islam developed a stateless praxis.

Tribal identity continued to have meaning within mainstream Islamic society. 'In the Arab-Muslim world, the social realities consisting of tribe, clan and lineage were characterised by a remarkable consistency and permanence.'[4] In the early army and garrison cities, and long afterwards in urban society, clan connections underlay social and political relationships. The early non-Arab converts had to be attached to an Arab tribe as clients (mawali) of one of its tribesmen. The space Islam left for clans and tribes may help to explain why it spread with such ease in central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, absorbing newcomers (notably, the Turco-Mongol peoples). Unlike the monarchical-feudal states of Christian Europe, the Islamic People linked segmental groups without destroying their internal structures. Observation of these phenomena inspired the greatest Islamic social theorist, Ibn Khaldun, much as observation of the Gaelic Highland clans – the only remaining tribal society in Europe –

inspired the Scottish historical school and modern sociology.

Secondly, certain features of tribal society[5] were carried straight over into the new People; for example, there was a continued emphasis on genealogy and lineage in social relationships and in cultural perceptions. Lineage conferred authority, and continued to be celebrated in poetry and historiography.[6] Leading positions among the ʿulama (Learned, Religious Experts) and Sufis were handed down in families (Lapidus 1988: 255, 428). One acquired special status if one could claim biological descent from Muhammad. Spiritual authority was personal, deriving from an individual's qualities, such as piety and learning. Sharif (lit. noble) referred primarily to ancestral nobility, but became a general term for social and political leadership. This was in contrast to the organisation of authority in Christianity in this period; the authority of bishops and clergy depended much more on their official position and less on personal merit.

Tribal values lived on in the moral order laid down in the Qur'an. 'Those that have kinship by blood are closer to one another in the book of God than the believers who are not kindred' (Q. 33:6). Good and bad were described in terms of personal relationships (trustfulness (iman), ingratitude/infidelity (kufr)). Members of the community were to possess personal honour, courage, manliness (muruwwa: *virtu*), and sidq (truthfulness, faithfulness, loyalty), and to practise hospitality.[7]

At the same time these values were given a universalist meaning. The People, it was said, were bound together by faith and justice, not, like the Arab tribes, by kinship. Islam revolutionised tribal society by catapulting the individual into the centre of social responsibility; no longer could one shelter behind the group from God. Concern for justice must override clan ties. ʿAsabiyya (clannishness, group spirit) in the sense of helping 'your own people in an unjust cause' was condemned (Izutsu 1966: 64, 155–6; Othman 1960: 100). What ultimately matters is not tribe, race or gender, but godliness:

> O believers, let not any people scoff at another people who may be better than they … O mankind, we have created you male and female and appointed you races and tribes that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing of you. (Q. 49:8–13)

Thirdly, certain tribal features were, again, sublimated onto the People as a whole. [8] The new religion and its Law instilled a social identity that bound members together, carved them off from outsiders. A strong sense of belonging and a 'clear-cut distinction between members and non-members' were transposed onto the religious ʿumma. The Law achieved this partly because it covered most aspects of behaviour, often in great detail. It replaced tribal custom while retaining the immediacy of the group in the life of the individual. The Shari'a became the skeletal structure of Islamic society which was law-governed (nomocratic) to a peculiar degree.

All this was achieved by a variety of methods, not perhaps consciously designed for this end, but in some ways achieving social cohesion more successfully than the Judaic, Hellenic, Roman or Christian regimes. Many

ritual parts of the Shari'a, rules about the body and its functions (such as circumcision, rules about defecation, menstruation, teeth-cleaning, dietary rules and the numerous details of sexual and familial etiquette), had the effect of making members instantly recognisable to one another; of making relations between relative strangers predictable and manageable. Religious significance was attached to acts that were of no obvious utility but achieved social bonding, such as communal prayer and pilgrimage. In the Pilgrimage, Islam brought together the universal and the particular with almost Hegelian genius, as believers from all over the world came together to revere, among other things, a black rock – once a focus of local tribal worship. The relationship between insiders and outsiders was not mitigated by a theory of values universal to human beings as such; Islam was an uncompromisingly pure form of revelationism. The boundaries of the People were the boundaries of the moral universe. This was symbolised and reinforced by the Arabic language.

All this was, as it were, neo-tribal.[9] The new society was in principle universal, and in practice commercial and 'citied' (Hodgson's phrase meaning cities were an integral part), but individuals were still removed from themselves and absorbed into the group. The result was a type of society generically different from Greek, Roman and also Euro-Christian civilization.

Holy War (jihad) consummated the male fraternity and upheld the division between insiders and outsiders. The right to conquer and plunder were carried over straight from pre-Islamic nomadic tradition into Islam; 'Muhammad's God … elevated tribal militance and rapaciousness into supreme religious virtues' (Crone 1987a: 245). Fighting unbelievers and killing idolaters, even if they were not the aggressors, were religious duties. Islam more than any other world religion made a virtue of war, although it also regulated it. A surprising proportion of hadith (Reports, narratives, 'traditions' about what the Prophet had said or done) were about the conduct of battle and division of spoils. The prospect of expansion and exploitation of material and human resources was often decisive in creating and preserving Islamic dynasties. Absence of such opportunities usually resulted in their decline.

Neo-tribalism is evident in the relative informality and egalitarianism of early Islamic society (Marlow 1997: 4–5). The process by which the Shari'a itself (below, Chapter 3) came into being was informal and personal, rather than institutional. In its formative period, it depended upon oral transmission and was implemented relatively informally. The Shari'a developed, rather like a language, by accretion from different sources spread by word of mouth – the Reports. The religious leaders were the 'ulama (lit. Learned, Experts, sing. 'alim), and their primary function was the transmission and application of the Code. Among the 'ulama, the relationship between teacher and pupil was personal. In contrast to the Christian clergy of this period, they were not a hierarchy; there was no formal organisation or even test of membership. They owed their position to a mutual acknowledgement of (religious) Learning ('ilm) and piety (Mottahedeh 1980: 137–40).

On the other hand, Muhammad and his followers did succeed in creating a society that was trans-tribal and trans-national. The religious rules governing

inheritance and exchange facilitated long-distance commerce. The norms of the Shari'a provided a basis on which persons of different lineages, tribes and nations could interact, and on a relatively equal footing; they could recognise one another as members of the same People, without actually abandoning lineage, tribe or nationality. This was a new version of the monotheistic ideal of universal brotherhood.

Monotheistic religious minorities (the 'people of the book': Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians) were granted a special status as protected peoples (dhimmi) (Bat Ye'or 1985). This was a new venture in inter-communal relations: the Muslims regarded Jews, Christians and so on as 'peoples' in the sense of quasi-autonomous religious communities, each conceived as an 'umma with a valid but imperfect revelation and law from God. The arrangements made for them under Islamic law differed from any previous relationship between conquerors and conquered, or indeed between rulers and subjects. In accordance with the Qur'an and earliest Muslim practice and teaching, they were allowed to practice their own religion, manage their own private and community affairs according to their own rules, and live the lives of unmolested resident aliens, provided they avoided any form of publicity for non-Islamic creeds. This may appear slightly less generous than the treatment of alien creeds in ancient Rome, but it had the advantage of being codified and thence more stable (until the twentieth century).

The *political* pattern of Islam makes some sense if we identify it as a 'post-tribal' society, one which has recently emerged from tribalism. This helps to explain why it never developed formal state structures or constitutions. There were political authorities, performing similar functions as in other societies, but these were individuals, usually a leading member of a dominant clan, and they tended to come to power not by a formal process of appointment, election or even hereditary succession but through their acknowledged prowess as individuals, and the military dominance of their clan. The impact of post-tribalism on political culture and political theory was incalculable. One consequence of this is that Westerners who study Islamic political thought are engaged upon a quest for which our political language equips us poorly.

Muhammad set out to replace both the tribe and the state with a religious community and a moral and legal order. And he did indeed found a unique type of community, face-to-face and worldwide, relating individual to group through a unique combination of rites and ethics which, in retrospect, could have been deliberately designed to forge inter-personal bonds on a global scale. Islam provided a specific path, quite different to that taken by Egypt, the Greek poleis and the feudal monarchies of Europe, from tribalism to a wider and more structured society. The space occupied in other cultures by relatively impersonal state officials was here occupied by the Shari'a and charismatic individuals. What all these societies had in common was dynasties.

A NEW KIND OF POLITICAL SOCIETY

Although the Qur'an is mostly concerned with religion and ethics and has little to say about law and even less about government, it expresses a mood from which inferences can be taken. In particular, certain ideas cluster around its concept of community ('umma). The founding concept was *islam*, meaning submission to God and 'entry into a covenant of peace' (Crone and Cook 1977: 20; Izutsu 1966: 87–9). This was to be the fundamental relationship between God and humans. This very concept of *islam* catches the fusion between religion and government, sacred and secular. 'Those who swear fealty to thee [Muhammad] swear fealty by that very act unto God. The hand of God is over their hands' (Q. 48:10). This was a metamorphosis of the Jewish idea of covenant.

First, the idea of the People was detached from nationhood. Non-Arabs are welcome; indeed, they are as morally obliged to join as Arabs are. Humans 'were a single 'umma [people/nation] then they became disunited'. The Islamic community is supposed to be distinguished from the Christian (which also aspired to universalism) by its harmonious unity and absence of doctrinal disputes, ascribed partly to the simplicity of its teachings. The key internal function is the settlement of disputes peaceably among its members, and a united front against unbelievers. This was surely one reason for Muhammad's and his successors' legislative activity. The key external function was to spread the Message.

The unity of the People emerges as the fundamental social norm. Within the People all adult males share the same rights and duties (Crone 1980: 62; 1986: 50; Marlow 1997). The only basis for human superiority is piety and Knowledge; even then (according to a hadith of uncertain date), 'a man shall not lead another man in prayer in a place where the latter is in authority, and no-one shall occupy the place of honour in another man's home except with his permission'.[10] There was a religious duty to provide for the needy (especially orphans) by charity (zakat: alms). This was the ideology that overthrew empires.

After Muhammad's death, it was assumed that someone must succeed him in his role as Leader (Imam) of the community, as his Deputy (Caliph). Apart from that there is almost nothing about political leadership or state structures. This may work for a Messenger in a tribal confederacy, inspired by God. Muhammad displayed special talents as a leader and military commander; but there was no provision for the succession. This had a disabling effect on Islamic dynasties. All we are told is: first, 'O believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you should quarrel on anything, refer it to God and the Messenger' (Q. 4:62, later known as 'the verse of the commanders'). (This sounds a bit like an adaptation of Luke 10:16.) Similarly, the Hadith (Reports: mostly compiled rather later, mainly 720–70) emphasised that, 'He who obeys the commander has verily obeyed God'.[11] On the other hand, the principle of kingly domination (mulk) was bitterly attacked;[12] to call a human being king was to trespass upon the divine prerogative. (There was a faint parallel here with old Roman republicanism.) Rebellion was condemned

but speaking out against injustice recommended ('The most excellent jihad is the uttering of truth in the presence of an unjust ruler').[13]

In the main, the Reports also rarely mention government or politics: this may be treated as a significant (indeed, a 'political') omission. Wensinck's concordance has fourteen columns on prayer, eight on barter (bai), six on war, six on marriage, three and a half on menstruation, two on community, two on imam (and three-quarters on the toothbrush) (Wensinck 1971; see also Guillaume 1966). Societies that emerged out of the Islamic faith tended to be strong on communal groups but to have weak or transient political structures.

THE WARS OF SUCCESSION

The problems of a Prophetic polity without an agreed way of organising itself became apparent in the divisions that tore the People apart from 656 to 661 (the first fitna: trial/ civil war). The first conflicts within Islam were not, as in Christianity, about the nature of the divine, but about who should lead and how the leader should be appointed; they were about the exercise of power in a religious community. This indicates the 'political' character of the new faith.

The irony is that the Muslims had virtually nothing in the way of constitutional theory to tell them how to rule, whom to appoint as ruler and so on. The Reports are mostly about ritual, law, personal morality; few address political topics directly. There is hardly any *explicit* political theory in either the Reports or the early Jurists. This silence may lend a bit of support to the view of Abd al-Raziq (below, p. 330), that the Prophet's priority was not founding a quasi-state, but using political power as required by circumstances for religious ends.

Events of this period, or versions of them, acquired symbolic and credal significance for later Muslims and have, in part, shaped the identities and political thought of Islam ever since. Muhammad left no known successor and on his death (632), before the conquests really began, his Companions chose as Leader (imam) and Deputy (caliph) of the Prophet, first, Abu Bakr (r.632–4) – a colourless caretaker; then ʿUmar (r.634–46), a respected figure, under whom the Muslims conquered what would ever after be their heartlands. He was to be the subject or source of many influential Reports. He was succeeded by ʿUthman (r.646–56). All three were chosen from Muhammad's tribe, the Quraysh, the latter two by a council of notables.

During ʿUthman's reign a split developed between his family and associates, and others, who believed they were being denied their fair share of wealth and other benefits accruing from the conquests. ʿUthman was assassinated, and his opponents rallied to ʿAli (Muhammad's cousin, married to his daughter, who had become a 'symbol of the party of protest')[14] as the new Deputy (r.656–61). They held that ʿUthman had 'forfeited his status as imam by his violations of the law'.[15] Those who thought that ʿUthman had remained the legitimate Leader and been unjustly killed, demanded a new election by consultation (shura).

In the ensuing war, ʿAli won the battle of 'the camel' (656: near Basra); but

at the battle of Siffin (657: on the Euphrates) Muʿawiya, governor of Syria under ʿUthman, managed to obtain a truce. This alienated some of ʿAli's supporters, the Khariji (called seceders or rebels by their opponents); they condemned ʿAli for subjecting his entitlement to human arbitration, and elected their own imam (*EI* 3:1167–8 and on Kharidjites). ʿAli was assassinated by a Khariji; his son recognised Muʿawiya (r.661–80). So began the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750). Islamic unity – of a kind – had been restored.

These divisions were about who was entitled to lead the Community and how he should be chosen. They were the origin not only of the two main rival branches of Islam throughout history and today, the Sunni and Shiʿa, but of other sects, some of which lasted for centuries, who also defined themselves by reference to these events. This further suggests the underlying political character of early Islam.

The Sunnis (Traditionals), who held that the Leader should be elected (in some sense) from within the Quraysh, would later look back to the Madina period and the first four 'rightly-guided' (rashidun) Deputies as a model and touchstone for Islamic political rectitude. The Shiʿa would regard ʿAli as the sole legitimate successor of Muhammad on the ground that he had been chosen by the Prophet by 'designation [nass]'. In their view the Leadership (Imama) belonged to whichever of Muhammad's direct biological descendants, from ʿAli's son Hasan onwards, had been designated by his predecessor.[16]

The question of the Leadership was related to the question of membership of the People: what qualifies a person to belong to the People and, therefore, to enter paradise? What kind of community is Islam? Under the Umayyads, some groups, the Muʿtazila (those neutral in the dispute between the claims of ʿUthman and ʿAli) and the Murjʾia or Postponers (of a decision between ʿAli and ʿUthman) put a premium on unity and sought to prevent division by getting everyone to leave the claims of both parties to the judgement of God. These adopted a tolerant and inclusive view of membership; the Postponers held that even a sinner is still a Muslim, the Muʿtazilites that the serious sinner is in between believer and infidel (*EI* on Muʿtazila and on Murjʾia).

The Kharijites went in the opposite direction: any lapse in faith or morals leads to instant exclusion from the People. They dropped the kinship requirement for the Leadership altogether, and insisted instead on very stringent moral conditions: the Leader must exceed all in justice and piety, and any lapse leads to instant deposition. Appointment is to be by election and oath of allegiance (bayʿa), understood as a mutual pledge in which the Leader promises to implement the Qurʾan and Tradition and nothing more, and the people pledge loyalty. The Najdiyya Kharijites of the late seventh century appear to have held the far more radical view that the Leadership can be dispensed with altogether: 'If [people] acted justly and cooperated and helped one another in piety', and if they fulfilled their legal obligations, 'then they could manage without the Imam' (Crone 2000).

The Kharijites were devotees of religious violence; for them Holy War was the sixth pillar of Islam. They advocated indiscriminate killing (istiʿrad) of all their opponents on the ground that these must be polytheists and as such had

no rights and should not exist.[17] Thus, while they denied lineage, they were neo-tribal in their ideal of equality and in their savage assertion of the division between insiders and outsiders.

NOTES

1. For what follows see Hodgson (1974: vol. 1, pp. 154–217; Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Crone (1980); Crone and Cook (1977); Izutsu (1966) and now Hallaq (2005).
2. Lewis (1988: 32); Crone (1980: 25); Izutsu (1966: 58); Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 237 ('there is a strong sense of ethnogenesis … Muhammad [was] the creator of a people'), pp. 241, 246–7; G. E. von Grunebaum, 'The Nature of Arab Unity before Islam', *Arabica* 10 (1963), pp. 5–23; I. Lichtenstadter, 'From Particularism to Unity: Race, Nationality and Minorities in the Early Islamic Empire', *IC* 23 (1949), pp. 251–80.
3. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J. W. Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915); see Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp. 463–6, 475–6.
4. Guichard (1977: 23) (in Spain there was a 'long continuance of contiguous human groups, constituting little ethnic entities, relatively closed to one another'); Reid (1983). On the social background to the rise of Islam, see Hallaq (2005, ch. 1).
5. On the tribe see M. H. Fried, 'On the Concept of Tribe', in J. Helm (ed.), *Essays on the Problem of Tribe* (Seattle,WA: University of Washington Press, 1967), pp. 1–24; Jean Baechler, *Démocraties* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1985), pp. 325–6, 568, 571; Patricia Crone, 'The Tribe and the State', in John A. Hall (ed.), *States in History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp.48–77.
6. Izutsu (1966: 62–3); Franz Rosenthal (1968: 29, 49, 100) ('… the universal retention of the genealogical view of human relations as the driving force in history').
7. Izutsu (1966: 87, 252); *EI* 1: 325b. Quotations from the Qur'an are taken from *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. A. J. Arberry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955 and 1964).
8. 'All Muslims were to be as one tribe': Hodgson (1974: vol. 1, p. 253); J.-O. Blickfeldt, *Early Mahdism: Politics and Religion in the Formative Period of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), p. 46.
9. The term used by Hodgson (1974: vol. 1, p. 229).
10. Maulana Muhammad Ali (ed.), *A Manual of Hadith* (Lahore: the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, n.d.).
11. Ibid., p. 396.
12. M. Rahimuddin (trans.), *Sahifah Hammam ibn Murrabih*, 5th edn (Paris: Publications du centre culturel Islamique, 1961), p. 82.
13. Ali, *A Manual of Hadith*, p. 398.
14. Hodgson (1974: vol. 1, p. 213); Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
15. Patricia Crone in *EI* s.v. 'Uthmaniyya.
16. I am grateful to Patricia Crone for emphasising how remarkably little is known for certain about the exact positions adopted by various groups in the first century of Islam.
17. *EI* on Kharidjites and on Isti'rad. I am grateful to Patricia Crone for this last point (personal communication).