
UNIT 13 THE RISE AND EXPANSION OF ISLAM*

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13.0 OBJECTIVES

The present Unit covers the rise of Islam upto the first four Pious Caliphs. After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- appreciate the rise of Islam in the Arabian peninsula,
- locate the socio-political, economic and religious scenario in pre-Islamic Arabia,
- comprehend various approaches pertaining to the emergence of Islam in the Arabian peninsula,
- learn basic theories pertaining to the rise of Islam in the Arabian peninsula,
- know the consolidation process of the Islamic expansion under the four Pious Caliphs, and
- situate the long drawn crusades that shook the entire Europe and the Middle East and the Maghrib during the seventh to the thirteenth centuries.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In the 6th century CE a phenomenon occurred in the Arabian peninsula, particularly in Hejaz/Hijaz, which had a huge impact on West Asia, Europe and Central Asia and changed the course of the history of the World. It was the rise of Islam. The movement

was so swift that within a period of half a century, the Caliphal empire was well-established and within a century, Islam became a world religion.

13.2 PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND THE BEGINNING OF ISLAM

By the early 7th century, in West Asia there existed a combination of cultured settled world and a world on its frontiers which was in closer contact to its northern neighbours and opening itself up to their cultures. The power of the Byzantine (defeated by the Ottomans in 1453) and the Sassanid empire (lost to the Arabs in 651) was somewhat on a decline while the settled tribal communities in Arabian Peninsula were consolidating their position and some of them on the borderlands were actively participating in the politics of Syria and Iraq. Soon a new political order was created in which the ruling group was formed not by the peoples of the earlier empires but by the Arabs from western Arabia, particularly Hejaz.

The new political order identified itself with a revelation given by God to Muhammad in the form of *Quran*. Abul Qasim Muhammad b. Abdullah was born in Mecca in 570 CE. He belonged to the Hashim clan of the tribe of Quraysh. Quraysh had well-established themselves in the field of trade and commerce and were counted amongst the wealthiest merchants of Arabia though the clan of Muhammad was not the most prominent one within it. Due to their role in trade, they emerged as the single most powerful tribe of the peninsula. In fact, trade was not the only source from where their prominence sprang. The control of the sanctuary Ka'aba, where the images of local gods were kept and which was central to the religious orientation of the people of the region, by the Quraysh enhanced the prestige of the tribe. They had fostered the pilgrimages (and accompanying fairs) made at certain seasons to Mecca itself and to a neutral spot not far away ('Arafat), as well as other markets held in the region. Muhammad had grown up an orphan, under the care of uncle Abu Talib. He had shown his competence as a trader in the service of a well-to-do widow, Khadijah.

In his thirties, Muhammad seems to have become engrossed with questions of how to live a serious life of truth and purity. He meditated intensely during periods of retirement in a cave on Mount Hira' outside the town. He did not dissociate himself from the rites and customs of the Quraysh, which indeed continued to be dear to him. But he sought something more which they lacked. Around the age of forty, during one of his retirements in Mount Hira', he heard a voice and saw a vision which summoned him to offer worship to the God who had created the world, one God of the monotheists. Encouraged by his wife, Khadijah, he accepted the summons as coming from God Himself. Thereupon, he received further messages which he interpreted as divine revelation, and the prayer recitation of which formed a major element of the new cult. The messages collectively were called the *Qur'an*. For a time, only his wife and a few close friends shared the cult with him. But after some years the messages demanded that he summon his fellow Quraysh to the worship of God, warning them of impending calamities if they refused. From a private monotheist, he was to become a Prophet to his people.

As support for Muhammad grew, his relations with the leading families of Quraysh became worse. They did not accept his claim to be the messenger of God and was considered as someone who attacked their way of life. The situation of Muhammad became dodgy when Khadija and Abu Talib died in the same year. As the teachings developed, more opposition from the followers of accepted beliefs became clearer. Muhammad realised that for the safety of his men, to overcome the resistance of Quraysh and to increase the number of his adherents, some political base was necessary. Finally,

his position became so difficult that in 622 he left Mecca for an oasis settlement 200 miles to the north, Yathrib, later known as Medina. This movement to Medina in 622 CE is known as the *hijra*, the date from which the Muslim era began.

Medina was an agricultural oasis. Like Mecca it was not inhabited by a single tribe, but unlike Mecca it was marked by bitter feuds between the leading tribal groups — the Aws and the Khazraj which threatened at times the existence of Medina. Also, like Mecca, Medina was undergoing social changes, which was undermining Bedouin form of kinship. Agriculture rather than pastoral needs governed its economy, and its social life was increasingly governed by spatial proximity rather than kinship ties. He had been welcomed by the inhabitants of Medina who accepted him as the arbitrator of their disputes. In a society with no common law or government, a man with a religious vision and who was just, politic, tactful was often selected by the feuding clans as the arbitrator. The early biographers have preserved the texts of agreements signed between the adherents of Muhammad on one hand and the two main tribes, Aws and Khazraj together with some Jewish groups on the other.

From Medina, Muhammad began to consolidate his power and soon entered in an armed struggle with the Quraysh. The community came to believe that it was necessary to participate in the wars to fight for what was right. First the *Muhajirun*, the exiled Meccans, raided Meccan caravans for booty. The raids soon turned into battles. By 624, at the Battle of Badr, Muhammad defeated a larger Meccan force and won tremendous prestige everywhere in Arabia. It was taken as divine favour which led to the defection of some of the Bedouin tribe who had the responsibility to protect the Mecca's caravan lines. In the following years, Meccans took the initiative and attacked Muhammad and Medina first in the Battle of Uhud (625) and then in the Battle of Khandak (627), though the first one was a defeat for Muhammad, but both the battles proved profitable for him. He faced the worst attacks of Mecca. However, each time the circumstances helped him to consolidate his position with the Jewish clans of Medina.

Muhammad's aim was not to fight Mecca till death but to convert her people to Islam. Therefore, he eased after the battle of Khandak. In 628 CE, Muhammad along with his followers, made a pilgrimage to Ka'aba. According to Ira Lapidus, he did this to show that Islam was an Arabian religion and would preserve the pilgrimage rites in which Mecca had a great stake. The idea that Abraham was the founder of a high monotheistic faith and of the sanctuary at Mecca already existed. Now he was seen neither a Jew nor a Christian but a common ancestor of both, and as ancestor of Muslims too. There was also a change in Muhammad's relations with Quraysh and Mecca. Muhammad concluded a truce at al-Hudaybiya as he marched for pilgrimage in which the Meccans agreed to admit the Muslims for the pilgrimage and Muhammad dropped his demand that he be regarded as the Prophet of God. Moreover, he agreed to an unequal arrangement. According to this treaty children who left Mecca to become Muslims would have to be returned if they did not have parental consent, while Muslim apostates would not be returned. Though this was an unequal alliance, Muhammad made tremendous gain from it. Muhammad was a power to contend with and that Mecca had given up her efforts to defeat him. Muhammad's adherents in Mecca continued to swell. In 630, the leaders of the city of Mecca surrendered it to Muhammad who occupied it without resistance. He gave amnesty to everyone and announced the principles of new order that every claim of privilege or blood or property is abolished by him except the custody of the shrine Ka'aba and the watering of the pilgrims. In the year 632, Muhammad died.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Write five lines on the early life of Prophet Muhammad.

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- 2) Trace Prophet Muhammad's rise to power.

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- 3) Mention the process of the beginning of Islam in the Arabian peninsula.

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13.3 MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES

There are basically four dominant modern approaches for writing early Islamic history:

- i) **Descriptive Approach:** This approach for the study of Islam utilized the Islamic sources in the first instance to describe Islam and its early history. They were drawn to the literature written by the Muslim scholars for the rich information it provided and believed that since these were Islamic sources they would present a less biased account of Islam. It was a move ahead of the bigotry of polemical traditions but it overestimated the documentary value of Islamic literary sources. The section on Islam provided by Gibbon in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* fits into this category. It was a predominant approach in the 18th-19th centuries.
- ii) **Source-Critical Approach:** With a passage of time, historians started realizing the limitations in Islamic sources. As common in medieval sources they contained sometimes contradictory reports. The scholars studied the contradictions and attributed them to different informants who had different agendas and degrees of reliability as reporters (individual reports were introduced through a chain of narrator called *sanad/isnad*). The scrutiny of earlier informants led to the Source-Critical Approach. It was initially developed in the second half of the 19th century. An

idea developed that early Islamic history can be reconstructed by making a comparative analysis of various reports as by comparing them. One can set aside those traceable to 'weak' informants' reports and this way one could sift earlier historical from later legendary material.

- iii) **Tradition-Critical Approach:** Its advocates challenged the assumption that information in traditional Islamic literature represented copies of early documents or carry an eye-witness account through a chain of narrators. They argue that reports we find in a number of literary works merely capture in written form the oral traditions about the past. The accounts must be used to reconstruct the past with great caution because it is usually impossible to know which material may have to be dropped, added or changed in the course of transmission. Pioneer in this regard is the work of Ignaz Golziher whose work *Muhammadan Studies* (1889-90) presented such insights that many reports attributed to Prophet were a later addition. Many scholars of 20th century like Joseph Schacht, M. J. Kister, Rubin etc. offered detailed tradition-critical studies.
- iv) **Sceptical Approach:** The complexities of sources led many to adopt this approach. It rejects the historicity of almost all the traditionally conveyed material. The fundamental argument of scholars in this group is that tradition may not contain any kernel of true material and even if it does have, it is not possible to disentangle it from the many layers of distortions due to successive waves of compression, fragmentation and reinterpretation. The skeptical school raised pertinent questions like reliability of sources from early Islamic history and appropriate attitude of scholars towards it but sometimes the claim seems overstated. Moreover, the approach is negative. While it questions 'what happened' it has not yet offered a convincing alternative reconstruction of 'what might have happened'. Noteworthy earlier contributions in this regard were of Patricia Crone's *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Michel Cook's *Hagarism* (1977) and John Wansborough's *The Sectarian Milieu* (1978).

These different approaches emerged at successive historical periods but rather than supplanting its predecessors, each new approach co-existed beside them and all approaches are being practised in varying degrees.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Explain the descriptive approach of writing early Islamic history.

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- 2) What is the source-critical approach to study the early Islamic History.

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- 3) Do you agree with sceptical proponents who rejected the historicity of all traditionally conveyed material?

13.4 THEORIES PERTAINING TO THE RISE OF ISLAM: SOME HISTORIOGRAPHICAL RECONSIDERATION

There are two basic theories regarding the rise of Islam:

- 1) Meccan Trade Theory/Commercial Wealth Theory
- 2) Nativist Theory

13.4.1 Meccan Trade Theory

The propounder of Meccan trade theory was Montgomery Watt. He saw the emergence of new religion as a result of deeper socio-economic changes and tried to look at why did it gain such wide acceptance among Arab tribes within a short span of time. Montgomery Watt, who has written many books on Muhammad and his life like *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina*, examines the nature of society on the eve of the emergence of Islam. He sees the rise of Islam as response to the transformation which was taking shape due to trade and adoption of sedentary life-style by some tribes in the region. Mecca was the juncture of two major trade routes, one went north and south through the mountainous Hejaz from the Yemen and Indian Ocean lands to Syria and Mediterranean lands and the other, less important, went east and west from Iraq, Iran and the Central Eurasia to Abyssinia and Eastern Africa. Meccan traders were involved in long distance trade. The Quraysh controlled the north-south trade route and enhanced their riches through this lucrative trade. It was at Mecca that the most striking changes occurred. The expansion of Meccan commerce eroded traditional ties and introduced tensions in the society. The wealth from trade or earnings from pilgrims brought into Mecca did not benefit everyone uniformly. The rise of Mecca as hub of expanding international trade network caused a number of problems: greater social stratification, greater social inequalities, and greater dependence of poorer classes on wealthier ones. This led to conflict at various levels. The relatively simple tribal organization of Quraysh had no mechanism to cope with this new situation. Moreover, there were tribes which were taking up agriculture on a limited scale and other coming within the orbit of settled societies on the peripheries of Arabia. Muhammad's call for unity was an answer to this new emerging social differentiation and Islam provided these tribes with a scheme for social formation. In this scenario, Muhammad emerged and his proclaimed message was intended to dissolve the tribal units altogether and led to the formation of a single community. Since the movement declared equality of all men before God, communities facing social inequalities now acquired or were expected to acquire much greater social economic equality. The movement emphasized on social

justice and rejection of all forms of hierarchical class differentiation in the Arab society. The emergence of Prophet and the success of his teachings are interpreted in terms of solutions he provided to the contemporary social problems.

Similar opinion has also been put forward by other historians like Rodinson in his work *Muhammad*, Marshal Hodgson in *Venture of Islam* and M.A. Shaban in *Islamic History: A New Interpretation AD 600-750*.

13.4.2 Nativist Theory

This hypothesis of Watt that the Quraysh transition to a merchandise economy undermined the traditional order of Mecca generating social and moral malice to which Muhammad's teaching was the answer, was challenged by Patricia Crone. She asserted that the *Mecca traded in humble products rather than in luxury goods*. While Watt argued that Mecca was the transit point in the long-distance trade between India, Africa and Mediterranean, Patricia Crone on the basis of Kister (1986) asserted that trade was of humble kind. The international trade of Meccans rested largely on articles such as leather and clothing. She questioned, 'could they have founded commercial empire of international dimensions on the basis of leather goods and clothing?'

Looking at the articles of trade she concluded that trade in spices was very little and there existed almost no exchange trade in gold and silver. Other items like raisin, wine, slaves and other things were sold exclusively within Arabia. It was leather which was traded on a large scale and clothing, animals and miscellaneous food stuffs, though less attested, probably had a large circulation.

She proposed three negative points: **First**, it was not a transit trade. Meccan were considered as middle men in long distance trading network. They used to collect native and foreign goods from south Arabia and Ethiopia and transported them to Syria and Iraq. But according to Crone, goods they sold in the North were of north Arabian origin, and not of Indian southeast Asian origin. Perfumes were purchased from south Arabia for resale in the north and in Hijaz and not for sale in Byzantine or Persian empire. Moreover, any Meccan goods, be it perfume or other items were destined for redistribution within these regions. They were markets for Hijazi leather-ware and clothing, Yemeni perfume in cities of southern Syria, Hira but not to Antioch, Constantinople, or Ctesiphon. **Second**, it was not a trade of a kind that attracted the attention of Greek and the Fertile Crescent. There is a mention of political importance of Arabia but Quraysh and their trading centres were not mentioned at all in Greek, Latin, Syria, Aramaic, Coptic or in any other literature composed outside Arabia. **Third**, it was not a trade that presupposed control of any trade route in Arabia.

Patricia opines that the silence of sources explained the nature of trade itself and that it should have attracted the attention outside Arabia had it been on a large scale. Quraysh were traders, therefore, their commercial activities were of the kind conducted in this region since time immemorial. Control over trade routes (Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Ethiopia) is therefore, meaningless and sources do not assert that the Meccans were in control of any trading routes or dominated the export trade of any particular locality, let alone monopolizing the trade of Arabia at large. Clearly it was a local trade. For Patricia Crone, Meccans traded in humble goods than in luxury items.

She further points out that such a brief period of commercial wealth was not likely to upset Meccan society to a radical change. It took more than a century of commercial success to undermine the tribal order of a population that had been neither uprooted nor forced to adopt a different organization in connection with its economic activities.

Viewed as pagan enemies of Islam, the Meccans were accused of neglect of kinship ties and other protective relationships as well as having a tendency for the strong to eat the weak. However, looking at the sources it seems that the Meccans preferred their traditional way of life to Islam. It is for this that they have been penalized in sources. One should not forget that the Message was accepted in Medina. They accepted monotheism. The Meccans had to be conquered before they were to be converted. It seems that the problems for which Muhammad had solutions must have been problems shared by the people of Medina.

Patricia after making these points posed another question that why a social reform in Mecca would explode across the entire Peninsula? Clearly one must concentrate on issues which were common to Arabia and not just Mecca. Islam originated in tribal set up. Their gods were ultimate sources of natural phenomena — rain, fertility, disease etc. — that were of great importance to human life but beyond their control. They were worshiped for practical importance and the services they could render in controlling these phenomena. But they neither required nor received emotional commitment, love, loyalty from their devotee. A god was no more than a powerful being and the point of serving him was that he could be expected to respond by using his power in favour of the servants/devotees. The practices like the great annual pilgrimage were apparently not conducted in the name of any 'one' 'single' deity.

Pre-Islamic Arabia had less developed mythology, economy, rituals. Religious life was reduced to periodic visits to holy places. They were not involved in complex questions about nature and meaning of life. Was death the end? The concept of religion as the 'ultimate truth' concerning nature and meaning of life, was absent. So conversion was not due to any spiritual crisis, religious decadence, or decline of pagan beliefs. What the mass conversion shows is that Prophet Muhammad offered them a programme, a strategy, a road map of Arab state formation and conquest.

It is believed that the turning point of Prophet Muhammad's career came when he began to attack the ancestral god of Quraysh. He attacked the very foundation of his tribe. It was not monotheism which posed a threat to pagan sanctuary or Meccan trade. The Meccans were not willingly to tolerate an attack on their ancestors. But Muhammad had a vision for alternative community. In denouncing his ancestors, he demonstrated that his God was incompatible with tribal divisions as they existed. He showed that his God was both a single and an ancestral deity. Allah was the one and only God of Abraham, the ancestor of the Arabs. Since around ancestral deities, groups formed, therefore it was around Allah and Allah alone that the Arabs should be regrouped, all ancestral deities that sanctioned current divisions being false.

It is indeed fascinating that Muhammad and his successors were able to bring the unification in effect in a region which had never been politically united. The society of Medina was divided by feuds, it was not difficult to explain why they would be willingly to experiment with Prophet Muhammad's political programme. But why did the Arabs in Muhammad's time find vision of state structures and unification so attractive?

Crone argues that he preached state formation and conquest. Without conquest unification of Arabia was not possible. It was a period when Persians and Byzantines were encroaching upon Arabian peninsula and their presence was felt throughout the peninsula. Arabia had been subjected to foreign rule. In such a scenario, Islam originated as a *nativist movement*, or in other words as a *primitive reaction to alien domination*. Nativist movements were primitive in the sense that those who engaged in them were people without any political organization. She sees early Islam as *nativist movement* born out of deep attachment to Arabian way of life in opposition to penetration of

foreign influences. The foreign influences were identified by her as those values which were introduced by Byzantine and Persian's attempts to dominate it. But then Crone also agrees to the view that sedantization was taking place in certain parts of Arabia which necessitated growth of state structure at the expense of tribal ties.

Patricia believed monotheism was used by Muhammad to galvanize Arab reaction to the encroachments of late antiquity's superpowers: Byzantine and Sassanid Persia. However, conceptually, her idea of economic and military imperialism and Arab nationalism, has inherent flaws. She weaved the plausible around the obscure. But why were the Arabs became so important at this time/juncture? Can a movement so successful be based only on conquest? Patricia also made arbitrary selection of sources to fit in her arguments. If Quraysh system of agreements with tribes on commerce be rejected as fabrication then it became more difficult to account for the ascendancy established by Quraysh and inherited by Muhammad. As Mecca lacked natural resources, foodstuffs such as grain and date had to be imported. To purchase it they must have had some sources of income.

R.B. Serjeant, reviewing her work, said that no doubt Quraish commercial activity has been inflated by Western writers. Lammens and followers of his theory argue that the trade inherited by the Meccans was of the scale described by Pliny and in *Periplus* (keeping in mind the trade pattern of classical age). W.A. Watt developed his theory out of it. Nonetheless, this does not negate the existence of Quraysh commerce. Crone has also questioned the argument that the Quraysh made regular journeys to points in northern Yemen and traded even in commodities. She argues that a commodity which was so plentiful in Syria and Byzantium, why should these countries be interested in importing it from elsewhere? Crone has emphasised that we need to look into other factors also like, *demand for foreign rarities, fluctuations of prices, or scarcities arising from political actions*. She also does not believe that such accidents/actions as piracy affected trading to any significant extent instead weather conditions and many such other factors did play equally important role. However, it appears that Crone's whole treatment of the subject is strictly mechanical, not allowing scope for such eventualities. Interestingly, on the one hand she talks about tribal sentiments and on the other hand presence of strong Arab consciousness, both are contradictory.

Though Patricia Crone's work has been criticized by many, Patricia's work of 1987 and also an earlier work of Michael Cook (*Hagarism*) in 1977 with its provocative manner of presentation ignited intense discussion among scholars about the origin of Islam.

13.4.3 Revisionist Theory

Fred Donner in his lecture delivered at the University of Edinburgh ('The Study of Islam's Origins since W. Montgomery Watt's Publications' November 23, 2015, University of Edinburgh) made an extensive survey of the revisionist works being done on the subject of Islam's origin. The appearance of these first revisionist works completely revitalized the study of early Islam. He pointed out that another dimension was added in the 1970s, i.e., Late Antiquity studies, with Peter Brown's epoch-making book *The World of Late Antiquity* in 1971. Brown's book included a final chapter on Late Antiquity as an appendix to the early Islamic history (to the fall of the Umayyads and early Abbasids). Brown synthesized several fields of study that had hitherto been largely separate — the Late Roman (or early Byzantine) history, church history, especially the history of the eastern churches, the study of Sasanian history and the study of early Islamic history. Brown conceived Late Antiquity extending from the second to the eighth centuries CE in the Near East and the Mediterranean, and portrayed this period as the

one that was of the most dynamic cultural and social creativity rather than that of a 'decline'. Brown's integration of early Islamic history into the framework of Late Antiquity broadened the perspective of historians on early Islam.

According to Donner, there is renewed interest in various forms of documentary evidence for this period, studies of the coins and seals of the early Islamic and of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires and **papyrology**. The existence of papyri from the seventh century, written in Greek, Coptic, and Arabic, had long been known, but they had not, with few exceptions, been much used by historians. In 1980s and especially the first decade of the twenty-first century a number of scholars began working actively in Arabic papyrology.

Even more striking were developments in the study of the archaeology of the early Islamic period. Until the 1960s, relatively little archaeological work had been undertaken that focused on the Islamic period in the Near East, and much of what had been done was concerned principally with recovering works of Islamic art or with major architectural monuments. Beginning in the 1970s, however, there was an explosion of archaeological explorations conducted along broader lines (often with an anthropological focus), especially in Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Turkey, with important work also undertaken in Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, and Yemen. This work has helped in correcting serious misconceptions about the historical evolution of the Levant, particularly, during the early Islamic period. For example, it had earlier been the norm to assume that the rise of Islam coincided with a general collapse of prosperity, but the careful work of Donald Whitcomb, Alan Walmsley, and others have revealed that many areas in the Levant continued to flourish during the seventh and into the eighth centuries. The rise of Islam, rather than being seen as an episode of violent destruction and discontinuity, instead appears to be what Peter Pentz calls it an 'invisible conquest' because at most sites in the Levant the transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule was so gradual as to be imperceptible, at least in terms of the archaeological evidence, in contrast to the image gained from literary sources, both Christian and Islamic.

This burst of new works and the new evidence, and novel interpretations of long-known literary evidence, resulted in the appearance of many new attempts to reconstruct 'what actually happened' on the eve of the origin of Islam. There was a wave of revisionist writings away from the traditional paradigm. These new writings propose many new theories. Some of them claim that Islam was merely another form of Christianity; while a few even questioned the presence of Prophet Muhammad. But all these are not backed by sources and evidence and seem mere speculations. We will not go in their details because these are not supported by enough research.

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) Write briefly the salient points of Meccan trade theory.

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- 2) What is the argument of Nativist theory propagators on the origin of Islam?

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- 3) Discuss the views of Donner on the origin of Islam?

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13.5 SPREAD OF ISLAM AFTER THE DEATH OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The death of Prophet Muhammad created a vacuum. It was believed that there would be no further Prophet after Muhammad. But Prophet was not only the religious but political leader as well. The question of no one assuming his position as Prophet received general acceptance but someone had to take physical charge of the state and guide the religious community. As no specific rules were laid down for this purpose, there was considerable scope for dispute at this point. The question of who should have religious and political authority after the Prophet was to become increasingly contentious with passage of time, leading to conflicts and often serious doctrinal differences.

Why Prophet did not appoint his successor? In Sunni tradition, Prophet was involved in careful coalition and prudent politics was silent on succession because he wanted the success of radical monotheism which required holding to traditional tribal practice which gave little or no attention and shift to authority that was purely inherited or transpired (rather than earned). The other reason was that the community was fragile and the Prophet thought not to impose his wishes. Another is to posit on his part an impending sense of the end. However, nothing can be said with certainty.

Though, Sunnis accept that Prophet had appointed a successor, and wanted community to be rallied around Abu Bakr who was being among the firsts to convert and senior most and hence, the natural choice. But Shias argue that Mohammad had appointed Ali as his successor. At the time of the death of Prophet there were three groups: The Meccan Quraysh aristocracy and the Ansar of Medinese ‘helpers’ who provided critical support, and who argued that the succession should take place within the family of Prophet.

By and large political authority passed into the hands of the leading Quraysh families after 632. Abu Bakr one of the closest companions of the Prophet was chosen as *Khalifa* (successor of Prophet). For next few centuries khalifa became the main title for religious leaders of Muslims and head of the state founded by Prophet Muhammad. When Abu Bakr took over, the newly formed state was in danger. Some Bedouin tribes broke away from Medina because in Arabia the idea of being part of permanent state was a new one. Another serious issue was that some tribal religious leaders declared themselves to be Prophets. The Muslims of Mecca and Medina denounced these leaders as false Prophets. Abu Bakr had to launch a series of campaigns to re-establish control over these tribes. The campaigns are called wars of *ridda* (apostasy or defection from one's religious allegiance). The battles and skirmishes that broke out after the Prophet's death when tribesmen repudiated treaties negotiated by Prophet, thus brought the Muslim armies within hailing distance of the two great powers, viz, Byzantine and the Sassanids. Abu Bakr died within two years of becoming *khalifa* (Caliph). He nominated Umar Ibn al-Khattab as his successor. Umar expanded the boundaries of the state, consolidating himself not only in Arab but also embarking upon large scale territorial expansion outside Arab as well as in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Egypt. The conquest of West Asia was at the expense of Sassanid and Byzantine empires.

For over eighty years prior to the rise of Islam, the Sasanian and Byzantine empires had been involved in fierce combat for supremacy over west Asia. Syria and Mesopotamia were main parties of war and fell between the two empires. In the long run this conflict weakened the two empires considerably. When Arabs embarked upon the Byzantine and Sassanid territories in 633-34 the two powers were already exhausted so much militarily that they were unable to put up any resistance. In 636, Persian army was routed at battle of Qadisiya. Next year Arab forces under Saad captured Sassanid capital Ctesiphon. With this Sassanid rule came to an end in Iraq and Saad established himself as military and civil head in Iraq. Similarly, in Syria the town of Damascus was first attacked in 634 and taken in 635. The fall paved the way for the annexation of Syria and Palestine. Khalid bin Walid played an important role in it. In 639 Egypt was also occupied.

Though Muslims were outnumbered, they were swift in movement, agile, well coordinated and highly motivated. The defence of Byzantines and Sassanids were brittle. In contrast to large scale pitched battles and protracted campaigns typical of Byzantine and Sassanid (6th-early 7th centuries), the Islamic conquests of mid-7th century were relatively short engagements by a small hit and run army which rarely laid siege or caused large number of casualties. In many cases the Byzantine local elites made underhand deals to avoid violence. Moreover, the Christian population — **Copts** in Egypt, **Monophysites** in Syria, **Nestorian** in Iraq all had long history of troubled relationship with the Byzantines and the Sassanid overlords. Their dissatisfaction was important where Christian-Arab border tribes and military auxiliaries joined the conquerors and where fortified cities capitulated. The conquest was due to weakened military powers and they could consolidate because local population was content to accept the new regime. Moreover, the conquest was further secured by large migration of Arab peoples. With the defeat of Byzantines and Sassanids, frontiers between populations broke down leading to massive movements of the people from Arabia into the lands of the Middle East. The Byzantine, however, retained its richest and most populous province, Anatolia and Balkans, though Syria was lost. Survival of Byzantine left the Arabs with a contested and dangerous frontier and a permanent barrier to their expansion. The Sassanians by contrast were utterly destroyed. The entire Iraq fell in their hands after the battle of Qadisiya (637). With the collapse of the Sassanid empire,

Arabs had to face in Iran many weak but inaccessible principalities protected by mountains and deserts. It took almost a decade to subdue those quasi-independent principalities of the Sasanian empire. Khurasan was finally captured in 654.

With so many provinces coming under their responsibility of governing, also exploiting, the conquered sedentary people and responsibility of controlling Arabian migrants came to new Caliphs and aristocracy. Medinians decided on two basic principles: that Bedouin would be prevented from damaging agricultural society and the new elite would co-operate with chiefs and notaries of conquered population. The necessary arrangements were made in the reign of second Caliph Umar (634-44). The first principle of Umar entailed the transformation of Arab conquerors into elite military class who garrisoned the subdued areas and carried on further conquests. To prevent Bedouins to raze agricultural lands and to segregate the Arabs from conquered people the Bedouins were made to settle in garrison cities (*amsar*). The three most important new cities founded in Iraq and Egypt were: Basra, at the head of Persian gulf which was strategically located for easy communication with Medina. Kufa became the administrative capital of northern Iraq, Mesopotamia and northern and eastern Iran. Fustat, the new capital of Egypt which served as base for Arab expansion into north Africa until Qayrawan (in Tunisia) was founded in 670, In other provinces they generally did not found new cities but settled in towns, suburbs, and villages on the outskirts of existing towns.

The *amsars* not only served as house for Bedouin immigrant and to organise armies but also helped to distribute the spoils. In principle, Arabs were not permitted to seize landed property. Conquered land was considered community property and therefore revenue and not land could be given to the conquerors. This arrangement protected conquered areas from pillaging and distributed spoils of victory far more equitably.

Secondly, the policy was that the conquered population should be disturbed as little as possible. This meant that Arab Muslims did not attempt to convert conquered people to Islam. The Prophet, in Arabia, had set the precedent of permitting Jews and Christians in Arabia to keep their religion, if they agreed to pay the tribute. The caliphate extended the same privilege to Middle Eastern Jews, Zoroastrians whom they considered protected people (*zimmis*) and people of the Book (*ahl-i kitab*).

Just as Arabs had no interest in changing religious situation, they had no desire to disturb the social and the administrative structure. The caliphate had sent governors to oversee the collection of tributes and taxation, distribution of taxes as salary, lead Muslims in prayers but local situation was largely left in local hands. In practice, the relationship between Arabs and the local elites varied from region to region and circumstances of Arab conquests and on the available social and administrative machinery.

In each province, Arabs accepted a system of taxes already prevalent. In Iraq, they adopted Sasanian system of collecting both land tax (*kharaj*) and poll tax (*jizya*). Land was measured, tax was levied keeping in mind the productivity, value of produce, irrigation, transportation, etc. In addition, everyone was expected to pay poll tax (*jizya*).

In short Arab conquest followed a pattern familiar from past nomadic conquest of settled regions. The conquering people became military elite, the settled societies

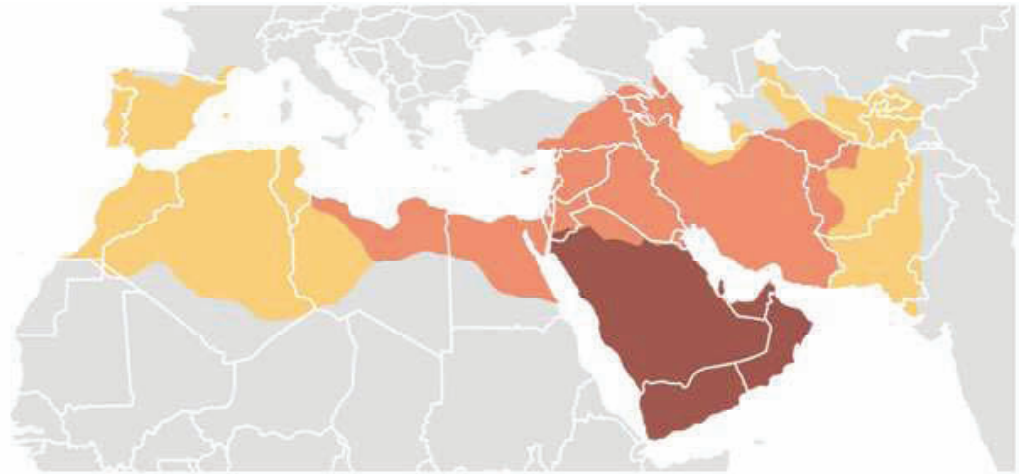
were exploited to support them. The governing arrangement is a compromise between elites of conquering peoples and those of conquered or settled population.

Umar was killed in 644. He appointed a board of six selectors to nominate succession after him. Usman became the third *Khalifa* (644-656). Usman was a *muhajir*¹ but belonged to Umayyad clan. This caused considerable indignation among Hashimites. Usman made himself unpopular by appointing members of Umayyad clan on all major official positions. Although conquest of Iran was completed under Usman, the initial pace of expansion slowed down after 650. This added to the dissatisfaction. Some centres in southern Iraq and Egypt became centres of opposition (*tokhaliyf*). There was a revolt of Egyptian troops and amidst the chaos, Usman was assassinated in 656.

However, there was violent struggle over the question of succession after Usman. This struggle was called the first *Fitnah* or civil war. At Medina the supporters of Ali joined hands with rebels from Egypt and proclaimed him as next *khalifa*. This was not acceptable to the Umayyads. There was another fraction led by Zubayr which opposed this settlement. He was an associate of Muhammad who was also joined by Aisha, the wife of the Prophet. However, the most serious challenge came from Muawiyah, the governor of Syria, also descendent of Ummaya and cousin of Usman. He had a strong base in Syria and revolted against Ali and refused to surrender to Ali's demand for allegiance and called for revenge for the assassination of Usman. Except Syria all other regions accepted Ali as *khalifa*. The refusal of Muawiyah led to the battle of Siffin (657) in northern Mesopotamia. The battle was inconclusive and both sides agreed for arbitration. Nothing concrete could emerge. Muawiyah remained the *de facto* ruler of Syria. Ali ruled the rest of the empire and shifted his capital to Kufa (Medina was now too inconvenient to be a seat; besides Ali also had large following in Kufa).

However, the civil war or *fitnah* created permanent division within the Muslim community. Siffin provoked first major sectarian division in Islam. Muslims were divided as to who had the legitimate right to occupy *khalifat*. Muslims who wanted the succession of Muawiyah and the historical sequence of *khalifa* after him; and those who believed that Ali was the only rightful *khalifa* and that Ali was divinely endowed with special qualities of leadership by virtue of his belonging to the family of the Prophet and being the true successor incapable of rendering any error and that only he and his decedents should succeed. There was another breakaway group which was opposed to any arbitration between Muawiyah and Ali. In their opinion Ali's conduct amounted to a compromise with Ummayyads and therefore, was no longer the leader of Muslim community. Those who took this extremist stand were called *Kharji*. They held that *khilafat* should be determined by descent but *khalifa* should be elected by the community of Muslims at large and he should hold this position only as long as he was sinless in the conduct of the office. Taking their stand they seceded from Ali. All these three groups developed separate vision of Islam. This gave rise to major sects of Sunnis and Shias among Muslims. You will read about them in **Unit 15**. Finally, a *Kharji* murdered Ali in 661 and *Khilafat* passed on to the Ummayyad dynasty.

¹ People who accompanied/emigrated from Mecca to Medina along with Prophet Muhammad in 622.



Expansion under the Prophet Muhammad, 622-632; Expansion during the Patriarchal Caliphate, 632-661; Expansion during the Umayyad Caliphate, 661-750

Map 13.1: Expansion of Islam

Author: DieBuche, July 2010

Source: <http://guides.library.iit.edu/content.php?pid=27903&sid=322018> (via Image: Age_of_Caliphs.png);

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spread_of_Islam#/media/

File:Map_of_expansion_of_Caliphate.svg

13.6 ISLAM AND THE WEST: THE CRUSADES

Islam made inroads into the Christian west along with the Arabs conquests of 635-645. We have seen how Arabs overran Byzantine and Iran. Byzantine lost to Arabs their prized possessions — Syria, Egypt, Palestine and finally North Africa (Maghrib) by 698. This forced Greek speaking Byzantine people to migrate to Anatolia (Turkey). Towards Iberian Peninsula, the Muslim armies occupied Cordova, crossed Pyrenees, entered deep into Gaul (southern France) and reached upto Bordeaux. However, in 731 Arabs got defeated at Toulouse and the very next year (732) in the historic battle of Poitiers (Tours) they faced crushing defeat at the hands of Charles Martel the Hammer. There were constant attempts by the Arabs to vanquish the Byzantine ‘Christian’ capital Constantinople.

The Abbasids (for details see **Unit 14**) envisaged wars against the Byzantine as their ‘religious duty’, called them ‘tyrants’ and war against them as ‘*jihad*’. A serious challenge in this regard was faced by the Byzantines in 1071 when the Seljuk commander Alp Arslan inflicted crushing defeat upon Byzantine armies at Manzikert (Eastern Turkey) and made the Byzantine emperor Romanas IV his prisoner. This forced the Greek population to migrate even further from Anatolia towards Balkans. These developments led the emergence of *reconquista* (reconquest movement) in Spain/Iberian Peninsula in the first half of the eleventh century. This led to series of successes of the Christian armies at Toledo (1085), and Sicily (1095). The Byzantine emperor Alexius I (r. 1081-1118) after the crushing defeat in 1071 appealed to his Christian brethren. It was on Alexius I’s appeal that Pope Urban II responded quickly and proclaimed a ‘holy war’ against the ‘Saracens’ at the Council of Clermont in southern France in 1095. Thus began the First Crusade in 1095. The war cry was to ‘reconquer’ the Holy Land, the Land of the Christ and his apostles for Christianity’ (Knysh 2017: 345). The next wave of crusades began in 1099 which was largely Barons’ crusade. The crusader armies occupied Anatolia, Syria including Edessa, Antioch and Tripoli and sacked Jerusalem in 1099.

However, Seljuk *amir* Zengi, ruler of Mosul, in 1144 wrested Endessa from the Franks. Zengi's son Nur al-Din occupied several strongholds of the crusaders in Syria and Palestine. These victories ignited Pope Eugenius III to call upon Europe's nobility to 'defend the eastern church'. Thus began the Second Crusade which lasted from 1146-1148. After Nur al-Din's death in 1174 the command of the *jihadi* armies was taken over by Salah al-Din, his lieutenant in Egypt. He inflicted a crushing defeat over the crusader's army in the Battle of Hattin (1187) in north Palestine and occupied Jerusalem.

Once again Pope gave call for the Third Crusade (1189-1192). Even after Salah al-Din's death in 1193 *jihad* continued throughout the thirteenth century. The fearsome Mamluk general Baybars (d. 1277) succeeded in pushing back crusaders from Levant. There followed a number of crusades: two led by French king Louis IX, canonised as St. Louis (1214-1270).

With the establishment of the Ottoman empire under the aegis of Osman made the crusader's dream to occupy Jerusalem almost impossible. There were series of clashes. The Ottoman Sultan Murad defeated the Serbian army in the Battle of Kosovo Field (1389); in 1389 Ottoman Sultan Bayazid I defeated Hungarian, French and German crusaders at the Battle of Nicopolis (Hungary). Ottoman ruler Mehmed II (r. 1444-1446; 1451-1481) finally occupied the last Byzantine bastion Constantinople in 1453. Now all the hopes of the crusaders to ever occupy Jerusalem were lost.

However, Islamic interactions with the West had deep cultural impacts. At that time Arab Islam was the source of ideas for the West. The impact of Rhazes and Avicenna on European medical sciences was long standing. The West also learned astronomy, mathematics, chemistry and optics from the Arabs. Arabic translations of Greek works made the Greek knowledge available to the West. The Arabic translations of Aristotle's works by Ibn Rushd (known to the Europeans as Averroes; 1126-1198) were read in the European Universities. The knowledge of zero and technology of paper making also travelled to the West through the Arab inroads who in turn acquired the knowledge and learned the techniques from India and China respectively.

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) Discuss controversy about succession following Prophet Muhammad's death.

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- 2) Discuss the expansion of Islamic territories under Caliph Umar.

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- 3) Why were the Muslim armies so successful over their Byzantine and Sassanid rivals?

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- 4) What were Crusades? Why were they fought?

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13.7 SUMMARY

The rise of Islam was the most significant event in the Arabian peninsula which shook not only the peninsula but also had far reaching impact across the world. It was Prophet Muhammad who brought the scattered tribes of the Arabian peninsula under one polity. However, the rise of Islam was the result of much deeper socio-economic changes that were taking place in the peninsula. The Arabian peninsula's advantageous position as trading hub, being situated at the crossroads between the Byzantine and the Sassanids and down south connected with the Indian Ocean network through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, chiefly provided them the economic leverage and superiority. However, Nativists emphasise that the success of the Prophet lay more in unifying the Arab tribes than in the increasing 'richness in trade'. After Prophet's death Abu Bakr and Umar focussed largely on the expansion and consolidation of the borders of Islam which they could successfully do by following the policy of non-interference, while not disturbing the local socio-political and economic set up nor did they emphasize upon conversions of the local populace (Jews and Christians) to Islam. During Usman's rule further consolidation took place and administrative issues settled. However, he was partial towards his clan, the Ummayyad, and appointed them on key positions giving rise to dissatisfaction. By Ali's period schism in Islam grew and Muslims got divided into two major groups — the Sunnis and the Shias, the third one, even more radical, was that of the Kharijites who were ultimately responsible for the murder of Ali, the fourth of the Pious Caliphs, details of which we would be dealing in **Unit 15**.

13.8 KEYWORDS

Coptic

: The term in Greek means Egyptian. It denotes largely Christians of Egypt. During the Coptic period (4-9 century CE) largely Egyptian population was Christian.

Isnad/Sanad

: Authentication of *Hadis* through chain of

transmission (countless numbers of narrators;
scholars of *Hadis*)

Monophysites

- : They believed that Jesus had only one single ‘nature’ (divine or synthesis of divine and human) against the dyophysites who believed in two ‘natures’ of the Christ — one divine and the other human. Monophysites were referred to the Christians of the Eastern Roman Empire who rejected the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.

Nestorian

- : They are the Christians of the Church of the East, the Syriac Church, also called the Persian Church. It was established in 410 CE. The Council of Ephesus condemned Nestorius (386-451), leading to the Nestorian schism. Subsequently Nestorius’ supporters migrated to Sasanian Persia. Nestorianism emphasized upon the divine and human natures of Jesus.

Papyrology

- : Documents written on papyri.

13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Section 13.2
- 2) See Section 13.2
- 3) See Section 13.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Section 13.3
- 2) See Section 13.3
- 3) See Section 13.3

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) See Sub-section 13.4.1
- 2) See Sub-section 13.4.2
- 3) See Sub-section 13.4.3

Check your Progress-4

- 1) See Section 13.5
- 2) See Section 13.5
- 3) See Section 13.5
- 4) See Section 13.6

13.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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13.11 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

The Birth of Islam: Muhammad, the Preacher

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU1tHggYR6k>

Rise of Islam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uvq59FPgx88>