imam) could never be cut off. The Imamis eventually ruled that the Twelfth Imam had gone into occultation in 874, so that to them as to the Sunnis, religious authority came to rest on fallible scholarly learning, but by then they had developed a different corpus of the hadith and a different law. Both the Zaydis and the Isma'ilis continued to concentrate religious authority in imams in the here and now, with the proviso that there might be periods without such imams (or without such imams in the open) in between.

Even within Sunnism the classical concept of sunna was never unchallenged. Sufis claimed religious authority as saints endowed with supernatural powers rather than book learning, the value of which they sometimes rejected altogether. Scholars, too, might claim to be saints or, more drastically, to be the messiah (Mahdi), thereby endowing themselves with supreme authority that was not normally available. In modern times the very concept of the Prophet's sunna has become an object of debate, with much discussion of the authenticity of the hadith and even outright rejection of it in favor of exclusive reliance on the Qur'an. Some of the most influential thinkers in modern times have been laymen without scholarly training. But the classical distribution of religious authority still prevails.

See also hadith; al-Shafi'i, Muhammad b. Idris (767–820); Sunnism; 'ulama'

Further Reading

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PATRICIA CRONE

Sunnism

Sunnism is the form of Islam to which the majority of contemporary Muslims (close to 90 percent) adhere. In formal terms Sunnism is defined by acceptance of the authoritative nature of the Prophet's sunna (paradigmatic behavior and beliefs) as transmitted through his Companions and by recognition of the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar b. al-Khattab, 'Uthman b. 'Affan, and 'Ali b. Abi Talib), drawn from the Companions, as legitimate caliphs and moral exemplars. By contrast, the Kharijis do not recognize the third and the fourth caliphs, and most forms of Shi'ism do not recognize the first three. The Khariji and Shi'i positions rendered all later caliphs illegitimate, a view once seen as tantamount to the entire community living in sin: a legitimate caliph was required for the performance of public religious duties such as the Friday prayer, the

conduct of jihad, and the execution of certain punishments known as ḥudūd. The Sunnis preferred to differentiate between practical requirements and moral perfection and so adopted less utopian standards for legitimizing a claimant to the office of the caliph, but even these standards were difficult to enforce. The Sunnis thus chose to recognize anyone who seized power as the caliph as long as he was a Qurashi (a member of the tribe of the Prophet), partly to minimize bloodshed and partly to ensure that they would retain some moral hold on the state. Sunnis do not consider caliphs after the first four as moral exemplars, nor were their actions, executive proclamations, or decisions on points of law regarded as having any value as precedents, so their often reprobable behavior did not endanger Islamic norms.

The Sunnis tended to hold that all de facto holders of public power (initially caliphs, thereafter sultans and amirs) were to be obeyed, whether formally legitimate or not and regardless of their mode of government, however unjust, unless they violated God's commands. Resistance, according to the Sunni view, should be passive rather than armed; the martyrdom of individuals was preferable to the large-scale bloodshed and general instability that accompanied revolt. All Muslims eventually came to live under rulers who were technically illegitimate in terms of the stipulations laid down for the caliphate (or, as it is usually called in this context, the imamate). But the Sunnis went further than others in accommodating these rulers, and in so doing they made most of Islamic history their own.

Like other Muslims, however, they lived under unstable regimes, many of them established by the pastoralist tribes that formed a warlike base outside the cities or beyond the borders of the Muslim world. These tribesmen often seized power by invasion (e.g., the Almohads or Almoravids in Andalus, and the Seljuqs, Mongols, and Safavids in the east), or they supplied the bulk of soldiers for existing armies, as free men or slaves, usually monopolizing political and military offices as well, leaving only the bureaucracy and religious affairs in the control of the existing urban elites. Determined though the Sunnis were to domesticate all regimes (as long as they were Muslim) and make them serve the cause of Islam as best they could, their relationship with these regimes was balanced by both cultural and political alienation from them.

Historically the bearers of Sunnism are religious scholars who are in principle learned laymen rather than religious specialists marked off from the laity by special gifts or institutional affiliation, making for a dispersed pattern of religious authority. But keeping the community together is a fundamental Sunni value, and internal disagreement never reached the point of producing enduring schisms.

Religious scholars ('ulama') are authoritative only to the extent that they master the Qur'an and hadith (the mass of short reports recording aspects of the sunna), as studied and interpreted through the sciences devoted to them, most prominent among these being the study of the shari'a. It is their learning, and that alone, which sets the scholars apart from everyone else. In terms of legal doctrine, this means that the ultimate legal authority is vested in the Qur'an

and the hadith (both treated as revelation) rather than in an office or a person endowed with special sanctity, whether by descent or special grace, such as the Shi'i imam or holy men.

It was around 800 that the Qur'an and authenticated hadith reports came to be seen as the sole legitimate source of Islamic legal norms reflective of God's will. The theory is best exemplified in the thought of Shafi'i (d. 820). Although he was motivated primarily by the desire to overcome regionalism, his jurisprudential system denied the political ruler the ability to create Islamic law. Sunni scholars held that the ruler could issue administrative rules and other regulations, but he could not create legal institutions or norms that reflected the divine will. Authorized by his own ability to engage in competent interpretation (*ijtihād*), the ruler could, however, decide which legal rule the courts were to apply when juristic interpretation yielded several legitimate interpretations, as they usually did. In the past, many dynasties used this ability to favor a particular legal school (often the Hanafi).

The *Siyāsa Shar'iyya* Tradition

While Sunni religious scholars were more accommodating of de facto rulers than their Shi'i counterparts, the public law they taught was often impracticable and highly idealized. They made up for this by granting rulers wide authority to make discretionary rules for the sake of public order. The administrative and criminal law generated in this way was deemed to be merely instrumental, devoid of the moral authority of Islamic law. The 14th-century jurists Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn al-Qayyim, however, sought to place this law, and public policy in general, on a firmer moral footing and bring it into the purview of the shari'a by modifying some of the inflexible and impractical rules. The outcome was labeled *siyāsa shar'iyya*, or shari'a-oriented governance. Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim hoped to engender greater cooperation between lay Muslims, religious scholars, and rulers by orienting all of them toward establishing a just society in conformity with a broader vision of the shari'a. *Siyāsa shar'iyya* thus does not represent a reluctant move to accommodate alien rulers but rather an attempt at further integration of society and political elites.

The Rise of the Activists

In the early 20th century, Sunnism saw an unprecedented form of politics: the mass political movement. This is perhaps best exemplified by the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, founded in the late 1920s, to national prominence during the events preceding and following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Abandoning the quietist attitude that had prevailed in much of the scholarly establishment even in the colonial period, and taking advantage of Sunnism's relative lack of formal authority, the Muslim Brotherhood refused to trade legitimacy for patronage by normalizing or accommodating the foreign, non-Muslim occupation of Egypt. Backed by laymen and led by one, Hasan al-Banna, they demanded an immediate end to British presence on Egyptian soil and at the very least a more public display of Islamic symbols and application of Islamic norms, if not the application of the shari'a as the law of the land.

In the aftermath of the end of formal colonial occupation in the late 1940s and 1950s, two Sunni thinkers emerged who were to exert an enormous influence on Islamic political thought: Mawdudi of Pakistan and Sayyid Qutb of Egypt. Both thinkers gave a more concrete form to the amorphous demands of movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Neither was a religious scholar by profession. Mawdudi, though trained in the Islamic sciences at an early age, was a journalist, while Qutb, who worked as a literary critic in his early life, had no formal religious training at all. Unlike medieval Sunni scholars, who tended to have a realistic conception of political possibilities, both thinkers had a utopian streak. Both sought to mobilize all Muslims for the transformation of Muslim society from its present state of Western-inspired decadence and corruption to a state of perfect individual and collective obedience to God's will. In their view, Muslim rulers must actively seek to uphold and implement the shari'a to count as legitimate: mere confessional membership in the Muslim community did not suffice. Mawdudi provided a more detailed account of a government that could count as Islamic than Qutb, who was content to assert that it was only through subservience to God and obedience to Him that human beings could break their servitude to one another. Both, however, stressed that sovereignty belonged to God alone and inferred that rulers whose government failed to accord with His will had to be actively resisted. Qutb advocated open rebellion; Mawdudi did not. Mawdudi further proposed that only God could legislate and that Islam required all Muslims to work actively for the establishment of an Islamic state. Such a state would have a representative institution charged with the function not of legislating but rather of discovering God's law and offering advice to the executive on the best way to implement it. The political programs of many Islamist movements of the 1960s through the 1990s were rooted in Mawdudi's and Qutb's ideas, but the most radical movements of the early 21st century have gone well beyond them by extending the legitimacy of revolt to attacks on the foreign powers that sustain the corrupt regimes of the postcolonial Muslim world. On the other hand, the vast majority of Sunni Islamist thinkers and political movements have categorically rejected Qutb's call for rebellion against illegitimate regimes. These movements tend either to adopt participation in the electoral process to acquire political power or else to channel their energies into the provision of social services for the poor. Recent Sunni Islamist thinkers have also moved away from the idea that belief in God's exclusive sovereignty excludes the possibility of democratic government. The popular religious scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi, in fact, insisted that voting is a perfectly acceptable method for the Muslim community to decide issues relevant to their common good, specifically where there are historical differences of opinion in Islamic law.

See also consensus; hadith; *ijtihād* and *taqlīd*; jurisprudence; shari'a; sunna

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MAIRAJ SYED

Syria

Syria (*Shām*, "the left-handed region," when one faces the rising sun in the Arab heartlands) falls naturally into an eastern mountain range along the Mediterranean with its major cities of Damascus and Aleppo and into a western section with a plain of steppes and deserts. Prior to the Muslim conquest, Syria had been a wealthy Roman province (64–300), with Antioch as its capital, and had continued to flourish in its golden age during the Byzantine period (300–634). Conquered by Muslim Arab forces in 635–36, Syria became the center of the Arab Empire under the Umayyad dynasty, with Damascus as its seat of government (658–750). During the first phase of the Abbasid Empire (750–945), with Baghdad as the seat of the caliph, Syria lost its central position to Iraq, became the principal Muslim province bordering on the Byzantine Empire to its north, was drawn into tribal conflicts between southern and northern Arabs, faced attempts by Muslim rulers of Egypt to extend their hegemony over its territory, and became the theater of competing Sunni-Shi'i influence. During the second phase of Abbasid rule (945–1258), Syria initially experienced a period of renaissance under local dynasties, foremost among them the Shi'i dynasty of the Hamdanids ruling from Aleppo, at the same time coming under the increasing influence of the Isma'ili Fatimid dynasty, which sought to extend itself from its base in Cairo, the capital of its counter-caliphate. With the Sunni revival patronized by the Turkic Seljuq sultans after their takeover of Baghdad in 1055, Syria soon came under the control of Seljuq *atabegs* (tutors), among them the Turkic Zengids of Aleppo and the Kurdish Ayyubids of Damascus. The Ayyubid Saladin brought Fatimid rule to an end in 1171 and defeated the Crusaders at Hattin in 1187, thereby restoring Jerusalem to Muslim control and firmly establishing Sunni rule over Syria.

At the time of the Mongol invasions of the Iranian lands that brought the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad to its end in 1258, the Mamluks succeeded to the rich heritage of the Ayyubids in both Egypt and Syria after having definitively arrested the Mongol advance westward in 1260 at the Battle of 'Ayn Jalut. For its part, Syria flourished under Mamluk rule as a land of prosperity and a center of learning but was dealt a harsh blow by Tamerlane's invasion in 1401, which devastated Aleppo and Damascus. Thereafter

Syria's culture declined, and the country was conquered in 1516 by the Ottoman Turks, who had established themselves in Anatolia and the Balkans and had conquered Constantinople in 1453, renaming it Istanbul and taking it as the capital of their expanding empire. Under the Ottomans, Syria continued for three centuries as a province ruled by Turkish pashas, administrators appointed by the Ottoman sultans, while much of local urban politics was dominated by the powerful influence of prominent Arab families, such as the 'Azms.

Over the centuries, Greater Syria (including the regions of today's Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan) made significant contributions to Islamic culture and civilization out of proportion to its geography and population within the spectrum of the Muslim world. Umayyad caliphs built the first great monuments of Islamic architecture: the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. Syrian Nestorian Christians, foremost among them Hunayn b. Ishaq al-'Ibadi (d. 873), were the principal translators of Greek works of philosophy and science into Arabic. During Abbasid times the great Arab poets Mutanabbi (d. 965) and Ma'arri (d. 1058), the philosopher Farabi (d. 950), and the anthologist of Arabic poetry Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 967) flourished in Aleppo. Ibn 'Asakir's (d. 1175) magisterial history of Damascus and Ibn al-'Arabi's (d. 1240) definitive synthesis of Sufi mysticism were both completed in Damascus. In Mamluk times Damascus produced a plethora of scholars, among them the ideologue Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), the historian Dhahabi (d. 1348), the biographer Safadi (d. 1363), and the exegete Ibn Kathir (d. 1373). In modern times the Academy of Damascus, founded in 1919, and the Arab Academy began an active literary production under the aegis of Arab nationalism.

During World War I the British wrested Syria from Ottoman control with the help of an Arab army, and the five provinces of Syria became a French mandate after the war; the French influence was more pervasive in the region of Mount Lebanon, and France accordingly declared it a separate Lebanese republic in 1926. A year prior, the People's Party was formed to work for Syrian independence and national unity. The outbreak of World War II prevented total independence from being realized, but with the departure of the last French soldiers in 1946, Syria gained full sovereignty and adopted a new civil code in 1949, replacing the Ottoman code of the *Mecelle*. After World War II and articulated in opposition to foreign rule, Arab nationalism emerged as the leading ideology and allowed Syrians of all confessions—Sunni, Shi'i, 'Alawi, Druze, and Christian—to unite against European powers whose colonial presence all over the globe was steadily eroding. This secular and nationalist trend, however, encountered the opposition of grassroots organizations, cultural institutions, and benevolent associations that had developed between the two world wars in several cities in Syria, characterized overall by a strong Islamist trend that sought to combat immoral foreign influence and propagate Salafi religious education. Two movements took the lead in Syrian society: the secularist and nationalist Ba'th Party and the traditionalist and Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. On the political front, military coups followed in rapid succession, one of which established a