

Abstract

This book studies the careers of the descendants of five important religious élite families of the Ḥijāz for the Umayyad and early ‘Abbāsīd periods (40–218 AH). The eponym of each family was among the earliest and most celebrated converts to Islam and each was a viable candidate for the caliphate after the murder of ‘Umar I (d. 23 AH). Yet, though two among them did rule as caliphs in a highly volatile milieu, no direct descendant of theirs was ever able to assume the supreme rule of the Muslim polity after them. What happened to these highly prominent families? This book presents the sociopolitical trajectories of these élite families.

The Arabo-Islamic historiographical tradition not only ignores the sociopolitical history of the early Islamic Ḥijāz, but it also confronts the historian with many insurmountable technical challenges. The problems of the paucity of the desired narrative historiography and the notoriously unwieldy sources can be overcome if provincial history is made to depend on prosopography, i.e. if it is taken to be a history of individuals belonging to identifiable groups. Insofar as they belong to increasingly wider categories—family branch, family, clan, tribe, etc.—that have a diachronic presence, a detailed and reliable sociopolitical history of the Ḥijāz can be reconstructed. This is what this book aims to do in a preliminary way on the basis of the five families.

The body of the book addresses three subjects: (1) the potential use and abuse of Arabo-Islamic genealogies and prosopographies for writing provincial histories; (2) kinship and marriage in early Islamic Arabia generally and, more specifically, the importance of cognate and marital links for social ascendancy and for the creation of quasi-corporate political blocs that cut across tribal and agnatic lines; and (3) the social and political history of the Ḥijāz. As for the last point, in summary, this book shows that, with a few exceptions, ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86 AH) had been able to reconcile with the Ḥijāzī élite by the end of the counter-caliphate of ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr (r. ca. 63–72 AH), plying them, as Mu‘āwiya (r. 40–60 AH) had once done, with gifts and political posts. As his program of centralization became more oppressive in his last years, so too did his relationship with an increasingly disenfranchised Ḥijāzī élite become more strained. By the end of the reign of al-Walīd (r. 86–96 AH), the Ḥijāzī élite had mobilized again, this time forming two blocs—one under the leadership of the Ḥasanīd ‘Alīds and the other under the initial joint leadership of the ‘Abbāsīds, Ḥusaynīds, and Ḥanafīya. It is the movement of these two groups that culminated in the demise of the Umayyads (40–132 AH), after which the élite structures were again reshuffled. In the early ‘Abbāsīd period, the marginalized élite who had once been attracted to the Ḥasanīd bloc were again absorbed into government service in the Ḥijāz. During this time, one also begins to notice the gradually increasing cooperation of the various ‘Alīd lines.