CONVERSION AND CONTINUITY

Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands
Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries

EDITED BY

MICHAEL GERVERS
AND
RAMZI JIBRAN BIKHAZI
The Age of Conversions: A Reassessment

Michael G. Morony

In recent decades there has been a major shift in the consensus on when most non-Arabs in the territory of the early Islamic empire became Muslim. The older view had the majority of non-Muslim non-Arabs converting to Islam within a century of the conquest in order to escape paying the poll tax and was based on taxation figures recorded for Iraq and Egypt. In the case of Egypt this was encouraged by Ya‘qūbi’s conclusion from tax receipts that most of the Christians in Egypt had converted between the reigns of ʿUthmān (644-56) and Muʿāwiyah (660-80). Becker gave the same reason for mass conversion but put the attainment of a Muslim majority in Egypt in the first half of the ninth century. Likewise, the nominal conversion of the majority of pagan Berbers was dated to the early eighth century following the completion of the conquest of North Africa, and the native population of Spain was assumed to have converted quickly after its conquest. The belief in early mass conversions was endorsed by Arnold in spite of the lack of direct evidence.

Extensive critical reexamination of the sources has subsequently led to a revision of this older view and to a later dating of the point at which most non-Arabs become Muslim. The work of Dennett marked a

1 Kremer, vol. 1, p. 172.
2 Ya‘qūbi Buldan, p. 339.
4 Marçais, pp. 35-40.

turning point by convincingly eliminating the desire to escape the poll tax as a motive for early mass conversions. By the 1960’s Hodgson had decided that extensive conversions began under the later Marwānīd Umayyads in the early eighth century and became more general for several generations into the early Abbasid period, by which time most of the urban and much of the rural population of most of the empire "seem to have become Muslims." This had been encouraged by greater equality among Muslims, social mobility, and a wave of self-perpetuating economic expansion that drew rural converts to cities. In the 1970’s Brett reported a consensus that most of the people in Egypt and North Africa had converted to Islam by the ninth century; Lapidus dated the mass conversion of Egyptian Copts more precisely to the middle and later decades of the ninth century, and Bulliet set the completion of the primary conversion process in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq at 1010 and put the conversion of Spanish Christians between 816 and 1105 with the median at about 961. According to Frye the rural population of Iran was converted to Islam in the century between 850 and 950. Bulliet has argued that conversions were minimal in Iran before the mid-eighth century, that forty percent of those who converted probably did so between 770 and 865, that Iran was a Muslim "country" by the early tenth century, and that the conversion process was effectively completed by the beginning of the eleventh century when eighty percent of the population may have been Muslim. Bulliet’s hypothesis and method of analyzing genealogies were adopted by Glick to identify an "explosive period" of conversion in Spain nearly coinciding with the reign of ʿAbd al-Rahmān III (912-61), with Spain eighty percent converted by about 1100. Although he is critical of both Bulliet and Glick, Wasserstein has employed the idea of an "explosive growth in the rate of conversion to Islam" in tenth-century Spain to explain cultural integration. Levitzion has endorsed these views by generalizing that conversion to Islam is not necessarily widespread after military conquest.

The concept of an "age of conversions" has thus survived. Its date has been successively revised downwards and the explanations for it

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7 Denett.
9 Brett, p. 9.
10 Lapidus, pp. 256-57.
13 Bulliet Conversion, pp. 44, 50-51; Bulliet "Emergence," pp. 31, 47. These views are integrated into the text of Kennedy Age, p. 201.
14 Glick, pp. 34-5, 283.
15 Wasserstein, pp. 26, 33, 37, 168, 226.
16 Levitzion Con. Islam, p. 9.
have changed. Although still highly speculative and supported by a host of assumptions, the idea of an "age of conversions" is as legitimate a basis for historical periodization as any other, especially for religious and social history. But in this case there appears to be a fascination with numbers, a concern to establish the point at which "significant" conversion began in numerical terms, and perhaps a Western democratic bias behind assumptions about why it is important to be a numerical majority. Once it had been determined at which point Muslims became a majority, the interest in subsequent conversions seems to have diminished. There may also be semantic problems with calling a religious community a "minority" unless its members were really outnumbered, although "minority" can also imply legal inferiority due to youth. Lapidus was concerned with the process whereby "a predominantly Christian province with a small Arab-Muslim governing minority was converted to a Muslim province with a relatively small Christian minority."17 Bulliet has assumed that in order to be Islamic a society must have an overwhelming numerical preponderance of Muslims that, in turn, encourages the formation of mass-oriented institutions that determine the shape of society.18 But what other choice is there than to evaluate the extent of conversion in numerical terms? It must be admitted that even contemporary observers sometimes noted the relative preponderance of different religious communities.

There is also a tendency to put matters into a temporal sequence by type of sect. For Bulliet the appeal of millenarian movements and Khārijīsm to the lower classes was continued by the Karrāmīyyah and Ismā'īliyyah after Iranian society had become overwhelmingly Muslim.19 According to Frye the timing of the conversion of the Iranian countryside is explained by a change in Islam whereby "political sects" such as the Khārijites and Shi'ites were followed by "doctrinal sects" more concerned with personal commitment, especially the sufi and Ismā'īli movements that emerged "inside the body of legalistic Islam."20 Never mind that the Ismā'īliyyah were Shi'ite or that the career of the sufi Shaykh Kāzarūnī (963-1033) lies outside the dates Frye gives.

Another tendency is to make an historical division between a period of conversion in urban centers followed by a period of conversion by diffusion in the countryside,21 ignoring the fact that sectarian missionaries sometimes sought out remote regions to create constituencies.

17 Lapidus, p. 248.
18 Bulliet Conversion, pp. 2, 40; Bulliet "Emergence," p. 32.
In particular Bulliet's influential hypothesis on the process of conversion in Iran is innovative, speculative, provocative, and intriguing. He proposes a conversion curve based on the first appearance of Islamic names in the genealogies of 469 families from Nishapur and Isfahan.\textsuperscript{22} In spite of sniping about converts adopting false genealogies and Christians with Muslim names in Spain,\textsuperscript{23} Bulliet's results are probably valid for his sample. His results are also highly plausible, attractive and tidy. They have been refined and qualified with consummate sophistication. He admits that the conversion pattern of his sample applies specifically to the urban upper classes. He notes differences in legal system (madhhab) among the descendents of converts who were found to be Ḥanafī or Šafī'ī by the eleventh century. His assumption that conversions were distributed evenly throughout the period of conversion\textsuperscript{24} may only have resulted from plotting a curve on a graph. The interrelationship between conversion and other contemporary developments is strenuously argued. It is left for others to complain that his sample may not be representative of the entire population.\textsuperscript{25} To the extent that he represents his curve as potentially valid for all of Iran as defined by its modern borders, it is useful to remember that his arguments are based mainly on northeastern Iran, that it is unclear whether Central Asia is included or not, and that southern Iran tends to be overlooked. In offering his conversion curve as a hypothesis for other Islamic regions, he takes local differences into account and concedes that the curve might occur at different times in different places. It might be equally productive at some point to establish conversion curves for separate sub-regions within "Iran."

Bulliet's work is significant for other reasons. He neatly sidesteps the issue of mass conversions by tribal societies "since tribes often appear to convert nominally en masse."\textsuperscript{26} Instead, his focus is on "social conversion" by individuals.\textsuperscript{27} Consequently his hypothesis should not be expected to apply to mass nominal conversions, and it would be unfair to use examples of them against him. Among non-Arabs, Turkic and Berber tribespeople are specifically excluded,\textsuperscript{28} but he seems to avoid totally the question of whether tribal Daylamites should be included or not. Arabs are excused, of course, on two counts: (1) the issue is defined as the conversion of non-Arabs, and (2) Arabs were tribal. The development of an Islamic society at Makka, Madina, Kufa, and Basra (one could add Fustat and Kairawan) was delayed for a century or two by

\textsuperscript{22} Bulliet Conversion, pp. 18, 29, 48.
\textsuperscript{23} Wasserstein, p. 226.
\textsuperscript{24} Bulliet Conversion, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{25} Frye "Observations," p. 82.
\textsuperscript{26} Bulliet Conversion, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{27} Bulliet Conversion, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{28} Bulliet Conversion, p. 114.
the existence of a tribal social structure.

At first blush it seems extremely radical to claim that the earliest communities of Muslims were not very Islamic because they lacked the mass-oriented socio-religious institutions that developed in later centuries. It is difficult to swallow the implication that only one kind of society can be Islamic, that *masjids* did not function as popular centers for communal life, that *ribâts* did not provide organization and integration for Muslim communities in frontier regions before sufis reoriented their use, that the early Khârijites did not constitute communities of "true believers", or that personal piety and exemplary behavior were not the foci of an early Islamic identity as law became later. Whatever objections one may have to the way Bulliet has done it, however, it does seem valid and useful to distinguish between the conversion of individuals and the conversion of groups. Might it not also be valid and useful to distinguish between the conversion of children and that of adults, that by women and by men (Bulliet's sample is overwhelmingly male), by captives and by free persons, or between conversion from polytheism to monotheism and that from one monotheistic religion to another?

Bulliet’s work is also significant for eschewing most of the reasons that tend to be given for widespread conversion. Several types of conditions have been offered as favorable to conversion. One is the internal weakness within non-Muslim communities due to corruption, inequality, and sectarian conflict. Others include the similarity of some doctrines and practices, cultural assimilation and the adoption of Arabic speech, and the attractiveness of Islamic military success, rationalism, simplicity, and hope.²⁹ Lapidus has summarized the conditions that reduced the resistance of Copts to conversion as "social restrictions, legal inferiority, Muslim hostility, excessive taxation, and physical insecurity."³⁰ Bulliet would seem to have none of this. Social conversion is represented as depending primarily on social contact between Muslims and non-Muslims. The more Muslims there are, the more likely are non-Muslims to come into contact with them. Conversion is argued to result mainly from previous conversions in a kind of "band wagon" effect. Thus the acceleration of the rate of conversion in Iran in the late eighth century might have occurred without any other factor to encourage it.³¹ However, there manifestly were other circumstances of the sort identified above. So, although Bulliet’s suggestion is plausible, we will never know what might have happened without those circumstances.

²⁹ Arnold, pp. 70-74, 105, 207-08; Frye *Arabs*, p. 126; Frye "Observations," p. 87.
³⁰ Lapidus, p. 260.
³¹ Bulliet *Conversion*, p. 31.
Bulliet does, however, suggest a connection between the formation of sectarian groups of Muslims and the spread of conversion. In spite of the title of his book, Arnold was able to give almost no examples from early Islamic history of efforts by Muslims to convert non-Arabs, although he noted the missionary activity of Isma'iliis among Jews and Christians in addition to that among Muslims in the ninth and tenth centuries.\textsuperscript{32} For this later period, which is now taken to be the age of conversions anyway, Brett suggests that "it might be thought that an important factor in the spread of Islam beyond the original ruling group was the proliferation of rivals in competition with each other for support." He even gives the competition of Ibâdiyyah, Malikiyyah, Isma'iliyyah, Almoravids, and Almohads for local constituencies in North Africa as examples, before retreating from this explanation for conversion.\textsuperscript{33} Bulliet comments that "heterodox Islamic sects have frequently made their strongest appeal to isolated populations previously unconverted or only nominally converted to Islam." His examples include the Zaydiyyah in the mountains of northern Iran, the Isma'iliyyah in the mountains of northeastern Algeria, the Almohads in the mountains of Morocco, and the Nuṣayriyyah, Druze, and Assassins in the mountains of Syria. He also notes the competition between the Hanbalis and the Shi'ites for constituencies in Iraq.\textsuperscript{34} To the extent that several of these populations were tribal, however, Bulliet's curve for social conversion might not be expected to apply. Nevertheless, competitive conversion efforts might be seen as a side-effect of sectarian conflicts among Muslims beginning in the third and fourth decades of the eighth century when Islam began to be spread by sectarian merchants as missionaries and agents who sought to recruit constituencies in border regions such as the Ibâdiyyah in North Africa and the Abbasid agents among Iranians in Khurâsân.

The manner in which Bulliet's hypothesis is developed from the quantitative analysis of biographical dictionaries, the results of which are then related to contemporary events, gives it an aura of autonomy. The text is uncontaminated by references to accounts of conversion in the sources or to scholarship on Islamic history until he is ready to relate his conversion curve to events. It is difficult to believe that he was unaware of such material beforehand, or that the quantitative analysis was performed in a hermetically sealed vacuum. Much of this material would provide grist for his mill. For that reason at least it is worthwhile to consider Bulliet's hypothesis seriously and to do what he urges us to do, that is, to use his hypothesis as a heuristic device, in this case by

\textsuperscript{32} Arnold, pp. 9-10, 211-12.

\textsuperscript{33} Brett, pp. 6-7.

\textsuperscript{34} Bulliet, Conversion, pp. 90, 111. Kennedy (p. 203) makes sectarian divisions a partial result of "increasing numbers of Muslims from different geographical and social backgrounds."
comparing it with impressionistic accounts of conversion in literary sources. Since the conversion curve he developed for Iran is the basis for principles he applied elsewhere, it seems most productive and efficient to confine ourselves to accounts of conversion in Iran.

Before 695 conversion in Iran is expected to have been minimal (2.5% of those who converted). The complaint by the Nestorian catholicos, Isho'yahb III (647-59), in a letter to Simeon, the metropolitan of Rev-Ardashir in Pars, that "many" Christians in Pars and Kirman had converted to Islam to escape paying taxes in spite of the lack of persecution by Arabs is imprecise, but presumably these converts belonged to the minimal number. The evacuation of Zoroastrians from Kirman at the time of the conquest and the settlement of Arabs there provides contiguity between Muslims and Christians in Kirman if not direct evidence of contact. Ištakhrī's account that the Zoroastrians in the mountains of Barīz in Kirman only converted to Islam when the Abbasid dynasty came to power would fit the thesis of later diffusion from urban centers to the countryside. It would also put this group among the 13.5% of early adopters who converted in Iran between 695 and 762. Minimal conversion in Iran before 695 would also include the "many" Zoroastrians who converted to Islam in Sistan in about 666 due to a combination of the justice of the governor and compulsion, and the activity of the Arab settlers at Ardabil who are said to have converted the entire province of Azerbaijan, although perhaps they only subdued it.

Early adopters (13.5% of those who converted) would include the poorer Soghdians of Bukhara who succumbed to the carrot and stick tactics of Qutaybah b. Muslim (governor 705-15), those who were converted by unofficial preaching afterwards, and those who converted en masse at Samargand in the 720's in response to Abū al-Saydā's offer of equality with Arabs and tax relief. That is, unless Soghdians are not Iranian, or such mass conversions are ruled out automatically. More to the point, perhaps, are the 4,000 early adopters converted by al-Jarrāh b. Ṭācordova governor of Khurasan for Īmār b. ʿUmar II (717-20). We are also told that when Bahram Sīsī was marzubān of Merv for Muslim b. Saʿīd between 723 and 738 there were 30,000 recent converts to Islam

36 Baladhuri, pp. 391-92.
37 Ištakhrī, p. 164.
38 ʿTarikh-i Sistan, p. 91.
39 Baladhuri, p. 329.
40 Narshakhi, pp. 47-9.
41 Tabari ʿTarikh 1, vol. 2, p. 1507. This and the following are among the few examples Arnold was able to give.
compared to 80,000 Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews in the vicinity of Merv.\textsuperscript{43} Fortunately, we have been taught not to take such round numbers literally, otherwise we might conclude that converts were 27\% of the adult, male, non-Arab population in the vicinity of Merv by that time. We might also conclude that, if they were 13.5\% of those who converted, there were ultimately over 220,000 converts, and that the remaining 80,000 non-Muslims produced 190,000 later converts.

The 100,000 converts said to have been won to Islam in Farghana and Shash by the exiled Hanafis Abū Muʿādh of Balkh and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Khālid of Tirmidh before 796\textsuperscript{44} look like good candidates for Bulliet's early majority (the 34\% of converts who converted between 762 and 820). But perhaps these regions on the northeastern frontier of Central Asia are too remote to count, or Murjiʿite attitudes favoring nominal conversions associated with the Ḥanāfīs at Balkh\textsuperscript{45} rule them out for that reason. This is too good an example of conversion by Ḥanafīs to have to give it up, but it is not actually said that their converts became Ḥanafī. One hopes that this was not the basis for generalizations that most converts in Iran in the eighth century became Ḥanafī.\textsuperscript{46}

The activities of the Karrāmiyyah may have contributed to the conversion of Bulliet's late majority (the 34\% who converted between 820 and 875). The founder of this sect was Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muhammad b. Karrām (ca. 806-69), a native of Sistan of Arab descent. Exiled by the governor of Sistan, he preached to the peasants and illiterate people of Ghur, Gharchistan, and the countryside of Khurasan. Based at Nishapur, he attracted weavers to his sect; he died in Jerusalem. There appears to be no way of knowing how many (if any) of his followers during his own lifetime were converts to Islam. He may have been responsible for the few Muslims in Ghur in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, but neither Jūrjānī nor Istakhri identify them as Karrāmiyyah. By the tenth century the Karrāmiyyah were strongest in Khurasan, had lodges (khānqāhs) in Merv, Samarqand, Guzgan, Khuttal, and Farghana, and were numerous in the mountains along the upper Oxus. If any of these people were converts, they, and the 5,000 Zoroastrians and people of the Book (ahl al-kīāb) converted by the preaching of the Karrāmī leader at Nishapur, Abū Yaʿqūb Ishāq b. Mahmāshād (d. 993), would belong to the 16\% of laggards who converted between 875 and 1009.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} Tabari \textit{Tārīkh}, vol. 2, pp. 1462, 1688.
\textsuperscript{44} Balkhi, pp. 135-36.
\textsuperscript{45} Madelung "Murjiʿa," pp. 33-6.
\textsuperscript{46} Lévi-Adam \textit{Con. Islam.}, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{47} Bosworth "Karrami.,” vol. 4, pp. 667, 669; Bosworth "Ghar," pp. 120-21, 128-29; Bosworth "Rise," pp. 5, 7.
The importance of social contact appears to be corroborated for the late majority by the anecdote of how the sufi Ahmad b. Ḥarb al-Nisaburi (d. 849) converted his Zoroastrian neighbor, Bahram, along with its themes of religious syncretism, social caring, and doctrinal dispute.48 Baladhuri’s report that Islam became widespread in Central Asia during the reign of al-Mu’tasim (833-42)49 would put these converts among the late majority, but the "many" Zoroastrians in Daylam converted by the Zaydi Naṣir al-Haqq Abū Muḥammad in 873 barely made it.50

When the Zaydi al-Hasan ibn Ḥaḥim al-Uṭrūsh converted most of the Daylamite population of the interior and the Gilite population east of the Safidrūd after 903,51 his converts were already laggards. So were the Gilite population of most of Gilan west of the Safidrūd who were converted by the Hanbali Abū Ja’far al-Thumī of Amul, if this happened in the early tenth century.52 According to Frye the conversion of the isolated villages of the Biyabanak region of central Iran also occurred in about the ninth or tenth century.53

For what they are worth, tenth-century geographers provide imprecise impressions of the extent of the non-Muslim population of Iran. Iṣṭakhri records that in the first half of the tenth century there were more Zoroastrians in Fars than anywhere else, that they were a virtual majority among non-Muslims outnumbering the adherents of any other religion, that there were fewer Christians and even fewer Jews, and that almost every district or village had a fire-temple.54 Taken at face value this says nothing about the relative proportion of Muslims to non-Muslims in Fars. Whether or not Muslims were a virtual majority in Fars by the early tenth century could be argued either way. Muqaddasi reports for about 995 that there were still many Jews, a few Christians and different kinds of Zoroastrians in Khurasan, that there were more Jews than Christians in the Jibāl along with numerous Zoroastrians, and that in Fars Zoroastrians outnumbered Jews while Christians were few.55 According to the Nestorian chronicler Mārī b. Sulaymān "many" Christians in Iran converted to Islam in the late tenth century due to persecution and to the corruption of the clergy.56

49 Baladhuri, p. 431.
52 Madelung “Minor,” p. 209.
54 Iṣṭakhri, pp. 100, 118-19, 139.
55 Muqaddasi Agālim, pp. 323, 394, 439.
56 Arnold, p. 77.
One of the most explicit and useful examples of conversion is provided by the career of Shaykh Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Shahrīyār Kāzarūnī (963-1033). We are told that most of the people around the town of Kazarun, near Shiraz, were Zoroastrians when he arrived, that the mosque he and his followers built in 371/981-82 (he would have been nineteen years old) had to be enlarged twice, first by twenty bays (hars) and then by one hundred, to accommodate the increase in his Muslim followers due to the conversion of all sorts of people, that in his time Muslims came to outnumber Zoroastrians in the region of Kazarun, and that by the time he died 24,000 Zoroastrians and Jews had converted to Islam including four free women and several girls who helped in his ribāt.\footnote{Mahmud, pp. 10-11, 27-31, 154-55, 182, 197, 416, 485. This appears to be the only example in which conversions are actually said to have made Muslims a majority.} The first thing to say is that whatever happened in Kazarun is not evidence for the rest of Fars. Otherwise, nothing prevents the pattern of conversion in Kazarun from 982 until 1033 from following Bulliet’s conversion curve, and it is worth noting that once Muslims out-numbered Zoroastrians, Shaykh Kāzarūnī gathered an army and led it against the border with the unbelievers.\footnote{Mahmud, p. 197.} Nevertheless, his 24,000 converts were either among the laggards in Iran or even among those who converted after 1009.

By contrast the conversion of Ghur by the Karrāmiyyah in the early eleventh century is based on inference. Ghur had remained non-Muslim until the early eleventh century when the people became Muslim under Ghaznavid occupation. When the Karrāmi rulers of Ghur adopted other forms of Islam in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, their subjects are said to have always previously belonged to the Karrāmi sect.\footnote{Bosworth “Ghur,” pp. 119, 127-30.} If the people of Ghur really did convert in the early eleventh century, they would have been later than the laggards.

A conversion pattern based on these impressionistic accounts would be episodic rather than smooth, but, then, the style of the literary sources is episodic.\footnote{The information in these sources is no less reliable than that in the biographical dictionaries used by Bulliet; that is, both types of source have similar limitations, and the information from one does not necessarily invalidate the information from the other. Nevertheless, as a single conversion curve for all of Iran, Bulliet’s hypothesis does not appear to work for Kirman, Fars, Daylam, the poor Soghdians of Bukhara, or for people in remote rural or mountainous regions.} The information in these sources is no less reliable than that in the biographical dictionaries used by Bulliet; that is, both types of source have similar limitations, and the information from one does not necessarily invalidate the information from the other. Nevertheless, as a single conversion curve for all of Iran, Bulliet’s hypothesis does not appear to work for Kirman, Fars, Daylam, the poor Soghdians of Bukhara, or for people in remote rural or mountainous regions.

With regard to the consequences of conversion, Bulliet argues that the position of Muslims relative to the followers of other religions
changed in favor of Muslims.\textsuperscript{60} It would be difficult to deny that conversions contributed to such a change, but other factors such as demographic replacement might have helped. The slaughter of pagan Berbers in the vicinity of Kairawan by the Aghlabid, Ja'far b. Khazar (841-48)\textsuperscript{61} had nothing to do with conversion, but certainly contributed to such a change. So did the suppression of revolts by non-Muslims by eliminating the people least likely to convert. In some cases mass conversions appear to have followed the suppression of such revolts.\textsuperscript{62} Both Becker\textsuperscript{63} and Lapidus\textsuperscript{64} appealed to the account of al-Kindī reported by Maqrīzī that after the last of the Coptic rebellions was suppressed in 832 it was followed by the settlement of Arabs in rural Egypt and by the mass conversion of Copts. But Becker made this the culmination of a period of conversion, while Lapidus made it the beginning. The impression of a change in the relative numbers of Muslims and non-Muslims may also be due to different rates of reproduction that resulted in differential demographic growth over several generations or even centuries.\textsuperscript{65}

But numerical preponderance may be less significant for social predominance than the ability of the Muslim population to assimilate non-Muslims through conversion. Although there appears to be a connection between assimilation and conversion, opinions have differed over whether assimilation was a cause or a consequence of conversion. For Arnold, cultural assimilation encouraged conversion.\textsuperscript{66} For Wasserstein, conversion contributed to the assimilation of Andalusians into a common "ethnic" identity.\textsuperscript{67}

Buten has also argued that the weakening of centralized government and growing local autonomy tend to occur after the midway point on the conversion curve, because the conversion of the majority to Islam meant that non-Arab armies could be recruited locally and so created a feeling that Islam was safe from non-Muslim threats.\textsuperscript{68} Frye turns this around by saying that the end of the fear that Islam could be overthrown by non-Muslim minorities encouraged mass conversions.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{60} Bulliet \textit{Conversion}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{61} Norris, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{62} For Ḥishāb, see Frye \textit{Arabs}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{63} Becker \textit{Beiträge}, vol. 2, pp. 120-21, 135.
\textsuperscript{64} Lapidus, pp. 256-57.
\textsuperscript{65} Arnold, pp. 79, 81.
\textsuperscript{66} Arnold, pp. 70-74.
\textsuperscript{67} Wasserstein, pp. 55, 237-38.
\textsuperscript{68} Bulliet \textit{Conversion}, pp. 46-7, 85, 128-29; Bulliet "Emergence," p. 35. See also Kennedy \textit{Age}, pp. 202-03.
\textsuperscript{69} Frye "Observations," p. 87.
Either way this assertion of an attitude is pure speculation without the
corroboratation of a statement by a contemporary. It is also made with the
advantage of hindsight. This may work for Iran, but Muslims turned out
not to be very safe from non-Muslims in northern Syria, Spain or Sicily.
It would just be as plausible to suggest that widespread conversion was a
consequence of political autonomy as that it was a cause.

Another consequence of conversion, according to Bulliet, was the
development of factionalism in Iran between the descendants of earlier
and later converts.70 Apart from the way that this seems to be a
generalization based on Hanafi and Shāfī’i factions at Nishapur from the
mid-tenth century, he seems to assume that converts joined a particular
Islamic legal system (madhhab) in the eighth and ninth centuries.
Although these legal systems indeed began to be formed in the eighth
and ninth centuries and came to be named after major legal scholars who
lived then, and although Hanafi and Hanbali scholars engaged in efforts
at conversion in Iran, popular identification with a madhhab appears to
have been an eleventh-century development.

Bulliet’s argument goes further, however, to suggest that mass-
oriented Muslim institutions developed out of conflict among the Sunni
legal systems from the tenth through the twelfth centuries.71 The
contribution of the conversion process to factionalism thus becomes a
one-dimensional “cause” of institutional development. It would be just
as plausible to argue for a more general atmosphere of sectarian
competition, including the Karrāmiyyah, Zaydiyyah, and Ismā’iliyyah,
in the development of successful institutions. If we want to relate
conversion to institutional development, we could also say that converts
brought a background of communal institutions with them, but then it
would be necessary to identify what their former institutions were and
show how Islamic institutions resembled them. It is just as likely that
the breakdown of order as the Islamic empire fell apart created
circumstances that encouraged the development of grass roots socio-
religious institutions.

In general, by presenting widespread conversion as the “cause” of a
range of other contemporary developments, relationships tend to be
asserted rather than demonstrated. Conversion could equally have been a
consequence. Other contemporary developments could have been
coincidence, and what is ascribed to conversion might have been
“caused” by something else. If there was an “age of conversions” in Iran,
Bulliet’s hypothesis does not appear to describe it adequately. Outside
of his own sample the process seems to have been less than evenly

70 Bulliet Conversion, pp. 61-2, 128-29; Bulliet “Local,” pp. 38-40. His suggestion that later
converts became Ash’arīs in the ninth century is anachronous.
71 Bulliet Conversion, p. 62; Bulliet “Emergence,” p. 36.
distributed, remote regions were not necessarily converted after major cities, and there appears to have been a greater degree of conversion in some places at the beginning and end, in the seventh and tenth centuries, than his curve would suggest. Nor was conversion the only way in which Muslims became a majority; demographic replacement through emigration, massacre, and different rates of reproduction contributed to the change. The proper use of a heuristic device is to test a theory in order to revise it, not to spin out its implications. The latter is an empty exercise if its basis is flawed.

The purpose of this exercise has not been to stake out a minimalist position but to clarify the difference between "evidence" and "argument" and to identify some of the bases for generalizations. If we do not wish to be blind sages examining an elephant, how do we treat apparent contradictions or conflicting information? When two pieces of "evidence" are contradictory we can say that one or both are mistaken. We can say that one or both are exceptions. We can say that both "really" mean something else. We can say that neither is actually about the same thing (i.e. they are apples and oranges). Or we can accept the contradiction. But, in that case, we might want to explain it, perhaps by using one to qualify the other.

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Dennett

Dozy

Frye Arabs

Frye "Biyabanak"

Frye "Observations"

Glick

Hodgson

Isho'yab
Istakhri  

Kennedy Age  

Kremer  

Lapidus  

Levtzion Con. Islam  

Madelung “Minor”  

Madelung “Murji’i’a”  

Mahmud  

Marçais  

Mas’udi Muruj  

Muqaddasi Aqalim  

Narshakhi  

Norris  

Saʿd  

Tabari Tarikh 1  

Tarikh-i Sistan  
Wasserstein


Ya'qubi *Buldān*