

Social Contexts of Rebellion in the Early Islamic Period

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The proposed project will study social contexts of rebellion in the early Islamic period, from the reign of 'Abd al-Malik (c.692-705 CE) until the defeat of the last major 'Alid revolts in c.815-816 CE. This 'long 8th century CE' (692-816 CE) saw a high frequency of rebellions across the entire Islamic Empire. The research group will focus on four categories of revolt: *ashrāfi* rebellions, led by tribal notables (*ashrāf*); revolts that made claims to power in the name of the family of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE); Khārijite rebellions; and non-Muslim/mixed rebellions, the case study consisting of three Armenian revolts. The project's scope is limited to the empire's central lands; regions like Transoxania or North Africa are outside its purview.

Scholarship on rebellion in this period is surprisingly scarce, and much of what there is emphasizes its religious aspects. Many studies thus analyse rebels and revolts in the framework of heterodoxy, martyrdom, and millenarism; the social contexts of rebellion remain poorly understood. In contrast, the underlying premise of the proposed project is that religion constitutes only one among many markers of identity and (thus) only one among many factors that influence social action, here participation in rebellion. The research group will therefore investigate the selected rebellions in the period of study specifically with regard to their socio-political and economic dimensions.

The project pursues three main objectives: i) improving our understanding of rebellion in the 8th century CE by liberating it from the primacy of religion, also through the inclusion of non-Muslim/mixed revolts; ii) creating a typology of rebellion in the early Islamic period that responds to the lack of a theoretical underpinning of Islamicist discourse on revolt; and iii) advancing a more nuanced picture of early Islamic society, its social strata and inter/intra-communal relationships, which also includes the (changing) mechanisms and processes of power distribution. The focus on a 'long 8th century CE' allows for a diachronic analysis that tracks (changing) patterns of rebellion independent from common periodization, i.e. the separation of the 8th century CE into an Umayyad (pre-750 CE) and an 'Abbāsīd (post-750 CE) period, which is unsuited for the study of long-term developments.

The project operates on two levels: individual case studies conducted by team members are intended to shine a new light on the social composition and (thus) motivation of particular revolts, with ramifications for the broader contexts in which these were situated. The critical comparison of these studies over the course of the project will enhance our grasp of the macro level of rebellion in the early Islamic period. In sum, while religious dimensions of revolt can and will not be disregarded, the planned project will lead to a more complex and profound understanding of why and how people in the early Islamic period chose to engage in rebellion.