

transformations within Makkah and made the effective regulation of its external relations a necessity so as to safeguard its commercial interests, resulted in the development of several institutions, such as *ṣadaqah* (charitable offerings), *rifādah* (support), *siqāyah* (providing water to the pilgrims to Makkah), *ilāf* (a pact guaranteeing safety and safe-conduct), *ḥums* (those people inhabiting the *ḥaram* at the time of the Prophet's appearance who observed rigorous religious taboos), and *ḥilf* (confederacy). However, institutional development in Makkah proved inadequate to the demands created by rapid economic progress.

The resultant problems gradually formed the material basis which caused the advent of Islam. Islam, in turn, sought to promote Makkah's commercial capitalism through, for example, the concept of a monotheistic God's absolute and everlasting authority, which solved the problems associated with the breakdown of pre-Islamic Makkah's tribal authority, and through its concept of an ummah which transcended tribal barriers and made social and economic mobility possible.

After suggesting that Islam suited the interests of Makkah's merchants, the author surveys early Islamic history using commerce as his point of reference. He argues that already during the reign of 'Uthmān, the pre-Islamic merchant class (the "Traditional Segment") had virtually monopolized the state machinery and made it an instrument for promoting its commercial interests. This policy was continued by the Umayyad state with great success. The assertion of the Traditional Segment's economic interests, however, came to be bitterly opposed by those Muslims who owed their position only to Islam (the "New Segment") and not to any pre-Islamic factors. 'Umar, during his reign, tried to balance these contending parties. However, during the reign of his successor 'Uthmān, members of the New Segment became so disenchanted with his policies that they murdered him. This group later identified with 'Alī. As 'Alī's coalition was a collection of groups with different interests, some of them left and became known as the Khawārij. The victory of Mu'āwiyah over 'Alī during the arbitration after the Battle of Ṣiffīn cleared the way for the former to undertake the internal reconquest of the ummah and represented the final victory of the Traditional Segment.

This is the substance of Ibrahim's argument. The book ends with an epilogue which briefly alludes to some subsequent historical developments in the Umayyad and the early 'Abbasid periods. He concludes that although Islam lent itself to the promotion of commercial capitalist interests during its first two centuries, its spirit was in fact neither capitalistic nor feudalistic, although historically it has been able to adapt itself to the dominant social forces.

The following observations may now be made. The thesis that the advent of Islam is essentially a product of the socioeconomic situation created by

the development of commercial capitalism in Makkah is essentially a reiteration of Montgomery Watt's ideas.¹ Ibrahim's work does, however, mark an advance due to its greater detailing of Makkah's commercial milieu, the rise of Islam within it, and its tracing of continuities of pre-Islamic commercial trends into Islamic times.

However, while Ibrahim's reconstruction of the process whereby the Banū 'Umayyah gradually acquired economic and political power in Makkah and then used it to establish the 'Umayyad caliphate is noteworthy, his attempt to link the advent of Islam with the development of merchant capital is rather unconvincing. For instance, he does not explain why, if Islam was so eminently suited to the Makkan merchants' interests, did they so bitterly oppose it until the end?² Perhaps more importantly, as Patricia Crone pointed out in her current polemic against Watt's view on the nature of Makkah's trade, if Islam was a product of Makkan commerce and its attendant problems, why was it first accepted in Medinah, a city in which Makkah's economic conditions did not exist?³

Ibrahim's account of the first civil war is, on the whole, disappointing. The substance of his interpretation follows the arguments of Martin Hinds⁴ and M. A. Shaban⁵ and does not add anything significant to them. Throughout, the explanation is reduced to the conflicting economic and social interests of the New Segment and the Traditional Segment and, while it is recognized that the "conflict . . . was within an Islamic framework," no effort is made either to explicate this framework or to give it any importance.

¹For Watt's other works, see: *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); *Islam and the Integration of Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); and *Muhammad's Mecca: History in the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988).

²Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 235.

³*Ibid.* While Crone's argument that if Islam emerged in response to the needs of Makkan trade it would not have been accepted first in Medinah (where economic conditions were very different) is valid, her further assumption that because Makkah's merchant class rejected Islam because it could not solve those very problems is not valid. This can be shown by pointing out the fact that the solutions provided by Islam were opposed by the rich Makkan merchants who were intent upon maintaining their current status at the expense of solving Makkah's larger economic problems. But, *pace* Ibrahim, to say that the Prophet's mission could offer a solution to Makkah's economic problems is not the same, however, as saying that it was *suited* to the interests of the rich Makkan merchants nor that his mission was itself inspired by these conditions.

⁴M. Hinds, "Kufan Political Alignments and Their Background in the Mid-Seventeenth Century A.D.," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* II (1971): 346-67. Also see his article "The Murder of Caliph 'Uthmān," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* III (1972): 450-69.

⁵M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

The discussion, moreover, is often very vague. For example, he notes that the conflict between the New Segment and the Traditional Segment “was expressed in two opposing views of the office of the caliph and its powers” (p. 166), but nowhere does he explain what these two opposing views of the nature of the caliphate may have been. When summing up the New Segment’s stand following ‘Uthmān’s murder, the author writes: “In essence the New Segment said that the Traditional Segment should accept the entire transformation brought about by the death of ‘Uthman” (p. 169). But as to what this “transformation” may have been, and whether it was brought about immediately on the caliph’s death or not, the reader is left to draw his/her own conclusions.

Unfortunately, the author displays a tendency to indulge in oversimplifications and sweeping generalizations, especially in the epilogue. This adds nothing to his originality, but does detract from the worth of this book. One is moreover struck by the author’s overriding concern to link all developments to economic causes, a concern which sometimes results in rather crude and misleading interpretations. Thus, for instance, ‘Umar II’s policy of ameliorating the conditions of the *mawālī* (freed slaves) is inaccurately accounted for exclusively in terms of the commercial expansion which occurred during the time of the Umayyad caliphate. This condition then necessitated their fuller participation in the community’s life so as to enable commerce to maintain its accelerated activity (pp. 191 ff). Comments on al Ma’mūn’s religious policy are rather more curious: his victory in the civil war against his brother “brought another threat against the landowners when he adopted the Mu’tazilī dogma and began to enforce their doctrine of the ‘Createdness of the Qur’an’ . . . The most vehement opponent of the Mu’tazilah and the doctrine of the ‘Createdness of the Qur’an’ was Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal . . . himself a petty landlord” (p. 192). How the theological tenets of the Mu’tazilah could threaten landed interests is accounted for by the suggestion that postulating a “created,” and thus a temporally limited rather than eternal, Qur’an could possibly extend the scope for the exercise of caliphal authority. This authority, when brought to bear on taxation, could then adversely affect the interests of the landowning classes (p. 193)! In opposing this doctrine, Ibn Ḥanbal, “himself a petty landlord,” was thus in fact defending landed interests.

This reviewer has no wish to deny that helpful light can often be shed on sociopolitical and sometimes also on intellectual and religious problems and developments by referring to relevant economic factors. In general, however, the influence of economic factors is far more subtle (even if and when it is substantial) than a simple one-to-one correspondence (of the kind the author attempts with reference to al Ma’mūn’s religious policy, for instance, or more generally with the rise of Islam itself) would allow. Furthermore, the influence of economic or, for that matter, of any other factors on given

historical developments has to be clearly demonstrated rather than merely suggested or asserted.

To conclude then, it may be stated that although this book addresses an extremely important period in the history of Islam, its one-sided perspective precludes it from making an important contribution to our understanding. However, it does have the merit of emphasizing and trying to trace historical continuity between the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods. Its interpretation of early Islamic history in terms of economic factors and developments could also have been useful if, in highlighting their role, other factors as well had been considered for the purposes of historical accuracy and interpretative balance.

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من إصدارات المعهد العالمي للفكر الإسلامي



نحو نظام نقدي عادل
للدكتور محمد عمر شابرا
الكتاب الحائز على جائزة
الملك فيصل العالمية
(١٩٩٠/١٤١٠)

الطبعة الثانية المنقحة والمزودة

ترجمة: سيد محمد سكر
مراجعة: د. رفيق المصري

هذا الكتاب يعتبر أول دراسة علمية شاملة لأهداف النظام
النقدي الإسلامي ومؤسساته وعملياته، ولا ريب أن العدالة تقع
في طليعة هذه الأهداف التي لا غنى عنها..

غلاف عادي: ١٢ر٩٥ دولاراً
تجليد فاخر: ١٩ر٩٥ دولاراً

٤٠١ صفحة