

Qur'anicization of Religio-Political Discourse in the Umayyad Period

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During its first two centuries (roughly 7th-8th centuries C.E.), the followers of Muḥammad established an empire stretching from Spain to Central Asia, and developed both a full array of political institutions and a noteworthy tradition of statecraft. The goal of the following essay is to explore briefly the development of the terminology that was used to describe these imperial institutions and concepts of statecraft. The evolution of early Islamic political terminology is of special importance historically because it reflects a fundamental shift in the way members of the early community thought about themselves. The process represents, in effect, what we might term the “Islamization of the state,” and it bears heavy implications both for our understanding of Islam’s early history and for how modern thinkers (whether Muslim or non-Muslim) interpret the political content of the Islamic tradition. This is a matter of no mean significance in a time when Western and Islamic political values appear to be on a collision course.

Islamic tradition, of course, presents Muḥammad as having established Islam as we know it already during his own lifetime, in complete form and in all its details. There is good reason to believe, however, that in fact Muḥammad began not a new religion or new religious confession, but a monotheistic revival movement. According to this view, the community Muḥammad founded, and the movement he started, was open to, and included as members, pious monotheists of all kinds. It embraced those who followed Muḥammad and the teachings of the Qur’ān; but it also included righteous monotheists of other kinds, such as Jews and Christians who shared a belief in the need to live in observant obedience to God’s law as enshrined in their scriptures: the Torah and the Gospels. While some Qur’ānic verses suggest that righteous Christians and Jews were to be counted among those who would attain salvation (Donner 2002-2003, 17-24), the most obvious bit of textual evidence for this inclusion of Jews, at least, in Muḥammad’s new community is found in the *ṣaḥīfa* document (or “Constitution of Medina”). It states clearly that various Jewish groups of Yathrib constituted part of the *umma* or new community established by Muḥammad (Lecker, 2004: *infra*).

This monotheistic revival movement we can best call the “Believers’ movement,” because its adherents seem to have referred to themselves as “Believers” (*mu’minun*). We see this usage clearly in the Qur’ān, which is the first text that provides us with reliable information about the thought-world of the early community (Donner, 1998: 35-61). The word *mu’min*, “Believer,” or others related to it (such as the phrase “O you who believe”) is used almost 1000 times in the

Qur'ân and is clearly the term designating those to whom the Qur'ân is addressed—its original audience; no other term is used as frequently (*muslim* and related words, for example, occur fewer than one hundred times in the Qur'ân).

After the death of Muḥammad in 632 CE, the Believers' movement was headed by a series of leaders who were called *amîr al-mu'minîn*, "commander of the Believers." They were the ones who organized the rapid expansion of a new state organized by the Believers throughout the Near East, and the first creation of an Empire. After perhaps 75 years or a century, however, this more "open" understanding of the nature of the community founded by the prophet began to be replaced by a narrower sense of community, according to which only those who followed Qur'ânic law really qualified as Believers. This change in self-conception was accompanied by a shift in terminology, whereby the Qur'ânic terms "Islam" and "Muslim" were elevated to become the primary designators of this new religious confession and its adherents. Only after this shift in understanding had begun, that is after about the year 700 CE, were the new conceptions and terms projected back onto the beginnings of the movement, so that Muḥammad and his companions retrospectively were considered to be, like their eventual successors, also "Muslims" in the later sense. This change took hold rather slowly and unevenly, however, and there is ample evidence that the earlier symbiosis in the operation of the empire between Muslims and non-Muslims (to use the later terminology) survived well into the 2nd/8th century. For example, we read in numerous sources (particularly Christian sources of the late 7th and 8th centuries) of Christians or Zoroastrians who served as tax-collectors or other officials of the Islamic state--some even in high positions, such as Saint John of Damascus, who was what we might today call "prime minister" in the administration of the Umayyad rulers (between ca. 685 and perhaps 725 CE) (Sahas, 1972: 32-48).

This shift in terminology, from "Believers" to "Muslims," is part of a broader process by which Islam, as we know it, was crystallizing out of the matrix of the earlier Believers' movement. The hallmarks of this process were an increased emphasis on the status of Muḥammad as prophet, and an increased emphasis on the Qur'ân as the final and most perfect revelation of God's word. It is not that Muḥammad and the Qur'ân were not known in the earlier, "Believerish" phase of the movement, although the absence of robust documentation for this earliest phase in the community's development makes certainty on this question, as on most others, beyond our grasp. But it may be that Muḥammad and the Qur'ân were taken for granted, considered so obviously part of the fabric of the new movement that they required no special emphasis among the earliest Believers. The Qur'ân may have been, for them, simply one of several authoritative sources of spiritual guidance; similarly, their memories of Muḥammad's role as social and political leader of his community may have masked, for a time, his more unique status as prophet, as unique recipient of or conduit for God's word. Whatever the case may be, we can observe that in the Qur'ân and in the earliest surviving documents, the emphasis is clearly on the importance of God, and on God's unity. Muḥammad is scarcely mentioned in the Qur'ân, while God is ever-present; and the earliest coins follow closely the designs of Byzantine or Sasanian coins, with the addition only of short slogans such as "In the name of God" or "There is no God but God, who has no associate." The first known coin bearing name of Muḥammad, on the other hand, was minted more than a half century after Muḥammad's death, in the year 66 AH (685-6 CE) (Hoyland, 1997: 694). From then on, in contrast, the emphasis on Muḥammad as God's apostle or prophet becomes increasingly common on coins, and we more and more frequently see quotes recognizably drawn from the Qur'ân.

The increased emphasis on these two notions, then—Muḥammad as God's prophet, and the Qur'ân as God's revelation—clearly and decisively distinguished Qur'ânic Believers from other monotheists who had formerly been part of the Believers' movement, particularly from Christians and Jews. This shift was taking place just as the Qur'ânic Believers themselves were becoming known as Muslims (*muslimûn*). Part of this process was an apparently intentional program of re-labeling or re-naming established institutions of the state. The Umayyad rulers and their

entourage, as those in charge of what we can now call the Islamic empire, seem to have applied terminology derived from the Qur'ân to key institutions and concepts that had developed in the earlier, "Believerish" phase of the empire's rise. Their object in doing so was to legitimize their state, and their rule over the state, in terms of God's revealed word—a policy we can call "Qur'ânicization." It seems likely, moreover, that the process, once inaugurated by the Umayyads, was continued even after their downfall by the pious and others who wished to redefine the origins of their community as much as possible in terms that had by then become recognized as distinctively "Islamic," that is, as linked to the Qur'ân and the prophet Muḥammad.

The remainder of this essay will be devoted to discussing briefly a number of key terms and concepts that formed part of this shift in terminology. As we shall see, one of the main challenges we face in tracing this process of Qur'ânicization is to determine when a particular term came into use (and in just what meaning), since the copious traditions about the first century or so of the Islamic community found in later narrative sources frequently engage in "back-projection" of later terms, which they interject into earlier historical contexts in which those terms may not yet have been used, or in which they were used with a meaning different from the one they later acquired. Some otherwise valuable studies of Islamic political vocabulary and the use of Qur'ânic terminology suffer from the fact that they are based entirely on such later traditions (Al-Sayyid, 1984a; Al-Sayyid, 1984b; Al-Jomaih, 1988; Lewis, 1988; As-Sirry, 1990), which masks the shift from an early to a later, Qur'ânicized terminology. It is only by examining, in particular, the contemporary documentary sources for the early community and comparing their testimony with later narrative traditions that we can hope to see such shifts in terminology; unfortunately, even some studies that take documentary sources into account do not always sufficiently screen out information from later narrative traditions (e.g., Crone and Hinds, 1986).

Political Leadership

The most obvious and easily grasped example of Qur'ânicization—and among the most important—involves the terminology applied to the head of state. As already noted, the head of the Believers' movement was from the beginning called *amîr al-mu'minîn*, "commander of the Believers." This title captures nicely both the early movement's self-conception as a community of Believers and the idea that the one leading them had powers resembling those of a military commander (Arabic *amîr*). The inscriptions, papyri, and other truly documentary sources from the seventh century that refer to this personage—numbering perhaps two dozen in all—invariably refer to him as *amîr al-mu'minîn*, "commander of the Believers." Non-Muslim sources dating to the seventh or early eighth century CE also affirm this titulature: Byzantine texts, when they begin to refer to the ruler of the rival state, refer to him as *amiroulmoumin*, clearly an effort to render the Arabic *amîr al-mu'minîn* into Greek; Christian texts in Syriac call him *amîra d-mhaymnē*, the latter word (*mhaymnē*) being the Syriac equivalent of the Arabic *mu'minîn*, "Believers;" and the Frankish pilgrim Willibald in the 720s spoke of "the Saracen king whose name was *Mirmumnus*," another garbled version of the same title. The term even shows up in Chinese annals referring to leaders as early as the 650s. There can be no doubt, then, that the term *amîr al-mu'minîn* was the primary, indeed almost certainly the exclusive, term used to designate the leader of the community of Believers in the seventh century. Yet toward the end of the seventh century, the Umayyad *amîr al-mu'minîn* 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705) began to refer to himself in his coinage using a new term: *khalîfa* (Anglicized as "caliph"), literally "representative," "lieutenant," or possibly "successor." 'Abd al-Malik and his advisers evidently favored the new term because *amîr al-mu'minîn*, although long-established and well-understood by everyone, is not a term found in the Qur'ân. Indeed, even the first element of the title, *amîr*, does not occur in the Qur'ân. (*Amîr* is usually understood to mean "commander" or "one who gives orders" and, from its form, is possibly a South Arabic or Aramaic loan-word.) The new term, *khalîfa*, however, does appear in the Qur'ân, and it seems likely that this is why 'Abd al-Malik chose to call himself by this term. In the Qur'ân, the word *khalîfa* appears only a few times, and its meaning seems a bit vague; important, however, is the fact that it occurs in a phrase

that suggests some special relationship with divine authority (the phrase is *khalîfat Allâh*, “*khalîfa of God*”)—and it is in exactly this form, “*khalîfa of God*,” that the term *khalîfa* first appears on the coins of ‘Abd al-Malik as a designation of himself, the ruler. This represents, then, a clear case of “Qur’ânicization.” ‘Abd al-Malik, as ruler, attempted to link the established office of head of state, *amîr al-mu’minîn*, with the Qur’ân (and hence with divine authority) by re-naming it using this Qur’ânic word, *khalîfa*.

The Umayyads’ effort to replace the older term did not succeed at once, for the term *amîr al-mu’minîn* continued in use for many centuries alongside *khalîfa* as a designation for the ruler. Later Muslim chroniclers, however, favored the new terminology and, somewhat misleadingly, applied it retrospectively to ‘Abd al-Malik’s predecessors, all of whom they call, anachronistically, “caliphs.” The position of head of the Islamic state, we can say, had by the time of the later Muslims chroniclers been terminologically (and conceptually) Qur’ânicized. It was this later application of the term *khalîfa* to early heads of state that misled some scholars to claim that the term *khalîfa* was also in early use in this way (Crone and Hinds, 1986), but the silence of the documentary sources on this point, all of which use *amîr al-mu’minîn*, is deafening; moreover, it has been shown convincingly that the Qur’ânic term *khalîfa* was not glossed by the earliest commentators to mean head of state (Al-Qâdî, 1988). That association was, as we have seen, a product of the policy of Qur’ânicization.

Communal Identity and Boundaries

More fundamental, but harder to trace, is a change we have already mentioned—the shift in terminology from “Believers” (*mu’minûn*) to “Muslims” (*muslimûn*) as the main way of referring to members of the community. With this change came a narrowing of the boundaries of the community to include only Qur’ânic Believers, so that those Christians and Jews who had hitherto been part of the Believers’ movement were now, so to speak, defined out of it. This change was paralleled by an increased use of, or emphasis on, the very word *islâm* as the designation for the movement itself.

Our difficulty in tracing this change arises for a couple of reasons; for one thing, both the word *mumin*, “Believer,” and the words *muslim* and *islâm* are found in the Qur’ân and sometimes—rarely—used in early documentary texts, so it becomes important to establish as securely as possible exactly what these terms meant in the particular texts in which they are used, and to see if they evolved in meaning over time. This is, of course, always a tricky thing to do when dealing, as we are, with texts that are limited in number, insecurely dated, and often fragmentary and poorly contextualized. Some passages in the Qur’ân suggest that the word *muslim* originally referred essentially to outward, perhaps merely political, submission to the community, whereas *îmân* (“Belief”) and *mu’min* (“Believer”) referred to inner, spiritual acceptance of the ideas of monotheism and Muḥammad’s prophecy, and a commitment to live righteously in the community in accordance with the stringent dictates of God’s revealed law. Most striking in this regard is Qur’ân 49: 14, which reads, “The bedouins [*al-a’râb*] have said, ‘*âmannâ* [we believe].’ Say [to them]: ‘You do not believe; rather, say “*aslamnâ* [we have submitted],” for Belief [*îmân*] has not yet entered your hearts.’” As we have seen, the early community seems to have included some Christians and Jews among the Believers, and the preliminary evidence suggests that the shift to “Islam” begins in the last quarter of the first Islâmîc century (end of the seventh century CE)—just at the time the Umayyad rulers are beginning to call themselves “caliphs.” The evidence includes such documents as the interior inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (690s C.E.), which criticize the concept of the Trinity in such a way as to draw a line between Christians (or, at least, trinitarian Christians) and the core of the community; it is also around this time that we begin to see increased textual emphasis on the significance of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission.

Tracing this set of shifts is also difficult, however, because the later Muslim community was intent on disguising the fact that their community began as a Believers’ movement with a

broader, more inclusive sense of membership than eventually came to prevail once the community had redefined itself as a community of Muslims (i.e., excluding Christians and other non-Qur'anic monotheists). Following the period of redefinition and the coalescence of their identity as Muslims (late seventh and early eighth centuries CE), the community produced in the eighth and later centuries a veritable flood of reports that projected the later understanding of their Muslim identity back to the very origins of the Believers' movement. This effort included many reports that attempt to equate the meanings of the terms "Believer" and "Muslim" (even though the Qur'ân text itself shows them to mean different things, as we have seen). They also employed other stratagems designed to persuade everyone that "Islam," as understood in their day, went right back to the time of the prophet and sprang, completely and in all its details, from his teaching.

An interesting side development related to this shift from "Believers" to "Muslims" and the enthronement of the concept of *islâm* as the new designator for the community was the formulation of the phrase *dâr al-islâm*, the "abode of Islâm," to refer to all areas ruled by the Islamic state, and its antipode, *dâr al-ḥarb*, "the abode of war," as a designation for all areas outside the state. Neither of these phrases is found in the Qur'ân. They seem to develop in juridical discussions of the mid-eighth century CE, clearly following on the emergence of the term *islâm* as primary designator for the community, and the hints I have found so far suggest that they developed in the court circles of the Umayyad caliphs of Syria, who were (until their overthrow in 750 C.E.) responsible for leading the Muslim community's military efforts against the Byzantine empire. The terms *dâr al-islâm* and *dâr al-ḥarb* may have evolved to address questions relating to the treatment of Byzantine subjects who found themselves in Muslim territory, and conversely, to offer guidelines (particularly on matters of ritual observance) for Muslims who found themselves, so to speak, on the wrong side of the fence—that is, in Byzantine territory.

Foreign Warfare

The Qur'ân uses the term *jihâd*, which essentially means "striving" or "exerting oneself," in a variety of ways, ranging from one's inner struggle against sinful desires to violent struggle against unbelievers who attack the Believers. In the Qur'ân, *jihâd* appears especially in the phrase *jihâd fî sabil Allâh*, "striving in the way of God." The word *jihâd* became very prominent in the Muslim juridical literature of the second Islamic century (eighth century CE) and later, particularly in the sense of "holy war," that is, war directed against non-Muslim states or communities (Cook, 2005; Bonner, 2006; Landau-Tasseron, 2004). Indeed, it came to be associated specifically with the military campaigns organized by the caliphs against the Islamic state's external enemies. Islamic legal texts of this and later periods (that is, from the 8th century CE onwards) usually present *jihâd* as a duty incumbent on the community as a whole, rather than on each individual Muslim. This might be understood in two ways: on the one hand, it can clearly be understood as relieving individual Muslims of the duty of undertaking *jihâd* as long as the caliph is actively pursuing *jihâd* on behalf of the community. On the other, it might be considered as tantamount to making conduct of *jihâd* a monopoly of the state—in effect, barring individual Muslims from launching *jihâd*-warfare on their own initiative, without the sanction of their rulers.

Much remains to be clarified about the historical evolution of the meaning of the word *jihâd*, but it is clear that these later understandings of *jihâd* differ significantly from the meaning it seems to have in the Qur'ân, where the word is addressed especially to individuals and where it embraces a wide variety of actions among which fighting or violent coercion is only one option. This appears to be another example of Qur'anicization, whereby the Qur'anic word *jihâd* came to be applied as a standard term to warfare against non-Believers that had earlier been described originally using other terms, such as *qital* ("fighting") or *ghazwa* ("raiding"), but only a thorough examination of early documentary sources will allow us to test this hypothesis. It does seem, however, that in this

instance we see the purveyors of Islamic law in the eighth and later centuries taking a term that in the Qur'ân seems to impinge upon the individual Believer and applying it to the state—even though the concept of the state, or any specific guidance on governance, is almost entirely absent from the Qur'ân.

The Judiciary

Like any state, the empire erected by the early Believers was faced with disputes among members of its community, and it seems likely that the early *amîr al-mu'minîn*s took such issues seriously in view of the main goal of the Believers' movement, which was to vanquish iniquity and establish a righteous (and, therefore, presumably just) public order in preparation for the Last Judgment. Papyrus documents from the first Islamic century/seventh century C.E. describe cases in which provincial governors, or the village headmen who often served as their subordinates, were called upon to settle civil complaints. Sometime in the eighth century, however, we begin to find a new designation for the person responsible for passing judgments: *qadi*, “judge.” This term does not appear, to the best of my knowledge, in any papyrus or other document dating from the first century A.H./seventh century C.E. It does occur once in the Qur'ân, in the general sense of “one who decides something,” but the related verb (*qada*) occurs many times, so the later use of the term *qadi* would very likely have evoked echoes of Qur'ânic discourse. This seems, then, to be another instance in which an existing political institution or practice was terminologically “Qur'ânicized,” that is, re-labeled with terminology drawn from the Qur'ân, as a way of enhancing the state's claim to Islamic legitimacy. In this case, the ruler seems to have initiated a new position or office, designated by the term *qâdî*, to handle judicial procedures that heretofore had been part of the duties of a governor.

The Islamic era/calendar

The dating era that we usually call the “Islamic” or “*hijra*” era, beginning in the year 622 CE, provides another interesting example of an effort to project “Islamic” values back to the beginning of the Believers' movement through creative re-naming. For the historian, there are two very striking facts about this era or dating system. The first fact is that we find it already in place at a very early time in the history of the community. There are quite a number of actual documents from the first “Islamic” century that provide an exact date as part of the document's text—these include papyri, inscriptions, and, above all, thousands of coins minted by the leaders of the Believers' movement or by their subordinates. Some of these documents are astonishingly early, including some early papyri dating to the year 22 (Bell, 1928). This fact obviously has very important implications for our understanding of the nature of the early Believers' movement. In recent years some scholars have argued that Islam first emerged as the consequence not of an organized movement of some kind, but as the result of a series of fortuitous accidents: the collapse of the great empires, the conquest of parts of their territory by uncoordinated tribes of Arabian nomads, etc. (Sharon 1988; Nevo and Koren, 2003; Popp 2005). But it is difficult to defend the idea that the expansion of Muḥammad's community was some kind of “accident,” that is, that it was the consequence of a haphazard series of unrelated events, in light of the existence of a uniform system of dating, which implies that there was some kind of central ideology underlying the movement. The mere existence of a single, new dating system does not tell us what this ideology may have been—perhaps it was related to apocalypticism?—but it does support the contention that the expansion was the result of some kind of coordinated movement.

The second striking fact about this era or dating system, however, is really just as revealing for the historian: it is that most of the early datings provide only the year (or day, month, and year), but do not provide the name of the era itself. That is, a document will say simply something like, “This was written in the year 55,” without any indication of the era—year 55 of what. Later Islamic tradition, of course, claims that these dates are in what we usually call the “*hijra* era,” that is, that the era commemorates the prophet Muḥammad's *hijra* or emigration from Mecca to

Medina in 622 CE. This event marked the moment when the Believers' movement first assumed the status of an autonomous political community, and would indeed be a very appropriate starting-point for the community of Believers' dating system. But the fact remains that none of the early documents—no single one—uses the term *hijra* to designate the era. A very few, however, do designate the era, but using another term: a papyrus in the Louvre, for example, refers to “the year 42 *min qaḍā' al-mu'minîn*”, “in the jurisdiction of the Believers” (Râghib, 2007), and a few others with this terminology are found in Vienna. This provides us with further documentary confirmation that the members of the community founded by Muḥammad at first thought of themselves as “Believers,” and that for a half-century at least they viewed their government as being a manifestation and application this concept of righteous Belief. But the question then becomes: when did the association of this era with the *hijra*, rather than with the Believers' movement, begin? One simply does not find the term “years of the *hijra*” used in documents from the first “*hijra*” century, and the learned papyrologist Yûsuf Râghib has suggested to me that it may not really begin to appear in papyri until the third century “of the *hijra*” (personal communication, 2008). It is all the more striking that the era is not linked to the word *hijra* until so late, since it has been suggested that the term *hijra* was used in the early community to refer to military service (Crone, 1994); this is presumably why the Believers are first referred to by some seventh-century Greek and Syriac sources as *hagarenoi* and *mhaggrâyē*, derived from the Arabic *muhâjirûn*, “those who make *hijra*.” It seems, then, that in this case, too, we have an example of a later attempt to associate a well-established practice—the practice of dating—with the prophet Muḥammad (through his *hijra*). Renaming the era as that of the *hijra* enhanced the legitimacy of the practice of dating itself, and of the community and state that was associated with the practice, in terms that were “Islamic”—that is, tied to the prophet and Qur'ân—but in this case, perhaps just as important, the renaming helped efface the memory of the more ecumenical nature of the early community as a “Believers' movement.”

Expansion of the Community

In classical Islamic tradition, which crystallized in the second and third centuries AH and later, the campaigns of expansion of the early community are referred to as *futûḥ* (sing. *fath*), commonly translated as “conquest.” The thousands of reports about this heroic chapter in the history of the community were collected to form one of the great themes of Islamic historiography (Noth, 1994; Donner, 1998). It is not clear, however, what term or terms were used to refer to the expansion of the early community of Believers, including its conquest or subjugation of cities, at the time of the events themselves. The word *fath* in Arabic, as is well known, means “opening,” not “conquest,” and to render the notion of conquest words derived from other Arabic roots might seem more obvious, some of which are actually used in the Qur'ân, such as *q-h-r* or *z-f-r*. It is noteworthy, however, that in the Qur'ân the verb *fataḥa* ‘alâ is sometimes used when God bestows a great favor on someone (e.g. Qur'ân 6: 44). It seems that Islamic traditionists adopted this usage in coining the term they used to designate the expansion of the community, the individual moments of which—such as the defeat of an enemy army or the incorporation of a new town, whether by military or peaceful means—were termed *fath*, reflecting the later theological view that these events were act of grace and evidence of God's favor for the community of Believers. Whatever original words may have been used to discuss the expansion, subsequent Islamic tradition came to favor a Qur'ân-inspired term to refer to it (Donner, 1998: 174-82; Robinson, 2001-6; Donner, in press).

Civil Wars

Just as Islamic tradition adopted a Qur'ânic word to refer to the expansion process of the early community, so too it turned to the Qur'ân for a designation of the violent struggles that pitted different factions of the ruling elite of the early community against one another in a struggle for leadership—in particular, the first and second civil wars (656-660 and 680-692 respectively). In this case, the word chosen was *fitna*, which in the Qur'ân and in Arabic generally means

“temptation,” “seduction,” and “enticement,” primarily of the worldly kind: sexual temptation, or the temptation posed by wealth or power. Again, it is not known what terms, if any, were used by actual participants in the early civil wars to refer to those events or to the motivations of various actors in them. The Qur’ānic word *fitna*, however, conveyed unequivocally the sentiment of traditionists, for whom the open struggles for power among Companions of the prophet posed something of a theological problem. By their time (eighth century CE and later) the doctrine that all Companions of the prophet Muḥammad (ṣaḥāba) were paragons of virtue had come to prevail, so open fighting among them could most gracefully be explained away by arguing that one or another Companion had succumbed to the temptations of the world. Like *futūḥ*, *fitna* became one of the main themes of classical Islamic historiography (Donner, 1998: 184-90; cf. As-Sirry, 1990).

Frontier Outposts

A wide variety of institutions that developed during the early Islamic period came to be known under the term *ribāṭ*. They included buildings that might be described as fortified outposts, border posts, fortresses, observation posts, watchtowers, caravanserais, and Ṣūfī convents or monasteries; and the architectural forms they assumed were as diverse as their functions (Borrut and Picard, 2003; cf. Chabbi, 1995). This diversity of form and function has posed a challenge to researchers, many of whom have struggled to identify the essential feature (in either form or function) that qualified a building as a *ribāṭ*—the assumption being that the word has a single basic meaning that must be applicable to any institution so called.

It is invariably noted in such discussions that the word *ribāṭ* occurs once in the Qur’ān, and in two other passages the Qur’ān uses a related verbal form, all of which seem to occur in the context of Believers making preparations for war “in God’s way,” but the passages are quite vague. It seems likely that we are dealing here with another example of Qur’ānicization, in which traditionists (and perhaps people in general) came to apply the Qur’ānic word *ribāṭ* to diverse institutions and practices simply to give them the cachet of being something associated with positive effort for the faith, sometimes but not always in a military context. There is no reason, then, to believe that all the establishments that bear the designation *ribāṭ* will have a similar function or form, and we can assume that depending on their actual functions, they may have been referred to by a variety of terms (e.g., *qal’a*, *miṣr*, *burj*, etc.) before they came to be identified as *ribāṭs*.

The foregoing examples provide sufficient evidence that we can begin to discern a pattern. Once those who followed the Qur’ān had decided that they, and only they, were truly “Believers,” sometime around the year 700 CE and thereafter, they began to re-name key institutions of the empire and community their predecessors in the Believers’ movement had created, so as to link them to the Qur’ān and to the prophet, Muḥammad, whom they considered to have been the vehicle of the Qur’ān’s revelation. In doing so, they were simply attempting to construct a strong basis for religious legitimation of their government—something they tried to do also in other ways, such as by fostering the collection of historical traditions about the life of the prophet Muḥammad and his early community, or by constructing major buildings at important religious sites, such as ‘Abd al-Malik’s Dome of the Rock, on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. But in the process of redefining themselves in this way they also did something more, and did so I think deliberately: they suppressed, or buried, or reinterpreted out of existence, almost all evidence that the movement originally started by Muḥammad had been a more open “Believers’ movement” than later Islam would be. Where Islam became focused exclusively on Muḥammad and the Qur’ān, the Believers’ movement had involved close association and cooperation with righteous non-Qur’ānic monotheists, particularly with Christian and Jewish Believers, with whom they had joined forces to bring to the world what they thought was a properly righteous and God-fearing way of life, enshrined in a stable and protective political order. This policy of “Qur’ānicization,” was thus one important part of the process by which the community founded by Muḥammad was

gradually transformed from a community of Believers into a community of Muslims. It was, however, a process that, while first set in motion by the Umayyads as rulers of the first Islamic state, continued after their fall from power in 750 CE. The practice of Qur'anicization had by then evidently acquired a momentum of its own, for subsequent generations of Muslims, in particular their intellectual and religious elites, saw as well as had the Umayyads that it was important to legitimize their community and its institutions in ways that linked them to the Qur'ân and the career of the prophet Muḥammad. The result was that much of the classical Islamic discourse about Islam's origins became cloaked in a veil of Qur'anic vocabulary that often obscures the realities of the early Believers' movement. To peer behind this veil, we must search diligently for further scraps of documentary evidence that might tell us how things looked before the process of Qur'anicization got underway.

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