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Religion, Culture, and the Secular
The Case of Islam

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1 Introduction

Why jump into a sea, where everything is seemingly fleeting, floating, and fluid? There is not a single concept that offers solid ground to stand on: 'religion' is problematic, 'culture' elusive, 'secularity' contested, and 'Islam' one big question mark. 'Identity', to name that which looms so large in modern contexts, fares no better. Yet jump we must if we are to do more than critique conceptualisations that we consider flawed, and instead provide what is expected of academics: critical reflection that does justice to the subject at hand, while at the same time speaking to wider intellectual, moral, and political concerns. This paper contributes to the debate on multiple secularities by discussing conceptualisations of religion and culture and their relevance to articulations of secularity 'in Islam'. Written from the perspective of historically grounded Islamic studies, with a focus on the period up to 1500, this paper nonetheless addresses current concerns, for while the secular and hints at secularity can be identified in pre-modern Muslim majority contexts, they only emerged as themes of theoretically informed debate in the modern period.

The illustration shows Kay Khusraw crossing Lake Zara, facing all sorts of dangers. Safavid *Shahname* 1590–1600. Washington, Freer Sackler Gallery FS-S1986.265_001.

Islam invites reflection on the concepts of religion and culture because, as a global phenomenon with a historical depth spanning well over a millennium, it has been plural from an early date. Plurality evolved into diversity as Islam expanded geographically and socially to become a world religion (well before world religions were supposedly "invented" by European scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries). To identify the 'Islam' resulting from these processes, the interplay of religion and culture, or civilisation, has been regularly invoked. Significantly, culture has usually been defined in relation to religion, as 'Islamic culture.' As Louis Gardet stated several decades ago:

> Islam is a religion. It is also, almost inseparably from this, a community, a civilization and a culture. It is true that many of the countries through which the Qur'anic faith spread already possessed ancient and important cultures. Islam absorbed these cultures, and assimilated itself to them in various ways, to a far greater extent than it attempted to supplant them. But in doing this, it provided them with attributes in common, with a common attitude to God, to men and to the world…The history of the Muslim peoples and countries is thus a unique example of a culture with religious foundation, uniting the spiritual and the temporal, sometimes existing side by side with 'secular' cultures, but most often absorbing them by becoming very closely interlinked with them.[1]

The prevalent view today is that Islam is a religion that forged a civilisation, and that the two are difficult to keep apart. Islam is internally diversified along various lines, some of them manifested in 'sectarian' affiliation (such

1   Louis Gardet, "Religion and Culture," in *The Cambridge History of Islam: 2B Islamic Society and Civilization*, ed. Peter Holt, Ann K. S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 569. The claim to uniqueness should be treated with caution, as should several other claims contained within these few sentences. Islam is not as unique as Gardet and others may think. 'Catholic culture', 'Protestant culture', and perhaps even more so, 'Jewish culture' have been subject to intense debate regarding their constituent parts. If one were to look beyond the three monotheistic religions, Confucianism would offer itself up for inspection. More on this below.

as Sunni, Shi'i, or Alevi), others in specific understandings of theology and piety (Sufi, Salafi), and yet others tied to culture and region. Culture and region are seen as interlinked, and the Islamic world as divided into a number of culturally distinct zones (the Arab world, a Persianate sphere including Anatolia, the Indian subcontinent, and Central Asia, Southeast Asia, China, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe), within which Islam is considered to be inflected in characteristic ways. Some question the purpose and validity of drawing such lines, however, while others deny that Islam can even be Islam if it recognises culture as a factor 'inflecting' it. The controversy over 'European Islam' is a case in point. At the same time, contemporary discussions of Islam and Muslim identity, and about Islamic reform, ethics, and politics are frequently predicated on a *distinction* between religion and culture, with important consequences for the conceptualisation of secularity.[2] Examples range from the display of Islamic symbols in public space (is a specific form of veiling designed and/ or perceived as an expression of religion or of culture?), through issues of gender and governance to patterns of consumption, aesthetics, and the arts.

Current debates in both academia and politics, on religion, culture, and the secular are very much concerned with the effects of power, hegemony, exclusion, and marginalisation. But there is another element relevant to these issues, which relates to flexibility rather than hierarchy. In contemporary conceptualisations of an Islamic social, moral, and political order, many Muslim speakers regard Islam as a stable *religious* reference system (although this is not the term they would commonly use), one that is accessible in widely different settings. These settings are frequently labelled 'cultural.' Compared to those classified as religious references, cultural references are commonly considered to be softer, more malleable, and more easily negotiable.[3] The same applies to the boundaries derived from

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2   My focus therefore differs from Jeanette Jouili's in her important article "Islam and Culture", where she discusses the relevance of culture discourses for Muslim subjectivities in the West, as well as their potential for Islam and Muslims gaining recognition within their respective non-Muslim majority societies: Jeanette S. Jouili, "Islam and Culture: Dis/junctures in a Modern Conceptual Terrain," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61 (2019). Incidentally, I agree with Alexander Knysh that in many instances, the term 'subjectivity' is synonymous with (if not to say: identical to) 'identity' (Alexander Knysh, *Sufism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 242n55).

3   During an encounter in the early 2000s, heavily veiled young female academics in Yemen's capital San'a' declared the headscarf to be *religiously* mandatory and non-negotiable whereas according to them, the face veil was a *cultural* symbol, tied to Yemeni

them. The distinction that treats religion as the stable element and culture as flexible, however, exemplifies the very approach that many consider a fallacy. This approach posits what is said and *prescribed* by the normative texts, first and foremost the Qur'an and prophetic traditions (Sunna), as the universal norm, corresponding to the Great Tradition (in the singular). By contrast, it ascribes 'what local people just *do*' the secondary rank of local practice, corresponding to the Little Traditions (in the plural), which are non-binding and non-normative.[4] Yet it also refers to an established principle of Islamic legal reasoning that distinguishes between the stable and the flexible, or mobile, elements of Islam. More on this below.

As I have previously dealt with the political and legal aspects of secularity and secularisation in Islamic contexts, with a focus on the early modern and modern periods, I would like to refer readers to these publications rather than repeating my arguments here.[5] In the following, I will focus on particular distinctions relevant to the conceptualisation of religion and culture, adopting the very kind of approach that Shahab Ahmed rejected as misguided in his thought-provoking, rambling, and occasionally irritating *What is Islam?*:

> I will argue that the human and historical phenomenon of Islam is a field of meaning where truth is constituted, arranged, and lived in terms not of categories constituted by mutual exclusion, but rather by categories of

custom and tradition, and dispensable in a different sociocultural context (such as on a trip to Berlin). For them, culture was possibly socially or discursively constructed but not religion, or what they identified as religious.

4   See, e.g., Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 255.

5   See notably Gudrun Krämer, *Gottes Staat als Republik: Reflexionen zeitgenössischer Muslime zu Islam, Menschenrechten und Demokratie* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1999); Gudrun Krämer, "Gottes-Recht bricht Menschen-Recht: Theokratische Entwürfe im zeitgenössischen Islam," in *Theokratie und theokratischer Diskurs: Die Rede von der Gottesherrschaft und ihre politisch-sozialen Auswirkungen im interkulturellen Vergleich*, ed. Kai Trampedach and Andreas Pečar (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); Gudrun Krämer, "Secularity Contested: Religion, Identity and the Public Order in the Arab Middle East," in *Comparative Secularities: Religion and Modernity in the Global Age*, ed. Marian Burchardt, Matthias Middell, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015) and Gudrun Krämer, "Piety, Politics, and Identity: Configurations of Secularity in Egypt," in *A Secular Age beyond the West: Religion, Law and the State in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Mirjam Künkler, John Madeley, and Shylashri Shankar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Gudrun Krämer, *Der Vordere Orient und Nordafrika ab 1500* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2016) seeks to integrate these questions into a broader historical narrative.

mutual intersorption and inter-locution that run athwart and *conceptually frustrate the secular/religious binary or religion/culture division.* As such, the use of a vocabulary that seeks, in the first instance, to organize and understand phenomena by categorically distinguishing between religion and secular, or between religion and culture, simply does not help us clearly to *see* the human and historical phenomenon of Islam (and we should not imagine that the solution to this is to argue that, in Islam, everything is 'religion' – or that everything is 'culture').[6] [my emphases]

I disagree, except for the last clause, set in parentheses. I argue that for heuristic purposes, it is productive to retain the categories of religion and culture, or civilisation, and to keep them apart conceptually, especially in current debates on the nature of Islam. This approach prioritises analysis – literally taking things apart and looking at, or even for, cracks and fissures – over the search for an integrated whole. But I am not the only one to draw distinctions: Muslims past and present have done so in manifold ways. The difficulties inherent in the exercise are not to be underestimated: both religion and culture are notoriously difficult to define. There is overlap, ambiguity, and polyvalence, and boundaries are porous as well as shifting. What is more, to distinguish between categories in social and cultural analysis does not require setting them up as opposites, premised on mutual exclusion. If religion and culture are distinct, they are nonetheless entangled in multiple ways. The beauty of the term 'entanglement' lies precisely in the fact that it allows for distinction without assuming separation, that it explores the connections involved, that it is dynamic, and that it invites the search for actors, motives, sites, and driving forces without presupposing a prime mover. The following will require some engagement with Islamic studies, for without at least a cursory look at the theological and legal ramifications of the arguments exchanged, the echoes they evoke and the resonance they find among Muslim audiences cannot be understood. Without a sense of these echoes we will get no feel for what is at stake in the debates on religion, culture, and secularity 'in Islam'.

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6   Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 116.

2 Conceptual Issues
2.1 The Concept of Culture

Grand, sparkling, and mercurial, 'culture' tends to slip from the hands of those who seek to grasp it. Positions on the subject cover a wide range: there are those who still work with the assumptions of the *Kulturkreis* school, which regarded cultures as closed, homogeneous, enduring, and static units.[7] These assumptions have been thoroughly discredited among academics, but they continue to inform public discourse and identity politics in many parts of the world. For this reason, they cannot be ignored. Then, there are those who reject the concept of culture as a product of othering, which, based on an essentialist construction of an 'Other', first fixes its character, preferably with reference to a given textual tradition, to then use that Other as a negative foil for the superior 'Self'. Some want to abandon 'culture' altogether, declaring the concept to be irredeemably tied to essentialist assumptions. Within the wider field of Islamic studies, the rejectionist camp usually draws on post-colonial theory, with Edward Said's critique of Orientalism visibly in the foreground and Michel Foucault conspicuously in the back.[8] A minority of critics go further, claiming that the term 'culture' serves as a placeholder for 'race', and that boundary drawing based on perceived or alleged cultural differences is, in essence, racist ('cultural racism', 'racism without race')[9]. Here Frantz Fanon, Étienne Balibar, and Stuart Hall loom large. Except for the remaining partisans of *Kulturkreis* ideas, all of these groups are informed by post-structuralism and view boundary drawing primarily as a strategy of exclusion.

Social and cultural anthropology, literary studies, cultural studies, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, cultural sociology,[10] have established

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7 Ethnologist Leo Frobenius, who coined the term 'Kulturkreis' ('culture circle' or 'culture area') in the late 19th century (Leo Frobenius, *Der Ursprung der afrikanischen Kulturen* (Berlin: Verlag von Gebrüder Borntraeger, 1898)), later distanced himself from the concept.

8 See notably Lila Abu-Lughod, "Writing Against Culture," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe: University of Washington Press, 1991). For spirited defences of the concept of culture, see William H. Sewell Jr., "The Concept(s) of Culture," in *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Christoph Brumann, "Writing for culture: Why a successful concept should not be discarded," *Current Anthropology* 40 (1999); or Daniel Varisco, *Culture Still Matters* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

9 Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, nation, classe: Les identités ambiguës* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988).

10 Notably represented in the USA by Jeffrey Alexander and his students. For German-

themselves as the leading fields in the academic debate (or what today is rather innocuously called 'conversation') about culture, identity, and the discursive construction of difference. Three of these (sub-) disciplines even include the term 'culture' in their names. My own field, Islamic studies, has been somewhat slow to join the debate, and its contributions have received little attention outside the field.[11] While the construct of cultural racism, cast in the form of 'anti-Muslim racism', has been adopted and critiqued within cultural studies, it is largely absent from Islamic studies broadly understood, unless dealing with Islam in Europe and North America. While I follow the argument that both race and culture can be construed so as to suggest a solid box restricting those within in the way a prison confines its inmates, I question the usefulness of a concept that transfers the constructs of 'race' and 'racism' from their alleged biological determinants, from which there can be no escape, to socially constructed cultural ones, which may certainly be restrictive but leave the escape option open. Even conceding that American usage of the term race, focussing on the body, blood, and the experience of slavery,[12] differs from continental European usages – in particular the German one – this transfer comes at the expense of precision in a very sensitive domain, and I therefore do not endorse it.

My understanding of culture owes much to the 'cultural turn' and comes close to the definition submitted by social anthropologist Andreas Wimmer.[13] Accordingly, culture is not a sub-system with its own systemic

language research, see Uta Karstein and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Culture," in "Soziologie – Sociology in the German-speaking World," ed. Bettina Hollstein et al., special issue, *Soziologische Revue* (2020).

11   Stefan Conermann and Syrinx von Hees, eds., *Islamwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft: I. Historische Anthropologie. Ansätze und Möglichkeiten* (Schenefeld: EB-Verlag, 2007). By contrast, Shahab Ahmed's *What is Islam?* has already triggered critical debate; see Rushain Abbasi, "Did Premodern Muslims Distinguish the Religious and Secular? The Dīn-Dunyā Binary in Medieval Islamic Thought," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2020) and the discussion under the rubric of "Kitabkhana," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 1 (2020).

12   For the US concept and context, I rely on Katrin Simon, *Die Erben des Malcolm X: Afroamerikanische Muslime zwischen Widerstand und Anpassung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), esp. chap. 1. For the cultural racism paradigm, see, e.g., Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity, and Muslims in Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

13   Andreas Wimmer, "Kultur: Zur Reformulierung eines sozialanthropologischen Grundbegriffs," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 48, no. 3 (1996) and along similar lines, Carola Lentz, "Culture: The making, unmaking and remaking of an anthropological concept," *Working Papers of the Department of Anthropology and*

logic, or one field of human activity among others. Rather, it consists of a web of interpretations and representations of the self and the world, or cosmos. The image of the web conveys a sense of coherence, stability, and continuity, and yet the web and its individual threads are constantly changing, conditioned by time, locale, and social context. The web is elastic but it cannot be stretched *ad libitum*, and the stretching is done by humans. This definition builds on decades of reflection on the meaning of culture, including notably Clifford Geertz's famous reference to Max Weber, according to which "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun", and Geertz's own attempts at "guessing" (his own term) the meaning of cultural signs and symbols.[14] But the definition goes beyond semiotics in highlighting the practices, processes, sites, and structures that sustain these human-made webs of meaning(s). By the same token, it is considerably broader than understandings that identify culture with custom, tradition, and the weight of the past more generally; or with civilisation, refinement, and cultured behaviour; or with the arts and human creativity as a whole. Culture, as I understand it, pervades different spheres of life and informs, or even shapes, individual thought, emotions, and actions, as well as communal and societal order, particularly as it is settled and solidified in discourses, artifacts, and institutions.

This definition of culture is broad and challenging, and it calls for concrete examples to illustrate what exactly is meant by all those carefully chosen words. Some issues are particularly significant, especially in intercultural comparison: the relationship with nature, the body and sexuality, disease, age and death, time, work and technology; aesthetic preferences and emotional regimes; evaluations of social inequality, gender roles, and gender relations; notions of honour and shame; rules of communication and politeness; dietary prescriptions, sartorial styles, table manners, and forms of sociability, down to assessments of what it means

African Studies 166 (Universität Mainz: Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, 2016). For an influential contribution, see Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Culture and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

14   The quote is from Geertz, not Weber. Geertz was, however, not entirely lost in the pursuit of meaning. In his controversial study of Islam in Indonesia and Morocco he stated that "religion is a social institution, worship a social activity, and faith a social force" (Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), esp. 19). For Weber, see Hans F. Kippenberg and Martin Riesebrodt, eds., *Max Weber's "Religionssystematik"* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

to be alone, referring to solitude rather than loneliness. Much of this is implicit rather than explicit, as argued by David McMahan in his study on Buddhist modernism, who defined "a culture's lived world" as

> the daily repertory of practices, implicit ideas, and dispositions that structure perception and action, allowing people to engage in social intercourse, know what is appropriate and inappropriate, understand what to expect of each other, and discern power relations.[15]

In the modern period, culture has been closely tied to identity and identity politics. High culture, popular culture, and mass culture, if we want to use these aesthetic-*cum*-social categories at all, have their place under the umbrella of culture. However, they are largely irrelevant to the present enquiry. More relevant is the way culture, religion or moral philosophy, and territory have been tied together in the construct of regional cultures, or cultural regions: Confucian China and Korea, Shinto Japan, Christian Europe, the Islamic Middle East, the Islamic world. The case of Confucianism is especially instructive: Confucianism was and is predominantly understood as an ethical and moral tradition or philosophy, and as a constituent element of Chinese and Korean *culture*.[16] But at times it was articulated in religious terms, or elevated to the status of a state cult. Equally, there were periods in which its founder was venerated and offered sacrifices in elaborate ritual.[17] Through century upon century of survival,

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15 David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

16 For the debate, initiated by European Jesuits in the 17th century, on whether Confucianism is a philosophy or a religion, see Zhao Dunhua, ed., *Dialogue of Philosophies, Religions and Civilizations* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2007); Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sébastien Billioud and Joel Thoraval, "The Contemporary Revival of Confucianism: *Anshen liming* or the religious Dimension of Confucianism," *China Perspectives* 3 (2008). By contrast, John Lagerwey has adopted a very broad conception of religion that subsumes virtually every aspect of thought and behaviour under this rubric (John Lagerwey, *Paradigm Shifts in Early and Modern Chinese Religion: A History* (Leiden: Brill, 2019)). I thank Elliot Lee for bringing this important work to my attention even though I cannot seriously engage with it here.

17 Sun, *Confucianism*, 153–72; Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 16–47 and 204–09 for the cult of Confucius. The Kong Temple in Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius, in Shandong province, serves as an excellent illustration of these trends; see James A. Flath, *Traces of the Sage: Monument, Materiality, and the First Temple of Confucius* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016). To explore the shifting relations of ritual, worship, religion, and culture in China

adjustment, and reinterpretation, the great and variegated Confucian tradition proved remarkably elastic – a term, which, incidentally, I find more helpful than 'fluid' or 'hybrid', which are often used in this context. The 'cultural region' construct can be viewed as a nod to the *Kulturkreis* school's 'cultural circles', even though the region, theoretically speaking, is more open than the circle.

It can of course be argued that religion is part of the web of meanings, representations, discourses, practices, and institutions just described, and for that reason is a *facet of* culture and not just *embedded in* culture. From an agnostic perspective, both religion and culture are created by humans and are thus 'socially' or 'discursively constructed'. Yet one can endorse this position and still hold that religion does not, as it were, dissolve into culture, and that it is possible, productive, and in certain instances even necessary, to distinguish between the two, not least because practising adherents of the respective religions have done so in the past and continue to do so in the present. Significantly, theoretically informed authors such as David McMahan, whose focus is on religion, do not seem unduly worried by the entanglement: they take it for granted that religion is culturally embedded and inflected, and that for this reason, culture matters. But they do not dissolve religion in culture.[18] The same is true of the great majority of scholars, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, researching Islam and Muslim or Islamicate societies.

Still, many questions remain, beginning with who is interested in the classification exercise, why they undertake it, and the criteria of the classification itself: which kinds of idea, behaviour, object, emotion, or institution do they register as either religious or cultural, or both? A fundamental question is whether within a given paradigm, one or the other takes precedence, providing the primary, if not the exclusive frame of reference. Here either religion is made the roof under which a wide array of phenomena can be accommodated as articulations of culture, or, conversely, culture is placed on top with a number of phenomena fitted as 'local' or 'religious' under its umbrella. In either case, both the logic and function

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more deeply, I would have to engage with the work of Hubert Seiwert, which again I cannot do, at least not here. I have, however, benefited from his "The Dynamics of Religions and Cultural Evolution: Worshipping Fuxi in Contemporary China," in *Dynamics of Religion: Past and Present*, ed. Christoph Bochinger and Jörg Rüpke (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2017).

18   McMahan, *Making for Buddhist Modernism*, esp. 15–19.

of the chosen paradigm need to be examined. With the emergence of the modern nation state, the latter has come to predominate in many parts of the world, and not just in the West: collective identity has increasingly been defined in terms of culture, under which religious loyalties and sentiments have been subsumed. The court decision in the German federal state of Bavaria in 1995 that declared the crucifix to be a symbol not of religion but of Bavarian history and culture, serves to illustrate the point.[19] By the same token, a hierarchy was established that made culture the arbiter of what was acceptable in public life and what was not, and who belonged to the community or nation and who did not. The political appropriation of culture features prominently in China, where Confucian values have been rehabilitated by the Communist leadership as the moral foundation of state and society, and, even more problematically, in India, where Hinduism is being translated into a national culture, absorbing existing local, moral, philosophical, and religious traditions.[20] However, the trend is not universal, and the emergence of the modern nation state has not been identical with giving primacy to culture: most governments in the Muslim world have moved in the other direction and made religion the yardstick of legitimacy, authenticity, and identity. This is the case even when the government did not go so far as to establish Islam as the state religion, or Sharia as the main or exclusive source of legislation. The paradigm holding culture as the determining factor raises the issue of secularity in a particularly challenging manner. That positing religion as the determining element might at first sight appear simpler in this regard, falling neatly into the category of secularism, or rather the rejection thereof. Needless to say, reality is more complicated.

Significantly, Muslim debates on Islam and identity, as well as most of the theoretically informed literature on Islam past and present (irrespective of the religious affiliation of its authors), largely focus on religion rather

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19 See also: Mohammad Magout, *A Reflexive Islamic Modernity: Academic Knowledge and Religious Subjectivity in the Global Ismaili Community* (Baden-Baden: Ergon, 2020), 50–55.

20 I am aware that there is a vast corpus of literature for both countries. For China, I have drawn on Yee Lak Elliot Lee, "Muslims as 'Hui' in Late Imperial and Republican China: A Historical Reconsideration of Social Differentiation and Identity Construction," in "Islamicate Secularities in Past and Present," eds. Markus Dressler, Armando Salvatore, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, special issue, *Historical Social Research* 44, no. 3 (2019) and for India, on Vanya V. Bhargav, "Between Hindu and Indian: The Nationalist Thought of Lala Rajpat Rai" (Thesis, Oxford, 2018).

than on culture. It is no coincidence that there is hardly any research on pre-modern Muslim concepts of culture in the broad anthropological sense, rather than in the sense of culture as custom, including customary law (*'urf, 'ada, adat*; also *'amal*, work, practice, praxis), and culture as literature (*adab*), music, and the visual and performing arts. While culture stirs the imagination, religion still evokes passion. One of the questions asked outside of Islamic literature – narrowly defined – is whether religion is a valid concept to describe pre-modern Islam at all.

2.2 The Concept of Religion

Let me start with a pointed statement: Islam is a religion, formed, like other religions and ethical-*cum*-moral traditions, in the (often conflictual) encounter of different religious, moral, philosophical, and cultural teachings, practices, and actors. However unassailable and, indeed, politically correct this statement may appear to those invested in 'shared' or 'entangled history', it has been opposed both by devout Muslims who insist on Islam's origin in divine revelation, and by contemporary scholars who see religion, or at least an abstract, generalised concept of religion, as the 'invention' of early modern European scholarship. Many among the latter are informed by post-colonial theory, though it was historians of (Christian) religion who traced the evolution of an abstract concept of Religion in Europe, and its dissemination, rom the 17th century onwards,[21] and it was Orientalists, some of them very much old school, who first questioned the suitability of an abstract concept of religion for non-Western traditions such as Islam. Numerous titles speak of the 'invention' of a given religion, particularly Buddhism, Hinduism, and Shinto, or of the concept of world religions, first by European scholars and Christian missionaries, and then by members of the respective traditions eager to refashion themselves in the European image.[22] Islam, as we will

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21 See Reinhold Glei and Stefan Reichmuth, "Religion between Last Judgement, law and faith: Koranic *dīn* and its renderings in Latin translations of the Koran," *Religion* 42, no. 2; Ernst Feil, *Religio*, 4 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986–2007) is a study in conceptual history (Begriffsgeschichte).

22 Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, eds., *Secularism and Religion-Making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Markus Dreßler, "Modes of Religionization: A Constructivist Approach to Secularity," *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 7 (Leipzig University, 2019) have come up with the attractive term "religion-making". For the inventors of invention, see notably Talal Asad, Timothy Fitzgerald, Russel T. McCutcheon, Tomoko Masuzawa (cited in Christoph Kleine and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Research Programme of the

see, posed more of a challenge.[23] Needless to say, uncritically transplanting a post-Enlightenment Western understanding of religion, derived from Latin Christianity, to pre-modern and non-Christian contexts cannot be valid.[24] But there are, nonetheless, several problems, too, with the invention theory. Not only does it construe a single modern (Western) understanding of religion that does not even do justice to the many manifestations of Christianity past and present, it also disregards, or does not consider carefully enough, pre-modern Muslim conceptions of Islam.

The more I read and listen, the more I am puzzled by the quantities of ink and energy spent on demolishing, or 'deconstructing', an abstract *concept* of religion, quite independently of any kind of struggle against *religion* that might be based on secularist convictions. The Islamic, or Islamist, variant of this critique has in fact little to do with the secularist goal to dissociate state, law, and public order from religion and the clerical structures associated with it. Quite on the contrary: it aims to liberate Islam (rather than religion as a whole) from the shackles of the secular modern nation state to which it had been subjected and to return it to an earlier state of power and glory. Post-colonial scholars believe in the subjection story, with the modern nation state as the chief villain in the piece, but they do not, as a rule, dream imperial dreams. Rather, they seek to critique modernity and to identify actors and factors 'subverting' it, potentially including holistic ideologies based on religion, culture, and collective identity.[25]

The deconstruction drive has served to shake researchers out of complacency, forcing them to look more critically into the terms they

HCAS 'Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities'," *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 1 (Leipzig University, 2016), 32 as well as Nile Green and Mary Searle-Chatterjee, eds., *Religion, Language, and Power* (London: Routledge, 2008).

23 For critical readings of the invention theory focusing on Islam, see Daniel Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and Unsaid* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); Magout, *A Reflexive Islamic Modernity*, esp. 36–42. It has been argued that Western understandings of Sufism were invented by late 18th-century European scholars (see, e.g., Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (London: Shambhala, 1997), 1–18, 147) and, of course, this makes an important difference; see Alexander Knysh, *Sufism*, 1–7, 238n14, 240n31.

24 See Michael Bergunder, "Was ist Religion? Kulturwissenschaftliche Überlegungen zum Gegenstand der Religionswissenschaft," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 19, no. 1–2 (2011), esp. 50–55. Reinhard Schulze provides a nuanced reading of the Protestantisation thesis in his article "Islam und Judentum im Angesicht der Protestantisierung der Religionen im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Course of History: Exchange and Conflicts*, ed. Lothar Gall and Dietmar Willoweit (Munich: R. Oldenburg, 2011).

25 Ali Mirsepassi's critique of Foucault's idealisation of the Islamic Republic of Iran points

employ. Yet, in my view, many critiques of the modern concept of religion are themselves flawed, offering only a reductionist portrayal of circumscribed religion, seeing it as represented by the Church and located in the heart, or conscience. This portrayal may correspond to the hopes and expectations of French Jacobins raising the flag of *laicité*, but it does not adequately mirror the European and North American experience in its diversity. The 'Islamic' variant ties together critiques both of the Catholic Church and of Protestant understandings of religion. In this view of Catholicism, it is the Church that supposedly controls the hearts, minds, and bodies of the believers (who are then often identified with Christianity as a whole).[26] Conversely, Protestantism is held to understand religion as a faith exclusively located (or should we say, locked?) in the heart and, as it were, cut off from the world. This depiction, however, chooses to ignore the fact that the Catholic Church has never fully controlled even the Catholics, and that Protestants, while subscribing to the priority of 'inner' faith, expect themselves and others to live by this faith, and translate it into works large and small. For this reason, their faith cannot be fully private.

Significantly, little attention has been paid to the Protestant emphasis on 'practical ethics', which Reinhard Schulze rightly underlined in his critical reading of 19th-century 'religion-making' (not his term), mostly in the German context.[27] Practical ethics had a far-reaching impact on the sociopolitical realm: Protestants have called for a sanctification of everyday life (*Alltagsheiligung*), and Weber wrote on 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'. Christians who live their faith do not do so only in church and on Sundays and major Christian holidays. Hence what is portrayed as *the* modern, Western concept of religion as intensely private and narrowly confined to two sites – the Church, or a

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in this direction; Ali Mirsepassi, "Mistaken Anti-modernity," *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 6 (Leipzig University, 2019), esp. 5–6. Perhaps we should examine more closely how deconstruction of the concept of religion bears on conceptualisations of secularity – not so much with a view to the past as to the present and future.

26 The image of the Catholic Church dominating society and culture, hampering science and freedom of thought, figures prominently in Muslim critiques of secularism; see, e.g., Krämer, *Gottes Staat als Republik*, and Daniel Kinitz, *Die andere Seite des Islam: Säkularismus-Diskurs und muslimische Intellektuelle im modernen Ägypten* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2016), 278. The argument that European Christians needed to invent secularism in order to liberate themselves from the suffocating grip of the Church, and that, for this reason, they banished religion to a niche, is by no means restricted to Sunni Islamists.

27 Schulze, "Islam und Judentum," 157–58.

comparable clerical structure, and the heart, or conscience – represents a secularist model of what religion is and where it belongs. It gives primacy to the perspective of the secular(ist) territorial state, and of French *laicité* in particular, over the self-understanding of practising Christians. In doing so, it misrepresents historical experiences and current configurations, which do not (all) conform to the secularist model but rather convey the many shades of secularity.

A clearer view is to be gained by distinguishing two understandings of religion: on the one hand, *religion as a set or web of beliefs and practices* guiding individual and possibly even collective life, which may or may not be tied to a community and a given clerical structure; and on the other, *religion as a neatly defined compartment of life* centred in faith, with rites and rituals relegated to the margins, if not altogether devalued.[28] I see no reason why Islam should not qualify as a religion in the former sense, irrespective of the time period we are looking at. It has a set of beliefs, creeds, laws, and well-defined practices that are understood by Muslims as worship of a god who declares himself (there is no way of making this phrase gender-sensitive) to be the one and only God, *un et indivisible* (Ar., *tauhid*). This is not the same as a shared passion or ideology, such as football, nationalism, capitalism, or communism. Islam has also inspired a community built on this foundation, combining belief and belonging. Based on its normative texts, which already reflect comparison, Muslim scholars have systematically compared Islam to other religions and/or moral traditions with respect to their (alleged) tenets and practices.

Like other believers, however, Muslims have had to deal with internal diversity. Early on, the Muslim community fanned out (critics would say 'split and splintered') into different schools of theology and law. They developed distinct notions of correct belief and pious conduct, social order, political rule, and justice, the weight of faith as opposed to works, the correct methods of deriving norms from the authoritative texts, the possibility of attaining truth through non-textual means, the relationship of reason to revelation, and so on. These notions varied according to time and place. The great communities of Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims, with their specific visual, emotional, and memorial cultures (!), and their own doctrines of religious authority and legitimate rule,

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28 In adopting this shorthand for 'religion', I do not wish to belittle the earnest search of scholars of religion for their subject. At the same time, the present distinction only partially corresponds to Stausberg's distinction between attributive, structural, and functional differentiation, as summarised by Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr, "Research Programme," 20.

are part of this diversity. The same applies to the wide stream of Sufism, which cuts across theological, legal, and 'sectarian' affiliation.

Sufi shrine in Hezheng, Gansu province, north-west China. Photo: Gudrun Krämer, 2015.

In the attempt to capture the effects of plurality and diversity, reference has frequently been made to the tension between unity and diversity, and between continuity and change. Many of us have tired of these pairings, and more imaginative ways of articulating the tension are available. Following Clifford Geertz who had described culture as a 'continent of meaning', Shahab Ahmed argued that

> the task of conceptualizing and understanding Islam becomes precisely to discover and map its 'Continent of Meaning' and to make sense of that continent as a *continent*: as a continuous, connected and contained – if topographically, climatically and demographically variegated – entity. It is to conceptualize how that continent is elaborated, articulated, constructed, conceived and experienced as an undulating *whole*, even when its parts present themselves in and as apparently distinct and disconnected local topographies.[29]

The image of the continent is, however, problematic, not least because Ahmed highlights not just coherence but *containment*. By contrast, the insistence on connectedness, or 'connectivity', is widely shared. Rather than evoking an "undulating whole", or engaging with the complexities of signs, symbols, and

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29   Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 249–50.

significations, which abound in recent discussions of culture and religion, others have described Islam more soberly as a *set of references*. These can be employed to "elaborate, articulate, construct, conceive, and experience" Islam as an inherently plural, changeable, connected, and contingent entity.[30] Two elements are important here: the actor-centred approach, and the fact that the references need not be textual, let alone legal. An actor-centred approach does not negate the reference function of the Qur'an, which Muslims take as the unmediated word of God, and the Sunna of the prophet Muhammad, seen as its explication and, to some extent, its realisation. But it does, however, shift the focus to reception and interpretation, which are contingent and thus temporally, spatially, socially, and culturally bounded. The emphasis is on what Muslims *read, understand*, and *do* rather than on what the Qur'an and the prophet Muhammad say. Without going into the requisite depth at this juncture, this perspective could be described as a mild form of constructivism: meanings are socially and discursively 'constructed'. The actor-centred approach was taken to its extremes by anthropologist Gabriele Marranci when he stated that "it is not Islam that shapes Muslims, but rather Muslims who, through discourses, practices, beliefs and actions, make Islam."[31] But as long as Muslims in their various local contexts refer to a shared corpus of foundational texts, they are tied to this corpus, whose interpretation cannot be stretched arbitrarily.

Just as significantly, the insistence on references does not consider only textual ones. It therefore does not suggest that Islam as text has always been the prevalent way of understanding and living Islam. Islam is certainly a discursive tradition, as Talal Asad has argued, following W. Cantwell Smith, but it is not exclusively so. In many settings, Islam was mediated through people rather than texts, and these people did not necessarily either authenticate their behaviour or legitimise their claims to authority through recital of the Qur'an and prophetic Hadith. What Shahab Ahmed called the 'legal-supremacist mode', propagated by today's Islamists as the only correct way of understanding Islam, does not adequately reflect how Islam was understood and lived by Muslims for centuries.[32] Saints and Sufis were quite able to present their path to truth as valid and indeed

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30   See, e.g., Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies, *Renewal proposal*, 2011.
31   Gabriele Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), 15.
32   Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, esp. 80, 117–29.

superior, defying 'legalist' criticism of their teachings and practices.[33] The same holds true for philosophers, whose referral to their own body of texts highlights the fact that a focus on text is not necessarily the same as a focus on law, or Sharia in particular. Yet irrespective of past trends, the textual approach is the dominant one today, and it is dominated by legal discourse. Within this frame, the references are ultimately contained in, derived from, or in some way related to, the foundational texts of Islam. Under the conditions of globalisation and mediatisation, with the multiplication of means of access to the Qur'an and the Sunna even for those who cannot read Arabic, or who are not fluent in the language, these texts constitute the one and irrefutable reference for 'constructing' Islam.

In their vast majority, Muslims recognise certain core references which give coherence and continuity to a global community that has no unifying clerical structures and authorities comparable to the Catholic Church or the great Buddhist lamas, and no communal offices, such as congregations, parishes, monasteries, and priests, to hold it together (in this respect, Islam comes closest to Judaism). I therefore subscribe to Ahmet Karamustafa's summary (albeit not to every word of it):

> Islam *does* revolve around certain key ideas and practices, but is it imperative to catch the dynamic spirit in which these core ideas and practices are constantly negotiated by Muslims in concrete historical circumstances and not to reify them into a rigid formula that is at once ahistorical and idealistic… There have always been and continues to be a multiplicity of perspectives among Muslims even about what the core ideas and practices of Islam are. Minimally, however, we can assume a set of beliefs (a version each of monotheism, prophesy, genesis and eschatology) that underwrite a set of values (dignity of human life, individual and collective rights and duties, the necessity of ethical human conduct – in short a comprehensive moral program) in turn reflected in a set of concrete human acts (ranging from the necessity of greeting others to acts of humility like prayer). It is also necessary to add, though this is an obvious point, that this nucleus is believed to be contained in the fundamental sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the exemplary life story of Muhammad. It is a version of this core that lies at the center of each and every one of the innumerable manifestations of the Islamic civilizational tradition in human history.[34]

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33 Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds., *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies & Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Knysh, *Sufism*, 4, 40–42, and chap. 3 and 5.

34 Ahmet Karamustafa, "Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress," in *Progressive Muslims*, ed.

These beliefs, values, and practices can be affirmed, modulated and, within certain limits, contested. Muslims have differed in terms of their understanding of God, the role of the prophet Muhammad, the character of the Qur'an as text, the site of religious authority, the weight of reason in relation to revelation, or of law in relation to Sufi and poetic experience, the evaluation of music and the visual arts, the definition of gender roles, and the implementation of justice. There is no need to equate belief in a certain core that constitutes Islam with essentialism. And while it may well be true that "Islam is always Islam to somebody",[35] it remains to be seen who that somebody is, how many of them there are, and what other Muslims have to say about them. There are more options than just essentialism on the one hand and unbridled relativism on the other. Provided 'religion' is not turned into a straightjacket, with the strings made of unbending rules enshrined in the Qur'an and the Sunna of the prophet Muhammad, and which Muslims have to wear if they are to be recognised as Muslims, 'religion' seems entirely appropriate to describe Islam, or at least a crucial dimension of it. As we will see, when it comes to our second possible reading of religion, that of religion as a neatly compartmentalised or 'quarantined' aspect of life, the situation is different.

2.3 Muslim Understandings of Islam

In their painstaking deconstruction of Western constructs of 'religion', the proponents of the colonial invention thesis have largely ignored Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim teachings and experiences, almost as if Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims as 'colonial subjects' had no voices of their own, and no discursive tradition(s) with distinctive categories of rites, beliefs, and community.[36] Talal Asad, one of the leading and most

Omid Safi (Oxford: OneWorld, 2003), 108–09; see also below, section "*Din, Iman,* and Islam".

35 Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam. Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 202. It is hard to be original: in 1957, Wilfred Cantwell Smith stated blandly that, "To some extent each religion is all things to all men… When we look beyond symbols to their meanings, we cannot but recognize that each world religion has, in the last analysis, as many forms as it has believers" (Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 8).

36 Other voices exist. For an important study that traces the interaction of Buddhists, or sympathisers with Buddhism, from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, including Japan, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Britain, and the US, see McMahan, *Making of Buddhist Modernism*, who rather than invoking 'invention', speaks of a "cocreation of Asians, Europeans, and Americans"; McMahan, *Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 6. Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New

stimulating voices in the chorus, cannot be accused of silencing the natives and ignoring Islamic tradition. But his critique nonetheless raises a number of questions, not least because he is not particularly interested in detail, let alone philology. In his take on religion and Islam, we hear considerably more from Western authors than from Muslim ones. According to Asad, the post-Enlightenment Western concept (and there appears to be only one) equates religion with interior, individual, private belief as a "distinct mental state".[37] This he contrasts with an order in which belief is intimately linked to works, woven into the social fabric, and tied to power relations.

Similar views have been frequently expressed by both post-colonial and Islamist critics of modernity, in their respective idioms and with their respective agendas. Though their assessments of plurality and ambiguity in pre-modern Islam may diverge sharply on closer inspection, they do tend to agree that Islam constituted a coherent and integral whole prior to the irruption of colonial modernity, and the imposition of the modern nation state. The influential Indian Islamic author and activist Abu l-A'la Maududi (1903–79) even spoke of a 'seamless whole'. Like a blanket, Islam had covered all – family and trade, gender and health, agrarian relations and urban life – and provided rules for everything: business and divorce, devotion and sociability, aesthetics and politics.[38] According to the same reading, colonial modernity cut up this fabric to produce functional differentiation between religion, law, politics, culture, the economy, and the arts, replacing integrity and connectedness with incoherence and fragmentation. To be precise, I should speak of 'integrality', however it is integrity that is most commonly evoked in these critiques, used in the sense of moral uprightness, or in Charles Taylor's sense of wholeness or fullness. To anyone sympathetic to the Romantics' critique of modernity, this argument will surely resonate.

From a critical perspective, it is worth looking more closely at the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916–2000), noted scholar of Islam and

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York: Oxford University Press, 2005) points in a similar direction. Reinhard Schulze in his "Islam und Judentum" equally highlights interaction rather than invention, as does Ammeke Kateman in her study *Muḥammad 'Abduh and His Interlocutors: The Concept of Religion in a Globalizing World* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

37   Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 45–48. He seriously engaged with Islamic sources in the chapter "Reconfigurations of Law and Ethics in Colonial Egypt," in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 205–56.

38   For Maududi, see Krämer, *Gottes Staat als Republik*, 43.

comparative religion, committed Presbyterian Christian, and one of the most influential contributors to the present debate. Smith firmly believed that religion is primarily about faith and that faith is the heart's response to the Divine. In his *Islam in Modern History* (1957), which predates his more widely read *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962) by several years, he insisted on the crucial importance of inner faith to Muslims ("The reality of Islam is a personal, living faith, new every morning in the heart of the individual Muslim")[39] and the *meaning* attached to "externalities", such as institutions and patterns of behaviour by those "who have the faith". But he also declared that Islam was a religion, one distinct from other religions, first and foremost (Protestant) Christianity, through its close link between faith, community, and practice, or what he called Islam's "practical form":

> The community is based on, as it is integral to, individual faith. Not only is Muslim society held together (as are other societies) by common loyalties and traditions, and by a very carefully worked out system of values and beliefs. Not only is it the product of a superb ideal. It pulsates with the vitality of a profoundly held and deeply personal conviction, a religious conviction that is warm and meaningful for the individual member… As a creed or theological system may be the expression in an intellectual form of a personal faith – as is often the case, particularly with Christians – so a social order and its activities are the expression in a practical form of a Muslim's personal faith… A good Muslim is not one whose belief conforms to a given pattern, whose commitment may be expressed in intellectual terms that are congruent with an accepted statement (as is the case generally in Protestant Christianity), but one whose commitment may be expressed in practical terms that conform to an accepted code. [40]

It is indeed true that prior to the late 19th century, Muslims did not conceive of Islam as a clearly demarcated sub-system, constituted by, and limited to, faith

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39 Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 9 and 7–8; see also 307–08. "We hold that behaviour, institutions, creeds, and other externalities are real and significant, but are not religion. At least they are not all of it, and particularly are not faith. Religion, we suggest, is what these things mean to men" (Smith, 8n5). Given the widespread emphasis on orientalist misunderstandings of other religious traditions, the *respect* Smith expressed for Islam merits attention: "For one thing, all religions, and most clearly the great world faiths, are quite literally infinite. There is no end to their profundity; nor to their ramification, their variety. For each religion is the point at which its adherent is in touch, through the intermediary of an accumulating tradition, with the infinitude of the divine" (Smith, 7). His "accumulating tradition" is obviously close to Talal Asad's later notion of 'discursive traditions'.

40 Smith, 18–19 and 20. In the same context, he stated that, "Many have recognized that the

and worship, detached from social life, and unaffected by power relations. It is also true that pre-modern Muslims did not have a concept of 'conscience', which was only elaborated from the late 19th century onwards (in modern Arabic, the most common terms are *damir* or *wijdan*).[41] However, this does not mean that prior to the advent of modernity, all Muslims conceived of Islam as a seamless whole, covering everything. Nor does it mean that Muslims had no possibility of distinguishing between religious and non-religious matters, or that they did not do so in certain contexts. To make such a claim is to disregard a vast body of literature written by Muslims for Muslims, in genres ranging from legal texts and philosophical treatises to religious polemics to mirrors for princes, courtly prose, and Sufi poetry.

2.4 *Din*, *Iman*, and Islam

When trying to determine whether Muslims possessed a notion of 'religion' before their encounter with Western modernity, scholars have focused on *din*, which today is mostly translated as either 'religion' or 'the Islamic way of life'. There are several problems with this approach: firstly, *din* is not the only relevant term, and the Qur'an is not the only relevant text; moreover, many contemporary authors ascribe to *din* a single meaning, which is precisely what it did *not* have among pre-modern Muslims.[42] The term *din* is Qur'anic,

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community is not only a social group but a religious body; that 'church and state' are one, to use the inappropriate language of the West" (Smith, 18). The language is indeed so inappropriate that it should be avoided altogether. I also do not subscribe to his characterisation, and indeed celebration, of the wholeness of Islam as religion, society, and culture, with religious law regulating "everything from prayer rites to property rights", and the Muslim's "entire life activity being organized into a meaningful whole by this divine pattern" (Smith, 29).

41 Significantly, the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* has no entry for 'Conscience', and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition* refers to *damir* in the context of grammar, where it signifies a pronoun. For relevant studies, see Oddbjørn Leirvik, "Conscience in Arabic and the Semantic History of 'Ḍamīr," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 9 (2009); Schulze, "Islam und Judentum," 155–57; and Florian Zemmin, "Validating Secularity in Islam. The Sociological Perspective of the Muslim Intellectual Rafiq al-'Azm (1865–1925)," in "Islamicate Secularities in Past and Present," eds. Markus Dressler, Armando Salvatore, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, special issue, *Historical Social Research* 44, no. 3 (2019).

42 See articles Louis Gardet, "Dīn," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1991) as well as Patrice C. Brodeur, "Religion," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2004); and Clare Wilde and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Religious Pluralism and the Qur'ān" in the same volume. Stefan Reichmuth in: Glei and Reichmuth, "Religion between Last Judgement," 250–60, and in "The Arabic Concept of Dīn and Islamic Religious Sciences in the 18th Century: The Case of Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791)," *Oriens* 44, no. 1–2 (2016) outlines the chronological evolution as well as the semantic scope of the term. Linguistic closeness notwithstanding, New Persian *din* (Avesta *daena*, Middle

and hence Muslims have been at pains to elucidate the precise meaning of the relevant references. These references are numerous, and as even a brief survey reveals, they carry different meanings. Among the best-known Qurʾanic attestations of *din* are the famous "The right religion with God is Islam" (*inna l-din ʿinda llah al-islam*; Sura 3:19) and "There is no compulsion in religion" (Sura 2:256). Beyond that, there is the *din al-haqq* (true religion, or the *din* of truth, i.e., God, as notably in Sura 30:30), the *din Ibrahim* (the religion/cult of Abraham), the *yawm al-din* (Day of Judgement), and many others. The example of *din*, therefore, serves as a reminder that the Qurʾan is a book of inspiration for believers, not a textbook for scholars of religion.

A number of Qurʾanic references identify *din* (which in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic is linguistically tied to debt, reckoning, retribution, reward, and punishment) with the fulfilment of the obligations God imposed on his creatures, that he created so that they should worship and obey him. It is in this sense that Sura 5:3 is commonly understood. In the translation by Tarif Khalidi it reads: "Today I have perfected your religion; I have completed My bounty upon you; And I have sanctioned Islam as your religion."[43] Sura 5, of which this passage forms but a small part, draws the outlines of what was meant by *din* in this particular context: the sura opens by calling upon the believers to fulfil their contractual obligations (*ʿuqud*), which Khalidi translates as "legal obligations". This is an allusion to Sura 7:172, which describes God's conclusion of a covenant with humanity at the dawn of creation, in which they acknowledged him as their lord.[44] Sura 5 continues with a long list of prescriptions. These range from the particular – when to hunt, what to eat, how to pray, what kind of women to marry – to the general, exhorting the believers to "join hands in virtue and piety (*birr* and *taqwa*)" but not in "sin and aggression" (5:1), and to conduct themselves virtuously (*bil-qist*) before God, practise justice, and put their trust in God (5:6–11). The passage also includes what is known in Islamic scholarship as 'promise and warning':

Persian/Pahlavi, *den*) is even more difficult to capture than Arabic *din*, ranging as it does from inner self, vision, or conscience to divine and human wisdom; see Mansour Shaki, "Dēn," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. VII, fasc. 3 (London: 1994).

43 For the relevant references, see Muhammad Fuʾad ʿAbd al-Baqi, *al-Muʿjam al-mufahras li-alfaz al-qurʾan al-karim* (repr. Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1978) entries *din* to *mudayyinina*.

44 The primordial covenant mentioned in Sura 7:172 raises a host of theological questions regarding the human intellect, God-given nature, and predestination; see Gerhard Böwering, "Covenant," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 466.

God "promises those who believe and do good deeds (*salihat*) that they shall have forgiveness and a glorious recompense. But those who blaspheme (*kafaru*) and cry lies to Our revelations, these are the denizens of hell" (5:9).

What emerges from these lines is a notion of *din* as piety (*birr, taqwa, ihsan*), which requires a consistent pattern of conduct inspired by the fear and love of God, well beyond the observance of specific acts and taboos. Thus defined, piety is very much in line with what Max Weber described as *Lebensführung*, and has been rather loosely rendered as the 'Islamic way of life'.

The huge body of textual and non-textual materials relating to *din* from the early Islamic period to the 18th century still awaits systematic study, which would require philological rigour, but should not be restricted to philology. Stefan Reichmuth's scrutiny of Arabic texts provides important insights into the semantic shifts to be observed even within the religious literature, narrowly defined.[45] One strand of interpretation, which gained salience in the context of Islamic reform, linked (Islamic) *din* to piety in general and to the *'ibadat* in particular: the 'acts of worship' through which the believers express their gratefulness and obedience to the Creator. These acts of worship were not prescribed on a list sent down through the Qur'an. Rather, it was Muslim scholars who defined them, notably including the so-called Five Pillars of Islam: the profession of faith (*shahada*), the five daily ritual prayers (*salat*), alms giving (*zakat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*sawm*), and, if physically and financially possible, the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). All were designed to be public acts that could be seen, heard, and numbered. By the same token, they signalled communal loyalty and affiliation. Significantly, Muslim scholars also declared the *'ibadat* to be immutable and non-negotiable, forming part of what is fixed and stable in Islam and distinguished from 'social relations' (*mu'amalat*), which were said to be contingent upon time and place and, for this reason, more flexible and negotiable.[46] I will return to this point

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45 Reichmuth, "The Arabic Concept of Dīn", and Glei and Reichmuth, "Religion between Last Judgement." I am a little surprised by Reichmuth's conclusion that Arabic *din* attests to "direct or indirect borrowing" from Middle Persian *den*, and that, "This might be how *dīn* in Islam *finally came out*, as in Persian Religion, as a wisdom of divine origins anchored within Man from the very beginning of the world [my emphases]" ("Religion between Last Judgement," 259). The reference is to the notion of *fitra*, inborn disposition (which he identifies with *din*), and the primordial covenant just mentioned.

46 The relevant technical term here is *huquq Allah*, the 'rights of God'. Among the earliest

later. What matters here is that pre-modern Muslim scholars (and, it is to be presumed, many other Muslims as well) did not, in fact, identify Islamic *din* with faith as a "distinct mental state". Rather, they viewed it as a web of beliefs, devotional practices, and specified acts of worship, as well as pious conduct and obedience to God (*taʿat Allah*) more generally. For this reason, *din* was more than the *religio* of late Republican Rome. *Religio* described the correct performance of cultic and devotional acts towards a deity or a number of deities, rather than describing a consistent way of life, a textual tradition, or a community based on belief and belonging, as represented by Judaism, Christianity, and eventually Islam.[47]

Religious scholars were, of course, not the only Muslims to reflect on the issue. That the scholars involved were theologians and jurists, however, is evident in their manner of reasoning, with subtle arguments predicated on fine distinctions, and many points of disagreement between them. Notably, too, *din* was not the only term available to Muslims, in discussing matters of belief and belonging. There was a whole array of relevant Qur'anic terms at their disposal, from *iman* to *islam* and from

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scholars to classify the *ʿibadat*, or pious acts more generally, as 'the rights of God' was al-Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 857). For the complexities of this distinction in modern writings, see Krämer, *Gottes Staat als Republik*, 54–58, and below.

47 Here, I follow Jörg Rüpke, *Pantheon: Geschichte der antiken Religionen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2016), 13, 395. Rüpke defines religion in the Italic/Roman context as the situated communication of individuals with an entity or entities that they saw as superior but whose presence, agency, and existence they could not plausibly demonstrate to others beyond doubt. The relevant practices were dispersed and woven into different social and political fields, and although certain functions required specialists, such as priests, they were not systematised to constitute a distinctive religious field (Rüpke, 18–34, 76–77, 84, 136, 147–48, 171, 185–91, 222–23). According to Rüpke, these practices and functions did not rest on a textual tradition, and it was only in the imperial age that a notion of religion as specialised knowledge that was also accessible through texts emerged (Rüpke, 166, 216, 223, 392–94). Significantly, Rüpke occasionally refers to experiences that might be understood as religious by us or by the actors involved, but we do not get a sense of what they might have consisted of. What Rüpke makes abundantly clear, however, is that religion is not a given and that religious ideas and practices need to be explained, especially when they require high investments (Rüpke, 21). In a highly original study of late antique and early Islamic Arabia, Ludwig Ammann made a similar argument with regard to the emergence of Islam: "Religion ist bei den alten Arabern kein Glaubenssystem, kein Ort der Reflection, sie ist im Grunde nicht mehr als ein käuflicher Nothelfer" (Ludwig Ammann, *Geburt des Islam: Historische Innovation durch Offenbarung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001), 33). Both authors support the basic assumption of the *Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe* that, to put it very simply, religion was not a given, let alone everything, in the pre-modern era, either in Europe or beyond (Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr, "Research Programme," 19–20).

ihsan to *milla* or even from *umma* to *shariʿa*, none of them unambiguous.[48] In addition, they employed terms that emerged only later, such as *ʿaqida* (creed or dogma) and *iʿtiqad* (creed, belief); for comparative purposes, they also used *din* in the plural form of *adyan* or *diyanat*, which is not to be found in the Qur'an and very rare in prophetic Hadith. Some distinguished between *din* and *islam*, in the sense of 'surrender' and 'submission' to God. Others placed *iman* (which is normally translated as faith), *ʿaqida*, *islam*, and *ʿibada* under the rubric of *din*. Still others used *din* and *iman* synonymously, or subsumed *din* under *iman*. In the Islamic sciences, and argumentative theology (*kalam*) more particularly, the *usul al-din* ("the roots of *din*") deal with dogmatics. *Iman*, which is almost as difficult to pin down as *din*, was crucial to definitions of belief and unbelief and to the question of what decided the religious status of a Muslim, and what excluded them from the community.[49]

This is not the place to go into the debate over the relative weight of faith and its profession, works, and consistent adherence to all obligations, commandments, and interdictions set down by God or the prophet Muhammad – a debate which preoccupied Muslims for centuries, with many (Sunni) Muslim scholars of theology and law defining both *iman* and *islam* as comprising 'word and action' (*qawl wa-ʿamal*), i.e., the profession of faith and praxis. This was an issue that gained added urgency in the context of *takfir*, the exclusion of Muslims from the community under the charge of heresy or apostasy.[50] Nor is this the place to investigate the fine distinctions some have drawn between belief and faith (such as,

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48 For *milla*, see Markus Dreßler, "From 'Religious Community' to 'Nation': The Transformation of the Term Millet in the Late Ottoman Context," *Die Welt des Islams,* under review (2020). As the set of ethical, moral, legal, and aesthetic rules, norms, and values that guide and shape individual conduct, communal life, and societal order, Sharia is more than the Islamic law to which it is frequently reduced, and like *din*, it has often been described as 'the Islamic way of life'. Muslims have disagreed and continue to disagree on what exactly is implied by 'guide' and 'shape'. Some would say 'determine', largely ruling out human agency. However, this has never been the only position, let alone the dominant one.

49 In the most immediate sense, *iman* is what makes a person a believer, *mu'min*, calling for a substantive definition; see Jane I. Smith, "Faith," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

50 Faced with intra-communal strife, many Muslim scholars past and present have argued that judgement on belief and disbelief should be left to God and not be passed by men (and women). See Camilla Adang et al., eds., *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam: A Diachronic Perspective on* Takfir (Leiden: Brill, 2016), esp. Hossein Modarressi, "Essential Islam: The Minimum that a Muslim is Required to Acknowledge;" also Smith, "Faith," 170–72.

'belief' as the confirmation of accepted teachings, or dogma, and 'faith' as the individual's inner feeling and experience). What matters here is that influential (Sunni) Muslim scholars have always insisted that professed belief was decisive in recognising a person as a Muslim, without denying the importance of praxis, comprising correct ritual performance and habitual pious conduct.

2.5 *Din, Dunya,* and *Dawla*

In the popular exercise of pairing and comparing, *al-din*/religion was frequently combined with, and distinguished from, *al-dunya*/(this) world.[51] The pairing and comparing will take us well beyond scholarly circles, and into the literary salons of urban society as well as into the world of rulers. The Qur'an and Muslim tradition frequently link, and just as often juxtapose, *al-din* with *al-dunya*, which literally speaking points to something spatially 'nearer' or 'nearest', but also 'lower' in both the physical and the moral sense. Here, it designates the 'nearer abode', 'this world', or the lowest heaven. Clearly, the two items are not of the same kind, with *al-din* referring to worship and piety and *al-dunya* to space and cosmology. Significantly, *al-dunya* is easier to identify than its partners, *al-din* and *al-akhira*. Within a religious perspective, we can distinguish different evaluations of *al-dunya* and what pertains to it (*al-dunyawi*): a salvational approach devalues *al-dunya* as a lower sphere concerned with individual bodily comfort and worldly success. But there is also a strong tradition within theology and law that identifies the benefits of religion to individual wellbeing and communal welfare in this world. As this type of reasoning is deeply woven into Islamic theological and legal discourse, *al-dunya* cannot be simply identified with the secular.

In what I have called the salvational approach, *al-dunya* was most commonly combined with *al-akhira*, the 'afterworld' or 'otherworld'. Muslims generally understood *al-dunya* as the (physical) world and present, 'lower' life (*al-hayat al-dunya*) with its pleasures and desires, superficial,

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51 For theological discussions broadly understood, Rushain Abbasi in his article, "Did Premodern Muslims Distinguish the Religious and Secular?" demonstrates that they indeed did: the pairing, which was premised on a distinction, was common albeit controversial. Abbasi also shows that pre-modern Muslims generally assumed the *dunya* to be shared by all humankind, easily understood, and hence not in need of detailed description. By contrast, *din* was thought to be specific and in need of explication (Abbasi, "Did Premodern Muslims Distinguish," esp. 193–99, 200, 203).

fleeting, and deceptive. The world was worldly, caught up in the pursuit of power, pleasure, property, or wine, life, and lust, as the prominent 14th-century scholar Taj al-Din al-Subki put it in his *Tabaqat al-Shafiʿiyya*. Here, we also see the impact of culture, inflecting the pleasures and desires of this world and, by the same token, deflecting Muslims from the straight path leading them to God. Sura 29:64 voices a familiar theme when it states that, "The present life is nothing but frivolity and amusement. But the Abode of the Hereafter is the real life." Sura 2:285–6 is more threatening, warning that, "Those who have purchased the present life in exchange for the afterlife, for them punishment shall not be lightened, nor shall they find any to help them."[52]

Muslim ideas and images were not derived solely from the Qur'an and the legal and theological tradition at large. There was a vast body of eschatological and literary texts resting on other sources, creating a rich tapestry of narrative as well as some visual material. As a result, Muslim ideas and images of the afterlife, paradise, heaven, and hell were multifaceted and multidimensional. To begin with, *al-dunya* and *al-akhira* have a spatial dimension in addition to the temporal one. *Al-akhira*, comprising heaven and hell (which in themselves are layered), stands for an 'otherworld' that exists in parallel to this world and not just as a 'hereafter', or 'the world to come'.[53] The boundaries between this world and the other are permeable: winds, scents, sounds, and material objects flow from one to the other, plants and animals can cross over, as can select men and women, either physically or in their dreams. But there is also a hierarchy involved, for the otherworld is superior to this world with its 'lower life'. Still, it would be futile to search for clear lines: when Christian Lange calls religion the search not so much for the *last* things as rather for the *ultimate* things, which are not far but *near*, the line between the two gets blurred, given that, as stated earlier, *al-dunya* indicates the near. It is a paradox mirroring the assumption that God is both near and utterly removed. When Lange

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52 Trans. Tarif Khalidi; see also Sura 4:74. For the Qur'anic references, see ʿAbd al-Baqi, *al-Muʿjam al-mufahras* and Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 37–39.

53 Lange, *Paradise and Hell*, esp. 4–13, 37–39, 67–70. For the relevance of this understanding to Sufism, see Alexander Knysh, who stated that "The purpose of ascetic self-discipline and self-imposed strictures is, as numerous Sufi masters have argued for centuries, to purify the soul and to prepare it for a vision of or communion/communication with God *here and now* [my emphases]" (Knysh, *Sufism*, 10).

describes *al-dunya* as the 'ordinary reality' and *al-akhira* as the 'ultimate reality', separated by a divide which, however, can be crossed, we obtain a different idea.[54] When *al-dunya* is interpreted as "signifying everything that befalls humans before death or every activity that is not aimed at the service of God",[55] we perceive the distinction from *din*, or belief and worship. Of course, for the believer, much of what "befalls humans before death" is, however, decreed by God and hence of religious significance.

In the context of modern concerns, the second pairing, which combines *al-dunya* with *al-din*, is more immediately relevant. If *al-dunya* is the mundane and ordinary sphere, then it stands to reason that *al-din* denotes something else. This is commonly identified as otherworldly, spiritual, religious, and/or devoted to the service of a deity or a number of deities. Muslim scholars have written at length on the subject, especially from the 11th century C.E. onwards, elaborating on the respective properties of *din* and *dunya*, and the proper ways of dealing with them. Drawing notably on the noted scholar and bureaucrat Abu l-Hasan al-Mawardi (d. 1048), with his influential *Adab al-din wa-l-dunya*, Sunni religious and legal scholars attempted to delineate the fields of *din* and *dunya*. In the 13th century, Muhammad b. al-Mansur Ibn al-Haddad tersely described them as follows:

> There are two kinds of administration: the administration of *dīn* and the administration of *dunyā*. The administration of *dīn* is that which brings about the execution of (religious) obligations, and the administration of *dunyā* is that which brings about the prosperity of the earth.[56]

Several points make this statement relevant to modern concerns (and to dismantling unfounded assumptions regarding pre-modern conceptions of religion and its others): for one thing, it takes the existence of distinct but interrelated fields as a given without theorising about this distinction.[57] It

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54 Lange, *Paradise and Hell*, 12–13.

55 Lutz Wiederholt, "Profane and Sacred," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 283r.

56 Ibn al-Haddad, *Al-Jawhar al-nafis fi siyasat al-raʾis*, ed. Ridwan al-Sayyid (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa li-l-Tibaʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1983), 61–62, quoted from Abbasi, "Did Premodern Muslims Distinguish," 218.

57 I entirely agree with Rushain Abbasi in seeing what at some point he calls the "interactive *dīn* and *dunyā* dynamic" (Abbasi, 190) as precisely that: dynamic and premised on a distinction but as a rule not presupposing a separation. Unfortunately, Abbasi occasionally undercuts his own argument by using the terms 'separation' and 'separate'. At the same time, he oversimplifies when he refers to divine law as one of the 'things' falling within the

does not spell out the limits to religious obligations, but it at least clarifies that in this particular combination, *din* cannot signify an 'Islamic way of life' encompassing everything, as many would have it. If that were the case, *al-din* would have swallowed up *al-dunya*, or at least made positive reference to it impossible. Yet this is precisely what was happening: the scholars and bureaucrats creating the relevant discourse may have regarded *al-dunya* as the sphere of the mundane and ordinary, but they did not devalue it. Rather, they carefully considered the religious (*dini*) and worldly (*dunyawi*) benefits deriving from specific actions and institutions to the individual and the community, including notably their safety and prosperity. Both were taken seriously.[58] The political logic underpinning this discourse closely intersected with legal reasoning, which discussed (and continues to discuss) the benefits (*masalih, manafi'*) of individual acts, techniques, and institutions for the welfare of the individual and, even more so, the community and society at large. For this reason, *al-maslaha al-mursala* and *al-maslaha al-'amma* have frequently been translated as public interest.[59]

We are fortunate in that we do not have to explore the *din-dunya* relationship solely through the lens of religious and legal scholars, which tend to dye and all too often discolour our perception of Muslim social, cultural, and political life. A mass of non-religious textual and material

religious field: "My paper will demonstrate that the medieval *dīn-dunyā* binary represented a conceptual separation of the world into distinct religious and non-religious spheres analogous to the modern religious-secular, with things like worship, prayer, and divine law on one side and all worldly matters on the other" (Abbasi, 191). As he himself shows, and as I have argued repeatedly, 'divine law' does *not* fall squarely within a religious sphere, and by the same token, it is not *outside* the non-religious sphere; see above, n. 5.

58 In his characteristic high-flying style, Wilfred Cantwell Smith emphasised the dual obligation: "Our thesis has been that Islam is essentially a religion, and as such profoundly personal and also finally transcending all particularities and the confines of this mundane world and all its affairs; nonetheless that is has been distinctively characterized by a deep concern for these affairs. It has had a central conviction that the true Muslim life includes the carrying out in this world of the divine injunction as to how mankind, individually and corporately, should live… At its fullest, this conviction has risen to the vision of building the ideal society" (Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 39). For a superb case study on the promotion of agriculture and irrigation as encouraged in Islamic advice literature and put into practice by Timurid rulers in 15th-century north-east Iran (Khurasan), see Maria E. Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), chap. 4.

59 For pre-modern ('classical') debates, see Felicitas Opwis, *Maṣlaḥa and the Purpose of Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). I cannot go into the vast and controversial modern debate on utility, *maslaha*, and the 'finality of Sharia', or *maqasid al-shari'a*.

evidence allows us to go much further. Names, sobriquets, and titles provide an excellent entrance point, and they happen to have been a favourite object of historical study in previous decades, frequently in conjunction with epigraphy and numismatics.[60] In contradistinction to their Umayyad predecessors (r. 661–750), who had refrained from adopting regnal titles, the ʿAbbasid and Fatimid caliph-imams adopted titles that highlighted their special relationship with God, be it in a passive role (al-Mutawakkil ʿala llah, 'the one who trusts in God,' al-Mustansir bi-llah, 'the one who is victorious through God,' al-Mahdi bi-llah, 'the divinely guided one') or in a more active one (al-Qaʾim bi-amri llah, 'he who implements God's command'). From the mid-10th century C.E. onwards, when the ʿAbbasids had become desperately dependent on military men of Turkic origin (commonly referred to as 'the Turks') within their realm, and were threatened by military forces of Iranian, Turkic, or Arab origin from abroad, they granted titles including the elements *din*, *dawla* (rotation, dynasty, dynastic realm),[61] *mulk* (realm, dominion, kingdom), *milla* and *umma* (religion, religious community, Muslim community) to the military commanders and heads of the civil administration on whom they relied. Whereas religious scholars tended to hold titles including *din*, courtiers, generals, military strongmen, and high-ranking bureaucrats ('secretaries', *kuttab*) were given honorifics marking them out as the pillar, support, friend, sword, glory, sun, or star of *din*, *dawla*, *mulk*, or *milla*: Salah al-Din (Saladin), Sharaf al-Dawla, Nizam al-Mulk, Qiwam al-Milla, and so forth.

The significance of the specific element selected should not be overstated: in spite of some attempts on the part of chancery scribes and bureaucrats to correlate titles to rank and functions (e.g., military or

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60 For the following, see C.E. Bosworth, "Laḳab," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*, vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1998); for more detail, see, notably, Johannes H. Kramers, "Les noms musulmans composés avec Dīn," in *Acta Orientalia* 5 (1927); Hasan al-Basha, *al-Alqab al-islamiyya fi l-taʾrikh wa-l-wathaʾiq wa-l-athar* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda, 1957); Albert Dietrich, "Zu den mit ad-dīn zusammengesetzten islamischen Personennamen," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 110 (1960). Bosworth also points to the fact that the granting of titles was a major source of caliphal income and, for that reason, they had to be paid for in one way or another. Heribert Busse in his *Chalif und Großkönig. Die Buyiden im Irak (945–1055)* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2004) provides detailed evidence for the Buyid period (r. in Iraq 945–1055).

61 In Ismaʿili (Sevener) Shiʿi thought, to which the Fatimids adhered, *dawla* had a cosmological and soteriological meaning and should be translated as 'aeon' rather than 'realm.' I am grateful to Sarah Stroumsa for alerting me to this fact.

civil), no consistent pattern emerged between the 10th and 15th centuries.[62] One and the same man could be awarded the title of Rukn al-Dawla ('pillar of the realm') one year and Rukn al-Din the next. The various elements could be strung together in ever longer chains, for example in the honorifics varying the *dawla* element, carried by all leading male members of the Buyid clan, Persian-speaking Shi'i warlords from the region of Daylam, on the southern shore of the Caspian, who, in 945/46 C.E. imposed their protectorate over the Sunni caliphs (Buyid rule was also known as *dawlat al-Daylam*). The practice reached a peak with 'Imad *al-Din* Sharaf al-Dawla Mu'ayyid al-Milla Mughith al-Umma Safi Amir al-Mu'minin (pillar of religion, honour of the realm, supporter of the community and its provider, and true friend of the commander of the faithful, i.e., the caliph). *Rien ne va plus.* The artillery of titles was clearly meant to impress, eagerly coveted and dearly paid for. Title mania was, however, also censured by the pious and ridiculed by the urbane.

In the mid-11th century, the Iranian Shi'i Buyids were displaced by the Turkic Sunni Seljuks, who imposed themselves even more forcefully on the 'Abbasid caliphs and adopted the title of *sultan*, which a few decades previously had been introduced by Mahmud of Ghazna (d. 1030). By that time, the Arabic title *malik* (king), which in earlier times had been denounced as un-Islamic, had been rapidly gaining in popularity and was either granted to, or arrogated by, a growing number of military strongmen. 'King' could be topped by 'king of kings', either in Arabic or in Persian. The Buyids had already adopted the ancient Persian title of *shahanshah*, 'king of kings', underlining a claim to power that was based on Iranian *cultural* heritage and kingship.[63] Several Buyids and Seljuks forced the caliph to crown them in a Sasanian-style ceremony and to confer high-sounding titles on them, including 'king in, or of, the east and the west' (*malik fi* or *al-mashriq wa-l-maghrib*).

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62 The scribe who finished Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyasatname* after the author's death tried to impose a firm distinction between titles given to military men (x *al-dawla*) and civilian bureaucrats (y *al-mulk*)(Nizāmulmulk, *Siyāsatnāma: Das Buch der Staatskunst*, trans. Karl Emil Schabinger Freiherr von Schowingen (Zurich: Manesse, 1987) esp. chap. 41). He failed, as one would learn from looking at the titles of Seljuk dignitaries.

63 Busse, *Chalif und Großkönig*, 159–84, and Wilferd Madelung, "The assumption of the title Shāhanshāh by the Būyids and 'The reign of the Daylam' [Dawlat al-Daylam]," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 27 (1969).

The Seljuks also seem to be the first to have been granted honorifics pairing *al-dunya* and *al-din*, such as Mu'izz or Jalal al-Dunya wa-l-Din for Sultan Malik-Shah (r. 1072–92).[64] The combination of *dunya* and *din* echoed an ancient Iranian trope according to which 'religion and government are twin brothers'. This idea was vigorously adopted by Muslim 'theorists' of government, first and foremost the famous Seljuk vizier Abu l-'Ali Hasan Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092).[65] The trope was, of course, not uniquely Islamic. For Western Europe, it has perhaps been best studied with regard to early modern England and France, and brought to life in Hilary Mantel's acclaimed trilogy on Henry VIII's powerful counsellor and chancellor Thomas Cromwell (d. 1540).[66] In the Islamic context, the formula could be read as a broadening of the scope: *dunya* suggested more than either *dawla* or *mulk*, which in the Sunni tradition referred to the realm controlled by a ruler, and by the same token designated the recipient as his servant. In the late 12th and early 13th centuries, a number of Turkic rulers more or less arrogated these titles to themselves. Among them, the Khwarezm Shahs posed the greatest threat to the caliphate until their fall to the Mongols in the early 1220s, followed some three decades later by the Mongol conquest of the 'Abbasids themselves.

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64 All Seljuk sultans, as well as their chief consorts/wives and sons, were addressed with honorifics modulating the *dunya wa-din* formula (pillar, saviour, reviver, support, etc. of *al-dunya wa-l-din*); see Nizāmulmulk, *Siyāsatnāma*, 384.

65 Nizāmulmulk, *Siyāsatnāma*. See notably Shaul Shaked, "From Iran to Islam: Notes on some themes in transmission. 1. 'Religion and sovereignty are twins,' in Ibn al-Muqaffa's theory of government," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984); Noah Feldman, "The Ethical Literature: Religion and Political Authority as Brothers," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 5, no. 2 (2012); Neguin Yavari, *Advice for the Sultan: Prophetic Voices and Secular Politics in Medieval Islam* (London: Hurst, 2014), 29–37; Safi, *Politics of Knowledge*, 3–7, 106, 119. Safi also documents the trenchant critique of the trope by the exciting figure of 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadhani (d. 1131) (Safi, chap. 6, esp. 182–89). For the reign of Nizam al-Mulk, dubbed "al-dawla al-Nizamiyya" by Muslim observers, who in his capacity as vizier and *atabeg* combined administrative, fiscal, and military responsibilities, see Safi, chap. 2.

66 Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009); *Bring Up the Bodies* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012); and *The Mirror & the Light* (London: Fourth Estate, 2020).

Coins and medallions minted for the Khwarezm Shahs declare them to rule both, *din* and *dunya*, as distinct units harmoniously brought together under their aegis.[67]

لا اله الا الله

محمد

رسول الله

السلطان الا

عظم علا الد

نيا و الدين محمد

Coin of the Khwarezm Shah Sultan 'Ala l-Dunya wa-l-Din Muhammad b. Tekish (r. 1200–20).

After the fall of the Isma'ili (Sevener Shi'i) Fatimids in Egypt, both the Sunni Ayyubids (r. 1171–1250) and the Sunni Mamluks, former military slaves who displaced the Ayyubids and ruled until they were defeated by the Ottomans in 1516–17, similarly used the *dunya wa-din* formula. Baibars al-Bunduqdari, the de facto founder of the new political order (which was not strictly speaking a dynasty), who had risen to power through murder and cunning, called himself "the sultan, the king, the victorious, pillar of *al-dunya* and *al-din (al-sultan al-malik al-zahir rukn al-dunya wa-l-din)*". He managed to stay in power for seventeen years (1260–77).

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67 For more detail, see Lutz Richter-Bernburg, "Zur Titulatur der Ḫwārezm-Šāhe aus der Dynastie Anūštegīns," *Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, n. s., 9 (1976).

Gold dinar of Sultan Baibars, title shown above the emblem of the leopard. Source: wikimedia.

Only rarely was *din* directly combined with *dawla*, as in the case of Mahmud of Ghazna's father Sebüktekin (Nasir al-Din wa-l-Dawla) or of Aybak (Qutb al-Dawla wa-l-Din). Both were manumitted military slaves who served a dynasty before founding de facto independent sultanates in present-day Afghanistan and northern India.[68] What we see more frequently is strings of titles carrying either *din* or *dawla*, such as Taj al-Din 'Ala' al-Dawla, or Jamal al-Din Sharaf al-Dawla. It would seem that the trope that religion and government were twin brothers was generally expressed through *mulk* rather than *dawla*, which may still have carried too much of the dynastic association, at least for Sunni Muslims. It was only in the 20th century, when *dawla* simply signified 'state', having long since shed its dynastic associations and even more so its soteriological ring, that Islamists proclaimed that 'Islam is religion and state' (*al-Islam din wa-dawla*), with a fully developed political theory of its own.

Many Western observers have identified *din/dini* with 'the spiritual' and *dunya/dunyawi* with 'the temporal'. This includes prominent Islamicists such as Henri Laoust and Louis Gardet who assigned to the realm of the spiritual what was based on revelation and to the temporal what was not.[69] At best, this interpretation is misleading. It evokes the mediaeval European doctrine of the two swords: a spiritual one held by the Church, and a temporal one wielded by lay rulers. As the conflict over the investiture of bishops and abbots in 11th- and 12th-century Europe serves to show, things were more

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68   Bosworth, "Laḳab," 622, 623, and 629 is not entirely consistent. A Seljuk courtier carried the title Kamil al-Dawla wa-l-Din (Safi, *Politics of Knowledge*, 190–91). The Delhi sultan Iltutmish (r. 1211–36) held the title of Shams ('sun') al-Dunya wa-l-Din. However, in each instance the title was frequently shortened to "al-Din," dropping either al-Dawla or al-Dunya.

69   Louis Gardet, "Dīn," 295v; see also Gardet, "Religion and Culture."

complicated, and not only because the feudal order itself was so complex, defying all efforts at neat categorisation.[70] Beginning with the Emperor of the Holy (!) Roman Empire, a number of princes claimed not only to have been appointed through the grace of God but to have been anointed by God. Even in mediaeval Europe, the lines separating the temporal from the spiritual were thus far from clear, and frequently disputed.

Similar points hold for the Near East: the men who from the 10th century C.E. onwards made their way to power as *amirs* and *sultans* did not uniformly see themselves as temporal rulers complementing the spiritual authority of the Sunni caliph. The great Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 1048) did report in his "Chronology of Ancient Nations" that certain astrologers had described the caliph as a mere figurehead with religious authority (al-Biruni called it *dini* and *i'tiqadi*) rather than temporal power (*mulk dunyawi*).[71] Al-Biruni was, however, not a 'political theorist', and he referred to the political realities of mid-10th century Iraq, rather than caliphal theory. Regardless, one should be cautious of giving undue weight to his words, given the intricacy and instability of the context and power configuration he describes. To begin with, the concept of the caliph as a purely 'spiritual' figure is ill-founded. The 'Abbasid caliphs laid claim to genealogical charisma (as defined by Max Weber) through their descent from the house of the prophet Muhammad, and were widely seen as the head of the (Sunni) Muslim community, or Umma. They were able to use their aura of religious legitimacy to confer legitimacy on other rulers, who were in theory subject to them. The caliph's function was to 'uphold Islam' and to ward off heresy and disbelief; some transmitted prophetic *hadiths*, others issued creeds carrying their names. The fuzziness of boundaries notwithstanding, religious (here: doctrinal and legal) authority must be distinguished from religious function.

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70 I will not go into the dispute over whether the term 'feudal' is heuristically valid, whether anything like a 'feudal order' ever existed, what vassalage entailed, what the status of bondage and serfdom implied, and whether the categories of Roman Law fitted social reality. In the present context, the vital point is that bishops and abbots, in addition to being high Church clergy, were also fief holders and vassals, and hence had to swear loyalty to two masters, the Pope and their prince. These loyalties, and the status of the prince vis-à-vis ordained clergy, were seen quite differently by lawyers of the Church and diverse emperors or kings, respectively.

71 See Abbasi, "Did Premodern Muslims Distinguish," 216.

Contrary to what al-Biruni may have thought, caliphal claims to religious authority were diffuse and disputed.[72] In the so-called *mihna* ('tribulation', inquisition) of the first part of the 9th century, the caliphs failed in their attempt to impose a specific doctrine on the scholars of theology and law (*'ulama'*), despite the latter's lack of corporate institutionalisation and the independent material resources tied to it. From the second half of the 9th century onwards, the Sunni *'ulama'* were widely portrayed as the 'heirs of the prophets', qualified to rule on religious and legal issues, on the basis of the authoritative textual sources. Still, in their majority they continued to affirm the caliph's role as guardian of the faith and the Muslim community. Muslim philosophers from al-Farabi (d. 950) to Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037) to Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198), working and reworking important strands of Greek tradition, offered their own understandings of caliphal authority by variously identifying prophets, *imams*, and the philosopher king.[73] By the 12th century, Sufi *shaykhs*, saints, and brotherhoods had emerged as additional players in the field, adding yet another element to what was already a complicated configuration. As a result, religious authority was dispersed, with considerable potential for competition, tension, and negotiation, even while the rhetoric of collaboration was studiously preserved.

Unlike the 'Abbasid caliphs, the Buyids, Seljuks, and Khwarezm Shahs lacked genealogical legitimacy, as defined by Muslim religious scholars. Additionally, they did not meet many of the other eligibility criteria the same scholars had fixed, such as religious knowledge; many of them did not even speak Arabic. Nonetheless, they were Muslims, and they wielded power (*shawka*). The deficiency concerning their genealogy and religious qualification did not impair their capacity to uphold both social order and correct religion. 11th-century Sunni scholars and bureaucrats eventually went as far as to assert that what ultimately counted was order and justice, and not

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72 Muhammad Qasim Zaman emphasised cooperation rather than conflict between caliph and *'ulama'* (Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbāsids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunnī Elite* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), esp. 101–18, 201–13). Ira M. Lapidus spoke of 'tacit collaboration' and a 'tacit bargain' (Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 264–65). His "Separation of State and Religion" no longer reflects current research. See also: Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, eds., *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Krämer, "Gottes-Recht bricht Menschen-Recht," and below.

73 For a spirited contribution to a contested field, see Patricia Crone, *God's Rule – Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), chap. 14.

whether the ruler was a Muslim.[74] How these rulers placed themselves vis-à-vis the caliph and the *'ulama'* depended on time and circumstance:[75] the Shi'i Buyids showed themselves remarkably flexible in adjusting to changing circumstance, exchanging mutually binding oaths of loyalty with the Sunni caliphs, who in theory they should have considered illegitimate usurpers of an imamate rightfully belonging to selected male descendants of 'Ali alone. The Seljuk Tughril Bey (r. 1055–63) started off by portraying himself as the loyal sword rescuing his caliph from Shi'i oppression at home and abroad, while taking on the titles of 'exalted sultan', *padshah* (emperor), and *shahanshah*. Both the caliph and the Seljuks granted honorifics including *din*, *dawla*, and *mulk* to the military and civilian elites serving them. Thus the famous Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk ('order of the realm'), whose given name was Hasan, eventually added Qiwam al-Din ('pillar of religion') and Radi Amir al-Mu'minin ('the one with whom the caliph is pleased') to his titles. The Seljuk Sultan Malik-Shah (r. 1072–92) went furthest by appropriating caliphal prerogatives and titles (notably *khalifat Allah*, God's deputy, and 'the shadow of God on earth'), and like several of his Turkic and Buyid predecessors, endeavoured to rid himself of the caliph altogether.

The further we move from the writings of Muslim scholars of theology and law, to consider other narrative genres, chancery documents, law in practice, and major expressions of art and culture, the more clearly we discern the power of a monarchical tradition, in which princes sought religious legitimacy, and made considerable efforts to be viewed as pious, but were nonetheless quite willing to assert themselves, even overriding religious laws and regulations if necessary. Disdain for worldly pursuits and pleasures was not the rule for rulers. If it had been, Muslim history and historiography would have been very different.[76] What is evident is

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74 Omid Safi traces the remarkable shifts of the celebrated scholar and Sufi Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who ended up legitimising any ruler provided he upheld justice (as it was understood in his time and milieu) (Safi, *Politics of Knowledge*, chap. 4).

75 For the Buyids, see Heribert Busse, *Chalif und Großkönig*, notably 57–60, 103–04, 131–59, 185, 203–21, 261–74, 294–95; for the Seljuks, Safi, *Politics of Knowledge*, 3–7, 19, 21–22, 26–31, 35–42, 61–62, 75–76, 79. For Nizam al-Mulk, see the Seljuk secretary and historian Anushirvan b. Khalid (d. 1137), quoted in the Introduction to Nizāmulmulk, *Siyāsatnāma*, 58.

76 In addition to the titles already cited, see Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001) and, with a focus on the Maghreb, Jocelyne Dakhlia, *Le divan des rois: Le politique et le religieux dans l'islam* (Paris: Aubier, 1998); for Timurid Iran and Moghul India, see A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

that, irrespective of the precise arrangement, there was no neat separation of powers between ʿAbbasid caliphs, Buyid *amirs*, and Seljuk *sultans*: they were all held responsible for *din* and *dunya*, 'upholding Islam', securing peace and prosperity at home, and expanding the borders of Islam abroad. Titles and power configurations changed with the early modern empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Moghuls. The pattern of collaboration and competition did not.

3   Religion, Culture, and the Islamicate

3.1 Islam and Community-Building

It is one thing to ask whether Islam was historically understood by Muslims as a *religion*. It is a different matter to investigate under which conditions a religious *community* emerged, that was clearly recognisable as Muslim/Islamic and demarcated from others: in its immediate sense, *islam* refers to an attitude and an act rather than to a distinct community of believers. *Islam* denotes 'surrender' (to God and his decree). One may translate 'Islam' as 'submission', as Michel Houellebecq notoriously did, and as many Muslims and students of Islam have done before him. However, one should then equally read the Lord's Prayer as an act of submission ("Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven").[77] The relevant sources, including first and foremost the Qur'an, suggest that Muhammad and his followers initially had an open, inclusive understanding of *islam* and that all people who 'devoted themselves' to the God of Muhammad and his followers could be accepted as 'believers' (Arab., *mu'minun*).[78] The question of how open the gates were in reality, and whether they actually let in Jews, Christians, and other seekers of the Divine (sing., *hanif*) defining 'belief' according to

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77 Evidently, this is not a comment on Houellebecq's novel *Soumission* which has been variously read as utopia, dystopia, satire, and/or a culturally racist critique on Islam. Houellebecq's novel featured on the cover of *Charlie Hebdo* the day it was attacked by militant Islamists.

78 For philology see notably: James Robson, "'Islām' as a Term," *The Muslim World* 44 (1954): 101–09; and D.Z.H. Baneth, "What did Muhammad mean when he called his religion 'Islam'? The original meaning of *aslama* and its derivatives," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971). For the historical narrative and theological analysis, see Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chap. 1, esp. 32–35, and Smith, "Faith," esp. 167–70.

their own criteria, remains unresolved, however. Whether this inclusive approach applied to the entire prophetic era, i.e., the two decades between 610 and 632 C.E., is better left for specialist discussion. By contrast, the distinction between believers and Muslims (*mu'minun* and *muslimun*) retained its relevance and continues to be discussed to the present day.

Certain echoes of the more open understanding of Islam lingered on. For example, in Islamic renderings of the Alexander legend, as incorporated into the poetic works of Nizami and others, Iskandar/Alexander the Great was shown making the pilgrimage to Mecca. I will return to this issue later.

Iskandar/Alexander at the Ka'ba in Mecca. Nizami, *Khamsa* 1560–61. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France. BNF Supplément persan 1956 f. 212v.

The historical record evidences a community built on a different basis, a fact relevant to discussion of the nexus between religious bond and political loyalty and, by extension, the potential for secularity 'in Islam'. According to Muslim tradition, shortly after the journey (*hijra*) of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Yathrib in 622 C.E., the Muslim refugees entered into a treaty alliance with several of Yathrib's pagan and Jewish clans. Among Muslims, Yathrib came to be known as Medina (*madinat al-nabi*, city of

the Prophet). Muhammad headed the community in his dual capacity as prophet among the believers (*mu'minun*, and only in a few instances *muslimun*) and arbitrator among the hostile local clans. The alliance was formally laid down in the so-called 'Constitution of Medina'[79] and was based on a distinction between religious and political affiliation, although this distinction was not elaborated in any theoretical manner. Muhammad's claim to religious authority was valid only in the eyes of the believers. To everyone else, he had to prove himself as a political leader – one reason among others not to equate community building with identity construction. The alliance sought by the Muslim refugees in their new environment was based on *politics*, not cult and belief.

Some Muslims continue to invoke the alliance established in Medina as the ultimate model of state- and community-building in Islam. Many believe that in Medina, Muhammad created what resembled a modern state, and that Muslims wrote the first constitution in human history. The assertion serves an obvious function in the competition over primacy and superiority of claims, but it does nothing to elucidate what went on in Medina in the 620s. Muslim historians tell us that the Medinan alliance was short-lived. Within a few decades, Islam emerged as a community (*umma*) of its own, clearly distinguishable from that of the Jews, the Christians and the God-seeking *hanif*s, to which one either belonged or not. The so-called Pact of 'Umar, attributed to the second Sunni caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattab (r. 634–44) but only fully elaborated several centuries later, was framed as a contractual agreement the Christians of Damascus had sought from their Muslim conquerors. It prohibited non-Muslims from dressing as Muslims did, wearing their hair and beards in a similar fashion, teaching their children the Qur'an, or practising their cult in areas inhabited by Muslims. Some of these clauses could easily be read as cultural. By the same token, the Pact fixed the social ascendency of Muslims over non-Muslims in minute detail. The principle of rendering religious difference visible could also be read as a strategy of conflict prevention, a dual function that was carried into the modern era.[80] If, in

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79   There is no extant copy of the document that came to be known as the "Constitution of Medina" (the text itself refers to a *sahifa*, a 'book' or 'sheet of paper') but it is widely considered to be authentic, even among critical historians; see Michael Lecker, *The Constitution of Medina: Muḥammad's First Legal Document* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2004).

80   Albrecht Noth, "Abgrenzungsprobleme zwischen Muslimen und Nicht-Muslimen: Die 'Bedingungen Umars' (aš-šurūṭ al-ʿumariyya) unter einem anderen Aspekt gelesen,"

the process, the external walls were raised, the gates still remained open to those who were prepared to undergo the rather simple act of conversion. However, the gates were only open in one direction: conversion was declared irreversible, and abandoning Islam amounted to regressing to an inferior status of belief or even disbelief. Apostasy led not only to social ostracism, it was subject to severe punishment under Islamic law.

3.2 Muslims and Others

The basic structure of Islamic theological, ethical, moral, aesthetic, and legal teachings, practices, and institutions was erected over the course of some three centuries, particularly in the urban centres of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt rather than in Mecca and Medina. For that reason, Islam was not the Arab desert warrior religion it was portrayed to be by European scholars up to Max Weber.[81] What emerged as 'Islam' resulted from continued exchange with representatives of other religious, ethical, moral, and philosophical traditions, notably Jews and Christians, with the Qur'an placing itself squarely within the monotheistic tradition.[82] While it would be fascinating to systematically explore the sites, types, and conditions of interaction, the persons involved, and the tools and mechanisms employed, I shall not do so here. What matters here is that in the course of these encounters, Muslim scholars elaborated in greater detail their understanding of the 'religion of truth' (*din al-haqq*) and the properties of other cults and beliefs, leading to sophisticated taxonomies that went way beyond the unsystematic Qur'anic references and prophetic *hadith*s. Qur'anic verses such as, "You have your religion, and I have mine" (Sura 109:6), and "It is He Who sent His Messenger with Guidance and the religion of truth, that He may exalt

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Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 9 (1987); and Gudrun Krämer, "Moving Out of Place: Minorities in Middle Eastern Urban Societies, 1800–1914," in *The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750–1950*, ed. Peter Sluglett (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

81 For Weber, who never dealt with Islam systematically, see Wolfgang Schluchter, ed., *Max Webers Sicht des Islams: Interpretation und Kritik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987); and Gudrun Krämer, "Islam, Kapitalismus und die protestantische Ethik," in *Kapitalismus: Historische Annäherungen,* ed. Gunilla Budde (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

82 The Qur'an speaks of its own place in the chain of revelations; see Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Stefan Wild, ed., *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

it above all religions [*al-din kullihi*], even if the idolaters find it abhorrent" (Sura 9:33), point to an acute awareness of plurality, competition, and the determination to establish a hierarchy. Thus Sura 3:110 famously declared, "You are the best community [*umma*] ever brought forth among mankind, commanding virtue and forbidding vice, and believing in God," and Muhammad was credited with stating that "Islam is exalted, and nothing is exalted above it" (*al-Islam ya'lu wa-la yu'la*).[83]

Scholarly elaborations on *din* in the singular and *adyan* or *diyanat* in the plural, or on *milla* (pl. *milal*) as religious community/communities, and on orthodoxy, heresy, and apostasy make it abundantly clear that for the authors involved Islam was a religion comparable to, indeed superior to, other religions.[84] While Iranian traditions[85] infused with Zoroastrianism had a notable impact on Islamic law, administration, religious practices, and broader cultural ideas, it was Jews and Christians that constituted *the most relevant other* in the authoritative religious literature. In modern Arabic parlance, the 'heavenly religions' (*al-adyan al-samawiyya*) comprising Judaism, Christianity, and Islam correspond to the 'Abrahamic religions' of Western tradition. The ambivalent relationship between Muslims, Jews, and Christians was deeply significant to Muslim self-understanding and to the continuity of a community that rested on, and in turn demanded, belief *and* belonging. This relationship allowed for connection as well as distancing, and for the recognition of commonality as well as claims to superiority.[86]

Based on Qur'anic references, Muslim religious and legal scholars expressed this claim to superiority in the shape of a pyramid: Muhammad

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83 For the *hadith*, see *Sahih al-Bukhari*, kitab al-jana'iz 79, no. 79 (Edition Beirut: Dar al-Arqam, s.d.), 284; for the axiom and its legal ramifications, see Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, esp. 35–39.

84 Out of the extensive literature, see again Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, chap. 2, who among other things shows (without explicitly addressing this claim) that the assertion that the plural *adyan* was only created in the modern period is wrong.

85 I cannot go into the long and unresolved debate over whether to speak of 'Iran' (with the emphasis on territory) or of 'Persia' (with the emphasis on language, ethnicity, and rule by ethnic Persians) for the period under consideration. Here as in many other contexts, naming is not innocent. Rather, the debate is deeply embedded in cultural and political battles; for a summary, see Sarah B. Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 8–12; see also below for discussions of a 'Persianate' sphere.

86 For the normative aspects, see Wilde and McAuliffe, "Religious Pluralism and the Qur'ān" and Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*; my article "Pluralism and Tolerance," in *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction*, ed. Gerhard Bowering (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) considers contemporary positions in more detail.

received the ultimate revelation correcting Jewish and Christian deviations from, and outright falsifications of, the genuine heavenly revelations of earlier prophets. Through this ultimate revelation, God "perfected" the religion (*din*) of Muhammad and the believers and made it "complete" (Sura 5:3); hence rendering Islam the perfect religion. Difference translated seamlessly into hierarchy. The parallels with the equally ambivalent relationship of Christians to Jewish tradition, which also allows for both connection and a claim to superiority, are evident. It would be all the more interesting to explore the Chinese concept of *sanjiao*, the 'three teachings', which describes the multifaceted, occasionally tense but generally harmonious relationship between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.[87] It is important to note that coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims could extend far beyond the original triad of Muslims, Jews, and Christians, to include communities that the majority of Muslim theologians and legal scholars did not recognise as believers and hence denied the possibility of peaceful coexistence to. Buddhists and Hindus in the Indian subcontinent as well as Confucians and Daoists in East Asia are the most conspicuous examples. Some Muslim theologians and jurists, applying their understanding of the Qur'an, Sunna, and Sharia, tried to work out rules that would enable interreligious coexistence. Many other Muslims, first and foremost Sufis, did not bother with such exercises and simply acknowledged the diversity of humankind, blithely stating the possibility that there was more than one path to truth and the Divine. The ecumenical approach reflected a profoundly religious approach, with no hint of a secular outlook. A number of philosophers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, went further in asserting that all religions shared a common ground and indeed were equally true. However, the philosophers also argued that religion was for the masses, whereas an intellectual elite attained truth through rational philosophy – a patently secular argument, which was consequently denounced by religious scholars, who questioned the philosophers' status as believers.[88]

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87 See Joachim Gentz, "Die Drei Lehren (*sanjiao*) Chinas in Konflikt und Harmonie: Figuren und Strategien einer Debatte," in *Religionen nebeneinander: Modelle religiöser Vielfalt in Ost- und Südostasien*, ed. Edith Franke and Michael Pye (Münster: Lit, 2006) and Xinzhong Yao, *Introduction to Confucianism*, 223–44.

88 These critics declared the claim that all religions were equivalent (*takafu' al-adyan*) to equal godlessness (Sarah Stroumsa, "Comparison as a Multifocal Approach: The Case of Arab Philosophical Thought," in *Comparative Studies in the Humanities*, ed. Guy G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2018), 135–40).

Alongside the possibility of recognition, tolerance, and inclusion, Muslims have always had the option of non-recognition, intolerance, and exclusion. The latter could go well beyond discursive othering, and 'submission' to God could entail fighting those who resisted the Muhammadan call (*da'wa*). Just as the Medinan alliance had served to defend the community against hostilities from both outside and within, religiously sanctioned warfare (*jihad*) could be directed against members of other religious communities as well as against men and women who self-identified as Muslims. In the latter case, such conflict required that the target first be excluded from the community (*takfir*) because of ideas and practices they either espoused or were said to espouse, a requirement that left ample room for slander and defamation. In many cases, this involved the charge of worshipping people at the expense of worshipping God alone, which was equated with polytheism (*shirk*, 'association'), violating the core tenet of Islam that there is only one God (*tauhid*). Charges could also be based on ideas and behaviour that the men and women concerned considered perfectly legitimate within their own understanding of Islam, or that they attributed to culture, custom, and tradition: festive celebrations and mourning rituals, the consumption of alcohol and drugs, shared prayer with non-Muslims in times of drought and military threat, matrilineal succession, and so on. There was disagreement over whether a particular notion or behaviour constituted a mere misdemeanour ('minor sin'), which did not challenge the individual's status as a Muslim, or a 'grave sin', which excluded them from the community and even justified taking up arms against them. These debates do not concern us here, except that they highlight the importance of correct belief and that they could be related to custom and culture.

3.3 Islam and the Islamicate

Under the influence of Michel Foucault and Talal Asad, scholars of Islam have been preoccupied, if not obsessed with the workings of power and exclusion, particularly within the framework of the modern nation state. Yet power entered the stage much earlier. Within the Islamic ecumene, the strongest influence was Islam itself. As stated previously, Islam was formed in continuous encounter with existing traditions, but this encounter did not occur in a power vacuum. Islam, in the dual sense of a community of Muslims and of a religious tradition in the making, established itself as hegemonic very early on, in contrast to foundational developments in most religious and/or moral traditions, including Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism and

Christianity. Two decades after Muhammad's death in 632 C.E., Arab Muslims ruled over a vast geographical expanse between what is today Morocco and north-east Iran, containing a demographic majority of non-Muslims and a growing number of converts.[89] The latter were integrated into the community through the tribal institution of patronage (*wala'*), in which non-Arab converts attached themselves as 'clients' (*mawali*) to Arab Muslim patrons.[90] Ethnicity should not have been a factor in conversion, as discrimination on such lines ran directly counter to both Qur'anic teachings and certain sayings of the prophet Muhammad that declared all believers to be equal ("like the teeth of a comb") and piety to be the only marker of distinction recognised under Islam. In this regard, modern scholars who celebrate Islam as having been global and cosmopolitan from the very beginning, skipping over a parochial period that Judaism and Christianity passed through, have a point.[91] But they overlook the inequalities in power, social standing, and revenue derived from conquest that non-Arab Muslims experienced in the early period. The Mawali made important contributions to many fields of Islamic knowledge, including Arabic grammar and lexicography. By the mid-9th century C.E. the taint attached to client-status had largely faded into the background, although it could still be traced through the names of fathers, grandfathers, and other forebears. Memories of Arab superiority were never entirely obliterated, though, as evidenced by the pride taken by Muslims from Senegal to Singapore in a pure Arab lineage (which as a rule, was only 'pure' if one wrote out the women).

Within the Muslim empire, Islamic references shaped power, law, and administration at both the imperial and, to varying degrees, the local level. Hegemony, which initially derived from the role of Islam as the religion of the ruling class, gained a broader base as more and more people converted to Islam, both within the empire and increasingly beyond its borders. In the Middle East, this process was by and large completed by the 14th century. From then on, Muslims constituted not only the ruling class, but also the majority of the subjects of Muslim rulers. Similar processes later occurred in Central

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89 Wilfred Cantwell Smith tied Muslim attitudes concerning the separation of religion and state (secularity would have been the better term but was not yet in use) to their early success: whereas Christianity had been a "religion of adversity", Islam had characteristically been the "religion of triumph in success" (Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, esp. 28–32, here 31).

90 See Monique Bernards and John Nawas, eds., *Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Ulrike Mitter, *Das frühislamische Patronat: Eine Studie zu den Anfängen des islamischen Rechts* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2006).

91 Again, Shahab Ahmed serves as a prominent example (*What is Islam?*, 144).

and Southeast Asia as well as in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, though not in the Indian subcontinent, where even under Islamic rule, Muslims continued to be outnumbered by non-Muslims almost everywhere.

In his contribution to the *Cambridge History of Islam*, published in 1970, Louis Gardet cautiously asked

> whether a distinction should be made between a *Muslim* culture proper, inspired by Islamic values and particularly by the text of the Qur'an, and a culture which existed *in Muslim territory*, and which either interpreted the religious beliefs of Islam in its own way, or ignored them or even opposed them.[92]

He tentatively answered this question with the well-known trope (not fully shared by me) that "Islam is, in its deepest sense, *dīn wa-dawla*, 'religion and city', and too rigid a classification into separate sections would not be true to the historic reality".[93] At roughly the same time, the historian Marshall Hodgson's monumental three-volume-study *The Venture of Islam*, significantly subtitled *Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, was posthumously published. In this work, Hodgson introduces the term 'Islamicate' to characterise a context impregnated with Islamic references (my words not his) by Muslims as well as non-Muslims, without being bound to religion and the normative Islamic tradition at large. I do not completely support his classification of religion, culture, and society as Islamic, Islamicate, and Islamdom, respectively, especially not in the distinction he makes between society and social relations ("Islamdom") on the one hand, and culture ("Islamicate") on the other. Hodgson himself is not entirely consistent here, for only one page after introducing these terms, he sums them up as follows:

> 'Islamicate' would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to *the social and cultural complex* historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.[94] [my emphases]

Consequently, the following interpretation is inspired by Hodgson but reflects subsequent thinking including my own.

In the pre-modern Islamicate societies that evolved over time, it was Islamic norms and conventions that had the greatest impact on how people

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92 Gardet, "Religion and Culture," 601.

93 Where Gardet speaks of a 'Muslim' culture, I use 'Islamic'. And, as shown above, I do not subscribe to the *dīn wa-dawla* thesis.

94 Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (Chicago, London: Chicago University Press, 1974), vol. 1:57–60, here 59.

thought and lived, affecting aesthetic preferences and social practices even among those who did not belong to the Muslim community (though it should perhaps be repeated that affecting, shaping, inspiring, and informing is not the same as 'determining'). This was true not only for domains in which one might have expected a certain degree of adjustment to Islamic law, such as business, trade, and the establishment of pious foundations (*waqfs*). It could also be seen in language, clothing, architecture, and the art of the book, where such an adjustment was not necessarily required. On the contrary, as mentioned above, during the early conquests, Muslims had insisted on clearly marking religious affiliation, in order to be able to distinguish the Muslim from the non-Muslim at first glance. The 'Pact of 'Umar' was designed to *prevent* the emergence of an Islamicate entity, in which Muslims and non-Muslims, believers and non-believers mixed freely and could not easily be distinguished from one another.

Shahab Ahmed has made a passionate case that for Muslims in what he called the Balkans-to-Bengal complex in the half-millennium stretching from 850 to 1350, the poetry of Hafez, the love of beardless youths, wine-drinking, rationalist philosophy, and Sufi illuminationist thought, which all stood in flagrant contradiction to certain unequivocal legal injunctions in the Qur'an and Hadith, were not *culture*, or one locally or culturally bounded expression of Islam among others, but *Islam*:

> … it has been to plant the seed in the mind of the reader that these contradictions cannot meaningfully be understood, as they generally are, by separating them out as differences between the *religious* and *cultural* (or *religious* and *secular*) spheres of something called Islam, with integral Islam obtaining in a somehow self-evidently 'religious' space… Rather, I suggest that these contradictions call for – indeed, demand and require – a suspension of these received categories of distinction in order to reconceptualize Islam as a human and historical phenomenon in *new* terms which map meaningfully onto the import of the prolific scale and nature of the *contradictory normative claims* made in history by Muslims about *what is Islam*.[95]

Leaving aside its idiosyncratic style, this passage provides much food for thought – and query. The picture Ahmed draws of Islam as the experience of Muslims is immensely attractive: open and generous, loving and

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95   Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 73. In a similar vein, he stated that "it is not at all clear how 'culture' is to be filtered out of 'religion,' or 'religion' distilled out of 'culture'. Indeed, it would appear that the Muslim practitioners of art, literature and politics… are going out of their way *not* so much as to *make* a conscious distinction as to confuse or confound any distinction – or if they are making a distinction, they are being confoundingly confusing about it." (Ahmed, 165, and chap. 1 and 6).

sensitive, daring but also modest, embracing ambiguity and contradiction, prepared to agree to disagree, eager to explore, and keen to welcome new possibilities.[96] There can be no doubt that what he describes is not just a figment of his imagination but reflects lived experiences as documented in poetry, paintings, courtly prose, and Sufi writings. Less exuberant authors, such as Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen and Luca Patrizi have similarly stated that, "The wine-obsessed libertine does not belong to another culture than the puritan *ʿālim*. He merely makes different choices."[97] Point well taken – but not accepted as a general rule; for what may have been true for the Balkans-to-Bengal gentleman, or the Arab libertine, was not necessarily true for their non-Muslim neighbours or their fellow Muslims in other times and places, as illustrated by centuries of argument over love, music, and the female voice, modesty and decency, ambiguity and certainty.

And did the wine-loving Muslims that they place so noticeably in the foreground generally think of their 'choices' as not just *normal* but *normative*, as Ahmed has argued with reference to major poets, philosophers, and Sufi figures:

> The primacy that is given to the constitutive determinacy of legal discourse over other discourses serves to *distort our perspective* and effectively prevents us even from *recognizing* – let alone understanding – that, historically, Muslims have constructed normative meaning for Islam in terms that allowed them to live by and/or with norms other than and at odds with those put forward by legal discourse.[98]

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96 On the final pages of his book, Ahmed makes it clear that his aim is not to engage in nostalgia or to paint a rosy picture of Islam, with the "Sufi-philosophical amalgam" serving as the "soft" face of Islam (Ahmed, 539). His statement would go some way to placate (Western) scholars of Sufism, such as Bernd Radtke and Alexander Knysh, who take issue with the romanticising approach to Sufism as the epitome of the Muslim's search for love and beauty, as represented by noted (Western) scholars such as Annemarie Schimmel; see Bernd Radtke, *Neue kritische Gänge: Zu Stand und Aufgaben der Sufikforschung* (Utrecht: M.Th. Houtsma Stichting, 2005); Knysh, *Sufism*, esp. 41–42.

97 Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen and Luca Patrizi, "Introduction," in *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam: Sufi adab*, ed. Francesco Chiabotti et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 19.

98 Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 121; also 44–45, 80, 94–101, 117–29. Reading Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyasatname*, it becomes clear that for this 'Order of the realm' and 'Pillar of religion', drinking was perfectly normal for kings and caliphs, although they should avoid giving out orders while drunk, but that respectable scholars did not drink; see esp. chap. 17 and 29, which deal with the ruler's boon companions (sing. *nadim*) stating that they should be entertaining, able to keep a secret, know large parts of the Qur'an by heart, and master chess and games of dice. Moderation is the word here as in all other affairs; see notably chap. 50. Nizam al-Mulk also expands on the trope that heretics engage in

Ahmed shows little interest in the social site of these positions. As an aside, there is not a single woman in his picture: writing or listening to poetry, holding a glass of wine, or making love to a youth. Perhaps more immediately relevant to discussions of the Islamicate: what Ahmed at some point calls "a common paradigm of Islamic life and thought"[99] may have been Islam for many Muslims. But it cannot have been so for non-Muslims who *took part* in the 'paradigm' without *being part* of the Muslim community. He is also wrong when he claims that for Hodgson and his followers, 'Islamicate' equals 'less Islamic' and hence less pure and authentic than Islamic.[100] Hodgson was not a Salafist, and those who use 'Islamicate' today are not concerned with purity and authenticity but with inclusion, that is to say with the recognition that pre-modern Islamicate culture was created by Muslims, non-Muslims, and possibly some agnostics too. Ahmed misses the point entirely when he asserts that Muslims "*consciously* constitute… their faith by incorporating and synthesizing the ideas and behaviours of non-Muslims", affirming that Islam is there to "prune, correct, purge and complete" (their faiths), as Kenneth Cragg put it so well.[101] The point is not that Islam "incorporates" and "synthesizes" other faiths but that living Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Zoroastrians participated in a society dominated by Muslims, and to some degree shaped by their socio-legal rules and aesthetic preferences. It is when we move beyond the Muslim perspective that the necessity to distinguish between religion and culture comes out most clearly.

3.4 Writing the Islamicate

Exchange resulting from encounters could take many forms, and the discursive strategies employed varied greatly. Exchange could involve competition in which individual elements were adopted and adapted so as to turn them against the other; it could be portrayed as the retrieval of ideas and

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drink, drugs, and debauchery, esp. incest and the exchange of women; see notably chap. 47. For the Turco-Mongol Timurids, who tended to drink heavily, see Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 27–28, 78. It is clear from anthologies of Arabic poetry that drinking wine was not the preserve of Turks, Persians, and Turco-Mongols.

99   Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 75.

100   Ahmed, 171.

101   Ahmed, 173–74. The reference is to the Anglican bishop and noted scholar of Islam Kenneth Cragg's (1913–2012) *The House of Islam* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1975), 5–6.

practices the other had preserved; or it could be appropriated, or outright stolen so as to rebuild one's own community (nostrification). Exchange could be seen as a joint venture aimed at erecting a common edifice. Frequently, exchange was not formally acknowledged or went unnoticed ("unintentional borrowing") but nonetheless left its trace.[102] Among critical scholars, terms suggesting unilateral action, such as 'influence', 'appropriation', or 'borrowing' have come to be viewed with suspicion. 'Inspire' and 'inform' have largely taken their place, accompanied by 'flow' and 'conversation'. 'Assimilation' is completely out. To highlight the multidirectional and frequently unintentional character of exchange, the term 'crosspollination' has been introduced by literary scholars, notably in translation studies.[103] All these terms are doubtlessly subtle, attributing considerable agency to those involved, but they are also liable to masking the element of power, which both rests on and sustains asymmetrical relationships. Cultural flows do not occur in neutral space, and the wind does not necessarily blow with equal strength in all directions. By the same token, the notions of 'shared space' and 'shared history', attractive though they are, need to be treated with caution so as not to fall into the trap of romancing. Most golden ages have been shown to be less glittering than assumed. If there is one field in which equality was established among educated men across religious and confessional boundaries, it was philosophy, at least at certain times and in certain places. Sarah Stroumsa has persuasively argued that within Islamicate contexts, philosophy constituted an extra-territorial sub-culture with remarkable staying power. She also came up with the suggestive image of the whirlpool, in which "each drop contributes to the character of the whole body of water, its own color changing in the turbulence."[104] But, and this is my image, it was also possible for different parties to draw from the same fountain to water their own separate garden plots, barring entry to others.

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102 Tacit appropriation has been shown to be common in the philosophical field, especially as regards Muslim lendings from non-Muslims; see Sarah Stroumsa, "Comparison." For "unintentional borrowings", see Philip Ivanhoe, "The Shifting Contours of the Confucian Tradition," review of *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng and John B. Henderson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994)", *Philosophy East and West* 54, no. 1 (2004): 84.

103 See e.g. Anna Akasoy, James Montgomery and Peter Pormann, eds. *Islamic Crosspollinations: Interactions in the Medieval Middle East* (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007).

104 See her articles "Comparison" (the whirlpool image appears on p. 143) and "The Literary *Genizot*: A Window to the Mediterranean Republic of Letters," *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 8, no. 2–3 (2020).

Contact, exchange, transmissions, and flows were ubiquitous in the pre-modern realm of the 'Islamicate'. A number of fields have allowed us to get a better sense of the sites, processes, discursive strategies, and outcomes of the relevant encounters. Rational philosophy has just been mentioned as one of the domains in which Muslims, Jews, and Christians engaged jointly, sometimes in competition with one another, but more often working on the edifice together. Translation has been best studied for the 8th to 10th centuries C.E., and is commonly referred to as 'Greek-into-Arabic', even though it also involved other languages, such as Syriac, Middle Persian (Pahlavi), and Sanskrit. Empirical science rested on even wider networks of exchange. The religious field, conventionally understood, is particularly rich. Pilgrimage was a fertile source of such cross-pollination. While Mecca and Medina were exclusively reserved for Muslims, there were numerous shared sites, such as Jerusalem or the innumerable tombs and shrines of holy men and women, which were thought to be impregnated with their blessing power (*baraka*). Sufism has been a prime field in which to study productive encounters, from the inspiration Muslim ascetics and mystics received from Christian neighbours to the impact of Sufi notions and practices on Near Eastern Jewish pietists,[105] and the encounters of Sufis, dervishes, Brahmins, and yogis in the Indian subcontinent and the wider Persianate sphere. Overall, Jewish-Muslim encounters have perhaps been studied most intensively, covering material as well as intellectual culture, from shared business and devotional practices to joint engagement with mysticism, philosophy, theology, and law. Shlomo Dov Goitein's six-volume *Mediterranean Society* serves as a prime example of what the Islamicate means and implies.[106] Goitein spoke of a "Jewish Arab symbiosis",[107] though writing before the term 'Islamicate'

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105 See Nathan Hofer, "Training the Prophetic Self: Adab and *riyāḍa* in Jewish Sufism," in *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam: Sufi adab*, ed. Francesco Chiabotti et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2017) and Elisha Russ-Fishbane, *Judaism, Sufism, and the Pietists of Medieval Egypt: A Study of Abraham Maimonides and His Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

106 The Mediterranean horizon Goitein invoked has since been filled by other scholars who, following in Braudel's steps, explored ideas and anxieties shared by men and women in early modern Europe and the adjacent areas of the Islamic(ate) world. Cornell Fleischer's study of eschatology ("A Mediterranean Apocalypse: Prophecies of Empire in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61 (2018)) is a brilliant example of the inclusive approach.

107 S. D. Goitein's *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts Through the Ages*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1974) and *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–93). For critical comment on the concept of symbiosis, see

became widely known. Subsequently, 'symbiosis', too, has gone out of fashion to be largely replaced by *convivencia*. Jewish-Muslim *convivencia* in mediaeval Egypt, Syria, and most of all in Muslim Spain, al-Andalus, has brought forth some of the most sophisticated work in this domain, followed by a growing interest in the Ottoman experience.

Yet it was not only non-Muslims who adjusted to Islamic patterns. Muslims, too, adapted to local customs and sensibilities, even in regions they dominated. The Delhi sultans and the Mughal emperors of India are no doubt the best-known examples of far-ranging acculturation: as Sunni Muslims of Turco-Mongol origin, they ruled over an overwhelmingly non-Muslim majority, and in the Indian subcontinent the pull of Islam proved to be weaker than it had been in the Middle East and in Africa. In Iran and adjacent territories, Muslim conquerors and their successors adapted to the language and culture of their subjects. From the 12th to the 18th centuries, the Persianate cultural sphere stretched from Anatolia through Central Asia to South, East, and Southeast Asia. To describe a cultural sphere largely defined by the principle language of court culture, Marshall Hodgson spoke of a Persianate civilisation, Bert Fragner coined the term Persophony (*Persophonie*), and Robert Canfield referred to Turco-Persia.[108] The Mongol Ilkhans of the 13th century and, to an even greater extent, the Turco-Mongol Timurids of the 14th and 15th centuries provide the most striking examples of these processes in areas as diverse as administration, irrigation, music, poetry, and the art of the book.

Cultural exchange in the Persianate sphere was especially complex as it offered a pool of prestige terms, goods, and institutions that could easily compete with (Arab) Islamic ones outside of the religious sphere, narrowly defined. Yet it also serves to illustrate an important dimension of cultural encounter: retrojection into the past rather than preservation of a legacy of the past, as carefully studied by Sarah Bowen Savant.[109] Shaul

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Stroumsa, "Comparison," 137–38, 144–45, and Stroumsa, "The Literary Genizot."

108 Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 2:293. His term has since been widely accepted; see, e.g., Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, eds., *The Persianate World* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). Bert Fragner, *Die Persophonie: Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999); Robert L. Canfield, ed., *Turco-Persia in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). To avoid giving preference to one language over the others, Shahab Ahmed preferred to speak of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex (Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, esp. 32, 73–85).

109 For the following, see notably Savant, *The New Muslims*, 92; also 21–25, 34–37, 39–47, 72–73, 101–02, and chap. 4. Marshall Hodgson, too, commented on the elements of loss,

Shaked had earlier described the circularity of scholarly argument that first traced a given theme to its (presumed) Iranian origins to then postulate an Iranian influence on the theme concerned. Faintly echoing Savant, Neguin Yavari concluded that, "The Muslims chose and carefully crafted an image of Sasanid lore that suited their own ends, and presented the result as a 'self-image', a partially domesticated wellspring of ethical teachings and political traditions."[110] For modern scholars, the pre-Islamic Iranian past is difficult to access, as most of the relevant sources in Avestan and Middle Persian have been lost, making it very difficult to establish either the continuity or modification of religious ideas and cultural patterns, from pre-Islamic to Islamic times. To Muslims and non-Muslims living after the destruction of the Sasanian Empire in the 660s, more material seems to have been available. In any event, most of the texts we have today were compiled and written down in the Islamic era, and most of the authors who wrote, reconstructed, or imagined the history, culture, and 'wisdom' of the Achaemenids, Seleucids, Parthians, and Sasanians were Muslims. The great compendium of Zoroastrian law and ethics, the *Denkard* ("Acts of religion") was probably written down by Zoroastrians, in Middle Persian, in the 9th or 10th century C.E, that is, during the 'Abbasid period.[111] The famed *Shahname*, the 'Book of Kings,' the most powerful source of moral example, political doctrine, and entertaining lore in the Persian-speaking world, was composed around 1000 C.E. by a Muslim author, Abu l-Qasim Firdawsi, and dedicated to a Turkic Muslim ruler, Mahmud of Ghazna (who cared little for it). Persian *andarz* ('good precepts' and 'practical wisdom'), which drew on Parthian, Sogdian, and Persian sources and shared many features with *adab*, was in large part written down in New Persian in the 14th century C.E., again in an Islamicate setting.[112]

3.5 The Many Uses of Adab

This takes us to the protean concept of *adab*. If Sufism is an ocean, *adab* is a sea with moving shores. *Adab* is one of the pillars of Islamicate culture and is especially relevant here, as it draws attention to the fine

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retrieval, and reconstruction (Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:43–44).

110 Shaked, "From Iran to Islam," 62 and 75–76; Yavari, *Advice for the Sultan*, 35.

111 See Philippe Gignoux, "Denkard," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. VII, fasc. 3 (London: 1996).

112 See Shaul Shaked and Zabihollah Safa, "Andarz," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. II, fasc. 1 (London: 1987).

distinctions between culture and religion that existed before the irruption of modernity, and as it was reconfigured as essentially secular in the 19th century. In a nutshell, *adab* is knowledge put into exemplary practice as good manners and proper behaviour, setting forth examples of how to live a life of moral uprightness and refined civility, pleasing in the eyes of God and one's fellow humans. More precisely, pre-modern *adab* in the singular and the plural (*ādāb*, rules of *adab*) stands for the efforts to cultivate and practise a behaviour that is appropriate to a given role or setting, be it as a judge, a prince, a physician, a craftsman, a lover, or a Sufi.[113] (I use the male form on purpose: *adab* literature was written by men for men. Modern celebrations of *adab* as the foundation of a cosmopolitan secular humanism tend to gloss over the gender dimension.) What is deemed correct and proper is to a large extent socially and culturally conditioned. *Adab* could define the ethics and conduct of the pious seeker of the Divine, modest, unassuming, and ascetic, or it could invoke the ideal of the cultivated, courteous, and urbane urbanite, elegant in his way of speech, dress, and gesture. In all its broad variety, *adab* was almost universally appreciated as a cultural asset.

Irrespective of the precise context and definition, *adab* connects the exterior with the interior, relating bodily comportment, outer appearance, and praxis with inner states and dispositions. To obtain *adab* requires education, taming, and training, which discipline the body, the mind, and the self. At the same time, *adab* denotes the media used to instil the desired virtues and habits. At least outside a religious field, narrowly defined, these media were meant to educate, edify, and entertain, combining wit and erudition. They did so, not through systematic exposition of a given theme, but through series of

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113 The relevant literature is growing fast. For a brilliant introduction with extensive referencing, see Peter Heath, "Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Adab*, and the Art of the Essay," in *Al-Jāḥiẓ: A Muslim Humanist for our Time*, ed. Arnim Heinemann et al. (Würzburg: Ergon, 2009). The following titles are indispensable for the pre-modern period: Barbara D. Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Francesco Chiabotti et al., *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam*; Knysh, *Sufism*, 137–48, and the following entries in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*: Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, "Adab a) Arabic, early developments," fasc. 2014–3; Susanne Enderwitz, "Adab b) and Islamic scholarship in the ʿAbbāsid period," fasc. 2013–4; Thomas Bauer, "Adab c) and Islamic scholarship after the ʿSunnī revival," fasc. 2013–4; and Erik S. Ohlander, "Adab, in Ṣūfism," fasc. 2009–1. Also Armando Salvatore, "Islamicate *Adab* Tradition vs. the Islamic Sharīʿa, from Pre-colonial to Colonial," *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 3 (Leipzig University, 2018), 7–15.

anecdotes, *sententia*, and reported statements meant to illustrate 'how to do things'.[114] The 'invitation to the banquet' (*ma'duba*), to which linguists have traced the origin of the term,[115] was richly laid out. Some of its practitioners included poetry and music, others restricted it to prose literature, though as a rule this, too, would include ample quotations from poetry. Even when restricted to prose, *adab* literature was extremely wide-ranging, comprising elegant prose, moral discourse, handbooks of courtly and of Sufi etiquette, bald humour and satire, expressions of Sufi sensibilities, religious critique, indifference, and agnosticism, the elaboration of cultured refinement, and the celebration of eccentric and even outrageous behaviour. If religious scholars tried to control *adab* through defining its *ādāb*, then they failed.

The position of *adab* between culture and religion is of particular interest. The concept and practice of *adab* was shared by Middle Eastern speakers of Arabic, Persian, and other languages irrespective of their ethnic and religious affiliation, though they might conceive of its origins and properties in different ways. Attempts to stake an exclusive claim on *adab*, declaring it to be wholly derived from either Arab or Irano-Persian tradition were common, reflecting the long-standing competition between Arabs and 'Persians'.[116] These claims were largely expressed in terms of ethnicity, cultural superiority, and temporal precedence (who was first, and who took what from whom?). Nonetheless, they were also not free from religious connotation: for many Arab Muslims, Arab stood for Muslim, and for many Iranians, Persian also meant Zoroastrian. That *adab* drew on ancient Greek, Indian, and Persian 'wisdom' literature was widely acknowledged.[117] The celebrated littérateur al-Jahiz (d. 868/9), whom many saw as *the* Arab humanist par excellence, described *adab* as the "accumulation of the wisdom and the learning of the past nations and generations."[118]

At the same time, many valued elements of *adab* did not necessarily derive from an ancient treasure trove to be appreciated by later generations. Instead

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114 Peter Heath compared this method to a slide show (Heath, "Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Adab*, and the Art of the Essay," 155 and 163).

115 Mayeur-Jaouen and Patrizi, "Introduction," 3–4, 35.

116 Known as *shuʿubiyya* (from Ar., *shuʿub*, "peoples", "nations") and hotly contested; for a brief introduction, see Savant, *New Muslims*, 27–28, 51–52.

117 For Greek *paideia* and Indian 'wisdom', see Louise Marlow, "Among kings and sages: Greek and Indian wisdom in an Arabic mirror for princes," *Arabica* 60 (2013); for India, see also Yavari, *Advice for the Sultan*, 56–64.

118 Hämeen-Anttila, "Adab," 6; Mayeur-Jaouen and Patrizi, "Introduction," 16–25. In spite of its title, Arnim Heinemann et al., eds., *Al-Jāḥiẓ: A Muslim Humanist for our Time* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2009) remains reserved regarding the claim to pre-modern Arab or Islamic humanism.

they were *attributed to* Greek, Indian, and Persian kings and sages to lend them added prestige, irrespective of whether these elements had ever formed part of their 'wisdom'. They stood for a retrojection into the past, not a legacy of this past. Courtly literature of 'mirrors for princes' and heroic epics defined good conduct through the combination of wisdom, virtue, and in the case of rulers, strength and beauty. The exemplars of such conduct were kings and caliphs, sages, physicians, ascetics, viziers, and prophets, irrespective of language, ethnicity, and religion. Examples are manifold: Aristotle and Alexander the Great; the Sasanian kings Anushirvan, Ardashir, Feridun, and Kay Khusraw; Borzuye and Buzurgmihr the Wise; Moses and the prophet Muhammad; 'Umar b. al-Khattab, the second caliph recognised by the Sunni Muslims, 'Ali b. Abi Talib and his son Husayn, but also the first Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya, whom the Shi'is detest; the ascetic Hasan al-Basri; the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun, the Buyid *amir* 'Adud al-Dawla, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna, the Seljuk sultan Sanjar, and many others. Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyasatname*, written at the very end of the 11th century, serves as an excellent illustration of this virtue parade. Women are conspicuous in their virtual absence, except as sources of socio-political disorder and moral corruption.[119]

The study of *adab* takes us back to Gardet's statement that Islam "absorbed these cultures, and assimilated itself to them in various ways, to a far greater extent than it attempted to supplant them."[120] If we replace 'assimilate' by 'adapt and adopt' we get closer to current perceptions. In any event, crossing or simply disregarding boundaries is not the same as transgressing them, let alone subverting them. *Adab* is not *per se* a subversive genre. What matters here is that *adab* was largely seen as part of culture, be it in the shape of a specific culture, either shared or particular, or as the repository of a great tradition of wisdom and learning shared by humanity.

Significantly, most of the Muslim scholars, Sufis, and littérateurs practising *adab* distinguished it from the religious sciences, suggesting a separate *field* of Islamic religious studies.[121] The same seems to have

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119 For Nizam al-Mulk's misogyny, see esp. *Siyāsatnāma*, chap. 43. As Omid Safi has shown, his lashing out against 'the veiled ones' should also be seen in the context of his power struggle with Malik-Shah's powerful wife Tarkan Khatun (Safi, *Politics of Knowledge*, 67–74). Contextualisation is always welcome. Misogyny, however, is resilient and survived the demise of our subjects.

120 Gardet, "Religion and Culture," 569.

121 Louis Gardet explicitly speaks of a religious field made up of Islam's 'religious sciences' and

applied to Jews and Christians with regard to their respective religious disciplines. Compared to the religious sciences, *adab* was more open in its themes, formats, methods, and authors. Modern scholars have considered it parallel to the ideals of *urbanitas* and *humanitas* of Antiquity and the Renaissance. Some portrayed it as the core of an Islamic humanism that was essentially secular and separate from the 'scholasticism' of the religious scholars. Yet treating *adab* as separate from the religious sciences did not necessarily amount to removing it from the purview of religion. *Adab* could incorporate religious norms and maxims, and draw on the Qur'an, Hadith, and the rich body of Islamic lore; many of its practitioners were (also) *'ulama'*. For this reason, Charles Pellat's verdict that *adab* literature was "clearly profane" and as such constituted the "core of Islamic culture", is untenable.[122]

In the pre-modern era, dissociating *adab* from religion was a possibility but not a general rule. By the late 19th century, the lines had been more firmly drawn: as literature, *adab* was largely restricted to belles-lettres, specially in Arabic.[123] At the same time, it was increasingly understood as an alternative, non-religious register of cultured refinement, one not primarily inspired by the Qur'an and prophetic example. For this reason it was considered essentially secular. This shift in understanding came not from Western orientalists but from some of the leading lights of the 'Arab Renaissance' (Nahda), such as Jurji Zaydan (1861–1914), who, it should be added, was a Christian intellectual. Within the new discourse on civilisation, and the ethics and practices upholding it, *adab* was to an extent displaced by *akhlaq*, religious morals and morality. This, though, takes us well beyond the present enquiry. Suffice to say that even in the twentieth and the early

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learning (Gardet, 600).

122 Charles Pellat, "Variations sur le thème de l'adab," *Correspondances d'Orient* 5–6 (1964), quoted from Mayeur-Jaouen and Patrizi, "Introduction," 17. George Makdisi was perhaps the most prominent advocate of this view: *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990). For critical comment, see Heinemann et al., *Al-Jāḥiẓ*.

123 For the following, see the monumental conference volume Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, ed., *Adab and Modernity: A 'Civilising Process'? (Sixteenth-Twenty-First Century)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020) which ventures far beyond the Arab world. For Arabic *adab* in general, see also Boutros Hallaq, "Adab e) modern usage," in *Encyclopedia of Islam Three*, fasc. 2014–2; Anne-Laure Dupont, *Ǧurǧī Zaydān 1861–1914* (Damascus: ifpo, 2006) and her more recent article, "Un *adab* des classes modernes," in Mayeur-Jaouen, *Adab and Modernity*.

21st century, Sufi and religious *adab*, broadly defined, continued to flourish in familiar as well as in entirely new formats.

3.6 Illustrating the Islamicate

Within the Muslim empire, many non-Muslims who did not convert to Islam despite powerful incentives to do so, nonetheless adjusted culturally to an environment that was politically dominated by Muslims. Adjustment could cover a broad range: from simple borrowings that caused little change in the prevalent patterns of thinking and living, to various types of adaptation, to manifest acculturation. For an example from the religious sphere narrowly understood, Syrian Bibles and homiletic texts written in the 13th and 14th centuries closely resemble manuscripts of the Qur'an in their aesthetic design.[124]

The Gospel according to St. Matthew, copied in Palestine in 1336. British Library Add. MS. 11856 f. 1v-2r

Borrowing even occurred in regions not under Muslim rule, inspired by the power, prestige, and aesthetic appeal associated with imperial Islamic culture. Phillip Wagoner illustrated this phenomenon in his study of the South Indian kingdom of Vijayanagara, where in the 15th century, the king and court adopted what they identified as Islamic dress and titles.[125]

Adaptation could also affect 'sacred architecture'. A prominent example is the Armenian Vank Cathedral built on the orders of Shah 'Abbas (r.

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124 See Meliné Pehlivanian, Christoph Rauch, and Ronny Vollandt, eds., *Orientalische Bibelhandschriften aus der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – PK: Eine illustrierte Geschichte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016) or Barbara D. Boehm and Melanie Holcomb, eds., *Jerusalem 1000–1400: Every People Under Heaven* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). Exhibition catalogue.

125 Phillip B. Wagoner, "'Sultan among Hindu Kings': Dress, Titles and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara," *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (1996).

1589–1618 in New Julfa (today a district of Isfahan) for the local Armenian community, which the shah had forcefully deported from their home town of Julfa at great cost of lives and goods. The cathedral's decoration was decidedly Christian (including European-style putti) but its domed interior was designed to resemble a mosque by its Muslim architect.[126]

Dome of the Armenian Vank Cathedral, New Julfa, Isfahan. Photo: Gudrun Krämer, 2016.

In other instances, the 'Islamic imprint' went well beyond simple borrowing. 19th-century Armenian Christian women wearing a face veil in an Ottoman environment are a case in point. This example, however, highlights the ambiguities inherent in the process, for while veiling could be seen as a result of acculturation, it could also be read as a desire to escape notice as non-Muslims and to become invisible in public space. As such, it ran directly counter to the overall aim of the 'Pact of 'Umar', which had been to render religious difference *visible*.

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126 For the larger picture, see Mohammad Gharipour, ed., *Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim Communities Across the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

Chevalier Auguste de Henikstein: Turques, Arménienne, Grecques (Turkish women, an Armenian woman and two Greek women). Album, 1825. Source: Wiki Commons (Romanian Academy Library, via europeana.eu)

Entanglements were often complicated: the long-established Jewish communities in Iran spoke and wrote Judeo-Persian. Between the 17th and the 19th centuries, Jews, Armenians, and Zoroastrians were repeatedly exposed to strong government pressure including forced conversion. Given that the ruling Shi'i elite also suppressed Sunni Muslims, Sufis, and various other Muslim groups and sects, however, their policies cannot be seen as directed solely against non-Muslims, let alone Jews. At the same time, Jewish patrons had the biblical stories written by Jewish Persian poets illustrated with motifs drawn from non-Jewish Iranian sources. These included the great epic poems, as well as popular stories of Muhammad and other prophets recognised by Islam. A 17th-century illustrated manuscript of Shahin-i Shirazi's 'Book of Moses' (*Musaname*) depicted Moses according to contemporary Muslim convention, with a nimbus of fire and a veil

covering his face.[127] In Imrani's 'Book of Conquest' (*Fathname*), Joshua, the Israelite leader who conquered the Promised Land, is depicted as a Safavid Iranian hero, again with a halo of fire surrounding his head.[128] In post-Mongol iconography, the nimbus of fire primarily marked the prophet Muhammad, other prophetic figures, and the Shi'i imams, and was probably adapted from China.

In these examples, a pre-Islamic Persian literary and aesthetic tradition was crossed with an Iranian Islamic one, with Chinese influences added to the blend, to illustrate constitutive episodes of Jewish collective memory that could easily be classified as religious. There are certain caveats, though, as almost none of the extant Judeo-Persian manuscripts were signed, and there is some speculation among art historians as to whether the Jewish patrons may have commissioned the illustrations in Muslim ateliers.

Moses and the Angel of Death. Shahin-i Shirazi, *Musaname*, Iran 1686. British Library Ms. Or. 1704

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127 Shahin-i Shirazi's *Musaname* was written around 1327 and illustrated in 1686; see Vera Basch Moreen, *In Queen Esther's Garden: An Anthology of Judeo-Persian Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) and Dennis Halft OP, "Das 'Buch der Bücher' auf Persisch," in *Orientalische Bibelhandschriften*, ed. Pehlivanian, Rauch, and Vollandt.

128 The *Fathname* by the Judeo-Persian poet Imrani (1454–1536) was composed in Isfahan in around 1474. Illustrated manuscripts from the 17th and early 18th centuries are held at the British Library (Ms. Or. 1704) and the Ben-Zvi Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; on the Jerusalem manuscript, see Vera Basch Moreen, *The Bible as a Judeo-Persian Epic: An illustrated manuscript of 'Imrani's Fath-Nama'* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 2016).

In the context of this discussion, however, this is of secondary import. Irrespective of whether the artists were Jews or Muslims, they illustrated manuscripts that were clearly marked as Jewish. Jews participated in Islamicate culture in Iran as much as did Zoroastrians, Armenian Christians, and Muslims of non-Shiʿi denomination. Cultural participation, however, said little about hierarchies and inclusion in the social and political spheres, in which (Shiʿi) Muslim dominance was clearly expressed – one more reason to keep religion and culture apart.

For Muslims, adoption, adaptation, and acculturation were not limited to intermittent borrowings; they sometimes extended deep into the religious imaginary. In Ibn Husam Khᵛafi's *Khavaranname*, written around 1426 C.E., ʿAli b. Abi Talib (d. 661 C.E.) – cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad, fourth 'rightly-guided' caliph of the Sunni and first legitimate imam of the Shiʿi Muslims, and one of the iconic figures of Muslim memory and imagination – accomplishes the deeds of the ancient Iranian heroes, as celebrated in the *Shahname* and other Persian heroic epics.

ʿAli slays a dragon. Ibn Husam Khvafi: *Khavaranname*. Bukhara, 15th century. Tehran, Reza ʿAbbasi Museum. Photo: Gudrun Krämer, 2016.

Sarah Savant has explored the many ways Iranian/Persian heroes, events, and locales were "written into" prophetic history.[129] Echoes of such operations can be found, for example, in 16th- to 19th-century manuscripts of the *Shahname* depicting the great hero Isfandiyar thanking God after having slain a dragon, or escaped from a deadly snowstorm. Here, entanglements run deep: while Islamic prayer may to some extent have been patterned on Zoroastrian precedent,[130] Zoroastrians pray standing, whereas Muslims alternately stand and kneel. In several Kashmiri manuscripts from the 19th century, Isfandiyar and his paladins clearly pray in an Islamic style. In the *Khavaranname*, by contrast, it is not Iranian tradition that is being Islamised, with Rustam and other noble warriors made "honorary Muslims".[131] The reverse is true: ʿAli, the Islamic warrior-hero par excellence, is embedded in the Iranian tradition. The *Khavaranname* is far from obscure: translations into a variety of languages spoken by Muslims, including Turkish, testify to its popularity, as does the significant number of extant manuscripts from the 15th to 19th centuries.[132]

Even more threads were woven into 'The Chronology of Ancient Nations' (*al-Athar al-baqiya ʿan al-qurun al-khaliya*) by the Shiʿi polymath

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129 Savant, *New Muslims*, e.g., 59–60. The Iskandar/Alexander praying at the Kaʿba in Mecca shown above serves as another example.

130 Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), 32–33.

131 As Shahab Ahmed has argued with regard to descriptions of Muslim rulers as replicas of the evil king Zahhak (Ar., al-Dahhak), and their enemies mirroring good king Feridun, one of the most popular heroes in the *Shahname*, who ultimately defeated and executed Zahhak (Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 442–44). The links connecting ancient Iranian and Shiʿi ideas and rituals are difficult to trace. The evidence to support speculations that the mourning odes and rituals for ʿAli's martyred son Husayn were inspired by the mourning for the pure and innocent martyr prince Siyavush is inconclusive. Yann Richard, *L'islam chi'ite* (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 132–33, is slightly more detailed than Heinz Halm, *Die Schia* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 180; see also Mehr Ali Newid, *Der schiitische Islam in Bildern: Rituale und Heilige* (Munich: Edition Avicenna, 2006), esp. 94–117.

132 Ibn Husam Khvafi or Khusfi lived 1381–1470; see Julia Rubanovich, "ḴĀVARĀN-NĀMA i. The Epic Poem," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2017, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khavaran-nama-1 and Raya Shani, "ḴĀVARĀN-NĀMA ii. The Illustrated Manuscripts," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2017, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khavaran-nama-illustrations; also Raya Shani, "The Shahnama Legacy in a Late 15th-Century Illustrated Copy of Ibn Husam's Khavaran-nama, The Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran Ms. 5750," in *Shahnama Studies III: The Reception of the Shahnama*, ed. Gabrielle van den Berg and Charles Melville (Leiden: Brill, 2018). Pages of a manuscript of the *Khavaranname*, illustrated in the so-called Turkman Commercial Style in Shiraz 1476–87, are available online from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum, New York. For a broader sweep, showing ʿAli as the quintessential Islamic warrior and icon of sacred kingship, see Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 37–55.

Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 1048). In this work, al-Biruni tells the story of Ahriman, the Zoroastrian embodiment of evil, and Mashya/Mishi and Mashyana/Mishiyana, the children of Gayumarth[133], first man, or rather the "prototype of humanity", according to Zoroastrian cosmogony. By the 11th century, Zoroastrian motifs had been liberally crossed with biblical, Qur'anic, and prophetic ones, relating Ahriman to Iblis/Satan and Mashya and Mashyana to Adam and Eve. The latter are included in the Qur'an, which, however,

concentrates entirely on Adam and mentions his companion only anonymously; Eve's Arabic name Hawwa is post-Qur'anic. Islamic tradition subsequently embellished the story.

An illustrated manuscript of the 'Chronology of Ancient Nations' from the early 14th century shows Ahriman/Iblis/Satan appearing as an old man in a garden (the text speaks of the mountains) to tempt the naked human couple with fruit, after they had gone without food and drink for fifty years. Even with the biblical apple exchanged for a pomegranate, Muslims, Jews, and Christians had no problem identifying the scene.

Al-Biruni, *Kitab al-athar al-baqiya*. Illustrated ms. dated 1307–8. Edinburgh University Library, Ms. 161 f. 48v. Copyright The University of Edinburgh.

133 Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, 12–13. For the Qur'anic story, see Cornelia Schöck, "Adam and Eve," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2001); for the link to Zoroastrian tradition, see Savant, *New Muslims*, 140–50, and 42–45, 57–59, and Albert de Jong, "First Man, First Twins. The Origins of Humankind in Zoroastrianism," in *Religious Stories in Transformation: Conflict, Revision and Reception*, ed., Albertina Houtman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2016). For al-Biruni's story, the English translation (pp. 107–09) of the relevant passage in Eduard Sachau's German annotated edition (Leipzig 1878) is considerably longer than what is found in the illustrated mss. held in Edinburgh and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. BNF Ms. ar. 1489 f. 32v. There are also various spellings for the names: in the Edinburgh and Paris mss., it is *Maishi* and *Maishyana*.

There is always another turn of the screw, and the results could stretch the notion of the Islamicate to its limits: the Arabic inscription on the tomb stone for the Turco-Mongol conqueror Timur (d. 1405), in Samarkand, identified a son of ʿAli b. Abi Talib as the 'being of light' that according to Turco-Mongol lore, entered Alanqoa, the virgin ancestress of Chengiz Khan and Timur. The inscription also quoted Qurʾan 19 (Surat Maryam), verses 17 and 20, which speak of Mary's immaculate conception of Jesus.[134] With Alanqoa set in parallel to Maryam/Mary, and with a son of ʿAli named as their ancestor, the Mongols were written into Islamic salvational history without sacrificing their claims to the most illustrious Mongol genealogy.

The entanglements and transpositions presented here did not alter the communal affiliation of the respective artists, scholars, and their audiences. However, they create challenges in demarcation with regard to cultural affinity, which for non-Muslims was not bound up with their religious affiliation, and even for Muslims was less clear-cut than is often presumed. Religion and culture, belonging and identity did not necessarily coincide in this period, and they do not always do so today.

4 Continuities, Ruptures, and New Vistas

4.1 Text and Context

In line with the perspective of 'entangled history', the historical-critical method applied here to the formation of Islam as a religion and community showed Islam to be the result of continuous exchange and friction. This approach stands in marked contrast to the convictions of most Muslims past and present. They see Islam as grounded in revelation, with an archetype of 'the book' preserved in Heaven and 'sent down' to Muhammad in its definite form in Arabic.[135] From the believer's perspective, the Qurʾan is the word of God,

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134 Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*, 37.

135 See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Qurʾān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). I cannot go into the dispute, culminating in the 9th and 10th centuries C.E., over the createdness of the Qurʾan, which declared God's word to either be eternal and uncreated, or created by God. At the time, the dispute had a political dimension in addition to the theological one; see Gerhard Böwering, "God and his Attributes," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2002). For the doctrine of *iʿjaz*, the inimitable linguistic beauty of the Qurʾan constituting the miracle his sceptical contemporaries demanded from Muhammad to prove his prophethood, see Matthias Radscheit, *Die koranische Herausforderung* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1996) and Richard C. Martin, "Inimitability," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

not the product of human creativity. It is God who is speaking in the Qur'an, not Muhammad in dialogue with the community of believers. Switching to a different register, Islam is the result of a *top-down* rather than a *bottom-up* process. It is not a social construct. When Muslims write of the Qur'an being 'compiled', they are not describing a creative process of editing oral and written materials, but of 'collecting' the revelations received by Muhammad over the course of two decades, providing Muslims with a book equal to what the Jews and Christians already had. Significantly, Jews and Christians are referred to in the Qur'an as the 'People of the Book' (*ahl al-kitab*).

According to Islamic doctrine, the Qur'anic revelation occurred in a specific time and place, and thus necessarily a sociocultural context; its message, however, is not tied to this context. It is of universal and eternal validity. Belief in revelation therefore did not spare Muslims the challenge of how to resolve the tension between the assumed unchanging character of the 'message' on the one hand and its ever-changing 'realisations' on the other.

World time and local time. Great Mosque of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, Central China. Photo: Gudrun Krämer, 2015.

If God was addressing a specific audience, this audience had to be linguistically and mentally capable of understanding what he said (this view is also shared by those studying Islam from a believer's perspective). To be understood, revelation therefore had to be phrased, or even framed, in the language of the audience, which in this case consisted of the townsfolk, oasis farmers, and nomadic herders on the north-western

Arabian coastal strip in the 7th century C.E., that is to say late Antiquity. Revelation was not only conveyed through the Arabic language, it was also inevitably tied to this sociocultural setting and its prevalent cultural code, or idiom (on this point, 'critical' Islamic studies part from the believer's perspective). If Islam, however, was to continue to be relevant to *all* people over space and time, then as with other religions and moral-*cum*-ethical traditions and philosophies, its adherents had to either distance themselves from the original sociocultural milieu ('Arab Islam'), or try to reshape their own environment so as to fit their conception of the original setting.[136] This was not merely a theoretical challenge. It was debated through the centuries, creating one of the great dividing lines within the Muslim community. If there were those who looked back to what they imagined the early community to have been, others understood Islam from their own sociocultural and political contexts and adapted it to these where necessary.

In the modern period, identity and identity politics could and can be tied to both the defence of 'local' expressions of religion and culture and the notion of an original, unchanging Islam solely inspired by revelation. Both could and can be used to draw boundaries around the group and enforce conformity within it. Resistance against any kind of adjustment, which was well known in the pre-colonial era, intensified in colonial and post-colonial settings. Today it is represented by Salafists, who consider any attempt to adjust Islamic theology and law to post-prophetic conditions to be an illegitimate innovation (*bid'a*) if not apostasy and disbelief. By the same token, they call for a faithful emulation of the prophet Muhammad and the first generations of Muslims (the *salaf salih*, the 'pious predecessors') down to the minute details of daily conduct.[137] The conduct of the *salaf* largely reflected the norms and customs of the Arabian Peninsula and adjacent territories in late Antiquity. Critics of emulation did not always present a consciously articulated and theoretically underpinned alternative, distinguishing religion from culture, custom, or a secular sphere. Most simply lived as Muslims and considered what they did and thought to be Islam. But there were also those who sought to reinvigorate Islam, or rather the Muslim community, through a reading of the message that

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136 Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:34; for a different context, see Gardner, *Confucianism*, 48.

137 See Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meier (London: Hurst, 2009) and Daniel Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

reflected contemporaneous concerns, rather than seeking to resuscitate the original Arab community in another location. Under modern conditions, this effort could not avoid affecting conceptions of 'identity.'

The presence and global influence of Salafi theologians and activists, who, citing the Qur'an and the Sunna of the prophet Muhammad, seek to unify Muslims on the basis of their understanding of original (Arab) Islam, have been assisted by funding from powerful donors in the Arab Gulf. By the same token, the Salafi agenda has also provoked resistance from those who defend their own understanding of Islam from external influence, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, by referring to local custom, culture, and tradition. Examples include Islamic movements in northern Nigeria, Tunisia, Sudan, and Indonesia, which do not pursue liberal ideals, but invoke their own role models, including anti-colonial jihad movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. These movements reject the influence of Arab Gulf States as culturally alienating and politically patronising, if not neo-colonial. The defenders of local religious and cultural traditions also include some of those who propagate a vision of a liberal, 'enlightened' Islam.

Female members of the revivalist piety movement Tabligh-i Jamaat in India. Source: Agnès De Féo, "Behind the Veil, In the Ranks of the Tablighi Jamaat," August 18, 2017. https://talesoftheveils.wordpress.com/2017/08/18/3994/

To return once more to the invention-of-religion thesis: it is true that from the late 19th century onwards, Islam was rethought in the encounter with Western notions of religion, culture, and civilisation, which challenged Islam's status as a religion and civilisation capable of promoting reason, science, and progress.[138] Some responded by calling for a return to the foundations of Islam as a *religion and civilisation*, or 'way of life.' Others advocated a clear break not just from the *Islamic tradition* as a human-made edifice erected on the foundations of true Islam, but from *Islam* as a religion and civilisation. A number of Sunni reformers did, in fact, adjust to a Protestant understanding of 'real' and 'true religion', one centred in 'inner' faith, without, however, discarding 'outward' ritual altogether.[139] They insisted on communal worship, epitomised by the Five Pillars, as an indispensable marker of Muslim identity. However, they denounced much of what had hitherto been Islam to millions of Muslims, including their social elites, as being articulations of popular religion and superstition, which had rendered Muslims passive and impotent and had debased Islam in the eyes of the world. Sufism, unless expressed 'soberly' as refined spirituality, served as a primary target of reformist zeal. Reform in the shadow of modernity did entail new ways of looking at the foundational texts and Islamic tradition at large, but it did not 'invent' Islam on the Protestant model.

In this context, it would be worth investigating the attempts of Muslim scholars in 17th- and 18th-century China to portray Muhammad as a sage from the West analogous to the Confucian and Daoist masters of the East, all of whom could claim authority and respect within their own sphere, and to depict Islam as a *moral tradition* analogous to Confucianism (the "Dao of Muhammad").[140] These efforts were noteworthy because, in a conscious

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138 For relevant case studies, see Birgit Schäbler, *Moderne Muslime: Ernest Renan und die Geschichte der ersten Islamdebatte 1883* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016) and Kateman, *Muḥammad ʿAbduh and his Interlocutors*. For concrete examples, see Muhammad ʿAbduh, "al-Din al-islami, aw: al-islam," in *al-Aʿmal al-Kamila* 3:465–501 and adopting a secular perspective, Rafiq al-ʿAzm, as analysed in Zemmin, "Validating Secularity."

139 See Gudrun Krämer, "Renewal and Reform in Sunni Islam," in *The Protestant Reformation in a Context of Global History: Religious Reforms and World Civilizations*, ed. Heinz Schilling and Silvana Seidel Menchi (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2017) and with different emphasis Schulze, "Islam und Judentum," and above.

140 See Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); James D. Frankel, *Rectifying God's Name: Liu Zhi's Confucian Translation of Monotheism and Islamic Law* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).

effort to be accepted as an integral part of Chinese civilisation and society, they presented Islam in terms of Chinese conceptions of ethics, morality, and cultured behaviour. In the Chinese context, this was not an exceptional occurrence: the first Buddhists who arrived in China portrayed the Buddha as a Confucian sage or Daoist deity. Even after Buddhism had become more clearly understood in China, the analogy of Buddha and sage was still occasionally invoked.[141] At the same time, the Muslim *rapprochement* to prevalent Chinese patterns was not altogether different from portraying Islam as part and parcel of modern civilisation and society. In any event, it represented a significant step towards adapting religion to (the dominant) culture. The Chinese case is revealing in that the Muslim scholars ultimately failed to convince the majority of Chinese-speaking (Hui) Muslims and Han Chinese, who as a rule, showed little interest in their religious teachings. While hurting themselves in the face of the Han Chinese bureaucracy, they also appear to have overtaxed the imagination of Chinese Muslims who conceived of Islam as more than a moral philosophy.[142]

4.2 The Stable and the Flexible

In his influential study, *What is Islam?*, W. Montgomery Watt illustrated the tension between the idea of Islam as a unified and unifying whole, and the flexibility built into its fabric. Watt started off by saying:

> The word translated 'religion' is *dīn*, which in Arabic commonly refers to a whole way of life… which permeates the whole fabric of society in a way of which men are conscious. It is – all in one – theological dogma, forms of worship, political theory, and a detailed code of conduct, including even matters which the European would classify as hygiene or etiquette.[143]

At this point Watt gives us the widest possible stretching of *din*/Islam, as it was invoked in the past and even more so in modern Islamic discourse.

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141 The interaction of the great traditions, which beyond the three teachings (*sanjiao*) would have to include popular religion/cults and Christianity, is much too complex to be dealt with here, particularly by a non-specialist; for the Buddhist experience, I have relied on Xinzhong Yao, *Introduction to Confucianism*, 233–37.

142 For a nuanced assessment of the situation under the Qing dynasty, see, however, Tristan S. Brown, "A Mountain of Saints and Ages: Muslims in the Landscape of Popular Religion in Late Imperial China," *T'oung Pao* 105 (2019). I am again grateful to Elliot Lee for having brought this paper to my attention.

143 Montgomery Watt, *What is Islam?*, 2nd ed. (London: 1979), 3.

Regarding political theory, he is simply wrong, as would be shown in any serious study of the topic not written by a contemporary Islamist. Watt himself modified his statement when he went on to say:

> In general it will be found that the Islamic vision permeates and informs the whole life of society and individuals in the Islamic world. This does not mean that the vision or religious belief absolutely determines the whole of life, for there are *various aspects which have a relative autonomy, but it exercises a certain control or pressure on the whole*. Such a conception of the function of religion is closer to the Muslim conception of *dīn* than to the usual occidental conception.[144] [emphases mine]

The "relative autonomy" within the boundaries of the "Islamic vision" points to an established principle of Islamic theology and law, which distinguishes between immutable and moving elements, or, as it is commonly put, the stable and the flexible (*al-thabit wa-l-mutaghayyir*).[145] Combined with the legal concept of indifferent issues and neutral spaces, this distinction has the potential to create significant room for manoeuvre. By declaring certain acts or institutions to fall within what they defined as the morally "indifferent" domain (*al-mubah*), or neutral space, Muslim scholars did not remove or separate them from the purview of Islam.[146] Rather, they carved out spaces that could be regulated by human-made rules, provided that those rules did not openly violate Islamic norms and values (which, of course, could be a matter of contention). These rules could then be designed to cater to the specific requirements of the situation. The concept of the morally indifferent aspects or neutral space, regulated by their own particular rules, is deeply relevant to conceptions of both culture and secularity. It is also exceedingly complex, intersecting with the considerations of public interest and individual benefits (*maslaha, masalih*), which are integral to Islamic legal reasoning, though they did not carry as much weight in the pre-modern period as they do today. It also touches on the sacred-profane binary dear to Western analysts but notoriously difficult to apply to Islam. The least problematic way to capture the 'profane' within a normative Islamic framework may be to characterise

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144 Watt, *What is Islam?*, 4.
145 The distinction between the stable and the flexible is generally traced back to Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), one of the most influential authorities for modern Islamists. For modern Muslim debates, see Krämer, *Gottes Staat als Republik*, esp. 54–65.
146 They did, however, step on a slippery slope, for linguistically, *mubah* is closely related to *ibaha*, which also signifies licentiousness, or libertinage.

it *ex negativo* as certain times, acts, states, objects, and places that are not subject to specific taboos regulated by Sharia.[147] In this regard, the 'profane' overlaps with both *al-dunya* as the 'ordinary', 'lower world' and the neutral space defined as *mubah*, but it is not identical to either. Islam, as the religious scholars understood it, remained the ultimate arbiter of the rules of the game. Its guardians decided on the size and place of the holes in the fabric. But this is only part of the picture. Even in the pre-modern era, Muslims took it upon themselves to define the scope of their room to manoeuvre. We would expect artists, Sufis, and freethinkers to be at the forefront of those trying to enlarge their breathing space. In a stimulating study of Islam and science, Ahmad Dallal has argued that in the 11th century C.E., Muslim scientists and intellectuals developed an understanding of science as a neutral space: freed from the epistemological hegemony of religion, science was able to claim validity for its findings on the basis of empirical observation and secular reason, independently of religious reason and revelation.[148] Accordingly, scientists observed nature not in order to unravel the marvels of divine creation, confirm the truth enshrined in the Qur'an, and prove the existence of God, but instead analysed natural phenomena for their own sake. This was not a subversive act, and indeed many of the scientists involved were religious scholars. As emphasised by Dallal, this was not a matter of establishing a new hierarchy, with religion being subordinated to science. But the elements of autonomy and dissociation must not be underrated, either.

5 Concluding Remarks

There are many Muslims today who seek to liberate Islam from the accumulated weight of the legal tradition, with its detailed rules and regulations, to reconstruct Islam as an ethical and moral message. They do not look to reproduce the sociocultural structures and values of late

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147 Azfar Moin is not the only one to have signalled that in Islamicate contexts, the normative Sharia approach is by no means the only one, and that very different notions of the sacred may hold sway, not only among the masses but also among the social, cultural, and political elites.

148 Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 147–48.

antiquity Arabia, but instead respond to modern ideals of justice, freedom, human rights, and human creativity.[149] There are those, especially in Europe and North America, who cast Islam as a fount of 'spirituality' for a society that cannot live on constitutional patriotism alone. Some self-identify as 'cultural Muslims'. Very few openly embrace secular positions (the term 'secularity' is virtually untranslatable in the majority of languages spoken by Muslims outside the West). With their emphasis on the ethical and moral character of Islamic teachings, Muslim reformers face challenges similar to those of oriental Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Hindus, and Buddhists, who equally strove to make their respective traditions 'modern'.[150] The translation of Sharia into a set of ethical and moral principles may be easy to convey to those Muslims who focus on piety and religious experience rather than the strict observance of the law. These Muslims do not necessarily self-identify as Sufis. By contrast, it may prove harder to convince the majority of those Muslims who, while possibly disregarding many of the injunctions of Sharia in their own behaviour, cannot envisage parting entirely with its legal provisions. In this instance, work is required to satisfy their demand for textual proof. The requisite tools are nonetheless available, ranging from Qur'anic hermeneutics to sophisticated methods of legal interpretation (*maslaha*, the 'finality of Sharia', 'pragmatic eclecticism') which, at least today, are designed to widen the scope of flexibility and, by the same token, of Muslim agency.[151] They favour what they identify as the overarching values of the message, and the 'spirit of the law', over its letter. In doing so, they draw on the relevant scholarly traditions rather than discarding them, while recalibrating them in subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways. Not only have the relevant methods been honed in small reformist circles, but they have also been applied by the highest judicial authorities in Muslim majority societies.

The contextualisation of Qur'anic references and prophetic *hadiths*, which treats them as valid but contingent, opens up the possibility of

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149 Out of a huge body of literature, see Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naʿim, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

150 The literature is growing. In addition to the studies of McMahan on modern Buddhism and Pennington on modern Hinduism, see e.g., Monica M. Ringer, *Pious Citizens: Reforming Zoroastrianism in India and Iran* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

151 Again, I cannot go into this matter here. For *maslaha*, see Opwis, *Maṣlaḥa and the Purpose of Law*; for pragmatic eclecticism, see Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, *Pragmatism in Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015).

distinguishing even more sharply between belief, faith, or 'spirituality', on the one hand, and law, custom, and culture on the other. If this process sounds like a translation of Islam into the type of privatised, compartmentalised, secularised religion its critics have identified as modern, Western, and essentially Christian, this is indeed a possibility. But it is not a given. For most Muslims, the mandatory acts of worship are not to be abandoned: Islam will not be cut down to inner faith and rendered invisible. Sharia will not be abolished in its entirety but instead refashioned as a moral and ethical frame that accords with the universal values of justice, peace, and compassion. In the process, the external walls sealing off the Muslim community will be lowered, commonalities with other religious, moral, and philosophical traditions enhanced, and the claim to religious superiority muted. If developed consistently, this process could ultimately overcome the equation of Islam, Sharia, and identity, which has been reinforced under the combined pressure of colonisation and globalisation. It could normatively support internal plurality and cultural adjustment, which in many places have always been the reality, and accommodate an understanding of secularity that allows all to breathe, devout Muslims, non-Muslims, and agnostics alike.

Tehran shop window.
Photo: Gudrun Krämer, 2016.

To come back to the conceptual challenges addressed by the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities", this paper confirms several of the assumptions shared by many, albeit not all, members of the group: for pre-modern configurations of Islam (in its broadest sense), it does make sense to distinguish between processes of differentiation on the one hand and conceptual distinctions on the other. Distinctions are not only obvious to the modern observer; they were made by pre-modern Muslims and non-Muslims living in Islamicate contexts and expressed in textual as well as in non-textual form. Pre-modern Muslims did have a concept of religion, which was not limited to *din* in all its semantic variety. By the same token, they distinguished between *din*/religion and *dunya*/world. Concerning governance, they differentiated between *din*, *mulk*, and *dawla*, with the latter two referring to princely rule, or dynasties,[152] rather than the state in the modern sense. The legal and moral injunctions of Islam, and Sharia more particularly, were frequently ignored or openly flaunted, and not just by the powerful. Muslim scholars of theology and law elaborated concepts of 'neutral space' of indifferent moral and religious status, which could be claimed by princes, merchants, artists, scientists, as much as by 'ordinary people'. It would be a complete misunderstanding of pre-modern Muslims and their lifeworld to imagine that religion covered and regulated every aspect of it. At the same time, challenges to religion in general, and to Islam in particular, from within the Muslim community (I am not speaking about interreligious polemics here) were rarely openly voiced.[153]

When we ask about religion's others in an Islamic context, we are for the most part talking about Islam's others. The others existed, but they are not easy to identify: they could be understood as culture, custom, or neutral space, or, if religion is narrowed down to Islam, shared space, or indeed the secular. Even when secular values, customs, and traditions were openly invoked, they were not as a rule set up as rivals or opposites to religion, or to Islam more specifically. *Adab*, morality, good governance ('justice'), and the empirical sciences are cases in point. In addition, non-religious actors and domains tended to be even less firmly institutionalised than Islamic ones: there existed no independent secular academies and no secular scientific institutions able to

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152 As mentioned above, Ismaʿili notions differed from the Sunni concepts described here.

153 See Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers in Medieval Islam*: *Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

survive the changing moods of princes. The adjudication of conflict in courts set up by the rulers, or even headed by them (notably the so-called *mazalim* courts), formed a major exception. While it might be worthwhile searching for the 'reference problems' addressed in specific contexts, and I would suspect that balancing religious diversity and enabling the autonomous development of functional domains of society would have some role to play, I see little use in constructing ideal types for the pre-modern period.

Secularity existed at certain times, rather than at specific junctures, and within specific fields. It did not, however, evolve into an overarching 'guiding idea' anchored in specific groups of society, with resilient autonomous institutions to rely upon. Still, such secularity as existed was rich enough to be taken up and refashioned in the modern period, when it was propagated for the sake of individual rights and liberties, balancing religious diversity, societal and national integration and development, securing the autonomous development of functional domains of society, or a special blend of all these. Its advocates were thus able to refer to local traditions, or even Islam, rather than acquiring a secularity package from the West.[154]

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154 See Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Burchardt, "Revisiting the Secular: Multiple Secularities and Pathways to Modernity," *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 2 (Leipzig University, 2017), 20–24; Kleine and Wohlrab-Sahr, "Research Programme," 15.

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