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JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAM FROM MUHAMMAD TO THE FALL OF THE UMAYYAD CALIPHATE

The period from the reign of the Christian Emperor Heraclius (610-641 C.E.) to the rise of Islam is a unique and largely neglected historical era that witnessed rapidly changing interactions between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Many Jews believed this time of declining Christian dominance and the ministry of Muhammad (ca. 610-632 C.E.) marked a new age of history. During the seventh century C.E., Jewish communities combined apocalyptic beliefs with mysticism to explain Islamic rule. Most of these apocalypses contain visions attributed to Jewish mystics that view the Arab conquest as one of the signs of the end of days. They show that the Jewish community of Palestine used a variety of mystical traditions, apocalyptic calculations, and messianic beliefs to explain this turbulent period when Christian rule in the country collapsed. Christians likewise used similar traditions to account for the appearance and dominance of Islam throughout the Middle East. This paper examines a few Jewish and Christian texts that document this historical period, which are among the oldest literary witnesses to Muhammad and the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 C.E.). They are not only interesting for the light they shed on ancient Jewish views of Islam, but they also document a unique form of Judeo-messianism as well as Judaism's early relationship with the Muslim community in Palestine.

I. Early Islamic History: The Problem of the Sources

The Qur'an is the Scriptural text of the Islamic faith. Unlike the Hebrew Scriptures, it is a book largely without any historical context. It is of little use for reconstructing Muhammad's life (ca. 570-632 C.E.);

it does not narrative events but merely refers to them.[1] The audience of the Qur'an is presumed to know the missing details and the major events of Muhammad's life. The same is true of the text's frequent allusions to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures; the reader is expected to recognize biblical citations by a few words or brief extracts.[2] The great amount of biblical material in the Qur'an suggests that Islam emerged from a sectarian atmosphere in which these stories were well-known. But what is not widely recognized is that several post-rabbinic Jewish apocalyptic writings offer a different understanding of Islam's beginning than the traditional accounts.

The historical accounts of Muhammad's life largely derive from the stories collected in the books of the Hadith (reports of Muhammad's teachings) and the much later Biographies of the Prophet (*Sirat Rasul Allah*). The standard account of Muhammad's career is based on the *Sirat Rasul Allah* of Ibn Ishaq (d. 767 C.E.). However, we only have an abbreviated version of this book produced by Ibn Hisham (d. 834 C.E.), who informs the reader that "…things which it is disgraceful to discuss; matters which would distress certain people…all these things I have omitted."[3] Unfortunately, most of our early Islamic historical sources went through a similar redactional process that, with few exceptions, occurred after the ninth century C.E.[4]

Scholarship has demonstrated that the "occasions of revelation" (*asbab al-nuzul*), which document Muhammad's deeds, are largely salvation history. They were produced to account for and explain Islam's often obscure foundational text and the life of its prophet.[5] Because recent historical and textual research suggests that the text of the Qur'an was finalized much later than the presumed version purportedly produced by the third Caliph Uthman (ca. 656 C.E.), scholars need earlier materials to reconstruct the careers of Muhammad and the early Caliphs.[6]

[1] M. Cook, *Muhammad*, New York 1983, pp. 69-70; F. E. Peters, *The Quest of the Historical Muhammad* "International Journal of Middle East Studies" 23 (1991), pp. 291-315.

[2] A. Rippin, *Literary Analysis of Qur'an, Tafsir, and Sira: The Methodologies of John Wansborough*, [in:], R. C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* Tucson 1985, pp. 151-63.

[3] A. Guillaume, Translator, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasûl Allăh,* Oxford 1955, p. 691.

[4] R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam,* Princeton 1997, pp. 32-49.

[5] A. Rippin, *The Function of Asbab al-Nuzul in Koranic Exegesis*, "Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies" 51 (1988), pp. 1-20.

[6] See the debates over the date of the Qur'an discussed in Jane D. McAuliffe (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān,* Cambridge 2006, esp. pp. 23-75; A. Rippin (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, Malden, MA 2009, esp. pp. 140-220.

A largely neglected body of texts attributed to the Jewish sage Rabbi Šimʿōn ben Yoḥai likely contain some of the oldest extant accounts of Muhammad and the early Caliphs, and document Jewish messianic and apocalyptic perceptions of Islam.

II. Rabbi Šimʿōn Ben Yoḥai and Jewish Apocalyptic Visions of Islamic History

Rabbi Šimʿōn Ben Yoḥai was a prominent religious figure during the Second Jewish Revolt (132-35 C.E.) who was famous for his rejection of Roman rule and culture.[7] Several apocalyptic texts attributed to him feature predictions about the last days. Two works in particular, *The Secrets of R. Šimʿōn ben Yoḥai* (=*Secrets*) and *The Prayer of R. Šimʿōn ben Yoḥai* (=*Prayer*), contain revelations attributed to Šimʿōn that document Islamic history.[8] Heinrich Graetz recognized the historical importance of the *Secrets* when he demonstrated that it describes the end of the Umayyad Caliphate.[9] This text has a long transmission history that is not yet fully understood. It was later expanded in the *Prayer.* Another version of the *Secrets* is found in the *Midrash of the Ten Kings*, which contains additional material that may have emanated from an earlier lost work.[10] This section focuses on the *Secrets* and the *Prayer*. The second of the two works is particularly important because it includes some unique material that possibly emanated from an earlier lost *Apocalypse of Šimʿōn Ben Yoḥai*.[11]

To understand the portrayal of early Islam in the *Prayer,* it is important first to examine a passage in the earlier *Secrets* that contains a messianic interpretation of the Arab Conquest. This section briefly mentions an Ishmaelite prophet. It begins with a description of two empires: the Arabs (=Kenites, Ishmaelites) and the Byzantines (=Edom).[12] The writ-

[7] Boyarin calls him the most radical Tannaitic rejecter of Rome, its culture, its legitimacy, and its values. See D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Stanford, 1999, p. 64.

[8] Texts, A. Jellinek (ed.), *Bet ha-Midrasch: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der jüdischen Literatur,* Leipzig 1855 & 1857, vol. 3, pp. xix, 78-82 (*Secrets*); vol. 4, pp. 117-26 (*Prayer*).

[9] H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart,* 3rd ed., Leipzig 1871, vol. 5, pp. 441-9.

[10] Text, C. M. Horvitz, ed. *Bēt 'eqed ha-aggadōt*, Frankfort 1881, vol. 1, pp. 16-33.

[11] J. Even-Shmuel, *Midreshē ge'ullā*, rev. ed., Jerusalem 1954, pp. 167-9, 175-77.

[12] For these identifications, see P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the*

er expects the Arabs to play a role in the messianic era by eliminating the Byzantines and restoring the land to its former owners.

> He began to sit and explain "and he beheld the Kenite" (Num 24:21). When he saw that the kingdom of Ishmael was coming, he began to say, "Is it not sufficient, what the wicked kingdom of Edom did to us, but must we also have the kingdom of Ishmael?" Then Metatron the Prince of the Presence, answered and said, "Do not fear, Son of Man, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, only brings the kingdom of Ishmael in order to save you from this wickedness (i.e. Edom). He will raise up over them a prophet in accordance with His will, and he will conquer the land for them and they will come and restore it in grandeur, and there will be great strife between them and the sons of Esau. Rabbi Šimʿōn answered and said, "How do we know that they are our salvation?" He answered, "Did not the Prophet Isaiah say, "And he saw a troop with a pair of horsemen, one riding an ass, one riding a camel (Isa 21:7)." When did he put the rider of an ass before the rider of the camel?" He should have said "rider of a camel, rider of an ass?" But when he goes forth riding a camel the dominion will sprout through the rider on an ass.

The reference to Numbers 24:21 suggests that the original work contained a messianic interpretation of the Arab conquest of Palestine in which the Kenites subdue the oppressive Byzantines. The "rider" seems to be the prophet Muhammad, whose appearance is described in messianic terms. Isaiah 21:5-7 became a widely cited text as proof that the Hebrew Scriptures predicted Muhammad.[13] The author expects the Arabs to play a role in the messianic period by eliminating the Byzantines and restoring the land to Israel. The use of the Isaiah passage compares the Arabs' mission with that of the Messiah: the Arabs are not merely his forerunners, but the liberators prophesied by Isaiah.[14]

For the author of the *Secrets*, the arrival of Muhammad and the Ishmaelites is the culmination of the messianic drama that terminated Byzantine rule in Palestine. The placement of this section at the beginning of the *Secrets* is problematic since its messianic interpretation of Muhammad's prophetic ministry makes better sense at the end of an apocalypse. This suggests that the author has excerpted it from an earlier work. The original document was supplemented with an interpretation of the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty under Marwān II (744-50 C.E.), who is named in the text.[15]

The writer of the *Secrets* was not the only Jewish author to espouse a favorable view of the end of Byzantine rule and the Arab Conquest. The apocalyptic prophecy known as *On That Day* describes the messianic hopes of its writer following the last war between the Byzantine and the Persian Empires. He believes the Arab Conquest of Palestine signals the imminent coming of the Messiah.[16] The messianic content of the *Midrash of the Ten Kings* is also similar to the *Secrets* and the *Prayer*, but its historical content is sometimes different and less specific. The *Ten Kings* includes a quotation from Isaiah 21:13, but mentions that the Arab prophet will harm Israel. This likely refers to Muhammad's Jewish opponents in Medina. The writer also says that "great men of Israel" will join Muhammad and that he will conquer Jerusalem. This passage is based on traditions that Jews were among Muhammad's prominent supporters.[17] Some of the unique content in the *Ten Kings* likely emanated from an earlier lost work that may be reflected in material incorporated into the *Prayer*.

The *Prayer* reflects a later period than the *Secrets* and is clearly negative towards Muhammad. Imagery likely taken from a much earlier text is inserted by the *Prayer's* author into a section that predicts the Crusader (=Kenite) capture of Jerusalem and the slaughter of its inhabitants.[18]

Islamic World, Cambridge, 1977, pp. 35-7; J. C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader,* Atlanta, GA 2005, p. 69.

[13] ʿAlî aṭ- Ṭabarî (9th century C.E.) and other subsequent Muslim writers adopted this interpretation, which was soundly refuted by a variety of Christian authors like the writer of the pesudepigraphal *Letter of Leo III to 'Umar II* (ca. 900). See further, G. E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation,* Chicago 1946, pp. 1-30; A. Jeffery, *Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence Between 'Umar II and Leo III*, "Harvard Theological Review" 37 (1944), pp. 269-332. See also the connection between Isaiah 21, Islam, and the messianic era in the *Prayer* and Maimonides's *Letter to Yemen***.**

[14] See further Hoyland, *Seeing*, pp. 308-12.

[15] He is also named in the *Ten Kings* and the *Prayer*.

[16] Text, Even-Shmuel, *Midreshē ge'ullā,* pp. 158-60; J. Yahalom, *'Al toqpān shel yetṣirōt sifrūt ke-maqōr le-vērur she'ēlōt histōriyōt*, *Cathedra* 11 (1979), pp. 125-33. See Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, pp., 5, 153 n. 16; Hoyland, *Seeing,* pp. 319-20; B. Lewis, *On That Day: A Jewish Apocalyptic Poem on the Arab Conquests*, [in:], Pierre Salmon (ed.), *Mélanges D'Islamologie,* Leiden 1974, pp. 198-200.

[17] Cairo Genizah MS. 2541v. Text, J. Leveen, *Mohammed and His Jewish Companions*, "Jewish Quarterly Review" 16 (1926), pp. 399-406. See also B. Lewis, *An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History*, "Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies" 2 (1950), pp. 323-24.

[18] In this text, unlike the *Secrets*, the Kenites in some sections represent an oppressor who precedes the advent of Islam (=Byzantines) and also their later incarnation as the Crusaders. See Crone and Cook, *Hagarism,* p. 35; Reeves, *Trajectories*, pp. 93 n. 91 & 96; Lewis, *Apocalyptic*, pp. 322-23.

The relevant passage reads:

> At that time the kingdom of the Kenites will come to Jerusalem, conquer it, and kill more than thirty thousand of its inhabitants. Because of their oppression of Israel, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will send the Ishmaelites against them, and they will make war with them in order to save Israel from their hands. Then a crazy man possessed by a spirit will arise and speak lies about the Holy One, Blessed be He, and he will conquer the land, and there will be enmity between them and the children of Esau.

The text continues with an interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah 21:7 that is similar to the *Secrets.* However, the prior favorable depiction of Muhammad is transformed into a negative description of him that is likely based on Hosea 9:7.[19] Even-Shmuel suggested that the original apocalypse viewed the rise and spread of Islam as preceding the time of redemption.[20] This messianic hope is preserved in the *Secrets*, but has been removed from the *Prayer* and the *Ten Kings* to express later disillusionment with Islam. Although the *Secrets* likely preserves a version closer to its source text, its favorable treatment of Muhammad is placed within a larger text that reflects on later Islamic and Christian history and denigrates Islam. It opens with an interpretation by Rabbi Šimʿōn of Numbers 24:21 to portray the kingdom of Ishmael as merely one of a succession of empires that mistreated and enslaved the Jews. Nevertheless, the *Secrets* preserves some valuable historical information pertaining to Jewish messianic beliefs when relations between Jews and Muslims were favorable.

III. Caliph Umar, the Umayyad Caliphs, and Judeo-Messianism

It should not be surprising that the *Secrets* contains several messianic interpretations of the Arab Conquest of Palestine. Prior to this event, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius entered Jerusalem in 630 C.E. with the relic of the True Cross and forcibly baptized Jews. His persecution lasted until the Arabs captured Tiberius (636 C.E.) and Jerusalem (637 C.E.). Jews appear to have welcomed the Arab invaders, whom they interpreted in light of Jewish prophecy as their deliverers.[21] But what appears to have encouraged such expectations were the religious beliefs of early Islam and Caliph Umar's building activity on the Temple Mount.

The *Secrets* and the *Prayer* associate Isaiah's asses with the messiah. Both texts state that the second Muslim king will befriend Israel, repair the Temple, and make war against the Byzantines. The *Secrets* expands this section to prophesy that he will build a place of prayer atop the "foundation stone" to fulfill Numbers 24:21. This is clearly an allusion to the second Caliph Umar (634-644 C.E.). He treated the Jews favorably and, according to the *Secrets,* erected something on the Temple Mount. Although the Dome of the Rock was not built until the reign of the fifth Caliph Abd al-Malik (685-705 C.E.), there was certainly an earlier structure there as documented by the Christian pilgrim Arculf (670's C.E.).[22] While Jerusalem is not named in the Qur'an, it was the seat of the Umayyad Caliphate, the first ruling dynasty in Islamic history. The city had a special importance for the Umayyad's since their kingdom included Syria, which was the first territory ruled by the Arabs after Muhammad's death. Early Islamic traditions and interpretations of Sura 50:41 view it as a praise of Jerusalem, which is also supported by a 785 C.E. inscription from the Negev. This shows the centrality of this city for the Umayyad Caliphs and the early Islamic community.[23]

Although little information about the Umayyad dynasty exists, traditions preserved by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Wasiti record that they did not build the Dome of the Rock as a place of prayer, but to protect the rock of the Temple (*bayt al-maqdis*) from the elements.[24]

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[19] See further, Lewis, *Apocalyptic*, p. 323; Reeves, *Trajectories*, p. 94 n. 97. See also T-S A45.3v 15-17. Text, S. Hopkins, *A Miscellany of Literary Pieces from the Cambridge Genizah Collections: A Catalogue and Selection of Texts in the Tayler-Schechter Collection, Old Series, Box A45*, Cambridge 1978, p. 7. For similar terms used to describe Muhammad, see Qur'an 15:6; 17:47; 34:8; 38:4; 68:51 cf. Qur'an, 10:5; 16:24; 21:5

[20] *Midreshē ge'ullā*, pp. 162-74.

[21] See further Hoyland, *Seeing*, p. 311; W. J. Van Bekkum, *Jewish Messianic Expectations in the Age of Heraclius*, [in:], Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (eds.), *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation,* Leuven 2002, pp. 95-112. There is no archaeological evidence of destruction or abandonment of villages in Palestine during the changeover from Byzantine to Arab rule. See H. Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests,* Philadelphia, PA 2007, pp. 66-97.

[22] For sources on the structures on the Temple Mount, see M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099,* Cambridge 1992, pp. 65-74; Hoyland, *Seeing*, pp. 64-5, 221-3

[23] M. Sharon, *The 'Praises of Jerusalem' as a Source for the Early History of Islam*, "Biblioheca Orientalis" 2 (1992), pp. 56-7.

[24] Text, Muhammad ibn Ahmad Wāsitï, *Faïḍā'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, Isaac Hasson (ed.), Jerusalem 1979, esp. nos. 136-45. Cornell writes that the cooperation between Muslims and Jews at this time was quite close, and that the rituals performed at the Dome of the rock on Mondays and Thursdays were perhaps modeled on ancient Temple rites. See V. J. Cornell, *Theologies of Difference and ideologies of Intolerance in Islam*, [in:], J. Neusner and B. Chilton (eds.), *Religious Tolerance in World Religions,* West Conshohocken, PA, 2007, p. 277.

The rituals he documents that took place there were conducted by Jewish families and included ablutions with perfumed ointments by men in special clothing on Mondays and Thursdays. Although these Jews undoubtedly did not consider their activities as taking place within the actual Temple, they likely viewed the Dome of the Rock as a symbol of the Temple, and the Arab conquest as the beginning of the period of redemption. The favoring of Judaism on the Temple Mount, the performance of rituals by Jews at the sacred rock, and the choice of passages that denounce Christian belief in the Trinity to adorn the Dome of the Rock—the earliest extant passages from the Qur'an—suggest that the early Muslims sought to associate themselves with Judaism. If later traditions concerning the Christian desecration of the foundation rock atop the Temple Mount are historical, this would further explain why the Jews favored the Muslims at this time.[25] It is also likely that the early career of Muhammad facilitated such early Jewish-Muslim cooperation and messianic expectations. However, the Syriac Christian community of the period had a more negative opinion about Islam.

IV. Syriac Christian Responses to the Beginning of Islam

From 409 to the 470's C.E., the Romans fought the Visigoths, Alans, Seves, Vandals, and other tribes for control of Europe. The Christian bishop Hydatius viewed their arrival as the fulfillment of the four plagues prophesized in the Book of Revelation.[26] He and Christians such as Augustine, Orosius, Prosper, and Jerome, used Scripture to explain the horrors these tribes inflicted on the West.[27] All used Jewish apocalyptic traditions, largely Daniel mediated through Revelation, to explain the appearance of these new powers and the 410 C.E. sack of Rome by Alaric and the Visigoths.[28] Christians even fabricated apocalyptic calculations at this time to make pagans look bad: a Greek oracle

[25] Islamic traditions record that Christians cut stone from the rock to build the Holy Sepulcher and prevented the Jews from protecting it. See further Suliman Bashear, *Qur'ān 2:114 and Jerusalem*, "Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies" 52 (1989), pp. 235-6.

[26] Hydatius, *Chronica minora Saec. IV.V.VI.VIII*, Theodor Mommsen, ed., Berlin: Weidmann, 1894, pp. 47-49, 207.

[27] See further, Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization,* Oxford 2005*,* pp. 13-31; Brian Croke, *Historiography*, [in:], *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity,* Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, ed., Oxford 2012*,* pp. 415-7.

[28] See, for example, Sulpicius Severus's (*Chronicle*, 2.3.2. in *Sulpice Sévère: chroniques* [Ghislaine de Senneville-Grave, ed., Paris 1999], p. 228) use of the statue in Daniel to explain Rome's inability to stop these tribal invasions.

purportedly had predicted Christianity would last for 365 years.[29] Although many believed the onslaught of hostile tribes was proof of Christianity's imminent demise, the genre apocalypse demonstrated otherwise. Like their earlier Jewish predecessors, Christians used apocalyptic traditions to explain their changed historical circumstances and the rise of new powers. They asserted that their present tribulations were proof that the periodization of history in Daniel's visions was true. When Islam appeared, Christian writers, like the Jewish community shifted the focus of their apocalyptic writings from documenting foreign tribal invasions to explain this new religious power.

Syriac Christian writers used apocalyptic language, especially the periodization and eschatologization of history, to explain Islam's dominance over the Byzantines in the Middle East. Examples include a text that lists natural disasters that occurred between 712 and 716 C.E. to show that the end of times was near.[30] A 775 C.E. document that enumerates the generations from Adam to the present records the legitimate transfer of authority from the Romans to the Arab Caliphs.[31] This and other writings accept the end of Byzantine rule and seek to explain the arrival of the Arabs.[32] Many, like the author of the 7th century C.E. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, used apocalyptic imagery to interpret the Arab conquest as the sign marking the beginning of the final days.[33] Its author concludes that Arab dominance is temporary. However, the writer predicts the present situation will worsen before God sends a Christian deliverer to punish the Arabs. Then an Antichrist will bring about another period of suffering before the Lord's coming.[34] The

[29] Augustine, *City of God.*, 19.53-54. Despite Augustine's assertion this was a pagan oracle, it was certainly invented by Christians. See, Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome,* Oxford 2011, pp. 126-31. See also, Wolfgang Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen altertum: ein Versuch ihrer Deutung,* Munich 1971, pp. 50-51.

[30] Text, F. Nau, *Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716 d'après le ms. du British Museum Add. 17193*, "Journal asiatique" 11 (1915), pp. 225-79.

[31] E. W. Brooks, et al., *Chronica Minora, III,* Paris 1905, pp. 348.

[32] A 724 C.E. list of Caliphs does not even mention the Byzantines and appears to accept Arab rule as inevitable. See E. W. Brooks, *Chronica Minora, II,* Paris 1904, p. 155.

[33] Harald Suermann, *Die Geschichts theologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslime in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts,* Frankfort 1985, pp. 34-85.

[34] See, G. J. Reinink, *Pseudo-Methodoius und die Legende vom römischen Enkaiser*, [in:], *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, Werner Verbeke, et al. eds., Leuven 1988, pp. 82-111.

writers of these Syriac texts all believed that God determined the course of history and the devout could use Scripture to discern the divine plan.

The widespread appearance of Syriac Christian apocalyptic literature beginning in the seventh century C.E. should not be surprising since it was perhaps the best genre to explain the new historical event of Islamic rule. What is unexpected is that Jews first embraced this genre to portray their new conquerors favorably, and then used it to reject them. The initial Jewish support for Islam was a reaction to the situation Jews had faced under the Byzantines and the Sasanians. After their conquests of Palestine, both empires centralized their administration under an absolutist government and then sought to promote religious unity among their subjects.[35] Islam differed from these empires because it at first was not viewed as a distinct religion, but merely as a form of monotheism close to Judaism. It was this factor that contributed to the initial Jewish support of the Muslims.

The Armenian bishop Sebos (late 7th century C.E.) states that just prior to the rise of Islam a group of Jewish refugees from Edessa settled among the Arabs and persuaded them of their kinship with the Jews; Muhammad later adopted their teachings.[36] Subsequent Jewish writings show a great knowledge of Islam. *The Secrets of R. Šimʿōn ben Yoḥai*[37], *Pesikta Rabbati*,[38] *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*,[39] and other Jewish texts[40] use apocalyptic imagery, messianism, and the Danielic periodization of history to explain Islam's domination. For the author of a section of the *Secrets*, the arrival of Muhammad and the Ishmaelites is the culmination of the messianic drama that terminated Byzantine rule in Palestine. This earlier portrayal of Muhammad and the early Islamic rulers was changed in this text to portray them unfavorably. The Jews, like the Christians, came to use apocalyptic language to explain Islam's current supremacy, and its eventual destruction. As the Byzantines began to de-

[35] Robert G. Hoyland, *In God's Path*, Oxford, 2015, pp. 66-102.

[36] Robert Thomson, translator, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebos*, Liverpool 1999, pp. 134-5.

[37] Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrasch*, vol. 3, pp. xix, 78-82.

[38] William G. Braude, *Pesikta rabbati*, New Haven, 1968.

[39] Chaim M. Horowitz, *Pirke de-rabi Eli'ezer*, Jerusalem, 1972.

[40] e.g., The signs of the messiah in *'Otot of R. Šimʿōn ben Yoḥai* (Arthur Marmorstein, *Les signes du Messie*, "Revue des études juives" 52 [1906], pp. 176-86); An apocalyptic text on the Umayyads in Cairo Geniza Ms. 2642 43a-b (Israel Lévi, *Une apocalypse judéo-arabe*, "Revue des études juives" 67 [1914], pp. 178-82); An apocalyptic text on the Arab conquest, *On That Day,* Judah Even-Shmuel, *Midreshē ge'ullā*, rev. ed., Jerusalem, 1954], pp., 158-60).

feat the Muslims, Islamic writers began to write apocalyptic texts to elucidate Islam's decline in which Muhammad predicted six portents that would occur before the end of the world.[41] Muslims largely abandoned the genre around 864 C.E. when the Abbasids took control over the entire Middle East and postponed their messianic expectations into the remote future.[42] In the early days of Islam, some Jews and Christians had a favorable messianic understanding of Muhammad's ministry.

V. Muhammad: A Messianic Prophet?

A few Christian writings shed additional light on the Jewish perceptions of Muhammad, Islam, and the texts examined in this study. Unlike these Jewish apocalyptic writings that predict Islamic rulers, these Christian works are primarily chronicles that look to the past. What is perhaps most surprising is that they do not portray Muhammad as the prophet of a new religion. Sophronius (d. ca. 639 C.E.), Patriarch of Jerusalem and the first to mention the arrival of the Arabs in Palestine (ca. 634 C.E.), merely describes their appearance as God's punishment of Christian heresy.[43] We likewise find no mention of a new religion with the arrival of the Arabs in a Syriac chronicle of 637 C.E.[44] A Syriac chronicle of 775 C.E. describes Muhammad as a Prophet and Messenger, but only states that he opposed paganism and taught monotheism.[45] An enigmatic Christian inscription from a church in Ehnesh, Turkey, uses Psalm 44 to explain the recent Christian defeats by the Muslims and identifies Muhammad as the Messiah.[46] Although this inscription may have been intended to appease the Muslims, it has an interesting parallel in the *Doctrini Jacobi*. This Greek anti-Jewish tract recounts a persecution of Jews in Carthage on the order of Heraclius that was likely written within a short time of its purported 634 C.E. date of composition. It describes current events in Palestine and states that Muhammad was still alive. The Jews of the country purportedly welcomed him because

[41] See further, Suliman Bashear, *Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Source*s, "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society" 1 (1991), pp. 173-207.

[42] David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton, 2002, p. 49.

[43] Text, A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, ed. *Analekta Hierosolymitikēs Stachyologias 5,* St. Petersburg 1898, pp. 151-68.

[44] BL Add. 14.461. Text, E. W. Brooks, *Chronica Minora, II,* Paris 1904, p. 75.

[45] MS 162 (*Chronicle of Zuqnïn*). Text, J. B. Chabot (ed.), *Incerti auctoris chronicon anonymum pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum I,* Paris 1933, pp. 148-54.

[46] See A. Palmer, *The Messiah and the Mahdï: History Presented as the Writing on the Wall*' [in:], W. J. Aerts (ed.), *Polyphonia Byzantina*, Gröningen 1993, pp. 45-84.

he was preaching the advent of the "anointed one who is to come."[47] The *Doctrini Jacobi* not only describes Muhammad as preaching a form of Judaic messianism, but some early traditions identify Caliph Umar as the Messiah and view his entry in Jerusalem as confirmation of his true identity.[48]

This exalted view of Muhammad and Umar in the *Secrets* is indirectly supported by Christian texts, and suggests that Muhammad began his career as a messianic prophet espousing a religion similar to Judaism. In light of the Byzantine persecutions, some Jews apparently saw Muhammad's mission, and the Umayyad activities on the Temple Mount, as signs that the messianic era had dawned. The Armenian Bishop Sebos (660's C.E.), who wrote the earliest extant account of Muhammad, claims that Jews played a role in teaching the Arabs about the one God and Abraham. Sebos emphasizes the Palestinian orientation of Muhammad's movement, and his familiarity with Moses, to associate the Arab capture of Palestine with the period of messianic redemption.[49]

The *Secrets* suggest that many Jews supported the Umayyad Caliphate, especially 'Abd al-Malik's (685-705 C.E.) activity on the Temple Mount. The *Secrets* also records that the four sons ("the four arms") of 'Abd al-Malik, all of whom became Caliphs, continued building activity there. A fragment of an apocalyptic Judeo-Arabic work also mentions these four sons and their constructions atop the Temple Mount.[50] Umar built a structure there to connect the nascent Islamic faith with the Jewish Scriptures in part to strengthen his political authority and to win the support of the Jews.[51] Oleg Grabar writes that Jewish apocalyptic writings of this time that refer to the revival of the Temple under the Umayyad Caliphs do so to show that the Dome of the Rock was "a monument to Muslim eschatological thought." They also reveal that the traditions of Muhammad's sayings and Qur'anic commentaries of this period began to connect Jerusalem with the end of time and the divine judgment.[52]

[47] 5.16. Text, N. Bonwetsch (ed.), *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati,* Berlin 1910. A Syriac chronicle (BL Add. 14.643) of 640 C.E. records Muhammad as alive in 634 C.E. in Palestine. Text, Brooks, *Chronica,* pp. 77-159 (AG 945, pp. 147-8).

[48] See further Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 5, ns. 18-24; Reeves, *Trajectories*, pp. 81-2.

[49] For Sebos's texts, see Hoyland, *Seeing*, pp. 124-32.

[50] Cairo Geniza Ms. 2642 43a-b. Text, Israel Lévi, *Une apocalypse judéo-arabe*, pp. 178-82.

[51] Sharon, *Praises*, pp. 66-67.

[52] Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem,* Princeton 1996, p. 133.

VI. Conclusion

Jewish messianic interpretations of Islam ended with the 750 C.E. fall of the Umayyad Caliphate. The new Abbassid Caliphs transferred the capital to Baghdad and largely erased the Umayyad dynasty from history. It was the worsening of relations between the Jews and the Arabs beginning with the Caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik (685-705 C.E.) and the replacement of the Umayyads by the Abbasids (750-1258 C.E.) that led to a Jewish resurgence of the apocalyptic genre and the widespread Jewish denunciation of Islam. Caliph al-Malik promulgated a more confessional version of Islam with an Arabian sacred geography focused on the Ka'ba.[53] The Abbasids finalized this process with the removal of Syria-Palestine from Islam's sacred story because they associated this territory with their hated Umayyad predecessors.[54]

As Christians began to replace the Jews as Islam's main subjects, Islamic scholars increasingly engaged in the Islamization of their history. Muhammad became a prophet who taught the pillars of the religion of Abraham, which actually began in Arabia. Like Moses, Muhammad led an Exodus of his followers but never reached Palestine.[55] Islam subsequently expunged Jewish messianism from its Scriptures and beliefs to further separate it from its Jewish roots and the land of Palestine. The Jewish writings examined in this study bear witness to a lost form of Judeo-messianism connected with early Islam. The *Secrets* and the *Prayer* show that the Jewish obsession with explaining Islam's dominance continued up to the Crusades. These texts are valuable historical witnesses to the parting of the ways between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

[53] Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: the End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam,* Philadelphia, 2012, pp. 197-265.

[54] Antoine Borrut, *Vanishing Syria: Periodization and Power in Early Islam*, "Der Islam" 91 (2014), pp. 37-68.

[55] See Hoyland, *In God's Path*, pp. 36-7, 219-30.