

AET1

Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Tripos, Part IB

Friday 03 Jun

09.00am-12.00pm

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. You must not copy text from your own supervision essays.

SECTION A: Essay Questions

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

1. What are the sources for the era of the Prophet and what do they tell us about early Islam?
2. Why were the early Muslims so successful in conquering the territories of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires?
3. Why have some scholars described the Umayyad caliphate as an 'Arab' kingdom?
4. What did the rise of opposition to the Umayyads in North Africa and Khurasan have in common?
5. What were the main military, political and cultural pillars of the Abbasid caliphate?
6. To what extent were the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates 'Islamic' and how did that affect the political and legal status of non-Muslims?
7. On what grounds did the Fatimids and Umayyads claim a right to the caliphate in the tenth century CE and who were the targets of their ideological programmes?
8. Discuss the importance of the foundation of the *amṣār* and the development of other cities to the flourishing of Islamic empire between 630 and 1000.

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) When the kingdom of the Persians came to an end, in the days of their king Khosro, the kingdom of the children of Hagar at once gained control over more or less the whole world, for they took the whole kingdom of the Persians, overthrowing all their warriors who prided themselves in the arts of war. We should not think of the advent [of the children of Hagar] as something ordinary, but as due to divine working. Before calling them, [God] had prepared them beforehand to hold Christians in honour; thus they also had a special commandment from God concerning our monastic station, that they should hold it in honour. Now when these people came, at God's command, and took over as it were both kingdoms, not with any war or battle but in menial fashion, such as when a brand is rescued out of the fire; not using weapons of war or human means, God put victory in their hands in such a way that the words written about them might be fulfilled, namely, 'One man chased a thousand and two men routed ten thousand'. How otherwise could naked men, riding without armour or shield, have been able to win, apart from divine aid, God having called them from the ends of the earth so as to destroy, by them, 'a sinful kingdom' and to bring low through them the proud spirit of the Persians.

John Bar Penkāyē, *Rīš Mellē*, Book XV, trans. Sebastian Brock, 'North Mesopotamia in the late Seventh Century', *JSAI* 9 (1987), pp. 57-58.

- b) This is a compact from Muḥammad the Prophet between the Mu'minūn and Muslimūn of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who join them as clients and attach themselves to them and fight the holy war with them. They form one people to the exclusion of others. The Muḥājirūn from Quraysh keep to their tribal organisation and leadership, co-operating with each other regarding blood money [and related matters] and ransoming their captives according to what is customary and equitable among the Mu'minūn. The Banū 'Awf keep to their tribal organisation and

leadership, continuing to co-operate with each other in accordance with their mutual aid agreements regarding blood money [and related matters], and every sub-group ransoms its captives according to what is customary and equitable among the Mu' minūn. [The same statement is then made in relation to the Banū'l-Ḥārith, Banū Sā'ida, Banū Jusham, Banū'l-Najjār, Banū 'Amr b. 'Awf, Banū'l-Nābit, Banū'l-Aws.]

Ibn Ishāq, trans. M. Lecker, *The 'Constitution of Medina': Muḥammad's First Legal Document*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004, pp. 32-33.

- c) 1. In the name of God the Merciful, the Co]mpassionate.
2. From Nājid b. Muslim to 'Abd] Allāh b. As'ad. Peace
3. be upon you and I praise for you God besides Whom there is no g]od but [He.]
4. Further, the *amīr*, may [Go]d make him prosper, wrote to me
5. with what he has calculated for me, of the amount in coin of the people of the prov[ince] of their taxes in kind.
6. So pay this to him and ... [...] self to me
7. the amount in coin of that ... So hurry to me
8. [the] amount in money and write me (so)that I pay in coin what you have paid of that
9. and collect their taxes in kind [...] of the scribes
10. and we have calculated what the people of every village have to pay of the taxes in kind
11. and its (different) sorts and what has to be paid in coin of it.
12. So inform the people of each village what fell on them in coin and let them give it
13. to the solvent amongst them. And write [...] and the quota of the tax in kind
14. in its entirety so that your [s]cribe transfers (it) to us, God willing,
15. that which has fallen on the men, of wheat and barley and beans
16. and what was assigned to them of thi[s] in coin.

P. M. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 292-3.

- d) Naṣr then wrote to Marwān informing him about Abū Muslim and his manifesting a revolution and about his strength and that he was summoning men to follow Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad. The letter found Marwān when a messenger from Abū Muslim to Ibrāhīm had already fallen into his hands...In it he cursed and reviled Abū Muslim for not exploiting his opportunity with Naṣr and al-Kirmānī while he could, and told him not to leave one Arab in Khurasan unslain. The messenger handed the letter over to Marwān and Marwān wrote to al-Walīd b. Mu‘āwiyah b. ‘Abd al-Malik, his governor for Damascus, ordering him to write to the administrator of the Balqā’ to go to Ḥumaymah Wells and seize Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad, bind him securely and send him to him with a mounted escort.

Al-Ṭabarī, The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume XXVII: The ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, trans. J. A. Williams, Albany: SUNY, 1985, pp. 83-84.

- e) The killing of ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’. To return to the account of ‘Uthmān and others, he said that ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ speedily set off full of hatred for Abū’l-Muhājir and when he reached Ifrīqiya he bound Abū’l-Muhājir in heavy fetters, removed him from his post, and took him with him on a campaign to the Sūs in irons. The people of the Sūs are a tribe (*baṭn*) of the Berbers called ‘Anbiya’. He travelled through their lands but no-one opposed him or fought him and he departed for Ifrīqiya. When he drew near to its borders, he permitted his companions to disperse until he just had a small group with him. He came to a place called Tahūdha where Kasīla b. Lamzam confronted him with a great army of Romans and Berbers because news had reached him of the dispersal of men from around ‘Uqba. They fought a hard battle in which ‘Uqba was killed as well as Abū’l-Muhājir, still fettered in irons. Then Kasīla and those with him travelled on and settled at the place ‘Uqba had laid out.

Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, ed. Charles Torrey: New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922, p. 198.

- f) As regards the saying you quote of Abū Bakr's: 'My election was hustled through,' and 'Umar's: 'Abū Bakr's election was hustled through; may God preserve us from its dire consequences,' the matter is plain and the arguments about it straightforward. On the Prophet's death, Muslims were divided into distinct categories. Some were well-informed believers, true to God and His Prophet. Others had submitted but knew nothing of the imamate, the reasons for its establishment or the dissolution. Others again were more highly placed than Abū Bakr in the tribe of Quraysh, but were concerned less with the interests of Muslims in general than with having the imam chosen from a tribe as close as possible to their own, thus winning nobility and celebrity for their clan and themselves. Others enjoyed ties of kinship with the Prophet which gave them exemption from learning and good works. Others again were powerful but weak in faith, or had light purses but great ambitions; indifferent to peace and concord, they did not scruple to fan the flames of revolt and rouse the rabble.

Al-Jāḥiẓ, *The Life and Works of al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. and trans. C. Pellat (English translation by D. M. Hawke), London: Routledge, 1969, p. 77.

- g) No one may reason analogically unless he has gained the qualifications that enable him to undertake such reasoning. These qualifications are knowledge of the rulings in God's Book - His obligations, inculcation of manners, abrogation, unrestricted and restricted passages, and His guidance. One draws inferences about what parts of it are subject to speculative interpretations by using the practices of God's Emissary; if there is no such practice, then using the Muslims' consensus; and if there is no consensus, then by reasoning analogically. No one may reason by analogy unless he knows the prior practices, the opinions of the forebears, the people's consensus, their legal

disagreements, and the Arabic language. Neither may he draw an analogy unless he has a sound intellect and is able to distinguish among what is ambiguous.

Al-Shāfi‘ī, *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, ed. and trans. J. Lowry, New York: New York University Press, 2013, p. 365.

- h) This family were among those who excelled in seeking the ancient sciences, and they focused their aspirations on them, and they fatigued themselves for them and they dispatched to the lands of Byzantium men who gathered them for them and they brought to their presence men bearing [knowledge] from all districts and regions at a great price. They made known the wonders of knowledge. The sciences with the greatest hold on them were: geometry, mechanics, music and astronomy to a lesser degree. Muḥammad b. Mūsā died in 259 AH in the month of Rabī‘ I. Aḥmad b. Mūsā had a son called Muṭahhar, who was poorly educated and he entered the ranks of the boon companions of al-Mu‘taḍid. Among the books of the Banū Mūsā were: their *Book on the qaraṣṭūn* (a balance used by Archimedes, later used for scales), Aḥmad b. Mūsā’s *Book of Ingenious Devices (Mechanics)*, Ḥasan b. Mūsā’s *Book on Circles and Rectangles*, the *Book of the first motion of the firmament* attributed to Muḥammad and the *Book of Conics*.

(Ibn) al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Raḥmāniyya, 1929-30, pp. 378-379.

- i) So the call to al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh was established in the great mosque of Bobastro and the daily prayers and Friday sermons took place there. The impoverished neighbourhood mosques were repaired and the grand churches destroyed. The beautification of these churches and its connection with the accursed ‘Umar’s seizure [of Bobastro], the impoverishment of its mosques and the decrepitude which overtook them was one of the greatest indications of the apostasy of the accursed ‘Umar

and the most eloquent [mark] of his unbelief. In the same year al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh commanded that he should be addressed in correspondence and in prayers from the pulpits as ‘commander of the faithful’ because he was entitled to that name which was his by right and possessed by others by [false] arrogation or borrowing.

Una Crónica Anónima de ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III al-Nāṣir, eds E. Lévi-Provençal and E. García Gómez, Madrid: CSIC, 1950, pp. 78-79.

- j) Waki’ related in the account which I have on his authority that Abū Ja’far built the city in circular form because a circular city has advantages over the square city, in that if the monarch were to be in the centre of the square city, some parts would be closer to him than others, while regardless of the divisions, the sections of the Round City are equidistant from him when he is in the centre. Al-Manṣūr then built four main gates, dug moats, and erected two walls and two faṣīls, and the inner wall was higher than the outer wall. He commanded that no one be allowed to dwell at the foot of the high inner walls or build any dwelling there; but ordered construction along the wall in the second faṣīl because it was better for the fortification of the wall. Then he built the palace and mosque. In the back of al-Manṣūr’s palace was a reception hall...and in the back of this hall was an audience room...whose ceiling ended in a dome.

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādi, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād*, trans. Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970, p. 52.

END OF PAPER

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