

Technical Terms

Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History

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Adhān: The call to prayer pronounced loudly to indicate that it is the hour of prayer.

Ahkām: “Orders”. According to Islamic Law, there are five kinds of orders: 1) obligatory (*wājib*) 2) order without obligation (*mustahab*) 3) forbidden (*muharram*) 4) disliked but not forbidden (*makrūh*) 5) legal and allowed (*halāl*).

Ahl al-Bayt (People of the House) refers to the Family of the Prophet Muhammad. *Ahl al-Bayt* appears twice in the Qur’ān (XI: 73 and XXXIII: 33).

Ahl al-Kitāb (People of the Book): people who have received revealed scriptures. The Qur’ān refers explicitly to the Jews, Christians, Sabians, and Magians (*Majūs* i.e. Zoroastrians).

Ahl al-hadīth: the traditionalists who emphasized *hadīth*(s) as the primary source for interpreting the Will of God.

Allāh Akbar: Allāh is the Greatest.

Amāna: The trust or the moral responsibility including all the duties commanded by God. The Shī’ites interpret the trust, mentioned in the Qur’ān (XXXIII: 72), as referring to the *Walāya* of ‘Alī.

Amīn: Amen meaning O God accept our invocation.

Amr: Divine Command.

Ansār (helpers): The Companions of the Prophet from Madīna who embraced Islam and helped the Muslim emigrants from Makka and other places.

‘Aql: intellect.

Al-‘Aql al-Fa’‘āl: The Active Intellect who is the Tenth Intellect (Archangel) in Avicenna’s theory of creation.

‘Ashūrā’: The 10th of the month of Muharram (the first month in the Islamic calendar) when Shī’ites commemorate the massacre of Imām Husayn at Karbalā’.

Awsiyā’: Plural of Wasī (Inheritor).

Ayāt: Proofs, evidences, verses, signs, revelations, etc.

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Badr: A place about 150 kilometers to the south of Madīna, where the first great battle in Islamic history took place between the early Muslims and the Quraysh.

Bātin: is the esoteric or inner meaning of the Qur'ān.

Bay'a (pledge): a pledge of obedience given by the citizens to the Prophet or the Imām.

Bid'a: heresy (or any innovated practice in religion).

Burāq: an animal bigger than a donkey and smaller than a horse on which the Prophet went for the *mi'rāj*.

Caliphate: the Muslim State.

Dayyān: Allāh; it literally means the One Who judges people from their deeds after calling them to account.

Dhikr: remembrance of God or invocation of a Divine Name. For the Sufis, *dhikr* is a form of meditation or spiritual method of concentration to get closer to God.

Dhimmī: A non-Muslim living under the protection of an Islamic government.

Diya (Diyāt plural): blood-money (for wounds, killing etc.), compensation paid by the killer to the relatives of the victim (in unintentional cases).

Fadak: a town near Madīna.

Fajr: dawn or early morning before sunrise, or morning prayer.

Falsafa: Islamic philosophy is an attempt to harmonize Islamic revelation (*wahy*) and philosophy (*falsafa*). Its main sources are the Qur'ānic revelation and the Hellenic heritage.

Fanā' fī Allāh: complete extinction in God which is the objective of many Sufis.

Faqīh: a learned man who can give legal verdicts.

Fātiha: the first Sūra of the Qur'ān.

Fayd (emanation): many Islamic philosophers explain that the creation emanated directly from God as the rays emanate from the sun.

Fiqh (jurisprudence): is the science of law which means "understanding." This science deals with observances of ritual and social legislation. The Sunnis have four schools of jurisprudence. The Shī'ites have their own schools.

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Fuqahā': the scholars of law.

Ghazwat al-Khandaq: the name of a battle in which the Muslims dug a Khandaq (trench) around Madīna to protect the city.

Hanīf: the one who adheres to pure Islamic monotheism (worshipping God alone and nothing else).

Harām: unlawful, forbidden and punishable from the viewpoint of religion.

Hawāzin: a tribe of Quraysh.

Hijra: the emigration of the Prophet from Makka to Madīna (Yathrib) in 622 which marked the first year of the Islamic calendar.

Hirā': a well-known cave in a mountain near Makka.

Hadīth(s): the statements of the Prophet i.e. his sayings and deeds.

Hadīth Qudsī: holy tradition where God speaks directly.

Hajj: pilgrimage to Makka.

Halal: lawful.

Hubal: the name of an idol in the Ka'ba in the pre-Islamic period of ignorance.

Hudaibiya: a well-known place ten miles from Makka.

Hudūd (plural of hadd): Allāh's boundary limits for *halāl* (lawful) and *harām* (unlawful).

Hukm: a judgment of legal decision (especially of Allāh).

Ibdā': act of primordial origination performed by the Originator (*Badī'*) i.e. God.

Īd al-adhā (the feast of the sacrifice) consists of a four day festival of Muslims starting on the tenth day of Dhū al-Hijja (month). The feast is a commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Ishmael who at the last minute was replaced by a ram. On this occasion a communal prayer is performed and afterwards an animal is sacrificed.

Īd al-fitr (the feast of breaking of the fast): the three day festival of Muslims starting from the first day of Shawwal, the month that follows Ramadān. *Fitr* literally means "breaking the fast."

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Ihrām: a state, during the *hajj*, in which one is prohibited to practice certain deeds that are lawful at other times. It also refers to the costume the pilgrim wears.

Ihsān (excellence): the highest level of perfection. The Prophet explained *ihsān* as having arrived at a state where you “worship God as if you saw Him.”

Ijmāʿ: consensus of the religious authorities (‘*ulamā*’).

Ijtihād: individual thought applied to questions that are not covered in the Qurʾān and the *sunna*.

Imām: the person who leads others in the prayer or the Muslim Caliph (or ruler). For the Shīʿites, this term often refers to the Successors of the Prophet i.e. the direct descendants of ʿAlī and Fātima.

Imāma: the office of the Imām (leader of the Muslim State). For the Shīʿites, *Imāma* is equivalent to *Walāya* the sacred mission of Imāms (direct descendants of ʿAlī) in the spiritual and material guidance of believers. It refers to the “holy power” given to the Imāms through Divine election.

Imān: faith, belief.

Al-Insān al-Kāmil: the Perfect Human Being is used in reference to Prophets or very exceptional human beings.

Isrāʾ: the night journey of Prophet Muhammad from Makka to Jerusalem.

Jāhiliyya: the pre-Islamic period of ignorance.

Jihād: derives from the root *jahada* meaning “to strive or to exert oneself” toward some goal. The Prophet used to distinguish between the “little struggle” (*al-jihād al-asghar*) against the enemy and the “great struggle” (*al-jihād al-akbār*) against our own lower selves.

Jinn: a creature created by Allāh from fire in contrast to angels who are created from light.

Jizya: tax imposed on non-Muslims living under the protection of an Islamic government.

Haqīqa Muhammadiyya (Muhammadan Reality): the Prophetic *Logos* or Light of Muhammad which encompasses all the Light of previous Prophets.

Kaʿba: a square stone in the great mosque of Makka towards which all Muslims turn their faces in prayer.

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Kāfir: an infidel who rejects the Divine Revelation.

Kalām: means speech in Arabic. Some verses of the Qurʾān (II: 75; IX: 6) contain the expression Kalām Allāh (Word of Allāh), which is very similar to the Greek term *Logos*. The term is also used to refer to *ʿilm al-kalām* meaning: “the science of dialectical theology” that establishes the doctrine of various schools such as the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites.

Karbalāʾ: is a town in ʿIraq where the grandson of the Prophet, Husayn, was massacred in 61/680 by the troops of the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd.

Khalīfa (Caliph): the Imām or the Muslim ruler.

Khawārij: the people who dissented from the religion and disagreed with the rest of the Muslims.

Khutba: religious sermon.

Kūfa: a town in ʿIraq.

Kufr (“disbelief”): the state of being an infidel (*kāfir*).

Lāt: well-known idol in Hijāz which used to be worshipped during the pre-Islamic period of ignorance.

Laylat al-Qadr (the Night of Power): one of the odd last ten nights of the month of fasting (i.e. Ramadān), it is described in the Qurʾān as better than one thousand months, therefore those who worship God during this specific night will receive an immense spiritual benefit. See the Qurʾān Sūrat XCVII: 1-5].

Madīna: well-known town in Saudi Arabia, where the Prophet’s mosque is situated.

Makrūh: undesirable from the point of view of religion, although not punishable.

Mamlūk: a male slave.

Maqām Ibrāhīm: the stone on which Abraham stood while he and Ishmael were building the Kaʿba.

Maʿrifa: gnosis, saving knowledge, enlightenment.

Marwa: a hill in Makka, neighboring the great mosque of Makka.

Masjid: mosque.

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Ma'sūm: infallible, sinless.

Mawlā: a Master or Lord.

Mina: a place outside Makka on the road to 'Arafat. It is five miles away from Makka and about 10 miles from 'Arafāt.

Mi'rāj: the ascent of the Prophet to the heavens.

Muhkam: Qur'ānic verses the order of which is not abrogated.

Mu'adhdhin: A call-maker who pronounces the *adhān* loudly, calling people to come to pray.

Mujtahid (one who strives): religious scholar who has the capacity to apply his individual thought to questions that are not covered in the Qur'ān and the *sunna*.

Munāfikīn (the disaffected or the hypocrites): a party in Madīna that pretended to be sympathetic to Islam but in fact they were supporters of the Quraysh of Makka.

Mutakallimūn: Islamic theologians.

Mutashābihāt: Qur'ānic verses which are ambiguous and difficult to understand.

Nass: the designation of a Successor.

Qadar: Divine Pre-Ordainment.

Qādī: judge.

Qā'im al-Qiyāma: the Lord of Resurrection who, at the end of time, will unveil the inner meanings of all revelations.

Qibla: the direction in which all Muslims turn their faces in prayers and that direction is towards the Ka'ba in Makka (Saudi Arabia).

Qiyās: reasoning by strict analogy; deduction based on the Qur'ān and the *hadīth(s)*.

Quraysh: one of the greatest tribes in Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad belonged to this tribe, which had great powers religiously and financially.

Qutb: Pole of the creation referring to the Perfect Human Being.

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Raka'āt: the prayer of Muslims is divided into four units that consist of one standing, one genuflection and two prostrations.

Ramadān: The month of fasting. It is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet during the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*).

Sadaqa: the voluntary giving of alms.

Safā and Marwa: two hills at Makka neighboring the great mosque of Makka to the east. One who performs *hajj* should walk seven times between these two hills.

Salāt: obligatory prayers performed five times a day.

Saum (fasting) implies not eating or drinking from sunrise till the sunset.

Shahāda: Muslim profession of faith which implies to testify: “*Lā ilāha illā Allāh* (There is no god but God!)” and “*Muhammad Rasūl Allāh* (Muhammad is the Messenger of God).” To these statements the Shī'ites had “*‘Alī Amīr al-mu’minīn ‘Alī Allāh* ‘Alī the Prince of believers comes from God.”

Sharī'a (religious law): “way” or right path of action; an all-embracing sacred law revealed by God in His Divine Commandments for the guidance of humanity.

Shirk: polytheism or worshipping other gods along with Allāh.

Shūrā: consultation.

Siffīn (battle of): a battle that took place between ‘Alī’s followers and Mu’āwiya’s followers at the Euphrates River in ‘Iraq.

Sunna: the spoken and acted example of the Prophet.

Sūra: a chapter of the Qur’ān.

Tabula secreta (secret Tablet): this expression in Latin refers to the Qur’ānic expression *Lawh-i mahfūz* (guarded Tablet).

Taqiyya: the term is derived from *waqā* which means “to guard or protect against something.” It means to dissimulate one’s faith in period of danger.

Taqwā (Fear of God): the root of *taqwā* is *waqā* which means “to guard or protect against something.” The Fear of God is an attitude of gratitude and respect. It involves caution and prudence in the sense that a believer does not want to displease God in all his actions.

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Tarīqa: means spiritual path, following a method of spiritual practice often embodied in a Sufi order.

Tawhīd (Unity of God): the central doctrine of Islam which consists in acknowledging the Unity of God.

Ta'wīl: spiritual exegesis consisting in unveiling the first intended inner meaning of revelation.

Tanzīl: the sending down from Heaven of the literal revelation.

Uhud: a well-known mountain in Madīna. One of the great battles in the Islamic history took place at its foot. This battle is called *ghazwa Uhud*.

'Ulamā': plural of *'alīm* meaning religious authorities.

Umm al-Kitāb (Mother of the Book) refers to Qur'ānic verses (III: V) that are clear.

Umma: Muslim community.

Usūl al-fiqh: principles of jurisprudence. For the Sunnīs, they are: the Qur'ān, the sunna, *ijmā'*, and *qiyās*.

'Uzzā: well-known idol in Hijāz which used to be worshipped during the pre-Islamic period of ignorance.

Walāya: is the office of the *Awliyā'* (the Friends of God). For the Shī'ites, it is the sacred mission of Imāms (direct descendants of 'Alī) in the spiritual and material guidance of believers. It refers to the "holy power" given to the Imāms through Divine election.

Walī [plural *Awliyā'*]: Friend, Guardian, spiritual Master, etc.

Waqf: religious endowment.

Wasī: Inheritor of the Prophet.

Wasiyya: Will or testament.

Wazīr: the prime minister who administered the government for the Caliph.

Yathrib: one of the names of Madīna.

Zāhir is the exoteric or outer meaning of the Qur'ān.

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Zakāt: the obligatory alms given to the poor.

Zamzam: the sacred well inside the grand mosque of Makka.