Envisioning Islam

DIVINATIONS: REREADING LATE ANCIENT RELIGION

Series Editors: Daniel Boyarin, Virginia Burrus, Derek Krueger

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ENVISIONING ISLAM

Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World

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Introduction

> John: If a village of heretics should return to the true faith, what should one do with their mysteries?
>
> Jacob: They should be sent to the adherents of their faith. For this also happened to me. Once there were some Hagarenes who carried off the Eucharist from Byzantine territory. And when they feared their conscience and brought it to me, I sent it to adherents of the Byzantine confession.
>
> —Jacob of Edessa, *Second Letter to John the Stylite*

In the late seventh century, John the Stylite sent his friend Jacob, bishop of Edessa, a series of inquiries ranging from when to consecrate holy oil to whether one should fast after Pentecost. Complications arose, however, when John asked what he should do with Eucharistic elements from a village that had just renounced Byzantine theology. By this time, there already was a two-hundred-year tradition of John and Jacob's church seeing the Byzantine Eucharist as invalid. Because Jacob had acquired a reputation of being a stickler for ecclesiastical boundaries, John probably thought his mentor would further reify church divisions, declare the Byzantine Eucharistic elements profane, and instruct him to simply throw them out. Jacob, however, confounded these expectations. He instructed John to find some local Byzantine Christians and give them the villagers' Eucharistic elements. But Jacob did not stop with this unexpected answer. He followed it with an even more surprising story relating his interactions with some Hagarenes.

The word "Hagarenes" was the most common term Jacob used to speak of people whom we would call Muslims. The beginning of his anecdote thus appears to support the most common modern understanding of Christian-Muslim interactions, a relationship that twentieth- and twenty-first-century

writers often characterize as a "clash of civilizations." At first, Jacob shared a story that seemed to be about Muslim raiders invading the Byzantine Empire and pillaging Christian religious symbols to denigrate an opposing faith. But again, Jacob confounded expectations. According to Jacob, these Hagarenes eventually decided to return the Eucharistic elements to the local bishop, a decision that cannot be easily explained through a clash-of-civilizations model of interreligious encounter.

Unfortunately, Jacob's account and dozens like it do not appear in modern discussions of early Christian-Muslim relations, because they were written in the "wrong" language. Because most modern scholars of early Christianity have been trained primarily in Greek and Latin, most modern discussions of early Christian depictions of Islam have concentrated on Greek and Latin texts. But when Muslims first encountered Christians they did not meet Greek-speaking Christians from Constantinople, nor did they meet Latin-speaking Christians from the western Mediterranean. Rather, they first encountered Christians from northern Mesopotamia who spoke the Aramaic dialect of Syriac. Living primarily in what constitutes present-day Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, and eastern Turkey, these Syriac Christians were under Muslim rule from the seventh century onward. They wrote the earliest and the most extensive accounts of Islam and described a complicated set of religious and cultural exchanges that were not reducible to the solely antagonistic. Nevertheless, because so few scholars read Syriac, there has been relatively little analysis of these sources. As a result, most historical reconstructions of Christian-Muslim relations exclude from consideration the largest corpus of early documents about Islam. Instead, studies most commonly focus on works whose martial context often reinforces an oppositional, clash-of-civilizations model of interreligious encounter.

Greek and Latin texts were not unanimous in how they depicted Islam, nor am I suggesting that they should be examined less. Nevertheless, because of most historians' linguistic training, there remains a notable bias as to which sources scholars privilege when they investigate early Christian reactions to Muslims. How might the history of Christianity's relationship with Islam change if, instead of relying on the writings of Christians who often met Muslims on the battlefield, one focused on Syriac Christians like Jacob who had more everyday contact with Muslims? I suggest that, by shifting these earliest sources from the periphery to the center of analysis, historians can more accurately envision the first interactions between Christianity and Islam.

Syriac texts such as Jacob's not only present different images of Islam;

they also provide particularly valuable historical information about the beginning of Muslim rule. With the exception of the Qur'an, most Arabic witnesses to Islam were not composed until more than a century after Muḥammad's death. In contrast, dozens of Syriac documents concerning early Islam were written contemporaneously with the events they described. Their perspective of seeing Islam from the outside helps refine our own images of the first Islamic centuries.

Jacob's story of Hagarenes returning the Eucharist also points toward two tendencies among Syriac discussions of Islam that are particularly upsetting to a clash-of-civilizations model. The first tendency is a much more positive Christian depiction of Islam than that of most Western sources. Under Muslim rule, Syriac churches expanded to form the most geographically extensive branch of Christianity the late ancient and early medieval world had ever seen. Under Islam, Syriac churches stretched from Asia Minor and throughout the Middle East through Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkestan into India, Tibet, and China. In the Islamic Empire, elite members of this expansive church held key government positions, attended the caliph's court in Baghdad, collaborated with Muslim scholars to translate Greek science and philosophy into Arabic, accompanied Muslim leaders on their campaigns against the Byzantines, and helped fund monasteries through donations from Muslims—including money from the caliph himself. Syriac Christians ate with Muslims, married Muslims, bequeathed estates to Muslim heirs, taught Muslim children, and were soldiers in Muslim armies. Members of the Syriac churches had a very different experience of Islam than did most Greek and Latin Christians.

These direct interactions did not result in uniformly positive images of Islam. Syriac texts do not suggest that early Christian-Muslim interactions were a paragon of harmony and coexistence, a claim that would simply replace one reductionist model of interfaith encounter with another. Nonetheless, the enormous diversity of Syriac writings about Islam makes them especially challenging for depictions of a uniformly hostile reaction. They remind us that Christians' and Muslims' first interactions were not characterized by unmitigated conflict.

For those who study the history of interreligious encounters, such interactions should not be surprising. Nevertheless, in recent years the increasing dominance of the clash-of-civilizations view toward Christian-Muslim relations has effectively drowned out most other perspectives. As the largest and most diverse corpus of early Christian writings on Islam, Syriac texts form

a particularly useful resource for challenging reductionist models of early Christian-Muslim relations.

Jacob's account also points to a second tendency that was prevalent among Syriac texts. His Hagarenes considered the Christian Eucharist sufficiently powerful to be worth stealing and later returning. Their actions seem less surprising after one reads numerous Syriac references to Muslims requesting Christian exorcists, attending church, seeking healing from Christian holy men, visiting Christian shrines, and endowing Christian monasteries. There are also references to Christians attending Muslim festivals, becoming circumcised, referring to Muḥammad as God's messenger, and draping their altar with a Muslim confession of faith. Jacob's tale is just one of many Syriac accounts that expose a much greater continuum between the categories of early Christianity and early Islam than most modern scholarship acknowledges. Their portrayal of a world of overlapping religious influence, fuzzy boundaries, and categorical ambiguity is even more devastating to a clash-of-civilizations model. Syriac sources suggest that early Christianity and early Islam were too interconnected to be completely separate entities, to say nothing of clashing civilizations.

An investigation of Syriac writings on Islam thus offers important parallels to current investigations of early Christian-Jewish interactions. In recent years, it has become increasingly common for scholars of late antiquity to reject the often repeated claim that Christianity and Judaism became separate religious entities soon after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE.[1] Many scholars instead argue that "the border between them was so fuzzy that one could hardly say precisely at what point one stopped and the other began."[2]

This scholarship often cites first- through sixth-century discussions of Christianity and Judaism that were surprisingly similar to Syriac discussions of Christianity and Islam. Consider, for example, the sermon of fourth-century bishop John Chrysostom in which he lambasted congregation members for attending synagogue services.[3] Although his complaint was written four centuries earlier and concerned Jews instead of Muslims, its motivation varied little from the title of an eighth-century Syriac letter condemning Christians who attended Hagarene festivals. Syriac sources abound with these sorts of accounts—the same kinds of accounts that have so strongly convinced scholars of early Christianity and early Judaism to revise their paradigms for understanding late ancient religious identity. But these postconquest texts now spoke of Christian-Muslim interactions.

Envisioning Islam asks how seventh- through ninth-century Syriac

Christians navigated a world in which Christianity and Islam were much less distinct than is commonly imagined. The wide array of genres in which Syriac authors wrote about Islam both assists and complicates an investigation of these interconnected communities. Varying in length from brief scribal marginalia to a history book of several hundred pages, Syriac references to Islam appear in theological tractates, inscriptions, apocalypses, manuscript colophons, ecclesiastic letters, canon collections, universal chronicles, scriptural exegeses, hagiographies, pseudoepigrapha, martyrologies, local histories, prayers, and scientific treatises.

In the last thirty-five years, scholars have become increasingly aware of this treasure trove of Syriac references to Islam. Particularly influential is Patricia Crone and Michael Cook's publication *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977).[4] Crone and Cook built *Hagarism*'s controversial reassessment of Islamic origins primarily on early Christian sources, including a number of Syriac documents that previously were known to only a few specialists. Although most rejected its conclusions, *Hagarism* motivated other researchers to begin focusing on specific Syriac texts that speak of Islam. These scholars have made editions of ancient Syriac manuscripts, translated many of these works, and tackled some of the thorniest source-critical issues surrounding these documents' composition. Of particular note are the numerous publications of Sydney Griffith, Andrew Palmer, Gerrit Reinink, and Barbara Roggema. Equally groundbreaking were Robert Hoyland's *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, and *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1, *600–900*, edited by David Thomas and Barbara Roggema.[5] These two works provide a synopsis for each of the main early Christian writings on Islam. Their brief descriptions and extensive bibliographies remain the starting point for all serious research in the field.

Nevertheless, modern discussions of Syriac reactions to Islam remain quite fragmented. The field has become dominated by important but short investigations, scattered in hard-to-find journals and mainly read only by other scholars of Syriac. Most of these articles examine a single text, and few provide a particularly accessible entryway into the larger corpus. Research focused on only a handful of these documents simply cannot convey the diversity of ways Syriac sources envisioned Islam. Given how vital these early sources are for the history of Christianity, the history of Islam, and the history of these religions' interactions, it seems timely to produce a book that follows a more inclusive approach. Instead of an in-depth study of a single text, I investigate the entire known corpus of early Syriac writings on Islam,

a collection of more than sixty seventh- through ninth-century documents. *Envisioning Islam* explores how a synthesis of these texts might affect modern accounts concerning the first encounters of what eventually became the world's two largest religions.

First Contact

When Muslims first encountered Christians they did not encounter a unified Christianity. Of particular contention were the increasingly heated debates regarding Christology: how to best describe the relationship between Christ's divinity and Christ's humanity.[6] Two hundred years earlier, these controversies had surfaced when Constantinople's Bishop Nestorius declared that Jesus's mother should not be called "the bearer of God." Nestorius and his supporters argued that Mary could not have given birth to Christ's divine nature, only to Christ's human nature. From their perspective, only by keeping Christ's human nature and divine nature conceptually separate could one avoid the blasphemous belief that during the Crucifixion God himself had suffered and died. In 431 Nestorius was outmaneuvered by his nemesis, Cyril of Alexander, and the Council of Ephesus ruled that Nestorius and his views were heretical. For Nestorius, this meant exile. For Christianity, this meant a division that continues to this day.

By the fifth century, there were already many Christians for whom some version of the two-nature Christology espoused by Nestorius and his teacher, Theodore of Mopsuestia, was a central theological dogma. This was particularly the case for the Church of the East, primarily located in Persian territory. By anathemizing these beliefs, the Council of Ephesus further separated the Church of the East from the rest of Christianity. This church continues today. Present-day adherents are often called Assyrian Christians or, more disparagingly, Nestorians. Twenty-first-century scholars more often refer to members of the Church of the East as East Syrians.

In 451 the Byzantine emperor Marcian convened the even more divisive Council of Chalcedon. The council's decision that Christ was "in two natures" became official doctrine for the Byzantine Church and eventually for Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Many, however, saw the council as artificially dividing Christ into two parts and undermining the central importance of his incarnation as the key to salvation. During the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, opponents of the council's decision began to consolidate into several

anti-Chalcedonian churches, such as the Armenian, Coptic, and Ethiopic churches. In the geographic area most central to this book, the predominant anti-Chalcedonian church was what modern scholars call the West Syrian or the Syrian Miaphysite church. This church also continues today, and, in the twenty-first century, its official name is the Syrian Orthodox Church. Its Miaphysite adherents are disparagingly called Monophysites or Jacobites.

Toward the middle of the seventh century, the Byzantine emperor made this situation even more complicated when he tried to circumvent the difficulty of discussing Christ's nature by instead speaking of Christ as having a single will. The attempt to forcefully impose this *monothelete* doctrine even on fellow Chalcedonians resulted in yet another church, the Maronites. As a result, even though the Christians examined in this book belonged to a single linguistic community—they all spoke Syriac—they comprised four competing confessional communities: East Syrians, Miaphysites, Chalcedonians, and Maronites.

Two hundred years worth of Christological divisions shaped the late ancient church. But as these debates continued to rage, several unexpected reversals of fortune also forever changed the history of Christianity. In 610 Heraclius, the son of a Byzantine general, rebelled against Emperor Phocas (d. 610), who in turn had come to power through the murder of his predecessor, Emperor Maurice (d. 602). As the last one standing after a series of coups, Heraclius took charge of an empire fraught with military and theological challenges. His most immediate concern was the ongoing campaigns against the Persians. In 602 the Sasanian king had used Phocas's murder of Maurice as a pretext to invade Byzantine territory. Heraclius's murder of Phocas did not end Persian advances, which simply intensified. In 614 the Persians gained control of Jerusalem and captured the most precious of Christian relics, Jesus's true cross. It took Heraclius ten more years to turn the tide. In 624 he headed a military campaign into Armenia that eventually brought him through Mesopotamia and, in 628, to the outskirts of the Persian capital of Ctestiphon, twenty miles from present-day Baghdad. His military successes prompted a Persian coup and subsequent capitulation.[7] In 630 Heraclius crowned his victory with a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, during which he returned Jesus' cross.

But in 630 Heraclius was not the only late ancient military leader to process into a sacred city. In the same year, 750 miles to the southeast, the prophet Muḥammad was triumphantly returning to Mecca. According to Muslim tradition, Muḥammad first began receiving divine revelations the

same year Heraclius came to power. Then, while Heraclius engaged in his campaigns against the Persians, Muḥammad fought his own battles. First, he struggled to form a fledgling community of believers in Mecca. Then, in 622, he relocated that community two hundred miles to the north, to the city of Yathrib, later named Medina. Finally, while Heraclius was campaigning through Armenia and Mesopotamia, in Arabia Muḥammad led the Medinans on a series of military ventures against the Meccans, whom he defeated in 630 when he took control of the city and its sacred shrine, the Kaʿaba.

In 630 it was unlikely that Heraclius had heard much about Muḥammad. As part of their ongoing conflict, the Byzantine and Persian Empires had frequently bribed various Arab tribes or employed them as mercenaries. But neither Heraclius nor his Persian contemporaries imagined that the tribes of Arabia could effectively unite around a single figure. So Muḥammad's death in 632 passed unremarked by the Byzantines and the Persians. During the following two years, both empires also mainly ignored Muḥammad's successor, Abū Bakr, as he consolidated the Arab tribes in the *ridda* wars of 632–633.

In early 634 Heraclius was most likely in Damascus when he first heard about the Arab defeat of a Byzantine garrison near Gaza.[8] Soon afterward he received reports of major Syrian cities falling under Arab control. In response, Heraclius sent in substantial Byzantine troops. The Arabs defeated the majority of these, most resoundingly in 636 at the Battle of Yarmuk, after which Arab forces took effective control of all of Syria, and Heraclius began a strategic withdrawal. The Persians faced a similar phenomenon with the first military engagements occurring in 634 and a fairly continuous loss of territory continuing throughout the late 630s and early 640s. Unlike the Byzantines, the Persians soon lost their empire, with the last Sasanian king dying in 651.[9] As a result, by the middle of the seventh century, approximately half of the world's Christians were suddenly under Muslim rule.[10] Once Heraclius fled back to Constantinople, these Christians were left to a new world empire. They became the first Christians to encounter the emerging religion of Islam and the first to interpret this dramatic change of fortune.

Challenging the Standard Narrative

Most modern discussions of Christian-Muslim interactions travel the same route that Heraclius did. As soon as they reach the time of Muḥammad's death, these modern narratives also quickly move westward and ignore those

Christians who lived under Islam. They instead concentrate on frequent conflicts between the Byzantine and Islamic Empires, which continued until 1453, when Islamic forces took Constantinople, or they concentrate on relations between Islam and the Latin West.

A much smaller number of modern narratives, however, do allude to Syriac Christians. When they do, their fleeting references usually fall into two camps. The first camp is particularly widespread among popular writings and explicitly supports a clash-of-civilizations narrative. Its proponents first comb the Qur'an and Islamic legal sources to find the most belligerent references to Christianity. They then use a small selection of Syriac sources to support this image of unmitigated hostility between Christians and Muslims. The second camp goes in the opposite direction. Primarily dependent on a single sentence from a no-longer-extant ninth-century chronicle, they suggest that the Christological divisions between Byzantine and more Eastern Christians caused most Syriac Christians to be "relieved" at the conquests and to see the Arabs as "liberators" setting them free from Byzantine oppression. What unites these otherwise opposing camps is a belief shared by almost all modern narratives of early Christianity and early Islam, the belief that early Christianity and early Islam were clearly distinguished entities.

In recent decades challengers to this standard narrative have arisen, especially among scholars of early Islam. The study of early Islamic history has remained particularly contentious because of the lack of securely dated sources. Modern historians generally have recourse to three sets of texts. The first consists of tens of thousands of pages of early Abbasid-era historical works that speak of the seventh century. Unfortunately, all of these were compiled more than a century after the events they depict, and it is nearly impossible to separate early material from later embellishment. The second source for early Islamic history has traditionally been *hadith*—sayings attributed to Muḥammad and his earliest followers. These, too, were compiled centuries after the fact, and the difficulty remains of how to distinguish which *hadith* accurately depict the seventh century. The final source has been the Qur'an.

Until recently, those who wanted to question an early, clear division between Christianity and Islam often concentrated on redating the Qur'an. A minority of Islamicists began suggesting that the traditional date of the Qur'an's composition is wrong. Arguing that much of the Qur'an was actually written in the late seventh century or, in some cases, even the mid-eighth century allowed these scholars to also challenge other traditions regarding early Islam. Much of this scholarship included claims that the Qur'an is a

multi-author work, that many of the writers lived outside Arabia, and that they may have written in a language other than Arabic.[11] Most of these scholars also suggested a much greater overlap between early Christianity and nascent Islam than did the standard narrative.

Because claims of fuzzy boundaries between early Christianity and Islam were often linked to a controversial redating of the Qur'an, they remained anathema to most Islamicists. In the last decade, however, several Islamicists have begun approaching these issues from a different perspective. These scholars often accept most of the traditional claims concerning the Qur'an's composition. Nevertheless, through a detailed examination of Qur'anic verses, early material remains such as coins and inscriptions, and a few other documents that most scholars think are datable to the seventh century, these Islamicists have also begun to argue for a much greater continuum between early Christianity and Islam.[12]

The increasing prominence of such perspectives may signal a paradigm shift within Islamic studies. Occasionally, proponents of this view even cite some Syriac sources to support their arguments. But this revision to seventh-century Islamic history soon rejoins the more traditional narrative. Most of these scholars contend that the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705) firmed up the boundaries between Christianity and Islam. From then on, most scholars again ignore Syriac sources along with their challenge to models of distinct religious identities.

What if these recent shifts in Islamic studies have not gone far enough? How would the history of early Christian-Muslim relations look differently if the categorical boundaries of Christianity and Islam were ill defined, not simply in the decades immediately following Muḥammad's death, but also for the next few centuries? In his discussion of early Christianity and Judaism, Daniel Boyarin writes:

> The border space between the juridical and abstract entities Judaism and Christianity, throughout late antiquity and even beyond, was a crossing point for people and religious practices. Religious ideas, practices, and innovations permeated that border crossing in both directions. There were people, as well, who simply didn't recognize the legitimacy or even the existence of the border.[13]

Envisioning Islam proposes a similar context for early Christian-Muslim relations. It argues not simply that Syriac authors were slow to distinguish Islam from Christianity, but that Syriac texts reflect a much more substantial and

long-lasting overlap between Christianity and Islam than the standard narrative allows.

This book examines Syriac sources from the vantage point of this crisis of differentiation. Each of its forays into Syriac images of Islam centers on a specific issue: conquest memories, narratives of identity, discussions of Muslim rulers, a continuum between early Christianity and Islam. It then investigates how Syriac texts concerning this issue were both a reflection of and a reaction to ambiguously defined religious boundaries.

Chapter 1 investigates how Syriac depictions of the Islamic conquests changed over time. The first two hundred years of Syriac sources definitely refute the claim—often repeated in academic journals, in Western civilization textbooks, and in more popular literature—that non-Chalcedonian Christians welcomed the conquests as liberation from Byzantine persecution. Instead, Syriac authors of every theological persuasion constantly struggled to explain how God could have permitted the conquests. A chronological exploration of these increasingly detailed collective memories helps one trace how Christian communities modified their depictions of Christianity and Islam's first encounters to better address their contemporary, highly fluid situation.

Chapter 2 investigates how, just as memories of the conquests changed over time, so did Syriac conceptualizations of Islam. Among the first Christians to encounter Muslims, Syriac authors provide a particularly useful vantage point for exploring how Christians began to classify Muslims and how such classifications became increasingly tied to issues of religion. Although Syriac Christians had a more direct knowledge of Islam than did most other Christians, they were surprisingly resistant to defining Islam as entirely other. Instead, they frequently denied Islam its alterity and depicted it as a derivative form of Christianity. Syriac narratives of identity often minimized the conceptual distance between Christianity and Islam as an apologetic strategy. Nevertheless, this different type of difference-making also stemmed from an environment in which the borders between Christianity and Islam were much less distinct than many desired.

Chapter 3 breaks from the chronological framework of the previous chapters to suggest less linear ways to approach Syriac texts. It presents four related case studies of how Syriac authors used the literary figure of a Muslim ruler to think through the ambiguities of Muslim rule. The chapter investigates Syriac descriptions of Muḥammad, the binary categorization of subsequent Muslim leaders, Muslim officials in Syriac disputation texts, and Islamic rulers in intra-Christian polemics. In each case, Syriac writers

employed a Muslim interlocutor to better articulate and defend the very distinctions that Islamic rule was challenging.

Chapter 4 moves from narratives about Islamic rule to the negotiation of life under Islam. It builds on previous chapters' exploration of the ongoing difficulties in differentiating early Christianity from early Islam and more explicitly investigates how archaeological remains, literary narratives, manuscript changes, and legal rulings illustrated the fuzziness of seventh- through ninth-century religious boundaries. These sources not only depict an environment in which Christians and Muslims had substantial interactions, but they also contain numerous figures who violated modern norms of exclusive religious identity. They indicate that modern assumptions of clearly defined confessional communities are anachronistic for the seventh through ninth centuries. The repeated attempts by authorities to reify communal boundaries suggests that, in practice, many were disregarding any firmly set division between early Christianity and early Islam.

The conclusion briefly discusses how Syriac texts and the re-envisioning of early Christian-Muslim relations that they enable might affect modern images of Islam.

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Because few have had previous exposure to seventh- through ninth-century Syriac documents, one of my goals is to introduce these works to a wider audience. *Envisioning Islam* contextualizes these texts by placing them in the larger narrative of modern scholarly reconstructions of early Islam and highlights some of the places where these texts challenge that narrative. Most of all, I argue for the importance of these texts by showing how useful they can be for investigating issues that are not confined solely to the field of Syriac studies. This results in certain trade-offs. The most obvious are chronological and linguistic. The earliest text I examine was written in the midst of the conquest of Syria in the late 630s. The most recent text I consider was written in the 860s. After that time, most Christians under Muslim rule no longer wrote in Syriac, a primarily Christian language. Instead, they wrote mainly in Arabic, a language increasingly used by both Muslim and Christian inhabitants of the Islamic empire.

Envisioning Islam seeks not so much to be comprehensive as to be suggestive. It is not an all-encompassing study of every aspect of Syriac reactions to Islam. Focusing on Syriac texts, it does not address all of the early

Christian writings on Islam, much less every facet of early Christian-Muslim interactions. Instead, by reassessing the historical context for early Christian-Muslim relations and analyzing what Syriac texts can tell us about these encounters, its chapters illustrate the importance of including previously neglected sources in conversations regarding late ancient Christianity, classical Islam, the early Middle Ages, and Christian-Muslim interactions.

By placing ancient and modern representations of Islam in conversation with each other, *Envisioning Islam* also uses the diversity of ancient Syriac images of Islam to challenge today's widespread cultural assumptions about the history of Christian-Muslim relations as well as recent scholarly reconstructions of early Christian-Muslim interactions. The result is not the proclamation of a golden age of religious tolerance. Instead, *Envisioning Islam* seeks to critique overly simplistic constructions of Christianity and Islam's relationship with each other. It argues that the first two and a half Islamic centuries were characterized by a multiplicity of complex, heavily negotiated interactions occurring in a rapidly changing and highly permeable environment. Such an image of early Christian-Muslim relations does not produce a clear, easy-to-summarize model of interreligious encounter. But if extant Syriac sources have anything to say about it, such an image is a more accurate depiction of how the first Christians experienced Islamic rule. It also has strong resonance with, and, I believe, strong relevance to, the present day.

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Chapter 1

When Good Things Happened to Other People: Syriac Memories of the Islamic Conquests

For these barbarian tyrants are not men. Rather, they are Sons of Devastation set on devastation. They are annihilators and will be sent for annihilation. They are destruction and will come out for the destruction of everything. They are defiled and love defilement. And when they come out of the desert, they will split open pregnant women. They will snatch babies from their mothers' laps and dash them upon the rocks like defiled animals. . . . They are rebels, murderers, blood shedders, and annihilators. They are a testing furnace for all Christians.

—*Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*

But the God of vengeance, who rules the kingdom of men on earth, who gives it to whom He wants and appoints the lowest of men over it—when He saw that the measure of the Romans' sins was overflowing and that they were using every sort of cruelty against us and our churches and [that] our confession was close to being destroyed, He rose, persuaded, and brought the Sons of Ishmael up from the land of the south, those indeed who had been despised and scorned and unknown among the nations of the world. And by them we gained deliverance. In this way, we profited not a little. For we had been ransomed from the tyrannical kingdom of the Romans.

—*Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē

Contrary to the well-known maxim, history is not always written by the winners. The earliest and most extensive descriptions of the Islamic conquests were composed not by victorious Muslims but by defeated Christians. The changes brought about by Muslim rule motivated later Syriac Christians to look back to the 630s as a key moment in their communities' history. Syriac conquest accounts thus preserve an invaluable record of collective memory. That is, they reflect how their authors attempted to "make sense of their own present through recourse to constructed narratives of their pasts."[1]

Examining conquest accounts as a form of collective memory substantially shifts the way one analyzes these texts. Instead of using Syriac accounts to reconstruct the Islamic conquests "as [they] actually happened,"[2] a collective memory approach emphasizes these works' representational nature.[3] Such an approach does not deny that some authors—such as Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē—had access to an impressive amount of historical material. Instead, it acknowledges that contemporary concerns more often shaped the ways these writers transmitted this information than did their actual knowledge of the early seventh century.

The lens of collective memory also focuses on the multiplicity of contested representations. As the diametrically opposed assessments of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and Dionysius's *Chronicle* remind us, a consensus never emerged for how best to depict the conquests or what the conquests should signify for Syriac Christianity. Perhaps most significantly, the theoretical category of collective memory helps one explore the ideological function of these texts.[4] Speaking of conquest accounts as collective, contested memories tied to specific social locations and agendas forces one to critically examine the power dynamics behind these texts' construction and reception.[5]

Syriac conquest accounts also present one of the few premodern examples where the memories of those who lost a military encounter have been better preserved than those who won. There are almost no surviving Islamic references to the conquests that can be securely dated to before 750. In contrast there are over a dozen surviving Syriac conquest accounts written before the Abbasid revolution, and another handful written during the first Abbasid century. These earliest memories of the conquests were preserved in a variety of genres: biographies, narrative chronicles, scriptural commentaries, theological disputations, letters, and apocalypses. Many of these transmitted memories of local communities and reflected the situations, desires, and idiosyncrasies of small groups of people. In other cases, they participated in a much larger trajectory of literary memory, adopting and adapting motifs

and passages from other works, creating multiple layers of intertextuality. All provided a very different perspective on the conquests than one finds among later Muslim writers.

For Syriac Christians, the greatest challenge in remembering the conquests was explaining their results: good things happened to other people. In recent decades the widespread impression has emerged that Syriac Christians were themselves a key factor in the Arabs' seventh-century military success. This argument is based almost exclusively on the ninth-century passage from Dionysius quoted above. The argument goes as follows: because of the persecution of non-Chalcedonian Christians in the Byzantine Empire, and Christian-Zoroastrian tensions in the Persian Empire, Miaphysites and East Syrian Christians were relieved at the prospect of Muslim rule. Some modern authors suggest that Syriac Christians actually collaborated with Muslims, helping them defeat the Byzantines and Persians.[6] Others argue that Syriac Christians, at the very least, did not fully resist Arab military advances.[7] Instead, they welcomed their new conquerors as liberators.[8] Such claims are repeated in modern documents ranging from scholarly articles to academic monographs, Western civilization textbooks, popular literature, and Internet sites. Regardless of their source, such claims share a similar flaw: they are wrong.[9] Although most Syriac writers had considerable theological disagreements with Byzantine and Persian rulers, not until Dionysius in the mid-ninth century did any suggest that the conquests were beneficial to Syriac Christianity. Instead, for two hundred years, Syriac Christians like the anonymous author of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* constantly wrestled with the question of how to explain what, in their eyes, was an undeniably unfortunate event: Christians had lost.

The necessity of making the best of a bad situation undoubtedly contributed to the proliferation of Syriac conquest accounts. As a result, unlike most other instances of premodern collective memory, here one finds a large number of extant writings, distributed fairly evenly over two and a half centuries, all of which refer to a single event. Even more unusual, the majority of these descriptions appear in texts whose date of composition can be narrowed to a period of a few years, helping situate them in a larger historical trajectory. Thus, one can follow how succeeding generations remembered the 630s and how their changing collective memories of the conquests reflected and affected the development of Christian-Muslim interactions.

Nevertheless, when evaluating the first 250 years of Syriac conquest accounts, we still must keep in mind collective memory's double partiality.[10]

Despite a surprisingly large number of Syriac works surviving, most did not. What remain are only traces of some of the ways that Syriac Christians remembered the conquests. The fragmentary state of the evidence warns against reductionist, linear schemes of evolutionary development. Additionally, relative chronology is just one of many variables—such as genre, geographic locale, theological affiliation, and social location—that make each text idiosyncratic and unique. The resulting variation between accounts such as those found in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and Dionysius's *Chronicle* warns against hasty generalizations. There appears, however, to have been a strong correlation between these accounts' depictions of the conquests and their authors' historical situation.

The earliest strata of conquest accounts were exceedingly brief. They focused almost exclusively on chronicling military engagements with occasional nods to questions of theodicy. At the end of the seventh century, during the second *fitna* (Arab civil war) and the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Malik, the conquests took on greater important. Their reassessment resulted in a brief but dramatic spate of Syriac apocalypses. After the consolidation of Umayyad power, apocalyptic hopes quickly fizzled. Syriac conquests accounts, however, proliferated in other genres and were increasingly tied to religious apologetics. After the Abbasid revolution of 750, memories of the conquests became more present oriented as discussions of how a given city was conquered during the 630s and 640s became increasingly important for eighth- and ninth-century Abbasid policies toward those cities. Up to this point, all Syriac conquests accounts shared the view epitomized in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*: the Islamic conquests were bad news for Syriac Christians. Only with the mid-ninth-century *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē were the events of the 630s sufficiently distant to be radically reassessed and recast as a liberation from Byzantine tyranny. By examining Syriac conquest accounts not as sources for positivist history but as a record of collective memory, one can observe—in the broadest terms—how changing circumstances and changing memories interacted with each other.

The Earliest Reactions: Memories of the Conquests During the Rashidun and Sufyanid Caliphates in the Mid-Seventh Century

From the viewpoint of the twenty-first century, the Islamic conquests were a world-changing event. Few in the seventh century, however, remembered them that way. As Byzantinist Averil Cameron once noted, many seventh-century church leaders considered the now little-known controversy of monothelitism to be much more important than the conquests.[11] The disconnect between modern and ancient assessments of the rise of Islam becomes especially clear in the earliest Syriac writings about the conquests. For most of the seventh century, Syriac authors did not anticipate that their conquerors would be around very long, they did not speak about Islam as a religion, and they certainly did not depict the conquests as a clash of civilizations. Nevertheless, these first memories of their conquerors' military success laid the groundwork for the more involved and impassioned discussions that soon followed.

The earliest surviving reference to the Islamic conquests appears in very modest trappings. The sixth-century manuscript British Library Add. 14,461 contains a Syriac translation of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.[12] The Gospel of Matthew begins on the codex's second page and initially left the first page blank. In 637 an anonymous writer used this extra space to compose an eyewitness report of the conquests. Now called the *Account of 637*, this one-page note is poorly preserved and, because of numerous lacunae, remains frustratingly incomplete:

> . . . Muḥammad . . . [p]riest, Mār Elijah . . . and they came . . . and . . . and from . . . strong . . . month . . . and the Romans . . . And in January the . . . of Emessa received assurances for their lives. Many villages were destroyed through the killing by . . . Muḥammad and many were killed. And captives . . . from the Galilee to Bēt . . . And those Arabs camped by . . . And we saw . . . everywhe[re] . . . and the . . . that they . . . and . . . them. And on the tw[enty-si]xth of May, . . . went . . . from Emesa. And the Romans pursued them . . . And on the tenth . . . the Romans fled from Damascus . . . many, about ten thousand. And the following [ye]ar, the Romans came. On the twentieth of August in the year n[ine hundred and forty-]seven [i.e., 636 CE] there assembled in Gabitha . . . the Romans and many people . . . [R]omans were

> ki[lled], about fifty thousand . . . In the year nine hundred and for[ty-eight].[13]

Nevertheless, even in its fragmentary state, the extant text clearly referred to *ṭayyāyē*, a Syriac term that scholars most commonly translate as "Arabs." In Syriac, however, the term was more complex than its typical translation implies. Originally a designation for a specific tribe, prior to the conquests *ṭayyāyē* (singular *ṭayyāyā*) was the term usually used to speak of people living in Arabia, especially those seen as nomadic.[14] The *Account of 637* used *ṭayyāyē* like its predecessors did, primarily as a term of ethnicity. As detailed in the next chapter, over time *ṭayyāyē* increasingly took on a religious valence and came closer to the modern usage of the term *Muslim*. Because of *ṭayyāyē*'s complexity and its changing meaning, I generally leave *ṭayyāyē* untranslated. In addition to its reference to *ṭayyāyē*, the *Account of 637* spoke of Muḥammad, towns surrendering, and substantial Byzantine casualties. This brief autograph foreshadowed many of the characteristics found throughout the first few decades of Syriac recollections of the conquests. As in this note, the earliest strata of Syriac accounts often reported the conquests in an annalistic fashion, documenting where battles were fought and approximating military and civilian casualties.

Just three years after the composition of the *Account of 637*, a Miaphysite priest named Thomas produced a set of writings, now called the *Chronicle ad 640*.[15] Thomas's chronicle contained only a brief reference to the conquests:

> In the year 945 [634 CE], the seventh indiction, on Friday, February the fourth, at the ninth hour, there was a battle between the Romans and the *ṭayyāyē* of Muḥammad in Palestine, twelve miles east of Gaza. The Romans fled, abandoned the patrician *Baryrdn*, and the *ṭayyāyē* killed him. About four thousand poor villagers from Palestine—Christians, Jews, and Samaritans—were killed and the *ṭayyāyē* destroyed the whole region. In the year 947 [635/636 CE], the ninth indiction, the *ṭayyāyē* invaded all Syria. They went down to the region of Persia and conquered it and they went up to the mountain of Mardīn. The *ṭayyāyē* killed many monks in *Qdr* and *Bnt'* and the blessed Simon, the door keeper of *Qdr*, the brother of Thomas the priest, died there.[16]

Particularly striking for someone who had lived through the conquests is how little Thomas wrote about them: in a forty-eight-folio document, only six

sentences. For Thomas, Heraclius's defeat of the Persians twenty-five years earlier was momentous and memorable, not the military conflicts of his own day.

But as Arab rule continued, Syriac writers felt increasingly obliged to present at least brief explanations for the conquests. For example, in a letter written in the 650s, the head of the East Syrian church, Catholicos Isho'yahb III (d. 659), noted that the "*ṭayyāyē* to whom at this time God has given rule over the world" were generally benevolent toward Christians.[17] The catholicos's letter did not focus on the Islamic conquests per se. Instead, Isho'yahb briefly referred to *ṭayyāyē* in the larger context of ecclesiastical politics. Nevertheless, his statement that *ṭayyāyē* rule had been divinely ordained became a claim that later writers would frequently make and would further develop.

A few years after the death of Isho'yahb III, an anonymous East Syrian Christian composed a work that modern scholars most often call the *Khuzistan Chronicle*.[18] This text provided a rapid, chronological survey of Persian rulers and the leaders of the East Syrian church. It also witnessed a terminological shift among Syriac descriptions of the conquests. Instead of using only the Syriac term *ṭayyāyē*, the author of the *Khuzistan Chronicle* also employed a more biblically inspired nomenclature: "the Sons of Ishmael." Later authors continued this pattern and frequently referred to their conquerors also as "Ishmaelites" or "Sons of Hagar."

Toward the chronicle's end appeared several pages detailing the conquests: "God brought against them the Sons of Ishmael [who were as numerous] as sand upon the sea shore. Their leader was Muḥammad. Neither walls nor gates nor armor nor shield withstood them and they took control of the entire Persian Empire. And Yazdgard sent countless troops against them and the *ṭayyāyē* destroyed all of them."[19] Amid lists of battles and booty two brief sentences tried to explain the conquests' origins. The chronicler's comments were very similar to those of Isho'yahb III. He stated that God raised up the Sons of Ishmael, and reassured his readers that "The victory of the Sons of Ishmael who overcame and subjugated their two kingdoms was from God."[20] Like most other early descriptions of the conquests, the *Khuzistan Chronicle* provided neither motivation for the Sons of Ishmael's actions nor morals to learn from their military success.

Soon after the *Khuzistan Chronicle*, two Syriac authors produced much more partisan explanations for the conquests. A Miaphysite account appeared in the earliest Syriac apocalypse that refers to Islam.[21] Although it was actually composed in the seventh century, this apocalypse claimed as its author the most famous of Syriac writers, the fourth-century Ephrem the Syrian

(d. 373). Unlike earlier accounts that most often presented the conquests as simply another military conflict, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem* depicted them as a harbinger of the end times. Written in poetic verse, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem* claimed that the conquests were meant to punish Byzantine impiety, especially their persecution of Miaphysites.[22] But the Sons of Hagar would soon become just as evil as their Byzantine predecessors:

They will separate a son from his father
and a daughter from her mother's side
They will separate a brother from his brother
and a sister from her sister's side
They will kill the bridegroom in his bedroom
and expel the bride from her bridal chamber
They will take a wife away from her husband
and slaughter her like a lamb
They will throw an infant from his mother
and drive the mother into captivity
The child will cry out from the earth
and his mother will hear, but what should she do?
For he will be trampled by the feet
of horses, camels, and infantry
They will not allow her to return to him
and the child will remain in the desert
And they will separate children from [their] mother
like a soul from the body
And she will look at them while
her beloved are torn from her lap
Two of her children to two masters
and she herself to another master[23]

In his description of the conquests, the author used the versification traditionally ascribed to Ephrem. In Syriac, each line consists of seven syllables. The author also drew on a long-standing Syriac tradition of dialogical poems, and increased the sense of pathos through a biblically inflected dialogue between a mother and her enslaved children:

Her offspring will cry out in anguish
and their eyes pour forth tears

And she will turn to her beloved
and milk will overflow from her breast
"Farewell, my beloved
and may God accompany you
He who accompanied Joseph
into slavery among foreigners
He will accompany you, my offspring,
in the captivity into which you go"
"Farewell, our mother
and may God accompany you
He who accompanied Sarah
into the household of Abimelech the Gerarite
He will accompany you
until the day of resurrection"[24]

This was certainly not a case of Christians seeing Muslims as their liberators. According to the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem*, in response to the wickedness of the Sons of Hagar, God would soon release the armies of Gog, Magog, and the other nations of the North (an allusion to Ezekiel 38–39). These eschatological tribes would destroy the Sons of Hagar. The tribes, in turn, would be defeated by an angelic host, who would reinstate the Romans. This second cycle of Roman rule would conclude with the coming of the Antichrist, the eschaton, and the Last Judgment. *Pseudo-Ephrem* foreshadowed the apocalyptic reactions to political events that dominated late seventh-century Syriac writings but, in this poetic apocalypse, the eschatological role of the Sons of Hagar remained relatively underdeveloped. From the perspective of *Pseudo-Ephrem*, the Sons of Hagar were just one of several forerunners of the end times, and the text discussed them for only 100 of its 560 lines.

Miaphysites were not the only Syriac Christians whose memories of the conquests were shaped by intra-Christian conflicts. Around the early 680s, a Maronite bishop named George of Resh'aina wrote a brief biography of Maximus the Confessor.[25] Maximus was the most renowned opponent of monothelitism, the controversial doctrine that although Christ had a divine and a human nature, he had only a single will. The first lines of the account clearly showed that Bishop George was no fan of Maximus's position. The incipit read: "The history of the wicked Maximus of Palestine, who blasphemed against his creator and his tongue was torn out."[26] The exposé began with Maximus being born from the illegitimate union of a Persian slave woman

and a Samaritan. The extant text cut off in the midst of Maximus convincing a covenant of nuns to support his theological doctrines. The intervening six folia made several brief references to the conquests. George was not overtly concerned about the initial reason for the conquests, and he included only a quick allusion to the *ṭayyāyē* being a divinely ordained punishment. More important for him was the alleged connection between the *ṭayyāyē*'s military expansion and Maximus. George claimed that once the *ṭayyāyē* conquered Syria, the Byzantine authorities were no longer able to combat Maximus's doctrines. After Maximus gained a following in *ṭayyāyē*-controlled Syria, his influence moved to Africa, Sicily, and Rome. As Maximus's theology spread, so did the *ṭayyāyē*. According to George, the *ṭayyāyē* kept "following the wicked Maximus" so that "God's wrath punished everywhere that accepted his error."[27] From George's perspective, the conquests had no connection to Islam. The document's religious concerns remained focused solely on Christianity; in this recollection of the conquests, the *ṭayyāyē* served simply as the catalyst and the punishment for Christian heresy.

Even a brief survey of the earliest ways that Syriac Christians commemorated the conquests suggests that their authors felt they had much more pressing issues to address than the rise of Islam. Although the scant attention these early authors paid to the conquests may surprise modern readers, it was perfectly understandable given their historical context. For the majority of seventh-century Syriac Christians, the most involved geopolitical changes came not with the Islamic conquests of the 630s but from the Byzantine-Persian wars from 602 to 628, which were much more destructive than the Islamic conquests.[28] With a few notable exceptions, during the Islamic conquests the majority of sustained military engagements took place in the countryside, minimizing civilian casualties. Most cities capitulated to Arab forces without prolonged siege.[29] Material evidence of the Islamic conquests is minimal, and the conquests did not leave the type of destruction layers associated with much more devastating invasions.[30] Instead, inscriptional evidence witnessed continual church occupation and even new construction throughout the period.[31] This does not mean that the Islamic conquests were of little consequence for the indigenous population. But it does remind us that the conquests' political and theological ramifications will have little correlation to the number of lives lost.

In a period of just over thirty years, many Syriac Christians experienced no fewer than four changes of governance—Byzantine to Persian to Byzantine to Arab—and initially there was little reason to suppose that Arab rule

would last any longer than Persian or Byzantine rule. At first Arab forces settled mainly in newly founded garrison towns,[32] Islam generally did not proselytize non-Arabs, conversion rates among non-Arabs remained low,[33] local governing structures were left almost completely intact,[34] and even the *jizya* (poll tax) seems to have been more a gradual expansion of previous revenue structures than a radically new burden.[35] As a result, what we call the Islamic conquests were first described as though there was nothing explicitly Islamic about them, and what we see today as one of the world's most important interreligious encounters barely received mention by its contemporaries.

The End Is Near: Memories of the Conquests During ʿAbd al-Malik's Reign in the Late Seventh Century

Circumstances in the middle of the seventh century motivated Syriac writers to allude only briefly to the conquests. Soon after the composition of *Pseudo-Ephrem* and the *Life of Maximus*, however, the political situation drastically shifted, forcing Syriac Christians to reevaluate how they remembered the conquests. Of particular import were the changes brought about through the consolidation of Umayyad rule under the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705) and his policies of Islamization. With ʿAbd al-Malik, the caliphate took an active role in championing Islam, promoting it as the supersessionary, state-sponsored religion of an increasingly Islamic empire.[36]

The initial Syriac response to ʿAbd al-Malik's policies of Islamization was quite apocalyptic, with late seventh-century Syriac Christians drawing on centuries of apocalyptic resources and redirecting them toward their conquerors.[37] Because most Syriac Christians did not consider Revelation to be canonical, for them the most important apocalyptic text was the book of Daniel. Ever since its composition in the mid-second century BCE, the book of Daniel's repeated references to four successive kingdoms preceding the eschaton made its imagery a favorite for those who were keen on predicting the world's imminent end. However, Daniel remained a problematic resource for explaining the conquests. Centuries of Jewish and Christian interpretation had already established a widely shared consensus that the last of Daniel's four world kingdoms was that of the Greco-Romans; there was to be no human kingdom after theirs. This initially left little place for the Arabs, and one can observe various strategies that postconquest authors used to make room in

Daniel's schema for the conquests.[38] This combination of political, religious, and interpretive challenges Syriac Christians felt under ʿAbd al-Malik's reign motivated late seventh-century authors to attach a degree of significance to the conquests they had previously lacked.

An increased emphasis on the conquests first appeared in the work of East Syrian monk John bar Penkāyē.[39] Around 687 John finished his *Book of Main Points*, a world history from Creation to his own day. He wrote during the second *fitna*, which began soon after the death of the caliph Muʿāwiya II in 683. For the following nine years, the Umayyad caliphs Marwān (r. 684–685) and his son ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 705) fought against a rival caliph, ʿAbd Allah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 692). To make John's situation more precarious, when he composed the *Book of Main Points* his region of Iraq was not under the control of either of these contending caliphs. Rather, a group of non-Arab prisoners of war had staged an initially successful anti-Arab rebellion and had recently taken the city of Nisibis, located a hundred kilometers southwest of John's monastery. During this time of local rebellion amid a much larger civil war, John's abbot asked him to write his history.

When the *Book of Main Points* spoke of the conquests, John concerned himself neither with individual battles nor with casualty figures. Like many Syriac authors of the previous generation, John wrote in the genre of a chronicle. Nevertheless, John's chronicle focused not on *what* happened during the conquests but on *why* the conquests happened in the first place. Just one sentence into his conquest narrative, he presented the explanatory framework that would dominate his understanding of the rise of Islam:

> Indeed, we should not consider their coming to be ordinary. For it was a divine deed. Prior to summoning them, He had previously prepared them to hold Christians in honor. Thus there also carefully came from God a certain commandment that they should hold our monastic order in honor. And when they came in accord with a divine commandment, they seized—so to say—the two kingdoms without war or difficulty. Thus, with neither armor nor human wiles, in a despised fashion like a brand snatched from a fire, God thus gave victory into their hands so that what was written concerning them could be fulfilled: "One pursued a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight" [Deut. 30:30]. For, apart from divine aid, how could naked men riding with neither armor nor shield be victorious? He summoned them from the ends of the

> earth to devastate a sinful kingdom and with them humble the arrogance of the Sons of Persia.[40]

God called, prepared, commanded, and gave victory to the Sons of Hagar in such a way that everyone could see that "the entire world was handed over to the *ṭayyāyē*."[41] But why would God do this?

This question of theodicy dominated John's work. He drew on interpretive frameworks popularized by church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (d. ca. 339) as well as on an extensive East Syrian tradition of understanding God's dealings with humanity in terms of divine pedagogy. He then interpreted the previous six centuries of church history as a cycle of Christians learning from their tribulations, growing closer to God, and, once their situation improves, falling back into error.[42] Applying this heuristic to his own time, John claimed that, once Roman persecution of Christians subsided in the early fourth century, theological error overtook the church. The resulting Chalcedonian theology led to the Byzantines' defeat by the *ṭayyāyē*. As for the Persians, they were defeated because of their excessive pride and because of Zoroastrian persecution of East Syrian Christians.[43]

What would happen next? John again diverged from earlier seventh-century Syriac authors. According to him, humanity had already lost its last chance for reform. Realizing that nothing would motivate humanity to repent, God had removed His heavenly care from the world, ushering in the beginning of the end.[44] As for the Sons of Hagar, according to John, the anti-*ṭayyāyē* forces that recently took control of Nisibis would soon defeat them.[45] This victory, however, would also be short-lived, as John states: "I truly know that the end of ages has reached us."[46]

Although he dedicated only one book of his fifteen-book world history to discussing the Sons of Hagar, the *Book of Main Points* "was composed first of all as a Christian response to the rise of Islam."[47] A quintessential example of remembering the past through the lens of the present, John wrote his history backward. That is, as a result of the tribulations that he and his community faced, John was convinced the eschaton would soon arrive. This motivated him to look back in time to establish an ongoing pattern of God's pedagogical relationship with humanity and to find a decisive moment—the conquests and their immediate aftermath—when this pattern was broken. Although his predecessors briefly alluded to God giving the *ṭayyāyē* military victory, John showed a level of theological engagement with the conquests that was not found in previous works. The next decade of Syriac memories

of the conquests would become dominated by many of the questions John struggled with (Why the conquests? What would happen to the *ṭayyāyē*? What would happen to us?), as well as with his answers (We suffered because of our sins. God would defeat them. The world soon would end.). Nevertheless, the rapidly changing political environment of the late seventh century would cause slightly later authors to write very differently about these issues than John did.

John ended up being wrong. The rebellion of former prisoners of war that he thought would defeat the Arabs was easily put down, Ibn al-Zubayr was defeated in Mecca, ᶜAbd al-Malik became the sole caliph, and his descendants would control the Umayyad caliphate until 750. The end of the second *fitna*, however, was far from an unmitigated blessing for Syriac Christians. The political stability following the second Arab civil war, along with ᶜAbd al-Malik's substantial building program, the minting of his own coins, a census, and tax reform, all suggested that the Arab state was not going away anytime soon.[48] As head of this state, ᶜAbd al-Malik championed Islam. Toward the end of the second *fitna*, Muslim proclamations of faith as well as polemics against Christian theology began to appear on mile markers,[49] coins, and, most prominently, the newly constructed Dome of the Rock. Built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and inscribed with Qur'anic passages decrying Trinitarian theology, the Dome of the Rock clearly pronounced the caliph's intent to make Islam a successor religion to Christianity.[50] In the words of Islamicist Stephen Humphreys, "A more forthright statement of the religious identity and purpose of his empire, or of the reduced status that non-Muslims (and Christians in particular) would have in it, is hard to imagine."[51] While he was increasing Islam's public prominence, the caliph also began to regulate public displays of Christianity, especially those depicting the cross.[52]

At the same time that ᶜAbd al-Malik was pursuing these policies of Islamization, he also promoted Arabicization. Of particular import was ᶜAbd al-Malik's changing the language of governance and taxation from a variety of local languages—such as Coptic, Greek, and Syriac—to a fully Arabic administration.[53] This helped begin a centuries-long process that eventually reduced Syriac from a lingua franca to a primarily liturgical language.

For Syriac Christians, the immediate literary response to these changing circumstances was a series of apocalypses, the most popular of which was a document now called the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*.[54] The text claimed as its author Bishop Methodius (d. 311), to whom God revealed "the generations and kingdoms" from the time of Adam until the world's end 7,000 years

later.[55] The real author, however, most likely wrote toward the conclusion of the second *fitna* in 690/691.[56] At this time, ʿAbd al-Malik had just conquered Mesopotamia, and it became increasingly obvious that, contrary to the predictions of Christians like John bar Penkāyē, the civil war would not destroy the *ṭayyāyē*. The caliph had also just instituted tax reforms increasing the amount of revenue gathered by the government, and he had begun constructing the Dome of the Rock. In response to these developments, the author of *Pseudo-Methodius* stubbornly proclaimed the invincibility of the Byzantine Empire and the imminent demise of the Sons of Ishmael—a stance that contemporary events made increasingly untenable.

Like many previous Syriac works, *Pseudo-Methodius* stressed God's role in initiating the conquests. *Pseudo-Methodius* explained to its readers that

> It was not because God loves them that He allowed them to enter and take control of the Christians' kingdom, rather on account of the iniquity and sin done by Christians, the like of which was not done by any previous generation. For men would clad themselves in the wanton clothes of prostitutes and would adorn themselves like virgins. Standing openly on the cities' streets, shamelessly rabid with drunkenness and lasciviousness, they would have sex with each other. Prostitutes also would openly stand on the streets. A man would enter, fornicate, and go out. And his son would come and defile himself in the very same woman. Brothers, fathers, and sons together would all defile themselves in one woman.[57]

In response to these sins, God summoned these "barbarian tyrants," "rebels, murderers, blood shedders, and annihilaters" who were "not men but children of devastation."[58] *Pseudo-Methodius* "predicted" that these Sons of Ishmael would wage war against the Byzantines, destroy the Persians, decimate the Christian population, and cause many to deny their faith. In describing the conquests as God's punishment for Christian transgressions, *Pseudo-Methodius* drew from a well-established Syriac tradition equating catastrophe with sin.[59] But for the author of *Pseudo-Methodius*, as for John bar Penkāyē before him, the present-day crisis was so great that these disasters served not as a call for repentance but as a signal of the world's impending end. *Pseudo-Methodius* emphasized that, despite all evidence to the contrary, the Sons of Ishmael would not remain for long. Given the anticipated brevity of their rule, from the perspective of *Pseudo-Methodius*

the Sons of Ishmael did not constitute a world kingdom and therefore did not challenge the traditional interpretation of Daniel in which only four kingdoms—Babylonians, Persians, Medes, Greco-Romans—would precede the world's end.[60] The Sons of Ishmael were simply God's tool to chastise Christians and to separate the truly faithful from the faithless. Soon after the conquests, God would raise up the last king of the Greeks, a figure the author created by combining motifs he found in two earlier Syriac texts, the *Romance of Julian the Apostate* and the *Legend of Alexander*.[61] This last king of the Greeks would launch a war against the blaspheming Sons of Ishmael, would quickly defeat them, and would enslave them a hundred times more bitterly than they did the Christians. The king would then punish Christian apostates and reign from Jerusalem over a ten-year period of peace and prosperity, after which he would give up earthly rule to Christ by placing his crown on the true cross as it ascended to heaven. This would usher in Jesus' Second Coming and His defeat of the Antichrist.

Pseudo-Methodius's detailed apocalyptic schema was more involved than any previous depiction of the conquests. Through translation into Armenian, Greek, Latin, and Slavonic, *Pseudo-Methodius* profoundly shaped the next millennium of Western writings on Islam.[62] Like the author of *Pseudo-Ephrem* and John bar Penkāyē, the most likely Miaphysite author of *Pseudo-Methodius* considered the conquests to be God's response to Christian sins. Like his apocalyptically inclined predecessors, he also saw the Sons of Ishmael as reigning only briefly.[63] In addition to its influence on later writings, what most distinguished *Pseudo-Methodius* from prior conquest accounts was its substantially more negative depiction of the conquerors, the conquests, and their aftermath than that found in almost any other early Syriac text. The intensity of its vitriol may have contributed to its popularity among more western Christians. For example, the Latin version of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* survived in almost 200 extant manuscripts, the earliest dated to 727.[64]

A year or two after *Pseudo-Methodius*'s initial composition, a writer from the city of Edessa created an abridged and modified version of *Pseudo-Methodius* that modern scholars most often call the *Edessene Apocalypse*.[65] Although heavily dependent on *Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Edessene Apocalypse* made several important changes to its source's apocalyptic schema that augmented the emphasis on sacred space. Unlike *Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Edessene Apocalypse* specified that both the Sons of Ishmael and a horde of unclean nations from the North would be defeated in Mecca, that the city of Edessa would

remain inviolate, and that Christ's final victory would follow two reconquests of Jerusalem.[66] It also claimed that, as a final portent of Christianity's coming victory over the Sons of Ishmael, a horse that had never had a human rider would enter the church of Constantinople and place its head into a bridle made from the nails of Jesus' true cross. Here, the author of the *Edessene Apocalypse* drew from the Syriac *Judas Cyriacus Legend*. This earlier text claimed that Constantine's mother, Helena, discovered the true cross in Jerusalem and made Constantine a bridle from its nails. As pointed out by Gerrit Reinink, the *Edessene Apocalypse* made the story's Jerusalem connection even stronger through its reference to an unridden horse, a scriptural echo of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.[67] Few Syriac Christians would have overlooked this apocalyptic appropriation of sacred space. The multiple references to Jerusalem and Jesus' cross would have been especially poignant during a time when ʿAbd al-Malik was establishing Jerusalem as an Islamic center and regulating Christian displays of the cross.

The final extant Syriac apocalypse written during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik was attributed to the apostle John, the younger brother of Zebbudee, and thus was titled the *Apocalypse of John the Little*. It appeared in the concluding section of a larger work, the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, which consisted of a brief synopsis of the gospels and Acts followed by three related apocalypses: an anti-Chalcedonian apocalypse attributed to Peter, an anti-Jewish apocalypse attributed to James, and John's anti-Muslim apocalypse.[68]

For contemporary events to parallel the book of Daniel, the author of the *Apocalypse of John the Little* reinterpreted the first three kingdoms of Daniel's schema to be the Romans, the Persians, and then—quite ahistorically—the Medes. Thus the South (the *Apocalypse*'s term for the Arabs) could become the fourth and final kingdom that Daniel prophesied. Once the three prior kingdoms had become corrupt:

> Then suddenly the prophecy of the beautiful, pure Daniel will be fulfilled: "God will bring forth a mighty southern wind." And from it will come a people hideous in appearance, whose appearance and conduct are like those of women. And a warrior, one whom they will call a prophet, will rise up among them. . . . And the South will prosper. They will trample Persia with the hooves of their armies' horses and subdue it. And they will devastate Rome. None will be able to stand before them because [this] was commanded them by the holy one of heaven.

This fourth kingdom consisting of the people of the South would cause the people of the North to suffer greatly, especially under constant demands for tribute. During the last ten and half years of their rule, the people of the South would persecute Christians because they "hate the Lord's name." In response, God's angel would divide them into two parties (an allusion to the second *fitna*), each claiming a different king. A bloody conflict would follow at the "water well" (an allusion to the well of Zamzam in Mecca where in 692 ʿAbd al-Malik's forces defeated Ibn al-Zubayr).[69] Soon afterward a "man from the North" would rise up and begin to destroy the South. This eschatological figure was very different from *Pseudo-Methodius*'s and the *Edessene Apocalypse*'s king of the Greeks. The "man from the North" would not pursue the South beyond Christian territory nor ultimately defeat it. Instead, "God will incite upon them evil times of misery. And without a battle they will be devastated. And for all the world's generations, [the South] will not [again] take up arms and rise up in battle."[70]

Most likely written toward the end of ʿAbd al-Malik's reign, the *Apocalypse of John the Little* was much less grand in its apocalyptic scheme than earlier works; the Byzantine emperor had a smaller role in the conqueror's downfall, there was little discussion of why the conquests occurred in the first place, there was no reconquest of Jerusalem, and the apocalypse did not conclude with the end of the world. It is also important to remember that the *Apocalypse of John the Little* was part of a longer work. The anti-Chalcedonian and anti-Jewish polemics found in the two apocalyptic sections preceding the *Apocalypse of John the Little* suggest that explaining the conquests was just one of the author's many concerns.

Contrary to the expectations of at least some Syriac Christians, the second *fitna* did not end Arab rule. Instead, it ended with an increasingly stable, increasingly assertive, and increasingly Islamic caliphate. This made untenable the previous way of remembering the conquests as an unfortunate but relatively mundane, temporary event. Instead, late seventh-century Syriac authors recast the conquests as something truly earth-shattering. If the second *fitna* did not destroy the *ṭayyāyē*, something else had to. Through allusions to earlier Syriac texts and through new interpretations of Daniel, these apocalyptic authors created intricate, intertextual revenge fantasies. For these writers, the conquests became the first act in a seven-decades-long divine drama that was about to conclude in the vindication of Christianity. As a result, the Sons of Ishmael would soon "become slaves and [in] servitude they will serve those

who had served them. Their servitude will be a hundred times more bitter than their own [enslaving was]."[71]

Syriac Christians were not alone in their belief that the world was soon to end. The Qur'an contained numerous verses that appear to have been influenced by imminent eschatology.[72] The Islamic conquests also motivated seventh- and eighth-century Jewish and Zoroastrian writers to proclaim the world's imminent demise. Coptic, Greek, and later Muslim texts were not far behind.[73] What stood out about seventh- and early eighth-century Syriac Christian apocalypses was not simply their intensity (few could match, for example, the gloom and doom of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*). What most distinguished Syriac anti-Islamic apocalypses was their transitory nature. Among Syriac Christians, the apocalyptic way of remembering the conquests was amazingly short-lived. Almost all extant examples (John bar Penkāyē's *Book of Main Points*, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Edessene Apocalypse*, the *Apocalypse of John the Little*) were written under the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik. When it became increasingly apparent that their conquerors would be in control for the long run, Syriac memories of the conquests quickly became less apocalyptic. As the *Apocalypse of John the Little* showed, by the early eighth century even those memories still preserved in the literary genre of an apocalypse no longer carried the same message of the world's imminent end that they had so adamantly proclaimed only a decade earlier.

Preparing for the Long Haul: Memories of the Conquests During the Later Umayyad Caliphate in the First Half of the Eighth Century

When the Umayyad dynasty solidified under ʿAbd al-Malik and his successors, Christian hopes for a quick end to Arab rule began to fizzle. As their apocalyptic expectations were not met, Syriac Christians had to develop other interpretive frameworks to address memories of the conquests. After the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, there were no other extant Syriac apocalypses for more than a century. But discussions of the conquests proliferated in other genres. These conquest accounts from the first half of the eighth century neither described specific battles nor predicted the world's impending end. Instead, they situated the conquests within a broader context of scriptural exegesis, king lists, and apologetics. In contrast to the late seventh-century

apocalypses, authors of these slightly later texts often downplayed the conquests' historical and theological significance. They suggested that even if the *ṭayyāyē* had established a long-lasting kingdom, the kingdom's rise and persistence should present little challenge to Christianity.

Such attempts to minimize the conquests' significance took place as ᶜAbd al-Malik's successors expanded his policies of Islamization and Arabicization.[74] During the early eighth century, state officials frequently intervened in church affairs,[75] and there slowly emerged additional anti-Christian measures, such as forbidding non-Muslims from giving legal testimony against Muslims.[76] Changes in tax policy also affected Syriac communities. During the seventh century, conversion to Islam would not lessen a convert's tax liability. But ᶜAbd al-Malik's nephew, Umayyad caliph ᶜUmar II (r. 717–720), legislated that converts to Islam no longer had to pay the *jizya* (poll tax).[77] It took decades for ᶜUmar II's tax reform to be put into widespread practice. Nevertheless, officially tying the tax rate to religious affiliation represented an important shift in Umayyad policy. Syriac literature from the early eighth century showed a growing awareness of Islam's theological challenges to Christianity, and the first extant disputation texts appeared in the early 700s. At this time, Syriac Christians also reevaluated the ways they commemorated and interpreted the conquests.

Miaphysite bishop Jacob of Edessa (fl. 684–708) provides a useful illustration of how memories of the conquests changed around the end of the seventh century. In his writings, Jacob made dozens of references to *ṭayyāyē*, but his extant works contained only one explicit discussion of the conquests. This short reference appeared among a collection of Jacob's scriptural comments or *Scholia*, and it is unclear when he wrote it. Jacob commented on 1 Kings 14:21–28 where the biblical text claims that, because of the Israelites' sins, the Egyptian pharaoh Shishak successfully invaded Jerusalem. After explaining how the ancient Israelites were a type for Christians, Jacob wrote:

> Therefore, because of the evil of Rehoboam and of Judah, God brought upon them Shishak the reigning king of Egypt. And, as divine scripture relates, because of their sins and provocation, he took them captive, scattered them, and destroyed their cities. So also us, because of our sins and many iniquities, Christ handed us over. And he enslaved us under the harsh yoke of the Arabians.[78] . . . Because we did not take notice of all this grace and freedom that had been given us, but became oppressors and deniers

> of grace—just like ancient Judah, we were handed over to bondage and slavery, to plunder and captivity.[79]

On one level, Jacob was doing nothing new. Like the *Life of Maximus the Confessor*, the *Book of Main Points*, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Edessene Apocalypse*, and the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, Jacob suggested that the conquests and Eastern Christianity's subjugation to Arabian rule were the result of divine retribution for Christian sinfulness. When they discussed the conquests, some of these earlier texts briefly alluded to passages in the Hebrew Scripture, such as prophetic passages from Daniel. But Jacob was the first Syriac Christian to fully develop an exegetical strategy that explicitly related Christian defeat during the conquests to a specific biblical precedent. Just as the Israelites' sins in the tenth century BCE allowed a foreign king to take control of Jerusalem and enslave God's chosen people, so too in the seventh century. The result of Jacob's exegesis was just the opposite of what one finds in the earlier Syriac apocalypses. Here, the conquests were no longer extraordinary events so unprecedented they signaled the world's end. Instead, the conquests were a repeat of biblical history. This analogy between the sins of contemporary Christians and ancient Israelites did not stop at offering a tidy explanation for the Arabians' military success. It also pointed toward their eventual (albeit no longer imminent) demise. Even if the Israelites' captivity under foreign invaders might last for decades or even centuries, eventually their repentance motivated God to destroy their conquerors and free His people. Undoubtedly, Jacob was hoping for a similar outcome.

A different strategy for minimizing the conquests' significance appeared in two early eighth-century texts that spoke about Arab rulers. The first was a brief caliph list written between 705 and 715.[80] The list began: "[In] the year 932 of Alexander, the son of Philip the Macedonian [= 620/621 CE], Muḥammad entered the land. He reigned seven years. After him, Abū Bakr reigned: two years. After him, ʿUmar reigned: twelve years. After him, ʿUthmān reigned: twelve years. After him . . ."[81] The record continues to the beginning of Caliph Walīd's reign in 705. What made the sequence particularly striking was its detached presentation. The prophet Muḥammad was just like any other king. There was no need to explain the conquests. One king followed the other, just as in any other kingdom. The author stripped the memories of the conquests of any overarching trauma or meaning and simply buried them within a list of relatively mundane political changes.[82]

Written just a few years later, the aptly named *Chronicle of Disasters*

explained how a long list of catastrophes "happened according to the just, incomprehensible, and astonishing judgments of God."[83] This inventory of calamities began with a comet's appearance: "When the kingdom of the Sons of Ishmael held power and its control stretched over the entire land, in the days of Walīd son of Malik, son of Marwān, who reigned at that time."[84] One has to make it through a plague, a drought, a locust infestation, a hurricane, a hailstorm, and several earthquakes before encountering the second reference to Arab rule, when Walīd died and was succeeded by his brother Suleiman. The list ended fairly anticlimactically with a hailstorm killing a number of birds. Yet more interesting than the fowls' unfortunate fate was the way the author interwove these natural catastrophes with the two references to Umayyad caliphs. The text did not explicitly link the kingdom of the Sons of Ishmael with other listed items. Nevertheless, the intercalation of these two rulers in the midst of more conventional misfortunes certainly suggested that these caliphs were part of God's chastisement for Christian sins.

Both the *Chronicle ad 705* and the *Chronicle of Disasters* are dull reading. This was part of the point. By reducing the rise of Islam to simply a list of kings or sandwiching the notice of a new caliph between one hailstorm that damages vineyards and another that destroys birds, these texts domesticated the conquests. The last surviving Ummayad era conquest account, however, showed just how much was at stake in these seemingly innocuous commemorations. In the 720s, an anonymous East Syrian writer claimed to have recorded a conversation between an unnamed monk from the Monastery of Bēt Ḥālē and an unspecified *ṭayyāyā* official who was visiting the monastery. The resulting *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* (also known as *The Disputation Between a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable*) contained an eight-folio discussion between these interlocutors concerning topics such as Trinitarian theology, Christian veneration of relics, and origins of the Qur'an.[85] This supposed transcript ended with the *ṭayyāyā* declaring that were it not for the fear of repercussions, many *ṭayyāyē* would have converted to Christianity.[86]

Discussions of the conquests played such a central role in the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* that its most recent interpreter proclaims, "The relation between political power and right religion is the main problem in the *Disputation*."[87] The *ṭayyāyā* first discussed the conquests when he presented *ṭayyāyē* military success as proof of Islam's doctrinal correctness: "This is the sign that God loves us and agrees with our confession [*tawditā*]: he gave us authority over all religions and peoples. Behold they are slaves subject to us."[88] Although here appearing in a Christian text, the argument was identical to that found

in a number of early Islamic sources.[89] Passages in Christian works such as the *Book of Main Points* and *Pseudo-Methodius* tried to preempt this line of reasoning. The dialogical format of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, however, helped it become the first Syriac text to have a *ṭayyāyā* character explicitly articulate this challenge. The result was a particularly vivid example of contested commemoration in which two characters expressed diametrically opposed views of the conquests' meaning. Although the dialogue's characters were literary fictions, the perspectives they presented were not. The text's plot (such as it is) sought to adjudicate between these two interpretations of the past and reassure its audience that the Christian memory of the conquests was the correct one.

The monk initially raised two objections to the *ṭayyāyā*'s claim. First, similar to what Jacob of Edessa implied in his appeal to biblical history, the monk noted that the world had seen the rise and fall of many kingdoms and that those who first seemed to be military victors later suffered defeat. According to the monk, such reversals of fortunate were particularly prevalent among the kingdoms God initially used to chastise His chosen people. The monk's second objection to the *ṭayyāyā*'s understanding of the conquests rejected the conquest memories of most earlier Syriac accounts. Many earlier Christian texts emphasized that after the conquests the conquerors controlled most of the known world. In contrast, the monk in the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* argued, "You Sons of Ishmael control [only a] little of the earth and all creation is not subjected to your authority."[90] In support of this claim, the monk presented a long list of lands and peoples not yet conquered. After minimizing the conquests' chronological and geographical significance, the monk turned to defending specific Christian beliefs and practices.

The two interlocutors returned to the conquests at the end of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* when the *ṭayyāyā* asked questions that had undoubtedly been puzzling many eighth-century Christians: "Why has God delivered you into our hands? [Why] are you led by us like sheep to the slaughter, your priests and bishops are killed, and the rest [of you] are subjected and enslaved day and night by the king's tribute that is more bitter than death?"[91] At first glance, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*'s responses were almost identical to *Pseudo-Methodius*, on which they clearly depended. The monk quoted the same verse from Deuteronomy: "God does not bring you into the promised land to inherit it because of your righteousness, but because of the wickedness of its inhabitants." Next, like *Pseudo-Methodius*, he referred to the sixty years of Israelite enslavement prior to Gideon as a precursor to the *ṭayyāyē*'s current subjugation of Eastern Christians.

The monk finished by citing, as did *Pseudo-Methodius*, Hebrews 12:6: "The Lord chastises whomever He loves."[92]

Despite these similarities of argument, there remained two important differences between the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* and its predecessors. The first difference related to the issue of genre. By using the format of a dialogue and combining points found scattered throughout works like *Pseudo-Methodius* into a single paragraph, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* provided an easily accessible and potentially reassuring list of why the historically, geographically, and scripturally informed Christian should not see the conquests as a sign of Christianity's inferiority to Islam. The second difference related to the issue of argumentation. The *Disputation* took what was previously a defensive argument—despite *ṭayyāyē* military success, Christians remained God's chosen people—and transformed it into a seemingly counterintuitive claim. In the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, the *ṭayyāyē*'s victory in the conquests actually proved God's disdain for them. This line of reasoning began immediately after the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* quoted Hebrews 12:8. Unlike *Pseudo-Methodius*, when commenting on this verse, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* switched into the second person: "'The Lord chastises whomever He loves [Hebrews 12:8].' And if *you* are without chastisement, *you* are foreigners and not sons."[93] The implication emerged that *your* lack of suffering was not a sign of divine favor but stemmed from *you* not being one of God's sons. Since the Sons of Ishmael were not part of God's family, God did not bother to use adversity to correct their behavior.

The *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* then combined the motif of kinship with that of inheritance. In its last lines, one learns that God punishes Christians in the temporal world so they can inherit heaven. Similarly, although a righteous Son of Hagar would not abide in eternal torment, in God's kingdom he still would be considered "as a hireling and not as a son."[94] The *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* built on a lengthy tradition of interreligious intertexuality. When it was initially written, the Genesis story of Abraham, Hagar, and Sarah emphasized that God's chosen lineage passed not through Hagar to her son Ishmael but through Sarah to her son Isaac, the progenitor of the Israelites. Hundreds of years later, Paul commented on this passage in Galatians 4. But he reversed the traditional Jewish interpretation. Paul claimed that Hagar's offspring represented the Jews, and Sarah's lineage belonged only to those who followed Christ. When the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* spoke of people whom we call Muslims as "the Sons of Hagar," it read contemporary events through Paul's interpretation of Genesis. That is, people we refer to as Muslims were, in the

Bēt Ḥālē Disputation's exegesis, taking the role that the Jews did in Paul's. As Hagar's children, they were being disinherited from God's chosen lineage.

Other Syriac texts used similar terms and implied a similar point. But the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*'s understanding of the conquests played a unique role in this argument. The dialogue ended with a sort of divine irony. According to the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, Christians' military defeat actually signified their kinship to God. Because Christians were God's children, God chastised them so they would learn to become worthy heirs. In contrast, the Sons of Hagar were militarily successful simply because God did not bother to correct those who were not really His sons. Through the conquests, God gave the *ṭayyāyē* territory in this world as a sign that they would not be His true heirs in the world to come.

The complexity of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*'s exegesis helps to illustrate how much memories of the conquests had changed under the Umayyad dynasty. The rise of ʿAbd al-Malik, the end of the second *fitna*, and Umayyad policies of Islamization substantially affected the ways Syriac Christians remembered the events of the 630s as well as the genres in which they preserved these memories. In some cases, Syriac Christians reacted by using the genre of apocalypse to increase the conquests' cosmological significance: they were literally the end of the world. In other cases, Syriac Christians reacted, often in the forms of king lists and chronicles, by downplaying the conquests' significance: the conquests were a relatively mundane transfer of kingship. But in the dialogical disputation text of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* one finds the conquests imbued with greater religious valence. As the caliphate became increasingly invested and increasingly public in the promotion of Islam, Syriac Christians now remembered the conquests as being increasingly Islamic. That is, the ways one interpreted the conquests became important for arguing the relative merits of Christianity versus the merits of the confession (*tawditā*) proclaimed by Hagar's children.

An Increasingly Distant Past: Memories of the Conquests During the Early Abbasid Caliphate of the Mid-Eighth Through the Mid-Ninth Century

After the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, there occurred a several-decade hiatus in extant conquest accounts. When the next surviving account appeared in the 760s, we encounter Syriac Christians in a very different situation than forty years earlier. In 747 the Abbasid family led a revolt against Umayyad rule.

Three years later they defeated the Umayyad caliph Marwān II and took control of the Islamic empire.[95] The change from Umayyad to Abbasid rule in 750 dramatically affected Syriac Christians' collective memories of the conquests in terms of both how often they wrote about the 630s and how they chose to remember them.

Abbasid interactions with Christianity varied greatly depending on a given caliph's policies or a local governor's practices; there was no uniform treatment of Christians under Abbasid rule.[96] Nevertheless, several long-term developments in the early Abbasid period shaped the fortunes of all Syriac communities between 750 and the mid-ninth century. The most important of these was greater contact between Syriac Christians and early Muslims. These interactions took place on a number of levels. In 767, the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur moved the capital of the Islamic empire from Damascus to the newly constructed city of Baghdad. This move was particularly advantageous for East Syrian Christians because Baghdad was located just a few kilometers from Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the traditional seat of their catholicos. The shift of capitals thus enabled the head of the East Syrian church to have frequent dealings with the caliphate. More broadly, as a result of the process of Arabicization that had started a century earlier, many Syriac Christians were now bilingual, allowing for more direct interactions with Muslims and a greater knowledge of Islam. Early Abbasid society also began a widespread translation project in which Abbasid authorities and private elites sought to translate all available texts of Greek science and philosophy into Arabic. Because many of these works had already been translated from Greek into Syriac, Syriac scholars were active participants in the Abbasid translation movement.[97] The Abbasid translation movement also popularized Aristotelian logic, which became a common intellectual currency shared by Christians and Muslims. Several early Abbasid rulers also popularized public religious debates that provided a more formalized venue for religious exchange.[98] At the same time, cities and towns had increasingly mixed populations that, combined with the ongoing effects of Arabicization, facilitated everyday contact between Christians and Muslims.

This does not mean that the eighth and ninth centuries were an age of universal tolerance and mutual respect. During the Abbasid period, conversion to Islam became increasingly prevalent and eventually led to a substantial decrease in the number of Syriac Christians.[99] At the same time, Abbasid authorities were developing their own governmental, legal, and intellectual systems that were increasingly distinct from those of their Byzantine and

Sasanian predecessors. The government bureaucracy was now conducted almost entirely in Arabic; compared to the Umayyad period, Christian elites no longer played as large a role in government administration.[100] Often in response to requests from quarreling Christians, Muslim officials continued their involvement in church politics.[101] Several Abbasid caliphs also became increasingly aggressive in the ongoing project of Islamization. During the early Abbasid period, a set of legal traditions designed to differentiate *dhimmī* (non-Muslims) from Muslims began to reach its classical form, the so-called Pact of ʿUmar.[102] Scholars continue to debate how often regulations on the appearance and behavior of *dhimmī* were actually enforced.[103] Nevertheless, it remains clear that over time these rules, which Muslim authors attributed to Caliph ʿUmar (d. 644), became increasingly discriminatory and more frequently implemented. The result was unexpected reversals of fortune, such as one caliph befriending and another imprisoning the East Syrian catholicos, as well as seemingly contradictory behavior, such as one of the most anti-Christian caliphs having a Christian chief physician.[104]

Combined with the increased chronological distance between the conquests and later Syriac writers, such developments strongly influenced the ways Abbasid-era Christians remembered the 630s. Of particular note was the relative infrequency with which later Syriac authors wrote about the conquests. During the Abbasid period, there was a substantial increase in the number and length of Syriac texts about Islam. But unlike the first hundred years of Syriac writings on Islam, when the majority of texts discussed the 630s, most early Abbasid Syriac works did not even mention the conquests. The result was a dearth of Abbasid-era Syriac descriptions of the conquests, punctuated by a couple of authors who wrote about them extensively. Even among the minority who addressed the conquests, their concerns had shifted dramatically from those of their predecessors. For these writers, memories of the conquests became even more presentist, ever more strongly influenced by the author's contemporary political context.

Maronite writer Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785) composed one of the first Abbasid-era accounts of Islam. Later authors credit Theophilus with translating Homer and Galen into Syriac, penning astrological treatises, and composing a lengthy historical chronicle. They also claim that he once accompanied the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi on a military campaign, most likely as his astrologer. Although Theophilus's *Chronicle* is no longer extant, three later authors—the Greek Theophanes (d. 818), the Syriac Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē (d. 845), and the Arabic Christian Agapius of Manbij (d. ca. 950)—had access

to Theophilus's text.[105] By identifying passages that these later writers shared, modern scholars can reconstruct a general sketch of Theophilus's *Chronicle*, even if one cannot always determine the exact wording of the original work or recover it in its entirety.[106]

Even a rough outline of Theophilus's *Chronicle* hints at important changes in the collective memory of the conquests. Of particular note was Theophilus's move away from the question that dominated so many of his predecessors—why God allowed the conquests—to new issues that were becoming particularly relevant for Christian-Muslim interactions. In place of asking why God gave victory to the conquerors, Theophilus was much more interested in how the conquests unfolded. But unlike the earliest Syriac writings about the conquests, for Theophilus, addressing the question of "how" the conquests took place did not end with enumerating military encounters and casualty figures. The key moments in the conquests were not the battles but the capitulations. Theophilus's *Chronicle* described how the Christian patriarch Sophronius surrendered Jerusalem to Caliph ʿUmar and received a treaty guaranteeing the safety of the city's Christian inhabitants, how all the other cities of Syria surrendered as well—each establishing an agreement with the conquerors—and how Theophilus's hometown of Edessa peacefully submitted to the *ṭayyāyē* and made a treaty with their commander.[107] These stories of cities surrendering most clearly distinguished Theophilus from Umayyad-period writers.

Such surrender narratives marked an important shift in the use of memories of the conquests. Under the early Abbasids, Muslim authorities were particularly interested in finding seventh-century precedents for the appropriate treatment of local Christian populations. Rulers now used how a given city was conquered in the 630s—by force or by treaty—to adjudicate current-day issues ranging from tax rates to the permissibility of church construction. In response, Christians like Theophilus collected and often composed conquest treaties and accounts of the situations under which they were written.[108] These descriptions of the past not only attempted to set a legal precedent for the treatment of Christians in a particular city, but they also more broadly tried to "prescribe harmonious coexistence" and "anchor ideals of co-operation and co-existence in a formative beginning."[109]

Consider, for example, Theophilus's account of Jerusalem's surrender.[110] Theophilus emphasized that Jerusalem's bishop Sophronius, not a secular authority, took the initiative to make a treaty with ʿUmar and to negotiate

the city's surrender. Theophilus thus established the political primacy of the bishopric.[111] Theophilus's account also focused on Sophronius and ʿUmar's peaceful, collegial encounter to model for his eighth-century audience how cooperation between Christian and Muslim elites could benefit both communities. It remains unlikely that Theophilus knew the complete circumstances of how Jerusalem, the other cities of Syria, or even his own Edessa were conquered in the 630s. For him, however, memories of these events had a direct relevance for contemporary politics. Regardless of how detailed his knowledge of seventh-century history actually was, Theophilus could not afford to retell the conquests without including anecdotes of key cities peacefully surrendering and their Christian inhabitants gaining assurance of benevolent treatment.[112]

But Theophilus's descriptions were not universally irenic. Although his *Chronicle* minimized conflict between Muslims and Syriac Christians, it depicted a triangulation of power, with Christians and Jews using their relations with *ṭayyāyē* authorities to attack each other. For example, Theophilus's version of Jerusalem's surrender specified that the treaty Sophronius negotiated forbade Jews from continuing to live in the city. Physical exile did not, however, rid Theophilus's Jerusalem narratives of the Jews; they appeared again when the *ṭayyāyē* began construction on the Temple Mount, an event that Theophilus dated to the late 630s.[113] At this point, he stated, the Jews proclaimed that nothing built by *ṭayyāyē* on the Temple Mount would remain standing as long as there was a cross on the Mount of Olives. According to Theophilus, in response the *ṭayyāyē* initiated a policy of eliminating Christian crosses wherever they might be found.

Theophilus's narrative resulted in an increased permeability between past and present and an important shift in culpability. The *Chronicle* projected the late Umayyad and early Abbasid regulation of Christian displays of the cross back to the conquest of Jerusalem.[114] Theophilus then placed the blame for this anticross policy not on Muslim rulers but on Judaism; according to his *Chronicle*, opposition to the cross did not stem from a theological conflict between Islam and Christianity but from an early misunderstanding brought about by malicious Jews. Theophilus's *Chronicle* represented a much more politically savvy form of collective memory. Because narratives of the past now influenced present-day law, memory crafting became a central way for Syriac elites to affect Abbasid treatment of Christians. We are thus a long way from John bar Penkāyē in the 680s, who claimed that, during the conquests, naked

Sons of Hagar riding without shield or armor were God's punishment for Christian sins. In Theophilus's *Chronicle* the *ṭayyāyē* benefited from political fortune and military advantage, and Theophilus replaced issues of theodicy with questions regarding the legal status of specific cities and populations. The resulting narratives, with their politically empowered bishops, negotiating *ṭayyāyē*, and vilified Jews, both reflected and affected Christianity's increasingly contested status in the Abbasid Empire.[115]

Soon after Theophilus completed his *Chronicle*, an anonymous Miaphysite writer composed a 190-folio work that modern scholars most often call the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*.[116] Its history from the world's beginning to the 770s provides the longest surviving Syriac account of early Christians under Islamic rule. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, however, substantially differed from Theophilus's work in the relative importance it attributed to the conquests—of the 58 folia speaking of Muslim rule, the author dedicated less than two to his discussion of the conquests. The few conquest descriptions that the chronicler chose to include were most often rapid-fire military summaries that, despite their hectic pace, still included occasional references to the politically important question of how a given city was captured. For example:

> In the year 948 [636–638 CE], the *ṭayyāyē* crossed the Jazira and the Romans fled. ʿIyād invaded Edessa. In the year 952 [640–641], the *ṭayyāyē* besieged Dara and attacked it. Many people from both sides were killed, more from the *ṭayyāyē*. Finally, the *ṭayyāyē* gave them assurances and subdued [the city]. From then onward, no one [else] was killed. In the same year, they besieged ʿDvin where many people were killed, as many as 1200 Armenians. In the year 953 [641–642], the *ṭayyāyē* conquered Caesarea Philippi. The year 955 [643–644]: the Roman general and patrician Valentinus came to battle the *ṭayyāyē*. But he became terrified of them and fled leaving [behind] all his wealth which the *ṭayyāyē* took. In the same year, Procopius and Theodorus went out and in great anger invaded Baṭnan of Serug. They pillaged, plundered, and stole everything they wanted and returned to their land.[117]

Part of the reason the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* gave the conquests short shrift may be that the author had little access to previous writings about the time period. Nevertheless, if Theophilus had been in a similar situation, he probably would

have made something up (and he very well may have done just that).[118] In contrast, for the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, conquest history was simply not very relevant. This was partially due to the nature of the later sections, which focused primarily on local history around Āmīd in the 760s and 770s. In part this was also due to the author writing from a very different perspective than did Theophilus. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* was anything but irenic regarding Muslim rule, especially as experienced under the caliph al-Manṣūr and the governor of Mosul, Mūsā bar Muṣʿab. Unlike Theophilus's work, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* did not use conquest narratives to model interfaith cooperation. The author also made a sharp distinction between pre-Abbasid Muslims, whom he called *ṭayyāyē*, and Abbasid-era Muslims, whom he called "Persians."[119] As a result, for the author of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, collective memories concerning the conquests were less germane to his contemporary world than they were for Theophilus. The chronicler's decision to say so little about the conquests in a document that said so much about contemporary Muslim rule illustrated changing priorities regarding what parts of their history Syriac authors felt were most important to remember, interpret, and transmit.

Less than a decade after the composition of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, another short reference to the conquests appeared in the works of the head of the East Syrian church, Timothy I. Like Theophilus before him, Timothy I had a particularly close relationship with the caliph al-Mahdi. The catholicos was a frequent member of al-Mahdi's court, was personally commissioned by the caliph to translate a work of Aristotle from Syriac into Arabic, and wrote a lengthy letter describing his discussion with the caliph about Christian theology. As in the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, the conquests played an extremely minor role in Timothy's writings, taking up only two sentences in his extensive oeuvre. Nevertheless, despite their brevity, these sentences vividly illustrated how quickly and dramatically Syriac Christian memories of the conquests were changing.

Timothy alluded to the conquests in a letter detailing a discussion he had with al-Mahdi.[120] Partway through their conversation, the caliph asked the rather sensitive question of what the catholicos thought about Muḥammad. Timothy began his carefully worded answer with a list of reasons that Muḥammad was a praiseworthy man who walked on the paths of the prophets. In this context, Timothy stated that, because of Muḥammad's monotheism, God "honored him exceedingly and subjected two powerful kingdoms to his control. . . . The former kingdom, that is the Kingdom of the Persians,

worshipped creatures instead of the Creator. The latter, that is the Kingdom of the Romans [i.e., the Byzantines], attributed suffering and mortality to the one who cannot suffer and die."[121]

The end of Timothy's statement seemed quite similar to what John bar Penkāyē had said just over a hundred years earlier: God punished the Persians for their polytheism and the Byzantines for their Christology. But Timothy's larger point differed substantially from anything found among Umayyad-era Christians. Christian authors in the first century following the conquests were adamant that God giving the *ṭayyāyē* military success had nothing to do with their relative virtue. But now in the 780s, the head of the East Syrian church openly proclaimed that God gave victory directly to Muḥammad as a sign of divine approval. The moral Timothy draws from his brief reference to the conquests was not a call for Christian repentance nor a portent of Islam's imminent demise. Rather: "Who will not praise [Muḥammad] . . . the one whom God has praised, and will not weave a crown of glory and exaltation to the one whom God has glorified and exalted?"[122] It is difficult to overemphasize the contrast between Timothy's late eighth-century letter and earlier writings such as the late seventh-century *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, which proclaimed, "It was not because God loves them that He allowed them to enter the Christians' kingdom and to seize it."[123]

If we had an actual transcript of Timothy's comments to al-Mahdi, one might excuse the catholicos for spontaneous hyperbole. But the allusion to the conquests appeared in a letter written to a fellow Christian. Although most likely recounting a real meeting with the caliph, Timothy's report was a carefully constructed literary depiction designed to reassure, not challenge, its Christian readership. Undoubtedly, his claim that the conquests were an indication of God's approval of Muḥammad was another example of late eighth-century realpolitik. What is most interesting, however, is not the sincerity of Timothy's argument but its palatability. A statement that just fifty years earlier would have horrified most Umayyad-era Christians now occurred in a document so popular among eighth- and ninth-century Christians that just a few years after its initial composition, it appeared in multiple recensions and languages.[124]

In stark contrast to the author of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* and Timothy I, who barely spoke of the conquests, the most important ninth-century Syriac chronicler, Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē, could not stop talking about them.[125]

Toward the end of his tenure as the Miaphysite patriarch (r. 818–845), one of Dionysius's bishops asked him to compose a world history.[126] The resulting *Chronicle* covered events from the late sixth century until at least 842 and contained the largest known early Syriac discussion of the conquests. Unfortunately, except for a few pages, Dionysius's *Chronicle* no longer survives. Our knowledge of what he wrote thus depends on two later writers who quoted extensively from his *Chronicle*: the twelfth-century Miaphysite patriarch Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) and the anonymous author of the thirteenth-century *Chronicle ad 1234*.[127]

At first glance, passages attributed to Dionysius that spoke of the conquests appear very similar to those of Theophilus before him. This is not surprising considering that Theophilus's eighth-century *Chronicle* was Dionysius's main source of information concerning the seventh century. But when compared to other chroniclers who also read Theophilus, Dionysius stood out in how often he preserved and most likely expanded Theophilus's descriptions of the conquests. As in the earliest strata of conquest accounts, Dionysius made reference to numerous battles and casualty figures. But his descriptions were much longer and more detailed than those found in seventh-century portrayals. Dionysius filled his narratives with the follies and the exploits of Byzantine and Arab leaders. These anecdotes also showed that he, like Theophilus before him, was particularly fond of recording surrender agreements.

Even more informative than what parts of Theophilus's *Chronicle* Dionysius chose to preserve were passages that most likely appeared in Dionysius's *Chronicle* but were not taken from Theophilus. This material offers the greatest insight into Dionysius's view of the conquests and suggests that he drastically altered the roles that all previous conquest accounts had assigned to the Byzantines and the Sons of Ishmael. This role reversal first appeared in a set of remarks that Dionysius made regarding the conquests' origins. My chapter began with this passage, as it remains perhaps the most influential—and most frequently misinterpreted—early Syriac conquest account. The left column came from the *Chronicle ad 1234*,[128] which scholars generally feel more faithfully reproduced Dionysius's work. The right column came from Michael the Syrian.[129] Identical words in the Syriac are italicized in the translations to show how these later chroniclers both preserved and modified sections of Dionysius.

Chronicle ad 1234

But *the God of vengeance, who rules the kingdom of men* on earth, *who gives it to whom He wants and appoints the lowest of men over it, when He saw* that the measure of the Romans' sins was overflowing and that they were using every sort of cruelty against us and our churches and [that] our confession was close to being destroyed, He aroused and persuaded and *brought the Sons of Ishmael from the land of the south,* those indeed who had been despised and scorned and unknown among the nations of the world. And *by them we gain*ed deliverance. And in this way *we profited not a little,* for we had been ransomed from the tyrannical kingdom of the *Romans.*

Chronicle of Michael the Syrian

And therefore *the God of vengeance, who rules* over all and changes *the kingdom of men* as He wants and *gives it to whom He wants and appoints the lowest of men over it, when He saw* the Romans' cruelty—that whenever they ruled, they cruelly stole our churches and our monasteries and they judged us without pity—
He brought the Sons of Ishmael from the land of the South

that *by them* we might *gain deliverance* from the Romans. . . . *We have profited not a little* to have been freed from the *Romans'* cruelty and from their evil and their wrath and their bitter enmity toward us. And we are at peace.

At first, Dionysius's perspective seems somewhat like that of the seventh-century *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem*, the *Life of Maximus the Confessor*, John bar Penkāyē's *Book of Main Points*, or the eighth-century *Apology* of Timothy I, all of which also attributed the conquests to the Byzantine persecution of orthodox Syriac Christians (although they disagreed on who were the true representatives of orthodoxy). Dionysius went a step further than these earlier works, however, when he depicted the conquests not just as the Byzantines' punishment but also as Syriac Christians' rescue, suggesting that the outcome was better for Syriac Christians than continued Byzantine rule.

Dionysius further villainized the Byzantines and valorized the *ṭayyāyē* through a number of unique narrative details.[130] For example, he interrupted Theophilus's discussion of Heraclius to speak of an encounter between Heraclius's brother Theodoric and a Chalcedonian stylite. Theodoric told the stylite that he planned to persecute the Miaphysites once he returned from battling the *ṭayyāyē*. According to Dionysius, this rash statement resulted in God's abandonment of the Byzantines and the *ṭayyāyē*'s decisive victory over Theodoric's forces.[131] Soon after Theodoric's humiliating defeat, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius left Syria and allowed his army to ravage the country

as if it were enemy territory.[132] Dionysius further accused the Byzantines of torturing the native population to discover where they had hidden their possessions.[133] As a result, the Syriac Christians welcomed the *ṭayyāyē* on their successful return from defeating the Byzantines.

In contrast to his depiction of Byzantine wickedness and divinely ordained defeats, Dionysius stressed how God helped the virtuous *ṭayyāyē* to overcome their foes. For example, before a key battle, the *ṭayyāyē* cried out, "God helped us on land. God will protect us in the water." Their cavalry then miraculously swam across the Tigris unscathed, and they easily defeated the Persians.[134] So, too, when a Byzantine general demanded that his Syrian ally support him, the Syrian recognized that God was on the *ṭayyāyē*'s side, and he responded, "If I help you, I shall get no help from God." Soon afterward the general and his army all perished, while the Syrian was saved.[135]

Almost two hundred years after the conquests, Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē wrote a radically different version of the conquests in which *ṭayyāyē* military victory served not simply as punishment for Byzantine theological error but also as redemption for Syriac orthodoxy. In his narrative, the *ṭayyāyē* and their initially benevolent policies toward Syriac Christians become a foil to Byzantine persecution of Miaphysites. Unfortunately, many twentieth- and twenty-first-century authors have read Dionysius's work uncritically as an objective description of the conquests and their reception. The result has been a widespread myth that, during the conquests, Syriac Christians conspired with Muslims against the Byzantines and welcomed the Arabs with open arms. The first two hundred years of Syriac conquest accounts easily disprove this contention. The contrast between Dionysius and earlier commemorations of the conquests also reminds us that Dionysius's accounts often revealed much more about the ninth century than they did about the seventh. Partially as a result of Islamic control of Syria and Mesopotamia, by Dionysius's time connections between Byzantine and Syriac Christianity were all but severed.[136] For ninth-century Syriac Christians looking back two centuries, the Byzantines seemed so distant from true Christianity that their defeat no longer presented a theological quandary. Instead, memories of the conquests functioned less as arguments for the relative merits of Christianity versus Islam than as a means to solidify intra-Christian divisions.

The perceived distance between Syriac Christians and the conquests continued to grow over time. After Dionysius, the conquests made few appearances among Syriac writings until the encyclopedic chronicles of Elias

of Nisibis in the eleventh century, of Michael the Syrian at the end of the twelfth century, and of Barhebraeus and the anonymous author of the *Chronicle ad 1234* in the thirteenth century. Similarly (with the notable exception of Agapius, who depended heavily on Theophilus's *Chronicle*), later Arabic Christian authors also rarely discussed the conquests. Besides references to conquest treaties, which continued to make periodic appearances in Abbasid-era texts,[137] writings by Christians under Muslim rule shifted their focus to other topics, concentrating less on why or how the conquests occurred and more on what Christians should do in their wake.

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Just over two hundred years separated Dionysius's *Chronicle* from the *Account of 637*. The vast differences between this carefully constructed, extensive narration of the conquests and the brief scribbling on a gospel flyleaf show how much had changed in the intervening centuries. We must remember that the majority of later Syriac writers knew less, not more, about the conquests than their predecessors did. The expansion and proliferation of Syriac conquest accounts did not usually stem from increased knowledge about seventh-century history but was a form of memory work in which Syriac Christians retold and reinterpreted the Islamic conquests as a tool for addressing contemporary challenges.

The earliest accounts' focus on specific battles and the brevity of their discussions reflected a mid-seventh-century impression of the conquests as just one in a long, ongoing series of military invasions of northern Mesopotamia. Such nonchalant portrayals of the conquests may have reassured their audiences that recent military defeat presented few theological challenges to Syriac Christianity. They also remind us that the conquests were not so much a single, datable event as a long-term process in which military conflict was only the first (and, in many cases, least dramatic) step.

The second *fitna* and ʿAbd al-Malik's policies of Islamization and Arabicization caused Syriac authors of the late seventh and early eighth centuries to invest the conquests with much greater significance, especially when they appear in late seventh- and early eighth-century apocalypses. Nevertheless, the resulting apocalyptic writings still depicted the conquests as a temporary phenomenon, a short-lived harbinger of the world's imminent end. As the second Arab civil war became a more distant memory and Syriac Christians

began to face greater pressure to assimilate and convert, apocalyptic expectations were replaced with more apologetic concerns. Because Muslims increasingly cited the military successes of the 630s as proof of Islam's doctrinal superiority, the ways Syriac Christians remembered and explained the conquests became an important defense for Christian beliefs and practices. Many early eighth-century authors downplayed the conquests' importance by either treating them as a fairly mundane transfer of kingship from one power to another or by drawing on biblical parallels to depict them as only a temporary chastisement for Christian sins. Others, like the author of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, used the genre of a dialogical disputation to forward intricate exegetical arguments that directly refuted contemporary Muslim explanations of the conquests' success.

The change to Abbasid rule resulted in more frequent and more direct contact between Christians and Muslims. In Abbasid times, these interactions were also of a different character than those most common in the Umayyad period. Now Syriac Christians more often had to address issues such as intermarriage, conversion, and direct theological debate, causing them to reevaluate the conquests. Unlike their predecessors, most authors from the mid-eighth century onward were convinced that Muslim control of Mesopotamia was more than a temporary phenomenon. Some writers, notably Theophilus of Edessa and Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē, wrote extensively about the conquests. Their depictions of the 630s were particularly attentive to the politics of their own day, emphasizing (or perhaps inventing) treaty agreements and intensifying intra-Christian and Christian-Jewish rivalries. Most early Abbasid-era writers, however, said very little about the conquests and instead concentrated more directly on the topic of the next chapter: interreligious dialogue and debate.

Contrary to many modern accounts that portray Syriac Christians as welcoming Muslim rule, until Dionysius's *Chronicle*, written two centuries after the conquests themselves, Syriac sources were unanimous in seeing the conquests as a lamentable development. Throughout the seventh through ninth centuries, the conquests and their aftermath forced Syriac Christianity to collectively grapple with the problem of good things happening to other people. Christian defeat in the 630s and subsequent Muslim rule of Christian populations motivated generations of Syriac Christians to continually reevaluate their past in light of their rapidly changing present. It was precisely this constant re-remembering of a formative moment in their history that shaped

Syriac Christian self-identity and informed their interactions with emerging Islam. An examination of the ways Syriac Christians received, modified, and conveyed competing recollections of the conquests thus provides important insights into how these later communities remembered the early seventh century, as well as how they used these collective memories to explain their present and affect their future.

Chapter 2

A Different Type of Difference-Making: Syriac Narratives of Religious Identity

> Christianity would be an exalted and necessary thing and an honored and venerable name even if it were considered to be the newest and the last of all human customs and religions [*deḥlātē*]. But indeed it is the first and the [most] ancient, as I will explain. And [it is] older than barbarism, *ḥanputā*, Judaism, and all beliefs and religions that human thought has introduced to this world. That is to say, it is as old as humanity's creation even if it received this honored and revered designation [of Christianity] in later times. . . . And indeed that covenant, the teaching of our Lord Christ, also, as I said, is named Christianity. For by it we are distinguished [*prishinan*] from all human teachings and religions in this world. In this way, we say that Christianity is older and prior to all religions.
>
> —Jacob of Edessa, *Defining Christianity*

In the late seventh century, the Miaphysite bishop Jacob of Edessa composed an entire book against those who disobeyed church laws. No copies of his complete work survived. All that remains is a single chapter that two ninth-century Syriac scribes preserved and titled "what Christianity is and that it precedes and is older than all religions."[1]

At first glance, this recently published text seems fairly pedantic. Jacob's definition of Christianity as "God's covenant with humanity" was far from novel. The interest lies not in Jacob's mundane answers for how to define Christianity but in his having to respond to the question in the first place.

Apparently, this was an issue that just would not go away. Two centuries later it remained sufficiently compelling that Abbasid-era scribes considered Jacob's answers to be the one part of his book they had to copy.

Jacob filled his chapter defining Christianity with religiously inflected terminology ranging from the Syriac *deḥlātē* (most often translated as "religions") to *ḥanputā* (most often translated as "paganism," as it comes from the term *ḥanpā*, most often translated as "pagan"). But perhaps the chapter's most important word was the seemingly innocuous *prish*, a participle most often meaning "distinguished from." For Jacob—and, one suspects, for the two later scribes who prioritized this section of Jacob's work—the most pressing issue was religious distinction—establishing a strong hierarchy in which a clearly defined Christianity remained at the top.

In other writings, Jacob explicitly spoke of Islam. Here, the term "barbarism" or *ḥanputā* might have been a polemical allusion to Muslims, an attempt to portray them as barbarians or pagans. Alternatively, what we call Islam may simply have been one of the other human "customs," "teachings," "beliefs," or "religions" that Jacob lumped together. Nevertheless, Jacob's chapter left little doubt regarding Islam's influence on his thought.

To Syriac Christians like Jacob, the emergence of Islam produced a crisis of differentiation. Their new conquerors increasingly defined themselves as supersessionary to Christianity; Jesus was said to have foretold their prophet, their scriptures claimed to succeed the Old and New Testaments, and their monuments—such as the Dome of the Rock, which was being built at the time Jacob was writing—purposefully challenged Christian holy sites. Furthermore, under Islamic rule Christianity no longer was favored over other religions, nor was one branch of Christianity automatically preferred over another.

In the seventh through ninth centuries, however, the generality we call Islam was still in its conceptual infancy, and the boundaries between early Christianity and early Islam remained imprecise. The ambiguities perpetuated by Islam's rise forced Christians like Jacob not only to defend Christian self-identity but, in the process, to strategically define Islam. Even Jacob's emphasis on Christianity's antiquity was likely a reaction to this changing religious environment. Muslims might claim that Islam went back to Abraham. Jacob insisted Christianity went back to Adam.

So how did Islam become a religion in the eyes of those under Muslim rule? What did the category we call Islam signify for Syriac Christians? How did Christians distinguish all-too-similar monotheisms? Answering

such questions is more complicated than investigating Syriac memories of the conquests. With conquest accounts, one could isolate a single subject—the events of the 630s—and in only a few cases did knowledge of that subject improve over time. But Syriac depictions of Islam were multivariable. As with memories of the conquests, the changing circumstances of Muslim rule affected how Syriac authors wrote about Islam. Yet unlike memories of the conquests, Syriac narratives of Islam had no fixed reference, as Islamic beliefs and practices frequently changed during the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. Additionally, there was an evolving knowledge base because most later Syriac authors had substantially more contact with Muslims than their predecessors did.

Changing historical circumstances also affected the broad contours of Syriac discussions of Islam. The first generation of Syriac writers and the vocabulary they used suggested that they rarely saw their conquerors as possessing their own religion. Toward the end of the second civil war and following ʿAbd al-Malik's policies of Islamization, Syriac writers of all genres showed an increased knowledge of their conquerors and an increased willingness to portray Muslims as having some distinctive beliefs and practices. By the end of the Umayyad era, Syriac narratives began to depict Muslims as presenting explicit theological challenges to Christianity, and listed Muslims alongside followers of other religions. After the Abbasid revolution, Syriac authors knew a great deal more about Islam. Their apologetics and polemics often cited Qur'anic passages and took full advantage of the shared intellectual currency of Aristotelian logic and Greek science brought about by the Abbasid translation movement. Nevertheless, even later Syriac authors often minimized distinctions between Christianity and Islam.

Syriac authors did not strive to portray Islam objectively. Still, their discussions differed substantially from those found in many Greek and Latin sources. Written for an audience that often had daily interactions with Muslims, most Syriac writings were more restrained than Greek and Latin texts in how they caricatured Islam.[2] There were no claims that Muslims worshipped Aphrodite, as found in the Venerable Bede and John of Damascus; or that Muslims professed God to be spherical and that the Qur'an was a stupid little text full of blasphemies, as asserted by Nicetas of Byzantium; or that Muslim beliefs were an amalgamation of Judaism, Arianism, and Nestorianism, as hypothesized by George the Monk.[3] Syriac depictions of Islam were neither altruistic nor entirely accurate, but the degree to which Syriac writers exaggerated or misrepresented Muslim beliefs and practices also generally

remained more restrained than that of many Latin and Greek authors.[4] Although polemics abounded in Syriac texts, they often paled in comparison to more Western sources. Few Syriac sources matched the acidity of George the Monk's description of Muslims as "men whose slimy souls would befit pigs, and who put above all things pleasure and lasciviousness, for they are unconsciously and incurably sick,"[5] Emerold the Black's "abominable people . . . who follow the commandments of demons,"[6] or Eulogius's and the *Istoria de Mahomet*'s condemnation of Muslims to hell.[7]

Syriac sources did not go that route. Facing political domination and a supersessionist religion, Syriac Christians engaged in a different type of difference-making, one that refused to understand Islam as entirely other. The resulting contrast between Syriac and non-Syriac representations makes Syriac sources essential for illustrating the multiplicity of early Christian reactions to the rise of Islam.

Nevertheless, the diversity of Syriac responses also presents a methodological challenge. Tracing the ways Syriac Christians depicted Islam reads like a complicated whodunit. We must constantly ask about language (What was it called?), knowledge (Who knew what when?), conceptualization (How was it categorized?), motive (Why think of it this way?), and utility (What could one do with this concept?). Only through a multifaceted inquiry can one effectively examine how successive generations of Syriac Christians began to group a range of people, ideas, and practices into a single category; how this category became increasingly depicted as a religious one; and how this process of categorization related to a world where religious boundaries were often blurred and resisted.

What's in a Name?

Syriac terminology further complicates an investigation into seventh- through ninth-century descriptions of Islam. Syriac writers often spoke of "Judaism" (*ihudāyutā*), "Christianity" (*kriṣṭyānutā*), and "Zoroastrianism" (*mgushutā* = "Magianism"). An analogous abstract noun for Islam, however, did not appear until a late eighth-century chronicle once used the word *mashlmānutā* ("Muslimness"), a term extant texts did not again employ until the twelfth century.[8] In all other cases, rather than using an abstract noun for a collective entity (what we call Islam), early Syriac writers instead referred to individuals (what we call Muslims). Even here the situation was more complex than in English

because there never emerged a single Syriac word for Muslims. Instead, over time Syriac authors adapted or coined various expressions to speak of their conquerors. Exploring the evolution of these terms provides important information concerning Syriac perceptions of Islam.

Prior to the conquests, numerous Syriac writings used the word *ṭayyāyē* to speak of people whom we most often call Arabs.[9] Nevertheless, the translation "Arabs" can be extremely misleading, in part because of the difference between ancient and modern views of ethnicity and religion.[10] In modern English usage, "Arab" primarily denotes a racial identity that does not necessarily specify a given religion. That is, although many Arabs are Muslims, one can be an Arab Christian. In contrast, the English usage of Muslim primarily denotes a religious identity but not necessarily a specific ethnicity. That is, one can be a black Muslim, a white Muslim, a Hispanic Muslim, and so on. This distinction reflects a modern perception that one's race is fixed at birth, but one's religion is voluntary and potentially changeable. As the work of Denise Buell has pointed out, late ancient ethnic reasoning differed substantially from modern suppositions.[11] In antiquity, race and religion were more interconnected, and their boundaries more fluid. Religious practice was often a primary marker of ethnic identity, and race a primary marker of religion. Additionally, for most ancient authors, not only religion but also ethnic identity was mutable; what we categorize as religious conversion was often simultaneously seen as a process of ethnic transformation.[12] Syriac narratives of identity and the terminology they used often reflected this more dynamic understanding of religion and race.

Fortunately, many of the terms Syriac Christians employed to speak of their conquerors are traditionally translated using names such as Hagarenes or Saracens. Because modern English speakers so rarely use these words, they retain some of the flexibility found in the Syriac. But others words, such as those most commonly translated as Arabs (*ṭayyāyē*, singular *ṭayyāyā*) and pagans (*ḥanpē*, singular *ḥanpā*) are overdetermined in English. Because their English translation conceals their richer meanings in Syriac, I have left these words untranslated. By avoiding some of the English terms that so often lock one into modern categories of ethnicity and religion, I aim to better explore how Syriac Christian narratives and vocabulary reflected changing perceptions of their conquerors.

For example, in their analysis of early Syriac writings containing the word *ṭayyāyē*, previous scholars have shown how this term initially referred to a specific tribe but later came to more broadly designate the indigenous people

of Arabia.[13] Although many *ṭayyāyē* were polytheists, in and of itself, the word *ṭayyāyē* did not denote a specific religious affiliation; preconquest Syriac writers could apply *ṭayyāyē* to Christians as well as to non-Christians.[14] Although it was employed with less frequency than *ṭayyāyē*, preconquest Syriac writers also used the Greek loanword *Saracen* (Syriac *sarqāyē*) to speak of these groups. Among preconquest writers, one's religion (e.g., polytheism) often correlated with one's ethnicity (e.g., *ṭayyāyē*, Saracen), but not always. Whether the group was seen as primarily sedentary or nonsedentary had a greater effect on Syriac terminology. Syriac authors generally applied the terms *ṭayyāyē* and *Saracens* to populations they depicted as mainly nomadic. From the perspective of sedentary communities, these terms carried a pejorative valence, helping to distinguish the author's community from a supposedly subordinate one.

The conquests, however, challenged this conceptual system. From the perspective of postconquest Syriac Christians, many *ṭayyāyē* and Saracens no longer lived "safely" in Arabia, nor were they primarily nomadic. Even more disturbing, now they were in charge. In response to this astounding reversal of fortunes, Syriac Christians needed to better differentiate themselves from their new conquerors. For Syriac Christians, this presented both a terminological challenge (what to call their conquerors) and a conceptual challenge (how, despite military defeat, to argue for Christian superiority).

In the seventh through ninth centuries, Syriac Christians deployed three terminological strategies to maintain a hierarchy for themselves and their conquerors. The first was to only slightly modify preconquest categories. Because words like *ṭayyāyē* and *Saracens* had previously drawn an ethnic distinction between self and other, many postconquest authors continued using these words as primarily racial markers. Once the *ṭayyāyē* and Saracens had more permanently settled in northern Mesopotamia, these terms simply lost many of their nomadic overtones. The second strategy of differentiation was to accentuate ethnic difference through a polemic of unfavorable lineage. Labeling their conquerors as "Sons of Hagar," "Sons of Ishmael," and "Ishmaelites," Syriac Christians deployed biblical genealogies to suggest that, despite their military success, the conquerors remained inferior to the conquered. These two strategies were especially prevalent in the seventh century, when their emphasis on lineage resonated with the strong connection in early Islam between tribal affiliation and being part of the Muslim *umma* (community).

Syriac discussions of ethnic difference never disappeared, especially

because in antiquity ethnicity and religious practice remained closely linked. Nevertheless, over time Syriac narratives of identity developed a newer discourse that emphasized religious characteristics. For example, in the seventh century there could be Christian *ṭayyāyē* and non-Christian *ṭayyāyē*. But in some ninth-century texts, *ṭayyāyē* took on greater religious valence and the phrase "a Christian *ṭayyāyē*" became a contradiction in terms, for now all *ṭayyāyē* were, by definition, Muslims.

This discursive move emphasizing the religious appeared across all genres of Syriac literature. In part this was due to later Syriac authors becoming more familiar with their conquerors' beliefs and practices. But this categorical shift also strongly correlated with important changes in the Umayyad Empire. Only after the emergence of Umayyad Islamization policies did Syriac narratives more consistently distinguish conquerors from conquered principally along religious lines.

In this way, Muslims essentially "got religion." Like other ancient writers, Syriac authors never separated religion and ethnicity; religious identity was never nonethnic. The question was simply what kind of terms, figures, and arguments a given writer chose to foreground. In Syriac narratives of identity, later authors eventually shifted from emphasizing their conquerors primarily as members of a given lineage (what we most often condense into the term *Arab*) toward portrayals that more explicitly focused on beliefs and practices (what we most often condense into the term *Muslim*). This process of recategorizing and redefining people allowed Syriac Christianity to (quite literally) come to terms with Islam.

Emphasizing Ethnicity: Mid-Seventh-Century Narratives of Identity During the Rashidun and Sufyanid Caliphates

Contrary to many present-day stereotypes of early Islam, throughout much of the seventh and early eighth centuries, admission into the *umma* was reserved exclusively for Arabs. Religious conversion was predicated on ethnic conversion. For a non-Arab to become Muslim, that individual first had to gain membership in an Arab tribe by becoming the *mawlā* (client) of an Arab sponsor.[15] From a seventh-century Islamic perspective, ethnicity and religion were not independent variables. All Muslims were Arabs, and ideally all Arabs were Muslims.[16]

It is thus not surprising that the earliest conquest accounts, such as the

Account of 637 and the *Chronicle ad 640*, designated their conquerors with ethnically inflected terms. The ways they used the Syriac word *ṭayyāyē* made them seem unaware (or at least uninterested) in religious difference. They employed a primarily racial term to designate a group of foreign, military conquerors. For these authors, there was nothing Islamic about the conquests or the victors.

It did not take long, however, for Syriac depictions of their conquerors to become more diverse. Of particular note are three brief references that appeared in the letters of the East Syrian catholicos Ishoʿyahb III (d. 659). The most oblique of these emerged when Ishoʿyahb was rebuking a group of bishops who refused to acknowledge his authority as catholicos. As part of a litany of complaints against these bishops Ishoʿyahb claimed that they

> neither know nor understand that they also are subject to this worldly authority that now rules everywhere. . . . For the fools do not even discern that we are commanded to give every authority whatever we owe him: that is, to whomever [is owed] the poll tax, the poll tax; to whomever [is owed] tribute, tribute; to whomever [is owed] reverence, reverence; and to whomever [is owed] honor, honor.[17]

Ishoʿyahb here presented his conquerors as simply another set of rulers, worldly authorities to whom one must give honor and taxes just like previous rulers.

Two of Ishoʿyahb's other references were more detailed. In a letter to another bishop rebelling against his authority Ishoʿyahb stated:

> For also these *ṭayyāyē* to whom at this time God has given rule over the world, behold [how] they are toward us. Not only, as you know, do they not oppose Christianity. Rather, they are givers of praise to our faith, givers of honor to our Lord's priests and holy ones, and givers of aid to churches and monasteries. Indeed how did your inhabitants of *Mzwn* forsake their [own] faith [*haymānutun*] on pretext of theirs? And this when, as even the *Mzwnāye* say, the *ṭayyāyē* did not force them to forsake their faith [*haymānutun*]. To keep their faith [*haymānutun*] they only asked them to forsake half of their possessions.[18]

In this case Ishoʿyahb ascribed several potentially religious attributes to the *ṭayyāyē*. According to him, on the one hand, the *ṭayyāyē* supported Christian institutions and praised Christianity, though he never told why or how they did this. On the other hand, they seemed to have their own faith (whose content remained unspecified) and imposed financial disincentives on those who desired to stay Christian.

A third letter from Ishoʿyahb provided the earliest extant example of the Syriac term "Hagarene" (*mhaggrāyē*, sometimes spelled *mhaggrē*; singular *mhaggrāyā*).[19] In this letter, Ishoʿyahb initially spoke of his conquerors as *ṭayyāyē* Hagarenes, and then simply as Hagarenes. Modern scholars continue to debate the origins of the term *mhaggrāyē*, with some suggesting it came from Muslims' self-designation in Arabic as *muhājirūn* (emigrants), and others suggesting a connection with Hagar as their biblical progenitor.[20] Regardless of its origins, unlike *ṭayyāyē*, Syriac writers never employed the word *Hagarenes* when speaking of Christians. Instead, *Hagarene* exclusively referred to people we would characterize as Muslims. Ishoʿyahb's use of this term, especially in the phrase "Hagarene *ṭayyāyē*," suggests that he wanted to depict this group as different from their predecessors (that is, non-Hagarene *ṭayyāyē*). But as in his other letters, what exactly made them distinct remained unstated. He simply argued that Hagarenes did not naturally favor the Miaphysites, and in any cases when they did, with a little effort they could be persuaded to support the East Syrian cause instead. Ishoʿyahb thus provided the earliest example of a larger trend among Syriac writings. When Syriac Christians spoke of dealings with their conquerors, the authors' main concern was rarely Christianity's encounter with another religion. Instead, the discussion often focused on how to get their conquerors to support one branch of Christianity over another.

The proliferation of terms and depictions continued in the East Syrian *Khuzistan Chronicle* (ca. 660), which referred to *ṭayyāyē*, Sons of Ishmael (*bnay ʾIshmāʿel*), and Ishmaelites (*ʾIshmāʿelāyē*).[21] As with *ṭayyāyē*, the terms *Sons of Ishmael* and *Ishmaelites* had strong ties with ethnicity and made an occasional appearance in preconquest writings. Yet the use of *Sons of Ishmael* and *Ishmaelites* accentuated an ethnic difference between conquerors and conquered through its allusion to biblical lineage. These terms clearly referred to the Genesis discussion of those descended from the slave woman Hagar and her son, Ishmael. This genealogy carried a derogatory edge, as both Genesis 21 and its later interpretation in Galatians 4:21–31 emphasized Hagar's lineage

as one of slavery and inferior to the lineage of God's chosen people, the line of Isaac.[22] Like the *Khuzistan Chronicle*, many later Syriac writers also used these terms, along with the related phrase "Sons of Hagar," when speaking of their conquerors.[23] Despite the multiple terms the *Khuzistan Chronicle* used to describe the conquerors, their role remained solely that of military invaders. Like previous chroniclers, the author gave little indication that the *ṭayyāyē*, Sons of Ishmael, or Ishmaelites held any distinctive religious beliefs or practices. Instead, even his brief reference to the Kaʿaba in Mecca emphasized "it is not new for the *ṭayyāyē* to worship there." Rather, they had been doing so since the time of Abraham.

A different perspective can be found in a fragmentary document that modern scholars call the *Maronite Chronicle*.[24] Of the work's discussion of the postconquest period, only a few entries dated to the late 650s and early 660s remain.[25] Although they most often spoke of *ṭayyāyē*, these passages also provided the first example of a postconquest Syriac source that used the Greek loanword *Saracen* (Syriac *sarqāyē*).[26] In this case, the author employed *sarqāyē* as roughly synonymous with *ṭayyāyē*. Nevertheless, the *Maronite Chronicle* contained three episodes concerning Caliph Muʿāwiya (d. 680) that are particularly important for the history of Syriac depictions of their conquerors. The first provided another example of Syriac Christians appealing to rulers in the context of intra-Christian strife. According to the *Maronite Chronicle*, in the late 650s Muʿāwiya judged a theological debate between the Maronites and the Miaphysites. The *Maronite Chronicle* claimed that Muʿawiya declared the Maronites to be the winners and subsequently fined the Miaphysites 20,000 denarii. Much to the chronicler's dismay, the Miaphysite patriarch soon used this to his advantage and continued to pay 20,000 denarii each year to persuade the caliph to protect the Miaphysites from the Maronites.[27] The second episode took place the following year. According to the *Maronite Chronicle*, as part of his coronation in Jerusalem, Muʿāwiya prayed first at Golgotha, then at Gethsemane, then at Mary's tomb.[28] The third reference was a brief allusion to Muʿāwiya's minting of gold and silver coins that, unlike Byzantine coins, were not imprinted with a cross.[29] This narrative of a caliph who adjudicated intra-Christian debates and prayed at Christian holy sites but refused to mint coins with a cross reminds us that characters found in early Syriac sources often defy our attempts to pigeonhole them in easily defined, mutually exclusive religious categories.

The Miaphysite *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem* and the Maronite *Anti-Life of Maximus the Confessor* most likely also predated the second *fitna* (civil

war).[30] As with most other documents from this time period, their depictions of the *ṭayyāyē* (in the *Anti-Life*) or the Sons of Hagar (in *Pseudo-Ephrem*) had little religious valence. The only detail one obtains about their beliefs and practices is that according to *Pseudo-Ephrem*, they upheld the "covenant of Abraham," most likely a reference to circumcision.[31] Otherwise, they simply acted as God's scourge to punish sin and Christian heresy.

So what did Syriac authors prior to the reign of ᶜAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705) know, or at least care to share, about their conquerors' beliefs and practices? The clear answer: not much. When they described their conquerors, these writers almost always used terms that already had a long history of ethnic connotations. Although in antiquity ethnicity was often linked to religious affiliation, the ways these authors used terms such as *ṭayyāyē*, *Sons of Ishmael*, *Ishmaelites*, *Sons of Hagar*, and *Saracens* did little to suggest that they imbued them with substantial religious meaning. These authors distinguished conquerors from the conquered primarily through appeals to different racial lineage rather than explicitly religious characteristics.

As a result, regardless of the genre in which they appear, early Syriac narratives of what their conquerors believed and practiced were minimal, at best. Only Ishoᶜyahb III, who used a new term (*Hagarene*), and the *Maronite Chronicle* provided any details. But even if we were to combine information from all of these sources, the sum total would be the following: these people, most often called *ṭayyāyē*, were relatively benevolent toward Christianity and could be helpful allies when battling other Christians. According to one source, they had a faith whose content remained unspecified, and they may have provided financial disincentives for people to remain Christian. According to a second, they kept the "covenant of Abraham." According to a third, one of their rulers once prayed at Christian holy sites but nevertheless minted coins without the sign of the cross. From the perspective of Syriac Christians, this did not make a religion.

Consolidation into a Religious Challenge: Late Seventh- Through Early Eighth-Century Narratives of Identity During the Umayyad Caliphate

Just as the second *fitna* and the solidification of Umayyad rule under ᶜAbd al-Malik affected Syriac conquest accounts, these events also profoundly shaped Syriac narratives of what their conquerors believed and practiced. The

Umayyad focus on Jerusalem, especially the building of the Dome of the Rock, suggested that the Umayyads were making religious as well as territorial claims. The desire of ʿAbd al-Malik and his descendants to promote their religion motivated them to change the coinage by replacing Christian iconography with verses from the Qur'an, regulate the public display of Christian symbols, and correlate legal rights with religious affiliation.[32] Only after the caliphate's increasing emphasis on religious distinction did Syriac authors draw greater attention to their conquerors' religion.

ʿAbd al-Malik's nephew, Caliph ʿUmar II (r. 718–720), instituted perhaps the most influential change in this ongoing policy of Islamization when he began to assess taxes not on the basis of lineage but on the basis of religion. Prior to ʿUmar II, the main way to be exempt from the *jizya* (poll tax) was by being born Arab. In most cases, even the process of becoming the client of an Arab sponsor and then joining the *umma* did not result in a change of tax status. That is, the poll tax remained tied primarily to natal not religious affiliation. Although his policy changes were not consistently implemented until well after his death, ʿUmar II declared non-Arab converts exempt from the poll tax.[33] From this point on, the caliphate presented a religion that, at least in theory, transcended ethnic difference. ʿUmar II may also have begun a series of evolving regulations that tried to more clearly distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims.[34] Throughout the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries these restrictions on non-Muslims would become further developed and eventually codified into the so-called Pact of ʿUmar.

During this time, when their conquerors' religion was becoming both more assertive and—in terms of its self-presentation—less exclusively tied to race, Syriac Christians began to distinguish themselves from their conquerors less through the language of ethnicity and more through the language of religion. Nevertheless, the increased focus on religious distinction was not uniform; throughout the Umayyad era, Syriac writings displayed a range of reactions to the increased visibility and assertiveness of Islam. Some Christians continued to depict their conquerors as not having their own beliefs or practices; others were more conscious of distinctive traits but did not present them as indicative of substantial religious difference. Toward the end of the Umayyad period, several Syriac authors more explicitly recognized their conquerors' theological challenges to Christianity and began to consolidate the beliefs and practices of their conquerors into the category of a religious entity. Only at this point did Syriac writers first discuss their conquerors in terms that began to approximate our modern usage of words such as *Muslim*

and *Islam*. Nevertheless, even these later authors often chose to deemphasize differences between Christianity and Islam. Instead of depicting Muslims as completely other, they frequently argued that Islam was more a derivative and inferior form of Christianity than an independent religious tradition.

John bar Penkāyē's *Book of Main Points* represents a first step in this direction. Writing in the midst of the second *fitna*, John interchangeably used the terms *ṭayyāyē*, *Sons of Hagar*, and *Ishmaelites*. John, however, seemed to know more about his conquerors' beliefs and practices than previous authors had. His lengthiest discussion of his conquerors' doctrine appeared in the description of Caliph Muʿāwiya:

> Justice flourished in his days and there was great peace in the regions he controlled. He allowed everyone to conduct himself as he wanted. For, as I said above, they upheld a certain commandment from him who was their guide concerning the Christian people and the monastic order. By this one's guidance they also upheld the worship of one God in accord with the customs of ancient law. And, at their beginning, they upheld the tradition of their instructor Muḥammad such that they would bring the death penalty upon whoever seemed to have dared [transgress] his laws.[35]

In the rest of his work, John provided only a few additional details: the Sons of Hagar held Christians (especially monks) in honor; those under their jurisdiction could keep their own faith, although they had to pay tribute; the Sons of Hagar had a sanctuary in the south.[36] A leader, monotheism, legal material, and a sanctuary—all were traits attributable to a religion. John, however, did not take the next step and use his increased knowledge to present his conquerors as a separate religious entity the way he portrayed Judaism or Zoroastrianism. Given his apocalyptic perspective, it is unlikely that John felt that the Sons of Hagar would be around long enough to justify their truly having their own religion. He saw them as transitional figures, appearing in the world's last decades to punish Christian sins and soon to depart with the coming eschaton.[37] In the almost two hundred pages of his text, John's discussion of the conquerors' cult and doctrine took up only a few sentences.

The three Syriac apocalypses written soon after the second *fitna*—the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Edessene Apocalypse*, and the *Apocalypse of John the Little*—provided even less information about their conquerors' beliefs than John did, most likely for the same reason. Unlike in earlier works,

in these apocalypses the Sons of Ishmael were not benevolent toward Christianity. Instead, "They will especially afflict all who confess Christ, our Lord. Because, to the end, they will hate the Lord's name."[38] Why they despised Jesus remained unspecified. *Pseudo-Methodius* further stated that, because of their military success, they proclaimed that the Christians have no savior;[39] the *Edessene Apocalypse* claimed that God will send a drought due to the "Sons of Ishmael's impiety";[40] and the *Apocalypse of John the Little* noted that they considered their warrior leader to have been a prophet.[41] That was it. For these authors, as in the writings of John bar Penkāyē, the conquerors' role as a short-lived scourge of Christian sins completely overshadowed their own religious system.

Although he occasionally shared his contemporaries' apocalyptic worldview, Jacob of Edessa's (d. 708) discussions were very different.[42] His writings reflected a more detailed knowledge of his conquerors' beliefs and practices than earlier sources did, and of all seventh-century authors Jacob came the closest to depicting an independent religious tradition, albeit one with extremely ill-defined borders. This shift was undoubtedly partially due to the consolidation of Islamic identity under Umayyad rule and the caliphate's increased emphasis on religious promotion. Nevertheless, Jacob did not simply report difference. He also strategically made it. Sometimes Jacob found it useful to emphasize a rhetoric of distinction. Because Jacob more explicitly distinguished the religious tenets of conquerors from conquered, starting with his writings it seems increasingly justified to employ the term *Muslims*. At other times, Jacob preferred to emphasize similarity, and the narratives he shared and the vocabulary he chose often blurred the boundaries between Christians and Muslims.

Jacob referred to Muslims in multiple works, written in multiple genres, thereby aiding our understanding of what he knew about Muslim cult and doctrine. According to Jacob, Muslims prayed toward the Kaʿaba; they believed that although Jesus is the Messiah, the Word of God, and the Spirit of God, He was not God's son; and they had a written profession of faith.[43] Although Jacob's knowledge appeared to be more detailed than that of his predecessors, like earlier authors, he presented very little explicit response to Muslim theological challenges to Christianity. Nevertheless, unlike previous writers, this turn-of-the-century bishop began to consolidate Muslim beliefs and practices into a more identifiably religious category.

This paradigm shift becomes particularly apparent in several references to conversion. Like some earlier writers, Jacob often called his conquerors

Hagarenes. But especially when speaking about changes in religious affiliation, Jacob often paired Hagarenes with another term, *ḥanpē* (singular *ḥanpā*). The most common English translation of *ḥanpē* is "pagans" because Syriac writers frequently used this term when referring to polytheists. But *ḥanpē* was not restricted only to polytheists. I usually leave *ḥanpē* untranslated because Syriac writers both before and after the conquests also used it to polemically refer to other monotheists. In such cases, Syriac authors were not so much claiming that their theological opponents literally were polytheists (although most polemicists liked to keep this as an open possibility), but that their opponents' beliefs were as errant as those of true polytheists. Postconquest Syriac authors often employed this double meaning: literal polytheists and monotheists who were as errant as polytheists.

When Jacob wrote about his conquerors, the term *ḥanpē* was particularly important. Syriac writers not only used *ḥanpē* as a noun but also constructed a related verb, "to become a *ḥanpā*" (*'aḥnep*). Jacob built on this, as he and his correspondents were the first extant writers to similarly construct a verb, "to become a Hagarene" (*haggar*). For example, in his letter *Replies to Addai*, Jacob was asked, "Is a priest permitted to pardon someone who became a Hagarene [the verb *haggar* related to the noun *mhaggrāyā*] or became a *ḥanpā* [the verb *'aḥnep* related to the noun *ḥanpā*] if he is about to die?"[44] In another section of *Replies to Addai*, Jacob responded to the concern that a woman married to a Hagarene might herself become a Hagarene (verb: *thaggar*) if she were deprived of the Eucharist.[45] In his *First Letter to John the Stylite*, Jacob was asked if a priest should rebaptize a Christian who became a Hagarene (verb: *nhaggar*) or a *ḥanpā* (verb: *naḥnep*) but subsequently repented. He responded that a person could be baptized only once, but that, on return to Christianity, prayers should be said over the penitent.[46] Jacob may have considered movement from being a Christian to being a *ḥanpā* or a Hagarene to involve, at least partly, an ethnic transformation. Nevertheless, the verb meaning "to become a Hagarene" and especially its pairing with "to become a *ḥanpā*" suggested that Jacob and his correspondents considered Hagarenes and Christians as belonging to separate religious categories as well.

Jacob's classification of Hagarenes as a religious group became even more apparent in his *Third Letter to John the Stylite*. When defending Mary's Davidic lineage, Jacob noted that Christians, Jews, and Hagarenes all affirmed that the Messiah must come from David's line. Jacob went on to distinguish what each group believed concerning Jesus.[47] Jacob's letter was mainly concerned with Mariology and only briefly spoke of Hagarenes. Nevertheless,

this quick reference provided one of the clearest indications of how much Syriac perceptions of their conquerors had changed between the mid-seventh and early eighth century. By including Hagarenes among a list of other well-known religions and by delineating the Hagarenes' Christology the same way he did that of Christians and Jews, Jacob suggested that Hagarenes had their own religious beliefs.

For Jacob, however, the distance between Christians and Hagarenes was smaller than one might first imagine. His discussions of conversion presupposed that some Syriac Christians decided to become Muslim, and later some of these converts subsequently returned to being Christian—a process Jacob made fairly easy. Even when not speaking of conversion, his canons often witnessed substantial overlap between these categories. For example, Jacob's rulings referred to priests who used Christian relics to exorcise possessed Hagarenes, a Hagarene husband who threatened to kill a priest if the priest did not give his Christian wife the Eucharist, and Hagarenes who felt guilty about stealing the Eucharistic elements from the Byzantines and so gave Jacob the pilfered oblation.[48]

Jacob's vocabulary also reflected this permeability. He used nouns such as *ṭayyāyē* or *Hagarenes* to refer to people we would categorize as Muslims. Unlike earlier writers, he used a verb to speak of people who "become Hagarene" (*mhaggar*), and he once used an adjective to speak of a "Hagarene confession" (*tawditā hāggārāytā*).[49] Like almost all other Syriac writers, Jacob did not, however, have an abstract noun for Muslims' religion. From a lexical standpoint, this was especially striking because Syriac often employs a standardized ending, *utā*, to indicate an abstract noun such as Christianity (*kristyānutā*) or Judaism (*ihudāyutā*). Nevertheless, Jacob did not coin a word such as Hagarism when he wanted to speak more abstractly about what we call Islam. Instead, he and his correspondents had a tendency to conflate their conquerors' beliefs and practices with another abstract noun, *ḥanputā*. Most modern scholars translate *ḥanputā* as paganism. But like the related word *ḥanpā*, *ḥanputā* was not used solely for polytheists. Several postconquest writers used this word to refer to what Muslims believed and practiced. With Jacob and his correspondents, however, these terms were even more amorphous. For example, note how often in the *First Letter to John the Stylite* the discussion elided *ḥanputā*, becoming a Hagarene, and becoming a *ḥanpā*:

> John: "If a Christian should become a Hagarene or become a *ḥanpā* and, after a while, he should regret [this] and return from his

> *ḥanputā*, I want to learn whether it is right for him to be baptized or if by this he has been stripped of the grace of baptism."
>
> Jacob: "On the one hand, it is not right for a Christian who becomes a Hagarene or becomes a ḥanpā to be [re]baptized. . . . But concerning whether he had been stripped of the grace of baptism because he became a Hagarene, I have this to say . . ."[50]

A similar pattern can be found in Jacob's *Replies to Addai*. At one point, Addai asked, "What should be done with a holy table on which *ṭayyāyē* have eaten meat and left soiled with fat?" Jacob responded, "A table on which *ḥanpē* have eaten is no longer an altar."[51]

This categorical fuzziness certainly presented polemical advantages. Many of Jacob's other writings showed a basic knowledge of Islam; his terminological alterations most likely did not stem from Jacob believing that all *ṭayyāyē* and Hagarenes were polytheists. Rather, by emphasizing the categorical similarities between *ṭayyāyē*, Hagarenes, *ḥanpē*, and *ḥanputā* Jacob's rhetoric implied equivalency. Later Christians made this analogy more explicit to apply centuries of Christian antipagan polemic to Muslims. But for such comparisons to work, they first had to implicitly grant Muslims membership in the category of a religion even if that religion's conceptual boundaries remained quite porous.

Jacob's writings illustrated how an early eighth-century Christian might at times draw and at other times blur religious boundaries. Two other authors of that time, the East Syrian catholicoi Ḥnanishā and Mār Abbā, indicated that Christians were also becoming more aware of anti-Christian polemics.[52] These writers noted how "the *ṭayyāyē* of our time" claimed that Jesus was not God's son but only a prophet.[53] Mār Abbā more specifically stated that such gainsayers "do not accept 'birth' in their creed [*syāmā*]," a possible allusion to Qur'an 112:3 ("God has not begotten and has not been begotten").[54]

Ḥnanishā and Mār Abbā quickly dismissed this "new foolishness" (*lelutā*) and provided little direct refutation to their conquerors' "creed."[55] In contrast, two Umayyad-era disputation texts took these theological challenges much more seriously. They represent a pivotal moment of Syriac conceptualization of their conquerors in which Syriac authors more fully depicted their conquerors as having a religious system that challenged Christianity. Most likely in the early eighth century, a Miaphysite Christian wrote the account that modern scholars title the *Disputation of John and the Emir* and an East Syrian

Christian composed a longer text now known as the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*. Although their content differed, both documents described an alleged debate between a Christian and a high-status interlocutor. These two texts allow one to see difference making in action. In their dramatization of religious distinctions, these texts invited the reader to listen in and learn from the ensuing dialogue, which depicted the conquerors' religion as a direct theological threat to Christianity.

By the eighth century, disputation texts were already a well-established genre in Syriac literature.[56] The popularity of these documents was aided by real public debates. The courts of Justinian (d. 565) and later Byzantine rulers often sponsored theological debates between competing groups of Christians.[57] The Sasanians were even fonder of adjudicating such disputes, and one hears of Persian rulers sponsoring contests between Miaphysite and East Syrian Christians. A surviving East Syrian document was even written as preparation for just such an occasion.[58] As suggested by the *Maronite Chronicle*'s claim that Caliph Muʿāwiya oversaw a contest between Maronites and Miaphysites, and as substantiated by later Islamic sources, Muslim rulers continued this tradition of public debates.[59] The popularity of these events does not mean that either *John and the Emir* or the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* preserved the words of an actual debate. Instead, their authors drew on the tropes of such disputes to fashion carefully constructed and ideologically charged literary works.

The choice to write in this genre tells much about Syriac Christians' changing views of their conquerors. Such disputations, both in real life and in literature, almost always occurred between proponents of competing religious traditions. By discussing Muslim beliefs and practices in the framework of a disputation, the authors of *John and the Emir* and the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* implicitly gave them the categorical status of a religion—more specifically, a religion that threatened Christian orthodoxy. What these authors detailed made this even more explicit.

John and the Emir claimed to be a letter written by an unnamed companion of John Sedra, the seventh-century Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch.[60] The text related an alleged conversation between the patriarch and an unspecified Hagarene leader in which the emir presented several brief questions to John, who provided more lengthy responses. The emir's questions highlighted the issues that Syriac Christians found most pressing in their theological debates, real and imagined, with Muslims. The emir began by asking if the Gospel is one.[61] He then inquired how one could account for the diversity of Christian

beliefs.[62] He asked whether Christ is God.[63] He subsequently challenged that if Christ were God, who would have governed the world when Christ was in Mary's womb?[64] The emir then shifted to a discussion of the religious affiliation of Abraham, Moses, and other Old Testament notables. His final inquiry concerned inheritance law.[65] In the course of only four folios, the text brought up issues of Christian diversity, scriptural exegesis, Christ's divinity, the incarnation, and legal traditions. In every case, the emir's question presupposed that Hagarene views on each issue were quite different from Christian ones, a supposition borne out by the patriarch's responses.

John and the Emir was also the first literary text to refer to the conquerors only as Hagarenes.[66] Here, Hagarene had a more explicitly religious connotation than it did for most previous Syriac writers. For example, in response to the emir's question regarding Christian diversity, John responded, "Just as the Torah is one and the same and is accepted by us Christians and by you Hagarenes and by the Jews and by the Samaritans, but each people differs in faith, so also concerning the Gospel's faith."[67] As in Jacob of Edessa's discussion of Mary, in *John and the Emir* Hagarenes appeared amid a list of other well-known religious groups. *John and the Emir* also explicitly referred to each group as having its own faith (*haymānutā*). At the same time, *John and the Emir* conformed to Denise Buell's observation of a strong correlation in antiquity between religion and ethnicity.[68] The text stated that Christians, Hagarenes, Jews, and Samaritans each had a different faith, something we would most often attribute to the category of religion. Nevertheless, it also explicitly categorized each group as also constituting a people (*ʿamā*). In other words, the vocabulary shift to Hagarenes did not mean that Syriac Christians no longer saw their conquerors as belonging to an ethnic group. Instead, starting in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, Syriac authors simply emphasized that the ethnic distinction between conquerors and conquered also involved a difference in beliefs and practices.

The text provided several additional clues about what the author thought was distinctive about the Hagarenes. For example, in *John and the Emir* Christians and Hagarenes had different views of scriptural authority. The author seemed to believe that Hagarenes saw the Torah as authoritative, and he had John say to the emir, "you accept Moses and his books."[69] Nevertheless, the text claimed that they did not recognize the entire Old Testament as canonical, and at one point the narrator interjected, "And the glorious emir did not accept these things from the prophets but wanted it to be shown to him [from] Moses."[70] A more oblique reference to scriptural differences appeared

in the discussion of inheritance law, where the emir's detailed question might allude to Qur'an 4:12.[71]

Most likely written in the 720s, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* employed a similar narrative strategy. But this East Syrian disputation text presented a much more complicated discussion of religious distinction than that found in *John and the Emir*. According to the text, a *ṭayyāyā* official had recently visited Bēt Ḥālē. While at the monastery, he began to challenge the efficacy of the narrator's prayers. This claim led to a broader discussion between the narrator and the official about what Christians and *ṭayyāyē* believed and practiced. At the end of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*'s eight-folio recap of this supposed conversation, the *ṭayyāyā* had become so impressed by the monk's presentation that he concluded, "I testify that were it not for fear of the government and shame before men, many would become Christians."[72] As this neat, trite, triumphal ending suggests, similar to *John and the Emir*, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* was not an accurate transcription of an actual exchange between a *ṭayyāyā* and a Christian. Nevertheless, it yields important clues about how Syriac Christians in the first half of the eighth century were categorizing their conquerors.

In the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, the *ṭayyāyā*'s questions were both broader in range and greater in depth than those found in *John and the Emir*. In *John and the Emir*, the emir simply presented quick cue lines for Christian refutation. But in the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, the interlocutor often continued with probing follow-up questions. The result was a more fulsome depiction of challenges to Christian theology, especially to Christian practices such as icons, relics, the Eucharist, veneration of the cross, praying to the East, and disregard for Jewish law.

At first glance, it seems that the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* strongly differentiated between the religions of conquerors and conquered. The discussion began with the *ṭayyāyā* stating: "I know that everyone loves his faith. But tell me the truth, isn't our confession better than all confessions on earth?"[73] After the monk asked him to justify this claim, the *ṭayyāyā* responded: "We keep Muḥammad's commandments and the sacrifices of Abraham . . . but we do not appoint God a son who is visible and suffers like us. . . . We do not worship the cross, the bones of martyrs, and images as you do."[74] During the course of their dispute, one further learns that the *ṭayyāyē* had their own scripture, explicitly called the Qur'an, from which the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* paraphrased several passages. Even the text's plot reads like a conversion narrative, as the *ṭayyāyā* moved from attacking Christianity to finally admitting, "I know that your doctrine is correct and also your belief is better than ours."[75]

The *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* distinguished the outward differences between conquerors and conquered, especially in terms of religious practice. Nevertheless, at a deeper level it elided these distinctions. Such elision was partially reflected in the author's choice of terms. The text called the notable a *ṭayyāyā*, a Son of Hagar, or a Son of Ishmael—all terms that Syriac authors could also apply to Christians. The text avoided *Hagarene*, which was reserved only for Muslims. Religious difference was further reduced by what the narrator said about the relationship between Christian beliefs and those of Hagar's descendants. In response to the *ṭayyāyā*'s question, "Tell me the truth, how is our prophet Muḥammad regarded in your eyes?" the monk first replied that Muḥammad had proclaimed "the one true God."[76] When pressed, the monk went on to state that Muḥammad even believed in the Trinity. Nevertheless, aware of the *ṭayyāyē*'s propensity toward idolatry, Muḥammad did not teach them all of the doctrines he had learned from a Christian monk named Bahira. The text implied that if the Sons of Hagar truly knew what their prophet had known, they, too, would be Christian.

There are several other places in the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* where religious boundaries remained surprisingly permeable. For example, according to the monk, *ṭayyāyē* based their law not only on the Qur'an but also on the Torah and the Gospels. Even more striking are two relatively ecumenical statements found toward the end of the document. According to the *ṭayyāyā*, Muḥammad recognized that Christian monks would "enjoy the kingdom." He then went on to proclaim that "Truly, God will not reject whoever, in accord with this doctrine that you related to me, holds your faith and is free from inequity and sin."[77] Soon afterward, the monk provided a slightly less generous response to the *ṭayyāyā*'s question, "Are the Sons of Hagar going to enter the kingdom or not?": although not gaining the same reward as christians, "he will live in grace, in abodes far from torment."[78]

The *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* used more explicitly religious language than any previous Syriac writing dealing with Muslims. In the course of the dialogue, the *ṭayyāyā* official spoke of faith (*haymānutā*), confession (*tawditā*), religion (*deḥltā*), and doctrine (*reʿyānā*). As for the monk, he never used these terms when discussing the *ṭayyāyē*'s beliefs and practices. In other words, although aware that Muslims professed to have a distinctive religion, the author took care never to legitimate this claim.[79] Instead, from the author's perspective, even if the Sons of Hagar thought that they had their own religion, at best this might have been an inferior derivation from Christianity. Unbeknownst to them, their prophet was a proponent of the Trinity. Their basic beliefs were first taught to Muḥammad by a Christian monk, and, given

their confession of the "one true God," a virtuous Son of Hagar would not suffer torment in the world to come. Because of this closeness between what Christians and Muslims believed, the *ṭayyāyā*'s concluding statement that only social and political pressure prevented many from becoming Christian seemed less absurd than it otherwise might have. Thus even in disputation texts, a genre deeply invested in the delineation of difference, Syriac authors pulled back from depicting Islam as entirely alien to Christianity.

Almost no surviving Islamic texts can be securely dated to the Umayyad period, making it exceedingly difficult to determine how "accurate" Syriac depictions of Islam were. Despite their geographic proximity, were seventh- and early eighth-century Syriac writers unaware of many of early Islam's basic tenets? Or perhaps Syriac writers simply underreported Islam's religious distinctiveness? Alternatively, it remains quite possible that modern scholars have overemphasized early Christian-Muslim divisions, and Syriac writings reveal a much more permeable environment than has generally been recognized. Regardless of how one answers these larger questions, there is no doubt that Umayyad-era Syriac sources reflected radical changes in the ways Christians thought about, wrote about, and categorized their conquerors during the first century after the conquests. Developments in terminology (*ṭayyāyē*, Saracens, Sons of Hagar, Sons of Ishmael, Ishmaelites, Hagarenes), level of detail, narrative context, choice of genre, even length of presentation, all suggested that later generations of Syriac Christians were increasingly inclined to construct their conquerors' beliefs and practices as constituting a categorical entity (what we call Islam). Syriac Christians became more familiar with their conquerors' doctrines, and they more specifically defended Christianity against its challenges. In the later part of the Umayyad era, Syriac authors also began to designate their conquerors as having a religion, albeit one whose boundaries with Christianity remained quite porous and hard to define.

Confounding Categories: Later Eighth-Century Narratives of Identity During the Early Abbasid Caliphate

By the mid-eighth century, authors of all genres of Syriac literature had developed areas of rough consensus for how to portray their conquerors' beliefs and practices. The terminology developed by Umayyad-era writers, the growing knowledge base regarding Muslims, the inclination to more directly address Muslim polemics, and the tendency to attribute religious characteristics

to their conquerors served as the foundation for Abbasid-era texts. Early Abbasid-era authors often expanded on their predecessors' work by developing additional terminology and sharing more detailed knowledge about their conquerors' religion.

As for Muslims themselves, under the Abbasid dynasty, their institutions and doctrine began to consolidate into forms that became closer to those found in modernity, such as the rise of the *ulama* (religious authorities), a clearer separation between Sunnis and Shiites, the increasing authority of *hadith* (sayings attributed to Muḥammad), the beginnings of Sufism, more distinctive artistic expressions, the development of Islamic jurisprudence, and the emergence of schools of law. Thus, when discussing how Abbasid-era Christians depicted what Muslims believed and practiced, it seems increasingly justified to speak of Syriac Christian reactions to Islam. These authors' familiarity with Islam did not, however, result in uniformity, and early Abbasid texts became particularly divergent regarding the question of just how different Christianity and Islam were from one another.

Just as the Abbasid revolution influenced Syriac memories of the conquests, it also affected Syriac Christian narratives of Islam. Abbasid rule was more centralized than Umayyad rule, and Abbasid caliphs further expanded previous policies of Islamization.[80] Under the Abbasids, the types and amount of taxes paid by Muslims and non-Muslims became more consistently distinguished.[81] Construction projects such as al-Mahdi's rebuilding of the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem were important architectural proclamations of Islam's grandeur. Legal restrictions on *dhimmī* (non-Muslims) became increasingly common and discriminatory. In the ninth century, these coalesced into a set of regulations commonly called the Pact of ʿUmar.[82] The Abbasid period also witnessed more frequent conversion to Islam; by the end of the ninth century, Muslims may have constituted over half of the population.[83]

Under the Abbasids, many Syriac Christians also learned Arabic, providing them with greater opportunities for social and religious interchange. Christians continued to hold important government posts, and after Baghdad became the Abbasid capital, East Syrian elites had more direct access to the caliphate.[84] As Abbasid rulers and theologians became interested in Greek science and philosophy, Syriac Christians played a key role in the Abbasid translation movement, a widespread and largely successful attempt to translate classical philosophical and scientific works. Muslim elites often commissioned Syriac scholars to translate these texts into Arabic.[85] The resulting cultural prominence of Aristotelian logic provided a common intellectual

currency that facilitated interreligious discussions and debate. Knowledge of Arabic also gave many Syriac Christians access to the Qur'an, as well as familiarity with contemporary developments in Islamic theology. Syriac texts written during the first 150 years of the Abbasid caliphate often reflected these authors' more frequent interactions with Muslims and their greater exposure to Islam.

The earliest known Abbasid-era account of Islam was Theophilus's *Chronicle*, written in the mid-750s. Unfortunately, this *Chronicle* no longer survives; for its content one relies on Theophanes, Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē, and Agapius, whose later writings often depended on Theophilus's earlier work.[86] Although these later authors frequently used Theophilus's writings to describe the conquests, when it came to describing Islam they generally went their own way. Nevertheless, these writers shared one short section concerning Muḥammad's teaching that almost certainly originated with Theophilus. In this passage, Theophilus emphasized the carnal nature of Muḥammad's description of paradise, referring to rivers of wine, milk, and honey as well as men eating, drinking, and having sex with particularly beautiful women.[87]

Only a few other points concerning Islam can be securely traced back to Theophilus.[88] Most allusions to religious difference appeared in discussions of specific caliphs who removed crosses, rebuilt a church, minted aniconic coins, or exiled a Christian metropolitan for blaspheming the *ṭayyāyē*'s faith.[89] This handful of short passages suggested that Theophilus saw the *ṭayyāyē* as somewhat distinct from Christians, although the *ṭayyāyē*'s religious beliefs and practices remained quite peripheral to Theophilus's narrative.[90]

Although only the sparsest details concerning Islam can be reclaimed from Theophilus's *Chronicle*, around 775 much more information appeared in the anonymous *Chronicle of Zuqnin*.[91] This Miaphysite chronicle is the longest surviving early Syriac text that speaks of Muslims, and it provides important evidence for how quickly Christian understanding and depictions of Islam changed following the Abbasid revolution. In the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, one enters a completely different world than that found in the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, composed fifty years earlier, or Theophilus's *Chronicle*, written twenty years earlier. Almost a third of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* was set after the conquests, and Muslim characters appeared on almost every one of these fifty-seven folios.

The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* referred to Muslims using the terms *ṭayyāyē* (especially when speaking of the Umayyads), *Persians* or *Assyrians* (especially when speaking of the Abbasids), *Hagarenes*, and *ḥanpē*. It is also the first extant

source to use the Syriac term *Mashlmānē*.[92] This was a rare term among Syriac authors discussing Muslims.[93] The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* used it only twice, and the only other extant author prior to the twelfth century who called Muslims *Mashlmānē* was the chronicler's Arabic-speaking contemporary, the East Syrian catholicos Timothy I. Even if rarely used, this term remains of particular interest because the Syriac *Mashlmānē* shared the same consonantal roots as the Arabic "Muslims" (commonly literally translated as "those who submit"). *Mashlmānē*'s occasional appearance suggested that Syriac Christians were beginning to adopt Muslims' own terms of self-designation, a process that was undoubtedly aided by Syriac terminology becoming increasingly influenced by Arabic, and by Syriac authors' growing bilingualism.

According to the *Chronicle*, these Muslims were supposed to be monotheists.[94] Their first king, Muḥammad, whom Muslims called a prophet and the messenger of God, turned them away from polytheism to belief in the one true God.[95] Although Muslims believed that Jesus was the Word and the Spirit of God and a prophet born from a virgin, they did not believe he was God's son (see Qur'an 4:171).[96] Their rituals included ablutions, prostrations toward the south, and prayer.[97] They built a house of worship on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.[98] They had a book that they claimed came down from heaven.[99] They attributed various laws to Muḥammad, including those concerning taxation and especially inheritance.[100] Unlike Christians, they used a lunar calendar and had the battle cry "*allahu akbar*."[101]

Not only did the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* present more information about Islam than any previous Syriac work, its narrative depicted Islam as a religious entity that was fairly distinct from Christianity. At one point the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* spoke of Jews, Christians, and *ṭayyāyē* as separate groups who had different burial practices.[102] Elsewhere it told of a prefect who ordered Jews, Christians, and *ṭayyāyē* to come together and publicly petition God to end a drought, an ecumenical effort that ultimately succeeded.[103] The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* was also the only extant Syriac source written in the first millennium CE that designated a unique abstract noun to speak of Islam. The chronicler added *-utā*, a common Syriac ending for abstract nouns, to *Mashlmānē* to form *mashlmānutā*, a construction perhaps best rendered in English as "Muslimness."[104] This term first appeared when the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* spoke about tax collectors who persecuted both Hagarenes and Christians. The chronicler emphasized that they did this not because of their love of *mashlmānutā*, but simply out of greed.[105] A second possible reference is even more intriguing, but unfortunately it appeared in a badly damaged section of the manuscript.

Here, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* spoke of apostates leaving Christianity to enter *ḥanputā* and *m---nutā*. The middle three letters of the second word have literally been eaten by worms. Given the context, it remains likely that the bookworms originally chomped on *-shlmā-*, that is, the middle of the word *mashlmānutā* (Muslimness). This equation of Islam with *ḥanputā* appeared in many other places in the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*. Like Jacob of Edessa before him, the chronicler also designated Islam simply as *ḥanputā* and frequently called its followers *ḥanpē*.[106]

The *Chronicle*'s attempt to differentiate between Christianity and Islam became most apparent in its conversion accounts. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* spoke of hundreds of Christians converting to Islam and bemoaned the apostasy of Christian youth, adults, and elders, along with innumerable priests and deacons.[107] Unlike Jacob of Edessa, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* depicted conversion as a one-way street. The government had imposed a death sentence against any convert who tried to return to Christianity, and once a Muslim, the convert also irretrievably lost the Holy Spirit.[108] Instances of now irreversible conversion made it increasingly important for the author to differentiate Christian and Muslim beliefs and practices. The text specified that, to convert to Islam, a Christian must renounce baptism, the Eucharist, the cross, and "everything Christians confess."[109] The convert also had to proclaim belief in Muḥammad as God's messenger to whom a book descended from heaven and that Jesus was not God but only a prophet.[110]

Throughout his narrative, the author focused on how recent calamities—especially the tyrannical rule of Caliph al-Manṣūr and his governor of Mosul, Mūsā bar Muṣᶜab—were God's just responses to Christian sin. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin*'s harsh portrayal of these rulers has made it an often quoted source among modern clash-of-civilizations authors. But the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* was not written primarily as an attack against Islam. Despite calling Islam *ḥanputā* and his diatribes against Christians who apostatize, the author of the *Chronicle* never directly refuted specific Islamic beliefs nor explicitly defended the Christian faith. He even went out of his way to emphasize that Muslims did not actively coerce Christians to convert; in one narrative a Muslim even unsuccessfully tried to persuade a deacon to remain Christian.[111] The chronicler also repeatedly emphasized that the harsh policies of al-Manṣūr and Mūsā bar Muṣᶜab were not religiously motivated but were aimed at Persians, *ṭayyāyē*, Jews, and Christians alike. The author found the uniformity of this oppression particularly regrettable because the lack of religious discrimination meant that he could not proclaim any new Christian martyrs.[112] In the

Chronicle, Christianity and Islam were competing religions to the extent that people left Christianity to become Muslims. Nevertheless, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* remained a far cry from one modern author's claim that it bore witness to Christians as "a hunted population."[113]

Just a few years after an anonymous Miaphysite monk wrote the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, the East Syrian catholicos Timothy I (r. 780–823) was in Baghdad composing his *Letter 59*. Most often called Timothy's *Apology*, this letter recounted two audiences the catholicos had with Caliph al-Mahdi and their ensuing conversations regarding Christianity. Like the authors of earlier disputation texts such as *John and the Emir* and the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, Timothy wrote his *Apology* in the form of a dialogue between a Christian and a Muslim ruler, although Timothy's *Apology* was almost ten times longer than its predecessors.[114] The questions attributed to al-Mahdi and Timothy's responses to them demonstrated what the catholicos thought were the most pressing issues of contention between late eighth-century Christians and Muslims. Along with the author of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Timothy was one of only two first-millennium Syriac writers who occasionally called Muslims *mashlmānē*.[115]

In Timothy's *Apology*, the caliph and the catholicos spent more time discussing the Trinity and the Son's incarnation than any other topics. These two conversational strands occasionally diverted to related issues, such as Mariology, East Syrian Christology, and scriptural exegesis, but quickly returned to the question of the Son's divinity. There were also short debates regarding Christians' adoration of the cross, their lack of circumcision, and their tradition of praying toward the East. Timothy and al-Mahdi also spoke briefly about Muḥammad, and we learn that Muslims saw Muḥammad as a prophet who taught monotheism.[116] Muḥammad also recorded a set of holy scriptures called the Qur'an, which he claimed were revealed to him by the angel Gabriel.[117] Throughout the *Apology*, one can also ascertain a fair amount about Muslim scriptural exegesis as al-Mahdi presented and Timothy refuted Muslim interpretations of Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Gospel of John in support of Muḥammad's prophethood. Perhaps more surprisingly, in the depicted dialogue Timothy actually quoted the Qur'an more often than al-Mahdi did, presenting at least ten Qur'anic passages in support of the Son's divinity.[118] Al-Mahdi also charged, and Timothy refuted, that Christians had purposefully tampered with scriptural texts and removed all biblical references to Muḥammad's prophethood (*taḥrīf*).

The tone of Timothy's *Apology* was quite amicable. Unlike Theophilus's

Chronicle, there was no diatribe or ridicule of Muslim conceptions of paradise. Contrary to the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Timothy's *Apology* did not call Muslims *ḥanpē* or characterize Islam as *ḥanputā*. Nevertheless, on occasion Timothy cautiously refuted specific tenets of Islam, especially Muḥammad's claims to prophethood. Timothy also always presented a spirited defense of Christianity, and in his letter, he gave himself the last word on almost every topic. The exceptions from reasoned, polite conversation occurred when Timothy shifted the discussion away from East Syrian Christianity to Chalcedonians, Miaphysites, and Jews. Here, at least from Timothy's perspective, the catholicos and the caliph had found common enemies, and the resulting passages were quite harsh.

Just as the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* reflected profound shifts in Miaphysite depictions of Islam, so too Timothy's *Apology* indicated how much East Syrian perceptions of Islam had changed between the early and the late eighth century. In the *Apology*, Timothy's portrayal of Muslim beliefs and practices was fairly irenic. Timothy pointed to areas of theological disagreement and, at least in his portrayal of his audience with al-Mahdi, showed no hesitation in arguing with the caliph. But unlike his discussions of Jews or other Christians, whenever he speaks of Islam, Timothy remained polite. This lack of belligerence was at least partially due to the *Apology*'s literary setting—the caliph's court would have been an unlikely site for an extended diatribe against Islam. The *Apology*'s tenor also correlated with Timothy's social status as catholicos and his cordial relationship with Caliph al-Mahdi, who, as part of the Abbasid translation movement, even commissioned Timothy to translate Aristotle's *Topics* into Arabic.[119]

Timothy's *Apology* was a carefully constructed literary production, not a word-for-word transcript of his audience with al-Mahdi. Nevertheless, Timothy's work provides important data regarding Syriac Christians' evolving knowledge of Islam. Just as *John and the Emir* and the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* used the disputation format, suggesting a categorical distinction between Christianity and Islam, the *Apology*'s debate between catholicos and caliph presumed two fairly distinct groups. Timothy's *Apology* also illustrated an increased familiarity with Islamic beliefs and practices. Although earlier works outlined many of the issues addressed in the *Apology*, Timothy provided a level of specifics not found among previous sources. Of particular note was Timothy's knowledge of the Qur'an, which he so often quoted. Given his bilingualism, Timothy may have himself read the Qur'an. Alternatively, like later Arabic Christians, Timothy may had access to a testimonial list

that collected those Qur'anic passages most useful for Christian-Muslim debates.[120] This was certainly how Timothy's writing affected later generations; the very Qur'anic passages cited in Timothy's *Apology*, as well as Timothy's interpretations of them, became increasingly common among later Christian apologies.[121] Timothy also assumed a more informed audience than most earlier accounts. For their readers to follow the story line, prior Syriac authors often provided background information regarding Islam. For example, *John and the Emir* used a narrative aside to explain what scriptures the emir considered to be authoritative, and Theophilus prefaced his conquest account with a quick outline of Muḥammad's life and Muslim beliefs. In contrast, Timothy assumed his audience already had a basic understanding of Islam; he saw no need, for example, to gloss his first references to the Qur'an or to Muḥammad.

Timothy I's *Apology* remains the most important document for assessing the catholicos's knowledge and categorization of Islam. But Timothy's other writings provide a rare opportunity to see how the same Syriac author spoke differently about Islam depending on genre and anticipated audience. In addition to the *Apology*, Timothy also wrote several less-studied letters that alluded to Muslims. These works were more technical in their argument than the *Apology* and less conciliatory in tone.[122]

The most detailed was *Letter 40*, which Timothy most likely wrote within a year of composing the *Apology*.[123] Timothy framed this letter much as he did his *Apology*. He explained to the letter's Christian recipient, Sergius, that, while at the caliph's court, a man well versed in Aristotle approached Timothy to debate with the catholicos about God's nature.[124] Like the *Apology*, the vast majority of *Letter 40* was Timothy's account of the ensuing dialogue. The letter's main topics were not dissimilar to those discussed with al-Mahdi: the Trinity, the incarnation, and the adoration of the cross. But their presentation was very different.

Timothy emphasized that this was an "Aristotelian inquiry," and the content of his and his opponent's statements reflected this.[125] Their debate ranged from a detailed discussion of epistemology to Timothy trying to forge an Aristotelian framework for justifying Trinitarian theology. His letter anticipated an audience of Sergius and others who could appreciate the catholicos's ability to use Greek philosophy with greater finesse and greater success than his "notable," "powerful," "wealthy," "illustrious," "specially trained," opponent could. In *Letter 40*, Timothy also foregrounded his knowledge of the Qur'an when he cited several Qur'anic passages to support the existence of

the Trinity by showing that "also, in your writings, we find words concerning God in the singular and in the plural."[126] At another point, Timothy defended the Trinity by an appeal to contemporary Muslim discussions of God's various divine attributes, the *ṣifrat Allah*.[127]

A similar dynamic can be found in several of Timothy's shorter letters, especially *Letters 34*, *35*, and *36*, which concentrated on the appropriate terminology to describe Christ.[128] These letters did not rely as heavily on Aristotelian logic as did *Letter 40*, but otherwise provided a similar style of argumentation. In *Letters 34–36* Timothy again defended the Trinity by allusion to the Islamic understanding of God's divine attributes. He also cited a number of verses from the Qur'an and provided a fairly detailed exegesis of several of them.

What most distinguished these letters from Timothy's *Apology*, however, was his overarching characterization of Islam. In the introductory section of *Letter 40*, he wrote:

> For behold, not only in the days of Herod and Pilate, in the days then of those old Jews, was there defeat and victory, truth together with falsehood. But also now, in the days of the rulers who reign and in our times, in the days of the new Jews among us, there is the same struggle and the same contest to discern falsehood from truth. For the stumbling block of the cross has not yet ceased. But there is nothing to fear from such a fight and from struggle. . . . For the greatness of Christ our Lord as well as the guilt of the prince of the air [i.e., Satan] and his servants is known more than the rays of the sun. But even though its head has been crushed, the serpent's tail still wiggles with life.[129]

The tone of this letter was very different from what appeared in the *Apology*. In his *Apology* Timothy portrayed himself and al-Mahdi as united against the Jews, who were "despised today and rejected by all" and whose teacher was Satan himself.[130] In *Letter 40*, Timothy compared Christians' present-day rulers (including, one supposes, al-Mahdi) with Herod and Pilate, equated Muslims ("new Jews") with first-century Jews, and suggested that his defense of Christian doctrine was part of an ongoing battle against Satan and his minions. This was not the only letter in which Timothy made this analogy. In *Letter 24* he asked Sergius to send him a document against "the new belief of the new Jews."[131] In *Letter 36* Timothy wrote about a broadly "Jewish

belief" and debated against a series of adversaries who "denigrate Christ," including Manichaeans, Arians, Marcionites, Jews, and an unnamed group of "opponents" who were clearly Muslim.[132]

This list pointed toward the internal logic for Timothy's characterization of Muslims as "new Jews." Syriac Christianity already had a long history of calling one's theological opponents Jews, a polemic that previous generations of Christians most often applied against other Christians whom they regarded as heretical.[133] They argued that the Christology of their opponents was so errant that it essentially crucified Christ a second time. Because these authors claimed that first-century Jews had killed Christ in Jerusalem, this also justified labeling contemporary Christian heretics as Jews. Timothy's use of the term "new Jews" took this intra-Christian polemic and applied it to Muslims. For Timothy, Muslims' rejection of Jesus' divinity, incarnation, death, and resurrection made them Jew-like. Such a characterization not only provided Syriac Christians with a quick ad hominem attack. It also allowed them to more easily deploy centuries of anti-Jewish (and, by analogy, intra-Christian) arguments against Muslims. Given Timothy's firsthand knowledge of Muslim theologians and the Qur'an, it remains unlikely that he thought of Islam simply as a form of Judaism or a Christian heresy. Timothy's occasional reference to Muslims as "new Jews" carried greater polemical than etiological value. Nevertheless, it resonated with the broader tendency among Syriac Christians to conceptually blur the boundaries between Islam and other religious traditions.

At roughly the same time that Timothy began composing his *Letters*, his East Syrian compatriot Theodore bar Koni wrote an eleven-book summary of East Syrian theology, practice, and scriptural exegesis called the *Scholion*.[134] Because Theodore was teaching in the city of Kashar, located between the Islamic centers of Kūfa and Baṣra, like Timothy, he assumed that his readers already had some familiarity with Islam.[135] When Theodore wrote about Islam he could focus on those parts of Christian doctrine and practice that Muslims found to be most controversial. His work addressed a very similar set of topics to that found in Timothy's *Apology*: the Trinity, the Son's divinity, the incarnation, Christology, scriptural exegesis, baptism, circumcision, the Eucharist, and Christian adoration of the cross. What distinguished the *Scholion* was the purposefully ambiguous ways it categorized Islam, especially as personified in an imaginary interlocutor whom Theodore called "the student."

Like many Christian authors, Theodore wrote his work as a series of

questions and answers. Through vitriolic and heavily stereotyped depictions, Greek and Latin authors often used this format to clearly differentiate Christianity from Islam. In contrast, like other Syriac disputations, such as *John and the Emir*, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, and Timothy's *Apology*, Theodore's text confuted straightforward categories. Consider, for example, its introduction:

> The tenth book of the *Scholion*: A reproof and refutation made in simple speech and a disputation in question and answer [format] against those who, although they confess to accept the Old [Testament] and acknowledge the coming of our Lord Christ, are far from both. They demand from our hands a defense of our faith not from all the scriptures rather [only] from those they acknowledge. . . . Although filled [with] reproofs against *ḥanpē* and support of the faith, as is our custom in the entire book, we nevertheless have put it in question [and answer format]. The one who is in the place of the *ḥanpē* is the student, and in place of the Christians is the teacher.[136]

Could a true *ḥanpā* acknowledge Christ and the Old Testament? Who exactly was this student, and what is his religion?

In the ensuing dialogue between the student and the teacher, we learn that the student was not a Jew but was circumcised.[137] He believed in a single creator God and in the authority of the Old Testament but not the New Testament.[138] He knew that Christ has already come and would come again to play a role in the Last Judgment.[139] Nevertheless, the student was initially adamant that Christ was not God's Son, as God can neither beget nor be begotten (Qur'an 112:3).[140] The student received these traditions from a man who was born six centuries after the coming of Jesus.[141] At first it seems clear who the student really was: as every recent commentator of Theodore's *Scholion* affirms, he was a Muslim.

This, however, was not what Theodore said. His introduction called the student a *ḥanpā*. Why the circumlocution? Perhaps Theodore was using the term *ḥanpā* as the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* did—as a derogatory synonym for "Muslim." But every other Syriac author who called a Muslim a *ḥanpā* glossed this in some way, either calling him "a new *ḥanpā*" or elsewhere also using more typical Syriac words for Muslims, such as *ṭayyāyē*, Sons of Hagar, Ishmaelites, or Hagarenes—terms that Theodore avoided. In addition, once one leaves the introduction, the student was never again called a *ḥanpā*. Instead,

the student polemically employed the label of *ḥanpānutā*, objecting that Christian practices were as idolatrous as those of *ḥanpē*.[142] Perhaps we should instead see Theodore's term *ḥanpā* as a cryptic reference to Islam, a means to avoid offending powerful Muslims. Theodore's *Scholion*, however, contained hundreds of quotes from Theodore of Mopsuestia and over two hundred pages of East Syrian scriptural exegesis; this clearly was internal literature. Even if some indomitable Muslim readers made it to Book 10, despite the term *ḥanpā* they would have had no more trouble figuring out the religious leanings of the student than we did.

At other times, the student appeared to be Jewish, despite the text explicitly saying he was not a Jew. From Theodore's perspective, like the Jews, the student did not understand the typological meaning of the Old Testament and therefore misread the scriptures. In a passage reminiscent of Timothy's letters, the teacher even replied to the student's scriptural exegesis with the retort, "You still think as a Jew."[143] A few pages later, the teacher disparaged the student's belief and "that of the Jews your companions."[144]

Often the student appeared to be more closely aligned with East Syrian Christianity. Even at the beginning of the dialogue, the student seemed nearly Christian. He was a monotheist who believed in Christ and the Old Testament, and, like most Christians, he thought that the majority of Old Testament law was no longer valid. Early in the dialogue, the student was even able to recognize the supposed errors of Chalcedonian and Miaphysite Christologies.[145] The perceived distance between the student and orthodox Christianity became even smaller as the book continued. The dialogue's plot revolved around the motif of the student raising an objection, the teacher correcting the student's misunderstanding of scripture, and the student admitting that on each issue East Syrian Christianity did not contradict the student's own beliefs. Similar to the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* written some seventy years earlier, the dialogue ended with the student proclaiming the truth of Christianity, although he remained unwilling to become Christian for fear of losing his worldly reputation.[146] By this point, however, we already were questioning whether, unbeknownst to the student himself, he was a Christian all along.

The result was a figure who was now and then a *ḥanpā*, sometimes almost Jewish, occasionally a confused Christian, and most likely considered himself Muslim. Theodore's choice of debate topics and his occasional echoing of Qur'anic passages showed that he had a very good idea of what late eighth-century Muslims believed, and what they found most disturbing

about Christianity. In the *Scholion*, however, he refused to give Muslims the status of having their own religion. Theodore clearly meant his depictions to be a caricature. The confused and confusing student was a synecdoche for Islam, a jumbled patchwork of human ideas that were easily dismantled by the Christian teacher. Nevertheless, Theodore's depiction of one individual incorporating multiple religious identities may be read against the grain as a surprisingly accurate assessment of the level of religious hybridity and overlap that likely characterized much of seventh- through ninth-century northern Mesopotamia.

The Maronite chronicler Theophilus, an anonymous Miaphysite monk from Zuqnin, the East Syrian catholicos Timothy I, and the East Syrian theologian Theodore bar Koni all wrote during the "golden age" of the Abbasids. All were affected by Islamization, Arabicization, the translation movement, and greater interreligious contact. For Syriac Christians like Theophilus and Timothy, bilingualism and being part of the caliph's entourage facilitated a much more direct knowledge of Islamic beliefs and practices. Other Syriac Christians gained firsthand knowledge of Islam through collaborating with Muslims in the translation movement, holding key administrative positions, attending public debates, or through more quotidian encounters. Some may have themselves read the Qur'an, others may have had Qur'anic excerpts collected as testimonials, and a few also knew of contemporary trends in Islamic theology. Abbasid-era writings reflected both their authors' more frequent dealings with Muslims and their audiences' increased knowledge of Islam. The tendency of these Syriac texts to sometimes reify and sometimes diminish categorical boundaries also pointed toward the challenges these interactions presented for those who wished to maintain religious distinctions.

A Fuzzy Distinction: Ninth-Century Narratives of Identity

Not long after Timothy I wrote his *Apology* and Theodore bar Koni his *Scholion*, the Abbasid government entered a period of instability often called the fourth *fitna*. To avoid a succession crisis, the caliph Harūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) declared that on his death the caliphate should pass to his elder son, al-Amīn, and on al-Amīn's death to al-Amīn's younger brother, al-Mamūn. Soon after becoming caliph in 809, al-Amīn violated his father's will and declared his own sons to be next in succession. This prompted his brother al-Mamūn to rebel, destroy most of Baghdad, and have al-Amīn killed.

Political unrest continued for several years following this fratricide.[147] Syriac texts written during and in the decades following the fourth *fitna* continued the trajectory found in earlier Abbasid-era writings. Their authors displayed an increasingly detailed knowledge of Islamic beliefs and practices. Yet they most often used this knowledge to deny Muslims the otherness of a separate religion. At the very time when Islamic institutions such as the increasingly powerful *ulama*, authoritative *hadith* collections, and the beginnings of the four traditional schools of Sunni law increasingly distinguished Islam from Christianity, Syriac sources refused the opportunity to understand Islam as entirely other.

Most likely in reaction to the turmoil brought about by the fourth *fitna*, a Syriac Christian composed the earliest surviving Abbasid-era apocalypse.[148] Soon afterward, someone added a dialogue and then a second, related apocalypse.[149] The character Sergius Bahira linked these three sections, and the resulting text is now known as the *Bahira Legend*.[150] At least by the early eighth century, the figure of a Christian monk named Bahira had already become an established part of Islamic tradition. According to Muslim sources, when Muḥammad was young he encountered the monk Bahira, who proclaimed that the boy would grow up to be a great prophet. For Islamic authors, Bahira thus served as a Christian proof of Muḥammad's legitimacy. Bahira's prominence in Islamic traditions motivated later Christians to retell this narrative from a more Christian point of view.[151] The *Bahira Legend* was the most widely circulated of these "counterhistories," its popularity attested by multiple Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, and Latin recensions in more than thirty surviving manuscripts.[152]

The apocalypses at the beginning and the end of the *Bahira Legend* provided a compendium of Syriac terms for Muslims. Muslims were called *ṭayyāyē*, Arabians (*ʿArbāyē*), Saracens, Sons of Hagar, Sons of Ishmael, and Ishmaelites, and each name was fairly interchangeable with the others.[153] These apocalypses showed a strong knowledge of Islamic history and eschatology and also included an allusion to al-Mamūn's siege of Baghdad.[154] But the historical accuracy of Sergius Bahira's predictions ended once he recounted events set after the mid-810s. At this point, the text appropriated the eschatological material found in the seventh-century *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and, like *Pseudo-Methodius*, ended with a king of the Greeks destroying the kingdom of the Ishmaelites. More original by far was the *Bahira Legend*'s dialogical section, which presented a broader schema for understanding Islam and its relationship with Christianity.

This dialogical section began with a narrative frame similar to that of the early Islamic accounts on which it depended. The boy Muḥammad was part of a caravan that arrived near Sergius Bahira's cell. The monk had a vision that the young Muḥammad was destined to lead his people to greatness.[155] From here, though, the account diverged from the Islamic versions and became a parody of Muslim tradition. In the Syriac *Bahira Legend*, Sergius Bahira explained to Muḥammad his bright future, leading to a series of catechetical lessons as he taught Muḥammad about monotheism, Old Testament prophecy, the Trinity, orthodox Christology, Jesus' resurrection, proper worship, and monasticism.[156] Sergius Bahira decided to teach Muḥammad at night doctrine that Muḥammad would share with his people by day. Bahira instructed Muḥammad to claim that this teaching came directly from the angel Gabriel. To make the content more palatable, he also had Muḥammad tell his followers of a material paradise full of wine, milk, and honey where every man would have seven beautiful girls and where the excesses of food and drink would simply "leave the body like sweat." Sergius Bahira went on to design Islam's rituals, but assured Muḥammad that he would not make them very strenuous. For example, although Muslims would occasionally fast, such fasts only had to be during the day and even then only for a month.[157]

To help authenticate this deception, Sergius Bahira wrote a book that he stuck on a cow's horn and he sent the cow Muḥammad's way one Friday. Muḥammad proclaimed that the book came down on the cow from heaven. Therefore, it should be called the Sura of the Cow and every Friday should be declared holy.[158] Unfortunately, after Sergius Bahira's death, a Jewish scribe named Kalb corrupted everything the monk had written. Kalb also introduced the fallacious belief that the Christian scriptures spoke of Muḥammad. According to Kalb, the Gospel of John's discussion of a *paraclete* (helper) who would visit the disciples after Jesus' death was not, as most Christian exegetes believed, a reference to the Holy Spirit. Instead, it was a reference to the coming of Muḥammad.[159]

The polemic intent of this retelling of Islamic origins was quite clear and undoubtedly remained a chief reason for the *Bahira Legend*'s popularity; handwritten manuscripts of the Syriac *Bahira Legend* were still being produced as late as the 1970s. But the *Bahira Legend* was not simply a flippant tell-all of how Islam "really" was the invention of a Christian monk that was further corrupted by a malicious Jewish scribe. It also bore witness to two trends found throughout many earlier Syriac depictions of Islam: Syriac

Christians' increasingly detailed understanding of Islam, and their tendency to construct Islam as a deformed version of Christianity.

The *Bahira Legend*'s parody depended on a strong knowledge of Islam. The authors knew basic Islamic historiography, including such figures as the Jewish convert Kaʿb al-Aḥbār and the Christian monk Bahira, as well as claims regarding Muḥammad's illiteracy. They knew several details regarding the Islamic conception of paradise, including theological debates concerning how to account for bodies in paradise no longer needing to defecate.[160] They knew of general Muslim beliefs about Christ, about the Qur'an, and about ritual practices, including the start of the Ramadan fast at daybreak when one can first distinguish a white thread and black thread from each other.[161] Such knowledge was not limited to the text's authors. For the narrative to be effective, its ninth-century audience must have been familiar with these details as well.

For modern readers, the shrillness of the *Bahira Legend*'s assault against Islam's foundations can obscure another important element of this work. As Barbara Roggema suggests, throughout the *Bahira Legend*, the authors emphasized minor recognitions of Christianity found in the Islamic tradition and characterized any Muslim objection to Christian doctrine as a misunderstanding, to give "the notion of common ground between the religions credibility."[162] In other words, the *Bahira Legend*'s main argument was quite similar to that found in the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, which a century earlier stated that Muḥammad really believed in the Trinity, or in Theodore bar Koni's *Scholion*, which twenty years earlier presented a Muslim interlocutor who seemed surprisingly Christian. Even the *Bahira Legend*, arguably the harshest early Syriac attack on Islam, repeated the claim that Christianity and Islam, once properly understood, were pretty much the same thing.[163]

At approximately the same time that the Syriac *Bahira Legend* was compiled, the East Syrian scholar Job of Edessa completed his *Book of Treasures*. Although written in a very different genre than the *Bahira Legend*, Job's early ninth-century compendium of scientific and theological topics also emphasized the overlap between Christianity and Islam.[164] The *Book of Treasures* never explicitly mentioned Islam, but the authorities Job cited and the issues he addressed suggested that he wrote this text to help Syriac elites more fully engage with the intellectual milieu they shared with Muslim scholars of early Abbasid Baghdad.

Job's interest in Islam most clearly appeared when he stated that his

work avoided citing scriptural passages because nonbelievers would not accept them.[165] Instead, he attempted to "show the truth from the support of nature." Written in the midst of the Abbasid translation movement, the *Book of Treasures* unsurprisingly cited Galen and Aristotle more frequently than any other authority.[166] Greek philosophy and science provided Job with an acceptable language to speak across confessional boundaries. By purposefully avoiding the citation of Christian scripture, he was able to write a surprisingly ecumenical work. That is, even if few Muslims would read a Syriac compendium of knowledge, it provided "Christian scholars in Baghdad with the philosophical and scientific materials necessary to discuss with Muslim scholars cosmological and other items."[167] Job's text shows how the Abbasid translation movement created an environment in which Christian and Muslim elites could converse using the shared intellectual currency of Greek logic. But Job's writings did not stem from an environment of unmitigated interfaith understanding. His no longer extant *On Faith*, with its defense of Christian beliefs and practices, was as much an act of defining religious boundaries as were the Syriac disputations that preceded it. The *Book of Treasure*'s extensive discussion of the afterlife's nonmateriality also served as a polemic against Islam's more materialistic depictions of paradise. Similar to the *Bahira Legend*, the *Book of Treasures* even included a discussion of how it would be scientifically impossible for material bodies in heaven to eat and drink without excretion.

In 819 al-Mamūn defeated a rival caliph and returned to Baghdad, effectively ending the fourth *fitna*. Al-Mamūn eventually designated his younger brother Al-Muʿtasim as his heir, and, on al-Mamūn's death in 833, al-Muʿtasim succeeded him as caliph. Al-Muʿtasim and his son al-Wāthiq, who became caliph in 842, oversaw the further centralization of Abbasid rule. During al-Wāthiq's reign, the Miaphysite patriarch Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē (r. 818–845) composed a several-hundred-page chronicle concerning the history of Syriac Christianity up to the 840s. Only two pages of Dionysius's *Chronicle* survive intact. The remainder is attested only in the writings of two later authors who had access to Dionysius's work: the twelfth-century patriarch Michael the Syria (d. 1199) and the anonymous author of the *Chronicle ad 1234*. Of particular import is a passage from Dionysius in which he summarized his understanding of Islam. Both the *Chronicle ad 1234* and Michael the Syrian's *Chronicle* placed this passage immediately prior to their accounts of the Islamic conquests.

Most scholars suggest that the *Chronicle ad 1234* more accurately preserves Dionysius.[168] But the pattern of word-for-word agreement between

the *Chronicle ad 1234*[169] and the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian[170] indicates that both must have substantially edited Dionysius's discussion. Nevertheless, there remains sufficient content overlap to appreciate the rough contours of Dionysius's original discussion:

Chronicle ad 1234	Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*
Let us therefore also speak of the laws and commandments that [Muḥammad] said were from God and were given him to establish for them. Thus he taught them: to confess one God, the creator of all (although he does not name Him Father, nor Son, nor Spirit but a single divinity, a single person, and a single hypostasis who in no way was begotten or begets and who has no associate). And [Muḥammad] accepts Moses and his book. And he accepts the Gospel, except that he does not confess that Christ was crucified.	And he established for [the *ṭayyāyē*] those laws that [Muḥammad] said were from God and were given him to establish for them. He taught them to confess one God, the maker of all (although he does not name Him Father, nor Son, nor Holy Spirit. But he says [that He is] a single divinity, a single person, and a single hypostasis who in no way was begotten or begets and who has no son or companion or associate). And [Muḥammad] accepts the book of Moses and the prophets and also some things from the Gospel, while he rejects much of it and says that he agrees with only a little [of the Gospel].
And concerning Christ, [Muḥammad] considers Him to be a righteous man and honored among the prophets,	And concerning Christ, [Muḥammad] considers and says that He is the one whom the prophets prophesied would come. Although surely a righteous man and a prophet like one of the prophets, [according to Muḥammad Christ is] not God or God's son as we Christians confess. Rather [for him Christ] was the greatest of the other prophets.
who was born from a virgin without intercourse just as Adam [was born] from earth. For He was created by God's word.	[He] was not born from a man's seed or from intercourse. Rather, He was created by God's word. And He came to be through Mary by the breath of the Spirit, just as by His breath [God] commanded and Adam was created from dust. The Holy Spirit breathed into [Adam], and he stood up and came into existence. And therefore, they sometimes name Him God's word and His spirit like one who is a

creature and a creation of Gods word. Thus we call Him God's son, for without suffering or division He was born, like a word from the mind. Seeing this carnally and like one who bears a son from a woman, they blame [us] and speak wickedly against we who confess [Christ]. And they say that the holy virgin Mary is the sister of Aaron and Moses.

And none of them confess that Christ was crucified by the Jews. Rather [they claim that] one of His disciples, when He gave him His form, was crucified and died. And Christ himself, while hiding, was carried off to the garden and was received by God. . . .

And [Muḥammad] does not accept that He was crucified, but [he does accept that] He performed miracles and raised the dead. And when the Jews stretched out [their] hands against Him, another man appeared to them similar to [Christ's] form. And they crucified him. And Christ himself was taken up to the fourth heaven alive. And He will be there until the end. And He will come to earth a second time. And at God's command, He will judge men on the day of the resurrection. And they also confess the resurrection and the reckoning of deeds. . . .

And [Muḥammad] allows one to legally marry as many free women as one wishes. And he allows one as many concubines as one can [have]. And [Muḥammad allows] one to divorce his wife and give her a certificate of divorce in accord with the law of Moses. And he also taught them to pray five times a day while, with the utmost necessity, washing before prayer.

They take up to four free women [as wives] and as many concubines as they want. And if one divorces his wife by oaths, he cannot take her [again] or break his oaths until he has given her to another man. And then his oaths will be absolved and he again can take her. They pray five times a day and make four genuflections with each prayer. They confess the resurrection of the dead and that there will be judgment and reckoning of everyone in accord with his deeds. . . . And they possess a love of the world: desire, pleasure, food, drink, clothing and polygamy with free women and concubines. And it is permissible for one to divorce his wife and take another. They have a daytime fast for thirty days, that is one month a year.

And [he taught them to] fast thirty days a year during a certain month

called Ramadan. Although they fast during the day, he permits them to eat the entire night

But the entire night they eat until morning. And they wash in water before they pray and even [wash] the body's orifices. When they approach a woman or have a wet dream, they wash their entire body and then pray. And they worship in the direction of the Kaʿaba; from any direction where they find themselves, they worship toward it. And they circumcise males and females, although they do not follow the rule of Moses which designates circumcision to be on the eighth day. Rather, they circumcise at whatever age they happen to be.

And they circumcise males and females among them. And their prostrations at the time of prayers are to the south.

And [they] also [confess] that a book was composed which Muḥammad said was from God, copied into his mind by an angel. And [they confess] that [Muḥammad] translated it into his own language for men's hearing. And they call it the divine book.

These fragments of Dionysius's account illustrate the wealth of information the patriarch had concerning Islam. But the way he presented this material resulted in an Islam that was stuck between more stable religious categories. Dionysius began by stressing the similarities between Christianity and Islam: monotheism, overlapping scripture, belief in Jesus' virginal birth, expectation of a final resurrection and judgment. At the same time, he detailed the difference between Christian and Muslim beliefs concerning Jesus. His account of Islamic Christology best displayed the depth of his knowledge of Islam, and his discussion of Muslim beliefs directly echoed a number of Qur'anic verses: God does not have a son (Qur'an 5:17), He is neither begotten nor begets (112:3), He has no associate (4:48), Jesus is seen as a righteous man (3:46) and a prophet (19:30), born of a virgin (3:47, 19:16–22), made from dust as Adam was (3:59), created as God's word (4:171), who was not himself crucified, but the Jews instead crucified another man who took Jesus' form (4:156–59). With the notable exception of their beliefs concerning Jesus,

Muslims were quite similar to Christians. Like earlier Abbasid-era authors, Dionysius initially constructed Islam as almost (but not quite) Christian.

Interwoven with this characterization of Islam as "almost Christian" appeared a set of implied comparisons to Judaism. According to Dionysius, Muslims accepted the Torah but not the entire Gospel. Like the Jews critiqued in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Muḥammad permitted divorce. In the *Chronicle ad 1234*, the connection between Islamic and Jewish divorce was even more explicit in the phrase "a certificate of divorce in accord with the law of Moses" that closely followed the language that Mark 10:4 and Matthew 19:7 used to describe first-century Jewish practice. Finally, Muslims' alleged circumcision of women as well as men made them seem über-Jewish: they circumcised more often than even the Jews did. This characterization was further parodied in Michael the Syrian's version, in which Muslims were more indiscriminate in their circumcisions, usually performing them at the wrong time. Although Dionysius included some distinctively Islamic practices, such as praying five times a day or performing a monthlong fast, his mix of detailed knowledge and occasional polemics did not result in an independent religious tradition. Rather, Islam was kind of like Christianity—but not really—and occasionally too Jewish to really be Jewish.

Two years after Dionysius's death in 845, Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861) came to power. Under al-Mutawakkil Christian involvement in the translation movement continued, and the caliph even had a Christian chief physician, but he ended the tradition of open religious debates, enacted a series of anti-Christian measures, and imprisoned many Christians.[171] It may also have been under al-Mutawakkil's reign that a set of traditions concerning non-Muslim communities more fully consolidated into the so-called Pact of ʿUmar. It remains unclear to what degree the Pact of ʿUmar reflected actual practices.[172] Nevertheless, at least in theory, the eventually canonical form of the Pact established sumptuary laws to distinguish non-Muslims from Muslims, forbade new church construction, and regulated public displays of Christian worship.

One of the Christians who suffered under al-Mutawakkil's policies was the Miaphysite deacon Nonnus of Nisibis, who was jailed in Samarra. Much to Nonnus's dismay, the same prison also held two notable East Syrian Christians, Thomas, metropolitan of Bēt Garmai, and Theodosius, the reigning catholicos.[173] Living in close quarters with these East Syrian ecclesiastics did little to promote a spirit of ecumenism. Instead, it prompted Nonnus to write a treatise against Thomas and Theodosius and two letters defending Miaphysite Christology.[174] When not debating his prison mates' theology, Nonnus

found time to write another tractate, the *Apologetic Treatise*, that defended Miaphysite doctrine against an unspecified "questioner."[175] Although the *Apologetic Treatise* never explicitly mentioned that the questioner was Muslim, both its topics and Nonnus's description of his opponent's beliefs left little doubt as to his religious affiliation.

The *Apologetic Treatise* focused on the now typical issues of Abbasid-era writings on Islam. It started with the common ground of monotheism and then moved to the more disputed topics of Trinitarian theology and the incarnation. Nonnus defended Christian doctrine primarily with scriptural citations. Like Job of Edessa before him, he also argued on the basis of reason and analogy. Nonnus, however, showed an even greater awareness of contemporary Islamic thought than did his predecessors. As Sidney Griffith points out, not only did a number of his passages contain clear Qur'anic echoes, but like Timothy I, Nonnus also aligned Christian Trinitarian theology with contemporary Muslim discussions of God's divine attributes.[176]

What most distinguished the *Apologetic Treatise*, however, was the terminology Nonnus used. He eschewed the most common Syriac appellatives for Muslims, such as *ṭayyāyē*, Hagarenes, Ishmaelites, Sons of Ishmael, and Sons of Hagar. Instead, like the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* and Theodore bar Koni's *Scholion*, Nonnus referred to Muslims as *ḥanpē*. But here they were *ḥanpē* with a difference. When speaking of the incarnation, Nonnus contrasted the *ḥanpē* of old (*ḥanpē hānun dmen qdim*) with contemporary *ḥanpē* (*hāleyn dhāshā ḥanpē*). According to Nonnus, contemporary *ḥanpē* opposed the *ḥanpē* of old, and, unlike their predecessors, contemporary *ḥanpē* believed in one God.[177] He later referred to this group as the new *ḥanpē* (*ḥadtē dḥanpē*) and claimed that they were better than other *ḥanpē* because they believed that Jesus was born from a virgin, was the Word and Spirit of God, performed many miracles including creating a bird from clay, ascended to heaven, and would return to the world a second time.[178] This fairly accurate depiction of Qur'anic statements about Jesus clearly revealed that those whom Nonnus called new *ḥanpē* were really Muslims.

Although Nonnus generally preferred Muslims to many other religious groups, his treatise was no ringing endorsement of Islam. He explicitly called Muslims non-Christians (*dhānun dlaytayhun kristyāne*), stating that they "stupidly" said that Jesus was "a man who was appointed" and that they did not believe in his crucifixion.[179] Like Job of Edessa before him, Nonnus also referred to Muslims' material view of paradise and, like the authors of the *Bahira Legend*, alluded to *hūrī* (virgins in paradise).[180]

By the end of his tractate, Nonnus still spoke of Muslims as *ḥanpē*, but now they had lost even the designation of "contemporary" or "new." In the last pages of the *Apologetic Treatise*, he complained that these people were clearly degenerate. Alluding to 1 Corinthians 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12–14, which spoke of the spiritually mature, who ate solid food, and the spiritually immature, who drank only milk, Nonnus complained that Muslims reversed the natural order of progression. After they had experienced maturity and true food, they perversely returned to infancy and weak milk, for they now resisted teachings that came from scripture, nature, and reason.[181]

Undoubtedly, being thrown in jail because of a caliph's anti-Christian policies and spending years stuck there with one's theological nemeses did little to foster a favorable opinion of Islam. Given the circumstances, Nonnus's *Apologetic Treatise* remained fairly restrained and presented a relatively accurate rendition of the theological fault lines between Christianity and Islam. What is most intriguing about his work, however, is how its discussion of Islam simultaneously marked and blurred distinctions, both making and then collapsing categories. Muslims were not Christian; they were *ḥanpē*. But they differed from previous *ḥanpē* because of their new belief in monotheism and their partially correct views of Jesus. That is, they were too Christian-like to be old-fashioned heathens. But even this fuzzy distinction dissolved at the conclusion of the document when these new *ḥanpē* lost both the name and the claim to anything new and returned to the spiritual immaturity they were supposed to have outgrown. This was recounted by a man who defended Christian theology through appeals to the shared idiom of the Abbasid translation movement and recent developments in Islamic theology.

The assassination of Caliph al-Mutawakkil in 861 must have been good news for Nonnus, as soon afterward he was released from prison. For the caliphate, however, al-Mutawakkil's death led to a decade of virtual anarchy with no fewer than four caliphs reigning and dying in a nine-year period.[182] During this time, an East Syrian bishop named Thomas of Margā composed a lengthy monastic history now called the *Book of Governors*.[183] Unlike Nonnus's *Apologetic Treatise*, Thomas's *Book of Governors* was not an apology against Islam, but a series of anecdotes celebrating the miraculous deeds of the abbots and alumni from the author's home monastery, Bēt ʿAbhē. Because the *Book of Governors* focused on a single monastery, there was little reference to the political unrest of the author's day, and few of its passages even alluded to Islam. But amid Thomas's hundreds of stories containing such figures as a temporarily resurrected dog, teleporting trees, and a petrified dragon appeared

about a dozen Muslim characters. These individuals had only bit parts in the narratives. Nevertheless, they revealed important information about how a mid-ninth-century bishop depicted Islam to his readership. Similar to the more systematic writings of Nonnus of Nisibis, Thomas's narratives both constructed and elided distinctions between Christianity and Islam.

What initially stood out in Thomas's stories about Muslims was his word choice. At first, his vocabulary seemed like a return to the seventh century. He avoided all the terminological innovations of the past two hundred years that had produced a vast array of names for Muslims; in the course of several hundred pages he referred to Muslims solely as *ṭayyāyē*. But for Thomas *ṭayyāyē* had shed most of the racial connotations it held for earlier authors and instead took on a much more exclusively religious meaning. When Thomas wanted to speak of a character whom we might call "ethnically Arab," unlike most earlier authors he did not use the term *ṭayyāyā* but the terms Ishmaelite or Son of Ishmael.[184] Thus, for Thomas, Ishmaelite was analogous to other Syriac terms of ethnicity, such as Egyptian or Armenian. In contrast, he used the word we often translate as "Arab" to speak of groups we primarily define by religion; he employed *ṭayyāyē* just as he might have Jews or Zoroastrians. According to Thomas, there could be Ishmaelite Christians and Ishmaelite *ṭayyāyē*, but all *ṭayyāyē* were Muslim.[185]

Thomas's focus on religion appeared not only in his stories' terminology but also in their plots. For example, he related the story of the priest Cyprian, who encountered a *ṭayyāyā* fishing in the Tigris. Cyprian was surprised to hear the *ṭayyāyā* making a brief prayer in the name of the Christian ascetic Mār Narsai prior to casting his net. He asked the fisherman, "How when you are a *ṭayyāyā* man do you cry out to the holy Narsai, the teacher of the Christians?"[186] Cyprian's question presupposed that the *ṭayyāyā* could not himself be Christian. In another story, after Mār Cyriacus arrived in town, Thomas stated that both the Christians and the *ṭayyāyē* tried to be blessed by the holy man.[187] He clearly envisioned two separate groups. Even more telling was the passage where he discussed Timothy I's mission to "barbarian nations." Here, Thomas claimed that *ḥanpē* were even worse than Jews and *ṭayyāyē* because, although not Christian, Jews and *ṭayyāyē* at least "confess in one God, the creator of heaven and earth."[188] Here, Thomas made explicit the categories implicit in his other stories. In the *Book of Governors*, there were three types of monotheists: Christians, Jews, and *ṭayyāyē*.

A more careful look at Thomas's work reveals that even for an author who at first seemed to distinguish between Christianity and Islam, these

categories nevertheless remained fuzzy and permeable. In the *Book of Governors*, numerous Muslim characters acted in very Christian-like ways. They accompanied Christian holy men and were awed by their miracles. They even summoned an abbot to exorcise a *ṭayyāyā* woman possessed by Arabic-speaking demons who later proclaimed, "There is no faith or truth except among the holy Christian people."[189]

Thomas's fictional characters engaged in the very sort of boundary-crossing activities described almost two hundred years earlier in Jacob of Edessa's canons. In the *Book of Governors* such stories were, of course, carefully constructed anecdotes reflecting a specific authorial agenda, not objective testimony to actual events. Nevertheless, like other Abbasid-era authors, Thomas wrote about Muslims in ways that both reified and blurred divisions between Christianity and Islam. He suggested that Christians and Muslims belonged to separate religious categories. In the hundreds of pages he wrote, Christians never converted to Islam, nor *ṭayyāyē* to Christianity. Even the *ṭayyāyā* demoniac who proclaimed that Christian beliefs alone were true never was baptized. Nonetheless, by often deemphasizing the distance between these categories, the narrative world of the *Book of Governors* allowed characters to express a religious preference, and according to Thomas, that preference was always for Christianity.

In their narratives, writers such as the authors of the *Bahira Legend*, Job of Edessa, Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē, Nonnus of Nisibis, and Thomas of Margā categorized Islam very differently than their predecessors had. By the time of the fourth *fitna* and its aftermath, a focus on religious traits often overshadowed the language of ethnic difference that had dominated earlier Syriac works on Islam. Ninth-century Christians encountered Islam as a much more fully formed and religiously defined entity than it had been in previous generations. Nevertheless, even for mid-ninth-century Syriac writers, the conceptual boundaries of Christianity and Islam remained extremely porous.

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Taking their cue from postcolonial studies, many recent scholars have explored how groups use the category of religion to create and reinforce power hierarchies. For example, Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions* argues that, prior to the nineteenth century, "there was no 'Buddhism' to consolidate disparate observations gathered in and about Asia. . . . Buddhism as such came to life, perhaps for the first time, in a European philological

workshop."[190] Recent scholarship on the religions of South Asia has also investigated the emergence of the category of Hinduism as a means to unite a diverse set of practices and beliefs under a single name. This research often explores the relationship between British colonial practices and the coinage of the term *Hinduism*.[191] Some scholars have also examined how groups that others label as a religion appropriate this category in their own struggles to resist oppressive practices or promote a nationalist agenda.

The point of such research is not to deny that there are people, now called Buddhists, who follow a broadly similar set of beliefs and practices, now called Buddhism. Nor is the point to adjudicate whether Hinduism is or is not a religion. Instead, such work reveals that many well-known and widely accepted categories into which we commonly group people, beliefs, and practices are of relatively recent vintage. This realization leads to questioning why these particular classifications were created, what was at stake in their establishment, and what they can tell us about the period during which they first arose.

Such investigations most often focus on the nineteenth century, presenting it as a key era in the transformation of a long-standing Western paradigm of four religions—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and heathenism—into our present-day framework of hundreds of independent religious traditions. By showing how non-Muslims first characterized Islam as a religion, an investigation of early Syriac sources takes us further back in history; it allows us to explore the premodern background to the modern concept of world religions.

Syriac texts do more, however, than simply present a *longue durée*. They also allow one to analyze the construction of religion from a very different perspective than that typically found in postcolonial studies. Syriac descriptions of Islam did not come from colonialists, but from communities that had suffered military defeat. These descriptions did not concern the beliefs and practices of the colonized, but those of their conquerors. Syriac texts did not present the unmediated, authentic voices of the subaltern. But they do illustrate some of the ways premodern writers used discussions of religion to strategically position themselves in relation to a more dominant group.

As the first Christians to encounter Muslims, Syriac authors were at the forefront of non-Muslim constructions of Islam, an increasingly dominant entity whose own identity claims were frequently tied to discourses of religious distinction and supersessionism. Nevertheless, for Syriac Christians the

theological gap between these monotheisms remained perilously small. Both shared a similar prophetic lineage and an overlapping scriptural tradition. Combined with physical proximity and frequent social interactions, nascent Islam's greatest challenge to Syriac Christianity was not its alterity but its similarity. It became what Jonathan Z. Smith calls the "proximate other"; from the perspective of Syriac writers, the beliefs and practices of their conquerors were "too much like us."[192]

As an early response to the conquests, seventh-century apocalypses could use racial stereotypes to portray *ṭayyāyē* as ruthless invaders or barbarian hordes. But once it became increasingly clear that divine intervention was not going to defeat their conquerors, once Christians interacted with Muslims more directly, once caliphs became more invested in religious promotion, Syriac narratives of identity had to become more sophisticated. As Muslim authorities consolidated the generality of Islam, so did Syriac Christians.

Once Muslims "got religion" in the eyes of Syriac Christians, theirs could be compared with that of others. The centuries' old genre of religious disputation texts allowed writers such as the authors of *John and the Emir* and of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, Timothy I, and Theodore bar Koni to produce lengthy apologies of the most controversial doctrines of Christianity and to forward claims of religious superiority. The equating of Muslim beliefs and practices with Judaism or *ḥanputā* in writings such as the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* and the *Letters* of Timothy I redeployed long-established anti-Jewish and antipagan polemic. As a religion, Islam could be parodied—as in the *Bahira Legend*—or aspects of it could be used to defend Christianity—as in Christian exegesis of the *ṣifrat Allah* in the Qur'an.

But even as all genres of Syriac texts increasingly attributed religious characteristics to Muslims, the categorical boundaries of Islam remained ill defined. The firm divisions that Greek and Latin works so often promoted through their highly polemical depictions of Islam were simply too out of step with the everyday experience of Syriac Christians to be effective. Instead, Syriac Christians more often used their increasingly detailed knowledge of Islamic beliefs and practices to deny Muslims their alterity. The crisis of differentiation experienced by Syriac Christians facilitated claims built on the very proximity that they otherwise found to be so threatening. Syriac authors frequently used similarities between Christians and Muslims to argue that Islam was neither an independent religion that superseded Christianity nor

one that had ancient roots. Islam was simply a recent, inferior derivative of Christianity.

The rhetorical strategy of minimizing the distance between Christianity and Islam often resulted in less vitriolic descriptions than those found in most Greek and Latin texts. Nevertheless, this different type of difference-making was not aimed at interfaith understanding. Rather, it made the best of an undeniably difficult situation. Contrary to the claims of Jacob of Edessa, for many Syriac Christians, it no longer was self-evident that Christianity "preceded," was "older," or—most disturbing—even was distinct from "all religions."[193]

Chapter 3

Using Muslims to Think With: Narratives of Islamic Rulers

Then a *ṭayyāyā*, crossing from the mountains to the city, came to this monastery along with many divisions [of men]. [He was] an evil and cruel man. He had with him a hunting dog that he brought along as a gift for one of the rulers over him. After he had bound it in the outer martyrium, somehow it happened that that dog died. When it was morning and he saw that his dog was dead, he became quite indignant and he began to threaten the monks. . . . [And the monks] went to Rabban's cell and informed him of the matter. [Rabban Cyriacus] took up his staff, came, entered, saw the *ṭayyāyā*, and said to him, "Why are you so enraged and threatening us?" He said, "Because you killed the dog that I brought with great effort." He said to him, "If your dog is not dead, will you demand anything from us?" He said to him, "God forbid that I would at all trouble you." The blessed old man asked about the dog and they showed it [to him] from a distance. He said to that *ṭayyāyā*, "Your dog is not dead. Rather, you and your companions rise and mount up and I will wake your dog and he will go with you." After [the *ṭayyāyē*] mounted up, [Rabban Cyriacus] went out and touched [the dog] with the tip of his staff saying, "Dead dog, get up and die outside our district." Immediately that dog got up. All those *ṭayyāyē* saw and were amazed. They threw a rope of bark on it and led it away. But when it reached Edra Balas, the dog died. And in this way those men departed having not harmed anything.

—Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors*

What should one do with a ninth-century dog story, especially the story of a dog who—at least at first—can't stay dead? Our initial questions might center on the canine. For example, what did Rabban Cyriacus's statement "your dog is not dead" mean? Did Cyriacus lie, and the hound really was dead the first time around? Instead, did the narrator lie, and the doggy was never truly resurrected? Alternatively, like some ninth-century predecessor of the famous twentieth-century quantum mechanics dilemma named Schrödinger's cat, was this poor pooch in an indeterminable state, neither truly alive nor truly dead until the story's end? As if that's not enough to wrap one's head around, a closer look at the anecdote yields even more questions regarding the dog's owner. Thomas, the East Syrian bishop of Margā, depicted the leader of this band of *ṭayyāyē* as quite temperamental. Once the Muslims departed from the district and the ruler's dog died (again?), the reader would expect him to return to the monastery in a rage. Instead, the dog's owner adhered to the letter of his agreement with Cyriacus. As if realizing that it was his fault for not specifying that Cyriacus's veterinary intervention should provide for the hound's long-term health, the ruler simply left the monastery at peace. Was he really as "evil and cruel" a man as Thomas initially suggested?

Given such questions, like the anonymous ruler in the tale, perhaps we too should simply express amazement at the dog's resurrection and then—upon the story's conclusion and the dog's eventual demise—just keep on going. But what would happen if instead we turned back? For Thomas was not alone in producing puzzling and ambiguous stories about Muslim rulers, stories that differed greatly from those found in Greek and Latin sources. What could this tale and others like it tell us about Syriac Christian reactions to Muslim rule? How did such anecdotes reflect and affect Christian experiences of living under Islam?

Just as postconquest Syriac Christians struggled with how to remember the Islamic conquests and how to categorize Islam, they also had to reckon with Muslim rulers. Prior to the conquests, many Syriac Christians had interacted with Byzantine leaders who did not share their Christology, and Sasanian rulers who were often Zoroastrian. Muslim rule, however, presented a different set of challenges, especially as these new rulers' attitudes toward Christianity in general and toward a given branch of Syriac Christianity in particular remained highly variable.

In contrast to most Greek and Latin descriptions of Muslim rulers, Syriac discussions presented sympathetic as well as hostile figures. The resulting images ranged from Muḥammad as a crypto-Christian to emirs guarded by

God's own angels, governors dumbstruck at the power of Christian holy men to a polite caliph ajudicating an interreligious debate, and Muslim leaders seeking Christian baptism to a demon-exorcising emir. Syriac discussions also included many practical prescriptions, ranging from discussions of bribery to the most polite ways to address a new Muslim governor.

These narratives, which appear in all genres of postconquest Syriac literature, most often used the character of a Muslim ruler not simply to characterize Islamic rule but also to further a number of other agendas. Many of these agendas stemmed from the crisis of differentiation brought about by the conquests and their aftermath. The rise of Islam forced Syriac Christians to distinguish themselves from a competing form of monotheism, one whose boundaries remained frustratingly porous and underdefined. In addition, Islamic rule minimized preexisting hierarchies between Christians and Jews and between the various Syriac churches. As a result, Syriac discussions of Muslim rulers often centered on reasserting Christian identity, not only vis-à-vis Islam but also in relation to Judaism and rival branches of Christianity. The ways Syriac authors depicted Muslim leaders and how they used these characters to forward a work's plot enabled these writers to better articulate and defend the very distinctions Islamic rule was challenging.

In its investigation of Syriac depictions of Muslim rulers, this chapter breaks from the previous chapters' chronological framework because my goal is not principally to show how Syriac narratives of Islamic leaders changed over time. Instead, I want to explore several different types of Syriac discussions of Muslim rulers: descriptions of Muḥammad, the binary categorization of subsequent Muslim leaders, Muslim officials in Syriac disputation texts, and Muslim rulers in intra-Christian polemics. Each of these four cases shows how focusing solely on the historicity of the materials is a misplaced strategy. That is, even authors who had access to detailed information about a given ruler did not transmit this data in the form of objective biographies. When speaking of Muslim rulers, Syriac authors constructed literary characters. These characters had many purposes, and only rarely did the primary purpose stem from the author's interest in the rulers themselves. Instead, Syriac authors most often used the character of a Muslim ruler "to think with." Their portrayals served an ideological function far removed from simply discussing Islamic rule.

An examination of these often surprising Syriac discussions of Muslim rulers (such as the story of a temporarily resurrected dog) allows one to identify how these narratives functioned to impart social meaning and to identify

what meanings they chose to impart. In other words, looking at how Syriac Christians used Muslim rulers to think with does not simply provide an entry into what these authors thought about Islamic rule. It also allows one to better appreciate how the transition to Muslim rule more broadly affected early Christian thought.

Thinking with Muḥammad

In the mid-eighth century, a Syriac scribe finished his main assignment with several folios to spare.[1] The scribe used the extra pages to append a brief text concerning Muḥammad and subsequent rulers up to Caliph Yazīd (d. 724).[2] The resulting *Chronicle ad 724* is the only surviving copy of this caliph list. Nevertheless, the text's use of Arabic loanwords and a lunar calendar suggests that it was not a Christian who originally compiled this note.[3] Rather, the scribe (or one of his predecessors) translated a no longer extant Arabic caliph list into Syriac. This work's inclusion in an eighth-century Christian manuscript reminds us how quickly texts crossed confessional and linguistic communities. As a series of textual emendations attest, such crossings were not, however, without controversy.

The *Chronicle ad 724* initially began:

> A notice concerning: the life of Muḥammad, the messenger of God—from his first year, after he had entered his city and three months before he entered [it];[4] and [concerning] how long each subsequent king who rose up over the Hagarenes lived after they began to reign; and [concerning] how long there was dissension [*pitnā*] among them.
>
> > Three months before Muḥammad came.
> > And Muḥammad lived ten [more] years.
> > And Abū Bakr son of Abī Quḥāfa: two years and six months.
> > And ʿUmar son of al-Khattab: ten years and three months.[5]

The Syriac translator produced a literally faithful translation of the Arabic, for the Syriac repeated its source's traditional claim of Muḥammad being God's *rasul* (messenger). To preserve this meaning, the translator did not use a typical Syriac word for messenger. Instead, he coined a new one by

transliterating the Arabic. The incipit's bright red ink further emphasized this appellation. The surprise for modern readers is the willingness of an eighth-century Christian to refer to Muḥammad as God's messenger. Perhaps the translator did not yet appreciate *rasul*'s theological implication in Islam. Alternatively, perhaps the document reflected a less clear division between early Christianity and Islam than most modern scholars assume.

Regardless of the translator's motives, his choice to preserve the claim of Muḥammad being God's messenger shocked more than just modern readers. At least one ancient reader was so affronted that he erased the word *rasul*, leaving the rather cryptic "Muḥammad of God."[6] Then, either this reader or another erased two additional letters, changing what was originally a noun, "the life of," into the verb "reject." Together, these two erasures transformed a bright red incipit that originally read, "A record of the life of Muḥammad, the messenger of God" into "The record that Muḥammad [is] of God is rejected."[7] These alterations contain important information concerning what various Christians thought was (and later was not) an acceptable way to refer to Muḥammad. The contested wording also reminds us of Syriac Christians' ongoing struggle to find a decidedly Christian way to conceptualize Muḥammad.

Syriac sources preserved many of the world's first references to Muḥammad. In the earliest ones, Muḥammad's name appeared in a military context. Just a few years after his death, the *Account of 637* and the *Chronicle ad 640* spoke of battles between Byzantine forces and "the *ṭayyāyē* of Muḥammad."[8] It remains uncertain whether these authors thought Muḥammad led the conquests or whether they simply used the phrase most often translated as "the Arabs of Muḥammad" to distinguish the *ṭayyāyē* responsible for the conquests from other *ṭayyāyē*. Later Syriac works more explicitly claimed that Muḥammad led the conquests. For example, in the 660s, the *Khuzistan Chronicle* referred to Muḥammad as the leader (*mdabbrānā*) of the Sons of Ishmael, whom God sent to destroy the Persians.[9] A century later, Timothy I said that God "brought low before [Muḥammad's] feet" the Byzantine and the Persian kingdoms.[10] The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* stated that the *ṭayyāyē* "under [Muḥammad's] leadership had conquered the Romans in battle."[11] Regardless of the historicity of such claims, over time Christians increasingly connected the conquests with Muḥammad himself.[12]

Syriac sources also categorized Muḥammad as an important political leader. Jacob of Edessa's *Chronicle*, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, the *Chronicle ad 819*, and the *Chronicle ad 846* all referred to Muḥammad as the *ṭayyāyē*'s first

king.[13] In each case, the author employed the same word (*malkā*) that he used to discuss Byzantine emperors and Sasanian kings. Muḥammad also appeared in several Syriac ruler lists. Most often these texts made no distinction between Muḥammad and the Byzantine emperors that appeared before him or the caliphs who appeared after him.[14] Syriac sources also frequently dated an event using the years of Muḥammad's reign, just as they used the reigns of Byzantine and Persian rulers.

It did not take long for Syriac writers to become aware that Muḥammad's followers saw him as more than simply a military commander or a political leader. In the 680s the East Syrian John bar Penkāyē spoke of Muḥammad as the guide (*mhaddyānā*) of the Sons of Hagar whom God directly commanded to respect Christians, especially Christian monks.[15] He went on to state:

> By this one's guidance [the Sons of Hagar] also upheld the worship of one God in accord with the customs of ancient law. And, at their beginning, they upheld the tradition [*mashlmānutā*] of their instructor [*tār'ā*] *tārā*' Muḥammad such that they would bring the death penalty upon whoever seemed to have dared [transgress] his laws.[16]

Fifty years later, the Miaphysite *Chronicle of Zuqnin* also characterized Muḥammad as the *ṭayyāyē*'s guide (*mhadyyānā*), as their lawgiver (*sā'em nāmusē*), and as a fearer of God.[17] It continued, "This man they also called a prophet (*nbiyā*), because he turned them away from all sorts of cults and informed them that there is one God, the maker of [all] creation."[18]

The *Book of Main Points*, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, and most later Syriac documents were very explicit about who attributed what to Muḥammad. From the perspective of these works, Muḥammad was a fearer of God, he guided the *ṭayyāyē* to monotheism, he established laws, and he even received a divine commandment to respect Christian monastics. But unlike the *Chronicle ad 724*, when it came to titles such as prophet or God's messenger, these works carefully noted that such attributions did not come from Christians.[19]

In contrast to John bar Penkāyē's *Book of Main Points* and the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, which never refuted such claims, many Syriac texts directly addressed the validity of Muslim beliefs about Muḥammad. The earliest refutation appeared in the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, most likely written in the 720s. In the *Disputation*, the characters of an anonymous *ṭayyāyā* official and East Syrian monk often discussed Muḥammad. From the *ṭayyāyā*, we learn that

he considered Muḥammad to be a prophet, that Muḥammad's followers carefully upheld his commandments, and that Muḥammad proclaimed that Christian monks would inherit God's kingdom.[20] The monk's responses were less generous. From his perspective, Muḥammad was a "wise and God fearing man" who taught the *ṭayyāyē* monotheism and gave them the commandments found in the Qur'an.[21] However, Muḥammad did not teach the *ṭayyāyē* all that he knew. According to the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, a monk named Sergius Bahira taught Muḥammad about the Christian Trinity. Because the *ṭayyāyē* were only just weaned from idolatry, Muḥammad dared not share the mystery of the Trinity lest it should confuse the *ṭayyāyē*, and they would return to polytheism.[22] The *Disputation* thus used Muḥammad's alleged knowledge of the Trinity to affirm Muḥammad (he was actually a pretty good Christian) but to invalidate his received message (Muḥammad's followers could not handle the truth, so Muḥammad never taught it to them).

Fifty years later, the East Syrian catholicos Timothy I wrote a similar (albeit much more detailed) discussion of Muḥammad. In a lengthy letter now known as Timothy's *Apology*, the catholicos reported telling Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi:

> Muḥammad is worthy of all praise from all rational people. For he walked on the road of the prophets and he journeyed on the path of the lovers of God. For if all the prophets taught about one God and Muḥammad taught about one God, then is it not evident that Muḥammad also walked on the path of the prophets? If all the prophets removed men from evil and brought them to good and Muḥammad removed his people from evil and brought them to good, then it is evident that Muḥammad walked on the road of the prophets. If all the prophets removed men from the worship of demons and from the cult of idols and brought them to God and to His worship and Muḥammad removed his people from the cult of demons and from the worship of idols and brought them to the knowledge and worship of the one God (He who alone is (God) and beside Him there are no others), then it is clear that Muḥammad walked on the path of the prophets. If Muḥammad taught about God, His Word, and His Spirit and all the prophets prophesied about God, His Word, and His Spirit, then Muḥammad also walked on the path of all the prophets. . . . Both I as well as all lovers of God say these and similar things concerning Muḥammad.[23]

Timothy's presentation of Muḥammad as a righteous, commendable monotheist comes across as accommodating or, at the very least, as an example of realpolitik. But unlike the Syriac translator of the *Chronicle ad 724*, Timothy did not unquestionably adopt Muslim views of Muḥammad, and he remained uncompromising on one crucial issue. However much Muḥammad may have "walked on the path of the prophets," Timothy was darn sure that Muḥammad was not himself a prophet. Throughout his dialogue, Timothy returned to this topic, presenting arguments centered around two main points: Muḥammad could not be a prophet because (1) he never performed any miracles, and (2) scripture never foretold his coming.[24]

By Timothy's day, Muslim scholars had already extensively debated the question of Muḥammad's performance of miracles. In their exegesis of Qur'an 6:109, which instructed Muḥammad not to perform any signs because these came only from God, Muslim scholars quickly developed a tradition that Muḥammad's only miracle was the *iʿjāz al-Qur'ān* (inimitability of the Qur'an).[25] Nevertheless, the emerging *sīra* (biographical) tradition began to attribute other miracles to Muḥammad as well.[26] In Timothy's *Apology*, however, the caliph used neither of these traditions to refute Timothy's claim regarding Muḥammad's lack of miracles.

Timothy and the caliph did, however, actively contest whether the Bible ever referred to Muḥammad. Central to their debate was the Muslim doctrine of *taḥrīf* (tampering). In several places the Qur'an speaks of the "people of the book" tampering with Scripture.[27] Although the Qur'an remained ambiguous about what this tampering actually consisted of, later Muslim theologians more explicitly charged Jews and Christians with directly changing sacred texts. They often argued that as part of this process of scriptural corruption, Jews and Christians removed biblical prophecies that originally referred to Muḥammad. In Timothy's *Apology*, al-Mahdi explicitly told Timothy, "There were many testimonies [about Muḥammad] but the scriptures were corrupted by you and you removed them."[28] In response, Timothy listed several objections to charges of *taḥrīf* ranging from outright denials (e.g., no Christian would dare) to rather innovative reasoning (e.g., Christians' and Jews' hatred for each other would prevent them from making the same changes to the biblical text).[29]

As with the issue of Muḥammad and miracles, al-Mahdi remained surprisingly silent and simply accepted Timothy's defense of the Bible's integrity. This did not, however, end their debate about Muḥammad and the Bible. The caliph pointed to three passages: Deuteronomy 18:18, Isaiah 21:7, and John

16:7. Al-Mahdi maintained that the figure each verse predicted—"one like Moses," "one on a camel," "the paraclete"—was actually Muḥammad. Timothy spent some time refuting al-Mahdi's exegesis; here again, the *Apology* gave Timothy the last word.[30]

When Timothy spoke of Muḥammad, he did not, however, limit his scriptural exegesis to the Bible. The catholicos also provided a Christian interpretation of the Qur'an. Timothy argued that the Qur'an's use of the first-person plural for God and the appearance of untranslatable letters preceding several Qur'an *suras* (chapters) proved that Muḥammad knew of the Trinity:

> He openly taught about one God. But as for the Trinity, he professed it with symbols and with signs by (expressions) such as "His word," and "His spirit," and "We have sent our spirit," and "We have formed a completed man." And thus he did not teach openly about (the Trinity) lest they be scandalized by it as by polytheism. But also he did not completely hide it lest he stray from the way of Moses and of Isaiah and of all the prophets. But he professed (the Trinity) with symbols, with the three letters at the beginning of the *suras*.[31]

The argument that, because of his followers' inclination toward polytheism, Muḥammad never explicitly taught about the Trinity had already appeared in the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*. What distinguished Timothy's depiction of Muḥammad was not the conclusion (Muḥammad was a crypto-Christian) but how he got there (Muḥammad himself wrote this in the Qur'an). As with Timothy's interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, his Qur'anic exegesis remained unchallenged by al-Mahdi.

In real life, it is unlikely that the caliph who commissioned a translation of Aristotle's *Topics* would himself have been such a lousy debater. There is no doubt that the *Apology*'s presentation was biased. Nevertheless, it fairly accurately outlined the key arguments and scriptural passages that dominated centuries of Christian and Muslim debates about Muḥammad. The inclusion of such arguments in the catholicos's letter showed that Syriac Christians were now writing in a context in which discussions about Muḥammad demanded much greater sophistication than they did half a century earlier. These arguments also illustrated the increasingly close connection between the characterization of Muḥammad and issues of textual authority.

The strong association between discussions of Muḥammad and discussions of the Qur'an's legitimacy became even more apparent in the Syriac

Bahira Legend. Written a few decades after Timothy's *Apology*, the *Bahira Legend* parodied three doctrines that contemporary Muslims used to substantiate Muḥammad as a true prophet: first, the Muslim characterization of Muḥammad as illiterate to ensure that the Qur'anic text was a divine and not a human creation; second, the Islamic story of a Christian monk named Bahira who encountered the young Muḥammad and verified his prophethood; third, the charge of *taḥrīf* to explain why Jewish and Christian Scriptures did not explicitly mention Muḥammad. The *Bahira Legend* inverted each of these, mutating them into arguments against the Qur'an's authenticity.

The *Bahira Legend* started with the same characterization of Muḥammad as that found in many Muslim texts—Muḥammad as *ummī*. The Qur'an once referred to Muḥammad as an *ummī* prophet; by the time of the *Bahira Legend*'s composition Islamic scholars most often interpreted *ummī* as meaning illiterate.[32] Islamic authors used Muḥammad's alleged illiteracy to authenticate the Qur'an as sacred scripture. They argued that if Muḥammad could not read or write, he could not have composed the Qur'an. Instead, it must have come directly from God. The Syriac *Bahira Legend* made the same initial deduction: because Muḥammad was illiterate, he could not have written the Qur'an. But this Christian author quickly moved to a radically different conclusion. If Muḥammad could not have written the Qur'an, another mortal must have. To substantiate this, the author drew on the Muslim *sīra* tradition and its story of Muḥammad meeting the monk Bahira. In Muslim versions of the story, the Christian monk Bahira met the young Muḥammad and was the first to recognize his "signs of prophecy."[33] Thus, in Islamic sources, the Christian monk served to validate Muḥammad as a true prophet. The Christianized version inverted this motif. In the Syriac *Bahira Legend*, Sergius Bahira did not recognize Muḥammad as a true prophet; instead, the monk's actions disproved this claim. In this telling, Sergius Bahira concocted an entire theological system to dupe the Sons of Ishmael into erroneously thinking Muḥammad was a prophet.[34] Sergius Bahira designed this made-up religion to appeal to their sensuality: for example, he guaranteed that every man would have seven beautiful girls in paradise and ensured that religious fasts would end at dusk.[35] At night, Sergius Bahira taught these doctrines to Muḥammad. By day, the simpleton Muḥammad recited what he had heard from Sergius Bahira and claimed it came from the angel Gabriel.[36] Eventually, Sergius Bahira codified the main tenets in a document called the Qur'an. With the help of Muḥammad (and a cow), Bahira orchestrated the resulting text's "miraculous" appearance among his followers.[37]

This tale of Muḥammad's and the Qur'an's ignominious beginning presented the Qur'an's composition as a paragon of *taḥrīf*. The *Baḥira Legend* compounded this charge of corruption by claiming that Sergius Bahira's Qur'an originally included several key Christian doctrines. According to the *Baḥira Legend*, soon after Sergius Bahira's death, the Qur'an fell into the hands of a Jewish scribe named Kaʿb. The reference was to Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, who according to Islamic tradition was one of the first converts to Islam.[38] In Muslim sources, Kaʿb played a key role in supporting arguments of Jewish and Christian *taḥrīf*; several Muslim texts had Kaʿb claim that he had personally seen biblical manuscripts that originally spoke of Muḥammad but were later crossed out.[39] The *Baḥira Legend* reversed Kaʿb's traditional role and here had him alter a text, in this case removing from the Qur'an those sections that originally supported Christianity.[40] The result was the Qur'an as a doubly corrupt document, the invention of an errant monk whose most truthful doctrines were later removed by a maleficent Jew.

As these works illustrate, Syriac depictions of Muḥammad were not objective accounts of a seventh-century Muslim ruler. Instead, Syriac writers used their characterization of Muḥammad to further both apology and polemic. Often Syriac authors spoke of Muḥammad in ways that minimized tension between Christianity and Islam. By highlighting Muḥammad's role in the renunciation of paganism, they emphasized Christians and Muslims as co-monotheists. When speaking of Muḥammad as a lawgiver, Syriac ecclesiastics repeatedly claimed that Muḥammad commanded his followers to respect Christians, especially Christian monks, providing a precedent for continued beneficence. Additionally, these authors' generally positive depictions of Muḥammad presented a very accommodating attitude toward Islam's founder. If their readers wanted to have a relatively polite discussion with contemporary Muslims about Muḥammad, many surviving Syriac texts would have provided a good model. On the other hand, several of these texts could also have been useful for a Christian who wanted to be a little more feisty, or simply needed reassurance of Christianity's superiority. They provided arguments ranging from challenges to Muḥammad's prophethood to Muḥammad being a crypto-Christian to Muḥammad and his Qur'an as an archetype of *taḥrīf*.

Nevertheless, even at their most polemical, Syriac discussions of Muḥammad still followed the more general tendency of Syriac authors in being less hostile to Islam than more Western writers were. The most derogatory Syriac characterization of Muḥammad was that of a misled simpleton,

a far cry from the lusty Muḥammad as found in the Latin *Istoria de Mahomet*, a follower of the heresiarch Nicholas as found in the Latin writings of Paschasius Radbertus, or a miserable epileptic as in the Greek works of Theophanes and Constantine Porphyrogenitus.[41] Unlike the Greek writings of John of Damascus, Syriac texts never portrayed Muḥammad as the harbinger of the Antichrist or spoke of him as "blasphemous and obscene," as did Constantine Prophyrogenitus.[42] Nor was he an impure enemy of God taught and possessed by demons or a stupid man writing with a perverse pen who loved debauchery, massacres, pillage, and blasphemy, as depicted by the Byzantine writers Nicetas of Byzantium and George the Monk.[43] Nor was he an idol-worshiping slave to sin who made his own religion by combing the errors of Jews, Arians, and Nestorians.[44] In Syriac sources, Muḥammad did not receive his teaching from a demon in the form of a vulture, as reported in the *Istoria de Mahamed*, or from a wicked angel, as in the Latin writings of Eulogius.[45] Unlike the Latin texts of Alvar and Eulogius, Syriac sources never spoke of Muḥammad's diabolical revelations or of his ensnaring souls for the devil, nor did they condemn him to eternal damnation.[46] There were no Syriac equivalents of Nicetas of Byzantium's statement that Muḥammad "was by nature perverse and talkative, or rather stupid and bestial, a coward too, quick to anger, distrustful and arrogant. Really I do not know what he lacked in all the many kinds of perversity that Satan possesses."[47] Nor were there any Greek or Latin equivalents of Timothy I's statement of Muḥammad being "worthy of all praise," or to the numerous Syriac depictions of Muḥammad as a laudable monotheist.

Why was there such a profound difference between how Syriac and non-Syriac texts characterized Muḥammad? Perhaps Syriac Christians were wary of Muslim reprisals for insulting their prophet. But we have no evidence of Muslim officials reading Syriac, and it seems unlikely that Syriac-speaking converts to Islam had either the access or the desire to go through hundreds of Syriac texts to police the occasional reference to Muḥammad. In contrast, Greek authors living in Muslim territory wrote vitriolic descriptions of Muḥammad, even though some Muslim officials could read Greek. Fear of retaliation also fails to explain the favorable depictions of Muḥammad that were found in many Syriac texts. It made no sense for Christian authors to plant positive references to Muḥammad in the hopes that some rare Muslim reader of Syriac would one day discover them and become more favorably inclined toward Christianity.

As with Syriac discussions of Muslim rulers more broadly, the key

to understanding Syriac descriptions of Muḥammad is to remember that they appeared in texts that functioned as internal literature. Muslims would have found the argument that Muḥammad knew about the Trinity quite unpersuasive. Nor would the *Baḥira Legend*'s lampooning of Muḥammad have won Muslim friends and influence. These texts were written by and for Christians—more specifically, by and for Christians who had frequent interactions with Muslims, but who had little love for the Byzantine Empire. The Chalcedonian monk John of Damascus wrote his Greek diatribes against Muḥammad from the Palestinian monastery of Mār Sabas; the East Syrian catholicos Timothy I wrote his *Apology* from the caliph's court in Baghdad.

For Syriac Christians, the extreme mischaracterizations of Muḥammad found in many Greek and Latin texts were not so much dangerous as simply unproductive. Attacking Muḥammad's character was effective for the Iberian writer Eulogius and his fellow Córdoba martyrs who were going out of their way to be executed by Muslim *qāḍīs* (judges); and such depictions were motivational to the inhabitants of Constantinople, which was periodically besieged by Muslim troops. They were much less useful for Syriac Christians, who more often intended to promote coexistence than conflict. For such Christians, their ongoing interactions with Muslim contemporaries brought about complicated theological challenges that could not be addressed with facile responses. What these Christians needed were descriptions of Muḥammad that, unlike the original version of the *Chronicle ad 724*, were decidedly Christian but, unlike most Greek and Latin caricatures, at least partially resonated with their audiences' more thorough knowledge of Islamic tradition. As a result, Syriac discussions of Muḥammad were often more balanced, informed, and multifaceted than those found in most non-Syriac sources.

Nevertheless, Syriac discussions about Muḥammad were rarely just about Muḥammad. Especially in the more detailed treatments found among Abbasid-era writers, the discussion quickly moved from Muḥammad himself to questions of textual corruption. Unlike most Greek and Latin writers, Syriac authors rarely made ad hominem attacks against Muḥammad. Instead, their depictions of Muḥammad reflected a deep concern for textual vulnerability. They described him in ways that defended the textual integrity of the Christian Bible and attacked the textual legitimacy of the Qur'an and its traditional interpretation. Timothy I went on for pages refuting Muslim charges of Christian *taḥrīf* and suggested that the Qur'an secretly encoded knowledge of the Trinity. The *Baḥira Legend* redeployed figures that Muslim writers

used to refute Christianity and recast them into a narrative about the Qur'an's human composition and later textual corruption.

It is as if Syriac authors took the Qur'anic depiction of Christians as "people of the book" at its most literal to argue that Christians were people of *the* book. From this perspective, either the Qur'an was not legitimate Scripture or it also belonged to Christianity. As a result, Syriac discussions did not so much villainize Muḥammad as Christianize him. In the process, they tried to domesticate not only the messenger but also his message. According to these authors, the Qur'an was no longer a newly revealed text that opposed Christianity. Instead, it was a derivative text that, however warped its current form, ultimately stemmed from Christian truth.

Given Muḥammad's prominence in the Islamic tradition, it was not surprising that how Christian writers described him often reflected their more general attitude toward Islam as a whole. Syriac discussions of Muḥammad can also serve as a synecdoche for Syriac discussions of other Muslim rulers. Like their depictions of Muḥammad, many Syriac depictions of other Muslim leaders were decidedly more favorable than those found in Greek and Latin texts. As in their descriptions of Muḥammad, Syriac writers also used discussions of these leaders for purposes beyond simply describing a single individual. But unlike their discussions of Muḥammad, Syriac discussions of later Muslim rulers were much more polarized; surviving texts often included both extremely negative as well as extremely positive characterizations.

Thinking with Bad Rulers and Good Rulers

A late eighth-century inscription from the narthex of a church in Ehnesh, in northern Syria, listed a series of historical events, including the conquests, a famine, an eclipse, and a reference to Caliph al-Mahdi who "ordered that the churches be torn down and that the [Miaphysite tribe of *ṭayyāyē*] the Tanukh become Hagarenes."[48] An adjacent wall contained a second inscription written in five columns under five overlapping circles that form a cross. This inscription began, "through you we will beat down our enemies," and continued with psalm verses that Christian exegesis and liturgy traditionally related to victory through the cross.[49] The colored letters of the inscriptions were placed at eye level, allowing Christians congregating before and after services to contemplate the connection between these two inscriptions carved by the same hand.[50] It would not take much reflection to realize that the first inscription's

reference to the caliph left little ambiguity as to the congregation's enemies that the second inscription saw the cross as eventually overcoming.[51]

The *Ehnesh Inscriptions* exemplified one strand of Syriac depictions of Muslim leaders—the narrative of the evil ruler. They also serve as an important reminder of how often such characterizations intersected with other issues that were key to Syriac Christians, particularly the ongoing competition between various Syriac churches. For while a Syriac mason was in northern Syria chiseling a condemnation of al-Mahdi's destruction of Miaphysite churches, the East Syrian catholicos was referring to the very same caliph as a "lover of God" and praying that all the nations of the world would become subject to al-Mahdi's rule.[52] Such contradictory attitudes toward a Muslim ruler were not limited to contemporary depictions of al-Mahdi. There rarely emerged a univocal Syriac opinion concerning Muslim leaders. As in their depictions of Muḥammad, Syriac narratives of other Muslim rulers seemed much less concerned with accurately depicting Islamic rule than with employing Muslim leaders as literary characters to make broader theological points.

Given that their new rulers were non-Christian, it was not surprising that many Syriac writers, such as the author of the *Ehnesh Inscriptions*, wrote about evil Muslim leaders. Such characters made occasional appearances in all genres of Syriac literature, but most commonly inhabited Syriac chronicles.[53] Examples included John bar Penkāyē's depiction of the prideful Muslim general bar Nitron, the *Chronicle of Disaster*'s discussion of the greedy and deceitful Caliph Suleiman, Theophilus's account of Caliph Hishām killing Roman prisoners of war, and the *Chronicle ad 819*'s critiques of Caliph Walīd.[54]

The longest, most detailed, and most vitriolic of such accounts appeared in the late eighth-century *Chronicle of Zuqnin*. The author detailed the evil deeds of caliphs such as Yazīd II (who, the author claimed, tried to destroy all religious images, white animals, and even blue-eyed people), generals such as al-Jarrah (who ruthlessly murdered peasants until God eventually smote him), and other governmental officials such as ʿUbayd-Allah (who razed monasteries and roasted their abbots alive).[55] But the author's greatest nemeses were Caliph al-Manṣūr and his governor of Mosul, Mūsā son of Muṣʿab. When discussing their rule, the *Chronicle* stated, "all the world's pages and parchment would not suffice for writing [all] the evils that in our time came upon men."[56] Nevertheless, the author gave it his best try, dedicating more than 170 pages to ten years' worth of afflictions under a caliph who "enjoyed the sword more than peace" and his governor, who could rightly "be called the anti-Christ."[57]

The *Chronicle*'s list of these two rulers' atrocities was immense. Of particular concern were their tax policies—a combination of economic exploitation, unjust confiscation, and outright torture. The only thing that upset this author more than tax collection was that, despite all of their evils, he could find no evidence that these rulers ever specifically targeted Christians. They were equal opportunity oppressors, and the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* repeatedly emphasized that Muslims suffered even more than Christians under these rulers, that they tormented people of all religions, and that their agents acted out of a love of money not out of a love of Islam.[58] The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* judged this to be particularly regrettable; because all were persecuted regardless of religious affiliation, one could not extol afflicted Christians as martyrs.[59]

Although one occasionally suspects a degree of hyperbole, there is little doubt that such reports reflected a wide range of suffering experienced by Syriac Christians in the seventh through ninth centuries. What was most unexpected about such accounts was not their composition by Christians under Muslim rule but their relative infrequency. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* remained one of the few Syriac sources that was unremittingly critical of almost all Muslim rulers. It may not be coincidental that it also remained one of the most unpopular Syriac sources. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* appears in only a single manuscript, most likely the author's original copy.[60] No later Syriac writers seems to have read the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* or quoted from it. In contrast, more widely read Syriac sources were usually filled with good Muslim rulers alongside evil ones, with a few indifferent rulers thrown in for good measure.[61] This does not mean that narratives of good Muslim rulers had any greater claim to historical accuracy than those of evil ones. But in their narratives of good rulers, Syriac works diverged from most non-Syriac sources.

The figure of a good Muslim ruler became so standardized among Syriac writings that one even finds purposefully generic documents outlining the traits and deeds of unspecified, virtuous Muslim leaders. Later readers simply had to add the name of their local ruler to these templates. This phenomenon of "insert ruler's name here" is most evident in two recently published documents now housed in the British Library.

Sometime in the ninth or tenth century, a Miaphysite scribe named Ṣalibā produced a 93-folio codex now cataloged as British Library Additional 14,653.[62] Toward the end of this manuscript appeared seven brief documents that the nineteenth-century cataloger William Wright called "forms of letters, to be used in addressing various persons."[63] Each spoke to the addressee

in the second person, discussed his situation in only the most general of terms, provided exhortation, and ended with a blessing. Ṣalibā titled one of these texts *To the Rulers of the World*, which stood out as being the only one of the seven templates addressed to a non-Christian.

In this document, the Christian author called a Muslim leader "your Excellency, my lord, who is appointed as a head for this people under your authority."[64] He compared the ruler's governance to that of David and Hezekiah. He continued praising the leader's conduct and the benefits of his rule:

> And through your mind that is healthily conducted by knowledge and by virtue, the weak are strengthened, the sick become strong, the noble are encouraged, the poor are upheld, the rich are strengthened, the orphans and the widows are supported, God is glorified, and your rule is honored. . . . Through you, your entire empire sees all the glory of [your] rule, understands its advantages, and glorifies God, its author.[65]

The text then emphasized the recipient's ability to intercede on behalf of his subjects and successfully plead their causes before more highly placed governmental officials. God would help the ruler in this task because his good conduct had persuaded "God to appease the governors' hearts toward your will."[66] A few sentences later, one learns that God had become the ruler's vice-regent and "will lead the people subjected to your honor on all the straight paths and ways that lead to eternal life. Those who in love and in great willingness submit to your authority will multiply and increase."[67] By the end of this document, we even discover that God had appointed His angels to protect the ruler's life. They would assure him and his descendants not only earthly success but also "because of your beautiful conduct, in the kingdom of heaven you will be seen as great."[68]

Within a few decades of Ṣalibā's copying *To the Rulers of the World*, another Miaphysite scribe finished a 189-folio codex now known as British Library Additional 14,493.[69] Near the end of the manuscript appeared a brief text titled *Concerning an Entrance Before a New Emir*.[70] The author began by stating that because of Adam's fall and the subsequent decline of humanity, the world needed wise rulers such as this emir, whom God had chosen, just as He had previously chosen Moses and David.[71] The text then directly addressed the emir and claimed that, prior to his rule, the region was of little regard but now had become renowned.[72] The author next reminded the emir

of the ephemeral nature of the present world and, like the author of *To the Rulers of the World*, concluded by assuring the emir that God guards and blesses him and his family.[73]

In the course of addressing these topics, the author devoted much of his time to extolling the emir. He seemed even more concerned, however, with reassuring the recipient that the Christian community supported "our own blessed emir."[74] He emphasized that Christians realized that "rule is not suitable for everyone, but [only] for those chosen and appointed by a special lot and by a calling from God."[75] Fortunately, God had appointed for them an emir who was "from a noble race and from an honorable people" and had "praiseworthy conduct, temperate reasoning, a peaceful appearance, and a beautiful name."[76] As a result of these virtues, "just as the Queen of Sheba when she came to Solomon said, 'Blessed are your wives. Blessed are your servants. Blessed are those who continually hear your wisdom [1 Kings 10:8],' we likewise say, 'Blessed is our country and our region when it is led by fearers of God like you'."[77]

These two works' glowing praise of Muslim authorities and repeated assurances of Christian support for their rule were undoubtedly the result of a fair amount of realpolitik and not a little wishful thinking. Nevertheless, it is important to note how far assurances that God's angels protect Muslim rulers were from descriptions found in many non-Syriac writings. Consider Latin writers such as Paschasius Radbertus, Paul Albar, and Eulogius, who spoke of savage Arab rule, claimed that Saracens perverted the worship of God, and condemned all Muslims to eternal damnation.[78] Consider Greek writers such as George the Monk and Nicetas of Byzantium, who spoke of all Muslims as incurably sick, slaves of error, and God's enemies.[79] Also compare these generic Syriac templates to non-Syriac depictions of specific Muslim rulers, such as the Latin *Chronicle of Alfonso III*'s description of the treacherous rebel leader Musa, who slaughtered Franks and Gauls, the *Chronicle of 754* discussion of the same general crucifying men and slaughtering infants, and the Greek Theophanes's claim that ʿUmar II killed any Christian who did not convert to Islam.[80]

One must also take into account the possible functions of these texts. The survival of two such works suggested not simply that Syriac Christians found it useful to have purposefully generic documents about Muslim rulers but also that the motif of a good Muslim ruler was sufficiently widespread to support the composition and consumption of such literature. We should not, however, view their only readership as those struggling with how to best

address actual Muslim rulers. By the time *To the Rulers of the World* reached Ṣalibā's hands and was copied into the middle of a collection of hagiographies, prayers, excerpts, and anonymous discourses, the chance of someone coming across it just when he needed to write to government authorities seems fairly remote. As for *Concerning an Entrance Before a New Emir*, we could envision how an ecclesiastical official, faced with the challenge of visiting a newly appointed ruler, would be pleased to remember that he had a document that could give him a helpful starting point for composing his own comments. Nevertheless, even if some who encountered this text soon afterward actually entered before a newly appointed govenor, this was undoubtedly a small percentage of its readership. Instead, these short works may have been the ancient analogue to the chapter in *Miss Manners* speaking about the etiquette of a White House dinner.[81] Although potentially useful for someone attending such an affair, few among *Miss Manners*'s millions of readers were likely to receive such an invitation. Instead, her readership was encouraged to imagine what such an event would be like and how they would behave on such an occasion.

For most readers, *To the Rulers of the World* and *Concerning an Entrance Before a New Emir* likely served a similar purpose. Even for those who would never write to a worldly ruler and never meet an emir (new or otherwise), these texts suggested what such encounters might look like and what would be the most practical Christian responses. A now hypothetical letter to a ruler or introductory speech to an emir was used not so much as a model for how to write or to speak to Muslim leaders as an exemplar for the proper Christian attitude toward them. Such texts most often functioned as internal literature whose main audience was other Christians. They invited readers to enter an imaginary universe in which Muslim rulers were always "wise," "rational," "peaceful," "fearers of God"—or, at the very least, persuadable—and in which Christian obedience to worldly authorities was inevitably rewarded.

This narrative of the good Muslim ruler was not limited to the generic form found in these two recently published texts. It can be found throughout most genres of Syriac literature. For example, in the *Life of John of Dailam*, John successfully exorcised demons from the daughter of the seventh-century caliph ʿAbd al-Malik. According to this *vita*, ʿAbd al-Malik was so pleased that he gave John permission to construct churches and monasteries throughout the Umayyad Empire, directly funded the building projects, granted all Christian clergy tax exemption, and commanded his governors to honor Christian customs and laws.[82] The *Life of Gabriel of Qartmin* contained

a similar tale.[83] In this version, however, the protection of Christian worship and granting of tax exemption was ascribed to Caliph ʿUmar, no doubt to undermine contemporary Muslim authorities who attributed to the same caliph the "Pact of ʿUmar," a set of legal restrictions placed on Christians that prescribed exactly the opposite of what was found in the *Life of Gabriel*. In the *Life of Theoduṭē*, the governor of Dara fell prostrate before Theoduṭē, offered to pay for a monastery's poll tax out of the governor's own pockets, and helped the holy man build a new monastery.[84]

The character of the specific good Muslim ruler also figured prominently in Syriac chronicles, such as that of the late seventh-century East Syrian John bar Penkāyē, who eulogized the rule of Caliph Muʿāwiya, under whom "Justice flourished in his days and there was great peace in the regions he controlled."[85] Similarly, the *Chronicle* of the mid-eighth-century Theophilus originally included an extended anecdote concerning ʿUmar's entry into Jerusalem, emphasizing the caliph's piety and his congenial meeting with Bishop Sophronius.[86] Two decades later, even the Miaphysite *Chronicle of Zuqnin* could single out a few just Muslim rulers.[87] In the ninth century, the *Chronicle ad 819* praised ʿUmar II's kindness and compassion, and the *Chronicle ad 846* mentioned that Caliph Suleiman released Syrian captives unharmed.[88]

Praise for Muslim rulers also appeared in ecclesiastical letters, such as a mid-seventh-century epistle from the East Syrian Ishoʿyahb III claiming that "The *ṭayyāyē* to whom at this time God has given rule over the world . . . are givers of praise to our faith, givers of honor to our Lord's priests and holy ones, and givers of aid to churches and monasteries."[89] In a letter mentioning the caliph's potential support for the rebuilding of churches, Timothy I stated that God was protecting the life of al-Mahdi, in his *Apology* the catholicos continually extoled al-Mahdi, and in a later letter Timothy spoke of al-Mahdi's son and successor, Caliph Harūn, donating 84,000 *zuzē* to help rebuild a monastery.[90]

In their depictions of good, as well as of evil, rulers, many Syriac authors were clearly revisionist with their history. It seems unlikely, for example, that ʿAbd al-Malik, who erected the Dome of the Rock with its anti-Trinitarian inscriptions and initiated a program of Islamization, would have encouraged (or would have directly funded) an empire-wide church-building project.[91] It also remains improbable that Yazīd II actually ordered that all people with blue eyes be killed.[92] Although some descriptions of Muslim rulers presented a complex character with good and evil traits, in most cases their authors' reliance on stock characters and characteristics reminds us that we are dealing

more with literary tropes than with accurate depictions. This becomes even clearer when one considers how often Syriac writers tended to bifurcate Muslim rulers into the categories of purely evil and purely good. This tendency was so pronounced that in at least one case we can catch an author writing diametrically opposed descriptions of the same ruler.

In Thomas of Margā's mid-ninth-century *Book of Governors*, two story cycles centered on the Muslim governor ᶜAmran, son of Muḥammad. Thomas, however, originally wrote these narratives at different times. The account that is now in a section titled "Book 6 of the *Book of Governors*" initially was part of a prior, independent work by Thomas called the "History of Rabban Gabriel"; years after Thomas composed the *Book of Governors* a scribe renamed this earlier text "Book 6 of the *Book of Governors*" and placed it at the end of the originally five-book monastic history.[93] Thomas included a later account of ᶜAmran in book 4 of his *Book of Governors*.

In his earlier work, Thomas began his description of this Muslim governor by asking, "Who is unacquainted with ᶜAmran son of Muḥammad, this very cruel servant who was mollified and was turned from his violence by the intervention of [Mār Gabriel]?"[94] The reforming of ᶜAmran began when Mār Gabriel, equipped with divine foresight, instructed a monk to go to the local village, find a *ṭayyāyā* named ᶜAmran, give him ten oxen, and ask ᶜAmran to visit the monastery of Bēt ᶜAbhē once he received his inheritance. After events transpired as Gabriel predicted, ᶜAmran "was amazed and astonished. With his soul's sense he knew and perceived that the Christians' judgment was great and exalted before God, 'for behold, their holy ones see and know hidden things.'"[95] Soon afterward, ᶜAmran arrived at Bēt ᶜAbhē, fell prostrate before Mār Gabriel, and asked Gabriel to pray for him. Gabriel replied, "If you establish a covenant before me [and] before God that you will not kill Christians, I will reveal to you what you will become and what will happen to your children and your grandchildren."[96] After ᶜAmran agreed that he and his descendants would protect Christians, especially monks and clergy, Gabriel informed him that he would peacefully inherit the entire district of Margā. The narrative ended with Thomas assuring his audience that ᶜAmran fulfilled his promises and commanded his sons to do so as well.[97]

Compare this story to what Thomas subsequently composed about the same ᶜAmran, son of Muḥammad. This later version included a series of encounters between ᶜAmran and the Christian abbot Mār Cyriacus (the same holy man whom Thomas earlier reported as having temporarily resurrected a dog). It began, "There was a certain troublesome Ishmaelite whose name was

ʿAmran bar Muḥammad whom I also wrote about in the *History of Rabban Gabriel*—a cruel, powerful man, merciless, and a murderer."[98] In this account, ʿAmran seized fields, killed their owners, captured village after village, and wanted to murder Mār Cyriacus so that he could take possession of the monastery of Bēt ʿAbhē. In response to ʿAmran's attempt to coerce the monks into signing away Bēt ʿAbhē, Cyriacus rebuked ʿAmran, telling him that the monastery would never be his, that he would die an untimely death, and that the earth would three times refuse his dead body. Shamed by these words, ʿAmran departed and planned Cyriacus's demise. God thwarted ʿAmran's initial plot when He teleported Cyriacus from Bēt ʿAbhē directly into ʿAmran's audience chamber. Understandably, ʿAmran was "stupefied and amazed," and he promised that he would no longer trouble the monks. ʿAmran's shock did not last long, however, and immediately after Cyriacus's departure, he sent five men to ambush and kill Cyriacus. God intervened again, and fire sprang from Cyriacus's fingertips to foil the attempt on his life. At this point, ʿAmran finally learned his lesson and no longer harassed the monks of Bēt ʿAbhē. The narrative concluded with ʿAmran's death and, in accord with Cyriacus's prediction, the earth casting out ʿAmran's corpse three times.[99]

It remains difficult to reconcile these two stories. ʿAmran could not peacefully inherit Margā and constantly kill its landowners; he could not keep his promise to respect the clergy and try to assassinate the abbot of Bēt ʿAbhē. Although Thomas wrote both anecdotes and even had the more recent version allude to the prior one, he did not feel obliged to have his later characterization of ʿAmran correspond with his earlier portrayal. These opposing accounts remind us that Thomas's writings about Muslim leaders, like those of most of his contemporaries, were more concerned with literary convention than with narrative consistency. The two depictions of ʿAmran, one antagonistic and the other conciliatory, also paralleled the extremes to which Syriac narratives about Muslim rulers tended.

One reason Thomas could get away with such varied accounts was that although both these narratives were ostensibly about ʿAmran son of Muḥammad, it soon becomes apparent that ʿAmran was a bit player in this drama. His main role was to serve as a witness for the miraculous deeds of Christian holy men, and thus implicitly as a witness to the truth of East Syrian Christianity. For this purpose, it mattered little if ʿAmran were beneficent or maleficent. Both the ʿAmran "mollified" by Gabriel's accurate predictions of the future and the "murderous" ʿAmran outwitted by the teleporting Cyriacus were equally effective in building a narrative that extolled the deeds of

an ascetic superstar. The key was not so much whether ʿAmran was good or bad but simply that he was "amazed" by the holy man's power.

Thomas's contrasting narratives concerning the very same governor remind us how often Syriac authors used the character of a Muslim ruler as a literary device to further agendas far removed from depicting Islamic rule "as it actually was." Syriac tropes of the universally acclaimed good ruler, the unrelentingly bad ruler, and the ruler whose main task was simply to be amazed provide little reassurance for the empirical accuracy of these descriptions. As with Syriac depictions of Muḥammad, instead of relying on such depictions to historically reconstruct specific Muslim leaders, it is often more fruitful to analyze how Syriac authors used the figure of a Muslim ruler "to think with." That is, what were the various ways the depictions of these characters interacted with other authorial agendas? The benefits of such an approach become particularly apparent when dealing with a slightly different genre of Syriac literature, disputation texts. For it is in Syriac disputations that the characterization of Muslim rulers became central to the authors' overarching defense of Christianity.

Thinking with Disputation Texts

Prior to the conquests, Syriac Christians already had a long tradition of writing religious disputations (*drāshē*), which followed the question-and-answer format common to Christian as well as non-Christian school texts.[100] Authors often made these disputations more dialogical by framing them as oral debates between two opponents, one an orthodox Christian, the other a pagan, Jew, or heretic.[101] Only a few of these texts stemmed from a specific, real-world debate, and none were accurate transcripts of such encounters. Nevertheless, at least some of the popularity of these works was due to the prevalence throughout late antiquity of public, interreligious debates.[102] The Byzantines and Sasanians often sponsored and publicly arbitrated these contests, even when both sides were of a different religion than the judging official.[103]

Such debates continued in the Islamic Empire, now adjudicated by caliphs and emirs instead of Byzantine emperors and Sasanian kings. Syriac Christians also continued to write dialogical disputations, but with a difference. In many postconquest imaginations of such debates, Syriac authors no longer depicted government officials as neutral arbitrators. Instead, they embedded these Muslim rulers within the debate itself. The consequence

was not simply a shift from disputations against pagans, Jews, and heretics to disputations against Muslims. The dynamic in the resulting narratives also changed. The figure of the ruler took on a more complex role. On the one hand, at the dispute's onset the Muslim ruler assumed the role of theological adversary, an opponent to orthodox Christianity. On the other hand, he maintained his role as judge and, by the conclusion, was ultimately transformed into a witness—willingly or otherwise—to Christian truth. Syriac authors used this characterization of a Muslim ruler to affirm the superiority of orthodox Christianity over all contenders, whether those contenders were Islam, Judaism, or competing branches of Christianity.

Three eighth-century Syriac disputations exemplified this characterization of Muslim rulers, as well as its rhetorical consequences. Two anonymous Syriac authors living under Umayyad rule composed the Miaphysite *John and the Emir* and the East Syrian *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*. During the early Abbasid era, the East Syrian catholicos Timothy I wrote the third, Timothy's *Apology*.

John and the Emir purported to relate the conversation of the seventh-century Miaphysite patriarch John Sedra (r. 631–648) and an unspecified Muslim leader. The work's author used the setting of a Muslim court to give *John and the Emir* a feeling of suspense and the appearance of authenticity. Surrounding the dialogical section was an epistolary frame supposedly penned by an unnamed member of John's entourage. This figure claimed to write "because we know that you are anxious and afraid on our behalf."[104] To reassure readers of John's safety, the letter described the patriarch's congenial audience with the emir that took place on Sunday, May 9. Nevertheless, further allusions to potential menace occurred toward the end of the letter, when the narrator asked the reader to pray so that the Lord "would make a resolution to this affair that pleases His will."[105] He then noted that even Chalcedonians were aware of "the greatness of the danger and the anguish that awaited if the Lord did not care for his church."[106] Additional prayer requests concluded the document, and the reader was instructed to pray for all the holy fathers who accompanied the patriarch to the emir's court: Thomas, Severus, Sergius, Aitilaha, Andrew, "their entire synodal board," and the unnamed narrator.[107]

The resulting text viscerally drew the reader into its narrative world. Through the narrator's constant use of the second person, we feel directly addressed by the author; he even asks us to pray for him. At the same time, there is also dissonance when we realize that we are not the original audience but are snooping through someone else's mail. The narrative built on

this voyeurism, giving us direct access to the emir's court, reproducing John's and the emir's very words. The accuracy of this encounter was vouchsafed by a well-placed informant whose detailed list of names and dates ensured the document's accuracy.

Twentieth-century reactions attest to the rhetorical power of this setup. In the decades following François Nau's 1915 publication of *John and the Emir*, scholars were preoccupied with determining exactly which Muslim governor had met with John.[108] They dated the document based on which Sundays in John's patriarchate fell on May 9.[109] They combed Syriac chronicles to find references to mid-seventh-century Miaphysite clergy named Sergius, Aitilaha, and so on.[110] In the 1980s, one scholar claimed the letter was written by John's secretary.[111] In the late 1990s, another cited the document's reference to its audience's anxiety as evidence that *John and the Emir* was penned immediately after the events it depicted.[112]

There are few better examples of what literary critic Roland Barthes called the "reality effect."[113] *John and the Emir*'s detailed and affect-laden descriptions of a high-stakes encounter created an aura of genuineness that undoubtedly was as persuasive for ancient readers as it was for most twentieth-century scholars. There remained, however, a small flaw in its presentation. The document was almost certainly composed fifty or more years after John's death, it was most likely never a letter, and there is little evidence that John ever had a theological dispute with a Muslim official, suspense-filled or otherwise.[114] In other words, the character of the Muslim emir, and the potential threat that he represented, transformed what would have been a fairly dry piece of theological apologetics into an evidently very engaging pseudo-epistle.

The figure of the emir did more than simply give the document a compelling setting. The Muslim ruler provided both catalyst and structure for John's defense of Christianity. Throughout *John and the Emir*, the Muslim governor fed the patriarch cue lines: "Why when the gospel is one, is the faith diverse?" "Is [Christ] God or not?" "As for Abraham and Moses, what sort of belief and faith did they have?"[115] Each question provided the author an opportunity to mount a detailed defense of Christian doctrine. Most of John's responses remained unchallenged by the emir. In every case, John got the final word.

The result was a rather one-sided conversation. In total John spoke 390 words, and the emir only 130. By the end of the document, the patriarch came across as fairly learned. He had a ready answer to each of the emir's challenges, and every response persuaded the emir to quickly change the topic.

In contrast, the emir's simplistic questions and ready acquiescence made him appear fairly naive. The author, however, counterbalanced this with rhetoric of praise. Seven times in the course of only three folios the narrator referred to the Muslim ruler as the "glorious" (*mshabḥā*) emir and even instructed the reader to "pray for the glorious emir."[116] This phrasing also bore the trappings of realism. It was reminiscent of Syriac templates for how one should speak to a Muslim ruler, such as *To the Rulers of the World* and *Concerning an Entrance Before a New Emir*, which also spoke of "glorious" rulers and presented prayers on behalf of a Muslim official.[117] The author had the best of all worlds: enough hints of danger to keep the reader engaged, but something of a pushover emir who ultimately presented little real threat in the face of orthodox Christianity; a hard-punching patriarch who clearly won every argument, but in a setting of courtly praise and civility, so there was no lasting animosity.

As with other disputation texts, the dialogical section of *John and the Emir* also drew on the long-standing trope of a governmental official judging an interreligious debate. In this case, the emir's judgment carried even greater weight when one accounted for his bias. Unlike the more traditional settings of a ruler as a neutral arbitrator, here the emir was cast as one of the contestants. In spite of his vested interest, the Muslim ruler nevertheless appeared satisfied with John's responses. The narrative transformed the emir from being a potentially hostile opponent to becoming a favorably impressed judge and even a reluctant witness of Christian truth.

The one narrative incident that interrupted *John and the Emir*'s question-and-answer format also emphasized motifs of judging and witnessing. After John delivered a lengthy explanation concerning the Old Testament patriarchs' knowledge of the Trinity, the emir demanded scriptural proof. John replied with a citation list from Hebrew prophets. Taking on the role of judge, the emir decreed such evidence as inadmissible and ruled that only passages from the Torah were acceptable.[118] In response, John quoted Genesis 19:24: "The Lord brought down from before the Lord fire and sulfur upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah."[119] Surprisingly, the emir immediately considered this passage's double reference to "the Lord" to be a clear indication that God had multiple hypostases. In shock, he demanded textual witnesses for the passage. Fortunately, John just happened to have with him a copy of Genesis in both Greek and Syriac. Next, eyewitnesses followed as the narrator exclaimed that "there were also present with us in [that] place certain Hagarenes and they saw those writings with their eyes."[120] Still not satisfied, the emir called on an

expert witness, "a Jewish man who was considered by them an expert of scripture" to confirm that "this was so in the wording in the Torah."[121] Alas, this final witness did not stand up well to cross-examination, and he responded to the emir's question by stating, "I do not know exactly."[122] The resulting narrative of multiple witnesses served a number of functions, including an exegetical defense of the Trinity, an apology against Muslim charges that Christians falsify Scripture (*taḥrīf*), and a rather blatant polemic against Judaism. As elsewhere in *John and the Emir*, the ruler implied his final judgment on the topic through his silence and his determination to move immediately to the next issue.

Although written by an East Syrian rather than a Miaphysite author, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* remained structurally similar to *John and the Emir*.[123] It was also framed as a letter reporting in question-and-answer format an alleged conversation between a Muslim ruler and a Christian. The text described the Muslim simply as a *ṭayyāyā* notable who fell sick and spent ten days at the monastery of Bēt Ḥālē during the reign of the emir Maslama (d. 738).[124] While at the monastery, the *ṭayyāyā* told an unnamed monk that the monk's theological errors prevented God from accepting his prayers. This challenge led to an eight-folio defense of Christianity.

The *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* addressed many of the same topics found in other Syriac disputations. It differed from most other Syriac texts, however, in its characterization of the *ṭayyāyā* ruler. In Syriac works, the figure of a Muslim ruler usually remained quite static. The *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, however, emphasized this character's development. As the dialogue progressed, so did the *ṭayyāyā*'s acceptance of Christianity. As he became increasingly convinced of Christian truth, the tone and content of his comments reflected this shift.

The text began with a clear hierarchy between the *ṭayyāyā* official and the monk. After the *ṭayyāyā*'s first criticisms of Christianity, the monk responded that, in most matters, "I should honor you because of your authority and your status."[125] But the monk insisted that for a true theological debate to take place, the *ṭayyāyā* must speak respectfully and without an interpreter. Only then could one achieve the Syriac equivalent of the Greek ideal of *parrhēsia*—a debate on equal ground characterized by frank speech. The *ṭayyāyā* agreed, but his initial comments remained not simply frank but also much more assertive than those found in *John and the Emir*. They included the clearly rhetorical question "Isn't our confession better than all confessions on earth?" as well as the charge that Christians led even pagans astray through their worship of the cross, relics, and icons.[126]

Very soon, however, the *ṭayyāyā* found the monk's replies increasingly persuasive. *John and the Emir* most often implied the emir's assent by quietly shifting the topic. The *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* more explicitly marked acquiescence. For example, at one point the *ṭayyāyā* abruptly stated, "leave aside [those matters] and answer these things." Later, when the monk used the Qur'an to "prove" Jesus was God's son, the *ṭayyāyā* could only reply, "here it is right to take refuge in silence."[127] More often, though, after hearing the monk's explanations, the *ṭayyāyā* explicitly agreed with him: "my opinion accords with what you have said," "I consider these things to be correct," "I accept the truth of everything you have said," and so on.[128] At times the *ṭayyāyā* not only agreed with the monk but offered additional proof in support of the monk's point, such as citing the Qu'ran to affirm the monk's Christology or referring to a portrait that Jesus sent to Edessa to bolster the monk's defense of the veneration of icons.[129]

This transformation from theological adversary to friendly witness and fellow advocate culminated at the conclusion of the document, where the text inverted the hierarchy between the *ṭayyāyā* and the Christian and hence between Islam and Christianity. The once exalted *ṭayyāyā*, first characterized as "one of the nobles before the emir Maslama," by the end of the document admited to the monk, "truly you possess the truth and not error as some thought. . . . Truly God will not reject whoever, in accord with this doctrine that you related to me, holds your faith." He went on to state, "I know that your confession is right and also your doctrine is superior to ours."[130] The dialogue ended with the *ṭayyāyā* becoming a sort of crypto-Christian. He concluded that were it not for temporal gain, "many would become Christians."[131] The *ṭayyāyā*'s final judgment suggested that only worldly status prevented him from openly converting to Christianity.

The *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* also used the character of the Muslim ruler to merge anti-Islam and anti-Jewish polemics. As in *John and the Emir*, the dialogue began with an allusion to admissible evidence. In this case the *ṭayyāyā* initially stated, "we do not accept all your books."[132] Later, the monk instructed the *ṭayyāyā* to "listen carefully to everything from the Torah and the Prophets," and the *ṭayyāyā* replied, "truly I will accept proof from the Old [Testament]."[133] The *ṭayyāyā*, however, did not simply recognize a primarily Jewish canon. From the perspective of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, he also initially interpreted the Hebrew Scripture like a Jew. The *ṭayyāyā*'s first exegetical challenge was "why do you not acknowledge Abraham and his commandments?"[134] When pressed to clarify, the *ṭayyāyā* stated that his primary concerns were Christians not offering sacrifices and not being circumcised.

The monk replied with a crash course in Christian typology. The literal words of the Hebrew Scripture were simply shadows of the truth whose main function was to point toward Jesus. Laws, such as those for circumcision, were solely a sign for Christ's coming. Instead of following these former shadows, one now had to undergo the new circumcision, Christian baptism.[135] The *ṭayyāyā* assented. The monk then explained how Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac was a type of Christ's passion and resurrection.[136] The remainder of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* continually drew on similar, long-established examples of Christian typological exegesis to emphasize how "proofs are in the shadow of the Old [Testament] . . . that signify types fulfilled in the New."[137] As Gerrit Reinink has pointed out, even the very quotations that the author of the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* used came directly from earlier anti-Jewish testimonial collections. For example, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* presented the same scriptural references in the same order as those found in Jacob of Serug's (d. 521) homilies against the Jews.[138] Both the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*'s arguments, and even its composition history, thus aligned Muslims and Jews as misinterpreting Scripture. The *ṭayyāyā* ruler's acceptance of the monk's typological interpretations was an integral part of his character development and allowed him to "progress" from an errant Jewish/Muslim literalism to a recognition of Christian truth.

The figure of the *ṭayyāyā*, however, did not serve solely to judge the relative merits of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Like other disputations, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* used the *ṭayyāyā* ruler to adjudicate intra-Christian rivalries as well. Partway through the dialogue, the *ṭayyāyā* stated that if Jesus were divine, then the divine would have suffered and died on the cross.[139] This statement was not merely a Muslim argument against the incarnation. It was also a typical East Syrian critique of Miaphysite and Chalcedonian theology. In response to the *ṭayyāyā*'s observation, the monk stated that if one were a heretical Christian and saw Jesus as a mixture, intermingling, or confusion of the human and the divine, then this would blasphemously imply God's death on the cross. Because East Syrians appropriately distinguished between Jesus' divinity and his humanity, however, they avoided this theological dilemma. The *ṭayyāyā* immediately concurred.[140] The implication was not only that East Syrian Christology was superior to that of other Christians but that "heretical" Christologies led Muslims to misunderstand and critique Jesus' incarnation.

Like *John and the Emir* and the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, Timothy I's *Apology* took the form of a letter describing a Christian's debate with a Muslim

ruler.[141] Unlike its anonymous predecessors, this epistle almost certainly reported an actual encounter, in this case a meeting between the East Syrian catholicos and the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdi (r. 775–785).[142] As a result, scholars have been particularly inclined to treat Timothy's *Apology* as an accurate transcript of this conversation. A more careful examination of the letter, however, shows that the *Apology* was as carefully constructed a literary work as were earlier disputations. It also contained many of the same themes. Timothy employed the ruler's words to help defend Christian truth, he emphasized the exchange's civility, and he used the ruler to judge against Judaism and against competing branches of Christianity. But Timothy developed each of these motifs more fully than did earlier writers.

Timothy constructed a dialogue in which a Muslim ruler posed short questions that allowed Timothy to mount staunch defenses of Christianity that often went on for pages. Nevertheless, unlike earlier disputations, this ruler provided many more follow-up questions and sometimes explicit rebuttals. This interchange occasionally created a fast-paced dialogue of give-and-take. For example:

> Our king said to me, "Is Jesus Christ good or not?" We answered his majesty, "If Jesus Christ is God's word and God is good then Jesus Christ is good for he is co-substantial with Him, like a ray with the sun's globe." Our king said, "How did Jesus say, 'None are good except for one, God'?" [Mark 10:18]. We answered him, "Was the prophet David just or not?" Our king said, "He was just and the most just." I said, "How did the prophet David say, 'There is none who is just, not even one'?" [Ps. 14:3]. Our king said. . . .[143]

Such sections made the *Apology* seem like a more realistic rendition of an actual debate. They also resulted in a very different characterization of the Muslim ruler. Al-Mahdi did not simply provide cue lines; instead, he became a worthy sparring partner for the catholicos. Just as Timothy quoted the Qur'an, al-Mahdi quoted the New Testament. Both occasionally disputed each other's statements. Both set argumentative traps for each other. Nevertheless, the *Apology* made sure that al-Mahdi was good only up to a point. Despite al-Mahdi's more challenging arguments, Timothy had little trouble defeating them. He always got the last word, and the caliph's rapid shift to a new topic marked Timothy's success.

As in earlier texts, here, too, the author mitigated a potentially hostile

exchange through the rhetoric of court civility. In Timothy's case, this approached almost melodramatic proportions.[144] The dialogue began with Timothy reciting a complimentary address to the caliph and concluded with a prayer on behalf of the caliph and his sons, expressing the hope that all nations would become subject to the caliphate.[145] The forty intervening folios constantly referred to al-Mahdi as victorious, wise, intelligent, God-loving, illustrious, and knowledgeable. Timothy opened the second half of his *Apology* with an aside assuring his reader that al-Mahdi "is benevolent, and loves wisdom even if it [comes] from other people. . . . He began to speak and converse not angrily or harshly (for harshness and pride are far from his soul), but gently and humbly."[146] Timothy was particularly accommodating regarding the most sensitive theological issues. His descriptions of Muḥammad were the most exultant of Syriac discussions of the Prophet. When al-Mahdi asked him if the Qur'an was God-given, Timothy politely dodged the question, stating, "It is not for me to decide whether it is from God or not."[147] He also stressed his loyalty to the caliph, praising Muslim military campaigns against "the tyrannical and rebellious Byzantines."[148]

This exchange was not the only time in the *Apology* that Timothy identified a common enemy. The most poignant example occurred in his allusions to Judaism. According to Timothy, Jews killed Jesus, murdered the other prophets, "are like the blind without eyes," had Satan as their teacher, and "are hated and despised by everyone."[149] Al-Mahdi tacitly agreed with these characterizations. Nevertheless, in the *Apology*, Jews still had evidentiary value. Timothy used the animosity between Christians and Jews to refute Muslim charges of *taḥrīf*; their mutual loathing guaranteed that they would never collaborate and make the same changes to the biblical text.[150]

Like other disputations, Timothy's *Apology* used a Muslim ruler to adjudicate intra-Christian conflicts. In this case, the caliph became a surprisingly quick expert in the Christological controversies. At first, al-Mahdi argued for a Miaphysite view of Christ. Like Timothy's Christian opponents, al-Mahdi also initially characterized Timothy's Christology as overly dyophysite.[151] In both cases, Timothy explained the superiority of East Syrian Christology and successfully "dissolved [al-Mahdi's] uncertainty."[152] As part of this process, al-Mahdi produced scriptural dilemmas that Timothy showed could only be resolved through East Syrian Christology.[153] Apparently al-Mahdi was a quick study, because by the end of the *Apology*, Timothy called on the caliph to directly judge whose Christology was orthodox. Timothy stated that Miaphysite and Chalcedonian Christians claimed that "God suffered and died in

the flesh." He continued, "Your majesty must decide and make known who confesses rightly and who wrongly." Our victorious king said, "In this you speak more rightly than they. For who would dare say that God dies? I do not think that even demons would say this."[154] Like other Syriac disputations, Timothy's *Apology* evoked a Muslim ruler's supposedly unbiased status as an outsider to give weight to his theological decisions regarding Christianity. In this case, Timothy argued that even a Muslim could quickly realize that Miaphysite and Chalcedonian Christians were blasphemous heretics.

Many modern scholars have noted that Syriac disputation texts likely served a catechetical function, providing their audiences with appropriate, quick responses to common critiques of Christianity.[155] Even if a given reader never deployed these exact responses when speaking with actual Muslims, these texts could at least reassure Syriac Christians that there were clear, concise answers to contemporary theological challenges. Some scholars even suggest that a main purpose of these texts was to directly dissuade Christian conversion to Islam.[156]

One mechanism by which Syriac disputations texts such as *John and the Emir*, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, and Timothy's *Apology* achieved such goals was through the reality effect. Detail-filled setting, characterization, and dialogue produced an aura of authenticity. The result was not an objective rendering of actual interfaith encounters. Rather, the trappings of realism created an affective, imaginative space in which author and readers envisioned these exchanges. The backdrop of an interfaith debate was a particularly useful framework for such imaginings. In late antiquity, public religious debates required at least the semblance of participants being of initially equal status.[157] Only laying aside worldly power and official preference allowed participants to speak frankly (*parrhēsia*) so that one could judge the validity of the debaters' theological arguments.

In Greek and Latin texts, Muslim interlocutors were generally very unsympathetic characters.[158] In contrast, the propensity of Syriac sources to depict less hostile Muslim rulers allowed Syriac authors to emphasize the civility of the debate. Troping actual debates, Syriac disputation texts could combine the preexisting motif of governmental ruler as impartial judge with the ruler's actual participation in the debate. Syriac authors thus used Muslim characters to both guide and adjudicate the discussion. The ruler decided what evidence was admissible. He called additional witnesses, whether textual witnesses or outside experts. He gave summary judgments on the Christian's arguments. He weighed the relative merits of various branches of Christianity. The result

was a rich, imaginative universe based on the conceit that, once placed on equal standing, Christians could easily, convincingly, and politely defeat even the most powerful Muslim rulers.

Thinking One's Way Toward Orthodoxy

Syriac disputations often employed the character of a Muslim ruler to defend Christianity and argue for the superiority of "orthodoxy." The strategy of using the figure of a Muslim official to adjudicate truth claims appeared in other genres of Syriac literature as well. But in these other texts, the Islamic ruler most often did not judge the relative merits of Christianity and Islam. Instead, even more frequently than in disputation texts, he judged the relative merits of various branches of Christianity.

In the seventh-century *Maronite Chronicle*, the motif of a Muslim ruler as the adjudicator of intra-Christian debates appeared at its most literal. This text claimed that in 659 Caliph Muʿāwiya oversaw a theological debate between the Miaphysites and the Maronites. The caliph declared the Maronites the winners and subsequently fined and silenced the Miaphysites. According to the *Maronite Chronicle*, the Miaphysites later used this to their advantage by continuing to pay the fine on an annual basis to buy the caliph's protection.[159] In the *Maronite Chronicle*, a Muslim ruler served as an official judge (albeit an easily bribed one) for an intra-Christian debate. More often, however, Syriac texts presented a Muslim leader as a figurative judge between competing Syriac churches. In such cases, the Muslim character still adjudicated the relative merits of various branches of Christianity. Here, however, the ruler's judgment was often unintentional, frequently given through actions rather than words.

A particularly vivid example of this type of narrative appeared in the most likely eighth-century *Qenneshrē Fragment*, a text dominated by issues of witnessing and judgment.[160] This Miaphysite work recounted how the monastery of Qenneshrē suffered from a demon infestation. In response, several monks obtained relics to help exorcise their possessed brethren. As the relics arrived at the monastery, the demons insulted them. The relics subsequently reanimated into the bodies of the martyrs to whom they originally belonged. The reconstituted martyrs then tortured the insolent demons.[161] In this hyperliteralist universe, the body parts of ancient martyrs (Syriac *sāhdē*; literally, "witnesses") now attested to the efficacy of relics. This conceit, however,

depended on the demons' unintentional complicity. Their adverse reactions served as proof of the relics' power. This trope was taken a step further in the *Qenneshrē Fragment*'s final section, which was set in the court of the Muslim emir ᶜAbdallah bar Darrai. In this episode, ᶜAbdallah convened the possessed monks and himself used a piece of Jesus' holy cross to exorcise one of them.[162]

Like disputation texts, the *Qenneshrē Fragment* employed the figure of a Muslim ruler to prove the truth of Christian beliefs and practices. In this case, the ruler's successful use of the true cross, the most famous of Christian relics, clearly supported the text's attempt to justify the veneration of relics, a practice that contemporary Muslims widely criticized. But this Miaphysite document was also heavily invested in intra-Christian polemics. For example, earlier in the *Qenneshre Fragment* a Miaphysite holy man interrogated a demon-possessed monk, stating:

> "Tell me if one of you was at the Council of Chalcedon." One of the demons approached, swore harsh, mighty oaths and said, "By that powerful devil by whose name one cannot deceive, I swear to you that Sataniel, the head and chief of all our forces, he led this Council of Chalcedon. . . ." Again the holy one bound the demons with oaths and said to them, "Who is dearer to you, the Nestorians or the Chalcedonians?" Here the demons did not know [how] to make a distinction and they answered, "They are sick with one [and the same] illness and they have fallen [into] one [and the same] calamity. We love them—those ones and these ones—because they separate the Son of God from the divinity at the moment of his crucifixion. They say that we crucified a created man and not God."[163]

Similar polemics took place in the *Qenneshrē Fragment*'s final scene, which was set in ᶜAbdallah's court. Here the setting of an emir's court allowed the author to combine his ongoing intra-Christian polemics with a Christian defense of relics.

ᶜAbdallah was a Hagarene and could arguably serve as an unbiased arbitrator. His very name, ᶜAbdallah (literally, "the servant of God"), gave his judgment additional weight. When the possessed monks came to his court, the narrator specified that they were not simply residents of the monastery of Qenneshrē but specifically Chalcedonian monks. The emir then presided over an interrogation of the possessed Chalcedonians.[164]

The reader soon learns, however, that ʿAbdallah's position was not as secure as one initially thought. After two days of interrogation, one demon admitted that the only thing preventing him from possessing the emir was that a Miaphysite bishop at the court brought with him relics of a Miaphysite saint. Soon afterward, a young man arrived with a ring that contained a piece of Jesus' cross. ʿAbdallah used this ring to appraise the cross's efficacy. The emir put the ring with the cross splinter on his own staff and approached a possessed monk; the demon within the monk cried out. ʿAbdallah removed the relic from his staff and replaced it with his signet ring. This time, when he approached the possessed monk, the monk jumped up and grabbed the emir's ring. Once again, the emir put the ring with the true cross back on his staff, touched the possessed man, and this time successfully exorcised the possessed Chalcedonian monk.[165]

Maronites and Miaphysites were not alone in using the figure of a Muslim ruler to further intra-Christian polemics. The most sustained use of this narrative device occurred in the East Syrian *Life of Rabban Hormizd*.[166] Set in the mid-seventh century,[167] its anecdotes often focused on the holy ascetic Rabban Hormizd's ongoing conflict with local Miaphysites, especially Miaphysite monks from the Monastery of Bezkin and the Monastery of Mār Mattai. In the course of his monastic battles, Rabban Hormizd had run-ins with three Muslim governors, each of whom eventually served as a witness to the veracity of East Syrian Christianity and the fallacies of the Miaphysites.

According to the *vita*, Rabban Hormizd's first extended encounter with governmental authority was due to five Miaphysite monks who impregnated a prostitute. These monks took the prostitute and her baby to the entrance of Rabban Hormizd's cave, murdered her, and told the governor that Rabban Hormizd impregnated and killed the prostitute. When the governor arrived at the crime scene, things looked fairly dire for Rabban Hormizd until he resurrected the prostitute just long enough for her to explain that it was not Hormizd but the Miaphysites who killed her. After she died a second time, her newborn son spoke on Rabban Hormizd's behalf, confirming that he was born from the seed of two of the monks, the other three being impotent. Having witnessed these miraculous deeds, the governor beat the monks, incarcerated them, and helped destroy the Monastery of Bezkin. Unfortunately for Rabban Hormizd, the Miaphysites managed to bribe the governor of Mosul, who intervened, freed the monks, and allowed them to rebuild their monastery.[168] The narrative turned to this governor next.

One day the governor's son became sick and died. Soon afterward, with

the help of Jesus' name, a washing from the cross, and sacramental bread, Rabban Hormizd resurrected the governor's son. Just then, Miaphysites from the recently rebuilt Monastery of Bezkin arrived, bringing condolences to the governor for the death of his child. On seeing these recent developments, however, the monks quickly changed their tune, now praising God for the son's resurrection. The governor asked Rabban Hormizd to baptize him.[169] The Miaphysite abbot tried to intervene, inviting the governor to the Monastery of Bezkin, as "our baptism and his are the same."[170]

Rabban Hormizd objected, proclaiming, "our baptism and your baptism are as dissimilar as God and Satan."[171] To prove this, he "summoned the governor and all those who were gathered there to be a witness."[172] He sent for two boys, one baptized by Miaphysites, the other by East Syrians, and he put both into a bin of holy water. When the East Syrian child entered the bin, the holy water sensed that he has already been baptized and parted so as not to rebaptize him. When the Miaphysite child entered, the holy water remained in place, because it knew that the boy was still in need of baptism, thus proving that true baptism could be obtained only through East Syrian clergy. Impressed by these deeds, the governor, his son, and ten of his companions were baptized by Rabban Hormizd. The Miaphysites sulked back to their monastery.[173]

Even after his conversion, the governor of Mosul remained a pivotal figure in the ongoing battles between Rabban Hormizd and the Miaphysite monks of Bezkin. These monks journeyed to the Miaphysite monastery of Mār Mattai to obtain enchanted bread from the monastery's idol. They then went to Mosul and offered the governor some wine mixed with this bread. When the governor and his son foolishly drank the concoction, they became possessed by demons, forgot Rabban Hormizd's previous deeds, accepted a bribe to kill him, and—on the way to fulfill this demon-inspired hit—spent the night at the Monastery of Bezkin. At this point God decided that enough was enough and sent an angel with a crowbar to decimate the Miaphysite monastery. The angel began dismantling the monastery; the governor escaped and returned to his senses; the surrounding villages took up the cause and destroyed the Monastery of Bezkin once and for all.[174]

Rabban Hormizd had one final interaction with a Muslim ruler, in this case a new governor of Mosul named Ali.[175] As a result of sorcery and more demon-baked bread, Ali became good friends with the Miaphysite abbot of Mār Mattai.[176] When Hormizd visited Ali, the Miaphysite abbot was flying overhead thanks to a legion of invisible demons. Hormizd bound the demons,

and the abbot plummeted to a sudden (and according to the text, very messy) death.[177] Impressed, Ali asked Rabban Hormizd to heal his demon-possessed son. After a successful exorcism, Rabban Hormizd took leave of this last Muslim character in the *Life of Rabban Hormizd* and headed home, literally walking on water.[178]

The polemical intent of the *Qenneshrē Fragment* was fairly blatant: relics from a Miaphysite saint protected a Muslim emir from being taken over by Chalcedonian-loving demons that possessed a group of dyophysite monks. No more nuanced were impotent, prostitute-killing Miaphysites in the *Life of Rabban Hormizd* using demonic bread to possess Muslim emirs. These stories, though, shared more than simply a lack of subtlety. Both accounts used the figure of a Muslim ruler to adjudicate truth. Both had their protagonists initiate the late ancient equivalent of a science fair experiment to simultaneously show the power of a decidedly Christian ritual element—in one case a relic, in the other baptismal water—and to prove the superiority of one branch of Christianity over another. Both shared the detail of rulers being susceptible to demonic possession.

The recurrent motif of a Muslim leader as judge of religious truth was a permutation of a ruler's traditional role in religious disputations. In the Roman, Byzantine, Sasanian, and Islamic Empires, a ruler might convene and adjudicate a religious debate even when the contestants were of different religious traditions from the ruler. In Syriac disputation texts such as *John and the Emir*, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, and Timothy's *Apology*, this role shifted, so that the ruler no longer presided over an actual deliberation. Instead, the Muslim ruler became a literary character who was directly involved in the debate itself. In these texts, the ruler fed cue lines to the Christian interlocutor and provided summary judgments, often about the relative merits of one branch of Christianity versus another or of Christianity versus Judaism. Syriac texts such as the *Maronite Chronicle*, the *Qenneshrē Fragment*, and the *Life of Rabban Hormizd* took this trajectory one step farther. They contained narratives in which the Muslim ruler did not participate in an official debate, but his presence nevertheless provided the circumstances in which the reader could discern religious truth.

The tendency of these narratives to use the character of a Muslim ruler to adjudicate not just between Christianity and Islam but also between different branches of Christianity reflected a historical situation in which the hierarchies among Syriac churches were in great flux. Prior to the conquests, Syriac Christians inhabited a world with clear official preferences. In the early

seventh-century Byzantine Empire, there was little chance of Miaphysites persuading Constantinople to support them over their Chalcedonian competitors; the Persian Empire generally favored the Church of the East. The arrival of Islam added a wild card to intra-Christian competition because there was no reason why Muslim leaders should naturally prefer one Syriac church over another. Following the conquests, the power hierarchy of Miaphysite versus East Syrian versus Chalcedonian versus Maronite was up for grabs.[179] The result was a virtual free-for-all with Syriac Christians constantly trying to woo governmental authorities to support their branch of Christianity as opposed to that of their Christian opponents.

Concerns about how to address this increasingly volatile situation appeared even in the earliest strata of Syriac writings about Muslims and crossed genre as well as confessional boundaries. The first extant letter speaking of Muslims came from the East Syrian catholicos Isho^{c}yahb III assuring his readers that Hagarene leaders did not necessarily favor Miaphysites and could instead easily support East Syrians.[180] In the late seventh century, the East Syrian John bar Penkāyē complained that Miaphysites took advantage of Caliph Mu^{c}āwiya's religious tolerance and tried to convert Chalcedonian Christians to Miaphysite Christianity.[181] Eighth- and ninth-century writings attested to ongoing attempts by Syriac Christians to involve Muslim authorities in intra-Christian battles that showed no signs of abating.

This historical setting helps to explain why Syriac narratives embedded in texts ranging from disputations to *vitae*, from chronicles to monastic histories, so often had their Muslim characters embroiled in intra-Christian conflicts. In the majority of these narratives, the story ended with the Muslim leader as a firm ally of a given branch of Christianity. His support not only provided material benefits to "orthodox" Christians but also served as a witness to their orthodoxy. These narratives provided a tight and tidy conclusion to an unsettling, permeable situation. Their clear-cut endings should warn us that they come from a world that was even messier than the one they described.

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Whether they appeared in descriptions of Muḥammad, in characterizations of subsequent leaders, in disputation texts, or in intra-Christian polemics, the resulting narratives used Muslim rulers to think with. As a result, these accounts challenge how we view both ancient and modern truth claims

concerning the seventh through ninth centuries. The Christian employment of Muslim leaders as literary topoi substantially complicates the modern reconstruction of specific policies instituted by specific late ancient elites. Indeed, ancient attempts to embellish accounts with the trappings of realism frequently produced the very details toward which modern historians have most often gravitated. Confusing the medium for the message, we risk misidentifying these detailed descriptions as factually accurate.

This dynamic also problematizes how scholars address issues of genre. The tendency among modern writers to use Syriac descriptions of Muslim leaders to directly reconstruct actual Muslim rule has become particularly pronounced among discussions of Syriac chronicles.[182] Many recent works simply quote or paraphrase the chroniclers' characterizations of a given Muslim leader.[183] The result is not simply an overly positivist heuristic, but a replication of the original authors' dualistic categories of the evil and the good Muslim leader.

At the same time, the appearance of clearly ahistorical characters—such as a temporarily resurrected dog—has caused modern scholars to almost completely ignore documents that have traditionally been labeled as hagiographies. They rarely even cite the numerous passages on Muslim rulers in works such as the *Book of Governors*, the *Life of John of Dailam*, the *Life of Gabriel*, the *Life of Theoduṭē*, the *Life of Rabban Hormizd*, and the *Qenneshrē Fragment*. This does not mean that every document has the same claims to historicity. But it does suggest a failure to recognize that what we traditionally label as historiography is "as 'literary,' as 'moralizing,' and as much a rhetorical art form" as what we label hagiography.[184]

By reading across traditional genre categories, this chapter has tried to more critically evaluate texts that have been traditionally designated as historiographic, and to less dismissively evaluate texts that have been traditionally designated as hagiographic. A purposefully promiscuous mixing of Syriac sources that temporarily eschewed the constraints of genre designation shifted our focus away from discovering exactly "how it actually was" and provided the opportunity to ask other questions.[185]

In particular, this approach has helped us focus on how stories about Muslim rulers reflected different strategies Syriac Christians used for dealing with the ambiguities of Muslim rule. Sometimes these anecdotes presented templates for how to effectively navigate the challenges of non-Christian rulers. They featured accounts of bribery, persuasion, or flattery. More often they addressed long-term questions of identity now made even more pressing

because of the changes brought about by the rise of Islam. Sometimes, the characterization of a Muslim official allowed an author to think through and defend Christian doctrine. Other times, the character of a Muslim leader related to how an author thought about and asserted Christianity's superiority to Islam. Often, however, accounts of Muslim rulers had little to do directly with Islam. Instead, these accounts articulated theological differences between Christians and Jews and between other Christians, boundaries that the change to Islamic rule had made increasingly precarious. Across all genres of Syriac texts, discussions about Muslim rulers had little to do with objectively characterizing Islamic governance and were not used simply to envision Islam. Rather, the employment of the literary figure of a Muslim ruler helped Syriac authors better define Christianity.

Chapter 4

Blurring Boundaries: The Continuum Between Early Christianity and Early Islam

> Because [governor Mūsā] was crafty and shrewd, no place where anyone had put anything of theirs was hidden from him. Rather, it was as if the object cried out to him, "Here I am. I am so-and-so's." He learned of everything as quickly as whoever had hidden it. Everything was revealed to him, just as it has been written concerning the Son of Destruction. And he quickly learned about those who took [Syrian] wives, bore Syrian children, mingled with Syrians, and were even indistinguishable from Aramaeans. He seized the leaders of the village where they were living and he struck their bodies with intense blows until they offered ransom which they brought him. And when he had caught all of them and had them thus ransom each other, he also sold everything they possessed and took [the proceeds] as his own.
>
> —*Chronicle of Zuqnin*

The *Chronicle of Zuqnin*'s anonymous author was clearly not a fan of the Abbasid governor of Mosul, Mūsā son of Muṣᶜab (r. ca. 769). Nevertheless, we may find his arch-enemy useful for our own purposes. For Mūsā's uncanny ability to discover what was previous hidden may help us discern something we might otherwise overlook. According to the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Mūsā's most recent revenue stream involved a pyramid scheme of kidnapping, ransom, and outright theft. Central to Mūsā's plot was his determination to

ferret out those "who took [Syrian] wives, bore Syrian children, mingled with Syrians, and were even indistinguishable from Aramaeans."[1]

What makes this statement so intriguing is that the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* consistently employed the words Syrians (*suryāyē*) and Aramaeans (*ʿarāmāyē*) only to speak of Christians.[2] But here the author used these terms not simply to refer to intermarriage, a phenomenon well attested in both Christian and Muslim texts. According to the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, there was so much on-the-ground mingling that some people could successfully "pass" as Christians. But just when communal boundaries seemed completely blurred, the narrative used Mūsā to reify them. It turns out that the author's claim of indistinguishability was actually hyperbolic. Thanks to Mūsā's diabolical talent at discerning all that was hidden, he could differentiate who was *truly* Christian and thus firm up precarious borders.

As Chapter 3 emphasized, we should not think of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* as an unbiased report of Islamic governance. The point is not that a greedy, late eighth-century Muslim ruler really went about dismantling groups trying to pass as Christian. What is most intriguing about this anecdote is not its verifiable historicity but its assumed plausibility. Its author anticipated that his audience would find such a scenario so believable that he only had to present the bare bones of this episode; it needed no additional explanation or gloss.

In their examination of how Syriac Christians remembered the conquests, categorized Islam, and depicted Muslim rulers, previous chapters have constantly emphasized the fuzziness of seventh- through ninth-century divisions between Christians and Muslims. As a result, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*'s assumption that its audience would be familiar with the blurring of boundaries no longer seems quite so surprising. Nevertheless, Mūsā's tale suggests that additional profit might still be gained by looking even closer at early Syriac communities. By examining Syriac discussions of interreligious interactions, Christian-like Muslims, Muslim-like Christians, and conversion we might discern some of the ways that Syriac Christians negotiated the ambiguities of life under Islam. Such an investigation not only exposes a much greater continuum between the categories of early Christianity and early Islam than is acknowledged by most modern scholarship. It also documents an ongoing debate between those who wanted to shore up confessional distinctions and those less concerned with a clear divide between Christian church and Muslim *umma* (community).

Crossing Borders and Drawing Boundaries

In the late fifth century, a monumental church, now known by the unassuming name of Basilica A, was built in the Syrian city of Rusafa.[3] The lavishly decorated basilica housed the relics of the soldier-martyr Sergius, one of the most famous late ancient saints. As a result, Rusafa quickly became a renowned pilgrimage site.[4] Sergius, however, was not reserved solely for Christians. After the conquests, his cross-confessional appeal also affected the layout of Islamic Rusafa.[5]

In the early eighth century, the Umayyad caliph Hishām (r. 724–743) decided to reside in Rusafa. While there, he funded a new Umayyad mosque. The site Hishām chose for his mosque was a surprising one. He built it (quite literally) on unstable ground. Despite the presence of several sinkholes that had already damaged the surrounding buildings, he constructed the mosque immediately north of Basilica A.[6] Clearly, the caliph's overarching concern was not geological. Instead, his aim was to situate the mosque within a few dozen meters of Sergius's relics. Even more surprising, Hishām built a door in the mosque's *qibla* wall (the wall facing Mecca) that opened directly into the church courtyard. This architectural innovation resulted in Christians and Muslims sharing a common hall. It also provided Muslim worshippers quicker access to Sergius's shrine.[7]

Through the construction of adjacent sacred spaces (a mosque immediately next to a church), Hishām helped create a shared sacred space (Sergius's shrine). In Rusafa Christians and Muslims were not simply praying next door to each other. Rather, a door literally connected the two communities. The resulting topography was very different from that created when Christians built churches over destroyed pagan temples or when ʿAbd al-Malik constructed the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount. The mosque in Rusafa showed Muslim interest in attaching themselves to Christian worship practices. The architectural elements of adjoining worship spaces, a doorway, and a shared hall were not effective symbols of supersession. Rather, they both symbolized and helped create a more contiguous religious identity.

One could attribute the juxtaposition of Rusafa's mosque and church to a caliph's idiosyncrasies were it not for so many other references to shared sacred spaces. Several Islamic texts spoke of seventh-century Christians and Muslims jointly worshipping in the Damascus church of John the Baptist.[8] Later Islamic legal works also frequently addressed the question of whether

Muslims could pray in Christian churches.[9] In terms of material cultural evidence, the recently excavated Church of the Kathisma even contains the remains of a *miḥrāb* (a prayer niche facing Mecca) in its ambulatory.[10] The site's stratigraphy suggests that the *miḥrāb* was in use while the building still functioned as a Christian church.[11] Syriac texts similarly reflect substantial interreligious contact. They do not, however, simply provide additional evidence of interconfessional mingling. They also contain detailed accounts of how Christians and Muslims interacted in this increasingly pluralistic world.

The spatial layout of Rusafa vividly illustrates the proximity of early Christianity and early Islam. An adjacent mosque and church, joined by a common courtyard, remind us that early Christians and Muslims were literally rubbing elbows. Seventh- through ninth-century Syriac texts often reacted to this physical closeness, especially in their discussions of interreligious interactions. They suggest that we should not view early Christianity and Islam as hermetically sealed, self-contained entities. Instead, Syriac Christians lived in a world where people and objects exhibited "border crossings so fluent that the borders themselves sometimes are hard to distinguish."[12] Narratives of these crossings reflected categorical permeability. But their tellings also implied, and often sought to reinforce, the very boundaries that had supposedly been transgressed.

Discussions of such crossings appeared in all genres of Syriac sources, but they were especially prominent among Syriac legal texts. The continuing attempts of Syriac legal writers to regulate interreligious interactions illustrated both the desire of elites to shore up confessional boundaries and their inability to do so. The earliest and most prolific of such writers was Jacob of Edessa. Ordained in 684 as the Miaphysite bishop of Edessa, Jacob gained a reputation as a stickler for church regulations. Frustration at his contemporaries' disregard for church rules led him to resign his bishopric four years later, retire to the monastery of Jacob at Kayshum, and, while there, write yet more canon law. In 708 Jacob returned to be Edessa's bishop, but he died a few months later.

Most of Jacob's legal decisions appeared in epistles that he wrote in response to specific questions. These letters often preserved the inquiry directed to Jacob along with his response.[13] His decisions frequently reflected, often reacted against, and occasionally condoned substantial interconfessional mingling. In some cases, Jacob's rulings reluctantly allowed such interactions. For example, he explained to the priest Addai that ideally an abbot should not share a meal with an emir. But Jacob conceded that "due to necessity"

the abbot might, nevertheless, have to do so.[14] Other Syriac works ranging from epistles to disputation texts to prayers to letter templates spoke of the meeting of Christian and emirs. What differentiated Jacob's letter was the focus on food. Addai's question was, "If an emir ordered an abbot to dine with him, should he eat or not?" The issue at hand did not seem to be whether a meeting between abbot and emir could take place. Like other Syriac texts, Jacob's letter took this for granted. Instead, the central concern was the eating itself. Addai's one-sentence question and Jacob's two-sentence answer never specified whether the underlying concern was the intimacy of a shared meal, a purity question regarding the served food, the implied hierarchy between host and guest, or some other issue. But their discussion did suggest that emirs had clergy over for dinner, an invitation that would be difficult for Christians to refuse.

Another example of reluctant interactions appeared in Jacob's discussion of cases where *ṭayyāyē* had conscripted Christians into military service. According to Jacob, even if clergy were compelled to fire catapults at advancing Byzantine troops, their bishop should soon afterward restore them to their liturgical duties. In the case of a priest who was forced to kill a Byzantine soldier who was scaling the city wall, the bishop should assign a time of penitence, after which the priest might return to ecclesiastical service.[15] Jacob's ruling may have preserved unique historical information about the fate of Christian populations in conquered cities, especially as references to Christians being conscripted to fight the Byzantines do not have clear parallels in Islamic texts. This reference was particularly significant, as Jacob's letter predates most Arabic sources by over a century.

In contrast, there were other exchanges that Jacob actively encouraged. One of his most intriguing responses followed Addai's question, "Should a priest teach the children of Hagarenes who have the authority to punish him if he does not teach [them]?" The setup was similar to the question regarding an abbot dining with an emir. So was the first line of Jacob's response: "Necessity also permits this." But he went on to state that, even if there were no duress, a priest should happily teach Hagarene children, because "often from things like these occurs that which brings much advantage."[16] Once again, the most interesting aspects of Addai and Jacob's correspondence were left unsaid. Why, for example, would a Hagarene want a Christian to teach his children? Did Hagarenes consider Christian priests to be especially learned? Were priests being sought to help teach Greek or to teach Syriac? What specific advantages did Jacob anticipate? Would accepting such an assignment

help curry favor with an emir? Would it make his children more favorably inclined toward Christians? Could a priest's teachings somehow better promote or defend Christianity?

Jacob's short rulings more often raised questions than answered them. Nevertheless, their discussions of Christians sharing dinner with emirs, co-defending a city wall, and teaching Hagarene children certainly reflected a world of substantial interaction. Syriac depictions of everyday contact between Christians and Muslims also appeared throughout nonlegal sources. Muslims visited Syriac monasteries, billeted troops in Christians' houses, haggled for Christians' oxen, funded Christian monasteries, intervened in ecclesiastical elections, bought grain from a monastery, intermarried, deposited money with a monk, and publicly joined Christians to petition God for rain.[17] Christians herded Muslims' sheep, befriended a caliph, argued with Muslims over the ownership of a millstone, translated texts for a Muslim patron, kissed a Muslim visitor, bribed Muslim officials, allied with Muslims against a particularly onerous governor, and enlisted in a Muslim army.[18] Whether they described a mundane meeting on the street or a formal summons to the caliph's court, seventh- through ninth-century Syriac texts abounded with examples of interreligious encounters. Prescriptive sources, such as Jacob's letters, often tried to restrict such interactions. Literary sources more often took them for granted. None saw them as unusual.

Undoubtedly, the most frequent Christian-Muslim interactions were those that took place in everyday settings. Those most frequently discussed by Syriac sources, however, took place in the courtroom. For Syriac writers, the issue was not Muslims taking Christians to court. Instead, the concern was Christians who chose to bypass ecclesiastical courts and instead tried their cases against other Christians in front of a Muslim judge. This apparently common practice infuriated the authors of Syriac legal texts.

Early Islam adopted a Sasanian-like system of delegating the governance of non-Muslims primarily to the heads of their communities.[19] Especially in civil cases, *dhimmī* (non-Muslims) were to be judged by their own courts.[20] For such an exilarch system to work, each religious community needed its own robust jurisprudence.[21] As the Muslim governor in the eighth-century disputation *John and the Emir* said, "Show me that your own laws are written in the Gospel and be guided by them or submit to Hagarene law."[22]

The problem was that Syriac Christians initially had very little civil law.[23] Because preconquest Miaphysites were mainly under Byzantine rule, Roman law codes already met most of their needs.[24] Primarily living under

Zoroastrian rule, East Syrians had begun to codify their civic legislation, but by the early seventh century their civil law still remained underdeveloped.[25] After the conquests, the situation quickly changed. Well before the ninth- and tenth-century foundations of the four traditional Sunni legal schools, the large amount of legal material in the Qur'an as well as emerging Islamic jurisprudence forced Syriac Christians to more systematically develop their own systems of law.[26]

The result was a rapid consolidation and expansion of Syriac legal codes.[27] For example, the late eighth-century metropolitan bishop Ishoʿbokht wrote the first East Syrian legal compendium, the *Composition on the Laws*.[28] Ishoʿbokht stated that he compiled diverse Christian legal traditions to form a more unified system of jurisprudence similar to that of "those who now rule over us."[29] Later in the *Composition*, Ishoʿbokht alluded to Muslims who claimed "that the Christians do not have laws."[30] When a similar accusation appeared in the early eighth-century *John and the Emir*, the author could only curtly deny this charge by referring to unspecified legislation in accord with the Gospel.[31] The composition of exhaustive legal texts, such as Ishoʿbokht's eighty-chapter tome, gave such a response much greater weight. The *Composition on the Laws*'s transmission history showed how acutely such texts were needed. Ishoʿbokht wrote his work in Persian. Within a few years of its initial composition, no less a figure than the East Syrian catholicos Timothy I commissioned the work's translation into Syriac.[32]

Christians like Ishoʿbokht grew concerned about how fellow Christians, as well as Muslims, evaluated Christian legal traditions. This dual consciousness was particularly apparent in discussions of inheritance law. Here, too, *John and the Emir* identified the problem. The emir asked, "If a man dies and leaves sons or daughters and a wife and a mother and a sister and a cousin, how should his property be divided among them?" John dodged the question, responding, "the gospel is divine and commands the heavenly teachings."[33] Although such a non sequitur might suffice in the carefully constructed literary world of a disputation text, it was woefully inadequate for the real world. As a result, Syriac Christians quickly developed extensively detailed discussions of inheritance. For example, an unpublished set of inheritance laws commissioned by the East Syrian catholicos Jean bar Isa (r. 897–906) included what one should do in the case of

> a man leaving a brother from his father and his mother's sister, along with a brother who is from his mother and his father's

> brother, along with a brother from only his father or from his mother or if he should leave the son of his father's uncle and mother's sister, along with other sons of his father's brother, or the son of his mother's brother or father's sister.[34]

Page upon page of equally complex scenarios suggested that the goal of such texts was not simply to adjudicate actual disputes but also to use detailed minutiae to assure their readers that Christianity had a thoroughly developed legal tradition. The resulting texts not only provided specific legal guidance. They also portrayed Christianity as a religion whose jurisprudence was not overshadowed by that of Islam, an argument aimed at fellow Christians as well as Muslims.

But the development of Syriac civil law was not simply a case of Islamic thought influencing Christian thought. It also represented an attempt to stem the interchange of people. In the early ninth century, Timothy I made this explicit. He noted that one motive for Christians going to nonecclesiastical courts was the lack of Christian legal precedents.[35] Timothy's commissioning the translation of Isho'bokht's legal compendium, and the catholicos's own composition of canon law, were clearly designed to rectify this problem.

The rapid development of Syriac civil law reflected one strategy that the religious elite employed to dissuade Christians from turning to Muslim courts. The other strategy was more blatant.[36] Throughout the seventh through ninth centuries, one finds canon after canon condemning Christians who circumvent ecclesiastical jurisdiction. For example, the canons of the East Syrian catholicos George I (676) stated that Christians' lawsuits were to be judged by "believers who have been designated by the bishop. . . . Those who are to be judged should not go outside the church and [be judged] before *ḥanpē* or [other] unbelievers."[37] George's Miaphysite contemporary Jacob of Edessa also declared it unlawful for clerics to bring legal disputes "before the leaders of the world or before *ḥanpē*."[38] A century later, Timothy I made a similar proclamation and asked, "If they go to the judgment of those outside [the church], how are they Christian?"[39] The concern reappeared when Timothy adjudicated a case of Christian-on-Christian assault. In a verdict contrary to modern ideas of justice, Timothy assigned the victim a harsher sentence than to the assailant. The assaulter had to do two months' penance for attacking a fellow Christian. The assaulted had to do three months' penance because he initially wanted to try the case before a nonecclesiastical judge.[40] But despite Timothy's efforts, Syriac Christians continued to seek more favorable rulings in Muslim courts.

Unfortunately for Syriac bishops, even when clergy initially adjudicated a case, this did not mean that their decision remained intact. The 818 CE canons of the Miaphysite patriarch Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē spoke of Christians, including priests and deacons, who overturned a bishop's verdict by appealing to "worldly authorities or to someone else from a foreign tribe, those who are outside the fold of the church, or to one of the [secular] rulers of the Christians."[41] According to Dionysius, whoever dared to do this would be excluded from the Eucharist and all contact with fellow Christians. Dionysius was not the first to deal with this issue. A similar decision had appeared thirty years earlier in the rulings of the Miaphysite patriarch Giwargi and six years earlier in the decisions of Dionysius's predecessor, the patriarch Qyriaqos.[42] Nor was Dionysius the last to encounter this issue. Thirty years later one of his successors, the patriarch Ignatius IV (r. 878–883), had to up the ante. He declared that any Christian who sought to circumvent an ecclesiastical decision through appeal to "a worldly authority or a ruler of the *ṭayyāyē*" would be condemned by Jesus himself.[43]

It was fairly obvious why Syriac legal sources were particularly concerned about issues of jurisdiction. As Uriel Simonsohn noted, "The efforts of ecclesiastical leaders to maintain juridical authority, a *judicial exclusiveness*, should be seen in the context of an ecclesiastical concern with maintaining communal boundaries."[44] It also was fairly obvious why certain Christians decided to go to Muslim courts. Then, as today, one chose the jurisdiction that seemed most likely to result in a favorable ruling.[45]

Syriac texts not only spoke of Christians and Muslims sharing sacred spaces, meals, and courts. They also spoke of them sharing families, most commonly through intermarriage. Here again, Jacob of Edessa provided the earliest witness. In a letter he wrote to Addai, Jacob addressed the case of a Christian woman who freely married a Hagarene. Addai's main question was whether it was still permissible for a priest to offer this woman the Eucharist.

Addai's query resonated with centuries of debates regarding the Eucharist and confessional identity. For Miaphysite clergy, the Eucharist had become a particularly important marker of ecclesiastical borders. Letters, canons, and hagiographies continually advocated that Miaphysites participate only in the Miaphysite, as opposed to the Chalcedonian, Eucharist. Not all congregation members agreed. Especially in times and places where there was a shortage of Miaphysite clergy, parishioners became much more concerned with simply obtaining the Eucharist than with the confessional allegiance of the clergy providing it. Despite the difference between elite prescription and nonelite

practice, Miaphysite clergy still tried to use the Eucharist to solidify communal boundaries.[46] As a result, Addai's brief inquiry posed not simply a question of orthopraxis (should the priest give this woman the Eucharist) but also a question of identity (was a Christian woman married to a Muslim still considered an orthodox Christian).

Addai, however, made the issue even more complicated by noting that the Hagarene husband, although generally compassionate toward Christianity, was threatening to kill the priest if he did not serve his wife the Eucharist. Addai asked if one should give such a woman the Eucharist so as to dissuade her from becoming a Hagarene. Or should she be given the Eucharist only in situations in which the priest was being threatened? Alternatively, would it be sinful for the priest to give her the Eucharist, even taking into account the risk to his life?[47]

Many of the questions that Addai wrote used extensive details more to force the articulation of a general principle than to accurately portray actual events. For example, Addai's next questions concerned how strictly one must follow the rule that a deacon should not kill animals: What if the animal were sick? What if a hunter had already wounded it? What if the deacon himself mortally wounded the animal, but another hunter killed it? What if the deacon caught a bull by its horn with one hand, stabbed it with his other, but only a professional butcher delivered the death blow?[48] Just as we might expect there to have been few seventh-century deacons who could catch a bull one-handed and who always had a butcher in tow, so, too, it remains unclear whether Addai actually knew of an intermarried, Eucharist-loving woman who just happened to have a compassionate yet potentially homicidal Hagarene husband.

It is important to view the writings of Jacob and his correspondents as carefully constructed literary works, not direct case law. Addai could simply have asked if a priest should give the Eucharist to a Hagarene's wife. When six hundred years later the Syriac polymath Barhebraeus copied the very same canon for his thirteenth-century readers, he did indeed remove all of the details and ambiguities found in Addai's original question; Barhebraeus's version simply referred to "a woman married to a Hagarene who says that she will become a Hagarene if the Eucharist is not given to her."[49] In contrast to this later redaction, Addai originally painted a purposefully confusing picture: Why did the Christian woman willingly marry a Hagarene? Why was the Muslim husband so interested in having his wife receive the Christian Eucharist? Given that he was considering murdering a priest, what did Addai

mean by the husband being compassionate toward Christianity? The seventh-century (as opposed to thirteenth-century) version of Jacob's correspondence pointed toward particularly messy circumstances.

Jacob responded that the Hagarene's threats were irrelevant; the woman was to be given the Eucharist to minimize the risk of her becoming a Hagarene. He then used the details Addai provided to move from specifics to a general principle and from the consideration of the individual woman to a consideration of the larger Christian community. Jacob stated that even if there were no threatening husband and no fear of the woman herself apostatizing, the clergy must nevertheless try to discourage others from entering this precarious situation in the first place. The priest should thus impose penance on the woman "so that other women fear lest they too stumble [i.e., intermarry]."[50] Jacob expressed his clear preference against intermarriage. But, unlike later writers, he was much more practical in his response. Jacob did not prohibit intermarriage, and he specified that the priest must prescribe only a bearable punishment, undoubtedly to prevent the Christian woman from becoming discouraged and apostatizing.

Almost a century after Jacob wrote about intermarriage, a council convened by the Miaphysite patriarch Giwargi ruled very differently on exactly the same issue. On May 22, 785, Giwargi's council issued twenty-two canons covering a variety of disciplinary topics ranging from divorce to incest to drunk deacons.[51] Between a ruling excommunicating clergy who baptized heretics and a ruling defrocking monks who left their monastery to marry women in the surrounding village appeared two canons that spoke of intermarriage. Although these decisions have gone unnoticed by almost all modern scholars, they provide a key example of how the intermingling of Christians and Muslims forced Syriac Christians to try to solidify distinctions between Christianity and Islam.[52] Canon 12 was addressed to "those Christians who give their daughters to *ḥanpē* or Hagarenes or Nestorians."[53] The council's response was a clear case of boundary maintenance. It ruled that if any priest allowed his daughter to so marry, he should be expelled from the priesthood. If the offending parents were laity, they should neither receive the Eucharist nor be allowed to enter a church. As for the Christian wives of Hagarenes, according to the next canon, they should also be excluded from church and the Eucharist.

In terms of categorical distinctions, the council's decisions were particularly instructive. Hagarenes had now become part of a list of quintessential outsiders sandwiched, as it were, between *ḥanpē* and heretics; and the

Eucharist, which previously distinguished between competing branches of Christianity, now served to mark out those Christians too closely connected with Islam. As with much canonical literature, it may also be useful to read these canons backward. That is, their prohibition of intermarriage suggested that it was a sufficiently frequent phenomenon to attract the attention of a late eighth-century council. It is also noteworthy that the canons spoke only of women intermarrying, implying that the underlying concern was conversion. The council assumed that a woman was more likely to take on the religious practices of her husband than the other way around.[54]

Contemporary East Syrian legal sources presented a similar picture, although they more often spoke of Christians generally marrying nonbelievers, as opposed to specifying the partners as being Hagarenes. Ishoʿbokht (ca. 770) stated that a Christian man could not marry a non-Christian woman, nor a Christian woman a non-Christian man.[55] In 805 Timothy I ruled differently depending on the gender of the Christian. He did not allow a Christian woman to marry a non-Christian lest she and her children become non-Christian.[56] A Christian man, on the other hand, could marry a non-Christian woman if he had reason to believe she would subsequently convert to Christianity.[57] Soon afterward, Ishoʿbarnun (d. 824) made similar decisions. A Christian woman who willingly married "a *ḥanpē*, a Jew, or a man of another religion" was to be expelled from the church, along with her parents.[58] A Christian man, however, was to be expelled only if he allowed his non-Christian wife to keep her religion.[59] Both Ishoʿbokht and Ishoʿbarnun also spoke of a spouse's apostasy as acceptable grounds for divorce.[60]

How much had changed since Jacob of Edessa! In the late seventh century, the Miaphysite bishop of Edessa specified that a woman married to a Hagarene should be given the Eucharist and included in the church community. In 785 a Miaphysite council ruled that clergy should use the Eucharist to exclude from the church a woman in exactly the same situation. A similar course of action was prescribed by most contemporary East Syrian sources. How much had stayed the same. Regardless of whether it was permitted or condemned, intermarriage clearly continued.

Of related concern to intermarriage was the question of interfaith inheritance. For example, Timothy I was asked what should be done if a Christian bequeathed his estate to a Muslim. He responded that if other God-fearing Christians were nearby, the bequest should not be honored. However, if there were no good Christians in the area, the church should consider inheritance by a Muslim to be legitimate.[61] In contrast, Ishoʿbokht declared that

only Christians could inherit from other Christians. Non-Christian children could not inherit from Christian parents, nor could a non-Christian woman inherit from a Christian husband unless she converted to Christianity.[62] A century later, Gabriel of Basra repeated Isho'bokht's ruling in his own canon collection.[63]

Syriac sources, especially Syriac legal texts, showed how frequently Christians and Muslims interacted. From mosque to church, city wall to classroom, legal court to marriage bed, seventh- through ninth-century Christians and Muslims were in regular contact. These interconfessional encounters affected not only people but also religious items. Rulings by Jacob of Edessa provided an especially interesting discussion of this phenomenon. In his discussion of objects, there existed a particularly close relationship between the posed questions, which reflected substantial permeability, and Jacob's responses, which initially tried to reestablish clear communal boundaries, often through appeals to concepts of purity. For example, the priest Addai once asked Jacob what he should do with an altar on which *ṭayyāyē* ate.[64] Addai's dilemma raises a number of questions for the modern reader: Why did *ṭayyāyē* desire to have a Christian altar? How did they get it? Was their eating on it intended as an affront to Christianity? Why couldn't Addai resolve this issue on his own? Why did he require further guidance? In contrast to the ambiguities of Addai's inquiry, Jacob's reply was very clear-cut. He gave two options. If Addai washed and scoured the table, it could be put to secular uses in the church, but it "is no longer an altar." Alternatively, Addai could break and bury it.[65] Both options constructed the *ṭayyāyē*'s action as a purity violation that rendered the altar permanently profane.

Viewing Jacob's decisions as purity regulations helps us better understand the logic behind his responses. In her classic study *Purity and Danger*, anthropologist Mary Douglas writes: "Pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications. . . . Wherever the lines are precarious we find pollution ideas come to their support."[66] For Jacob, *ṭayyāyē* eating on a Christian altar was simply untenable. The movement of a sacred object between communities illustrated the permeability of the groups' boundaries and also symbolized the very hybridity that Jacob felt Christianity must avoid. Jacob tried to resolve this definitional crisis by declaring the transgressive object profane. By excluding from the sacred whatever was too close to being non-Christian, he reinscribed the very distinctions that the object's movement had initially challenged.

Archaeological evidence, legal texts, literary works—all pointed to a profound degree of interchange between Christians and Muslims. Whether through quotidian interactions or intermarriage, through influence on jurisprudence or the transfer of religious objects, these communities were anything but isolated from each other. The frequency of such border crossings suggested that Syriac authors were much more interested in patrolling the boundaries between Christianity and Islam than were most of their audience.[67] Although religious elites were often heavily invested in building fences between religious communities, many Christians and Muslims disregarded such divisions or considered other identity markers to be more significant than religious ones. Consider, for example, the case of the homicidally inclined Hagarene husband who demanded that a priest give his wife the Eucharist. From the husband's perspective, it was much more important to keep his Christian wife happy than to define his family as exclusively Muslim.

Syriac sources thus go beyond simply documenting interreligious contact. They also challenge the modern assumption of clearly defined boundaries between early Christianity and early Islam. The plethora of Syriac references to cross-confessional interactions hinted at these communities' permeability. But the dissonance between modern perception and ancient practice becomes even more apparent in another set of Syriac accounts. Several Syriac works described Muslims acting in ways that fit quite poorly with our belief in a strong distinction between Christianity and Islam. Here, too, legal as well as literary texts depicted a world in which religious communities were much less sharply bound than is commonly imagined.

Christian-Like Muslims

In recent years, scholars of early Christian-Jewish relations have increasingly shifted their focus from polemical literature in which "denials of sameness are precisely what we would expect in situations of difficult difference" to literary narratives that pointed toward a much greater degree of interaction and overlap than was officially sanctioned.[68] A similar heuristic may help one better understand early Christian-Muslim relations. Of particular import are a number of Syriac texts in which Muslim characters acted in ways that, at least to modern eyes, appeared to be very Christian. For us, such descriptions of religious intermingling may seem surprising. For seventh- through ninth-century Christians, they would have seemed quite realistic.

Consider three chapters from Thomas of Margā's ninth-century *Book of Governors*. The story began with the East Syrian monastery of Bēt Abhē having fallen on hard times. A locust infestation destroyed most of the monastery's harvest, forcing its newly appointed abbot, Mār Cyriacus, to borrow money from local merchants. No one knew how Mār Cyriacus would pay off this debt.[69] Fortunately, the next chapter opened with a philanthropically minded *ṭayyāyā* arriving on the scene.[70] This *ṭayyāyā* was the ideal candidate to bail out Bēt ᶜAbhē: he had made previous donations to monasteries, he was very rich, and—best of all—his only son was suffering from a fatal illness. Thomas wasted no time. By the chapter's fourth sentence the *ṭayyāyā* had a vision telling him to summon a monk from Bēt ᶜAbhē to heal his son. He immediately shared his vision with the bishop of Nineveh, who quickly determined that the envisioned monk must be Mār Cyriacus. In response to the bishop's subsequent request, Cyriacus washed the cross he wore and sent the resulting holy water to the *ṭayyāyā*. His son drank it and instantly was healed. The chapter ended with Cyriacus's notoriety on the rise as this incident was told throughout Mosul. Although now famous, Cyriacus was still broke.[71]

Even a mildly perceptive reader could predict what would happen next. Nonetheless, Thomas broke up the heretofore hectic narrative and began the next chapter not with the story's resolution but with some scriptural exegesis. He previously characterized the *ṭayyāyā*'s faith as "close to that of ours."[72] Thomas now cited the *ṭayyāyā*'s actions as fulfilling Zachariah 8:22: "and many people and mighty nations will come to beseech the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem."[73] That is, in the prophecy of Zachariah, Gentiles, although not Jewish, would eventually glorify God at the Jerusalem Temple. So, too, this Muslim, although not Christian, would support Christian monasteries. Having found a proper scriptural precedent, Thomas returned to the story. Cyriacus was introduced to the Muslim, who recognized him from his vision. The *ṭayyāyā* immediately paid Cyriacus's debt of 8,000 *zuzē* and, for good measure, donated an additional 2,000 *zuzē* to Bēt ᶜAbhē. The narrative ended with the monks rejoicing, appropriately enough. As for the anonymous *ṭayyāyā*, we never hear of him again.[74]

Thomas relentlessly moved to his next story. We, however, may want to pause and reflect a bit on what he has recounted. A man whose faith "was close to" (*qrib*: literally "approaches, comes near to") Christianity, who had previously given money to Christian monasteries, who later received a divinely sent vision of a Christian holy man, who then immediately consulted with the local bishop to interpret his vision and to arrange for a healing, whose son

was cured by the washing from an abbot's cross, and who went on to endow an entire monastery. Does such a man fit comfortably within our definition of a Muslim? This story suggests that modern conceptions of a clear separation between Christianity and Islam are anachronistic for late antiquity. Few twenty-first-century Christians would anticipate a Muslim funding Christian religious institutions, consulting Christian clergy for spiritual aid, or using Christian holy water. But as numerous Syriac sources attested, such a character was quite at home in the ninth century.

Other literary narratives preserved similar accounts of Muslims acting in very Christian ways. This blurring of religious boundaries was especially prevalent in Syriac stories that included minor Muslim characters. In terms of status, these Muslim characters were nonelite, they rarely received proper names, and they frequently formed an undifferentiated group of *ṭayyāyē* or Hagarenes.[75] In terms of the story itself, these Muslim characters helped to set the scene, or played only bit parts. As a result, modern readers might consider such minor characters as superficially developed and interchangeable. It is, however, the very stock and stereotypical nature of these figures that allows us to examine them more easily as a group and to investigate how their general characterization might have reflected, however imperfectly, early Christian-Muslim interactions.

In Syriac narratives, Muslim minor characters frequently interacted with Christian holy men and often appeared in Christian holy spaces. For example, the *Life of Theoduṭē* stated that when the patriarch Julian arrived in Āmīd, he was met by the city's *ṭayyāyē* as well as by fellow Christians.[76] A crowd of *ṭayyāyē* also appeared when the work's main character became bishop. In an overflowing church, *ṭayyāyē* gathered alongside Christians to witness Theoduṭē's ordination.[77] *Ṭayyāyē* listened to one of Theoduṭē's homilies and constantly followed Theoduṭē's commandments.[78] Government officials were equally impressed. A *ṭayyāyā* governor sought Theoduṭē's blessing, officials from Edessa greeted Theoduṭē when he entered the city, and the governor of Dara helped Theoduṭē build a new monastery.[79] Perhaps written as early as the late seventh century, the *Life of Theoduṭē* used the presence of Muslim characters to indicate that a Christian protagonist was so charismatic that his holiness was recognized across confessional divides.[80] By the seventh century, non-Christian minor characters affirming the power of Christian holy men was already a well-established literary trope. It was found both in earlier Greek texts translated into Syriac, and in indigenous Syriac literature. On one level, postconquest Syriac literature, such as the *Life of Theoduṭē*, simply

had Muslim minor characters inherit the literary role previously filled by Jews and pagans. On another level, however, these narratives in Syriac texts ranging from *vitae* and monastic histories to chronicles, letters, and canon law took for granted that their audience would consider plausible a world in which nonelites were attracted to holy men, regardless of these figures' official religious affiliation.

Sometimes such blurring occurred when Muslim characters requested Christian spiritual aid. For example, Muslims thronged the bishop Theoduṭē, asking for his blessing.[81] So, too, in the *Book of Governors*, a crowd of *ṭayyāyē* surrounded Mār Cyriacus to be blessed by the Christian holy man.[82] Occasionally, Christians helped Muslim minor characters more directly, such as when Theoduṭē used oil and relics to heal a crippled *ṭayyāyā*.[83] A more spectacular healing occurred in the *Book of Governors* when Mār Elijah exorcised a *ṭayyāyā* woman who was possessed by demons. In a scene similar to the Synoptic Gospels' accounts of the demoniac of Gerasenes, Mār Elijah expelled the demons from the woman and instructed them to flee to the pagan-dominated city of Harran. Those present heard the demons repeatedly cry out in Arabic, "O, let us go to Harran. O, let us go to Haran" as their voices slowly faded into the distance. The story ended with the woman stating that "There is neither faith nor truth except among the holy Christian people."[84] In Thomas's narrative, this unnamed woman did not officially convert to Christianity. Instead, she remained in a liminal state. Nominally she was still Muslim. But she was a Muslim who proclaimed Christianity as the only true religion.

At times the degree of categorical overlap between Muslim and Christian characters surprised even the narrative's protagonist. Thomas of Margā related the story of the priest Cyprian who encountered a *ṭayyāyā* fishing in the Tigris. Cyprian was dumbfounded when he heard the *ṭayyāyā* praying in the name of the Christian ascetic Mār Narsai. Cyprian challenged the fisherman, asking why a *ṭayyāyā* invoked the name of a Christian teacher.[85] In response, the fisherman recounted that one evening he saw Mār Narsai literally walking on water. Narsai, not wanting the story of his miracle to spread, sent his disciple to the *ṭayyāyā*. The disciple requested that while Narsai was alive, the Muslim would not reveal what he had seen. The fisherman agreed, and the disciple instructed him always to utter Narsai's name prior to casting his net. The fisherman finished his story, "And from that time forward, whenever we mention the name of that holy man, with a bountiful hand we take a haul [of fish] from the Tigris."[86] Although this explanation satisfied Cyprian, it

actually complicated rather than solved his initial query. We are left with the question whether a fisherman who consistently and successfully called on the name of a Christian holy man is so easily categorized as a Muslim.

Thomas's extended narrative may also have reflected his own unease with such a scenario. Cyprian's surprise at the *ṭayyāyā*'s invocation of a Christian saint implied that this was something irregular. The story within the story affirmed this as unusual, noting that the *ṭayyāyā* fisherman had been given explicit permission to call on the holy man's name. In the world of Thomas's narrative, the potentially transgressive action was portrayed as exceptional. In the world of Thomas's audience, it was likely to have been much more common. As affirmed by other Syriac sources, many seventh- through ninth-century Christians and Muslims had similar perspectives to that of these minor characters. Often their primary concern was not religious allegiance but ritual efficacy. Clear-cut doctrinal divisions and well-defined religious boundaries were much less important than expedient blessings, a successful exorcism, or a net filled with fish.

There was a clear agenda behind Syriac descriptions of Muslims seeking Christian holy men or attesting to Christian truth. What makes such anecdotes particularly interesting, however, is that they do not appear only in documents commonly designated as literature. Syriac legal decisions occasionally discussed the very circumstances described in literary accounts. This dual attestation in literary and legal accounts suggests that we are dealing with more than a mere trope. Three rulings found in Jacob of Edessa's letters to John the Stylite provide particularly important corroboration. One ruling spoke of Hagarenes seeking Christian exorcists, another of Hagarenes entering Christian churches, and yet another of Hagarenes obtaining (and returning) the Christian Eucharist.

In his *First Letter to John the Stylite*, John asked Jacob, "Should a priest give the blessings of the holy ones to Hagarenes or to *ḥanpē* who are possessed by evil spirits so that they be healed?"[87] This question presupposed the very same situations described in Syriac literary accounts. As in the *Life of Theoduṭē*, Hagarenes requested blessings from Christian holy men. As in the *Book of Governors*, they desired to be exorcised by a Christian exorcist. Like the Muslim minor characters that appeared in Syriac narratives, the Hagarenes John encountered were more interested in the efficacy of a given ritual than the religious affiliation of its practitioner.

The plot thickened when John went on to ask, "Or likewise [is it right to give them] *ḥnānā*?"[88] *Ḥnānā* was a common Syriac Christian ritual element,

most often made by mixing water with the dust of a martyr's bones. In other words, John was asking whether a Christian priest could heal a Hagarene petitioner using Christian relics. The question suggested a divide between elite prescription (Islamic texts that critiqued the Christian cult of relics) and common practice (an on-the-ground acceptance of the relics' power).

Jacob's response to these inquiries was an unequivocal affirmation: "It is by all means right, very right that none hinder anything like this. Rather it should be given to them for every sickness, whatever it may be."[89] In this case, Jacob's interest in good publicity overrode any concern for strict religious boundaries. He went on to tell John that such healings were an important demonstration of Christian power and that John should perform them without hindrance.

In his *Second Letter to John the Stylite*, Jacob responded to the question, "Is it necessary that the church doors be closed on the day when the Eucharist is offered?" Jacob replied, "This is necessary, especially because of the Hagarenes, so that they might not enter and mingle with believers and that they might not disturb them and ridicule the holy mysteries."[90] At first glance, this response appears nonsensical. If Hagarenes really planned to disrupt Christian services, it remained unlikely that a closed door would deter them. Even if John locked the doors, the Hagarenes could simply have arrived early and entered with the rest of the congregation. Instead, I suspect that the Hagarenes John and Jacob discussed were not so much malicious as the very sort of Muslims described in literary narratives such as the *Life of Theoḏuṭē*—curious onlookers wishing to obtain additional religious blessings through their participation in Christian services. In other words, the primary concern here was mingling between Christians and those Hagarenes who, for whatever reason, also chose to attend church.

Later in the same letter, Jacob addressed another example of Muslim attraction to Christianity. But in this case, he was responding to a question that initially had nothing to do with Islam. John the Stylite had asked what he should do with Chalcedonian Eucharist elements from a village whose entire population had just become Miaphysite. Jacob replied that the Eucharist elements should be sent to other Chalcedonians, presumably in another village. Jacob's answer, though, did not stop here. He cited an analogous situation that he had previously faced. While in Byzantine territory, some Hagarenes had stolen the Eucharistic elements. Once they returned to Edessa, they felt so badly about their theft that they brought the pilfered elements to Jacob, who in turn sent them to the nearest Chalcedonian Christian.[91]

From whatever perspective one reads this account, it remains peculiar. If one concentrates on the Hagarenes' action, the surprise is the value these Muslim soldiers associated with the Christian Eucharist. First, they had to enter a Byzantine church to steal the elements (however one envisions this happening or for whatever purpose). Then, they had to transport them all the way to Edessa. Finally, they attributed sufficient power to these Christian ritual elements to reconsider their initial plans for the stolen Eucharist elements, and subsequently go to the trouble of giving them to the city's bishop. Jacob's retelling of these events was no less puzzling, because it minimized instead of reified distinctions between Muslims and Christians. John the Stylite initially inquired about Chalcedonians. It was Jacob who shifted the conversation and used his own experience with Hagarenes as an argument for how John should deal with the Chalcedonians. The Hagarenes Jacob encountered already appeared rather Christian-like in their concern for the Eucharist. Jacob's discussion made them even more so. For his analogy to make sense, one must consider Muslims at least somewhat equivalent to non-Miaphysite Christians.

As the rulings of Jacob of Edessa suggested, even for Christian elites there were times when a certain permeability in religious boundaries could be advantageous—as long as it involved Muslims whose belief "was close to ours" or Muslims who were attracted to Christian practices. Much more problematic for Syriac authors were self-identified Christians whose theology was seen as perilously close to being Islamic, or self-identified Christians who participated in Muslim practices. Such figures, however, were challenging not just to ancient writers patrolling communal boundaries. They are even more challenging to modern scholars who suggest an early, clear-cut "parting of the ways" between Islam and Christianity.

Muslim-Like Christians

As a mid-ninth-century bishop, Thomas of Margā was happy to share stories of Muslims seeking Christian exorcists, funding Christian monasteries, or proclaiming the truth of Christian doctrine. For Thomas, such tales reinforced rather than challenged Christian supremacy. An account of Muslim-like Christians, however, required more drastic intervention. This was exactly what happened when Thomas introduced the reader to a group of Persians who, "although in name they were Christians, confessed Christ to be a mere human being and [that] 'he was like one of the prophets.'"[92]

Who were these folk who said such "un-Christian" things about Christ? Chase Robinson saw them as belonging to a group of Christian heretics that were endemic to the region and suggested a genealogical link to Paul of Samosata.[93] Jack Tannous, in contrast, briefly argued that they simply represented a "low octane christology" and presented them as just one end of a wide spectrum of popular beliefs.[94] But regardless how modern scholars categorize this congregation, it is hard to imagine that Thomas's readership would not also have associated their beliefs with Islam. The statement that Christ is a "mere human being" and "like one of the prophets" was a close paraphrase of the Qur'anic view of Jesus expressed in suras 4:171 and 5:75. Thomas's anecdote also employed the very same language that other Syriac authors, such as the East Syrian catholicos Ḥnanishā and the Miaphysite author of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, used to describe Muslim views of Jesus.[95] For Thomas's audience such statements would not so much symbolize a legacy of Paul of Samosata or simply indicate too low a Christology. They also would have had strong resonances with Islam.

Nevertheless, even if Thomas's readers associated these congregants with Islam, this was clearly not the group's self-identity. They all attended church on Sunday, they were ministered to by East Syrian bishops, they sang psalms, they took the Eucharist, and they had been baptized. Unlike the philanthropic *ṭayyāyā* "whose faith was close to ours," these characters innately threatened a Christian readership, and Thomas felt it necessary to quickly and firmly resolve their categorical ambiguity.

Fortunately, the holy Māran-ammeh arrived on the scene to straighten things out. Immediately after the congregation sang the psalm verse "Light has dawned for the righteous," Māran-ammeh's prayer resulted in the church filling with a light "that surpassed the light of the sun."[96] After performing this miracle, Māran-ammeh asked the congregation, "Now that Christ our Lord has showed you His light and blazed His truth in your hearts, will you confess with us that Jesus Christ is Lord?"[97] Having literally seen the light, they immediately renounced any Islamic-like theology, proclaiming, "We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and is God."[98] Māran-ammeh forgave them and, for good measure, miraculously tamed an incorrigible mule belonging to one of the congregants.[99] Having domesticated both congregation and mule, Māran-ammeh moved to the next town, where he would miraculously destroy an ant nest.

As this homely ending reminds us, Thomas's *Book of Governors* preserved stories. Simply because Thomas spoke of a Syriac congregation proclaiming

an Islamic-like Christology does not mean that there actually was such a church in ninth-century Margā. Nevertheless, it remains striking how closely these literary characters corresponded with references found in other genres such as manuscript incipits and Syriac legal material. Although literary narratives, manuscript titles, and canon laws had very different claims to historicity, the parallels between them suggest that all of them came from a world with substantial religious overlap.

Thomas's story presented two perspectives on Christian orthodoxy. From the perspective of the congregants, Christianity need not be Trinitarian. These characters initially saw nothing unorthodox about a denial of Jesus' divine Sonship. From the perspective of the character Māran-ammeh (and, one suspects, that of Thomas and his implied readership), Christianity needed to be much more clearly distinguished from Islam. In this narrative, Māran-ammeh's miracle facilitated the triumph of this more stringently delineated version of Christianity over a more amorphously defined version.

With Thomas's story, however, we remain in the realm of literary depiction. This battle over the boundaries of orthodoxy took a more concrete form in a rarely studied British Library manuscript that was briefly discussed in Chapter 3. British Library Additional 14,643 has been dated on paleographic grounds to the mid-eighth century.[100] At its end appears a Syriac translation of an originally Arabic caliph list. The list finished with the reign of the caliph Yazīd, suggesting that the Arabic version was written before Yazīd's death in 724 and was fairly soon afterward translated into Syriac. The list's incipit initially read: "A notice concerning: the life of Muḥammad the messenger [*rasulā*] of God." The willingness of an eighth-century Syriac translator to refer to Muḥammad as God's messenger should surprise anyone who suggests an early, clear separation between Christian and Muslim beliefs. It might be possible that the translator did not realize the theological significance of the term *rasūl*. But it is hard to imagine that someone who translated the rest of this Arabic list without a problem would not know such a common word. Even if the translator were unfamiliar with the term, the statement "Muḥammad the_____ of God" should have given a Christian sufficient pause to allow him to double-check the meaning of the intervening word before transcribing it.[101] More likely, this eighth-century Christian simply felt that the belief in Muḥammad being God's messenger remained theologically permissible.

Although calling Muḥammad God's *rasūl* seems to have been acceptable to at least one eighth-century Christian, it did not remain that way. In

its current state, this page of British Library Add. 14,643 now contains two erasures. A later reader, obviously concerned about defining Muḥammad as God's messenger, erased the problematic term *rasulā*. Either he or another reader also erased two letters from a word found earlier in the same line. As a result of these erasures, the original incipit, "A record of the life of Muḥammad, the messenger of God," was transformed into "The record that Muḥammad [is] of God is rejected."

These manuscript changes graphically illustrate an important trajectory of early Christian-Muslim interactions. The eighth-century stratum challenges our belief in a strong distinction between the categories of early Christianity and early Islam. Here was a bilingual Christian scribe who had access to an Arabic caliph list and likely considered unproblematic the claim that Muḥammad was God's messenger—a statement he repeated verbatim in his translation and passed along, without comment, to future readers. The latter stratum shows that this degree of religious overlap was unacceptable to later Christians. A later reader quite literally erased this ambiguity and replaced it with interreligious polemic as he attempted to firm up the very categorical boundaries the earlier text had elided.

This divergence of opinions over how strictly one should draw the line between Christianity and Islam was not restricted to one of Thomas's stories and one of the British Library's manuscripts. It also motivated one of Jacob of Edessa's legal decisions. Although Jacob wrote this decree in the late seventh or early eighth century, it survived only in a thirteenth-century canon collection edited by Barhebraeus. Barhebraeus cited Jacob as ruling that a cloth embroidered with the "Hagarene confession of faith" (*tawditā hāgāraytā*) could not be reused as a Christian altar covering.[102] Jacob's decision tried to clearly demarcate a ritual object as exclusively Christian and to avoid mixing elements he considered Hagarene with those he considered Christian.

Besides the obvious issue of how Jacob's audience obtained this cloth in the first place, his ruling also begged the question: how could seventh-century Christians have even considered draping the proclamation of a rival faith over their altar?[103] Whereas Jacob saw the embroidered cloth as belonging to a rival faith, the congregants may have had a very different perspective. What Jacob labeled as Hagarene, they may have seen simply as monotheistic and not mutually exclusive with Christianity. This hypothesis gains further support when one considers that many late seventh-century witnesses to the *shahāda* (Muslim confession of faith) did not yet include a reference to Muḥammad but simply read, "there is no God but God."[104] Like Thomas's

story and the transmission history of BL Add. 14,643, Jacob's decision preserved two competing visions of Christianity. The first allowed more substantial overlap between Christianity and Islam. For those invested in more carefully defined religious boundaries, this elicited a response that attemped to more strictly delimit the Christian church, separating it from the Muslim *umma*. Ninth-century story, eighth-century manuscript, seventh-century canon—all preserved traces of Christians whose theology was much closer to that of early Muslims than ancient elites (or, for that matter, much modern scholarship) felt comfortable with. In addition, a Syriac manuscript incipit and a legal canon alluded to early Christian involvement in Islamic practices.

In the mid-680s, the Miaphysite patriarch Athanasius of Balad (r. 684–687) wrote a multipage letter criticizing Christians who participated in "*ḥanpē* festivals" and ate from "*ḥanpē* sacrifices."[105] By the 680s, the Syriac term *ḥanpē* already had a 500-year tradition of describing polytheists.[106] Thus, the most straightforward reading of Athanasius's original letter was as a condemnation of Christians attending pagan festivities, who were a common target of ecclesiastical invective from the time of the apostle Paul onward.

Long after Athanasius's reign, the term *ḥanpē* continued to be used for polytheists. But in the centuries following Athanasius's patriarchate, Syriac Christians also employed *ḥanpē* to speak of Muslims.[107] Because of the word's changing meaning, for subsequent generations the object of Athanasius's invective became ambiguous. Had the patriarch written against Christians mingling with polytheists or against Christians mingling with Muslims?

Once an eighth-century scribe added the current incipit to the patriarch's letter, such ambiguity was removed. In extant manuscripts the letter is now titled, "A letter of the blessed patriarch Athanasius concerning this: that a Christian may not eat from the sacrifices of those Hagarenes who now rule."[108] It is possible that, on finding the term *ḥanpē* in the body of the letter, whoever wrote this title sincerely believed that Athanasius had written against Muslims. Alternatively, the scribe may have seen an easy opportunity to redirect the now dead patriarch's authority against Islam. In either case, instead of using the term *ḥanpē* in the letter's title, this scribe chose *mhaggrāyē*, a word that did not appear in the body of the letter and that was exclusively used for Muslims. Just to be safe, he even specified "the *Hagarenes* who now hold power." With the addition of this title, the scribe repackaged what was most likely originally an antipagan polemic and redeployed it against Islam.

This strategy's success can be seen in the eight surviving manuscripts that preserve the letter, two of which date from the eighth century; all contain the

same incipit. A careful reader might still ascertain that Athanasius's original concern was most likely not Islam. But at least by the eighth century, the combination of Syriac Christians frequent use of *ḥanpē* as a polemical way to connote Muslims and the letter's title now referring to Hagarene sacrifices effectively transformed the patriarch's letter into an anti-Muslim tractate.

The transmission history of Athanasius's letter provides a vivid example of how the rise of Islam motivated a scribe to modify the document he was copying.[109] It also raises an important question: Why did an eighth-century scribe go out of his way to chastise contemporary Christians for partaking in Hagarene sacrifices? Shouldn't they have known better already? Like the initial appearance and later erasure of the word *rasulā* from a British Library incipit, the title added to Athanasius's letter suggests substantial overlap between church and *umma*. Enough Christians were participating in Muslim festivals to prompt a scribe to create a patriarchal ruling against Christians' attendance of Muslim rituals.

Over a hundred years later, a canon from Athanasius's distant successor, the patriarch Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē, suggested that the phenomenon of shared ritual continued well into the ninth century. Written in 818, Dionysius's fifth canon condemned Christians who underwent the "*ḥanpē* and Jewish custom" of circumcision.[110] In theory, the term *ḥanpē* could be translated as "polytheists." But there is no evidence for ninth-century Mesopotamian polytheists who practiced circumcision. Instead, like many other Syriac authors, Dionysius almost certainly used the term *ḥanpē* to mean Muslims. Syriac Christians also often depicted Islam as a form of Judaism and in some cases even called Muslims the "new Jews."[111] As a result, Dionysius's phrase "Jewish custom" carried a double entendre associating circumcision not only with literal Jews but also with Muslims. In the second half of this canon, it became even clearer that Dionysius was primarily concerned about Christian participation in an Islamic rite. Here, he spoke of Christians circumcising as an act of apostasy undertaken for worldly gain. Christians under Muslim rule would have had little profit motive to convert to polytheism or Judaism.

What makes this canon against Islamic circumcision so intriguing, however, is that it was not really aimed against conversion to Islam. Instead, the concern was over someone who became circumcised but nevertheless was still assumed to be Christian. To battle such hybridity, Dionysius evoked Paul's Letter to the Galatians to argue that one must make a choice: one could either be a Christian or be circumcised, not both. Canon 5 and its arguments presupposed a situation in which some ninth-century Christians chose to

undergo the Muslim practice of circumcision, but, unlike their patriarch, they and their community still considered them Christian.

How would we categorize people who proclaimed Christ as simply one of the prophets, described Muḥammad as God's messenger, included a Muslim confession of faith in their place of worship, attended Muslim festivals, and underwent circumcision? They hardly fit most modern definitions of Christians. Nevertheless, few seventh- through ninth-century individuals woke up in the morning wondering if they should still self-identify as Christian. The problem was not how one defined oneself, but how one defined an other. There were competing visions for how rigidly one should delineate religious communities. Many elites desired clear-cut distinctions between church and *umma*, and strictly defined confessional borders. Later Abbasid-era texts seemed particularly invested in more rigorous difference-making and in more carefully distinguishing who was who. Because the vision of these elites closely aligns with twenty-first-century Western perceptions of exclusive religious commitment, modern scholars are particularly at risk of confusing ancient elite prescription with ancient popular practice. It is here where descriptions of Muslims who, from our perspective, seem Christian-like and Christians who, from our perspective, seem Muslim-like become especially useful. Whether they appear in literary narratives, manuscript incipits, or legal rulings, such figures challenge modern presuppositions of a strong divide between early Christianity and early Islam. They remind us that religious elites did not have a monopoly on defining one's identity and that lived religious experience was often much messier than what surviving texts advocated.

Conversion Accounts

The conquests and their aftermath blurred the boundaries between Christian and non-Christian. Syriac discussions of cross-confessional interactions, of Christian-like Muslims, and of Muslim-like Christians reflected this increasingly permeable situation. Such writings also articulated strategies of boundary maintenance. Few of their readers would directly experience an entire congregation spontaneously renouncing its Muslim-like beliefs or a Christian holy man exorcising a legion of Arabic-speaking demons from a Muslim woman. Nevertheless, in their presentation of such situations, literary narratives and legal rulings presented ideal types to help their audience navigate their own much less spectacular but also less tidy interactions.

Perhaps the greatest fluidity experienced by Syriac Christians under Muslim rule was not simply one of overlapping categories but more directly a permeability of people. Through conversion, individuals visibly transferred themselves from one community to another.[112] Scholars remain divided regarding the conversion rate of Christians to Islam, especially as Muslim rulers initially discouraged and certainly did not require non-Arabs to become Muslim.[113] Most famously, Richard Bulliet's analysis of Muslim biographical dictionaries estimated that Christians became a minority in early ninth-century Iran and early tenth-century Iraq. Initially meant to correct claims of a more rapid decrease in the number of Christians, more recent scholarship has challenged Bulliet's timetable as itself too precipitous.[114]

Over the span of centuries, most Syriac Christians eventually did convert to Islam. But over the period of an individual lifetime, this demographic shift would have been less perceivable. Additionally, for much of the period the Syriac churches were also gaining converts from other populations. For example, the late eighth and early ninth centuries were periods of such immense growth for the Church of the East that Timothy I established six new ecclesiastical provinces and sent missionaries to India, China, Turkestan, Yemen, and Tibet.[115] Syriac sources also spoke of gaining new converts from Zoroastrians, and if one can trust John bar Penkāyē's complaint regarding Miaphysites, Muslim rule may have motivated some Chalcedonian Christians to join other Syriac churches less directly associated with Byzantium.[116]

As a result, in the first two and a half centuries of Islamic rule, the actual number of converts from Christianity to Islam did not threaten the survival of Syriac Christianity. Nevertheless, especially during those times when the social and economic benefits of conversion were high, the threat of mass conversion weighed heavily on the minds of Syriac authors.[117] Modern scholars have repeatedly claimed that many Syriac texts about Islam were originally written to help stem conversion. Sources ranging from apologies defending Christian doctrine to polemical texts ridiculing Islam could have been useful for dissuading potential converts.[118] Nonetheless, it remains noteworthy that very few Syriac texts explicitly addressed the issue of conversion. Even more surprising, instead of firming up categorical divisions between Christianity and Islam, surviving Syriac conversion accounts often made confessional boundaries even more blurry.

The earliest Syriac conversion account appeared in a letter written by the East Syrian catholicos Ishoʿyahb III (d. 659). Ishoʿyahb addressed his *Letter* 14C to Simeon, the metropolitan bishop of Rev Ardashir, who was

attempting to secede from the catholicos's authority. Ishoʿyahb's letter included a lengthy reprimand of the alleged shortcomings of Christians under Simeon's jurisdiction. As part of this list, he asked why, despite *ṭayyāyē* rule constantly favoring East Syrian Christians, they "forsake their [own] faith [*haymānutun*] on pretext of theirs? And this when, as even the *Mzwnāyē* say, the *ṭayyāyē* did not force them to forsake their faith [*haymānutun*]. To keep their faith [*haymānutun*] they only asked them to forsake half of their possessions."[119] Unfortunately, Ishoʿyahb's pointed inquiry raised more questions than it answered. Just a sentence earlier, he had stated that the *ṭayyāyē* praised Christianity, honored the clergy, and aided churches. How was this consistent with the catholicos's assertion that they demanded half of a Christian's possessions? Given that most modern scholars argue that it was not until the tax reforms of ʿUmar II (r. 717–720) that converts received any substantial tax benefit, how can we account for Ishoʿyahb's claims? If mid-seventh-century rulers were indeed issuing a 50 percent tax against Christians, why do we not hear of this in any other source?

The allusion to conversion in Ishoʿyahb's *Letter* was not an unbiased description of on-the-ground reality. Instead, the author employed a very brief conversion narrative in response to a pressing internal crisis of church polity.[120] His reference to conversion served primarily as a polemical analogy. In attempting to secede from his catholicos's authority Simeon was as worldly and faithless as those who abandoned their faith for financial gain. Ishoʿyahb thus used one sort of apostasy, a city's alleged denial of Christianity, to reprimand what he saw as another, their bishop's disobedience.

Two decades later, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* provided a slightly longer conversion account: "Many who were children of the church will deny the Christians' true faith, the holy cross, and the glorious mysteries. Without compulsion, lashing, or blows, they will deny Christ and make themselves like unbelievers."[121] For *Pseudo-Methodius*, such apostasy had individual as well as communal consequences. The author was particularly concerned lest his audience consider these conversions as signs of God's disapproval. To guard against this, *Pseudo-Methodius* made several arguments to support the initially counterintuitive claim that apostasy actually proved the community's orthodoxy. First, denials of Christ were not unexpected but part of God's preordained plan for history. As the author claimed to be the fourth-century martyr Methodius, what could be seen as an admission (contemporary Christians were apostatizing) was instead framed as a prediction (even four and a half centuries earlier God revealed that such apostasy would occur). This

argument was made even more explicit when the apocalypse explained that the apostle Paul had prophesied concerning these events when he wrote, "In latter times people will leave the faith and follow unclean spirits and the doctrine of demons."[122] On an apologetic level, the citation of 1 Timothy 4:1 furthered the position that all along God knew that in the reader's time some would apostatize. On a polemical level, it characterized the Ishmaelites' beliefs as demonic and implicated apostates as accomplices of demons.[123]

Pseudo-Methodius also argued that there were no real conversions, for those who eventually denied Christianity were never truly Christian in the first place. *Pseudo-Methodius* drew primarily on Paul's remnant theology found in Romans 9–11. Just as Paul argued that "not all who belong to Israel are Israel" (Romans 9:6), so, too, in the reader's day, not all who claimed to be Christian truly were so. *Pseudo-Methodius* even portrayed apostasy as strengthening the church, for "all who are fraudulent and weak in faith will be tested in this chastisement and become known. . . . And they will willingly seperate themselves from the Christian congregation."[124] The Sons of Ishmael thus served as a "testing furnace," "that the faithful might be seperated from the unfaithful."[125]

Finally, just as *Pseudo-Methodius* elsewhere argued that the conquests did not reflect God's love of the Sons of Ishmael but were simply a brief phase before their dramatic defeat, the apocalypse also foretold divine revenge on apostates. Through the imminent arrival of the eschatological king of the Greeks, not only would God impose slavery a hundred times more bitter on the Sons of Ishmael than that which Christians had experienced but also "all the anger and wrath of the King of the Greeks will be upon those who denied Christ."[126]

Although we might say that *Pseudo-Methodius* contained a conversion account, its author would most likely have disagreed. In *Pseudo-Methodius*, there was no moving from one community to another, but an act of denial (*kpar*) that divulged where one's allegiances were from the very beginning. From this perspective, there was no "turning" in conversion, nor any point in discussing an apostate's "return." Apostasy was not a transformation but a revelation. The apostate never really belonged to Israel, but to demons all along.

Pseudo-Methodius's contemporary Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) presented a very different view of conversion. Like most modern understandings of conversion, for Jacob conversion was in some sense transformative. It moved an individual from one state to another. This perspective affected even the

language that Jacob and his correspondents used. His three references to conversion spoke of someone who might "become a Hagarene" (*hagar*) or someone who wants to "return" (*hpak*, *pnā*) to Christianity. According to Jacob, an individual could start as a Christian, move to being a Hagarene, and come back to Christianity.

In his discussion of intermarriage, Jacob spoke about a Christian woman married to a Hagarene husband. He ruled that the woman's priest should assign her penance to dissuade other Christians from intermarrying. Nevertheless, Jacob wanted to ensure that the woman did not become discouraged and decide to become a Hagarene. So he specified that the assigned penance should no be more than she could bear, and he emphasized that the priest should still serve the Eucharist to this woman.[127]

This ruling aimed to prevent a potential conversion from occurring in the first place. Jacob's other two discussions of conversion were post facto; both spoke of former Christians, now Muslims, wanting to return to Christianity. In another letter to Addai, Jacob responded to the question of whether a priest should pardon a former Christian who had become a Hagarene or a *ḥanpā* but, when dying, wanted to return to Christianity. Jacob responded that the priest could pardon him. If the reconvert subsequently died, the priest was to bury him. If he lived, the reconvert must see a bishop who would impose appropriate penance, but not harsher than what the penitent was able to bear.[128]

In a letter written to John the Stylite, Jacob responded to a similar issue but with greater detail. John spoke of a Christian who became a Hagarene but now wanted to return to Christianity.[129] He asked Jacob two questions: (1) Should the reconvert be rebaptized? (2) By becoming a Hagarene, had the reconvert lost the grace of baptism? Jacob responded first with the proper ritual sequence for reconverting a Christian. He should not be rebaptized. Instead, the head priest should pray over him and after a period of penitence allow him to take the Eucharist. As for the reconvert's spiritual well-being, Jacob claimed that only God could answer such a question. Then he concluded with a puzzling statement suggesting that the convert would actually be eternally damned. As this ending seemed to contradict Jacob's other statements on reconversion, it might have been a later addition to the manuscript tradition. Regardless of whether these last sentences stemmed from Jacob's second thoughts or from an interpolation, when Barhebraeus copied this canon in the thirteenth century, he did not include the ambiguous ending.[130] Unlike the original letter, Barhebraeus's version also clearly distinguished between Hagarenes and *ḥanpē*.

Jacob's canons were not direct witnesses to life as actually experienced among late seventh-century Miaphysites. Nevertheless, his three decisions regarding conversion and reconversion remained tantalizing both in what they portrayed and in what they did not say. They depicted a world in which the boundaries between Christianity and Islam were easily traversed. Christians intermarried with Muslims and were at a particularly high risk of becoming Muslim. Overly harsh penance might further precipitate their apostasy. Other Christians had already become Muslim, and some later wanted to return to Christianity. In an emergency, these double converts could quickly be pardoned. Otherwise they should undergo a ritual for readmission into the Christian community, even if their eventual fate remained indeterminate.

What these rulings did not provide was any indication of the frequency, the motivation, or the circumstances of these conversions. They were also strangely silent regarding the role of Muslim authorities in such cases. Of particular note, Jacob's two discussions of reconversion never suggested that the erstwhile Christians, then Muslims, and again Christians would be in danger of governmental repercussions for having converted from Islam to Christianity. They suggested that in Jacob's time Muslim conversion to Christianity was not yet seen as a capital offense. All three decisions also pointed toward a much more permeable boundary between Christianity and Islam than that tolerated by most later writers.

After Jacob of Edessa, one has to wait almost a century to find among Syriac sources anything other than brief allusions to conversion.[131] In 775, however, the anonymous author of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* dedicated the last six folios of his chronicle to this topic. According to the chronicle, to avoid paying the poll tax, thousands apostatized: "Not only the young but also adults and those old in days. Worse of all, innumerable priests, presbyters, and deacons also did this."[132]

Like *Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* harshly depicted conversion to dissuade yet more Christians from becoming Muslim. To apostatize was to trade Christ for Satan, and paradise for "unquenchable fire."[133] As happened to Judas when he betrayed Christ, whenever Christians converted to Islam, the Holy Spirit left their bodies and was replaced by an impure spirit.[134] The discerning could recognize such apostates by their smell, as well as by the look in their eyes "as that radiant image of their substance became disfigured."[135]

In addition to discussing the converts, the chronicler initially provided a few details about the conversion process. Apostates went before a governor.[136]

They then renounced "Christ, baptism, the Eucharist and the Cross . . . and everything of Christ's providence, confessing only that Christ is the Word and the Spirit of God."[137] Afterward, their names were placed on an official list.[138] Nevertheless, according to the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, those who left the Christian community were never accepted as true Muslims; other Muslims still distinguished them from those who were born Muslim.[139]

The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* followed this general description of apostasy with two specific conversion narratives. The first concerned a deacon who went to a *ṭayyāyā* sponsor to help him become a Hagarene. The chronicler emphasized that the *ṭayyāyā* initially tried to dissuade the deacon from converting, warning that if the deacon were later to return to Christianity he would be tortured, presumably by Muslim authorities.[140] Eventually, however, the *ṭayyāyā* agreed to convert the deacon. He asked the deacon to verbally renounce Christ, baptism, the cross, the Eucharist, "and everything which Christians confess." The convert then had to affirm that Muḥammad was the messenger of God, proclaim belief in "the book that descended upon him from heaven," and agree that "Isa is the Word and Spirit of God, he is a prophet, but he is not God."[141] Finally, the deacon was to untie his belt and pray to the south.[142] As soon as the deacon did this, "something like a white and beautiful dove came out of his mouth and ascended to heaven. And when that wretch saw this, he wailed grievously like a woman. He terrified all those who were there, saying, 'Woe to me! Woe to me! Woe to me! What has happened to me?'"[143]

The chronicler clearly intended his readers to be as terrified by this narrative as were those who had just witnessed the Holy Spirit's dramatic departure. This account of a specific apostate repeated almost verbatim the chronicler's earlier generalities about conversion. In both discussions, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* emphasized that Christians were never pressured to convert, provided the same list of what was renounced, and focused on the apostate's loss of the Holy Spirit. Such a narrative was substantially different from Jacob's canons. For Jacob of Edessa, a Christian could convert to Islam and return to Christianity, although his fate in the next world might be uncertain. In the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, religious conversion was a one-way street. Not only would Muslim authorities torture anyone who tried to return to Christianity, but the very act of conversion required the convert to renounce everything Christian and inevitably lose the Holy Spirit. For this chronicler, there was no question as to the fate of a convert to Islam. An apostate would suffer horrifically in this life and the next.

Both the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*'s general comments on conversion and its tale of the wailing deacon tried to make a clear distinction between Christianity and Islam. Its second extensive conversion narrative, however, suggested that there might have been much greater categorical ambiguity in eighth-century Mesopotamia than the chronicler desired. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* dedicated its last folios to a martyrology in which the protagonist, Cyrus of Harran, served as a foil to Christians in the *Chronicle* who, without any coercion, nevertheless converted to Islam.[144] The concluding martyrology, however, was far from a straightforward account. One difficulty had to do with the manuscript's fragmentary state of preservation; the very text narrating the martyrdom of Cyrus had itself suffered over time and now contains a number of worm-eaten lacunae. But even if it had been fully preserved, the martyrdom of Cyrus of Harran would still have been a problematic tale. How could the chronicler write a traditional Christian martyrology set in a time when being Christian was perfectly legal? At first glance, an easy solution would be for this to have been a story of reconversion. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* had already referred to the torturing of converts to Islam who later returned to Christianity. In fact, three centuries later, when the same Cyrus made a brief appearance in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian, Michael spoke of Cyrus having originally converted to Islam, later returning to Christianity, and being martyred because of his reconversion.[145]

Michael's way of telling the story, however, would have been completely unacceptable to the author of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*. Cyrus being a reconvert would contradict the *Chronicle*'s previous anecdotes in which once a Christian converted to Islam there was no turning back. Furthermore, if he himself were a convert to Islam, Cyrus would not have the faith and perseverance necessary to serve as a foil to the wailing deacon or the *Chronicle*'s thousands of apostates seeking to avoid the poll tax. The chronicler had to find a way to explain Cyrus's martyrdom and still write an anticonversion account.

The result was a narrative of hybridity made all the more confusing by the text's incomplete state of preservation. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* began by giving Cyrus impeccable credentials. His father was a virtuous Christian priest. The piety of his mother was comparable to that of John the Baptist. Cyrus himself was a "blessed fruit" whose faith shone like a brilliant star amid the dark city of Harran, a renowned center of paganism.[146] After such a literally clear beginning, the story quickly became murky. The next few lines are fragmentary but spoke of Cyrus's strength and courage and then of a battle between Muslim troops. The missing text must have connected Cyrus with

this battle, most likely as a soldier in one of the Muslim armies.[147] Although the figure of a Christian fighting alongside Muslims appeared in contemporary accounts, a Muslim army was not necessarily the first place one would look for someone "who journeyed on the path that Christ prepared for us."[148]

Fifteen lines later, the text is mostly intact, but the situation is no less puzzling. Cyrus was back in Harran. Unnamed opponents had leveled false accusations against him, and he was being tried by the Abbasid emir, Humayd ibn Qaḥṭaba. Apparently Cyrus had just asked the governor that he be allowed to pay the poll tax. The emir was initially confused by this request. Few go out of their way to pay taxes, and, according to the emir's records, Cyrus was Muslim and thus exempt from the poll tax. Cyrus explained that although he had been registered as a Muslim, this was done against his will. The governor insisted that Cyrus nevertheless was Muslim and therefore could not pay the poll tax. Instead, he must accompany the emir to prayer. Otherwise the governor would torture him for apostasy.[149]

From here on, the narrative conformed to the standard topoi of Christian martyrology. The emir demanded that Cyrus deny Jesus and instead proclaim the Muslim confession of faith. When Cyrus refused, the governor tried to ply him with promises of riches should he renounce Christ, and with promises of physical torment if he did not. When Cyrus did not yield, the governor threw him into prison.[150] The extant text then breaks off for a few lines, and when it returns Cyrus had apparently escaped from prison. After four years and a few more lines of fragmentary text had passed, Cyrus decided to go back to Harran, even though he knew that he would be martyred on his return. His fellow Christians tried to persuade him to stay safely in Edessa, but Cyrus assured them that he was prepared to be a lamb for the slaughter.[151] At this point, the surviving text breaks off entirely. But the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*'s earlier note that Cyrus of Harran was martyred in 770 leaves little doubt as to the story's original conclusion.[152]

What amounted to little more than a clerical error—Cyrus improperly registered as a Muslim—gave the chronicler the martyr he had been looking for. This plot twist allowed for Cyrus's life to be resolutely Christian (and therefore a foil to that of apostates), but for his death to still occur through martyrdom under Muslim rule. The resulting narrative also helped the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* appropriate centuries of antipagan polemics found in earlier Christian martyrologies and redeploy them against Islam. This process was both facilitated by and facilitated the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*'s recurrent claim that Islam was a form of paganism. But while the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* sought

to solidify divisions between Christianity and Islam, it seemed to blur them further. For, now, governmental authorities, accidentally or otherwise, could claim that the staunchest of Christians was actually a Muslim.

We have no better way to confirm the veracity of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*'s account of Cyrus of Harran than we do its account of the wailing deacon, about whom the chronicler "forgot the name of the man, that of his father, and also that of his village."[153] The question of Cyrus's historical existence, however, had little effect on later readers. Regardless of how accurately they depicted late eighth-century Mesopotamia, the *Chronicle*'s stories of the thousands of anonymous apostates, the wailing deacon, and the martyr Cyrus came together to construct a narrative world in which conversion from Christianity to Islam signified both the distance and (intentionally or otherwise) the potential overlap between these communities.

Ishoʿyahb III's *Letter* 14C, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, Jacob of Edessa's rulings, and the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* all addressed Christians apostatizing. Occasionally, Syriac sources also spoke of Muslims later becoming Christian. For example, Ishoʿdnah of Basra's ninth-century *Book of Chastity* briefly outlined the life of Joseph Hazzaya, the son of a Zoroastrian priest.[154] When he was seven years old, Joseph was captured by *ṭayyāyē* and sold into slavery. His *ṭayyāyā* master had him circumcised and "made him a *ḥanpā*." In theory the term *ḥanpā* could have meant that Joseph became a polytheist or that he became a Muslim. But it made little sense for a *ṭayyāyā* to circumcise the young Joseph to make him a polytheist. Instead, this narrative episode of his circumcision almost certainly pointed toward his having been made Muslim. Three years later, Joseph was sold to a Christian. When he and his Christian master visited the monastery of John Kamul, Joseph was filled with love for Christ and baptized. He later entered the monastery and eventually became an abbot.[155]

In the *Book of Chastity*, Joseph's childhood conversions from Zoroastrianism to Islam and eventually to Christianity foreshadowed his later spiritual progress as a monk. But these conversions were not the story's main focus. Other Syriac works, however, more explicitly emphasized a Muslim's conversion to Christianity. For example, in the *Life of Gabriel of Qartmin*, Gabriel's miracles persuading an Arabian to convert to Christianity became one of the author's primary examples of the divine powers God granted this seventh-century Miaphysite saint.[156] At this point in his *Life*, Mār Gabriel had recently become abbot of the Monastery of Mār Simeon. In his new role, Gabriel "performed many signs and wonders." But the narrative detailed only one of them.[157]

While Mār Gabriel was abbot, a wealthy Arabian merchant visited the monastery and befriended a monk named John.[158] Impressed by John's discretion, prior to leaving on a potentially dangerous journey, the merchant deposited 1,000 dinars of gold with his new friend. Unfortunately, John was a bit too discreet and never told anyone about the Arabian's gold. When the Arabian returned three years later, John had died, and none of the remaining monks knew anything about the deposit. The infuriated merchant began torturing one of the monks, threatening to cut him apart "limb from limb" unless he told him where the money was. Luckily for the monk, Mār Gabriel intervened, took the Arabian to John's tomb, and demanded that the dead man tell them where the gold lay. John's voice came forth from the tomb revealing where the deposit was buried. After uncovering the gold, the merchant was so amazed at Mār Gabriel's power that he swore to never leave this monastery where "the dead speak with the living." The merchant was baptized, distributed all his possessions to the poor, joined the monastery, and became a famous miracle worker.[159] As for Mār Gabriel, immediately after this episode he was ordained a bishop and traveled to the court of the caliph ʿUmar, where he obtained a treaty guaranteeing that Christian clergy and monks would be exempt from taxation and that no restrictions would ever be placed on their public worship.[160]

Almost exactly the same story appeared in the late eighth-century *Chronicle of Zuqnin*. A *ṭayyāyā* deposited his money with the doorkeeper of the Miaphysite monastery of Mār Abel. The doorkeeper buried it and died without telling anyone about the deposit. When the *ṭayyāyā* returned three years later, he began to torture the monks. In this case, the holy Mār Habib temporarily resurrected the doorkeeper, asked him where the money was hidden, and subsequently returned the deposit to the *ṭayyāyā*.[161] Although set at a different time, in a different monastery, and with a different holy man, this was essentially the same tale. But unlike the *Life of Gabriel of Qartmin*, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* made no mention of the *ṭayyāyā* converting to Christianity.

A similar reluctance to portray a Muslim converting to Christianity can be found in the Miaphysite *Life of Theoduṭē*. Possibly written as early as the late seventh century, the *Life of Theoduṭē* related the encounter of the *ṭayyāyā* ruler of Āmīd with the city's future bishop, Theoduṭē.[162] The narrative began with Satan enticing the unnamed ruler to falsely accuse Theoduṭē of conspiring with the Byzantines. The wicked ruler subsequently apprehended Theoduṭē, dragged him into a mosque, and had him beaten. That evening God blinded the ruler, who then begged Theoduṭē's forgiveness.

Unfortunately for the ruler, Theoduṭē was not feeling particularly lenient. He cursed him and told him, "Once God's arrow has been loosed, it cannot be deflected from its target." His only concession was that, for God's name to be glorified, the ruler would regain his sight, but he then "will be hit again, and harder." Theoduṭē made the sign of the cross and used Jesus' name to heal the ruler. "All who witnessed it were amazed," and Christians, Hagarenes, and *ḥanpē* flocked to seek Theoduṭē's blessing. As for the ruler, the very next day he was thrown from his horse and died. As a result, "the people feared the Lord and his servant."

This incident in the *Life of Theoduṭē* contained intriguing parallels to Paul's conversion narratives as they appeared in Acts. Like Paul, the unnamed ruler began as a persecutor of Christians. But in this case, he dragged a Christian into a mosque instead of out of a synagogue. God blinded him, like Paul; and, like Paul, he regained his sight through the intervention of a Christian holy man. But the anecdote's conclusion both alluded to and broke from its exemplar. The story ended where Paul's conversion began: while traveling the main character fell to the ground. Acts used this incident to start Paul's journey toward becoming a Christian. The *Life of Theoduṭē* used this incident to end the ruler's life. Nevertheless, even deceased, the ruler became a sort of evangelist, his death causing many to fear the Lord.

Through its incomplete echoing of Acts, the *Life of Theoduṭē* hinted at but then pulled back from becoming a conversion narrative in which the deeds of the Christian holy man persuaded a Muslim to convert to Christianity; instead of completing the motif and converting the ruler, the text killed him. Nonetheless, even without a full-fledged conversion, the author's description of the ruler's fate still made a far from subtle comparison between Muslim leaders and Christian holy men, and, by implication, the power of their respective religions. It was only through the sign of a cross and Jesus' name that the previously sightless leader recovered long enough to bear witness to Christian truth, causing all to recognize God's power, as well as the power of the soon-to-be bishop of Āmīd.

A similar, albeit less lethal conclusion occurred among the ninth-century anecdotes of Thomas of Margā's *Book of Governors*. At one point, Thomas told of Mār Elijah's successful exorcism of a *ṭayyāyā* woman who was possessed by demons. After the demons' expulsion, the woman proclaimed, "There is no faith or truth except among the holy Christian people."[163] But despite her proclamation of Christian belief, she was never baptized.

A few Syriac texts spoke of Muslims converting to Christianity.[164] Most

instead went the way of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, the *Life of Theoduṭē*, and the *Book of Governors*. They carried the narrative to the point where one would expect the Muslim character to convert, but then went no further. One could argue that constraints of realism intervened in such cases. Although Christian readers were perfectly happy to accept stories of temporary resurrections, miraculous healings, and divine smitings, a Muslim converting to Christianity might have strained credibility. Alternatively, these "almost conversion" narratives may themselves have had an important apologetic function. Even if the occasional conversion of a Muslim could beef up the résumé of a Christian holy man, it in no way explained why, in their own experiences, most readers of these tales more often witnessed Christians becoming Muslims than the other way around. Stories in which Muslim characters came to recognize the truth of Christianity but nevertheless did not convert opened up the possibility of numerous crypto-Christians. They suggested that the lack of mass conversions to Christianity in no way detracted from the widespread acknowledgment of Christian superiority. These narratives reinforced the argument that the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* explicitly put on the lips of its Muslim interlocutor: "were it not for the fear of the government and of shame from men, many would become Christians."[165]

At first, one might assume that conversion accounts shored up the permeability found in other Syriac sources. That is, in their descriptions of people moving from one religious category to another, these accounts would reify a categorical distinction between Christianity and Islam. Some Syriac accounts clearly intended to do this. But most ended up adding instead of subtracting ambiguity. To explain why many had apostatized, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* argued that not all who seemed to be Christian would turn out to be Christian in the end. Jacob of Edessa's rulings made the boundary between Islam and Christianity more porous by establishing specific rituals to allow former Christians to return to the fold. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* concluded with a martyr who claimed to be Christian yet was claimed to be Muslim. The few stories of conversions from Islam to Christianity and the more numerous "almost conversion" narratives raised the possibility of an untold number of crypto-Christian Muslims. Modern scholars categorize most of these conversion accounts as fictitious. Nonetheless, their complex narratives of ambiguity and hybridity often seemed surprisingly realistic.

• • •

In 2003, Fred Donner began his article "From Believers to Muslims":

> Studies of early Islam, by Muslims and non-Muslim scholars alike, have almost without exception taken as axiomatic that Islam from its early days constituted a separate religious confession distinct from others—in particular, distinct from Judaism, Christianity, Magianism, and of course from the *mushrikūn*, those who "associate other beings with God."[166]

Thanks in large part to Donner's seminal article, as well as his later book *Muhammad and the Believers*, this passage is no longer an accurate depiction of Islamic studies.[167] What was once relegated to a handful of specialists has become increasingly mainstream in the study of classical Islam. Recent works by scholars such as Chase Robinson, Stephen Shoemaker, and others emphasize the difficulties in differentiating seventh-century Islam from other monotheistic traditions.[168] Although not without its detractors, such scholarship suggests a fairly substantial paradigm shift.

Donner and others argue that the earliest Muslim *umma* included not only people whom we would characterize as Muslims but also Christians and Jews. In its earliest incarnation, normative Islam was not an exclusive religious category. Instead, Islam was originally multiconfessional. Most of these scholars suggest that in the late seventh century Islam decidedly broke from this earlier model of an ecumenical movement. Especially during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 684–705), Islam quickly solidified into a more rigidly defined religious community in which the categories of Muslims and People of the Book (i.e., Christians, Jews, and in some cases Zoroastrians) became mutually exclusive.[169] Syriac discussions of cross-confessional interaction, Christian-like Muslims, Muslim-like Christians, and conversion accounts certainly complement these recent works in Islamic studies. Here we enter the world of conflicts—real and imagined—that reflected both the fantasy and the reality of being a subject community.

Syriac materials, however, differed in two important ways from the sources most commonly cited by Islamicists. First, those who argue for the interconfessional character of nascent Islam most often rely on early normative texts, chiefly the Qur'an and the *Constitution of Medina*. They use these Islamic writings to investigate how early Muslim elites defined membership in Islam. Early Syriac writings offer a different perspective that on occasion may have better reflected on-the-ground practice. Syriac authors did not pen

unproblematic, objective accounts. Nevertheless, when an eighth-century Syriac scribe refashioned an earlier letter into a diatribe against Christians attending Muslim festivals, the manuscript change provided a fairly strong indication that popular practice transgressed the boundaries instituted by Muslim and Christian elites. Texts such as the Qur'an and the Dome of the Rock inscriptions provided useful information on changing prescriptions of what Islam should be like. Early Syriac works often complemented Islamic sources by providing intriguing glimpses of everyday practices.

Second, the chronological range of Syriac materials allows them to do more than simply reinforce the idea of a fairly ecumenical, early seventh-century "community of believers." Even among Islamicists who argue for substantial overlap between nascent Islam and Christianity, most claim that, soon after the second *fitna*, the *umma* excluded Christians. This hypothesis relies on a model of religious distinction not that dissimilar from the older heuristic of early Christian-Jewish relations in which the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE resulted in a clean separation of church and synagogue. Syriac sources challenge this view and point toward a world characterized by continued religious ambiguity and border crossings that did not neatly end under ʿAbd al-Malik. Syriac texts indicate that even as late as the ninth century Islam and Christianity had not fully parted.

These texts suggest that the prevalent image of early Christianity and early Islam as fairly separate religious entities is anachronistic not just for the early seventh century but also for long afterward. According to the conventional narrative, when he wrote during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, Jacob of Edessa should not have worried that Christians would drape their altars with Muslim confessions of faith. Nor should late seventh-century Muslims have concerned themselves with the power of pilfered Christian Eucharist elements. An eighth-century Christian translator should have known better than to refer to Muḥammad as God's messenger. Ninth-century Christians should not have expected that they could become circumcised like Muslims yet still be considered Christian. Syriac writings ranging from the seventh-century *Maronite Chronicle* to the eighth-century *Chronicle of Zuqnin* to the ninth-century *Book of Governors* are not supposed to have presented, with so little comment, narratives of a Muslim caliph praying in the Holy Sepulcher, a Christian martyr whom an emir considered to be Muslim, and Christians proclaiming that Jesus was simply one of the prophets.

Syriac sources reflected ongoing debates between those who desired a clear confessional boundary between Christianity and Islam and those "who

simply didn't recognize the legitimacy or even the existence of the border."[170] For early Christian authors, the disconnect between elite prescription and popular practice presented a very practical problem: How could they solidify distinctions between Christian church and Muslim *umma*? Literary narratives, canon laws, and even physical changes to manuscripts attested to various strategies that were used to more clearly define and regulate the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. For modern scholars, this fluidity also presents a problem—in this case, a historiographical one. There is a tendency for "scholars to retroject modern anxieties about religious clarity and orthodoxy onto a period of blur and flux in religious boundaries."[171] The result is a perilous alignment of the biases of ancient texts with those of modern scholarship. Both tend toward downplaying the categorical overlap, precarious lines, and fuzzy borders that characterized early Christianity and early Islam.

Here is where the recent work on early Christian-Jewish relations cited in this book's introduction seems particularly useful. Increased attention to late ancient Christians and Jews sharing meals, worship spaces, festivals, blessings, and intermarrying has led many modern scholars to abandon the previous consensus of an early, clean distinction between church and synagogue. Syriac evidence for analogous Christian-Muslim interactions suggests that it may be equally fruitful to question the axiom that "from its early days [Islam] constituted a separate religious confession distinct from others."[172] Recent scholarship on early Christian-Jewish relations has begun to replace a model of "the parting of the ways" with heuristics of hybridity, membership gradience, and continuous community. The result is "not a history based on inviolable boundaries, but a history based on border crossings so fluent that the borders themselves sometimes are hard to distinguish."[173] Regardless what specific language we use to describe the seventh through ninth centuries, similar paradigms can help us better appreciate and better convey the messiness of late ancient religiosity.

No single Syriac source alone necessitates such a reevaluation of early Christianity and early Islam. Some were just stories. Some are difficult to date. Some may simply have been idiosyncratic, misinformed, or purposefully misleading. But given their number, their appearance across genres, and their composition throughout the first two and a half Islamic centuries, we should not simply disregard or facilely dismiss them. Instead, taken as a whole, they strongly suggest that, throughout much of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, the boundaries between Christianity and Islam were often "so fuzzy that one could hardly say precisely at what point one stopped and the other began."[174]

Conclusion

> Some Westerners . . . have argued that the West does not have problems with Islam but only with Islamist extremists. Fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate otherwise. The twentieth-century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxist-Leninism is only a fleeting and superficial historical phenomena compared to the continuing and deeply conflictual relations between Islam and Christianity. . . . The causes of this ongoing pattern of conflict . . . flow from the nature of the two religions and the civilizations based on them.
>
> —Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*

In 1993 Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington published a *Foreign Affairs* article and later a book popularizing the phrase "clash of civilizations."[1] Rarely can one so clearly document an academic writer's effect on the popular imagination. Prior to 1993, the periodical database Nexis records only 11 sources using the phrase "clash of civilizations." In the seven years following Huntington's work, this number increased to 625. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the number of citations jumped to over 5,000.[2]

In his book, Huntington identified nine civilization groups that could potentially clash. In theory, each of these civilizations should receive equal attention. In practice, this was decidedly not the case. Initially, one-third of the time when a publication specified a clashing civilization, it was Islam. Post-9/11, Islam—one of Huntington's nine civilization groups—constituted 68 percent of the references.[3] The result is a dualistic worldview in which a homogeneous entity called Islam inevitably clashes with an equally entrenched entity Huntington calls "the West."

Huntington's work was more interested in predicting the future than in

discussing the past. But this did not deter him from overarching statements in which "fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate" that seemingly inevitable Christian-Muslim conflicts "flow from the nature of the two religions."[4] Recently published, widely read hate literature builds on this paradigm. To cite a particularly egregious example, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam* claims "to give you all the information you need to understand the true nature of the global conflict that America faces today." Such information includes that "Islam is a religion of war; it is also, profoundly, a religion of intolerance," and that, throughout its history, Islam has never even tolerated non-Muslims.[5] The broad popularity of *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam* caused it to rank among the top 0.1 percent of Amazon.com sales, and, for almost three years, it was Amazon's top best seller in the category "Islamic history." Similar sentiments can be found in other well-circulated publications, such as *Christians, Muslims, and Islamic Rage*; *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide*; and *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West*, that explicitly refer to Huntington's work.[6]

A string of unsupported accusations dominates many of these texts. A surprising number of recent publications, however, come with the trappings of academic legitimacy. For example, the aforementioned *Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam* contains numerous sidebars of books "you're not supposed to read." These provide a reading list of supposedly scholarly works that present "a devastating refutation of the whitewashed PC myth" of Islamic tolerance.[7] Of particular import to these anti-Muslim writers are a series of books first appearing in 1971 under the pen name Bat Ye'or. Bat Ye'or's most famous work, *The Dhimmi*, consists of a series of introductory essays constructing a history of continuous Muslim oppression of Jews and Christians. The second half of the book supports this vision of uninterrupted conflict through 244 pages of excerpted primary sources, often taken substantially out of context.[8] For Bat Ye'or and the numerous writers who cite her, reconstruction of the early history of Christian-Muslim relations becomes a heuristic for understanding all subsequent phases of Christian-Muslim interactions.

Historians will never eliminate the sales potential of books like *The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimitude, and Freedom*; *Jihad in the West: Muslim Conquests from the 7th to the 21st Centuries*; and *Islam Unveiled*.[9] Nevertheless, the continued neglect of early Syriac sources certainly makes these authors' job much easier. Greek and Latin texts remain far from homogeneous in their discussions of Islam. The martial context in which many were written, however, results in a number of them having particular appeal for those who advocate

a clash-of-civilizations model of Christian-Muslim encounters. Syriac sources are not immune from this sort of appropriation. Nonetheless, their diversity of images of Islam serves as an important corrective to models of inevitable, unmitigated conflict between Christians and Muslims.

The greatest value of Syriac writings on Islam, however, lies not simply in providing a list of counterexamples that illustrate more positive Christian depictions of Muslims or instances when Muslim authorities acted beneficently toward Christians. As many have pointed out, what we define as religious tolerance is anachronistic for the late ancient and medieval world.[10] To consider another faith as having as much access to divine truth as one's own would have made little sense to those living in the first millennium, regardless whether they were Muslim, Christian, Jewish, or Zoroastrian. In the present political climate, countering excerpts of anti-Muslim writings with less hostile sources may help us to envision a less adverse history (and hence future) of Christian-Muslim relations. But if historians of antiquity uncritically accept the terms of this debate—that one can somehow measure a given religion's overall level of tolerance—we risk perpetuating the very reductionism that should be refuted.

A historically contextualized and synthetic examination of Syriac sources, however, leads to a much more nuanced view of early Christian-Muslim encounters. Syriac sources reflected a world in which the question of relative tolerance was not the primary concern. Instead, beneath the surface of even the most polemic writings lay evidence of connected cultures, shared histories, and religious interdependence. Neither a paradigm of clashing civilizations nor one of universally tolerant *convivencia* could properly conceptualize this multifaceted, interconnected world.

For Syriac Christians, the challenge was not so much how to coexist but how to remain distinct. Their discussions of Islam rarely focused just on Islam. Instead, these writers' emphasis always remained on Christian self-identity. From this perspective, competing Christian communities were often much more threatening than Muslims were. As a result, to modern eyes, Syriac authors frequently come across as quite accommodating or occasionally even indifferent toward Islam. This disconnect between ancient and modern concerns necessitates that historians address questions other than just the relative level of tolerance. *Envisioning Islam* has tried to illustrate some of the benefits of such an approach.

By concentrating on the writings of seventh- through ninth-century Syriac Christians, *Envisioning Islam* has explored how rarely studied works could

substantially enhance understanding of early Christianity, early Islam, and Christian-Muslim interactions. From the diverse perspectives of these earliest Christian writings about Muslims, Christianity and Islam no longer seem to have been locked in an inevitable conflict that "flows from the nature of the two religions and the civilizations based on them."[11] These writings further suggest that for centuries Christianity and Islam exhibited too much permeability, interdependence, and convergence to be defined as firmly bound, independent entities, to say nothing of clashing civilizations.

Through focusing on Syriac texts, I have aimed to produce an in-depth case example of early Christian reactions to Islam and to highlight the importance of relatively unexplored texts for understanding Christian-Muslim interactions. As a case example, the point is not that Syriac literature is uniquely suited for such an inquiry. Instead, by examining the rich Syriac documentation of early Christian-Muslim encounters, I hope to motivate future scholars to more thoroughly incorporate the perspectives of all the churches under Islamic rule. Such a project would benefit from additional in-depth analysis of specific linguistic traditions, as well as from more synthetic studies that begin to put these diverse perspectives into conversation with each other. Through a synthetic, book-length examination of a substantial subset of these texts, I wanted to signal how rich this corpus remains for additional study. For these texts not only provide us with important data concerning ancient images of Islam. They also remain vital for helping us to re-envision the world's two largest religions and their relations with each other.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

Epigraph: Jacob of Edessa, *Second Letter to John the Stylite* 9 (*CSCO* 367:237).

1. In particular, see Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 16–24.

2. Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 11.

3. John Chrysostom, *Discourses* 8.8.9, 1.1.5 (*PG* 48:941, 844).

4. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

5. Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1997); David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1, *600–900* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

6. Alois Grillmeier's four-volume work *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1979–90) remains a standard reference. For some more recent (and concise) discussions that focus on the controversies' impact on Syriac Christianity, see especially Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *Die apostolische Kirche des Ostens: Geschichte der sogenannten Nestorianer* (Klagenfurt: Kitab, 2000), 25–34; S. P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester* 78, 3 (1996): 32–35; Lucas Van Rompay, "The East (3): Syria and Mesopotamia," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 376–78; Van Rompay, "Society and Community in the Christian East," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 239–66; Adam M. Schor, *Theodoret's People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 3–5.

7. In particular, see James Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns and the

Revival of the East Roman Empire, 622–630," *War in History* 6, 1 (1999): 1–44; Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 122–91.

8. Extant sources substantially disagree over the exact chronology of all the following events. See Fred McGraw Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 91–220, and Walter E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), which remain the standard references on the subject. Also see James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 461–70.

9. Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 157–220; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 467–70.

10. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, ed. William Chester Jordan, Michael Cook, and Peter Schäfer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 11.

11. For brief overviews of these debates, see, for example, Herbert Berg, "Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Early Islam," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (1997): 3–19; Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1998), 20–25; Gerald R. Hawting, "The Rise of Islam," in *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*, ed. Youssef M. Choueiri (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 18–22; Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Introduction: Qur'anic Studies and Its Controversies," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2008), 8–17.

12. For example, see Suliman Bashear, "*Qibla musharriqa* and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," *Muslim World* 81, 3–4 (1991): 267–81; Fred M. Donner, "Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation: The Umayyads' Silent Heritage," in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 191–92; Donner, "The Islamic Conquests," in *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*, ed. Choueiri, 36–38, 45; Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11; Robert Hoyland, "New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State," *Bulletin of SOAS* 63, 3 (2006): 409–10; Chase F. Robinson, "The Rise of Islam, 600–705," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1, *The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, ed. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 189; Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muḥammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 199–218, 261.

13. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1.

CHAPTER 1. WHEN GOOD THINGS HAPPENED TO OTHER PEOPLE: SYRIAC MEMORIES OF THE ISLAMIC CONQUESTS

Epigraphs: *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 11.17–18 (*Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium* 540:31–32 (herafter cited as *CSCO*)); *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē, as preserved in the *Chronicle ad 1234* (*CSCO* 81:236–37).

1. Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 10–11. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daneil Levy, "Introduction" in *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37, write, "Studying (and theorizing) memory allows us to shift our focus from time to temporalities, and thus to understand what categories people, groups, and cultures employ to make sense of their lives, their social, cultural, and political attachments, and the concomitant ideals that are validated—in short, the political, cultural, and social theories that command normative attention." For brief overviews of scholarship concerning collective memory, see especially Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 10–24; Patrick Hutton, "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," *History Teacher* 33, 4 (2000): 533–48; Hutton, "Memory and History at the End of History," *Quadrante: Areas, Cultures and Positions* 2 (2000): 114–28; Olick et al., eds., *The Collective Memory Reader*, 39–47; Jeffrey K. Olick, "'Collective Memory': A Memoir and Prospect," *Memory Studies* 1 (2007): 20–21. For a discussion of the strong links between collective memory and social identity, see Jan Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis: Zehn Studien* (Munich: Beck, 2000), 17; Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problem of Method," *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 122–26; Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1995): 227.

2. For a discussion of the famous phrase by nineteenth-century historian Leopold von Ranke, "wie es eigentlich gewesen," as well as an overview of the objectivity debates among twentieth-century historians, see Elizabeth Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 9–41.

3. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Remembering Pain: Syriac Historiography and the Separation of the Churches," *Byzantion* 58 (1988): 295 illustrates an approach similar to my own. Although her work addresses how subsequent generations of Miaphysites recollected the Council of Chalcedon, Harvey's observation that, for later Syriac Christians, "the problem was how to remember what had happened: not simply how to explain their own history, but further, how to evaluate its meaning" is also very applicable to Syriac memories of the conquests.

4. Numerous scholars of collective memory emphasize the ideological employment of collective memory. As Zelizer, "Reading the Past," 216 succinctly puts it, collective memory is "history with a purpose."

5. For a discussion of the importance of reception history in the study of collective memory, see Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History," 1395–97.

6. For example, Muhammed Ovey, *Muslim-Christian Relations: Past, Present, Future*

(New York: Orbis, 1999), 27–28, 30; Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude, Seventh–Twentieth Century* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 114.

7. Many popular authors claim that, because of their dislike for the Byzantines and the Persians, non-Chalcedonian Christians quickly and easily surrendered to Arab forces. See, for example, Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity*, 144; Alan Jamieson, *Faith and Sword: A Short History of the Christian-Muslim Conflict* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 15, 17. Some go so far as to claim that the non-Chalcedonians' alleged lack of resistance directly resulted in the Islamic conquests' success. For example, Ovey, *Muslim-Christian Relations*, 30 writes, "The amazing rapidity of the Arab advance was due to the cooperation of local Christians disgusted with Byzantine cruelty and oppression." See also Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads, and Modernity* (New York: Verso, 2002), 31–32; Paul Fregosi, *Jihad in the West: Muslim Conquests from the 7th to the 21st Centuries* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1998), 73; Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 263.

8. Numerous scholarly articles do claim that non-Chalcedonians saw the conquests as a positive development, often welcoming their conquerors as liberators. See, for example, Konrad D. Jenner, "Canons and Christian Identity," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 108; John C. Lamoreaux, "Early Eastern Christian Responses to Islam," in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays*, ed. John Victor Tolan (New York: Garland, 1996), 18, 24; Jane I. Smith, "Islam and Christendom: Historical, Cultural, and Religious Interaction from the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 311; Harald Suermann, "Orientalische Christen und der Islam: Christliche Texte aus der Zeit von 632–750," *Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 67 (1983): 122, 133–34. This claim has become the dominant narrative among popular accounts of the conquests. See, for example, Roland Miller, *Muslims and the Gospel: Bridging the Gap; A Reflection on Christian Sharing* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2005), 17; Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 46; Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity*, 57.

9. This is no secret among recent scholars of Syriac and Coptic studies. For example, see Jan J. van Ginkel, "The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest in Syriac Historiography: How Did the Changing Social Position of the Syrian Orthodox Community Influence the Account of Their Historiographers?," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 171–84; Sidney H. Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bēt Halē and a Muslim Emir," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3, 1 (2000): 29–54; Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1997), 23; John Moorhead, "The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions," *Byzantion*

51 (1981): 579–91; Harald Suermann, "Copts and Islam of the Seventh Century," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Grypeou et al., 95–110.

10. I am here indebted to Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 15 and her discussion of the New Testament Gospels being partial "in both senses of the term."

11. Averil Cameron, "The Literary Sources for Byzantium and Early Islam," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic East*, vol. 1, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1991), 12.

12. William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired Since the Year 1838* (London: Longman, 1870), 1:65–66.

13. Edition in Theodor Nöldeke, "Zur Geschichte der Araber im 1. Jahrh. d.H. aus syrischen Quellen," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 29 (1875): 77–78; *CSCO* 3:75. English translations in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 117; Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 2–4; Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Source Book of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015). German translation in Nöldeke, "Zur Geschichte der Araber," 78–79. Discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 116–17; Nöldeke, "Zur Geschichte der Araber," 79–82; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 1, 4; Michael Philip Penn, "Monks, Manuscripts, and Muslims: Syriac Textual Changes in Reaction to the Rise of Islam," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 12, 2 (2009): 240; Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 1:65–66.

14. *CSCO* 615:2 n. 6; David Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2011), 78; Sidney H. Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam* Mōrān 'Eth'ō 7 (Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1995), 8; Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad: His Scripture and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in *La vie du prophète Mahomet*, ed. T. Fahd (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 124; John Healey, "The Patriarch Išo'yabh III and the Christians of Qatar in the First Islamic Century," in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq: Collected Papers from the Christianity in Iraq Seminar Days, 2004–2008*, ed. Erica C. D. Hunter (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2009), 6–7; Robert G. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 88–89 n. 158; Ovidiu Ioan, *Muslime und Araber bei Īšō'jahb III. (649–659)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 89; J. B. Segal, "Arabs in Syriac Literature Before the Rise of Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984): 103 n 89.

15. Edition in *CSCO* 3:70–155. Partial English translation in Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 13–23; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. Latin translation of entire chronicle in *CSCO* 4:63–119. Discussions in James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 59–66; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 118–20; Andrew Palmer, "Une chronique syriaque contemporaine de la conquête arabe: Essai d'interprétation théologique et politique," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe–VIIIe siècles*, ed. Pierre Canivet and

Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1992), 331–46; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 5–12, 23–24; Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 3: 1040–41.

16. *Chronicle ad 640* (*CSCO* 3:147–48).

17. Ishoʿyahb III, *Letter* 14C (*CSCO* 11:251). English translation of excerpts from *Letter* 14C in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 179; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. Discussion in S. P. Brock, "Ishoʿyahb III of Abiabene," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian Brock, Aaron Butts, George Kiraz, and Lucas Van Rompay (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2011), 179; Healey, "Isoʿyahb III and the Christians of Qatar," 1–9; Healey, "The Christians of Qatar in the 7th Century A.D.," in *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Ian Richard Netton (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 222–37; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 179; Ioan, *Muslime und Araber*, 89–122; Richard E. Payne, "Persecuting Heresy in Early Islamic Iraq: The Catholicos Ishoyahb III and the Elites of Nisibis," in *The Power of Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 397–409; Martin Tamcke, "The Catholicos Ischoʿjahb III and Giwargis and the Arabs," in *Les Syriaques transmetteurs de civilisations: L'expérience du Bilād El-Shām à l'époque omeyyade* (Antelias, Lebanon: Centre d'Études et de Recherches Orientales), 201–9; Herman G. B. Teule, "Ishoʿyahb III of Abiabene," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 133–36; William G. Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph: A Study of the Relationships of the Church of the East with the Sassanid Empire and the Early Caliphates up to 820 AD* (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1974), 85–99.

18. Edition in *CSCO* 1:15–39. German translation in Nöldeke, "Syrische Chronik," 5–48. English translation in Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. Discussions in Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 128–35; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 182–89; Florence Jullien, "La chronique du Ḥūzistān: Une page d'histoire sassanide," in *Trésors d'Orient: Mélanges offerts à Rika Gyselen*, ed. Philippe Gignoux, Christelle Julien, and Florence Jullien (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2010), 159–86; P. Nautin, "L'auteur de la 'Chronique anonyme du Guidi': Élie de Merw," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 199 (1982): 303–13; Nöldeke, "Syrische Chronik," 1–4; Chase F. Robinson, "The Conquest of Khūzistān: A Historigraphical Reassessment," *Bulletin of SOAS* 67, 1 (2004): 14–39; Herman G. B. Teule, "The Chronicle of Khuzistan," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 130–32. For a composition date ca. 660, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 185; Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: An Appraisal," in *The Biography of Muḥammad*, ed. Harald Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 278; John W. Watt, "The Portrayal of Heraclius in Syriac Historical Sources," in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 652.

19. *Khuzistan Chronicle* (*CSCO* 1:30).

20. Ibid., 37.

21. Edition in *CSCO* 320:60–71. German translation in *CSCO* 320:79–94. English translations in Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*; Jeffrey Thomas Wickes, "Time, Wickedness and Identity in Pseudo-Ephrem's Homily on the End" (MA thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2007), 37–55. Discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 260–63;

Gerrit J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Ephraems 'Rede über das Ende' und die syrische eschatologische Literatur des siebenten Jahrhunderts," *ARAM* 5 (1993): 437–63; Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 111–29; Suermann, "The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 160–62; Wickes, "Homily on the End." The date of this text's composition remains somewhat uncertain. Because *Pseudo-Ephrem* shows little detailed knowledge of Islam, does not allude to the second *fitna*, and, unlike most later apocalypses, does not appear to be dependent on the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (written in the early 690s), Reinink, "Rede über das Ende," 455–62 suggests that *Pseudo-Ephrem* was composed before the mid-680s. Most have accepted Reinink's dating.

22. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem* (*CSCO* 321:61).

23. Ibid., 62.

24. Ibid.

25. Edition in Sebastian Brock, "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor," *Analecta Bollandiana* 91 (1973): 302–13. English translations in Brock, "Life of Maximus the Confessor," 314–19; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. Discussion in Brock, "Life of Maximus the Confessor," 299–301, 320–46; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 139–42; Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 3: 1206. Uncertainty remains regarding the *Syriac Life*'s authorship and date of composition. The *Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor* refers to its author as George, said to be a bishop as well as a disciple of Bishop Sophronius (d. ca. 639). Both Brock, "Life of Maximus the Confessor," 336 and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 139 suggest that the *Life* most likely was written around the time of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680 CE), which condemned monotheletism. This would explain the author's vitriol toward Maximus and still allow for its author to have been Sophronios's disciple. If, however, the work is pseudonymous, it could have been written up to several decades later, as it appears in a manuscript that, according to the paleographic judgment of Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 3: 1206, was written in the seventh or eighth century.

26. *Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor*, incipit (Brock, "Life of Maximus the Confessor," 302).

27. *Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor*, 17–23 (309–13).

28. Chase F. Robinson, "The Rise of Islam, 600–705," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1, *The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, ed. Chase F. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 191. With a few exceptions, Christian populations presented only sporadic resistance to Arab troops, and therefore casualties were kept to a minimum. See Fred M. Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 118; Victoria L. Erhart, "The Church of the East During the Period of the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester* 78 (1996): 61–63; Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 237; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 103, 109; Humphreys, "Syria," 512; Robinson, "The Rise of Islam," 197–98; Robinson, "Conclusion," 684; Chase F. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, ed. Patricia Crone (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 65; Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities*

of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1995), 71–77; Tolan, *Saracens*, 32–33; Alan Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria: An Archaeological Assessment* (London: Duckworth, 2007), 47.

29. Robinson, "The Rise of Islam," 197–98; Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, 118; Erhart, "The Church of the East," 61–63; John Haldon, "Introduction: Greater Syria in the Seventh Century: Context and Background," in *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria: A Review of Current Debates*, ed. John Haldon (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 10; Humphreys, "Syria," 512; Robinson, "The Rise of Islam," 197–98; Kaegi, *Heraclius*, 237; Kaegi, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 103, 109; Robinson, "Conclusion," 684; Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, 65; Sahas, "The Seventh Century in Byzantine-Muslim Relations," 16; Schick, *Christian Communities of Palestine*, 71–77; Tolan, *Saracens*, 32–33.

30. Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, 107; Haldon, "Introduction," 10–11; Humphreys, "Syria," 510–12; Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 215; Marcus Milwright, "Archaeology and Material Culture," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Robinson, 1: 666; Robinson, "The Rise of Islam," 198; Robinson, "Conclusion," 684; Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, 65; Schick, *Christian Communities of Palestine*, 78–79; Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, 47. Peter Pentz, *The Invisible Conquest: The Ontogenesis of Sixth and Seventh Century Syria* (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1992), 74 concludes, "The 7th century conquest of Syria is—in archaeological terms—totally invisible. That is to say, archaeological evidence is abundant, while the archaeologist looking for a break in the material is searching in vain . . . seen in a broad perspective, urban as well as rural life continued substantially unchanged—or were improved and expanded—well into the 8th century."

31. Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, 107; Schick, *Christian Communities of Palestine*, 79–80; Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, 45.

32. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 31; Clive Foss, "Syria in Transition, A.D. 550–750: An Archaeological Approach," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997): 258; Gerald R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 37; Robert Hoyland, "Introduction: Muslims and Others," in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, ed. Robert Hoyland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), xiv; Michael G. Morony, "Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq," in ibid., 131; Robinson, "The Rise of Islam," 224. Many of these authors emphasize, however, that this initial isolation did not last long, and the garrison towns became increasingly permeable and a point of interaction between Arab and non-Arab populations.

33. Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xxii–xxv; Michael G. Morony, "The Age of Conversions: A Reassessment," in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 135–37; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of the Demons: Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam," in *Cultures of Conversions*, ed. Wout J. van Bekkum, Jan N. Bremmer, and Arie L. Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 129.

34. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 31; Foss, "Syria in Transition," 266; Hoyland,

"Muslims and Others," xiii; Michael G. Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 97–98; Robinson, "The Rise of Islam," 200, 209; Robinson, "Conclusion," 684.

35. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 113; Erhart, "The Church of the East," 60–61; Chase F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites After the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44–50.

36. For a discussion of ʿAbd al-Malik's program of Islamization, see also Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, 194–211; Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, 64–65; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 16; G. J. Reinink, "From Apocalyptics to Apologetics: Early Syriac Reactions to Islam," in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 80–81; Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 128; Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 59–121, 126–28.

37. Although none of the extant sources make an explicit connection between the numerical year and imminent eschatology, it may be significant that the most common dating system Syriac Christians used counted the years from the Seleucid era, which Syriac Christians calculated as beginning in 312 BCE. This means that, according to most Syriac calendars, the year 1000 AG (after the Greeks) occurs in the late seventh century.

38. Francisco Javier Martinez, "The Apocalyptic Genre in Syriac: The World of Pseudo-Methodius," in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers et al. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 345–46; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic East*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1992), 1:158; Wido van Peursen, "Daniel's Four Kingdoms in the Syriac Tradition," in *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation: Studies Presented to Professor Eep Talstra on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Wido Th. van Peursen, and Janet W. Dyk (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 189–207. Han J. W. Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims in Northern Mesopotamia in Early Islamic Times: The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles and Related Texts," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, ed. Canivet and Rey-Coquais, 72; Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: A Syriac Apocalypse from the Early Islamic Period," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic East*, ed. Cameron and Conrad, 1: 201; Griffith, "The Syriac-Speaking Churches in the Medinan Era," 36–37; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 259–60; Martinez, "The World of Pseudo-Methodius," 345–52; Cynthia Villagomez, "Christian Salvation Through Muslim Domination: Divine Punishment and Syriac Apocalyptic Expectation in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries," *Medieval Encounters* 4, 3 (1998): 207.

39. There is not yet a published edition of the entire *Book of Main Points*. T. Jansma, "Projet d'édition du Ketābā d-rēshmellē, de Jean bar Penkayé," *L'Orient Syrien* 8 (1963): 87–106 discusses the various manuscript traditions. Alphonse Mingana, *Sources syriaques I* (Leipzig: Dominican Press, 1907) includes an edition of Books 10–15 based on a single manuscript. English translations of end of Book 14 and most of Book 15 in Sebastian Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē's Rīš Mellē," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 58–74; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. French translation of Book 15 in Mingana, *Sources*

syriaques I, 172–97; discussions in M. Albert, "Une centurie de Mar Jean bar Penkayē," in *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont* (Geneva: Patrick Cramer, 1988), 143–51; Brock, "John Bar Penkāyē's Riš Mellē," 51–56; Brock, "Yohannan bar Penkaye," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 440; Peter Bruns, "Von Adam und Eva bis Mohammed: Beobachtungen zur syrischen Chronik des Johannes bar Penkaye," *Oriens Christianus* 87 (2003): 47–64; Lutz Greisiger, "John bar Penkāyē," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 176–81; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 194–200; Jansma, "Projet d'édition," 87–106; Herbert Kaufhold, "Anmerkungen zur Textüberlieferung der Chronik des Johannes bar Penkāyē," *Oriens Christianus* 87 (2003): 65–79; K. Pinggéra, "Nestorianische Weltchronistik: Johannes Bar Penkāyē und Elias von Nisibis," in *Julius Africanus und die christliche Weltchronik*, ed. M. Wallraff (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 263–83; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Paideia: God's Design in World History According to the East Syrian Monk John bar Penkaye," in *The Mediveal Chronicle II: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle, Driebergen/Utrecht, 16–21 July 1999*, ed. Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 190–98; Reinink, "East Syrian Historiography in Response to the Rise of Islam: The Case of John Bar Penkaye's Ktābā d-rēš mellē," in *Redefining Christian Identity*, ed. Murre-Van den Berg et al., 77–90; Addai Scher, "Notice sur la vie et les oeuvres de Yohannan bar Penkaye," *Journal Asiatique* 10 (1907): 161–78; Jean-Louis Simonet, "Les citations des Actes des Apôtres dans les chapitres édités du Ketaba deres melle de Jean Bar Penkaye," *Le Muséon* 114 (2001): 97–119; Harald Suermann, "Das arabische Reich in der Weltgeschichte des Jōhannàn Bar Penkàjē," in *Nubia et Oriens Christianus: Festschrift für C. D. G. Müller*, ed. P.O. Scholz and R. Stempel (Cologne: Jürgen Dinter, 1987), 59–71; Young, *Patriarch, Shah, and Caliph*, 99–105.

40. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 14 (Mingana, *Sources syriaques I*, *141–*42).

41. Ibid., 142.

42. See Reinink, "God's Design in World History," 191–94 for how "God's *paideia* is the guiding principle of John's concept of history."

43. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 14, 15 (Mingana, *Sources syriaques I*, *142, *145).

44. For a discussion of God removing his care (*bṭilutā*) from the world, see Reinink, "East Syrian Historiography," 85–87.

45. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 15 (Mingana, *Sources syriaques I*, *167).

46. Ibid., 165.

47. Reinink, "East Syrian Historiography," 79.

48. Reinink, "A Concept of History," 186. For a discussion of ambitious building projects, see Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 59–119; Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 52–116; Robert Hoyland, "New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State," *Bulletin of SOAS* 63, 3 (2006): 399; Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, 71–75. The literature regarding ʿAbd al-Malik's coin reform is truly vast. A general overview can be gained from Stephen Album and Tony Goodwin, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean*, vol. 1, *The pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period* (Oxford:

Ashmolean, 2002), which remains a standard reference. For some more recent studies, see Jere L. Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty: The Shahāda, Qur'anic Verses, and the Coinage of Abd al-Malik," *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World* 27 (2010): 1–30; Fred M. Donner, "Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation: The Umayyads' Silent Heritage," in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 203–4; Gene W. Heck, "First Century Islamic Currency: Mastering the Message from the Money," in *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria*, ed. Haldon, 97–123; Stefan Heidemann, "The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire and Its Religion on Coin Imagery," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. Gülru Necipoglu (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 149–95; Heidemann, "Numismatics," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Robinson, 1: 648–95; Jeremy Johns, "Archeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46, 4 (2003): 426–33; Alan Walmsley, "Coinage and the Economy of Syria-Palestine in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries CE," in *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria*, ed. Haldon, 21–44. For a discussion of ʿAbd al-Malik's census and tax increase, see Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims," 67; Sidney H. Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, ed. Canivet and Rey-Coquais, 126; Humphreys, "Syria," 519; Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 130 n. 17; Robinson, "The Rise of Islam," 219; Reinink, "A Concept of History," 180.

49. Griffith, "Islam and Christian Icons," 125; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 700.

50. O. Grabar, "Ḳubbat al-Ṣakhra," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 1986, 298–99; Griffith, "The Syriac-Speaking Churches in the Medinan Era," 35; Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, ed. William Chester Jordan, Michael Cook, and Peter Schäfer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 32–33; Griffith, "Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God: Iconophilia and Iconophobia in the World of Islam in Umayyad and Early Abbasid Times," in *Die Welt der Götterbilder*, ed. Hermann Spieckermann, Brigitte Groneberg, and Frauke Weiershäuser (New York: De Gruyter, 2007), 351; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation Between a Monk of Bet Hale and an Arab Notable," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Grypeou et al., 153; Reinink, "Early Christian Reactions to the Building of the Dome of the Rock"; Josef van Ess, "Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock: An Analysis of Some Texts," in *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, ed. Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 90, 101.

51. Humphreys, "Syria," 520–21.

52. Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 14; Griffith, "Islam and Christian Icons," 126–29; Humphreys, "Syria," 520. Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 131.

53. Griffith, "John of Damascus," np; Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, 9–11; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 481 n. 89; Robinson, "The Rise of Islam," 219, 224; Robinson, "Conclusion," 684; Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, 124–26.

54. Edition in *CSCO* 540:1–48. German translation in *CSCO* 540:1–78. English

translations in Francisco Javier Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1985), 122–54; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 230–42; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. The secondary literature on *Pseudo-Methodius* is quite extensive. For a comprehensive bibliography of secondary literature up to 1993, see *CSCO* 540: xlviii–lxi. For a more select bibliography up to 2007, see Lutz Greisiger, "The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius (Syriac)," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 167–71. More recent scholarship includes Glen W. Bowersock, *Helena's Bridle, Ethiopian Christianity, and Syriac Apocalyptic* (Louvain: Peeters, 2010), 211–20; E. J. van Donzel, Andrea B. Schmidt, and Claudia Ott, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources: Sallam's Quest for Alexander's Wall* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 26–32; Benjamin Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: An Alexandrian World Chronicle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); Greisiger, "Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius," 163–70.

55. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, Introduction (*CSCO* 540:1).

56. For a discussion of when to date *Pseudo-Methodius*'s composition, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 264; *CSCO* 540: xi–xxv; Reinink, "Romance of Julian," 81, 85; Reinink, "A Concept of History," 186.

57. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 11:5–6 (*CSCO* 540:25–26).

58. Ibid., 31–33.

59. Villagomez, "Christian Salvation Through Muslim Domination," 209–13.

60. For *Pseudo-Methodius*, as with most Syriac discussions of Daniel, the Greeks and the Romans are combined into a single kingdom. In contrast, as Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 266–67 and Reinink, "A Concept of History," 158 point out, *Pseudo-Methodius* never refers to the Arabs as constituting a kingdom. Instead, the author compares their governance with that of the Midianites from the biblical book of Judges, who temporarily conquered the Israelites but seven years later were defeated by Gideon (*Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 5: 6–7 [*CSCO* 540:9]).

61. *Pseudo-Methodius*'s depiction of the last king of the Greeks has been strongly influenced by two earlier Syriac works. First, the author of *Pseudo-Methodius* draws on the sixth-century *Romance of Julian the Apostate*, which speaks of Emperor Jovian's triumph over the tyrannical pagan ruler Julian (r. 360–363). Second, the author of *Pseudo-Methodius* draws on the *Legend of Alexander,* written ca. 630, which has Alexander the Great promise that his throne and crown will be given to Christ in Jerusalem. For a discussion of the connections between *Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Romance of Julian the Apostate*, see Reinink, "Romance of Julian," 77, 88; Reinink, "A Concept of History," 168–78, 184–85; Reinink, "Alexander the Great," 173–77. For a discussion of the connections between *Pseudo-Methodius* and the *Legend of Alexander*, see Reinink, "A Concept of History," 164.

62. By the early eighth century, *Pseudo-Methodius* was translated into Greek and from Greek into Latin and Slavonic. Its multiple versions formed the basis for almost all subsequent Byzantine apocalypses and influenced numerous medieval authors farther west. In the Syriac tradition, Miaphysite manuscripts preserve two recensions of the *Apocalypse*

of Pseudo-Methodius, and excerpts are found in many later Miaphysite as well as East Syrian writings.

63. There has been considerable discussion concerning the theological affinity of *Pseudo-Methodius*, although in recent years there has been a growing consensus that the original author was Miaphysite. In particular see Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, 28–29; Greisiger, "Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius," 163; *CSCO* 540: viii–xi, xxv–xxix; Reinink, "A Concept of History," 159–64.

64. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, "The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius (Latin)," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 250.

65. Edition in Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic," 222–28; François Nau, "Révélations et légendes: Méthodius-Clément-Andronicus," *Journal Asiatique* 9 (1917): 425–34. English translations in Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic," 232–39; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 244–50; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*; French translation in Nau, "Révélationes et légendes," 434–46; German translation in Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 86–96; discussions in Bowersock, *Helana's Bridle*, 211–20; Lutz Greisiger, "The Edessene Apocalypse," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 172–75; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 267–68; Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic," 206–21; Nau, "Révélationes et légendes," 415–25; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 243–44; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Der edessenische 'Pseudo-Methodius'," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 83 (1990): 31–45; Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 162–74. Although various dates of composition have been assigned to the *Edessene Apocalypse*, arguments for the early 690s have generally been accepted.

66. *Edessene Apocalypse* (Nau, "Révélationes et légendes," 425–34).

67. Reinink, "Reactions to the Dome of the Rock," 237–39; Reinink, "Romance of Julian," 82–85.

68. Edition in J. Rendel Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles Together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 15*–21*. English translations in Harris, 34–37; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*; German translation in Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 98–108. Discussions in S. P. Brock, "Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 179; Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims," 67–74; Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," 189–213; Greisiger, "Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," 222–25; Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, 7–24; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 267–70; Reinink, "Apocalyptics to Apologetics," 75–80; Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion*, 175–91.

69. Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims," 73; Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," 207.

70. *Apocalypse of John the Little*, in Harris, *The Gospel of the the Twelve Apostles*, 21*.

71. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 13:13 (*CSCO* 540:39).

72. For recent overviews of the Qur'an and imminent eschatology, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muḥammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 119–96 and Shoemaker, "The

Reign of God Has Come': Eschatology and Empire in Late Antiquity and Early Islam." *Arabica* 61 (2014): 514–58.

73. For an overview of non-Syriac apocalypses written in response to Islam, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 278–335; John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 67–105; Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, esp. 182–85, 245–48, 274–77, 414–18.

74. Donner, "Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation," 201–3; Humphreys, "Syria," 520–21; Papaconstantinou, "Between Umma and Dhimma," 141; Reinink, "The Veneration of Icons," 341.

75. Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xvii; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 18; Morony, "Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq," 129; Simonsohn, *A Common Justice*, 7, 159; Uriel Simonsohn, "Communal Boundaries Reconsidered: Jews and Christians Appealing to Muslim Authorities in the Medieval Near East," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14 (2007): 330.

76. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 596; Humphreys, "Syria," 522.

77. Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 15; Sidney H. Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam," in *Redefining Christian Identity*, ed. Murre-Van den Berg et al., 94; Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, 76–81; Wadi Z. Haddad, "Continuity and Change in Religious Adherence: Ninth-Century Baghdad," in *Conversion and Continuity*, ed. Gervers and Bikhazi, 35; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 339–40, 596; Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xxiv; Humphreys, "Syria," 522; Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 107; Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 130. But as Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xxv notes, it is unlikely that economic benefits alone would be sufficient motivation for religious conversion.

78. Jacob seems to use Arabian (*ʿArabāyē*) and *ṭayyāyē* synonymously. For example, in his *Chronicle*, Jacob has an entry that reads: "The beginning of the kingdom of the Arabians whom we call *ṭayyāyē*" (Jacob of Edessa, *Chronicle* [*CSCO* 5:26]).

79. Jacob of Edessa, *Scholia*, in George Phillips, *Scholia on Passages of the Old Testament* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864), 27. Edition in Phillips, *Scholia*, 25–27. English translations in Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*; Phillips, *Scholia*, 39–42. Discussion in Dirk Kruisheer, "Reconstructing Jacob of Edessa's *Scholia: A Collection of Essays*," in *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oreintal Christian Interpretation*, ed. Judish Frishman and Lucas Van Rompay (Leiden: Peeters, 1997), 187–96; Robert Bas ter Haar Romeny, "Jacob of Edessa on Genesis: His Quotations of the Peshitta and His Revision of the Text," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. Robert Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151–56. Similar rhetoric appears about a hundred years later in the introduction to a set of Miaphysite canons under the patriarch Qyriaqos, who claims that because of Christian rebellion from God's laws and commandments, Christians have become subject to a foreign people and suffering from barbarian nations (*CSCO* 375:8).

80. Edition in J .P .N. Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Lugnuni Batavorum, 1862), 11. English translation in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 394; Palmer., *West-Syrian*

Chronicles, 43; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. French translation in François Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716," *Journal Asiatique* 11, 5 (1915): 226. Discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 394–95; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 43–44.

81. *Chronicle ad 705* (Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, 1:11). As Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 395; and Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 44 note, the *Chronicle ad 705* has several chronological errors. The reference to *Muḥammad* reigning is most likely an allusion to *Muḥammad*'s rule of Medina, which is traditionally dated to 622.

82. It remains possible that this Syriac author relied on a no-longer-extant Arab exemplar for the caliph list. If this were the case also for the *Chronicle ad 705*, what would remain intriguing is the scribe's willingness to translate and incorporate such a list without any comment or framing.

83. Edition in Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean," 253–56. English translation in Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 45–47; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. French translation in Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean," 264–67. Discussions Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 47–46; Penn, "Monks, Manuscripts, and Muslims," 248–49.

84. *Chronicle of Disasters* (Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean," 253–56).

85. No published edition or translation. Discussion in Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 138–45; Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims*, 26–37; Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac"; Griffith, "Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God," 347–80; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 465–72; Peter Jager, "Intended Edition of a Disputation Between a Monk of the Monastery of Bet Hale and One of the Tayyoye," in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984*, ed. Drijvers et al., 401–2; Gerrit J. Reinink, "The Lamb on the Tree: Syriac Exegesis and Anti-Islamic Apologetics," in *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations*, ed. Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 109–24; Reinink, "Political Power," 153–70; Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 134–37; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Bible and Qur'ān in Early Syriac Christian-Islamic Disputation," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Beirut: Ergon, 2007), 57–72; Reinink, "Apocalyptics to Apologetics," 82–87; Reinink, "The Veneration of Icons," 329–42; Barbara Roggema, "The Disputation Between a Monk of Bēt Hālē and an Arab Notable," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 268–73; Addai Scher, "Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés à l'archevêché chaldéen de Diarbékir," *Journal Asiatique* 10 (1907): 395–98.

86. The *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* probably does not accurately portray an actual debate between a Christian and a Muslim but is a carefully constructed narrative of how the author wished such an encounter might proceed. Reinink, "Lamb on the Tree," 113 refers to it as a "highly artificial product"; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 469 notes, "It is immediately obvious that this disputation is a literary fabrication."

87. Reinink, "Political Power," 169. See also Reinink, "The Veneration of Icons," 341; Reinink, "Bible and Qur'an," 59.

88. *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* (Diyarbekir MS 95, fol. 2a).

89. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 473, 526–27; Hoyland, *Seeing*

Islam, 25; Reinink, "A Concept of History," 153; Robinson, "The Rise of Islam," 201; Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 152–53; Tolan, *Saracens*, 21, 37.

90. *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* (Diyarbekir MS 95, fols. 2a–3a).

91. Ibid., fol. 8a.

92. Ibid., fols. 8a--8b.

93. Ibid., emphasis added.

94. Ibid., fol. 8b.

95. For an overview of the Abbasid revolution and the early Abbasid caliphs, see Cobb, "The Empire in Syria," 255–69; Elton L. Daniel, "ʿAbbāsid Revolution," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., 2007, 2–7; Tayeb El-Hibri, "The Empire in Iraq, 783–861," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Robinson, 1:269–304; Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*.

96. For a general overview of Syriac Christians under early Abbasid rule, see *CSCO* 420; Hans Putman, *L'église et l'Islam sous Timothée (780–823): Étude sur l'église nestorienne au temps des premiers ʿAbbassides avec nouvelle édition et traduction du dialogue entre Timothée et al-Mahdi* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1975), 111–16; Harald Suermann, "Timothy and His Dialogue with Muslims," *The Harp* 8/9 (1995–1996): 262–66.

97. For an overview of the Abbasid translation movement and Syriac Christians' participation in this movement, see Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muḥammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013), 139–53; Philippe Gignoux, "La transmission de l'héritage grec aux Arabes par les Syriens," in *Les Syriaques transmetteurs de civilisations*, 53–65; S. H. Griffith, "Islam, Syriac Interactions with," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 221–22; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 106–28; Griffith, "From Patriarch Timothy I to Ḥunayn Ibn Isḥāq: Philosophy and Christian Apology in Abbasid Times; Reason, Ethics and Public Policy," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue*, ed. Tamcke, 77–79; Jacob Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam: Modern Scholarship, Medieval Realities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 258–85; Ute Pietruschka, "Classical Herritage and New Literary Forms: Literary Activities of Christians During the Umayyad Period," in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 34; Tamcke, "Catholicos Ischocjahb III," 201–2; Gérard Troupeau, "Le rôle des syriaques dans la transmission et l'exploitation du patrimoine philosophique et scientifique Grec," *Arabica* 38 (1991): 1–10; John Watt, "Greek Philosophy and Syriac Culture in Early ʿAbbasid Iraq," in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq*, ed. Hunter, 10–37; Watt, "Syriac Translators and Greek Philosophy in Early Abbasid Iraq," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 4 (2004): 15–26. See esp. Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)* (New York: Routledge, 1998); and Jack B. Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2010), 22–106.

98. Griffith, "Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam," 120–23; Griffith, "Topics and Strategies of Christian Apologetics," 36; Griffith, "The Monk in the Emir's Majlis:

Reflections on a Popular Genre of Christian Literary Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period," in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Mark R. Cohen, Sasson Somekh, and Sidney H. Griffith (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 60–65; Martin Heimgartner, "Die Disputatio des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos (780–823) mit dem Kalifen al-Mahdî," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue*, ed. Tamcke, 54–55.

99. Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 16–32, 43–63, 90–91; Jean-Maurice Fiey, "Conversions à l'Islam de juifs et de chrétiens sous les abbassides d'après les sources arabes et syriaques," in *Rapports entre juifs, chrétiens et musulmans*, ed. Johannes Irmscher (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1995), 13–28; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 11; Morony, "The Age of Conversions," 135–50; Papaconstantinou, "Between Umma and Dhimma," 144–45, 151.

100. But as Erica C. D. Hunter, "Interfaith Dialogues: The Church of the East and the Abbassids," in *Der christliche Orient und seine Umwelt*, ed. Lutz Greisiger and Sophia G. Vashalomidze (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 290; Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 108; and Mun'im Sirry, "The Public Role of Dhimmīs During ʿAbbāsid Times," *Bulletin of SOAS* 74, 2 (2011): 187–204 point out, Christian participation in the Abassid government remained quite significant.

101. Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xvii; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 18; Simonsohn, *A Common Justice*, 7, 159; Simonsohn, "Communal Boundaries Reconsidered," 330.

102. Mark R. Cohen and Qāḍī ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Zabr, "What Was the Pact of ʿUmar? A Literary-Historical Study," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23 (1999): 100–157; Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 54–60; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 15–17; Milka Levy-Rubin, "Shurūṭ ʿUmar: From Early Harbingers to Systematic Enforcement," in *Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. David M. Freidenreich and Miriam Bayla Goldstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 30–34 ; Levy-Rubin, "Shurūṭ ʿUmar and Its Alternatives: The Legal Debate on the Status of the Dhimmīs," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30 (2005): 170–206; esp. Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*.

103. Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, 99 points out that modern scholars suggest that, with a few notable exceptions, Muslim authorities generally did not enforce these rules. Sirry, "The Public Role of Dhimmîs," 192 n. 22 emphasizes the difference between the theory of jurists and the actual practices of the caliphate and concludes that the implementation of the measures was "practically zero" (194). So, too, does Griffith, "The Syriac-Speaking Churches in the Medinan Era," 45. Levy-Rubin, "Shurūṭ ʿUmar: From Early Harbingers to Systematic Enforcement," 31–32 and *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, 99–112 argues for a more vigorous enforcement of these regulations especially beginning in the mid-ninth century.

104. See Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 119–22.

105. Because of Theophilus's influence on these later writers, modern scholars often call his chronicle the *Syriac Common Source*. To approximate what Theophilus wrote, scholars compare similar episodes in the *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian* and the *Chronicle ad 1234* that preserve sections of Dionysius's *Chronicle* with those appearing in Theophanes and Agapius. As Robert G. Hoyland, "Arabic, Syriac and Greek Historiography in the First Abbasid Century: An Inquiry into Inter-Cultural Traffic," *ARAM* 3, 1&2 (1991): 228–29 points out, it quickly becomes clear that each of these sources has modified Theophilus's passages, making reconstruction of his original wording impossible.

106. Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 34, argues that later authors modified Theophilus's text to a much greater extent than has generally been assumed. Hoyland presents parallel translations of those passages from later witnesses that seem to come from Theophilus. Discussions in L. I. Conrad, "The Conquest of Arwād: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near-East," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, ed. Cameron and Conrad, 1:317–401; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, 192–236; Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 400–409; L. Van Rompay, "Theophilos of Edessa," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 409–10; Herman G. B. Teule, "Theophilus of Edessa," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 305–8.

107. For an English translation of the parallel passages, see Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 118–19.

108. Van Ginkel, "The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest," 180; Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, esp. 12–15, 28–32.

109. Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 15, 19.

110. For an English translation of the parallel passages, see Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 114–17.

111. Ibid., 109–14.

112. Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 20.

113. For an English translation of the parallel passages, see Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 126–27.

114. Although some of the earliest Christian writings about Islam note Muslim opposition to the cross, systematic governmental actions against the cross do not appear until the time of ʿAbd al-Malik and his successors. See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 592 n 16; and Griffith, "Islam and Christian Icons," 126–31.

115. Following chronology, one could add the *Chronicle ad 775*. Its reference to the conquests consists solely of the statement "In the year 930 of Alexander, Heraclius and the Romans entered Constantinople. And Muḥammad and the *ṭayyāyē* went out from the south and entered the land and conquered it" (*CSCO* 5:348).

116. Previously called the *Chronicles of Pseudo-Dionysius*. More recent scholarship usually employs the more neutral *Chronicle of Zuqnin* because the narrator identifies himself as a monk of the Miaphysite monastery of Zuqnin. Edition in *CSCO* 104:145–378 with corrections in Amir Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 318–28. English translation of Book 4 in

Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV*, 138–34. French translation of Book 4 in *CSCO* 507:108–313. Edition and English translation of the *Martyrdom of Cyrus*, which appears in the last fragmentary pages, in Amir Harrak, "Piecing Together the Fragmentary Account of the Martyrdom of Cyrus of Harrān," *Analecta Bollandiana* 121, 2 (2003): 297–328. Discussion in Amir Harrak, "La victoire arabo-musulmane selon le chroniqueur de Zuqnin (VIIIe siècle)," in *L'historiographie syriaque*, ed. Muriél Debié (Paris: Geuthner, 2009), 89–105; Harrak, "Christianity in the Eyes of the Muslims of the Jazirah at the End of the Eighth Century," *Parole de l'Orient* (1995): 339–57; Harrak, "Arabisms in Part IV of the Syriac Chronicle of Zuqnīn," in *VII Symposium Syriacum*, ed. René Lavenant (Rome: Pontifical Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1998), 469–98; Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV*, 1–33; Harrak, "Martyrdom of Cyrus," 297–328; Harrak, "Ah! The Assyrian Is the Rod of My Hand! Syriac View of History After the Advent of Islam," in *Redefining Christian Identity*, ed. Murre-Van den Berg et al.; Harrak, "Joshua the Stylite of Zuqnîn," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 322–26; Harrak, "Zuqnin, Chronicle of," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 450; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 409–13; Yusuf M. Ishaq, "The Significance of the Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel Mahrē," *Orientalia Suecana* 41–42 (1992–1993): 106–18.

117. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:150–51).

118. At the beginning of the *Chronicle*'s fourth book, the author apologizes for not being able to find reliable histories that cover the years 586 to 775, and states that for this section he has had to rely on oral accounts and his own recollections (*CSCO* 104:146). Lawrence I. Conrad, "Syriac Perspectives on Bilad al-Sham During the Abbasid Period," in *Bilad al-Sham During the Abbasid Period*, ed. Muḥammad Adnan al-Bakhit and Robert Schick (Amman: History of Bilad al-Sham Committee, 1991), 25–26 suggests that, contrary to his preface, the author of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* relied on an earlier, scant annalistic account for his information concerning the conquests.

119. Harrak, "Syriac View of History," 52, esp. n. 28.

120. Timothy's *Letter* 59 is also known as Timothy's *Apology*. Edition *CSCO* 631. English trans. of earlier edition in Alphonse Mingana, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch Before the Caliph Mahdi," in *Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshuni, Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1928), 15–90. German translation in *CSCO* 632. Edition of Syriac epitome in Albert Van Roey, "Une apologie syriaque attribuée à Élie de Nisibe," *Le Muséon* 59 (1946): 383–91. French translation of Syriac epitome in Roey, "Une apologie syriaque," 391–97. Discussion in David Bertaina, "The Development of Testimony Collections in Early Christian Apologetics with Islam," in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 158–62; Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 145–59; D. Bundy, "Timotheos I," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 414–15; *CSCO* 632, i–lxvi; Heimgartner, "Disputatio des Patriarchen Timotheos," 41–56; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 472–75; Hunter, "Interfaith Dialogues," 289–302; Karl-Heinz Kuhlmann, "The Apology of Timothy, the Patriarch, Before Caliph Mahdi: The Christian-Muslim Dialogue Yesterday and Today,"

The Harp 8/9 (1995–1996): 167–76; Putnam, *L'église et l'Islam sous Timothée I (780–823)*; Barbara Roggema and Martin Heimgartner, "Timothy I," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 515–26; Khalil Samir, "The Prophet Muḥammad as Seen by Timothy I and Some Other Arab Christian Authors," in *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Richard Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 75–106; Suermann, "Timothy and His Dialogue with Muslims," 263–75; Mark N. Swanson, "Folly to the Ḥunafā: The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Grypeou et al., 248–55.

121. Timothy I, *Apology* 15 (*CSCO* 621 I, 101–2).

122. Ibid., 102.

123. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 11:5 (*CSCO* 540:25).

124. For a brief discussion of the transmission history of Timothy's *Apology* and its subsequent popularity, see Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 48; Griffith, "Patriarch Timothy I to Hunayn ibn Ishāq," 76; Griffith, "Syrian Christian Intellectuals in the World of Islam: Faith, the Philosophical Life, and the Quest for an Interreligious Convivencia in Abbasid Times," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 7 (2007): 55; *CSCO* 632.

125. One could also add to this list the *Chronicle ad 819*, which provides little discussion of the conquests, noting simply that in the 630s the *ṭayyāyē* entered Syria, defeated the Byzantines at Yarmuk, and subsequently took control of Mesopotamia. Edition in *CSCO* 109:1–22; partial English translation in Palmer, "The Messiah and the Mahdi," 75, 76–80; discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 419–21; Palmer, "The Messiah and the Mahdi," 75, 83–84; Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur ʿAbdin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9–13.

126. Partial reconstruction based on *Chronicle ad 1234* in Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 111–221. Discussed in Rudolf Abramowski, *Dionysius von TellMaḥrē, jakobitischer Patriarch von 818–845: Zur Geschichte der Kirche unter dem Islam* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1940); Sean W. Anthony, "The Syriac Account of Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē concerning the Assassination of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 69, 2 (2010): 209–24; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 416–19; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 85–110; Herman G. B. Teule, "Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 622–26; W. Witakowski, "Dionysios of Tel Maḥrē," *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, 127–28.

127. The most commonly cited edition of Michael's *Chronicle* is found in Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 4, with a French translation in vols. 1–3. A more recent facsimile edition appears in Gregorios Yuhanna Ibrahim, *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex of the Chronicle of Michael the Great* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2009). Chabot also published an edition of the *Chronicle ad 1234* (*CSCO* 81–82) and a Latin translation of the first volume (*CSCO* 109), but he died before he could translate the second volume. Decades later, A. Abouna published a French translation of this second volume (*CSCO* 354). My own practice is to limit my attributions to Dionysius to those places where one of these authors specifies he is quoting from Dionysius or to those passages shared by Michael's *Chronicle* and the *Chronicle ad 1234*, since neither author appears to have been aware of the other's

work. I then treat these passages as imperfect reflections of the plot details originally found in Dionysius's work. But I do not assume the wording is Dionysius's unless there is substantial word-for-word agreement between the two later accounts. Despite the problems of false negatives (true Dionysius material we falsely attribute to a later author) and false positives (material we attribute to Dionysius that actually comes from another shared source), there is a consistent enough pattern of agreement to allow us to speak, at least in the broadest of terms, about the general content of Dionysius's *Chronicle*.

128. *Chronicle ad 1234* (*CSCO* 81:236–37).

129. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.3; J. B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche [1166–1199]* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1910), 4:410.

130. Van Ginkel, "The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest," 175, 180 notes how Dionysius sets up an opposition between "noble Arabs" and "arrogant Romans," and throughout his *Chronicle* "Arabs are presented as being on their best behavior." See also Morony, "History and Identity," 3.

131. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.5 (Chabot, *Chronique*, 4:414–15); *Chronicle ad 1234* (*CSCO* 81:242–44).

132. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.7 (418); *Chronicle ad 1234* (251).

133. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.10 (428); *Chronicle ad 1234* (257).

134. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.7 (417); *Chronicle ad 1234* (247).

135. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.10 (429); *Chronicle ad 1234* (258–59). It remains possible that at least some of these negative depictions of the Byzantines originated not from the ninth-century Dionysius but from the eighth-century Theophilus. But when one compares those sections of Theophilus in Dionysius that have analogues in Theophanes or Agapius, a similar pattern emerges. Dionysius's versions are almost always more negative toward the Byzantines and more positive toward the *ṭayyāyē*.

136. Van Ginkel, "The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest," 183; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 129–31; Griffith, "Christians, Muslims and the Image of the One God," 377; Morony, "History and Identity," 3.

137. For a brief discussion of some of these later references to conquest treaties, see Morony, "History and Identity," 22–25.

CHAPTER 2. A DIFFERENT TYPE OF DIFFERENCE-MAKING: SYRIAC NARRATIVES OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Epigraph: Jacob of Edessa, *Defining Christianity*, in Michael Philip Penn, "Jacob of Edessa's *Defining Christianity*: Introduction, Edition, and Translation," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 64, 3–4 (2012): 183, 187.

1. This chapter appears in two manuscripts: BL Add. 12,154, which William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired Since the Year 1838*, (London: Longman, 1871), 2:976 dated on paleographic grounds to the late eighth or early

ninth century; and BL Add. 17,193, written by a scribe named Abraham in 874 CE (BL Add. 17,193, fol. 1a).

2. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, ed. William Chester Jordan, Michael Cook, and Peter Schäfer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 12; Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East Since the Rise of Islam*, ed. H. L. Murre-Van den Berg, J. J. van Ginkel, and T. M. van Lint (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 17; Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)," in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 273; Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1997), 24; Barbara Roggema, "Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters: A Theme in the Christian Portrayal of Islam in the Near East," in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in ʿAbbasid Iraq*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1, 3; Dietmar W. Winkler, "Christian Responses to Islam in the Umayyad Period," in *Syriac Churches Encountering Islam: Past Experiences and Future Perspectives*, ed. Dietmar W. Winkler (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2010), 80, 84.

3. Bede, *Expositio actuum apostolorum* 7:43 (M. L. W. Laistner, *Bedae Venerabilis, Expositio Actuum Apostolorum et Retractatio* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1939), 34); John of Damascus, *Concerning Heresy* 101 (*Sources chrétiennes* 383:21); Nicetas of Byzantium, *Foreword* (*Patrologia Graeca* 105:708, 704 (herafter cited as *PG*); George the Monk, *Chronicle* (*PG* 110:865–68).

4. Sidney H. Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: The Topics and Strategies of Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam," in *Die Suryoye und ihre Umwelt*, ed. Andreas Heinz Martin Tamcke (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), 17.

5. George the Monk, *Chronicle* (*PG* 110:872–73), trans. in J. M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 2000), 2: 32.

6. Ermold the Black, *Poem on Louis the Pious* 1:287–98. Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches Toward the Muslims* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984, 216.

7. Eulogius, *Memoriale Sanctorum* 1.25 (Juan Gil, *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum* (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1973), 389); *Istoria de Mahomet* (Kenneth B. Wolf, "The Earliest Latin Lives of Muḥammad," in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 96–99). Any quick listing of Greek and Latin descriptions of Islam results in a substantial oversimplification and flattening of a complex reaction to the rise of Islam. Nevertheless, there remains a very noticeable difference in tone between how most Greek and Latin works depict Islam and how Syriac texts most often do. For a more detailed discussion of

individual Greek and Latin texts on Islam, see the appropriate sections of David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1, *600–900* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*.

8. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium* 104:341 (herafter cited as *CSCO*)). The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* may also use *mashlmānutā* a second time, but in this case not all of the word's letters are extant (*CSCO* 104:383). Theodore bar Koni also employs this term in a work discussing Islam but in a context that more strongly suggests the word's most common meaning of "tradition" (*CSCO* 69:235). The twelfth-century Dionysius bar Salibi also uses *mashlmānutā* to speak of Islam (*CSCO* 614:4, 104, 123). For a brief discussion of this term, see *CSCO* 615:4 n. 18; Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Berlin: Reuther and Reichard, 1895; reprint Wipf and Stock, 2004), 378; Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts," 270; Robert Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (1879; Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 2:4193–94.

9. J. B. Segal, "Arabs in Syriac Literature Before the Rise of Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984): 98–123; Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 1:1460.

10. As Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 13–21 discusses, some modern historians advocate using only the term *ethnicity* for antiquity, as they see the term *race* as anachronistic for this period. Because the term *ethnicity* is equally modern, like Buell I use these two words interchangeably, recognizing that both are at best an approximation of ancient categories.

11. Buell, *Why This New Race*, 1–34, esp. 6.

12. Ibid., 1–34, esp. 2–3, 6, 991, 139.

13. See Chapter 1, n 14.

14. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 148, 159 n 156; Segal, "Arabs in Syriac Literature Before the Rise of Islam," 100–103.

15. Monique Bernards and John Nawas, "Introduction," in *Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam*, ed. Monique Bernards and John Nawas (Leiden: Brill, 2005), ix–x; Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 41; P. Crone, "Mawlā," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 1989, 874–82; Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 181; Gerald R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate, AD 661–750*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4–5; Robert Hoyland, "Introduction: Muslims and Others," in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, ed. Robert Hoyland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), xxii; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 339; Chase F. Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, ed. Patricia Crone (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 76.

16. Richard W. Bulliet, "Conversion Stories in Early Islam," in *Conversion and Continuity*, ed. Gervers and Bikhazi, 130; Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*, 41; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 161; Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, 4–5.

17. Ishoʿyahb III, *Letter* 15C (*CSCO* 11:268–69).

18. Ishoʿyahb III, *Letter* 14C (*CSCO* 11:251). See Chapter 1 n. 17. There has been some

debate regarding the location to which Ishoʿyahb refers. Most modern scholars amend the received text from *mrunāye* (inhabitants of Merw in Persia) to *mzunāye* (inhabitants of Mazon in Oman). See, for example, John Healey, "The Patriarch Išoʿyabh III and the Christians of Qatar in the First Islamic Century," in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq: Collected Papers from the Christianity in Iraq Seminar Days, 2004–2008*, ed. Erica C. D. Hunter (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2009), 5; John F. Healey, "The Christians of Qatar in the 7th Century A.D.," in *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Ian Richard Netton (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 228, 230 n34; Ovidiu Ioan, *Muslime und Araber bei Išōʿjahb III. (649–659)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 100–103; Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 128 n. 11; Martin Tamcke, "The Catholicos Ischoʿjahb III and Giwargis and the Arabs," in *Les Syriaques transmetteurs de civilisations: L'expérience du Bilād El-Shām à l'époque omeyyade* (Antelias, Lebanon: Centre d'Études et de Recherches Orientales, 2005), 208; Jack Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2010), 443, 443 n. 1047. In contrast, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 181, argues that the manuscript reading is correct and refers to Merw.

19. *Hagarene* remains a rare designation for Muslims among seventh-century writers. Besides Ishoʿyahb's *Letter* 48B, the only other occurrences are in the colophon of BL Add. 14,666, fol. 56 (dated 682) and in the writings of Jacob of Edessa, in which it appears several times.

20. David Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2011), 79; Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam," in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G. H. A. Juynboll (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 15; Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 8–9, 160–61; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 24 n. 6; Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam* (Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1995), 9–14; Griffith, "Free Will in Christian Kalam: Moshe Bar Kepha Against the Teachings of the Muslims," *Le Muséon* 100 (1987): 151–54; Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad: His Scripture and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in *La vie du prophète Mahomet*, ed. Toufic Fahd (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 122–24; Healey, "Isoʿyahb III and the Christians of Qatar," 7–9.

21. *Khuzistan Chronicle* (*CSCO* 1:30–32).

22. Sidney H. Griffith, "The Syriac-Speaking Churches and the Muslims in the Medinan Era of Muḥammad and the Four Caliphs," in *Syriac Churches Encountering Islam*, ed. Winkler, 23 n. 32; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 24 n. 6; Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam*, 10–11; Griffith, "Moshe Bar Kepha Against the Teachings of the Muslims," 151–54; Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 122.

23. For a discussion of the phrase "Sons of Hagar," see Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam," 15; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 24 n. 6; Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 124; Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam*, 9–11; *CSCO* 3:43–74.

24. Edition in Ignazio Guidi and E. W. Brooks, *Chronica Minora* (Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1904), 43–74. English translation in Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Source Book of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015). French translation of seventh-century notices in François Nau, "Opuscules Maronites," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 4 (1899): 322–28. German translation of seventh-century notices in Theodor Nöldeke, "Zur Geschichte der Araber im 1. Jahrh. d.H. aus syrischen Quellen," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 29 (1875): 37–57. Discussions in M. Breydy, "Das Chronikon des Maroniten Theophilus ibn Tuma," *Journal of Oriental and African Studies* 2 (1990): 34–46; James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 175–78; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 135–39; Nöldeke, "Zur Geschichte der Araber," 82–89; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 29, 35; Herman G. B. Teule, "The Maronite Chronicle," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 145–47.

25. The lack of a firm date for when the *Maronite Chronicle* was written complicates how one evaluates these episodes. Many modern scholars suggest the late 660s, but it remains possible that the *Maronite Chronicle* was not completed until later. The scribe did not copy the entire chronicle, and he ends abruptly in an entry dated to 664. It is unclear how much further the original continued. Because of its chronological accuracy, including the correct correspondence of specific dates and their proper day of the week, Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2 (1976): 18–19 and Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 29 suggest that it was written in the 660s. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 139 cautions against this conclusion.

26. *Maronite Chronicle* (*CSCO* 3:72). The term *Saracen* remains fairly uncommon among Syriac sources. It appears among the Kamed el-Loz inscriptions dated 714/15; see P. Mouterde, "Inscriptions en syriaque dialectal à Kamed (Beq'a)," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 22 (1939): 82; in the *Chronicle of Disasters*, composed in the late 710s; see François Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716," *Journal Asiatique* 11, 5 (1915): 256, and in the ninth-century *Bahira Legend* (West Syrian recension) 0.0, 12.5; see Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 312, 312, 338. For a discussion of this term in Syriac, see Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 124.

27. *Maronite Chronicle* (*CSCO* 3:70).

28. Ibid., 71.

29. Ibid.

30. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem* (*CSCO* 320:60–71); *Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor* (Sebastian Brock, "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor," *Analecta Bollandiana* 91 (1973): 302–13).

31. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem* (*CSCO* 320:61).

32. See Chapter 1 n. 36.

33. See Chapter 1 n. 77.

34. For a recent defense of at least some of the later restrictions originating with ʿUmar II, see Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 88–98, 101, 168.

35. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 15; Alphonse Mingana, *Sources syriaques I* (Leipzig: Dominican Press, 1907), *146–*47. See Chapter 1 n. 41.

36. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 14, 15, 15 (*141, *147, *155).

37. For example, John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 15 (*165).

38. *Apocalypse of John the Little* (J. Rendel Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles Together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), *20). Reinink, "Apocalyptics to Apologetics," 79 suggests that this may be an allusion to Muslim rejection of Christ's divinity.

39. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 13:5 (*CSCO* 540:37).

40. *Edessene Apocalypse* (François Nau, "Révélations et légendes: Méthodius-Clément-Andronicus," *Journal Asiatique* 9 (1917): 427).

41. *Apocalypse of John the Little*, *18.

42. For an overview of Jacob's discussion of Islam, see Jan J. van Ginkel, "History and Community: Jacob of Edessa and West Syrian Identity," in *Redefining Christian Identity*, ed. Murre-Van den Berg et al., 67–76; Robert Hoyland, "Jacob and Early Islamic Edessa," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 11–24; Robert G. Hoyland, "Jacob of Edessa on Islam," in *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers*, ed. G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 149–60; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 160–67; Konrad D. Jenner, "The Canons of Jacob of Edessa in the Perspective of the Christian Identity of His Day," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. Romeny, 101–12; Dirk Kruisheer, "A Bibliographical Clavis to the Works of Jacob of Edessa," ibid., 265–94; Alison G. Salvesan, "Yacqub of Edessa," *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian Brock, Aaron Butts, George Kiraz, and Lucas Van Rompay (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2011), 432–33; Salvesen, "Jacob of Edessa's Life and Work: A Biographical Sketch," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. Romeny, 1–10; Herman G. Teule, "Jacob of Edessa," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 226–33; Teule, "Jacob of Edessa and Canon Law," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. Romeny, 83–100; Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam," 168–212; Jan J. van Ginkel, "Greetings to a Virtuous Man: The Correspondence of Jacob of Edessa," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. Romeny, 67–82.

43. Jacob of Edessa, *Fourth Letter to John the Stylite* (BL Add. 12,172, fol. 124a); Jacob of Edessa, *Third Letter to John the Stylite* (Nau, "Lettre de Jacques d'Édesse," 518–19); Jacob of Edessa, *Tract Against the Armenians* (C. Kayser, *Die Canones Jacobs von Edessa übersetzt und erläutert* [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1886], 4); Barhebraeus, *Nomocanon* (Paul Bedjan, *Nomocanon Gregorii Barhebraei* (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1898), 12).

44. Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai* 111 (*CSCO* 367:261).

45. Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai* 75 (Harvard Syriac 93, fol. 26b).

46. Jacob of Edessa, *First Letter to John the Stylite* (*CSCO* 367:253). It is important

to note that Jacob never alludes to any repercussions from Muslim authorities for those converts to Islam who later return to Christianity.

47. Jacob of Edessa, *Third Letter to John the Stylite*.

48. Jacob of Edessa, *First Letter to John the Stylite* (*CSCO* 367:249); Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai* 75 (Harvard Syriac 93, fol. 26b; English translation in Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*); Jacob of Edessa, *Second Letter to John the Stylite* (*CSCO* 367:244).

49. The phrase "Hagarene confession" appears only in an excerpt from Jacob preserved by the thirteenth-century writer Barhebraeus (Barhebraeus, *Nomocanon* (Bedjan, *Nomocanon*, 12)). It remains possible that Barhebraeus's wording of this canon may differ from Jacob's original.

50. Jacob of Edessa, *First Letter to John the Stylite* (*CSCO* 367: 253).

51. Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai* 25 (Thomas J. Lamy, *Dissertatio de Syrorum fide et disciplina in re eucharista* (Leuven: Vanlinthout, 1859), 126–28). It remains possible that Jacob was simply speaking of polytheistic *ṭayyāyē*. But, as other writings by him interchangeably use the terms *Hagarenes* and *ḥanpē*, it seems more likely that the *ṭayyāyē* Jacob here refers to are Muslim. Likewise, *Replies to Addai* 80 (Harvard Syriac 93, cited in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 606) uses the term *ṭayyāyē* to speak of Muslim rulers.

52. Unfortunately their works are fragmentary and preserved only as brief quotations in later collections. Ḥnanishā died around 700. Fragments of Mār Abbā's commentaries are found in a later East Syrian commentary, the *Gannat Bussamē*. There is no published edition or translation of this text. For a discussion of its textual tradition, see Gerrit J. Reinink, *Studien zur Quellen- und Traditionsgeschichte des Evangelienkommentars der Gannat Bussame* (Louvain: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1979), v–xxi. Traditionally Mār Abbā's is said to have been born in 641. He became catholicos in 741 and lived until 751. It remains unclear when in his life he wrote these passages quoted in the *Gannat Bussame*. Gerrit J. Reinink, "An Early Syriac Reference to Qur'an 112?," in *All Those Nations . . . Cultural Encounters Within and with the Near East*, ed. H. L. J. Vanstiphout (Groningen: Styx, 1999), 127–28 briefly suggests, "Taking into account the fierce tone of his polemic we may perhaps even suggest that Abbā's is responding to very recent events . . . not long after the turn of the seventh to the eighth century."

53. Reinink, *Gannat Bussame*, 64–65.

54. Reinink, "An Early Syriac Reference," 123.

55. British Library Or. 9353, fol. 353a. Discussion in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 200–203; and Reinink, "Fragmente der Evangelienexegese des Katholikos Henanišo I," 89–91.

56. Sidney H. Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Kōnī's Apology for Christianity," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47 (1981): 170; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation Between a Monk of Bet Hale and an Arab Notable," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 159; and Reinink, "The Lamb on the Tree: Syriac Exegesis and Anti-Islamic Apologetics," in *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations*, ed. Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 111–19 have appropriately noted the similarities between

disputation texts speaking of Muslims and the Syriac *drāsā* or controversial treatises in which students learn how to respond to opponents from another religious tradition or a competing branch of Christianity.

57. Richard Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); see Joel Thomas Walker, *The Legend of Mār Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 172–74.

58. Walker, *The Legend of Mār Qardagh*, 174–80.

59. *Maronite Chronicle* (*CSCO* 3:70). For Islamic sources on public theological debates, see Griffith, "Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam," 120–23; Griffith, "Topics and Strategies of Christian Apologetics," 36; Griffith, "The Monk in the Emir's Majlis," 60–65; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Mark R. Cohen, Sasson Somekh, and Sidney H. Griffith, *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999).

60. Edition and translation in Michael Philip Penn, "John and the Emir: A New Introduction, Edition and Translation," *Le Muséon* 121 (2008): 82–85, French translation in Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean," 257–64. Discussions in Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 87–93; Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts," 257–59; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 459–65; Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean," 225–47; Penn, "John and the Emir," 83–109; Reinink, "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature," 171–87; Barbara Roggema, "The Disputation of John and the Emir," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 782–85; Roggema, "The Debate Between Patriarch John and an Emir of the Mhaggrāyē: A Reconsideration of the Earliest Christian-Muslim Debate," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue*, ed. Tamcke, 21–39; Abdul Massih Saadi, "The Letter of John of Sedreh: A New Perspective on Nascent Islam," *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society* 11, 1 (1997): 74–80; Samir Khalil Samir, "Qui est l'interlocuteur musulman du patriarche syrien Jean III (631–648)?," in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen-Oosterhesselen 10–12 September*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers et al. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 387–400; Harald Suermann, "The Old Testament and the Jews in the Dialogue Between the Jacobite Patriarch John I and 'Umayr Ibn Sa'd Al-Anṣārī'," in *Eastern Crossroads: Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy*, ed. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2007), 131–41; Suermann, "Orientalische Christen und der Islam: Christliche Texte aus der Zeit von 632–750," *Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 67 (1983): 125–28.

61. *John and the Emir*, 82.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid., 82–83.

65. Ibid., 83–84.

66. Ibid., 82, 84.

67. Ibid., 82.

68. Buell, *Why This New Race*, 30–31, 36, esp. 41–49.

69. *John and the Emir*, 83.

70. Ibid., 84. This recognition of a different scriptural canon may also account for John never quoting from the New Testament to support his arguments.

71. Ibid.

72. *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* (Diyarbekir MS 95, fol. 8b). See Chapter 1 n. 85.

73. Ibid. fol. 16).

74. Ibid., fols. 1a–2b.

75. Ibid., fol. 8a.

76. Ibid., fol. 5a.

77. Ibid., fol. 8a

78. Ibid., fol. 8b.

79. Reinink, "Bible and Qur'an," 68, 58 n. 7 reaches a similar conclusion.

80. Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (New York: Longman, 1986), 134, 142.

81. Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xxiv.

82. See Chapter 1 n. 102.

83. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*, 82. A number of critics of Bulliet's estimate remain; see esp. Michael G. Morony, "The Age of Conversions: A Reassessment," in *Conversion and Continuity*, ed. Gervers and Bikhazi, 135–48; Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam," 482 nn. 1143–44, 487–88.

84. Hanna P. Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu: Lettre de Timothée I (728–823) à Serge* (Rome: Giovanni Canestri, 1983), 19–22; Erica Hunter, "Interfaith Dialogues: The Church of the East and the Abbassids," in *Der Christliche Orient und seine Umwelt*, ed. Lutz Greisiger and Sophia G. Vashalomidze (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 290; Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 135; Karl Pinggéra, "Konfessionelle Rivalitäten in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Islam: Beispiele aus der ostsyrischen Literatur," *Der Islam* 88, 1 (2012): 51–72, 56; Hans Putman, *L'église et l'Islam sous Timothée (780–823): Étude sur l'église nestorienne au temps des premiers ʿAbbassides avec nouvelle édition et traduction du dialogue entre Timothée et al-Mahdi* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1975), 92–109.

85. See Chapter 1 n. 97.

86. See Chapter 1 n. 106.

87. For an English translation of the parallel passages, see Robert G. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 86–90.

88. For example, Theophilus briefly mentioned the Arabs worshipping in mosques. See Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 115–17.

89. See Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 126–27, 170–71, 190–91, 242–43.

90. Robert G. Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: An Appraisal," in *The Biography of Muḥammad*, ed. Harald Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 286 appropriately summarizes Theophilus's viewpoint as follows: "The Arabs are seen as having ascended to the first rung of the monotheist ladder, but as being still a long way off from the more lofty heights of Christianity."

91. See Chapter 1 n. 116.

92. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:195, 316).

93. Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin; Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 849 notes its use in Michael the Syrian and Barhebraeus. Also see Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 783; Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2:4195.

94. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:149, 169).

95. Ibid., 149, 390, 396, 398.

96. Ibid., 388–90.

97. Ibid., 279–80, 391.

98. Ibid., 272.

99. Ibid., 390.

100. Ibid., 149, 317.

101. Ibid., 156; 233.

102. Ibid., 310–11.

103. Ibid., 318.

104. Also see Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 378; Harrak, "Arabicisms," 495; Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2:4195; Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, 849. Syriac authors commonly use *mashlmānutā* to speak of a tradition. But in these passages it is quite apparent that the chronicler is using *mashlmānutā* to refer to Islam, a usage that is also attested among later sources, such as the twelfth-century writings of Dionysius bar Salibi (*CSCO* 614:4, 104, 123).

105. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:341).

106. Ibid., 284, 381, 383, 388; 162, 280, 252, 253, 254. For a discussion of the Syriac use of *ḥanpē* to describe Muslims, see Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 78; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 43 n. 63; Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam*, 8–9; Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis," *ARAM* 3, 1–2 (1991): 127–28; Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century," *Jewish History* 3, 1 (1988): 72–73; Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion," 176–77; Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 118–21.

107. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:385, 380).

108. Ibid., 390, 396; 385, 391.

109. Ibid., 388–90.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid., 383, 390–91, 390.

112. Ibid., 316, 330.

113. Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude, Seventh–Twentieth Century* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 76.

114. Timothy I, *Apology* 10, 13 (*CSCO* 631:77–78, 94–95). See Chapter 1 n. 120.

115. For example, Timothy I, *Apology* 9, 10, 14 (*CSCO* 631:63, 78, 98); Timothy I, *Canons* 75, 76 (Eduard Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1908), 2:106).

116. Timothy I, *Apology* 15, 16 (*CSCO* 631:99, 114).

117. Timothy I, *Apology* 14 (*CSCO* 631:98).

118. Hunter, "Interfaith Dialogues," 297.

119. Sebastian Brock, "Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9 (1999): 233–46; Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu de Timothée I*, 39–41; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 47.

120. Bertaina, "Development of Testimony Collections," 172–73.

121. Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 158.

122. In contrast, Timothy's *Canons* are closer in tone to his *Apology*. For example, Timothy I, *Canon* 75 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, 2:106) allows for Muslims "who fear God" to inherit from Christians.

123. Edition in Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu de Timothée I*, 274–331; and Thomas R. Hurst, "Letter 40 of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (727–823): An Edition and Translation" (MA thesis, Catholic University of America, 1981), 10–47. French translation in Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu de Timothée I*, 185–273. English translation in Hurst, "Letter 40," 48–99. Discussions in Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu de Timothée I*, 42–183; Sidney Griffith, "Patriarch Timothy I and an Aristotelian at the Caliph's Court," in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq*, ed. Hunter, 38–53; Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 45–46; Griffith, "The Syriac Letters of Patriarch Timothy I and the Birth of Christian Kalam in the Mu'talzilite Milieu of Baghdad and Basrah in Early Islamic Times," in *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, ed. Wout Jac van Bekkum, Jan Willem Drijvers, and Alex C. Klugkist (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 105–15; Thomas R. Hurst, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I (727–823): A Study in Christian-Muslim Controversy" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1986), esp. 32–43; Hurst, "Letter 40 of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I," 4–7; Roggema, "Timothy I," 519–22; Suermann, "Timothy and His Dialogue with Muslims," 272–74; Suermann, "Der nestorianische Patriarch Timotheos I," 217–30; David Thomas, "Explanations of the Incarnation in Early 'Abbasid Islam," in *Redefining Christian Identity*, ed. Murre-Van den Berg et al., 127–29.

124. Timothy I, *Letter* 40 (Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu de Timothée I*, 275).

125. Ibid., 285.

126. Ibid., 313.

127. Ibid. See Griffith, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I," 110; Griffith, "Topics and Strategies of Christian Apologetics," 23; Hurst, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I," 131–32 for a discussion of the relationship between Timothy's arguments and Muslim discussions of *ṣifrat Allah*.

128. Edition in *CSCO* 74:156–264. Latin translation in *CSCO* 75:107–89. Discussion in Griffith, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I," 115–30; Hurst, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I," esp. 43–68; and for *Letter* 34, Hurst, "Letter 34 of Timothy I," 367–82.

129. Timothy I, *Letter* 40 (274–75).

130. Timothy I, *Apology* 9 (*CSCO* 631:67–68).

131. *CSCO* 74:138–39.

132. Ibid., 241.

133. See Christine Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 106–56.

134. Edition in Scher, *CSCO* 69:231–84. French translation in Robert Hespel and René Draguet, *Théodore bar Koni: Livre des Scolies (recension de Séert) II, Mimrè VI–XI* (Louvain: Peeters, 1984), 172–211. Discussion in A. M. Butts, "Theodoros bar Koni," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 405–6; Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts," 261–62; Griffith, "Theodore Bar Kōnī's Scholion," 53–72; Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion," 158–88; Teule, "The Disputation," 343–46.

135. Griffith, "Theodore Bar Kōnī's Scholion," 53; Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion," 161.

136. Theodore bar Koni, *Scholion* 10 (*CSCO* 69:231–32).

137. Ibid., 244.

138. Ibid., 231–32, 274.

139. Ibid., 271.

140. Ibid., 276–77.

141. Ibid., 246.

142. Ibid., 241.

143. Ibid., 276.

144. Ibid., 283.

145. Ibid., 256.

146. Ibid., 283.

147. For more detailed discussions of the fourth *fitna*, see F. Gabrieli, "Al-Amīn," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 1960, 437–38; M. Rekaya, "Al-Maʾmūn," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 1987, 331–39; Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 62–63.

148. The Syriac *Bahira Legend* exists in both a Miaphysite and an East Syrian recension. Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam*, 115–17 and Griffith, "Muḥammad and the Monk Baḥīrā: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times," *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995): 158–59 argues that the *Bahira Legend* was originally composed by a Miaphysite. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 115–17 refutes this and quite plausibly suggests "an attempt has been made to construct an apologetic story that appeals to all Christians, for which Christological statements had to be kept to a minimum" (112).

149. Sergius Bahira's predictions in the first apocalypse of the *Bahira Legend* are historically accurate until events that are set after the 810s, strongly suggesting that this section was written during the fourth *fitna*. Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 38; Griffith, "Muḥammad and the Monk Bahira," 157; Abdul-Massih Saadi, "The Story of Monk Sargis-Bahira: Early Christian-Muslim Encounters," *Karmo* (1999): 24; and Krisztina Szilágyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk: The Making of the Christian Baḥīrā Legend," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 191 have suggested that the content of the

second and third sections of the *Bahira Legend* indicates that these, too, were written no later than the ninth century.

150. Edition and English translation in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 253–374. Discussions in Armand Abel, "L'apocalypse de Bahīrā et la notion islamique de Mahdī," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales* 3 (1935): 1–12; Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 124–30; Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira," 47–58; Richard Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 14 (1899): 189–201; Griffith, "Muḥammad and the Monk Bahira," 146–74; Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam*, 37–49; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 476–79; Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam*, 248–57; Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*; Roggema, "The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 600–603; Roggema, "The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rijksuniversiteit Groninge, 2007); Roggema, "A Christian Reading of the Qur'an: The Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā and Its Use of Qur'an and Sīra," in *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 57–74; Roggema, "The Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā: Some Remarks on Its Origin in the East and Its Traces in the West," in *East and West in the Crusader States: Context—Contacts—Confrontations II*, ed. Krijnie Ciggaar and Herman Teule (Leuven: Peters, 1999), 107–23; Saadi, "The Story of Monk Sargis-Bahira: Early Christian-Muslim Encounters," 22–34; Szilágyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk," 169–214.

151. The Syriac *Bahira Legend* alternates between calling the monk simply Bahira, as in Islamic texts, and calling him Sergius Bahira. For a discussion of these names and their significance, see Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 56–59. For an overview of the various Islamic Bahira accounts especially, see Barbara Roggema, "Baḥīrā," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed.(Leiden: Brill, 2011), 82–83; Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 37–60.

152. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 11–36. For an overview of surviving manuscript witnesses, see Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 238–45; Szilágyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk," 170 n. 4.

153. Concerning the term *ʿArbāyyā*, see Segal, "Arabs in Syriac Literature Before the Rise of Islam," 99–106; Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2:2983. Many preconquest writers used this term. After the conquests, *ʿArbāyyā* was occasionally applied to Muslims but could also be used to speak of an *ʿArbāyyā* Christian. On the similarities between these terms, see Jacob of Edessa's *Chronicle*, where Jacob speaks of "the kingdom of those Arabians (*ʿArbāyyē*) whom we call Arabs (*ṭayyāyē*)" (*CSCO* 3:326). For a brief discussion of the term *ʿArbāyyē*, see Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 88–89 n. 158, 113 n. 250.

154. Szilágyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk," 174.

155. *Bahira Legend* 12–13 (East Syrian recension: Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 270–72 / West Syrian recension: Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 338–40).

156. *Bahira Legend* 14 (272–76/340–46).

157. *Bahira Legend* 16 (272–76/340–46).

158. *Bahira Legend* 16 (278–84/348–52).

159. *Bahira Legend* 9 (282–84/352–54).

160. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 121–29.

161. *Bahira Legend* 16 (268/352). See also Qur'an 2:187.

162. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 102.

163. The East Syrian recension of the *Bahira Legend* has three additional episodes appended to the main text. These are much more polemical against Islam but were almost certainly added to the text later in its transmission history. These three anecedotes follow section 19 of the *Bahira Legend*, which explicitly stated that the account of Bahira had come to a close. Each of these sections also begins with the Syriac word *tub*, meaning "again" or "furthermore," which commonly links separate accounts together (Szilágyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk," 177). Additionally, these three episodes appear only in the East Syrian recension of the text and not in the West Syrian recension, either of the two Arabic recensions, or in the Latin recension. There is little doubt that these were added by later copyists. But it remains unclear when they were added. One of the three accessible manuscripts containing these later accounts dates from the seventeenth century; the other two are from the nineteenth (Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 238). There are several other East Syrian manuscripts that may contain these episodes but have not yet been examined by modern scholars. One of these no longer survives and may have been as old as the fifteenth century. The others are from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 243–45). Additionally, a reference to the Daylamites earlier in the East Syrian recension suggests that even the main part of this recension may not have been composed until at least the tenth century, and therefore the three additional episodes would have been written later than that (Szilágyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk," 191 n. 118). Given the strong likelihood that these three episodes postdate the ninth century, I have not included them in my analysis of early Syriac reactions to Islam.

164. Edition in Alphonse Mingana, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical and Natural Sciences as Taught in Baghdad About A.D. 817 or Book of Treasures by Job of Edessa* (Cambridge: Heffer and Sons, 1935), 297–470. English translation in Mingana, *Book of Treasures*, 1–296. Discussions in Mingana, *Book of Treasures*, xv–xlviii; Gerrit J. Reinink, "The 'Book of Nature' and Syriac Apologetics Against Islam: The Case of Job of Edessa's Book of Treasures," in *The Book of Nature in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Arie Johan Vanderjagt and Klaas van Berkel (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 71–84; Barbara Roggema, "Iyob of Edessa," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 225–26; Roggema, "Job of Edessa," 502–9.

165. Job, *Book of Treasures* (Mingana, *Book of Treasures*, 458).

166. Mingana, *Book of Treasures*, 23–24; Reinink, "The 'Book of Nature'," 72.

167. Reinink, "The 'Book of Nature'," 74.

168. L. I. Conrad, "The Conquest of Arwād: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near-East," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 1, *Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1992), 329, 346; Jan J. van Ginkel, "The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest in Syriac Historiography: How Did the Changing Social Position

of the Syrian Orthodox Community Influence the Account of Their Historiographers?," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Grypeou, Swanson, and Thomas, 175, 182–83. Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 13, however, notes that the *Chronicle ad 1234* is still eclectic in its preservation of Dionysius's *Chronicle* and that Michael the Syrian occasionally includes material from Dionysius that the *Chronicle ad 1234* omits.

169. *Chronicle ad 1234* (*CSCO* 81:228–30).

170. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.2 (Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche [1166–1199]* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1910), 4:405–7).

171. For a discussion of the changes brought about by al-Mutawakkil's anti-Christian policies, see Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 63; Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis," 83–104; Hunter, "Interfaith Dialogues," 302; Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire*, 108–11; Milka Levy-Rubin, "Shurūṭ ʿUmar: From Early Harbingers to Systematic Enforcement," in *Beyond Religious Borders: Interaction and Intellectual Exchange in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. David M. Freidenreich and Miriam Bayla Goldstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 35–36, 41–43; Levy-Rubin, "Shurūṭ ʿUmar and Its Alternatives," 204; Mun'im Sirry, "The Public Role of Dhimmīs During 'Abbāsid Times," *Bulletin of SOAS* 74, 2 (2011): 188, 193; Sirry, "Early Muslim-Christian Dialogue: A Closer Look at Major Themes of the Theological Encounter," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 16, 4 (2005): 366–67.

172. See Chapter 1 n. 103.

173. Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis," 117–18.

174. These three works remain unedited but are described in Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 2:618–20.

175. Edition in Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe: Traité apologétique*, *1–*34. Latin translation in Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, *35–*68. Discussions in Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts," 265–67; Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis," 115–38; Michael Philip Penn, "Nonos of Nisibis," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 313; Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 43–60; Teule, "Nonnus of Nisibis," 743–45.

176. Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis," 115–38.

177. Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe*, 9.

178. Ibid., 12.

179. Ibid., 14, 12.

180. Ibid., 31.

181. Ibid., 33–34.

182. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 171–75.

183. Thomas must have written *The Book of Governors* after 850, as he alludes to the death of Catholicos Abraham II (d. 850). Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 215 suggests that he "is writing considerably later, probably about the 860s." Edition in Budge, *The Book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Marga, A.D. 840*, vol. 1 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1893). English translation in Budge, *The Book of Governors*, vol. 2. Discussion in Jean-Maurice Fiey, "Thomas of Marga: Notule de littérature syriaque," *Le*

Muséon 78 (1965): 361–66; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 213–15; Michael Philip Penn, "A Temporarily Resurrected Dog and Other Wonders: Thomas of Margā and Early Christian/Muslim Encounters," *Medieval Encounters* 16, 2 (2010): 209–42; Herman G. B. Teule, "Thomas of Margā," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 688–90; William G. Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph: A Study of the Relationships of the Church of the East with the Sassanid Empire and the Early Caliphates up to 820 AD* (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1974), 106–27.

184. Thomas, *Book of Governors* 1.9, 4.18, 4.21, 5.2, 6.16 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:29, 222, 239, 253, 387).

185. For a more detailed discussion of Thomas's terminology for Muslims, see Penn, "A Temporarily Resurrected Dog," 216–23.

186. Thomas, *Book of Governors* 5.16 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:315).

187. Thomas, *Book of Governors* 4.24 (246–48).

188. Thomas, *Book of Governors* 5.11 (281).

189. Thomas, *Book of Governors* 5.11 (287–89).

190. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 122, 126.

191. The past few decades have seen a vigorous debate among specialists of South Asia between those who claim Hinduism to be a modern, constructed category particularly indebted to British colonialism and those stressing a long-standing core Hindu tradition. My own interest is not to adjudicate to what extent, when, or by whom Hinduism was defined. Instead, I simply wish to point out that the zeal with which these questions have been argued illustrates that the issue of how those who see themselves as outside a given group might construct that group as a religion has become an increasingly pressing question in the field of religious studies.

192. Jonathan Z. Smith, "What a Difference a Difference Makes," in *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, and "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1980), 47.

193. Jacob of Edessa, *Defining Christianity*, in Penn, "Jacob of Edessa's *Defining Christianity*," 183.

CHAPTER 3. USING MUSLIMS TO THINK WITH: NARRATIVES OF ISLAMIC RULERS

Epigraph: Thomas of Margā, *The Book of Governors* 4.19, in E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Marga, A.D. 840* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1893), 1:228–29.

1. William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired Since the Year 1838* (London: Longman, 1872), 3:1040.

2. Edition in *Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium* 3:155 (herafter cited as *CSCO*). English translation in Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1997), 395–96; Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 49–59; Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Source Book of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015). Discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 395–96; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 49–50; Michael Philip Penn, "Monks, Manuscripts, and Muslims: Syriac Textual Changes in Reaction to the Rise of Islam," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 12, 2 (2009): 240–44.

3. As Robert G. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 30 n. 93 and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 396 point out, the *Chronicle ad 724* states that the sum total of all the regnal dates it lists is 104. This total only works if one uses lunar years; with solar years it would be off by three years. The caliph list includes two Arabic loanwords, *rasūl* and *fitna* (dissension).

4. Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 30 n. 96 explains, "'The three months before Mḥmṭ came' presumably refer to the interval between the beginning of the Islamic calendar on 16 July 622 and the date of Muḥammad's arrival in Medina on 24 September 622." See also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 396.

5. BL Add. 14,643, fol. 56b. The text is not vocalized and does not mark doubled letters. For purposes of translation, I have used the Syriac consonantal structure and added the traditional vocalization and letter doubling. As noted by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 395–96 and Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 50, the caliph list is not completely accurate in terms of its chronology and never speaks of the caliphate of Ali but simply refers to five years of *fitna*.

6. One can appreciate the translational dilemma. The most common Syriac term for messenger (*shliḥā*) is also used to speak of Christ's apostles, making it a potentially problematic translational choice. Nevertheless, other Syriac Christians easily got around this. Many, such as the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, also use *rasulā* but explicitly state, "they called him a prophet and the messenger of God" (*Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:149)). Centuries later the thirteenth-century polymath Dionysius bar Ṣalībī went out of his way to avoid *shliḥā*. When referring to Muḥammad as an "apostle," Dionysius coined a Syriac neologism *mshadarā* (from the verb *shadar* = "to send"). The translator of the *Chronicle ad 724* had a much easier option. He very easily could have simply omitted this potentially problematic phrase and left it as "A notice concerning the life of Muḥammad." The later reader who erased part of the incipit was also left with a bit of a dilemma. He clearly felt it unwise to erase the entire controversial phrase, as this would have forced him to erase "God."

7. Michael Philip Penn, "Moving Beyond the Palimpsest: Erasure in Syriac Manuscripts," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18, 2 (2010): 289–92; and esp. Penn, "Monks, Manuscripts, and Muslims," 240–44.

8. *Account of 637* (*CSCO* 3:75); *Chronicle ad 640* (*CSCO* 3:147).

9. *Khuzistan Chronicle* (*CSCO* 1:30).

10. Timothy I, *Apology* 15 (*CSCO* 631:101–2).

11. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:149). The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* does not appear to be entirely consistent on this point. It dates Muḥammad's death to 626 or 627 and dates most of the military encounters between Byzantine and Arab forces to the years immediately after this. See also the late seventh- or early eighth-century *Apocalypse of John the Little*, which speaks of Muḥammad as a "warrior" (*gabrā qrabtānā*) who gathered the people of the south (*Apocalypse of John the Little* (J. Rendel Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles Together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), *18). The *Chronicle ad 775* also refers to "Muḥammad and the Arabs" entering the land and subduing it (*CSCO* 5:348). Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē (ca. 845) provides a more involved narrative in which Muḥammad led the first raids into Palestine but then retired to Medina while his followers undertook the conquests themselves. *Chronicle ad 1234* (*CSCO* 81:227–29); Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.2 (J. B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1910), 405.

12. Robert G. Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: An Appraisal," in *The Biography of Muḥammad*, ed. Harald Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 279; Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 4, 24; and especially Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muḥammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

13. Jacob of Edessa, *Chronicle* (*CSCO* 5:236); *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:149); *Chronicle ad 819* (*CSCO* 81:10); *Chronicle ad 846*, in E. W. Brooks, "A Syriac Chronicle of the Year 846," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 51 (1897): 572.

14. For example, *Chronicle ad 705* (J. P. N. Land, *Anecdota Syriaca* (Leiden: Lugnuni Batavorum, 1862), 11); *Chronicle ad 775* (Chabot, *CSCO* 81:337–49).

15. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 14, 15 (Alphonse Mingana, *Sources syriaques I* (Leipzig: Dominican Press, 1907), *141, *146).

16. Ibid., 146–47.

17. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:140). The chronicler is less sanguine about later traditions associated with Muḥammad; he claims that Muḥammad's lascivious followers assign his authorship to whatever laws they most desire and then declare, "this was established by the prophet, the messenger (*rasulā*) of God. And it was also thus commanded to him by God" (*Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:150)). This passage may be one of the earliest non-Muslim references to *hadith*.

18. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:149).

19. See also Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē as preserved in Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.2 (Chabot, *Chronique*, 4:404); *Chronicle ad 1234* (*CSCO* 82:227).

20. *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* (Diyarbekir MS 95, fols. 5a, 1b, 8a).

21. Ibid., fols. 5a, 5a, 6a.

22. Ibid., fol. 5a.

23. Timothy I, *Apology* 15 (*CSCO* 631:99–102). Also see Qur'an 4:171.

24. Timothy I, *Apology* 7–8. M. Heimgartner, *Timotheos I., ostsyrischer Patriarch: Disputation mit dem Kalifen Al-Mahdi* (Louvain: Peeters, 2011), 37–52).

25. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, ed. William Chester Jordan, Michael Cook, and Peter Schäfer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 97; Sarah Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985): 107.

26. Sidney H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad: His Scripture and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in *La vie du prophète Mahomet*, ed. T. Fahd (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 142–43; Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad," 287; Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy," 106–9; Jack Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2010), 495.

27. For a brief discussion of *taḥrif*, see Griffith, *In the Shadow of the Mosque*, 10; Sandra Toenies Keating, "Refuting the Charge of Tahrīf: Abū Rā'ita (d. ca. 835) and His 'First Risāla on the Holy Trinity'," in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden: Brill, 2005): 41–45; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.(2000), 111; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19–35; Gorden Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 37–66; Gabriel Said Reynolds, "On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*taḥrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, 2 (2010): 189–202.

28. Timothy I, *Apology* 8, 13 (Heimgartner, *Timotheos I*, 43, 90).

29. Ibid., 43–45, 90–94.

30. Timothy I, *Apology* 10, 7, 8 (77–80, 38–42, 46–51).

31. Timothy I, *Apology* 16 (114).

32. Qur'an 7:158. Although the Qur'anic use of *ummī* does not seem to have originally meant illiterate, this becomes its dominant meaning in the later interpretive tradition. See Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 144–45; and esp. Isaiah Goldfeld, "The Illiterate Prophet (Nabī Ummī): An Inquiry into the Development of a Dogma in Islamic Tradition," *Islam* 57 (1980): 58–67. The *Bahira Legend* plays off this claim. *Bahira Legend* 16 (East Syrian recension in Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 278; West Syrian recension in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 348) has Muḥammad himself state that he cannot read. The *Bahira Legend* also has both Muslim characters and the narrator speak of Muḥammad not only as illiterate but also as ignorant and simpleminded (e.g., *Bahira Legend* 12, 16 [ibid., 270, 284/338]). It substantiates this characterization through Muḥammad's simplistic questions regarding elementary theological doctrines. See Chapter 2 n. 150.

33. For a discussion of the Islamic versions of the Bahira story, see Barbara Roggema, "Baḥīrā," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed. (2011), 82–83; and esp. Roggema, "The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1, *600–900*, ed. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 37–60.

34. Part of Sergius Bahira's motivation is that God has informed him that Muḥammad will become a future leader. To curry Muḥammad's future support for Christian ascetics, Sergius Bahira decides to help him, *Bahira Legend* 15 (East Syrian recension in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 278–80; West Syrian recension in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 346–48).

35. *Bahira Legend* 16 (280–82/350–52)

36. Ibid., 280/348.

37. Ibid., 282–84/252–54. Satirizing the traditional name of sura 2 ("The Cow"), the *Bahira Legend* claims Sergius Bahira put the copy of the Qur'an he wrote on the horn of a cow.

38. Sidney H. Griffith, "Muḥammad and the Monk Bahīrā: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times," *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995): 150, 165; Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 198–99.

39. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 199.

40. *Bahira Legend* 20–22 (East Syrian recension in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 298–306); *Bahira Legend* 9 (West Syrian recension in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, 334). The *Legend* (268/332–34) also claims that Kaʿb also began the fallacious rumor that the Gospel of John's discussion of the paraclete was a reference to the coming of Muḥammad.

41. *Istoria de Mahamed* (Kenneth B. Wolf, "The Earliest Latin Lives of Muḥammad," in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 96); Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheum* (Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches Toward the Muslims* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 205); Theophanes, *Chronicle* (Carolus de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1883–85), 1:334; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* 14 (R. J. H. Jenkins G. Y. Moravcsik, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus De Administrando Imperio* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 76).

42. John of Damascus, *Concerning Heresies* 100 (*Sources chrétiennes* 383:211).

43. George the Monk, *Chronicle* (*PG* 110:869–773; Nicetas of Byzantium, *Foreword to the Following Refutation of the Book Forged by the Arab Muḥammad* (*PG* 105:789, 741).

44. Nicetas of Byzantium, *Foreword* (*PG* 105:793); George the Monk, *Chronicle* (*PG* 110:868, 865).

45. *Istoria de Mahamed* (Wolf, "The Earliest Latin Lives of Muḥammad," 96–97); Eulogius, *Memoriale Sanctorum* 1.8. Juan Gil, *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum* (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1973), 2:377.

46. Alvar, *Indiculus luminosus* (Gil, *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum,* 1:299);

Eulogius, *Memoriale sanctorum*, preface (Gil, *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, 2:367); *Istoria de Mahamed* (Wolf, "The Earliest Latin Lives of Muḥammad," 96).

47. Nicetas of Byzantium, *Refutatio Mohamedis* (*PG* 105:753). Trans. in J. M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 2000), 2:31.

48. Transcription in Andrew Palmer, "The Messiah and the Mahdi: History Presented as the Writing on the Wall," in *Polyphonia Byzantina: Studies in Honour of Willem J. Aerts*, ed. Hero Hokwerda, Edmé R. Smits, and Marinus M. Woesthuis (Groningen: Egbert Fortsten, 1993), 62. English translations in Palmer, "The Messiah and the Mahdi," 64; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 71–72; Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*. Discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 415–16; Palmer, "The Messiah and the Mahdi," 45–84; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 71–74.

49. Palmer, "The Messiah and the Mahdi," 52–56; Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 72–73.

50. Palmer, "The Messiah and the Mahdi," 52–53, 58–59.

51. Palmer, *West-Syrian Chronicles*, 73.

52. *Synod of Ḥenanishoʿ II* (J.B. Chabot, *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 245–46). Timothy I, *Apology* 21 (*CSCO* 631:162). Also see Timothy I, *Letter* 50 (Oscar Braun, *Das Buch der Synhados nach einer Handschrift des Museo Borgiano* (Stuttgart: Roth, 1900), 298), where Timothy refers to God as protecting the caliph's life.

53. For example, the preface to the 794 CE canon collection of the Miaphysite patriarch Qyriaqos refers to "every kind of suffering" that came upon Christians from a "foreign people" (*CSCO* 375:8). The canons of Gabriel of Basra (r. 884–891) refer to Christian persecution under Caliph Mutawakkil; Gabriel of Basra, *Canons*, Question 67 (Hubert Kaufhold, *Die Rechtssammlung des Gabriel von Basra und ihr Verhältnis zu den anderen juristischen Sammelwerken der Nestorianer* (Berlin: J. Schweitzer, 1976): 287–89).

54. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 15 (Mingana, *Sources syriaques I*, 155); *Chronicle ad 819* (*CSCO* 81:14); John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 15 (Sebastian Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē's Riš Mellē," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 156–57); *Chronicle of Disasters* (François Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716," *Journal Asiatique* 11, 5 (1915): 256); Theophilus as preserved in Theophanes, *Chronicle* (Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, 1:414); Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.21 (Chabot, *Chronique*, 463); *Chronicle ad 1234* (*CSCO* 82:313).

55. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:63–164, 169–70, 199–200).

56. Ibid., 317.

57. Ibid., 263, 253.

58. Ibid., 298–300, 338, 341. As Amir Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 21 writes, "Our Chronicler tended to paint in deep black and pure white, with very little in between. Thus he called al-Manṣūr 'a tyrannic ruler' and other choice epithets, as seen above, but he described

his brother ʿAbbas as a 'merciful and peace-loving man,' though both were Arabs and Muslims."

59. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:333).

60. Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 9–17.

61. Compare, for example, Theophilus's condemnation of Caliph Walīd II, who destroys churches and tortures a metropolitan (Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 199–200) with the same author's depiction of Caliph Muʿāwiya, who restores Christian churches after an earthquake (John bar Penkāyē likewise follows his exultation of Caliph Muʿāwiya with a condemnation of the rule of Muʿāwiya's son Yazīd (Mingana, *Sources syriaques I*, 146, 155).

62. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 2:808. Edition, English translation, and discussion in Michael Philip Penn, "Addressing Muslim Rulers and Muslim Rule," *Oriens Christianus* 93 (2009): 72–74, 79–81.

63. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 2:808.

64. *To the Rulers of the World* (Penn, "Muslim Rulers and Muslim Rule," 80). The work never explicitly states the religious affiliation of the world's rulers. Two reasons suggest that it envisioned them as Muslims. First, Ṣalibā copied this text at least a century into the Abbasid era, at which time most rulers in northern Mesopotamia were Muslims, and, for a ninth- or tenth-century reader of Syriac, it was extremely unlikely that the phrase "the rulers of the world" would connote Christians. Second, the author alludes to and occasionally quotes passages from Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, but nothing in the text draws from solely Christian scripture or refers to anything, such as Jesus or the Trinity, that might upset a Muslim recipient. This is particularly remarkable when compared with the other documents in this collection. Only the last six lines of the work preceding *To the Rulers of the World* survive. Nevertheless, even in these few lines there appears a reference to "Christ's power," as well as references to the Father and the Holy Spirit (BL Add. 14,653, fol. 77a). Of the five documents following *To the Rulers of the World*, four end with a benediction referring to Christ (BL Add. 14,653, fols. 78b, 79a, 80b, 82a). The one missing the benediction talks of "the word of our Lord" and then quotes from the Beatitudes (BL Add. 14,653, fol. 80b). Similar New Testament citations can be found in most of the other texts, such as the last one, which speaks of the Gospel, "the word of our Lord," and "the deeds of our Lord" (BL Add. 14,653, fols. 81b-82a).

65. *To the Rulers of the World* (Penn, "Muslim Rulers and Muslim Rule," 80).

66. Ibid., 80.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts*, 1:219 dates this manuscript to the tenth century. As with *To the Rulers of the World*, this only provides a terminus ante quem for the work's initial composition; there is no evidence suggesting that this is an autographon. Edition, English translation, and discussion in Penn, "Muslim Rulers and Muslim Rule," 74–77, 82–84.

70. The author provides no details about the emir himself and the praises lavished on

the emir are quite vague and could quite easily be applied to almost any ruler. The lack of specifics suggests that the work was aimed more at emirs in general than toward any particular ruler. Several factors do suggest that the author sees this generic emir as a Muslim. First, of course, is the very term "emir." Although a Syriac writer could use this Arabic loanword simply to denote a ruler, its most common use was to speak of a Muslim ruler. See Robert Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879; reprint 2007), 246; Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Berlin: Reuther and Reichard, 1895; reprint Wipf and Stock, 2004), 27; Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 25. Examples of Syriac documents that use the term emir to speak of Muslim rulers include John bar Penkāyē's *Book of Main Points*, the *Disputation of John and the Emir*, the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation*, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, the *Life of Rabban Hormizd*, and Barhebraeus's *Chronicle*. Second, at least by the tenth century when this work was incorporated into BL Add. 14,493, a regional leader "from a noble race and from an honorable family" would almost certainly have been Muslim. Third, the text's use of the term "emir of the faithful" seems to be a deliberate borrowing from Muslim polity; for example, Barhebraeus's *Chronicle* (Paul Bedjan, *Chronicon syriacum: E codd. mss. emendatum ac punctis vocalibus adnotationibusque locupletatum* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1890), 227, 236), the *Ehnesh Inscriptions* (Palmer, "The Messiah and the Mahdi," 62), and the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (*CSCO* 104:174, 258) all use the phrase "Commander of the faithful" to refer to Muslim caliphs. Fourth, as with *To the Rulers of the World*, if the work were addressed to a Christian ruler one would expect, especially in the closing benedictions, some reference to Jesus or the Trinity. But, except for a brief quotation from Romans 13:1, where Paul states all human authorities are ordained by God, the author makes no reference to the New Testament or anything specifically Christian. Finally, in BL Add. 14,493, *Concerning an Entrance Before a New Emir* appears immediately after a work titled *Prayers in Arabic and Written in Syriac*. This Garshuni text also begins with words that one should speak to an emir, albeit in this case an emir who knows only Arabic. Although it remains possible that a scribe would put a work about a Christian ruler immediately after one about an Arabic-speaking (and thus almost certainly Muslim) emir, this is unlikely.

71. *Concerning the Entrance Before a New Emir* (Penn, "Muslim Rulers and Muslim Rule," 82).

72. Ibid., 84.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., 82.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Paul Albar, *Vita Eulogi* 12 (Gil, *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, 1:337); Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheum* (Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, 205); Eulogius, *Memoriale Sanctorum* 1.25 (Gil, *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, 2:389).

79. George the Monk, *Chronicle* (*PG* 110:865); Nicetas of Byzantium, *Foreword* (*PG* 105:673).

80. *Chronicle of Alfonso III* 25 (Juan Gil Fernández, José L. Moralejo, and Juan

Ignacio Ruiz de la Peña, *Crónicas asturianas: Crónica de Alfonso III* (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 1985), 218–19); *Chronicle of 754* 54 (José Eduardo López Pereira, *Chronica Mozarabe de 754: Edicion critica y traduccion* (Zaragoza: Urb. la Bombarda, 1980), 70–72; Theophanes, *Chronicle* (Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, 1:399).

81. Judy Martin, *Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior* (New York: Norton, 2005), 699–707.

82. *Life of John of Dailam* 28–29 (Sebastian Brock, "A Syriac Life of John of Dailam," *Parole de l'Orient* 10 (1981–1982): 139). Edition in Brock, "John of Dailam," 125–43. English trans. in Brock, "John of Dailam," 144–51. Discussions in Brock, "John of Dailam," 123–34, 152–75; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 203–5.

83. *Life of Gabriel of Qartmin* 12 (Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur `Abdin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), lxxii). Edition and English translation in Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, lv–xcii. Discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 121–24; Andrew Palmer, "The Life of Gabriel of Qartmīn'," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 892–97; Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 13–18.

84. *Life of Theoduṭē*. There is not yet a published edition of the text or its translation. An edition and English translation by Andrew Palmer should be forthcoming. I am here dependent on passages cited in Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak", 457, 457, 463. Discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 156–60; Andrew Palmer, "Āmīd in the Seventh-Century Syriac Life of Theodūtē," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 111–38; Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 88–91; J. B. Tannous, "Theodotos of Amid," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian Brock, Aaron Butts, George Kiraz, and Lucas Van Rompay (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2011), 456–72.

85. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 15 (Mingana, *Sources syriaques I*, 146).

86. As for Theophilus of Edessa, there remains some question regarding his confessional identity. Two later sources, Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē and Barhebraeus, provide brief biographical details. Dionysius claims Theophilus was a Chalcedonian, Barhebreaus that he was a Maronite.

87. For example, al-Manṣūr's brother Abbas; see *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (*CSCO* 104:263).

88. *Chronicle ad 819* (*CSCO* 81:15); *Chronicle ad 846* (*CSCO* 3:234).

89. Isho'yahb III, *Letter* 14C (*CSCO* 11:251).

90. Timothy I, *Letter* 50 (Braun, *Das Buch der Synhados*, 298); Timothy I, *Apology*; Timothy I, *Letter* 8 (*CSCO* 74:90).

91. *Life of John of Dailam* 28–29 (Brock, "John of Dailam," 139).

92. *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (*CSCO* 104:164).

93. Budge, *Book of Governors*, vol. 1 based his edition of the *Book of Governors* on four closely related manuscripts, the oldest of which was written in the seventeenth century. Each of these manuscripts divides the *Book of Governors* into six books. Nevertheless, several pieces of data support Book 6 having originally been an earlier work of Thomas's.

Book 5 draws the narrative of Bēt Abhe to a close, stating, "here ends the history of the holy men who lived in the Monastery of Bēt ʿĀbē," and then concludes with a final apology and benediction (Thomas, *Book of Governors*, 5.17 [Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:324]). What appears in extant manuscripts as Book 6 suddenly jumps to stories unrelated to Bēt ʿĀbē, focusing on the figure of Mār Gabriel. Gabriel appeared only briefly in the first five books, when in Book 4 Thomas speaks of having written an earlier life of Mār Gabriel that also spoke of ʿAmran bar Muḥammad (Thomas, *Book of Governors*, 4.21 [Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:239]). J. M. Fiey, "Thomas of Marga: Notule de littérature syriaque," *Le Muséon* 78 (1965): 364–65; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 213–14; and Herman G. B. Teule, "Thomas of Margā," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 688 arrive at a similar conclusion. See Chapter 2 n. 183.

94. Thomas, *Book of Governors* 6.16 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:386).

95. Ibid. (387).

96. Ibid. (388).

97. Ibid.

98. Thomas, *Book of Governors*, 4.21 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:239).

99. Thomas, *Book of Governors*, 4.21–22 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:239–44).

100. Sidney H. Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Kōnī's Apology for Christianity," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47 (1981): 170; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation Between a Monk of Bet Hale and an Arab Notable," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Grypeou, Swanson, and Thomas, 159; Reinink, "The Lamb on the Tree: Syriac Exegesis and Anti-Islamic Apologetics," in *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations*, ed. Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 111–12; Bas ter Haar Romeny, "Question-and-Answer Collections in Syriac Literature," in *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context*, ed. Annelie Volgers and Claudio Zamagni (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 145–63; Joel Thomas Walker, *The Legend of Mār Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 165. Several scholars have stressed the possible influence of Syriac *drāshā* on later Islamic *kalām*. See, for example, Sidney H. Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bēt Halē and a Muslim Emir," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3, 1 (2000): ix; Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion," 171; Harald Suermann, "Timothy and His Dialogue with Muslims," *The Harp* 8/9 (1995–1996): 262; Walker, *The Legend of Mār Qardagh*, 170–71, esp. n21.

101. David Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2011), 3, 22, 33–34; Walker, *The Legend of Mār Qardagh*, 171.

102. Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 10, 237, 246; Averil Cameron, "Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byzantine Period," in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East: Forms and Types of Literary Debates in Semitic and Related Literatures*, ed. G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (Louvain: Department Oriëntalistiek, 1991), 101–4.

103. For a discussion of Byzantine and Sasanian sponsorship of such debates, see Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 37, 41, 236; Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 31; Walker, *The Legend of Mār Qardagh*, 165, 176–77. As Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 20 summarizes, "At the end of the dialogue, the merits of the competing claims were weighed against one another, and the dialogue came to a conclusion. Many texts used a political leader or impartial observer as the judge between the speakers."

104. *John and the Emir* (Michael Philip Penn, "John and the Emir: A New Introduction, Edition and Translation," *Le Muséon* 121 (2008): 82–85). See Chapter 2 n. 60.

105. *John and the Emir* (Penn, "John and the Emir," 85).

106. Ibid., 85.

107. Ibid.

108. Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean," 225–79. As Gerrit J. Reinink, "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993): 172–73, notes, "After Nau's study scholars were more concerned with the question of the identity of the emir and the date of meeting than with the contents of the colloquy." Khalil Samir, "Qui est l'interlocuteur musulman du patriarche syrien Jean III (631–648)?" in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen-Oosterhesselen 10–12 September*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers et al. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 389–93 summarizes the various attempts by Leone Caetani, François Nau, Henri Lammens, Ephrem Barṣaum, and George Graf to identify the emir. He then presents his own candidate, ʿUmayr ibn Saʿd al-Ansari.

109. Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 11; Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean," 227; Abdul Massih Saadi, "The Letter of John of Sedreh: A New Perspective on Nascent Islam," *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society* 11, 1 (1997): 68; Harald Suermann, "The Old Testament and the Jews in the Dialogue Between the Jacobite Patriarch John I and 'Umayr Ibn Sa'd Al- Anṣārī'," in *Eastern Crossroads: Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy*, ed. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2007), 141.

110. Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean," 263 n. 3; Saadi, "The Letter of John of Sedreh," 78.

111. Samir, "Qui est l'interlocuteur?," 388.

112. Saadi, "The Letter of John of Sedreh," 78.

113. Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 141–54.

114. For a brief overview of the controversy concerning when to date this text, see Thomas and Roggema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 783–84. For arguments for a late seventh- or early eighth-century dating for *John and the Emir*, see Reinink, "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature," 171–87; Barbara Roggema, "The Debate Between Patriarch John and an Emir of the Mhaggrāyē: A Reconsideration of the Earliest Christian-Muslim Debate," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Beirut: Ergon, 2007), 38–39; and esp. Penn, "John and the Emir," 69–81.

115. *John and the Emir* (Penn, "John and the Emir," 82, 82, 83).

116. Ibid., 85.

117. Penn, "Muslim Rulers and Muslim Rule," 71–84.

118. *John and the Emir* (Penn, "John and the Emir," 83–84).

119. Ibid., 84. As Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean," 260 n. 2 points out, this same proof text is found in Severus of Antioch's *Cathedral Homily* 70.

120. *John and the Emir* (Penn, "John and the Emir," 84).

121. Ibid.

122. Ibid.

123. See Chapter 1 n. 85.

124. *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* (Diyarbekir MS 95, fol. 1a).

125. Ibid., fol. 1b.

126. Ibid., fols. 1b–2a.

127. Ibid., fols. 2b, 5a.

128. Ibid., fols. 3b, 4a, 8a.

129. Ibid., fols. 4b, 5b.

130. Ibid., fols. 1a, 8a.

131. Ibid., fol. 8b.

132. Ibid., fol. 1b.

133. Ibid., fol. 5b.

134. Ibid., fol. 2b.

135. Ibid., fols. 2b–3a.

136. Ibid., fol. 3a.

137. Ibid., fol. 6a.

138. Gerrit J. Reinink, "Bible and Qur'ān in Early Syriac Christian-Islamic Disputation," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue*, ed. Tamcke, 69.

139. *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* (Diyarbekir MS 95, fols. 3a–3b).

140. Ibid.

141. See Chapter 1 n. 120.

142. *CSCO* 632:xl–xliii; Martin Heimgartner, "Timothy I," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 523–24; Heimgartner, "Die Disputatio des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos (780–823) mit dem Kalifen al-Mahdī," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue*, ed. Tamcke, 54–55.

143. Timothy I, *Apology* 12 (*CSCO* 631:82–83).

144. As Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 156 points out, "These compliments are not only literary devices; the dialogue's language exemplifies the proper courtesy that is to be shown in a work of learned literature."

145. Timothy I, *Apology* 2, 21 (*CSCO* 631:162).

146. Timothy I, *Apology* 14 (*CSCO* 631:97).

147. Timothy I, *Apology* 8 (*CSCO* 631:45).

148. Timothy I, *Apology* 19 (*CSCO* 631:148).

149. Timothy I, *Apology* 9, 9, 8, 9, 13 (*CSCO* 631:62, 57–58, 44–45, 67–68, 95).

150. Timothy I, *Apology* 13 (*CSCO* 631:90–91).

151. Timothy I, *Apology* 3 (*CSCO* 631:8–11).

152. Ibid., 13.

153. Ibid., 10–11.

154. Timothy I, *Apology* 20 (*CSCO* 631:157).

155. Sidney H. Griffith, "The Syriac-Speaking Churches and the Muslims in the Medinan Era of Muḥammad and the Four Caliphs," in *Syriac Churches Encountering Islam: Past Experiences and Future Perspectives*, 38; Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad," 118; G. J. Reinink, "From Apocalyptics to Apologetics: Early Syriac Reactions to Islam," in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. Wolfram Brandes and Felicitas Schmieder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 86.

156. Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 238; Griffith, "The Syriac-Speaking Churches in the Medinan Era," 38, 42; Reinink, "Bible and Qur'an," 58–59; Dietmar W. Winkler, "Christian Responses to Islam in the Umayyad Period," in *Syriac Churches Encountering Islam*, ed. Winkler, 81.

157. Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 20; Walker, *The Legend of Mār Qardagh*, 171.

158. Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues*, 237; Sidney H. Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)," in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 273; Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 18.

159. *Maronite Chronicle* (*CSCO* 2:70). According to the *Maronite Chronicle*, the Miaphysite patriarch soon established a specific tax on monasteries to fund the continual bribery of Muʿāwiya. To gain additional favor, the patriarch even bequeathed his estate to the caliph. See Chapter 2 n. 24.

160. For the dating of the *Qenneshre Fragment*, see Michael Philip Penn, "The Composition of the Qenneshrē Fragment," in *Aramaic in Post-Biblical Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Eric Myers and Paul Flesher (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 33–48.

161. *Qenneshre Fragment*, in Michael Philip Penn, "Demons Gone Wild: An Introduction and Translation of the Syriac *Qenneshre Fragment*," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 79 (2013): 380–83.

162. Ibid., 385–87.

163. Ibid., 384–85.

164. Ibid., 385–87.

165. Ibid.

166. Edition in E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Histories of Rabban Hōrmīzd the Persian and Rabban Bar-'Idtā*, vol. 1 (London: Luzai, 1902). English translation in Budge, *Histories of Rabban Hormizd*, vol. 2. Discussions in Budge, *Histories of Rabban Hormizd*, 2:i–xxiv; Stephen Gero, "Cyril of Alexandria, Image Worship and the Vita of Rabban Hormizd," *Oriens Christianus* 25 (1978): 79–80, 90–97; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 189–92.

167. The *Life of Rabban Hormizd* (Budge, *Histories of Rabban Hormizd*, 1:3) claims

to have been written by Simon, a disciple of the late seventh-century Rabban Yozadak. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 190–91 gives a fair amount of credence to this authorial claim. In contrast, Gero, "Cyril of Alexandria," 90–92 argues that the composition was written after 886. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 191 n. 60 debates Gero's dating, suggesting that, although later authors may have modified the *Life*, most of it was completed before the late ninth century. In support, Hoyland notes that Isho'dnaḥ of Baṣra's mid-ninth-century *Book of Chastity* is familiar with the general outline of the *Life*.

168. *Life of Rabban Hormizd* 10 (Budge, *Histories of Rabban Hormizd*, 1:60–62).

169. *Life of Rabban Hormizd* 11 (65–69).

170. Ibid., 69.

171. *Life of Rabban Hormizd* 12 (70).

172. Ibid.

173. Ibid., 70–71.

174. *Life of Rabban Hormizd* 13–15 (71–79).

175. The governor's prominent position and his name would have strongly suggested to the work's audience that this character is a Muslim. Furthermore, when speaking of Rabban Hormizd, Ali refers to "his God," and when speaking to Hormizd he refers to "your God" (*Life of Rabban Hormizd* 23 (Budge, *Histories of Rabban Hormizd*, 1:101, 104).

176. *Life of Rabban Hormizd* 23 (98–99).

177. Ibid. (103).

178. Ibid. (104).

179. Jan J. van Ginkel, "History and Community: Jacob of Edessa and West Syrian Identity," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East Since the Rise of Islam*, ed. H. L. Murre-Van den Berg, J. J. van Ginkel, and T. M. van Lint (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 67; Richard E. Payne, "Persecuting Heresy in Early Islamic Iraq: The Catholicos Ishoyahb III and the Elites of Nisibis," in *The Power of Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 403; Winkler, "Christian Responses to Islam," 72.

180. Isho'yahb III, *Letter* 48B (*CSCO* 11:97).

181. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 15 (Mingana, *Sources syriaques I*, 147).

182. For more extended discussion of genre and historicity in Syriac literature, see Michael Philip Penn, "A Temporarily Resurrected Dog and Other Wonders: Thomas of Margā and Early Christian/Muslim Encounters," *Medieval Encounters* 16, 2 (2010): 212, 239–42.

183. Of particular note are the works written under the pen name of Bat Ye'or. For example, Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude, Seventh–Twentieth Century* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996) consists of two parts. The first half provides a narrative overview of non-Muslims under Islamic rule from the seventh to the twentieth century, much of this a paraphrase of selected Muslim and non-Muslim texts. The second half, titled "Documents," reprints excerpts under headings such as "depopulation," "on exile," "on torture," and so on. Syriac chronicles play a particularly prominent role in Bat Ye'or's work. On Bat Ye'or and

her influence, particularly see influence, particularly see Michael A. Sells, "Christ Killer, Kremlin, Contagion," in *The New Crusades*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 360–66.

184. Felice Lifshitz, "Beyond Positivism and Genre: 'Hagiographical' Texts as Historical Narrative," *Viator* 25 (1994): 100. See also Nancy Khalek, *Damascus After the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20–22; Lifshitz, "Beyond Positivism and Genre," 95, 100–102, 113, 102, 98, 113.

185. See Chapter 1 n. 2.

CHAPTER 4. BLURRING BOUNDARIES: THE CONTINUUM BETWEEN EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND EARLY ISLAM

Epigraph: *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium* 104:256 (herafter cited as *CSCO*)).

1. As is often the case in the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, the text does not specify the religious allegiance of these minor characters. It simply refers to those who intermingled with the Syrians. Although it remains possible that this story is not about Muslims, this remains unlikely. First, the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* almost always explicitly identifies any character who is a Jew, Manichaean, Zoroastrian, or polytheist. The lack of explicit designation already substantially decreases the groups these people originally belonged to. Second, throughout the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, *Syrians* and *ṭayyāyē* are often paired terms. Given that this anecdote is about identities in flux, it makes perfect sense to here replace the more specific *ṭayyāyē* with a more generic reference. Third, the alternative scenario, that this is a story about non-Aramaean Christians marrying Aramaean women, makes little sense. Elsewhere the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* never concerns itself with interethnic mingling of Christians or why this would have provided a pretext for the governor's intervention. Nor does the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* provide any background for an unexpected influx of non-Syrian Christians into northern Iraq. In the narrative world of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* this region is inhabited by Aramaeans, Jews, polytheists, an occasional Zoroastrian or Manichaean, and lots of Muslims. The verb here used to describe the intermingling (*'eṯḥalaṭ*) is also the verb other Syriac authors commonly use to speak of Christian-Muslim intermarriage. Amir Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 226 n. 2 arrives at a similar conclusion.

2. Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 225 n. 1, 226 n. 2.

3. For a discussion of pre-Islamic Rusafa, see esp. Elizabeth Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius Between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 60–100; and Lara Tohme, "Spaces of Convergence: Christian Monasteries and Umayyad Architecture in Greater Syria," in *Negotiating Secular and Sacred in Medieval Art: Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist*, ed. Alicia Walker and Amanda Luyster (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 137–39. For Basilica A, see Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, 80–87, esp. 82–84

for issues of dating; and esp. Thilo Ulbert and Iris Bayer, *Die Basilika des Heiligen Kreuzes in Resafa-Sergiupolis* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1986), which provides a detailed site report of the basilica.

4. Elizabeth Key Fowden, "Sharing Holy Places," *Common Knowledge* 8, 2 (2002): 134–35; Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, 92–100.

5. For a discussion of Umayyad Rusafa, see esp. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, 174–89. See also Dorothée Sack, *Rusafa IV: Die grosse Moschee von Resafa-Rusafat Hisam* (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1996), esp. 155, which provides a detailed site report of the mosque.

6. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, 181.

7. Fowden, "Sharing Holy Places," 135 writes, "The mosque's proximity to the shrine suggests an effort to benefit from the saint's miracle-working presence and to provide Muslims with a place nearby to worship—and even to participate in the cult of St. Sergius." Also see Sack, *Rusafa IV*, 155–56, 160, Tafeln 3, 4, 5, 11; Tohme, "Spaces of Convergence," 141; Dorothea Weltecke, "Multireligiöse Loca Sancta und die mächtigen Heiligen der Christen," *Der Islam* 88 (2012): 80–85.

8. For a discussion of such references, see Fowden, "Sharing Holy Places," 129–34; Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, 177–79; Nancy Khalek, *Damascus After the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 85–134.

9. Suliman Bashear, "*Qibla musharriqa* and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," *Muslim World* 81, 3–4 (1991): 268, 277–78, 281–82.

10. Rina Avner, "The Dome of the Rock in Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem: Architecture and Architectural Iconography," *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World* 27 (2010): 41; Avner, "The Recovery of the Kathisma Church and Its Influence on Octagonal Buildings," in *One Land Many Cultures: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislao Loffreda OFM*, ed. G. Claudio Bottini, Leah Di Segni, and L. Daniel Chrupcala (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 2003), 180–81.

11. Avner, "Dome of the Rock," 41–42. For additional evidence of shared worship spaces, see Bashear, "Qibla musharriqa," 274–82; Elizabeth Key Fowden, "Christian Monasteries and Umayyad Residences in Late Antique Syria," in *Antigüedad y cristianismo: Monografías históricas sobre la antigüedad tardía*, ed. J. Ma Blázquez Martínez and A. González Blanco (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2004), 576–80; Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 215.

12. Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 97.

13. See Chapter 2 n. 42.

14. Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai* 57 (Thomas J. Lamy, *Dissertatio de Syrorum fide et disciplina in re eucharista* (Leuven: Vanlinthout, 1859), 156).

15. Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai* 80 (Harvard Syriac 93, fols. 28b–29a).

16. Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai* 58 (Lamy, *Dissertatio de Syrorum fide*, 158).

17. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (J. B. Chabot, *Chronicon anonymum pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum II* (Louvain: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1933), 161); *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* (Diyarbekir MS 95, fol. 1b); *Life of Gabriel of Qartmin* 9 (Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur 'Abdin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), lxvii); Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 4.19 (E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Marga, A.D. 840* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1893), 1:228); *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:375); Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors* 6.16 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:386–87); Timothy I, *Letter* 8 (*CSCO* 67:90); *Life of John of Dailam* 28–29 (Sebastian Brock, "A Syriac Life of John of Dailam," *Parole de l'Orient* 10 (1981–1982): 139); Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 4.19 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:224–25); *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:192); Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 6.17 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:400); *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:256, 161, 318).

18. Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 2.41 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:130–31); *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:211); Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 3.4 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:153–55); Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē, *Chronicle*, as preserved in *Chronicle ad 1234* (*CSCO* 81:263–64) and Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 11.8 (J. B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1910), 421–22); Timothy I, *Letter* 43 (Henri Pognon, *Une version syriaque des Aphorismes d'Hippocrate* (Leipzig: Henrichs, 1903), xvi); Timothy I, *Letter* 48 (Pognon, *Aphorismes d'Hippocrate*, xxii); Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 6.16 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:387); *Life of Rabban Hormizd* 10 (E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Histories of Rabban Hōrmīzd the Persian and Rabban Bar-'Idtā* (London: Luzai, 1902), 1:64); *Maronite Chronicle* (*CSCO* 2:70); *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:197); *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (Amir Harrak, "Piecing Together the Fragmentary Account of the Martyrdom of Cyrus of Ḥarrān," *Analecta Bollandiana* 121, 2 (2003): 320).

19. Antoine Fattal, "Comment les Dhimmis étaient jugés en terre d'islam," *Cahiers d'Histoire Égyptienne* 3 (1951): 322–24; Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1997), 15; Michael G. Morony, "Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq," in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, ed. Robert Hoyland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 130. For an extensive discussion of Christians' legal autonomy under early Islam, see Néophyte Edelby, "L'autonomie législative des chrétiens en terre d'islam," *Archives d'Histoire du Droit Oriental* 5 (1950/1951): 1–43. For a discussion of the limits of such autonomy and the circumstances in which Christians would be tried by a Muslim judge, see Fattal, "Comment les Dhimmis étaient jugés," 327–41.

20. Uriel I. Simonsohn, *A Common Justice: The Legal Allegiances of Christians and Jews Under Early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 4–6. There were many instances in which *dhimmī* were tried in Muslim courts, including cases in which one of the parties was Muslim, in which the parties were both *dhimmī* but of different faiths, in cases concerning public order, or often when one of the parties chose a Muslim court over that of his or her own religion.

21. Robert Hoyland, "Introduction: Muslims and Others," in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society*, ed. Hoyland, xiii, xv; Morony, "Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq," 114–17, 121.

22. *John and the Emir* (Michael Philip Penn, "John and the Emir: A New Introduction, Edition and Translation," *Le Muséon* 121 (2008): 84).

23. Simonsohn, *A Common Justice*, 147; Simonsohn, "Seeking Justice among the 'Outsiders': Christian Recourse to Non-Ecclesiastical Judicial Systems Under Early Islam," in *The Christian Communities of the Middle East*, ed. Bas ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 205, 210, 216; Simonsohn, "Overlapping Jurisdictions: Confessional Boundaries and Judicial Choice Among Christians and Jews Under Early Muslim Rule" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2008), 177, 211.

24. Simonsohn, "Seeking Justice," 211.

25. Ibid., 209, 211, 216.

26. Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," in *Arab-Byzantine Relations in Early Islamic Times*, ed. Michael Bonner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 71; Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xvi.

27. Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xv; Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," 71; Simonsohn, "Seeking Justice," 210.

28. Edition and German translation in Eduard Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1914), 3:2–201. Discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 205–9; and Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, 3:viii–xvii, 287–344.

29. Isho^{c}bokht, *Composition of the Laws* 1.1 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, 3:8).

30. Isho^{c}bokht, *Composition of the Laws* 1.14 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, 3:20). Here Isho^{c}bokht uses the term *ḥanpē*, which often means "pagan," but numerous Syriac authors also use this word when discussing Muslims. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 208 notes that in this passage Isho^{c}bokht's reference to *ḥanpē* almost certainly means Muslims as opposed to polytheists.

31. *John and the Emir* (Penn, "John and the Emir," 84).

32. Isho^{c}bokht, *Composition of the Laws*, preface (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, 3:2). The preface of the *Canons of George I* (J. B. Chabot, *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 215–16) also includes an unprecedented discussion of the importance of law to Christianity.

33. *John and the Emir* (Penn, "John and the Emir," 83–84).

34. Paris syr. 354, fol. 143b. Also see the twenty-one canons written by Simeon of Rewardashir (most likely a close contemporary to the late eighth-century Isho^{c}bokht) in Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher,* 3:153–207.

35. Timothy I, *Canon*, Prolog (Eduard Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher* (Berlin: Reimer, 1908), 2:56–57).

36. Simonsohn, "Seeking Justice," 209.

37. George I, *Canon* 6 (Chabot, *Synodicon orientale*, 219). Briefly discussed in David M. Freidenreich, "Muslims in Canon Law, 650–1000," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History,* vol. 1, *600–900*, ed. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Leiden:

Brill, 2009), 88–89; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 192–94; Lucas Van Rompay, "Gewargis I," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian Brock, Aaron Butts, George Kiraz, and Lucas Van Rompay (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2011), 175; Simonsohn, *A Common Justice*, 103; Herman G. B. Teule, "Ghiwarghis I," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 151–53.

38. Jacob of Edessa, *Canon* 30 (CSCO 367:272). Also see similar decrees made in 794 by the patriarch Qyriaqos; Qyriaqos, *Canons*, 25, 46 (*CSCO* 375:12, 16–17).

39. Timothy I, *Canon* 12 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher,* 2:67).

40. Timothy I, *Canon* 13 (67–69).

41. Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē, *Canon* 4 (*CSCO* 375:29–30).

42. Gīwargī, *Canon* 11 (*CSCO* 375:4); Qyriaqos, *Canon* 14 (*CSCO* 375:21). This was not the first time Qyriaqos wrote against this issue. Eighteen years earlier in 794 he had issued *Canon* 25 against those who turned to worldly rulers for judgment and *Canon* 46 against Christians who appeal a bishop's decision to worldly rulers (*CSCO* 375:12, 16–17).

43. Ignatius, *Canon* 4 (*CSCO* 375:53). In 896 Dionysius II's *Canon* 8 prohibited Christians from seeking legal decisions from non-Christians (60).

44. Simonsohn, "Seeking Justice," 193.

45. Simonsohn, *A Common Justice*, 13, 147–56.

46. Volker L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 158–65.

47. Jacob of Edessa, "Further Questions of Addai," 75 (Harvard Syriac 93, fols. 26b-27a).

48. Jacob of Edessa, "Further Questions of Addai," 76–78 (Harvard Syriac 93, fols. 27a-28a).

49. Barhebraeus, *Nomocanon* (Paul Bedjan, *Nomocanon Gregorii Barhebraei* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1898), 41–42). Barhebraeus's *Nomocanon* cites several of Jacob's canons, most often removing the original question and incorporating an abbreviated version of it into Jacob's answer. In this case, Barhebraeus's version not only avoids many of the ambiguities of Addai's original question, but it also increases the emphasis on conversion risk by having the woman herself explicitly threaten to become a Hagarene.

50. Jacob of Edessa, "Further Question of Addai," 75 (Harvard Syriac 93, fols. 26b–27a).

51. *Canons of the Patriarch Giwargi* (*CSCO* 375:2–6).

52. An exception is Freidenreich, "Muslims in Canon Law," 92–93 who briefly discusses this ruling.

53. *Canons of the Patriarch Giwargi* (*CSCO* 375:4).

54. East Syrian authors make this assumption more explicit. See, for example, Timothy I, *Canons* 26–27 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher,* 2:75).

55. Isho^{c}bokht, *Composition on the Laws* 2.8 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher,* 3:51–52).

56. Timothy I, *Canon* 27 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher,* 2:75).

57. Ibid.

58. Isho^{c}barnun, *Canon* 10 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher,* 2:122).

59. Ishoʿbarnun, *Canon* 11 (122).

60. Ishoʿbokht, *Composition on the Laws* 2.11 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher,* 3:56–58); Ishoʿbarnun, *Canon* 114 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher,* 2:168).

61. Timothy I, *Canon* 75 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher,* 2:106).

62. Ishoʿbokht, *Composition on the Laws* 4.4.9 (Sachau, *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, 3:118). Ishoʿbokht does rule, however, that Christian children can inherit from *ḥanpē* parents; however, he warns that if the children encounter any resistance to their inheritance, they should not press their claim.

63. Gabriel of Basra, *Canons* (Hubert Kaufhold, "Über die Entstehung der syrischen Texte zum islamischen Recht," *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985): 161).

64. Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai* 25 (François Nau, *Les canons et les résolutions canoniques de Rabboula, Jean de Tella, Cyriaque d'Amid, Jacques d'Edesse, Georges des Arabes, Cyriaque d'Antioche, Jean III, Théodose d'Antioche et des Perses* (Paris: Lethielleux,1906), 49). Both Freidenreich, "Muslims in Canon Law," 96 and Karl-Erik Rignell, *A Letter from Jacob of Edessa to John the Stylite of Litarab Concerning Ecclesiastical Canons* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1979), 95–96 are probably correct in considering this to be a "portable altar," a table for the Eucharist that is small enough to be moved from place to place.

65. Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai* 25 (Lamy, *Dissertatio de Syrorum fide*, 126).

66. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 2–3, 139.

67. Several other scholars have also noted the disconnect between elite emphasis on confessional boundaries and popular practice. See, for example, Richard W. Bulliet, "Process and Status in Conversion and Continuity," in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 4; Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013), 369; Robert G. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 34; Uriel I. Simonsohn, "'Halting Between Two Opinions': Conversion and Apostasy in Early Islam," *Medieval Encounters* 19 (2013): 369; Simonsohn, *A Common Justice*, 7; Jack Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2010), 18.

68. Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 10.

69. Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 4.17 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:221–22).

70. Thomas of Margā consistently uses *ṭayyāyā* to speak of a person whom we would characterize as a Muslim. See Michael Philip Penn, "A Temporarily Resurrected Dog and Other Wonders: Thomas of Margā and Early Christian/Muslim Encounters," *Medieval Encounters* 16, no. 2 (2010): 216–23.

71. Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 4.18 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:222–23).

72. Ibid. (222).

73. Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 4.19 (223).

74. Ibid. (224–25).

75. Unlike the term *Hagarene*, *ṭayyāyē* is not used by all Syriac authors to speak only of Muslims. In some cases *ṭayyāyā* could refer to a Christian or pagan of Arab descent. For stories that speak of a *ṭayyāyē*, I have limited my discussion to those in which either context clearly indicates that the *ṭayyāyā* is Muslim or to those from authors such as Thomas of Margā who consistently uses *ṭayyāyā* only for followers of Islam (see Penn, "A Temporarily Resurrected Dog," 216–23).

76. See Chapter 3 n. 84.

77. Andrew Palmer, "Āmīd in the Seventh-Century Syriac Life of Theodūtē," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 125.

78. *Life of Theoduṭē*, cited in J. B. Tannous, "Theodotos of Amid," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 464, 472.

79. Tannous, "Theodotos of Amid," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 457, 459–60, 463.

80. As Palmer, "Āmīd in the Seventh Century," 123–25 notes, the *Life of Theoduṭē* uses *ṭayyāyē* to speak of Muslims. The text's reference to Christians and *ṭayyāyē* as separate groups precludes these characters being what we would call Arab Christians.

81. Palmer, "Āmīd in the Seventh Century," 125.

82. Thomas of Margā, *The Book of Governors* 4:24 (Budge, *Book of Governors,* 1:248).

83. Palmer, "Āmīd in the Seventh Century," 125.

84. Thomas of Margā, *The Book of Governors* 5.11 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:287–89).

85. Thomas of Margā, *The Book of Governors* 5.16 (315).

86. Ibid., 316.

87. Jacob of Edessa, *First Letter to John the Stylite* 6 (*CSCO* 375:228–29).

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Jacob of Edessa, *Second Letter to John the Stylite* 9 (*CSCO* 375:237).

91. Jacob of Edessa, *Second Letter to John the Stylite* 23 (Arthur Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition I* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO 1975–1976), 244).

92. Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors* 3.3 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:151).

93. Chase F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites After the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98–102.

94. Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam," 396.

95. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:389) attributes a similar statement to Muslims. According to the *Chronicle*, Muslims profess that Jesus "is a prophet, [he is] just like one of the prophets, a man like me and you." Ḥnanishā refers to Muslims as some new folly and attributes to them the belief that Jesus was only a prophet (BL Or. 9353, fol. 253a; published transliteration in Gerrit J. Reinink, "Fragmente der Evangelienexegese des Katholikos Henanišo I," in *V Symposium Syriacum*, ed. René Lavenant (Rome: Pontifical Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1990), 90). It also seems unlikely that Thomas is trying to describe an East Syrian congregation that became too Miaphysite

in their Christology. The claim that one's Christology makes Jesus solely human is most often used by Miaphysites to indict Dyophysites, not the other way around. Thus, when Māran-ammeh's miracle convinces the congregation to return to orthodoxy, they respond by proclaiming that they believe that Jesus is the Son of God and is God. This statement makes perfect sense as a way to prove that they no longer followed Islamic beliefs about Jesus. But it would in no way distinguish them from Miaphysites or Chalcedonians. Their statement would essentially be a non sequitur if the story had been about the congregation shifting its allegiance from the Christology of one established Syriac church to another. All of these churches would agree with their response, so it could in no way prove that the congregants had returned to East Syrian beliefs.

96. Thomas of Margā, *Book of Governors*, 3.3 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:151).

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid., 152.

100. BL Add. 14,643, fol. 56b. See Chapter 3 n. 2.

101. See Chapter 3 n. 6 for more detailed discussion of the translator's word choice.

102. Barhebraeus, *Nomocanon* (Bedjan, *Nomocanon*, 12).

103. Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam," 308–9 cites a discussion by Jacob found in Mardin 310, fols. 208a–b. Here, Jacob complains about Christians who use fabric containing images of Greek pagan stories as an altar covering simply because they thought such images were particularly beautiful. It is quite possible that Barhebraeus's short quotation of Jacob's prohibition regarding using a cloth embroidered with the "Hagarene confession of faith" originally came from a similar context.

104. The reign of Jacob's contemporary, Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik, is when one first finds evidence for a double *shahāda*, that is, a confession that there is only one God and Muḥammad is His prophet. For example, in the latter part of ʿAbd al-Malik's reign, the caliph began to circulate coins inscribed with the double *shahāda*. Jacob's ruling may suggest, that, even in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, a single *shahāda* continued to circulate. For discussions of the transition from a single to a double *shahāda*, see Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 112, 205–6, 208–9, 249; Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhath* 50/51 (2002–2003): 47–48; Robert Hoyland, "New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State," *Bulletin of SOAS* 63, 3 (2006): 397.

105. An edition of the letter and a French translation appear in François Nau, "Littérature canonique syriaque inédite," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 14 (1909): 128–30. English translations in Rifaat Y. Ebied, "The Syriac Encyclical Letter of Athanasius II, Patriarch of Antioch, Which Forbids the Partaking of the Sacrifices of the Muslims," in *Orientalia Christiana: Festschrift für Hubert Kaufhold zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Peter Bruns, Hubert Kaufold, and Heinz Otto Luthe (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 169–74; Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Source Book of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015). Brief discussions of the letter can

also be found in Freidenreich, "Muslims in Canon Law," 91; Michael Philip Penn, "Athanasius (II) of Balad," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Brock et al., 46; Penn, "Monks, Manuscripts, and Muslims: Syriac Textual Changes in Reaction to the Rise of Islam," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 12, 2 (2009): 244–46; Teule, "Athanasius of Balad," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 157–59.

106. Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Berlin: Reuther and Reichard, 1895; reprint Wipf and Stock, 2004), 244; Robert Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879; reprint 2007), 1322.

107. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:284, 381, 383, 388; 162, 280, 252, 253, 254); Theodore bar Koni, *Scholion* 10 (*CSCO* 69:231); Nonnus, *Apologetic Treatise* (Albert Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe: Traité apologétique* (Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1948), *9). Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 244 briefly notes this change of meaning by citing the eleventh-century writer Elias of Nisibis. Athanasius's contemporary Jacob of Edessa occasionally alternates between *ḥanpē* and Hagarene when speaking about the same person; e.g., *Replies to Addai* 25 (Lamy, *Dissertatio de Syrorum fide*, 126); *First Letter to John the Stylite* 15 (Vööbus, *CSCO* 367:249). There are, however, several reasons favoring the letter as originally having been antipagan as opposed to directed toward Muslims: (1) The letter reads as a straightforward polemic against Christian participation in polytheist feasts, and nothing in its content hints at Muslims being present. (2) The repeated reference to *ḥanpē* sacrifices makes much more sense when speaking about polytheists (whose sacrifices had been the target of Christian invective since the first century) than about Muslims. (3) The letter refers to the "food of their sacrifices and to what is strangled," an allusion to Acts 15:20, 15:29, and 21:25, each of which speaks of what has been sacrificed to idols—that is, by polytheists.

108. Athanasius of Balad, *Letter* (Nau, "Littérature canonique syriaque inédite," 128).

109. For other examples of this phenomenon, see Penn, "Monks, Manuscripts, and Muslims," 235–57.

110. Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē, *Canon* 5 (*CSCO* 375:30).

111. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, ed. William Chester Jordan, Michael Cook, and Peter Schäfer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 70–71; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 538–41; and esp. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century," *Jewish History* 3, 1 (1988): 65–87.

112. Recent scholarship on theories of conversion is truly immense. For a starting point for discussions of conversion in early Islam, see Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 33–42; Fred M. Donner, "Modern Approaches to Early Islamic History," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1, *The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, ed. Chase Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 644; R. Stephen Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 373–78; Simonsohn, "Halting Between Two Opinions," 342–70; Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam," 407–80.

113. Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 74; Donner, "Modern Approaches," 644; Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 158, 161; Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xxii; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 338, 349; Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 521; Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 92; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of the Demons: Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam," in *Cultures of Conversions*, ed. Wout J. van Bekkum, Jan N. Bremmer, and Arie L. Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 129.

114. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*, 23, 82. Despite numerous potential errors in his calculations, most scholars cite Bulliet estimates as substantiated fact. For critiques of Bulliet, see Ira M. Lapidus, "Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History by Richard W. Bulliet (Review)," *American Historical Review* 86, 1 (1981): 187–88; Tamer el-Leithy, "Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo, 1293–1524 A.D." (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2005), 21–22; Michael G. Morony, "The Age of Conversions: A Reassessment," in *Conversion and Continuity*, ed. Gervers and Bikhazi , 138–39, 144–47; Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam," 482–83 n. 1143.

115. Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *Die apostolische Kirche des Ostens: Geschichte der sogenannten Nestorianer* (Klagenfurt: Kitab, 2000), 57–58; Hanna P. Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu: Lettre de Timothée I (728–823) à Serge* (Rome: Giovanni Canestri, 1983), 22–25.

116. For discussion of the conversion of Zoroastrians to Christianity, see William G. Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph: A Study of the Relationships of the Church of the East with the Sassanid Empire and the Early Caliphates up to 820 AD* (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1974), 152–55. John bar Penkāyē, *Book of Main Points* 15 (Alphonse Mingana, *Sources syriaques I* (Leipzig: Dominican Press, 1907), *147). For discussions of East Syrian reports of converting Miaphysites, see Young, *Patriarch, Shah, and Caliph*, 149–50.

117. Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 130, 137; also Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xii refers to the "ever present specter of apostasy." As several recent studies have concluded, for most of the Umayyad era there were few economic or status benefits for Christians who converted to Islam, as there was no tax advantage provided for converts to Islam until the reign of ʿUmar II (r. 717–720), when converts to Islam might no longer had pay the poll tax. But, even then, there was no uniform policy of tax exemption until well into the Abbasid era; see Jamsheed K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Iranian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 114; Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xxiv–xxv; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 340; Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 130. As Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 114 and Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xxv point out, economic motivation was unlikely to be the primary reason for conversion to Islam. In contrast, Tannous, "Syria Between Byzantium and Islam," 440–42 argues that avoiding the poll tax was a major motivation for at least nominal conversions to Islam.

118. For example, Sidney H. Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: The Topics and Strategies of Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam," in *Die Suryoye und ihre Umwelt*, ed. Andreas Heinz and Martin Tamcke (Münster: Lit, 2005), 31; Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad: His Scripture and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in *La vie du prophète Mahomet*, ed. T. Fahd (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 111; Hoyland, "Muslims and Others," xxviii; Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: An Appraisal," in *The Biography of Muhammad*, ed. Harald Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 288 n. 51; Ovidiu Ioan, *Muslime und Araber bei Īšō'jahb III. (649–659)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 102; Karl Pinggéra, "Konfessionelle Rivalitäten in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Islam: Beispiele aus der ostsyrischen Literatur," *Der Islam* 88, 1 (2012): 60; Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 137–38; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic East*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1992), 159, 164, 181, 186.

119. Isho'yahb III, *Letter* 14C (*CSCO* 11:251). See Chapter 2 n. 18.

120. In her discussion of this letter, Victoria L. Erhart, "The Church of the East During the Period of the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester* 78 (1996): 70 arrives at a similar conclusion: "Isho'yahb may be using the defection of some Christians to Islam only to deflect attention from his more urgent problem, the refusal of the bishops to recognize Isho'yahb's claim to authority over them."

121. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 12 (*CSCO* 540:33). See Chapter 1 n. 54.

122. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 12 (*CSCO* 540:33).

123. Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of Demons," 132–33.

124. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 12 (*CSCO* 540:34).

125. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 11, 13 (32, 36).

126. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 13 (40).

127. Jacob of Edessa, *Further Questions of Addai* 75 (Harvard Syriac 93, fols. 26a-27a).

128. Jacob of Edessa, *Questions of Addai* 116 (*CSCO* 367:261).

129. Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to John* 15 (*CSCO* 367:253).

130. Barhebraeus, *Nomocanon* (Bedjan, *Nomocanon*, 22, 42).

131. See *Apocalypse of John the Little* (J. Rendel Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles Together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 37), which, depending on how one translates a fairly ambiguous expression, may contain a brief allusion to conversion.

132. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:385, 389).

133. Ibid., 382.

134. Ibid., 385, 392.

135. Ibid., 385.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid., 388.

138. Ibid., 392.

139. Ibid., 387, 392.

140. Ibid., 390.

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid., 391. For a discussion of a specific type of belt as signifying that one is a non-Muslim and the untying of such a belt as part of the conversion process, see Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 328 n. 1; and Harrak, "Christianity in the Eyes of the Muslims of the Jazirah at the End of the Eighth Century," *Parole de l'Orient* (1995): 342–43.

143. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:391).

144. In ibid., 385 the chronicler makes this contrast explicit when he tells his readers that he will first discuss the bitter shoots who apostatized and only afterward will tell of the beautiful shoot and the light. The *Chronicle*'s opening description of Cyrus employs the same phrases (Harrak, "Martyrdom of Cyrus," 318).

145. Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 9, 26 (Chabot, *Chronique*, 1:476).

146. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (Harrak, "Martyrdom of Cyrus," 318).

147. Harrak, "Martyrdom of Cyrus," 302–7; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 377.

148. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (Harrak, "Martyrdom of Cyrus," 318). Harrak, "Martyrdom of Cyrus," 306 presents several other examples of Syriac works that speak of Christians who are enrolled in Muslim armies.

149. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (Harrak, "Martyrdom of Cyrus," 320).

150. Ibid., 320–24.

151. Ibid., 324–26.

152. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:381).

153. Ibid., 391.

154. Edition in J. B. Chabot, *Le livre de la chasteté* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1896), *1–*75. French translation in Chabot, *Le livre de la chasteté*, 4–54. Discussions in Chabot, *Le livre de la chasteté*, 1–3; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 211–13.

155. *Book of Chastity* 125 (Chabot, *Le livre de la chasteté*, 64–66).

156. Edition and English translation in Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, lv–xcii. Discussions in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 121–24; Andrew Palmer, "The Life of Gabriel of Qartmīn'," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Thomas and Roggema, 892–97; Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 13–18. Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 14 suggests a composition date between the mid-ninth and mid-tenth centuries.

157. *Life of Gabriel of Qartmin* 9 (Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, lxvii).

158. It is clear at the beginning of the story that the Arabian is not a Christian. When he refers to Jesus, he speaks of him as "his" (i.e., the monk's) lord and he is not baptized. But the text never makes it explicit that the Arabian is a Muslim. There are several reasons, however, for why this Arabian most likely is a Muslim as opposed to a polytheist: (1) Other Miaphysite sources use the term *ʿArabāyā* to speak of Muslims, for example, Jacob of Edessa, *Chronicle* (*CSCO* 5:326); *Bahira Legend* (West Syrian recension) 17.6 (Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 354). If the narrator considered this character to be a polytheist, it seems very likely that he would have specified that he was a *ḥanpā*. (2)

In the narrative, the Arabian states that he gave his money to the monk because the monk was a fearer of God. This statement makes much more sense if the Arabian is Muslim than if he were a polytheist. (3) The trope of a Muslim visiting a Christian monastery is common in both Islamic and Christian literature. The Arabian's visit to the monastery and his befriending a monk there have plenty of literary precedent if he is a Muslim. It is much more counterintuitive if he is a polytheist. (4) The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* version of the story, which seems to come from at least a similar oral tradition, speaks of the main character as a *ṭayyāyā*, a term this chronicler reserves for Muslims.

159. *Life of Mār Gabriel of Qartmin* 10 (Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, lxvii–lxxii).

160. *Life of Mār Gabriel of Qartmin* 11–12 (lxii).

161. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, Book 4 (*CSCO* 104:160–63).

162. Palmer, "Āmīd in the Seventh Century," 124–25.

163. Thomas, *Book of Governors* 5.11 (Budge, *Book of Governors*, 1:287–89).

164. In addition to the *Book of Chastity* and *Life of Gabriel of Qartmin*, see *Life of Rabban Hormizd* 12 (Budge, *Histories of Rabban Hormizd*, 1:70–71), in which Rabban Hormizd baptizes the Muslim governor of Mosul.

165. *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* (Diyarbakir MS 95, fol. 8b).

166. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 9.

167. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

168. For example, Bashear, "*Qibla musharriqa*," 267–81; Berkey, *Formation of Islam*, 92–93; Fred M. Donner, "Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation: The Umayyads' Silent Heritage," in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 191–92; Donner, "The Islamic Conquests," in *A Companion to the History of the Middle East*, ed. Youssef M. Choueiri (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 36–38, 45; Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11; Hoyland, *Theophilus' Chronicle*, 34; Hoyland, "New Documentary Texts," 409–10; Chase F. Robinson, "The Rise of Islam, 600–705," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Robinson, 1:189; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 199–218, 261. Not all these scholars share Donner's belief that the Qur'an and the *Constitution of Medina* advocate an interconfessional or, in Donner's phrasing, an ecumenical movement. They do, however, all argue that seventh-century Islam—whether by design or by practice—was often difficult to differentiate from contemporary Judaism and Christianity. Their depictions of early Islam thus markedly differ from the dominant narrative found both in later Muslim sources and in much secular scholarship.

169. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 12; also see Berkey, *Formation of Islam*, 80–82; Donner, "Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation," 191, 198, 208; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 194–226; Hoyland, "New Documentary Texts," 409; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 211.

170. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1.

171. David Frankfurter, "Beyond 'Jewish Christianity': Continuing Religious Sub-Cultures of the Second and Third Centuries and Their Documents," in *The Ways That*

Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 131.

172. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims," 9.

173. Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 97.

174. Ibid., 11.

CONCLUSION

Epigraph: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 209–10.

1. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (1993): 22–49. There is an extensive amount of popular and scholarly literature that critiques Huntington's work. Some particularly prominent examples include Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, "Introduction: Constructing the Muslim Enemy," in *The New Crusades*, ed. Qureshi and Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 1–47; Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Definitions: On Samuel Huntington," in Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 569–693; Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, October 22, 2001, 1–4; Amartya Sen, "Civilizational Imprisonments: How to Misunderstand Everybody in the World," *New Republic*, June 10, 2002, 28–31; John Trumpbour, "The Clash of Civilizations: Samuel P. Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and the Remaking of Post-Cold War World Order," in *The New Crusade*, ed. Qureshi and Sells, 88–130; For some examples of Huntington's influence on policy makers, see Trumpbour, "Clash of Civilizations," 99–101, 94.

2. Nexis, search by year, "clash of civilization*."

3. Nexis, search by year, "clash of civilization*," within twenty-five words of the various civilization groups Huntington listed in *The Clash of Civilizations*, 26–27.

4. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 209–10.

5. Robert Spencer, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades)* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2005), cover, 47, 85.

6. Christopher Catherwood, *Christians, Muslims, and Islamic Rage: What Is Going On and Why It Happened* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 165–87; Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide*, trans. Miriam Kochan and David Littman (Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002); Robert Spencer, *Onward Muslim Soliders: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2003), ix–x. Also see Paul Fregosi, *Jihad in the West: Muslim Conquests from the 7th to the 21st Centuries* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1998).

7. Spencer, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam*, 16.

8. Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians Under Islam* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985).

9. Mark Durie and Bat Ye'or, *The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom* (LaVergne, Tenn.: Deror Books, 2010); Fregosi, *Jihad in the West*; Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002).

10. E.g., Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), xviii–xix; Mun'im Sirry, "The Public Role of Dhimmīs During 'Abbāsid Times," *Bulletin of SOAS* 74, 2 (2011): 188.

11. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 210.

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Acknowledgments

In August 2001, I began a Kraft-Hiatt fellowship at Brandeis University. At that point I had become quite concerned with how reductionist were most modern images of Christian-Muslim relations; time and again, almost 1,500 years of complex, multivalent interactions were reduced to a history of unmitigated animosity. In response, I wanted to explore whether writings from a little-known branch of Christianity might change our perspective. Could these ancient, neglected texts add greater nuance to how we envision the earliest encounters of what eventually became the world's two largest religions?

A month later, my project became more pressing and much more complicated. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, American views of Islam grew increasingly uniform and increasingly hostile. Historians of antiquity are unlikely to singlehandedly reverse this trend and instantly dissuade best-selling authors and influential speakers from unequivocal denunciations of Islam. But I do think historians can challenge the reigning view that throughout time Christianity and Islam always and inevitably clash.

These changes in the early twenty-first-century political, religious, and cultural landscape profoundly affected the shape of this book. What I had originally thought would be a fairly straightforward, quick project no longer was. Instead, it turned into a much longer but, to my great delight, much more collaborative endeavor than I could have ever imagined. Almost a decade and a half later, it seems that the import for this sort of project has not lessened, though my ability to remember everyone who has contributed to this work certainly has. So I apologize in advance that my list of intellectual interlocutors and dear friends remains woefully incomplete.

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