

From *muḥammad* Jesus to Prophet of the Arabs

The Personalization of a Christological Epithet

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1. Preliminary Note

Whoever wants to investigate the term *muḥammad* by examining its genesis, history and meaning, cannot start by taking the Qur'ān as a basis, as this alleged name form appears here only in four places. According to both Muslim tradition, which originated from the 9th CE century on, and the majority of Western Islamologists, this sacred book had already been compiled and edited into its current form between the years 650 and 656 under the third Caliph 'Uṭmān: all other versions were forbidden. However, the oldest manuscripts stem from the second half of the 8th century, with the exception of one larger fragment found in Ṣan'ā', which might go back to the first half of the 8th century. These manuscripts show at least one thing, however: they do not draw on a finished codex, which, in fact, was only gradually emerging and would not be finished before the 9th century.¹

It is true that in the case of New Testament manuscripts there is also a substantial time interval between the oldest extant manuscripts and possible autographs; but, in the meantime, they have been edited text-critically, i.e., displaying all variants that can be found in manuscripts, so that the presumed original, and if not that, then at least the oldest accessible form of the text, can be inferred. Furthermore, they can be arranged in a relatively exact chronological order as to their content and form, using methods of literary criticism, form criticism, history of tradition and other disciplines. Due to the fact that the traditional report concerning Muḥammad was generally assumed to be authentic without further questioning, this has hardly ever been attempted with texts from the Qur'ān, apart from a subdivision of the surahs into a Meccan period (with three phases) and a Medinan one. Moreover, it proves to be much more difficult than in the case of the New Testament because of the peculiarities of the revelations referred to in the Qur'ān, which hardly contain any regional, historical, "biographical" or other "contextual" details, if the texts are read plainly for what they are, i.e., without making use of the exegetical literature of the 9th century with all the stories built around dark and incomprehensible passages to give them some sense.

It is true that many Qur'ānic texts and materials are definitely older than their first attestation in later manuscripts, as is shown e.g. by the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock; but these earlier versions are largely unknown to us and we have no information as to what they looked like; we neither know about their scope nor can we say in which language they had originally been composed.

Reports of Muslim authors from the 9th century, who tell us about a final edition of the Qur'ān under the third caliph 'Umar, must be considered a literary *topos*, the aim of which was to present the Qur'ān as very old and as close as possible to the time of the Prophet. This *topos* about the emergence of holy literature was current at that time; in a similar way, referring to even older traditions, it can be found in reports about the "Avesta", the collection of Zoroastrian sacred scriptures, and the "Zand", their corresponding laws and commentaries: By command of the Great King, the Avesta and Zand were to be compiled in the same way as Zoroaster himself had received his revelations from (God) Ohrmazd/Ahuramazda. According to tradition, his Majesty, the King of Kings Ardashir I, then followed the religious authority in his court, Tansar, and chose *one* version as canonic; the other versions were excluded from the Canon. Later on, scriptures on a large variety of themes important for Zoroastrianism, which were spread across India, the Byzantine Empire and other countries, were collected at the court of Great King Shapur I and then added to the Avesta.²

If the reports of the 'Utmānic final edition of the Qur'ān are understood as literary *topoi* of later times – analogous to the collection of Zoroastrian holy literature – then it must be assumed that the canonical text of the Qur'ān is composed of older and newer layers of texts; thus it is the product of a prolonged collection and compilation process, so that its individual texts have to be examined in detail for their possible temporal classification within the framework of history of tradition. Therefore, the path of the term *muḥammad* will be tracked first and foremost with the help of datable and locatable evidence of that time. Due to the absence of literary sources, only coins and inscriptions of the first two Muslim centuries³ come into question for this purpose. Christian literature as a possible source of information about that time will be examined in another section.⁴

2. *muḥammad* as a Christological title

The term *muḥammad* appeared as an honorary title of Jesus on the coinage of Arab rulers and on inscriptions in the second half of the 7th century and in the first half of the 8th century. The Christological honorific epithet *muḥammad*, which, according to later Arabic understanding, means "the one to be praised" or "the praised one" has a history. The combination of letters *MḤMT* in Persian or Syrian writing was first found a little later than the term

“God’s servant” (‘*Abdallāh*) on coins in the area of East Iran around the year 40 H (661 CE).⁵

Since 241 (the conquest of the city of Ḥaṭra), Christians had been deported to this area under the Sassanids, first from the Eastern Mesopotamian Empire of ‘Arabīya and later from other parts of the country, even from the city of Antioch.⁶

Apparently there were two regions of origin for these coins in which different concepts were represented. In the north-east, today’s Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, the term MḤMT is linked to the concepts ‘*abdallāh* and ‘*ḥalīfat Allāh*; this program would later be represented and enforced by ‘Abd al-Malik, who came from Merv far north of Herat. In the south-east, i.e., the area around Kerman, east of Persis, the term MḤMT is equated with *walī allāh* and associated with the law of God, according to the Persian, i.e., mostly Imperial Aramaic, interpretation.

Coinage which documents a religious-political program requires two things: firstly a ruler who has the right or the power to mint such coins, and secondly a religious-political history of at least a few decades, during which the notions internalized by that ruler have had time to develop. As far as we know, ‘Abd al-Malik was the first person to have minted MḤMT coins, while on his way from east to west.⁷ In the east, however, possibly in his native region of Merv (Marw), this concept must have had a long tradition and affected the way of thinking; in any case, it seems to go back much further than the lifetime of a Prophet of the Arabs. As coins minted since the beginning of the 60s of the 7th century show, the notion of a *muḥammad* is older than the designation of a subsequent Prophet of the Arabs; moreover, this notion stems from a completely different region, which had nothing to do with the Arabian Peninsula.

If (among other languages) Syriac should have been spoken (and not only written) in this region, then MḤMT could be understood as a Syriac term *mḥmt* (MḤMT – *mehmāt*). The ending “t” in MḤMT – instead of “d” (MḤMD) – could be due to phonetic spelling (hardening of end consonants like in German or Russian);⁸ the whole form would then have to be correctly read as *mehmād* (“the Desired/ Promised One”), which in Arabic led to the pronunciation *maḥmad*.

According to Volker Popp, the languages spoken in this region at this time were above all varieties of Middle Persian and to a lesser degree Parthian. If that were the case, then MḤMT could be understood as an Aramaic heterogram (i.e., a word written in Aramaic [e.g. *mlk*], but pronounced in Persian [*šāh* – “king”]). It could represent the Ugaritic “loan word” MḤMD in Aramaic, meaning “chosen” or “the chosen one” and pronounced in Middle Persian as *mehmet/mahmat*.⁹ As power relations became increasingly

dominated by Arabs and those entitled to coinage turned more and more to Arabic as their language of reference, the unvocalized term MḤMT had to be grammatically interpreted as an Arabic form, in our case the form “*muḥammad*” (passive participle of the second stem of “*ḥ-m-d*”, meaning “the praised one” or “the one to be praised”). This is documented on bilingual coins from the year 60 AH (681 CE) on which *MḤMT* in Middle Persian and *muḥammad* in Arabic script are to be found side by side.¹⁰ Since the 60s AH (680s CE) the Arabic term *muḥammad* in Arabic characters is nearly the only form to be found on coins in the whole of the Syrian region. When the Arabic transcription became common practice, the Syriac meaning “*the desired one*” was replaced by the Arabic understanding: “*the one to be praised*” or “*the praised one*”.

The older phonetic interpretation of the Arabic consonantal skeleton “*mḥmd*”, *Maḥmad*, seems to have been used for a long time alongside the form *Muḥammad*. In any case it is still used by the theologian John of Damascus (who died in about 750) for the “pseudo-prophet”¹¹ in texts written in Greek in West Syria. Furthermore, it is also conceivable that the Arabization of MḤMT could lead to the reading *aḥmad*. This version could certainly have emerged for theological reasons. The *Sīra* (biography of the Prophet) considers *Aḥmad* a synonym of *Muḥammad*. Therefore, Sprenger’s observation is understandable that the terms/names *muḥammad* and (its approximate equivalent) *aḥmad* were exchanged freely:

“Understandably traditions came into existence very early, according to which the prophet’s mother or his grandfather were ordered to name the child Mohammed in a vision before his birth. In all traditions which refer to his name alone, a fluctuation between Ahmad and Mohammad can be found.”¹²

Since ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign and due to the increasing process of Arabization the form *muḥammad* became the dominant one. Something already indicated by the clearly Christian symbolism on coins, which rules out an “Islamic” understanding of the term *maḥmad*/*muḥammad*, becomes certainty when the inscriptions on the interior walls of the Dome of the Rock from the year 72 (CE 693) and the relevant material from the Qur’ān are taken into consideration.¹³ Here the Messiah is *Jesus son of Mary* (‘Īsā bn Maryam); *muḥammad*, Servant of God (*‘abdallāh*), prophet, messenger, the word and the Spirit of God. At least up until this time, i.e., around 700 CE, probably even until 750 CE, the term “*muḥammad* Jesus” was current.

In areas close to the former Phoenician territories, the term *muḥammad* might go back to a loanword from Ugaritic, where the form means “desirable, precious”, or another closely related Semitic language. The basic Semitic meaning of the verbal root might be “finding something desirable or precious on account of its form or splendor”,¹⁴ so the participle *mḥmd* might be translated as “(the) chosen (one)”.¹⁵ Such an understanding – Jesus is *the*

Chosen One, is close to biblical usage: the people of Israel considered themselves to be the “chosen people”, a term still used in Paul’s speech in the Acts of the Apostles (13, 17).¹⁶ In his Epistle to the Romans (8:33) Paul calls everyone who believes in Jesus Christ a “chosen one (eklektós)”. And in Deutero-Isaiah (i.e., chapters 40-55 of Isaiah), God calls the “Servant of God” (עַבְדִּי ‘abdi – lit.: my servant”) “my chosen one” (בְּחִירִי – b^hhiri), on whom he has put his Spirit. in the Second Book of Isaiah (42:1). The same verbal root appears in 49:7:

לְמַעַן יְהוָה אֱשֶׁר נֶאֱמַן קִדֵּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבְחַרְךָ
ləma’an YHWH ^{na}šär nä^{mi}mān qəḏoš yisra’el wa-yyibəḥārək
 Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has *chosen*
 You.” (New American Standard, my emphasis)¹⁷

In the Gospel according to Luke, in the transfiguration scene, the voice out of the clouds calls Jesus the “chosen (*eklelegménos*) son”, probably by analogy. The term is dissimilar to that in the Gospel of Mark (9:35), which served as a model for both Luke and Matthew, the term used there being “beloved one” (also in: Matthew 17:6). On the cross, Jesus is taunted by members of the High Council; having helped others he should now help himself, “if he be Christ, the chosen (*eklektós*) of God” (Luke 23:25 [King James]). The two Greek forms *eklelegménos* and *eklektós* are forms of the same verbal root: *eklegō* – “to choose, elect”. Thus, if *muḥammad* is understood as “the chosen one” then the term would reflect an important biblical and Christological tradition.

But also the other meaning, – “glorified, highly praised” or similar – which goes back to the Classical Arabic usage of the root, has a good biblical and Christological basis. In psalm 118:22, we read:

אֶבֶן מַאֲסוּ הַבּוֹנִים הִיְתָה לְרֹאשׁ פִּנְנָה: –
’āḇān ma^{su} ha-bbōnīm hay^tāh lə-ro’š pinnāh.
 The stone which the builders rejected
 Has become the chief corner stone. (...)
 (verse 26): בְּרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה בְּרַכּוּכֶם מִבֵּית יְהוָה: –
bārūk ha-bbā’ bə-šēm YHWH bēraḱnükām mibbē’it YHWH.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD;
 We have **blessed** you from the house of the LORD. (NAS; my emphasis)”

The root “brk” meaning “to bless” used in these Hebrew verses is also common in Arabic, where the exact equivalent of the form “*bārūk*” (also used as a name, e.g. Baruch Spinoza) would be “*mu-bārak*” (the name of the former Egyptian dictator). Even modern speakers of Arabic will admit that *muḥammad* and *mubārak*, if understood as adjectives, are synonyms.

In the Gospels, this glorification of the psalmist is interpreted as a reference to Jesus: during the triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, the following words are shouted to him:

“blessed (*eulogēmenos*) is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Mark 11:9; as well as in the parallel verses of Matthew 21:9 and Luke 13:35).

According to Mark 14:61-62, the High Priest asks Jesus during his questioning before the High Council:

“Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One (*ho hyiós tou eulogētou*)? And Jesus said, ‘I am.’”

So Jesus is the son of the Blessed One and himself the Blessed One who comes in the name of the Lord. In the so-called “Sanctus”, a central hymn of the Latin mass liturgy, the wording is: *Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini* – *blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*, the corresponding form of *muḥammad*, – *benedictus* – is just as common a name in Christian countries as *Baruch* in Judaism and *Muḥammad* among Muslims. Moreover, this sentence is semantically not too far away from a second part of the *Šahādah*, the Islamic creed:

“*muḥammadun rasūlu llāh* – commonly translated as: Muhammad is the messenger of God.”

The Christian Arabic version of the biblical verse is:

“*mubāarakun al-’ātī bi-smi - r-rabb*
a blessed one the coming one in the name of the Lord.”

We have already mentioned the fact that *muḥammad* and *mubāarak* are synonymous. But even the first part of the *Šahādah* (*lā llāha illā llāhu* – there is no god but God) has a biblical basis: Deut 6:4:

“שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד –
šma’ yisra’el YHWH elohēnū YHWH eḥad
Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

The same sentence is quoted in Mark 12:29:

ἄκουε Ἰσραὴλ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστὶ
Hear, o Israel! The Lord our God is one God.”

A third interpretation of *muḥammad*, which Alois Sprenger¹⁸ takes into consideration and which fits the already mentioned meaning of the verbal root in Syriac and other old Semitic languages, can certainly be eliminated for the earlier contexts. He refers to the claim of the Qur’ān exegete Ibn ‘Abbās “that Mohammad is mentioned in the Torah”. Sprenger admits that the term in

Classical Arabic means “to glorify” or “to praise”, but adds: “but in related dialects, also those contemporary with the Arabic that was spoken [...] in the Syrian desert ...”, it can also mean “to wish for” or “to long for/desire”. *Muḥammad* would then be “the one who is longed for”.¹⁹ Sprenger refers to Haggai 2:8 and Daniel 11:37:

וְהִרְעַשְׁתִּי אֶת-כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם וּבָאוּ תְּמִדָּת כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם וּמִלֵּאתִי אֶת-הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה כְּבוֹד אֲמַר יְהוָה
זְבָאוֹת:

“*wə-hūr²⁰’aštī ’āt-kāl [kāl] ha-gōyim ū-bā’ū ḥāmdat̄ kāl [kāl] ha-gōyim ū-millē’tī*
’āt ha-bayit̄ ha-zzāh kāḥōd’āmar YHWH šəḥā’ōt

‘I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the **wealth** of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:8; my emphasis)

וְעַל-אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָיו לֹא יִבִּין וְעַל-תְּמִדָּת נָשִׁים וְעַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהֵי לֹא יִבִּין כִּי עַל-כָּל יִתְגַּדֵּל:
wə-’al ’ālohē ’aḥotāw lō’ yāḥīn wə-’al ḥāmdat̄ nāsīm wə-’al kāl [kāl] ’ālō’h lō’
yāḥīn ki ’al kāl yitgaddāl

He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the **desire** of women, nor will he show regard for any other god; for he will magnify himself above them all. (Dan 11:37)”

The Hebrew form *ḥāmdah* (in the NAS version translated as both “wealth” and “desire”) here reflects the original Semitic meaning “something longed for/desired”. For this reason A. Sprenger thinks that the “claim of Ibn ‘Abbas, that the prophet is foretold in the Old Testament under the name of Mohammad”, is “at least partly” justified.²⁰ As this view is based on the opinion of a Qur’ān exegete of the 9th century, it can certainly be eliminated when it comes to the meaning of *muḥammad* in earlier texts.

The first two sources of the term *muḥammad* are linguistically, etymologically and theologically plausible. The Classical Arabic understanding of the form as “praised, blessed”, which seems to have become increasingly dominant over time, fits most contexts in later attestations of the form. It also matches the use of the form in the inscription on the Dome of the Rock, where the praise of God (from the same verbal root: *ḥamd*) is followed by the praise (*muḥammad*) of God’s servant.

In both cases the term *muḥammad* constitutes a *Christological predicate*, namely one which corresponds to both the Judeo-Christian and the common Semitic view. Within this Arab-Syriac mentality the historical figure of Jesus, who is intentionally called the “Son of Mary”²¹, is valued highly in his role within salvation-history. This interpretation within the framework of salvation-history is even clearer with Aphrahat (died after 345), who did not yet know about the Council of Nicaea, when he speaks of the “Prophetess Mary [...] mother of the great Prophet”, i.e., Jesus.²² In the realm of

Hellenistic Christology, the predicates are different: the Majesty of Jesus is described in *natural categories*: Jesus is the (corporal) Son of God, the incarnate God.²³

However, this view only became official doctrine in the Greek (and as a consequence also in the Latin) church since the Council of Nicaea in the year 325. In the Syriac church the outcome of the Council of Nicaea – a Christology assuming two natures of Christ and a Binitarian (later Trinitarian) concept of God – was only accepted at a synod in Seleukia-Ctesiphon in the year 410. Only after that these doctrines gradually adopted by Syriac theologians.²⁴ These doctrinal changes, however, did not reach the (formerly deported) Syro-Arabic Christians in the east of the Persian Empire. They stuck to their Syro-Arabic Christology, which they kept in the heartland of Iran and later in West Syria – after they had managed to gain power after the decline of the Sassanid Empire.

To sum up, we come to the conclusion that *muḥammad* expresses the “Majesty of Jesus” and reflects the Syrian and Arab-Syrian (pre-Nicean) Christology, which is also attested on coins, in the inscription on the interior walls of the Dome of the Rock and in Qur’ānic material: Jesus is the Chosen/Praised One (*muḥammad*), the Messiah (*masīḥ*), God’s servant (*‘abdallāh*), the Prophet (*nabī*), the Messenger (*rasūl*), God’s trustee/ procurator (*walī Allāh*), the Word and the Spirit of God.

But how did it come about that “*muḥammad* Jesus” gradually became the “Prophet of the Arabs”?

2 The Separation of Jesus from his Christological Predicate

2.1 Function and Possible Misunderstanding of Christological Predicates

Christological predicates serve as a way of putting into words the experience of the faithful that, through Jesus, their religious questions had been answered and the feeling of hope evoked – in spite of the ever present experience of deficiency in history. He is, for those who believe in him, the “mediator of salvation”. Therefore, Christians adopt superlative topoi for Jesus, which is handed down from their religious and cultural traditions as perceptions of salvation.²⁵

Jesus was either called the Messiah, the Messenger, the *muḥammad* and so forth, i.e., following the “Semitic” tradition within the framework of salvation history, or – ontologically – as the physical Son of God, God’s Word incarnate, i.e., following the “Greek way”. In either case, these predicates reflect concepts of religious ideals and hopes, which are definitely in contrast to Jesus as a “figure of poverty”. Accordingly, it is understandable from the perspective of the psychology of religion, that these predicates were often more fascinating than Jesus himself.

In Hellenistic Christology there was the danger of the title taking on a life of its own. Jesus was perceived, above all, as God walking around on earth and the concrete person Jesus was neglected. Also in Jewish-Christian and Syrian-Arabic Christology, the majestic titles were so fascinating that the figure of Jesus receded. This process of a shift of interests to the majestic name and its gradual disengagement from its historical catalyzer Jesus, the original subject of all titles, is historically verifiable and attestable. In so doing, the focal point of our investigation will be the inscriptions that the respective rulers programmatically added to the sacred sites they erected, as these, more than anything else, reveal the official religious concept propagated by these rulers.

2.1 The time of ‘Abd al-Malik

In the programmatic Christological inscriptions on the interior walls of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem from the year 693, all of the titles named above are still explicitly linked to Jesus, the Son of Mary: it is for him that God’s blessing is requested. A divine sonship is rejected. The inscription on the exterior walls of the building, done at approximately the same time, avows Allah as the sole deity without associated partners, and uses the same majestic titles *messenger*, *prophet*, *muḥammad*, *God’s servant*: a divine sonship is equally dismissed. The blessing of God is craved for the messenger of Allah. However, the name *Īsā* (Jesus) or the term *masīḥ* (messiah), to which all these epithets refer according to the inscription on the interior walls, are not to be found in the text.²⁶ A possible explanation would be that the inscriptions on the exterior walls represent a second, somewhat later time layer. Here, the epithet is already detached from the name of Jesus. A text belonging to the same time layer might be the inscription on a milestone found close to Tiberias (AH 83/ CE 704), on which the only God – any partnership is rejected – and *muḥammad*, the prophet, is professed.²⁷

Already at the time of Mu‘āwiya the name “Jesus” is not to be found on coins, which, as a rule, reflect the central religious concepts of the current ruler in concise form. That, in fact, they *do* refer to Jesus is “only” recognizable due to the Christian symbols employed: one or more crosses, the depiction of a Christian ruler or of a reigning or alternatively apocalyptic Jesus, the head of John the Baptist in connection with a dove (symbol Christ’s baptism) etc. Even during the early phase of Abd al-Malik’s reign, when the Arabic motto *muḥammad* had already started to appear on coins, they nevertheless still displayed these undoubtedly Christian symbols (crosses or pictures of Christian rulers).²⁸ These symbols, although clearly Christian in origin, even though they are generally misinterpreted in Islamic numismatics as Islamic to make them fit the traditional report, soon receded in favor of a new

symbol: stone pyramids, which were stacked up in tiers in the fashion of the Nabatean and Syrian steles. What does this stone symbol mean?

We do not know the theological developments of ‘Abd al-Malik and his advisors and therefore have to rely on indirect evidence. An important clue for interpretation purposes can be found in the erection of the building built over the rocks of Mount Zion and decorated with the inscriptions mentioned – the Dome of the Rock. According to its architecture as well as its Christological inscriptions this is a Christian building. Its location was motivated both by Jewish tradition (the Temple Mount as well as the myths linked to it: [Adam’s grave and the place of the sacrifice of Isaac etc.]), and by specific Christian traditions (the Dome of the Rock as a Church of the Holy Sepulchre in contrast to the Byzantine Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City of Jerusalem).²⁹

The idea that Jerusalem already played a central role in Syrian-Christian projections is shown by the Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel, which was composed possibly as early as the 4th or 5th century CE, but is definitely “pre-Islamic”.³⁰ According to Apocalyptic literature, in the Last Days everything will be concentrated on Jerusalem. After all, it is the Antichrist who is ruling there, before he is killed by an angel (syrDan. 21-24). The eschatological epiphany of God will happen on Mount Zion (syrDan. 26-29). Then Christ comes as a powerful warrior who brings peace to the world (syrDan. 30-32) and builds a new Jerusalem. Afterwards all nations go on a pilgrimage to Mount Zion (syrDan. 38-39). This tradition remained in force for centuries. The interest in Jerusalem – at that time the religious “center of the world” –

“culminated at the end of the 7th century in the construction of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount”, which “stirred up the fiercest of emotions among the (*rather: other [my correction]*) Christians because this undertaking could be regarded as the reconstruction of the temple.”³¹

One question which strangely enough has hardly been discussed up to now still remains: Why was the rock under the cupola of the cathedral not leveled out and the church building constructed in the conventional style, but rather the people entering were confronted with the bare rocks, lined and vaulted by the building? This only makes sense if it is the solid rock itself which is programmatically brought to the fore in this way. The central significance of the rock is equally apparent in the stone portrayals which were tiered and tapered up to the top on the coins of ‘Abd al-Malik as far as North Africa. Similarly, in his book against heresies, John of Damascus names as the one hundredth (Christian) heresy the “*Ismaelites*” (not “*Muslims*”) and their prophet “*Machmed*” (not “*Muhammad*”); he reports that they worship a stone³² (which has nothing to do with the black stone in the Ka’ba).

The replacement of the cross depictions and comparable symbols by ‘Abd al-Malik should not be interpreted as apostasy from Christianity. It should

rather be seen as the adoption of another Christian program, – as opposed to Syrian, Jacobite and particularly Byzantine Christianity, – and was supposed to demonstrate the foundation of the Arabic Church and its empire.

In order to recognize the patterns in effect here, it is necessary to go back to biblical, above all, Old Testamental traditions, the images and stories of which made up the background of all religious concepts and programmatic assertions of that time. So the question arises: Where in the Bible do we read about such a function of the “stone”?

Apart from archaic traditions (which had an effect on the Old Testament), the programmatic significance of stone and rip-rap revetment obviously goes back to Old Testamental concepts, in which important agreements and contracts were guaranteed using holy stones or stone symbolism. God promised Jacob prolific offspring in a “dream”, which was understood to be a positive answer to the foundation of the people of Israel (Gen. 28:10-22). Consequently, Jacob “rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top (28:18).” The Hebrew word used for this memorial stone was *מַצֵּבָה* *maṣṣēbāh*, which normally designates a stone pillar. He then called this location *בֵּית-אֵל* *bēt-’ēl* (*Bethel*, i.e., “house of God”). The full form of the designation for God (*bēt ’ālohīm* – *house of God*) appears in verse 22:

וְהָאֵבֶן הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר־שָׂמֵתִי מַצֵּבָה יְהִי־הָיָה בֵּית אֱלֹהִים וְכָל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן־לִי עֲשֹׂר אֶעֱשֶׂרְנוּ לָךְ׃
 wə ha-’ābān ha-zo’i ’ašār śam’i maṣṣēbāh yih’hāh bēt ’ālohīm wə-kāl [kol] ’ašār
 titān-li ‘ašser ’a’as’rānnū lāk

This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”

In another place, Jacob erects a pile of stones as confirmation of his contract with his father-in-law, Laban (Gen. 34:45-48), which Laban (verse 47) named *יָגַר שְׁהָדוּתָא* *Yāgar Śāh^adūtā’* (NAS: Jegar-sahadutha). It is interesting to note that this is the only clearly Aramaic word in a text entirely written in Hebrew. It means “piles of evidence”; Jacob gave it a Hebrew name: *גַּלְעָד* *Gal^p’ēd* (NAS: Galeed), the Hebrew translation of the word: “a pile serving as a witness”.³³

The Christological adoption of this stone symbolism can be seen in the quotation of Psalm 118:22) in the gospels:

“The stone which the builders rejected
 Has become the chief corner stone.”

Instead of presenting speculative explanations, a sentence by the Syrian theologian Aphraḥaḥ about the Christological significance of rock and stone from his book “Demonstrations” will be adduced:

“Demonstration 1:3: And now hear concerning faith that is based upon the Stone, and concerning the structure that is reared up upon the Stone. [...]”³⁴

1:6: But I must proceed to my former statement that Christ is called the Stone in the Prophets. For in ancient times David said concerning Him: –*The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the building. (emphasis in the original English translation; the sentence is Ps. 118:22, see above)*³⁵

“[...]By these things they rejected the Stone which is Christ. And how did it become the head of the building? How else than that it was set up over the building of the Gentiles and upon it is reared up all their building (the German translator adds here: “as a foundation stone”).”³⁶

Aphrahat quotes further verses of the Old Testament with stone symbolism, which he understands from the perspective of Christology, e.g. Ezekiel 13:10 and 22:30 and above all Isaiah 28:16:

“Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.’”

and adds Matthew 21:44:

“And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”³⁷

Then he explains (Demonstration 1:8):

“And again Daniel also spoke concerning this stone which is Christ. For he said: ‘The stone was cut out from the mountain, not by hands, and it smote the image, and the whole earth was filled with it (Daniel 2:34-35)’.”

Furthermore, he refers to Zechariah 4:7³⁸ and stresses the significance of the quote:

“*Demonstration 1:9*: And definitely did He show concerning this stone:— Lo! On this stone will I open seven eyes (Zechariah 3:9).” *Demonstration 1:17*: And also Simon who was called Cephas because of his faith was called the firm rock (Matthew 16, 18).”³⁹

Aphrahat’s bible exegesis reads like an iconographic guide for the construction of the Dome of the Rock. Just to what extent ‘Abd al-Malik was familiar with the writings of Aphrahat evades our knowledge. But it can be assumed that a Syrian-Christian pictorial theology of this kind, based on Old Testament material, dominated his perception of the world. The significant role of Old Testament concepts for the doctrine of ‘Abd al-Malik is also visible in the depictions of utensils of Solomon’s Temple on the coins he had struck.⁴⁰

However, both areas of symbolism – stone and temple utensils – do not point to ‘Abd al-Malik’s return to Judaism or adoption of a totally new religion, but are characteristics of his peculiar, Arabic Christianity.⁴¹ Evidence

that this is indeed so can be found in the very inscriptions added (by him) to the Dome of the Rock. For users of his coins, however, this symbolism was no longer self-evident as being Christian, as in the case of the former depictions of crosses. This lack of understanding can be read in a remark by John of Damascus about stone worship among the Ismaelites: He had not understood what it was all about. The result of this was that titles common on coins, and probably also as religious concepts, above all the predicate *muḥammad*, were no longer perceived as referring to Jesus.

2.3 The time of al-Walīd

‘Abd al-Malik’s successor, al-Walīd, had given up his father’s apocalyptic ideas referring to Jerusalem and expanded the sanctuary of John the Baptist in Damascus, the *Ḥarām*, where the head of John the Baptist was preserved, a site which had already been treasured by Mu‘āwīya.⁴² Damascus is situated in the very north of the old (“Arabian”) Nabatean Empire. The occupation of this tradition through John’s sanctuary in the north had its counterpart in the south: the construction of a sanctuary in Medina, 49 years later. There are inscriptions on both buildings which document the religious and political program of the ruler and formally and conceptually follow the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock. Space limitations prevent an interpretation of the entire texts of these inscriptions in the present study; but a formal analogy between these texts and the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock and the majestic titles referred to is obvious.

The Umayyad Mosque constructed in the “Year of the Arabs” 86/87 AH (707/708 CE) in Damascus was certainly a Christian building/structure. The church previously located there was completely or partially torn down for the new construction. A programmatic inscription was affixed to the “mosque” by al-Walīd.⁴³

At the beginning, al-Walīd renounced the religious bigotry of his father and explained that “there is no coercion in matters of the *dīn*” (according to conventional and current Arabic understanding erroneously translated as “religion”), and that from now on “the right path has been distinguished from the wrong one”. The text is the same as surah 2:256:

“la ikrāha fī d-dīn. qad tabayyana r-ruṣḍu mina l-ḡayyi.

There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. (Pickthall’s translation)”

Christoph Luxenberg translates the term *dīn* trying to reconstruct the understanding of the time the text was written:

“Whatever is true/ correct/ righteous (*dīn*) cannot be denied, the right way (*ruṣd*) is distinguished from the wrong way (*ḡayy*; i.e., in the scriptures).”

This interpretation connects the two clauses logically.

Then the oneness of God without association of partners and the unity of the community is professed: in the following it is said that “our prophet is praised (*muḥammad*). May God incline to him and bless him”. This blessing reflects the contents of the text on the interior and exterior walls of the Dome of the Rock. The following sentence states that al-Walid, the servant of God, built the sacred site and (partially?) tore down the previous church.

Although the few majestic titles (*rasūl* and *muḥammad*), the rejection of partners associated with Allah and the “quoted” blessing refer to Jesus, he is not explicitly mentioned as “the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary” as in the Dome of the Rock. Here, the title has priority, comparable with the protocol of a religious sovereign. Like his father had done on a milestone not far from Tiberias and on coins, the new ruler al-Walid calls himself “servant of God (*‘abdallāh*)”.

2.4 The Sacred Site in Medina

This tendency can also be found in an inscription on a sanctuary in Medina, which was erected in 135 (756), thus after the beginning of the Abbasid period.⁴⁴ However, the first centuries after the end of the Umayyad dynasty should be considered an interim period during which the traditional religious concepts and formulae were kept and complemented by legal regulations inspired by the Eastern Mesopotamian Arabs, who themselves had been strongly influenced by the Persians.⁴⁵

In the inscription, the acknowledgement of a monotheism without association of partners is followed by the affirmation of the “correct” Christology through the repetition of the same Christological titles, which can already be found in the Dome of the Rock and, limited to only two titles, the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. The remaining predicates are: *muḥammad*, *rasūl* and (as an addition not found in Damascus) *‘abdallāh*, followed by a blessing of the messenger, as in Jerusalem and Damascus. Unlike the inscriptions on the interior walls of the Dome of the Rock, but like those on the exterior walls, there is no mention of the messiah, Son of Mary. The person who ordered the affixation of the inscriptions did not mention his own name but his title, to which *‘abdallāh*, however, also belonged.

Here the question arises whether in these inscriptions Islam is already intended as a new religion of its own, or if Christian concepts still continue to be valid, albeit with more radical traits (emphasis on command and obedience, dominance of the new creed). Similarly it is not clear what exactly is to be understood by *kitāb allāh* (God’s scripture) and the *sunna* of the prophet.⁴⁶

There is good reason to assume that Jesus is still meant – and therefore the religion is still to be considered a kind of Christianity, as the predicate *‘abdallāh* (servant of God) as a title, is not linked with the ruler, but also with the epithet *muḥammad*. Only in later Islam was it to become the designation of the prophet’s father, so that now Muḥammad is the son of a “person called *‘Abdallāh*”. According to Volker Popp, the concept of *Muḥammad* as the name of the “Prophet of the Arabs” begins when, in inscriptions, the epithet “God’s servant” is no longer used referring to him.⁴⁷

There are also other reasons to assume this, above all, theological ones: the apparent formal coherence of the four inscriptions, which are constructed analogously, show that they document a comparable religious program, evolving on its way from Jerusalem to Medina, the themes being the nature of God and Christology. The four inscriptions on the interior and exterior walls of the Dome of the Rock, in Damascus and in Medina proclaim the religious and political program of the rulers who ordered them. What they have in common is the proclamation of the oneness of God in connection with a strong rejection of any association of God with partners or the concept of Jesus as his son. As the predicate “son of God” is thus impossible the alternatives *muḥammad*, *‘abdallah*, *rasūl* etc. had to be resorted to. In the inscriptions on the interior walls of the Dome of the Rock these are still explicitly linked to the messiah Jesus, son of Mary, on all other inscriptions only implicitly, as the words *‘Isā bn Maryam* or *masīḥ* are missing. A request for God’s blessing on him always follows.

As the predicate *muḥammad* and other terms are confronted with the concept of an association of partners to God (i.e., trinity) or of Jesus as the Son of God, it becomes a key term of a theological and Christological program, of a “correct” view (i.e., *dīn*) of the nature of God and Christ. There might be some objection as we cannot be sure that these terms refer to Jesus. So let us assume that Jesus was not meant and that these terms refer to the founder of Islam, the Prophet of the Arabs: If that were the case, why then was it felt necessary to contrast the acknowledgement of “*Muḥammed, the Prophet of the Arabs*” with the (strongly rejected) association of partners to God or the view that Jesus was God’s son? If in the central religious formula of the “new religion”, which – according to the sunnah – was mainly preached to former polytheists, two views are explicitly mentioned (albeit rejected) that are in stark contrast to the intended propagation of an undifferentiated monotheism (i.e., “monarchianism”), this might have the adverse effect!⁴⁸ The risk of a Binitarian and Trinitarian complication/ dilution of the strict monotheism, which is the core of Islam, was only present in forms of Christianity that were influenced by Hellenism. The Arabic Christians vehemently rejected this development, which had also been coming into the East

Syrian region since the synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. So in these texts, *muḥammad* is not the name of a person, but one of a number of predicates, which explicitly negate a Christological doctrine of the two natures of Christ or a Binitarian or Trinitarian view of the nature of God, i.e., they reflect exactly the “pre-Nicean” Syrian-Arab conception.

Maybe the inscriptions in Medina are the last to present *muḥammad* as a (Christological) title, as the concrete linkage to Jesus seems to have almost completely receded behind the predicates. Thus, the re-interpretation of the predicate *muḥammad* as the name of a Prophet of the Arabs called *Muḥammad* was made possible.

This gradual disappearance of Jesus behind his Christological predicates could also have something to do with the fact the Persian influence, which also played a role at the beginning of the Qur’ānic movement, had meanwhile become stronger. This is already shown by the inscriptions in Medina and all the more by the developments in and since the late 8th century.⁴⁹ It seems to be that Persian Christianity was more theocratic and methodical than its Syrian counterpart which led to a weakening of the position of Jesus. As the Syrian influence decreased, the figure of Jesus faded more and more into the background or out of sight.

2.5 *muḥammad* as a title in later Islamic tradition

It is interesting to note that the later Muslim tradition of the 9th century, contrary to the other current biographies of the prophet, seem to remember that *muḥammad* was originally a title, and only secondarily a name given to newly born children. In his “Book of The Major Classes (*Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*)”⁵⁰ the famous Arab scholar Ibn Sa’d (died 845) reported about the different names of the prophet in a section of his biography entitled “Report on the Names and Patronymics of the Messenger of Allah”.

Ibn Sa’d summarizes existing sources from different (fictional?) authors. According to one version, the prophet was at first named *Qutām* at his birth by his grandfather ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. It was later that his mother, Āmina, spoke about a dream with an angel and the grandfather renamed him Muḥammed.

In other sources cited by Ibn Sa’d in the same chapter, up to six other names are mentioned, of which *Muḥammad* was only one.⁵¹ According to Ibn Sa’d six names were reported in two sources (in other sources it is three and five names). According to them, the prophet himself said that he had six names: *Muḥammad* (the Blessed/Praised One), *Aḥmad* (the Highly Praised One), *Ḥātim* (the Seal), *Ḥāšir* (the Awakener [of the dead?]), *‘Āqib* (the last prophet; concluder) and *Māḥī* (the Redeemer [of sins]; also: the one who is awakened [to life]; the Eraser [of sins]). All of these are theologically significant names which would fundamentally fit Jesus more easily. In any case

Alois Sprenger should be agreed with when he concludes with reference to the reports in Ibn Sa‘d:

“In these traditions ‘Mohammad’ appears, in the same way as the rest of the other names, as an epithet of the prophet and not as a proper name.”⁵²

To sum up: Alois Sprenger already opined that *muḥammad* was a title and not a proper name. Of course, he relates everything to the Prophet of the Arabs. It is his opinion

“It (Islam) is the only world religion about the formation of which we have reliable information, regardless of its age.”⁵³

If historical-critical methods are applied (a formal issue) and (only) contemporary sources are taken into consideration (a material issue), then this conviction begins to totter. However, the fact that Islamic sources as late as the 9th century know that Muḥammad (and other “names”) are actually theological titles, remains noteworthy and is difficult to deny.

By the beginning of the Abbasid era, however, these had taken on a life of their own and, at least at first sight, had detached themselves from their original subject Jesus. Now a situation had arisen in which the former title *muḥammad* could and had to be connected to other material under new conditions and requirements which corresponded to the increasingly strong Arabic character that both the religion and the political leadership had meanwhile adopted.

3. The historicization of the title *muḥammad* as Prophet of the Arabs

There are numerous examples in the history of civilization of how basic initial processes are traced back and linked to people whose actions allegedly originated these processes; in some cases, narrative traditions evolve around these “founding fathers”, because central aspects of what the new creed is all about can much more easily be made understandable and conceivable if these aspects are clad in a (albeit fictitious) biography with a message, or to use the Greek word, a *kerygma*.

The foundation of cities and empires can be based on initial figures (e.g. Romulus and Remus), as well as the derivation of a nation (e.g. Moses), a religion and so forth, but also central religious content can be turned into a legendary person of flesh and blood, for example “the three divine virtues”, *faith*, *hope* and *love*, which are worshipped as concrete saints both in the Greek/Russian and in the Latin church.

Above all breaks and new beginnings in the evolution of a religion constituting a new phase of its history are often linked to narratives about their founder. In some cases, these characters are completely fictitious, like the Chinese “philosopher” Lao tsu (老子 Pinyin: Lǎozǐ, literally: “old one”), the biblical patriarchs, in other cases explanations of theological or philosophical views are connected to “historical” people, whose actual biography is hardly known at all, like Gautama Siddhartha or Zarathustra.⁵⁴ In the third case the sparse biographical material that does exist is recounted with a kerygmatic intention and extended for the purpose of propagation, the best example being the problem of the “historical Jesus” as opposed to the “kerygmatic Jesus”.

Even sacred literature with central significance for a religion can be ascribed to fictitious founding figures and be established in their biography, like the *Gathas* of Zarathustra or the “*Five Books*” of Moses, a figure of central importance in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the latter case his authorship remained undisputed for more than two thousand years, although the “exodus” of the Jews (with the drowning of a whole army) is neither mentioned in any Egyptian text nor did their wandering in the desert and conquest of the Promised Land leave any archaeological traces.

So if we are to assess the understanding and probably only later “personalization” of the concept *muḥammad*, originally a central term to be found on all inscriptions and coins struck by non-Trinitarian Arabic Christians since ‘Abd al-Malik, we have to keep these facts in mind. At first, i.e., in the iconography of the coins and particularly in the Dome of the Rock, *muḥammad* only referred to the *Servant of God* and the *Messiah Jesus, Son of Mary*. Then the name of Jesus was mentioned less and less and was thus gradually overshadowed by the predicates, something that could easily happen, as most of the new members of the movement – unlike the old ruling class – did not know the original meanings and connotations of these terms. So it comes as no surprise that they got the impression that *muḥammad* was in fact a name and referred to a historically different person.

Above all opponents of the non-Trinitarian, explicitly “Arab” Christianity from other Christian denominations, i.e., mainly the Syrian and Byzantine Christians (e.g. John of Damascus), did not know the Christological title *muḥammad* from their own tradition. What could be more obvious for them than to understand the term as the name of the Prophet of the Arabs? Thus, they boosted a development within Arab Christianity which had presumably already started, although we unfortunately have no material proof of this.⁵⁵

The titles “Messiah”, “Servant of God”, Bearer of “Word” and “Spirit”, commonly used in “pre-Nicean” Christology and increasingly misunderstood, gradually receded. They were more and more replaced by the epithets *muḥammad* and the two titles “prophet (*nabī*)” and “messenger (*rasūl*)”. Together they were interpreted as *muḥammad*, the messenger of God and the

prophet, a person who stood for the beginning of a new Arabic religious movement: *Muḥammad, the Son of ‘Abdallāh*.

This development has a second origin: The Arab Christians from the East, who had determined the course of events since ‘Abd al-Malik, had brought with them at least the core constituents of the Qur’ānic material, let us call it tentatively the “Meccan” part. They edited, or in some cases maybe even had to translate it into the – at that time – only emerging Arabic language, the result being a kind of Arabic with a strong Syro-Aramaic imprint. In some passages it might even be fair to call it an *Aramaic-Arabic hybrid language*, as shown by the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock in the 7th century. Further material was added to these core constituents in the course of the 8th century. These parts might be very roughly equated to the “Medinan” surahs and verses.

The authorship of a modern book is usually clear, but in the case of holy literatures their content is very often not connected to an “author”, but rather to “creators”, “guarantors” or “informants.” Almost at the same time as the Qur’ān, the Zoroastrian traditions were gradually codified into a canon of scriptures. Their authorship was attributed to a man called Zarathustra, who, as the newest Iranological research shows, is a largely legendary figure. It might be that the oldest kernel of the Qur’ān, the “Meccan” surahs which the first generation of Arab Christians had brought along from the East, was assigned to a similar “informant/ transmitter” of the divine message, an idealized *Moses*. Even in the case of Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount* it is quite obvious that the model for this was the reception of the Ten Commandments by Moses on Mount Sinai, so that Jesus was portrayed as a “new Moses”. Similarly, the *New Moses of the Arab Christians* from the East was expected to guarantee the long-awaited exodus from the isolated East Iranian enclaves into their new and old home country or even into the Holy Land. This conceptual “archaeology”, in terms of history of ideas, was later forgotten due to two events: First, the “exodus” was successfully completed after the collapse of Sassanid rule and ‘Abd al-Malik’s taking over of power, and secondly, Qur’ānic material was now available in Arabic language and script. Now *muḥammad* appears as the prophet and messenger addressed in the Qur’ān.

Furthermore, the Arabization of these Christians must be taken into consideration. Like in the case of the Nabateans, we might assume that the language of everyday intercourse of the Early East Arab Christians was a kind of Arabic, but that the written language they used was originally rather a kind of Aramaic (albeit with an Arabic substrate), which was then gradually replaced by a then only emerging written Arabic Koine (now with an Aramaic substrate). At the time of the “Arab” *Ma‘āwiya* (Aramaic)/ *Mu‘āwiya* (Arabic), – the Aramaic name form appears in the oldest “Islamic”

inscription in Gadara in Greek letters (!) – this process was still “in statu nascendi”, but it began powerfully with ‘Abd al-Malik and his successors. The new rulers perceived themselves as distinctly “Arabic”, as heirs to, for example, the old (“Arabic”) Nabatean Empire, during which programmatic sacred sites were built in the north (Damascus) and in the south (Medina), in addition to the “theological center” (Jerusalem). So it was more and more the *Arabic* character of this autonomous and, – at first still superficially (?) Christian – religion and the Arabic language of the Qur’ānic texts which increasingly became the dominant feature and served to establish a new identity: *muḥammad* now had to be understood as the normative *Prophet of the Arabs*, who stood *at the beginning* of the new movement, – “a messenger, (one) of yourselves (surah 9:128, Pickthall)” – at the same time the *Arab* transmitter of the meanwhile *Arabic* Qur’ānic revelation.

The emergence of the concept of a *Prophet of the Arabs* that the Qur’ānic sayings can be traced back to, can indeed have taken place as late as the first half of the 8th century, when Jesus was still (officially) the subject of the Christological titles in the inscriptions and on coins, as the report of John of Damascus shows, who talks about *Ma(ch)med* as a historical figure and who assigns several surahs, – in his Greek: *graphé* (scripture) – directly to him. However, the person he considers a “pseudo-prophet” for him is the founder of the *Christian heresy of the Ismaelites*, so when he discusses their doctrine, for him it is not a *new religion*, but *one of many heresies within Christianity*.

Accordingly, in an initial phase – until about 750, – Mohammed is indeed occasionally seen as a historical figure and initiator of the movement, but still in the context of Christianity. This is supported by the fact that this historicized *Muḥammad* is still probably seen as an “apostle” of Jesus Christ – the Christian Arabic term used for “apostle” is *rasūl*, the same word which in Islam means “messenger (of God)/ prophet”, – whose task it is to confirm and enforce the Torah and the gospel, i.e., the scriptures (Arabic: *kitāb*), against the false interpretations of other “People of the Book (*ahl kitāb*; according to Muslim understanding: Christians and Jews)”. Y. D. Nevo and J. Koren assume an earlier proclamation of *Muḥammad* as *Prophet of the Arabs*: 690-692.⁵⁶ For this assessment, their differing interpretation of the inscription in the Dome of the Rock is crucial. Whether the latter can really be interpreted as referring to a “prophet Muḥammad”, is highly questionable.⁵⁷

There does not seem to have been any personalization of the epithet *muḥammad* in the 7th century. The alleged evidence of Christian sources of this time cited by many authors for this purpose, in which *Muḥammad* is supposedly spoken of, are often uncritically analyzed and, in order to bring them into accordance with historiography, which is presumed authentic, wrongly dated. In the course of the first half of the 8th century, up to John of Damascus, there is evidence of an understanding of the term *muḥammad* as

the designation of a Prophet of the Arabs named *Muḥammad*,⁵⁸ thus the earliest evidence of a historicization of *muḥammad*.

But it was not until relatively late in the 8th, or even as recently as the early 9th century, that the idea arose that the Arabic movement was a new and *no longer Christian* religion; however, it was not yet described as *Islām*). Due to this development, the Prophet of the Arabs named *muḥammad* becomes the autonomous preacher of a new religion who adjusts and surpasses the wrong teachings of Jews and Christians with a new revelation. The *Arab* preacher becomes the proclaimer of the *Qurʾān*, which is no longer a confirmation of the Torah and the gospels, but, – according to later surahs, – an autonomous text on a par with (and even above) these scriptures.

Since this time there have been attempts to biographically fill the life of the Prophet, which was supposedly spent on the Arabian Peninsula. Mecca and Medina, which are only seldom mentioned in the *Qurʾān* (Mecca once and Medina three times; in all cases it is not clear as to whether place names are meant!), become central locations in his life. In this process, the origin of this movement in the East Mesopotamian Empire *ʿArabīya*, a country which had meanwhile fallen into oblivion, was an advantage, as this location could now be equated with the *Arabian Peninsula*.

These early attempts from the second half of the 8th century are no longer available to us. The biographies of the Prophet cited today were all written down in the 9th and 10th centuries,⁵⁹ the collection of the *sunna* in the 9th century, but these later works may indeed have used sources from the second half of the 8th century; for their purpose of gaining credibility it was then only logical to backdate their sources and claim an uninterrupted chain of transmitters starting with the alleged “companions (of the Prophet)” (*ṣaḥāba*), his relatives and wives, in other words, to connect to the early days “of Islam.” In this process, an amazing amount of historicizing material was collected from the stories in circulation, which were all linked to *Muḥammad*, apart from numerous newly created stories. The great pains taken to put together lists of informants and transmitters are clear indicators of the profound deficit felt due to these intentionally backdated traditions.

4. The Qurʾānic Material on the Figure of the Prophet⁶⁰

4.1 The three phases of Qurʾānic development and the historicization of *muḥammad*

On inscriptions and coins, i.e., on contemporary material evidence, the term *MḤMT* (according to the extant evidence) appeared for the first time in the year 40 AH (661 CE), while the Arabic spelling *Muḥammad* can be found

unvocalized no earlier than the year 60 AH (681 CE). Therefore, it would be astonishing if the term had already been used in the (few?) Qur'ānic materials which existed up to these temporal breaks. In fact, *muḥammad* appears in no more than four places in the Qur'ān, although the prophet is consistently addressed in the surahs as *rasūl* or *nabī*.

As we have shown, until at least 135 AH (756 CE = inscription in Medina), *muḥammad* was a Christological title, at least in official theology (according to Chr. Luxenberg's nomenclature "*Muḥammad I*"). However, even before this, in the first half of the 8th century, a historicization/ personalization of the concept might have been initiated ("Mohammed II").⁶¹

This historicization can only be detected in a few late ("Medinan") passages in the Qur'ān. It has to be mentioned that, according to later theologically inspired historiography, all places where God speaks to a *messenger* (*rasūl*) or *prophet* (*nabī*) or simply says "you", translators and commentators understand this as referring to the *Prophet of the Arabs* and add (mostly in brackets) the name *Muḥammad*. Therefore the topical index of most modern Qur'ān translations enumerates hundreds of occurrences under the entry *Muḥammad*. These comparatively frequent passages are, however, mostly short and as rule formulated in a very general and unspecified way, so that there is no clear indication as to whom they refer exactly. If the evidence on coins and inscriptions is taken into consideration, it turns out that whomever they might refer to, it can hardly have been the figure of the "prophet *Muḥammad*" as he appears in the biographies until the second half of the 8th century. However, the fact remains that it is always a "you" or a "prophet" who is addressed in the Qur'ān. As the oldest surahs, which originated in the far East of Mesopotamia, indeed assume a prophetic addressee, – unless these titles (*rasūl* and *nabī*) are not only literary *topoi* and the 2nd person relating to a "typological 'you'" (for the type "prophet in general") – then we can assume that there was a first (Aramaic) preacher in the land of origin whose name is not known. Therefore the claim is not "*the prophet Muḥammad did not exist*", – even the question "*did Muḥammad exist?*" is too simplistic, – but rather:

There might have been a prophetic figure at the beginning of the religious movement that later became Islām, but his name was not Muḥammad, and his life was unlike the one described in the Sira literature (biographies of the Prophet).

When later the prophet's life was depicted with ever more concrete details, it might have been this prophetic leader that provided the personal kernel to which later generations added legends and stories, without, however, being aware of his possible historical beginning.

Biblical figures named in the Qur'ān are the following: Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*): 79 times, Moses: (*Mūsā*): 136 times, Aaron (*Hārūn*): 20 times, Jesus

(*Īsā*): 24 times, Mary (*Maryam*): 34 times, Adam (*Adam*): 25 times, Noah (*Nūḥ*): 33 times and Pharaoh (*Fir‘awn*): 74 times; the term *nabī* (prophet) without a name: 43 times, “messenger/apostle of Allah” (*rasūl Allāh*) appears more than 300 times in different variations. The form *muḥammad* is named in only four places.⁶²

As several Qur’ānic texts existed as early as the end of the 7th century in Arabic, the prophet addressed in them, whenever he speaks about Jesus or Moses/Jesus, can only be the already implied “unknown prophet” from the beginning of the Qur’ānic movement or a “typological prophet”. In later texts from the first half of the 8th century, in contrast, the “prophet” might already designate the meanwhile personalized *Prophet of the Arabs*, i.e., to a purportedly historical figure. Nevertheless, even this latter person of reference still belongs to the context of Christianity, like an apostle, and must therefore be examined individually; this is certainly the case wherever his purpose is the confirmation of “the Scriptures”, the Torah or the Gospel. So surah 62:2 assumes that God

“hath sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to make them grow, and to teach them the Scripture and Wisdom, ...” (cf. also e.g. surah 3:184; 7:10; 10:95; 28:52).

Most invectives against the “People of the Book (*ahl kitāb*)”, who are reproached with having distorted the Torah and the Gospel, probably belong to this context. Statements of this kind do not mean that we are dealing with a new religion; it is, unfortunately, much more a matter of a common “debate culture” within Christianity to accuse people with different opinions, whether fellow Christians or Jews, of having a false understanding of the scriptures.

It is often claimed that the Qur’ān aims at replacing the Bible, one Ḥadīth even explicitly discourages Muslims from reading anything but the Qur’ān.⁶³ It is undoubtedly so that there are many references in the Qur’ān which assert that it was God himself who taught it (e.g. surah 55:2; surah 85:22; surah 59:21 and others) and (a little later?) the fact that the Qur’ān is written in clear Arabic is stressed (e.g. surah 41:44; surah 46:8-10 and others). Thus the new scripture claims to be a new norm and to possess literary authority. However, the Qur’ān never *contrasts* itself with the Torah or the Gospel, but always stresses that it *confirms* them. Moreover, the etymology of the word *Qur’ān* from Syriac *qəryāna*, i.e., “lectionary” (compendium of Biblical and liturgical texts), is generally accepted. So the Qur’ān should be understood as an *Arabic* (or Syro-Arabic) lectionary, the aim of which is to confirm the scriptures/ writing (*kitāb*) and interpret them in the right way,⁶⁴ so that even the djinns say:

- “1. Say (O Muhammad): It is revealed unto me that a company of the Jinn gave ear, and they said: Lo! it is a marvelous Qur’an,
2. Which guideth unto righteousness, so we believe in it and we ascribe unto our Lord no partner.” (surah 72:1-2).

Or they say:

“When before it there was the Scripture of Moses, an example and a mercy; and this is a confirming Scripture in the Arabic language, that it may warn those who do wrong and bring good tidings for the righteous.” (surah 46:31; cf. 46:12).

The messenger/ transmitter of this Qur’ān says of himself:

“I am no *new thing among the messengers (of Allah)*, nor know I what will be done with me or with you. I do but follow that which is inspired in me, and I am but a plain warner.” (surah 46:9; my emphasis)

Elsewhere, he talks about himself as a “messenger making plain (*rasūlun mubīn*” (surah 43:29), which probably alludes to the fact that the new scripture is written in Arabic, the normal language of intercourse of the target group, not Aramaic, the language of higher education. This *warnar (munḍir)*, who saw himself as a true (i.e., non-Trinitarian) Christian, is not named; the obviously very important and often stressed fact that the Qur’ān was written in (clear, plain; Arabic: *mubīn*) Arabic, however, makes it clear that the “warner”, prophet and messenger must have been an Arab. So the “Arabic Qur’ān (*Qur’ān ‘arabī*)” (surah 43:3) requires a “warner of their own (*munḍirun minhum*)” (surah 50:2) – a clear indication of the concept of a Prophet of the Arabs; but he is still in the line of the preceding prophets. In some verses of surah 33, the prophet is portrayed as having a lifestyle which is definitely no longer “Christian”, – e.g. in verse 28, he turns out to be a polygamist (“O Prophet! Say unto thy wives”). Concerning his religious orientation, however, even this surah sees him in line with the other prophets:

- “7. And when We exacted a covenant (*miṭāq*) from the Prophets, and from thee (O Muhammad) and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant;
8. That He may ask the loyal of their loyalty. And He hath prepared a painful doom for the unfaithful.”

It is interesting to note that Pickthall’s rendering of the Arabic word *miṭāq* as “covenant” reflects the Biblical covenants between God and his prophets. The German translation by Max Henning,⁶⁵ does the same by translating the word as “Bund”, whereas the prestigious translation by R. Paret⁶⁶ totally ignores this reference to the Bible and translates as “Verpflichtung (obligation)”.

As soon as the movement that lived according to the Qur'ān was perceived as a new religion, the Qur'ān stepped up right beside the scriptures as possessing equal authority. It is even placed above the scriptures in so far as it is a "clear/plain (*mubīn*)" book. For example in surah 9:111, the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'ān are named side-by-side, but in surah 15:1 this fact is stressed:

"9:111: It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an."

15:1: These are verses of the Scripture and a plain Reading. (*tilka 'āyātu l-kitābi wa-qur'ānin mubīnin*)"

In verse surah 3:3 the significance of the Qur'ān that ("only"?) confirms the scriptures (Torah and Gospel), is strongly emphasized:

"He hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture with truth, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel." (cf. also verse 4-9 and surah 4:136)

The nature of the Qur'ān as a revelation is repeatedly stressed, e.g. surah 16:102-103. Above all in the Medinan surahs, the Qur'ān appears as an important scripture of divine revelation, although even here the connection to the Torah, the Gospel, or to "scripture" is preserved.⁶⁷

Now Jews and Christians can be contrasted with the followers of the Qur'ānic teachings (surah 9:30-31):

"30. And the Jews say: Ezra (*'Uzayr*) is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they!

31. They have taken as lords beside Allah their rabbis and their monks and the Messiah son of Mary, when they were bidden to worship only One God. There is no god save Him. Be He glorified from all that they ascribe as partners (unto Him)!"

Just what made the author of these verses think that the Jews worship Ezra as the son of God is still not resolved. The polemics against Christians, however, sticks to the arguments and positions already brought forward in the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock and on the temples in Damascus and Medina, as well as to the views advocated in other Qur'ānic texts. Up to this time, the controversy had, in the main, been a debate between Christian groups and individuals, – Syro-Arabian Christianity versus Hellenistic and Syro-Hellenistic Christianity. But now, in surah 9, the common Christian base seems to have been abandoned – both "the Jews" and "the Christians" are contrasted with the new creed as adherents of totally different religious

orientations. A fundamental separation seems to have been announced. Similarly, in surah 2, verse 108 “your messenger” is contrasted with Moses as an autonomous figure and in verse 120 the following is said:

“And the Jews will not be pleased with thee, nor will the Christians, till thou follow their creed.”

According to Chr. Luxenberg’s nomenclature this could be considered a case of “Muḥammad III”; but even here the messenger is still not mentioned by name.

It is worth noting that the Qur’ān stresses that the belief that only one god should be worshipped is identical to the (Biblical) command to Jews and Christians and that this belief is presented again and again within the context of identical successive revelation.⁶⁸ But the preaching of the Qur’ān appears to be the only one which completely corresponds to this original revelation.

This new step is now put into a theological-symbolical framework which begins with Abraham,⁶⁹ a figure recognized by both Jews *and* Christians and who preceded both these religions:

“Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to Allah), and he was not of the idolaters.” (surah 3:67)

A similar foundation myth had been used by Paul in his Letter to the Romans:

“For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir to the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” (Romans 4:13)

Choosing Abraham as a reference point allowed young Christianity to fall back on an authority which is older than Judaism (i.e., the law). The use of this fallback by the new movement is not only obvious from the parallels to Paul, but also from the perspective of Arabic tradition: long before the later Islam became established, the Arabs had been designated as *Ismaelites* – descendants of *Ishmael* (יִשְׁמָאֵל) *yīsmā’ēl*; Arabic: *’Ismā’īl*), Abraham’s son with his wife’s Egyptian handmaid *Hagar* (חַגָּר) *Hāḡār*, Arabic: *Hāḡar*), – or, after his mother, *Hagarenes* (Greek: *Agarēnoi*, Syriac: *hagrāyē* or *mhaggrāyē*; the latter probably related to the *muhāḡirūn*, i.e., according to Muslim tradition those early Muslims who had fled from Mecca to Medina, as opposed to Medinan Muslims, the *anṣār*).⁷⁰

Like in the case of Paul’s epistles to the early Christian communities, relating to Abraham was an indicator that the religious movement had started to break away from the original religion. In Paul’s case it was Christianity splitting from Judaism and in the later parts of the Qur’ān, the new religion Islam from Christianity. The fourteenth surah is entitled “Abraham” (the allegedly “Arabic” form *Ibrahīm* is probably a later misreading);⁷¹

the followers of the Qur'ānic movement represent the religious orientation of Abraham. (surah 2:130: "And who forsaketh the religion of Abraham save him who befooleth himself?"). They are not like the "Jews or Christians":

"And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters."(surah 2:135)

Abraham established "the house (*bayt*)" as "a resort for mankind and a sanctuary, (saying): Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray) (surah 2:125)". Muslim exegetes are convinced that by this "house", the *Ka'ba* in Mecca is meant, although the Arabic text of the Qur'an offers no basis for this interpretation.

As the Arabic movement gradually became an independent entity, which reached out beyond Judaism and Christianity and based itself on the Qur'an as the ultimate revelation, the transmitter of this scripture and thus (in retrospect) founder of the new religion acquired a new quality. The Prophet of the Arabs now appears as the final authority in the revelations from God. Like Mani, the "founder" of Manichaeism, who had claimed something similar, he is now called "Seal of the Prophets (*ḥatam al-nabiyyīna*) (surah 33:40)".

To sum up, we come to the following, slightly simplified conclusion: among the Qur'ānic texts we can distinguish between three consecutive phases which overlap at the edges: the oldest is the phase in which a Syro-Arabic Christianity is represented and where an unnamed preacher is addressed who points to either Jesus or Moses; in the next phase the material remains Christian, but is interpreted by the Qur'an *in Arabic* (as far as it exists) so that a *Prophet of the Arabs* appears as its source – the first stage of a historicization of the epithet *muḥammad*; in the last phase the movement sticks to the biblical salvation-historical concepts, but sees the Qur'an as the final and ultimate revelation. In this stage the movement considers itself to be a new "religion"⁷² and the Prophet of the Arabs as the promoter of a new revelation and founder of this religion.

The detailed development and embellishment of the biography of *Muḥammad* first took place in the 9th and 10th century. By now the amount of alleged biographical material, anecdotes and sayings of the prophet on offer is so enormous that it already seems to exceed the possibilities of a single finite life.

4.2 The four places Where the Form *muḥammad* Appears in the Qur'an

The four passages in which the term *muḥammad* is mentioned in the Qur'an should be briefly discussed, beginning with the oldest passage – if the chrono-

logical assumptions based on the order and counting of the surahs should be correct. As there are no critical editions of the Qur'ān, the translations and transliterations are based on the Cairo edition of the Qur'ān, here in the English translation by Pickthall and Rudi Paret's German translation and commentary.

(1) Surah 48:29

“Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves. [...]

muḥammadun rasūlu llāhi wa-llaḏīna ma'ahū 'ašiddā'u 'alā l-kuffāri ruḥamā'u baynahum”

Surah 48 “al-Faṭḥ (literally: “opening”; mostly translated as “victory; conquest”; Paret: “Erfolg [success]” can be subdivided into two parts. The first part, verses 1-28 is about combative conflicts, the displeasure of the Bedouin in having to fight, the divine determination of success and about reward and punishment. Verse 29, in the context of this surah unusually long, forms the second part. But length, – a purely formal feature, – is not the only difference between this verse and those of the preceding text, there is also its conciliatory content which has nothing to do with fighting. It seems to be a separate entity that was later inserted at this point. Perhaps the same is true for the likewise longer verse 25 which is about a holy site, sacrificial animals and the hindrance of sacrificial actions; this verse might have been inserted as in the previous sentence Mecca is allegedly mentioned:

“And He it is Who hath withheld men's hands from you, and hath withheld your hands from them, *in the valley of Mecca*, after He had made you victors over them. Allah is Seer of what ye do.

wa-huwa llaḏī kaḏḏaba 'aydiyahum 'ankum wa-'aydiyakum 'anhum bi-baṭni makkata min ba'di 'an 'azfarakum 'alayhim wa-kāna llāhu bi-mā ta'malūna baṣīran.”

The expression “*bi-baṭni makkata*” does not literally mean “valley” of Mecca, but rather “middle; orig.: belly” and the context of this verse does not give any hint as to whether Mecca is really a place name, let alone does it assign any features of the later sacred city to this place. If, furthermore, we consider that this is the only verse where the form “makka” appears, – in the often adduced second passage, the form is “bakka”, not “makka”, – then it becomes logical why it must have seemed necessary to insert verse 25.

Apart from the questionable mention of Mecca, the first part provides no concrete information that could serve to either historically or geographically localize the description, unless we adopt the views of the theological historiography of the 9th century. However, something special is found in this part: Mecca or “the valley in Mecca” is mentioned.

At this point we must take into consideration that, – contrary to common belief and to what can be found in most encyclopedias, press articles and school books, which only repeat the legends of the Traditional Account, – the Arabian Peninsula did not play a role up until the Abbasid period and Mecca was neither an important trade center before Islam, nor ever the capital of an Islamic State; Mecca is not even mentioned in any contemporary document about this new religious movement. The focus first switched to the south of the former Nabatean empire only after the construction of the sacred site in Medina. In the following decades, this area seems to have expanded even further. In any case, at the time of *Harūn (al-Rašīd)* (died 809) Mecca was a pilgrimage site and was enlarged as such.

If the mention of Mecca should belong to the original text and the word should really designate the later sacred city, then the whole first part of the surah might have to be dated far into the second half of the 8th century. For scholars from the historical and philological sciences, however, it is a very normal and frequent event that insertions into an old text are made in the process of the copying from one manuscript to another. In so doing, the new manuscript is brought “up to date” and now represents the “state of knowledge” of the writer. So does the mention of Mecca belong to these later additions or is it part of the original text? At present, this question cannot be answered because of the lack of a text-critical edition of the Qur’ān.

The second part, verse 29, opens with the sentence “Muḥammad is the messenger of God” (according to both Pickthall and Paret). If the sentence should have to be translated in this way, it would be an example for a consummated historicization, at least in relation to the name. Then this part of the surah would be connected to the subject of the first part.

But the sentence could also be translated as: “Blessed is the messenger of God”; in this case *muḥammad* would still be a predicate or title. But a title for whom? If we read the explanations following the first sentence, it is stated about those who are with the messenger that

“Thou seest them bowing and falling prostrate (in worship), seeking bounty from Allah and (His) acceptance. The mark of them is on their foreheads from the traces of prostration. *Such is their likeness in the Torah and their likeness in the Gospel* like as sown corn that sendeth forth its shoot and strengtheneth it and riseth firm upon its stalk [...]. Allah hath promised, unto such of them as believe and do good works, forgiveness and immense reward. (my emphasis)”

These passages sound very Christian, apart from the second sentence: “And those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves.” This indeed does not sound like a sentence Jesus would have said, but it is by no means unusual in the history of Christianity. In short: If we

interpret verse 29 as an originally separate entity, which was secondarily added to the first part, then *muḥammad* can or must be understood as a *honorific title* for the messenger of God; the following context refers to the Torah and the Gospel and therefore to Jesus.

If the surah should originally have been an entity and the mention of Mecca belong to it, then *Muḥammad* would have to be understood as the name of the messenger and founder of a new “religion” for the first time; this would mean that this text belongs to a very late stage. If the first and second parts should form an entity and the mention of Mecca goes back to the interpolation of a later scribe, then surah 48 must be seen as the beginning of a “historicization” of the form *muḥammad* as a name, but it would not mean that the new movement had already split from Christianity.

Unfortunately, research about the Qur’ān is not at all based on the common text-critical method so well established in other disciplines, and even methods of comparative literature and form-criticism are rarely applied. Here new ground must be broken everywhere, even the beginnings of a truly scientific discussion are missing. If methodological reasoning is taken into consideration, as is usual in the study of literature and especially in biblical exegesis, then verse 29 has to be seen as an independent and theologically older entity and *muḥammad* as a title, not a name.

(2) Surah 47:2

Surah 47 is entitled “*Muḥammad*”. On the whole, it provides an only loosely connected collection of individual war-like sayings, (“Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks”, v.4), and of God’s very unforgiving manner (God “surely will not pardon” the disbelievers, v. 34), of eschatological statements (heaven, hell) and ethical orders not to “hoard”, and “spend in the way of Allah”, verses 37 and 38). As regards their content, the verses do not intrinsically belong together and even their formal composition gives no indication of a concept. Therefore, it is hardly possible to assign a *Sitz im Leben* (roughly: “setting in life”, i.e., context in everyday life) to them *as a whole*, and even for single verses such an undertaking would be rather hypothetical. The surah opens with the verse:

“Those who disbelieve and turn (men) from the way of Allah, He rendereth their actions vain.”

Then comes the verse containing the form *muḥammad* (47:2):

“And those who believe and do good works and believe in that which is revealed unto Muhammad and it is the truth from their Lord. He riddeth them of their ill deeds and improveth their state.

wa-llaḏīna ’āmanū wa-’amilū ṣ-ṣāliḥāti wa-’āmanū bi-mā nuzzila ’alā

*muḥammadīn wa-huwa l-ḥaqqu min rabbihim kaffara ‘anhum
sayyi’ātihim wa-’aşlahā bālahum*”

The third verse also belongs to this entity:

“That is because those who disbelieve follow falsehood and because those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus Allah coineth their similitudes for mankind.”

But a completely new theme begins in verse 4:

“Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks until, when ye have routed them, then making fast of bonds;”

So the first two or three verses can or must be read separately. It is said of (the) *muḥammad*, that God sent a revelation down to him which is the truth of the Lord. Who is this *muḥammad*? If we use surah 19:30 as an aid, the infant Jesus says:

“I am the slave (*‘abd*, others translate as “servant”) of Allah. He hath given me the Scripture and hath appointed me a Prophet, [...]”

Similar things are said in the Qur’ān again and again about Moses. Because of these Qur’ānic parallels, verse 47:2 should be translated as

“those who believe in what has been sent down to the Blessed One (*muḥammad*) (as a revelation or scripture).”

In principle, the translation of *muḥammad* as a name would be conceivable if these verses could be attributed to the second phase and the beginnings of a historicization of the Prophet of the Arabs. But this possibility is ruled out by the last clause of verse 2: “And those who believe and do good works and believe in that which is revealed unto Muhammad/ the Blessed one, and it is the truth from their Lord. *He riddeth them of their ill deeds and improveth their state.*” The “redemption from sins” through faith is a “soteriological” concept, i.e., it refers to salvation as effected by Jesus Christ, not to a Prophet of the Arabs. The first three verses can obviously be considered Christian and *muḥammad* should be understood as a Christian title.

(3) Surah 33:40

The characterization of Surah 33, – “al-Aḥzāb”, diversely translated as “the Clans, the Coalition, the Confederates or the Groups (Paret)” is the plural of “ḥizb”, in modern Arabic meaning “(political) party” (cf. “*Hisbollah* – the *Party of God*”), – as a whole is not intended at this point. It would appear

sufficient to have a closer look at verses 37-40 as well as verses 50-59, as they are unambiguous and clearly belong together.

The Islamic tradition understands verses 37-40 as alluding to the story of Zainab: the prophet, who apparently must have coveted the (in the Qurʾān unnamed) wife of his adoptive son Zayd and at first wanted to relinquish any claims on her, because “*wa-taḥṣā n-nāsa* – thou didst fear mankind” (verse 37). But God gave her to him as his wife after her divorce from Zayd was consummated. Verse 38 says that the fear of the prophet was unfounded:

“There is no reproach for the Prophet in that which Allah maketh his due. That was Allah’s way with those who passed away of old and the commandment of Allah is certain destiny.”

Then, in verse 40, the form *muḥammad* is mentioned:

“Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets; and Allah is aware of all things.
mā kāna muḥammadun ʾabā ʾaḥadin min riḡālikum wa-lākin rasūla llāhi wa-ḥātama n-nabiyyina wa-kāna llāhu bi-kulli šayʾin ʿalīma”

In this context, *Muḥammad* seems to be the name of the Prophet of the Arabs if the traditional explanation is accepted. Here and in verses 50-59, the entirely historicized Prophet of the Arabs is portrayed in the context of new religious and ethical ideas which bear no relation to Jesus as a person, nor to his message, as he would have considered the described behavior of the Prophet as an especially abominable case of adultery.

In verses 50-59, without mention of further names, God’s prophet is allowed to take wives from different groups of women, apart from the slaves (“whom thy right hand possesses [*wa-mā malakat ʾaymānuhum*]”):

“O Prophet! Lo! We have made lawful unto thee thy wives (*ʾaḥlalnā laka ʾazwāḡaka*) unto whom thou hast paid their dowries, and those whom thy right hand possesseth of those whom Allah hath given thee as spoils of war, and the daughters of thine uncle on the father’s side and the daughters of thine aunts on the father’s side, and the daughters of thine uncles on the mother’s side emigrated with thee, and a believing woman if she give herself unto the Prophet and the Prophet desire to ask her in marriage, a privilege for thee only, not for the (rest of) believers (*ḥālīṣatan laka min dūni l-muʾminīna*). [...]”

At the end it says:

“It is not allowed thee to take (other) women henceforth nor that thou shouldst change them for other wives even though their beauty pleased thee, save those whom thy right hand possesseth (here a different wording: *ʾillā mā malakat yamīnuka*). [...]” (verse 52).

This is clearly no longer Christian, so both groups of verses must have come into existence very late. First, *Muḥammad* was already the “Seal of the Prophets”; secondly, rules that were diametrically opposed to the most basic ethics of Christianity had penetrated the new “religion”, and thirdly, stories from the *Sīra* (the Prophet’s biography) about his wives seem to be alluded to. However, surah 33 does not mention names of the women in question, nor does it reveal any biographical data about them. In the case of Zayd’s wife, however, the information is quite specific. In verses 50-52, a kind of summary of marriage relationships is offered and in verses 53-59 instructions are given on contact with the wives of the Prophet and himself:

“Linger not for conversation. Lo! that would cause annoyance to the Prophet, and he would be shy of (asking) you (to go);” (verse 53)

Some sentences might mean that the Prophet is presumed already dead:

“Lo! Allah and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet. [...]”

Another hint at the prophet’s passing away is the fact that in verse 6, the wives of *Muḥammad* are described as “mothers” of faithful believers (“The Prophet is closer to the believers than their selves, and his wives are (as) their mothers.”), which is generally explained as a prohibition to marry them after the prophet’s death. According to the *Sīra* it is hardly imaginable how especially older Muslims should otherwise have been expected to consider a (still at his death) teenager, like his favorite wife *‘Āiṣa*, as their mother.

Whether these stories were attributed to a fictitious person *Muḥammad* or whether they are “true stories” about a historical Prophet of the Arabs (whose name was not *Muḥammad*!), which were preserved by Islamic tradition, cannot be determined. In the latter case, there must have been an “Arab preacher” either at the very beginning of the movement or over the course of time, who was later, secondarily, awarded the originally Christological honorific predicate *muḥammad* as a name, like Caesar’s adopted son and later emperor Octavian was awarded the sovereign title “Augustus (the illustrious one; < augere – to increase)”, which then became his name. This is one possibility. But it is also possible, or even probable, that stories of marriages, divorces and love affairs of e.g. a sheikh were in circulation, first independently handed down and secondarily added to the “*Muḥammadan*” tradition.

Until now there have never been any reasonable historical arguments to (answer) this question.

(4) Surah 3:144

The long surah 3, “*al ‘imrān* – the Family of ‘Imrān (Paret: die Sippe [clan] of ‘Imrān)” provides an abundant range of statements, of which many relate to

biblical texts or to Jesus, but which are only rarely indicative of a comprehensive context. Verses 144-148 can be treated as an entity, attached to verse 143, which speaks about death, probably applying the “Mnemonic Keyword principle”. In the crucial verses (144 and the beginning of verse 145)⁷³ we read:

“144. Muhammad is but a messenger (*wa-mā muḥammadun ’illā rasūlun*), messengers (the like of whom) have passed away before him (*qad ḥalat min qablihi r-rusulu*). Will it be that, when he dieth or is slain, ye will turn back on your heels? He who turneth back doth no hurt to Allah, and Allah will reward the thankful.

145. No soul can ever die except by Allah's leave and at a term appointed. [...]”

Pickthall adds the words “the like of whom” to the “messengers that have passed away before him”. Rudi Paret translates differently and refers the verse to Muḥammad:

“Vor ihm hat es schon (verschiedene andere) Gesandte gegeben. – Before him there have been (several other) messengers”

In his commentary, he mentions an interesting parallel in surah 5:75, where exactly the same is said about Jesus:

“The Messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger, messengers (the like of whom) had passed away before him.

mā l-masīḥu bnu maryama ’illā rasūlun qad ḥalat min qablihi r-rusulu”

As we can see, the Arabic wording is exactly the same, a clear indication that the verse (at least originally) referred to Jesus. Moreover, it is interesting to note what remains of the sentence in surah 3, if the words in brackets of both Pickthall and Paret are merely left out: then a messenger is spoken of in verse 145 who is killed and dies; and this is according to God's will and according to the Scriptures. In Pickthall's translation “No soul can ever die except by Allah's leave and *at a term appointed*”; this does not become very clear, but Paret provides the literal translation in brackets:

“Keiner kann sterben, außer mit Gottes Erlaubnis und nach einer befristeten Vorherbestimmung (w. Schrift).

Nobody can die, except with God's permission and after a limited(-term) providence (lit.: scripture)

wa-mā kāna li-naḥsin ’an tamūta ’illā bi-’iḍni llāhi kitāban”

The Arabic expression “*’illā bi-’iḍni llāhi* – except with God's permission” is clear, the following word “*kitāban*” (accusative of *kitāb* – scripture) is a bit unusual. The only way to understand it is adverbially “scripture-wise”, i.e., “according to scripture”. This is clearly alluding to Jesus' statement that his

death was inevitable, because the scripture had to be fulfilled (e.g. Mt. 26:24, during the last supper):

“The Son of Man is to go, *just as it is written of Him*; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!”

Especially the gospel of Matthew provides abundant examples of events that only happen so that “the prophet/ a prophecy is fulfilled”:

“2:17: Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled.

13:14: In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, [...].

26:54: How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?

27:9: Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: [...].”

So it seems quite clear that the Qurʾānic verse ““Nobody can die, except with God’s permission and *according to scripture*” applies to Jesus (and other prophets, cf. verse 146):⁷⁴

That he can die and be killed, although he is the messenger, – though not more than only the servant of God (surah 3:51), – is justified in verse 59:

“Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is.”

Therefore, there is no reason to “turn back on your heels” because of his death (verse 144) and to “turn back” and away from him. This is how “many a prophet” felt, so that “a number of devoted men/ *Paret*: many thousands of people, *ribbiyyūna kaṭīrun*” were therefore hit by misfortune and still did not “weaken, nor were they brought low” (verse 146); Then “their cry was only that they said: Our Lord! Forgive us for our sins (*ḡfir lanā dunūbanā*, verse 147)”; the latter is an appeal requesting forgiveness almost identical to the one in the Lord’s Prayer.

The verses are reasoning the violent death of Jesus, to whom God says in verse 55: “Then unto Me ye will (all) return,” so God “called him home” and (then) elevated him up to him; *elevation* follows death; the classic Jewish and Syrian-Christian “Elevation Christology (German: Erhöhungschristologie)”.

It takes a fair bit of blindness to relate all of this to a Prophet of the Arabs named Muḥammad. The introductory sentence of verse 144 must therefore be translated: “*And the blessed One (Muḥammad)* is only a messenger (and can be killed)”, the person meant being Jesus, like in the surah 5, 75 already mentioned: “*Christ, Son of Mary*, is only a messenger. There have been (other) messengers before him”.

4.3 Conclusion

Three mentions of the form *muḥammad* (surah 3:144; surah 47:2; surah 48:29) can be related to Jesus, if not with certainty, – due to the opaqueness of the surrounding text, – then at least in all probability. They can only be understood as referring to a Prophet of the Arabs if they are read from the perspective of the traditional literature of the 9th century. A Prophet of the Arabs as a historical figure is only meant once (surah 33:40), although he is not described; nevertheless, in this verse *Muḥammad* seems to be meant as his name.

Of course, certain questions remain, which arise as a result of the literary characteristics of the Qur’ānic texts, the intended messages of which can only be deciphered imprecisely and for the interpretation of which so far no scientifically verifiable model is available. However, the Qur’ān seems to confirm the conclusions drawn from the evidence provided by contemporary coins and inscriptions: the historicization of the honorific predicate *muḥammad* and reinterpretation as a personal name was a very late event.

5. Further “biographical” Material about a Prophet of the Arabs in the Qur’ān

Not only traditional Islamic scholars, but also professors of Islamic studies in the West have looked for and found evidence of a biography of Muḥammad in the Qur’ān. As an example for this approach, an article entitled “Muḥammad” written by Adel Theodor Khoury shall be adduced:

“The Qur’ān rates the marriage (*of Muḥammad; my addition*) to Khadidja as a divine act of grace for Muḥammad (93:7-8).”⁷⁵

But is this really the information we may infer from the Qur’ān? The surah cited by Khoury contains only 11 verses and no names! The three verses cited plus the preceding one are the following:

“6. Did He not find thee an orphan and protect (thee)?

’a-lam yağidka yatīman fa-’āwā

7. Did He not find thee wandering and direct (thee)?

wa-wağadaka dāllan fa-hadā

8. Did He not find thee destitute and enrich (thee)?

wa-wağadaka ’ā ’ilan fa-’ağnā”

According to surah 93, 6-8, the prophet addressed was an orphan, errant and poor: but God took him in,⁷⁶ led him and made him rich. As we “know” from the traditional Islamic literature (which was written a few centuries later based on chains of oral transmitters), Muḥammad became rich through his marriage with his elder rich cousin Ḥadiġa, whom he later married and who

became the first human being the prophet converted to Islam. Nothing of all this can be found in the Qur'ān! But of course, the stories from the 9th century can easily be connected to Qur'ānic statements, which they match perfectly. The possibility that these later traditions were just invented in order to make sense of opaque Qur'ānic passages, is of course totally ignored, just as all of the other possibilities to make sense of particular verses are ignored, in our case: all the other possibilities *to become rich* or all of the other prophets who might be addressed in this surah without being named.

Rudi Paret, the famous German orientalist and translator of the Qur'ān shares the opinion of many Islamic scholars that the Qur'ān does not provide enough details to enable us to depict the life of Muḥammad.⁷⁷ However, despite all the reservations towards its late transmission, he still refers to the biography allegedly to be found in it. Likewise, W. Montgomery Watt believed that the attempt to reconstruct a description of Muḥammad's life solely from the Qur'ān was "beyond hope",⁷⁸ so that he drew on later narratives for his two volume biography.

The legendary character of the Ḥadīṭ collections of the 9th century has been recognized more and more since Ignaz Goldziher.⁷⁹ But as hardly anything can be said about Muḥammad without taking these texts at face value, this otherwise great and critical scholar still uses these narratives as if they were authentic, his excuse being "without this material, the Qur'ān is useless as a historical source."⁸⁰

The preliminary decision makes an impartial examination of the Qur'ānic statements very difficult. Only if the mere "apparent" knowledge of the Sira is dismissed in terms of its investigation, might the Qur'ān become valuable as a historical source again. But maybe then it becomes possible for other conclusions to be drawn.

In the following, several examples of "biographical" Qur'ānic notes will be discussed.

5.1 Surah 93:6-8

In the surah mentioned previously (93:6-8), God says about the prophet that he was an orphan, errant (in faith) and poor. These statements are written in the context of the short surah which can be considered to be the original entity. After an oath formula (verses 1 and 2: "By the morning hours – and by the night when it is stillest"), we read in verse 3:

- “3. Thy Lord hath not forsaken thee nor doth He hate thee.
4. And verily the latter portion will be better for thee than the former
5. And verily thy Lord will give unto thee so that thou wilt be content.
6. Did He not find thee an orphan and protect (thee)?

7. Did He not find thee wandering and direct (thee)?
8. Did He not find thee destitute and enrich (thee)?
9. Therefore the orphan oppress not,
10. Therefore the beggar drive not away,
11. Therefore of the bounty of thy Lord be thy discourse.”

In the surah, God appears in the third person (except v. 9-11), instead of in the first person as is mostly the case. This makes it rather look like a (later) reflection of the life of a prophet. Obviously, the prophet must have had cause to feel abandoned and hated by God, a potential reproach which is countered by the promise of reward in the next world. The general situation of a prophet “in a crisis”, who gets the impression that everything is in vain, is commonplace in biographies of prophets, so neither would it be astonishing for the *Prophet Muḥammad* – provided the author of these verses already knew of this concept.

The adduced good deeds that God had bestowed upon him up to this point contain the message that the prophet was *errant*, *poor* and an *orphan*, thus the number of prophets that could be meant here is limited. From biblical tradition, Moses is certainly a possible candidate. Before God showed himself to him at the burning thorn bush (e.g. surah 28:29-30), the Qur’ān says about him:

“He said: I did it then, when I was of those *who are astray*.
qāla fa’altuhā ’iḍān wa-’ana mina *ḍ-ḍāllīn*” (surah 26:20)

Apart from being “*errant*” as described in this verse, Moses was also poor (the son of a Hebrew slave) and a kind of orphan, as he had been put in a basket and set adrift on the Nile river. But like the prophet addressed in verses 6-8 he was saved and enriched: He went from being the poor son of a Hebrew to being the (rich) son of a pharaoh whose home was looked after by God (cf. e.g. surah 28:7-13). But it could also be Muḥammad who is meant, i.e., the figure described in the biographies of the 9th century, which certainly refer back to this surah and elaborated on it.

That this surah should refer to the Prophet of the Arabs, however, is rather improbable, as both the ethical consequences and above all the preaching of the mercy of God (instead of the threat of the Day of Judgment) are indicators that it belongs to an older layer of Qur’ānic texts. Considering the very frequent mentions of Moses in the Qur’ān, this surah would then be a sort of biblical meditation on the person and fate of Moses, whose life in “this world” was characterized by danger and distress, for which he was promised happiness in the afterlife (cf. e.g. surah 28:37).

Due to the starkness of the texts, which does not allow us to immediately recognize the associations originally connected with them, the question of which prophet was meant here cannot be determined for certain. If the

internal logic of the Qur'ān is followed, the most likely candidate is Moses, because the Qur'ān provides stories which are appropriate to Surah 93. Considering the obvious age of the surah, which, among other things, is also reflected especially in its poetic style and its versification, Muḥammad (i.e., the later personification) is a rather unlikely candidate; at most an unknown Prophet of the Arabs (i.e., the prophet addressed in direct speech elsewhere in the Qur'ān, whose name was not yet Muḥammad) would be conceivable. But this is also difficult to imagine, as it is not supported by the text.

5.2 Surah 43:29-31

“29. Nay, but I let these and their fathers enjoy life (only) till there should come unto them the Truth and a messenger making plain (*rasūlun mubin^{um}*).

30. And now that the Truth hath come unto them they say: This is mere magic, and lo! we are disbelievers therein.”

The understanding of surah 43, 29-31 raises similar difficulties. Here the sending of a “messenger making plain” (v. 30), to whom the Qur'ān was sent down, is spoken of. The people standing around asked:

“31. And they say: If only this Qur'an had been revealed to some great man of the two towns? (*rağulin mina l-qaryatayni 'aẓim^{im}*)”

According to this verse, the messenger was not a man who possessed power. If the “messenger making plain” is an Arab messenger and the Qur'ān a lectionary in Arabic (and not “the scriptures”), then the source behind the Qur'ān is seen as a historical figure, – even without being named, – and Moses is not meant. However, in surah 11:96 the same is said about Moses:

“And verily We sent Moses with Our revelations and a clear warrant.

(*wa-la-qad 'arsalnā mūsā bi- 'āyātīnā wa-sulṭānin mubīnⁱⁿ*)”

It is interesting to note that the Arabic word here corresponding to Pickthall's adjective “clear” is “*mubīn*”, the same word that corresponds to the attribute of the prophet in surah 43:29 “*making plain*”. Another question that arises concerns the “two towns” mentioned. Just which towns are meant cannot be determined here. The explanation given by Paret in his commentary that Mecca and Ṭā'if are meant is not proved by anything, – apart from much later traditions.

5.3 Surah 53:1-18 and 81:19-26

Three “visions” of the Prophet which are supposed to prove that his teachings are guaranteed from the outside are reported in the Qur'ān, although – apart

from this case – the Qur’ānic texts are not normally justified with visions and do not report of anything visionary.

In Surah 53:1-12, the prophet “grew clear to view when he was on the uppermost horizon (v. 6-7)”, i.e., on the border between the earth and the sky a person “which one of mighty powers hath taught him, one vigorous (v. 5-6)”; “10. And He revealed unto His slave that which He revealed. (*fa-’awḥā ’ilā ’abdihi mā ’awḥā*).” Interestingly, the prophet is referred to as “*’ilā ’abdihi – to his slave/ servant*”.

In the same surah, verses 53:13-18, the prophet saw him come down “at the utmost boundary, (marked by) the lote-tree”:

“13. And verily he saw him, yet another time. 14. By the lote tree of the utmost boundary (*’inda sidrati l-muntahā*), [...]”

In surah 81:19-26, the prophet sees, on the other hand, an “honored messenger”:

“19. That this is in truth the word of an honored messenger (*rasūlin karīm^{im}*), [...]

23. Surely he beheld him on the clear horizon. (*wa-la-qad ra’āhu bi-l-’ufuqi l-mubīnⁱ*)”

What is a little surprising is verse 22, which presupposes that at least some of his contemporaries considered the new prophet to be a lunatic:

“22. And your comrade is not mad. (*wa-mā ṣāḥibukum bi-mağnūn^{im}*)”

The Arabic word used here, *mağnūn*, is derived from the same root as the noun “*ğinn – ghost, spirit*”, thus meaning “*obsessed by a ghost*”.

These visions are purely formal and do not provide any assertions regarding the content. In all of them, however, it is about providing legitimacy to what the preacher says by referring to someone *who has power (with God)*. Visions 1 and 2 do not make any further assertions, – here it could be God himself who is meant, – but Vision 3 explicitly calls this person an “honored messenger”, probably an angel who has authority with God.

While Pickthall (correctly) does not mention the word “Qur’ān” in his translation of this surah, R. Paret adds this word in brackets (81:25: “Der Koran [w.: er (*lit.: it*)]). What is spoken about in all of these places in the Qur’ān is not “*the Qur’ān*”, but more generally: “*revelation*”. In verse surah 53:18 the wording is:

“18. Verily he saw one of the greater revelations of his Lord.
la-qad ra’ā min ’āyāti rabbihi l-kubrā”

The Arabic word corresponding to Pickthall’s rendering “*revelations*” is “*’āyāt*”, normally translated as “*verses*”. But the “normal” word for “*revela-*

tion (waḥy)”, or at least the corresponding verbal root “awḥā – reveal”, also appears:

“And He revealed unto His slave that which He revealed. (*fa-’awḥā ’ilā ’abdihi mā ’awḥā*)”.

No further information is given about the preacher, but he is described twice as “your comrade (*ṣāḥibukum*)” (surah 53:2 and surah 81:22), a word translated as “euer Landsmann (your fellow-countryman)” by Paret. The translation is probably only based on the assumption that if it is about an Arab preacher, then he must certainly be a countryman of the Arab audience.

The place of appearance is mentioned twice as *on the horizon* (*bi-l-’ufuqi*), in surah 53:7 “on the uppermost horizon (*bi-l-’ufuqi l-’alā*)” and in surah 81:23 “on the clear horizon (*bi-l-’ufuqi l-mubīn*)”. In one case, a *lote tree* is added to the description: 53:14. “By the lote tree of the utmost boundary (*’inda sidrati l-muntahā*)”. The *lote-tree* (Arabic: *sidra*) belongs to the buckthorn plant, so it is a thorn-bush; this might allude to Moses and the burning thorn-bush (Ex. 3:2):

“The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush (𐤀𐤍𐤁𐤏 – *sənāh*); and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.”

The story is alluded to elsewhere in the Qur’ān (e.g. surahs 28:29; 20:10; 27:7-8), but in all these verses a fire is mentioned, but no bush, e.g. 20:10:

“When he saw a fire and said unto his folk: Wait! I see a fire afar off. Peradventure I may bring you a brand therefrom or may find guidance at the fire.”

For linguistic reasons, Christoph Luxenberg believes that the translation “lote-tree” goes back to a misunderstanding, the correct translation should be “curtain/drape”. In this case, the “curtain/drape” between heaven and earth could be what is meant, thus the same as “the uppermost of the horizon”. Then the verse would have no direct connection to Moses.

The “comrade (*ṣāḥib*)” is called the slave/servant of God, a description claimed by Moses in surah 37:122. If Moses is meant, then the description “comrade/ (your countrymen)” in his speech would be directed at a Jewish audience.

If these texts are interpreted without all the legends of later biographies of Muḥammad and without all the fictitious explanations of the exegetes of later centuries, but rather only using Qur’ānic material, then Moses must have been the one who referred back to an authorization for his teaching from

outside. Again and again the Qur'ān stresses that the revelations or “*the book/ the scripture (kitāb)*” came down to Moses from God.

Also the statement made in this context in surah 81:22 (“And your comrade is not mad”) is to be found in the Qur'ān as an accusation made by the pharaoh about Moses:

“(Pharaoh) said: Lo! your messenger who hath been sent unto you is indeed a madman! (*qāla 'inna rasūlakumu llaḏī 'ursila 'ilaykum la-mağnūn^{um}*)” (surah 26:27)

The Arabic term used for “mad” is “*mağnūn*” in all cases, which would indicate that surah 81 refers to Moses.

Briefly, if these three visions are read separately, they probably relate to Moses and not to the biography of Muḥammad, which was not yet known at the time these texts were written.

This also applies to the accusation of obsession which does not contain anything biographical, – for example epilepsy or such like, – but is common as a reproach against prophets, not only for Moses in the Qur'ān (surah 26:26), but also in the New Testament, e.g. for John the Baptist (Matthew 11:18; Luke 7:33) and Jesus (John 7:20; 8:48; 49:52) – thus “alleged madness/obsession” is a topos of criticism of the prophets.

5.4 Surah 10:16

The only remaining piece of possibly biographical evidence can be found in surah 10:16. The topic of the preceding verses is the Qur'ān and its recitation. Then the prophet says:

“16. Say: If Allah had so willed I should not have recited it to you nor would He have made it known to you. I dwelt among you a whole lifetime (*fa-qad labiṭtu fikum 'umuran*) before it (*min qabliḥī*) (came to me). Have ye then no sense?” (the English words in brackets are Pickthall's explanations)

The “it” that “came to him” is explained by Paret in brackets: “i.e., the Qur'ān”. Whether it is really the Qur'ān in its present form that is meant here is highly questionable, but Paret is certainly not too far from the truth if he presumes the existence of at least an early core version of the Qur'ān that this verse is alluding to. Should this be the case, then the transmitter of the Qur'ān is described as not very young, considering the “*lifetime ('umur)*” that he had spent with them “*before it*”, i.e., the revelation. This would be an indication of a kind of historicization, albeit not one in line with the later biographies, as Muḥammad's alleged age of forty at the first revelation would make him too young to later utter such a verse. At the same time, the impression is conveyed that the Qur'ān, the scripture, was already finished during his lifetime. These verses should probably rather be considered as a posthumous assignment of the Qur'ān to the person who was its preacher. This was then

adopted as the standard understanding of how the Qur'ān had come into being. Only in the 9th century was this beginning of the scripture located in the age of the third caliph, 'Uṭmān.

5.5 Conclusion about Biographical Material in the Qur'ān

As we have seen, the Qur'ānic texts offer no biographical information, or at least no unquestionable biographical information about the life of Muḥammad. Moreover, the insinuations of conflicts and the like are so vague that the events alluded to cannot be located; in most cases it is not even clear whether these verses are about “real” battles, the passages rather resemble descriptions of eschatological battles in the widespread Syriac apocalypses of the time. It was not until the biographies of the 9th century that the smallest insinuations and vaguest allusions in the Qur'ān were construed into veritable stories.

At least it can be extracted from younger layers of the Qur'ān that the source behind the Qur'ānic texts was presumed to be a *Prophet of the Arabs*. This is explained in several other places in the Qur'ān (e.g. surah 46:12; surah 26:195-199). But it is questionable as to what is meant by “Arabic”.⁸¹ Regardless of how the “Arabic” or the “clear (*mubīn*)” language is to be understood, a prophet must be presumed who is no longer identical to the biblical figures. But only once in the Qur'ān, in surah 39:40, can this “historicization/ personalization” be linked to the name *Muḥammad* with a reasonable degree of certainty.

6. Specific References to the Arabic Peninsula in the Qur'ān ?

The texts of the Qur'ān cannot easily be linked to the places named in later biographies. Muḥammad is believed to have been born in Mecca. He then is said to have lived first in Mecca, then in Medina and then in Mecca again, but the Qur'ān does not indicate this at any time. Muḥammad is said to have moved from Mecca to Medina (the so-called *hiğra*) in the year 622, but the Qur'ān does not mention this at all, not even indirectly. Therefore the next chapter is dedicated to the question of just which geographical references the Qur'ān contains.

6.1 Mecca (Makka)

The “valley of Mecca ([*bi-*]baṭni makkata)” (surah 48:24) is mentioned only once in the Qur'ān. Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally⁸² consider this surah a very late one:

“Surah 48 has to be considered as belonging to a time after the peace of Ḥudaibiya (in the month Ḍu’lqa’da of the year 6), but only verses 1-17 stem from right after this period, i.e., probably after Muḥammad’s return to Medīna, which is claimed by some for the whole surah.” (1st part, p. 215 f.)

The traditional Islamic homepage “WikiIslam”,⁸³ shares this view, classifying this surah (*al-fath* – *victory, conquest*) as the fourth youngest one. Both the style and the contents of the surah make this late classification very probable. The context in which the alleged place name is mentioned is as follows:

“22. And if those who disbelieve join battle with you (*wa-law qātalakumu llaḏīna kafarū*) they will take to flight, and afterward they will find no protecting friend nor helper. [...] 24. And He it is Who hath withheld men’s hands from you, and hath withheld your hands from them, in the valley of Mecca (*wa-huwa llaḏī kaffa ’aydīyahum ’ankum wa-’aydīyakum ’anhum bi-baṭni makkata*), after He had made you victors over them. Allah is Seer of what ye do. 25. These it was who disbelieved and debarred you from the Inviolable Place of Worship (*humu llaḏīna kafarū wa-ṣaddūkum ’ani l-mašğidi l-ḥarāmi*), and debarred the offering from reaching its goal.”

First of all, nothing in this text indicates that *makka* is the name of a place. Even the word next to it, *baṭn*, does not originally mean “valley”, but “belly” (like Hebrew *bātān*; with suffixes: *biṭn-*), from which the secondary meaning “middle” is derived. Compare Judges 3:21:

“Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly. – וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֶת יָמִינוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת הַחֶבֶרֶת מִלְּתֵיתוֹ וַיִּדְבֹּק בְּבֶטְנוֹ – wa-yyiṣṭāqā ‘āhā bə-biṭnō”

So what the text says is: “in the middle (lit.: belly) of *makka*”, provided the vocalization and doubling of the second consonant, which is not indicated in the original *kūfī* script, is correct. What might be taken as an indication that Mecca is meant, is the use of the term “the Inviolable Place of Worship (*l-mašğidi l-ḥarāmi*)”. Literally, *mašğid* means the “place of prostration” (today: mosque), and *ḥarām* means “forbidden”. If we forget the modern designation of mosques in Mecca and other places, which is attested only much later, then again nothing indicates that *makka* or the *l-mašğid l-ḥarām* mean Mecca or even a specific mosque there. If the term *makka* (or rather its rasm: *m-k-h*) should already have been present in the earliest manuscripts of this Qur’ānic text, i.e., if it is not a later addition of a scribe, and if it should really have meant the city of Mecca, – not at all impossible considering the unchallenged late dating of the surah, – then this text might have been written as late as at the time of *Harūn al-Rašīd*.⁸⁴ However, no further information is given about this place, nor is the term mentioned in reference to the prophet.

But even if this verse does not (clearly) refer to a city called Mecca, later tradition undoubtedly does. But is it really clear that this city was on the Arabian Peninsula? This question has yet to be answered. In an addition to the *History of the Gothic, Vandals and Suebi Kings* of Isidore of Seville (died 636) from the second half of the 8th century (the “*Continuatio Byzantia Arabica*”, which continues the account until 754), about the year 741 it is said that *Habdemale* wages a war against *Habdella*. The latter had also been fought by his father many times, the last time

“*apud Maccam, Abrahæ, ut ipsi putant, domum, quæ inter Ur Chaldaeorum et Carras Mesopotamiæ urbem in heremo adiacet* – at Mecca, Abraham’s house, as they [the Arabs] believe, which lies between Ur in Chaldea and Carras, a city in Mesopotamia, in a wasteland (steppe, desert)”.⁸⁵

This addition (“*addidamentum*”) to the Chronicle of Isidore is based on unknown sources outside Spain and provides possibly the oldest mention of a place called *Mecca*, linked to Abraham. However, it is not located on the Arabian Peninsula, but in “Mesopotamia”. It is important to note here that the city Isidore, spelt *Carras*, is a Latin transcription of the Greek *Carrhae* which, on the other hand, is the Greek spelling of the biblical town Har(r)an (*Hārān*), which is mentioned in Genesis:

“Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran (*Hārān*), his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. וַיֵּצְאוּ עִדְדִּיָּהוּ וַיְשֻׁבוּ שָׁם *wa-yyābō’ū ‘ad hārān wa-yyešəbu šām.*” (Gen. 11:31; the name of the city is *Hārān*, not the same as the of Lot’s father!)

The “house of Abraham” is therefore located between Ur and Harran, thus in Samarra.⁸⁶ This localization is quite plausible, both in view of the biblical stories of Abraham and the region of origin of the oldest Qur’anic materials. If such an association is imaginable, then the mention of Mecca in the Qur’an might even have taken place in an earlier phase of its genesis and therefore had nothing yet to do with the Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula.

6.2 Medina (*al-madīna*)

Medina (*al-Madīna*), the later meaning of the word is “city” [of the prophet], the name, however, contains the root “*dīn*” (law; religion) and might originally have meant simply “legal district; the place where a certain legal order is valid”. This original meaning is still reflected in Hebrew, where the *State of Israel* is called “*mədīnaṯ Yiśra’ēl*”. According to many interpreters the form *madīna* first appears first in surah 63:8:

“They say: Surely, if we return to Al Madinah (*yaqūlūna la-’in raġa’nā ’ilā l-madīnati*) the mightier will soon drive out the weaker (*la-yuḥriġanna l-’azzu minhā l-’adalla*); when might belongeth to Allah and to His messenger and the believers; but the hypocrites know not.”

R. Paret, however, does not consider the form to be a name yet, but translates it as meaning “city”, but he still understands it as referring to the city Medina: “When we return to the city (in other words: Medina) ...” At this point, it should be noted that other “cities/ towns” in the Qur’ān, especially those destroyed by God for their disbelief, are not called *madīna*, but *qarya* (plural: *qurā*; modern Arabic meaning: “village”), e.g. surah 6:123:

“123. And thus have We made in every city (*wa-ka-dālika ġa’alnā fī kulli qaryatin*) great ones of its wicked ones, that they should plot therein.”

Or in the plural:

“And We set, between them and the towns which We had blessed, towns easy to be seen, [...] – *wa-ġa’alnā baynahum wa-bayna l-qurā llatī bāraknā fihā quran ḡāhiratan*” (surah 34:18)

There are, however, exceptions, where *madā’in*, the plural of *madīna*, is used:

“They said: Put him off, (him) and his brother, and send them into the cities summoners – *qālū ’arġih wa-’aḥāhu wa-b’at fī l-madā’ini ḡāširīn^a* [...]” (surah 26:36)

A variant of the sentence is found in surah 7, where the same story is told:

“They said (unto Pharaoh): Put him off (a while) him and his brother and send into the cities summoners – *qālū ’arġih wa-’aḥāhu wa-’arsil fī l-madā’ini ḡāširīn^a*” (surah 7:111)

In this story, *madīna*/ pl. *madā’in* is used throughout:

“Then Pharaoh sent into the cities summoners – *fa-’arsala fir’awnu fī l-madā’ini ḡāširīna*” (surah 26:53)

Even the singular *madīna* is found simply meaning “city”:

“Pharaoh said: [...] this is the plot that ye have plotted in the city that ye may drive its people hence. – *qāla fir’awnu [...] ḡādā la-makrun makartumūhu fī l-madīnati li-tuḥriġū minhā ’ahlahā*” (surah 7:123)

Whether *qarya* and *madīna* were really synonyms is a question that cannot be answered with certainty. The two other cases of “*al-madīna*” are generally understood to refer to the city Medina, formally called *Yatrib*, and are to be found in surah 9:

“And among those around you of the wandering Arabs there are hypocrites, and among the townspeople of Al-Madinah (there are some who) persist in hypocrisy whom thou (O Muhammad) knowest not. [...] – *wa-mimman ḥawlakum mina l-ʿarābi munāfiqūna wa-min ʿahli l-madīnati maradū ʿalā n-nifāqi lā taʿlamuhum [...]*” (surah 9:101)

“It is not for the townsfolk of Al-Madinah and for those there is none who can repel His bounty. – *mā kāna li-ʿahli l-madīnati wa-man ḥawlahum mina l-ʿarābi ʿan yataḥallafū ʿan rasūli llāhi*” (surah 9:120)

R. Paret translates these passages using the name *Medina*, probably an appropriate translation in this case: after all, Medina had belonged to the territory characterized by Qurʾānic tradition since around the middle of the 8th century, much earlier than Mecca. There are other verses where the singular form *madīna* appears and which definitely do not refer to the city of Medina, e.g. in the story of the seven sleepers:

“Now send one of you with this your silver coin unto the city [...] – *fa-bʿaṭū ʾaḥadakum bi-wariqikum hādīhi ʾilā l-madīnati [...]*” (surah 18:19)

It is interesting to note that in the three cases where *madīna* probably refers to the town *Medina*, the connotations associated with the term are negative. There is nothing positive said about the Bedouin (“wandering Arabs”; in Arabic simply: *l-ʿarāb*) in surah 9:101 and 120, which is a contrast to the ideal state claimed by the traditional literature. Apparently, the program of the sanctuary of Medina⁸⁷ did not find favor “among those around you of the wandering Arabs” (surah 9:101) or “the townsfolk of Al-Madinah” (surah 9:120).

6.3 Bakka

In many translations of the Qurʾān a second verse is cited as mentioning the name of the sacred city of Islam:

“96. Lo! the first Sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at Mecca, a blessed place, a guidance to the peoples; – *ʾinna ʾawwala baytin wuḍiʿa li-n-nāsi la-lladī bi-bakkata mubārakan wa-hudan lil-ʿālamīn*” (surah 3:96)

As the transliteration of the Arabic text shows, the term is not “*makka*”, but “*bakka*”, two words as distinct in Arabic as the wizard “Merlin” and the city “Berlin” in English. Even the “sanctuary” in Pickthall’s translation is only a “house” (*bayt*) in the Arabic original. R. Paret interprets *Bakka* as *Mecca* as well, probably because Islamic tradition since Ṭabarī had done so, although a consonant shift from “m” to “b”, or forms alternating between these phonemes are uncommon in Classical Arabic. The reason why Muslim scholars

interpreted Bakka as Mecca is probably the reference to Abraham and a compulsory pilgrimage in the preceding and following verse:

“95. Say: Allah speaketh truth. So follow the religion of Abraham, the upright. (*fa-ttabi‘ū millata ‘ibrāhīma ḥanīfan*) He was not of the idolaters. (*wa-mā kāna mina l-mušrikīna*) [...]

97. Wherein are plain memorials (of Allah's guidance) (*fīhi ‘āyātun bayyinātun*); the place where Abraham stood up to pray (*maqāmu ‘ibrāhīma*); and whosoever entereth it is safe. And pilgrimage to the House is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither. (*wa-li-llāhi ‘alā n-nāsi ḥiğḡu l-bayti mani statā‘a ‘ilayhi sabīlan*)”

If these verses should really refer to *Mecca* and the *Ka‘ba*, then several details are very surprising. First of all, the “memorials” are, in fact, “*āyāt*”, a word which means both “signs” and “verses” (e.g. of the Qur‘ān), but does not designate a building. Moreover, these signs cannot relate to “Bakka” or “Makka”, as both these words are clearly feminine, but the “-*hī*” in “*fīhī* – in it” is clearly masculine. Then the *maqāmu ‘ibrāhīma* is the “place where Abraham stands/ stood/ dwells”, a so-called *nomen loci* of the root “*q-w-m*” (to stand, dwell); a prayer is not mentioned. What made the translators add this prayer is clear: “to perform prayer” in Arabic is “*aqāma aṣ-ṣalāt*”, the verb *aqāma* being the 4th stem of the same root “*q-w-m*” (lit.: to cause to stand prayer), but there are many expressions with derivations of this root, so there is no compelling reason for adding this noun. Furthermore, the word used here for “pilgrimage” is *ḥiğḡ*, not *ḥağḡ*. Both forms are, of course, similar and have the same *rasm* (consonant skeleton), but it is unusual that one of the *Five Pillars of Islam* (*arkān-al-Islām*) should not appear in its proper form here. And finally, the destination of the pilgrimage is simply called “*bayt* – house”, although no house has been mentioned before. Of course, every Muslim will equate the place where Abraham prayed (*maqāmu ‘ibrāhīma*), this “house” and the *Ka‘ba*, but again there is no text-inherent reason for doing so. As we will see in the next section, the word *ka‘ba* only appears in surah 5.

So it must be assumed that *bakka* is not *Mecca*. But no other city of this name is known, unless we speculate, for example, that Bakka is a shortened form of *Ba‘labakk* (Baalbek) in the Lebanon constituting a pre-Islamic temple to Allah?).

So what does this mysterious word mean ? Christoph Luxenberg bases his new interpretation on an underlying Syro-Aramaic verbal root and translates surah 3:96:

“The first sanctuary which was built for the people is the one which he fenced in (*defined*) as a holy (literally: blessed) (district) and (as) a guidance for the people”.

Luxenberg continues:

“This is confirmed by reading the following verse 97 which says that Abraham’s residence (...) can be found in this (district)... and whoever enters it shall be secure.”⁸⁸

The context supports Luxenberg’s translation. Thus it must be assumed that *Bakka* does not mean Mecca or any other city, but designates (some kind of) a fenced-in holy district.

6.4 Ka’ba

The form *ka’ba* appears twice in the Qur’ān, both cases in surah 5 (*al-mā’ida* – the table [spread]), in verses 95 and 97:

“(the forfeit) to be brought as an offering to the Ka’bah (*hadyan bālīga l-ka’bati*)” (surah 5:95)

“Allah hath appointed the Ka’bah, the Sacred House, a standard for mankind, and the Sacred Month and the offerings and the garlands. – *ğā’ala llāhu l-ka’bata l-bayta l-ḥarāma qiyāman li-n-nāsi wa-š-šahra l-ḥarāma wa-l-hadya wa-l-qalā’ida*” (surah 5:97)

This mention of *Ka’ba* twice in a coherent text could yield further specific information about localities. Apart from these verses, no comparable sanctuaries are named in the Qur’ān, they are only described:

“And when We made the House (at Mecca) (*bayt*) a resort for mankind (*maṭābatan li-n-nāsi*) and a sanctuary (*’amnan*), (saying): Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray) (*wa-ttaḥiḍū min maqāmi ’ibrāhīma muṣallan*). And We imposed a duty upon Abraham and Ishmael, (saying): Purify My house for those who go around and those who meditate therein and those who bow down and prostrate themselves (in worship).” (surah 2:125)

Other epithets used for sanctuaries are “the ancient House (*[bi]-l-bayti l-’atīq*)” (surah 22:29); “Thy holy House (*[’inda] baytika l-muḥarrami*)” (surah 14:37); “the Inviolable Place of Worship (acc.: *[a]l-mašğida l-ḥarāma*)” (surah 48:27). Mostly ritual duties and practices are reported in the context of these references. However, unfortunately, a localization of this house is missing; this is also true of the conceptual clarification of *ka’ba* in surah 5:95 and 97, as it is not said where it is located.

Hence, the questions arise as to whether it is always the *Ka’ba* in Mecca that is meant when the above-mentioned designations for cult sites are used and whether “the place where Abraham stood up to pray/ dwelt (*maqāmu ’ibrāhīma*)” is to be found in Mecca. After all, there were other *Ka’bas* in the Middle East, which, according to the customs of that time, were circumambu-

lated; in this respect the Qur'ān suggests no connection to Mecca at all. In a Syrian (Christian) chronicle written between 670 and 680 (?) in Southern Iraq, it says that no-one knows where the "house of Abraham" can be found.⁸⁹

The thesis that "Abraham's dwelling place" can be found in Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula is indeed historically adventurous. But as the Arabs saw themselves as children of Ishmael, such a theological construction would be conceivable. But the Qur'ān itself provides no hints, the only source we have being the traditional literature of the 9th century. If the Spanish chronicle mentioned above is used as a basis and Mecca is presumed to be in Mesopotamia, then there would be no conflict with biblical geography and the "place where Abraham dwelt" would be located in Mesopotamia (more precisely in Samarra), roughly as in the Bible.

6.5 The direction of prayer (Qibla)

The Qur'ān contains sayings in which the direction of prayer is declared unimportant in view of correct behavior:

"It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West (*laysa l-birra 'an tuwallū wuḡūhakum qibala l-mašriqi wa-l-maḡribi*); but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day [...]" (surah 2:177)

Here the underlined preposition *qibala* is derived from the same root as the noun "*qibla*". surah 7:29 might point in a similar direction:

"29. Say: My Lord enjoineeth justice. And set your faces, upright (toward Him) at every place of worship (*wa-'aqīmū wuḡūhakum 'inda kulli mašḡidin*) and call upon Him, making religion pure for Him (only)."

As already mentioned, "*mašḡid*", originally meaning only "*place of prostration*", is the modern word for mosque; Pickthall correctly translated it as "place of worship". Whether "at every place of worship" really means that the direction is unimportant, is not entirely clear, but it is still surprising that it is not mentioned at all when, at the same time, the place of worship is declared generally unimportant.

The following verse seems to stress the omnipresence of God, irrespective of the direction of prayer:

"(about other gods) And if they answer not your prayer (*fa-'illam yastaḡībū lakum*), then know that it is revealed only in the knowledge of Allah (*fa-'lamū 'annamā 'unzila bi-'ilmi llāhi*); and that there is no God save Him. Will ye then be (of) those who surrender? (*fa-hal 'antum muslimūn^a*)" (surah 11:14)

Surah 2:148 and 149 are somewhat ambiguous. In verse 148 the way of life is declared the most important feature of a good Muslim:

“And each one hath a goal toward which he turneth; so vie with one another in good works. Wheresoever ye may be, Allah will bring you all together (*‘ayna mā takūnū ya’ti bikumu llāhu*). Lo! Allah is able to do all things.”

The phrase in Arabic, “*‘ayna mā takūnū ya’ti bikumu llāhu*”, literally means: “*Wherever you may be, God will come to you*”, which sounds as if inspired by Matthew 18:20:

“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

But already in the next verse we read:

“And whencesoever thou comest forth (for prayer, O Muhammad) turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship. (*wa-min ḥayṭu ḥaraḡta fa-walli waḡhaka šaṭra l-masḡidi l-ḥarāmi*)” (surah 2:149)

There are several preceding verses in the same surah which emphasize the importance of the (individual) direction of prayer:

“142. The foolish of the people will say (*sa-yaqūlu s-sufahā’u mina n-nāsi*): What hath turned them from the qiblah which they formerly observed (*mā wallāhum ‘an qiblatihimu llatī kānū ‘alayhā*)? Say: Unto Allah belong the East and the West. (*qul li-llāhi l-mašriqu wa-l-maḡribu [...]*)” (surah 2:142)

R. Paret interprets the phrase “the qiblah which they formerly observed – *qiblatihimu llatī kānū ‘alayhā*” as referring to the *qibla* in the direction of Jerusalem, which is then changed to Mecca (see his commentary surah 2:142-150):

“[...]And We appointed the qiblah which ye formerly observed (*wa-mā ḡa’alnā l-qiblata llatī kunta ‘alayhā*) only that We might know him (*‘illā li-na’lama*) who followeth the messenger, from him who turneth on his heels. (*man yattabī’u r-rasūla mimman yanqalibu ‘alā ‘aqibayhi [...]*)” (surah 2:143)

It does not really become clear that the direction of prayer was actually changed from one city to another. Nor is it clear that *qibla* means “direction of prayer”. Especially one of the following verses suggests a much more general meaning, maybe “customs, rituals” or such like:

“And even if thou broughtest unto those who have received the Scripture all kinds of portents, they would not follow thy qiblah, nor canst thou be a follower of their qiblah; nor are some of them followers of the qiblah of others. – *wa-la- ‘in ‘atayta llaḡīna ‘ūtū l-kitāba bi-kulli ‘āyatin mā tabī‘ū qiblataka wa-mā ‘anta bi-tābi‘in qiblatahum wa-mā ba’ḡhum bi-tābi‘in qiblata ba’ḡin wa-*

la-'ini ttaba'ta 'ahwā'ahum min ba'di mā ḡā'aka mina l-'ilmi 'innaka 'iḡan la-mina z-zālimīn⁶⁸ (surah 2:145)

Just what might be the reason why the word *qibla* was generally understood to mean “direction of prayer” is to be found in verses surahs 2:144, 149, 150):

“[...] And now verily We shall make thee turn (in prayer) toward a qiblah which is dear to thee. (*fa-la-nuwalliyannaka qiblatan tarḡāhā*) So turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship (*fa-walli waḡhaka šaṡra l-masḡidi l-ḡarāmi*), and ye (O Muslims), wheresoever ye may be, turn your faces when ye pray toward it. [...]” (surah 2:144)

Verse 2:149 has already been mentioned above:

“And whencesoever thou comest forth (for prayer, O Muhammad) turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship. (*wa-min ḡayṡu ḡaraḡta fa-walli waḡhaka šaṡra l-masḡidi l-ḡarāmi*)” (surah 2:149)

Exactly the same wording is found again in the following verse!

“Whencesoever thou comest forth turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship [...] – *wa-min ḡayṡu ḡaraḡta fa-walli waḡhaka šaṡra l-masḡidi l-ḡarāmi*” (surah 2:150)

So here the expression “*fa-walli waḡhaka šaṡra l-masḡidi l-ḡarāmi* – turn thy face toward the Inviolable Place of Worship” appears three times in exactly the same form within a passage of six verses, without there being any textual reason for this: the phrase is definitely not a refrain! R. Paret always adds a set of brackets with the words “in Mecca” after his rendering of “*masḡid al-ḡarām* – die heilige Kultstätte (the sacred cult site)”. But apart from Muslim tradition, there is no clear indication of either *qibla* meaning “direction of prayer”, or of a change of the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca!

Apart from the unspecific verse surah 7:29, all relevant verses referring to the *qibla* are to be found in surah 2, which appears like an unconnected compilation of statements, mostly from much later. The interpretation of “*masḡid al-ḡarām* – the Inviolable Place of Worship / the sacred cult site” as referring to Mecca would make sense if these verses stemmed from the era of Hārūn al-Rašīd, the caliph who converted Mecca into a pilgrimage site. This interpretation is possible: but why is the simple phrase “in Mecca”, which would make everything clear, never found in any of these verses referring to the *masḡid al-ḡarām*? The explanation might be that for the listeners/readers of the time it was perfectly clear that “the sacred cult site” was there.

Nevertheless, it is very difficult to bring the statements in line with one another; surah 2:142-143 speak of a “qiblah which they formerly observed ([*an*] *qiblatihimu llatī kānū 'alayhā*) and “which ye formerly observed (acc.: *l-qiblata llatī kunta 'alayhā*)”, which is now being changed. But also the

previous direction of prayer – provided *qibla* means “direction of prayer here” – was arranged in this way “that We might know him who followeth the messenger, from him who turneth on his heels”. This conveys the impression that this early direction of prayer was a specific feature of the Qur’anic movement in contrast to the (other) Christians. It is by no means clear whether surah 2:144 refers to the changing of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca: “and now verily We shall make thee turn (in prayer) toward a qiblah which is dear to thee” is followed by “and ye (O Muslims), wheresoever ye may be, turn your faces (when ye pray) toward it”. The two sentences do not necessarily refer to the same thing, nor does either of them clearly refer to prayer: the Arabic text of the first sentence says: “*fa-la-nuwalliyannaka qiblatan tarḍāhā*” – lit.: “and verily we will make you turn you (concerning) a *qibla* you will be content with it”. Nothing is said about prayer, as Pickthall’s translation suggests. The second sentence: “*fa-walli waḡhaka šaṭra l-masḡidi l-ḡarāmi*” literally means: “and turn your face in the direction of the forbidden/ inviolable place of worship”.

If we did not know from the traditional literature and from modern Muslims that the direction of prayer is towards Mecca, in other words, if we just possessed this text, we would never translate and interpret it the way Paret and Pickthall did. The root the noun *qibla* is derived from is *q-b-l*, which means “to accept”, the related preposition “*qabla*” meaning “in front of, before”. The reason why *qibla* came to be interpreted as “direction” might be the preposition “*qibala* – towards” in the first verse mentioned in this section:

“It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West (*laysa l-birra ’an tuwallū wuḡūhakum qibala l-mašriqi wa-l-maḡribi*); but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day [...]”(surah 2:177)

But even if all the above-mentioned verses should really refer to the direction of prayer, – this possibility cannot be ruled out categorically, – then the changing of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca would already have been the second establishment of a direction of prayer which, just like the earlier one, distinguished the new creed from the (Trinitarian) Christian one. So why change a feature to make it distinctive, if it is already distinctive?

Moreover, these statements only make sense if it is assumed that in the 7th and 8th centuries all Christian churches had altars which faced the East, which is documented, for example, in this region for the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Hagia Sofia in Constantinople and for churches in Northern Syria).⁹⁰ So at least in churches, Christians prayed in an eastbound direction. A first distinctive direction of prayer of the Qur’anic movement could have been Jerusalem in the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, which was changed, later, towards the end of the 8th century, to the new sacred city of Mecca.

If all above-mentioned verses are understood in this “conservative” way, Mecca would appear as the spiritual center of the new creed in the latest parts of the Qur’ān. This is conceivable, but remains uncertain, because the Qur’ānic verses are so vague.

6.6 The Punishment Stories (“Straflegenden”)

The Qur’ān offers a series of biblical and non-biblical stories (“from the ancient Arabian wealth of myths and legends”⁹¹) which are arranged according to a tight pattern: God sent a prophet into a city or to a clan or nation; the people dismiss him and do not believe, so God destroys them. Occasionally it is added that the prophet and a few who believed in him are saved. These stories are called to mind in the Qur’ān, that is to say they are told as if they are known to the audience already. They had probably been put into a collection before they were added to the Qur’ānic texts.

In the “punishment stories”, – unlike everywhere else in the Qur’ān, – the names of the respective messengers as well as the clans and cities to which they were sent are mentioned. Those from the biblical tradition are known to us, but the ones from “ancient Arabic myths and legends” are not always familiar to us. A review of these legends has shown that real information indeed underlies several of these stories.⁹² Frequently, catastrophes which had in fact already happened centuries before the composition of the Qur’ān were then interpreted using the theological pattern mentioned.

The verifiable non-biblical information refers to the area of the Midianites/ Nabateans in North-West Arabia. These stories seem to have been included in the Qur’ān at some time. This may have happened after Mu‘āwiya had consolidated the early form of an “Arabic” empire, followed by ‘Abd al-Malik, during whose reign the Qur’ānic movement established itself in the West-Syrian region as well.

These “pre-Islamic” stories, which were integrated into the Qur’ān, probably as a whole, display regional and local references, but reveal nothing about the geographical location of Qur’ānic preaching.

6.7 Conclusion

The little evidence that exists of cities, regions and landscapes in the Qur’ān does not provide a sufficient basis to link its preaching to the region of the Arabian Peninsula. The texts themselves are geographically vague in a strange way: they could have originated from anywhere in the Syrian-Arabic region which includes the Middle East.

Further information might be obtained through etymological research, e.g. determining the influence of the Syrian and Persian languages and notions on the Qur’ān, as well as by means of datable and locatable coinage which documents the beginning and further proliferation of Qur’ānic motifs.

A historicization of the title *muḥammad* can be recognized in later parts of the Qur'ān, following the notion of an Arab messenger or one “making plain (*mubīn*)”, who represents the Arabic-Qur'ānic movement as their preacher – still without the separation from Christianity (but, however, from the *other* Christians). The historicization to a Prophet of the Arabs with the name *Muḥammad* can only be found with a certain degree of probability in one place (surah 33:40), as the views expressed there about marriage are definitely no longer Christian. But even in those passages from the later parts of the Qur'ān where the prophet is mentioned without a name, he gains a new individuality when compared to Jesus and Christians. At the same time the Qur'ān is placed next to or above the Torah and the Gospel.

However, this historicization does not indicate any geographical location in the region of the Arabian Peninsula.

After the manuscript was finished, I came across an article about Muḥammad by Patricia Crone on the internet.⁹³ She writes about the difficulties in locating the life of Muḥammad on the Arabian Peninsula (“the middle [of Arabia] was *terra incognita*) or in Mecca, which was unknown at the time: “In sum, we have no context for the prophet and his message”, she concludes and suggests “the Dead Sea region” as the theater of all the events mentioned; an opinion, however, which is not backed by very much evidence.⁹⁴

At least it must be conceded that she dares to utter critical thoughts, – an exception among scholars of Islamic Studies, although she still maintains the historicity of a prophet called Muḥammad,⁹⁵ which she bases on the (probably incorrect) testimony of Christian sources.⁹⁶

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Endnotes

Karl-Heinz Ohlig: *From muḥammad Jesus to Prophet of the Arabs*, pp. 251-307

- 1 Cf. K.-H. Ohlig, *Weltreligion Islam. Eine Einführung*, Mainz, Luzern 2000, p. 60–67.
- 2 See R.C. Zaehner, *Zurvan. A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, Oxford 1955, Chapter I (English translation of the Persian Report, p. 7 (below), 8.9).
- 3 I base my view especially on the following publications: Yehuda D. Nevo, Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam. The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*, Amherst, New York 2003, as well as articles of Volker Popp in *Inârah* anthologies: *Die frühe Islamgeschichte nach inschriftlichen und numismatischen Zeugnissen*, in: Karl-Heinz Ohlig, Gerd-Rüdiger Puin (eds.), *Die dunklen Anfänge. Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, Berlin ¹2005, ²2006, p. 16-123; Christoph Luxenberg, *Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem*, in: *ibid.* p. 124-147; in the present anthology (German version): Volker Popp, *Von Ugarit nach Samarra. Eine archäologische Reise auf den Spuren Ernst Herzfelds*. In the following, these articles will be quoted in endnotes only in those cases, where a specific passage is referred to.
- 4 About this matter cf. my article “Evidence of a New Religion in Christian Literature ‘Under Islamic Rule?’” in the present anthology.
- 5 Cf. Volker Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte*, op. cit. p. 63-64.
- 6 About the most important Sassanian deportations, beginning with the reign of Shapur I (240-270 CE), cf.: Erich Kettenhofen, *Deportations II*. In the Parthian and Sasanian Periods, in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (ed. by Eshan Yarshater), Volume VII, Fascile 3, Costa Mesa (California, USA) 1994, p. 298-308.
- 7 Cf. V. Popp, *Von Ugarit nach Samarra*.
- 8 “*Mehmat* – the angry one“, makes no sense.
- 9 Cf. V. Popp, *Von Ugarit nach Samarra*.
- 10 Cf. V. Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte ...*, op. cit. p. 63-64; cf. e.g. p. 66, pic. 16.
- 11 Johannes Damascenus, *Über die Häresien, Liber de haeresibus opera polemica*, in: *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskus*, vol. IV, ed. by Bonifatius Kotter (PTS 22), Berlin, New York 1981, haer. 100, p. 60, line 11. The form *Mamed* without “ch” (H) could be the transcription of the Syriac term *mamed* meaning *baptist*; but the possibility that what is meant here is *Mahmed* is much more probable. The reason could be that in West Syrian dialects the originally pharyngeal “ḥ – IPA: [ħ]” was weakened, or simply that this phoneme is not a speech sound in Greek: the Greek letter Chi (Χ) was originally pronounced as an aspirated [k^h], later as a velar fricative [x]; the glottal [h] appears in Greek as the “spiritus asper” only at the beginning of words (cf. also the Greek transliteration of Aramaic *Yuhannā* as Ἰωάννης (*Iōannēs*) vs. Latin *Johannes*).
- 12 A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad nach bisher grösstentheils unbenutzten Quellen*, 1st vol., Berlin ²1869, p. 161.
- 13 Cf. Christoph Luxenberg, *Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem*, op. cit. p. 124-147.
- 14 Botterweck G. *Johannes/ Ringgren, Helmer* (1980). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 4. Stuttgart, pp. 452.

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- 15 Cf. Segert, Stanislav (1984). *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/ London; p. 162, text 88.53 (1.4:V:12-19); see also: Markus Gross: "New Ways of Qur'anic Research", chapter: 6.6 "Muḥammad" and the Semitic Root "ḥ-m-d", as well as Volker Popp: "From Ugarit to Sāmarrā", both in the present anthology.
- 16 Cf. also Romans 11:28.
- 17 Cf. also 1 Thess. 1:4; Kol. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:10.
- 18 A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad ...*, op. cit. p. 159.160.
- 19 A. Sprenger, *ibid.* p. 159.
- 20 A. Sprenger, *ibid.* p. 160.
- 21 Already Paul von Samosata (died 272) had polemically opposed the Greek understanding of Jesus as God's son: *Fragmente aus dem Synodalbrief (nach 268)*, Nr. 5 (Friedrich Loofs, *Paulus von Samosata. Eine Untersuchung zur altkirchlichen Literatur- und Dogmengeschichte*, Leipzig 1924, p. 331), *Akten der Disputation mit dem Presbyter Malchion*, Nr. 8 (268; Greek and German: F. Loofs, *ibid.* 337); Diodor von Tarsus (died before 394), *Fragmente* 11, 13, 15, 18, 29 (Syriac and German: Rudolf Abramowski, *Der theologische Nachlass des Diodor von Tarsus*, in: *ZNW* 42, 1949, pp. 31, 33, 37, 47), *Fragmente (of Diodorus) in Leontius, Contra Nestorium et Eutychem* 3 (Greek: MPG 86, 1, 1865, 1388 A); Theodorus of Mopsuestia (died 428), from the theses refuted by Cyrill (Mansi 4, 45 [219]); Aphrahat (died after 345), *Unterweisungen (Demonstrations)* 14, 39 (Aphrahat, *Unterweisungen. Zweiter Teilband. Aus dem Syrischen übersetzt und eingeleitet von Peter Bruns [Fontes Christiaani, Bd. 5/2]*, Freiburg, Basel, Wien et al. 1991, 376).
- 22 Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 14:33. Aphrahat mentions Jesus as member of a chain of prophets (passim) and calls him „the Great Prophet“ (cf. also *Demonstration* 2,6; 4,6; [17,11]).
- 23 Cf. my monograph: *Fundamentalchristologie. Im Spannungsfeld von Christentum und Kultur*, München 1986, p. 90-124; p. 198-244.
- 24 Cf. my article: *Das syrische und arabische Christentum und der Koran*, in: K.-H. Ohlig, G.-R. Puin (eds.), *Die dunklen Anfänge*, op. cit. p. 370-394 (whole article: p. 366-404).
- 25 Cf. *Fundamentalchristologie*, op. cit. 635-638.
- 26 About the text cf. Y. D. Nevo und J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, op. cit. p. 412-413.
- 27 About the text cf. Y. D. Nevo, J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, *ibid.* p. 410-411.
- 28 Cf. V. Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte ...*, op. cit. p. 66, pic. 17 and 18.
- 29 About the importance of the Dome of the Rock cf. V. Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte ...*, op. cit. p. 81-85; Ch. Luxenberg, *Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem*, op. cit. p. 143-145.
- 30 *Syrische Danielapokalypse (Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel). Deutsche Übersetzung und Einleitung (German translation and introduction)*: Matthias Henze, *Apokalypsen und Testamente. Syrische Danielapokalypse (Jüdische Schriften aus helle-*

- nistisch-römischer Zeit, vol. 1, fasc. 4), Gütersloh 2006; there, 20, Ausführungen zur Abfassungszeit.
- 31 G.J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, transl. by G.J. Reinink (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, Vol. 541), Einleitung (introduction) XX. XXI. However, Reinink thinks that the Dome of the Rock is an Islamic building, „the first of its kind in Islamic history“ (ibid. XXI).
 - 32 Johannes Damascenus, *Über die Häresien, Liber de haeresibus opera polemica*, haer. 100, op. cit., p. 64, p. 87-94.
 - 33 Thus for the first time: V. Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte ...*, op. cit. p. 67-76.
 - 34 Aphrahat, *Unterweisungen (Demonstrations)*. Erster Teilband (first half of the first volume). Aus dem Syrischen übersetzt und eingeleitet von Peter Bruns (*Fontes Christiani*, vol. 5/1), Freiburg, Basel, Wien et al. 1991, 82; for the English version the translation by John Gwynn was used: John Gwynn. *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 13*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3701.htm>
 - 35 Aphrahat, ibid. p. 84.
 - 36 Aphrahat, ibid. p. 85.
 - 37 Aphrahat, ibid.
 - 38 Aphrahat, ibid. p. 86.
 - 39 Aphrahat, ibid. p. 95.
 - 40 V. Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte*, ibid. p. 85.
 - 41 Why there is no longer a cross depicted above the “stones”, like in the case of the stairs on coins of Heraclius a few decades before, cannot be answered with certainty. It might be the adoption of an archaic, e.g. Nabataean, symbolism, which is re-interpreted from an Old Testament perspective (V. Popp’s view); alternatively it could be due to the non-acknowledgement of the soteriological effect of Jesus’ death on the cross (about this question cf. my article: *Das syrische und arabische Christentum und der Koran*, op. cit. p. 395-396).
 - 42 Cf. V. Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte*, op. cit. p. 98.
 - 43 About the text cf. Y. D. Nevo, J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, op. cit. 418-419.
 - 44 About the text cf. Y. D. Nevo, J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, op. cit. 420-421.
 - 45 Cf. among others Ignaz Goldziher, *Islam und Parsismus*; V. Popp, *Der Einfluss persischer religiöser Raster auf Vorstellungen im Koran*.
 - 46 About this question cf. V. Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte*, op. cit. p. 105-107.
 - 47 V. Popp, *Die frühe Islamgeschichte ...*, ibid. p. 106.
 - 48 Cf. my article: *Das syrische und arabische Christentum und der Koran*, op. cit. p. 378-384.
 - 49 Cf. I. Goldziher, *Islam and Parsism*; V. Popp, *The Influence of Persian Religious Patterns on Notions in the Qur’an*.
 - 50 Arabic Edition, Karachi (Pakistan) 1967; Arabic (with German commentary): Ibn Saad. *Biographien Muhammeds, seiner Gefährten und der späteren Träger des Islams bis zum Jahre 230 der Flucht*, vol. 1, Theil I: *Biographie Muhammeds bis zur Flucht*, ed. by E. Mittwoch, Leiden 1905, und Theil II: *Biographie*

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- 51 About this matter cf. also A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad*, op. cit. p. 156-157.
- 52 A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad*, op. cit. p. 157.
- 53 A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad*, Vorrede, I.
- 54 The historicity of both the Buddha and Zarathustra, even of a historical kernel, is far from undisputed. What tradition tells of their lives is so contaminated with obvious legends, exaggerations and later interpolations, that it is very hard to filter out a historical person.
- 55 The only testimonies that come into question are Qur'anic texts; about this matter cf. p. 350 ff.
- 56 Y.D. Nevo and J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, op. cit. p. 131.
- 57 Cf. Chr. Luxenberg, *Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem*, op. cit. pp. 124.
- 58 Also cf. my article: Evidence of a New Religion in Christian Literature "Under Islamic Rule"; there the question of the "information" contained in historicizing material is discussed.
- 59 However, there are many problems attached to this matter that have not yet been discussed, as the manuscript attestation of traditional literature generally ascribed to the 9th and 10th century, only sets in about three or four centuries later.
- 60 All quotations from the Qur'ān, unless otherwise indicated, are from Marmaduke Pickthall's translation, which is also available on the internet; in some cases Rudi Paret's German translation and commentary were also used: *Der Koran. Übersetzung von Rudi Paret*, Stuttgart 2004.
- 61 Cf. Chr. Luxenberg, *Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem*, op. cit.
- 62 Y.D. Nevo and J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, op. cit. p. 265.
- 63 Cf. Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Les Fondations de l'Islam*, éditions du seuil, 2002, p. 290: the author mentions the incident when 'Umar had a text from the Bible that he liked copied, and was later reprimanded by the Prophet, who stated that it "suffices to read the Qur'ān".
- 64 Cf. about this question: Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, Berlin 2004, p. 81-86.
- 65 *Der Koran. Aus dem Arabischen übertragen von Max Henning*, Stuttgart 1973.
- 66 R. Paret translates "Verpflichtung (obligation)" instead of "Bund (covenant)", so that the biblical context is hidden.
- 67 Cf. Q 2:89: Paret: "And (now) when a scripture (i.e., the Qur'ān) came to him, which confirmed what was already there (as revelation) ..., as what they already knew (referring to the content of the message), (in a new revelation), then they did not believe it." According to R. Paret the verse is addressed to the Jews; but before, in v. 87, Moses and Jesus are spoken of, so that the statement is about the disbelief of both groups, Jews as well as Christians. Pickthall translates: "And when there cometh unto them a Scripture from Allah, confirming that in their possession

- though, before that they were asking for a signal triumph over those who disbelieved and when there cometh unto them that which they know (to be the Truth) they disbelieve therein.”
- 68 Cf. e.g. Q 2:136: „We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto Us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob. and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, add that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. ...“.
- 69 Cf. Gen 12-25. V. Popp opines that the reference to Abraham goes back to the early days of the movement. This is valid for many aspects; in surah 87:18-19 for example it says: “Lo! This is in the former scrolls, The Book of Abraham and Moses.” Paret interprets the “scrolls” as first manuscripts of the revelation. The salvation aspect of the reference to Abraham, however, seems to stem from a later phase, after Islam had established itself as a separate creed, so it would not be expected to appear in such an early surah.
- 70 Cf. Evidence of a New Religion in Christian Literature “Under Islamic Rule”?
- 71 Cf. about this question: Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, Über die Bedeutung der ältesten Koranfragmente aus Sanaa (Jemen) für die Orthographiegeschichte des Korans, in: Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer, Karl-Heinz Ohlig, Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, Neue Wege der Koranforschung, magazin forschung (Universität des Saarlandes)1, 1999, p. 39-40.
- 72 It must be borne in mind that the notion “*religion*” goes back to a Western concept from a rather modern age. In the following, it will only be used for the sake of categorization from the perspective of the science of religion. The term *religion* in our modern sense is not an appropriate translation of the Arabic word *dīn*.
- 73 In Max Henning’s German translation, op. cit., p. 80, counted as verses 138-139.
- 74 In verse 145 we read: “No soul can ever die except by Allah’s leave”. One might add: “No soul (like Jesus or other prophets before him) ...”, whose death is then mentioned in the following verse 146.
- 75 Adel Theodor Khoury, Muhammad, in: id., Ludwig Hagemann, Peter Heine, Islam-Lexikon. Geschichte – Ideen – Gestalten, vol. 3, Freiburg, Basel, Wien 1991, p. 544.
- 76 In his translation of the Qur’ān (Der Koran. Aus dem Arabischen übertragen von Max Henning, op. cit. p. 585), Max Henning explains what it meant that Muḥammad was “taken in” by God): “Muḥammad was tenderly brought up by his grandfather.”
- 77 Cf. Rudi Paret, Mohammed und der Koran. Geschichte und Verkündigung des arabischen Propheten, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz 1957, p. 32-35.
- 78 W. Montgomery Watt, B. Ursprung und Werdendes Islam, in: id., Alford T. Welch, Der Islam. I Mohammed und die Frühzeit – Islamisches Recht – Religiöses Leben (translation from the English by Sylvia Höfer, Die Religionen der Menschheit, ed. by Christel Matthias Schröder, vol. 25,1), Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz 1980, p. 48.
- 79 Cf. about this question: W.M. Watt, ibid. p. 49-50.
- 80 Similarly W. M. Watt, ibid. p. 50.

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- 81 Cf. about this question: V. Popp, Von Ugarit nach Samarra.
- 82 Theodor Nöldeke, Geschichte des Qorāns, 2nd edition revised and edited by Friedrich Schwally, 1st part: Über den Ursprung des Qorāns, 2nd part: Die Sammlung des Qorāns, Leipzig 1909.
- 83 http://wikiislam.net/wiki/Chronological_Order_of_the_Qur'an
- 84 Cf. V. Popp, Von Ugarit nach Samarra.
- 85 Add.(itamenta) IV. V: Continuatio Byzantina Arabica a. DCCXLI, belonging to: Isidori iunioris episcopi Hispalensis historia Gothorum Wandalorum Sueborum ad a. DCXXIV, in: Monumenta Germaniae historica, tomus XI: Chronicorum minorum saec. IV, V, VI, VII, Vol. II: Chronica minora, edidit Theodorus Mommsen, Berlin 1844 (Add. IV and V, the whole article: p. 323-369). My attention was directed to this text by Johannes Thomas, Professor of Romance Studies at the University Paderborn.
- 86 Concerning transcriptions: personal communication of Volker Popp.
- 87 Cf. *ibid.* Evidence of a New Religion in Christian Literature "Under Islamic Rule"?
- 88 Chr. Luxenberg, Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran, *op. cit.* p. 336-337, A. 352 (quotation: 337); the quotation was translated anew from the German version.
- 89 Cf. my article "Evidence of a New Religion in Christian Literature 'Under Islamic Rule'?"
- 90 Cf. about this question: F. Zoepel, Ostung. II. Im Christentum, in: LThK ²1992, Vol. 7, p. 1294.
- 91 Rudi Paret, Der Koran als Geschichtsquelle, in: *Der Islam* 37, 1961, p. 35.
- 92 Cf. Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, Leuke Kome / Layka, die Arser / Ashab al-Rass und andere vorislamische Namen im Koran, in: K.-H. Ohlig, G.-R. Puin (eds.), *Die dunklen Anfänge*, *op. cit.* p. 317-340.
- 93 Patricia Crone, What do we actually know about Mohammed?; www.openDemocracy.net (webpage was accessed 31 June, 06)
- 94 P. Crone, *ibid.* p. 4.
- 95 P. Crone, *op. cit.* p. 1-2.
- 96 Cf. my article "Evidence of a New Religion in Christian Literature 'Under Islamic Rule'?"