

AET1

Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Tripos, Part IB

Easter 2021

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.

The **word limit** for each question is **1500** words.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS TO BE SUPPLIED FOR THIS EXAMINATION

Student declaration form

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Answers may be written by hand in **black ink** or typed.

If written by hand, upload your answers as a scan or image file.

If typed, upload them in a document, such as a Word document or PDF.

Files should be saved as MES17_*[your number]*.

Write your number **not** your name as well as the paper code (MES17) on each page of your submission.

Upload a completed student declaration form as a separate file.

RESOURCES PERMITTED FOR THIS EXAMINATION

Your exam answers must be entirely your own new and original work, with any quotations clearly marked as such. You may use your own notes and any primary or secondary sources in preparing your answers if you wish to do so.

The exam will begin as soon as you open the file containing the questions. Once begun you will have six hours to complete the exam.

SECTION A: Essay Questions

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

1. To what extent do the sources allow for a reconstruction of the history of the Arabian Peninsula in the sixth century CE?
2. What do sources written in languages other than Arabic contribute to our understanding of the Prophetic career of Muhammad and the development of the Muslim polity until c.660 CE?
3. Account for the patterns of unrest within the Caliphate under the Marwanid Umayyads (684–750 CE).
4. 'Neither Muslim nor Arab.' To what extent is this an accurate characterisation of the Arabian 'conquest society' before c.680 CE?
5. Outline and explain the effects of Muslim rule on Jewish and Christian life in the first four centuries of Islam.
6. '[W]herever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy.' (Talal Asad). What, in your view, constitutes 'orthodoxy' in premodern Islamic culture?
7. 'The coming of Islam merely accelerated existing social and economic changes in the cities of North Africa and Middle East.' Discuss.
8. Account for the character and diversity of elite political legitimisation strategies in the tenth- and early eleventh-century Islamic world.

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. Now 'Abdu'l-Muttalib was a most impressive, handsome and dignified man, and when Abraha saw him he treated him with the greatest respect so that he would not let him sit beneath him. He could not let the Abyssinians see him sitting beside him on his royal throne, so he got off his throne and sat upon his carpet and made 'Abdu'l-Muttalib sit beside him there. Then he told his interpreter to inquire what he wanted, and the reply was that he wanted the king to return two hundred camels of his which he had taken. Abraha replied through the interpreter, 'You pleased me much when I saw you; then I was much displeased with you when I heard what you said. Do you wish to talk to me about two hundred camels of yours which I have taken, and say nothing about your religion and the religion of your forefathers which I have come to destroy?' 'Abdu'l-Muttalib replied, 'I am the owner of the camels and the temple has an owner who will defend it.'

Ibn Ishaq (d. 767 CE). *The Life of Muhammad*. Trans. and ann. A. Guillaume. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955, 25.

- b. 29. Fight those who do not believe in God and the last day, who do not forbid what God and His messenger have forbidden, and who do not practise the religion of truth among those who have been given the book, until they pay the tribute tax out of hand and have been subdued.
30. The Jews say that Ezra is the son of God; the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God. That is what they say with their mouths, following the unbelievers before them. God fight them! How they are perverted!
31. They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God, as well as the Messiah, Mary's son, even though they were commanded to serve but one God besides whom there is no God but Him. Glory be to Him, above what they associate,
32. desiring to extinguish the light of God with their mouths. But God refuses to do other than perfect His light, even though the unbelievers detest it.

'The Qur'an: *surat al-bara'a* (Q 9.29–32)' translated in N. Calder et al., *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 13.

- c. Now when the sons of Ismael went to the east from the desert of Sin, their king Amr did not go with them. Being victorious in battle, they defeated both kingdoms; they occupied [the land] from Egypt as far as the great Taurus mountain, and from the western sea as far as Media and Khuzhastan. Then they penetrated with royal armies into the original borders of the territory of Ismael. The king commanded ships and many sailors to be gathered, to cross the sea to the south-east: to Pars, Sakastan, Sind, Krman, [and] the land of Kuran and Makuran as far as the borders of India. So the troops rapidly made preparations and carried out their orders. They burned the whole land; and taking booty and plunder they returned. After making raids over the waves of the sea, they came back to their own places.

This we heard from men who had been taken as captives to Khuzhastan, [from] Tachkastan.

The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos, translated by R. W. Thomson. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999, I, 101–2.

- d. Up to the time of the arrival of the children of Hagar the church in Persia had been under the rule of the Magians and so had nothing else to pit itself against. There were, however, some (internal) scandals which sprang up, but they were not allowed to come to anything, for our Lord held them back. This being the situation ever since the time of the Apostles up to the reign of this last Khosro, our Saviour – who foresees everything before it takes place – saw how much a state of ease proved detrimental to us, and (observed) the ills to which we had been exposed as a result of the interference of Christian kings who wanted to ascribe suffering to that Nature which is above suffering – something that perhaps not even demons had ever dared to do.

John Bar Penkaye (John of Fenek, fl.c.689 CE). *World History*, trans. in S.P. Brock, 'North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkaye's *Ris Melle*' *JSAI* 9 (1987), 59.

- e. To the God-loving priest and teacher, Rabban Mar Pethion: Timothy the sinner greets you and hopes to see you.

The royal command required of us to translate the *Topika* of the philosopher Aristotle from Syriac into the Arabic tongue. This was achieved, with God's help, through the agency of the teacher Abū Nūḥ. A small part was done by us as far as the Syriac was concerned, whereas he did it in its entirety, both Syriac and Arabic; the work has already reached a conclusion and has been completed. And although there were some others who were translating this from Greek into Arabic — we have written to inform you how and in what way it happened that all this took place — nevertheless (the king) did not consider it worth even looking at the labours of those other people on the grounds that they were barbaric, not only in phraseology, but also in sense, whether because of the natural difficulty of the subject (*hypothesis*) — for you are aware of the style (*eidos*) of the Philosopher in matters of logic, and how and to what extent he infuses obscurity into the beauty of (his) meaning and sense — or as a result of the lack of training of those who approached such things. For you know the extent and magnitude of the toils (*agones*) and labours such a task requires. But (the king) entirely approved of our labours, all the more so when from time to time he compared the versions with each other.

Patriarch Timothy I (d. 823 CE), "Letter 43". Tr. Sebastian Brock.

- f. Al-Husain from ash-Sha'bi: The latter was asked whether the people of as-Sawad had a covenant, to which he replied, "At first, they had none; but when the Moslems consented to take *kharaj* from them, then they came to have one."

Al-Husain from 'Amir: The latter said, "The people of as-Sawad have no covenant."

The Magians. 'Amr an-Naqid from Ja'far ibn Muhammad's father: The Emigrants had a sitting place in the mosque in which 'Umar used to discuss with them the news he received from the different regions. One day he said, "I know not how to treat the Magians;" upon which 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Auf rose and said, "I bear witness that the Prophet said, 'Treat them according to the same law with which ye treat the People of the Book.'"

Al-Baladhuri (d. c. 892 CE). *The Origins of the Islamic State (Futūḥ al-Buldān)*, tr. P. Hitti. 2 Vols. New York: Columbia University, 1916, I: 424.

- g. At last the tribesmen of the Mudar, the Rabi'ah and the Qahtan agreed to lay aside their feuds and unite as one in fighting Abu Muslim. Once they had driven him from Marw, they would look to their own affairs and what they had agreed upon. They therefore wrote a carefully worded treaty among themselves, and word of this reached Abu Muslim. It alarmed him, and he took it seriously and reconsidered his situation. Lo, the water supply of Makhwan dropped, and he feared that Nasr b. Sayyar might cut off his water, so he moved to Alin, the village of Abu Mansur Talhah b. Zurayq the *naqib*.

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE). *The History of al-Ṭabarī Volume XXVII. The Abbasid Revolution*. Trans. and ann. J. A. Williams. Albany: SUNY, 1985, 80.

- h. Since God, the Mighty and Glorious, wanted the renewal of our dynasty and our might and to show His favour to us, His being burdened with our victory and the testing of our friends, and the destruction of our enemies, so that when the end of it arrived and it had reached the furthestmost degree, the satan came out hopeless, uttering rants, his fire blazing, his persistence continuing. Having been aroused to anger over his transgressors, God allowed retribution among them by giving control to His servant and appointing him to the task. Thus did God clear up its darkness and cast light on its blackness, open its denseness, and avert the distress of it, through me and by my hand, as a mark of esteem by which God singled me out, an excellence whose nobility He bestowed on me, a favour for me to store up. It is up to me to restrict it and connect its newness to the older favour to my pure forefathers and the previous beneficence of His to my grandfathers, the rightly guided imams.

“*Khuṭba* of al-Manṣūr on the ‘Īd al-ḥiṭr, 336 AH (14 April 948 CE), at al-Mahdiyya.” In P. Walker, *Orations of the Fatimid Caliphs: Festival Sermons of the Ismaili Imams*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009, 116–17.

- i. The vizier knew what they said was the truth, but he did not dare speak. He therefore summoned Abu Sahl Isma'il, entrusted the notables to him, and sent him to the city. Abu Sahl convened a *diwan* and assembled the people, and those who fell into his hands informed him about those who had fled, so that there was no place in the city from which wailing and lamentation did not arise. The horsemen and the foot soldiers went and seized the fugitives and brought them back, and Abu Sahl Isma'il distributed written assignments to the army to collect their pay from the people. They set fire to the city and did whatever they wanted and took whomever they wanted, and it was like the end of the world. The *diwan* did its work, and the Sultan was not aware of what was happening, and no one had the courage to inform him of it and tell him the truth. In four days the army collected 160,000 dinars, as well as twice that amount in random looting, and also various provisions.

Bayhaqi (d. 1066 CE), *Tarikh*, 460–62, in B. Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople. Volume 1: Politics and War*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974, 69–73 (“The Looting of Amul (1035)).

- j. 11. We shall always dress in the same way wherever we may be, and we shall bind the *zunnār* round our waists.
12. (a) We shall not display our crosses or our books in the roads or markets of the Muslims nor shall we conduct processions (lit. go out) on Palm Sunday and Easter.
(b) We shall only use clappers in our churches very softly and we shall not display the cross on them.
(c) We shall not raise our voices in our church services or in the presence of Muslims, nor shall we raise our voices when following our dead.
(d) We shall not show lights on any of the roads of the Muslims or in their markets.
(e) We shall not bury our dead near the Muslims.
13. We shall not take slaves who have been allotted to the Muslims.
14. We shall not build houses overtopping the houses of the Muslims

Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 1126 CE), *Sirāj al-Mulūk*, Egypt, 1872, 229–30, tr. Lewis and Levy-Rubin.

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Page 7 of 7