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**“Revisioning Democracy: Republican Democracy and Islam”
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The Middle East is often said to possess “a democracy deficit” compared to the alleged rapid spread of democracy in the rest of the world. What this expression is meant to imply is that it is the people of that embattled region or its institutions that are somehow defective. What is practically never noted is that perhaps the assumed universal features of *liberal* democracy are in fact, not universal. This is the argument in this paper. Liberal democracy as known in America (the alleged “gold standard”) is in fact a limited product of the European Enlightenment and outside of the ideological heartland of the Enlightenment it is in reality a parochial concept. Elsewhere in the world, among other things including the prominence of religious values, it is the welfare of the community that has priority and not the individual, as well the prominence of religion and not secularism. This paper addresses a *republican* democratic alternative to liberal democracy. Such an alternative is necessary in the Middle East. The reason is that liberal democracy with its commitment to reform and not revolution is irrelevant to the political problem of the Middle East. This problem is the prevalence of bloody and repressive tyrannical rule. When a tyrant has a boot on the throat of its population it is not sufficient to speak of the gradualism of reform and the operation of civil society. Republican democracy developed in ancient Rome (Livy and Cicero) and argued that it was the creation of a free state that permitted freedom and not the autonomy of the individual. The individual in fact was expected to exercise citizen virtue within the state and by means of this, work for the common good. Republican democracy is top down and not bottom up via the civil society variety of liberal democracy. The argument here is that republican democracy with its emphasis upon tradition, virtue and morality rather remarkably resembles the essential characteristics of Islam. As a consequence, republican democracy might very well be argued to constitute Islamic democracy. If there is to be a democratic future of the Middle East, it will likely be one of republican democracy.