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The place and role of the “farewell sermon” in the regulation of interethnic relations in the Islamic world

Maksat Baizak*
Department of Religious Studies
Nur-Mubarak University
050060, 73 Al-Farabi Ave., Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan
baizakmaksat09@gmail.com

Mukhan Issakhan
Department of Religious Studies
Nur-Mubarak University
050060, 73 Al-Farabi Ave., Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

This study addresses the reconstruction of the original religious and legal principles that facilitated the transformation of fragmented tribal society in seventh-century Arabia into a model of multi-ethnic integration. The relevance of the topic was determined by the need for reconstruction of original religious-legal norm to transform the Arab fragmentary tribalism into a model of multi-ethnic integration. The study aimed to determine what the normative core of the “Farewell Sermon” was and what role it played in the formation of mechanisms for supratribal social integration in the early Muslim community. The research was conducted through the contextual, comparative-historical, and textual analysis of three main source domains: homiletic (the “Farewell Sermon”), legal (the Constitution of Medina), and diplomatic (six letters of the Prophet), with a correlation with narrative and historiographic data on the social structure of early Islam. The results of the research revealed that in the Arabia of the 7th century there was a fragmented tribal, Jewish, and Christian society with no universal rules of interaction between groups. In this situation, the “Farewell Sermon” proclaimed several universal provisions: equality of people irrespective of their origin, individual responsibility instead of collective punishment, protection of vulnerable groups, rejection of ethnic superiority, and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Comparison with the Constitution of Medina led to the conclusion that these principles were transformed into legal norms for the unity of ummah, collective security, and contractual autonomy of religious communities. Analysis of the texts of diplomatic letters made it possible to identify similar normative orientations that transfer to the sphere of inter-civilizational communication with the rulers of Byzantium, Persia, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, and Abyssinia. The research indicates that the “Farewell Sermon” may be interpreted as an important normative reference point for the early Islamic model of inter-ethnic integration, which retains conceptual relevance for contemporary intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Keywords: early Muslim community; homiletic tradition; multi-ethnicity; protection of individual rights; principles of justice.

Introduction

The formation of interethnic and intertribal relations in the early Muslim community is central to understanding the emergence of the principal social and normative structures of Islamic civilisation. Seventh-century Arabia was characterised by strong tribal autonomy combined with ethnic, confessional, and political diversity, while mechanisms regulating relations beyond kin groups remained limited. Scholarship therefore commonly interprets early Islamic norms as a response to the need to overcome fragmentation and establish broader frameworks of solidarity, responsibility, and conflict resolution (Burge, 2020; Donner, 2010; Smalley, 2025).

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Research on this transformation can be examined through three interconnected themes. The first concerns the reorientation of tribal structures through principles of equality, personal responsibility, protection from oppression, and commitment to the common good (Ubaidillah, 2024; Hussain, 2022). The second focuses on the institutionalisation of these principles within the ummah, including the political and legal organisation of Medina (Subhan & Maulida, 2025; Robinson, 2020; Al-Azmeh, 2020). The third addresses relations with Jewish, Christian, Arab, and non-Arab groups, demonstrating that early Islamic norms developed through interaction between diverse communities rather than social isolation (Kaukua, 2021; Dye, 2022; Kravchuk et al., 2025).

Within this context, the Farewell Sermon, the Constitution of Medina, and the Prophet's diplomatic correspondence represent three important source corpora. The sermon articulates ethical principles related to human dignity, justice, responsibility, and the rejection of lineage-based superiority. The Constitution of Medina provides an institutional dimension through provisions concerning communal unity, security, group autonomy, and dispute resolution. Diplomatic letters extend the analysis to external relations, where political communication intersected with moral and normative claims (Anthony, 2020; Lecker, 2024; Hamidullah, 1985, 1987).

However, these sources require historiographical caution. The wording and transmission of the Farewell Sermon remain debated because the text is preserved through later biographical and hadith traditions rather than a contemporary transcript (Rubin, 2010; Anthony, 2020). Similarly, discussions continue regarding the textual unity, dating, and transmission history of the Constitution of Medina (Watt, 1956; Donner, 2010; Lecker, 2024). The diplomatic letters also vary in terms of attribution and manuscript reliability: while Hamidullah (1985, 1987) defended their authenticity, historical-critical approaches emphasise the need to assess individual documents separately (Anthony, 2020; Shoemaker, 2022). Therefore, this study examines these sources as transmitted textual corpora and focuses on their normative correspondences rather than assuming direct preservation of original formulations.

Despite extensive research on early Islamic ethics, Medinan governance, and prophetic diplomacy, the relationship between these three corpora remains insufficiently synthesised. Previous studies have generally analysed the Farewell Sermon, the Constitution of Medina, or diplomatic correspondence separately, leaving the extent of their normative relationship unclear. A comparative examination is therefore needed to determine how these sources collectively contribute to understanding early Islamic models of interethnic regulation (Lecker, 2024).

The aim of the present study was to establish the normative significance of the "Farewell Sermon" within the early Islamic system of interethnic interaction. To achieve this aim, the study analyses the socio-historical conditions of seventh-century Arabia, examines the normative principles of the "Farewell Sermon", compares them with the provisions of The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document (Lecker, 2024), investigates the Prophet's diplomatic letters as instruments of intercultural communication, and identifies how these sources contributed to the formation of a broader model of intergroup interaction.

Materials and methods

The methodological basis of the study relied on a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach combining historical-critical analysis, the comparative textual analysis method, and structural-functional analysis of the normative provisions of early Islamic sources. These methods were applied to three main corpora of texts: homiletic (the "Farewell Sermon"), legal (the "Constitution of Medina"), and diplomatic (six letters of the Prophet), as well as to narrative and historiographical evidence enabling the reconstruction of the social context.

Historical-critical analysis was aimed at reconstructing the historical and social environment in which the homiletic, legal, and diplomatic texts were formed. For this purpose, studies on the genesis of the early Muslim community and the transformation of tribal structures into a supra-tribal ummah were utilised (Donner, 2010; Watt, 1956), along with works on the political-military and inter-civilisational context (Hoyland, 2015), on economic and migratory processes (Crone, 1987), and on

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the ethno-confessional structure of the region (Trimingham, 1952). On the basis of these studies, parameters of multi-ethnicity, confessional diversity, and political fragmentation of seventh-century Arabia were identified, within which the norms of the "Farewell Sermon" and the Medinan agreement were subsequently interpreted.

The comparative textual analyisis method was applied to the homiletic, legal, and diplomatic corpora in order to identify recurring formulae and concepts. The reconstruction of the content of the "Farewell Sermon" was based on its presentation and analysis in the monograph by A. McCloud et al. (2013), in comparison with the early Islamic biographical tradition (Rubin, 2010). The text of the "Constitution of Medina" was examined using the edition by M. Lecker (2024). The diplomatic corpus was reconstructed on the basis of M. Khamidulla (1985) and M. Khamidulla (1987). A comparison of these three groups of sources made it possible to reveal which formulations and normative elements of the sermon were reproduced in the legal document and the diplomatic messages, and which elements were adapted to the new addressees and the new political context.

A structural-functional analysis was employed to describe the functioning of the identified normative elements in each group of texts, and within the single early Islamic legalistic system. The contemporary approach to reconstructing the process of formation of early normative structures, for example, is used in P. Smalley (2025), where it is argued that the Medina legal model and the accompanying diplomatic correspondence should be treated as a single process in the formation of religious and ethical tradition of early Islam. Within this approach, the norms of equality, individual responsibility, protection of vulnerable categories, and collective security are identified as stable structural units and then correlated with their social function in the context of the multi-ethnic Medina community and its external political engagements.

The synthesis of these methods and source corpora allowed for the construction of a unified analytical framework: the homiletic texts were treated as the ethical level, the *Constitution of Medina* as the level of legal institutionalisation, and the diplomatic correspondence as the external application of the identified norms. This combination was more appropriate than a single-source philological approach because the research question concerned relationships among three distinct textual genres, and it was more suitable than quantitative content analysis because the meaning and social function of the recurring norms depended on their historical and political contexts. The integrated design therefore enabled both contextual reconstruction and systematic cross-corpus comparison, while making the analytical procedure transparent and reproducible for subsequent studies.

Results

The formation of the early Islamic normative order occurred within the context of a complex ethnic, cultural and political configuration of the Arabian Peninsula of the seventh century, as is established throughout the work of P. Crone (1987). The region functioned according to a kinship-tribal model, and within that model, groups operated according to their own local legal and moral norms. The norms provided the necessary group stability, but they did not enable the coordination of interests between groups, and their local character did not enable the settlement of disputes. The absence of a higher arbiter meant that rounds of conflict and rivalry were repeated. This tendency was demonstrated by F.M. Donner (2010) through his determination that the absence of a universal regulatory structure prevented the establishment of a stable political order due to the absence of a central regulatory authority.

The additional complexity of this regional configuration, however, was that of the role of Arabia as a contact zone between two major powers: Byzantium and the Sasanian Persian Empire. The political and economic impact of these major empires in the region, as determined by R.G. Hoyland (2015), is visible in the emergence of transregional trading centres in Mecca and Yathrib, which show evidence of extensive contact with external parties. These cities functioned as nodal points for the exchange of goods, cultural models, and social practices.

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The ethno-confessional map of the region included not only Arab tribes, but also Jewish communities, Christian groups of various traditions, as well as migrants from Ethiopia, whose presence was demonstrated in the classic study by J.S. Trimingham (1952). The coexistence of such heterogeneous communities formed a multi-layered social environment in which different legal conceptions and economic systems intersected.

Such an interweaving of political, ethnic, and religious factors intensified the fragmentation of the region and demonstrated the limitations of local legal norms. None of the existing codes ensured stable regulation of relations between different communities, which objectively increased the demand for a supra-tribal normative system. Under these conditions, there emerged a need for universal rules capable of transcending tribal boundaries and ensuring the coordination of interests within a multi-ethnic environment (Table 1).

Table 1. Ethnic and religious groups of Arabia and adjacent regions in the seventh century

Group/region	Ethnic affiliation	Religious tradition	Socio-political status
Arab tribes of the Hejaz	Arabs	Pagan cults, later Islam	Tribal autonomy
Jewish tribes of Yathrib	Semitic groups	Judaism	Economic and military autonomy
Christian communities of Najran	South Arabian groups	Christianity	Semi-independent communities
Ethiopian settlers	Cushitic peoples	Christianity	Support of the Aksumite Kingdom
Bahraini Arabs	Arabs of the eastern territories	Christianity/paganism	Under Sasanian influence
Omani tribes	Arabs	Pagan traditions	Commercial-port alliances
Persian administrators	Iranians	Zoroastrianism	Control over coastal regions

Source: created by the author on the basis of M. Hamidullah (1985), J.S. Trimingham (1952), P. Crone (1987), F.M. Donner (2010), R.G. Hoyland (2015).

Table 1 demonstrates that, against the background of the complex ethno-political structure of seventh-century Arabia, the need for a universal normative system acquired particular significance. The homiletic texts of early Islam, among which the “Farewell Sermon” occupies a key place, began to perform the function of a supra-tribal regulatory mechanism. In the study by A. McCloud et al. (2013), they argue that the sermon formulated a complex of norms oriented towards coordinating relations between different tribes and communities. Unlike local codes operating within individual kin groups, the provisions of the sermon had a universal character and were applicable regardless of origin, social status, or confessional affiliation.

The normative role of the “Farewell Sermon” manifested itself in two interrelated planes: as a system of spiritual and moral prescriptions and as a mechanism for forming common rules of coexistence in a multi-ethnic environment. The sermon delineated the contours of a community model in which the value of the individual did not depend on lineage hierarchy, and social relations were structured in accordance with principles of justice, mutual respect, and responsibility. In this way, a basic set of norms was formed that ensured the coordination of interests between different ethnic and confessional groups (Hasanov, 2024).

One of the central provisions of the sermon was the affirmation of the equality of all people regardless of their ethnic origin. As established by A. McCloud et al. (2013), the traditional structures of Arabia

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were based on strict lineage stratification, which determined an individual's place in the social system and maintained distinctions between strong and weak tribes. Within this logic, rights and obligations were distributed unevenly: affiliation with a powerful kin group provided stronger access to protection, compensation, political influence, and collective support, whereas members of weaker tribes, dependants, and outsiders possessed fewer practical guarantees. These differences allowed inherited status to determine both the benefits available to individuals and the burdens imposed upon them, thereby reproducing social asymmetries across generations. The *Farewell Sermon* redefined the grounds of social superiority, linking it not to origin, but to moral conduct and personal qualities. Such an approach undermined traditional hierarchies and created prerequisites for integrating representatives of different groups into a single community.

Provisions aimed at the protection of the individual were of considerable importance. In conditions where, in tribal societies, responsibility for an offence often extended to the entire kin group, the practice of collective punishment led to prolonged intertribal conflicts. The sermon formulated an orientation towards the individualisation of responsibility – its application prevented the escalation of violence and limited the possibility of private incidents developing into large-scale kin confrontations. A. McCloud et al. (2013) showed that such a reorientation constituted one of the key steps in the formation of early Islamic legal logic.

Particular attention was devoted to the inviolability of the life, property, and dignity of members of the community. In conditions of frequent armed confrontations, the affirmation of the value of human life became a fundamental norm oriented towards stabilising internal order. The sermon contained a call to renounce practices leading to the destruction of the social structure and to move towards peaceful means of resolving conflicts. These provisions reflected the need to strengthen mechanisms of stability within the multi-ethnic environment of Medina and its surroundings.

A significant block of prescriptions concerned the protection of socially vulnerable groups. In the social structure of Arabia, pronounced distinctions existed between free persons, dependants, and slaves, and an asymmetry in the statuses of men and women was also recorded. In the "Farewell Sermon", norms were formulated requiring fair treatment of those who were more frequently than others subjected to injustice. In this way, the understanding of social responsibility was broadened, and the idea of the just distribution of rights and obligations was strengthened.

The universalist character of the sermon manifested itself in the aspiration to unite different tribes on the basis of common principles rather than lineage affiliation. The norms formulated in the text could be used both within the community and in interaction with external political subjects. The results of comparing the content of the "Farewell Sermon" with historical and social data concerning the early Muslim community indicate a significant correlation between the norms articulated in the sermon and practical forms of intergroup interaction. As established in the studies by F.M. Donner (2010), U. Rubin (2010), and A. McCloud et al. (2013), the early Islamic community used the provisions of the sermon as an instrument for stabilising relations between tribal and confessional groups. These norms were not confined to the sphere of spiritual prescriptions – they performed the function of a regulatory mechanism applicable in everyday practices of interaction within the community (Table 2).

Table 2. The main normative provisions of the "Farewell Sermon" and the social functions of each provision

Provision	Content	Social function
Equality of all people	Rejection of ethnic superiority	Reduction of intertribal hostility
Individual responsibility	Inadmissibility of collective punishment	Termination of blood vengeance
Protection of individual rights	Inviolability of life, property, and honour	Stabilisation of internal order

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Prohibition of exploitation	Protection of women and vulnerable groups	Strengthening of social solidarity
Universality of norms	Applicability to different tribes and communities	Establishment of a common legal framework

Source: created by the author on the basis of F.M. Donner (2010), U. Rubin (2010), A. McCloud et al. (2013).

Table 2 makes it possible to systematise the key normative provisions of the *Farewell Sermon* and to demonstrate how each of them performed a specific social function within the structure of the early Islamic community. Taken together, these provisions did not amount to abstract moral injunctions, but formed a practically applicable regulatory mechanism oriented towards stabilising intertribal and intercommunal relations. The affirmation of the equality of all people, through the denial of ethnic superiority, undermined traditional hierarchies and reduced the conflict potential between tribes. The principle of individual responsibility limited the practice of blood vengeance and transferred conflicts into the sphere of personalised legal adjudication. Norms protecting individual rights and prohibiting exploitation strengthened social solidarity and consolidated the inadmissibility of violence as a form of social interaction (Podoprigora et al., 2019). The universality of the norms ensured their applicability to different tribal and confessional groups, creating a common legal framework for a multi-ethnic space. This was important because shared standards for rights, obligations, and dispute resolution reduced dependence on lineage-based privilege and made coordinated security and coexistence possible across otherwise autonomous communities.

The functioning of the multi-ethnic community in Medina became the next stage in the transformation of homiletic norms into an institutionalised social order. In this context, the work of M. Lecker (2024) appeared as the first attempt at the formal consolidation of principles previously articulated within the homiletic corpus. The document created the foundations of a social contract aimed at uniting the Arab tribes of Aws and Khazraj, numerous kin groups, as well as several Jewish tribes residing within a single political space. Thus, religious and moral prescriptions acquired legal form, binding upon all participants in the community.

The structure of the Medinan agreement reflected an aspiration to form a mechanism of supra-tribal solidarity capable of ensuring the stability of the political space under conditions of ethnic and confessional diversity. As demonstrated by W.M. Watt (1956), the agreement did not entirely dismantle traditional forms of social organisation, but reoriented them by subordinating them to the operation of a common legal order. This conclusion is consistent with the reconstruction of the early Islamic community by F.M. Donner (2010), in which Medina is regarded as a space for the formation of a new political identity based not on lineage affiliation, but on inclusion within the normative system of the ummah.

The principle of the unity of the community, enshrined in the document, entailed the creation of a common political subject, within which various tribes and religious groups were regarded as parts of a single whole. This represented a qualitative shift in comparison with the traditional tribal model, in which social identity was determined exclusively by kin affiliation. The supra-tribal character of the community made it possible to establish more stable mechanisms of interaction and to reduce the dependence of political order on competition between kins.

At the same time, the agreement safeguarded the autonomy of individual groups in religious, family, and internal matters. Jewish communities were recognised as autonomous parties in accordance with the principle of respect for cultural and confessional plurality (Lecker, 2024; Watt, 1956). The combination of autonomy and common obligations created a flexible model of coexistence, which made it possible for different parties to be integrated into a common political framework while retaining their identity (Donner, 2010; Lecker, 2024). The central element of the agreement was the mechanism of collective security. The defence of the city was the responsibility of all parties to the agreement, and the safety of any individual group was considered part of the common good. In contrast to the tribal model, where security was guaranteed through alliances of kin, the Medinan model relied on a supra-tribal principle of solidarity, which reduced the probability of internal armed

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conflict and increased the robustness of the community in relation to external dangers (Watt, 1956; Donner, 2010).

The system for handling conflict was also of particular importance. The transition from reciprocity and blood vengeance to procedures governed by common rules indicated the institutionalisation of justice as a basis of social order (Watt, 1956; Lecker, 2024). Conflict was no longer treated exclusively as a matter of revenge by kin, but was transferred to recognised mechanisms of adjudication and collective responsibility. In this way, the document codified a movement from the traditional logic of retaliatory conflict towards a normative model of settlement (Donner, 2010; Lecker, 2024). The economic aspect of the agreement was expressed through common obligations, including participation in the payment of ransoms for captives, contributions to defence, and compensation for damage caused between groups. These provisions linked rights to reciprocal duties and thereby supported the stability of the wider community (Watt, 1956; Lecker, 2024).

Certain provisions refer explicitly to internal threats. Prohibitions on providing refuge to wrong-doers, restrictions on entering separate agreements with external powers, and taking care to consider the interest of the entire community in decisions pertaining to that community, all contributed to avoiding fragmentation within the political community and limiting the possibility of schism. Thus, the document also contributed to the protection of its common order.

The comparison between the provisions of the “Farewell Sermon” and M. Lecker (2024) indicated a high degree of correspondence between homiletic and legal traditions in early Islam. The equal treatment principle laid out in sermon found its legal expression as equal legal status for parties to The Constitution of Medina. Individual responsibility found its legal expression in the prohibition on blood vengeance. Concern for vulnerable groups finds its place in mechanisms of collective security for all groups (Apakhayev et al., 2017). These parallels suggest that The Constitution of Medina incorporated ethical and moral principles that had been articulated earlier and expressed them within a legal framework.

Thus, The Constitution of Medina served both as a political-legal framework, and as an instrument transforming homiletic ethics into a sustainable normative order. This document provides an example of a successful multi-ethnic model of coexistence based on a combination of equality, autonomy, and collective responsibility. In this capacity, the Medinan agreement became a key link in the process of forming early Islamic mechanisms for regulating interethnic relations (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of the provisions of the “Farewell Sermon” and The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad’s First Legal Document

Normative aspect	**“Farewell Sermon”**	**Constitution of Medina**
Principle of equality	Equality of all people regardless of origin	Equal legal status of the parties to the agreement
Individual responsibility	Inadmissibility of collective punishment	Prohibition of blood vengeance and transition to legal mechanisms
Protection of vulnerable groups	Admonitions against exploitation and injustice	Security guarantees for all allied communities
Model of intergroup interaction	Ethical and moral norms of mutual respect	Institutional rules of shared coexistence
Collective security	Call for general peace and the cessation of strife	Obligation of joint defence of the city
Freedom of religion	Moral recognition of diversity	Legal recognition of Jewish autonomy

Source: created by the author on the basis of M. Lecker (2024), W.M. Watt (1956), F.M. Donner (2010).

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The data presented in Table 3 make it possible to trace how a unified normative code, formed within the early Islamic tradition, was implemented across different foreign-policy situations. Regardless of the religious affiliation of the addressees, the level of their political authority, or the nature of their relations with Medina, the diplomatic letters were structured around a stable set of ethical reference points. The recorded repetition of normative formulae indicates that the regulatory model developed within the community was constructed as universal – applicable to both internal and external formats of interaction. Unlike traditional practices of intertribal diplomacy, which were based on situational alliances and balances of power, the early letters relied on a stable value-legal framework that included principles of responsibility, justice, and respect for human dignity (Aitzhanova et al., 2024).

Of particular significance is the fact that the diplomatic letters were not limited to recording political intentions, but also performed a function of normative transmission. The messages simultaneously served as instruments of diplomatic communication and as means of articulating principles of social order developed within the Muslim community (Hamidullah, 1985, 1987; Ahmed, 2021). Early diplomacy therefore functioned not only as a mechanism of foreign policy, but also as a channel through which the normative model associated with homiletic and legal traditions was communicated to external rulers and communities (Thameem & Ali Gilani, 2024).

In this context, the diplomatic letters demonstrate an expansion of the sphere of operation of the early Islamic legal order beyond Medina. Whereas the “Farewell Sermon” articulated universal ethical and moral orientations, and the Constitution of Medina institutionalised them within a multi-ethnic community, diplomatic correspondence ensured their projection into the sphere of inter-civilisational contacts. Thus, the formation of the normative system may be characterised as a three-level process: the homiletic level established value foundations, the legal level formalised them into binding norms, and the diplomatic level extended them into the foreign-policy domain.

The content of the letters suggests that early diplomacy was based on recognition of the subjectivity of the addressees and respect for their political status. Regardless of the degree of tension in relations, the letters maintained an orientation towards dialogue, which manifested itself in the variability of their tone: a deliberately respectful style of address to the Byzantine emperor, ethically motivated criticism in the letter to the Persian ruler, diplomatic moderation in the message to the Egyptian governor, appeals to commercial norms in the communications addressed to Bahrain and Oman, and an emphasis on humanity and the protection of the vulnerable in the letter to the Negus of Ethiopia. Such differences testify to the high adaptability of the normative model, which made it possible to take cultural and political contexts into account while preserving unified ethical principles.

At the same time, the surviving letters generally privilege persuasion and the moral justification of political or religious claims over an explicit threat of force. This pattern suggests an early form of normatively oriented international communication in which political objectives were framed through ethical arguments, although the tone and historical circumstances differed among the individual documents (Hamidullah, 1985, 1987; Ahmed, 2021).

A comparison of the diplomatic corpus with the provisions of the Farewell Sermon and the Constitution of Medina suggests internal normative correspondences among the three source groups. The idea of equality articulated in the sermon is reflected in the recognition of the dignity of external addressees; individual responsibility appears in appeals to rulers concerning the consequences of their decisions; protection of vulnerable groups is echoed in humanitarian obligations; and collective security is reflected in efforts to prevent escalation. These parallels indicate that diplomatic practices may be interpreted as an external development of norms also present in the homiletic and legal corpora (McCloud et al., 2013; Lecker, 2024; Hamidullah, 1985, 1987).

Taken together, the homiletic, legal, and diplomatic corpora make it possible to reconstruct a connected model of early Islamic intergroup and intercivilisational regulation. The model combined movement from tribal fragmentation towards supra-tribal solidarity, replacement of collective kin responsibility with more personalised mechanisms of regulation, and increased reliance on normative procedures of settlement. It also retained the capacity to accommodate ethno-cultural and confessional diversity by incorporating distinct communities into a common political and legal

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framework rather than requiring the elimination of their identities (Donner, 2010; Lecker, 2024; Anthony, 2020).

Accordingly, the *Farewell Sermon* may be interpreted not only as a religious and moral text, but also as an important normative reference point within the subsequent development of early Islamic legal and political thought. The *Constitution of Medina* records the institutional articulation of comparable principles, while the diplomatic letters indicate their possible application in intercivilisational interaction. This sequence supports a cautious interpretation of early Islamic norm formation as a multi-level process concerned with coexistence under conditions of ethnic, religious, and political diversity (McCloud et al., 2013; Lecker, 2024; Hamidullah, 1985, 1987).

Table 4. Normative elements of the six diplomatic letters of the Prophet and their addressees

Addressee	**Political context**	**Main normative elements**	**Socio-ethical orientation**
Heraclius (Byzantium)	Eastern Christian Empire	Recognition of shared theological roots	Peaceful coexistence
Khosrow II (Persia)	Sasanian state	Justice and the rejection of oppression	Limitation of the abuse of power
al-Muqawqis (Egypt)	Byzantine influence	Responsibility of the ruler before the people	Protection of the rights of subjects
Ruler of Bahrain	Eastern Arabian territories	Mutual obligations and integrity	Stability of trade relations
Rulers of Oman	Indian Ocean trade	Righteousness and honesty in trade	Economic justice
Negus of Ethiopia	Christian state of Aksum	Mutual respect and the protection of the vulnerable	Support for refugees and humanitarian conduct

Source: created by the author on the basis of M. Hamidullah (1985; 1987), R.G. Hoyland (2015), J.S. Trimingham (1952).

The data of Table 4 demonstrate that the Prophet's diplomatic correspondences exhibited a universal normative code underlying the relations of the local political centre and its counterparts. The appeal to justice, the respect for human dignity, and the rejection of aggression, irrespective of the addressee, indicates their common ethical underpinnings. The inclusion of the same sets of normative formulae attest to the preserved model of inter-civilisational interaction based on early homiletic and legal sources (Spytska, 2022).

A comparative analysis of homiletic, legal, and diplomatic corpora of early Islam indicates that the "Farewell Sermon" represented an important normative foundation that influenced the further development of interethnic interaction. The homiletic pledge of equality, individual responsibility, the rejection of injustice, and the appeal to human dignity received legal consolidation in early legal documents, and their repeated transfer to the domain of foreign-policy interaction (Silagadze et al., 2020; Zubiashvili et al., 2023). Thus, the sources studied demonstrate a consistent progression of a universal normative code: the sermon lays ethical grounds, legal documents institutionalise it in the community, and diplomatic correspondences apply it to inter-civilisational interactions, which indicates that the "Farewell Sermon" played an instrumental role in the formation of a stable model of intergroup coexistence (McCloud et al., 2013).

The study of homiletic, legal, and diplomatic corpora of early Islam demonstrated internal normative consistency, which governed the continuity of the key principles across various domains of social regulation. The content of the "Farewell Sermon" formed its value-based foundation, which gained

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legal expression in the Medinan agreement and further elaboration in foreign policy correspondence. The sources studied demonstrate that a universal normative code acted as a universal mechanism of intergroup and inter-civilisational interaction. Thus, the early Islamic normative model can be interpreted as an integrated framework oriented towards maintaining the stability of a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional space.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the Farewell Sermon occupied an important place within the normative environment of early Islamic interethnic regulation through its emphasis on equality, individual responsibility, protection from injustice, and human dignity. These principles correspond with scholarship on the treatment of religious and ethnic others in early Islam (Khan et al., 2020; Duderija, 2022). The present analysis extends this literature by identifying comparable principles across homiletic, legal, and diplomatic corpora, although these parallels should be understood as evidence of normative coherence rather than definitive proof of direct textual dependence.

The comparison with the Constitution of Medina indicates that early Islamic governance combined communal unity with recognition of distinct groups. This interpretation corresponds with studies of Muslim-Jewish relations, religious diversity, and covenantal arrangements as mechanisms for regulating obligations and protecting communities (Ulfat, 2024; Nor, 2025; Manzano Moreno, 2021; Abulmajd, 2021; Rane, 2022). At the same time, the Constitution may also be interpreted as a pragmatic political agreement shaped by the immediate circumstances of Medina rather than only as an implementation of the sermon's principles. Therefore, the findings indicate conceptual correspondence between the sources while acknowledging alternative explanations related to common social needs, later transmission, and debates concerning authenticity and dating (Watt, 1956; Donner, 2010; Lecker, 2024).

The diplomatic corpus similarly suggests that principles of justice, responsibility, dignity, and non-aggression were applied within relations with external rulers and communities. This supports scholarship that considers prophetic correspondence as part of early Islamic diplomatic and legal practice (Ahmed, 2021; Thameem & Ali Gilani, 2024). However, these letters differ in provenance, manuscript history, and historical certainty, meaning that their importance lies primarily in the recurrence of normative themes rather than in establishing an uninterrupted documentary sequence from the sermon to each individual letter (Hamidullah, 1985, 1987; Anthony, 2020).

The testimonies of Syrian Christians analysed by Acar (2025) provide external evidence that some seventh- and eighth-century Christian authors viewed Muslim authorities as capable of administering justice and respecting minority communities. Nevertheless, these accounts reflect particular theological, political, and historical perspectives and cannot be treated as neutral descriptions of Muslim governance as a whole. Their contribution lies in demonstrating how some non-Muslim observers represented Muslim rule, while their limitations require comparison with Muslim traditions, legal texts, and other historical evidence.

The broader literature reveals a tension between normative ideals and historical practice. Research on interreligious coexistence highlights concepts of mutual respect, covenantal responsibility, and recognition of the other (Bhutto et al., 2022; Jäckh et al., 2025), whereas historical-critical studies emphasise uncertainties surrounding transmitted texts and their interpretation (Rubin, 2010; Shoemaker, 2022). This tension limits the conclusion that the three corpora constituted a fully unified legal programme, but it supports the more cautious interpretation that they preserve overlapping ethical and political vocabularies addressing diversity, conflict, and authority.

Taken together, the comparison indicates that the Farewell Sermon may be regarded as a significant normative reference point in early Islamic interethnic thought. Principles related to equality, justice, protection of vulnerable groups, and recognition of diversity recur in the Constitution of Medina and diplomatic traditions, suggesting continuity across internal governance and external communication. The contribution of this study lies in analysing these sources within one framework while recognising uncertainties of transmission, authenticity, and historical application. Its conclusions therefore

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concern the coherence of transmitted normative traditions rather than direct derivation of every document from a single original text.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that the early Islamic normative model of the 7th century Arabian Peninsula developed within a context of ethnic, confessional, and political fragmentation. In this environment, the Farewell Sermon articulated principles of equality, individual responsibility, justice, and human dignity that provided a supra-tribal framework for interaction between diverse groups. Rather than eliminating existing identities, this model sought to regulate relations through shared ethical obligations.

The analysis of the Farewell Sermon shows that its key principles — equality regardless of origin, protection of individual rights, prohibition of exploitation of vulnerable groups, and universality of moral norms all represented a normative orientation towards reducing conflict and strengthening social solidarity. These principles provide an important basis for understanding early Islamic approaches to intergroup regulation.

The study of the Constitution of Medina indicates that comparable principles were expressed through institutional mechanisms of governance. Its provisions concerning communal obligations, security, dispute resolution, and recognition of religious groups demonstrate an attempt to establish social order within a diverse political environment. The document may therefore be considered an early example of a legal arrangement that transformed ethical principles into mechanisms of collective regulation.

The analysis of prophetic diplomatic letters suggests that these principles were also reflected in relations beyond Medina. Themes of justice, dignity, peaceful interaction, and responsibility appear within the diplomatic corpus, indicating that the normative framework extended into broader intergroup and inter-civilisational communication.

Overall, the Farewell Sermon, Constitution of Medina, and Diplomatic Letters can be understood as interconnected components of a multi-level normative system: the sermon articulated ethical foundations, the Constitution provided internal institutional expression, and diplomatic correspondence represented external application. A limitation of the study is its reliance primarily on textual and normative sources, with limited archaeological and socio-cultural evidence regarding local variations in practice. Future research may further compare early Islamic models of interethnic regulation with contemporary approaches to managing religious and cultural diversity.

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