

# The Wiley Blackwell History of ISLAM

Edited by Armando Salvatore

Associate Editors: Roberto Tottoli and Babak Rahimi



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# The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam

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# The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam

Edited by  
Armando Salvatore

Associate Editors  
Roberto Tottoli  
Babak Rahimi

Assistant Editors  
M. Fariduddin Attar  
Naznin Patel

**WILEY** Blackwell

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# List of Contributors

**Asma Afsaruddin** is Professor of Islamic Studies and former Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at Indiana University, Bloomington. She is the author or editor of seven books, including her most recent *Contemporary Issues in Islam* (Edinburgh University Press 2015) and the award-winning *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (Oxford University Press 2013). She was named a Carnegie Scholar in 2005.

**Anna Ayşe Akasoy** is Professor of Islamic Intellectual History at the Graduate Center and Hunter College, City University of New York. Her research interests include the intellectual culture of the medieval Muslim West and contacts between the Islamic world and other cultures. Her current research project concerns the religious functions of Alexander the Great in the Islamic tradition.

**Johann P. Arnason** is Professor Emeritus of Sociology, La Trobe University, Melbourne, and Professor of Historical Sociology, Charles University, Prague. His research has focused on the comparative analysis of civilizations and on theories and varieties of modernity. He has written or edited books about the Soviet model, the dual civilization of Japan, the Greek *polis*, and the Eurasian world in the 10th–13th centuries, as well as theoretical works such as *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions* (Brill 2003).

**M. Fariduddin Attar** is currently pursuing his PhD at the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University. His main research focus is post-Avicennian philosophy and theology in the Islamic East. He has taught philosophy in a number of universities in Jakarta, Indonesia.

**Mohammed A. Bamyeh** is Professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh and the editor of the *International Sociology Reviews*. He is the author of *Anarchy as Order* (Rowman & Littlefield 2009), *Of Death and Dominion* (Northwestern University Press 2007), *The Ends of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press 2000), and *The Social Origins of Islam: Mind, Economy, Discourse* (University of

Minnesota Press 1999). He has also edited *Intellectuals and Civil Society in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris 2012), *Palestine America* (Duke University Press 2003), and *Literature and Revolution* (as a special issue of the Arab-American journal *Mizna*, 2012). His latest book, *Lifeworlds of Islam*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

**Amira K. Bennison** is Professor in the History and Culture of the Maghrib at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Magdalene College. Her teaching and research interests include the medieval Islamic West (Islamic Iberia and Morocco), Maghribi modes of legitimation and cultures of power, and 18th- to 19th-century Muslim religiopolitical discourse and engagement with modernity. She is the author of *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires* (Edinburgh University Press 2016), and *The Articulation of Power in Medieval Iberia and the Maghrib* (Oxford University Press 2014). She has also edited *The Great Caliphs: the Golden Age of the 'Abbasid Empire* (I.B. Tauris 2009), *Cities in the Premodern Islamic World* (with Alison L. Gascoigne; Routledge 2007), and *Jihad and its Interpretations in Pre-Colonial Morocco* (Routledge 2002), as well as numerous articles.

**Michele Bernardini** is Professor of Persian Language, Literature, and History at the University of Naples "L'Orientale." Among his publications are various works on the Mongol and Timurid periods, including *Mémoire et propagande à l'époque timouride* (Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes 2008) and *I Mongoli. Espansione, imperi, eredità* (with Donatella Guida; Einaudi 2012). He is the editor-in-chief of the journal *Eurasian Studies* and a member of the editorial board of *Series Catalogorum*, devoted to cataloguing collections of Oriental manuscripts.

**Caterina Bori** received her PhD from the University of Rome La Sapienza and is currently Associate Professor in the History of Islam and Early Modern Muslim Civilizations at the University of Bologna. Before that she was Teaching Fellow in the History Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, and Research Fellow at the Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin. She has published extensively on Ibn Taymiyya and his historical milieu, and is currently exploring the transmission of the doctrines of *siyasa shar'iyya* into the Mamluk and early Ottoman periods.

**Rachida Chih** is a Senior Researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and a member of the Center for Turkish, Ottoman, Balkan, and Central Asian Studies (CETOBAC), École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris. She is currently completing a book on Sufism in Egypt in the 17th and 18th centuries. Her published works include *Le soufisme à l'époque ottomane/Sufism in the Ottoman Era* (with Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen; Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire 2010), *Le soufisme au quotidien: Confréries d'Égypte au XXe siècle*; *Le saint et son milieu* (with Denis Gril; Sindbad/Actes Sud 2010), and *Sufism, Literary Production and Printing in the Nineteenth Century* (with Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen and Rüdiger Seesemann; Ergon 2015).

**Devin DeWeese** is a Professor in the Department of Central Eurasian Studies at Indiana University. He earned his PhD at Indiana University in 1985 and has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), Guggenheim Foundation, and Carnegie Scholar program. He is the author of *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Türkles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (Pennsylvania State University Press 1994) and *Islamization and Sacred Lineages in Central Asia: The Legacy of Ishaq Bab in Narrative and Genealogical Traditions*, Vol. I: *Opening the Way for Islam: The Ishaq Bab Narrative, 14th–19th Centuries* (with Ashirbek Muminov; Daik-Press 2013). His numerous articles on the religious history of Islamic Central Asia and Iran focus chiefly on problems of Islamization, on the social and political roles of Sufi communities, and on Sufi literature and hagiography in Persian and Chaghatay Turkic.

**Bruce Fudge** is Professor of Arabic at the University of Geneva. He is the author of *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: al-Tabrisi and the Craft of Commentary* (Routledge 2011) and editor-translator of *A Hundred and One Nights* (New York University Press 2016).

**George Hatke** received his PhD in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University and is currently Senior Lecturer in Ancient South-Arabian History and Epigraphy at the Institut für Orientalistik, University of Vienna. His areas of research include pre-Islamic South Arabia, ancient and medieval Ethiopia, and Indian Ocean trade.

**Paul L. Heck**, Professor of Islamic Studies in the Department of Theology at Georgetown University, publishes on the intellectual history of Islam and the nature of Christian–Muslim relations both sociologically and theologically. His most recent monograph is *Skepticism in Classical Islam: Moments of Confusion* (Routledge 2014).

**Ahmet T. Karamustafa** is Professor of History at the University of Maryland, College Park. His expertise is in the social and intellectual history of Sufism in particular and Islamic piety in general in the medieval and early modern periods. His publications include *God's Unruly Friends* (University of Utah Press 1994) and *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh University Press/University of California Press 2007). He is currently working on a book project titled *Vernacular Islam: Everyday Muslim Religious Life in Medieval Anatolia* (co-authored with Cemal Kafadar) as well as a monograph on the history of early medieval Sufism titled *The Flowering of Sufism*.

**Jamal Malik** is Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Erfurt. After studying Islamic Studies and Political Science in Bonn, he received his PhD in 1988 at Heidelberg and conducted his postdoctoral studies (leading to a professorial Habilitation) in 1994 at Bamberg. Before joining the University of Erfurt in 1999, Jamal Malik worked in different positions at the Universities of Bonn, Heidelberg, Bamberg, and Derby. His current research interests focus on *da'wa* movements, Sufism, and *madrasas*, along with Islam in South Asia and Europe.

**Matthew Melvin-Koushki** received his PhD from Yale University and is Assistant Professor of History at the University of South Carolina. He specializes in early modern Islamic intellectual and imperial history, with a focus on the theory and practice of the occult sciences in Timurid-Safavid Iran and the broader Persianate world.

**Ethan L. Menchinger** is Lecturer in Early Ottoman History at the University of Michigan, where he received his PhD in Near Eastern Studies in 2014. He was a Fellow in the program “Europe in the Middle East—the Middle East in Europe” at the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin and a Visiting Scholar at the University of Toronto. He has published articles on Ottoman political thought, philosophy, and intellectual history as well as translations and is the author of *First of the Modern Ottomans: The Intellectual History of Ahmed Vâsîf* (Cambridge University Press 2017).

**A. Azfar Moin** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Islamic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (Columbia University Press 2012).

**Jane H. Murphy** is Associate Professor of History at Colorado College. She is currently working on a study of the rational sciences in the life and times of ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti.

**Naznin Patel** is a graduate student at the School of Religious Studies at McGill University. Her research interests include Renaissance Italian and early modern intellectual history, with particular emphasis on its interaction with Islamic philosophy and theology.

**Babak Rahimi** is Associate Professor of Communication, Culture, and Religion at the Department of Literature, University of California, San Diego. He earned his PhD from the European University Institute, Florence, in October 2004. Rahimi has also studied at the University of Nottingham, where he obtained an MA in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy in 1997, and the London School of Economics and Political Science, where he was a Visiting Fellow at the Department of Anthropology, 2000–2001. His book, *Theater-State and Formation of the Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran: Studies on Safavid Muharram Rituals, 1590–1641 C.E.* (Brill 2011), studies the relationship between ritual, public space, and state power in early modern Iranian history.

**Sajjad Rizvi** is Associate Professor of Islamic Intellectual History at the University of Exeter. An intellectual historian trained at Oxford and Cambridge, he has published extensively on the course of philosophy in the Islamic East in the early modern period and is currently writing a monograph on the intellectual history of Islamic philosophical traditions in 18th-century North India and Iran.

**Armando Salvatore** is a sociologist and a scholar of comparative religions. He is the Keenan Chair in Interfaith Studies and Professor of Global Religious Studies (Society and Politics) at the School of Religious Studies, McGill University. He has

taught and researched at Humboldt University Berlin, the University of Naples “L’Orientale,” the National University of Singapore, and, more recently, the Australian National University and the University of Leipzig. He is the author of *The Sociology of Islam: Knowledge, Power and Civility* (Wiley Blackwell 2016).

**Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen** is Associate Professor of Islamic and Arabic Studies at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen. His field of research is contemporary Islam, with a particular focus on the establishment of a modern Muslim public sphere, the role of the Muslim ‘*ulama*’ in modern Arab states, and the articulation of Islamic topics in the new pan-Arab television networks. Key publications include *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dār al-Iftā* (Brill 1997), *Global Mufti. The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi* (co-edited with Bettina Gräf; Hurst/Columbia University Press 2009), and *Arab Media Moguls* (co-edited with Donatella della Ratta and Naomi Sakr; I.B. Tauris 2015).

**Devin Stewart** earned a PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Pennsylvania in 1991. He has been teaching in the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies, Emory University, since 1990. His research has focused on the Qur’an, Shi’i Islam, Islamic legal theory, institutions, and education, and other topics in Arabic and Islamic studies. He is the author of *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Utah University Press 1998) and editor and translator of *Disagreements of the Jurists* (New York University Press 2015).

**SherAli Tareen** is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He has published extensively on various aspects of Muslim reform, colonial modernity, and secularism, with a focus on South Asia.

**Isabel Toral-Niehoff** studied History and Arabic Studies in Tübingen where she earned her PhD in 1997 with a thesis titled *Kitab Ġiranīs. Die arabische Übersetzung der ersten Kyranis. Herausgegeben, übersetzt und Kommentiert*. She acquired her professorial habilitation in 2008 at Free University, Berlin. Her main research and publishing fields are Arabia and the Near East in Late Antiquity, cultural identity, cultural transfer processes, Arabic occult sciences, and classical Arabic literature and historiography. She has published the monograph *Al-Ḥīra: Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext* (Brill 2014).

**Roberto Tottoli** is Professor of Islamic Studies at the Department of Asian, African, and Mediterranean Studies, University of Naples “L’Orientale.” He was a Member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, 2016–2017. He has published studies on the Biblical tradition in the Qur’an and Islam such as *Biblical Prophets in the Qur’an and Muslim Literature* (Routledge 2002) and *The Stories of the Prophets of Ibn Murrarīf al-Tarāfi* (Klaus Schwarz 2003), and on medieval Islamic

literature. His most recent publications include *Ludovico Marracci at Work: The Evolution of His Latin Translation of the Qur'ān in the Light of His Newly Discovered Manuscripts* (co-authored with Reinhold F. Gleis; Harrassowitz 2016), and *Books and Written Culture of the Islamic World. Studies Presented to Claude Gilliot on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday* (co-edited with Andrew Rippin; Brill 2015).

**John O. Voll** is Professor Emeritus of Islamic History at Georgetown University. He is a past president of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, and the author of *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Syracuse University Press 1994) and numerous other books and articles on Islamic and world history.

**Ali Yaycioglu** is a historian of the Ottoman Empire and the early modern Muslim world at Stanford University. His book, *Partners of the Empire: Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford University Press 2016) is an attempt to rethink the Ottoman experience within the global context of the revolutionary age of the 18th and early 19th centuries.



# Preface

*The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam* is a collective project whose beginnings go back to the Summer of 2008, when I received an invitation to provide a proposal for such a volume to Wiley Blackwell. Ever since, the project has required an ongoing exchange with a variety of scholars of Islam with diverse disciplinary backgrounds. From the beginning, both the publisher and I shared the goal of providing a reference work based on fresh scholarly findings, while taking into account relevant research traditions and their underlying, if contended, scholarly approaches. The outcome of almost a decade of work and exchange is a volume addressed to a composite academic audience, ranging from advanced undergraduates to professionals who aspire to acquire a knowledge on the history of Islam which is comprehensive, up to date, and manageable. Yet the volume might also contribute to scholarly debates not confined to Islamic Studies: most notably through the analysis of the transformations that marked the transition of the Islamic ecumene from premodern to modern sociopolitical conditions.

Published histories of Islam are either single-authored studies that reflect the author's individual approach or collective works with an encyclopedic ambition and/or a multivolume range. They therefore risk overstating either the unity or the diversity of Islamic history. This volume is a cohesive collective undertaking based on an originally unitary yet articulate conception. This has been executed through distributing the task of dealing with discrete aspects and periods of Islamic history among a selected group of intellectually motivated scholars within history, Islamic Studies, and historical sociology—both within the English-speaking academia and outside of it—who share the need for reasonable conceptual innovations. Our goal has been to strike a balance between older and younger scholars and to achieve a fair degree of geographical distribution, with one third of the contributors (and one of the main editors) coming from non-Anglophone institutions. This diversity was also achieved in response to a specific request by the publisher, back in 2008, to provide a comprehensive representation of scholarly traditions in the study of Islam. This also includes the self-renewal of the time-honored continental orientalist 'schools.'

This is why *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam* can help absorb and redeploy basic analytic concepts which are mostly taken for granted by both the specialist and by a larger academic audience. We provide a well-studied selection of key topics that are neither confined to the taste and skills of a single author nor reflective of the encyclopedic ambition of covering the entire ‘world of Islam.’ We have addressed the unity and diversity of the history of Islam, both as a religious tradition and as a civilizational process, by blending historical analysis and theoretical reflection. Our main goal has been to help our readership to understand a complex tradition-*cum*-civilization the knowledge of which is essential for making sense of the wider transcivilizational dynamics of the Afro-Eurasian hemisphere—including the far western exceptionalism of the ‘Occident.’

Against the background of teleological assumptions concerning why the Islamic civilization finally succumbed to the hegemonic power of the ‘West,’ the book illustrates the distinctive Islamic (and Islamicate) unfolding of the dialectic of ‘commoners’ and elites across urban, agrarian, and nomadic milieus. It shows how the related patterns of life conduct were shaped in connection with highly variable and often flexible institutions of governance. The particular key to presenting an articulate yet cohesive history of Islam consists in consciously focusing on the ongoing dynamics linking religion and culture to power and civility. This focus puts a premium on a rather transcivilizational approach, whereby the Islamic ecumene is seen both in its internal articulations and in its external openness and permeability, rather than through the lens of a more narrowly conceived area study perspective.

The volume consists of seven parts. Part I deals with Islam’s overlapping, relevant ‘beginnings’ out of the older and wider dynamics of the Irano-Semitic civilizational area. Part II covers the classic era of the caliphate from the middle of the 7th to the middle of the 10th century CE: this epoch played a formative role especially in setting the terms of the future continual interaction between the *shari’a* tradition (oriented to life conduct and juridical regulation) and the *adab* culture (radiating from the courts of the rulers and able to shape the character of statecraft and administration, but also decisively influencing the enactment of cultured life forms): they interacted and competed in shaping key notions of the Islamicate order, ranging from the subject to the state. Part III embraces the formative epoch of what comparative civilizational analysts have called the “ecumenic renaissance” occurring throughout the Afro-Eurasian landmass during the early second millennium CE, within which the expanding Islamic ecumene played a crucial role, notably through the spread of Sufism (from the collapse of the power of the caliphate in the middle of the 10th to the wave of Mongol conquests in the middle of the 13th century). Part IV deals with the renewal of the expanded Islamic ecumene from the Mongol capture of Baghdad of 1258 until the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople of 1453. Part V encompasses the early modern period, lasting until the end of the 17th century and the Battle of Vienna. Part VI covers the 18th and most of the 19th century, an epoch coinciding with the global rise of European

powers, during which Islamic movements of revival and reform saw the light. Part VII explores the era of anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial reorganization carried out by sociopolitical (including “Islamist”) movements and new elites, animated by a variety of patterns of mobilization and organization (both national and transnational), up to the present era.

This chronological subdivision represents a partial revision of the approach of the most important work in the history of Islam to date by Marshall G.S. Hodgson (see the Introduction to this volume) and of other conventional periodizations, in that it shifts the beginning and end of some epochs and intervenes in the overall logic that delimits and connects successive eras. It particularly suggests a tripartition of the larger epoch we identify with modernity into an early modern yet largely precolonial era, a colonial period, and a long (yet ongoing) phase of exit from colonial domination toward problematic attempts to reconstruct sociopolitical autonomy in the era of postcolonial nation-states, culminating in their crisis between the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Similarly, the unity of the seventh period cuts through the late-colonial and postcolonial phases (a type of labeling that, if taken too literally, along with the underlying periodization, is too blatantly modeled on the Western trajectory of colonial modernity) and envisions a rather unitary epoch of movement-based resurgence and corresponding attempts to build independent states—a period that has been increasingly characterized by centrifugal processes, especially from the 1970s until today. This tripartition of the modern age has the merit of rejecting the still dominant narrative postulating the existence of a Western monopoly on the birth of modernity from its inception, and which is based on reductive and homogenizing assumptions about linear alignments of Reformation, Enlightenment, and the commercial and industrial revolutions of Northwestern Europe.

Each of the seven parts consists of four chapters that cover the more strictly geopolitical and the wider civilizational dimensions of Islamic history, as well as the theological-juridical field, more exclusive forms of elite culture, and the fundamental dimension of Sufi and ‘popular’ traditions and practices: sometimes representing the ‘lines of flight’ from the consensus but more often reinstituting it in new ways. This assortment is necessary to provide systematic unity to the materials, though it has been obviously molded by the specific orientations of the chapter contributors. While in some cases a certain amount of background knowledge by the reader can be assumed, the chapters are generally written to be accessible to broader audiences. Each author treats a given topic from a specific perspective, allowing a modest overlap among chapters on dealing with key events, characters, or themes. The intention has been to strike a suitable balance in preserving the scholarly autonomy of each author and chapter while guaranteeing a degree of cohesion to the volume as a whole which aims to improve on what we can find in comparable collective works, however excellent their scholarly quality.

After my proposal for the book was approved by Wiley Blackwell in late 2008, I started inviting contributors from different backgrounds, and in the years 2011

and 2014, respectively, I asked Roberto Tottoli and Babak Rahimi to collaborate in the editorship. I am grateful that they accepted and also joined the task of inviting contributors, winning over to the project a pool of authors whose chapters play a particularly critical role in the balance of the entire volume, most notably with regard to the highly contentious fields dealing with early Islam and early modernity. In the distribution of preliminary editorial work, Roberto took care in particular of Parts I and II, Babak of Parts V and VI, and I dedicated myself to Parts III and VII, while Babak and I collaborated on Part IV. On the latest stage of work, which started around 18 months ago after Roberto Tottoli had collated and ordered the individual chapter drafts, I took over the entire manuscript anew and submitted it to substantial, yet sustainable revisions.

It goes without saying that without Roberto's and Babak's contributions to the editing work, this volume would have never seen the light. Qualitatively, the editorship of this volume is theirs as much as it is mine, while I tried to preserve and nurture, through several ups and downs, a sense of continuity, purpose, and standard from those increasingly remote beginnings of the project. This endeavor also entailed keeping fidelity to the project as originally discussed with the publisher and further channeled by four anonymous reviewers, to all of whom I owe thanks. In the final phase I particularly benefited from an intensive six-month collaboration with M. Fariduddin Attar and Naznin Patel at McGill University, where we all received the graceful and constant support of Professor Daniel Cere, Director of the School of Religious Studies. Farid's and Naznin's sharp acumen in reading and commenting on all chapters helped me in particular with the work of conceptual and architectural homogenization of the volume. Last and really not least, I have immensely benefited from the continual advice of the leading comparative historical sociologist and social theorist Johann P. Arnason, whose co-authorship of the Introduction only partly reflects his essential contribution to shaping the volume.

Armando Salvatore  
Utrecht, June 2017

# Introduction: The Formation and Transformations of the Islamic Ecumene

Armando Salvatore, Johann P. Arnason, Babak Rahimi,  
and Roberto Tottoli

## The Notion of a Transcivilizational Ecumene

The particular complexity of the historical study of Islam is nowadays a given for scholars in the broader field. This acknowledgement contrasts sharply with crass generalizations in public and media discourse on Islam, not only in the West. The project underlying this volume, belonging to the *Wiley Blackwell History of Religions* series, explores the diverse ways through which the undeniably religious dimension that is at the core of Islamic traditions (or simply Islam) innervates a distinctive type of ‘civilizing process’ in history. This process crystallized in institutional forms at a variety of levels: broadly social, specifically religious, legal, political, cultural, and, transversally, civic.

No doubt the scholarly interest in studying this expansive civilizing process has acquired a new boost due to late 20th-century developments associated with what has been roughly called a “re-Islamization process” occurring in the context of the most recent wave of globalization, whose beginnings should be traced back to the 1970s. Debates on globalization did not always take a historical turn, but when they did, the question of earlier globalizing waves—including premodern ones—was bound to be posed, and the exceptional success of the premodern Islamic expansion stood out as a prime example. Correspondingly, the applicability of modern concepts to the macro-civilizational formation created by this process could be considered.

Apart from a relatively brief early stage, the Islamic ecumene was not a unified empire, and it never became a world economy. It was always to some or to a large extent intertwined with multiple economic worlds, centered on the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and Central Asian trade routes. But the notion of an Islamic world system *sui generis* has been suggested (Voll 1994) and several elements seem to speak in its favor: an exceptional importance of international trade, high geographical mobility, a notable degree of legal uniformity, and widely shared cultural codes. Several such trends have been the object of study of a historically and theoretically informed sociology of Islam (Turner 1974; Stauth 1993; Salvatore 2016), a field of research taking shape in the wake of the intellectually most challenging yet comprehensive single-authored oeuvre within the field to date. This work was produced precisely at a time, in the late 1960s, when the complexity of the wider field of Islamic Studies started to be recognized through an increasingly diversified set of investigations (Donner 2010: 641–2). I am referring to Marshall Hodgson's posthumously published three-volume *The Venture of Islam* (Hodgson 1974, I–III). Hodgson was Professor of World History and Chair of the prestigious interdisciplinary Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

In his scholarly career Hodgson interacted closely with representatives of both world history and modernization theory and his approach clearly transcended the conceptual limitations of Islamic Studies. A retrospective reading of key motives from his oeuvre has been recently facilitated by its reception among historians, historical sociologists, and civilizational analysts within a broader comparative perspective. Particular attention has been devoted to how religious traditions are supposed to feed into the broader civilizing process through which societies and states take form. Moreover, Hodgson can be credited for anticipating interpretations that only became familiar to a larger academic public from the late 1970s onward, ranging from the critique of the bias of orientalist worldviews to a pluralizing approach to the issue of modernity. In spite of writing during the zenith of modernization theory between the 1950s and 1960s, Hodgson warned us of the dangerous extent to which concepts applied to Islam and its history came to depend on the hegemony of Western modernity.

References to Max Weber, few in number but contextually significant, show that Hodgson was aware of classical social theory as well as of the need to go beyond such references, although in his work there is no trace of contact with the sociological debates that toward the end of his life and career were beginning to significantly alter received understandings of Weber's work. Hodgson's own reasons for being enticed to take into account sociological concepts were directly related to the broader historical setting within which he wanted to situate the Islamic "venture." His starting point was namely a perceived shortcoming of scholarship dealing with "pre-modern citted societies ... from Sumer to the French Revolution" (Hodgson 1974, I: 31). As he saw it, anthropologists had developed a systematic framework for the study of premodern non-citted communities, and sociologists had done something comparable for modern

societies; but apart from exceptions like Max Weber, he lamented that the long period in-between had not been tackled on that level. For Hodgson, a systematic approach to the premodern citted world would, first and foremost, have to account for the structures and dynamics of world history, and in the first instance those of the Afro-Eurasian macro-civilizational area. His idea of civilizations and their ongoing processes linking urban centers to rural and nomadic sectors needs to be understood in this context, as referring to units partly demarcating themselves, but also, and most importantly, interacting with each other and developing innovative capacities within an encompassing and ultimately global space. Thus, even if he never used the concept of civilizing or civilizational process, civilizations were conceived by him very much in process-like terms.

Let us take stock on analyzing this civilizational approach. Hodgson begins with a definition of “culture ... as a pattern of lifeways received among mutually recognized family groups.” In a more explicitly historical perspective, this pattern represents “a relatively autonomous complex of interdependent cumulative traditions, in which an unpredictable range of family groups may take part” (Hodgson 1974, I: 32). A civilization then appears as a “wider and more rarefied level” (Hodgson 1974, I: 33) of cultural identity. Civilizational patterns depend on “dominant lettered traditions,” whose cultural imprint tends to be accompanied by a continuity of social institutions. Yet, as Hodgson stressed, “each civilization defines its own scope” (Hodgson 1974, I: 33), so that the interconnections of cultural and institutional factors will differ in both degree and kind. Further warnings against reading too much into a general concept of civilization follow from reflections on its interpretive and explanatory reach. The ways of demarcating and understanding a civilization “must differ with the grounds for singling it out” (Hodgson 1974, I: 34); Hodgson’s prime example of such variations is the case of Byzantium, widely seen as a distinctive civilization but also as a phase in the history of Hellenic culture or part of a wider Christian world. This is not to suggest that no demarcation is more appropriate than other possible ones; to stay within this thematic range, the idea of three civilizations emerging from the transformation of the Roman world—Western Christendom, Byzantium, and Islam—has decidedly proved more fruitful for comparative research than the notion of one monotheistic complex.

If long-term civilizational patterns have a role to play, that role must be defined according to Hodgson within this perspective: “Historical change is continuous and all traditions are open and in motion, by the very necessity of the fact that they are always in internal imbalance. Minds are always probing the edges of what is currently possible” (Hodgson 1974, I: 37). Hodgson’s most basic working hypothesis for comparative studies thus follows: “The difference between major traditions lies not so much in the particular elements present within them, but in the relative weighting of them and the structuring of their interplay within the total context” (Hodgson 1974, I: 37). The next point to note is the connection between the above claims and the specific features of the “venture of Islam,” to

the extent Hodgson saw the latter as a creative transformation and integration of multiple legacies. This is where a clarification of Islamic variations on this theme is needed, drawing on Hodgson's insights but moving toward a more explicit theoretical and comparative stance. One obviously distinctive feature of the Islamic experience is the very close interconnection between the "internal imbalance" (Hodgson 1974, I: 37), which Hodgson sees as a reason for openness and ongoing change, and external dynamics.

This is due to the fact that the unfolding of Islamic civilization to an exceptionally sustained record of expansion requires paying due attention to different aspects of that process: religious, imperial, and civilizational. The expansive process involved multiple encounters with other civilizations, with varying outcomes on institutional as well as regional levels. The changing balance of expansion and interaction also set the scene for internal differentiation, as between the permanently shifting patterns of a quite open-ended relation between political and religious authority. This is not to deny that the Islamic forms and directions of the religiopolitical nexus are distinctive, but they have to be defined in terms of historical trajectories. Their specific features are due to the characteristics of the religious message (as it developed during the formative periods), the successive phases of expansion, and the encounters with other civilizational trajectories.

This realization clashes against orientalist bias envisioning this relation as particularly rigid, due to Islam's putative 'origins.' Long before Edward Said, Hodgson was critical of unexamined orientalist generalizations. As summarized by Edmund Burke III, "Marshall Hodgson clearly saw that Islamic history was a strategic point from which to undertake a critique of the discourse on Western civilization" (Burke III 1993: xv). To mark both the idiosyncratic and the shared elements characterizing the rise to hegemony of the Islamic ecumene at the very center of the Afro-Eurasian civilizational landmass, Hodgson's idea of a civilizational "Islamdom" distinct from Islam proper, that is, as a religious tradition, contributed to open the way to transcend the static idea of Islam as a monolithic civilization developing the themes of its origins between Mecca and Medina. Islamdom effectively described the unstable yet creative crystallization of an ecumene comparable in principle with Latin Christendom but actually deploying much more fluid and malleable civilizational characteristics. Islamdom was kept distinct from Islam by Hodgson for a variety of reasons, but most notably for its potential to create synergies among previously distinct cultural worlds and religious traditions. For Hodgson, it represented the specific "complex of social relations" or "the milieu of a whole society" embodied by Islamic civilization, being the perpetually shifting outcome of complex interactions with Islam's core religious traditions (Hodgson 1974, I: 58).

Thus the nature of Islamic civilization appeared to Hodgson as *sui generis*, if compared with China, India, or the West, precisely for being able to trigger off a new type of synthetic, even transcivilizational dynamics across the Afro-Eurasian depths. He never used the term "transcivilizational ecumene" or any equivalent one, but his emphasis on Islamdom's unprecedented ability to impose a significant



degree of cultural unity across regional boundaries, and to expand to the Eastern and Western extremities of Afro-Eurasia, points in that direction. Alternatively, if we follow Shmuel N. Eisenstadt in theorizing modernity as a new type of civilization, distinguished—among other things—by a very high capacity to transcend regional origins and formative contexts (Eisenstadt 2004), Islamdom was in this regard indisputably its most significant predecessor. For much of the “Middle Millennium” (Zedar and Wiesner-Hanks 2015: 667), as the editors of the fifth volume of the *The Cambridge World History* call the period from 500 to 1500 BCE that saw the unfolding of a “proto-globalization” (Olstein 2015), the “centrality of Islamic civilization” (Cook 2015) was a basic fact, which started to change, and only slowly, during the early modern era.

The uniqueness of this proto-global centrality of Islamdom was rendered by Hodgson in terms of transcivilizational circulation, cosmopolitan opening, and institutional flexibility. According to him, the civilizational complex of Islamdom innervated by Islamic traditions inherited and creatively recombined the cultural characters and the political specificities of a vast and more ancient geocultural region that he called the “Irano-Semitic” civilizational area. Prior to the rise of Islam this region embraced rather heterogeneous religious communities sharing ideas of prophetic monotheism but divided by a long history of competition and conflict. The civilizing process occurring within Islamdom inherited and brought to a common denominator both the religious characteristics of the Irano-Semitic area and their impact on the management of the worldly realm. For Hodgson, “[t]he Irano-Semitic prophets analyzed neither the inner self nor the outer world”; they “summoned the personal conscience to confront a cosmic moral order, which expressed itself in the contingencies of social history” (Hodgson 1974, I: 117–18).

In other words, the rise of Islam brought to the Irano-Semitic multi-traditional constellation an unprecedented input from the hitherto peripheral Arabian Peninsula (including a language that became a key bearer of lettered traditions), and centered the whole process on a new religious vision. A markedly pluralistic background thus entered into the making of new civilizational patterns. To sum up, thanks not only to the emergence of Islam but also to the unfolding of Islamdom, “the post-Cuneiform Irano-Semitic tradition between Nile and Oxus, from Syria to Khurasan,” brought prophetic monotheism “to a certain culmination,” also by exalting the “communal articulation” of the town commoners most exposed to its message, “while overcoming its divisiveness” (Hodgson 1993: 107).

In parallel to acknowledging unambiguously that the new venture of Islam had been long in the making via monotheistic traditions in different Semitic and Iranian manifestations, Hodgson also stressed the increasingly self-assertive strength of urban, and in particular mercantile, groups. At the confluence of such combined trends, Islam infused Islamdom with a strongly egalitarian social ethics (Arnason 2006: 32). Thus, rather than the Hijaz (the narrow region of the Arabian Peninsula where Mecca and Medina are located), the cradle of Islam and the platform from which its hemisphere-wide expansion started should be, according to

Hodgson, identified with the wider “Nile-to-Oxus” region. He unabashedly stated that “when Islam was announced there, the new doctrine did not seem strange,” since it was quite well aligned with earlier developments of the Irano-Semitic realm (Hodgson 1993: 105). The new call met the aspirations of townspeople facing agrarianate dominance over societies strongly stratified in classes or castes.

Further developing Hodgson’s vision of Islam’s venture requires nowadays a concerted scholarly engagement on a quite broad scale, entailing more than simple interdisciplinary collaborations, namely the adoption of a transdisciplinary perspective matching history with theory. The present volume, building on the strengths of Hodgson’s approach, intends to accomplish a step in this direction requiring in some cases a distancing from Hodgson and the exploration of alternative interpretive paths, among those the increasingly diversified and methodologically reflexive field (rather than discipline) of Islamic Studies has produced over the last four decades.

## **I. Late Antique Beginnings (to ca. 661)**

There are various keys that may help us to decipher the intricate process that generated the seeds of the Islamic ecumene in the Near East during Late Antiquity (ca. 200–600), a label coined by Peter Brown (1971) which has helped to recontextualize several strands of historical research on the Euro-Mediterranean and West-Asian regions. The interpretive questions here at play concern the economic, cultural, and political developments of the 5th and 6th centuries CE in the Arabian Peninsula and in the wider area, and more particularly the early 7th century in the places where Muhammad’s prophecy met with success. Hodgson’s contribution highlighted the need for elaborating an adequate approach to the plurality of intervening factors. His simultaneous focus on the region’s empires and on the characteristics of the new call of Muhammad placed the late antique beginnings of Islam firmly within the longer-term dynamics of the Irano-Semitic civilizational area.

It is fair to say that the almost simultaneous new approach inaugurated by Hodgson in the study of Islam and the coining of the category of Late Antiquity by Peter Brown and his students, especially Garth Fowden (2013), have profoundly changed an earlier, paradigmatic assumption according to which Islam emerged as if in a vacuum. Based on the combined perspectives of Brown and Hodgson, the rise of Islam should be seen as the latest momentous development in the spread of an increasingly universalizing monotheism, which had already seen the birth of Judaism and Christianity in the region, but also of Manichaeism and other less fortunate ventures. Islam succeeded in the creation of a new commonwealth or ecumene which was able to provide cohesion to the “Nile-to-Oxus” region and

well beyond. It rapidly doubled up as Islamdom, the increasingly mature social engine and civilizational process reflecting a new historical momentum. At the same time, political changes followed the social dynamics of a regional pattern that was already connecting the Mediterranean to the Eastern provinces of Iran (Hodgson 1974, I).

In a world already reflecting—as from the 5th century—significant changes in the production of wealth and in the balance between agricultural organization and trading activity as well as in the specific dynamics of sedentarization and nomadism, the emergence of Islam did not constitute a sudden change but provided a new powerful catalyst to the genesis of a new social order, aligned within the longer-term evolution of the Irano-Semitic civilizational area but also able to potentiate and transcend them. The urbanization process and the new social transformations ignited by the policies of the agrarian Roman/Byzantine, Himyarite, and Sasanian empires were matched by the nomadic-sedentary dynamics that characterized the Arabian Peninsula. The epoch witnessed, if not the ‘ethnogenesis’ of the Arabs, at least the consolidation of Arab tribal communities as polities through accelerated interaction with the above-mentioned expansionist empires. The social and economic background provided by the Byzantine and Sasanian empires in the north, the historical reality in the African Horn, and the Arabian pre-Islamic lore and sociocultural dynamics were equally fundamental in influencing what was to become in the course of few generations a new *ecumene* linking China and India to the Atlantic Ocean.

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of historical factors and the questions of historicity concerning Islam’s canonized narratives of origin, it was Muhammad and the memory of his prophetic mission as attested in the Qur’an and the recordings of his deeds and sayings which triggered the new extraordinary venture. However, the Islamic *ecumene* as the dynamic interaction of Islam and Islamdom is not only the result of Muhammad and his companions’ actions but also of several other factors. Muhammad’s exceptional re-forming capacity embraced images and symbols of cosmic and social order that were widespread within the Irano-Semitic civilizational area. They underwent an intense process of recombination and reconstruction on the semi-periphery of the big empires that encompassed multiple brands of Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism, including several heterodox manifestations and challenges, some of which synthesized the heritage of those religious traditions. In the context where the final (yet almost prototypical) prophet Muhammad operated, such ideas were not just up for grabs and free-floating, but already integrated, to a significant extent, in institutional frameworks.

The Qur’an hints at the events in the life of the Prophet receiving it, and given the results of the recent researches on Qur’anic codices demonstrating beyond any doubt its origin in the 7th century, it must be considered a unique document on the early emergence of Islam in the Hijazi milieu. Further, several authors, and in

particular Angelika Neuwirth (2010), have attempted to read the Qur'an as a testimony of late antique currents and contentions, thus simultaneously reflecting, on one hand, the specific revelation received by a new prophet talking to localized audiences, and on the other hand, the religious sensibility and cultural attitudes of a much wider region. Consequently, what was to become the Qur'an includes these early texts that the community a short time later collected and ascribed to the mission of Muhammad, thus building on it both a scriptural canon and a community.

Islam appears as emerging out of a complex combination of phenomena within sedentary societies that responded to changing economic conditions and were torn apart by nomadic waves crossing from the South to the North of the Arabian Peninsula. It seems clear that the long phase of crystallization of the initial teachings of Islam produced a rather continuous dynamic of state formation that calls for some caution in identifying a full-fledged "early Muslim state," as mentioned in the title of the last chapter of the first volume of Hodgson's trilogy (Hodgson 1974, I: 187; Arnason 2006: 34). From the chapters of Part I in this volume we can access key parameters to connect the variety of interpretations (and the new findings on the beginnings of Islam's venture into history) to a long-term trajectory that, far from singling out a 'golden age' of Islam from its alleged later decay, came to full fruition only in the subsequent epochs. In other words, whatever the controversies on Islam's 'origins,' they did not rigidly predetermine the rich and highly differentiated history of the Islamic ecumene.

In Chapter 1, George Hatke focuses on the pre-Islamic, Irano-Semitic civilizational area throughout Late Antiquity and explores the interaction among various socioeconomic sectors: agrarian, commercial, and pastoralist. He shows how the Irano-Semitic area constitutes a spectrum rather than a sharp divide corresponding to the political frontier between the Roman/Byzantine and Sasanian domains. Not only does the distinction between Semitic and non-Semitic realms have scarce significance in the late antique context, but one should also consider the shared experience of Hellenism intended as a cosmopolitan outlook which took Greek culture as its point of reference but coexisted and interacted with local Near Eastern cultures. Once the commonalities of the Irano-Semitic sphere are recognized, the political and military rivalry between the Roman and the Sasanian empires appears as one among several components of transregional interactions within this sphere. This acknowledgment opens the way to appreciate the socioeconomic dimension of late antique life shared by the two empires as well as by those polities with which they interacted.

The chapter shows how throughout the epoch the rival empires also competed in investing into the agricultural potential of the Fertile Crescent by making new areas available for farming and settlement. At the same time, they sought political leverage over nomadic and semi-nomadic Arabian tribal networks and the support of client formations. Although the Arabian Peninsula had a significant nomadic population, textual and archaeological evidence indicates agricultural activities

there as well. Sedentary and nomadic communities were sometimes at loggerheads, yet they relied on each other for various products and services. Significant in Hacke's analysis is that agriculture and pastoralism reflect practices displaying a variety of attitudes in relation to cultural positions and beliefs. The extent to which pastoralism entered a tense relation with commercial flows did not hinder most regional actors from continuing to trade and develop multiple connections among themselves. The Arabian Peninsula was not a background stage to these dynamics, but rather a permanent and often silent source of connectedness which ended up providing a type of regional coherence imprinting the lines of development of the entire late antique Near East.

Hatke shows how an original Arab, both urban and nomadic, tradition ranging from the South to the North of the peninsula has conceived of itself as a specific culture in relation to the other known cultural areas, but, at the same time, has expressed continuous relationship to this 'other' outside the inner peninsular core and with the ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean. Economic ties connected a peripheral or semi-peripheral to a central late antique world in terms of close otherness, thus affecting at the same time the political and religious spheres. The Arabs appear increasingly as both close observers and key actors within the historical culmination of a variety of late antique trajectories, with which they had sufficient familiarity and on which they were able to intervene.

In Chapter 2, Isabel Toral-Niehoff deepens the study of the aspects of Late Antiquity on the eve of the advent of Islam which concern the involvement of North Arabian sociopolitical dynamics in the antagonism of the Roman and the Sasanian empires: a process that connected key Arab power formations to the centers of the Irano-Semitic area and their religious traditions. The two groups of Northern Arabs playing such a key role were namely the Ghassanids (also Jafnids), as military allies of the Romans, and the Lakhmids (also Nasrids), as proxies of the Persians. They both acted as cultural mediators and commercial agents, while also being the target of competing missionary efforts.

The chapter comparatively explores how the two groups mediated at various levels between the world of great power competition and the concerns and strategies of the Arabs living in the Arabian Peninsula on the eve of Islam, thus playing a role in the shaping of the Qur'anic milieu in the Hijaz.

Toral-Niehoff concludes by showing that the two North Arabian kingdoms contributed key innovations both on a political level, by legitimizing within wider Arab milieus notions and practices of political authority aligned with late antique patterns, and within the cultural sphere. They promoted standards of literacy favorable to the scripturalization of Arabic and matching the concepts of prophethood, revelation, and holy script which they entertained as part of their sharing in the late antique cultures of the Irano-Semitic area.

Chapter 3, by Mohammed A. Bamyeh, shifts the attention toward the society and culture of West Central Arabia, the cradle of Islam, before and around its dawn. It focuses on how early Islam was both rooted in and diverged from the

pre-Islamic sociocultural environment of the region. It deepens the analysis of the tension between nomadic and sedentary ways of life and the role of world trade in fostering sedentary settlements. It also explores the way a particular combination of specific economic conditions, political structures, and patterns of solidarity gave rise to the type of spiritual experimentation that would culminate with the advent of Islam.

The rise of Mecca, Bamyeh argues, should not be measured in terms of its prominence in trade, which is difficult to corroborate, but through its centrality in the circulatory character of the regional market. Circularity is defined by him in terms of the periodicity determined by an annually renewable routine, represented by the pilgrimage, which preexisted the dawn of Islam and provided a cyclical culmination to the trading process across the peninsula, with Mecca as its hub. This model shows that both the sociopolitical organization and the religious practices of the trading networks went well beyond the teachings and patterns absorbed from the neighboring imperial centers. They decisively reflected the experience of more dynamic and less controllable nomadic and semi-sedentary Arab peninsular circulatory networks.

The chapter finally traces the fortunes of a few pre-Islamic experiments in giving shape to a new and broader concept of cohesive sociopolitical formation upon which the edifice of the Islamic ecumene was eventually built. The longer-term genesis of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula is therefore addressed as a cluster of cultural, social, and political forces that crystallized in such a way as to blend earlier popular traditions (both 'polytheist' and 'monotheist') into the consensus materials of a new, originally Arab transtribal culture, before assuming ever more global and complex forms.

Chapter 4, by Anna Ayşe Akasoy, starts from acknowledging that the life of Muhammad remains a highly controversial topic among historians. Yet alongside the Qur'an, the document traditionally known as the Constitution of Medina is largely accepted as a reliable historical source from which to reconstruct Muhammad's leadership and prophetic calling. This document can be taken as defining a new order relying on a fresh religious vision well-grounded in the late antique context and representing an original reading of a wider prophetic tradition well-rooted in the Irano-Semitic civilizational area.

Muhammad's preaching, along with its prophetic impetus and monotheistic message, fits particularly well into the late antique patterns of the holy man, while his prophetic leadership reflected in the Constitution of Medina delineates the political implications and specificities of his religious call. While making frequent references to Qur'anic passages to trace out the emergence of his prophetic mission and the early events in his life, the chapter addresses what today represents a sort of minimal common consensus on the first steps of a movement reflecting and remolding the religious sensibilities and the social ethics of the era and the region. The process led to the establishment of the early Muslim proto-state, if not an anti-state, compared with the leading, hierarchical regional empires. Therefore

the Constitution of Medina marked the culmination of the simultaneously transgressive and resynthesizing dimension of Muhammad's life and leadership.

Akasoy finally shows how, after Muhammad's passing, fundamental questions of political and religious authority in the community were renegotiated, also in intensely conflicted ways, among contending constituencies. Questions of community leadership revolved on the significance of kinship, piety, and the nature of religious guidance. The new order had its origin both in Muhammad's leadership and in the struggles over his legacy. This was only the beginning of a long process that saw the rise of a new commonwealth, the Islamic ecumene: a process that already under Muhammad's successors, the first caliphs, led far away from West Central Arabia toward ever new cultural and political frontiers.

## II. The High Caliphate (ca. 661–946)

To clarify the complex relationship between religious visions, the civilizing process, and institutional crystallizations, one needs to focus in particular on the formative period of the Islamic ecumene coinciding with the era of florescence that Hodgson dubbed the "High Caliphate," lasting until the middle of the 10th century, when the effective power of the 'Abbasid Caliphate collapsed and the Buyids, who had been mercenaries at the service of the 'Abbasids, took over. The period, inaugurated by the assassination of 'Ali in the great mosque of Kufa and the advent of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), has been traditionally considered by scholars as marking the zenith of 'classical' Islam. Hodgson has shown how this three-century-long span of time effectively resulted in the creation of Islamdom, whose driving forces led on one side to the confrontation of competing interpretations of doctrine and legitimacy and on the other to the spread of a new type of imperial agrarian power in the "Nile-to-Oxus" region. This power, along with an evolving religious consciousness, brought prosperity and relative stability to an expanding, central region of the Afro-Eurasian civilizational landmass which spanned both sides of the once resistant border between the antique Graeco-Roman and Persian empires.

During the High Caliphate, the ideal of the Arab Prophet of monotheism whose call was imbued with the peninsula's lore and visions and which determined the fortunes of the early elites of the conquests, was gradually superseded by the universalistic message of the Qur'an. At this stage, the first waves of non-Arab converts pressed to participate and be included in the new flourishing order. The change was set in motion with the Umayyad 'Abd al-Malik and the Marwanid caliphal line, but was to receive final and decisive promotion with the advent of the 'Abbasids in the middle of the 8th century. The process of definition of the charisma of the caliph was neither simple nor linear. The pivot of this power was nonetheless the development of a legitimate reference to the revealed message and its prophetic carrier in a situation where the unique type of authority vested in

Muhammad's personality and mission needed to be canonized but could not be extended. In this context, models of sacral monarchy that the caliphate inherited from earlier, most notably Persian, ruling traditions risked being exposed to accusations of un-Islamic deviations.

As summarized by Arnason, "the imperative need to derive legitimacy from prophetic origins went together with the unsettled problem of defining the precise nature of the connection" (Arnason 2006: 36). The state authority prevailing within the Islamic ecumene in this epoch was thus characterized by an oscillation between convenient configurations of the charisma of succession to the Prophet and the more autonomous charisma of statesmanship and cultured administration. Thus the political absolutism of the caliphate revealed its vulnerability to challenges from rising bearers of religious knowledge and law, namely the '*ulama'*/*fuqaha'*', and more generally from the urban classes supporting a morally grounded egalitarian cosmopolitanism which Hodgson dubbed the "piety-minded opposition" to centralized rule (Hodgson 1974, I: 247), nourished by what he called the "populistic" ethos of the mercantile class (Hodgson 1974, I: 130–7).

Yet even the rising piety-minded, populistic groups, raising the banner of God-given norms or *shari'a*, represented just one set of programs and visions vying for consensus in a fast expanding community, within which universalistic, populistic, and spiritual aspirations competed and collided, but also overlapped. Piety-minded trends were also, and increasingly, differentiated, ranging from Shi'i factionalism, passing through the increasingly influential "*hadith* party" (*ahl al-hadith*), to renunciant groups and individuals. If a certain level of *shari'a* orientation became hegemonic, this did not occur as a neat reflection of the emerging Sunni majoritarian consensus, since it resulted out of a continuous mediation with, and interplay among, conflicting, including Shi'i, tendencies. One of the major questions raised by Hodgson was whether this *shari'a* orientation reflected a conception of a religious law inspiring every aspect of life, as consonant with both Judaism and Manichaeism, and in this sense as continuous with pre-Islamic Irano-Semitic forms of piety-mindedness and populistic trends. The *ahl al-hadith* were, in this regard, the best candidates to fill this role, which gained prominence notwithstanding the presence of other popular countervisions. Such diverse forces came to form a certain equilibrium in the course of the 10th century, only to be subjected to even deeper reshufflings in the following epoch.

The divide between the Sunni majority consensus and various Shi'i groups did not exactly match differences of class and status, to the extent one cannot reduce the Shi'a to the banner of revolt raised by disenfranchised masses against the Sunni orthodoxy of powerful elites. Yet in the late 9th century a wave of Isma'ili Shi'i rebellions represented a threat of bigger proportions than earlier 'Alid revolts and culminated in the rise of the Fatimid Caliphate in North Africa. The Fatimids represented not only a fierce power contender to the 'Abbasids but also an encompassing alternative to the very doctrinal grammar that had hitherto delimited the contentions among piety-minded groups, both Sunni and Shi'i.



While from 'Abbasid times onward these piety-minded traditions were consolidating their normative grip over vast social strata by regulating multiple aspects of social life, the rather cosmopolitan court culture of the scribes and bureaucrats, following Sasanian models and emphasizing the mastery of forms (both ethic and aesthetical) and ideals of all-round cultivation (often subsumed under the literary trope of *adab*), provided both a glue to the expanding range of knowledge production and a countervailing force to the social hegemony of the '*ulama*' class. However, this court culture did not aspire to suppress the patterns of knowledge, normativity, and social prestige that coalesced around *hadith*, *fiqh* ("jurisprudence"), and Qur'anic piety. The *adab* discourse (more than a stand-alone genre) at times linked up ideas of the body politic, blueprints of intervention on society (via the organization of violence and taxation), the self-understanding of emerging elites, and the violence-containing inward-projection of the norms produced in the process. Such visions found a crystallization in ideas of the "circle of justice," linking the sovereign to the key task of dispensing justice based on warranting security and fair taxation, as the only means to grant prosperity to the general population: a rather dynamic concept of sociopolitical order that was to gain increasing prominence in the following epochs.

Chapter 5, by Amira K. Bennison, explores the trajectory of the High Caliphate during which the two dynasties of the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids ruled over much of the Islamic ecumene by building a universalist empire. The originally Arab empire became an ever more diversified Islamic commonwealth with an original institutional outlook resulting from the fertile encounter between Arabian and earlier Roman and Sasanian traditions. Such syntheses were fiercely contested by groups like the Kharijis and the Shi'a emerging out of 'Alid allegiances. The effervescent power politics of the time were decisively intertwined with questions of political legitimacy and ruling charisma related to prophetic inheritance.

The chapter shows how such conflicts did not prevent the flourishing of an ever richer high culture radiating from the new 'Abbasid capital, Baghdad, located firmly at the center of the "Nile-to-Oxus" region, and setting the tone for contemporary and subsequent enterprises in the ecumene. The new capital embodied the increasing diversity of its Muslim and non-Muslim population with Persian and later Turkic components providing, respectively, crucial bureaucratic and military know-how to the centralizing empire.

Bennison finally argues that the quest of various groups for sociopolitical autonomy was inherent in the increasing complexity of the commonwealth. The process contributed to erode the power of the 'Abbasid court, produced fluctuations in its centralizing endeavors, and finally facilitated a military takeover by a warrior dynasty originating from Northern Iran—a pattern that was to leave a deep mark on the subsequent epoch. Noteworthy, however, is how political destabilization was matched by an increasing cultural balance, which was to combine diversity with stability and so provided a decisive centripetal force to the Islamic ecumene during the period of fragmentation and competing claims to authority inaugurated by Buyid rule in the middle of the 10th century.

In Chapter 6 Devin Stewart explores the formation of disciplines and scholarly groups devoted to covering an increasingly diversified and highly contentious spectrum of Islamic knowledge, ranging from the study of Qur'an and *hadith*, through law and theology, to philosophy and mysticism. It shows how jurists were able to achieve dominance in the wider field over against other scholars through a process that decisively contributed to lay the groundwork of what by the end of the age emerged as an overarching Sunni consensus on the hermeneutic parameters of practiced knowledge.

The chapter devotes particular attention both to the internal dynamics and to the external implications of the study of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Particularly important was the way the *ahl al-hadith* ("the *hadith* party"), supporting the normative centrality of prophetic reports, gained the upper hand against the rationalist inclined *ahl al-ra'y*, who emphasized the importance of *ra'y* intended as "rational discretion." The resulting Sunni paradigm spilled over into other disciplines by reflecting the majoritarian commitment to a solid prophetic narrative, namely *hadith*. At the same time, the emerging Sunni majoritarian vision was no less fraught with alternative orientations feeding into dynamics of confrontation eroding the political stability of the caliphate.

Stewart finally emphasizes how the intellectual enterprise of the *ahl al-hadith* affected other piety-minded currents which found convergence on a kind of populism that facilitated imposing a grip on the majority of the community. The triumph of the *hadith* party occurred while imperial unity was collapsing and the residual caliphal claims to wield the keys to religious authority were effectively countered by the scholarly consensus, which started to entail and enact claims to autonomy that were to be further developed in the subsequent era. The pioneers of the consensus were soon to bow to the hegemony of those they legitimized, namely the *fuqaha'* and in particular the Shafi'i and Hanbali legal schools.

Chapter 7, by Ahmet T. Karamustafa, focuses on the broad spectrum of unfolding modes of piety. Alongside the *shari'a*-minded pietism of the scholars that prevailed in major urban centers, alternative conceptions of pious life, some of which were infused with messianic expectations, animated the groups that came to be known as Shi'is, Kharijis, Karramis, and Sufis. Most alternate pious orientations and lifestyles represented counterpoints rather than countervisions, and the popular veneration of saintly individuals who were revered for their perceived proximity to God and their powers to work miracles ultimately affected the emerging *shar'i* vision and its underlying consensus.

The chapter shows how, particularly in the course of the second century of 'Abbasid rule, several scholars not belonging to the *hadith* party fully embraced the centrality of the corpus of prophetic reports. In spite of the fact that not few among them cherished rationalist methods, they consciously benefited from the fact that now the community was empowered against the caliphs for embodying

the living character of the prophetic teachings. Renunciants and the first Sufis shared in this trend by not only joining but, increasingly, leading the rising popularity of piety-minded orientations.

Karamustafa also explores how the strongest explicit opposition to the imperial status quo was represented by 'Alid groups. They developed not just a counterprogram to Sunni ruminations over legitimate authority but also alternate visions of the overall meaning of being Muslim and the role of Islamic commitments within the human drama. However, we should not consider the ascendancy of the underlying Shi'i modes of piety as building a separate niche within wider trends, since the popularity of the Shi'i *imams* rose in parallel with the authority of Sufi masters and the veneration of the carriers of *walaya* ("proximity to God," "sainthood"): a key concept destined to become ever more central to the religiopolitical developments of the subsequent epochs.

Chapter 8, by Paul L. Heck, investigates how, while the religious factions were competing on the definition of legitimate authority and the deeper meanings of Islamic commitments, an even more intricate game of classification of knowledge unfolded, mainly centered at the caliphal court. A thriving intellectual field relying on caliphal sponsorship and the patronage of wealthy courtiers took form, whose most prominent example during the epoch was the *bayt al-hikma* of Caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833). The process was not merely cultural as it had a high practical and political significance. It matched the need to train bureaucrats of various rankings by inculcating in them not only an expanding range of concepts but also the cultured habitus itself required for service at court.

The chapter shows how the process, often driven by the rising *adab* discourse, did not pit the high culture of literati and administrators against the knowledge derived from revelation and prophetic traditions. What was sought in the process were adequate balances, suitable amalgamations, and above all paradigms of classification able to create meaningful relations among the various knowledge branches, both those genuinely Islamic and those originating from Greek and Persian wisdom traditions, from the plain exoteric to the extremely esoteric. The intellectual vibrancy of such enterprises was not an antidote against clashes and disagreement, which marked the evolution of the knowledge field.

Heck demonstrates that through the contentious process effectiveness of communication and clarity of speech and writing became widely acknowledged as essential to good governance. He explores in particular the tension between the adoption of Arabic as the language of Islamdom and the process of vetting and assimilating the various non-Arab cultural legacies playing a role in the unfolding cultural amalgamations. Arabic became the language to be cultivated not just for the sake of piety and for the needs of government but also for developing a mastery of appropriate cultural and life forms, enriched and not diminished by an intense program of translations from other languages.

### III. The Earlier Middle Period (ca. 946–1258)

According to Hodgson, the implications of the wider Afro-Eurasian entanglements facilitated by Islam's expansion became ever more visible in the post-caliphal era, which he called the "Middle Periods," lasting until the middle of the 15th century, and which he saw as subdivided into an earlier and a later period, with the cutting date symbolically given by the drama of the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258. The state of relative anarchy of the Islamic ecumene after the demise of caliphal power and before *pax mongolica*, during Hodgson's Earlier Middle Period, not surprisingly gave a further boost to patterns of collective self-organization and individual social mobility that had already provided cohesion to social and public life within Islamdom during the earlier epoch of the High Caliphate.

The increased florescence of translocal connectedness that prevailed during the Middle Periods exalted the egalitarian dimension that Islam had inherited from the broader, earlier Irano-Semitic civilizational developments. The Islamic ecumene kept expanding and relied on largely self-steered local, regional, and long-distance networks. These were enriched by a growing variety of local and regional traditions and integrated through a common set of ideas, values, and norms, whose main carriers were traveling scholars, traders, and bureaucrats often doubling up as literati. This type of rather horizontal cohesion overtook top-down promulgations by rulers and administrators seeking to impose stable governance over populations and territories. It was gradually absorbed by different types of Islamicate courts of suzerain polities symbolically tied to what was left of the central caliphal authority (for this synthetic description of Part III we borrow from the interpretive framework on the Earlier Middle Period developed in Salvatore 2016).

This growth of sociopolitical autonomy (be it driven by conformist forms of piety or by transgressive teachings and practices) became possible since the looming anarchy at the governance level did not necessarily translate into a contagious anomy. The dynamics rather led to a strengthening of the consensual basis of common norms. The result of this shift toward translocal and quite horizontal patterns of governance in the post-caliphal era was that the expansion of Islam/Islamdom solidified the predictability of transactions and mutuality over long distances. This development obviated the need for enduring centralized state authorities who rather tended to curb and overtax the socioeconomic process, which was supported by largely autonomous social forces.

The mercantile counterhegemony of the urban strata was particularly vibrant, in spite of the difficulty of setting up politically independent city-states. Such a predicament forced the urban businessmen to seek connections and income in their wider region and across transregional spaces. Cities were important, but rather as nodes within wider circulatory nexuses, unlike late medieval Europe, where they prospered as increasingly self-centering entities controlling and exploiting the countryside and constituting themselves as corporate powers. In parallel,

long-distance trade, which was never a pure business enterprise, became robustly bound up to wider knowledge-power networks centered on the emerging, organized Sufi brotherhoods. The increasing importance of such traders during the Earlier Middle Period highlights the growing centrality of the “Nile-to-Oxus” cradle of Islam/Islamdom within its wider perimeter of expansion along the networked, long-distance routes nowadays known as the Silk Road (with their no less important maritime counterpart across the Indian Ocean).

It is important to consider that long-distance caravans included religious personnel. The expansion of trade networks relying on Persian and Arab merchants entered a positive loop with the propagation of Islam as not just a religious-ethical idiom but also as a code regulating a wide range of relations and transactions, with commercial ties figuring prominently from Islam’s inception. This was not a new phenomenon, but the peaking of a process of marrying trade and mission across Afro-Eurasian depths previously carried over by Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Christian, and Manichaean long-distance travelers, among which Iranic populations (including Central Asian Bactrians and Sogdians) often played a leading role.

The *adab* court discourse and related practices survived the eclipse of the High Caliphate and its intensely knowledge-centered court life and became particularly important during the Earlier Middle Period. *Adab* consolidated as an elite-oriented yet flexible matrix of rules of good life, courteous exchange, and civic cohesion based on bundling together cultured life forms considered adequate to respond to Islam’s core message without falling into the trap of considering it as a totalizing and closed doctrine. It contributed to regulate the relations between a political elite of ever more markedly military origin led, in each potentate, by an *amir*, and the urban notables (*a’yan*), including both leading ‘*ulama*’ and traders. *Adab* was therefore instrumental in providing cohesion to what Hodgson called the *a’yan-amir* system of rule and consensus that characterized the Middle Periods (Hodgson 1974, II: 64–9). Within these dynamics the class of the ‘*ulama*’ was able to represent the knowledge-based core of the wider stratum of urban notables. They developed a sociopolitical competence to face the military commanders by maximizing the prestige and usefulness of the broader skills originating from various branches of the Islamic sciences, which were ultimately secured under the umbrella of the administration of civic space and public services secured by *waqf* (“pious endowment”). The *waqf* became ubiquitous in both urban and rural settings and also essential to build up and maintain the main nodes of the long-distance trading networks. On the other hand, the rulers’ courts started to interface ever more intensely with selected Sufi milieus and *adab* became integrated within Sufi codes of demeanor.

Chapter 9, by Amira K. Bennison, embraces the transformations unfolding after the Buyid takeover in Baghdad until the final demise of the caliphate as a consequence of the Mongol conquests. The rise of the sultanate as a new *de facto* institution, in principle bereft of an intrinsic ruling charisma and legitimacy, was integral to the political fragmentation of the epoch and the continuous political ascendancy of Persian administrators and Turkic military commanders. However,

the new political equilibria favored the role of religious scholars and Sufis, well exemplified by the Saljuq model of governance. While sultanic power was formally delegated by the 'Abbasid caliph, the support of religious personnel was essential to the new rulers.

The chapter shows that while the effectiveness of the universalist religiopolitical model enshrined in the caliphate dissipated, the resulting decentralization favored pluralism and a growing degree of social and cultural autonomy. At the same time, the idea of the caliphate survived the upheavals of the epoch and was revived by the Fatimids in Egypt and the Umayyads in al-Andalus. The normative integration of the Islamic ecumene was favored by an intensifying circulation of scholars, charismatic masters, and artists as well as of traders and pilgrims, since the rivalry among courts favored free movement and competition to attract the best talents.

Bennison also lays emphasis on how the florescence of cultural production decisively reflected the novelty of the age, particularly via the combination of circulation and convergence of cultural ideas and personnel. The ongoing and open-ended dynamics were inscribed within a permanent search for localized and contingent balances between a largely *de facto* politico-military type of ruling power and a knowledge-based, strongly legitimate sociocultural power.

Chapter 10, by Bruce Fudge, explores the process through which the intellectual florescence facilitated by the proliferation of centers of cultural production across an expanding ecumene promoted a better integration of speculative disciplines within the mainstream of Islamic sciences centered on jurisprudence, *hadith* studies, and theology. The outcome of the process was the consolidation of what we know as Sunni Islam and its equilibria based on scholarly consensus.

The chapter discusses in particular the intellectual debates and the institutionalization of education unfolding under Buyid rule, and the ways in which currents of speculation or rational inquiry acquired prominence within the cultural field. In the process, legal knowledge was able to match theoretical efforts with practical accommodations of local custom. Law as practiced was often guided by the imperative to suit the needs of diverse populations and social groups under the umbrella of an overarching notion of a universal *shari'a*.

Fudge ultimately shows that this understanding of *shari'a* was not a token of strict conformism but a broad normative standard allowing for a plurality of entry points into defining one's own contribution to the definition and functioning of the Islamic ecumene. A certain degree of uniformity proved necessary precisely to tame the sectarian disturbances of the previous epoch, while the consolidating consensus absorbed earlier intellectual energies, which were thus valorized and integrated into the mainstream Muslim culture. The process did not curb discussions and dissent but determined the modalities through which ideas were produced, entertained, and transmitted.

Chapter 11, by Asma Afsaruddin, analyzes the controversial theme of legitimate authority which became a primary divide between the emerging Sunni consensus and Shi'i alternative conceptions. It shows that the fault lines that had first taken

form during the High Caliphate crystallized during the Earlier Middle Period, lost their earlier fluidity, and became both more accentuated and irreversible.

The chapter investigates the trajectory of these developments during the post-Occultation period, inaugurated from the moment the Twelfth Imam, who did not appoint a successor, was believed to have disappeared. The event marked the crystallization of the Twelver Shi'a, the largest Shi'i denomination, and settled the issue of legitimate authority, to be vested in the rightful religiopolitical leader whose return was due to herald the end of times.

Afsaruddin finally demonstrates how, in spite of the fact that the Shi'a shared its reverence for the Prophet's family with the Sunni mainstream, it avowed an allegiance imbued with a degree of soteriological significance that was rejected by the Sunnis. This orientation set particularly high standards of infallible legitimacy for the religiopolitical authority of the *imams*, in contrast with the rather pragmatic Sunni conceptions of leadership within the Muslim polity.

Chapter 12, by Babak Rahimi and Armando Salvatore, explores the rise of organized Sufism in the epoch as an ensemble of distinct cultural practices marked by rituals, aesthetics, and discourses of spirituality. Although the city played a critical role in the emergence and consolidation of these practices, the nexus with rural and nomadic milieus was crucial in determining the crystallization of a new type of civility imbued with Sufi ethos.

The chapter also considers how the organizational dimension of the rise of the *tariqa* ("order" or "brotherhood," literally "path") was entrenched in disciplining practices which helped embed the Muslim self within a variety of social bonds. These practices included master-disciple relations and fraternal bonds, which established powerful norms of propriety and conduct but also alternate public spaces of civility.

Rahimi and Salvatore show how Sufi ways of organization taking form in the Earlier Middle Period facilitated an emerging culture of networks as well as performative and symbolic practices highlighting a new reflexivity of being-in-the-world, as one with longing for union with the Divine. This process was also favored by the overlapping of some Sufi aggregations with a parallel type of youth-based brotherhood usually designated as *futuwwa* (in Arabic) and *jawanmardi* (in Persian).

#### IV. The Later Middle Period (ca. 1258–1453)

From the Mongol conquest of 'Abbasid Baghdad in 1258 to the Ottoman takeover of Byzantine Constantinople in 1453, during Hodgson's "Later Middle Period," Islamdom underwent a dramatic growth in terms both of population and of pluralization of beliefs and practices. During this epoch, Persianate Islam, mystical thought, messianic expectations, and utopian aspirations overlapped and were sometimes merged to serve attempts to reconstruct a new world order.

The process configured what Hodgson called a “mercantile-nomad symbiosis” and marked a major restructuring of sedentary Islamicate societies (Hodgson 1974, II: 402). Rather than a decline, Hodgson saw the nomadic incursions, and the deepening political fragmentation, as a prelude to a new epoch of economic revival and cultural and religious florescence. The outcome of the process was an intense correlation between political reconstruction, manifested in the formation of new military states over agrarian territories in the central regions of Islamdom, and cultural production within the arts, literature, and urbanite life: a process that defined the Islamicate Later Middle Period as one of the most significant eras in human history.

The fall of Baghdad to the Mongols is usually remembered as the climax of destruction wrought on the Islamic ecumene by the heirs of Chingiz Khan (ca. 1162–1227). Yet it was also the ground zero for a process of rebuilding more cohesive patterns of governance within the ecumene through new blends of ruling charisma and civic cohesion. It certainly marked a turning point in Islamic history. The sack of the city under the commandership of Hülegü Khan (r. 1256–1265) led to the execution of the last ‘Abbasid Caliph, al-Musta‘sim (r. 1242–1258), thus paving the way for the rise of new ruling coalitions and dynasties building their own legitimacies outside of the caliphal shadow, like the Timurids in Central Asia, the Ottomans in Anatolia, and the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria.

Despite their defeat at ‘Ain Jalut in 1260 by the Mamluk army, the Mongols widened through their conquests the networks of circulation and exchange of the Islamic ecumene and helped set up new zones of contact beyond their realms of occupation. Its initial destructive nature notwithstanding, Mongol imperial rule entailed the protection and strengthening of key commercial routes, enabling the Venetian Marco Polo (1254–1324) and the Moroccan Ibn Battuta (1304–1368/9) to undergo long-distance journeys as far as East Asia.

The explorations of Ibn Battuta represented the zenith of Afro-Eurasian traveling networks. In the course of 30 years of travel (1325–1354) from North Africa to Mecca, Persia, India, Ceylon, China, and the Iberian Peninsula, eventually crossing the Saharan Desert in Africa, Ibn Battuta met with merchants, scholars, and Sufi travelers with most of whom he could communicate through a common language, Arabic, and a shared legal idiom, the *shari‘a*. He also encountered customs and cultures such as those in Mali, West Africa, where local practices defied his conception of Islam.

What he witnessed midway through the Later Middle Period was a manifestation of an Islamic ecumene as the expanding core of the wider Afro-Eurasian civilizational zone. In a significant way, the Mongols’ highly tolerant attitude toward most religious traditions in their imperial domains facilitated the formation of an open cultural environment within which Islam gradually prevailed, while undergoing significant transformations in the process, particularly affecting the nexus between religious commitments and political rule.

Chapter 13, by Michele Bernardini, traces the history of the military conquests and political transformations of the epoch. It explores the intense competition between the



new military dynasties that fought for hegemony especially over the eastern regions of Islamdom. It shows that the rise of the Ottoman state amounted to an expanding imperial force, which, however, did not sedate such a competitive landscape, but rather brought to a higher level of sophistication the centralization of post-Mongol state power originating from tribal confederations of Central Asian provenance.

The chapter describes how Mongol control over the eastern part of the Islamic ecumene coincided with the establishment of the Ilkhanid kingdom at the time of the Great Khan Möngke (r. 1251–1258), and with the Mamluk–Golden Horde alliance, which played a substantial role in an endemic conflict between the Ilkhanids and their neighbors. In the western part of the Islamic ecumene, other dynasties like the Hafsids and the Merinids enjoyed a period of prosperity, while India maintained independence thanks to Sultan Iltutmish.

Bernardini highlights the process through which the end of Ilkhanid rule in the first half of the 14th century led to a long period of fragmentation and finally to the emergence of several principalities that sought to acquire hegemony over their regional environment. After the dramatic conquests of Amir Timur (Tamerlane), various powers fought for political and military hegemony over the eastern part of the Islamic ecumene. A civil war in Anatolia finally allowed Mehmed I (r. 1413–1421) to restore the Ottoman state, so that his successors Murad II (d. 1451) and Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446; 1451–1481) could emerge as the lords of an empire extending from the Balkans to Eastern Anatolia.

Chapter 14, by Caterina Bori, expands on Bernadini's discussion of post-Mongol Islamdom by arguing that competition over authority was not limited to military politics. Similar trends within the field of theological and legal discourse contributed to safeguarding the *shari'a* tradition in the new era, most notably facilitating its accessibility to the general public of ordinary Muslims.

The chapter complements Hodgson's analysis of the "conservative" cultural attitudes of the time by focusing on the Mamluk Sultanate, a crucial political force of Islamdom where the Sunni consensus clearly prevailed over other denominations. It analyzes the role of *madrasas* in the preservation of a tradition aimed at replication and transmission of forms of knowledge within elite scholarly circles. It shows complex and ever negotiable scholarly dynamics on the one hand, and the sociocultural dimension of doctrines and practices of justice on the other, which developed through the elites' interaction with the ordinary knowledge of the commoners.

By thematizing the role of the general public in the process, Bori originally revises Hodgson's notion of conservatism as a social practice designed to control knowledge production. She clarifies the extent to which the professional world of the '*ulama*' was far from being homogeneous. At the same time she proves that the commoners were not necessarily uncultivated subjects, but included a partially educated urban middle-class component. This is particularly clear in the case of the common practice of public recitation and commentary of *hadith*, which shows the extent to which religious personnel directly engaged a larger public going well beyond their peers.

Chapter 15, by Babak Rahimi, discusses the consolidation of Sunni and Shi'i trends within the ambivalent spiritual and social landscape of the epoch. Specifically, it looks at such developments in the context of historical transformations initiated by the Mongol conquests and the complex ways such changes, ranging from social to ideological, gave way to the configuration of new dissident movements and the crystallization of fresh institutional equilibria.

The chapter argues that *pax mongolica* facilitated the proliferation of several dissident movements that eventually cohered into imperial domains based on Twelver Shi'a and Sunni centralizing powers and encouraged a high degree of incorporation of the institutions led by the jurists. It also explores how the emerging political orders were grounded upon new alliances, institutional arrangements, and cultures of sociability.

Rahimi demonstrates how the spread of 'Alid-loyalist chiliastic movements, which culminated in the Safavid climax to imperial power, along with Sufi apocalyptic groups such as lettrism in Anatolia and Iran, marked a historic watershed in the history of Islam/Islamdom. During this transition once peripheral notions and practices of political and spiritual authority pushed their way into the centers via new self-legitimizing claims over orthodoxy.

Chapter 16, by Devin DeWeese, investigates the process through which increasingly organized Sufi enterprises encompassed ever wider social networks, also thanks to the codification and popularization of patterns of relations between Sufi masters and their disciples.

The chapter shows how the growing institutionalization of these orders became often manifest in terms of hereditary succession of spiritual authority, frequently resulting in the production of distinct knowledge supported through localized forces.

DeWeese argues that the defining feature of this organizational shift was the success encountered by diverse Sufi groups in establishing competing notions of authority. This development increasingly assimilated local traditions, especially within rural areas, while also allowing for antinomian reactions to the emerging codes of conduct.

## V. Early Modernity and Civilizational Apogee (ca. 1453–1683)

Islamic history in this epoch unfolded within the broader global context through which new material, political, and cultural conditions set the stage for the rise of the modern world. From the mid-15th to the late 17th centuries the globe saw a dramatic increase of interconnectedness across both the Old and the New Worlds. According to Hodgson, by the dawn of the modern era Islamdom reached the zenith not only of its political power but also of its cultural creativity. He famously stated: "In the sixteenth century of our era, a visitor from Mars might well have supposed that the human world was on the verge of becoming Muslim"

(Hodgson 1993: 97). The expansive and cosmopolitan universalism of early modern formations, centered on four powerful, increasingly centralized Islamic empires, namely the Ottomans (1281–1924), the Mughals (1526–1858), the Safavids (1501–1722), and the Uzbeks (1500–1747), was able to bridge cultural circulation and economic exchange between Europe and China.

While already on the rise in the Later Middle Period, overseas travel now played a critical role in emergent global networks affecting migration, production, and consumption of commodities, as well as the development of new technologies. The Afro-Eurasian hemisphere-wide interconnectedness and circulation underwent a qualitative change particularly across the Indian Ocean and on the new Atlantic routes. European overseas explorations were primarily responsible for this connectivity leap, with the colonization of the Americas, Africa, and parts of Asia—but so were Indian, Persian, and especially Ottoman travelers who vigorously ventured across the Indian Ocean pursuing economic and political gains.

Europe, formerly a frontier region, became the new hub of this global connectivity: not merely through territorial explorations and expansions, but decisively through leading the way in military conquest and via a new degree of capitalist accumulation of wealth that was to shape global human relations for centuries to come. As European polities became increasingly integrated, bolstered by the wealth obtained especially from Africa and the Americas, their competition for colonial conquest intensified. Nonetheless, Muslim power did not succumb to European hegemony during this period and continued to flourish across the four Muslim empires and beyond them.

The comparative history of empires has produced results that can be used to back up a more specific comparison and contextualization of the regimes in question. In particular, the links of all four empires to Central and Inner Eurasian traditions (particularly through variously elaborating on the Mongol heritage) are increasingly emphasized. On the other hand, a comprehensive view of this period of Islamic history must also take note of the extensive peripheries of the Islamic ecumene, including some less conclusive imperial ventures in these regions. By the 16th century the leading Muslim states had asserted a distinctive type of Islamicate cosmopolitanism, particularly nourished by sophisticated courtly and marketplace cultures, integrated social life, and centralized spiritual and administrative authorities. Islam became truly Afro-Eurasian.

Such advances in political centralization and bureaucratic rule were buttressed by emerging royal charismas of universalist absolutism, based on inherited ideas of the emperor as a saint-philosopher-king of various provenance, and where the notion of *walaya* as elaborated particularly by Ibn al-ʿArabi (1165–1240) in the Earlier Middle Period played a crucial role. Select Sufi brotherhood increased their level of institutionalization by contributing to such developments in parallel with the centralization of state rule. This process often entailed a regulation of *waqf* properties, of which Sufi Islam often had a lion's share through familial, tribal, and courtly associations.

In turn, sacral charisma and imperial-Sufi alliances were matched by increasingly elaborate conceptions of temporal frames. The empires adopted such frames not only to organize political, cultural, and religious events, but also to accommodate and, at times, innovate within the development of traditions, rituals, and ideologies which proved essential for strengthening governance and bolstering legitimacy.

Chapter 17, by Matthew Melvin-Koushki, argues that the ruling cultures of the early modern Islamic empires manifested the consistent accomplishment of the millenarian universalism that had characterized Islam since its inception, at the same time they also marked discontinuities with inherited attributes of ruling prerogatives and charisma. It explores how the Timurid project of expanding the Turko-Mongol political legitimacy inherited from Chingiz Khan was increasingly nourished by Perso-Islamic symbols of religiopolitical legitimacy.

In particular, the chapter shows how 'Alidism, Sufism, and occultism concurred to legitimize the establishment of universal imperial states while they forged ahead in a climate of intense competition for resources and territories, especially in the frontier regions. The new rulers styled themselves as saint-philosopher-kings, millennial sovereigns, and divine cosmocrators and, often in competition with Sufi saints, vied for sacral power (*walaya*).

Melvin-Koushki reconstructs a complex religiopolitical nexus by showing how spiritual authority, including juristic designations, was intimately connected with multiple framings of political sovereignty. While Sunni and Shi'i rulers competed for *walaya*, the Ottoman Emperor Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566) claimed millennial authority through his ambitious legal reforms. Most notably, the author assesses the outcome of this early modern process as manifesting a supra-Islamic (if not post-Islamic) turn in religiopolitical legitimacy and effectiveness, precisely to the extent it realized the millenarian yet cosmopolitan impetus that had remained unfulfilled during both the High Caliphate and the Middle Periods.

Chapter 18, by A. Azfar Moin, explores the extent to which the transformations of early modern templates of sacralization of rule were actively supported by scholarly elites (particularly those active at rulers' courts) whether by way of Sufism, occultism, or 'Alidism. This process was part of a larger change through which the early modern configurations of Muslim power impacted the role of the '*ulama*'. They had to cope with—and some of them contributed to shape—forms of sovereignty that relied less on the scriptural traditions innervating Islamic law and more on the prevalent devotional and cultic traditions of everyday Islam.

However, the chapter shows, Islamic law and its certified interpreters, the '*ulama*', did not lose influence. Many of them gained institutional prestige and influence within the Ottoman, Safavid, and the Mughal empires. As the centralizing states sought to strengthen the complex administrative institutions of the religious field,

the demand for competent ‘*ulama*’ increased. The early modern religious scholars working in the state apparatuses devised distinct discourses to combine scriptural, cosmic, and occult knowledge, such as astrology and lettrism.

Moin ultimately shows that the sociopolitical functions of the ‘*ulama*’ in this epoch were significantly different from those in the era of the High Caliphate, yet integral to the major transformations that marked the early modern civilizational apogee of Islamdom. In the process, religious scholars were able to promote their own influence and participate in the broader imperial projects.

Chapter 19, by Sajjad Rizvi, shows how the intellectual life of the early modern era witnessed a dynamic and diverse set of developments in astronomy, logic, and philosophy. It explores the combination of philosophy and Islamic spirituality comprising the growth of bundled traditions such as exegesis, theology, and scriptural discourses. While the focus in the Ottoman and Indian realms leaned toward logic and astronomy, in the Persianate lands the period was marked by the flowering of a hybrid notion of love and the pursuit of wisdom.

The chapter shows how in Safavid Iran philosophy was increasingly understood as being not only the pursuit of wisdom but also and especially a way of life. This was considered entirely compatible with the religious commitment to Islam, while being integrated within the rituals and customs of the empire.

Rizvi demonstrates that while engaging with the traditions inherited from both the *falsafa* (“philosophy”) of the High Caliphate and the mixed discourses of the Middle Periods, this approach to philosophy configured a sophisticated dealing with knowledge that folded theology, exegesis, and other rational and scriptural disciplines into the desire to understand the nature of reality—indeed of ultimate reality.

Chapter 20, by Rachida Chih, shows how in the early modern era Sufism’s prominence grew on both intellectual and social levels. It explores how, in a context of increasing circulation of goods and mobility of people, the Sufi brotherhoods brought to completion their integration into society. The strongest factor in the spread of Sufism were the expanding transregional travel routes, which also facilitated growing ties between Sufi orders and provincial and at times imperial state actors.

The chapter analyzes how the urban centers that benefited from renewed prosperity particularly under the Ottomans became the crossroads of intellectual exchange and spiritual transmission. It explores the process that favored a new dissemination of the ideas of Ibn al-‘Arabi, which had previously been regarded with caution in most Arab-speaking regions.

Chih shows how charismatic Sufi leaders often established relationships with viziers, sultans, and emperors and so gave birth to the great Sufi orders that exist to this day. This expansion of the Sufi brotherhoods often coincided with a renewal of ideas and practices related to *siyaha*, the perpetual voyage in search of spiritual perfection. Debates, exchanges, and conflicts were born of this enhanced mobility and the myriad meetings occurring in the emerging global framework.

## **VI. Facing the Global Rise of European Power (ca. 1683–1882)**

Earlier approaches to Islamic history were afflicted by a compulsion to locate a crucial watershed in the history of Islam/Islamdom at the end of the 18th century, the European century of Enlightenment, in coincidence with Napoleon's occupation of Egypt and Syria at the end of that century. We rather prefer to see an epochal cut as symbolically coinciding with the siege of Vienna of 1683, marking a turning point in a long sequence of Ottoman–Habsburg wars and with it the end of the early modern epoch of Islamicate civilizational apogee. This chronological ordering allows us to see the new epoch as lasting approximately two centuries, until the British (initially also French) military occupation of Egypt that started in 1882. With it, one of the historically central regions of Islamdom became subject to colonial control by the leading European colonial power. The period hereby covered reflects the trajectory through which the Islamic ecumene lost its centrality within global interconnections and power balances and saw its power first eroded and then overwhelmed by the European rise to world hegemony.

However, it would be reductive to conceive of the dynamism of this epoch merely in terms of global power shifts of tectonic magnitudes. On the one hand, it would be difficult to deny that the era sanctioned the dissolution of the flexible yet resilient (and thus far expansive) patterns of cohesion of what we have called the Islamic ecumene (and the beginning of its recoiling into what we nowadays mostly dub, by rather unreflectively surmising a common identity, the “Muslim world”: see Aydin 2017). On the other hand, however, key developments in the field of knowledge production, religious mobilization, economic and political reforms, and intellectual reflection and critique make this period an epoch of major (and to a remarkable extent still endogenously driven) transformations within what was left of Islamdom's dynamism.

Europe's rapid rise to global hegemony did not translate into an abrupt breakdown of the cumulative strength of Islamicate traditions of knowledge and power networks, nor should we analyze all developments related to Islam/Islamdom in the epoch in terms of reaction or response to Europe. It is rather that the reflective, creative, and even critical potential that came to maturation in the previous period was now carried over into a multipolar process exposed to ever more internal and external variables. The process entailed new vulnerabilities, to the point that it is difficult, and probably useless, for the historian to preventively disentangle outer pressures from inner tensions.

Particularly in the course of the 18th century, several intellectual developments combined visions of revival of a pristine Islamic ethos with programs of sociopolitical renewal. Such movements were only selectively associated with the processes of centralization and decentralization promoted or accepted by the ruling elites and the court personnel of the major empires. On the other

hand, the leaders of these movements, some of which belonged to the Sufi fold, were conscious of the new power constellations and therefore brought into the knowledge–power equation a capacity to read social realities and transformations probably unknown to earlier personalities, including those we have singled out as the political and intellectual leaders of the Middle Periods and early modernity.

Yet the inception of late-colonial modernity during the 19th century was to change the equation once more and quite irreversibly. Innovative responses were followed by an implosion of traditions and norms. This traumatic development did not entirely impair conscious change and proactive responses, but channeled them within ever narrower disciplinary boundaries determined by the ever more ubiquitous Western colonial blueprints of governance and civility. Increasingly during this century several urban reformers started to target what they saw as deviant practices of popular Sufi brotherhoods. This type of discourse ended up obscuring the rather proactive innovative practices instituted by some Sufi orders within semi-peripheral regions of the ecumene (like Cyrenaica). Such practices contributed to revive *ijtihad* (independent interpretative effort and judgment) well before urban reformers took over this motive and put it at the center of their own discourse. They also helped improve the organizational structures of the brotherhoods, up to the point of configuring, in some select cases, state-building activities in their own right, often directly opposing processes of colonial intrusion.

The urban arenas came under the more direct influence of European powers in the context of what we might call a transcultural type of public sphere where the discourse of and on Islam acquired new traits and an unprecedented level of reification, thus overriding the malleability (and openness to shifting local practices) which had characterized Islamic sociopolitical grammars in past epochs. These processes were supported by key technological and communicative developments, most prominently the spread of the printing press and the rise of periodicals and dailies appealing to growing audiences. As a result, the production and circulation of blueprints arguing for change accelerated, alongside the advancement of the deeply ambivalent perception, among Muslim intellectuals and larger publics, of increasingly sharing in a global civilization while being tributary to a pervasive Western hegemony, which was as much cultural as it was political and economic.

Chapter 21, by Ali Yaycioglu, explores how the Muslim polities of the age responded to the incipient globalization process, the so-called age of revolutions, and the gradual imposition of European hegemony. It focuses in particular on how the powerful centralizing formations that had prevailed within Islamdom during the early modern era, far from linearly collapsing under the pressure of European colonialism, entered a frenzy process of upheaval. Here disintegration dynamics were met by new integration processes mostly conducted through a web of contractual relationships linking provincial to imperial elites and often allowing semi-independent polities to carve a space for themselves within the interstices of great power politics.

The chapter shows how the rising reform impetus was nourished not only by the urgency to cope with internal crises and external pressures, but also by a heightened circulation of ideas of social cohesion and political governance. These emerging discourses put Islamic traditions in closer competition and exchange with European and other non-Islamic blueprints and practices.

However, Yaycioglu argues, in the course of the 19th century the appeal of nation-state building, starting from Greece, began to radiate in all directions of the Islamicate compass, from Morocco through the Ottoman Balkans to Afghanistan. This development radically and irreversibly altered the previously dominant knowledge–power equation and predetermined the future dynamics of a nationally articulated “Muslim world.”

Chapter 22, by Ethan L. Menchinger, traces the emergence of modern intellectuals as a social layer reflecting on the turbulences of the age and acting as cultural mediators, discourse leaders, and also social critics. The increasing circulation of intellectual discourse was able to create an even higher degree of connectedness across the Islamic ecumene than already possible in previous epochs, since imperial borders were no obstacles to mobility.

The chapter delineates the involvement of the producers of knowledge with power holders, bureaucrats, and other social groups within the centers and peripheries of the empires through the main political upheavals of the age.

Menchinger demonstrates that creativity was not an accident in the intellectuals’ activities but the very rationale for their social existence and prestige. Even those knowledge producers who resisted reform and change could not simply reproduce traditional arguments, not even when they invoked inherited norms. The instability of the age exalted intellectual innovation in spite of the pressure represented by the increasing global power and prestige of European models and norms.

Chapter 23, by Jane H. Murphy, investigates how knowledge and science production, placed in a longer-term trajectory, further enlivened the creativity of the epoch. While the end of the period is marked by a famous intervention by the leading French orientalist Ernest Renan, who postulated the existence of a European “spirit” as particularly suitable to scientific inquiry and indicted Islam and its civilization for being the antithesis of this same spirit, the two previous centuries had seen significant developments in intellectual and scientific creativity that historians of the Islamic ecumene have started to account for.

The chapter shows that it was a historically contingent intersection of rationality, science, and colonialism that in the late 19th century constructed a resistant academic prejudice that needs to be dismantled. Islamicate knowledge/science, intended as the branches of *‘ilm*, underwent momentous changes well prior to the European colonial encroachment on the Islamic ecumene. In questioning a central tenet of the historiographical model positing the decline of the rational sciences in post-classical Islamicate societies, the chapter demonstrates their continued innovative cultivation throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

Murphy shows that this continuous development relied precisely on investing in the traditional factors of strength represented by the interconnectedness and mobility



of scholars which had characterized the previous eras. She enjoins that while a comparison with the history of science in Europe should not be discarded, exploring the inner Islamic history of the rational sciences is necessary not just to dispel resistant bias but also to decenter the teleological framework guiding a Europe-centered perspective on the history of knowledge production. Focusing on networks of production and the history of interconnectedness is the key to breaking such a teleology and the often too stale comparisons resulting from it.

Chapter 24, by John O. Voll, shows that the role of Sufism in popular devotional life remained vital during the epoch while its manifestations were subjected to critical though gradual transformations. The long-standing tension between strongly *shari'a*-minded masters and '*ulama*' and popular devotional practices and the attachment to charismatic saints underwent new strains but also clarifications. Most *shari'a*-minded scholars did not reject the Sufi path in principle, but rather opposed popular Sufism as practiced by locally venerated spiritual guides. In intellectual life, Sufi teachers extended and often potentiated traditions inherited from previous epochs, particularly in the field of *hadith* scholarship.

The chapter shows how strongly codified vertical relations between master and disciple became ever more solidly supported by codes of virtuous disciplines based on the imitation of Muhammad. With regard to such developments, one has spoken of a distinctive "neo-Sufi" associational form characterized by a new type of sociopolitical activism. The evolution of Sufi institutions and organizational styles as they adapted to changing global realities went along with the strengthening of interregional and hemispheric networks based on the activities of some major orders. More centralized regional brotherhoods emerged in several areas, supported by more formal and hierarchical modes of organization, especially after the 18th century, that is, in coincidence with (or right before) the first impact of colonial forces on specific regions of the Islamic ecumene.

Voll also explores how throughout the period Sufi leaders and brotherhoods were often at the forefront of movements of religious renewal. The rise of activist, revivalist (or, as Voll stresses, "renewalist") Sufi aggregations linked in original ways inherited dimensions of Sufi thought and new approaches to recruitment, practice, and mobilization. The process bolstered their capacity to create powerful forms of civility able to push for social and even political change. This new impetus was nurtured by a quite orthodox commitment to Islam's potential for mobilizing various social groups in order to implement renewed Islamic ideals of social cohesion and justice.

## **VII. Colonial Subjection and Postcolonial Developments (ca. 1882–present)**

Dramatic breakthroughs characterized the final part of the 19th century, during which the metamorphosis of the Islamic ecumene into what we now call the "Muslim world," on the one hand rather inchoate and on the other supposedly

held together by an identitarian commitment to Islam, was consummated. The late 19th-century watershed, symbolically coinciding with the British occupation of Egypt, marks the interruption of the long-term “venture of Islam.” The shift was effected by the attainment of an extensive and pervasive level of either direct colonial domination or intense colonial pressure on Muslim lands, polities, and populations. A sense of irremediable loss of historic integrity and rupture of cultural and institutional continuity ensued, reaching into the present through a phase of increasingly vulnerable postcolonial arrangements. It is this process that provides a weak identity to what is largely perceived as an amorphous (and problematic) Muslim world, showing substantially new elements of fragmentation if compared with the two earlier yet modern periods studied in Part V and Part VI.

At the same time, this concluding Part VII undertakes the task of delivering a reading of the epoch without falling into the epistemic trap of isolating the Middle East (or, as it came in vogue during the last couple of decades, the MENA area) from its much wider Islamic and global contexts. Such designations of the region that roughly corresponds to the core domains of the Ottoman Empire are themselves a product of the developments of the period following the final collapse of the Islamic ecumene. The 20th-century focus on the Middle East as the core of the Muslim world, which the present century has thus far inherited and even aggravated after 9/11, is both a reflection of the strategic great power games of the era and the result of a gravely distorted lens that relies on a lazy epistemology envisioning the Muslim world as a smooth continuation of the Islamic ecumene. Without indulging in a zealous deconstructive move, it suffices to remember that the regions of the Muslim world that do not belong to the Middle East have become both quantitatively and qualitatively preponderant (and increasingly so) over the period in question.

The reasons for the resilient political and symbolic centrality of the Middle East within Islamic Studies in spite of its inexorable decline in terms of relative power and wealth are part and parcel of the increasing association of the history of Islam and the Muslim world with ‘crises.’ The way such crises unfold (and are perceived and constructed through Western eyes) is certainly complex. It is clearly related to the mutation and weakening of the Western global hegemony in the modern world, probably even more than it depends on transformations that are specific to the region. An example of the above entanglements is that the type (and label) of sociopolitical movement and organization mainly inspired by Islamic teachings that we now take for granted as “Islamism,” started to take shape after several crucial strategic and political transformations already unfolding in the late 19th century came to full fruition within late-colonial political arenas, starting in the period between WWI and WWII. Such transformations were subject to further recrudescence from the 1970s until now, in the context of new strategic shifts occasioned by the 1973 oil “crisis” that deepened the distortions inherent in the double box represented by the “Muslim World” and the “Middle East,” supposedly lying at its core (Salvatore 1997).

In the process, the most successful manifestations of Islamically inspired organizations and activism shifted their focus from the late 19th century’s reform-bent elite parties, benevolent societies, and public discourses, to the large-scale

mass movements of the late 1920s and 1930s. This metamorphosis of Islamic reformism into what imperfectly we call Islamism was also, largely, the symptom of a profound social change that manifested itself through the political mobilization of new social strata reaching into lower, yet educated, middle classes and popular classes alike. Alongside the printing press and the emerging periodicals, including dailies, the legacy of the Muslim reform discourse was of remarkable importance for the Islamists, since it included the capacity to spin increasingly thick webs of communication and new forms of sociability, no longer restricted to literary salons, clubs, and philanthropic and scientific societies. The process revealed a certain continuity between Islamic reformism and Islamism in their capacity to respond cohesively to the colonial challenge in order to advance aspirations to collective welfare. Neither was the '*ulama*' class looking idle from the sidelines for long. Increasing numbers among religious scholars shared in the new developments and engaged proactively within collaborations and contentions with the colonial and postcolonial rulers.

Reformists, agitators, public intellectuals, and '*ulama*' of all hues and stripes were active in the emerging print-based public spheres, which became an essential arena for formulating claims and denouncing enemies throughout the above-mentioned transformations of processes of mobilization. The key rupture we have identified as taking place in the last third of the 19th century largely coincided with the emergence of such a modern type of public sphere across the majority of regions belonging to the Muslim world. Discussions and controversies in the public sphere characterized the entire sequence of late-colonial and postcolonial politico-intellectual developments.

The tension itself between precolonial and colonial norms empowered the reform-bent carriers of the tradition to renew and upgrade their cultural repertoires. Alongside, Sufism, even when targeted as backward, played a role by helping transport key reformist ideas into the emerging nationalist frameworks that became hegemonic around the mid-20th century. This is not too surprising, since the new forms of identity demanded by belonging to a nation (a model borrowed from colonial Europe and entailing the centrality of citizenship and the adoption of universally valid legal and constitutional categories) could not occur in a cultural vacuum. The "re-Islamization" process that has been unfolding since the 1970s has contributed to fill this vacuum, while the postcolonial states, which have often postured as bulwarks against purported risks of an Islamist takeover, haven manifested an increasing vulnerability due to a chronic deficit of legitimacy. This deficit is only partly compensated by their acquisition of ever more sophisticated instruments of repression of domestic oppositions (which Islamists have hardly ever monopolized).

Chapter 25, by SherAli Tareen, explores the impact on the Islamic ecumene of the categories of nationalism, citizenship, progress, and reform, as carried by colonial modern discourse. As emphasized by Tareen, the idea and trope of *islah* ("reform") was a traditional one, but the sense of urgency with which it was formulated and brandished during the epoch was largely new. Muslim reformers

had to face a novel institutional terrain characterized by the spread in the region of the model of the modern Westphalian state, along with its techniques of control of populations and territories and the supporting ideologies, such as nationalism and secularism, which threatened to subvert several tenets of Islamic discursive traditions. On the other hand, many reformers challenged this pressure proactively by selectively reworking Islamic traditions in terms of their potential, matching what many among them—and most prominently the leading Egyptian reformer Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905)—saw as the urgent need to engage in a rational reflection on fundamental Qur’anic principles. This reflexive work was to be guided by an aspiration to unity that was as social as it was theological, and which entailed discarding all undue innovations and encrustations warranted by neither revelation nor reason.

The chapter shows how this pressure was particularly strong in the case of the Ottoman Empire, in the course of the process through which it was exposed to an increasing European occupation of various among its territories, particularly in the Balkans and North Africa. In this context, reformers, whether from within the bureaucracy or acting as public intellectuals, were intent on crafting citizens committed to the survival of the empire. However, in order to achieve this goal, which set them against European claims of Ottoman (when not outright Islamic) backwardness, they inevitably, though in varying degrees, signed up to the European civilizational discourse articulating differentials among stages of progress.

Tareen further investigates how Ottoman reformers attempted to demonstrate that their work was the outcome of an endeavour aimed at valorizing the progressive components of their ruling and knowledge traditions, inherited from the rich history of the empire and of the entire Islamic ecumene. Muslim reformers and religious scholars alike were often keen on subsuming their endeavors under the banner of authenticity. Various templates of authenticity facilitated their task to actively reimagine their past in order to be equipped to tackle the increasing complexity of the present.

Chapter 26, by Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, examines how religious scholars, the ‘*ulama*’, far from merely resisting change, were able to gain tangible advantages from the major transformations of the epoch via their own traditional institutions, their formal and informal links to state elites, and, most crucially, their growing role in the media. Muhammad ‘Abduh set the goal to help reshape the traditional institutions and the training itself of the ‘*ulama*’, most of whom in their turn happened to share in the reform program whose main stated goal was to revitalize Islamic traditions against the Western colonial encroachment.

The chapter explores the ways through which the traditional knowledge of the ‘*ulama*’ could become one major factor of sociopolitical influence within the new colonial and postcolonial power constellations, in spite of the evident erosion of the power and prestige of the religious institutions centered on the *madrasa* and the deep institutional changes that also embraced the legal system and the educational sector. The key to this process of proactive adaptation to the new realities

was for the *'ulama'* to compensate the loss of their near-monopoly as law specialists and as the masters of higher education by reconstructing their status as "men of religion."

Skovgaard-Petersen also argues that Muslim reformers were not necessarily unsympathetic toward the *'ulama'* (in fact several came from their ranks), but raised key questions as to the usefulness of their knowledge for the wider program of reform. Several *'ulama'* did not hesitate to take their destiny in their own hands and responded to the challenges of lay public intellectuals. The *'ulama'* thus found themselves well positioned to benefit from the religious resurgence that gained steam during the 1970s. Though no longer in a position to monopolize Islamic religious learning, they have managed to uphold their role as those who know how to apply their religious learning conscientiously and influentially in the society of their day.

Chapter 27, by Mohammed A. Bamyeh and Armando Salvatore, explores the role of intellectuals in the epoch by focusing on continuities and discontinuities from earlier roles. The analysis revolves around the intellectual task consisting in giving form to civic cohesion and providing influential voices in the emerging print-based public spheres.

The chapter investigates how and to what extent intellectuals provided an alternative source of authority to that of colonial and postcolonial states, how they operated within a cluster of sources of customary authority in society, and the effect of their role on modernist transformations and postcolonial developments.

Bamyeh and Salvatore finally show the metamorphosis of the role of intellectuals in the public sphere determined by their participation and leadership within popular movements and revolts of the early 21st century. It was during events such as those associated with the "Arab Spring" of 2011 that young intellectuals and leading activists developed new skills entailing a rejection of the elitist residues accruing to inherited models of intellectual leadership. This momentous transformation was supported by the ways social media contributed to reshape (and in some cases dilute) the modalities of earlier critical intellectual discourse, as was also the case with the Iranian "Green Movement" of 2009 and its aftermath.

In Chapter 28, Jamal Malik examines how several members of Sufi brotherhoods have been active in politics and social reform during the epoch, as they both exercised social influence and have been subject to instrumentalization by state elites, within Muslim-majority societies and in Muslim-minority diasporas alike.

The chapter highlights how this resurgence of influence and activism occurred in spite of the endeavors of subsequent generations of Muslim reformers and Islamists to delegitimize Sufi activities by a variety of means, both propagandistic and coercive. Reformers and Islamists largely focused on the trope of Sufism as a harbinger of deviance and superstition, instead of acknowledging their own indebtedness to anti-colonial Sufi movements and thinkers.

Malik further calls our attention to how, as the processes of globalization unfold, the question of the suitability of Sufi ideas and practices for modern life cannot be

dissociated from the assumption of several Western governments that Sufism has the potential to provide a counterforce to Islamist groups. Many Sufis, however, have proven to have more in common with Islamists than is generally perceived. In addition to activism in politics and social reform, the continuing Sufi call for a return to the idealized life of the Prophet and his companions, such as epitomized in the concept of *tariqa muhammadiyah* ("Muhammadan path"), bears indeed a decisive resemblance to Islamist ideas.

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# Part I

## Late Antique Beginnings (to ca. 661)



# Agrarian, Commercial, and Pastoralist Dynamics in the Pre-Islamic Irano-Semitic Civilizational Area

George Hatke

## Introduction

As the early Islamic state achieved control of the Arabian Peninsula and expanded into the Fertile Crescent, North Africa, Iran, and Central Asia, it inherited an already interconnected world of agrarian, pastoral, and urban communities. The timeframe of circa 200–600 CE within which we will examine the socioeconomic history of these communities corresponds roughly with what has long been called Late Antiquity. At the political level Late Antiquity witnessed the polarization of the Fertile Crescent and the Caucasus between two rival superpowers, the Christian Eastern Roman Empire—popularly, if inaccurately, called Byzantium—and the Zoroastrian Sasanian Empire, which fought each other on and off throughout this period. The Irano-Semitic civilizational area that encompassed the Sasanian Empire and much of the Eastern Roman Empire is essentially a linguistic construct: the Iranian side represented by those regions of Iran and Central Asia where related Indo-Iranian languages were spoken, the Semitic side by the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Northern Horn of Africa, where such cognate languages as Aramaic, Arabic, and, in the far South, the Ancient South Arabian and the Ethio-Semitic languages were spoken. Aramaic- and Arabic-speaking populations, it should be noted, were to be found on both sides of the Romano-Sasanian frontier. The far South of the Semitic-speaking world of Late Antiquity, located well beyond this frontier, witnessed important political, economic, and social developments of its own, the most significant being the

achievement of political supremacy in South Arabia by the kingdom of Himyar and in Ethiopia by the kingdom of Aksum. Relations between these two states were often as volatile as those between the Roman and Sasanian empires. Aksum, in fact, intervened militarily in South Arabia as early as the 3rd century and would later, during the first half of the 6th, make its most significant show of force in the region by establishing a system of indirect rule through local puppet-kings.

It must be stressed that, in linguistic and cultural terms, the Irano-Semitic sphere of Late Antiquity was a spectrum rather than a region marked by a sharp divide. To begin with, the Semitic/non-Semitic dichotomy which we now take for granted was of limited importance in the late antique context where religious and political divisions were often more significant than linguistic or ethnic cleavages. That a 4th-century Persian-speaking convert to Christianity like Aphrahat could become one of the greatest Syriac authors of Late Antiquity illustrates the porousness of the Irano-Semitic divide. In addition, there are a number of cultural and ideological commonalities between the two sides. Among these was the Christian religion which, beginning in the 4th century, gained a significant following throughout the Irano-Semitic sphere, including Ethiopia and parts of Arabia. Another commonality was the experience of Hellenism, best understood as a cosmopolitan mode of expression inspired by Greek learning and Greek styles in art, architecture, and literature, which coexisted and interacted with non-Greek cultures. In the centuries following the conquest by Alexander (356–323 BCE) of the Achaemenid Empire, Hellenism gained currency under the Ptolemaic, Seleucid, and Greco-Bactrian dynasties in the form of Greek education, the popularity of Greek art, and the identification of local gods with Greek deities. Through trade, Hellenism was diffused throughout much of the Irano-Semitic sphere and beyond, thus becoming by the turn of the Common Era a language of cultural symbols and attitudes shared by communities over an area extending from the central Mediterranean in the West to Northern India in the East and from the Black Sea in the North to the Horn of Africa in the South.

By virtue of the cosmopolitan character of Hellenism, the school of Greek philosophy at Nisibis once closed—or more properly, disenfranchised—by Justinian (r. 527–565) could still find a home in the Sasanian realm, while at the turn of the 7th century Alexandria could still attract students like Petros, a Nestorian Christian from Beth Qatraye in East Arabia. Even in the remote village of Nessana in the Negev, fragments of Virgil's *Aeneid* are found together with biblical texts from the 6th century. Once the commonalities of the two sides of the Irano-Semitic sphere are recognized, and the armed conflict between the Roman and Sasanian empires understood as only one component of transregional interactions within this sphere, it becomes possible to better appreciate the socioeconomic overlap between the two empires. In what follows we will examine late antique socioeconomic trends in the Roman Near East and the Sasanian Empire as well as in the Arabian Peninsula, this last being an all-too-often overlooked part of the late antique world deserving special attention here given its role as the birthplace of

Islam. Our focus, following a brief and—given the fragmentary nature of the evidence—schematic treatment of demography, will be on the agrarian and pastoral economies of the Irano-Semitic civilizational area, the relations between agrarian and pastoral communities, and commerce.

## Demographic Trends in the Irano-Semitic Civilizational Area

According to recent estimates, the eastern provinces of the Late Roman Empire had a combined population of approximately 19–20 million before they were hit by the plagues of the 540s (Haldon 2010: 39). Members of the urban elite in the Roman Near East often owned estates, as is clear from a collection of 6th-century papyrus documents from Petra (Butcher 2003: 144; Morony 2004: 169). However, while cities depended heavily on their agricultural hinterlands, archaeological and textual data suggest that the dominant socioeconomic unit throughout most of the Roman Near East was the village, rather than the villa estates typical of much of the Roman West, and that most exchanges were conducted between villages independently of urban centers (Butcher 2003: 138–40, 149–50; Cameron 1993: 177, 180). During Late Antiquity some regions, such as the limestone massif of Northwestern Syria, witnessed demographic growth in village communities, the population of the Jabal Barisha area peaking at an estimated 21,000 during the 5th and 6th centuries (Butcher 2003: 146). Increasing density of settlement, and thus of population, has also been noted in parts of Southern Palestine, the Golan, and the Negev and seems to have reached its height in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. Even with the climate-induced stresses sustained by agrarian communities in the Mediterranean in the early 540s, together with the plague which broke out almost simultaneously and affected the entire region, the rural communities of Syria-Palestine seem, in most cases, to have flourished well into the 7th century. Those communities located in more southerly regions fared best. While cities like Apamea and others in the North of Syria-Palestine fell into gradual decline from the mid-6th century onward, other cities further south in Palestine and Transjordan, like Gerasa, Pella, and Bostra, flourished into the 7th century and continued to produce high-quality pottery on a large scale (Haldon 2010: 25, 64). It is a testament to the resilience of village society in the Roman Near East that in regions like the Negev farming enclaves were occupied as late as the 8th or 9th century, while the more substantial settlements of Avdat, Nessana, and Shivta ceased in the 7th (Hirschfeld 2001: 264).

Estimating the population of the Sasanian Empire to the east is far more difficult given the many topographical and climatic variations within that polity. If an early 7th-century Chinese text, the *Chou-shu* (“The Book of Chou”), is to be believed, there were no fewer than 100,000 households in the city of Ctesiphon on the east bank of the Tigris, though obviously this figure—even if accurate—can in

no way be used to extrapolate the overall population of the empire. Furthermore, given Ctesiphon's role as the Sasanian capital, its demographic size is likely to have far exceeded that of other cities. Demographic growth was probably most significant not on the Iranian plateau, which was never a major center of urban or agricultural expansion in Late Antiquity, but in the fertile regions of Mesopotamia, the Diyala Basin, and Khuzistan, where the Sasanians promoted agrarian expansion on a large scale (Daryaee 2010: 401–2; Haldon 2010: 39–40).

As for the Arabian Peninsula, attempts to estimate its overall population during Late Antiquity are futile. Here too, population density varied widely from region to region depending on terrain and climate. In particular, the contrast between agrarian regions like South Arabia and the much drier regions of the North must have been significant. Only in the case of South Arabia can we speak of anything like an urban society in an Arabian context. Even in this case most settlements were small by the standards of the Roman and the Sasanian Near East, though the establishment of Himyarite supremacy in South Arabia between the late 3rd and early 4th centuries seems to have led to demographic concentration around such towns as Marib and Zafar. Elsewhere in South Arabia, many settlements which had flourished around the turn of the Common Era were abandoned. In East Arabia, archaeological evidence indicates a similar trend beginning in the 3rd century CE. Thus while a number of large and prosperous settlements flourished between the 3rd century BCE and the 2nd century CE at Thaj in present-day Eastern Saudi Arabia, Failaka in Kuwait, Qal'at al-Bahrayn in Bahrain, and Mleiha and al-Dur in the United Arab Emirates, occupation at these and other sites had either declined or ended altogether by the 3rd century CE (Kennet 2005: 114–15). At settlements in East Arabia where occupation continued into later periods, it was often restricted, as it was at Mleiha and al-Dur, to the immediate vicinity of fortified residences—the strongholds, perhaps, of the leaders of Arab tribes like those which show up in increasing numbers in historical sources from South Arabia and the Roman world from the 3rd century onward. Judging from the limited quantity of coins and pottery from Mesopotamia, Iran, and South Asia found at Mleiha and al-Dur, these tribal elites of East Arabia—if such they were—engaged in some foreign trade, and indeed at Mleiha there was an increase in imported pottery during the late Parthian–early Sasanian period. Yet between the 5th and 7th centuries, even Mleiha, al-Dur, and Qal'at al-Bahrayn were deserted, while sites like Suhar in Oman and Kush and al-Khatt in the United Arab Emirates remained occupied.

## **Agrarian Societies**

As in all preindustrial societies, the main bulk of the population in the late antique Irano-Semitic sphere was based in rural areas. In this section we will consider what this population produced, beginning with the Roman Near East. The several hundred villages, dating between the 4th and mid-6th centuries, which have been

identified in Northwestern Syria produced olives, grapes, wheat, beans, vegetables, sheep, cattle, and poultry. Together with Palestine, such regions of Syria as the Hawran and the Upper Euphrates valley also produced wine. Although wine was often exported abroad, the villages of the Roman Near East were for the most part sustained by the production of crops and livestock to meet local and regional demands. Thus while large-scale specialized production of olive oil was the key to the success of village communities like those of Northern Syria, it appears that most of this oil was intended for Syrian rather than international markets (Butcher 2003: 148–9; Sartre 2005: 264). Even the olive oil alluded to on one Roman-period ostrakon from the port of Berenike on Egypt's Red Sea coast might have been intended for use by Western merchants during their time abroad in Arabia and India rather than as a commercial export per se (Sidebotham 2011: 234). Within Syria, the importance of olive oil production varied according to region; some villages had few or no oil presses, while the village of Behyo, for instance, had as many as 37 (Butcher 2003: 150). Throughout the Late Roman Near East, viticulture and the cultivation of olives were sustained by elaborate irrigation methods that involved the construction of dams, aqueducts, and cisterns, often in very arid regions. In some areas, as in the desert to the northeast of Salamiya in Syria, networks of shafts connected by subterranean channels known as *qanats* provided water for irrigation during the 6th and 7th centuries (Rousset 2010). In this technology it is possible to recognize the influence of the Iranian world, where *qanats* were utilized as early as circa 800 BCE, though apparently not as often during the Sasanian period as after the Islamic conquest. The labor needed for these agrarian projects seems to have been provided by freemen. Slaves are almost totally absent from the epigraphic record of the Roman Near East and, while the Jerusalem Talmud speaks of Jewish landowners possessing slaves, it need not follow that agriculture itself depended on slave labor (Sartre 2005: 216–17). In this regard the situation in the Roman Near East mirrors that of the rest of the Roman world, where the supply of slaves appears to have shrunk during Late Antiquity causing the price of slaves to rise (Depeyrot 2006: 231).

In the Sasanian realm a number of irrigation projects were undertaken in the area of modern-day Iraq, among them the system of trunk canals linking the Euphrates and Tigris and the Nahrawan/Qatul-i Kisrawi canal system fed by the Lesser Zab, 'Azaym, Tigris, and Diyala rivers. Both systems allowed double-cropping and improved agricultural yields (Simpson 2000: 58). New settlements developed along the irrigation canals and rural programs were initiated whereby populations were transferred to virgin lands. In addition to these new settlements, some very ancient settlements in Southern Mesopotamia, such as Babylon, Borsippa, Nippur, and Uruk, remained important market towns during Late Antiquity, as shown by the large quantity of Sasanian pottery uncovered at these sites. Throughout Sasanian Mesopotamia, there existed several classes of landowning nobility: the *vaspuhr* at the top, who owned large estates; the *shahrijan*, who provided many of the provincial governors; and at the bottom, the *dekanan*, a class of small landed proprietors (Morony 2005: 186–9). In Iran this last group managed

to retain ownership of much of the agricultural land well into the Islamic period, right down to the 11th century (Buliet 2009: 14–15). A series of business and legal documents from late antique Balkh in Northern Afghanistan indicates the existence at the eastern end of the Iranian world of a class of urban-based landowners with an interest in buying entire districts in rural areas with irrigated land (Rezakhani 2010: 201–2).

Although some of the revenue from the provinces remained in the hands of the landowning nobility, administrative reforms during the reigns of Kavadh I (488–531) and Khusraw I (531–579) achieved a greater degree of centralization (Gyselen 1998: 104). Particularly effective in this regard was the policy of establishing royal cities throughout the empire, each administered by an official appointed by the central authority, as a result of which a great deal of land became part of the royal domain (Haldon 2010: 51). Frequently the emperor would grant land to his relatives and friends, while small plots were also assigned to soldiers at the end of their military service. At other times, settlement on newly acquired land was forced. This was particularly true in periods of warfare with the Roman Empire, as a result of which large numbers of prisoners of war were deported from Roman cities in Northern and Central Syria and were resettled in Central and Southern Mesopotamia as well as in Fars. These prisoners of war often brought with them their skills and expertise in manufacturing, construction, horticulture, and agriculture. Side by side with the Aramaic-speaking villagers who constituted the majority of Mesopotamia's population there also existed a number of Iranian villagers in Sasanian Mesopotamia, the descendants of people who had been forcibly removed from Khurasan. This policy of resettling Iranians in provincial areas of the empire was maintained by the Sasanians till the very end of their empire, for Iranian civilians are known to have settled in Syria-Palestine during the Sasanians' short-lived occupation of the Roman Near East in the early 7th century (Foss 2003: 161). The Zoroastrian community of East Arabia subjected to the *jizya*, a poll tax levied on non-Muslims, during the time of Muhammad may have been the descendants of a similar group.

For the study of the socioeconomic history of the Sasanian Empire one particularly important source of material is the Talmudic literature left by the Jews of Sasanian Mesopotamia—quite possibly the largest Jewish community in the Diaspora—between the 3rd and 7th centuries. Talmudic sources mention two main types of taxation in Mesopotamia, a land tax and a poll tax, the latter requiring official registration of the Sasanian Empire's subjects according to their place of residence (Gafni 2006: 807–8). In light of rabbinic attempts to avoid the poll tax by claiming equal status with Zoroastrian priests who were in principle exempt from taxation—to the extent that at times some rabbis passed themselves off as Zoroastrian priests—this particular tax must have represented a burden for many. On the other hand, other rabbis in Sasanian Mesopotamia became rich landowners whose fields were worked by laborers, tenant farmers, and contractors. The laborers themselves seem on the whole to have been freemen for, while slaves are



mentioned in Talmudic literature, and while the Middle Persian *Madayan i hazar dadestan* ("Book of a Thousand Judicial Decisions") compiled during the reign of Khusraw II (590–628) deals with slavery in some detail (Perikhanian 1983: 635–41), it is doubtful that the agricultural economy of Sasanian Mesopotamia was dependent to any significant degree on slave labor, any more than that of the Roman Near East was. Although some rabbis also made an income through the sale of date beer, wine, linen and flax clothing, and silk, agriculture was the main occupation at all levels of Jewish society, primarily with the purpose of producing food for personal consumption.

Talmudic information on agriculture is supplemented by the roughly contemporary corpus of Bactrian business and legal documents from Balkh. Agricultural produce, such as wheat, grain, and onions, is mentioned in these texts and, judging from numerous references to wine and vineyards, viticulture seems to have played an important role in the local economy (Rezakhani 2010: 198–9). Also mentioned are such livestock as oxen, cows, sheep, and chickens, as well as horses. While both the sale and the manumission of slaves, and in one case a donation of a slave to a priest, are dealt with in contracts from this corpus, the employment of free laborers indicates once again that, as in more westerly regions of the Irano-Semitic sphere, the economy of the Balkh region was not based on slave labor. In addition to the items mentioned in the Balkh documents, such crops as corn, cotton, and sorghum were also cultivated during the Sasanian period. In the case of cotton we have evidence of cultivation not only in texts but also in the form of carbonized cotton seeds from the 5th century and later at Merv, together with fragments of cotton fabric at Shahr-i Qumis in Northeastern Iran and Tall-i Malyan in Fars (Simpson 2000: 64). Little if any cotton seems to have been cultivated on the Iranian plateau itself during the Sasanian period, and since Khotanese Saka, an East Iranian language, employs a term for cotton, *kapaysa*, which is derived from Sanskrit *karpasa*, it would appear that India, rather than Iran, was the point of origin for what little cotton might have been cultivated in the Sasanian Empire (Bulliet 2009: 6–8).

Although much of the Arabian Peninsula was the domain of pastoralists, the agricultural potential of the region's oases and of its southern and eastern peripheries did not go unexploited, though the extent and intensity of agricultural production during late pre-Islamic period is at times unclear. While medieval Arabic sources have much to say about agriculture in Arabia on the eve of Islam, little archaeological material from the late pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods is forthcoming from Arabian sites, though further excavations will likely remedy the situation. Traces of extensive irrigation systems at al-Kharj and al-'Uyun in al-Aflaj to the south of present-day Riyadh have been assigned a vague date of circa 200–600 CE by archaeologists, though often without any hard evidence (King 1994: 208–9). The *Khuzistan Chronicle*, an anonymous 7th-century Syriac text, describes the "region of the Hagarites" near the Gulf coast of present-day Saudi Arabia as "abounding in waters and palm trees and possessing strong buildings." The chronicle also mentions Hatta, which is said to be "located on the seashore in the vicinity of

the islands of the Qataris, dense with varied plantations” (Guidi 1955: 38), and which is identified with the region of al-Khatt, on Saudi Arabia’s Gulf coast—not to be confused with the similarly named site in the United Arab Emirates. In contrast to the more northerly regions of the Near East, such cultivation as the terrain and the climate of Arabia allowed seems, based on ethnographic evidence from early modern times, to have been done mostly by hand (Potts 1994: 161–2). But in the more densely populated areas of South and—to a lesser extent—East Arabia, the slide-plough was used. An iron ploughshare dating from the 1st or 2nd century CE, excavated by the Iraqi mission at Mleiha, indicates as much, as does a nearly complete skeleton of a male ox from a late 3rd-millennium BCE well at Maysar in Eastern Oman showing signs of stress that suggest that it was used as a draught animal. As for the Hijaz, the use of the plough is implied by references in the Qur’an to plowing (Qur. 2:71, 30:9) and to tillage (Qur. 2:71, 2:205, 2:223, 3:14, 3:117, 6:136, 6:138, 21:78, 42:20, 56:63, 68:22). Of the crops cultivated, date palms, grapes, olives, and pomegranates are mentioned (Qur. 6:99, 6:141, 13:4, 16:11).

In the case of South Arabia we have the benefit of a large number of inscriptions from the pre-Islamic era describing agricultural activities as well as the construction of dams and irrigation canals. Although generic terms for different types of fields and plantations often leave us in the dark as to what specific crops were cultivated, date palm plantations and vineyards are frequently mentioned, suggesting that owning and deriving wealth from these carried a certain prestige. The choice between vineyards and date palm plantations was dependent on climate and terrain. The Jawf area of Yemen seems to have been the favored region for palm plantations, while viticulture was practiced mostly in the moister southern highlands of Yemen (Bron 1997: 106). A Sabaic inscription from Wadi ‘Abadan in the Western Hadramawt (‘Abadan 1), dating from July 360, documents the agricultural works undertaken by a group of Himyarite noblemen after their return from a series of military campaigns in East, Central, and West Arabia. In the area of Wadi ‘Abadan they planted some 23,000 crops, 6,000 *‘ilb* trees (*Zizyphus spina Christi*), and 2,000 *ban* trees (*Moringa peregrina*) on terraced hillsides and fallow lands, together with five vineyards (Müller 2010: 53). As evidence of the technical side of agriculture, the use of the slide-plough in this region is indicated by traces of plough furrows at Marib (Potts 1994: 164) as well as by a relief dating from around the 2nd century CE, now kept in the Louvre, which depicts a farmer with a slide-plough drawn by two oxen (Potts 1994: 164; Charbonnier 2008). Wooden sticks inscribed in a cursive form of the South Arabian script supplement the information on South Arabian agriculture derived from epigraphic sources. Among the crops mentioned in these texts are lentils and sesame, the latter an Indian import adopted in South Arabia as early as the first millennium BCE.

South Arabian agriculture, the origins of which date as far back as the 4th millennium BCE, had social as well as economic implications, for while South Arabia was—and is—a tribal society like the rest of Arabia, its tribes cohered less through the ideology of genealogical filiation, whether real or imagined, than

through inherited ties to the land itself, as well as through allegiance to a tribal deity and the use of a tribal calendar (Korotayev 1995: 13–4, n. 7). Only in more northerly areas of the Arabian Peninsula were genealogies the main basis of tribal identity. Thus Safaitic graffiti, scattered throughout North Arabia and the Syrian Desert and dating between the 1st century BCE and the 4th century CE, record the genealogies of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribesmen as far back as 10, 12, or even 15 generations (Winnett and Harding 1978: 20; Macdonald 1993: 384; Sartre 2005: 236), while the indigenous peoples of ancient South Arabia, though often alluding in inscriptions to their tribe or clan, rarely mention their ancestors before the father's generation. The economic differences between pastoralists and agriculturalists were also reflected in tribal hierarchy. Among nomadic pastoralists, the full member of the tribe traditionally occupied a rank above that of the poorer kinsman and the protected client drawn from a non-kin group. But among the sedentary communities of ancient South Arabia a tribe was comprised of a leading "seigneurial" clan of landowners and several clans of vassal tenants who owed rent to the seigneurial clan for the land they cultivated (Beeston 2005: 83). In this connection it should be mentioned that, although pre-Islamic Arabia was a patriarchal society, women belonging to prominent tribes could wield considerable influence and often possessed great wealth. Thus Greek and Syriac sources from the 6th century CE report that a Christian woman from Najran named Ruma had in her private treasury some 40,000 gold coins—enough that even the Himyarite king Ma'dikarib Ya'fur (r. ca. 518–522) had borrowed from her in a time of need—and that she possessed gold, silver, copper, pearls, rubies, slaves, and entire villages (Pigulevskaja 1960: 117).

Since many South Arabian inscriptions credit kings with the construction of dams and irrigation canals, it is clear that the ruling elite of ancient South Arabia invested heavily in agriculture. To illustrate this point, let us consider two royal inscriptions set up at the Great Dam of Marib in Western Yemen recording repairs made there in the mid-5th and mid-6th centuries. The first was erected in January 456 by the Himyarite king Shurahbi'il Ya'fur (r. ca. 433–462) and records that, in order to feed the workmen employed in the restoration of the dam, the king provided 217,000 measures of millet-, wheat-, barley-, and date-meal; 1,302 slaughtered cattle; and 1,100 head of livestock, specially raised for slaughter, and yearlings. No fewer than 430 camels were required for carrying an undisclosed quantity of black grape and dried raisin wine, and 200 camels for carrying date beer. Then, when the dam ruptured some months later as a result of the spring rains, a workforce of 20,000 was brought in to repair those parts that had been damaged and was fed with 295,340 measures of fine flour and meal—again made of barley, millet, and dates—together with 1,363 slaughtered head of livestock and 1,000 teams of animals, while 670 camels brought drinks of black grape and dried raisin wine and 42 measures of honey and butter (Müller 2010: 70, 72–3).

The second inscription was erected in March 548 by Abraha (r. after 531), a general in the Aksumite army that had invaded South Arabia in 525 and

who later proclaimed himself king of Himyar (see Chapter 3). The need for repairs to Marib's agricultural infrastructure might have been particularly acute during Abraha's time, for geological evidence obtained from a stalagmite in the Hoti cave of Northern Oman indicates that the Arabian Peninsula suffered a series of droughts between 500 and 1000 CE, the most severe occurring circa 530 (Fleitmann et al. 2010). To feed the workmen employed in repairing the dam, Abraha is reported in his inscription to have brought in some 50,806 measures of flour, 26,000 measures of dates, 3,000 head of various types of livestock, and 7,200 head of small cattle. On this occasion 300 camels were needed to bring the black grape and dried raisin wine, and a further 11,000 measures of date wine were also provided (Müller 2010: 116–17). No mention is made in Shurahbi'il Ya'fur's inscription or in Abraha's of the vessels in which the various types of wine and beer were transported. Leather bags are one possibility, for the Palmyra Tariff Law, dating from 137 CE, mentions the use of goatskin sacks for the transport of oil and animal fat (Sartre 2005: 244), and it is quite plausible that wine and beer were transported in a similar fashion. It has also been suggested that the bags, presumably made of leather, which are mentioned on Roman-period ostraca from Berenike, were used to transport wine (Sidebotham 2011: 232). Pottery vessels may also have been used, for a mosaic pavement from a church at Kissufim in present-day Southern Israel, dating from 576–578, depicts a camel driver leading a camel loaded with amphorae (McCormick 2012: 72).

## **Commerce and the Urban Economy**

While the workforce employed in agricultural production occupied a place, second only to slaves, at the base of the social ladder, their labor provided an important source of wealth for landowning elites in the late antique societies of the Irano-Semitic sphere. But while wealth gained through agriculture was an important component of elite status in these and other preindustrial societies, wealth gained through commerce was viewed rather negatively. In this regard members of the Sasanian elite were no exception, for they regarded commerce with disdain (Tafazzoli 1974: 191), even as displays of their wealth depended on merchants to procure raw materials and luxury items from distant lands. Their attitude was to a large degree informed by Zoroastrian doctrine, stressing as it does cultivation, tilling the soil, and care of livestock as religious duties while regarding commerce as a lowly profession which, since its practitioners accrued wealth from the labor of others, was little better than robbery (Panaino 2004: 386–9). The *Letter of Tansar*, a 6th-century work surviving only in Arabic and Neo-Persian translations, speaks against young men who “busy themselves like tradesmen with the earning of money and neglect to garner fair fame” (Howard-Johnston 2008: 127). Since members of the landowning elite were the pillars of Zoroastrian society, this

prejudice against merchants and commerce in Zoroastrian texts comes as little surprise and explains why many of the merchants involved in the Sasanians' long-distance trade belonged to religious minorities, most notably Christian and Manichaean. As members of the largest and most influential Christian sect in the Sasanian Empire, the Nestorians played a particularly important role in long-distance trade. One such individual, a 7th-century monk named Bar Sahde from Beth Qatraye in East Arabia, is reported in a Syriac hagiography to have in his youth set out to India on a merchant ship (Bedjan 1901: 487). Nestorian merchants from the Gulf region were also involved in the trade of pearls and precious stones and belonged to the diaspora of Nestorian communities in Soqatra, India, and Sri Lanka whose clergymen, according to the 6th-century merchant-turned-amateur-geographer and Christian apologist Cosmas Indicopleustes, hailed from Iran (1968: 502, 505 [3.65.1–13, 11.14.1–4]; 1973: 342, 344). In addition, Ma'na, a Nestorian metropolitan of Fars, is said to have translated books from Syriac into Persian and to have composed many religious odes, poems, and hymns in Persian for the benefit of these expatriate Persian-speaking Christians in "the countries of the sea" and India (*Chronicle of Se'ert* 1911: 117; cf. *Chronicle of Se'ert* 1910: 328).

From Syriac law books and the Middle Persian *Book of a Thousand Judicial Decisions* we learn that commerce during the Sasanian period was conducted largely by associations, companies, or families of merchants by whom products were delivered to bazaars for sale (Frye 1993: 62). In royal cities, masons, woodcutters, ceramicists, metalworkers, jewelers, and stone-cutters were also organized in guilds, unless they belonged to royal workshops. Like merchants, artisans occupied a low position in Sasanian society and again were often Christians (Gyselen 1998: 105). According to Syriac sources, artisan guilds were organized under chiefs, who in turn answered to a "chief of artisans" (Tafazzoli 1974: 192). Archaeological surveys in Mesopotamia indicate the large-scale production of bricks, pottery, and glass during the Sasanian era at industrial settlements located on major waterways, and it is likely that many crafts associated with urban areas in Jewish, Aramaic, Syriac, Middle Persian, and Arabic sources were also practiced in rural areas.

In South Arabia, attitudes toward merchants and craftsmen seem to have been much like those in the Sasanian Empire, though in the South Arabian case we lack explicit expressions of anti-merchant sentiment in texts. Unlike the cities of the Fertile Crescent, ancient South Arabian cities were not major centers of production and, apart from the weaving of linens, little industrial activity seems to have gone on there (Breton 1998: 109). With the slump in the fabled incense trade during Late Antiquity, many South Arabian merchants might have sought their fortunes as middlemen in western trade with South Asia. However, while merchants played an important role in the South Arabian economy, and while codified commercial laws were at times published in monumental inscriptions (Avanzini 2004: 284–90), the fact remains that, with some notable exceptions dating mostly from the mid-first millennium BCE, few South Arabian inscriptions recount commercial ventures. Only in the kingdom of Ma'in, located in the Jawf region of Yemen, did