

# THE UMAYYAD DYNASTY'S CONVERSION TO ISLAM

*Putting Muslim Traditions into the Historical Context  
From the Low Point Until ca. 692 AD*

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Copyright: author A.J. Deus, June 2013, reviewed by: Richard Bulliet, Michael Cook, Marcin Grodzki, Robert Hoyland, Robert Kerr, Andrew Rippin, Mondher Sfar, Warren Treadgold, and Helmut Wagner.<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my thankfulness to all that have contributed to this article, either positively or critically. It is only through their collaboration that a provocative hypothesis has become a confident one.

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<sup>1</sup> The participation of any reviewer does not imply their consent to this article, either in part or in full.

## Introduction

Modern Muslims are searching for political policies that are based on the Umayyad role model, which was so successful that poverty had been eliminated and not a single individual could be found to accept the zakat — the alms. According to Muslim tradition, the Umayyad leaders of the early caliphates were among the families that had originally followed Prophet Muhammad. Hence, the question whether or not and when the Umayyads had indeed converted to Islam seems of paramount importance in modern Muslim socio-economics.

Many scholars think that asking this question constitutes some sort of heresy of a broadly established consensus. While there is a small but growing body of scholars that point at a Syro-Aramaic Christian background in the Koran, the understanding of the mechanisms and interactions of the Judaic<sup>2</sup> religions still slumbers in the darkest ages, in particular when it concerns Islam and its perceived proponents.

The Inarah Institute for Research on Early Islamic History and the Koran has made it its mission to apply a critical approach to its research. One of their members, Christoph Luxenberg, suspects, for example, that the Koran

intended itself first of all to be understood as nothing more than a liturgical book with selected texts from the Scriptures (the Old and New Testament) and not at all as a substitute for the Scriptures themselves, i.e. as an independent Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

Luxenberg uncovered that the structural terms *Koran*, *Sura*, and *Aya* have been borrowed from Syro-Aramaic Christian customs. He thinks that this is a key to the understanding of the language in the Koran.<sup>4</sup> Also, he attributes the Friday prayers to a repositioning of the Christian Good Friday<sup>5</sup> and the secret symbols at the beginning of a number of suras to Syro-Aramaic church origin. They constitute instructions such as which Psalm to read, which key to sing it in, or which Bible passages to read.<sup>6</sup> In a context of a Koran that views Jews, Christians,<sup>7</sup> and Sabians as partners, the findings are not surprising but seem to shed light on only one element of at least three. Nevertheless, the Koran speaks to an audience intimately familiar with the Torah, the Hebrew Bible, the Gospel, and the Talmud. Thus, Luxenberg's findings are important details in a larger Judaic framework that is yet to be understood. Overall, the Koran contains relatively little spiritual markers that could be viewed as strikingly novel. The few innovations are rather embedded in a very old and familiar context. For example, when examining the innate hatred of the authors of the Koran against the Samaritans as “touch-me-not,” it becomes immediately evident that Judaic insiders were at

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<sup>2</sup> The word *Judaic* is here used as an umbrella term for sects that are related to Judaism, e.g. Judaism, Christianity, Manicheanism, and Islam. *Judaic* and *Jewish* are of distinct meanings in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* (2007) 104.

<sup>4</sup> Christoph Luxenberg in Markus Gross, Karl-heinz Ohlig, Schlaglichter (Schiler, 2008) 417 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 436-440.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>7</sup> An-Nasara refers to the first Judeo-Christian sect of Nazarenes (which qualification is not part of this article) and includes in its broader meaning at least the Nestorian and Jacobite Arian Christians. The term is used to distinguish this branch of Christianity from the Melkite Christian branch, the Sabian followers of John the Baptist. The preferred umbrella term would otherwise be *masihiyyun* for Syrian Christianity.

work.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a list of Judaic prophets in the Koran is so pin-point precise that there can be no doubt over its roots.<sup>9</sup>

While the four first Jewish sects from after Prophet Ezra should be at the beginning of Islam's story, the Council of Nicea in 325 AD serves as the starting point of the Umayyad's. At the council, Jesus had been declared divine Son of God and Christianity was happily united, according to the Arian church historian Eusebius:<sup>10</sup>

We believe in one God, the Almighty Father, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth. Who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.<sup>11</sup>

With this creed, the council essentially condemned the old pre-Nicean beliefs of arch Christianity and its sects. The original form of the council's canons is unknown, but, for example, the earliest Latin version is different from the Greek, both of which differ from the Oriental version, leaving all three versions in doubt. The rejection of Jesus as god or as begotten "Son of God" and the creed's missing crucifixion were central beliefs of Syrian Christology, and they would later in history surface in the seed of Islam. Indeed, the Koran itself seems to refer to Nicea:

We heard not of this in the previous creed. It is but an imposture. [...]

And that it [the book] may warn those who say, "God hath begotten a Son." [...]

Praise be to God who hath not begotten a son, who hath no partner in the Kingdom, nor any protector on account of weakness.<sup>12</sup>

There is another problem with Nicea: only seven representatives of the new creed of Jesus being God<sup>13</sup> had miraculously outvoted three hundred representatives of the widely accepted old creed of Jesus being a human rebel on a mission to redeem Israel.<sup>14</sup> Henceforth, Bishop Arius's defense of the ancient beliefs was treated as if it constituted an innovation.

Fifteen years later, the Melkite<sup>15</sup> position would be petrified in the Council of Antioch in 341 AD, declaring Jesus a man with his spirit constituting the Word of God. The council must have been a counter-coup that was staged exclusively by Eastern bishops (including Eusebius as the ring-

<sup>8</sup> See Koran 20:87-20:90 and 20:96-20:97. Although Exodus does not put the blame on the Samaritans (Aaron was in charge, and his role is downplayed in the sura), the Koran's stance is a mere continuum of the hatred against them that is attested by historians from the creation of the Torah through to the revelations of the Muhammadeans. The enmity rests on the Samaritan's denial of the Holy Temple and the Torah as fabrications.

<sup>9</sup> Koran 6:87-6:88: And we gave him Isaac and Jacob, and guided both aright; and we had before guided Noah; and among the descendants of Abraham, David and Solomon, and Job and Joseph, and Moses and Aaron: Thus do we recompense the righteous: And Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elias: all were just persons: And Ismael and Elisha and Jonas and Lot: all these have we favoured above Mankind.

<sup>10</sup> Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* (unfinished, 339 AD), III:14.

<sup>11</sup> The First Ecumenical Council, Nicene Creed, 325 AD, Henry R. Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, Vol XIV of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, 2nd series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (repr. Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Koran 38:3, 18:3 and 17:111.

<sup>13</sup> Represented by Hosius, Bishop of Corduba.

<sup>14</sup> Represented by Arius, Bishop of Alexandria.

<sup>15</sup> The ahistorical term "Melkite" is used for convenience only in order to avoid a discussion about countless sectarian variations.

leader!) who created the geo-spiritual middle position between Alexandria and Constantinople. Instead of happy unity, the variations in the number of Nicea's canons, Antioch's counter-edict, and Alexandria's stubborn refusal to compromise reflect a long and bloody struggle that would be in full swing at the beginning of the seventh century. The broad party lines had already been drawn in the fourth.

Coincidentally, after Nicea the Jews were expelled east, and the pre-existing Eastern Christian parties were complemented with several displaced Jewish sects of arch-Jewish, Judeo-Messianic, Judeo-Trinitarian, or Rabbinic origin. Their drive for the redemption of Israel, their love for biblical genealogies, and their ritual re-enactments of religious dramas would later help to connect the dots. But the tendency of organized religion to assimilate local traditions and bury inconvenient truths would make the work of historians and archaeologists difficult and hazardous.

Scholars commonly assume that the complex and often contradictory traditions are an unreliable source for historic evidence. Indeed, literary sources from the eighth or ninth century are inadmissible to reconstruct early Islam of the seventh century. Patricia Crone, for example, goes as far as thinking that one cannot work with the Hadiths. The trouble in studying these texts is that a host of Jewish and Christian undercurrents is irreconcilable with the Muslim narrative. In other words, scholars that consider these later literary sources have *no choice* but to engage in selective reading. However, these texts are not entirely futile as they contain substrates for each of the three Koranic partners, Christians, Sabians, and Jews. These conflicting subtexts are habitually ignored by those that follow the traditional Muslim literature as if they were written without at least some rational intent or relevance to the time of their writings. In fact, when studying the voluminous Hadiths, it almost feels as if the authors could not commit to simply delete alien "historical" passages but instead chose to hide them in a maze of details that are frequently removed from time, space, or actors.

The overwhelming number of surahs in the Koran is of Anti-Trinitarian origin — even at the time thought to stem from Nestorianism and be "like" Arianism, although both terms were not precise. As *Arianism* labels the decisive chasm for writers during the Umayyad period, the label is used in this article for convenience.<sup>16</sup> But they are *not exclusively* Christian as they are also geared against Ezra and Adam being the sons of God,<sup>17</sup> a deviation not explored here.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the Anti-Trinitarian stance allows for the separation of a number of sects that would undoubtedly be opponents of the Koran.

It is assumed that the Umayyads were Muslims and that Islam's birth-pains were related to Pagan remnants in Mecca. However, the current historicity appears to rest on a whitewashed order of events that is indicative for an eagerness of actors to be connected to and be supporters of

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<sup>16</sup> After the council, the term *Arian* seems to substitute the former term *Nazarenes* (al-nasara).

<sup>17</sup> Koran 9:30 and Koran 20:114-124.

<sup>18</sup> Bukhari, ca. 864-870 AD (CMJE and the University of Southern California, 2007-2009) 6:60:105:

"We used to worship Ezra, the son of Allah." It will be said to them, "You are liars, for Allah has never taken anyone as a wife or a son."

[While Bukhari might have attempted to explain away the passages in the Koran, in the twelfth century, Muslims would be found praying at Ezra's shrine, although without qualification whether Ezra was viewed as a son of God (The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela (1171 AD) 73).]

Muhammad. This scenario not only defies human nature but also the reality of organized religion. From the beginning, Judaism and Christianity were in a state of perpetual fragmentation that was triggered by new books or ideas. The slightest deviations in beliefs tended to lead to fierce opposition and bloodshed, and it would thus be foolish to assume widespread agreement on a Koran that is intrinsically unclear.

Despite the risks to ridicule, one might question whether the “buried” traditions were *more* reliable — while remaining inadmissible — than the ones that portray unity and quick adoption of Islam. When, as a matter of curious exercise, the cards were swapped and the Jewish, Sabian, or Christian passages were selected and put in a context of the contemporary sources and the Koran's internal evidence, an entirely different history emerges. The accounts are indeed full of inner- or inter-caliph division and religious strife that are embedded in greater sectarian conflicts in the Middle East.

### **The World at its Low Point**

The struggle finds its continuance in the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD where Byzantine Orthodoxy had declared Jesus as both fully man *and* fully god. The Byzantines were determined to implement the new doctrine throughout Christianity at swordpoint, if needed. In the early sixth century, this led to the displacement of the Arian Lakhmids in Syria with the help of a new Byzantine ally, the Melkite<sup>19</sup> Ghassanids from the Western Arab Peninsula.<sup>20</sup> As new partners, the latter were lifted to royal vassal kings,<sup>21</sup> while the emigrating Ishmaelites turned into vengeful enemies from southern Iraq, also called Arabistan, or Hira. As new allies of Persia, they were lifted to Persian royal vassals and went on to help crushing Justinian's<sup>22</sup> superior army in 531 AD, leading to the *Eternal Peace* agreement. Justinian subjected the church in the Byzantine Empire and in parts of Italy to Roman law, made the universal faith state religion, and seized the treasures of the Arian churches.<sup>23</sup> Jews should enjoy no honors, and they were discriminated against in civil and religious rights. They were even forbidden to use the Hebrew language for their worship. What followed Justinian's terror was a mass exodus from the Byzantine Empire in all directions. Montanists, Sabbatians, Samaritans, and, before all, Jews and Arians turned into emigrates — millions of them. In response, the Jews in Yemen started killing Trinitarian Christians, which led to the former's expulsion by their Christian neighbors, prompting more Jewish emigrates. The Justinian Plague then depopulated entire areas in an unprecedented catastrophe and drove the superstitious survivors into even more religious extremism. Persia fought back and managed to occupy Syria, cutting the Melkite Ghassanids off from the Byzantine domains. In the confusing back and forth, the Persian and

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<sup>19</sup> “Melkite” or “Melchite” is a later umbrella term for those that rejected the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. However, the label itself does not seem to have come into use before the Synod of Constantinople III in 681 AD. Hence, “Melkite” is anachronistically used for ease of understanding and continuance.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Habib, Muh 370-71; cf. Ya'qubi 233, 235, from Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs, From the Bronze Age to the coming of Islam* (Routledge, 2002) 231-240.

<sup>21</sup> By Anastasius I, Byzantine Emperor from 491-518 AD.

<sup>22</sup> Justinian I was Byzantine Emperor from 527-565 AD.

<sup>23</sup> *Corpus Juris Civilis* (529 AD). This is a curious decision after multiple emperors from 381 AD onward had allegedly already established the Divine Trinity as state religion.

Byzantine empires ended up forging an alliance in 591 AD. Both, the Melkite Ghassanids and the Lakhmid Ishmaelites, lost their partners, military contracts, and prestigious royal status.

The successive cruelties are prominently and timely attested by John Bishop of Nikiù<sup>24</sup> in regards to Emperor Maurice<sup>25</sup> at the turn of the seventh century<sup>26</sup> and in regards to Emperor Heraclius,<sup>27</sup> who managed to seize the Eastern Church in Seleucia-Ctesiphon for his holy war.

This fundamentalism coincides with Rome's low point with merely 20,000 inhabitants from once having been a glorious megacity of over 1.7 million. A series of deadly plagues had before decimated mankind, and calamity after calamity over the past 150 years had left much of the world in ruins. Pope Gregory in Rome had expressed his feelings that the world had come to an end,<sup>28</sup> and it was his successor that converted the Pagan Roman Pantheon into a Christian church. The last acts of the senate in the city of Rome were recorded in 580, asking for help from Constantinople against the approaching warlords of the Lombards.<sup>29</sup> Seven years into Maurice's reign, the Council of Toledo<sup>30</sup> had submitted the Spanish Christians to Constantinople, anathemizing Arius and his ancient doctrines, and accepting the creeds of Chalcedon, joining the Byzantine atrocities until the "Muslims" would come to their aid over a century later.

At the beginning of the seventh century, the great empires were in a state of imminent collapse, and a religious world war was nearing its apex.

Sectarian unrest during the time of Maurice, Phocas, and Heraclius had swept the entire Middle East and Europe, and "apostates" seem to have tried to forge alliances in support of their agendas.<sup>31</sup> The Melkite Patriarchs of Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch seized on the opportunities and merged their churches.<sup>32</sup> John Bishop of Nikiù declared that God was patient with those apostates and heretics that had undergone baptism *a second time*, i.e. those that fell from Orthodoxy into the Muslim camp — where *Muslim* indicates a large number of *emigrates* who had fled from the Byzantine territories — and then rejoined Trinitarian Orthodoxies.<sup>33</sup> The bishop tightly linked the rise of the *emigrates* to the Heraclian persecutions.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>24</sup> John's position is of Miaphysite Orthodoxy which opposed all three, Arianism, Melkite, and Byzantine Orthodoxy with the Chalcedonian creeds.

<sup>25</sup> Flavius Mauricius Tiberius Augustus alias Maurice was Byzantine Emperor 582-602.

<sup>26</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiù, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) XCIX, 1-2: And thereupon Domitian, the son of the emperor's brother, gave orders that force should be used to compel the Jews and Samaritans to be baptized and become Christians. But these proved false Christians. And likewise he forced heretics to be enrolled in the orders of the Church; for he was a true Chalcedonian.

<sup>27</sup> Flavius Heraclius Augustus was Byzantine Emperor 610-641 AD.

<sup>28</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* (ca. 600 AD) IV:LVIII: we should with our whole soul condemn this present world, at least because we see that it is now gone and past.

<sup>29</sup> Dukes Faroald of Spoleto (- ca. 592 AD) and Zotto of Benevento (- 591 AD). Faroald invaded the center of Italy and Zotto the south.

<sup>30</sup> The Council of Toledo was held in 589 AD.

<sup>31</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiù, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXIV, 18-20: And in regard to Rome it is recounted that the kings of (this) epoch had by means of the barbarians and the nations and the Illyrians (the Jews in Jerusalem) devastated Christian cities and carried off their inhabitants captive, and that no city escaped save Thessalonica only; for its walls were strong, and through the help of God the nations were unable to get possession of it. But all the province was devastated and depopulated. Then the armies of the east arose against Rome, and they took the Egyptians prisoners, who were there, and who had fled from Egypt from fear of Bonosus. These were Sergius the Apostate and Cosmas who had delivered up his city. Now these had denied the Christian faith and had abandoned holy baptism, and had followed in the paths of the pagans and idolaters.

<sup>32</sup> Severus ibn al-Mukaffa, *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, Severus of Al'Ashmunain (Hermopolis), *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic church of Alexandria* (1904) Part 2: Peter I - Benjamin I (661 AD), *Patrologia Orientalis* 1, ANASTASIUS, THE THIRTY-SIXTH PATRIARCH. A. D. 605-616.

<sup>33</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiù, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXVII, 7-8: But God has been patient with the apostates and heretics who have undergone baptism a second time in submission to despotic emperors. [...] How then, is it not far better for us to endure patiently the trials and punishments which they inflict upon us? They indeed think to honour our Lord Christ by so doing, whereas they are found to be perverted in their faith. They have

The Arians and semi-Arians believed in Jesus being man, had before been supported by the Persian Empire, and they had in turn assimilated Persian customs. They continued to vehemently oppose the Chalcedonian formula. Also, the Persian emperors had made sure that the Christians in the East remained religious enemies of the Byzantines. Their core would have been clustered around southern Iraq and the eastern Arab Peninsula with the patriarch located in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which was in danger of conversion by Heraclius's conquest. Hence, the chair of the pope of the Eastern Church was held vacant for twenty years by the Persian Emperor. Only a few years earlier, the church had still firmly held on to its Nestorian foundation.<sup>35</sup>

The emperor also killed the last Lakhmid Ishmaelite king in Al-Hira and put Elijah bar Kabsha<sup>36</sup> in his place in order to prevent the Ishmaelites from converting to the Orthodox enemy camp. Elijah — a biblical name that cannot be lightly overlooked in an end of the world context<sup>37</sup> — is claimed to having led a revolt by the Lakhmid Ishmaelites in 610 AD and is said to having declared independence from Persia. This king vanished<sup>38</sup> as Muhammad appeared out of the cave of “Hira” in an obvious remembrance of the cave of Elijah where the ancient and the new prophet received revelations from Angel Gabriel. One might be tempted to speculate that the secession may have fallen together with Heraclius's victory over the Persians in 622 AD, releasing Al-Hira in 0 AH, later morphing into the year commemorating Hijra.<sup>39</sup> The latter is a perplexingly trivial event, not only in the grandiose life of Muhammad but in the context of the pivotal religio-political upheaval.

The Melkites advanced the geo-spiritual middle ground in Syria, where Jesus was man but his spirit was the word of God.<sup>40</sup> They also refused to submit to the new Orthodoxy and were strong in modern Syria and in the western Arab Peninsula.<sup>41</sup> According to John Bishop of Nikiù, the Jews on Byzantine territory were also to be force-converted to the Chalcedonian creed, lifting them to a potential partner in an allied Judaic opposition.

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not indeed voluntarily apostatized, but they persecute those who agree not with them in faith. God forbid (such agreement)! for they are not servants of Christ: yet they think they are such in their thoughts.

<sup>34</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiù, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXXI, 2: And every one said: “This expulsion (of the Romans) and victory of the Moslem is due to the wickedness of the emperor Heraclius and his persecution of the Orthodox through the patriarch Cyrus. This was the cause of the ruin of the Romans and the subjugation of Egypt by the Moslem.”

<sup>35</sup> Synod of the Eastern Church, 605 AD, under Pope Mar Gregorius: W. St. McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity*, a.a.O. 151.

<sup>36</sup> Eyas ibn Qabisah al-Ta'i (or Iyas ibn Qabisa, chief of Tayyi') ruled the Lakhmids 602-611 AD together with the Persian governor Nakirjan, followed by governor Azadhbeh 611-633 AD.

Thomas the Presbyter, *Chronicle* (ca. 640 AD) 147-148: “In the year 634 [...] there was a battle between the Romans and the tayyaye d-Mhmt [Lakhmids of Muhammad] in Palestine twelve miles east of Gaza [...]”

A biological relationship seems to have been later reinterpreted as an adoption:

Safi ur Rahman Al Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet* (Darussalam, 2002) 72: The Prophet was later entrusted to Halimah bint Abi Dhuaib from Bani Sa'd bin Bakr. Her husband was Al-Harith bin Abdul-Uzza called Abi Kabshah, from the same tribe.

<sup>37</sup> Malachi 4:1-6: Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

<sup>38</sup> One of Muhammad's early aliases was Kabsha: Bukhari, ca. 864-870 AD (CMJE and the University of Southern California, 2007-2009) 6:60:75.

<sup>39</sup> Through a different path, Robert M. Kerr, in *Annus Hegirae vel Annus (H)Agarorum?* (May 2012), comes to a similar conclusion that *A.H.* means *Year of the Arabs*. He also recognizes that the new timescale was widely understood in that way. It triggered no (religious) discussion and needed no further qualification as to its meaning.

<sup>40</sup> Their creed would be reflected in John, Bishop of Nikiù, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXX, 57: The Godhead indeed is not converted into the manhood, nor the manhood into the other nature, but the Word which became flesh had become unchangeable, and no change can affect the Word. But the Word which has become flesh is one divine Substance.

While there is little doubt that John, Bishop of Nikiù rejected the Chalcedonian creeds, there is ambivalence in the text as to his beliefs that reach across the spectrum of Christology from Jesus being born man (LXVII, 11), his Word being of God (CXX, 57), or even Jesus being God (CXXI, 8).

<sup>41</sup> The Melkite patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem were force converted with the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Trullo in 692 AD.

Moreover, the idea of Jesus having both, a human and divine nature, created a new dispute that would weaken the inner cohesion of the Byzantines just in time to play into the hands of the advancing “caliphate.” If Jesus was both god and man, the question was whether his will was also of dual nature. The result was a rebellion in Egypt. Given that a united stance of the church could deploy a lot of muscle against governments, the Western and the Orthodox clergy postured with arrogance and threatened to destabilize the empire with severe terrorist activities. Paralyzing inner weakness and sectarian conflicts prevented Heraclius from decisive action against expanding precursors to a caliphate. His own whim about Jesus’s will had turned against him.

Those who took control of the various power factions were of the most dangerous extremists that faith had brought forth in history. They were religious terrorist organizations on a global scale, willing to kill or die for their faith in the fundamentalist versions of God and Jesus (or Ezra/Adam) on either side. For example, Jerusalem was engulfed in sectarian killings in 615 AD, and the Persian Emperor seized the True Cross and had tens of thousands of inhabitants in the Holy City executed.<sup>42</sup> The Jews were now homeless, expelled from Spain, Persia, and Constantinople.

With this geo-political background, it seems likely that the Koran served as a doctrinal enforcement of Jesus, Ezra, and Adam being men rather than constituting the foundation of a new and insignificant religion that targeted Quraysh Pagans, a tribe of sheer obscurity of which nothing is known. The Koran’s authors express themselves unambiguously that the new scripture would not have been received well, had it addressed foreigners of the Children of Israel.<sup>43</sup> The authors also address the latter directly not only as the recipient of the message<sup>44</sup> but also as those that had confirmed its conformity with Moses’s laws.<sup>45</sup> The difficulty to understanding the Koran is in its negative message that insists in practically every sura that no other god should be associated with the single Judaic god. Probably the best anti-doctrinal clarification in regards to Jesus can be found in the Koran, representing an exact “response” to Orthodox definitions:

O ye people of the Book! overstep not bounds in your religion; and of God, speak only truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only an apostle of God, and his Word which he conveyed into Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from himself. Believe therefore in God and his apostles, and say not, “Three:” (there is a Trinity) — Forbear — it will be better for you. God is only one God! Far be it from His glory that He should have a son! His, whatever is in the Heavens, and whatever is in the Earth! And God is a sufficient Guardian.

<sup>42</sup> Sebeo’s History of the seventh century (publishing ca. 670 AD), English by Robert Bedrosian (1985) 24: The multitude of the Christians grew stronger, struck at and killed many of the Jews. The remainder of the Jews jumped from the walls, and went to the Iranian army [...] On the 19th day [of the siege] which was the 27th day of the month of March in the 25th year of the reign of Xosrov Apruez [615], ten days after Easter, the Iranian forces took Jerusalem and putting their swords to work for three days they destroyed [almost] all the people in the city. Stationing themselves inside the city, they burned the place down. The troops were then ordered to count the corpses. The figure reached 57,000. Thirty-five thousand people were taken alive, among whom was a certain [Melchite] patriarch named Zak’aria who was also custodian of the Cross. [The Persians] sought for the life-bringing Cross and began to torment [the clerics], executing many clerics at that time. Finally [the clerics] pointed out the place where it was hidden. [The Persians] took it into captivity and also melted all the city’s silver and gold, which they took to the court of the king.

<sup>43</sup> Koran 26:197-26:199: Was it not a sign to them that the learned among the children of Israel recognised it? If we had sent it down unto any foreigner, And he had recited it to them, they had not believed.

<sup>44</sup> Koran 27:78-27:79: Truly this Koran declareth to the children of Israel most things wherein they disagree: And it is certainly guidance and a mercy to the faithful.

<sup>45</sup> Koran 46:9: If this Book be from God, and ye believe it not, and a witness of the children of Israel witness to its conformity with the Law, and believe, while ye proudly disdain it . . . ? Ah! God guideth not the people guilty of such a wrong!

The Messiah disdaineth not to be a servant of God, nor do the angels who are nigh unto Him. [...]<sup>46</sup>

Another sura is even narrower in its view but with an important distinction where Jesus morphs from an *apostle of God* to a mere *apostle* (or vice versa), a path not followed in this article:

Infidels now are they who say, “God is the Messiah, Son of Mary;” for the Messiah said, “O children of Israell! worship God, my Lord and your Lord.” Whoever shall join other gods with God, God shall forbid him the Garden, and his abode shall be the Fire; and the wicked shall have no helpers.

They surely are Infidels who say, “God is the third of three:” for there is no God but one God [...]

The Messiah, Son of Mary, is but an Apostle; other Apostles have flourished before him; and his mother was a just person: they both ate food. [...]<sup>47</sup>

The Koran emerges as the continuum of a pool of Judeo-Christian sects that refused to submit to Chalcedon or to any other Trinitarian notion. First, the new scripture appears as a call to jihad against those that had declared holy war against them. Even though the above quoted verse declares that the spirit constitutes the word of God, the Melkites' spirit went through John the Baptist to Jesus. To survive, they may at first have been part of a Muhammadian alliance. Later they must have renounced their membership when it became clear that the “Quraysh” dynasty started to claim the spiritual supremacy over the new Judaic pact. This theocracy possibly emerged out of al-Hira, Basra, or Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Al-Hira was one of the few Christian centers of Syro-Aramaic liturgical teachings while Basra and Seleucia-Ctesiphon appear to be the main holding areas at the time for the Jewish emigrates. The Melkite middle ground in Syria was particularly prone to flip-flopping, thus likely breaking alliances and undergoing double baptisms, which seems to find repeated parallels in the Koran.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, on the Koranic foundation, the call to forfeiting power to the Quraysh prominently stands out.<sup>49</sup> The centrality of a Quraysh lineage<sup>50</sup> for the ultimate price of the top post in an empire would undoubtedly prompt ancestral modifications by aspiring rulers of non-Quraysh descent. The problem of genealogical fixing has long been recognized by Muslim scholars, for example by the fourteenth century Muslim historian and philosopher Khaldun.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, changing a lineage has been part of the Judaic survival strategies for centuries before. However, genealogies were only subject to suspicion as long as they concerned a “Quraysh” from *other* sectarian origins. One's own heritage was never questioned. Yet, cross-accusations of genealogical tinkering point at a common source: fraud — by all of them. The questions here unanswered are *when* and *how*.

<sup>46</sup> Koran 4:126-4:127.

<sup>47</sup> Koran 5:76-5:77 and 5:79.

<sup>48</sup> For example Koran 24:46-24:47: For there are who say “We believe on God and on the Apostle, and we obey;” yet, after this, a part of them turn back. But these are not of the faithful.

And when they are summoned before God and His Apostle that He may judge between them, lo! a part of them withdraw:

Or Koran 4:136: see text under Muawiyah.

<sup>49</sup> Koran 106.

<sup>50</sup> It may be noted that the Muslim lineages through Elijah create a paradox of ancestry with different fathers for the prophet. Bringing Ishmael and Elijah together in one lineage is impossible.

<sup>51</sup> Muhammed ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 AD), *The Muqaddimah (1377 AD)*, translated by Franz Rosenthal (Princeton University, 1958) Introduction: it should be known that most of those who attack the (‘Alid) descent of (the Idrisids) are themselves persons who claim to be descendants of Muhammad or pretend to be connected with his descendants, and who envy the descendants of Idris. The claim to (Muhammadan) descent is a great title to nobility among nations and races in all regions. Therefore, it is subject to suspicion.

## A Jumble of History

In the primary sources during the rise of Christianity and Islam, the word *Pagan* is often used as a curse-word for differing sects rather than a label for polytheist beliefs of Roman, Persian, or Arab flavors. From a Muslim or Arian Christian point of view, every sect that believed in anything other than a single and undivided Judaic god was Pagan. They called Trinitarians *associators* and *idolators* or also *enemies of God*<sup>52</sup> because they, according to John of Damascus,<sup>53</sup> had declared Christ to be the Son of God. Likewise, the accusation of idolatry stems from the veneration of the cross.

God is One; Say not Three; He has no son. These core doctrinal issues are repeated so many times in the Koran that it seems beyond doubt that *Islam* stands on its surface for rejecting Trinitarian doctrines. In contrast, the Koran mentions *polytheism* in the sense of Paganism only in two insignificant contemporary events and otherwise exclusively in historic analogies.

From an Orthodox point of view, differing ideas that denied the Trinity would either be *anti-Christ* or *God-less* for denying Jesus being God or *Pagan* in order to avoid calling the enemy by its name. They would have looked at the Muslims as having embraced the “doctrine of the beast, that is, Muhammad.”<sup>54</sup> The First Commandment in Exodus is quite clear: You shall have no other gods before me.<sup>55</sup> There are scholarly interpretations that attempt to explain away the Trinitarian difficulty with Paganism, but these are not subject to this discussion.

It is believed that Muhammad had merely chanced upon the preexisting Jewish and Christian scriptures. Hence, it is unclear what the religious affinities were and who accepted or refuted the teachings of Muhammad. The Koran suggests that early Muslims — in parallel to the followers of Jesus in the New Testament — had turned away from the new teachings after the prophet's death.<sup>56</sup> Ibn Ishaq portrayed Islam as evaporating.<sup>57</sup> Although his evidence is inadmissible, he explicitly stated that a *relapse* into idolatry took place (e.g. Trinitarian beliefs) and that Judaism and Christianity rose *again*, both remaining unclear as to the author's understanding. If there had been a nascent Islam in 632 AD (the traditional date), it turned into a scattered stillbirth, and it seems that the evolution of Prophet Muhammad's last sermon, *The Way of Truth*, into the Koran was interrupted for the time being, if it ever made it into the scriptural collection. Despite the presence of 10,000 witnesses to the last sermon, the collective memory seems to have forgotten which sura this might have been. Instead, multiple sectarian versions with competing messages are extant. As an analogy, Islam

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<sup>52</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiû, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXIV, 1: And when those Moslem, accompanied by the Egyptians who had apostatized from the Christian faith and embraced the faith of the beast, had come up, the Moslem took as a booty all the possessions of the Christians who had fled, and they designated the servants of Christ enemies of God.

<sup>53</sup> John of Damascus, *The Fount of Knowledge* (ca. 740 AD), On Heresis, in Frederic Chase, *Fathers of the Church* (1958) VII: Moreover, they call us Hetaerists, or Associators, because, they say, we introduce an associate with God by declaring Christ to the Son of God and God. [...] others say that the Hebrews hated us and deceived us by writing in the name of the Prophets so that we might be lost. [...] Thus, you speak untruly when you call us Hetaerists; we retort by calling you ‘Mutilators of God.’ They furthermore accuse us of being idolaters, because we venerate the cross, which they abominate.

<sup>54</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiû, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXXI, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Exodus 20:3.

<sup>56</sup> Koran 3:138: Muhammad is naught but a Messenger; Messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels?

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Biography of Muhammad* (ca. 760s AD) last illness: When the apostle of Allah died many Arabs relapsed into idolatry; Judaism and Christianity rose again, and Hypocrisy became common, so that the Muslims seemed like a flock of sheep on a wintry night, because of the loss of their prophet. Then Allah roused them again under Abu Bakr.”

pretends as if it was unclear where Jesus's *Sermon of the Mount* should be found in the New Testament.

The notion of an ignorant origin of the Koran does not withstand scrutiny. Sebeos, Bishop of the Bagratunis, wrote in the 660s that Muhammad was not only an expert in the Torah but that his mission was to conquer the Promised Land — a redeemer of Canaan and Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup> This redeemer role might be alluded to in the Koran itself.

And when Jesus son of Mary said, “Children of Israel, I am indeed the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.”<sup>59</sup>

If the two mysteries of the Koran's Ahmad and Al-Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism were carelessly combined, one could — to the horror of linguists — jump to the conclusion that a redeemer had indeed been expected. One could speculate that *Ahmad* (not Muhammad) has a similar meaning as *Messiah* or *Christ*, which is only marginally different from the prophesy in the book of John where *another* Paracletos should follow the Paracletos Jesus.<sup>60</sup> The Hebrew word *mashiah* means the *anointed* (of the Lord): “This is the word rendered in Septuagint as Greek *Khristos*. In Old Testament prophetic writing, it was used of an expected deliverer of the Jewish nation.”<sup>61</sup> Hence, turning the perspective to almost any view, Ahmad likely rests on a Judeo-Christian foundation and is supposed to be an *anointed* redeemer of Israel, a function that may bear many names with the same meaning.

Consistent with Sebeos's notion that the ideas came from Edessa and constituted a handover, a verse in *The Cow* indicates that the power over religion had been transferred from the family tree of Isaac to the Ishmaelites.

And Abraham charged his sons with this and Jacob likewise: “My sons, God has chosen for you the religion; see that you die not save in surrender.” Why, were you witnesses, when death came to Jacob? When he said to his sons, “What will you serve after me?” They said, “We will serve thy God and the God of thy fathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, One God; to Him we surrender.” That is a nation that has passed away; there awaits them that they have earned, and there awaits you that you have earned; you shall not be questioned concerning the things they did.<sup>62</sup>

Isaac's power has passed away, and of Abraham's sons, only one is next in line: his first-born Ishmael. While Sebeos's agenda is unknown, an analysis of the subtle differences between the biblical story of Joseph and the one in the Koran also unmasks biblical experts rather than some

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<sup>58</sup> Sebeo's History of the seventh century, 30 (publishing ca. 670 AD), English by Robert Bedrosian (1985): Twelve peoples [representing] all the tribes of the Jews assembled at the city of Edessa. [...] Heraclius, emperor of the Byzantines, gave the order to besiege it. When [the Jews] realized that they could not militarily resist him, they promised to make peace. Opening the city gates, they went before him, and [Heraclius] ordered that they should go and stay in their own place. So they departed, taking the road through the desert to Tachkastan<sup>58</sup> to the sons of Ishmael. [The Jews] called [the Ishmaelites] to their aid and familiarized them with the relationship they had through the books of the [Old] Testament. [...] In that period a certain one of them, a man of the sons of Ishmael named Mohammad, a merchant, became prominent. [...] and [Mohammad] taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially since he was informed and knowledgeable about Mosaic history. [...] He said: “God promised that country [Canaan, Israel] to Abraham and to his son after him, for eternity. [...] Now, however, you are the sons of Abraham, and God shall fulfill the promise made to Abraham and his son on you. Only love the God of Abraham, and go and take the country which God gave to your father, Abraham.

<sup>59</sup> Koran 61:6.

<sup>60</sup> Although the Eastern Church may have mainly relied on the book of Matthew according to the Hebrews (5:4 and 3:10-12), see in particular John 14:16 where Jesus views himself as another Paracletos: And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper [Paracletos], to be with you forever.

<sup>61</sup> *Online Etymology Dictionary*, www.etymonline.com, keyword “Messiah,” accessed October 16, 2009. Edited by the author for clarity.

<sup>62</sup> Koran 2:134.

illiterate people that happened to have *chanced* upon the Bible. A tradition attributes the first caliph Abu Bakr<sup>63</sup> to the tribe of Joseph, Isaac's grandson. The importance of this caliph is that he is the first outside of Muhammad's family to accept Islam. While the traditions remain inadmissible, the connection between Joseph and Abu Bakr is just one of these pieces of a majestic puzzle that are preferably ignored without a convincing rationale. However, *not* exploring this Pandora box of uncomfortable thought defies rationality and proper historical methodology. It also leaves Muslims (and followers of other orthodoxies) in the slumber of happy innocence and helps lighting the fuses on some of their more explosive zealots — on a march toward yet another Holocaust that can hopefully be avoided by constructing an insight into the mechanisms of Judaic religions.

The Coptic Apocalypse of Pseudo-Shenute wrote down an after-the-fact prophesy about the incursion of the Ishmaelites:

After that shall arise the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Esau, who hound the Christians, and the rest of them will be concerned to prevail over and rule all the world and to [re-]build the Temple that is in Jerusalem. When that happens, know that the end of times approaches and is near. The Jews will expect the Deceiver and will be ahead of the [other] peoples when he comes. When you see the [abomination of] desolation of which the prophet Daniel spoke standing in the holy place, [know that] they are those who deny the pains which I received upon the cross and who move freely about my church, fearing nothing at all.<sup>64</sup>

The prophesy not only spoke about the Ishmaelite goal to rebuild the Holy Temple of Jerusalem but also about their partners, the sons of Esau.<sup>65</sup> This is a particularly interesting clue to the origin of the Quraysh, because they shifted their lineage first from the biblical Jacob to his brother Esau. Both Jacob and Esau were sons of Isaac. The significance is a symbolic disguise. Esau had been betrayed by Jacob of his birthright to the inheritance of Israel, and he had also married Ishmael's daughter.<sup>66</sup>

The concentration of messianic hopes around this time is connected to the prophesies of the Seventy "Sevens" in the Book of Daniel<sup>67</sup> where an anointed one was expected to arise as their ruler. The Jews at the time were hopeful that the meaning of the prophesy indicates the arrival of the Messiah 490 years after the Third Jewish-Roman War (135 AD).<sup>68</sup> The renaming to Muhammad — Man of Delights — and the birth of the prototype Koran needs to also be seen in context of the anticipation of the redemption of Israel and the arrival of a new King of the Jews.

From the ninth century, al-Kindi<sup>69</sup> reflected back unto the birth of the Koran. He was active in the House of Wisdom in Baghdad and was employed by a number of Abbasid rulers.

Show me any proof or sign of a wonderful work done by your master Muhammad, to certify his mission, and to prove what he did in slaughter and rapine was, like the other, by Divine command.

<sup>63</sup> Bukhari, ca. 864-870 AD (CMJE and the University of Southern California, 2007-2009) 3:34:420: The Prophet said, "Verily you are the companions of Joseph. Tell Abu Bakr to lead the people in the prayer."

<sup>64</sup> Pseudo-Shenute, *Vision* (ca. 644 AD) 340-41.

<sup>65</sup> Genesis 25:25: Esau was the firstborn of Isaac, Abraham and Sarah's son. He was red and hairy. His twin brother was Jacob.

<sup>66</sup> Mahalath.

<sup>67</sup> Daniel 9:20 – 9:27.

<sup>68</sup> Note the proximity to 0 AH: 135 + 490 = 625 AD. The count may have started with the death of a leader rather than the end of the war.

<sup>69</sup> Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, 801–873 AD.

The result of all of this is patent to you who have read the scriptures and see how, in your book, histories are all jumbled together and intermingled; an evidence that many different hands have been at work therein, and caused discrepancies, adding or cutting out whatever they liked or disliked. Are such, now, the conditions of a revelation sent down from heaven?<sup>70</sup>

Al-Kindi was of the opinion that the Koran had been pieced together of different histories by a number of authors. It would have been helpful if those polemics included a discourse about some of the Koran's content, providing posteriority with clues about what those discrepancies included. At the least, given the Arian and Jewish subtexts in the Koran, there seems to be room for interpretation and alternative scenarios. However, Al-Kindi does provide for a critical clue: the Koran is a jumble of histories, rather than plain fabrications. Hence, the task would be — a path not followed here — to untangle the Gordian Knot rather than to discard it.

The Kaaba in Mecca, which stood at least a century before Prophet Muhammad of the traditional view, was believed to having housed Christian memorabilia. Indeed the Koran itself describes Mecca as Trinitarian:

Inquire then of the Meccans whether thy Lord hath daughters, and they, sons?  
Have we created the angels females? and did they witness it?  
Is it not a falsehood of their own devising, when they say, "God hath begotten?" They are indeed liars.<sup>71</sup>

That God should have begotten a son is at the heart of the longstanding conflict between Byzantine Orthodoxy and (Semi) Arianism. According to John of Damascus, Orthodoxy and the Sabians at the time seem to have venerated saints as gods also,<sup>72</sup> explaining the nature of the above verses. The presence of the female Goddess Uzza complicates the matter only for those that do not grasp her mother role in Mecca and elsewhere.

In the Koran, Prophet Muhammad is believed to be portrayed as one of the messengers of God (but not always), together with Jesus Christ, who is labeled as *son of Mary*.<sup>73</sup> The latter designation is a doctrinal clarification for Arian Christianity: Mary is *not* the Mother of God because Jesus is *not* the Son of God. The Koran also singles out Christians as particularly receptive to the new scripture:

Thou wilt surely find the most hostile of men to the believers are the Jews and the idolaters; and thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say "We are Christians;" that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud, and when they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears

<sup>70</sup> Andrew Rippin, *Muslims, their religious beliefs and practices* (Routledge, 2005) 14; from Emmanuel van Si, *Radical Islam, Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (Yale University Press, 1985) 2.

<sup>71</sup> Koran 37:149-37:151.

<sup>72</sup> John of Damascus, *Apologia Against those who Decry Holy Images*, I:16-1:17: How, then, shall we not record on image the saving pains and wonders of Christ our Lord, so that when my child asks me, "What is this?" I may say, that God the Word became man, and that for His sake not Israel alone passed through the Jordan, but all the human race gained their original happiness. Through Him human nature rose from the lowest depths of the earth higher than the skies, and in His Person sat down on the throne His Father had prepared for Him. [...] God, the Scripture says, stood in the synagogue of the gods, (Ps. 82.1) so that the saints, too, are gods. Holy Gregory takes the words, "God stands in the midst of the gods," to mean that He discriminates their several merits. The saints in their lifetime were filled with the Holy Spirit, and when they are [22] no more, His grace abides with their spirits and with their bodies in their tombs, and also with their likenesses and holy images, not by nature, but by grace and divine power.

<sup>73</sup> Koran 61:6: And when Jesus son of Mary said, "Children of Israel, I am indeed the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me, and giving good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad."

because of the truth they recognize.<sup>74</sup>

The *idolators* are a reference to Byzantine Orthodoxy and *Christians* likely to East-Syrian Christians. According to tradition, when Prophet Muhammad entered the Kaaba, he was not cleaning out Pagan idols, but Trinitarian Christian images of Abraham, Mary, the symbol of the Holy Spirit in the baptism of Jesus, a dove,<sup>75</sup> and others.

The Prophet entered the Ka'ba and found in it the pictures of (Prophet) Abraham and Mary. On that he said, "What is the matter with them (i.e. Quraish)? They have already heard that angels do not enter a house in which there are pictures; yet this is the picture of Abraham. And why is he depicted as practicing divination by arrows?"<sup>76</sup>

This also inadmissible tradition is in conflict with the idea of Paganism, and the texts in brackets hint at later editions that seem to attempt clarifications of passages that are today assumed to refer to the Quraysh. Rather than an anti-Pagan campaign, one might read a Judaic sweep against idols into the story — foreshadowing the sectarian continuum with the iconoclast controversy of the following century. Divination by arrows is, of course, a Judaic tradition in the context of Israel's redemption,<sup>77</sup> and the practice would possibly continue elsewhere for some time.

It can be taken from the *Doctrina Jacobi* from around 640 AD — another problematic source — that Prophet Muhammad had appeared among the Saracens.

A false prophet has appeared among the Saracens [...] They say that the prophet has appeared coming with the Saracens, and is proclaiming the advent of the anointed one who is to come [...] So, I Abraham, made enquiries, and was told by those who had met him: "There is no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only bloodshed; for he says he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible."<sup>78</sup>

The text refers to an anointed one to come, which is a reference either to the second coming of Jesus before the end of days or to the appearance of a messiah, in either case a Paraclete. While the text fails to identify Muhammad, the primary sources seem to be in agreement that the Judaic sects were facing the end of time, and the expected outcome is the same in both cases: the redemption of Israel.

Without going into the complications of differing Saracen groups, multiple contemporary prophets alongside Muhammad, and which parts of the Koran may have existed at the time, a *false* prophet appearing with these tribes does not necessarily translate into a wholesale conversion from many possible Judaic sects to Islam. Maybe only the immediate followers of a Muhammad had adopted a new doctrine that could have derived from as little as a sermon that had complemented other scriptures such as the Torah and one Gospel of the New Testament.

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<sup>74</sup> Koran 5:85.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Biography of Muhammad* (ca. 760s AD): The conquest of Mecca: After this, he called Uthman b. Talha and took from him the key of the Kaba. This was opened to him, and he entered. There he found a pigeon made of aloe-wood, and he broke this idol with his own hand and threw it outside.

<sup>76</sup> *Bukhari*, ca. 864-870 AD (CMJE and the University of Southern California, 2007-2009) 4:55:570.

<sup>77</sup> 2 King 13:17: Elisha said, "Shoot!" and he did so. Elisha said, "This arrow symbolizes the victory the Lord will give you over Syria." Sozomenus, ca. 420 AD, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 7:24: The arrows and darts which were sent against the Romans, as if projected by the opposing ranks, were turned upon the bodies of those who had cast them; and their shields were wrenched from their hands, and whirled against them with filth and dust.

<sup>78</sup> *Doctrina Jacobi* (ca. 640 AD), Patricia Crone, M.A. Cook, *Hagarism, The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge University Press, 1977) 3-4.

## Unequal treatment of Christians

John, Bishop of Nikiú should be a near contemporary prime source for the unfolding events during Prophet Muhammad's lifetime and also after his death. The troubling issue is that the chronicle's chapters between 610 and 640 are missing and that a Muslim Arab edition lies between the original and the extant Ethiopian translation. This leads to deep distrust of the text by modern scholars. Nevertheless, Bishop John attests to a *Muslim* conquest of Egypt with the help of Umar the Great.

And 'Amr the son of Al-As sent a letter to Umar the son of Al-Khattab in the province of Palestine to this effect: "If thou dost not send Moslem reinforcements, I shall not be able to take Misr." And he sent him 4,000 Moslem warriors.<sup>79</sup>

This constitutes a first evidence for the presence of *Muslims* in the Syrian home territory of the upcoming Umayyad dynasty. Modern translators sometimes take words like *Saracen* for *Muslim* out of ignorance that *Saracen* means nothing other than *Saracen* with its confusing pre-Muslim baggage. As the missing thirty years indicate a brute force elimination of inconvenient truths and the bishop's text (except for its ending paragraphs) appears otherwise fairly consistent, the word might simply be a similarly innocent error where the Arab word *muhajirun* might have morphed into *Muslims* instead of *emigrates* or Robert Kerr's interpretation, *Arabs*. The journey in the search for evidence might end at the same junction, only a couple of decades later in time. It is more important that 'Amr Al-As was "the chief of the Moslem,"<sup>80</sup> not "Caliph" Umar the Great. The latter maintained, according to tradition, family ties to the Umayyads through marriage and was nicknamed *the Redeemer* as if he was a messiah that had succeeded to redeem Israel. However, the bishop puts the Muslim advance yet again into a context of religious strives within the Byzantine Orthodoxy:

And 'Amr left lower Egypt and proceeded to war against Rif. He sent a few Moslem against the city of Antinoe. And when the Moslem saw the weakness of the Romans and the hostility of the people to the emperor Heraclius because of the persecution wherewith he had visited all the land of Egypt in regard to the orthodox faith, at the instigation of Cyrus the Chalcedonian patriarch, they became bolder and stronger in the war. [...] But God, the Guardian of justice, did not neglect the world, but avenged those who had been wronged: He had no mercy on such as had dealt treacherously against Him, but He delivered them into the hands of the Ishmaelites. And the Moslem thereupon took the field and conquered all the land of Egypt. And after the death of Heraclius, the patriarch Cyrus on his return did not cease (his) severities and persecution against the people of God, but rather added violence to violence.<sup>81</sup>

The bishop appears to view Ishmaelites and Muslims as one and the same, or maybe one as a subset of the other.

The Covenant of Umar is another inadmissible document that is generally believed to contain redactions of the ninth century<sup>82</sup> to a treaty that may go back to a century earlier.<sup>83</sup> Yet, when

<sup>79</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiú, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXII, 5-6.

<sup>80</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiú, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXX:72: And thereupon 'Amr the chief of the Moslem made his entry without effort into the city of Alexandria.

Compare with CXXI:3 wherein Amr al-As seems to emerge as the leading figure in a kingmaking process:

And 'Amr became stronger every day in every field of his activity. And he exacted the taxes which had been determined upon, but he took none of the property of the Churches, and he committed no act of spoliation or plunder, and he preserved them throughout all his days. And when he seized the city of Alexandria, he had the canal drained in accordance with the instructions given by the apostate Theodore.

<sup>81</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiú, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXV, 9 and 13-14.

<sup>82</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, Marc Saperstein, *The Jew in the medieval world: a source book*, (the Hebrew Union College Press, 1999) 315-1791, page 14.

evading the scholarly discussion of the document's purpose or evolution and examining the text as authentic in its core and isolated from later interpretations, no effort was made to convert the residents in Syria to a specific faith, which is commonly attributed to a Muslim custom. The covenant confirmed the intention of a peaceful coexistence of believers from various Christian faiths in Jerusalem, as a matter of curiosity dubbed "Illyaa" in the text — Elijah — but possibly an Arabic form of Aelia [Capitolina], named so by the Roman Emperor Hadrian.

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Beneficent.

This is what the slave of Allah, Umar b. al-Khattab, the Amir of the believers, has offered the people of Illyaa' of security granting them Amaan (protection) for their selves, their money, their churches, their children, their lowly and their innocent, and the remainder of their people.

Their churches are not to be taken, nor are they to be destroyed, nor are they to be degraded or belittled, neither are their crosses or their money, and they are not to be forced to change their religion, nor is any one of them to be harmed.

No Jews are to live with them in Illyaa' and it is required of the people of Illyaa' to pay the Jizya, like the people of the cities.

It is also required of them to remove the Romans from the land; and whoever amongst the people of Illyaa' that wishes to depart with their selves and their money with the Romans, leaving their trading goods and children behind, then their selves, their trading goods and their children are secure until they reach their destination.<sup>84</sup>

The treaty established religious tolerance and respect among the believers of the various faiths as long as they believed in one god and were not Jews. The Romans — marked for expulsion — are meant to be those of the Byzantine Empire who had tried to cleanse its population of those that did not adhere to the Chalcedonian creed. Yet, as Richard Bulliet reasons, Umar's approach could have been good strategy.<sup>85</sup> But then, why expel the Chalcedonians and not the Melkites? Why would the monotheistic Jews be a target for continuing their ban from the Temple Mount that had been in place for over five centuries?

A tenth century Midrashim text, if it is authentic, suggests from a Jewish point of view that the Jews were engaged in a religious quarrel about Jerusalem with the Melkites of Umar:

Israel will say to the king of the Arabs, "Take silver and gold and leave the temple." The king of the Arabs will say, "You have nothing to do with this temple. However, if you want, choose a sacrifice as you did in the past, and we will also offer a sacrifice, and with the one whose sacrifice is accepted, we will all become one people." [...] At that time, the Arabs will say to Israel, "Come and believe in our faith," but Israel will answer, "We will kill or be killed, but we will not deny our belief!" At that time, swords will be drawn, bows will be strung and arrows will be sent, and many will fall.<sup>86</sup>

Even though the Koran insists on a partnership with the Jews, the primary sources seem to agree, although this one would again be inadmissible, that not all was well in Jerusalem but also that the Temple Mount was a vital component of the "invader's" interest.

<sup>83</sup> Milka Levy-Rubin, 'Shurūt 'Umar and its alternatives: the legal debate on the status of the dhimmīs' (Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 30, 2005) p. 173.

Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia, 1979), vol. 1, p. 25.

<sup>84</sup> *Covenant of Umar (637 AD)*.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Bulliet, review of this article.

<sup>86</sup> Midrash Sefer Eliyahu, Pirkei Mashia'ch, 2:36, kabbalaonline.org.

According to tradition, Umar distributed a nascent Koran, which should have contained Prophet Muhammad's last sermon *The Way of Truth*. These first editions would later be destroyed by Uthman.

Upon what is in this book is the word of Allah, the covenant of His Messenger, of the Khulafaa' and of the believers if they (the people of Illyaa') gave what was required of them of Jizya.<sup>87</sup>

The head tax, the jizya, was standard practice under both, Byzantine and Persian rule and not unique to Islam. It seems that the occupiers merely left the preexisting tax systems unchanged. However, the core in Umar's covenant is that greater Syria did not convert to Islam, here represented with the holy city of Jerusalem, and that the name of the book of Allah remains elusive.

For centuries, greater Syria was the hotbed for sectarian clashes over Judaic hair splits. All of a sudden, according to tradition, they changed heart and welcomed a new ideology without further ado in the midst of a religious world war. They supposedly embraced an ideology that was fundamentally opposed to their own — not just in details but in the central tenet to their understanding of Jesus's divinity, so much so that they would come to view the emerging Muslims as Antichrist, a symptom of the end of the world.

In Egypt, according to John Bishop of Nikiù, the story had unfolded quite differently, which was also bustling with Jews and Christians. The treatment of the inhabitants in Egypt was distinct from Umar's concept of peace.

Now on that day of the festival of the holy Resurrection they released the orthodox that were in prison; but, enemies of Christ as they were [the invaders], they did not let them go without first ill-using them; but they scourged them and cut off their hands.

And on that day these (unhappy ones) wept and their tears poured down their faces and they were spurned, even as it is written regarding those unclean persons: "They have defiled the Church by an unclean faith, and they have wrought apostasies and deeds of violence like the sect of the Arians, such as neither Pagan nor barbarian has wrought, and they have despised Christ and His servants, and we have not found any that do the like amongst the worshippers of false idols."<sup>88</sup>

In contrast to Jerusalem, members of John's Orthodoxy in Egypt (referring to Egyptian opponents to the Chalcedonian creed) had been mutilated. This discrepancy is an indication for the need to keep the various Christian, Jewish, and emerging Muslim sects and their geographic locations strictly apart when studying the evolution of Islam or other Judaic religions. Modern research seems to treat early Islam as one rather than identifying its sectarian elements and various royal contenders. The current approach could be compared to pretending that all Christian and Jewish sects during the sixteenth century were simply "Christians." With such a view, we would understand nothing about the Reformation and could even imagine unity.

If John Bishop of Nikiù did not take the new faith for Arian, he at least thought that it was *like* Arian Christianity. Just after the before mentioned passage, the bishop clarified that the newcomers thought of themselves as servants of Christ.<sup>89</sup> He later termed their belief *faith of the beast*,

<sup>87</sup> Covenant of Umar (637 AD).

<sup>88</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiù, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXVII, 5-6.

<sup>89</sup> John, Bishop of Nikiù, *Chronicles* (ca. 690 AD) CXVII, 8.

referring to Satan, but this does not represent a different opinion from what he thought of the Arians or anybody else who challenged his pre-Chalcedonian Christian Orthodoxy. Indeed, the new faith would be *like* Arian because it not only consisted of an alliance of converging Jewish, Arian, and Semi-Arian Christian sects but also because it added a new doctrinal element: Muhammad.

In the ninth century, Bukhari wrote that a Christian had penned suras for Muhammad.

There was a Christian who embraced Islam and read Surat-al-Baqara [The Cow] and al-Imran [The House of Imran], and he used to write (the revelations) for the Prophet. Later on he returned to Christianity again and he used to say: "Muhammad knows nothing but what I have written for him." Then Allah caused him to die, and the people buried him, but in the morning they saw that the earth had thrown his body out.<sup>90</sup>

This later tradition seems to suggest agreement with the bishop. According to Bukhari, although only usable as literary evidence, somebody of a differing creed had been working with Muhammad only to later part in disagreement.

### **In the cross-fire of holy wars**

The Persian and Arabian Christians had long before rejected a rule of the Eastern Church in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, but the Ishmaelites helped strengthen their opposition. The eastern pontiff, Isho'yahb III, wrote in a letter to the Christians of Qatar:

Not satisfied with their wickedness against the church of God, your so-called bishops extended the demonstration of their rebellion to the rulers there and to the chief ruler who is above the rulers of this time. They rose up against the primacy of the church of God, and they have now been scorned by the rulers as befits their insubordination. (Epistulae 266) [...]

You, my faithful, in whose salutary power are the islands and desert dwellers (yothay madbro)—namely those of Dirin [modern Tarut], Mashmahig, Tilun [Dilmun/Bahrain], Khatt and Hajar—should be diligent now more than ever before in the assistance of your faith and in the lawful establishment of the priesthood that sanctifies you even more than in attending to worldly affairs. So pick out and send to us either those fallen bishops who are in your mind suitable once more to be restored to sacerdotal service, or others considered by you more suitable than them for the great task of the exalted service of God's church, so that thus they might be anointed, consecrated and perfected. (Epistulae 267-68)

In order to follow the mainstream Muslim story, one has to ignore Isho'yahb's concerns that the Arian bishops had rebelled against pope, king, and emperor. According to the text, there was a schism in the Eastern Church, and it seems not impossible that Islam was superimposed unto it: The *like* Arians had essentially taken over most of the bishoprics in the Arab Peninsula, including Mecca, then called Hasor.<sup>91</sup> They had refused to enter a compromise regarding the nature of Jesus for centuries and were intent on defending their *old* version of *like* Arian Christianity under a new leader under the possible pen name of Muhammad. Meanwhile, parts of the Eastern Church were already under forced conversion to the Chalcedonian creed through their bishops.<sup>92</sup> In response, the *like*

<sup>90</sup> Bukhari, ca. 864-870 AD (CMJE and the University of Southern California, 2007-2009) 4:56:814.

<sup>91</sup> Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs, From the Bronze Age to the coming of Islam* (Routledge, 2001) 31-32.

[One might wonder why the Koran speaks of Mecca while Isho'yahb's patriarchy lasted from 649-659 AD.]

<sup>92</sup> Sebeo's History of the seventh century (publishing ca. 670 AD) 30, English by Robert Bedrosian (1985): "You must have anathematized the three fathers, Theodore, Diodore and Nestorius, and have accepted the term Galdath Alcha or those Greeks would never have allowed you to approach their altars." [...] "Otherwise, we shall make for ourselves another Catholicos, and do you hold your authority on the Persian side." Since the

Arians seized those bishoprics loyal to them. The old guard had acquired a rebellious and non-conciliatory approach toward their alien pontiff.

The *one* large religious conflict that is documented in the historic record before the advent of Muslim traditions is between Byzantine Orthodoxy, Melkite Christianity, and *like* Arianism. It provides for the contextual framework that a different scenario for Islam's beginnings is not only possible but also probable.

### The Uthman Paradox

Umar the Great was succeeded by Caliph Uthman,<sup>93</sup> the first caliphal leader of the wealthy royal Umayyad family clan. According to inadmissible tradition, he was elected by appointment.

When he was buried, the group (recommended by Umar) held a meeting. Then Abdur-Rahman said, "Reduce the candidates for rulership to three of you." Az-Zubair said, "I give up my right to Ali." Talha said, "I give up my right to Uthman," Sad, "I give up my right to Abdur-Rahman bin Auf." Abdur-Rahman then said (to Uthman and Ali), "Now which of you is willing to give up his right of candidacy to that he may choose the better of the (remaining) two, bearing in mind that Allah and Islam will be his witnesses." So both the sheiks (i.e. Uthman and Ali) kept silent. Abdur-Rahman said, "Will you both leave this matter to me, and I take Allah as my Witness that I will not choose but the better of you?" They said, "Yes." So Abdur-Rahman took the hand of one of them (i.e. Ali) and said, "You are related to Allah's Apostle and one of the earliest Muslims as you know well. So I ask you by Allah to promise that if I select you as a ruler you will do justice, and if I select Uthman as a ruler you will listen to him and obey him." Then he took the other (i.e. Uthman) aside and said the same to him. When Abdur-Rahman secured (their agreement to) this covenant, he said, "O Uthman! Raise your hand." So he (i.e. Abdur-Rahman) gave him (i.e. Uthman) the solemn pledge, and then Ali gave him the pledge of allegiance and then all the (Medina) people gave him the pledge of allegiance.<sup>94</sup>

The text justifies how Uthman managed to become a caliph while there is no evidence that the six (!) parties mentioned were united. Uthman and Az-Zubair have been arch-enemies, at least at some point in time. If the text is taken at face value, a high priest (or an imam) decided which one was to become head of state.

The importance of Uthman cannot be understated. Tradition from two hundred years after the fact states that he put together and distributed the Koran — notably with the help of Az-Zubair.<sup>95</sup> The minor unsettling issue with Uthman is that he neither partook in the critical battles alongside the prophet nor was he part of the pledge of the allegiance to Muhammad.<sup>96</sup> Hence, it seems strange that there is no contemporary claim to the Uthmanian problem, no protests, and no respective conflicts. Therefore, the distribution of the Koran seems uncalled for. Sadeghi and Bergman argue,

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Catholicos was unable to leave the territory of his authority, he requested a statement of faith from the king. Immediately a document was sent to him written in the king's hand, anathematizing Nestorius and all heretics; but it did not anathematize the council of Chalcedon.

<sup>93</sup> Uthman ibn Affan ruled the caliphate 644-656 AD. He was one of the companions of Muhammad and member of the Umayyad dynasty.

<sup>94</sup> Bukhari, ca. 864-870 AD (CMJE and the University of Southern California, 2007-2009) 5:57:50.

<sup>95</sup> *Bukhari*, ca. 864-870 AD (CMJE and the University of Southern California, 2007-2009) 4:56:709: Uthman called Zaid bin Thabit, Abdullah bin Az-Zubair, Said bin Al-As and Abdur Rahman bin Al-Harith bin Hisham, and then they wrote the manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an in the form of book in several copies.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:57:48: "O Ibn Umar! I want to ask you about something; please tell me about it. Do you know that Uthman fled away on the day (of the battle) of Uhud?" Ibn Umar said, "Yes." The (Egyptian) man said, "Do you know that Uthman was absent on the day (of the battle) of Badr and did not join it?" Ibn Umar said, "Yes." The man said, "Do you know that he failed to attend the Ar Ridwan pledge and did not witness it (i.e. Hudaibiya pledge of allegiance)?" Ibn Umar said, "Yes."

How can one know that it was Uthman who sent the regional codices? The first argument for this concerns collective memories. In the late first century and early second century AH [seventh and eighth century AD], communities remembered having received the standard text from Uthman. It was not only the different cities that had the same recollection, but also the different and at times clashing religious communities, including the proto-Shi'is and the Harigis. No one traced the standard version to a source other than Uthman. The 'Alids did not ascribe it to Ali. Even those who transmitted the variants found in non-standard codices (such as the codex of Ibn Mas'ud) did not dispute the Uthmanic origin of the standard version.<sup>97</sup>

Following the logic of the authors' argument, faith must be futile, even though it represents the collective memory of miraculous events that did *not* happen. Moderns readily accept that the ancient Egyptian religion(s) had served elites to maintain power and were superimposed unto preexisting spiritual myths. It is also common wisdom that Egyptian pharaohs had tried to erase the memory of entire godly dynasties, sometimes by chiseling out faces and in other instances by razing entire cities. When it comes to the three great Judaic beliefs, we seem at a loss that similar mechanisms might have been at work and that evidence of the god of the Israelites first appears thousands of years after human helpers had long created other supreme gods. As researchers in religion know, given enough time and patience, the collective memory can indeed be shaped and reshaped. Depending on the thorough cleansing of historic evidence — in particular pertaining to scriptural evidence that was then exclusively in the hands of the priestly elite — and the placement of the first traditions, the beliefs could have a single source that would trigger a chain of shaping efforts. Modern science is about to formalize just how this process best works when embedded in a familiar framework.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, even in the absence of any evidence, it seems imaginable that a base Koran could have appeared around this time. Given the religious context, a standard Koran may have been distributed *under*, rather than *by* Uthman. Hence, in order for the collective memory to change, little effort would be needed in the mosques.<sup>99</sup>

The major issue with Uthman is that he supposedly burned Muhammad's original dictations for the Koran in the copies that had before been distributed by Umar (prompting the suspicion that the collective memory had a single source at a bargaining table that was driven by a desire to posture with unity). This amounts to the destruction of Umar's authentic words from God himself, not some mass prints that merited riots and killings in modern times. The burning of a Koran is an act of enmity; the incineration of the originals is a declaration of war. Hence, if there ever existed older editions, these handwritten originals from direct witnesses to the prophet's heavenly communications would have been displayed with pride to posterity or carefully locked away only to eventually be unearthed. Indeed historic evidence is full of examples where Muslims would not dare

<sup>97</sup> B. Sadeghi & U. Bergmann, *The Codex Of A Companion Of The Prophet And The Qur'an Of The Prophet* (Arabica, 2010) Volume 57, pp. 348-354.

<sup>98</sup> Cristian Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Justin Cheng, Jon Kleinberg, Lillian Lee, You had me at hello: How phrasing affects memorability (Cornell, 2012): [...] Together, these results suggest that memorable quotes consist of unusual word sequences built on common syntactic scaffolding.

<sup>99</sup> The Aramaic word *mosque* (*masjid*) for "place of worship" had been used since the fifth century BC.

Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, *The mosque: the heart of submission* (Fordham, 2006) 85, paraphrased: *Masjid* derives from the verb *sajada* (to bow down, prostrate oneself). The earliest use of the verb is to be found in an Aramaic account on papyrus of Ashiqar, from the Elephantine islands, dating to the fifth century BC. Although the precise meaning is unclear, the first use of the nominal form *msgd'* is found in an Elephantine papyrus, dating to the late fifth century BC. The noun can subsequently be found on Nabataean stele, mostly from the Damascus and Basra regions, dating from the first century AD. Dating from the second and third century AD, Latin inscriptions from the Commagen region refer to *Jupiter Turmasgadas*, which is the same vocalization as the Arabic *Turmasgide*. A Greek inscription from Dura Europos has a similar designation.

to extinguish anything with the name of their god on it. Having destroyed it creates either a paradox or is an expedient innovation. It is a testament to a perplexing absence and to a post-prophetic invention of at least parts of the Koran, a path not followed here. However, it allows for a bold thesis: it might be preferable to dismiss the collective memory of Uthman's involvement in the Koran in order to avoid the embarrassment of having destroyed the original holy books.

Uthman was determined to establish a royal succession. His half-brother was appointed to be the governor of Kufa and his first cousin became top advisor to the caliph, always according to tradition. Uthman's foster brother turned governor of Egypt, and the governorship of Syria was enlarged. Placing relatives on these visible top posts sent out a clear message and seems to be the result of an Umayyad conquest rather than an election by giving up rights and forging consensus. Building such a solid power base contradicts the previously stated "election" mechanism under what appears to be the formation of a Muslim theocracy. It rather seems to be the successful result after a declaration of war. In other words, if Umar had been part of an alliance, Uthman broke it.

This notion merits the exploration of a detail. Professor Oleg Grabar explains,

The proper title for the leader of the Muslim community [...] was Khalifat Rasul Allah, Successor to the Prophet, not Khalifat Allah. The difference is hugely significant. The title Khalifat Rasul Allah implies that the caliph is simply a steward of Muhammad's legacy, a mere trustee of the prophetic estate; by contrast, Khalifat Allah implies that the leader of the Muslims is the very voice of God on earth, invested with divine authority. In reality every Muslim claimant to the caliphate from Uthman onward explicitly claimed the status of Khalifat Allah.<sup>100</sup> [...] Each leader argued, and their followers passionately believed, that they spoke for God and dispensed the law of God. To reject God's chosen leader was to reject divine authority.<sup>101</sup>

The use of the title Khalifat Allah by the Umayyads since Uthman (?) suggests that forces were at play that were not all Muslim. Grabar may not have realized how close he was at the core of the issue, but it is remarkable that the Koran picks up on exactly this difference. In sura *Those Who Drag Forth*, the Egyptian Pharaoh proclaims his own supreme divinity:

But he treated him as an impostor, and rebelled;  
Then turned he his back all hastily,  
And gathered an assembly and proclaimed,  
And said, "I am your Lord supreme."  
So God visited on him the punishment of this life and of the other.  
Verily, herein is a lesson for him who hath the fear of God.<sup>102</sup>

The last verse is critical. It seems to turn the text into an analogy to warn contemporaries to refrain from lifting themselves to the status of *Khalifat Allah*, which would, one might suppose, introduce a sort of intercessor role between Caliph and God.

And now are ye come back to us, alone, as we created you at first, and ye leave behind you the good things which we had given you, and we see not with you your intercessors whom ye regarded as the

<sup>100</sup> Crone and Hinds (1986) 19.

<sup>101</sup> Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 119.

<sup>102</sup> Koran 89:21-89:25.

companions of God among you. There is a severance between you now, and those whom ye regarded as partners with God have deserted you.<sup>103</sup>

This point is made exactly in this verse where the *intercessors* had been regarded as *partners with God*. This would not only introduce a paradox of a post-Muhammadian creation of this sura (and many others) but also an extension of the understanding of the associator role in the Koran beyond the narrow problem of Trinitarian beliefs — a rejection of Umayyad leaders being elevated to intercessors with God.

Better yet, Ibn Ishaq, the earliest biographer of Muhammad from the mid eighth century flat-out declared Uthman a Christian. According to him, inadmissible as this evidence is, the actors of the time were seeking for the true religion of Abraham.

O ye Quraysh, seek a religion for yourself, for, by Allah, you have none whatever. And the four dispersed to various countries to seek the religion of Abraham. Waraqa<sup>104</sup> decided on Christianity and followed the books of its teachers until he had obtained knowledge of the scripture. Ubaydullah<sup>105</sup> remained in doubt until, after the revelation, he made profession of Islam and went to Abyssinia;<sup>106</sup> but when he arrived there he became a Christian and died thus, after having renounced Islam.

The third, Uthman, went to Byzantium, where he became a Christian and attained high office. The fourth man, Zayd,<sup>107</sup> became neither Jew nor Christian, although he renounced the religion of the Quraysh and abandoned idols, blood, and sacrifices slain for idols, and condemned the burying alive of female infants.<sup>108</sup>

Ishaq's text suggests that Zayd started out as a Quraysh, Waraqa and Uthman as Melkite Christians, and Ubaydullah probably as an Arian Christian. All agreed in their opposition against the creeds of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. One way to reconcile Ishaq's version with the accepted history of Islam is to forget about it.

### Rome pitches in

Seemingly unrelated, another inner-Christian religious conflict took place between Constantinople and Rome. As greater Syria had broken off from Constantinople, so did the church in Rome. Trying to emancipate the church, Pope Martin I<sup>109</sup> and Maximus the Confessor, both Eastern Christians, tore down the edicts of the Byzantine Empire and ended the issue of whether Jesus's will was divine, human, or both.<sup>110</sup> In order to restore obedience, the teenage Emperor Constans<sup>111</sup> ordered for Pope Martin to be arrested. It seems that the latter had been accused of conspiring with the "caliphate." In his defense, Pope Martin said,

At no time did I send letters to the Saracens nor, as some say, a statement (tomus) as to what they should believe; neither did I ever dispatch money, except only to those servants of God travelling to that place for the sake of alms, and the little which we supplied to them was certainly not conveyed

<sup>103</sup> Koran 6:94.

<sup>104</sup> Waraqa ibn Nawfal, was an alleged cousin of Muhammad's first wife. He was a Melkite priest with an emphasis on the Torah.

<sup>105</sup> Ubayd-Allah ibn Jahsh was the alleged brother of one of Muhammad's wives.

<sup>106</sup> Ethiopia.

<sup>107</sup> Zayd is believed to be an adopted son of Muhammad and a former Syrian slave.

<sup>108</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Biography of Muhammad* (ca. 760s AD), early life.

<sup>109</sup> Pope Saint Martin I was pope from 649 to 653 AD when he was arrested. He died in Constans' confinement in 655 AD.

<sup>110</sup> Lateran Council, 649 AD.

<sup>111</sup> Constans II was Byzantine emperor from 641 to 668 AD.

to the Saracens.<sup>112</sup>

Obviously, the papacy in Rome was involved in a greater dispute between Byzantine Orthodoxy, Roman Christianity, Melkite Christianity, and *like* Arianism (without a more detailed qualification, the latter two could potentially be assigned to *Saracens*). In order to get Rome in line, Greek puppet popes were dispatched from then onward. While they did not bother to describe their beliefs for centuries to come, the idea that the Western popes had tried to make friends with the *Saracens* cannot easily be dismissed. After all, the Orthodox beliefs had before been imposed unto Rome against their will. Pope Martin's letter suggests that their relations were at least friendly, if not intimate. The danger may have been that the Vatican negotiated with the *Saracens* for a religious alliance against Constantinople.

Pretending that the Umayyads would be of a Melkite sect close to Pope Martin's pre-Heraclian Eastern Church but vehemently opposed to Orthodoxy seems more logical than the assumption of dealings with the Muslim "Anti-Christ."

### Internal Jihad

The fog lifts further with Isho'yahb's text, the prelate who had mentioned *Muslims* and their doctrines. The word he had used was *mbaggraye*, which is now commonly translated as emigrates. It reappeared in similar fashion in Greek as *moagaritai* and in Arab as *mubajirun*. However, that this means *Muslim* implies an acceptance of certain historical and doctrinal aspects of Islam that seem premature. It can be said that a group was riding under the flag of *tayyaye mbaggraye*. This in turn would render them *Lakhmid* or *Ishmaelite emigrates*, exiled from Syria during the sixth century. In his detailed paper about the new *Muslim* timescale, Robert Kerr reduces the term *mubajirun* to simply meaning *Arabs*, a proposal that cannot be dismissed lightly.<sup>113</sup>

The heretics are deceiving you [when they say] there happens what happens by order of the Arabs, which is certainly not the case. For the Ishmaelite emigrates [tayyaye mbaggraye] do not aid those who say that God, Lord of all, suffered and died.

The writer meant to talk about two separate groups and say that calamities did not happen by the order of the Syrian Arabs but by the Ishmaelite emigrates. A series of different doctrines emerge and also conflicting parties: the Ishmaelite emigrates (as the *like* Arians), the Christians in Rome, and the Melkites in Syria, among others. They all opposed the Orthodox Christians in Constantinople.

Isho'yahb also referred to a large presence of Pagans throughout the Middle East and confirmed the concept of relative religious freedom under the Umayyads:

As for the [Syrian] Arabs, to whom God has at this time given rule (shultana) over the world, you know well how they act toward us. Not only do they not oppose Christianity, but they praise our faith, honor the priests and saints of our Lord, and give aid to the churches and monasteries. Why then do your people of Oman reject their faith on a pretext of theirs? And this when the people of Oman themselves admit that the Arabs have not compelled them to abandon their faith, but only

<sup>112</sup> Pope Martin, Ep. 14, PL 87, 199A, (ca. 655 AD).

<sup>113</sup> Robert M. Kerr, Annus Hegirae vel Annus (H)Agarorum? May 2012.

asked them to give up half of their possessions in order to keep their faith. Yet they forsook their faith, which is forever, and retained the half of their wealth, which is for a short time.<sup>114</sup>

It seems that Isho'yahb was on a mission to win back the defecting bishoprics in the Arab Peninsula. As was shown before, only in Syria of that time were the Christians tolerated in the expressed way, and Oman seems to have accepted the faith of the Umayyads (whichever that was) and rejected conversion to Byzantine Orthodoxy.

Having said that, first, Muhammad's relative Ali was to wage a "civil war" against the Umayyads, according to tradition — assuming that they were united in one form or another before the advent of Ali. The latter brought Syria under his allegiance, at least for a while. Muawiyah,<sup>115</sup> a mighty ruler of the Umayyad clan, had risen under Caliph Ali to be governor of the province of Syria, which included Jerusalem. Holding the strings of a well-trained army that was highly experienced in conflicts with the Byzantines, Muawiyah had a great joker to play. Nevo and Koren say that he "was no more than the warlord or strongman, who emerged triumphant among the Arab foederati in Syria."<sup>116</sup> They point at the lack of hard evidence and the continued usage of the Byzantine coinage. Whatever the accounts of battles and rebellions entail, in the end, it was Muawiyah rising to be caliph, and the aspirations to the throne by the followers of Ali were crushed with his assassination in 661. Muawiyah's rise is attested by John bar Penkaye who also wrote that the caliph was instructed by "Muhammad," respectively by his doctrines, whichever they were at the time, and that the Umayyads gained control over the *two* kingdoms of Byzantine and Persia.<sup>117</sup>

Caliph Muawiyah focused on politics and economics, bringing forth the best time of the early Muslim era, socially and economically (the absence of rich literary treasures of the time should trigger suspicions about this notion also). However, coinage minted by him hinted at the Umayyads now rejecting crucifixion, which is one of the mainstays of the Muhammadeans who thought that Jesus had been taken from his persecutors before they could have killed him.<sup>118</sup>

In July of the same year the emirs and many Arabs gathered and proffered their right hand to Muawiyah. Then an order went out that he should be proclaimed king in all the villages and cities of his dominion and that they should make acclamations and invocations to him. He also minted gold and silver, but it was not accepted, because it had no cross on it.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Isho'yahb III, *Ep.* 14C, 251, (659 AD) 180.

<sup>115</sup> Muawiyah ruled the caliphate 661-680 AD. He was of the Umayyad Dynasty and was the heir apparent of the throne of Mecca. He was a companion of Muhammad and considered a Ghassanid Saracen.

<sup>116</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an in its historical context* (Routledge, 2008) 14.

<sup>117</sup> John Bar Penkaye's *Riṣ Millē*, Book XV, in Sebastian P. Brock, *North Mesopotamia In The Late Seventh Century, Jerusalem Studies In Arabic And Islam* (Liverpool, 1987) 61: Having let their dispute run its course, after much fighting had taken place between them, the Westerners, whom they call the sons of 'Ammāyē, gained the victory, and one of their number, a man called Muawiyah, became king controlling the two kingdoms, of the Persians and of the Byzantines. Justice flourished in his time, and there was great peace in the regions under his control; he allowed everyone to live as they wanted. For they held, as I have said above, an ordinance, stemming from the man who was their guide [mhaddyānā], concerning the people of the Christians and concerning the monastic station. Also as a result of this man's guidance [mhaddyānūtā] they held to the worship of One God, in accordance with the customs of ancient law. At the beginnings they kept to the traditions [mašmānūtā] of Muḥammad, who was their instructor [tā'rā], to such an extent that they inflicted the death penalty on anyone who was seen to act brazenly against his laws.

<sup>118</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Biography of Muhammad* (ca. 760s AD) Revelation: Allah took Jesus to Himself when they had determined to kill him.

Compare Acts 25:18-19: [...] when the accusers stood up, they brought no charge of such things as I supposed; but had certain questions against him about their own religion, and about one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

<sup>119</sup> The Maronite Chronicle (664+ AD), from Andrew Palmer, Sebastian P. Brock, Robert G. Hoyland, *The seventh century in the west-Syrian chronicles* (Liverpool University Press, 1993) 32.

According to the Maronite Chronicle, the coins that lacked the cross were opposed by the Christian population. However, a Greek inscription of Muawiyah for the renovation of baths in Palestine from the year 664 AD is decorated with a cross<sup>120</sup> and seemingly ending with a homage to Gadara's patron saint John the Baptist.<sup>121</sup> This indicates not only that the leadership had the same issue with the missing cross on the coins but that we might indeed be dealing with a Byzantine successor "state." According to Volker Popp's findings, the inscription depicts an *era of the Arabs*, revealing Muawiyah's ignorance for the *era of Hijra*.<sup>122</sup> When he moved the capital from Al-Hira to Damascus, as tradition claims, he obviously did so to deny Ishmaelite leadership and also to protect the Basilica of John the Baptist, the later site of the Great Mosque of Damascus from where he also minted coins with the Baptist or with the Lamb as an icon for the latter.<sup>123</sup> The centrality of John the Baptist for the Umayyads is part of a chain of connections from the flip-flopping Sabian<sup>124</sup> partners of an ecumenical alliance, to the Koran's story of the submission to God by Sheba,<sup>125</sup> through to the acceptance of Melkite Christianity in Yemen, to the first century expulsion of the followers of John the Baptist in Jerusalem, and to their arch-Jewish rituals, a deviation not followed here. The word *Sabian* itself signifies *baptized*.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, Muawiyah prayed at the tomb of Mary, which was just outside Jerusalem.

[In] Constan's eighteenth year [659 AD (!)], many Arabs gathered at Jerusalem and made Muawiyah king and he went up and sat down on Golgotha [the Church of the Holy Sepulchre]; he prayed there, and went to Gethsemane and went down to the tomb of the blessed Mary to pray in it.<sup>127</sup>

If not implying a divinity in Mary, praying to the mother goddess probably indicates the Trinitarian Melkite stance of Jesus's mother as the recipient of the Holy Spirit (the word of God), which would be passed on through her to the son rather than through John the Baptist. Here again, Richard Bulliet points out that both actions could rest on a wise strategy of the leadership to which one could agree if the fundamental doctrinal differences were not so explosive as to merit war for centuries. After all, the prohibition to worship anything but their god is the beating heart of Islam. If pretending that the previous Umayyads would have been Muslims, Muawiyah would possibly have been Melkite Christian, even though he may have had to submit to Ali and accept Muhammadian doctrines — at first. Hence, the changes in the representation of the icon may have more to do with yet another broken alliance. After the assassination of Ali and the rise of Muawiyah to caliph, the latter reintroduced the cross that was important for the Christians and terminated the allegiance to the short lived confederation. Henceforth, Muawiyah refused to submit to Muhammad's throne.

<sup>120</sup> Y. Hirschfeld and G. Solar, *The Roman Thermae At Hammat Gader: Preliminary Report Of Three Seasons Of Excavations* (Israel Exploration Journal, 1981) Vol. 31, 203-205.

<sup>121</sup> [...] in the 6th year of the indiction, / in the year 726 of the colony, according to the Arabs (kata Arabas) the 42nd year, / for the healing of the sick, under the care of Ioannes, / the official of Gadara.

<sup>122</sup> Volker Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte nach Inschriften und numismatischen Zeugnissen* (Inarah) 3.7.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.8.

<sup>124</sup> A list of contemporary writers looks at the Sabians as a Christian sect (Abd 'Allah 'ibn al-'Abbas (ca. 650 AD), Khalil Ibn Ahmad (d. ca 787, also claims that they also worship angels)), or as holding the middle ground between Christianity and Judaism (Mujahid 'ibn Jarir (d. 722), Abu Hanifah (d. 767), 'Awza' (d. 773), Malik 'ibn 'Anas (d. 795), Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855)). Few others would view them as in between Judaism and Zoroastrianism.

<sup>125</sup> Koran 27:42-27:45.

<sup>126</sup> In the Koran *sābi* ah from *sbia* "baptized," Federico Corriente, *Dictionary of Arabic and Allied Loanwords: Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, Gallician and Kindred Dialects* (Koninklijke Brill, 2008)

<sup>127</sup> J. Green and Y. Tsafir, *Greek Inscriptions from Hammat Gader: A Poem by the Empress Eudocia and Two Building Inscriptions*, Israel Exploration Journal, Vol. 32, Nos. 2-3, Jerusalem 1982, p. 31.

Furthermore, Muawiyah did not wear a crown like other kings in the world. He placed his throne in Damascus and refused to go to Muhammad's throne.<sup>128</sup>

Muawiyah not only rejected the throne of Muhammad in Al-Hira — in the text treated as a contemporary<sup>129</sup> — but also the Koran, as petrified in an inadmissible Shi'ite tradition.

But I know that his word is the truth which was brought down from his fathers and that it will be confirmed. So I fear the book of truth fall to the Umayyads and they hide it and store it in their treasuries.<sup>130</sup>

Otherwise, Muawiyah's caliphate showed secular characteristics.

To the north, the Maronite Chronicle explained a custom when Muawiyah broke the peace not only with the Muhammadian throne but also with the Byzantine Empire:

When Muawiyah had acquired the power which he had aimed at and was at rest from the wars of his people, he broke the peace settlement with the Romans and refused to accept peace from them any longer. Rather he said, "If the Romans want peace, let them surrender their weapons, and pay the tax."<sup>131</sup>

It was shown before that paying tax used to be a normal pre-Islamic practice. The most striking aspect of the passage is that it treats the caliph as "successor" to Heraclius in Syria, breaking an agreement with the Byzantines, not with a Muhammadian caliphate. If that was so, then he must have been spiritually closer to Byzantine Orthodoxy than to Arian Christianity. According to Robert Hoyland, it is almost as if the Syrian author was thinking in terms of a transfer of legitimate authority (*translation imperii*) from the Romans to the Arabs.

Internal and external sources suggest that the Umayyad Muawiyah had become a determined enemy of the emerging faith and its leadership. While Uthman seems to have broken a first alliance, Muawiyah, educated in Muhammadian spirituality, must have not only broken a second alliance but also become a determined opponent of his teachers. This is also what the Koran "prophesizes."

Verily, they who believed, then became unbelievers, then believed, and again became unbelievers, and then increased their unbelief — it is not God who will forgive them or guide them into the way. Announce to the hypocrites that a dolorous torment doth await them.<sup>132</sup>

Damascus was now beautified in the image of the once-glorious city of Rome, and the caliph's court was as lavish as those of emperors, such that Bernard Lewis did not seem to recognize a Muslim state but rather a successor state that left the old administration intact.<sup>133</sup> Muawiyah's chief secretary was a Melkite. When further pretending that Muawiyah was also a Melkite, employing Christians was the logical choice rather than the exception. The secretary would have been one of his own. Bat Ye'or goes even further:

The treasurer of Amr b. al-As was a Christian named Sabunji who had supported the Arab invaders

<sup>128</sup> The Maronite Chronicle (664+ AD), from Andrew Palmer, Sebastian P. Brock, Robert G. Hoyland, *The seventh century in the west-Syrian chronicles* (Liverpool University Press, 1993) 32.

<sup>129</sup> Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyah (633-700 AD) is the "rightly guided Mahdi" and originator of the Kaysanite sect that claimed leadership after Ali.

<sup>130</sup> Al-Sahifa al-Kamilah al-Sajjadiyya, *The Perfect Book of al-Sajjad* (ca. 678-713 AD) Preface:28.

<sup>131</sup> The Maronite Chronicle (664+ AD), from Andrew Palmer, Sebastian P. Brock, Robert G. Hoyland, *The seventh century in the west-Syrian chronicles* (Liverpool University Press, 1993) 32.

<sup>132</sup> Koran 4:136-4:137.

<sup>133</sup> Bernard Lewis: *The Arabs in History* (Oxford University Press, sixth edition, 2002) 60.

at the time of the conquest of Egypt, although he was a Melchite. As reward for his services, he was appointed treasurer to the caliph, an office which remained in his family and was inherited by his grandson, Bishop John of Damascus.<sup>134</sup>

Given the religious animosities of the day that endure in the twenty-first century, it seems unlikely that the Umayyad leadership would have granted such extraordinary privileges to Christians without a strong, underlying connection. To be sure, the grandfather of John of Damascus, Mansur, was responsible for the region's taxes under the Ghassanid vassals of Emperor Heraclius.

By putting his son Yazid in charge to resolve the problem of succession, Muawiyah re-established a hereditary royal monarchy, yet again. There was no intention to submit to an emerging Muslim theocracy. A coin of Yazid is dated with *year 1 of Yazid*, clearly ignorant of an Islamic calendar or even rejecting the *Arab's*. Meanwhile, Byzantine style and Zoroastrian style coins seem to evolve separately. During the short reigns of the next two Umayyad caliphs,<sup>135</sup> tradition claims that three distinct areas broke off in the wake of the Battle of Karbala:

When Ibn Ziyad and Marwan were in Sham and Ibn Az-Zubair took over the authority in Mecca and Qurra<sup>136</sup> revolted in Basra, I went out with my father to Abu Barza Al-Aslami till we entered upon him in his house while he was sitting in the shade of a room built of cane.<sup>137</sup>

Coming from Basra, Az-Zubair sacked Mecca. Until then, the city had been in the hands of the Melkite Ghassanids and played no role in the rise of Islam. Muawiyah II may have fallen victim in the assault. Az-Zubair would turn out to be a Muslim “Imam” with a claim in the traditions that would reach back to the leader's childhood under Prophet Muhammad.<sup>138</sup> From his caliphal seat in Mecca, he would establish a sort of Muslim papacy and expand his influence into the Arab Peninsula, Iraq, Egypt, and parts of Syria. The Umayyads fiercely opposed Az-Zubair's aspirations, and it Al-Hira and Basra would probably likewise have clashed with him.

The next Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik<sup>139</sup> used religion to solidify his claim to power in a similar way as popes or emperors of the Byzantine and Persian empires did. However, according to the historian Yehuda D. Nevo, no evidence of Islam was found before 691.

A distinctive feature of all the Arab religious institutions during the Sufyani and on into the Marwanid one is the complete absence of any reference to Muhammad. Neither the Prophet himself nor any Muhammadan formulae appear in any inscription dated before the year 691.<sup>140</sup>

That does not mean absence of an emerging Islam (that might still not recognize itself as such) but merely a confirmation that the Umayyads rejected the new doctrines. Should ‘Abd Al-Malik still have been Melkite Christian (continuing the assumption), the unusual features that make historians wonder about their affiliations would naturally blend into the evolution of the story of the Umayyad Dynasty. Later Christian writings label the caliph as *commander of the faithful*, which would be

<sup>134</sup> Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam* (Associated University Presses, 1996) 124.

<sup>135</sup> Muawiyah II ruled the Umayyad caliphate 683-684 AD for about four months, Marwan I ruled 684-685 AD.

<sup>136</sup> The Qurra are here taken as a synonym for the Quraysh, alias the Kharijites.

<sup>137</sup> Bukhari, ca. 864-870 AD (CMJE and the University of Southern California, 2007-2009) 9:88:228.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:59:595: [...] So they looked for such a person and found none who knew more Koran than I because of the Quranic material which I used to learn from the caravans. They therefore made me their Imam (to lead the prayer) and at that time I was a boy of six or seven years, wearing a Burda (i.e. a black square garment) proved to be very short for me (and my body became partly naked).

<sup>139</sup> Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan was Caliph in Damascus from 685-705 AD. He was of the Ghassanid Umayyad Dynasty.

<sup>140</sup> Yehuda D. Nevo, *Toward a Prehistory of Islam* (JSAI 17, 1994), from Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says* (Prometheus, 2002) 133.

an unusual wording if it would not mean faithful to the Christian author's belief. The tagline would frequently be used until the dynasty's displacement by the Abbasids.

In the time of 'Abd al-Malik, the son of Marwan, the commander of the faithful, there was great peace and tranquility; there was neither hostility nor war. In all the family of men, believing and unbelieving, among all the heathen, Jews and Saracens, there was a heart longing to see Jerusalem. [...] <sup>141</sup>

[The caliph] was wise in the way of the world, but foolish before god; he used to read the Old and the New scriptures: Genesis, Exodus, Kings, and from the New [Testament], Paul and the Apostles. <sup>142</sup>

Around the same time, Anastasius Sinaita viewed the Saracen Arabs in the context of Christian heretics as Melkites who he described as viewing Jesus as man, venerating other saints, and rejecting the idea of a begotten Son of God. <sup>143</sup> Later edits render this text problematic also.

Something unusual must have happened that Islam popped up to be "state religion" almost overnight since 'Abd al-Malik seems to have failed to read the Koran. Instead of longing for Mecca, his people and probably himself craved for Jerusalem. The naming of his son, Sulayman, is another indication to the centrality of Solomon's Temple for the Umayyads.

Whichever religious background the Umayyads adhered to, it was incompatible with the ideas of Islam. The research of Neuwirth and Heidemann also points at a scenario that deviates from the official narrative.

The Kharijite leaders [...] placed distinctive religious slogans on their coins challenging the claim of the Umayyads to rule, with the expression that there is only guidance by God. The Kharijite beliefs, though, were not at all a common denominator among all Muslims. <sup>144</sup>

A solution could be that the Kharijites may have been the masterminds behind a new plan. They are identified as earliest followers of Muhammadian doctrines.

Zubayr's name first appeared on coins of Kirman in 681-2. In the year 684, after the death of the Umayyad caliph Yazid, the coins show that he assumed the imperial title "amir of the believers." In the year 687, his brother Mus'ab secured Basra, Iraq and the territories to the east as far as Sijistan. The Umayyads seemed to have lost their cause. <sup>145</sup>

Those coins were minted in the Persian Pahlavi script and language, apparently addressing the local population and the armed forces stationed there.

The Zubayrid governors had targeted the ideological and religious deficiencies of the Sufyanid Umayyad regime. The probable audience of these coins' ideological message was not only the new Arab military elite, but also the old Persian speaking Zoroastrian elite that controlled the civil administration in the east. <sup>146</sup>

The Kharijites seem to have been determined to gain control from out of Basra, and it is likely with them and az-Zubair that the secrets of early Islam will be revealed. Coinage of Caliph az-

<sup>141</sup> Peeters, *La Passion de s. Michel*, para. 7. P. 70; Blanchard, *The Georgian Version of the Martyrdom*, 150.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 7. P. 70, 150.

<sup>143</sup> Anastasius Sinaita, *Viae dux* (unreliably dated before 690 AD) I 1; ebd. 9, line 45-49 and X 2,4; ed. Uthemann, ebd. 169.170, Zeilen 5-12.

<sup>144</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, Stefan Heidemann, *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'an* (Brill, 2009) 188.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-169.

Zubair tells that attempts may have been made to end the civil war with a truce. Part of that agreement was probably a power-sharing deal in which az-Zubair led a theocracy and the Umayyad 'Abd al-Malik was to be governor of Syria.

Up until the reforms in 692, the Umayyads accepted crosses on the Byzantine imitations of their coins. Before, 'Abd al-Malik's arch-rival, the Kharijite az-Zubair, was identified as caliph on a coin dated 686. A coin dated 692 that bore 'Abd al-Malik's name was made of the same stamp series (not necessarily by az-Zubair) but said *Partisan of the Caliph* and bore also the imprint *Mubammad, Apostle of God*. 'Abd Al-Malik had been used on a coin dated 685 once before in connection with the prophet Muhammad. There, he was branded *governor* of his (future) enemy az-Zubair.<sup>147</sup>

The coins suggest that 'Abd al-Malik had to submit to az-Zubair and that he may have been a usurper.<sup>148</sup> It cannot be reconciled that 'Abd al-Malik gave his enemies the honor of being displayed on coins as competing caliphs. Instead, they had been minted by a rival Kharijite caliphate who seems to have succeeded in submitting the Umayyads to its rule for a period.

Four milestones on the road from Damascus to Jerusalem speak a similar language. They are placed at 109, 107, 8, and 7 miles from the Holy City, and they all carry the inscription *commander of the faithful*. Only one inscription from a difficult pass was inscribed in 695 AD, presumably later than the four others, with the addition *Mubammad is the apostle of Allah*. The mysteries continue after the currency reform, for example with coins that bear the Jewish Menorah with the imprint *Mohammad is God's prophet*.<sup>149</sup> Maybe the evidence is trying to say: independent "caliphates" were competing against each other, and they may not have had a shared understanding of the Koran or of Muhammad.

The year 692 is also a key turning point for the Melkite patriarchies in Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch. They had to flee to Constantinople where the Chalcedonian creed was finally accepted in the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Trullo and where the use of the Lamb in church iconography was prohibited,<sup>150</sup> an obvious mainstay of the Melkites. However, the submission of the leadership constitutes by no means the wholesale end of Melkite opposition to Chalcedon but merely a new fragmentation of the faith. The old would live on for centuries to come. The central question is how 'Abd al-Malik fits into this change of heart. Did he follow suit with the Melkites (and how did they adapt) or did he submit to Islam?

The council provides for a fairly precise definition by whom the Melkite patriarchate had been displaced. It connects Nestorius with Jewish messianism in a heretical renewal.

We condemn as foreign to the divine scheme the absurd division of Nestorius [Arian], who teaches that the one Christ consists of a man separately and of the Godhead separately and renews the Jewish impiety.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Stephen Album, Tony Goodwin, Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean: *The Pre-Reform Coinage of the early Islamic Period* (Ashmolean, 2002) page 22. Year 66 is Walker Sch.5 (p.97) for year 67, see Spink Zurich, 17 March 1987, lot 376.

<sup>148</sup> It gets even more complicated when a coin dated 690 AD, again from the same stamp series, bears the name of Atiya b. al-Aswad, Kharijite caliph, and "in the name of God, possessor of the command." Another mint dated 700 AD bore the name of Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad, also one who rebelled against al-Malik.

<sup>149</sup> Walker 605 ff.; and D. Barag, "The Islamic Candlestick Coins of Jerusalem," *Forum Ancient Coins*

<sup>150</sup> Philipp Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, The Council in Trullo, 692 AD* (T&T Clark, 1893) Canon LXXXII.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, Canon I.

When it comes to the historical context, scholars of theology seem to be at a loss, in particular because Nestorianism and its predecessors should have been long dead for over two centuries. Why would an Orthodox church council bother to condemn an extinct sect? Precisely at the same time, a Koran emerges with the opposing doctrinal stance of Jesus being a man with a Judaic god that remains undivided. For theologians, the following is merely a reminder that the bishops had to return to their seat after having left it for some unspecified reason.

Those clerics who in consequence of a barbaric incursion or on account of any other circumstance have gone abroad, we order to return again to their churches after the cause has passed away, or when the incursion of the barbarians is at an end.<sup>152</sup>

When put in the historical context, the council produced a number of canons that viewed a Nestorian advance as *a barbaric incursion* with a faith that resembled Judaism. Moreover, the barbarian priests would be re-baptized, attesting to their closeness at the time:

Willing to do all things for the edification of the Church, we have determined to take care even of priests who are in barbarian churches.<sup>153</sup>

The priestly voices from the past are loud and clear: there was no consciousness of Islam in Constantinople of 692 AD and an incursion into Syria rode under Nestorian flags. In other words, it may only be from here on that Islam would step into the spotlight as a new religion.

### **The Inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock**

‘Abd al-Malik is believed to having ordered to add Koranic texts inside the Dome of the Rock, which was constructed on top of a large rock that marks the Well of Souls at the center of the Temple Mount. The sacred rock is the Foundation Stone of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem. The Well of Souls is the sanctuary of the Judaic god. Also, a black paving stone in the floor marks the gateway to paradise. Muhammad ascended from here to heaven. As for the reliability of collective memory, the tradition of the prophet’s ascension justifies for Muslims an otherwise inexplicable religious building. The Foundation Stone was also the place where the Roman Prefect Pilate is said to having sentenced Jesus to be crucified. Hence, God, Jesus, and Muhammad are united at this holy spot on the Temple Mount.

From Adomnan Arculf’s text from around 700 AD, it can be inferred that the dome was neither standing nor under construction during the 670s. The original prayer house in Jerusalem that had been built in the 630s was enlarged and used by the Melkite Saracens on top of Roman ruins.

In that famous place where once stood the magnificently constructed Temple, near the eastern wall, the Saracens now frequent a rectangular house of prayer which they have built in a crude manner, constructing it from raised planks and large beams over some remains of ruins. This house can, as it is said, accommodate at least 3000 people.<sup>154</sup>

Arculf’s text makes no hint at the construction or existence of the dome. While Anastasius Sinaita attests to large scale construction activities on the Temple Mount under al-Malik, the Zuquin Chronicle of the late eighth century would make no mention of the Dome of the Rock when

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., Canon XVIII.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., Canon XXX.

<sup>154</sup> Arculf, *Adomnan, De locis sanctis* (ca. 700 AD) 1.1.14.186, p. 221.

referring to restoration going on in the ruins of Jerusalem. Instead, the chronicle seems to try to tell that whatever may have been on the Temple Mount had not been used as a mosque until Al-Mansur.

The caliph moved into the western region in order to go to Jerusalem. He wreaked havoc, turned everything topsy turvy, terrorizing and devastating, to a degree worse than in Mesopotamia. He acted as Daniel had prophesied of the Antichrist himself. He turned the temple into a mosque, because the little that remained of Solomon's [Temple] became a mosque for the Arabs [...] He repaired the ruins of Jerusalem.<sup>155</sup>

Is it certain that the Temple of Solomon is referring to the dome and not to the rectangular Al-Aqsa Mosque? The universally accepted notion that the Dome of the Rock was built by al-Malik is not intended to be challenged here, but rather his involvement in the inscriptions. However, in order to fixate the dome or the inscriptions unto al-Malik, this primary evidence would have to be ignored. From the understanding that something else had been converted to a mosque follows that there were not possibly Muslim inscriptions before said conversion.

From the late eighth century exists a Bible from the Court School of Charlemagne that is now stored in the British Library. On its cover, it depicts a scene with the Annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah at the altar of the Temple of Jerusalem.<sup>156</sup> Although only a golden dome is depicted, it is believed that the intent of the designer was to show the Dome of the Rock in the background. A similar design is found on another manuscript fragment of the Court School.<sup>157</sup> However, the logic of both designs points at the intention to show the holy place of Zechariah in the Haram area of the al-Aqsa Mosque.

The traveler Bernhard the Monk visited the Holy City around 870 AD and wrote about the Dome of the Rock: "The Temple of Solomon is in the north, which houses a Saracen synagogue."<sup>158</sup> It is remarkable that Bernard recognized the Dome of the Rock as a synagogue. Christian monks do not usually get confused about such fundamental terminology. This suggests that the Temple of Solomon had been a mosque for less than a century only to become (or revert back to) a synagogue.

Although absence of evidence is no evidence of absence, here we are not dealing with some obscure detail of fact but with one of the most important buildings and inscriptions in Islam.

In the late ninth century, the Sunni historian and geographer Ya'qubi reported in a way that the building would have been standing long enough to leave room for interpretation:

Then 'Abd al-Malik built above the Sakhrah a Dome, and hung it around with curtains of brocade, and he instituted doorkeepers for the same, and the people took the custom of circumambulating the Rock (al-Sakhrah of Jerusalem), even as they had paced round the Ka'ba (at Mecca), and the usage continued thus all the days of the dynasty of the Omayyads.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Pseudo Dionysius of Tell-Mahre, Zuqnin Chronicle (ca. 775), Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam* (Associated University Presses, 1996) 75. The caliph visited Jerusalem in 758 and 771.

<sup>156</sup> Court School of Charlemagne, Harley Gospels 2788, folio 109r., British Library, London, late 8th century.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., Cott. Claudius B.V., folio 132v., British Library, London, late 8th century.

<sup>158</sup> John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Aris & Phillips, 2002) 266: Ad Aquilonem est templum Salomonis, habens synagogam sarracenorum.

<sup>159</sup> Al-Yacubi, *Tarikh*, edited by M.T. Houtsma, *Historiae* (Leiden, 1883) 2 vols.

The inadmissible traditions of both historians, Ya'qubi and Bukhari contain passages that claim that Mecca was forbidden<sup>160</sup> or later destroyed,<sup>161</sup> providing a reverse reasoning for the dome's construction. It seems possible that the structure was not standing in the 770s or lay in ruins and that mosaics were absent toward the end of the ninth century. Else, they would have not only been unknown but also covered up by a curtain. While it seems possible that the Sunni Ya'qubi would be eager to father generous support of the Muslims upon the Umayyad lineage, this last wink with the curtain is an indication of a much older spiritual connection than commonly believed:

Whence that custom of ours is derived, of having a fine linen veil, after the temple has been built, to be drawn over the entrances. But the ten other curtains [...] had golden clasps, in order to join the one curtain to the other, which was done so exactly that they seemed to be one entire curtain. These were spread over the temple, and covered all the top and parts of the walls, on the sides and behind [...].<sup>162</sup>

One might be inclined to recognize a description of the present-day veil that is spread over the Kaaba in Mecca. However, it is a first-century description by Josephus explaining why the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was hidden behind a veil. In other words, the veiling of holy buildings finds its origin in the Jewish religion, not in some obscure Pagan rituals. The circumambulation around the Foundation Stone or the Black Stone may likewise have a common root in arch-Judaism<sup>163</sup> as a victory ritual in the conquest of the Promised Land and may merely have been reintroduced to Jerusalem.

The tenth century geographer Al-Muqaddasi, seems to have relied on traditions when his narrative turns to the Temple Mount:

The al-Aqsa Mosque lies at the south-eastern corner of the Holy City. The stones of its foundations (of the outer wall), which were laid by David, are ten ells, or a little less in length. [...] On these the Caliph Abd al Malik subsequently built, using smaller but well-shaped stones, and battlements are added above. This mosque is even more beautiful than that of Damascus [built in 715 AD], for during the building of it they had for a rival and as a comparison the great church belonging to the Christians at Jerusalem, and they built this to be even more magnificent than that other. But in the days of the Abbasids occurred the earthquakes which threw down most of the main building; all, in fact, except that portion round the Mihrab. [...] the edifice rose firmer and more substantial than ever it had been in former times. The more ancient portion remained, even like a beauty spot, in the midst of the new; [...].<sup>164</sup>

The main building on the Temple Mount had almost entirely been destroyed to its foundations, perhaps in 746 AD and not under Abbasid rule as the writer suggests, just at the dusk of Umayyad rule. The same earthquake had also completely obliterated the Nea Church. Likewise,

<sup>160</sup> Al-Muqaddasi: [‘Abd al-Malik] forbade the people to journey forth to Mecca. [...] “Men shall journey to but three mosques, the Holy Shrine (Mecca), my mosque (Medina) and the mosque of the Holy City (of Jerusalem) [...] And this Rock, of which it is reported that the Apostle of God set his foot when the ascended into heaven, shall be to you in the place of the Ka’ba.” Then ‘Abd al-Malik built above the rock a dome.

<sup>161</sup> Bukhari, ca. 864-870 AD (CMJE and the University of Southern California, 2007-2009) 2:23:474: When the wall fell on them during the caliphate of Al-Walid bin Abdul Malik, the people started repairing it [...].

<sup>162</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* ca. 90 AD, III:6.4, translated by William Whiston.

<sup>163</sup> Joshua 6:2-6:5: [...] On the seventh day, you shall march around the city [Jericho] seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall go up every man straight before him.

Joshua 6:20-6:21: [...] and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

<sup>164</sup> Al-Muqaddasi, *Description of Syria, Including Palestine* (ca. 985 AD) translated by Guy Le Strange (London, 1886) 41-42.

the Dome of the Rock could not have escaped substantial damage. Al-Muqaddasi's description of the al-Aqsa Mosque details mosaics, doors, and other ornaments. In describing the Mosque of Damascus, he compares al-Aqsa with the *great church*, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which he calls *the Kumamah* — the dunghill.<sup>165</sup> In the context of Damascus, he notes about the Kumamah:

[...] Caliph 'Abd al Malik, noting the greatness of the Dome of the Kumamah and its magnificence, was moved lest it should dazzle the minds of the Muslims, and hence erected, above the rock, the dome which now is seen there.<sup>166</sup>

He then treats the Dome of the Rock as if it was an integral part of an ongoing construction (he does not say so).

In the centre of the platform is the Dome of the Rock, which rises above an octagonal building having four gates, one opposite to each of the flights of steps leading up from the court. [...] All these are adorned with gold, and closing each of them is a beautiful door of cedar-wood finely worked in pattern. These last were sent by command of the mother of the Khalif Al Muktedir Billah [908-932 AD]. At each of the gates is a balustrade of marble and cedar-wood, with brass-work without; and in the railing, likewise, are gates, but these are unornamented.<sup>167</sup>

Even though inadmissible as evidence for al-Malik's activities, renovations at the dome seem to have been under foot at the beginning of the tenth century. He continues in describing all the details, even those without ornaments.

The Dome, externally, is completely covered with brass plates, gilt, while the building itself, its floor and its walls, and the drum, both within and without, are ornamented with marble and mosaics, after the manner that we have already described when speaking of the mosque of Damascus. The cupola of the Dome is built in three sections: the inner is of ornamental plates; next come iron beams interlaced, set in free so that the wind may not cause it to shift; and the third casing is of wood, on which are fixed the outer plates. Up through the middle of the cupola goes a passage way, by which a workman may ascend to the pinnacle for aught that may be wanting, or in order to repair the structure.<sup>168</sup>

The workmen did not seem to have taken note of inscriptions that would decorate the dome. Neither did Al-Muqaddasi, who otherwise described Jerusalem as a city dominated by Christians and Jews.<sup>169</sup> He would not have failed to mock the Christians as he does in other places of his writings.<sup>170</sup> In one passage in the text, he marvels at a talisman that is inscribed with *Muhammad is Allah's Apostle* and again, *In the name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate*<sup>171</sup> — but not the inscriptions.

Under the rubble emerges that the al-Aqsa Mosque probably originally celebrated the annunciation of both, John the Baptist and Jesus.

Of the holy places within (the Haram Area), are the Mihrab Maryam (the Oratory of Mary), Zakariyyah (of Zachariah [father of John the Baptist]), Ya'kub (of Jacob), and Al Khidr (of Elias or St. George), the Station of the Prophet, and of Jibrail (Gabriel), the Place of the Ant, and of the Fire,

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 43-45.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

and of the Ka'abah, and also of the Bridge As Sirat, which shall divide Heaven and Hell.<sup>172</sup>

The Dome of the Ascension likely commemorated Jesus as prophet, not Muhammad. Although names can change over time, the mosque seems anchored in the Umayyad's Melkite/Sabian hypothesis made here. Likewise, another lonely hint that the dome could fall under the Umayyads is that one gate is named the Gate of al Walid.

Given an undoubtedly Jewish heritage, the importance of the Foundation Stone could certainly not have escaped any of the caliphs from the three great dynasties, and it is likely that a sort of veneration was immediately instated since the rock was dug from under the dung, possibly by Umar. It is not contradictory that 'Abd al-Malik may have established ritual guards for the Foundation Stone.<sup>173</sup> For this, neither buildings nor inscriptions are required. A building over the rock would likely have been part of any master plan, which would have found smaller beginnings only to be continuously enlarged and beautified. Its speedy completion would probably have gone beyond the life of a single caliph.<sup>174</sup> They would have ordered inscriptions to tell the visitor in one way or another about the spiritual meaning of the place. However, either earthquakes or religious zealotry may have consumed those. Likewise, the mosaics covering the inside seem artistically ahead of the time compared to the frescoes in Qasr Amra, an Umayyad palace from 30 years later.

The inscriptions of the inner octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock contain the following:

In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate [...] Muhammad is the servant of God and His Messenger [...]

The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a Messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not "Three" - Cease! (it is) better for you! - God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son [...] <sup>175</sup>

Religion with God [is] Islam. Those who [formerly] received the book differed only after knowledge came unto them, through transgression among themselves.<sup>176</sup>

The inscriptions address Trinitarian Christians directly. They clarify a position that denies the *three* of the Holy Trinity altogether with a direct quote from the Koran. The text declares Jesus as the human son of Mary but also that the word and the Holy Spirit are from God. The passage about the Word of God that was conveyed unto Mary possibly agrees with the Gospel of Luke.<sup>177</sup> In the books of Mark and Matthew according to the Hebrews, Jesus received the Holy Spirit (the Word of God) upon being baptized by John the Baptist.<sup>178</sup> Hence, the verses are probably also Melkite anathema.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>173</sup> Al-Muqaddasi, 48.

<sup>174</sup> The current external mosaics were added under Suleiman I, ruler of the Ottoman Empire 1520-1566. The completion of these mosaics alone took seven years.

<sup>175</sup> Koran 4:169.

<sup>176</sup> The Arabic Islamic Inscriptions On The Dome Of The Rock In Jerusalem, 72 AH/692 AD, Islamic Awareness, retrieved at Islamic-awareness.org on December 19, 2009.

<sup>177</sup> Luke 1:35.

<sup>178</sup> Matthew 3:16.

Moreover, the passage contains a first appearance of the word *Islam*. There exists a tombstone of Abassa, the daughter of Bint Juraij of the same year. It was rediscovered in a mausoleum in Aswan, Egypt. At this time, there were certainly Muslims that would be concentrated around Az-Zubair's Mecca, Basra, and Al-Hira. Also, they would have spread further in the wake of the Mukhtar Rebellion in 686 AD. While it is not surprising to find tombstones with inscriptions of Muhammad or Islam, these archaeological treasures of immense spiritual and economical value, if their origin can be authenticated under unbiased scrutiny, have nothing to do with the Dome of the Rock other than that the word *Islam* could indeed be timely.

The inscriptions of the outer octagonal arcade of the Dome of the Rock contain the following paragraphs:

[...] There is no god but God. He is One. Praise be to God, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence [...]

The dome was built by servant of God 'Abd Allah the Imam al-Ma'mun, Commander of the Faithful, in the year two and seventy. May God accept from him and be content with him. Amen, Lord of the worlds, praise be to God.<sup>179</sup>

The repetitive and uninspiring nature of the text hints at an intellectual low point much later in time. It seems inconceivable that such verses were to survive the crusades at the beginning of the next millennium. Andrew Rippin thinks instead that the oddities may rest on the craftsmen who designed the mosaic work. This notion implies that religious imagery or texts on buildings could rest on the careless whim of designers. However, while moderns might not understand it all, few details in the religious context of Jerusalem would have been left to chance.

The inscriptions are signed off (or corrected) by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mamun<sup>180</sup> as imam over a hundred years after 'Abd al-Malik. An *imam* is a leader of a mosque, similar to the rabbi with the Jews. As az-Zubair did before, beginning over half a century later, the leaders of the Abbasid Caliphate would present themselves as imams when they were going to subdue the empire. During the seventh century, no evidence exists that Umayyad caliphs would have attributed the term to themselves. The common conception of modern researchers is that al-Mamun would not have had the courage to modify the original inscriptions in this holy building. However, in other places, in particular in the Great Mosque of Damascus, he had no remorse to remove or alter the Umayyad inscriptions.<sup>181</sup> Instead, the Abbasid caliphs were determined to alter history as much as their successors would again be determined to erase the memory of the Abbasids.

The signature of al-Mamun is a clue that the inscription may date from much later — so much so that those who applied it carelessly were confused about who may have ruled the caliphate at the time of the dome's construction. Benjamin of Tudela reported in the twelfth century that the

<sup>179</sup> The Arabic Islamic Inscriptions On The Dome Of The Rock In Jerusalem, 72 AH/692 AD, Islamic Awareness, retrieved at Islamic-awareness.org on December 19, 2009.

<sup>180</sup> Abū Ja'far Abdullah al-Mā'mūn ibn Harūn was Abbasid caliph 813-833 AD.

<sup>181</sup> Finbar Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus* (Brill, 2001) 126: [Al-Mamun] altered the foundation inscription in the Dome of the Rock, mutilated the inscriptions in the Great Mosque of Damascus, and is said to have removed the maqsuras from the congregational mosques of Syria on the pretext that they constituted an innovation.

Dome of the Rock was built even before, under Caliph Umar the Great, who died in 644.<sup>182</sup> At the time of the passing through of Benjamin of Tudela, the dome was in use by Christians and not by Muslims or Jews. Even in the Italian city of Pisa a small copy of the “Mosque of Omar”<sup>183</sup> would later be erected, although the expression would logically refer to the entire al-Aqsa Mosque, rather than to the dome only. However, Benjamin could not have mistaken the builder of the dome for another if there was an inscription. After all, he was a Jew, and the building was sitting on top of his most holy site, the dwelling place of God.

The current inscriptions, which are at the heart of the Muslim/Christian controversy, are merely bragging about the superiority of Islam over Trinitarian beliefs and were likely added post-al-Malik.

### Conclusion

One of the intriguing riddles in the study of the emergence of Islam is the notion that a vast empire, the caliphate, was supposedly Islamized within ten years. Even the uncalled-for conversion of many Arab tribes to Islam is the most unlikely of all possible religious scenarios. All attempts to convert the Jews failed — here as Koranic partners! — since the Romans had taken hold of Israel almost six hundred years earlier, and the various Christian sects could not agree on their faiths — not even today. The Pagans did not give in easily either, and they would certainly not listen to Muhammad's Judaic teachings. The Muslims' conversion of their population at the flick of a switch seems rather impossible, replacing countless sects of five competing religions all at once, Paganism, Arian Christianity, Manicheanism, Melkite Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Conversions were a process in flux that could take centuries, even at swordpoint. Why else would history be full of sectarian bloodshed, if not for the old resisting the new? The same applies for Islam and one of its supposed early dynasties, the Umayyads.

Unless the suggestions of inadmissible traditions, contemporary external evidence, and the Koran itself are ignored, the first conclusions from this article are that the origin of Islam is by no means Pagan but rests on *like* Arian Christianity — pre-Nicean Christology in its Arian branches merged with an adaptation of Nestorianism and Judeo-Messianism — and on professional Judaic insiders rather than on an amateurish chance construct. In other words, much of the content in the Koran rests on very old dogmas rather than on new ones. The target groups were many non-Trinitarian Judaic sects. The final composition of the Koran needs to be freed from the *assumption* of having been revealed to a single prophet or even to a single sect. Instead, one might like to search for synod style agreements that may have been reached (and broken) in several stages over almost the entire seventh century or even before. The Christian churches have shaped the collective memory through such a process over centuries. There is no prerogative that it would have been any different in the early stages of Islam, in particular in the face of the Koran accusing some groups of having repeatedly broken and turned away from their agreement. As this new religion rests on

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<sup>182</sup> The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela (1171 AD) 36: Upon the site of the sanctuary Omar ben al Khataab erected an edifice with a very large and magnificent cupola, into which the Gentiles do not bring any image or effigy, but they merely come there to pray.

<sup>183</sup> Church of Santo Sepolcro.

rejecting any kind of transgressions and accuses its opponents of forging the scriptures, it must claim the high-road of infallibility despite the fact that the Koran openly “repairs itself.”<sup>184</sup>

Given the inclusion of the Umayyads in the lineage of the Quraysh and in the Islamic version of history (but without implying an early conversion to Islam), they must have either been part of rewriting their past at some point before they were ousted, or that they had come to a lineage arrangement under a prototype agreement that may have had nothing to do with a new faith. But where is the evidence of *when* the Umayyads converted to Islam? It seems that a possible faith orientation of the Umayyads toward Melkite Christianity leans on rather slim evidence, albeit multiple, near contemporary, and also in later inadmissible traditions. However, the here selected lop-sided traditions and external sources seem to be in agreement that the leading members of the clan were unwavering (Melkite) Christians and opponents of the Muhammadian throne and maybe also of the Koran. The outcome remains unchanged even upon eliminating the traditions. On the other hand, a conversion from any preexisting faith to early Islam rests not only on guesswork and exclusively on inadmissible traditions from long after the fact but also on simply ignoring the archaeological and primary evidence. Yet, as Richard Bulliet points out, the Umayyads could have believed whatever they liked and still have ruled the land. This is beside the point. There is not a dot of historic or archaeological evidence in Syria of the much touted missionary efforts of a new religion from Muhammad almost to the last decade of the seventh century. Instead, the order of events presents a continuum and a deepening of Judaic sectarian conflicts from hundreds of years before. The implication of Bulliet's argument is that the Umayyads could have tolerated iconography of competing Christian and Zoroastrian religions on their coins. If that is so, then their indifference could likewise include Muslim sects and texts later on.

While it is exciting to explore these issues from a historic perspective, the economic implications for Muslims could be immense. If the Umayyads were indeed adherents to any differing creed other than Islam, then the economic dreams of modern Muslims rest on the premises of another faith. It may help explaining why Muslim doctrines seem unable to address global systemic poverty, of which countries under the influence of Islam absorb the bulk.

When exactly the Umayyads converted to Islam remains to be determined, and the mystery may never be resolved. The solution to this important question has the potential to not only uproot the tradition based evolution of Islam but also to provide answers to the causes of the Renaissance in Christian Europe when the Spanish Saracens reached Italy. The secrets possibly lie in the under-explored whereabouts of those Melkites that may have continued to reject the Chalcedonian creeds.

As Islam is unquestionably a Judaic religion, it is in the Judaic context that the puzzle will find its arrangement.

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<sup>184</sup> Koran 2:100.