



AET1  
Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Tripos, Part IB

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Tuesday 4 June 2019      9.00am to 12.00noon

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**Paper MES17**

**The Formation of Islam**

Answer **three** questions, **two** from section A and **the one (comprising three commentaries)** in section B. All questions carry **equal** marks.

Write your number **not** your name on the cover sheet of **each** answer booklet.

**STATIONERY REQUIREMENTS**

*20 page answer booklet*

*Rough Work Pad*

**SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS TO BE SUPPLIED FOR THIS EXAMINATION**

*None*

**You may not start to read the questions printed on the subsequent pages of this question paper until instructed to do so.**

## SECTION A: Essay Questions

Answer **two** of the following eight questions.

1. How should we conceive of relations between the Hijaz and other parts of the Middle East and East Africa in the century prior to Muhammad's prophetic career?
2. How did the character of violent unrest within the Muslim Empire change between c.650 and c.750 CE?
3. Compare and contrast Marwanid and early Abbasid strategies of legitimation.
4. What circumstances made the Translation Movement possible?
5. How, when, and why did non-Muslim majorities become minorities in lands ruled by Muslims?
6. How and why was urban life transformed in the Middle East between c.600 and c.1000 CE?
7. Account for the variety in the character of the various Islamic polities that formed in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE. (Answer with reference to **at least three** examples.)
8. How can we best explain the content and formation of the texts known as the "Covenant of 'Umar'?"

## SECTION B: Set text commentary question

All candidates **must** answer this question.

1. Comment on **three** of the following ten primary source extracts (a-j):

- a. This is the tribe which took its origin and had its name from Ishmael, the son of Abraham; and the Ancients called them Ishmaelites after their progenitor. As their mother Hagar was a slave, they afterwards, to conceal the opprobrium of their origin, assumed the name of Saracens as if they were descended from Sara, the wife of Abraham. Such being their origin, they practise circumcision like the Jews, refrain from the use of pork, and observe many other Jewish rites and customs. If, indeed, they deviate in any respect from the observances of that nation, it must be ascribed to the lapse of time, and to their intercourse with the neighbouring nations. Moses, who lived many centuries after Abraham, only legislated for those whom he led out of Egypt. The inhabitants of the neighbouring countries, being strongly addicted to superstition, probably soon corrupted the laws imposed on them by their forefather Ishmael.

Sozomen (d.c.448/9). "Ecclesiastical History." In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume 2*, edited by P. Schaff. "Christian Classics Ethereal Library." VI.xxxviii [=p.830].

- b. I will also give a description concerning the disease which struck and has remained strong and spread over the whole earth in this its 52<sup>nd</sup> year, a thing never before reported. For, two years after the city of Antiochus was captured by the Persians, a pestilent affliction took up residence, in some respects comparable to that related by Thucydides but in others very different. It was said, and still is now, to have begun from Ethiopia. In turn, it overran the whole universe, leaving none among men without some experience of the disease. And whereas some cities were stricken to such an extent that they were completely emptied of inhabitants, there were parts where the misfortune touched more lightly...

Evagrius Scholasticus (fl. c.593). *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*. Trans. and ann. M. Whitby. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000, 229–30 (Bk 4.29).

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- c. Now Mukhtar, angry with the 'Aqulaye [Kufans] on the grounds that they were useless to him in war, had given orders that all their slaves should be liberated and go into battle in their masters' stead. When this order had been issued, several thousand of them, slaves of captive origin, collected around him, and he appointed them a commander whose name was Abraham [Ibrahim]. This man he sent against bar Zayat [Ibn Ziyad] with 13,000 men, all footsoldiers, without arms or equipment, horses or tents: all they had in their hands was either a sword or a spear or a stick ... the two armies met on the river named the Hazar [Khabur], there there was a fierce battle in which all the warriors of the westerners were slain.

John bar Penkaye [John of Fenek], fl. c.690 CE, *Ris Melle* ('Summary of World History'), book 15, in S. P. Brock, 'North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century.' *JSAI* 9 (1987), 65–6.

- d. I left them and was met, lastly, by some Muslims. They said, "Don't listen to any of those you just met! They're just a bunch of infidels who associate partners with God. The only true religion is Islam, which God sent to all people through his prophet Muhammad, who summons you to worship God alone and to associate nothing with him. [...] For those who do good, the reward is paradise. From underneath it, there will flow rivers of water, milk, honey, and wine—a delight for those who drink. In it, for pleasure, there will be women with black eyes, ones that neither jinn nor men have touched, as well as whatever other good things a person desires, in castles of emerald, ruby, gold, and silver, and so on, forever and ever. [...]"

Theodore Abu Qurrah (d. c. 825), 'Theologus Autodidactus', tr. J. C. Lamoreaux. *Theodore Abu Qurrah*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005, 10.

- e. The Kinanite went forth until he came to the cathedral and defiled it. Then he returned to his own country. Hearing of the matter Abraha made inquiries and learned that the outrage had been committed by an Arab who came from the temple in Mecca where the Arabs went on pilgrimage, and that he had done this in anger at his threat to divert the Arabs' pilgrimage to the cathedral, showing thereby that it was unworthy of reverence.

Ibn Ishāq (d. 767)/ Ibn Hishām (d. 833). *The Life of Muhammad*. Trans. A. Guillaume. Oxford: OUP, 1955, 22.

- f. As for the canal known by the name of Shaila, it is claimed by the Banu Shaila ibn Farrukhzadan al-Marwazi that Shapur (Persian king) had dug it out for their grandfather [*jaddihim*, i.e. ancestor] when he sent them to guard the frontier at Nighya in the canton of al-Anbar. According to others, however, the canal was so called after one, Shaila, who made a contract for digging the canal in the days of the caliph al-Mansur: the canal being old but buried, al-Mansur ordered that it be excavated. Before the work was brought to an end, al-Mansur died and the work was completed in the caliphate of al-Mahdi. According to others, al-Mansur ordered that a mouth (only) be dug for the canal above its old mouth; but he did not complete the work. Al-Mahdi completed it.

al-Balādhurī, Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā (d. c. 900). *The Origins of the Islamic State (Futūḥ al-Buldān)*. Trans. P. K. Hitti. 2 Vols. New York: Columbia University, 1916, I: 433.

- g. Abu Muslim was staying at a village called Balin in a tent, without any guards or doorkeepers. The people magnified his authority and said, "A man from the Banu Hashim has appeared, endowed with urbanity, gravity and calm [*ḥilm wa-waqār wa-sakīna*]." A number of young men from the people of Marw set out, pietists who sought religious insight (*fiqh*) and they came to him at his camp, and asked him about his genealogy [*nasab*]. He responded, "What I have to say is better for you than my genealogy." Then they asked him about matters relating to *fiqh*. He told them, "The command to do good and reject what is reprehensible is more important for you than this. We have work to do, and have more need of your assistance than of your questions, so excuse us."

al-Ṭabarī (d. 923). *The History of al-Ṭabarī Volume XXVII: The 'Abbāsīd Revolution*. Trans. J. A. Williams. Albany: SUNY, 1985, 76.

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- h. "...Now our lord, the Commander of the Faithful (whose life God prolong!) is well aware of the doings of the Samanids that are passed; how their orders were obeyed, their name revered, their affairs well ordered and their provinces organized, all through their display of loyalty to the Commander of the Faithful, and the homage which they rendered him, and through the attachment and inclination which they professed to him. When the pious founders of the line had passed away, and unworthy successors survived, they disengaged themselves from the coils of loyalty, and schismatically broke with the Commander of the Faithful.

al-Ṣābī, Hilāl b. Muḥassin (d. 1056), "Continuation of the Experiences of the Nations." In *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, ed. H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth, VI, 367, Oxford: Blackwell, 1921.

- i. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Nasr says that Muhammad ibn Ja'far has included this chapter in his book, but it is incomplete. Ibrahim, who is the author of the "Account of Muqanna'," and Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari say that Muqanna' was a villager from the vicinity of Merv, from a village called Kaza. His name was Hashim ibn Hakim. At first he was a bleacher, but afterwards he busied himself studying science. He acquired knowledge of every sort; he studied conjuring, the art of incantations, and talismans. He knew conjuring well, and also pretended to prophecy. Mahdi ibn Mansur killed him in the year 167/783. He learned books of the science of the ancients and was a master in necromancy. His father was called Hakim and he had been one of the captains of the amir of Khurasan in the days of Abu Ja'far Dawaninqi (Mansur).

Al-Narshakhī (fl. 943-4)/al-Qubāwī (fl. 1128-9)/Muḥammad b. Zufar (fl. 1178-9). *The History of Bukhara*. Trans. R. N. Frye. Cambridge, Mass.: MMA, 1954, XXVII-XXVIII (= pp. 65–6).

- j. Summit of beauty! You are my desire!  
How can my fluttering heart bear it!

God has decreed this love you see  
and I cannot find a way to deny the Creator's decree

Say to the caliph of Umayya,  
the flood of whose gifts can never be stopped:

You have made al-Mansur and al-Rashid forgotten men!  
You have shown up al-Mahdi and al-Wathiq!

You have equalled the former caliph and imam  
your ancestor 'Abd al-Malik

“Isma‘il [b. Badr’s] (fl. mid-tenth century CE) verses on ‘Abd al-Rahman III.” In James, D. *A History of Early al-Andalus: The Akhbār Majmū‘a*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 142.

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