CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Eastern Rome and the Rise of Islam

History and prophecy

Olof Heilo

ROUTLEDGE

Eastern Rome and the Rise of Islam

The emergence of Islam in the seventh century AD still polarises scholars who seek to separate religious truth from the historical reality with which it is associated. However, history and prophecy are not solely defined by positive evidence or apocalyptic truth, but by human subjects, who consider them to convey distinct messages and in turn make these messages meaningful to others. These messages are mutually interdependent, and analysed together provide new insights into history.

It is by way of this concept that Olof Heilo presents the decline of the Eastern Roman Empire as a key to understanding the rise of Islam – two historical processes often perceived as distinct from one another. *Eastern Rome and the Rise of Islam* highlights significant convergences between Early Islam and the Late Ancient world. It suggests that Islam's rise is a feature of a common process during which tensions between imperial ambitions and apocalyptic beliefs in Europe and the Middle East cut straight across today's theological and political definitions. The conquests of Islam, the emergence of the caliphate, and the transformation of the Roman and Christian world are approached from both prophetic anticipations in the Ancient and Late Ancient world, and from the Medieval and Modern receptions of history. In the shadow of their narratives it becomes possible to trace the outline of a shared history of Christianity and Islam. The "Dark Ages" thus emerge not merely as a tale of sound and fury, but as an era of openness, diversity and unexpected possibilities.

Approaching the rise of Islam as an historical phenomenon, this book opens new perspectives in the study of early religion and philosophy, as well as providing a valuable resource for students and scholars of Islamic Studies.

Olof Heilo obtained his PhD at the Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies in Vienna and is currently teaching history at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Lund.

Culture and Civilization in the Middle East
General Editor: Ian Richard Netton
Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Exeter

This series studies the Middle East through the twin foci of its diverse cultures and civilisations. Comprising original monographs as well as scholarly surveys, it covers topics in the fields of Middle Eastern literature, archaeology, law, history, philosophy, science, folklore, art, architecture and language. While there is a plurality of views, the series presents serious scholarship in a lucid and stimulating fashion.

Previously published by Curzon

The Origins of Islamic Law
The Qur'an, the Muwatta' and Madinan Amal
Yasin Dutton

A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo
The History of Cambridge University's Genizah Collection
Stefan Reif

The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism
Hadith as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad
Andrew J. Newman

Qur'an Translation
Discourse, Texture and Exegesis
Hussein Abdul-Raof

Christians in Al-Andalus 711-1000
Ann Rosemary Christys

Folklore and Folklife in the United Arab Emirates
Sayyid Hamid Hurriez

The Formation of Hanbalism
Piety into Power
Nimrod Hurvitz

Arabic Literature
An Overview
Pierre Cachia

Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Lyric Poetry
Orient Pearls
Julie Scott Meisami

Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily
Arabic-Speakers and the End of Islam
Alexander Metcalfe

Modern Arab Historiography
Historical Discourse and the Nation-State
Youssef Choueiri

The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes
The Aristotelian Reception
Salim Kemal

Published by Routledge

1. **The Epistemology of Ibn Khaldun**
   Zaid Ahmad

2. **The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah**
   Conflict or Concilation
   Abdul Hakim I Al-Matroudi

3. **Arabic Rhetoric**
   A Pragmatic Analysis
   Hussein Abdul-Raof

4. **Arab Representations of the Occident**
   East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction
   Rasheed El-Enany

5. **God and Humans in Islamic Thought**
   Abd al-Jabbār, Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī
   Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth

6. **Original Islam**
   Malik and the madhhab of Madina
   Yasin Dutton

7. **Al-Ghazali and the Qur'an**
   One Book, Many Meanings
   Martin Whittingham

8. **Birth of The Prophet Muhammad**
   Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam
   Marion Holmes Katz

9. **Space and Muslim Urban Life**
   At the Limits of the Labyrinth of Fez
   Simon O'Meara

10. **Islam and Science**
    The Intellectual Career of Nizam al-Din al-Nizaburi
    Robert G. Morrison

11. **Ibn 'Arabî – Time and Cosmology**
    Mohamed Haj Yousef

12. **The Status of Women in Islamic Law and Society**
    Annotated translation of al-Tāhir al-Haddād's Imra'tunā fi 'l-sharīca wa 'l-mujtamac, with an introduction
    Ronak Husni and Daniel L. Newman

13. **Islam and the Baha'i Faith**
    A Comparative Study of Muhammad 'Abduh and 'Abdul-Baha 'Abbas
    Oliver Scharbrodt

14. **Comte de Gobineau and Orientalism**
    Selected Eastern Writings
    Translated by Daniel O'Donoghue
    Edited by Geoffrey Nash

15. **Early Islamic Spain**
    The History of Ibn al-Qū.tīya
    David James

16. **German Orientalism**
    The Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800 to 1945
    Ursula Wokoeck

17. **Mullā Sadrā and Metaphysics**
    Modulation of Being
    Sajjad H. Rizvi

18. **Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis**
Genesis and Development
Hussein Abdul-Raof

19. **Al-Ghazali, Averroes and the Interpretation of the Qur'an**
Common Sense and Philosophy in Islam
Avital Wohlman, translated by David Burrell

20. **Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East**
Edited by Anthony O'Mahony and Emma Loosley

21. **Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism**
Expanding the Crescent from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (1880s–1930s)
Amal N. Ghazal

22. **Islamic Ethics**
Divine Command Theory in Arabo-Islamic Thought
Mariam al-Attar

23. **Muslim Fortresses in the Levant**
Between Crusaders and Mongols
Kate Raphael

24. **Being Human in Islam**
The Impact of the Evolutionary Worldview
Damian Howard

25. **The UAE and Foreign Policy**
Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests
Khalid S. Almezaini

26. **A History of Early al-Andalus**
The Akhbar Majmu'a
David James

27. **Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought**
Al-Ghazali's Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation
Alexander Treiger

28. **Shi'i Theology in Iran**
The Challenge of Religious Experience
Ori Goldberg

29. **Founding Figures and Commentators in Arabic Mathematics**
A History of Arabic Sciences and Mathematics, Volume 1
Roshdi Rashed, edited by Nader El-Bizri, translated by Roger Wareham, with Chris Allen and Michael Barany

30. **The Muslim Conquest of Iberia**
Medieval Arabic Narratives
Nicola Clarke

31. **Angels in Islam**
Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti's al-Haba'ik fi akhbar al-mala'ik
Stephen Burge

32. **Theological Approaches to Qur'anic Exegesis**
A Practical Comparative-Contrastive Analysis
Hussein Abdul-Raof

33. **Ibn al-Haytham and Analytical Mathematics**
A History of Arabic Sciences and Mathematics, Volume 2
Roshdi Rashed, translated by Susan Glynn and Roger Wareham

34. **Ghazali's Politics in Context**
Yazeed Said

35. **Orientalism Revisited**
Art, Land and Voyage
Edited by Ian Richard Netton

36. **Ibn al-Haytham's Theory of Conics, Geometrical Constructions and Practical Geometry**
A History of Arabic Sciences and Mathematics, Volume 3
Roshdi Rashed, translated by J. V. Field

37. **Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt**
Ibn al-Nafis, Pulmonary Transit and Bodily Resurrection
Nahyan Fancy

38. **The Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue**
Historical and Modern Interpretations
C Jonn Block

39. **Arabic and Hebrew Love Poems in Al-Andalus**
Shari L. Lowin

40. **Religious Scholars and the Umayyads**
Piety-Minded Supporters of the Marwanid Caliphate
Steven C. Judd

41. **Skepticism in Classical Islam**
Moments of Confusion
Paul L. Heck

42. **Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought**
Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī
Maria de Cillis

43. **Ibn al-Haytham, New Spherical Geometry and Astronomy**
A History of Arabic Sciences and Mathematics, Volume 4
Roshdi Rashed, translated by J.V. Field

44. **Classical Mathematics from al-Khwārizmī to Descartes**
Roshdi Rashed, translated by Michael H. Shank

45. **Legal Authority in Premodern Islam**
Yahyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī in the Shāfiʿī School of Law
Fachrizal A. Halim

46. **Ethics in Islam**
Friendship in the Political Thought of Al-Tawḥīdī and his Contemporaries
Nuha A. Alshaar

47. **The City in the Muslim World**
Depictions by Western Travel Writers
Edited by Mohammad Gharipour & Nilay Üzlü

48. Moral Rationalism and Shari'a
Independent Rationality in Modern Shī'ī Uṣūl al-Fiqh
Ali-Reza Bhojani

49. An Arab Ambassador in the Mediterranean World
The Travels of Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān al-Miknāsī
Nabil Matar

50. The Poetics of Ancient and Classical Arabic Literature
Orientology
Esad Duraković

51. Eastern Rome and the Rise of Islam
History and prophecy
Olof Heilo

52. Literature and the Islamic Court
Cultural life under al-Ṣāḥib Ibn 'Abbād
Erez Naaman

Eastern Rome and the Rise of Islam

History and prophecy

Olof Heilo

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Names: Heilo, Olof, author.
Title: Eastern Rome and the rise of Islam : history and prophecy / Olof Heilo.
Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, [2015] | Series: Culture and civilization in the Middle East
Identifiers: LCCN 2015025825| ISBN 9781138101388 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315656960 (e-book)
Subjects: LCSH: Byzantine Empire–History–527-1081. | Islamic Empire–History–750-1258. | Christianity and politics–History–Middle Ages, 600-1500. | Islam and politics–Europe. | Christianity–Relations–Islam. | Islam–Relations–Christianity. | Civilization, Western. | Islamic civilization.
Classification: LCC DF571 .H45 2015 | DDC 297.09/21–dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015025825

ISBN: 978-1-138-10138-8 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-65696-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Taylor & Francis Books

Contents

Figures

Acknowledgments

The following work is based on my PhD thesis *Seeing Eye to Eye: Islamic Universalism in the Roman and Byzantine Worlds*, which was supervised by Johannes Koder and Herbert Eisenstein and defended at the University of Vienna in 2010. For the present result I stand in particular debt to Charles Lock, who has kept encouraging me to revise the thesis for publication and assisted me whenever the English language caused me trouble; to Gerhard Burda, who has enhanced my grasp on the theoretical problem and helped me to pose the right questions; and to Tonje Haugland Sørensen, who has never tired of exchanging ideas and providing me with inspiring reading material. Among various people who have followed my work at different stages and discussions over the last few years, I would like to thank Ragnar Hedlund, Ingela Nilsson, Despoina Ariantzi, Roger Sages, Tarek Bajari, Maria Pakkala, Bob Carter and Christian Høgel. Last, but not least, I consider myself extremely privileged to have parents and siblings who have not just politely listened whenever I have been eager to share my ideas and findings, but also provided me with valuable feedback and always made me return to the work with renewed feelings of love and curiosity.

Café Eiles, Vienna, June 2015

Abbreviations

Dan. *Daniel*
Eccl. *Ecclesiastes*
Hez. *Ezekiel*
Luk. *Luke*
Macc. *Maccabees*
Matth. *Matthew*
Rev. *Revelation*

Prologue

At first sight, the appearance of a major religion in the history of mankind might seem difficult to describe in anything short of apocalyptic terms. At least, when it is said to have originated with an individual whose life was fundamentally transformed by the revelation of its message, one is obliged to concede that it begins with an apocalyptic experience; if it is further reported to have not just changed his life, but also rendered him the status of a prophet among others, it seems consistent to admit that the same transformation extends to his believers; and if it is further said to have inspired his believers to actions of widespread and lasting impact, it is quite tempting to transfer the same description upon the paradigm they have come to represent.

Unsurprisingly, thus, the emergence of Islam in the seventh century AD keeps polarising scholars who are at a loss how to keep the religious truth apart from the historical reality with which it is associated. At the far ends of this field of tension one can find scholars stressing the importance of the apocalyptic origin to the point where it becomes ontological to history as we know it, and scholars denying it to the point where the same history is deconstructed beyond recognition.[1] However, if they cannot agree among themselves how a revealed truth claim has interacted with the realities of what we know as history, how can we ever expect religious believers to see eye to eye with non-believers? The pessimist will probably conclude that we cannot: that the fields of perception are mutually exclusive and lack common points of focus.

What is forgotten in this entire entanglement of viewpoints is that history and prophecy share a common field where they are defined not by the positive evidence or apocalyptic truths that they ultimately represent, but by human subjects who consider them to convey a distinct message, pattern or meaning. If history had been a mere sum of facts from the past, there would be no historians of the Late Ancient or Early Islamic Era, no historians of the Western world or the Middle East, no historians of the Byzantine Empire or the Middle Ages, since these are paradigms added to the material in the conviction that they will make it readable, understandable and, in short, meaningful to the observer. Similarly, confining prophecy to a completely apocalyptic horizon would turn the revelation into an essentially esoteric or

mystical matter and make it considerably more difficult to tell different prophetic religions apart than happens to be the case. In the distinct forms they provide, however, it is not *merely* apocalyptic, just as the history of our historians is not *merely* descriptive.

The positivist and the fundamentalist are equally likely to revolt against this very hint of a relativism for which they will blame the devil, the postmodernists, or both; yet this is not said to imply that they should give up their allegiance to the belief in an absolute truth or absolute reality. It does mean, however, that a strict definition of history as well as prophecy must imply the obliteration of all subjectivity in favour of a world merely consisting of ideas or facts, leaving the two of them with monistic explanations that differ merely on the plane of human subjects for which they appear to show less interest. Maybe they are both right at least in a hermetic sense; maybe a post-human world will prove them both to have been right in one way or another. When this is written, however, it is in a human world in which history deals with religious ideas and prophecy deals with historical facts; and somewhere on the intermediary level of this human existence, they both appear to meet and conceive meanings that are not mutually exclusive but mutually interdependent.

We should start examining this problem by setting out, not from the seventh century AD, but the seventh century BC. Taking a glance at the history of prophetic monotheism in a way that gives precedence neither to history nor to theology, we will attempt to detect if they are in any way correlated and how.

1 The dream of Nebuchadnezzar

Abraham distinguished himself from his idolatrous relatives in Mesopotamia not just by the covenant with an invisible god, but also by the decision to leave them and settle in the land of Canaan. What was monotheism to him became what might be best defined as henotheism or monolatry among his followers. Worshipping their own god, they left it to the peoples from whom they had separated themselves to worship other gods. There was no universal truth claim involved.[2]

There are two main exceptions to it, centred on strikingly similar plots.

The first one is the story of Joseph in Egypt. We have all heard it: Joseph is the second youngest of his brothers and his father's favourite. His jealous brothers sell him as a slave and he ends up in Egypt, where he goes through a few considerable ups and downs involving a benevolent master and his enamoured wife. For many years he lives in and interacts with this colourful world of god-kings, cultic diversity and religious idolatry, but stays faithful to the god of his father. One day he is asked to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh and uses the occasion to mention the invisible god he considers able to reveal the truth. Pharaoh is pleased with the interpretation he delivers and Joseph is awarded with a high rank in the country, where even his treacherous brothers and their families are eventually invited to settle down.[3]

It has been popular to identify the Pharaoh of Joseph with Akhenaten (d. 1336 or 1334 BC), the promoter of a revolutionary but short-lived proto-monotheist cult in Egypt, which is supposed to explain his apparent appreciation for the god of Joseph and the complete disappearance of that appreciation within a few generations, when a new Pharaoh threatens the progeny of Joseph and his brothers with extinction.[4] However, irrespective of the historical setting, the story might be said to exemplify a monotheist belief that is universal in its outlook and apocalyptic in its promise. God is with Joseph throughout his hardships and thus proves His enduring quality even in face of temporary setbacks; He is able to divine the dreams of Pharaoh and thus shows His truth to be valid for other peoples than just the interpreter.

An important end note is how the later exodus from this now hostile world has become a main foundation narrative of what we know as Judaism: Pharaoh and his troops are destroyed in the Red Sea, the covenant between the emigrants and their god is sealed at Mount Sinai, and Yahweh – the revealed name of the invisible god – awards his chosen people with the conquest of the promised land of Canaan.[5]

The second and more elaborate story is the one we find in the Book of Daniel. It begins with the misfortune of not just one boy, but of all the children of Israel. In the late seventh century BC the kingdom of Judah has become a pawn in the political game between the main regional powers, and the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II, who has just conquered Assyria and defeated its Egyptian ally, manifests his power in the region by carrying off a group of Judaean youths from noble families, renaming them in honour of his own gods and having them serve in his royal palace at Babylon. One of them, Daniel, is faced with the same challenge as once Joseph was: that of interpreting the dream of the king. In this case the situation is further complicated by Nebuchadnezzar's peculiar refusal to tell the contents of his own dream and his subsequent threat to execute the interpreters who fail to do so. However, Daniel, having stayed true to his religious laws and faithful to the god of his ancestors, receives a revelation that enables him to meet the wilful demands of the king and to retell the dream as fearlessly as if it had been his own:

> O King, you had a dream in which you saw an image, a huge idol that was facing you and whose countenance was terrifying. Its head was made of pure gold; its hands, breast and arms were made of silver; the belly and thighs were of bronze; the legs of iron and the feet of iron mixed with clay. As you beheld it, a rock, untouched by hands, broke away from a mountain and smote the image upon the feet of iron and clay, and shattered them to pieces. And instantly the clay, the iron, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all shattered, and they became like the chaff of a threshing place in summertime; a strong wind carried them away and they were nowhere to be found. But the rock that had smitten the idol became a huge mountain that filled the whole world.

> This was what you saw in your sleep; and now we are going to present the king with its interpretation. You, King of Kings, upon whom the God of Heavens has bestowed a strong and powerful kingdom that encompasses every place where sons of men are dwelling (…), you are the golden head. And after you another and inferior kingdom will arise, and a third one that will be like bronze and rule over the whole world, and a fourth one that will be strong like iron, shattering everything and laying it to dust (…) As you saw the feet and the toes were part iron, part clay: this kingdom will be divided, possessing the strength of iron, but parts of it will be broken (…) And in the days of that empire the God of Heaven will let a kingdom appear that is to rule forever, never to be destroyed or left to be ruled by another people: it will crush all other kingdoms and prevail forever.[6]

The episode opens an entire book devoted to the interplay between religious truth, represented by the prophet, and historical reality, represented by the various rulers and empires he serves throughout his long life. Each of its single episodes can be said to illustrate the pattern outlined above: the story of how the friends of Daniel are threatened by extinction in a fiery furnace because they refuse to worship a colossal idol of Nebuchadnezzar, and how their rescue at the intervention of God makes the king repent; the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar, in which a world-filling tree is cut down by an angel of God, precluding the madness with which the king will be punished for his hubris; the story of his successor Belshazzar and the mysterious writing on the wall that presages the imminent fall of the Babylonian kingdom to the Persians; the story of how Daniel is saved from the lion's den where his new Persian master Darius has felt compelled to throw him when the prophet has declined to worship the king; and finally a series of apocalyptic visions in which Daniel is foretold the future of his life and the whole world up to the moment when the Angel Michael will make way for the resurrection of the dead and the Final Judgment.[7] The Book of Daniel is the main apocalyptic scripture of the Jewish scriptural canon and has served as a main inspiration for eschatological movements throughout the ages.

Before we take a closer look at the Book of Daniel, it should be added that – unlike the story of Joseph – its historical setting might be easily identified from both Biblical and non-Biblical sources.[8] However, our purpose is as little to discuss the historicity of the story as to ponder its metaphysical truth. What we want to scrutinise is how the two of them can be able of conceiving any convergent meanings at all.

2 Horizons of space

To begin with we will note that, unlike Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar refuses to put words to his own dream. This sets out the narrative with a mystical aspect that indeed defies any logic or meaning, even human language. It is entirely

confined to the mind of the king and can only be *revealed*. However, even as it is revealed to the prophet, it is still up to the prophet to give it a verbal form that is acceptable to the dreamer and interpret it in a way that makes sense to them both.

In order to see eye to eye, thus, both subjects must sacrifice their subjective absoluteness. The king, master of life and death in an empire that has defeated its main regional opponents and laid claim to the whole known world, acknowledges the fact that something has entered his own mind from which an outsider, a boy from one of the subdued peoples, has been able to relieve him. The prophet, spokesman for a celestial god who knows even what goes on in the mind of the king, acknowledges the present power of this foreign ruler and worshipper of alien deities.

Even as they do seem to meet, the king and the boy are confined to an esoteric insight from which the world remains excluded. Their dream is devoid of clear agents and subjects (the idol simply *is* there, the falling of the rock just *occurs*, "untouched by hands"), although the interpretation clarifies it by identifying the statue and its head with the spatial power of the king over "every place where men are dwelling", and the rock with the "god of heavens", whose kingdom lies in the future. Daniel has already credited the "god of heavens" with the revelation of the dream, and Nebuchadnezzar will respond by praising this deity as "a god above all other gods".[9] How, though, can such a universal god be identified with Yahweh or any other deity perceived from the closed horizons of their different religious, cultural and political epistemologies?

We should consider the wider historical context from which the scenario could make sense. In 587 BC Jerusalem is finally sacked by the troops of Nebuchadnezzar: the last tribes of Israel are dispersed, the temple that has been the centre of their cult is demolished and the physical symbols of their covenant with Yahweh are lost. Less than half a century later, in 539 BC, Babylon itself is sacked by the Medes and the way lies open towards a complete absorption of the ancient cultural regions of Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Iran into the first "World Empire", Achaemenid Persia. The ruler of this complex entity, Cyrus the Great, tries to legitimise his rule by means of a religious quasi-syncretism that has been precluded by the last Babylonian kings.[10] He proclaims the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem and the return of the people of Yahweh to their Promised Land, at the same time as he remains receptive towards the foreigners who – like Daniel – prefer to stay in his service.

The Persian paradigm thus offers a context that makes the universal message of Daniel epistemologically feasible. It appears to have a significant impact upon the Biblical books of Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah, which are all named after prominent Jews who filled high positions at the Persian court, and the Psalms, where Cyrus the Great is described as the "Lord's anointed ruler".[11] Nonetheless, while it does match the apocalyptic promise, it also reveals the practical problems of a belief that implies the complete fusion of

all nations in the name of a common God. Such a development would fly in the face of the Temple rebuilders in Jerusalem who fear for the truth of their worship and the wrath of their god if they were to sacrifice the exclusivity of their community; and it would be further at odds with the political universalism of the Persian rulers, which requires tolerance for and the preservation of all nations under its rule, including the polytheist ones.[12] The metaphysical truth of the nocturnal dream does not overcome these diverse and transformative facts of life in full daylight.

With the spatial world shrouded in a veil of realities that keep the universal message of the prophecy confined to its current believers, the fulfilment of its promise must be deferred to the dimension of time. God – the one and only, *the* god, God – has not yet revealed Himself to everybody; the history of mankind is part of the unfolding process. The God who was with Joseph in his captivity has protected Daniel and his compatriots in Babylon and Persia, and just as He appears to open the hearts of their new rulers to the words of His prophets, He will make His truth manifest to all mankind once these terrestrial empires have been laid to dust. Other Biblical prophets begin to reveal similarly expanding horizons of faith, and given that Daniel appears to have felt little concern about spending the rest of his life in Persian service, one feels inclined to conclude that the postponement of the apocalyptic promise to an unspecified future serves to maintain a state of religious ambiguity similar to the Persian syncretism. Until the dream of Nebuchadnezzar has come true, the realities of everyday life in this diverse world will not interfere with the prophecy, nor be infested with fear of the shattering future it has predicted.

3 Horizons of time

The Book of Daniel is set in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, but most likely written at a far later date, in the mid-second century BC. [13] The intermittent period is marked by an historical shift: the Persian Empire ceases to exist, first arrested in its expansion by an alliance of Greek city-states at its Mediterranean outskirts, and finally shattered to dust in just a few years by their new Macedonian ruler, Alexander the Great. The youthful conqueror embarks upon a military quest from Egypt to India and prepares a campaign into the Arabian Peninsula when he dies at Babylon in 323 BC, leaving a political muddle that extends from Iran to the Mediterranean.

Whereas the whole region we now refer to by the term Middle East has been a cultural crossroad since the dawn of history, the Greek element is often perceived to add a cultural dichotomy between West and East that will resound in the historical consciousness of later ages. This is conditionally true but generally misleading. The era following the conquests of Alexander is characterised by a cultural integration no less multidirectional than the Persian one, and the Eastern Mediterranean in particular remains a borderland far more complex than implied by geodetical abstractions. If anything, the historiographical prerogative and cultural memory reveal a geopolitical shift

westwards: the dissemination of the Greek classics will be lasting, while the literary heritage of the ancient Mesopotamian world – to which Daniel once directed his prophetic message – will sink into oblivion. However, this development is itself the result of a long process of transmission and reception, not the inevitable outcome of a young dreamer and his deeds, which later on will often drop all moorings to historical reality and ascend to the heaven of heroic tales.[14]

These reflections are of a certain importance to our topic here, as historicising simplifications are just as likely to affect the identification of apocalyptic monotheism with the historical destiny of Judaism. The Temple worship at Jerusalem continues into the Hellenistic era in accordance with the tradition established under Persian rule, and the lasting presence of the Greek language and habits leads to the integration of different customs and beliefs in areas under Hellenist influence. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Holy Scriptures, for which the Ptolemaic kings at Alexandria are usually credited, bears witness to a diverse, cosmopolitan monotheism that will flourish for centuries in the urban centres around the Eastern Mediterranean. It does testify to a Judaism that distinguishes itself from Hellenism by identifying with an historical exclusivity, but the compilation, translation, transmission and reception of their scriptural canon – in Hebrew as well as in Greek – remains the eventual outcome of an open and complex process that takes place in a present tense and in constant interaction with the world.[15]

Some of the latest additions to the Septuagint may appear as a direct affront to the very notion of an historical openness. The Maccabean Books, devoted to the piety, heroism and martyrdom of the Jews who opposed the Hellenising policies of the Seleucid King Antiochus IV (d. 164 BC), draw upon apocalyptic beliefs that evoke the prophecies of Daniel, identifying the peculiar Greek term βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως or "abomination of desolation" that occurs in the final visions of Daniel with Greek idols at the temple of Jerusalem.[16] We are not going to consider the coincidental addition of the Book of Daniel to the Septuagint – and the fact that the final visions of Daniel show strong parallels to the historical circumstances surrounding the last years of Antiochus IV – from the perspective of its historicity, but from the assumption that it is supposed to convey a feeling of historical continuity or fulfilment. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar is about to break the constraints of spatial diversity and join forces with time: in a moment of distress, a conclusive historical intervention will separate the meaningful from the meaningless and make the universal Truth prevail.

Beliefs of this kind are not exclusive to Judaism, and maybe they are likely to emerge in times of rapid and unpredictable changes. Plato used the ancient myth about the golden, silver, bronze and iron ages of Man to illustrate the terrestrial laws of degeneration and decline whose reversal he foresaw through the intervention of a master race or philosophical superman.[17] The remedial narratives of apocalyptic and historicist ideologies may well compensate for a perceived relativity and unreliability of terrestrial values in a complex and

unpredictable world. However, whatever they achieve in terms of a temporary redemption from distress or inspired acts of heroism remains subject to time: it goes on unperturbed by history and does not show any reverence for the greatest of warriors, heroes, conquerors or kings. Contrary to what apocalypticists and historicists usually claim, time is no reliable ally at all, and this also accounts for the fact that their own narratives tend to be characterised by a very incoherent record of being applied to actual events. If Jewish traditionalists in the second century BC read the clay feet of the statue in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as a reference to the Seleucid Empire – which actually did collapse after the death of Antiochus IV – the result is bound to disappoint at least some of them. Instead of growing "until it fills the whole world", the Jewish kingdom that the Maccabeans have restored remains a tiny political entity that will soon be swallowed up by its former Roman ally.

On the other hand, the Jewish traditionalists could be said to follow a rational line of thinking. They are surrounded by a world in which cultural integration has extended to the religious sphere and led polytheist believers to identify their traditional gods with those of their neighbours. If monotheism is going to burst the boundaries of historical Judaism, it is not inconceivable that it will end up in a similar way: assimilated with the surrounding world to the point where it loses every resemblance to its world of origin and becomes something uncannily different.

4 The reality of God

Just as with regards to Daniel, we do not need to debate the message of Jesus or its historicity; we should merely note that the latter shares a few key concepts with the former. The "Abomination of Desolation" is a sign that the "Son of Man" is coming to establish the "Kingdom of God". Exactly what this means remains obscure, apart from that it will occur very soon. His disciples will not find time to warn all the cities of Israel before it happens. Some of them will die for testifying to it, others will live to witness it, and in either case the result will be violent. The message that has been entrusted to them is like a sword that will sever traditional bonds of kinship and social relations; those who are not prepared to accept it under such conditions can only postpone the depredation that the Divine Justice will bestow upon them. Old forms of religious worship will not offer any lasting refuge: once again, the Temple will be destroyed and Jerusalem will suffer devastation.[18]

We should divert the attention here from the historical context of Jesus to that of those who write the Gospels. Like Daniel, their protagonist belongs in an age of political universalism: he is said to have been born around the time when the Roman Emperor Augustus ordered the entire inhabited world to be taxed, and to have been condemned to death by the Roman prefect of Judaea in the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Over the centuries that have passed since the conquests of Alexander, the influence of the Latin Republic of Rome has steadily grown to encompass the whole Mediterranean Sea. The Greek

language and culture remain a common denominator in most areas under its control, and still under that surface it is seething with transformative patterns of local habits and beliefs. What the *Pax Romana* has added, similar to its Persian precedent, is the political prerogative of a common framework within which different peoples and cultures are allowed to thrive and prosper. The authority that Augustus has inherited from Julius Caesar couples the cult of the armed peace with that of its commander or emperor, who joins the pantheon of polytheist beliefs around the sea and has temples erected and idols of him replicated in his honour throughout the empire.

The imperial cult does not explicitly intervene with the religious pluralism that is a requirement for its own existence; even the monolatrous peculiarities of the Jews are tolerated as long as the adherents pay their taxes and refrain from turning their god against the emperor.[19] However, it adds to latent cultural tensions in the region. Increasing unrest will culminate in the first Jewish–Roman war in AD 66–73, when Jerusalem is destroyed and the Temple is desolated for the last time. In other words, what has been a mere apocalyptic possibility during the lifetime of Jesus is an historical reality to those of his followers who live to see it. Whatever Jesus had meant when he quoted Daniel, it cannot have been anything in the vein of the Maccabean Books if it were supposed to convey a meaningful message to the Evangelists at the end of the first century AD. It is not so much that the Temple curtain between Man and God has been ripped apart, as that the closed Jewish horizon of the Temple itself has been levelled and the world returned to a state in which it was in the heyday of Babylon.

Trying to maintain a closed horizon in face of such devastating facts leaves the believer with a few options. One is to stay true to the apocalyptic promise and expect the Roman Empire to be overturned by a new messianic figure like Cyrus who will restore Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.[20] Another option is to absorb the reality of the present as the eschatological stage of a universal apocalypse, declare all temples and empires to have become obsolete and expect a new, angelic and otherworldly reality to take their place.[21] The latter option is perhaps prone to gain attention among the same kind of people who feel attracted to neo-Platonic or proto-Manichean beliefs, but it is not with regards to their religious objective that they are of interest to us here. The question is to what extent their spatial impact and prevalence over time are subject to the world they appear to reject.

Once we leave the inner life of the Jewish and Christian believers to enter the external world where they actually live, it becomes questionable whether the religious horizon has ever been closed at all. Mediterranean cities like Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus, Thessaloniki, Rome and Carthage have housed well-integrated communities of Jews for centuries, many of which have effectually already abandoned the temple. The part of the Christian movement that takes root in the same milieu will remain close to – sometimes even indistinguishable from – Hellenistic Judaism at the same time as it reaches out to the Gentiles. The coexistence is far from devoid of conflict, but the fact

that a large-scale epistemological rapprochement takes place and establishes the fundament of a universal monotheist faith that will become known as Christianity, remains a strong testimony to a spatial world of mobile and open identities.

These religious and cultural transformations are bound to affect the political framework of the Roman Empire, and when the latter shows signs of shrugging under the external and internal challenges of the third century, its diversity naturally renders itself prone to polarisation. The Christians who are accused of attracting bad luck or encouraging moral dissent in these times will hardly smoothen the conflict potential by embracing the persecutions in the eschatological conviction that the world is about to end and that all suffering is transient. However, one should remember that the apocalyptic horizon of the martyrs is diametrically opposed to the one of those who preserve their stories, tombs and bodily remains as sources of strength for the living.[22]

The same precaution is valid for the fourth century turnaround, as Christianity is accepted under Constantine and declared state religion of the entire Roman Empire under Theodosius. Seen from the closed horizon of this outcome, it is understandable if the track record of Christianity – from the Pentecostal miracle in Jerusalem and the conversion of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus, to the vision of Constantine before the Battle at the Milvian Bridge and the First Ecumenical Church Council in Nicaea – will be interpreted in apocalyptic terms.[23] However, as little as this ought to let us forget that the nature of the whole process has been dialectic and not teleological, should it let us ignore the fact that even this horizon remains less closed than what it claims to be.

The emperors, who mainly reside in Constantinople from this time, have given the church a main body within the empire and integrated it with everyday public life. The church councils ensure that religious disagreements are being properly addressed and do not disturb the imperial peace. Under the surface of this political and cultural continuity the religious and philosophical diversity is ubiquitous. Gentile beliefs are tacitly assimilated; Jews remain a vital element within the empire despite the vexation of some Christians; rival forms of Christianity take root among Armenians, Syrians, Copts, Germans and other peoples at the margins of the empire. The resurgent Persian Empire of the Sassanid shahs will give shelter to some of these groups, promote its own state religion of Zoroastrianism and cast itself in the role of a main rival to the Roman Empire. Believers who feel alienated by the worldly empire even after it became Christian will look for a new kind of martyrdom in the solitude of spiritual and corporal chastisement, usually in the desert.[24]

At the end of the day, the fact that an intermediary borderland separates the crushing truth of the heavenly God from the prevalent realities of the terrestrial world seems to leave the apocalypticist with two options. Either the spread of Christianity is still about to pave the way for the Kingdom of God by means of the terrestrial agents who have accepted its truth and claim to defend it, like the Roman Empire. Or the very fact that such an empire still

exists means that the premises are altogether wrong. The rock has not struck; the idol is still standing.

****

In the above, we have tried to follow the outline of two apparent opposites: a striving towards an absolute unity of Being, and the prevalence of an inherent diversity of human existence in time and space. We have seen that the two are well able to converge or coexist, and that they do not necessarily exclude or eliminate each other, at least not as long as they are open to mutual acceptance in a present and subjective tense. It is only from a hyper-subjective viewpoint that the multitude of and diversity in beliefs that all adhere to the claim of an absolute unity must be solved either in the regression to henotheistic segregation by means of a religious, cultural or political confinement of the epistemological horizons, or in the expectance of the redemptory power of fate and history to obliterate all other epistemological horizons and progress towards a universal monotheism.

As these distinctions indicate, the whole problem has less to do with God or theological truths than with human subjects and their perceptions of the world. The individual horizon changes everything: if the world is acknowledged merely as the inner reality of the believer and his environment, or if it is acknowledged as a spatial whole but seen as a merely transient stage in time, it implies that what the believer does not perceive to be immediately or ultimately meaningful is not real. The most extreme manifestations of such convictions are bound to run into trouble sooner or later, since they cannot both reject the world and live in it, and at first sight this may seem to be a logical outcome of monotheism. However, as long as the validity of the Divine truth in a present tense falls back upon the human horizon of the believer and its mono-, heno-, or even polytheist nature is decided by his or her place in the world, it is not the belief as such that matters, but how open the individual believer is to an independent reality beyond his or her subjective position in time and space.

These are the premises on which an historical study like this must begin. We do not doubt that religious beliefs are immanently true at every present moment when they help their believers to overcome their Heideggerian thrownness, but when we are trying to detect how the *beliefs as such* work in the world at large and over time – individually, socially, politically – we must concede that the way in which they turn out to be instrumental to the context in which they are adopted will be decided by a multitude of needs and desires revealing other shores of existence. A Christian may regard his faith as a means to a terrestrial end, or his world as a means to a celestial end; a Jew can define his god through the adherence to his own community or his community through the adherence to his own god; a Pagan can wish for the gods to provide him with the means for a good life or try finding the means to a good life in the absence of gods. This is the reason why we have avoided going into details on specific aspects of ideological interaction in the ancient world,

such as influences of Persian religion upon Judaism or Greek philosophy upon Christianity, soteriological dimensions of the incarnation or moral implications of beliefs in the afterlife, as well as culturally dominant or subaltern concepts of holiness or social justice.

What we should take with us from this brief introduction, however, is the epistemological impact of religions that are communicating over time as much as space. In this sense, Judaism and Christianity are scriptural religions not only in their adherence to writings that have become considered sacred but also in their awareness about the historical development to which they testify. Even as their believers keep their eyes fixed on a prophetic future, their actions along the way leave perceptible traces that will slowly and stealthily – just like their scriptural canon – accumulate into an historical past. The nature of this past will be just as diverse and incoherent as the present from which it is perceived, and while the preferential right of interpreting it is normally confined to contexts that are able to maintain an historiographical tradition, it can fuel conflicts between their ideologists in ways that are less related to their understanding of God in a present tense than with mutually incompatible notions of the redemptory nature of their history. It promotes an historicist self-understanding, a regressive rather than progressive form of apocalypticism that may partly serve to explain the widening gap between Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity. However, it is still important not to impose its closed horizon upon the ground-level and everyday realities of a world in which the two communities actually keep interacting.

Emerging at the fringes of the Roman and Persian Empires on the Arabian Peninsula, Islam belongs to the monotheistic tradition that we have surveyed and with which it explicitly identifies.[25] It will take almost two centuries for it to develop a similar historiographical tradition, which is less surprising both in consideration of the time needed for accumulating a past that renders itself to historical interpretation, and of the overall nature of an intermittent period whose political upheavals and cultural shifts create a shaky environment for historiographers. However, it leaves the later observer in doubt, not so much about events and beliefs in the early history of Islam as about the epistemological horizon from which the earliest Muslims acted. The fact that they emerged as the main victors out of the seventh century crises and founded a new empire in the former Roman and Persian territories in the Middle East makes them directly complicit in the historical process and makes it even more tempting to search for their motives. Was it in an apocalyptic conviction to fulfil the monotheist promise that they set out to conquer the known world, or was it a side effect of a wider context that provided them with historical momentum? As we turn to the actual topic of this book, we must try to understand each single link in the chain of interaction on its own specific terms and conditions. To some extent it means to question the very horizon from which we are used to understanding the past we have come to know as history.

Notes

1 Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis* (2010) 4, "The history of the Middle East in the seventh century (…) is the equivalent on the human plane of a cosmic event, even perhaps the Big Bang"; Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (1980) 12, "… this unreality arises from the fact that what the sources would have us believe cannot be true: new religions do not spring fully-fledged from the heads of prophets, old civilizations are not conjured away".
2 Soler, *Qui est Dieu?* (2012), 33–41, 60–77.
3 *Genesis* 37, 39–47.
4 This theory – which is rarely endorsed by contemporary scholars, or at least not in this form – was most famously promoted by Sigmund Freud in *Der Mann Moses und die Monotheistische Religion* (1939).
5 *Exodus* 5–14, *Numeri* 34.
6 *Dan.* 2:31–45 (ch. 1–2; 1–30 for the background).
7 *Dan*. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7–12.
8 For a concise overview, see Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon* (1985) 21–41, 81–112.
9 *Dan*. 2:28, 2:47.
10 The "Cyrus cylinder", issued after the conquest of Babylon, expresses adherence to the gods of the city and thus seeks to legitimise the rule of the conquerors. At least in its general idea it is preceded by the Nabonid cylinder, named after the Babylonian king who might have been the original protagonist in the story of the madness of Nebuchadnezzar in *Dan*. 4. See further, Razmou, "The Cyrus Cylinder: a Persian Perspective" in Finkel (ed.), *The Cyrus Cylinder* (2013) 104–25.
11 *Isaiah* 44:24–45:13.
12 The Achaemenids are often labelled as Zoroastrians, but the earliest testimony of their adherence to Ahura Mazda as the sole source of their rule comes from the reign of Darius I (r. 522–486 BC). See further Pierre Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire Perse: de Cyrus à Alexandre* (1996) 105–7. The Apocryphal additions to Daniel include a story (*Bel and the Dragon*) in which the prophet proves to Cyrus the Great that an idol to the god Bel is incapable of devouring sacrificial offerings.
13 Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1988) 408.
14 For Hellenised Jews like Josephus, it was clear that Alexander had shown his reverence for Yahweh when he passed Jerusalem during his conquest of Persia (*Antiquities of the Jews* XI 8:5). However, Alexander would also be transformed into a Persian hero in the Medieval Persian epic *Shahname*, whereas the Late Ancient Greek *Alexander Romance* inspired a rich variety of Medieval Christian legends, not least in the West where he is traditionally counted among the "Nine Worthies". Islamic tradition sometimes identifies Alexander with the mysterious *Dhu'l-Qarnayn* whom the Qur'an (18:83) credits with the erection of a giant wall of copper to keep away the eschatological invaders of Gog and Magog (cf. ch. 3). See further Stoneman, *Alexander the Great: a Life in Legend* (2008).
15 For the historical context, see Timothy Law, *When God Spoke Greek* (2013) esp. 33–42, 59–62; on Jerusalem in the Hellenistic era, see the article by Patrich in Grabar, Kedar (eds.) *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade* (2009) 41–48.
16 *1. Macc*. 1:54, 6:7; cf. *Dan*. 9:27, 11:31, 12:11. The capital of the Seleucid Empire, Seleucia, had replaced Babylon as the capital of Mesopotamia, representing the power of the new Hellenic rulers. However, the land would remain a stronghold of Jewish intellectualism and a cultural counterweight to the Eastern Mediterranean.
17 Plato, *Res Publica* 546d/e, f.

18 *Matth*. 10:5–38, 11:20–24, 12:46–50, 15:1–20, 16:27–28, 23:37–24:44, *Mark* 3:31–35, 8:34–9:1, 13:1–37, *Luk*. 9:23–27, 10:1–20, 12:8–12, 49–53, 13:1–4, 21:5–33, 22:35–38.

19 One should not ignore the famous Roman inclination to superstition here: the same efficiency that applied to technological and administrative achievements extended to the religious sphere, where it was considered an utmost concern to retain good relations with invisible forces, known and unknown. Eck, *Augustus und seine Zeit* (1998) 88ff, 112ff.

20 The first Jewish efforts to rebuild the temple would take place within a mere generation, under Simon Bar Kokhba, who will die fighting the troops of Emperor Hadrian in AD 135.

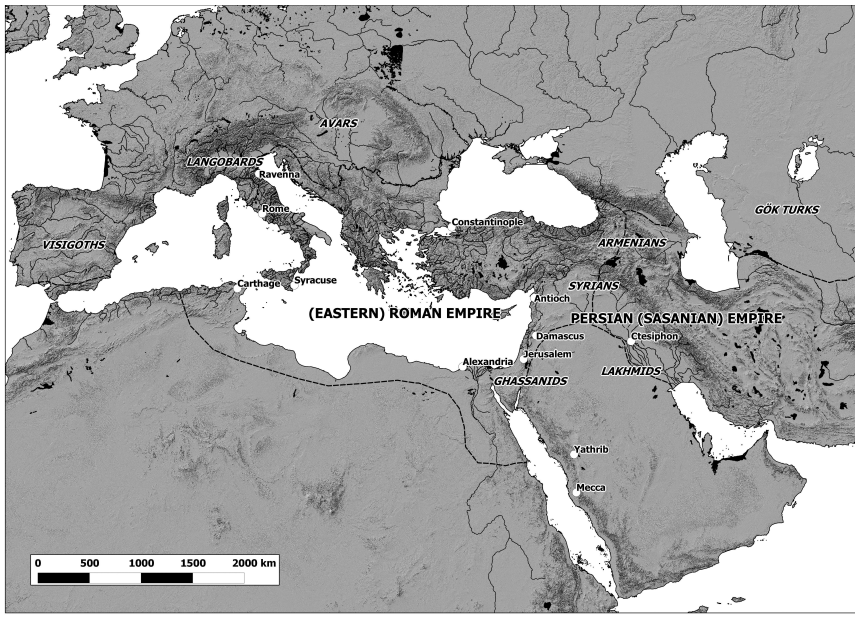
21 This is the main outcome of the *Book of Revelation* that will eventually conclude the whole Christian Bible. Drawing a great deal upon Old Testament imagery and symbolism, it has remained favourite reading for ecstatic and eschatological movements throughout the ages, but it was only hesitatingly added to the main body of the Christian canon, and somewhat later in the politically stable East than in the turbulent West (cf. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (1974) 7f.)

22 Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean* (2002), esp. 59–69, 162–77.

23 Following a long tradition of apocryphal stories concerning Roman reactions to the life of Christ, the church father Tertullian would even claim that Emperor Tiberius, urged on by a report from Pilate, had tried to convince the Senate to grant Jesus a place in the Roman Pantheon – as if the epistemological subtext for the later understanding of Christianity had been there from the very beginning.

24 Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (1995) 19–36, 54–77, 89.

25 Cf. Q 2:135–141; God is One (2:163–164, 37:4, 39:4, 42:3–5, 72:18–21, 112) and His truth is valid for the entire mankind (21:92, 23:52–3, 60:4); people will flock to the belief in Him (110:2); those who refuse will be free to do so, at least for a time (2:15–20, 10:49, 19:84, 23:54, 29:52–54, 44:15–17, 74:11–56, 83:10–17, 84:20–25, 86:13–17, 109:1–6) but God Himself will punish them just as He did with mighty peoples and empires before them (6:6–11, 7:59–168, 10:98–100, 11:50–103, 14:9–18, 15:80–84, 19:73–4, 21:11–15, 29:28–41, 30:9/42, 34:15–19, 38:11–16, 40:21–22, 41:13–18, 43:8, 44:17–39, 46:21–28, 47:10–13, 51:31–46, 54:9–42, 65:8–10, 69:4–12, 71:21–28, 85:17–18, 89:6–14, 91:11–15, 98:6, 105:1–5). The terrestrial life is but a transient stage (3:196–7, 11:15–16, 17:18, 18:7–8, 20:100–104, 42:36, 55:26, 57:20) that will be destroyed when the Day of Judgment arrives (14:48–51, 18:46–49/99, 20:105–109, 21:95–104, 23:101–115, 25:11–19, 37:18–33, 44:40–50, 45:34–35, 50:20, 52:7–16, 54:1–6, 69:13–37, 70, 75:1–14, 77:7–49, 78:17–30, 79:6–13, 34–46, 80:33–42, 81, 82, 84:1–15, 85:12–16, 87:9–19, 88, 89:21–25, 99, 101); worldly authorities have no power in comparison (96:17–18) and no terrestrial bonds of kinship can offer any help (23:101). Imperatives of social justice and moral constraint indicate that this cannot and should not be read from a purely eschatological point of view (2:168–188/219–242/261–284, 3:130–143, 4:2–43, 5:2–11, 6:136–147/151–13, 17:53, 24:27–32/58–62, 30:38–39, 33:28–37/49–59, 42:36–43, 49:11–13, 58:1–4, 65:1–7, 69:1–5, 76:7, 83:1–9, 89:15–20, 90, 92:8–10/18–21, 102, 103, 104, 107) but the obligation to a self-sacrificing struggle against visible and invisible enemies of the Divine message means that the apocalyptic dimension cannot be ignored either (2:218, 9:5–16, 38–46, 86–98, 47:4–6, 48:17).



Map 1 The Ancient world in the late sixth century.
Source: Map drawn by Dr Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, Vienna.

1 A broken Colossus

Historical paradigms are helpful when we are trying to find our way through the past, but rarely relatable to anything that can be found on the real-time level of human perceptions about the world. Paradigms such as the Ancient world or the Middle Ages are measured in millennia, but the closer one comes to the purported transition, the more elusive they get, and at some point they become muddled almost beyond recognition. This is completely natural, as their closed character is perceived from a retrospective point of view and not in a present tense, where the world remains open, where the future is unknown, the past is understood from a viewpoint different from our own, and most distinctions are of a present and spatial character. Discarding all retrospective frameworks of interpretation, however, would leave the later reader with a meaningless heap of random facts and make the past as inaccessible as the future.

We might begin by illustrating the problem in a way that matches our overall topic. We are told that the inhabitants of Rhodes had erected a statue in honour of the sun god Helios after a failed Macedonian siege in 304 BC. Practically all we know about this statue is that it was huge, cast in bronze and included in most lists of the ancient "Seven Wonders of the World". Authors who never saw it described it in exaggerated terms, as an over-dimensioned, gilded figure that straddled the harbour of Rhodes and held out a torch to direct seafarers by night. Impious Roman emperors were rumoured to have tried remodelling its head in their own likeness; the sheer size of the statue is said to have attracted the wrath of Heaven and led to its fall.[1]

As an historical fact, the Colossus makes a rather weak figure. We do not at all know where on Rhodes it stood or what it really looked like, and its destruction is reported on several occasions, the first one during an earthquake not long after it was erected. It does not mean that it was non-existent for the most part of its alleged history, or that the traditional reports of it are all wrong; but its most lasting quality is undoubtedly that of a recurrent object of human imagination. As such, it makes up for much more than just a fanciful narrative or an historical curiosity. As a symbol of human achievement or hubris, it straddled the transforming religious landscape of the Ancient world from the Pagan to the Christian eras.

Like its fellow Wonders, the Colossus also tells us something about the Ancient world as a geographical unit: its narrative cosmos straddled the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The authors who listed the Seven Wonders of the World would not have included, for instance, the monuments of China or India, of which they had no direct knowledge and no tools to comprehend. They were familiar with the pyramids of Egypt and they knew about the bygone gardens of Babylon, because they had absorbed the memory of the ancient Near Eastern cultures as a history somehow related to their own world. Writing in Greek or Latin, they focused upon sites that had a direct relation or meaning to their own literary cosmos, like Olympia, Halicarnassus, Ephesus, Rhodes and Alexandria, and sometimes even Rome, but focus lay upon the Eastern Mediterranean.[2]

If we place the end of antiquity somewhere in the fourth or fifth century, we reveal our adherence to a Western European horizon from which the Roman Empire began to disintegrate with the German invasions and the imperial presence in the city of Rome was eclipsed by that of the Christian pope. There is nothing wrong with this as long as we remain aware of the limited scope of our outlook. Nominally, the city of Rome was still ruled from the new imperial capital of Constantinople, and the church that spanned the mercantile networks of the Mediterranean stood under the further jurisdiction of patriarchs in Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. If the Latin Romans had left a monument more lasting than bronze, it was in the idea of a unifying power in this terrestrial cosmos, a power that would bear their name long after Greek had retained its position as the predominant language in the empire.

Those who are prepared to extend the age of antiquity beyond the Western European horizon usually refer to a Late Ancient era culminating in the reign of the Emperor Justinian I (527–565) in Constantinople. Not only did he successfully reclaim control over Rome and Italy, Carthage and North Africa, and assert the power of the Christian Roman Empire against the rising power of Zoroastrian Persia on the Eastern front, but he would leave lasting political, juridical, religious and artistic imprints even upon the cultural history of the West. Furthermore, those who are keen to maintain the notion of decline and imminent collapse will find a great source of evidence in the secret work of his imperial chronicler Procopius: beyond the surface of the triumphant picture presented in *The Persian Wars, The Vandal Wars* and *The Gothic Wars*, the *Secret History* claims to reveal the true nature of a hollow idol, a giant on feet of clay. Procopius lashes out against the emperor and his Empress Theodora, whom he incriminates with all kinds of vices and depravities, at the same time as he describes a Roman world depopulated by plagues, earthquakes and climate change, exhausted by religious dissent, factional violence and an inability to keep the enemies at bay.[3]

There is plenty of historical evidence to corroborate details in this picture and confirm the outlines of a transformation from an ancient to a Medieval society even in the East, where the increasing refusal of Armenians, Syrians

and Copts to confess the imperial form of Christianity points to the failing power of the Roman unity.[4] However, rather than a matter of overstating the paradigm, the problem with the decline-and-fall narrative is that it considers the transformation from a teleological perspective. It would be more honest to the post-Justinian world to say that it remained perceptibly marked by a Roman imperial prerogative at the same time as it was crisscrossed by decentralising and segregative tendencies that revealed narrowing horizons of time and space. When we approach the fateful seventh century and the rise of Islam, we must not fall into the trap of perceiving this as a closed process just because we happen to be acquainted with its outcome.

1 Crossroads

The last monument to have been dedicated on the old *Forum Romanum* in Rome is a Corinthian column erected by the Roman Exarch Smaragdus in honour of the Emperor Phocas (r. 602–610) in Constantinople. The inscription on its fundament indicates that the pillar once featured a gilded statue of the emperor on top, but does not specify the reason why it was erected. It might have been related to the fact that the emperor had favoured the supremacy of the pope in Rome over the other patriarchs, or that he had allowed the reuse of the ancient Pantheon as a Christian church. It could also have been a manifestation of loyalty from his Italian exarch at a time when the Langobards posed a persistent threat to the Roman power structures on the peninsula.[5]

Positioned in front of the ancient rostrum and conspicuous still to modern-day visitors to Rome, the column of Phocas is outstanding in more than one sense, for the legacy of its emperor is quite a bad one. A soldier of simple origin, Phocas had come to power after a revolt that flared up during a harsh winter of famine and culminated with the brutal execution of the legitimate Emperor Maurice and his sons – all of them mere boys – together with a number of prominent royal family members and servants at the imperial court in Constantinople. The Greek historiographers who were active under the reigns of his successors would recall Phocas as a barbarian half-wit through whom more or less all misfortune entered the world.[6]

It is tantalizing to bestow paradigmatic implications upon single individuals and events, and it is true that the military coup of Phocas was the first of its kind to be met with success since the days of Constantine the Great. However, if the history of the latter proves anything, it is how the most tenacious bloodstains in the imperial purple can sometimes fade with time. Historiographical records accumulated over centuries and through various mechanisms of fate had made Constantine – who had become sole ruler of the empire by destroying the tetrarchy, executing his former allies and their families, and lived a far from Christian life – into an imperial saint. Whatever eulogies the pope and the Italian exarch tried to bestow upon Phocas on a

real-time level, on the other hand, would turn out to be confined to a few volatile years during which the new and inexperienced emperor found himself in the rather uncomfortable position of which he had so ingloriously robbed his unfortunate predecessor.[7]

The eastern fringes of the Roman Empire had been dominated for centuries by a confederation of Iranian groups that filled the power vacuum after the collapse of the Greek Seleucids, and whose once Hellenised culture had gradually given in to a Persian revivalism that culminated with the emergence of the Sasanian or Sassanid dynasty in the third century. Not far from the ancient capital of Persepolis that Alexander the Great had destroyed, at Naqsh-e Rustam, a group of rock reliefs commemorates the triumphs of the first Sassanid shahs, including the humiliation and captivity of the Roman Emperor Valerian after the Battle of Edessa in AD 260. In the sixth century the Persians had become a considerable threat to the Roman political interests in the East, and a number of aggressive wars revealed power ambitions that extended to Armenia, the Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula. A 590–591 war of succession had forced the young Shah Khosrau II to make a peace agreement with the Romans, but given its unfavourable conditions it would be only a matter of time before he would try to find a suitable pretext for breaking it.[8]

The usurpation of Phocas arrived at a convenient moment for the shah, but just like the person, this fact cannot grasp the much wider crisis with which it became associated. The Roman–Persian war that it reignited would last for twenty-five years, and long before it ended Phocas had gone the same way as his predecessor. Unable to contain the Persian threat, the emperor fell victim to a plot hatched by the Senate in Constantinople and the Roman governor of Carthage, who dispatched his son and nephew with troops against Constantinople. In October 610, the former reached the capital by sea and was crowned emperor as soon as the story of Phocas had been concluded by the capture and execution of its protagonist. Only the lone column and inscription on the old Forum in Rome remained standing as a memory of an emperor whose statues were otherwise smashed all over the empire.

The name of the new emperor was Heraclius. Aged thirty-five, his father having served in earlier wars against Persia, and with a name that recalled the most famous hero of ancient mythology, his rise to power might have boded well. In fact, it would mark the point at which the already precarious situation took a fatal turn for the worse. The rebellion of Phocas had provided the shah with a *casus belli*, but that of Heraclius gave him the opportunity to launch a full-scale invasion. Having reversed the Roman gains from the last peace, Khosrau II turned down the desperate requests for a new peace agreement and pushed into Syria.[9] Once the Persian troops had reached the Mediterranean coast, the way lay open both to the interiors of Anatolia – once the cradle of some of the earliest Christian communities – and to Egypt, which was the granary of the Roman capital.[10] Even before the invaders had reaped these fruits, the holy city of Jerusalem had submitted to their rule.

Khosrau II is another historical personality whose biography would tease the imagination of later ages. He became shah at a rather young age after an adventurous struggle for power; he appears to have been involved in some romantic escapades; he became known as a patron of the arts, music and technology; his long reign saw an enormous expansion of the Sassanid Empire at the cost of its Roman archenemy.[11] All of this serves to create a close-knit narrative of an unusual individual whose great rise would eventually lead to his great fall, and its partial proximity to Achaemenid role models makes for a tempting parallel.[12] Perhaps Khosrau wished to restore the ancient Persian Empire or promote Zoroastrianism as a new universal religion; perhaps he did suffer from megalomania. The point is that no one creates a world empire or a universal religion simply because he has come up with the idea of doing so. If he made a difference it was because he directed a blow at the prerogative of the Roman Christian empire, not because he possessed any far-reaching means to replace it.

The shah cannot have been unaware of the great reputation that his ancient predecessors enjoyed in Jewish history, where they were remembered for restoring the Promised Land to the Jewish people and rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. If Khosrau dreamt of imitating Cyrus the Great and attracting sympathies in the conquered territories, he might have attempted to sow matching expectations among Jews in the Roman Empire, and there are indications that the Persian invasion of Palestine was facilitated by Jews who hoped for a new turn of the prophetic cycle, a purification of Jerusalem and a restoration of the Temple, possibly inspired by the belief that the Roman Empire had been the last of the terrestrial empires predicted by Daniel.[13] Such a deliberate use of apocalyptic convictions in the service of a terrestrial agenda, on the other hand, could have created new problems for the conquerors. Messianic believers were unlikely companions on which to build a stable Persian peace and they were bound to confront the more numerous local communities – Jewish and Christian – that did not approve of their notions of redemption. Furthermore, the Temple was related to the New Testament prophecies of Jesus about the End of times, which meant that the point where history resumed for the Jews marked the point where the Christians found it replaced by an eschatological future. A worst-case scenario could turn the apocalyptic panic into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The modern reader who feels estrangement towards the apparent influence of religious thinking upon the Late Ancient man is advised to focus less upon religion in a purely theological sense and more upon the utopian dimension that made it so politically complicit. After all, the Late Ancient world was one in which religious truths and political realities rarely converged. Judaism flourished in Persia, where the Savoraim scholars gave the Babylonian Talmud much of its present form, but Jews remained a vital element around the Mediterranean. The Roman Empire identified with its own form of Christianity, but the Nestorian or Eastern Syrian church prospered in Asia and acted as a living proof that Christianity was not identical to Rome.

Jerusalem had been a site of shared reverence to Jews and Christians at a time when the border between them was still less sharp, and the Roman Christian era had seen it grow into a new urban centre after the destruction it had suffered in AD 70; however, it remained a terrestrial city, and the Temple Mount was left a ruin in order to keep apocalyptic expectations down.[14] This was not merely an act of humiliation by one religious community over another, but also a clever way of muddling the border between the physical and metaphysical realities that made up the totality of their shared religious cosmos. The strategy may not have been successful at all times, and additional precautions of a physical segregation between the communities were probably causing more harm than good in the long run, but by 614 it had still worked comparably well for a couple of centuries.

Hardly surprising, the Persian invasion caused uncertainty and unrest. Urban riots broke out in Jerusalem a few months after the conquest, when a group of local youths had slain the representatives of the shah, and inspired Christian acts of violence against the local Jews, who took a harsh revenge when the Persian authorities had restored control over the city.[15] However, the extent of the destruction reported by Christian authors is debatable, and the shah must have realised what a difficult balancing act he faced, for he tried to show himself generous towards the Christians in the years that followed, and there are no indications that the Jews of Jerusalem were permitted, or even dared, to commence any building activities on the Temple Mount.[16] On the other hand, Khosrau brought the relic of the True Cross – the wooden bar on which Jesus was claimed to have been crucified – from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the Persian capital Ctesiphon, accompanied by a number of captives, including the Orthodox patriarch.[17] This might have been less humiliating to Christianity in a strictly religious sense than it was to the secular power of Rome, and at least for the time being, the Roman church that found itself left behind was unlikely to look for a political alternative in Ctesiphon – where other Christian communities abounded – and more prone to conclude that faith alone would offer any lasting salvation now it had lost its secular framework.[18]

An immediate result of the Persian victory, thus, may have been a surge in apocalyptic expectations that hampered any further political stabilisation. As such, the capture of Jerusalem in 614 could have created an Eastern equivalent to the capture of Rome by the Visigoths in 410, which had shocked the Latin and Western parts of the empire and provided the main background for the utopian visions of St Augustine, *The City of God*. [19] It is important to note that such feelings would have transgressed not only the area in and around Jerusalem, but also the theological boundaries of the region at large. At least one independent source from these years appears to testify to widespread feelings of concern: the Qur'an, the compilation of revelations that the Prophet Muḥammad began to receive in and around his Pagan Arab city of Mecca in 610. A few verses that would form the introduction to a Qur'an

chapter called "The Romans" are understood to have offered him consolation after the Roman defeat:

> The Romans have been vanquished in the land nearby, but after being vanquished they will be victorious again within a few years. God is master over the past and the future, and on that day the Believers will rejoice over His help. He helps whom he wants; He is both mighty and compassionate.[20]

Centuries later, these verses would spark controversy among Muslim scholars: would God have spoken out in favour of the Romans? Some commentators tried to read the passive verb *ghulibat* (to be vanquished) as *ghalabat* (vanquish) and suggested that the verse referred to a Roman victory that God was about to reverse. Others asserted that it referred to a Roman and hence Christian defeat to the Zoroastrian Persians, who were not per definition monotheists.[21] After all, the prophet long used to pray in the direction of Jerusalem, to which Muslim tradition says he was taken by Divine grace a few years later.[22] The fact that the traditional reading of the verse does not support an historicist interpretation could testify to its early date, glimpsing forth from a moment when people in the region felt uncertain about the future. The community of the prophet struggled to survive in Mecca, and the faceless Persian adversary in the verse does not appear as a credible candidate to replace one world order with another. It is of course notable that the verse does not take the Roman defeat as a point of departure for apocalyptic visions of the kind to which Jewish and Christian observers seem to have resorted; besides, it is partly understandable if the traditional reading has prevailed since the prophecy turned out to become perfectly true.

The great story of the rise of Khosrau II would find its logical end in the no less spectacular story of his fall. Even the later Persian *Shahname* or Book of Kings, in which the shah takes the role of a tragic hero, admits that he showed tendencies to the same kind of pride that had brought so many of his predecessors out of touch with the forces of nature.[23] In the Graeco-Roman world, the literary *topos* of Persian hubris went back to the Classical age: what the Pagan saw as the epitome of godlessness – human hubris towards nature[24] – received a Christian morale with the shah depicted as a worshipper of the material cosmos rather than of its Creator. Khosrau had made himself, it was said, a palace with an artificial sky, with celestial bodies and weather conditions controlled by machinery that enabled him to play God.[25] However, the relic he had stolen in Jerusalem – the True Cross – was to prove that the God of the Christians was stronger and more enduring. Later Islamic historiographers added the story of how Khosrau had received a letter from the Prophet Muḥammad inviting him to Islam, and how the shah had responded by tearing it to pieces and throwing it into the Tigris: they saw it as a foreboding of how his own empire was soon torn to pieces.[26]

The simple truth is that the Persian conquests, impressive as they may seem, offer few clues to what a new *Pax Persica* could have looked, and no one would know, for at last the moment of the Roman Emperor Heraclius had arrived. His initial passivity in face of the Persian invasion is less surprising than his ability to stay in power throughout a disastrous decade: the collapse of the Roman Near East had been accompanied by a breakdown of the Danubian front against the Slavs and Avars in the Balkans, and for a while it began to look as if Constantinople would suffer the same fate as had the old capital of Rome some two hundred years before.[27]

The turning point came in 622. Unaware about the prophet in Mecca who was about to take an important step into the unknown, leave his native city and lay the foundations of an independent religious community in the nearby oasis of Yathrib, alias Medina, the Emperor Heraclius unexpectedly put himself at the head of a number of military campaigns against his enemies in Europe and Asia. Whether he could count on assistance from the Slavs, Bulgarians and even Franks who were soon to eclipse the power of the Avar khaganate in Eastern Europe is not a question to be discussed here, but at least two dangerous attempts from the side of the latter were averted – against his person in 622 and against Constantinople in 626.[28]

However, it was the Asian campaigns that would secure his legacy. Having loosened the Persian grip on Anatolia, Heraclius embarked upon a daring expedition through Armenia, established an alliance with the Gök Turk warlords on the northern fringes of the Sassanid Empire and suddenly invaded its Mesopotamian heartlands. Unlike Alexander the Great, the emperor did not need to pursue his war into the mountainous highlands of Iran in order to strike at the core of the Persian Empire, for the Sassanids had chosen to reside on the fertile plains next to the old Seleucid capital, just slightly north of ancient Babylon. As it became clear that the road to Ctesiphon lay open to the Romans, the power of Khosrau II came crashing down, and in the winter of 628 he ended like Phocas: imprisoned, humiliated and executed by his own.[29]

This time Persia sued for peace. Roman feelings of triumph knew no bounds. After six years of toiling – the court poet of Heraclius announced – the emperor could look back on his work like the Creator on the Seventh day. He was a new Heracles, the mythical Greek hero who had slaughtered the hydra, but he was also a new Alexander, who had overthrown the Persian Empire. And he was like Constantine, the first Christian emperor, who had conquered in the sign of the Cross.[30] Clearly, a great victory had been won: not only by Heraclius, but also by his troops, his Turkish allies, the Persian General Shahrbaraz who had switched sides in the middle of the war, and the common people whose taxes and sacrifices had supported the whole expenditure. However, these realities all but disappear behind the imagery in which they were clad and make it difficult to understand the general mood of a world that had lived through a sequence of political reversals of a kind that it normally takes generations to process. Mixing in the choir of exalted voices

were observers who interpreted the sudden chain of events as apocalyptic premonitions of things to come. A Golden Age would dawn, either in the sense that the whole world would become united under the Roman Empire, or that the Roman Empire would give way to the Kingdom of God.[31] Such beliefs were equally apocalyptic whether they expected their own horizon to fill the world or foresaw the eschatological collapse of the latter; and they transgressed the major theological divisions in the region as they used the Book of Daniel in general, and the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in particular, as a source of inspiration. Worryingly, such tendencies even pervade chronicles that were composed in the imperial capital.[32]

The initial triumph was celebrated in Constantinople in 629. On the coins that were issued for the event, Heraclius appeared without the Latin titles he had inherited from his Roman predecessors, but its Greek cognate βασιλεύς (which technically just meant "king") was extended with the extension "faithful in Christ", as if the emperor wanted to stress both his submission to celestial powers and the apparent invincibility that it had bestowed upon him.[33] He would not aspire to the position of the Creator: unlike Khosrau he was to admit that the true "king of kings" was the one who had been crucified for the salvation of mankind. Hence the terminal point of the triumph was not Constantinople or Rome but Jerusalem. That is where the relic of the True Cross, retrieved from the spoils of war in the Persian treasury at Ctesiphon, would be handed over to the emperor and returned to the site of the death and resurrection of Christ at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Just as with reference to Khosrau II's capture of Jerusalem in 614, the modern and secularised reader is best advised to approach the religious dimension in the triumph of Heraclius with the utmost caution. A perceived correlation between Christianity and political success had been a main component of the Late Ancient world since the days of Constantine, and this *do ut des* attitude to the visible and invisible forces of the terrestrial world had enabled it to absorb and tolerate the diversity and ambiguity that kept seething under the surface of congruence. As we have seen, people throughout the empire were unlikely to display identical attitudes even when it came to apocalyptic expectations: whereas some observers may have concluded that the Kingdom of God was approaching, others would have seen the return of the Cross as a sign that the Divine grace had returned to the terrestrial empire. A mere theological definition of Christian Orthodoxy is unsuited to explain the division, and the triumph will be better understood through historical and religious antecedents that provided it with a narrative framework.

It was Constantine the Great who had given Jerusalem its new Christian status after the humiliation it had suffered as a Jewish city. As we saw above, Constantine left the Temple Mount in ruins, but erected a magnificent Christian basilica on the site of Golgotha and the tomb of Christ. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre would have dominated the skyline of the holy city even after the Persians had ransacked it and carried away the True Cross, but the relic itself was connected to the foundation of the church: Helen, the mother of

Emperor Constantine, is supposed to have discovered it during the preparatory excavations.[34] In a sense, the whole point of departure for the Roman Christian narrative after Constantine had been his mysterious vision of a cross before the battle that secured his victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312, even if the legend is of a later date.[35] The return of the relic to Jerusalem thus appears to point in the direction of a Roman secular ideology that tried to steal back the thunder, put the apocalypse back in the bag and send a political signal to dissenting Christians.

On another note, the entry into Jerusalem by a Roman emperor was an entirely unprecedented event that evoked the Jewish and Biblical origins of Christianity rather than the Roman political form it had attained. Some scholars have drawn attention to the fact that a son born to Heraclius in the year 630 was given the name David, and that a group of silver plates dating from the same period depicted the Biblical king who had entered Jerusalem and installed the Ark of the Divine Covenant at the site of the later Temple.[36] Such symbolism would not necessarily deprive the triumph of its secular dimension: the notion of a Divinely sanctioned success upon earth was no less Jewish than it was Roman, at least as long as it did not implicate itself with the question about a Messianic future. Emperor Titus had manifested the Roman victory over the Jews in AD 70 by bringing the Temple treasures to Rome and parading them in his triumphal procession; Emperor Justinian I is reported to have obtained the same treasures from the Vandals in 533–534 and paraded them through Constantinople before he dispatched them back to Jerusalem.[37] The perceived numinosity of these objects did not reveal anything about Pagan, Jewish and Christian notions about the future. If the restoration of the Cross to Jerusalem had a more problematic dimension it was because it implied that the Christian Romans had replaced the Jews as the carriers of a Messianic promise. It would match the report that Heraclius evicted all Jews from Jerusalem in the wake of his triumphal entry and ordered all Jews to be forcibly baptized throughout the world.[38]

The triumph was meticulously planned. On the day of the spring equinox, 630, the True Cross was to be handed over to the emperor on the Mount of Olives on the eastern side of Jerusalem, where Christ had ascended to Heaven, and Heraclius was to carry it across the Kidron valley into the city. The most direct route to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre would take him past an octagonal sanctuary known as the Tomb of Mary in Gethsemane, followed by the vast esplanade of the destroyed Temple. The logical point to cross the city walls in between them is marked by the now walled-up Golden Gate, which symbolically connected the Temple Mount with the exterior of the city.[39] The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel had described its ritual and symbolical function for the long bygone Temple:

> This gate shall be closed and must not be opened, and no one can enter through it. For the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered through it and it has to be closed. But the Commander will sit inside it, and he will eat

> bread before the Lord; he will enter by the way of the porch and go out the same way.[40]

Perhaps the emperor, sweating along the road up from the Kidron valley towards the city walls of Jerusalem with the True Cross of Christ on his shoulders, surrounded by his dignitaries and the people crowding to get a glimpse of the strange event, recalling the dolorous road he had left behind him since the day he had left Carthage twenty years before, did really believe that he was about to fulfil an apocalyptic promise. As we will see, the imagery of a Roman emperor who conquers the world and then goes to Jerusalem to cede all his power to God would multiply in apocalyptic writings from this time. However, just as in the cases of Phocas and Khosrau, there was an obvious danger in toying with superhuman expectations that he could not have been in a position to fulfil. It is well possible that Christian sceptics – at least retrospectively – might have considered Heraclius guilty of the same kind of hubris as the shah when he identified his own power with that of the Heavens. Two centuries later, in the distant German city of Fulda, the monk Hrabanus Maurus would claim that only when the emperor dismounted in humility and took off his imperial garb, did an angel appear and open the walled gate to the holy city.[41] It was in this version that the triumph of Heraclius seemed to make sense, and how it would be remembered in Christian art and literature for centuries to come.[42] Islamic chroniclers took up the thread in a different way by making the visit to Jerusalem the occasion for a dream in which the emperor was foretold the imminent fall of his own power to a "circumcised race", which is supposed to have first directed his suspicions towards the Jews.[43]

In a sense one could say that the careers of Phocas, Khosrau and Heraclius are presenting us with the last grand narratives of the Ancient world, but it is well worth pondering the increasingly hysterical notes they were striking and how narrow in scope they actually were. What was supposed to follow the triumphal entry of a Roman emperor, returning like Alexander from his victory over Persia and carrying the Cross of Christ from its Babylonian captivity into Jerusalem? Would the emperor with the strange name reminiscent of the Pagan hero fulfil all prophetic promises and pave the way for the Kingdom of God? Had history come to an end?

Beneath such high-strung emotions and expectations of redemption, which we cannot know for sure how widespread they really were, we can merely hint the traces of a terrestrial world that would not budge and give way: a world of dull and dogged everyday concerns that tried to go back to its usual trot as God showed no signs of turning up. Heraclius had never been a superman like his namesake: it had taken him more than a decade to consolidate his position even in the capital and he remained a controversial personality. In 623, he had married his own niece Martina, a scandalous event that would pursue him for the rest of his life and cause the Senate to interfere with his succession when he was dead.[44] However, even his military victories could

barely conceal the challenges they brought. The recovered areas abounded with ethnic and religious groups that had long since begun to alienate themselves from his empire.

Heraclius would stay in the region for several years, during which he met the Nestorian catholicos Ishoyahb III and the Syrian monophysite patriarch Athanasius, leaders of two Christian groups whose theological dogmas the Roman emperors had once been powerful enough to anathemise and force into exile. He further maintained amicable relations with the Armenians, which was perhaps facilitated by his family origins,[45] but his effort to patch together the theological gaps that had long served as main pretexts for the separation of the different communities would result in a crisis of confidence in his own rows. At first Heraclius appeared to gain approval from both the Syrian patriarch and the pope in Rome when he suggested a compromise of theological dogmas – monothelitism or monoenergism – that was meant to reconcile the main body of the Roman church with those on its Eastern fringes. However, in 634 the church in Jerusalem elected a new patriarch, Sophronius, who openly opposed this imperial compromise of Orthodox Christianity.[46] The emperor had taken the Cross of Christ upon his shoulders; now it looked as if Christianity would tear his empire apart.

To counter the triumphal portrait of Heraclius with a negative antithesis, on the other hand, is to replace one apocalyptic narrative with another. Just like in the case of his enemies we cannot say what Heraclius might have accomplished in the longer term.[47] Two things are clear: God did not show up in Jerusalem on 21 March 630, and the walled-up Golden Gate by which the emperor entered the city on that day testifies to the fact that none of his successors would ever retrace his footsteps.

2 "Submit, and you will be in peace"

Even if religious idealism was not the driving force behind the decisions of Heraclius, the emperor must have been a naïve pragmatist if he believed that forced conversions of Jews would prevent rather than fuel factional tensions. The Persian surrender of Edessa to the Romans had already resulted in Christian acts of violence against the local Jews, and the emperor had felt obliged to intervene when he learned the details from a Jewish survivor.[48] The later Armenian chronicler Sebeos is alone in reporting that Jews who survived the incident took refuge in the Arabian Peninsula and convinced local Arabs to help them take up arms against the Romans.[49]

Not only might Jews and non-Roman Christians have objected to the imperial rhetoric. In fact many Roman Christians who felt less attracted by end-time scenarios must have been equally sceptical about the conversion of people towards whom they had long since developed – or inherited – a set of cultural prejudices.[50] Those who opposed the imperial efforts to reconcile the Eastern church revealed similar feelings that had little to do with theology.[51] Their objections reveal a grain of sense, for cultural differences were unlikely

to disappear with the theological ones; and it is hard to see how people who had been forced to accept Christianity for political reasons would consider their baptisms as anything more than a simple survival strategy. The natural attraction that Roman Christianity had enjoyed in its heyday of success had not emanated from a simple assertion of political force or the compelling nature of its religious ideology, but from an overall framework of peace, prosperity, stability and continuity that it had come to represent.[52]

In times of turmoil and unrest the field of play was narrow and unpredictable. A Jewish convert who began propagating Christianity to fellow Jews in Carthage in the summer of 634 was more concerned about the salvation of their souls in an unruly world than about the possible prevalence of the Roman Empire in which they lived:

> From the ocean, from Scotland and Britain, Spain and France, Italy, Greece and Thrace, to Antioch and Syria, Persia and Anatolia, Egypt and Africa and beyond Africa, were the Roman lands until today, and it seemed the foundations of this empire were made of bronze and marble … but now we see Rome weakened.[53]

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar was probably about to come true after all, even if the signs were difficult to read.[54] Just before the debate took place, a Roman official in the Palestinian Caesarea had fallen victim to a band of Arabs,[55] and the local Jews had heard rumours about an unusual claim that was circulating among the aggressors:

> Speaking to an old man who was versed in the scriptures, I said to him: "What do you say, my lord and teacher, about the Prophet who has risen among the Arabs?" And he said to me, while he groaned deeply: "Nonsense; do prophets come armed with sword and chariot? These are mere works of anarchy …"[56]

The Arab prophet had claimed to possess "the keys to paradise", something the rabbi considered "incredible": "there is no truth in this, only bloodshed".

By 634 the Prophet Muḥammad would have been dead for two years, but the date matches the point when his religious movement showed initial signs of breaking the geographical confines of the Arabian Peninsula. It had grown rapidly during the years in Medina, and just two months prior to the triumphal entry of Heraclius into Jerusalem, in January 630, the prophet and his followers had entered Mecca and cleansed the ancient sanctuary of Ka'ba of its Pagan idols. Arab tribes all around the Peninsula began paying loyalty to the nascent monotheist community, which caused a nervous imbalance in the whole network of tribal relations that spanned the region and extended far into Roman and Persian territories. Later Islamic historiographers refer to two clashes with Roman troops that are supposed to have taken place when

the prophet was still living, and which are said to have claimed the life of his oldest friend and companion Zayd ibn Ḥārithah.[57]

It is worth stopping for a while to ponder the two worlds that seem to meet here: the Ancient Roman and Christian, and the Medieval Arabic or Islamic. They are both so intrinsically wound up with what they would eventually become and how they were retrospectively envisioned that it is an extremely delicate task to discern their implications on a present-tense level. The problem is not primarily (as it is often said) that the Islamic and Arabic historiography is of a much later date, but that its view of the world is confined to a context that is already Arabic and Muslim through and through. It is easy to get the impression that its coherent world appears out of the blue and that the one surrounding it dissolves by the gentlest touch.[58]

Islamic historical descriptions of Heraclius are revealing on many levels. Just like the Persian shah, the Roman emperor is supposed to have received a letter from the Prophet Muḥammad in which he was invited to pay reverence to the Jewish and Christian God in the newly revealed form that had appeared among the Arabs:

> In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful; from Muḥammad, slave of God and prophet, to Heraclius, lord of the Romans; peace be upon the rightly guided. I summon you to Islam: *submit, and you will be in peace.* [59]

The story ascribes a more benign or at least neutral response to Heraclius than it does to Khosrau II, but does not describe his immediate reactions. Instead, we are told that a coming Roman humiliation at the hands of a "circumcised race" was revealed to the emperor in a dream, a report that is paralleled in a few non-Muslim efforts to explain the anti-Jewish policies that followed the triumph in Jerusalem.[60] Realising that Arabs were circumcised exactly like Jews, Heraclius interrogated an Arab merchant and opponent of Muḥammad from Mecca, Abū Sufyān, and became so convinced by what he learned about the prophet that he openly confessed his personal belief in him:

> If you are telling the truth, he will rule over the land under my feet. I knew he would come, but not that he would be one of you. Alas, if I had known! I would have come to him and met him; if I were with him I would wash his feet.

The report ends with the emperor failing to convince his closest affiliates to recognise Muḥammad as a prophet, a scenario that displays an at least unintended likeness to the unsuccessful attempt of Heraclius at reconciling the Orthodox and monophysite churches by means of a new dogma.[61] However, the culmination point of these narratives is a political showdown and not a religious debate: the Roman emperor, having learned that the Muslim Arabs are "warriors by day and monks by night", realises the futility of a

struggle against an opponent with a Divine mandate and bids farewell to Syria and the Near East.[62] Of course the narrator considers the Roman defeat to be correlated with the overall issue of faith in the same sense as he considers the Arab victories to be an apocalyptic fulfilment of the truth of Islam, but how did he expect the vanquished to draw any similar conclusions?

At this time, people in the Eastern Mediterranean used the terms "Arabs" and "Saracens" with reference to the Semitic Bedouins, herdsmen and traders who roamed the hot deserts of Arabia, where the laws of the settled world had little or no impact, and the "Fertile Crescent" where they occasionally settled down to adopt local beliefs, habits and laws. The Biblical terms "Hagarenes" or "Ishmaelites" implied an ancestry of all Arabs from Ishmael, Abraham's first son with the handmaid Hagar, whose destiny God had described in the following manner:

> He will be a wild man: his hands will be against everyone, and the hands of everyone will be against him.[63]

This story played a significant role in the early movement of Muḥammad as it showed how intertwined the life of the Arabs had always been with the Jewish and Christian world; but whereas this was undeniably accurate, to non-Arabs the same story offered an aetiological myth for explaining the ambivalence that characterised their relations with the Arabs. Christian hagiographers could not only tell stories of Bedouins whom Christian anchorites or holy men had convinced to abjure their Pagan beliefs, but fortified monasteries like St Catherine in Sinai, Mar Saba in Palestine and Saydnaia in Syria testify to the vulnerability of people who settled in their neighbourhood, as do stories about monks, hermits and pilgrims who were killed, robbed, enslaved and sometimes even sacrificed to the gods of Arab tribes on raiding trips.[64] The waywardness posed a political opportunity as much as a problem to the sedentary empires: the Ghassanid or Jafnid tribe had acted as a client and buffer state to Rome, as had the Lakhmid or Nasrid tribe to Persia, but mutual dissent obstructed any stable peace and sometimes dragged the main powers into conflict with each other.[65] A Roman court geographer had described a notable case that took place in the reign of Emperor Justin II (d. 581):

> There are innumerable Arab tribes, and most of them are desert-dwellers and have no leader; some are subjects to the Romans, other ones to the Persians. Justinian [I], who was a noble and broadminded man, realised this and sent gifts in times of peace to the Arabs on the Persian side, whereas Justin [II], who was proud and could not care less for the minds of barbarians, displayed nothing but contempt for them. Now, they are a very greedy race, and when they found that the payments had ceased, they notified the Persian shah, (…) claiming that they had received money to keep peace and refrain from attacking the Romans. However, [the Roman envoy] John, aware that their claim was inaccurate, said:

> "If anyone else than the great shah Khosrau [I] had stood up for the unjust claims of the Arabs, this would not have been any issue of importance."[66]

The fact that the Arabs had returned in the name of a much mightier instance does not seem to have had any reassuring effect. Palestine was the main target of the invasions that began to catch general attention in or around the year 634,[67] but eyewitnesses were less concerned about the underlying reason than about seeing the region, which had barely recuperated from the Persian wars, subjected to "works of anarchy",[68] "a barbarian desert people … wild, reckless beasts, humans only in their appearance, destroying human society"[69] and "overrunning a land where they do not belong".[70] They had always known the Arabs as barbarian raiders and were unlikely to think of them in other terms all of a sudden; and even if some rumours about their revelation may have leaked – as the debate in Carthage would indicate – it seems to have been obscured by its appeal among people for whom they had an ingrained fear.

A particular term that finds its way into Syriac and Greek sources from this time could indicate that some observers saw a distinct element in the Arab incursions that did not equal anything they had seen before: the Arabic word *muhājirūn* or emigrants, which turns into *mhaggraye* in Syriac and μαγαρίται in Greek. Originally used among the followers of the prophet who fled from religious persecution in Mecca and later accompanied him to Medina, it might have received a new meaning once they emigrated into territories that had fallen under their sway.[71] Non-Arabs who became acquainted with the militant character of this emigration could have recognised a religious element in it even if they were likely to ascribe its origins to Arabs looking for material gain: it bore a certain reminiscence to the Exodus, the story of how the Jews who emigrated from Egypt became rewarded for their toiling in the desert and their Divine covenant by the successful conquest of the Promised Land. Even as such, however, it created an inverse affirmation of a Divine dimension in the appearance of Arab invaders in the "rich and fertile land of Palestine",[72] Syria and Iraq: God had taken His hand from the sedentary population and given the land to its enemy, not as a sign of love for the latter but out of wrath and disappointment with the former.[73]

A possibility that would indirectly confine the truth claim of the new movement to "Arabs" in some sort of ethnic sense – thus explaining the reluctance of external observers to recognise a universal religious message behind the incursions – is that an exponential wave of religious conversions among the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula gained momentum among the Christian or semi-Christianised tribes along the fringes of Roman and Persian influence.[74] This does not mean that the new movement was "Arab", as implied by modern notions of a common nationality based on language or ethnicity. Still when Ibn Khaldūn described the group solidarity (*'aṣabīya*) of the fourteenth-century Arab Bedouins, he imagined desert dwellers forged

together in larger or smaller groups – and for longer or shorter periods – by tribal affiliations or major religious events like the appearance of prophets, preachers and saints.[75] An emerging coherence of the Arabic language formed a main basis for the preaching of Muḥammad, but the frequent use of terms like *mu'minūn* ("Believers"), *umma* ("Community of Believers") or *amīr al-mu'minīn* ("Commander of the Believers") among his followers seems to indicate an ideological awareness that was not exclusively ethnic or cultural. If there was anything distinctly "Arabic" about it, it was because it gained momentum in a tribal world situated at the cultural crossroads of Roman, Persian, Yemeni and Ethiopian cultural influences, with open or fleeting borders between various religious beliefs and practices.[76]

The non-Arab testimonies, thus, tell us little or nothing about the conviction of the conquerors, but they are highly indicative of an epistemological gap that became apparent in the wake of the invasions. Once the new monotheist movement entered the sedentary territories, it entered a world that already abounded with monotheists who had other loyalties, other identities and other ways of living. It was a predicament similar to the one that Heraclius had just faced: some contemporaries might have been eager to join a faith that could be identified as the fulfilment of an apocalyptic truth, but others would have continued to identify with their own communities and remain unresponsive to its appeal.[77] The impression that they had to do with a faith for Arabs or people who were culturally and politically alien must have confirmed them in their scepticism. An early Christian eyewitness to the invasions in Egypt noted that the conquerors claimed to fast and pray, but sneeringly added that their violent behaviour uncloaked them as just as bad role models as the Jews. Later Christians oscillated between assuming that the "Arabs" had received their religious message from murky sources or simply got it all wrong because they were unable to give up their violent or barbarian nature.[78]

The possibility that an ideological impetus, perhaps nourished by apocalyptic expectations, might have taken a realist turn in confrontation with terrestrial realities is at least confirmed by a sudden change of protagonists. Once again the Roman Near East is falling apart, and in Jerusalem the emperor leaves the stage to the patriarch Sophronius, a harsh critic of his efforts to reconcile the Eastern churches. As in the remoter areas of Europe where the imperial power had been forced to withdraw, it mirrored a confidence crisis of the secular rule whose Messianic and Universalist rhetoric had turned out to be vain and empty. Instead it was up to the church to prove itself as a pragmatic alternative by offering consolation and support, and containing the panic that threatened to fill the vacuum.[79] Sophronius had addressed the invasions as early as in his Christmas sermon of 634, when he deplored the fact that the Arabs controlled the Palestinian interior and prevented the Christian pilgrims from visiting the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.[80] As the threat showed no signs of abating over the next years, the tone in his preaching took a more dramatic turn:

> Why are so many wars fought among us? Why are the barbarian raids multiplying? How come so many Arab troops are attacking us? For what reason does all this rape and pillage take place? Why is human blood being ceaselessly shed? Why are the birds of heaven devouring bodies of men? Why are churches torn down, why is the Cross debased? (…) The God-hating Arabs and destroyers, the terror from the desert – as clearly foretold by the Prophets – are coming over places where they do not belong, plundering the cities, destroying the fields, setting fire to the villages, burning the holy churches and deluging the sacred monasteries; they resist Roman troops, waving their trophies of war and lay victory to victory (…) These villains would not have been able to do this, they would not have attained the power to do or say such godless things, if we had not first debased our dowers and defiled our purity, thus angering Christ, the giver of all things (…) We are the reason for all this.[81]

In the end, then, the point was aimed not against the Arabs but against the Christians. In the eyes of Sophronius the Roman power had already lost its moral predicament; it could only be further confirmed by its inability to withstand the new conquests. However, his conclusions also testify to the fact that he did not consider the Arabs as enemies of faith except in an indirect sense: for all he knew, they may have been God's tools of wrath or precursors of the Antichrist, but whatever they believed was not his problem. His concern was the survival of his own community upon earth.

It is easy to discard this as some kind of ostrich philosophy, but it was not just a deluded argument for the patriarch and his flock to stand their ground and hope for salvation in the next world. It liberated them from the equally deluded alternative to resist in the name of a political ideology that had already failed to offer them a lasting prospect of peace, and it left them morally free to look for a *modus vivendi* with the conquerors. This was a necessity, for the invasions were no more limited to Palestine: they had moved on to Mesopotamia, where the devastated Persian Empire offered little resistance, and to Syria, where Heraclius saw the fruits of his struggles disappear in front of his very eyes. A last desperate attempt to dam the tide came to a fatal showdown in the river valley of Yarmouk, slightly east of the Golan Heights and the Sea of Galilee; and in the summer of 636, four years after the rumours first went around about a prophet among the Arabs, the story of the Roman triumph ended just as ignominiously as the one of its Persian enemy. The emperor ordered the Cross to be dispatched to Constantinople, his own authorities to vacate Syria, and then set out on his last journey to the capital.[82]

The historical promises of Heraclius had failed to materialise; those of the new conquerors had still to be articulated. The prophet had left his community in the hands of the *amīr al-mu'minīn* or Commander of the Believers; in 634 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, an early Meccan associate of Muḥammad, had succeeded the prophet's own father-in-law, Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, in the post.

'Umar is an enigmatic figure: attested to have been addressed as a Messiah by some people in the conquered territories, he is also described as a man who was deeply rooted in his native culture and left most military operations outside the Arabian Peninsula to his commanders Khālid ibn al-Walīd and 'Amr bin al-'Āṣ.[83] When Sophronius realised that the situation in Jerusalem had become unsustainable, he asked for a peace agreement with the highest authority of the conquerors, and 'Umar set out for Jerusalem. Later Islamic traditions spiced their descriptions of his journey with reports of the alien people and habits he encountered. Apparently, the conquered Paradise was full of temptations.[84]

A similar mood of cautious expectation must have pervaded those he had gone out to meet. Less than a decade earlier Heraclius had entered Jerusalem with much ado, with holy relics, imperial garments and ceremonial paraphernalia. The man who now approached the city from the south was an Arab, a man from the desert. He had no air of splendour and he was riding on a donkey. He entered the city with a group of followers and headed towards the old Jewish temple mountain to pray there. Perhaps only at that point some spectators must have been seized by a shudder, recalling the prophecies of Daniel.[85] Apart from that, nothing in the appearance of the Arab leader would have been directly frightening. When he met with the patriarch Sophronius, he even chose for himself a separate place to pray outside the basilica of Constantine the Great. The two men came to an agreement that would serve as a model when other cities of Syria and Egypt chose to pay for peace. The Christians were promised safety for themselves, their property, their churches and their cross; they would not be forcibly converted to the faith of the Arabs, no taxes would be taken from them before the harvest, and they would not have to live together with the Jews in the city.[86] At least the last demand appears as a sad testimony to a world that had factually failed to find a *modus vivendi* on its own.

Just as during the Persian conquest, we encounter hints that some Jews may have expected the new conqueror to take revenge upon the Romans and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.[87] Islamic historiographers who did not want to implicate 'Umar with too strong Jewish sympathies were keen to stress the fact that whereas he visited the ruined Temple Mount, he chose to pray on its southern side towards Mecca, with his back to the old Foundation Stone.[88] A wooden prayer hall was soon built on the spot, a forerunner of the later al-Aqsa Mosque. Its name – "the farthest" – refers to a mystical experience of the Prophet Muḥammad that is hinted in the seventeenth *sura* of the Qur'an: during a night of prayer, he found himself brought to "the farthest site of prayer".[89] The association to the Temple Mount makes perfect sense given its importance for the monotheist tradition with which he identified, but the decision of 'Umar to pray on its southern side shows that the conqueror realised the potential danger of assimilating his own faith with those of the conquered territories. In fact, it may be worth suggesting a similar concern in his decision to pray outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where the

much later hero against the Crusaders, Saladin (1137–1193) built the present Mosque of ʻUmar. It is usually stated that ʻUmar acted out of tolerance for the Christians and that he did not wish to lay claims to their holy sites, but he may also have feared the consequences of a sudden religious assimilation that would have posed a main threat to the exclusivity of his own community in the conquered territories.

In general, then, the actions of ʻUmar reveal an approach just as pragmatic and cautious as that of Sophronius. Peace treatises ensured the safety of the existing religious communities in Syria, Palestine and Egypt from further hostilities in exchange for taxes to the Arabs and submission to their authority. In this concern, the transferral of power must have been rather smooth, which would explain why material evidence from the 630s shows few or no signs of great upheavals taking place, or lasting damage being done to the existing communities.[90] Churches were built and renovated in the middle of the power shift, trade and farming went on as usual. ʻUmar and the Believers he commanded were not the only ones likely to realise the imprudence of "works of anarchy" that would exhaust the settled peoples in the area and destroy their valuable resources. Semitic merchants and pastoralists had shared this land with the sedentary populations long before Romans and Persians extended their spheres of power to the region and began to assert their cultural attraction among them.[91] Even Bedouin raiders were fully aware of its needs, since they had always profited from its abundance. Practical concerns enabled conquerors and conquered to meet on common ground where an ideological confrontation became unnecessary, and people might have given little thought to the wider implications of the mutual encounter once they saw that the peace agreement was functioning.

However, two more dramatic consequences that would become lasting seem to have been embryonic at this point. First, the historical prerogative of what we have come to know as the Ancient world undergoes a major shift after 630. The poets and chroniclers whom Heraclius had encouraged to revive the imperial Roman narrative after the Persian wars laid down their pens and fell silent again.[92] The voices that were raised in the wake of the Arab invasions came from representatives of the church like Sophronius and Maximus Confessor, who lashed out against the emperor, the heretics and the Jews for attracting the wrath of God.[93] The invasions left no trail of Christian martyrs as the Persian wars had done, which testifies as much to the limited extent of ideological confrontations during the conquest as it does to the low morals of the conquered peoples.[94] In fact, the next generation of Orthodox Christian martyrs would be victims of Roman imperial persecutions on a level that had been unheard of for centuries; Maximus Confessor earned his nickname because he was one of them. The sympathetic portrait of the defeated Heraclius that can be found in later Islamic historiography – perhaps testifying to a vague feeling of reconnaissance among early Muslims towards a Roman emperor who had supposedly been the only one in his empire to recognise Muḥammad as the fulfilment of the prophetic promise – is absent in its post-630

Greek equivalents. Old accusations against the immoral marriage of the emperor resurfaced and vile rumours circulated in the capital, where the grain supplies from Egypt were once more under threat. The patriarch Cyrus in Alexandria is said to have tried forging a tax agreement between the emperor and the conquerors by proposing a marriage alliance between a daughter of Heraclius and the commander ʻAmr bin al-ʻĀṣ in Egypt, and the emperor is accused of having brutally punished the patriarch for being so forthcoming towards "Pagans".[95]

Second, if the conquests confirmed the identity crisis of the Roman world, they threw the conquerors into a no less problematic situation, however much ʻUmar tried to contain it. They had taken control of the region at a remarkable speed and with a success rate for which their ideological conviction has to take no small credit, but it was no religious war, for the incitement in that concern was entirely one-sided. It did not face any ideological opposition from the local religious communities that were allowed to thrive as before; neither did it bridge the epistemological gap and bring about a complete integration of all monotheists. Converted Arabs showed their intention to stay in the conquered territories as they kept emigrating – often in entire tribes – and settling down in military camps (*amsār*) which were soon multiplying all over the Fertile Crescent.[96] The main key to staying in power under such conditions lay in their exclusivity as a militant elite, not as the heralds of a message that assimilated them with their new subjects. Islamic historical tradition confirms this picture of a conqueror who remained an outsider among his new subjects and says that ʻUmar returned to Mecca and Medina, shunned the new provinces and kept a strong distance from all things foreign. It even provided his biography with a final twist that may have more than an accidental moral in it: in 644, the Commander of the Believers was murdered by the only non-Arab admitted to his presence, a slave of Roman or Persian origin who had been hired as a craftsman but who felt badly treated by his master.[97] In an almost mythological manner the irreversible fate entered from the back door, through an agent whose qualities the Commander of the Believers had thought it would be possible to appropriate and yet remain unaffected by.

The end of ʻUmar could be said to reflect the fact that the overwhelming Arab victories in the "territories where they did not belong" had long-term consequences for the Arabs who stayed in the Arabian peninsula and believed that the conquests would not affect *their* traditional way of life. Some thirty years after the death of the prophet, Arab poets would lament the depopulation of his homeland to the new provinces that lay open to gains and careers.[98] If everyday life went on comparably unperturbed in the conquered territories, the conquest would turn out a cultural shock to the Arabs, for which the coming-of-age of Islam in the world would forever mean the loss of innocence of the desert.[99]

3 Fighting with beasts

The first sign that the conquerors were subject to the same terrestrial realities as everybody else was that they caught diseases that had already weakened the local populations. Upon the first invasion of Syria, ʻUmar had appointed an Arab governor over the captured city of Damascus, Yazīd bin Abū Sufyān, but within a few years he had died from plague and had to be replaced in the post by his brother Muʻāwiya. The two brothers belonged to the influential Umayyad clan, which had longstanding connections to Syria both as traders and as owners of a little estate in the agricultural areas. It was their father, Abū Sufyān, who had reportedly been taken to Heraclius in order to inform him about the Prophet Muḥammad. When ʻUmar was murdered in 644, the community in Mecca bestowed his authority upon ʻUthmān, a cousin of Muʻāwiya who was twice son-in-law of Muḥammad. From that point, the Umayyad family would lay claim not only to Syria, but also to the leading position among the followers of the prophet.

The second sign that the conquerors had become accustomed to the world they conquered was that they had begun fighting each other within it. ʻUmar had been killed by a non-Arab, but when ʻUthmān was murdered in 656, it was by fellow Arabs and Believers who felt disappointed by his tendency to enrich his own family with the income from the conquered territories. The murder resulted in a civil war, as Muḥammad's nephew ʻAlī claimed the highest authority over the Believers in the newly conquered areas of Mesopotamia, whereas Muʻāwiya – swearing to revenge the murder of his cousin – declined to submit Syria. The old elite in Mecca rallied around Muḥammad's widow ʻĀisha and struggled to keep up with the influence of the provinces, but was defeated by ʻAlī in the so-called "battle of the camel".[100] ʻAlī made a truce with Muʻāwiya, but was murdered in 661 by a group of disappointed followers, the Khawārij or Kharijites, who claimed to defend the ideological ideals of the earliest movement and resisted all tendencies to set up terrestrial governments. For the time being it meant that Muʻāwiya and Damascus won the main political power among the conquerors practically in a draw.

The Arabic word describing the civil wars in Islam – *fitna* – can mean both sedition and temptation. It also correlates to the word describing the trials (*fitān*) that are expected to herald the Day of Judgment in Muslim apocalyptic writings. Whether the terminology mirrors feelings at the time of the civil wars, or later desires to explain the disruption they caused, it is clear that the conquests were less implicit than they purported to be, and that the conquerors – if they had believed themselves to ride on the tide of an apocalyptic promise – were soon taken down from the heights of heavenly truths to the concerns of terrestrial realities. The geographical division lines that appeared in the wake of the civil wars followed existing patterns that would not give in to the new turn of events: where the Roman and Persian Empires had once competed for hegemony, Syria and Iraq emerged as rival centres of authority, a situation that was further complicated by the fact that the conquerors were

rooted in tribal patterns of affiliations, rivalries and loyalties. From this point of view, the *fitna* can hardly be called an incomprehensible disruption of the conquests – in a sense, it emerged as their natural outcome and consequence.

The newcomers were not the only ones who were busy fighting each other. Centuries of efforts to establish a new Persian hegemony in the Near East had come to a disastrous end with the fall of Khosrau II and dragged his empire into a civil war between members and affiliates of the Sassanid house. A young grandson of Khosrau II, Yazdegerd III, had come to power in Ctesiphon in 632 but his authority dwindled in the face of the Arab incursions. A vulnerability that had become evident during the wars with Heraclius decided the fate of an empire that had ruled Iran from the plains of Mesopotamia and Iraq: when Ctesiphon fell to the Arab invaders in 637, the thirteen-year-old shah had lost his main base of power, and he would spend the ensuing fourteen years on the run across Iran until he met his inglorious fate at the hands of a simple miller outside the distant city of Merv in present-day Turkmenistan. His descendants ended up at the imperial court of the T'ang dynasty in China, where their traces were lost in the mid-eighth century.[101]

The Roman Empire could rely on a strength that had been the main Persian weakness: its capital lay protected by the mountainous Anatolian plateau. The gradual loss of Egypt to the Arabs in 639–642, however, meant that it lost its main granary, and the lack of control threatened to spread along the North African coast.[102] As long as the empire maintained its naval hegemony, the Mediterranean provided it with a basis of power that was bound to cause considerable trouble to the conquerors, but the Arab invasions were just one of many indications that the old balance of power was tilting. When Heraclius died in 641, Spain had slipped out of control to the Visigoths, most of Italy was *de facto* already lost to the Langobards, and in the ensuing years the Roman exarchs in Ravenna and Carthage would rise in rebellion against the imperial authority in Constantinople. The grandson of Heraclius, the young Emperor Constans II, made himself hated as he struggled to pick up the pieces of the empire. When Pope Martin I in Rome condemned the imperial effort to reconcile the Christians in the East, Constans II had him arrested and brought to Constantinople. Accused of inciting rebellion and supporting the Arabs, the pope was deposed and exiled to the Crimean Peninsula.[103] Ten years later, in July 663, the emperor paid a visit to the new Pope Vitalian in Rome, reportedly toying with the thought of restoring the old status of the city as the imperial seat of residence. Its impoverished condition, however, convinced him to leave after a mere twelve days during which he attended two masses in St Peter's, dined with the pope and stripped the Pantheon of its brazen roof and other valuables.[104] It was an inglorious but somehow outright way of ending seven centuries of imperial presence in the city. Constans II, who would be the last emperor to claim the ancient Roman title *consul*, settled in Syracuse on Sicily, where he fell victim to a murderous plot in which Mu'āwiya might have been at least partly complicit: in 668, a servant clobbered him with a soapbox as he lay in his bath.[105]

Whatever his role in the murder, Muʿāwiya did emerge as a main profiteer of these tumultuous decades. Syria had become the eye of the storm that raged around it, and its new ruler found himself in a rich and prosperous land, assisted by a Roman infrastructure and bureaucracy that kept administrating it and collecting its taxes.[106] Islamic chroniclers provided – as so often – anecdotal examples when they tried to illustrate the ability of Muʿāwiya to gain the confidence of his new subjects and secure his own position as their ruler. A typical case involves him describing his relationship to friends and enemies alike as a thin hair that he could pull and loosen, but never allow himself to break. His openness to change and differences in habits is sometimes juxtaposed with the more conservative attitudes of his predecessor ʿUmar, who is stated to have reproached him in the following way:

> "Muʿāwyia! You are approaching with a cortege and you are leaving likewise; and it has come to my ears that you hold *levee* in your mansion and that there are clients at your door." [Muʿāwiya] answered: "Commander of the Believers! Our Enemies are present everywhere and they have got eyes and spies; I want them, Commander of the Believers, to see that there is power in Islam."[107]

It is easy to trace the outlines of an accusation that later Muslims would sometimes direct against Muʿāwiya and his Umayyad successors: like his father Abū Sufyān, who had informed Heraclius about the prophet and adopted Islam at a late stage when he had nothing to lose, they had betrayed its initial ideology once they had asserted themselves as rulers in the non-Muslim territories.[108] Just as in the case with Islamic traditions on Heraclius, the problem with such reports is not that they are unfalsifiable but that they blatantly reveal the horizon of later historiographers. They are not only remarkably deaf to the complex realities at the ground level of a world in which their faith was still that of a small conquering elite, but they also appear to assume that the conquests developed according to a teleological master plan that was just as clear to Muʿāwiya and his contemporaries as it was to them.

In fact few things are as unclear as the horizon from which the followers of the prophet saw their role in the world after the first *fitna*. Muʿāwiya might have been the first man in a long time whom fate granted a comparably stable working environment, but not even the safety of Syria could be taken for granted in a world where two main empires had failed to maintain their hegemony; and he was hardly helped by the inner tensions of the Arabs who kept emigrating from the Arabian Peninsula in widening circles into Egypt and Iran. Whether it was in a mixture of pragmatism and persistence that he managed to outlast the storm and make it work in his favour, or whether he actively contributed to it driven by a deliberate plan or conviction – if there is something Muʿāwiya cannot have possibly known, it is the outcome of the process of which he was now part.

He certainly struggled to gain more confidence among the conquered peoples. A Greek inscription in the bathhouse of Gadara, dated in the year 662, thanks him for repairing the hot compartment (*caldarium*).[109] When an earthquake destroyed the cathedral in Edessa, Muʿāwiya had it rebuilt.[110] A Latin pilgrim who visited Jerusalem around the year 680 described Damascus as a "royal capital" and Muʿāwiya as the "king of the Arabs", acting as an impartial judge between the Jews and Christians of the city;[111] a similar Maronite report finds him judge in a case between monophysites and Orthodox.[112] A Nestorian monk in Iraq who thought the End to be near described his reign as the calm before the storm, an era when "justice flourished" and "there was great peace in the regions under his control; he let everyone live as they wanted" – the only fact that troubled the author was that the old distinctions between Jews, Christians and "Pagans" had become meaningless.[113] A similar conclusion is echoed in the Armenian chronicle of Sebeos, which ends in a present tense: "having brought them [the Arabs] into submission to himself, he [Muʿāwiya] rules over the possessions of the sons of Ismael and makes peace with all."[114]

The Maronite chronicle has described his accession to power immediately after or towards the end of the first *fitna*:

> In AG 971 [659 AD] … many Arabs gathered at Jerusalem and made Muʿāwyia king, and he went up and sat down on Golgotha; he prayed there, and went to Gethsemane and went down to the tomb of the blessed Mary to pray in it … In July of the same year the emirs and many Arabs gathered and proffered their right hand to Muʿāwyia. Then an order went out that he should be proclaimed king in all the villages and cities of his dominion and that they should make acclamations and invocations to him. He also minted gold and silver, but it was not accepted, because it had no cross on it. Furthermore, Muʿāwyia did not wear a crown like other kings in the world. He placed his throne in Damascus and refused to go to Muḥammad's throne.[115]

What Muʿāwiya is stated to have performed here is simply a repetition of the triumph of Heraclius in 630, although in reverse order: he prayed at the site of the Crucifixion – either outside (like 'Umar had done) or inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – and set out for the "Tomb of Mary" in Gethsemane on the other side of the Kidron valley and the city walls; and it feels tempting to conclude that he passed the Temple Mount and the Golden Gate. Apparently missing are the apocalyptic overtones that had pervaded the return of the Holy Cross to Jerusalem, although the author adds that terrible earthquakes accompanied the event.

This apparent imitation of a Roman political triumph receives a more ominous shade when it is put in the light of the external policies that Muʿāwiya pursued against his Roman political predecessors. Not only did he exploit the inner conflicts of the Roman world with the same ability as he had already

displayed during the *fitnas*, but he seems to have deliberately and aggressively striven to push the conquests into a decisive confrontation with Constantinople. He encouraged regular Arab raids beyond the Taurus Mountains into Anatolia and expressed a wish to equip an Arab fleet and go to war against the Romans in the Mediterranean at a point when 'Umar is still said to have expressed only horror at the prospect of letting people embark upon this "mighty creature ridden by a tiny one":

> I have heard that the sea of Syria [the Mediterranean] exceeds the vastest thing on earth; that it requests from God every day and night to deluge the earth and swallow it up. How could I send troops to this obstinate infidel? By God, one Muslim is dearer to me than whatever the Romans have there.[116]

Two years after the death of 'Umar, Roman naval forces almost retook Alexandria and the new Commander of the Believers, 'Uthman, gave Mu'āwiya permission to launch a naval attack on Cyprus (649), which was followed by fleet expeditions to Sicily (652), Crete and Rhodes (655). As the Arab fleet won a major naval battle against Constans II and Mu'āwiya dispatched an expedition to Constantinople, it must have been increasingly clear that he was trying to pierce the very heart of the Roman Empire.[117] The Arab raids on Constantinople would increase in scope and frequency after the death of Constans II in 668 and culminate in a series of sieges in 674–678.

Perhaps the main historical riddle of the seventh century is not so much why a monotheist or Arab movement took control over the ancient and Biblical lands of the Fertile Crescent – for which spiritual and material desires could have provided them with a common goal – but how their further expansion into lands where their presence had no historical precedence could be kept together after the point when their initial achievements had already revealed their dangerous capacity to drive them apart. It is one thing to say that the sheer ferocity of the Arab attacks manifested the ideological conviction of their warriors to have a Divine mandate in this world as much as in the next one;[118] irrespective of theology, it matched a concept of heroism and immortality that had pervaded the world of the archaic Greeks as much as that of the later Vikings, and does not explain the emergence of a coherent Islamic world more than the personality of Alexander the Great had explained the impact of Hellenism. However, it feels tempting to trace the outline of an empire that would reap the fruits of the conquests and sow the seeds of things to come in the policies of the new Umayyad elites as they tried to gain the favour of the conquered peoples in the former Roman territories and divert the attention of the conquerors to the remaining world of Rome. This was an adventurous political enterprise that did not simply perpetuate the conquering ideology but also threatened the religious purity of the conquerors. As we shall see, it soon raised a number of questions that would prove difficult to answer.

It is from these years of early Arab expeditions into the Mediterranean that we hear about the Colossus of Rhodes for the last time.

> [The Arabs] went to Rhodes and destroyed it. It had a colossus of bronze which was very impressive; it was said to be one of the great wonders of the world. They decided to break it and take away the bronze. It was of Corinthian bronze and in the likeness of a man standing. When they set fire to its base, they realised that by great metal stakes it was fixed to stones within the earth. By great ropes many men pulled on it and suddenly it was uprooted and fell to the ground. They say that its height was 107 feet. 3000 loads of brass were carried off and were sold to a Jewish man from the city of Hims.[119]

There are reasons to suspect a certain exaggeration on the part of the author, since the existence of the Colossus cannot be corroborated from other sources during centuries of devastating earthquakes and emperors who – like Constans II – confiscated every scrap of metal on which they managed to lay their hands. However, maybe some parts of it remained, and perhaps the Arabs did destroy them as a manifestation of power, or for the sake of material gain. The smashing report matches our acquaintance with the Colossus, and it is worth pondering what it could have meant to a world where the Danielic prophecies had become a recurrent point of reference. Any observer familiar with the dream of Nebuchadnezzar must have seen the dispersal of the Rhodes Colossus as the foreboding of an apocalyptic process during which all terrestrial empires – and especially the Roman one, since it represented the last component in the colossal idol – were heading for their downfall.[120]

Irrespective of whether some of the conquerors realised that such expectations were in the air among the people they conquered – and whether some of the people who submitted to their power assumed that they were going to establish the Kingdom of God – or not, it is worth recalling the legacies of Phocas, Khosrau, Heraclius and ʻUmar: whatever difference they made in the short term must not be confused with their long-term impact. If Muʻāwiya and his followers had ambitions that went beyond the narrowing horizons of the people they commanded, the point where history seemed to come to an end would have marked the point where their own history began. Even as the general turmoil provided them with temporary momentum, the prevalence of apocalyptic and eschatological fears and hopes did not bode well, and they would have to resort to unusual measures in order to contain them.

Notes

1 Conrad, "The Arabs and the Colossus", *JRAS* III:6/2 (1996) 165–87.
2 Clayton, Price (eds.), *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World* (1988) 158ff.
3 Procopius, *Anecdota*, esp. chs. VII–XI and XVII–XIX.

4 Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (2006) 200–204; and Sarris, *Empires of Faith* (2011) 125–204.
5 Hülsen, *Das Forum Romanum: seine Geschichte und seine Denkmäler* (1904) 81–2.
6 Theophyl. Simocatta, *Hist*. VIII 10:2–5; Nicephorus patr., *Hist. Brev.* 3:6–11. The legacy has been a tenacious one: see for instance Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (1968) 57ff, 69ff, 353. For a closer analysis, see Meier, "Kaiser Phokas (602–610) als Erinnerungsproblem", *BZ* 107:1 (2014) 139–74.
7 Stephenson, *Constantine: Roman Emperor, Christian Victor* (2010) 279–302; Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 240.
8 Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 125f, 236.; Bowersock, *Empires in Collision in Late Antiquity* (2012) 3ff.
9 See *Chronicon Paschale* 707–9 for the humble letter that the Senate despatched to the shah.
10 Foss, "Syria in Transition" *DOP* 51 (1997) 258–68, "The Persians in Asia Minor and the end of Antiquity" *EHR* 357 (1975) 721–747.
11 Ferdowsi, *Shahname*, transl. Levy (2003) 176–183, 190–97; cf. the famous romance *Khosrau ve Shirin* by Nizami (d. 1209) which has remained a classic both in Iran and in the Turkish world.
12 Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (1993) 24–36.
13 Levi, "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès", *REJ* 68 (1914) 129–60 esp. 150f; Wheeler, "Imagining the Sasanian Capture of Jerusalem", *OCP* 57 (1991) 73ff.; van Bekkum, "Jewish Messianic Expectations in the Age of Heraclius" in: Reinink, Stolte (eds.) *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation* (2002) 95–112.
14 A notable attempt to rebuild the temple is reported from the reign of the neo-Pagan Emperor Julian in 361–363 (Ammianus Marcellinus, *Histoire* XXIII:I:3).
15 *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, transl. Thomson (1999) 68–70.
16 Tsafrir, "The Temple-Less Mountain", in: Grabar, Kedar (eds.) *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade* (Jerusalem 2009) 99; Bowersock, *Empires in Collision* 32ff; Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 257f.
17 Antiochus of Mar Saba (IX–XV in the Georgian text translated by Garitte,"La Prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614", *CSCO* (1960) 203; Sophronius, "Anacreontica" XIV:60. Perhaps tellingly, later Persian tradition would confuse this event with the distant Persian victory over the Roman Empire in AD 260 (cf. Ferdowsi, *Shahname* 189).
18 Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (1994) 42.
19 Augustinus, "De Civitate Dei contra Paganos" 14ff.
20 Q 30:2–5.
21 Tabari, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (1910) 21:11f.
22 Q 17:1; Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an* XVII. Cf. Busse, "The Destruction of the Temple and its Reconstruction in the Light of Sura 17:2-8"; and van Ess, "Die Himmelfahrt Muhammads und die frühe islamische Theologie", Reinert (ed.) *Islamische Grenzen und Grenzübergänge* (2007).
23 Ferdowsi, *Shahname* 197–201.
24 Most famously illustrated in the claim (Herodotus, *History* 7:35) that the Achaemenid King Xerxes decided to punish the Hellespont by whipping it when he had failed to build a pontoon bridge over it.
25 Niceph. Patr. *Historia breviarium* 16:20–26.
26 Qummi, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an* 152.
27 Kaegi has listed thirteen labours in *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (2003) 300f.
28 Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 250f, 307ff.
29 Kaegi, *Heraclius* 174.

30 Georg of Pisidia, *Heraclias* 198, 327.
31 Reinink, "Heraclius, the new Alexander" in: Reinink, Stolte (eds.) *The Reign of Heraclius* 81–94.
32 *Chronicon Paschale* 264:6–12, 365:6–8; Theophylactus Simocatta *Hist*. V 15:6–7.
33 Kaegi, *Heraclius* 186.
34 Theodoret, "Historia Ecclesiastica" XVII (957–61).
35 Dinkler, "Das Kreuz als Siegeszeichen" *ZTK* 62 (1965) 9–13.
36 *II. Sam* (*II. Kings*) 5:6–9, 6:1–16; Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 258.
37 Where they seem to have vanished, as no reference to them is made during the Persian conquest in 614. Cf. Procopius, *Vandal Wars* 2.9.
38 Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 79–92. Cf. Sophronius, "Anacreontica" XVIII:85.
39 Mango, "The Temple Mount, AD 614–638", in: Raby, Johns (eds.) *Bayt al-Maqdis: Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem, Part One* (1992) 15.
40 *Hez*. 44:1–3.
41 Hrabanus Maurus, "Homiliae de Festis Praecipuis etc.", ed. Migne, *PL* 110 (1864) 131ff. Cf. Borgehammar, "Heraclius Learns Humility: Two Early Latin Accounts Composed for the Celebration of Exaltatio Crucis", *Millennium* 6 (2009) 145–201.
42 Brandes, "Heraclius between Restoration and Reform", in: Reinink, Stolte (eds.) *The Reign of Heraclius* 17 (n.1), 25, 28–30, 35–6.
43 Tabari, *Tārīkh ar-rusūl wa l-mulūk*, ed. de Goeje (1879–1901) I:1561–2.
44 Niceph. Patr. *Hist.*, 14:11–14, 15:23–25, 23:6–11, 27:7–13, 28:1–9.
45 Kaegi, *Heraclius* 21f, 214f. The children of the marriage were all born with severe physical defects.
46 Winkelmann, *Der Monoergetisch-Monotheletische Streit* (2001) 36–8.
47 Bowersock, *Empires in Collision* 49ff.
48 Kaegi, *Heraclius* 203f.
49 *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* 134.
50 Maximus Confessor, "Epistolae", *PG* 91:540–541. Cf. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response*, 91f., Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 260.
51 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. de Boor (1883) *AM* 6121.
52 Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, 52f. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 30f.
53 *Doctrina Iacobi*, ed. Bonwetsch (Berlin 1910) III:9 p 62 l 6–12.
54 Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 168.
55 Cf. Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6123; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 59.
56 *Doctrina Iacobi* V:16 p 86 l 17–21.
57 Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (1991) 287–305; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (2010) 92–97.
58 Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (1980) 11f.
59 Tabari, *Tārīkh ar-rusūl wa l-mulūk* I:1561. On the play of words in italics, see ch. 2.
60 Cf. "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria" I:489ff.
61 Tabari, *Tārīkh ar-rusūl wa l-mulūk* I:1566
62 Tabari, ibid., I:2391–2396.
63 *Genesis* 16:12.
64 Caner, *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai* (2010) 1–4, 39–51, 84–88, 94–6, 103–116, 122–3, 128–33, 139–40, 151–4, 159–68, 184–5, 197–8. Cf. Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddima* (2004) 194.
65 Bowersock, *Empires in Collision* 6.
66 Menander Protector, fragment, 9,1:30–40, 44–50.
67 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (1997) 23, 63, 117ff., 120, 262.

68 *Doctrina Iacobi, loc. cit.*
69 Maximus Confessor, "Epistolae" 91:540–541.
70 Ibid., and Sophronius, "Anacreontica" 3205D.
71 Athamina, "*A'rab* and *muhājirūn* in the environment of *amṣār*", *SI* 66 (1987) 4–25, 9; Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (2005) 11–22; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 85f, 203f; Crone, Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977) 8f.
72 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6123.
73 Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslim in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts* (1985) 68–70, quoting the Syriac Pseudo-Methodius; cf. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* (2011) 108, quoting Michael the Syrian.
74 Hoyland, for instance, has suggested that one aim of the initial conquests could have been to replace the power of the Christian Ghassanids in the region (*Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 558).
75 Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah* 196.
76 Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 264–6; Bowersock, *Empires in Collision* 6–28; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 56–82; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 554–56.
77 On the ecumenical nature of the early Islamic movement, see Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 108–118. Note that the Qur'an is aware and tolerant of the fact that a communal division would prevail among the monotheist communities (Q 5:48, 16:93, 42:8).
78 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 121, 468, 506, 537–8; *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 95–7; *The Chronicle of Zuqnin* (transl. Harrak) 142; John of Damascus, "De Haeresibus" *PG* 94 764–5; cf. also Wolf, "The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad", in: Gervers, Bikhazi (eds.) *Conversion and Continuity* (1990) 99f.
79 Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* 99f.
80 Sophronius, "Anacreontica" 3205D.
81 Sophronios, *Logos eis to hagion baptisma*, ed. Papadopoulou-Keramos (1881) 166–7. Sophronius further describes how the Arabs *utter blasphemies against Christ and the church, they are recklessly blaspheming God; in fact, these God-enemies claim to be masters of everything, as they follow their master, the Devil*, but he uses the pre-Islamic terms "Saracens", "Ismaelites" and "Hagarenes" without any clear distinction.
82 Kaegi, *Heraclius* 240–58. Syrian chronicles claim that the Roman troops devastated the country they left "as if it already belonged to the enemy"; cf. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 106–9.
83 Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 98f.; Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 267–9; Crone, Cook, *Hagarism* 5; cf. Tabari, *op. cit.* I:2729–76.
84 Tabari, *op. cit.* I: 2410.
85 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 114–17; cf. *Dan.* 9:27, 11:31, 12:11.
86 Tabari, *op. cit.* I:2405–6.
87 Ibid. I2406–7, and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 311.
88 Tabari, *op. cit.* I:2408.
89 Q 21:1.
90 Pentz, *The Invisible Conquest: The Ontogenesis of Sixth and Seventh Century Syria* (1992) 16ff; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 106–118; Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 275–9.
91 Burns, *Damascus: a History* (2005) 104–7.
92 Treadgold, *The Byzantine Historians* (2013) 1–37.
93 Maximus Confessor, "Epistolae", loc. cit.
94 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 345–86.

95 Nicephorus Patr., *Historia* 24:26–25:3, 26:15–27:3.
96 Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 136–40.
97 Tabari *op. cit.* I:2722–28.
98 Wellhausen, *Das Arabische Reich und sein Sturz* (1960) 34.
99 Cf. Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddima* 164ff.
100 It was so called since ʻAisha took part from the back of a camel, and the battle did not end until she was carried off by ʻAlīʻs men. See Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* 155–70, for a concise summary of the first *fitna*.
101 Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran* (2014) 1–27.
102 Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa* (2011) 11–15.
103 Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis* (2010) 157–62; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 74f.
104 *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Duchesne (1902) 343–4.
105 Nicephorus Patr., *Historia* 31:27–32:1.; Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6160. For the connection to Muʻāwiya, see Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis* 488–95.
106 Sarris, *Empires of Faith* 275–79.
107 Tabari, *Tārīkh ar-rusūl wa l-mulūk* II:207.
108 Cf. Miles, "Early Islamic Inscriptions Near Taʻif in the Hijaz" *JNES* 7 (1948) 236f.
109 Gatier, "Les inscriptions grecques d'époque islamique", in: Canivet, Rey-Coquais (eds.), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe–VIIIe siècles* (1992) 149.
110 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessaʻs Chronicle* 171.
111 Arculf, "De locis sanctis", *PL* 88, 805B, 786D.
112 "An unknown Maronite Chronicle" transl. Palmer in *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (1993) 30.
113 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 196.
114 *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* 154.
115 "An unknown Maronite Chronicle" 31–32.
116 Tabari, *Tārīkh ar-rusūl wa l-mulūk* I:2822.
117 Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis* 474–81.
118 Sarris,*Empires of Faith* 273–4.
119 Transl. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessaʻs Chronicle* 139f.
120 Conrad, "The Arabs and the Colossus" 165–87.

2 Taming Leviathan

The late seventh century shows an increasing amount of evidence for the use of the Arabic terms *Muslim* (submitter) and *Islam* (submission) to denote the new monotheists and their faith. As we saw above, scholars have toyed with the possibility that it could have been preceded by a more loose definition, like "believer" (*Mu'min*) or "emigrant" (*Muhājir*).[1] Whether this is accurate or not, we should consider the fact that all ideological definitions show a natural inclination to realism over a longer period of time. Main theological deviations within the Late Ancient world often ended up along the lines of political, cultural and ethnic divisions, which is not said to deny the impact of religious beliefs to the Late Ancient world, but to emphasise the fact that the everyday life of most religious believers took place within social and political contexts that smoothened ideological divisions by appropriating them, sometimes at the cost of widening the gaps to other political, cultural and ethnic groups. Believers who rejected such mundane definitions rarely survived on their own, and even when they did so, they always took the first step to a de-ideologisation of their faith once they procreated and brought up new generations of individuals within contexts where the faith came to represent much more than just an individual belief.

If modern readers find this gap between ideals and realities confusing, it might have been less problematic in Late Antiquity. Even the Qur'an admits that although not all Arabs at the time of the Prophet *believed*, their factual *submission* (*Islām*) to the Prophet of God would still be worthy of recompense:

> The Arabs say: "We believe!" But tell them: "You do not *believe*; but say 'We *submit* ourselves!' Faith has not entered your hearts, but when you hearken to God and his messenger, He will repay the least of your acts."[2]

> This [*submission*] is the way of your Lord, a straight way. For those who recall it we have presented a straight message.
>
> For them, there is a House of Peace in the presence of their Lord; He is their patron in the place they have strived for.[3]

"Peace" and "submission" are intertwined: *Islām* is the substantive of the fourth stem form *aslama* (submit oneself, resign, surrender) of the verb *salima* that means "to be in peace" or "to be safe". Since the fourth stem form is causative, one could say that the Muslim – the one who submits – attains a state of peace by submitting. This is exactly how we are told that the Prophet Muḥammad addressed the Emperor Heraclius and the other rulers in the region: *aslim taslam* – submit, and you will be in peace.

This does not mean, as it sometimes tends to be simplified, that Islam means peace; what it means is that absence of Islam means absence of peace. The one who has submitted to God and His community has entered a realm of submission, the *Dār al-Islām*, a path that leads to the *Dār as-Salām* or realm of peace – the place where God is the sole patron, Paradise. The one who has not submitted remains in the realm of war, the *Dār al-Ḥarb*, and it follows that, from an apocalyptic point of view, the Divine promise will not have become fully realised as long as it prevails. It is hardly surprising if many non-Muslims have tended to understand this as an ideology of war, since their alleged or perceived resistance to its ultimate objective has turned them into enemies that it has seemed permissible to fight. In fact the original Arabic terminology belonged in a context that had fewer reasons to care about distant empires and peoples and more reasons to care about tribal Arabs whose inner political and religious dissent threatened the prevalence of the community of the prophet:[4] belief and submission served the same Divine objective.

The conquests reshuffled the definitions. The conquerors ceased to be polytheists among monotheists or monotheists among polytheists and became monotheists among monotheists, and the purpose of their terrestrial authority became a matter of strife and doubt. Muʿāwiya partly managed to suppress the tensions by externalising them, but a second civil war would flare up right along the front lines of the first one. On his deathbed, Muʿāwiya ordained his own son Yazīd to succeed him as Commander of the Believers, a hereditary order of succession that met acceptance in Syria but not in Mecca and Medina, where a nephew of Muḥammad's widow ʿAisha, Ibn az-Zubayr, took upon himself to reclaim the authority of the prophet in his old city; and neither in Iraq, where the local conquerors summoned ʿAlī's son Ḥusayn to reclaim his dead father's right to the religious leadership over what would become the Shiʿi branch of Islam. Yazīd responded with violence in both cases: Ḥusayn was killed with a small group of followers on the battlefield of Karbalah whereas Mecca was beleaguered and the Kaʿba was destroyed with catapults. When Yazīd suddenly died in the midst of this, having ruled for only three years, he left a political chaos that would last for nine years and bring the word *Islām* to a wholly new prominence.

Under the surface of such circumstances, which attract considerable attention in the Muslim world still today, the conquered peoples began to grow accustomed to a rule that – paradoxically – was of a primarily secular kind since its reality did not converge with their own religious ideologies. They paid the taxes that ensured their protected status and were perhaps not

necessarily happy about it, but whether they were scared or enticed to obedience, the power structures that were preserved in their religious hierarchies canalised their energy in ways that did not disturb the peace upon which their prevalence ultimately relied. This is important to bear in mind, as it meant that the appeal of political submission to a common authority was far from limited to the conquerors. As we have already seen, the main problem that presented itself to the latter was how to straddle the divergent expectations on a rule that had to carry an apocalyptic promise on the same time as it tried to defend a terrestrial system that promoted peace and stability.

1 Stumbling blocks

Half a century had elapsed since Emperor Heraclius entered Jerusalem. The last locals to directly remember anything of Roman rule were most likely dead or at least very old in the measures of the time. Perhaps some of them could still recall a few years of uncertain stability that followed wars and unrest, when nobody knew what the Arabs were still up to, but upon the death of Mu'āwiya, the old Roman Near East had been the heart of his empire for two comparably stable and prosperous decades, sufficient time for the local power structures to consolidate. Since the conquerors had mostly preserved the old bureaucratic system the change of rulers must have seemed less dramatic from the perspective of their subjects, and their ability to create political stability may have made them popular. One Christian source goes so far as to claim that Mu'āwiya's son Yazīd was loved by all his subjects for his great humility and pleasant behaviour.[5] It should be added that the same Yazīd was cursed by his opponents in Mecca for being a drunkard, fornicator and immoral ruler, and has remained a veritable devil in Shi'i Muslim imagination to this very day.

It might seem odd that the conquered peoples remained reluctant to define their new overlords in religious terms. They must have had lots of opportunities to study the ritual practices of the conquerors, who often prayed in or adjacent to local churches. In Damascus, the capital of the new empire, they even shared the main area of the cathedral of St John the Baptist with the Christians. A Latin pilgrim visiting Damascus at the time of Mu'āwiya hardly raised his eyebrows at it,[6] and yet it must have been clear – since the Arabs faced the broad, southern wall in the direction of Mecca – that something was fundamentally different about their prayers. From regular encounters and occasional debates both Jews and Christians would have become well acquainted with the theological views of the newcomers,[7] and the monopoly of violence alone cannot explain why this sparked few controversies in a region where people had often torn each other to pieces over smaller issues.

'Umar had taken care to keep his believers away from the dangers of becoming assimilated by the world they conquered, but sooner or later they had to leave the splendid isolation of their military camps and interact with their new subjects. Slaves that they had taken and clients who had asked for

their protection entered their houses and joined their families.[8] Perhaps it was inevitable that their ideological status had to be reinforced by means of a definition that expressed some sort of commitment to their political exclusivity. Realising that the Romans and Persians had failed to unite the local communities in anything but a political sense, and anxious to retain their tax-paying basis among them, they would have been well advised to keep stressing it, even if it meant tampering with the apocalyptic promise of their faith. For the more pragmatic elements among the non-Muslims this must have seemed as a safeguard against any future efforts from their new overlords to proselytise or assimilate them by force and thus averted a direct religious confrontation.[9]

More disconcerting was the seething resistance from Messianic and apocalyptic factions among the conquerors. The most prominent victim of the second civil war, Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī Ṭālib, the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, is still remembered all over the Shiʿi Muslim world as a martyr of religious resistance against the godless Umayyad rule; and insofar as the Sunni Islamic historical tradition is accurate in these matters, it claims that the rulers in Damascus were fully aware of the moral implications of what they had done when they were presented with his severed head:

> By my life [Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya said], not one person believing in God and the Last day could find an equal or the likeness to the Messenger of God among any of us. But he [Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī] made a fault of reason since he did not heed these words: "*Say: You, our God, are the King of Kings; You give the kingdom to whomever You like and You take the kingdom from whomever it might be as it pleases You; You elevate whomever You like and You debase whomever it pleases You. Everything lies in Your hands; You are the master of all things.*"[10]

Whereas the Qur'an is used here to provide an argument for accepting the submission to a terrestrial government even if it is morally inferior, it should be remembered that the Christian Romans relied on similar readings of their holy scriptures, and that the evocation of a common God did not necessarily convince opponents who differed in their basic concepts about the world.[11] A few years after the death of Ḥusayn, his followers would rally in support of a supposed *Mahdī*, a Messianic figure expected to create a kingdom of Divine justice and forego the end of the world.[12] It conformed to a pattern that had presented innumerable ancient rulers already with the problem of laying claims to a world whose reality or prevalence their subjects denied.

Jews and Christians, too, kept apocalyptic feelings alive. The first controversy to arise over an issue of faith in the conquered city of Jerusalem concerned the same battleground as in the days of Khosrau and Heraclius: the Temple Mount. As we saw, ʿUmar prayed there during his brief visit to Jerusalem, but took the precaution of doing it on its southern side where he faced Mecca and not the Foundation Stone of the Temple. It is unclear

whether he knew the implications of a place that was a *totem* to the Jews at the same time as it was a *taboo* to the Christians, or whether he merely wished to pay reverence in his own way to a site that played such a central role to his own faith along with the others. At any rate, a prayer hall for the conquerors, the first al-Aqsa Mosque, would soon mark the spot. The Latin pilgrim we mentioned above described it as a "rectangular prayer-house built from wooden beams", big enough for "three thousand people".[13] The later Byzantine chronicler Theophanes, drawing on a Syriac original, calls it a προσκυνητήριον – prostration place – a direct translation of the Arabic word *masjid*, mosque.[14] However, he and other Christian sources also claim that 'Umar had started to rebuild the Jewish Temple, and some Jewish observers appear to have been optimistic to that end as well.[15] According to one report, the edifice refused to stand up until a group of Jews told 'Umar to remove the big cross on the Mount of Olives.[16] Christians describing such scenes must have been convinced that the Arabs somehow were in cahoots with the Jews, but they also complained about Christians who lent a hand in the work,[17] which indicates that far from all locals were prepared to regard the conquerors as the "abomination of desolation" predicted by the Prophet Daniel and by Christ to forego the end of the world.[18]

It cannot be excluded that one source of Arab reverence for the Temple Mount lay in its eschatological significance,[19] but when an apocalyptic event is brought to a certain level of physical reality it inevitably trades in the essence of its prophetic truth for the reality of its historical existence. The ceremonial use of the Golden Gate by Heraclius and Mu'āwiya may have appealed to apocalyptic beliefs, but might also have manifested a deliberate effort to get the better of such beliefs by appropriating them and turning their expectations into a sacred past. The conquest of Jerusalem was likely to evoke end-time scenarios among most groups in the region, but the building program that was developed by the conquerors soon reached a level of ambition rarely shown by people who expect the end to be nigh.[20] Perhaps it was in their efforts to suppress eschatological expectations that the newcomers first came close to a rule that actually managed to keep the different monotheist communities together; at least it would explain certain features of the visual language and rhetoric they adopted.

The years that followed the death of Mu'āwiya's son Yazīd saw a comeback of the native city of the prophet, as the nephew of 'Aisha, Ibn az-Zubayr, challenged the Umayyad authority. Suppressing the followers of Ḥusayn, he extended his area of power to Iraq, and it is on coins issued by his governors there that we first encounter written expressions of faith focusing on the unity of God and the prophethood of Muḥammad.[21] The setting is important, as these former Persian territories had grown into an area of discontent with the political equilibrium that emanated from Damascus and the formerly Roman territories in the West. It was not just the "party of Alī", the nucleus of what would become Shi'i Islam, that attracted support from disgruntled conquerors and locals;[22] the most uncompromising of all factions, the *Khawārij* or

Kharijites who had murdered ʻAlī in 660, considered it their right and duty to kill any believer who accepted the terrestrial forms of rule that emerged in the wake of the conquests. Their militant piety and egalitarianism, their detachment from the world and objection to religious and political institutions, their apocalyptic world view and emphasis on individual struggle and martyrdom, may seem precedential for modern cases of Muslim extremism, but they did in fact maintain some of the fundamental ideals of the original movement whose purity they claimed to defend.[23] For Ibn az-Zubayr it meant a delicate act of balance between the post-Roman imperialism of the Umayyads and the apocalyptic religiosity of the Kharijites.

The 683 siege of Mecca had caused much damage to the Kaʻba, the ancient Arab sanctuary whose foundation was attributed to Abraham and that the prophet had cleansed of its Pagan idols when he entered the city in 630. Ibn az-Zubayr decided to raze the burnt shell to the ground and rebuild it as he believed it to have looked in the days of the Biblical patriarch. He allegedly did this by providing the cubic building with a semi-circular apse in the north, pointing towards Jerusalem and decorated with mosaics taken from a church in Yemen: it incorporated the tomb of Ishmael and even the Black Stone now encapsulated in the façade of the Kaʻba was placed in a special casket inside.[24] It is difficult to assess the meaning of this, but it seems tempting to juxtapose its manifestation of reverence for a terrestrial sanctuary with the apocalyptic threat from the Kharijites, and it deserves special attention in consideration of the developments that would take place once the Umayyads had regained the initiative. Their new leader, ʻAbd al-Mālik ibn Marwān, who claimed the title Commander of the Believers in Damascus in 685, not only resumed the military struggle with Mecca and Iraq, but spent large amounts of time and money to refurnish the Temple Mount in Jerusalem with a new building, placed as a seal over the Foundation Stone of the Jewish Temple: the Dome of the Rock. Slightly altered in its exterior, it remains the principal landmark of Jerusalem and the first existing monument of Islam.

Islamic historiographers would later claim that ʻAbd al-Mālik built the Dome of the Rock in order to distract the Muslim pilgrims from Mecca.[25] The Dome of the Rock is a centralised structure, encouraging circumambulation just like around the Kaʻba, and its centrepiece is a rock, representing the place of the All holiest of the Jewish temple. The latter had been empty, symbolising victory over Pagan idols, just like the Kaʻba after the prophet had cleansed it from everything but its Black Stone. As has been mentioned, the prophet was said to have been taken to the Temple Mount at night as he was praying in the Kaʻba in Mecca.[26] Whereas the Kaʻba is understood as the sanctuary Abraham built for the exiled Ishmael, the Rock on the Temple Mount is identified in Jewish tradition as the place where Abraham sacrificed his son Isaac – identified as Ishmael in Muslim tradition.[27]

The mosaic frieze inside the Dome of the Rock is the earliest physical evidence we have of Islam as a thoroughly conceived unit of faith. Some of its formulas are easily recognisable from the Qur'an, whereas others are only

similar in their meaning, but they all give a picture of a religion that has a clear and distinct theology. Religion with God is *Islām*. Angels and prophets are mediators between God and humans, and Muḥammad is the foremost. There will be a Day of Judgment. There are also frequent references to Jesus, addressed to the *ahl al-Kitāb* or People of the Book, a term used in the Qur'an to denote monotheist faiths in a wider sense:

> O people of the Book, do not exaggerate in your faith
> and do not say anything but the truth about God:
> Christ, Jesus, the son of Mary, was the Prophet of God and His Word
> which He bestowed upon Mary through His Spirit
> Believe in God and in his Prophets
> and do not say: (God is) three;
> cease with that; it is better for you.
> God is the One God; bow to Him.[28]

Apparently, 'Abd al-Mālik directed the message of his new building not just to his own believers, but also to the Jews and Christians whose nervous fidgeting regarding the nature of God and Christ was seen as a sign of having gone astray. The size of the Dome would have matched the cupola of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and emphasised the parallelism of the two sites,[29] and its octagonal structure points similarly towards a deliberate imitation of the "Tomb of Mary" on the other side of Golden Gate. It could have marked the point when the gate was walled up as to seal its apocalyptic implications and restore the dignity of the Temple Mount.

Islamic tradition would tell more or less fantastic stories about the impression the new complex made upon the locals of Jerusalem.[30] Three centuries later a famous Muslim geographer who was born and grew up in the – still largely Christian – city of Jerusalem, would recall how his uncle had taught him, when he was a mere boy, to admire the great monuments built on behalf of 'Abd al-Mālik and his son Walīd:

> He had seen Syria being a land of Christians and he saw that they had beautiful churches with bedazzling decorations whose reputation was widespread, as the Qumama [Church of the Holy Sepulchre] or the churches of Lydda and Ruha, so he decided to give the Muslims a mosque that would detract their attention (from these churches), by creating one of the Wonders of the world. Can you not see how 'Abd al-Mālik, since he had seen the mighty dome of the Holy Sepulchre and its beauty, feared that it would take possession over the hearts of the Muslims and erected the dome over the Temple rock?[31]

One year after the Dome of the Rock had been completed, in 692, Ibn az-Zubayr died in a final battle outside Mecca, and Damascus reclaimed the position it had taken under Mu'āwiya. 'Abd al-Mālik reversed the changes

made to the Ka'ba and rebuilt it in the cubic form it has today, together with the surrounding mosque.[32] He was first intent upon pulling down the "Tomb of Mary" in Gethsemane simply for the purpose of reusing its columns in the new mosque, but Christian friends and state officials persuaded him not to do so, and instead a new delivery of columns was required from the emperor in Constantinople.[33] 'Abd al-Mālik must have felt favoured by God on all frontiers: he had presented both the emperor and the religious opposition with a more lasting challenge than military victories, a visual statement of faith that has survived innumerable wars and conflicts ever since, and he had appropriated a term that would be more commonly used from this time to define the religious movement of the Arab conquerors in the Middle East: *Islām* and its active participle, *Muslims*.

2 Give to Caesar what is Caesar's

In Constantinople, the situation was less triumphant. The military setbacks against the Arabs had been followed by violent Bulgarian invasions from the north, adding to a torrential flood of Slavs who were settling all over the Balkans under circumstances far more cataclysmic than those accompanying the Arab conquests. This is important to bear in mind because one might otherwise relapse into a simplified perception of a declining Roman Empire being caught up in a dualistic struggle with the emerging world of Islam. In a wider perspective, the protagonists of those narratives had merely bumped into each other a few times at this point, but rarely met face to face: they were still busy finding their own way in the lasting political turmoil. Just as the Umayyads in Damascus were struggling to vindicate their authority both among fellow Muslims or Arabs and former Roman or Persian subjects, the emperors in Constantinople tried to maintain their own authority among fellow Christians and foreign conquerors alike.

In 680, the year when Mu'āwiya died and the new *fitna* broke out, Emperor Constantine IV summoned a church council, the sixth canonical in Christian history, with the purpose of finally disentangling the religious confusion wrought by his great-grandfather Heraclius half a century before. Chapter 1 mentioned how a theological compromise had sought to reconcile the monophysite communities of the Middle East with the Orthodoxy of the Roman world. Being met with derision from the former and condemnation from the latter, it had attained little more than a religious isolation of the imperial office. A pope had been deposed; protesters had been martyred; but at length it was clear that the emperors could only lose a war in which the aim was to convert their own people, for some unclear reason, to a different theological dogma. Perhaps they admitted with a certain feeling of relief that the Arab invasions had unburdened them of the challenge to reconcile the Oriental churches.

In another sense, the church council could be seen as a deliberate attempt to re-establish imperial legitimacy in the Near East. The emperor may have had the impression that a general loss of confidence in the imperial office had

driven some Christians into the arms of the Arabs, and conversely, some Christian observers may have interpreted the continuous setbacks of the empire as a Divine punishment for the preposterous attempt of Heraclius to declare that God had but one will or energy. We are certainly not dealing with realities on the ground level of formative historical facts, but these suggestions can at least give us some hints as to how the church council strived to reunite the common identity of the Roman Empire and the Christian ecumene. It did in fact result in a return of Orthodox sympathies towards the empire, which must have caused certain irritation in Damascus. It is especially interesting to note as we begin to examine the increasingly religious overtones in the iconographic battle that would unleash between the two capitals.

The Maronite who described the coronation of Mu'āwiya stated that the Arabs had tried to strike gold and silver coins, but that these were not accepted, "since they had no crosses on them".[34] The report is interesting because it brings up an apparent Muslim aversion towards the Christian symbol of the cross, a fact that can be corroborated by other sources.[35] As has already been observed with reference to the triumph of Heraclius, the cross was not merely a symbol of the redemptory hope for a better world, but also a representation of everyday stability and prosperity. As a sign of victory, it had been associated with the Roman Empire whose political framework had long safeguarded the Eastern Mediterranean economy: occupying one side each of most Roman coins, the cross and the emperor had nicely fitted the words of Jesus on Roman taxpaying.[36] The emperor had left Syria and the Near East to their fate, but the system of values that had supported him stayed behind; whatever meaning the local populations attributed to his defeat, their main concern must have been to keep their own world running as before, and until the conquerors had proven themselves capable of coming up with a trustworthy alternative, they were unlikely to discard a language of power and symbols that enjoyed widespread recognition.

The Roman and post-Roman territories remained economically integrated in the decades that followed the Arab conquests; this period saw a continued circulation of Roman coins in the Near East together with locally struck coins that imitated Roman models. Similarly, Sassanid Persian coinage featuring images of Zoroastrian fire-altars were struck or imitated in Iraq long after the Arab conquests.[37] A few coins that were struck from the time of Mu'āwiya do indeed seem to represent an innovation owing to the desires of the new rulers in Damascus: they have kept the image of the Emperor Heraclius but removed the cross-beam from the cross, which makes the remainder look like some kind of a staff. However, this is an exception, and gives some credence to the claim that coins without crosses did not gain widespread recognition. Other coins from this period are bilingual, inscribed in Greek and Arabic; a few early types are inscribed only in Arabic, and one of them even mentions the name Muḥammad; and yet they all feature crosses.[38]

In 685, Emperor Constantine IV died and was succeeded by his son Justinian II, a hot-tempered young man whose eventful reign would offer few

opportunities to calm down. He started it under an apparently benign star: the *fitna* kept the enemies in Damascus busy, and the Christian Jarājima and Mardaites had turned out to be most effective tools for Roman retaliation against the raids of Muslim Arabs into Anatolia. In 688, the emperor could sign a favourable peace treatise with Damascus, in which he promised to resettle the Mardaites where they could do no harm; in return, ʻAbd al-Mālik promised to pay a yearly tribute of 365ʻ000 *solidi*, 365 horses, 365 slaves, and share the tax incomes from Cyprus and Armenia with the emperor. Emboldened by the successful resettlement enterprise, Justinian II went on the offensive against the Bulgarians and Slavs in the Balkans, whom he tried to resettle in Anatolia, and started to affirm the absolute power of the imperial office in ways that would provide later chroniclers with unusually grisly and appalling details of his reign.[39]

In 692, the emperor convoked a church synod known as the *Quinisextum* ("fifth-sixth") council; its official purpose was to provide the two previous councils with a proper body of canon. It would have far-reaching cultural implications. Apart from discouraging Pagan customs still common in the empire – especially traditions related to the ancient wine-god Dionysus – and forbidding Jews to bathe together with Christians, it attacked practices known from churches under papal jurisdiction in the Latin West, most notably the celibacy of priests and the symbolic depiction of Christ as a sacrificial lamb. The pope was not even properly represented at the council and refused to sign the acts when they were presented to him; few things better illustrate the crumbling imperial authority than the fact that Justinian II, whose grandfather had deposed a disobedient pope, now failed to repeat a similar manoeuvre.[40]

The new church council has sometimes been used to explain an iconographic shift in the official coinage of the empire. Roman coins from the late seventh century show an increase in artistic detail and realism, partly a reversal to prototypes from the fourth century.[41] The Type I coins of Justinian II (685) – still struck throughout the Mediterranean as far as Sardinia and Carthage – depict the emperor holding a globe on the obverse side, a cross on steps on the reverse. However, the Type II coins come with an innovation: on the obverse side is now seen an intricate image of Christ *Pantokrator* and the Latin text REX REGNANTIUM, whereas the emperor, holding the cross on the reverse side, is described as SERVUS CHRISTI. The term "King of kings" might sound like a distant echo of the Persian title *Shahinshah*, but here it is applied to the triumphant Christ. Heraclius had cast himself as the servant of the Redeemer whose cross he had carried; his great-great-grandson more appears as the servant of a celestial victor whose facial features show a certain resemblance to the ancient Pagan image of Zeus. It contrasts with the short-bearded or beardless Christ known from early Christian and Near Eastern art.[42]

This was the same year as the *fitna* ended, an event that inspired the victorious ʻAbd al-Mālik to embark upon an ambitious program of tax and monetary reforms in his empire. From this time, coins struck in Umayyad dominions feature the Islamic *shahāda*, the Muslim confession of faith:

"There is no god but God and Muḥammad is His messenger." Crosses have become rare, although the coins continue to adhere to Roman iconographic models; the "staff" that has replaced the cross is maintained in different variations and the image of the emperor transforms into the image of a standing figure with long beard and hair, dressed as an emperor but holding a sword instead of a globe. The same image is featured on imitations of Sassanid models and leaves room for two possible interpretations: either it depicts ʿAbd al-Mālik, or it actually depicts the Prophet Muḥammad. Arabic inscriptions make both suggestions seem viable, however incredible it may appear from a later Islamic point of view.[43]

Since ʿAbd al-Mālik had promised to pay 365ʿ000 *solidi* to the emperor every year, one can easily imagine that sooner or later Justinian II would hold one of these coins in his hand. At least that is where we are supposed to fit in a curious little anecdote, again from the hand of the later Byzantine chronicler Theophanes:

> In this year Justinian thoughtlessly broke the peace with ʿAbd al-Mālik … For he did not accept the money he got from ʿAbd al-Mālik, the coins being of a new kind which had never been seen before …When ʿAbd al-Mālik heard about it, he devilishly pretended to ask Justinian not to break the peace, and accept the money since the Arabs could not put Roman imprints on their coins, whereas the gold was keeping its weight, and the Romans thus needed not be affected by the new coinage of the Arabs. [Justinian] misjudged this as a sign of fear …[44]

The claim that Justinian II broke the peace as a consequence of the new coinage is probably spurious, but it is not unlikely that he felt frustrated with an enemy who even under peaceful conditions kept challenging the political prerogative of his own empire. The rejection of the cross, the adaptation of Arabic for official purposes and the open proclamation of a new religious doctrine, whatever he understood from it, might well have stirred the irate emperor, who realised that his symbolical capital was slipping out of his hands at the same pace as he received formal capital. Muslim historiographers offer a strikingly similar story about Roman imports of papyrus from lands now under Arab control, and claim that ʿAbd al-Mālik provoked Justinian by providing exported papyrus scrolls with a Qur'anic headline in Greek and Arabic, whereupon the emperor threatened to insult the prophet on his coins. It was as a consequence of this, it is said, that ʿAbd al-Mālik decided to start his own mint.[45]

Again, it is noteworthy that the Quinisextum church council took place in the same year as ʿAbd al-Mālik concluded the *fitna*. Perhaps the claim that "the Arabs could not put Roman imprints on their coins" mirrors the fact that ʿAbd al-Mālik had to pay Muslim troops in the eastern part of his empire, and that he felt uneasy about doing this with coins modelled on overtly Roman or Christian prototypes. On the fourth set of Umayyad coins

introduced in 696–697 all images have been replaced by text, quoting the *Ikhlās* Qur'an *sura*, stating that "God has not begotten and is not begotten", an open affront against the whole Christian concept of the incarnation.[46] These coins were somewhat lighter, which has been attributed to a reversal to older Arabic weight standards, and clearly money "of a kind which nobody had ever seen before", skipping both crosses and emperors and bearing testimony to a new religious concept as well as a growing confidence of the nascent empire in Damascus.

It is also a fact that the peace between the two empires ended as soon as the *fitna* had ceased. Now that the Mardaites were gone, the Arabs could again make raids and incursions into Roman Anatolia without fear of retaliation, just as they had done in the days of Mu'āwiya, and 'Abd al-Mālik systematised the expeditions under the pretext of waging a *jihād* or "holy struggle in the way of God", against his non-Muslim neighbours. He did not invent this concept, which had been an implicit undercurrent of the conquests, the *fitnas* (when all the contracting parties had claimed to fight in the "way of God" in some way or another) and the military expeditions of Mu'āwiya.[47] However, precisely because it had been used against him, 'Abd al-Mālik must have been aware of the urgent need to re-externalise its objective lest it turned against him again. Umayyad *Islām* and *jihād* began to converge in a more considerate way than before, eventually – as we shall see – surviving the context that brought them together.

Did 'Abd al-Mālik deliberately break the peace? As we saw above, Theophanes blames Justinian II and claims that the Arabs went to battle with the peace treaty hanging on their spearheads so as to show the emperor that he would be held responsible for breaking it.[48] It is notable that both Muslim and Christian apocalypticists at the time seem to have expected the Roman emperor to embark upon a decisive counter-strike, and that the Slavs he had settled in Anatolia upon the removal of the Mardaites had been used to create an elite corps with the peculiar name "chosen people".[49] This policy proved to be a failure: the Slavs changed sides and went over to the Arabs, causing a resounding Roman defeat. The emperor took a harsh revenge on their wives and children,[50] but his pride preceded his fall. A concluding anecdote just for the sake of it: in 695, Justinian II is said to have ordered the demolition of a church in Constantinople because he wanted to extend the imperial palace. Within a year, a popular revolt had deposed him, burned his two most hated advisers at the stake, and exiled him to the Crimean Peninsula.[51]

Perhaps it was out of respect for the dynastic legitimacy that the life of the emperor was spared, but his tongue and nose were cut off, earning him the name ῥινότμητος, the nose-less. As such, he would return to power ten years later in a surprising *coup d'état*. By that time, Carthage and the rest of North Africa had fallen to the Arabs, which stood on the verge of entering Spain and the European mainland. A century of unabated military setbacks for the Roman Empire had undone the vision of Constantine the Great: the cross was no longer a sign of imperial victory. In its stead, the Umayyad concept of

Islām had emerged as a symbol of political power: it would soon be clear that Justinian II was not the only ruler who could demolish churches.

3 Guardians of Paradise

As Commander of the Believers, ʻAbd al-Mālik brought a new name for the highest authority of the Muslims into common use: caliph. The Arabic word means "deputy", "vicar" or "successor", and later Islamic tradition associated the title with the political succession from the prophet, which made it appear more or less synonymous to the title Commander of the Believers.[52] It is worth noting, however, that the word has a very considered use in the Qur'an, where it is said that Adam, the first man, was created to be the "caliph of God" upon earth. This can mean little more than "vicar" or "deputy", not "successor"; it is also used with reference to the Biblical King David in the Holy Land.[53] It is tempting to connect the Umayyad use of the title with the geographical setting of the Biblical lands that made up the core part of their empire.[54] If the Commander of the Believers is also caliph of God in the terrestrial Paradise, it explains why *Islām* as a political commitment remains a religious virtue. It unites the believers by the purpose of guarding and extending the common *Dār al-Islām* instead of fighting each other in pursuit of individual gain, and the prerogative of the caliph to proclaim *jihād* or "holy struggle" – and the notion of a heavenly reward for any physical sacrifice it may involve – completes the picture. The bellicose language that had first pervaded the conquests may have been eschatological, but even in times of peace it offered a compelling parable for the inner, spiritual life of the community. It is not to say that we have to do with a purified idea of a "spiritual *jihād*" as promoted by later Sūfī groups,[55] but that eschatological and non-eschatological objectives are convergent down to the level of the individual believer whose striving towards God goes through the community, the *umma*. As Blankinship stressed, even the common prayers in a mosque carry a strong resemblance to a battlefield formation, with the community standing in wide, horizontal ranks behind the prayer-leader, and with a particular virtue being connected to praying in the first row[56] – a contrast in shape and orientation to the Christian basilica that becomes particularly conspicuous in the first monumental mosque of Islam.

Faiths and cults had come and gone in the Fertile Crescent since the dawn of history, and being one of the oldest inhabited places on earth, Damascus had housed many of them. What had once been built as a temple to the Aramean storm god Hadad had been extended in the Hellenistic and Roman eras when it was used as a temple to Zeus or Jupiter, only to be converted into a church when the Emperor Theodosius I suppressed all Pagan cults in 391.[57] Dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, the church must have filled or replaced the space of the closed temple *naos* or *cella* that stood in the middle of the wide, colonnaded *temenos* courtyard, its rectangular shape aligning on the east–west axis of the existing complex. When the Arabs conquered the

city in 635, they made it a habit to pray along the broad southern wall of the courtyard, following the Muslim *qiblah* or prayer direction towards Mecca. At the time, they would have made up little more than a local garrison, but their unobtrusive role would change during the following decades, as Damascus became the capital of their new empire. It is easy to imagine how the local Christians, who might have spotted a few Arab warriors along the southern wall of the courtyard as they entered and left the church still *c.*650, would have found themselves totally engulfed in Muslims if they happened to have an errand to the site on a Friday in the year 700. A separation became increasingly likely, especially since the Umayyad leadership must have felt a waning interest in aligning themselves with the church as they had done at the time of Muʿāwiya. The post-Roman church and the Umayyad elite had forged a profitable alliance in times of turmoil, but the recent church councils had healed the rift between the Orthodox communities and the emperor, and the conclusion of the *fitna* had tied the Umayyads to their Muslim subjects in a new way.

There was also a generational shift underway. ʿAbd al-Mālik still had Christian friends and advisers and may have felt reluctant to confront them, but we are told that one of his grandsons showed open disdain for the local Christians by spitting on an icon. Around the turn of the eighth century we first learn that the Umayyads ordered slaughters of pigs and showed irritation at the sound of the wooden *naqus* used by the local Christians to call people to liturgy.[58] It does not mean that the empire underwent a radical change all of a sudden: the non-Muslim communities, however divided, remained the overwhelming majority of the population in cities under the caliphs and formed the basis for the civil economy. However, it shows how the Christian and Muslim identities were drifting away from each other, just as the non-Orthodox and Orthodox Christian ones had already done in the late Roman era.

Al-Walīd, who became caliph upon the death of his father in 705, finally chose to buy out the Christians. He pulled down the church in the middle of the courtyard and erected a new prayer hall along the southern wall. This three-aisled construction, upheld by Corinthian columns and Etruscan colonettes, resembles a Christian basilica if it is viewed from its eastern or western short side, but the aisles are all of equal size, the domed transept is situated in the middle, and the whole building is much "longer" than would be normal for a Christian basilica – and of course this means broader when it is seen from the direction that is facing the *qiblah*. [59] That also meant that the courtyard gained an almost transcendental function within the complex, not merely as the site of the ablution fountain that gives ritual access to the inner prayer hall, but as a *forum* connected to the external world of the buzzing city. As such, the first imperial mosque of Islam evokes the room impact of the pre-Christian Roman city rather than the sanctuary that it replaced. It is not only a *masjid*, a place for praying, but a *jāmiʿ*, an assembly place for the Muslims, manifesting the unity of the conquering elite in urban surroundings that were marked by a religious and political decentralisation.[60]

Walīd's mosque in Damascus became the prototype of many other structures; a few years later, his brother and successor Sulaymān (r. 715–717) had similar mosques erected in Ramla and Aleppo.[61] Walīd also refashioned the mosque in Medina, pulling down the structures that had stood there since the days of the prophet and erecting a complex in the same style as the mosque in Damascus.[62] Following the successful example of his father, he wrote to the emperor in Constantinople and asked for both workers and materials for these building activities; it makes one ponder the fact that Justinian II must have become involuntarily involved in erecting most of the early monuments of Islam. The request was linked to an angry protest note sent by the emperor when he had learned about the demolition of the church of St John: Walīd would have threatened to destroy many more churches if the emperor had refused to grant his wish. Whether the caliph was actually indulging in that kind of political bullying is impossible to know; one story has it that he intended to pay Justinian II with an enormous amount of pepper, but that it was never dispatched.[63]

Perhaps more than anything else, the Umayyad monuments indicate a growing similarity between the caliphate and the empire it had replaced. Irrespective of its inner conviction, it embodied an armed peace not very different from the *Pax Romana* that had emanated from a no less militant ideology of power and scattered its military-camp settlements and propagandistic state cults around the Mediterranean. Umayyad experiments in urban planning, such as the one at Anjar, halfway between Damascus and Beirut – founded with a Roman-style square town plan and a central *tetrapylon* – are rare but show deference to Late Ancient tradition.[64] To complete this picture of a cultural continuity under the new power of *Islām*, it is worth taking a brief look at Umayyad building activities in the interior and on the outskirts of the desert, areas that had been particularly vulnerable to Arab invasions and where the old landholders had fled in large numbers, causing a dramatic change in settlement patterns. The abandoned lands were distributed among the new rulers, and from the time of al-Walīd, the plains were filled with castles and estates. Maintaining a militarised framework, their interiors served peaceful purposes, similar to the fortified Christian monasteries in the region.[65] Perhaps the old Persian word *paradise*, in the sense of an enclosed garden, describes them best, surrounded as they are today by the desert in all directions; but then one should remember that in Umayyad times these areas were the subject of much care to keep the grounds fertile and the irrigation systems in order. Located in the borderland between the desert and the fertile areas, the Umayyad estates manifest a power that relied on them both.

The desert estates of Minya, Mshatta, Qusayr 'Amra, Qusayr al-Hayr, Khirbat al-Minyah and Khirbat al-Mafyar, to mention the most famous ones, mostly date from the late Umayyad era (718–749). Like a last spark of Antiquity, they offer a synthesis of Mediterranean and Near Eastern villa architecture, and rich decoration programmes that stand out as a final glimpse of Hellenistic art, complete with references to Greek mythology and bucolic

imagery. Orientalising interpretations of Western beholders and puritan Muslim prejudices against a dynasty routinely accused of depravity have often made these *triclinias*, reception rooms and bathhouses appear as monuments of imperial hedonism, which misses a vital point. As Fowden has shown, the imagery is evocative of the Qur'anic Paradise, with the Umayyad ruler taking the place of Adam, the "caliph of God", in its midst.[66] Similar depictions of a peaceful and prosperous earth straddled Pagan and Christian art as much it bridged the gap between terrestrial and eschatological notions of Paradise,[67] and whereas the Qur'an describes a Paradise that Christian polemicists – and popular Muslim imagination – interpreted in physical, not to say carnal terms,[68] it would be equally unjust to reduce Umayyad figurative art to this dimension as to conclude from ancient plastic art that its artists and patrons had a preference for nudity. As later controversies over figurative art in Christianity and Islam will show, the nature of spiritual and physical meanings always remains in the eyes of the beholder.

An interesting example can be found in the late Umayyad palace of Khirbat al-Mafyar, north of Jericho. It was left unfinished when it collapsed in an earthquake in 744, but the remains reveal an extremely high level of artistic proficiency. A mosaic floor inside what appears to have been a combined bathhouse and reception room depicts a fruit tree surrounded by grazing gazelles on the left side, and a lion killing a gazelle on the right. It has a stylistic resemblance to the sixth-century mosaics that have been excavated from the Great Palace in Constantinople, and it seems tempting to assume that it contains a political message: the tree is a common symbol of the ruler in Near Eastern art, and the juxtaposition of a peaceful and violent existence would match the power of the caliph of God who was simultaneously Commander of the Believers.[69] Other scholars have rather convincingly argued that the location of the mosaic in the proximity of a bath makes a sexual implication more likely.[70] However, even if there is no particularly political significance in the mosaic, there is most certainly one in the standing image that was once featured on the façade over the doorway to the palace: just like on the early coins of ʿAbd al-Mālik, a bearded man with a sword seems to represent the physical power of the caliph.[71] Though the desert castles were built for the enjoyment of the Umayyads, no one should be made to forget that what enabled their existence was the armed peace of the caliphs.

The mixture of messages is taken to a completely new level in the bathhouses of Qasr ʿAmra, in present-day Jordan. A fresco inside them depicts six legendary rulers of the world, including the Roman emperor, the Persian shah, the Visigothic king and the king of Abyssinia – all mentioned by name on inscriptions in Greek and Arabic. Next to the badly damaged fresco is what seems to have been a depiction of the "seventh king", the Umayyad Caliph Walīd II (743–744) with his young sons and wives, reclining on cushions, reminiscent of the Qur'anic descriptions of Paradise.[72] It offers a slightly inconsiderate message: the Umayyads had never defeated Khosrau II (who had been overthrown after the victory of Heraclius) or Roderic (the king of

the Spanish Visigoths whose Arab subjugators were badly treated by the caliph), neither had they managed to outwit the Christian empires of Rome and Ethiopia. What Walīd II tried to keep up, less than a decade before his whole family was overthrown and brutally annihilated, was the political narrative of *Islām*. The depictions of the six kings attending to the Umayyad caliph would have appeared as the fulfilment of the will of the prophet when he despatched letters to the rulers of the world with the invitation to Islam: *aslim taslam*, submit, and you will be in peace.

The last Umayyad decades left a few literary traces: mostly poetry, but also moral works of education (*'adab*) written for them by court secretaries such as Ibn al-Muqaffa (d. 756/757) – famous for his beautiful Arabic rendering of Indian and Persian fables in *Kalilah wa-Dimnah* – or Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yahyā (d. 749/750). Their blending of Muslim virtues with an aristocratic stoicism is just one example of how the Late Ancient world imperceptibly continued into that of the Early Middle Ages: the world was the same; human nature was the same; only the gods had been exchanged for God:

> Bestow upon God every morning, which He lets you enjoy to see, and in whose dawn of light He reveals your well-being, your thankfulness for the fortunes which He bestows upon you: letting you enjoy yet another day of functioning limbs, a healthy body, an abundance of benefits and visible gifts, and then recite from the Book of God […] in which you will find healing for the heart from its diseases, the exit of the whispers of the devil and his evil slander, the glory in the signs of enlightenment of all things, the director to the right path and a mercy for all believers.[73]

The narrative of inner peace within a world of troubles is transferred to the caliph himself. A sound and firm belief in the unity of God and submission to His will serves the psychological purpose of establishing a feeling of collectedness and control, creating an atmosphere where rational decisions can be made. From such examples, the prince growing up to be caliph should learn to be humble, dutiful, respectful towards others and grateful towards God. He should be on his guard against pride and passions, which are the enemies of sound reason; yet caution should not be a cause of indifference towards others. He must be kind to his soldiers, but be wary of exposing himself by chattering; gifts may be distributed among people of nobility, but he must be wary of waste and gaudiness. He should always surround himself with soldiers or family members of noble mind and wisdom of life, behaving kindly and attentively in their company, thus earning their respect and sympathy, but be wary of inappropriate jokes and gossip which could hurt his reputation. Against flattery and insinuations he must arm himself with sound scepticism, without hurting anyone in public or displaying feelings of anger; and if he has personal favourites at the court or among the soldiers, he must not disclose these when speaking to them.

The more ominous side of what at first glance can appear as a Machiavellian "Mirror for Princes" is that it is in fact a letter dispatched to the crown prince as he was at the frontier to fight one of the Kharijite rebellions that heralded the end of the dynasty. It gave him a very clear justification for war:

> Stand up against your enemies, those who are called so in *Islām* since they have turned their back on the community of their own people, falsely claiming to be faithful rulers, but keeping it for legal to shed the blood of their followers.[74]

The Umayyad propagation of *Islām* and the caliphate was a narrative of power, just as the "Roman peace" had been long before. For a limited period of time, it appeared to lead the political energy of the Near East in a common direction. What it achieved was impressive, but it was eventually outrun by the forces it tried to tame.[75]

However, we return for the last time to the great Umayyad mosque in Damascus. It was badly damaged in an 1893 fire; today one can merely glimpse fragments of the mosaics that once adorned its inner courtyard walls. But what was reconstructed in the twentieth century shows a veritable Paradise of trees, rivers and palaces. Like a Christian monastery, it will appear as a peaceful haven in the midst of a troubled world, but like a Roman military camp it will also look like a bastion against the troublemakers, a religious battlefield for those hearkening to the caliph in his call for unity. In contrast to the desert palaces, it is devoid of depictions of humans or animals, but the visitors to the mosque will actively fill their place when following the call to prayer which the caliph will lead. To complete the convergence of terrestrial and eschatological interpretations, if the vanguard against the enemies of the caliphate would be repaid for their self-sacrificing struggle in the eschatological Paradise, those who hearkened to the call for prayer in Damascus would have entered a terrestrial Paradise guarded and led by the "caliph of God upon earth".[76]

Notes

1 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 336–44, 545–56; Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers* 203–11, Lecker, *The Constitution of Medina: Muḥammad's First Legal Document* (2004) 44.
2 Q 49:14.
3 Q 6:126–7.
4 Cook, *Understanding Jihad* 10.
5 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 620. Cf. p317 for a similar Jewish perspective.
6 Arculf, "De locis sanctis" 805B; for an interpretation of how he could have understood the Muslim prayer, see Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen* (1986) 42.
7 Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest* (2011) 52–66.
8 Cf. Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran* 7–11.

9 *Dhimmī,* the term used to denote the "protected peoples", derives from the term for custody or obligation, *dhimma*, whereas *jiizīya*, the tax they were forced to pay, means recompense.
10 Tabari, *Tārīkh ar-rusūl wa l-mulūk* II:380–381; the quotation from the Qur'an is from 3:25.
11 Cf. Campbell, "It Must Be the End of Time: Apocalyptic Aḥādīth as a Record of the Islamic Community's Reaction to the Turbulent First Centuries", *Medieval Encounters* 4:3 (1998) 178–87.
12 Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers* 183f.
13 Arculf, "De locis sanctis" 781b.
14 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6127.
15 Ibid., AM 6135. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 311.
16 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 126–7.
17 Flusin, "L'esplanade du Temple á l'arrivée des Arabes", Raby, Johns (eds.) *Bayt al-Maqdis: Abd al-Mālik's Jerusalem* (1992) 17–31.
18 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6127
19 Livne-Kafri, "On Muslim Jerusalem in the Period of its Formation", *LA* 55 (2005) 214–5.
20 Cf. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (2002) 325.
21 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 550–3.
22 Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran* 7–27.
23 Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers* 163–4.
24 Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ* (1981) 1506–8. Mas'udi, *Murūj ad-dhaḥab*, ed. Meynard (1861–77) V:192; al-Muqaddasi, *Ahsan al-Thaqasim*, ed. de Goeje (1904) 74–5. Tabari, *Tārī kh* II:537. The foundations of this apse are known as the *haṭīm* (border) and are still visible today.
25 Ya'qubi, *Tārīkh*, ed. Houtsma (1883) II:311.
26 Cf. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr* to sura XVII.
27 According to a much later report, 'Abd al-Mālik placed the alleged horns of the ram sacrificed instead of Isaac inside the Dome of the Rock (cf. Elad, "Why did 'Abd al-Mālik build the Dome of the Rock?" in: Raby, Johns (eds.) *Bayt al-Maqdis* 34–35, 40–48). On Ishmael and the Ka'ba, see Lings, *Muḥammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (1991) 1–3, 12–14. Islamic tradition provided the Ka'ba with a filicidal past too: Muḥammad's grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭālib was said to have made a vow to sacrifice his son there, just like Abraham, but was prevented by his wife. The boy, of course, was the later father of Muḥammad. Cf. also Bashear, "Abraham's Sacrifice of his Son and Related Issues" *DI* (1990) 67/2.
28 Q 4:171.
29 Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture* (1958) 34ff. The death and resurrection of Christ on Golgotha parallels the sacrifice of Isaac on Moriah, and until the destruction wrought by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim in 1009, the Dome of the Holy Sepulchre marked the spot of the rock tombs over which it was built.
30 Elad, "Why did 'Abd al-Mālik build the Dome of the Rock?" 36f.
31 al-Muqaddasi, *Aḥsan al-Thaqāsim* III:159.
32 Tabari, *Tārīkh* II:854.
33 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6183.
34 "An unknown Maronite Chronicle" 31–32.
35 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 549, 596f.
36 *Matth*. 22:21.
37 Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (1984) 38–51.
38 Foss, *Arab-Byzantine Coins* (2008) 112–118, 18–37.
39 Nicephorus patr., *Historia*37:19–24, 42:25–43:6, 46:9–19; Agnellus of Ravenna, *Liber Pontificalis [Ecclesiae Ravennatis]*, ed. and transl. Nauert (1996) 506.
40 Agnellus of Ravenna, *Liber Pontificalis* 372–4.

41 Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* (1959) 28.
42 It reappears on the Type III–IV coins from the second reign of Justinian II. Ibid., 46, 52, 58.
43 Foss, *Arab-Byzantine Coins* 66–83
44 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6183.
45 Baladhuri, *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (1957) 283–4.
46 Q 112.
47 Cook, *Understanding Jihad* 5–22; Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers* 82ff, 172; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 554–6.
48 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6184. The troops of Mu'āwiya had hung the Qur'an on their spearheads when they faced the troops of 'Ali in the battle of Siffin (660).
49 Ibid.; Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser", in: Verbeke, Verhelst and Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (1988) 97; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 331f.
50 Oikonomides, "Silk Trade and Production: The Seals of Kommerkiarioi", *DOP* (1986) 40 51ff. connects Theophanes's report on Justinian "making himself rid of" their families at the Marmara shore with the unusually large sale of slaves traceable from 694/5 Bithynian seals.
51 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6186–7.
52 Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddima* 285f.
53 Q 2:30; Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers* 209–11; cf. Crone, Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (1986) 4–42.
54 Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (2004) 125ff.; Fowden and Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads* (2004) 52ff.
55 Cook, *Understanding Jihad* 32–48.
56 Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State: The Reign of Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Mālik and the Collapse of the Umayyads* (1994) 15f.
57 Burns, *Damascus* 12–18, 38–40, 61–68, 88–91.
58 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 189; Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* (1995) 167.
59 Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 59–64.
60 Grabar, "Islamic Art and Byzantium", *DOP* 18 (1964) 73.
61 The former was destroyed in an earthquake in 1033; the latter was burnt down by Nicephorus Phocas during his 962 conquest of northern Syria.
62 Tabari, *Tārīkh ar-rusūl wa l-mulūk* II:1192. According to one Muslim report, one of the Christian workers tried to paint a pig over the *miḥrab*, and then fell off his ladder and died. Ironically, the same fate is said to have befallen a worker helping 'Umar I to build the first al-Aqsa Mosque (see above), but there it is provided with a Christian moral. Intended as warnings, these stories merely confirm that the religious borders were not as sharp as the narrators maybe would have preferred.
63 For a detailed overview to these diplomatic turns, see Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus: Gesandschaften und Verträge zwischen Kaisern und Kalifen 639–750* (1996) 167–202.
64 Hillenbrandt, "Anjar and Early Islamic Urbanism", in: Brogiolo, Ward-Perkins (eds.) *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (1999) 59–98.
65 Fowden and Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads* 175ff.
66 Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* 115–41.
67 Maguire, "The Good Life", in Bowersock, Brown, Grabar (eds.) *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World* (2001) 238–57.
68 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6122; cf. also the *Syriac Chronicle of Zuqnin* (trans. Harrak) 142, or the alleged exchange of letters between Emperor Leo III

and the Caliph ʿUmar II discussed in Chapter 3. See further Bijlefeld, "Eschatology: some Muslim and Christian Data", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 15.1 (2004) 35–54, esp. 42f.

69 Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sassanian Iran and the Islamic World* (1972) 45.

70 Behrens-Abouseif, "The Lion-Gazelle Mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafyar", *Muqarnas* 14 (1997) 11–18.

71 Franz, "Entstehung und Anfänge einer islamischen Kunst unter der Dynastie der Omayyaden," in Ruprechtsberger (ed.), *Syrien: von den Aposteln zu den Kalifen* (1993) 315–335, and for a photographic depiction, see p. 328.

72 Fowden, *Qusayr ʿAmra* 175–196, 211ff.

73 *Risālat ʿAbd al-Hamīd al-Kātib*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAli, *Rasāʿil al-bulagha* (1954) 175–6.

74 Ibid., 188–9.

75 More on this topic in al-Qadi, "The Religious Foundation of Late Umayyad Ideology and Practice", in: *Saber Religioso y Poder Politico en el Islam* (1994); repr. in Donner (ed.), *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures* (2012) 37–79.

76 Cf. Q 9:100, 56:11–12.

3 Shadows at dusk

The paradisiacal manifestations of the Umayyad monuments in Syria and Palestine should not allow the observer to forget that they were erected in the midst of an empire that was plunged into wars on all fronts. Theoretically, the caliphs may have curtailed further civil wars by stressing the virtue of *Islām* and projecting the internal strife of the Muslims upon those who had not yet submitted in spirit and action, but even as they claimed to rule over war and peace, it is questionable whether the Umayyads did attain a position where they could have bridled the snorting charges instead of just letting them scour away in all directions and scatter on the horizon.

The Umayyad propagation of *Islām* had emerged out of the need to distinguish the monotheist conquerors from the conquered, and to provide a common purpose for their diverging motives. But exactly what was that purpose? If it was of a terrestrial kind, it is easy to see the Umayyad caliphs as successors of a political universalism that had been propagated by the Persians and the Romans when they struggled to unite different peoples under a common rule. Especially the fact that they resided in Syria and directed their main attention westwards, towards Spain and North Africa, to Sicily, Crete, Rhodes and Cyprus, to Carthage and Constantinople, could be seen as a wish to replace the Romans as guardians of a universal peace. As in the Qasr 'Amra fresco, the political and religious unity offered by *Islām* would have given them victory where other terrestrial empires had failed. It sounds speculative, and of course it is. As we said with reference to Khosrau II, no one conquers the world or creates a new world religion just because he has come up with the idea of doing so. However, it offers us some idea about what the caliphs could have had in mind if the ultimate aim of their wars had been strictly terrestrial.

The Messianic and eschatological undercurrents of the faith that had brought them to power, on the other hand, spoke a different language. Conquering the Fertile Crescent fulfilled the promise of a better world to those who were merely happy to give up the harsh life of the desert, but not all conquerors were prepared to submit to the base conditions of a terrestrial Paradise. For those who longed for a spiritual rather than physical redemption,

the expansion of the community of the prophet, the wars to subdue the Arabs, the conquest of the Near East and the military victories over the Romans were the birth pangs of a Divine promise coming true, an apocalyptic process whose goal lay in the eschatological paradise.[1] The fight for a terrestrial empire was of little value against the backdrop of a world that was drawing to an end: the joys it could offer were idols, shadows and temptations. This connection between *jihād* and eschatology offers some of the most important clues we have to the ideology of early Islam, and it finds strong backing in the Qur'an and the vast *hadīth* literature with traditions on the sayings and doings of the prophet.[2] An ideological counter-reaction to Umayyad imperialism might have been inevitable.

If we turn to the question of where the Umayyad caliphs saw themselves, we must consider that it is difficult enough to create an all-encompassing ideology over a vast and incoherent area, and practically impossible to ensure its coherence over time. A striking aspect of the seventh century is how Roman imperialism, humbled by its political defeats, would turn increasingly Christian: first under Heraclius, who tried to appeal to the Near Eastern communities once persecuted by the empire; and then under Constantine IV, who sacrificed the reconciliation efforts with them for the sake of the Orthodox. The interludes of Constans II and Justinian II revealed other aims, but both emperors suffered internal opposition, repeated setbacks and violent ends. Since the religious networks proved the strongest communicative units over their own space, it might have been a natural consequence that the imperial narrative would cling to this most unyielding thread in the wire. Conversely, the caliphs might have set out with a very concrete terrestrial aim, but have been dragged along by apocalyptic beliefs that were inherent in the conquest that had brought them to power.

What is clear is that Muslim apocalyptic literature contains a considerable amount of predictions on the conquest of Constantinople and the fall of the Roman Empire to the Arabs. Featuring references to places in Syria and Palestine, they must have mirrored beliefs and expectations of the Umayyad world:

> [Muḥammad, the Messenger of God] said: "You will march into the Arabic lands and subdue them in the name of God; then to Persia and subdue her in the name of God; then you will march against Rome and subdue it in the name of God; then you will march against Antichrist (*Dajjāl*) and subdue him in the name of God." Nāfi' [bin 'Utbah] concluded: "Antichrist will not come ere Rome is subdued."[3]

As we can see in this example, the context is thoroughly eschatological. The fall of the Roman Empire forms part of an apocalyptic scenario in which the old empires of the world are falling to the Muslims, to be followed by a deciding battle with the one-eyed Antichrist or *Dajjāl*, in which Jesus and the *Mahdī* will play significant roles.[4] It shows a strong likeness to Jewish

Messianic, Roman and Persian notions about a just rule that will put an end to all terrestrial afflictions, as much as to Christian, neo-Platonic and Manichaean anticipations of a redemption beyond the physical existence itself. The convergence between different apocalyptic traditions becomes particularly clear once we approach the Umayyad wars against the Romans from two opposing viewpoints that, upon closer examination, turn out to be confusingly similar.

1 Bracing for Armageddon

Eschatological anticipations had been comparably low in Roman Christian Late Antiquity, even to the point that the canonical status of the Apocalypse of John – today concluding every Bible all over the world – was questioned, and the seventh millennium – which would have begun in the sixth century according to the most widespread chronology – was ignored.[5] The fact that the Christian communities had become allowed to live and prosper on their own meant that the tribulations of the Pagan persecutions had turned into a sacred past, whereas the tribulations foregoing the Last Judgment could be pushed into an eschatological future. *How* remote that future was could not be determined: natural catastrophes, famine, wars, plague could give people cause to change their minds, and sometimes not even that was needed – scurrile sects, philosophical schools, ecstatic movements questioning the meaning of the world had prevailed throughout the Ancient world long before Christianity.

The seventh century saw a surge in prophetic and apocalyptic expectations. In the wake of the Roman–Persian wars, and possibly inspired by the heavily propagated triumph of Heraclius, Syriac authors showed a growing interest in the claim that Alexander the Great had spent his Asian campaigns erecting a great wall against the end-time invaders of Gog and Magog.[6] A reminiscent story is featured in the Qur'an, where it is said that *Dhū l-Qarnayn* or "the one with two horns" has confined Gog and Magog behind a giant wall of copper and that people "will fall upon each other like breaking waves" when the wall collapses.[7] In the seventh-century Syriac *Apocalypse of Daniel*, the prophecy is attributed to the Prophet Daniel, whose Old Testament book had already given rise to a vast amount of interpretation, amendment and extension. In this apocalypse, the Antichrist is supposed to open the "Gates of the North" and let out the armies of Gog and Magog, who will conquer the earth and pitch their tents outside Jerusalem. However, since the Antichrist will fail to raise the dead, God will intervene and send an angel to kill him.[8] No references are made to the Arabs, but there are signs of the same imagery pervading descriptions of the wars between Damascus and Constantinople in the days of Emperor Justinian II.[9]

Two Syriac apocalyptic works from the late seventh century integrate the Arab conquests with their end-time scenarios, albeit in different ways. The Eastern Syriac (Nestorian) work of John bar Penkaye, written at the time of

the second *fitna* in Iraq, claims that the Arab invasions were God's punishment over the Christians, especially due to the many heresies that had risen in the Roman West, but concludes from the events that are taking place at the time of the author that the "Arab kingdom" will be destroyed by the forces of the *shurṭa*, presumably the Shi'i movement of Mukhtar.[10] On the other hand, a Western Syriac apocalypse that seems to have been written just a few years later makes the Arabs into its focal point: the Edessan author known as Pseudo-Methodius inserts a long *ex eventu* prophecy on the conquests and describes them in terms taken from the New Testament Revelation of John.[11] In this version, the Arab conquests have nothing to do with religious heresy, and they are not so much a punishment as a chastisement. God has given terrestrial power to the Arabs just as He once gave it to the Jews in the days of the Old Testament: not because He loves them, but because of the sins of the people they conquer; because (as the author describes in great detail) Christian men and women go around drunk in the streets like prostitutes, commit adultery with each other and indulge in all kinds of impurity, God has left their land to the death and destruction at the hands of the Arabs, and these will rob them of what they have and lay heavy taxes upon them. This will inspire "false Christians" to abandon their faith and join the godless debauchery of the new rulers, thus leading to a religious purification of the existing communities which will prepare them for the eschatological invasions from Gog and Magog.[12]

The Syriac Pseudo-Methodius seems to date from around the year 690, before 'Abd al-Mālik had made an end to the second *fitna* and regained the initiative on the Roman front, since it is from that direction that the Syrian author expects salvation to come.[13] Unlike the work of John bar Penkaye, it would be translated into both Greek and Latin, and adapted and modified long into the modern era in order to appeal to Christian readers seeking consolation from Muslim political victories. In the Greek translation, which probably dates from the early eighth century, the turning point is assumed to take place when the Arabs try to conquer Constantinople, personified by its ancient Greek founder Byzas:

> Woe is to you, Byzas, when Ishmael will catch up with you: for his horse overtakes everything. The foremost of his people will pitch his tent in front of you and the battle will commence, and they will shatter the gate of Xylokerkos and come as far as the Forum Bovis (…) But then a voice from the heavens will be heard saying: "Now the punishment is enough" and the Lord will take the fear of the Romans and put it in the hearts of the Arabs, and He will take the courage of the Arabs and put it in the hearts of the Romans. Turning around to flee, they will be cut down by their own (…) And the king of the Greeks, that is the Romans, will stand up in wild fury, like a man who has awoken after a long sleep, intoxicated by too much wine, and whom men had held to be like dead and of no use. He will evict them down to the Red Sea and plunge the sword of

> desolation into Yathrib [Medina], which is the land of their fathers (…) and they, and their women, and their children, and those who have cared for their offspring, and all their guardians in the lands of their fathers will be in the hands of the Roman emperor, and he will put them to the sword and in captivity and deliver them to death and ruin.[14]

The most interesting aspect of this entire scenario is that it acts as a strange mirror to Muslim prophecies about a future conquest of Constantinople, which is supposed to fulfil the terrestrial conquests of Islam. In some *hadīths* this will be accomplished by Jewish warriors united under the first half of the Islamic creed, or by a man with the name of a prophet.[15] However, it will be interrupted by Satan, who will cry out to the conquerors that "the *Dajjāl* has taken place in your midst". Then the Antichrist will arrive, followed by Gog and Magog, to be defeated by Jesus, who will descend to earth from the eastern minaret of the Great Mosque in Damascus.[16]

Theological definitions play decisive roles in these scenarios,[17] and yet what they depict can hardly be called a theological confrontation between Christianity and Islam. Confined to their own inner horizons, the Muslim and Christian apocalypticists have no eyes for each other: their minds are entirely focused on the struggle between the spiritual truths they confess and the physical realities they resent. In a sense, they could be said to share the same enemy.[18] When Pseudo-Methodius expects a "Greek king" to evict the Arabs, it is not with the purpose of restoring the Roman or Christian empire in its Late Ancient form: the king, who is described as a descendant of Byzas, Alexander the Great and the ancient kings of Ethiopia, is a warrior-saviour who will force all Jews and "Pagans" (which could well mean Muslims) to baptism, commence a utopian era and renounce all power to God.[19] Similarly, in the Muslim apocalyptic tradition the conquest of Constantinople merely heralds the advent of the *Dajjāl* and the *Mahdī*, not the establishment of a terrestrial Islamic world empire. In both cases, the horizons of understanding are strikingly similar to those of the very religious and political agents they are supposed to destroy.

As we have seen, seventh-century non-Muslims were not necessarily concerned about the ideology that had inspired the Arab or Muslim conquests. Occasionally they felt disturbed by building activities on the Temple Mount or the disappearance of the crosses from the coins, but as long as their own flocks were not decimated and could prosper even under the new conditions of power, they would have regarded the Arabs as first and foremost mundane rulers. It does not mean that they were generally happy about the new state of things, but that they could understand it as yet another feature in a long chain of transient political realities – John bar Penkaye simply shoehorned the old prophecies of Daniel to include the Umayyad Empire.[20] Pseudo-Methodius, on the other hand, seems to imply that rising numbers of non-Muslims felt motivated to gain admittance to the community of the Muslim rulers, but driven by political rather than religious desires: in his eyes, the

church is cleansed of "false" Christians who abandon their faith in the opportunistic hope of becoming like their worldly masters. It follows from this that more pious elements among the Muslims must have felt similar concerns about conversions to Islam that they assumed to be merely politically motivated.[21] In the worst case they would lose their purity, be corrupted by the material gains and vainglories of the world and end up like the Jews, who had fallen from God's grace when they assimilated with the peoples they had conquered in the Holy Land, or like the Christians, whose faith had come to serve a terrestrial empire. The increasing similarity between the Umayyad Empire and its political predecessors meant that the objective of the conquests became as unclear as that of the converts, and apocalyptic *hadīths* are just as keen as Pseudo-Methodius to stress that the decisive battle for Islam will take place when the Muslims are in a minority and the Romans form a majority of the inhabitants on earth.[22] Only the most honest and self-sacrificing of Muslims will be prepared to defend the holy cities of the prophet:

> The Last Hour will not come before the Romans land at 'Amaq or Dābiq. An army consisting of the best men of Medina will go out to meet them … They will fight, and a third will die fleeing – God will never forgive them – and a third, the best of martyrs for God, will die fighting, and a third, which will not give in, will win victory and conquer Constantinople.[23]

Just as in the case of Heraclius, it feels tempting to say that if the Umayyad wars were influenced by beliefs of this kind, they had effectively lost the battle for their mundane power from the very start. They could try and maintain momentum against the Romans, but in the eyes of their subjects *their own* empire was not supposed to last once it had accomplished the mission of bringing an end to all other empires.

The dream of conquering Constantinople and fulfilling the promise kept spurring on the Muslims as the eighth century dawned; and as we shall see, it would turn into a spiritual goal for later centuries of Muslim "holy warriors" in Anatolia. As an historical endnote, it might be worth considering the impact of "Greek fire", a secret weapon reportedly invented by a Roman scientist who had fled from the Arabs in Syria or Egypt, and which was used to destroy the Arab fleet during the first series of sieges in the reign of Mu'āwiya. The military significance of the weapon – a flame-throwing device usually positioned in the bows of the Roman warships – is often considered too good to be true, but it might have had a certain psychological impact upon a series of sieges that were accompanied by supernatural expectations. A fire-sprouting Roman emperor must have impressed Christians as much as Muslims, and possibly ignited a certain interest among the caliphs to learn chemistry.[24]

Which takes us back to the concrete realities of history.

2 Showdown at the Bosporus

In the year 705, the nose-less Justinian II had returned to power in Constantinople and triumphed over the usurpers who had claimed the imperial title in his absence. Since they bore the convenient names Leontius and Apsimar, he received the cheers of the crowd to the words of the Biblical Psalm where the faithful are encouraged to trample upon adders (ἀσπίδα), lions (λέοντα), dragons and basilisks. However, the ensuing reign of terror would not last long: in 711, a new revolt made off with the emperor once and for all. His six-year-old son Tiberius was "slaughtered like a sheep".[25]

A crisis in government followed. Three emperors replaced each other within six years: Bardanes or Philippicus (711–713), an Armenian who caused a religious row by digging up the old issue about a theological compromise with the Oriental churches, but proved unable to deal with an immediate Bulgarian threat to the capital; Artemius or Anastasius II (713–715), a civil servant who lost the support of the western Anatolian troops who made him emperor; and finally Theodosius III (715–717), a poor customs officer from Ephesus who was declared emperor in spite of his vehement protests but somehow managed to reconcile the Bulgarians.

The caliph al-Walīd died in the same year and was succeeded by his younger brother Sulaymān, who became the first caliph to bear the name of a prophet.[26] He also came to power as the first Islamic centennial was drawing near, almost 100 lunar years having passed since the emigration of the prophet to Medina, which seems to have carried a certain significance for apocalyptic expectations of the time.[27] Whether motivated by this or by the political confusion in Constantinople, Sulayman launched the biggest campaign ever for conquering the Roman capital.

What happened then is extremely obscure. It seems that when the Muslim land forces reached Amorion, the main city of Roman Anatolia, they tried to gain access by flattering its στρατηγός or general by calling him emperor and encouraging those in the city to do the same.

What was the name of the general? Most reports agree that he was called Leo, which in Greek (Λέων) as well as Latin means "lion", but a number of stubborn rumours want to have it that his real name was Konon and that the name Leo merely served as a cover-up for his foreign origin.[28]

From where, then, did he come? Some chroniclers would claim that his family came from the Anatolian province of Isauria, hence he is usually known as Leo the Isaurian. Other reports state that his family came from Syria. There is some consensus about his connection with the main border city known as Germanikeia in Greek and Marash in Arabic. He is sometimes supposed to have been fluent in both languages.[29]

What were his aims? Whereas it is clear that he had made a career in the service of the emperor, we also hear of him advising the caliph in Damascus on the new expedition to Constantinople, and he is supposed to have gained the confidence of the Umayyad general, who stayed with him for a time in Amorion.[30]

As far as the chronology is concerned, it seems that with or without support from the invaders, the enigmatic Leo marched to Bithynia in north-western Anatolia, where he took the son of Theodosius III hostage and forced the emperor to abdicate, after which he entered Constantinople and was crowned emperor on the 25 March 717, the day of the Annunciation. A few months later, the Arabs troops joined their fleet at the Bosporus and realised that Leo had tricked them. Denied to enter the city, they took up a siege, but the "pious emperor" sent "fire-spouting ships" against the "wagers of war upon Christ"; the defenders were assisted by a harsh winter, mutinous Christians in the Arab fleet, and Bulgarians who exploited the vulnerability of the foreigners.[31] In the midst of this the Caliph Sulaymān unexpectedly died, which put a damper on the fighting spirit of the Arabs.[32] At last the siege was lifted, cancelling the expected Armageddon on 15 August 718, the Dormition, the other main feast day of the Mother of God, which would also correspond to 13 Muharram, the first month in the Islamic year 100.

Even without legendary embellishments, it is clearly a series of extraordinary events, but they are entangled in a jumble of contradictory narratives. First, it seems that Muslim tradition transforms a major defeat – actually the fatal turning point of the Umayyad caliphate – into a principal victory for Islam, as the Muslim General Maslama is received in the Roman capital and supervises the foundation of the first mosque in Constantinople, to be used by future Arab prisoners of war.[33] Byzantine and Orthodox historical traditions similarly transform the 717–718 events into a major Christian victory provided by the Virgin Mary. Most notably, however, they reverse their opinion on Leo the Isaurian in such a manner that one cannot help asking how later readers made any sense of the incoherence. The Byzantine chronicler Theophanes, having just called the emperor "pious", is all of a sudden calling him "impious" and goes on to tell how the Patriarch Germanos learned that the new emperor's name was, in fact, Konon. Struck by fear, the patriarch recalled a mysterious prophecy saying that the destruction of Christian images would come through an emperor of this name, an emperor who would be a forerunner of the Antichrist.[34]

Armenian and monophysite sources might have preserved a picture of Leo truer to the context in which he came to power. In such sources – in some kind of Pseudo-Methodian scenario – Leo appears as a saviour who comes to deliver Constantinople by reviving its Christian mission to the world. The New Rome has, so to speak, turned into a New Jerusalem, and the classical references that had still applied to Heraclius have now been thoroughly replaced by Biblical types: Leo is a new Moses who prays together with the clergy and the inhabitants of the city and sinks the Muslim fleet by touching the Bosporus with the Cross.[35] What is nowhere stated, though it seems necessary to make it explicit, is that the Muslim Arabs had set out to conquer the Roman capital but found themselves meeting resistance from a Christian stronghold.

Due to the general bias of the sources, there is very little one can say for sure about Leo, but at least one official document offers a first-hand insight into his world: the *Ecloga*, Leo's later contribution to the older Law of Justinian I. Nowhere in Roman jurisprudence has the Divine nature of law been stated so explicitly as in the *Ecloga*, which begins with an invocation of the Holy Trinity and then famously goes on to declare Christian love for mankind as the reason why offenders should be burned, hanged, blinded or have their noses slit, tongues cut or hands chopped off.[36] As the seventh century political events have shown, such punishments had been practised in the empire for a long time. What is new is the degree to which they are motivated by religious arguments and supported by Scripture:

> The Ruler and Creator of every thing, our God, who made Man and marked him with honour, gave him, as the prophet says, the Law as a help to know what he should do and what he should not do: the former will lead him to salvation, and the latter will cause him to be punished … For it is God who has proclaimed both, and the power of His words will … as it is said in the Gospels, never pass away.[37]

Perhaps it should be noted that this was written several decades before the schools of Islamic law or *Sharī'a* began to develop. It is not said to retain the simplistic view of Leo the Isaurian as an emperor who brought dramatic changes to the Late Ancient world – it is a futile task to distinguish an historical teleology in an unruly era. When Leo had his son and heir baptised, he named him Constantine, in what he himself must have regarded as a fully legitimate way of affirming both Roman and Christian continuity in the imperial office.[38] However, to say that the "Leo paradigm" is a mere literary after-construction would be to deny the fact that the literary Leo incorporates a multitude of characteristics that are traceable in the seventh-century changes. With Leo, the apocalyptic ideology of Heraclius reaches its far end: imperial Christianity is replaced by a Christian Empire, the universal emperor transformed into an apocalyptic saviour and Jerusalem rather than Rome seems to have become its true capital. Just like Heraclius, Leo is stated to have ordered compulsory baptisms for Jews and Christians who did not recognise baptisms in the Orthodox sense.[39] The reasons are obscure, but the process offers an interesting mirror to the developments that were taking place in what would become the Islamic world.

Tabari presents us with an intriguing story from the first meeting of the Muslim troops with Leo. Scorning the Caliph Sulaymān who "fills his stomach with whatever he finds" – a common accusation of worldliness that became retrospectively directed against practically all Umayyad caliphs – Leo receives the answer that Muslims are expected to obey their leaders. His own reply sounds ironical: "You are right … Before, we used to fight each other because of faith … but now, we fight each other because of royal prestige."[40]

Unless Leo puts himself on a par with Sulaymān, the meaning must be that the Muslim warriors could no longer claim religious legitimacy for their conquests, since they were only benefiting an insatiable Arab kingdom "of this world".

Later Christian observers would condemn Leo by associating him with those he had fought: he had "Arab masters", an "Arab advisor", he was "Arab-minded", his followers were "Arab wolves".[41] As we shall see, these invectives have no coherent meaning. Just like his predecessors, Leo stressed "Orthodoxy" throughout his reign, causing great distress not only for Jews and heretics within the empire but – as his tragic legacy shows – for the Christians who were to write the history of his rule. Since he had also accepted that a mosque be built in Constantinople, it is logical that his *Ecloga* would be the first imperial source to acknowledge the existence of an "Arab" faith. The paragraph marked with the clarifying *pinax* "on those who become *Magar*" (μαγαρίζειν) says that "those who are taken prisoners by the enemy and abjure our supreme Christian faith should, if they return, be turned to the jurisdiction of the Church".[42] This is one of very few instances in Greek texts where a precise term for Muslims – *muhājirūn*, or emigrants, as we saw in the first chapter – is brought into a considerate use. Though the distinction is not generally upheld in later sources, it seems clear from this point that two faiths rather than political entities are facing each other. However, that begs the ensuing question of what those two faiths actually implied on the everyday physical level of their believers.

3 A question of faith

Leo the saviour of Christian Constantinople from the armies of the Muslim Arabs would turn into Leo the destroyer of the Christian images and the forerunner of the Antichrist. The Umayyads, who had directed the armies of the most powerful Islamic Empire ever towards Constantinople, would be remembered as the "cursed tree" of Banu Umayya, a dynasty that had allowed itself to become absorbed and corrupted by the vanities of the Romans instead of fulfilling the fight for the Rule of God.

The Caliph Sulaymān had initially ordained his oldest son Ayyoub to succeed him, but when the latter died in 716, he changed the line of succession in favour of a cousin, ʻUmar ibn ʻAbd al-Azīz, an outsider in the Umayyad clan, associated with certain Messianic expectations and whose overall reputation for piety and asceticism distinguished him from the worldly manners of his predecessors. Toning down the aggressive expansionist politics pursued by his predecessors, he tried to initiate an inner process of spiritual revival within his own empire.[43] Following a Near Eastern source, the later chronicler Theophanes interpreted it in the following way:

> In this year [718–719] after a great earthquake occurred in Syria, ʻUmar forbade the drinking of wine in the cities and forced the Christians to

> become Muslims (μαγαρίζειν) and those who became Muslims he made free of taxes, but those who refused he killed, and many became martyrs. He also decreed that a Christian could not witness against an Arab. He even wrote a dogmatic letter to the emperor Leo, believing it would make him "become *Magar*" (Muslim).[44]

'Umar's actions seem to be directly related to a foreign faith and not merely to the secular rule of the Arabs. It could indicate that the Umayyad rhetoric of political *Islām* somehow tried to find the way back to its spiritual and ideological roots just after Leo the Isaurian had become emperor in Constantinople.

The parallelism between the two rulers should perhaps not be exaggerated, but it is almost impossible to ignore it, since Leo and 'Umar are attested in different traditions to have initiated the first official debate between Christianity and Islam. Some versions of the alleged letters are preserved, the fullest version in the history work of the Armenian Ghewond, which may contain some core parts from the early eighth century. Gaudeul has tried to reconstruct the letter of 'Umar II on the basis of two Arabic sources, whereas Robert Hoyland argues for at least a possible Greek original for the "letter of Leo" found in the work of Ghewond.[45] Jeffreys, whose translation will be used below, suggested that the original dialogue could have taken place in Arabic, though Leo refers to "our Greek tongue". It is of course very unlikely that Leo actually wrote the letter we have, but the contents, as retold by Ghewond, are not at odds with what could have been written at the Constantinople court during the early eighth century.[46] In theme and style, the debate conforms to purported early dialogues that had taken place between Christian priests and Arab warlords in the conquered territories, but its particular identification of the Christian faith with the political power in Constantinople is interesting.

The dialogue, as retold by Ghewond, is initiated by the caliph. It could be interpreted as a deliberate repetition of what had happened a century before, when the Prophet had written to Heraclius in order to invite him to Islam with his famous words: *aslim taslam*, "submit, and you will be in peace". At that time, Heraclius is said to have stood at the height of his triumph over Persia. Nothing would have seemed more befitting to the caliph, after a century of continuous setbacks for the Roman Empire, than to write a new letter and, so to speak, remind the emperor of the unheeded warning. On the other hand, the letter of 'Umar does not contain the bragging of a triumphant victor, but simply questions on the nature of the Christian religion. It is almost as if it had suddenly occurred to the caliph that Christianity in fact was a separate religion, not merely a corrupt version of his own Abrahamic faith:

> There has often come over me a desire to know the teachings of your so imaginative religion, and to make a profound study of your beliefs … So I pray you, tell me truly, why … is it that you have not been willing to

> accept what Jesus Himself has said as to His person, but have preferred to make researches into the books of the Prophets and the Psalms, in order to find there testimonies to prove the incarnation of Jesus? This provides a reason for suspecting that you had doubts, and regarded as insufficient the testimony that Jesus bears to Himself …[47]

Many arguments here are familiar from Muslim polemics against Christianity, but apart from the reference to Christianity as "imaginative", the tone of the letter seems to be honest and inquisitive rather than scornful and polemical. Of course one is tempted to ask why the caliph, surrounded as he was by Christians everywhere, should have regarded the Roman emperor as the most proper person to address. The problems puzzling the caliph are mainly non-political and can be listed thus:[48]

1 Theological complications: the Trinity, and how God can be a man, or a man can be God.
2 Dubious practices and innovations, such as the veneration of saints and relics, of pictures and the "instrument of torture" (the cross).
3 Practical problems: how can the Christians be sure that the Bible is true and unfalsified if it has been handed down through hands they know nothing about; and why, if they are sure, is there such great discord among the Christian sects?
4 Logical inconsequences: why the Christians are struggling to find prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament while bypassing any possible prophecies pointing at Muḥammad in the New, or why they acknowledge Jewish scriptures devoid of references to Judgment, Heaven and Hell, whereas they reject Jewish documented customs such as circumcision, sacrifice and the sabbath.
5 The lack of eschatology in the Bible.

Especially the last point is interesting, suggesting that end-time expectations played a crucial role in Muslim conviction of the sixth and seventh centuries.

Leo's answer, as presented by Ghewond, is about fifty times as long as the letter of 'Umar, and it shows a certain disdain in its tone, if not simple outrage.[49] The emperor has already exchanged letters with 'Umar, it says, "when necessity demands", in worldly affairs, but not in matters of Christian doctrine, "since our Lord and Master himself has bidden us refrain from exposing our unique and divine doctrine before heretics for fear it be turned into ridicule".[50] Leo claims that he already has full knowledge of Islam – "we possess historical documents composed by our blessed prelates who were living at the same epoch as your legislator Muḥammad" – and refers to their revealed scripture: "we know that it was 'Umar, Abū Turāb and Salmān the Persian, who composed that, even though the rumour has got round among you that God sent it down from the heavens."[51]

The details of the letter need not be scrutinised here. The main part of it is concerned with defending and explaining the Christian faith in detail and refuting accusations of corruption in its scripture or theology. Just as some of the arguments proposed by the caliph are recurring themes in Muslim polemics, so some of the arguments proposed by the emperor are commonplace in Christian apologetics. In order to defend the Trinity and double nature of God, he uses the common metaphor of the sun and its rays; in order to explain the crucifixion, he refers to the human nature of Jesus in Islam.[52] He promptly dismisses the reading of "Paraclete" as a prophecy of Muḥammad ("'Paraclete' signifies 'consoler', while Muḥammad means 'to give thanks', or 'to render grace', a meaning which has no connection whatever with the word Paraclete").[53] Interestingly, he makes no outspoken efforts to convince the caliph of becoming a Christian, as if he considers 'Umar unreceptive of such lofty thoughts. In particular, he stresses blatant Muslim misreadings of Christian scripture and doctrines as a sign that the caliph is not taking the debate seriously.

Most interesting, however, are those alleged passages in which Leo defends Christian practices and habits, for that is where he finds an opportunity to attack the religion of the caliph. He never makes any direct counter-attack against the *faith* of the Muslims; the emperor consequently refuses to meet the caliph on a theological level and ignores both the "legislator" (Muḥammad) and the "Furqan" (the Qur'an) as barbarian fancies. He is well aware that the Arabs consider themselves as heirs to the faith of Abraham, and misses no opportunity to remind them of what this implies, as he describes the "marvellous" Christian theology at length. Attacks upon the Muslim Arabs, however, are based upon the following points:

1 The caliph says that the Christians are sectarians, but the Arabs, despite belonging to "one nation", are already divided into a multitude of religious sects who are brutally fighting each other.[54]
2 The Christians, being civilised, no longer practise certain Jewish customs, whereas the Arabs are barbarians who pursue circumcision of both males and females "in a time as modern as ours".[55]
3 Christian veneration of holy men and their relics is hardly a point of criticism for the Arabs, whose wars have caused so many good Christians to die for their faith.[56]
4 The Christians are no more idol-worshippers than are the Arabs, who venerate both the Ka'ba and the Black Stone in a desert to which "Jesus Christ used to drive out many demons".[57]
5 Worst of all, the Arabs indulge in carnal lusts with many women "as if it were a question of tilling fields": "When you are tired of your wives, as of some kind of nourishment, you abandon them at your fancy … before retaking your repudiated wives you make them sleep in the bed of another. And what shall I say of the execrable debauchery which you commit with your concubines?"[58]

In a sense, the two men keep talking past each other no less than their apocalypticists had already done. After all, Leo has merely defended Christianity in an ideological sense – he does not try to defend what all people do who claim to be Christian.[59] Instead, he holds the caliph responsible for habits and behaviours among the Arabs that sometimes have a complicated role within Islam as well. Warfare, sectarianism, circumcision, polygamy and veneration of the Black Stone in the Ka'ba were all practised by the Arabs before Islam; only the last phenomenon is generally regarded as a Muslim act of piety, and even as such it is defended by tradition in order to avoid *Muslim* insinuations about Paganism.[60] However, it confirms the fact that non-Muslims kept perceiving Islam as an *Arab* ideology of power, for which conversion required the acceptance into a tribal society and the adaptation of the values of the conquering elite. Leo pinpoints the weakness in such a faith when he says that Christianity has spread to nations all over the world, and that no fewer than twelve peoples of different customs, habits and languages adhere to one divine faith, even if the caliph refuses to understand it.[61] The faith of the caliph, he stresses – raising doubts as to whether it is a "faith" in any spiritual sense at all – is only the belief of one single people who have spread by means of violence and tyranny, driven by personal greed and carnal lust. A viewpoint largely coherent with that of many non-Muslim observers of the Arab conquest, is laid in the mouth of the emperor:

> You call "the Way of God" these devastating raids which bring death and captivity to all peoples. Behold your religion and its recompense. Behold your glory, ye who pretend to live an angelic life. As for us, instructed in and convinced of the marvellous mystery of our redemption, we hope, after our resurrection, to enjoy the celestial kingdom, so we are submissive to the doctrines of the Gospel, and wait humbly for a happiness such that "eyes have never seen it, nor ears ever heard it, but which God has prepared for those who love Him". We do not hope to find there springs of wine, honey or milk. We do not expect to enjoy there commerce with women who remain for ever virgin, and to have children by them, for we put no faith in such silly tales engendered by extreme ignorance and by paganism. Far from us be such dreams, such fables. "The kingdom of God consisteth not in eating and drinking", as saith the Holy Spirit, "but in justice", and "at the resurrection men will not marry women, nor women men, but they shall be as the angels."[62]

One cannot help thinking that if the literary Leo (and one must remember that only as such can he be considered the "author" of the letter quoted by Ghewond and others) was seen as a new and purer kind of emperor, a Christian redeemer who had fled from the Arab tyranny in the east and come to restore the true spirit of Christianity within a degenerated empire, this would be precisely the kind of criticism that would hit the literary 'Umar,

who had himself failed to become a Muslim redeemer, and now stood as the morally dubious ruler over a worldly empire of "Arabs" and their subjects.

When the Umayyad caliphs began to promote their specific concept of *Islām* in the conquered territories, the non-Arabs were already forming a broad tax-paying basis of the civil economy within the heartlands of the empire, and the Muslim Arab monopoly of violence ensured the maintenance of a social hierarchy in which the faith of the ruling elite remained unattainable to most. Seen from the outside, *Islām* stood for a submission to the Arabs that did not infringe upon the religious life of the existing communities. Seen from the inside, the Arabs who submitted to the caliph fulfilled a religious obligation that justified the ruling position of their community. However, if confidence in their Divine mandate were lost, the purpose would not be clear anymore; if the force that had toppled so many rulers suddenly had become a ruling force itself, it had lost its moral initiative to continue a struggle for higher goals. If the enormous conquests had convinced the Arabs of their mission to the world, the 717–718 defeat at the gates of Constantinople must have plunged them into doubt. Perhaps it was not so much the failure to conquer the Roman capital that frustrated the caliph, as the failure to fulfil the apocalyptic promise. In fact, even if the Muslims *had* captured Constantinople, the predicament might have been quite similar once the rest of the eschatological scenario failed to materialise. Islam was at least recognised as a separate faith in Constantinople from this time – but this made it only more manifest that it had been subjected to the rules of the terrestrial world and that it played on equal terms with the Christians. Maybe God still favoured the latter; it would at least explain why 'Umar showed such an interest in the religious mind of Leo and decided to ask the emperor about the secret that had opened the gates of Constantinople for a Christian general but not for the armies of Islam.

Ghewond claims that the letter had "a very happy effect" on the caliph: "he commenced to treat the Christians with much kindness. He ameliorated their state, and showed himself very favourable towards them, so that on all hands were heard expressions of thankfulness to him."[63] Similar to the Islamic claim that Heraclius became a Muslim sympathiser after receiving the letter of Muḥammad, the Armenian tradition suggests that 'Umar became a Christian supporter after reading the letter of Leo, a suggestion that may not be altogether false, although the sources remain highly divided on the topic.[64] Christians who praised 'Umar II in such terms do not seem to have quite comprehended that by abandoning the Umayyad imperial notion of *Islām* as a hierarchic imperial system led by an exclusive elite, and promoting a more egalitarian form of Islam that was open to everybody, the caliph enabled Islam to compete spiritually with Christianity. The converse claim that 'Umar suppressed Christians in his realms and forced them to "become *magars*", is clearly exaggerated, but contains a grain of truth since he must have presented Christian leaders in his realms with an unheard-of provocation. From the moment when conversions were openly encouraged, they could not rely upon

the conviction that the newcomers had come to take their taxes but leave their communities intact. For the same reason, the caliph must have made the more crass politicians in Damascus scratch their heads: conversions of non-Muslims on a broader scale deprived the state of tax-payers and undermined the exclusivity of its elite. It foreboded a crisis much more severe than those that had been glimpsed in the wake of the conquests and the *fitnas*. [65]

When ʻUmar II died in 720, the line of succession continued along the sons of ʻAbd al-Mālik, the builders of the desert estates with their frescoes and mosaics. The imperialists returned to power. So it comes that the last light of the Ancient world seems to shine forth for a while in the Umayyad regions of Syria and Palestine, but the shadows that the caliphs threw upon the surrounding world grew longer and longer, and in the end darkness overtook them from behind. They kept sending warriors on yearly raids into Anatolia and around the Mediterranean, extending their power far into Central Asia and bringing home vast amounts of booty and slaves; but they also began to face repeated military setbacks, and in the end they had not even any worldly prestige to rely upon.[66] An inner-familiar war of succession turned into a third *fitna*, after which *Islām* would never again return to any state of complete political unity.

Civil wars and inner tensions plagued the Roman world as well at this time,[67] but there were other signs of the world coming to an end. A false Messiah appeared in Syria, embezzling money from many Jews, and an imposter who claimed to be Tiberius, the murdered son of Justinian II, was paraded as an emperor through some cities in the Near East. Mysterious intriguers appeared at the courts of Damascus and Constantinople, telling the caliph and the emperor to destroy images in their empires. Plagues decimated the population in Constantinople, and the emperor resettled people from Syria and the Aegean in the area. Earthquakes occurred in the imperial capital and in Palestine, where churches and synagogues fell down, and the Umayyad palace with the statue of the caliph and the mosaic with the tree and the gazelles collapsed before it had been completed. Edessa was struck by heavy floods while other regions were plagued by drought and famine. A volcanic eruption occurred on the island of Thera, and in a cold winter icebergs could be seen drifting along the Bosporus. In Yemen, monkeys attacked people and drove them from their homes. Celestial signs were frequent and ubiquitous and on some days the sky became inexplicably dark.[68]

The end dawned from the very edge of Umayyad power. A mysterious figure known as Abū Muslim appeared in Khurasan, the "land of the rising sun" east of Iran. He was clad in black, his hair grew freely and he followed an ascetic and abstinent lifestyle associated with many Muslim warriors. Rallying around the descendants of Abbās, an uncle of the Prophet Muḥammad, he attracted people from various beliefs and ethnicities to a movement that promised a Messianic change. Those who joined him marked their solidarity by dressing in black, and wherever they gained power, they raised black banners. Within a few years, the Abbāsid movement had swept across Iran

and Iraq and overthrown the ruling dynasty and its supporters in Syria and Egypt. The last Umayyad Caliph Marwān II (r. 744–750) was driven from his residence in the Mesopotamian Harran and met his fate during a battle on the shores of the Nile. Damascus was captured and its inhabitants were put to the sword in large numbers.[69] Members of the Umayyad house were killed wherever they were found; the rage did not even halt for the bodily remains of the dead caliphs. A young prince by the name of ʿAbd ar-Rahmān made it to the other side of the Mediterranean where Andalusia, the westernmost outpost of the caliphate, became his base of power and where his descendants would rule for centuries to come. His dramatic flight marks the beginning of the fascinating story of the golden age of Medieval Islamic Spain, but does not belong here, where the story of Umayyad *Islām* has come to an end.

Of course, it does not mean that Islam had come to an end, just as the breakdown of Roman power in Europe and the Near East had not spelt the end of Christianity. Leo and ʿUmar had both been wrong: between imperialist ambitions and apocalyptic expectations, their two faiths had already started to live their own everyday lives.

Notes

1 Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers* 197–9.
2 Cook, *Understanding Jihad* 22–31; Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 273n.
3 Muslim, *Sahīh* 8:178.
4 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 93–120.
5 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* 7f; cf. Landes, "Apocalyptic Expectations" in: Verbeke, Verhelst, Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* 163. A possible turn of the millennium in the year 519 is dismissed by Theophanes (*Chronographia* AM 5999/6000).
6 Reinink, "Heraclius, the new Alexander" in: Reinink, Stolte (eds.) *The Reign of Heraclius* 81–94.
7 Q 18:33.
8 Henze, *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* (2001) 11–15, 90–96.
9 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6178, referring to the withdrawal of the Mardaites from Syria.
10 Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom Römischen Endkaiser" 84–94.
11 "They resemble the beasts of the fields and the birds of heaven, and the Lord says to them: 'Come together for the great sacrifice I have prepared for you; eat the flesh of the fat and drink the blood of the heroes'", *Rev.* 19:18. Cf. Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion* 60–62 (l. 319–327).
12 Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion* 60–76 (l. 319–327; 337–352; 352–426; 492–499; 427–459; 500–516; 516–539).
13 Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser" 95–6; Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodios: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam", in: Cameron, Conrad (eds.) *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I* (1992) 141.
14 Pseudo-Methodios, "Apocalypse", ed. Lolos 13, 9–12. The Xylokerkos gate is the present Belgrad kapısı; the Forum Bovis was located in the contemporary Aksaray area.
15 Muslim, *Sahīh* V 766–7 (*hadith* 37).
16 van Donzel, Schimdt (eds.) *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources* (2010) 78–80.

17 The Jews are victorious when they cite the *shahāda*; in the Syriac Pseudo-Methodius God intervenes when the Arabs deny the Christian redeemer (Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion* 74 (l. 498)).
18 Cf. the further congruence between Jewish, Christian and Muslim narratives in the identification of Constantinople with Babylon: Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 54–66; and Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (1985) 156.
19 Alexander, "The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and its Messianic Origin", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978) 5–9. The memory of Heraclius seems to have loomed throughout the region, at the same time as it becomes clear how his comparably modest show in Jerusalem must have paled in the light of such supernatural expectations.
20 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 532–5, 541–44.
21 Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran* 10.
22 Cf. Cook, *Understanding Jihad* 136–61.
23 Muslim, *Sahīh*, V 747–8 (*Hadith* 31). Cf. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 49–54 'Amaq and Dābiq are located in Syria.
24 See Haldon, "'Greek fire' revisited" in: Jeffreys (ed.) *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization: Essays in Honour of Stephen Runciman* (2006) for a modern-day reconstruction. Khālīd bin Yazīd, a young brother of Mu'āwiya II (683–684) is reported by Baladhuri (*Futūh al-Buldān* 283) to have advised 'Abd al-Mālik on the new coinage, and is described as an "alchemist" by Tabari (*Tārīkh* II:429). Ibn al-Nadim refers to him in the tenth-century *Fihrist* as "the wise man of the house of Marwān" who realised the need to collect books and knowledge from the conquered peoples.
25 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6203.
26 The Biblical king Solomon (Arabic Sulaymān) has the status of a prophet in Islam.
27 Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 331–5; it is notable that the dead son of Justinian II seems to resurface in these Islamic traditions at the final battle. On Sulayman, see Shaban, *The Abbāsid Revolution* (1970) 74; Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion: Eine Studie zum Umayyadenkalifen Sulaiman b. Abdalmalik und seinem Bild in den Quellen* (1987) 120–37.
28 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* (1973) 13–24.
29 The most detailed description of his early career is provided by Theophanes (*Chronographia* AM 6209), but the adventures it involves takes place elsewhere and the only thing they seem to have in common with the Arabic accounts (cf. *Kitāb al-Uyūn* 24–33) is that they describe him as a shrewd liar. Cf. further Gero, *op. cit*. 25–31 for a full discussion.
30 Ibid., 32–4; Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 209–15.
31 Ibid., Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6209.
32 See Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion* 125–7, for a discussion on the chronology. A certain notion of nemesis seems to have pervaded the career of Sulaymān, as he is preening himself in royal robes and admiring his reflection in the mirror just before he dies (Tabari *Tārīkh* II:1337).
33 al-Muqaddasi, *Ahsan al-Taqāsim* III:147. Cf. Constantine VII, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Jenkins (1967) 97.
34 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6209, 6211.
35 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* 36–43; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others* Saw It 297–9.
36 Bible verses like *Matth*. 5:29f provide this with an immaculate logic, as Gregory pointed out in "The Ekloga of Leo III and the Concept of Philanthropia", *Byzantina* 7 (1975) 269f, 275ff.
37 Leo III, *Ecloga*, ed. Burgmann (1983) l 11–20.
38 It would eventually be held *against* the later Emperor Constantine V: historiographers who could not reconcile themselves to the fact that what they considered

an anomaly of an emperor had been named Constantine, distinguished the *Kopronymos* ("shit-name") Constantine from other Constantines by recalling an embarrassing mishap at the baptismal font (Theophanes, *Chronographia* 6211)
39 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 221 (Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6214).
40 Tabari, *Tārīkh* II:1315.
41 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6215, 6218, 6224; cf. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collectio* (1960) XIII 197.
42 Leo III, *Ecloga* 17.6, *pinax* 176. In modern Greek, this term means "to become dirty".
43 Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State* 31–5; Shaban, *The Abbāsid Revolution* 76ff.
44 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6210; cf. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 215–18.
45 Gaudeul, "The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar", *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984); Hoyland, "The Correspondence of Leo III and 'Umar II" *Aram* 6 (1994) 168f; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 490–501.
46 Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam", *DOP* 18 (1964) 125–129.
47 "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Leo III and 'Umar II", transl. Jeffreys, *HTR* 37 (1944) 277.
48 Ibid., 277–8.
49 Ibid., 286.
50 Ibid., 282.
51 Ibid., 292 Abū Turāb refers to the caliph 'Alī.
52 Ibid., 293, 300, 314.
53 Ibid., 293.
54 Ibid., 295.
55 Ibid., 317. "Modern" is Jeffrey's translation; a different interpretation of the word would be "late" or even "utmost", which would indicate an apocalyptic context rather than some sort of theory of cultural evolution. I am grateful to Archbishop Krikorian for clarifying this point.
56 Ibid., 321.
57 Ibid., 322f. This passage also contains a much-quoted *defence* of the veneration of images, which sheds some doubt on Leo's alleged iconoclastic policies. Note that pre-Islamic Arabs had worshipped gods in the form of stones, and that stones in Arab folklore are sometimes inhabited by *djinns*.
58 Ibid., 325f.
59 Leo explicitly distances himself from *all the voluptuous, impure, filthy, impious people who conduct themselves like pagans, and among whose number you count us. But these are people who disguise under the name of Christ their own abominations, giving themselves out to be Christians, but whose faith is only a blasphemy, and their baptism only a soiling* (ibid., 297).
60 Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ* XXV:50.
61 Jeffreys, *loc. cit.*
62 Op. cit. 328–9.
63 Ibid., 330.
64 Cf. Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers* 221f; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 625, 653f, but also Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 215–18 for a selection of incompatible testimonies.
65 Shaban, *The Abbāsid Revolution* 86–92, 168.
66 Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State* 200–236.
67 Brubaker, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 650–850* (2011) 156–163.
68 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 215, 220–2, 224–25, 231, 233, 236–7, 241–4, 254, 265, 270–73; Nic. Patr., *Hist.* 57:23–58:9, 64:5–12, 66:11–15; Theophanes, *Chronographia* 435:2–14.

69 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 266–91; Tabari II:1949–59, III:48; cf. Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory* (1986) 107–133. Theophanes (*Chronographia* AM 6241) claims that Marwān II "belonged to the sect of the Epicureans". It is unclear which Syriac word he substituted with this name for an ancient Greek school of philosophy; at least it does not seem to imply that the caliph was a pious Muslim.

4 Eyes in the dark

According to later chroniclers it was less than a year after the siege of Constantinople had been lifted – in 719, when 'Umar II was still in power – that the elders of the clan of the Prophet, the Hāshemites, assembled outside Medina and swore to overthrow the Umayyads.[1] The report is rather characteristic of the way in which the nascent Islamic historiography tended to look back on the Umayyad past from a present that was dominated by its Abbāsid successors. Not only was the 749–750 revolution seen as an almost seamless transferal of power from one dynasty to another one, but by tracing its origins far back into the Umayyad era and depicting the Hāshemite Abbāsids as its main agents, the chroniclers reduced the first Islamic empire into an historical appendix and evaded some of the more uncomfortable causes for its demise.[2]

The reality is more complex. If the Umayyads had managed to create a stable power equilibrium in the old Roman regions around the Eastern Mediterranean, it was a different thing in the former Sassanid areas from Iraq to Khurasan, where fractions of disgruntled Muslims or estranged Arabs had intermingled with their new subjects practically from the time of the conquests. These lands became a breeding ground for rivalling interpretations of Islam and proved to be areas where large-scale conversions of non-Arabs gained momentum.[3] Islamic historiographers tend to be silent on such matters, which makes it difficult to assess how formative they were to the revolution that brought the Abbāsids to power, but irrespective of whether the mysterious "Abū Muslim" was an honest believer who stood up to an Umayyad leadership that he found immoral, or a mere agent provocateur who stirred unrest on behalf of their Abbāsid competitors, it can at least be said that the revolution he unleashed opens a rift in the grand narratives of both dynasties and offers a glimpse into the historical subconscious of the emerging Islamic world.

Something similar could be said of the empire that we have so far persisted to call Roman but which now definitely begins to resemble something that might better deserve the modern term Byzantine. When he died in 741, Leo III left a dynasty that would rule it for another three generations. Of the triumphalism that had characterised the Late Ancient capital two centuries

before little might have been left, but at least Constantinople had managed to hang on to the Anatolian and Balkan peninsulas that it physically straddled and that would constitute the core areas of the remaining empire. Leo had not only outsmarted the Umayyads at the gates of Constantinople in 718: in 740 he dealt an important blow at the Arab raids into Anatolia and repelled their forces at the fortress of Akroinion, and in the turmoil that followed the downfall of the Umayyads his son Constantine V managed to take control over his native city of Germanikeia, alias Marash, south of the Taurus Mountains.

Whether he was an Isaurian, as his dynasty would call him, or a Syrian, as his native city would indicate, Leo was the product of a borderland that partly predated the political division that had emerged when Heraclius bade farewell to the Near East and withdrew to Anatolia. Muslim and Mardaite raids failed to bring any lasting gains for the rulers in Damascus or Constantinople; in fact, the borderland itself would often challenge their prerogative, and for all the religious fervour with which it is associated it sometimes turned out to be less of a bulwark between the two empires and religions than a shared arena for individuals and movements with unclear loyalties. Beliefs, tastes and customs transgressed the Taurus Mountains, and if the caliphate had to cope with Messianic believers at the fringes of their power, the emperors had to curb the appeal of various syncretistic, Manichean and gnostic movements among the Jews, Armenians, Slavs and other groups in Anatolia.[4]

The geographical shadow zone between the empire and the caliphate matches a world that was becoming increasingly different from what we know under the term Antiquity and more and more similar to something we call the Middle Ages. If we widen our horizons from the Eastern Mediterranean for a while, we may find the developments we have surveyed so far complete a process that had been going on for centuries in the West, where foreign invaders together with economic, demographic and geopolitical changes had led to a gradual fragmentation of the ancient unity, a seclusion of its urban culture and a decentralisation of the infrastructural power. Like Abū Muslim, Leo appears as a representative of a world where bold and adventurous individuals had gained unprecedented powers at least in the short term. Their often ambiguous legacy might confirm the disruptive nature of their actions, but also indicate that later observers found it difficult to see a long-term pattern in them. In this world of individual quests, the religions we have come to know as Christianity and Islam lose the distinct forms we all too often assume to be inherent in them.

1 Unseen warfare

Long before the Arabs emerged from the interior to take control of the settled cities of the Levant, single mystics, fanatics and thinkers had left the cities to settle on the fringes of the desert as hermits, monks and anchorites. They

followed in the footsteps of the Jewish prophets and patriarchs as much as those of Jesus or John the Baptist, although it is mainly in Christian narratives that the memory of them has been preserved. The mixture of fear and respect that marked their relation with the Arabs of the desert left occasional traces in Islamic historical tradition: as a boy, the Prophet Muḥammad is said to have accompanied his uncle Abū Ṭālib on a journey to Bostra, where his future call to prophethood was predicted by a monk called Bahira.[5]

Apart from the harsh life and barren landscape, what the mystics and nomads in the desert appear to have had in common were first and foremost frequent encounters with demons. Monks were consulted when local tribes needed help against pestering spirits, a fact that Christian hagiographers used to exemplify the universal validity of their faith and its ability to spread even among untamed barbarians.[6] The main definitions involved here are of course largely misleading: Christian beliefs had spread among the desert tribes long before they were made to constitute a Roman state religion, and due to the epistemological divide that kept separating settled and nomad societies, it is likely to have meant something very different to the Arabs who professed them than it did to the Christians who wrote about it. Still in the Islamic era priests and monks in nomad areas would face similar dilemmas, confronted by Arabs or Turks who asked for Christian sacraments but refused to learn core Christian teachings or change their ways of life.[7] Bedouins in the Syrian and Egyptian deserts are in fact reported to visit Christian monasteries still today, asking the monks to expel *djinns*, which does not at all mean that they are Christians.[8] For them, a person possessed by a spirit is detected by his inability to *function* normally, and rather than a guide in intellectual matters of faith, the task of the monk is to deal with spiritual phenomena that affect the physical existence in a wrong or harmful way.[9]

For the monks the demons were no less perceptibly real, as they were to most people at the time: few facts can better illustrate the physical nature of concepts that modern men have tried to relegate to the unclear category of spirituality. They could appear in a wide range of forms: as ghosts, animals, humans; hide their ugly nature behind a beautiful face in order to win the confidence of their victims, or a monstrous one in order to frighten them.[10] They were particularly keen to harass pious people, and sometimes they did so in the shape of Jews, black people or Arabs – before as well as after the rise of Islam.[11] This does not mean that Arabs were generally seen as demons but it gives an interesting dimension to some Christian efforts to understand the rise of Islam.[12] According to Anastasius of Sinai, who spent the last years of the seventh century writing concerned treatises about the struggle against demons, his contemporary Arabs were the companions of evil spirits, but worse, since according to him demons would normally fear and respect Christian symbols and sacraments.[13] John of Damascus – integrated in the hierarchy of the caliphate – does not go that far, but still seems to think that the exclamation *ʻAllāhu akbar* ("God is the greatest") is hidden praise of a Pagan goddess connected to the Black Stone in the Kaʻba.[14]

The Qur'an says that djinns – a term derived from the root *janna*, to be hidden or invisible – exist just as humans and angels do; they are created from fire,[15] possess free will, and hence they are receptive to matters of faith.[16] Prophets like Solomon tamed them and God forced them to work for him,[17] whereas Muḥammad was sent to preach, not only to humans, but also to djinns.[18] At the same time, the Qur'an explicitly warns humanity about the power of the djinns[19] – Iblis or the devil is said to be one of them[20] – and suggests that Christians and Pagan Arabs believe in an affinity between God and djinns.[21] What is important to note here is that as long as there does not exist any eschatological expectation of an imminent struggle between Good and Evil, djinns or demons can in fact be accepted as a natural part of human existence: the necessity to protect oneself against their power does not imply extinguishing them, since this might be considered impossible.[22] When the invisible forces of nature are an active agent in the physical reality, their rejection can be a matter detached from the metaphysical or apocalyptic question of the ultimate and universal truth.

The pragmatic circumvention of what is primarily a problem for theologians is similar to the one that we have already discussed with reference to the truth claims of Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity. For the same reason, it is hardly surprising that we find the Christian monk exert appeal as an evictor of demons across theological boundaries, just like the Jewish prophet as an interpreter of dreams. As a "holy man" in the widest sense he could protect people from evil but also afflict them with curses, powers that became integral parts of the Christian notion of holiness and sainthood in Late Antiquity. The same powers were also assumed to survive the bodily death of the saint: just as his soul could still intermediate between God and the world, his relics were felt to be powerful mediators and a source of strength for the living. In the rural areas of Anatolia and Syria, the physical devotion to the holy man obtained almost perverse forms that blurred the distinction between the dead and the living.[23] Extreme forms of asceticism – the most famous cases being the Stylites, hermits who spent their time meditating on top of tall pillars – abounded in the same regions during the centuries before Islam and attracted huge numbers of followers. Those who had chosen a life in solitude and chastisement may have seen themselves first and foremost as spiritual warriors and seekers of God, an ideal that was not even exclusively Christian; but people in their environment saw them just as much as physical and terrestrial sources of protection and fortune, and it was through the pens of Christian hagiographers that their memory would be preserved for later eras.

A recognition of sainthood similar to the Christian one is absent in mainstream Islam, but the devotion for the holy man is present in all traditional Muslim societies, as are the sites of pilgrimage that mark their tombs and bodily remnants.[24] In areas of religious heterogeneity, such sites have often been shared between the followers of different communities, which can only come as a surprise to someone who assumes that religion is all about theology. Of course, if Christians could consider the Muslim faith a mere

continuation of Arab Paganism and the Muslim God an evil spirit, it goes without saying that the reverse is true from the point when the Muslim possesses the theological tools to denounce the accusations: from that point, the Christian holy man may as well be put in the same box in which he had once put his Pagan predecessors. It does not alter the fact, however, that an element of ambiguity prevails in the borderland between the communities and that in practice they can sometimes appear to differ less than their theoreticians would like to admit.

2 Deadly witnesses

If the spiritual strength of the holy man matches a character that is usually attributed with the wisdom of old age, the physical qualities of the martyr in Christian and later Muslim imagination lie closer to those of the youthful hero. The fact that the martyr is technically dead matters less in this borderland of physical and spiritual realities. Like any saint, he could always intercede on behalf of the living.

The early Christian martyrs earned their Greek name – μάρτυς, which means "witness" – from the fact that they had died as witnesses to the Divine truth coming true: they were the forerunners in an apocalyptic drama.[25] As such, they offered moral support to a movement that somehow managed to make its own physical decimation seem meaningful. It was a different thing, though, once the future of Christianity was no longer at stake and the more everyday concerns of its various adherents came to the foreground. The martyrs who enjoyed the greatest popularity in Late Antiquity were often soldiers who had died during the last persecutions before Constantine and joined the "heavenly army" from which they could put their strength in the service of the living.[26] Both Jewish and Pagan symbols and narratives were integrated into what became a veritable Christian mythology about the warrior saints and their miracles: they slayed dragons and demons, rescued captive maidens and boys, destroyed Pagan idols, and demonstrated the power of Christian symbols and sacraments. However, most of all, they helped ordinary people during difficult enterprises and at important stages of life. The cult of the warrior-saint was so widespread in pre-Islamic Syria that many Arabs appear to have confused it with Christianity as such. An image that has become associated with St George in the West – the "holy rider" who from horseback kills the devil in the form of a dragon, a snake or a demon – remains associated with many other warrior saints throughout the Orthodox Christian world, and Islamic tradition would connect it to the wise man al-Khidr who is mentioned together with Moses in the Qur'an.[27] Cases of Muslims praying before images of "holy riders" have been documented through the ages and the practice is still current in some areas, where it is believed to help women in childbirth.[28]

Exactly how, where and when the Christian concept of martyrdom entered the Muslim vocabulary is not entirely clear.[29] The Qur'an states that those

who have died fighting for the Muslim community have gained immortality and are the foremost in the presence of God,[30] a notion that – as we saw – the Umayyads were particularly keen to draw upon when they tried to stress their own prerogative to lead the believers in *jihād*. By that time, of course, the caliphate was already a matter of strife, and the suspicion that *jihād* was motivated by material gain or worldly prestige rather than faith is hinted at not only in the critical remarks that are attributed to Leo III, but also in Islamic apocalyptic fears of future military setbacks due to dishonest believers. The *hadīths* allot a terrible place in Hell to such fighters of *jihād* or *mujāhids*: on the Day of Judgment, God will lift the veil off everything that has been hidden and judge each man according to his inner intentions (*niyya*).[31] The eschatological moral of the early Christian martyrs is easily recognisable here, even if it has become intensified: the martyr is not dying for the apocalyptic truth as a passive victim but as an active fighter of the world, and by the end the only thing that matters is how he is seen by God. Toying with the Arabic terminology, one could say that he is a martyr (*shahīd*) testifying (*shahida*) to his faith in an omniscient God (*as-Shāhid*) by obliterating his body, the world, and everything else that separates him from the absolute truth. The three words derive from the same Arabic root that simply means "to see".[32]

The Umayyad failure to conquer Constantinople and put an end to the Roman Empire may have confirmed the suspicion that the caliphate had lost its true spiritual guidance and that the caliphs had not been worthy to lead the armies of Islam into the apocalyptic battle against the empires of the world, but this did not necessarily put off the fighters who had joined the yearly campaigns initiated by Mu'āwiya and resumed under 'Abd al-Mālik. The regular Muslim raids into Anatolia continued with varying success long after the Umayyads had left the stage: they brought few material gains, but attracted huge numbers of Muslim warriors and transformed the apocalyptic war into a feverish ritual of iterated aggression against the empire on the other side of the Cilician Gates.[33] The redemptory end of the world had, so to speak, turned into the redemptory end of the believers who gave up their lives for the same metaphysical goal. As such, their quest was spiritual, no longer political, and it was increasingly detached from the worldly empire and civil society that the stabilising caliphate had come to represent. The *ghāzī*, the Muslim borderland warrior, became a religious role model not very different from the Christian desert father: the demons he combatted in order to be united with God could be his inner spiritual temptations as much as the physical seductions of the external world he had set out to destroy. In a blend of monasticism and militarism for which there are notable precedents and successors in many other cultures, he combined fighting and martial arts with fasting and sexual abstinence, precipitating later Sufis who were often warriors and mystics alike.[34]

Paradoxically, we have scattered reports on Christian expressions of devotion for Muslim warriors. Abū Ayyoub Ansari, a companion of the Prophet

Muḥammad who died during an early siege on Constantinople in the reign of Mu'āwiya, is claimed to have been buried outside the city walls, where his tomb was cared for by locals who went there to pray for rain in times of drought.[35] The highly knowledgeable and well-traversed historian al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) claims that Muslims were sometimes included among the "strong and courageous" people who could be found on icons in Anatolian churches.[36] Even if we assume that this assumption derives from a rather unorthodox identification of ordinary Christian warrior saints, it acts as an interesting cognate to Muslim interpretations of the holy rider as al-Khidr and indicates that the spiritual legacy of the Muslim warriors somehow percolated the very areas that they considered it their right and duty to physically rape and pillage on a regular basis.

The historical reality beyond the ideological fervour of the holy warriors and their role in popular imagination might have been even more crass. The origins of the militant organisations that became breeding grounds of the frontier fighters remain a matter for scholarly debate, but explanations tend to involve restless young men who technically might have had more in common with circus hooligans or aristocratic "jocks" than with the preachers from whom they claimed to take their inspiration.[37] It was one thing as long as their aggressive energy could be externalised towards the enemies of the caliphate, but as we have already seen, the ideological factions that emerged in the wake of the *fitnas* rarely hesitated to direct their attacks against other Muslims and often left non-Muslims unharmed as they did so. If Abū Muslim could still appeal to popular sympathies for the spiritual warrior when he raised his black banners against the Umayyad caliphs, later Muslims would feel uneasy at the fact that people whose self-obliterating submission to God they admired also threatened the prevalence of their own community on earth.[38] Just as in the Christian world, the meaning of the martyr transforms with the decline of the apocalyptic context even though he remains, like the desert father, an alluring alternative on the fringes of society.[39]

In later Medieval tales and legends, Christian as well as Muslim, the warrior of faith – who is now more of a hero than a saint – is integrated into the community of the narrator even as his actions take place in a physical or spiritual borderland. The most famous example is Digenis Akrites, the half-Greek, half-Arab border warrior who fights monsters and Arabs along the border to the caliphate. His actions appear in a Christian framework for the simple reason that his father, a Syrian aristocrat, has left his Muslim family to live in Roman Anatolia with a Christian bride he had abducted and fallen in love with. Digenis himself is hardly a moral ideal for a pious Christian: at twelve, he abducts a girl, joins a robber band, and in a famous episode later on in the epic, he rapes an Amazon. His Christianity consists not so much in fighting for Christ as in enjoying superhuman powers by Divine grace and sometimes with assistance of the warrior saints who support his individual quests.[40] Mirroring a world where the holy man has gone into occultation and left the field of play to the young hero, stories of this kind keep teasing

popular imagination; but just like in classical Antiquity, they take place in a magic reality, a bygone heroic age that has become as physically distant as once the apocalyptic future.

3 The visible and the invisible

Discussions about religious reciprocity between Late Ancient Christianity and Early Islam have often focused on Byzantine iconoclasm, a phenomenon that scholars have lately started to eye with increased suspicion.[41] It is a topic on which the Early Medieval historiographers are unusually talkative, though, and one can indeed get the impression that they are trying to establish a link between negative attitudes towards images in the caliphate and in the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire. Thus we learn that an evil Jewish physician convinced the caliph Yazīd II (720–724) to issue a decree following which all images of living creatures should be destroyed, but that the caliph died before the plan materialised; instead there appeared an evil Syrian at the court of Leo III in Constantinople who instilled in the emperor the same actions.[42] A volcanic eruption on the Aegean island of Thera in the summer of 726 provided the emperor with a pretext to claim that the Christian veneration of images had attracted the wrath of God and that all images in the Roman Empire ought to be destroyed, which led to protests from the church and particularly from the pope in Rome.[43]

The Jewish and Syrian agents match a milieu where we hear about Messiases and imperial impostors leading people astray across all political and religious borders and with apparently unclear objectives.[44] Abū Muslim, the enigmatic revolutionary, somehow fits here as well; and it might perhaps be worth drawing a parallel to how the rise of Emperor Leo III appears in many sources: unknown name, unknown origins, unknown agenda, and indicating that only after saving Constantinople from the Arabs did he reveal his true nature as some sort of secret Arab scion. However, this is how later observers tried to discern patterns in the divergent trends of the eighth century and explain what they perceived to be an inconsistency in the linear narratives. In fact, the Greek term σαρακηνόφρων ("Arab-minded") first appears to have been applied by the *supporters* of Emperor Leo III and his son Constantine V to one of their most ardent critics, John of Damascus.[45]

What was the matter of strife? At least in this case the object of vilification is less mysterious, even if he, too, belongs in an undefined borderland of Christianity and Islam: John of Damascus, also known as al-Manṣūr, was the son of a Christian state official at the caliphate court in Damascus. At some point during the reign of Leo III, John felt a need to criticise certain policies against images that had begun to emanate from Constantinople and which would become known as iconoclasm or the "breaking of images". The writings of John would be a main source of legitimacy for the opposing faction of "iconodules" or "venerators of images".[46] It is worth noting that John lived and worked in a Muslim milieu and under the political protection of the

Umayyads: according to the traditional legend, Leo III tried to cause a split between him and one of the caliphs, who ordered his hand to be cut off, but thanks to the grace of the Mother of God, a new hand grew back in its place, and John used it to write his defence of Christian images.[47] More important to the discussion here is the fact that John also appears to have written some of the earliest Christian refutations of Muslim beliefs without connecting them to the iconoclast policies that he criticised among his fellow Christians.[48] The Umayyad attitude to figurative arts does not need to be further elaborated here; the caliphs may have avoided ostentatious depictions of living creatures in their religious monuments, but as a whole their reign still marked the last flourishing of an artistic tradition that went back to Antiquity.

The *Orationes* of John are no mere expressions of Christian devotion for icons, either. They are intricate discourses on the nature of images, Christian representations of a philosophical tradition that went back to Plato.[49] The first oration is the longest and most poetically elaborate: John describes how images are able to tell silent stories to the eye, educate the illiterate, and how their beauty brings even the learned man closer to God.[50] The invisible God can never be depicted,[51] but the signs of Him – like shadows of His invisible reality – can be found everywhere in nature and deserve respect.[52] Matter is not evil or impure – that is a Manichean attitude – [53] and God commands man to show reverence for the earth, just like the Prophet Daniel did for the Pagan king Nebuchadnezzar.[54] As one devotes respect to the image of the emperor without claiming that the image is the emperor,[55] every image is part of an intricate hierarchy going back to the Divine, unfathomable origin of the world.

The second oration has a gloomier atmosphere. It begins with a warning against Satan, the snake that fooled man into believing he could be like God,[56] and lashes out against imperial efforts to take control of the church and refashion its faith. "The Manicheans wrote a new Gospel according to Thomas; you are writing a new Gospel according to Leo."[57] It keeps demanding respect for physical objects of devotion, but the argumentation relies more on religious scripture than on a philosophical approach. In the third oration, a new understanding of images is outlined.[58] Quotations from Late Ancient church fathers are frequent: it is clear which rich tradition John belongs to, and if he is criticising real conditions in the remaining parts of the Roman Empire it seems that a dramatic change had somehow come over a world where both secular and religious figurative arts had been present in everyday life.

Unfortunately we know extremely little of how iconoclasm unfolded, and we are not exactly helped by the prolific literary production of its later adversaries, which merely depicted the Emperors Leo III and his son Constantine V as devils in imperial garb. Scattered fragments remain from the acts of the 754 church council in Heireia where the Emperor Constantine V seems to have tried to gather theological support for the policies that his

father had adopted on images, an effort that the church would depict as an imperial act of infringement.[59] However, just as with the holy man and the holy warrior, it might be helpful to focus less on theology and politics and more on the religious practices in their midst. It is possible, for instance – as Haldon and Brubaker have suggested in their recent landmark publication on the topic – that the iconoclasts were concerned about what they felt to be an increasing tendency within the Christian world to regard icons as objects of power, similar to the relics of holy men, and that this goes for their alleged hostility towards relics as well.[60] In fact, a very curious eighth-century source tells us that in the reign of Leo III many *ancient* statues in Constantinople were destroyed because the emperor was "irrational".[61] From the same source, we learn that the pre-Christian pieces of art with which the Roman capital abounded were indeed dangerous: inhabited by Pagan demons, they could topple and crush anyone who made an effort to find out what they depicted.[62]

This is no far-fetched connection.[63] "Irrational" fears of Pagan figurative art in Constantinople are attested from other periods of political distress,[64] and mirror the equally "irrational" attraction that the Christian image simultaneously enjoyed.[65] Here, though, the problem is no longer about Christian approaches to Christian images, but about the ambiguity of any image that lacks an epistemological framework.[66] For the same reason, while Muslim attitudes to images are usually interpreted as expressions of religious rationalism or theological objections to idolatry,[67] it is equally important to remember that Islam emerged in a world where objects of figurative art had not been a central element in the cultural matrix, and that its own epistemology on the matter developed in confrontation with both Christian and Pagan perceptions of icons and statues that were considered to possess superhuman and magical powers.[68] Cases of disfigured mosaics in Palestinian churches and synagogues during this period leave the question open as to whether they yield to official Muslim or local Jewish and Christian objections to figurative arts, but it should be noted that the iconoclasts have attacked depictions of mostly humans and animals in general and concentrated their efforts on the eyes and faces that could be perceived to possess some kind of soul.[69]

As we have seen, the Umayyad coins were stripped of all figurative images shortly before the year 700, but up to that point this does not appear to have been any matter of main concern.[70] Something to which we do know that the caliphs objected from the very beginning, however, were depictions of the cross, which is consistent with the supernatural powers with which it was associated among the Christians. Far from rejecting it as an object of idolatry, the Byzantine iconoclasts praised its apotropaic qualities;[71] in fact, it appears as the central element of the visual culture they left behind.[72] This is logical, for if the image was sometimes considered dangerous, the cross was intimately associated with Christian victories, and the Isaurian emperors could indeed pride themselves with a reversal of the military setbacks that had haunted the

empire since the days of Phocas. Constantine V not only led successful campaigns against the Arabs, but also against the far more immediate threat of Slavs and Bulgarians in the north. He further undertook important restoration works in Constantinople and repaired the aqueduct of Valens, which had been defunct since the Avar siege in the reign of Heraclius. Scattered accounts that have survived mainly in monophysite Christian sources praise him as a holy warrior with superhuman abilities, while Arabic descriptions connect him to magical powers and secret knowledge about the forces of nature.[73] Most importantly, however, his religious policies seem to have enjoyed support in the army: soldiers disrupted the first effort to reopen the discussion on the images in Constantinople in 786, and the victories of the Isaurian emperors would appear as an argument for the re-adoption of iconoclasm in the early ninth century, when soldiers prayed at his tomb asking him to save the city from a devastating Bulgarian onslaught.[74]

To conclude, once they are brought down to the level of everyday concerns for physical and terrestrial wellbeing, apparently theological concerns turn out to be of a practical nature, which explains why the perceived immanence of invisible powers through physical mediators has such strong potential to polarise. Since the warrior and the wise man, the symbol and the image all are perceived to possess powers that may be dangerous as well as beneficial in the world of here and now, they are prone to pit individuals against individuals, particularly in a world that is fragmented by social dissent and suspicion.[75] Perhaps it explains why the emperors who successfully defended the borders of their Christian empire against Pagans and Muslims, and were imagined by some Christians as fighters of evil, could be accused by other Christians of being practically everything they had fought against.

Of course, this is only one aspect of Byzantine iconoclasm. Its legacy might indicate an ambiguity of holiness in a spatial and real-time sense, but it also shows how far later historiographers would go in order to tone down the ambiguity of their own subject over time. This begs the question of if the perceived discontinuity from the world of Antiquity to the world of the Middle Ages is mainly a matter of what has been deemed useless and discarded in the formative process of later historical narratives, and the forces that have spurred and motivated such a development.

Notes

1 el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography* (1999) 4.
2 As Crone and Hinds noted in *God's Caliph* (esp. 105–110), the anti-Umayyad bias is not a mere matter of Abbāsid propaganda, but mirrors the growing prerogatives of the *'ulamā* body of clerics.
3 Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (1979) remains the central study on this topic, but see also Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran* 7–27, 81–6, 114–21, 453–93; Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* 431–66; and Morony, "The Age of Conversions: a Reassessment" in: Gervers, Bikhazi (eds.) *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands* (1990).

4 On the so-called Montanists, see Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 221 (for a discussion on their identity see Sharf, *Jews and Other Minorities in Byzantium* 113–18; on the Athinganoi and Paulicians, see Theophanes Continuatus *Historia* 42 and 165ff).
5 Lings, *Muḥammad* 29–30. The Qur'an (57:27) does not denounce Christian monasticism, although it depicts it as an exaggeration of faith.
6 Theophylactus Simocatta, *Historia Vita Ammonios* 14.
7 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 162ff; Brand, "The Turkish Element in Byzantium", *DOP* 43 (1989) 16f.
8 Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* (1997) 169ff, 188ff, 406f.
9 Cf. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in the Medieval Islamic World* (1992) 21ff (esp n.20).
10 Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* (1996) 134ff.
11 John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale* LX/2912; cf. *Vita S. Andreæ Salis*, ed. Rydén (1995) 688, and from both works, cf. LXVI/2917 and 633, respectively.
12 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 87–103; McCrillis, *The Demonization of Minority Groups in Christian Society during the Central Middle Ages* (1974) 192ff.
13 Anastasius Sinaitae, "Quaestiones" CXXVI. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 87–103.
14 John of Damascus, *De hæresibus* 764–5, 769. The epilepsy that many Christian authors ascribed to the Prophet Muḥammad naturally rendered itself to demonic interpretations (cf. *Mark* 9:17).
15 Q 15:27, 55:15.
16 Q 51:56, 55:33.
17 Q 27:17ff, 34:12ff.
18 Q 46:29ff, 72.
19 Q 6:112, 6:128ff, 7:38, 7:179, 114.
20 Q 18:50.
21 Q 37:158.
22 Cf. the traditions about the *Dajjal*, sometimes identified with a strange Jew in Medina at the time of Muḥammad. Asked whether the man ought to be killed, the prophet answered that it would be fruitless, for if he were the *Dajjal*, he could not be killed (Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 110ff).
23 Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean* 162ff; Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (1982) 162f.
24 Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood* (2008) 91–117, 187–211.
25 *Rev.* 6:9–11.
26 Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (2003) 277–84.
27 Q 18:60–82.
28 Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain* 179f, 189ff; Brotton, "St George between East and West" in: MacLean (ed.) *Re-orienting the Renaissance* (2005) 61ff.
29 Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (2004) II:387ff.
30 Q 3:169.
31 Muslim, *Saḥīḥ* 18:43 (pII:102); cf. al-Ghazzali, *Iḥyā fī 'ulūm ad-dīn* (1939) IV:517; Nawawi, *hadith* 1.
32 The *shahāda* or "witnessing" is the common name for the Muslim creed (*there is no God but God and Muḥammad is his prophet*). The hope of one day being able to see God "like the moon on a full moon's night" became a core element of Islamic traditionalism and gained particular popularity among the border warriors; cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* (1997) 412. The relationship between the seeing Eye and the Light of God is such a common topic of Islamic mysticism that it hardly needs to be stressed here; cf. Rumi, *Mathnavi* II:1286 for a beautiful example.

33 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in Jihad and the Arab–Byzantine Frontier* (1996) 24–42, 113ff, 122ff, 130ff.
34 Ibid., 135ff; Cook, *Understanding Jihad* 32–48.
35 Tabari, *Tārīkh* III:2324; Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat al-kubri* (1958) III:485; Ya'qubi, *Tārīkh* (1883) II:285; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'arif* (1960) 284.
36 Mas'udi, *Murūj ad-dhaḥab* VIII:74. See also Canard, "Un personnage de Roman arabo-byzantin" (1973) on the famous *ghāzī* al-Battal, the protagonist of many later Turkish legends.
37 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 1–7, 125ff. Vryonis, "Byzantine Circus Factions and Islamic Futuwwa Organisations", *BZ* (1965); Cameron, *Circus Factions* 341–3; Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society* (1995) 182f.; Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law* (2007) 338–347, 453f, 457f. See further Sharf, *Jews and Other Minorities in Byzantium* (1995) 99f. for comparisons of urban violence related to sport or religion.
38 See the eminent study by Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (2009), esp. on the Kharijites, 196–230.
39 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 314f. Cf. Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean* I (esp. 18, 32ff) and IV.
40 *Digenis Akritas*, ed. Jeffreys (1998) G I:20–29, 4:27–32.
41 Brubaker, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 772–99.
42 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6215; Tabari, *Tārīkh* II:1463; Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 221f n622.
43 Nic. Patr. *Hist*. 57:23–58:9.
44 Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* 220, 233–4.
45 *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collectio*, ed. Mansi XIII 356 C/D.
46 Brubaker, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 183–9.
47 Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas* (1950) 71–85. The chronology of the legends is totally inconsistent.
48 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 485ff.
49 Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (1992) 188; Beck, *Von der Fragwürdigkeit der Ikone* (1975) 10f.
50 John of Damascus, *De Imaginibus* 1268A-B.
51 Ibid., 1238.
52 Ibid., 1242f.
53 Ibid., 1246D.
54 Ibid., 1272C, quoting the anti-Jewish works of Leontius of Naples.
55 Ibid., 1262D, quoting the works of St Basil.
56 Ibid., 1285A. It further deplores the fact that the first oration was not properly understood (1284C).
57 Ibid., 1303.
58 Ibid., 1337ff.
59 Brubaker, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 189–97.
60 Ibid., 775–82.
61 *Parastaseis syntomoi Chronikai* (1984) 5c, p.62.
62 Ibid., 28, p.90.
63 Cf. for instance the concerns that are raised at the Heireia council acts about the use of "Pagan craft" for depicting the Mother of God: "when demons hailed Jesus as God, he upbraided them, because it is unfitting for Him, being born witness by demons." (Mansi XIII 277 C-D). As for the iconodules, their support for Christian images offer few clues to how the two factions regarded images in general: the iconodule*vita* of Stephan the Younger accuses Emperor Constantine V of replacing icons in the churches with secular images, hunting scenes, plant motifs and portraits, accusations that should be put on a par with claims that the emperor was a dragon or an Arab. Cf. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire,*

312–1453: Sources and Documents (1972) 152f; and Rochow, *Kaiser Konstantin V* (1994) 133f.

64 Theophanes Continuatus, *Historia* 155, 411, where the destruction of ancient statues is assumed to bring about the fall of Arabs and Bulgarians, respectively; cf. also Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. van Dieten 558–9, where the famous statue of Athena is assumed to have attracted the Crusaders.

65 John of Damascus, for instance, claims that they offer protection against demons (*op. cit.* 1264A).

66 It is perhaps in the same vein that we find the statues in the Hippodrome in Constantinople occur as objects of sexual desire in popular imagination (*Vita S. Andreæ Salis* 780C).

67 Haddad, "Iconoclasts and Mu'tazila: The Politics of Anthromorphism" *GOTR* 27:2–3 (1982).

68 Grabar, "Islamic Art and Byzantium" 69–72; Brubaker, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 785–7. A tenth-century Slavic vita claims that Muslims in the Abbāsid caliphate sometimes painted demons on the doors of their Christian neighbours (*Vita Constantini*, ed. Kantor (1983) 35f).

69 Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* 180–219, esp. 189–94, 203, 213.

70 In fact, Islamic coinage would occasionally feature images even if the visual culture of the Islamic world remained largely non-anthropomorphic; cf. the 855 memorial coin of al-Mutawakkil (847–61) at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Inv. No.: MK_OR7283).

71 Cf. how the later Byzantine saint and scholar Theodore of Studion (759–826) recalled his mother, an iconoclast sympathiser: when other women, "out of fear of demons", put "spells and incantations and other charms" or "magic necklaces and amulets" on their small children, she preferred to protect her new-born solely with the sign of the Cross, "which she held to be more impregnable than weapons and shields". Theodor Studites, "Laudatio Funebris in Matrem Suam" 884f.

72 Brubaker, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 140–43.

73 Rochow, *Kaiser Konstantin V* 78ff, 86f., 123–131.

74 Theophanes, *Chronographia* AM 6305. Brubaker, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 366ff.

75 Brock, "Iconoclasm and the Monophysites" in Bryer, Herrin (eds.) *Iconoclasm* (1977) 57. Cf. *Vita S. Andreæ Salis* 261–71 for an illustration of this problem with regards to the holy man (in this case, a "fool in Christ") and Procopius, *Anecdota* XII for a similarly ambivalent depiction of the power associated with the emperor: here Justinian I, roaming the imperial palace at night, loses his human form and shows his demonic nature as a formless piece of meat.

5 New horizons

In itself, the transitional era from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages was hardly more enigmatic than any other historical period. We may feel disoriented about it because we are unable to reconstruct vital parts of its inner life and the decisions it involved; it does not mean, however, that people at the time were disoriented about their world or went around groping in the darkness. The fact that they left us with few testimonies might mean something as simple as that they had more urgent things to do than to record their actions, or that later eras ignored or suppressed the testimonies they left. At least if we perceive difficulties in connecting to them because of this, the problem is entirely on our side – they could not have cared less about a posterity that was just as unknown to them as the future is to us.

For the same reason, it is important to remember that the religious beliefs we discuss here do not reveal anything about the historical continuity that we sometimes assume to be implied in their teleology. In a sense, the magic belief that accepts the transience of its own reality does not have to differ from the apocalyptic belief that accepts the immanent reality of the present. In both cases, questions of coherence and continuity are irrelevant: their notions of holiness and acts of devotion take place in a cyclical interplay of physical and spiritual realities whose truth claims are spatially or temporally limited. The religious belief is subject to the horizon of the believer, and the historical impact of the latter is decided by the horizon of the world in which he or she is making an impact. As such, they can mean all or nothing.

We will cautiously suggest here, however, that two important trends are likely to tilt the interplay between religious ideas and historical realities in the favour of the latter: the disempowerment of the individual by the majority, and the prevalence of a cultural environment where the written word makes for an accumulation of memory. The political universalism of the Persian, Roman and Umayyad Empires had faced a tough apocalyptic backlash, but the eighth century reveals new clusters of coercion and understanding. Disentangling these historical threads, it is crucial not to confuse the political narratives of the subsequent eras with the historical realities that would eventually prove to work in their favour.

1 Patterns of continuity

For the Syrian monk who wrote the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* in northern Iraq around the year 780, the consolidation of Abbāsid power that had followed the overthrow of the Umayyads was not an enjoyable process to witness. The "Persians", as he calls the new men of power, dispatched brutal soldiers and tax collectors to the provinces who abused the local communities in all ways possible. Even more disturbing to the author was the fact that many Christians in the region had started to convert to Islam in large numbers of "twenty, thirty, one hundred, two hundred or three hundred", who went to the governors at Harran where they, "without compulsion", "without blows or torture" professed Islam. The author saw demonic powers at work and noted how the converts grew "repugnant" in their appearance, in the "odour" and "the look of their eyes".[1]

However, the worst of all was that he could see no meaning in it all. Apart from the presumed scheming of invisible forces it was impossible to forge a religious narrative out of the human suffering. Among the "Persian" perpetrators were Christian officials who used their power to demand sexual services from nuns and children of their poor co-religionists,[2] and some of those who suffered were "Arabs", Muslim farmers who begged their own Muslim co-religionists among the tax collectors to "levy the tax in accordance with the law instituted by Muḥammad, their guide and law giver … to collect in kind what each possessed", but merely received the sneering answer: "Go sell your goods as you like and give us what is ours: gold!"[3] The chronicler was left to deplore a pain beyond gods and meanings:

> If this persecution, in which Christians, pagans, Jews, Samaritans, worshippers of fire and sun, Magians, as well as Muslims, Sabeans and Manichaeans were subjected together, had not been general, would gods or goddesses not have been extolled in this bitter persecution? But the matter concerned neither religion nor worship East or West. Terms such as "worshipping toward the South" or "worshipping toward North" had become irrelevant. If only Christians had been singled out in this persecution, I would have praised the martyrdoms of our days more than all those of the past …[4]

The last remark is an interesting one, for the eighth century marks a surge of Christian martyrological narratives about people who refused to profess Islam.[5] Whether this mirrors the fact that conversions had gained momentum or that the rulers had become less tolerant, it paradoxically points at a rising self-consciousness of the non-Muslim communities. Just like in the early Christian era, the grand end-time scenarios that had absorbed all hopes and all despair had been replaced by down-to-earth and everyday concerns for survival, and at some point or another the concerns of the community surpassed those of the individual. Contrary to the apocalypticists who had seen

the first cases of apostasy as a spiritual purification preparing their communities for the end, or the indefinable believers for which the saints were sources of physical and individual strength, the martyrologists integrated the latter with the former and made the adherence to their own community seem meaningful from a longer perspective even if it implied individual hardship and suffering.[6]

The eighth century also saw the first compilation of a biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, the *sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 761).[7] This is important, not in the sense that a written source is paradigmatically different from the oral traditions on which it draws, but because it indicates a similar wish to strengthen the consciousness of the Muslim community by stressing its common aetiological narrative. Islam had ceased to be the faith of the Arab conquerors and dissipated among the peoples they had conquered, and conversions of the kind that the *Zuqnin* chronicler witnessed would not only bring Islam a new dynamic but also challenge its old coherence.[8] Focus shifted from the future to the past: the apocalypse remained a distant truth, but not in everyday life where the *hadīth* – the sayings and practices of the prophet – had come to serve as a main source of guidance and identification for the *umma*. It became the task of the *'ulamā*, the emerging class of Muslim clerics, to collect these traditions and sort out those that they considered to be of foreign or unreliable origin.[9]

Why did apocalyptic expectations abate? In a sense, they did not: they lived forth on a smaller scale, at the fringes and within the undercurrents of society, among the mystics and warriors to whom people tied their hopes, and in the desire for the evils of the world to disappear. Insofar as they served as a basis for the developing body of Islamic law, the *hadīth* could be said to deal with the past less for its own sake than for offering protection against the degeneration of the present.[10] However, the accumulating past that followed it like a shadow raised the demands for efforts to understand the present as part of a bigger continuity: in this sense, the communities that emerged out of the eighth century could be called functions of time. At the level of a moment, each believer may strive towards God on his or her own, but as the moment is prolonged into a life, the actions become a reality to families, neighbours and communities; and as many generations survive and multiply, different groups of believers will inevitably try to understand their common role within it.

The external framework within which this inner transformation took place can be further explained from geopolitical facts: the expectation that all terrestrial empires were about to disappear and be replaced by a universal kingdom of God had become increasingly out of touch with anything that could be called reality. The Roman – or Byzantine, as we will call it from now on – Empire had simply refused to vanish, and conversely nothing indicated that it would be able to turn the tables on the Muslims again and initiate a new Heraclean re-conquest of the Near East within any foreseeable future.[11] In a sense it seemed as if the political equilibrium of the pre-Islamic era had returned, with the Abbāsid Caliphate taking the role of an expanded Persia

and the Byzantine state acting as a diminished Roman Empire. The *Zuqnin* chronicler may have resorted to an archaising language when he called the new elites "Persian", but it was not altogether wrong considering the Iranian origins of the revolution that had brought them to power and the future influence of Persian culture on their social and religious hierarchies. With the 762 foundation of Baghdad at the ancient crossroads of Mesopotamia, the caliphate even received a new capital that could be said to stand in a direct geopolitical continuity with Babylon, Seleucia and Ctesiphon.[12]

Developments in the West further confirm this picture of a world in a state of spatial re-orientation. The relationship between the popes in Rome and the emperors in Constantinople had never been an easy one, as the controversies under Constans II and Justinian II had shown, but up to the mid-eighth century it was still customary for newly elected pontiffs to await formal recognition from the emperor. Many of them had Greek or Eastern origins, which mirrored the composition of the Roman clergy at large, the last one being Zacharias (741–752).[13] The iconoclast controversy is usually assumed to have brought the tensions to a breaking point in the reigns of Emperor Leo III and his successors, but what was at stake was just as much the recurring question of imperial influence in religious matters. It is notable that the foundation narrative of the Western church has sometimes been dated to the late eighth century: the *Donation of Constantine*, which turned the tables on the emperor by claiming that Constantine the Great had bestowed secular powers on the pope.[14] Further signs of a growing self-confidence within what would become the Western, Latin or Roman Catholic Church can be found in the reluctance of the late eighth-century popes to put imperial portraits on display in Rome and the dating of pontifical years from the birth of Jesus – the specifically Western Christian chronology that we are still using.[15]

It also fell upon the first in a long line of Western European popes, Stephen III (752–757), to look for a new political ally. In 753, instead of asking the emperor for support against the pestering Langobards, he went to the Frankish King Pippin III, whose father Charles Martel had halted a series of Muslim raids from Umayyad Spain at the 732 Battle of Tours. The rapprochement between the Papacy and the Franks could be described as the moment of conception of the later Western world: after an unruly pregnancy of some five decades, during which the condemnation of iconoclasm at the seventh ecumenical church council in Nicaea appeared to revitalise the bruised relations between Rome and Constantinople, the new Frankish liaison finally gave birth on Christmas day 800, when Pippin's son Charlemagne (c.747–814) was crowned "emperor in the West" by Pope Leo III in Rome. The Papal decision was definitely not approved of in Constantinople, where the Empress Eirene had just used her political momentum after the successful church council to blind her son, the young Emperor Constantine VI, and assume power on her own. A Western justification for the coronation of Charlemagne was found either in the fact that Eirene was a woman and thus illegitimate, or in the precedents of the fifth century, when two emperors had

ruled jointly from Rome and Constantinople. At any rate, the promotion of an historical narrative that linked ancient Rome to the new West would prove immensely successful, and retrospectively conclude an era that is popularly still referred to as the "Dark Ages" in English.

Here we have come quite far from the point of our departure, and as we have noted elsewhere, it is important not to impose the paradigms by which we tend to understand the past upon the realities of which it is made up. What the coronation of Charlemagne, the initial termination of Byzantine iconoclasm, the foundation of Baghdad and the emergence of a new historiography reveal is not a teleological desire to generate historical narratives for ages to come, but the simultaneous efforts of new elites in the mid-to-late eighth century to assert themselves in a diverse world of growing geographical and historical self-consciousness.[16]

2 Cohesions and divisions

The 787 council at Nicaea would turn out to be the last of its kind. For almost five centuries, the ecumenical church councils had offered Christianity a way of tackling the inner diversity of the world with which it had tried to identify, and the classical models of disputation on which they relied had manifested the open or temporarily limited nature of the religious definitions they created.[17] The attempts to compensate for the widening cultural and political gap between the Mediterranean and the Middle East by persecuting the Oriental churches or seeking union with them had shown the utmost limits of what a unifying ideology could achieve, and in a sense it was consequent to the alienation of the East in the sixth and seventh centuries that the seventh and eighth centuries pitted the main body of the Mediterranean church against the emperors. In both cases the split would become lasting and leave the patriarchal pentarchy of the Late Ancient Christian world in a rather rumpled condition: the Arab conquests left the patriarchates in Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch bereft of much of their factual power, and the alliance of the Latin popes and the new Western powers left the elites in Constantinople with the comparably smaller task of reconciling the imperial office with that of the local patriarch.[18]

This does not mean that the remaining Byzantine Empire and the church that would be known as Orthodox were some stiffened waste products of the Ancient world. The ninth century in particular is associated with what has sometimes been described as a cultural "renaissance" in Constantinople, where learned patriarchs like John the Grammarian, Photius and Nicholas Mysticus balanced the secular power of colourful emperors such as Theophilus (r. 829–842), Basilius the Macedonian (r. 867–886) or Leo the Wise (r. 886–912). If the empire could no longer assert itself in Western Europe or the Middle East, it had gained a certain momentum on the northern Balkan frontier. The persistent threats against Constantinople from Bulgarians and Slavs did not abate, but tough political reprisals were matched by the soft

power of a cultural attraction that laid the foundations of a commonwealth of lasting impact for Eastern Europe.[19] Byzantine missionary activities in these areas further increased the tensions between the Greek East and Latin West, and put Constantinople and Rome on the path towards a religious schism for which theological differences had become secondary to the overall geopolitical division.

The political, cultural and religious assimilation of the Muslim Arabs and their former subjects in the Near East, on the other hand, did not alter the factual diversity of what had become the Islamic world. The Islamisation of the non-Arabs in Iran and Iraq increased the number of believers who were rooted in the cultural and intellectual traditions of the Late Ancient world, and the Arabisation of non-Muslims in Syria and the Levant forced the Muslims to defend their faith against the polemics of Christians who used classical debating skills to argue against Islam in its own tongue.[20] Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the new Abbāsid capital became the scene of febrile intellectual activities, as the new elites strived to increase the competitive ability of their faith and provide it with tools for handling its inner diversity. The first half of the ninth century saw a major religious schism arise over the question of whether the Qur'an was created or uncreated and whether man possessed a free will or not, a debate that bore certain similarities to earlier Christian controversies and manifested a cultural continuity within the expanding horizons of Islam.[21] Traditionalist hardliners mostly countered it simply by refusing to counter it at all: they declined to take part in debates and thus alienated themselves from the dynamic of a society that was about to give their faith a unique and unsurpassed position in the Medieval world.[22]

Just as before, the temporary prevalence of certain ideologies or policies under certain historical circumstances will not explain the overall historical prevalence of the divisions and cohesions that they were expected to embody. Conversions of the kind that are described in the *Zuqnin* chronicle could mean all or nothing in the long run – the same period saw the rise and fall of innumerable religious movements that the historiographers of a hostile or indifferent posterity would relegate to the darkness of heresies. If they relied on any perceivable continuity on a day-to-day and ground level it must have been of a subtler and more tenacious kind than the most compelling arguments of their theologians or warriors. The Muslim frontier *'amīr* who converts to Christianity at the beginning of the *Digenis Akrites* seems to be less torn between the two faiths than between his Byzantine bride and his Arab mother, who reproaches him in a long letter for the utter flippancy by which he has abandoned the name, honour and traditions of his family for the sake of a "pig-eater",[23] a fictitious example with an interesting parallel in the experiences of later Byzantine missionaries among the Slavs.[24] It is not said so as to reduce the continuity of religious communities in the Early Medieval period to a matter of dominant mothers, but to illustrate the fact that what conveyed their identity from generation to generation was a civil life of social

bonds and human relationships that created the very epistemological backdrop of a history otherwise focused on individual (and predominately male) agents.

Just as in the early Umayyad era, what prevailed can only be unsatisfyingly described in ideological terms. In a strict ideological sense, religions will separate and break through the boundaries set by the values of society by means of a message that gives a meaning to the individual – a reason why their rise is often marred by political conflicts that have less to do with the ideas or even practices they promote than with the extent to which they empower individuals with a freedom beyond the control of the social environment. However, insofar as they unite as much as they are untie, and convey as much as they disrupt, religions integrate the frameworks that are set by everyday human relations, loyalties, values and identities. If they had been purely ideological we would have dealt with a confusing history of believers changing gods or faiths freely and unperturbed by physical, social and political constraints; instead, the religions we normally refer to are less ideological than epistemological, embedded as they are in the everyday customs, values and relationships of the adherents whose terrestrial lives they follow from the cradle to the grave.

3 The return of the kings

The names of the early Abbāsid caliphs left little doubt that they had come to make the world a better place: al-Manṣūr (the one aided by God), al-Mahdī, al-Hādī or ar-Rashīd (the rightly guided ones), and al-Amīn or al-Ma'mūn (the trustful ones). Even more revealing is the name by which they referred to their new capital, later known as Baghdad: *madīnatu s-salām* or City of Peace: it was a Messianic language with broad appeal that must have sounded like an echo from the now distant days of the conquests. They maintained an image of militancy and piety, and Harun ar-Rashīd (r. 786–809) in particular tried to make himself a name as a *ghāzī* by joining the campaigns of Muslim fighters against Byzantium in the border zone, which he fortified and extended.[25] It was under such a spell that the early Islamic historiographers competed to describe the conquests (*futūh*) of Islam, and Byzantine Crete and Sicily fell to Arab raiders and pirates, who harassed Italy as far as Rome and stirred apocalyptic fears in Constantinople.[26] However, the reality was more complex, and the lip service of emerging Muslim individuals and dynasties to the caliphs in Baghdad could not conceal the fact that they had become part of a world where they fought for the same aims as people of other faiths and often even by their side. The pious elements among the frontier warriors – doubtlessly aware of this – eyed the caliphs with increasing suspicion even as straggling Abbāsid efforts to deal a coordinated blow at the Byzantine power were met with cases of devastating success; and ultimately they both failed to break the enemy physically or morally: just like in the days of Leo III, it only increased his ideological conviction and technical inventiveness.[27]

It seems consequent to this that posterity came to associate Harun ar-Rashīd and his family with a very different environment, namely the glittering court life and thrilling adventures of the *Thousand and One Nights*, a later Medieval collection of folk tales in which the caliph is found roaming the streets of Baghdad (a city he really detested) in disguise.[28] What is notable about this is not the discrepancy between the historical and imagined Harun, but the proximity of the latter to a narrative *topos* that can be found in other cultural contexts. A Byzantine legend claims that Emperor Leo the Wise once left the imperial palace to spy on his subjects and landed in the clutches of a guardsman who, failing to recognise him, gave him a severe beating and put him in a prison cell.[29] Here the ruler has ceased to be the magic or demonic figure of the kind that we met in the iconoclast era: he does not derive his power from some personal affinity with the invisible forces of nature but from the visible *persona* that they bestow upon him. In a story that carries a rather suspicious resemblance to cases we have surveyed, the later Persian epic *Shahname* by Ferdowsi (d. 1020) similarly claims that the mythical kings of Iran had attained their power by taming the demons of the earth and received a shimmering *farr* or aura that visibly manifested the cosmological order of which they had become part. The hubris of the fourth King Jamshid, who claimed to be creator and master of the universe, destroyed this Divine harmony, and as a result Iran had to suffer for a thousand years under the Arab demon-King Zahhak, who hid two brain-eating dragons on his shoulders. When Zahhak was finally overthrown in a rebellion – which incidentally began with a black-clad man in Khurasan – the legitimate kingship of the new Shah Feridun was marked by the return of the shimmering *farr*. [30]

How did Islam manage the *volte-face* of its believers from divinely sanctioned conquerors to rulers and subjects in a terrestrial empire of the kind that we encounter in later Medieval imagination? As the outright and brilliant answer of the much later Medieval genius of Muslim historical theory indicates,[31] this problem is, if not equally fictitious to the propagandistic and popular narratives, at least of a theoretical quality that does not impede the practical realities on the ground level of everyday life. The physical world may represent a transient stage in an apocalyptic process, but once the individual believer accepts the circumstances within it that decide his or her ability to strive towards the ultimate goal, widening horizons of time and space will not only lead to the growth of a historical consciousness but also to a rising awareness about the demands of society, such as the implementation of common laws and rules or the coordination of foreign relations. It goes without saying that this transformation does not take place at any specific point in time but continuously and in the persistent interplay of historical subjects and their environment.[32]

In this sense the rise of the Abbāsid caliphate was a much more open process than its later rhetoric liked to admit, and the result turned out to be a far more fragile construction than the one that Abū Muslim had assisted them in bringing down. Al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–833) had to undergo the same experience

as so many Christian emperors had already done, when his effort to take sides in the discussion on the createdness of the Qur'an manifested the limits of his power over the *'ulamā* clerics, who claimed the preferential right to interpret the *Sunna* of the prophet. The growing dependency of the central monopoly of violence on the Central Asian *ghilmān* (young slave soldiers) from the time of his brother al-Mu'tasīm (r. 833–842), on the other hand, made the office of the caliph increasingly ceremonial even in a political sense. Still, it should be noted that it was in this ambiguous state that the institution of the Sunni caliphate prevailed for centuries or even a millennium to come – far longer than the Umayyads with their rhetoric of universal submission. It gave religious legitimacy to a power that identified with the *umma* and respected the *'ulamā*, and as the latter began to regard the historical prevalence of the former as a proof of the religious truth of Islam, it found little or no reason to interfere with it, however much it seemed to contradict the apocalyptic or Messianic mission of the faith.[33]

In all the cases we have mentioned above, the common denominator is not just geopolitical stabilisation or the consolidation of civil societies, but the marginalisation of the individual by the majority. The ruler whose power is reduced to his *persona* is a case in point: it mirrors a world where the short-range power of the individual has become enclosed within a long-term continuity emanating from neither the top nor the bottom of society, but from the realities that encompass it as a whole. Whereas the social construction of power can still be disclosed by the outsider who lacks the requirement for seeing it as something else than what it "is"[34] the individual who denies the reality of the world in full knowledge of what he is doing may have to pay for it in a matching manner.[35] Perhaps everyday redemption can still be found in myths and stories about quests and adventures, but as we saw in the preceding chapter, these have been cautiously relegated to a distant frontier or an heroic past.

The partly anecdotal character of the Islamic historiography that began to take on a more considerate form from this time reveals the strong proximity of its nascent discipline to that of the *hadīth* narrators. It also shows a certain stylistic preference for laconic poignancy and black humour. In a characteristic case we learn how al-Manṣūr, the Abbāsid caliph who founded Baghdad in 762, managed to rid himself of Abū Muslim, the pious revolutionary who had raised the black banners in defiance of the Umayyads and retained his popularity among elements that the Abbāsids now felt increasingly keen to pacify. In 755 he was unceremoniously cut down in the presence of al-Manṣūr and his body stuffed in a mat that the caliph presented to his general Ja'far ibn Ḥanẓala al-Bahrānī with the following words:

> "What is your opinion on Abū Muslim?"
> "If you have taken one single hair from his head," Ja'far answered, "you must continue to kill, and kill, and kill …"
> "God bless you!" al-Manṣūr said; "Look in this mat."

When Ja'far saw the corpse in it, he said:
"Commander of the Believers, count this day as the first day of your caliphate."[36]

Notes

1 *The Chronicle of Zuqnin* (parts III and IV), transl. Harrak (1999) 324.
2 Ibid., 302.
3 Ibid., 260.
4 Ibid., 273f.
5 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 336–47.
6 On the situation of the Christians in the early Abbāsid Caliphate, see Griffith, "Byzantium and the Christians in the Lands of Islam", *Medieval Encounters* 3:3 (1997) 231–65.
7 Schöller, *Exegetisches Denken und Prophetenbiographie* (1998) 57ff.
8 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 345–86; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (1998) 61–74; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* I:423ff.
9 Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (1994) 82; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (2003) 24ff, 85–97.
10 Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbāsids* (1997) 187; Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins* (1998) 255–71.
11 Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival* (1988) 3ff.; Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 315ff.
12 Kennedy, *The Early Abbāsid Caliphate* (1981) 86f., 101f, 115ff.; el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography* (1999) 8f.
13 Ekonomou, *Byzantine Rome and Greek Popes* (2007) 244–72, 298–301. John V (685–686), Sergius (687–701), Sisinnius (708), Constantine (708–715), Gregory III (731–741) were Syrians; John VI (701–705), John VII (705–707) and Zacharias (741–752) were Greeks from Sicily or southern Italy.
14 Brubaker, Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 168–73, 251.
15 Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* 413–16. In Constantinople it became customary to count the years from the creation of the world, which was supposed to have occurred in 5509 BC.
16 Cf. the critique of Lassner in *The Shaping of Abbāsid Rule* (1990) 139–162, 169–83, and the response of Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (1998) 52f n42, as well as the caveat of Brubaker and Haldon with regards to the "Donation of Constantine", *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* 251.
17 Cf. Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (1995) 6ff, 24ff, 149ff. 217ff, 234f.
18 Griffith, *op. cit*.
19 Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* (1971) 77ff, 81, 275ff., 274, 360ff.
20 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* 454ff; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* I: 180–95, 423ff.; Griffith, "Byzantine Orthodoxy in the world of Islam".
21 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 61–74, 166ff; Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 145, 161, 202.
22 van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 199, 214ff., Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity* (2009) 231–271.
23 *Digenis Akrites* G 2:50, E 225ff. The Greek word χανζυρίσσης or χατζιροφαγούσα is notable for being a hybrid of two languages (*khinzīr* meaning pig or swine in Arabic).
24 Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 369.

25 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* 96f, 101ff, 131; Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 144f., 323f.; Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early Abbāsids* 180ff, 188, 199.
26 Theophanes Continuatus, *Historia* 84:2–11; cf. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* 66.
27 The 838 Arab destruction of Amorion became the subject of a major literary work about Christians martyred for their refusal to adopt Islam. From the same time a kind of optical communication system is reported to have warned Constantinople about Arab incursions in the frontier region.
28 Kennedy, *The Early Abbāsid Caliphate* 107f, 115, 120 130f.; el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography* 17–21.
29 "How could I know him when I cannot imagine having ever seen him? At some public ceremonies, I have seen him when he passed by, but only from a distance (since I could not get close) and it seemed to me I beheld a miracle and not a man." Liutprand, *Antapodosis*, ed. Chiesa (1998) I:11 (XX). Leo considers himself having been under a "bad star" when he left the palace, but when he returns to the palace on the following day and is recognised by his own guards, he is under a "benign star" again.
30 Similar stories of demonic interventions are used to explain historical disruptions in other cultures; cf. the classical Chinese novel *Shui Hu Zhuan* or *Outlaws of the Marsh* by Shi Nai'an (d. 1372).
31 Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah* 257.
32 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* 325.
33 Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* 96; Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 99, 167ff, 180ff, 188, 190ff.
34 A story that is today widely known by the name "The Emperor's New Clothes" derives from a fourteenth-century Andalusian collection of folktales, *Libro de los enxiemplos del Conde Lucanor et de Patronio*, many of which have Arabic origin. In this case, it is a black slave who takes the place of the little boy in the more famous version of the story.
35 A famous example is al-Hallāj, who was executed by the 'Abbāsid caliph in 922 for his claim to be "the Truth". His reputation in Sufi tradition seems to derive from the paradox that his blasphemy *in* the physical world was also a denial *of* the truth of that world.
36 Tabari, *Tārīkh* III:116, et al.

6 Cultural capitals

Abbāsid Baghdad is associated with a Golden Age of literary and scientific activities that would put their mark on ages to come, and as we have seen, Constantinople in the same era has been similarly imagined as the scene of a Byzantine revival, humanism or even "renaissance". Whereas there is some justification for these designations, the paradigms did not emerge out of nothing: the allegedly "dark" ages that had seen the disintegration of the Roman world and the rise of Islam were times of agricultural development (the spread of new crops all over Europe and the Near East), technical innovations (mills, stirrups, paper) and scientific discoveries (in medicine, chemistry, mathematics and astronomy) from China to the Mediterranean. They cut across the cultural and historical paradigms by which we are accustomed to approach the past, and despite the comparably scarce amount of written testimony of the era, we have spotted a few notable cases that involved our political protagonists: the "Greek Fire" and alleged optical telegraph that defended Constantinople against Muslim attacks; the irrigation systems of the Umayyad desert estates and the Arab acquisition of knowledge in seafaring; the astronomical mechanisms in the palace of Khosrau II. Intellectually, the compilation of the Babylonian Talmud, the last ecumenical church councils and the Umayyad attempts at political universalism in the name of Islam show us an era not of stagnation and fanaticism, but one when the religions we have come to know seem to have been more formative than ever.

This reveals a fundamental problem with the historicising terms in which the ensuing ages have been defined and begs the question of whether the real continuity break with the Ancient world took place at the point when it was supposedly revived. From the moment when the past is relegated to the other side of a "Middle Age" it is confined to a closed and historicising understanding of time and change; even if this was not necessarily how the ninth-century elites saw their own role in history, it is a caveat that modern readers must bear in mind lest they feel tempted to revive the simplifying historical narrative of a "renaissance" when they are struggling to get a grasp on the dynamic complex we have come to know as the Early Middle Ages.[1]

1 The power of words

The Islamic caliphate was not the only political entity to enjoy a rapid ascendancy in the seventh and eighth centuries. In 626 the newly established T'ang Dynasty in China brought forth a young and ambitious emperor, Taizong (d. 649), who would put an end to the centuries of unrest and dissent that had followed the fall of the Han Dynasty in 220, and initiate a longer period of consolidation and expansion. The Gök Turks who had assisted Heraclius during his Persian campaign in 626–628 found their Eastern Khaganate overrun by the T'ang armies in 630, and in 657 their Western Khaganate followed suit, which laid the foundations for a longer period of Chinese dominance in Central Asia.[2] In the wake of the Abbāsid revolution the interests of the two rising powers in the region came to a partial overlap at the border of present-day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where T'ang and Abbāsid troops clashed in the year 751.

The battle of Talas was a marginal affair for both sides, but it is associated with an encounter that led to the introduction of an important Chinese invention in the caliphate: paper. Paper production soon flourished in the new Abbāsid capital, a fact that did not necessarily cause but certainly increased its desire and capacity to assert its cultural and intellectual dominance.[3] Ibn Isḥāq's written biography of the prophet stands at the beginning of what would become a veritable boom in literary production under Abbāsid patronage, a heritage that practically overshadows the more physical legacy of the Umayyad architectural monuments.[4] Baghdad turned into the leading centre for the codification of Islamic law and historiography, and it also became a place where ancient Greek works of philosophy found their way into Arabic and where the Arabic language as such appropriated and developed a heritage with which it would be associated for ages to come. It is easy to understand the Abbāsid concerns for its status, for if they had to ensure that the faith prevailed from which they claimed legitimacy, the increasing number of non-Arab Muslims under their rule forced them to muster matching arguments in favour of their own language and ethnic origin.

In the transfer of knowledge from Greek to Arabic, Syriac played a central role, and it was often from Syriac monasteries and churches that the Abbāsid patrons picked their translators. However, they also sent agents to look for Byzantine manuscripts, and it has been suggested that the development of the Greek minuscule in the late eighth century mirrors an increased demand for books in the wake of the Abbāsid translations.[5] What is clear is that even in Constantinople the late eighth century marks a point from which literary activities appear to come to life again, and where a new generation of historiographers sat down to compile and recollect the events that had passed since the days of Heraclius. They belonged to a monastic and iconodule faction that came under renewed pressure after the 815 restoration of iconoclasm, and as a consequence the image they conveyed about the iconoclast emperors was overtly negative. When iconoclasm was finally abandoned in

843, this became the version of eighth-century Byzantine history that prevailed.[6]

Some of the most prolific intellectual activities in the Byzantine capital took place from the mid-to-late ninth century, when the Patriarch Photius wrote a summary of classical works known as the *Bibliotheca*. Preserving otherwise lost works in short versions or quotations, its puzzling foreword has led to speculation that it might have been based on books in Baghdad rather than in Constantinople.[7] At any rate, Photius seems to have been on amicable terms with the father of an Abbāsid caliph,[8] which is particularly interesting in juxtaposition to his disastrous relationship with the pope and the Western church, which he officially anathemised after Rome and Constantinople had fallen out over the missionary activities among the Bulgarians.[9] The last conflict would be taken to a further level by his contemporaries Constantine (or Cyril, *c.* 827–869) and Methodius (*c.* 815–885), the brothers whose missionary activities in Moravia resulted in the precursor to the Slavic alphabet that manifests a dividing line between Byzantine and Western areas of cultural influence in Eastern Europe still today.[10] In all these cases, the role of the written word to solidify existing divisions is apparent, and the deliberate use that the new political elites tried to make of it.[11]

2 Between magic and science

Less than a century after Photius, a Baghdad book trader called Ibn al-Nadīm wrote an Arabic compendium of books, the *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, that offers a few fascinating glimpses into the circulation of knowledge and literature in the Abbāsid caliphate. In the *Fihrist*, early references to the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights* intermingle with medical tractates, historical reports and ancient Greek works that had been translated into Arabic. It is famous for crediting the caliph Ma'mūn for having commissioned the translations after he had seen Aristotle in a dream:

> al-Ma'mūn saw in a dream the image of a man who was white in colour, red in appearance, with close eyebrows, bald head, blue eyes and pleasant character, sitting on his bed. al-Ma'mūn said: "In his presence, I was filled with fear, and I said: 'Who are you?' He replied 'I am Aristotle'. I was pleased and said: 'Wise man, can I ask you something?' He said: 'Ask.' I said: 'What is good?' He said: 'What is good in the mind.' I said: 'And what after that?' He said: 'What is good in the law.' I said: 'And what after that?' He said: 'What is good in the society.' I said: 'And what after that?' He said: 'After that? There is nothing after that.'"[12]

The anecdote is rather characteristic of Ibn al-Nadīm, who uses similar hearsay to claim that philosophy had been current among the Ancient Greeks and Romans but prohibited from the time when they became Christian, when they either burned the works of the ancient philosophers or locked them up

with other Pagan treasures in old temples where they withered or were eaten by mice.[13] Other authors use such stories to convey opposing viewpoints in which the Umayyads are praised for their refusal to engage with the sciences that threatened the fundaments of their prophetic religion, and it might be worth drawing a parallel to later stories about the reported destruction of the ancient library at Alexandria by Caliph 'Umar or the alleged burning of the patriarchal library in Constantinople by Emperor Leo III.[14]

The question of how controversial the sciences were in the Medieval Christian and Muslim worlds is partly muddled by a modern tendency to associate science with rationality and religion with a lack thereof. Whereas the debates on the createdness of the Qur'an drew protests from traditionalist *'ulamā* against rationalist approaches to revealed religion, the border between the different approaches was often fluent.[15] In Constantinople, the Patriarch Photius was accused by his traditionalist opponents of having sold his soul to a Jewish magician in order to gain wisdom and knowledge about Ancient Greek writings, "magic and astrology",[16] and when he once claimed that an earthquake had been caused, not by the sins of the Christians but by an "abundance of water"[17] they gave him the Arabic nickname *marzouk*.[18] However, the "Jewish magician" repeats a trope that we already met in the iconoclast era, and the fact that early Medieval "magic and astrology" may refer to "alchemy" as well as "chemistry", "astrology" and "astronomy" reveals an underlying problem of separating pre-modern religion, magic and science in a coherent way.[19] The most cautious approach might be to consider popular resistance to both science and magic as expressions of social scepticism to the empowerment of the individual. The *Fihrist* devotes a whole chapter to "magic" arts of the kind that are supposed to make the practitioner participate in the secret powers of nature, and it is perhaps no coincidence that it prefers to illustrate the origin of the Arabic translations of Aristotle with a story that has a more or less fairy-tale character.

3 At the edge of worlds

To the Umayyads, the military victories over the Romans had acted as a confirmation that the Christians had gone astray, but the conquest of Constantinople had lost its attraction and the considerate incursions into Anatolia were abating; consequently the apocalyptic rhetoric of holy war gave way to a more disengaged rhetoric of cultural derision. With the appropriation of the Ancient Greek classics, Muslim authors found evidence for the "irrationality" of the Christian faith in the Byzantine way of thinking, speaking and writing. Articulated by Al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) in the heyday of the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, such notions were echoed by Mas'ūdī (d. 956) in the next century, to be followed by Islamic authors outside the Abbāsid caliphate and long after it had ceased to exert any power.[20]

There are signs that the elites in Constantinople felt a gnawing discomfort at the new state of things. Thus we learn that the Emperor Theophilus

(r. 820–842) sent his cousin, the Patriarch John the Grammarian, with sacks of gold to Baghdad in order to show the Arabs "the riches of the Romans".[21] When he returned, it is said, the emperor ordered him to describe the palaces in Baghdad and commissioned a new palace in Constantinople based on his testimony.[22] The same chronicle claims that a certain learned man in Constantinople at the time, "Leo the philosopher" or "Leo the mathematician", had been neglected by his contemporaries until one of his disciples brought his name to the attention of the Caliph al-Maʿmūn in Baghdad:

> Maʿmūn sent him a letter saying: "(…) despite your understanding of virtue and deep knowledge, you are unknown to your countrymen and have not yet received the fruits of your own wisdom and learning, as you receive no honours from them. Do not hesitate to come to us and to share your teaching with us: if you would do that, the whole Arab people would listen to you and you would be honoured with money and gifts like no man before." (…) This was the reason why the man came to the awareness of and in the service of the emperor (…) Theophilus, who called for him, bestowed money upon him and made him teach at the Great Church. (…) Theophilus then wrote (to the caliph) that it would be irrational to give up his own treasures to others, and to give away to foreigners the knowledge for which the Romans were admired in the whole world.[23]

Insofar as the veracity of this story might be doubted it is because we know the caliph al-Maʿmūn to have been surrounded by brilliant and revolutionary mathematics like al-Khwārizmī whereas we know next to nothing about the achievements of Leo.[24]

With the stakes raised in the game of cultural influence, the Byzantine Empire must have felt an urge to brush up its image. A Slavonic hagiographer would later record how the young Constantine or Cyril, the future missionary to the Slavs, having "studied Homer and geometry with Leo, and dialectics and all philosophical studies with Photius; and in addition to that, rhetoric and arithmetic, astronomy and music, and all the other Hellenistic arts", was chosen by the Emperor Michael III (r. 842–867) to follow an embassy to the caliphate after the "Arabs" had challenged the Christians to a religious debate. Constantine, consequently referred to as a "Philosopher", went to the Arabs, "a wise people, well versed in scholarship, geometry, astronomy and other sciences" and quickly outwitted them with his great knowledge:[25]

> they asked him many other questions, testing him in all the arts that they themselves knew. He explained everything to them. And when he had convinced them, they again said to him: "How do you know all this?"
>
> The Philosopher said: "A certain man drew water from the sea and, carrying it in a bag, boasted to strangers, saying: 'See this water? No one has any except me!' To him came a man who lived by the sea and said:

> 'Are you not ashamed of what you are saying, boasting merely about this stinking bag? We have a sea of it!' You are acting the same way. All the arts have come from us."[26]

A similar Abbāsid invitation to a religious debate in the late ninth century provoked a polemical writing that would define the official Byzantine attitude to Islam for ages to come,[27] and offers a logical point to leave this historical survey. The "Golden Ages" in Constantinople and Baghdad had grown organically and imperceptibly out of the "Dark Ages" that had supposedly preceded them: a political consolidation within new geographical boundaries led to a disentangling of the Muslim and Christian threads of history from the jumble of apocalyptic expectations and the brutal carding of imperial universalism, and to their rearrangement on a more literary level where they strengthened the status of the new Medieval elites and tied together potential believers from near and far.[28] The increasing amount of written material testifying to this process has formed the way in which we still perceive the historical heritage of the Islamic, Byzantine and Western worlds, but as always it is important not to confuse the historical circumstances that enabled and necessitated them with those that would preserve and cultivate their memory.

The most important development on both sides of the religious and political border seems to have been the mutual acceptance of a terrestrial division for which the articulation of religious differences manifested a struggle that concerned not so much God as the world and the desire to understand it as a meaningful entity. It made it possible to see eye to eye on an everyday level; or, as the pupil and successor of Photius, Nicholas Mysticus, wrote in a 914 letter to the caliph in Baghdad:

> Two empires rule the whole world: that of the Arabs and that of the Romans, standing above everything and shining like the greatest two of the celestial bodies; it owes them, because of this, to keep together and foster brotherhood, rather than remain everlasting foreigners to each other due to differences in their way of living, in their habits, and in what they venerate.[29]

Notes

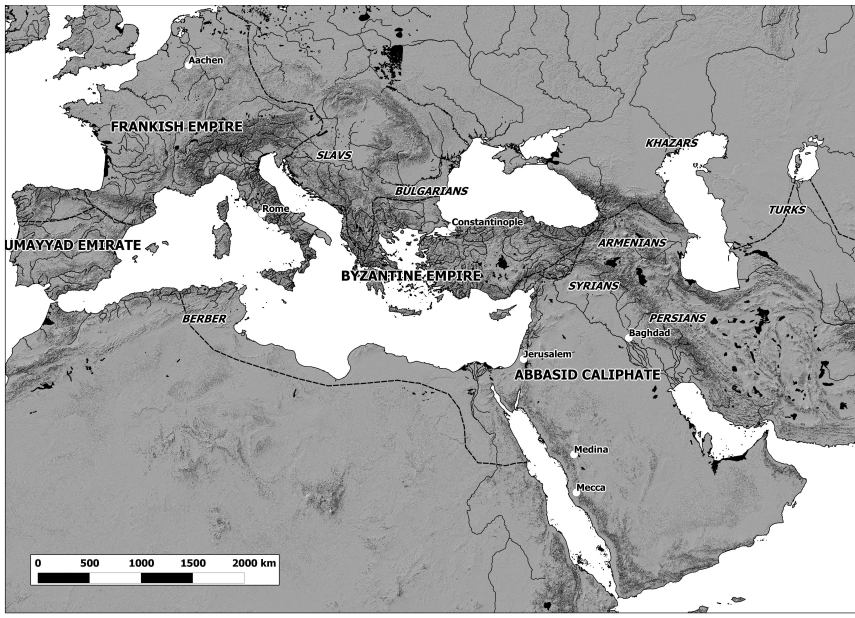
1 Cf. the important criticism of Speck, "Cultural Suicide" in: Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?* (1998) 73–84, with the conclusions of Wickham in *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (2005) 825–31.

2 Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and its Turko-Mongol Neighbours: Culture, Power and Connections 580–800* (2012) 32f., 48ff; see also Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, who suggests that the Gök Turks actively contributed to the devastating falling-out of Rome and Persia before and during the reign of Khosrau II.

3 Bloom, *Paper before Print: the History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (2001) 43f., 90–123; Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* 25–40.

4 el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography* 1–16, 216–220; Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 199, cf. 163ff.
5 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 136ff, 175–186. Perhaps somewhat speculatively, it could be suggested that the Arabic script has stenographical qualities in itself, both because it is technically a cursive and because it can be written without vowels.
6 Treadgold, *The Byzantine Historians* 1–77; Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium* 7ff.
7 Hemmerdinger, "Photius á Bagdad" *BZ* 64 (1971) 37; Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law* 175–85. Recent research makes it seem less likely (see Ronconi, "The Patriarch and the Assyrians: New Evidence for the Date of Photios' Library", *Segno e Testo* 11 (2013) 387–95), but the question of how Photius gained access to such a great number of books remains difficult to answer, as shown by the irreconcilable suggestions of Mango, "Books in the Byzantine Empire, AD 750–850", *Books and Bookmen in Byzantium* (1975) 40, and Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius* (1980) 26, 34.
8 As hinted in a letter by his successor Nicholas I Mysticus (2:14–15), whose receiver was erroneously identified as the "Emir of Crete" by a later copier. It might have been written to the Caliph al-Muktafī (r. 902–908) or perhaps more likely al-Mu'taḍid (r. 892–902), who was fluent in Greek, a personal friend of the translator Isḥaq ibn-Hunayn and a pupil of Aḥmad ibn al-Tayyib, who in turn was a pupil of al-Kindi. Cf. Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views on Islam" 128; Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 125; and Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 261.
9 Photius, *Epistolae*, No.2 (l.219–230).
10 Cf. *Vita Constantini* 71.
11 Cf. Mango, "The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photius", in Bryer, Herrin (eds.) *Iconoclasm*; and Mango, "Books in the Byzantine Empire" 45.
12 Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 243.
13 Ibid., 241ff.
14 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 156f; Lewis, "The Vanished Library" *NYRB* 37/14 (1990); cf. Nilsson, "The Literary Voice of a Chronicler" in: Tocci (ed.), *The Brill Companion to Byzantine Chronicles*, forthcoming.
15 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 166ff; Zaman, *Religion and Politics* 145, 202.
16 Symeon Magistros, *Chronographia* 670.
17 Leon Diakonos, *Historia* (1828) 68f, and Michael Attaleiates, *Historia* (2011) 89f discuss the origin of earthquakes without connecting this interpretation to Photius. Cf. Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist* 261 on a tractate by al-Kindi that features a similarly materialistic model of explanation.
18 Symeon Magistros, *Chronographia* 673:19, 673:21. The additional claim that "every man has two souls, one which is sinful and one which is not", was brought up at the council of 869 at which Photius was temporarily suspended (Mansi, *Sacrorum* 16:404); its meaning is unclear, although Owen Barfield offered an interesting interpretation of it in his *Unancestral Voice* (1965) (kindly brought to my attention by Prof. Lock).
19 Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* 171; Irwin, "Petrarcha and that 'Mad Dog Averroës'" in MacLean (ed.) *Re-orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (2005) 114.
20 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 83–95.
21 Theophanes Continuatus, *Historia* 95:19–96:7; John Zonaras, *Epitomae* III:361.
22 Ricci, "The Road from Baghdad to Byzantium", in: Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century* 131–149; Keshani, "The Abbāsid Palace of Theophilus: Byzantine Taste for the Arts of Islam", *Al-Masaq* 16/1 (2004) 75–91.
23 Theophanes Continuatus, *Historia* 188–190.

24 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 180.
25 *Vita Constantini* 31–7.
26 Ibid., 39.
27 Nicetas Byzantius, "Refutatio Mohamedis", *PG* 105. Criticising the Qur'an not just because it differs from the Bible, but also because of its alleged irrationality, the author begins by deploring the lack of systematic order in the Qur'an (704f.), calling it a demonic work (705C, 764C, 797ff), and taking its references to the invisible forces of nature as indications that it advocates polytheism (777ff), that the Muslim God must be both good and evil (780B), that Islam permits its believers to indulge freely in their own lusts and rages (829f), and that the Muslims are praying to a Pagan idol (720B). The theological core of Islam is attacked by means of a curious mistranslation in which an Arabic characterisation of the unity and indivisibility of God, *ṣamad*, is interpreted as "spherical" or even "hammered out"; it is followed by the amusing miscomprehension that the "clotted blood" in *sura* 96 implies that humans are made out of "leeches". On the possible origins of the Greek translation of the Qur'an used by Nicetas and later Byzantine polemicists, see Høgel, "An Early Anonymous Greek Translation of the Qurʿān: The Fragments from Niketas Byzantios' *Refutatio* and the Anonymous *Abjuratio*" (2010).
28 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* 151–55; Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 141–57.
29 Nicolas, *Ep.*1.



Map 2 The Medieval world in the early ninth century
Source: Map drawn by Dr Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, Vienna

Epilogue

If the monotheist God could be likened to a universal singularity, the revelation of the Divine truth would require a corresponding description, and nothing contradicts the possibility that this is how the history of Islam began in the year 610, as the armies of the Persian king were pushing into the Roman Near East and Heraclius was wrangling with Phocas for power in Constantinople – crushing, bursting and overwhelming, as it is described in the Qur'an and in the biography of Muḥammad.[1] However, the question of what it means on the wider historical level of a world where time and space set the limits of human understanding is more difficult to answer.

It took a while for the prophet to come to terms with his revelations, years for a community of believers to emerge, decades for the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula to submit, and almost a century for conversions to gain momentum in the areas they conquered. In all of these cases, openness was the key to the ideological appeal across individual, social and cultural boundaries; however, retrospectively the entire process was often perceived from a horizon that was epistemologically closed by the facts that it had generated. It would be hard to blame the Abbāsid historiographers for the fact that they tried to give coherent meaning to facts that were the product of time as much as space, but it is understandable if their promotion of an orthogenetic or teleological narrative – whose subject seemed to be detached from the interactions of a complex era and indistinguishable from its outcome – might have buttressed the feeling that Islam was a faith that had expanded, but never really transgressed the confines of the world from which it had originated. It provided arguments to the non-Muslims who kept associating Islam with the political agents through which it spread and thus denied the universal character of its apocalyptic truth.

In the above we have tried to bridge the gap between the apocalyptic origins and the historical outcome of the process by approaching it from a Late Ancient world in which something like an apocalyptic expectation *did* exist, and from which Islam *could* have been understood across the boundaries of what became the Islamic world. We will try to discern its implications for one last time.

1 The apocalypse as history

Looking back upon the Four Ages of Man that had passed since the birth of the gods, Hesiod did not doubt that he lived in the worst age, the Iron Age: "for now men are offered no respite from any toils and sufferings by day, or distress by night; and the gods bestow the worst hardships upon them." Even the age of the Heroes that had followed the Golden, Silver and Bronze Ages was a thing of the past: by learning the rules of a cruel world, human existence could become more endurable, but only fools would try to escape the fate that the gods had decided for them.[2] The somewhat later author of the Jewish *Koheleth* came to a similar conclusion even if it was presented in a happier mood: "everything that happens has already been named and the lot of man is decided upon, and there is no use of struggling with someone who is stronger (…) Everything that God has made is beautiful in the right moment: he has put the whole world in the hearts of men in such a way that they can never understand the works of God from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing good for them except being merry and doing good things in life. If a man eats and drinks and finds good things in the midst of his hardships, it is a gift from God."[3]

At first glance, a material world that is considered to be more enduring than the subjects that populate it will create a cyclical understanding of history that is also more or less closed. It is at least not for mortals to break out of the cycles or make a difference within them. Nature is stronger than history, and even if the world perhaps does follow some linear master plan, it is still the fate of men to remain obedient to its laws, enjoy its blessings and respect its equilibrium. The fundaments of a sound well-being (εὐδαιμονία), Aristotle concluded, were found in a respect for the everlasting: a life like that of Sardanapalus was not worthy of pursuit. By Sardanapalus he meant the last king of Assyria, reported to have spent his whole life indulging in depraved cravings for instant gratification and to have perished in a conflagration of his palace at Nineveh when the Babylonians conquered the city in 612 BC. In fact even the desire for virtue and knowledge (αρετή) which Aristotle observed among his contemporary Greek citizens had a strain of vanity: only the contemplative happiness of the philosopher seemed to overcome the mortal existence of man and society alike and appreciate what was eternally and universally good.[4]

The first rift in this vertical dualism between earth and heavens results from its implicit acknowledgment of a reality beyond all human power and comprehension. Unexpectedly, things *may* change. God, the gods or their chosen ones *may* intervene. There *may* exist unknown laws of nature that make things turn differently from what is feared, hoped or expected. A reverence for the numinous and a fascination for the magical, a wish to understand the secret mechanisms of nature and the universe – all of it implies not only the acknowledgment of a world beyond the human subject but also that it is possible to align with it. Ancient mystics and scientists assumed that it

was attainable; Platonists and Jewish Messianists indicated that it was inevitable; and of course, god-kings from the Egyptian pharaohs to the Persian shahs and the Roman emperors claimed to rule in accordance with it, even if it meant that they made a full circle back to the closed cosmological system it was supposed to overcome.

Beliefs of this kind occasionally made individuals embark on adventures that appeared to prove their veracity. Few turned out to be the stuff of which stories are made, but it happened. The young Alexander is said to have wept when his teacher Anaxarchus taught him about the infinite number of worlds; the conquests with which he became associated as an adult unsettled the laws of the terrestrial world in which he had been raised.[5] The rise of mystical and philosophical movements in the Hellenist era, the intermingling of Greek, Jewish, Egyptian, Indian and Persian cultural elements all over the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East attest to the inner openness of the Ancient world. The struggles of the Late Roman and Persian Empires to suppress, contain or integrate beliefs they considered harmful to their own political prevalence points to an internalisation of the dualism between earth and heaven, and the rise of human history as a focal point in the redemptory process, a notion that would keep haunting the Christian Empire.

The spiral of apocalyptic expectations that transformed the world of Justinian I into the world of Heraclius thus offers an important backdrop to the rise of what we have come to know as Islam, and could explain the ideological appeal that the early Muslim movement exerted. Perhaps it was logical that the terrestrial universalism of Christian Rome was surpassed by an agent that had taken its apocalyptic promise to its logical end. It does not mean, of course, that the Late Ancient world would have kept running *ad infinitum* otherwise, or that it was conjured away at the appearance of Islam: history no more ended when ʿAbd al-Mālik sealed the Golden Gate than it did when Muʿāwiya exited through it, or when Heraclius entered by its means. The Umayyad caliphs may have combined the rhetoric of terrestrial universalism that they inherited from the late Roman and Persian Empires with the eschatological and Messianic hopes of different believers in the Near East, but appropriating the vertical dualism did not break it down: they could use a temporary rift in it to enter, but not close the same rift behind themselves.[6] The geopolitical divisions of the Late Ancient world prevailed, the crystallisation process of its communities continued, the other empires fell neither morally nor physically. The Islamic expansion eventually decelerated apocalyptic expectations among the conquerors, creating a far-reaching stopover on the road from the *Dār al-Ḥarb* to the *Dār as-Salām*: the *Dār al-Islām*, the terrestrial peace under the caliph of God.

Marginalised factions maintained the original momentum. The party of ʿAlī – the nucleus of what would become Shiʿi Islam – took up the Messianic promise at an early stage and often kept doing so in both ardent and humble defiance of the world that it conveyed to the later Sufis, while the Kharijites maintained an eschatological horizon that came to characterise the warriors

along the frontiers. Both could be said to have stayed as true as was possible to the apocalyptic origins of Islam, even if they took different paths: the former as a colourful monotheism in a persistent state of unfolding in the world, the latter in an austere isolation for which the path to God lay in the immediate destruction of the world or of the body, or both. Depending on the individual outlook of the believers, the border was often fleeting, and it might have been in a convergence of both Messianic and eschatological expectations that the Abbāsids took power: as in all the cases we have surveyed, the impact of beliefs was always an impact of human believers with human contradictions.

Perhaps this is also what finally allows us to get a grasp on the apocalypse as an historical reality: at each and every moment during which it is moving from the past to the future, it is still conveyed by the present against which it appears to revolt. By denying the validity of the perceptible world and deferring its validation to a different world, by deriving its truth from a closed understanding of the past or postponing its verification to an imagined future, by declaring the reality of the present moment to be deceitful or transient it may try to escape the laws of physics, but this will usually lessen rather than increase its impact in the longer term. Teleological expectations can make a difference on an individual level and within the shorter spans of time, but their later fulfilment becomes decided by realities and conjunctures beyond the reach of the individual. Psychologically, the astronomical proportions of a universal god that implies the ultimate destruction of the physical world might as well take its believer back to the presentist *après-nous-le-deluge* mentality of a Sardanapalus.

What the attraction and impact of apocalyptic ideologies reveal, on the other hand, is that there was an element of openness in all the developments that we have surveyed. Perhaps they are some of the most fascinating examples we have of the overall vitality and creativity of a period that has inspired storytellers and frustrated historiographers until today; perhaps the failure to understand the rise of Islam as part of this open historical process is simply the accumulated outcome of centuries of refusal to approach it with an open historical mind.

2 History as an apocalypse

The first major chronicle attested to have been composed in Constantinople after the time of Heraclius, the history of Trajan the Patrician, is lost. It appears to have dated from the unruly years surrounding the 717–718 Umayyad siege.[7] The next generation of chroniclers in Greek, the Patriarch Nicephorus (d. 828), George Syncellus (d. after 810) and Theophanes Confessor (d. after 817) drew upon it when they surveyed the two centuries that had passed since (in the words of the former) Phocas had risen to power and "all the misfortunes began that had since come over the Christians".[8] They lived in an environment that was dominated by the persistent controversy over iconoclasm, and as a result the rise of Islam and the loss of the Near East

were partly overshadowed by the developments that had commenced when the Umayyad threat began to abate and the Isaurian emperors took power. This led to what could be called the first paradox in the historiography of Islam: whereas many Muslim chroniclers in the Abbāsid era toned down the qualities of the Umayyad caliphs, whose armies had once conquered half the Christian world, their contemporary Byzantine colleagues took an overtly negative stance towards the imperial dynasty that had successfully defended Constantinople and Anatolia against the conquering Muslims.[9]

The second paradox grew out of the emancipation of the Latin West from the now entirely Graecophone empire in the East. Here the question of discontinuity was not a matter of two, but of three or even four centuries during which Rome and the West had been a periphery to Constantinople. As new political powers emerged and grew all over Western Europe, and the Papacy could shift its balance point to these new allies, the way lay open for disconnecting the East altogether. The Latin language and literature provided a direct link to the Ancient world that it conveyed to the Franks under Charlemagne and further to the later German emperors from the time of Otto I. If the emperors in Constantinople could maintain an attitude of distraught arrogance towards these *arrivistes*, [10] the collapse of their eastern border against the Seljuk Turks in the year 1071 tilted the historical balance forever. The Crusaders who took up arms in favour of their Christian brethren some two decades later temporarily eased the Turkish stranglehold on Anatolia, but when they went on to conquer Jerusalem from the Fatimids in 1099 it was not with the aim of restoring it to an increasingly weak "Byzantine" Empire, which had become a mere appendix in the Western historical consciousness. In 1204 the Crusaders would in fact turn against Constantinople itself and destroy it, thus ironically accomplishing what the Muslims had failed to do.[11] However, the original conflict between Islam and the Late Roman Empire was now forgotten: in an historical sense the rising West met Islam entirely on its own – both in Spain, where the post-Umayyad Muslim states were pushed out over the ensuing centuries, and in the Near East, where the Crusader states expired with the apocalyptic fervour that had ignited them. The East being detached, the West lacked the interest to comprehend and contextualise the rise of Islam as a part of its own history.

And the gap kept widening. With the advent of the early modern era, an entire millennium was gradually put in the shadow of developments that would turn the Mediterranean into a European periphery and the Christian culture that it had nurtured into an intermission in the historical consciousness of Westerners who had started to devour the Classical works that Medieval Latin, Byzantine and Arabic copyists and translators had put at their disposal. This is not said to discredit the Western claims to an ancient heritage with which it was connected by an ardent love alone, but in the quest for this Paradise lost it showed a certain tendency to leave its own guides in the infernal abyss of intermittent realities and forget them there. In 1453 Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks, which at least retrospectively appeared

to confirm the West in its role as sole heir of the ancient world. The subsequent Turkish presence in the Balkans and around the Mediterranean added a Muslim element to Europe that was perceived in terms of barbarism or exoticism, but not as the outcome of a shared past.

In all of the cases above, the alienation of Islam was an indirect one; it was its wider historical context – rather than Islam itself – that was detached from the linear narrative. In the modern era it came full circle as enlightened aristocrats like Gibbon began to connect the conquests of Islam with visions of "noble savages" who had been untarnished by the alleged corruptions of the declining Roman Empire.[12] This Rousseauian juxtaposition of an Iron Age of civilisational degeneration with a tribal society that had purportedly preserved the Arcadian purity of a bygone golden age is strongly Platonic, but it also carries a striking resemblance to the teachings of the Salafi or Wahhabi Muslim reformers who were rising in defiance of the Ottoman Empire at the same time.[13] It is consequent to this that the nineteenth century, which developed a veritable obsession with the rebirth of ancient culture – most notably during the Greek war of independence – gave rise to the first modern Islamist schools of thought, which appropriated the Western narrative of the "Middle Ages" to stress the historical otherness of Islam.[14]

This is where we begin to trace the outlines of a problem that has followed us from the very start. Historical paradigms offer closed frameworks and definitions of a history that would otherwise appear as an incomprehensible chaos of past events that may mean all or nothing; and by doing so they are – in a sense – nothing but inverted apocalypses. Insofar as modern man and woman tried to compensate for the deficits in the pre-modern epistemologies they inherited when they analysed the rapidly expanding complex of facts that made up their observable cosmos, they perpetuated the religious search for a hidden meaning; and if they could not consider themselves the centre of the universe, they often succumbed to the no less irrational belief in the redemptory nature of history.[15] In the never-ending *mise en abyme* of epistemological alienation that the Western desire for a long-term historical meaning had left in its own past, Islam appeared to be cut off from all dialectics and left to wander in an endless night of dreams and djinns.

This book does not purport to offer any redemption for a mutual alienation that contemporary agents are often happy to perpetuate because it serves their own causes. If it has filled any purpose at all, it is by showing how it is possible to go through the alleged darkness of the past with a conscious mind and navigate one's way between the closeness of its facts and the openness of its meanings. It is this oneiromantic challenge that we are now trying to conclude.

****

Our point of departure was a period that the German philosopher Karl Jaspers – using an idealising language that reveals a certain affinity to his own reading of Nietzsche's "great zenith" as a moment where the thought

obliterates the world[16] – likened to an "axial age" in human history. According to this interpretation, the centuries between 800 and 200 BC left such a rich heritage of human thought throughout the old world from the Mediterranean (the ancient Greek philosophers), the Near East (the Jewish prophets), eastwards across Iran (the Persian world empire of the Achaemenids and Zarathustra) and India (Gautama Buddha, Bhagavad-Gita) to China (Confucius and Laotze), that later ages could but compete to revere and revive it.

If we are to maintain the notion that the rise of Islam took place at its nocturnal counterpoint, in an era associated with political dissolution, low cultural productivity and ideological developments from which posterity was sometimes eager to distance itself, we should at least admit that the best way of perceiving in the dark is to look obliquely, and by directing the glance at the most rudimentary outlines of its overall framework we will still find traces of an Ancient world that was not really lost but re-invented. The fact that everyday life had often become embodied by the religious communities all over the Mediterranean and the Near East does not mean that people had become more irrational than they were before or than they are today; their epistemological horizons may have narrowed, but the religious hierarchies of power prevented them from dissolving altogether and offered platforms of cohesion on which new secular elites could build. Their communicative infrastructure helped convey the ancient heritage far beyond the immediate reach of the new cultural centres, and their respect for the written word made sure that the past remained continuously documented. The fact that the new literary traditions to which they gave rise struggled to maintain their own epistemologies in a complex and unpredictable world turns the historiographical paradoxes we saw above into a mere reminder that the processes they attempted to simplify and historicise were in reality dynamic and flexible. It liberates us from the irritating urge to accuse past receptions of history for our own failures to approach it on its own terms – something that would make us commit the very mistake that we claim to correct – and frees us to try to rediscover the perceived darkness in full admittance of our own limits. What we will find is a cosmos of human rather than demonic desires, where the interplay of religious truths and historical realities becomes at least indirectly perceptible.

This, however, is where the historian will always beg to differ with philosophers and theologians who prefer to focus on thoughts and ideas as such, rather than on the agents and circumstances that transmit them. History shows the existence of a world outside thoughts and ideas, where they are conveyed not solely by the force of their inner truth but by that of the external realities that delineate their local and temporary meanings. This is no irrelevant realisation in an age when ideological extremists of all kinds – both religious and secular – tend to evade scrutiny on the physical level of the present by resorting to simplified interpretations of the past or the future. Arguments based on theology or philosophy will only confirm them in the

feeling to take part in a redemptory struggle between invisible forces, not relieve the rest of mankind from the future of an age whose technological achievements have irreversibly increased the damage of the visible result. However, as they keep their eyes shut to the frustrating realities outside their subjective horizons, the historian can at least divert the attention of their surroundings to the world where they keep throwing visible shadows and where the daylight is continuously refracted in the eyes of other human subjects.

This is where we could return to the dream of Nebuchadnezzar for one last time. For it is certainly credible that a rock could smash a metal statue to pieces, at least if it had the right amount of matter and velocity, and the structure of the statue is weak. But could the rock really begin to grow out of itself and inflate until it filled the whole world? The answer to that question must be of such a metaphysical quality that I think it is time to stop here.

Notes

1 Q 96; Lings, *Muḥammad* 43ff.
2 Hesiod, *Opera et Dies* 174–211.
3 *Eccl*. 7, 3
4 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethic* 1095a–1096a. On Sardanapalus, see Diodorus Siculus, *Library* (1946) II:23–27.
5 Plutarch, *Moralia* 466, often misquoted to imply that Alexander later wept when he believed that he had nothing left to conquer.
6 For the same reason, contrafactual speculations on how history would have turned out if Heraclius had contained the invasions at Yarmouk or if the Umayyads had conquered Constantinople are absurd: whereas both scenarios are plausible in a present tense, their *long-term impact* is perceived from a horizon that is closed by facts they generated over a *longer period of time* and not in a present tense. Cf. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, transl. McLaughlin and Pellauer (1984) 140–1.
7 Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis* 306ff.
8 Nic. Patr. *Hist.*3:6–11; cf. ch. 1.
9 Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* II:381; Treadgold, *The Byzantine Historians* 8–77.
10 Liutprand, *Antapodosis* 39–41, 43.
11 Cf. Heilo, "When did Constantinople Actually Fall?", in: Nilsson, Stephenson (eds.) *Wanted – Byzantium* (2014) 77–92.
12 Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1897) chapters 50–52.
13 Cf. Plato, *Leges* 677e–680e. Note that such patterns are recognisable in the cyclical models of Ibn Khaldun as well: here the desert represents a state from which all civilisations rise and to which they eventually return, normally after four generations. Salafism, of course, takes its name from the Islamic "forefathers" of the four first generations from the prophet. However, the modern notion about an ancient Enlightenment that succumbed to a Medieval darkness owes as much to the Hesodian myth of a blissful past that already Lucretius had dismantled (Lucretius, *De Rerum Naturae* V:925–1010).
14 Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939* (1993) 103–129; Guida, "Al-Afghānī and Namık Kemal's Replies to Ernest Renan: Two Anti-Westernist Works in the Formative Stage of Islamist Thought" *TJP* 2:2 (2011) 57–70. In another interesting parallel to Western anti-Medievalism, Arab nationalists often

blended the idea of their cultural revival (*nahda*) with anti-Ottomanism; cf. Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire 1516–1918: A Social and Cultural History* (2013) 199–206, 225–231. See also Bryce, "The Absence of Ottoman, Islamic Europe in Edward Said's Orientalism", *TCS* 30 (2013) 99–121; and Heilo, "Beyond Orientalism: Why we need Byzantium to understand Islam", ed. Grünbart (forthcoming).

15 Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (2007) 215–49, esp. 235–38 and 244–46; Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (1991) 91–101, 170 *passim*. See further, Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (2004) 140 (ch. 31); and Camus, *L'Homme Revolté* (1979) 221ff, 234ff; it is perhaps notable that the last two take diametrically opposite positions when they are trying to find the historical roots of modern historicist thought – the former among the Ancient Greek Platonists, the latter in Judaeo-Christian Messianism. More specifically on our topic, see the excellent article by Hagen, "The Imagined and Historical Muḥammad", *JAOS* (2009) 97–111, esp. 109–11.

16 Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens* (1936) 355ff. A very different take on this complex question – which might be mentioned here because it was important to the way in which this essay was originally conceived – is provided by Carl Gustav Jung in his *Seminar on Nietzsche's* Zarathustra: "We must free ourselves from this most unscientific prejudice that our thoughts mean something in the sense of producing something. A thought is a phaenomenon in itself; it proves nothing … the idea that a world returns to non-being by perfect consciousness is a philosophical idea which we have to notice; but we cannot say that this makes or destroys a world. It only makes and destroys *our* world … For things are *our* world, not *the* world" (abridged edition, 1998, 72f).

Christian years		CHRONOLOGY		Islamic years
600	Phocas	*Deposition and murder of emperor Maurice*		
		The Roman-Persian War begins		
610	Heraclius	*The Prophet Muhammad has his first revelations*		
620		*Muhammad leaves for Medina*		
		Heraclius campaigns against Persia		
630		*Heraclius in Jerusalem, Muhammad in Mecca*	’Abū Bakr	10
		Arabs incursions in Syria and Iraq	‘Umar	
640	Constans II	*Arab conquest of Egypt*		20
			‘Uthmān	
650				30
		First fitna	‘Alī	
660			Mu‘āwiya	40
		Constans II in Rome and on Sicily		
670	Constantine IV	*First Arab sieges of Constantinople*		50
		Sixth Ecumenical Church Council	Yāzid I	60
680		*Second fitna*	Marwān I	
			‘Abd al-Mālik	
690	Justinian II (a)	*Quinisextum Church Council.*		70
		The Dome of the Rock is built		
	Leontius			
700	Apsimar	*Arab conquest of Carthage*		80
		The Umayyad mosque in Damascus is built	al-Walīd	
	Justinian II (b)			90
710	Bardanes, Anastasius II, Theodosius III			
		Arab conquest of Spain	Sulaymān	
	Leo III	*Siege of Constantinople*	‘Umar II	100
720			Yāzīd II	
			Hishām	
730		*John of Damascus defends the images*		110
				120
740			al-Walīd II, Yāzīd III, Ibrāhīm	
	Constantine V	*Third fitna*	Marwān II	130
750		*Abbasid revolution*		
		Iconoclast Church Council		
		The pope Stephen III visits the Franks	as-Saffāḥ	140
760		*Foundation of Baghdad*	al-Manṣūr	
		Ibn Ishaq writes a biography of the Prophet		150
770				
	Leo IV	*Early Graeco-Arabic translations*	al-Mahdī	160
780	Constantine VI			
			al-Hādī	170
		Seventh Ecumenical Church Council	al-Rashīd	
790				180
	Eirene			
800		*Coronation of Charlemagne in Rome*		

Dynasty of Heraclius

Isaurian dynasty

Umayyad dynasty

Abbasid dynasty

Bibliography

Primary sources (texts and translations)

Abdalhamid bin Yahya (1954), *Rasā'il al-bulaghā (Risālat 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-kātib)*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd 'Ali, Cairo.

Agnellus of Ravenna (1996), *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. and transl. C. Nauert, Freiburg im Breisgau.

Ammianus Marcellinus (1977), *Histoire*, ed. J. Fontaine, Paris.

Anastasius Sinaitae (1865) "Quaestiones", *Patrologia Graeca* 89, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.

Antiochus of Mar Saba (1910), "Antiochus Strategos' Account of the Sack of Jerusalem", transl. F. Conybeare, *English Historical Review* 25: 506–508.

"An unknown Maronite Chronicle" (1993), transl. A. Palmer in *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, Liverpool.

Arculf (1864) "De locis sanctis", *Patrologia Latina* 88, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.

Augustinus (1864), "De Civitate Dei contra Paganos", *Patrologia Latina* 41, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.

Baladhuri (1957), *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, Cairo.

Bukhari (1981), *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Cairo.

Chronicon Paschale (1832) ed. B.G. Niebuhr, Bonn.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus imp. (1967), *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. R.J.H. Jenkins, Washington.

Digenis Akritas: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions (1998) ed. and transl. E. Jeffreys, Cambridge.

Diodorus Siculus (1946) *Library*, London: William Heinemann Ltd.

Doctrina Iacobi (1910), ed. G.N. Bonwetsch, Berlin.

Ferdowsi (2003), *Shahname*, transl. R. Levy, Tehran.

Georg of Pisidia (1860), "Heraclias", *Patrologia Graeca* 92, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.

al-Ghazzali (1939), *Iḥya 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Cairo.

Ghewond (1944), "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Leo III and 'Umar II", transl. E. Jeffreys, *Harvard Theological Review* 37.

"History of the patriarchs of the Coptic church of Alexandria" (1904), *Patrologia Orientalis* 1, ed. A. Evetts, Paris.

Hrabanus Maurus (1864), "Homiliae de Festis Praecipuis etc.", *Patrologia Latina* 110, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.

Ibn al-Nadim (1871), *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. G. Flügel, Leipzig.

Ibn Kathir (1980), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Cairo.

Ibn Khaldun (2004), *al-Muqaddima*, Cairo.

Ibn Qutayba (1960), *al-Maʿārif*, Cairo.
Ibn Saʿd (1958), *Ṭabaqāt al-kubri*, Beirut.
John of Damascus (1864) "De Haeresibus", *Patrologia Graeca* 94, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.
John of Damascus (1864) "De Imaginibus Orationes, I–III", *Patrologia Graeca* 94, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.
John Moschos (1863) "Pratum Spirituale", *Patrologia Graeca* 87, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.
John Zonaras (1867) *Epitomae*, ed. M. Pinder, Bonn.
Kitāb al-ʿuyūn wa l-ḥadāʿiq (1869), ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden.
Leo III imp. (1983), *Ecloga*, ed. L. Burgmann, Frankfurt.
Leon Diakonos (1828), *Historia*, ed. B.G. Niebuhr, Bonn.
Liber Pontificalis (1902), ed. L. Duchesne, Paris.
Liutprand of Cremona (1998), *Antapodosis, Homelia Paschalis, Historia Ottonis, Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana*, ed. P. Chiesa, Turnhout.
Mansi (1960), *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collectio*, Graz.
Masʿudi (1861–77), *Murūj ad-dhahab wa-maʿādan al-jawhar*, ed. B. de Meynard, Paris.
Maximus Confessor (1865) "Epistolae", *Patrologia Graeca* 91, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.
Menander Protector (1985), fragment from *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, ed. and transl. R.C. Blockley, Liverpool.
Michael Attaleiates (2011), *Historia*, ed. T.H. Tsolakis, Athens.
al-Muqaddasi (1904), *Aḥsan al-Thaqāsim*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden.
Muslim (1970), *Sahīh Muslim*, ed. Abu-Zaina, Cairo.
Nawawi (2004), *A Selection of Authentic Qudsi (Sacred) Hadiths with an-Nawawi's Forty Hadiths*, ed. and transl. ʻAbdul-Fattah, Cairo.
Nicephorus Patriarch of Constantinople (1990) *Historia Breviarium*, ed. C. Mango, Washington.
Nicetas Byzantius (1862) "Refutatio Mohamedis", *Patrologia Graeca* 105, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.
Nicetas Choniates (1975), *Historia*, ed. J. van Dieten, Berlin.
Nicolaus Mysticus (1973), *Nicholas I. Patriarch of Constantinople*, ed. and transl. R.J.H. Jenkins and L.G. Westerinck, Dumbarton Oaks.
Parastaseis (1984), *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, ed. A. Cameron and J. Herrin, Leiden.
Photius (1986), *Epistuale et Amphilochia (I–VI)*, ed. B. Laourdas and L.G. Westerinck, Leipzig.
Plutarch (1957) *Moralia*, London: William Heinemann Ltd.
Procopius (1905–06), *Vandal Wars, Anecdota: Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Haury, Leipzig.
Pseudo-Methodios (gr.) (1976), "Apocalypse", *Apocalypsis (redactio I–II)*, ed. A. Lolos, Meisenheim am Glan.
Pseudo-Methodios (syr.) (1985), *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion auf die einfallenden Muslim in der edessenischen Apokalyptik des 7. Jahrhunderts*, ed. and transl. H. Suermann, Frankfurt, 34–85.
Qummi (1967/68 [1387]), *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān*, Najaf.
Sebeos (1999), *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, transl. R.W. Thomson, Liverpool.
Sophronius of Jerusalem (1863) "Anacreontica Oratio in Christi Natalitia", *Patrologia Graeca* 87, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.
Sophronius of Jerusalem (1881), *Logos eis to hagion baptisma*, ed. Papadopoulou-Keramos, St Petersburg.
Symeon Magistros, Pseudo-Symeon Hist. (1838), *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonn.

Syriac Daniel (2001), *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, ed. M. Henze, Tübingen.
Tabari (1879–1901), *Tārīkh ar-rusūl wa l-mulūk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden.
Tabari (1910) *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Bulaq: al-Amiriya.
Theodor Studites (1860) "Laudatio Funebris in Matrem Suam", *Patrologia Graeca* 99, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.
Theodoret (1864), "Historia Ecclesiastica", *Patrologia Graeca* 82, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris.
Theophanes (1883), *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig; transl. C. Mango and R. Scott in *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History 284–813*, Oxford 1997.
Theophanes Continuatus (1838), *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker, Bonn.
Theophilus of Edessa (2011), *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, transl. with an introduction and notes R.G. Hoyland, Liverpool.
Theophylactus Simocatta (1995), *Historia Vita Ammonios, Diegisis Ammoniou monachou pero ton anairethenton hypo ton barbaron, To martyrologion tou Sina* 2.
Vita Constantini (1983), "The Life of Constantine", *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*, transl. M. Kantor, Ann Arbor.
Vita S. Andreæ Salis (1995) ed. L. Rydén.
Ya'qubi (1883), *Tārīkh Aḥmad bin Abī Ya'qūb bin Ja'far bin Wahab*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma, Leiden.
Zuqnin (1999), *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, parts III and IV*, transl. A. Harrak, Toronto.

Secondary literature

Alexander, Paul J. (1985), *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
Alexander, Paul J. (1978), "The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and its Messianic Origin", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41.
Athamina, Kh. (1987), "*A'rab* and *muhājirūn* in the environment of *amṣār*", *Studia Islamica* 66.
Barasch, Moshe (1992), *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea*, New York: New York University Press.
Barfield, Owen (1965), *Unancestral Voice*, London: Faber & Faber.
Bashear, Suliman (1990), "Abraham's Sacrifice of his Son and Related Issues", *Der Islam* 67/2.
Beck, Hans-Georg (1975), *Von der Fragwürdigkeit der Ikone*, München: Akademie der Wissenschaften.
Behrens-Abouseif, D. (1997), "The Lion-Gazelle Mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafyar", *Muqarnas* 14.
Bijlefeld, W.A. (2004), "Eschatology: Some Muslim and Christian Data", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 15/1.
Blankinship, Khalid Yahya (1994), *The End of the Jihad State: The Reign of Hisham ibn 'Abd al Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
Bloom, Jonathan (2001), *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
Bonner, Michael (1996), *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in Jihad and the Arab–Byzantine Frontier* (American Oriental Series81), New Haven: American Oriental Society.

Borgehammar, S. (2009), "Heraclius Learns Humility: Two Early Latin Accounts Composed for the Celebration of Exaltatio Crucis", *Millennium* 6, 145–201.

Bowersock, Glen W. (2012), *Empires in Collision in Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel.

Brand, C.M. (1989), "The Turkish Element in Byzantium", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43.

Brandes, W. (2002), "Heraclius between Restoration and Reform", G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte (eds.), *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, Leuven: Peeters.

Breckenridge, James D. (1959), *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II*, New York: American Numismatic Society.

Briant, Pierre (1996), *Histoire de l'Empire Perse: de Cyrus à Alexandre*, Paris: Fayard.

Brock, S. (1977), "Iconoclasm and the Monophysites", A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds.) *Iconoclasm*, Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies.

Brotton, J. (2005), "St George between East and West", G. MacLean (ed.), *Re-orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brown, P. (1971), "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", *Journal of Roman Studies* 61; reprinted in P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, London: University of California Press 1982.

Brown, P. (1976), "Town, Village and Holy Man", D.M. Pippidi (ed.), *Assimilation et résistance à la culture gréco-romaine dans le monde ancien*, Bucharest: Editura Academiei; reprinted in P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, London: University of California Press 1982.

Brown, Raymond E., Fitzmyer, Joseph A. and Murphy, Roland E. (1988), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Prentice Hall.

Brubaker, Leslie and Haldon, John (2011), *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 650–850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bryce, D. (2013) "The Absence of Ottoman, Islamic Europe in Edward Said's *Orientalism*", *Theory, Culture & Society* 30/1.

Bulliet, Richard W. (1979), *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Burns, Robert (2005), *Damascus: A History*, London: Routledge.

Busse, H. (1996), "The Destruction of the Temple and its Reconstruction in the Light of Sura 17:2–8", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20.

Cameron, Alan (1976), *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*, Clarendon.

Campbell, S. (1998), "It Must Be the End of Time: Apocalyptic Aḥādīth as a Record of the Islamic Community's Reaction to the Turbulent First Centuries", *Medieval Encounters* 4:3.

Camus, Albert (1979 [1951]), *L'Homme Revolté*, Paris.

Canard, Marius (1973 [1932]), "Un Personnage de Roman Arabo-Byzantin", Variorum reprints, *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, London.

Caner, Daniel F. (2010), *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Clayton, Peter and Price, Martin (1988), *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World*, London: Routledge.

Conrad, L. (1996), "The Arabs and the Colossus", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* III:6/2.

Cook, David (2002), *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (SLAEI 21), Princeton: Darwin Press.

Cook, David (2005), *Understanding Jihad*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Cormack, R. (1977), "The Arts during the Age of Iconoclasm", A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds.) *Iconoclasm*, Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies; Variorum reprints *The Byzantine Eye: Studies in Art and Patronage*, London 1989.
Creswell, Keppel Archibald Cameron (1958), *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, Harmondsworth: Librairie du Liban.
Crone, Patricia (1980), *Slaves on Horses*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Crone, Patricia (2014), *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Crone, Patricia and Cook, Michael (1977), *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Crone, Patricia and Hinds, Martin (1986), *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Dalrymple, William (1997), *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium*, London: Henry Holt and Co.
Dinkler, R. (1965), "Das Kreuz als Siegeszeichen", *Zum Kreuz als Tropaion in der fruhchristlichen Theologie vgl*. 62.
Dols, Michael W. (1992), *Majnün: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Donner, Fred (1998), *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (SLAEI 14), Princeton: Darwin Press.
Donner, Fred (2010), *Muḥammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Eck, Werner (1998), *Augustus und seine Zeit*, München: C.H. Beck.
Eisener, Reinhard (1987), *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion: Eine Studie zum Umayya-denkalifen Sulaiman b. Abdalmalik und seinem Bild in den Quellen*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz.
Ekonomou, Andrew J. (2007), *Byzantine Rome and Greek Popes*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
Elad, A. (1992), "Why Did 'Abd al-Mālik Build the Dome of the Rock?" J. Raby and J. Johns (eds.) *Bayt al-Maqdis: Abd al-Mālik's Jerusalem, Part One* (OSIAIX), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Ettinghausen, Richard (1972), *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World*, Leiden: Brill.
Finkel, Irving (2013), *The Cyrus Cylinder*, London: I.B. Tauris.
Flusin, B. (1992), "L'esplanade du Temple á l'arrivée des Arabes", J. Raby and J. Johns (eds.) *Bayt al-Maqdis: Abd al-Mālik's Jerusalem, Part One* (OSIAIX), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Foss, Clive (1975), "The Persians in Asia Minor and the End of Antiquity", *English Historical Review* 357.
Foss, Clive (1997), "Syria in Transition 550–750: An Archeological Approach", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51.
Foss, Clive (2008), *Arab-Byzantine Coins*, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library.
Fowden, Elisabeth K. (1999), *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius Between Rome and Iran*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Fowden, Elisabeth K. and Fowden, Garth (2004), *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads*, Athens: Ethniko Hidryma Ereunon.
Fowden, Garth (1993), *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fowden, Garth (2004), *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Franz, H.G. (1993), "Entstehung und Anfänge einer islamischen Kunst unter der Dynastie der Omayyaden", E.M. Ruprechtsberger (ed.), *Syrien: von den Aposteln zu den Kalifen*, Linz: Ph. von Zabern.

Freud, Sigmund (2006 [1938]), *Der Mann Moses und die Monotheistische Religion*, Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

Garitte, G. (1960), "La Prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614", *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 203, Louvain.

Gatier, P.-L. (1992), "Les inscriptions grecques d'époque islamique", P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds.) *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe–VIIIe siècles*, Damascus: Actes du Colloque international.

Gaudeul, J.M. (1984), "The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar", *Islamochristiana* 10.

Gero, Stephen (1973), *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III, with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO.

Gibbon, Edward (1897), *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J.B. Bury, London: Methuen & Co.

Goldziher, Ignaz (2004), *Muhammedanische Studien I–II*, 2. Nachdruck der Ausgabe Halle 1888, Hildesheim.

Grabar, Oleg (1964), "Islamic Art and Byzantium", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18.

Grabar, Oleg and Kedar, Benjamin Z. (2009), *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade*, University of Texas Press.

Gray, John (2007 [1995]), *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age*, London and New York: Routledge.

Gregory, T.E. (1975), "The Ekloga of Leo III and the Concept of Philanthropia", *Byzantina* 7.

Griffith, S.H. (1997), "Byzantium and the Christians in the Lands of Islam", *Medieval Encounters* 3:3.

Griffith, S.H. (1998), "What has Constantinople to do with Jerusalem? Palestine in the Ninth Century: Byzantine Orthodoxy in the World of Islam", L. Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Guida, M. (2011) "Al-Afghānī and Namık Kemal's Replies to Ernest Renan: Two Anti-Westernist Works in the Formative Stage of Islamist Thought", *Turkish Journal of Politics* 2/2.

Gutas, Dmitri (1998), *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbāsid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)*, London: Psychology Press.

Haddad, R.M. (1982), "Iconoclasts and Mu'tazila: The Politics of Anthropomorphism", *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27: 2–3.

Hagen, G. (2009), "The Imagined and Historical Muḥammad", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129:1.

Haldon, J. (2006), "'Greek Fire' Revisited: Recent and Current Research", E. Jeffreys (ed.) *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization: Essays in Honour of Stephen Runciman*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heilo, O. (2014), "When Did Constantinople Actually Fall?", I. Nilsson and P. Stephenson (eds.) *Wanted – Byzantium: The Desire for a Lost Empire*, Uppsala: Uppsala University.

Heilo, O. (forthcoming), "Beyond Orientalism: Why we Need Byzantium to Understand Islam", M. Grünbart (ed.), *Verflechtungen zwischen Byzanz und dem Orient / Entanglements between Byzantium and the Orient*, Berlin: Byzantinische Studien und Texte.

Hemmerdinger, B. (1971), "Photius á Bagdad", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 64.

Herrin, Judith (1995 [1987]), *The Formation of Christendom*, Oxford: Princeton University Press.

el-Hibri, Tayeb (1999), *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hillenbrandt, R. (1999), "Anjar and Early Islamic Urbanism", G.P. Brogiolo and B. Ward-Perkins (eds.) *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden: Brill.

Høgel, C. (2010), "An Early Anonymous Greek Translation of the Qur'ān: The Fragments from Niketas Byzantios' *Refutatio* and the Anonymous *Abjuratio*", *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 7.

Hourani, Albert (1993), *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Howard-Johnston, James (2010), *Witnesses to a World Crisis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hoyland, Robert (1994), "The Correspondence of Leo III (717–741) and 'Umar II (717–720)", *Aram*6.

Hoyland, Robert (1997), *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (SLAEI 13), Princeton: Darwin Press.

Hülsen, Christian (1904), *Das Forum Romanum: seine Geschichte und seine Denkmäler*, Rome.

Irwin, R. (2005), "Petrarcha and that 'Mad Dog Averroës'", G. MacLean (ed.) *Re-orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jaspers, Karl (1936), *Nietzsche: Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens*, Berlin.

Jokisch, Benjamin (2007), *Islamic Imperial Law*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Jung, Carl Gustav (1997), *Jung's Seminar on Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, ed. J.L. Jarrett, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kaegi, Walter E. (2003), *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaegi, Walter E. (2011), *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaplony, Andreas (1996), *Konstantinopel und Damaskus: Gesandschaften und Verträge zwischen Kaisern und Kalifen 639–750*, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen 208, Berlin.

Kennedy, Hugh (1981), *The Early Abbāsid Caliphate*, Princeton: Croom Helm.

Keshani, H. (2004), "The Abbāsid Palace of Theophilus: Byzantine Taste for the Arts of Islam", *Al-Masaq* 16/1: 75–91.

Khalek, Nancy (2011), *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Khalidi, Tarif (1994), *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Landes, R. (1998), "Apocalyptic Expectations", W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Lassner, Jacob (1986), *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*, New Haven: American Oriental Society.

Lassner, Jacob (1990), *The Shaping of Abbāsid Rule*, Princeton.

Latour, Bruno (1991), *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, Paris.

Law, Timothy (2013), *When God Spoke Greek*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lecker, Michael (2004), *The Constitution of Medina: Muḥammad's First Legal Document*, Princeton: Darwin Press.

Levi, I. (1914), "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès", *Revue des études juives* 68: 129–160.

Lewis, B. (1990), "The Vanished Library", *New York Review of Books* 37/14.

Lim, Richard (1995), *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lindberg, David C. (1992), *The Beginnings of Western Science*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lings, Martin (1991), *Muḥammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.

Livne-Kafri, Ofer (2005), "On Muslim Jerusalem in the Period of its Formation", *Liber Annuus* 55.

McCrillis, Leon Neal (1974), *The Demonization of Minority Groups in Christian Society during the Central Middle Ages*, PhD thesis, University of California.

Maguire, Henri (2001), "The Good Life", G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar (eds.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Mango, Cyril (1972), *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Mango, Cyril (1975), "Books in the Byzantine Empire, AD 750–850", *Books and Bookmen in Byzantium*, Dumbarton Oaks.

Mango, Cyril (1977), "The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photius", A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds.) *Iconoclasm*, Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies.

Mango, Cyril (1992), "The Temple Mount, AD 614–638", J. Raby and J. Johns (eds.) *Bayt al-Maqdis: Abd al-Mālik's Jerusalem, Part One* (OSIAIX), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Masters, Bruce (2013), *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire 1516–1918: A Social and Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meier, M. (2014), "Kaiser Phokas (602–610) als Erinnerungsproblem", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 107/1.

Meyendorff, John (1964), "Byzantine Views of Islam", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18.

Meyendorff, John (1974), *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Fordham University Press.

Miles, G.C. (1948), "Early Islamic Inscriptions Near Ta'if in the Hijaz", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*7.

Morony, Michael G. (1984), *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Morony, Michael G. (1990), "The Age of Conversions: A Reassessment", M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi (eds.) *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian*

Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries (PMST 9), Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.

Nasrallah, Joseph (1950), *Saint Jean de Damas: Son époque – sa vie – son œuvre*, Harissa: Imp. Saint Paul.

Nilsson, I. (forthcoming), "The Literary Voice of a Chronicler", in R. Tocci (ed.), *The Brill Companion to Byzantine Chronicles*.

Obolensky, Dimitri (1971), *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453*, New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Oikonomides, N. (1986), "Silk Trade and Production: The Seals of Kommerkiarioi", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 40.

Olster, David M. (1994), *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew*, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Pentz, Peter (1992), *The Invisible Conquest: The Ontogenesis of Sixth and Seventh Century Syria*, Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark.

Popper, Karl (2004 [1957]), *The Poverty of Historicism*, London: Routledge.

al-Qadi, W. (1994), "The Religious Foundation of Late Umayyad Ideology and Practice", *Saber Religioso y Poder Politico en el Islam*, Madrid; reprinted in F. Donner (ed.), *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2012, 37–79.

Reinink, G.J. (1988), "Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser", W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, Mediaevalia Lovaniensia I:XV, Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Reinink, G.J. (1992), "Pseudo-Methodios: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam", A. Cameron and L.I. Conrad (eds.) *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material* (SLAEI1), Princeton: Darwin Press.

Reinink, G.J. (2002), "Heraclius, the New Alexander", G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte (eds.), *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, Leuven: Peeters.

Renard, John (2008), *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ricci, A. (1998), "The Road from Baghdad to Byzantium and the Case of the Bryas Palace in Istanbul," L. Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Ricoeur, Paul (1984), *Time and Narrative*, transl. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Robinson, Chase F. (2003), *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rochow, Ilse (1994), *Kaiser Konstantin V. (741–775)*, Berliner Byzantinische Studien 1, Frankfurt a. M.

Ronconi, F. (2013), "The Patriarch and the Assyrians: New Evidence for the Date of Photios' Library", *Segno e Testo* 11: 387–395.

Rotter, Ekkehart (1986), *Abendland und Sarazenen*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Samellas, Antigone (2002), *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean (50–600 AD): The Christianisation of the East, an Interpretation* (STAC 12), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Sarris, Peter (2006), *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sarris, Peter (2011), *Empires of Faith*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schick, Robert (1995), *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* (SLAEI 2), Princeton: Darwin Press.
Schöller, Marco (1998), *Exegetisches Denken und Prophetenbiographie*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
Shaban, M.A. (1970), *The 'Abbāsid Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sharf, Andrew (1995), *Jews and Other Minorities in Byzantium*, Jerusalem.
Sizgorich, Thomas (2009), *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Skaff, Jonathan K. (2012) *Sui-Tang China and its Turko-Mongol Neighbours: Culture, Power and Connections, 580–800*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Soler, Jean (2012), *Qui est Dieu?*, Paris: Éditions de Fallois.
Speck, P. (1998), "Cultural Suicide?", L. Brubaker (ed.), *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 73–84.
Stephenson, Paul (2010), *Constantine: Roman Emperor, Christian Victor*, New York: Overlook Press.
Stoneman, Richard (2008), *Alexander the Great: A Life in Legend*, Yale University Press.
Stratos, Andreas N. (1968), *Byzantium in the Seventh Century I–V*, transl. Marc Ogilvie-Grant, Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert.
Treadgold, Warren (1980), *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius*, Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies.
Treadgold, Warren (1988), *The Byzantine Revival*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Treadgold, Warren (2013), *The Byzantine Historians*, New York.
van Bekkum, W.J. (2002), "Jewish Messianic Expectations in the Age of Heraclius", G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte (eds.), *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, Leuven: Peeters.
van Donzel, Emeri, and Schmidt, Andrea Barbara (2010), *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources*, Leiden: Brill.
van Ess, Josef (1997), *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam (I–VI)*, Berlin: de Gruyter.
van Ess, Josef (2007), "Die Himmelfahrt Muḥammads und die frühe islamische Theologie", B. Reinert (ed.) *Islamische Grenzen und Grenzübergänge*, Bern: Peter Lang.
Vryonis, Speros (1965), "Byzantine Circus Factions and Islamic Futuwwa Organisations", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 58.
Walter, Christopher (2003), *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate.
Wellhausen, Julius (1960 [1902]), *Das Arabische Reich und sein Sturz, 2. unveränderte Auflage*, Berlin.
Wheeler, B.M. (1991), "Imagining the Sasanian Capture of Jerusalem", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 57.
Whittow, Mark (1996), *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
Wickham, Chris (2005), *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Winkelmann, Friedhelm (2001), *Der Monoergetisch-Monotheletische Streit*, Frankfurt.
Wiseman, Donald J. (1985), *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolf, K.B. (1990), "The Earliest Latin Lives of Muḥammad", M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi (eds.) *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (PMSt 9), Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.

Zakeri, Mohsen (1995), *Sasānid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society: The Origins of Ayyārūn and Futuwwa*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Zaman, Muḥammad Q. (1997), *Religion and Politics Under the Early Abbāsids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunnı Elite*, Leiden: Brill.

Index