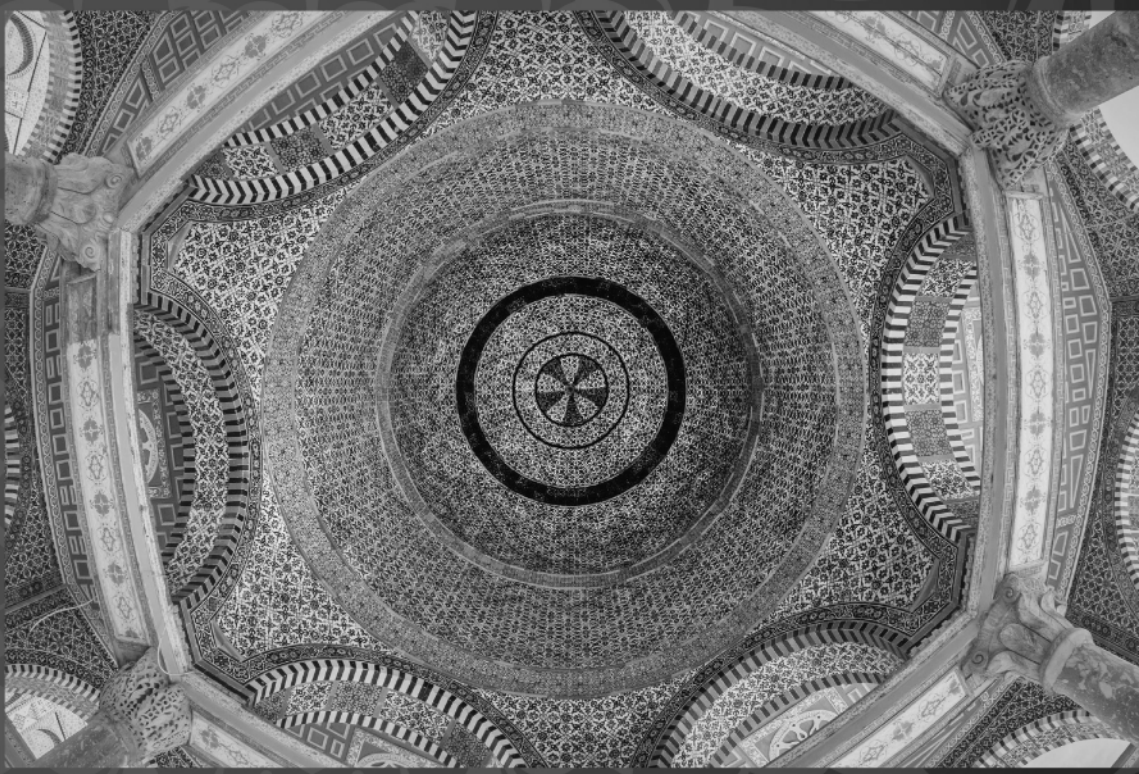
Problèmes d'histoire des religions

Guillaume DYE (Ed.)

Early Islam

The Sectarian Milieu of Late Antiquity?



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Acknowledgments

The papers collected here were presented during the 4th Nangeroni meeting of the Enoch Seminar/Early Islamic Studies Seminar, entitled "Early Islam: The Sectarian Milieu of Late Antiquity?", which took place at the Villa Cagnola, in Gazzada, near Milan, on 15-19 June 2015.

The conference was meant to foster dialogue between scholars from various backgrounds, and it followed the principles of the Enoch Seminars and the Nangeroni meetings, which are now famous among scholars working on Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity. In short, papers were not read during the meeting, but pre-circulated among the about forty participants before the conference, where they were amply discussed. Most of the papers of the volume keep tracks of the lively and stimulating debates we experienced during this meeting, and I wish to thank all the participants for their energy and involvement, which made this event a huge success, from a scholarly and from a human point of view as well. Among the participants who did not write a paper for this volume, but whose comments and remarks during the meeting were particularly numerous and useful, I would like to single out Carlos Segovia, Manfred Kropp, David Powers, Jan Retsö, Anders Klostergaard Petersen, and Meira Polliack.

As chair of this conference, I greatly benefited from the help and advice of my co-chair Gabriele Boccaccini (University of Michigan), who is also the founder of the Enoch Seminar. My friend Carlos Segovia, who had already chaired a Nangeroni meeting and knows therefore the difficulties of the task, provided me with many relevant suggestions and advices, as did other members of the Board of Directors of the Early Islamic Studies Seminar, namely Manfred Kropp, Emilio González Ferrín and Tommaso Tesei. From a more practical point of view, the assistance of Rodney Caruthers (University of Michigan) in the organization of this meeting has been invaluable. Last but not least, I wish to thank the sponsorship of the Nangeroni Foundation, which has simply made such a conference possible.

In preparing this book, I also greatly benefited from the help and assistance of Julien Decharneux, whom I thank for his very attentive reading of the whole manuscript.

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Guillaume Dye
Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

Introduction

□ Guillaume DYE

The following volume presents select proceedings from the first gathering of the Early Islamic Studies Seminar (EISS), which took place at the Villa Cagnola, in Gazzada, near Milan, on 15-19 June 2015.[1] A few words about this institution might therefore be relevant.

The *Early Islamic Studies Seminar* is an emanation of, and is associated to, the *Enoch Seminar: International Scholarship on Second Temple Judaism, Christian, Rabbinic, and Islamic Origins*. Founded in 2001 by Gabriele Boccaccini (University of Michigan), the *Enoch Seminar* is an academic group of international specialists in Second Temple Judaism and Christian Origins, who share the results of their research and meet to discuss topics of common interest. The *Early Islamic Studies Seminar* works on the same basis (with, until the Covid crisis, a meeting every two years), except of course that its field of investigation is different: whereas the *Enoch Seminar* focuses on the period of Jewish history, culture and literature from the Babylonian Exile (598-537 BCE) to the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135 CE), the *Early Islamic Studies Seminar* adopts a complementary approach and focuses on the period of Near Eastern and Mediterranean history which goes from the sixth century to the early/mid-tenth century. The formula "Early Islam" is thus only a convenient way to refer to the period

[1] The proceedings of the second and third meetings, which took place in Pratolino, near Florence, on June 12–16, 2017 and again in Gazzada, near Milan, on June 16–20, 2019, have been published in Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen, Guillaume Dye, Isaac W. Oliver, and Tommaso Tesei, eds, *The Study of Islamic Origins. New Perspectives and Contexts*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2021.

which goes from Late Antiquity to, roughly, the time of al-Ṭabarī, which marks a decisive step in the shaping of Islamic identity.[2]

One of the main goals of the *Enoch Seminar* is to dismantle the misleading walls of separation that still divide its field of research, recovering the unity of the period, whose study offers an important contribution to the understanding of the common roots of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Similarly, the *Early Islamic Studies Seminar* intends to eradicate arbitrary disciplinary borders, which have done so much damage to the study of Islamic origins, and to develop more innovative instruments and methods. In a word, the *Early Islamic Studies Seminar* aims to promote a renewed study of Early Islam as part of the complex process of religious identity formation in Late Antiquity, in close dialogue with scholars working on early Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism and other neighbouring fields of research, like Manichean, Iranian, Byzantine or Arabian studies. Qur'anic studies are thus only a part of the topics studied by the *Early Islamic Studies Seminar*, even if they are a central aspect of the project.

The genesis of this endeavor began in June 2013 in Brussels, during a meeting between Guillaume Dye and Carlos A. Segovia, who were soon joined by Emilio González Ferrín, Manfred Kropp, and Tommaso Tesei as board of directors to create the Early Islamic Studies Seminar (EISS). With the support of the Enoch Seminar, the EISS has since then organized three Nangeroni Meetings devoted to the Qur'ān and early Islam. In the inclusive spirit promoted by the Enoch Seminar, the EISS has accordingly invited to its meetings specialists in Qur'anic and Islamic studies as well as those who specialize in the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Judaism, the New Testament, and other related fields.

Such an interdisciplinary gathering of scholars opens new paths and strengthens the dialogue between scholars of Early Islam and scholars from neighbouring disciplines, especially Jewish and Christian studies. This dialogue goes both ways. On one side, studies of Late Antique Jewish and Christian traditions (and other religious traditions, like Manichaeism, as well), which constitute the background of so many Qur'anic pericopes, are obviously essential for the study of Islamic origins: indeed, the Qur'ān is a literary, religious, historical and linguistic Near Eastern document of the seventh-early eighth century, whose main contents belong, or are related, to the "Biblical culture" of Late Antiquity. Therefore, it seems natural and relevant to study it using, with the relevant adaptations when necessary, the methods, tools, and concepts which have already been fruitfully applied to the study of similar religious movements.[3] And since Jewish studies, Early Christian studies, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha studies, etc., have developed finer instruments than those generally used by traditional

[2] Incidentally, this period marks also the decline of apocalyptic hopes in Sunni Islam (Late ninth century) and Shi'i Islam (Late tenth century).

[3] It goes without saying that such an approach does not negate the Arab background of the Qur'ān – the real question is rather to assess its exact nature and range.

Islamicists in their study of the Qur'ān, we can hope that the expertise and experience of colleagues working in such fields will be a major asset for the *Early Islamic Studies Seminar*.

But on another side, the study of Early Islam is also a gold mine for Christian and Jewish studies, and more generally for the study of Late Antique and Medieval non-Muslim religious traditions. The sixth and seventh centuries were a crucial epoch in the history of Judaism and Christianity – a time of deep and fast changes, a period of transition from the religious landscape of Late Antiquity to a new one which, in the following centuries, entailed for Jews and Christians cohabitation with a new religion, Islam, which was in constant interaction, and even *cross-pollination*, with them. It means, in other words, that the relations between, on the one hand, pre-Islamic Christianity and Judaism, and on the other hand, Early and formative Islam, should be addressed from both sides. The title of the book – *Early Islam: The Sectarian Milieu of Late Antiquity?* – is therefore not only an homage to John Wansbrough;[4] it also nicely encapsulates the idea that the genesis of Islam, as a historical and social phenomenon, is simply unintelligible when it is not addressed in its context, which is characterized by a mix of crosspollination, symbiosis, contest and polemics with the various religious traditions of Late Antiquity.

As said earlier, one of the goals of the *Early Islamic Studies Seminar* is to develop more effective tools for the study of the Qur'ān and Islamic origins. Such an agenda supposes some dissatisfaction with the way such studies have often been practiced, and the present volume seeks to renew the study of Early Islam in a way which is more consonant with the approaches, methods and tools of Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity studies. This methodological agenda is sketched in Stephen J. Shoemaker's contribution, "Method and Theory in the Study of Early Islam," which shows why and how formative Islam should be fruitfully investigated using the well-established historical-critical approaches deployed in the study of Judaism and especially early Christianity. At the end of his paper, Shoemaker refers to post-colonial studies, and their focus on the way identity and difference are constructed and managed in an imperial context. This makes a nice transition to the next paper, by Greg Fisher and Philip Wood, entitled "Arabia and the Late Antique East." Fisher and Wood afford a very useful synthesis of the history of Pre-Islamic Arabia, especially regarding its relations to its imperial neighbors, thus enlightening the historical context of the emergence of Islam.

Since the Early Islamic Studies Seminars and the Enoch Seminar are, in some way, siblings, it was relevant to invite Annette Reed to give the inaugural paper of our first Nangeroni meeting. Her article examines the afterlives, in Early Islam, of the Enochic traditions on the fallen angels, a topic whose study combines many methodological

[4] See John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu. Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978.

concerns we are sensitive to, like the importance of the *longue durée*, the relevance of the pseudepigrapha, the significance of angelology and demonology, or the attention to phenomena of crosspollination and symbiosis. The next paper, by Gilles Courtieu ("Cushions, Bottles and Roast Chickens! More Advertising about Paradise") addresses a different topic – the Qur'anic description of Paradise. It shows how several of its aspects can be explained as a kind of *transfert* of elements which belong to the Sasanian empire's high culture. Courtieu relies on a kind of source (sadly) seldom used by scholars in Qur'anic studies, namely material sources, including Sasanian silverware representing banquets. In his own paper ("The Seismic Qur'ān: On Collective Memory and Seismic Eschatology in the Qur'ān"), Thomas Hoffmann uses another original approach, and suggests, interestingly, that the Qur'anic discourse does not only refer to earthquakes when it describes seismic activity, but also to volcanic eruptions – a phenomenon well attested in Western Arabia.

The study of the most ancient witnesses of the Qur'anic text has become one of the crucial fields of Early Islamic studies. The issue of dating these Qur'anic fragments has especially attracted most attention these recent years. In "Dating Early Qur'anic Manuscripts: Reading the Objects, their Texts and the Results of their Material Analysis," Alba Fedeli provides an excellent methodological survey and analysis of the merits and limits of the various methods which can be used for this task – especially C14. She convincingly shows that radiocarbon-based analyses cannot be divorced from the textual, artistic, codicological and paleographical analyses of the artifacts under scrutiny.

The next four papers explore, in different ways, the Christian background and context of the Qur'ān. Paul Neuenkirchen ("Eschatology, Responsories and Rubrics in Eastern Christian Liturgies and in the Qur'ān: Some Preliminary Remarks") highlights striking parallels between Syriac liturgy and lectionaries and Qur'anic manuscripts. These pertain to similar scribal practices in the manuscripts themselves, as to similitudes in the liturgical lexicon and formulas. In other words, the Qur'ān seems indebted to Eastern Christian scribal techniques and to a certain form of Christian liturgy.

Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann's chapter ("Conversion from Jewish and Christian Milieus to Islam and its Influence on the Formation of the Qur'ān") might be considered as an English *précis* of his seminal book *Die Entstehung des Korans: Neue Erkenntnisse aus Sicht der historisch-kritischen Bibelwissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2015[3], 2012[1]) – a book which, sadly, did not get the attention it deserves in the mainstream scholarship on the Qur'ān. Pohlmann argues persuasively that various Qur'anic passages point to a post-prophetic context, with Christian or Jewish *literati* putting their pens at the service of the new movement of the Believers in the composition of these texts. This approach is also pursued by Guillaume Dye in "The Qur'anic Mary and the Chronology of the Qur'ān"). Using the tools of redaction and source criticism, Dye, like Pohlmann, sees the Qur'ān as a layered text, and attempts to determine the relative chronology of the passages relative to Mary. He argues for the

following chronology – Q 19:1-33 > Q 3:33-63 > Q 19:34-40 – and situates all these text in a post-conquest setting, more precisely in a Palestinian milieu, Q 19 being deeply indebted to the Jerusalem liturgical and popular Marian traditions, especially those of the Kathisma church.

The system of the Nangeroni meetings promotes debates; long papers are assigned a formal respondent, which sets the tone for the ensuing discussion during the meeting. Isaac Oliver, in his "The Historical-Critical Study of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Scriptures," provides a modified version of the response he gave to Guillaume Dye's paper, promoting scholarly exchange – on thematic and methodological issues – between specialists working across fields as diverse as Second Temple Judaism, New Testament, early Christianity, early rabbinic literature, and early Islamic studies. Oliver also reflects on the question of historical-criticism by drawing from his own teaching experience in a non-confessional university in the United States. Similarly, Philip Wood ("Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula and possible contexts for the Qur'ān") discusses the papers of Segovia,[5] Pohlmann and Dye, and seeks to provide an answer to the following question: if we seek to situate the emergence of Christian Qur'anic communities, or at least the transmission of "Christian lore," to what extent might this have been possible in sixth-century Arabia? He argues that several factors should increase the plausibility (though not provability) of greater Christian exposure to the Arabian Peninsula, but also notes that the different kinds of intra-Christian Qur'anic material may have developed in different Christian contexts.

The Early Islamic Studies Seminar and the Nangeroni meetings are meant as a place for debate, so that diversity of opinions and approaches should be welcome. We include therefore a dissenting voice, that of Ulrika Mårtensson. In her paper "History, Exegesis, Linguistics: A Preliminary, Multi-Discipline Approach to Ibn Hishām (d. c. 215/830) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) on the Origins of Islam and the Qur'ān," she argues for a more traditional approach, finding in Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī's works the most valuable clues for understanding the emergence of Islam. It is to be hoped that the presence of such conflicting approaches in the same volume will stimulate a constructive discussion.

[5] Carlos A. Segovia's paper at the meeting ("A Messianic Controversy Behind the Making of Muḥammad as the Last Prophet?") is not included here, but updated parts of it can be found in Carlos A. Segovia, *The Quranic Jesus. A New Interpretation*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2018, esp. chapters 3 and 5.

Method and Theory in the Study of Early Islam

□ Stephen J. SHOEMAKER

It is no secret that method and theory have been relative latecomers to the study of early Islam. Only during the past few decades have we seen studies of Islamic origins comparable to the critical investigations of early Judaism and Christianity that have been underway for almost two centuries now. And these new perspectives have hardly been welcomed with open arms. The vitriol and lack of intellectual generosity that such approaches have often received – especially in the early years – is quite troubling to one trained initially in the field of early Christian studies, where diversity of opinions and approaches is celebrated. Yet despite some significant gains in these areas in recent years, it seems that an older Orientalist model of philological study and accommodation of traditional Islamic perspectives remains entrenched, even as such scholars themselves occasionally seek to brand more critical approaches instead with this scarlet "O" of Orientalism. To a certain extent, however, the prevalence of such traditional approaches is to be expected. In many respects the study of early Islam in the West is still in its infancy, at least when compared with Christian and Jewish origins. Major sources remain untranslated (or poorly translated), and accordingly the scholar of formative Islam must labor for years to obtain the necessary facility in Arabic, an endeavor which inures one to the joys of philology and also invites significant respect for the content of texts that has been obtained only through considerable toil.

Related to this problem is the institutional setting of early Islamic studies, which for generations has been situated in departments of Near Eastern Studies or Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations rather than Religious Studies. To a significant extent this isolation is largely the fault of Religious Studies itself, which in the past has not attended to Islam and especially early Islam with nearly the same interest shown for Judaism and Christianity, or even Buddhism and Indian religions. Indeed,

many North American departments of Religious Studies have made their first hires in Islamic studies only over the two past decades or so. Nevertheless, the consequences of such disciplinary placement are significant, inasmuch as many scholars who study early Islamic religion lack any significant training in Religious Studies. The result is often a fairly limited methodological perspective dominated by philology and an understandable interest and respect for the traditions of early Islamic historiography. The various methods and theories used by scholars to study other religious traditions are by comparison largely absent, except perhaps for some exposure to the methods of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies. Moreover, such training, while yielding scholars impeccably skilled in Arabic and Persian, tends by its very nature to be linguistically narrow. Hebrew of course has been a common partner language, particularly in light of the Qur'ān's biblical matrix, and Syriac is now often a welcome new addition. Yet to study the first century of Islam, one really needs more Greek and Armenian and Coptic than Persian it would seem, and specialists on early Islam who receive training in these languages are few and far between.[1]

Even as Islamic studies has begun to move more fully into Religious Studies, problems with method and theory remain, especially with respect to earliest Islam. Formative Islam still has yet to be investigated using the well-established historical-critical approaches deployed – with much success – in the study of early Christianity and Judaism. Thus Wansbrough's observation to this effect over thirty years ago still rings true today: "As a document susceptible of analysis by the instruments and techniques of Biblical criticism, [the Qur'ān] is virtually unknown."[2] To be sure, the Qur'ān is a very peculiar sort of text, seemingly a kind of late antique religious miscellany, and likewise our sources are much more plentiful and diverse for the emergence of Christianity, for instance. Nevertheless, the fact remains that very little work has been done to date that would qualify as serious historical-critical study of the Qur'ān. Instead, scholars have largely preferred to concentrate on the received Islamic interpretation of the Qur'ān according to the various early *tafsīr*s, or to read the Qur'ān in tandem with the early biographies of Muhammad, the *sīra* tradition, in order to reconstruct the history of Muhammad's prophetic activities in Medina and Mecca.

The lineage of this methodological privation can be traced back, I have elsewhere proposed, to Heinrich Ewald and especially his prize student, Theodor Nöldeke. Ewald trained many of the field's "founding fathers," including, in addition to Nöldeke, Julius Wellhausen. By all accounts Ewald was a doctrinaire and domineering *Doktorvater*, whose Christian piety and traditionalism set him sharply against the emerging

1 On these disciplinary issues, see, e.g., Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p. 123–127; id., *Creating the Qur'ān: A Historical-Critical Study*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2022, p. 6–8; and Aaron W. Hughes, *Situating Islam: The Past and Future of an Academic Discipline,* London, Equinox Publishing, 2008.

2 John E. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. ix.

historical-critical approaches to early Christianity of his day.[3] Yet nothing was so pernicious and perverse in his view as the transformative studies of F. C. Baur and the Tübingen School that Baur inaugurated. Baur and his colleagues literally invented the field of early Christian studies in the middle of the nineteenth century and set it down the methodologically critical path that has defined the investigation of Christian origins to this day. For Ewald, however, Baur's doubts about the New Testament's historical accuracy amounted to an insidious "overturning and destruction of all intellectual and moral life."[4] Against Baur and his ilk Ewald insisted that the writings of the New Testament faithfully recorded the life and teachings of the historical Jesus and the beginnings of the Christian church. While Ewald was given to an agonistic temperament in general, his vitriol for Bauer was exceptional, such that one historian has remarked, "scarcely ever was a theologian attacked with such venomous invective or so spitefully maligned as Baur" was by Ewald.[5] Such an intellectual context perhaps could not be expected to birth a methodologically critical study of Islam comparable to what was developing in early Christian studies at that time.

It would appear that Ewald's forceful rejection of emerging historical criticism may have left an imprint on his students and on Nöldeke in particular. Nöldeke's achievements as a philologist are certainly beyond question, yet unfortunately they are not always matched by his work as a historical-critical scholar, at least in comparison with his contemporaries in early Christian studies. In his studies on the Qur'ān, which astonishingly still largely control much of the discourse even today, Nöldeke adopts only a modicum of the critical perspectives that were emerging at that time within the German academy.[6] In contrast to the skepticism and critique of traditional narratives that was increasingly embraced by Baur and other pioneers of early Christian studies, Nöldeke firmly maintained the Qur'ān's attribution to Muhammad in its received

[3] On Ewald's fierce opposition to the new approaches that had emerged within early Christian studies, as well as his nature as a mentor, see T. Witton Davies, *Heinrich Ewald, Orientalist and Theologian 1803-1903: A Centenary Appreciation*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1903, p. 23, 36–40, 63–64, 68–71; Johann Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, Harrassowitz, 1955, p. 167, 217; Horton Harris, *The Tübingen School*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 43–48; William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992, p. 287–293; C. Snouck Hurgronje, "Theodor Nöldeke: 2. März 1836 — 25. Dezember 1930," in *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 85, 1931, p. 238–281, 245; Holger Preissler, "Die Anfänge der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft," in *ibid*., vol. 145, 1995, p. 241–327, 258. For remarks concerning Ewald's methodological conservatism and resistance to the emergent historical-critical approaches within early Christian studies from perhaps the two greatest innovators of the field, see Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die tübinger Schule und ihre Stellung zur Gegenwart*, Tübingen, L. Fr. Fues, 1860, p. 122–171; and Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, London, Adam and Charles Black, 1910, p. 116 (esp. no. 4), 135.

[4] Harris, *The Tübingen School*, *op. cit*., p. 45.

[5] *Ibid*., 43.

[6] Not long ago Angelika Neuwirth described Nöldeke's work as "the rock of our church": Andrew Higgins, "The Lost Archive," in *The Wall Street Journal* (New York, 2008). See also, e.g., Andrew Rippin, "Western Scholarship and the Qur'ān," in J.D. McAuliffe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 240 [235–251]: Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorāns* "is the work that set the tone, approach, and agenda for most of the European and American scholarship that has been produced since." See also Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren: die literarische Form des Koran - ein Zeugnis seiner Historizität?*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2007, especially p. 7*, 27*.

form as well as its accuracy as historical record of earliest Islam.[7] One imagines that he learned to spurn such critical approaches from his mentor Ewald, to whom Nöldeke dedicated the published version of this prize-winning dissertation.[8] Instead, Nöldeke's work largely reflects the historical positivism characteristic of nineteenth-century philology, which aimed at reconstructing the past largely "from the visible surface of history" and stood in sharp "opposition to the *Geschichtskonstruktionen* of the enlightenment," reflected at the time primarily in Hegel's philosophy, and in the study of religion, in Baur and the Tübingen School. For Nöldeke, history was made by "great men," whose genius could be seen in the works that they had authored, making it important that Muhammad, and in no sense the later Islamic community, had to be identified as the unique source of the Qur'ān.[9]

The long shadow of Nöldeke's foundational work unfortunately left Qur'anic studies largely bereft of the historical-critical approaches increasingly favored in the study of other religious traditions until relatively recently. The study of *ḥadīth* and the *sīra* traditions have shown slightly more promise, however, no doubt inspired by the Islamic tradition's own acknowledgement that such materials were routinely fabricated within the early Islamic community on a massive scale: al-Bukhārī, for instance, is said to have rejected over 593,000 of the 600,000 *ḥadīth* that he examined as later forgeries.[10] Ignác Goldziher, in his *Muhammedanische Studien*, set the tone for western studies of the *ḥadīth* by bringing the "hermeneutics of suspicion" to bear on these traditions right from the start.[11] Over half of a century later Joseph Schacht pursued this methodological skepticism further still, even as he introduced a highly useful – if not always completely reliable – method for dating *ḥadīth* according to the chains of transmission identified in their *isnād*s. This approach, generally known as "common source analysis," compares all the various *isnād*s assigned to a particular tradition in a wide range of different collections in order to identify the earliest transmitter named in all of these highly varied chains of transmission, the so-called "common link."[12] As Schacht not unreasonably concludes, this figure is most likely the person who first put a particular tradition into circulation, since numerous *isnād*s all unanimously identify

7 Theodor Nöldeke - Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, Leipzig, Dieterich, 1909-19, vol. 2, p. 1–5.

8 According to Nöldeke's own assessment of his *Doktorvater*, "Ewald war, als Lehrer unmethodisch, dictatorisch, verlangte gleich vom Anfänger sehr viel; aber er regte gewaltig an, imponirte [sic] durch seine ganze Persönlichkeit: und, wer sich Mühe gab, lernte viel bei ihm. Freilich wenn man selbstständig geworden war, dann ward es kaum möglich, auf gutem Fuss mit ihm zu bleiben, denn er sah die kleinste Abweichung von seinen Ansichten als einen Abfall von der Wahrheit an, und zörnte darüber mächtig." Davies, *Heinrich Ewald*, *op. cit*., p. 37.

9 Hartmut Fähndrich, "Invariable Factors Underlying the Historical Perspective in Theodor Nöldeke's Orientalische Skizzen (1892)," in A. Dietrich, ed., *Akten des VII. Kongressesfür Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976, p. 148, 152–153. See also Baber Johansen, "Politics and Scholarship: The Development of Islamic Studies in the Federal Republic of Germany," in T.Y. Ismael, ed., *Middle East Studies: International Perspectives on the State of the Art*, New York, Praeger, 1990, p. 75–83; Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa*, *op. cit*., p. 21–220.

10 Patricia Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 33.

11 Ignác Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, Halle, M. Niemeyer, 1889-90, vol. 2.

12 Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950, esp. p. 163–175.

him as a source. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain how these highly variegated chains of transmission could converge on this single individual as their earliest common source. The alternative, that somehow all of these different *isnād*s have by chance "invented" the same early transmitter, is comparatively unlikely.

Some degree of confidence may thus be placed in identifying the "common link" with the earliest history of a particular tradition, although even this seemingly fail-safe method is not without significant problems and uncertainties.[13] For instance, Michael Cook has demonstrated that when applied to eschatological traditions, which often can be securely dated by their content, such common link analysis often fails to indicate the correct date. How could this happen?[14] The most common explanation involves the supposed "spread of *isnād*s," according to which, as Schacht was the first to propose, these chains of transmission have in fact been altered both by the complications of transmission over an extended period of time as well as by the editorial interests of an evolving Islamic tradition. Such changes can lead to the identification of false common links.[15] Some contemporary scholars have protested – often aggressively – that any such spread of *isnād*s would require a conspiracy of forgery on a massive scale.[16] Yet such a grand conspiracy is by no means needed for such changes to have occurred, as other scholars have more reasonably explained. It is simply a false dichotomy to insist that either there must have been a massive conspiracy or the traditions in question are authentic, as some have proposed.[17] Therefore, in order to guard against such possible adjustments to the chains of transmission, this approach is only reliable for traditions

[13] See also the more extended discussion of this in Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, *op. cit*., esp. p. 80–90; and Stephen J. Shoemaker, "In Search of ʿUrwa's Sīra: Some Methodological Issues in the Quest for 'Authenticity' in the Life of Muḥammad," in *Der Islam*, vol. 85, 2009-11, p. 257–344.

[14] Michael Cook, "Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions," in *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 1, 1992, p. 25–47. See also Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, *op. cit*., p. 122–123, no. 53. Andreas Görke has recently attempted to account for these failures, but many of his observations were already recognized as problems and addressed in Cook's article. Many of the problems identified by Görke, however, impinge on arguments that he himself has made in other articles attempting to assign authorship of certain *sīra* traditions to ʿUrwa. Andreas Görke, "Eschatology, History, and the Common Link: A Study in Methodology," in Herbert Berg, ed., *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, Leiden, Brill, 2003, p. 179–208.

[15] Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, *op. cit*., p. 163–175; Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 107–116; see also Cook, "Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions," *op. cit*., p. 24 and p. 40 no. 19, where he answers some objections by Juynboll to his explanation of this phenomenon; Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, *op. cit*., p. 27–34; Norman Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 236–241.

[16] E.g., Harald Motzki, "The *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī as a Source of Authentic *Aḥādīth* of the First Century A.H.," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 50, 1991, p. 1–21, 3–4, 6–7, 9, etc. Such pleading is particularly evident in this article: Harald Motzki, "The Prophet and the Cat: On Dating Mālik's *Muwaṭṭa'* and Legal Traditions," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 22, 1998, p. 18–83, esp. p. 32 no. 44, p. 63. To a certain extent Donner also employs this sort of argument in his study of early Islamic historical writing: Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton, Darwin Press, 1998, esp. p. 25–9, 283, 287.

[17] E.g., "The frequent references to concepts such as authenticity and forgery indicate a very undynamic view of the tradition. In Motzki's approach there seem to be only two sorts of material to be found in Muslim traditional literature: authentic and forged. And if forged, then the work must be the work of an individual forger." Gerald R. Hawting, "Review of Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 59, 1996, p. 142. See also Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 53–54.

bearing an extremely dense pattern of transmission from multiple, intermediate "common links," a threshold that only few traditions are capable of meeting. In many such cases, however, this method has been used to persuasively date traditions to the beginnings of the second Islamic century. Although certain scholars have sought to argue for even earlier datings of these traditions through special pleading on behalf of the ethical qualities of the early transmitters,[18] such arguments are methodologically problematic and ultimately not very convincing.[19]

The *sīra* traditions pose even greater difficulties, and indeed, the medieval Islamic traditions itself recognized that this corpus was especially unreliable and prone to pious forgeries, even more so than the legal *ḥadīth*.[20] On the whole, western scholarship has come to acknowledge the artificial and tendentious nature of Muhammad's earliest biographies, which were first compiled over a century after his death.[21] These narratives accordingly reflect the concerns and interests of Islam during the eighth and ninth centuries more than actual historical accounts of Muhammad's life and the formation of the Islamic community. While some nineteenth century scholars were so intoxicated by the rich detail of these biographies as to proclaim that Islam had been "born in the full light of history," upon closer examination more recent scholarship has come to the conclusion that the *sīra* traditions are highly unreliable as sources for the seventh century and must be regarded with a great deal of skepticism. Against this epistemological collapse, Montgomery Watt famously protested that despite their late formation and apparent artificiality, the earliest biographies nevertheless contained at their core a historically reliable kernel of truth that could guarantee their general framework.[22] Nevertheless, Watt merely asserted this point and was never able to muster any persuasive arguments for the accuracy of this narrative core, and so we are left with a mythical account of the life of Muhammad that is significantly removed from the events of the early seventh century, whatever they may have been. Indeed, what we have in these early Islamic biographies of Muhammad resembles much more

[18] E.g. Motzki, "The *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq," *op. cit*., p. 3–4, 6–7, 9, etc; Harald Motzki, "*Quo vadis*, *Ḥadiṯ*-Forschung?: Eine kritische Untersuchung von G. H. A. Juynboll: 'Nāfi', the *Mawlā* of Ibn 'Umar, and His Position in Muslim *Ḥadiṯ* Literature'," in *Der Islam*, vol. 73, 1996, p. 40–80; Harald Motzki, "*Quo vadis*, *Ḥadiṯ*-Forschung?: Eine kritische Untersuchung von G. H. A. Juynboll: 'Nāfi', the *Mawlā* of Ibn 'Umar, and His Position in Muslim *Ḥadiṯ* Literature,' Teil 2," in *Der Islam*, vol. 73, 1996, p. 193–231.

[19] Calder, *Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence*, *op. cit*., p. 194–195; Hawting, "Review of Harald Motzki," *op. cit*.; Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature From the Formative Period*, Richmond, Surrey, Curzon, 2000, p. 36–38, 112–114; Christopher Melchert, "The Early History of Islamic Law," in Herbert Berg, ed., *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, Leiden, Brill, 2003, p. 301–304; Robert G. Hoyland, "Writing the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad: Problems and Solutions," in *History Compass*, vol. 5, 2007, p. 587.

[20] E.g., W. Raven, "Sīra," in P.J. Bearman - T. Bianquis - C.E. Bosworth et al., eds, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1960-2005, p. 660–663. See also Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*, London, Oneworld, 2014, p. 232.

[21] For further discussion, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Les vies de Muhammad," in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Le Coran des historiens*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 2019, vol. 1, p. 183–245.

[22] W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1953; id., *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956; id., "The Reliability of Ibn Isḥāq's Sources," in T. Fahd, ed., *La vie du Prophète Mahomet: Colloque de Strasbourg, Octobre 1980*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1983, p. 31–43. See also Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, *op. cit*., p. 16–20.

the second and third-century apocryphal acts of the apostles from the early Christian tradition than the canonical gospels. If these legendary biographies of the Christian apostles were our only sources for reconstructing the beginnings of Christianity, our understanding of Christian origins would be alarmingly different from what we are presently able to reconstruct on the basis of earlier sources at our disposal.

A handful of scholars has recently sought to verify the authenticity of certain key elements from Muhammad's traditional biographies using the methods of common source analysis described above. In particular, they aim to assign these traditions to ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 712), thereby reaching back into the later first century of Islam. Joined to this then are special pleadings of the sort mentioned above that the highly ethical character of earlier Muslims ensures that they would not have simply made up the traditions that ʿUrwa received.[23] Unfortunately, this approach is flawed on multiple fronts.[24] Considerable manipulation of the received patterns of transmission and reliance on transmissions known to be highly unreliable are often necessary to reach ʿUrwa. Likewise, the biographical transmissions were not transmitted as widely, and so the number of sources available for reconstructing a complex patterns of transmission is not as great as is the case with legal *ḥadīth*. Accordingly, the networks of transmission are often not sufficiently dense to identify ʿUrwa as the common link with much confidence. The "spread of *isnād*s" is perhaps in many cases responsible for ʿUrwa's appearance as the common link. Finally, anyone who reaches a certain age gains an appreciation of how memories evolve over a relatively short period of time to reflect the way things "should have been." The same is no less true of communities, and particularly a community as dynamic as earliest Islam, where urgent eschatological beliefs and rapidly changing circumstances would all but ensure that collective memory of the time of origins would almost unconsciously adjust itself to meet the current situation. We should hardly be surprised that memories of Muhammad and the early community changed so that the beliefs of the eighth and ninth century Muslims were inscribed onto Islam's earliest history[25]. Firm conviction in the truth of what they believed – rather than a grand conspiracy of forgery! – inspired and even

[23] E.g., Gregor Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1996; id., *The Biography of Muhammed: Nature and Authenticity*, London, Routledge, 2010; Andreas Görke - Gregor Schoeler, "Reconstructing the Earliest *Sīra* Texts: The Hiǧra in the Corpus of ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr," in *Der Islam*, vol. 82, 2005, p. 209–220; Gregor Schoeler, "Foundations for A New Biography of Muḥammad: The Production and Evaluation of the Corpus of Traditions from ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr," in Herbert Berg, ed., *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, Leiden, Brill, 2003, p. 19–28; Andreas Görke, "The Historical Tradition about al-Hudaybiya. A Study of ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr's Account," in H. Motzki, ed., *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*, Leiden, Brill, 2000, p. 240–275; Harald Motzki, "The Murder of Ibn Abī l-Ḥuqayq: On the Origin and Reliability of Some *Maghāzī* Reports," in H. Motzki, ed., *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*, Leiden, Brill, 2000, p. 170–239; Andreas Görke - Gregor Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte über das Leben Muhammads. Das Korpus ʿUrwa ibn Az-Zubair*, Princeton, Darwin Press, 2008.

[24] See my extensive critique of this approach in Shoemaker, "In Search of ʿUrwa's Sīra," *op. cit*., Schoeler, Görke, and Motzki collectively published a swift response in the same journal: Andreas Görke - Harald Moztki - Gregor Schoeler, "First Century Sources for the Life of Muḥammad? A Debate," in *Der Islam*, vol. 89, 2012, p. 2–59. I will not respond to their article here, but suffice it to say that I stand by what I have written, and I invite interested parties to read both articles and decide for themselves.

[25] See Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'ān*, *op. cit*., p. 148–203.

required accounts of the community's foundation that showed harmony between "classical" Islam and the faith of Muhammad and the early Believers.

On the whole, this profound erosion of confidence in our main sources for the life of Muhammad and the formation of his religious community severely undermines any effort to reconstruct the earliest history of the Islamic tradition, and accordingly recent scholarship on early Islam has often resigned itself to effective silence regarding the first century.[26] Such reticence is certainly understandable when the only other option is to rely on sources known to be unreliable. Yet difficult though the circumstances are, we need not abandon Islamic origins to historical agnosticism. We simply have to find other avenues for investigating the early history of Islam beyond relying on the much later memorializations of the period of origins offered by Ibn Isḥāq and other students of al-Zuhrī.[27] One particularly useful approach that has long been in use is *matn* criticism, as first articulated especially by Goldziher at the end of the nineteenth century and after him by Schacht.[28] Here one looks to the *matn* itself for signs its antiquity, and in this regard the "criterion of dissimilarity" or "criterion of embarrassment" from New Testament studies is particularly useful.[29] According to this principle, traditions that are embarrassing or contradictory to what became established tradition are unlikely to have been invented in a setting where their content would have posed such dissonance. Instead, it is much more likely that such reports transmit older traditions preserved against the later tradition's interest, perhaps in only a handful of minor sources, on account of their antiquity. Therefore, traditions that describe Muhammad or his followers as saying or doing something at odds with the classical Islam of the eighth and ninth centuries are likely to be early, having been formed before these orthodoxies and orthopraxies became established but being preserved nonetheless on account of their antiquity.

Reports about earliest Islam from contemporary non-Islamic writings offer an invaluable if underutilized source of information. To be sure, these must also be taken critically and cannot be taken simply at face value for what they report, just as we would expect of the early Islamic sources. One especially needs to take into account

[26] E.g., Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009; Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, although the latter does mention some seventh-century tombstones.

[27] Particularly important in this regard will be the translation (with Arabic text) of the *maghāzī* from ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanʿānī's *Muṣannaf* much of which is attributed to Maʿmar, now published in Sean W. Anthony, *Maʿmar ibn Rāshid: The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muhammad,* New York, New York University Press, 2014.

[28] Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, *op. cit*., vol. 2, p. 22–31; id., *Muslim Studies*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1967-71, vol. 2, p. 33–40; Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, *op. cit*., p. 176–189.

[29] For a brief presentation of the criterion of authenticity and the related criterion of discontinuity, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, New York, Doubleday, 1991, p. 168–174. For a more popular presentation, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 91–94. For a more thorough discussion of this criterion and its history within Biblical Studies, see Gerd Theissen - Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, Louisville, Ky., Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, esp. p. 1–171.

the possibility of distortion due polemic, misunderstanding, or bare ignorance. Nevertheless, these extra-Islamic reports, from the Christians, Jews, and Samaritans of the first Islamic century, frequently offer historical sources of the highest quality, written during the period in question and often on the basis of eyewitness reports. For instance the account of rise of Islam in the Armenian history attributed to Sebeos is of particularly high quality: Sebeos draws here on a written source composed in Jerusalem during the first decades of Islamic rule on the basis of eyewitness reports from those who had been taken captive by the Muslims.[30] We need to mine these sources even more than we already have, and Jonathan A. C. Brown's dismissal of their value as the equivalent of "writing a history of the Soviet Union during the Cold War using only American newspapers" is at best a clumsy and unreflective analogy.[31] It is misguided to presume such partisanship and deliberate misrepresentation on the part of these early non-Islamic sources, which often seem somewhat perplexed in the midst of such sweeping change and are genuinely trying figure out who their new overlords are and what they believe. Moreover, by the same token, one certainly must observe that relying solely on the early Islamic tradition in this case would be like writing a history of the Soviet Union during Cold War using only Soviet newspapers, which is effectively what Brown and so many other Islamicists generally have done when writing the history of early Islam. And, for what it is worth, I more than suspect that an account based on the American news media would, in fact, prove more accurate than one drawn from the pages of Pravda or reports from TASS. Yet that is beside the point: surely any historian of the Cold War Soviet Union would use Soviet, American, and other sources together in a critical manner, and that is precisely what historians of formative Islam must also begin to do with more regularity and rigor.

Another important area for further exploration is the documentary evidence for early Islam, particularly early Arabic papyri, which so far have been largely neglected, and also coinage, both of which promise to reveal more about the early tradition that we have yet discovered. Michael Cook remarks that coins and official inscriptions from the last decade of the seventh century show significant variation in the Qur'anic text still at this point. Likewise Alfred Welch refers to "thousands of variants" recorded in classical Islamic literature.[32] These sources need to be systematically mined for the information that they provide regarding the history of the Qur'anic text. It is true that recent radiocarbon datings of three fragmentary Qur'ān manuscripts indicate their

[30] See Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, *op. cit.*, p. 199–204; id., *A Prophet Has Appeared: The Rise of Islam through Christian and Jewish Eyes: A Sourcebook*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2021, p. 62–72; Robert W. Thomson – James Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1999 (Translated Texts for Historians, vol. 31), vol. 1, p. lxviii–lxx; p. 102 no. 634; and vol. 2, p. 238–240.; Tim W. Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes and Apocalyptic Expectations: A Re-evaluation of the Armenian History attributed to Sebeos," in *Le Muséon*, vol. 115, 2003, p. 365–366.

[31] Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Muhammad: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford - New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 96.

[32] Michael Cook, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 118–122; A. T. Welch, "al-Ḳur'ān," in P.J. Bearman - T. Bianquis - C.E. Bosworth et al., eds, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden, Brill, 1960-2005, vol. 5, p. 404b. Many of the variants found in classical literature have been gathered in 'Abd al-Laṭīf Muḥammad al-Khaṭīb (ed.), *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, Damascus, Dār Saʿd al-Dīn, 2010.

production in the seventh century.[33] If these early datings prove correct,[34] it will be essential to reconcile somehow these variants – not to mention those of the Dome of the Rock – with these early manuscripts.[35]

One of the most promising approaches for reconstructing the beginnings of Islam is to proceed more or less *solo corano*, as some recent studies have done with impressive results. To be sure, one will want to analyze the Qur'ān in conjunction with the contemporary non-Islamic reports and critical study of the *sīra* traditions (but not the early *tafsīr*). As the sole surviving literary document from the first century of Islam, the Qur'ān merits a privileged position in any effort to understand Islam's earliest history. Even if its final redaction may have come only at the end of the seventh century, there can be no question that the Qur'ān offers our best witness to Muhammad's religious beliefs as interpreted by his earliest followers. Unfortunately, the Qur'ān is, as Fred Donner observes, a "profoundly ahistorical" text[36] that reveals frustratingly little about the events of Muhammad's life and the early history of the religious community that he founded. Instead, the Qur'ān serves primarily to gather together much earlier biblical and Arabian traditions and funnel them through person of Muhammad, excluding from its purview the "incidentals of time and space."[37] Therefore any information about Muhammad and his new religious community must be carefully teased out from the Qur'ān's often cryptic oracles.

By its very nature this approach seeks to read the Qur'ān against rather than according to (as has so often been the case) the traditional narratives of Islamic origins. This is not a matter of interpreting the Qur'ān at every instance in a manner that is at odds with the received Islamic tradition. Rather, the aim is to identify instances where the traditions of the Qur'ān seem to stand in tension with later Islamic memories of the beginnings of Islam, while searching also for parallel anomalies in the early Islamic tradition that similarly resist interpretive closure, as well as confirmations from the non-Islamic sources. In this way it becomes possible to open up space between sacred text and tradition, in order to discover potential differences between the faith of Muhammad and his earliest followers and the remembrance of these events by those

[33] See Behnam Sadeghi - Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet," in *Arabica,* vol. 57, 2010, p. 343–436; Behnam Sadeghi - Mohsen Goudzari, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," in *Der Islam*, vol. 87, 2012, p. 1–129. But see also François Déroche, *Qur'āns of the Umayyads: A First Overview*, Leiden, Brill, 2014, p. 48–56.

[34] Which is far from certain: see Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*, p. 70–95 and also Alba Fedeli's paper, discussing radiocarbon dating, in this volume.

[35] The inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock were most recently published with translation in Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 92–99. Rather astonishingly, Estelle Whelan has attempted to establish an early date for the Qur'ān on the basis of the Dome of the Rock's inscriptions: Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'ān," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 118, 1998, p. 1–14. Nevertheless, her special pleading that canonical verses have been adapted to a missionary purpose in this setting is not persuasive.

[36] Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, *op. cit.*, p. 75–85, esp. p. 80.

[37] John E. Wansbrough - Andrew Rippin, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Amherst, N.Y., Prometheus Books, 2004, p. xvii; Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

in later centuries. Both Donner and Patricia Crone have recently adopted such an approach with compelling, if also controversial results. Through close and careful reading of the Qur'ān, along with other early evidence, both Donner and Crone have demonstrated respectively that the nature of the earliest "Islamic community" and the religious and socio-economic context of the Qur'ān are quite different from how the later Islamic tradition came to remember.[38] And while there are some nagging issues with Donner's interpretation, most especially with regard to the Qur'ān's anti-Trinitarianism (as he himself acknowledges), his hypothesis of an early "community of the Believers" makes better sense of the available evidence than the traditional Islamic narratives of origins.[39]

Other similar endeavors of this nature hold great promise for investigating the earliest history of Islam. Nevertheless, as we continue to excavate the Qur'ān in this fashion, a more methodologically robust toolkit will be required than what is on offer in Nöldeke and many other earlier studies of the Qur'ān. In this respect, Qur'anic studies would benefit significantly, I believe, from adopting many of the methods that have long been employed in biblical studies, and more specifically, New Testament studies and the study of the historical Jesus. It is odd that such approaches have not been more frequently utilized in analyzing the Qur'ān. Yet part of the problem seems to be that scholars of early Islam have persistently looked to study of the Hebrew Bible – rather than the New Testament – as a potential model for study of the Qur'ān. For instance, Aziz al-Azmeh, in his recent critique of more skeptical approaches to early Islamic history, persists in identifying the study of the Old Testament as the main point of comparison.[40] Other similarly-minded scholars have averted this critical turn on the grounds that the methods used in studying the Hebrew Bible are not applicable because the Qur'ān "crystalized much more rapidly than the Old Testament tradition."[41] Only such restricted vision could possibly explain Nöldeke and Schwally's assertion that the "development of the Islamic canon is utterly unique – one could say that it took place in the opposite fashion [from the Biblical texts]."[42] To be sure, if one's model is the formation of the Hebrew Bible, the period in question is indeed impossibly short, which is why study of the New Testament offers a much better model for study of the Qur'ān, despite its frequent neglect. In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, whose contents reflect a process of sedimentation that took place over several centuries with discrete periods of redaction, the Qur'ān, like the Gospels, was more hastily compiled from

[38] Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," in *al-Abḥāth*, vol. 50-1, 2002, p. 9–53; Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010; Patricia Crone, "How Did the Quranic Pagans Make a Living?," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 68, 2005, p. 387–399; id., "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," in *Arabica*, vol. 57, 2010, p. 151–200.

[39] See also Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, p. 199–218.

[40] Aziz al-Aẓmeh, *The Arabs and Islam in Late antiquity: A Critique of Approaches to Arabic Sources*, Berlin, Gerlach, 2014, p. 10–11.

[41] Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, *op. cit*., p. 29.

[42] Nöldeke - Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, *op. cit*., vol. 2, p. 120. See, however, Wansbrough's thoughtful critique of Nöldeke's largely unwarranted assumptions: Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, *op. cit*., p. 43–44.

various independent fragments of tradition after a relatively brief period of oral transmission, within the context, it would seem, of imminent eschatological belief. Indeed, comparison with the New Testament suggests that the formation of the Qur'ān was not nearly so *völlig abweichend* as Nöldeke was once able to imagine.

Of the many methods used in the study of the New Testament criticism, form criticism seems to hold the most promise for application to the Qur'ān at this stage.[43] It is true that some scholars have previously experimented with form critical approaches to the Qur'ān, most notably, Hartwig Hirschfeld, Richard Bell, and John Wansbrough.[44] Yet insofar as insights from form criticism have been applied to the Qur'ān, these have been drawn largely from models developed for study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, rather than New Testament form criticism, which seems much more applicable to the circumstances of the Qur'ān's formation. Despite significant overlap between the two approaches, with their common interest in identifying the *Sitze im Leben* that gave rise to individual traditions, New Testament form criticism works within a much shorter time frame, when the tradition was changing much more rapidly than in the writings of the Hebrew Bible, particularly in light of the powerful eschatological impulse within earliest Christianity.[45] Such circumstances seem very similar to those in which the Qur'ān was forming, and accordingly the approaches developed for studying the transmission and collection of Jesus's sayings are more likely to bear fruit in analyzing the Qur'ān's prophetic speech.

[43] Frank van der Velden's warning against any approach to formative Islam that might "look into the kind of hermeneutical abyss that misled some Christian biblical exegetes of the 'new form critical school' in the 1970s" seems a bit premature and unwarranted. Not only has the Qur'ān so far been relatively shielded from the critical perspectives of Form Criticism, but it seems unwise to proscribe a valuable and well-established method of historical analysis simply because one does not particularly like the results that it yields. See Frank van der Velden, "Relations between Jews, Syriac Christians, and Early Muslim Believers in Seventh-Century Iraq," in *Al-ʿUsur al-Wusta: The Bulletin of Middle East Medievalists*, vol. 19, 2007, p. 31.

[44] Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran*, London, Royal Asiatic Society, 1902; Richard Bell, *The Qur'ān*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1937-9; Richard Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur'ān*, Manchester, University of Manchester, 1991; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, *op. cit*. Bell's proposed division of the Qur'anic *sūra*s into smaller units has not met with much acceptance, yet even if his reconstruction is rather imperfect and highly idiosyncratic, the approach is undoubtedly correct: see, e.g., Welch, "*al-Ḳur'ān*," *op. cit*., p. 417–418; Andrew Rippin, "Reading the Qur'ān with Richard Bell," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 112, 1992, p. 639–647. An interesting approach to the *ḥadīth* using elements of Form Criticism was published by R. Marston Speight, "The Will of Sa'd b. a. Waqqāṣ: The Growth of a Tradition," in *Der Islam*, vol. 50, 1973, p. 249–267.

[45] For more on the importance of Form Criticism within modern New Testament study, see William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992, p. 269–286; Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1972, p. 325–341. A somewhat more guarded summary can be found in Stephen Neill - Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 253–269. Nevertheless, as the authors note (themselves both bishops in the Anglican church), Form Criticism was never as well received in Britain as it was by scholars in Germany and the United States: *ibid*., p. 269-276; see also Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 2, *op. cit*., p. 269. The classic example of the method's application to the gospels is Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, New York, Harper & Row, 1963. A more basic overview of the method can be found in Jarl Fossum - Phillip Munoa, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction to Gospel Literature and Jesus Studies*, Belmont, CA, Wadsworth, 2004, p. 66–77.

The first step in developing a distinctively Qur'anic style of form criticism would involve parsing the traditions of the Qur'ān according to the different forms of discourse that they represent.[46] Alfred-Louis de Prémare has made a good start in identifying many of the main categories,[47] and following such comprehensive classification, traditions adhering to a similar form could be studied in relation to one another. Such an approach could replace Nöldeke's rather dubious classification of the Qur'anic suras according to the sequence of their revelation in Mecca and Medina. Indeed, form criticism would no longer operate at the level of complete suras but would instead analyze their individual elements according to literary form. Moreover, it would sever the connection between the Qur'ān's traditions and Muhammad's biography, a hermeneutic marriage that has frequently been used to construct a sense of unity and coherence out of the Qur'ān's rather diverse assemblage of a wide range of textual material and traditions. The very nature of the Qur'ān's traditions and the early reports of their assemblage almost cries out for such analysis. As Andrew Rippin notes, their initial piecemeal collection on "stones, palm leaves, and the hearts of men" (or as Peters has it, "on scraps of leather, bone and in their hearts") "virtually jumps out at the scholar familiar with form criticism when faced with such Muslim testimony."[48]

With the Qur'ān's contents being newly visible following their analysis according to literary form, scholars would be in a position to begin hypothesizing as to the original *Sitze im Leben* of the various individual traditions. In doing so it will be essential to consider the possible origin of specific traditions outside the scope of Muhammad's prophetic ministry, either before he began to form his religious community or after his death. Even if the radiocarbon dated manuscripts ultimately are able to validate the Qur'ān's production only decades after the end of Muhammad's life, the likelihood that the early "Islamic" community continued to edit and develop new Qur'anic traditions during their early transmission must be taken seriously into consideration. Comparison with study of the sayings of Jesus certainly identifies such redaction as a very real possibility. It is axiomatic in historical-critical study of the gospels that the early Christian community shaped and reshaped – even "invented" – traditions about the life and preaching of Jesus during the so-called "tunnel period" of their oral transmission, a process that did not cease even after these traditions began to be collected in writing.[49] During this relatively brief interval – only about twenty

[46] John J. Collins suggested the value of such an approach in a communication at the 2007 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, a proposal that seemed to be well received by those in the audience: John J. Collins, "Response to Session on 'Islamicate Apocalypsis: Textual, Historical, and Methodological Considerations'" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, 18 November 2007).

[47] Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran: questions d'hier, approches d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Téraèdre, 2004, p. 29–45.

[48] Rippin, "Reading the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 642; F. E. Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 23, 1991, p. 291–315, esp. p. 293–295.

[49] See, e.g., E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London, Allen Lane, 1993, p. 57–63; Ehrman, *Jesus*, *op. cit*., p. 21–53; James D. G. Dunn - Scot McKnight, *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research*, Winona Lake, Ind., Eisenbrauns, 2005; Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1995, vol. 2, p. 59–64.

years before the "Q" collection of Jesus' sayings and just forty to fifty years before the first of the canonical gospels were compiled – the early Christian traditions were subjected to significant modifications on a massive scale: according to a recent estimate by a particular group of New Testament scholars, eighty-two percent of the words attributed to Jesus in the canonical gospels were *not* actually spoken by him.[50] Accordingly, if as Chase Robinson insists, scholarship on early Islam should be "committed to the idea that the history made by Muslims is comparable to that made by non-Muslims,"[51] the possibility that similar evolution is reflected within the Qur'ān's traditions should not be ruled out as a matter of course.

Perhaps some scholars will resist a historical approach to the beginnings of Islam on the grounds that study of the historical Jesus has proven so contentious and has produced a Jesus whose image occasionally shifts with the times and frequently resembles the ideals of the investigators. There is no denying that this has happened. Nevertheless, the eschatological prophet that most biblical scholars believe Jesus to have been can hardly be seen as the result of wishful thinking. Perhaps others will object, as some New Testament theologians have, that such an endeavor holds little purpose, since it yields a reconstruction of the time of origins that is of little or no use for members of the religious tradition in question.[52] Yet I doubt that many such scholarly remonstrants would actually wish that the question of the historical Jesus had never been investigated, to be replaced instead by the three volume historical biography of Jesus by Pope Benedict XVI.[53] Still, it is important to be forthright about the nature of this undertaking. The quest of the historical Muhammad, like that of Jesus before him, will not reveal who Muhammad "really" was; instead, it will yield understandings of Muhammad and his earliest followers that have been analyzed through the methods of historical criticism. Surely this is a valuable and worthy

[50] Robert Walter Funk - Roy W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, New York, Macmillan, 1993, p. 5. Although the perspectives of the Jesus Seminar that are presented in this volume lie somewhat outside the mainstream in their belief in a non-eschatological Jesus and a rather early dating of the Gospel of Thomas, this work has the advantage of reflecting the collective views of a number of New Testament Scholars on the authenticity of specific sayings when studied using, among other methods, Form Criticism. In general terms, the findings of this group are reflective of the field as a whole regarding the transmission of the sayings of Jesus in the first decades of Christianity. Concerning the dates of these early Christian writings, see, e.g., Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development*, Philadelphia, Trinity Press International, 1990, p. 87; Ehrman, *Jesus*, *op. cit*., p. 48, 82. The "Q" gospel is a lost collection of Jesus' sayings that was most likely compiled sometime around the year 50. Its contents are largely known from the comparison of the gospels of Matthew and Luke, both of which have independently utilized this early written collection. Certain traditions known to both Matthew and Luke, but apparently not to Mark, are understood to derive from this lost collection. As it is currently understood, Q was essentially a list of sayings ascribed to Jesus, without any narrative context or a Passion narrative. For more information, see, e.g., Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1975, p. 38–80.

[51] Chase F. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, Oxford, Oneworld, 2005, p. 103.

[52] See, e.g., Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, San Francisco, HarperOne, 1996.

[53] Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, New York, Doubleday, 2007; Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2011; Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, New York, Image Books, 2012.

enterprise, and one that seems essential to Islamic studies' integration further within the discipline of religious studies more broadly.

Others may object in light of the stern critique of modernity that has been raised in the guise of post-modernity. Given that the historical-critical approach is largely a product of Enlightenment values and modern historiography, should it not be largely discarded now that we have recognized serious intellectual problems with the truth claims of modernity? One finds something like this reasoning in Jonathan A. C. Brown's recent *Misquoting Muhammad*. Despite the title's reference to Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*, Brown demurs from engaging in a similar sort of historical-critical study of early Islam. Instead, he frequently invokes the value and authority of pre-modern traditions in the face of modernity's current crisis.[54] One finds a similar sort of reaction in certain Christian theologians, for instance, in certain works aligned with the Radical Orthodoxy movement, which similarly advocate a sort of return to pre-modern ways of thinking about theology, albeit without completely abandoning many of the valuable perspectives brought about through modernity.[55] Indeed, it remains a fact that post-modernity is defined primarily in terms of modernity, as being a reaction to and critique of modernity and the Enlightenment; it does not offer a positive alternative worldview capable of replacing their powerful tools for analyzing the world and the human experience of it. Some theorists would thus maintain that instead of post-modernity, we are now in a phase that better understood as a new stage of modernity, a late or "liquid" modernity, given that so much of modernity's intellectual framework remains intact despite this forceful critique.[56] Accordingly, in order to reach post- or late modernity, modernity itself must first be traversed.

Instead of developing a new-found appreciation for the value of pre-modern perspectives on religion, late modern historians of early Islam would do well to adopt an approach much like the one proposed by Dale Martin in his *Sex and the Single Savior*. Martin advocates a sort of hybridity between the modern and the post-modern with a method that he describes in part as "postmodern historicism." Martin retains the methods of historical criticism which, after all, have proven themselves extremely effective for analysis of the New Testament and other ancient writings. Yet at the same time he fully accepts the postmodernist critique of modernity's overbold truth claims – hence the term "historicism" rather than "history." The methods of modern historical criticism will not reveal what really happened, as Leopold von Ranke once dared to imagine, nor are they objective or nonbiased. Yet they are able to establish certain probabilities about interpreting the past that derive from the rigor of the methods

[54] E.g., Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, *op. cit*., p. xv–xvii, 236–237, 268–272, 288–290. As a work of theology, rather than history, one certainly can find merit in Brown's approach.

[55] See., e.g., John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward, eds, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. x, 285.

[56] E.g., Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991; Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, & Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 142; Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000.

themselves. Accordingly, postmodern historicism "uses the methods of modernism without the confidence in the 'knowledge' produced by modernism."[57] Such historical criticism, tempered by more moderate truth claims, is equally suited for study of the Qur'ān and earliest Islam.

Finally, a more purely postmodern approach with seemingly considerable potential for study of early Islam is post-colonial studies. Post-colonialism's attention to how identity and difference are constructed and managed in an imperial context seems ideal for investigating the formation of a distinctively Islamic faith and identity amidst the sectarian milieu of the late ancient Near East that this new Arab empire so rapidly subsumed. Both the ancient Greek and Roman empires have been the subject of numerous post-colonial studies, and the model offered by analyses of the Roman Empire in particular hold value for approaching the early Islamic empire.[58] In the Greek empire initially established by Alexander the Great, identity focused largely on a binary between Greek and barbarian, marking a sharp distinction between social "self" and other. The response to difference was thus largely to Hellenize the colonized cultures. In the Roman Empire, by contrast, cultural difference was instead something to be managed largely through its incorporation within Romanness. As Jeremy Schott observes, "Rome sought to contain the threat of diversity by incorporating otherness within its borders, not through its elimination."[59] Rome expanded not through the spread of *Romanitas* or *Latinitas* but instead through the appropriation and dominance of difference. In contrast to Greek xenophobia of other inferior cultures, the Romans sought to negotiate cultural heterogeneity as a more flexible, and perhaps, ultimately more successful way of managing difference. This Roman model sounds very similar to the adaptive and inclusive strategy that characterized the early Islamic empire during the period of its initial rapid expansion. I suspect that a scholar more skilled in the methods of post-colonial analysis than I could shed considerable light on the emergence of Islam using such an approach.

[57] Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*, Louisville, Ky., Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, p. 162.

[58] Here I owe a great debt to Andrew Jacobs' recent book: see Andrew S. Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised: A Study in Early Christian History and Difference*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, esp. p. 7–8. See also Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004.

[59] Jeremy M. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, p. 161.

Arabia and the Late Antique East

☐ Greg FISHER and Philip WOOD

Once a niche subject, the history of pre-Islamic Arabia – a region spanning the Red Sea and the Gulf, the Peninsula, southern Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and the Sinai – is now an established part of the framework of late antique historiography. A period of intensive enquiry has provided us with a more complex view of the Arabian past, one that connects the history of the region and its inhabitants to the history of the Near East and the Roman and Persian empires.[1] A plethora of methodologies and approaches are driving modern studies of the relationship between the inhabitants of pre-Islamic Arabia and their neighbours. Some enquiries remain rooted, for a range of reasons, in the Graeco-Roman and Syriac sources, leaving the later Persian and Arab-Islamic traditions to one side.[2] Others seek to combine the pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions, although the lack of critical editions of key Arab-Islamic

[1] The literature is vast. For a comprehensive analysis with complete and up-to-date bibliography to 2015, see Greg FISHER, ed., *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, focusing on the pre-Islamic period; see also Robert HOYLAND, "Early Islam as a late antique religion," in Scott JOHNSON, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 1055, conceptualising Islam (in part) as "another facet of the kaleidoscope world of Late Antiquity." See too Aziz AL-AZMEH, *The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity. A Critique of Approaches to Arabic Sources,* Berlin, Gerlach, 2014; Angelika NEUWIRTH, Nicolai SINAI, and Michael MARX, eds, *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu,* Leiden, Brill, 2010; Garth FOWDEN, *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014. On the "Arabias": Michael MACDONALD, "Arabs, Arabias, and Arabic before late antiquity," in *Topoi*, vol. 16, 2009, p. 277–332; Robert HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs from the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, London, Routledge, 2001.

[2] Greg FISHER, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans and Sasanians in Late Antiquity,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011 and Greg FISHER, "Kingdoms or dynasties? Arabs, history, and identity in the last century before Islam," in *Journal of Late Antiquity*, vol. 4, 2011, no. 2, p. 245–267, written from the perspective of a Roman historian. See also HOYLAND, *Arabia*, *op. cit.*; Irfan SHAHID, *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs*, Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks, 1984; Irfan SHAHID, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. I, Washington DC, Dumbarton Oaks, 1995.

sources (in particular) has proven to be a serious obstacle.[3] Some research focuses on archaeological, philological, and epigraphic evidence, either alone or as supplements to the different historical traditions.[4] Other studies adopt a comparative-based methodology, in part to mitigate the limitations of the primary sources. A recent volume examines similarities and differences between the late antique Arabian and Egyptian frontiers,[5] while anthropological studies provide useful templates to address ancient Near Eastern scenarios.[6] Arab "barbarians" are being placed alongside late antique western Germanic "barbarians," viewing the evolving relationship between Romans and Arabs as one of chiefdom- and state-formation, or understood within the framework of classicising historiography.[7] Another recent study places the position of the Arabs within the context of state-formation amongst the Berbers in late antique North Africa.[8]

One strand of current scholarship examines the way in which developments of great significance for the Islamic period were not only *underway* prior to the seventh century, but were also *intertwined* with the history of areas adjacent to Arabia. One example of the way that different cultural and religious phenomena connect the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods concerns the Arabic script.[9] Leila Nehmé's discoveries at Hegra have confirmed that the Arabic script evolved out of Nabataean Aramaic script at the southern limits of the old Roman *Provincia Arabia*.[10] Known pre-Islamic examples of a recognisably Arabic script are found in Roman Syria and, on the basis of new discoveries, near Najrān in modern Saudi Arabia. Two of the three Syrian

3 Cf. Al-Azmeh, *The Arabs*, *op. cit*.

4 Denis Genequand, "The archaeological evidence for the Jafnids and the Naṣrids," in Greg Fisher, ed., *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 172–213 and Denis Genequand, "Some thoughts on Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, its dam, its monastery and the Ghassanids," in *Levant*, vol. 38, 2006, no. 1, p. 63–84 (archaeology); Michael C.A. Macdonald, ed., *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language*, Oxford, Archaeopress, 2010 (epigraphic/philological); Pierre-Louis Gatier, "Les Jafnides dans l'épigraphie grecque au VI^e siècle," in Denis genequand and Christian Robin, eds, *Les Jafnides. Des rois arabes au service de Byzance*, Paris, Editions de Boccard, 2015 (epigraphy).

5 Jitse H.F. Dijkstra and Greg Fisher, eds, *Inside and Out: Interactions between Rome and the Peoples on the Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, Leuven, Peeters, 2014.

6 See for example Philip Carl Salzman, "The meeting of the twain: Tribe and state," in Jitse H.F. Dijkstra and Greg Fisher, eds, *Inside and Out*, *op. cit*., p. 83–90; and Greg Fisher, "State and tribe in late antique Arabia: A comparative view," in *ibid*., p. 281–298.

7 Fisher, *Between Empires*, *op. cit*.; Fisher, "Kingdoms or dynasties?", *op. cit*. (barbarians); Geoffrey Greatrex, "Procopius and Roman Imperial Policy in the Arabian and Egyptian Frontier Zones," in Jitse H.F. Dijkstra and Greg Fisher, eds, *Inside and Out*, *op. cit*., p. 249–266 (classicizing historiography).

8 Alexander Drost and Greg Fisher, "Structures of power in late antique borderlands: Arabs, Romans, and Berbers," in John W.I. Lee and Michael North, eds, *Globalizing Borderlands Studies in Europe and North America*, Lincoln, NE, University of Nebraska Press, 2016, p. 33–82; cf. Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 17.

9 On the development of the Arabic script, see Macdonald, *The Development of Arabic* and Zbigniew T. Fiema, Ahmad Al-Jallad, Michael C.A. Macdonald, and Laïla Nehmé, "*Provincia Arabia*: Nabataea, the Emergence of Arabic as a Written Language, and Graeco-Arabica," in Greg Fisher, ed., *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 373–433.

10 Laïla Nehmé, "Aramaic or Arabic? The Nabataeo-Arabic Script and the Language of the Inscriptions Written in this Script," in Ahmad Al-Jallad, ed., *Arabic in Context. Celebrating 400 years of Arabic at Leiden University*, Leiden, Brill, 2017, p. 75–98.

examples, at Zabad and Ḥarrān, are dedicatory inscriptions found on Christian martyria.[11]

By the sixth century, Christianity had penetrated deeply into Arab communities from Syria to Iraq, with the martyr cult of St. Sergius, to whom one of the inscriptions is dedicated, particularly popular with the Arabs.[12] Of the numerous theories advanced to explain the development of the script, and the emergence of Arabic as a prestige language some have focused on the activities of Arab Christians, as well as an imitation of "court culture" by Arabs allied with the Roman or Persian empires.[13] This debate illustrates that the development of the Arabic script – a script of immense religious significance in the Islamic era – needs to be understood within the context of the late antique milieu. Studies on "Graeco-Arabica" – the fascinating interplay between Greek and Arabic in the *Provincia Arabia* and neighbouring regions – further reflect the importance of the pre-Islamic period, and Roman dominance in the Near East, for an understanding the evolution of Arabic.[14]

Rome, Persia, and Arabia

One important advance in the scholarship of the pre-Islamic Near East is a much clearer understanding of how Roman, Persian, and Ḥimyarite interests intersected in Arabia, including the west/central and northern areas that include Mecca and Yathrib (Medina). Such competition, often infused with febrile ideologies and political concerns, created an environment that by the sixth century was progressively polarised along different sectarian lines.

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[11] Zabad: Fiema, Al-Jallad, Macdonald, and Nehmé, "*Provincia Arabia*," *op. cit.*, p. 410–411 and Greg Fisher and Philip Wood, with George Bevan, Geoffrey Greatrex, Basema Hamarneh, Peter Schadler, and Walter Ward, "Arabs and Christianity," in Greg Fisher, ed., *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 347–349; Ḥarrān: Fiema, Al-Jallad, Macdonald, and Nehmé, "*Provincia Arabia*," *op. cit.*, p. 414–415 and Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 349–350; Najrān: see C.J. Robin, Ali al-Ghabban and Said al-Said, "Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān (Arabie séoudite méridionale): nouveaux jalons pour l'histoire de l'écriture, de la langue et du calendrier arabes," in *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres*, 2014, p. 1033–1128. Easily accessible photo at https://www.islamic-awareness.org/history/islam/inscriptions/hspalar1.

[12] Elizabeth Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999, remains the classic study.

[13] See Nabia Abbott, *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Kur'anic Development, with a Full Description of the Kur'an Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1938, p. 5–8; cf. Fisher, *Between Empires*, *op. cit.*, chapter 4; Macdonald, *The Development of Arabic*, *op. cit.*, and Hoyland, *Arabia*, *op. cit.*, p. 242–243 and Wood's contribution to this volume for discussions of language and identity.

[14] See now Fiema, Al-Jallad, Macdonald, and Nehmé, "*Provincia Arabia*," *op. cit.*, p. 395–421; Ahmad al-Jallad, "The Arabic of Petra," in A. Arjava, J. Frösnen, J. Kaimo, eds, *The Petra Papyri V*, Amman, ACOR, p. 35–58 (which also notes cases of Arabic-Aramaic bilingualism); Ahmad al-Jallad and Ali al-Manaser, "New epigraphica from Jordan I: A pre-Islamic Arabic inscription in Greek letters and a Greek inscription from north-eastern Jordan," in *Arabic Epigraphic Notes*, vol. 1, 2015, p. 57–70; Ahmad al-Jallad and Ali al-Manaser, "New epigraphica from Jordan II: Three Safaitic-Greek partial bilingual inscriptions," in *Arabic Epigraphic Notes*, vol. 2, 2016, p. 55–66; Ahmad al-Jallad and Ali al-Manaser, "New epigraphica from Jordan III: Two new Greek-Safaitic bilinguals, Greek graffiti and a Safaitic text by a man from Bostra," unpublished text.

The Arabian "Great Game" – the contest between Rome and Persia for influence in Arabia – can be traced back to as early as the end of the first century BC, when Augustus ordered the prefect of Egypt, Aelius Gallus, to lead an expedition to *Arabia Felix*.[15] As a result, embassies from Ḥimyar and Saba' were dispatched to Rome, acknowledging the emergence of Roman power in the Red Sea.[16] During the same time period, the Parthians appear to have established a presence along the eastern side of the Peninsula, triggering concerns in Rome that may have factored into the decision to send Gallus to the south.[17] In the second century, the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom (AD 106)[18] and the inscriptions from al-Ruwāfa in northwestern Arabia (before 169)[19] reflect continued Roman interest in exerting some kind of influence in the western portion of the Peninsula, but it was not until the reign of Constantius II (337–61) that a determined effort was once again directed southwards. By this point, Ḥimyar had supplanted Saba' as the most powerful kingdom in *Arabia Felix*, while the kings of Sasanian Persia had established a foothold along the eastern side of the Peninsula and, most probably, into Oman.[20] Ḥimyar, which had already despatched embassies to both Rome and Persia, received a Roman embassy in c. 340. Its leader, Theophilus the Indian, sought to convert the Ḥimyarite kings, proponents of a form of Jewish-inspired monotheism,[21] to Christianity. This early ideological effort to win over an increasingly important southern kingdom failed.

Roman-Persian competition for the peoples of Arabia intensified significantly in the fifth and sixth centuries, and was progressively infused with ideological concerns. By the mid-fifth century, Ḥimyar had conquered much of *Arabia Deserta*, extending its influence to the southern boundaries of the Roman and Persian empires. References to polytheism vanished on Ḥimyarite inscriptions by the end of the fourth century,

[15] Strabo, *Geography* 16.4.22; see Hoyland, *Arabia*, *op. cit.*, p. 44–45; S.E. Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa 30 B.C.-A.D. 217*, Leiden, Brill, 1986 and S.E. Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2019.

[16] *Periplus Maris Erythraei* §23; see Hoyland, *Arabia*, *op. cit.*, p. 46–47.

[17] *Periplus* §33; Daniel Potts, *Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, 2 vols., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, vol. 2, p. 111–114, 146-152, 228-229, 274-288.

[18] See Fiema, Al-Jallad, Macdonald, and Nehmé, "*Provincia Arabia*," *op. cit.*, p. 373–395 and G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998.

[19] A new edition of these inscriptions is published in Michael C.A. Macdonald, Aldo Corcella, Touraj Daryaee, Greg Fisher, Matt Gibbs, Ariel Lewin, Donata Violante, and Conor Whately, "Arabs and empires before the sixth century," in Greg Fisher, ed., *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 44–56.

[20] Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2008, p. 2–6; V.F. Piacentini, "Ardashīr I Pāpākan and the Wars against the Arabs: Working Hypothesis on the Sasanian Hold on the Gulf," in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, vol. 15, p. 57–77; D.T. Potts, "The Sasanian relationship with South Arabia: Literary, epigraphic and oral historical perspectives," in *Studia Iranica*, vol. 37, p. 197–213, p. 198.

[21] See now Christian Robin, "The Judaism of the Ancient Kingdom of Ḥimyar in Arabia: A Discreet Conversion," in G. MacDowell, R. Naiweld and D. Stökl, eds, *Diversity and Rabbanization. Jewish Texts and Societies between 400 and 1000 CE*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 165–270, who also summarises the earlier literature.

and with Zoroastrian Persia and Christian Rome to the north, much of central Arabia was "encircled" by "ecumenical"[22] states with monotheistic (or universal) religions.[23]

The three states of Rome, Persia and Ḥimyar developed a complex political relationship with groups in the interior of the Arabian peninsula. In practical terms they managed this relationship through the use of client kings. Ḥimyar co-opted the great confederation of central Arabia, Maʿadd, probably by using the leaders of the southern Arabian tribe of Kinda and installing them as viceroys.[24] The descendants of one of these leaders, Ḥujr, were later subjected to Roman diplomatic pressure during a time of poorly-understood disturbances at the southern limits of the *Provincia Arabia*.[25] Earlier, an Arab leader in Persian service named Amorkesos had defected to Rome, before setting up a fiefdom somewhere at the northern end of the Red Sea in the late fifth century.[26] At much the same time, after a time of tension between Christians and Jews in South Arabia, Rome's ally Aksūm gained a stranglehold on Ḥimyarite politics, installing a series of rulers in Ẓafār receptive to Aksūmite and Roman interests.[27] Meanwhile, in the north, Roman pressure finally delivered results as the Arab leaders in control there apparently "went over."[28] It was a time of great change, and for a period, with Ḥimyarite leaders aligned with Rome under Aksūm's wardship, and the western side of the Peninsula and the north apparently stable under the tutelage of Roman allies, Rome controlled a swathe of territory perhaps as far as Yemen itself, reaping tangible results: an Ḥimyarite royal inscription from the desert west of Riyadh, dated to June 521, records a mission led by the Ḥimyarite king Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur that perhaps penetrated as far as southern Iraq, and may have been carried out with the support of Roman allies.[29]

In 523, the situation changed once again. Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur had died by the summer of 522, and was replaced by a man known variously as Joseph, Masrūq, or Dhū Nuwās. Once in power, Joseph, asserted his commitment to Judaism, revolted against his Aksūmite overlords and attacked the Aksūmite troops in Yemen. One aspect of Joseph's rebellion included the killing of Christians in Najrān. Though this was

[22] Hoyland, "Early Islam," *op. cit.*, p. 1057.

[23] Theophilus' mission is reported by Philostorgius = *Church History*, 3.4. See also Christian Robin, "The peoples beyond the Arabian frontier in late antiquity: Recent epigraphic discoveries and latest advances," in Jitse H.F. Dijkstra and Greg Fisher, eds, *Inside and Out*, *op. cit.*, p. 33–82. For the conquest of *Arabia Deserta* see Christian Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta in Late Antiquity: The epigraphic evidence," in Greg Fisher, ed, *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 137–144.

[24] Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta," *op. cit.*, p. 144.

[25] Edwell, Fisher, Greatrex, Whately, and Wood, "Arabs," *op. cit.*, p. 219–221.

[26] Malchus, fragment 1. See Macdonald, Corcella, Daryaee, Fisher, Gibbs, Lewin, Violante, and Whately, "Arabs and empires," *op. cit.*, p. 85–88 for translation and commentary on this passage.

[27] Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta," *op. cit.*, p. 145–147.

[28] See the confused passages in Theophanes, *Chronicle*, p. 141 and 144, and Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.36, with commentary in Edwell, Fisher, Greatrex, Whately, and Wood, "Arabs," *op. cit.*, p. 219–221; see too Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta," *op. cit.*, p. 147.

[29] Ma'sal 2 = Ry 510, translated and discussed in Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta," *op. cit.*, p. 156–158. Cf. too. Ps.-Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle*, p. 57–58 for activities of pro-Roman Arabs.

probably not a targeted religious pogrom, and does not feature very prominently in the inscriptions of Joseph's regime, the martyrdoms became famous throughout the Christian Near East.[30] At the urging of Justin I (518–27), the Aksūmite king Ella Asbeha (Caleb) (r. c. 500-34) launched an expedition across the Red Sea to oust Joseph, who died perhaps sometime between 524 and 530.[31]

The end of Joseph's rule gave new life to the possibility of a Christian axis binding South Arabia to the Roman Empire, and Justinian (527-65) persisted with diplomatic efforts throughout the western part of Arabia. The emperor sent embassies to the Aksūmite appointee on the Ḥimyarite throne, Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ (Esimiphaeus) (r. 531-35), as well as to Ella Asbeha, "demanding that both nations on account of their community of religion should make common cause with the Romans in the war against the Persians."[32] Justinian also pressured the descendants of Ḥujr in northern Arabia, winning over a certain Kaisos/Qays, as well as his sons. Yet tangible results from the south were not as forthcoming: Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ and Ella Asbeha appeared reluctant to commit to fighting on Rome's behalf. In c. 535, Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ was replaced by Abraha, who "only once began the journey [to invade Persia] and then straightway turned back."[33]

Abraha distanced Ḥimyar from Aksūm, and wielded significant political influence. A long inscription on the Marib Dam records a diplomatic conference held in in 547, to which ambassadors from Rome, Persia, Aksūm, and the Roman- and Persian-allied Arabs were summoned. Abraha was a Christian, as clearly shown by his royal inscriptions,[34] but the king sought to align Ḥimyar along his own interests, and was clearly reluctant to surrender Ḥimyarite policy to the demands of the great powers to the north. Nevertheless, Abraha's Christianity could not avoid an ideological association with the Roman Empire, and relations between the two states appear to have been cordial: Justinian, for example, may have provided artisans and material

[30] Al-Ṭabarī, *History of Prophets and Kings*, 1.919-20. On this see Munt, Daryaee, Edaibat, Hoyland, and Toral-Niehoff, "Arabic and Persian sources," *op. cit.*, p. 447–450. For the Najrān episode see Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, and Christian Robin, eds, *Juifs et Chrétiens en Arabie aux V^e et VI^e siècles: regards croisés sur les sources*, Paris, Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2009 and Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta," *op. cit.*, p. 147–148. A useful narrative is given in N. Nebes, "The Martyrs of Najrān and the End of the Ḥimyar: On the Political History of South Arabia in the Early Sixth Century," in Neuwirth, Sinai, Marx, eds, *The Qur'ān in Context*, *op. cit.*, p. 27–59.

[31] Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta," *op. cit.*, p. 149. These events may be reflected in the medieval Ethiopic text the Kebra Nagast ('the glories of the kings'), which gives a prominent place to both Caleb and Justin. Note the discussions of Muriel Debié, "Le Kebra Nagast éthiopien : une réponse apocryphe aux événements de Najran ?" in Beaucamp, Briquel-Chatonnet, Robin, eds, *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie*, *op. cit*, p. 255–278; Manfred Kropp, "Zur Deutung des Titels. «Kebra Nagast»," in *Oriens Christianus*, 80, 1996, p. 108–115; Pierluigi Piovanelli, "The apocryphal legitimation of a Solomonic Dynasty in the Kebra Nagast – A Reappraisal," in *Aethiopica*, 16, 2013, p. 7–44.

[32] Procopius, 1.20.9-10; cf. Nonnosus = Photius, *Bibliothèque*, 3, translated by R. Henry, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1959; Robin, "The peoples beyond the Arabian frontier," *op. cit.*, p. 35.

[33] Procopius, 1.20.12; cf. though Malalas, *Chronicle*, 18.56.

[34] For translation and discussion of these texts see Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta," *op. cit.*, p. 150–154, 164–166, 169–171.

for the famous church in Ṣanʿā', al-Qalīs. Later, after Abraha's death, his sons Yaksūm and Masrūq proved unable to maintain Ḥimyarite independence. Fighting between themselves for control of the kingdom, perhaps with the connivance of Roman and Persian agents, they squandered their inheritance. Masrūq emerged victorious, but soon fell victim to Persian ambitions in the region. He was toppled by a Persian invasion in c. 570, which was facilitated by Himyarite elites who had once supported Joseph, and the Arabic sources describe a pogrom against the Axumites in south Arabia.[35]

Arab allies, Arab enemies, Arab Mediators

Another important development in modern studies of pre-Islamic Arabia concerns the role and function of individual Arab leaders, and the "tribal" group to which they are conventionally related. Current views privilege the élite over the "tribe,"[36] partly due to evidential concerns, and partly for methodological reasons concerned with state formation, state/tribe relationships, and for comparisons with élite barbarian leaders elsewhere in the Roman and Persian empires.[37]

Different groups of Arabs and individual Arab leaders, are known to us from contemporary Graeco-Roman, Syriac, and epigraphic sources, caught up in the competition between Persia, Rome, and Ḥimyar, as shown in the table below. Independence of action largely proved impossible: alliance with one of the major powers offered the only practical solution to those in the Arabian borderlands, reflecting political realities that played out in similar ways for the peoples of western Europe, the Caucasus, and Mesopotamia.[38]

***Major Arab Allied leaders known from contemporary evidence*[39]**

Persian Arabs

late 3rd c.	ʿAmr(u) of Lakhm
d. 328	Mara' l-Qays/ Imru' l-Qays
late 4th c.	Podosaces
early 5th c.	al-Nuʿmān I

[35] Tabari, I, 945-58. See Robert G. Hoyland, "Insider and outsider sources: Historiographical Reflections on late antique Arabia," in Fisher and Dijkstra, eds, *Inside and Out*, *op. cit.*, p. 273–275 [267–280]. Boaz Shoshan, "The Sasanian conquest of Himyar reconsidered: In search of a local hero," in M. Bjerregaard Mortensen, G. Dye, I. Oliver, and T. Tesei, eds, *The Study of Islamic Origins: New Perspectives and Contexts*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2021, p. 259–274 examines the late sixth century aftermath.

[36] See for e.g. Salzman, "The meeting of the twain," *op. cit.*, for definitions and discussion of this term.

[37] Fisher, "State and tribe," *op. cit.*, for discussion of these elements; see too Hoyland, "Insider and outsider," *op. cit.*

[38] See e.g. Fisher, *Between Empires*, *op. cit.*

[39] Adapted from Fisher, ed., *Arabs and Empires*, *op. cit.*, p. xxv–xxvi.

460s/70s	Amorkesos/ Imruʾ l-Qays (switched sides → Rome)
5th c.	al-Mundhir
late 5th/early 6th c.	al-Nuʿmān II
r. c. 504–54	al-Mundhir, (Al(a)moundaros/as), son of Sikika/ Saqiqa/Zekike
c. 554–?	ʿAmr/Ambrus, son of al-Mundhir
570s	Qābus, brother of ʿAmr
590s–c. 602	al-Nuʿmān III, son of al-Mundhir

Roman Arabs

350/60s	Zokomos
370s	Mavia
4th/5th c.	Thaʿlaba, possible king of Ghassān
c. 420	Aspebetus/Peter
c. 420	Terebon (Elder, son of Aspebetus)
mid-fifth c.	Terebon (Younger, grandson of Terebon)
late 5th c.	Jabala (Gabala)
528	al-Tafar
520s	Gnouphas
520s	Naaman (al-Nuʿmān)
early 6th c., r. c. 528/9–568/9	al-Ḥārith (Arethas), son of Jabala
early-mid 6th c.	Abū Karib, brother of al-Ḥārith
early 6th c.	Erethas, son of al-Ḥārith
early 6th c.	Thaʿlaba, son of Audelas
?–d. 545	unnamed son of al-Ḥārith
?–d. 554	J(G)abala, son of al-Ḥārith
c. 568	(presumed ally) Asaraël, son of Talemos
?–?, r. 568/9–581/2, d.??	al-Mundhir (Al(a)moundaros/as), son of al-Ḥārith
late 6th c.	al-Nuʿmān, son of al-Mundhir
late 6th c.	unnamed sons of al-Mundhir (one perhaps al-Nuʿmān)
late 6th c.	Jafna, son of al-Mundhir

Ḥimyarite Arabs

5th c.(?)	Ḥujr
late 5th/early 6th c.	al-Ḥārith/Arethas

possibly the same figure as:

late 5th/early 6th c.	Arethas, "son of Thalabene"
late 5th/early 6th c.	Ogaros (?Ḥujr), son of Arethas, "son of Thalabene"
late 5th/early 6th c.	Badicharimos, son of Arethas, "son of Thalabene"
early-mid (?) 6th c.	Qays/Kaisos, related to al-Ḥārith/Arethas (above)
early-mid (?) 6th c.	Mavias, son of Qays
early-mid (?) 6th c.	ʿAmr, son of Qays
early-mid (?) 6th c.	Yezid, son of Qays

With political pressures came ideological and religious expectations, such as alignment with Christianity for allies of Rome. Hagiographies of the fifth and sixth centuries are replete with stories of Arab "conversion," often effected in rural areas by wandering holy men.[40] Some "conversions" resulted in military alliance, and tangible results on the battlefield.[41] Many such narratives are didactic or rhetorical in nature, but at least one Arab convert became a bishop, attending the Council of Ephesus in 431,[42] while Amorkesos won an audience with the Emperor Leo through his timely use of a Christian priest.[43] The high-profile participation in ecclesiastical politics of the Jafnids[44] and the scattered epigraphic examples from parts of the late antique Near East also illustrate the permeation of Christianity into Arab life.[45] The martyr cult of St. Sergius, whose principal shrine was located at Ruṣāfa in Syria, and, as noted above, proved popular amongst Arab leaders.[46] Such interest was not confined to the Roman Empire: Sergius was, in the eyes of one contemporary, "the most efficacious saint in Persia";[47] Aḥūdemmeh, the bishop of Tikrit, even attempted to lure pilgrims away from Ruṣāfa by providing an alternative, closer to home in Iraq.[48]

The literary and epigraphic evidence for the Jafnids illustrates their role as Christian Arab leaders in the villages and towns of what is now rural northern Jordan and southern Syria. Little is known about what, if any, religious affiliation was followed by Ḥujr and his sons, although deepening Roman interest in northern Arabia in the late fifth and early sixth centuries suggests that Christianity may have penetrated here as well.[49] Parts of eastern Arabia and the Gulf were organised into the Church of the East, and excavation has revealed the existence of an ancient monastic settlement at Kilwa, in northern Arabia. There was a Christian community at Socotra, though this

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[40] See Greg Fisher and Philip Wood, "Writing the History of the 'Persian Arabs': The Pre-Islamic Perspective on the "Naṣrids" of al-Ḥīrah," in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2016, p. 247–290 for a collection of such accounts with commentary; on the importance of rural "networks" of religious significance, see Elizabeth Fowden, "Rural Converters among the Arabs," in A. Papaconstantinou, N. McLynn, and D. Schwartz, eds, *Conversion in Late Antiquity*, Farnham and Burlington VT, Ashgate, 2015, p. 175–196.

[41] E.g. Zokomos: Sozomen, *Kirchengeschichte*, 6.38; see also the story of Mavia: Socrates Scholasticus, *Kirchengeschichte*, 5.1.

[42] "Aspebetos." For his career see Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of St. Euthymius*, p. 10, translated by Richard Price, *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Kalamazoo MI, Cistercian Press, 1991.

[43] Malchus, fr. 1 (trans. Blockley): "Amorkesos wished to become an ally of the Romans and phylarch of the Saracens under Roman rule on the borders of Arabia Petraea. He, therefore, sent Peter, the bishop of his tribe, to Leo…"

[44] The name given to the Roman-allied Arab family that dominates our sources for c. 528–590. For Jafnid epigraphy see Gatier, "Les Jafnides," *op. cit.*; Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 313–347.

[45] E.g. the range of martyria inscriptions from Anasartha and al-Ramthāniye, together with those from Zabad and Ḥarrān, combined with the evidence from the Jafnids. See Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 311–312.

[46] Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, *op. cit*.

[47] Theophylact Simocatta, 5.14.3.

[48] *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (edited and translated by Francois Nau, *Patrologia Orientalis* 3, p. 29). For discussion of Aḥūdemmeh's career see Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 350–357.

[49] Leila Nehmé, "New dated Nabatean inscriptions," in *Arabian Epigraphic Notes*, 3, 2017, p. 121–164, notes (p. 150) Christian inscriptions at Dūmat al-Jandal which probably lay in Hujrid domains. Hind the elder, the wife of al-Nu'mān III of Hira, had a Hujrid background and is referred to in an inscription as the founder of a monastery at al-Ḥīra (p. 153).

is of unknown antiquity, and we have already encountered the Christian population in South Arabia, which, in the sixth century, was Julianist.[50] Certainly it seems clear that Christianity spread southward from Rome and Persia throughout parts of the Peninsula, even if mapping the spread with certainty has proven elusive.[51]

Contemporary knowledge of Persia's Arab allies and their religious affiliation is largely provided by Roman sources. The Naṣrids[52] *may* have been linked with Persia as early as the late third century, but it is impossible to establish a definitive link between the ʿAmr(u) who appears on the late third-century inscription of Narseh from Paikuli, and the series of Persian Arab leaders that terrorised church congregations, performed human sacrifice, fought Rome's armies, and had the ear of the Persian kings, and who were eventually deposed in c. 602/4.[53]

Much has been written about the military function of both Roman- and Persian-allied Arabs in the war between the two great powers, and of Arab raiding and its consequences.[54] Away from the military sphere, and of great interest for the themes of this volume, is the function of the Jafnid and Naṣrid leaders as mediators in both religious and secular spheres.[55]

Our understanding of Arab mediation is informed by modern studies of tribal leadership that emphasise the importance of the skill for the survival of tribal leaders. Such studies illustrate that successful mediation allowed leaders to navigate the complex relationships between tribes and states, and could also bring extensive opportunities to win prestige, wealth, and political power, especially during periods of inter- (or intra-) state competition. Obtaining resources from the state for the benefit of others and protecting the integrity of the tribe from the state are two examples of such intercessory activities.[56] While little is known of any role played by the Ḥujrid leaders

[50] On Socotra see G. Hatke, "The Other South Arabians. The Ancient South Arabian Kingdoms and their MSA (Modern South Arabian) Neighbors (ca. 300 BCE-550CE)," in G. Hatke and R. Ruzicka, eds, *Ancient South Arabia Through History. Kingdoms, Tribes and Traders*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 1–62, at p. 47–49.

[51] Saba Farès-Drappeau, "Christian monasticism on the eve of Islam: Kilwa (Saudi Arabia) — new evidence," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2011, p. 243–252 (Kilwa). Two recent surveys are very useful: F. Briquel-Chattonet, "L'expansion du christianisme en Arabie: l'apport des sources syriaques," in *Semitica et Classica*, 3, 2010, p. 177–187; M. Nicosia, "Christianity in the Gulf: Vestiges of the East Syrian presence in late antiquity," in *West & East*, vol. 4, 2021, p. 371–387.

[52] The name given to the line of Persian-allied Arab leaders between c. 293 and 604. See Fisher and Wood, "Persian Arabs," *op. cit*.

[53] Helmut Humbach and Prods O. Skjærvø, *The Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli*, , vol. 3.1, Munich, Wiesbaden, 1983, p. 71.

[54] Edwell, Fisher, Greatrex, Whately, and Wood, "Arabs," *op. cit*.; Noel Lenski, "Captivity and slavery among the Saracens in late antiquity (ca. 250–630)," in *Antiquité tardive*, vol. 19, 2011, p. 237–266.

[55] For Arab leaders as mediators see generally Greg Fisher, "Mavia to al-Mundhir: Arab Christians and Arab Tribes in the Late Roman East," in Kirill Dmitriev and Isabel Toral-Niehoff, eds, *Religious Culture in Late Antique Arabia*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2017, p. 165–218 ; Fisher, "State and tribe," *op. cit*.

[56] E.g. Philip Carl Salzman, *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East*, Buffalo, NY, Prometheus Books, 2008; id., *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State*, London, Routledge, 2004; id., "Tribal chiefs as middlemen: The politics of encapsulation in the Middle East," in *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1974, p. 203–210; Willian Lancaster and Fidelity Lancaster, "Concepts of leadership in Bedouin society," in John Haldon and Lawrence

in this regard, mediation was a defining attribute of the approach taken by Jafnid and Naṣrid leaders to opportunities and obstacles in their relations with their Roman and Persian patrons. Success at mediation brought renown and stability to the two principal tribal dynasties in both the religious and secular fields, and highlights the place of tribal chiefs as intercessory agents between different late antique communities.

The Jafnids

The preeminent position of the Jafnids was primarily won through success in mediation: between tribe and state, between the state and the rural settlements of Syria and Jordan, and between rival bishops. It was often carried out at the direct invitation of the state.

In 528, the Jafnid leader al-Ḥārith was personally chosen by Justinian as a consolidated ruler over the numerous Arab tribes which were in alliance with Rome.[57] He thus became the primary locus for the movement of state resources such as gold, supplies, and equipment, and also became responsible for protecting the position of his family and the people under his leadership.

The Jafnids may have originally gained Roman patronage through their ability to defeat previous Roman Arab clients.[58] The relative permanence of the Jafnid-Roman relationship rested on their continued ability to secure the borderlands from other Arab groups and their continued usefulness in the Persian wars. Both of these activities were in part dependent on the Jafnids' ability to reward their followers, whether with booty or by redistributing the Romans' gifts. Their mediation with this wider circle of Arabs, whether as allies or as overawed potential rivals, was dependent on their ability to remain both useful and threatening in the eyes of the Romans.[59]

But what set the Jafnids apart from earlier Arab federates was their close ties to the rural populations of Roman Syria, in particular Severan Miaphysite Christians. Earlier Arab allies of the Romans had developed close ties with local Christians (such as Aspebetos in in fifth-century Palestine)[60] but the Jafnids appear as high-profile patrons and arbitrators for Miaphysites in a way that their predecessors had not. In addition, figures such as Aspebetos had not provided a combination of politico-religious patronage and effective military leadership that was nearly as potent as that offered by the Jafnids al-Ḥārith and his son al-Mundhir.

I. Conrad, eds, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, Elites Old and New*, vol. 4, Berlin, Gerlach Press, 2021, p. 29–62; Ernest Gellner, "Tribalism and State in the Middle East," in J. Khoury and P. Kostiner, eds, *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1990, p. 109–126.

57 Procopius, 1.17.40-8.

58 Maurice Sartre, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine*, Bruxelles, Latomus, 1982, p. 148.

59 Fisher, *Between Empires*, *op. cit.*, p. 116–127.

60 Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 302–311.

Miaphysites in the Roman world had suffered periodic persecution by the emperors Justin I, Justinian and Justin II. But this was interspersed with successive imperial attempts to forge compromises with the Miaphysites and to act as an orthodox ruler on behalf of both Miaphysites and their Chalcedonian opponents at the same time. The Jafnids probably converted to Christianity during a period of Miaphysite dominance during the reign of Anastasius (498-512).[61] The Miaphysite historian John of Ephesus, writing his *Ecclesiastical History* in c. 585, would decry Chalcedonian persecution, but primarily saw it as the work of fanatical bishops, rather than the emperors of his day. He seems to have hoped earnestly for reconciliation, and we should not imagine that the boundaries between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites were insurmountable at this time.[62]

However, the loss of imperial patronage does seem to have had the effect of splintering the Miaphysites into different factions and producing "internal heresy," such as the Tritheist movement, led by the Cilician monks Conon and Eugenius. The breakdown in central authority became particularly acute after c. 550.[63] It is against this context that the Jafnids could establish themselves as religious mediators among the Miaphysites.

John of Ephesus, writing before c. 568, describes the appointment of two new bishops, Theodore and Jacob Baradeus, probably intended for the cities of Bostra and Edessa in c. 542. Jacob began to consecrate Miaphysite clergy, many of whom were based in rural areas and who thus provided an alternative to the Chalcedonians. The appointments had been made possible through a number of different court figures, among them the Jafnid phylarch al-Ḥārith.[64]

Al-Ḥārith went on to play a significant role as a patron of the Miaphysites. A Syriac monastic letter celebrates the role of the "Christ-loving *patrikios*" in condemning the Tritheist "heresy," and he probably founded two Miaphysite monasteries, among other acts of Christian euergetism.[65] This type of patronage is even more visible under al-Ḥārith's son, al-Mundhir, who acted as a moderator between two rival Miaphysite factions, the Jacobites and the Paulites. Al-Mundhir made formal attempts to heal this schism at Constantinople at the request of the Chalcedonian emperor Tiberius, in 580.[66] These acts garnered him considerable prestige. Though his attempt at

[61] Exactly how this is occurred is not reported by the sources, but the Jafnids were certainly adopted as clients during the reign of Anastasius, i.e. during the brief window when Miaphysitism was an imperial orthodoxy (Theophanes, *Chronicle*, p. 141–143). Note SHAHID, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, op. cit.*, p. 695.

[62] Philip WOOD, *We Have No King but Christ: Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquests (c. 400–585)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 163–173.

[63] WOOD, *We Have No King*, *op. cit.*, p. 170 and 250.

[64] The same event is described in several different hagiographies and al-Ḥārith's role seems to have been progressively exaggerated as time went on. See Philip WOOD, "Christianity and the Arabs in the Sixth Century," in Greg FISHER and Jitse H.F. DIJKSTRA, eds, *Inside and Out*, *op. cit.*, p. 355–370, 361–362.

[65] FISHER, *Between Empires*, *op. cit.*, p. 59; WOOD, *We Have No King*, *op. cit.*, p. 250–251.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 251. For the inscriptions relating to the Jafnids see GATIER, "Les Jafnides," *op. cit.* and George BEVAN, Greg FISHER, and Denis GENEQUAND, "The late antique church at Tall al-'Umayrī East: New Evidence for the Jafnid Family and the Cult of St. Sergius in Northern Jordan," in *BASOR*, vol. 373, 2015, p. 49–68. For the disputes between the

reconciliation was ultimately unsuccessful, he is lauded by John of Ephesus in terms normally reserved for an emperor: he is a pious and self-controlled ruler, able to pursue a path of moderation when all around him have lost their reason.[67]

As allies appointed by a Chalcedonian emperor, but whose political position was increasingly associated with the Miaphysites of the rural borderlands, al-Ḥārith and his son al-Mundhir cultivated a political middle ground where mediation was the key to success. This middle ground spanned religious boundaries, enabling them to move between different communities that were often suspicious of one another.[68]

Ultimately, we should remember that Jafnid power was built on their continued ability to balance the competing needs to be a useful client to the Romans and a supplier of booty to their own followers. The fall of al-Mundhir, greatly lamented by John of Ephesus, was precipitated by the phylarch's ever-increasing demands for subsidies from the Romans to match his successes in war. The Jafnid leader was captured in a ruse, quickly deposed, and the alliance between his family and the Empire dissolved.[69] In the event, al-Mundhir's exile illustrates to what degree Jafnid power had always been dependent on how well they fitted Roman policies and priorities at any given time. Note, however, that some Jafnids probably continued in Roman service and may have converted to Chalcedonianism, so modern historians should be wary of following John of Ephesus' rhetoric too closely, in depicting the Jafnids simply as devoted Miaphysites.

The Naṣrids

The Naṣrids attitude towards Christianity was initially much more negative than that of the Jafnids. An early source illustrating their approach is the Syriac *Life of St. Symeon*, which describes how a certain al-Nuʿmān (d. 418) responded to the power of the saint. Explaining that his allegiance to Ctesiphon prevented him from becoming Christian, al-Nuʿmān then tried to enforce a conversion ban amongst his followers. He then mysteriously received a vision, and then a sound thrashing. Bruised, he wisely decided to allow anyone who wished, to adopt Christianity without fear.[70] It would be easy to dismiss this story as Roman, Christian, anti-barbarian (and anti-Persian)

supporters of Jacob Baradeus and the sometime patriarch of Antioch, Paul the black, see Ernest Brooks, "The Patriarch Paul of Antioch and the Alexandrine Schism of 575," in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 30, 1929/30, p. 468–476 and Pauline Allen, "Religious Conflict between Antioch and Alexandria c. 565-630 CE," in Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil, eds, *Religious Conflict from Early Christianity to the Rise of Islam*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2013, p. 187–200.

67 Wood, "Christianity and the Arabs in the sixth century," *op. cit*., p. 359.

68 See Wood, *We Have No King*, *op. cit*., chapter 6; Lucas van Rompay, "Society and community in the Christian East," in M. Maas, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 239–266; W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972.

69 For the demise of the Jafnids, see Wood, *We Have No King*, *op. cit*., p. 252–253; Fisher, *Between Empires*, *op. cit*., p. 177–178; Edwell, Fisher, Greatrex, Whately, and Wood, "Arabs," *op. cit*., p. 255–268 and Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit*., p. 325–328.

70 *Life of Symeon* (Syriac), p. 67, translated by Robert Doran, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, Kalamazoo MI, Cistercian Press, 1992.

rhetoric. But beyond the expected demonstration of the superiority of the Christian God, in a Christian text, lies an important clue to Naṣrid policy. The approach taken by al-Nuʿmān – non-committal, or even inclusive – was replicated in various degrees by those who followed him, even during times where the Naṣrid leaders themselves were demonized for persecuting Christians. The best-known of the Naṣrid leaders, al-Mundhir (504-54) is repeatedly castigated in Roman sources for sacrificing all manner of people to pagan deities.[71]

Yet these atrocities took place on raids into *Roman* lands; the killing of *Roman* Christians can be explained as part of the religiously-polarised conflict between Christian Rome and Zoroastrian Persia. Roman Christians were fair game for Persian raids; but in Iraq, there had been churches at the Naṣrid city of al-Ḥīra since at least 410, and a town near al-Ḥīra had held a major synod in 424.[72] The growing prominence of the Church of the East, the position of Christian leaders in Sasanian political circles, and the sporadic patronage of (and interest in) St. Sergius sites (including Ruṣāfa) by Persian monarchs clearly show that the Naṣrid leaders required a balanced strategy to approach religious issues.[73]

It does not seem, then, that the Naṣrid were particularly interested in fermenting problems between themselves and Christians in their *own* territory. If anything, they made a conscious attempt to appeal to all confessions, and there is a curious tradition that al-Mundhir flirted with the idea of becoming Christian himself, although these stories have the odour of Roman propaganda.[74] More interesting is the response which al-Mundhir made to an embassy from Joseph in the aftermath of the killings at Najrān. Joseph sent messengers to al-Mundhir, encouraging him to escalate his anti-Christian raids, but al-Mundhir demurred, apparently to avoid alienating Christians in his own army.[75] Yet only a short while later, our main source for these events, the *Chronicle* of Ps.-Zachariah, records one of al-Mundhir's most daring raids into Roman Syria, where, the author avers, nuns from Emesa and Apamea were captured and then sacrificed.[76] Even if we treat these stories as fact, rather than Roman stereotype, there need not be a contradiction here. Roman Christians could be killed or sold for ransom, as long as those nearer to home – that is, those whose support was required – were left alone. Prestige for the Naṣrid leaders might be won on the battlefield and

[71] Procopius, 2.28.12; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, p. 177–179; Malalas, *Chronicle*, p. 445, 460–461.

[72] Jean-Baptiste Chabot, ed. and trans., *Synodicon Orientale*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1902, p. 285/676. See C. Bosworth, "Iran and the Arabs before Islam," in E. Yarshater, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 1983, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 593–612; on al-Ḥīra see Isabel Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra: Eine Arabische Kulturmetropole im Spätantike Kontext*, Leiden, Brill, 2013. For the Church of the East see Joel Walker, "From Nisibis to Xi'an: The Church of the East across Sasanian Persia," in Scott Johnson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 994–1052.

[73] Philip Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert. Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, esp. chapter 7. Persian kings and Sergius: see Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, *op. cit.*, p. 128 (Khusrau I) and 135 (Khusrau II).

[74] See for e.g. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, p. 157–158.

[75] Ps.-Zachariah, *Chronicle*, 8.3d.

[76] Ps.-Zachariah, *Chronicle*, 8.5a.

bolstered by royal support, but it was also crucially obtained by holding the respect of different communities, both Christians and non-Christians alike. This, too, was a form of mediation that was driven by political concerns, of keeping the peace between the different groups of people under Naṣrid influence, and it also represented an ability to bridge different parts of the sectarian milieu. The balancing act embodied by the policy of the Naṣrids reflected the fundamental capacity of a tribal leader to build prestige and influence, by maintaining the goodwill of the constituent parts of those under his leadership.[77]

The examples of the Jafnids and Nasrids (and possibly the Ḥujrids too) allow us to see the fragility of these middlemen between the great powers and the tribes of the Arabian interior. On one hand they derived their influence from great power patronage: this provided the wargear and money that allowed them to dominate potential enemies and reward clients. But it also left them vulnerable to a given political equilibrium. Only the continuation of conflict between the powers and demonstration of military prowess ensured that sponsorship would continue. Excessive demands on their patrons, or unwarranted displays of independence could be swiftly punished.

The Great Power Stimulus in Arabia

As noted in the introduction to this essay, a welcome development in the historiography of the pre-Islamic Near East is its incorporation into some of the broad research problems posed by scholars of late antiquity. In particular, questions are now being asked about the similarities between the well-studied "barbarian west" and the interaction between Romans and Arabs in the east.[78] Historians of the Rhine and Danube frontiers have stressed how contact with the Roman Empire effected long term political and economic change in the *barbaricum*. Settlement concentration and the hoarding of money and weapons all suggest an increase in hierarchy and in militarisation.[79] Both phenomena are plausibly connected to the role of the empire as an employer, recruiting barbarian troops who then brought back new skills and technology across the border, and as a predator, stimulating the creation of coalitions to resist Roman power or negotiate for subsidies. In addition, after they crossed the frontier and established their own kingdoms on former Roman territory, the kingdoms of the Franks, Visigoths, Ostrogoths and Vandals made use of imperial technology,

[77] Gustave VON GRUNEBAUM, "The nature of Arab unity before Islam," in *Arabica*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1963, p. 11 [5–23].

[78] Robert HOYLAND, "Late Roman Provincia Arabia Monophysite Monks and Arab Tribes: A Problem of Centre and Periphery," in *Semitica et Classica*, vol. 2, 2009, p. 117–139; FISHER, *Between Empires*, *op. cit*. Peter WEBB, *Imagining the Arabs*: *Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, is, to our minds, unfairly critical of attempts to draw comparisons with other parts of the Roman world.

[79] Lotte HEDEAGER, *Iron-Age Societies: From Tribe to State in northern Europe, 500 BC to AD 700*, translated by John HINES, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1992; Peter HEATHER, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History*, London, Macmillan, 2005, p. 456–459; C.R. WHITTAKER, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A social and economic study*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994; HOYLAND, *In God's Path*, *op. cit*., p. 17–26.

iconography, and legal, political, and religious ideas as the "inheritors" of Roman power in the west.[80]

We can trace similar patterns in the Arabian peninsula. Michael Macdonald has observed the references to Roman federate units drawn from the nomads in the Safaitic epigraphy.[81] The second-century al-Ruwāfa inscriptions from northwest Saudi Arabia suggest that Arab troops were being employed as militia in the area.[82] References in the late fourth/early fifth century *Notitia Dignitatum* make clear reference to "Saracen" troops,[83] and authors such as Ammianus, Sozomen, and Socrates Scholasticus describe Arab soldiers fighting with (and sometimes against) imperial forces.[84] In the sixth century, Jafnid and Naṣrid leaders fought alongside the Roman and Persian armies in campaigns in Syria and Mesopotamia, while troops drawn from the peoples of central and southern Arabia fought as far north as southern Iraq alongside the kings of Ḥimyar.[85] One can speculate that the organisation of military units served to endorse and reify ethnic/tribal groups that might have otherwise been more ephemeral.

Exposure to great power clientage may have also stimulated conflict within the peninsula. Arab expectations of booty,[86] or the need for pasture in times of drought,[87] also seem to have driven the belligerence of the Naṣrid or Jafnid kings, even when the Romans and Persians were officially at peace. Our sources for the east tend to show us the peaks of the hierarchy, the Arab kings who acted as middlemen, but they were themselves patrons to wider confederations whose loyalty they had to maintain. Though the archaeological investigation of the Arab peninsula is not as developed as that for northwestern Europe, we can still reasonably point to the demand for wargear, as something that stimulated trade. For instance, the frontier town of Umm al-Jimāl in the northern Transjordan seems very prosperous: it hosted a theatre and some fifteen churches, but did not hold any official position in the Roman administrative hierarchy and was not the seat of a bishop. Its excavator, Bert de Vries, has plausibly

[80] See for example Heather, *Fall of the Roman Empire*, *op. cit.*; Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005; Peter Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500-700*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

[81] Michael C.A. Macdonald, "On Saracens, the Rawwāfah Inscription and the Roman Army," in Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity in Pre-Islamic Arabia*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009; Cf. Fergus Millar, *Religion, Language and Community in the Roman Near East: Constantine to Muhammad*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 159 connecting the *equites Thamudeni* of the *Notitia Dignitatum* with the Thamūd mentioned in the Qur'ān.

[82] Macdonald, Corcella, Daryaee, Fisher, Gibbs, Lewin, Violante, and Whately, "Arabs and empires," *op. cit.*, p. 44–56. Also note A. al-Jallad and C. Bernard, "New Safaitic and Greek Inscriptions from the Jordanian Ḥarrah Relating to Auxiliary Roman Military Units," in *ZDMG*, vol. 171, 2021, p. 69–80.

[83] See for example *Nd. Or.* 32.27-8, 28.17, and 34.22. See also Irfan Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs*, Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984, p. 57–63.

[84] See Macdonald, Corcella, Daryaee, Fisher, Gibbs, Lewin, Violante, and Whately, "Arabs and empires," *op. cit.*, p. 74–89.

[85] See the discussion above, and Robin, "The peoples beyond the Arabian frontier," *op. cit.*; Edwell, Fisher, Greatrex, Whately, and Wood, "Arabs," *op. cit.*

[86] E.g. Theophylact Simocatta, discussed in *ibid.*, p. 262–263.

[87] E.g. *ibid.*, p. 218–219.

suggested that its wealth came from the trade in mounts, possibly used for warfare.[88] Similarly, Patricia Crone speculated that the Quraysh of Mecca were involved the trade in leather for use by the Roman army, in particular units stationed in Bostra and the Transjordanian desert.[89] War between the great powers increased the importance of their frontier provinces and their demands for military allies and for equipment, and this in turn stimulated the kinds of economic contact that also allowed the spread of ideas.[90]

This model of imperial exploitation of the peninsula has several corollaries for the development of the milieu in which Muḥammad arose. The first of these is the familiarity of some groups of Arabs with a variety of technologies developed in the Fertile Crescent. The tenth century historian al-Hamdānī identifies Persian involvement in sixth century copper and silver mines in Nejd and in Yemen.[91] Early Muslims may have been able to use methods for deep mining developed by the Persians, which allowed the exploitation of mines in Ayla and western Egypt that the Romans had abandoned as no longer profitable.[92]

The trench (*khandaq*) dug to defend the Muslims from the attacks of the Quraysh is represented in the Muslim Arabic tradition as a contribution of Salmān al-Fārisi, a Persian Companion of Muhammad.[93] Later Muslim historians, such as al-Ṭabarī, also imagine the caliphs employing a postal service (*barīd*) to keep in contact with troops scattered over a wide area, which, if it can be believed, would also be a case of borrowing from the great powers.[94]

But perhaps the most important indication of the Arabs' familiarity with the techniques of government and logistics employed by the great powers comes in the papyri produced in the early years of the Muslim occupation of Egypt. Soon after the invasion we find papyri that employ Arabic administrative terms that are not based on local Greek or Coptic usage, as well as Hijri dating (our earliest example is from 643).[95] Within a generation we also find the installation of a poll tax, labour corvées

88 Bert De Vries, "Umm el-Jimal I: A Frontier Town and its Landscape in Northern Jordan, Fieldwork 1972–81," in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* supplement 26, Portsmouth, RI, JRA books, 1999, esp. p. 238–239; Maurice Sartre, *Bostra, des origines à l'Islam*, Paris, Geuthner, 1985, p. 129–132.

89 Patricia Crone, "Quraysh and the Roman Army: Making Sense of the Meccan Leather Trade," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 70, 2007, p. 63–88.

90 Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and His People*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 178.

91 Timothy Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate, AD 500-1000*, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2012, p. 82, 94. At p. 134, he discusses C-14 dating of ore samples taken from the mine at al-Radrad in Yemen (AD 613 +/- 70).

92 *Ibid*., p. 107, 139.

93 Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad*, New York, NYRB Classics, 2021 (1961), p. 209.

94 Fred M. Donner, "Centralized authority and military autonomy in the early Islamic conquests," in Fred M. Donner, ed., *The Expansion of the Early Islamic State*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 4–52.

95 Petra M. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 65–69; Robert Hoyland, "New documentary texts and the early Islamic state," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 69, no. 3, 2006, p. 401–403 [395–416]; Lucian Reinfandt, "Empireness

and the regular requisition of agricultural products for military use.[96] The fact that such requisitions could be accounted for may have allowed an occupying army to draw on the indigenous population for resources and labour in a way that was *relatively* fair and efficient.

Muslim sources represent pre-Islamic Arabia as a world of *jāhiliyya*,[97] whose political ignorance matched their ignorance of true religion, and Roman and Persian observers might also dismiss the Arabs' potential for government.[98] But the speed and stability of the Arab conquests, both within the peninsula and beyond, becomes much easier to understand if we envisage them learning logistic and military technologies from their neighbours. Even if we disbelieve the Islamic-era stories that speak of Persian attempts to raise taxes from Medina,[99] there is clear evidence for Persian involvement in other parts of Arabia beyond the Ḥijāz.[100]

A second major corollary of the relationship between the great powers and Arabia was the vacuum that was left at the removal of the Naṣrid and Jafnid phylarchs in the late sixth century. Here again we can look to an interesting comparison from the Rhine frontier. James Drinkwater has observed how the immediate first tier of barbarian federations suffered from the collapse of Roman authority in Western Europe: groups like the Alamanni were highly dependent on Roman service and subsidy, whereas groups deeper inside the *barbaricum* such as the Franks were better placed to take advantage of a moment of crisis.[101]

We propose that a similar model can be constructed for the Jafnids and Nasrids. The two dynasties were significantly dependent on imperial authority. They were the first-line recipients of great power patronage, from whom subsidies flowed to lesser clients deeper in the interior.[102] This pattern would explain the contrast one finds in

in Arabic letter formulae," in Stefan Prochazka, Lucian Reinfandt, and Sven Tost, *Official Epistolography and the Languages of Power: Proceedings of the First International Conference of the Research Network Imperium & Officium*, Vienna, Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2015, p. 281–292.

96 Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, *op. cit*., p. 70–73; Frank R. Trombley, "Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa and the Christians of Umayyad Egypt: war and society in documentary context," in Petra M. Sijpesteijn and Lennart Sundelin, eds, *Papyrology and the History of Early Islamic Egypt*, Leiden, Brill, 2004, p. 199–226.

97 Peter Webb, "Al-Jahiliyya, Uncertain Times of Uncertain Meanings," *Der Islam*, vol. 91, no. 1, 2014, p. 69–94.

98 Walter D. Ward, *Mirage of the Saracen: Christians and Nomads in the Sinai Peninsula in Late Antiquity*, Berkely, CA, University of California Press, 2014.

99 Michael Lecker, "The levying of taxes for the Sassanians in Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)", in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 27, 2002, p. 109–126; Meir Kister, "Al-Ḥīra: Some notes on its relations with Arabia," in *Arabica*, vol. 15, 1968, p. 144–147 [143–169].

100 Daniel Potts, "Arabia II: The Sasanians and Arabia," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2012; Potts, *Arabian Gulf*, vol. 2, *op. cit*., p. 152 (for the integration of insular Baḥrayn into the Sasanian provincial system); p. 244–245 (for Persian language on the east Arabian coast); p. 335–336 (for Sasanian material culture in Oman). The Christian presence in eastern Arabia was also dependent on the connections to the Sasanian world: Potts, *Arabian Gulf*, vol. 2, *op. cit*., esp. p. 150 and 253.

101 John F. Drinkwater, *Alamanni and Rome 213-496 (Caracalla to Clovis)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 359–363.

102 Kister, "Al-Ḥīra," *op. cit*.

the Muslim historians commenting on al-Ḥīra, who combine "royal" material, which emphasises Naṣrid legitimacy, with more subversive *akhbār* that envies their wealth.[103] But the Arab kings were also extremely vulnerable to shifts in the status quo, which occurred on a massive scale when the frontier was reorganised following the Persian conquest of the Roman Levant in the 610s and the subsequent withdrawal of Roman forces. The fall of the Naṣrids immediately prior to the Persian conquest has even been explicitly linked to invasion planning, anticipating significant changes in the Persian frontier and Persian requirements for Arab allies.[104]

We can therefore envisage a scenario where a second tier of Arab leaders, who had once received resources from the Jafnids or Naṣrids, were suddenly left without resources with which to reward their own followers. The existence of such a second tier may explain, for example, the appearance of numerous Arab leaders in sources for the end of the sixth century and beginning of the seventh, who are otherwise unknown – figures such as "Ogyrus" and "Zogomos," fighting alongside the Romans in the late sixth century, the mysterious seal of the patrician "Gabalas" (Jabala) from the early seventh, or the graffito of a "Numinos" (al-Nuʿmān) from Ruṣāfa.[105] The loss of the "top tier" might also have driven an increase in raiding, as Arabs sought to extract wealth by other means: the famous battle of Dhu Qār in c. 609 could be seen as an example of these pressures.[106] But it also implies an environment where there was a vacuum at the summit of a number of tribal hierarchies, as mid-ranking leaders sought patrons who could keep their own positions secure. The rise of Maslama (known by the pejorative name Musaylima in the Muslim sources), prophet of Yamāma, might be understood against such a background: Maslama's predecessor Hawdha had been a direct client of the Persians, but that leadership role was no longer an option in the subsequent generation and the niche was left open for another kind of leader.[107] Similarly, the speed with which Medina acquired authority over the whole peninsula may reflect the previous development of local hierarchies and the demand for leadership and patronage, which was then provided by a nascent polity with a track record on the battlefield and a powerful message.

[103] Philip Wood, "Al-Ḥīra and Its Histories", in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 136, p. 785–799.

[104] James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 437–441.

[105] Theophylact Simocatta, 2.2.5, 2.10.6-7; on the seal see Irfan Shahîd, "Sigillography in the Service of History: New Light," in C. Sode and S. Takács, eds, *Novum Millennium: Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck*, London, Routledge, 2001, p. 369–377. For "Numinos" see Gatier, "Les Jafnides," *op. cit*.

[106] On Dhu Qār, see Fred M. Donner, "The Bakr b. Wā'il Tribes and Politics in Northeastern Arabia on the Eve of Islam," in *Studia Islamica*, vol. 51, 1980, p. 5–38; Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, *op. cit*., p. 90–93 and 185.

[107] Dale F. Eickelman, "Musaylima: An Approach to the Social Anthropology of Seventh Century Arabia," in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1967, p. 17–52; Al Makin, *Representing the Enemy: Musaylima in Muslim Literature*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2010. See al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 1984-5.

Conclusion

The Romans do not seem to have envisaged a southern limit for the *Provincia Arabia*; the ambition of Ḥimyar took its armies to Iraq; Sasanian (and Parthian) interests embraced eastern and southern Arabia. The major late antique powers viewed Arabia (in all of its geographical scope) as a competitive arena, and it is clear that from the fourth century onwards the balance of power shifted repeatedly and unpredictably between Roman, Persian, and Ḥimyarite leaders. Well-known events such as the massacre of Najrāni Christians reflect the interface between questions of political and sectarian allegiance, as keenly felt in Ẓafār as they were in Constantinople or Ctesiphon. The competition in Arabia witnessed the interface of two major religious traditions and three states, whose spheres of influence shifted throughout the Arabian Peninsula. This, of course, has been long known. But an investigation of how great power confrontation shaped Arabia and the Arabs, whether through conquest and sponsorship or the encounter with complex government and monotheist religion, will help to inform an understanding of an early "Islam," and a Medinan empire, "born of Late Antiquity."[108]

[108] Hoyland, "Early Islam," *op. cit.*, p. 1069.

Fallen Angels and the Afterlives of Enochic Traditions in Early Islam

□ Annette Yoshiko REED

In memory of Patricia Crone

How does the study of early Islam relate to research on the so-called "pseudepigrapha" associated with the antediluvian scribe Enoch? When I began writing my dissertation on early Enochic traditions about the fallen angels – over twenty years ago – such a question might have struck me as odd. At the time, the import of such a topic seemed to lie in recovering the value of non-canonical Jewish texts like the *Book of the Watchers* (*1 Enoch* 1-36) for understanding Second Temple Judaism and its Jewish and Christian afterlives. In working to invert the arrow of analysis of early Enochic literature away from source-criticism and toward reception-history, my interventions were thus aimed at interlocutors interested in the history of Jewish and Christian interpretation of Genesis, in the hopes of illumining the interpenetration of debates about primeval history, parabiblical literature, and the problem of evil among Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity.

It only took a moment, however, for this initial impression to change. Or more specifically, a single short email message: "Hello! My name is Patricia Crone. I am a scholar of Islam. May I invite you to lunch to talk about fallen angels?" That message led to a lunch, during which she quizzed me about details about the various versions and trajectories of Jewish and Christian traditions about antediluvian angelic descent, the sins and punishments of the fallen angels, and their names, in relation to a paper that she was writing on "The *Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān" – which she would go on to present at a 2005 workshop in Jerusalem in memory of Shlomo Pines, but which

did not appear in print until 2013.[1] Although space did not permit the expansion of my 2002 dissertation to include the Islamic materials that we discussed, I integrated some references into the revised 2005 book version and began to compile relevant materials, drawing both on her suggestions and on the parallel efforts of John C. Reeves.[2] More recently, I have returned to these materials for a project in collaboration with Reeves on *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, collecting and analyzing Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, and Arabic references to Enoch, Enochic books, and Enochic traditions.[3]

I begin by recounting my own experience so as to begin on a note of caution: I participated in the 2015 Early Islamic Studies Seminar/Fourth Nangeroni Meeting as a complete outsider to the study of Islam – a specialist in Second Temple Judaism and late antique Judaism and Christianity, curious to learn from the discussions, but hardly qualified to speak to the topic of "Early Islam: The Sectarian Milieu of Late Antiquity?" As an outsider, however, I wonder whether my experiences may not be wholly irrelevant. The past decades have seen some dazzling efforts to situate Arabia, Iran, and early Islam in late antique contexts,[4] and these same years have been marked also by a remarkable growth of conversation across Biblical Studies and Qur'anic Studies,[5] as facilitated by new interdisciplinary fora and institutional partnerships such as the "Qur'ān and Bible" units at the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Annual Meeting and SBL International meeting, the establishment of the International Qur'anic Studies

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1 Patricia Crone, "The *Book of the Watchers* in the Quran," in Haggai Ben-Shammai, Shaul Shaked, and Sarah Stroumsa, eds, *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism, and Science in the Mediterranean World*, Jerusalem, The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2013, p. 16–51.

2 Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, esp. p. 255, 277; John C. Reeves, ed., *Tracing the Threads,* Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1994; Id., "Exploring the Afterlife of Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Medieval Near Eastern Religious Traditions: Some Initial Soundings," in *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, vol. 30, 1999, p. 148–177; id., "Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qurān," in id., *Bible and Qurān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, Leiden, Brill, 2003, p. 43–60.

3 John C. Reeves and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Sources from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,* vol. 1, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018; a second volume is in preparation.

4 Surveys and assessments include Robert Hoyland, "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," in Scott F. Johnson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 1053–1077; Michael E. Pregill, "Rethinking Late Antiquity: A Review of Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muḥammad: The First Millennium Refocused*," in *International Qur'anic Studies Association website*, https://iqsaweb.wordpress.com/2014/03/17/rla/, 2014; id., "Introduction: Conflict and Convergence in Late Antiquity," in *Mizan Project*, November 11, 2015, http://www.mizanproject.org/introduction-conflict-and-convergence-in-late-antiquity/. On Arabia see now Glen W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, and on Iran, Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Islam*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

5 For some different approaches see, e.g., Michael E. Pregill, "The Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān: The Problem of the Jewish 'Influence' on Islam," in *Religion Compass*, vol. 1, no. 6, 2007, p. 643–659; id., *The Golden Calf between Bible and Qur'an*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020; Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 39–54; Carol Bakhos, "Genesis, the Qur'ān and Islamic Interpretation," in Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr and David L. Petersen, eds, *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, Leiden, Brill, 2012, p. 607–632.

Association (IQSA) as an affiliated organization with SBL, and the founding of EISS in association with the Enoch Seminar.[6] Such trends are now becoming prominent enough to resound even among those of us who do not work in Arabic, the Qur'ān, or early Islam. In the hopes of helping to enable further interdisciplinary conversation, this article revisits Crone's above-noted article on "The *Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān" – albeit with an eye backwards and outwards.

I should stress that my concern, in what follows, is *not* with the sources of the Qur'ān. Rather, I would like to ask what can be gained for scholarship on Enochic texts and traditions, the historiography of Late Antiquity, and the discipline of Religious Studies by extending research on the afterlives of the *Book of the Watchers* along trajectories with a *telos* in Islam. Accordingly, I draw upon my project with Reeves, as well as building upon his recent studies of Hārūt and Mārūt,[7] while also taking this opportunity to explore some ideas about channels of transmission and settings of interchange that I have not been able to address in detail in my past publications on fallen angels, the reception-history of the *Book of the Watchers*, and the late antique transmissions and transformations of Second Temple Jewish texts and traditions.[8]

In the process, I reflect upon the ramifications for Religious Studies of exploring questions and connections of this sort. At least since Abraham Geiger and the forging of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in nineteenth -century Germany, similarities between Jewish and Islamic writings have been a nexus for charged contestation over "origins" and, hence, also for the reification and essentialized retrojection of religious difference in claims and counter-claims about purity, priority, "influence," and "borrowing."[9] Just as attention to the afterlives of Enochic traditions about angelic descent has helped to highlight the complex and continuing interpenetration

[6] Michael Pregill (personal communication) notes that "Qur'ān and Bible" was started as a joint AAR-SBL initiative around 2004, later migrating to the SBL Annual Meeting, and the topic garnered its own unit in the SBL International Meeting approximately five years later; IQSA began meeting as an SBL affiliate in 2013, which is also the same year that EISS was founded.

[7] Esp. Reeves, "Some Explorations," *op. cit*.; id., "Resurgent Myth: On the Vitality of the Watchers Traditions in the Near East in Late Antiquity," in Angela K. Harkins, Kelley Coblentz Bautch and John C. Endres, eds, *The Fallen Angels Traditions: Second Temple Developments and Reception History*, Washington, D.C., Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2014, p. 94–115; id., "Some Parascriptural Dimensions of the Muslim *Tale of Hārūt wa-Mārūt*," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 135, no. 4, 2015, p. 817–842.

[8] See above as well as Annette Yoshiko Reed, "From Asael and Šemiḥazah to Uzzah, Azzah, and Azael: 3 Enoch 5 (§§7–8) and the Jewish Reception-History of 1 Enoch," in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2001, p. 105–136; id., "The Trickery of the Fallen Angels and the Demonic Mimesis of the Divine: Aetiology and Polemics in the Writings of Justin Martyr," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2004, p. 141–171; id., "Reading Augustine and/as Midrash," in Lieve Teugels and Rivka Ulmer, eds, *Midrash and Context*, Piscataway, N.J., Gorgias, 2007, p. 75–131; id., "Enoch in Armenian Apocrypha," in Kevork Bardakjian and Sergio La Porta, eds, *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition*, Leiden, Brill, 2014, p. 149–187.

[9] Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* Bonn, F. Baaden, 1833, on which see now Susannah Heschel, *Jüdischer Islam: Islam und jüdisch-deutsche Selbstbestimmung*, trans. Dirk Hartwig, Berlin, Mathes und Seitz, 2018. See also Michael Pregill, "Isrā'īliyyāt, Myth, and Pseudepigraphy: Wahb b. Munabbih and the Early Islamic Versions of the Fall of Adam and Eve," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 34, 2008, p. 215–222.

of Jewish and Christian traditions in Late Antiquity, so this topic may also provide an apt crucible for experimenting with new approaches to Jewish and Islamic traditions.

Even as the old fixation on "origins" has been widely critiqued across the discipline of Religious Studies, many common scholarly reading practices remain predicated on the assumption that clusters of related materials are best explained through arrows or hierarchies of derivation. The dominant approaches to explaining commonalities between texts from different traditions, for instance, still privilege the discovery of direct literary dependence, the construction of unilinear chains of exegetical development, and the rhetoric of interreligious "influence" and "borrowing."[10] But what is effaced or ignored in the quest (whether tacit or explicit) for the "origins" of ideas, motifs, and "religions"? What might we learn by approaching some "parallels" as attesting constellations of cultural activity surrounding the preservation of received materials through textual and other technologies of memory? In some cases and places, might it be more apt to imagine an interconnected multiplicity of creative efforts to preserve and revivify the past? And what might we discover about the micro-dynamics of cultural continuity and change by looking to the reworking of received materials also for clues as to specific settings, mechanisms, and channels of their transmission, textualization, and transformation?

In her above-noted 2013 article, Crone shows how attention to traditions about fallen angels can challenge us to relate early Islamic materials to late antique parallels or precursors in a manner that departs *both* [1] from the old "origin-tracing," whereby "Western scholars envisage Muhammad as picking up bits and pieces of religious lore from his Jewish, Christian, and diverse other neighbors without much understanding of what they meant," *and* [2] from the isolationism that can be fostered by a "sense that Islam arose in a world apart."[11] "The tribal societies evoked in pre-Islamic poetry," Crone notes, "are so utterly different from the Near East described in Greek, Syriac, Aramaic, Coptic, or Iranian works that one automatically classifies ideas which can be shown to have originated in the non-Arabian Near East as 'foreign elements,' or in other words, as features appearing out of their normal context, so that they have to be explained by mechanisms such as traders accidentally picking up this or that on their journeys."[12] Attention to fallen angels, however, reveals a different picture, more akin to bricolage than "borrowing":

> *What we see in the Qur'ānic treatment of the fallen angels… is not the impression of a passerby who had picked up some ancient story without much sense of*

[10] For genealogy and critique of this preoccupation with "origins" in the study of "religion(s)" see Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993; I discuss this further in relation to Christian Origins, in particular, in my *Jewish Christianity and the History of Judaism*, Tübingen, Mohr, 2018.

[11] Crone, "*Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 50–51.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 51.

> *what it meant. What we see is the story in the context to which it had come to belong by late antique times, complete with the magical practices it was held to explain and the angry sense of being outflanked by disreputable people that the situation induced in the observer. Wherever or whenever the encounter(s) took place, the observer is engaging with the tradition as it looked in his time, not simply plundering it, let alone getting anything wrong. Islam here grows by imperceptible steps… out of the environment that came before it, creating a new one as it does so. It would be enormously illuminating if we could see the entire Qur'ān in this way.*[13]

In what follows, I consider Crone's arguments in light of the broader set of early Islamic materials about fallen angels that Reeves and I have collected and analyzed. Rather than focusing on the meaning or sources of the Qur'ān, however, I explore the significance of these early Islamic materials from the other side. Might it be "enormously illuminating" also to see early Enochic texts and tradition, *not just* as a vital part of Second Temple Judaism, an element in the Jewish background of early Christianity, or a subterranean current infusing later Jewish mysticism, *but also* as a vibrant component of some Islamic texts and traditions? What might we learn, in the process, about Late Antiquity?

Much has been written on Idrīs in relation to Enoch, including as a test-case for what Philip S. Alexander terms "Transformations of Jewish Traditions in Early Islam" and as a component in what Kevin van Bladel reconstructs as the interweaving of diverse late antique elements into the "Arabic Hermes."[14] Following Crone, I would here like to look to the fallen angels as another test-case in both senses. Like Alexander, however, I do so not as a historian of Islam seeking precedents or contexts, but rather as a historian of Judaism who finds such connections critical for understanding the significance of those Second Temple texts now commonly marginalized as "non-canonical," "inter-testamental," or "pseudepigraphical."

We learn *some* things when we juxtapose Bible and Qur'ān. But we can learn *other* things when we look beyond these canonical scriptures to the broader "parascriptural" array of oral and written reflection on primeval periods, which are often prominent at the overlaps of Jewish and Muslim memory-making. Reeves has made a case for understanding such overlaps as resonant with longstanding Near Eastern mythic patterns that remained generative for the *longue durée*.[15] What I would like to

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[13] *Ibid*., p. 51.

[14] Philip S. Alexander, "Transformations of Jewish Traditions in Early Islam: The Case of Enoch/Idris," in Gerald R. Hawting, Jawid Mojaddedi and Alexander Samely, eds, *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions in Memory of Norman Calder*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 11–29; Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009. On later trajectories see now Kameliya Atanasova, "Enoch as Idrīs in Early Modern Ottoman Sufi Writings: Two Case Studies," in Ariel Hessayon, Annette Yoshiko Reed, and Gabriele Boccaccini, eds, *Rediscovering Enoch? The Ancient Jewish Past from the 15th to 19th Centuries*, Leiden, Brill, 2023, p. 397–412.

[15] Reeves, ed., *Bible and Qur'ān*, *op. cit*.; id., "Some Parascriptural Dimensions," *op.cit*.

investigate, here, is whether attention to the specific selections and expressions of such patterns might reveal something about the interlocking knowledge-practices, technologies of memory, and channels of transmission that facilitated the preservation and circulation of older stories, names, and ideas about angels and the antediluvian age among Muslims, Jews, and others.

Fallen Angels from the *Book of the Watchers* to the "Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt"

At least since the 1920s, synthetic treatments of "fallen angels" have included Islamic traditions about Hārūt and Mārūt.[16] This pair of angels is mentioned only once in the Qur'ān:

> *And they follow what the satans recited over Solomon's kingdom. Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved, teaching the people sorcery and that which was sent down upon Babylon's two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt; they did not teach any man without saying, "We are but a temptation (*fitna*); do not disbelieve!" From them they learned how they might divide a man and his wife,[17] yet they did not hurt any man thereby, save by the leave of God, and they learned what hurt them, and did not profit them, knowing well that who so buys it shall have no share in the afterlife; evil then was that for which they sold themselves, if they had but known. (Q 2:102)*[18]

Completely absent here, however, are precisely those features privileged in the only related "biblical" source. In Genesis, passing mention is made of "sons of God" who saw the beauty of "daughters of men" and chose wives from them in the days before the Flood (6:2), resulting in hybrid sons and the spread of Giants and/or Nephilim (6:4), as well as contributing to the deterioration whereby "all the thoughts of humankind were evil all the time" (6:5) such that God regretted creating them and brought the Flood (6:6-7). In Q 2:102, by contrast, no mention is made of sexual transgression or hybrid progeny. Hārūt and Mārūt are explicitly called angels,[19] and they are linked

[16] E.g., Leo Jung, "Fallen Angels in Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan Literature: A Study in Comparative Folk-Lore," in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 16.3, 1926, esp. p. 295–310, as later extended in Bernard J. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels,* Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1952, p. 113–116. Many of the connections there compiled were noticed already in earlier work, e.g., Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed,* p. 104–107; Bernard Heller, "La chute des anges Schemchazai, Ouazza et Azaël," in *Revue des études juives*, vol. 49, 1910, p. 206–210. For a sense of these traditions in the context of Muslim reflection on angels see now Stephen R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's al-Haba'ik fi akhbar al-mala'ik*, London, Routledge, 2012.

[17] Crone posits a connection to the "hate-charms" taught by Watchers in the *Book of the Watchers* (*1 Enoch* 9:7) in her "*Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān," *op. cit.*, p. 27–28.

[18] Here and below reproducing Arberry's rendering with minor revisions for readability.

[19] Contrast, e.g., the case of Iblīs, whose angelic status is debated, and whose transgressions are sometimes connected to his status as *jinn* (Q 18:15); see further Whitney S. Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs,* Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2011. p. 120–133.

to teachings of magic. No reference is made of any transgression or rebellion on their part. The satans who teach sorcery in the time of Solomon are said to disbelieve,[20] and the content of their teachings are traced to Hārūt and Mārūt. But it is stressed that these two angels were "sent down" by God and that they warn their students "do not disbelieve!"

As noted above, my concern here is not with the sources behind the Qur'ān. It may be worth noting, however, that Q 2:102 only makes sense as a tradition about "fallen angels" when we look to traditions of illicit angelic instruction first attested in the Enochic *Book of the Watchers*, written in Aramaic around the third century BCE.[21] There, Watchers like ʿAsael and Shemiḥazah are not just accused of sexual pollution with human women and siring monstrously hybrid sons; they are also credited with corrupting teachings of root-cutting, sorcery, metal-working, cosmetics, weapons-making, and various sorts of astral divination.[22] The comparison, however, also highlights some interesting points of divergence. The *Book of the Watchers* recounts in detail how two hundred angelic Watchers decided to descend from heaven to earth, abandoning their heavenly posts. Illicit angelic instruction is thus presented as one in a series of angelic transgressions, contributing to the deterioration of earthly conditions and spread of human sin that necessitated the Flood. In Q 2:102, by contrast, two angels are "sent down." Hārūt and Mārūt may be credited with teaching magical knowledge, but they are not agents in the "origins of sin": they only do so for the sake of testing of humankind, and consequently, they contribute to the cause of human obedience to the divine.

In this sense, the pattern in Q 2:102 falls closer to the account of angelic descent in *Jubilees*, composed in Hebrew in the second century BCE. There, angels are said to have been sent down to earth by God during the lifetime of Jared "to teach humankind do what is just and upright on the earth" (*Jub* 4:15) – only to be corrupted later by long-term exposure to earthly life and its temptations (4:22; 5:1-18). Whereas the *Book of the Watchers* accuses ʿAsael, Shemiḥazah, and other Watchers of teaching root-cutting, sorcery, metalworking, cosmetics, weapons-making, astral divination (*1 En*

[20] As Crone notes, there is no connection – whether of parentage or otherwise – here made between the satans and these angels, and this is another point of contrast with the *Book of the Watchers*, which places the origins of demons as the disembodiment of the spirits of the Watchers' Giant sons after their bodies were destroyed by the Flood ("*Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 27).

[21] See further Reed, *Fallen Angels*, *op. cit*., p. 24–49.

[22] See *1 Enoch* 7:1; 8:1-3; 9:7; 13:1-2; 16:2-3. Part of the key chapter for the trope of illicit angelic instruction, *1 Enoch* 8:3, is attested in Aramaic fragments from Qumran and can be reconstructed from the evidence of 4QEn^{a} (1 iv 1–5) and 4QEn^{b} (1 iii 1–5) as follows: "Shemihazah taught the casting of spells [and the cutting of roots; Hermoni taught the loosing of spells,] magic, sorcery, and skill; [Baraq'el taught the signs of the lightning flashes; Kokab'el taught] the signs of the stars; Zeq'el [taught the signs of the shooting stars; Ar'taqoph taught the signs of the earth;] Shamshi'el taught the signs of the sun; [Sahriel taught the signs of] the moon. [And they all began to reveal] secrets to their wives"; see further Michael A. Knibb, "The Book of Enoch or Books of Enoch? The Textual Evidence for 1 Enoch," in Gabriele Boccaccini and John J. Collins, eds, *The Early Enoch Literature*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, p. 23. On the differences in the Greek, also Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Gendering Heavenly Secrets? Women, Angels, and the Problem of Misogyny and Magic," in Kimberly Stratton, ed., *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in Antiquity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 108–151.

7:1; 8:1 3), and "all the deeds of godlessness, wrongdoing, and sin" (13:1), moreover, *Jubilees* associates them only with divination (*Jub* 8:2-4).[23]

Most scholars of Second Temple Judaism have read the differences between these two early accounts of antediluvian angelic descent as reflecting a deliberate departure of *Jubilees* from the *Book of the Watchers*. Reeves, however, questions the dominant scholarly practice of stringing together known accounts of antediluvian angelic descent into a chronological line of written sources chained from "origin" to "interpretation" (e.g., Genesis → *Book of the Watchers* → *Jubilees*), and he looks to the different dynamics revealed by expanding our purview also to include consideration of Qur'anic and other Islamic accounts.[24]

Significantly, for our purposes, this move forms part of Reeves' broader argument that the multiplicity in both Second Temple and late antique periods – and the connections between them – may reveal the multiplicity of an enduring mythic complex in the Near East that cannot be reduced to biblical exegesis. It is certainly possible to compile some selective examples of Jewish and Christian accounts of antediluvian angelic descent and summarize them in isolation, interpreting them only in terms of the history of the interpretation of Genesis.[25] Especially when we expand our purview to include the Qur'ān, however, the limitations of this approach are starkly exposed – not least for its anachronistic retrojection of distinctively modern (and largely Protestant and European) assumptions about the transmission of religious traditions as a textualized domain defined by private acts of reading a fixed text of Scripture.

In the decades since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars have become increasingly aware that the premodern Jewish and Christian encounter with the biblical past involved far more than only the text of what comes down to us as the Bible. The memory of the biblical past, rather, encompassed a fluidly dynamic yet surprisingly stable complex of motifs and traditions, circulating in oral and written forms – what James Kugel has called "The Bible As It Was."[26] If the *Book of the Watchers* and *Jubilees* can help us to recover something of this complex, perhaps so too for early Islamic sources.

Questions of this sort are certainly raised, at the very least, by our evidence for the immense spread and the interconnected complexity of Enochic traditions in Late

[23] Reed, *Fallen Angels*, *op. cit.*, p. 87–89.

[24] Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions," *op. cit.*; id., "Resurgent Myth," *op. cit*. He there critiques common arguments for a direct interpretative relationship between the *Book of the Watchers* and *Jubilees*; in my view, however, the two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

[25] E.g. Lionel R. Wickham, "The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men: Genesis VI 2 in Early Christian Exegesis," in James Barr et al., eds, *Language and Meaning*, Leiden, Brill, 1974, p. 135–147; Ferdinand Dexinger, "Judisch-christliche Nachgeschichte von Genesis 6,1–4," in S. Kreuzer and K. Lüthi, eds, *Zur Aktualität des Alten Testaments*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1992, p. 155–175; Walter H. Wagner, "Interpretations of Genesis 6.1–4 in Second-Century Christianity," in *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 20, 1996, p. 137–156.

[26] James Kugel, *The Bible as it Was*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1997.

Antiquity. As Reeves and I note in our introduction to *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*:

> *Texts in a broad array of languages – including Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and Arabic – integrate motifs or mythemes from known Enochic books. In addition, direct references to words, "prophecies," or "books" of Enoch can be found across a broad continuum of writings created by Jews, Christians, Muslims, Manichaeans, and "gnostics".... For many centuries, both old and new Enochic writings appear to have circulated in various forms among Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others – together with other oral and written expressions of distinctively Enochic traditions about Enoch, the fallen angels, and the Giants. Even after the exclusion of "books of Enoch" from the Jewish Tanakh and most Christian Old Testaments – and even despite efforts to marginalize materials associated with Enoch by some rabbis and church fathers – materials related to Enoch remained remarkably widespread, traveling across creedal and community boundaries in the Near East and beyond, throughout the first millennium of the Common Era.*[27]

It is critical to acknowledge the potentially ancient character of the constituent parts of much of the complex – and certainly much more than survives *in writing* in early and known forms. Whatever might be said of more ancient traditions, however, it is also clear that the *Book of the Watchers* and other early Enochic writings had a rich reception-history of their own, even apart from the exegesis and expansion of Genesis. This reception-history, in turn, seems to have proved generative for some of the distinctive streams of tradition that shaped the memory of the primeval past in Late Antiquity – perhaps particularly in the Near East. The challenge, then, is how *both* to acknowledge older and enduring shared patterns not attested in surviving literature *and also* to attend to the specific choices of selections and articulations in the forms that we do know from specific texts, times, and places.

Crone experiments with such a doubled approach to fallen angels in the Qur'ān. Rather than treating Q 2:102 as *sui generi* or treating its silences as "gaps" that are "filled" by later exegetes "borrowing" Jewish ideas, for instance, she builds a case for understanding this terse passage against the background of the richly developed traditions about fallen angels that echo, interpret, rework, and extend the *Book of the Watchers* across the Near East. The names Hārūt and Mārūt have no precedent in Jewish or Christian materials,[28] and even in the Qur'ān, these angels are not described as "fallen" *per se* – whether in the sense of having departed improperly from their

[27] Reeves and Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 5.

[28] The names of Hārūt and Mārūt are typically traced to the Iranian Haurvatāt and Ameretāt; for the proposal of Manicheaen mediation see Jean de Ménasce, "Une légende indo-iranienne dans l'angélologie judéo-musulmane," in *Etudes Asiatiques*, vol. 1, 1947, p. 10–11. Note also the later appearance of these names in Hebrew, as attested in T.-S. K 1.1 (12th c.), for which see Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, eds, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1994, vol. 1, p. 79–82, with a parallel in MS Vatican 245 fol. 111b, as

posts in heaven or in the sense of having polluted themselves through lust or sex with human women. Nevertheless, as Crone notes: "It is a striking fact that although the Qur'ān gives the angels Iranian names and says very little about them, the exegetes effortlessly recognized them as the fallen angels from the Watchers story."[29]

This recognition, in her view, is not merely a matter of later reinterpretation; rather, "echoes of the *Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān" – Crone argues – already serve "to relate the Qur'ān to a well-documented context on the fringes of the Arab world in late antiquity."[30] To make this point, Crone adduces other Medinese suras that seem similarly to reflect familiarity with the late antique complex of traditions extending Enochic and related ideas about fallen angels.[31] These include a possible allusion to angelic descent in Q 2:30,[32] but especially the otherwise mysterious statement attributed to Jews in Q 9:30:

> *The Jews say: "'Uzayr is the son of God," while the Christians say: "Christ is the son of God...." (Q 9:30)*

She reads the enigmatic reference to 'Uzayr as possibly related to the late antique multiplication of variations on 'Asael (עשאל/עסאל; Gr. Αζαηλ) – the name of the fallen Watcher most often associated with sins of teaching in the *Book of the Watchers*.[33] In addition, she interprets the assertions that angels do not descend apart from divine permission in the Meccan suras Q 19:64 and 97:4 as a "further thought about angelic descent."

Much of Crone's article is oriented toward supporting her proposed solution to the longstanding puzzle of the identity of 'Uzayr (Q 9:30). But whether or not we accept the one hypothesis, her approach remains significant for the reorientation here modeled. She stresses that the "interest of all four or five examples lies in the light that they throw

discussed in Gershom Scholem, "Some Sources of Jewish-Arabic Demonology," in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 16, 1965, p. 9; Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions," *op. cit.*

29 Crone, "*Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 29.

30 *Ibid*., p. 50.

31 See my *Fallen Angels* and references there, as well as Angela K. Harkins, Kelley Coblentz Bautch and John C. Endres, eds, *The Fallen Angels Traditions: Second Temple Developments and Reception History*, Washington, D.C., Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2014; Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, eds, *The Fall of the Angels,* Leiden, Brill, 2004.

32 See below on this passage in relation to traditions about the fall of Satan and the fall of Iblīs – a complex that, I would suggest, remains distinctive from (even if intersecting at times with) Jewish and Islamic traditions about antediluvian angelic descent aligned with Enochic texts and traditions, even if largely conflated in their Christian counterparts, especially in the Latin West. (So too, e.g., Bodman, *Poetics of Iblīs*, *op. cit*., p. 70–83, although there neglecting to integrate more recent insights into the continued tenacity of Enochic traditions long after Second Temple times.)

33 Crone, "*Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 48–50, picking up an idea positing by Paul Casanova, "Idrîs et 'Ouzaïr," in *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 205, 1924, p. 356–360. On the issues surrounding the traditional linkage with Ezra see also Vivianne Comerro, "Esdras est-il le fils de Dieu?," in *Arabica*, vol. 62, 2005, p. 165–181.

on the religious milieu in which the Qur'ān arose."[34] Accordingly, her use of intertexts like the *Book of the Watchers* enables an emphasis on continuity rather than rupture, both between the Qur'ān and its late antique "religious milieu" and between Qur'ān and *tafsīr* as well. It is in this sense that her conclusion is potent and persuasive: "The overall impression conveyed by these references is that the Watcher story formed part of the general background against which the Qur'ān was revealed."[35]

This impression is further confirmed and extended by Reeves in his recent synthetic analysis of the complex of Islamic interpretative and narrative traditions that came to be consolidated under the medieval rubric of the "Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt" (*qiṣṣat Hārūt wa-Mārūt*).[36] Focusing upon the *tafsīr* to Q 2:102 by al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE) and "tales of the prophets" (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*) and other anthologies by Maqdisī, Thaʿlabī, Kisā'ī, and Qazwīnī, Reeves draws out a common narrative structure that intersects at several points with earlier Enochic and related traditions, pointing to multiple strands of older elements therein preserved. The fullest versions, for instance, feature "[1] a prolegomenon in heaven, [2] resulting in an angelic mission to earth, [3] the corruption of these emissary angels, and [4] their consequent punishment by God."[37] Some make explicit the setting of the antediluvian age and/or reference a human intercessor in a manner directly paralleling the role of Enoch in the *Book of the Watchers*.

The most stable and dominant components of the medieval complex, however, are unparalleled in either biblical or Second Temple traditions. Reeves notes, for instance, how "angelic amazement at human wickedness is the flashpoint which sets all the extant versions of the 'Tale' into narrative motion."[38] Significantly, for our purposes, it is here that we find the most compelling commonalities with the distinctive forms of the angelic descent myth within late antique and medieval Jewish literature, which tend to integrate elements of the Rabbinic trope of angelic rivalry with humankind.[39] To be sure, this trope is also attested in Syriac Christian literature in relation to narratives about the creation of Adam and fall of Satan at the beginning of time, in a manner aligned with the Qur'anic treatment of Iblīs (e.g., Q 2:30; 7:12).[40] The "Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt," however, resonates most sharply with the parallel but distinctive

[34] Crone, "*Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 17.

[35] *Ibid*., p. 17.

[36] Most extensively now in Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions," *op. cit*.

[37] Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions," *op. cit*., p. 820 – there quoting an account associated with Mujāhid in the *Tafsīr* of Ṭabarī as an example, but also including discussion of many different versions as well as a detailed chart of the overlaps and differences across ten of them.

[38] Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions," *op. cit*., p. 821.

[39] Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1975.

[40] Bodman, *Poetics of Iblīs*, *op. cit*., p. 72–83; Gary A. Anderson, "The Exaltation of Adam and the Fall of Satan," in Gary A. Anderson, Michael E. Stone, and Johannes Tromp, eds, *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays*, Leiden, Brill, 2000, p. 83–110; Reynolds, *Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, *op. cit*., p. 39–54; Tammie Wanta, "Satan Whispered: Considering Qur'ānic Accounts of Satan's Fall in Light of Syriac Christian Tradition," in Cornelia B. Horn and Sidney H. Griffith, eds, *Biblical & Qur'anic Traditions in the Middle East*, Warwick, RI, Abelian Academic, 2016.

deployment of this trope in late antique and medieval Jewish literature in relation to Enoch/Metatron, the Generation of Enosh, and the Generation of the Flood – a development largely unparalleled in Christian literature.[41] This emphasis marks a contrast to the angelic descent myth as known from the *Book of the Watchers* and most of its Christian tradents. "As the [Muslim] exegetes tell the story," as Crone notes, "it is not about angelic revolt or the origin of sin. Rather it is about how tough it is to be a human being."[42]

Although the corruption of the angels in the "Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt" almost always involves some attempted or actual sexual transgression, moreover, it is typically along lines unprecedented in Genesis, the *Book of the Watchers*, or *Jubilees* – that is: with reference to a single very beautiful (often Persian) woman who becomes a celestial being (usually Venus). Whether Hārūt and Mārūt are depicted as descending for positive aims such as judging and/or for the sake of testing the self-claimed superiority of angels to humankind, the "Tale" thus introduces a sense of their fall into fleshly lust – an element that is strikingly absent from Q 2:102. Not only does the timing resonate with *Jubilees*' narrative of angelic descent, but it also finds poignant counterparts in the cluster of medieval midrashic traditions that Adolf Jellinek called the "Midrash of Shemḥazai and Azael."[43] There, the two main Watchers of the *Book of the Watchers*, Shemiḥazah and ʿAsael in Aramaic, reappear as Shemḥazai and ʿAzael in Hebrew, alongside many tropes and traditions known from the *Book of Giants* as well as *Jubilees*

[41] The one notable exception to this pattern is Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 8.9-14, which also tells the tale of angelic descent as a story about angelic rivalry leading to angelic descent, followed by their corruption while on earth and their teachings of magic as well as other technical and divinatory skills. Just as in the preface to *Aggadat Bereshit*, for instance, the angels here let themselves down without God's consent but also to prove humankind wrong – only to find themselves corrupted by flesh. Inasmuch as Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* contains "Jewish-Christian" features, took form in fourth-century Syria, and includes distinctive prophetological ideas with notable parallels in Islamic literature, it may be an important witness to the reception of *Jubilees* and cultivation of a distinctive complex of antediluvian angelic descent in the late antique Near East; see further Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Retelling Biblical Retellings: Epiphanius, the Pseudo-Clementines, and the Reception-History of *Jubilees*," in Menahem Kister et al., eds, *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation, from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity*, Leiden, Brill, 2015, p. 304–321.

[42] Crone, "*Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 30. Interestingly, this same point is sometimes made quite explicitly in midrashim; the widespread diffusion of the trope is clear, e.g., in its inversion in *Pesikta Rabbati* 34.2, where humans complain to God about the angels, citing Azza and Azael in much the same way that the accusing angels cite the Generation of Enosh and the Generation of the Flood: "Master of the Universe, you gave us a heart of stone, and it led us astray; if Azza and Azael, whose bodies were fire, sinned when they came down to earth, would not we of flesh and blood sin all the more?"

[43] This title was given by Adolf Jellinek to a short midrash about the fallen angels found in Simeon ha-Darshan's midrashic anthology *Yalqut Shimoni* (thirteenth century; Frankfurt?); *Bet ha-Midrasch: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der jüdischen Literatur*, 6 vols., Leipzig, 1853-1877, vol. 4, p. 127–128. *Yalqut*'s source here is commonly identified as *Midrash Abkir*, a non-extant midrashic collection that may date from the early eleventh century (e.g., Heller, "La chute des anges," *op. cit*., p. 205). Versions also occur in R. Moshe ha-Darshan's *Bereshit Rabbati* (eleventh century; Narbonne) and the copy of the anthological chronicle of Yeraḥmeel ben Solomon (ca. 1150; Southern Italy?) preserved in Eleazar ben Asher Ha-Levi's collection *Sefer ha-Zikronot* (ca. 1325). Due to its affinities with the Qumran and Manichean versions of the *Book of the Giants*, as well as its utility as an aid for reconstructing these fragmentary works, scholars have typically focused on the most expansive form of this midrash. It should be noted, however, that this form is constructed from smaller units which also circulated separately in less narrativized forms, both before and after, and which are marked as distinct traditions even in *Bereshit Rabbati*.

and the *Book of the Watchers*. Yet this medieval "midrash" also includes the oldest extensive Jewish versions of the tale of angel(s) attempting to seduce a woman who becomes a star – and, hence, the closest Jewish counterparts to those elements of the "Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt" without attested Second Temple antecedents.[44]

Inasmuch as the materials attesting the "Midrash of Shemḥazai and Azael" date from the eleventh century and following, Reeves concludes that "the Muslim Hārūt and Mārūt complex both chronologically and literarily precedes the articulated version of the Jewish 'Midrash.'"[45] What their overlaps reveal, however, is much more than a single moment of "borrowing" or a single direction of "influence."[46] The medieval Jewish materials may have been shaped by their Muslim counterparts, but – as Reeves stresses – both also integrate what we know to be far older traditions, some first known in Second Temple Jewish forms, others first glimpsed in "gnostic" and Christian writings. Their "parallels," thus, speak to Jewish–Muslim interactions in the Middle Ages, but they simultaneously help to highlight the longstanding local traditions in the Near East that made both sets of traditions poignant and possible, perhaps laying the groundwork for a cross-fertilization which was always already much more than mere "borrowing."

Magic, Stars, and Angel-Human Hybrids in Late Antiquity and Early Islam

With Crone's contextual suggestions and Reeves' corrective insights in mind, then, I would like to return to the question of fallen angels in relation to early Islam. Even if we imagine an older and larger complex of traditions of which only a few written examples come down to us, what might we learn from attention to the choices of selection, textualization, and framing in those forms that we do have? How should we contextualize and interpret their distinctive foci and dominant concerns? Is it possible to glimpse any clues to specific channels of transmission or predominant settings of preservation and cultivation?

To explore these questions, it may be useful to look more closely at some of the relevant materials from the period *between* the Qur'anic materials on which Crone focuses *and* the literary consolidation of the "Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt" as analyzed by Reeves. Especially intriguing, in my view, are the multiple references to Hārūt and Mārūt in the writings of al-Jāḥiẓ (AH 160-255/781-869 CE), a Muslim author of East African heritage who was active in Mesopotamia (i.e., specifically Baṣra, in what

[44] For a passing reference, albeit difficult to date, see however Midrash Tanḥuma (ed. Buber), Hosaphah to Ḥuqqat §1.

[45] Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions," *op. cit.*; see also Heller, "La chute des anges," *op. cit.*, p. 210.

[46] I.e., contrary to the quite puzzling mischaracterization of Reeves' argument in Moshe Idel, "On Neglected Hebrew Versions of Myths of the Two Fallen Angels," in *Entangled Religions*, vol. 13, no. 6, 2022.

is now southern Iraq).[47] Al-Jāḥiẓ mentions Hārūt and Mārūt in multiple scattered contexts, each of which – I suggest – may be revealing, not just for what is *stated* but also for what is *assumed*.

Whereas Q 2:102 makes no reference to angelic sin, for instance, one of al-Jāḥiẓ's passing references to the pair is the following question in *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr*:

> *And which one was the more wicked: Hārūt or Mārūt? (§77)*[48]

The assumption here is precisely what is unstated and even countered in the Qur'ān—that is: the characterization of these two angels as "fallen" in some fashion. Al-Jāḥiẓ does not describe why or how they are wicked. It is already assumed (or so it seems) to be known without need for explanation.

Also telling is another brief reference to the two later in the same work:

> *God has mentioned magicians in the Qur'ān. He told about Hārūt and Mārūt, and He spoke about "the enchantresses who blow on knots" (Q 113:4). (§182)*[49]

In this case, al-Jāḥiẓ adduces Hārūt and Mārūt, not as exemplary of fallen angels, but rather exemplary of magicians. Consequently, this tradition draws our attention back to Q 2:102 and its most striking point of differences from the "Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt": the former is not framed as a story about fallen angels, but rather as a teaching concerning the temptations of magic.[50] It is this Qur'anic emphasis, in turn, which is presumed as central here by al-Jāḥiẓ.

At first sight, this emphasis on their magic may appear to mark a departure from the Second Temple traditions about the fallen angels integrated into the later "Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt." Even this, however, has a notable Enochic lineage. Elsewhere, I have surveyed the *Nachleben* of the trope of illicit angelic instruction from the *Book of the Watchers*, mapping the range of ways in which it was redeployed by Jews and Christians in reflections upon ambivalent types of knowledge – that which is powerfully efficacious yet potentially corrupting. Already in the Greek translation of the *Book of the Watchers* (ca. first century BCE/CE?), the magical connotations of

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[47] See further Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jahiz*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969, p. 3–27; James E. Montgomery, *Al-Jāḥiẓ: In Praise of Books,* Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013. From the perspective of the reception-history of Enochic literature, of course, his East African heritage proves potentially intriguing in light of the preservation of the Ge'ez compendium *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* as scriptural among Ethiopian Christians. That said, he is well known for his wide-ranging knowledge and immense learning.

[48] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr* §77, ed. Charles Pellat, Damascus, 1955; trans. Reeves, from Reeves and Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, *op. cit*., vol. 2.

[49] al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr* §182; trans. Reeves, from Reeves and Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, *op. cit*., vol. 2.

[50] "The angels," as Crone also stresses, "are not guilty of any sexual sins; they merely teach people magic" ("*Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 27).

the fallen angels' teachings become enhanced.[51] At least since the second century CE, the connection is further explored by early Christians writing in Greek and Latin; Justin Martyr (second century CE) contends that fallen angels enslaved humankind "with magical writings" as well as idolatrous sacrifices (*2 Apol.* 5.4), and variations upon this association become common among Christian authors from the second to fourth centuries CE – most often in the context of arguments about the genealogy of idolatry, "heresy," and religious error.[52] The trope of the fallen angels' teaching becomes widespread enough among early Christians, however, that it is also used in other ways, including to condemn women who beautify themselves with cosmetics,[53] but also to make more positive claims. Evidence for the latter clusters especially in late antique Egypt. Clement of Alexandria (third century CE), for instance, appeals to fallen angels to claim a powerfully ambivalent lineage for "pagan" philosophy, while Zosimus of Panopolis (fourth century CE) uses them for the aetiology of alchemy.[54] In both cases, the arguments are framed as interventions into broader debates about the history of knowledge – as also echoed, in the case of alchemy, in technical Hermetica of presumably "pagan" Greco-Egyptian provenance.[55]

Within the classical Rabbinic literature, we find no counterparts to this appeal to the teachings of the fallen angels as a locus for epistemological reflection – most likely because of the apparent rejection both of Enochic books and of the angelic interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4 beginning around the second century CE.[56] When Jewish interest in Enoch later reemerges, however, so too with Jewish interest in illicit angelic instruction, beginning in the Hekhalot literature in Hebrew: *Sefer Hekhalot*/*3 Enoch*, the earliest source to attest the Jewish association of Enoch with Metatron, tells the tale of Enoch's transformation as a tale of angelic rivalry sparked by the complaints of a group of two or three ministering angels called ʿUzza, ʿAzza, and/or ʿAzael (Schäfer, ed., *Synopse* §6 = *3 Enoch* 4), and it also includes a narrative about these angels on earth teaching sorcery for the adjuration of heavenly bodies for idolatrous worship in the Generation of Enosh (Schäfer, ed., *Synopse* §§7-8 = *3 Enoch* 5).[57] The latter offers an interesting intertext for Q 2:102 and this passage from al-Jāḥiẓ inasmuch as it is a rare example of the treatment of antediluvian descent without any reference to sexual

[51] See further Reed, "Gendering Heavenly Secrets," *op. cit.*

[52] E.g., Clement, *Ecl.* 53.4; Irenaus, *Haer.* 1.15.6; *Epid.* 18; Tertullian, *Idol.* 9.1; *Apol.* 35.12; Lactantius, *Inst.* 2.16; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, *op. cit.*, p. 161–177.

[53] E.g., Tertullian, *Cult.fem.* 1.2; Cyprian, *Hab.Virg.* 14.

[54] E.g., Clement, *Strom.* 5.1.10.2; Zosimus *apud* Sync. 14. 6-14.

[55] Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Beyond Revealed Wisdom and Apocalyptic Epistemology: Early Christian Transformations of Enochic Traditions about Knowledge," in Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias, eds, *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality*, London, T.&T. Clark, 2009, p. 138–164; Reed, "Gendering Heavenly Secrets," *op. cit.*, p. 125–129; see further below.

[56] Reed, *Fallen Angels*, *op. cit.*, p. 122–159.

[57] Citations of *3 Enoch* are to Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1981.

transgression, one focusing solely on the problem of angelic instruction of humankind in magical arts.[58]

It is as a group of angels with the names known from the manuscript tradition for *Sefer Hekhalot/3 Enoch* (עזאל, עזה, עוזה, and variants) that a concern for fallen angels reemerges in Jewish literature – often with a fluidity between angelic descent and angelic rivalry as well as a surprising ease for flipping of their status from fallen angels to ministering angels and back again. Some precedent can be found already in Second Temple times; in the Dead Sea Scrolls, for instance, we find some variants on the *Book of the Watchers*' Asael (e.g., עזאזאל, עזזאל) and his partial assimilation to the mysterious Azazel (עזאזל) of Leviticus 16 (e.g., 4QAgesCreat A frag. 1 7-10; 4QEnGiants 7 i 6; cf. *b.Yoma* 67b). More proximate and significant for understanding the late antique Babylonian context of the cultivation and spread of the traditions that we see in *Sefer Hekhalot/3 Enoch*, however, are the echoes in Aramaic incantation bowls from late antique Mesopotamia, wherein names of this sort are multiplied much along the same lines attested across the Hekhalot manuscripts.

In a broader sense this pattern forms part of the multiplication of *-el* angel/demon/archon names attested in magical materials known from the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, Palestinian amulets, and Cairo Genizah, which all include some names similar to Asael/Azael.[59] In the Aramaic incantation bowls, however, this particular set of names occurs more frequently and often in settings with intriguing connections to the depiction of these figures in *Sefer Hekhalot/3 Enoch*.[60] One bowl, for instance, lists them alongside Metatron in the course of a petition for the nullification of sorceries from a range of different nations, as practiced "in the seventy languages, either by women or men" (lines 8-9):

[58] In later Jewish mystical literature, the trope of fallen angels as teachers of "magical arts" or "sorcery" becomes common; e.g., *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* §25; *Zohar* (ed. Vilna) 1.58a; 1.126a; 3.207b-208. Notable is the emphasis on their continued role in such teaching in *Zohar* 1.58a, not just as the culture-heroes who introduced such knowledge to humankind: "up to this day they remain here and teach magical arts to human beings." The trope also appears in some medieval midrashim (e.g., *Aggadat Bereshit ad* Gen 6:4) but is less widespread. Even sources that include reference to the teachings of Azael, et al., sometimes draw instead on other elements such as Azael's association with "all kinds of dyes and women's ornaments by which they entice them to sin" in *Bereshit Rabbati*; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, *op. cit*., p. 258–268. On Enochic texts and traditions in this material, see now Shaul Magid, "Why Enoch Did Not Die: The Soul Construction of Enoch in the Zohar and sixteenth -Century Kabbalah," in *Rediscovering Enoch*, forthcoming.

[59] E.g., *Papyri Graecae Magicae* IV 2142; XXXVI 174; XLV 7; Moses Gaster, "The Logos Ebraikos in the Magical Papyrus of Paris, and the Book of Enoch," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1901, p. 109–117; Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte*, *op. cit*., T.-S. AS 142.39 1a line 25. See Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1928, p. 12, for a list of literary sources in which Azael (or variations thereof) denotes a heavenly angel.

[60] Reed, "From Asael," *op. cit*., p. 121–122. For further detailed attention to the evidence of the bowls, which Crone already stressed as especially promising (as discussed below), see now Yakir Paz, "Eternal Chains and the Mountain of Darkness: The Fallen Angels in the Incantation Bowls," in Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, ed., *Apocryphal and Esoteric Sources in the Development of Christianity and Judaism*, Leiden, Brill, 2021, p. 533–558.

> *All of them (i.e., the sorceries) are brought to an end and annulled by the command of the jealous and avenging God, the One who sent Azza and Azael and Metatron, the great prince of his Throne. They will come and guard the dwelling and the threshold of Parrukukdad son of Zebinta and Qamoi daughter of Zaraq. (Gordon D* Archiv Orientální *VI in Isbell,* Corpus*, 112-13, lines 10-12)*

Here, Azza and Azael are invoked to protect Parrukukdad and Qamoi from sorcery – presumably as non-fallen angels, even as the reference to "sending" allows for the possibility that they have already descended to earth. In any case, it is striking that these figures are here associated with Metatron and adjured in a spell dedicated to countering the very sorcery with which they are elsewhere associated. Two bowls from Nippur with duplicated materials attest an association with Hermes as well:

> *In the name of Gabriel and Michiel and Raphiel, and in the name of Asael Asiel [עסאל עסיאל] the angel and Ermes the gr[eat lord…]. (16007 Montgomery 7, line 8).*

> *In the name of Gabriel and Michael and in the name of Raphael and Asiel [עסיאל], and in Hermes the great lord, in the name of YHW in YHW. (16081 [Myrman], line 8)*[61]

In other bowls, figures with such names are called upon as ministering angels:

> *In the name of Michael, Raphael, Azael [עזאל], Azriel, Ariel… the holy angels who stand in front of the throne of the great God. (Naveh & Shaked,* Amulets and Magic Bowls*, A 7a:2-5)*

> *On your right are very many, on your left is Uziel [עוזיאל], in front of you is Susiel, behind you is Repose. Above these is God's Shekhinah. (Naveh & Shaked,* Amulets and Magic Bowls*, A 1:1-3)*[62]

At least in late antique Mesopotamia, the association of fallen angels with magic, then, was not merely a matter of theorizing antediluvian angelic sin or mapping the origins of different types of knowledge: it is reflected also in the realm of ritual practices and material objects for the protection of individuals from supernatural harm.

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[61] Here, the name Asiel emerges as a variation on Asael, concurrent with the assimilation of the names of other angels to the "–iel" ending (i.e., Michael → Michiel; Raphael → Raphiel). On Hermes, Metatron, and Enoch, see James A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur,* Philadelphia, Penn Museum, 1913, p. 122–124.

[62] Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity,* Jerusalem, Magnes, 1985. See also Moussaieff Collection Bowl 6 lines 7-8 as discussed in Shaul Shaked, "Peace be Upon You," in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, vol. 2, 1995, p. 211–216. Cf. Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, *op. cit*., A 1:1, A 7:3; Joseph Naveh & Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem, Magnes, 1993, A 19:23.

Significantly, for our purposes, the evidence for Jewish magic thus helps to highlight one plausible setting in which some Enochic traditions about the Watchers could have been transmitted, developed, and cultivated even apart from the interpretation of Genesis – and with an enduring emphasis on magic rather than angelic descent or sexual transgression.[63] The earliest Enochic material, after all, is consistently in Aramaic and already exemplary of a scribal tradition of "Aramaic cultural mediation" that ensured the movement of astronomical knowledge from cuneiform culture to Jewish and other settings, as Jonathan Ben-Dov has shown, and the incantation bowls may be best understood as a later extension of much the same phenomenon, as Siam Bhayro has suggested.[64] Especially in light of the broader affinities between the bowls and the Hekhalot literature, moreover, it makes sense that these Enochic traditions also reemerge in *Sefer Hekhalot/3 Enoch* – seemingly initially in Mesopotamia as well.[65]

The evidence of the Aramaic incantation bowls also point to a specific late antique setting in which traditions about angels flowed back and forth between Jews and non-Jews.[66] Indeed, it is often said that magic was as an interreligious or transreligious phenomenon, and this seems especially true for these bowls from late antique Mesopotamia, as shown by the remarkable parallels between the presumably Jewish bowls in Babylonian Aramaic and those in Mandaic and Syriac.[67] Accordingly, it is perhaps not surprising to hear of the Muslim exegete al-Kalbī from Iraq (d. 763 CE) discussing the angels ʿAzā, ʿAzāyā, and ʿAzazīl, and equating two of them directly with Hārūt and Mārūt.[68] Nor is surprising that al-Jāḥiẓ, also writing in Iraq, might refer to the import of Hārūt and Mārūt with primary reference to their association with magic.

[63] This is consistent with a broader pattern noted by Michael Swartz, in his survey of affinities between Qumranic precedents for later Jewish mystical, magical, and divinatory sources, whereby there is much more continuity both in form and content with regard to magic and divination than with regard to those themes deemed "mystical or visionary"; the former are more "stable and enduring" and seem to play a consistent role in the life of a community; "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Later Jewish Magic and Mysticism," in *Dead Sea Discoveries*, vol. 8, 2001, p. 182–193, quote at p. 193.

[64] Jonathan Ben-Dov, *Head of All Years*, Leiden, Brill, 2008; Siam Bhayro, "The Reception of Mesopotamian and Early Jewish Traditions in the Aramaic Incantation Bowls," in *Aramaic Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2013, p. 187–196.

[65] The exact nature of this relationship remains a matter of some debate; see further Shaked, "Peace be Upon You," *op. cit*.; Raʿanan Boustan, "The Emergence of Pseudonymous Attribution in Heikhalot Literature: Empirical Evidence from the Jewish 'Magical' Corpora," in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, vol. 14, 2007, p. 18–38. In the case of *Sefer Hekhalot/3 Enoch*, 11th/12th c. Genizah fragments (T.-S. K 21.95.L) attest the circulation of a version with more magical and astrological concerns prior to the Rabbinized versions that come down to us from the Haside Ashkenaz.

[66] Steve Wasserstrom suggests the same channel for the transmission of traditions about Metatron in *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 194–205.

[67] See e.g., Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, *op. cit*., p. 95–101, 115–116; Shaul Shaked, "Popular Religion in Sasanian Babylonia," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 21, 1997, p. 103–117. Even though Odeberg's list of parallels between *3 Enoch* and Mandaean literature (*3 Enoch*, 64-79) is plagued by the parallelomania of his age, it is perhaps worth revisiting, particularly in light of the interest in Metatron in the Mandaic magical bowls. Wasserstrom, e.g., notes the similar duplication of Azazel in Mandaean tradition, for instance, where Azazael and Azaziel are two of the four angels of the West; see his "Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Muslim literature," in Reeves, ed., *Tracing the Threads*, *op. cit*., p. 101–102, and references there.

[68] Crone, "*Book of the Watchers* in the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 30.

It is against this specific background that Crone argues, as noted above, for understanding ʻUzayr as a variant (whether aural or scribal) of the same complex of names.[69] By her reading, fallen angels are here used to critique Jewish claims to commerce with angels but also to evoke the dangers posed also to Muslims of the temptations of magic. Even without the addition of Q 9:30 to the complex, in fact, such dynamics can be inferred from Q 2:102, particularly when considered in context:

> *The problem that preoccupies the Qurʾān in the passage on Hārūt and Mārūt is that some People of the Book (i.e., Jews or Christians) prefer magic to the truth. In the preceding verse it complains that a party of the People of the Book react to the fact that a messenger has come to them from God by throwing the book behind their backs (2:101); they prefer to follow that which the demons related to Solomon, i.e., magic… We find ourselves right in the middle of Jewish magic, a well-attested phenomenon and one in which speculation about Solomon is well known to have played a role… In Mesopotamia and Iran, the great majority of incantation bowls were made by Jews, often for clients bearing Iranian names, suggesting that magic was regarded as something of a Jewish specialty there, and it must have been from a region within the Iranian sphere of influence that the story passed to the Qurʾān, for Hārūt and Mārūt are Haurvatāt and Ameretāt, two of the Zoroastrian divine beings known as* amesha spentas*, and it is in Babīl that the Qurʾān places them.*[70]

However we choose to reconstruct the connection of angels and magic variously attested by the Qurʾān, al-Kalbī, and al-Jāḥiẓ, this evidence is important – in my view – for exposing the limitations of focusing our consideration of connections between Jewish and Muslim ideas about angels only on literary or "religious" sources. Traditions about transmundane powers were often cultivated and disseminated for more individualized purposes in other forms and settings, including exorcistic and protective prayers and objects, healing rites, aggressive magic, and apotropaic and other amulets.

A similar caution arises when we look to a third reference to these figures in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr* (§41), which is framed in yet another context:

> *What is the tale of al-Zuhara (i.e., Venus)? And what happened to Suhayl (i.e., Canopus)? And what is said about Hārūt and Mārūt?*[71]

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[69] *Ibid*., p. 36–48. On this reading, Crone suggests, "the charge against the Jews would not reflect ignorance or misunderstanding of Jewish belief, but rather the anger and the polemical exaggerations that this tends to induce" (p. 43).

[70] *Ibid*., p. 27–28.

[71] Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr* §41; trans. Reeves, from Reeves and Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, *op. cit.*

In this case, the two angels appear in a list in which the first two bear quite obvious connections to astronomy. The connection of these four figures is explicated in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, as we shall see below. For now, it suffices to note the significance of this terse iteration for reminding us about the circulation of traditions about fallen and other angels also in technical and other discourses about planets and stars: just as we may miss something when we refract premodern traditions about angels through a modern bifurcation of "religion" from "magic," so too from "science."

Al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-tarbīʿ wa-l-tadwīr* also includes a question about Hermes and Idrīs, directly prior to the above questions (§40). More determinative for his treatment of fallen angels, however, is another question in the same work, which might seem at first sight to be wholly unrelated: "Just who was the father of Jurhum?" (§182). The two references to Hārūt and Mārūt in his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* are both framed as answers to this very question:

> *They claim that Jurhum was the offspring of what transpired between the angels and moral women. (The angel responsible) was an angel who disobeyed his Lord in heaven, (and) He sent him down to earth with the form and constitution of a human being. (This is) analogous to what occurred at the time of the affair of Hārūt and Mārūt and the affair of al-Zuhara (Venus), who was Ānāhīd. Whenever an angel would disobey God Most Exalted, He would send down to earth in the form of a human being. This one married the mother of Jurhum, and she bore him Jurhum… Stemming from this type of procreation and this type of composition and attribution were Bilqīs, the queen of Saba' (Sheba), and Dhū l-Qarnayn (Alexander the Great?).*[72]

> *They claim that Abū Jurhum is a descendant of those angels who came down to earth at the time when they were disobedient in heaven, similar to what is said about Hārūt and Mārūt. They brought about (the existence of) Suhayl (Canopus), who was a tithe-collector (now) transformed into a star, and they brought about the (the existence of) al-Zuhara (i.e., Venus), a woman whom they desired, whose name was Ānāhīd, (now) transformed into a star. Something similar to this is said in India about the star named ʿUṭārid (Mercury).*[73]

In both passages, al-Jāḥiẓ adduces Hārūt and Mārūt as exemplary of the very phenomenon of fallen angels, in the sense of angels who disobeyed in heaven, came down to earth, and desired human women. Angelic descent is thus explicit. That it is mentioned in the course of speculating about historical figures associated with legends of mixed human-angelic parentage – and specifically Jurhum, an ancestor of an ancient Arabian tribe in Mecca – draws our attention to local ancestral lore as

[72] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. F. Atawi, Damascus, 1968, vol. 1, p. 113.20–25; trans. Reeves, from Reeves and Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2.

[73] *Ibid.*, 6.456.3-6; trans. Reeves, from Reeves and Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2.

another possible element informing the early Islamic interest in fallen angels. It is in this context, in any case, that sexual transgression is here added to the profile of Hārūt and Mārūt, and they are thus adduced as examples of what is assumed to be a broader and more common phenomenon of angelic descent, as occasioned by angelic disobedience and divine punishment.

Although these passages begin along similar lines, however, each focuses on a different type of result – one earthly, the other celestial. The first tradition quoted above draws attention to the products of a presumably physically consummated angelic–human union, thereby leading to further speculation about other possible hybrids in human history: "stemming from this type of procreation and this type of composition and attribution were Bilqīs, the queen of Saba' (Sheba), and Dhū l-Qarnayn (Alexander the Great?)." Even if the latter is uncertain, one might readily imagine some connection to any variety of tales about figures of mixed parentage across the Near East, as disseminated in settings ranging from local folklore to imperial propaganda. We may be tempted to connect them with the Giants of Enochic texts and traditions in particular, but Jāḥiẓ's framing here reminds us that the interest in hybrid products of angelic–human union was hardly limited to speculation about the antediluvian age; indeed, if anything, we here see how fallen angels can be used to integrate and structure diverse received materials.

The second passage from *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* quoted above makes a different point, which is resonant with another branch of the reception-history of Enochic texts and traditions – that is, the cluster of late antique Egyptian reflection on illicit angelic instruction noted above. The above-noted appeal by Zosimus to use fallen angels to explain the origins of alchemy, for instance, finds a "pagan" counterpart in a story put in the voice of Isis herself in the Hermetic *Letter of Isis to Horus*:

> *...it came to pass that a certain one of the angels who dwell in the first firmament, having seen me (i.e., Isis) from above, was filled with the desire to unite with me in intercourse. He was quickly on the verge of attaining his end, but I did not yield, wishing to inquire of him as to the preparation of gold and silver. When I asked this of him, he said that he was not permitted to disclose it, on account of the exalted character of the mysteries, but that on the following day a superior angel, Amnael, would come… The next day, when the sun reached the middle of its course, the superior angel, Amnael, appeared and descended. Taken with the same passion for me he did not delay, but hastened to where I was. But I was no less anxious to inquire after these matters. When he delayed incessantly, I did not give myself over to him, but mastered his passion until he showed the sign on his head, and revealed the mysteries I sought, truthfully and without reservation.*[74]

[74] *Letter of Isis the Priestess to Horus* in Marcellin BERTHELOT, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*, 2 vols., Paris, Steinheil, 1888, vol. 2, p. 29 [28–33]. Translation follows Kyle A. FRASER, "Zosimos of Panopolis and the Book of Enoch: Alchemy as Forbidden Knowledge," in *Aries*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2004, p. 132–133.

This Hermetic text echoes early Enochic traditions about illicit angelic instruction but is also an early attestation of the narrative tradition concerning a woman whom angels or archons try to seduce but who escapes, whether through divine intervention or her own trickery, to become a star, constellation, or planet in the sky. Also in late antique Egypt, multiple variations of this narrative are integrated into "gnostic" accounts of primeval history, as attested in Coptic in the Nag Hammadi codices.[75] As noted above, it does not become integrated into known Jewish literature until the Middle Ages, when it emerges alongside Enochic traditions in the so-called "Midrash on Shemḥazai and Azael"; there, Shemḥazai encounters one of the "daughters of men" (often given the name Asterah), tries to seduce her, and gives in her demands that he first teaches her "the Name by which you are able to ascend to the Raqia," whereupon she ascends and escapes him and becomes among the stars in the Pleaides.[76] Even as this tradition recalls assertions from the *Book of the Watchers* about the Watchers' revelation of secrets to their wives, it also resonates with Rabbinic speculations about the Pleiades and the astronomical causes for the Flood, as preserved in the Babylonian Talmud (e.g., *b. RH* 11b–12a).

The patterns in the surviving attestations, thus, permit only speculation about possible Second Temple or older Jewish precedents.[77] What is important, for our present purposes, is the circulation of similar narratives across the divides of "Christian," "gnostic," and "pagan" literatures in Late Antiquity – but also across different knowledge-enterprises traditionally studied in isolation from one another by virtue of modern distinctions between "science," "religion," and "magic." Here too, the framing of these materials by al-Jāḥiẓ offers a useful corrective. Not only does al-Jāḥiẓ situate this particular tradition about fallen angels as primarily a matter of discussion concerning stars, but he points to parallels in India without any evident sense of a need to specify a difference of "religious" context: "something similar to this is said in India about the star named ʿUṭārid (i.e., Mercury)."[78]

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[75] See, e.g., *Hypostasis of the Archons* 92:18-93:1 and parallels discussed in Guy Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, Leiden, Brill, 1984, p. 53–61.

[76] In the variation of this aggadah is found in *Seder Hadar Zeqenim* and framed with reference to Gen 6:2 and Gen 28:12 (see Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrasch*, *op. cit*., vol. 5, p. 156), the woman becomes the constellation Virgo.

[77] See now Reeves, "Parascriptural Dimensions," *op. cit*., and further references there.

[78] The intensity of Muslim curiosity about Indian astrology and astronomy is noted by al-Bīrūnī – who complains, in fact, that "our fellow-believers… relate all sorts of things as beings of Indian origin, of which we have found not a single trace with the Hindus themselves" (*Alberuni's India*, trans. E. C. Sachau, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 211), before himself going to recount South Asian astrological and astronomical knowledge in great detail! In this case, the Indian tradition in question is not entirely clear. When Georges Dumézil sought Sanskrit counterparts to Hārūt and Mārūt in the hopes of reconstructing a common mythic substratum of twin tales, he looked to the Aśvins, citing their lust for the woman Sukanyā in the *Mahābhārata* (3.123); e.g., "Les Fleurs Haurot-Maurot et les Anges Haurvatat Ameretat," in *Revue des études arméniennes*, vol. 6, 1926, p. 43–69. This passage has been widely cited as if it was an obvious "parallel" (e.g., Jean de Ménasce, "Une légende indo-iranienne," *op. cit*., p. 10), but it remains that Mbh 3.123 and its variants exhibit very few commonalities of either detail or structure to the narratives surveyed above; notably lacking, for instance, is any element of astral or celestial transformation. That said, there is no dearth of Sanskrit narratives featuring women and others transformed into stars and constellation – indeed, as Stella Kramrisch observes, ancient South Asian traditions often "perpetuate figures not only by throwing them onto the screen of memory but also on the vault of heaven where they shine as stars" (*Presence of Śiva*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994,

Conclusions

In his 1995 *Between Muslim and Jew*, Steve Wasserstrom observed that "the study of religion has barely begun to interrogate the extraordinary phenomenon of Jewish–Muslim symbiosis, much less rethink the paradigm itself."[79] A decade later, Gil Anidjar repeated his insight – adding the need for attention to "the distance that is already presupposed, established, and sedimented in words, foremost among words such as the word 'between.'"[80] It may be worth repeating Wasserstrom's call even today. And, if so, it is perhaps especially with Anidjar's further caution about what may be effaced when related sets of Jewish and Islamic traditions are confined to the rubric of interaction *between* "religions."[81]

In the case of the fallen angels, we have seen how some stories, tropes, names, mythemes, and ideas move so fluidly that it may not be meaningful to label them as *only* "Jewish" or "Muslim" – let alone to imagine that arguments over priority of "origins" or directionality of "influence" might exhaust their significance. Some of these overlaps may well speak to an enduringly local Near Eastern heritage that cannot be tied to a single "religion" in exclusion of others.[82] Even the later iterations, moreover, reflect interconnectivity of a sort not readily reduced to a modern sense of dialogue or exchange *between* "religions" – in part because of the importance of magic and astronomy for shaping the discourse about fallen angels in Late Antiquity. From a modern Western perspective, it might seem self-evident that "angels" are a topic of interest only for "religion." Our evidence for fallen angels, however, blurs the boundaries of what modern thinkers separate as "magic," "science," and "religion." Here as elsewhere, scholars may wish to ask and answer questions about *religious* difference or dialogue, but many of the answers in our premodern materials speak instead to other questions – such as about the efficacy of incantations or the aetiology of celestial movements in the night sky. Our premodern materials sometimes appeal, moreover, to an antediluvian age that enables the imagining of a remembered past prior to the very types of differentiation that modern scholars of Jewish Studies, Islamic Studies, and Religious Studies are trained to study.

I leave it to others to determine whether or not early Islamic traditions about the fallen angels are representative or unusual. It may be worth noting, however, how our findings above relate to the consideration of early Islam and Enochic texts and traditions by Alexander and others on the basis of other examples of Enochic

p. 39). For the example of Prajapati chasing his daughter and being chased in turn by Rudra/Śiva across the sky, as correlated to movements of Sirius, Orion, and Aldebaran, see p. 40–50 there.

79 Steve Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 7.

80 Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 171–172.

81 As Anidjar notes of Wasserstrom, most scholarship "does not interrogate the sphere of 'religion' within which he locates his subject, nor does he offer reasons for such a confining location" (*The Jew, the Arab, op. cit.,* p. 171).

82 See also the argument made more broadly in Patricia Crone, *Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Islam*, *op. cit*., esp. p. 191–390, there with a focus on pre-Islamic Iran.

traditions. Alexander's survey of materials about Enoch and Idrīs, for example, concludes that "contacts between Muslims and Jews which ensured the transmission of traditions from Judaism to Islam were basically at a scholarly level... across the restricted front of scholarly dialogue... based to some extent on written sources" – or, in other words, not a matter of "storytelling and folklore" but rather "theological and textual hermeneutics."[83] What we have seen above, however, is perhaps more akin to what van Bladel maps as the variegated continuum of late antique materials given fresh expression in early Islamic traditions about the pre-Islamic past – in his case, especially Hermetica, and in our case, also including traditions best known from Hekhalot literature, Aramaic incantation bowls, and transregional Eurasian narratives about women who become celestial bodies. In this sense, our findings fit well with what Wasserstrom has shown for the place of magic also in the transmission of traditions about Metatron into Islamic intellectual culture.[84]

In some ways, what we have seen for fallen angels is also akin to what is suggested by David J. Halpern and Gordon Newby on the basis of an eschatological tradition about the sun and the moon associated with the Yemenite Jewish convert to Islam, Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. ca. AH 32/652 CE). Halpern and Newby point to a possible precedent in the association of fallen angels with fallen stars in the *Book of the Watchers* and other early Enochic materials.[85] This, in turn, inspires them to suggest that "a Judaism more akin to that of the pseudepigraphic Enoch books than to that of the Talmud and Midrash" existed "side by side with rabbinic Judaism… in seventh century Arabia."[86] The generative connection of astronomical and apocalyptic traditions fits well with what we have noted above. What we saw from our survey of a broader scope of data, however, is a situation far more complex than can be captured by isolating one "variety of Judaism" to serve as "influence" upon Muḥammad. Attention to Islamic "parallels," in fact, helps to reveal Rabbinic Judaism as more elastic, more dynamically connected to Hekhalot and magical Jewish traditions, and more embricated in an interconnected Near Eastern milieu than commonly assumed.[87]

Whereas Alexander, Halpern, and Newby focus on illuminating "Islamic origins," moreover, I would like to suggest that the juxtaposition of Jewish and Islamic materials may be no less important for reorienting our own scholarly purview and perspectives away from a fixation on "origins" and away from the teleological assumptions that

[83] Alexander, "Transformations of Jewish Traditions in Early Islam," *op. cit.*, p. 29 – although contrast Reeves, "Some Explorations," *op. cit.*, p. 44–52.

[84] Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew, op. cit.*, p. 194–205.

[85] Specifically: *1 Enoch* 18:11-19:2 (*Book of the Watchers*); 86:1-4; 88:1-3 ("Animal Apocalypse").

[86] David J. Halpern and Gordon Newby, "Two Castrated Bulls: A Study in the Haggadah of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār," in *Journal of the American Royal Society*, vol. 102, no. 4, 1982, p. 631–638.

[87] Hence, interestingly, confirming many of the insights and arguments made on other grounds in Raʿanan Boustan, "Rabbinization and the Making of Early Jewish Mysticism", in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 101, no. 4, 2011, p. 482–501. See further now his and other contributions to Gavin McDowell, Ron Naiweld, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, eds, *Diversity and Rabbinization: Jewish Texts and Societies between 400 and 1000 CE*, Cambridge, Open Book Publishers, 2021.

often accompany this fixation. It is in this sense that it may be heuristic for scholars of Second Temple Judaism to attend to trajectories that culminate in Islam. Most often, in the field of Biblical Studies, this assumed *telos* is some contemporary expression of Christianity, Judaism, and/or Western culture. And this, in turn, has led to the naturalization of *some* questions and categories but the occlusion and obfuscation of *other* questions and categories.

In the case of the *Book of the Watchers*, for instance, scholars typically take for granted that its depictions of the fallen angels must speak primarily to theological debates about the "origins of evil." Attention to the trajectories of the tradition as transmitted and transformed within Islam, however, helps us to notice how many of the *Book of the Watchers*' Jewish and Christian interpreters and tradents are also more concerned with questions about knowledge, on the one hand, and the comparison of angels and humankind, on the other – and also to notice the prominence of such concerns even already in the *Book of the Watchers*.

So too with magic and astronomy: when we situate early Enochic texts and traditions as prolegomenon to the history of (European) Christianity, it may seem obvious to focus foremost on its relationship to Genesis and on its opinions about the "origins of evil." But when we look back at these traditions from the perspective of those elements that proved most fertile among Muslims, Jews, "pagans," and others in the Near East, we are reminded of the determinative place of astronomical knowledge in the Aramaic Enoch tradition, already from its very earliest known stages.[88] And just as knowledge about stars was already blurred and interwoven with knowledge about angels in the Enochic *Astronomical Book*, even prior to the *Book of the Watchers*, so knowledge about fallen angels and demons in the *Book of the Watchers* and *Book of Giants* also dovetails with what we now know from the Dead Sea Scrolls about the place of transmundane powers in the Jewish magic of the time (e.g., exorcistic incantations; apotropaic prayers). Here as elsewhere, part of the power of the recent turn toward reception-history is perhaps to unsettle the notion of any single straight line from the "origin" or "invention" of this or that story or idea in the ancient past to its use or loss by "us" in the present – but also to unsettle the assumption of any single present "us" as the self-evident or single culmination.

By means of conclusion, then, I would like to return to the moment with which I began. Some years ago, I had occasion to recall it when attending a Colloquium in honor of Patricia Crone at the Institute for Advanced Study,[89] and both the memory and the event impressed me with the power of conversations between scholars of Islam and scholars of Judaism – not just to inform the specialist study

[88] Annette Yoshiko Reed, «Ancient Jewish Sciences and the Historiography of Judaism », in Jonathan Ben-Dov and Seth L. Sanders, eds, *Ancient Jewish Sciences and the History of Knowledge in the Second Temple Period*, New York, New York University Press, 2014, p. 197–256.

[89] Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey, 25 February 2015.

of each, but also to shed new perspectives on the period between them, pushing us beyond the conventionalized bounds of the study of Late Antiquity as centered on the Christianization of the Roman Empire and as culminating in medieval Europe and the modern West. There is arguably something quite significant at stake – both historically and historiographically – in conversations of this sort. Whether or not this or that specific "parallel" between Jewish and Muslim traditions is found to be plausible or illuminating, much may be gained by expanding the scope of Late Antiquity beyond the Roman Empire, looking to the multivalently magnetic contact-zones of Mesopotamia and their rippling effects upon communities and literatures across an interconnected Near East and beyond. And, hopefully, in the process, our own perspectives on the past may become further interconnected as well.

Cushions, Bottles and Roast Chickens! More Advertising about Paradise

□ Gilles COURTIEU

This study is intended to be an extension of a recently published paper[1] about the formation of the Qur'anic notion of paradise. The descriptions of Paradise in the Qur'ān are very coherent, complementary and colourful, and their purpose is to create efficient mental images; thus, by all these features, they should clearly be distinguished from other Qur'anic sources of inspiration, mainly Arab, Jewish or Christian. According to this thesis, all evidence came from another culture with much higher standards of life, material comfort, and even luxury,[2] a way of life which stirred up hope and desire in ancient Arabia, from Bedouins or other Arabs ("loose living, moral laxity and indulgence in *la dolce vita*," *dixit* E. Yarshater[3]).

Images, ideas and words did not come from Heaven but from the very Earth, not so far away, precisely from Iran and Mesopotamia, from the Sasanian Empire,[4] just in its *akme*, at the beginning of the seventh century, and a place such as al-Ḥīra is surely

1 Gilles Courtieu, "Das Glück bei Allah oder bei Khosrau? Prachtenfaltung wie bei einem persischen Gastmahl in den Paradiesversen des Koran," in Markus Gross & Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds, *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion* IV, Berlin, Verlag Hans Schiler, 2017, p. 499–543.

2 Cf. Michael Carter, "Foreign vocabulary," in Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2006, p. 120–139. See p. 130: "These terms hint at an acquaintance with higher political systems and a degree of luxury."

3 Ehsan Yarshater, "The Persian presence in the Islamic world," in Richard G. Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh, eds, *The Persian presence in the Islamic world*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 7 [4–125].

4 Cf. Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*. Leiden, Brill, 1938 (2007), p. 14: "The contacts between Arabia and the Sasanian empire of Persia were very close in the period immediately preceding Islam."

the link between Arabia and Iran.[5] Most of the Qur'anic words used in that context do not seem to be of Arabic origin and they display a Persian appearance.[6]

Descriptions of Paradise have in common to produce a very clear and directly credible scenery, a pleasing and mundane banquet for friends, courtiers and allies, made up of precise objects, materials, people, behaviour, smells and even colours. That is the reason of the success of such a creation: producing another actual world, directly believable, without any excess of fantasy.[7]

So it will be interesting to study the material elements of this material world because all of them came from a material and historical reality, as even the vocabulary clearly tells us.

I already focused on the vessels as an introduction to Persian banquet,[8] and I will here also continue in a similar direction, dealing with three not so prosaic details: (1) the cushions which lie on the bed of the pious chosen one, and their physical and symbolic signification on Earth, especially in Persian civilization; (2) a more accurate etymology and a more accurate meaning of the beverage container called *kūb*; (3) a small enigma about the paradise menu: why do the happy few in Qur'anic paradise eat only bird meat, in other terms, fowl or, to remember an old French word passed to English, poultry.

Namāriq for your comfort

The Qur'ān promises pious men[9] the most comfortable, quiet and permanent physical stance in life: reclined down on a kind of a bed, or a sofa (*arā'ik*).[10] They are drinking and talking to their neighbours or watching the servants, just as to say that they are not dead indeed. That is why they are not exactly stretched out on their backs, as if they were in a funerary context. As it is shown in the banquet's iconography for thousand years, they have to rest on their side, from the hip to the shoulder. This polite and social attitude, for all the members of these banquets, is not in the long run a very comfortable one, because they always have to lean on the same elbow, for some

5 Yarshater, "The Persian presence in the Islamic world," *op. cit*., p. 24–25. See also Isabel Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra. Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2014, p. 68–74, about the process of acculturation there, in particular about language and "höfischer Etikette."

6 Yarshater, "The Persian presence in the Islamic world," *op. cit*., p. 50.

7 The no-limit fantasy is a creation of the Sunna and the later Islamic literature. The Qur'anic paradise, on the contrary, is ruled by a strict *etiquette*.

8 Courtieu, "Das Glück bei Allah oder bei Khosrau?," *op. cit.*

9 Nothing is said about women. In paradise, as on Earth as well, banqueting is a male activity.

10 Q 18:31; 36:56; 56:13; 83:23, 35.

hours, or even for eternity.[11] The Qur'anic description insists on the physical attitude of leaning on one elbow.[12]

Then, there is a great need for smooth cushions or pillows (*namāriq*,[13] *abqarī*[14]), but in this very codified social context, these items get an important significance. For the Iranian court *etiquette*, to possess as many cushions as possible is a way to express a hierarchy and social pre-eminence among banqueters. In fact, the iconography presents two types of situations.

In the first one, typical of a royal ideology, the king, as the master of ceremony, is sitting on his throne or on a broad chair, a pile of cushions on his side (from three to seven items), though he has no need for them; the courtiers are in attendance, as one can see on Sasanian silverware.[15] Then, the king, as described in Armenian literature,[16] gives his cushions to those he wishes to favour. P'awtos Buzand (also known as Faustus of Byzantium) gives in his *Histories* some examples of this custom, which seems to be the principal way to establish a hierarchy in court, for instance with a courtier called "the senior one by throne and cushion in the royal palace."[17] He specifies how the possession of a cushion is a mark of honour for some of the courtiers of King Arshak:

> *[He designated] others, from such and lesser clans, who as officials took-their-ease upon cushions before the king with diadems on their heads. Not counting the mightiest* nahapets*, and the* tanuters*, those who were only officials, [the holders] of nine hundred cushions, came to the palace in the time of feasting [and were] disposed on banqueting-couches.*[18]

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[11] For an accurate description, see Jean-Marie Dentzer, "Iconographie iranienne du souverain couché et le motif du banquet," in *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes*, vol. 21, 1971, p. 39.

[12] Q 18:31: *wa-ḥasunat murtafaqan*: ''sitting on soft chair'' (Abdel Haleem); ''reclining (…) on couches'' (Droge); ''und liegen (behaglich) auf Ruhebetten'' (Paret); more accurate translations in Blachère : ''accoudés sur des sofas'' or Abu Sahlieh ''accoudés sur des divans,'' where the elbow reappears...

[13] Q 88:15; Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*, p. 281: a word whose origin is Middle Persian *namr*, "sweet"; Yarshater, "The Persian presence in the Islamic world," *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[14] Q 55:76; Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*, p. 210–211, probably from a Persian formula meaning "something splendid."

[15] Oleg Grabar, "An introduction to the art of Sasanian silver," in *Sasanian Silver*, Chicago: The University of Michigan Museum of Arts, 1967, figs. 13-14; more examples in Prudence O. Harper, *Silver vessels of the Sasanian period: vol. 1*, *Royal Imagery*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Arts, 1981: plate of Strelka, 7 cushions (p. 220, fig.19), "Coupe de Salomon," 6 cushions (p. 234, fig. 33), plate of Qazvin, 5 cushions (p. 235, fig. 33), plate of Klimova, 3 cushions (p. 236, fig. 35).

[16] For an assessment of Armenian sources in Sasanian history, cf. Philippe Gignoux, "Pour une évaluation de la contribution des sources arméniennes à l'Histoire sassanide," in *Acta Antiqua Academiae scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 31, 1988, p. 53–65.

[17] Nina G. Garsoïan, ed., *The epic histories attributed to P'awstos Buzand*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1989. Bk 3, chap. 9, § 32.

[18] *Ibid*., Bk 4, chap. 2, § 77.

In that way, the king grants them a part of his *xwarrah*,[19] his grace, *charisma*, superiority and generosity.[20] When courtiers are allowed to sit a little nearer to the centre of power, the pile of cushions is simply higher. That custom was still used by Kurdish tribal chieftains in the twentieth century, according to an eye-witness.[21]

A satiric example of this custom's diffusion among the society and other cultures is given by a Talmudic text, The *Bavli Bava Kama*,[22] recording an episode of Rav Kahana's life, when he met R. Johanan, who behaved in his school like a kinglet among his students:

> *R. Johanan was seated on seven mats (*bistrikei*). They pulled one mat from beneath him. He made [another] statement, and [again] he (Rav Kahana) questioned it, until they pulled all the mats from beneath him, so that he was now sitting on the ground.*[23]

The Persian influence is clear because the word cushion (or mat) is of Pehlevi origin, namely *v(i)starg*.[24] If this cushion matter could reach the Talmud, then it was able to reach the Qur'ān as well!

In the second type of situation, the iconography presents, mostly on silverware, not a royal but a more aristocratic scene, which can be a consequence of royal presentation: the banqueter, a noble male, is laying at the banquet on a couch, leaning on his left elbow, and some cushions are behind his shoulder. With his right hand, he usually holds a cup of wine. He can be alone, or sharing the couch with a female.[25] The Islamic literature provides some additional evidence: Ṭabarī describes the seat of Rustam,

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[19] The middle Persian form of the avestic *x^{v}arənah*; for explanations of this complex notion, cf. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, "Le *x^{v}arənah*," in *AION* (Ling. Section), vol. 5, 1963, p. 19–31; Richard N. Frye, "The Charisma of Kingship in Ancient Iran," in *Iranica Antiqua*, vol. 4, 1964, p. 36–54; Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Sacral Kingship in Sasanian Iran," in *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, vol. 2, 1988, p. 35–52.

[20] Marie-Louise Chaumont, "L'ordre des préséances à la cour des Arsacides d'Arménie," in *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 254, 1966, p. 471: "... le degré d'élévation de ces coussins les uns par rapport aux autres et par rapport au coussin royal, le plus élevé de tous, qui signalait aux regards l'ordre des préséances." Garsoïan adds, in *The epic histories*, *op. cit.*, p. 515: "The number of pillows heaped on the feasting couch of an individual likewise denoted his importance."

[21] Josef Orbeli, "Sasanian and early Islamic Metalwork," in Arthur U. Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, eds, *A Survey of Persian Art. Volume 2*, London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 721.

[22] *Bavli Bava Kama* 117a-b.

[23] Daniel Sperber, "On the unfortunate adventures of Rav Kahana," in Shaul Shaked, ed., *Irano-Judaica*, Jerusalem, Yad Izhaq Ben-Zvi, 1982, p. 85.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 87.

[25] For the silverware, examples in Orbeli, "Sasanian and early Islamic metalwork," p. 230, figs. A-B: in the first, Bahrām Gūr has five cushions, in front of princess Sapinud; in the second, an anonymous prince leans on three cushions; Ann C. Gunter and Paul Jett, *Ancient Iranian metalwork in the A. M. Sackler Gallery and the Freer Collection of Art*, Washington, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1992, n° 18 (5 cushions), 25 (4 cushions). In the Parthian rock relief of Tang-i Sarwak, the male figure leans on a banquet, and there are nine cushions in the pile, cf. Roman Ghirshman, *Parthes et Sassanides*, Paris, Gallimard, 1962, figs. 67-9.

the Persian chief commander at the Battle of Qādisiyya, with cushions (*wasā'id*) and rugs (*anmāṭ*) on it.[26]

So, these cushions are indeed aulic and diplomatic gifts, from a superior and sacred origin, from the *Kings of Kings*. They raise, actually and symbolically, those who are upon them, in a very material and visible hierarchy.

In the Qur'ān, which preserves ancient customs, albeit mostly from other cultural contexts, the possession of cushions is not only a matter of physical comfort: it is the expression of a very special favour and a place in an imaginary social or political order, and these advantages are to be enjoyed for eternity.[27]

Kūb for your thirst

The following interlude is just a clarification and a confirmation regarding Qur'anic vocabulary. Once again, it leads us out of Arabia, this time to the West, to Europe and the Roman Empire.

Ka's, kūb, ṣiḥāf, ibrīq, āniya[28] are the words used in the Qur'ān for vessels involved in wine supply and its consumption. Some are easy to identify (*ibrīq*), others are not, although the text gives some details about their use and appearance. Let us focus on the individual wine container (cup and goblet in English), the one people can handle just with one hand. In a single description (Q 52:23), it is clearly expressed that the *ka's* goes from one guest to his neighbour, just as the Sasanian etiquette requires.[29] If this identification of *ka's* as a cup is correct,[30] how can we deal with the word *kūb*? The homonymy is striking, and even scholars can be tempted by this direct, though a little bit careless or lazy attribution: *kūb* came from the Graeco-Roman word *koupa* or *cup(p)a; kūb* has to be or a goblet[31] or a cup[32] and it should be as simple as that.

[26] Yohanan Friedmann, tr., *The Histories of Tabari* XII, New York, State University of New York Press, 1992, vol. 12, § 2270.

[27] As far as I know, the only one who wrote about this topic is Shaul Shaked, *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam: studies in religious history and intercultural contact*, Aldershot, Variorum, 1995, chapter 7: "On some symbols of royalty", but he didn't dare to link it with the objects mentioned in the Qur'ān.

[28] Q 43:71; 56:18; 76:15; 88:14.

[29] Mario Grignaschi, "Quelques spécimens de la littérature sassanide conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Istanbul," in *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 254, 1966, p. 117. After drinking, servants bring the craters nearby the guests.

[30] Cf. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 252: Jeffery chooses the word "goblet," and favours the Greek solution: " [Aramaic and Syriac forms] seem to be from the Byzantine κοῦπα (Lat. *cupa*, …), from the older Gk. κύμβη."

[32] For Bell, Abdel Haleem and A. J. Drodge, it is simply "cup." Paret translates "Becher," equivalent to the cup in English; Sami Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh chose the elegant "calice."

It is certain that the *etymon* is a form like *cup(p)a*, but it never meant "cup" in any time in the past. The first evidence is taken from the Qur'anic text itself. First, as we have seen, the individual wine container is *ka's*. Then, in Q 88:14, the *kūb* is told to be laid down (on the floor or on a table?). In Q 56:18, *kūb* is mentioned first in the process of distribution. In Q 76:15, people (servants?) will circulate with it among the guests: they carry it.[33] So, the *kūb* has to be a much bigger container, not a cup reaching everyone's lips. If so, we need to explain why it gets such a confusing name in English or in French translations (and other languages as well). It is only possible to understand the problem if you get rid of the attraction of Greek, just for a second. In fact, the Greek language had dozens of words for wine containers with precise purposes and various forms (it is the topic of the entire Book XI of Athenaeus of Naucratis). Among them, around 500 A.D., according to Hesychius of Alexandria, there was still the *kumbas* and the *kumbion*.[34]

For once, in Byzantine Greek, the archetype is not the ancient Greek form and sense, but the Latin one, either directly (by the military, for example) or passing through Greek and Aramaic. The Byzantines, as an exception, just took a technical word from the Latinate Western part of the Roman Empire. In Latin, from ancient times, the meaning of *cup(p)a* is constant and obvious, and very different from the small Greek drinking cup.[35] *Cup(p)a* refers to a big container[36] (even a cask or a barrel, in wood), for liquids in general, especially wine of course, and its purpose is conservation, transport and at the end, distribution: the item present in the Qur'anic verses and in the paradise banquet. *Kūb* is one of the rare words coming from Latin, and this is not surprising, because of this special and so popular beverage that is wine.[37]

Even if it is now clear that *kūb* has the meaning of a big object, it is still quite difficult to get an accurate translation for that word, and to find out which one will be the best. Blachère chose the word "crater," which implies that there was a mixing of wine and water inside it.[38] But in the Qur'ān, there is evidence that the mixing was made in the

[33] In the Sasanian drinking etiquette, the guests will not move one towards the other to give him the "cup" (too exhausting, too dangerous): a servant will do it, and he can quickly clean the container, cf. Grignaschi, "Quelques spécimens de la littérature sassanide conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Istanbul," *op. cit*., p. 117.

[34] Moritz Schmidt and Hermann Duft, eds, *Hesychii Alexandrini lexicon*, Iena, Sumptibus Hermanni Dufftii (Libraria Maukiana), 1867, col. 937: both of them are described as a "kind of a drinking vessel." Hesychius gathered ancient information; he is not a useful source for late Antiquity.

[35] From ancient times, both languages took this word from an outside origin, not one from the other; it could have been κώπη "hole, gap," cf. Michiel De Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the other italic languages*. Leiden, Brill, 2005, p. 155. Ironically, the remote origin of both can be Semitic (cf. the Ka'ba itself).

[36] Cf. Aegidii Forcellini, *Totius Latinitatis Lexicon*, Prati, Typis Aldinianis, 1891, vol. 2, p. 543: "*Cuppa proprie est ligneum vas vinarium amplum*"; *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* vol. 4, p. 1410: "*Vas grande, dolium ligneum*"; that is why people spoke currently about *vinum de cupa*, taken directly from the barrel (Pliny, *Natural History* 14:27, Cicero, *In Pisonem* 27, Petronius, *Satiricon* 60:3).

[37] It is easy to understand why huge wood barrels were more used than the terracotta amphoras at the end of Antiquity, and this expansion was followed by the Latin word.

[38] He added an interesting note to his translation: "… du bas-latin *cupa*, ne désigne pas dans le Coran un vase à boire, mais un récipient sans anse, portatif, avec grande capacité, posé par terre, pour mêler le vin et l'eau" (*Le Coran (al-Qor'ân).* Traduction de R. B., Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1999 (1956), p. 649, no. 14).

individual cup itself: see the mention of the *ibrīq*, or ewer, passing through the guests, refilling and balancing the amount of alcohol. Archaeology reveals the existence of quite big containers, jugs, amphoras or bottles. Craters seem to be old-fashioned and too Greek to be real. And we still have to understand the real procedures of wine distribution in banquets in the Ancient Near East.

Poultry for your hunger

In the third part of this study, I will talk about a small but puzzling element in the description of the Qur'anic Paradise: the menu. The pious chosen ones will drink wine, they will eat fruits, and then, meat. In a unique verse, the nature of the meat is specified: bird meat (*laḥm ṭayrin*[39]), fowl or poultry, and in Sasanian terminology, what they call "white meat." How can this kind of delicacy be an additional seduction for the Qur'anic audience?

First, it comes from a simple principle: you have to promise what is impossible, or very rare to get and swallow in real life, what would be a prodigious bliss indeed for the frustrated human imagination.[40] In seventh century Arabia, just as in other periods, birds are not included in the everyday diet.[41] Texts tell us about big and usual animals to sacrifice and occasionally, about some game or prey, improper to sacrifice and, as a flying bird, rather dry and tough flesh. Flying game is surely not the kind of meat the Qur'ān mentions: the latter has nothing to do with the normal Bedouin diet[42] – it is a much more delicate, fatty and juicy meat, namely the meat of birds bred in a farming economy (a kind of activity impossible to initiate in Arabia).[43]

Once again, we have to go back to the Sasanian empire to find such products, greatly appreciated as signs of gastronomic luxury and sophistication. The Mazdaean paradise itself (surely one of the sources of Qur'anic paradise, as a whole) did not promise a

[39] Q 56:21: "Fleisch von Geflügel" (Paret); "the meat of (…) bird" (Abdel Haleem); "chair d'oiseaux" (Blachère); another explanation by Christoph Luxenberg, "Al-Najm (Q 53), Chapter of the Star. A new Syro-aramaic reading of verses 1-18," in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed., *New perspectives on the Qur'ān: the Qur'ān in its historical context 2*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 279–297. On p. 286, no. 13, he translates into English a rather neutral "fresh food": "As regard Q 56:61, it is rather difficult to imagine that there is 'roast bird' in paradise." It seems to him that Qur'anic paradise actually exists and he has a high opinion of it!

[40] Cf. Stefan Wild, "Lost in philology? The Virgins of Paradise and the Luxenberg hypothesis," in Aneglika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx, eds, *The Qur'ān in context: historical and literary investigations into the Qur'ānic milieu*, Leiden, Brill, 2010, p. 625: a paradise considered as the opposite of a deplorable reality.

[41] Cf. Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*. 2 vols. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1888. About the details of their diet and the fauna in general, vol. 1, p. 325–328; he wrote about the *gatta* fowl that "they are dry-fleshed birds and not very good to eat," according to the nomads, vol. 2, p. 72. Otherwise, elsewhere in his book, those people are only interested in birds of prey… and eggs.

[42] Joseph Horovitz, "Das Koranische Paradies," in *Scripta Universitatis atque Bibliothecae Hierosolymintanarum*, Jerusalem, Hebrew University Press, 1923. p. 9.

[43] Nowadays, chickens are very frequently eaten, but the frozen meat comes from Europe, especially from Brittany, thanks to the refrigerated cargo ships.

gourmet menu, but only an extension of ritual diet[44] (milk and butter, ox fat and *haoma*). The Qur'ān promises much more, that is to say, the best of the Sasanian gastronomy, as we read it in ancient sources: fruits and meat, more precisely poultry. The first group of evidence comes from ancient texts of the gastronomic tradition of Persia, as recorded in Greek sources first, always from the social elite and the royal court.[45] For instance, one should remember the observation of Heracleides of Cumae, in his *Persian History*:

> *... many birds also are consumed, including Arabian ostriches – and the creature is large –, geese, and cocks.*[46]

And Alexander the Great, as soon as he became "the last of the Achaemenids," received from one of his satraps:

> *ten thousand smoked coots, five thousand thrushes, ten thousand smoked quails...*[47]

In Sasanian times, among the vast choice in food,[48] we get information about the way people appreciated meat in general: tender, very hot and fatty,[49] with a clear interest in cooked birds. But a Late Antique treaty (in the form of an initiatory story), the *King Husrav and his Boy*,[50] has some chapters about cooking, and gives us more evidence about the species of fowl which were bred and cooked. The listing is impressive. The text looks like an examination, with a collection of questions and (correct) answers. The king asks:

> *Say which food is the finest and the most savoury.*

And the learned servant answers:

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44 Philippe Gignoux, "L'enfer et le paradis d'après les sources pehlevies," in *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 252, 1968, p. 234.

45 Cf. on that topic, Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "Persian Food Stereotypes and Political Identity," in John Wilkins, David Harvey and Michael J. Dobson, eds, *Food in Antiquity*, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1995, p. 286–302.

46 Athenaeus of Naucratis, *The Deipnosophists*. 7 vols, edited by Charles B. Gulick. Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1961-80, vol. 2, 145e.

47 Athenaeus of Naucratis, *The Deipnosophists*, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, 393d.

48 A general survey is provided by St. John Simpson, "From Mesopotamia to Merv: reconstructing patterns of consumption in Sasanian households," in Timothy Potts, Michael Roaf, Diana L. Stein, eds, *Culture through Objects. Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of P. R. S. Moorey*, Oxford, Griffith Institute, 2003, p. 347–378.

49 Grignaschi, "Quelques spécimens de la littérature sassanide conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Istanbul," *op. cit.*, p. 116.

50 Text translated by Davoud Monchi-Zadeh, "*Xus-rōv i Kavātān ut Rētak*, Pahlavi text, transcription and translation," in *Acta Iranica*, vol. 22, 1982, p. 47–91.

> *These are fowls all fine and good. Pea-cock and the francolin*[51] *and the partridge and the pheasant and the grey-partridge and the* spēt-dumbak *(white-tail) and the* sūr-parrak *(red-wing) and the goose which is the* čugūk *and the domestic goose and the young crane and the autumal bustard and the* kawk-anjir *francolin and the waterfowl* xsēnsār *and the ducks.*[52]

The text offers us more: a delicious recipe of marinated and then roasted chicken, an *akme* in the art of cooking:

> *But with the male domestic chicken that have been fed on hemp seeds, barley flour, and olive oil, made to run and to fast the day before (it) is killed, and plucked and hung by the leg, and on the second day, hung by the neck and brine-trated, no fowl can compete.*[53]

And then, we can take advantage of that final advice, the taste of paradise for gourmets:

> *of the fowl, fine is the meat of the back, and of the back, the finest is nearest to the tail.*[54]

Only then, does the text enumerate all the other pleasures of a Sasanian life…

The Armenian princes have that taste in common, as we can read in chronicles, but they prefer to hunt those birds, fat and delicious, and they ate the fowl meat in the banquets which followed.[55]

Even the *Shāhnāmeh* is full of references to poultry, the meat cooked and eaten on special occasions, as after-battle banquets. A simple comparison in a fighting context is revealing: the fallen enemy is told to be "like a bird upon the spit."[56] A comic moment is an argument between a merchant and his apprentice because the latter has bought

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[51] A kind of African partridge, taller than the common one.

[52] Monchi-Zadeh, "*Xus-rōv i Kavātān ut Rētak*," *op. cit.*, p. 67–68, § 25. This list is somewhat different from the text translated for the first time by Jamshedji M. Unvala, *The Pahlavi text "King Husrav and his Boy,"* Paris, P. Geuthner, 1920, §§ 23-24: "The (?) bird and the pheasant, and the hen, and the partridge, and the grey partridge with the white tail and the red wings, and the (?) and the (?) and the lark, and the fattened (?) and the male crane and the *čarz* with the crest, which appears in the month of *tir*, and the black starling and the water-hen." The *čarz* is probably the bustard, cf. Nancy H. Dupree, "Cooking." *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cooking (updated on October 28, 2011). The meanings of other birds' names are of course hard to find out.

[53] Monchi-Zadeh, "*Xus-rōv i Kavātān ut Rētak*," *op. cit.*, p. 68, § 26; there is confirmation in that quotation that those birds were bred for food.

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] Lazar Parpetsi, *History* 1:6 (Victor Langlois, ed., *Collection des Historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie*. 2 vols. Paris, Firmin Didot, Frères, Fils et Cie, 1869). Are these hunts real ones in the wild or fake ones in "Persian paradises"?

[56] Firdawsi, *Shahnameh*, edited by Arthur G. Warner and E. Warner. London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co Ltd, 1905-25., 9 vols, vol. 3, v. 1172.

a chicken.[57] In the Bijan/Manijeh romance, a roasted bird played a supporting role when a singlet-ring is concealed inside. One of the character added then that this meal "had the taste of Paradise"![58]

The Zoroastrian purity rules didn't prevent this paramount taste for poultry; actually, the *Denkart*, the late encyclopaedia of Zoroastrianism, forbids only to eat, among birds, dark ravens, owls, and vultures[59]: a prohibition which still gives room to gastronomy!

Evidence from literary texts should be sufficient, but the one from Sasanian iconography is overwhelming. Most of the birds depicted are not majestic eagles flying high in the sky or catching rabbits in their claws. No, on the contrary: these birds are calm and fat, they never fly, they stroll slowly on the ground: chickens, ducks, peacks, Guinea fowl, pheasants, herons, flamingos, geese, partridges, and birds of composite appearance are everywhere.[60] Most of the time, there are some collars around their necks and this detail confirms that they are bred and fattened as a royal property, and that they are precious, because they are delicious. Some have thought that this detail should be interpreted as the expression of the *xwarrah* (that subtle notion we met before)[61], mostly when the collar became a kind of fluttering scarf[62] or if a ring is kept in their beaks.[63] Then, those ducks' and chickens' presence on artefacts are like the menu of royal generosity in his banquets, the wealth in his kitchens, the appetite of his courtesans.

So this theme is present in all the various categories of Sasanian art, as a mark of propaganda: stucco decoration in the palaces,[64] silk and wool,[65] rock reliefs,[66]

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[57] *Ibid*., vol. 7, v. 1511.

[58] *Ibid*., vol. 3, v. 1119.

[59] *Denkart* 5/16/1: As regards the use of birds as food, the flesh of three species (the vulture, the dark raven, and the owl) is forbidden, according to the Behramjee Janjana old edition (1900) available in http://www.avesta.org/denkard/dk5s.html. The French translation in Amouzgar/Tafazzoli edition of the *Denkart* (in 5/14/3) provides another meaning for these birds names (Jaleh Amouzgar, Ahmed Tafazolli, eds, *Le Cinquième Livre du Denkard* (*Cahiers de Studia Iranica* 23). Paris, 2000. p. 52–53): wild starling (*sarigar*), raven (*warāg*), eagle (*dalman*) ; the main Zoroastrian trouble with birds is of course the funeral role of some birds, as corpses-eaters. But it did not suppress appetite for other kind of birds.

[60] List in Orbeli, "Sasanian and early Islamic Metalwork," *op. cit*., p. 721, and in Grabar, "An introduction to the art of Sasanian silver," *op. cit*., p. 68.

[61] Cf. Boris Marshak, "The decoration of some late Sasanian silver vessels and its subject matter," in Vesta Sharkhosh Curtis, Robert Hillenbrand and J. M. Rodgers, eds, *The art and archaeology of ancient Persia: new light on the Parthian and Sasanian empires*, London, I.B. Taris Publishers and the British Institute of Persian Studies, 1998, p. 84.

[62] Grabar, "An introduction to the art of Sasanian silver," *op. cit*., p. 69, p. 114, no. 13.

[63] Gunter and Jett, *Ancient Iranian metalwork*, *op. cit*., no. 26, 28.

[64] Ghirshman, *Parthes et Sassanides*, *op. cit*., p. 218, fig. 240, from Ctesiphon.

[65] Cf. an old list in Arthur U. Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, eds, *A Survey of Persian Art*, London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1939, vol. 2, p. 695–698, figs. 241, 245, 246.

[66] Cf., on people's clothing, as a decoration, at Taq-e Bostan, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/clothing-iv#prettyPhoto[content]/12. Another impressive evidence on the same relief: one servant's jacket covered with ducks, cf. Harper, *Silver Vessels*, *op. cit*., p. 112.

glyptic,[67] sigillography[68] and, of course, silverware, alone at the bottom of a cup,[69] or in medallions all over the surface of a bottle,[70] strolling in fancy vineyard,[71] or staring at nude female dancers.[72]

Domestic fowl remains a major and rather mysterious artistic theme after the fall of the Sasanians.[73] Such birds are found on Islamic silverware or stucco decoration in Umayyad period as well.[74] They will continue to be linked with wine drinking for centuries, in poetry or as a zoomorphic shape for luxury vessels.[75]

The amount of information means that during the elaboration of the Qur'anic text, outside of Arabia, the images of plumy volatiles were very popular, not as symbols of power and hegemony, but of luxury and sophistication, perhaps as symbols of royal grace and favour – the everlasting *xwarrah*, in a gastronomic manner, by the excellence of food on the one hand, just as the bacchic use of the wine, on the other. This fits quite well with the global Persian (and not specifically Zoroastrian) origin of the Qur'anic description of the *Firdaws*: a profane, cultural and social origin indeed.

Conclusion

The Qur'anic Hereafter, both paradise and hell, provides a paradox: to convince the audience of the existence of another world, the authors needed the most material, realistic (and historical) images and notions, taken from other cultures and not from their own imagination. The other world was then just the world just nearby: the ever wealthy Mesopotamia, observed by Arab neighbours (not the so-called Bedouins of the Ḥijāz, but nearer people). These other cultures and ways of life were more attractive and well known abroad. The first model is without any doubt the Sasanian elite social behaviour at its best (the banquet), as seen with the cushions and the roasty fowl, and in a minor proportion, Byzantine culture, as seen with the *kūb*/*cup(p)a*: always out of Western and Central Arabia.

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67 David Whitehouse, *Sasanian and Post-Sasanian Glass in The Corning Museum of Glass*, New York, The Corning Museum of Glass and Hudson Hill Press, 2005, n° 36, p. 37.

68 Christopher J. Brunner, *Sasanian Stamps in the Metropolitan Museum of New York*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978, p. 107–111.

69 Gunter and Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork*, *op. cit.*, n° 26.

70 Yeda Godard, "Une bouteille d'argent sassanide," in *Athar-e Iran*, vol. 3, 1938, p. 291–300, fig. 203.

71 Gunter and Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork*, *op. cit.*, n° 17, n° 39.

72 *Ibid.*, n° 17, n° 34.

73 Jean David-Weill, "Une coupe d'argent de style sassanide au Musée du Louvre," in *Monuments et mémoires Piot*, vol. 45, 1951, p. 118.

74 Cf. the stucco panels in the Khirbet al-Mafjar palace.

75 Assadullah S. Melikian-Chirvani, "The Wine Birds of Iran from Pre-Achaemenid to Islamic Times," in *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, vol. 9, 1995, p. 41–97.

The next adventure will be, of course, the visit of Qur'anic hell with Sasanian glasses, where there are so many things to discover inside: less bliss, more pain, to sum it up in a few words.

The Seismic Qur'ān: On Collective Memory and Seismic Eschatology in the Qur'ān

□ Thomas HOFFMANN

In this article I investigate religious representations of seismicity, in particular volcanism, in the foundational scripture of early Islam, i.e., the Qur'ān. Seismic activity in the form of earthquakes has been noticed and commented upon in Qur'anic studies, but the phenomenon of volcanism has been completely disregarded – despite its close correspondence to volcanic hypotheses in Hebrew Bible studies. Furthermore, I explore how these representations can be identified and interpreted and why they became worthwhile to remember and disseminate in a scripture like the Qur'ān.

Volcanism as a religious component and more or less dramatic natural intervention in human societies is a well attested historical phenomenon, not least in regions where volcanic activity is prominent, such as Indonesia, Hawaii, Middle and Central America.[1] Undoubtedly, volcanism has also affected the religious life of people and societies in places where volcanism has been dormant or very rare in historical times but active prehistorically, that is, in times where the textual, visual and performative-ritual sources are either absent, highly fragmentary or extremely open in terms of interpretation.

With its deepest roots in Western Arabia and its unique status as the very first book (or proto-book) in Arabic, the Qur'ān must also be construed as a testimony to a pre-Islamic Arabian past, *in casu* its seismic-volcanic past. Although some seismic-volcanic activity on a catastrophic scale has been attested in Islam's West-Arabian

[1] E.g. Judith Schlehe and Urte Undine Frömming, "Volcanoes," in Bron R. Taylor, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, London, Thoemmes Continuum, 2005, p. 1707–1709.

history, i.e. from the middle of the sixth century and onwards, the volcanism depicted or alluded to in the Qur'ān must necessarily stem from pre-Islamic times.

The main hypothesis is as follows: despite academic Qur'anic studies' recognition that the Qur'ān describes seismic phenomena in the form of earthquakes, no one has seriously probed the idea that some of the Qur'anic earthquakes correspond surprisingly well with volcanic activity. So far, academic study, and Muslim exegesis too, has confined itself to the idea that the seismic phenomena described and alluded to in the Qur'ān simply refers to earthquakes; defined here as the shaking and/or displacement of the ground, i.e. without the eruptive phenomena associated with volcanoes. To be sure, the phenomenon of earthquakes is well attested in the Qur'ān, but I will argue that we obtain a more coherent and accurate representation of the Qur'ān if we expand the notion of earthquake to include volcanic activity as well.

In order to recognize this wider seismic context, however, we must first know a little bit about West Arabia's geology and about volcanism. Even more importantly, we must be able to imagine an archaic frame of mind – a frame of mind that for at least 100,000 years has depended on the same kind of brain and cognitive system that modern homo sapiens possess today. However, this archaic frame of mind now and then still had to articulate, transmit and recall extraordinary and spectacular seismic phenomena in language. In order to do this, the archaic mind had to take recourse to a rhetoric that was highly metaphorical, mythical (typically involving divine agents, personification of natural phenomena including the animation of the inanimate) and blatantly fantastic and attention grabbing. In pre-literary societies, this was accomplished by the use of various oral-formulaic and poetic-mnemonic devices.[2]

The theoretical points of reference behind this seismic-volcanic perspective is beholden to a bold hypothesis, which argues that many so-called myths and legends sometimes convey information about historical or natural events. Accordingly, myths sometimes betray (pre)historical knowledge and become – in a portmanteau word – *mythstory*. An engaging and compelling reservoir of theoretical inspiration along these lines derives from Elizabeth and Paul Barber's monograph *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth*.[3] Another source of inspiration has been Barbara Sivertsen's monograph *The Parting of the Sea: How Volcanoes, Earthquakes, and Plagues Shaped the Story of Exodus*.[4]

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2 See e.g. Andrew G. Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'ān*, Lanham, Lexington, 2014; Thomas Hoffmann, "Ritual Poeticity in the Qur'an: Family Resemblances, Features, Functions and Appraisals," in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2004, p. 35–55.

3 Elizabeth Wayland Barber and Paul Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.

4 Barbara J. Sivertsen, *The Parting of the Sea: How Volcanoes, Earthquakes, and Plagues Shaped the Story of Exodus*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011.

After having argued and demonstrated, by a select number of representative examples, that volcanoes indeed are active in the Qur'anic text, I finally proceed to argue that this text reflects traces of prehistoric collective, traumatic memories of seismic disasters that in all probability have taken place along the Western ranges of the Arabian Peninsula, i.e., the most seismically active area on the peninsula. Furthermore, it is to be argued that these memories have been transformed from being a somewhat vague cluster of traumatic witness-reports conveyed in mythological, metaphorical and oral-formulaic language, to being turned into an 'up-dated' monotheistic vision of *magnalia Dei*, God's great deeds, partly in continuation of the Biblical topos of the trembling of nature during theophany.[5] Some of these *magnalia* refer to an ancient Arabian past as indicated by certain genuine Arabic names that does not figure in Biblical literature, such as Hūd and Ṣālih, and some conjure up a sense of an impending apocalyptic Judgment Day. In brief, a shift from pre-monotheist collective memory to monotheist visions.

Finally, a caveat must be issued as I am not trained in the hard sciences of geology or seismology but take my point of departure from the field of humanities and theology, specifically history of religion, Islamic and Biblical studies, but also various forms of cognitive studies. I am, however, committed to the interdisciplinary framework of so-called humanistic volcanology, which investigates how human beings and societies react and process volcanic risk and eruptions.[6]

Desideratum: The seismic Qur'ān

Seismic phenomena in the form of earthquakes are unmistakably present in the Qur'anic text universe as part of God's interventions in the human sphere. It is thus no coincidence that one of the oldest suras, Q 99, is named 'The Earthquake', *al-Zalzala*. Another sura, Q 22, opens with this prominent apocalyptic-seismic scenario: "O men, fear your Lord! Surely the earthquake [*zalzalah*] of the Hour is a mighty thing." (Q 22:1).[7] A third sura, Q 7, recalls the history of the people of Thamūd: "So the earthquake seized them, and morning found them in their habitation fallen prostrate." (Q 7:78).[8] Two other passages, Q 33:11 and Q 2:214, use the same Arabic consonantal root as in earthquake, "*zalzalah*," i.e. Z-L-Z-L, but with a more figurative meaning:

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[5] Samuel E. Loewenstamm, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Verlag Butzon and Bercker Kevelaer, 1980, p. 173–189; Leland Ryken et al., "Earthquake," in Leland Ryken et al., eds, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Leicester, InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 224–225.

[6] See e.g. John P. Lockwood and Richard W. Hazlett, *Volcanoes: Global Perspectives*, Chichester, Eiley-Blackwell, 2010; Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders, *Volcanoes in Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects of Major Eruptions*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.

[7] *Yā-ayyuhā l-nāsu ittaqū rabbakum inna zalzalata l-sā'ati shay'un 'aẓīmun.* Translations are by Arberry if nothing else is noted.

[8] *Fa-akhadhathumu l-rajfatu fa-aṣbaḥū fī dārihim jāthimīna*.

that people were tested by God and were "shaken."[9] In Q 11:82 we come across the sentence "We made its upside into its downside" (my translation), which also seems to suggest seismic activity. A synonymic root that also denotes earthquakes, blasts and shivering is R-J-F, as in Q 73:14 and 7:78: "Upon the day when the earth and the mountains shall quake [*tarjufu*]" and "So the earthquake [*al-rajfatu*] seized them..."[10] The root R-J-J denotes the act of rocking but it is only used twice and in the same verse, i.e. Q 56:4: "When the earth shall be rocked" (the remaining occurrences being Q 79:6; 7:91, 115; 29:37).[11] If one, however, pursues the context and instantiations of these roots, the meaning of earthquakes *strictu sensu* becomes less unequivocal and begins to bring to mind features of volcanic activity. For now, one example must suffice: in Q 11:82 where God is said to turn the earth upside-down, the very same phrase is immediately followed by another phrase, which seems to indicate so-called *ejecta* or *tephra*, namely "and [We] rained down stones of baked clay on it, layer upon layer."[12] Such extended contexts reveal that scholarship – for no apparent reason except lack of imagination or knowledge – has failed to notice the possible volcanic representations in the Qur'ān, whether anchored in historical memory or in the recycling of mythical topoi.[13]

While Islamicist scholarship has produced a few articles on earthquakes and other natural disasters as well as the perception and interpretation hereof in the classical Islamic world, no monograph or article has appeared with a distinct earthquake profile in relation to the Qur'ān or Islamic religion.[14] Melville's entry on "Zalzala" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* provides an up-to-date overview of earthquakes in the entire Islamic region, from Morocco to Southeast Asia. Ambraseys provides a comprehensive catalogue of source texts, but they do not engage with the Qur'anic material or natural environment except for a few remarks.[15] In Qur'anic studies proper, earthquakes are usually only mentioned in passing. The various works that deal with Q 99, "The Earthquake," seem only to consider the sura as a variation of an eschatological topos.[16] Although the *summa* of Qur'anic scholarship, *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'*ān, contains an entry on "Earth" by Heidi Toelle, it does not deal with the topic of

[9] Z-L-Z-L is a rare quadriliteral root, Arabic usually employs triliteral roots, with highly sound-symbolic potential.

[10] *Yawma tarjufu l-arḍu wa-l-jibālu…* and *fa-akhadhathumu l-rajfatu…*

[11] *Idhā rujjati l-arḍu rajjan.*

[12] *Wa-amṭarnā* ʿalayhā *ḥijāratan min sijjīlin manḍūdin.*

[13] Volcanic activity has been a prominent subject in Biblical studies. For an up-dated article on the research, see Jacob E. Dunn, "A God of Volcanoes: Did Yahwism Take Root in Volcanic Ashes?," in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament,* vol 38, no. 4, 2014, p. 387–424.

[14] E.g. Anna Akasoy, "Islamic Attitudes to Disasters in the Middle Ages: A Comparison of Earthquakes and Plagues," in *The Medieval History Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1-2, 2007, p. 387–410; Elias Antar, "Earthquake!," in *Saudi Aramco World*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1971, p. 24–31; Konrad Hirschler, "Erdbebenberichte und Diskurse der Kontinuität in der postformativen Periode," in *Der Islam*, vol. 84, 2008, p. 103-139; Charles Melville, "Zalzala," in Peri Bearman et al., eds, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Leiden, Brill Online, consulted 20 June 2022.

[15] Melville, "Zalzala," *op. cit.*; Nicholas N. Ambraseys, *Earthquakes in the Mediterranean and Middle East: A Multidisciplinary Study of Seismicity up to 1900*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

[16] Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran. Band I: Frühmekkanische Suren*, *Poetische Prophetie*, Berlin, Verlag der Weltreligionen/Insel Verlag, 2011, p. 160–166; Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'*án*: The Early Revelations*, Ashland, White Cloud Press, 2001, p. 109, 174–175.

earthquakes, which is relegated to an entry on "Eschatology" in which it only receives scanty remarks.[17] Even Toelle's otherwise excellent and innovative monograph on the classical elements in the Qur'ān, i.e. fire, water, air and earth, does not consider the possible volcanic features of these elements.[18]

As to the volcanic aspect of Qur'anic seismology, the scholarly production is almost non-existent, except for one ambitious article co-authored by three scholars, one of whom (Andrey Korotayev) is an expert on pre-Islamic Yemen.[19] This article adduces the hypothesis that the emergence of Islam is critically connected to a cluster of regional and global natural disasters, including regional earthquakes as well as local and global volcanic eruptions. Unfortunately, the article seems to have suffered a wide disregard within Islamic studies, perhaps due to the authors' extensive use of empirical data and vocabulary (and somewhat peculiar English) taken from scientific disciplines not familiar to scholars from the humanities and perhaps also due to its appearance in a lesser known Hungarian journal of orientalist studies. While I hold certain reservations about some of the inferences made regarding the emergence of Islam and the suggested concomitant cluster of natural disasters, much of the empirical data stands uncontested and will provide crucial background to my hypothesis. Thus, I put their hypothesis about causal links between natural disasters and the emergence of Islam in abeyance and adopt a less sweepingly multi-causal hypothesis: that the Qur'ān merely articulates a collection of seismic memories. Based on the mere reading of the Qur'ān, the lack of, as it were, volcanic sensitivity is somewhat surprising given some of the rather dramatic wordings, allusions and imagery presented herein. If we juxtapose the Qur'anic data with the natural environment of the early seventh century West-Arabian Qur'anic milieu, the lack of scientific studies is even more surprising since the region both pre-historically and historically has experienced the geo-hazards of both earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.[20]

Arabia Felix, Arabia Deserta and *Arabia Vulcania*

Before we venture into the details of a volcanic Qur'ān, a brief outline on volcanic Arabia should prove worthwhile. The geographers of Greek and Roman antiquity coined the phrase *Arabia Felix*, "the fortunate or fecund Arabia," to designate South

[17] Heidi Toelle, "Earth," in Jane D. McAuliffe, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 2, Leiden, Brill, 2002, p. 2–5; Jane Smith, "Eschatology," in *ibid*., p. 44–54.

[18] Heidi Toelle, *Le Coran Revisité: Le Feu, l'Eau, l'Air et la Terre*, Damas, Institut Français d'Études Arabes de Damas, 1999.

[19] Andrey Korotayev, Vladimir Klimenko, Dimitry Proussakov, "Origins of Islam: Political-Anthropological and Environmental Context," in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 52, no. 3-4, 1999, p. 243–276. See also Korotayev, *Pre-Islamic Yemen: Socio-Political Organization of the Sabaean Cultural Area in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries AD*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1996.

[20] Ambraseys, *Earthquakes in the Mediterranean and Middle East*, *op. cit.*; Peter Harrigan, "Volcanic Arabia," in *Saudi Aramco World*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2006, p. 2–13.

Arabia, i.e. the area corresponding to contemporary Yemen. They also used the expression *Arabia Deserta*, "the abandoned or deserted Arabia," to designate the desert interior of the Arabian Peninsula. They did not use the expression *Arabia Vulcania*, "(the Romanized Greek god of fire and volcanoes Hephaestus) Vulcanus' Arabia," though the name would certainly have been fitting for the Western parts of the peninsula.

The Red Sea defines a tectonic plate boundary between the African and the Arabian plates. Seismic activity in the West Arabian inland in the form of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are the indirect result of this major plate boundary. On the Arabian Shield, defining the north-Westerns parts of Saudi Arabia, a vast spread of so-called *harra*, basaltic lava-fields, are found.[21] These lava-fields cover around 80,000 km² of the Arabian Shield, and are intersected with various fairly young volcanic formations such as scoria cones, basaltic shield volcanoes, domes, spatter and tuff cones, different forms of hardened lava flows (i.e, the smooth and ropy pahoehoe and the rough and rubbly *ʻaʻā*[22]), maar craters, various forms of tephra, fumaroles, and one basaltic strato-volcano.[23] Many of the volcanoes are visible for Muslims when they journey back and forth between Islam's two most sacred cities, Mecca and Medina. Volcanologist Camp and Roobol have identified a distinct North-South chain that has been named the Mecca-Medina-Nafud volcanic line.[24] In 2009, one of these harrats, Harrat Lunayyir, became active. The magma had set in motion again and was pushing up through the crust causing approximately 30,000 minor earthquakes that caused an eight-kilometre-long surface fault rupture. As this swarm of earthquakes could possibly lead to a full-blown eruption Saudi authorities decided to evacuate approximately 40,000 people from the area, but the seismic activities eventually subsided.[25]

Throughout historical time eruptions have occurred; in terms of history of religion the so-called Medina eruption was almost fatal for the holy city. It sprang from a large harrat named Harrat Rahat and took place in 1256.[26] It lasted almost two months, and produced a massive lava flood that was on the brink of inundating Medina.

[21] The geological terminus technicus *harra* is taken from the Arabic *ḥarrat.* There are also harras as far north as in Syria and Jordan.

[22] Various spellings, e.g. aa.

[23] See e.g. Francesco G. Fedele, "Fossil Volcanism and Archaeology: the North Yemen Highlands," in Claude Albore Livadie and François Widemann, eds, *Volcanology and Archaeology*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 1990, p. 11–23; Harrigan, "Volcanic Arabia," *op. cit*. For an overview of the area in terms of so-called geoheritage, see M. R. Mohammed Moufti and Karóly Németh, *Geoheritage of Volcanic Haraats in Saudi Arabia*, Switzerland, Springer, 2016. For a brief overview of terminology related to volcanoes, see e.g., homepage of British Geological Survey https://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/hazards/volcanoes/types.html

[24] See Victor E. Camp et al., "The Madinah eruption, Saudi Arabia: Magma mixing and simultaneous extrusion of three basaltic chemical types," in *Bulletin of Volcanology*, vol. 49, 1987, p. 489–508; John Pint and Susy Pint, "The lava fields of Saudi Arabia and the formation of the Kishb lava tubes: An interview with Dr. John Roobol," 2005. http://www.saudicaves.com/lava/introobl.htm.

[25] John Pallister et al., "Broad accommodation of rift-related extension recorded by dyke intrusion in Saudi Arabia," in *Nature Geoscience*, vol. 3, no. 10, 2010, p. 705–712.

[26] See *Smithstonia Institution Global Volcanism Program* homepage which includes further references to the Medina eruption: https://volcano.si.edu/volcano.cfm?vn=231070

Volcanologists have estimated that thirteen major eruptions have transpired during the past 4500 years, that is, one every 346 years on average.[27] It is in an environment like this that the Qur'ān was produced.

Allah in the Ashes: seismic disasters on the eve of Islam

Having now established the general seismic framework of the Arabian Peninsula within the large span of geological time, we are prepared to inquire into the much more limited span of historical time. For this purpose, the earlier mentioned article written by Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov will be consulted. The title "Origins of Islam: Political-Anthropological and Environmental Context" betrays a rare interdisciplinary approach. Thus, in traditional Islamicist scholarship, the emergence of Islam has been explained with reference to two general, more or less interrelated, paradigms. One – epitomized in the influential works of W. M. Watt – suggests that the emergence of Islam was the result of a religious and socio-economic crisis in Mecca, the native town of the prophet Muḥammad, aggravated in particular by increasing economic inequalities between the tribal aristocracy and the poorer classes.[28] This crisis was again viewed as a local, urban effect of a general social malaise and feeling of anxiety that beset many of the societies of late antiquity.[29] The other paradigm rests on the notion that Islam is but a variant of the two "original" Semitic-Hellenistic monotheisms, namely Judaism and Christianity. Viewed this way the themes and topics of the Qur'ān is a kind of re-narrated (and later re-written) Biblical scripture. To be sure, the Qur'ān is a highly intertextual oeuvre betraying copious Biblical links, but to explain the eschatological and apocalyptic material in the Qur'ān as mere recycling and wandering Biblical topoi is to neglect the natural environment and milieu of ancient Western Arabia. Although Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov also view early proto-Islam through the lens of crisis, they differ from the standard crisis paradigm in their contention that natural history plays a crucial role in the genesis of Islam.

Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov starts out with two enigmatic civilizational collapses on the southern and Northern reaches of the Arabian Peninsula around the middle of the sixth century. The southern collapse took place in the second half of the sixth century concerns *Arabia Felix*, i.e. the 1500-year old and distinct South Arabian civilization, and was so devastating that written texts stopped being produced. South Arabia had in this period experienced intense societal and religious turmoil with coups, invasions and persecutions.[30] Likewise, the important dam of Marib (also

[27] Harrigan, "Volcanic Arabia," *op. cit*.

[28] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956; id., *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1956.

[29] Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East 600-1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

[30] On this question see also François de Blois, "The date of the "martyrs of Nagran"," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 1, 1990, p. 110–128; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Documentation for Ancient Arabia: Part one, Chronological Framework and Historical Sources*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1994; Irfan Shahîd, "On

known as the dam of ʿArim), which had been in use as a massive irrigation reservoir from around 1750-1700 BC experienced a catastrophic breach and was never rebuilt. Scholars have estimated that this led to mass emigration of as much as 50,000 people. Two verses in the Qur'ān seem to comment on this catastrophic event, i.e. Q 34:15-16:

> *For Sheba [i.e. the kingdom of Saba] also there was a sign in their dwelling-place – two gardens, one on the right and one on the left: "Eat of your Lord's provision, and give thanks to Him; a good land, and a Lord All-forgiving." / But they turned away; so We loosed on them the Flood of Arim, and We gave them, in exchange for their two gardens, two gardens bearing bitter produce and tamarisk-bushes, and here and there a few lote-trees.*[31]

In regard to the Northern collapses, they involve two vassal kingdoms, respectively the north-eastern Lakhmid Kingdom, subject to the Sassanid Empire, and the north-Western Ghassanid Kingdom, subject to the Byzantine Empire. The Lakhmid Kingdom was eventually appropriated by the Sassanids in the early seventh century and the Ghassanid Kingdom was finally conquered by the Muslims in 632.

Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov acknowledge that the entire Arabian Peninsula was experiencing deterioration in hierarchical royal polities and an increase and entrenchment of acephalous clan-tribal systems due to social-political turbulence. It seems as if large parts of the Arabian region were changing to a much more fluid and mobile form of social organization that revolved around so-called sacred territories, *ḥaram* and *ḥawṭa*, and pilgrimage-fairs, *mawāsim*, acting as more or less provisional eddies of refuge in the general climate of low-intensity fighting and vendettas, *tha'r*, that formed an important part of the tribal ethos. In addition to these cultural transformations, the authors refer to research that suggests that earthquakes and torrential monsoon rainfall could have devastated the dam fatally.[32] Proverbially speaking, it may have been the straw that broke the camel's back. The technical name for this is punctuated entropy.[33]

This southern scenario, however, does not explain the royal deterioration in the north and the rising success of tribal organization in between north and south. Relying on dendrochronology, palynology, marine micro-fauna data, ice and deep-sea cores as well as historical documentary sources, the authors put forward the thesis that Islam's

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the Chronology of the South Arabian Martyrdoms," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 5, 1994, p. 66–69; Glen W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

31 *La-qad kāna li-saba'in fī maskanihim āyatun jannatāni 'an yamīnin wa-shimālin kulū min rizqi rabbikum wa-ishkurū lahu baldatun ṭayyibatun wa-rabbun ghafūrun / faa'raḍū fa-arsalnā 'alayhim sayla l-'arimi wa-baddalnāhum bijannatayhim jannatayni dhawāta ukulin khamṭin wa-athlin wa-shayin min sidrin qalīlin.*

32 Andrey Korotayev, *Ancient Yemen*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995; Michael Schaloske, *Untersuchungen der sabäischen Bewässerungsanlagen in Mārib*, Mainz am Rhein, Von Zabern, 1995.

33 Christopher L. Dyer, "Punctuated Entropy as Culture-Induced Change: The case of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill," in Susannah M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith, eds, *Catastrophe & culture: the anthropology of disaster*, Santa Fe, NM, School of American Research Press, 2002, p. 159–185.

emergence was contingent on "a series of disastrous environmental phenomena both in the Mediterranean region and in the Near East, as well as in the rest of the world."[34] Among these, Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov mention the Vesuvio eruption in 512, a major and catastrophic earthquake in Syria in 526, followed by several earthquakes in Asia Minor and Europe. In 547 Egypt suffered an extreme Nile inundation that eventually caused a great famine, and in 551 a wave of earthquakes unfolded from Constantinople to Alexandria. At the same time – and perhaps aggravated by these natural disasters – the greatest plague ever raged from 531-580, that is, the so-called Justinian Plague.[35] Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov also directs attention to the fact that at least five eruptions took place in Arabia in the sixth and seventh century.[36]

As already mentioned I have some reservations regarding the causal links between Islam's emergence and concomitant long- and short-term climatic-seismic processes and consequences. Thus, I hold Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov's main hypothesis in abeyance and let it suffice for us to use their data for a more modest purpose, namely as corroborations that the Qur'ān indeed contains streaks of collective memories about seismic activity, including volcanism.

Natural *mythstory*

As noted in the introductory section the theoretical position behind my approach to Qur'anic volcanology is particularly inspired by Elizabeth and Paul Barber's *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth*. The Barbers convincingly argue that most so-called myths or legends, whether connected to illiterate or literate religions or traditions, were typically conceived as oral history. In order for people to transmit and maintain these mythical narratives they are subjected to a number of cognitive, mnemonic constraints. However, the boldest part of their work rests on the following questions and hypothesis:

> *How particular types of myths developed out of actual events: how people crunched down the information into the limited channel available for*

[34] Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov, "Origins of Islam: Political-Anthropological and Environmental Context," *op. cit.*, p. 263.

[35] A number of scholars have proposed that the Justinian Plague had weakened the Byzantine Empire so much that it became fatally vulnerable to the Arab-Muslim conquests that gained momentum under the first caliphs, see e.g. Josiah C. Russell, "That Earlier Plague," in *Demography*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1968, p. 174–184; Lester K. Little, "Life and Afterlife of the First Plague Pandemic," in Lester K. Little, ed. *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541-750*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 3–32. Another scholar, Clive Foss, has expressed doubts on this hypothesis, see Clive Foss, "Syria in Transition, A.D. 550-750: An Archaeological Approach," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 51, 1997, p. 189–269.

[36] Referring to Tom Simkin et al, *Volcanoes of the world: a regional directory; gazetteer, and chronology of volcanism during the last 10,000 years*, Stroudsburg, Hutchinson Ross, 1981, p. 112; Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov, "Origins of Islam: Political-Anthropological and Environmental Context," *op. cit.*, p. 267–268.

> *transmission, enhanced its memorability, then shot these little time capsules of knowledge down the pipeline to the listeners of the future. Not all myths are of this type, of course, but many more of them turn out to stem from actual events and real observations of the world than 20th-century scholars have commonly believed…* [37]

While some of the authors' hypotheses remain hypotheses, they are nonetheless able to present a number of strong corroborations that myths can – provided that they are interpreted correctly – convey quite accurate information.[38] In our case the most illuminating example is their reading of the so-called Klamath myth (located in the Pacific Northwest) that seems to give a fairly accurate description of the eruption of the now collapsed Mazama mountain approximately 7680 years ago.[39] Throughout Barber and Barber's book volcanological interpretations are interwoven and one chapter is completely devoted to volcanological readings, in particular Hesiod's epic poem *The Theogony*, which they not only read as a poem about *a* volcanic eruption – in concurrence with Mott Greene's earlier analysis – but as a poem about the eruption of Thera.[40]

The hypothesis that mythical and legendary narratives can be exploited as historical sources if approached with prudence and the right precautions is not new.[41] Thus, one should certainly not expect a vocabulary as detached and fine-grained as modern scientific language, but rather be ready to decipher a rhetoric that uses metaphors, analogies, hyperbolic and formulaic language, presents "fantastic" agents and details, conflates elements, compresses and warps elements of chronology and points of view. The Barbers adduce a catalogue of four rhetorical-cognitive devices termed the mytho-linguistic principles, i.e. Silence, Analogy, Compression, and Restructuring, which they divide into additional, finer-grained principles. For the present interpretation of the Arabian-Qur'anic material, these principles will not be applied systematically, as mnemonics and cognition is not the primary subject here.

In the past three decades, the idea of ethnohistory, mythstory or geomythology has been embraced and investigated by scholars working in the cross field of volcanic studies, anthropology and archaeology.[42] A somewhat related endeavor has been

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37 Barber and Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

38 See also David K. Chester and Angus M. Duncan, "Geomythology, Theodicy, and the Continuing Relevance of Religious Worldviews on Responses to Volcanic Eruptions," in John Grattan and Robin Torrence, eds, *Living Under The Shadow: Cultural Impacts of Volcanic Eruptions*, Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press, 2007, p. 203–224; Dorothy Vitaliano, *Legends of the Earth*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973.

39 Barber and Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky*, *op. cit.*, p. 8–16. This and others Pacific Northwest myths have been interpreted in the same vein by Vine Deloria, *Red Earth, White Lies*, New York, Scribner, 1995. Both Barber and Deloria pay homage to Vitaliano's *Legends of the Earth*.

40 Barber and Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky*, *op. cit.*, p. 71–88; Mott T. Greene, *Natural Knowledge in Preclassical Antiquity*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p. 61–62.

41 Jan Vansina, *Oral Traditions as History*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

42 See e.g. Russel J. Blong, *The Time of Darkness: Local Legends and Volcanic Reality in Papua New Guinea*, Seattle, University of Washinton Press, 1982; Chester and Duncan, "Geomythology, Theodicy, and the Continuing

pursued in contemporary humanistic volcanology, where witness reports and post-eruption narratives have been subjected to different kinds of analysis regarding reliability, rhetorical representation, and psycho-social dynamics of coping and collapse.[43]

Seismic eschatology in the Qur'ān

In the Qur'ān, divine epiphanies and interventions can descend on human beings as a sense of tranquility, *sakīna* (Q 48:18), or words of consolation (Q 94:1-6). However, this is an exception to the rule. Usually such divine moments are depicted as awe-inspiring or even terrifying events or scenarios. In the Qur'ān's abundant eschatological passages about the future collapse of the world as well as the violent destruction of past sinful and wayward nations (Noah's contemporaries, Pharao's Egypt and certain Arabian tribes or nations such as Thamūd and ʿĀd), the level of rhetorical intensity and grandiose imagery rises. Frequently, these passages stage the *eschaton* as striking breaches of the natural order. It is nature running amok and depicted in scenarios comprising some of the following phenomena, many of which betray a seismic and volcanic features:

- Celestial phenomena such as solar and moon eclipse (e.g. Q 75:9), the splitting of the heavens (e.g. Q 69:16) and the moon (e.g. Q 54:1), sudden darkness and blindness (e.g. Q 75:7); blackout and scattering of the stars (e.g. Q 77:8; 82:2), falling fragments from the sky (e.g. Q 17:92).
- Meteorological phenomena in the form of sandstorms (e.g. Q 29:40) and hurricanes (Q 17:69), and freezing or burning winds (e.g. Q 69:6; 56:42)
- Geological phenomena in the form of earthquakes (e.g. Q 99), splitting earth (e.g. Q 80:26; 86:12), collapsing mountains (e.g. Q 81:3), boiling oceans (e.g. Q 81:6), and eruptions from the interior of the earth (e.g. Q 99)
- Sound phenomena such as shocking trumpet blasts (e.g. Q 69:13), deafening clamor and thunderclaps and unidentified screams (e.g. Q 101:1; 69:5; 15, 73:83; 54:31).[44]

Relevance of Religious Worldviews on Responses to Volcanic Eruptions," *op. cit.*; Shane Cronin and Katharine V. Cashman, "Volcanic Oral Traditions in Hazard Assessment and Mitigation," in John Grattan and Robin Torrence, eds, *Living Under The Shadow: Cultural Impacts of Volcanic Eruptions*, Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press, 2007, p. 175–202; Wayne Moodie, A. J. W. Catchpole, Kerry Abel, "Northern Anthapaskan oral traditions and the White River Volcano," in *Ethnohistory*, vol. 39, 1992, p. 148–171; Patrick D. Nunn, "On the convergence of myth and reality: examples from the Pacific Islands," in *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 167, 2001, p. 125–138; Donald A. Swanson, "Hawaiian oral tradition describes 400 years of volcanic activity at Kilauea", in *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research*, vol. 176, 2008, p. 427–431; Paul W. Taylor, "Myth, legends and volcanic activity: an example from Northern Tonga," in *Journal of Polynesian Society*, vol. 104, 1995, p. 323–346.

43 Lockwood and Hazlett, *Volcanoes: Global Perspective*, *op. cit.*, p. 395–478.

44 The early Muslim exegete al-Thaʿlabī (d. ca. 1035) referred to the sound as a "scream from heaven, in which there was the sound of every thunderbolt and the voice of everything on earth that has a voice…" (quoted in

Often these apocalyptic Qur'anic scenarios are presented in a semi-poetic staccato, e.g., Q 81:1-14, in which the swiftness and dramatic overturning of the natural and societal order is emphasized. Qur'anic catastrophes are further characterized by an intriguing tension between something that is imminent and to be expected, both dreaded and hoped for, and something that truly escape people's expectations and always take them unawares (e.g. Q 7:187). Modern disaster research' attentiveness to slowly accumulating disasters, e.g. climate change is beyond the epistemological horizon of the Qur'ān.[45]

This list of eschaton also attests to the very different conceptions of the catastrophic; modern societies, for instance, do not usually regard solar eclipses as catastrophes or fatal portents. Rather, they celebrate them as exceptional and interesting astronomical events. Whereas modern societies would generally affirm that phenomena like earthquakes are almost nothing but harmful and costly (*pace* the research that investigates how disasters can augment and hone people's resources of resilience, solidarity and creative coping[46]), pre-modern monotheist societies were much prone to construe such disasters as blessings and curses (depending on who it befell) bestowed and inflicted by a wrathful but ultimately just God.[47] Thus, in the Qur'ān natural disasters are often set up as theatres in which the just and the unjust, the virtuous and the wicked, are opposed to each other as the elected and condemned, as those heading for eternal bliss or eternal agony.

The seismic Qur'ān: From earthquakes to eruptions

Like in Greek and Roman antiquity, the pre-Islamic and early Qur'anic Arabs did not have a word for volcano.[48] Though volcanoes are not mentioned explicitly in the Qur'ān – in contrast to earthquakes – I propose that it actually contains several mytho-poetic indices that could very well betray vestiges of a collective volcanic memory. This memory, however, is not to be identified with any specific and historically datable eruptions, like the eruption of Vesuvio for instance, but should rather be construed as somewhat vague, condensed and twisted collective memories of past eruptions

Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 80).

45 E.g. Mike Hulme, "The conquering of climate: discourses of fear and their dissolution," in *Geographical Journal*, vol. 174, no. 1, 2008, p. 5–16.

46 For a volcanic variant of this research, see Katherine V. Cashman and Shane J. Cronin, "Welcoming a monster to the world: Myths, oral traditions, and modern societal response to volcanic disasters", in *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research*, vol. 176, 2008, p. 407–418. See also Compare David K. Chester, "Theology and disaster studies: The need for dialogue," in *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research*, vol. 146, no. 4, 2005, p. 319–328. David K. Chester, Angus M. Duncan and Heather Sangster, "Human responses to eruptions of Etna (Sicily) during the late-Pre-Industrial Era and their implications for present-day disaster planning," in *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research*, vol. 225-226, 2012, p. 65–80.

47 For a relevant study of natural disasters and wrathful gods, see Amos Nur, *Apocalypse: Earthquakes, Archaeology, and the Wrath of God*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008.

48 Holger Sonnabend, "Volcano," in Hubert Cancik et al., eds, *Brill's New Pauly*, Leiden, Brill Online, 2013, consulted 20 June.

that were to be rhetorically stabilized, stored and refined in Arabian lore, depending heavily on oral-formulaic features and sundry poetic devices.[49] Later again, with the emergence of the Arabian prophet Muhammad, this material was transmitted and incorporated into a monotheist-prophetic framework of genres, namely eschatology, apocalypse, and paraenesis (i.e. passages of exhortation), but still heavily dependent on oral-formulaic and poetic devices. As for these devices, a significant feature is the repetitive structure and use of formulaic stock phrases.

The Qur'ān is a text with regular occurrences of cataclysmic tableaux or montages. This term is chosen because the verses should not be construed as coherent reports about a particular cataclysmic event. Rather, they should probably be interpreted as a configuration of observations and reports edited into a sequence that condenses space, time, and information. A good deal of these montages exhibit a manifest seismic profile, including images of earth's crusts cracking open and references to underground material emitting. In traditional Qur'ān scholarship, these references have usually been interpreted as earthquakes. Scholarship seems to have been unaware that volcanic eruptions can occur parallel with earthquake-like activity. Hence, Qur'anic scholars have not wondered why so many of the Qur'anic earthquakes are mentioned in connections with moving mountains. It seems as if the scholars have been thinking that the mountains only move due to the earthquakes. To be sure, mountains can be experienced as trembling during an earthquake, but the persistent mentioning of moving and shaking mountains may instead suggest that the mountains are not "passively" affected by earthquakes. In fact, it is much more plausible that these mountains are to be associated with a scenario of their own: volcanic eruptions. Furthermore, these pulverizing or shaking mountains are occasionally connected with phenomena that could very well resemble typical features of volcanic eruptions. This includes frequent descriptions of fire and molten metals, sudden disappearance of visibility, extreme sound burst, significant changes of the mountains' forms, and plumes of smoke and ashes.

Phenomena like these would be hard to describe as catastrophic if they did not impinge upon humans and their social environment. A number of passages describe the immediate consequences of an earthquake and/or volcanic eruptions. A passage like Q 7:78 seems to describe the eradication of the ancient Arabian people of Thamūd: "So the earthquake seized them, and morning found them in their habitation fallen prostrate." The Arabian people of Madyan also suffer this fatal destiny (Q 7:91). The Biblical story about the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, which bears striking vestiges of a volcanic eruption (Genesis 19:24-28), is also reiterated in the Qur'ān in 7:80-84. In the Qur'anic version, however, the Biblical fire and brimstone have changed to a destructive "rain," *maṭar*. This provides a fine example that not all volcanic allusions in the Qur'ān must be rooted in an ancient pre-Islamic Arabian context but

[49] E.g. Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*; Hoffmann, "Ritual Poeticity in the Qur'ân," *op. cit.*

can reflects travelling narratives that also alter substantially over time; *in casu* fire and heated stones turning into a rainfall that nonetheless yield the same destructive consequences as in the Biblical story.

Below, I present a catalogue of plausible volcanic indices in the Qur'ān attached to which are cursory explanatory and interpretive remarks. The catalogue does not presume to be exhaustive, but represent a work in progress. Thus, I only comment on verses that provide the most striking examples. As already noted, the various verses do not report specific events but present syntheses of various events, including different viewpoints and modes of perceptions (visual, haptic, and auditory).

Sura- and verse no.	Transliteration	Translation	Commentary
7:171	*wa-idh nataqnā l-jabala fawqahum ka-annahu ẓullatun waẓannū annahu wāqiʿun bihim*	And when We shook the mountain above them as if it were a canopy, and they supposed it was about to fall on them.	Typical reference to seismic tremor but notice also the Arabic word for "canopy," i.e. *ẓulla*, which generally refers to something that covers and give shadow or overshadows. In this context it could very well allude to a vast dark ash cloud that appears so massive it might fall down upon the awestruck people.
11:82	*Jaʿalnā ʿāliyahā sāfilahā wa-amṭarnā ʿalayhā ḥijāratan min sijjīlin manḍūdin*	We made its upside, its downside / and [We] rained down stones of baked clay on it, / layer upon layer (TH)	A reference to intense seismic tremor combined with images of hot, possibly brittle and ceramic-like ejecta, as well as layers of tephra fragments.
19:90	*takādu l-samāwātu yaṭafaṭṭarna minhu wa-tanshaqqu l-arḍu wa-takhirru l-jibālu haddan*	It almost causes the heavens to be torn apart, the earth to split asunder, the mountains to crumble to pieces.	A cluster of virtual, on-the-brink-*eschaton* (i.e. 'it almost causes'). The description of the heaven torn apart has usually been explainedas an effect of Qur'anic cosmology according to which the firmament is layered.

			According to this cosmology, it is the celestial layers that are torn apart or split open. An alternative volcanic interpretation suggests that this scenario fits better with an eyewitness scenario where fire and smoke seems to drive a wedge into the firmament.
20:105-108	*takādu l-samāwātu yaṭafaṭṭarna minhu wa-tanshaqqu l-arḍu wa-takhirru l-jibālu haddan / fa-yadharuhā qā'an ṣafṣafan / lā tara fīhā 'iwajan wa-lā amtan / yawma'idhin yattabi'ūna l-dā'iya lā 'iwaja lahu wa-khasha'ati l-aṣwātu lil-raḥmāni fa-lā tasma'u illā hamsan*	They will question thee concerning the mountains. Say: 'My Lord will scatter them as ashes; / then He will leave them a level hollow / wherein thou wilt see no crookedness neither any curving. / On that day they will follow the Summoner in whom is no crookedness; voices will be hushed to the All-merciful, so that thou hearest naught but a murmuring.	Volcanic eruptions can dramatically alter the form of mountains, e.g., by massive landslides, sector collapses or disappearance. Verse 108 on 'the Summoner' could very well be a reference to the pervasive and almost deafening sound impact of an eruption. This could leave people with temporary or permanent impaired hearing, making talk appear as murmur or whisper.
24:43	*…wa-yunazzilu mina l-samā'i min jibālin fīhā min baradin fa-yuṣību bihi man yashā'u wa-yaṣrifuhu 'an man yashā'u yakādu sanā barqihi yadhhabu bil-abṣāri*	…And He sends down out of heaven mountains, wherein is hail, so that He smites whom He will with it, and turns it aside from whom He will; wellnigh the gleam of His lightning snatches away the sight.	Mountains are here depicted as reservoirs of punishing hail. The choice of hail can be viewed as an effect of the so-called conflationary principle where the original material (ejacta and tephra) over time has been mistaken for/ conflated with a similar material. The reference to lightning might be a reference to the phenomenon that volcanic ash-clouds can develop supercharged static electricity.[50]

[50] See e.g. Oregon State University *Volcano World*: http://volcano.oregonstate.edu/volcanic-lightning

27:87-88	*wa-yawma yunfakhu fī l-ṣūri fa-faziʿa man fī l-samāwāti wa-man fī l-arḍi illā man shāʾa allāhu wa-kullun atawhu dākhirīna / wa-tara l-jibāla taḥsabuhā jāmidatan wahiya tamurru marra l-saḥābi*	On the day the Trumpet is blown, and terrified is whosoever is in the heavens and earth, excepting whom God wills, and every one shall come to Him, all utterly abject; / and thou shalt see the mountains, that thou supposest fixed, passing by like clouds…	A reference to the terrifying sound of an eruption. The eschatological trumpet, *al-ṣūr*, could be a loan from Biblical eschatological imagery, but it could also be interpreted as a loan that fits with the rare and uncanny sounds of volcanic eruptions. Trumpets, furthermore, conjure up images of anthropomorphic agency, *in casu* angels, which is also typical for volcanic metaphorical language. Mountains, as images of massiveness par excellence, are radically altered in this montage when turned into images of flowing and mobility. The comparison with clouds could be a metaphorical depiction of a volcanic ash-cloud.
51:32-33	*qālū innā ursilnā ilā qawmin mujrimīna / li-nursila ʿalayhim ḥijāratan min ṭīnin*	They said, 'We have been sent to a people of sinners, / to loose upon them stones of clay	Possibly a reference to pyroclastic ejecta.
52:1-16	*wa-l-ṭūri/ wa-kitābin masṭūrin / fī raqqin manshūrin /wa-l-bayti l-maʿmūri /wa-l-saqfi l-marfūʿi / wa-l-baḥri l-masjūri / inna ʿadhāba rabbika la-wāqiʿun / mā lahu min dāfiʿin / yawma tamūru l-samāʾu mawran / yawma tamūru l-samāʾu mawran / fa-waylun yawmaʾidhin lil-mukadhdhibīna / ladhīna hum fī khawḍin yalʿabūna / yawma yudaʿʿūna ilā nāri jahannama daʿʿan / hādhihi l-nāru allatī kuntum bihā tukadhdhibūna / afasiḥrun hādhā am antum lā tubṣirūna / iṣlawhā…*	By the Mount /and a Book inscribed / in a parchment unrolled, / by the House inhabited / and the roof uplifted / and the sea swarming, / surely thy Lord's chastisement is about to fall; / there is none to avert it. / Upon the day when heaven spins dizzily /and the mountains are in motion / woe that day unto those that cry lies,/ such as play at plunging,/ the day when they shall be pitched into the fire of Gehenna / 'This is the fire that you cried lies to! / What, is this magic, or is it you that do not see? / Roast in it!	A typical eschatological montage with an emphasis on movement and flow. The expression "the sea swarming" could allude to boiling and steaming seawater when meeting lava. The lava allusions are later reiterated in the "fire of Gehenna" scenario (Gehanna being another name for Hell, which is also called *al-Nār*, "the Fire"). Also references to seismic activity.

53:53-54	*wa-l-mu'tafikata aḥwā / fa-ghashshāhā mā ghashshā*	and the Subverted City He also overthrew, / so that there covered it that which covered.	Reference to seismic tremor and plausibly a reference to a city buried under layers of tephra.
55:35, 43-44	*yursalu 'alaykumā shuwāẓun min nnārin wa-nuḥāsun fa-lā tantaṣirāni / hādhihi jahannamu allatī yukadhdhibu bihā l-mujrimūna / yaṭūfūna baynahā wa-bayna ḥamīmin ānin*	Against you shall be loosed a flame of fire, and molten brass; and you shall not be helped […] This is Gehenna, that sinners cried lies to; / they shall go round between it and between hot, boiling water	Probably references to pyroclastic ejecta and lava flows. For the Qur'anic audience, the name of Gehenna naturally associate to images of fire since its other name is *al-Nār*, "The Fire." Here images of boiling water, perhaps hot springs, are added. A psychological element of utter helplessness and desperate confinement seems to be conjured up.
56:41-44	*wa-aṣḥābu l-shimāli mā aṣḥābu l-shimāl / fī samūmin wa-ḥamīmin / wa-ẓillin min yaḥmūmin / lā bāridin wa-lā karīmin*	The Companions of the Left (O Companions of the Left!) / mid burning winds and boiling waters / and the shadow of a smoking blaze / neither cool, neither goodly;	The Companions of the Left is a Qur'anic expression referring to the condemned souls on Judgment Day. The verses seems to dwell on the fatal importance of spatial position in relation to an eruption, in this case being trapped in the middle of volcanic hazards such as scorching winds, perhaps gas explosions. A smoking blaze that is big enough to cast a shadow could very well suggest an eruption column.
66:6	*yā-ayyuhā lladhīna āmanū qū anfusakum wa-ahlīkum nāran wa-qūduhā l-nāsu wa-l-ḥijāratu 'alayhā malā'ikatun ghilāẓun shidādun*	Believers, guard yourselves and your families against a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, and over which are harsh, terrible angels	Probably references to lava and its deadly potency. The image of terrible angels could perhaps refer to the vents from which the lava erupts.
67:16-17	*a-amintum man fī l-samā'i an yakhsifa bikumu l-arḍa fa-idhā hiya tamūru / am amintum man fī l-samā'i an yursila 'alaykum ḥāṣiban fa-sa-ta'lamūna kayfa nadhīri*	Do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not cause the earth to swallow you, the while it rocks? / Do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not loose against you a squall of pebbles, then you shall know how My warning is?	References to earthquakes and the appearance of fatal fissures in the ground are combined with images of a violent bombardment of pyroclastic material.

69:4-7, 13-16	*kadhdhabat thamūdu wa-'āḍun bil-qāri'ati / fa-ammā thamūdu fa-uhlikū bil-ṭāghiyati / wa-ammā 'āḍun fa-uhlikū birīḥin ṣarṣarin 'ātiyatin / sakhkharahā 'alayhim sab'a layālin wa-thamāniyata ayyāmin ḥusūman fatarā l-qawma fīhā ṣar'a ka-annahum a'jāzu nakhlin khāwiyatin / […] / wa-ḥumilati l-arḍu wa-l-jibālu fa-dukkatā dakkatan wāḥidatan / fa-yawma'idhin waqa'ati l-wāqi'at / wa-inshaqqati l-samā'u fahiya yawma'idhin wāhiyatun /*	Thamūd and 'Ād cried lies to the Clatterer. As for Thamūd, they were destroyed by the Screamer; / and as for 'Ād, they were destroyed by a wind clamorous, violent / that He compelled against them seven nights and eight days, uninterruptedly, and thou mightest see the people laid prostrate in it as if they were the stumps of fallen down palm-trees. / […] So, when the Trumpet is blown with a single blast and the earth and the mountains are lifted up and crushed with a single blow /then, on that day, the Terror shall come to pass, / and heaven shall be split, for upon that day it shall be very frail.	References to several disasters suffered by the ancient Arabian nations Thamūd and 'Ād. The disasters depicted exceed the usual Qur'anic instantaneous disasters and continue for several days. Also references to ear-splitting sounds or shockwaves in the form of clatter, screams, trumpet blasts, violent winds. Images of mass annihilation of people who appears as scattered and destroyed pieces of palm material across the landscape. The split-sky image is perhaps a reference to smoke or fire plumes. The word "terror" is here a highly metaphorical translation of the root W-Q-', which denotes something that falls down or is thrown down. Thus, it could very well be a reference to ejecta and tephra.
70:8-9	*yawma takūnu l-samā'u ka-l-muhli / wa-takūnu l-jibālu ka-l-'ihni*	Upon the day when heaven shall be as molten copper / and the mountains shall be as plucked wool-tufts	Could plausibly refer to the deep orange colouring of the sky that sometimes occur due to an eruption. The mountains as wool-tufts simile could be a conflated image of white ash clouds.
77:8-10, 16, 29-33	*fa-idhā l-nujūmu ṭumisat /wa-idhā l-samā'u furijat / wa-idhā l-jibālu nusifat / […] a-lam nuhliki l-awwalīna / […] anṭaliqū ilā ẓillin dhī thalāthi shu'abin / lā ẓalīlin wa-lā yughnī mina l-lahabi / innahā tarmī bisharārin kal-qaṣri*	When the stars shall be extinguished, /when heaven shall be split / when the mountains shall be scattered / […] / Did We not destroy the ancients, / […] / Depart to a triple-massing shadow / unshading against the blazing flame / that shoots sparks like dry faggots, / sparks like to golden herds.	A typical eschatological montage with a striking accumulation of volcanic references: occultation of the stars, split-sky image, collapsing mountains. The most conspicuous references concern the triple fire-breathing smoke-columns. The verse on the destruction of "the ancients" is a Qur'anic idiomatic expression that refers to ancient nations in the past.

78:18-21	*yawma yunfakhu fī l-ṣūri fa-ta'tūna afwājan / wa-futiḥati l-samā'u fa-kānat abwāban / wa-suyyirati l-jibālu fa-kānat sarāban / inna jahannama kānat mirṣādan*	The day the Trumpet is blown, and you shall come in troops, / and heaven is opened, and become gates, / and the mountains are set in motion, and become a vapour. / Behold, Gehenna has become an ambush.	Reference to violent sounds, perhaps terrified people crowding together. Dramatic changes in the sky along with seismic tremor. The mountains becoming a vapour could very well refer to an ash plume. Gehenna as a synonym for fire is presented as a fatal dynamic spatiality that traps people unawares, perhaps in the form of lava flows.
81:1-6, 12	*idhā l-shamsu kūwirat / wa-idhā l-nujūmu ankadarat / wa-idhā l-jibālu suyyirat / wa-idhā l-'ishāru 'uṭṭilat / wa-idhā l-wuḥūshu ḥushirat / wa-idhā l-biḥāru sujjirat / […] / wa-idhā l-jaḥīmu su"irat*	When the sun shall be darkened, /[…] when the mountains shall be set moving, / […]when the savage beasts shall be mustered, / when the seas shall be set boiling, / […] when Hell shall be set blazing,	A typical apocalyptic montage consisting of a number of natural disasters or extraordinary events that combined seem to depict volcanic eruptions. Darkening of the sun could be the result of an ash cloud. The moving mountains could refer to sector collapse. The unusual conduct of wild animals that muster instead of taking flight in various directions could be an observation of trapped animals. The boiling sea could refer an underwater eruption or lava flowing into the sea. The last verse could refer to the suddenness of an eruption with pyroclastic flows.
84:1-4	*idhā l-samā'u inshaqqat / wa-adhinat lirabbihā wa-ḥuqqat / wa-idhā l-arḍu muddat / wa-alqat mā fīhā wa-takhallat*	When heaven is rent asunder / and gives ear to its Lord, and is fitly disposed; / when earth is stretched out / and casts forth what is in it, and voids itself	A typical split-sky image combined with an image of the earth's radical restructuring and images of eruptions.
99:1-3	*idhā zulzilati l-arḍu zilzālahā / wa-akhrajati l-arḍu athqālahā / wa-qāla l-insānu mā lahā*	When earth is shaken with a mighty shaking / and earth brings forth her burdens, / and Man says, 'What ails her?'	The sura has taken name after the earthquake scenario delivered in the first verse, but the second verse reveals a clear volcanic element. The last verse points to people's traumatic bewilderment.

101:1-5, 9-11	*al-qāri'atu / mā l-qāri'atu / wa-mā adrāka mā l-qāri'atu / yawma yakūnu l-nāsu ka-l-farāshi l-mabthūthi / wa-takūnu l-jibālu ka-l-'ihni l-manfūshi*	The Clatterer! / What is the Clatterer? / And what shall teach thee what is the Clatterer? / The day that men shall be like scattered moths, and the mountains shall be like plucked wool-tufts. […] but he whose deeds weigh light in the Balance / shall plunge in the womb of the Pit / And what shall teach thee what is the Pit? /A blazing Fire!	The first three verses reiterate the notion of "the clatterer," *al-qāri'a*, a so-called *Kunstwort* [51] probably referring to something that strikes or hits, which again conjures up images of pyroclastic shelling. The image of mountains appearing like wool-tufts could be a conflated image of white ash clouds in connection to an eruption. The so-called "Pit" is a translation of the word *hāwiya*, which has been subjected to several philological interpretations.[52] None, however, have entertained the idea that it could be a metaphorical reference to a volcano's vent. The very last verse could refer to the lava in the vent, perhaps even explosive eruptions of lava.
105:3-5	*wa-arsala 'alayhim ṭayran abābīla / tarmīhim bi-ḥijāratin min sijjīlin / fa-ja'alahum ka-'aṣfin ma'kūlin*	And He loosed upon them birds in flights, / hurling against them stones of baked clay / and He made them like green blades devoured.	This sura is usually read as a reference to the destruction of a hostile Christian army heading towards Mecca in 570 AD, the traditional birth year of Muḥammad. The somewhat enigmatic word for the hurling airfall, i.e. *ḥijāratin min sijjīlin*, "stones of baked clay," could be interpreted as pyroclastic material. Big birds, vultures or eagles, are often mentioned in volcanic myths and they may plausibly be mentioned because mountain slopes are their natural habitat.[53]

[51] Neuwirth, *Der Koran*. Band I, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

[52] On hāwiya, see James Bellamy, "*Fa-ummuhū hāwiya: A note on sūrah 101:9*," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 112, 1992, p. 485–487; Devin Stewart, "Pit," in Jane D. McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān, op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 100–104.

[53] See also Barber and Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky*, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

			Furthermore, from a distance buoyant tephra in an ash cloud can sometimes look like flying birds – combining this observation with pyroclastic tephra, the image of stone-bombing birds adds a sense of realism in what would often be interpreted as a piece of fantastic literature.[54]

Further possible volcanological reference could be added and more thorough exegesis of the verses should be pursued, but this selection should suffice for now.

From (eye)witnesses to visions: from vulnerability to empowerment

Having argued that volcanoes are part and parcel of the West-Arabian environment indeed are depicted in the Qur'anic text, I now proceed to argue that the Qur'anic text plausibly reflects a prehistoric collective, traumatic memory of seismic disasters that have taken place along the Western ranges of the Arabian Peninsula. In order to survive as collective memory the information conveyed must meet certain criteria as listed by the Barber and Barber.

First, the information must be considered important and relevant. Certainly, local or regional catastrophic events like earthquakes and eruptions meet this criterion. Seismic disasters may not necessarily be experienced as catastrophic by those inflicted – as Korotayev, Klimenko and Proussakov have argued with reference to Southeast Asian super-eruptions. Local and regional eruptions, however, can be experienced in sight and sound from a long distance and must have been construed as significant or striking. If the seismic disasters were close enough to human beings, they have certainly been perceived as overwhelmingly dangerous and sometimes even fatal. For survivors or witnesses passing by the stricken sites the experience could potentially be traumatic or at least have triggered a sense of vulnerability. I argue that these collective memories of vulnerability and trauma may have been transformed in late antiquity where they went from being a cluster of witness-reports clad in a pre-scientific, "mythstorical" language functioning as a collection of traumatic collective memory to being 'rewritten' within a new monotheist eschatological teleology or theology.

[54] Professor of Volcanology Katherine Cashmann, University of Bristol, personal communication.

Second, "the information must continue to correspond to something still visible to the hearers… If tellers of volcano myths migrate away from all volcanoes, the original meaning of those myths is sure to become clouded or lost".[55] The visibility of the harrats and the various mountains/volcanoes in the West Arabian milieu is evident. Perhaps this is what happened when the early Muslims, also known as "the emigrants," *al-muḥājirūn*, migrated from Western Arabia, exchanging the political centres of Mecca and Medina to Syria (and later Iraq).

The third criterion maintains that the information has to be framed in a mnemonically efficacious way. In oral-formulaic language, this is often achieved by reiteration and redundancy and by use of rhetorically striking words and phrases. The Qur'anic text certainly employs redundancy, excels in unusual and often vivid rhetoric and imagery, and use "strange," *gharīb*, words to catch the attention and activate mnemonic cognition. This is particular noticeable in the eschatological and exhortative passages.

Given the strong cognitive and social incentives to store and transmit these seismic-volcanic experiences, it may now appear contradictory that I have been arguing that the volcanic components have been relegated into to a mere earthquake topos. How can this be? An explanation probably depends on several factors.

First, the volcanic passages' conversion from rather fluid, oral testimonies to codified written passages – eventually canonized as a typical late antiquity scripture – have obviously protected the basic structure of the reports, but have also transferred the original references of these testimonies to a totally new context. Namely that of a closed canon, in which the testimonies took on a more autonomous and symbolic significance associated with monotheist eschatology. The kind of flexible and tacit knowledge that oral-formulaic cultures usually exploit became fixed and ossified at the same time as the references turn into more and more theological (god)speech. In other words, a transformation of narratives of environmental and geo-hazardous content to proclamations and prophecies of a decidedly religio-political content.

Second, the great removal of the early caliphate's powerbase in Medina and Mecca in Western Arabia to the Umayyad dynasty in Damascus, Syria, and then, after 750, to the Abbasid dynasty in Iraq and Baghdad, changed the geological context substantially. Earthquakes were still a geological factor in the region of the Fertile Crescent, but volcanoes were absent. This may explain why the later exegetes, including Islamicist scholars, forgot to gloss and interpret these passages as references to volcanic eruptions.

Finally and most importantly, the volcanic passages changed their functional status. They had emerged as witness-reports and traumatic, cautionary tales with a high degree of immediate recognition among its original Arabian audience. Due to the

[55] Barber and Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

Qur'ān's new prophetic program this collective memory, however, came to be pitched as eschatological and exhortative discourse subsumed under a monotheist aegis and agenda, most evidently as a kind of rewritten Bible. The primary significance of these passages were no longer earthquakes or volcanoes. Rather, these powerful natural events became didactic props and paraenetic lessons that should convince and alert a sceptical audience to accept the idea of an omnipotent and unique God, who rewards and punishes people and nations according to a binary scheme of salvation and damnation. Warnings about volcanoes were turned into *taqwā*, "fear of God," and a celebration of *magnalia Dei*, "God's great deeds." The cost of this grand, cultural shift seems to be a loss of mythstory and regional knowledge about the Arabia's environmental risks and geo-hazards. However, the profit of this cultural loss, seems to be an overcoming of an ancient, collective trauma and a new sense of monotheist empowerment and salvation history.

Dating Early Qur'anic Manuscripts: Reading the Objects, Their Texts and the Results of Their Material Analysis[1]

□ Alba FEDELI

When Adolf Grohmann addressed the problem of dating early (undated) Qur'anic fragments in his famous article published in 1958, he proposed that they dated from the first century of the Islamic era, through comparison with external evidence given by dated early Arabic papyri confirming and elaborating Giorgio Levi della Vida's hypothesis. Grohmann initiated a dating system based upon the similarities of the paleographical characteristics of papyri and early Qur'anic manuscripts, thanks to access to artifacts and new findings such as the fragments from the Vatican Library described by Levi della Vida, the Michaélidès Collection, the manuscripts of the National Egyptian Library in Cairo and, lastly, the papyri of Khirbet el-Mird.[2]

[1] This article is an expanded version of a paper which circulated at the Fourth Nangeroni Meeting in Milan, 15-19 June 2015: *Early Islam: The Sectarian Milieu of Late Antiquity?* (Early Islamic Studies Seminar) with the title "Is the dating of Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts Still a Problem?". After the media discussion and the Web community's reactions to the BBC announcement of the radiometric measurements of the so-called "Birmingham Qur'ān" in July 2015, the original title seemed to be incongruous in relation to the discussions generated by the "Birmingham Qur'ān" phenomenon. All the reactions – independently from the direction scholars and community suggested or approved – showed quite clearly that the dating of early Qur'anic manuscripts is still a problem that has not lost its topicality nor has been solved. Everybody was discussing the problem, whether he/she believed that manuscript dating is still a problem, or he/she accepted the C-14 analysis and dating of the "Birmingham Qur'ān" as having settled the matter. Several new analyses and important studies have been conducted after the last revision of this article at the beginning of 2020 that make it outdated. However, as the paper circulated and was quoted in articles and books, e.g., Guillaume Dye's article in *Le Coran des historiens* published in 2019 ('Le corpus coranique. Questions autour de sa canonisation', p. 861, 864); Stephen J. Shoemaker's book published in 2022 (*Creating the Qur'an. A Historical-Critical Study*, especially, p. 78–82) and social media e.g. snapshots of the 2015 paper uploaded on Twitter, the present article on radiocarbon dating has already its place in scholarship and should be available as a printed publication.

[2] Adolf Grohmann, "The problem of dating early Qur'ānS," in *Der Islam*, vol. 33, 1958, p. 213–231. In 1947, Levi della Vida expressed his position about the non-improbability of early Qur'anic manuscripts being dated from the second half of the seventh century because of their script style that is completely analogous to script

Such a position was a reaction to the historical and cultural context at the beginning of the twentieth century in terms of theories regarding the development of the Arabic script, as well as to debates on the authenticity of the Qur'ān as a sacred text whose origins coincide with the origins of Islam. Thus, Grohmann addressed his position to both paleographers and textual critics. For example, he discussed his hypothesis based on the external evidence of Arabic papyri against the positions of Josef von Karabacek (1845-1918), who disagreed with the dating proposed by Bernhard Moritz (1859-1939), and with Mojtaba Minovi (1903-1977), who disputed the genuineness of early Qur'anic manuscripts. Nevertheless, Grohmann also mentioned Arthur Jeffery, with his doubts about the existence of Qur'anic manuscripts dating from the first century of Islam, within the frame of his studies of the *qirā'āt* tradition.[3]

In fact, dating early Qur'anic manuscripts, albeit fragmentary, plays a crucial role in Islamic studies as – if they are dated from the first century of Islam – they can partially disprove the re-dating of the Qur'anic text as a product of several and later generations in a long process, as proposed, for example, by John Wansbrough in the 1970s, as well as confirming the traditional chronology and history of the Qur'ān as it is proposed in Islamic accounts. Nevertheless, they could represent evidence for questioning the traditional chronology in the opposite direction, if they are dated before Islam, as observed by Gabriel Said Reynolds regarding the "too early" dates of the Birmingham manuscript.

In fact, the reception of the BBC announcement in July 2015 of the radiometric dating of MS Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a (i.e. the so-called "Birmingham Qur'ān") exemplifies the critical role of dating early Qur'anic manuscripts both at the academic and general public level with their unprecedented reactions, which is not merely attributable to the digital revolution and its powerful tools for information dissemination.

of papyri and inscriptions dated from the same period. See Giorgio Levi della Vida, *Frammenti Coranici in carattere cufico nella Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Codici Vaticani Arabi 1605, 1606)*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947, p. vii–viii.

3 This position of Arthur Jeffery is clearly expressed in his private correspondence with Alphonse Mingana, *e.g.* in the typed and signed letter of Jeffery to Mingana, Cairo 25 January 1936: "The orthodox savants will soon be in a bad way. On the one hand our work on the qirā'āt is showing that the text of the Qur'an is in a very wobbly condition, and if you now demonstrate that the text of the *Ḥ*adīth is equally unsound, where will they be?", mentioned in Alba Fedeli, *Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham*. PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham UK, 2015, p. 32–33.

Radiocarbon analysis and its mathematically reliable dating, when there are no discrepancies

In recent times, the use of the Accelerated Mass Spectrometry (AMS) technique for performing radiocarbon measurements has become a revolutionary method for dating early Qur'anic parchments with its label of "mathematically reliable dating" which seems to have had a great impact on Web communities and the general public, replacing the traditional paleographical method. The academic community has sometimes a skeptical approach to radiocarbon dating and scholars still seem to react to the consequences and contradictions generated – in a few cases – by the results of C14 analyses simply by not accepting them,[4] particularly in those cases where the paleographical relative dating does not agree with the radiocarbon absolute dating. Interesting examples are the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest, the Tübingen manuscript and the "Birmingham Qur'ān."[5]

[4] The approach seems to correspond to what Säve-Söderbergh said at the 12th Nobel Symposium in 1969: "If a C14 date supports our theories, we put it in the main text. If it does not entirely contradict them, we put it in a foot-note. And if it is completely 'out of date' we just drop it" (Torgny Säve-Söderbergh and Ingrid U. Olsson, "C14 dating and Egyptian chronology," in Ingrid U. Olsson, ed., *Radiocarbon Variations and Absolute Chronology*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wicksell, 1970, p. 35, quoted in Royal Ervin Taylor, *Radiocarbon Dating. An Archaeological Perspective*, Orlando, Florida, Academic Press, 1987. p. x).

[5] Beside the examples mentioned by Déroche in his survey, i.e. the Qur'ān of the Nurse (the colophon and *waqfiyya* date is 410/1020, while the radiocarbon date is 871-986 CE), a copy bearing a *waqfiyya* date of 295/907 (radiocarbon date 716-891) and the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest (see François Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, *A First Overview*, Leiden, Brill, 2014. p. 11–14), there are: a privately owned fragment (610-770 CE) described in Yasin Dutton, "An Umayyad Fragment of the Qur'an and its Dating," in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 9/2, 2007, p. 57–87; Ṣan'ā' MS DaM 20-33.1 (657-690 CE), in Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer, Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, "Neue Wege Der Koranforschung," in *Magazin Forschung (Universität des Saarlandes)*, vol. 1, 1999, p. 33–46; St. Petersburg MS E20 (775-995 CE) in Efim Rezvan, "On the Dating of an ''Uthmanic Qur'an' from St. Petersburg," in *Manuscripta Orientalia*, vol. 6/3, 2000, p. 19–22; further Ṣan'ā' manuscripts, i.e. MS DaM 01-29.01 (1405 ± 30 BP, *i.e.* 603-662 CE for sample Lyon-6040 and 1515 ± 30 BP, *i.e.* 439-606 for sample Lyon-6041), and MS DaM 01-25.01 (1475 ± 30 BP, *i.e.* 543-643 CE for sample Lyon-6044) in the online database of the Centre de datation par le radiocarbone (https://www.arar.mom.fr/banadora/); Leiden MS Or. 14.545b (650-700 CE) on the website of the university of Leiden (http://libraries.leiden.edu/special-collections/special/ancient-quran-fragments.html) and the Coranica website (http://www.coranica.de/computatio-radiocarbonica-en); Berlin MS Wetzstein II 1913 dated 662-765, σ 2 (95.4%); MS Wetzstein II 1919 dated 670-769, σ 2 (95.4%); Berlin MS or. fol. 4313 dated 606-652, σ 2 (95.4%) and Leiden MS Or. 6814 mentioned in the website of the Corpus Coranicum project (www.corpuscoranicum.de); the famous Birmingham MS Mingana Isl. Ar.1572a (1456 ± 21 BP, *i.e.* 568-645 CE, 95,4%) in Fedeli, *Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, op. cit.*, p. 175–178 and *The Birmingham Qur'an Manuscript.* University of Birmingham, Brochure of the Exhibition 2-25 October 2015, Birmingham, 2015, p. 9 and, lastly, the manuscript Tübingen Ma VI 165, see below.
Moreover, after the Fourth Nangeroni Meeting and the submission of this paper, several further artefacts have been radiocarbon dated in the framework of the *Coranica* Project and important contributions have been published. See, for example, Michael Josef Marx and Tobias J. Jocham, "Radiocarbon (^{14}C) Dating of Qur'ān Manuscripts," in Andreas Kaplony and Michael Marx, eds, *Qur'ān Quotations Preserved on Papyrus Documents, 7th-10th Centuries and the Problem of Carbon Dating Early Qur'āns*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, p. 188–221, and Eva Mira Youssef-Grob, "Radiocarbon (^{14}C) Dating of Early Islamic Documents: Background and Prospects," in the same volume, p. 139–187. The former paper is an enriched version of a 2015 article (Michael Josef Marx and Tobias J. Jocham, "Zu den Datierungen von Koranhandschriften durch die ^{14}C-Methode," in *Frankfurter Zeitschrift für Islamisch-Theologische Studien. Koranforschung Verortung und Hermeneutik*, vol. 2, 2015, p. 9–43) in which the authors discussed mainly the four manuscripts Tübingen Ma VI 165, Berlin We II 1913 and ms.or.fol.4313 and Leiden Cod.or.14.545 b/c.

The content of the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest has been divulged and studied extensively in the last decade,[6] while since the 1970s it has been the object of speculation and expectations as the alleged only surviving example of non-'Uthmanic text.[7] In his article, Sadeghi interpreted the palimpsest's text and its variant readings as proving the existence of Companions' codices, reading a non-'Uthmanic text in accordance with the account of the Islamic tradition regarding the promulgation of the 'Uthmanic Qur'ān assigned to about 650 CE. The bases of such a claim to confirm the traditional chronology are firstly, the results of the radiocarbon analysis of the parchment fragment known as Stanford '07, which is one of the scattered leaves once belonging to the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest[8] and secondly, the stemmatic analysis of the (accessible) text of the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest. These radiometric analyses carried out at the Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) Laboratory at the University of Arizona estimated that the parchment was dated 1407 ± 36 years BP (before present, i.e. 1950 CE) thus having a 95% probability (2σ) of belonging to the period from 578 to 669 CE and a 68% probability (1σ) of being dated from the period 614-656 CE. On the basis of the collation between the *scriptio inferior* of the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest and 'Uthmān's text type besides the data about the codex of Ibn Masʿūd, Sadeghi suggested that these three elements were copied from a prototype and that the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest confirms the

[6] See Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet," in *Arabica*, vol. 57, 2010, p. 343–436; Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, "Ṣanʿā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," in *Der Islam*, vol. 87, 2012, p. 1–129; Elisabeth Puin, "Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Ṣanʿā' (DAM 01-27.1)," in Markus Gross and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds, *Schlaglichter. Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, Berlin, Hans Schiler, 2008, p. 461–493; id., "Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Ṣanʿā' (DAM 01-27.1). Teil II," in Markus Gross and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds, *Vom Koran zum Islam: Schriften zur Frühen Islamgeschichte und zum Koran*, Berlin, Hans Schiler, 2009, p. 523–581; id., "Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Ṣanʿā' (DAM 01-27.1). Teil III: Ein nicht-ʿuṯmānischer Koran," in Markus Gross and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds, *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion I. Von der koranischen Bewegung zum Frühislam*, Berlin – Tübingen: Hans Schiler, 2010, p. 233–305; id., "Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Ṣanʿā' (DAM 01-27.1). Teil IV: Die *scriptio inferior* auf den Blättern 17, 18 und 19 der Handschrift DAM 01-27.1 (Sure 9:106-Ende, dann 19:1-67 und weiter)," in Markus Gross and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds, *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion II. Von der koranischen Bewegung zum Frühislam*, Berlin – Tübingen: Hans Schiler, 2011, p. 311–402; id., "Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Ṣanʿā' (DAM 01-27.1). Teil V: Die *scriptio inferior* auf den Blättern 14 and 15 sowie Auseinandersetzung mit den Thesen und der Edition des Koranpalimpsests von Behnam Sadeghi und Mohsen Goudarzi," in Markus Gross and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds, *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion III. Die heilige Stadt Mekka – eine literarische Fiktion*, Berlin – Tübingen: Hans Schiler, 2014, p. 477–618; Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest. The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First Centuries AH*, Oxford: Oxford University Press & The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017; Éléonore Cellard, "The Sanaa Palimpsest. The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First Centuries AH by Asma Hilali," in *Review of Qur'anic Research*, vol. 5, 2019, no. 9 (retrieved on 18 September 2019: https://iqsaweb.wordpress.com/publications/rqr); id., "The Ṣanʿā' Palimpsest: Materializing the Codices," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2021, p. 1–30; and François Déroche, *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle*, *Essai sur la formation du texte coranique*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2019, p. 201–229.

[7] Scholars have referred in general to the Ṣanʿā' manuscripts and not specifically to the palimpsest. For example, Michael Cook observed the absence of readings from non-'Uthmanic codices, noting, "I know of no such readings but perhaps the earliest fragments from Ṣanʿā' will have something to offer," in Michael Cook, "The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran," in *Graeco-Arabica. Festschrift in honour of V. Christides*, vol. 9-10, 2004, p. 98 [89–104]; while Alfred-Louis de Prémare referred to the Ṣanʿā' manuscripts as reading several variants of a text that was not yet established, stating "Y a-t-il de surcroît, dans l'un ou l'autre des spécimens existant à Sanaa, des variations textuelles plus notables dont on s'interdirait de faire état, et dont les informations circuleraient confidentiellement entre chercheurs?" (Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran. Questions d'hier, approches d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Téraèdre, 2004, p. 59).

[8] Sadeghi and Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qurʾān of the Prophet," *op. cit*. The leaf is in private anonymous hands and in this paper, it is referred to as Stanford '07.

existence of Companions' codices, thus providing evidence of the promulgation of the 'Uthmanic Qur'ān.[9] It should be noted that Sadeghi provided evidence for dating the palimpsest based on the textual features of the manuscript and its radiocarbon dating, thus excluding the paleographical (and codicological)[10] peculiarities of the artifact. It would be interesting to include further manuscript evidence in his stemmatic analysis, both in terms of further manuscript texts and of further elements that are present in the manuscript beyond its text.[11]

The unexpected and incongruous results given by radiometric measurements of the parchment of the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest available in the online database of the Centre de Datation par le RadioCarbone at the University of Lyon (Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1) and partially divulged in Déroche's survey of the current situation on radiocarbon dated manuscripts and in Robin's document about the dating of the Ṣan'ā' manuscripts,[12] seem to have been investigated by further radiometric analyses of the fragment (i.e. MS DaM 01-27.01 corresponding to Q 21:72) which in 2008 the Lyon laboratory esteemed as dating between 388 and 535 CE (radiocarbon age 1620 ± 30 years BP).[13] In addition to this sample, the database of the French laboratory includes details of two further fragments mentioned also in Déroche, such as the leaves from which the sample have been cut, by indicating the correspondent Qur'anic verse, namely Q 6:159 for the sample dated 543-643 CE (radiocarbon age 1475 ± 30 years BP) and Q 20:74 for the sample dated 433-599 CE (radiocarbon age 1530 ± 30 years BP). It has to be noted that the scattered leaves to which the Stanford '07 fragment belongs are likely to be part of the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest held at al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, while the three fragments listed among the Lyon laboratory's results and mentioned in Déroche are part of the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest held at Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt. The leaves of Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt and al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya together with the few leaves scattered in private collections constitute a single *codex rescriptus*.

[9] *Ibid*. See also Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," *op. cit.*

[10] Although previous materials are adapted to the format and layout of a new *codex rescriptus* in the palimpsesting process and existing traces of the codicological structure are completely destroyed in palimpsests, Cellard suggested the possible codicological structure of the original recycled object, see Cellard, "The Ṣan'ā' Palimpsest," *op. cit*.

[11] On the use of stemmatic analysis in Qur'anic manuscript studies and the potentialities of including elements of the script, decorations and subdivision of the text in understanding the evolution among manuscripts possibly by using phylogenetic programs, see Alba Fedeli and Andrew Edmondson, "Early Qur'anic Manuscripts and their Networks: a Phylogenetic Analysis Project," pre-circulating paper for the Conference "Qur'anic Manuscript Studies: State of the Field," Budapest May 2017 after the research project *Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts and their Relationship as Studied Through Phylogenetic Software* at the Central European University, Budapest.

[12] Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, *op. cit*., p. 13 and Christian Robin, "Appendice : Les manuscrits coraniques en écriture ḥijāzite de Ṣan'ā' : quelques datations," in Christian J. Robin, "L'Arabie dans le Coran. Réexamen de quelques termes à la lumière des inscriptions préislamiques," in François Déroche, Christian J. Robin and Michel Zink, eds, *Les origines du Coran, le Coran des origines*, Paris, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2015, p. 65.

[13] See the BAnque NAtionale de DOnnées RAdiocarbone pour l'Europe et le Proche Orient of the Lyon Laboratory (http://carbon14.univ-lyon1.fr/p1.htm). Information about sample no. 31867, Lyon-6045, taken in 2008 is available in their database: http://www.arar.mom.fr/banadora/ (resource accessed on 15 May 2015 and 12 November 2019). See also the fourth sample listed by Robin, "L'Arabie dans le Coran," *op. cit*., p. 65.

In reporting the two results of the Lyon laboratory (i.e. 543-643 and 433-599 CE), Déroche underlined that they "simply cannot be accepted,"[14] suggesting the geographical conditions as a possible reason for the discrepancy, mentioning the arid or semi-arid climate. Sinai mentioned the results reported in Déroche, but "since Déroche does not supply further details, it seems preferable for the time being to rely on Sadeghi and Bergmann's results, although further testing is probably called for" and the results of the older dating are labeled as "bizarrely" given.[15] The subsequently requested radiometric measurements of the leaf reading Q 21:72, which the Lyon laboratory had previously dated to 1620 ±30 years BP (i.e. 388 - 535 CE),[16] were given different uncalibrated ages, i.e. 1423 ± 23 years BP by the Oxford laboratory, 1437 ± 33 years BP by the Zurich laboratory and 1515 ± 25 years BP by the Kiel laboratory.[17]

Apart from possible judgments about the reliability and precision of the Lyon laboratory and its unexpected and incongruous results, the reasons why a single artifact – the Ṣanʿāʾ Qur'anic palimpsest – has been given four dates (388-535, 433-599 and 543-643 CE by Lyon and 578-669 CE by the Arizona laboratory) should be investigated and the possible sources of error understood. Furthermore, the measurements by Lyon, Oxford, Zurich and Kiel reveal considerable differences even within the same parchment leaf. This discrepancy should call for further investigation about the causes that determined such inconsistency. In radiocarbon measurements, unexpected or incongruous results can reveal important information about the context of the samples and possible sources of contamination.[18]

In fact, parchment is a complex biomaterial whose main component is collagen,[19] and its chemistry and condition can be modified by external factors as "harsh

[14] Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, *op. cit*., p. 13. Reported also in Hilali, The *Sanaa Palimpsest*, *op. cit*., p. 20–21.

[15] Nicolai Sinai, "When did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Part I," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 77, no. 2, 2014, p. 276 [273–292].

[16] Sample no. 31867, taken in 2008.

[17] See Robin, "L'Arabie dans le Coran," p. 65. A footnote adds that "Les résultats de Kiel et de Zurich ont été obtenus au second essai, ce qui suggère une possible contamination de l'échantillon et expliquerait le résultat aberrant obtenu à Lyon." Reynolds refers to the discussions of the early dates given by the Lyon laboratory over social media in his text published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, mentioning "Some scholars have held that they are so early that the job had been botched. However, still further tests (not yet published) on additional fragments of this manuscript have been done which have also yielded early results. In any case, the Birmingham results suggest that Lyon might not have botched the job after all". See Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Variant Readings: The Birmingham Qur'an in the Context of Debate on Islamic Origins," in *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 August 2015, p. 14–15.

[18] Elisabetta Boaretto, "Dating Materials in Good Archaeological Contexts: The Next Challenge for Radiocarbon Analysis," in *Radiocarbon*, vol. 51/1, 2009, p. 275 [275–281]: "Unexpected results may provide invaluable archaeological information when problems of context and analytical procedures can be excluded. This information could lead to a revision of the chronology, but may also provide insights into the site structure and the site formation processes, such as disturbed contexts."

[19] Elena Badea, Giuseppe Della Gatta and Tatiana Usacheva, "Effects of Temperature and Relative Humidity on Fibrillar Collagen in Parchment: A Micro Differential Scanning Calorimetry (Micro DSC) Study," in *Polymer Degradation and Stability*, vol. 97, 2012, p. 346–353.

cleaning, improper conservation and restoration,"[20] and environmental factors such as humidity, temperature, light, pollution and extreme events including floods.[21] Differential Scanning Calorimetry measurements have been used to evaluate the effect of accelerated aging on new parchment and environmental damage to historical parchment.[22] The good condition of al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya parchments as I saw them in 2008 seems to suggest that these leaves and the Dār al-Makḥṭūṭāt leaves had been placed and stored in two different places for a long period of time. The fact that the leaves held at al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya are not damaged even without having been restored raises the question as to whether they have been exposed to the elements, like the Dār al-Makḥṭūṭāt parchments, which were stored in the false ceiling of the Great Mosque of Ṣan'ā' for centuries, thus exposed to hot conditions and heavy rain.[23] This phenomenon of temperature variations and rain should be considered in investigating why some of the analyses have dated the latter parchments to an older period in comparison with the Stanford '07 fragment. For this reason, the choice of the sample to be removed from the artifact should avoid areas of localized degradation such as the edges of a manuscript, which are normally preferred for destructive analyses[24] because they do not contain script.[25] This stresses the fact that radiocarbon tests – which are a powerful method for dating parchments – can sometimes estimate results that seem imprecise (or impossible), because of the alteration and contamination of the biomaterial, thus dating something that is not the age of the parchment, i.e. anything that contains carbons from a different age. In this regard, a further distinction can be suggested between the condition of the leaves from Dār al-Makḥṭūṭāt and al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, as only the former leaves were restored during the German mission in the 1980s. Lastly, the different laboratories probably used different pre-treatment methods for removing contamination.[26]

[20] Elena Badea, Lucreția Miu, Petru Budrugeac, Maria Giurginca, Admir Mašić, Nicoleta Badea, and Giuseppe Della Gatta. "Study of Deterioration of Historical Parchments by Various Thermal Analysis Techniques Complemented by SEM, FTIR, UV-Vis-NIR and Unilateral NMR Investigations," in *Journal of Thermal Analysis and Calorimetry*, vol. 91, no. 1, 2008, p. 17 [17–27].

[21] Elena Badea, Giuseppe Della Gatta, and Petru Budrugeac, "Characterisation and Evaluation of the Environmental Impact on Historical Parchments by Differential Scanning Calorimetry," in *Journal of Thermal Analysis and Calorimetry*, vol. 104, no. 2, 2011, p. 495–506.

[22] Badea, Della Gatta and Usacheva, "Effects of Temperature and Relative Humidity," *op. cit.*

[23] The 1970s manuscripts were discovered during restoration work on the Mosque because of the damage caused by natural disasters such as frequent floods and heavy rain. However, the collective memory of local people in Ṣan'ā' reported that there was a previous discovery of manuscripts known since the 1960s. The leaves from al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya are supposed to be part of this previous discovery. See Alba Fedeli, "Deposits of Texts and Cultures in Qurʾānic Palimpsests: A Few Remarks on Objects and Dynamics in Palimpsesting," in Claudia Rapp, Giulia Rossetto, Jana Gruskovà and Grigory Kessel, eds, *New Light on Old Manuscripts: The Sinai Palimpsests and Other Advances in Palimpsest Studies*, in *Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung*, vol. 45, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Forthcoming 2022.

[24] Fiona Brock, "Radiocarbon Dating of Historical Parchments," in A. J. Timothy Jull and Christine Hatté, eds, *Proceedings of the 21st International Radiocarbon Conference*, in *Radiocarbon*, vol. 55, no. 2–3, 2013, p. 353–363.

[25] To my knowledge, the sample taken in October 2007 during my participation in the project to digitize a few Ṣan'ā' manuscripts was removed from the external margin of a leaf.

[26] See Brock, "Radiocarbon Dating of Parchments," *op. cit.*, as regards pre-treatment methods, i.e. the five pre-treatment protocols and the inconsistent results for untreated samples. See also Fiona Brock, Michael Dee, Andrew Hughes, Christophe Snoeck, Richard Staff and Christopher Bronk Ramsey. "Testing the Effectiveness of Protocols for Removal of Common Conservation Treatments for Radiocarbon Dating,"

The large discrepancy between the results of the leaves from al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya and Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt, but also among the samples of the same leaf, suggests the necessity of investigating any possible source of contamination[27] and the physical, biological and chemical deterioration of the parchment, otherwise such dating of a single artifact is useless, insofar as the results are inconsistent.

Radiocarbon and other methods of dating (absolute and relative dating)

Nevertheless, radiocarbon analyses should not be divorced from other methods of dating such as the study of the material culture of the object with its paleographical, codicological and artistic peculiarities, together with the textual analysis of the content. Materiality and text have to be compared to and confirmed by external evidence such as, for example, similar linguistic features of dated texts and paleographical elements of dated documents.

Thus, for example, Grohmann dated early Qur'anic manuscripts in comparison with the script of early Arabic papyri, and in the 1980s, Déroche initiated a new method for grouping the large and non-systematized corpus of early Qur'anic manuscripts based on paleographical analysis and comparison with contemporary dated documents.[28] His contribution changed the study of Qur'anic manuscripts and their classification. Moreover, in analyzing the codex Parisino-petropolitanus, Déroche also considered the textual variants, the writing process by a team of professional scribes in charge

in *Radiocarbon*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2018, p. 35–50, and the interesting remarks about the importance of knowing the exact details of conservation treatment of artefacts because of the potential alterations to the chemistry of both the conservation treatment and the sample material (p. 36 and 43). As regards the German mission and the conservation projects planned and executed after the 1970s discovery of the manuscripts, Thomas Eich is tracing their details in "Die Wissenschaft, eine Revolution – und der Alltag. Das Jemen-Projekt an der Hamburger Orientalistik in den 1980er Jahren," in Rainer Nicolaysen et al., eds, *100 Jahre Universität Hamburg. Band 2, Studien zur Hamburger Universitäts- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte in vier Bänden*, Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2021, p. 489–508.

[27] As regards factors that can affect the accuracy and precision of radiocarbon dating, see for example "*in situ* production of ^{14}C in plant structures (particularly wood) at relatively high altitudes by the direct action of cosmic-ray-produced neutrons" (Taylor, *Radiocarbon Dating*, *op. cit*., p. 7); "the presence of high organic content materials such as peats, and the proximity of petroleum products such as asphalt or tar or fossil organics such as lignite or coal" (*ibid*., p. 40) and solvents, as they contain carbon (*ibid*., p. 42–43). As an example of incorrect radiocarbon dating due to contamination, see the case of the dating of the Dead Sea scrolls in Georges Bonani, Susan Ivy, Willy Wölfli, Magen Broshi, Israel Carmi and John Strugnell, "Radiocarbon Dating of Fourteen Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Radiocarbon*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1992, p. 843–849; Niccolo Caldararo, "Storage Conditions and Physical Treatments Relating to the Dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Radiocarbon*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1995, p. 21–32; Steve Braunheim, Joseph Atwill and Robert Eisenman, "Redating the Radiocarbon Dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Dead Sea Discoveries*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2004, p. 143–157; Kaare Lund Rasmussen, Johannes van der Plicht, Gregory Doudna, Frederik Nielsen, Peter Højrup, Erling Halfdan Stenby and Carl Th. Pedersen, "The effects of Possible Contamination on the Radiocarbon Dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls II: Empirical Methods to Remove Castor Oil and Suggestions for Redating," in *Radiocarbon*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2009, p. 1005–1022.

[28] François Déroche, *Les Manuscrits du Coran. Aux origines de la calligraphie coranique*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale (*Catalogue des manuscrits arabes. Deuxième partie: Manuscrits musulmans, 1, 1*), 1983.

of copying from an exemplar, and the use of the object itself in discussing the dating of the manuscript as produced after 650 and before 700 CE, in the third quarter of the seventh century. More recently, in his 2014 *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, Déroche described a paleographically homogeneous group of manuscripts introducing a new style of writing (i.e. group O I). On the basis of the page layout, illuminations and a professional approach to the text, the scholar identified an aesthetic and ideologically motivated change in this group that he connected to the Umayyad ruling elite thus placing the style of writing and its manuscripts at the end of the seventh century and beginning of the eighth century. The consideration for possible implications in terms of socio-historical context, like for example the new vision of the Qur'ān as a book to be distinct from other sacred books or the production under official patronage are an instrument for suggesting that manuscripts were produced under the Umayyad rule during the first decades of the eighth century.[29]

In her article published in 1990, Whelan tried to apply art-historical methods to the paleographical analysis of Qur'anic manuscripts, and not only to their ornaments, to group them and formulate their relative dating,[30] by also focusing on the possible different milieus of professional scribes, namely scholars specializing in copying the Qur'anic text in the so-called Kufic style and those who wrote any kind of text for different patrons. Moreover, Whelan stressed the fact that "no external evidence so far known – no colophon, *waqf* notice, or other datable element – permits a definitive attribution of any extant Qur'ān or group to a period earlier than the third/ninth century."[31] Although her analysis was focused on the art-historical components of manuscripts, she recognized the methodological importance of including all of the aspects of a corpus (i.e. paleographical, codicological, textual and ornamental criteria) and their context in order to group manuscripts on geographical and chronological bases.

Textual analysis has a central role, for example in Dutton's study of an Umayyad fragment of three leaves, among which one has been radiocarbon dated to between 609 and 694 CE with a 95.4% probability (i.e. 1363 ± 33 years BP).[32] The analysis of the text and verse numbering led him to date the leaves to the end of the first century or beginning of the second century of Islam, as the presence of variants reflecting a Meccan system different from the readings of Ibn Kathīr (d. 120/738) implies that the leaves were written before Ibn Kathīr became the standard reading of Mecca. For Dutton, the paleographical element is not used as a criterion for dating the manuscript,

[29] François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam. Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 156–157; id., *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, *op. cit.*, p. 75–105 and 107–133.

[30] Estelle Whelan, "Writing the Word of God: Some Early Qur'ān Manuscripts and Their Milieux, Part I," in *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 20, 1990, p. 113–147.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

[32] OxA-10860, see Dutton, "An Umayyad Fragment," *op. cit.*, p. 63–64. Dutton uses the same approach in his analysis of MS Mingana Arabic Islamic 1572a (see Yasin Dutton, "Two 'Ḥijāzī' Fragments of the Qur'an and Their Variants, or: When Did the *Shawādhdh* Become *Shādhdh*?" in *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts*, vol. 8, 2017, p. 1–56).

but the textual criterion confirmed by radiocarbon analysis provides evidence for attributing the script to the Umayyad period, in contrast with Déroche who classified such a script as early Abbasid by assuming "a broadly linear chronological development to early Qur'anic scripts, with 'Ḥijāzī' scripts coming first,"[33] rather than the coexistence of two writing styles.

Sometimes, radiocarbon dating seems to possess a sort of supremacy that authorizes the acceptance of its results separate from other methods of relative dating. Nevertheless, radiocarbon dating should provide confirmation of parallel analyses,[34] as paleography, for example, "is often a more accurate method of dating."[35] Without a link to the textual and physical analysis of the artifact, dating like that provided and shared through the Web for the Tübingen manuscript Ma VI 165 risks generating an irreversible impact on the Web community without providing any context for such information. The analyses performed by the ETH Laboratory of Ion Beam Physics in Zurich dated the Tübingen manuscript to a quite narrow range, i.e. the period between 649-675 CE, with a 95.4% probability (i.e. 1357 ± 14 years BP). The Web community echoed the information from Tübingen University's press release,[36] which was reported extensively on numerous websites and transformed into the discovery of a copy of the Qur'anic text "that may be the oldest in the world"[37] in a sort of competition among institutions that hold and scholars who study or identify "the oldest" Qur'anic manuscript in the world. Moreover, this competition led to the inevitable comparison with the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest, as we read for example: "Up until today, the famous Ṣanʿā' manuscript has been viewed as the oldest manuscript, dating back to almost exactly 671 AD. The MA VI 165 script cannot be narrowed down further than between 649 AD to 675 AD, so now both documents are tied for the 'oldest copy' record."[38] The alleged almost exact year 671 CE for the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest agrees neither with the information collected in the database of the Lyon laboratory nor with the information given in Sadeghi and Bergmann's article.[39] In 2014, in announcing and then discussing the radiocarbon results of the Tübingen manuscript, the notion of the dating of the parchment has completely been superimposed upon the

[33] Dutton, "An Umayyad Fragment," *op. cit*., p. 82. In commenting the radiocarbon results of fourteen Qur'anic manuscripts, Marx and Jocham observe the chronological development of script styles as supported by C-14, see Marx and Jocham, "Radiocarbon (14C) Dating of Qur'ān Manuscripts," *op. cit*., p. 214–216.

[34] Richard Burleigh and Arthur David Baynes-Cope, "Possibilities in the Dating of Writing Materials and Textiles," in *Radiocarbon*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1983, p. 669–674.

[35] Bonani et al., "Radiocarbon Dating of Dead Sea Scrolls," *op. cit*., p. 843.

[36] The press release stated simply the period (i.e. 649-675 CE) and that this dating was a century older than previously thought, see https://www.uni-tuebingen.de/en/news/press-releases/press-releases/article/raritaet-entdeckt-koranhandschrift-stammt-aus-der-fruehzeit-des-islam.html, published online on 10 November 2014 (accessed on 10 November 2014 and 15 May 2015).

[37] See for example Rahat Husain, "World's Oldest Quran Discovered and may be Linked to Imam Ali," in *Communities Digital News*, 19 November 2014. http://www.commdiginews.com/world-news/middle-east/worlds-oldest-quran-discovered-and-may-be-linked-to-imam-ali-30011/ (accessed on 19 November 2014 and 29 February 2016).

[38] Husain, "World's Oldest Quran Discovered," *op. cit*.

[39] Sadeghi and Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion," *op. cit*.

dating of the text. In this replacement process, no reference has been proposed to the type of script and letter shapes of the text itself or a comparison to contemporary dated documents which exhibit similar features, meaning that the uniformity of letter shape and writing system between dated documents (i.e. papyri or inscriptions that have a date or a reference to a precise episode) and undated early Qur'anic manuscripts could confirm the results of the radiocarbon measurements.[40] The (parchment and thus the) script of the Tübingen manuscript should not be an isolated concept without a process of comparison with features present in contemporary examples. Reference to textual elements in this manuscript has been proposed by Michael Marx and Tobias Jocham, although their comments about the archaic orthographic features are not supported by numbers and frequency.[41]

A comparative approach between artefacts and contemporary documents provided a clearer insight into the comprehension of the early Arabic script when 'Ali ibn

[40] Déroche identified the Tübingen manuscript MAVI165 as a variety of the script B Ia dated from the second/eighth century based on its paleographical features (see Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, *op. cit*., p. 132–133). The peculiar – although inconsistent – shape of *'ayn* in final position with a descender ending in a spiral-shaped tail (e.g. at l. 7 of the first leaf that has been displayed on almost all of the websites repeating the news of the radiocarbon results of the analyses of the Tübingen manuscript) should be compared with similar situations – if they exist - exhibiting such a feature. A further example of letter shape that can reveal the typology of the script is *kāf* in its final and isolated position, see François Déroche, "Un critère de datation des écritures coraniques anciennes: le kâf final ou isolé," in *Damaszener Mitteilungen*, vol. 11, 1999, p. 87–94 and pl. 15-16. The manuscript exhibits this letter in its shape with two parallel horizontal traits mainly of the same length (i.e. parallel symmetrical) or the lower trait slightly longer than the upper horizontal, while the ascender has the same height as *alif* and is almost perpendicular to the horizontal traits (Déroche, "Un critère de datation," p. 90). In building typologies and groups of scripts, Déroche considered the final and isolated *kāf* with non-parallel asymmetrical horizontal traits as the older shape in comparison with the script of early papyri from the beginning of Islam and attested before the sixth century. On the other hand, the final and isolated *kāf* with parallel and asymmetrical horizontal traits is likely to be the shape preferred at the end of the first/seventh century, in use in the second/eighth century and discontinued at the beginning of the third/ninth century (Déroche, *ibid.*, p. 90–91). Within the groups B II and D – to which belong manuscripts dated from the third/ninth-tenth centuries (Déroche, *Les manuscrits du Coran*, *op. cit*., p. 50–51), Déroche observed that the two parallel traits are of the same length (i.e. short *kāf* in contrast with elongated *kāf*). Thus, the shape of the final and isolated *kāf* of the Tübingen manuscript with parallel and symmetric traits seems not to suggest a very early date. However, paleography has not been taken into account nor discussed in accepting the radiocarbon analysis results in the web-based dissemination about the dating of the manuscript.

[41] In the later literature about the radiocarbon analysis of the Tübingen manuscript, a comparison with further orthographic features of the text was elaborated in order to discuss the dating of a manuscript that paleographically is dated from the eighth century while 14C measurements place its parchment production in the seventh century, see Marx and Jocham, "Radiocarbon (14C) Dating of Qur'ān Manuscripts," *op. cit*. The authors proposed a few partial analyses of the orthography of the Tübingen manuscript, focusing on a few key words that occur frequently in the text. Thus, for example, they observe that the manuscript contains the archaic spelling of the word *shay'* as *sh'y* without substantiating the archaic spelling with numbers and frequency. In fact, in the section of text of its seventy-seven leaves, the word *shay'* occurs forty-eight times, exhibiting the old orthography in nine instances and the more recent orthography without *alif* in thirty-nine instances. Therefore, the presence of the non-old spelling in the 80% of the cases would suggest to further analyze the orthographic situation of the manuscript in order to understand its possible production in the seventh century. Moreover, the distinction between archaic spelling as generated in its historical period and caused by a mechanism in the copying process from an older exemplar is a possibility mentioned by the authors, i.e. "yet it is also conceivable, of course, that the scribe had copied an archaic spelling", see Marx and Jocham, "Radiocarbon (14C) Dating of Qur'ān Manuscripts," *op. cit*., p. 208. Thus, the archaic orthography argument does not seem to be completely persuasive in supporting the manuscript production in seventh century. The orthographic argument is worth being explored and placed in its historical context although it deserves a more complete investigation.

Ibrahim Ghabban and Robert Hoyland compared the characteristics of the script (letter shape and writing system) and the orthography of the inscription of Zuhayr, dated 24 AH/644-645 CE with documents dated to the first few decades of Islam, for example the Ahnas papyrus of 22 AH. Despite the different writing materials – ink on papyrus and incisions on sandstone rock – the script and orthography of these two documents is "startlingly uniform."[42]

Interplay between (social) scholars, journalists and bloggers: the dating of the "Birmingham Qur'ān"

The risk of the irreversible impact predicted by the media coverage of the Tübingen manuscript dating expressed all of its power in the reactions to the announcement of the radiocarbon dating results for the Mingana leaves in July 2015. The Oxford laboratory dated the manuscript Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a between 568-645 CE (95.4 %), i.e. 1456 ± 21 years BP.[43] The reception of the Birmingham Qur'ān phenomenon – the manuscript is now widely known as the "Birmingham Qur'ān" – has been unprecedented. The message of the headlines of the BBC announcement, i.e. "'Oldest' Koran fragments found in Birmingham University" and "What may be the world's oldest fragments of the Koran have been found by the University of Birmingham" does not correspond to and is not substantiated in the article itself by any arguments telling that the Birmingham manuscript is the oldest. In fact, in the article based upon the related video and statements from a few scholars, Sean Coughlan wrote: "among the earliest in existence"; "one of the oldest fragments of the Koran in the world"; "so old"; "one of the oldest fragments of the Koran in the whole world"; "among the very oldest surviving texts of the Koran"; [the manuscript] "becomes one of the oldest known fragments of the Koran"; "this makes it impossible to say that any is definitively the oldest" and "among the very oldest." Despite the absence of direct declarations about the oldest Qur'anic manuscript, the object has been received all over the world as it appears in the headlines. All media, blogs, newspapers and broadcasting echoed those headlines. Moreover, as in the case of the Tübingen manuscript, the reception of the press release about the C-14 analyses and the significance of the manuscript transferred the newness of the results to the

[42] 'Ali ibn Ibrahim Ghabban and Robert Hoyland. "The Inscription of Zuhayr, the Oldest Islamic Inscription (24 AH/AD 644-645), the Rise of the Arabic Script and the Nature of the Early Islamic State," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2008, p. 233 [210–237].

[43] Sean Coughlan, "'Oldest' Koran fragments found in Birmingham University," BBC News, 22 July 2015. http://www.bbc.com/news/business-33436021, accessed 22 July 2015 and 29 February 2016. The journalist quotes David Thomas, Susan Worrall and Muhammad Isa Waley. The radio-carbon measurements are reported in T.F.G. Higham, C. Bronk Ramsey, D. Chivall, J. Graystone, D. Baker, E. Henderson and P. Ditchfield, "Radiocarbon Dates from the Oxford AMS System: Archaeometry Datelist 36," in *Archaeometry*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2018, p. 634 [628–640]: OxA-29418 parchment, ?goat, MS1572 Cadbury Research Library, $\delta^{13}C$=-21.0‰ 1456 ± 21. A further note by Sarah Kilroy specifies that the parchment was taken from MS 1572a.

object itself, which was received as a discovered manuscript which had "remained unrecognised in the university library for almost a century."[44]

A detailed analysis of the perceived impact of the press release about the Mingana leaves is outside the scope of this contribution; nevertheless it is worth mentioning here a few points regarding the Birmingham phenomenon from a sociological and historical point of view. In fact, the Birmingham press release, although unprecedented with its 150 million views in the first days and its reactions, should be compared with previous cases in order to understand its peculiarities. In addition to the Tübingen manuscript case in November 2014, the impact of Qur'anic manuscript studies can also be traced in two previous releases: the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest and its significance as received through the famous article by Toby Lester "What is the Koran?" in 1999[45] and the previous case of the Mingana-Lewis palimpsest and the reactions to its "trumpeted" edition in 1914, stressing the dating and type of this manuscript text, *i.e.* pre-ʿUthmanic.[46] Inevitably, different media, *i.e.* newspaper and scholarly works, affected the reception of the 1914 case, while social media in their infancy characterized the 1999 case, although the academic community seemed not to respond to the strong reactions to the nature and significance of the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest. Although influenced by the technological shift in social media, it would be interesting to trace the historical continuities between the Birmingham phenomenon (and on a small scale, the Tübingen case) and the reception of the Mingana-Lewis edition and the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest.

Furthermore, in the Birmingham case, the radiometric results have been received, used and presented in different ways. Although the Oxford laboratory attributed the Birmingham parchment to a range of years between 568 and 645 with a 95.4% probability, the interplay between scholars, social scholars, journalists and bloggers has acclaimed the text (and rarely the parchment) in different ways. Their choices of a precise year (568 or 645 CE) or even a middle point (around 606-607 CE) picked from the range given by the Oxford laboratory's results were unfounded and arbitrary.

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[44] As media perceived the "Birmingham Qur'ān" as the oldest, consequently they presented the manuscript as having remained unrecognized until it was dated by radiometric analyses, while it was actually known from the concise and imprecise information published in the *Catalogue of Islamic Arabic Manuscripts of the Mingana Collection*, apart from an article published in 2011 in which Gerd-R. Puin used MS Mingana Isl.Ar.1572 (9 ff.) to build a database of ortho-epic writings in the Qur'anic text, based on manuscript evidence (see Gerd- R. Puin, "Vowel Letters and Ortho-epic Writing in the Qur'ān," in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed., *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2*, London, Routledge, 2011, p. 147–190). Moreover, the nine-leaf manuscript Mingana Isl.Ar. 1572 had been available online in the *Virtual Manuscript Room* of the University of Birmingham since 2009, while actually MS 1572a and 1572b are presented as two different entities (http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Islamic_Arabic_1572a/table/). I thank Gerd-R. Puin for having provided me with details about the Mingana manuscript he listed in his article, *i.e.* Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572.
Further observations about the reception of the leaves have been published in Alba Fedeli, "Collective Enthusiasm and the Cautious Scholar: The Birmingham Qur'ān," in *Marginalia*, 3 August 2018 (in *Origin Stories: A Forum on the "Discovery" and Interpretation of First-Millennium Manuscripts*, online forum in Marginalia). https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/collective-enthusiasm/ accessed 17 December 2019.

[45] Toby Lester, "What is the Koran?" *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1999.

[46] Alphonse Mingana and Agnes Smith Lewis, *Leaves from Three Ancient Qurâns Possibly pre-ʿOthmânic with a List of their Variants*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1914.

Thus, MS Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a was merely the oldest Qur'anic manuscript according to the BBC headline and immediately became proof of the authenticity of the Islamic accounts of the beginnings of Islam and its sacred text in the majority of the press by the end of July 2015, merely through stressing the year 645 CE, i.e. around the standardization project of the caliph ʿUthmān. One month later, at the end of August 2015, the same object had become evidence of the non-authenticity of the Qur'anic text through stressing the year 568 CE, i.e. before Muḥammad. Paradoxically enough, some newspapers presented or received the manuscript dated 645 CE and the manuscript dated 568 CE as two different objects, without realizing that it was the same unique manuscript dating from the range period 568-645 CE.

Lastly, the transposition of the newness category from the radiometric results to the discovered object has involved consequently and necessarily the creation of a person who discovered the manuscript. In this dynamic, the discoverer – initially presented by the BBC announcement as a nameless PhD student – was perceived as a "Ph.D. Student Stumbles Upon Oldest Known Pages of Islam's Holy Book"[47] in Headlines & Global News and more interestingly, "A Ph.D. student who stumbled upon several ancient pieces of paper hidden in another book may have inadvertently discovered pages from the world's oldest Quran, researchers at the University of Birmingham in England announced Wednesday" in the Huffington Post.[48] As implied by the concept of discovery, the novelty must be unpredicted, inexplicable and exceptional, not planned in advance and not involving previous knowledge.[49] This inexplicability and absence of previous knowledge in the discovery process is intertwined with the divorce between the manuscript analysis and the manuscript object.

The direct observation and study of the object – considering the two Mingana leaves and the 16-leaf fragment held at the BnF (MS BnF328c) as a single work – gives details about its codicological features and hypothetical quire structure of a larger fragment, and its paleographical characteristics, which reveal the work of a single scribe who planned the layout very carefully and was a master in executing a well-proportioned and regular script. Lastly, the textual analysis reveals the linguistic competence of the

[47] Suzette Gutierrez, "Oldest Quran Found: Ph.D. Student Stumbles Upon Oldest Known Pages of Islam's Holy Book," in *Headlines & Global News*, 22 July 2015. http://www.hngn.com/articles/111898/20150722/oldest-quran-found-phd-student-stumbles-upon-known-pages.htm (accessed 23 February 2016).

[48] Ryan Grenoble, "Student Finds Old Parchment In University Library, Turns Out It's Probably The World's Oldest Quran," in *The Huffington Post*, 22 July 2015 [updated 23 July 2015]. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/this-may-be-the-worlds-oldest-quran_us_55afbc05e4b07af29d5707be (accessed 23 February 2016). The two Mingana parchments (MS 1572a) – and not papers – were bound together with seven other leaves. As the Mingana leaves were the first and seventh leaf, it seems inappropriate to suggest that the two leaves were hidden in another book. Moreover, it has to be noted that the PhD student who worked on the early Qur'anic manuscripts of the Mingana Collection is perceived as different and separate from the researchers of the University of Birmingham, as they were able to recognize the discovery and its significance.

[49] Later, these characteristics were perceived and changed to the opposite stereotype of a manuscript hunter. My previous studies about the Birmingham Qur'anic leaves are in Alba Fedeli, "The Provenance of the Manuscript Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572: Dispersed Folios from a few Qur'ānic Quires," in *Manuscripta Orientalia*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2011, p. 45–56.

scribe, who was probably copying from a written exemplar.[50] The mastery of the scribe and the hypothesis that he was copying from a written exemplar imply consequently that the work could not have been executed very early, as the written exemplar requires a period for producing the exemplar and the establishment of a mechanism of copying from an authoritative text.[51] This would suggest that the Mingana-BnF manuscript[52] was realized at a somewhat later date after the period of the animal's death proposed by radiometric analyses (i.e. after 568-645 CE).[53] Another hypothesis is that the entire chronology of the beginning of Islam and the beginning of the written transmission of the Qur'anic text should be revised, in that the beginning should be brought forward, thus placing – among other features – the development of technical skills in writing and the existence of copied exemplars before 'Uthmān's death. In the latter hypothesis, based upon the large range of the radiometric analyses, it would be advisable to compare and discuss such dating with further contemporary dated materials such as papyri, inscriptions or other textual manuscript traditions, and to possibly connect radiocarbon dated manuscripts with other similar, although undated, Qur'anic manuscripts.

Evolution of manuscripts and phylogenetics: putting the manuscripts in their history rather than in history

Although focusing on single letter shapes can mislead the reader of early manuscripts, they must be considered particularly in comparison with letter shapes of other Qur'anic manuscript witnesses for building relative dating among early Qur'anic manuscripts and with other dated materials in order to construe an absolute dating in which every method and technique play an equal role. All of the elements converge necessarily on a single point: the unique possible date on which a manuscript was written, or rather on which copyist(s) wrote a single manuscript project. Excluding

[50] Detailed description of the single fragment (MS Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a plus MS BnF 328c) in Fedeli, *Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, their Text*, *op. cit*., p. 40–49 and 140-192.

[51] The socio-cultural environment in which the manuscript was produced and the possible traces of the presence of an official patronage are a crucial element in the argument proposed by Déroche in grouping and dating the style of writing of manuscripts (see Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, *op. cit*., e.g. p. 100–102 as regards style O I).

[52] Although MS BnF328c and MS Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a are a single project executed by a unique scribe, the results of the radiocarbon analyses of the Birmingham leaves cannot be automatically attributed to the Paris parchments. In fact, 568–645 is the range of time in which the animal used for producing the (Birmingham) parchment died and not the period in which the manuscript text was realized. In theory, in any manuscript, each parchment leaf could give different results, insofar as the leaves were produced from different animals which died in different periods.

[53] Dating suggested in Fedeli, *Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts, their Text*, *op. cit*.. Dutton proposes that MS Mingana 1572a, 1572b, BnF ar. 328a (*i.e.* part of the Codex Parisino-petropolitanus) and British Library Or. 2165- and more generally, "oblong, vertically formatted *maṣāḥif* with 'old' spellings" belong to the period 30–85 AH (Dutton, "Two 'Ḥijāzī' Fragments," *op. cit*., p. 40). Referring specifically to the Birmingham Qur'ān and the radiocarbon analysis results, he observes that "the actual writing of this fragment is highly unlikely to predate 'Uthmān's activity in standardizing the *muṣḥaf*, which took place around the year 30 AH/650AD" (*ibid*., p. 45).

one of the dating elements can be deceiving, whereas using all of them can reduce the limitations of each.

A possible tool which could comprise all the elements concurring to reveal a relative dating seems to be phylogenetics, i.e. the analysis of the changes incorporated in manuscripts to estimate their evolution and relationship by means of the latest technologies applied to trace phylogenetic trees to estimate mutations in DNA and their propagation in the field of evolutionary biology. These techniques are supported and facilitated by computer programs, and in recent times phylogenetic programs have been applied to the analysis of manuscript copies (phylomemetics) in handling their relationship,[54] proving to be valid as far as phylomemetics have been tested in analyzing artificial manuscript traditions with a known phylogeny because they have been produced by modern scribes.[55]

Phylogenetic computer programs have not been adopted in the field of Qur'anic manuscript studies until recently, and even traditional stemmatic analysis is in its infancy, with the studies of Cook[56] and Sadeghi,[57] preceded by the example of Nöldeke and focusing on the collation of a standard text and readings reconstructed through the Islamic tradition, whereas the Ṣanʿā' palimpsest with its textual analysis is the only manuscript evidence to have been considered in previous stemmatic analyses. Phylogenetic computer programs used to conjecture the evolution of Qur'anic manuscripts have the important advantage of allowing the scholar-encoder to decide which elements to insert into his or her transcriptions (*i.e.* which regularization has to be applied and which significant variants have to be considered), encoded in a form that can be processed by phylogenetic software.[58] This means that any elements can be comprehended by such software in this analysis: paleographical, codicological, ornamental, art-historical and textual. There are no limits on the elements that can be included in this analysis, such as the results of chemical ink analyses, DNA analysis and biomolecular analysis of the skins used for producing manuscript parchments.[59]

[54] Christoph J. Howe and Heather F. Windram, "Phylomemetics—Evolutionary Analysis beyond the Gene," in *PLoS Biology*, vol. 9, no. 5, 2011: e1001069. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.1001069.

[55] Matthew Spencer, Elizabeth A. Davidson, Adrian C. Barbrook, and Christopher J. Howe, "Phylogenetics of Artificial Manuscripts," in *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, vol. 227, 2004, p. 503–511.

[56] Cook, "The Stemma of the Regional Codices," *op. cit.*

[57] Sadeghi and Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion," *op. cit.*

[58] The testing phase of this research project was realized at the Center for Religious Studies, Central European University, Budapest from 2015 to 2017. See the paper, above mentioned, on "Early Qur'ānic Manuscripts and their Networks: a Phylogenetic Analysis Project," presented by Fedeli and Edmondson. The results from Hythem Sidky's phylogenetic analysis of Qur'anic manuscripts and text have been presented on occasion of a few conferences in 2018 and 2019 and published after the last revision of the present article, see Hythem Sidky, "On the Regionality of Qur'ānic Codices," in *JIQSA*, vol. 5, 2020, p. 133–210.

[59] This is a project by Sarah Fiddyment at the University of York: she uses non-destructive analyses of parchment collagen, as illustrated in her paper "Books and Beasts: A New Approach to Our Parchment Heritage," presented at the symposium *The Codicology and Palaeography of Early Qur'an Manuscripts*, 14 May 2015, University of Cambridge, Cambridge. See also Timothy Stinson, "Counting Sheep: Potential Applications of DNA Analysis to the Study of Medieval Parchment Production," in Franz Fischer, Christiane Fritze and Georg Vogeler, eds, *Kodikologie und Paläographie im digitalen Zeitalter / Codicology and Palaeography in the Digital*

The evolution among manuscripts that will be deduced from all these elements is the relative dating of manuscripts, which requires a rethinking of the partial pictures drawn from each specific method.

At a second stage, the results of radiocarbon analysis as well as comparison with the external evidence of contemporary documents (papyri and epigraphy) provide an absolute dating of the manuscript transmission that can be examined in comparison with data from the Islamic tradition about the transmission of the Qur'anic text.[60] Moreover, a new approach appeared very recently with regard to radiocarbon analyses that could solve the two major limits we have to face in dealing with manuscripts: C-14 analyses are destructive procedures, so institutions and libraries holding such ancient artifacts are quite reluctant to cut a piece of parchment from manuscripts, and the rare samples are mainly removed from deteriorate margins that should be avoided.[61] However, optical detection of radiocarbon containing CO_2 has been recently identified[62] by using saturated-absorption cavity ringdown (SCAR) spectroscopy,[63] which does not imply any sample degradation. This optical radiocarbon detection method still needs to be improved for future dating applications, but it seems to be revolutionary in archaeology. Nevertheless, its results will provide mere confirmation of parallel analyses and hypothesis, as already stressed for the current situation of carbon-dated parchments.

The problem discussed by Grohmann about dating early Qur'anic manuscripts has not been solved even by C-14 analyses that cannot be – in any case – divorced from the whole textual, artistic, codicological and paleographical analyses of the artifacts, otherwise centuries of study risk being ignored.

Age, Norderstedt, Herstellung und Verlag der Druckfassung BoD, 2010, vol. 2, p. 191–207; Sarah Fiddyment et al., "Animal origin of thirteenth-century uterine vellum revealed using noninvasive peptide fingerprinting," in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*; vol. 112, no. 49, 2015, p. 15066–15071; M.D. Teasdale et al., "Paging Through History: Parchment as a Reservoir of Ancient DNA for next Generation Sequencing," in *Philosophical Transactions Royal Society*, B 370, 2015: 20130379.

60 The importance of placing a dated document in relation to other dating results and modeled to dated objects is rightly highlighted in Youssef-Grob, "Radiocarbon (14C) Dating of Early Islamic Documents," *op. cit*., p. 172 and 178. The author stated that "^{14}C results have to be interpreted from different angles and with the help of further internal and external evidence (paleographic, stylistic, contextual, etc.) which must be carefully aligned with it" (p. 179).

61 Brock, "Radiocarbon Dating of Parchments," *op. cit*., p. 354.

62 Iacopo Galli et al., "Molecular Gas Sensing Below Parts Per Trillion: Radiocarbon-Dioxide Optical Detection," in *Physical Review Letters*, vol. 107, no. 27, 2011: 270802-1/4.

63 Giovanni Giusfredi et al., "Saturated-Absorption Cavity Ring-Down Spectroscopy," in *Physical Review Letters*, vol. 104, 2010: 110801-1/4. After the presentation of this paper in 2015, further research has been conducted on the novel use of SCAR spectroscopy, see for example the Patent in Davide Mazzotti et al., *Method for Measuring the Concentration of Trace Gases by SCAR Spectroscopy.* International Application Published under the Patent Cooperation Treaty, International Publication Number WO 2017/055606 Al. 6 April 2017; and Iacopo Galli et al., "Radiocarbon measurements with mid-infrared SCAR spectroscopy," 1–1. 10.1109/CLEOE-EQEC.2017.8086860 (2017).

Eschatology, Responsories and Rubrics in Eastern Christian Liturgies and in the Qur'ān: Some Preliminary Remarks

□ Paul NEUENKIRCHEN

Among the different literary genres which compose the corpus of texts that will come to be known as the Qur'ān,[1] one finds for instance a certain number of laws and rules which were originally clearly not meant to be recited,[2] while another category of materials therein is made up of prayers and other definitely liturgical texts such as hymns and homilies whose primary *raison d'être*, on the contrary, is to be cantillated.[3]

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1 Alfred-Louis De Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran: Questions d'hier, approches d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Téraèdre, 2004, p. 29–30 : ''Le Coran tel qu'il se présente aujourd'hui est un assemblage de textes, un corpus'' and ''lorsque nous parlons du Coran, nous avons affaire à un corpus d'écritures et non à une entité qui serait indépendante de cette réalité concrète et observable.'' More recently, see Guillaume Dye, "Le corpus coranique : contexte et composition," in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Le Coran des historiens*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 2019, vol. 1, p. 785–786.

2 See for example the laws of Q 24 which are contained in the twenty following verses: Q 24:2-9; Q 24:27-33 and Q 24:58-62. These sets of rules most probably formed part of a separate collection of legislative texts used by the community of Believers led by Muḥammad that were integrated in an edited corpus destined for recitation. This can be seen in Q 24:27-33 where the individual rules all end with a common typical sentence with the same rhyme-type and involving God such as: *Allāh ya'lamu mā tubdūna wa-mā taktumūn* (Q 24:29) or *Allāh khabīr bi-mā yaṣna'ūn* (Q 24:30). This is certainly an editorial technique allowing the inclusion of non-liturgical materials into a corpus meant to be read or recited. On the presence of this phenomenon in an ancient Qur'ān manuscript, see François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam : Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 140.

3 De Prémare, *Aux Origines du Coran*, *op. cit.*, p. 30; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, London and New York, Routledge, 2010, p. 233; Guillaume Dye, "The Qur'anic Mary and the Chronology of the Qur'ān" (in the present volume) and id., "Le corpus coranique," *op. cit.*, p. 791–794; Paul Neuenkirchen,

Paradoxically, the latter materials seemingly do not constitute a very important part of Islam's sacred Book, while at the same time, as it was noted at the very beginning of the twentieth century by Orientalists such as Friedrich Schwally or Julius Wellhausen after him, the very Arabic word *qur'ān* which is used seventy times throughout the Qur'ān was most certainly derived from the Syriac noun *qeryōnō*,[4] meaning a liturgical "lesson".[5] Although the implications of such a central Arabic word finding its origins within a Christian liturgical context should have led to a spur in comparative studies between lectionaries as well as other liturgical texts and the Qur'ān, it is not until the 1970s that monographs such as Günter Lüling's *Über den Ur-Qurân* discussed these links,[6] and not until a bit over two decades ago that Christoph Luxenberg's *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran* popularized the hypothesis that Islam's sacred Scripture is closely related to the Syriac language and its Eastern Christian background.[7] The latter undoubtedly renewed scholarly interest in that field, although mostly from a philological perspective, thus leaving open the questions of what a formal comparative study between early Syriac lectionaries and liturgies and Qur'anic manuscripts could shed light upon as well as what a textual comparative study between these lectionaries/

"Late Antique Syriac Homilies and the Qur'ān. A Comparison of Content and Context," *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales* vol. 37, 2022, p. 3–28.

4 Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns. Über den Ursprung des Qorāns*, Leipzig, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2nd edition, 1909, vol. 1, p. 33–34 (in the 1st edition of the *Geschichte des Qorāns*, Gottingen, Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1860, p. 25, T. Nöldeke only mentioned the possibility that *qur'ān* derived from the Hebrew *mīqᵉrā*); Julius Wellhausen, "Zum Koran," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 67, 1913, p. 634 (therein he explicitly mentions that this theory is Schwally's in his edition of the *Geschichte des Qorāns*); Josef Horovitz, "Quran," in *Der Islam*, vol. 13, no. 1-2, 1923, p. 66–69; id., *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1926, p. 74; Alphonse Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Kur'ān," in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* vol. 11, no. 1, 1927, p. 88; Karl Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter*, Leipzig, Brockhaus, 1935, p. 133; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1938, p. 234.

5 Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, Edinburgh and Berlin, T.&T. Clark and Reuther&Reichard, 1895, p. 336 (*lectio*); Jessie Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1902, p. 519 (a lection, lesson); and Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, Indiana and New Jersey, Eisenbrauns and Gorgias Press, 2012, p. 1409 (reading). When discussing the relation between the Arabic *qur'ān* and its Syriac etymon, Western authors have had a tendency to incorrectly write that the Syriac *qeryōnō* means a "lectionary." On this subject, see Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'ân's Self-Image. Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 16, who rightly remarks that "Even if one sees merit in the argument that the origin of the word *qur'ân* is to be found in the Syriac *qᵉryânâ* (a liturgical reading), Nöldeke plainly mistranslates this word as 'Lektionar', a meaning nowhere attested in the lexicons, where a 'lectionary' is rather *ktâbâ da-qaryânâ*, literally a book of liturgical readings." From what Payne Smith writes in her dictionary as well as from what I noticed firsthand in Syriac lectionaries, the word in use for a "lectionary" is *ktōbō d-pūrosh qeryōnē*, or simply *pūrosh qeryōnē* as the latter is found in introduction to the lessons of the ms St Thomas Church (STC) 8 (40) possibly dating from the twelfth century C.E.

6 Günter Lüling, Über den Ur-*Qurân. Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qur'an*, Erlangen, Lüling, 1974 augmented and translated into English under the title *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation. The Rediscovery and reliable Reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal hidden in the Koran under earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 2003. During the 1970s, a major work also discussed the liturgical function of the Qur'ān: John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu. Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1978. Reprint: New York, Prometheus Books, 2006, p. 61: "in both form and function the origins of Muslim scripture were liturgical" (also see the following pages up to p. 70 which justify his argument by textual demonstrations).

7 Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, Berlin, Verlag Hans Schiler, 2000, augmented and translated into English as *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran. A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran*, Berlin, Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007.

liturgies and the Qur'ān could help us understand as far as the latter's function.[8] This will hopefully shed new light on a certain number of Qur'anic passages and in turn lead us to reconsider the *Sitz im Leben* that could be behind some of them.[9]

Rubrics: some formal parallels between Syriac lectionaries and Qur'anic manuscripts

In this section, I would like to briefly examine what results could be drawn from a comparison between the scribal techniques used to mark rubrics (thus delimitating different sections of the text) in both Syriac lectionary manuscripts and early Qur'anic manuscripts.

End of line fillers and verse division markers

In a 2008 article, Christoph Luxenberg alluded to the question of verse division markers in a printed nineteenth century Syriac breviary where they bear a *Kreuzform* (which looks like ✣), and compared it to a Qur'anic manuscript (which he does not identify but seems rather recent) where one finds the same form of verse division markers.[10] While it is legitimate to discuss possible parallels between such markers, doing so in such recent writings loses of its relevance, which is why I wish to draw on two examples of my own which show striking affinities: on the one hand, the end of verses markers in the British Museum (BM) Add. 14528[11] and those found in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF) Arabe 328a[12]; and on the other, the verse

[8] Some interesting articles have recently looked into the relationship between the Qur'ān and lectionaries such as Claude Gilliot, "Des indices d'un proto-lectionnaire dans le « lectionnaire arabe » dit Coran," in François Déroche, Christian Julien Robin and Michel Zink, eds, *Les origines du Coran, le Coran des origines*, Paris, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2015, p. 297–314. In this article, Gilliot argues that early Qur'anic passages are commentaries (Targums) on an older lectionary. By the same author, see also "Mohammed's Exegetical Activity in the Meccan Arabic Lectionary," in Carlos A. Segovia and Basil Lourié, eds, *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, New-Jersey, Gorgias Press, 2012, p. 371-398 and especially p. 394–397. Others have discussed the links between specific suras and liturgical texts such as Guillaume Dye, "La nuit du Destin et la nuit de la Nativité," in Guillaume Dye and Fabien Nobilio, eds, *Figures bibliques en islam*, Brussels-Fernelmont, eme, 2011, p. 107–169 and especially p. 131 and 136–138 in which Dye makes a convincing comparison between Q 97 and Ephrem's hymns. By the same author, see "Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confisqués, aux sources de quelques péricopes coraniques (Q 19 : 16-33)," in Isabelle Depret and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Partage du sacré. Transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités interconfessionnelles*, Brussels-Fernelmont, eme, 2012, p. 55–121.

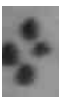
[9] The *Sitz im Leben* comes from a text's oral provenance and can give clues as to its origin, its objective, and its authors – *in fine*, the *Sitz im Leben* can therefore shed light on the history of the pre-literary tradition. See Michaela Bauks and Christophe Nihan, eds, *Manuel d'exégèse de l'Ancien Testament*, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 2nd edition, 2013, p. 98–100.

[10] Christoph Luxenberg, "Die syrische Liturgie und die "geheimnisvollen Buchstaben" im Koran: Eine liturgievergleichende Studie," in Markus Gross and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds, *Schlaglichter. Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, Berlin, Verlag Hans Schiler, 2008, p. 443–444.

[11] A Christian lectionary in Syriac dated from the sixth century C.E.

[12] A Qur'ān dated from the beginning of the eighth century C.E.

division markers present in the Codex Climaci Rescriptus (CCR) 3[13] and the ones in the BnF Arabe 326a.[14]

B.M. Add. 14528 (f. 159b)[15]			BnF Arabe 328a (f. 78b)[16]
CCR 3 (f. 120a)[17]			BnF Arabe 326a (f. 2a)[18]

Furthermore, two Qur'anic manuscripts dated from the eighth century C.E. – Istanbul, TIEM, ŞE 1186, fol. 1a, where a row of horizontal dots fill in the blank after the last line of Q 30 and before the beginning of Q 31, as well as Istanbul, TIEM, ŞE 4321, fol. 1a where we find a horizontal row of double dots filling the space after the last line of Q 54 –, show some interesting stylistic affinities with what one comes across in two sixth century C.E. Syriac manuscripts: B.M. Add. 14528 and B.M. Add. 14654.[19]

These two sets of characteristics found in manuscripts dating from about the same period cannot exist by mere coincidence, and, as Alain George wrote, it is clear that "some of the earliest Qur'anic scribes had become acquainted with Christian scribal techniques" as they were either Christian or had been before converting to proto-Islam.[20]

Headings, rubrics and instructions

Within the earliest Syriac Biblical manuscripts that have come down to us and which date back to the 5th-6th centuries C.E., the scribes used to write headings in red ink at the beginning of certain pericopes that could be used for important celebrations.[21]

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13 Part of the Syriac *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*, a palimpsest dated between the sixth and the ninth century C.E.

14 A Qur'ān written in H I style thus dating it from the eighth century C.E.

15 Detail from Francis Crawford Burkitt, "The Early Syriac Lectionary System," in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923, p. 39.

16 Detail from URL: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8415207g/f164.image.r=arabe%20328, accessed on May 26th, 2022.

17 Detail from Agnes Smith Lewis, *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1909, plate V. The detail comes from the *scriptio inferior* of the manuscript which is dated to the sixth century C.E. by Lewis, following the opinion of George Margoliouth.

18 Detail from URL: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8415205n/f11.image.r=arabe%20326, accessed on May 26th, 2022.

19 François Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads. A First Overview*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2014, p. 99 and figures 29 and 27 respectively. See also Alain George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, London, Saqi Books, 2010, p. 48 for a striking example of chapter division markers in a Syriac manuscript written in 586 C.E. and in Ṣan'ā' IN 00-29.1 (written in *ḥijāzī* style).

20 George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

21 Sebastian P. Brock, "Manuscrits liturgiques en syriaque," in François Cassingena-Trévedy and Izabela Jurasz, eds, *Les liturgies syriaques (Études syriaques 3)*, Paris, Paul Geuthner, 2006, p. 270. The ms B.M. Add. 14654 dated to the sixth century C.E. which is composed of fragments of three manuscripts (containing martyrdoms, among

From there on developed a tradition of marking rubrics in such a manner within different types of Christian writings such as lectionaries or collections of homilies. Generally speaking, introductive rubrics are deprived of a specific formula, but instead start off by the noun characterizing the type or nature of what will follow.[22] Contrariwise, when a conclusive note is found in a Syriac lectionary, it is always the same: "ended" (*shlēm*),[23] as can be seen *inter alia* in the St Mark Monastery lectionary manuscript which has the following indication following a homily: "the homily is ended" (*shlēm mīmrō*).

It is quite striking that we find the same tradition of indicating information about a sura (its name or the number of its verses) in red ink at the end or at the beginning of a Qur'anic "chapter." A close counterpoint to the Syriac ending formula[24] can be found in different places of the *scriptio inferior* of the so-called "Ṣan'ā' 1" palimpsest manuscript[25] – such as on fol. 22a, ll. 22-23: "This is the end of sūrat al-Tawba" (*hādhihi khātima sūrat al-Tawba*).[26]

Moreover, one can compare a similar tradition of giving a directive regarding the scriptural reading to come such as "Read from the Gospel of…" (*yūqrō men bsūrēh*) in the PSLG (Codex C, fol. 3b)[27] or "Read the Gospel of Joseph" (*taqrā Injīl Yūsēf*) written in Garshūnī in the PSL (fol. 203b),[28] to the "reading instruction" ordering the reader or reciter not to pronounce the *basmala* written (most probably in red) between Q 8 and Q 9 found in the *scriptio inferior* of the "Ṣan'ā' 1" palimpsest (fol. 5a l. 9): "Do not say *bi-sm Allāh*" (*lā taqūl bi-smi Llāh*).[29]

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other things) shows such rubric headings in a red ink (although its color is often faded) which start with the words "Martyrdom of…" (*sohdūtō d-*). See fol. 17b or 27b for clear examples.

22 Some examples of these will be given later in the section entitled "Remnants of rubrics in the Qur'ānic text?".

23 This is the case in the PSLG, the PSL, the STC 8 (40) and the St Mark Monastery 53 (dated from 1413-1414 C.E.). It may also be the case in the B.M. Add. 14528 where the end of a section is marked by what could be the Syriac letter *shīn*.

24 An opening formula does seem to be more common in ancient Qur'ān manuscripts, such as can be seen in the Arabe 328a where we read on fol. 89b: "Beginning of surat Ḥā' Mīm al-Zukhruf [containing] eighty-eight verses" (*fātiḥa sūrat Ḥā' Mīm al-Zukhruf thamān^{in} wa-thamānūn āya*). See Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran*, *op. cit.*, p. 50 (the sura titles were added in red ink in a later handwriting which Déroche defines as NS). On the opening formula in early Qur'ān manuscripts, see for example Adolf Grohmann, "The Problem of Dating the Early Qur'āns," in *Der Islam*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1958, p. 213–231. Reprint in Ibn Warraq, ed., *What the Koran Really Says*, New York, Prometheus Books, 2002, p. 732 regarding the ms Michaélidès 190.

25 Ṣan'ā' 1 is the name arbitrarily given to this manuscript by Sadeghi and Goudarzi (see following footnote). Its "official" original name which follows the logic of the classification of the other manuscripts found at the same time in the capital of Yemen is IN 01-27.1. This manuscript is dated from the eighth century C.E. as far as the *scriptio superior* is concerned.

26 Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the origins of the Qur'ān," in *Der Islam*, vol. 87, no. 1-2, 2010 (published 2012), p. 63.

27 Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary of the Gospels* (*Evangeliarium Hierosolymitanum*), London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner&co., 1899, p. 3. The PSLG is dated from 1030 C.E.

28 Agnes Smith Lewis, *A Palestinian Syriac Lectionary. Containing Lessons from the Pentateuch, Job, Proverbs, Prophets, Acts, and Epistles*, London, 1897, p. 122. The PSL is dated from the eleventh century C.E.

29 Sadeghi and Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the origins of the Qur'ān," *op. cit.*, p. 53. On this instruction, see Asma Hilali, "Le palimpseste de Ṣan'ā' et la canonisation du Coran : Nouveaux éléments," in *Cahiers Glotz*, vol. 21, 2010, p. 445–446 (and now see Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest. The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First*

Some parallels between rubrics in Syriac lectionaries and the Qur'ān

I have just discussed a few examples of formal affinities between Christian Syriac and Qur'anic scribal techniques which strongly suggest that early copyists of the Qur'ān were Christians,[30] or had adopted certain aspects of the Syriac manuscript tradition. The cases I have mentioned were taken from Qur'āns most certainly dating from the second/eighth century – that is, from several decades after the death of Muḥammad. The question we can ask ourselves now is: what could be said by comparing Syriac lectionaries and liturgies to the Qur'anic text – not merely in its form but in its very content?

Liturgical introductions and the Fātiḥa

The first surah of the Qur'ān, the Fātiḥa or "Opening" (of the Scripture/of the Qur'ān, as the full Arabic has it: *fātiḥat al-kitāb/al-Qur'ān*) has long been singled-out by Muslims and Western scholars alike for being a prayer in the first person addressed to God, and one with strong liturgical resonances.[31]

I would like to suggest two possibilities that would directly link this opening sura to Christian liturgical texts. First off, it is interesting to note that two of the Syriac lectionaries I mentioned previously – the PSL and PSLG – are introduced in a similar manner. Respectively:

> *In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit […] For all Eternity […] Amen. (*b-shīmēh d-abō wa-d-brō w-rūḥō d-qūdshō *[…]* l-ʿolam ʿolmīn *[…]* amīn*)* on fol. 1a,[32] and

Centuries AH, Oxford, Oxford University Press and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017, p. 39–40). My thanks to Guillaume Dye for pointing out Hilali's article to me.

30 The early Islamic tradition itself (for example ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 827 C.E.) or Ibn Abī Šayba (d. 850 C.E.)) acknowledges that in several instances "some of the earliest Muslims had Christian scribes copy the Qurʾan for them". See George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, *op. cit.*, p. 52–53.

31 Arthur Jeffery, "A Variant Text of the Fātiḥa," in *The Muslim World*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1939, p. 158: "[the Fātiḥa] was not originally part of the text, but was a prayer […] to be recited before reading the book"; Shlomo D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Leyden and Boston, Brill, 2010 (originally published in 1966), p. 83: "[the Fātiḥa's] very contents prove that it is a liturgical composition created deliberately for this purpose"; Angelika Neuwirth and Karl Neuwirth, "*Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* – Eröffnung des Text-Corpus Koran oder 'Introitus der Gebetsliturgie'?" in Walter Gross, Hubert Irsigler and Ernst Seidl, eds, *Text, Methode und Grammatik: Wolfgang Richter zum 65. Geburtstag*, Sankt Ottilien, Eos Verlag, 1991, p. 331–357. These examples are far from being exhaustive. For a more detailed discussion on the Fātiḥa, its problematic status for some early Muslims, its affinities with liturgy and its relation to Syriac lectionaries as well as an introduction to a certain type of liturgical practice, see Paul Neuenkirchen, "La Fātiḥa. Une introduction liturgique à la prière commune ?" in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 166, no. 1, 2016, p. 81–100 and id., "Sourate 1 Al-Fātiḥa (L'ouvrante)", in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Le Coran des historiens*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 2019, vol. 2a, p. 17–54.

32 Smith Lewis, *A Palestinian Syriac Lectionary*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

> *In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For all Eternity. Amen.* (b-shīmēh d-abō wa-d-brō wa-d-rūḥō d-qūdshō l-ʿolam ʿolmīn amīn) on fol. 3a of the Sinai codex C.[33]

Just like these lines open the book of liturgical lessons and precede the different *qeryōnē*, the Fātiḥa opens the Qur'ān which gathers different lessons and texts. Furthermore, we find some of the same elements such as:

a) "In the name of the Father (i.e., God)" (*b-shīmēh d-abō*) corresponding to "In the name of God" (*bi-smi llāh*) followed by "the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*wa-d-brō w-rūḥō d-qūdshō*) corresponding to "the Merciful, the Compassionate" (*al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*) that could be understood as a Qur'ānic reformulation of the Trinity into an anti-Trinitarian expression (thus constituting an Arabic bipartite formula, but nevertheless strictly Unitarian).[34]

b) "for all Eternity" (*l-ʿolam ʿolmīn*) which could correspond to "Lord of all Eternity"[35] (*rabb al-ʿālamīn*)

c) "Amen" (*ōmīn*) corresponding to the "Amen" (*āmīn*) that Sunni Muslims pronounce together after the reciting of the Fātiḥa during communal prayer, following a practice ascribed to Muḥammad, even though this element does not appear textually in the Qur'ān.[36]

Therefore, it is not impossible to consider that at the time of the Qur'ān's edition – which, according to some scholars, possibly occurred sometime around the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān's reign (65/685-86/705)[37] – this collection

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[33] Smith Lewis and Gibson, *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary of the Gospels*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[34] Let us also point out here that we find a phrasing akin to the *basmala* in the Maronite Third Anaphora ascribed to Nestorius (d. *ca.* 450 C.E.), as an introduction to an intercession/supplication prayer (*kushōpō*): "O Lord, Gracious God, Merciful and Compassionate" (*ō Mōryō Alōhō ḥanōnō wa-mraḥmōnō wa-mraḥpōnō*). See Francis Y. Alichoran, *Missel Chaldéen*, Paris, Église catholique chaldéenne, 1982, p. 78 (only the pages to the Syriac text will be given hereafter).

[35] And thus not "Lord of the Worlds" as is often found in Western translations of the Qur'ān which in turn follow the exegetes' interpretation of this phrasing which is most certainly a *calque* of this Syriac expression (see also the Hebrew *ʿōlāmīm* which means: "the times to come"). See for example Q 6:90 (*in huwa illā dhikrā li-l-ʿālamīn*) where translating "… this is a Reminder for Eternity" makes more sense than "… this is a Reminder for the Worlds"; or Q 21:71 (*al-arḍ al-latī bāraknā fīhā li-l-ʿālamīn*) where the more appropriate translation is surely "… the Earth which We have blessed for Eternity".

[36] See for example the following *ḥadīth*: "The messenger of God (peace and blessings upon him) said: When the imam says *ghayr al-maghḍūb ʿalayhim wa-lā l-ḍāllīn* [i.e., Q 1: 7], respond saying: Amen (*āmīn*)!" In chronological order, this tradition appears first in Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*, Beirut, Dār al-jīl, n.d., p. 75. The same text (*matn*) then appears in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Beirut, Muʾassasa al-risāla, 1999-2001, vol. 12, p. 112; vol. 13, p. 95 and vol. 16, p. 17. The same *matn* further appears twice in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2007, vol. 1, p. 187 and vol. 3, p. 141. Also see Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Riyadh, Maktaba l-maʿārif li-l-nashr wa-l-tawzīʿ, 2007, p. 163; as well as al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿalā l-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2009, vol. 1, p. 340; and al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, Beirut, Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1997, vol. 1, p. 314. For other similar *ḥadīth*-s, see Neuenkirchen, "La Fātiḥa," *op. cit.*, p. 85–86.

[37] See for instance Paul Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde. Étude critique sur l'islam primitif*, Paris, Paul Geuthner, 1911, p. 110 ff.; Alphonse Mingana, "The Transmission of the Koran," in *The Journal of the Manchester*

of heterogeneous texts was introduced in an adapted form following the Christian scribal tradition of lectionaries but suited to fit the proto-Muslim *tawḥīd* dogma.[38]

Secondly, a comparison between the first sura of the Qur'ān and the order of the First Anaphora (*ṭaksō d-qūddōshō da-shlīḥē*) ascribed to the apostles Addai and Mari (third century C.E.) proves even more fruitful to understand the possible *Sitz im Leben* of the Fātiḥa. Indeed, the introduction (*qadmoyōtō*) to this Anaphora starts in the following manner[39]:

> *The priest says: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (*b-shēm abō wa-brō w-rūḥō d-qūdshō*). Praise be to God (*tēshbuḥtō l-Alōhō*) in the highest of the heavens. Peace on Earth and mercy for Men for all Eternity (*b-kolʿēdon l-ʿolmīn*)."*
>
> *The people respond by saying: "Amen (ōmīn)."*[40]

In these few lines, we will have recognized the three elements mentioned above concerning introductions in Syriac lectionaries and two new elements: the doxology "Praise be to God" (*tēshbuḥtō l-Alōhō*) which corresponds exactly to Q 1:2: "Praise be to God" (*al-ḥamdu li-Llāh*), as well as the fact that in our example, the missal indicates that after the priest has finished his first line of introduction, the people present during the liturgical celebration must respond by saying "Amen" (*ōmīn*), thus finding

Egyptian and Oriental Society, vol. 5, 1916, p. 25–47. Reprint in Ibn Warraq, ed., *The Origins of the Koran: Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book*, New York, Prometheus Books, 1998, p. 97–113 (see p. 112–113); Chase F. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, London, Oneworld Academic, 2005, p. 100–104; De Prémare, "'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān and the Process of the Qur'ān's Composition," in Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd R. Puin, eds, *The Hidden Origins of Islam. New Research into Its Early History*, New York, Prometheus Books, 2010, p. 189–221; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant. Sources scripturaires de l'islam entre histoire et ferveur*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2011, p. 67 and 80–84; Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'ān Manuscripts*, Plymouth, Lexington Books, 2011, p. 165–166; Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet. The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p. 147–158; and Guillaume Dye, "Le corpus coranique : Questions autour de sa canonisation", in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Le Coran des historiens*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 2019, vol. 1, p. 903–906. For the opposite view which espouses the traditional Sunni narrative, see for instance the recent articles by Nicolai Sinai, "When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure? [Parts I and II]," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 77, no. 2, 2014, p. 273–292 and no. 3, 2014, p. 509–521, respectively. Also see François Déroche, *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle. Essai sur la formation du texte coranique*, Paris, Seuil, 2019, p. 156–160.

38 The limit to this hypothesis, however, is that it fails to explain the first part of Q 1:2 as well as Q 1:4-7.

39 As is recorded in the Missal edited by Alichoran, *op. cit.* As far as I know, the first manuscript in which this Anaphora appears dates from fourteenth century C.E., which could pose a methodological problem since we are suggesting that the Qur'ān, a literary work from the seventh/eighth century C.E. relies on a prayer that is only textually attested seven centuries later. Nevertheless, it is commonly admitted that the Assyro-Chaldean liturgy is very conservative and has not changed much through the centuries. On this subject and on the dating of the First Anaphora, see Irénée-Henri Dalmais and Aimé-Georges Martimort, eds, *L'église en prière. Vol. 1 Principes de la liturgie*, Paris, Desclée, 1983, the second chapter on Oriental liturgical families (Ia).

40 Alichoran, *Missel Chaldéen*, *op. cit.*, p. 5–6.

a parallel in the aforementioned *ḥadīth* in which Muḥammad instructs the Believers to say "Amen" (*āmīn*) after the imam has finished reciting the Fātiḥa.[41]

Remnants of rubrics in the Qur'anic text?

The last point I wish to make regards the so-called "self-referential" vocabulary of the Qur'ān.[42] My question here is: could some of this terminology be directly inherited from Syriac lectionaries? The three following substantives might bring an answer:

a) *qur'ān*: as I mentioned in my introduction, this word has long been thought to derive from the Syriac *qeryōnō*, and I believe that its derivation from the Arabic *fu'lān* form of the *q r '* stem is an *a posteriori* explanation to make sense of this word since as far as I know, in the Qur'ān, the majority of nouns going back to this so-called *fu'lān* form find their origin in the Syriac language.[43]

Therefore, as a derivative of the Syriac *qeryōnō*, the term *qur'ān* could be used in the sense of a liturgical service or *Officium* in the Qur'ān itself.[44] Indeed, Q 17:78 is one of the few passages where this substantive seems to have a rather primitive sense and could reflect a *terminus technicus* of Christian liturgy as can be found in numerous rubrics of Syriac lectionaries.[45]

[41] For possible links between the end of the Fātiḥa (i.e., Q 1:4-7) and the *Pater Noster* or *Lord's Prayer*, see Ignaz Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, Heidelberg, C. Winter, 2nd edition, 1925, p. 55 and more recently Emran I. El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, London and New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 107-110 and 228; as well as Neuenkirchen, "La Fātiḥa", *op. cit.*, in which I argue that Q 1:4-7 is an adaptation of the liturgical version of the *Pater Noster* as is found in what follows of Addai and Mari's Anaphora.

[42] On the subject of self-referentiality in the Qur'ān see for example: A.H. Johns, "The Qur'an on the Qur'an," in *International Congress for the Study of the Qur'an. Australian National University, Canberra, 8-13 May 1980*, Canberra, anu, 1981, p. 1–7; Richard G. Hovannisian and Speros Vayronis, eds, *Islam's Understanding of Itself*, California, Undena, 1983; Stefan Wild, ed., *The Qur'ān as Text*, Leiden, Brill, 1996; Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, *op. cit.*; Stefan Wild, ed., *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006; Thomas Hoffmann, *The Poetic Qur'ān. Studies on Qur'ānic Poeticity*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007; Mustapha Ben Taïbi, *Quelques façons de lire le texte coranique*, Limoges, Lambert-Lucas, 2009; and Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même. Vocabulaire et argumentation du discours coranique autoréférentiel*, Leiden, Brill, 2014.

[43] One notable exception is found with the Qur'anic word *burhān* which derives not from Syriac but from the Ge'ez *bərhān* for "light" and "proof." Out of the dozen of Qur'ānic nouns that are formed on the so-called *fu'lān* form, the word *bunyān* is interesting since it derives from the Syriac *benyōnō* which could offer a good point of comparison for the way *qur'ān* hypothetically originated from *qeryōnō* (one could therefore imagine a hypothetical primitive Arabic *quryān* form). Compare to Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, *op. cit.*, p. 72–74.

[44] Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, *op. cit.*, p. 120–121, footnote 163: "The meaning of *qeryānā* as a *pericope* (a selection from the *Scriptures* for reading in the ecclesiastical Service) is attested in the Koran in Sura 17:78, where *qur'ān al-fajr* means the (selected) *reading* (from the Bible = the *Scriptures-reading*) in the matutinal Service (*Hora matutina*). This ecclesiastical technical term corresponds to the Syriac term *qeryānā d'eddān ṣaprā* "the (*Scriptures*) *reading of the morning Service*" […] Furthermore, the Koran, as a *Liturgical Book*, seems to use here this term in the sense of *liturgical Service* (*Officium*), so that *qur'ān al-fajr* "*the dawn-Reading*" corresponds as a synonym to *ṣalāt al-fajr* "*the dawn-Prayer = the dawn-Service*" (*Officium matutinum*) (Sura 24:58)".

[45] Here I will limit myself to one example with the sixth century C.E. ms BM Add. 14528, fol. 159b which has: "Lesson for Sunday" (*qeryōnō dīlēh d-ḥad bshabō*) at the beginning of a rubric. In such a context, the phrasing of Q 17: 78 could be understood as: "lesson for the dawn [prayer]."

b) *sūra*: although this word which is used ten times throughout the Qur'ān came to mean one of its "chapters", this definition came later and definitely does not have this connotation in the text itself. However, there is an interesting parallel in a rubric heading present in Syriac lectionaries[46]: *sedrō*, which refers to "prayers of commemoration or intercession" within the context of the liturgy of hours[47] and which hypothetically could have been misread from ܣܕܪܐ (*sedrō*) as ܣܘܪܐ (*sūrō*) in the *serṭō* script where the Syriac letter *dolat* very much resembles the Arabic *wāw* and thus could have formed the term *sūra*.[48]

c) *dhikr* or *dhikrā*: these words find a counterpoint in the Eastern Christian prayer type called *dukrōnō* – that is "remembrance" or "commemoration" – used for the days dedicated to the Virgin Mary or the saints.[49] This particular term also appears in Syriac lectionaries as a rubric heading,[50] and is an important part of the Eastern Christian liturgy commemorating the Fathers, in which the priest starts by saying "Memory of our Lord (*dukrōnēh d-Mōran*), of our God…;"[51] a phrasing similar to Q 19:2's "Memory of Your Lord's mercifulness [to] His servant Zachariah" (*dhikr raḥmat Rabbika 'abdahu Zakariyyā*) which could very well work as a title heading.[52]

[46] One example is St Mark Monastery 53, written in *serṭō* script.

[47] Isaia-Claudio Gazzola, "Lexique des termes liturgiques," in François Cassingena-Trévedy and Izabela Jurasz, eds, *Les liturgies syriaques (Études syriaques 3)*, Paris, Paul Geuthner, 2006, p. 288.

[48] See John Bowman, "Holy scriptures, lectionaries and the Qur'an," in *International Congress for the Study of the Qur'an. Australian National University, Canberra, 8-13 May 1980*, Canberra, Australian National University, 1981, p. 31 where the author writes that he has seen a New Testament manuscript written in Syriac in which "the Gospels had in the margin sections marked off as *Qaryane*, and sub-divided into *Surata*." Another possibility that I would suggest for the Arabic *sūra*'s origin lies with the Christian Palestinian Aramaic noun *bsūrō*, for "tidings" or a "message" from God, a meaning that would perfectly fit all Qur'ānic instances of *sūra* (James A. Bellamy, "More Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 116, 1996, p. 196–203, had proposed taking the Hebrew *bsōrāh* for "good tidings, news" as the origin of *sūra*).

[49] Gazzola, "Lexique des termes liturgiques," *op. cit.*, p. 286. It should be noted here that Jewish liturgical practice has an intertextual reading based on a common vocabulary (*gezerah shavah*) called *zikrōnōt* for the morning service of Rosh Hashanah. See Richard S. Sarason, "Liturgy, Midrash in," in Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, eds, *Encyclopedia of Midrash. Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2005, vol. 1, p. 478.

[50] For example, in the STC 8 (40) where we read "For the morning of the remembrance of…" (*ṣafrō d-dukrōnō d-*).

[51] Pierre-Edmond Gemayel, *Avant-Messe Maronite: Histoire et structure*, Rome, Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studorium, 1965, p. 17, taken from the Maronite Missal which has a rubric called "Remembrance" where one reads instructions for the liturgical celebration: "The priest […] says in secret: Memory of our Lord (*dukrōnēh d-Mōran*), of our God […] We commemorate our Father, Adam. We commemorate our Fathers". He then goes on saying: "Remember, O God (*Alōhō 'ebad bēh dukrōnō*), with benevolence, […] saint…". Also see p. 228 and 297 as well as Alichoran, *Missel Chaldéen*, *op. cit.*, p. 7 for another example of this type of prayer.

[52] Interestingly, Q 19:1-63 which has a strong liturgical background – reminiscent of a Syriac *sogītō* (see Dye, "Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confisqués," *op. cit.*, p. 64 and *passim*, and id., "The Qur'anic Mary") – is dedicated to the memory of Mary (Maryam in Q 19:16-33) and Fathers (Zachariah, John the Baptist, Jesus, Abraham and his father, Moses, Ishmael and Enoch/Ezra), just like the *dukrōnō* part of the Eastern Christian liturgy is dedicated to the memory of "saints, of the Virgin [Mary], of Saint John the Baptist […], of Fathers, […], prophets…". See Gemayel, *Avant-Messe Maronite*, *op. cit.*, p. 228. The author gives a translation of this type of prayer which resembles certain aspects of Q 19: "Memory of Jesus-Christ, of his annunciation, of his conception […] Memory and remembrance of Our Lady Mary, virgin and holy […], of Saint John the Baptist…", *ibid.*, p. 231. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the refrain which comes back six times throughout Q 19:1-63 speaks of the commemorated's birth, death, and resurrection in their stories' conclusions while the Maronite *dukrōnō*'s conclusion "resembles […] the reading of the "Book of the Living" and the "Book of the Dead" in the

Responsories

Doxologies and eulogies

As Anton Baumstark had noted almost a century ago in an important, though somewhat forgotten article, some of the wording of the Qur'ān "was conveyed to Muḥammad through liturgy,"[53] and more specifically through an Eastern Christian canal,[54] as can be seen with the use of two types of doxologies: *subḥān* and *al-ḥamd* which are found over fifty times throughout Islam's sacred Book,[55] and whose combined use (as in Q 3:17-8) could be connected to the Christian daily prayer.[56] Baumstark singled out another interesting passage in the Qur'ān which gives the prayer of the Blessed in Paradise (Q 10:10):

> *There, their prayer will be: 'Glory to You, O God!'. There, their salutation will be: 'Peace!'. And the end of their prayer will be: 'Praise be to God, Lord of all Eternity'* (daʿwāhum fīhā subḥānaka Llāhumma wa-taḥiyyatuhum fīhā salām wa-ākhir daʿwāhum an al-ḥamdu li-Llāh Rabb al-ʿālamīn*).*

This verse which allies a doxology (*subḥānaka* and *al-ḥamd*) to a eulogy (*Allāh rabb al-ʿālamīn*) forms what Baumstark called "*eine Eulogie und Doxologie mischende christliche Gebetsweise*."[57]

Conversely, a Christian liturgical prayer recited in turn by a deacon and a celebrant found within the aforementioned First Anaphora, in the "Order of the signing and the breaking [of bread]" (*ṭaksō d-rūshmō w-da-qṣōyō*) allies the same type of doxologies: "Praise to Your holy name" (*tēshbuḥtō la-shmok*) and "Glory to You, my Lord" (*shūbḥō lok Mōr*) with the corresponding eulogy: "for all Eternity" (*l-ʿolmīn*).[58]

Nestorian Missal," *ibid.*, p. 228. Finally, we will note that this same Qur'ānic refrain starts with "Peace be upon him…" just like in the *dukrōnō*, the saints are commemorated by a song starting with "Peace be upon you…", *ibid.*, p. 17.

53 Anton Baumstark, "Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus im Koran," in *Der Islam*, vol. 16, 1927, p. 232.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 234–237 and 247–248.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 235–236.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 271. The blessing or benediction stems from an ancient Jewish prayer called *berakāh* in which "Short blessings are one-line formulas, beginning, "Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who…"", Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Liturgy of Judaism: History and Form," in Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck and William Scott Green, eds, *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism*, Leiden, Boston and Köln, Brill, 2000, vol. 2, p. 824. Many concrete examples of such prayers can be found in the so-called Qumran scrolls. See for example "Blessed is the Lord…" in 4Q504, Col. III: 20 and Col. V: 14; in 1Q34bis, Frgs. 1-2: 4; in 4Q507, Frg. 2: 2 and Frg. 3: 1; in 4Q509, Frg. 3: 9, 4: 4, etc. or "I give thanks to You, O Lord…" in 1QHa, Col. IV: 9, 17 and 26, Col. VI: 8 and 23, Col. X: 20 and 31, etc. See Donald W. Parry and Emmanuel Tov, eds, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader – Part 5: Poetic and Liturgical Texts*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2005.

57 Baumstark, "Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus im Koran," *op. cit.*, p. 238. Compare this to "Forever and ever. Amen! Amen!" in 4Q509, Frg. 4: 5 and Frg. 49: 1.

58 Alichoran, *Missel Chaldéen*, *op. cit.*, p. 39. The doxologies in the form "Glory to You" (*shūbḥō lok*), corresponding to the Qur'anic "Glory to You" (*subḥānaka*), are very common in the Maronite liturgy. See for example, Alichoran, *Missel Chaldéen*, *op. cit.*, p. 24 for another example within the First Anaphora; p. 54 for this doxology

Moreover, the central Christian prayer called *Gloria in excelsis* or *Greater doxology* has its most primitive core based on Luke 2:14[59]: "Praise to God in the highest, peace on Earth and mercy to Men" (*tēshbuḥtō l-Alōhō ba-mrawmē w-ʿal arʿō shlōmō w-sabrō ṭōbō la-bnay nōshō*) which includes two elements found in Q 10:10 (*shlōmō = salām* and *tēshbuḥtō l-Alōhō = al-ḥamdu li-Llāh*) and which goes on with a non-Biblical verse: "Glory to… for all Eternity", combining the two final elements of the Qur'anic prayer of the Blessed in Paradise (*shūbḥō = subḥān* and *ʿolmīn = al-ʿālamīn*).[60]

Traces of liturgical responsories in Muslim Tradition

It is a well-known fact that the Qur'ān contains refrains or responsories – that is, sentences that come back several times within a same surah and contribute to giving the text a definite liturgical flavor, allowing one to infer an underlying *Sitz im Leben* of communal prayer celebration.[61]

While we can only suppose a liturgical background to certain verses of the Qur'ān, the Muslim Tradition corpus comprising of both *Ḥadīth* and *Tafsīr* literature paints a precise – although not necessarily authentic – picture of responsories linked to the recitation of the Qur'ān. We have already discussed the case of the *ta'mīn* pronounced by the congregation after the recitation of the Fātiḥa and here I will limit myself to only one other example with what is recorded in different exegeses regarding the recitation of the last verse of *sūrat al-Tīn* (Q 95:8): "Is not God the most Just of Judges?" (*a laysa Llāh bi-aḥkam al-ḥākimīn*).

In a common *ḥadīth* transmitted in many *Tafsīr*-s, it is said that after reciting this last verse, the Prophet Muḥammad (or his Companion, Qatāda b. Diʿāma, in another version) would respond by saying: "Yes, indeed! And I can testify to that [literally, "I am among the witnesses of that"]!" (*balā wa-anā ʿalā dhālika min al-shāhidīn*).[62] What

in the Second Anaphora ascribed to Theodor of Mopsuestia (d. ca. 428 C.E.); p. 69 in the Third Anaphora ascribed to Nestorius, etc.

[59] Jean Tabet, *L'office commun maronite. Étude du lilyō et du ṣafrō*, Kaslik, Bibliothèque de l'université du Saint-Esprit, 1972, p. 25, 43 and 56. The *Gloria in excelsis* is recited by two choirs during the introduction of the Maronite *lilyō* and *ṣafrō*. It is also present in the Maronite *Enarxis*. See Gemayel, *Avant-Messe Maronite*, *op. cit.*, p. 14 and Sarhad Y. Hermiz Jammo, *La structure de la messe chaldéenne du Début jusqu'à l'Anaphore. Étude historique*, Rome, Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studorium, 1979, p. 53–57. It should be noted here that many other pieces composing the liturgical celebration are comprised of similar doxological and eulogical elements such as the *Benedicte*, the *Ḥussōyō*, etc.

[60] A version of the *Gloria in excelsis* can be found as the Introduction to Addai and Mari's First Anaphora. See Alichoran, *Missel Chaldéen*, *op. cit.*, p. 5–6.

[61] The most striking examples of responsories are found in Q 77 (*wayl^{un} yawma'idh^{in} li-l-mukadhdhibīn*), Q 55 (*fa-bi-ayy ālāʾ rabbikumā tukdhdhibān*), Q 54 (*fa-kayfa kāna ʿadhābī wa-nudhur/wa-laqad yassarnā l-qurʾān li-l-dhikr fa-hal min muddakir*), Q 37 (*wa-taraknā ʿalayhi fī l-akhirīn/salām ʿalā … fī l-ʿālamīn/innā ka-dhālika najzī l-muḥsinīn*). Two different responsories appear in Q 26 (*inna fī dhālika la-āya wa-mā kāna aktharuhum muʾminīn/wa-inna rabbika la-huwa l-ʿazīz al-raḥīm* and *fa-ttaqū Llāh wa-aṭīʿūn*).

[62] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2003, vol. 3, p. 499 has this sentence completed with an extra "O most Just of Judges!" (*yā aḥkam al-ḥākimīn*); ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr*, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1999, vol. 3, p. 441 also quotes this *ḥadīth*; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, Cairo, Dār al-ḥadīth, 2010, vol. 11, p. 641 gives two different traditions, one in which Muḥammad says, "Yes indeed…" and another in which it is not the Prophet, but his Companion, Qatāda who declares,

is striking in this example is that, although I have not found a precise parallel to it in Christian responsories,[63] the wording and rhyme of this responsory completely fit in the context of Q 95 and it is almost as though it could have been an actual concluding verse,[64] just as is the case with the "Amen" (*āmīn*) of Q 1. Could it then be that these two short texts (known today as suras) were amputated of elements that sounded too liturgical and that Muslim Tradition kept a record of their liturgical *Sitz im Leben*? The question remains open.

Eschatology

In a recent monograph, Emran El-Badawi has argued that a certain number of expressions and ideas in the Qur'ān can be traced back to a background of the Aramaic Gospels with which the former was "in dialogue."[65] Therein, he devotes an entire chapter to the subject of eschatology[66] and analyzes important themes and expressions common to both the Aramaic New Testament and the Arabic Qur'ān, such as the shaking of the earth and the tearing of the heavens which find counterpoints in the apocalyptic imagery of Mark 13, for example.[67]

Even though it is undeniable that the Qur'ān shares common traits with Aramaic Scripture and that it draws on some of its vocabulary, images, and themes, El-Badawi fails to characterize in what manner its eschatological passages re-use, interpret and modify previous Biblical texts. In the following lines, I would like to succinctly suggest a possible way in which Qur'anic eschatological verses transform Biblical material by examining an eschatological excerpt from a Syriac liturgy. Before doing so, it is useful to draw attention to the fact that a recent paper by Nicolai Sinai has convincingly

"Yes indeed…". In this same exegesis, al-Ṭabarī also mentions the fact that Ibn 'Abbās would answer with the doxology "Glory to You, O God! And yes indeed!" (*subḥānaka Allāhumma wa-balā*) upon completing the recitation of Q 95:8. Yet another version of the *ḥadīth* ascribed to the Prophet is found in AL-ṬABARĀNĪ, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Jordan, Dār al-kitāb al-thaqāfī, 2008, vol. 6, p. 525: "Yes indeed O Lord, You are the most Just of Judges, and I can testify to that" (*balā yā rabb anta aḥkam al-ḥākimīn wa-anā 'alā dhālika min al-shāhidīn*). See also AL-THA'LABĪ, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2004, vol. 6, p. 495 for Qatāda reporting that Muḥammad would answer "Yes indeed…" after the recitation of Q 95.

63 In its form, having a person (or more than one if we consider the phrase could have been "… And *we* can testify…" (… *wa-innā 'alā dhālika*…)) pronouncing such an attestation after the recitation of a religious text is similar to the audience's response in a "Proclamation" (*korūzūtō*) in the First Anaphora. See ALICHORAN, *Missel Chaldéen*, *op. cit.*, p. 42: "Lord, forgive the sins and errors of Your servants", which is pronounced every time after the celebrant says a different sentence. As for the contents of this "Qur'anic responsory," one can compare them to a prayer in the same Anaphora attributed to Addai and Mari, *ibid.*, p. 21: "We believe in one God…" or to the *Laku Mōrō* hymn which is one of the most archaic elements in the Chaldean liturgy: "Lord God, […] let us be the witnesses to…" (see HERMIZ JAMMO, *La structure de la messe chaldéenne*, *op. cit.*, p. 87 and 59).

64 Compare to the prayer-verse Q 3:53: "Our Lord, we believe in what You sent down and we follow the messenger – so write us among the witnesses!" (*Rabbanā āmannā bi-mā anzalta wa-ttaba'nā l-rasūl fa-ktubnā ma'a l-shāhidīn*).

65 EL-BADAWI, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, *op. cit.*

66 The sixth chapter entitled "Divine Judgment and the Apocalypse".

67 *Ibid.*, p. 176. This case is relevant here as Q 81 which we will be discussing shortly draws on the imagery of Mark 13.

discussed parallels between some of the Qur'anic eschatological terminology or expressions and those of Late antique Syriac homilies,[68] a subject to which I also dedicated my doctoral thesis.[69]

In the latter study, I argued that a significant part of the Qur'anic corpus which is comprised of an eschatological discourse which is generally paraenetic and is aimed at scaring its audience into repentance, is in fact better understood as made up of Arabic homilies that are stylistically and thematically very close to Late antique Syriac homilies on the End of times.[70] These Arabic homiletical compositions, like their Syriac counterparts, draw on vocabulary and imagery inherited from the Biblical textual tradition (which was most certainly not known in Arabic, but in Aramaic/Syriac[71]) to create an original eschatological discourse, adapted to a new language and a new context (both cultural and historical). The same, of course, could be said of different types of Syriac liturgies which similarly use Biblical turns of phrases in creating a novel discourse and which could equally be relevant for a comparison with the Qur'ānic discourse on the End, especially since until the present day, some parts of Eastern Christian liturgies have a definite "eschatological flavour."[72] This brings me to the following quotation of the conclusion to the Maronite Saturday *lelyō* night office which starts off by the reading of an ancient poetic piece called *ḥoyen l-ḥaṭṭoye*:

> *When the armies will tremble because of Justice,*
>
> *And that terrified, they will stand before It uncovered […]*
>
> *When the fire will roar and the generations will tremble […]*
>
> *When the trumpet will sound and the generations will tremble,*
>
> *And each one will enter and receive according to his actions […]*
>
> *When the evil, like myself, will be grasped by fear,*
>
> *And the fire, with its intensity will unveil the sinners […]*
>
> *When the sea of fire will roar for the Test […]*
>
> *When over there the goats will be separated on the left,*
>
> *And the lambs on the right […]*[73]

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[68] Nicolai Sinai, "The Eschatological Kerygma of the Early Qur'an," in Hagit Amirav, Emmanouela Grypeou, and Guy Stroumsa, eds, *Apocalypticism and Eschatology in Late Antiquity. Encounters in the Abrahamic Religions, 6th-8th centuries*, Leuven, Paris, and Bristol, Peeters, 2017, p. 219–266.

[69] Paul Neuenkirchen, *La fin du monde dans le Coran. Une étude comparative du discours eschatologique coranique* (PhD dissertation), Paris, École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2019.

[70] Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, *op. cit.*, p. 251: "In the Syriac homilies, as in the Qur'ān, the fundamental medium of exhortation is eschatology."

[71] Guillaume Dye, "Traces of Bilingualism/Multilingualism in Qur'ānic Arabic," in Ahmad Al-Jallad, ed., *Arabic in Context. Celebrating 400 Years of Arabic at Leiden University*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2017, p. 366.

[72] Tabet, *L'office commun maronite*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 170. Some of these verses from the *ḥoyen l-ḥaṭṭoye* are found in the manuscript Add. 17.130 (dated 877 C.E.), fols. 36b-37a.

A reader familiar with the Qur'ān's discourse on the End will have immediately recognized a similar general atmosphere of terror and fear caused by descriptions of Judgment Day (see, for example, Q 21:103; Q 27:89 and Q 34:23, 51), as well as specific textual parallels with some of its eschatological passages, such as Q 99:1: "When the Earth trembles [with] its trembling" (*idhā zulzilat al-arḍ zilzālahā*); Q 74:8: "When the trumpet will blast" (*fa-idhā nuqira fī l-nāqūr*); or Q 81:5: "When the beasts are gathered" (*wa-idhā l-wuḥūsh ḥushirat*); and Q 81:6: "When the seas will start boiling" (*wa-idhā l-biḥār sujjirat*).[74] Indeed, not only do both eschatological texts share stylistic affinities, both having short vivid verses starting with "When…,"[75] but also do they share a common imagery, speaking of the "trembling", the trumpet sounding, the sea roaring or boiling and the animals separated or gathered.[76]

As Emran El-Badawi has argued, this imagery ultimately goes back to Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24-5 and Luke 21:25-6. According to his theory, these Biblical verses have impacted the introductory verses of the so-called "Meccan" suras on the End which can be brought to nine contents: "1. There is suffering, 2. The sun, moon and stars are mentioned, 3. The sun darkens, 4. The moon's light fails, 5. The stars fall, 6. The sea roars, 7. People die out of fear, 8. The earth quakes, 9. The heavens shake."[77] In our example taken from an ancient Syriac liturgy, we similarly find the suffering, the roaring of the sea, the fear and the shaking, as well as the sounding of the trumpet, all of which are mentioned in verses introduced by the eschatological particle "when" and all of which similarly stem from the Biblical textual tradition (not only from the Gospels or the Apocalypse of John, but also from the Jewish Bible).

I would then propose that just like the author of the *ḥoyen l-ḥaṭṭoye* composed a new eschatological poetic liturgical text in Syriac using a repertoire of images and themes from the Biblical tradition, so has (or have) the author(s) of the Qur'ān drawn from this very same repertoire to similarly create original eschatological material in Arabic to be recited or read in front of an audience to bring them to repentance and conversion.

Conclusion

Through a few brief but precise and concrete examples of formal and textual comparison between the Qur'ān's text and manuscript tradition on the one hand and Christian Syriac liturgies and lectionary manuscripts on the other, I have tried

[74] For this last example, also see Q 82: 3: "When the seas will be made to burst" (*wa-idhā l-biḥār fujjirat*).

[75] On this Arabic particle in its eschatological context see: Angelika Neuwirth, "Structural, linguistic and literary features," in Jane McAuliffe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 104; and on its Syriac equivalent's use in eschatological homilies, see Sinai, "The Eschatological Kerygma," *op. cit.*, p. 239.

[76] Sinai, "The Eschatological Kerygma," *op. cit.*, p. 259 (on the oceans overflowing), p. 260 (on the trumpet blasting) and p. 263 (on the separation on Judgment Day).

[77] El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, *op. cit.*, p. 175–176.

to show that Islam's sacred Book is not only indebted to Eastern Christian scribal techniques as is reflected in the oldest Qur'anic manuscripts that have reached us, but also to a certain form of Christian liturgy. This is clearest in passages of the Qur'ān where we find prayers (Q 1 and Q 10:10),[78] but also in some of the terminology is uses (the so-called "self-referential" vocabulary, doxologies, eulogies and eschatological phrasing) and in the later Muslim Tradition which points to definite practices of responsories in a context of scriptural recitation in the community of Believers led by Muḥammad. All of these elements find more or less explicit counterpoints in Eastern Christian liturgical practices recorded in manuscripts or in modern-day Missals, and one can already specifically draw attention to the importance of the First Anaphora ascribed to the Apostles Addai and Mari for understanding the liturgical *Sitz im Leben* behind several Qur'anic passages; and more generally consider the vast amount of Syriac homiletic and other liturgical texts by Eastern Christian writers from Late Antiquity to better comprehend a wide range of Qur'anic features – from ambiguous words and complicated verses to the very *raison d'être* of certain suras.

[78] My forthcoming article "Al-Iḫlāṣ: An Intertextual Reading of a Qur'ānic Creed" also discusses the close affinities between the prayer/profession of faith of Q 112 on the one hand and a Syriac confession of faith composed by Narsai (d. ca. 503) on the other.

Conversion from Jewish and Christian Milieus to Islam and its Influence on the Formation of the Qur'ān[1]

□ Karl-Friedrich POHLMANN

The subject of this article touches on an open issue concerning the origin of the Qur'ān; it is an issue still unresolved to this day. It is generally known that a large number of suras and text-passages of the Qur'ān are paralleled in biblical traditions and other Jewish and Christian lore. That requires an explanation. For Muslims such similarities and resemblances can be explained by the idea that key books of revelation for Jews, Christians and Muslims must be regarded as outcomes of the impartation of a divine book that existed in heaven, and that it was the role of the archangel Gabriel to convey the revelation texts to the Prophet Muhammad.

So-called "western" Qur'anic Studies cannot accept this explanation because of their post-Enlightenment view of the world. So western scholars take in consideration various reasons possibly underlying the close affinity between Jewish as well as Christian lore and Qur'anic texts. Some of them are convinced they have found evidence of informants of the Prophet Muḥammad. And it is without question that "essential sections of the Qur'anic message were received from the oral lore of a variety of religious communities who were rooted in the widely dispersed and non-normative Jewish and Christian traditions."[2] There are also several Jewish, Christian and Islamic references to conversion from Jewish and Christian milieus to the Qur'anic

[1] This article is designed as a kind of *précis*, making some of the analyses developed in Karl-Friedrich POHLMANN. *Die Entstehung des Korans: Neue Erkenntnisse aus Sicht der historisch-kritischen Bibelwissenschaft*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 3. Auflage, 2015, available for an English-speaking readership. I want to thank Guillaume Dye for his help in preparing the print-ready version of my article.

[2] Cf. Gerhard BÖWERING, "Recent research on the construction of the Qur'ān," in by Gabriel S. REYNOLDS, ed., *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 83.

community. I will start with some general remarks about such references. After that I will demonstrate the influence of conversion and converts on the development of Qur'anic texts illustrated by concrete Qur'anic passages.

Islamic, Jewish and Christian references to the sources of Muḥammad and to conversion from Jewish and Christian Milieus to the Qur'anic and Islamic community

Western scholars point out that several text passages in the Qur'ān (e.g. Q 5:82f.; 9:31; 57:27) indicate circles of Christian clergymen and monks as transmitters of information.[3] Q 7:159 emphasizes: "Of the people of Moses was a community guiding by the truth and thereby acting fairly." Some commentators want to apply this verse to those Jews who converted to Islam in Muḥammad's age.[4] For example, regarding Q 28:52-54 ("Those to whom we have given the Book before it [i.e. the Qur'ān] – they believe in it"), Ibn Isḥāq explains in his biography of the Prophet that these verses relate to a Christian community Muḥammad converted to Islam.[5]

Furthermore Qur'anic passages reject several voices accusing Muḥammad by saying that his texts of revelation were the result of being instructed by another person: "We know very well that they say: 'It is only a human being who teaches him'; the speech of him they hint at is foreign, but this is Arabic speech clear" (Q 16:103; compare moreover Q 25:4f.; 44:14; see also Q 6:105).

In addition to this possible Qur'anic evidence, one could also mention some old Islamic traditions which refer to Muḥammad's connections with Jewish and Christian milieus. For instance it is mentioned that Muḥammad was in touch with Waraqa b. Nawfal, who had become a Christian; he was a cousin of Khadīja, Muḥammad's first wife.[6] In addition Muḥammad's familiarity with two slaves in Mecca of Jewish or Christian origin is mentioned.[7]

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[3] See Johannes Koder, "Möglichkeiten biblischer Glaubensvermittlung der Byzantiner im Umfeld der Entstehung des Islam am Beispiel der Hymnen des Romanos Melodos," in Tilman Nagel, ed., *Der Koran und sein religiöses und kulturelles Umfeld*, München, Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010. p. 138.

[4] See Adel Theodor Khoury, *Der Koran, Arabisch-Deutsch: Übersetzt und kommentiert von Adel Theodor Khoury*, Gütersloh, Chr. Kaiser/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2004, footnote p. 253; compare also Q 26:197; 35:28.

[5] See Ibn Ishaq. *Das Leben des Propheten: Aus dem Arabischen übertragen und bearbeitet von Gernot Rotter*, Kandern, Spohr, 1999, p. 79.

[6] See *Ibid*., p. 40; compare for example Claude Gilliot, "Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur'ān: Is the Qur'ān partly the fruit of a progressive and collective work?" in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, *op. cit*., p. 91.

[7] Let me quote from Claude Gilliot's article (*Ibid*., p. 90): "According to the renowned exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767): 'There was a servant of 'Āmir b. al-Ḥaḍramī al-Qurashī. He was a Jew, not an Arab ...; he spoke Greek ..., and his name was Abū Fukayha Yasār. As the Qurayshis saw the Prophet speaking with him they said: 'Indeed, he is being taught by Abu Fukayha Yasār.' ... According to another version: 'The apostle used often to sit at al-Marwa at the booth of a young Christian called Jabr, slave of the Banū l-Ḥaḍramī, and they used to say:

Apart from the possibility of Muḥammad having special contacts as just mentioned it is beyond dispute that there were long established Jewish and Christian groups in the Arabic peninsula. Arabia in the sixth and seventh century was not *terra deserta et incognita*; it was more or less concatenated with the Aramaic, Jewish and Christian milieus (for instance with Syria, al-Ḥīra, al-Anbār, etc.[8]). Griffith points out that Arabic speaking Christians "with a Syriac-speaking background" were involved in communicating biblical and extra-biblical themes.[9] Besides, the seventh and eight centuries literary sources, especially Christian, bear witness to the numerous interactions between, on the one hand, Jews and Christians and, on the other hand, the Arab conquerors."[10] As an example of a clearly ethnic approach to the *Mhaggrayê* (Pohlmann: i.e. "emigrants") as a group, one could mention the seventh century Nestorian author John of Phenek (d. 690s), who writes, 'Among them (Arabs), there are many Christians, some of whom are from the heretics, others from us'."[11]

There is therefore no question that Muḥammad could have shared some of the common knowledge about Jewish and Christian religious lore either through hearsay or via direct contact with informants from Jewish or Christian circles as well as converts; so that it was possible for him to create Qur'anic texts drawing from this knowledge.[12] But how do we explain the origin and the development of several

'The one who teaches Muḥammad most of what he brings is Jabr the Christian, slave of the Banū l-Ḥaḍramī'.'' Compare also Claude Gilliot, "Informants," in Jane D. McAuliffe, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 2, Leiden, Brill, 2002, p. 513.

8 Compare Claude Gilliot, "Zur Herkunft der Gewährsmänner des Propheten," in Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, eds, *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, Berlin, Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007, p. 167.

9 See Sidney H. Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: The 'Companions of the Cave' in *Surat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian tradition," in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, *op. cit.*, p. 127. See further, about Q 18:9-26: "It would seem that much Christian lore in Syriac lies behind the Qur'ān's evocation of the Christian scriptures, the beliefs and practices of the churches, and their homiletic traditions, as they must have circulated among many Arabic-speaking Christians in the Qur'ān's original audience in the time of Muḥammad" (*ibid.*, p. 131). Griffith mentions Salmān al-Fārisi: "... an early Persian convert to Islam, who had previously become a Syrian Christian monk; he became a Muslim and an associate of Muḥammad in Yathrib/Medina" (Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 21, n. 46). Hoyland elucidates: "Converts, especially among the literary elite, must have introduced something of their native traditions into their newly adopted religion ..." (Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton (NJ), The Darwin Press, 3rd ed., 2007, p. 33). He remarks: "Muslim tradition is able to cite a number of Jewish rabbis who accepted Islam. Most famous were 'Abd Allāh ibn Salam and Ka'b al-Aḥbār, who were wholehearted and enthusiastic converts" (*Ibid.*, p. 505).

10 In addition to the now classical book of Hoyland, *Seeing Islam, op. cit.*, see the two recent sourcebooks: Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims. A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2015; Stephen J. Shoemaker, *A Prophet Has Appeared. The Rise of Islam through Christian and Jewish Eyes*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2021.

11 Quoted by Abdul Massih Saadi, "Nascent Islam in the seventh century Syriac sources," in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, *op. cit.*, p. 218; compare Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 342, no. 22.

12 Many texts in the Qur'ān which retell common narrative material, modify it or underline new points of view, could come from a prophet Muḥammad, e.g. so called "consolation stories" with Moses as the typological predecessor of Muḥammad (compare Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang*, Berlin, Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010, p. 654) or the so-called "*Straflegenden*" (compare e.g. Q 79:15-26 and 20:10-99; see Neuwirth, *ibid.*, p. 654). This means the prophet himself having been familiar with this material has put a lot of it into words which he recited in front of his first followers or the early Qur'anic community (see

Qur'anic passages, which we recognise as being obviously the result of a Qur'anic re-reading and literary creation?[13]

What follows now is an attempt to demonstrate more specifically how certain passages are clearly a result of literary activities of some scribes, experts of the Qur'ān in the Qur'anic community, and absolutely not of the prophet Muḥammad or his secretaries.

Examples of, and evidence, for Jewish or/and Christian converts influencing and contributing to the early growing Qur'anic movement (or rather in the early Islam?)

Qur'anic texts about the role and status of Jesus

An initial overview of several different and varying mentions of, and remarks on Jesus leads us to conclude that Jesus' relation to God, his role and status, were not homogeneously assessed by the Qur'anic community.

Some instances among many[14]: In several listings of the messengers of God such as in Q 37:75-178 Jesus is not mentioned and obviously not important.[15] However, listings in Q 33:7 (Muḥammad, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, son of Mary) and in Q 42:13 (Noah, Muḥammad, Abraham, Moses and Jesus[16]) obviously classify Jesus as one of the outstanding messengers.[17]

Regarding the last mentioned verses, it seems that they indicate an increase in Christian influence on the Qur'anic movement. Moreover Jesus' specific honorific titles in several texts e.g. "*messenger* of God, and *his Word (kalimatuhu)*, *spirit from Him (rūḥun minhu)*" (4:171f.), "prophet" (19:30) and "the word of truth" (*qawla l-ḥaqq*)" (19:34) can be taken as evidence for advanced discussions having taken place

Claude Gilliot, "The 'Collections' of the Meccan Arabic Lectionary," in Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Cornelis H.M. Versteegh and Joas Wagemakers, eds, *The transmission and dynamics of the textual sources of Islam: essays in honour of Harald Motzki*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, p. 105–133).

13 In the case of some passages about Jesus and Mary and also of the so-called "Iblīs-Texts," we come across various literary "revised editions," namely a succession of texts wherein always the younger one serves as a new edition in order to correct and complement (often for theological reasons) an older but already literary available version. Who created such text passages in the Qur'ān?

14 Compare Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, *op. cit.*, p. 175ff.

15 In Q 4:163, in the line of the Prophets "Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon," Jesus is only one of many others; but in Q 4:164 in particular, Moses' importance is emphasized. A similar case is Q 6:74-87; after Abraham (Q 6:74-83) the verses 84-87 mention Isaac and Jacob and then Noah and his righteous descendants: David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zechariah, John, Jesus, Elijah, Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, Lot.

16 Without: "son of Mary"; compare Q 4:163; 6,85; also Q 43:63.

17 The same is true in Q 57:25; 23:23-50; 61:5-9 (compare Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, *op. cit.*, p. 176) as well as in Q 2:136. In these texts, Jesus is regarded as a predecessor of Muḥammad on a par with Noah, Abraham and Moses.

in the meantime in Qur'anic circles about Christian opinions on Jesus' status and importance.

It is also noticeable that several passages reserve a relationship to God's Spirit or the Holy Spirit exclusively for Jesus, and that other messengers are not taken into account in the same way as Jesus.[18] Of particular note is that according to remarks in Q 21:91; 66:12 (compare also Q 5:110) and 19:17 Jesus' mother, the Virgin Mary, receives God's Spirit.[19] In Q 19:17 we read concerning the subject "the Virgin Mary and Jesus' birth": "Then We sent to her Our Spirit, who took for her the form of a human being, shapely." Obviously the formulation of these texts is predicated on the awareness of certain Christian narratives of Jesus' birth in which the reference to God's Spirit or the Holy Spirit is an integral part.[20]

A comparison of these remarks is very instructive: on the one hand the important Christian assertion of faith "Jesus, son of the Virgin Mary" is obviously essential and indispensable in a later phase of the genesis of the Qur'ān; on the other hand the relevant text passages try increasingly to avoid a misunderstanding of the mention of God's spirit and the Holy spirit in the context of Jesus' birth. That can be seen in the fact that all other passages concerning the subject "the Virgin Mary and Jesus' birth" either avoid the reference to the image of God's Spirit breathed in the virgin Mary (Q 19:16-21; 5:110) or do not mention God's spirit and the Holy Spirit at all (compare Q 19:34-36; 3:42-51).

This raises the question of which author or circle was interested – and in which phase of the collection of the Qur'ān – in incorporating texts with such genuine Christian traditions into the Qur'ān. The following comparative analysis of Q 3:33-51; 19:16-33.34-36 and 5:110 – passages concerning the topic "the virgin Mary's origin as well as Jesus' origin as son of Mary" – will cast light not only on the genesis of these texts but also on the situation of the Qur'anic movement and its scribes.

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[18] With reference to 2:253 Horovitz explains that here the notice stating Jesus' support of the "Holy Spirit" (*rūḥ al-qudus*) characterizes Jesus' prominent position"'(Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*. Berlin und Leipzig, Walter de Gruyter, 1926. p. 39).

[19] Q 21:91: "And her who guarded her private parts – so we breathed into her some of Our spirit (*fa-nafakhnā fīhā min rūḥinā*) and made her and her son a sign to the worlds"; Q 66:12: "And Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān, who guarded her private parts – so We breathed into them some of Our spirit (*fa-nafakhnā fīhi min rūḥinā*), and she counted true the words of her Lord and His Books."

[20] Compare Matthew 1:18: "... she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit"; Matthew 1:20: "... for that what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit"; Luke 1:35: "And the angel said to her (Mary): The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, son of God." – In the narrative of Jesus's birth in the *Protoevangelium of James* (from the second half of the second century AC; compare Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. I. Band, Evangelien*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1990, vol. 1, p. 334ff.; see also Silvia Pellegrini, "Das Protevangelium des Jakobus," in Christoph Markschies and Jens Schröter, eds, *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung. I. Band: Evangelien und Verwandtes*, p. 903–929. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012, p. 903–929; one reads in 14:2: "The child in her originates from the Holy Spirit" ("Denn das, was in ihr ist, entstammt dem heiligen Geist"); and 19:1 declares: "Her conception is from the Holy Spirit" ("Das Kind hat sie vom Heiligen Geist empfangen").

On the question of the genesis of Sura 3:33ff. A comparative analysis of Sura 3:33-51; 19:2-33.34-36 and 5:110

Using a synopsis[21] it is possible to see the obvious parallels and partial word-for-word correspondences in the two passages and to recognize how these texts are closely interlinked (compare Q 19:8 and 3:40; 19:10 and 3:41).

Several observations make clear, there is no question but that the author of Q 3:33-41 knew the passage Q 19:2-10 about Zechariah and that with recourse to it he created his version as a new revised edition, while at the same time supplementing new details.

First: In Q 19:2-21 we see no link between the narrative about Zechariah (and John 19:2-15) and the verses about the virgin Mary (Q 19:16-22). In comparison, the author of Q 3:33ff. offers a more coherent sequence of events. He reports that after the birth of Mary (Q 3:36) it was Zechariah who was caring for Mary in the temple (Q 3:37). Obviously for this version in Q 3:33ff. the author picked up on narrative traditions which are captured in the so-called *Protoevangelium of James* (see above footnote 20). The parallels are clear enough and significant: In the *Protoevangelium of James* we are told that even before her birth Mary was consecrated to God by her mother (compare Protev. 4:1 and Q 3:36); Mary was brought up not by her parents but in the temple where God miraculously fed the child (compare Protev. 8:1 and Q 3:37). Second: Several minor corrections include "three days" (Q 3:41) instead of "three nights" (Q 19:10); and in contrast to Q 19:1ff. it is clear in Q 3:38 that from the beginning Zechariah is acting and praying in the temple, and that the angels announced God's message (Q 3:39), while in Q 19:7ff. an angel is not explicitly mentioned.

If we examine now the relation between Sura 3:45-51 and Q 19:20, 35/36; 5:110,[22] we can see that the passage Q 3:45-51 concerning the announcement of Jesus's birth and his significance as well as his relationship to God (Q 3:51) can be shown to be more recent than Q 19:16-36.[23]

The author responsible for the whole passage 3:33-51 created 3:42-51 with recourse to statements in Q 19:16-33 and 19:34-36, at the same time modifying them and introducing new emphases. For instance Mary's question in Q 3:47 ("She said: 'My Lord, how will I have a child when no man has touched me?'") is nearly the verbatim text of Q 19:20. However, instead of orienting himself to Q 19:17 where God sends his spirit to Mary (a being who then calls himself in 19:19 God's messenger), the author avoids mention of God's spirit (*ruḥanā*) in Q 3:42, 45, 47; instead it is now one of the angels who announces God's plan to Mary. The answer to Mary's question in Q 3:47 is "He said: 'Such is God, He creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only

[21] Cf. Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, *op. cit.*, p. 184f.

[22] Compare Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, *op. cit.*, p. 186f.

[23] See also Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, *op. cit.*, p. 592ff; Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010. p. 144ff.

says to it, 'Be,' and it is'." This does not correspond to God's word in Q 19:21 ("It is easy for Me"), but to the statement in Q 19:35 "... When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is." And in Q 3:51 the author uses Q 19:36 as Jesus's concluding word.

As the synoptic comparison can demonstrate the author of Q 3:45-51 also knew and appraised Q 5:110: He transformed God's speech in Q 5:110 partly into words of the angels and partly into Jesus's statements (1st person singular) while wording and sequence remained largely identical.[24] Regarding Q 3:42-51, therefore, it is obvious that the author created and compiled his revised edition dealing with the topic "Mary and Jesus" ("the virgin Mary, the birth of Jesus and Jesus' importance as messenger of God") with literary reference to Q 19:16-36 and 5:110. In other words: Q 3:42-51 is a literary compilation of statements in Q 19:16-36 and 5:110. So here we have something quite different from other cases of Qur'anic lore.[25]

Q 3:33-51 - the question of place and time (the date of its historical context)

In light of the foregoing considerations the expertise of the author of the entire text Q 3:33-51 (i.e. the latest Qur'anic version concerning the genuinely Christian topic "the virgin Mary, the birth of Jesus and his relationship to God") can be characterized as follows.

First: the author of this passage was able to evaluate critically Qur'anic statements which were already available to him as literary texts (i.e. on the basis of existing texts, Q 19:1ff; 5:110).

Second: on this basis he was able to create a new literary edition, while eliminating flaws and uncertainties he detected in earlier Qur'anic texts.

Third: he had specific knowledge of, and familiarity with several specific Christian traditions concerning the virgin Mary and Jesus' birth (e.g. Protoevangelium Of James, Gospel according to Luke, Ch. 1).

Fourth: his overriding interest was to provide a correct Qur'anic theological framework for all the statements about the virgin Mary, God's Spirit, and Jesus in the following Qur'anic passages (e.g. Q 5:110; 19:2-36; 21:91; 66:12).

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[24] That the converse cannot be true, i.e. that Q 5:110 is an excerpt from Q 3:42-51, results from the following observations. Firstly: The author of Q 3:42-51 follows the specific wording of Q 5:110 but ignores the statement therein, that God strengthens Jesus with the Holy spirit. Secondly: In contrast to Q 5:110 the author of Q 3:49 makes clear that Jesus will act as messenger of God ("a messenger to the children of Israel") and that Jesus' miracles listed in the sura have to be understood as a sign from God ("I have come to you with a sign from your Lord").

[25] Compare e.g. the so-called legends of consolation for the Prophet Muḥammad (Moses-stories), see above footnote 12.

That's why the author consistently avoids mention of the Spirit of God in his passage. His aim is to rule out the possibility of misunderstandings and misinterpretations, namely that mentioning any participation or assistance of some kind by God's spirit in the context of Jesus' birth – in whatever manner – could evoke the idea of Jesus being the son of God – an idea not acceptable to the Qur'anic community. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the author finally ensures in Q 3:47, that Jesus' birth is just the effect of the Word of God: "She (Mary) said: 'My Lord, how shall I have a child seeing no man hath touched me'; He said: "So (shall it be), God creatheth what He willeth, when He decideth upon a thing, he simply saith 'Be' and it is'."[26]

To put it in a nutshell: the author reveals himself as an expert in Qur'anic texts – i.e. as a Qur'anic scribe – with a genuine Christian background. It all seems to suggest that this author was originally a member of a Christian milieu, a theologically learned Christian scholar, who had converted to the Qur'anic movement.

The gradual incorporation of texts relating the subject "the Virgin Mary and Jesus' birth" (i.e. Q 21:91; 66:12; 5:110; 19:2-36; 3:33-51) and the existing literary relationships between these passages clearly reveal two things. On the one hand this subject must have been of major significance for some members of the Qur'anic movement, and this was the case over a longer period until the later stages of the genesis of the Qur'ān; and on the other hand it is evidence that there were debates on the contentious issue on the high status of Mary and Jesus. It has to be concluded therefore that at the time of the writing of these passages the author of Q 3:33ff. as a Qur'anic scribe with a genuine Christian background was acting in close contact with other members of the Qur'anic community who shared the same background. As members of the Qur'anic community such groups were not Christians, but everything seems to suggest that they were converts coming from Christian circles.

It is impossible to believe that this author whose major interest was to provide a correct Qur'anic theological framework for all the statements about the virgin Mary and Jesus did his work before the eyes of the Prophet Muḥammad himself.

The nature of the proven text production[27] and the related situation of the Qur'anic community lead clearly to the conclusion, that text passages of this sort date from a very late phase of the literary codification of the Qur'ān following Muḥammad's death.

[26] Cf. also Q 3:59; see Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

[27] Donner's consideration ("But, might such similar passages not just as cogently be viewed as transcripts of different *oral* recitations of the same story made in close succession, something like different recordings of a politician's stump speech delivered numerous times over a few days or weeks?' (cf. Fred M. Donner, "The Qur'ān in recent scholarship: challenges and desiderata," in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, *op.cit.*, p. 34) is, because of the evidence of the special literary character of the texts under analysis, obsolete.

Christian converts and the formation of the Qur'ān

Angelika Neuwirth evaluates Q 3:33-59 as an uniquely detailed tale in the Qur'ān of the Holy Family intending to balance the Christian tradition and the Abrahamian tradition.[28] One may see here "an important stage of development in the shaping of the qur'ānic message."[29] Because of the images of Mary and Jesus presented in this passage as well as the numerous contacts with Christian lore, Neuwirth assumes "an intense contact between the community and liturgically versed ... adherents of the Christian tradition to have preceded or accompanied the composition of the sura."[30] However Neuwirth has to leave open the issue of how such "intense contact" happened or was organized and to what purpose; nor can she say anything about the concrete manner in which the composition of Sura 3:33-59 was "accompanied" and influenced due to such contacts.

My analyses, however, lead me to suggest that the author, at least of Q 3:33-59 (perhaps also the authors of the passages Q 19:2-36 and 5:110 and others) must have been a member of a circle in the Qur'anic movement with a Christian background.

A prerequisite or impetus for his editing of Q 3:33-59 was the existence of such a circle for whom the topic "the virgin Mary, the birth of Jesus and his relationship to God" was a very important element of their faith which they could not call into question, even as members of the Qur'anic community.

The special character of the texts I have analyzed provides clear proof that at the time of the author of Q 3:33ff. many members of the Qur'anic community were having to contend with their originally Christian background. On the one hand they continued to believe in their traditions of the virgin Mary and her son Jesus; but this subject was on the other hand the subject of discussions with other circles within the community: it needed to be established whether – and in what way – Christian traditions of this sort could or should be incorporated in already existing parts of the Qur'ān.

Neuwirth's so-called "undermining" of the Abrahamian tradition[31] in Sura 3 by Christian traditions of Mary and Jesus is the final result of a significant increase of conversions from Christian milieus and the corresponding reactions and developments within the Qur'anic community.[32]

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[28] See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, *op. cit.*, p. 538.

[29] Angelika Neuwirth, "Debating Christian and Jewish Traditions. Embodied Antagonisms in *sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Q 3:1-62)," in Otto Jastrow, Shabo Talay and Herta Hafenrichter, *Studien zur Semitistik und Arabistik: Festschrift für Hartmut Bobzin zum 60. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2008. p. 303.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 299.

[31] See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, *op. cit.*, p. 541.

[32] My insights are partly in line with conclusions in Michel Cuypers' book *The Banquet: A Reading of the fifth Sura of the Qur'an*, Miami, Convivium Press, 2009, p. 486f. I quote: "The sura gives the impression of a confrontation with a large, organized Christian community, competing with the Muslims. In addition, the constant call to Christians to convert, which extends over two of the three sequences in the second section [Pohlmann: i.e. Q 5:72-120], uses an impressive panoply of arguments to try to convince them of their errors, arguments which would have

As I have already said the authors were originally members of a Christian milieu, theologically learned Christian scholars, who had converted to the Qur'anic movement. They were acting in close contact with members of the Qur'anic community from the same background. Such groups being members of the Qur'anic community were not Christians; but everything seems to suggest that they were converts coming from Christian circles and now coping with their originally Christian background.

To sum up, the formation of the Qur'ān, at least of parts of the Qur'ān, was influenced by the increase in conversions from Christian milieus, very possibly in the period of the expansion of Islamic influence after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Examples of and evidence for converts of Jewish milieus: the so-called Iblīs/Satan-Versions (particularly Q 38:71-85; 7:11-24; 20:115-123; 2:30-38)

I can give here only a short report on my own insights which I have developed elsewhere. In the case of these Iblīs-passages,[33] it may be sufficient here to mention only the following observations and results of my literary analysis.[34]

These seven passages are directly connected with each other; on the one hand you can observe partial word-for-word correspondences; on the other hand the author of the respective later version (for instance Q 20:115ff. compared with Q 7:11ff.; 2:30ff. [the latest one in the Qur'ān] compared with Q 20:115ff.) has obviously detected literary and theological flaws in older versions (e.g. in Q 7:11ff. and 38:71ff.). That is to be

taken time to develop during the controversies. This does not really fit ... with Muhammad's prophetic career as the Muslim account in the *Sīra* gives it. The place given to Christians, not just Jews, in sura 5, leads us to envisage a later period, once Islam was established in Christendom" (p. 486). Cuypers is aware, "that this view does not really agree with the Muslim tradition in which the redaction of the Qur'anic text ... ended at the same time as its revelation to the Prophet ..." (p. 487). Cuypers, however, has no answer to the question of who was using "an impressive panoply of arguments to try to convince them of their errors, arguments which would have taken time to develop during the controversies" (p. 486–487). For him it is the text using a panoply of arguments. But the question is: Who created this text using a "panoply of arguments," who was the author with intimate knowledge of Christian literature? Cuypers rightly emphasizes: "Scholars have paid particular attention in the passage (Sura 5) 109–111 to apocryphal writings, while the allusions to the Gospel of John seem to be much more important" (p. 410). My question, however, is: Who was able to make allusions to the Gospel of John ...?

[33] In all seven Iblīs/Satan passages (Q 2:30-38; 7:11-24; 15:26-43; 17:61-65; 18:50-51; 20:116-123; 38:71-85) we recognize as characteristic a "drama" – a plot – of which we can give the following brief outline: God creates a human being (i.e. Adam). He calls on the angels to fall down before Adam. The angels accept God's demand but not Iblīs (i.e. Satan). That is why God expels Iblīs/Satan. Then Satan announces that he will mislead and deceive men in the future. Additionally, the text passages Q 2:30-38; 7:11-24 and 20:116-123 specify how Iblīs/Satan deceives Adam and his wife in paradise. – The Qur'anic Iblīs-story is a clear parallel to the protologic myth of the fall of an Angel (i.e. Satan's Fall from heaven/paradise) as we read it e.g. in the Jewish book *Vita Adae et Evae* (written in the second century AD, early Judaism; see Otto Merk and Martin Meiser, *Das Leben Adams und Evas*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998, and in the Christian *Book of the Cave of Treasures* (written in the late sixth or early seventh century AD); see Alexander Toepel, *Die Adam- und Seth-Legenden im syrischen Buch der Schatzhöhle: Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung*, Louvain, Peeters, 2006.

[34] See Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, *op. cit.*, p. 85–153.

concluded from the author's corrections and supplementations in the later version. These corrections and supplementations also signalize that the author had at his disposal special knowledge of Jewish scriptures and theology.

The comparison of the Iblīs-texts leads to the conclusion that Qur'anic passages of this sort are put into writing by authors who were responsible for large quantities of older Qur'anic passages already recorded in writing. On the one hand these authors obviously played an important part in the development of the Qur'anic Community. On the other hand their expert knowledge of Jewish lore and theology[35] indicates their Jewish background.

All things considered I conclude that the later versions of the Iblīs-passages come from Jewish *literati* (that is *scribes*) who converted to the Qur'anic movement. Texts of this sort – i.e. literary revisions of older already written Qur'anic passages – date from a very late phase of the codification of the Qur'ān and cannot have been created by Muḥammad himself.

In any case, the traditional explanatory model for origin and development of Qur'anic texts does not apply to the versions of the Iblīs/Satan story.

Concluding remarks – Jewish and Christian converts and the formation of the Qur'ān

As I tried to show texts like the Iblīs-versions and several passages concerning Mary and Jesus, texts of this sort are results of successive processes of literary creation, and thus cannot have come from the Prophet himself. That's why one is confronted with the question: Who were the real authors of those passages? As we have seen

- the authors must have been members of the Qur'anic community, they must have had immediate access to written Qur'anic texts which had been used until then,
- they must have possessed the literary skill and knowledge to sort, organize and revise a lot of Qur'anic suras,
- and especially notably is the authors' close involvement and familiarity with Christian or Jewish lore and theology.

[35] See e.g. the specific references to *Vita Adae et Evae, Book of Jubilees, Midrash Gen.Rab.*; cf. Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

To sum up, let me say that these authors were Jewish and/or Christian converts organizing and revising older Qur'anic texts after Muḥammad's death in the time of the expanding Qur'anic movement.[36]

Another important result in the case of the passages about the Virgin Mary and Jesus: this subject must have been of major significance for a specific circle within the Qur'anic community, and this was the case over a longer period until the latter stages of the genesis of the Qur'ān, culminating as we have seen in the passage in Surah 3:33ff.

The development of these passages results from an increasing number of members of converts coming from Christian milieus. On the one hand they continued to believe in their traditions of the virgin Mary and her son Jesus; on the other hand it is evidence that there were debates on the contentious issue on the high status of Mary and Jesus, discussions with other circles within the community. It needed to be established whether – and in what way – Christian traditions of this sort could or should be incorporated in already existing parts of the Qur'ān.

[36] Cf. Richard W. Bulliet, "Conversion Stories in Early Islam," in Michael Gervers and Ramzi J. Bikhazi, eds, *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990, p. 132: "Intellectually vigorous converts aided in the gradual definition of Islamic belief and practice, often drawing half-consciously upon the ideas or scriptural interpretations of their previous religion."

The Qur'anic Mary and the Chronology of the Qur'ān

☐ Guillaume DYE

As John Wansbrough remarked forty years ago, in the preface of his *Quranic Studies*: "As a document susceptible of analysis by the instruments and techniques of Biblical criticism, [the Qur'ān] is virtually unknown."[1] Indeed, if Muḥammad is the sole author of the Qur'ān, or if the Qur'ān is nothing more than the record of his *ipsissima verba*, then applying the methods of Biblical criticism to the Qur'ān seems pointless.

But is this understanding of the Qur'ān warranted? Strictly speaking, it is not the outcome of a close examination of the Qur'anic text: it is based, first of all, on the Muslim narratives which, as is well-known, should be taken with caution.[2] That many historians, especially those following the "Nöldekian paradigm," have taken for granted the general framework induced by these sources is one thing; whether they

* Several versions of this paper have been presented on various occasions: in June 2015, in Milan, during the 1st Nangeroni Meeting of the Early Islamic Studies Seminar, in November 2015 at the Aga Khan University (London) and at the University of Cambridge, at the invitation of (respectively) Philip Wood and Peter Sarris, in December 2015 at the University of Tel Aviv, at the invitation of Meira Polliack, and finally in January 2017 at the Seminar *Islam Médiéval* (IRBIMMA, CNRS, Paris), at the invitation of Sylvie Denoix. Various people – colleagues or friends – were also generous enough to give or send me comments on previous versions of this work – comments I did my best to take into consideration. In addition to the colleagues already mentioned, I owe therefore a great debt to many people, especially Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen, Julien Decharneux, Gilles Dorival, Erica Hunter, Manfred Kropp, Paul Neuenkirchen, Isaac Oliver, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, David Powers, Gabriel Reynolds, Uri Rubin, Christian Sahner, Carlos Segovia, Stephen Shoemaker, Nicolai Sinai, and Jan M.F. van Reeth. Any remaining errors are my sole responsibility.

1 John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, expanded and edited by Andrew Rippin, Amherst, N. Y., Prometheus, 2004, p. xxi.

2 Excellent synthesis in Boaz Shoshan, *The Arabic Historical Tradition and the Early Islamic Conquests. Folklore, tribal lore, Holy War*, London, Routledge, 2016, p. 1–28.

were right to do so is another.[3] Instead of addressing the Qur'ān – not only its content, but also its history – with the lenses of the later Muslim tradition, it might be welcome to gather as much evidence as possible from the text itself, without presupposing the traditional model of the genesis of the Qur'ān. This is, incidentally, a familiar process in the studies of the Gospels: scholars do not take the testimony of Papias of Hierapolis as authoritative; rather, they design models, explaining the chronology and the interdependency of the various Gospels, from clues present in the Gospels themselves.

Indeed, inside the Qur'anic corpus itself, there might be substantial evidence which could lead us to consider with an open mind the following hypothesis: in the years or decades following Muḥammad's death, the work on the "Qur'ān" (taken as a proper name, probably an anachronistic term before the edition of the *muṣḥaf*) might not have merely consisted in the rearrangement of preexistent pericopes (the "collection"),[4] but could have included the evolution and transmission, with all its hazards – including the phenomenon of rewriting – of *logia* and other texts,[5] and also the writing of new pericopes.

This view is based on several arguments (some of them will be developed below), related to **a)** the dating and the localization of the sources; **b)** the profile of the author(s)/editor(s); **c)** the contexts in which the Qur'anic pericopes and suras are supposed to fit best; and **d)** the nature of the editorial and compositional work displayed in the Qur'ān.[6] Seen in this light, the Qur'ān is a text which is both *composite*

[3] On this traditional paradigm (which is a naturalization, or secularization, of Sunni narratives) and its limits, see Guillaume Dye, "Le corpus coranique : contexte et composition," in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Histoire du Coran. Contexte, origine, rédaction*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2022, p. 849–866 [839–953] (this paper was initially published in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Le Coran des historiens*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2019, vol.1, p. 733–846). See also Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an. A Historical-Critical Study*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2022, p. 16–42. This paradigm can be described in four theses. *Thesis 1*: The Qur'ān is a record of Muhammad's preaching. It was virtually ready at the time of his death, because all the texts which, later, would form the Qur'ān, already existed and circulated, separately, on various supports. *Thesis 2*: The Qur'ān reflects the experience of the community around Muḥammad in Mecca and Medina, between 610 and 632. We should understand the Qur'ān according to its chronological order, which mirrors Muḥammad's career. *Thesis 3*: A collection/edition of the Qur'ān was made under the caliph 'Uthmān (d. 656), roughly two decades after Muḥammad's death. This edition soundly reflects the words of Muḥammad. The codex of 'Abd al-Malik (d. 705) is only a sponsored version of 'Uthmān's codex. *Thesis 4*: The various parts of the Qur'ān were well-known enough in the original community to make possible a reliable and uninterrupted transmission of the text.

[4] Speaking of the *collection* of the Qur'ān is an unjustified concession to religious dogma, which supposes that the work which led to the *muṣḥaf* was nothing more than the gathering of preexistent texts, the scribes simply putting the pieces of the jigsaw in the right order. A similar problem arises when an historian refers to the *revelation* of a sura in Mecca or Medina. Maybe it is only a way of speaking, but this is questionable, since (among other problems) it occults everything which can amount to a process of composition.

[5] On the limits of oral transmission and social memory, see Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, *op. cit.*, chap. 5-7; on the use of writing in the composition of parallel passages, see Guillaume Dye, "Le Coran et le problème synoptique : quelques remarques préliminaires," in Markus Gross & Robert M. Kerr, eds, *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion VI: Vom Ummayadischen Christentum zum abbasidischen Islam*, Berlin & Tübingen, Schiler & Mücke, 2021, p. 234–261.

[6] In addition to the references above , no. 3, see for example Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran. Questions d'hier, approaches d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Téraèdre, 2004, p. 57–99; Frank van der Velden, "Konvergenztexte syrischer und arabischer Christologie: Stufen der Textentwicklung von Sure 3,33-64," in *Oriens Christianus*, vol. 91, 2007, p. 164–203; id., "Kotexte im Konvergenzstrang – die Bedeutung textkritischer

and *composed*. It is a collective and at least in part a *scribal* work. Therefore, even if the "Prophetic period" is anchored in the Arabian Peninsula, we should not confine our research to the Ḥijāz of the early decades of the seventh century in our understanding of the genesis of the Qur'ān. We should also give up the traditional model of Meccan and Medinan suras, and rather consider the Qur'ān within a larger chronology.

As a composite and composed work, with various layers and many parallel narratives, the Qur'ān fits perfectly a method – fruitfully employed in Biblical and New Testament studies – called "redaction criticism" (*Redaktionskritik*). Relying on various significant criteria, like tensions, contradictions, style changes, breakings in the literary genre or in the themes developed inside a text, presence of various ways to introduce and stage the speech of various characters, etc., this method endeavors to reconstruct, at least in part, one or several previous states of a text, and studies the successive redactions/editions which gave the text its final form. However, since the nature of this approach is often misunderstood, it is certainly relevant to include here a few comments about its merits and limits.

1) *Redaction criticism is necessary*. The examination of the editorial process is an unavoidable methodological step in any historical or scholarly use of the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels, and the Qur'ān. Structural and synchronic approaches can shed some light on the latest versions of the texts under scrutiny, but they are unable to use such texts as historical sources, since they might easily mix various historical stages of textual development in their analysis. In fact, examining only its final form considerably restricts the information which can be deduced – literally and historically – from a text or a corpus. **2)** *Redaction criticism is reliable*. It does not mean it is infallible and omniscient (no method is). It has limits: it is unable to reconstruct *every* development of a text (we should therefore avoid models which are too ambitious and complex), and some of the editorial process might be untraceable (editorial work can consist in additions, omissions, rewriting, and relocations, and the first category is easier to notice). But when it is practiced cautiously (e.g., when it does not use criteria too mechanically, or does not ignore larger cotexts), and especially when there is cumulative evidence of editorial reworking, redaction criticism has a very high chance to hit the mark. **3)** *Redaction criticism can be applied to the Qur'ān*. It is sometimes said that redaction criticism could be applied to the books of the Hebrew Bible, whose texts were composed and reworked for centuries, whereas it could not be applied to the Qur'ān, whose genesis is much shorter. However, the genesis of the Qur'ān and the genesis of the Gospels took roughly the same time, and the Gospels are very

Varianten und christlicher Bezugstexte für die Redaktion von Sure 61 und Sure 5, 110-119," in *Oriens Christianus*, vol. 92, 2008, p. 130–173; David S. Powers, *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men. The Making of the Last Prophet*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, p. 155–196, 227–233; Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans. Neue Erkenntnisse aus Sicht der historisch-kritischen Bibelwissenschaft*. 3. Auflage. Darmstadt: WBG, 2015; id. "Conversion from Jewish and Christian Milieus," in this volume; Tommaso Tesei, "The Qur'ān in Context(s)," in *Journal asiatique*, vol. 309, no. 2, p. 185–202.

successfully studied with the tools of redaction criticism.[7] **4)** *Redaction criticism is holistic*. Diachronic methods are not necessarily atomistic. Even when they compare variant versions of a similar pericope, they have to take into account the cotext of the variants. And when redaction criticism attempts to identify various layers of composition inside a book, a corpus or a text, it is also holistic.[8]

Let us see now how an approach in terms of intertextuality and redaction criticism can shed light on the contents and the genesis of the Qur'ān, with a specific example (the Qur'anic Mary), beginning with sura 19.

Sura 19

This sura includes ninety-eight verses. It can roughly be divided into three parts (1-63, 64-74, 75-98).[9] The division I am interested in occurs between v. 63 and 64.[10]

> Q 19:63: "That is the Garden which We give as an inheritance to those of Our servants who guard (themselves)."
>
> Q 19:64: "We come only down by the command of your Lord."

The "we" in v. 63 refers to God, the "we" in v. 64 to the angels. In fact, v. 58-63 conclude a long section on prophetic stories, while v. 64 marks the beginning of a new section, even if, from a formal point of view (same rhyme, same grammatical subject), it smoothly follows the preceding verse. In other words, v. 64-65 work as a sort of glue which connects Q 19:1-63 to an independent pericope, which runs (at least) to v. 72.

We can therefore focus on Q 19:1-63, which displays a thematic unity (see the plan of this section in Annex 1, p. 190). It appears clearly that the Christological controversy section (v. 34-40) raises three problems. First, it breaks the literary genre of the text:

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[7] The term *Redaktionsgeschichte* was coined by Willi Marxsen in his study of the *Gospel of Mark* (incidentally, the oldest Gospel, and therefore the closest in time from Jesus' preaching). See Willi Marxsen, *Der Evangelist Markus. Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums*. 2 Auflage. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959, p. 11. The approach I am advocating here does not *presuppose* that the genesis of the Qur'ān is identical to the genesis of the Gospels (in fact, there are similarities as well as differences). My point is simply to dismiss a common *a priori* argument which prevents the use of very useful tools in Qur'anic studies. See also Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Method and Theory in the Study of Early Islam," in this volume.

[8] For an excellent defense of redaction criticism (on the Hebrew Bible, but it remains relevant in other contexts), see Reinhard Müller, Juha Pakkala, and Bas ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing. Growth and Change of Texts in the Hebrew Bible*, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2014 (very valuable also for the *empirical* evidence it brings to the fore), esp. p. 1–18, and more recently Reinhard Müller and Juha Pakkala, *Editorial Techniques in the Hebrew Bible. Towards a Refined Literary Criticism*, Atlanta, SBL Press, 2022.

[9] There is a change of rhyme after v. 75 (rhyme in *–dā*, a few times in *–zā*, and maybe once *–rā*, since it is sensible to read *dhikrā* instead of *rikzā* in v. 98); moreover, v. 75 begins by *qul*, "Say!", a common Qur'anic editorial device which can be used to join separate pericopes.

[10] Translations of the Qur'ān are taken from Arthur J. Droge, *The Qur'ān. A New Annotated Translation*, Sheffield, Equinox Publishing, 2013, with minor modifications sometimes.

the preceding and following verses are stories related to prophetic figures, which mix narratives and dialogues, and have nothing to do with such a polemical address. Second, this polemical passage breaks the tenet of the text, which is otherwise *definitely not anti-Christian*. Finally, it breaks the continuity of a very strict rhyme: the interlude rhymes in *–ūn*, *-īm* and *–īn*, instead of*–iyyā* (in a few cases *–ayyā*) everywhere else until v. 74. These are three independent clues which all support, in various respects, the same conclusion, namely that v. 34-40 are an interpolation: without this interlude, the text is much more consistent, in terms of content and in terms of form. In short, v. 34-40 *did not belong* to the original version of Q 19:1-63.[11]

Talking about *the original version* raises, however, several methodological problems. In many cases, it is not possible to reconstruct in detail the original version of a text. Therefore, since we might not know what it exactly consisted in, the "original version" is rather a *Grenzbegriff*. Moreover, there might have been several editorial layers before the interpolation. What we can then assert is that there existed one or several earlier stages of the text which did not contain the controversy interlude. For the sake of convenience, I will now mean by Q 19:1-63* *any earlier version of Q 19:1-63 without v. 34-40*, even if I do not take for granted that v. 1-33 and 41-63 in Q 19:1-63* are necessarily identical with the same verses in Q 19:1-63, since there certainly have been other editorial interventions (which I will not discuss here, insofar as they are not relevant to my main argument).[12]

[11] A point already noticed by (among others) Régis Blachère, *Le Coran (al-Qor'ān).* Traduction de R. B., Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1999 (1956), p. 332.

[12] For example: **1)** v. 33 might have been, at first, a *He-speech*, not an *I-speech* (the modification might be concomitant to the addition of the polemical interlude). Note the special tempo of v. 15 and 33, which evoke a psalmodic response. In this case, Q 19:1-63* might have been composed as a liturgical hymn (but not necessarily practiced in a concrete liturgical setting), while undergoing, later, some editorial changes which hid, in part, its original stylistic inspiration. **2)** V. 12-14 and 17 are in *We-speech*. This makes the whole of Q 19:1-63* a text in *We-speech* (in its narrative parts), whereas the style and genre of the piece would suggest a liturgical hymn – normally a *He-speech*. This might be the result of an editorial revision (if we follow the hypothesis above), but it could be also an initial decision of the author of Q 19:1-63* who could have in mind, *as an abstract model*, a liturgical hymn, *but* directly composed his text in *We-speech* (compare Q 18:83-102 in *We-speech* and its written Syriac source, the *Alexander Legend*, which is in *He-speech*). In this case, the remarkable tempo of v. 15 and 33 could be explained as a borrowing of a liturgical formula which belonged to the verbal and stylistic repertoire of the author. The affinities with the Syriac *dukrona* are striking (see Paul Neuenkirchen, "Eschatology, Responsories and Rubrics in Eastern Christian Liturgies and in the Qur'ān," p. 140, no. 51, in this volume). **3)** V. 16, 41, 51, 54, 56 (*wa-dhkur fī l-kitāb*…) look like a secondary elaboration of v. 2 (*dhikru raḥmati*…), which is very similar to a rubric heading in a lectionary (see again Neuenkirchen, *ibid.*). They should be translated as "Remember in the Book/Scripture," and not "Mention (Muḥammad!) in the Book (the Qur'ān)." **4)** The section on Abraham displays narration and dialogs, but from a literary and theological viewpoint, it is less impressive than the two previous sections. There are some parallels elsewhere in the Qur'ān (Q 6:74-84; 9:114; 21:51-72; 26:69-89; 29:16-18; 37:83-101; 43:26-28). It seems probable that the *Vorlage* of this section comes from another author. But was it lightly rewritten and added by the author of Q 19:1-33*, or was the insertion done at a later editorial stage? **5)** There is no dialog in v. 51-57. Do these verses belong to the original composition? Are they only chapter heads, which the orator would have developed or improvised upon? Or were these doxologies added at a later editorial stage? Compare also Q 6:84-90, following a section on Abraham which is partly parallel to Q 19. **6)** The conclusion (v. 58-63) seems decidedly composite. **7)** Empirical evidence of late editorial work can perhaps be drawn from the *scriptio inferior* of the Ṣan'ā palimpsest (DAM 01-27.1), which contains Q 19:1-70 *with the interpolation* (hence, it is not one of the earliest versions), but displays some differences with the so-called 'Uthmanic *rasm*. For example, v. 15 reads *'alayhi wa-s-salāmu* instead of *wa-salāmun 'alayhi* (same reverse order in v. 33), and v. 16 reads *wa-dhkurā* (dual!) *fī l-kitāb* instead of *wa-dhkur fī l-kitāb*. More

Q 19:1-63* is a text which could be described as almost Christian, or more relevantly as Christian-compatible: it is unclear how it could be possible to be closer to Christianity, except by simply asserting some specific Christological dogmas – something the text does not do. Even if it might seem strange at first glance, *all the details of the text* have their origins in written, liturgical or popular Christian traditions, and can be acknowledged by Christians (more on this below). It is therefore appropriate to speak here of a "text of convergence."[13] With its stanzas, refrain, and alternation of narration and dialogues, this text also looks like a well-known literary genre in Syriac religious literature: the *soghitha*, a dialogue poem involving Biblical or prophetic characters.[14] Q 19:1-63* could perhaps even be described as a Qur'anic *soghitha*. This formula does not downplay the originality of the piece, which adapts the Syriac literary genre to the genius of Arabic, but hints at the probable literary model of the author of this Arabic text.[15] Mary is also a popular character in Syriac dialogue poems, which were performed (and still are, for some) in the night Vigil services of Syriac churches, especially in the period around Nativity and during Holy Week.[16]

The main sections of the text (2-15, 16-33, 41-50) exhibit dialogues around a parent and a child: dialogue in the Temple between Zachariah and the angels and/or God about John's conception and birth; dialogues between Mary and the angel (Annunciation), Mary and Jesus, and finally Jesus and the priests at the Temple; dialogue between Abraham and his father: the subtexts of this last section (see the "cycle of Abraham" and especially *Apocalypse of Abraham* 1-7) show that this dispute is related to worship in the temple where Abraham's father officiates. The topics of *offspring* and *Temple* are therefore crucial.

Given the central place of the section on Mary, it is sensible to suggest the following hypothesis: this Qur'anic text might be modelled on compositions celebrating the role of Mary in the Nativity. This fits well with the literary genre and the content of the piece, and it is confirmed by a close examination of v. 16-33.

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examples can be found in Elisabeth Puin, "Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Ṣan'ā (DAM 01-27.1). Teil IV: Die *scriptio inferior* auf den Blättern 17, 18 und 19 der Handschrift (DAM 01-27.1) (Sure 9:106-Ende, dann 19:1-67 und weiter)," in Markus Gross & Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds, *Die Entstehung einer Welreligion II. Von der koranischen Bewegung zum Frühislam*, Berlin, Verlag Hans Schiler, 2012, p. 332–345, 369–399; Asma Hilali, *The Sanaa Palimpsest. The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First Centuries AH*, Oxford, Oxford University Press & The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017, p. 44–70, 248–250. Concerning issues pertaining to the use of radiocarbon and other methods in dating Qur'anic manuscripts, see Éléonore Cellard, "Les manuscrits coraniques anciens. Aperçu des matériaux et outils d'analyse," in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Histoire du Coran. Contexte, origine, rédaction*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2022, p. 695–738 (this paper was initially published in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Le Coran des historiens*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2019, vol.1, p. 663–706); Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, *op. cit*., p. 70–95, and Alba Fedeli 's paper in this volume.

13 To borrow the excellent formula of van der Velden, "Konvergenztexte syrischer und arabischer Christologie," *op. cit*.; id, "Kotexte im Konvergenzstrang," *op. cit*.

14 See for example Sebastian Brock, "Dialogue Hymns of the Syriac Churches," in *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review*, vol. 5, 1983, p. 35–45.

15 Manfred Kropp, "Résumé du cours 2007-08 (Chaire Européenne)," in *Annuaire du Collège de France. Résumé des cours et travaux,* 108e année, 2008, p. 791–793.

16 Sebastian Brock, "Mary and the Angel, and other Syriac dialogue poems," in *Marianum*, vol. 68, 2006, p. 119.

This passage can be divided into three parts (v. 16-22, 23-26, 27-33).[17]

Verses 16-22

This subsection is formally delimited by *makānan sharqiyyan* ("eastern place") in v. 16 and *makānan qaṣiyyan* ("remote place") in v. 22. Thematically, it goes from Mary's childhood to Jesus' Nativity. From a source-critical viewpoint, it follows the *Protoevangelium of James*, with some elements more directly related to Luke 1.

First, let us look more closely at v. 16-17:

> *"And remember Mary, in the Scripture, when she withdrew from her family to an eastern place, / she took a veil apart from them" (*wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi maryama idhi ntabadhat min ahlihā makānan sharqiyyan / fa-ttakhadhat min dūnihim ḥijāban*)*

This sentence is so allusive that it is impossible to understand it without a good familiarity with the subtexts involved. Happily, these texts are well-known: the Qur'ān alludes here to the *Protoevangelium of James*, which tells the story of Mary's childhood (Prot 7:2-8), especially when Mary (aged three) is consecrated at the Temple. The "eastern place," in other words, is the Temple (the typology Mary/Temple is central in Christian traditions). But why is the Qur'ān using such a formula to refer to the Temple? It is certainly important to keep a rhyme in *-iyyā*, but there is also another interesting subtext, from Hesychius of Jerusalem's *Fifth Festal Homily*:

> *"Another named you [Mary] "Closed door," but located in the East."*[18]

The original context of this homily is the Feast of the Memory of Mary, the oldest Marian celebration, which commemorated the role of Mary in the Nativity. Hesychius sees Mary as prefigurated in a vision of Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 43-44, especially 43:1-4, 10; 44:1-4), where the eastern gate of the Temple is the place by which the Lord returns to His Temple.

The mention of the veil also connects this sentence to the Temple. The *Protoevangelium* explains that Mary weaves the curtain of the Temple (Prot 10:1-2; 12:1, see Exodus 25-27). I am not sure, however, that Q 19:17 refers to this specific episode.

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[17] The following three sections summarize, but also deepen, Guillaume Dye, "Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confisqués : aux sources de quelques péricopes coraniques (*Q 19 : 16-33*)," in Isabelle Depret & Guillaume Dye, eds, *Partage du sacré : transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités interconfessionnelles*, Bruxelles-Fernelmont, EME, 2012, p. 63–109 [55–121], which provides some additional details and references.

[18] Michel Aubineau, *Les homélies festales d'Hésychius de Jérusalem*. Ed., tr. and comm. by M. A., Brussels, Société des Bollandistes, 2 vols, 1978-1980, p. 160.

Droge suggests that *fa-ttakhadhat min dūnihim ḥijāban* only means that Mary hid herself.[19] This would allude to another element in the *Protoevangelium*: just after narrating the entry of Mary in the Temple (Prot 7:2-8), it mentions that she stayed inside the Temple (Prot 8:1, see Q 3:47), in a place which is necessarily the "Most Holy Place" which, as we know (Hebrews 9:3-4), was located *behind a curtain*. The link between the Qur'ān and the *Protoevangelium* remains anyway very close.

The impossibility to understand such allusive verses without a precise knowledge of their subtexts has noteworthy hermeneutical consequences. There is here, as so often in the Qur'ān, not a self-contained narrative, but a series of allusions which are supposed to be understood by the ideal readership or audience of the text – since this audience should know the stories which lie behind. Therefore, if the Qur'ān never speaks of Joseph in this context, it does not entail that it denies his existence, or his presence near Mary. It only means that the character of Joseph is pointless regarding the Qur'ān's homiletic intentions, which are focused on Mary, her role in the Nativity, and the help God granted her.

The following verses (Q 19:17-21) narrate the Annunciation (Prot 11:1-3; the Qur'ān, however, is here closer to Luke 1:26-38).[20] V. 22 ("so she conceived him, and withdrew (*intabadhat*) with him to a remote place (*makānan qaṣiyyan*)") recalls v. 16 while introducing the issue of Jesus' birth, which will be the focus of v. 23-26. This Qur'anic detail about Jesus' nativity seems obscure at first sight, but we should recall, once again, the *Protoevangelium of James*, which locates the birth of Jesus in a desert zone, midway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, near the place where Mary takes rest on her journey to Bethlehem (Prot 17:2-18:1). There are strong reasons to connect this passage of the *Protoevangelium* and the "remote place" of Q 19:22.[21] Significantly, this last detail about the Nativity is *specific* to the traditions of the *Protoevangelium* (it is absent in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, and in the other Infancy narratives).

Verses 23-26

Verses 23-26, on the other hand, have no link with the traditions of the *Protoevangelium*. They narrate a well-known story, the palm miracle, which is related in various sources

[19] Droge, *The Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*, p. 194, n. 22.

[20] The angel tells Mary that she will beget a son (Q 19:18), as in Luke 1:31, whereas Prot 11:2 speaks of a word (see Q 3:45). This dependence on *Luke* does not refute the decisive role of the *Protoevangelium*, since the crucial point is the sequence and the localization of the events. One detail in the Annunciation narrative (v. 17: "We sent to her Our spirit, and it took for her the form of a perfect human being," *fa-'arsalnā 'ilayhā rūḥanā fa-tamaththala lahā basharan sawiyyan*) evokes Ps-Matthew 9, where the angel is described as a "young man of ineffable beauty." The Qur'ān and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* both rely here on a common and earlier trope.

[21] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qur'ān: The Qur'ānic Account of Jesus' Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 28, 2003, p. 17 [11–39]; Dye, "Lieux saints communs," *op. cit*., p. 67–71. Other explanations (Mary goes to the desert after she drank the "bitter water" (Prot 16:2), or the visit to Elisabeth (Luke 1:39-56, Prot 12)) are not convincing.

in the Christian apocryphal traditions, for example the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* 20:1-2 and several narratives of Mary's Dormition.[22] This episode is a consolation narrative (in the Christian traditions, and in the Qur'ān as well), with strong eschatological connotations (the symbol of the palm).[23] However, this story is supposed to take place during the flight to Egypt, not at the time of Nativity. Yet what might look like a strange mistake can be explained in a different and fascinating way.

It is necessary here to refer to a significant archeological finding. In 1992, 350 m north of the monastery of Mar Elias (hence between this monastery and Ramat Rahel), the remains of a Byzantine church were discovered. This zone is located midway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem – the place where Rachel gave birth to Benjamin and died (according to some Jewish traditions), and where Mary took rest on her way to Bethlehem (according to the *Protoevangelium*).[24] Various ancient sources tell that there was a church there, called the Church of the Kathisma of Mary Theotokos (Church of the Seat of Mary, mother of God).[25]

Several excavation campaigns, led by Rina Avner, revealed an exceptional building.[26] The Kathisma church was an octagonal church from the Byzantine era. It has two octagonal concentric belts around the central space (like a mausoleum inside another mausoleum). Its dimensions are remarkable: 41,5 m according to an axis east-west, 36 m north-south. Even more remarkable is the presence of a rock inside the central octagon. The shape of the rock is irregular, measuring approximately 2.5 m x 3 m (the rock was originally larger). The central octagon is delimited by two rings of columns. The pilgrims were traveling between them in their prayers or processions. The size and structure of the building show that it was an important place of pilgrimage.

[22] The palm miracle narrative does not seem attested in Syriac sources, even if it was certainly known in the Syriac-speaking world. For Ethiopian, see the *Mäṣḥafä ʿəräft* (*Liber Requiei*) in Victor Arras, *De transitu Mariae. Apocrypha Aethiopice 1 et 2*. Ed. and tr. V. A., Louvain, Secrétariat du CorpusSCO (CSCO 343 (Geez) & 351 (Latin)), 1973-1974, §§ 5-9; for Georgian, Michel van Esbroeck, "Apocryphes géorgiens de la dormition," in *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 92, 1973, p. 67–73; for Irish (from a Latin source), Charles Donahue, *The Testament of Mary. The Gaelic Version of the Dormitio Mariae together with an Irish Latin Version*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1942, p. 28–31. Sozomen (*Ecc. Hist.* V, 21, 8-11, p. 229 Hansen) knows two different versions of the palm miracle.

[23] Michel van Esbroeck, "Bild und Begriff in der Transitus-Literatur, der Palmbaum und der Tempel," in Margot Schmidt & Carl-Friedrich Geyer, eds, *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, Regensburg, Verlag F. Pustet, 1982, p. 333–351.

[24] Dye, "Lieux saints communs," *op. cit*., p. 73–74.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 75–77.

[26] Rina Avner, "The Recovery of the Kathisma Church and its Influence on Octogonal Building," in Giovanni Claudio Bottini, Leah Di Segni & Lesław Daniel D. Chrupcala, eds, *One Land – Many Cultures. Archeological Studies in Honour of Stanislao Loffreda OFM*, Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 2003, p. 173–186; id., "The Kathisma: A Christian and Muslim Pilgrimage Site," in *ARAM*, vol. 18-19, 2006-2007, p. 541–557; id., "The Dome of the Rock in Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem: Architecture and Architectural Iconography," in *Muqarnas*, vol. 27, 2010, p. 31–49; id., "The Initial Tradition of the Theotokos at the Kathisma: Earliest Celebrations and the Calendar," in Leslie Brubaker & Mary B. Cunningham, eds, *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium. Texts and Images*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, p. 9–30. See now Rina Avner et al., *The Kathisma church and monastery of Mary Theotokos on the Jerusalem-Bethlehem road: Final Report of the 1992, 1997, 1999 and 2000 excavation seasons*, Jerusalem, The Israel Antiquities Authority, 2022. Pictures of the remains of the church, especially of its mosaics, as well as its plan, can be found in Avner's works and on the Internet. Summary of previous research in Guillaume Dye, "Lieux saints communs," *op. cit*., p. 77–81.

Thanks especially to numismatic and ceramic evidence, excavations have dated three levels of pavement. The oldest one goes back to the middle of the fifth century, when the church was built. The second is dated from the beginning of the sixth century and displays substantial renovations, which probably occurred around 531. A water pipe, made of ceramic tubes, was then fabricated. It surrounded the rock and brought water from a spring located in the northeast. This blessed water was collected by pilgrims who could bring it back with them in memory of their pilgrimage (a little bottle decorated with a palm tree was even found[27]). The third level, from the early eighth century, is posterior to the Arab conquests. What seems to be a circular niche (a *miḥrāb*), is then built, south of the building. The Kathisma church might thus have been transformed into a mosque.

The floor of the latest level contains mosaics with geometric patterns; in one of the rooms, the mosaic is a large palm tree flanked by two smaller ones. These mosaics are very similar to those of the Dome of the Rock.[28] Moreover, as the Kathisma church and the Dome of the Rock are buildings of similar dimensions, following an analogous plane (concentric octagons with a rock at the center), we can surmise that the Kathisma church could be, at least in part, the architectural model of the Dome of the Rock.[29]

But the most important point is related to the liturgical and popular traditions of the Kathisma. Indeed, it has been shown that two different traditions were associated with the Kathisma church and its *rock*:[30] first, narratives related to the *Protoevangelium of James* and the rest of Mary on her way to Bethlehem,[31] second, narratives related to the rest of Mary and the palm tree miracle during the flight to Egypt.[32] This is the *only attested example*, before the Qur'ān, of a connection between these two (otherwise independent) traditions.[33] This gives good ground for the thesis that the Qur'ān

[27] Avner, "The Kathisma: A Christian and Muslim Pilgrimage Site," *op. cit*., p. 547 and fig. 6, p. 556.

[28] Compare Avner, "The Dome of the Rock in Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem," *op. cit*., p. 43, fig. 9, and Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of Rock*, Cambridge (Mass.), The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 84, fig. 28.

[29] Avner, "The Dome of the Rock in Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem," *op. cit*.

[30] Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qur'ān," *op. cit*., p. 22–31; Dye, "Lieux saints communs," *op. cit*., p. 75–77, 84–90.

[31] See *De situ terrae sanctae*, in Paul Geyer et al., eds, *Itineraria et alia geographica*, Turnhout, Brepols (CCL 175), 1965, p. 123–124; Theodore of Petra, *Vita sancti Theodosii*, in Hermann Usener, ed., *Der heilige Theodosios*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1890, p. 13–14; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita sancti Theodosii*, in Eduard Schwartz, ed., *Kyrillos von Scythoplis*, Leipzig, J.C. Hinrichs, 1939, p. 236, 20–21.

[32] See *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, in Geyer et al., eds, *Itineraria et alia geographica*, *op. cit*., p. 143.

[33] Some additional comments are needed on this crucial topic. Our earliest Syriac manuscripts of the Dormition narratives (late 5th-early 6th centuries, see Agnes Smith Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ed. and transl. by A.S.L., Studia Sinaitaca no. XI, London, C.J. Clays and Sons, Cambridge University Press, 1902) are prefaced by the *Protoevangelium of James*. Later in the sixth century, the so-called *Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Thomas* has been added between the *Protoevangelium* and the *Transitus Mariae* (see Cornelia B. Horn, "Syriac and Arabic Perspectives on Structural and Motif Parallels Regarding Jesus' Childhood in Christian Apocrypha and Early Islamic Literature: the 'Book of Mary,' the *Arabic Apocryphal Gospel of John*, and the Qur'ān," in *Apocrypha*, vol. 19, 2008, p. 267–291, esp. p. 278–279), thus making a single unit, going from the conception and birth of Mary to her death (Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 28–29). However, the Syriac Dormition narratives and the *Infancy Gospel* do *not* mention the palm miracle. The *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, on the other hand, is heavily dependent on the

depends here on specific Palestinian traditions. But the dependence is in fact much more striking.

Verses 27-33

According to v. 27, Mary brings Jesus to her people (*qawm*, contrasting with her family, *ahl*, in v. 16).[34] If we rely on the previous subtexts, and also on the logic of the narrative, we should suppose that she goes back to the Temple of Jerusalem, where she meets the Jewish people, or the priests, who act as the authoritative representatives of the Jewish people.

This is confirmed by a close reading of v. 27-32, a remarkable passage which recalls the Christian apocryphal stories where Jesus speaks and does miracles from the cradle.[35] The Qur'ān is merging here two episodes – or rather, it is merging in the same story the *functions* of these episodes: the trial of Mary in the Temple (which takes place, in Prot 15-16, between the Annunciation and the Nativity) and the presentation of Jesus

Protoevangelium of James in its first part (chapters 1-17) and on narratives related to the flight to Egypt in its second part (chapters 18-24), including the palm miracle (20-21). Since the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* was composed in Latin, probably in the early seventh century, and is a reshuffle of several independent texts (such as the *Protoevangelium* in a Latin translation), it cannot be the source of the Qur'anic narrative, and the Qur'ān is not its source either (Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qur'ān," *op. cit.*, p. 18–22). However, both texts rely on common ground, and belong to an attested tradition which aggregates tales from the *Protoevangelium* and from the Dormition narratives. Should we therefore posit a lost written source for both texts, which could have been disseminated as early as the 5th or 6th among Arab tribes, as Jan van Reeth has recently argued, in a series of stimulating and erudite papers (see Jan M.F. van Reeth, "Le *Vaticinans Puer I : la tradition syriaque," in Christian* Cannuyer and Catherine Vialle, eds, *Les naissances merveilleuses en Orient. Jacques Vermeylen (1942-2014) in memoriam*, in *Acta Orientalia Belgica*, vol. 28, 2015, p. 225–250; id., "Le *Vaticinans Puer* II : l'enfant Jésus dans le Coran," in Jaakko Hämen-Anttila, Petteri Koskikallio and Ilkka Lindstedt, eds, *Contacts and Interactions. Proceedings of the 27th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants – Helsinki 2014*, Leuven, Peeters, 2017, p. 393–404, esp. p. 397–399; id., "Le *Vaticinans Puer* III : la *Mémoire de la Mère de Dieu* et son *Kathisma* selon la tradition occidentale," in Guy Guldentops, Christian Laes and Gert Partoens, eds, *FELICI CVRIOSITATE. Studies in Latin Lierature and Textual Criticism from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century. In honour of Rita Beyers*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2017, p. 85–111, esp. p. 106–111)? I remain skeptical about this hypothesis. It does not seem mandatory to posit a common written source, and I am not sure that it should be assigned to the mid-fifth century Kathisma church: at this time, there is no evidence that the Kathisma, which was connected to the Nativity traditions of the *Protoevangelium,* had already been connected to the palm miracle (this mix is a sixth century phenomenon, related to popular practices such as pilgrimage). And even if we did posit such a source, it would not account for at least three crucial aspects of the Qur'ān: first, the birth at "a remote place" (v. 22) mentioned in the *Protoevangelium* but not in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (maybe the putative source mentioned it, but it remains unverifiable); second, the fact that the palm miracle takes place at the time of Nativity (there is no reason to suppose that it was the same in the source); third, the pericope when Mary goes back to Jerusalem (v. 27-33) which, as we will see soon, depends on seventh century traditions specifically related to the Kathisma church and absent from the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* and also, in all probability, from its possible sources too.

[34] Note the echoes between v. 22: "she conceived him" (*ḥamalathu*, literally, "she carried him"), and v. 27: "then she brought him to her people, carrying him (*taḥmiluhu*)."

[35] Cornelia B. Horn, "Intersections: The Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* in Sources from the Christian East and the Qur'ān," in *Apocrypha*, vol. 17, 2006, p. 113–150; id., "Syriac and Arabic Perspectives," *op. cit.*; Carlos A. Segovia, "Noah as Eschatological Mediator Transposed: from 2 Enoch 71-72 to the Christological Echoes of 1 Enoch 106:3 in the Qur'ān," in *Henoch*, vol. 33, no. 1, p. 129–144; van Reeth, "Le *Vaticinans Puer* I," *op. cit.*; id., "Le *Vaticinans Puer* II," *op. cit.*, id., "Le *Vaticinans Puer* III," *op. cit.*

in the Temple (Luke 2:22-40), which was celebrated at the Kathisma church forty days after Nativity (on 2 February). There is no confusion here, but a subtle homiletic move. In the *Protoevangelium* and *Luke*, the stories of the trial in the Temple and the presentation in the Temple respectively fulfill two functions: first, to legitimize, against the accusations of adultery, Mary's pregnancy (and thus the birth of Jesus); second, to affirm and acknowledge the special status of Jesus (he is the Messiah). The Qur'ān is doing something similar here: by answering himself, miraculously, the adultery charges against his mother, Jesus shows the legitimacy of his birth and cleanses his mother from all suspicion; yet at the same time, he makes a Christological statement which asserts *who he is* – his prophetic status. All this is thus well known now by the "people of Mary," namely the Jews, whom the Qur'ān accuses of spreading a great slander (Q 4:156),[36] and of not acknowledging that Jesus is a prophet and a messenger (see for example Q 61:6), even though they had learnt the truth about these matters, in the clearest possible way, from Jesus himself.

However, the text raises a significant riddle (Q 19:28):

> *"Sister of Aaron [*yā-'ukhta hārūna*]! Your father was not a bad man, nor was your mother a prostitute."*

According to the Qur'ān, Mary is the "sister of Aaron," the "daughter of 'Imrān" (*bint 'Imrān*) (Q 66:12), and the biological daughter of "the wife of 'Imrān" (*imra'at 'imrān*) (Q 3:35-36). This evokes the Biblical Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, and daughter of 'Amram (Exodus 6:20; 15:20; 1 Chron 5:29) – but Miriam and Mary are two different characters…[37]

Some polemicists have seen here evidence for the alleged ignorance of Muḥammad, who was so unfamiliar with Biblical culture that he mixed up two characters who are supposed to be separated by more than a thousand years. On the other hand, some Muslim exegetes have argued that this Aaron was not the Biblical Aaron, but someone from Mary's tribe. However, when the Qur'ān speaks of Aaron, it is always of the Biblical Aaron, brother of Moses (see e.g. Q 19:53). These theories can therefore be discarded.

Another explanation has recently been suggested.[38] In the Qur'ān, *ibn* and *bint* do not always mean "direct child": they can also mean "descendents, progeny" (Q 2:246; 3:49; 5:72; 7:35; 17:70; 36:60); moreover, *akh* and *ukht* do not always indicate a sibling

[36] That is to say, accusing Mary of adultery or prostitution – a common anti-Christian Jewish polemic.

[37] Both have the same name in Aramaic and Arabic (*Maryam*). In Greek, there is both *Mariam* and *Maria* for Mary, mother of Jesus, and even if *Mariam* is the usual name for Miriam, there are manuscripts where she is called *Maria* (for example in the Codex Sinaiticus). The *Protoevangelium* has also the form *Mariammê* (16:3; 17:2) – certainly a hypocorism.

[38] Suleiman Mourad, "Mary in the Qur'ān: A reexamination of her presentation," in Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 163–166.

relationship: they can refer to a religious bond (Q 3:103), an ancestor (Q 7:38), a predecessor (Q 43:48) or a tribal relationship (Q 7:73). According to this interpretation, the formula "sister of Aaron" means only that Mary is a descendent of Aaron:

> *The expression* sister of Aaron*, moreover, occurs in the Qur'ānic reference to the questioning of Mary in the Temple. It is especially appropriate in this context for the questioners, the Temple's priests, to magnify Mary's moral transgression (her pregnancy) by appealing to her ancestor Aaron, whose descendents are the only Israelites qualified to serve in the Temple, where Mary herself was raised. In other words, Mary as a descendent of Aaron is expected to keep the purity of the sanctuary, rather than defile it by supposedly committing the shameful act that would lead to a pregnancy. Here too, there are no grounds on which to argue that the Qur'ān is identifying Mary as literally the sister of Aaron.*[39]

This is smart: from a linguistic point of view, it is possible indeed to understand the words this way, and what it tells about the blame addressed to Mary might be true. Yet, ultimately, this explanation is not successful, since it cannot account for Q 3:35-36:

> *When the wife of 'Imrān said: 'My Lord, surely I vow to You what is in my belly, (to be) dedicated (to Your service). (…) And when she had delivered her, she said, 'My Lord, surely I have delivered her, a female', (…) 'and I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her with You, and for her offspring [*dhurriyyatahā*], from the accursed Satan'.*

This passage relies on the story of the birth of Mary, as narrated in the *Protoevangelium of James* (Prot 5).[40] *Imra'at 'Imrān* can *only* mean "the wife of 'Imrān" (see also Q 3:40; 4:128; 7:83; 11:71, 81; 12:21, etc.). It does not mean that she is a descendent of 'Imrān, or simply a member of his tribe. There is also no reason to think that 'Imrān is the name of Mary's biological father, called *Joachim* in Christian sources (Prot 1-5), which are familiar to the author of the sura. Moreover, Mary is called "sister of Aaron" and "daughter of 'Imrān," and the wife of 'Imrān is her biological mother, just as Miriam is the sister of Aaron, the daughter of 'Amram and obviously also the daughter of 'Amram's wife. If Mourad's interpretation were true, it would be necessary to subsume three different words (*ukht*, *bint*, *imra'a*) under one meaning ("descendent") which is the secondary meaning of the first two words, and hardly a possible meaning for the third one.

There must be, therefore, something else, or rather something more, than Mary's Aaronid descent in the Qur'anic "Mary, sister of Aaron" – and that should not amount

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 165–166.

[40] There is of course a significant variation: in the *Protoevangelium*, Anna (Mary's mother) asks a midwife whom she gave birth to, and the midwife answers: "A girl." The Qur'ān, as usual, erases the secondary characters and encapsulates all the story as a dialog between God and the primary character.

to a confusion of any kind, since the author of sura 19 has an intimate knowledge of Christian traditions.

The solution of this riddle should be found in *typology*, an approach of Scripture whose basic principle is to see former characters or events as prefiguring, or announcing, later figures or events. It has deep affinities with the use of inner-Biblical parallels, and it is certainly fair to say that typology is one of the most widespread exegetical devices in Christianity. It can easily be combined with allegoric exegesis, which considers Biblical characters, places or episodes (i.e. concrete, material entities) as symbols of abstract or spiritual notions.

So, when the Qur'ān states that Mary is Aaron's sister and 'Imrān's daughter, it does not state that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is Aaron's biological sister and 'Imrān's biological daughter, but it claims that she is prefigured, one way or another, by the "family of 'Imrān," especially Aaron and Miriam (obviously, the homonymy on the name *Maryam* plays a role). Once again: it is not *simply* a connection to Aaron's lineage.[41]

The typology between Mary and Miriam is unusual in ancient Christian literature (see below), possibly because it was slightly embarrassing.[42] Some parallels have been suggested, but they do not seem really successful for understanding this sura.[43] What we need to find out, therefore, is rather a possible Christian subtext for the formula "Mary, sister of Aaron," and its relation to the Qur'ān.

In fact, this is not a very difficult task, provided we look at the right place, namely the cult of Mary as it was practiced in the Jerusalem area in the late sixth and early seventh century.[44]

We know that the Kathisma church was related to the feast of the Memory of Mary, which was celebrated on 13 August (at least from the end of the sixth century:

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41 *Contra* Angelika Neuwirth, "The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarcal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism," in Angelika Neuwirth, Michael Marx & Nicolai Sinai, eds, *The Qur'ān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations in the Qur'*ānic Milieu, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 506–508.

42 See Gilles Dorival, "Is Maryam, Sister of Aaron, the Same as Maryam, the Mother of Jesus? Quran 19:28 Revisited," in Moshe Blidstein, Serge Ruzer, and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, eds, *Scriptures, Sacred Traditions, and Strategies of Religious Subversion. Studies in Discourse with the Work of Guy G. Stroumsa*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2018, p. 103–112, who gives two main reasons: the virginity of Miriam was a debated issue; the image of Miriam was quite mixed since, as the sister of Moses, she had rebelled against her brother because of his Ethiopian wife (see Nb 12).

43 Especially Édouard-Marie Gallez, "Le Coran identifie-t-il Marie, mère de Jésus, à Marie, sœur d'Aaron ?" in Anne-Marie Delcambre & Joseph Bosshard, eds, *Enquêtes sur l'islam. En hommage à Antoine Moussali*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2004, p. 139–151, who refers to the rock mentioned in 1 Co 10 :3-4. See also, for a typological reading, Michel Dousse, *Marie la musulmane*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2005, p. 19–20. See the discussion in Guillaume Dye, "Lieux saints communs," *op. cit.*, p. 95–98.

44 More details in Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, *op. cit.*, p. 115–139, and Simon Claude Mimouni, *Dormition et Assomption de Marie. Histoire des traditions anciennes*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1995 *Dormition et Assomption de* p. 371–471.

previously, it was celebrated on 15 August, but the date changed when the Emperor Mauritius decided that Mary's Dormition would be celebrated on 15 August). The topic of the celebration was the commemoration of the role of Mary in the Nativity. If we want to understand the meaning of this celebration, we should have a brief look at the texts which were read then.

According to the *Armenian Jerusalem lectionary*, a document which describes the liturgy in Jerusalem between 417 and 439, the readings for the Memory of Mary (on 15 August) were as follows:[45] Psalm 132(131):8; Isaiah 7:10-16; Galatians 3:29-4:7; Psalm 110(109):1-7; Luke 2:1-7. I will make only two remarks.

First, the reading which gives the ultimate meaning of the commemoration is the verse "Arise, O Lord, to your resting place, You and the Ark of Your holiness" (Psalm 132(131):8). Here the Ark is Mary. The allegory Ark of Covenant/Mary is central in Christian literature (it is already in Luke).[46] What is celebrated is Mary's virginity and divine maternity. Her role is prefigured by the Ark of Covenant: Mary is the Ark, and the house of the Lord.

Second, Galatians 3:29-4:7: this text is the best example (with Romans 4) of the kind of rhetorical move which vindicated Christian supersessionism towards the Jews[47] – a move the Qur'ān borrows and uses against the Jews and sometimes (probably in its latest layers) against the Christians too. Moreover, both texts speak of offspring (Romans 4:9-18; Galatians 3:29) and heritage (Romans 4:13, 16; Galatians 3:29; 4:1, 7) – see Q 19:58, 63.

During the sixth century, the Palestinian cult of the Virgin underwent a significant evolution: the commemoration of the role of Mary in the Nativity was more and more mixed with elements belonging to traditions on Mary's Dormition. After the

[45] No. 64 in Athanase Renoux, *Le codex arménien Jérusalem 121*. Éd., introd. trad. et notes par A. R., Turhout, Brepols, 2 vols (PO 35.1 & 36.2), 1969 & 1971. The Armenian lectionary does not mention any church, but it locates the celebration midway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, where Mary took rest on her way to Bethlehem, and where the Kathisma church would be built later.

[46] René Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc I-II*. Paris, J. Gabalda, 1957, p. 148–161; Michel van Esbroeck, "The Virgin as the true Ark of Covenant," in Maria Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004, p. 63–68. Psalm 132(131):8 is quoted twice in Hesychius' Fifth Homily (Aubineau, *Les homélies festales d'Hésychius de Jérusalem*, *op. cit*., p. 164); it is also cited by Epiphanos of Cyprus to explain the leap of John the Baptist in Elizabeth's womb when Mary visited her (Luke 1:41) (Michel van Esbroeck, *Les versions géorgiennes d'Épiphane de Chypre. Traité des poids et des mesures* (CSCO 461), Leuven, Peeters, 1984, p. 42).

[47] This was not the original meaning of the passage: Paul was not a Christian (it would be an anachronistic label), but a Second Temple Jewish writer, and his point was only that Jews were not the only heirs of God's covenant. He never meant they had to be replaced with another community. On the importance of this supersessionist myth in the Qur'ān, see Carlos A. Segovia, "Discussing/Subverting Paul: Polemical Re-readings and Competing Supersessionist Misreadings of Pauline Inclusivism in Late Antiquity: A Case Study on the Apocalypse of Abraham, Justin Martyr, and the Qur'ān," in Gabriele Boccaccini and Carlos A. Segovia, eds, *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 2016, p. 341–361; id., "'Those on the Right' and 'Those on the Left': Rereading Qur'ān 56:1-56 (and the Founding Myth of Islam) in Light of *Apocalypse of Abraham* 21-22," in *Oriens Christianus*, vol. 100, 2017, p. 227–241.

reform in the end of the sixth century, the Marian liturgy in Jerusalem became a stational liturgy.[48] It lasted five days (13-17 August), was centered on Mary's Dormition (celebrated on 15 August), and began on 13 August at the Kathisma church, with the feast of the Memory of Mary.[49] Thanks to Georgian sources,[50] we have some information about the content of this liturgical circle: during the first decades of the seventh century, the readings for the Memory of Mary, interspersed by the recitation of Psalm verses (72(71):1, 6; 65(64):2), were Isaiah 7:10-17; Hebrews 9:1-10; Luke 11:27-32. Two days later, on 15 August, the readings were Proverbs 31:29; Job 28:5-11; Ezekiel 44:1-3; Galatians 3:24-4:7; Luke 1:39-56.[51]

There are at least two very significant elements here. The first one is Ezekiel 44:1-3, which is indirectly evoked by Q 19:16. The second is Hebrews 9:1-10.[52] Hebrews 9:3-4 describes the "Most Holy Place," located behind a curtain. The place where Mary glorifies God and gets her food from an angel (Prot 8:1) can only be this "Most Holy Place," alluded to in Qur'ān (Q 19:17; 3:37). According to Hebrews 9:4, there was in this room "the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered Ark of the Covenant. This Ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the Covenant."[53]

Q 19:2-63* does not mention the Ark of Covenant, but the topics of the covenant and the Temple (and at the same time priesthood) are omnipresent: the insistence on God's mercy and help towards His servants, throughout the sura, presupposes the centrality of the covenant; Zachariah is priest in the Temple; Mary spends her childhood in the Temple; once Jesus is born, she goes back with him to the Temple; the argument between Abraham and his father is related to the temple and idolatry, in other words, to the question of the nature of the divine presence and worship. It is also noteworthy

[48] A stational liturgy is a mobile form of worship: services are held at a specific shrine, on a designated feast day.

[49] Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, *op. cit*., p. 132–140.

[50] Georgian lectionaries and homiliaries count among our best evidence for reconstructing Late Antique Jerusalem's religious practices. For the lectionaries, see the synthesis of Stig Simeon R. Frøyshov, "The Georgian Witness to the Jerusalem Liturgy: New Sources and Studies," in Bert Groen, Steven Hawkes-Teeples and Stefanos Alexopoulos, eds, *Inquiries into Eastern Christian Worship. Selected Papers of the Second International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy, Rome, 17-21 September 2008*, Leuven, Peeters, 2012, p. 227–267; for the homiliaries, see Michel van Esbroeck, *Les plus anciens homéliaires géorgiens : étude descriptive et historique*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste, 1975.

[51] Nos. 1144-1147 and 1149-1155 in Michel Tarchnischvili, *Le Grand Lectionnaire de l'Église de Jérusalem. Tome II*, texte géorgien, Louvain, Peeters (CSCO 204), 1960 ; id. *Le Grand Lectionnaire de l'Église de Jérusalem. Tome II*, traduction latine, Louvain, Peeters (CSCO 205), 1960.

[52] Hebrews 9:1-10 was also read, alongside with Psalm 132(131), for the celebration of the Ark of Covenant, every 2 July (no. 61 in Renoux, *Le codex arménien Jérusalem 121*, *op. cit*.; nos. 1070-1074 in Tarchnischvili, *Le Grand Lectionnaire de l'Église de Jérusalem*, *op. cit*.) – certainly not a coincidence.

[53] This is a nice example of the enrichment of the content of the Ark in Biblical traditions (see Madeleine Petit, "Le contenu de l'arche d'alliance : génération et addition de themes," in André Caquot, Mireille Hadas-Lebel and Jean Riaud, eds, *Hellenica et Judaica. Hommage à Valentin Nikiprowetzky*, Leuven, Peeters, 1986, p. 335–346). The Ark, originally, contained only the tablets of the covenant (Exodus 25:12-16). The gold jar of manna refers to Exodus 16:31-34, Mary was identified with the jar in Christian exegesis (van Esbroeck, "The Virgin as the true Ark of Covenant," *op. cit*.), and Aaron's staff (Numbers 17) refers to the Messiah.

that the main reading at the Kathisma church, on 13 August, commemorating Mary's role in Nativity, mentioned the name of Aaron (Hebrews 9:4). But there is more.

The 12 August, namely the day just before the beginning of the Marian stational liturgy (13-17 August), was dedicated to the commemoration of *Aaron* (the celebration took place in the Holy Sepulchre).[54] The text read during this celebration was Hebrews 5:1-10, which explains how Jesus the Son is also Jesus the High Priest; it also displays a comparison between Aaron and Jesus (v. 4-5) and quotes Psalm 110(109):4 ("You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek"), a verse which was read for the feast of the Memory of Mary, on 15 August, in the former liturgical calendar.

This closeness between the figure of *Aaron* and the *Jerusalem Marian* celebrations of the early seventh century is remarkable. It is confirmed by an apocryphon on the Dormition of Mary, known only through a tenth century Georgian manuscript, the Tbilisi A-144 codex.[55] This manuscript, one of the six witnesses of the ancient Mravalthavi, a homiletic collection only known in Georgian, contains the translation of a series of homilies and apocrypha (as a rule, originally in Greek), used for liturgical celebrations in Jerusalem between the fifth and eighth centuries. It is the only witness to be quite complete for the second half of the year.

For 13 August, it mentions a liturgical reading, i.e. a lection "from the words of the prophet Jeremiah," which was read at the Kathisma church, in commemoration of "the gathering in Bethlehem, when the apostles led forth the Theotokos, from Bethlehem to Zion."[56]

The *Lection of Jeremiah* is a brief (two pages) and composite work. Two thirds of the text are simply a quotation from the *Life of Jeremiah*, a brief apocryphon to be found in the collection of the *Lives of the Prophets*.[57] The last third consists in interpolations which are specific to the *Lection*. It is a composite work in another respect, since it features elements related to the feast of the Memory of Mary, and others related to the Dormition (as shown also by the superscription). It dates most probably from the first decades of the seventh century.[58]

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[54] Nos. 1142-1143 in Tarchnischvili, *Le Grand Lectionnaire de l'Église de Jérusalem*, *op. cit.*; see also Gérard Garitte, *Le Calendrier palestino-géorgien du Sinaiticus 34 (X^e siècle).* Éd., trad. et comm. par G. G., Brussels, Société des Bollandistes, 1958, p. 84, 300.

[55] Description of the manuscript in van Esbroeck, *Les plus anciens homéliaires géorgiens*, *op. cit.*, p. 37–49, 158–180.

[56] Introduction, edition of the Georgian text and Latin translation in Michel van Esbroeck, "Nouveaux apocryphes de la Dormition conservés en géorgien," in *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 90, 1972, p. 363–369.

[57] The *Lection* follows the recension of Ps-Dorotheos of Tyre, with some passages close to the recension of Ps-Epiphanos.

[58] Since the text mixes elements from the feast of the Memory of Mary and elements related to the Dormition, it might be argued that it displays several layers of composition (in addition to the *Fortschreibung* of a part of the *Life of Jeremiah*). See van Esbroeck, "Nouveaux apocryphes de la Dormition," *op. cit.*, p. 364–365. There is another (and probably better) explanation: the *Lection of Jeremiah* could have been composed in a context

The text mentions a prophecy from Jeremiah to the Egyptians: their idols will be destroyed,[59] and salvation will come from a child who will be born from a virgin in Bethlehem and laid down in a manger (§ 2). This crib, into which the child is placed for one year to another until the visit of the Magi (§ 3), is (also) the symbol of the Ark of Covenant.

But Jeremiah, before the destruction of the First Temple, had saved the Ark and sealed it in a rock (§ 6).[60] Here the *Life of Jeremiah* and the *Lection of Jeremiah* rely on 2 Maccabees:

> *It was also in the writing that the prophet [Jeremiah], having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance. Some of those who followed him came up to mark the way, but could not find it. When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: 'The place shall be unknown until God gathers His people together again and shows His mercy. And then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated' (2 Maccabees 2:4-8).*

Then the *Lection* mentions another oracle (§§ 8-10):

> *And the prophet [Jeremiah] said:* 'His coming will be a sign for you, *and for other children at the end of the world.*[61] And nobody will bring forth the hidden Ark from the rock, except ***the priest* Aaron*, the brother of Mary.*** And nobody will unveil the tables therein, nor be able to read them, except the lawgiver Moses, the chosen of the Lord. And at the resurrection of the dead, the Ark will be the first to rise from the rock and to be placed on Mount Sinai, *so that the word of the prophet David will be fulfilled, in which he said: 'Arise, O Lord, to your resting place, You and the Ark of Your holiness,' which is the Holy Virgin Mary who passes from this world to the presence of God, she to whom the apostles proclaimed in Zion the praise of Myrrh saying: 'Today the Virgin is being guided from Bethlehem to Zion, and today from earth to heaven,'* and all

where the feast of the Memory of Mary was already intimately connected to the feast of the Dormition – exactly what happens in Jerusalem at this time. In other words: positing a lost proto-*Lection* does not seem necessary.

59 Ps-Matthew 23-24 mentions the destruction of the idols in an Egyptian temple, a few paragraphs after the palm miracle. That the *Lection of Jeremiah*, whose §§ 2-5 are related to Egypt, was read at the Kathisma church, corroborates the idea that palm miracle traditions were connected to the Kathisma.

60 On this story, see Madeleine Petit, "La cachette de l'Arche d'Alliance : à partir de la « Vie de Jérémie » 9-15 dans les « *Vitae prophetarum* »," in André Caquot, ed., *La littérature intertestamentaire*, Paris, PUF, 1985, p. 119–131.

61 The text is awkward here. It is possibly corrupted.

> the saints are gathered together around her and wait for the Lord, putting to flight the enemy who aims to destroy them.[62]

The *Lection of Jeremiah* is a fascinating yet much neglected text, which deserves a careful study in its own right. I will focus here on the formula "the priest Aaron, the brother of Mary" (*ahron mḡdelman jmaman mariamisman*).

Since the author is patently a (clever) cleric, he would not mistake Miriam for Mary (who is mentioned a few lines later as the "Holy Virgin Mary"). The words *priest brother of Mary* are an addition of the *Lection* (the *Life of Jeremiah* only mentions Aaron, without any further precision). In other words, highlighting this typological and symbolic relation is a deliberate decision of the author. Note also the mention, in addition to Aaron, of Moses, "the chosen of the Lord." Furthermore, following the *Life of Jeremiah*, the *Lection of Jeremiah* explains that the rock is located in the desert (where the Ark was before), between two mountains, where Moses reposes (§ 13).[63] In fulfillment of the prophecy, God also granted Jeremiah a place next to Moses and Aaron (§ 14) – beside the Ark, which remains a symbol for Mary.

All this brings an exceptionally close typology between Mary and the "family of 'Amram." It links Mary to *Aaron and Moses*, *on two levels* at least: the Ark of Covenant (related to Mary's role as Jesus' mother) and the Dormition. Indeed, according to Jewish traditions (of course known by Christians too),[64] Moses, Aaron and Miriam all experienced a dormition (as Mary, and her mother Anna, will also experience), dying "through a kiss of God (*Baba Batra* 17a)." There is also a link between, on the one hand, Jesus, and on the other hand, Aaron and Moses, since Jesus is the only one who has the power to bring forth the Ark (as the "High Priest")[65] and read the tables of the Law.

Let us now pause a bit and put things in order. The transition from "Aaron, brother of Mary" to "Mary, sister of Aaron" is rather straightforward, and it would be fanciful to suppose that the addition of "priest brother of Mary" displays a Qur'anic influence on the initial author, the Georgian translator, or a copyist. Moreover, the typology "Mary, sister of Aaron/Mary, mother of Jesus," although not non-existent, is not widespread in ancient Christian literature. As noted by Gilles Dorival,[66] it can be found in a passage

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[62] See van Esbroeck, "Nouveaux apocryphes de la Dormition," *op. cit*., p. 367 (Georgian), 369 (Latin). Non-italicized passages quote the *Life of Jeremiah* – the italicized portions of the text are thus specific additions made by the writer/editor of the *Lection of Jeremiah*. About the last sentence: Aaron was indeed celebrated on 12 August, but so was the gathering of the saints… The gathering of the saints is of course a significant variation to the gathering of God's people in 2 Maccabees 2:7.

[63] The various traditions of the *Life of Jeremiah* mention here "where Moses and Aaron repose." I see no serious reason for the absence of Aaron in the *Lection*, since he is mentioned before and after. A lacuna is possible.

[64] See the *Greek Transitus of Ps-John*, § 12, and the interpretation of Frédéric Manns, "La mort de Marie dans les textes de la *Dormition de Marie*," in *Augustinianum*, vol. 19, 1979, p. 514–515.

[65] The *Lection* does not only add "brother of Mary": it adds also that Aaron was a priest. This entails that the topic of *priesthood* is central here, which is not surprising, since the *Epistle to the Hebrews* is certainly one of the subtexts of the *Lection*, and shapes the Jerusalem Marian liturgy.

[66] See Dorival, "Is Maryam, Sister of Aaron, the Same as Maryam, the Mother of Jesus," *op. cit*.

of Gregory of Nyssa, and in sixth century anonymous dialogue (in Greek) between a Christian and some Jews.[67] It is therefore all the more remarkable that we found an occurrence of this rare typology in the *Lection of Jeremiah*, a text apparently not disseminated outside the liturgical activities of the Kathisma church.

To sum up, we found the following points of contact between the Kathisma church and Q 19:1-63*.

First, the Kathisma church was attached to the feast of the Memory of Mary, which commemorated the role of Mary in the Nativity – exactly what Q 19:1-63* is doing.

Second, the Kathisma church was, before the Qur'ān, the only attested place which connected the traditions of the *Protoevangelium of James* and the palm miracle *in this precise way*. In fact, the Qur'ān does not only repeat the traditions of the Kathisma: it *presupposes* them. The traditions of the Kathisma concerned two separate episodes – both related to the same *place*; they did not imply that the palm miracle took place at Nativity. The Qur'ān goes further and merges more decidedly both episodes, offering a creative variation.

Third, the Qur'anic expression "Mary sister of Aaron" is linked to a rather uncommon typology, of which one of the most remarkable attestations is found in a homily read at the Kathisma church every 13 August, during the same era. There are also very close links between the figure of Aaron and the Jerusalem Marian liturgy of the early seventh century, and these links look *specific* to this liturgy (I know of no other calendar, for example, when Marian celebrations follow the celebration of Aaron). More generally, the Jerusalem Marian liturgy (and particularly the *Lection of Jeremiah*) is surely the best place for finding elements which constitute the bedrock of the Qur'anic notion of the "family of 'Imrān" (*āl 'Imrān*).

Fourth, the Kathisma church displays significant architectural and artistic affinities with the Dome of the Rock. The "Muslims" of Palestine certainly knew this very important church in Jerusalem, and it seems that they transformed it into a mosque at the beginning of the eighth century (but this does not entail that they did not frequent the church previously). Iconography confirms that what was at stake was, at least in part, the palm miracle.

[67] See Gregory of Nyssa, *On virginity* (PG 46, p. 396–397): "Maryam; whom indeed I would believe to be a type of Maryam the mother of God." See also José H. Declerck, ed., *Anonymus dialogus cum Judaeis saeculi ut videtur sexti*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1994, p. 39: "But I know that Mariam too, my sister, who was a virgin at any time and who beat the timbrel symbol of virginity, because of the deadening of the members prefigured the mystery of the Holy Virgin." Some occurrences of the Miriam/Mary typology can also be found in Western Christianity (Augustine, Ambrose, Fortunatianus of Aquileia, Chromatius of Aquileia, Peter Chrysologus). See Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Mary between Bible and Qur'an: Apocrypha, Archaeology, and the Memory of Mary in Late Ancient Palestine," forthcoming. I am grateful to the author for sending me his paper. Although certainly not absent, the typology Miriam/Mary does not seem common either in Syriac literature.

In short, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that the composition of Q 19:1-63* is deeply and directly related to specifically Hagiopolite Marian traditions (further arguments corroborate this thesis, see Annex 3, p. 193–194).

Some profiling

The previous analyses allow us to draw some conclusions, at least provisional.[68]

We might first wonder when and where Q 19:1-63* might have been composed. According to Muslim traditions, sura 19 is Meccan. It is of course not impossible that traditions connected to the Kathisma church had been scattered in the Ḥijāz, through stories narrated by pilgrims, missionaries, monks, soldiers or merchants – even if it remains speculative (such an appeal to oral dissemination, which left no traces, remains unprovable and unfalsifiable). But knowing (maybe) various traditions is one thing; being able to compose a text like Q 19:1-63* is another.

Let us sketch indeed the profile of the author of Q 19:1-63*.

1) He is deeply familiar with Luke 1 and related traditions (compare Luke 1:13 and Q 19:3-4; Luke 1:13-22 and Q 19:7-11;[69] Luke 1:28-38 and Q 19:17-21).

2) He knows the traditions related to the Kathisma church – including the *Protoevangelium of James* and the palm miracle – and he presupposes the connection between these independent traditions. He also knows, one way or the other, the *Lection of Jeremiah*, a text which was apparently not widespread outside the Hagiopolite communities.

3) He is familiar with other aspects of the Jerusalem Marian liturgy and with the Dormition narratives. In fact, relying on the network of subtexts constituted by the Hagiopolite liturgy provides the best explanation for most of the content of Q 19-1-33*.

4) He follows a Christian usage in composing a section on Zachariah and John the Baptist as a preparation for the section on Mary and Jesus. The striking parallels between both sections (2-15 and 16-33; see Annex 2, p. 191–192) suggest that Q 19:1-33 is not the outcome of a complex editorial process which would mix a proto-version of Q 19:2-15 with an independent proto-version of Q 19:16-33. It looks, on the contrary, as a text with a striking unity, whose organization is shaped by a precise intention.

[68] Guillaume Dye, "Lieux saints communs," *op. cit.*, p. 109–121.

[69] There is an interesting variation between the Qur'ān and Luke. According to Luke 1:20, Zachariah will stay mute until John's birth (1:64); according to the Qur'ān, he will stay mute three days (Q 19:10: literally "three nights," *thalātha layālin*; 3:41 speaks of "three days"). Do these three days have a symbolic relation with the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple?

5) He practices Christian typological exegesis. If we include the section on Abraham, we shall conclude that he also knows the "cycle of Abraham."

6) He displays an outstanding homiletic talent, being able to merge episodes like the trial of Mary and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple in a unique narrative, using the literary device of Jesus speaking from the cradle (he knows therefore some of the "cradle miracle" traditions, which are attested about Jesus and other prophets). More significantly, his skills imply that he has an *intimate* understanding of a whole array of Christian traditions (some of them widespread, others specifically related to Palestine), since he is able to re-use them in a very consistent way (i.e., consistent with their original setting, and also within the Qur'anic pericope itself).

7) He has also some knowledge of Hebrew or (more plausibly) Aramaic. This is confirmed by a play on words made on the (Hebrew or Aramaic) name of John the Baptist (Q 19:12-13). The text reads *wa-'ātaynāhu l-ḥukma ṣabiyyan wa-ḥanānan min ladunnā wa-zakātan*, "and We gave him the wisdom/the judgment when he was a child, and grace/mercy (*ḥanān*) from Us, and purity." The meaning of the word *ḥanān* (a hapax in the Qur'ān) is ambiguous: it could indeed mean "grace," or "tenderness," but also "mercy," as in Hebrew or Aramaic. But note the name of John in Hebrew: *Yoḥanān*, i.e. *Yo-ḥanān*, "God is mercy." The word for "mercy" is visible also in Aramaic *Yuḥanan*, but it is of course absent in the usual reading of John's name in the Qur'ān, Yaḥyā, and it seems a bit far-fetched to look for it in the Christian reading of the same *rasm*, Yuḥannā. When the Qur'ān speaks of "mercy" elsewhere, including in this sura, it uses *raḥma* (Q 19:2, 21, 50, 53).

8) Since the Jerusalem liturgy was in Greek, either he has a good command of Greek, or he belongs to a multilingual circle where some people can translate or explain the Greek liturgy to non-Greek speakers. One could mention here Late Antique Palestinian monasteries, well-known for their multilingualism.[70]

9) He is certainly familiar with the literary genre of the *soghitha*, and writes a kind of "Arabic *soghitha*": the piece is, from a literary point of view, remarkable – this implies he was an Arab, or was perfectly bilingual.

10) His knowledge of Christology enables him to write a text of convergence which could work as a kind of biggest common Christological denominator. Were he less apt, he might have added unwelcome ideas for at least one of the parties involved (*mu'minūn*,[71] and the so-called Chalcedonians, Miaphysites, and Nestorians). He is

[70] Sidney H. Griffith, "From Aramaic to Arabic: The Languages of Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and the Early Islamic Periods," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 51, 1997, p. 11–31.

[71] A judicious term popularized by Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," in *Al-Abhath*, vol. 50–51, 2002–2003, p. 9–53; id., *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge (Mass.), The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010, but whose origin should be sought in Moshe Sharon, "The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land," in Moshe Sharon, ed., *Pillars of Smoke*

of course also familiar with some of the texts and convictions which circulated in the movement of the *mu'minūn*.

11) Nothing suggests that he relies on oracular words of Muḥammad. Thanks to his intimate knowledge of Christian and more specifically Palestinian Marian liturgical traditions, he composes a dialogue hymn, following the model of hymns which were sung or recited in a (Christian) liturgical setting.

It is highly unlikely, to say the least, that a scribe corresponding to such a profile could have belonged to the Meccan or Medinan circle around Muḥammad – or more generally to the Ḥijāz, except if we are ready to imagine Mecca or Medina as a kind of Arabic Edessa, Antioch, or Jerusalem.

We face here a very significant paradox, which does not seem to have received all the attention it deserves.[72] Indeed, there are good reasons to think that the Qur'ān often displays a Christian context.[73] Yet the Qur'ān is supposed to have originated in a setting – seventh century Western Arabia – where the Christian presence (all the more so the presence of literate Christians) seems marginal.[74]

Some layers of the Qur'ān which display ideas, attitudes, practices, pointing to a Christian background, might be explained as the outcome of a phenomenon of oral dissemination which would have reached, one way or the other, Western Arabia.

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and Fire. The Holy Land in History and Thought, Johannesburg, Southern Book Publishers, 1988, p. 225–236. It refers to Arab-speaking communities, related to Muḥammad's preaching, until Marwanid times. It should be used instead of *muslim*, anachronistic in this context.

[72] See Dye, "Le corpus coranique : contexte et composition," *op. cit*., p. 870–896, for further discussion and references.

[73] By "Christian context," I refer to several things, such as: **1)** some of the characters who get an eminent role in the Qur'ān are typically Christian: Jesus, Mary, John, Zachariah, the Sleepers of the Cave…; **2)** as a rule (there might be exceptions), when Qur'anic narratives refer to figures shared by Jews and Christians (Adam, Joseph, Moses…), they seem to mirror more closely Christian narratives than Jewish ones (see e.g. Joseph Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'ān: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives*. PhD, Princeton University, 2011): in short, the subtexts of many (para-)Biblical stories in the Qur'ān *tend* to be closer to Christian texts than Jewish ones, as far as we can know; **3)** some Qur'anic rhetorical arguments or *topoi* are borrowed from Christian sources: the anti-Jewish polemics, the use of the character of Abraham, and also Qur'anic demonology; **4)** many Qur'anic formulas and metaphors point to a Christian background; **5)** some texts are clearly addressed to Christians and reveal deep interactions between "Believers" (*mu'minūn*) and Christians; and **6)** some of the Qur'anic texts have been composed by *literati* who display a deep and precise knowledge of Christian texts and traditions.

[74] See for example François Villeneuve, "La résistance des cultes bétyliques d'Arabie face au monothéisme : de Paul à Barsauma et à Muhammad," in Hervé Inglebert, ed., *Le problème de la christianisation du monde antique*, Paris, Picard, 2010, p. 219–231 ; Harry Munt, "'No two religions': Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic ḥijāz," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* vol. 78, no. 2, 2015, p. 252–253. There is no doubt that Christianity encircled Western Arabia, but that does not imply it was widespread in Western Arabia: no evidence speaks for that, neither materially (no church, no monastery) nor in the literary sources (no bishop mentioned in the Acts of synods and councils, no hagiographical tradition) – and the Muslim tradition does not give much usable and reliable information either. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but it is not because our knowledge of Western Arabia remains scanty that we should speculate. For a good synthesis on pre-Islamic Christianity in Arabia, see the classical study of Theresia Hainthaler, *Araber vor dem Islam: Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit: eine Hinführung*, Leuven, Peeters, 2007 (p. 137–140 on the Ḥijāz). See also Philip Wood's paper in this volume; also Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an*, *op. cit*., p. 245-252.

However, other aspects of the Qur'ān suppose a Christian background which cannot easily be explained this way. In particular, a thorough and precise knowledge of Christian texts, traditions and exegetical tools cannot be gained by simple hearsay, but requires training and instruction; moreover, a text which addresses Christians as the main interlocutors, looking for convergence or polemics, supposes the presence of a Christian community and deep interactions with it.

In other words, Q 19:1-63* fits a context with **(a)** highly competent scribes with a Christian background (Christian *literati*), and with **(b)** deep interactions between the "Believers" and Christian groups. Such a context does not match what we know, nor what we can reasonably suppose, given the nature of the evidence at our disposal, about Western Arabia at the time.[75]

Which place and time would fit such a context, then? If we focus on the putative author, the most likely explanation is that he should be situated elsewhere than the Ḥijāz and, most probably, not too far from Jerusalem, since he was extremely familiar with the Hagiopolite liturgy and with specifically Palestinian traditions. And since writing such a skillful text requires very specific competencies, he should belong to the class of the religious *literati*. In other words, he was certainly a Christian cleric, active around Jerusalem, who "converted" to the new faith,[76] or put his pen at the service of the newcomers – all this happening, therefore, certainly *after the conquests*.

However, such a model of authorship might be unrealistic. Perhaps the sura is a collective work, implying various actors, and possibly interactions between the producers of the text and their community. This is true – but at some point anyway, the intervention of people having some of the skills noted above remains necessary. Moreover, the sura makes sense in a context where a Christian community is present. Except if we are ready to see Mecca as a place where there are Christian *literati* and a significant Christian community (something which is backed by no evidence at all), the idea that this sura fits a post-conquest context remains valid.

If this text was written after the conquests – more precisely, after the conquest of Jerusalem (which might have taken place between 635 or 638) –, many things become clearer.[77] Not only do we have a place where we can find a possible author (or decisive contributor, if this is a collective work) for this piece, but we also have a context of interactions between "Believers" and Christians. During the seventh century, it seems that Muslims frequented places of Christian worship. It was not unusual for them

[75] Some scholars might argue that, since the Qur'ān displays a significant Christian background, *then* it means that Mecca and Medina were full of Christians, some of them highly literate. This argument strikes me as perfectly circular.

[76] About Jewish or Christian converts behind some Qur'anic pericopes, see Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, *op. cit*. p. 193–194, id., "Conversion from Jewish and Christian Milieus," in this volume. I would speak of "conversion" with a grain of salt, because the confessional borders at this time might be quite fuzzy, and also because a conversion is not always necessary for writing a text of convergence.

[77] Dye, "Lieux saints communs," *op. cit.*, p. 114–115.

to visit and pray in the churches around Jerusalem: some traditions condemn these practices (this suggests they existed), whereas other traditions are more tolerant.[78] At the time of the conquests, and in the following decades, Muslims could requisition a quarter or a half of a church to pray there.[79] Other testimonies point to pilgrimage practices by Muslims (often mentioning prayers pronounced by 'Umar inside, or in front of a church), especially at the Church of Mary in the valley of Josaphat, and at the Church of the Ascension, at the Mount of Olives.[80] A famous passage from the *Maronite Chronicle*, a seventh century Syriac text, comes to mind: "many Arabs assembled in Jerusalem and made Mu'āwiya king. He ascended and sat down at Golgotha. He prayed there, went to Gethsemane, descended to the tomb of the blessed Mary, and prayed there."[81] The historical accuracy of this testimony might be debated, but the idea that Mary was a significant figure, shared among "Believers" and Christians, at least in Palestine, is highly plausible – and a text like Q 19:1-63* makes perfect sense in this context. Alternative hypotheses about the *Sitz im Leben* of Q 19:1-63* require, on the other hand, more complicated, not to say far-fetched, scenarios.

This hypothesis about sura 19 has interesting consequences, which pertain to the whole Qur'anic corpus, provided we examine some parallel passages.

Q 19:1-63*, Q 3:33-63 and Q 19:34-40

The most significant parallel to Q 19:1-63* is Q 3:33-63 (see Annex 4, p. 195, for a plan of this section). Like Q 19:1-63*, Q 3:33-63 is a text of convergence between *mu'minūn* and Christians.[82] It is at the same time a polemicizing address to the Jews.[83] Both texts are interdependent (see the parallels in Annex 5, p. 196–198, e.g. 19:8-9 *vs* 3:40; 19:10-11 *vs* 3:41; 19:20-21 *vs* 3:47): it is therefore possible to assess their relative chronology, on a literary basis only.

[78] Akimai Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship. Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage*, Leiden, Brill, 1999, p. 139–141; Suliman Bashear, "Qibla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayers in Churches," in *The Muslim World*, vol. 81, 1991, p. 267–282.

[79] Arthur Stanley Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslims Subjects. A Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar*, London, Oxford University Press, 1930, p. 38–40; Michel Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'Islam,* Beirut, Imprimerie Catholique, 1958, p. 184.

[80] Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, *op. cit*., p. 138–143. Sources also mention a prayer from 'Umar in the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. The primary function of these narratives is less historical than ideological – they justify, *a posteriori*, a well-established practice, which could have been in use at the Kathisma church too (Avner, "The Kathisma: A Christian and Muslim Pilgrimage Site," *op. cit*., p. 546).

[81] Michael Philipp Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims. A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2015, p. 58. My point is not to paint an idyllic picture of the relationship between Muslims and Christians – the reality was quite variable (and the Qur'ān contains, besides texts of convergence, many polemical texts).

[82] Van der Velden, "Konvergenztexte syrischer und arabischer Christologie," *op. cit.*

[83] See Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 53–54.

Relying on the Muslim tradition, scholars usually see Q 19 as Meccan and Q 3 as Medinan, but the most plausible setting for Q 19 is a post-conquest (therefore post-Medinan) one. What can be said, then, about Q 3?

Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann has recently examined this issue. He gives persuasive arguments which show that Q 3:33-63 is a reworking of Q 19:1-33 (in fact, Q 3:33-63 certainly relies on Q 19:1-33 and Q 5:110).[84] I would like to add two elements which vindicate his analysis.

The first one pertains to the formulas describing Mary's status in the "family of 'Imrān." It makes more sense to go from "Aaron, brother of Mary" in the *Lection of Jeremiah* to "Mary, sister of Aaron" in Q 19:1-63*, and then to "Mary, daughter of 'Imrān" (Q 66:12) and "Mary, daughter of 'Imrān's wife" (Q 3:35-36), than skipping directly from "Aaron, brother of Mary" to "Mary, daughter of 'Imrān's wife," and then reverting to "Mary, sister of Aaron." The formulas relating Mary to 'Imrān and his wife look as *variations* on "Mary, sister of Aaron," which remains the fundamental typology. Outside Q 3:35-36 and Q 66:12, there is no mention of 'Imrān – neither in the Qur'ān nor in the various subtexts possibly involved, as far as we can know. It is hard to imagine why the redactor of Q 3:33-63 or Q 66:12 would have coined such an unexpected formula, without any knowledge of, or allusion to, "Mary, sister of Aaron."

The second argument goes directly to the heart of the matter, namely: what was the purpose of writing a text like Q 19:1-63*, and why did it need to be reworked? Here too, another element should be added to Pohlmann's analysis.

Q 19:1-33, and more generally Q 19:1-63*, is a text of convergence. A text of convergence is often, by nature, very ambiguous – because of what it says, and also because of what it does *not* say. If this sura is a text of convergence between Christians and "Believers" (*mu'minūn*), it is above all through a praise of Mary: her virginity, her purity and her role in the Nativity are celebrated, using traditions and formulas shared, and easily understood, by (especially Palestinian) Christians. There is of course no mention of a title like Theotokos (mother of God) in the Qur'anic text, but if we stick to Q 19:1-63*, there is no negation – implicit or explicit – of this title either. Jesus is not called "son of God," but if we rely only on Q 19:1-63* (and not on Q 19:1-63!), his divine sonship is not denied either. The text describes Jesus as an exceptional figure, maybe even as the most eminent in the Qur'ān: his miraculous conception and birth, and his ability to receive revelation from the cradle, are unique.

How would a Christian from seventh century Jerusalem understand Q 19:1-63*? At first sight, he might be surprised and disappointed that Jesus is called only a prophet: he would have hoped at least the title "Son of God." Yet the title "prophet" for Jesus is

[84] Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, *op. cit.*, p. 183–195; id., "Conversion from Jewish and Christian Milieus," in this volume.

scripturally warranted (Matthew 13:57; 21:11; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; 7:16; 13:33; 24:19; John 4:19, 44; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17),[85] and the idea that it is God who appointed Jesus to the prophetic office (Q 19:30, *ja'alanī nabiyyan*, "He made me a prophet") has nothing strange for a Christian (see e.g. the parallel formula in Hebrews 5:5, about priesthood). The Christian would also recognize many traditions and miracles related to Jesus and Mary, as well as typological motives which make perfect sense for him. Moreover, he might suppose that, *implicitly*, Q 19:1-63* asserts Jesus' divine sonship and divinity. Such a belief, in this context, would not be absurd.

Why is it so? The answer is rather simple. The Qur'ān explicitly affirms the virginal conception (Q 19:17-22). Since the Qur'anic narrative owes much to Luke 1, it is not far-fetched to remind of Luke 1:34-35: "'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God'."

In other words, there is a scriptural basis which, for a Christian, warrants the inference which goes from virginal conception to divine sonship. From the historian's viewpoint, the inference from the divine sonship of Jesus to his divine nature should probably not be ascribed to Luke, but in a Late Antique (post-Nicaean) context, most of the Christians would take it for granted, and ascribe it to Luke. In other words, for our Christian from seventh century Jerusalem, the virginal conception entails the divine sonship which entails the divine nature of Jesus. Since the Qur'ān is unmistakably clear about the virginal conception, it would make sense to suppose, for a Christian, that Jesus' divine sonship and divine nature are not denied, and are actually *allowed*, by this text.

Our Christian would probably be wrong about the real convictions of (at least some of) the *mu'minūn* on this topic. We can surmise that the mainstream Qur'anic Christology of the *mu'minūn* agrees with Christians on at least two points – the virginal conception, and the idea that divine sonship entails (or simply means?) divine nature. However, this Christology dismisses Jesus' divine nature, as well as his divine sonship. Rejecting Jesus' divine sonship while admitting the virginal conception requires therefore a refutation of the inference based on Luke 1:34-35. Such a refutation can be found *nowhere* in Q 19:1-63* – and this is certainly one of the main aspects of the (deliberate?) ambiguity of Q 19:1-63*. On the other hand, this refutation is present in Q 3:33-63. After retelling the story of Mary and Jesus, adding some details, removing others, and trying to give a more innocuous description (from the viewpoint of the Christology of the *mu'minūn*) of Jesus' conception and birth, the text explains:

[85] In fact, most of what the Qur'ān tells about Jesus is based on passages from the Christian scriptures. See Guillaume Dye, "Mapping the Sources of the Qur'anic Jesus," in Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen, Guillaume Dye, Isaac W. Oliver, Tommaso Tesei, eds, *The Study of Islamic Origins. New Perspectives and Contexts,* Berlin, De Gruyter, 2021, p. 153–175.

> *The likeness of Jesus is, with God, as the likeness of Adam. He created him from dust, and then He said to him, 'Be!' and he was. (Q 3:59)*

This comparison with Adam refutes the inference from virginal conception to divine sonship: Jesus is like Adam, who has no father either, but is not called the son of God. This verse can thus be read as a *disambiguation* of Q 19:1-63*: it is therefore sensible to consider Q 3:33-63 as the later text.

This corroborates Pohlmann's description of the profile of the author of Q 3:33-63,[86] namely: someone who was able to evaluate critically Qur'anic statements which were already available to him as literary texts (Q 19:1-63*, 5:110), who was familiar with Christian texts, including the texts which were behind Q 19:1-63* (since several details of Q 3:33-63 rely on traditions from the *Protoevangelium of James* which are not mentioned in Q 19:1-63*[87]), who disambiguated the narrative of Q 19:1-63*, while providing an improved theological framework for the statements relative to Mary and Jesus. The author of Q 3:33-63 belonged thus to the same milieu as the author of Q 19:1-63*.

Now that we know that Q 3:33-63 and Q 19:34-40 are both later than Q 19:1-33, the next step is to assess their relative chronology. This can be done quite easily. Q 19:34-40 is in fact a patchwork of various Qur'anic passages including some verses of Q 3:33-63. It is therefore *later* than Q 3:33-63 (see Annex 6, p. 199-201).

So, we end up with the following chronology: Q 19:1-33, then Q 3:33-63, then Q 19:34-40, all these pieces being composed (or inserted in a larger text) in a post-conquest setting. The evolution follows a clear logic: Q 19:1-33 is explicitly consonant with the mainstream Christology of the *mu'minūn* and, more generally, with the Qur'anic model of God helping his servants or prophets, but it allows implicitly a possible "high" Christology; Q 3:33-63 follows the path of Q 19:1-33, praising Mary and Jesus, but corrects the ambiguities of the former text; more or less implicitly, it gives arguments for rejecting Jesus' divine sonship, but it does not explicitly condemn it; Q 19:34-40, on the other hand, in line with other polemical passages (Q 4:171-172; 9:31; 17:111; 112) explicitly condemns it.

Conclusion

The chronology suggested here (Q 19:1-63*, then Q 3:33-63, then Q 19:34-40), on a philological and literary basis, mirrors a more general process, which goes from a

[86] Pohlmann, "Conversion from Jewish and Christian Milieus," in this volume.

[87] Q 3:35-36 and Prot 4:1 and 5:2; Q 3:37 and Prot 8:1; Q 3:44 and Prot 8:2-3; Q 3:45 and Prot 11:2. If the author of Q 3:33-63 knows the *Protoevangelium of James* so well, then, of course, he knows that Mary's biological father is called Joachim, not 'Imrān.

kind of fuzziness to a more clear-cut confessional frontier. However, several issues still remain unresolved. I will briefly sketch some of them.

First, does this chronology imply that Muḥammad's movement began as a Christian preaching, which became, with time, less and less Christian? It is not necessarily so, and this is certainly not what I would claim. All we know is that, at some(s) time(s), there was a search of convergence between (some) *mu'minūn* and (some) Christians, and that this convergence faded with time, the Qur'ān displaying firm anti-Christian polemics (and supersessionism) in some of its later layers, as is shown, for example, by the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock (which include Q 19:34-36).[88] Various scenarios (generally implying, at one point or another, the kind of inter-confessional Abrahamic movement popularized by Donner) are possible – for example a Judaizing monotheistic group leaving Western Arabia and becoming more open to Christianity, and closer to the Christians in Palestine and Syria, and later reverting to a resolute anti-trinitarianism.

Second, is it really possible that such a substantial work of writing/rewriting could have been done on the Qur'ān after Muḥammad's (alleged) death in 632? Some might argue that this does not seem very probable, since the Qur'ān was collected very early, according to the (supposed) consensus of the Muslim tradition. Moreover, the very early C14 datings of several ancient fragments would rule out the possibility of such an authorial work.

There are in fact two (partly) independent issues here. First: did some authorial work take place on the Qur'ān after Muḥammad's death? If yes, then: how long did it last, namely, when did the *rasm* of the *muṣḥaf* reach closure? The second question is far from being solved.[89] Moreover, the C14 datings should be taken with due caution[90] – they are sometimes simply aberrant, they sometimes contradict the data of paleography, and in almost half of the cases, especially with the eldest materials, it seems clear that the manuscripts could be dated several years later than the date situated at the maximum end of the chronological interval provided by the radiocarbon dating.[91] All we can say is that the *rasm* of the Qur'anic corpus took a similar shape to the one we know today somewhere during the second half of the seventh century, and this leaves far enough room for the kind of authorial work described in this paper. However, it is impossible,

[88] Frank van der Velden, "Die Felsendominschrift als Ende einer christologischen Konvergenztextökumene im Koran," in *Oriens Christianus*, vol. 95, 2011, p. 213–246.

[89] Nicolai Sinai, "When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure? Part I," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 77, no. 2, 2014, p. 273–292; id., "When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure? Part II," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 77, no. 3, 2014, p. 509–521, argues for the usual 'Uthmanic dating; for a critical evaluation of this claim, see Guillaume Dye, "Le corpus coranique : questions autour de sa canonisation," in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Histoire du Coran. Contexte, origine, rédaction*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2022, p. 955–1026 [839–953] (this paper was initially published in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye, eds, *Le Coran des historiens*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2019, vol.1, p. 847–918).

[90] See the references above, at the end of no. 12.

[91] Cellard, "Les manuscrits coraniques anciens," *op. cit.*, p. 710.

in the current state of our knowledge, to give precise datings for the composition of these various post-conquest texts – only a relative chronology is available, as well as a *terminus post quem* (the beginning of the conquests) for the earliest text and a *terminus ante quem* (Marwanid times, but it might be earlier) for the later text.

Third, passages like Q 19:1-63*, Q 3:33-63 pertain to a more general issue – the numerous Qur'anic passages which are simply unaccountable if read with the lenses of Muslim tradition. Hence the following dilemma: *we cannot say that the general framework given by the Muslim tradition is right and, at the same time, take seriously the Qur'anic text*. In many ways, the Qur'ān often displays a Christian context. However, evidence does not support the idea of an early seventh century Ḥijāz where Christian communities would be prominent, and where Christian scribes able to write texts like (among other examples) suras 3, 5, 18 and 19, would be met (it is equally true for so-called Meccan suras and so-called Medinan suras). On the other hand, the idea that Muḥammad's career took place, not in the Ḥijāz, but further north, for example in Jordan or Palestine, in areas with a much higher level of Christian presence and literary culture, raises serious difficulties: it seems hard indeed to deprive Yathrib of its central role in the life and development of the communities behind Muḥammad's preaching and the conquests. In other words, the "Prophetic period" is certainly anchored in the Ḥijāz, but we need also to take into account other areas, periods, and (certainly doomed to remain anonymous) actors, for understanding the complex genesis of the Qur'ān. Some of the Qur'anic passages which could have been preached in a Ḥijāzī context might thus have been composed by people who were not indigenous (they might have come from places where Christianity was attested, like the Ghassanid or Lakhmid (al-Ḥīra*)* areas, or maybe also South Arabia). In other words, I suspect we could find traces of activities of (Christian) missionaries who addressed so-called Pagans with several usual *topoi* of missionary discourse, the relevant Qur'anic texts, as we read them now, being the results of interactions between the missionaries and the community who received the mission.[92] For some other texts, however (like those examined in this paper), we should disconnect, more decidedly, the redaction of the Qur'ān and a Ḥijāzī context, and acknowledge that they were most probably written after Muḥammad's death.

Finally, we know that some Christians joined the movement of the conquerors, and we also know that the esplanade of the Temple was certainly a place with a high symbolic meaning for the conquerors, since they built there a place of prayer as soon as they entered Jerusalem, according to early Christian sources. Later testimonies confirm that there was a place of prayer on the esplanade of the Temple, even before the Dome

[92] I suggest we can find such a phenomenon at work (which implies (re)appropriation, resemansation, reinterpretation, and possibly subversion of a missionary discourse) in Guillaume Dye, "Demons, Jinns and Figures of Evil in the Qur'ān," in Robert Haug and Steven Judd, eds, *Islam on the Margins. Studies in Memory of Michael Bonner*, Leiden, Brill, 2022, p. 124-146.

of the Rock was built.[93] The Kathisma church shares architectural and artistic features with the Dome of the Rock, the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock quote verses from sura 19, and the topic of the Temple lies behind sura 19 – as if this text provided a kind of "theology of the Temple," which could at the same time appeal to the Christians: it would be strange if there were here only coincidences. It makes therefore much sense to pursue further the issue of the relations between these two buildings, the traditions attached to them and more generally the topic of sacred topography in Early Islam.

[93] On these issues, see most recently Stephen J. Shoemaker, *A Prophet Has Appeared. The Rise of Islam through Christian and Jewish Eyes. A Sourcebook*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2022, esp. p. 11–23.

Annex 1: Plan of Q 19:1-63

1. K H Y ʿ Ṣ

2-15. Story of Zachariah

2. *dhikru raḥmati rabbika ʿabdahū zakariyyā* ("Remembrance of the mercy of your Lord (to) His servant Zachariah")

3-6. Zachariah's secret prayer (in the Temple) / 7-11. Annunciation to Zachariah / 12-14 Praise of John the Baptist

15. Refrain: *wa-salāmun ʿalayhi yawma wulida wa-yawma yamūtu wa-yawma yubʿathu ḥayya*^{n} ("Peace (be) upon him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive")

16-33. Story of Mary and Jesus

16. *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi maryama…* ("And remember in the Scripture Mary…")

16-17. Mary at the Temple / 17-21. Annunciation to Mary / 22/23-26. Nativity / 27-33. Mary and Jesus back to the Temple of Jerusalem; (self-)Praise of Jesus (30-33)

33. Refrain: *wa-s-salāmu ʿalayya yawma wulidtu wa-yawma ʾamūtu wa-yawma ʾubʿathu ḥayya*^{n} ("Peace (be) upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I is raised up alive")

34-40. Controversy section (anti-Christian)

41-50. Story of Abraham and his father

41. *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi ʾibrāhīma* ("And remember in the Scripture Abraham…")

51-53. Allusion to Moses (and Aaron)

51. *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi mūsā…*

54-55. Allusion to Ishmael

54. *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi ʾismāʿīla…*

56-57. Allusion to Idris (Enoch?)

56. *wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi ʾidrīsa…*

58-63. Conclusion

Annex 2: Inner parallels between Q 19:2-15 and 16-33

Incipit	Variation on the *incipit*
[2] *dhikru* raḥmati rabbika ʿabdahū zakariyyā	[16a] wa-*dhkur* fī l-kitābi maryama
Remembrance of the mercy of your Lord (to) His servant Zachariah	And remember Mary, in the Scripture

3-6. Zachariah's secret prayer in the Temple	16-17a. Mary in the Temple

7-9. Annunciation to Zachariah	17b-21. Annunciation to Mary
[7] yā-zakariyyā ʾinnā nubashshiruka bi-*ghulāmin*-i	[19] qāla ʾinnamā ʾana rasūlu rabbiki li-ʾahaba laki *ghulāman* zakiyya[n]
Zachariah! Surely we [the angels? God?] give you good news of a boy	He said: "I am only [surely?] a messenger of your Lord (sent) to grant you a boy (who is) pure."
[8a] *qāla* rabbi ʾ*annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun*	[20a] *qālat ʾannā yakūnu lī ghulāmun*
He said: "My Lord, how can I have a boy…	She said: "How can I have a boy…
[8b] wa-kānati mraʾatī ʿāqiran wa-qad balaghtu mina l-kibari ʿitiyya[n]	[20b] wa-lam yamsasnī basharun wa-lam ʾaku baghiyya[n]
when my wife cannot conceive and I have already reached old age?"	when no human being has touched me, and I not a prostitute?"
[9] *qāla ka-dhālika qāla rabbuka huwa ʿalayya hayyinun wa*-qad khalaqtuka min qablu wa-lam taku shayʾa[n]	[21] *qāla ka-dhāliki qāla rabbuki huwa ʿalayya hayyinun wa*-li-naj'alahū ʾāyatan li-n-nāsi wa-raḥmatan minnā wa-kāna ʿamran maqḍiyya[n]
He said: "So (it will be)! Your Lord has said, "It is easy for Me – I created you before, when you were nothing."	He said: "So (it will be)! Your Lord has said, "It is easy for Me. And (it is) to make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. It is a thing decreed."

10-11. Silence, signs and Temple	26b-29. Silence, fasting, signs and Temple
[10] qāla rabbi jʿal lī ʾāyatan qāla ʾāyatuka *ʾallā tukallima* n-nāsa thalātha layālin sawiyya[n]	[26b] fa-ʾimmā tarayinna mina l-bashari ʾaḥadan fa-qūlī ʾinnī nadhartu li-r-raḥmāni ṣawman fa-*lan ʾukallima* l-yawma ʾinsiyya[n]
He said: "My Lord, give me a sign." He said: "Your sign is that you will not speak to the people for three (days and) nights."	If you see any human being, say: "Surely I have vowed a fast to the Merciful, and I shall not speak to any human today."
[11] fa-kharaja ʿalā *qawmi*hī mina l-miḥrābi fa-ʾawḥā ʾilayhim ʾan sabbiḥū bukratan wa-ʿashiyya[n]	[27a] fa-ʾatat bihī *qawma*hā taḥmiluhū (...) [29] fa-ʾashārat ʾilayhi qālū kayfa nukallimu man kāna fī l-mahdi ṣabiyya[n]

So he came out to his people from the sanctuary and inspired them: "Glorify (Him) morning and evening."	They she brought him to her people, carrying him. (…) Then she referred (them) to him. They said: "How shall we speak to one who is in the cradle, a child?"

1) Zachariah is silenced by God because he asked a question he should not have asked. Mary is commanded to silence by God, but she did nothing wrong – it is partly required by the logic of the narrative. 2) Zachariah is leaving the Temple when he meets his *people*, in front of the Temple. His muteness is interpreted as the sign of a miracle, and he manages, with *gestures* (Luke 1:22), to make people glorify God. On the other hand, Mary is taking a reverse path. She is *coming back* to the Temple, where she meets either the whole *people*, or rather the priests at the Temple. She refers, with *gestures*, to Jesus – who, or whose talk, is the miracle. 3) V. 23-26 have of course no parallel in Q 19:2-15.

12-14. Praise of John the Baptist	**30-32. (Self-)praise of Jesus**
[12a] yā-yaḥyā khudhi *l-kitāba* bi-quwwatin	[30] qāla 'innī 'abdu llāhi 'ātāniya *l-kitāba* wa-jaa'alanī nabiyya[n]
"John! Hold fast the Book/Scripure!"	He said: "Surely I am a servant of God. He gave me the Book and made me a prophet."
[12b] wa-'ātaynāhu l-ḥukma *ṣabiyya*[n]	**See v. 29: fa-'ashārat 'ilayhi qālū kayfa nukallimu man kāna fī l-mahdi *ṣabiyya*[n]**
And he gave me wisdom/judgment when I was a child	They said: "How shall we speak to one who is in the cradle, a child?"
[13] wa-ḥanānan min ladunnā wa-*zakāt*an wa-kāna taqiyya[n]	[31] wa-ja'alanī mubārakan 'ayna mā kuntu wa-'awṣānī bi-ṣ-ṣalāti wa-z-*zakāti* mā dumtu ḥayyan
And grace from Us, and purity. He was one who guarded himself/pious	He has made me blessed wherever I am, and He recommended me prayer and purity as long as I live,
[14] *wa-barran bi-wālidayhi wa-lam* yakun *jabbāran* 'aṣiyya[n]	[32] *wa-barran bi-wālidatī wa-lam* yaj'alnī *jabbāran* shaqiyya[n]
and dutiful/respectful to his parents. And he was neither violent nor disobedient."	And (to be) dutiful/respectful to my mother. He did not make me violent nor miserable."

Refrain	**Refrain**
[15] *wa-salām*un *'alay*hi *yawma* wulida *wa-yawma* yamūtu *wa-yawma* yub'athu *ḥayya*[n]	[33] *wa*-s-*salām*u *'alay*ya *yawma* wulidtu *wa-yawma* 'amūtu *wa-yawma* 'ub'athu *ḥayya*[n]
"Peace (be) upon him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he is raised up alive"	"Peace (be) upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I is raised up alive"

Annex 3: Two further points of contact between the Jerusalem Marian traditions and the Qur'ān

These points of contact do not belong to the same kind of evidence highlighted in the main text. They are not *unique parallels*, but they may corroborate my general thesis in a more indirect way: in fact, if one supposes close links between the Kathisma church (and more generally the Jerusalem Marian traditions of the seventh century) and Q 19:1-63*, then several Qur'anic passages, otherwise obscure, find a convincing interpretation.

1) *Q 23:50*: *wa-ja'alnā bna maryama wa-'ummahū 'āyatan wa-'āwaynāhumā 'ilā rabwatin dhāti qarārin wa-ma'īn* ("and We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and We gave them both refuge on high ground, (where there was) a hollow (as) a dwelling place and a flowing spring")

Jesus and Mary found refuge on a high ground (*rabwa*, normally understood as a hill), on a stable or quiet place (*qarār*) where there is a flowing spring (*ma'**īn***). The spring (the word ma'īn would not fit in sura 19 because of its rhyme) evokes Q 19:24 and the palm miracle. However, it is excluded that the author of Q 23:50 relied only on Q 19, since there is no "high ground" mentioned there. Of course, the reference to such a *high ground* could be a purely literary choice, but a glance at the topography of the zone of the Kathisma church gives another answer – this zone, indeed, was famous for its wells and its hills, and the Kathisma church is in fact situated on the top of a hill. It is tempting then to see *qarār* as a metaphor for the rock where Mary, according to several Christian traditions, *took rest*.

2) *Q 19:32*: *wa-barran bi-wālidatī* ("and respectful to my mother")

That Jesus should be dutiful, or respectful, towards his mother, is not surprising. This is simply a reference to one of the ten commandments (see Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16, and other parallel passages, for example Matthew 15:4). What is more striking, however, is: why is there such a reference *here*, in this context?

According to my analyses, the author of Q 19:1-63* was familiar with the liturgical traditions of the Kathisma church, and especially the *Lection of Jeremiah*, read on 13 August for the celebration of the role of Mary in the Nativity. But since this celebration was part of a stational liturgy, we can reasonably suppose that he was also familiar with the other readings of the Jerusalem Marian liturgy of the first decades of the seventh century – and not only those of the Kathisma.

Indeed, in the same manuscript as the one giving the text of the *Lection of Jeremiah*, there is a homily attributed (wrongly) to John Chrysostom, which was read for the celebration of Mary's Dormition on 15 August. This homily is extant only in

Georgian.[94] The text refers to some of the Biblical passages read during the celebrations of 15 August (Ezekiel 44:2) and 13 August (Isaiah 7:14, Psalm 71:6), and also to some other biblical texts. At the end of his homily, the author writes, answering real or imaginary critics of Mary:

> *Could it be that one of those who hear hardly dare say: "Dear brothers, how is it possible that the Virgin reaches such glory [the Dormition]?" He has to shut his mouth, the liar! But reread the commandments of God, what the Lord teaches us: "Honor your father and your mother." The Lord himself, above all, would he not honor his mother?*[95]

Q 19:30-32 exhibits a Christological talk by Jesus in the cradle, which works as a legitimation, and defense, of his mother. It is extremely significant that, in the "First Homily of Pseudo-Chrysostom" and in sura 19, there is a reference to the same Biblical commandment, which plays, in both cases, exactly the same role. It is hardly a coincidence, especially considering all the cumulative evidence gathered before. Of course, the Qur'ān adapts its use of the Biblical commandment to the precise narrative context of Jesus' talk, since it speaks only of respect towards his mother (*barran bi-wālidatī*). Q 19:14, on the other hand, refers to the same Biblical commandment about John the Baptist: in this case, as in the Bible, it mentions respect towards both parents (*wa-barran bi-wālidayhi*). This insistence of John's filial piety seems motivated by the parallelism with Jesus (see Annex 2, about the inner parallels between Q 19:2-15 and 16-33).

[94] See Bernard Outtier, "Deux homélies pseudo-chrysostomiennes pour la fête mariale du 15 août," in *Apocrypha*, vol. 6, 1995, p. 166–167, 168–172, for a description of this homily and a French translation. Contrary to the *Lection of Jeremiah*, which is known in only one manuscript, we know the text of this homily from four different manuscripts.

[95] *Ibid.,* p. 171–172.

Annex 4: Plan of Q 3:33-63

33-34. Introduction. The main prophets and the "prophetical offspring"

35-37. Nativity and childhood of Mary: *'idh qālati mra'atu 'imrāna* ("When the wife of 'Imrān said…")]

35-37a. Nativity of Mary / 37b. Mary in the Temple

38-41. Story of Zachariah

38. The prayer of Zachariah / 39-41. Annunciation to Zachariah: *fa-nādathu l-malā'ikatu* ("Then the angels called him...")

42-47. Annunciation to Mary: *wa-'idh qālati l-malā'ikatu* ("And when the angels said…")

42-43. First part / 44. Interlude (editorial "staging") / 45-47. Second part: *'idh qālati l-malā'ikatu*...

48-51. Praise of Jesus

52-54. Jesus and the Apostles

55-58. Death of Jesus; paraenesis

55a. Death of Jesus: *'idh qāla llāhu*… ("When God said…") / 55b-75. Paraenesis / 58. Editorial "staging"

59-63. Conclusion

59. Ante-typology Adam/Jesus / 60-62a. Editorial "staging" / 62b. Doxology / 63. Divine threat

Annex 5: Parallel passages between Q 19:1-63* and Q 3:33-63

Mary in the Temple (Q 19)	Mary in the Temple (Q 3)
16 wa-dhkur fī l-kitābi maryama ’idhi ntabadhat min ’ahlihā makānan sharqiyya[n]	37 fa-taqabbalahā rabbuhā bi-qabūlin ḥasanin wa-’anbatahā nabātan ḥasanan wa-kaffalahā zakariyyā kullamā dakhala ‘alayhā zakariyyā l-miḥrāba wajada ‘indahā rizqan qāla yā-maryamu ’annā laki hādhā qālat huwa min ‘indi llāhi ’inna llāha yarzuqu man yashā’u bi-ghayri ḥisāb[in]
And remember Mary in the Book, when she withdrew from her family to an eastern place.	So her Lord accepted her fully and cause her to grow up well, and Zachariah took charge of her. Whenever Zachariah entered upon her (in) the Temple, he found a provision (of food) with her. He said: “Mary! Where does this (food) come to you from?” She said: “It is from God. Surely God provides from whomever He pleases without reckoning.”

3-6. Zacharia’s prayer (Q 19)	38. Zacharia’s prayer (Q 3)
4b wa-lam’akun bi-*du‘ā*’ika rabbi shaqiyya[n]	38b ’innaka samī‘u d-*du‘ā*’[i]
I have not been disappointed (miserable) in calling You (before), my Lord	Surely You are the hearer of the call
5 wa-’innī khiftu l-mawāliya min warā’ī wa-kānati mra’atī ‘āqiran fa-hab lī min ladunka waliyya[n]	38b hunālika da‘ā zakariyyā rabbahū qāla rabbi hab lī min ladunka dhurriyyatan ṭayyibatan
6 yarithunī wa-yarithu min ’āli ya‘qūba wa-j‘alhu rabbi raḍiyya[n]	
Surely I fear (who) the successors will be/what the successors will do after me, and my wife cannot conceive. So grant me from Yourself an heir/ally, (who) will inherit from me and inherit from the House of Jacob, and make him, my Lord, pleasing.”	There [in the Temple, see v. 37] Zachariah called on his Lord. He said: “O Lord, grant me a good descendant from Yourself.”

7-11. Annunciation to Zachariah (Q 19)	39-41. Annunciation to Zachariah (Q 3)
7 yā-zakariyyā ’innā *nubashshiruka* bi-ghulāmin-i smuhū yaḥyā lam naj‘al lahū min qablu samiyya[n]	39 fa-nādathu l-malā’ikatu wa-huwa qā’imun yuṣallī fī l-miḥrābi ’anna *llāha yubashshiruka* bi-yaḥyā muṣaddiqan bi-kalimatin mina llāhi wa-sayyidan wa-ḥaṣūran wa-nabiyyan mina ṣ-ṣāliḥīn[a]

Zachariah! Surely we [the angels? God?] give you good news of a boy	And the angels called him while he was standing, praying in the Temple: "God gives you good news of John, confirming a word from God. He will be a man of honor, an ascetic, and a prophet from among the righteous
[8] *qāla rabbi 'annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun* wa-kānati *mra'atī* 'āqiran wa-qad balaghtu mina l-*kibari* 'itiyya[n]	[40a] *qāla rabbi 'annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun* wa-qad balaghaniya l-*kibaru* wa-*mra'atī* 'āqirun
He said: "My Lord, how can I have a boy, when my wife cannot conceive and I have already reached old age?"	He said: "My Lord, how can I have a boy, when old age has already passed upon me and my wife cannot conceive?
[9] *qāla ka-dhālika* qāla rabbuka huwa 'alayya hayyinun wa-qad khalaqtuka min qablu wa-lam taku shay'a[n]	[40b] *qāla ka-dhālika* llāhu yaf'alu mā yashā'[u]
He said: "So (it will be)! Your Lord has said, "It is easy for Me – I created you before, when you were nothing."	He said: "So (it will be)! God does whatever He pleases."
[10a] *qāla rabbi j'al lī 'āyatan*	[41a] *qāla rabbi j'al lī 'āyata*n
He said: "My Lord, give me a sign."	He said: "My Lord, give me a sign."
[10b] *qāla 'āyatuka 'allā tukallima n-nāsa thalātha* layālin sawiyya[n]	[41b] *qāla 'āyatuka 'allā tukallima n-nāsa thalāthata 'ayyāmin 'illā ramzan*
He said: "Your sign is that you will not speak to the people for three (days and) nights."	He said: "Your sign will be that you will not speak to the people for three days, except by gestures."
[11] fa-kharaja 'alā qawmihī mina l-miḥrābi fa-'awḥā 'ilayhim 'an sabbiḥū bukratan wa-'ashiyya[n]	[41c] wa-dhkur rabbaka kathīran wa-sabbiḥ bi-l-'ashiyyi wa-l-'ibkār[i]
So he came out to his people from the Temple and inspired them: "Glorify him morning and evening."	Do not cease to remember your Lord, and glorify (Him) in the evening and the morning."

17-21. Annunciation to Mary (Q 19)	**42-47. Annunciation to Mary (Q 3)**
[19] qāla 'innamā 'ana rasūlu rabbiki li-'ahaba laki ghulāman zakiyya[n]	[45] 'iḏ qālati l-malā'ikatu yā-maryamu 'inna llāha yubashshiruki bi-kalimatin minhu smuhu l-masīḥu 'īsā bnu maryama wajīhan fī d-dunyā wa-l-'ākhirati wa-mina l-muqarrabīn[a]
He said: "I am only [surely?] a messenger of your Lord (sent) to grant you a boy (who is) pure."	When the angels said: "Mary! Surely God gives you good news of a word from Him: his name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, eminent in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near.
	[46] wa-yukallimu n-nāsa fī l-mahdi wa-kahlan wa-mina ṣ-ṣāliḥīn[a]

See v. 29-33.	He will speak to the people (while he is still) in the cradle and in adulthood, and (he will be) one of the righteous."
20 *qālat 'annā yakūnu lī ghulāmun wa-lam yamsasnī basharun* wa-lam 'aku baghiyya[n]	**47a** *qālat* rabbi *'annā yakūnu lī* waladun *wa-lam yamsasnī basharun*
She said: "How can I have a boy, when no man has touched me, nor am I a prostitute?"	She said: "My Lord, how can I have a child, when no man has touched me?"
21 *qāla ka-dhāliki* qāla rabbuki huwa 'alayya hayyinun wa-li-naj'alahū 'āyatan li-n-nāsi wa-raḥmatan minnā wa-kāna 'amran maqḍiyya[n]	**47b** *qāla ka-dhāliki* llāhu yakhluqu mā yashā'u
He said: "So (it will be)! And (it is) to make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us.	He said: "So (it will be)! God creates whatever He pleases.
21b wa-kāna 'amran *maqḍiyya[n]*	**47c** *'idhā qaḍā 'amran fa-'innamā yaqūlu lahū kun fa-yakūn[u]*
It is a thing decreed." **19:35b = 3:47c**	When He decrees something, He simply says to it: 'Be!', and it it is."

Annex 6: Q 19:34-40 as a Qur'anic patchwork

v. 34: *dhālika 'īsā bnu maryama qawla l-ḥaqqi lladhī fīhi yamtarūna* (That was Jesus, son of Mary, a statement of truth, about which/whom they are in doubt/they dispute.")

Who is the "they"? The *following* verses suggest: the Christians. But the identity of the people involved is, at first, unclear, and does not refer to any of the characters involved in the preceding verses, and certainly not to the "natural" referent, given the previous pericope (the Jews).

v. 35a: *mā kāna li-llāhi 'an yattakhidha min waladin subḥānahū* ("It is not for God to take/to have any son. Glory to Him")

This is a typical formula in the Qur'ān, almost always followed by a doxology (Q 2:116; 17:111; 18:4 (no doxology, but see 18:1); 19:88-92; 21:26; 23:91; 25:2; 39:4; 72:3).

v. 35b: *'idhā qaḍā 'amran fa-'innamā yaqūlu lahū kun fa-yakūnu* (When He decrees something, He simply says to it: 'Be!', and it it is."

The same verse occurs three times in the Qur'ān: 2:117; 3:47; 40:68. Q 19:35 and 2:116-117 are particularly close, since 2:116 and 19:35a are almost identical.

A comparison between Q 19:35b and 3:47 shows that 3:47 is earlier.

Q 19:35	**Q 3:47**
[35a] mā kāna li-llāhi 'an yattakhidha min waladin subḥānahū	[47a] qālat rabbi 'annā yakūnu lī waladun wa-lam yamsasnī basharun qāla ka-dhāliki llāhu yakhluqu mā yashā'u
It is not for God to take/to have any son. Glory to Him.	She said: "My Lord, how can I have a child, when no man has touched me?" He said: "So (it will be)! God creates whatever He pleases.
[35b] *'idhā qaḍā 'amran fa-'innamā yaqūlu lahū kun fa-yakūn*[u]	[47b] *'idhā qaḍā 'amran fa-'innamā yaqūlu lahū kun fa-yakūn*[u]
When He decrees something, He simply says to it: 'Be!', and it it is.	When He decrees something, He simply says to it: 'Be!', and it it is.

In Q 3:47, the Qur'anic formula occurs in a very natural context. It answers Mary's (understandable) query: "My Lord, how can I have a child, when no man has touched me?" The answer is that God is all-powerful: He gives life and death (Q 40:68), He can bring back to life, He created the heavens and the earth... But what is the role of this same formula in Q 19:35? The idea seems that it would be shameful for God to have a son. Why not – but how much does *'idhā qaḍā 'amran fa-'innamā yaqūlu lahū kun fa-yakūnu* contribute to the argument, especially in comparison to its input in

Q 3:47? The obvious conclusion is that the argument of Q 3 is the original setting of the sentence, which has been later re-used in another setting, where it is less relevant.

v. 36: *wa-'inna llāha rabbī wa-rabbukum fa-'budūhu hādhā ṣirāṭun mustaqīmun* ("Surely God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve/worship Him! This is a straight path.")

This verse is identical to Q 3:51 and 43:64 (see also Q 36:61 and 43:61 for *hādhā ṣirāṭun mustaqīmun*). It is in fact a Qur'anic *topos* (similar idea in Q 29:46; 42:15).

v. 37a: *fa-khtalafa l-'aḥzābu min baynihim* ("But the factions differed among themselves.")

This verse is identical to Q 43:65a.

v. 37b: *fa-waylun li-lladhīna kafarū min mashhadi yawmin 'aẓīmin* ("So woe to those who disbelieve on account of (their) witnessing a great Day.")

Compare Q 43:65b: *fa-waylun li-lladhīna ẓalamū min 'adhābi yawmin 'alīmin* ("So woe to those who have done evil because of the punishment of a painful Day!").

All this shows a remarkable closeness between Q 19:36-37 and Q 43:64-65:

Q 19:36-37	**Q 43:64-65**
36 *wa-'inna llāha rabbī wa-rabbukum fa-'budūhu hādhā ṣirāṭun mustaqīm*^{un}	**64** *'inna llāha huwa rabbī wa-rabbukum fa-'budūhu hādhā ṣirāṭun mustaqīm*^{un}
And surely God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve/worship Him! This is a straight path.	Surely God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve/worship Him! This is a straight path.
37a *fa-khtalafa l-'aḥzābu min baynihim*	**65a** *fa-khtalafa l-'aḥzābu min baynihim*
But the factions differed among themselves.	But the factions differed among themselves.
37b *fa-waylun li-lladhīna* kafarū *min* mashhadi *yawmin* 'aẓīm^{in}	**65b** *fa-waylun li-lladhīna* ẓalamū *min* 'adhābi *yawmin* 'alīm^{in}
So woe to those who disbelieve on account of (their) witnessing a great Day.	So woe to those who have done evil because of the punishment of a great Day.

The following verses in both suras display similar eschatological themes, but the literary dependency is less massive. It is clear, anyway, that Q 19:36-37 is a copy, and relocation, of Q 43:64-65 (and not the reverse). Q 43:65a fits its cotext much better: it refers to the fact that among the people of Israel, to whom Jesus was sent (Q 43:59ff), some people believed, and others did not (see Q 43:63, where Jesus "brings the clear signs," and is not followed by a good part of the people of Israel – see for example Q 61:6). On the other hand, Q 19:37a occurs suddenly, and the identity of "the factions" remains unclear.

The previous analyses also confirm that v. 34-40 are an interpolation (and certainly very late in the development of the Qur'anic corpus): not only, as we saw, do they disrupt the general flow of Q 19:1-63* (stylistically and theologically), but they resort to a completely different method of composition.

The Historical-Critical Study of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Scriptures*

□ Isaac W. OLIVER

The first conference of the Early Islamic Seminar Studies, which was held at the beautiful Villa Cagnola under the umbrella of the Enoch Seminar, was in many ways exceptional. It assembled members of the Enoch Seminar who specialize in early Judaism and Christianity with scholars of early Islam. The conference reinforced my conviction of the importance of studying early Islam in conjunction with early Judaism and Christianity as well as other Late Antique religious traditions (Zoroastrianism, Mandaeanism, etc.).[1] In what follows, I include a critical reflection that builds on the response that I was invited to share at the conference as a biblical scholar, with the hope that it will illustrate the promise that lies in promoting further scholarly exchange between specialists working across fields as diverse as Second Temple Judaism, New Testament, early Christianity, early rabbinic literature, and early Islamic studies. In particular, I discuss the historical investigation of the Qur'ān in light of the Gospel traditions, especially Luke (my specialization), and the fruits that this inquiry can in turn yield for understanding early Christianity itself. My musings focus on the question of historical-criticism and draw from my experience teaching Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures at a non-confessional university in the United

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1 I am using the epithet "early" in a flexible chronological way to include Judaism, Christianity, and Islam under a common rubric. By "early Judaism" I mean both the Second Temple and Late Antique periods. "Early Christianity" encompasses the first centuries of formative Christianity until the emergence of Islam (Antiquity and Late Antiquity). "Early Islam" refers roughly to the beginnings of Islam, that is, the time when the Qur'ān was formed, when Muḥammad lived, and the first traditions related to these two emerge. This inclusive usage of "early" is meant to connect the study of nascent Islam with the investigation of a diverse set of Jewish and Christian sources spanning from the Hebrew Bible to the Talmud and patristic literature while avoiding excessive terminology ("Second Temple Judaism," "Late Antique Judaism," etc.) or canonical language ("New Testament period," "Talmudic era," etc.).

States (Bradley). I provide accordingly a brief assessment of English translations of the Qur'ān and introductory works on early Islam that have been used in American universities at the undergraduate level. The realization that few pedagogical books treat early Islam in the same way that early Christianity and Judaism are critically presented in Western academies leads into a brief discussion on the sensitive issues of "Orientalism" and "anti-Semitism" as they relate to historical-critical inquiry, on the one hand, and ecumenical endeavors, on the other.[2] The reluctance to apply historical criticism or other critical approaches to the study of the Qur'ān and Islam is questioned. Besides promoting a better understanding of Islam as a historical, cultural, religious, and social phenomenon, the promotion of critical inquiry can, arguably, even contribute towards better Jewish-Christian-Muslim understanding. But the latter endeavor, however noble, should not theologically and teleologically condition historical-critical investigation in order to achieve preferred outcomes.

In everything that ensues the following disclaimer should always be borne in mind: Although I argue on behalf of the critical study of the Qur'ān and its canonical companions (e.g., *ḥadīth*), I do not wish to imply that historical criticism is the best or only appropriate way of reading the Qur'ān, that other approaches, including confessional ones, are illegitimate or inferior. I am also aware that historical-critical interpretations of the Qur'ān could be co-opted by non-academic (and even academic) readers for apologetic or discriminatory aims that I do not endorse. For example, some could argue, based on historical-critical findings, that Islam is an inferior religion because it came after and "borrowed" from Judaism and Christianity.[3] I do not share such views. Indeed, all religions including Judaism, the oldest of the three "monotheistic religions," inevitably drew from and engaged with their surroundings. First (or last) does not mean better. Nevertheless, as a scholar of religious studies, I believe in the importance of critically scrutinizing any religion. This is an endeavor that is worthy in its own right, and should not be discarded, even when it yields uncomforting answers that do not coincide with confessional beliefs. At a time when the humanities is struggling for its very survival in Western academies (I do not think that this is an exaggeration), the promotion of a rigorous critical inquiry of religion acquires even greater urgency. Theological investigation will be one of the first, in my opinion, to be impoverished if left uninformed by religious studies.

[2] This article was originally submitted for publication in 2015. Unfortunate delays in publication means that I was unable to engage with some important introductory works that subsequently appeared such as Nicolai SINAI, *The Qur'an: A Historical Critical Introduction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2017, which is a welcome tool for the historical-critical inquiry of the Qur'ān.

[3] Co-opting can travel in different directions as evinced by Muslim apologists who appropriate biblical criticism to promote the Qur'ān over against the Jewish and Christian scriptures – corrupted texts according to their convictions. I experienced this phenomenon directly when a sincere, well-intended Muslim student offered me the book, Laurence B. Brown, *MisGod'ed: A Roadmap of Guidance and Misguidance in Abrahamic Religions*, BookSurge Publishing, 2008. The author of this book draws from biblical scholars such as Bart D. Ehrman to debunk Judaism and Christianity, unaware that the same arguments can be applied to the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān and the Gospel Traditions: The Case of Q 19:1–63

In an important article, Stephen Shoemaker has drawn attention to a large octagonal church from Late Antiquity that lies approximately halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the "Kathisma of the Theotokos."[4] As Shoemaker points out, this church is the only known place outside the Qur'ān (19:1–63) that connects the nativity of Jesus with the flight into Egypt. This raises the possibility that the Qur'anic account of Jesus' nativity developed under the influence of Christian traditions originating from Palestine.

More recently, Guillaume Dye has strengthened Shoemaker's proposal through a redactional-critical analysis of Q 19:1–63.[5] As a biblical scholar, I find his usage of the redactional-critical method to be sound and compelling. Dye avoids the atomistic tendencies that dominated earlier stages of biblical criticism, which obsessed over source-critical minutiae and conjectured about the diachronic stages of the development of biblical texts in the smallest detail, even when dealing with hypothetical sources of the Pentateuch such as "J" or "E" or the so-called "Q" source allegedly standing behind the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.[6] Dye admits that it is often impossible to reconstruct *every* historical layer of a literary text. Even when dealing with the "original version" of Q 19:1–63, Dye concedes that it might not be possible to recover this text in any detail. The reconstruction is tentative. On the other hand, Dye does not dismiss historical inquiry entirely, nor does he shy away from making some specific observations about the Qur'anic pericope under investigation.

Here, I would like to stress that redaction criticism has, along with other historical and literary approaches (e.g., source criticism and form criticism), demonstrated that the Pentateuch and the canonical gospels are composite works. This is no small achievement. All historians of the Hebrew Bible agree that the Pentateuch is a complex, composite, and even contradictory text produced by various schools that spanned generations. Since the rise of historical criticism, no one has demonstrated – from a historical point of view – that "Moses received Torah from Sinai," as one rabbinic dictum famously puts it, even if Jews and Christians believed in the Mosaic

[4] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qur'ān: The Qur'ānic Account of Jesus' Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 28, 2003, p. 11–39.

[5] See Dye's contribution in this volume.

[6] Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, Berlin, G. Reimer, 1878, posited four sources, dubbed "J," "E," "D," and "P" for the Pentateuch that were written by different scribal schools. This hypothesis has been challenged although it does not detract from the critical consensus that continues to view the Pentateuch as a composite work. See Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, eds, *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011. Concerning the synoptic gospels, the so-called Two-Source Hypothesis (Matthew and Luke relied on Mark and a hypothetical document dubbed "Q") has prevailed for a long time. However, its premises are increasingly challenged. Working under the assumption that the synoptic gospels are multi-layered texts, some scholars are searching for alternative explanations. The bibliography is immense. See, among others, Mogens Müller, "Luke–the Fourth Gospel?" in Sven-Olav Back and Matti Kankaanniemi, eds, *Voces Clamantium in Deserto: Essays in Honor of Kari Syreeni*, Åbo, Teologiska fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi, 2012, p. 231–242; Matthias Klinghardt, "The Marcionite Gospel and the Synoptic Problem: A New Suggestion," in *Novum Testamentum* vol. 50, 2008, p. 1–27.

authorship of the Pentateuch until modern times.[7] The case of the canonical gospels is probably even more apropos for comparison with the historical investigation of the Qur'ān and the life of Muḥammad. At best, a century separates the composition of the canonical gospels in their final form from the historical Jesus. Yet no historian of early Christianity accepts, without questioning, the traditional accounts concerning the historical formation of said gospels. For example, historians of early Christianity do not roundly accept Papias' claim (second century C.E.) that Peter dictated an eyewitness account of Jesus' life to Mark who then recorded these materials in writing.[8] Similarly, it is hardly maintained, from a historical point of view, that *Matthew* the apostle wrote the canonical gospel that bears his name. The same observations apply to the Gospels of Luke and John as well.

Specialists of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament would certainly yawn at all of the assertions just made, but it is worthwhile recalling them when considering the Qur'ān – an *anonymous* text that arguably contains materials stemming from different sources with diverse viewpoints. The methods of source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the canonical gospels, despite their relatively short compositional life, underwent developmental stages that included, among other things, the oral transmission of materials originally formulated in Hebrew or Aramaic that were then translated into Greek, only to be further modified, deleted, and expanded to meet the various needs of an amorphous, fluid movement adapting to ever-changing circumstances (what is called in form criticism the *Sitz im Leben*) – all of this before the gospels reached the hands of redactors who gave these texts their final imprint through further editing. Historians of early Christianity might quibble over the schemes that best account for this process. They further acknowledge, more than before, the limitations of their historical enterprise, given the fragmentary evidence at their disposal. Some are also keenly aware of how their social-cultural locations have determined their historical interests and investigation. Nonetheless, virtually all would agree that the canonical gospels are composite works stemming from multiple sources that at best only convey the "gist" of what Jesus originally said and did.[9] From the perspective of "biblical criticism," there is nothing extreme in submitting the Qur'ān to historical-critical

[7] See Mishnah, *Avot* 1:1. In the rabbinic understanding, "Torah" encompasses not only the Jewish Scriptures but also the rabbinic teachings, the "Oral Torah," which is also authoritative.

[8] Papias' testimony is related by Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.39.15-16.

[9] The vague word "gist" is used by an exegete of the New Testament as conservative as Darrell L. Bock who acknowledges the limitations of the quest for the historical Jesus. See Darrell Bock, "The Historical Jesus: An Evangelical View," in James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, 2009, p. 249–281.

analysis, even if this may put into question traditional assumptions about the Qur'ān's formation.[10]

Working under the assumption that Q 19:1–63 ultimately depends on Christian subtexts, some of a Palestinian texture, I wish to offer some further remarks on this sura especially in relation to the Gospel of Luke. In his article, Dye claims that the earlier form of Q 19:1–63 (i.e., without the interpolation of v. 34–40) is definitely not anti-Christian. I could agree but would point out the following: I am struck by the resemblance of Q 19:2–33 with the doublet in the first two chapters of Luke that recounts the births of John the Baptizer and Jesus. While Q 19:16–33, from a source-critical point of view, depends in part on traditions known to us from the Protoevangelium of James, its literary structure resembles Luke's presentation. Unlike Q 19:2–15 or Luke ch. 1, the Protoevangelium of James does not start out narrating the birth of John. In fact, it alludes to the birth of John only in passing. Like Q 19:16–33, the Protoevangelium of James focuses on Mary and the birth of Jesus (though unlike Q 19, it also relates the martyrdom of Zechariah). By contrast, Luke opens with the announcement of John's birth by Gabriel to Zechariah in the temple.[11] Luke then reports the annunciation of Jesus' birth to Mary. Several parallels between the Lukan birth accounts of John and Jesus suggest a literary symmetry that is deliberate and intended to exalt Jesus above his predecessor John (a process known as "step-parallelism").[12] The redactor of Luke chs. 1–2 acknowledges the stature of John, conferring to him a miraculous birth, a priestly pedigree, and a prophetic calling. Ultimately, however, Luke's John is only the messenger of someone greater to come. Consider what the angel Gabriel has to say about Jesus in Luke 1:32–33: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (New Revised Standard Version).

Like the Lukan doublet, the Qur'anic doublet in Q 19:2–33 presents the births of John and Jesus as miraculous events willed by God. John's birth is remarkable because of its *timing*: it occurs despite his parents' senile age. Jesus' birth is remarkable for the *nature* of its manifestation: the Qur'ān affirms the virginal conception of Jesus.

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[10] John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Amherst, Prometheus, 2004, p. xxi, used the term "biblical criticism" to justify the historical-critical analysis of the Qur'ān. I prefer the term "historical criticism" to "biblical criticism," since the latter risks prioritizing the historical inquiry of *canonical* texts at the expense of neglecting the study of extra-canonical works. In the field of biblical studies, the term also tends to compartmentalize early Jewish and Christian texts anachronistically into canonical and non-canonical corpora (e.g., "Old Testament" vs. "intertestamental" literature; "canonical" vs. "apocryphal" or "pseudepigraphic" writings). For an assessment of Wansbrough, who mainly used form criticism, see Devin J. Stewart, "Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qur'an," in Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Sells, eds, *Qur'anic Studies Today*, London, Routledge, 2016, p. 17–51. Stewart highlights the importance of applying redaction criticism to the Qur'ān. Form and redaction criticism though need not be at odds with one another. All depends on the nature of the text under scrutiny.

[11] In Luke, Zechariah does not actually *pray* to have a child, as in Q 19:2–15. Nevertheless, this is implied in Luke 1:13 ("your prayer has been heard").

[12] Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, New York, Doubleday, 1993, p. 300–301.

However, unlike the Gospel of Luke, the Qur'anic pericope in its actual form does not seem to use the virgin birth to exalt Jesus above John. Perhaps this was no longer a pressing concern.[13] In this section of the Qur'ān, Jesus and John appear as near equals. Both figures are portrayed as mere mortals who look forward to the day of their resurrection. Apparently, Q 19:33 even assumes the *real* death of Jesus, challenging the widespread understanding (based on Q 4:157) that Jesus only *seemed* to have died.[14]

On the other hand, the Qur'anic presentation of Jesus as a talking baby, a theme missing in Luke, suggests a "high christology," particularly when read against the wider historical backdrop of intense christological debates that occurred among Christians in Late Antiquity concerning the relationship between the human and divine natures of Jesus. Was Mary the bearer of God? Was the *infant* Jesus truly divine? At first sight, by presenting Jesus as a wunderkind, the Qur'ān seems to favor one Christian theological position over another. However, in the immediate literary context, the presentation of Jesus as a child prodigy serves a different purpose: to safeguard the reputations of Mary and Jesus, given the exceptional yet questionable circumstances of the conception.[15] Moreover, the message that the infant Jesus delivers in Q 19 points back to his human nature: he is (but) a slave of God, a prophet appointed to pray and practice charity so long as he lives, destined to die but hopeful of his resurrection.[16] Thus the Qur'ān does not support Christian beliefs concerning the divine *nature* of Jesus even if it confesses the virgin birth. The Qur'ān reminds readers of the New Testament not to take it for granted that the account of the virgin birth in Luke (or Matthew) presumes Jesus' divine preexistence. Indeed, Luke says nothing about this matter in his gospel or in Acts.

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[13] The book of the Acts of the Apostles, traditionally ascribed to Luke, refers to disciples of John the Baptizer who were not followers of Jesus (Luke 5:33–39; 7:18–30; Acts 18:25–19:7). Rivalry between both groups continued after the time of John and Jesus, which accounts in part for the diverse ways in which the canonical gospels admit that the former baptized the latter.

[14] Cf. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, New York, Tahrike Tarsile Quran, 2011, p. 774, who concedes: "Christ was not crucified (4. 157). But those who believe that he never died should ponder over this verse." Yet even Q 4:157 does not necessarily deny the *execution* of Jesus, only the *claim* supposedly made by Jews: "Surely we killed the Messiah." One wonders whether this declaration shows awareness of polemical traditions attested in the *Toledot Yeshu* (Jewish counternarratives to the Christian gospels) as well as the Babylonian Talmud (b. Sanhedrin 43a) asserting that the Jews eliminated Jesus. Notice that Q 4:156 also reproaches the Jewish people for "saying against Mary a great slander," possibly an allusion to the illegitimacy of Jesus' birth that is attested in the *Toledot Yeshu* as well (see next footnote). It is important to underline that these Jewish counter narratives are posterior to Jesus, sometimes by several centuries (as is the case for b. Sanhedrin 43a), and respond to the Christian *Adversus Judaeos* tradition (making the Jewish polemics against Jesus pale in comparison), not to mention the rise of Christendom, which led to the deterioration of Jewish life under Christian rule.

[15] Here too (see previous footnote), it seems that Q 19:27–33 responds to allegations of the type found in the *Toledot Yeshu* and attested already in the writings of Celsus (see Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.28, 32, 39), which attack the propriety of Mary and the legitimacy of the virgin birth. On the *Toledot Yeshu*, see Philip S. Alexander, "Narrative and Counternarrative: The Jewish Antigospel (The *Toledot Yeshu*) and the Christian Gospels," in Lori Baron, Jill Hicks-Keeton, and Matthew Thiessen, eds, *The Ways That Often Parted: Essays in Honor of Joel Marcus*, Atlanta, SBL Press, 2018, p. 377–401.

[16] In the context of the Enoch Seminar conferences, we should not fail to mention the extraordinary births and virtues of Noah (*1 Enoch* 106) and Methuselah (*2 Enoch* 71). Dating *2 Enoch,* however, is fraught with difficulties, and we must contend with Christian influence. See Andrei ORLOV and Gabriele Boccaccini, eds, *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only*, Brill, Leiden, 2012.

As a Lukan scholar, what I find especially striking about the Qur'anic birth accounts of John and Jesus is the absence of distinctively Jewish features highlighted by Luke. Missing is the mention of the eighth-day circumcision of John and Jesus as per Jewish practice (Luke 1:59; 2:21). Likewise, the Davidic status ascribed to Jesus in Luke is absent in the Qur'ān. Luke presents Jesus as the Davidic messiah *par excellence*.[17] The very first passage of Luke's infancy narrative announcing Jesus's birth underlines his kinship with the Israelite king: "the angel Gabriel was sent from God to the city of Galilee called Nazareth, to a young girl betrothed to Joseph *from the house of David*" (1:26–27). Luke's emphasis on Joseph's affiliation with David belongs to a larger mechanism that enables Jesus to be born in Bethlehem—David's hometown (2:4, 11; 3:23–31). In this way, Luke shows that Jesus is of Davidic pedigree and provenance. Indeed, the annunciation in Luke underlines Jesus' Davidic sonship even more than his divine sonship (both, in reality, are just two sides to the same messianic coin): the angel Gabriel declares that God will give to Jesus "the throne of his ancestor David" and that "he will reign over the house of Jacob forever" (1:32–33). The absence of these Davidic suggests that Q 19 operates with(in) a Christian milieu where the Davidic messiahship of Jesus is no longer a pressing question as it had been for Luke (and Matthew). Christianity has changed. The Qur'ān accordingly seeks to deny the divine nature of Jesus rather than the Davidic or Jewish political-national connotations that were originally tied to Jesus' messianic identity. A historical-literary engagement with early Jewish and Christian sources therefore not only brings the Qur'anic message into sharper relief. It also sheds light on and reminds us about the historical developments of Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity.

One final question I raise concerns the possible acquaintance of the author of the original form of Q 19:1-63 with Aramaic or Syriac, a consideration that is very much in vogue in Qur'anic studies. The appearance of the hapax legomenon *ḥanān* in Q 19:13 is noteworthy in this regard and probably not a mere accident.[18] Behind this unique occurrence possibly stands a word play with John's Semitic (Hebrew) name *Yoḥanan*. In biblical Hebrew the meaning of the root *ḥnn* refers primarily to the concept of "grace," of "being gracious" or "showing favor."[19] This meaning continues in rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic, [20] although one also encounters the closely related notion of "mercy," notably in Syriac.[21] This semantic range presents challenges for translating the Arabic *ḥanān* in Q 19:13. Should it be rendered as "grace"[22] or "mercy"? The first option might seem more appropriate in light of the statement in Luke 1:80 that the

[17] Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, Sheffield, Sheffield University Press, 1995 (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 110).

[18] As pointed out by Dye in his contribution to this volume.

[19] Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols, Leiden, Brill, 2006.

[20] Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. Peabody, Hendrickson, 2005.

[21] Payne Smith, *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 1999.

[22] This is how Nessim Joseph Dawood, *The Koran*, New York, Penguin Press, 2006, renders it.

child John "grew and became strong in spirit," which suggests that he found favor or grace in God's sight.[23] On the other hand, statements in Luke such as, "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy [Greek: *eleos*]" (Luke 1:54; cf. Luke 1:78), may have led Aramaic-speaking Christians to associate the name of *Yoḥanan* with the notion of divine mercy and intervention (cf. the Luke 1:54, 78 in the Peshitta).

Regardless of the choice one makes here, why is the name *Yoḥanan* rendered as *Yaḥyā* in Q 19? Did the original author of Q 19:1-63 know Aramaic in contrast to the (final?) editor of this pericope who added the more polemical verses found in 19:34-40 and also altered John's name? Or was John's name changed from the very beginning? Whatever the case may be, the change from *Yoḥanan* to *Yaḥyā* links the proper noun to the word *ḥayya* ("life"), which appears in both Q 19:15 and 19:33, creating an even greater correspondence between John and Jesus. I would speculate that the divine naming of John as *Yaḥyā* in Q 19:7 might ultimately stem from a Christian or Qur'anic exegesis that tried to account for the rather unique episode related in Luke 1:59-63. In that passage, Elizabeth wishes to call her son Yohanan, breaking from the custom of naming the child after the father. Zechariah approves this exceptional act. His speech is then miraculously restored. The redactor(s) of Q 19:1-63 may have perceived this episode as truly exceptional, granting accordingly John a more distinctive name for the occasion, *Yaḥyā* rather than the more common *Yoḥanan*.[24]

The Instruction of Early Islam in Western Academic Institutions

Hopefully, the previous discussion has shown that there nothing scandalous or preposterous *en soi* to study early Islam – the Qur'ān included – from a historical-critical perspective. Indeed, this approach allows the scholar of religion to analyze early Islamic literature in the same way that other religious writings are normally investigated in academic circles. It is, furthermore, customary to present the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament in college courses in a way that cultivates a critical appreciation for their historical contexts and developments. Attention is given to sources embedded in the biblical writings – including their dating, authorship, and provenance. For the Hebrew Bible, this involves showing how its authors were inevitably shaped by and participated in their ancient Near Eastern contexts. Similarly, the New Testament is intimately situated within its original Jewish matrix even

[23] Admittedly, the key Greek word, *charis* (the equivalent of the Hebrew *ḥen*) is missing here; however, it appears in the parallel expression in Luke 2:52 in reference to the child Jesus.

[24] Alternatively, as Guillaume Dye and Manfred Kropp, "Le nom de Jésus ('Īsā) dans le Coran, et quelques autres noms bibliques," in Guillaume Dye and Fabien Nobilio, eds, *Figures bibliques en islam*, Bruxelles-Fernelmont, EME, 2011, p. 182–183, point out, the *rasm* can be read as *Yuḥa(n)nā* (stemming from the Syriac *Yoḥa(n)nā*), a form that is attested among Arab Christians until the tenth century. However, the name *Yaḥyā* appears in Nabatean inscriptions, which could explain why John is called this way in the Qur'ān. I thank Guillaume Dye for sharing this reference with me.

as it is understood within its broader Greco-Roman context. Textbooks and other resources that introduce beginner students to historical-critical issues related to the Pentateuch, the historical Jesus, Paul's letters, or the gospels abound in number. On the other hand, finding introductory textbooks and translations of the Qur'ān that adequately discuss issues related to its historical-literary formation, the "historical Muḥammad," or nascent Islam proves more challenging. For example, at the time of this writing, Oxford University Press does not possess any critical introduction or translation of the Qur'ān equivalent to its introductory works in biblical studies such as *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Bart D. Ehrman); *The Old Testament: Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (Michael D. Coogan); or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*.

Instead, one regularly encounters publications of a non-critical tenor, written by Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers alike, which for the most part rehearse traditional claims concerning Islamic origins. A few years ago, I considered Karen Armstrong's best-selling book, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*, because it was required reading for a world religions course a close acquaintance took at a large public American university.[25] Various publications, including scholarly ones, recommend it as well.[26] As the title of her book suggests, Armstrong aims to defend Islam by combating negative characterizations of its prophet. As someone who supports promoting Jewish-Christian-Muslim understanding, I certainly sympathize with Armstrong's ecumenical aspirations. The historian, however, will quickly note that the book contains no explanation of methodology or justification for the selective usage of ancient materials for reconstructing Muḥammad's life. Armstrong simply contends that "we know more about Muḥammad than about nearly any other founder of a major religious tradition."[27] However, such a wide-sweeping statement overlooks the late date of the relevant sources on Muḥammad, the *sīra*-s and *ḥadīth*-s, not to mention the penchant for the miraculous in some of these materials and, more generally, the rhetorical discursive strategies adopted by religious texts to further theological and political aims. But what about the Qur'ān as a source for uncovering the life of Muḥammad? Armstrong presents the issue in the following way: "For some twenty-three years, from about 610 to his death in 632, Muhammad claimed that he was the recipient of direct messages from God, which were collected into the text that became known as the Qur'ān. It does not contain a straightforward account of Muhammad's life, of course, but came to the Prophet piecemeal, line by line, verse by verse, chapter by chapter. Sometimes the revelations dealt with a particular situation in Mecca or

[25] Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time,* San Francisco, HarperOne, 2007, is an abridged, updated version of her *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1992, in which she confesses her reliance on the work of William Montgomery Watt.

[26] See, for example, the appendix of Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*, 2nd edition, Ashland, White Cloud Press, 2007, p. 229, which recommends on the same page the academic works of accomplished scholars such as Michael Cook, *Muhammad*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983; Patricia CRONE, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987; and Francis E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.

[27] Armstrong, *A Prophet for Our Time, op. cit.*, p. 15.

Medina."[28] The Qur'ān, however, makes no such claims about the progression of Muḥammad's career, on which it remains silent. Armstrong simply reiterates Islamic tradition and reads the Qur'ān accordingly. Her selective use of tradition facilitates her ecumenical agenda, which is confused with historical analysis. The historicity of reports culled from the likes of Ibn Isḥāq and Bukhārī are assumed rather than demonstrated, while materials that might upset Western tastes are simply left out. Armstrong's Muḥammad is certainly a prophet for our time but is he a messenger of his time?

By contrast, Armstrong has no qualms adopting historical-critical positions that prove congenial to her enterprise when dealing with the New Testament. For example, she questions the historical reliability of the depictions of the Pharisees in the canonical gospels, sharply distinguishing the historical Jesus' disposition toward the Pharisees from that of the gospel authors who wrote decades after Jesus. Armstrong admits, in other words, that the gospels often tell us more about the emergence of Christianity than the historical Jesus.[29] Why not entertain similar distinctions between the historical Muḥammad, the Qur'ān, and the traditional biographies and *ḥadīth*-s? And has not form criticism cautioned biblical and even rabbinic scholars against confidently peeling traditional layers in search of historical kernels, encouraging instead the appreciation of the function (theological, political, social, rhetorical, etc.) of a particular form in its original *Sitz im Leben*? Reliance on tradition for historical reconstruction proves problematic not only because of the late dating of such sources and their legendary accretions. Their very forms serve the developing needs of particular communities, and, at times, present insurmountable tasks for historical reconstruction. Stripping the miraculous from tradition will not necessarily bring one closer to the "historical truth." Verisimilitude, as the late Jacob Neusner pointed out long ago in the context of rabbinic studies, should not be confused with probability.[30]

John Esposito's approach in *Islam: The Straight Path* (Oxford University Press) is similar to Armstrong's, save that he is a specialist in Islam. Like Armstrong, Esposito assumes that "we know a good deal about Muḥammad's life after his 'call' to be God's messenger."[31] Moreover, Esposito observes, without critical qualification, that the "Quran has served as a major source for information regarding the life of the Prophet."[32] The brief biography of Muḥammad that he sketches, however, derives primarily from extra-Qur'anic traditions. This enables him to fill huge narrative gaps about the Prophet's life that are missing in the Qur'ān. At one point, Esposito touches on the issue of "biblical criticism" but simply to contrast it with the Islamic doctrine

[28] *Ibid*., p. 16.

[29] See Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1993, p. 81, which qualifies the tone of Matthew as "anti-Semitic."

[30] On this matter in rabbinic studies, see Seth Schwartz, "Historiography of the 'Talmudic Period,'" in Martin D. Goodman, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 101–102.

[31] John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 3rd ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 6.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 6.

of revelation (*waḥy*), which posits that the form, content, and very words of the Qur'ān emanate from God. Otherwise, Esposito's main concern, besides rehearsing Muslim self-understanding, is akin to Armstrong's, as he seeks to sooth Western anxieties about Islam.[33]

Finding a suitable translation of the Qur'ān with annotations that do not simply repeat tradition but are historically grounded can be equally challenging. For my courses, I have used the translations of the following authors: Michael Sells, N. J. Dawood, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Asa, A. J. Arberry, and M. A. S. Abdel Haleem. Sells' *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* artfully cultivates an appreciation for the poetic beauty of the Qur'anic text.[34] But as its subtitle suggests, Sells' book presents *sans plus* the traditional bifurcation of the Qur'ān into Meccan and Medinan layers. To be fair, Sells does not aim at providing any kind of historical reconstruction of the Qur'anic text. He seeks to convey a sense of the literary appeal of the Qur'ān to the non-Arabist, culling from a limited number of selected passages from the "Meccan revelations," which are less polemical and therefore more attractive for a non-Muslim audience. Jewish and Christian sources play little to no role in elucidating Qur'anic passages, although Sell's reference to pre-Islamic Arabian poetry proves illuminating.

Dawood, who was born in Baghdad and of Jewish heritage, sought to translate the Qur'ān in a way that would be accessible to the modern English reader. However, the introduction simply repeats Islamic tradition, while the layout of the translation does not number every verse in each sura. This raises difficulties for beginner students trying to navigate a new text. The annotations are also extremely brief.[35] Arberry's translation, though elegant, contains a unique numbering system, while some of its dated phrasings can prove burdensome for an undergraduate reader. Interestingly enough, the introduction contains hostile statements against the historical-critical method.[36]

Today, the English of the widely-distributed translation by Yusuf Ali would prove equally cumbersome. It is, furthermore, confessional in nature, at times "evangelistic" in its attempt to persuade readers about the merits and truths of Islamic belief. Nonetheless, its translation and numerous annotations derived from Islamic

[33] John Esposito's DVD lectures and course guidebook, *Great World Religions: Islam*, Chantilly, The Teaching Company, 2003, present the Qur'ān and the life of Muḥammad in the same manner.

[34] The book generated unfortunate controversy when it was selected as an annual reading assignment for incoming students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The controversy is recounted in the preface of Sell's book.

[35] Penguin first published Dawood's translation in 1956. It has been republished and updated multiple times.

[36] Arthur John Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, New York, Touchstone, 1996, vol. 2, p. 10: "Disciples of the Higher Criticism, having watched with fascinated admiration how their masters played havoc with the traditional sacrosanctity of the Bible, threw themselves with brisk enthusiasm into the congenial task of demolishing the Koran." This criticism is understandable, given the prejudice and excessive positivism of some Orientalists from Arberry's time.

medieval sources are valuable for appreciating Muslim interpretations of the Qur'ān.[37] Muhammad Asad's translation could be mentioned here as well, since it is also written from a similar confessional vein, with a tendency to demythologize and rationalize the Qur'ān for a modern readership.[38]

Three recent translations continue to adopt a traditional stance that ignores or even eschews critical analysis of the Qur'ān. Abdel Haleem's translation introduces each sura of the Qur'ān as "Meccan" or "Medinan," followed by explanatory comments in italics derived from medieval Islamic traditions (presumably Sunni). Naturally, these introductory notes frame the uninitiated reader's understanding of the Qur'anic text within a particular contextualization that derives solely from medieval tradition, which is understood as the original historical setting of the Qur'ān. This one-sided approach is striking for a work published by a Western academic university press (Oxford) and written by a professor working at a prominent Western institution (the University of London).[39]

Janet McAuliffe's translation is simply a revised version of Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān* (1930).[40] However, McAuliffe also includes selected readings that treat the Qur'ān from both confessional and non-confessional perspectives. This approach seems promisingly because it offers readers the opportunity to encounter the Qur'ān from various viewpoints. In her introduction, McAuliffe rightly observes that the scholarly critical perspective that presumes the Qur'ān was written by a human author (or authors), "often – but not always – speaks respectfully of the theological claims of believing scholars."[41] Yet McAuliffe, like many others, simply follows Islamic tradition in her introductory notes to each sura. Adopting the traditional bifurcation that divides the Qur'ān into "Meccan" and "Medinan" layers, McAuliffe describes the historical context of each sura with confessional terms. Each sura is introduced with the heading "Revealed at Mecca" or "Revealed at Medina." For example, McAuliffe states that sura 1 "was revealed before the fourth year of the Prophet's Mission."[42] This language is surprising for a translation that belongs to a "critical edition" series.[43] In biblical studies, it is customary for critical editions to speak of the production,

[37] Unfortunately, Yusuf Ali's annotations contain problematic statements about Jews and Judaism. See Khaleel Mohammed, "Assessing English Translations of the Qur'an," in *The Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 12, 2005, p. 58–71, for an insightful assessment of various Qur'anic translations, including some not treated here. Cf. Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Islamic Studies in the North America or Reflections on the Academic Study of the Qur'an," in *Islamochristinana*, vol. 40, 2014, p. 55–73.

[38] See M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. xxviii–xxix, for a short critique of this approach.

[39] Cf. Mohammed, "Assessing English Translations of the Qur'an," *op. cit.* : "Considering that the translator is a professor of Islamic studies at a secular university and ought to be aware of the haziness of early Islamic history, he should have adopted a more cautious approach to presenting such information as fact."

[40] Janet McAuliffe, *The Qur'ān*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2017 (Norton Critical Editions).

[41] *Ibid*., p. xvi.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 3.

[43] *Ibid*., p. xxxv.

transmission, and redaction of oral and written texts, or to add qualifiers (e.g., "according to traditional belief") that distinguish the critical from the confessional.

The *Study Quran*, published by HarperOne, is authored by several professors who work at private and public universities, several in North America. It was widely promoted at the 2015 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature.[44] HarperOne initially intended to create an edition of the Qur'ān that would correspond to *The HarperCollins Study Bible*. Those familiar with the latter know that it presents the Bible from a critical standpoint, as it is authored by professors in biblical studies teaching in Western institutions – confessional and secular – who embrace critical methods widely used in the Western academy. By contrast, *The Study Quran* categorically rejects these academic norms. In the preface of *The Study Quran*, the editor-in-chief Seyyed Hossein Nasr takes credit for this outcome in the following way:

> *I therefore accepted with humility on the condition that this would be a* Muslim *effort and that, although the book would be contemporary in language and based on the highest level of scholarship, it would* not *be determined or guided by assertions presented in studies by non-Muslim Western scholars and orientalists who have studied the Qur'an profusely as a historical, linguistic, or sociological document, or even a text of religious significance, or do not accept it as the Word of God and an authentic revelation.*[45]

For these reasons, Nasr adds, "I only chose Muslim scholars to collaborate with me in this task." However, he then states: "At the same time, I did not want the work to be confined or limited confessionally, ethnically, or geographically. It was to be universal and at the same time traditional, that is, expressing traditional Islamic views and therefore excluding modernistic or fundamentalist interpretations that have appeared in parts of Islamic world during the past two centuries."[46]

Nasr also attacks those who do not share his confessional beliefs with ad hominem remarks:

> *Although we have relied heavily upon traditional sources, which are the mainstay of our translation and commentary, we have also consulted reliable sources based on both previous and recent academic scholarship in Qur'anic studies. We have, moreover, carried out this task with constant awareness of the biases and fashions present in both historical and contemporary writings*

[44] An entire session was devoted to the edition at the annual meeting of AAR in Atlanta.

[45] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "General Introduction," in Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al., eds, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, New York, HarperOne, 2015, p. xl (italics Nasr's).

[46] *Ibid*., p. xl.

> *about the Qur'an. We have been fully aware that many of these resources suffer, from the Islamic point of view, from the fact that they do not accept the Quran as revelation, they have a truncated view of the Islamic intellectual tradition, or they reject the Islamic worldview as a whole. In some extreme cases, such sources are based on either thinly veiled or sometimes outright hostility toward Islam and are often grounded in very questionable theories and published for the sake of worldly ends, such as gaining fame or furthering academic careers.*[47]

Given these pronouncements, it is not surprising that *The Study Quran* does not include a single article that deals with the Qur'ān's historical context in Late Antiquity, its Jewish-Christian milieu, Byzantine, Abyssinian, or Persian contours, or possible Zoroastrian contacts Furthermore, *The Study Quran* does not engage in any kind of critical comparative religious discussion although it contains several informative essays on various topics dealing with the Qur'ān written from Islamic perspectives approved by its editors. Thus, the opening essay, "How to Read the Quran," supplies the reader, Muslim or other, with instructions on how the Qur'ān *ought* to be read, concerned as it is with Western depictions of Islam, on the one hand, and Islamic fundamentalism and sectarianism, on the other hand. But the extensive annotations on each sura draw mainly from medieval Islamic texts while almost wholly ignoring biblical, Second Temple, rabbinic, patristic, and other Late Antique sources.

Many of the works just assessed are certainly valuable as they introduce with sensitivity the complexity and diversity of Islam to the uninitiated reader. *The Study Quran* excels in this regard, providing the non-Arabist with an abundance of wonderful insights from Islamic tradition and *tafsīr*. These are efforts that theologians and specialists in religious studies alike can welcome as they reflect on the ethics and impact of their scholarship. The scholar of religion, however, must also consider how to present religious phenomena in a manner that does not simply replicate dogma or self-expression. Otherwise, to be consistent, all religions will have to be presented according to confessional criteria. The Book of Mormon, like the Qur'ān, will have to be described in unqualified terms as a "revelation" given to the prophet Joseph Smith by the angel Moroni. Ellen G. White's visions will have to be presented solely as prophecy that confirms Seventh-day Adventist doctrine.[48] And so on. If the pursuit of religious studies is to retain its academic integrity, it must submit *every* religion to the same type of critical scrutiny while guaranteeing that all persons can engage in this intellectual endeavor openly–regardless of their religious (non)affiliation, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and so on. To isolate Islam from such critical analysis would constitute a form of discrimination that could perpetuate its alterity. It may also unwittingly assume in a patronizing way that Islam is too primitive to handle and assimilate the same level of critical scrutiny that its Jewish and Christian siblings

[47] *Ibid*., p. xliv.

[48] Because they are modern figures, far more *contemporary* documentation is available from the time Joseph Smith and Ellen G. White, whose respective followers believe to be divinely inspired prophets.

have undergone. Surely there must be a way in academic circles to approach Islam (or any other religion) in a spirit that is critical yet charitable, skeptical yet respectful, sensitive yet uncompromising.[49]

Fortunately, there are a few works of instructional use that do not discriminate against Islam or the Qur'ān by omitting them from the same academic treatment applied to other religious traditions. I have found Francis E. Peters' *The Children of Abraham* to be pedagogically useful for the comparison of Islam with other religious traditions, especially Judaism and Christianity.[50] Peters introduces the general reader to the common challenges involved in the historical investigation of early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For example, when discussing the founding figures of Judaism, Peters soberly admits that their lives "unfolded in such remote antiquity that they are by now irretrievable."[51] In this regard, little can be known about the rabbis of Late Antiquity since the Talmud compiles "disjointed utterances and judgments that provide flavor and personality but are poor makings for biography."[52] If on the other hand the careers of Jesus and Muḥammad bear a discernible historical light, Peters nevertheless observes that they are also embellished with legendary accretions. The Qur'ān, furthermore, contains on virtually every page material that can be described as "biblical," leading to the sensible conclusion "that some Jewish or Christian, or perhaps Jewish-Christian, influence was at work."[53] Peters is aware that such a position could clash with the traditional belief that "Muhammad enjoyed an absolute originality, remote from either texts or informants, and was in communication with God alone."[54] Yet as Peters notes, this confessional position only raises another question: How could the Meccans of the early seventh century have been so familiar with the Qur'ān's opaque allusions to Moses, Abraham, and Jesus without solid knowledge of biblical and extra-biblical materials? The question is particularly acute in the case of Q 19, which was discussed earlier, since it is traditionally identified as "Meccan."[55] Peters' own answer to these historical issues remains somewhat elusive.

[49] Personally, I have found that the Muslim students who have enrolled in my courses, originating from countries as diverse as the USA, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Malaysia, have responded respectfully to my critical pedagogy. Some non-Muslim colleagues, on the other hand, have warned me to be careful of what I say about Islam for my own safety. I do not how to respond to such warnings (Are they "Islamophobic"?), which are admittedly discomforting, save to continue my academic task to pursue knowledge, wherever it may lead, while remaining respectful of other viewpoints.

[50] Francis E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.

[51] *Ibid*., p. 31.

[52] *Ibid*., p. 31.

[53] *Ibid*., p. 32.

[54] *Ibid*., p. 32–33.

[55] Consider, for example, how McAuliffe, *The Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*, p. 158, asserts that Q 19 "is of quite early Meccan revelation" since this is "established" by the post-Qur'anic tradition on the flight from Mecca to Abyssinia. Quoting the testimony attributed to Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib (Muḥammad's cousin) by Ibn Isḥāq, McAuliffe reasons that Q 19 "must have been revealed and well-known before the departure of emigrants for Abyssinia." However, if Q 19 is so early and of Meccan origin, why does it make sense only in a *Christian* milieu? Form criticism could have measured the unqualified trust in the traditional sources.

Despite his cautions, the historical emergence of the Qur'ān that he presents follows traditional accounts.[56]

Two more recent books introduce Islam with methods common to religious studies, historical inquiry, and other cognate disciplines. In *Muslim Identities*, Aaron Hughes underlines the complexity of Islam as a phenomenon grounded in history and human experience. The strength of this work lies in its theoretical sophistication and emphasis on the diversity of Muslim experience.[57] Gabriel Said Reynolds' *The Emergence of Islam* will please those interested in learning about the nascence of Islam, its messenger and the Qur'ān, in light of Jewish and Christian subtexts. Reynolds critically compares traditional Islamic understandings on Muhammad's life and the formation of the Qur'ān with alternative proposals that are firmly based on archaeology, philology, and historical analysis. This comparative method effectively elucidates the Qur'anic texts.

Thanks to Arthur Droge, there is now at least one English translation of the Qur'ān that is comparable to the many study guides for the Bible such as *The HarperCollins Study Bible* or *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Droge notes in the introduction to his translation that "there is certainly no shortage of English translations of the Qur'ān currently on the market," but not one, as he soberly observes, "suitable for use in an academic setting."[58] Droge's work, in contrast to countless other translations, shows textual critical awareness by proposing variant readings to several passages instead of blindly relying on the Cairo edition of the Qur'ān. He also provides an extensive introduction to the formation of the Qur'anic text that is informed by critical theory, discussing the challenges involved with traditional sources for historical reconstruction. As is common for biblical translations, Droge's work draws heavily from cognate languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac to shed light on Arabic terms.[59] The annotations contain numerous references to extra-Qur'anic sources written before the Qur'ān, biblical and non-biblical. At the time of this writing,

[56] Peters, *The Children of Abraham, op. cit.*, p. 33: "If the Quran came forth from the mouth of Muhammad, as it seems to have, then, whether God's word or Muhammad's own, it was uttered in terms comprehensible to a seventh-century Meccan and so may serve, with some basic adjustments, as a rough guide to the emergence of Islam. If we can credit it to Muhammad himself, the Quran may also reveal the evolution of the Prophet's spiritual life, and his religious and political problems and strategies." This approach is reflected more fully in Peters' specialized work, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1994. This work underscores the enormous difficulties confronting the "quest of the historical Muhammad," relegating more technical discussions to the appendix while repeating the traditional accounts about Muḥammad's life.

[57] Aaron W. Hughes, *Muslim Identities: An Introduction to Islam*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013.

[58] Arthur J. Droge, *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation*, Sheffield, Equinox, 2013, p. vii.

[59] See, for example, Droge, *The Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*, p. xvii, no. 38, which discusses the word "Qur'ān" itself with the Syriac *qeryana*, a term that denotes the reading and recitation of scripture in Christian liturgical settings.

Droge's work is the only English translation of the Qur'an that is based on methods of standard use in biblical studies.[60]

My brief survey hardly reflects the actual state of Qur'anic and early Islamic studies in all aspects. Textbooks and translations do, however, testify to certain conventions that have accumulated over time. The instructor will find no short supply of Qur'anic translations and introductory works that endeavor to present Islam in favorable light – for understandable reasons. However, many of these same works tend to resist critical inquiry, a tendency that becomes conspicuous when equivalent works produced in the fields of biblical, Second Temple, early Christian, and rabbinic studies are taken into consideration. Multiple factors may account for this type of reluctance. Droge points to the institutionalization of academic orthodoxies over the last one hundred and fifty years, highlighting a particular unwillingness, even in secular academic circles, to analyze religion critically because of its controversy.[61] Add to this the anti-Islamic discourses one hears from several corners, including from prominent political figures in the West, not to mention the complex web of political circumstances spun since 9/11, the rise of ISIS, and the refugee crisis, all of this in social and cultural contexts where many are poorly informed about religion, prone to generalizations, and unwilling or unable to nuance and contextualize. In such circumstances, any critical assessment (not to be confused, of course, with condemnation) of Islam might indirectly contribute to unfortunate prejudices. For many, this concern will reinforce the presupposition that any historical-critical pursuit into the origins of Islam automatically will collude with the notorious legacy of what Edward Said defined as "Orientalism," the perpetuation of Western colonialism and prejudice against the Islamic world in academic garb. The fear of such incrimination can be strong. But this charge should not go unchallenged. The days when New Testament scholars employed historical criticism to disparage Judaism are over. The eradication of anti-Semitic (or anti-Judaic) bias from biblical studies did not entail the abandonment of historical criticism.[62] Why can the same not be true for Qur'anic studies?

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[60] To repeat myself, I am not implying that other translations of the Qur'ān that rely on tradition are intellectually inferior. These works reveal profound insights from the Islamic tradition that warrant special attention and can inform modern translations. Consider, for example, how rabbinic interpretations of scripture complemented the historical-literary inquiry of Jacob Milgrom in his magisterial commentary on Leviticus for the prestigious Anchor Bible commentary series.

[61] Droge, *The Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*, p. xii–xii.

[62] To be sure, the historical-critical method has been extensively critiqued in biblical studies from various angles (post-colonial, feminist, etc.) and even rejected (e.g., by fundamentalists). It remains nonetheless a stronghold in the field of biblical studies even as it considers complementary approaches. The findings of historical criticism can also prove relevant beyond the ivory towers of academia, since at its core the historical-critical method simply inquires about the historical past–a human interest that I believe, based on personal interactions, crosses cultural borders. The very attempt to relate specific Qur'anic passages to instances about Muḥammad's life recorded in Islamic tradition, even if not a historical-critical endeavor, speaks to the shared interest in learning about the past.

Orientalism, Anti-Semitism, and Historical Criticism

Whether he intended to or not, Said's influential *Orientalism*, which was published in 1978, subsequently hampered the historical critical analysis of sources from the Islamic canon.[63] Said set out to demonstrate how the Western study of the "Orient" by Western philologists, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, political theorists, philosophers, and economists was profoundly entrenched in prejudices and stereotypes about the East, particularly Arabic culture. Worse yet, Said indicted Western philology for participating in the political project of "Orientalism" to colonize and retain control over the Arab world.[64] At the very least, the Western study of Islamic civilization represented an exercise in European self-affirmation rather than in an objective inquiry.

In the opening of his book, Said makes an interesting, though controversial, observation about the overlap between Orientalist and Western anti-Semitic discourses:

> *Too often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent; it has regularly seemed otherwise to me, and certainly my study of Orientalism has convinced me (and I hope will convince my literary colleagues) that society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together. In addition, and by an almost inescapable logic, I have found myself writing the history of a strange, secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism. That anti-Semitism and, as I have discussed it in its Islamic branch, Orientalism resemble each other very closely is a historical, cultural, and political truth that needs only to be mentioned to an Arab Palestinian for its irony to be perfectly understood.*[65]

One need only mention the name of Ernst Renan to recognize a certain truth to Said's comparison.[66] Interestingly, Said's work came out almost at the same time as E. P. Sanders' seminal *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.[67] Prior to War World War II, many Jewish and some Christian scholars had sought to combat anti-Jewish depictions of Judaism promoted by Western biblical scholars – in vain. Sanders could still detect in the New Testament scholarship of his time a penchant to depict early Judaism as a legalistic religion, a declining phenomenon ("*Spätjudentum*," as it was still called

63 Reflecting on the impact of Said's work, Carl Ernst and Richard Martin, eds, *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2010, p. 4, label Orientalism as a "bête noire" in the "post-Orientalist" era of Islamic studies.

64 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1978, p. 39: "To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact."

65 Said, *Orientalism, op. cit*., p. 27–28.

66 On this matter, see Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 33–37.

67 Ed P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1977.

by some German scholars), the anti-thesis of the far greater entity to appear on the historical scene – Christianity – which was definitively non-Jewish. Much of Sanders' six-hundred-page book deals accordingly with correcting this Christian misconception before tackling the theology of Paul proper. Like the study of the Orient, the Western study of Judaism had become an exercise in reification and self-affirmation, legitimizing Christian supersessionism and prejudice against Judaism. Sanders sought to correct such distortions by proposing an alternative model for understanding early Judaism, which he argued was a religion based on "grace." His work marked a significant shift away from Christian misrepresentations of Judaism in New Testament studies, particularly Pauline studies. Ever since, it has become customary to discuss Paul's relation to Judaism, not to mention that of Jesus, in a far more nuanced way that affirms Paul's Jewishness (however understood). Many now even maintain that early Christianity should be viewed originally *as* a "Judaism" or as one among many Jewish expressions that emerged during the Second Temple period. It should be noted, however, that Sanders used the tools of historical criticism and comparative religion in order to make this case possible. Unlike Said, he remained committed to historical-critical analysis, an "Orientalist" endeavor, even if he critiqued its misuse and the anti-Jewish prejudice that pervaded New Testament scholarship. In fact, his research reinvigorated the historical- critical analysis of the New Testament by promoting a more intimate, balanced engagement with Second Temple Jewish sources. This critical reassessment of the New Testament and its Jewish matrix has in turn contributed to a better understanding of Judaism, certainly a step forward from previous Christian interpretations that were supersessionist and triumphalist.

By contrast, Said's legacy has put into question the legitimacy of the historical-critical investigation of Islamic origins, thereby creating a wider gulf between the fields of early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His exposure of Western colonialist predispositions among certain Orientalists, though vital and necessary, did little to advance the understanding of the history of early Islam or the formation of the Qur'ān, questions that, admittedly, Said did not tackle nor care to pursue. Besides their chronological proximity, Said and Sanders' work only share an effort to denounce Western biases. Said critiqued mainly British and French Orientalists, Sanders, especially German biblicists. Said, however, tended to essentialize entire academic projects as illegitimate, disregarding along the way the scholarship of German Orientalists, including research by Jewish scholars who viewed Islam favorably and were not involved in any colonial project to dominate the Middle East.[68] Sanders, by contrast, denounced Christian misrepresentations of early Judaism while offering original proposals that

[68] Probably, no Jewish Orientalist expressed a favorable disposition toward Islam than Ignaz Goldziher, whom Said only mentions in a passing and misleading way (*Orientalism, op. cit.*, p. 209). Although he remained firmly Jewish, Goldziher considered himself to be a Muslim in a spiritual sense. On German Jewish Orientalists, see Susannah Heschel, "German Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Tool for De-Orientalizing Judaism," in *New German Critique*, vol. 117, no. 2, 2012, p. 91–107.

stimulated further investigation of Second Temple Judaism and Christian origins.[69] Said deconstructed; Sanders reconstructed.

My main goal in summoning and comparing the legacies of these two formidable figures is to caution against any premature dismissal of historical-critical inquiry.[70] A historical-critical investigation of the Qur'ān that is informed by the unfortunate legacy of "Orientalism" need not generate bias against Islam any more than the critical study of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, or the Talmud should promote anti-Semitism. On the contrary, new perspectives on the New Testament based on historical criticism have coincided with and even contributed to Jewish-Christian understanding. The two phenomena are not entirely unrelated. The recent publication of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, which targets Jewish and Christian readers alike, corrects erroneous understandings about early Judaism while drawing from the best that biblical scholarship has to offer.[71] Critical inquiry and ecumenical pursuits are not by definition opposed to one another (nor required to operate in concerted alliance). The former can inform the latter, while ethical awareness can certainly help historians of religion from committing the sins of their predecessors. In fact, I would venture to say that historical criticism could, under the proper circumstances, contribute to Jewish-Christian-Muslim trialogue. Seeing that the Qur'ān appears to be a real treasure trove filled with Jewish *and* Christian materials that have been reworked according to the Qur'anic genius, I cannot avoid ascribing a certain heuristic value in conceiving of Islam as a "Jewish-Christianity," just as (early) Christianity is now understood in a certain sense as (still) constituting a (Christian) form of "Judaism." By this nomenclature, I do not mean that Islam emerged as a "Jewish Christian" sect,

[69] Sanders' most influential proposal is his conception of "covenantal nomism," which he uses to define the religious nature of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism: "There does appear to be in Rabbinic Judaism a coherent and all-pervasive view of what constitutes the essence of Jewish religion and of how that religion "works," and we shall occasionally, for the sake of convenience, call this view "soteriology." The all-pervasive view can be summarized in the phrase "covenantal nomism." Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression" (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism, op. cit.*, p. 75).

[70] Does the rejection of historical criticism entail resistance to other critical readings of the Qur'ān? Until recently, Muslim feminist critics of the Qur'ān have challenged androcentric *interpretations* that they believe deviate from the original meaning of the Qur'ān. Those familiar with the history of feminist criticism in the context of biblical studies will quickly note the problem here. Jewish and Christian feminist critics of the Bible, who tend to be more at home with historical critical approaches, admit that patriarchal views are embedded within Scripture itself. See Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, for an excellent assessment of this delicate matter. Hidayatullah expresses concern that any Islamic admission of patriarchy derived from methods commonly used in biblical studies could be become complicit with "Western imperial" aims that disparage Islam. Biblical criticism, however, can be co-opted for all kinds of aims, including to posit the ascribed inerrancy of one Scripture (the Qur'ān) over against the supposed corruption of another (the Jewish and Christian Bibles). These (mis)appropriations of scholarship should, however, not deter academic inquiry, including the quest for "historical truth."

[71] Marc Zvi Brettler and Amy-Jill Levine, eds, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017.

as some scholars have speculated,[72] that it passively "borrowed" from Judaism and Christianity,[73] or that these three religions are essentially the same. Viewing Islam as a "Jewish-Christianity" underscores, rather, the reality that the first members of Islam interacted with Jewish and Christian actors and ideas from their time and space. This categorization, however troubling, could even encourage Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike to reflect on their shared yet contested heritage. Jews and Christians accustomed to viewing Islam as the "Oriental Other" can come to recognize that the Qur'ān is in a real sense both Jewish and Christian. Muslims, for their part, can appreciate how their Scripture builds from Christian and Jewish precedents.[74]

[72] Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church*, Douglas R. A. HARE, trans., Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1969; Cf. John Gager, "Did Jewish Christians See the Rise of Islam?" in Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds, *The Ways That Never Parted: Jewish and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003, p. 361–372.

[73] As implied by the title of the (nevertheless important) work, Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentum aufgenommen?* (PhD Diss., Bonn, 1833).

[74] Nevertheless, religious studies and theological reflection, as intellectual endeavors, must retain their respective autonomies if they are to preserve their integrity and distinctive voices. Confusion arises when theological statements and empirical observations are mingled without making firm distinctions, when faith is confused with fact, revelation with reason. By this, I do not wish to insinuate that a scholar of religious studies cannot belong to a particular confession or engage in theological endeavors. Some of the best biblical critics belong (more so in the past) to a particular religious affiliation, whether Jewish, Protestant, or Roman Catholic. For a discussion by scholars of religious affiliation on historical criticism, see Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula and Possible Contexts for the Qur'ān

□ Philip WOOD[1]

Several papers delivered at this workshop contend that different suras in multiple "Qur'anic communities" were composed in Christian contexts.

Carlos Segovia argues for the existence of four attitudes to Christianity in the Qur'ān. He proposes that the "unclear dissemination of vague identity markers against a background of common ideas and practices" gradually gave way to more firm boundaries between religious communities. For him, this explains the composition of sections of the Qur'ān that identify with Christianity *from the inside*, even as other references pursue a kind of unitarian theology that denies the divinity of Jesus.[2]

Guillaume Dye also argues for the later adaptation of Christian material. He persuasively points to the alteration of the rhyme scheme of sura 19 and the insertion of anti-Christian material into a text that is "definitely not anti-Christian." He states that this material originated in the liturgy and popular Christian traditions. He goes on to suggest that the specific context for this "Arabic *soghitha*" can be found in the Kathisma church near Jerusalem. He situates the composer of the original text in a multi-lingual milieu, where Greek, Aramaic, and Arabic were all used, and underscores the text's broad Christology, which does not alienate any Christian group.[3]

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[1] I would like to thank Guillaume Dye, Ahmad al-Jallad and Michael Pregill for their advice on this article, which was originally written in 2016.

[2] Carlos Segovia develops these ideas further in *The Quranic Jesus. A New Interpretation*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2018. At p. 26 he notes the many ways in which the Qur'ān describes Jesus, many of which are compatible with a Trinitarian theology if taken individually.

[3] Guillaume Dye, "The Qur'anic Mary and the Chronology of the Qur'ān," in this volume.

Finally, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann has highlighted the use of Christian honorific titles for Jesus (Q 4:171; 19:30; 19:34) and the close relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit and the Virgin, which is not seen for any other prophet. He proposes that this originated with an educated Christian who "converted" into the Qur'anic community.[4] Furthermore, he suggests that we should imagine that different parts of the Qur'ān were composed in different milieus, and that these parts were then combined in a single text. He also points to the multiple treatments of Iblīs (Q 2, Q 7, and Q 20) as a parallel to the various creation stories at the opening of Genesis.

All of these approaches aim to place the Qur'ān, "a profoundly ahistorical text," into history by attempting to reconstruct the kinds of communities that generated different suras.[5] They also attempt to undermine the idea that boundaries between religious communities and their ideas are "natural." Just as students of the Jesus cult emphasized that it must be seen as a movement within Judaism that incorporated Gentiles, so too we must stress that the Qur'ān was composed within the milieus of late antique monotheisms.[6]

The three approaches also share the idea that the Qur'ān is layered.[7] Thus Dye identifies an original Christian background in Q 19, with subsequent interventions, while Segovia uses attitudes to Christian lore as the basis for his fourfold dating of the Qur'ān as a whole. Of course, there have been numerous attempts to divide the Qur'ān into different layers of composition,[8] and the shift in attitude toward the Jews has long been recognized, but Pohlmann, Dye, and Segovia identify the layers of composition that either originate *within* Christian communities or show a high level of familiarity

[4] Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, "Conversion from Jewish and Christian Milieus to Islam. and its Influence on the Formation of the Qur'an," in this volume; id., Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans: Neue Erkenntnisse aus Sicht der historisch-kritischen Bibelwissenschaft*, Darmstadt, WBG, 3. Auflage, 2015.

[5] Quotation from Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 80.

[6] Cf. Stephen Shoemaker (*The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), who focuses on the "hybridity" of (late antique) identities. In a sense, Fred Donner (*Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, MA, Belknap, 2010) attempts to deal with this hybridity by imagining Muḥammad as the leader of a highly ecumenical eschatological movement.

[7] Also note Tommaso Tesei, "The Qur'ān(s) in context(s)," in *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 309, 2021, p. 185–202 for another argument involving intra-Quranic layering.

[8] Theodore Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans Erster Teil: Über den Ursprung des Qorans*, 2 Aufl., 2nd edition, Hildesheim and New York, Olms, 2005 (followed by Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran: Handkommentar mit* Übersetzung, Berlin, Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011; Jacqueline Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus: l'islam de Mahomet*, Paris, Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 2011 and Behnam Sadeghi, "The Chronology of the Qur'ān: A Stylometric Research Program," in *Arabica*, vol. 58, 2011, p. 210–299).

with Christian texts.[9] In this sense they share the approaches of Lüling and Luxenberg, though they do not share their normative commitments.[10]

Dye and Segovia explain the layering effect by suggesting that parts of the Qur'ān were composed after the Arab conquests of Syria and the Levant.[11] Though I think this is possible,[12] if the stronger statements against Christians within the Qur'ān were issued as the early community asserted its separation from Jews and Christians and became more socially and politically demarcated as a discrete community, this would *a priori* make the introduction of Christian lore into the Qur'anic corpus more likely to be early and to predate the conquests. Lüling, for instance, argued that Muḥammad compiled earlier Christian material, which he supplemented, after which post-Muḥammadan Islamic material was added as well.[13] This earlier material might have been composed simultaneously by different "proto-Qur'anic communities." Gilliot suggests that the accusations that Muḥammad relied on foreign informants imply a recent importation of Biblical lore into the Ḥijāz, and one could imagine that the proto-Qur'anic communities were the source of this novel material.[14]

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9 In a similar vein, Robert Hoyland, "The Jewish and/or Christian audience of the Qur'ān and the Arabic Bible," in Francisco del Río Sánchez, ed., *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2018, p. 31–40, argued that the use of allusions to Christian apocrypha in the Qur'ān (e.g. the references to 4 Baruch in Q 2: 259) implies wide dissemination of a monotheist vocabulary and/or a corpus of oral or written monotheist literature in Arabic within pre-Islamic Arabia.

10 Gunther Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: The Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal Hidden in the Koran under the Earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 2003; Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran*, Berlin, Verlag Hans Schiller, 2007. Note the sympathetic summary of Lüling's career in Fred Donner, "In memoriam. Günter Lüling (1928–2014)," in *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā. The Journal of Middle East Medievalists*, vol. 25, 2017, p. 229–234.

11 Dye, "The Qur'anic Mary," *op. cit*. I employ 'Arab' here as a term of convenience for the populations called 'Sarakenoi' in Greek and 'Tayyaye' in Syriac, but I recognize that the evidence for its use as an autonym by the different peoples of the peninsula is contested, and I do not use it here to imply a shared sense of identity or the use of a common language. See further note 53.

12 Dye, "The Qur'anic Mary," *op. cit*., p. 19. I find Dye's arguments for an addition to Q 19 in a Palestinian context to be convincing. I also think that Kevin Van Bladel, "The Syriac Sources for the Early Alexander Narrative in Arabic," in Himanshu P. Ray and Daniel T. Potts, eds, *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in Asia*, New Delhi, Aryan, 2007, p. 54–75; id., "The Alexander Legend in Qur'ān 18:83–102," in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed, *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 175–203, may be correct to see the re-use of the Alexander legend as part of Heraclian propaganda, though stripped of Christian content. Stronger versions of the post-conquest dating have to be rejected in the light of the earlier dating of Quranic manuscripts. For attempts to date the Qur'ān's compilation to the Marwanid period: John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 18–22; Alfred-Louis de Prémare, "Abd al-Malik bin Marwan and the process of the Qur'ān's composition," in -Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, eds, *The Hidden Origins of Islam: New Research into Early Islamic History*, Karl Amherst, NY, Prometheus, 2010, p. 189–224 ; for discussion of the final compilation of the Qur'ān under 'Uthmān, Marijn Van Putten, "'The Grace of God' as evidence for a written Uthmanic archetype : The importance of shared orthographic idiosyncrasies," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 82, 2019, p. 271–288.

13 Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, *op. cit*. Further comments in Gabriel S. Reynolds, "Introduction," in id., ed., *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, *op. cit*., p. 10.

14 Claude Gilliot, "On the Origin of the Informants of the Prophet," in Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, eds, The Hidden Origins of Islam, *op. cit*., p. 153–189. He comments on Q 16:103: "We know as well that people say a person is teaching him. The [content of the speech] is foreign but it is a pure Arabian tongue." Also note Claude Gilliot, "Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur'ān: Is the Qur'ān Partly the Fruit of a Progressive and Collective Work?" in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, *op. cit*., New York, p. 88–108;

This paper intends to examine the possibilities for contextualising the layered effect that other authors in this volume have identified. If we seek to situate the emergence of Christian Qur'anic communities, or at least the transmission of "Christian lore," to what extent might this have been possible in sixth-century Arabia? In her polemical rejection of earlier economic explanations for the rise of Islam, Patricia Crone placed explanatory weight on what she termed a "nativist reaction," one in which the cultural systems of the Fertile Crescent were appropriated and re-used by the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula.[15] Though she subsequently re-instated the role of an economic driver in the "rise of Muḥammad,"[16] it is still worth considering exposure to the cultural systems of the Fertile Crescent and how this may have contributed to the sectarian milieu of Arabia itself.

I argue that three factors should increase the plausibility (though not provability) of greater Christian exposure to the Arabian Peninsula, namely the increased role of the Arab clients of the Romans and Persians; the missionary expansion of the Miaphysites in the borderlands between the empires, and the growth of Christian influence within Sasanian Mesopotamia. I begin by comparing the cultural production of the Jafnid and Naṣrid kings, the major Arab clients of the Romans and Persians, before examining the possible role their patronage may have had on the dissemination and prestige of the Arabic language and on the composition of the kinds of Christian-inclined material that have been posited by Dye, Segovia, and Pohlmann. I conclude by postulating that the different kinds of intra-Christian Qur'anic material that they identify may have developed in different Christian contexts.[17]

Jan van Reeth, "Les prophéties oraculaires dans le Coran et leurs antécédents: Montan et Mani," in Daniel de Smet and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, eds, *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l'islam*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 2014, p. 77–137, esp. p. 79 and 93–4; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet, op. cit*., p. 225. Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014, p. 312–314 discusses a related situation in the Qur'anic discussion of the terms al-Raḥmān and Allāh, which may reflect an attempt to unify different religious schema (one foreign and one indigenous) in Muḥammad's Medina.

15 Patricia Crone, *The Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 247. I find her comparisons to nineteenth-century Pacific examples compelling.

16 Patricia Crone, "Quraysh and the Roman Army: Making Sense of the Meccan Leather Trade," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 70, 2007, p. 63–88.

17 Classic treatments of Christianity among the Arabs include François Nau, *Les Arabes chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VII^e^ et VIII^e^ siècle*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1933; Henri Charles, *Le Christianisme des Arabes nomads sur le limes et dans le désert syro-mésopotamien aux alentours de l'hégire*, Paris, Leroux, 1936; Tor Andrae, *Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, translated by Jules Roche, Paris, Librarie de l'Amérique et d'Orient, 1955; James Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Time*s, London, Longman, 1979; Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 4 vols., Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks, 1995–2009; Theresia Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam: Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit: eine Hinführung*, Leuven, Peeters, 2007; and now Greg Fisher and Philip Wood, with George Bevan, Geoffrey Greatrex, Basema Hamarneh, Peter Schadler, and Walter Ward, "Arabs and Christianity," in Greg Fisher, ed., *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 276–372.

The Roman Frontier

The Roman empire had long used Christianity as a political tool. Conversion to Christianity seems to have been a requirement for many of its client kings, on all of its frontiers.[18] The *Life of Symeon the Stylite* famously reports that al-Nuʿmān, the Naṣrid king of Ḥīra, prevented his Christian subjects from visiting the famous saint until he received an angelic vision.[19] We could read this story as an indication of the lure of Rome to Christians beyond the frontier, but we could also remark that the close connection between political allegiance and religion may have impeded the spread of the religion, especially in an environment like the Arabian Peninsula, which was contested by rival powers.

Instead, it was *within* the Roman empire, rather than through far-flung missions, that Arabs likely came into contact with Christian institutions and symbols. Great power warfare in the sixth century stimulated the employment or subsidy of Arabs: we get a sense of the greater prominence of the Jafnids in the Greco-Roman sources of the sixth century.[20] Indeed, the availability of these subsidies, and the prestige and booty available from the wars between Rome and Persia, may have stimulated the northward migration of tribes from the south of the peninsula that is reported in Muslim sources.[21]

Comparative studies emphasize that nomadic peoples rely on contact with settled populations to sell their goods (whether booty or animal products) and buy the agricultural products and arms of the settled world.[22] Patricia Crone argued that great power conflict stimulated a trade in leather goods that might feasibly have brought Arabs into Roman administrative centers and army bases such as Boṣrā.[23] The archaeologist Bert de Vries has suggested that the wealth of a site like Umm al-Jimāl (which had neither rich agriculture nor administrative prominence) might be explained in part by a trade in mounts, possibly used for travel and war.[24]

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[18] Peter Heather, "The Crossing of the Danube and the Gothic Conversion," in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 27, 1986, p. 289–318; Yves Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique romaine (IVe-VIIs siècles)*, Rome, Ecole française de Rome, 2003, p. 464–465; Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans and Sasanians in Late Antiquity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 40–45.

[19] Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit*., p. 299–300.

[20] Fisher, *Between Empires*, *op. cit*.; id., "Mavia to al-Mundhir: Arab Christians and Arab Tribes in the Late Roman East," in Isabel Toral-Niehoff and Kirill Dmitriev, eds, *Religious Culture in Late Antique Arabia*, Piscataway NJ, Gorgias Press, p. 165–218.

[21] Robert Hoyland, "Arab Kings, Arab Tribes, and the Beginning of Arab Historical Memory in Late Roman Epigraphy," in Hannah M. Cotton, Robert G. Hoyland, Jonathan J. Price, and David J. Wasserstein, eds, *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 387-390; Fisher, *Between Empires*, *op. cit*., p. 7.

[22] Anatoly Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, translated by Julia Crookenden, Madison, WI, University of Wisonsin Press, 1994.

[23] Crone, "Quraysh and the Roman Army," *op. cit*.

[24] Bert De Vries, "Umm el-Jimal I: A Frontier Town and its Landscape in Northern Jordan, Fieldwork 1972–81," in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* supplement 26, Portsmouth, RI, JRA books, 1999, p. 238–239 and Maurice Sartre, *Bostra, des ses origines à l'Islam*, Paris, Geuthner, 1985, p. 129–132. De Vries in particular notes the

The contact between Arabs and the "fixed points" of the Roman frontier resulted in the exposure of visitors to churches and pilgrimage sites.[25] This would have certainly been the case at Boṣrā, which hosted a large church dedicated to the rider saint Sergius, who enjoyed popularity among the Arabs.[26] Similarly, Umm al-Jimāl's wealth was expressed in some fifteen churches. This was surely more than was required by the resident population, thus these monuments may have been intended for display to outside visitors.

Outside the cities, the role of the Jafnid kings as sponsors of churches has rightly been emphasized.[27] And though their role as monastic founders is less certain, they do seem to have been respected leaders within the Miaphysite movement, and this allowed them to arbitrate between rival factions (the Paulites and the Jacobites) in the 570s.[28] The famous pilgrimage site of Ruṣāfa was also patronized by the Jafnid king al-Mundhir, through the construction of a small church (c. 580).[29]

The Jafnids acted as patrons in the mold of Roman Christian aristocrats and received high honors from Miaphysite writers such as John of Ephesus.[30] Their models of patronage of Christian sites were adopted by other lesser Arab leaders too.[31] Church-building was part of the Roman elite display that might have been readily exported to "barbarian" elites, who acquired a means of constructing "fixed points" for nomadic followers and a form of public giving that did not require the redistribution of wealth to followers.[32] Furthermore, this meant that church infrastructure could be built well beyond urban centers; this was true of Ahudemmeh's missions in the Jazīra that established a "bishopric of the Arab tribes."[33]

large number of corrals in the town, which implies a trade in horses and camels as mounts. Also see www.ummeljimal.org/en/library.html.

25 Cf. Elizabeth Fowden, "Rural Converters among the Arabs," in Arietta Papaconstantinou, Neil McLynn, and Daniel Schwartz, eds, *Conversion in Late Antiquity*, Farnham and Burlington VT, Ashgate, 2015, p. 178–182, building on Elizabeth Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999.

26 Sartre, *Bostra*, *op. cit.*; Clive Foss, "Syria in Transition, AD 550–750: An Archaeological Approach," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 51, 1997, p. 189–269. We find clear examples of the link between Sergius and the Arabs at the site of Tell al-'Umayrī (Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 333); Zabad (*ibid.*, p. 348) and Ruṣāfa (Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, *op. cit.*).

27 Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 320 for foundations at Qasr al-Heir al-Gharbi and "the church of Mundhir." Inscriptions call the Jafnids by their Roman honorifics and use their reigns as dating formulae.

28 *Ibid*, p. 323–325, esp. John of Ephesus HE III. 4. 36–40.

29 *Ibid*., p. 331–332; Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, *op. cit.*

30 Philip Wood, "Christianity and the Arabs in the Sixth Century," in Greg Fisher and Jitse Dijkstra, eds, *Inside and Out*, Leiden, Brill, 2014, p. 363 [355–370]; id., *We Have No King but Christ*: *Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquests (c. 400–585)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, ch. 7. Book IV of John's history presents al-Mundhir in terms normally reserved for a Roman emperor, as a champion of Miaphysite orthodoxy.

31 Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 350 suggest that Sharaḥīl's Harran inscription (568) could be an example of direct imitation of Jafnid precedent.

32 Wood, "Christianity and the Arabs in the Sixth Century," *op. cit.*, p. 366, commenting on the *Life of Ahudemmeh*. Also see Fowden, "Rural Converters among the Arabs," *op. cit.*

33 Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 355 with further references.

But the Jafnid example primarily serves to illustrate that Christianity became an important part of the self-fashioning of the Arab elite in the Levant and the Jazira: it does not follow that the institutions they sponsored or models of elite behavior they generated found fertile ground in the Ḥijāz. John of Ephesus does refer to al-Ḥārith's involvement in the appointment of two Miaphysite bishops, Jacob Baradeus and Theodore. The latter is described as bishop of "Hirta de Tayyaye" (the camp of the Saracens).[34] He is said to have exercised authority in the "southern and [eastern] countries and in the whole of the desert and in Arabia and Palestine."[35] But we do not hear much of Theodore's endeavors from John, and, given John's interest in missionary work, I would emphasize the fact that he does not credit Theodore with work beyond the southern frontier. It is likely, therefore, that "Arabia" here referred (roughly) to the hinterland of Boṣrā, that is the Roman province of Arabia.[36]

The Persian Frontier

Roman Syria is relatively well-known. It has been subjected to intensive archeological investigation and is illuminated by sources in Greek and Syriac. Sasanian Iraq, by contrast, is relatively poorly served: much of the information on the Naṣrid capital of Ḥīra comes from West Syrian observers or from the later (Christian and Muslim) Arabic tradition.[37] Nevertheless, if we read such material against the grain, there are indications that Ḥīra was a much more significant missionary center for Arabia than any site in Roman Syria.

Firstly, and most importantly, the synodical record shows that Ḥīra was an important center for the Church of the East. It was a see from at least 410, and a synod was probably held near Ḥīra in 424.[38] It was also the site of a Christian school, built on the model of the famous schools of Edessa and Nisibis.[39] At several points in the late sixth century it was even a burial place for the catholicoi of the Church of the East, in competition with Nisibis and Ctesiphon.[40] There are probably too many claims to the relics of the catholicoi to be credible as literal truth to modern historians, but these

[34] John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, PO 19, 154. PO 19: 238 describes Theodore as bishop in Bostra, but Ernst Honigmann, *Evêques et évêchés* monophysites d'Asie antérieure au VI[e] siècle, Leuven, Durbecq, 1951, p. 163–164 argues that this was only a titular see and identifies Ḥirtā as the Jafnid "capital" of Jābiya.

[35] PO 19. Brooks corrects "western" to "eastern" as a slip of the pen.

[36] PO 19: 238. For the ecclesiastical province see Robert Hoyland, "Late Roman Provincia Arabia Monophysite Monks and Arab Tribes: A Problem of Centre and Periphery," in S*emitica et Classica*, 2 vol. , 2009, p. 117–139 and Fergus Millar, "Christian Monasticism in Roman Arabia at the Birth of Mahomet," in *Semitica et Classica*, vol. 2, 2009, p. 97–115," who discuss Nöldeke's original hypothesis.

[37] Cf. general comments in Erica Hunter, "The Christian Matrix of al-Ḥīra," in *Les controverses des chrétiens dans l'Iran Sassanide*, Christelle Jullien, ed, Paris, Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2008, p. 41–56.

[38] Jean-Baptiste Chabot, ed. and trans., *Synodicon Orientale*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1902, p. 35, 43.

[39] Adam Becker, *The Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

[40] Jean-Maurice Fiey, *Pour un oriens christianus novus,* Beirut and Stuttgart, Steiner, 1993, s.v. Ḥīra.

claims are still noteworthy, since they show that Ḥīra was able to make its impact felt in the historical record of the Church of the East as a whole. And this in turn implies the existence of a population of scholars and clerics who could write in Syriac on its behalf.

Syriac was only one of three different literate traditions that were pursued in the city.[41] At the same time, some Ḥīrans were also involved in the administrative structures of the Sasanian empire. The poet ʿAdī b. Zayd is said to have written in Middle Persian and used his contacts in Ctesiphon to arrange the election of al-Nuʿmān III as king of Ḥīra.[42]

Finally, Ḥīra has a significant reputation as a center for Arabic poetry, including the so-called "hanging poems" (*muʿallaqāt*) that were said to have been composed in Arabic before Islam and displayed in the Kaaba.[43] They do not simply eulogize the Ḥīran kings, the poets often deride them for their reliance upon members of other tribes (or upon the Persians) to coerce their vassals into obedience. The poet al-Nabigha even wrote a salacious poem about al-Nuʿmān's wife.[44] Nevertheless, the jealousies expressed here place Ḥīra at the center of pre-Islamic Arabic culture, at least as it was preserved by later Muslims.

I have argued elsewhere that later Muslim and Christian Arabic material on Ḥīra suggests that the reign of al-Nuʿmān III also saw the production of a Naṣrid history that celebrated Naṣrid rule as a permanent and natural feature of the political landscape.[45] The ability of so many later authors to reproduce a very similar list of Ḥīran kings, and several shared anecdotes of the Ḥīran kings, suggests that this material was widely disseminated and that it was likely in Arabic.[46] The histories of Ḥīra were the only Arabian histories said to have been recited at Mecca during the *jāhilīya* period, alongside those of the Persians and Romans.[47]

The reports that state that Hishām b. al-Kalbī was able to research his books on Ḥīra in the city's churches and monasteries suggest that Christian institutions had an important role in preserving and nurturing Arabic cultural production, as well as Syriac.[48] Such institutions were not only sponsored by the kings themselves, but also

41 Isabel Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra: Eine Arabische Kulturmetropole im Spätantike Kontext*, Leiden, Brill, 2013.

42 Isabel Toral-Niehoff, "Late Antique Iran and the Arabs: The Case of al-Hira," in *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 6, 2013, p. 115–126, 120–121.

43 Fisher, *Between Empires*, *op. cit.*, p. 155–156.

44 Harry Munt, Touraj Daryaee, Omar Edaibat, Robert Hoyland, and Isabel Toral-Niehoff, "Arabic and Persian Sources for pre-Islamic Arabia," in Greg Fisher, ed, *Arabs and Empires Before Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 434–500, 481–82; Nathaniel Miller, "Tribal Poetics in Early Arabic Culture: The Case of *Ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*," Chicago, unpublished Phd, 2016, p. 78 and 82–83.;re-Islamic Arabia," p. 481–482.

45 Philip Wood, "Ḥīra and its Histories," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 136, 2016, p. 785–799.

46 Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra*, *op. cit.*, appendix 2.

47 Mahmoud Omidsalar, *Poetics and Politics of Iran's National Epic, The Shāhnāmeh*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 42.

48 Josef Horovitz, "ʿAdi ibn Zeyd, the Poet of Hira," in *Islamic Culture*, vol. 4, 1930, p. 31–69.

by different groups among the ʿIbād, who may have sought to ensure that their own claims to prominence as early converts to Christianity were recognized through their sponsorship of history.[49]

Thus Ḥīra was a meeting point for Syriac, Persian, and Arabic. It also hosted a fragile monarchy that needed to persuade Persian shahs, local (Christian) elites, and the tribes of the interior of its right and ability to rule, over and above other potential candidates. I suggest that this friction produced "heat" in the form of cultural production, namely the sponsorship of history and poetry. After his conversion to Christianity, the last Naṣrid king, al-Nuʿmān III, used this sponsorship to emphasize a firm and ancient connection between the Naṣrids and the Sasanians and to invent the conversion of earlier Naṣrids such as al-Nuʿmān I.[50]

At the same time, the sponsorship of poetry at Ḥīra may have been intended for a different audience: the Naṣrids sought to emphasize their "Arabness" by appealing to shared values of courage, and the protection of the needy.[51] Nathaniel Miller has recently observed that this poetry was intended to showcase the Nasrids' possession of prestige objects gained through their service to the Persian kings, through poems that celebrated wine-drinking, women, weaponry, fast horses and the generosity of the Nasrids to their own Arabian clients. Their goal was not to identify with foreign customs, but to 'skillfully mediate between Arabian nomadic values and foreign sedentary customs'.[52] Certainly, this sponsorship of poetry seems to underlie the later significance of the kings of Ḥīra in the Muslim Arabic memory of the past.[53]

[49] Wood, "Ḥīra and its Histories," *op. cit.*, discusses a possible example from the *Haddad Chronicle*.

[50] *Ibid*.

[51] Hoyland, "Epigraphy and the Emergence of Arab Identity," in Petra Sijpesteijn, Lennart Sundelin, Sofia Torallas Tovar, and Amalia Zomeno, eds, *From al-Andalus to Khurasan: Documents from the Medieval Islamic World*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, p. 217–242, 237.

[52] Nathaniel Miller, "Warrior elites on the verge of Islam: Between court and tribe in early Arabic poetry," in Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Ilkka Lindstedt and Saana Svärd, eds, *Cross-Cultural Studies in Near Eastern History and Literature*, Münster, Ugarit-Verlag, 2016, p. 137–173. esp. p. 153–154. Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*: *Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, has dismissed the role of the Jafnids and Nasrids to generating any pre-Islamic 'Arab' identity. While I think he is correct that the Marwanid and Abbasid period both saw substantial reshaping of what it meant to be an Arab, I think that some of the raw material for an eighth century Arab identity had already been formed in the sixth century. Also note Robert Hoyland's response to Webb in "Reflections on the Identities of the Arabian Conquerors," in *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā. The Journal of Middle East Medievalists*, vol. 25, 2017, p. 113–140. A. al-Jallad, "'Aʿrāb, and Arabic in Ancient North Arabia: the first attestation of (')ʿrb as a group name in Safaitic," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 31, 2020, p. 1–14, argues that ʿrb was indeed used as an endonym in pre-Islamic times.

[53] Khalil Athamina, "The Tribal Kings in Pre-Islamic Arabia: A Study of the Epithet Malik or Dhū al-Tāj in the Early Arabic Traditions," in *Qantara*, vol. 19, 1998, p. 19–38.

The Client Kings and the Emergence of Arabic

The Qur'ān repeatedly states that it is "an Arabic Qur'ān" and that it is inimitable.[54] These concepts rest on the comprehensibility of Arabic across a wide area and based on shared aesthetic norms. Though the Qur'ān plays an enormous role in shaping Arab identity, we must also recognize that it builds upon earlier manifestations of "Arabness", among them an Arabic script that could be employed in prestigious epigraphic contexts.[55]

Recent work by Leila Nehmé at Madā'in Ṣāliḥ (Ḥegrā) (in the northern Ḥijāz at the edge of Roman control) confirms the emergence of Arabic script from the Nabatean script.[56] This script had long been used in the Nabatean kingdom to record legal matters for communities that spoke Arabic. Michael MacDonald notes that the cursive character of this script implies that it was used in administrative contexts, thus we need not necessarily imagine the existence of written literary Arabic to explain this development in the script.[57]

Robert Hoyland has further observed that many of the places where the earliest sixth-century Arabic inscriptions have been discovered lie on the edges of the Roman world: that is the Ḥawrān, the Negev, and the region between Petra and Madā'in Ṣāliḥ.[58] He notes that these areas were also controlled by the Jafnid kings, who may have

[54] Though note the skeptical position of Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, *op. cit*., p. 115 and p. 118–120 who argues against the idea that *'arabi* is the name of a specific language or people in the seventh century.

[55] Note, however, that there was considerable variation between the different forms of Arabic used in the sixth and seventh centuries. Subsequent editing may have reduced the dialectal variation within the extant corpus of pre-Islamic poetry: Marijn Van Putten, "The Status Quaestionis of ʿArabiyyah, Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Quran," in IQSA blog 2017 (https://iqsaweb.wordpress.com/2017/11/06/the-status-quaestionis-of-ʿarabiyyah-pre-islamic-poetry-and-the-quran/). Miller, "Tribal poetics", *op. cit*., p. 307 and 402 notes the existence of regional variations within the pre-Islamic poetry. The Hijazi Arabic of the Qur'ān should also be distinguished from the forms of Arabic associated with the *qaṣīdah*, which were associated with the Maʿad of central Arabia and patronized at the Umayyad court: Marijn Van Putten, *Qur'anic Arabic. From its Hijazi Origins to its Classical Reading Traditions*, Leiden, Brill, 2020, p. 217–222. Robert Hoyland, "'Arabī and A'jamī in the Qur'ān: The Language of Revelation in Muḥammad's Ḥijāz," in Fred Donner and Rachel Hasselbach-Andree, eds, *Scripts and Scripture. Writing and Religion in Arabia circa 500-700 CE*, Chicago, Oriental Institute, 2022, p. 105–116, argues that the Qur'ān contrasts a clear vernacular (*'arabī*) with a language that is sacred but foreign, such as Hebrew, Greek or Syriac.

[56] Laila Nehmé, "A Glimpse of the Development of the Nabatean Script into Arabic," in Michael. C. A. MacDonald, ed., *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language: Papers from the Special Session of the Seminar for Arabian Studies held on 24th July, 2009*, Oxford, Archeopress, 2010, p. 47–88, and id., "Between Nabatean and Arabic: 'Transitional Nabatean-Arabic Texts,'" in Greg Fisher, ed., *Arabs and Empires Before Islam*, *op. cit*., p. 417–421. Peter Stein, "Literacy in Pre-Islamic Arabia: An Analysis of the Epigraphic Evidence," in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, eds, *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, Leiden, Brill, 2010, p. 258, distinguishes Hegra from the "Arabian cultural area" but I think this is unnecessary and unhelpful.

[57] Michael MacDonald, "Decline of the 'Epigraphic Habit' in Late Antique Arabia: Some Questions," in Jérémie Schiettecatte and Christian Robin, eds, *L'Arabie à la veille de l'Islam*, Paris, De Boccard, 2009, p. 17–25, 19–22. Cf. Michael MacDonald, "Reflections on the Linguistic Map of Arabia," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 11, 2000, p. 28–79, 59–60.

[58] Robert Hoyland, "Mt Nebo, Jabal Ramm, and the Status of Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Old Arabic in Late Roman Palestine and Arabia," in M. C. A. MacDonald, ed., *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language*, *op. cit*., p. 29–45, 35; Hoyland, "Epigraphy and the Emergence of Arab Identity," *op. cit*.

encouraged the use of Arabic as part of their promotion of a shared Arab identity on the part of the members of their confederation. This is plausible given that the Jafnids had a familiarity with written administration (we see them acting as arbitrators in property disputes at Petra, for instance),[59] and because the spread of Christianity among tribes entering Roman service may have been accompanied by the spread of literacy.[60] There is no attested pre-Islamic Arabic Gospel or liturgy, and the post-Islamic translations do not seem to rely on earlier precedent. Indeed, when translations do appear they employ Qur'anic language. [61] But we can still envisage a situation in which Christian texts were read in Syriac and then translated aloud; this might have made the idea of a written lectionary more widely known, and made writing itself seem more prestigious.

Though the Old Arabic inscriptions and the papyri from Petra dominate our impression of the writing of Arabic in the sixth century, I also note that Muslim Arabic sources stress Ḥīra as a site of the genesis of Arabic writing.[62] The Ḥīran kings had been established longer than their equivalents in the Roman world, and Ḥīra was a center of cultural production (in Syriac and in Arabic) and institutional foundations in a way that does not have known parallels in "Jafnid" southern Syria. We do not have take the Muslim Arabic accounts to be literally true, but I would still underscore Ḥīra's importance as a prime site of "intercultural transmission" and as a foundation of scholarly institutions, and Ḥīra may have played a role in the dissemination of writing in the Arabic script if not in its genesis.[63]

In the light of the hypotheses of Dye, Segovia, and Pohlmann, there is a further significance to the overlap of Syriac and Arabic, namely that these are possible locations for the creation of intra-Christian sections of the Qur'ān. Two major contributions to the Qur'ān from Syriac are highlighted in the literature, namely the

[59] E.g., Maarit Kaimio, "Petra inv. 83: A Settlement of Dispute," in *Atti del XXII congress internazionale di Papyrologia Firenze*, vol. 2, 2001, p. 719–724.

[60] Since Hoyland wrote, there has been a major discovery of early Arabic inscriptions at Najran, which are dated to 469–70: Christian Robin, Ali Al-ghabban and Sa'id al-Sa'id, "Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān (Arabie Séoudite méridionale) : nouveaux jalons pour l'histoire de l'écriture, de la langue et du calendrier arabes," in *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, vol. 153, 2014, p. 1033–1128. At first sight, this might look like an exception to Hoyland's argument, but we should note that Najran is said to have enjoyed close links to the Nasrid capital of Hira and that some sources report missionary links to the Jafnids as well: Lasse Toft, "Dhū Nuwās and the martyrs of Najrān in Islamic Arabic literature before 1400," in *Entangled Religions*, vol. 13, 2022, p. 37 [1–43].

[61] Ronnie Volandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch,* Leiden, Brill, 2015, p. 42.

[62] Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-buldān*, translated by Philip Hitti, in *The Origins of the Islamic State*, 2 vols., New York, Longmans, 1916–24, p. 471–473; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk,* edited by Michael de Goeje, Leiden, 2010, I, 2061. In general Jan Van Reeth, "Les prophéties oraculaires," *op. cit.*, p. 100–103; Nabia Abbott, *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Kur'anic Development: With a full Description of the Kur'anic Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1939, p. 4–5; Ahab Bdaiwi, "Scribes and Pens in early Islam," (forthcoming). Hoyland, "'Arabī and A'jamī," *op. cit*., p. 110, note 25, notes that, even if the letter forms of Arabic are derived from Nabatean, other features may still be drawn from Syriac, such as the proportionality of the Arabic letters.

[63] Cf. Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra*, *op. cit*.

use of Syriac loanwords (which far exceed those from other languages)[64] and the use of end of line fillings, verse division markers and rubrication in the earliest Qur'ān manuscripts that has paralells with East Syrian scribal practice.[65] And numerous scholars have noted religious ideas and imagery that are shared by West and East Syrian Christian traditions and the Qur'ān.[66] It follows that the same zone of bicultural interaction that innovated use of Arabic in prestige contexts or disseminated Arabic poetry may have also produced proto-Qur'anic material from within a Christian milieu, or a milieu exposed to Christian narratives and ideas.

It is also worth stressing that we do not have evidence for the presence of an institutional Christianity in the Ḥijāz: western Arabia is not mentioned in episcopal lists, and does not feature in the hagiography or ecclesiastical history surveyed below. There may have been Christian individuals or populations: the Sīra mentions Waraqa, a relative of Muḥammad's wife Khadīja, and inscriptions by a member of the Khazraj have been found that urge devotion to *al-ilāh* (which in all other inscriptions refers to the Christian god).[67] And there are cases where Christian religious language may have affected the religious expression of non-Christians.[68] But this still does not seem the kind of environment that might generate the kind of references to Jacob of Serug or Narsai of Nisibis that Julien Decharneux has identified in one passage of the Qur'ān (Q 55:5-13).[69] At least on the basis of current evidence, for the kind of environment that could generate this kind of Arabic reflection on Christian materials in Syriac, we need to look elsewhere in the Arabian peninsula.

In the following sections, I attempt to summarize some of the most salient evidence for Christian missionary activity in the peninsula. In particular, I highlight the possible

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[64] Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1938.

[65] Paul Neukirchen, "Eschatology, responsories and rubrics," in this volume.

[66] E.g., Guillaume Dye, "Réflexions méthodologiques sur la "rhétorique coranique,'" in Daniel de Smet and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, eds, *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l'islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 160 for the affinities between the *Testamentum Domini* and Q 23:1–11; Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam et le christianisme, op. cit.*, p. 67–161 for Christian monastic sources to Qur'anic eschatology and images of paradise (esp. Ephrem) and 196–197 on the idea of sleepless prayer; Sidney Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'an: The 'Companions of the Cave' in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian Tradition," in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, *op. cit.*, p. 109–138, 115 for the use of an Arabic calque on the Syriac terms for the Trinity and p. 121 for the harmonization of various West Syrian stories on the seven sleepers of Ephesus in Q 18:9–26; Emmanuela Grypeou, "A Table from Heaven: A Note on Qur'an, Surah 5, 111ff," in *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, vol. 2, 2005, p. 311–316 for the relationship between Q 5:111–115 and the West Syrian *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*; Reynolds, "Introduction," in id., ed., *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context, op. cit.*, p. 10 for the term Qur'ān itself as a derivation of *qeryānā* (liturgical reading); Hoyland, "The Jewish-Christian Audience", *op. cit.*, for 4 Baruch and Q 2: 259. Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity, op. cit.*, p. 492 notes the direct influence of two Biblical passages, Revelations (Q 57:3) and Psalm 37 (Q 21:105).

[67] https://alsahra.org/2017/09/نقوش-عربية-بلكنة-نبطية/. My thanks to Ahmad al-Jallad for discussion of this text.

[68] Ahmad Al-Jallad and Hythem Sidky, "A paleo-Arabic inscription on a route north of Ṭā'if," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, 2021, p. 1–12. They draw attention to the use of the word *rabb* (lord) outside an obviously Christia context.

[69] Julien Decharneux, "Maintenir le ciel en l'air « sans colonnes visibles » et quelques autres motifs de la *creatio continua* selon le Coran en dialogue avec les homélies de Jacques de Saroug," in *Oriens Christianus*, vol. 102, 2019, p. 237–268; Guillaume Dye, "Concepts and Methods in the Study of the Qur'an," in *Religions*, vol. 12, 2021, p. 1–17, at 11–13.

political and social contexts in which Christian proto-Qur'anic material might have been produced.

Miaphysite Missions into Arabia

Contemporary written evidence of Christian activity in the Arabian Peninsula is mainly in Syriac and written from a Jacobite (Miaphysite) perspective. John of Ephesus devoted one chapter of his hagiographic collection, the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (c. 568), to the Persian missionary Simeon beth Arsham.[70] Simeon had been active beyond the eastern frontier of the Roman empire in the previous generation, and he was famous for his involvement in debates against the Dyophysites of the Church of the East at the court of the Persian shah, Khusrō Anushirwān: "he even caused the Magians to laugh at them [the Dyophysites], since he would set up the Magians themselves as judges."[71] The narrative imagines the East as a haven for ancient heresies, such as Marcionism, Manichaeism, and Bardaisanism. This is certainly an attempt to blacken the Church of the East by geographical association, but it may also reflect an environment that was genuinely less "policed" in terms of religious orthodoxy than the Roman empire, and this impression may be true for the whole of Simeon's missionary zone.

Though the text is focused on his deeds in Ctesiphon, Simeon was also active in Ḥīra, and used it as a base to enter Sasanian Iraq.[72]

> *He used to go among the [different] lands even up to Hirta of the Tayyaye of the house of Nuʿmān, which he visited frequently so that he won over many of the Tayyaye who dwelt there. He got the magnates whom [he] had persuaded to become his disciples to build a Christian church in it.*[73]

The account of Simeon writing down the creed for the people he converted should also be noted:

> *to be certain that writing should remain without danger of alteration, he took linen cloths and medicated them so that they might take writing…and he would write the belief of every people in their own language from their chief bishops,*

[70] On his life in greater detail, see Jeanne-Nicole Saint-Laurent, *Missionary Stories and the Formation of the Syriac Churches*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2015.

[71] PO 17:144.

[72] Simeon is assumed to be "in the lands of the Tayyaye," and therefore unable to engage in debates at one point in the narrative. PO 17:146.

[73] PO 17:140.

> *and above that he would place the seal of the king of that people and of the bishops and their chief men in lead upon the cloth.*[74]

This last narrative is especially significant for the discussion of the stimulation of Arabic writing. It is a clear example of the role of missionaries in stimulating the use of written documents. In this case, we also see the export of the Sasanian custom of sealing to give a document authority and the innovation of writing materials in a zone where parchment was scarce. Simeon's concern over the creed probably reflects the use of the Trisagion[75] in the Miaphysite liturgy, and it may be that he emphasized writing because Dyophysite missionaries were also operating in the same area. Furthermore, his involvement with recently converted chiefs and local bishops also may have helped to embed local elites into wider networks. Documents would have been useful as symbols of the wider recognition of the authority of local elites, which also would have preserved the creedal statements made on the document.

For our purposes, we might speculate that the practice of translating the creed into local languages might have given them a prestige that they had hitherto lacked. We should probably assume that these local languages were written in Syriac script: John would likely tell us if Simeon had actually created a new script. Nevertheless, it seems plausible that, given Simeon's regular involvement with the Arabs, some of these languages were different dialects of "Old Arabic" in Ḥīra and its hinterland.

Dyophysite Missions into Arabia

The *Chronicle of Seert*, a major Christian Arabic history of the tenth or eleventh centuries, preserves three notices on Ḥīra that seem to derive from earlier Syriac material. These notices provide other kinds of information about the links between Ḥīran Christians and the rest of Arabia, though the late date of the source means that we need to be especially careful in how we handle these excerpts. The first of these was from approximately 400 and describes how one ʿAbdishoʿ of Arphelouna trained at the school of ʿAbdā in southern Iraq, then fled ordination as a bishop to convert "an island in [the region of] Yamāma and Baḥrayn." Following this he founded a monastery in Ḥīra, and returned to Maishān. His connection with Ḥīra is the most prominent part of his legend, and the section dedicated to him is titled "ʿAbdishoʿ of Arphelouna, who founded a monastery at Ḥīra."[76]

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[74] PO 17:156.

[75] Robert Taft, "Trisagion," in Alexander P. Kazhdan, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991; Volker-Lorenz Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Churches*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 166–173.

[76] *Chronicle of Seert*, PO 5:310–312. The island may be "Ramath," which lay "eighteen parsangs from Obelah," which is identified later in the text. Vincent Bernard, Olivier Callot; and Jean-François Salles, "L'église d'al-Qousour Failaka, Etat de Koweit. Rapport préliminaire sur une première campagne de fouilles," in *Arabian*

This hagiography is attached to a cycle of stories surrounding the saint ʿAbda and his disciples.[77] The existence of a mission near Ḥīra long predates the other hagiographies that describe Dyophysite proselytism in the region, and date to the early seventh century.[78] But even if the details that interest us are later inventions, they would still suggest the kinds of things that a later hagiographer would seek to invent to give contemporary monasteries greater antiquity, namely an earlier connection between Ḥīra and Ctesiphon and the link between Ḥīra and the eastern Arabian coast.[79]

A number of the monasteries on the Persian Gulf have been excavated, and Robert Carter dates them from the seventh to ninth centuries.[80] He suggests that earlier monastic foundations were built in perishable materials and not tied to trade networks.[81] Alternatively much of the textual evidence may simply be Islamic-period invention of an early Christian heritage for a region that had been relatively recently colonized.[82] Richard Payne emphasizes that the excavated monasteries were dependent on maritime links to Iraq, but the scene in the *Chronicle of Seert* envisages a land route to ʿAbdisho''s offshore island (though the abbreviated nature of the text makes it very hard to establish).[83]

Synodical records indicate that in in 410 there were bishops for Meshmahig (probably the island of Baḥrayn and the nearby coast) and Dayrin on the island of Tarut and in 576 there were bishops for Beth Qatraye and Mazun, which probably refer to the east Arabian coast and Oman respectively, and for Hajar, modern-day Hufuf in Saudi Arabia.[84] I would regard these as the earliest firm indications of a Christian presence, which might confirm the stories for a very early mission to Baḥrayn.[85]

The second narrative about Ḥīra embedded in the *Chronicle of Seert* describes the arrival of Miaphysite refugees from the Roman world after the persecutions of Justin I.

Archaeology and Epigraphy, vol. 2, 1991, p. 145–181, 145 identify this as al-Quṣūr in Kuwait; Daniel Potts, *Arabian Gulf in Antiquity*, 2 vols., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 245 n. 275 as Abū ʿAlī, north of Jubayl.

77 Philip Wood, *Chronicle of Seert, Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 75–78.

78 Philip Wood, "Ḥīra and Her Saints," in *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. 132, 2014, p. 5–20.

79 Van Reeth, "Les prophéties oraculaires," *op. cit*., p. 88 rightly observes the architectural connections between southern Mesopotamia, Ḥīra, and the Gulf.

80 Earlier dating of these settlements is probably influenced by the belief that Christians were expelled from the peninsula. These traditions are discussed in Harry Munt, "No Two Religions: Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Ḥijāz," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 78, 2015, p. 249–269.

81 Robert Carter, "Christianity in the Gulf during the First Centuries of Islam," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 19, 2008, p. 71–108.

82 Cf. Richard Payne, "Monks, Dinars and Date Palms: Hagiographical Production and the Expansion of Monastic Institutions in the Early Islamic Persian Gulf," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 22, 2011, p. 97–111.

83 Payne, "Monks, Dinars and Date Palms," *op. cit*.

84 Françoise Briquel-Chattonet, "L'expansion du christianisme en Arabie," in *Semitica et Classica*, vol. 3, 2010, p. 17–87, 181–182. Also discussion in Potts, *Arabian Gulf,* vol. 2, *op. cit*., p. 150, 253 and 256–257.

85 John Langfeldt, "Recently Discovered Early Christian Monuments in Northeastern Arabia," in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, vol. 5, 1994, p. 32–60 highlights the likely destruction of Christian sites in eastern Saudi Arabia.

It describes the Miaphysites being sponsored by one al-Ḥajjāj, the son of Qays of Ḥīra and al-Mundhir b. al- Nuʿmān, a famous Naṣrid king, known for raids on the Roman empire. The Miaphysites were invited to leave, acknowledge Dyophysitism, or submit to a religious debate. They agreed to the debate, which was adjudicated by al-Mundhir and undertaken against the catholicos Shila (503-523). Al-Mundhir found against them and, after diplomatic pressure from Justin, al-Mundhir expelled them and they moved to Najrān while others remained hidden in Ḥīra. Those in Najrān were said to adopt Julianism, which was also followed in the oasis of Payram, near Ḥīra, until a Dyophysite mission under ʿAbdā b. Ḥanīf in the early seventh century.[86]

This passage gives substantially more local detail. In particular, the appearance of otherwise unattested local figures who threaten to undermine the dominance of the Naṣrid kings or the Church of the East inspires confidence in the text. The narrative appears to have been composed in the seventh century, prompting the reflection on Payram. The figures of Shila and Justin may have been added to embed a local crisis into the international affairs of the time, but the complexity of the text suggests that it did not undergo heavy editing. The detail on Julianism in South Arabia in this narrative was also confirmed by John of Ephesus: "they [the Julianists] went east and west, to the capital, to Alexandria, to the whole of Syria, they even crossed to Hirta d-Beth Nuʿmān and Persia. One of them, named Sergius even rushed off to the land of the Himyarites…and consecrated another, named Moses, to be bishop in his stead."[87]

We should highlight the role played by a (still pagan) Naṣrid king in convening religious debates, and the opportunities that the existence of multiple Christian confessions gave to more minor political figures such as al-Ḥajjāj. The author also tacitly acknowledges the inability of the church to completely expel the Miaphysites from Ḥīra, and the text suggests that the converts made by Simeon beth Arsham were well-supported.[88] The Muslim Arabic description of Ḥīra's Christian elite (the 'Ibād) as 'Nestorian' may owe more to developments during the Islamic period.[89] Instead, we should probably imagine a situation in which Christian elites in Ḥīra belonged to both confessions, and may have transferred their allegiances between them many times. The involvement of al-Mundhir in the disputation shows that it was possible for Naṣrid kings to involve themselves in intra-Christian politics even when they remained pagan (later Arabic sources also present the wives and mothers of the Ḥīran kings as monastic founders, which was another method of involvement).[90] Finally, the

[86] *Chronicle of Seert*, PO 7:143-44. Further discussion of the Ḥīran hagiography set in the seventh century in Wood, "Ḥīra and Her Saints," *op. cit.*

[87] Witold Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Chronicle Part III,* Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1996, p. 111.

[88] Miaphysite bishops are attested for Ḥīra in the late sixth and early seventh century. Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam et le christianisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 31; Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times, op. cit.*, p. 193–194.

[89] Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, edited and translated by C. Barbier de Meynard and P. de Courteille, Paris, Imprimerie impériale, 1861–77, 2:328.

[90] Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times, op. cit.*, p. 192 and 196.

references to Najrān imply that Ḥīra was a gateway to the far south of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as to the east coast.

The third narrative concerns the final conversion of the Naṣrid king al-Nuʿmān III to Christianity. It describes how the king converted to Christianity at the hands of Simeon b. Jābir, the ʿIbadi bishop of Ḥīra for the Church of the East, only to turn to the Miaphysites soon afterwards. The catholicos Ishoʿyahb I and the shah Khusrō II arranged for the intervention of the holy man Sabrishoʿ, and the king returned to Dyophysitism.[91] The text may indicate that the initial conversion represented a loss of face for al-Nuʿmān, as the man responsible for his conversion was a fellow Ḥīran, albeit with a better Christian pedigree. His brief conversion to Miaphysitism might be interpreted as a bartering strategy that triggered the involvement of highly placed figures in the Church of the East and brought about a clear royal approval for his actions, and this also freed him from his local bonds to the ʿIbād.

Heterodox Christianities in Arabia

Many of these sources are hagiographic, and we should be wary of placing too much weight on individual details. But some general patterns do emerge. Firstly, both the Jacobite and the Church of the East accounts underscore the significance of Ḥīra, this time as a gateway for cultural influences from the Near East into the peninsula. The official "paganism" of the Naṣrid kings was no impediment to their involvement in Christian politics or to the presence of Christianity at Ḥīra. But the lack of a Christian political authority did contribute to the "unpoliced" character of Arabian Christianity. We gather the impression of institutional foundations by both groups, sponsored by the city's Christian elite, and further expansion to the south, whether in the form of contact with individual tribes, who were sent bishops, or the establishment of a string of monasteries along the east Arabian coast. Both environments saw the encounter of Arabic speakers with the use of written and liturgical Syriac; these might be seen as areas from which Christian proto-Qur'anic material was disseminated. However, I do not find anything in the sixth-century literary sources to suggest that Christianity was significant in the Ḥijāz.

Secondly, Arabia (like Iran or Iraq) was an environment where no single Christian orthodoxy was enforced and multiple Christian groups co-existed.[92] That said, none of the sources examined here indicate that communities of "Judeo-Christians," Montanists, Marcionites or Arians were (still) present in the Arabian peninsula, and

[91] *Chronicle of Seert*, PO 13:478–81. Cf. PO 13:468–69. A longer analysis is given in Greg Fisher and Philip Wood, "Writing the History of the Persian Arabs: Pre-Islamic Perspectives on the Nasrids of al- Ḥīrah," in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 49, 2016, p. 247–290.

[92] Compare Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, *op. cit.*, ch. 4 on northern Iraq. I also draw on Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, London, Allen and Martindale, 1952 who stresses the importance of "marginal" environments for religious innovation.

the existence of older "heretical" groups should not be used to explain features of the Qur'anic milieu.[93] Tannous has called this the "Jurassic Park" illusion, in which historians identify the expression of beliefs in their texts and then use heresiologists (often written several centuries before) to diagnose the presence of groups who spread those beliefs.[94] The authors I examine here were not afraid to identify heretical groups when they found them, or to highlight the sharing of false ideas between heretics. John of Ephesus devotes excursus to Melchizikeans, Montanists, Tritheists, and Arians,[95] and the *Chronicle of Seert* discusses Manichaeans, Marcionites, and Origenists,[96] so I would emphasize the fact that they do not identify such groups in Arabia when they record the Julianist presence at Najrān. I do not think modern analysts should conjure up groups where they do not exist.

But none of this is to deny that Christian theology is complex and that Christians on the edges of the properly catechized might not answer all questions in an orthodox manner.[97] Christian *identity* (and religious identity in general) often has much more to do with shared symbolism and narratives than technical theology.[98] For instance, it has frequently been observed that there is little evidence of Christian (or for that matter Jewish) theology in the Christian and Jewish pre-Islamic poets.[99] I think we should imagine that individuals who saw themselves as Christians (including priests) might easily give idiosyncratic ad hoc answers in response to questions of technical theology, especially in areas when Jewish ideas were in circulation.

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93 E.g. Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, *op. cit.*; Van Reeth, "Les prophéties oraculaires," *op. cit.*; Peter Von Sivers, "Christology and Prophetology in the Early Umayyad Arab Empire," in Markus Gross and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds, *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion III. Die heilige Stadt Mekka – eine literarische Fiktion*, Inârah, Berlin, Hans Schiler, 2014, p. 255–285; Guy Stroumsa, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins," in Behnam Sadeghi, Asad Q. Ahmed, Adam Silverstein, and Robert Hoyland, eds, *Islamic Culture, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2015, p. 72–97.

94 Jack Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak*, PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2010, p. 396. Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Arabs and Islam in Late Antiquity: A Critique of Approaches to Arabic Sources*, Berlin, Gerlach, 2014, p. 271–273 criticizes the "scouring of heresiologies and scriptures to identify textual coincidences" and the use of these as a basis for arguing for the continuous histories of obscure groups.

95 Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Chronicle Part III, op. cit.*, p. 101–102, 112 (On the Melchizidekans and their later involvement with the Julianists); John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History Part Three* I. 30–1 (on the Tritheites) and V. 15 and 21 (on the Arians and other heretics).

96 PO 5: 324-25 (on Marcionites and Manichees).

97 Cf. Fisher and Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," *op. cit.*, p. 306–308 and Frank Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, c. 370–529*, 2 vols., Leiden, Brill, 1993, p. 171.

98 Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam, op. cit.*, p. 433–434 and now Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society and Simple Believers,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2018.

99 Lawrence Conrad, "Mawali and Early Arabic Historiography," in Monique Bernards and John Nawas, eds, *Patronage and Patronate in Early and Classical Islam*, Leiden, Brill, 2005, p. 412–413. Cf. Hoyland, "The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur'ān and their Inscriptions," in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed, *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2*, New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 111, on the weakness of the links between Jews in Arabia and those beyond, as attested in the epigraphy.

One aspect of the relatively unpoliced nature of Christianity in Arabia may be the kind of sympathetic anti-Trinitarianism that we find in parts of the Qur'ān.[100] Similar ideas can be found in the mouths of Christian aristocrats of northern Iraq and expressed in the hagiography of Thomas of Marga (writing in the mid ninth century, but describing the seventh).[101] Thomas is, of course, incredulous of the claims that these aristocrats might be "real" Christians, but this may be another example of the tension between symbolic and theological definitions of Christianity. Rather the statement that Jesus was a (perfect) man rather than God, though perhaps still messiah or God's word,[102] may be a symptom of open theological borders in which it was not necessary to join every dot or follow through on the theological implications of every statement. The presence of such ideas may reflect shifts brought about by the Arab conquest of Iraq and the political importance of Muslims in this environment. But the anecdote in Thomas should also alert us to the possibilities of skeptical reflection on a religious tradition without abandoning communal religious labels.

One text we have not looked at so far is the *Acta Arethae*, a mid-sixth-century Greek source that describes the martyrdoms that occurred under the Jewish king Dhū Nuwās at Najrān in 523. One passage in this text describes a theological debate at Ḥīra, which is reminiscent of the scene we have seen in the *Chronicle of Seert*.[103] It is striking for what it tells us about the role of anti-Trinitarian ideas in Arabia. It describes how Dhū Nuwās' envoy comes to al-Mundhir seeking the death of the Christians. At this point an envoy from the Church of the East ("Nestorian") catholicos Shila also arrives, and he urges the "orthodox" at the court of Ḥīra to accept the position that Jesus was a perfect man and not a God: "We are Persians and we know that the king of the Romans and his priests know that the Jews crucified a man and not a God." He does this, we are told, in order to please the Jews and pagans.[104]

I do not want to discuss here the interpolation of the reply of the "orthodox" to emphasize Roman orthodoxy and the "heresy of Nestorius", which are later developments in the text.[105] Suffice it to say that the original text imagined a confrontation between Miaphysites and members of the Church of the East but was

[100] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers, op. cit.*, p. 70 observes the possible role of non-Trinitarian Christians in the "believers' movement."

[101] Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors*, III.iii (p. 151/310). Note a similar example of the opposition to Christian anti-Trinitarianism in a ninth-century Arabic *Summa Theologica* in Sidney Griffith, "The First Christian Summa Theologica in Arabic: Christian *kalām* in Ninth-Century Palestine," in Michael Gervers and Ramzi J. Bikhazi, eds, *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 21–23.

[102] For Jesus as God's word in the Qur'ān, see Q 3: 45 and 4: 171. For Jesus as Messiah, Q 5: 72 and 9: 30. Segovia, *The Quranic Jesus*, *op. cit.*, p. 26 gives a useful survey of the many ways in which the Qur'an describes Jesus.

[103] Another version of the same disputation is also found in Ps. Zachariah of Mytilene VIII.3.

[104] *Acta Arethae*, § 26.

[105] Lucas Van Rompay, "The Martyrs of Najran: Some Remarks on the Nature of the Sources," in Jan Quagebeur, ed., *Studia P. Naster Oblata, II. Orientalia Antiqua*, Leuven, Peeters, 1982, p. 301–309; Maria Detoraki, *Le martyre de saint Aréthas et de ses compagnons (BHG 166)*, Paris, Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2007, p. 89–92.

later re-edited by a Chalcedonian. But I would like to highlight the fact that such ideas as the Jews' crucifixion of a man are similar to those expressed in the Qur'ān. And it is possible that they are included here as an accusation against Shila because there were Christians who did indeed make such claims. Again, we need not believe that the Church of the East as an institution preached such beliefs, only that there were individual members of that church who made such statements.

The Qur'ān and Christian Imagined Communities: The Case of Najrān

The hagiographies associated with Najrān deserve further comment, particularly in relation to links between Romans, Persians, and Ḥīrans in south Arabia and the reception of Christian narratives by Muslims.

Ḥīra appears to have enjoyed important ties with Najrān, where Miaphysite exiles fled in the 520s and came to embrace Julianism. It was here that Christians were engaged in a protracted struggle against a much more firmly established Jewish community;[106] this struggle became active persecution at several points in the late fifth century and culminated in a major pogrom in the 520s.[107] These events were rapidly disseminated around the Syriac-speaking world[108] and were discussed at length in several important dossiers of related Syriac texts that probably date to the mid-to-late sixth century.[109]

The Christian community that was massacred at Najrān was probably Miaphysite. A Church of the East community was present there in the Islamic period, possibly from as early as the late sixth century.[110] And authors from the Church of the East in the tenth century claimed the Najrān martyrs as examples of non-confessional Christian

[106] Iwona Gajda, "Quel monothéisme en Arabie du sud ancienne ?" in Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chattonet, and Christian Robin, eds, *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux V^e et VI^e siècles: regards croisés sur les sources,* Paris, Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2009, p. 107–122.

[107] Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, and Christian Robin, "La persécution des chrétiens de Nagrān et la chronologie himyarite," in *Aram*, vol. 11-12, 1999-2000, p. 15–83; Christian Robin, "Nagrān vers l'époque du massacre," in Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chattonet, and Christian Robin, eds, *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux V^e et VI^e siècles*, *op. cit.*, p. 39–106.

[108] Detoraki, *Le martyre de saint Aréthas et de ses compagnons*, *op. cit.*, p. 84–85.

[109] David Taylor, "A Stylistic Comparison of the Syriac Ḥimyarite Martyr Texts Attributed to Simeon of Beth Arsham," in Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chattonet, and Christian Robin, eds, *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux V^e et VI^e siècles*, *op. cit.*, p. 143–176. Though Q 85 is widely believed to refer to the martyrs of Najrān, this is unlikely: Manfred Kropp, "Comment se fait un texte et son histoire. L'exemple du Coran," in *Folia Orientalia*, vol. 53, 2016, p. 131–168.

[110] Gianfranco Fiaccadori, "Gregentius in the Land of the Homerites," in Albrecht Berger, ed, *Life and Works of Saint Gregentios, Archbishop of Taphar: Introduction, Critical Edition and Translation*, New York and Berlin, De Gruyter, 2006, p. 53. For the mission to Najrān under Timothy I (d. 832) see Fiey, *Pour un oriens christianus novus*, *op. cit.*, s.v. "Nagran"; and Fiaccadori, "Gregentius in the Land of the Homerites," *op. cit.*, p. 78–79.

martyrdom.[111] But we should probably read the accounts of these martyrdoms as illustrations of Najrān's importance in Christian self-fashioning, as an archetypal example of the prestige of Christians in the Muslim narrative universe, rather than as statements of fact. Indeed, as John of Ephesus observes, the Miaphysites of Najrān were (or became) Julianists not long after the massacres, and Christian Arabic authors used "Najranite" as a synonym for Julianist.[112] Even the dossiers of material that developed around the martyrs in the late sixth century skirt over many details of the confessional allegiance of Christians in southern Arabia: what they represented for Christians elsewhere was much more important.

The dossier of Syriac material comprises three texts that all deal with the martyrdoms. They include the *Book of the Himyarites* (a fragmentary hagiographic collection) and two letters that (spuriously) claim to derive from eyewitness accounts of the events, one of which is ascribed to Simeon beth Arsham. The *Acta Arethae* are a Greek account of the same events and also derive from a Syriac original.

I have discussed these texts elsewhere, so here I only highlight certain key features.[113] First, they all emphasize the opposition between Christians and Jews (and pagans). True Christians are identified as those willing to be martyred, and are differentiated from false Christians, such as one "Bar Mauhaba" from "Hirta d-Nuʿmān" who acts as an emissary for the Jewish king.[114] At points, the texts stress the international corollaries of this struggle, against the "pagan" Naṣrids. Second, several texts identify Najrān as a new Jerusalem, whether because it was made holy by the martyrs, or because of its conquest by the Ethiopian king Caleb, "the new Joshua."[115] Third, it is likely that all of these materials were intended for dissemination outside Arabia, probably in Mesopotamia and/or Palestine.[116]

[111] Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, "Recherche sur la tradition textuelle et manuscrite de la Lettre de Simeon de Beth Arsham," in Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chattonet, and Christian Robin, eds, *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux V^e^ et VI^e^ siècles*, *op. cit*., p. 123–142; Wood, *Chronicle of Seert*, *op. cit*., p. 249–256.

[112] Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Chronicle Part III, op. cit*., p. 102; Martin Jugie, "Gaianite," *Dictionnaire de l'histoire et géographie ecclésiastique*; Anastasius of Sinai, Patrologia Graeca 89: p. 296.

[113] Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, *op. cit*., ch. 7. However, my dating of these texts was often too early, and should be revised in the light of Taylor, "A Stylistic Comparison of the Syriac Ḥimyarite Martyr Texts Attributed to Simeon of Beth Arsham," *op. cit*. This is significant because the imagination of a Miaphysite commonwealth, while stimulated by events in the 520s, was primarily a feature of the second half of the sixth century, much closer in time to the writings of John of Ephesus. I also failed to discuss the earlier Miaphysite layer of the *Acta Arethae*, for which see Van Rompay "The Martyrs of Najran," *op. cit*.; Detoraki, *Le martyre de saint Aréthas et de ses compagnons*, *op. cit*.

[114] Axel Moberg, trans. *Book of the Himyarites*, Lund, 1924, § 7 (p. 7); *Shahid's Letter*, §44.

[115] *Acta Arethae* § 24 (p. 248); *Book of the Himyarites* §§ 43–47 (p. 46–54).

[116] Detoraki, *Le martyre de saint Aréthas et de ses compagnons*, *op. cit*., p. 96, discussing the *Acta Arethae*. Also see *Shahid's Letter* § 63, requesting that the account of the martyrs be sent to Peter of Apamea and Thomas of Germanicia.

We should also note certain key features that differentiate the texts from one another, most notable being the terms of their geopolitical (or geoconfessional) orientation.[117] The *Acta Arethae* embeds the events in Najrān in contemporary Roman ambitions in the Red Sea: in Najrān, Caleb would seem to be acting at the invitation of the Roman emperor Justin I, and with his military support.[118] In this imagining, the Miaphysite perspective of the *Acta*'s original Syriac source has been overlaid during its transmission into Greek and the Chalcedonian emperor becomes an unproblematic defender of all Christians.[119]

The geoconfessional orientation of the first of the two Syriac letters (Guidi's Letter) is rather different.[120] It opens with the reception of the envoys of Dhū Nuwās by the Naṣrid king al-Mundhir at Ramla. The king mocks the "orthodox" and announces that "the king whom the Cushites set up in the land is dead." Al-Mundhir tells the Christians: "Now forsake the religion of Christ. You have already heard what happened to those who do not deny Christ, how the king of the Himyarites killed and destroyed them and burnt their church…Your Christ has been rejected by Himyarites and Persians and Romans, do you not now reject Him?" The king's mockery is countered by an Arab Christian noble: "It was not in your time that we became Christians, but in the time of our fathers' fathers."[121] In this description, four states (Ḥīra, Persia, Rome, and Himyar) have all rejected (Miaphysite) Christianity. The "orthodox" protest the antiquity of their belief and confess their faith in public, just like the martyrs who refused the inducements of wealth to convert to Judaism.

The letter imagines Simeon writing to a network of Christian cities to oppose the Jews, who receive the help of the rabbis of Tiberias. Simeon writes to Caleb (by way of the patriarch of Alexandria), and to the "faithful" of Egypt, Antioch, Tarsus, and Caesarea: he hopes to prevent the persecutions by threatening the synagogues of the Roman world. In other words, the text imagines an international competition between the Jews and the Christians, but in this imagined geography there is no place for the Roman emperor. Instead Justin is removed and a Miaphysite commonwealth that has no link to any state is left in his place.[122]

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[117] After Phillippe Blaudeau, *Alexandrie et Constantinople: De l'histoire à la géo-ecclésiologie*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2006.

[118] In particular note the text's imagination of a "chain of command" from Justin to the patriarch of Alexandria to Caleb (§ 27, with Detoraki, *Le martyre de saint Aréthas et de ses compagnons*, *op. cit*., p. 258) and the gathering of the Red Sea fleet (§ 28).

[119] Detoraki, *Le martyre de saint Aréthas et de ses compagnons*, *op. cit*., p. 89, 94; Aleksandr A. Vasiliev, *Justin the First: An Introduction to the Epoch of Justinian the Great*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1950, p. 283–302.

[120] Shorter (and earlier) versions of this letter are found in John of Ephesus and Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene. See the useful stem diagram in Taylor, "A Stylistic Comparison of the Syriac Ḥimyarite Martyr Texts Attributed to Simeon of Beth Arsham," *op. cit*.

[121] *Guidi's Letter*, p. 508 (translated by Arthur Jeffery, "Christianity in Southern Arabia," in *The Muslim World*, vol. 36, 1946, p. 210).

[122] *Ibid*., p. 518 (Jeffery, "Christianity in Southern Arabia," *op. cit*., p. 215). A further variant on the same idea can be detected at the end of the second letter, where a Roman, a Najranite, a Persian, a Ḥīran, and a Cushite are listed among the martyred clergy: *Shahid's Letter* §63–64 (30–2).

Finally, the first letter's anti-Jewish feeling draws on a specific vein of West Syrian writing that accuses Christians of being Jews in order to denigrate them.[123] Thus statements such as "a king who behaves treacherously is no king,"[124] while addressed by a martyr to Dhū Nuwas, may also be intended as a comment on Justin I and Justinian's persecutions of Miaphysites, and as a way of setting up a parallel between the Chalcedonian emperors and the Jews. Christian priests in the Roman world are even accused of selling their churches to the Jews.[125]

The construction of Jews and Christians and the way in which they are placed in a wider geoconfessional context is worthy of some emphasis. The martyrdoms at Najrān were not only a popular subject for literary compositions in the Near East, but they also acted as a symbol for Jewish and Christian rivalry. Moreover, the fact that these took place far beyond the Roman frontier allowed Miaphysite writers to present them as a part of a wider Miaphysite commonwealth in which the surrounding states are agents of persecution, and allies of the Jews.

I certainly do not argue that any of these texts exerted a direct "genetic" influence on the Qur'ān. But I do think that they allow us to imagine a proto-Qur'anic milieu in which Christianity could be separated from Roman identity, and in which the commemoration of martyrdom played a key role in communal solidarity. The hagiographies also illustrate how events in Arabia might have a significance far beyond its borders and how Arabia might be seen as a promised land or as a site of persecution for a chosen people. Finally, these narratives also allows us to think of how anti-Jewish rhetoric (such as that found in the Qur'ān) might have originally marked intra-Christian, as well as extra-Christian boundaries.[126]

Conclusions

I have set out evidence here for the presence of Miaphysite and Dyophysite Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula and ascribed a major role to Ḥīra as a gateway for missions to the south. I have suggested the possibility that the contact zone between Syriac and

[123] E.g. Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Chronicle Part III, op. cit.*, p. 20–27 (for the Chalcedonian patriarch Paul "the Jew"); Wood, *We Have No King but Christ*, *op. cit.*, ch. 5; André De Halleux, "Die Genealogie des Nestorianismus nach der frühmonophysitischen Theologie," in *Oriens Christianus*, vol. 66, 1982, p. 1–14; André De Halleux, "Un fragment philoxénien inédit de polémique anti-chalcédonienne," in Wilhelmus C. Delsman et al, eds, *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für Prof. Mag. Dr. J.P.M. van der Ploeg O.P. zur Vollendung des siebzigsten Lebensjahres am 4. Juli 1979 überreicht von Kollegen, Freunden und Schülern*, Kevelaer, Germany, Butzon and Bercker, 1983, p. 431–441. Also Taylor, "A Stylistic Comparison of the Syriac Ḥimyarite Martyr Texts Attributed to Simeon of Beth Arsham," *op. cit.*, p. 168–169.

[124] *Guidi's Letter*, p. 509 (Jeffery, "Christianity in Southern Arabia," *op. cit.*, p. 211).

[125] *Guidi's Letter*, p.518 (Jeffery, "Christianity in Southern Arabia," *op. cit.*, p. 215).

[126] Compare Manfred Kropp, "Tripartite but anti-Trinitarian Formulas in the Qur'ānic Corpus, possibly pre-Qur'ānic," in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed, *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2*, *op. cit.*, p. 247–264, who sees anti-adoptionist slogans used for intra-Christian polemic at the root of Q 72:3 and Q 112.

Arabic was an area both where Arabic script might have been used and developed, and where proto-Qur'anic Christian material might have emerged and been disseminated. This might allow for the imagination of a religious community without reference to the great empires of the day, a community that emphasized true religion as a force that bound members of different ethnic groups together. It might have also provided a powerful anti-Jewish rhetoric, which would prove attractive in an environment where some Arabian groups identified with Judaism, such as in the Ḥijāz.[127] On the other hand, the Christianities of the world beyond the Roman frontier were not highly policed, and the emergence of anti-Trinitarian ideas in Christian contexts in Arabia is possible, especially for groups in contact with Jewish ideas.

[127] Accusations of the falsification of Scripture may also originate in Christian anti-Jewish polemic. Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam et le christianisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

History, Exegesis, Linguistics:
A Preliminary, Multi-Discipline Approach to Ibn Hishām (d. c. 215/830) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) on the Origins of Islam and the Qur'ān

☐ Ulrika MÅRTENSSON[1]

Q. 14 (*Ibrāhīm*): [1]

(1) *'aliflāmrā'* [This is] a writing (*kitāb*) which We have sent down to you so that you may lead the people from the shades of darkness to the light, by the will of their Lord, to the path of the Mighty Who is Praiseworthy!

(2) God is the one to Who belongs what is in the heavens and the land, so woe to those who reject enacting security:[2] beware a harsh punishment!

(3) Those who make dearer to themselves the nearest life over the here-beyond and divert from the duties towards God seeking to distort them, those have gone far astray!

[1] I thank Guillaume Dye and all the participants in the Nangeroni seminar for the opportunity to develop this article, and for their very helpful comments and discussions. Special thanks are also due to Mustafa Shah for his patient and generous guidance of an old newcomer to the field of early Arabic linguistics and exegesis.

[2] For this translation of *al-kāfirīn* as the opposite of *al-mu'minūn*, see Ulrika Mårtensson, "Prophetic Clarity: A Comparative Approach to al-Ṭabarī's Theory of Qur'ānic Language, Rhetoric, and Composition," in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 22, 2020, no. 1, p. 236–237, with further references to id., "The Persuasive Proof: A study of Aristotle's rhetoric and politics in the Qur'ān and al-Ṭabarī's commentary," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 34, 2008, p. 378–379; Nora S. Eggen, "Conceptions of Trust in the Qur'an," in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 13, 2011, no. 2, p. 61; and *Lisān al-'arab*, entry *'-m-n.*

(4) We have sent out no messenger with a message except in the language of his people so that he can convey clear distinctions to them; then God leads astray who He wishes and guides who He wishes, since He is the Mighty Who Judges Justly!

(5) Thus it was that We sent out Moses with a message with Our signs: "Bring your people out from the shades of darkness to the light, and honour them through God's glorious deeds!" Indeed, in that there are certainly signs for anyone steadfast and thankful!

The passage Q 14:1–5 illustrates some language- and semantics-related principles expressed in the Qur'ān, notably that it is a writing (*kitāb*), which God sends down to His messengers in the language of their peoples, and in an exposition with clear distinctions, so that the latter may understand the message. Consequently, the early exegetes elaborated on the connection between the writing and the language, including the so-called "isolated letters" or "isolated pronounced particles" (*ḥurūf muqaṭṭaʿa*) in verse 1.[3] In my translation of the verse, I have inserted a bracketed [This is] to show how al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), one of the historians and exegetes discussed in this article, explained these letters. In grammatical terms, introducing "This is" means that the "isolated pronounced particles" are understood as separate from the sentence that follows. Al-Ṭabarī referred *'aliflāmrā'* in Q 14:1 back to his exegesis of Q 2:1–2, which reads: (1) *'aliflāmmīm* (2) *dhālika al-kitābu lā rayba fīhi hudan li-l-muttaqīna*. Ṭabarī points out that some linguists interpreted *'aliflāmmīm* in verse 2:1 as representations of the letters in the Arabic alphabet, and which *dhālika al-kitāb* refer to in the sense of "*'aliflāmmīm* is that writing (…)".[4] However, Ṭabarī disagrees with this interpretation. In his view, verse 2 is a new sentence, with *dhālika al-kitāb* as *mubtada'*. Furthermore, he argues in concord with some other exegetes, the "isolated pronounced particles" in verse 1 and in all other instances, constitute particles drawn together to form a *word*, hence do not represent individual letters. This, he argued, is because they are part of the *sūra* and therefore of God's word, and God always intends to convey His intended meaning in language intelligible to the addressed people. God's intention with these "isolated pronounced particles" is to say that words have multiple semantic senses (*wujūh*), dependent on the context, unless a report from the Prophet decisively determines the meaning. Another plausible meaning, according to some exegetes with who Ṭabarī agreed, is that the "pronounced particles" are oaths sworn by God and abbreviations of His Names and Attributes (*al-qasam bi-Llāh wa-'asmā'ihi wa-ṣifātihi*).

[3] Since *ḥarf* refers to a letter as a whole particle, e.g. *lām* and not just a vocalised *l*, as in verse 14:1 (*'aliflāmrā'*), In a discussion about his choice to translate the term *sabʿat aḥruf* as "seven modes" (of reading the Qur'ān), Nasser argues that *ḥarf* (singular) probably means "manner of pronunciation"; see Shady Hekmat Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'ān: The Problem of Tawātur and the Emergence of Shawādhdh*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, p. 15–16. I therefore choose "isolated pronounced particles" as translation of *ḥurūf muqaṭṭaʿa*, to convey that *ḥarf* may refer to both the written particle and its pronunciation, and the isolation of these pronounced particles from the rest of the verse or the verses that follow them.

[4] Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, Ṣidqī Jamīl al-ʿAṭṭār, ed., 15 vols., Beirut, Dar al-Fikr, 1995; vol. 1, part 1, p. 132.

In this capacity, they serve as symbolical signals (*shiʿār*) and sometimes names for those *sūra*s of the divine *kitāb* that they introduce.[5]

"Back to the Sources!'"

Thus, Ṭabarī and the exegetes he referred to, deliberated the written forms and meaning of the Qur'ān with reference to the Arabic language: a well-known fact. My point here is that the example shows the exegetes used linguistics and semantic theory to explain a feature of the Qur'ān, and that they drew different conclusions though they referred to the same discipline and theory. Yet much of contemporary research does not consider accounts in the Islamic exegetical and historical sources as historically valid explanations of the Qur'ān and Islam, grounded in analytical and theoretical paradigms pertaining to disciplines.[6] One reason is that the sources in composed form date from the second/eighth century onwards, i.e. they can be seen as retrospective, and that they are "confessional," i.e. explain the Qur'ān in terms of divine revelation and prophecy. Instead, scholars propose the Bible and Jewish and Christian exegetical and "apocryphal" scriptures and literatures, communities, and sanctuaries, as the real historical contexts for the Qur'ān, given the Qur'ān's frequent references to "Biblical," and Jewish and Christian figures and literary motifs and concepts. The corresponding method is to identify parallel terms, topics, and genres between the Qur'ān and the other scriptural traditions. While this approach dates to the turn of century 1800–1900, it is currently developed in a more systematic manner than before, sometimes under the umbrella term "Late Antiquity approaches to Islam."[7]

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[5] *Ibid*., vol. 1, part 1, p. 136–140. For a survey of "Islamic" and Orientalist explanations of *al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿa*, see Mehmat Akif Koc, "A Chronological Study of al-Ḥurūf al-Muqaṭṭaʿa from the Beginning to the Present," in *Ilahiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi*, vol. 56, 2021, p. 42–43 on the point that Ṭabarī perceived them as Qur'anic homonyms.

[6] For example, regarding *al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿa*, one may compare Ṭabarī's treatment with the summary in Alford Welch, "al-Ḳur'ān", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. While Welch refers to some, mainly late exegetes, his overall thrust is to cite modern western scholars. Welch's own conclusion has been summed up by Devin Stewart in the following terms: "[T]he mysterious letters are part of the original text, […] they in some fashion represent the Arabic alphabet rather than provide initials or abbreviations of other names or words, […] they are associated with the Book or Scripture, which is in most cases mentioned in the text immediately following them, and […] they are intended to rhyme or provide assonance with the following verses"; see Devin Stewart, "The mysterious letters and other formal features of the Qur'ān in light of Greek and Babylonian oracular texts," in Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in its historical context 2*, New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 340. Stewart then expands on the letters' rhythmic and oracular function, which he explains in terms of the *sajʿ* of soothsayers (*kuhhān*); p. 323, 340. He concludes: "[T]he mysterious letters are evidently intended to represent a distinctive or archaic alphabet associated with a scripture that is closely tied to the Biblical tradition, exists on a supernatural plane, and serves as the ultimate source for the revelations of the Qur'ān" (p. 341). Thus, Stewart, like Welch, comes close to what Ṭabarī defined as the linguists' (incorrect, in his view) interpretation but without referring to these early exegetical debates. As we shall see below, Ṭabarī would also have disagreed with the identification of the Qur'ān with soothsaying. Regarding Koc's survey (see footnote 5 above), he concludes that the letters are attention-markers, and that similar abbreviations could be used in Arabic poetry to perfect rhyme (p. 44–45). However, consideration of the overall semantic theory that e.g. Ṭabarī developed, and within which he explained the letters as signifying homonymy, is not within the purview of his survey.

[7] See e.g. the volumes by Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, New York, Routledge, 2008; id., ed., *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*, *op. cit*.; and publications pertaining to the *Corpus Coranicum*

Within this broader approach, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook represented a radical method, using Christian and Jewish sources and certain accounts of the Prophet Muḥammad and the early conquests, to challenge the Islamic sources' dominant chronology and narrative. Crone and Cook launched the thesis that Islam arose as a messianic movement to conquer Palestine and Jerusalem, and that the Prophet Muhammad was alive at the conquest, ca. 635-40. They also relocated the birthplace of Islam from the Ḥijāz to the northern Arabian Peninsula and the areas adjacent to Syria/Palestine.[8] On the other hand, Robert Hoyland has argued that while evidence from non-Islamic sources adds valuable information and produces a more complex picture of the rise of Islam, it does not shatter the Islamic account, that Ḥijāz and Arab tribal culture, which included Christianity, Judaism, and polytheistic cults, was the primary context for the Prophet and his religious message.[9] Thus, one does not have to leave Ḥijāz to explain connections between the Prophet and e.g. Jews and Christians.

The problem addressed in this article is that whether researchers reject or pick selected information from the Islamic sources, they tend to overlook the sources' distinct *explanatory* frameworks.[10] I choose to explore these frameworks because I am

project, e.g. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, eds, *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, Leiden, Brill, 2010. An illustrative monograph is Emran Iqbal El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, New York, Routledge, 2014. See also the recent detailed surveys by Mustafa Shah, "Vocabulary of the Qur'an: Meaning in Context," in Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 294–314; and Marianna Klar, "Qur'anic Exempla and Late Antique Narratives," in Shah and Abdel Haleem, eds, *The Oxford Handbook*, *op. cit*., p. 128–139.

8 Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977. Stephen Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, represents an elaborated, systematic application of Crone's and Cook's approach to Jewish, Christian, and some Islamic traditions, to support the thesis that the Prophet led the initial conquest of Jerusalem, and that he lived a few years longer than the established chronology allows for. See Guillaume Dye's chapter in this volume, for another take on the Palestine-theses. At least parts of Q 19 (*Maryam*) are, according to Dye, more likely to have been written in the vicinity of the Byzantine Kathisma Church, located in Palestine between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, than in Ḥijāz, given the knowledge about specific Christian texts and liturgies that the scribe must have had. Dye argues that the scribal writing process took place after the Prophet's death (10AH/632AD), and he dis-connects some of the contents of the written canon from the Prophet.

9 Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, London, Routledge, 2001; id., *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of An Islamic Empire*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

10 For general surveys of historiographical frameworks, see Franz Rosenthal, "The Influence of the Biblical Tradition," in Bernard Lewis and Peter Malcolm Holt, eds, *Historians of the Middle East*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 35–45; id., *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden, Brill, 1968; Abd al-Aziz al-Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs*; Lawrence I. Conrad, ed. and transl., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983[1960]; Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic historical thought in the classical period*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994. For studies of specific historians and their frameworks, see Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "Two Pre-Modern Historians: Pitfalls and Opportunities in Presenting them to Moderns", in John U. Nef, ed., *Towards World Community*, The Hague, Dr. W. Junk N. V. Publishers, 1968, vol. 5, p. 53–68; Marilyn R. Waldman, *Towards a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1980; Ulrika Mårtensson, *The True New Testament: Sealing the Heart's Covenant in al-Tabari's History of the Messengers and the Kings*, Saarbrücken, GlobeEdit, 2015[2001]; id., "Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of al-Ṭabarī's History of the Messengers and the Kings ," in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 16, 2005, no. 3, p. 287–331; id., "'It's the Economy, Stupid!' Al-Ṭabarī's Analysis of the Free-Rider Problem in the Abbasid Caliphate," in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 54, 2011, p. 203–238; id., "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts for the Quran: Implications for Contemporary Research," in Sebastian Günther, ed., *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam: Religious Learning between Continuity and Change*,

interested in the continuities, rather than discontinuities, between pre-modern and modern scholarly disciplines.[11] I match this interest by a purpose-made definition of "religion" as symbols, which people believe refer to a transcendental Reality, and which they employ discursively to signify a social and institutional order.[12] Concretely, the definition means that I understand religious discourses and concepts as something, which people use, sometimes critically, to make specific points about institutional orders. Hence, I approach the early historians' uses of concepts as indicators of their explanations of what was wrong with the old order, and how the Prophet and the Qur'ān offer a new and better one.

Let me illustrate the definition with reference to canon production. The Hebrew Bible underwent a very long period of oral and written transmission, and crystallises around prophetic criticism of kingship, and idealisation of the written law, the core of which Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai.[13] The Christian New Testament implies an "oral beginning" with Jesus, and writing occurring at a stage when communities have emerged across the Roman Empire, taking the shape of Gospels and Epistles, produced between *ca*. 50 and *ca.* 120 AD. Chronologically, some Epistles are earlier than some Gospels, i.e. the written narrations and testimonies to Jesus' life and mission, and both genres criticise the institutions of the law and rituals associated with Moses. In some accounts, the Gospels developed diachronically according to the logic of "simplest first" (Mark) and "more complex later". The Roman canon was formalised in the late 300s AD.

Even though the Qur'ān refers to "Biblical" persons and topics in a way that suggests the Bibles are the foremost models for thinking about its production as canon, the history of religions offers other heuristic models, including so-called New Religious Movements.[14] For example, L. Ron Hubbard (d. 1986) wrote *Dianetics* as a critique of the established sciences of psychiatry and psychology, and then he developed Scientology as an organisation offering personal development.[15] The order of events being that Hubbard first wrote *Dianetics*, and then the organisation of Scientology developed from his writings, not the New Testament way with a preacher, then a community, then writings. Another modern example is Bahā'ullāh (d. 1892), a

Leiden, Brill, 2020, vol. 1, p. 315–353; and for a critique of dominant Orientalist chronology and historiography, and a survey of three different histories written in Persian and dating between 1490 and 1540 AD, see Shahzad Bashir, "On Islamic Time: Rethinking Chronology in the Historiography of Muslim Societies," in *History and Theory*, vol. 53, 2014, p. 519–544.

11 On historiography, religion, and academic continuities and discontinuities, see Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, Tom Conley, transl., New York, Columbia University Press, 1988[1975].

12 Mårtensson, *The True New Testament*, *op. cit*., p. 22.

13 Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 2007.

14 For more sophisticated use of new religious movements as heuristic tools in religious studies, see Ingvild Sælid Gilhus and Steven J. Sutcliffe, "Conclusion: New Age Spiritualities – 'Good to Think' in the Study of Religion", in Gilhus and Sutcliffe, eds, *New Age Spirituality*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 256–262.

15 W. Vaughn McCall, "Psychiatry and Psychology in the Writings of L. Ron Hubbard," in *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 46, 2007, no. 3, p. 437–447.

claimant to the role "al-Bāb" or the precursor to the Twelver Shiite Messiah al-Mahdī. Bahā'ullāh criticised the Iranian Twelver Shiite institutional leadership and messianic doctrine, accusing them of being unable to adapt to the modern era. Al-Bāb produced writings, out of which grew the Bahā'ī faith. Sikhism, on the other hand, started as Guru Nanak's (d. 1539) perceived need to bridge Hinduism and Islam in the Indian context. Guru Nanak composed hymns of wisdom, and was succeeded by ten Gurus, who all contributed to the emerging collection of hymns and teachings, which gradually took written form as the "Sikh canon," Guru Granth Sahib. Structurally speaking, then, Jesus in relation to the New Testament canon is more similar to Moses in the Hebrew Bible and Guru Nanak's relationship with Guru Granth Sahib than to either of the other two cases.

These examples suggest that the founder produces a writing if the context of the founder is one in which writing is *both* the ideal and technically possible. In the case of the Prophet, the Islamic sources insist on the *written* character of his *divine* communication, and the term *kitāb* indeed occurs across the Qur'ānic canon.[16] Following my definition of "religion," this conceptualisation of the divine communication can be seen as a symbolical indication that "writing" in the Qur'ān and the Islamic sources signifies specific institutions.

Yet the Islamic sources also contend that the Prophet could not himself read or write – a symbol of the divine origin of his message – and that it was the Caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (r. 644–656 AD) who ordered the canon produced. Dictation and writing were however institutionalised in the context in which the Prophet established his religion, and he employed scribes for his correspondence and, as we shall see, for writing down his divine messages.[17] According to the Arabic lexicon *Lisān al-ʿarab*, composed by the Mamlūk scribe and judge Ibn Manẓūr (d. 712/1312), at the Prophet's time the scribes of the Arabs were from the city of al-Ṭā'if, just east of Mecca. They had learned their trade (*al-kitāba*) from a scribe from the Lakhmid capital al-Ḥīra in south-west Iraq, who in his turn had trained in the adjacent region of al-Anbār.[18] This information establishes a relationship between the regions of Ḥijāz and southern Iraq, centred on the scribal trade. I will pursue this regional relationship further below, as I attempt to define the institutional references of *kitāb*.

[16] An in-depth study showing the occurrence of *kitāb* across the whole Qur'ān is Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'ân's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, though Madigan argues that *kitāb* refers not to a written text but to oral discourse, similarly to the rabbinical concept "the oral Torah" or Plato's *logos*. For analysis of *kitāb* as referring to written text, in the particular contractual sense that writing imposes binding obligations and rights, see Gregor Schoeler, "Writing and Publishing: On the Use and Function of Writing in the First Centuries of Islam," in *Arabica*, vol. 44, 1997, no. 3, p. 423–435; Matthias Radscheit, "I'jâz al-Qur'ân im Koran?" in Stefan Wild, ed., *The Qur'an as Text*, Leiden, Brill, 1996, p. 113–123; Mårtensson, "The Persuasive Proof," *op. cit.*; id., "Al-Ṭabarī's Concept of the Qur'ān: A Systemic Analysis," in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 18, 2016, no. 2, p. 9–57. In this sense, *kitāb* is intrinsically connected with the reading-related term *qur'ān*.

[17] On written contracts among Quraysh in pre-Islamic time, and the Kaʿba's function as place for concluding and storing contracts, see Schoeler, "Writing and Publishing," *op. cit*., p. 424–425.

[18] See *Lisān al-ʿarab* Online (www.alwaraq.net), the root (*ʾ-m-m*), p. 198.

The above-quoted passage Q 14:1-5 suggests divine *kitāb* ensures clarity of speech, especially regarding distinctions between categories and terms.[19] The same connection between clear speech and legal obligations occurs across the canon, for example Q 3:75-81. Here, the idea also appears, that "taking other lords besides God" makes a person an unreliable contract partner, which suggests a semantic connection between linguistic/discursive clarity of terms, writing, and contractual reliability, symbolised by God and His Covenant (see also Q 7:169-173).[20] The doctrinal critique thus appears to dovetail with the problem of potentially unreliable contract partners.

Against this background, I will address the question what the concept "divine writing" symbolises, in terms of historical institutional references, in Ibn Hishām's biography (*Sīra*) of the Prophet and al-Ṭabarī's "universal history" and Qur'ān commentary. I will show how these historians offer distinct perspectives on history and the Qur'ān, depending on focus and methodological choices, and how this circumstance aligns them with modern researchers. I have structured the analysis with reference to three disciplines: history, Qur'ān exegesis, and linguistics.[21]

History

One contemporary historian who has explored the earliest historical works in terms of methodological and topical differences is ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī (d. 2010). According to Duri, the Qur'ān introduces a new concept of history among the Arabs, compared with the dominant local records of royal institutions and writing, poetry, and local tribal lore (*'ayyām*) in south and north Arabia. The Qur'ān presents itself as the continuation and completion of a history of prophecy, and offers a model for human history and society, which transcends local histories.[22] Duri also observed that even though all historians unanimously recognized the Qur'anic claim to represent the same prophecy institution that produced the Biblical scriptures and the Jewish and Christian religions, their methods and concerns differed. He assessed that the earliest historians were from Medina, notably ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/712) and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741). Their historical method mirrored legal *ḥadīth* methodology, and their principal focus was the Prophet's campaigns and administrative issues related to the *'umma*, i.e. the Islamic polity. Other historians, notably the Yemenite judge Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 110/728), instead employed *qiṣaṣ* accounts and *'isrā'īliyyāt* and focused on Creation, prophetic history, and Biblical-Jewish-Christian models

[19] Mårtensson, "Prophetic Clarity," *op. cit.*, p. 225–237.

[20] On the contractual significance of the canonised *written* Qur'ān understood as a continuation of general ancient paradigms, including the Hebrew Bible as well as pre-Islamic Arabic practices, see Schoeler, "Writing and Publishing", *op. cit.*, esp. p. 430.

[21] Here I am further developing results from Mårtensson, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit.*, by adding language and the Ḥijāz-Iraq relationship to the analysis.

[22] Al-Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing*, *op. cit.*, p. 20ff.; 74; cf. Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims*, Princeton, The Darwin Press, 1995, p. 217.

of legitimacy for the Prophet.[23] On this basis, Duri concluded that Qur'ān-based historical writing started first with the *ḥadīth*-oriented 'Medina school,' and that the more systematically 'Biblicizing' historical approach was slightly later and from another region. Furthermore, and again using the 'Medina school' as contrast, Duri also identified an 'Iraqi school,' which developed in the newly established garrison cities Kūfa and Baṣra. Where the 'Medina school' focused on the Prophet's *'umma*, the 'Iraqi school' wedded the *'umma*'s affairs to genealogy and local tribal affairs. Thus, the 'Iraqi school' integrated the pre-Islamic local and tribal histories into Islamic history, in the new form of Islamic *'ayyām* narrations and *'akhbār*. While all three cities – Medina in Ḥijāz, and Kufa and Basra in Iraq – were equally important cultural centres in the first Islamic centuries, 'the Islamic perspective' nevertheless originated in the Medina school, Duri argued.[24] In subsequent *sīra* and universal history, the three early approaches – the 'Medina school,' the 'Biblicizing school,' and the 'Iraqi school' – co-existed, though different historians emphasized different sources, methods, and topical concerns. At this point, Persian and other non-Arab historical records are also important. It is to this integrated stage that both Ibn Hishām's edition of Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīra* and Ṭabarī's universal history belong.[25] In Duri's view, Ṭabarī's history in particular reflects the 'Medina school's' *ḥadīth* methodology and source-criticism, though within the full topical range of universal history, i.e. including the sources and concerns of the 'Biblicizing school' and the 'Iraqi school,' as well as Persian historical records.[26]

Uri Rubin and Gerald Hawting offer an alternative historiographical chronology to Duri. Based on a study of isolated *ḥadīth* and *khabar*, Rubin has argued that reports constructing the Prophet's legitimacy first used Biblical models, and later adopted Islamic models related to Arabian polytheism.[27] Focusing on the Qur'ān itself, Hawting has concluded that Qur'anic polemic against *shirk* ("to associate something with God") refers to Christological doctrine, and that it is the later historical traditions that explain this Qur'anic polemic as referring to Arabian polytheism.[28]

Both Rubin's and Hawting's analysis imply that the early community developed from one stage ("Bible"/"Jews and Christians") to another ("Arabian polytheism"), reflecting the gradual emergence of a firm Arab-Islamic communal identity from a more fluid

[23] Al-Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing*, *op. cit*., p. 24–30; on Wahb b. Munabbih, also ch. 3. Also on the Qur'ān as starting point of subsequently diverse historiographical frames, Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, *op. cit*.

[24] Al-Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing*, *op. cit*., p. 137; see also ch. 2, "Origins of the Historical School of Medina: ʿUrwa–al-Zuhrī," and ch. 4, "Origins of the Historical School of Iraq: Its Rise and Development Until the Third Century A.H."

[25] *Ibid*., p. 33–37, 149–150, and ch. 5.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 150, 159.

[27] Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, *op. cit*., p. 217ff.

[28] Gerald Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemics to History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

one, close to Jews and Christians.[29] Duri's approach rather suggests a development, where historians from different regions developed different approaches. Hence, with Duri's perspective, representations of "origins" reflect methodology and region, because the polity's Arab-Islamic identity was distinct from other communities already with the Qur'ān and the outset of historical writing. This perspective would explain why Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) in his universal history employed both "Biblical" and "Arab" materials in his reports about the Prophet, even though by his time, the Biblical model should have been outdated as mode for conceptualising the Islamic Prophet, if we assume that "Biblical" models reflect early, fluid community boundaries, rather than methodology. The fact that Ṭabarī's structure was followed by e.g. Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) in *al-Kāmil fī al-ta'rīkh*, also shows it continued to be relevant.

Extrapolating from Duri it can be argued that the early historians conceived of prophecy and "writing" as institutions of wide regional and cultural occurrence, including but not limited to the Biblical scriptures and the Jewish and Christian traditions.[30] Franz Rosenthal's concept of Islamic historiography as the continuation of Near Eastern genres of education for rulers might support such a view. If we assume, with Duri, that the Qur'ān was the starting point of Islamic historiography, Rosenthal's approach implies that the historians conceived of Qur'anic prophecy as "education for rulers." Viewed from this perspective, historians who draw on the Qur'ān can be seen as offering critical counsel through narratives about prophets and the Prophet.[31]

Particularly relevant to this perspective is Steven Humphreys' observation that al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 283/897), Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), and al-Masʿūdī (d. 344/956), shaped their historical narratives according to the Qur'anic pattern of "Covenant, Betrayal, and Redemption." But where Yaʿqūbī and Masʿūdī are pro-ʿAlid and describe the Muslim community as having intractably betrayed the Prophet's Covenant (*mīthāq*) and "fallen in sin," Ṭabarī views the community as morally capable and treats Betrayal as a constant trial. However, according to Humphreys, all three historians treat the Qur'anic Covenant as representing a radical break with the political and religious past, i.e. not as a symbol integrating the Israelite, the Arab, the Roman, and the Persian

[29] Viewed in this way, Rubin's and Hawting's conclusions converge with the analysis of Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, MA., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 71–74, 194–196 *et passim*; see also Mårtensson, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit*., p. 335, for a critical assessment of Donner.

[30] See Geo Widengren's writings on the near-Eastern pattern "The Apostle of God and the Heavenly Book," in *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book (King and Saviour III)*, Uppsala, Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1950; id., *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension*, Uppsala, Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1955; and Stewart, "Mysterious letters," *op. cit.*

[31] Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, *op. cit*., p. 88f., 129. For this method applied to Ṭabarī and post-Ṭabarī historians, see Hodgson, "Two Pre-Modern Historians," *op. cit.*; Waldman, *Towards a Theory of Historical Narrative*, *op. cit.*; Mårtensson, "Discourse and Historical Analysis", *op. cit.*; "It's the Economy, Stupid!," *op. cit*.; and idem, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit*., on political-economic lessons for rulers and administrators. See also Bashir, "On Islamic Time," *op. cit.*, p. 530–542, even though emphasis in that study is not primarily on the Qur'ān and the Prophet.

Sassanian histories into the Islamic history.[32] Similarly, Hoyland too claims that Muslim historians established "a clean break" between the Prophet and Islam, and the region's political legacies.[33] On the contrary, and in agreement with Tarif Khalidi, I have previously showed that Ṭabarī through his historical discourse established Islam, the Prophet, and the Muslim Caliphs in continuity with preceding religious and political history.[34] Aiming at providing empirically grounded education and advice for the Abbasid administration, Ṭabarī analysed the outcomes of different models of imperial administration and taxation and plotted the Prophet and the Caliphs within this wider regional *administrative* framework. The key concepts by which he integrated especially Persian, but also Israelite, Arab, and some Roman political history with Islam was the Covenant (*mīthāq*) and writing (*kitāb*). With reference to this historical framework, I have argued, Ṭabarī defined Covenant as signifying a social contract, whose first *historical* manifestation was the Persian imperial legacy and its specific system of vassalage.[35] This social contract-based view of Covenant in the Qur'ān and Islamic historiography connects the Qur'ān with the Biblical Covenant tradition as well as with Persian and Arabic pre-Islamic cultures, whose sources abound with terms related to contract and covenant.[36]

This perspective on Covenant as a symbol of social contract aligns with studies which show the wide geographical expanse of the pre-Islamic Arab civilisation, which encompassed the entire Arabian Peninsula and the Mesopotamian and Syrian hinterlands, and interacted with at least three major regional powers: Rome, Persia, and Aksum (Ethiopia).[37] The Arabs who identified with the Qur'ān would thus have been in touch with several different polities and religious traditions simultaneously, which might explain why the Qur'ān effortlessly (re-)universalises prophets and concepts recognisable from the Bible, including Covenant: these are already part of a wider Arab cultural and linguistic universe.[38] Since Ḥijāz was as much part of

[32] R. Stephen Humphreys, "Qur'anic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography," in Frank M. Clover and R. Stephen Humphreys, eds, *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, p. 273f.

[33] Hoyland, *God's Path*, *op. cit.*, p. 4f.

[34] Khalidi, *Arabic historical thought*, *op. cit.*, esp. p. 78–79.

[35] Mårtensson, "Discourse and Historical Analysis"; id., *Tabari*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 55–56 *et passim* (Part 3); id., "It's the Economy, Stupid!," *op. cit.*; id., "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit*. On the system of vassalage, see Abbas Vali, *Pre-capitalist Iran: A Theoretical History*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1993.

[36] On Persian contractual concepts, see Parvaneh Pourshariati, "The Ethics and Praxis of Mehr and Mithras and the Social Institution of the *'ayyar*s in the Epic Romance of *Samak-e 'ayyar*," in *Journal of Persianate Studies*, vol. 6, 2013, p. 15–38. On Arab contracts and Qur'anic Covenant, their royal and political significance, and Near Eastern parallels, see Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, ch. 1–2. On the historical background and legal implications of Qur'anic Covenant, see Rosalind Ward Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an: God's arguments*, London, Routledge, 2004; Mårtensson, "The Persuasive Proof," *op. cit.*; id., "al-Ṭabarī's Concept of the Qur'ān."

[37] Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, *op. cit.*; Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads*, London, Routledge, 2003.

[38] Ulrika Mårtensson, *Divine Covenant: Science and Concepts of Natural Law in the Qur'an and Islamic Disciplines*, Sheffield, Equinox, 2022, ch. 3, 4 and 5.

this conceptual universe as any other region, the occurrence of Biblical and Jewish-Christian concepts and themes in the Qur'ān does not necessitate origins outside of Ḥijāz, or within Judaism or Christianity. Such literary features can be explained as commonly known tools employed rhetorically to shape the distinct identity of the Qur'anic creed and community.[39] Against this background, I will sketch how Ibn Hishām and Ṭabarī contextualised the Prophet, the Qur'ān, and the religious message, within the discipline of history and the two genres of the Prophet's biography (*sīra*) and the universal history and chronicle (*ta'rīkh*).

Ibn Hishām: The Prophet's Biography

Ibn Hishām (d. c. 215/830) was a historian, famous also for his knowledge of genealogy and grammar. His extant works include a history of South Arabian royal dynasties, and his edition of Ibn Isḥāq's (d. 150/767) biography of the Prophet, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*.[40] Ibn Hishām sets the Prophet's mission against the background of the intense wars between Byzantium and the Sassanid, Persian Empire, and their allies, and their repercussions in Ḥijāz. In religious, symbolical terms, the account defines the Prophet's mission and the Qur'ān as a message about Abrahamic divine Oneness. Abraham is connected with Mecca and the Kaʿba sanctuary through the myth that he founded the Kaʿba, while his son Ismail discovered the Zamzam well, and was buried within the sacred precinct (*ḥijr*).[41] The Prophet's genealogy is traced from Quraysh back to Adam, via Abraham and Ismail. This Abrahamic-Qurayshite genealogy includes the Qur'anic peoples of ʿĀd and Thamūd and the Yemenite Ḥimyar.[42] According to genealogists who Ibn Hishām relied upon, including one Abū Bakr (whose precise identity is not given), the king of al-Ḥīra, al-Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir, was a descendant of this line through Qunuṣ b. Maʿadd, while others said he descended from the Lakhm of the Yemenite Rabīʿa b. Naṣr. In either case, al-Nuʿmān is here included in Quraysh's wider genealogy.[43]

According to Ibn Hishām's narrative, the Quraysh had once followed Abraham's religion of divine Oneness and its rituals, but slipped into worshipping stone idols, which they erected around the Kaʿba.[44] One of the things associated with the Kaʿba is its status as sanctuary, in the sense that no intentional killing or conflict was allowed there, even in the time of paganism.[45] The good sides of Quraysh are the contractual pacts that they entered, especially "the pact of the Fuḍūl" (*ḥilf al-fuḍūl*), about which

[39] MÅRTENSSON, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit*., p. 318–323; here I draw on Sidney GRIFFITH, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'an: The 'Companions of the Cave' in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian tradition," in REYNOLDS, ed., *The Qur'an in its historical context*, *op. cit*., p. 109–137; p. 114–116, 131.

[40] W. Montgomery WATT, "Ibn Hishām," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

[41] Alfred GUILLAUME, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 4, 45, 85, 87.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 3–4.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 35–36.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 46–47.

it is said that the Prophet himself had spoken approvingly. The tribes of Quraysh had entered a covenant that if anyone of them, even those from outside Mecca, had been wronged the others would take his part against the aggressor and return his property to him.[46] The king in al-Ḥīra in southwest Iraq would have been part of the pact, given the explicit point made about his genealogical relationship with Quraysh. This is the same al-Ḥīra that *Lisān al-ʿArab*'s author Ibn Manẓūr identified as the place where the Ḥijāzī scribes came from (see above, on *kitāb*).

The virtue associated with contractual pacts and covenants is in line with how Ibn Hishām's narrative about the Prophet connects his Abrahamic message about divine Oneness with notions of justice and deliverance from inter-tribal conflict social and tribal hierarchies, including the freeing of slaves who profess the creed.[47] Consequently, the Prophet's message is also described as enabling those who have faith in it to defeat Rome and Persia and gain fortune in this world.[48] These connotations of political unity and social solidarity in a time of great conflicts are manifest also in the report about the famous Medina contract, where the Prophet unites in one written contract (*kitāb*) the migrants from Mecca and the helpers from Medina, with some of the Jewish tribes of Medina. Much like *ḥilf al-fuḍūl*, the contract protects the parties' religion and property, grants them right to equal shares in war booty, and protection, in exchange for loyalty to the contract and joint participation in *jihād* against external aggressors.[49] The Prophet's *kitāb* differs from *ḥilf al-fuḍūl*, however, in that it is founded on recognition of the Prophet's leadership first and foremost. As such, it aligns in principle with subsequent Islamic polities and social contract, which included a range of peoples and religious communities.

While Ibn Hishām localises the Prophet to Ḥijāz, he contextualises his mission with reference to the Prophet's and his Companions' attempts to persuade not only Quraysh but also Ethiopian Monophysite Christians from Aksum, and the Aksum-loyal Monophysite community in Najrān, of the virtue of divine Oneness over polytheism and over the wrong kind of Christology, apparently identified with Monophysite doctrine.[50] The divine mission itself, first sent down in the form of verses Q 96:1-5, is identified in terms of four categories: (1) as the fulfilment of a prophecy from the Gospel of John about "the Comforter," referred to by the Syriac term *munaḥḥemana*; (2) as the restoration of the Abrahamic doctrine; and (3) as "the law (*nāmūs*) that came

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 57–58. The connection of this confederacy with the Prophet is expressed also in a report about a conflict between the Ṣufyānid governor of Medina and al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, where the latter invokes the obligations of the confederacy and the former immediately grants him his right.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 56, 82, 112, 143ff., 194, 198ff.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 231ff.; see also Mårtensson, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit.*, p. 331–332.

[50] C. Jonn Block, "Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam with Implications for the English translation of '*Thalātha*' in Qur'ān 4.171 and 5.73," in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 23, 2012, no. 1, p. 50–75.

to Moses before."[51] It is also equated with (4) "the divine guidance of the religion of Jesus son of Mary" (*al-sharīʿa min dīn ʿĪsā b. Maryam*). The latter is described as the true form of Christianity that came to Najrān, a city adjacent to Ḥijāz in the south, with an ascetic from Syria, but which was subsequently corrupted by the Byzantine creed, as represented in Najrān and in Aksum, and it was this corrupted form of Christology that the Prophet and the Companions polemicized against.[52] It is interesting that this true, originally Syrian form of Christianity or "Jesus' *sharīʿa*" is associated with the Prophet's message, given Holger Zellentin's thesis that the Qur'ān engages with Jacobite law.[53] According to Manfred Kropp, it was actually the case that Arabia (Najrān) was Christianised by missionaries from Syria.[54] Equally important is the fact that when the *Sīra* begins the longer narration of the Prophet's mission as the restoration of Abraham's religion, it describes a group of "seekers of Abraham's true religion" with backgrounds within polytheism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism (*majūs*). Together with some Jews, these were the first individuals who recognised the Prophet's message as the true Abrahamic religion.[55] Hence, polytheists, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians all feature in the immediate context of the Prophet and legitimise his mission, as opposed to most of Quraysh who persisted in idol worship.

As mentioned, the political backdrop of these religious polemics is empires and their allies around and on the Arabian Peninsula: Zoroastrian Sassanid Persia, with its vassal kingdom of first polytheist then Nestorian Lakhm in al-Ḥīra in Iraq; Roman Orthodox Byzantium and its Syrian Jacobite allies; and the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum and the bishopric of Najrān. The Prophet and his Companions are *politically* friendly towards the polities of Aksum and Najrān, but reject their Christological *doctrine*. The Companion and eventually Caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (r. 644-656) was among those of the Prophet's Companions who sought asylum in Aksum from the hostile Quraysh. The support from Aksum, and the conversion of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, strengthened the Prophet in Mecca. But while in Aksum, the Companions read out verses from Q 3, 5 and 19 to the king of Aksum, criticising his Christology but thanking him for his hospitality.[56] In this way, Ibn Hishām portrays sections of the Qur'ān as a message to rulers about Abrahamic divine Oneness as the source of truly

[51] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, *op. cit.*, p. 103–104 on *munaḥḥemana* and Abrahamic religion; p. 107 on Moses' *nāmūs*. The report on Q. 96:1–5 and on Moses' *nāmūs* is transmitted by ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, Duri's earliest "Medina school" historian. See also Mårtensson, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit*., p. 328–331.

[52] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, *op. cit.*, p. 14–16; 'the law of Jesus son of Mary' on p. 16; Mårtensson, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit*., p. 333–334.

[53] Holger Zellentin, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as Point of Departure*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2013.

[54] Manfred Kropp, "Beyond single words: *Mā'ida–Shaytān–jibt* and *tāghūt*: Mechanisms of transmission into the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) Bible and the Qur'ānic text", in Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

[55] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 93–103. For a closer examination of the first Zoroastrian, then Christian Salmān al-Fārisī, see Sarah Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory and Conversion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 62–66; Savant interprets the traditions rather as strategies to incorporate Persians and "Iran" into Islam, than as information about the Prophet's time and context.

[56] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, *op. cit.*, p. 30–34 (political background), 146–59 (Companions in Aksum).

legitimate rule.[57] He thereby places some of the Qur'anic Christological polemics in the context of Ethiopian and Arabian Monophysitism. Regarding one such instance, Kropp has observed that the title of Q. 5, *al-Mā'ida*, is a term attested in Ethiopian Christian vocabulary, notably in a fourth century homily whose topics appear also in Q 5:111-15. He also points out that since Ethiopian parallels in the Qur'ān occur in *sūra*s from Medina, i.e. after the migration to Aksum, the migration may have been a historical transmission mechanism.[58]

The Jews of Medina play another role. Some of the city's Jewish tribes are party to the Prophet's contract (*kitāb*), as mentioned above. Hostilities broke out when, as I understand it, some of the Jewish tribes who were party to the contract and some who were not, colluded with the Prophet's enemies to bring him down.[59] Thus, the Jews represent the doctrinal problem of loyalty to pacts. Michael Lecker has interesting information from the geographer Ibn Khurradādhbih (d. c. 300/912), that two powerful Jewish tribes of Medina, al-Qurayẓa and al-Naḍīr, were tax collectors for the Sassanids until the mid-500s, i.e. they served as agents for the Persian Empire. In the later quarter of the 500s, which coincides with the Prophet's youth, they were instead subjected to taxation by an Arab king of the Khazraj (i.e. the Prophet's eventual supporters in Medina), who was appointed by the Lakhmid king in al-Ḥīra until he was in turn killed by the Sassanid Shah in the early 600s.[60] The *Sīra* does not mention this tax-administrative relationship between Ḥijāz and al-Ḥīra. Nevertheless, Ibn Hishām created a genealogical and contractual connection between the two regions through the Abrahamic-Quraysh line and the defence-pact, as mentioned above. The pact would therefore have committed its members to defend the Lakhmid king. By comparison, Ṭabarī's history highlights relations between Ḥijāz and al-Ḥīra, due to its broader framework.

Al-Ṭabarī: The Prophet in "universal history"

Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) main discipline was *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and he founded his own, independent *madhhab jarīrī* or "*jarīrī* methodology," named after his father Jarīr. He can rightly be characterised as a multidisciplinary scholar, who wrote works within *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *tafsīr* and *qirā'āt*, *ḥadīth*, *ta'rīkh*, and *adab*.[61] His *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, or "The History of the Messengers and the Kings," represents the genre of the universal history and chronicle of rulers and prophets. In Duri's view, Ṭabarī wrote universal history as the expression of God's will, enacted by prophets

[57] *Ibid*, p. 154–155.

[58] Kropp, "Beyond single words," *op. cit*., p. 210–213.

[59] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, *op. cit*., p. 231–235, 242ff.

[60] Michael Lecker, "The Levying of Taxes for the Sassanians in pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 27, 2002, p. 109–126.

[61] On Ṭabarī's life and works, see Franz Rosenthal, "General Introduction", *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume I: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, New York, SUNY Press, 1989, p. 5–154; Claude Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue et théologie en islam: l'exégèse coranique de Tabari (m. 310/923)*, Paris, J. Vrin, 1990, ch. 1–2.

and kings.[62] Thus, the history starts with God's Creation of the world and historical time, proceeds to treat the histories of Persian (in the broad sense), Israelite, Roman, and Arab kings, interspersed with prophets, up until the Prophet Muḥammad. In the section from Creation to the Prophet, the Persian king-lists provide the backbone for the chronology, since there is no common calendar for that period, only several conflicting ones. After the Prophet's migration (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina in the year 622, the history becomes a proper chronicle, structured year by year, following the Islamic calendar.[63] Topically, however, the pre-Islamic and Islamic sections of the history are connected, as discussed above.

Like Ibn Hishām, Ṭabarī provided the Prophet with the Abrahamic-Qurayshī genealogy. The Kaʿba and the ritual of the *ḥajj* also play an important role in the whole outline of the history. Here Adam, the first man, establishes the place of the Kaʿba, while Abraham and Ismail establish the detailed pilgrimage ritual, which the Quraysh corrupted through idol worship, and the Prophet eventually restored. More precisely, Ṭabarī defined the Abrahamic divine election as receiving "writings made to descend" (*kutub munzala*) from God, which contain "persuasive just rulings" (*ḥikam bāligha*); these of course include the Qurʾān.[64] Since *balāgha* is the Arabic term for rhetoric, the adjective *bāligha* implies that the Abrahamic writings are rhetorical in nature, persuasive because they demonstrate the justice of the divine message. Subsequently, in the account of the Prophet's first revelation, Ṭabarī, like Ibn Hishām, cites reports about it being identical with "the *nāmūs* that came to Moses."[65] Since Ṭabarī's history also includes reports about Moses, it is possible to compare the depictions of Moses and the Prophet. One of several traits and activities they have in common is that they are both law-giver prophets.[66]

However, Ṭabarī shows much less doctrinal interest in the Monophysite Ethiopian and Najrān contexts of the Prophet than Ibn Hishām. He was also less concerned with the Jews of Medina. In fact, he never even mentioned the Medina contract. Instead, he explored at length the relationship between the Persian Sassanids, their Arab vassals Lakhm in al-Ḥīra, and the Quraysh in the Ḥijāz, to which Ibn Hishām only alludes. Ṭabarī explicitly connects the Prophet's religious mission with the rise of the Northern Arabs against the Sassanids, due to the Sassanids violating their social contract with the kingdom of Lakhm.[67] The cause of this – with Humphreys' term – Betrayal of

[62] Al-Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing*, *op. cit.*, p. 150, 159.

[63] On time and calendars in Ṭabarī's history, see Mårtensson, *Tabari*, *op. cit.*, p. 75–76, 100, 104–106.

[64] William Brinner, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume II: Prophets and Patriarchs*, New York, SUNY Press, 1987, p. 105; modified translation of the key terms.

[65] W. Montgomery Watt and Michael V. McDonald, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume VI: Muḥammad at Mecca*, New York, SUNY Press, 1988, p. 67–73. One of the two reports is from ʿĀʾisha, ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (p. 67–69), and the other from Ibn Isḥāq and a *mawlā* of the Zubayr family (p. 70–73).

[66] Mårtensson, *The True New Testament*, *op. cit.*, p. 137–138; id., "Discourse and Historical Analysis," *op. cit.*, p. 315.

[67] Charles E. Bosworth, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume V: The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, New York, SUNY Press, 1999, p. 162–164; 331–373.

Covenant was that the Sassanid shahs would take young women from the vassal kings, except from the king of Lakhm because the Arabs' sense of honour forbade it. However, as the result of a complicated sequence of events, Shah Khusraw Parvez (r. 590-628) decided to require a maiden from the Lakhmid king's household. In this context, Ṭabarī's account refers the famous Qur'anic term *ʿīn*, which in Q 37:48 and 44:54 refers to females with downcast dark eyes who reside in lush, blissful gardens, to the wild cows that grazed along the Mesopotamian waterways. Specifically, the Lakhmid king, enraged by the Shah's request, conveys the message that the Shah should satisfy himself with one of these wild ewes instead of a maiden from the king's household.[68] The Shah, now equally furious, incarcerated and killed the Lakhmid king. As a result, the Arabs rose against and defeated the Persians in the Battle of Dhū Qār, dated sometime between 604 and 611. The battle was the start of the process of Arab conquests of Sassanid lands, according to Ṭabarī. Through a saying attributed directly to the Prophet, Ṭabarī connected the Arab victory over the Persians in Mesopotamia with the Prophet in the Ḥijāz:

> *It is reported that when the Prophet heard the news of Rabīʿa's rout of Kisrā's army, he exclaimed: 'This [has been] the first battle (*yawm*) in which the Arabs have secured their just due from the Persians (*intaṣafat al-ʿarab min al-ʿajam*), and it was through me that they were given the victory!'*[69]

By connecting the Ḥijāzī Prophet with Arab conquests of Sassanid territory, Ṭabarī implies that the conquests in fact began with the Prophet's mission, although the more systematic campaigns and decisive victories took place later under ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634-644). Note the institutional critique in this account: the Shah violated the terms of the social contract, but through the Prophet's mission, the Arabs became sovereign and could re-set the terms. In other words, the Prophet frees the Arabs from imperial vassalage, just as Moses freed his people from Pharaoh. In this way, Ṭabarī provides a political context and explanation for the dominant and positive role that Moses plays in the Qur'ān as liberator of a "difficult people": Moses' struggle to persuade his people to let him free them resembles Ṭabarī's account of how the Prophet had to overcome the Quraysh to free the Arabs.[70]

Another aspect of the Iraq-Ḥijāz link that Ṭabarī established is that the Zoroastrian Sassanids, in their wars against the Christian Byzantines, were allies with the polytheist Quraysh in Mecca. According to Ṭabarī's reports, the Prophet's central message was that *kitāb* is the precondition for legitimate political power and contracts.

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[68] *Ibid.*, p. 338–358 for the long narrative; for the exchange between the Lakhmid king and the Shah, p. 353–355.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 338; Mårtensson, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit.*, p. 346.

[70] On Moses' central role in the Qur'ān, see Devin Stewart, "Understanding the Qur'ān in English: Notes on Translation, Form, and Prophetic Typology," in Zeinab Ibrahim, Sabiha T. Aydelott and Nagwa Kassagby, eds, *Diversity in Languages: Contrastive Studies in Arabic and English: Theoretical and Applied Linguistics*, Cairo, American University of Cairo Press, 2000, p. 31–48.

In the pre-Islamic parts of his history, those Persian Shahs who are portrayed as just rulers, including the mythical Ôshahanj Fêshdād and the historically attested Khusraw Anūshirwān (r. 531–579), are associated with Covenant (*mīthāq*) and rule by *kitāb* ("written contract"). In the specific context of the Persian-Roman wars, however, the Byzantines are the Prophet's favoured party against the Sassanid Shah who broke his contract with the Lakhmid king, and the former are referred to as *ahl al-kitāb*. Ṭabarī also placed some Qur'anic verses in this context, e.g. *al-Rūm*, Q 30:1-5. The significance of these reports emerges against the background of Ṭabarī's historical framework, where he connected *kitāb* in the sense of written contracts and Covenant with just forms of pre-Islamic kingship and Abrahamic prophecy, both of which continue in Islam as the contractual principle that legitimises the Prophet's rule.[71] Accordingly, Ṭabarī also describes the Ka'ba temple as a site where oaths and contracts were concluded and affirmed, thus casting the annual pilgrimage itself as a ritual affirmation of "contract".[72]

Comparison

Both Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and Ṭabarī's history connect the concept *kitāb* with the Qur'ān. They both cite Ibn Isḥāq's report that the first sent-down *kitāb* (Q 96:1-5) was "the same *nāmūs* that came to Moses before," *nāmūs* being Aramaic for *nomos*, "law" in the constitutional sense. According to both historians, this *nāmūs* takes the form of *kitāb*: "writing" on a piece of silk brocade.[73] In addition, Ṭabarī, as we have seen, employed the concept *kitāb* to define the general Abrahamic divine election as consisting in "writings made to descend" (*kutub munzala*) from God, containing "persuasive just rulings" (*ḥikam bāligha*).[74] By attributing justice to *kitāb* in this way, Ṭabarī's broader historical frame sheds more light on why the term *nāmūs* appears in reports describing the first revelation: this *kitāb*, with its just legal rulings, is the *nāmūs* or constitution for the polity.[75]

In both Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and Ṭabarī's history, moreover, the Prophet's message refers to a political contest in the region, which draws in Ḥijāz and actualises the necessity of contractual pacts. In the *Sīra*, alongside the Quraysh's idol worship, Ethiopian and Najrānī Monophysite Christianity serve as the main doctrinal "other" of the Prophet's

[71] Bosworth, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume V*, *op. cit.*, p. 324–325; see also Mårtensson, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit.*, p. 345.

[72] Mårtensson, *Tabari*, *op. cit.*, p. 78, ref. to Michael MORONY, *The History of al-Tabari. Volume XVIII: Between Civil Wars: The Caliphate of Mu'āwiya*, New York, SUNY Press, 1987, p. 186; also Mårtensson, "It's the Economy, Stupid!," *op. cit.*, p. 226–227, ref. to G. Rex Smith, *The History of al-Tabari. Volume XIV: The Conquest of Iran*, New York, SUNY Press, 1994, p. 51, 126–127. See also footnote 17, above, on the Ka'ba's pre-Islamic functions related to contracts.

[73] Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, *op. cit.*, p. 106; Watt and McDonald, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume VI*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

[74] Brinner, *The History of al-Ṭabarī. Volume II*, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[75] On the constitutional sense of *nāmūs*, see Mårtensson, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts," *op. cit.*, p. 347–349. The topic is further developed in id., *Al-Ṭabarī's madhhab jarīrī: A Paradigm of Natural Law and Natural Rights for the 'Abbasid Caliphate*, forthcoming, Gorgias Press, 2022.

Abrahamic message of divine Oneness as treated in e.g. Q 3, 5, and 19 (to which one can add Q 112, the "creedal *sūra*" *par excellence*). The significant contract is the Medina contract (*kitāb*), which unites the Arab and Jewish tribes. Consequently, the Jews represent the doctrinal problem of betrayal of contract. In Ṭabarī's history, the significant concept is also *kitāb*, but he mentions no Medina contract. Instead, the imperial vassal contracts are the significant ones, especially the Sassanid-Lakhmid for the context of the Prophet. Both sources thus describe the divine message as the source of justice and as the *contractual* legitimacy of political power. Ṭabarī's history in particular frames the Prophet's mission as resulting in a new Arab-led polity, sovereign in relation to imperial powers.[76]

By thus connecting the Qur'ān and its message with the Abrahamic doctrine of divine Oneness, and the various pre-Islamic contractual political legacies, both Ibn Hishām and Ṭabarī portray the Prophet and Islam as continuation of existing religious and political traditions. The discourses align both with the Qur'ān's own history of prophecy, which stretches all the way back to Adam, and with a properly historical approach to prophecy as an institution with an ancient legacy in the region.[77]

Exegesis

This section treats explanations of the Qur'ān within the discipline of Qur'ān exegesis (*tafsīr*). Since Ibn Hishām was not an exegete, focus is now exclusively on Ṭabarī and his Qur'ān commentary *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, "The Encyclopaedia of Clarifications Concerning the Original Meaning of the Signs of the Reading." In this work Ṭabarī reports and makes numerous doctrinal and theological statements.[78] These include Christological debates. For example, in his exegesis of Q 19:34 on the nature of Christ, Ṭabarī cited Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), a Meccan *mawlā*, exegete, and *ḥadīth* transmitter of Greek Christian background. Ibn Jurayj reported that the Muslim doctrine on Jesus as God's spirit and word but not son was the fourth position in a doctrinal dispute also involving the Nestorians, the Jacobites, and "the Israelite kings of the Nasareans" (*al-isrāʾīliyya mulūk al-naṣārā*). Ṭabarī also quoted a shorter version transmitted by al-Aʿmash (d. c. 148/765), traditionist of Parthian royal family background (Mihrān), from Kufa.[79] These two traditions are thus transmitted by Successors (*tābiʿūn*) connected with non-Arabic polities, from respectively Ḥijāz

[76] Again, see Mårtensson, *Al-Ṭabarī's madhhab jarīrī*, *op. cit.*

[77] See also Mårtensson, *Divine Covenant*, *op. cit.*, about this approach.

[78] For studies of Ṭabarī's doctrinal definitions in the Qur'ān commentary, see Gilliot, *Exégèse*, *op. cit.*; Mustafa Shah, "al-Ṭabarī and the Dynamics of *tafsīr*: Theological Dimensions of a Legacy," in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2013, p. 83–139. For analysis of Ṭabarī's concept of the Qur'ān with reference to other doctrinal positions, see Mårtensson, "al-Ṭabarī's Concept of the Qur'an," *op. cit*.

[79] Pourshariati, "The Mihrans and the Articulation of Islamic Dogma: A Preliminary Prosopographical Analysis," in Philippe Gignoux, Christelle Jullien and Florence Jullien, eds, *Trésors d'Orient: Mélanges offerts à Rika Gyselen*, Paris, Association pour l'avancement des études iranienne, 2009, p. 283–315.

(Mecca) and Iraq (Kufa). By comparison, the early *tafsīr* by the Yemenite ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/826) contains the same long version as the one Ṭabarī cited but transmitted by the two Basran (Iraqi) Successors Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770) and Qatāda b. Diʿāma (d. 117/735). All versions depict the doctrinal positions as marking communal and polity-identities and imply that Qur'anic Christology (as distinct from general polemics against *shirk*) is a demarcation against several Christian doctrinally defined polities, and "the Israelites."[80]

The rhetorical connotations that Ṭabarī in the history attributed to the Qur'ān as an Abrahamic sent-down writing (*kitāb munzal*) containing *persuasive* just rulings (*ḥikam bāligha*), are prominent in the commentary. In its methodological introduction, Ṭabarī defined the Qur'ān as the divine act of making clear distinctions (*bayān*) and the divine public address (*khiṭāb*), which conveys God's "persuasive proof," *al-ḥujja al-bāligha*. He also defined *sūra* and *āya* in rhetorical terms. *Sūra* means a topically defined unit, while *āya* has two meanings: a sign (*ʿalam*) which points to something outside of itself, which it introduces and indicates; and a narrative account (*qiṣṣa*).[81] Consequently, God performs His rhetorical demonstration through signs (*āyāt*), which are constituent parts of the divine written address, in the form of narrative accounts, and which serve to clearly distinguish and expound a topic and persuade the addressees. God's clarifying activity has its counterpart in the exegetes' *bayān*, or clear distinctions of the meaning of the Qur'anic *āyāt*. The decisive difference is that the divine *bayān*, as conveyed by the Prophet, is inimitable because it is from the One God, Who has no created counterpart, and contains God's ultimately persuasive demonstration.[82]

Research on the Qur'ān as rhetorical demonstration supports Ṭabarī's definition of its overall form.[83] The definition could also explain why the Qur'ān declares it is *not* poetry (*shiʿr*), notably Q 26:224-225 and Q 36:69, and not soothsaying (*kahāna*), notably Q 69:40-43. Ṭabarī's commentary on Q 36:69 defines the Qur'ān as a "reading that conveys clear distinctions (*qur'ān mubīn)*", i.e. it makes it clear for those who reflect through their intellect and reason (*ʿaql wa-lubb*) that it is a sending-down from God to the Prophet, and therefore neither poetry nor soothsaying.[84]

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[80] For the point that Qur'anic Christology appears *closest* to (though not identical with) Nestorian doctrine, and the historical and historiographical implications of that, see Mårtensson, "Ibn Isḥāq's and al-Ṭabarī's Historical Contexts", *op. cit*., p. 323–326, 337, 347–349.

[81] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 69, 72.

[82] *Ibid*., vol. 1, part 1, p. 13–14, 17–19; see also Mårtensson, "The Persuasive Proof'," *op. cit*.; id., "Al-Ṭabarī's Concept of the Qur'an," *op. cit.*

[83] Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning*, *op. cit*.; Jacques Jomier, "L'Évidence de l'Islam," in Geneviève Gobillot, ed., *L'Orient Chrétien dans l'empire musulman: Hommage au professeur Gérard Troupeau*, Versailles, Éditions de Paris, 2005, p. 23–36; Geneviève Gobillot, "La démonstration de l'existence de Dieu comme élément sacré d'un texte", in Danielde Smet, Godefroid de Callataÿ and Jan M. F. van Reeth, eds, *Al-Kitâb: La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l'islam*, Bruxelles, Société belge d'études orientales, 2004, p. 103–142; Mårtensson, "The Persuasive Proof," *op. cit*.; id., "Prophetic Clarity", esp. Part 3, p. 258–259.

[84] Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, *op. cit*., vol. 12, part 23, s. 34. See also Marilyn Waldman, *Prophecy and Power: Muhammad and the Qur'an in the Light of Comparison*, Sheffield, Equinox, 2012, p. 58–60, and Toshihiko Izutsu,

This rhetorical theory of the Qur'ān provides another perspective on Moses' written *nāmūs* as the model for the first Qur'anic "sending-down" (Q 96:1-5) in the history. In the Qur'ān itself, Moses is associated with rhetoric: he worries that he is not eloquent enough to persuade his people, so God makes arrangements to secure clear communication.[85] Considering that Ṭabarī also defined the general Abrahamic divine election and sent-down writings in rhetorical terms, it appears that he identified the entire institution of prophecy with rhetoric. In other words, Biblical prophecy was significant for Ṭabarī's concept of the Qur'ān not because it "originated" historically in Judaism or Christianity, but because he defined prophecy as a rhetorical institution.[86]

Language, linguistics, and the Reading of the Writing

The third selected discipline is Arabic language and linguistics, which I will treat in terms of its implications for the Qur'anic script and "readings." Again, I rely mainly on Ṭabarī's exegesis.

Ṭabarī's account of the production of the Qur'anic script in the Introduction to his commentary is one of the main sources for "the traditional Islamic account." Ṭabarī begins by citing several versions of a Prophetic *ḥadīth*, that the Qur'ān as writing (*kitāb*) existed on a tablet with God in the Garden, from where it was sent down through seven gates, in "seven manners of pronunciation" (*sabʿat aḥruf*). These corresponded to some of the various idioms (*lughāt*, sing. *lugha*) of the Arabic language (*lisān*) that the Arabs spoke who God addressed through the Prophet. The Prophet read out the Qur'ān to the Companions, who learned it from him and then read it out themselves. However, they soon discovered that they read it slightly differently. They consulted the Prophet, who declared that each reader should read the way he had learned it from him, since the Qur'ān was sent down in "seven manners of pronunciation". In Ṭabarī's view, the acceptable "manners of pronunciation" refer to different words with the same meaning (*maʿnā*), i.e. synonyms, which do not give rise to disagreement over the meaning that God intended with His rulings and commands and prohibitions.[87]

Proceeding to describe the production of the script, Ṭabarī refers to a report from the Prophet's scribe, Zayd b. Thābit (d. c. 39/660). The process began during the first Caliph

God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung, Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Book Trust, 2002 [Tokyo: Keio University, 1964], p. 18, 185–186, on the Qur'ān's denial of kinship with poetry; Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser, and Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur'an*, Leiden, Brill, 2013 [1909], p. 28–31, on the Qur'ān as prose, not poetry, its end-rhymes notwithstanding.

85 Q 28:34; 20:25-28; and 26:13; Mårtensson, "Prophetic Clarity," *op. cit.*, Part 2–3.

86 Rhetorical comparison between the Biblical scriptures, the Qur'ān, and their respective exegetical literatures is explored in Mårtensson and Tor Ivar ØSTMOE, eds, "Originating Canons and Communities: Theories of Language and Rhetoric in the Qur'an, the Bibles, and Exegetical Literatures", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 22, 2020, no. 1; see Mårtensson, *ibid*, "Prophetic Clarity", for an application of the comparison to al-Ṭabarī's concept of prophecy.

87 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 24–42.

Abū Bakr's rule (632-634). However, it was during the large-scale conquests in the reign of his successor, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634-644), when so many Companions died in battle, that ʿUmar decided to collect a written copy of the Qur'ān, to preserve their knowledge. Zayd b. Thābit, referred to as *kātib al-waḥy*, "writer of the divine communication,"[88] had written the Qur'ān on various pieces of animal hide, palm papyrus, and dried shoulder blades of cattle and camels. During ʿUmar's rule a written collection (*ṣaḥīfa*) was produced, which after his death was kept by his daughter and the Prophet's widow, Ḥafṣa. During the reign of the third Caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (r. 644-656), military contingents from Syria and Iraq began accusing each other of unbelief because of their different readings of the Qur'ān. ʿUthmān decided to produce and impose a uniform *muṣḥaf* and appointed Zayd b. Thābit and "a discerning and eloquent man" (*rajul labīb faṣīḥ*), named Abān b. Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ, for the task, ordering them to write down what they agreed on and consult him on matters of disagreement. Upon completion, they compared their text with Ḥafṣa's collection, and found the two corresponded.[89] In Ṭabarī's view, this ʿUthmānic script (*rasm*) represented one of the seven original pronunciations (though it remains unidentified), and the other six were destroyed.[90] However, since the script was consonantal, there emerged different readings (*qirāʾāt*) and vocalisations, depending on the readers' syntactical and morphological analysis, and dialectical idioms. Ṭabarī was himself an authority on readings. In his own exegesis, he uses around twenty different readings as part of establishing the correct meaning of a phrase or verse. His basic criterion was alignment with the ʿUthmānic script, since it is the only script based on one of the seven pronunciations that God sent down. Yet he often cited readings he considered incorrect, and frequently rejected those that became standardised in the medieval period.[91]

One can compare Ṭabarī's understanding of readings with current theories. Jan Retsö has suggested that the Qur'ān's own distinction between *kitāb* ("writing") and *qur'ān* ("reading") refers to the difference between the consonantal script and the vowels. He interprets this distinction as reflecting development, where the consonantal script (*kitāb*) represents an earlier stage than the vocalisation and reading (*qur'ān*): the canon testifies to its own development, as it were.[92] Keith Small has approached the issue from another angle. The consonantal ʿUthmānic script is dateable to the 650s and could even date back to the Prophet's time. However, Small argues, the fact that the vocalisation system developed after the establishment of the script means that attempts to reconstruct one pre-canonical "Prophet's version" remain conjectural.[93] Ṭabarī

[88] For the meaning of *waḥy* as divine communication through discursive speech (*kalam*) in the linguistic sense, see Izutsu, *God and Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 163–215, esp. p. 179.

[89] Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, *op. cit*., vol. 1, part 1, p. 43–45.

[90] *Ibid*., p. 46–47.

[91] On Ṭabarī and readings, see Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings*, *op. cit.*, p. 39-47; Gilliot, *Exégèse*, *op. cit.*, Ch. VI. A good illustration is Ṭabarī's exegesis of the above-mentioned "Christological" verse Q 19:34.

[92] Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[93] Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'an Manuscripts*, Plymouth, Lexington Books, 2011, p. 179–180.

would explain the Qur'ān's terms *kitāb* and *qur'ān* as meaning "writing" and "reading," like Retsö, but in the reverse order: the Prophet's reading out the divine writing precedes the written script(s). Yet Ṭabarī's reasoning that the seven pronunciations in the *ḥadīth* represent a stage before and distinct from the post-'Uthmānic readings even though the 'Uthmānic script is based on one of the seven, aligns in principle with Small's approach. Shady Hekmat Nasser has analysed the same *ḥadīth* in a similar way. It could describe conditions in the Prophet's time, since the most reliable versions were transmitted by Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (of Duri's "Medina school"), as part of his reports on the collection and codification of the Qur'ān. However, the *ḥadīth* only gained wider currency towards the end of the first century. At that time, Nasser argues, the regional rivals to Umayyad power sought to maintain their specific ways of reading the Qur'ān after the 'Uthmānic script, and they legitimised the practice by interpreting this *ḥadīth* as applicable also to the post-'Uthmānic readings. Subsequently, the *ḥadīth* became a Prophetic model for Ibn Mujāhid's (d. 324/936) effort to "canonise" seven readings. This interpretation is historically inaccurate, in Nasser's view.[94] On this point, i.e. that the seven pronunciations are not the same thing as the numerous post-'Uthmānic *readings*, Nasser aligns with Ṭabarī.

Regarding the Qur'anic orthography, Small has contextualised its development within exegesis and the need to preserve precise meanings.[95] Such an exegetical context for the Qur'anic script necessarily involves Arabic grammar and morphology. Accordingly, Kees Versteegh has showed that the discipline of Arabic linguistics emerged in the context of Qur'ān exegesis.[96]

The earliest extant treatise of the Arabic language is the Basran grammarian Sībawayhi's *Kitāb* (d. 180/796), which draws on the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, poetry, and idiomatic speech for examples. Sībawayhi's semantics has been defined as rhetorical and pragmatist because he defined grammar as the formal structure that conveys meaning, while meaning is a speaker's intended message in a specific context. The theory relates to law and logic through the emphasis on *intended meaning* as both the presupposition for speech and the aim of explanatory, exegetical efforts.[97] Even though Sībawayhi's semantics is later than the Qur'ān, he refers to earlier linguistic authorities.[98] According to Mustafa Shah, sources refer to grammarians active as early as the second half of the 600s, i.e. in the early stages of the co-development of

[94] Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings*, *op. cit.*, p. 15–34.

[95] Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'an Manuscripts*, *op. cit.*, p. 177, ref. to Efim Rezvan, "The First Qur'ans," in Rezvan, ed., *Pages of Perfection*, St. Petersburg, ARCH Foundation, 1995, p. 108–109. See also François Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview*, Leiden, Brill, 2014, p. 71–73.

[96] Kees Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'anic Exegesis in Early Islam*, Leiden, Brill, 1993.

[97] Michael Carter, "Pragmatics and Contractual Language in Early Arabic Grammar and Legal Theory," in Everhard Ditters and Harald Motzki, eds, *Approaches to Arabic Linguistics*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, p. 25–44; Ramzi Baalbaki, "Inside the Speaker's Mind: Speaker's Awareness as Arbiter of Usage in Arabic Grammatical Theory,", *ibid*, p. 3–23; Amal E. Marogy, *Kitāb Sībawahi: Syntax and Pragmatics*, Leiden, Brill, 2010.

[98] Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'anic Exegesis*, *op. cit.*, p. 36–40 *et passim*; Carter, *Sībawayhi*, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2004; id., "Pragmatics and Contractual Language," *op. cit.*

grammar, exegesis, Qur'anic readings and orthography.[99] This co-development might explain the occurrence of hermeneutical terms in the Qur'ān itself, such as *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, *muḥkam*, and *mutashābih*.[100] Yeshayahu Goldfeld has argued that these occur in the Qur'ān because they were already part of pre-Qur'anic hermeneutics, including both Christian and Jewish Rabbinical paradigms of Late Antiquity.[101] Goldfeld's analysis implies that the Qur'anic script could reflect hermeneutics and semantics without that necessitating a date later than the second half of the 600s, or even later than the Prophet.

A final point concerns the geographical places related to Arabic linguistics. The two dominant post-Qur'anic linguistic schools are named after the Iraqi garrison cities Kufa and Basra, where the Arab conquerors settled. However, based on references to Ḥijāzī linguists in the works of Sībawayhi and the linguist-exegete al-Farrā' (d. 205/820), Rafael Talmon has argued that Mecca and Medina were also centres of Qur'ān reading and grammar in the first two centuries. The references in the sources indicate that there were interactions between the Ḥijāzī and Iraqi schools, although, Talmon concludes, Ḥijāzī linguistics was eventually absorbed by the Basran school, to which Sībawayhi belonged.[102] Furthermore, this Ḥijāz-Iraq linguistics axis corresponds to the names of the earliest styles of the Qur'anic script: Ḥijāzī and Kufan.[103] Kufa was located very close to the former Lakhmid capital al-Ḥīra, which, as we have seen above, was the place from where Ḥijāzī scribes were recruited, according to the lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr. Viewed from this perspective, linguistics and Qur'ān-writing appear to have developed together in these two regions, which correspond also with Duri's identification of Medina/Ḥijāz and Kufa and Basra/Iraq as the main centres of Arabic-Islamic historical writing. Finally, these scribal, linguistic, and historiographical connections between Ḥijāz and Iraq can be seen as reflected in the political connection that Ṭabarī established between the Prophet's mission in 610

99 Mustafa Shah, "Exploring the Genesis of Early Arabic Linguistic Thought: Qur'anic Readers and Grammarians of the Kūfan Tradition (Part I)," in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2003, p. 47–78; id., "Exploring the Genesis of Early Arabic Linguistic Thought: Qur'anic Readers and Grammarians of the Baṣran Tradition (Part II)," in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2003, p. 1–47; id., "The Early Arabic Grammarians' Contributions to the Collection and Authentication of Qur'anic Readings", in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2004, p. 72–102. See also Deroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, *op. cit.*, p. 73. On linguistics in traditions from Medina attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, and the possibility of dating them to second half of the 600s, see Robert Gleave, "Early Shi'i Hermeneutics: Some Exegetical Techniques Attributed to the Shi'i Imams," in Karen Bauer, ed., *Aims, Methods and Contexts in Qur'ānic Exegesis (2nd/8th – 9th/15th C.)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press/Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013, p. 141–172.

100 *tafsīr*: Q 25:33; *ta'wīl*: Q 12:6, 21, 101; Q 18:78, 82; Q 4:59; Q 17:35; Q 7:53; Q 10:39; *ta'wīl* of dreams: Q 12:36-37, 44-45, 100; *ta'wīl*, *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*: Q 3:7. On Qur'anic terms and concepts pertaining to a wider range of disciplines, including linguistics, political science, law, and theology, see Mårtensson, *Divine Covenant*, *op. cit.*

101 Yeshayahu Goldfeld, "Development of Theory on Qur'ānic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship," in *Studia Islamica*, vol. 67, 1988, p. 13–14. For exploration of this specific issue with reference to transmissions of Aristotelian thought, see Mårtensson, *Al-Ṭabarī's madhhab jarīrī*, *op. cit.*, ch. 2.

102 Rafael Talmon, "An Eighth-Century Grammatical School in Medina: The Collection and Evaluation of the Available Material," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2, 1985, p. 224–236; see also Gleave, "Early Shi'i Hermeneutics," *op. cit.*

103 Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

in Ḥijāz, and the fate of the Arab Lakhmid kingdom in al-Ḥīra/Iraq. It is also evident from Ṭabarī's commentary that he perceived the production of the Qur'anic written text as an interpretive effort, along the lines I have sketched above with reference to contemporary research; e.g. his exegesis of Q 20:114:

> *(114) Since God, the King, the True Right, is high above, do not hasten the reading before its communication to you has been concluded, and say: "My Lord, expand my knowledge!" (*fataʿālā Allāhu al-malik al-ḥaqq wa-lā tajʿal bi-l-qurʾān min qabli ʾan yuqḍā ʾilayka waḥyuhu wa-qul rabbi zidnī ʿilman*)*

He, Exalted is His Honour, says: Since He to Who servitude belongs – the King Whose rule overpowers every king and tyrant, the True Right above what those among His creatures who take other partners attribute to Him – is elevated above all His creatures (*wa-lā tajʿal bi-l-qurʾān min qabli ʾan yuqḍā ʾilayka waḥyuhu*), He, Majestic is His Praise, says to His Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh): "Do not hasten, O Muḥammad, the reading, so that your companions read it, or you read it to them, before the clear distinction of its intended meanings has been communicated to you." For it is reproachable for the one who dictates to dictate and fill in what God has made descend of His writing, before its intended meanings have become clearly distinct to him. And it was said: Do not recite it (*lā tatluhu*) to anyone, and do not fill it in for him before we have made it clearly distinct for you. The interpreters aiming at the one original meaning (*ahl al-taʾwīl*) have made statements similar to what we have just said.[104]

Conclusion

The aim with this article was to argue for systematic use of the Islamic sources in historical research on the Qur'ān and Islamic "origins." In line with Duri's approach, "systematic use" means identifying each scholar's distinct explanatory framework. To Duri's analysis, I have added the factors of institutional ideals and criticism, focusing specifically on "writing" and "contract," and specifics of discipline.

In their different ways, Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and Ṭabarī's universal history describe the Prophet's mission and the Qur'ān as continuation but improvement of regional political legacies, through return to Abrahamic prophecy. Both historians identify "good" political legacies with contract and writing, and cast Abrahamic prophecy as epitomising these principles, as expressed in the connection they establish between the law sent down to Moses and the Prophet's first revelation. The contexts they sketch for the Prophet's mission are complex, involving many political and religious actors in

[104] Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 9, part 16, p. 272. Cf. Mårtensson, "Persuasive Proof", *op. cit.*, p. 406–408; here I have modified the translation, especially to align the translation of *al-ḥaqq* with natural law theory; see Ulrika Mårtensson, "Through the Lens of the Qur'anic Covenant: Theories of Natural Law and Social Contract in al-Ṭabarī's Exegesis and History," in R. Charles Weller and Anver Emon, eds, *Reason, Revelation and Law in Islamic and Western Theory and History*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p. 52–57.

different geographical locations on and at the rims of the Arabian Peninsula. While the two historians share the belief or, from the outside view, axiom that God exists and communicates with His prophets, "contract" and "writing" appear in their accounts as political concepts and norms, which refer to social institutions (law, pacts, and scribes). This perspective corresponds with recent research on records of both pre-Islamic Arab and Islamic contracts, as discussed.

Thus, Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* describes the Prophet's mission as being in line with the Quraysh's pre-Islamic pact of solidarity (*ḥilf al-fuḍūl*), but also forming a new social contract, which united more Arab and now also Jewish tribes, and eventually included the Christian communities on the Arabian Peninsula. The contract also enfranchised lowly individuals by establishing loyalty with the Prophet as the decisive criterion.

Ṭabarī's works span several disciplines, including history and Qur'ān commentary. They converge on explaining the origins of the Qur'ān and its genre in simultaneously legal-contractual and rhetorical-linguistic terms. The framework, which corresponds with some strands within current research on history, Qur'ānic rhetoric, linguistics, and manuscripts, explains the Qur'ān and the Prophet in the context of Arab emancipation from imperial vassalage and subsequent sovereignty, a movement in which Iraqi and Ḥijāzī tribes were jointly involved. Rhetoric and divine legitimisation of "written contract" thus embodied the Qur'ān. Though Ṭabarī's rhetorical-linguistic aspect of prophetic "sent-down writing" is specific to his framework, the political connection between Iraq and Ḥijāz that he established in the history corresponds with the Abrahamic-Qurayshite genealogy that introduces Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and includes the Lakhmid king in Iraq.

The conclusion, based on Ibn Hishām and Ṭabarī, is that the emergence of Islam and the Qur'ān involved several regions, institutions (state administration, prophecy, scribes, law and contracts) and scholarly disciplines and methodologies (history, exegesis, linguistics). Ṭabarī's *oeuvre* illustrates such methodological conceptualisations of the Qur'ān. Because he worked within several disciplines simultaneously, he analysed the Qur'ān's "origins" through different sources and methods, yet with mutually corroborating results, which converge with some research.

A final point concerns Duri's thesis, that the earliest "Medina school", with its *ḥadīth* methodology and focus on the Islamic polity, differs from both the "Biblicizing school", which systematically used Biblical and Jewish-Christian materials to explain and legitimize the Prophet, and the "Iraqi school," with its re-framed interest in local and tribal affairs, and that Ibn Hishām's and Ṭabarī's histories encompass all three early schools. My analysis of Ibn Hishām's and Ṭabarī's writings cannot pronounce on whether Duri's early schools really were distinct. However, it supports Duri's thesis of *methodological complexity* in historical writing, which might explain why these two histories' explanations of the "origins" of Islam and the Qur'ān include several factors related to tribes and empires, and the institutions of prophecy, law, and scribes, and

single out the politically critical norms of "writing" and "contract" as the framework for analysing them.

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