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*The following debate opposes Prof. Richard Bulliet and Prof. Hichem Djait. Prof. Bulliet criticizes here Prof. Djait's work *La personnalité et le devenir arabo-islamiques*, published in Paris in 1974, which gives a preeminent place to the State in the definition of Islam's destiny and calls for a profound modernization. Prof. Djait answers Prof. Bulliet's objections. The debate took place in May 1975 at the University of California at Berkeley.*

Richard W. Bulliet

AN ANSWER FOR HICHEM DJAÏT — OR POSSIBLY A QUESTION

To explain why I disagreed strongly with your analysis of Islamic history I must outline for you some of my own ideas on the course of that history. I feel that the combination of an orientalist approach to history and a devotion to a historical methodology that has not advanced since the days of Ranke has resulted in a gross misunderstanding and miswriting of Islamic history. Thus, I feel that the historical data from which you derived your analysis distort the historical actuality they pretend to represent.

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First, a question of periodization. This is not a vital question, but it will help me order my thoughts. Roughly speaking, I feel that Islamic history should be broken into the following segments: I. 600-950—the period of Islamization which culminated in the rise of Islam as a mass social phenomenon. The terminal date might be a century or more later in Egypt and Syria and an additional century later in the Maghreb. My date is primarily for Iraq and Iran. II. 950-1400—the period during which the existence of a mass Moslem society brought into being and standardized an integrated set of social-religious institutions which were necessary for the functioning of a mass society but which had not been needed by the largely non-Moslem multi-religious society of the previous period. The institutions developed during this period emanate primarily from Iraq and Iran and were copied elsewhere because these were the first areas to have to cope with Islam as a mass social phenomenon. III. 1400-1700—the period of the great Islamic empires which came into existence as a result of and upon the foundation of the integrated Islamic social system developed during the second period. IV. 1700-1900—the period during which the integrated social system that had flourished during the third period was destroyed by political and cultural imperialism. V. 1900-2100—the period during which the shattered remnants of Islamic society will rethink and reformulate a new society which will be distinctly non-European but which cannot now be clearly envisioned.

Let me briefly comment upon this schema as a whole. Basically, I am saying that what is generally considered the Golden Age of Islam, the period of the powerful caliphates, is actually one of great confusion and heterogeneity. Islam was the religion of a small ruling caste; cultural output was either derivative of Greco-Roman-Persian culture or a continuation of pre-Islamic Arab tribal culture; the apparent power and centralization of the Caliphate reflect the dominance of the Arab ethnic element over a non-Moslem population and conceal the actual weakness of the Caliphate as a political institution. The success of Islamization could only have resulted in the destruction of the temporal power of the caliph. The decentralization and political chaos of period two is partly a product of foreign invasion

but it is partly the simple outcome of the dissemination of Islam among the general populace.

The most important period in Islamic history is period two (950-1400) during which truly Islamic social institutions came into being. This is the most creative period, but because of its lack of direct relation to a Greco-Roman past Western historians have ignored it. Essentially, as long as Islam remained an Arab religion, the social lives of Moslems were governed according to the norms of Arab tribal life. When converts were few, they were awkwardly incorporated into Arab tribal society. When they became many, in Iran and Iraq roughly between 850 and 950, they created a compulsion for Islam to serve them as their previous religions had served them. Since social organization according to religious community had been well established in the Byzantine-Sassanian period, the converts sought in Islam the type of complete social system to which they were accustomed.

Islam basically did not have a ready response to this pressure from the converted population. The Moslem converts looked for religious guidance not to the government, which had never before been the source of communal religious guidance, but to the men of religion, the *'ulama*. Originally, the *'ulama* arrived at their religious calling by the means known to most religions—they were individuals who aspired to lead pious lives. They did not see personal advantage in being a pious Moslem learned in his faith, but were so out of simple personal desire. Once they became the object of attention of growing numbers of Moslems, however, they came to realize that as models for the proper living of a Moslem life they had the capability of developing this emulation into a source of political, economic and social power. The *'ulama* were still naive in 900, but by 1000 they had developed into a closed caste monopolizing certain sources of economic and political power at the local level and seeking to increase their power still further. There is some evidence that by the time of the Mongol invasions Iran was on the threshold of developing a series of city-states dominated by the *'ulama* who were functionally a bourgeoisie, if one disregards the economic sense of the term.

Within this class, which I call the patrician class to empha-

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size that there was more to it than just religious scholarship, there were severe cleavages on grounds of *madhhab*. Behind these cleavages there seems to be a rivalry between one faction of relatively early converts who wished to retain the elitist conception of Islam that characterized the period of Arab domination and another faction of relatively late converts who wished to make Islam into a popular religion because they were isolated from positions of influence by the elitist faction. In concrete terms, the attributes of the elitist faction are: Hanafi law, Mu'tazili theology, reliance upon the legal system, preservation of Arabic as the language of Islam. The attributes of the populist faction are: Shafi'i or Hanbali law, Ash'ari or Hanbali theology, Sufism, vernacular languages in religion, and communal-fraternal organizations such as the *futuwwa* and the guilds. In the Maghreb the elitist faction is represented by the Maliki religious establishment and the populist faction by Ibn Tumart (although not by the Almohads who came after him).

Until these grand questions of the direction of Islam as a social system were decided, there could not be any long-lasting political stability. The victory of the populist faction was slow but complete. By 1400 internal dissension along these lines had largely disappeared and a set of closely interrelated and mutually supportive social institutions had come into being and become disseminated throughout Islam, replacing finally the heterogeneity of the early Islamic period. The main institutions are the Sufi brotherhoods, the guilds, the fraternal organizations, the urban residential quarters as political units, the *madrassa* system of education as a means of controlling and breaking the independence of the *'ulama*, and the *shari'a* which ceases to be debated on the level of *usul*. Once stability within the social system was achieved, the base existed for solid and long-lasting political development. Thus, the duration and relative success, despite wars and rebellions, of the Ottomans, Safavids, Moguls, and Alawis is the product of the achievement of a stable and well integrated social system based upon Islam. These empires are, in political terms, the crowning achievement of Islam. The apparent decline that has so often been alleged to have taken place in Islam never occurred. During period one, cultural achievement was fragile and dependent upon non-

Moslem sources. During period two it was entirely Moslem in inspiration because it was largely the product of the intense rivalry within the intelligentsia for control of what Islam as a social system was to become. In period three the relative stability of society and diminution of impassioned internal discord led, on the one hand, to a concentration upon non-verbal cultural artifacts, and, on the other, to the cultivation of communal and fraternal bonds as a cultural goal in their own right.

The closest parallel to the invasion of Napoleon as the centralizing event in the history of the modern Middle East is the invasion of Alexander the Great. In each case the invasion only confirmed a disparity in military power which had been evident for a century or more earlier but had been ignored. In each case the shock of military inferiority created both a desire to resist and a desire to embrace the invader. The invader was destructive, but he was clearly superior. He could only be resisted by embracing whatever was perceived as producing his strength. Alexander achieved the destruction of the cultures of the ancient Middle East because the inhabitants of the area embraced Hellenism as a superior way of life which would produce superior strength. Europe, symbolized by Napoleon, achieved the destruction of traditional Islamic society because the inhabitants of the Moslem countries embraced what they believed to be the aspects of Western culture that would create strength.

In the case of the Middle East in modern times, destruction of traditional social institutions proceeded on many fronts at once and was largely a self-destruction, a voluntary acquiescence to the apparent superiority of Western culture. Everything old was devalued as being bad and backward. The empires that had been the pride of Islam were regarded as oppressive and primitive political entities. There is no need to detail further the progress of these developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Basically, I believe that the Islamic world has received such a shock that any recovery of an independent mode of life cannot be expected until the passage of three or four more generations. Until then one can only observe and lament the successive manifestations of Western cultural imperialism. It took three centuries and more to recover from Alexander the

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Great, and it should take about as long to recover from Napoleon.

Now, the purpose of all of this historical summary, which I would have to expand to book length in order to explain fully, is to let you know from what basis of historical understanding, historical in strictly narrative terms, I approach your analysis of Islamic history. You will see that by ignoring, more or less, the question of means of production, I reached my conclusion that the state is not the dominant factor in Islamic history. As a social historian I regard the caliphate as a fatally weak institution and the later empires as the product of a successful resolution of social inconsistencies, a resolution carried out almost entirely by a social class that was beyond the control of the state. While I would not challenge the applicability of the Marxist schema to European history, I feel that it is an inadequate starting point for Middle Eastern history. None of the Marxist theoreticians has ever had a secure knowledge of Islamic history from which to derive or test a Marxist analysis because the history of Islam as currently written is so distorted by primitive historiographical thinking as to be more a hindrance than a help.

Looking at the history of the Middle East overall, I think that there is a strong synchrony between stages of development in the Middle East and parallel stages in Europe. Harun ar-Rashid was a lot richer than Charlemagne, but the syncretic culture of the caliphate was not too different from that of Alcuin. The commercial revolution that hit Italy in the twelfth century was shared in if not anticipated by commercial techniques in the Middle East. The growth of autonomous city-states centered around a bourgeoisie was paralleled in the eleventh and twelfth centuries by similar developments in the Middle East.

Parallels could be multiplied, but one stands out as being more important than any of the others. That one is a parallel between the factional rivalry among the *'ulama*-patrician class along elitist-populist lines culminating in the triumph of Ash-'arism and organized Sufism and the rivalry within the Christian church which began with Wyclif, Hus, Peter Waldo and the like and culminated in the Protestant Reformation and the

Catholic Counter-Reformation. In both cases similar points were at issue: dominance of the *shari'a* vs. dominance of the Catholic hierarchy, union with God in a direct Sufi manner vs. direct experience of Christ without the mediation of a priest, printing the Bible in vernacular languages vs. writing Sufi poetry in vernacular languages, etc. In both cases, as well, there is a common underlying source for the rivalry which explains why the two developments are roughly synchronous. In each case the social origins of the conflict reflect to a large degree early converts being challenged by later converts for dominance in the religion. The Protestant powers were in northern Europe where the populace at large was converted to Christianity at about the same time the populace of Iran and Iraq were being converted to Islam. The Catholic powers were in southern Europe where Christianity had older roots and where the dominance of the church was situated. It is noteworthy that the only areas of northern Europe to be converted early were Ireland and Gaul which remained in the Catholic camp.

You may not agree with this comparison, but let me develop its implications a bit further. If one accepts the Weberian scheme which focuses upon Protestantism as the generative source for those values that characterized the capitalist bourgeoisie and thus precipitated the Industrial Revolution, my parallel with Middle Eastern developments would suggest that within Ash'arism (no more fatalistic than Calvinism) and Sufism (no more other-worldly than the Anabaptists) there might have been found the seeds from which an Islamic capitalist bourgeoisie could have grown. I believe that this is, in fact, the case (note the aggressive militancy of Safavid Sufism in this period) but that the structure of the Islamic religion prevented this direction from being taken.

Pre-reformation Christianity was authoritarian and hierarchical. Islam, because of the failure of the caliphate and the imamate to achieve clear definition, developed along lines of consensus. As a result, when the great crisis of the eleventh-thirteenth centuries struck both religions, a crisis which split religious opinion into violently opposed factions, the authoritarian Christian ecclesiastical structure was too inflexible to accommodate the ideas of the challenging faction. They expelled the

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Protestants as readily as they had earlier expelled the Arians and the Nestorians, but this crisis was of a much greater order of magnitude and the result was a permanent split in Christianity. Islam, with its consensual structure, endured the period of rivalry and accommodated Ash'arism and Sufism within the faith. What this meant was that from similar ideological bases, which could potentially have developed in similar directions, Protestantism was forced to become combative, militant, and worldly because of the inflexibility of the Christian church while Ash'arism-Sufism were peacefully accommodated within Islam and permitted to develop along more contemplative, fraternal, and communal lines, rarely exhibiting their militant potential. In other words, I would argue that what prevented the development of a capitalistic bourgeoisie in Islam was not state domination of the economy but the organizational structure of the Islamic religion.

Coming down to the modern period, what is most regrettable in modern analyses of Islamic history as a basis for future progress is the rejection of the immediate past centuries. No people can come to grips with its future until it comes to grips with its past. The Salafiya movement goes to absurd lengths to reject the past, but no one seems willing to look at the centuries of Ottoman, Safavid, etc. rule and see in them the apogee of Islamic society. Instead the glories and cultural achievements are revived regardless of the fact that those glories, if such they were, were produced under entirely dissimilar historical circumstances. What made Islamic society great at its apogee was its humanistic concentration upon community and fraternity as cultural values. It is typical of Western ideologies to value individualism above community, but in recent years in this country and perhaps more so elsewhere younger people are beginning to reassess traditional Western values and place community above individualism. If this reassessment were to be carried to sufficient length, it might come about that the West would see that from that particular viewpoint Islamic society between 1500 and 1700 was superior to Western society even if it didn't produce a stronger army in the long run. At the present time, I feel that Western values are progressively dominating the thinking of intellectuals in the Islam-

ic world, even when they believe they are being sharply critical of them, while those same values are being rapidly undermined in the West itself.

Perhaps it is best if I stop here. I am afraid that I have tried to crowd too many ideas into too short an essay, but I am relying upon your understanding of the way historians think to fill in gaps I have left. I am sure you will appreciate that I have not written this as a criticism of your own analysis. I have simply wished to inform you as to my own analysis in the hope that both of us might be aided in our thinking by being exposed to different ideas.

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

madhhabs: juridical schools of Islam.

hanafite: Iraqi juridical school, founded in the 8th century.

mu'tazilite: rationalist current of theological reflection.

Shâfi'ite: juridical school whose founder is Shâfi'i and which gave the words of the Prophet pre-eminence over individual reason.

hanbalite: traditionalist juridical school founded by Ibn Hanbal (9th century) which gave even greater pre-eminence to the words of the Prophet. It played an important role in Baghdad in the 10th century as a spokesman for the masses.

al-Ash'arf: Moslem theologian who tried to conciliate the traditionalist current and the rationalist tendency of the *mu'tazilites*.

Sufism: principal mystical current of Islam.

futuwwa: heterodox secret society based on chivalrous values.

madrasas: official schools having a monopoly on teaching, created by the Saljukids beginning in the 11th century.

shari'a: orthodox Islamic Law.

usûl: foundations of law and of juridical reflection.

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ash'arism: theological system founded by al-Ash'arf, as conciliator between the exigencies of authority and those of reason, which became the official system of Sunnite Islam.

Salafiya: fundamentalist movement of the 19th century which advocated a return to the sources