

'The Theory and Practice of Rebellion in the Early Islamic World'

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Abstracts

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1.

(Anti-)Rebellion Discourse in the Hadith Corpus: The Politics of Islamic Scholarly Giants

Marjan Asi

Abstract

The hadith literature provides political messages both allowing and prohibiting opposition against the ruler. These activist and quietist political ideas provide the religious justification for those on either side of the political spectrum. Through the isnad-cum-matn method of hadith analysis, these hadiths are found spreading overwhelmingly from second century Iraq and are propagated by some major early Muslim scholars, including Hasan al-Basri, Sufyan al-Thawri, al-Amash and Abu Hanifa. A closer examination of their role in the spread of these hadiths allows for a better understanding of their own political leanings, clarifying the contentious and often conflictual reports of their political characters.

Bio

Marjan Asi recently defended her PhD at the University of Edinburgh. Her supervisor was Andreas Goerke. Her research focusses on the evolution of quietism in the early Islamic ḥadīth corpus.

2.

Early Ibādī Historiography: The Case of the Khawārij

Enki Baptiste & Adam Gaiser

Abstract

Often assimilated with the famous *khawārij*, the Ibādīs have long maintained an ambiguous relationship with the violent legacy of these rebels. This paper aims at offering insight into how early Ibādīs depicted the *khawārij* through a study of a set of terms used for this purpose. We show that the term *khawārij* and its substitutes were first carefully used before being associated with other terms that helped the Ibādīs to better identify the good and the bad troublemakers.

Bio

Enki Baptiste is a Ph.D. candidate at Lyon-2 University (France) under the supervision of Pr. Cyrille Aillet (Lyon-2 University) and Pr. Iyas Hassan (Paris Sorbonne University). The title of his Ph.D. project is *On the Edges of the Empire: Theory and Practices of Power in Medieval Ibādism (Oman, 8th-11th c.)*. He received a Fulbright scholarship and is currently in the United States for a four months stay at Florida State University (under Adam Gaiser's supervision) and at University of Maryland (under Antoine Borrut's supervision).

Adam Gaiser (Ph.D. '05, University of Virginia, History of Religions) is Professor of Religion at Florida State University. His research focuses on the development of early Kharijites and Ibadiyya, and on medieval Muslim sectarianism in general. Dr. Gaiser also teaches courses on Shi'ism, Islam in North America, Islamic Law, the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an. He is currently working on *An Introduction to Ibadi Islam* (contracted with Cambridge University Press).

3.

Becoming “People of the Mountain”: Aristocratic Accumulation and the Ruralization of Anti-Chalcedonianism in Sixth-Century Northern Mesopotamia

Walter Beers

Abstract

This paper will present a reinterpretation of the social history of the anti-Chalcedonian or Miaphysite movement in the sixth century as a case study in what I term “ruralization”—the process by which a religious category originating in elite and/or clerical circles becomes constitutive of a distinctly rural, subaltern socioeconomic identity. Borrowing theoretical insights from scholars of agrarian South Asia including Ranajit Guha and James C. Scott, I interpret this ruralization process as one in which agrarian and pastoralist communities utilize the categories of hegemonic religious discourse to defend their socioeconomic interests against elite domination and exploitation. Although the events discussed precede the seventh-century Arab conquests, I suggest that ruralization is a valuable hermeneutic for understanding not only the subsequent history of Christian subalterns in the Islamicate world (e.g., Maronites), but also for ruralized sectarian Muslim identities (Khārijite/Ibāḍite and Shīʿite) and more “syncretic” tendencies (Zoroastrian millenarians, Druzes, ʿAlawīs, etc.)

The focus of the paper will be the 520s and 530s in northern Mesopotamia, a key moment in the history of the nascent anti-Chalcedonian church (later to become the Syrian Orthodox). Contemporary narrative sources such as John of Ephesus and ps.-Zachariah of Mytilene characterize Roman state-led efforts to eradicate anti-Chalcedonian monasticism in the territories of Edessa and Amida as a persecution in stereotypical terms. The attested use of anti-insurgency tactics, however, as well as an abortive uprising by a local Armenian dynast, suggest that the sources’ sectarian labels conceal a more complex reality. I argue that Christian sectarian discourse narrativized a process of accumulation in which local monastic landowners found themselves under assault from aggressive aristocratic transplants from Antioch making strategic use of Roman anti-heresy laws. The resulting struggle drove both monks and dispossessed villagers into zones of marginal state control in the Taurus and the Ṭur ʿAbdin—solidifying the latter region’s status in particular as an anti-Chalcedonian refugium.

Bio

Walter Beers recently received his Ph.D. in History from Princeton University. His dissertation, supervised by Dr. Jack Tannous, was entitled “‘The Tottering House of the World’: The Ruralization of the Miaphysite Church in the Works of John of Ephesus (c. 507–88 C.E.).” In the 2022–23 academic year, he will be a postdoctoral fellow at the Haifa Center for Mediterranean History at the University of Haifa, where he will be revising his dissertation for publication and writing an article on the economic role of monasteries and ecclesiastical landowners in the late antique countryside. He hopes to begin work soon on a second project, a *longue-durée* social history of Christian subalternity in the early Islamic Near East.

4.

A Leader, an Army, a City, a People. Agents of Rebellion Against Aghlabid Rule in the 3rd/9th Century

Antonia Bosanquet

Abstract

The period of Aghlabid rule (184/800-296/909) over Ifrīqiya is generally seen as bringing political stability to the previously troubled province. This presentation will nuance this assumption by analyzing a rebellion against the Aghlabid ruler Ziyādat Allāh I. The rebellion lasted for three years and almost ended Aghlabid rule in the region. The presentation will consider what factors contributed to the initial success of the rebellion, including the participation of key demographic groups and their ability to harness social concerns. Particular attention will be paid to the role of the city of Tunis and its depiction in the sources as a recurring site of political opposition. Another important aspect is the appeal to non-Arab forces, usually understood as hostile to Aghlabid rule, to quell the rebellion. How does the portrayal of this rebellion help us to understand the internal dynamics of early Islamic Ifrīqiya and what does it reveal about relations with the non-Arab tribes outside the province's borders?

Bio

Dr. Antonia Bosanquet is a research associate (Post-Doc) in the DFG Center for Advanced Study "RomanIslam – Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies". She studied theology and religion at the University of Cambridge (B.A.) and Islamic studies (M.A.) in Tübingen, Germany. She holds a PhD in Islamic studies from the Freie Universität Berlin. Before joining RomanIslam, she was a research associate in the ERC project "The Early Islamic Empire at Work - The View from the Regions toward the Center".

5.

Three Ka'abas, Three Rebellions: Pilgrims, Rebels and Religiopolitical Imaginations in Early Islamic World

Muhamed Riyaz Chenganakkattil

Abstract

Rebellions have been a constant thematic of the socio-political imaginations in the early history of the Muslim world. Mainly the prevalent discourse of rebellion focuses on the 'uprising' against the existing political power of and figures to gain political legitimacy. However, the problem of rebellion with its particular connection to delegitimizing the political authority, reclaiming and shifting of space exporting symbolic religious objects, is rarely addressed in academic studies. In this paper, I engage with the characteristics of 'three rebellions' related to the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca focused on the questions of sacred space and the emergence of new religiopolitical imagination in the early Islamic world. To do this, I deal with the reimagination of Kaaba and sacred objects as the legitimate loci for rebels to claim authority over the pilgrims from different parts of the world. In a different approach, I show *three ka'abas* in juxtaposition with three distinct nature of rebellion of various contexts; firstly, setting a new Caliphate imagination by Ibn Zubair resorting to the sanctified premises of Kaaba, secondly, shaping an alternative political space by Qarmatain by robbing *Hajar-al-Aswad*, the black stone in Mecca, and thirdly, proposing a new spiritual rebellion against the unjust rulers by Hallaj, the rebel Sufi martyr, by asking his followers to consider one's own home as Kaaba and space for substitute pilgrimage. By highlighting the possible questions of 'political' entangled in the religious reality of Muslims, I examine the role of new spatial imagination in actualizing the rebellious potentials of various kinds. This paper is guided by three interconnected concerns: space, rebellion, and Muslim socio-political thought. To understand these three rebellions within their specific contexts, I use hagiographical sources and testimonials of the political turmoil.

Keywords: Muslim pilgrimage, rebellion, sacred space, religiopolitical, authority and legitimacy

Bio

Muhamed Riyaz Chenganakkattil is a doctoral researcher in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology. He is currently on an independent research visit to New York Public Library and Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, USA. His dissertation is focused on the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, especially from Malabar, a historical South Asian region, and narratives of the sacred with questions related to politics, experience and memory. He has published an article on "Unnaturalness of Hajj narratives: We-narrative and narrating performative collective subjectivity" in *Performing Islam* (Intellect Books) along with other article on debating the djinns in a south Asian context.

6.

“We Did Not Pull Our Hand from Obedience”: The Rebellion of the *jund* against al-Faḍl ibn Rawḥ ibn Ḥātim al-Muhallabī (794 CE)

Alon Dar (Universität Hamburg)

Abstract

The history of the early caliphate was marked by continuous clashes between provincial governors and provincial elites. This paper approaches those clashes as: a) a way for provincial elites to communicate displeasure and resentment to their superiors; b) a feature of the political and administrative apparatus of the caliphate, which relied heavily on the cooperation of Arab and Muslim elites in the provinces; and c) as one avenue of action among several options that were all part of the repertoire of public power.

In order to illustrate these points, the paper focuses on the overthrow and killing of the last Muhallabī governor of Ifrīqiya, al-Faḍl ibn Rawḥ ibn Ḥātim al-Muhallabī, by the *jund* of Tunis in 794 CE, after a full-scale revolt that shook the province. This event is preserved in numerous Islamic chronicles. The present study will examine this episode as an exemplary case that furthers our understanding of provincial power struggles. It will discuss certain mechanisms of rebellion by focusing on the events that led to the overthrow of the governor and drawing comparisons with similar case studies.

Bio

Alon Dar is a research associate in the Emmy Noether research group “Social Contexts of Rebellion in the Early Islamic Period (SCORE)”. His current research focuses on *ashrafi* rebellions in Iraq during the 7th-9th centuries AD. He holds an MA in Islamic Studies from Freie Universität Berlin and Middle-Eastern Studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He previously worked at the ERC project “Embedding Conquest: Naturalizing Muslim Rule 600-1000 CE” at Leiden University.

7.

“When the *Banū al-Ḥakam* Reach Thirty Men They Will Appropriate the Wealth of God, Seize the Servants of God, and Corrupt God’s Book”: a Generational Explanation of the Third *fitna* (126-136/744-754)

Leone Pecorini Goodall

Abstract

The use of *fitna* as chronological markers within early Islamic periodisation, has often excluded them from discussions surrounding ‘rebellions’, being viewed as ‘civil war’. Instead, when looking at underutilised primary sources such as Ibn ‘Atham (d. early fourth/tenth century), we find the term used to define what is accepted in modern historiography as ‘rebellions’, e.g., the Muhallabid revolt. The third *fitna*, as argued here, should be viewed as a rebellion with a variety of ‘rebels’ - Marwānids, Kharijites, Alīds and the ‘Abbāsids – and even transcending dynastic boundaries, ending with the defeat of the ‘Abbāsid ‘rebel’ ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī (136/754).

The proposed paper will make use of *ṭabaqāt*, poetry, eschatological literature, and historiography to argue that the *fitna* was caused by the growth of the *banū Marwān* - as exemplified by the *ḥadīth* quoted in the title - and the large-scale generational shifts of the conquest community in the 120s/740s. All claimants to the caliphate during the *fitna* represent a new generation of the Marwānid elite; grandsons (or great-grandsons) of ‘Abd al-Malik. Many of them were also born to concubines and had not been considered for caliphal succession up until that point. The accession of al-Walīd b. Yazīd meant that the patrimony – up until this point relatively evenly distributed - was further restricted, descending the Marwānid family tree. It is not surprising then to see sons of other caliphs rebel to lay claim to the privileges and authority linked to dynastic descent, which they would have lost if the caliphate passed to a subsequent generation. The largest visibly aggrieved factions are the *Banū Hishām* and the *Banū al-Walīd* who, linked together also through marriage, would bring Yazīd b. al-Walīd to power at the expense of their cousin al-Walīd b. Yazīd. This concern of restrictions is visible throughout nearly all succession narratives, with Hishām and his progeny often found as petitioner to maintain the patrimony, enquiring on the death of Sulaymān if “the caliphate will pass out of the hands of the sons of ‘Abd al-Malik?” I will aim to demonstrate that the same concerns were present thirty years later and that familial networks within the *Banū Marwān* are crucial to understanding the third *fitna* and the fall of the first Islamic dynasty.

Bio

Leone Pecorini Goodall is a fourth year PhD student in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Edinburgh/St. Andrews (supervisors: Marie Legendre, Yannis Stouraitis and Tim Greenwood). His thesis explores the patterns and means of succession of the late Umayyad and early Abbasids, focusing on over-looked aspects of succession such as the matrilineal line, age, eligibility and ‘failed’ heirs. His research makes use of Arabic, Armenian, and Greek language sources, adopting a source-critical and comparative approach.

8.

Armenia, 774-5: A Tax Revolt?

Alasdair Grant (Universität Hamburg)

Abstract

In the reign of the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Manṣūr (754–75), a series of revolts occurred in Armenia led by members of the Arcruni and Mamikonean noble families and involving members of others. The rebels defeated 'Abbāsīd forces, killed tax collectors, raided, besieged 'Abbāsīd-garrisoned settlements and withdrew to rural fortresses. The insurrections culminated in 774–5 with large-scale mobilization and ended with two major defeats. The most important Armenian historiographer of the eighth century, Lewond, emphasizes harsh taxation as the background to these revolts. This interpretation was taken up by other medieval authors and has been dominant in modern scholarship. The purpose of this paper is to interrogate this paradigm. It does so first by a close reading of the various Armenian and Arabic revolt narratives, analysing their claims, mutual agreements, disagreements, and silences. It then marshals further evidence for socioeconomic conditions in later eighth-century Armenia, affirming the case for material hardship. Overall, it suggests that the term 'tax revolt' is appropriate, but requires some qualifications. The insurgencies of 774–5 responded to medium- or long-term exploitation that affected poorer people and was increasingly affecting elites. They were, however, triggered both by hardship and by acts of violence against members of the Armenian nobility. These revolts were affiliated but discrete movements that centred on rural dynastic strongholds, led by elites but also supported by a few thousands of non-elites. The revolts aimed for a reprieve from taxation in the short term, but their long-term aims are less clear; aspirations for a future of collaboration with the Roman Empire may have played a larger role in the rebels' strategies than the existing narratives imply.

Bio

Dr. Alasdair Grant's research concerns primarily the history and literature of the medieval Mediterranean and Middle East. His main areas of interest are Byzantium, Armenia, the Latin East, and Scotland, and their relationships with one another and with the Islamic world. His role in the research group SCORE involves the study of Armenian revolts against Arab rule in the eighth century. His PhD was a study of inter-religious captivity in the Byzantine sphere and wider Mediterranean, c.1280–1450. He has also curated an exhibition on Scottish–Hellenic connections to mark the bicentenary of the Greek Revolution of 1821.

The Zanj Rebellion as *Marronage*: the Waterscape as Agent

Philip Grant

Abstract

The Zanj Rebellion (255-279AH/869-883CE) is extraordinary among the uprisings of the first Islamic centuries for its duration, but also for its location, the rebels establishing a functioning administrative apparatus based in southern al-‘Irāq, in the ‘backyard’ of the ‘Abbasid caliphate. The rebels’ composition is also without parallel in the entire period: enslaved agricultural labourers of probably East African origin, the Zanj who gave the revolt its name, under the leadership of a charismatic visionary claiming ‘Alid descent, assisted by a variety of men whose *nisbas* indicate connections to Iran, Nubia, or the Fezzan; but also a *kātib* related to high ‘Abbasid officials, and a slave of Baghdadi date-juice sellers, allied with local peasants and Bedouin. To account for these extraordinary features, it is helpful to compare the uprising with the phenomenon of *marronage*, the flight of slaves from early modern plantations, especially in the Caribbean, which at its most extensive involved the formation of autonomous political communities that engaged in diplomatic and military relations with European colonial governments. Maroon collectivities were enabled by the difficult landscape – mountains, forests, swamps – inhabited by former slaves. Similarly, the difficult ‘waterscape’ of lower al-‘Irāq and al-Ahwāz, with its major rivers, massive marshes, numerous canals, and access to the sea, must be regarded as a key agent of the revolt, a non-human ally for the rebels against the ‘Abbasid forces, but eventually also a partner to those same forces in their defeat of the insurrection. While the historiography of the revolt notes the importance of this terrain, reconceptualizing it as a waterscape permits more careful attention to the active role of waterways in shaping its endurance and intensity. Waterways, including their associated land and vegetation, enabled communication with Baghdad or the Persian Gulf; movements of troops and supplies; skirmishes and battles; provisioning; concealment; and disease.

Bio

Philip Grant has a PhD in Socio-Cultural Anthropology and currently works as Senior Researcher at Transformations of the Human, Berkeley, California, where he works with Silicon Valley technology companies to help them understand the philosophical ramifications of their activities, but his first love is late antique and early medieval history and especially the ‘Abbasid period. He is working on a monograph on the Zanj Rebellion, in particular with a view to rethinking the revolt by bringing perspectives from the contemporary social sciences to bear. He has an article forthcoming in *al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* on the agency of silk cloth in the uprising.

10.

Poet, Scholar, Khārijite? Navigating Rebellion with ‘Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān (d. 703 CE)

Hannah-Lena Hagemann

Abstract

The figure of ‘Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān (d. 703 CE) occupies a liminal space in the Islamic tradition. He was a well-known poet and transmitter of *ḥadīth*, but he is also remembered as a leader of the Ṣufriyya, a rather nebulous quietist branch of Khārijism. While not a contradiction in and of itself, narratives of his life display a certain tension related to the dual legacy of ‘Imrān the scholar-poet and ‘Imrān the Khārijite who praised the murderer of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE). The most famous episode in ‘Imrān’s Khārijite career is undoubtedly his confrontation with al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 714 CE), the powerful governor of ‘Irāq and the east for ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 705 CE). ‘Imrān’s flight from al-Ḥajjāj, whose relentless pursuit drove him from ‘Irāq to find shelter in Syria and ‘Umān, is an exciting tale of adventure that captured the imagination of many pre-modern Muslim scholars. It also complicates traditional understandings of what Khārijism was and how Khārijites were supposed to behave – remembered as eternal rebels, figures like ‘Imrān serve to upset the status quo.

This paper will study the history and historiography of ‘Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān, who has so far been largely neglected by scholarship. It will present the story of his flight and address some of the problems that inhere the various accounts extant today. An attempt to reconstruct ‘Imrān’s biography will be undertaken as well, although this is hampered by a scarcity of information. The second part of the paper will discuss the ways in which the story of ‘Imrān’s flight helps to nuance established notions of Khārijism, investigate the social fabric of early Islamic society, and shed light on processes of conflict resolution.

Bio

Hannah-Lena Hagemann is an historian of early Islam with a particular interest in historiography and historical memory, rebellion and social strife, Islamic Late Antiquity, the Umayyads, and the history of the Jazīra (Northern Mesopotamia). She received her PhD from Edinburgh University in 2015 for a dissertation on the representation of Khārijites in works (mostly chronicles) of the early Islamic historical tradition. She worked for Stefan Heidemann’s ERC project “The Early Islamic Empire at Work” (Hamburg) for several years, during which she focused on the administrative history and geography of the Jazīra. In her current position at Hamburg, she leads an Emmy Noether research group on ‘Social Contexts of Rebellion in the Early Islamic Period (SCORE)’, focusing once more on Khārijism.

11.

The Zaydī Imāmate in the Shadow of Power: Reconstructions of the Revolt of Ṣāhib Fakhkh Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (d. 169/786)

Najam Haider

Abstract

What are the requirements for a Zaydī Imām? At first glance, this is a simple question. There is ample literature that lays out the specific qualifications associated with a Zaydī Imām. First, a majority of Zaydīs agree that the Imāmate is confined to those descendants of Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 49/669-70) and Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 61/680) who possess exemplary personal qualities, including a propensity for justice. Second, according to Wilferd Madelung, a qualified candidate must establish his claim to the Imāmate “through armed uprising (*khurūj*) and a formal summons to allegiance (*da‘wa*).” Third, the growth of an Imām’s support is embodied by the oath of allegiance (*ba‘ya*) which also spells out his obligations to his supporters. In the resulting model, the Imāmate is founded on lineage and personality but ultimately derives its legitimacy from the Imām’s political skills as head of state.

This paper is primarily interested in the impact of the rise of Zaydī political states on the Zaydī view of the Imāmate. It is not radical to claim that power forces a reckoning with theory. But is such a change observable in Zaydī historical sources that recount the successful and unsuccessful efforts of ‘Alids vying to achieve power? In what ways does the presence of a dynastic line of Zaydī Imāms alter the biographies of figures primarily lauded for their embrace of rebellion? In order to answer these questions, this paper examines the failed rebellion of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī at Fakhkh in 169/786 as depicted in three Zaydī sources.

Bio

Najam Haider is professor in the Department of Religion at Barnard College. He completed his PhD at Princeton University (2007), M.Phil. at Oxford University (2000), and BA at Dartmouth College (1997). His research interests include early Islamic history, the methodology and development of Islamic law, and Shi‘ism.

12.

Arab Rebellion and Local Resistance: The Response among the People of Khurāsān and Transoxiana to the First and Second Fitnas and the “Rebellions” of ‘Abdallāh b. Khāzim and his son Mūsā

Robert Haug

Abstract

On at least two occasions, the Arab military commander praised as one of the bravest and fiercest cavaliers of his age, ‘Abdallāh b. Khāzim al-Sulamī, seized control of Khurāsān for himself by means that can be construed as rebellion. Following his death in 73/692-3, his son Mūsā carried on the tradition by capturing the city of Tirmidh where he established an independent kingdom on the northern banks of the Amu Dayra that lasted for over a decade. While these events are remembered in chronicles, local histories, and biographical dictionaries as acts of a rebellious general and governor, often used as a point of comparison for similar actions by later figures such as Qutayba b. Muslim, and presented in terms of inter-Arab conflict and competition, the recently and/or nearly conquered peoples of Khurāsān and Transoxiana played important roles in each of these events. When Ibn Khāzim first seized the governorship of Khurāsān from his feckless cousin Qays b. al-Haytham—alternatively dated to the caliphates of ‘Uthmān or Mu‘āwiya—an uprising in Ṭukhāristān provided an easy cover and explanation for his actions. During the Second Fitna, when Ibn Khāzim waged a violent war against his fellow Arabs to grab control of Khurāsān, the Hephthalites of Ṭukhāristān took advantage, possibly conquering and briefly holding the provincial capital of Marw. When Mūsā founded his rebel kingdom in Tirmidh, it became a refuge not only for Arabs fleeing the grasp of the Umayyad Caliphate but also Sogdians caught between the caliphate and the king of Samarqand who briefly united to resist reprisals from both sides of the river. This paper examines the intersection of rebellion among the Arab troops tasked with extending and defending the eastern frontiers of the caliphate and the responses from the local populations who had been subjected to these conquests. The combination of military conquest followed by civil war and rebellion among the conquering armies created decades of uncertainty and instability that opened the doors to multiple forms of resistance among both the conquered and conqueror as well as those living on the fringes of caliphal authority.

Bio

Robert Haug is Associate Professor of Islamic World History in the Department of History at the University of Cincinnati. He is author of *The Eastern Frontier: The Limits of Empire in Late Antique and Early Medieval Central Asia* (I.B. Tauris, 2019). His current project is an examination of the Arab conquest of Iran and Central Asia and the reach of the First and Second Fitnas into the frontier through the career of general, governor, and rebel ‘Abdallāh b. Khāzim.

13.

Religion and Rebellion: Mobilizing a following through religious image-building, the cases of the Qaramita and Zanj

Nimrod Hurvitz

Abstract

How did rebel movements come into being? In some cases the movement was based on familiar and well defined social groups such as tribe, religious community, ethnic or regional groups, that was led by communal leaders, and usually had an economic or political agenda. In other cases, they evolved out of an unconventional collaboration of social groups and individuals. Often, at the head of the latter stood anonymous missionaries, who gradually became the charismatic leaders of these movements, and their goals combined material and spiritual agendas.

The success or failure of these foreign strangers depended on their ability to convince large numbers of adherents that they possessed special spiritual qualities. Therefore, the path to positions of leadership often passed through religious charisma, and there are many indications that these individuals consciously devised strategies to construct religious authority.

This lecture examines the strategies devised by two such leaders, Ḥamdān Qarmāṭ of the Qarāmīṭa and `Alī b. Muḥammad of the Zanj, and the ways that they established their authority and won over followers. The chronicles depict them as utilizing religious symbols, rhetoric and practices to promote their religious standing and social influence. This lecture will examine the interplay between religious authority and leadership of rebellious movement.

Bio

Nimrod Hurvitz is a professor in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. His research interests are: the mutual influence between intellectual trends and social context; role of the Hanbali school of law in early Abbasid society.

14.

Making a Rebel, an Imam, or a Bandit? The Rebellion of Yaḥyā b. Zayd b. ‘Alī (d. 125/743) in Khurāsān

Natalie Kontny-Wendt

Abstract

Yaḥyā b. Zayd b. ‘Alī’s activities in Khurāsān at the end of Umayyad rule feature prominently throughout the Islamic historical tradition. Within the scholarly discourse, Yaḥyā’s status as a rebel seems to be generally accepted. At closer glance, however, the narrative of Yaḥyā’s life and death is not as clear as the scholarly literature would suggest. Which of Yaḥyā’s activities are ‘rebellious’ and how is the beginning of his rebellion marked?

The present paper will address the above questions by taking a closer look at the representation of Yaḥyā in the historiographical tradition. One of the main aims is to identify and discuss the variants within the rebellion narrative(s) that do not only represent Yaḥyā as a rebel. While some sources emphasize his status as imam, others seem to challenge his rebel status and frame him as a bandit. In a further step, Yaḥyā’s case is used as a springboard for asking more general questions about the category of ‘rebel’ and the historiography of ‘rebellion’ in the early Islamic period, suggesting that one crucial element was the making and breaking of oaths.

Bio

Natalie Kontny-Wendt is a PhD researcher in the Emmy Noether research group “Social Contexts of Rebellion in the Early Islamic Period (SCORE)”. She holds a M.A. and B.A. in Islamic Studies. Her current research focuses on pro-‘Alid – especially Zaydī – rebellions in the long 8th century CE.

15.

Revolts and Papyri: Everyday Administration and Elites in the Turbulent Long Eighth Century

Marie Legendre

Abstract

Between the late 7th and the early 9th century, the history of late Umayyad and early Abbasid Egypt can be narrated as a continuous string of revolts. Some of those events have been interpreted in the medieval and modern historiography as a symptom of problems with taxation: the payment of the poll tax, and particularly the one paid by converts to Islam. Other modern commentators have offered that some of those revolts were due to the replacement of local administrative elites at the level of the *kūra*/pagarchy or to changes in the dynamics of appointment of governors and their origin following the Abbasid takeover or even to fluctuations in the level of the Nile flood. This variety of motivations for revolt in the long 8th century in Egypt display a complex balance between local and central power which scholars continue to assess and this paper will first account for this. Additionally, those revolts have been mainly studied on the basis of narrative sources, with a particular focus on al-Kindī's *Book of the Governors and Judges*, and the formidable corpus of Egyptian papyri has been largely disregarded. In that sense, we have little knowledge of how much those events disrupted administration and fiscal collection in Egypt. This paper will attempt to fill that gap within a wider reflection on the social and geographical scope of revolts as depicted in the literature written in the provincial or caliphal centres. The wider aim of this paper is indeed to assess whether 'revolts' only concern the provincial elites and their 'espace utile' in Jean-Claude Garcin's words, which in Egypt is the Delta or Lower Egypt. As papyrus documents mainly come from Upper Egypt (the valley), it might be posited that revolts in elite circles did not get in the way of everyday administration in the hinterland, especially those of the early Abbasid period. This paper will put this idea to the test.

Bio

Marie Legendre is a senior lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. She earned her PhD from the University of Leiden (2013) and Université Paris-Sorbonne (Paris 4) (2014). Her research interests include Late Antique and early Islamic history, especially administrative and economic history (500–1200), the early Islamic conquest, administrative and fiscal history of the Umayyad and Abbasid empires, non-Muslims under Muslim rule, women and gender, Arabic and Coptic papyrology and multilingualism.

Since September 2021, she manages the international project "Caliphal Finances: The Finances of the Caliphate: Abbasid Fiscal Practice in Islamic Late Antiquity (2021-2026)", a five-year, European Research Council-funded project to provide for the first time a view 'from below' on Abbasid fiscal history through a study of papyrus documents in Greek, Coptic and Arabic written in Egypt.

The “Urban Autonomy” Paradigm and Medieval Muslim Society

Yaacov Lev

Abstract

During the 1060s the *cadi* of Tripoli (Syria), Abu Talib ibn Ammar, seized power in the town, ushering the independent phase in Tripoli’s history, which lasted until the Frankish conquest in 1109. In modern historiography, the events in Tripoli are perceived as a case/manifestation of ‘urban autonomy’ (Ashtor, 1956, 1958, 1975; Cahen, 1958, 1959; and Amabe, 2016). While the paradigm of ‘urban autonomy’ has its merits, the publication of al-Maqrizi’s writings concerning the Fatimids during the 1960s-1970s and the early 1990s necessitated a re-examination of the events. In 1094, a rebellion erupted in Alexandria led by its governor and the *cadi* Abu Abd Allah ibn Ammar, who stood for the right of Nizar, the son the deceased Fatimid imam al-Mustansir, to succeed his father. After a short initial success, the rebellion was crushed and its leaders paid with the lives for their stand against al-Afdal, the military vizier of the Fatimid state.

The events in Alexandria had a direct impact on the Ammar family in Tripoli and its attitude toward the Fatimid state. Their rebellion had evolved from so-called ‘autonomy’ to full-fledged rebellion against the manipulation of the Fatimid succession by al-Afdal. The evolution of the rebellion into a direct political challenge had grave consequences for the town’s ability to withstand the Frankish onslaught and exposed the Banu Ammar rulers to Fatimid vendetta in the form of a naval incursion into the town and the arrest of its leaders.

The paper will attempt to go beyond the religious aspects of the events in Alexandria and Tripoli and to shed light on the economic and administrative capacities of these two Mediterranean towns to maintain a short-living independence.

Bio

Yaacov Lev is Professor (Emeritus) in Middle Eastern Studies at Bar Ilan University, Israel. He is author of several books including *Saladin in Egypt* (Brill, 1998), *Charity, Endowments, and Charitable Institutions in Medieval Islam* (University Press of Florida, 2006) and *Towns and Material Culture in the Medieval Middle East* (Brill, 2013). His most recent publications include articles in *JSAI* and *Medieval Encounters*, and a chapter in *Developing Perspectives in Mamluk History*, edited by Yuval Ben-Bassat (Brill, 2017).

17.

“He made all the Muslims’ wealth that was pleasant ... into something for his own glory”: Abu Hamza’s rebel sermon and the image of the Umayyads

Andrew Marsham

Abstract

In 747 CE, Abū Ḥamza, who had pledged allegiance to the South Arabian Kharijite rebel leader usually known as Ṭālib al-Ḥaqq, seized the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina from Umayyad control. There he performed a famous sermon, or series of sermons, extant in many of the medieval Arabic sources. An *isnad-cum-matn* analysis suggests that the text had taken something like its extant form with four or five decades of the speech itself – very possibly earlier. In its content, it points to the particular grievances of rebels in the era of the last Umayyads as they related in particular to the *fay*’ – the non-battlefield revenues of the Muslims bestowed on them by God – and to the corrupt and immoral worldliness of most members of the Umayyad dynasty. The preservation of the speech in the later, Abbasid-era tradition, points to the literary merit of the text and the interest of the Abbasids in both *Kaiserkritik* and the political economy of conflict in the earlier empire; Abbasid-era scholars had a sophisticated understanding of the social and economic conflicts that motivated violent contention as well as a keen interest in the image of past monarchs and their exemplary character, both negative and positive. For this latter purpose, Abū Ḥamza’s speech was an interesting literary curio, which resonated with the image of the same monarchs in other texts. Thus, the extant sermon points both forward, into the salons of the late eighth and ninth century Baghdadi elite, and back, into the first century or so of Islam and pietist opposition circles to the rule of the Umayyads.

Bio

Andrew Marsham studied History at Oxford, where he became interested in the formative period of Islam and its wider context in world history. He went on to postgraduate study at Oxford in Arabic and Islamic History, and Arabic study in Egypt and Syria, before teaching and researching in Sheffield, Cambridge, Manchester and Edinburgh. His *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy* (Edinburgh, 2009), is the first full length study of the pledges of allegiance given to the rulers of the early Muslim Empire. He has also written on the execution of rebels, on history writing in Arabic, and on the early Muslim Empire and its Late Antique context. He recently edited *The Umayyad World* (Routledge, 2021) and co-edited *Power, Patronage and Memory in Early Islam* (Oxford, 2018) with Alain George (Oxford). He is currently working on *The Umayyad Empire (644–750 CE)*, forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press.

18.

The Medieval Islamic World: A View from the Mountains. Conquest, Conversion, Revolt, and State Formation

Christian Sahner

Abstract

It is sometimes assumed that certain regions of the early Islamic empire were prone to rebellion or were otherwise difficult to control for the caliphal authorities. Using examples from North Africa, Syria, and Iran, this paper examines whether specific areas were hotbeds of revolts; if so, what conditions may have contributed to this phenomenon; and why some regions vacillated between rebelliousness and submission to imperial power.

Bio

Christian Sahner is Associate Professor of Islamic History at the University of Oxford. He studies the history of North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia during the transition from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. His research interests are relations between Muslims and non-Muslims (including Christians and Zoroastrians), religious conversion, Islamic sectarianism, and the intertwined histories of the Umayyad, 'Abbasid, and Byzantine empires. Between 2022 and 2024, he is on research leave writing a new book with the support of the Leverhulme Trust and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. The book explores the history of religious change in three mountainous areas between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, including North Africa, Syria-Lebanon, and the Caspian region of northern Iran.

How Does Civil War Impact State Formation? The Case of the Early Caliphate

Mehdy Shaddel

Abstract

In his magnum opus, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*, American political scientist Charles Tilly identified war-making as a, if not *the*, principal dynamic in formation of states. In a somewhat Darwinian fashion, Tilly hypothesised that only those states that successfully marshal all their resources in the service of their struggle for survival manage to weather the storm of inter-state rivalry. But neither Tilly nor his followers and critics paid much attention to the role internecine conflict plays in the formation of states. Whilst external warfare may galvanise internal support for the state in such a way as to enable it to push through with its centralisation programme, such warfare does not necessarily always result in the formation of a more centralised state, as its aftermath has the potential to pit various interest groups within said state with centripetal or centrifugal tendencies against each other. In cases of a strong opposition, rebellion and civil war may ensue, and the outcome of this second phase of conflict may contribute immensely to the shape of the state that emerges from it. The present contribution seeks to test this thesis with reference to the case of the early Islamic state. It will argue that the so-called ‘wars of repudiation’ (*ridda*) may be thought of as the first civil war in the history of the Caliphate inasmuch as it marked an attempt by old-guard centrifugal elements to break away from the nascent Muslim polity. The outcome, the victory of the centripetal element based at Medina, resulted in the formation of a stronger political formation capable of waging wars of conquest. This was followed by the so-called First and Second Muslim Civil Wars, each of which contributed greatly to the centralisation of the early Islamic state. An appraisal of the changes brought about by the civil war which make further centralisation a desirable and possible outcome as well as an estimation of the strength of the state after each episode of internecine conflict will also be attempted.

Bio

Mehdy Shaddel is a scholar of early Islamic history specialising in the socio-economic, political, and religious history of the early Muslim empire. He has written on the historiographical tradition(s) pertaining to the early history of Islam, the Quran, and the material culture of early Islam, monetary and socio-economic history, as well as on late ancient religion, apocalypticism and eschatology, and comparative empires and state formation. He is currently working on two monograph projects, tentatively entitled *The Sufyanids and the Beginnings of the Second Civil War, 660-684 CE* and *The Rise of the Kaaba: A New History of Islam’s Holy Shrine, ca. 600-800 CE*, as well as a critical edition and translation of the *Kitāb al-wuzarā’ wal-kuttāb* of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdūs al-Jahshiyārī.

The Rebels of Early Abbasid Albania

Alison Vacca

Abstract

The goal of this chapter is to analyze Abbasid-era Arabic histories about the many rebellions in Caucasian Albania (Arrān) at the end of the Umayyad and start of the Abbasid periods, up to the reign of the caliph Hārūn al-Rašīd (r. 170/786-193/809). Organizing geographically around the three rebellious cities of Baylaqan, Tbilisi, and Derbent, each fighting against the caliphal capital at Barda, showcases the diversity of interests among Muslim communities in Albania. In particular, this provincial approach yields two interventions, one historiographical and the other historical. First, the Arabic sources chronicle Abbasid power. The details preserved about the rebellions are therefore about their suppression, thus celebrating caliphal might and inscribing the contours of caliphal control both geographically and militarily. Second, the reports about the quelling of rebellions in Albania also demonstrate the ways that Albania was an integral part of the Caliphate: the rebels did not advocate for the overthrow of the Abbasids and they frequently claimed connections with rebellious groups in other regions across the Caliphate. The many rebellions in Abbasid Albania demonstrate the region's inclusion in the Caliphate, rather than the desire of its inhabitants to redefine imperial borders.

Bio

Alison Vacca is the Gevork M. Avedissian professor of Armenian History at Columbia University. She is a historian of the early Islamic world, focused on Armenia and Caucasian Albania in the eighth- and ninth-century Caucasus. Her current research deals with identity (religion, ethnicity, and gender) and the Khazar frontier.