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Arab Christian Confederations and Muhammad's Believers: On the Origins of Jihad

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Abstract: The meaning and elaboration of *Jihad* (just-sacred war) hold an important place in Islamic history and thought. On the far side of its spiritual meanings, the term has been historically and previously associated with the Arab Believers' conquest of the 7th–8th centuries CE. However, the main idea of this contribution is to develop the "sacralization of war" as a relevant facet that was previously elaborated by the Arab Christian (pro-Byzantine) clans of the north of the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant and secondarily by the Arab confederation of Muhammad's believers. From the beginning of Muhammad's *hijra* (622), the interconnection between the Medinan clans that supported the Prophet with those settled in the northwest of the Hijaz is particularly interesting in relation to a couple of aspects: their trade collaboration and the impact of the belligerent attitude of the pro-Byzantine Arab Christian forces in the framing of the early concept of a *Jihad*. This analysis aimed to clarify the possibility that the early "sacralization of war" in proto-Islamic narrative had a Christian Arab origin related to a previous refinement in the Christian milieu.

Keywords: *Jihad*; *Qital*; Arab confederation; Ghassanids; Banu Kalb; Umayyad

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1. Introduction. Why Is Research on the Canonization of *Jihad* Still Relevant Today?

The 9/11 terrorist attack had a deep impact on the creative identification of Islam from a detrimental perspective, emphasizing this religion as having been violent, in particular against religious otherness, since the beginning of its history. The "Islamic conquests", which started a few years after Muhammad's death (d. 632) and that were to allow for a rapid "religious" supremacy in a huge geographical area, seem to "clearly" confirm more contemporary "Islamophobic" assumptions that were rooted in the perception of Islam as a violent faith.

The above hypothesis spread extensively among ordinary people but also among more educated ones, slipping into the dialectical and cognitive line of secularism, anti-clericalism, new forms of antisemitism and Islamophobia. Thankfully, contemporary historical methodology in the last century emphasized the framing of a "transitional" view in a new "Global"—"Comparative" approach that can limit the ideological drifts deriving from racism and ignorance by using a more multi-disciplinary perspective[1].

It is in relation to this methodology that it would be impossible today to consider "Islam" as a new religion that was clearly differentiated from Christianity and Judaism only a few years after the end of the prophetic phase (in 632, Muhammad's death highlights the end of the Prophetic phase) when the "Islamic conquests" would have easily allowed for gaining control of the entire Near East (Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt) within a decade.

"Transitional history" needs to reckon, first of all, with the complexities of a historical phase and geography in the Late Antiquity Era between the previous holders of power, namely, the Byzantines and the Sassanids, with the new ones. The Confederate clans of the north of the Arabian Peninsula as the Germanic populations close to the Western Roman Empire's borders before 476 were already known and enlisted in the imperial armies, as well as partially Romanized, Hellenized and Christianized.

Without assuming this conceptualization, we would be easy prey to the "Rage and Pride" of the sowers of hatred, and incapable of interpreting the historical events that led to the conquests of an immense amount of land in the century that followed the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632.

Historically considering that the first phase of these conquests ended in 751 in the east, which is the official date of the battle of Talas, and in 732 for the west, which is the official date of the battle of Poitiers–Tours, and that the last attempt to conquer Constantinople was probably around 715–717 (Canard 1926), it is possible that with the beginning of the 8th century, an increasingly consistent part of these armies were both more aware, from the points of view of identity and religion, i.e., of Muhammad's new prophetic message.

Nevertheless, the most urbanized regions of the Near East were "softly" conquered one or a few decades after the Prophet's death, in the first half of the 7th century, when a new religion, Islam, as the inner religious consciousness of the conquerors, obviously did not yet exist.

As suggested by Robert G. Hoyland in *God's Path* (Hoyland 2015, pp. 8–30), the astonishing conquest of Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as the Iberian Peninsula, Iran and up to the Indus valley afterward, was clearly related more to the "nomads'" skills and speed in warfare (as history teaches us concerning the Mongols, Huns and the Hephthalites) than probably to the conceptual canonization of the "sacred war" in a new faith, the prophetic phase of which had ended only a few years before. The conquerors' pillages and raids were transformed into a permanent seizure when the Arab confederation became concretely aware of the weakness of both of these ancient empires, namely, the Persian and Byzantine empires (Donner 1981).

Just as Christianity needed time to be framed and canonized, also because, during the first centuries, it was often rejected and persecuted, the same approach must also be used for Islam for erasing the banal idea that the Arab conquests were already Islamic as they were rooted in a bellicose canonized concept of *Jihad*, regardless of the concept attributed to it. In contrast, it was not until 140 years after the Prophet's death before an Islamic moral attitude to war became solidified, which was included in Islam's earliest juridical text, in which a limited section (*Kitab al-Jihad*) was dedicated to war and soldiers' behavior.

This step was reached after the end of this phase of expansion and after the establishment of a geographical border between the new Islamic political empire and the different potentates, with Byzantium being the first (Bonner 2006; Calasso and Lancioni 2017).

Summing up, it is historically evident, independently of the Islamic "narratives" that emerged in the early 'Abbasid period and that depicted Islam as already in existence from the beginning (Donner 1998, p. 174ff.), that it is an ideological hazard to frame the possibility of the affirmation of *jihad* as a peculiar Islamic facet a couple of year after the Prophet's death and when the new religion[2] was difficult to identify or to be distinguished from its Abrahamic background, which was a religious *milieu* rooted on Judaism and Christianity.

The above-listed passages need to be elucidated, specifically for framing the doctrinal and theological differences that characterize the new religion compared to the previous ones, in this case, Islam from Christianity and Judaism.[3]

2. The "Sacralization" of War in the Arab Christian Confederation before Islam

Irfan Shahid (d. 2016) dedicated his academic life to searching for the pre-Islamic Arab identity in the Roman eastern Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity; in his works, he was able to identify a process of increasing Romanization, Hellenization and Christianization of those people, described as "Arabs", that emigrated to the north of the Peninsula in different centuries CE (Fisher 2011, p. 14). Historical debate and doubts about Shahid's essays: *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (vol. 1 parts 1–2, 1995) have usually been manifested by Byzantine specialists: Mark Whittow's (Whittow 1999) analysis in *Rome and the Jafnids: Writing the History of a Sixth-Century Tribal Dynasty*, stressed the complexity of the historical period, the difficulties in identifying the alliances and the rifts of those

Saracen clans and confederations with the leading political and religious main authorities of Late Antiquity, namely, the Byzantines and the Persians.

However, and independently of the difficulties in historically determining a more precise interconnection between those actors—Byzantine sources in Greek: Procopius (d. 570), but also pre-Procopian historians, such as Zosimus Historicus (ca d. 520), post-Procopian historians, such as Aghatias Scholasticus (d. 582) and Theophylact Simocatta (d. ca. 640), and more general Ecclesiastical historians, such as Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 458), Hermias Sozomenus (d. ca. 450) and Theophanes the Confessor (d. 818)—have differently described, with a greater or lesser extent, sometimes detrimentally and sometimes the contrary, the relationship between Constantinople, Ctesiphon and their "Arabs" *foederati* forces of the southwest and southeast.

Two main historical aspects need to be discussed to understand the relationship between those "Arab" forces and the Byzantines, starting from the 4th century: the paradigmatic decision of Emperor Theodosius (d. 395 AD) to establish Christianity as the official religion of the entire Roman Empire (edict of Thessaloniki, 380 AD), as well as the task of Ambrose and Libanius in the attempt to convince the Emperor to be a Christian one in the defense of the faith and the empire's purification from pagans, whose persecution, including against Jews, started under his reign (Johnson 1997, p. 48ff; Sizgorich 2009, p. 81ff.).

Even although the presence of "Saracens *foederati*" in the Roman–Byzantine armies had been reported since the 4th century (Williams and Friell 1998, p. 134), it was in the 6th century, in particular under Emperor Justinian I (527–565) and his successors, that there was historical evidence of the rise and decline of this specific alliance. Furthermore, just like the different German tribes that played an important role during the decadence of the Western Roman Empire, the Saracens or *Tayyaye* (the Aramaic term to define the semi-nomadic Arabs) played a similar one in the eternal fight between the Romans and the Persians in Late Antiquity.

At the same time, some branches of those *foederati* forces played a more significant role in the direct relationship with the Byzantine and Persian authorities that benefited from their defensive–offensive services in the 6th century, namely, the Jafnids for Constantinople and the Nasride for Ctesiphon (Fisher 2011, p. 276ff.; Genequand and Robin 2015).

While it is probably true that from the 4th–5th century onward, different Saracen confederations played similar roles for both empires in an active and agile way, often related to border control, espionage and military inclusion in the imperial armies during the main military campaigns, these alliances were fragile and usually related to reciprocal interests. In his *Chronographia*, Theophanes the Confessor reported the presence of "Arabs" forces playing this role since around the end of the 5th century (Theophanes the Confessor 1997, p. 217).

This involvement also seemed deeply connected with the religious sphere: when, for example, the Kinda confederation decided to partially convert to Judaism (in the fifth century), the previous diplomatic relationship with Constantinople and main role for them became unbearable, pushing the Kinda into the Sassanian sphere of influence and changing the geopolitical strategies in the southeastern part of the Arabian Peninsula (Robin 1996, pp. 665–714; Olinder 1927). Religious belonging, since the 5th century, was playing an increasing impact in defining the Ancient Empires' alliances with the Arab Confederations of the north of the Peninsula.

Two main factors reached their climax in the 6th-century interconnection between the Byzantine empires and their *foederati* forces: the Jafnid branch of the Ghassanid confederation, more specifically, their military role and increasing autonomy in defensive–offensive tasks, as well as the impact of assimilation through a process of Romanization and Christianization (Shahid 1995, vol. 1, pp. 1, 734ff.; Shahid 1995, vol. 1 pp. 2, 793ff.; Hayajneh and Ababneh 2015, pp. 259–76).

The former task in the Byzantine strategy was played well by Al-Harith V ibn Jabalah (d. 569) and his brother Abu Karib ibn Jabalah in suppressing local revolts (the Samaritans in 529 AD) and taking part in military campaigns that ended favorably for the Byzantine *foederati*, such as the battle of Chalcis (554 AD).

The peace treaty of 561 AD between Constantinople and Ctesiphon highlighted the roles of the Jafnids and Nasrids[4] (the Persian *foederati*) in defending but also gaining significant results in peacefully controlling the trade routes that allowed merchants from Hijaz to safely take caravans along this north–south direction (Kawar 1956).

In parallel, the Jafnids started to be increasingly involved in religious Christological debates, which resembled, on a smaller scale, those led by the Byzantine emperors.

The great majority of the Arab Roman inscriptions discovered in recent decades by excavations are in Greek, with rare cases in Syriac, which was probably the liturgical language that was adopted before Arabic by those Saracens (Hoyland 1997, pp. 219–42; Langfledt 1994, pp. 32–60). Michael the Syrian (d. 1199), whose main source of Late Antiquity was Dionysius of Tel Mahre (d. 845), argued that Al-Harith V was capable of expressing himself in Greek and Syriac, showing the high level of assimilation to which the Jafnids had come (Michael the Syrian 1901, vol. 2, chp. 29, pp. 246–47).

This cognitive process was based on some specific facets (given below) that, unlike other Ghassanid clans, which remained less assimilated and semi-nomadic, stressed the level of involvement of the elite of those Saracen *foederati* as part of the complex Imperial and Christian strategy (see Appendix A).

1. The sedentarization process through the construction of a "capital" (Jabiyah), as well as monasteries (Harran al-Laja, Huwwarin, Samma', al-Maytur etc.), nunneries (Dayr Kiswa) and churches, all around their area of influence. "By founding the monasteries, the Jafnids were continuing the tradition which went back to the times before the arrival of the Ghassanids in the Byzantine territory. For instance, the rulers of the Salih (the Daja'ima dynasty) are credited with the construction of the monastery of Dayr Dawud located between Seriane and Sergiopolis (Rusafa)" (Shahid 1989, p. 473). The archaeological evidence about the Jafnids' role in the 6th century was reported in relation to their miaphysite faith (anti-Chalcedonian stance): the relationship, for example, between al-Harith V and the bishop Jacob Baradeus (d. 578) and their role in the theological debates between Baradeus and Paul of Beth Ukkame (d. 578) is reported to have taken place under the Arab chiefs al-Harith V and al-Mundhir III (Fisher 2011, p. 325). Their involvement in the internal non-Chalcedony theological debates was depicted and carved in many inscriptions in different monastic settlements and *Martyria* throughout Syria (Fisher 2011, p. 329ff.)

2. The cult for saints and martyrs. First of all, there was St. Sergius, who was the Saracens' referring saint, martyr and patron, although they also venerated St. Julian, St. George, St. John the Baptist and Simeon the Stylite (d. 459), as well as still living monks, such as Simeon the Stylite the younger (d. ca. 592). As reported by Th. Sizgorich, by the end of the sixth century, the controversies on the nature of Christ were contested over the religious identity of the one true community of God on Earth. In the same century, the local communities of Syria that opposed the imperially sponsored genre of orthodoxy that emerged from the Council of Chalcedony in 451, recalled their stories through narratives of oppression and persecution, many of which framed certain militant and charismatic ascetic figures, whose role was adopted as resistance against orthodoxy, underscoring their doctrinal specificity and boundaries (Sizgorich 2009, p. 108ff.).

The literature that grew up around monks and the monastic *praxis* seems to suggest that these figures were kindred with martyrs in the minds of the people of Late Antiquity in several ways, and there is evidence that many ascetics took the martyrs as models to be emulated (Sizgorich 2009, p. 124). This process clearly invested the Arab Christian communities that were mostly anti-Chalcedonian; Emperor Justin II (d. 578), who encouraged anti-Monophysite sentiments, seems to have tried to kill al-Mundhir III (d. ca. 602), the Jafnids' successor to al-Harith V.

3. Their direct involvement in the Byzantine army, as well as in its "religious narrative". The Jafnids' assimilation in Constantinople was not symptomatic of complete submission; their military role in protecting the empire's borders against the Saracen Sassanian *foederati* allowed them to enjoy a sort of independence in making raids, as well as maximizing pillages in enemy territory: in 567, a raid by the Jafnids was carried out against the Jewish Saracens of the oasis of Khaybar without any kind of Byzantine support. In 575, al-Mundhir III raided al-Hira, the capital of the Nasrides, deep in the Sassanian territory to show all his pietistic affiliation to Christian miaphysism, destroying the pagan *locus orationis*, but not the Christian churches (Demichelis 2021, pp. 24–25). When Khusrau II (d. 628) decided to take refuge under the protection of the Byzantine Emperor Maurice during the Bahram Chobin rebellion (590), the first authority with whom they contacted at the border was probably al-Nu'man VI ibn al-Mundhir, the son of al-Mundhir III, who directly brought the information to the Byzantine Emperor, as reported in *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* (2011, p. 47).

However, Byzantine's Christian Orthodoxy and rejection of the Arabs' anti-Chalcedony posture led to the "independent" military success of the Jafnids against the Nasrides, which likely caused a betrayal of al-Mundhir III by the Byzantines, who was kidnapped and exiled to the south of Italy[5], provoking a Saracen uprising, as well as the interruption of the alliance between the Jafnids and Constantinople. Nevertheless, the Christian *milieu* depicted above could easily be assumed in the framework of an *Imitatio Imperii*, which partly coincided with that in the bellicose field. Al-Harith V and al-Mundhir III are expressions of the syncretic belligerent attitude that allowed them to reconcile raids and pillages with a Christian and Byzantine posture. The battle of Chalcis (554 AD) in which Mundhir III, the chief of the Saracen Nasride pagan forces, was killed was symbolically considered the triumph of the Christian Saracens over those who were still pagans, just like the victorious sack of al-Hira (575 AD).

ʿAlqamah al-Fahl and Nabighah (1977, p. 50, v. 4) are the Arab poets who report the events as panegyrists; however, the same events are also described in the Chronicle of (Michael the Syrian 1901, vol. 2, l. 9, chp. 33, p. 269; John of Ephesus 1935–1936, vol. 2, pp. 284–87, 217) and the *Vita* of Saint Simeon the Younger (Van den Ven 1962, vol. 1, pp. 164–65), which were texts in Greek and Syriac, respectively.

The narrative is clearly interesting as syncretic: on the one hand, al-Harith V was described riding his horse *al-Jawn* and holding two swords, *Mikhdam* and *Rasub*, where a clear Arab and Bedouin custom of giving nicknames to horses and swords is reported in an ode by ʿAlqama al-Fahl (Shantamari 1969, pp. 43–44, vv. 25–28); on the other hand, the *profectio bellica* was invoked by praying to St. Sergius, their patron, but also to figures such as Job, Jesus and St. Simeon the Younger, who was still alive.

Afterward, the victory was celebrated in both the Saracen and the Christian traditions, thanking God for the victory and celebrating the martyrs, who were probably buried in a *martyrium* at Chalcis, as well as praised and exalted in the church of Jabiyah; in parallel, a jamboree was held with a parade of horses and warriors, just like the celebrations of the wedding between Princess Halimah and the most distinguished fighter of the battle (Michael the Syrian 1901, vol. 2, p. 269; Van den Ven 1962, vol. 1, pp. 164–66, vol. 2, pp. 188–90; Shantamari 1969, pp. 43–45; Nabighah 1977; John of Ephesus 1935–1936, pp. 284–87).

The conquest of al-Hira, the capital of the Sassanid *foederati* forces, is even more emblematic in showing al-Mundhir III's religious superiority, as certified by the victory in the field: the destruction of the pagan buildings and the preservation of the Nestorian–Monophysite ones, which was a very similar action to what happened in Mecca after the entrance of Muhammad in 630.

In his study, Irfan Shahid underlined that this army, having penetrated the enemy's territory as retaliation for the Nasrides' entry into the Byzantine region, was a "just war" waged against the actions of the Lakhmids against the Christians of the Roman Empire with the "prophetic" certainty that their enemies would have suffered a historical defeat:

Quamobrem, cum convenissent et parate accincti essent, arcanum eis declaravit, dicens: "Statim, cum vir nullus a nobis se seiunget vel recedet, omnes una in Hirtha de Nu'man in terra Persarum incidamus; et propter arrogantiam eorum et audaciae eorum in Christianos patratae vehementiam Deus eos in manus nostras tradet.

"Therefore, since they met and were armed, declared them secretly, saying: "Now, when none will dissociate themselves from us or recede, all together we will attack al-Hira of Nu'man in the land of the Persians; and for their arrogance and for the vehemence of their audacity against Christians, God, will bring them in our hands."

This clarified, first of all, the Jafnids' absolute faith in God to support them against their historical enemies, but also recognized the enemy's valor and audacity, highlighting a mixed Christian and "Arab" attitude.

A definitive passage that expresses the Jafnids' wars as directly related to a religious Christian narrative and which remained associated with al-Mundhir III's behavioral attitude as a Christian is also reported by John of Ephesus:

Itaque omnes vehementer profecti ad Hirta pervenerunt et in id silentio inciderunt, cum incolae eius valde inordinati silerent et tranquilli essent. Et exercitum totum qui in eo adfuit trucidaverunt et perdiderunt; et oppidum totum ecclesiis exceptis surruit et incendit tabernaculum suo in medio eius statuto, et in dies quinque consedit. Et Tayaye omnes quos comprehenderat comprehendit et vinxit. (John of Ephesus 1935–1936, p. 217, vv. 25–26).

"Therefore, all those who had left came quickly to Hira and in silence they attacked it, while its inhabitants were idle and quiet. They slaughtered and destroyed all the military forces that were in the city, the whole city destroyed except for the churches, and set fire to the (polytheistic) sanctuary located in the middle of the city, and in five days they encamped. And the Tayaye, all who found, won and took prisoners".

Military defeats that, following a specific narrative, led to the definitive conversion of the Nasride al-Nuʿman III ibn al-Mundhir (ca. 594 AD) and his sons Hasan ibn al-Mundhir and al-Nuʿman IV ibn al-Mundhir to Christianity, emphasized the growing importance of this religion's impact among the Saracens during the proto-Islamic age.

It is clearly difficult to establish a direct correlation between the Nasrides' defeats and their conversion to Christianity; however, it is supported by historical sources (*Chronicle of Seert* 1919, pp. 468–69; Theophanes the Confessor 1997, pp. 157–58) that their conversion underlined the northern "Arabs'" increasing association with this religion as their autonomous Diophysitism (Nestorianism) affiliation, unlike the myaphysite consciousness of the Jafnids.

The "sanctification" of violence within a monotheistic faith and God's support in defeating the enemy gained increasing support among the Arab *foederati* forces on the Byzantine side since at least the middle of the 6th century: Justinian I (d. 565) *reconquistas* in the 6th century, albeit ephemeral, was established based on the war's justice via divine approval of it through an updated form of legitimization of the *Bellum Gerere.* At the same time, Justinian and his generals codified a clear type of Christian Roman War that was rooted in the restoration of peace in a territory that was previously dominated by Rome, namely, North Africa and the Italian Peninsula, which were invaded by Arian Barbarians and needed to be liberated (*libertas*) to return it to its former status. Therefore, it is evident that in the same century, at least part of the Ghassanid confederation, which was the most Romanized and Christianized clan, began to share this *Imitatio Imperii,* even if their un-Orthodox status after the death of Justinian would have put their relationship with Constantinople in crisis (Stouraitis 2012).

Emperor Heraclius (d. 641) continued to implement a concept of sacred war with considerable rhetoric during the last Roman–Persian phase of the war (624–628): the melkite bishop of Alexandria, Eutychius (d. 940) in his Annales (1909, 51, 2–3) but also "The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor" (1997, pp. 438–39) depicted the Emperor's belligerent attitude against the Persians, emphasizing his evident attitude in arguing about the "just" war, the absolute faith in God's help, the necessary sacrifice to reach a definitive victory and the needs of martyrs in reaching the final outcome (Tesei 2019, p. 224). However,

Heraclius' age was drastically different from that of Justinian I, in particular when referring to Constantinople's capability to carry out a cohesive relationship with the Arab *foederati.* As argued by (Kaegi 1992, p. 24):"Emperor's Maurice harmful policy against the hitherto friendly Ghassanids Arabs, and Byzantine disdain for Arab federated troops who would have been able to defeat the Muslims; the debilitating effects of the long Byzantine war with Persia; the numerical superiority of the Muslims; the Muslim's ability to select the battlefields on the edge of the desert [. . .];" and other contributing causes over-stressed the weakness of the inner Byzantine front against a raid invasion from the peninsula.

Byzantine's policy in relation to the Christian Arabs before the 630s remained unclear (Kaegi 1992, p. 53), where this uncertainty was confirmed by (John of Ephesus pp. 131–32) and Evagrius (1898, p. 223); at the same time, the same Islamic sources maintained a sort of confusing narrative about which task the Ghassanid confederation played during the proto-Islamic conquests: Harith ibn Shamir al-Ghassani was the Ghassanid authority that delivered a message to the Emperor Heraclius from Muhammad (Ibn Saʿd 1904–1921, vol. 2, p. 17), but Jabala ibn al-Ayham was usually reported as being the Ghassanid chief that decided to follow the Byzantine Emperor back to Constantinople after the military defeat of Yarmuk (636) (Tabari 1992, vol. 12, p. 132ff.).

However, the most relevant aspect in our analysis is focused on the importance and influence that the Christian Arab clans played in relation to the "Believers" in framing the preliminary concept of "*jihad*".

3. "Believers" and Arab Christians Interconnections, Hypotheses and Certainties

While the Christian sacralization of war among the Saracen *foederati* of Byzantium, therefore, is considered as consistently concrete from at least the beginning of the 6th century, during the height of their military and political relationship with Constantinople, the passage of this "bellicose narrative" among the "Believers" of Muhammad is harder to identify.

Nevertheless, two main hypotheses need to be examined, which are done in this and the following part: the first is the clan relationship and support that Muhammad's believers received from the Christianized confederations of the north, while the second is the role played by the Christian Kalbite clan in establishing the Umayyad Arab empire.

In relation to the former, the complexity of the interclan and infra-confederation relationship must be analyzed on different levels of narratives and historical hypotheses, while the latter is more reliable since it depends on a clearer marriage policy between Banu Kalb and Banu Umayya.

The assumption that, during the war between Medina and Mecca, the Christian Byzantines and their Saracen *foederati* were more supportive of the Prophet while the Sassanian and their Arab allies were more in favor of the polytheists of Mecca is more speculative than concrete.

Considering Muhammad's family, it is true that his grandfather ʿAbd al-Muttalib (d. 578) was the son of a woman of the Banu Khazraj, one of the two eminent clans of Medina; therefore, it is plausible that when Muhammad, after the year of sorrow (619 AD), started to look around to find a place to emigrate, he was not unknown in Medina.

At the same time, as argued by Lecker, the presence of the Ghassanid confederations at the second meeting of ʿAqaba (622 AD) in support of the agreement between the *Ansar* and the *Muhajirun* seems to be attested by evidence, as well as that of the Khazraj clan, which was closely linked to the Ghassan, who became the leading authority in Medina in assuming a more anti-Jewish position, as was already manifested during the battle of Bu'ath (c. 617) (Ibn Hazm 1962, pp. 362–63; Lecker 2015, p. 287). At least three branches of the Khazraj who attended ʿAqaba seemed to be linked with the Ghassan: the Banu l-Harith ibn al-Khazraj, the Banu Zurayq and the Banu Najjar.

"Among the Najjar there was a family from Ghassan, more precisely the Banu l-Muharriq. This connection with Ghassan is significant because of Muhammad's family relations with the Najjar: his grandfather's mother Salma bint ʿAmr was one of them. Incidentally, Salma was a relative of Sawda whom Muhammad married several months after the *hijra* in a move meant to strengthen his link with the Najjar, and through them with the Khazraj as a whole." (Lecker 2015, p. 287).

Nevertheless, the inclusion of the Ghassanids in the early agreement between Medina and Muhammad, even if plausible, makes it hard to establish a direct relationship between the Roman *foederati* and a process of sacralizing war for a couple of reasons: the complexity of the infra-clan and infra-confederation relationship in this historical phase and the difficulty in attributing to a religious factor the reasons to undersign an alliance or the contrary.

The Banu Thaʿlaba, for example, were a clan of the Ghassanid confederation that supported Muhammad but they were Jewish; this clearly demonstrates that the Ghassanid confederation was a tribal and not a religious alliance. The Jafnid branch of the Ghassanids was certainly a Christian elite that already considered their military campaigns as supported by God, saints and martyrs, and was directly linked to a preliminary sacralization of war; they went into battle flying Christians flags as part of the Byzantine army but also, when independent of Constantinople's strategy, their religious afflatus in leading a military raid (see *al-Hira* in 575 AD) was confirmed by different sources. This aspect highlights the impact of religiosity in the praxis linked to warfare.

However, in the 580s, the relationship between Jabiyah and Constantinople was eroded by the fundamentalism of the emperors' orthodoxy, and it is very hard to find sources that can give us information about who substituted the Jafnids in their leading position with the Byzantines.

At the same time, it is very hard to know whether the Jafnids' religious attitude regarding war had been impressed and shared between all the clans of the Ghassanid confederation, as well as in their different geographical locations.

It is plausible to consider, as the so-called "Constitution of Medina" stressed, that during most of Muhammad's prophetic phase, the religious factor and sense of belonging was not so important because they were unclear and usually mixed.

If it is true that in the Medinan phase, the religious identification of otherness increased in impact, the polytheists of Mecca became the enemies, as did the Jewish tribes of Medina, not because of their religiosity but because they did not want to recognize the figure of Muhammad. The peaceful conquest of Mecca in 630 and the destruction of the divinities of the Ka'ba allowed previous unbelievers and polytheists to join the new community, which remained Abrahamically pluralistic (Rubin 1990, pp. 85–112; Griffith 1983, pp. 118–21). This "political" peaceful action highlights the concrete absence of a sense of Medinan supremacist religious feeling and that of a warlike attitude based on the enemy's annihilation because our God is the only truthful one.

If it seems correct that since the beginning of the 6th century, the emphasis toward a monotheistic conversion of the Saracens to Christianity was in rapid progress, the Nasride of al-Hira was only one example; the "Believers'" attitude toward structured religions and religious praxis was still unsophisticated, as was the understanding of the Christological debates that affected the Arab Christians of the Levant.

It was not until the canonization of the Qur'an and the first biography of the Prophet (*Sira an-Nabawiyya*) before we could perceive the 'Believers' vs. 'polytheists' narratives as more associated with violent counter-opposition, fighting and their consolidation in the historical *milieu* in Mesopotamia, the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant.

It is the Qur'an in 30: 2–7 that suggests the Believers' propensity toward supporting the Christian Byzantines against the Sassanian and it was not until the *Sira an-Nabawiyya*, in the early 'Abbasid age, that allows for establishing the importance of the Abrahamic roots of the Prophet Muhammad's message (Tesei 2018, pp. 1–29; Guillaume 1955).

Therefore, it is evident that if the impact of monotheist and monotheistic religions in the Peninsula increased an obvious religious fragmentation among the clans, the belief in monotheism was far from being understood or univocally approved regarding the plurality of Jewish and Christian clans and the presence of individual *Hanifiyya* believers (Rubin 1990), namely, those Arabs who already had a monotheistic conception of the divinity without being affiliated to Judaism or Christianity.

The religious identification of otherness in Muhammad's prophetic phase and the Medinan decade is still hard to identify; in parallel, the unity of the "Believers'" community during the last years of Muhammad's life (628–632) and the following few years, showed the complexity and the difficulties of joining and enlarging the preliminary *Ummah* (community): this aspect imploded in the first (656–660) and second *Fitna* (680–692).

The "narratives" that were elaborated in the *Sira an-Nabawiyya* found a limited confirmation in the canonization of the Qur'an: the battle of *Mu'tah*, involving the raid to the trans-Jordan area, which was probably annihilated by some Ghassanid clans (Guillaume 1955, p. 532), was not clearly reported by Byzantine sources;[6] at the same time, the idea that Emperor Heraclius (d. 641), after having definitely defeated the Sassanians in 628 AD, was planning an expedition to Northern Arabia is again unfounded, while on the contrary, it seems that the *Mu'tah* and *Tabuk* stories accentuated the intention of the Prophet Muhammad to project himself outside the Peninsula, which is an intention that he may never have concretely had.

This is also because, after Muhammad's death in 632, the information on the fragmentation of the early proto-Islamic community, not referring to the *Ridda*, but rather the first *Fitna*, was reported by non-Arabic sources (Thomson and Howard-Johnston 2000, pp. 134–37; Dionysios of Tell Mahre 1919–1924, pp. 173–80; Theophanes the Confessor 1997, p. 43Ff; *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 2011), showing the attention of the Levant toward the Saracen conquerors.

The "narratives" on *Mu'tah* and *Tabuk*, like those related to the last years of Muhammad's life, are associated with the "recognition" of the Prophet's status, not as a religious figure but as the receiver of delegations, such as those from eminent figures like the Byzantine Emperor and the Sassanian's *Shahanshah*.

This analysis aimed to offer a double interpretation related to the "story" reported one century later, at least, in the early Islamic historical narratives.

Mu'tah and *Tabuk*, but also the relationship of Muhammad with the Negus of Axum and the commercial relations with the Levant, underscore a solid interconnection between *Hijaz*, Syria and Palestine since at least the peace treaty of 561 AD, which emphasized the importance of the protection of the trade activities in the south–north direction:

"It is agreed that Saracen and all other barbarian merchants of either state shall not travel by strange roads but shall go by Nisibis and Daras and shall not cross into foreign territory without official permission. But if they dare anything contrary to the agreement (that is to say, if they engage in tax-dodging, so-called), they shall be hunted down by the officers of the frontier and handed over for punishment together with the merchandise which they are carrying, whether Assyrian or Roman." (Blockey 1985, p. 73).

This gave the Ghassanid and Lakhmid confederations of the North and the Arab merchants of *Hijaz* enormous power to lead caravans along a safe trade route. If *Mu'tah* happened, it clearly was outside the "recognized" and permitted route and it was perceived as a pillage raid, even if those that Muhammad had placed as the leading authorities of the mission, namely, Zayd ibn Haritha, Jaʿfar ibn Abi Talib andʿAbd ʿAllah ibn Rawaha, were "Believers" who had specific knowledge of the Ghassanid confederation and good relationships with them.

In parallel, the missions of *Tabuk* and *Dumat ibn Jandal* suggest, as narrated in the *Sira*, the Prophet was interested in expanding relations with the Christian Saracen clans that ruled those areas, the Banu Kalb in particular.

A second, but not antithetical, reading of the same narrative suggests that, even if the Qur'an and Muhammad do not hint at any conquest of the North, such a conquest would not have been possible without greater use of armed forces and the expansion of the alliances with other confederations. This is a possibility that will come only after the end of the *Ridda;* the religious interpretation of this term, which already identified the *Ridda* as a form of apostasy, should be reconsidered in preference for the more secular interpretation of "abandonment, withdrawal from a previous agreement". The Islamic narrative on it emphasized the existence of the rise of new Prophetic figures, male and female, that would like to assume a parithetic stance to Muhammad, with them being recognized equal to him.

However, the *Ridda* is the expression of the recognized independence that every Arab clan would like to preserve far from a centralized attempt of control made by Medina and Mecca after the Prophet's political victory in the Hijaz (Eickelman 1967, pp. 2–52; Shoufani 1973, p. 85ff.; Landau-Tasseron 2004, pp. 45–91; Landau-Tasseron 2005, pp. 141–73).

Therefore, it is plausible that the subjugation of the elements of the Saracen confederations of the Najd that were still nomadic was the paradigmatic factor that allowed for the new rulers of the early "Believers'" community to undertake an expansionist projection in the northern direction (Donner 1998, pp. 89–90).

Nevertheless, the concrete religiosity of the same "bunch" is very hard to identify and their complexity and plurality lead to the suggestion that even their religious affiliation was complex and plural too (Donner 2010; Sizgorich 2009, p. 231ff.).

4. The Kalbite and the Umayyad, the Necessary "Religious" Transition into the Future

The Kalbite clan is believed to have played a prominent role in establishing and preserving the Umayyad empire, the first Arab empire in History. The Kalb was an Arab Christian clan, probably monophysite, and part of the Ghassanid confederation and geographically situated in the north of the Arabia Peninsula, the Palmyrene steppe, the Hawran region and the Golan Heights.

Al-Tabari, in his *Ta'rikh*, argues that when Khalid ibn al-Walid signed a final alliance with Dumat al-Jandal in 633, he found Arab Christian people of the Bahra', Kalb, Ghassan (as generally understood) and even Tanukh clans; in other words, it is clear that at that time, the central northern Arabian area was a predominantly Arab Christian territory (Tabari 1993, vol. 11, pp. 57–59; Al-Baladhuri 1916, pp. 95–97).

However, Hisham ibn al-Kalbi, the most important narrator and a member of the clan himself in the early Islamic era, is one of the main sources who can give us information on the role played by this Christian clan in the 6th and early 7th centuries (Caskel 1966).

After the Meccans had realized that they lacked the necessary funds to complete building the Ka'ba, the Quraysh called a tribal leader of the Banu Kalb, Ubayy ibn Salim al-Kalbi, for financial support to end its building. As reported by King, the existence of paintings in the Ka'ba that seemed to portray ʿIsa ibn Maryam and his mother confirmed a kind of Arab Christian role in building this monotheistic religious temple (King 2004, pp. 219–29).

As stated by al-Jawwas ibn al-Qa'tal and reported in the *Jamhara* of Hisham ibn al-Kalbi: "the right side of the House which you cover with curtains belongs to us—an inheritance left by Ubayy ibn Salim al-Kalbi" (Ibn Qutayba 1981, p. 561).

However, it is difficult to identify if this *akhbar* was based on concrete evidence or on the author's attempt to give prestige to the clan he belonged to, which, as we will shortly see, had been accused of not properly being part of the early "Believers'" community.

The Banu Kalb, who were the main political authorities in the oasis of Dumat al-Jandal, would have continued to be closely linked with the Meccans in the pre-Islamic age and the following early Islamic period, in particular considering their alliance with the Umayyads.

In other words, thanks to the genealogical reconstruction of Ibn al-Kalbi, which certainly stressed the importance of the clan he belonged to, it could be identified as one of those who, already Christianized, was not unaware of the events that were taking place in the Hijaz, as well as already being linked with the Banu Umayya before Muʿawiya ibn Abu Sufyan strengthened their reciprocal relationship when he became the governor of Syria (Shahid 1995, p. 948; Donner 2010, pp. 184–85; Hitti 1951, pp. 431, 452, 581).

Another *akhbar* related to the Banu Kalb had as its protagonist Dihya ibn Khalifa al-Kalbi, who is recognized by Islamic traditions (Bukhari 1908, n. 503, n. 827, but not by other sources, as we have already seen) as the "believer" who, before the prophet's death, took a message to Emperor Heraclius. It is interesting to underline how Islamic "stories" are usually the expression of truth-like *topoi* in which an Arab Christian member but also Muhammad's companion played the role of a mediator carrying a message, which is only reported by Islamic sources, but that is also symptomatic of a transfer of power from the previous Emperor to the new future ruler.

This narrative assumed a "prophetic" *visio*, *post-eventum*, that played a significant goal in the imaginative construction of a religious identity.

It is historically and geographically exemplary that during the early campaigns in 634 until the battles of Yarmuk and Qadisiyya (636), the "Believers" had to cross areas that were predominantly controlled by Arab Christian clans and that this was achieved without any kind of conflict; at the same time, Arab Christian actors were mentioned on the "Believers'" side during the Syrian and Iraqi campaigns; however, as reported by Donner, it is probable that the Arab Christian participation in the Syrian and Iraqi campaigns was on both sides (Donner 1981, pp. 148, 186–89).

The Islamic narrative on Jabala ibn al-Ayham[7] is quite confusing concerning his real affiliation: Ibnʿ Asakir, Tabari and Baladhuri, probably using Azdi al-Basri, argued that the chief of the Ghassan started the battle on the side of the Romans, but afterward, we find him on the side of the *Ansar*: "you are our brethren and the sons of our fathers", it is reported that he had affirmed. Contrariwise, Hisham ibn al-Kalbi argued that the Ghassan chief allied with the "Believers" but after the battle of Yarmuk decided to follow the Byzantine in Cappadocia (Caskel 1966, vol. 1, p. 193, vol. 2, p. 248).

In considering the case of Jabala and the battle of Yarmuk, it could also be possible that the Ghassan chief started on the side of the Romans when the huge Byzantine army was directed toward Damascus and then Jabiyah, but afterward, aware of the clan's relationship with different *Ansar*, changed coalitions (Azdi 1970, pp. 219, 234; Ibn ʿAsakir 1951, vol. 1, pp. 163, 174; Baladhuri 1916, vol. 1, pp. 208–9; Tabari 1993, vol. 11, pp. 58–59, 87–122).

Ibn ʿAsakir, in his *Ta'rikh Madinat Dimashq*, clearly affirmed how Hisham ibn al-Kalbi also argued that the Arab Christians of the Ghassanid confederation, who did not follow the Byzantine forces outside Syria, rapidly converted to Islam and took part in the battle of Siffin (657) and Marj Rahit (684) during the first and second *Fitna*, becoming jurists, poets, generals and governors (Ibn ʿAsakir 1951, pp. 554–55).

However, this narrative emerged following a concrete Islamic political predominance in the early 'Abbasid age, more than one century later, when the framing of a religious identity became particularly important for reinforcing a more unitary understanding of the proto-Islamic one (Donner 1998; Shoshan 2016; Hoyland 2015). According to this understanding, the Christian identity of those Arab clans that for centuries before Muhammad had embraced this religion tended to disappear very quickly in the early Islamic sources, together with their previous religious identities; however, archaeological roots in recent times have confirmed the outliving of the Arab Christian identity well beyond the beginning of the "Believers'" rule (Guidetti 2017; Langfledt 1994, pp. 32–60; Bashear 1991, pp. 267–82). Our specific attention on the bellicose side, as well as on the influence concerning the early canonization of *Jihad*, remained not only related to the sacralization of war in the Arab Christian *milieu* under the Byzantines, which was analyzed above, but also the possible cognitive steps that put the same Arab Christian clans in direct relation with the new holders of power in the proto-Islamic age.

The role played by the Banu Kalb is particularly relevant in my point of view.

The famous Hassan ibn Malik ibn Bahdal al-Kalbi (d. ca. 688–89) became the most important ally of the Umayyad during the historical period of the *Fitnas*. However, with the increasing anarchic situation in Syria and Palestine, due to the internal fragmentation of the first "Believers"' community, and with the Byzantines on the other side of the Anatolian border, it is difficult to think that many Christian Arabs converted to such an unrepresentative new religion, as well as one that was not so different from Christianity (Levtzion 1990, pp. 229–331).

The importance of considering the Banu Umayya's matrimonial policy after they joined the "Believers"' community is important for understanding their future political strategy. The Umayyad, as is well known, recognized the figure of Muhammad very shortly before the Prophet entered Mecca 630), with ʿUthman ibn ʿAffan and a few more being exceptions.

The third *Khalifa al-Rashidun* had married two daughters of the Prophet: Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum, but both died before the Prophet, in 624 and 630, respectively. After Muhammad's death,ʿUthman's matrimonial policy led to implementing the relationship within the Quraysh confederation and the Arab Christian clans of the north, in particular, Banu Jadila and Banu Kalb (see Appendix A).

This policy was to be implemented by Muʿawiya (d. 680) and Yazid I (d. 683).

Muʿawiya (d. 680) married Maysum bint Bahdal, the daughter of Bahdal ibn Unayf ibn al-Kalbi, the chief of the Banu Kalb in Syria and Palestine, whose members played a significant military role in the Umayyad army, passing from the Sufyanid to the Marwanid phase and making a prominent contribution during the entire second *Fitna* and afterward.

A grandson of Bahdal ibn Unayf ibn al-Kalbi and nephew of Maysum, Hassan ibn Malik (d. 688/89) became the Umayyad governor of Palestine and Jordan during the rule of Muʿawiya and Yazid, remaining an eminent member of the court afterward (Tabari 1987, vol. 18, p. 215).

The information on Yazid ibn Muʿawiya (d. 683) is too fragmentary to portray a clear continuity. Nevertheless, as reported, the first-born of the Caliph grew up in the Kalbite clan and the Umayyad one, marrying a Kalbite woman at first, the mother of his son Muʿawiya II (Lammens 1910, pp. 233–312; Borrut and Donner 2016, pp. 42, 100–1, 109, 113; Perveen and Shah 2017, pp. 5–9).

The outbreak of the second *Fitna* showed the greater difficulties in keeping the Umayyad–Kalbite alliance.

With the death of Yazid I (683) and Muʿawiya II (684) and in the absence of a Sufyanid candidate, many clans of north Arabia, such as the Qays, started to support Ibn al-Zubayr as *amir al-mu'minin* and whose forces occupied Egypt, imposing a local Zubayrid governor (684).

The worsening situation made the Quda'a branch of the Kalbite confederation elect another non-Kalbite son of Yazid I, Khalid ibn Yazid, as *amir al-mu'minin*, but his young age, the Zubayrid's increasing support in Syria and the al-Mukhtar millenarian rebellion in Iraq emphasized the search for a valid candidate outside the Sufyanid branch.

As reported by different sources, in 683, the tribes of Quda'a, Kinda and Ghassan held a *shura* (*male chief assembly to make important decisions*) in Jabiyah and, after intense discussion, the alliance with Marwan ibn al-Hakam was proclaimed by Hassan ibn Malik ibn Bahdal, the chief of the Kalbites (Tabari 1989, vol. 20, p. 56ff; Al-Baladhuri 1959, vol. 5, p. 128ff; Yaʿqubi 1960, vol. 2, p. 304ff.).

At the same time, the armies that took part in the second *Fitna* and fought the battles of Harrah (683) and Marj Rahit (684) were mostly made up of Arab Christian clans, in particular on the Umayyad side, but also with some exceptions on the pro-Zubayrid forces: Crone reports that the Judham of Palestine did not accept submitting to a son of a Kalbite woman, as Yazid I was (Crone 1994, p. 44ff.)

At the battle of Marj Rahit (684), Kalbite, Ghassan and Tanukhid forces were mostly present and, in the following years, some of the most important generals of Marwan ibn al-Hakam (d. 685) and ʻAbd al-Malik (d. 705) were Humayd ibn Hurayth ibn Bahdal al-Kalbi (d. 693) and Sufyan ibn al-ʼAbrad al-Kalbi (d. 701), who secured Iraq for the Umayyad dominion against their enemies (Tabari 1989, vol. 20, pp. 52, 56–71; Tabari 1990, vol. 21, pp. 156–57; Baladhuri 1959, vol. 5, pp. 159–60).

The perception of the Kalbites' role in this historical phase left very few traces; moreover, in the Islamic sources, a "weak" tradition in the *Kitab al-Sunan* of al-Sijistani (1950–1951), probably fabricated in a Zubayrid or early ʻAbbasid environment,[8] highlights how the Banu Kalb were considered not only as unbelievers and part of an anti-Believers' coalition led by the Umayyads but also involved against the messianic-apocalyptic figure of the *Mahdi*, who would have finally imposed the Prophet's message.

It is very hard to identify the historical passages to which this *hadith* refers, with different hypotheses having been made (Attema 1942, p. 25ff.; Madelung 1981, pp. 291–305; Shaddel 2017, pp. 1–19; Donner 2010, p. 189; Demichelis 2021, pp. 70–73); it is possible that the tradition described below is a *collage* that reflects two different historical phases: a Zubayrid one and an early ʻAbbasid anti-Umayyad *milieu*.

However, the most relevant aspect for our study is that those who elaborated it probably considered the Kalb not only as unbelievers or part of an anti-Islamic coalition led by the Banu Umayya-Quraysh but also as being involved against the Messianic figure that will finally impose the Prophet's *Sunna.*

ثُمَّ يَنْشَأُ رَجُلٌ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ أَخْوَالُهُ كَلْبٌ فَيَبْعَثُ إِلَيْهِمْ بَعْثًا فَيَظْهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَذَلِكَ بَعْثُ كَلْبٍ

"Then there will arise a man of Quraysh whose maternal uncles belong to Kalb and send against them an expeditionary force which will be overcome by them, and that is the military expedition of Kalb."

The different levels of "narratives" here are interesting because they not only confirm the strong connection between Umayyad and Kalb but also highlight their anti-"Believers'" nature (without saying whether they were still Christians), and their enmity toward Mecca and Medina, which was sufficient to fight the *Mahdi* in an already apocalyptic *scenario*.

It is understandable that the reaction in stressing the Messianic intervention in identifying the true "Believers" from the false ones was linked to belonging to specific clans as historical *Believer* figures rather than to others. The depiction of Yazid I as not morally suitable to be an *ʼamir al-Muʼminin* is in continuity with the accusation attributed to ʿUthman ibn ʿAffan before his assassination.

ʿAbd al-Malik's attempt to shape a more "identitarian" version of religiosity after the end of the second *Fitna* (692) is emblematically related to a new imperial policy that aimed to limit the ongoing fragmentation. ʿAbd al-Malik's reforms at the end of the second *Fitna* stressed the central fact that whatever identity Islam had had before this paradigmatic event, the absence of great sophistication did not allow for such a clear distinction in an Abrahamic *milieu*, while it was not until ʿAbd al-Malik's caliphate that early differences were shown, in particular concerning the understanding of the Christian identification of Jesus (Brockopp 2017, p. 31ff.).

It is difficult to argue that the Banu Kalb influenced the process of canonization of *Jihad* in the early Islamic century, just as it is hard to say when the Arab Christian elements of the Umayyad army definitively converted to the new religion of Islam; in relation to this assumption, it is plausible that this process started after the end of the second *fitna*, when the security of Syria and Iraq was guaranteed by the element of the other main "Believers". The historical complexity of the second half of the 7th century gives us the impression that "narratives" and *khabar* overrode historical evidence and that the problem of Muhammad's succession affected the relationships between the different actors at least until the end of the Umayyad empire (747–750).

In parallel, the attitudes toward warfare and the Umayyad army were far from related to a professionalization of the army, which took place in the ʿAbbasid era; on the contrary, as reported by H. Kennedy, the second *fitna* was won by the Marwanid thanks to the Yemenite element[9] of the Syrian army, a component that was gradually weakened in the first half of the 8th century.

Therefore, it is evident that the refinement of a pietistic element in the early framing of a religious conceptualization of *Jihad* emerged in a geographical *milieu* in which different factors played a specific role.

5. Conclusions. Holy and Just War in Late Antiquity: The Factors That Framed the *Milieu*

The main aim of this article was to underscore the impact of the Arab/Saracen Christian clans in the land that was to be conquered by the central Arab confederation after Muhammad's death. The Christianization and Romanization of the Ghassanid confederation started in the 4th and 5th century and reached a climax in the 6th century with the Jafnids who, as shown, were the most prone to remaining "Arabs", but also in assimilating Byzantine and Christian facets in a syncretic view. Their Christian monophysite inclination, which made them, on the one hand, increasingly independent from Constantinople, on the other hand, increased their missionary spirit, which certainly had an impact in favoring the construction of churches, monasteries and nunneries, as well as fostered their warlike attitude as Christians.

If the Jafnids had already disappeared or were certainly no longer in power after Muhammad's death, the Christian Banu Kalb, who were part of the Ghassanid confederation, played an increasing role from when Muʿawiya ibn Abu Sufyan (d. 680) became the Governor of Syria.

Muʿawiya's enthronement in Jerusalem showed that many Arabs gathered in the Holy City to make Him "king", *malik*, defining him the "King of the Arabs" (*Chronicum Maroniticum* 1904, pp. 37–57):

"Many Arabs gathered at Jerusalem and made Muʿawiya king and he went up and sat down on Golgotha and prayed there. He went to Gethsemane and went down to the tomb of the blessed Mary and prayed in it. In those days when the Arabs were gathered there with Muʿawiya, there was an earthquake; much of Jericho fell, as well as many nearby churches and monasteries.'—'In July of the same year the emirs and many Arabs gathered and gave their allegiance to Muʿawiya. Then an order went out that he should be proclaimed king in all the villages and cities of his dominion and that they should make acclamation and invocations to him. He also minted gold and silver, but it was not accepted because it had no cross on it."

This was a behavioral attitude that clearly emphasized the respect and attention that was held toward the local Christian identity by the new power's holders, a position that continued to be adopted, at least until the end of the second *Fitna*.

In parallel, more recently discovered graffito, close to *Qasr Burqu'* (in Jordan) attested:

† *dkr ʾl-ʾlh* (first line), *yzydw ʾl-mlk* (second line)

This seems to suggest that there were Saracen Christians working in a desert castle that attested a *bay'ah* to Yazid ibn Muʿawiya (d. 683) (al-Shdaifat et al. 2017, pp. 315–24) and which confirmed an *adagio* that was already reported by different academics that highlighted the presence of Arab Christians in the proto-Islamic armies, in particular during the Umayyad age (Athamina 1998, pp. 347–78; Al-Qadi 2016, pp. 83–127; Kaegi 1992, pp. 52–54, 62, 100, 121, 144, 173–75; Sizgorich 2009, p. 231ff.).

The two most outspoken early *hadith* scholars/jurists who supported the broadest inclusion and remuneration of non-Muslims in the Islamic armies either came from Syria (al-Awzaʿi, d. 774) or lived in Syria (al-Zuhri, d. 741), which would have remained a frontier province via both land and sea (Al-Qadi 2016, p. 122).

The military *milieu*, moreover, cannot be considered without a more precise description of the religious one, which, in Late Antiquity, had already produced a significant conceptualization of just war, as the Jafnids had already affirmed above.

If in Antiquity as in Late Antiquity, war is holy because:

- It is the execution of a precise divine mandate;
- The enemy is without God, they are unbelievers, or unable to recognize the true One;
- The victory will be certainly reached by those who believe in the true God because "God is with us";
- The enemy needs to be exterminated or forcefully converted;
- A holy war, finally, is usually the expression of a messianic-apocalyptic *visio* and message between evil and good (Stouraitis 2018, pp. 59–70; 2019, pp. 89–106).

However, the above synthesis is only partially rooted in the first canonization of *Jihad* or the Saracen Christians' concrete understanding of it; in contrast, the above description seems more prone to be part of the Roman imperial absoluteness of Christian war justification than to the religious testimony of the martyrs.

If the geographical *milieu* is based on a monotheistic understanding of God's superiority over polytheism or religious otherness, the pietistic faith in preserving the martyr and suffering memory, as well as the monastic-ascetic attention toward praying and fasting, are aspects that reject the abuse of violence (Sizgorich 2009, pp. 146ff.).

It is for this reason that in reporting narratives and information about the Arab Christian raids against the Nasride enemy as the "Believers" against the Meccan polytheists, we have a limited impact of "civilian" injuries and victims, as well as the same narrative in preserving holy places.

The *Jihad*, as first considered in Islam in the 8th century, became a personal attitude which with the help of the Prophet's companions (martyrs) intended to re-establish the faith lost by the prompt fragmentation of the "Believers'" community after 632; it was a private spiritual way (Ibn al-Mubarak 1978) to reach a religious Islamic consciousness.

However, at the end of the same century, for political and military reasons, *Jihad* also assumed a more juridical aspect (Ibn Anas 1997; Fazari 1987; Shaybani 1966), namely, to establish laws that could lead the ʿAbbasid armies in war. It was a juridical spectrum that, with the Khuranization and Turkization of the army in the 9th century, limited the previous spiritual afflatus.

The early information about the figure of the *mujahid* in an early Islamic landscape is reported by Michael the Syrian in his *Chronicle* and Bar Hebraeus in his *Chronicum Ecclesiasticum* (very late sources), as well as in Ibn Qutayba, and it refers to the presence of *mutatawwiʿun* (volunteers) in the last attempt to conquer Constantinople by Umayyad forces in 715–717 (Michael the Syrian 1901, vol. 2, pp. 484–85; Bar Hebraeus's Chronography 1932, p. 10; Ibn Qutayba 1925–1930, vol. 1, p. 25).

At the end of the same century, Ibn al-Mubarak stressed attention on the individual *mujahid* who refused the comforts of life to reside on the border of the Islamic empire in a *Ribat*.

If this early interpretation of *Jihad* was rapidly dismantled and forgotten with the professionalization of the ʿAbbasid army in the 9th century, the first qualities of the *mujahid/mutatawwiʿa* initially framed the *Jihad* as a testimony rooted in voluntary *Imitatio* martyrs/saints toward an *Imitatio Muhammadi* that was not based in obtaining glory and prestige per se but in following an ascetic attitude for the glory of God.

If the early *Jihad* elaboration is evidently linked to reasons that affected the "Believers'" community from the end of the Prophetic phase (632), the cognitive transfer and preliminary historical framework were probably based on the early Jafnids' and Kalbite interpretation of war in the Saracen Christian *milieu.* This was already established in a geographical area of cenobitic and monastic experience that was certainly completed by the religious narratives of the Christian martyrs and saints killed in the last persecutions by Diocletian and Galerius at the beginning of the 4th century, but also of those of the Najran martyrs, as reported in the *Sira an-Nabawiyya*.

Accordingly, if the base framework of *Jihad* is probably Christian and rooted in the relationship built up by the Saracen *foederati* with the Byzantines during late antiquity (a model in which the raid for pillage is canonized in a Christian religious structure), the pre-Islamic internal conflicts due to the political reasons of Muhammad's succession drove the violence among the Believers, the Kharijites' violence and the murder of the most important of the Prophet's companions. As a consequence, *Jihad* and *Zuhd* would then indeed assume a purifying attitude in defending the empire's borders, which became the most important way to show faith in God and the prophetic figure of Muhammad (Heck 2004, pp. 95–128). These borders identified an increasing Islamic consciousness but also denoted the end of the campaigns of the conquests that were clearly less Islamic than is usually considered.

There is not an evident connection between the proto-Islamic conquests and this specific and early kind of *Jihad*; however, four centuries later, the Islamic reaction to the Christian crusades (11th–12th centuries) clearly emphasized a way back to a different and updated concept of *Jihad*, not only as war legislation but as a defensive moral attitude against an enemy invasion.

A similar attitude that would return even later during the European colonialist age (18th–20th centuries) when local authorities closely linked to Islamic Sufi confraternities remained the unique barrage against Western assimilation and Orientalist policies.

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Appendix A

Jafnids (Ghassanid Confederation), sixth century

1. Jabalah ibn al-Ḥarith (d. 528)
2. Al-Ḥarith V ibn Jabalah (d. 569, *phylarch Phoenice, Syrian and Euphratensis*) (brother) Abu Karib ibn Jabalah (*phylarch, Palestina Tertia, Arabia Deserta*)
3. Al-Mundhir III ibn al-Ḥarith, (d. *c.* 602, reign until 581, in exile in Sicily from 581)
4. Al-Nuʿman VI ibn al-Mundhir (reign 581–583, d. unknown, in exile in Sicily too)

Nasrids (Lakhmids Confederation), sixth century

1. Abu Ya'fur ibn ʿAlqama (d. unknown, not mentioned in the book)
2. Al-Mundhir III ibn Nuʿman (d. 554) during the battle of Chalcis
3. ʿAmr III ibn al-Mundhir (d. *c.* 569–570) (brother) Qabus ibn al-Mundhir (reign from *c.* 569–570 to 573) (brother) Al-Mundhir IV ibn al-Mundhit (reign 574–580)
4. Al-Nuʿmān III ibn al-Mundhir (d. 602, converted to Christianity ca. 594)
5. Hasan ibn al-Mundhir (d. unknown) (brother) al-Nuʿman IV ibn al-Mundhir (d. unknown) both converted to Christianity (ca. 594)

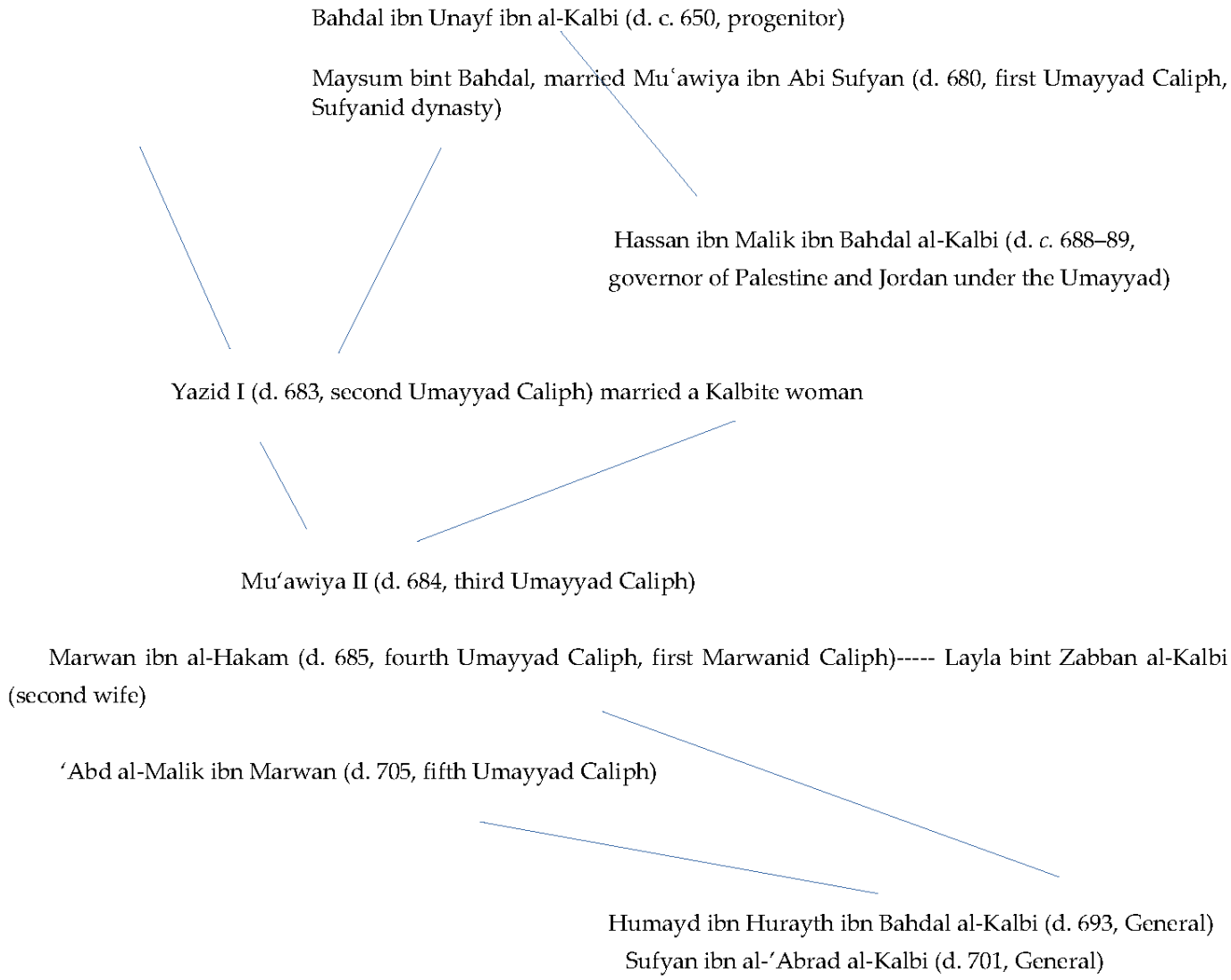

Figure A1. Umayyad-Kalbite (seventh century).

Notes

1 In the last few decades, the publications of the comparative history of the modern Mediterranean world and the transnational studies of the Islamic tradition as the Muslim history in a global dimension have implemented their presence in the academic scenario; e.g., (A. Kuru 2019).

2 Until today, the archaeological evidence has been unable to discover a complete Islamic *shahada*, the Muslim profession of faith: "there is no deity except God, He alone, He has no partner, and that Muhammad is His Servant and His Messenger", clearly dated before the turn of the 7th century (Hoyland 1997).

3 It is important to underline how Johannes of Damascus (d. 749), still in the first half of the 8th century, in *Die Heresibus* considered Islam a Christian heresy due to the presence in the Qur'an of a different unorthodox understanding of Christianity, the Trinity and Christ.

4 The Jafnids and Nasrides were the two most important clans of the Ghassan and Lakhm Confederations in the 6th century. Both were composed of different clans and were playing a geographical (southern) and military-strategic role between the two eminent empires in Late Antiquity.

5 Even if probably released in 602 when Phocas took power after killing Maurice (*Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 2011, p. 55).

6 Kaegi (p. 72) argued using possible information referring to *Mu'tah* in George of Pisidia's *Hexaemeron*; nevertheless, it is very difficult to conclusively establish that this battle happened without considering Islamic sources that were elaborated more than one century afterward.

7 Caetani, in his *Annales*, reported many different traditions about Jabala ibn al-Ayham (vol. 3 t.1, pp. 527, 550–51, 562, 598, 792, 937), the role played by the Ghassanids and what happened in the Ghassanid's capital al-Jabiyah; however, the original sources are usually in contradiction and problematic to verify.

[8] "There will be a dispute following the death of a *Khalifah*, and a man from al-Madinah will go out, fleeing to Makkah. Some of the people of Makkah will come to him and will bring him out against his will, and they will pledge allegiance to him between the Corner (Black Stone) and the *Maqam*. An army will be sent against him from Ash- Sham, which will be swallowed up by the earth in Al-Baida', between Makkah and Al-Madinah. When the people see that, the devoted worshipers from Ash-Sham and the best people from Al-'Iraq will come to him and pledge allegiance to him. Then there will arise a man from the Quraish whose maternal uncles are from Kalb, who will send an army against him and he will prevail over them. That (defeated army) will be the force of Kalb. The real loser will be the one who is not present when the wealth of Kalb is divided. He (the Mahdi) will divide the wealth and rule the people in accordance with the *Sunna* of their Prophet. Islam will become established on earth and he will remain for seven years, then he will die, and the Muslims will offer the funeral prayer for *him*." (Kitab al-Sunan 1950–1951, n. 4286).

[9] It is important to clarify here that "Yemenite" was the name given to those clans that were already settled in the north of the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, Jazira, Palestine and Syria before the "Believers'" conquests or as part of their army consisting of the Kalb, part of Kinda, Ghassan, Lakhm and Judham (the majority of them Christians); the "Yemenite" were different from the Qaysite element who, in contrast, had emigrated to the north when Mu'awiya was already the governor of Syria, and thus, later. (Kennedy 2001, tr. 2010, p. 76).

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