CHAPTER FIVE

THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF THE MUSLIM FRIDAY WORSHIP

The idea of a weekly day of rest is taken for granted by modern man. It appears to him so natural that he is hardly aware of the fact that it was largely founded on essentially religious, rather than rational, conceptions; that it took hundreds of years of severe, sometimes abstruse, practices to put it into effect even within the Jewish community, in which it originated; and that this legacy of Judaism in Christianity was adopted by the major part of humanity only in the wake of modern social legislation.

Likewise, it is not always realized that Friday, the Muslim weekly holy day, is essentially different from the Jewish Sabbath or the Christian Sunday. It is not at all a day of rest, but one of obligatory public worship, held at noon, the most characteristic part of which is a sermon consisting of two sections.

Therefore, on inquiring into the origin and nature of the Muslim Friday worship, it would not be correct to assume that the founder of Islam merely followed the example of the other religions, although it was certainly natural for him and his successors to do so with

1 Recently, various Muslim states have made Friday an official day of rest. However, this was done in response to the exigencies of modern life and in imitation of Western precedent. It is significant to note in this respect that Kemal Ataturk's Turkish republic made Sunday, and not Friday, its official weekly day of rest, cf. also below p. 125. To be sure, sporadic cases of closing the Government offices on Friday occurred also in the times of the Caliphs. Thus the Caliph al-Mu'tadid is reported to have ordered to close the offices on Friday and on Tuesday, "on Friday, because it was the day of prayer and because he loved that day, since his tutor used to free him on Friday from his lessons; and on Tuesday, so that the officials would have time to rest and to look after their own affairs." A. Mez, Die Renaissance des Islams, Heidelberg 1922, p. 79. Al-Jahshiyarî, Kitiib al-Wuzara p. 141, reports that the Government offices were closed on Thursday and Friday.

A query submitted to Moses Maimonides around 1190 speaks of Jewish and Muslim silversmiths and glassmakers forming partnerships. The Muslims received the gains made on Saturday and the Jews those made on Friday, obviously because the Muslims did not work on that day; cf. below p. 270.

It is most characteristic for the Muslim conception of the weekly day of worship that out of these ancient usages there developed no general day of rest.
regard to certain aspects of the holiday. Thus an ancient tradition has the Muslims say: "The Jews have every seventh day a day when they get together (for prayer), and so do the Christians; therefore, let us do the same."!

As might be expected, there exists no authentic and complete account of the establishment of this most important institution of Islam in the ancient sources. The only passage of the Koran which refers to it (see below), supposes it to be already in existence. On the other hand, the various reports about its beginnings by Muhammad's Muslim biographers, such as Ibn Sa'd and Ibn Hisham, or found in the compilations of Hadith, or oral tradition, are only too patently tendentious and highly contradictory. ²

Nevertheless, a number of facts about the origin of the Friday service emerge clearly from those accounts: (I) There was no Friday service in Mecca, the caravan city in which Muhammad began his prophetic career. Tabari, in his Annals, part I, p. 1256, l. 20, says so expressly, while all the other sources confirm this fact by implication." (2) Public worship was held by the new Muslims, at their own initiative, in Medina even before Muhammad arrived there in 622 and made it his permanent domicile, but it was Muhammad who ordered that it should be held regularly on Friday. (3) Some sort of address (rather than sermon) used to be made at that gathering, although the ancient sources do not contain any reliable information as to the regularity and contents of those speeches.' (4) The ancient accounts of the establishment of the Muslim weekly holiday indicate only one connection between it and that of the preceding religions: the instruction given by Muhammad to his representative in Medina

1 Al-Qastallani II, 176, ult., quoted by A. J. Wensinck, Mohammed en de laden te Medina, Leiden 1908, eXII. The part of Wensinck's study which deals with the borrowings of the Muslim from the Jewish cult has been translated from Dutch into French by G. H. Bousquet and G. W. Bousquet-Mirandolle, under the title "L'influence juive sur les origins du culte musulman" in Revue Africaine 98 (1954), 85-112.

² These reports have been studied by Wensinck in his thesis, quoted in the previous note and discussed thoroughly by C. H. Becker in his study of the development of the Muslim worship, Islamstudien I, 476 ff. (published previously in Der Islam 3 (1912), 374-399). Cf. also Franz Buhl, Das Leben Mwhammeds, Leipzig 1930, 214-5, and W. Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Medina, Oxford 1956, 198.

³ That a late author should depict Muhammad as preaching to his tribesmen in Mecca, on that day, of course, is of no consequence. Cf. Lîzân al-tArab, 1300 H, II, 82-83 s.v. 'rb. See also below page 117.

⁴ The material about this question has been collected and discussed by A. J. Wensinck in the article Kbutba in Ell.