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## ABBREVIATIONS

*EI*<sup>1</sup>, *EI*<sup>2</sup> = *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, first, second edition  
*EIS* = *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* or *Handwörterbuch*  
*GAL* = Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, second edition  
*GALS* = Supplementbände of *GAL*, first edition  
*GAS* = Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (details of these works will be found in the General Bibliography, section A, p.164)

N.B. n.14/6 means chapter 14, note 6; and similarly B/D means section D of the General Bibliography.

## NOTE ON THE SOURCES

For theologians and philosophers who died after about 900 the primary source is their own works, and these are now relatively easy of access. Many of the most important works are now in printed editions, and these are continually being added to. There are also much wider facilities for obtaining photographic reproductions of manuscripts. Carl Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* (see Bibliography) aimed at providing a complete list of manuscripts and printed editions; but of course it has nothing after its date of publication (1943, 1949). It is in process of being supplemented and brought up to date by Fuat Sezgin's *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, but that is progressing only slowly. Details of printed books and of important articles, sometimes with brief descriptions, are contained in the *Abstracta* which constitute the second half of each annual volume of the *Revue des études islamiques*.

For the earlier period only a few complete works exist, and these mostly short, though further discoveries are made from time to time. Much reliance has thus to be placed on the secondary information derived from historians and other writers, and notably from the heresiographers (writers of accounts of the sects). The secondary sources have to be handled cautiously and critically, especially since the names of the sects were originally nicknames and could be used differently by different people. It has also to be realized that the material in the best-known works of heresiography comes from Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite sources, and that in other strands of Islamic theology many points were viewed differently. In my book *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* I attempted a radical critique of the sources for the early period, and I will here assume that this is accepted. I will also omit detailed references to matters dealt with in the *Formative Period*. The German translation of this work has some small additions which take account of material published after the English version went to print, notably some works of Professor Josef van Ess of Tübingen dealing with the Murji'ites and the Qadarites. The same volume also contains a section on 'Islamische Theologie, 950–1850', which is parallel to the second half of the present book.

say what is politics and what theology. Nevertheless, apart from the 'false prophets' who inspired the revolts, known as the Ridda or 'apostasy', from about 632 to 634, no theological element is discernible in the political conflicts within the Islamic state until just before the beginning of the Umayyad period. This was not due, either, to the absence of strife and tension. The rivalry between the two main tribes of Medina continued almost to the time of Muḥammad's death; in the appointment of a successor the jealousy of the Medinans towards the Meccans came to light; in the wars of 'apostasy' certain nomadic tribes were opposing the Medinans, Meccans and certain other nomadic tribes; and the accession of 'Alī brought into the open a clash of interests between at least three different groups of Meccans.

A theological factor first comes into contact with politics in certain disputes which took place among the followers of 'Alī. These were mostly men from nomadic tribes, now settled in military camp-towns in Iraq; and the disputes occurred when 'Alī, after defeating one group of Meccan opponents in a battle near Basra, was trying to collect a sufficient army to meet his more serious rival, Mu'āwiya, who had at his disposal the army occupying Syria. Among the troops under 'Alī's command were some who were deeply attached to him; they are said to have sworn that they would be 'friends of those whom he befriended and enemies of those to whom he was hostile'. In other words, these men believed that a leader or imam such as 'Alī could make no mistakes and do no wrong. The opposing group not merely thought that 'Alī was capable of making mistakes, but regarded him as actually in error because he was not sufficiently definite in his support of those responsible for the murder of 'Uthmān. This second group considered themselves in a sense the spiritual descendants of the men who had killed 'Uthmān (though there does not appear to have been much personal continuity). 'Uthmān, they held, had sinned in that he had not punished the crime of a prominent member of his administration; and by this sin he had forfeited the privileges that went with membership of the community, thereby rendering it not merely no sin but even a duty for Muslims to kill him.

There were probably many men in 'Alī's army whose views came somewhere between these extremes; but it is the extremes that are important for the later theological developments. The two groups described are in fact the beginnings of the two great sects of the Shi'ites and the Khārijites. The Shi'ites derive their name from the fact that they are *par excellence* the 'party' (*shī'a*), that is, of 'Alī. The Khārijites (in Arabic usually Khawārij, singular Khārijī) were so called because they 'went out' or 'seceded' (*kharaḡū*), first from 'Alī and then from Mu'āwiya and the Umayyads. The best-known instances of such 'secessions' are two which occurred while 'Alī was getting ready to march against the army of Syria. The first party, who

went to a place called Harūrā', returned when 'Alī met some of their grievances; but some of the second party refused to be reconciled and were eventually massacred.<sup>1</sup> The frequency with which the story of these events is repeated should not be allowed to obscure the fact that there were five other small risings against 'Alī and about twenty during the reign of Mu'āwiya (661-80). There were also, of course, several more serious Khārijite risings at various times during the Umayyad period, and some historians have suggested that 'Khārijite' simply means 'rebel'; but a study of the theological side of the movement will show that this is not so.

The occurrence of risings under both 'Alī and Mu'āwiya proves that they were not due to personal dislike of the rule of either man, but must have resulted from some general features of the situation. Reflection suggests what these features were. The men concerned in the Khārijite risings were not of Meccan or Medinan origin, but men from nomadic tribes. Thirty years earlier these men and their fathers had been living the free life of the desert. Now they were caught up into the vast organization of the Muslim army. When the campaigns were over, they went back not to the familiar desert but to camp-cities in Iraq or Egypt. At this early period all Muslims were expected to take part in military service, and in return they received a stipend from the state. The amount of the stipend varied according to the priority of the family in adhesion to Islam. Though there is scope here for many economic grievances, there do not appear from the records to have been any such. It therefore seems probable that the underlying reason for the risings was the general sense of *malaise* and insecurity consequent on the rapid and abrupt changes. It is further probable that the incipient Shi'ite movement is a different response to the same sense of *malaise* and insecurity.

This hypothesis makes possible an explanation both of the different responses to the situation of the Shi'ites and the Khārijites, and also of the intense hostility between them. In a time of change, insecurity and crisis men tend to look for salvation to the thing in their past experience that has proved most fundamental and satisfying (whether they are fully conscious of what they are doing or not). It appears to be a fact that some men believe that salvation (or the attainment of the supreme end of human life) is to be found in the following of a leader who is endowed with more than human qualities. Such qualities are usually believed to be the gift of a god, though occasionally they may be thought of rather as a natural endowment. It is convenient to use the sociological term 'charismata' and to speak of a 'charismatic leader'. It also appears to be a fact that other men look for salvation not to a leader but to a community possessing certain charismata. By being a member of such a community (and by doing nothing to forfeit one's membership) a man attains salvation.

The negative form of this belief occurs in the tag: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. The positive aspect was prominent in the thought of many Muslims, for they spoke of the Islamic community as 'the people of Paradise', implying that all the members would eventually attain to Paradise.

The existence of deep-seated beliefs of this kind explains the appearance of the Khārijite and Shī'ite movements during the caliphate of 'Alī. In the stresses and strains of the completely new life into which they had been plunged, men were in need of something firm and secure. Deep, probably unconscious, impulses made them seek this security, some by following a leader with the charisma of infallibility, others by trying to ensure that the community of which they were members was a charismatic one. For the first group the old Arab belief that special qualities of character were handed down in certain families justified them in taking 'Alī as a leader of infallible wisdom, even when his actual political decisions were hardly in accordance with this belief. The second group had a certain advantage in that the community of Muslims had undoubtedly been founded by a divinely inspired prophet and possessed a way of life supernaturally revealed to it; to ensure that this community remained the people of Paradise, however, it was necessary, some of them felt, that those who broke the rules should be excluded from it. In this way there arose the distinctive Khārijite tenet that those who have committed a grave sin are thereby excluded from the community. Positively the Khārijites were seeking security in the knowledge that the community to which they belonged was a supernatural or charismatic one.

Further reflection along these lines shows why there was such bitterness between Khārijites and Shī'ites. For both groups the question was one of whether they were going to attain salvation or realize their supreme end; one might say roughly that it was a matter of life and death. In this situation the beliefs of each group contradicted those of the other; and so each group was in the position of preventing the other from attaining salvation. The Khārijites, not convinced of the infallibility of the leader, saw rather that he might make a mistake and thereby lead the whole community into a course of action which would cause them to forfeit their status as people of Paradise. The Shī'ites, on the other hand, were horrified at the prospect that ordinary uninspired members of the community might, by their interpretation of its scriptures (which the Shī'ites did not regard as infallible), cause the inspired leader to adopt a course of action which he knew to be wrong. In this way each group's chance of salvation, as they saw it, was endangered by the other group. It is not surprising that there was bitter hostility between them.

What has been said so far is fairly well established. When it comes, however, to the question why some men should turn to the

charismatic leader and others to the charismatic community, there is an explanation that can be given, but for the moment it must be regarded as a hypothesis needing further examination, (chiefly by comparing parallel instances in other cultures). It is conceivable that the two reactions to the same situation are due to ultimate and fundamental differences in the human constitution; but this is a dubious theory with serious consequences, and so it is preferable, if it can be done, to explain the differences by hereditary or environmental factors. There are two points which help towards an explanation.

The first point is that there are resemblances between the little groups of Khārijite rebels and the effective units of nomadic society. In the risings during the reigns of 'Alī and Mu'āwiya we are usually told the number of men involved, and it varies between thirty and five hundred, with an average of about two hundred. They did not retire to the desert, so far as we can judge, but merely withdrew to a safe distance from the towns of Iraq, and presumably kept themselves alive by raiding or by levying food from the countryside, until a government force suppressed them. Each little band presumably regarded itself as the core of the community of genuine Muslims, though not denying that there were genuine Muslims apart from the band. Most other men, however, were not genuine Muslims and therefore could be killed with impunity. Thus in various ways the little revolting bands were creating a form of life not unlike that of the divisions of a nomadic tribe. It was not exactly regression to desert conditions, for the basis of the Khārijite group was religion and not kinship. Yet it is significant that the Khārijites, like the nomads in earlier days, became noted for their skill as poets and orators; and, despite their Islamic faith, the sentiments expressed in their poems are close to those of the pagan nomads.

The second point to be noted is that, when one asks to which tribes the early Shī'ites and Khārijites belonged, a definite difference is found. The difference is not absolute, for a great many tribes are mentioned on both sides; but what can be asserted is that (1) a significant proportion of the early Shī'ites came from the tribes of South Arabia, and (2) the doctrinally important individuals and sects among the Khārijites (during the Umayyad period as a whole) were mainly from three northern tribes. Moreover, there does not seem to be anything in the history of the period from 622 to 656 to explain this difference of reaction. The northern tribes as a whole had been earlier in joining the Muslim raids into Iraq; but at least one tribe prominent among the Shī'ites had shared in the early raids. 'Alī had been sent by Muḥammad to perform special duties in South Arabia, but there is no mention of his gaining the special affection of the people. Whether the environments from which the members of these tribes came had been deeply influenced by Judaism or Monophysite or Nestorian

Christianity is a point that could be further investigated; but, even if some such influence can be proved, it does not look like giving the whole explanation.

The hypothesis to be put forward is that the difference in reaction is due to century-old traditions. The South Arabian tribes stood somehow within the tradition of the ancient civilization of that region, more than a thousand years old. In this civilization there had been divine or semi-divine kings. Even if the Arab tribesmen of the seventh century had not themselves lived under kings, they must unconsciously have been affected by the tradition, within which it had been usual in times of danger to rely on the superhuman leadership of the king. Because of this they in their time of crisis looked about for a leader of this type, and thought they had found one in 'Ali. The members of the northern tribes had not been within the sphere of influence of the belief in divine kingship. On the contrary, the normal practice in the desert tribes was for all the adult males to be regarded as in certain respects equal; and there are traces of 'democratic communities' of this kind far back in the pre-history of Iraq. Along with this practice of equality went a belief that outstanding excellence belonged to the tribe and the tribal stock, so that merely to have the blood of the tribe in one's veins gave one a place of honour in the world. The Arabs of the time just before Muḥammad gave this belief a this-worldly interpretation; but in the crisis round about 656 it would not be surprising if the idea of a small community of genuine Muslims evoked a deep unconscious response from those who had lived in this 'democratic' tradition. This at least is the view that is here propounded as a hypothesis.<sup>2</sup>

NOTES

1. See the sources given in notes 2/1, 2/6.
2. The views expressed in this chapter are formulated with greater detail in my previous writings: 'Shī'ism under the Umayyads', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1960, 158-72; 'Khārijite Thought in the Umayyad Period', *Der Islam*, xxxvi (1961), 215-31; 'The Conception of the Charismatic Community in Islam', *Numen*, vii (1960), 77-90; *Islam and the Integration of Society*, London 1961, 94-114. These works are summarized and supplemented in my *Formative Period*, 9-59.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE KHĀRIJITES

Mu'āwiya reigned as universally recognized caliph from 661 to 680. His power rested chiefly on the army composed of the Arabs settled in Syria, and he made Damascus his capital. In the practice of the nomadic Arabs a chief was usually succeeded by the best qualified member of his family; primogeniture and even sonship gave no special rights. This gave little guidance in arranging for the succession to the caliphate. Mu'āwiya tried to have his son Yazīd acknowledged as successor before his own death, but even so there were some who did not accept Yazīd. The opposition led to a catastrophic civil war when Yazīd died in 683, leaving only a minor son. 'Abd-Allāh ibn-az-Zubayr (or, more simply, Ibn-az-Zubayr), who had defied Yazīd from Mecca, now gained control of much of Iraq as well as of the region of Mecca and Medina. There was widespread confusion, and vast tracts of the caliphate were under the effective control of neither the Umayyads nor Ibn-az-Zubayr. Under the leadership of a member of another branch of the family the Umayyads fought back; in 691 they completed the recovery of Iraq, and before the end of 692 extinguished the last flames of revolt in Mecca.

The expansion of the caliphate, which had continued under Mu'āwiya but had been stopped by the civil war, was now resumed. In the east the Muslims extended their sway to Central Asia and north-west India; while in north Africa they pressed westwards into Morocco, and in 711 crossed the straits into Spain. To the north there were frequent expeditions against the Byzantines, but no permanent occupation of territory proved possible. The vastness of the territories ruled led to ever-increasing internal tensions, and the clumsy administrative machine lumbered along with creaks and groans. From about 730 or 735 it must have been clear to acute observers that the empire was slowly breaking up, and some of these observers attempted, by staging a revolt, to create an alternative government. None was successful, however, though they played a part in weakening the Umayyads, until eventually in 750 the armies of the 'Abbā-