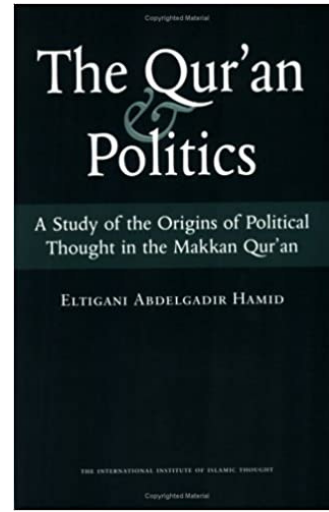


Eltigani Abdelgadir Hamid. *The Qur'an and Politics: A Study of the Origins of Political Thought in the Makkan Qur'an*. Translated by Abdul-Wahid Lu'lu'a. London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2004. Pp. 225. Paperback. ISBN: 1-56564-405-0.

The author of the book under review, Dr Eltigani Abdelgadir Hamid (b. 1951) is currently a professor of politics and Islamic studies at the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, Qatar University, Doha. This book is an English translation of his earlier Arabic monograph titled *Uṣūl al-Fikr al-Siyāsī fī 'l-Qur'ān al-Makkī*.¹ It explores the political foundations that were set during the Meccan period of the Qur'ānic revelation.

As the Muslim world became independent from colonial powers, it began searching for authentic models for its newly independent polities. It was, however, faced with the choice of either to emulate the contemporary West or to rebuild the political and legal structures in accordance with the Qur'ānic ideals and reconcile them with the modern age. To deal with this challenge is not possible without knowing the textual foundations from which Islamic political structure stems. The author argues that the Meccan verses of the Qur'ān establish a coherent political philosophy based on Islamic monotheism (p. 2). His claim is based on the idea of the Qur'ān as a unified, logical, and coherent text. Moreover, he holds that the Meccan *sūrahs* are predominantly concerned with the origins, he calls them *ummahāt* the “mother sources” on which the Islamic political society is to be built and major political objectives are to be achieved (p. 4). On the other hand, Medinan *sūrahs* are predominantly concerned with legislation in detail.

The book is divided into four substantive chapters. The first chapter has discourses on political thought, fundamentals of political thought, and the Meccan Qur'ān. The next two chapters broadly deal with the origins of Islamic political philosophy in the Meccan Qur'ān. The last



¹ Al-Tījānī ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥāmid, *Uṣūl al-Fikr al-Siyāsī fī 'l-Qur'ān al-Makkī* (Amman/Herndon, VA: Dār al-Bashīr li 'l-Nashr wa 'l-Tawzī'/International Institute for Islamic Thought, 1414/1995).

chapter deals with the secular ideologies of the West in comparison with Islamic political philosophy.

Hamid counters the claims of the Orientalist scholar Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) who subscribed to the view that the Meccan Qur'ān was no more than an attempt to develop religious inclinations within a small community and there occurred a fundamental change in its content after the migration of the Prophet (peace be on him). He also critiques Frants Buhl (d. 1932) and Tor Andræ (d. 1947), the other two Orientalists, for a similar argument that the main theme of the Meccan Qur'ān is only the fear of Hell. The author substantiates his critique by arguing that Islam is a process of striving, which means that every step undertaken during the Meccan period was a positive move towards gaining political power and discovering the means by which this power could be consolidated through Qur'ānic ideals.

The book commences with the study of Western political philosophy from its origins in Plato's idealism through the evolution of natural law theory, severely criticized by the schools of Positivism and Historicism. Furthermore, he traces the development of idealism in European history and shows how idealism gave way to realistic materialism that eventually branched out into various forms all opposed to the natural law theory. The author then presents a comparison between Western philosophy and Islamic monotheism and demonstrates how Islamic monotheism provides a more comprehensive understanding of the world, which defines life and its limits and sets a standard of criteria for identifying social objectives and justifying the claims of legitimacy (p. 15).

In chapter two, the author substantially relies on verses from *sūrat al-A'rāf* for his analysis and asserts that it presents valuable, general principles. What follows is a detailed survey of history with an argument about how these principles that are embedded in historical narratives of the Qur'ān were played out in the real world. For the author, a large portion of the Meccan Qur'ān constitutes historical examples of earlier nations and messengers who were sent to them. In addition, the historical narratives of the prophets (peace be on them) that were intended to stimulate and develop historical consciousness in the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) and his companions, implied that the current situation of the Quraysh and the Prophet (peace be on him) was similar to the former prophets and their nations. According to the author, the historical narratives of the prophets explicitly present political philosophy of the Qur'ān, arguing that "the messengers generally bring the people into line with the Revelation, as that was the

essence of their message. However, it initiated a struggle over the basic principle informing the supreme political sovereignty and its legitimacy in society” (p. 54). Consequently, the entire political philosophy is related to the wider Qur’ānic perspective of human history, where ideas acquire the force to shape society. Throughout the book, the endeavour to achieve political power is identified as a vital dimension for the Qur’ānic vision of value-based society.

In chapter three, the author selects *sūrat Quraysh* and *sūrat Banī Isrā’īl* to analyze local and international political contentions. *Sūrat Quraysh* provides an interesting example of how the internal decadence of Quraysh society led to the disintegration of political community. The author affirms that this internal decadence was the result of supremacy gained by trade values over religious values. Consequently, society rapidly slipped from monotheism to idolatry. The Prophetic call to return to the Abrahamic religion and the opposition of Quraysh to this call exposed their real intention. The call aimed directly at taking the sovereignty over the community from the hands of men and giving it back to “Lord of men.” For international power dynamics, the author selects *sūrat Banī Isrā’īl* and highlights the political and spiritual corruption of Persians, Romans, and Israelites and its impact on nascent Islamic state. The corruption that deeply entrenched in the state institutions of these empires, was about to become universal phenomena. The author affirms that the establishment of a state was an inevitable necessity to rescue Quraysh from organized upheaval. To substantiate his claim, he traces the political moves taken by the Prophet (peace be on him) for the establishment of the state.

The last chapter of the book gives fascinating insights into and understanding of secular ideologies and their influence on secular political thought. Examining the origins of Western secular thought back to Christianity, particularly to the ideas of Protestant reform movement, the author identifies a Protestant principle that called for the independence of individuals from all kinds of authority whether the church, the book, society, or the state (p. 61). Moreover, he argues that Martin Luther (d. 1546) strengthened the position of secularism by positing the theory of two adjoining kingdoms: the worldly and the heavenly, hence separation of the Transcendental from the state and its institutions. The author compares these secular currents with the Qur’ānic concepts and argues that the Qur’ān does not recognize conflict between sensual perception and revelation. He convincingly answers to the objections of those who subscribe to a view of establishing political ideology devoid of revelation.

This book has received positive editorial reviews and is lauded for its academic rigour and richness of contents. It provides answers for those who subscribe to the view that the Meccan Qur'ān is devoid of Islamic political philosophy. The book is of utmost importance for the students of Islamic studies and Islamic political thought.

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