THE BIRTH OF THE ISLAMIC CALIPHATE: CULTURAL-POLITICAL POLYMORPHISM AND SOCIOLOGY OF EMPIRES

ABSTRACT

The birth of the Arab Caliphate with its symbiosis of religious and political power defies conventional representations of premodern imperiogenesis as a process of political centralization and military expansion. That what has become known as the Umayyad/Abbasid Empire, had emerged out of a religious community, formed around Prophet Muhammad, which has turned subsequently into a military-religious order of the warriors of Islam. By blending a structural theory of status lineages and a social-psychological interpretation of sectarian formation, this study seeks to explain peculiarity of imperiogenesis in the seventh century Arabia. The paper problematizes the notions of "state-building" or "imperial statecraft" that imply that political actors follow deliberate strategies of "building" states and asserts that ultimate political crystallizations may be rather distant from original motivations of the alleged "empire-builders."

INTRODUCTION

For about two thousand years (500 BC-1500 AD), most of Eurasia was dominated by the assorted nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples (e.g., Saka, Xiongnu, Huns, Rouran, Hephthalites, Turks, Avars, Mongols). Life in the desolate homelands, wide-open landscapes, and extraordinary mobility of the horse-riding nomads provided an impetus for external projection of military force and resulted in rapid territorial expansion of the areas under the nomads' domination. Driven by the pull of the advanced agricultural civilizations and a desire to control major trading routes, steppe pastoralists moved southwards and westwards creating massive waves of human migration. Expansive but thinly populated steppe empires, that came into being along the latitudinal dimension of the Eurasian landmass lived off exacting tribute from the rich

agricultural states such as China, Persia, and the Roman Empire (later Byzantium) (Beckwith 2010, Favereau 2021, Pohl 2018).

Yet, despite the success in military conquests and predatory exploitation of the settled agriculturalists, most nomad-dominated empires were remarkably short-lived, lasting on average 155 years (Rogers 2012). As the centralized polities, the empire of the European Huns existed for 20-35 years, the First Turkic Khaganate for 78 years, and the Mongol Empire for about 55 years (Osinsky 2021). From that standpoint, a lifespan of the Arab Caliphate which lasted for about six centuries (c. 632-1258), represents a curious exception.[1] Unlike the Gök-Turks in Eastern Eurasia and the Avars in Eastern Europe, that created their states around that time, the Arabs had succeeded in establishing a durable political structure and leaving a remarkably rich cultural legacy in the Middle East.

Why have the Arabs succeeded in building a lasting empire? Naturally, most explanations point to the cementing role of Islam. Experts in global history emphasize the role of the potent synthesis of empire and universal nonethnic monotheism (Fowden 1993, 2014). Comparative studies that juxtapose the empire-building experiences of the Arabs and the Mongols similarly highlight the role of religion (e. g., Saunders 1965, Khazanov 1993). It was Islam, it is argued, that provided the basis for the Arab unification (Crone 1987). Yet, even if we assume that there was indeed a longing for political unification among the dwellers of Arabia, why has a religion become the agent of unification? Neither Attila nor Genghis Khan felt the need for any prophetic message to justify their political ambitions. Rephrasing Armstrong (1992: 94), why did Muhammad bother with God at all?

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[1] Hoyland (2015:209) claims that in comparison to the Roman/Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire, the Arab Empire was short-lived, but he compares a semi-nomadic empire with the classic *agricultural* empires.

The existing sociological literature offers little help in answering such a question. Premodern nomadic and postnomadic polities represent but a peripheral interest to historical sociologists.[2] Even though some promising interpretative frameworks have been outlined, they remain skeletal for they fail to elucidate the meso- and micro-mechanisms of the transformation (e.g., Zeitlin 2007). Historians, as one would expect, have generated a vast amount of literature on the subject. A brief analysis of this literature allows us to distill three major interpretations of rise of the Islam.

THE RISE OF ISLAM: EXISTING INTERPRETATIONS

Despite a significant overlap in the narratives of emergence of Islam historians tend to highlight different aspects of this transformation. One tradition of research, which goes back to the classic study of Montgomery Watt (1953) views emergence of Islam in the context of the Arabs' transition from a nomadic to a settled economy, corruptive effects of long-distance trade, and increasingly pervasive spirit of individualism causing its moral malaise. Mohammed's mission was first and foremost "a repudiation of the corrosive egoism of Meccan capitalism" which destroyed the fabric of the desert society (Zeitlin 2007: 116). Yet, Watt's diagnosis was challenged by Crone (1987) who demonstrated that Watts had exaggerated the scope of Mecca's trade while the evidence regarding a general malaise in Mecca was inadequate. In reality, Meccans were eminently successful, their institutions robust, and their tribal norms strong enough to resist Muhammed's preaching for nearly two decades (also see Nagel 2020: 61).

In contrast to studies that emphasized socioeconomic factors, Patricia Crone (1980, 1987) has advanced an argument, which highlighted a political mission of the Prophet. In her view,

[2] A recent review of empires by Krishnan Kumar "Empires: A Historical and Political Sociology" (2021) provides a less than a two-page discussion of the Arab Caliphate.

Muhammad has offered an attractive program of political unification of Arabia and the conquests of the adjacent states. The Prophet capitalized on bellicosity of the conflict-ridden Arab society and “elevated tribal militance and rapaciousness into supreme religious virtues” (Crone 1987: 245). In short, Islam served a legitimation function for a policy of Arab unification. One can hardly deny militance and bellicosity of the pre-Islamic Bedouins. However, as Donner (2010: 88) has aptly noted, the very category “Arabs” did not yet exist in Muhammad’s day, and it is misleading to conceive his followers as constituting an “Arab movement.” As Armstrong (2014: 184-201) has pointed out, there is no univocal or systematic Quranic teaching about military violence. In fact, militant spirituality in few quarters of the Muslim world prevailed later, in the late eighth century, when some adherents of Islam embraced a radicalized jihadist ideology.

Recent studies emphasize an unequivocally religious nature of Muhammed’s mobilization. Fred Donner, for instance, insists that Islam was first and foremost a religious movement. Muhammad was driven by a message of God, not social or political imperatives. Like other salvationist religions, Islam has had a strong eschatological orientation. The community of believers expected the Last Day of Judgement. Joining the community of believers and following the leadership of Muhammad was the way to ensure salvation (Donner 2010: 78-82). While much of this is surely correct, there are reasons to doubt the effectiveness of salvationist teachings outside Muhammad’s group, particularly among the desert Bedouins. Scholars point to pragmatism, realism, and matter-of-factness of Arabs and their fatalistic approach to the vicissitudes of life. In their everyday life, the Arabs followed a code of virtue and honor, which encompassed courage, patience, and endurance (Armstrong 2014: 179). It was unlikely that the Bedouins have easily succumbed to Muhammad’s theology. Acceptance of

Muhammad's authority by the Bedouins was dictated by recognition of his power, and as soon as the Prophet died, many tribes in Hijaz abrogated their alliance with the Muslims (Zeitlin 2007).

Among the numerous writings on early Islam Irving Zeitlin's (2007) work stands out as a unique attempt to develop a sociological interpretation. Zeitlin examined why Muhammad succeeded in transforming a small sect of believers gathered around him in Mecca into a mass religious and political movement in Medina. Zeitlin identified four factors that have made such a transformation possible: widespread discontent, ideology, charismatic leadership, and organizational strategy. In the Meccan phase of Muhammad's career none of these factors seemed to be operative. Medina, on the contrary, provided an environment where these conditions have materialized (Zeitlin 2007: 154). It is easy to notice that Zeitlin's framework aims primarily at explaining acceptance of Muhammad's message in Medina, not its emergence in Mecca. However, the birthplace of the Arab monotheism was Mecca, and it is emergence of Islam there that we need to examine first.

TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

My argument blends two streams of sociological research: structural and social-psychological. I begin with a structural component. The pre-Islamic population in Arabia fits well into a model of a highly segmented, kin-dominated tribal society organized by patrilineages. As Yamilette Chacon and her colleagues (2015) have argued, the institutional system of premodern chiefdoms placed individuals in differentially ranked lineages (or clans) that determined one's individual status. Such a system precluded neither interclan rivalry nor alliances among the lineages. However, once a certain lineage gained preeminence within a chiefdom, it often strove to perpetuate its status advantage. Thus, over time, all members of the lineage-organized chiefdom

except those in the senior line were likely to become downwardly mobile and potentially marginalized. Presumably, similar process of status ranking happened at the individual level within lineages.

Moving to a social-psychological component, what are the possible personal responses to downward mobility and a danger of marginalization? One classic study identifies exit, voice, and loyalty as most common outcomes (Hirschman 1970). However, scholars often overlooks an other-worldly solution: creating an alternative, imagined lifeworld, a dreamlike psychological refuge, which offers an alternative status hierarchy, in which one is placed at the very top of the group whereas other individuals at the lower positions. In most cases such an imagined reversal, sometimes with vindictive overtones, remains a personal fantasy. In some cases, however, an actor may imagine himself to be an agent of a supernatural agency and intimate to his associates that he is guided by divine providence. Furthermore, such an actor may prophesize that those who join him will be rewarded whereas those who refuse will suffer terrible consequences. If such a person finds supporters who are willing to believe this message and follow him, they form a splitting religious community, or a sect (Stark and Bainbridge 1979).

Any such community, by definition, experiences tension vis-à-vis a larger society (Johnson 1963), therefore its survival often depends on availability of a protected enclave and essential means of subsistence. Because a sect is but a small group within a larger society, it is likely to seek a peaceful *modus operandi* with its environment, which is not impossible, particularly if such a community has its own resource base (e.g., a piece of land good for cultivation). If a religious community, on the contrary, does not have its own economic base, it may be forced to obtain resources by expropriating its neighbors. Under certain circumstances,

regularization of violent expropriation may transform a religious community into a militant religious order, which becomes the incumbent of both ecclesiastical and military power.

A military religious order may begin offering protection to the neighboring communities in return for conversion into faith, recognition of authority and the right of taxation. Once such business of protection turns profitable, the occasional raids against neighboring communities turn into long-distance conquest expeditions. Such expeditions lead to accumulation of wealth in the hands of the leaders. An inauguration of a ruling dynasty and establishment of a hierarchical political order would complete a transition of a once persecuted sect into a patrimonial empire.

While such a scenario is theoretically plausible, its unfolding is predicated upon presence of many specific (perhaps unique) historical conditions and a series of path-dependent decisions and strategic interactions of various actors at the multiple turning points that would lead eventually to such an outcome (Kennedy 2007). In the rest of this paper, I will explore multi-level conditions and strategic interactions that resulted - rather unexpectedly - in the emergence of the Islamic theocracy and its subsequent transformation into the Umayyad empire.

MUHAMMAD IN MECCA: AN OTHER-WORLDLY SOLUTION TO AN IDENTITY CRISIS

What was the social context in Mecca when Muhammad received divine revelations and began his preaching? Mecca was dominated by the tribe of the Quraysh which settled around this local pagan sanctuary (haram) in the fifth or sixth century. The Meccans were involved in the Arabian caravan trade, but their primary source of wealth and status was service to the pilgrims who visited the sanctuary of Kaaba, a building which housed a black stone of meteorite origin. The Quraysh was divided into several lineages. A lineage was not only a primary identity-provider

and a source of support in a time of need, but also the structure that guaranteed protection to its members. The Arabs did not have a common law enforced by central authority; the order was maintained by the threat of blood revenge. A person with no clan identity would be a non-entity, likely to be attacked, robbed, or murdered. If an individual belonged to a powerful lineage, on the contrary, his status was respected, and safety protected. Muhammad descended from a prominent Meccan clan, named after his great-grandfather Hashim, but its influence was steadily declining, whereas influence of such Quraysh clans as al-Makhzum and Abd Shams was increasing (Kennedy 2016a: 25; Nagel 2020: 28).

The rigid tribal system benefitted those Qurayshites who belonged to the tribal oligarchy, but frustrated ambitions of those individuals, including relatively successful persons, who happened to believe that their station in life should be above the one that was ascribed to them by the lineage status system. The situation would turn for worse if a person, like Muhammad, experienced misfortunes within his own clan. Muhammad's father died before his was born, and his mother passed away when he was six. Muhammad was raised by his uncle Abu Talib, who felt much affection to his nephew, but being an orphan was not a promising start. Muhammad was not able to marry Abu Talib's daughter he desired; her father has found a better match in the clan of Makhzum. Thereafter, Muhammad accepted a marriage offer from Khadijah, a wealthy businesswoman older than him.[3] A marriage has brought about material stability, but not a relief from his insecurity, tension, and a sense of deprivation (Rodinson 1968: 53-54).

[3] The marriage seemed to be successful; the couple bore several daughters, but no male, which has not improved Muhammad's status in the eyes of the others. It is difficult to know if Muhammad suffered from the deprivations of strict monogamy allegedly enforced by Khadijah at the time when other Qurayshites had several wives, as Rodinson (1968: 53-56) has suggested, but that might had been the case as well.

A successful career of a merchant lied ahead, but Muhammad sought a retreat from his mundane activities, an opportunity for solitude, reflection, and a prayer to God.[4] When he was about forty, Muhammad's spiritual retreats to a cave in mountain Hira near Mecca became regular. There, he began to have dreams and radiant visions. At one of these retreats, as the Islamic tradition holds, Muhammad was visited by archangel Gabriel (or, in another version, God himself), who informed him that he was God's prophet. Initially, Muhammed, overwhelmed by the encounter, thought that he has turned into a jinn-possessed soothsayer (a *kahin*), but Khadijah's old grand-uncle Waraqa ibn Nawfal, who was possibly a Christian familiar with the scriptures, reassured Muhammad that he was indeed a receiver of God' message. Becoming an apostle of God, Muhammad began making regular revelations that later became codified in Quran (Brown 2011: 12-14; Lings 1983: 44-45; Nagel 2020: 29-30; Peters 1994: 148-152; Rodinson 1968: 72-73; Watt 1953: 39-58).

How can we make sense of Muhammad's extraordinary transformation? The various accounts of Muhammad's early life depict an experience of what Peter Berger (1967) called a "marginal situation." The early loss of both parents and drifting to a social margin resulted in the sense of precariousness, existential insecurity, or, in other words, a "nomic disruption," which refers to a dissolution of a customary meaningful order.[5] Death, for Berger, is a marginal situation and a nomic disruption par excellence: "Witnessing a death of others (notably, of course, of significant others) and anticipating his own death, the individual is strongly propelled

[4] Worship of a supreme impersonal deity was not unknown in Arabia, particularly among the hanifs (monotheistic pagans); for centuries the Arabs experienced spiritual influences of Christian and Judaic monotheism.
[5] Berger (22) explicates such a situation in the following passage: "The circumstances of such nomic disruption may, of course, vary. They might involve large collective forces, such as the loss of status of the entire social group to which the individual belongs. They might be more narrowly biographical, such as the loss of significant others by death, divorce, or physical separation."

to question the ad hoc cognitive and normative operating procedures of his "normal" life in society." He further continues: "Such marginal situations commonly occur in dreams and fantasy. They may appear on the horizon of consciousness as haunting suspicions that the world may have another aspect that its "normal" one, that is, that the previously accepted definitions of reality may be fragile or even fraudulent" (1967: 23). Thus, if we accept Berger's interpretative framework, Muhammad has become involved step-by-step in a drastic redefinition of reality, the semi-conscious or even unconscious process of the other-world-building activity, creating an alternative, imaginary lifeworld. His shocking, awe-generating encounter with the deity became only a culminative point of this self-transformation. In was not merely a coincidence, that old Waraqa, once he learned about Muhammad's encounter, has told that the *nomos* (Arabic: *an-namus*) had finally come to him (Nagel 2020: 30-31).

At that time, beliefs of most Meccans may be described as polytheistic. Meccans worshiped a pantheon of local deities, whose inscriptions surrounded the sacred Kaaba. However, monotheistic beliefs, as an example of Waraqa shows, were not unknown. Why has Muhammad abrogated and eventually denounced the existing religious institutions and practices? The answer, in my opinion, should be sought in monopolization of religious practices by the Quraysh tribal oligarchs, who jealously preserved their cultic prerogatives. In the context of Mecca, economic hegemony and religious domination were symbiotic. By preaching monotheism, Muhammad attempted to carve out his own spiritual authority within a local community. Initially, these efforts did not stir up much of the commotion. Muhammed was seen as a person who tried to restore the vanishing influence of his lineage. As Nagel (2020: 56) has noted, "His fellow Meccans perceived him, above all, as a member of the Banu Hashim who had embarked on the unwelcome project of renewing and strengthening the fading glory of his clan."

Sociology of the early converts to Muhammad's preaching remains obscure (Al-Azmeh 2014: 375). It is generally established that the group of the first believers represented a rather heterogeneous assemblage (Donner 2010: 41). Many of the believers cannot be regarded as marginal or weak (Nagel 2020: 68). Watt (1953: 95) has identified three classes of early Muslims: (a) younger persons of the best families, (b) persons, mostly young, from other families, and (c) persons without close ties to any clan as well as confederates, slaves, and freedman. There was hardly any common denominator among the early Muslims other than recruits' young age; the new believers originated in all strata of the society.

Fortunately, Watt's analysis has advanced beyond this observation. He has divided the Quraysh clans into three categories based on their ancestral proximity: (A) Hashim, al-Muttalib, Zuhrah, Taym, al-Harith ibn Fihr, and Adi; (B) Abd Shams, Nawfal, Asad, and Amir; (C) Makhzum, Sahn, Jumah, and Abd ad-Dar. All clans in Group A, except for Adi, were the weaker clans in the city, whereas clans in Group B and Group C were stronger clans (Watt 1953: 88-94). Most Muhammad's adherents came either from Group A, or from the younger and less influential members of Group B and Group C (Armstong 1992: 104-105).[6] Thus, Muhammad's followers were either members the clans with a declining status or secondary lines of the dominant clans. This is an important piece of evidence, which supports the structural component of my theoretical explanation derived from Chacon et al (2015).

MUHAMMAD IN MEDINA: FROM A PERSECUTED SECT TO A MILITARY-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

[6] Watt (1953: 96) has concluded: "It was not so much a struggle between 'haves' and 'have nots' as between 'haves' and 'nearly hads'

Muhammad's prophetic preaching has had a limited success in his native town. Only moving to Yathrib (later known as Medina) has allowed Muhammad to create a larger community of the Believers and turn Islam into a world-historical movement. Existing sociological accounts of Muhammad's activities in Medina are premised on two assumptions regarding his use of violent means for achieving his goals. One assumption suggests that Muhammad was driven by the goal of creating the unified Arab community while military violence was the means of achieving this ambitious goal (Crone 1987, Zeitlin 2007). Another argument holds that Islam from the very beginning was a warrior religion (Weber 1965: 51-52, Mann 1986: 345). Contemporary literature does not validate either proposition (see Al-Azmeh 2014, Donner 2010, Nagel 2020). True, the new faith did not preach non-violence or universal love. Like the preexisting tribal norms, Islam did not extend protection to the persons outside the community of the Believers. In the series of campaigns against their enemies the Muslims won several important battles. However, it is important to remember that the emigrants from Mecca have had limited prospects for economic activities in Medina. They possessed neither skills for agricultural cultivation nor ample opportunities for commerce which was monopolized by the local tribes. Due to the desperate conditions that threatened their very existence the newcomers had to resort to the traditional business of redistributing wealth by acquisition raids, or *ghazu*. The actions of the Believers, such as raiding Meccan caravans were dictated by the imperatives of survival in the environment where other options did not exist (Armstrong 2014: 179; Rodinson 1968: 161-162).

There was not a straight and pre-determined path to the all-out jihad (Armstrong 2014, Kennedy 2007). A series of successful raids worked as a faith-validating device. It showed that Muhammad and the Believers were on the right path, which, in turn, resulted in more raids and greater gain. However, Muhammad understood that without establishing control over the

Meccan sanctuary his religious power would be limited. He also realized that taking Meccan sanctuary by force would alienate the Bedouin tribes and cause more harm than good (Kennedy 1986: 30). So, to the great chagrin of his followers, Muhammed has chosen the path of negotiation and compromise, which resulted in a ten-year truce with the Quraysh, which allowed the emigrants peaceful pilgrimage to the holy place. It also released the desert Bedouins from the former obligations and allowed them to form the alliance with either Mecca or Medina (Armstrong 1992: 219).

Why did the Quraysh Meccan oligarchy accept his offer of compromise? To a large extent, they were forced to do so. The continuing caravan raids conducted by Muhammad's supporters undermined the Quraysh economic power. Feeling that local gods did not provide effective protection, more Meccan Arabs chose to migrate to Medina. Eventually the Quraysh leaders have reckoned that admission of monotheism was a relatively small price for reestablishing peace and ensuring free passage for the caravans. Indeed, the total collapse of Quraysh economic power was not in anyone's interests. If Quraysh merchants impoverish, there would be no more gain for the Believers as well.

Once predatory acquisition and imposition of protection have become the primary source of the Muslims' economic gain, it had become difficult to return to the status quo ante (Nagel 2020: 133). The news about Muslims' victories spread around the Arabia. The extension of Muhammad's power over Mecca's Qurayshites and other tribes led to a recognition of the Muslim theocracy by the Bedouins. Surely, not all tribes have embraced Islam and agreed to pay the required tax. But those tribes that had embraced a new faith, have become incorporated into the umma, and were no longer allowed to engage in raiding within the Muslim brotherhood.

Joining the Muslims in their expeditions against the outside communities was the promising way to keep doing their business (Nagel 2020).

Let's recast this part of the story in slightly more theoretical terms. Once a certain action proves itself rewarding, there are incentives to engage in such action over again (Homans 1961: 53). Once caravan raiding turned out successful, there were all reasons to engage in raiding over again. After that, there was only one more step to offering merchants (and agriculturalists) to pay for their protection. In a full accord with Tilly's (1985) theory on state formation, the Believers operated as a protection racket. There is little evidence that either Meccan merchants or desert Bedouins were attracted by the Prophet's religious message, or his message alone. A *real politik* consideration of having a powerful protector seemed to be their primary motivation in adopting monotheism (Armstrong 2000: 26). Being thus incorporated into the umma, the Qurayshites were able to resume their economic activities and even expand them. The Bedouins, on the other hand, had to forfeit their habit of raiding their neighbors but were invited to join the Muslims in their outward directed expeditions. In this way the brotherhood of the Believers began its transformation from a sectarian community into a militant religious order, which was fully institutionalized only after Muhammad's death.

MEDINA AND BEYOND: PROJECTING POWER OUTSIDE ARABIA

The almost thirty period of Islamic history after the death of Muhammad is known as the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (the *Rashidun*). Four Muhannad's successors continued his mission at that time: Abu Bakr (632-634), Umar (634-644), Uthman (644-656), and Ali (656-661). After the crisis of tribal apostacy and political centralization under Abu Bakr (i.e., Ridda, c. 632-633), the followers of the Prophet burst out of the Arabia into the adjacent regions, defeated the

Sassanids, trounced the Byzantine empire, and soon found themselves masters of Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt (Armstrong 2000, 2014).

In the meantime, the Muslim polity experienced a major internal metamorphosis. During the early days in Medina Muhammad drew his support from the emigrants from Mecca and his Medina's supporters. After subordination of Mecca and conversion of Quraysh aristocracy in Islam the latter became involved into the Muslims' expansionist program, which accelerated during the ridda wars under Abu Bakr. Because war offered the Quraysh new sources of material gain and career opportunities in the conquered lands, the Quraysh pursued the war with great enthusiasm (Madelung 1997: 49). In this way, the umma began to evolve from a military-democratic theocracy towards a patrimonial-aristocratic order. This trend has intensified under the third caliph, Uthman, who originated from the Umayyah clan of Abd Shams tribe. Unlike his predecessors, Uthman and associates have accumulated considerable wealth. The growing gap between the emerging ruling elite and the rank-and-file soldiers precipitated a major political crisis of the Caliphate.

THE UMAYYADS CALIPHATE AS A DYNASTIC EMPIRE

The civil war between the followers of Ali, who was proclaimed a fourth caliph after assassination of Uthman, and the supporters of Mu'awiya of the Umayyad clan, who served the Governor of Syria, ended with the victory of the Umayyads. Ali was killed by one of his former allies, who became known as the Kharijites (Splinters). Mu'awiya moved the capital from Medina to Damascus, which became the power base of the new regime. Even though the Muslim tradition is generally hostile to the Umayyads (Hawting 2001; Hoyland 2015), most members of the dynasty have turned out to be effective statesmen. Under the Umayyads, the Caliphate has reached to its largest expanse, from Spain in the West, Transcaucasia in the North, Transoxiana

in the East, and Sind (contemporary Pakistan) in the South. The Arab domain included large multilingual population practicing a variety of beliefs including Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism (Kennedy 2016b).

The Caliph remained an embodiment of supreme political and religious power. The state was divided into four provinces, each ruled by the governor (*amir*), except for the central province (Syria and Mesopotamia) ruled by the Caliph himself. The governors were responsible for collection of taxes, distribution of soldiers' pay, and protection of the borders. Below each governor there were the tribal chiefs, the *ashraf*, who linked the central government and the local tribesmen (Hawting 2001: 35-36).[7] The Arab troops were stationed in the garrison towns (*amsar*) and did not normally mix with local population. State officials and soldiers were included into the military register (*diwan*) and were entitled to stipends paid by the government. Most of the revenues came from the taxes (*jizya*) imposed on non-Muslim population. Under Caliph al-Malik, the government standardized coinage and made Arabic the official language of state administration (Donner 2010: 218-219; Kennedy 2016a: 102-103, 375; Kennedy 2016b: 47).

One more innovation, introduced by the early Umayyads, has changed the order of succession of the ruler. Traditionally, the Caliph was to be elected by the advisory council (*shura*) as a symbolic embodiment of the whole Muslim community. Piety, religious uprightness, and closeness to the Prophet were serious considerations in such matters (Donner 2010). In this respect, the Muslim community still functioned as a religious movement rather than a patrimonial state. In violation of the custom, Mu'awiya appointed his son Yazid a heir apparent. Although this nomination was contested by Mecca's traditionalists and resulted in the second

[7] Despite the trend towards centralization, the political structure was undermined by strong tribal factionalism (Crone 1987: 31-33, 40-41).

civil war, later this order was reintroduced by another Umayyad Caliph, Marwan. Hereditary succession remained a highly controversial issue in the Muslim world for centuries. Muslim scholars viewed such a transition as an inadmissible transformation of caliphate into a hereditary kingship, which subverted the original concept of authority in Islam (Hawting 2001). Whether or not we accept such thesis, the change was indicative of the general direction of the evolution of the Islamic community into a dynastic Quraysh-dominated state.

By the end of the seventh century the decentralized tribal system of the Arab civilization became transformed into a centralized patrimonial empire, where the Umayyad dynasty centered in Damascus ruled over the geographically enormous but a self-contained multicultural universe. In this way, it has become morphologically similar to other imperial states, yet it retained its ideological distinctiveness as the abode of Islam. The synthesis of the empire and monotheism has been thus accomplished.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST: AN IMPERIOGENESIS OF THE TURCO-MONGOLS OF THE INNER ASIA

Anatoly Khazanov (1993: 471) posed an interesting question: “Why did the nomads of the Eurasian steppes not need a new religion to achieve unity for conquests?” In contrast to the Arabian desert, the steppes and mountains of the Inner Asia offered a greater range and amount of the resources necessary for survival. The Turco-Mongolic tribesmen preferred nomadic lifeways and avoided sedentarization. These circumstances have created a more dynamic political universe. Unlike the Arabs, the Turco-Mongolian nomads have had experience of forming large chiefdoms and empires. Due to a porous frontier and penetrability of northern Chinese defenses, the nomads were able to raid and plunder China, which reinforced a trend towards political centralization and consolidation within nomadic communities. Large-scale

warfare was more endemic in East Eurasia than in Arabia. Turco-Mongolic noble tribesmen were warriors, never merchants. Even becoming an outcast in his own tribe, a noble warlord would be able to survive in the steppe. In order to advance in such environment, an aspiring leader would have to form his warband, build political alliances, and defeat one's opponents by use of diplomacy and military force. Such an opportunity was not readily available for Muhammad who was a Meccan merchant. The surrounding desert was not a hospitable environment. Therefore, he had to devise alternative means of advancement.

Unlike the Middle East, the birthplace of such century-old monotheistic religions as Judaism and Christianity, the Inner Asia lacked a tradition of eschatological monotheism. The Turco-Mongolic tribesmen practiced religious syncretism, which involved elements of animism, shamanism, and worship of Tengri, the god of blue sky. Tengrism, however, was not a salvationist faith. Unlike great monotheistic religions it was silent about the Day of Judgement, a path to salvation, or the afterlife. Lacking a kratophanic theology, it did not envelop and guide human action in a holistic and systematic way but merely legitimized the traditional order of things. This ancient tradition fit political rulers well. In those cases when a religious authority began to interfere with khagan's secular power, such a figure was promptly and ruthlessly eliminated.

CONCLUSION

The key theoretical implication of this research is that a concept of "imperial statecraft," like an earlier notion of "state-building" should be taken with a grain of salt. Such notions imply that political actors follow deliberate long-term strategies of "building" states. Furthermore, they imply that such actors are *political* actors par excellence. Neither assumption is tenable. Such actors may become political against their intentions. The ultimate political crystallizations may

be very distant from original motivations of the alleged "empire-builders." As the present study indicates, Muhammad did not build an empire. His realm was mostly out of this world. The political empire of the Arabs was a by-product of unique circumstances and multiple historical contingencies that occurred after his death. Initially, Muhammad did not seem to have a political ambition. He was a prophet, who wished to bring the people the message of God. Rejection of monotheism by the Quraysh in Mecca forced him to build a dissident community above the existing tribal structures. Once it became impossible in Mecca, he was forced to migrate to Medina. Because resources were scarce, the Believers turned to raiding the Quraysh caravans as the only available means of survival. These raids led to a disruption of the Meccan economy and forced the Quraysh oligarchy to seek an accommodation with the Believers. By adopting Islam, the Quraysh have preserved their economic standing and political influence. In fact, members of the Quraysh oligarchy might have won more that they have lost. The norms of Islam forbade conflicts within religious community and channeled violence outside the *umma*. From that point on, Islam began to adopt a distinctly militaristic coloring. The prospects of enrichment motivated military expeditions to the adjacent areas controlled by the enfeebled Byzantium and Persia. The tension between the populist-theocratic and military-oligarchic elements in the Muslim community was resolved in favor of the latter. The Rashidun caliphs initiated a series of conquests that culminated in creation of the vast dynastic empire under the Umayyads. Unlike those empires that have embraced monotheistic faith and used it as an integrative force (e.g., Rome), the Arab caliphate was born as a monotheistic religious community and was transformed into a dynastic empire by a peculiar (but not completely accidental) sequence of events.

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