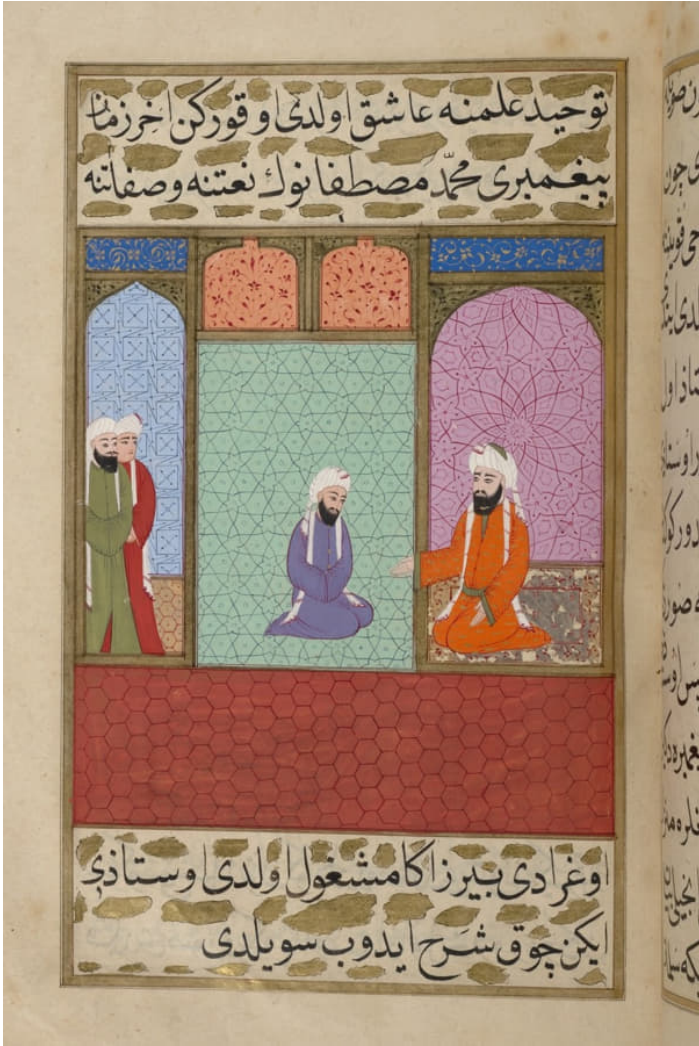


ANTHROPOLOGY IN ISLAM, ANTHROPOLOGY OF ISLAM

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"Classical" Islamology (that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) was never really interested in the vision of man in Islam, being preoccupied with philology and the creation of a library of texts. The idea of an "anthropology of Islam" is only a few decades old at most, and as such, it is part of the paradigm of the "science of man" developed over the last two centuries, which defines the practices and methods of ethnology and conditions its debates as well as its issues. This anthropology of Islam is poorly distinguished from sociology, which signed the death warrant of ethnology before integrating it into its orbit. To be precise, we should therefore speak of a sociology of Muslim societies, to be carefully distinguished from an anthropology of Islamized societies, which yet remains to be elaborated.

The anthropology of Islam is not ours. It is not like ours, carried by two thousand years of philosophical history, nor is it marked by the encounter in the second century of Christian wisdom and Greek wisdom, which cast Semitic concepts into the linguistic universe of Hellenism; and unlike ours, it has not elaborated a singular humanism (which is now beaten to a pulp) but which has nonetheless had several centuries of existence and debate.

If we consider the structure of biblical thought, its constitutive tendencies, the reasons why Saint Thomas Aquinas, after his master Albert the Great, chose Aristotle rather than Plato as his guide in philosophy become clear: the Platonic doctrine of matter, of the sensible, of evil, of soul and body, was incompatible with biblical realism and with love in the whole Hebrew tradition for the sensible creation. The first act of the Old Testament is a justly famous text, "the Creation story." What is called Genesis is the Semitic answer to the question that the pre-Socratics, also known as the physical philosophers, asked themselves: that of the origin of the world. But contrary to the depreciation of the Greek world and then of Manichaeism, the phrase "and God saw that it was good" establishes a solid foundation for a knowledge of the sensible world and even of matter, which is crucial for the future development of physics. It is also a mistake to believe that this text evokes the origin of man; rather, it provides the principles of intelligibility of human nature, and therefore the keys to understanding and knowing man, starting with the true nature of sexual differentiation. "Male and female (ish and isha) he created them." Woman in the Bible can only be interpreted as that which is most intimate to man, his opposite, his interlocutor, his helper in the difficult and exalting work proposed to accomplish creation.

Genesis implies a metaphysics and an idea of time. The world is not the product of a conflict of elements driven by chance—a concession to the mathematics of games—and the dark necessity of old Babylo-Hellenic myths. The world is the place of emergence, development and fulfillment of human

freedom, in creation, in history, and in the human world, family, city, different organic units as they appear in different climes and under different historical skies. Christianity contains a principle of order, of logic, of differentiation and therefore of freedom, which, properly understood, is destructive to all oppression.

Nothing of the sort in Islam.

The Koran has nothing like the "and God saw that it was good" that is found in Genesis. For Islam, death is the result of a problem of technical difficulties that the Creator could not solve. There is no real freedom in Islamic creation. This leads to a very precise relationship with the word: what is the point of convincing if everything is determined? What is the point of acting if the divine arbitrariness governs the whole world and human destiny?

The very foundations of religion are hostile to our entire tradition of rhetoric; and the "faith/reason" debate ended in the 12th century with Al Ghazali, the "gravedigger of reason." In case of conflict between reason and the precepts of Muhammad, it is the precepts of Muhammad that a Muslim must bow to. No deliberation, no use of reason in a difficult situation which requires a free and reasonable decision.

Averroes himself, an infinitely enlightened man, granted the right of exegesis to only a few chosen ones. From the point of view of the revealed Law, men are divided into three classes: those who are incapable of knowing any interpretation, those who can know the dialectical interpretation and those who can know the certain interpretation, that is, the philosophers. A few chosen ones.

It is found in Surah the Table (Al-Ma'idah') verse 101: "Do not ask questions about things that, if explained to you, might bring you misfortune."

Now, the whole life of the Muslim is governed by the Koran or by the Hadith, even if he often does not know them more than he distinguishes them. The Muslim law called Sharia has been established by jurists on the basis of these two essential sources.

If we want to pose correctly the problem of an anthropology of Islam (or in Islam), it is therefore necessary to distinguish two fields: that of Koranic anthropology (as we say today, biblical

anthropology) and that of the political anthropology of Islam. The latter can be inferred from the Mohammedan revelation, which requires the analysis of the main models of domination that can be seen being put in place in and through Muslim history.

At the heart of this political anthropology is the idea of jihad.

The Koranic anthropology alone involves a set of difficulties that are still insufficiently laid bare in research. Muslim prophecy enters history very quickly, and this history is a history of military conquest and warlike domination. Could an ideology of conquest have been forged with such urgency? This is a real question of military history, and this question also refers to a question of anthropology.

The fragmentary texts of the "revelation" to Muhammad are supposed to have been inscribed, as this revelation was being spoken, by attentive listeners upon various materials, constituted into a more complete text at the initiative of Muhammad and then at that of his supposed great companions. The definitive fixing of the Koran thus appears to have had as its source a collective and joint action emanating from the first community of believers.

Now, the Koran is characterized by the multitude of external contributions, contributions recognized as being essentially of "biblical" origin. The "biblicism" of the Koran (which goes back in time to the Creation) seems to have been constituted in a relationship to the books of Judaism but in a permanent historical hiatus with this contiguous past. The first difficulty with the anthropology of the Koran comes therefore from these biblical sources, which for half a century have been made autonomous from the source to which they refer. That there may have been "borrowing" is even denied in the name of a research that wants to be free of these invading myths. And yet there is the Bible, even though the Koran asserts its status as a revealed text. The a posteriori recognition of the Koran that is asked of the Jewish world is quite simply impossible. One cannot speak of coherence other than the coherence of the Koranic narrative in a set of suras that are both composite and terribly repetitive. From the Koran-revelation of the prophetic period to the Koran-vulgate (of the Uthmanian period) of the Muslim ages, one must admit a rupture of representation. The writing of the Koran seems to have been an Arab affair, whereas the exegesis and the construction of caliphal Islam were mainly a matter for converts. Relying on a tradition that mythically claimed to be authenticated by going back to the prophet and his companions, efforts were made to present a precise order of revelation of the suras, which corrected the order of the vulgate. It was essential that no question should remain unanswered. The great sacred tradition of classical Islam proceeds from this reality.

To this hiatus between the biblical sources and their "integration" into the written Koran, is added another hiatus, a chronological one, or if one prefers historical, between the tribal age of Mohammed and the societies that followed. This hiatus is also social, ethnic and religious. The notion of "Muslim" only managed to separate itself from its ethnic and racial component from the middle of the 8th century onwards with the accession of the Abbasid family to power.

The Koran reflects an extremely pragmatic traditional tribal society: the primary goal of patriarchal tribal families is to survive in a hostile environment. The desert environment means that their way of life is confined to practical problems. No binding structure: no police or courts. Marked by a system of survival representation, the tribes are governed by relationships of solidarity and alliance.

In the first period, being Muslim meant "entering into allegiance to Allah;" and this concerned the whole tribe (through negotiation or even blackmail); it meant being submissive, and from the beginning; becoming Muslim meant entering into an alliance that was first of all social, which was obviously not given to everyone: one had to be accepted as a member attached to a tribe originating from the Arabian Peninsula. As soon as one was no longer interested, one left the alliance. The members of this society did not care about heaven or hell. The goal was not to convert the world to Islam but to get booty. The exit from Arabia was about raids and massacres. For a century and a half, the conquered were not asked to convert; when the tribes left Arabia, they left others alive because it pays. The first "Muslims" just wanted the people to keep quiet and pay them tribute. What they thought or believed in was not their concern. During the period of the first two caliphates, that of Medina (in the founding age of original Islam) which is integrated into the traditional representation of Muslim historiography and that of Damascus which succeeded it in the middle of the seventh century, one could only become a Muslim by joining an Arab tribe: conversion was first of all social before being religious. The convert received the status of mawla, a freed slave.

The ideal Muslim community made up of pious companions therefore never existed. In the ninth century, when Islam integrated and dominated outside populations, it entered a completely different social model and it was then that the fantasy of an ideal past was created.

The appropriation of the period of origins by the founding narrative and the myth was all the easier since the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Muslim societies of the period of the triumphant caliphates had completely broken with the society of the tribal Arabs, contemporaries of the prophet, to whom they nevertheless claimed to belong. What had been defined by a first society (disappeared) was

rewritten by another society, not that of the Arabs, but that of the converts, the Abbasids. They broke with a certain tribal model and established an imperial logic, with a hierarchy, constraints, an ideology and a dogmatism that no longer gave precedence to the tribes, even if it still entered into the logic of domination.

The converts largely contributed to the transformation of the original model. Their previous religious practice influenced the way they practiced Islam. Many of them were former Christians and thus found a space in which the Bible and Jesus were still spoken of, and they imported something of the apostasy religion into it. And probably also in the Koran.

The corpus designated as "prophetic words" was invented in this new context, two or three centuries after the emergence of tribal Islam, in a society that no longer had anything to do with that of the seventh century.

Did this mean that the "tribal" difference was erased? No, it simply meant that all populations were now equally subject to the Muslim caliph. It was a change from one political model to another. It only remained to substitute a purely Muslim representation of this past. This was done as soon as the society to be built had found the ways of a common configuration which could integrate the various components. It is only then that Islam as we see it today was constructed.

Two political projects governed these two historical moments: that of the Islam of the tribes and that of the Islam of the caliphs. In the former, the aim was to create a civil society with Islam as its frame of reference, a frame adapted to the socio-political functioning of the clan society close to the original Islam of the time of the Prophet. Two centuries later, the model of imperialist states was set up with the aim of dominating other states, kingdoms or regions militarily, politically, economically, culturally and therefore religiously in order to extend their hegemony. Hence the importance of controlling wealth to finance the usual means of conquest: the army.

This is why we can say that there is no notion of a holy war for the Arab caliphates, Umayyads or Abbasids, but only a classical war between empires.

Throughout the history of Muslim domination, we can see the coexistence of these two political models, sometimes competing. Thus, in the eleventh century, in West Africa, facing the Berber Ibadites,

advocates of a non-state Islam, stood the Arab-Berber Malekites for whom it was a question of constituting an empire where Islam was the mark of submission of pagans (the blacks) and their insertion into the civilized world. Draining the gold from Ghana and Mali was a way of providing a source of financing for military campaigns.

At the very heart of the anthropology of Islam, that of the Koran as well as the political anthropology such as we can theorize it, there is the native violence of man, and in particular political violence: there is Jihad.

Originally, jihad was a very ordinary word which meant "to make an effort to achieve a result." The first reference in the Koran is to parents waging jihad against their children so that they would not join Muhammad. When the Prophet arrived in Medina, he needed volunteers to carry out an action, so jihad became, "make an effort to join me" or "volunteer." But this could only be based on the will of the individual. Some joined and then found it too dangerous and gave up. Jihad then became a kind of oath to do a certain action.

Thus, jihad is not a deviation from an essentially spiritual struggle. It is extolled, valued and justified in the Koranic text, and the entire political history of Islam is the history of institutionalized, justified and even glorified violence.

Sufism is held to be the mystical stream of Islam and it is said that true jihad is primarily about spiritual warfare. This is not the case. The figurehead of Sufism is Salman the Persian, whom tradition considers to be one of Mohammed's instructors, in a mixture of oriental wonder and apocalyptic type legends. He was an Iranian Mazdean who first converted to Christianity and then to Mohammed. He sought the pure religion that he took for that of Abraham. Converted to the Christian faith, he was locked up by his father, escaped, went to Syria and received religious instruction from several Christian bishops and monks. He learned from one of his masters of the coming of a prophet destined to close the cycle of prophetic revelations and to revive the true original religion of Abraham. Above all, with him came the idea of the existence of a spiritual "family," united by faith and obedience to God and, more generally, of the precedence of filiation by faith over that of the flesh. This notion has been widely taken up by many mystical currents and remains very present in Shiism, where pure-hearted believers are considered to belong to the same family, that of gnosis and wisdom. Salman has rather bolstered various imaginations, like that of Westerners magnetized by a certain romantic idea of Islam, and he has been instrumentalized for various purposes. He serves as both a historical and symbolic linchpin hold together mystical and initiatory Islam to Arab Islam. This thus guarantees the unity of the doctrine and

avoids its dismantling—at the price of much violence. In reality, Salman is perfectly inconsistent. The authority that he acquired is posterior to his existence, perhaps real, of companion of the prophet but which no source can attest. This notoriety is due to great intellectuals, both Eastern and Western.

Ibn Arabi, one of the great masters of speculative gnosis, presents Salman as the archetype of the religion and as the heir to the secret meaning of the revelations that preceded Islam. Salman thus plays the eminent role of initiator with the Prophet Muhammad concerning these previous revelations; those which founded in particular this supposedly pure Abrahamic religion. The relay was taken up in France by Henry Corbin who speaks of "angelic magisterium" when he evokes this hermeneutic function. In 2022, France Culture relayed these same ideas, which can be heard in replay. The subtitle reads: "The figure of the patriarch Abraham is the founder of monotheism. The prophetic gesture of the coryphaeus of the believers is presented in the Koranic writing as paradigmatic of the immutable religion, that of prime nature."

This Islam is a chimera of epigones of Louis Massignon.

The very concept of anthropology has no meaning in Islam; there is no concern for what Man is or for his accomplishment. It is an institutional violence, justified by the Koran, which serves to channel the native violence of men and their tribal groups. It is hard but it makes a kind of peace for Muslims (a very precarious war and sometimes it is even questioned) and an inexpiable war for everyone else.

How can a society receive by violence, intrigue, murder and war a public power that must enforce law, peace, justice, order and happiness? It can only do so by oppression, seduction, propaganda or lies.

This is the whole history of the violent domination of Islam, whatever the political model under which it implements this violent domination, wrapped in the religious phraseology that justifies it.

Marion Duvauchel is a [historian of religions](#) and holds a PhD in philosophy. She [has published widely](#), and has taught in various places, including France, Morocco, Qatar, and Cambodia. She is the founder of the Pteah Barang, in Cambodia.

Featured: *Salman the Persian and his Teacher*. Leaf from a Turkish manuscript, Istanbul, ca. 1594-1595.

