Chapter 1
Christians in the Middle East, 600–1000: Conquest, Competition and Conversion

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For the Christian communities of the Middle East, the Turkish invasions of the eleventh century were the second time that their political order had been overturned by an alien foe. The seventh century had already seen the complete redrawing of the political map of the region, as the Persian and Roman empires were catastrophically defeated by the forces of the nascent caliphate. When the dust had settled, the Persian realms had been entirely absorbed by the new Arab state, and the Roman empire was reduced to an impoverished rump state in Anatolia and the Balkans. Yet Christians continued to live and prosper in the conquered territories. There was no sudden conversion to Islam that accompanied conquest.[1]

In this chapter I would like to set out some of the evidence for the continuation and transformation of Christian social and political life under Muslim rule. This is significant firstly because it sets the scene for later developments in Anatolia after the battle of Manzikert (1071). But the earlier period also merits investigation because the period of early Islamic rule in the Middle East suggests a number of different models for how the processes of conversion, political accommodation and inter-confessional competition might work in different circumstances.

The religious conversion of the Middle East is a vast subject. I can only really scratch the surface here. But I do wish to emphasise the variety of the Christian experience, whether by confession, by region or by institution. I begin by setting out the confessional diversity of the Middle East as a whole, before discussing the aftermath of the Arab conquests and their different effects in Syria and in northern and southern Mesopotamia.[2] Finally, I turn to the elements of Arab-Islamic culture and jurisprudence that might allow us to explain the gradual conversion of parts of the Middle East to a new religion.[3]

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[1] My thanks go to Harry Munt and Sarah Savant for their advice.

[2] A useful general survey is provided by A. Eddé, F. Micheau and C. Picard (eds), *Communautés chrétiennes en pays d'Islam: du début de VIIe siècle au milieu de IXe siècle* (Paris: SEDES, 1997).

[3] I recognise that the categories 'Islam' and 'Christianity' are neither homogeneous nor stationary, i.e. that mutual influence meant that neither category remained the same. Therefore, when we speak of conversion to Islam in the seventh century or in the ninth we are actually speaking of different phenomena. Cf. R. Bulliet, 'Process and status in conversion and continuity', in *Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands. Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi (Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 1–12, at 3.

The Sixth Century: Three Christian Confessions

The Roman Middle East that fell to Arab arms in the seventh century was no homogeneous territory. As well as Jews, polytheists and Samaritans, the region played host to numerous different Christian confessions. The Chalcedonians were the most numerous of these. This group, intellectual ancestors of the modern Greek Orthodox, derived their theology from the formulae of the 451 Council of Chalcedon, in particular their emphasis on the independent human and divine natures of Christ (a Dyophysite Christology). This was the faith of the emperor and of the four great patriarchates of the east in Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. It was the only Christian group in the east to enjoy relatively close relations with the Pope in Rome and its adherents were scattered across the eastern Mediterranean. The Chalcedonians of the caliphate are often referred to as Melkites, and I shall use this term here.[4]

The second major Christian confession were the Miaphysites, those who asserted a single unified nature of Christ. This group is sometimes referred to as the anti-Chalcedonians, because they rejected the Council of Chalcedon and viewed this as their main point of departure from the Melkites. Here I shall use the term 'Jacobite', the name they were most commonly given by Arabic authors after the missionary bishop, Jacob Baradeus. Whereas the Melkites had been the direct recipients of imperial patronage, the Jacobites had been subject to periodic persecution throughout the sixth century at the hands of impatient patriarchs of Constantinople. In reaction to this persecution, and to their exclusion from a great deal of imperial patronage, they retreated into the countryside in their main strongholds of Egypt, Mesopotamia and northern Syria. They retained the structures of the Chalcedonian church, however, even if their councils and synods were convened in rural monasteries rather than in cities, and they continued to celebrate the imperial patronage they had received in recent in earlier eras.[5]

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[4] On the different confessions in general terms see I. Dorfmann-Lazarev, 'Beyond Empire I: Eastern Christianities from the Persian to the Turkish Conquests, 604–1071', in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 3: *Early Medieval Christianities, c.600-c.1100*, ed. Thomas F.X. Noble and Julia M.H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65–85. For developments in the Islamic period see S. Griffith, '"Melkites", "Jacobites" and the Christological controversies', in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. D. Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 9–57.

[5] M.M. Mango, 'The production of Syriac manuscripts, 400–700 AD' in *Scritture. Libri e testi nelle aree provinciali dell'impero bizantino. Acts of the Third International Congress of Greek Palaeography, Erice, September 1988*, ed. G. Cavallo (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1989), 162–79, at 167 on the dominance of monasteries in Miaphysite intellectual life; Philip Wood, *'We have no king but Christ': Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c.400–585)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 167; J. Tannous, 'Syria between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak', PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2010, 7, on monasticism as the preserver of an alternative 'Romanitas'. On Miaphysite theology, note the useful introduction by R.C. Chestnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Serug* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976). On the sixth-century background see V.-L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Modern historians have occasionally represented the Syrian Jacobites as a fifth column, eager to welcome the Arab invaders and expel their Chalcedonian persecutors.[6] However, these interpretations place rather too much weight on sources written or compiled long after the invasions themselves.[7] Sixth-century sources offer a much more nuanced view, in which the Jacobites represent themselves as servants of the emperor and as an 'orthodoxy in waiting', until such time as he would restore their exiled bishops to their rightful place.[8]

The third major confession that I will discuss here is the Church of the East, often referred to as the Nestorian church. This was the Christian church of the Sasanian empire, which adopted a heavily Dyophysite Christology that could occasionally be reconciled with the Council of Chalcedon. Christians in the Sasanian world endured periodic persecution at the hands of the state authorities, but this was interspersed by various experiments by the Sasanian state to give authority to the bishop of Ctesiphon and to try to influence Christian behaviour through institutional structures.[9]

Relations between all three groups varied substantially across the sixth century. All three could look to important moments of rapprochement or points of conflict in their shared histories, and the sixth century would offer a crucial phase that later historians would look back on, in order to chart contemporary identities. It is, perhaps, ironic, that the closest they came to reconciliation was with the aftermath of the reign of the emperor Heraklios (d. 641). His defeat of the Persian empire in 628 and his representation of the Sasanians as pagan enemies of God offered the possibility of Christian unity.[10] Supported by his allies from the Christian Caucasus, the emperor returned the True Cross to Jerusalem

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[6] G.E.M. De Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 444.

[7] e.g. Michael the Syrian, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot (Paris: Leroux, 1899–1924), 4 vols, XI, v–vii (vol. 4, 414–6/ vol. 2, 419–24) has a negative tone that presents the Romans as a tyrants, unsympathetic to Syria, and emphasises the favourable treatment of the Miaphysites by the Arabs. Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, reconstructed and trans. A. Palmer with S. Brock and R. Hoyland, *The Seventh Century in the West Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), using the *Chronicle of 1234*, ed. J. Chabot, *Chronicon Anonymum ad Annuum Christi 1234 Pertinens* (CSCO 81–2; Leuven: Typographeo Linguarum Orientalium, 1916–20), reports the 'unspeakable crimes' of the Romans during their retreat from Syria (§66, 250/ 157) and asserts that the Coptic patriarch Benjamin collaborated in the Muslim conquest out of enmity towards the Melkites (§69, 251–2/ 158). There is no direct statement of collaboration for Christians in Syria, unlike the Samaritans or the Jarajima of Antioch (al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. de Goeje (Cairo, 1901) and trans. P. Hitti, *The Origins of the Islamic State* (New York: Columbia University, 1916), 158–9).

[8] Wood, '*We Have No King but Christ*', 175.

[9] P. Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert: Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. 21.

[10] M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 1996), 69–82; J. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 435–45; Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert*, ch. 7. Note the positive reception of Heraklios' image as a Christian monarch in the Caucasus, where his coins were widely imitated: M. Tsotselia, 'Recent Sasanian coin findings on the territory of Georgia', *Histoire et mesure*, 17 (http://histoiremesure.revues.org/document888.html).

after its capture by the Persians and received communion with the Nestorian patriarch Isho'yahb II.[11] Where theologians had long failed to get different confessions to cooperate, the field of battle may have offered a more direct indication of God's will.

Of course, with the hindsight of subsequent events, we know that Heraklios' plans came to nothing with the Arab invasions of Syria and Iraq. God, it seemed, had other human agents in mind and other theologies to favour. But the fact that Heraklios came so close to establishing compromise should remind us of two things. Firstly, that any theologian conscious of his history would be aware of the real possibility of the union of the churches. And, secondly, that relations between different Christian confessions were also deeply intertwined with secular affairs, and that God's hand was seen in the deeds of emperors as much as in the internal workings of the church.[12]

The Effects of the Conquest

Large parts of the Roman Middle East fell to the Arabs very quickly indeed. This was not the long, drawn out struggle that characterised the fall of parts of the Roman West.[13] Al-Balādhurī reports that the Greeks fled cities like Homs and Damascus for the safety of Roman Cyprus, and that the Arab conquerors were permitted to live in their houses.[14] But the levels of population displacement and the destruction of property during the conquests appear to have been low. The archaeologist Alan Walmsley observes how rare it is to find signs of destruction

[11] B. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1992), vol. 2, 312–19; Wood, *Chronicle of Seert*, 213–5.

[12] The excerpted works of earlier historians were often translated into Arabic (e.g. The *Chronicle of Seert*, ., ed. and trans, Addai Scheer as 'Histoire nestorienne inédite: Chronique de Séert', *Patrologia Orientalis* 4 (1908), 5 (1910), 7 (1911) 13 (1919)) or embedded into later *florilegia* (quotation collections). M. Conterno, 'Culto e memoria di Constantino nelle tradizioni sire. Agiografia constantiniana nella liturgia e nella storiografia', in *Constantino I. Enciclopedia Constantiniana sulla figura immagine dell'imperatore del cossidetto editto di Milano* (Rome: Instituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2013), II: 425–39 discusses the treatment of the figure of Constantine as a touchstone of orthodoxy in the different oriental traditions.

[13] e.g. C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 31 for the effects of the Persians and Arabs in Anatolia; 34–5 for the Goths and Lombards in Italy. S. Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through Fifteenth Centuries* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), 451, contrasts the rapidity of the conquest of Trebizond to the rest of Anatolia and suggests that this is one explanation for the survival of Christianity in this region.

[14] Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 127, for the flight of 'Rūm' from Tripoli, with the comments of H. Kennedy, 'Syrian elites from Byzantium to Islam: survival or extinction?' in *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria: A Review of Current Debates*, ed. J. Haldon (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 181–200, at 189–92. Also note Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, ed. C. Torrey, *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1922), 130–1 for the occupation of houses in Alexandria abandoned by 'Rūm'.

in the cities of Syria and Palestine.[15] The conquest seems to have been swift and relatively tightly controlled.[16]

For several of the Christian confessions of the Middle East, the seventh century may have represented something of an 'Indian Summer', to use Chase Robinson's term.[17] Probably because they simply lacked the administrative manpower to closely monitor the conquered population, the caliphate seems to have allowed many local aristocrats, bishops and monasteries substantial powers to provide justice for their co-religionists[18] and relied on them to raise taxes on behalf of the state.[19] Numismatists have also suggested that similar groups took on the responsibility of minting imitations of Roman coins, when sufficient coin stock was no longer being imported from elsewhere or being produced by the state.[20] In Egypt we see Christian elites exploiting the absence of central government to raise much higher taxes on the agricultural population than had occurred under Roman rule.[21] In other words, the seventh century witnessed an absence of upper level government that was exploited by men on the spot.[22]

Another feature of this absence of state control is the remarkable progress made by Christian missionary activity and monastic building in the former Sasanian world in the same period. The entries for the years *c.*580–730 in the patriarchal chronicle of ʿAmr ibn Matta see a boom in the commemoration of monastic founders.[23] These foundations are clustered in northern Iraq, around

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[15] A. Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria: An Archaeological Assessment* (London: Duckworth, 2007), 47.

[16] F. Donner, 'Centralized authority and military autonomy in the early Islamic conquests', in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 3: *States, Resources and Armies*, ed. Averil Cameron (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 337–60, comes to the same conclusions from the literary sources.

[17] C. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 50–62.

[18] On the provision of justice by *dhimmī* religious leaders see U. Simonsohn, *A Common Justice: The Legal Allegiances of Christians and Jews under Early Islam* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) and N. Edelby, 'L'autonomie législative des chrétiens en terre de l'Islam', *Archive de l'histoire du droit orientale* 5 (1951): 307–51. Tannous, *Syria*, 459 gives the example of one Theodota of Amida, whose *Life* records that the Arabs gave him legal authority over 'all the Christians of Amida' (a local coup, therefore, for the Miaphysites).

[19] Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 91–117; P. Sijpesteijn, 'Landholding Patterns in Early Islamic Egypt', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 9 (2009): 120–33 on the retention of Christian pagarchs until the Marwanid period. Al-Tabari, *Ta'rīkh al-rusūl wal-mulūk*, ed. M. De Goeje (Leiden, 1879–98), vol. 2, 458 notes the use of *dihqāns* to collect taxes.

[20] M. Bates, 'Byzantine Coinage and Its Imitations, Arab Coinage and Its Imitations: The Byzantine-Arab Coinage', *Aram* 6 (1984): 381–403, at 393–4.

[21] John of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, trans. R. Charles (London and Oxford: William Norgate, 1916), CXXI, 5.

[22] The tyrannical powers of the *shahregan* of northern Iraq, and their eventual destruction by the Arabs, is a strong theme of the *Life of Maranemmeh*, preserved in Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, ed. and trans. E. Wallis-Budge (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1893), 149–53/ 307–12.

[23] Amr, *Kitab al-Magda*l. trans. H. Gismondi, *Maris, Amri et Salibae: De Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria* (Rome: de Luigi, 1899), 44/22–61/35, noting the lists of foundations at the end of

the great monastery of Izla, but they extend into Central Asia, and into Daylam on the shores of the Caspian. This general impression is also confirmed by archaeological evidence from the Persian Gulf, where a series of monasteries and churches have been recently re-dated to the early Islamic period, having long been thought to be Sasanian in date.[24] And in Palestine, 'Christian life went on both sides of the Jordan, not as an ebbing survival, but as the expression of a flourishing, self-assured and self-organised community.'[25]

Christian expansion in the seventh century may seem counter-intuitive, but we should bear in mind that Islam was, at that time, a religious opinion held by very few people indeed, and that they ruled the Middle East as a small and dispersed population, drawing on the resources and expertise of a much larger non-Muslim population. Moreover, the regions of Iraq and Iran were in an unusual position as former territories of the Sasanian empire, whose official Zoroastrian religion had suddenly and fatally lost its ability to retain adherents with the collapse of the empire.[26] The monastic history of Thomas of Marga describes a situation where most of the Christian converts in this era bear Iranian names, often with Zoroastrian connotations. These men were also powerful aristocrats, *dehqān*s and *shahregān* in the language of the text, and they seem to have facilitated the seventh-century expansion in monasticism through gifts of money and political protection.[27]

The relative freedom of Christians to proselytise Zoroastrians and pagans and expand monastic structures would remain continuous features of the seventh and eighth centuries.[28] But we should note that the independence of Christian

each section. They peter out after the entry for Pethion.

[24] R.A. Carter, 'Christianity in the Gulf during the First Centuries of Islam', *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19 (2008): 71–108. Note also R. Payne, 'Monks, Dinars and Date Palms: Hagiographical Production and the Expansion of Monastic Institutions in the Early Islamic Persian Gulf', *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 22 (2011): 97–111, who integrates this archaeological study into the hagiographical evidence.

[25] Quotation from L. Di Segni, 'Christian Epigraphy in the Holy Land: New Discoveries', *Aram* 15 (2003): 247–67, at 247. Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, 124–6 has emphasised the enormous expense involved in the construction of mosaics in churches in Palestine and the Transjordan in the early-to-mid eighth centuries. See further M. Picirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman: American Center of Oriental Research, 1993); M. Picirillo and E. Alliata, *Umm al-Rasas- Mayfa'ah I. Gli scavi del complesso di Santo Stefano* (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscum, 1994).

[26] M. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 297–302. Cf. T. Daryaee, 'Marriage, Property and Conversion among the Zoroastrians: From Late Sasanian to Early Islamic Iran', *Journal of Persianate Studies* 6 (2013): 91–100, who suggests that close-kin marriage was promoted as a means of keeping property within a shrinking community.

[27] e.g. Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, II, xliii, 136–7/282–3 on Hugairabad. See the discussions of C. Villagomez, 'The Fields, Flocks and Finances of Monks: Economic Life at Nestorian Monasteries, 500–850', PhD dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1998, and, drawing on this, Wood, *Chronicle of Seert*, 163–70.

[28] e.g. Narratives in Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, , xxxii, 110–1/ 242–3 (on Golai in northern Iraq); *Chronicle of Seert*, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 13 (1919(, XLV, L, LIV, LXXVI (missions to the Kurds and Arabs); *Life of John of Daylam*, ed. and trans. S. Brock, *Parole de l'Orient* 10 (1982), 123–90, §19, 25, 39 (missions in Daylam and Fars).

leaders, especially their bishops, was eventually curtailed. In the last decade of the eighth century, the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik began reforms to tighten the remit of the state and to restrict the behaviour of local elites. It was in his reign that we first hear of a census and land survey being conducted, even in rural districts such as northern Mesopotamia.[29] Similarly, the same period witnessed a strong crack-down on the high nobility (*shahregān*) of northern Iraq by local governors in Mosul: the aristocratic dominance and conspicuous consumption of the previous century was being brought to heel by a stronger and more centralised caliphate.[30]

This centralisation of the state, and the revenue that it brought, was also used to fuel a deliberate articulation of the state's Arabic and Islamic character. Epigraphic coinage, bearing the Arabic *shahāda*, was issued for the first time, and bureaucracy was increasingly conducted in Arabic, rather than in Greek and Persian.[31] The construction of Islamic monuments in Damascus and Jerusalem also proclaimed the religious identification of the state to a Christian population and to visitors from the still unconquered Byzantine world.[32] To both interest groups, this must have been a stark statement of cultural difference and the rejection of a Roman way of doing things. These cultural-religious statements took place against a background of military victory over the Byzantines and rival caliphs, and there was a strong expectation that Constantinople's fall, and possibly the end of the world, were both imminent.[33]

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[29] *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, ed. J. Chabot, *Incerti auctoris chronicon anonymum pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum* (Paris: Typographeo Reipublicae, 1927–33) and trans. A. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV, A.D. 484–775* (Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1999), 154/ 147–8.

[30] Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, III, viii, 163/ 329–30 (for Maranemmeh's condemnation of the shahrig Zadhai) with comments in P. Wood, 'Christians in Umayyad Iraq' in A. Marsham and A. George, *Power, Patronage and Memory in Early Islam: Perspectives on Umayyad History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

[31] J. Bachrach, *Signs of Sovereignty: The Shahada, Qurʾanic verses and the Coinage of ʿAbd al-Malik (65–86 AH/685–705 CE)* (forthcoming). For the background to this coinage reform, seen in terms of numismatic experimentation, see A. Walmsley, 'Coinage and the economy of Syria-Palestine in the seventh and eighth centuries CE', in Haldon, *Money, Power and Politics*, 21–44. For changes in the administration in Egypt in this period see P. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[32] C. Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), esp. 77 and 116–7 on construction in Jerusalem and the creation of uniform infrastructure. Studies in F.B. Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) and in J. Johns and J. Raby (eds), *Bayt al-Maqdis: ʿAbd al-Malik's Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[33] e.g. G. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius* (Leuven: E. Peeters, 1993), CSCO 540–1, English translation in P. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 1985), 36–51. Note the comments in G. Reinink, 'Ps-Methodius: a concept of history in response to the rise of Islam', in idem, *Syriac Christianity under Late Sasanian and Early Islamic Rule* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), vol. 9, and other chapters in this volume. These ideas were shared by many Muslims: D. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). For the Byzantine military failures of this period: Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 136–8; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 474–81.

Regional Identity and the Christians

Local chronicles composed in Syriac provide a rich vein of material for Christian attitudes to the competing powers of Byzantium and the caliphate. A particularly interesting example is the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, composed in a monastery in northern Mesopotamia between the 730s and the 770s by a number of different monks working in the same monastery.[34] The first composers of this *Chronicle* speak of the Arabs in undifferentiated terms as tyrants and oppressors sent from God, while considerable praise is heaped upon the emperors Leo III and Constantine V. This is all the more striking because the Zuqnin chroniclers were almost certainly Jacobites. Even after ʿAbd al-Malik's striking defeat of the Byzantines, and the persecutions suffered by his sixth-century co-religionists, the Byzantine empire remained a seat of God's providence, and the deeds of its emperors an obvious topic of interest for an ecclesiastical historian, even one writing beyond the borders of the empire. However, the account of the emperors is also rather ignorant of their theological innovations: to any Greek-speaking historian these emperors were famous as Iconoclasts.[35]

However, authors writing around the middle of the century offer considerably more space to the Arab rulers of Mesopotamia as the Byzantine emperors recede from view. The Umayyad caliph Marwān II is particularly prominent for making his capital in Harran, and the chronicler presents him as an attractive military hero, whose deeds will be an obvious point of interest for his listeners.[36] These stories pave the way for a sympathetic perspective on the cause of the Umayyads during the third *fitna*. This is seen primarily in 'racial', rather than religious terms: the Abbasids are Persians, and are characterised by their black skin and black clothes, and the negative effects of the first decades of Abbasid rule include their importation of large numbers of foreigners: Sindis, Khurasanis, Persians and Medians. By this stage, it seems that the early wave of Arab conquerors had become familiar to the chroniclers.[37] The writers of the 760s seem more able to differentiate between different groups of foreigners than their predecessors. Even if is only on a principle of 'better the devil you know', they increasingly felt sympathy for local Arabs who were subject to the same oppressive taxation

[34] On this text note C. Cahen, 'Fiscalité, propriété, antagonismes sociaux en Haute-Mésopotamie au temps des premiers Abbasides d'après Denys de Tell-Mahré', *Arabica* 1 (1954): 136–54 (for economic issues) and W. Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre: A Study in the History of Historiography* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987); P. Wood, 'The Chroniclers of Zuqnin and Their Times (c.720–75)', *Parole de l'Orient* 36 (2011): 549–68.

[35] *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 157–60/150–2 (on Leo III); 207/ 189–90 (on Constantine V). Contrast the negative portrayal given in Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango and Robert Scott as *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), e.g. AM 6232 (412/572) and AM 6244 (427/ 591).

[36] e.g. *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 188–9/174–5.

[37] Ibid., 229/206. The chronicler observes that many of this army are worshippers of fire and idols: the emphasis is on the alien nature of the caliph's army and on the signs of the apocalypse, rather than on the caliph as a Muslim per se.

regime as they were themselves.[38] A reference to the Abbasids removing Arabs from the villages of the 'Syrians' (*Suryaye*), where they had settled and intermarried with local women, suggests that this sympathy stems from some measure of social integration on the ground, though it is unclear whether such intermarriage had led to conversions in either direction.[39]

The final section of this regional chronicle is the longest, and also heavily weighted towards an eschatological understanding of history, filled with images of the apocalypse. It is only in this section, written in 776, that the Arabs and Persians are clearly identified as Muslims, rather than merely as foreigners. Here the frontier wars between the caliph and Byzantium are understood as a war between Christianity and Islam. The caliphal forces are described in the terms of Israel's opponents in the Old Testament as the cupbearers of Sennacherib: 'Where are now the kings of Egypt, Africa, the Nubians and the Moors? ... The deeds of the Persians were all in vain because the help of the Romans was the Lord.'[40]

The presentation of the war as a religious conflict may stem from the first apostasies that occurred within nearby communities in the time of the last of Zuqnin chroniclers. The *Chronicle* concludes with the celebration of the local martyr, Cyrus of Harran. Though Cyrus is celebrated for his steadfastness, the chronicler is still forced to admit that he has been killed for his return to Christianity, after a spell of time as a Muslim. Other accounts of Christian apostates are much freer to condemn those who leave their faith. In one moving scene, the chronicler describes the apostasy of a priest who ignores the entreaties and presents of his friends to renounce his faith, even adding additional curses against Christ and the Virgin that had not been requested by his Arab patrons. After saying the *shahāda*, the chronicler informs us that the Holy Spirit left his mouth in the form of a dove and flew away, a warning to anyone who would renounce their faith.[41]

Christians as Citizens of the Caliphate

Two key issues that emerge from the *Zuqnin Chronicle* are the increasing identifications with local Arab settlers and, perhaps paradoxically, increasing awareness of the government and its servants as Muslims, and, in some cases, religiously motivated opponents of the Christians. On one hand it shows that this border region was especially sensitive to the political rhetoric of Byzantium and the caliphate, but, on the other, the chronicler was clearly capable of

[38] Ibid, 316/273.

[39] Ibid., 256/ 226; On Arab settlement in Iraq in general see F. Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), ch. 5.

[40] *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 232–3/209.

[41] Ibid, 393ff./ 330ff. Note discussion of A. Harrak, 'Christianity in the eyes of Muslims of the Jazirah in the eighth century', *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995): 337–56.

sympathy for Arabs and Muslims, either as fellow Syrians or as fellow objects of government oppression.

Much of the literature has concentrated on modern historians' ability to quantify religious change and to understand the pressures to convert or to retain one's religion,[42] but before addressing this, I would like to emphasise the impact of the new regime on intra-Christian relationships. That is, my focus is on how the interplay between different parts of the caliphate came to affect relations between different Christian groups and between the clergy and the laity.

The Chronicle of Zuqnin shows a situation where the chronicler and his milieu remains peripheral throughout the Roman and Islamic periods. Though the Tur ʿAbdin did become a border zone, and this gave it a certain kind of salience, it was never an economic powerhouse that attracted the particular attention of the caliphal state.[43] A very different situation existed for Syria and Iraq. In Syria, the Abbasid revolution saw the disappearance of familiar patronage, which the region had enjoyed under both the Romans and the Umayyads. The *Life of Timothy of Kakushta* describes the situation in rural northern Syria before the Byzantine reconquest of the region, and I believe that it provides significant insights into the effects of this retreat of patronage on relations between the higher clergy and the uneducated laity of the countryside.

One of the most interesting scenes in this *Life* is the confrontation between Timothy and the patriarch Theodoret, which occupies the third quarter of the *Life* after Timothy's reputation as an ascetic and wonder worker has already been firmly established.[44] The first scene in the relationship between holy man and patriarch sees the saint condemn a prominent layman in Kakushta for committing adultery, The patriarch intercedes to ask Timothy to forgive him, but the saint refuses: to do so, would be to nullify the laws of God.[45]

Later in the year, the patriarch himself comes to visit the region and stops at Kakushta to pay his respects to the saint. But Timothy is less than accommodating. He points out that the patriarch carriage and his fine robes were not used by any of the disciples. Timothy tells the patriarch that he has had a vision in which he appeared in the midst of the apostles. But while they wore robes of glory, he appeared wearing lowly clothes and with the face of an Indian.[46]

Initially, Theodoret agrees to change his ways, but he soon relapses and renounces any pretences to asceticism. However, he receives his just desserts when the troops of the caliph arrest him as he consecrates the *myron* (holy oil) on Maundy Thursday. In a desperate bid for help, the patriarch bribes his captors to allow him to visit Timothy on his way to prison. Timothy promises to use his

[42] Especially R. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[43] See, in general, A. Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of the Tur ʿAbdin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[44] *Life of Timothy of Kakhushta*, ed. and trans. J. Lamoureaux and C. Cairala, as ' The Life of *Timothy of Kâkhushtâ*: Two Arabic Texts Edited and Translated', *Patrologia Orientalis* 48 (2000), Paris Manuscript (P) 18, 20, 22 (for his healing miracles and his ability to forgive sins).

[45] Ibid, P 22.1–2.

[46] *I*bid, P 27.1–2.

parrhēsia with God (his powers of intercession) to ensure Theodoret's safety and tells him not to accept any rewards from the caliph, but to ask him to consider the poor with regard to the *jizya*, to give you a document 'about the freedom to follow the laws of the churches and that they be built and repaired and that no monk be accosted in any way- in accordance with what is enjoined on them [the Muslims] in the pact drawn up by their master [Muḥammad]'.[47]

In Baghdad, Timothy's promises come true. Theodoret is condemned to death, but the executioner is unable to kill him after his hand miraculously withers up. Next, the caliph's concubine asks him to make Theodoret his doorkeeper instead of killing him. While serving the caliph in this capacity, Theodoret's opportunity arrives when the caliph's son falls sick and he cannot be cured by any of the doctors of Baghdad: Theodoret anoints the boy with '*baraka*', holy oil that has been blessed by Timothy, and the boy is cured.[48] After this miracle Theodoret is offered ludicrous wealth by the caliph. But this time he remembers Timothy's warning and askes instead for a reduction in the *jizya* for the caliph's Christian subjects and a guarantee of the rights to build churches and monasteries.

The subtext of this *Life* is an environment where Melkite Syria had been robbed of its patriarchal centres of Antioch and Jerusalem. The centres of power were moved to Iraq with the Abbasid revolution and the foundation of Baghdad.[49] And Antioch itself, once a mighty city, had been badly affected by the shift in trade routes to the east and its proximity to the Byzantine frontier.[50] It is notable that another tenth-century saint's *Life* describing the election to the patriarchate of Antioch, remarks that the candidates came from Baghdad and Samarra, rather than from the region around Antioch.[51] In such an environment, we should remember that the patriarch was no longer likely to be a local man, recruited from monasteries enmeshed in regional politics. Furthermore, the patriarch's ability to represent the wider Melkite community rested on his ability to make his presence felt at the court of the caliph, requiring both his physical absence from the Levant and a public display of wealth and learning. It was this kind of

[47] Ibid, S. 33. 3–5 (this passage is missing in the Paris manuscript due to a break in the manuscript, but the scene is present in the later Seidnaya manuscript).

[48] Ibid, P. 27. 5–11 and S. 33. 6–11.

[49] On the Melkites in general note H. Kennedy, 'The Melkite Church from the Islamic Conquest to the Crusades: Continuity and Adaptation in the Byzantine Legacy', in *17th International Byzantine Congress: The Major Papers* (New Rochelle, NY: A.D. Caratzas, 1986), 325–43 and J.-M. Fiey, '"Rum" à l'est de l'Euphrate', *Le Muséon* 90 (1977): 365–420. On the Christian presence in Baghdad see M. Allard, 'Les chrétiens à Bagdad', *Arabica* 9 (1962): 375–88, esp. 377–9.

[50] Wickham, *Framing*, 448–9.

[51] H. Zayat (ed. and trans.), 'Life of Christopher of Antioch', *Proche-Orient chrétien* 2 (1952): 17–38 and 333–66, at 23. The Jacobites also experienced tensions from this eastward shift in power, which robbed the monasteries of Qenneshre and Gubba Baraya of their traditional roles as nurseries of future patriarchs: see the discussion of the sources in M. Oez, 'Cyriacus of Takrit and his Book on Divine Providence', DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 2010, ch. 1. For the 'Nestorians', of course, this same shift in power brought them great importance, since the caliphal capital was now located in its traditional heartland: Wood, *Chronicle of Seert*, 227–8 and 236–8. See further below.

representation that allowed clerics to claim a role in protecting the rights of fellow *dhimmī*s before the authorities.[52]

The requirements of the court at Baghdad made the patriarch, and other higher clergy, vulnerable to the kind of ascetic criticism levelled by Timothy. The *Life* passes over a number of opportunities to criticise Muslims and Islam. Though Muslims occasionally request miracles from the saint he assures them that he will not ask them to change their religion.[53] And though the caliph's actions against Theodoret are clearly tyrannical, this is not where the emphasis of the story lies. Indeed, Muhammad is invoked as a kind of guarantor of Christian rights.[54] Instead the focus of the saint's invective is the local moral order and the failure of the higher clergy. Moreover, a significant twist to this narrative lies in the hagiographer's claim that Christians should thank Timothy for their low levels of tax rather than the patriarch: the patriarch's legitimacy as a defender of the people has been stripped away, undermining any claim that his worldly lifestyle might be justified.

A Shift in Power: The Rise of Iraq

The sources from Syria and northern Mesopotamia suggest a world where direct contact between the central government and church leaders had become an opaque process, and therefore one open to criticism from local leaders. But a very different trend emerges from the sources composed in Syriac and Arabic in Iraq in the ninth and tenth centuries.

Iraq's Church of the East had once enjoyed an important relationship with the Sasanian shahs, a relationship that had often been celebrated in hagiographies and histories composed in the sixth century. But this close link between church and state seems to have reached an apogee in the reign of the catholicos Timothy (d. 823), who played a major role in theological discussions at the court of the caliph and sponsored the translation of texts between Greek, Syriac and Arabic.[55] Timothy's reign began shortly after the transfer of the patriarchate of the east to the new capital of Baghdad, and he seems to have received a share of the massive wealth that was generated by the new city, which was soon adorned by a large number of churches and monasteries. Two of his letters refer to gifts of

[52] P. Wood, 'Christian Authority under the Early Abbasids: The *Life of Timothy of Kakushta*', *Proche-Orient chrétien* 61 (2011): 258–74, at 269–70.

[53] *Life of Timothy*, P 36.

[54] Cf. *Chronicle of Seert*, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 13 (1919), CIV (619–23).

[55] V. Berti, 'Libri e biblioteche cristiane nell'Iraq dell'VIII secolo. Una testimonianza dell'epistolario del patriarca siro-orientale Timoteo I (727–823)', in *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists: Proceedings of the Meeting of the European Science Foundation Network 'Late Antiquity and Arabic Thought'*, ed. C. D'Ancona (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 307–17; S.P. Brock, 'Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9 (1999): 233–46.

land from the caliph for church-building and the funding of missions to the east by the patriarch.[56]

The wealth of the Church of the East in this period seems to have an immediate effect on its ability to describe its own history, or rather, on Baghdad's ability to tell the history of the whole church from its perspective. The patriarchal chronicles are particularly rich for the period 750–900, corresponding to a growth in the sponsorship of history-writing.[57] In a similar vein, the *synodicon* of the church, with its collections of older canons and 'secular' legislation was made in the ninth century, beginning with the efforts of Timothy himself.[58] These were not naïve efforts to record the past, but systematic attempts to invoke antiquity to justify the increased centralisation of the ninth-century church and magnify the dominance of the catholicos.[59] Though centralising tendencies had always been present in the Sasanian church, we know from contemporary hagiographies that they were often resisted at a local level.[60] Timothy's efforts look like a much more comprehensive attempt to use history to claim rights in the present, especially by linking the codification of law to a simultaneous effort to codify history and to underscore the patriarch's own rights as a lawgiver.

Timothy's reign also saw a reworking of the ecclesiology of the Church of the East, where the church's institutional structures caught up with its missionary expansion in the past centuries. A church that had been limited to Iraq and Iran in the sixth century now stretched from western China to Cyprus and Melitene. The Church's expansion east is often highlighted in general studies, keen to demonstrate that Christianity's importance as an Asian religion long predated the European age of exploration.[61] But we might equally place an emphasis on the presence of Nestorian bishops well inside the former Roman empire. The caliphate united the prosperous provinces of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Egypt, which had long since been separated by a political frontier.[62] And this new unity facilitated trading and economic connections between previously separate regions. The caliphate saw the spread of Melkites in Merv and Herat, Nestorians in Damascus and Amida and Takriti Jacobites in the monasteries of lower Egypt.[63]

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[56] Wood, *Chronicle of Seert*, 236–7.

[57] Ibid, 229–41.

[58] See V. Berti, *Vita e Studi di Timotheo I (823), patriarca cristiano di Baghdad. Richerche sull'epistolario e sulle fonti contigue* (Paris: Peeters, 2009, Cahiers de Studia Iranica 41) on Timothy in general. On his role in collecting the *synodica* see W. Selb, *Orientalisches Kirchenrecht:* vol. 1: *Die Geschichte des Kirchenrechts der Nestorianer (von den Anfängen bis zur Mongolenzeit)* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), esp. 165.

[59] See Timothy's *Letter* 26, with discussion in F. Briquel-Chattonet, et al., 'Lettre du patriarche Timothée à Maranzekhā, évêque de Nineve', *Journal asiatique* 288 (2000): 1–13.

[60] e.g. *Acts of Mar Miles*, ed. P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrorum et Sanctorum* (Pari: Harrassowitz 1896), vol. 2, 260–76.

[61] e.g. C. Baumer, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 168–74.

[62] J. Dauvillier, 'Les provinces chaldéennes de "l'extérieur" au môyen âge', in *Mélanges Cavallera* (Toulouse: Bibliothéque de l'Institut Catholique, 1948), 261–316, esp. 273–4.

[63] J.-M. Fiey, 'Les diocèses de maphrianat syrien, 629–1860', *Parole de l'Orient* 5 (1974): 133–65; J. Nasrallah, *L'église melchite en Iraq, en Perse et en Asie Centrale* (Jerusalem: [s.n.], 1976); J.-M. Fiey,

In a way that had not been possible before, Christian institutions were offered new opportunities for expansion, opportunities that those near the wealth and patronage of the urban centres of Iraq were able to take full advantage of.

Explaining Conversion: A Shared Culture

Sidney Griffith has stressed the neutrality of high level religious discussion and the vibrancy of Christian rebuttal of Muslim theological arguments. He lays an emphasis on the importance of *kalām* for such debates, that is, of a logical framework derived from Aristotle that did not respect the primacy of any revealed texts.[64] And Jean-Maurice Fiey has stressed the high social position achieved by a Christian 'middle class' at Baghdad, and the close cooperation between prominent patriarchs and their Muslim rulers.[65]

Yet, as Griffith also observes, the history of Christians in the Middle East is also one of 'continual, if gradual, diminishment'.[66] Even if individual Christians found prominent employment and courtly honours, the overall pattern in the *longue durée*, is of a subaltern status, where Christianity could not be allowed the public prestige of the state religion and where one purpose of state legislation and the rulings of individual jurists was to discriminate between Muslims and non-Muslims.[67]

'Chrétientés syriaques du Horasan et Ségestan', *Le Muséon* 86 (1973): 75–104; M. Immerzeel, 'The stuccoes of Deir al-Surian: A *waqf* of the Takritans in Fustat?' in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium*, ed. M. Immerzeel and J. Van der Vleit, vols 1–2 (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 1303–20. Contrast the marked retraction of Christian bishoprics that has been observed for tenth Sicily (Eddé, Micheau and Picard, *Communautés chrétiennes*, 45) or fifteenth-century Anatolia (Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, 288–310).

[64] S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 64. See also idem, 'The Syriac Letters of Patriarch Timothy I and the birth of Christian *kalām* in the Muʿtazilite milieu of Baghdad and Basrah in early Islamic Times', in *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, ed. A. Van Bekkum, J.-W. Drijvers and A.C. Klugkist (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 103–32; D. Sklare, *Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon and his Cultural World: Texts and Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), discusses the influence of *kalām*, and the Muʿtazilite ideas of primary rationalism on Jewish thought in Baghdad in this period (47–61). Interestingly, he observes that Jewish intellectuals were most innovative, and open to their surrounds, when gaonic institutions were in *decline* (96).

[65] J.-M. Fiey, *Les chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides surtout à Bagdad, 749–1258* (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1980). This was particularly true for the Church of the East (130). More specifically see C. Cabrol, 'Les fonctionnaires d'etat nestoriens a Bagdad du temps des 'Abbassides (III/IXe–IV/X s.)', in *'Abbasid Studies* vol. 2, ed. J. Nawas (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 191–211; R. Le Coz, *Les médecins nestoriens au Moyen Âge. Les maîtres des Arabes* (Paris: Harmattan, 2005); H. Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1986), 93–108; S. Dadoyan, *The Fatimid Armenians: Cultural and Political Interaction in the Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), chs 4–5.

[66] S. Griffith, 'Christians under Muslim rule', in the Noble and Smith (eds), *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 3, 197–212, at 209.

[67] See further below.

One source of this 'gradual diminishment' is to see the process, perhaps paradoxically, as the result of the success of individual Christians and Jews in seeking employment in an Arabophone world. The caliph ʿAbd al-Malik initiated the Arabicisation of the bureaucracy and, even for non-Muslims, success in this world would have required the use of large numbers of religious formulae derived from the Qurʾan and *ḥadīth*.[68] And the success of this programme also meant that Arabic gradually became a suitable language for the Christian elite.[69] Arabic could, of course be used as a Christian language, and it may be that Christians in the caliphate were able to draw on an earlier history of the pre-Islamic use of Arabic by Christians.[70] And being able to deploy Arabic in elite contexts allowed Christians to play an important role as translators of Greek philosophy into Arabic, often through the intermediary of Syriac.[71]

However, this cultural proximity also had a downside, in that it rendered the crossing of religious boundaries relatively easy. The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* remarks that early converts to Islam were ostracised both from Christians and from Arab Muslims, and formed communities of their own, labelled ʿAydouli.[72] And Arab sources from the Umayyad era imagine that conversion would be accompanied by the adoption of an Arab lineage as a client, or *mawla*, of an Arab tribe.[73] But the disappearance of these sorts of interstitial identities for converts suggests the proximity of Christians and Muslims rendered them unnecessary in a later era. In any internal power struggle within a Christian group, whether we are speaking of secular aristocrats or of members of the clergy, conversion to Islam represented a strategy that would have given them new allies with connections to the state.[74]

Even to individuals who were not prepared to convert outright, the increasingly Islamic tone of the state, and of public religious discussion, may have led individuals to suppress doctrines that differentiated Christians from

[68] For religious formulae, note the numerous examples in A. Grohmann, *From the World of Arabic Papyri* (Cairo: Al-Maaref Press, 1952); Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*. For the language shift in the *diwān*, al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 193.

[69] C. Robinson, *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 73–4 and 124–6.

[70] S. Griffith 'From Aramaic to Arabic: The languages of the monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997): 11–31; S. Griffith, 'When did the Bible become an Arabic Scripture?', *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* (2013): 7–23.

[71] Tannous, *Syria*, 31–59 on the circles of translators that surrounded Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq. His work is an important corrective to D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early'Abbasid Society* (2nd–4th / 8th–10th centuries) (London: Routledge, 1998), which tends to ignore the Syriac contribution.

[72] *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 392/ 329.

[73] P. Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law: The Origins of the Islamic Patronate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), esp. 40 and 91; H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London: Longman, 1986), 94–6; Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 52.

[74] S. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 6 vols (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967–93), vol. 3, 12 observes for Fatimid Cairo that Jewish converts to Islam tended to be those with professional connections to prominent Muslims, such as successful doctors.

other monotheists. A ninth-century *Summa Theologica* in Arabic complains about those who make evasive statements about their faith or issue unitarian statements: 'What compels us to say Father, Son and Spirit and to maintain that the Messiah is God? We are content with that with which the Israelites were content, that God is one.'[75] Similar attitudes are reported for the *shahregān* of Mosul, whose wish for political independence from the caliph's government was coupled with a bid for intellectual independence from the clergy: 'Although they were nominally Christian, they confessed that Christ was an ordinary man, and said "He was as one of the Prophets." And the bishops of the country worked amongst them, but they did not accept the orthodox doctrine.'[76] Such sentiments might be read as forms of religious code-switching, where individuals did not change their confessional identity, but made compromises with the dominant discourses that surrounded them.[77] However, if such ideas acquired popularity in the long term, this may have eased the conversion of Christian laymen into Islam.[78] And for elites already familiar with Arabic (and popular Islamic slogans) from its use in administration and theology, it would not have been hard to retain the cultural capital of aristocratic lineage or valuable skills after conversion, whether this cultural capital was military, medical or literary.[79]

Explaining Conversion: Taxation

An obvious area where the state differentiated between religious communities, and demonstrated the subaltern status of the *dhimmī*s, was the area of taxation. The level of taxation, and the terminology in which it was expressed seems highly ambiguous in the early period. It probably varied considerably from place to place and included a poll tax, land tax and labour corvée.[80] The reports of later

[75] S. Griffith, 'The first Christian *Summa Theologica* in Arabic: Christian *kalām* in ninth-century Palestine', in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi (Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 17–25, at 21–3.

[76] Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*III,, iii (151/ 309–10).

[77] I borrow the term 'code-switching' from Tannous, *Syria*, who draws on descriptions of multilingualism to describe the religious landscape of the seventh-century Middle East.

[78] We should note that the drift of religious conversion due to such compromises need not have always been one way. Krisztina Szilagyi, 'Muslim conversion to Christianity in the Islamic World, 700–1000 AD' (unpublished paper, delivered in Cambridge, 2013) suggests that some of the ninth century disputation literature may have been composed by Muslim converts to Christianity. She points to Christians' cultural prestige, the prospect of a Christian reconquest and the existence of a large Christian population into which converts could disappear as facilitating factors. Cf. also T. Sizgorich, 'For Christian eyes only? The intended audience of the martyrdom of Antony Rwaḥ', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20 (2009): 119–35; Wood, 'Christians in Umayyad Iraq'.

[79] Compare the employment of Christian elites under the Turkish *Beylik*s: Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, 229.

[80] M. Legendre and K. Younes, *The use of terms ǧizya and ḫarāǧ in the first 200 years of hiǧra in Egypt* (http://hum.leiden.edu/lias/formation-of-islam/topics-state/study.html) emphasise

Muslim jurists and historians of the *futūḥ* do seem to conceive of differential taxation for the *dhimmī*s, and envisage that *dhimmī*s might seek to convert to alleviate their tax burden.[81]

Lena Salaymeh has argued that payment of *ṣadaqa* or *zakāt* (charity tax) was a public statement of full membership of the Muslim community. She has argued that payment of poll tax can be understood as an acknowledgement of partial citizenship, where the state acknowledged its duty to defend the *dhimmī* and accepted their legitimate presence within the caliphate.[82] In a similar vein, we might also see the poll tax as a sign of ritual exclusion, just as the *ṣadaqa* was a sign of membership of the Muslim *umma*.[83] If payers of the poll tax were to be defended by the state, then they could also be seen as an 'unmilitary class', in an empire that was rapidly expanding and where God's favour was shown through conquest. Irrespective of the monetary levels of the tax, the Qurʾan imagines the tax paid by the *dhimmī*s as an act of humiliation: 'Fight against those who disbelieve in God and the last day ... who do not follow the religion of truth from among those who have been given the Book, until they pay the *jizya* in exchange for the benefaction granted to them, since they have been humiliated.'[84]

Chase Robinson has argued that the payment of *jizya* was connected to the placement of seals around the necks of the *dhimmī*s, who were forced to wear marks to show that they had paid the *jizya* that simultaneously affirmed their

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both the ambiguity of the term *jizya* in the first Islamic century and the varying levels at which it was raised. Note also the general comments of P. Heck, 'Taxation', in *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾan*, ed. J. McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001–6), on both *jizya* and *ṣadaqa*.

[81] Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 52; S. Goitein, 'Evidence on the Muslim Poll Tax from Non-Muslim Sources', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 6, no. 3 (1963): 278–95 saw the *jizya* as a substantial burden by the Fatimid period in Egypt. M. Levy-Rubin, 'New Evidence Relating to the Process of Islamization in Palestine in the Early Muslim Period: The Case of Samaria', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43 (2000): 268–9, notes that economic distress was an important stimulus to Samaritan conversion. For the *jizya* on the *dhimmī*s in the medieval period see S. Heidemann, 'Charity and piety for the transformation of cities. The new direction in taxation and waqf policy in mid-twelfth century Syria and northern Mesopotamia', in *Charity and Giving in Monotheistic Religions*, ed. Y. Frenkel and Y. Lev (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2009), 153–74.

[82] L. Salaymeh, 'The charity tax in late antique Islam', unpublished presentation, London, 2014; Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim state*, 181–99.

[83] The case of the Banū Taghlib, Christian Arabs who had fought alongside the Muslims, seems to illustrate this. Al-Balādhurī reports that they objected to paying the *jizya* (here, poll tax) and agreed to pay a double *ṣadaqa*. I take the implication to be that they avoided the shaming rituals associated with the *jizya* paid by the *dhimmī*s, and paid through the same ritual that was used by Muslim Arabs. The scene also suggests that *ṣadaqa* was set at a lower level than *jizya* at this time (al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 181–2).

[84] C.E. Bosworth, '*Dhimma* in early Islam', in idem, *The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), at 41, citing Qurʾan 9: 29. However, we should note that the poll tax attested in the seventh-century papyri is not termed *jizya*, and the association of the tax with the Qurʾanic *jizya* is circumstantial at this date: Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 72–3. The payment of *jizya* is clearly associated with shaming in the sources on the Arab conquest of Iran: S. Savant, *New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 201.

semi-citizenship, and their exclusion from the political and arms-bearing class. These drew on earlier Near Eastern traditions of the sealing of slaves and war-captives, but were employed in the eighth and ninth centuries as a mark of *dhimmī* status and subjection to the *jizya*.[85] Against such a background, it is understandable that socially mobile individuals, especially military elites, might have sought conversion as a means of preserving status and deriving the social and economic benefits of the caliphate's expansion.[86]

There is also another way in which we might envisage state taxation indirectly leading to religious conversion. This is land flight, whereby peasants fled land that had been registered to pay tax to live elsewhere, whether in cities, in previously unsettled and unregistered land or on estates whose landlords would undertake to protect peasants from the tax. We might expect any of these behaviours when the tax burden was perceived to be especially high, such as the late eighth and early ninth centuries.[87]

All of these are behaviours that have long precedent in the Roman period, particularly in Egypt.[88] However, in an environment where large cities were founded as specifically Muslim settlements (*amṣār*),[89] flight away from the countryside may have also involved displacement into a Muslim majority area, where conversion was a means of 'getting ahead' that it did not represent in longer established settlements. Such migration may also have been accelerated by the effects of war, disease or economic change in the countryside.[90] This may be a way of reading the famous anecdote of the Iraqi governor al-Ḥajjāj driving

[85] C. Robinson, 'Neck Sealing in Early Islam', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 48 (2005): 401–40.

[86] e.g. the conversion of the people of Qazvin in Iran, al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 321.

[87] *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (290–8/253–9) for northern Mesopotamia; *History of the Patriarchs* trans. B. Evetts, PO 1 for Egypt; Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, XI. xxvi (vol. 4, 476–7/ vol. 2, 526) for exactions near Mosul and Qinnasrin, which triggered a famine. For the complex administrative attempts of the caliphate to prevent land flight in the Marwanid period, especially the issuing of passports (*sijl*), see Robinson, 'Neck Sealing', 429. Our understanding of 'tax', need not be restricted to the official exactions of the state, and might also include the seizure of land and wealth by elites, however these were legitimated. e.g. the seizures of 'Amran bar Muhammad in Beth Bozai in northern Iraq: Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, IV, xxi, 239/ 450.

[88] R. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 167 and 219–25 discusses the role of aristocrats protecting peasants from taxation and the issue of land flight. Brett, 'Egypt', in *New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1, 541–80, at 549, and F. Trombley, 'Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa' and the Christians of Umayyad Egypt, in *Papyrology and the History of Early Islamic Egypt*, ed. P. Sijpestiejn and L. Sundelin (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 199–226 at 207–8 discuss land flight in the Islamic era.

[89] H. Kennedy, 'From Shahrestan to Medina', *Studia Islamica* 102 (2006): 5–35, at 23–7; Sijpestiejn, *Shaping*, 77 on Fustat, emphasising its role as an entrepot.

[90] e.g. A. Walmsley, 'Urban trends in Palestina Secunda', in *Le Proche-Orient de Justinien aux Abbasides. Peuplement et dynamiques spatiales*, ed. A. Borrut et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 271–85 on the contraction of Pella and Jerash after the eighth century; Wickham, *Framing*, 448–9 on economic decline in the Limestone Massif of northern Syria; M. Levy-Rubin, 'New evidence', 257–76, at 260 for ninth-century plague in Samaria opening the land to subsequent Muslim settlement, which was followed by Samaritan mass conversion.

would-be converts into the marshes.[91] These men were probably at the lowest end of Iraqi rural society, seeking to improve their social standing and their economic prospects by migration and conversion. Such a scenario may have been more common in Iraq than Syria, because Arab Muslim settlement tended to be in discrete centres, separated from the rest of the population, where Muslims constituted a local majority.

A change of landlord may have also led to the breakdown of religious adhesion. In the Roman world, it was often considered to be a duty of the landlord to provide (and oblige) orthodox practice on the part of his tenants and to maintain churches on his estates.[92] The same argument would hold true for an even greater extent for monasteries. If the new landowner was a Muslim then rural tenants would not have experienced this level of religious patronage or obligation. With this in mind, the acquisition of lands by Muslim, whether by force[93] or purchase,[94] might have removed part of the support structures of rural Christianity.[95] In both Egypt and the Jazira, Muslim Arab landownership outside the *amṣār* seems to have started in the third quarter of the eighth century.[96]

Flight to peripheral land to escape tax collection may have also had significant demographic effects, which, in the long term, would have altered the balance of Muslims and Christians. Martin Brett has argued that this is what we find in Egypt, where the tax burden was high enough to provoke desperate anti-government revolts in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. He notes that monasteries on the more prosperous west bank of the Nile were progressively

[91] Al-Tabari *Tar'ikh*, II, 1435. The spread of Islam among slaves (and the conquered population in general) was dangerous to the conquest elite because it gave them a language with which to challenge the status quo: P. Crone, 'Imperial Trauma: The Case of the Arabs', *Common Knowledge* 12 (2006): 107–16, at 114. Al-Hajjāj was alleged to have (tyranically) levied the *jizya* even on former *dhimmīs* who had converted to Islam, which should be read as much as an attempt to preserve Arab Muslim status as secure tax revenues.

[92] L. Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 2010), 188–9 for the guidance/ coercion of Donatist and Catholic landlords over their *coloni*. Augustine credited church charity with 'making Catholics where there were none before' at Fussala: B. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 394.

[93] e.g. al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 129 describes how lands seized by Muʾawiya during the conquest of Syria were sold to oil-sellers from Kufa; Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, III, iv, 153–4/ 313–4; IV, xxi, 239/450 for the attempts of the monks of Beth 'Abe to protect their lands from appropriation by Muslim Arab elites.

[94] For the growth of long distance landowning following the Arab conquests: Wickham, *Framing*, 241–2.

[95] As well as spiritual support, the church might also act as an important source of relief from famine, which might otherwise drive migration to the cities (e.g. *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, PO 5, 19).

[96] Egypt: Sijpesteijn, 'Landholding patterns', 123–4. Muslim pagarchs are more frequently attested from the second quarter of the century (127). Iraq: C. Robinson, 'Al-ʿAttāf. b. Sufyān and Abbasid imperialism', in *Festschrift for Ahmad Mahdavi Damghani* (Berlin, forthcoming). The phenomenon of settlement of the countryside may be associated with the wider de-militarisation of Muslim society: H. Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London: Routledge, 2001), 77.

abandoned, and suggests that Christians were driven onto less fertile land that could not support earlier population levels.[97] This scenario seems most plausible for Egypt, with its stark gradient between fertile and infertile land, but something similar could have operated elsewhere as well.

Thus, even if one were to reject the thesis that taxation on the *dhimmī*s was actually heavier than on Muslims, there is still reason to suppose that the increasingly effective tax regime of the Marwanids and Abbasids served to break up the links between Christian tenants and their patrons.[98] And where *dhimmī*s migrated into majority Muslim areas, confession of a new religion would have been a good way of securing good will, and possibly accommodation, employment or gifts of money.[99]

Explaining Conversion: Shaming and Discrimination

Sidney Griffith quotes a famous scene from a provincial Muslim traveller who visits the *majlis* of the caliph al-Mahdī, and is stunned to find that no individual Scripture is accorded any precedence and that Muslims are forced to debate with Christians, Manichees and atheists solely on the grounds of reason.[100] It is indeed a powerful image of the tolerance of the caliph's court. But the traveller's shock also illustrates that this was not the norm: we should probably not assume that

[97] M. Brett, 'Population and conversion to Islam in Egypt', in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, ed. U. Vermuelen and J. Van Steenbergen (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 1–32, esp.18–20. Note especially his critical review of earlier literature and its reliance on selected passages in the medieval chronicles to make broader generalisations. See also M. Brett, 'Egypt', in *New Cambridge History of Islam* I, 541–80, at 554–6, emphasising the demographic effects of marriage between Muslim men and Christian women.

[98] The link between taxation, failed rebellion and conversion is made strongly in I. Lapidus, 'The conversion of Egypt to Islam', *Israel Oriental Society* 2 (1972): 248–62. On the highly monetised fiscal system of the caliphate see Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs*, 70–73 and 76–81. Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 156–8, comments on the increased 'bite' of the tax system under the Abbasids. Idem, 'Al-ʿAttāf. b. Sufyān' observes that the extended fiscal reach of the Abbasids was tied to their ability to gather information so successfully about the rural hinterlands of cities such as Mosul. Cf. also W. Kadi, 'Population census and land surveys under the Umayyads, 61–132/ 660–750', *Der Islam* 84 (2008), 338–413.

[99] The association between migration and conversion is made by Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 51–2. Such dangers are the theme of the mid eighth century *Life of Elias of Damascus* (R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 363–5). Elias was believed to have converted because he loosened his *zunnār* (the belt that Christians were obliged to wear) to dance at a party. Notably he was not accused of apostasy in his home-town of Heliopolis, but only when he returned to Damascus many years later. For gifts of money to new converts note the example of Ibn Qutayba at Bukhara, who gave two dirhams to all who attended Friday prayers (*History of Bukhara*, trans. R. Frye (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 47–8). R. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) has emphasised how modern religious converts are often recent in-migrants without strong local networks.

[100] Scene in S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 63.

the tolerance of the *majlis* was replicated in the cities of the provinces, especially those dominated by Muslims.

Throughout the caliphate as a whole, Jews, Christians and Samaritans were subject to a series of discriminatory measures in law that emphasised their subject status. While the conquerors had initially established generous terms with individual cities that surrendered, Muslim jurists increasingly sought a single systematic formula that might be applied to all of the *dhimmī*.[101] The most famous of these is the *shurūṭ ʿUmar* (the Pact of ʿUmar), which was first applied as a whole in the reign of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–61) and was (improbably) attributed to the caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. Its stipulations are as follows:

> Not to build new churches or monasteries or cells in our cities or neighbourhoods, nor repair, by day or night, any that fall into ruin or that are situated in the quarters of the Muslims.
> Give lodging to Muslims and refuse help to the spies of the enemy.
> Not to teach the Qurʾan to our children.
> Not to manifest religion in public, attempt conversion of Muslims or prevent conversion to Islam.
> To respect Muslims and rise from our seats when they enter a room.
> Not to seek to resemble Muslims by imitating their garments.
> Not to use saddles [as opposed to pack-saddles] while riding or bear weapons.
> Not to use Arabic seals.
> Not to sell fermented drinks.
> To cut the forelocks.
> Always dress the same, wherever we may be. Always wear the *zunnār*.
> Not to display crosses or have religious processions.
> To beat the *nāqūs* softly.
> Not to have loud funeral processions.
> Not show lights at the markets of Muslims.
> Not to take slaves allotted to Muslims.
> Not to build houses higher than those of Muslims.

This list is paraphrased from Milka Levy-Rubin's adaptation of Bernard Lewis' translation of the version of the *shurūṭ* given by al-Ṭurṭūshi (d. 1126).[102] We should note that it occurs in several variants, but that the substance of most of these stipulations is confirmed in the continuation of the *Samaritan Chronicle* of Abū'l-Fatḥ and its account of the reign of al-Mutawakkil, which seems to confirm the tradition surrounding the *shurūṭ*.[103] To the list of restrictions on the

[101] Though conquest agreements might still strongly incentivise conversion: e.g. al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, 130 where the 'Rūm' are expelled from Baalbek unless they convert.

[102] M. Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 171–2.

[103] Ibid., 59–60 and 105–7. The only parts that are not mentioned are the sections on teaching and studying the Qurʾan, which may simply be because the Samaritan community in Palestine had not traditionally done this.

dhimmīs in the *shurūṭ* we might also add the stipulations of Abbasid-era jurists on the lower levels of blood money paid to the family of murdered a *dhimmī*;[104] the various injunctions to Muslims against greeting Jews or Christians;[105] the lower value placed on the testimony of *dhimmīs* in courts of law;[106] or the restrictions on *dhimmī*s living in the Arabian peninsula.[107]

However, we should be very wary of presuming that the *shurūṭ* were imposed before al-Mutawakkil's reign. The jurist Abū Yūsuf (d. 798), while he is keen to maximise the duties of the *dhimmī* to pay *jizya* and erode localised claims for exemption,[108] offers much more tolerant stipulations. For instance, the *dhimmī* are only banned from taking pigs into areas where Muslims are in the majority, rather than from owning pigs altogether, and they are only banned from striking the *nāqūs* during the *adhan*. His emphasis is on the need to build loyalty among the *dhimmī*.[109] This stance may reflect his sense of the Muslims' numerical weakness and the proximity of a resurgent Byzantine enemy, as well as the need to justify higher levels of tax.[110]

Yet another attitude to the *dhimmī*s is apparent in the works of al-Shāfiʿī. He laid emphasis on the danger of the subversion of Muslims by Christians and of the fornication of Muslim women with *dhimmī*s. He shows a concern for physical and moral purity that seems to have faded by the time of the *shurūṭ*, and devoted much effort to the problem of *dhimmīs* selling pork, blood or carrion to Muslims or publically professing the divinity of Jesus.[111]

All three legal texts emphasise the need to distinguish between Muslims and *dhimmīs* in terms of dress, and these sumptuary restrictions seem to be based on the detailed regulation of the hierarchy of the Sasanian Empire.[112] Like the tax regime, the purpose of this legislation was to differentiate between 'full citizens' and 'semi-citizens', but the agendas of the jurists differed over time. Abū Yūsuf envisages an environment where Muslims lived in enclaves without Christian

[104] Edelby, L'autonomie législative, 342.

[105] M. Kister, 'Do not assimilate yourselves … *lā tashabbahū*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 12 (1989): 321–71; T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), ch. 8.

[106] Bosworth, '*Dhimma*', 49; Tritton, *The Caliphs*, 178–81; A. Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam* (Beirut: Impr. catholique, 1958), 113ff. Discrimination against *dhimmīs* might also overlap with the rich tradition of (often sexual) slanders against non-Arabs, e.g. S. Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 79–80 on the Nabaṭ.

[107] H. Munt, 'No Two Religions: Non-Muslim in the Early Islamic Ḥijāz', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (forthcoming).

[108] N. Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 137–44.

[109] Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, 70–8.

[110] For Byzantine resurgence in the end of the Umayyad period see Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 142–4. This situation was reversed in the early Abbasid period, culminating in the sack of Amorium in 838: Whittow, *Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, 145–51; C.E. Bosworth, 'Byzantium and the Syrian frontier in the early Abbasid period', in idem, *The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran*, XII.

[111] Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, 80–2.

[112] Ibid. ch. 5; Tritton, *The Caliphs*, 115–26.

neighbours, while al-Shāfiʿī fears that an influx of Christians will subvert Muslims from their religion or lead to heteropraxy.[113] The *shurūṭ* seems to mark a further shift, where the intention was to deliberately humiliate the *dhimmī*, prevent the maintenance of religious buildings and block the social mobility of groups that had become as capable in Arabic as the Arabs.

However, I think we should be wary of imagining that al-Mutawakkil's discriminatory laws represented a new norm for the caliphate. The *shurūṭ* may have been a legal paradigm that rigorists might appeal to in later years, but the continued building of churches and the employment of Christians in the administration suggests that it was not systematically applied. I would argue that the fact that the patriarchal chronicle singles out one caliph, al-Mutawakkil, as particularly opposed to the Christians, suggest that the *shurūṭ* was only applied periodically, by weak caliphs who sought to appeal to the lowest common denominators of public opinion.[114] In addition, we should remember that caliphs in this period were probably not unitary lawgivers on the model of Roman emperors: the caliphate enjoyed a number of different legal orthodoxies in this period, and different jurists may have varied considerably in their attitudes to *dhimmī*s.[115]

Explaining Conversion: Marriage

A specific area where Muslim legislation emphasises the inferior status of the *dhimmī* is their differential treatment in sexual matters. The Qurʾan is explicit that *dhimmī* may not marry Muslim women, while their women are permitted to Muslim men.[116] This stipulation ensures, in a patriarchal society, that mixed marriages will result in an expansion in the Muslim population.[117] The Qurʾanic injunction may also imply that much greater care needs to be taken in safeguarding the 'virtue' of Muslim females: this is certainly the implication of later laws that give lower penalties for fornication of Muslims with a female

[113] Krisztina Szilagyi has argued that the highly detailed apologies for Christianity written in this period were written by converts from Islam, so al-Shafi'i's fears may have been justified.

[114] Mari, *Kitāb al-magdal*, ed. and trans. H. Gismondi, *Maris, Amri et Salibae: De Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria* (Rome: de Luigi, 1899), vol. 2, 78–80/ 69–71 (Theodosius). On the political weakness of this caliph (following the Mu'tazilite controversy), see Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques*, 85–94. Cf. Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, 224–6 on the patchy imposition of the *shurūṭ* in Anatolia.

[115] For Abbasid legal pluralism and the state of 'permanent negotiation' between the state and jurists see M. Tillier, 'Legal knowledge and local practices under the early Abbasids', in Philip Wood (ed.), *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 187–204, criticising the position of B. Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law: Harun al-Rashid's Codification Project* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2007).

[116] Qurʾan 5.5.

[117] See discussion in A. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar* (London and Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1930), 12 and Fattal, *Le statut légal*, 129–34.

dhimmī than a female Muslim,[118] or the death penalty inflicted on *dhimmī* for the latter offence.[119]

These legal stipulations, which underscore the relative value of Muslim and *dhimmī* women, were mirrored in narratives of the ideal behaviour of Muslim men in protection of their women. Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* describes how an assault by a Jew on a pious Muslim woman legitimated the expulsion of the Jews from Medina in the lifetime of the Prophet.[120] We find a similar narrative narrated some four centuries later in the region of Aleppo, when an accusation by a Muslim woman against a 'Christian tavern owner' prompted the community to destroy the tavern.[121]

By the same token, Christian claims to celibacy and virtue were commonly discounted in Muslim Arabic poetry. Elizabeth Campbell has emphasised how monasteries and nunneries were stereotyped as sites of debauchery, where religious garments and rituals only served as trappings for the drunken orgies of their occupants.[122] In a similar vein, Tom Sizgorich suggested that monasteries were a centrepiece of 'Muslim imperial fantasy', inhabited by 'metonyms of an essentialised Christianity'.[123] Monasteries were a common motif for Muslim poets, but frequently the stories 'secularize the monastery, turning the sacred Christian space ... to a place of leisure and indulgence for Muslims. They discredit claims to piety [by] inverting the goals of monastic life ... The celebration of attractive Christian youths and unveiled women asserts Muslim dominance over passive and available Christians'.[124]

> Poets skirted on the edge of blasphemy in their presentation of the monastery as a site of licentiousness: 'I call on God as my witness ... that I desire music and song, to drink wine and to bite the cheeks of nubile youths'.[125] Sometimes this could even spill over into homosexual desire:[126] 'Monks in their monastery

[118] Tritton, *The Caliphs*, 189. This may be comparable to the discrepancy in the payment of blood money.

[119] Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, 80.

[120] Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1967), 363.

[121] E. Campbell, 'A Heaven of Wine: Muslim-Christian Encounters at Monasteries in the Early Islamic Middle East', PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 2009, 152. Cf. The criticism of the Abbasid Ibrāhīm ibn Yahyā for allowing the violation of 'Arab Muslim women' by his black soldiers in Mosul: al-Maqrīzī, *Book of Contention*, §120, trans. Bosworth (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1983), 93.

[122] Campbell, 'Heaven of Wine', 150–2.

[123] T. Sizgorich, 'Monks and their daughters: Monasteries as Muslim-Christian boundaries', in *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, ed. M. Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 193–216, at 194.

[124] Campbell, 'Heaven of Wine', 115–6. Cf. N. El-Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2004), 123–9.

[125] Cited in Campbell, *Heaven of Wine*, 118.

[126] Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World 1500–1800* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 24 emphasises that pederasty was not considered immoral: the penetrator was considered socially superior to the penetrated.

> intoned their prayers … wearing the *zunnār* on their waists … there was many a boy amongst them with a pretty face and eyelids painted with *kohl* … I followed him with longing glances 'til he acquiesced in obedience, promising to meet me with the wink of an eye.'[127]

The sexual submission of Christian men and women in a monastery was also a re-enactment of the military defeat of their ancestors, their own contemporary powerlessness and the supersession of their religion. A case in point is the visit of the caliph al-Mutawakkil to a monastery near Homs to view ruins. Here he is greeted by one of the monks who introduces him to his daughter Saʿānīn. Instead of protecting her from male visitors he allows her to drink with them. As the caliph became enraptured she led them to an upper room to overlook the churches, brought them food and sang them a Christian song on the lyre. Ultimately the caliph convinces her to convert to Islam and marries her.[128]

The anecdote presents the Christian girl as exotic, indulging in behaviour that would be impossible for a Muslim woman (singing, drinking and being alone in male company). But this exoticism also emphasises the caliph's victory: he shows his own moral superiority and that of Islam by converting the girl and marrying her, two actions that tame both her unguarded behaviour and her religion. Poetry is, of course, no clear guide to specific deeds. It should go without saying that the relationship between al-Mutawakkil may be no more than the fantasy of a tenth-century author. But it does suggest an environment where Christians and their religion were not accorded the same respect as Muslims, and where this was particularly manifested in assumptions about the body and sexuality, which were imagined a field for Muslims to re-enact the dominance of Islam. Such poetry, then, may have served to legitimate the different treatment of the *dhimmī*s, and it is possible that such attitudes filtered down into actual day-to-day behaviour.

Conclusions: The Challenge of Quantification

We have been able to chart several areas where Christians were reminded of their inferior status in an Islamic state. Taxation emphasised their military powerlessness and legislation on dress and behaviour underscored their social inferiority to Muslims, using a symbolic language that had been inherited from Sasanian Iran. And the Muslim poetic imagination reiterated the availability of Christian women to their 'conquerors'. All of these factors might have encouraged the abandonment of the Christian community, especially where Christians migrated to cities that were dominated by Muslims.

Our ability to quantify this process of conversion is limited. Richard Bulliet's study of biographical dictionaries identified the middle ninth century as the era of mass conversions, but his data only really applies to north-eastern Iran. It is

[127] Cited in Campbell, 'Heaven of Wine', 134.
[128] Campbell, 'Heaven of Wine', 147–8.

very unclear how far his study might be applied to the Levant or Iraq, where the presence of large numbers of Jews or Christians makes it harder to identify non-Muslims (because they often shared the same names), and because Judaism and Christianity did not experience the same kind of haemorrhage of prestige as Zoroastrianism.[129]

In a similar vein, literary texts, such as saints' lives and chronicles, often only provide anecdotal evidence, and it is hard to know where one can safely generalise from such comments, either for the rate of conversion or the motivations ascribed to converts.[130] It may be that conversion at a local level was often sudden: when local elites converted, we might imagine that their patronage networks swiftly followed.[131] In textual terms, two possible indicators might be the emergence of saints' lives that complain about apostasy and liturgical rites for the re-inclusion of apostates, both of which are features of the mid-eighth century.[132]

Architectural evidence may be the best way of tracing the conversion of the wealthy elites who would fund Christian churches and monasteries where the cultural reproduction of Christianity could occur. The pilgrimage complex of Qalaat Semaan in northern Syria[133] and the Church Mary in Edessa (Urfa) were both flattened by earthquakes in the early eleventh century.[134] This was not an infrequent occurrence, but on previous occasions they had always been rebuilt, presumably by local Christian merchants and landowners.[135] On this occasion, no repair was undertaken. Similarly, in the topographic accounts of Damascus made by Ibn ʿAsākir, of the 14 churches that existed in the city at the time of the conquest, four were seized by the Muslims by the eighth century, a further

[129] Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*. He dates the emergence of a Muslim majority to the ninth century in Iran and to the tenth in Syria and Egypt. For criticisms see M. Morony, 'The age of conversions: A reassessment', in Gervers and Bikhazi (eds), *Indigenous Christian Communities*, 135–50 and Tannous, *Syria*, 482–3, note 1143. For the Levant, C. Cahen, 'An Introduction to the First Crusade', *Past & Present* 6 (1954): 6–30, at 6–7 has argued that the region retained a Christian majority until the period of the Crusades.

[130] Note Brett's warnings ('Population and conversion to Islam in Egypt') on the over-reliance on al-Maqrīzī by Copticists.

[131] This model is suggested by studies of Ottoman Palestine: F. Tramontana, 'Payment of the Poll Tax and the Decline of the Christian Presence in the Palestinian Countryside (17th Century)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56 (2013), 631-52.

[132] Hoyland, *Seeing*, 336–86 on saints' lives; *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1: *(600–900)*, ed. D. Thomas and B. Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 821–4 on abjuration rituals.

[133] J.-L. Biscop, 'The "kastron" at Qal'at Sim'ān', in *Muslim Military Architecture in Greater Syria: From the Coming of Islam to the Ottoman Period*, ed. H. Kennedy (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 75–83.

[134] R.S. Humphreys, 'Christian Communities in Early Islamic Syria and Northern Jazira: The Dynamics of Adaptation', in *Money, Power and Politics*, ed. J. Haldon (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 47–8. Cf. R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: An Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995), 123.

[135] Some of these figures retained considerable wealth and the ability to engage in patronage far afield (e.g. Edessa: Wickham, *Framing*, 241; Takrit: Lucy-Anne Hunt, 'Stuccowork at the monastery of the Syrians in the Wādī Natrūn: Iraqi-Egyptian artistic contact in the 'Abbasid period', in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*, ed. D. Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 93–128 and M. Immerzeel, 'The stuccoes of Deir al-Surian'.

seven fell into ruin, and two more were seized in the eleventh century, leaving only two in use.[136] As Stephen Humphreys notes, even if we take into account the general lack of investment into Syria after *c.*800, the attenuation of the urban Christian community here is striking.[137] If we accept that church repair is a good proxy for the existence of a Christian elite that was willing or able to fund the kinds of institutional structures that could reproduce Christian identity for the next generation, then the next step in answering this question may be the detailed mapping of the fate of church buildings in the Middle East. Given current political problems, this will, of course, be a long way off.[138]

Finally, it is worth reiterating that we should find it surprising that Jews and Christians survived in the Middle East at all. A sideways glance at the fate of Buddhism in Sind, conquered by Arab armies in the early eighth century, may be a salutary reminder of what might have been. Here a state that was now clearly identified as 'Muslim' encountered a sophisticated religious 'other' that it classified as pagan. The region was Islamised quickly enough that when intellectuals in the Abbasid period began to write about Buddhism there seem to have been no Buddhists left in Sind: our only sources for the religion come from archaeology.[139] Christianity and Judaism were both known and, to some extent, respected in the Qurʾan, and this granted Christians and Jews rights as well as disabilities. In other words, the importance of the 'old religions' for the self-definition of Islam helped to ensure their preservation.[140] 'Cultural proximity' to the centres of caliphal power; shared religious narratives;[141] the

[136] Eddé, Micheau and Picard, *Communautés chrétiennes*, 215–25; Schick, *Christian Communities*, 130 observes that it is not common to see churches converted into mosques in the Umayyad period. Conversion to domestic use and the theft of masonry is much more common. Fattal, *Le statut légal*, 174–202 gathers examples for the construction and demolition of churches across the caliphate until the Ottoman conquest of Syria.

[137] R.S. Humphreys, 'Consolidating the conquest: Arab-Muslim rule in Syria and the Jazirah, 630–775 CE', in *Inside and Out*, ed. J. Dijkstra and G. Fisher (Ottawa: Peeters, 2015). Cf. idem 'Early Islamic Syria (634–970)' *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), 506–40, at 532–3, where he points to the effects of Arab tribal migration to the region of Homs in the late eighth century, and its effects on religious demography.

[138] E. Keser-Kayaalp, 'Church Architecture of Northern Mesopotamia, AD 300–800', DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 2011, and the articles collected in Borrut, Debié et al., *Le Proche-Orient de Justinien aux Abbasides* offer an important start.

[139] C.E. Bosworth, 'Sind', EI[2]. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 437 for the destruction of a large Buddhist temple in Daibul and the killing of the priests, and 439 for the later ruling that Buddhist temples should be treated like churches or synagogues. Cf. C.E. Bosworth, 'The coming to Islam to Afghanistan', in idem, *The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran*, XVI.

[140] I am influenced here by A. Jacobs, *The Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), who emphasises the importance of the Jews for the self-definition of fourth- and fifth-century Christians and suggests that this allowed the Jews to escape the fate of the Empire's 'pagan' populations.

[141] e.g. I. Goldziher, 'Influences chrétiennes dans la littérature religieuse de l'Islam', in *Ignaz Goldziher. Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. J. Desomogyi (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), vol. 2, 302–21. The local histories of Christian populations may have also play an important role in generating the regional identities of their Muslim conquerors: A. Talib, 'Topoi and topography in the

acknowledgement of alternative religious practices[142] and respected professional status[143] shielded Christians and Jews from direct pressure to convert, especially as long as Muslims remained in a minority.

histories of al-Ḥīra', in Wood, *History and Identity*, 123–47; H. Omar, '"The crinkly-haired people of the black earth." Examining Egyptian identities in Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's *Futūḥ*', in Wood, *History and Identity*, 149–67.

[142] Tannous, *Syria*, 460–3.

[143] e.g. L. Richter-Bernberg, 'Gondēšāpur: ii. History and medical school', *EIr*, on the esteem given to Christian physicians in Iraq.