THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

PATRICIA CRONE:
The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism.
xviii, 566 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. £65. ISBN 978 1 107 01879 2.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X13000992

With *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, Patricia Crone journeys to the mountains of the Iranian countryside, where she meets up with village rebels and theological misfits whose ideas conformed neither to Islam nor to Zoroastrian beliefs as recorded in our surviving Pahlavi texts. In the book, she is concerned principally with the eighth–twelfth centuries and with tracing the Iranian response to Muslim colonization, the revolts that followed, and the religious communities behind the revolts.

This book is Crone at her best as a scholar of human history, as she presents religion and ideas about divinity, death, and human society as a major factor in the course and outcome of the social and political changes initiated by the Arab conquests. She positions Iran especially in a Late Antique context, arguing for cultural, religious, and ideological continuities where otherwise diverse socio-political contexts, languages and religious identities might obscure common patterns of change and acculturation (she also bears in mind pre-Islamic Central and South Asian ideas and practices). The book is filled with ideas about Islam, Iran, and Iran's post-conquest experience; so many, in fact, that the density and complexity of its contents resist any attempt at summary in a short review such as this. Still, her most original argument is that a bewildering variety of movements and ideas – e.g. that God dwells in His messengers, that human souls experience reincarnation, or that a woman could be sexually shared by partners – can usefully be categorized under a common label: the Khurramiyya (or Khurramdīniyya). According to Crone, already under the Sasanians Khurramī ideas formed a substratum as "an ancient, widely disseminated set of rural beliefs and practices" (p. 26). At the time of the revolt of Mazdak, in Iraq and western Iran (*c.* 531–40), these did not have a name, although they formed "the substratum to Mazdakism", but in the decades leading up to the ʿAbbasid revolution we have attestations of Khurramism as such, and proof recurs until as late as the twelfth century, in a territory stretching from the mountains of Anatolia to those of Tien Shan, though most densely in the Zagros mountains (the Jibāl). The Khurramī name was often applied polemically to groups that did not call themselves by it, such as the Bāṭinīs, the "White-clothed ones", and so forth. Their religious identity could be ambiguous: there were "Khurramīs who still counted as Zoroastrians" (p. 261).

Crone divides her book into two main parts, the first treating revolts and the second treating "the Religion", i.e. Khurramism. This division into essentially political and religious halves provides her with the space for in-depth discussion of different revolts and for addressing distinct, and thorny, historiographical problems, several relating to outstanding questions for her period (e.g. what was the nature of the ʿAbbasid revolution?). Historians do not often feel at home with theology, nor do they tend to go far beyond orthopraxy. Crone has attempted to do justice to theology and religious practice for rural Iran while also addressing larger questions, such as whether Zoroastrianism should be considered a single religion. She often goes

beyond the hostile polemic of opponents, for example when she explains and contextualizes varieties of Khurramī "wife-sharing" as a "reproductive strategy". The structure of the book can make for challenging reading, however. Crone suggests in the introduction that a reader can peruse the text selectively for particular topics of interest, but this reader finds such a strategy impossible (though researchers on the ʿAbbasid revolution or any of the separate revolts she treats should, from now on, mine her book). Analysis central to her argument sometimes gets buried, as when she defines "nativism" in chapter 8 ("The nature of the revolts") or proposes, well into the second half of the book, that we should think of Zoroastrianism as a religion in plural terms, "along the same lines as the Iranian languages. By historical times there no longer was a single Iranian language, but rather a family of them … Zoroastrianism will similarly have taken the form of a family, subdivided along much the same lines as the languages" (pp. 319–20). The structure also suggests an imperfect attempt to wrestle a complex topic into a narrative, most notably with the third section, "Women and property", tacked on to the end.

Crone's book was justifiably awarded two prizes at the Middle East Studies Association meeting in October 2013: the Albert Hourani Book Award and the Houshang Pourshariati Iranian Studies Book Award. These awards honour Crone's broader achievements in critical and honest scholarship as much as they do the present work as "a study in comparative religion on an immensely learned and broad scale" (Albert Hourani award letter). Several ideas in this book will probably provoke some negative reaction, not least because *The Nativist Prophets*, as much as any of her other studies, displays what Chase Robinson has termed Crone's penchant for "prosecutorial rhetoric" ("Crone and the end of Orientalism", B. Sadeghi *et al.* (eds), *Festschrift for P. Crone* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). Much of this rhetoric involves extremely detailed argumentation that proceeds from, or leads to, broad generalizations, such as her statement that "the confrontation between Islam and Zoroastrianism" pertained to "divine immanence, human reincarnation, the God beyond conceptualization, and the problem of evil" (pp. 455 ff.). Most importantly, specialists (including her own intellectual offspring) may be sceptical about the Khurramiyya/Khurramdīniyya as an epiphenomenon. She tells us the terms that her sources use (e.g., "Muslimiyya", "Khidāshiyya", "Ḥarbiyya", etc.), but it is often hard to understand what the sources upon which she relies, such as Ibn al-Nadīm, really meant when they referred to Khurramism. There are also the cases where Crone uses the label even though she admits that her sources do not. What is one to make of the slipperiness of terms? In this reviewer's opinion, Crone has shown the persistence of a rich mosaic of ideas, and something of a Khurramī label, but has furnished less proof of a Khurramī religious identity, as such. There seem to have been patterns common to the Iranian countryside, but equally a lot of obscure polemic. We would need a more focused theory of transmission to put a name (rather than a label) on the ideas she identifies, and this the sources do not seem to support, despite Crone's deep and wide reading. Another question is whether Crone's conception of Persian Zoroastrianism as a sort of high-church, Pahlavi book Zoroastrianism really stands up, or whether it involves too rigid a polarity. In a related vein, there is the geographic dimension of her analysis, divided in her table of contents into "Western Iran" and "Eastern Iran". "Eastern Iran" (in which she includes Sogdia and Turkestan) is more heavily weighted; the region of Fārs (which Peter Brown once termed "the 'Deep South' of Iranian chauvinism") is excluded. In her text she uses the term "Persians" mostly to refer to the inhabitants of Fārs (see, for example, her index), even though the ethnic sense for her period would extend beyond the province. Should one tell a history

of Iranian "nativism" without serious consideration of Fārs and with little attention to ethnicity as a factor?

None of these comments should detract from the extremely important fact that Crone, in her investigation of the Iranian countryside, has forcefully challenged the way that scholars of Iranian history – focused on urban elites and Iran as sui generis – most often work (see also her persuasive case against seeing Iranian "nationalism" in her period, pp. 160 ff.). In general, the historiography of the Middle East needs more studies dedicated to history outside of cities. Crone's ideas about and assessment of the major historical forces at work in early Islamic Iran should serve as a wake-up call for other scholars to consider the place of early Islamic Iran in world history, ideas as powerful factors of history, non-urban settings, and how Iran's history can, in turn, shed light on other periods and regions.

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JOHN P. TURNER:
Inquisition in Early Islam: The Competition for Political and Religious Authority in the Abbasid Empire.
xvi, 228 pp. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013. ISBN 978 178076164 0.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X13001006

The *miḥna* or "testing" has long been considered a watershed event in an extended contest between the caliphs and the *ʿulamā*' for religious authority. But was it really? Have contemporary scholars accepted a particular account of the *miḥna* and created a modern *isnād* (chain of transmission) which repeats certain assumptions about the *miḥna* without sufficient consideration? In this book, John Turner reassesses the *miḥna* and its place in the religious competition between the *ʿulamā*' and the ʿAbbasid caliphs. He begins by looking at the polemical aspects of defining someone as a heretic or a religious "other". He then turns to accounts of heresy trials that occurred under the Umayyads and during the ʿAbbasid *miḥna*, which he "unpicks" to identify tropes, commonalities and the "layers" of which each account consists. Finally, he contextualizes such trials in relation to other political developments. His stated objectives are to clarify the "social role" of the caliphs with respect to religion and the normativity of caliphal involvement in heresy trials, and thus to question the assumption that the *miḥna* was an anomaly implemented primarily by al-Ma'mūn, and that it was a watershed event in the relationship between the caliph and the *ʿulamā*'.

After introducing the subject and reviewing *miḥna* scholarship, Turner turns in chapter 2 to the issue of heresy by exploring the objectives of doxographers in putting together volumes which defined "heresy", i.e. beliefs outside the range of normative "orthodox" practice. As he elucidates, these works sought to define orthodoxy and thus where the line between inclusion and exclusion into the community lay, with each author claiming centrality for his religious grouping. In this sense, their aim was very similar to that of caliphs when they sought to define and prosecute heresy. Importantly, Turner's discussion flags up the fluidity of orthodoxy at this period which made the process of drawing a line between it and heresy complicated and contested by different parties, including the main players in the book itself, the caliphs, the Ashʿarites and the Hanbalis.