strategies. The author cites not only the now well-documented and widely perceived biases of Western media but also the absence of due procedure and administrative restrictions when it comes to constructing mosques and allowing prayer-calls to be made from them which are treated as threats to public order. Dr Hofmann also refers to the controversy over the Muslim women’s headscarf stating that “a small piece of cloth seems to shake the foundations of entire republics” (on both sides of the divide, whether it is secular France or secular Turkey).

In concluding, it must be said that Dr Hofmann has admirably succeeded in all his aims: showing the mirror to both the West and the Muslims in terms of their fault-lines and also showing them the way forward to self-improvement and mutually beneficial interaction. Undoubtedly Dr Hofmann is a very versatile scholar of Islam — truly amongst the best resource-persons that Muslims can boast of anywhere.

Syed Akif


The dawn of Islam in the Near East, its proliferation in the region, and the subsequent social and religious developments influenced by it is a subject which enthralled many scholars of Islam, and Jonathan Berkey, the author of the book under review, is one of them. Presently, he is Associate Professor of History at Davidson College. The book deals with the religious and social history of the Near East and covers a period of twelve centuries, beginning from roughly the 7th century and coming down to the 19th century. The key question addressed in the study revolves around the issues of religious identity and authority, though the work touches on quite diverse themes.

Highlighting the gradual evolution of Islam over the centuries, the author questions the dominant view of the suddenness of Islam’s appearance in Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century CE. The central argument of the work is that the rise of Islam was not sudden but an outcome of a protracted process. The emergence of a self-conscious Islamic polity and the articulation of a
separate Muslim identity was the result of a gradual process. Berkey argues that Islam was a product of historical factors, which included, among others, the diverse religious traditions of the Near East. The Muslim identities were bound to those of the Jews, the Christians and others. Studying the historical origins and development of the Islamic traditions, the author contends that the emergence of Islamic identities and patterns of religious authority need to be seen as a continuation of the religious identities of the late antique Near East.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I on “The Near East before Islam,” which sets the context to the ensuing parts of the book, examines the religions of late antiquity. Being multi-cultural and multi-religious, the Near East presented a mosaic of cultural patterns and religious traditions informed by Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Paganism. This period was marked by intense religious competition and dialogue among these conflicting religious traditions. Centuries before the dawn of Islam, there existed two rival states in the region: the Byzantine Empire (the old Roman Empire) in north and north-west of Arabia and the Sasanian Empire in its east. Despite bitter rivalry between them, they had cultural and commercial contacts with each other. An important characteristic of the then Near Eastern society was its urban mercantile economy, which had profound impact on its religious developments. On the one hand, the widespread trading networks led to the dissemination of cultural traditions and religious ideas in the neighbouring regions, while on the other hand, these commercial activities also accentuated social inequities and economic disparities.

The author underscores the need to view the rise of religious traditions including Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism in the Near East against the backdrop of injustice, inequality and social disorder. He discerns two trends in the Near East in that era: First, the religions of the late antiquity were closely associated with states and empires, such as Christianity and Zoroastrianism being identified with the Roman and the Sasanian Empires respectively. As for Judaism, there was an amalgamation of political and religious authorities, but Manichaeism failed to establish a symbiotic relationship with any state. Secondly, a significant trend of the era was the universalist character and claims of the religions of late antiquity such as Christianity. Despite Judaism’s identification with a specific ethnic group, it too had a strong universalizing element in it. In fact, at the conceptual level, the monotheistic ideal of these religions considerably contributed to such universalist claims as the concept of a single god was more universally acceptable in contrast to the particularized local deities.

Regarding Islam, Berkey observes: “It is doubtful that Islam began as anything more than the monotheistic religion of the Arabs. Of course it did
eventually become universalist…” (p. 7). It may be pointed out here that at the doctrinal level, Islam was universalist in its orientation right from the beginning. Practically, it had acquired universalizing contours even during the lifetime of prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), among whose Companions included persons of Persian, Roman, and Ethiopian background. The assertion that the universalist character of Islam became more evident in the wake of the territorial expansion of the Muslim state can be accepted without much ado.

The second part focuses on the emergence of Islam, and covers the period stretching from 600 to 750 CE. In this part, an entire chapter is devoted to the approaches and critical problems of historiographical writing. In particular, it discusses the problems of using “the primary sources of pre- and early Islamic history” for historical reconstruction. Berkey succinctly puts it: ... “these sources inevitably reflect later attitudes and interests as much as, if not more than, those of the earliest Muslims, and projects those attitudes and interests back upon the people and events they describe” (p. 58). Moreover, the historical value, objectivity and authenticity of these early texts have also been questioned.

In order to set the context for the appearance of Islam, the political forms, socio-cultural patterns, and economic conditions of the Arabian Peninsula have been described. As for the interaction of Islam with other religious traditions of the age, the author suggests that it was a two-way process. Not only Islam contributed to developments within Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism, but the Muslims also adopted ideas, practices, or institutions from others, art and architecture being one example in point.

The political and social developments in the early Islamic era were considerably shaped by the tribal identities and ties of kinship among the Arabs. The Umayyad state, founded explicitly on the claims of one family, grew increasingly centralized and also harboured imperial designs. This era also witnessed the growth of internal schism within the body politic of Islam. The rule of the Umayyads, who claimed political as well as religious authority, was contested by various sectarian groups including the Khārjīs, Shi‘īs and Kaysāniyyah. Berkey observes that it was in response to varied sectarian identities that a distinct Sunni identity began to be crystallized in this era (pp. 85, 108).

Despite massive conversions to Islam, there lived Dhimmis or the non-Muslims under Muslim rule as subject population. Resultantly, interaction and ideological exchange took place among various religious traditions. For instance, one can identify a close connection between Jewish messianism and millennial expectations and the Shi‘ite doctrine of Mahdism. It was amid the religious turmoil of the mid-eighth century that the ‘Abbāsid Revolution
culminated in 750 CE with the establishment of a new dynasty. In particular, the ‘Abbāsids had capitalized on the millennial dreams of the Shi‘īte Muslims, but soon these supporters were disappointed with the regime leadership as well as policies.

The third part deals with the consolidation of Islam from 750 to 1000 CE in the wake of the ‘Abbāsid seizure of power. The eastward shifting of the capital to Baghdad profoundly affected the political and religious traditions, and socio-cultural and economic life of the Muslims. The ‘Arabness’ of the rule preserved by the Umayyads was eliminated, as the ‘Abbāsid regime was more inclusive. This was evident from the inclusion of non-Arabs, especially the Turks and Persians in the military and civil administrative bureaucracy. On the cultural plane, the era witnessed the spread of Arabic language in the Near East, which reduced the influence of Syriac and Coptic languages, though Persian survived this cultural onslaught. Economically, it was an age of prosperity and peace, marked by considerable urban growth. On the religious front, not only did the crystallization of the schools of Islamic law and jurisprudence take place in this era, but Sufism also gradually started to become institutionalized.

Unlike Shi‘ī Islam, in the religious authority Sunnī Islam is independent of the political authority. The ‘Abbāsids, though having a Sunnī orientation, made attempts to extend their authority over the realm of religion. Caliph Ma‘mūn (r. 198–218/813–833) initiated the practice of ‘inquisition’ (mihnah), requiring people to publicly profess the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur‘ān, which was advocated by the theological school of Mu‘tazilites, often referred to as the free-thinkers of Islam. After Ma‘mūn, Caliphs Mu‘taṣim (r. 218–227/833–842) and Wāthiq (r. 227–232/842–847) continued the practice, but Caliph Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861) had to abandon it in face of continuing opposition. Berkey observes: “...the failure of the mihna marked the definitive triumph of the ulama, rather than the caliph, as the principal locus of religious authority in Islam” (p. 127). Moreover, it marked the triumph of Sunnī traditionalism as well.

The development of the doctrinal foundations of Shi‘ism took place in this era, and its sub-sects Twelver Shi‘īs and Ismā‘īlis, and their subsequent offshoots too emerged. Sunnī Islam emerged as a response to this sectarian fragmentation of the Muslim community. The distinct Sunnī and Shi‘ī identities gradually emerged during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries. During these centuries, the non-Muslims were reduced to a minority in the Near East as a result of conversion which got accelerated in the post-‘Abbāsid Revolution era. As compared to Judaism and Christianity, Zoroastrianism
suffered the most, and the conversion of its adherents was more common. One reason is the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, which had hitherto supported it. The fourth and the last part of the book examines Medieval Islam (1000–1500 CE), an era marked by political fragmentation owing to the weakness of the institution of Caliphate, and the resultant emergence of semi-autonomous military regimes in the peripheral areas of the ‘Abbāsid Empire. Gradually, the central authority came to rest on the power of the military elite, who was predominantly of Turkish composition. An important feature of this era was a ‘creative tension’ between religious and political authority (p. 184). The ‘ulamā’, who represented religious authority, and the military rulers relied on each other, the former requiring financial support from the latter whereas the latter needed legitimacy for their alien regimes. Eventually, it helped increase the social power of the ‘ulamā’, while the state tried to control and contain their powers. In the wake of the decline of the institution of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning), the practice of *taqlīd* or imitation further enhanced the authority of the ‘ulamā’.

Regarding the issues of religious identities, Berkey observes that the dividing lines between the Muslims, Christians and Jews, and Sunnis and Shi‘is, and Ismā‘īlīs and Twelvers became quite distinct in the medieval times. The author questions the notion of a ‘Sunni revival’ during mid-tenth and mid-eleventh centuries, according to which amid Shī‘i dominance, the Saljuqs tried to assert the supremacy of Sunnism. He succumbs to the view that the phenomenon was more of a Sunnī “recentering”, whereby the ‘ulamā’ tried to eradicate the sources of friction in the Muslim community and bring in homogenization of religious life (p. 189). The Middle Period also witnessed Crusades — the armed conflict between the Muslims and Christian powers of Europe. These holy wars served as a source of “moral rearmament” for the Sunni Islam (p. 202).

Discussing the transmission of religious knowledge, the author highlights the rise of ‘family dynasties of scholars’. The system of instruction was informal and personalized, with little distinction between a mosque and a *madrasah* (religious seminary). The modes of knowledge were based on oral transmission as well as on written texts. The gulf between religious knowledge and rational sciences was too widened in this era (p. 230).

An important characteristic of this period was the institutionalization of Sufism, and the diversification of Sufi doctrines and practices. Various Sufi *silsilahs* or ṭuruq (pl. of *tariqah*, i.e. the path or way), employing different means and methods for spiritual growth, emerged, which contributed to the diversification of the Muslim religious experience (p. 238). Another significant development was the emergence of Sufi convents or hospices (variously
known as *khāngabs*, *ribāts*, and *zāwiyabs*) in the Near East. In the Middle Period, Sufism grew closer to the juristic Islam as well. The author also explores parallels between Sufism and *Shī‘ism*, and discusses the relationship of Sufism to political authority as well. Turning to popular religion, Berkey makes an important clarification: it was not identical but closely associated with Sufism. The characteristic features of popular religion included the popularization of practices associated with Sufis, veneration of individuals, visitation of tombs, and the rise of syncretic trends and superstitions, etc.

The study comes to a close on an epilogue on the transition from medieval to modern Islam, covering the history of the next three centuries. It begins with the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. An important feature was the ‘bureaucratization’ of the *ʿulamāʾ* (p. 264), as they accepted official positions such as that of *Shaykh al-Islām* at the court. Eventually, the power of the *ʿulamāʾ* grew to such an extent that they even started issuing orders to depose the sultans. These three centuries also witnessed the rise of the *Safavids* in Persia followed by the ‘Shi‘itization’ of Iran in the 16th century, which reoriented the religious identities of its populace. As for the *Sunnī* Islam, there were varied movements of reform and revival in the 18th century. The 19th century witnessed the penetration of European imperial powers, which resulted in the creation and/or sharpening of new identities, which were largely ethnic and nationalistic in nature.

The epilogue is followed by a list of suggested readings. A glossary of Arabic phrases and terms provided at the beginning of the book proves useful for readers unfamiliar with Arabic. An attractive cover illustration adds to the beauty of the book. The study is not narrative, though, in the words of its author, its analytical approach is historical (p. ix). The author has drawn on some of the basic questions regarding the origin and character of Islam raised by Max Weber and Marshall Hodgson. Moreover, he has particularly pointed out the prevalent scholarly misconceptions in the studies on Islam, and has sought to clarify them as well. No doubt, the study provides a scholarly treatment of the subject. As for its readership, not only students and lay public would find it interesting and informative, more serious scholars of the subject would also find it worth-reading.

Some critical comments and observations do not seem out of place here. The author has referred to ‘borrowings’ from Jewish or Christian religious traditions by Islam (passim). A little clarification seems appropriate here: if Islam is regarded as a continuation of, or more accurately, as the culmination of the Divine Revelation, which took the form of various religious traditions in the past, such as the monotheistic faiths of the Near East, the phenomenon of borrowing at the level of doctrine and practices needs a reinterpretation.
Moreover, while discussing the Near Eastern society, important issues of gender and slavery have not been adequately taken up, though one comes across sporadic references to them. The distinction between Islamic and Muslim in the study seems to blur at some places as well. The chronological scope of the work is quite vast covering a period of more than twelve centuries. The epilogue covering an era from 1500 to 1800 CE, nonetheless, treats the three centuries in less than ten pages while the reader expects some more.

Tanvir Anjum


“Fundamentalism” is defined in connection with those Muslim leaders who insist on direct access to the fundamentals of Qur‘ān and Sunnah to consist of rejecting the authority of the “medieval” jurists, Sufis, theologians and commentators as intermediaries in order to reinterpret Islam on their own as relevant to modern life. In other words, they reject exclusive adherence to any one of the four orthodox schools of Islamic jurisprudence, i.e. Imām Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu‘mān ibn Thābit (80–150/699–767), Imām Mālik ibn Anas (97–179/716–796), Imām Muḥammad ibn Idrīs Shāfi‘i (150–204/767–820) or Imām Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal (164–241/780–855). This, they believe, facilitates their right to reinterpret the Qur‘ān and Sunnah as relevant to modernity. For this reason they also reject the authority of the traditional ‘ulamā’ or religious scholars, convinced of their ability to perform *ijtihād* by themselves. Thus they all reject traditional orthodoxy. They all reject the classical Islamic civilization of the historic past as the suitable model for the present and future.