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God's War and His Warriors

The First Hundred Years of Syriac Accounts of the Islamic Conquests

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An interesting aspect of the recent popular literature on jihad is the emphasis placed on the Islamic conquests of the seventh century. Author after author returns to the conquests as proof that Christian and Islamic civilizations are fated to clash, as justification for why conflicts ranging from the First Crusade to the invasion of Iraq are defensive wars, and as a harbinger for all future Christian-Muslim encounters.[1] The specific ways in which these twenty-first-century writers use the conquests are historically contingent. Nevertheless, these modern authors participate in a tradition dating back thirteen hundred years of seeing the Islamic conquests as a privileged moment that, once properly interpreted, reveals a transcendent truth.

Despite also having a strong interest in seventh-century history, the first generations of Christians under Muslim rule asked very different questions regarding the Islamic conquests. Much of this comes, of course, from the numerous differences between late antiquity and modernity. Much, however, stems from another cause. Contrary to the common maxim, history is not always written by the winners. Our earliest and our most extensive descriptions of the Islamic conquests were composed not by victorious Muslims but, rather, by defeated Christians, particularly by Christians from northern Mesopotamia who wrote in an Aramaic dialect called Syriac. These Syriac Christians lived in what are today Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and eastern Turkey. They composed our largest and our most diverse corpus of early Christian writings on Islam. When these Syriac Christians wrote about the Islamic conquests, the primary question they asked was not what the conquests taught about Islam but what they taught about Christianity.

Like many modern authors, early Syriac writers saw the Islamic conquests as a holy war. Their understanding of holy war, however, differed greatly from what we find in much of the current literature. For these modern writers, the term *holy war*

is deployed pejoratively; the conquests were a holy war because Muslims wrongfully claimed that they were justified by God. Syriac Christians also viewed the Islamic conquests as a holy war but in this case a legitimate one. That is, from the perspective of Syriac writers, the Arabs' destruction of the Persian empire, their capture of much of the Byzantine empire, and the subjugation of eastern Christians to Islamic rule were the outcome of God's war against Christians. Syriac writings thus present the unusual circumstance of a group interpreting not its victory but its defeat as the outcome of a holy war.

Attributing the conquests to divine intervention built on the Hebrew Bible's notion of war as an act of God's retribution, correction, or punishment. It gave Syriac Christians a convenient explanation for Arab military victory. But it also raised a very awkward set of questions: If the Islamic conquests were God's war, did this make the Arabs God's chosen warriors? And if the Arabs were God's warriors, what does this say about the legitimacy of their rule of Christian subjects? The result is a very different discussion about the seventh century from what we find in modern anti-Muslim writings. Make no mistake: ancient conversations among Syriac Christians regarding the conquests were neither homogeneous nor pacific. They represent neither a pinnacle of ecumenicism nor a role model for interfaith dialogue. Nevertheless, a better appreciation of the vast differences between the earliest Christian interpretations of the Islamic conquests and modern constructs of the same event can help problematize overly facile depictions of early Christian-Muslim interactions.

Particularly important for challenging the often reductionist character of modern discussions of early Christian-Muslim encounters is a better appreciation for the diversity found among our most ancient Christian writings about Muslims. Even a study limited to the first hundred years of Syriac conquest accounts quickly reveals that early Christian reactions to the rise of Islam were far from univocal.[2] Some of this diversity comes from the multiplicity of genres in which conquest accounts appear: chronicles, letters, apocalypses, scriptural commentaries, disputations, and vitae. Theological divisions among Syriac Christians made these reports even more varied. As a result of a series of theological controversies, especially those concerning how best to express Christ's divinity and humanity, from the fifth century onward, Syriac Christians were divided into a set of competing Christian factions. At the time of the Islamic conquests, the most prominent Syriac churches included those of Chalcedonian Christians, who were in theological agreement with the Byzantines;[3] Miaphysites, who emphasized Christ's single nature;[4] East Syrian Christians, who placed greater emphasis on Christ having a dual nature;[5] and Maronites, who initially supported the seventh-century doctrine of Christ having a single will. Each of these groups often combined its interpretation of the conquests with a polemic against other Christians. Syriac descriptions of the conquests also changed dramatically over the first century of Muslim rule as shifting historical circumstances affected the ways later Christians represented an increasingly distant past event. As a result, a chronological examination of Syriac

references to the Islamic conquests reveals how a linguistically unified but theologically divided community employed a wide range of interpretive strategies to explain how Christians could lose a holy war.

The Earliest Reactions: Syriac Accounts 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, saw them this way. This disconnection between modern and ancient assessments of the rise of Islam becomes especially clear in the earliest extant Syriac writings about the conquests. For most of the seventh century, Syriac authors do not speak about Islam as a religion, nor do they anticipate that their Arab conquerors will be around very long. Nevertheless, these first allusions to Arab military success lay the groundwork for the more involved and impassioned discussions that soon would follow.

The earliest reference to the Islamic conquests appears in very modest trappings. In 637, a writer used extra space at the front of a Gospel manuscript to compose what appears to be an eyewitness report of the conquests.[6] Even in its fragmentary state, the extant text clearly refers to Muhammad, to Arabs, to towns surrendering, and to substantial Byzantine casualties. This brief autographon, most likely written while the conquests were occurring, foreshadows many of the characteristics found throughout the first few decades of Syriac writings about the conquests. As in this note, the earliest strata of Syriac accounts report the conquests in an annalistic fashion. They document when and where battles were fought and often try to approximate Byzantine and civilian casualties. These early works do not speak of their conquerors as having any particular religion, nor do they suggest that Arab military expansion was religiously motivated.

Just three years after the *Account of 637*, a priest named Thomas composed a set of writings now called the *Chronicle of 640*.[7] Thomas's chronicle contains two brief references to the conquests. In an entry for the year 634, Thomas speaks of a battle in Palestine between the Byzantines and the "Arabs of Muhammad," in which the Arabs killed four thousand villagers and ravaged the region.[8] Immediately afterward appears an entry for the year 635/36 in which Thomas speaks of the Arab conquest of all of Syria, the invasion of Persia, and the killing of monks near Mardin, including Thomas's brother.[9] Particularly striking for someone who has lived through the conquests is how little Thomas has to say about them—in a twenty-eight-folio document, only five sentences. For Thomas, it was the Byzantine emperor Heraclius's defeat of the Persians twenty-five years earlier that was momentous, not the military conflicts of his own day.

In later decades, as Arab rule continued, Syriac writers felt increasingly obliged to present at least brief explanations for the conquests themselves. For example,

among the extant letters of the East Syrian leader Isho'yahb III (d. 659) can be found one brief reference to the conquests. In a letter written sometime between 649 and 659, Isho'yahb notes that the "Arabs to whom God has at this time given rule over the world" are generally benevolent toward Christians.[10] Isho'yahb's statement that Arab rule has been divinely ordained is a claim that will become increasingly frequent and increasingly developed among later writers.

A few years after the death of Isho'yahb III, an anonymous East Syrian Christian composed a chronicle that modern scholars most often call the *Khuzistan Chronicle*.[11] Amid the several pages detailing the Islamic conquests appear only two brief sentences that try to explain the conquest's origins and the reason for Arab military success. Similarly to Isho'yahb III, the chronicler informs his readers that it was God who raised up the sons of Ishmael and God who gave them victory over the Persian and Byzantine empires, but he provides no further motivation for the Arabs' actions.[12]

Soon after the *Khuzistan Chronicle*, two Syriac authors provided much more partisan explanations for the conquests. A Miaphysite account now called the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ephrem* may be the earliest Syriac apocalypse that refers to Islam.[13] This seventh-century vision of the world's end depicts the conquests as the harbinger of the end times. According to *Pseudo-Ephrem*, the Islamic conquests were meant to punish Byzantine impiety, especially their persecution of Miaphysites.[14] But soon the Sons of Hagar became just as evil as their Christian predecessors. The Sons of Hagar "soak the earth with blood," impaling old men, trampling on infants they cast out of their mothers' arms, and enslaving all who somehow survive their onslaught.[15] In response to their wickedness, God will release the armies of Gog and Magog formerly imprisoned by Alexander the Great. The Antichrist will then come, soon to be followed by the eschaton and the last judgment.

Miaphysites were not the only Syriac Christians whose conquest accounts 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.[16] Most Chalcedonian Christians approved of Maximus's opposition to the controversial doctrine of monothelitism, which claimed that although Christ had a divine and a human nature, he had only a single will. Bishop George disagreed. His text begins: "The history of the wicked Maximus of Palestine, who blasphemed against his creator and his tongue was torn out."[17] The extant text of this exposé begins with Maximus being born from the illegitimate union of a Persian slave woman and a Jew, and it cuts off in the midst of Maximus converting a convent of nuns to his beliefs. The intervening six folios make several brief references to the Arabs and their conquests but contain only a quick allusion to the Arabs being a God-sent punishment. More important for George is connecting the conquests with Maximus himself. George claims that once Syria was conquered by the Arabs, the Byzantine authorities no longer were able to combat Maximus's doctrines. After Maximus gained a following in Arab-controlled Syria, his influence moved

into Africa, Sicily, and Rome. As Maximus's theology spread, so, too, did the Arabs who kept "following the wicked Maximus" as "the wrath of God punished every place which had accepted his error."[18] From George's perspective, the conquests had no connection to Islam, or really to the Arabs; rather, they primarily served as the catalyst and the punishment for Christian heresy.

A survey of the first few decades of Syriac conquest accounts suggests that their authors felt that they had much more pressing issues to address than the rise of Islam. Although the relatively little attention that these early authors gave to the conquests may surprise modern readers, it is 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 Sassanian invasion of Byzantine territory in 602 and Heraclius's reconquest in 628. These Byzantine-Persian wars were much more destructive than the Islamic conquests.[19] In its first decades, Islam generally did not missionize to non-Arabs, and conversion rates among non-Arabs remained low.[20] Local governing structures were left almost completely intact,[21] and even the much-bemoaned poll tax (*jizya*) seems at first to have been more a continuation and gradual expansion of previous revenue structures than a radically new burden.[22] As a result, what we call the Islamic conquests were first described in terms where there was nothing "Islamic" about them, and what we see as one of the world's most important encounters barely received mention by its contemporaries.

The End Is Near: Conquest Accounts in the Late Seventh Century

Soon after *Pseudo-Ephrem* and the *Life of Maximus* were composed, the political situation of Syriac Christians changed drastically, forcing them to reevaluate the conquests and their aftermath. Of particular import were the changes brought about through the consolidation of Umayyad rule under the caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan and his policies of Islamization. It is in this context that Syriac authors from the last decades of the seventh century began attaching a religious significance to the Islamic conquests that they previously lacked.

An increased emphasis on the conquests and their meaning first appears in the work of the East Syrian monk John bar Penkaye.[23] Around 687, John finished his *Book of Main Points*, a world history from creation to his own day.[24] John wrote his work during the second Arab civil war which began soon after the death of the caliph Mu'awiya II in 683. For the following nine years, the Umayyad caliphs Marwan (r. 684–685) and his son 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) fought against a rival caliph, 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr. To make John's situation even 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 just staged an initially successful anti-Arab rebellion and had recently taken the city of Nisibis, located about sixty miles southwest of the monastery John inhabited.[25] It was during this time of a local rebellion amid a much larger civil war that John's abbot asked him to write his history.

Unlike the previous generation of Syriac authors, John focuses not on what happened during the Islamic conquests but on why the conquests occurred in the first place. He could wait no more than a single sentence into his narrative before launching into the explanatory framework that will dominate his understanding of the rise of Islam:

> But it is not right that we should think of their coming in an ordinary way, for it was a divine deed. And before He called them, He previously prepared them to hold Christians in honor. In the same way, concerning our rank of solitaries, there was securely upon them some sort of commandment from God so that they would hold [it] in honor. And when these ones came, in accord with a divine commandment, they seized without battle and without fighting, so to speak, two kingdoms. Then in a contemptible way—as a brand is taken from the fire—without arms and without human trickery God thus gave victory into their hands so that what was written concerning them might be fulfilled: "one pursued a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight." How was it possible, then, that men who were naked and rode without armor and without shield would be victorious without divine aid [from] the one who called them from the ends of the earth to destroy with them a sinful kingdom and through them to humble the proud spirit of the Persians?[26]

Here we do indeed have a holy war. 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 Arabs."[27] But why would God do this?

It is this question of theodicy that dominates much of John's work. John interprets 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.[28] Applying this heuristic to his own time, John claims that once Roman persecution of Christians subsided in the early fourth century, theological error overtook the church. It was the resulting Byzantine theology that led to their defeat by the Arabs.[29]

Initially, God's new warriors did their job well. Nevertheless, according to John, "It was right that the deeds done by the Sons of Hagar also should be avenged."[30] Thus, the recent conquerors began to suffer exactly the same plight as the Christians before them. As soon as their military conquests were successfully concluded, they, too, fell into laxity, resulting in internal divisions and civil war. Their first civil war ended in the rule of Mu'awiya, whose peaceful reign induced another

cycle of laxity and disaster.[31] This brings us to John's own day, when, in the midst of the second Arab civil war, John and his contemporaries were suffering also from famine and plague.[32] So what will happen next? Here John again diverges from earlier seventh-century Syriac authors. According to John, humanity lost its last chance for reform during the peace under Mu'awiya. God has thus removed his heavenly care from the world, ushering in the beginning of the end.[33] As for the Sons of Hagar, according to John, it is the anti-Arab forces who just recently took control of Nisibis that will end their kingdom.[34] This victory, like that of the Arabs before them, will be short-lived, however, as John is "aware that the end of the ages has arrived for us."[35]

Although John dedicates only one book of his fifteen-book world history to discussing the Arabs, the *Book of Main Points* "was composed first of all as a Christian response to the rise of Islam."[36] John wrote his history backward.[37] Because of the tribulations that he and his community currently face, he is convinced that the eschaton will soon arrive. This motivates 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 Islamic conquests and their immediate aftermath, when this pattern was broken to the point of no return. Although his predecessors briefly alluded to God having given the Arabs military victory, John shows a level of theological engagement with the conquests not found in previous writers. Many of the questions John struggles with (why the conquests; what will happen to the Arabs; what will happen to us), along with his answers (we suffered because of our sins; God will defeat them; the world soon will end) dominate the writings produced in the following decade. Nevertheless, the rapidly changing political environment of the late seventh century will cause these slightly later authors to write very differently about such issues from how John did.

John ended up being wrong. The rebellion of former prisoners of war was easily put down, Ibn al-Zubayr was defeated in Mecca in 692, 'Abd al-Malik became the sole caliph, and his descendants would control the Umayyad caliphate until 750. The end of the second Arab civil war was not, however, an unmitigated blessing for Syriac Christians; as part of his consolidation of power, 'Abd al-Malik began a process of Islamization that drastically affected Christians under Muslim rule. The political stability following the second Arab civil war along with 'Abd al-Malik's substantial building program, the minting of his own coins, a census, and tax reform all suggested that the Arabs had established a successor state to the Byzantine and Persian empires that was not going away anytime soon.[38] As head of this state, 'Abd al-Malik took on the role of championing Islam.[39] Toward the end of the second Arab civil war, Muslim proclamations of faith and polemics against Christian theology begin to appear on mile markers,[40] coins,[41] and, most important, the newly constructed Dome of the Rock.[42] Built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and inscribed with Qur'anic passages decrying trinitarian theology, the Dome of the Rock clearly pronounced Islam's intent to be a successor religion to Christianity.[43] At the same time that 'Abd al-Malik was making

Islam increasingly prominent, he also began to regulate public displays of Christianity, especially of the cross.[44]

The immediate literary response to these changing circumstances was a series of Syriac apocalypses, the most popular being a document now called the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*.[45] This text claims to have been written by Bishop Methodius (d. 311), to whom God revealed "the generations and kingdoms" from the time of Adam until the world's end seven thousand years later.[46] The real author, however, most likely wrote during the conclusion of the second Arab civil war in 690/91.[47] At this time, 'Abd al-Malik had just conquered Mesopotamia, and it became increasingly obvious that, contrary to the predictions of Christians such as John bar Penkaye, the civil war would not destroy the Arabs. 'Abd al-Malik had also just instituted tax reform, increasing the amount of revenue gathered by the Arab government, and he began constructing the Dome of the Rock.[48] In response to these developments, the author of *Pseudo-Methodius* adamantly proclaimed the invincibility of the Byzantine empire and the Arabs' imminent demise. Any day now, the last king of the Greeks would rise up, defeat the Sons of Ishmael in a holy war, reclaim Jerusalem, avenge persecuted Christians, punish apostates, hand over earthly rule to Christ, and help usher in the end of time.[49]

Like previous Syriac writings, *Pseudo-Methodius* stresses God's role in initiating the Islamic conquests. But in *Pseudo-Methodius*, as in the writings of John bar Penkaye before him, the present-day crisis is so great that these disasters serve not as a call for repentance but, rather, as a signal of the world's impending demise. *Pseudo-Methodius* assures its readers that "It was not because God loves [the Sons of Ishmael] that He allowed them to enter the kingdom of the Christians."[50] The Sons of Ishmael are simply God's tool to chastise Christians and to separate the truly faithful from the faithless. *Pseudo-Methodius* predicts that the seventh-century Arabs will rule for only seventy years, a period whose end had just about come when *Pseudo-Methodius* was written.[51] *Pseudo-Methodius*'s discussion of these last years of Christian servitude to the Sons of Ishmael corresponds to the author's own day. At this time, Christians will suffer even more through plagues, famine, and insatiable taxation, and the Sons of Ishmael will boast about their conquests, proclaiming that "the Christians have no savior."[52]

At this point in the narrative, *Pseudo-Methodius* introduces a new character into its eschatological drama, the last king of the Greeks, who launches a holy war against the blaspheming Sons of Ishmael in which he quickly defeats the Arabs and enslaves them a hundred times more bitterly than they did the Christians. The king next punishes Christian apostates and, from Jerusalem, reigns over a ten-year period of peace and prosperity. An invasion from the unclean people of the North follows, during which the king of the Greeks gives up earthly rule to Christ by placing his crown upon the True Cross as it ascends to heaven. The end of time concludes with Jesus's second coming and his defeat of the "Son of Perdition."[53]

Similarly to *Pseudo-Ephrem* and John bar Penkaye, the most likely Miaphysite author of *Pseudo-Methodius* considers the conquests as God's response to Christian

sin, and, as do his apocalyptically bent predecessors, he predicts the brevity of Arab reign.[54] *Pseudo-Methodius*, however, represents "an important shift in the relation between apocalypticism and violence in the history of Christianity," especially in its depiction of Arab rule, its focus on Jerusalem, and its figure of the last Greek king.[55] *Pseudo-Methodius* presents a much more negative depiction of Muslims than that found in almost any other early Syriac text, and through emphasizing the role of a Byzantine emperor in overthrowing Jerusalem's erstwhile conquerors, in *Pseudo-Methodius* "Christian apocalyptic had, for the first time, issued a call for taking up arms against current foes."[56]

A year or two after *Pseudo-Methodius*'s initial composition, an author from the city of Edessa created an abridged and modified version of the work.[57] Modern scholars often refer to this slightly later text as the *Edessene Apocalypse*.[58] Although heavily dependent on *Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Edessene Apocalypse* makes several important changes to its apocalyptic schema. In the *Edessene Apocalypse*, the Sons of Ishmael's oppression of Christians results in the second Arab civil war. During this time, nature itself witnesses against the Arabs' infidelity through severe drought and famine. To foreshadow the final end of Arab rule, the *Edessene Apocalypse* draws on an earlier Syriac tradition, the *Judas Cyriacus Legend*, which has Constantine's mother, Helena, discover the True Cross in Jerusalem and make for Constantine a bridle from its nails.[59] According to the *Edessene Apocalypse*, in 692, an unridden horse will enter a church in Constantinople and place its head in this bridle, signaling that the "Kingdom of the Christians has come."[60] A king of the Greeks will then rise up and overthrow the Sons of Ishmael. This new Constantine will pursue the Sons of Ishmael to Mecca, where their kingdom will end. Unlike the case in *Pseudo-Methodius*, the eschaton does not soon follow the Arabs' demise. Rather, the kingdom of the Greeks will continue for 208 more years, and only then will the unclean nations previously vanquished by Alexander the Great invade. God will gather these nations in Mecca, and his angels will kill them with hailstones. Subsequently, the Son of Perdition will take control of all the world, except for the city of Edessa. When the Son of Perdition enters Jerusalem, another king of the Greeks will rise up and, as in *Pseudo-Methodius*, hand over his crown to Christ's cross on Golgotha. At this point, all living things will die, the world will end, and the last judgment will commence.[61]

The *Edessene Apocalypse*, like *Pseudo-Methodius* before it, uses a holy war to destroy the Sons of Ishmael quickly. But in the *Edessene Apocalypse*, this holy war is tied even more closely with sacred space. The text specifies that the defeat of the Sons of Ishmael and the unclean nations of the North will occur in Mecca, that the city of Edessa will remain inviolate, and that the victories of the now two kings of the Greeks will both follow reconquests of Jerusalem. The text's appropriation of the *Judas Cyriacus Legend* further strengthens this Jerusalem focus. Not only is the king of the Greek's victory ensured by the cross's nails initially found on Golgotha, but the reference to an unridden horse also provides a scriptural echo of Jesus's entry into Jerusalem. For Syriac Christians, this apocalyptic appropriation of sacred space would have been especially poignant during a time when 'Abd

al-Malik was establishing Jerusalem as an Islamic center and began to regulate Christian displays of the cross.

The final anti-Arab apocalypse written during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik is known as the *Apocalypse of John the Little* and appears as the last section of a Miaphysite text titled the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*.[62] Unlike *Pseudo-Methodius*, this slightly later apocalypse portrays the Arabs as the last of Daniel's four kingdoms. Once the previous kingdoms of the Romans, Persians, and Medes have become corrupt, God fulfills Daniel's prophecy that "the king of the South will be strong."[63] The Lord calls forth from the descendants of Ishmael a "people of a deformed aspect," led by a warrior whom they claim is a prophet. These people of the South conquer the people of the North, causing them to suffer greatly, especially under constant demands for tribute. Because they "hate the Lord's name," during the final ten and a half years of their rule, the people of the South persecute Christians. In response, God's angel causes a civil war, dividing them into two parties, each claiming a different king. A bloody conflict follows at the "fountain of the water," an allusion to the fountain of Zamzam in Mecca, where in 692, 'Abd al-Malik defeated Ibn al-Zybayr.[64] At this point, "a man from the North" will rise up and begin to destroy the Arab forces. This figure is very different from *Pseudo-Methodius*'s and the *Edessene Apocalypse*'s king of the Greeks. The man from the North proclaims that his victories come not from his own power, and the text reminds its reader that it is the Lord who forces the people of the South back to lands from which they came. The man from the North neither pursues them nor ultimately defeats them. Rather, God reduces them "without a battle" to the point where they will never again take up arms.[65]

Most likely written toward the end of 'Abd al-Malik's reign,[66] the *Apocalypse of John the Little* gives the Byzantine emperor a much smaller role in the Arabs' downfall. It provides little discussion of why the Islamic conquests occurred in the first place, there is no reconquest of Jerusalem, and the apocalypse does not conclude with the world's end. Its anti-Arab message is also framed by the anti-Chalcedonian and anti-Jewish polemics in the documents that immediately precede it in the manuscript. It thus "marks a transition between a period of apocalyptic hope and a more stable though more negative situation in which the various Christian churches, the Jews and the Muslims had to deal with each other and find their identities and boundaries."[67]

Preparing for the Long Haul: Conquest Accounts in the First Half of the Eighth Century

As the Umayyad dynasty solidified under 'Abd al-Malik and his successors, Christian hopes for a quick end to Arab rule began to fizzle; after the *Apocalypse of John the Little*, there are no other extant Syriac apocalypses for more than two centuries.

Discussion of the conquests in other genres, however, continued to proliferate. These conquest accounts from the first half of the eighth century do not describe specific battles or predict an impending eschaton. Instead, they situate the conquests within a broader context of scriptural exegesis, king lists, and apologetics. In contradistinction to the late-seventh-century apocalypses, these slightly later texts downplay the historical and theological significance of the conquests. They suggest that although the Arabs have established a long-lasting kingdom, this kingdom's rise and persistence should present little challenge to Christianity.

Just as the late-seventh-century apocalypses tried to combat the increasingly obvious longevity of Arab rule by proclaiming its imminent end, so, too, did attempts to minimize the conquests' significance come at a time when their results further threatened Syriac communities. 'Abd al-Malik's successors expanded his policies of Islamization. Muslim officials more readily intervened in church affairs.[68] We begin to find more explicitly anti-Christian measures such as 'Umar II (r. 717–720) forbidding non-Muslims to give legal testimony against Muslims.[69] The early eighth century also witnessed greater pressures for conversion, especially after 'Umar II legislated that converts to Islam would now be exempt from the poll tax.[70] Syriac literature of the early eighth century also reflects a growing awareness of the theological challenges put forth by Islam, with the first disputation texts appearing in the early 700s.[71] In such a context, it is not surprising that Syriac Christians would also reevaluate their interpretations of the Islamic conquests.

The Miaphysite bishop Jacob of Edessa provides a useful illustration for the conquests' changing role around the turn of the eighth century. Although Jacob makes dozens of references to Muslims in his writings, there appears only one mention of the conquests in Jacob's extant works.[72] It occurs among a collection of Jacob's brief scriptural commentaries, or *Scholia*, and it is unclear when in Jacob's lifetime it was written. The comment is on the biblical passage 1 Kings 14:21–28, which attributes the Egyptian pharaoh Shishak's successful invasion of Jerusalem to the Israelites' sins. After explaining how the ancient Israelites are a type for Christians, Jacob writes:

> Therefore, on account of the evil of Rehoboam and Judah, God brought on them Shishak, the king of Egypt. And, as holy scripture relates, he took them captive and scattered them and overthrew their cities because of their sins and their provocation. And thus also us: Christ has handed us over because of our sins and many iniquities. And He has subjected us to the Arab's hard yoke. . . . Because we did not notice all this grace and freedom that was given to us and we were ungrateful and deniers of grace, we were handed over to servitude and slavery, just as ancient Judah [was]—for prey and captivity.[73]

On one level, Jacob is doing nothing new here. Like his predecessors, Jacob suggests that the conquests and Eastern Christianity's subjugation to Islamic rule

were the result of divine retribution for Christian sinfulness. But Jacob is the first Syriac Christian to develop fully an exegetical strategy that will soon dominate writings about the conquests: he explicitly relates the losers of one holy war to those of another. Just as the sins of God's people in the tenth century B.C.E. allowed a foreign king to take control of Jerusalem and enslave God's chosen, the same happened in the seventh century C.E. The result is just the opposite of what we find in the earlier apocalypses. Now the conquests are no longer extraordinary events so unprecedented that they signal the end of the world. Instead, the conquests are a repeat of biblical history.

Although at first it might seem counterproductive to align oneself with the losers of history, such an analogy has some very concrete payoffs. Not only does the appeal to Christian sin offer a tidy reason for the Arabs' initial military success, but it also points toward the Arabs' eventual, albeit no longer imminent, demise. Even though the Israelites' captivity under foreign invaders lasted for decades or even centuries, their repentance eventually motivated God to destroy their conquerors and free his people. When viewed through the lens of the Hebrew scripture, being God's warrior in a holy war is not always a sign of divine favor.

A different strategy for minimizing the conquests' significance appears in two early-eighth-century texts that speak about Muslim rulers. The first, the *Chronicle ad 705*, is a brief list of caliphs written between 705 and 715.[74] The list begins, "Muhammad entered the land [in] the year 932 of Alexander, son of Philip, the Macedonian. And he reigned seven years. And after him Abu Bakr reigned two years. And after him . . ." The record continues to the beginning of al-Walid I's reign in 705.[75] Although it is filled with several chronological errors and omissions, what makes this inventory particularly striking is its nonchalant presentation. The Prophet Muhammad is just like any other king, there is no need to explain the conquests, and one king follows the other just as in any other kingdom.

Written just a few years later is the aptly named *Chronicle of Disasters*, which explains how a long list of catastrophes "happened according to the just, incomprehensible, and wondrous judgments of God."[76] This inventory of calamities begins 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 Walid son of Abd al-Malik, son of Marwan, who reigned at that time."[77] 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 Walid dies and is succeeded by his brother Sulayman, who gathers up all of the Saracens' wealth into a single treasury in Jerusalem. The list ends fairly anticlimactically with a hailstorm killing a number of birds. More interesting than these fowls' unfortunate fate, however, is the way the author interweaves these natural catastrophes with the two references to Umayyad caliphs. Although the text does not explicitly link the kingdom of Ishmael with other listed items, the intercalation of these two rulers in the midst of more conventional misfortunes certainly

suggests that these caliphs and their rule may also be part of God's chastisement of Christian sinners.

Both the *Chronicle ad 705* and the *Chronicle of Disasters* are dull reading, and that is part of the point. Reducing the rise of Islam to simply a list of kings or sandwiching the notice of a new Muslim ruler between one hailstorm that damages vineyards and another that destroys birds domesticates the conquests. The last Umayyad-era conquest account, however, shows just how much was at stake in these seemingly innocuous discussions of events. In the 720s, an East Syrian writer claimed to have recorded a conversation between an unnamed monk from the monastery of Beth Hale and an unspecified Arab official who was visiting the monastery. The resulting *Disputation between a Monk of Beth Hale and an Arab Notable* contains an eight-folio discussion between these interlocutors concerning topics such as trinitarian theology, Christian veneration of relics, and the origins of the Qur'an.[78] This supposed transcript ends with the Arab declaring that if it were not for the fear of repercussions, many Arabs would convert to Christianity.[79]

In the *Disputation*, discussions of the conquests play such a central role that its most recent interpreter proclaims, "The relation between political power and right religion is the main problem in the *Disputation*."[80] The Arab notable first raises this issue when he uses Arab military success as proof for Islam's doctrinal correctness: "This is the sign that God loves us and agrees with our confession: that He gave to us authority over all religions and over all nations. See—they are slaves subject to us."[81] Although here written by a Christian author, the argument is identical to that found in a number of early Islamic sources. Passages in Christian works such as the *Book of Main Points* and *Pseudo-Methodius* tried to preempt this line of reasoning, but the *Disputation* is the first Syriac text to have a Muslim character explicitly articulate this challenge.

The monk initially raises two objections. First, similar to what Jacob of Edessa implied in his appeal to biblical history, the monk notes that the world has seen the rise and fall of many kingdoms and that those who first seemed to be military victors later suffered defeat, especially those kingdoms that God used to chastise the Israelites. Then, unlike previous conquest accounts, which often emphasize how the Arabs took control of most of the known world, the monk notes that "You, sons of Ishmael, you hold a small part of the earth, and the whole creation is not subject to your authority."[82] In support, the monk presents a long list of lands and peoples not yet conquered. After having minimized the conquests' chronological and geographical significance, the monk turns to defending specific Christian beliefs and practices.

The two interlocutors return to the conquests at the very end of the *Disputation*, when the Arab asks a question that has undoubtedly been puzzling many eighth-century Christians: "What is the reason why God has handed you over into our hands, and you are driven by us like sheep to slaughter; and your bishops and priests are killed, and the rest are subjugated and enslaved, night and day, to the king's burdens, more bitter than death."[83] At first glance, the

Disputation's responses are almost identical to *Pseudo-Methodius*, on which they clearly depend.[84] There remain, however, two important differences between the *Disputation* and its predecessors. First, by using the format of a dialogue and combining points found scattered throughout works such as *Pseudo-Methodius* into a single paragraph, the *Disputation* provides 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. Second, the *Disputation* takes what was previously a defensive argument—that despite Arab military success, Christians remain God's chosen—and transforms it into a seemingly counterintuitive claim: the Arabs' victory in the conquests actually proves God's disdain for Muslims. This line of reasoning begins when, unlike in *Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Disputation* quotes Hebrews 12:8 in the second person. "The Lord chastises whomsoever He loves. And if *you* are without chastisement, *you* are strangers and not sons." The implication emerges that *your* lack of suffering is not a sign of divine favor but stems from *you* not being one of God's sons; since the Sons of Ishmael are not part of God's family, God does not even bother to use adversity to correct their behavior. The *Disputation* then combines this motif of kinship with that of inheritance. In the last lines of the manuscript, we learn that God punishes Christians in the temporal world so that they can inherit heaven. Similarly, although a righteous Son of Hagar will not abide in eternal torment, in God's kingdom he still will be considered "as a hired man and not as a son."[85] The *Disputation* thus ends with a sort of divine irony. Through the Islamic conquests, God gave the Arabs territory in this world as a sign that they would not be God's true heirs in the world to come.

Conclusion

Less than a century separated the *Disputation between a Monk of Beth Hale and an Arab Notable* from the *Account of 637*. Nevertheless, the vast differences between the former, a carefully constructed, eight-folio disputation, and the latter, containing brief scribblings on a Gospel fly-leaf, show how much had changed in the intervening hundred years. We need to remember that most later Syriac writers knew less, not more, about the Islamic conquests than their predecessors. The expansion and proliferation of Syriac conquest accounts did not stem from increased knowledge about seventh-century history but, rather, was a form of cultural memory work in which Syriac Christians retold and reinterpreted the Islamic conquests as a tool for addressing contemporary challenges that they and their communities faced. Although genre, theological affiliation, and authorial agenda made each account unique, there remained a strong correlation between their depictions of the Islamic conquests and the historical situation of their authors. 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. The second Arab civil war and 'Abd al-Malik's policies of Islamization caused Syriac authors of the late seventh and early eighth centuries to invest the conquests with much greater significance. Partially in response to the building of the Dome of the Rock, these apocalyptic writings more directly referred to holy war, the reconquest of Jerusalem, and an imminent eschaton. As the second Arab civil war became an increasingly distant memory and Syriac Christians began to face increased pressure for assimilation and conversion, apocalyptic expectations were replaced with more apologetic concerns. Eighth-century authors often downplayed the extent and importance of the conquests, either treating them as a fairly mundane transfer of kingship from one power to another or drawing on biblical parallels to depict the conquests as only a temporary chastisement for Christian sins.

Despite these chronological developments, throughout the first century of Islamic rule, Syriac conquest accounts were constantly driven by the issue of theodicy. Drawing on a long-standing view of God guiding history, Syriac accounts always saw the conquests as divinely inspired. This led to a debate about why God had declared a holy war on Christianity and what would happen to the new warriors he deployed against Christians. Such questions only intensified as Arab rule continued, as Islam became a more visible presence, and as Syriac Christians came under increased pressure to defend their beliefs and practices. Neither Syriac conquest accounts from the first hundred years of Muslim rule nor those from subsequent centuries ever reached a consensus regarding these issues. The very diversity of their opinions challenges any portrayal of a unified Christian reaction to the Arab defeat of Byzantine and Persian forces. Thus, we may conclude that many of the reductionist modern depictions of the Islamic conquests are based more on contemporary concerns and prejudices than they are on the accounts written by the first generations of Christians to encounter Islam.

Notes

1. See, for example, Paul Fregosi, *Jihad in the West: Muslim Conquests from the 7th to the 21st Centuries* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1998); Christopher Catherwood, *Christians, Muslims, and Islamic Rage: What Is Going On and Why It Happened* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003); Robert Spencer, *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance: How Islamic Law Treats Non-Muslims* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 2005).
2. For this chapter, I examine only those Syriac works that specifically discuss the Islamic conquests. This is only a fraction of the much larger corpus of early Syriac writings on Islam. For a listing and bibliography of most seventh- through ninth-century Syriac texts that speak of Muslims, see Michael Penn, "Syriac Sources for Early Christian/Muslim Relations," *Islamochristiana* 29 (2003): 59–78; and 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).

3. These Christians supported the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Because of their agreement with Byzantine Christology, their opponents often called them Melkites, from the Syriac word for "king."
4. This group is also often called Monophysites or, especially among their opponents, Jacobites after the name of one of their early bishops, Jacob Baradeaus. They also are known as Syrian Orthodox, which also designates many modern Christians who trace their lineage back to the early Miaphysites.
5. Their opponents often call this group Nestorians after the fifth-century bishop of Constantinople condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431. The Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East are the most well-known heirs to this tradition.
6. The original manuscript is described in William Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols. (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1870–73), 1:65–66. On the basis of paleography, Wright dates this copy of Mark and Matthew to the sixth century. Syriac edition in Theodor Nöldeke, "Zur Geschichte der Araber im 1. Jahrh. d.h. aus Syrischen Quellen," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 29 (1876): 77–79; and E. W. Brooks, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (CSCO), 3:75. English translations appear in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 117; and Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 2–4.
7. Syriac edition in Brooks, CSCO 3: 77–155. English translations of selected entries in Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 13–23.
8. Brooks, CSCO, 3:147–48.
9. Ibid., 148.
10. Isho'yahb III, Letter 14C (Duval, CSCO, 11:251.). English translation of excerpts from Letter 14C in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 179.
11. Syriac edition in CSCO, 1:15–39. German translation in Theodor Nöldeke, "Die von Guidi Herausgegebene Syrische Chronik übersetzt und commentiert," in *Sitzungeberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse* 128 (Vienna, 1893): 5–48.
12. CSCO, 2:30, 38.
13. Syriac edition in CSCO, 139:60–71. German translations in Harald Suermann, *Die Geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die Einfallenden Muslime in der Edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 256: *Europäische Hochschulschriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1985), 12–32; and CSCO, 321:79–94. The date of this text's composition remains somewhat uncertain. For recent discussions concerning when to date this text, see Gerrit J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Ephraems 'Rede über das Ende' und die Syrische eschatologische Literatur des Siebenten Jahrhunderts," *ARAM Periodical* 5 (1993): 437–63; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 262–63.
14. CSCO, 320:61.
15. CSCO, 320:62.
16. Syriac edition in Sebastian Brock, "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor," *Analecta Bollandiana* 91 (1973): 302–13; English translation 314–19. Uncertainty remains regarding the *Life*'s authorship and date of composition. See Brock, "An Early Syriac Life," 336; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 139, for discussions of the work's authorship and date of composition.
17. *Life of Maximus the Confessor* (Brock, "An Early Syriac Life," 302).
18. *Life of Maximus the Confessor* (Brock, "An Early Syriac Life," 309–13).
19. 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. Among Muslim sources, the Byzantine-Persian wars appear in Qu'ran 30:2–6 and in later hadiths.
20. Gerrit J. Reinink, "Following the Doctrine of the Demons: Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam," in Wout J. van Bekkum, Jan N. Bremmer, and Arie L. Molendijk, eds., *Cultures of Conversions* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 129; Robert Hoyland, "Introduction: Muslims and Others," in Robert Hoyland, ed., *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2004), xxii–xxv; Michael G. Morony, "The Age of Conversions: A Reassessment," in

Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi, eds., *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteen Centuries* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 135–37.

21. John L. Boojamra, "Christianity in Greater Syria after Islam," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1991): 229; 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), 87–88; Michael G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 97–98.
22. Chase F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44–50; Erhart, "The Church of the East," 60–61.
23. There is not yet a published edition of the entire *Book of Main Points*. Alphonse Mingana, *Sources Syriaques* I (Leipzig: Dominican, 1907), includes an edition of Books 10–15 based on a single manuscript. A French translation of Book 15 is in Mingana, *Sources Syriaques*, I:172–97. An English translation of the end of Book 14 and most of Book 15 is in Sebastian Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkaye's Ris Melle," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 57–73.
24. For discussion of when John most likely wrote the *Book of Main Points*, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 199–200; and Brock, "North Mesopotamia," 52.
25. For discussion of this rebellion, see Gerrit J. Reinink, "East Syrian Historiography in Response to the Rise of Islam: The Case of John Bar Penkaye's Ktaba D-Res Melle," in H. L. Murre-Van den Berg, J. J. Van Ginkel, and T. M. Van Lint, eds., *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 79, 81; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Paideia: God's Design in World History according to the East Syrian Monk John Bar Penkaye," in Erik Kooper, ed., *The Medieval Chronicle II: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle, Driebergen/Utrecht July 16–21, 1999* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 191; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 197–98; Harald Suermann, "Das arabische Reich in der Weltgeschichte des Johannan bar Penkaje," in Piotr O. Scholz and Reinhard Stempel, eds., *Nubia et Oriens Christianus: Festschrift für C. D. G. Müller zum 60. Geburtstag* (Köln: J. Dinter, 1987), 65–66.
26. John bar Penkaye, *Book of Main Points*, 14 (Mingana, *Sources Syriaques*, I:141–42).
27. Ibid.
28. See Reinink, "Paideia," 191–94, for how "God's *paideia* is the guiding principle of John's concept of history."
29. John bar Penkaye, *Book of Main Points* 14, 15 (Mingana, *Sources Syriaques*, I:142, 145).
30. Ibid., 15 (I:145).
31. Ibid., 15 (I:147, 154).
32. Ibid., 15 (I:160–65.).
33. For a discussion of God removing his care (*btiluta*) from the world, see Reinink, "East Syrian Historiography," 85–87.
34. John bar Penkaye, *Book of Main Points* 15 (Mingana, *Sources Syriaques*, I:167).
35. Ibid.,15 (I:165.).
36. Reinink, "East Syrian Historiography," 79.
37. Or, as Reinink writes, "He explains the present by giving an account of the past from the very beginning of the world"; "East Syrian Historiography," 83.
38. 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 Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, eds., *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe–VIIIe Siècles* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1992), 68; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam," in Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, eds., *The Byzantine and Early Islamic East*, vol. 1: *Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin, 1992), 186. For a discussion of ambitious building projects, see Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 59–119; Chase F. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, in Patricia Crone, ed., *Makers of the Muslim World* (Oxford: Oneworld,

2005), 71–75; Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 52–116. For more detailed discussion of 'Abd al-Malik's coins, see Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, 71–75. For a discussion of his census and tax increase, see Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims," 67; Sidney H. Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons," in Canivet and Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, 126; Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 180.

39. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 48.
40. Ibid., 700; Griffith, "Images," 125.
41. Although at first Arab coins resemble earlier coin types, they replaced Byzantine and Sassanian motifs with specifically Islamic ones, especially in the 690s. For discussions of the significance of these coin changes, see Gerrit J. Reinink, "Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation between a Monk of Bet Hale and an Arab Notable," in Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas, eds., *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 153; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 16; Sheila S. Blair, "What Is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?" in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns, eds., *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 64, 67.
42. For English translations of the Dome of the Rock inscriptions see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 696–99; and Blair, "What Is the Date?" 86–87.
43. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 32–33; Reinink, "Political Power," 153; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Early Christian Reactions to the Building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," *Xristianskij Vostok* 2 (2002): 228–30. For a discussion of the Dome of the Rock as a Muslim appropriation of Jerusalem and a challenge to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, see Josef van Ess, "'Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock: An Analysis of Some Texts," in Raby and Johns, *Bayt al-Maqdis*, 90, 101. For a discussion of its inscriptions, see Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy*, 56–71.
44. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 14; Griffith, "Images," 126–29.
45. Syriac edition in CSCO, 540. German translation in CSCO, 541. English translation of selected sections by Sebastian Brock in Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 230–42.
46. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, Introduction (CSCO, 540:1).
47. For a discussion of when to date *Pseudo-Methodius*'s composition, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 264; CSCO, 541:xii–xxix; Gerrit J. Reinink, "The Romance of Julian the Apostate as a Source for Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalypses," in Canivet and Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, 81, 85; Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 186.
48. For a discussion of 'Abd al-Malik's tax reform and the resulting tax increases, see Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 180.
49. For a discussion of *Pseudo-Methodius* having been written as a response to rumors concerning the construction of the Dome of the Rock, see Reinink, "Early Christian Reactions," 233–34; Reinink, "The Romance of Julian the Apostate," 79; Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 182–83.
50. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, XI:5 (CSCO, 540:25).
51. Ibid., X:6 (540:23). Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 150, n. 2, argues that *Pseudo-Methodius* sees 622, the traditional date for the Hijra, as the starting point for the seventy years of Arab rule. The author thus initially anticipated the Sons of Ishmael's end within a year or two.
52. *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, XIII:6 (CSCO, 540:34).
53. Ibid., XIII:11–XIV:14 (540:38–48).
54. There has been considerable discussion concerning the theological affiliation of *Pseudo-Methodius*, although in recent years, there has been a growing consensus that the original author was Miaphysite. In particular, see Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius," 159–64; Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 28–29.
55. Bernard McGinn, "Apocalypticism and Violence: Aspects of their Relation in Antiquity and the Middle Ages," in Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman, eds., *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 221.

56. Ibid., 221.
57. Syriac edition in François Nau, "Révélations et légendes: Méthodius-Clément-Andronicus," *Journal Asiatique* 9 (1917): 425–34. English translation in Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 244–50.
58. Because the two extant manuscript witnesses to this text are both fragmentary and do not include the beginning of the apocalypse, some scholars refer to the work as the *Edessene Fragment*.
59. For a discussion of how the author of the *Edessene Apocalypse* appropriates the *Judas Cyriacus Legend*, see Reinink, "Early Christian Reactions," 237–39; Reinink, "The Romance of Julian the Apostate," 82–85. For a Syriac edition, an English translation, and discussion of extant witnesses to the *Judas Cyriacus Legend*, see CSCO, 565.
60. The *Edessene Apocalypse* refers to the year 694, which most likely reflects the Edessene calendar and thus corresponds to 692 C.E. See Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 243; Reinink, "The Romance of Julian the Apostate," 81; Gerrit J. Reinink, "Der Edessenische 'Pseudo-Methodius,'" *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 83 (1990): 36–38.
61. *Edessene Apocalypse* (Nau, "Révélationes et légendes," 425–34).
62. Syriac edition in J. Rendel Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles Together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 15–21. English translation, 34–37.
63. Daniel 11:5.
64. Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims," 73; Han J. W. Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: A Syriac Apocalypse from the Early Islamic Period," in Cameron and Conrad, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic East*, 207.
65. *Apocalypse of John the Little* (Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, 15–21).
66. Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles," 208.
67. Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims," 74.
68. Michael G. Morony, "Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq," in Hoyland, *Muslims and Others*, 129.
69. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 596.
70. Previously, conversion to Islam did not necessarily exempt one from paying the poll tax (*jizya*). See Hoyland, *Muslims and Others*, xxvi; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 596; Kennedy, *The Prophet*, 107.
71. For example, the *Disputation of John and the Emir*, Syriac edition and English translation in Michael Philip Penn, "John and the Emir: A New Introduction, Edition and Translation," *Le Muséon* 121 (2008): 83–109; and the *Disputation between a Monk of Beth Hale and a Muslim Notable*.
72. Unfortunately, Jacob's *Chronicle* is only incompletely preserved, and the surviving manuscript breaks off after the entry for the year 631, so we most likely are missing the majority of what Jacob wrote about the conquests. The extant sections of the *Chronicle* do, however, speak of the beginning of the kingdom of the Arabs, which Jacob dates to 620/21, and contains brief references to Muhammad and to Arab raids in Palestine.
73. George Phillips, *Scholia on Passages of the Old Testament* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864), 27.
74. Syriac edition in J. P. N. Land, *Anecdota Syriaca* (Leiden: Lugnuni Batavorum, 1862), 11. English translations in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 394; and Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 43.
75. *Chronicle ad 705* (Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, 1:11).
76. Syriac edition in François Nau, "Un colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716," *Journal Asiatique* 11, no. 5 (1915): 253–56. English translation in Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 45–47.
77. *Chronicle of Disasters* (Nau, "Un colloque du Patriarche Jean," 253–56).
78. Unfortunately, there is no published edition or translation of the *Disputation*, and only sections of it appear in passages translated by Griffith, Hoyland, and Reinink, who have seen a copy of the *Diyarbakir Syriac* 95. For arguments regarding when the *Disputation* was written, see Gerrit J. Reinink, "The Lamb on the Tree: Syriac Exegesis and Anti-Islamic Apologetics,"

in Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar, eds., *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 111–13; Sidney H. Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bet Hale and a Muslim Emir," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000); Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 469.

79. Quoted in Griffith, "The Case of the Monk."
80. Reinink, "Political Power," 169.
81. Quoted in ibid., 160–61.
82. Quoted in ibid., 169.
83. Quoted in ibid.
84. For the *Disputation*'s dependence on *Pseudo-Methodius*, see ibid.
85. Quoted in Griffith, "The Case of the Monk."

PART TWO

THE CRUSADES

Throughout the Middle Ages, Muslim and Christian rulers fought one another all along the Mediterranean littoral. The Reconquista, the reconquest of Sicily, and the Crusades brought large numbers of Christian and Muslim warriors into close contact with one another, not just as foes but often as allies. The changing fortunes of war meant that Christian, Jewish, and Muslim populations changed masters repeatedly.

The beginning of the era of the Crusades is conventionally set at the Council of Clermont in 1095 and the summons to what we now call the First Crusade. But since Gratian's *Decretum* appeared half a century later, the discussions surrounding this council and this call took place without any coherent idea of just war in existence. In this period, jihad doctrine was by far more fully developed than just war doctrine. Islam's classical age, after all, coincided with Europe's "dark ages."

It is quite commonplace to find bold assertions about the "transmission of ideas" between Christians and Muslims during the era of the Crusades, with Jews often placed in the role of intermediaries. The boldest of all is the claim that the crusading idea itself was born out of Christian assimilation of jihad into the still-inchoate ideas of just war and holy war. As Jacques Ellul famously averred in *The Subversion of Christianity*, the Islamic jihad introduced into Christianity both holy war and just war:

> One fact, however, is a radical one, namely, that the Crusade is an imitation of the *jihad*. . . . [W]ith the Muslim idea of a holy war is born the idea that a war may be good even if it is not motivated by religious intentions so long as it is waged by a legitimate king. Gradually the view is accepted that political power has to engage in war, and if this power is Christian, then a ruler has to obey certain precepts, orientations, and criteria if he is to act as a Christian ruler and to wage a just war. We thus embark on an endless debate as to the conditions of a just war, from Gratian's decree to St. Thomas. All this derives from the first impulse toward a holy war, and it was the Muslim example that finally inspired this dreadful denial of which all Christendom becomes guilty.[1]

Other writers are more circumspect and less tendentious. Some suggest a significant role for the Benedictine order of Cluny in galvanizing the Reconquista as

a Christian holy war.[2] In 1088, the city of Toledo became the principal see of the Spanish church at the direction of Pope Urban II, a Cluniac, who would launch the First Crusade seven years later. Toledo had been taken from the Moors by Alfonso VI of León-Castile just three years earlier, and with its Arab and Jewish population largely intact, it had become the center of translation of Muslim and Jewish works into Latin.[3] Could Toledo have provided the conduit for ideas between Muslims and Christians?

Given the absence of any direct evidence, most scholars of the Crusades are unwilling to make any speculations on possible Muslim influences on crusading ideology. Ellul's claims notwithstanding, there was certainly enough material from within the scriptures and Greco-Roman natural law thinking to justify the crusade.[4]

Some of the most astute Muslim observers of the Crusades understood them as a different type of conflict from previous wars with Christians. They assimilated them into an Islamic frame of reference. Al-Sulami and Ibn al-Athir described the Franks as engaged in a Christian jihad to help their coreligionists under Muslim rule and to conquer Jerusalem. Both blamed the Muslim defeats on the political and moral decay within Islam, one manifestation of which was the abandonment of jihad.[5] The Counter-Crusades were thus spurred by a revival of jihad thinking, which brought to the fore issues related to defensive jihad and the sanctity of Jerusalem in Muslim piety.[6]

Notes

1. Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 103–4.

2. Vicente Cantarino, "The Spanish Reconquest: A Cluniac Holy War against Islam?" in Khalil I. Semaan, ed., *Islam and the Medieval West: Aspects of Intercultural Relations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), 82–109.

3. Anwar Chejne, "The Role of al-Andalus in the Movement of Ideas between Islam and the West," in Semaan, *Islam and the Medieval West*, 115–20.

4. H. E. J. Cowdrey, "The Genesis of the Crusades: The Springs of Western Ideas of Holy War," in Thomas Patrick Murphy, ed., *The Holy War*(Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 9–32; Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), chap. 1; Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21–31.

5. W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 1991), 82; Robert Irwin, "Islam and the Crusades," in Jonathan Riley-Smith, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 225–26.

6. See S. D. Goitein, "The Sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine in Early Islam," *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 140–48; Emmanuel Sivan, "Le caractère sacré de Jérusalem dans l'Islam aux XIIe–XIIIe siècles," *Studia Islamica* 27 (1967): 149–82.