

A prophet has appeared Coming with the Saracens”: The non-Islamic testimonies on the prophet and the Islamic conquest of Egypt in the 7th-8th centuries.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my teacher and friend Adrian Saunders († 2017).

*“Φέρ’ ὕδωρ, φέρ’ οἶνον, ὦ παῖ,
φέρε <δ’> ἀνθεμόεντας ἡμῖν
στεφάνους, ἔνεικον, ὥς δὴ
πρὸς Ἔρωτα πυκταλίζω”*

Anacreon 27D

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Thesis' Research Proposal

Introduction,

A. Status Questionis

The western view of Islam was always controversial. After the 9/11/2011 attack and the American wars in the Middle East, the media discussed much the warlike roots of the Islamic religion and the conquests. The discussion often focused on the birth of the Islamic religion and its relations with jihad. My thesis will focus on this aspect and particularly in the origins of Islam and particularly in the non-Muslim views of the Prophet Mohammad, the Early Islam and its initial conquests as they were seen by the non-Muslims. Since the topic is quite perplexed and vast, I shall restrict to the views on Egypt, on the first two centuries after the Islamic Hegira (630-750). Some of the drawbacks concerning this study is the little amount of non-Islamic evidence, on the literature. Just like Jesus Christ, who was almost not discussed by his contemporary Latin and Greek authors, the contemporary information of Mohammed comes from a few sources, as we will see¹.

The thesis will also discuss on how the Arabs and the Islamic conquest of Egypt were discussed and viewed in the non-Muslim 7th-8th century Egyptian sources as well as an analysis of the different interpretations on the early Islam and its conquests in these texts. My intentions are to collect, study, and analyze the different angles and ideological perspectives of the new religion. The questions that I shall introduce are the following: What was the description of the prophet and his mission in the early non-Muslim sources? Which were the different approaches between the Christians and the Copts, and how did each religious group reacted before and

¹ For the life of Jesus in Latin sources, see Tacitus *Annals* 15.44, Suetonius, *Nero* 16.

during the Arab invasion of Egypt? What was the main idea of the Coptic authors during the Arab occupation of Egypt and how these ideas were transformed during the 8th century? In a few words, that paper will mostly discuss some ideological approaches on the early Islam rather than history or events. Thus, this study will be consisted on three parts. After a brief introduction and the literature review, the first chapter will discuss the different non-Muslim views on the prophet and his preaching (630-40). Then, I shall proceed to the Greek sources. Next, I will discuss the various Coptic sources. In the last chapter, I will compare the information and summarize the outcome.

After reading the work of Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as other saw it* and the *Bibliographical history of the Muslim-Christian relationships*, I made source shortlist which I read and along with the contemporary literature, I discussed the various points of interest². One of my main strategies for this thesis was the extended analysis of each source separately as well a comparison in the end of the thesis. By doing this, I was able to distinguish the different ideological approaches on the topics and discuss the different views one by one and in comparison. Moreover, I read the Greek version of the texts, but the Coptic in translation. My main effort goes beyond cataloguing and demonstrating the main Non-Muslim sources. It is an effort on analyzing the source material with the help of modern research.

This thesis outcome is a two-sided story. First, I expect to have a solid attempt of mapping down and analyzing the different Non-Muslim perceptions towards the prophet and the early Islam. Second, this thesis brings to light some minor concepts and thoughts that were not included in detail by the research such as the date of the death of the prophet or the indirect

² In general, I followed the categorization made by Hoyland in different genres, for more see R. Hoyland, *Islam as others saw it, a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on Early Islam*, Princeton 1997, 32-34.

references to the Arab invasion in the Coptic anonymous sources. This thesis is not an attempt of analyzing the history of the Islamic conquests. I do not intend to discuss the birth of the Islamic religion either. My main effort is on analyzing the perceptions of the Non-Muslim, mostly of the Chalcedonian (Greek) and Copt Christians towards the early Islam. Thus, I will debate the attitudes, the related concepts and frameworks of the Non-Muslims towards the ways they viewed, discussed and wrote about the early Islam. My final intention is to represent the testimonies as a part of a larger Christian tradition, which differs from the Islamic. The choice of Egypt is not a coincident. Despite that much has been written on the history of the conquests, there are no studies on the different perceptions regarding Egypt in the non-Muslim sources. Moreover, so far there is no comparison on the different traditions (Greek-Egyptian) and their interpretations. But before proceeding to the sources, I shall discuss the literature review.

B. Literature review: The Arab-Christian relations in the 20-21st centuries: an amendment

The early 20th century research on the early Arab conquests in Egypt was dominated by Richard Butler. His monograph on the last thirty years of Byzantine dominance of Egypt merges almost all the major sources and is an essential guide for understanding the major events. His work is colossal, but lacks evidence in fields that were not developed during the 1900's, such as the study of the papyri and the Gnostic literature, the archaeological records and the modern studies of the "*obscure*" sources, such as John of Nikiu's Chronicle or The Doctrina Jacobi³. Butler used both Christian and Islamic sources; he was heavily influenced by the later Islamic

³ The 1902 version of Butler's work was re-edited by P. M Fraser in 1978, a brief overview of the changes is done by W.J. Aerts, *The Arab conquest of Egypt and the thirty years of the Roman dominion*, Mnemosyne 4, Vol 38, ¾ 1985, 449-50

texts (8th-9th century). His work influenced research, at 1950 Grohmann and later Morimoto edited the papyri of the early Islamic conquest of Egypt (641-750)⁴. Without any doubts, the most important work regarding the Christian-Muslim relationship was written in 1978 by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook. It was titled as *Hagarism: the making of the Islamic world*. This monograph was entirely focused on the Christian tradition on the Early Islam and the Arab conquests. The authors' novelties were two; first the research was entirely focused on how the non-Muslim saw the Arabs and their conquests, with a few references to the Arabic sources. Second, the authors presented and discussed the so-called model of *Judo-Hagarism*, an amalgam of Judaic elements incorporated into the early Islamic doctrine. This model was seen as controversial and received severe criticism. But, Crone/Cook were the first that discussed the other side of Islam, the non-Muslim sources. Thus, the importance of their work was beyond the hypothesis of the Judo-Hagarism.

The ideas of Crone/Cook received severe criticism but also influenced later research. In 1978, Wansbrough's work *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and composition of Islamic salvation*, was a study that examines the emergence of the Islamic religion in comparison to Christianity and Judaism is highly criticizing Judo-Hagarism. The main argument was that the Crone/Cook model was entirely fictional, as the Christian sources were obscure and untrustworthy. These arguments were popular during the 1980's, and despite the model of Judo-Hagarism was rejected, the Christian sources were further studied. The 1990's was a new era for the topic; Robert Hoyland's work *Seeing Islam as others saw it: an evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* was the first collection of non-Muslim sources in a single

⁴ One of the introductory works for the study of the modern papyri is A. Grohmann, *From the world of Arabic papyri*, Cairo 1952. The work of K. Morimoto, *The fiscal administration of Egypt in the Early Islamic period*, Dohoska 1981 can be considered as one of the fundamental works on the topic.

monograph⁵. Hoyland somehow continued the work of Crone/Cook. He provided modern translations of the texts and individually summarized all the previous studies. His work along with the volumes on the Arab-Christian relations (1998), they were milestones in the further study of the non-Islamic sources. The book of Hoyland and the Arab-Christian relations' works rejected the JudoHagar model. However, their careful analysis and criticism was an essential step towards understanding the nature of the sources as texts that discuss a different tradition of the Islam, which is in fact older than the earliest Islamic texts.

It is a hyperbole to state that the work of Crone/Cook affected the whole literature on the Arabic conquests. During the 1990's monographs related to the history of Alexandria (by Haas) and the Byzantine-Arab wars (by Kaegi) were published⁶. Moreover, sources like the *Doctrina Jacobi* or Sophronius were further studied and edited in French and English. The Byzantine anti-Judaic rhetoric which is the a major topic in texts that refer to Islam, such as the *Doctrina Jacobi* or the *Trophies of Damascus* were further discussed by scholars such as David Olster⁷. The Coptic literature, which was initiated in the 1970's was edited and translated by scholars such as Suermann.

The biggest achievement of Crone/Cook was not so much the creation of a new theory/model, since Judo-Hagarism is nowadays considered as obsolete, but the discussion of texts that were not popular or were considered as untrustworthy. Moreover, the major criticism that their work received was a starting point for further understanding and analyzing the Christian sources about the early Islam. In general, nowadays the early Islamic tradition is set

⁵ For a criticism of Robert Hoyland, see the criticism by Chase Robinson, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Third Series*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Nov., 2000), pp. 379-381

⁶ For more, see Walter Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge University Press, 1992 and see Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social context*, Baltimore 1997

⁷ See, David Olster, *Roman defeat Christian response and the literary construction of Jew*, Philadelphia 1994

within a wider concept of non-Islamic traditions which co-existed. My study aims at this direction. In particular, my paper will be about Egypt and the Islamic conquest. I briefly mentioned works on the history of Egypt during the late antiquity. However, not much was written on the Christian perceptions of the Early Islamic conquest of Egypt and its relation with the birth of the Islamic religion. My study wants to combine the non-Christian references of the prophet with those on the early conquest of Egypt. My intention, unlike Crone/Cook is not to discuss the JudeoHagar model or reconstruct the history of the Islamic conquest but to trace and discuss the major arguments of the non-Muslim towards Islam and Egypt. In other words, I strategically focus on the ideological perspective of the non-Muslim and try to understand the role of Islam in their texts. My further aim is to discuss whether these ideas can be blended up together and if they can be used as a part of a different tradition that pre-existed the Islamic texts, which were written 200 years after the invasions. Moreover, is to analyze the different perceptions in the Greek and Coptic texts about the Arabs and the conquest of Egypt. My final outcome is far beyond the ideas of Crone/Cook.

C. Sources' Selection

In general, this thesis deals with three categories of sources. The first category is the testimonies on the prophet; the texts (Doctrina Jacobi, Sebeos' History, secrets of Rabbi Simon) are the earliest evidence about the prophet. Unlike the later Islamic references, these texts describe Mohammed as a false prophet, who along with the Jews was engaged in atrocities in Palestine and not as a religious leader. Moreover, the texts are describing the prophet not as a religious leader but as a ruthless bandit; despite research has often described the texts as testimonies as unreliable, 7th CE religious texts, in fact the texts describe the emotions, thoughts and ideology of the Christians towards the prophet and the early Islam. Since my thesis' main

intention is to describe the Christian views towards Mohammed and the early Islam, these texts represent the raw, bitter early impression on the prophet's life and preaching in the eyes of the Christians. The prophet's mission and means are far different than those described in the later Christian Islamic texts. They represent an early tradition which is different than the Islamic and Christian views of the 8th century. Since my thesis is concentrating on the early testimonies, these sources perfectly match with my initial objective.

As for the sources on Egypt, most of the Greek texts were not composed in Egypt. Most of the authors were anchorites in Egyptian monasteries or lived in Egypt for a quite while, thus they had strong affiliation with the Egyptian Christianity. The Greek speaking authors have both direct and indirect references to the conquest of Egypt, which are usually depicting the Arabs as non-religious, warlike groups. Moreover, these authors are mostly Orthodox pro-Chalcedonian. They represent the official Christian doctrine which was promoted and supported by the emperors. Thus, the sources have strong ideological and religious views. All Greek sources agree that Heraclius' religious program disrupted the Church's unity and refer less to the Arab military power. Moreover, they see the Arabs as a non-religious warlike group of bandits. The texts do not concentrate entirely on the Arabs since they serve different purposes, but their image is far from being described as a new religion. Since the authors were far-away from Egypt or the conquests (with the exception of Sophronius), the Greek texts represent a less vivid description of the conquests. In relation to the main question of this thesis, which is analyzing the different views of the Christians towards Islam, the Greek sources tend to have a cold, more distant view on the conquests which is often embedded with hate against the Coptic Christian communities.

On the contrary, the Coptic sources have a more deliberate view of Islam. Since the Copts were subjected to the Islamic conquerors, they have direct references to them. Almost all

texts discuss the early Islamic rule in Egypt with direct views and the only exception is in the early apocalyptic texts that usually have allegoric references. These texts represent the feelings, thoughts and initial response of the Copts towards the early Islam. The main characteristic of the texts is the gradual expansion of the Muslim authorities towards the Coptic communities, which welcomed the Arabs with positive attitudes at first but were gradually subjected to a more severe rule. In general, all texts represent and discuss the views of the earliest Christians against the Islam and its expansion. The differences between the Greek and the Coptic texts apart from the language are huge. The Greek authors represent the Chalcedonian Orthodox Church, which was the dominant dogma in Egypt during the 4th-7th centuries. On the contrary, the Copts were the Egyptian Christians that were subjected to many persecutions during the Byzantine dominance of Egypt (330-616, 624-41) but became the legal Christian community after the Islamic conquest. In a few words, these two groups of sources represent two different groups of Christianity that co-existed in Egypt. So far, no study has combined these sources or used them in accordance for discussing the Islam and its expansion. My main goal, as mentioned is to gather all the main testimonies for the Islamic conquest of Egypt and try understand on how the first Muslim were seen by the Christians. These testimonies represent the major texts that describe the initial interaction between these two parties, and their overall value as we will see is fundamental for understanding the Christian tradition on the birth and the emergence of the early Islam.

1.) Early representations of the prophet in the non-Islamic literature

A. *The Doctrina Jacobi*

i.) *Date, summary and Authorship*

The discussion on the early Islam is not well-documented in the Byzantine Histories. Most of the information comes from later authors like Theophanes (9th century), who discussed about Islam on a 9th perspective, which was indeed influenced by the later Islamic literature⁸. However, one interesting document contains some useful information on the early Islam. The earliest reference to the prophet was found on a leaflet, which is dated around the mid 7th century and named as “Teaching of the Neobaptist Jacob”. There is no information regarding the author apart from his name and it is considered as the first, anonymous source concerning the Christians and Islam.

The text has a description on the prophet before or shortly after his death. This tract speech deals with a fictional dispute between a former Jew, forced to be baptized as Christian, named Jacob, and three other newly-baptized former Jews⁹. The text was written in a form of dialogue, and is rich in religious arguments between three Jews and a Christian converted ex-Jew who claims the sovereignty of the Christian doctrine against the Hebrews as well as describes the condition of the Byzantine Empire on the eve of the Arab expansion, with elaborate eschatological arguments¹⁰. The date of the text was either 634 or 640 and it was probably

⁸For a general overview on Theophanes and the early Islam, see Błażej Cecota, *Islam, the Arabs and Umayyad Rulers According to Theophanes the Confessor's Chronography*, *Studia Ceranea* 2, 2012, 97-101

⁹ For an introduction on the story of Doctrina Jacobi, see Sean Antony, *Muhammad, the keys*, 244-48

¹⁰ An interesting example on the Empire as the 4th beast of Daniel is in Doctrina Jacobi III.12.1.6

composed in Palestine but is set in Carthage¹¹. The text has survived in different versions and languages; the Greek (in five manuscripts) and in later translations in Ethiopic, Slavonic and Syriac¹².

ii. Context

Jacob is the story's main character. He is depicted as a wealthy Jewish merchant who arrives from Constantinople to Carthage to arrange business and he is captured, imprisoned and forced to baptize (in Pentecost, May 632). After he reads the scripts he becomes a devotee of the Christian doctrine¹³. Then he tries to convince his fellow newly-baptized Christian, ex-Jewish companions about the superiority of Christianity by examples that derive from the scripts and history. The text is a dialogue, possibly written for a Jewish audience; the text follows a religious dispute on doctrinal issues that derive from the scripts. In general, the efficiency of *The Doctrina Jacobi*, in terms of representing strong and stereotypical Chalcedonian Christian views regarding the 7th century Jewry is high. The text is an anti-Jewish tirade and not a history or a chronicle, thus its main intention is to provide theological arguments regarding the superiority of Christianity against Judaism¹⁴.

In general, *The Doctrina Jacobi* discusses some aspects that were silenced by other sources, such as the Anti-Jewish decree of Heraclius in 632¹⁵. There are however, two major issues concerning the reliability of the source; first is the date of the text. First, Dagron and

¹¹ For the dispute on date of the text, see Sean Anthony, *Muhammad, the keys*, 247, c.10-11 for an overview of the date of the text.

¹² G. Dagron et V. Deroche, *Doctrina Jacobi, la tradition du text*, 49-52

¹³ *Doctrina Jacobi*, I, 6-7

¹⁴ For an introduction on the story, see Peter Van de Horst, *A short note on the Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati*, in *Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, Brill, 2014, 2-3. In general, the *Doctrina Jacobi* resembles to *Adversus Judos*, an anti-Judaic tirade of the 7th century, for more see H. Griffith, *Jews and Muslims in Christian, Jewish and Arabic texts of the 9th century*, *The Jewish History*, Vol.3, No1, Spring 1988, 86

¹⁵ Averil Cameron, *Byzantines and Jews: Some recent work on the Early Byzantium*, *BMGS* 20, (1994), 250

Deroche dated the text between 632 and 646/7 indicating the latter as a *terminus ante quem*¹⁶. Speck has argued about the date of the text; he suggested that *The Doctrina Jacobi* is a compilation of sources merged into a single manuscript during or after the 12th century. His main argument is that the text has interpolations from later centuries¹⁷. The ideas of Speck remain unpopular and in general were rejected by modern scholarship as inaccurate¹⁸. The importance of *the Doctrina Jacobi*, can be summarized in the following words, *The Doctrina Jacobi* is not an optimal historical narrative but is a 7th century text of great value to historians for information on the 7th century¹⁹”.

In general, the text, he follows a strict religious pro-Chalcedonian polemic argumentation (The Creed was adopted at the Council of Chalcedona in 451, and condemned Monophysitism as well proposed the model of two natures of Christ) , but does not hesitate to inform the audience about his youth and prior life, which was apparently restless²⁰. In the text, Jacob argues with three Jewish, one of whom is Justus, an old friend of Jacob who is from Palestine. Justus’ writes about his escape from Palestine, after a massacre and informs him of a prophet that has risen among the Saracens and names himself as a prophet. The text goes as follows:

“*My brother Abraham wrote (a letter)... that a false prophet arrived. Then, when Sergius the general (κανδιδάτορ) was slaughtered by the Saracens in Caesaria, Abraham came to Sykaminis by boat. And he said that when the general was slaughtered, the Jews had great joy. And they said that the prophet came along with the Saracens and is preaching the coming of the*

¹⁶ G. Dagron, *Juifs et Chrétiennes*, 246-7.

¹⁷ H. Speck, 1997, *Varia VI: Beiträge zum Thema Byzantinische Feindseligkeit gegen die Juden im frühen siebten Jahrhundert*, *Poikila Byzantina* 15, Bonn, 457-8.

¹⁸ For more, see Walter Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion*, 36. Sean Anthony, *Muhammad, the keys* 247.

¹⁹ Walter, Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion*, 36, c.103.

²⁰ Jacob was apparently joining the circus factions and rioting during his youth. For more see *Doctrina Jacobi* I.40,1, I.11, V.20 apparently Jacob was a member of the Blues. For more, see Alan Cameron, *Circus factions: Blues Greens At Rome and Byzantium*, Oxford 1976.

Anointed (*Ηλειμμένον*) and Christ, and when I arrived at Sikamina I found an old man who had knowledge inscripts. “What are you telling me...for the prophet that came along with the Saracens. “He is an imposter (*πλάνος*). The prophets do not come with sword and arms²¹”.

“So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood. He even says that he hold the keys to paradise, which is incredible²².”

Although the prophet Mohammed is not mentioned by name, it is obvious that the passage refers to him. The text also refers to the 633 Arab sack of Caesarea, which is also documented in other sources²³. The testimony does not describe the Saracens as Muslims, or an organized group, but integrates them in the anti-Jewish tract narrative, which was a common rhetorical tool in the 7th century Chalcedonian anti-Jewish tirades²⁴. These should be understood in the content of the policy of Heraclius and the anti-Jewish campaign that followed the Byzantine triumph against the Sassanids. Heraclius’ anti-Jewish colophon was the decree of June/July 632, when all Jews of the Empire were forced to get baptized²⁵.

First and most important is the figure of the prophet in *The Doctrina Jacobi*. Interestingly, it is the earliest text to mention Mohammed and one of the earliest accounts that debates the death of Mohammed. According to the Muslim sources, the prophet died in 632. *The Doctrina Jacobi* is one of the oldest 7th century non-Islamic sources that represent the prophet as the leader of the Saracens in the Arab conquest of Palestine. Recent scholars have questioned the

²¹ Doctrina Jacobi, V.16

²² Doctrina Jacobi, V. 16.19, for the translation, Sean Anthony, *Muhammad the Keys*, 246

²³ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 633

²⁴ Shaun O’ Sullivan *Anti-Jewish polemic and the Early Islam*, The bible in Arab Christianity, Brill, 2006, 50-51

²⁵ For the forced baptize of the Jews, see G. Dagron, *Juifs et Chrétiens dans l'Orient du VII^e siècle*, Travaux et Mémoires 11 (1991), 260-8. For an introduction to the Judo-Byzantine relationship see also in Andrew Sharf, *Jews and other minorities in Byzantium*, Bari Lan, Israel, 1995, 96-109, see also page 102 for the 632 degree.

validity of the testimony. Griffith's view on *the Doctrina Jacobi* is that it is an unreliable text²⁶. The interesting thing about *The Doctrina Jacobi* does not lie on whether it is historical accurate or not. Overall, the text reflects an old Christian tradition that connects the prophet with the Messianic land of hope, as research has stated, but this idea was challenged by research²⁷. This tradition portrays the prophet as an imposter and a false prophet. Despite that the prophet has not been depicted as a Messiah in the old Islamic tradition, early 7th century Jewish communities understood the preaching of Mohammed as fulfillment of Jewish Messianic expectations²⁸. One of the most elaborate examples of this trend is the apocryphal work of the 7th century, titled the Secrets of Rabbi Shim'on as well as the History of Sebeos, in which the prophet is seen as the Messiah of the Jews. There is no doubt that the author of *The Doctrina Jacobi* was well aware of their contemporary Judaic eschatological concepts. The Judaic communities of Palestine supported the Sassanids during the long-term war against the Byzantines and after their defeat and the Heraclius' persecution and the creed of 631 many of them hailed the Arab expansion. Thus, the creation of a new messiah for the Jewish community was a natural reaction that followed the defeat and the Byzantine suppression.

In general, it is difficult to re-construct the initial ideological relationship between the early Muslim communities and the Jews, because the evidence is limited. Crone and Cook have stated that the Jewish Messianic views of the 7th century had a serious impact on the development of the early Islamic doctrine, but this has been questioned as *The Doctrina Jacobi*

²⁶ S. Griffith, *Jews and Muslims*, 86-87

²⁷ Stephen Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet* 26

²⁸ P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: The making of the Islamic world*, Cambridge 1977, chapter 1, 3-10. The ideas of Crone and Cook are commented on Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 3-5

reflects a farfetched Christian tradition and is not a historical analysis²⁹. Moreover, in the text of *Doctrina Jacobi* the Saracens are often represented as merged with Jews against the Christian population; this is a Christian view about Islam, which is incorporated into the anti-Jewish discourse³⁰. In general, the text's importance is high because it represents some unique depictions of the Early Islamic doctrine that were not presented in Muslim sources. One of them is the representation of the prophet as the key-holder of Paradise. According to the Christian religion, Peter was granted the keys to the paradise as he was the first to witness Christ as the God's prophet. The paradise-key theme was popular throughout the Late Antiquity. Thus, this depiction was also used as a metaphor on the efficiency of preaching as a mean for achieving the kingdom of God, hence their importance was high. An important detail is the distinction in the Early Islamic texts between the keys of earth and heavens, which are cosmological and is attributed to God and the keys of paradise which is eschatological³¹. It seems as if this peculiar phrase is highlighting the eschatological image of the prophet and is not used with a religious sense by the author(s). Although Crone/Cook saw the key motif in *The Doctrina Jacobi* as an older tradition of Hadith which was "sublimated into a harmless metaphor" as they stated, therefore it has no religious character in the text, it is more likely that it is an eschatological argument that portrays the prophet as the Messiah; like Peter in the Christian tradition, here the prophet holds the keys to the paradise, he is the chosen one from God³². However, since this text was written from a Christian perspective, this might be an inaccurate Christian metaphor on the prophet. According to Sean Antony, the theme of the prophet as a key-holder of Paradise is a

²⁹ P. Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 3. For the dispute, see J. Wansborough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and composition of Islamic salvation History*, Oxford 1977 117

³⁰ *Doctrina Jacobi*, V.17.25: "I believe in God, lord Jacob, that even if the Saracens and the Jews will catch me and cut me in pieces I shall not deny Christ, the son of God"

³¹ For more, see Sean Anthony, *Mohammed, Keys*, 248-54

³² P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism*, 4

unique early Islamic eschatological belief which is confirmed for the first time in a non-Muslim source. If the text was composed during the 7th century, it can be a later Islamic element which was used as an argument in this tract³³. My opinion is that these phrases can be used in a more precise dating of the text and mostly the manuscripts of *the Doctrina Jacobi*, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis³⁴.

The prophet's mission and expansion are also mentioned in *the Doctrina Jacobi*. Without any doubts, violence, conquest and slavery were encouraged in the birth and the emergence of the early Islam³⁵. On the other hand, the Christian tradition had an opposite view on the Messiah, who rejected violence and conquest. If we accept that the tract was written for a Judaic converted into Christian audience, the portrayal of the prophet as a slaughterer was enough for convincing his audience about his falsity. After all, the prophet is preaching the coming of the Christ and the Anointed one. Christians rejected this belief, since for them the prophet is a non-violent person and not a conqueror. Moreover, the authenticity of the prophet is not questioned by Jacob or a Christian but by an old man who had great knowledge of the Bible (probably a Jew), so his opinion is enough to characterize the prophet as false. One aspect that research has not discussed much is the use of this text and its role in the 7th century Anti-Jewish Heraclius' propaganda. The majority of research places the text as a part of the 7th century anti-Judaic polemics and rejects its uniqueness, the fact that it was written shortly after the Arab invasions. In my opinion, one of the purposes of the text was its use as an ideological embankment against the Judaic conversion to Islam. By the time it was written, the formality of the Islamic doctrine was an ongoing process,

³³ Sean Antony, *Mohammed keys*, 263

³⁴ Ibid., 262-3.

³⁵ Fred Donner Muhammad and the believers at the Origins of Islam, Harvard, 2010, 82 ,Michael Lecker, *The Jewish reaction to the Islamic conquests in Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions and Comparative Perspectives* (edit. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke), Leiden, 2012 180-2

blending elements from the Judaic eschatology in combination with Arbahamic and Samaritan motifs³⁶. The persecuted Jews had more than one reason to consider the prophet as the Messiah, and this fictional dialogue is probably a negative answer to this dilemma.

The text provides some accurate geographical and historical details regarding Palestine with high accuracy, which are also documented in other sources³⁷. Second and most important, the text echoes and records many pre-Islamic elements which were forgotten in the later tradition, such as the motif of the keys. This idea was first stated by Crone/Cook, it was debated by modern scholarship³⁸. In fact, despite being accurate, the text's main objective is to highlight the superiority of Christianity and not discuss the Islamic doctrine. Elements such as the keys to the paradise can be reflections of the Christian traditions which were seen as part of the early Islam. The prophet is not the main character of the text, but he is incorporated in the narrative as a part of the Judo-Christian conflict, the Messianic ideas are reflecting the Heraclius' persecution. In a few words, the text represents old series of related ideas about Islam which help us understand more the initial concepts of Islam.

B. The rest of the sources concerning the Prophet

i. The secrets of Rabbin Simon bar Yohai, date and authorship

In general, the non Muslim sources dealing with the prophet and written during his life or shortly after are not many. The next source is the so-called *The Secrets of Rabbin Simon bar Yohai*. It is a Jewish apocalyptic text which was probably composed during the Arab invasions and was re-written in the 8th century. Older research dated the text around the 8th century but contemporary

³⁶ This idea is mostly known from P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism*, 12

³⁷ For the topography of *Doctrina Jacobi*, see G. Dagron, *Juifs*, 246-7. P.Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism* 4-5, also M. Lecker, *Jewish reaction*, 197

³⁸ For the topography of *Doctrina Jacobi*, see G. Dagron, *Juifs*, 246-7. P.Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism* 4-5, also M. Lecker, *Jewish reaction*, 197

research considers the text as a compilation of older ideas that reflect the Arabic conquests and which probably was written during or shortly after the Arab conquest of Palestine (roughly around 630-50)³⁹. The text is considered as pseudonymous as there is no information about the author .

ii. Context

The text describes the Arab invasion in Palestine from a Judaic 7th century apocalyptic perspective, as a part of the Salvation against the Byzantine suppression. Mohammed is seen as the Jewish messiah who along with the Ishmaelite will restore the world order. Two of the related extracts go as follows:

“Do not be afraid, mortal, for the Holy One, blessed be He, is bringing about the kingdom of Ishmael only for the purpose of delivering you from that wicked one (that is, Edom [Rome]). In accordance with His will He shall raise up over them a Prophet. And he will conquer the land for them. And they shall come and restore it with grandeur. Great enmity will exist between them and the children of Esau⁴⁰.”

“He raises over them a crazy prophet, possessed by a spirit, and he conquers the land for them. And they come and seize dominion in greatness and there will be great enmity between them and the sons of Esau⁴¹.”

³⁹ For an overview, see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 308-12. For the date of the text, see also St. Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 27-28. In fact Shoemaker discussed the older translation of the text by Lewis and provides a new translation in page 30, it is the one I used for this edition.

⁴⁰ *Secrets of Rabbi*, 3:78. I used the translation of St. Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 28

⁴¹ *Secrets of Rabbi*, 25. I used the translation by St. Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 30. This passage comes from the so-called Cairo Geniza text.

The text contains some ideas similar to those found in *The Doctrina Jacobi*. The author(s) represent the prophet as a savior and the conquests were seen as a part of the salvation against the corrupted dominance of the Byzantines. Crone/Cook saw this text as another testimony of a messianic understanding of the Islamic conquests among the Jews. However, it seems as there were at least two different traditions (Greek and Hebrew), apart from the Islamic one. The *Doctrina Jacobi* is following the Christian tradition. On this basis Stephen Shoemaker discussed the different Christian tradition on the death of the prophet, which unlike the Islam, depicts Mohammed alive during the conquest of the Palestine, which is an interesting detail regarding his life and how the Christians saw him⁴².

Overall, the text's views the prophet's conquests as a part of a larger plan that derives from God and seeks in restoring the world order. The prophet here, unlike the *Doctrina Jacobi* is not depicted negatively, and the validity of his mission is not questioned. Moreover, unlike *the Doctrina Jacobi* the Muslims are referred to as *Ishmaelites* are mentioned in this text, but since the text is a compilation of older documents it is not sure when this epithet was added later. In general, this text represents the tight ideological relationship between the early Islam and Judaism. Crone/Cook discussed the early tight alliance between Islam and Judaism, the development of the early Islamic doctrine was highly affiliated by Judaism and especially from the 7th century Judaic apocalypticism, but was aborted later on⁴³. The development of the Islamic doctrine was a complicated procedure, as during its historical process it counteracted and borrowed many elements from the monotheistic religions. The tight bonds that initially connected Islam with the Jewish apocalypticism were broken once the Islamic religion was self-defined as an Abrahamic religion. Since the text was re-written, possibly multiple times it is

⁴² St. Shoemaker, *Death of a prophet*, 34

⁴³ P. Crone, M. Cook, *Hagarism*, 10-15

impossible to know its original context and words, or whether it presents discourses on an early phase of the Islamic doctrine, but it is an interesting Jewish aspect on the prophet, which is in fact different than the Islamic tradition.

iii. The Armenian History Attributed to the Bishop Sebeos: Date and Authorship

The last text that will be discussed here was composed by the Armenian bishop and historian, Sebeos. For his life little is known. He was a 7th century monk, who lived during the Sassanid occupation and Arab conquest of Armenia, and wrote a history work known as *The History of Sebeos*. It is a history of the near East from 572 to 661. The date of his work was probably during the 660's⁴⁴. The work of Sebeos discusses various episodes from the early Islamic history, such as the prophet, the emergence and conquests of Islam, the first Fitna (656-61 the civil war between the Arabs)⁴⁵.

iv. Context

Although virtually nothing is known about Sebeos, his work contains some of the earliest testimonies about Islam. Sebeos' work is teleological; the end of the world will come with the kingdom of Ishmaelites, which is viewed as the fourth beast of Daniel's vision⁴⁶. Sebeos has an interesting account on the birth of the Islamic religion:

“Taking desert roads, they [the prophet and his companions] went to Tachkastan, to the sons of Ismael, summoned them to their aid and informed them of their blood relationship through the testament of scripture. But although the latter were persuaded of their close relationship, yet

⁴⁴ The so-called Chronicle of Sebeos was *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* (edit., transl., notes R.W. Thomson), Translated texts for Historians, 2 volumes, Liverpool 1999

⁴⁵ For the text's date, see *The Armenian History*, xxxiiiv-xxxix, for Sebeos' personality lx-lxiii

⁴⁶ Sebeos, 177, Also, R. Hoyland, *Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam, Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish relations*, Vol. 2, Psychology Press, 1992, 92

they were unable to bring about agreement within their great number, because their cults were divided from each other.

At that time a certain man from among those same sons of Ismael whose name was Mahmet, a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learned and informed in the history of Moses. Now because the command was from on high, at a single order they all came together in unity of religion. Abandoning their vain cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. So Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication. He said: "with an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him forever. And he brought about as he promised during that time while he loved Israel"⁴⁷."

For Sebeos, the first alignment between the Jews and Mohammed and his tribes started after some Jewish refugees fled from Edessa, after the city's siege and capture by the Byzantines in the Byzantine-Persian Wars (626). In general, research has stated that this argument is related to one of the earliest phases of the Islamic doctrine that Crone/Cook called *Judeo-Hagarism*⁴⁸. Research has disputed this aspect as the Sebeos' account is an anonymous chronicle and is treated as an anonymous ecclesiastical history⁴⁹. Moreover, it underlines the relationship between Hagar, who is represented by the prophet's bloodline and Abraham, yet it is merged through the Jewish refugees⁵⁰. Mohammed used the teaching of Abraham as the central point of his religion, thus Judaism is considered as a major point in the birth of Islam. Moreover, the

⁴⁷ Sebeos, *Chronicle*, 134, translation in R. Hoyland, *Sebeos, The Jews* 89

⁴⁸ P.Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism*, 3

⁴⁹ For more, see R. Hoyland, *Sebeos, the Jews* 89-90

⁵⁰ R. Hoyland, *ibid*, 93

Commandments of God to Moses are mentioned. Here, the prophet is seen as an imitator of Moses who is promising a second exodus. In general, Hagarism and Judaism, as they were stated by Crone/Cook are evident in the text, and is confirmed by the previous example, research suggests that the alignment was often exaggerated by scholars⁵¹. According to Hoyland, “Then Sebeos description on the Jews flight into the dessert and gathering under Mohammed’s banner would signal only the enactment of a well-worn Jewish messianic fantasy”, according to him the Sebeos story is not trustworthy and is overwhelmed by teleology, he writes after the events and reconstructs his narrative accordingly. But without any doubts here the prophet is represented less negative in comparison to *Doctrina Jacobi* and the *Secrets*, but is fit in the same 7th century narrative; the prophet’s preaching is highly influenced by the Jewish religion according to this narrative. In general all texts represent the prophet as a merchant who preached the Abrahamic kerugma and composed an amalgam of Judaism with Hagarism. In the next chapter I shall discuss how the Greeks and Copts saw this merge and whether we can draw safe conclusions about its origins and beliefs.

To summarize, these three texts represent three different views on the prophet. They depict him as an imposter, as a savior and as a merchant. Although these depictions are different they are a part of a different tradition which is in fact older than the Islamic. Crone/Cook stated that these texts discuss elements of the early Islam which were forgotten during its history. But, modern research has stated that they are different traditions and their use should be with caution since they were written for Christian (except *Visions* which is a Jewish text) audience and their goal is not to represent the Islamic dogma but to boldly state the superiority of Christianity against the other religions.

⁵¹ Ibid, 89, c.3,

Chapter 2

The Greek-Egyptian sources and testimonies regarding the Early Islam and the Invasions

A. An Overview: Egypt on the eve of the Islamic conquest.

In the previous chapter, some of the most important testimonies regarding the prophet and the rise of Islam were discussed. In this chapter, I shall analyze the related sources to the Islamic conquest of Egypt. But before that, I will briefly discuss the history of Egypt before the Arab conquests. My initial objective is to give an idea on the religious conflicts of Egypt, and especially Alexandria on the eve of the Arab revolts.

On the dawn of the 7th century Egypt and particularly Alexandria went through tumultuous times. Fifty years after the Chalcedon's Council (451), the religious dispute was still at a stake. Marcian's (450-57) attempt of unifying the churches under the Chalcedonian Creed led to a further fragmentation and excessive violence in Egypt and particularly in Alexandria⁵². From 451 onwards two different patriarchs co-existed in Alexandria, the Orthodox (usually sent from Constantinople) and the Coptic. The Byzantine Chalcedonians were unofficially supported by the emperor and often organized persecutions against the Monophysite Copts. But the state's ideology was subjected to the different perception of each emperor and his court, therefore the anti-Chalcedonian persecutions varied accordingly to each emperor's religious program. In fact emperors like Anastasius (491-517) and Justinian (527-565) followed different strategies to confront the Chalcedonian Creed and the Egyptian Monophysite groups but their efforts did not

⁵² For an overview on 5th century Alexandria, see Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 21-31

end the theological dispute⁵³. Heraclius (611-41) followed a similar strategy. Just like his predecessors was opposed to religious pluralism; thus, his proposed solution was a formula that could bypass the doctrinal adversities of the Chalcedon Creed. Monoergism was the name of his proposed doctrine, arguing that Christ had two natures and One Energy, the Divine. This doctrinal view was not successful and caused a new intense religious dispute in Egypt from theologians such as Sophornius, as we will see. The doctrine was replaced by Monothelitism, which was also unpopular.

In the meantime, the Sassands conquered Egypt (619-29). Research describes the invasion as violent at first but in general terms tolerant towards the Christians, while the administration was similar to the Byzantine⁵⁴. After the war ended, the Byzantines recaptured Egypt. Heraclius' post-Sassanid religious policy in Egypt was directed towards unifying the different Christian groups (Orthodox-Copts) with *Monothelitism*, a new doctrinal remedy. Eventually his program failed⁵⁵. This unsuccessful religious policy along with the anti-Jewish polemics of Heraclius and the forced baptism of Jews in 632/633 led to further fragmentation on the eve of the Arab revolts. Heraclius' Monothelitism formula was rejected by Chalcedonians/Copts and created great controversy. This is evident in the Greek sources, as we will see.

⁵³ For the topic, see W.H.C. Frend, *The rise of Monophysite movement*, Cambridge 1972, ix-xvi. W.H.C. Frend's analysis on Zeno and Justinian's degrees on "narrowing" the gap between the Monophysites and the Orthodox is analyzed in pages 184-221 and 255-296 respectively.

⁵⁴ Saeid Jalalipour, *Persian Occupation of Egypt 619-629: Politics and Administration of Sasanians*, in e-Sasanica, Graduate paper 10, 2014, 13

⁵⁵ For an overview of the religious policy of Heraclius, see *Sophronius of Jerusalem and Seventh Century Heresy: The synodical letters and other documents* (edit., trnsl. Pauline Allen), Oxford 2009, 23-26

B. The Greek sources

i. The Patriarch Sophronius: The Synodical Letter, date and authorship

The first source that discusses the Arab invasions was composed by the patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronius (560-638). Sophronius was a Syrian Greek teacher of rhetoric and later an anchorite in Egypt and a monk in Saint Theodosius, Bethlehem. He was restless and travelled in Constantinople, Rome and Alexandria. During the end of his life he was elected archbishop of Jerusalem (634). He was a prolific 7th century author; his work includes poetry, sermons, letters and theological treatises. Overall, he was a profound supporter of the Chalcedonian doctrine. He rejected and condemned the Monothelitism dogma, and in 633 he proposed a new doctrinal formula, the *Diothelitism*: Christ has both human and divine Will (*Θέλησις*)⁵⁶. Sophronius' was a profound fighter against the imperial creed, but he was unsuccessful. During his life the doctrine was not condemned. As patriarch of Jerusalem, he surrendered the city to Umar without a siege. In his writings, he gives an early discourse on the Early Islam.

The first text about Islam is in his work titled as *The Synodical letter*. This source is a long letter which was addressed to Pope Honorius (625-38), the letter bears no date but research dates it to late 633-early 634⁵⁷, it was written in Classical Greek (Αττική διάλεκτος). The main scope of the letter is to analyze the superiority of the Chalcedonian Creed.

ii. Context:

In the Synodical letter, Sophronius has a detailed narration on the ecumenical synods and their decisions in the last part of the letter he discusses the different heresies. In the end of the text, he has a small note on the Arabs:

⁵⁶ Ibid, 36-40

⁵⁷ Pauline Allen, *Sophronius*, 47 for the date see c95

“a strong and vigorous scepter to break the pride of all the barbarians, and especially of the Saracens who, on account of our sins, have now risen up against us unexpectedly and ravage all with cruel and feral design, with impious and godless audacity⁵⁸.”

The author does not discuss the prophet neither does he consider the Saracens as a religious group. Kaegi stated that Sophronius was unaware of the Islamic religion, which is doubted by modern scholars⁵⁹. Sophronius' use of the word *Saracens* and the raids as punishment of the sinful Christians, later in the text Sophronius wishes that the pious emperor should crash them, as they can be used as a footstool (*ὑποπόδιον*) to our God-given rulers. Sophronius has used the argument, that the Saracens is a God-given punishment which derives from the Christians sins a couple of times in his work⁶⁰. He represents the Arab invasion as a divine-sent punishment, which prevails Christians from achieving Salvation. This argument is also found in Pseudo-Methodius (7th century) and later Christian apologists, for example in 1453⁶¹. The second reference to the Arabs in Sophronius' work is in his *Christmas Sermon*, which was probably written around 634. The content of this sermon was delivered at the *Church of Theotokos of Jerusalem*. During the time he delivered this speech, the Arabs were engaged in conflict in the outskirts of Jerusalem. Sophronius' main target is to alert the Christian population against the Arab invasions. On this speech, Sophronius highlights the Arab siege of Jerusalem; he compares the barricaded Christians of Jerusalem with Adam's exile from Paradise⁶². The Arabs are seen once more as the tool of God that is not allowing Christians from celebrating God

⁵⁸ Sophronius., Sermon 2.7.3, translation is from Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 69

⁵⁹ W. Kaegi, *Initial reactions*, 140

⁶⁰ For more, see Sophronius, *Christmas Sermon* 506, 516, *Holy Baptism* 155-6, 162-3

⁶¹ For the Arabs as tools of God in Methodius, see Pseudo-Methodius 11.5 and Leo D. Lefebure, *Violence in the New Testament and the History of Interpretation*, 89-90. The 1453 sack of Constantinople was seen as a punishment of the emperor for his attempts on unifying the Churches, for more, see Evagelos Chrysos, *Περὶ παιδείας λόγος*, in *Myriobiblos: Essays on Byzantine Literature and Culture*, Walter De Gruyter, 2012 96-97, c52, 53

⁶² Sophronius, *Christmas Sermon*, 514. For more see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 70

in his birthplace. Sophronius describes the Arab attacks as monstrous and barbaric (*θηριώδη καὶ βάρβαρον*). It is interesting that Sophronius makes a distinction between the Saracens, the Hagarenes and the Ishmaelites:

“And the Heshmailite sword we will blunt, and we will avoid the Saracen knife, and we will stop the Hagarine bow⁶³...”

It is interesting as this is an early testimony that is separating the three different names for the Saracens, a fact that has not been thoroughly discussed by modern research⁶⁴. Sophronius’ does not view the Arabs as a new religion. The different names he used indicate that they were different groups of people and they did not have one identity. My opinion is the following; since Sophronius’ aim is to alert his audience against the Arab invasions, this is a rhetorical tool rather than a religious view, used for overstating fear and danger. His initial target is to alert the audience against the Arab raids. He does not describe the Saracens as a new religion, as they are seen as Godless and barbarians. Moreover, he constantly places them in the history of God’s plan. The Christians, according to him should reunite and with the power of religion they will drive away the Saracens from the holy land of Bethlehem. Thus, the Saracens are seen as the Sin that will be repelled once the Christians will follow the right path of God.

iii. Sophronius’ *Speech on the Epiphany*: Date and Context

Sophronius also delivered a speech *on the Epiphany*, in Jerusalem, during its siege in 637, which is also the date of the text. The homily is considered as one of the most elaborate writings of the patriarch. In fact, just like his previous sermons, here Sophronius wants to

⁶³ Ibid, 508

⁶⁴ An interesting interpretation on Sophronius’ rhetoric and the Roman empire is in David Olster, *Roman defeat*, 101-105

pinpoint the Arab danger, which is mentioned in the last part of his speech. The Arabs are described as God-hated (*Θεομισείς*), Alastors (*Αλάστορες*), God-fighters (*Θεομάχοι*) and Satan's devotees (*τόν στρατηγόν αὐτῶν ἀσχέτως Διάβολον*)⁶⁵. Sophronius' rhetoric against the Arab invaders is fiercer in that speech in comparison with the previous, since the Arabs have advanced to the gates of the city. The speech was composed during the siege. It is interesting that the patriarch negotiated with the leader Umar the surrender of Jerusalem⁶⁶. Sophronius main target is to impose fear against the intruders and unity among his audience. This is obvious in these sermons, which are full of hyperboles and rhetorical exaggerations. There is a progressive negative depiction of the Arabs in the texts. In the 634 sermon, they are seen as less wicked as in 635, and 637. The reason is the Arab siege of Jerusalem. As the enemy was approaching the city, the danger was more evident. In general it is an important testimony of the views of the Arabs by a Chalcedonian supporter. As Sophronius was writing from a strong religious perspective, and his speeches were often addressed with high religious zeal. In general, Sophronius' testimony's importance is high because the Arabs are not seen as a new religion. Moreover, their role is placed in a teleological concept as a tool of God against the decadence of the Christians. Unlike his next two references to the Arabs, the patriarch here is optimistic. He considers that the Arabs will be repelled.

iv. Maximus the Confessor: Letter to Peter the Illustrious: Date and authorship

The second testimony comes from Maximus the confessor (d.662). He was a monk, theologian and scholar, a pupil of Sophronius and probably Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (7th century). Maximus' was probably born in Palestine. He studied philosophy and followed the

⁶⁵ Sophronius, *Homily on the holy baptism* 166-67

⁶⁶ Robert Hoyland, *In God's path*, 48

monastic life from an early age. After the Persian invasion in Asia Minor, he fled to Carthage, where he met Sophronius. He became acquainted with his ideas, after his death he travelled to Rome and Constantinople. During Heraclius' reign, he became a profound supporter of Diothelism. He mostly wrote sermons, commentaries on the work of his tutor Pseudo-Dionysius. Maximus was mutilated because of his strong opposition against Monothelitism, as an heretic, by the Byzantine authorities. His creed, Dyothelitism was earlier condemned in a synod; his tongue and his arm were cut. He died, shortly after his trial at Colchis, modern Georgia and was venerated as a saint in the Third Council of Constantinople (680-1)⁶⁷.

v. **Maximus' Letter Context:**

Maximus refers to the Arabs in one of his letters was written to the governor of Carthage and Alexandria, Peter the Illustrious. The letter was probably composed between 634-40, because it discusses the events of the conquests but before the Arab invasion of Egypt. Maximus wants to promote his friend Cosmas to bishop in Alexandria. This letter is praising Cosmas and attacking the Monophysites and the Nestorians.

In general, the letter has strong anti-Judaic rhetoric⁶⁸. At one point, he refers to the Arab invasions:

“For indeed, what is more dire than the evils which today afflict the world? What is more terrible for the discerning than the unfolding events? What is more pitiable and frightening for those who endure them? To see a barbarous people of the desert (Ἔθνος ὁρᾶν ἐρημικόν τε καὶ

⁶⁷ For an overview of Maximus' life, see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 76-77. For an introduction to the religious views of Maximus, I consulted the useful work by Demetrios Bathrellos, *Person, Nature and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford 2004 99-114. For Maximus' trial, see Daniel J. Sahas, *The seventh century in Byzantine-Muslim relations: Characteristics and forces*, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2:1, 1991, 10

⁶⁸ Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 77, c.76

βάρβαρον) overrunning another's lands as though they were their own; to see civilization itself being ravaged by wild and untamed beasts whose form alone is human⁶⁹.”

Maximus' letter condemns the Jews, as they are later described as God-haters and bringers of the Antichrist. He was also agitated against the forced baptized decree of 633. Since the letter bears no date, it is difficult to estimate when it was written. Robert Hoyland suggests that the letter was written after 634⁷⁰. In general, as in *the Doctrina Jacobi*, the main target of Maximus is the Jews and not the Arabs. The text is one of the many anti-Judaic testimonies of the 7th century.

The latter are used in order to stimulate the reader's attention, and as supplementary evidence on the malignity of Jews. It seems as if the Jews were placed in an eschatological concept, since they are seen as tools of Satan. There are no references to the Arabs as members of a religion, but in fact they are seen as a nation of the desert. In general, Maximus' main scope is to promote and prove the validity of the Chalcedonian Creed and condemn the compromising decree of Monothelitism.

The next reference to the Arabs is in a text by Stephen of Alexandria. He was a 7th century philosopher, alchemist, astronomer and teacher. Although little is known about his life many works are ascribed to him such commentaries as on Plato and Aristotle, alchemical and astronomical works. Stephen worked and lived during Heraclius' reign and was a profound supporter of Monothelitism. Unfortunately, most of the texts have been completed or re-written afterwards (possibly during 8th-9th centuries), thus his work needs a careful approach⁷¹. He has some references to early Islam. The first is a treatise against Mohammed cited in Constantine's

⁶⁹ Maximus the Confessor, Ep.14, 533-44, translation in Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 77-78.

⁷⁰ Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 77.

⁷¹ So far, there is no modern edition of the works of Stephanus. For a brief overview of his life, see Maria Papathanasiou, *Stephanos of Alexandria: a Famous Byzantine scholar, alchemist and astrologer*, in *Ambyx* No37, 1990 163-5

VII, 10th century work “*De Administrato Imperio*”⁷². Only the title is known, which was written “*By Stephen the philosopher of Alexandria, a definitive treatise for his student Timothy, having as its pretext the recent appearance of the godless legislation of Muhammad*”. In his textbook about dreams he portrays the prophet’s teaching as false. Last, an untitled work was attributed to Stephen, on which he discussed Islam; it is a list of the Muslim rulers from Mohammed to Mahdi (775-85), the work was probably falsely attributed to him. Since no modern study has been made in Stephen, his work needs an overall careful revaluation, but indeed he is an early testimony for Islam and the prophet. Stephen does not provide explicit information on the Early Islam, as his works have been overwritten. But, along with Anastasius of Sinai, they are the two surviving testimonies implicitly on Egypt during the early Islamic rule of Egypt and the Islam.

vi. Anastasius of Sinai: The Hodegos, date and Authorship:

The next author I shall discuss in this thesis is Anastasius of Sinai (d. circa 700). About the life of Anastasius, little is known. He was born in Cyprus, but left for the monastery of Agia Aikaterini in Sina after its occupation in 649⁷³. He devoted his life to asceticism; he was a prolific author of sermons, homilies, poems and theological tracts. He was a profound supporter of the Chalcedonian Creed, his work reflects some of the earlier testimonies regarding the Islamic-Christian dispute⁷⁴. So far, the authors discussed Islam either as a *Judo-Hagar* amalgam or as a false violent religion. Anastasius Sinaite wrote 40 years after the Islamic conquest of Egypt. His writings reflect some of the Early Islamic-Christian theological debates. None of his works however, was dedicated to Islam. The first polemical treatise against Islam was written

⁷²Constantine Porphyrogennitos, *De Administrato Imperio*, 16

⁷³ For the life of Anastasios of Sina, see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 92-3.

⁷⁴ Sidney S. Griffith, *Anastasios of Sinai, the Hodegos and the Muslims*, GOTR, 32,4,1987, 342

around 740's by John of Damascus⁷⁵. His most known treatise, called The Hodegos (The Guide) is a manual against the heresies. The work was dated around 660 or later but there is not exact date.

vii. Context:

In the preface, he refers to the Arabs:

“Thus when we wish to debate with the Arabs (*Ἀραβας*), we first anathematize whoever says two gods (*τον λεγοντα δυο Θεους*), or whoever says that God has carnally begotten a son, or whoever worships as god any created thing at all, in heaven or on earth⁷⁶”.

First, it is interesting that Anastasios refers to the Arabs. Research suggests that this preference, the use of Arab indicates that Anastasios' described the Arabs as a community/tribe and not as a religion⁷⁷. However, Anastasios was one of the earliest authors that probably had knowledge of the Islamic texts. He is the earliest Christian authors that discussed on one of the basic objections of the Muslim against Christianity is the nature of Christ as Son of God. This was stated in Qur'an and was a popular argument against the Christian faith⁷⁸. Anastasios' main target is the Diophysites and the Monophysites. Here, he literary states that their false teaching is feeding Islam's argumentations against Christ. Anastasios wrote under the caliphate's occupation of Egypt, which was already established for half a century ago, therefore his main target is the Christians and not Islam, which is mentioned nonetheless. The Islamic view on the carnal connection between Christ and Son is also discussed later in his work, after a dispute with a Diophysite supporter in Alexandria⁷⁹. Yet, again he comments this -peculiar to him- Islamist

⁷⁵ For John of Damascus' against Heresy, see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, The 'heresy' of the Ishmaelites*, Leiden, 1972, especially 127-32

⁷⁶ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae dux*, 1.1, 9, translation in Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 94

⁷⁷ Sidney Griffith, *Anastasios*, 352

⁷⁸ For more, see *ibid* 349-50.

⁷⁹ Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 94

idea on the nature of Christ. In fact, Anastasios is one of the earliest Christian authors who seems to have knowledge of Qur'an and identifies Islam as a different religion. According to research, his main arguments derive from Qur'an's rejections on the Christian doctrine⁸⁰.

Anastasios' writings are also related with politics. There is hostility against Heraclius in his works. In his letter, Anastasios argued that Heraclius' family, and especially Constans II (641-668) were responsible for the rise of Islam. For Anastasios, the Heraclian family, and especially Constans II persecutions against the Dyothelitists, (among their victims was the Pope of Rome Martin I (d.655) who was kidnapped) brought fragmentation and confusion. This opened the way to the Arabs to conquer Egypt and Syria/Palestine. Sources, such as Theophanes, Eutychios' of Alexandria (d.940) Annales and Michael the Syrian (d.1199) mention that Anastasios changed his name when he became a monk, and his prior name was Mahan. Supposedly, he was a general in the battle of Yarmouk that fled to Sinai, S. Griffith has stated that this story is probably fictional⁸¹. Anastasios probably never fought in Yarmouk as a general, but his hostility against the Heraclius' family was evident in his writings:

“Martin was exiled by the grandson of Heraclius [Constans II] and swiftly arose Amalik of the desert (καὶ θᾶπτον ἀνέστη ὁ ἐρημικός Ἀμελέκ), who struck us, the people of Christ. That was the first terrible and incurable fall of the Roman [Byzantine] army. I am speaking of the bloodshed at Yarmuk and Dathemon, after which occurred the capture and burning of the cities of Palestine, even Caesarea and Jerusalem... But those ruling and dominating the Roman Empire did not understand these things. They summoned the foremost men in the Roman Church, cut out their tongues and cut off their hands. And what then? The requital from God was the virtually complete destruction of the Roman army at Phoenix and the destruction of the fleet and

⁸⁰ For more, see H. Griffith, *Anastasios, the Hodegos*, 350-1

⁸¹ Ibid, 347. The sources that discuss Anastasios as a military apostate are found in pages 343-4.

*the destruction during his reign of the whole Christian people and all places. This did not cease until the persecutor [Constans II] of Martin perished by the sword [A.D. 668] in Sicily*⁸²."

It is the first concrete written synopsis of the Arab expansion. First and most interesting is the name Amalik. Kaegi stated that Amalik was Abd Al Malik (685-705) the Umayyad caliph, was rejected by Griffith on the basis that the testimonies were written long after . He proposed that Anastasius mentions the Amalike tribes, which are mentioned in the Old Testament⁸³. These tribes lived south of Sinai (Negev) and were enemies of the Ishraelites. It is interesting that this testimony is conflicting with Sebeos' account on the origins of the Muslims. Sebeos stated the Abrahamic origins, whereas Anastasius supported their emergence due to Amalek tribe, one of the lethal enemies of the Israelites.

The text suffers from historical inaccuracies, for example Heraclius was the emperor when the battles of Yarmouk took place instead of his great-son. Nevertheless his letter along with some Qur'anic elements that Anastasius used, are part of a significant testimony on early Islam. Anastasius' thoughts on early Islam can be placed in-between of the heretic approach on Islam in *the Doctrina Jacobi* and the religious tirades on Islam as a sinful religion in the latter texts of John of Damascus. The contribution of Anastasius in understanding the development of ideas regarding the early Islam is high, however so far there has been no translation or modern edition of his works, which is in fact necessary.

In general, the sources discuss the rise of Islam as an outcome of the religious policy of Heraclius, which was seen as a plague. All Greek sources were composed by Chalcedonians. It is interesting that there is no mention on the Islamic rule, only to their atrocities. Unlike the Copts,

⁸² Anastasios of Sinai, Sermo 3, 1156, translation is in Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 102.

⁸³ Walter Kaegi, Initial reactions, 143. For more, see also Sidney Griffith, *Anastasios*, 356.

the Chalcedonian fled from Egypt after 641, with a few exceptions, thus there is not much written after Anastasius.

Chapter Three: The Coptic sources

One of the great controversies regarding the Arab conquests is the capture of Alexandria and the attitudes of the Copts towards the Arabs and the early Islamic rule. The majority of the Islamic sources provide unbiased information, which is usually full of anecdotes and misinterpretations, as most of the sources were composed centuries after the Islamic conquests. The 20th century research has questioned these testimonies, especially those in relation with the conquest of Alexandria⁸⁴. In this chapter, I shall discuss the Coptic texts regarding the siege, the capture and the early Islamic domination of Egypt. My main goal is to show, discuss and highlight the initial reactions on the Arab conquest in the Coptic literature. The texts are separated into different categories, 7th (640-700) and 8th century (700-50). My main goal is to show the different attitudes before and shortly after the conquests as well to discuss the initial relationship between the Arabs and the Copts.

A. The anonymous sources: The early testimonies (650-700)

i. The Cambyses Romance: date and Authorship

The 7th century Coptic literature produced some interesting and unique repetitions of myths and stories, which indirectly mention Arabs, in an allegoric context. The first source is titled as “*The Coptic Cambyses romance*”. It is an anonymous, 7th century story, which was partially saved in one fragmented 7th century manuscript⁸⁵. The text’s story is about the Persian ruler, Cambyses II who planned a conspiracy in Egypt. He wrote to the Egyptian people about his plan and after the Egyptians declared their denial against this plan, Cambyses sent some false

⁸⁴ Richard Buttler, *Arabic Conquest*, 295. See also C. Haas, *Alexandria*, 338-51

⁸⁵ The text was edited by H.L. Jansen, *The Coptic story of Cambyses’ Invasion of Egypt*, Oslo 1950.

ambassadors to invite the Egyptians to a feast. The Egyptians were well aware of the danger and prepared an army. Since the manuscript was not saved after this point, there is no clue about the progress of the story. However, there is a strong indication that the story ended with a happy end for the Egyptians.

ii. Context

While the text refers to the Achaemenidic conquest of Egypt, there is strong connection with the Arab conquest of Egypt. Research suggests that this text was written (possibly by a Syriac monk from Scetis) while Patriarch Benjamin I (622-61) was bishop of Alexandria and is strongly influenced by Herodotus, the Bible as well the Sassanid conquest of Egypt. Moreover, research stated the allegoric parallel of Cambyses with Umar in the text. Research and particularly Leslie S.B. MacCoull has highlighted this connection⁸⁶. In addition, there is an implicit warning about the Islamic conquest⁸⁷. Although the text has no deliberate references to the Early Islam, it is considered as one of the earliest testimonies of the Coptic-Muslim relationships⁸⁸. However, the analysis on the manuscript dated it to the 7th-8th centuries. Therefore, this manuscript was probably composed before or after the Arab conquests.

iii. The legend of Eudoxia: Date and Authorship

The second text is titled as “*The legend of Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulcher*”. It is an anonymous source, probably dated to the 7th century or later. The story is based on an earlier 4th

⁸⁶ L. MacCoul, *the Cambyses narrative reconsidered*, Society for Coptic Archaeology, Cairo, 2011, 187

⁸⁷ Since the text has no deliberate references to the Arabs, I will not use any anstracts. For more on Cambyses, see Harald Suermann, *Copts and the Islam in the Seventh Century* in Emmanuela Grypeou (edit), *The encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Brill 2006, 101

⁸⁸ For more see, Lesile MacCoull, *The Coptic Cambyses* 186-8

C.E. legend, related to Constantine the Great. There are some changes in comparison to the original myth. The text is in Coptic, in a single manuscript, which was dated on the 7th century⁸⁹.

iv. Context

The legend of Eudoxia has some indirect references to the Arab invasions. The story is about Constantine's seize of power in Rome and a war against Persia. The holy sepulcher is revealed in Eudoxia's sleep. She is a Constantine's servant⁹⁰. Constantine finances her quest. In her Journey, she discovers the holy site, which in fact bears the Holy cross. The legend of Eudoxia combines many different mythological stories from 4th-5th centuries and compiles them in a mythological, allegoric concept. The story was inspired by an older myth on the discovery of Holy Cross by Helen, the mother of Constantine. Apparently the myth is inspired by older tradition. As for Eudoxia, she is probably inspired by the empress Athenais Eudocia (400-60), wife of Theodosius II (408-50). Eudocia travelled to Jerusalem and donated a large sum of money for pilgrimage. One of the interesting aspects regarding the text is the negative depiction of Jews. They are seen as atrocious and the torturers of Eudoxia, unlike the myth of Helen, where they were depicted as competent figures⁹¹.

Drake stated the comparison between Constantine and Heraclius, as both emperors seized the imperial power after a civil war and both were engaged in war against the Sassanids. They both seized power with arms, Heraclius often used the title New Constantine for his son Constantine III, so his influence in the text is high. Moreover, the Persians are compared to the Arabs, as they represent danger. The Persians threatened the new discovered Holy Sepulcher and

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⁹⁰ For the manuscript, see H. A. Drake, *A Coptic version of the Discovery of the Holy Sepulcher* in Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies, 20, 1979, 381, c.3

⁹¹ The story is summarized in Harald Suermann, *Copts and the Islam*, 102-3

they can be contrasted with the Arabs, who threatened Jerusalem and forced Heraclius to hide the Cross in Constantinople⁹². The text is overwhelmed by symbolisms, the Arabs are not mentioned. H. A. Drake dated the text as shortly prior to the Arab siege of Jerusalem; he saw it as a echo of the 7th century religious dispute.

v. The panegyric of the Three Holy Children of Babylon: Text and authorship

The third text is *The Panegyric of the three Holy Children of Babylon*. It is also an anonymous source that was probably written shortly after the Arab invasions (circa 650's). The date was debated by scholars as the surviving manuscript was dated to the 12th century⁹³.

vi. Context:

The text discusses the exodus from the paradise, Christ and the story of Daniel. It is one of the earliest testimonies discussing the Arabs:

“Let us not fast like the deicidal Jews; neither let us fast like the Saracens, oppressors who follow after prostitution and massacre, and who lead the sons of men into captivity, saying: ‘We fast and pray at the same time’⁹⁴,”

Research stated that this text the earliest testimony that represents the Saracens as oppressors. It is one of the earliest examples on implicit reference to the Arabs. Moreover, it is an early testimony of the denial of Christ by the Saracens⁹⁵.

⁹² For more, see H. A. Drake, *A Coptic version*, 387

⁹³ For the date of the text, see H. Suermann, *Copts an the Islam*, 107 and P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism*, 155

⁹⁴ For the text, see H. de Vis, *Homélies coptes de la Vaticane*, II Cahiers de la Bibliothèque Copte 6, Kopenhagen, 1929, 99-100. I used the translation from H. Suermann, *Copts and the Islam*, 108

vii. The dialogue of the Patriarch John: Date and Authorship

The last text of this category is the so-called Dialogue of the Patriarch John. This anonymous text is dated in 685/6, it is a dialogue between John the Patriarch of Alexandria (possibly John III) with the commander Abd-Al-Aziz ibn Marwan (he was the Umayyad governor –Wali ولي- of Egypt in 685-705), a Jew and a Melikite⁹⁶. It is a 7th century or later text with no author that discuss the early Islamic rule of Egypt.

viii. Context:

The text's story is the following: the patriarch is called to the Arab governor to inspect a silver box with a piece of cross that an heiress Jew left. After a miracle, the wood is identified with the Holy cross and is purchased by the patriarch for 3000 dinars. The patriarch has two disputes, with the Jew and the Melikite, eventually they are both converted. His last dispute is with the governor, about Eucharist; the governor supports that a robber was crucified instead of Christ. The patriarch asks his money back and the governor gives up. This story is considered as one of the earliest examples of a Muslim-Coptic religious dispute in a non-Muslim text; Suermann describes the text as "*the oldest doctrinal challenge to Coptic Christians that we find in the recordings with the Muslim*⁹⁷". Moreover, the text's represents an early attempt of the Muslim governor to interfere in the Coptic Church affairs. This relation was not explicitly mentioned in the texts, neither there is enough information on the texts. But it seems as the Arab commanders start to interfere on the Coptic affairs. Besides the legitimation of the Coptic church by the Arabs, there are not any recorded agreements between the Copts and the governors. The

⁹⁵ Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 121

⁹⁶ For the text, see Hugh Evelyn White, *The monasteries of Wadi 'n Natrun*, Part I: New Coptic texts from the monastery of Saint Macarius, 171-5

⁹⁷H. Suermann, *Copts and the Islam*, 105

texts underline this relationship, stating that there was an on-going suppression of the Copts by the Arab authorities.

B. The histories

The Arab conquest of Egypt was one of the main reasons for the revival of the Egyptian Copts. The Arabs legalized the Copts and their church replaced the Chalcedonian (which was close to the emperor and Constantinople) Church in Egypt. It is not a coincidence that there are not many Monophysite or Coptic histories written during the Byzantine domination of Egypt.

i. The Chronicle of John of Nikiu: date authorship and validity

The first historian is the John of Nikiu. He was a Copt, bishop of the city of Nikiu and his work is a world Chronicle from Adam to the Arab conquest of Egypt (642). He wrote in Coptic, but the original manuscript is lost. His work was transmitted in an Ethiopic manuscript, on which we have no detail for⁹⁸. He probably wrote during the 690's, while he was a bishop. Research is dubious about the date of the text, since the earliest possible date could be around 650's⁹⁹. There are two problems regarding the text; first, the text transmission is problematic, as the text was translated from Coptic to Arabic and then to Ethiopic but there is no information on that. Moreover, the modern edition which was edited by Hermann Zontenberg is also problematic. His edition was published in late 1880's and the text's transmission is problematic¹⁰⁰. Second, part of the work concerning the years 610-39 is lost. The validity of the text has been doubted by modern scholars such as Hoyland, who described it as a mediocre, full of anecdotes and legends

⁹⁸The chronicle of John of Nikiu was translated by R.H. Charles, *The Chronicle of John bishop of Nikiu*, London 1916. In this thesis, I used the following link: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/nikiu2_chronicle.htm

⁹⁹ For the date of John of Nikiu, see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 153

¹⁰⁰ For more, see Philip Booth, *Shades of Blues and Greens in the Chronicle of John of Nikiu* in *Buzantinische Zeitschrift* 104 (2), 2012, 555-56. In fact, Philip Booth discusses four notes on the Blues and Greens that were not bypassed by scholars.

source¹⁰¹. However, the importance of this source is high; it is the only Coptic contemporary testimony regarding the Arab conquests and also offers some interesting views on the Byzantine administration of Egypt.

ii. Context

In general, John is quite hostile against the pro-Chalcedonian emperors. His testimony is one of the main sources regarding the siege and capture of Babylon and Alexandria as well Egypt on the eve of the Arab conquest. His views on the Arabs are not entirely negative. John in fact regarded Heraclius as the main responsible for the Arab conquest:

“This expulsion (of the Byzantines) and victory of the Muslims is due to the wickedness of the emperor Heraclius and his persecution of the orthodox through the patriarch Cyrus¹⁰².”

As for the Arab domination of Egypt, he boldly stated the Arab atrocities following the conquest of Alexandria. According to John, the Islamic yoke was way heavier than the Byzantine and the Persian. However, the Arabic conquest has also some positive effects, as the property of the churches was not confiscated and looted by the Arabs. Nevertheless, the Christian populations were subjected to high taxation from Amr (the commander of the Arab army and first Arab governor of Egypt). John of Nikiu views on the Arabs are more neutral than his contemporary Copt authors. He also described the confusion on the aftermath of the Arab capture of Egypt, as other people were fleeing, others were fighting against the Arabs and some of them converted into Islam¹⁰³. However, myths and apocalyptic elements are common tools in his work, Islam for example is seen as faith of the beast¹⁰⁴. In general, he calls the Arabs as Ishaelites or Muslims. The latter is an epithet found in texts after 770's as Robert Hoyland

¹⁰¹ Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 154, c.129

¹⁰² John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 112.3,

¹⁰³ Ibid, 115.3

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 121.10

stated¹⁰⁵. Therefore, his testimony must be viewed with high caution as the original text was lost, and we are unaware on the changes in the Arabic version. On the overall, John of Nikiu represents some solid information regarding the conquest of Egypt. His testimony does not provide an unbiased truth but it is an interesting view of a 7th century Copt bishop. However, due to the problematic dating and textual transmission this source should be dealt with caution. A new edition of John of Nikiu's Chronicle might solve some of these problems.

iii. The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria: Date and authorship

The second history is the so-called *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*. It is a series of biographies of the patriarchs of Alexandria, dated from the 4th to the 19th centuries¹⁰⁶. The first part of this encyclopedia style history was written by the bishop Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa (d. 987). It is a compilation of Coptic texts dated from the times of Eusebius (4th century) to his own age, which were composed in Coptic, but re-edited and translated to Arabic by Severus. The first part of *The History of the Patriarchs* is composed by series of compiled texts, usually from the Egyptian monasteries, dated from the patriarch Mark (300) to the Arab conquest. The second part is slightly different as it covers from the Arab invasion to his contemporary age. Severus provides some original yet translated Coptic biographies and texts. The language is Arabic and so far there has not been any modern edition of the text¹⁰⁷. We are unaware of Severus' original sources and the amount of his adaptation of the earliest texts, he does not name his sources. Therefore, the text must be treated as an 11th century document with influence from the 7th century Coptic literature. However, the information taken from this account helps us reconstruct a part of the initial relationship between the Copts and the Arabs. Nonetheless, the

¹⁰⁵ Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 156

¹⁰⁶ I used *the History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria II, Peter I to Benjamin I (661)*, Patrologia Orientalis I (edit. B. Evetts), Paris 1907, 232-3,

¹⁰⁷ For the editions, see Harald Suermann, *Copts and the Islam*, 98

importance of this source is high. The source in general discusses some aspects on the early Copto-Arabic relations. Like the previous source, it discusses the initial Copto-Arabic relationship as well the gradual pressure of the Arabs against the Copts during the first fifty years after the Arab conquest of Egypt.

iv. The Life of Benjamin I in the Patriarchs' Lives

The life of Benjamin I was without any doubts intriguing. He was a Copt, first monk, and then patriarch during the Sassanid occupation of Egypt (618-22) and after the Byzantine restoration he went into exile (622-42). After the death of the Chalcedonian bishop Cyrus (d.642), he was the leader of the exiled Copts that negotiated with the Arabs. Moreover, as a religious leader he advised the general Amr' on the religious situation of Egypt¹⁰⁸. His meeting with Amr' is recorded in the source; this meeting is a strong indication that the Coptic Church became legal under the Islamic rule, as during the last twenty years of the Byzantine dominance of Egypt (622-41) the Copts were persecuted. Moreover, it confirms the status of the Coptic Patriarch as the leader of the Christian community. During the first twenty years of the Arab dominance of Egypt, the Coptic Church was not controlled by the Arabs. However, this period of freedom was brief. According to *The Lives of Patriarchs*, the first frictions of Muslim-Coptic relations started during the reign of John III (677-86). The lives of Patriarch discuss an ongoing dispute starting from Abd-al Aziz. The Egyptian commander was often interfering in the Coptic affairs, punishing the patriarch, or even destroying the property of the Church¹⁰⁹. In the *History of The Patriarchs*, the first dogmatic quarrels between the Copts and the Arabs started around 700¹¹⁰. In addition, the Islamic commanders often violate the rights of the Copts, an example is

¹⁰⁸ For the dialogue, see *ibid*, 98-99. Suermann used and commented the Muller's edition for the translations.

¹⁰⁹ *History of the Patriarchs III*, 25, translation in H. Suermann, *Copts and Islam*, 105

¹¹⁰ For more, see Harold Suermann, *Copts and Islam*, 100

the degree that was issued during the life of Isaac (685-89): all churches had the following words placed: “Muhammad is the great Apostle of God and Jesus is also an Apostle of God¹¹¹.”

In general, *The Coptic Lives of The Bishops* is a source that does not provide solid, categorical statements on the Copto-Arabic relations. But, as Harald Suermann suggests, “Individual episodes, however, throw a light on the relationship between Christians and the Islamic authority¹¹².” The main thing is that the commanders gained the support of the Coptic communities, which were in fact illegal on the last twenty years of Byzantine dominance in Egypt. Then, the church had some room to maneuver, which was restricted. But there is no indication whether these restrictions were part of an organized program, which is less possible but were subjected to the commanders of Egypt¹¹³. Thus, the vision of the Arabs in the Coptic history is mixed. The initial reactions are mixed. They are positive because the Copts were legalized under the Islamic rule, but negative because the invasion was violent. The Islamic yoke was probably fiercer than the Byzantine one, thus the main idea on the Arabs after the conquests is negative. Thus, it is an on-going pressure from the authorities.

C. The later Apocalyptic texts

The last category of sources is the apocalyptic texts. Coptic literature of the 7th-8th centuries was overwhelmed by texts that discuss visions, apocalypses, and related themes as the eternal battle between the Good and the Evil. The means, just like in every prophetic text are usually taken from the Gospels, whereas animals, mythological figures and extra-ordinary things

¹¹¹ History of the Patriarchs, 35-6, Harald Suermann, *Copts and Islam*, 107

¹¹² Harald Suermann, *Copts and the Islam* 99-100

¹¹³ An interesting example is on the Life of Patriarch Isaac, for more see *Histoire du Patriarch Copte Isaac*, 42-64, esp. 62-3 and Harald Suermann, *Copts and Islam* 106-7

are often involved. The Coptic apocalyptic texts of 7th-8th centuries are products of an expanded genre of apocalyptic texts, they are usually homilies, or visions.

i. The Vision of Shenoute: Date, authorship and context

The first text is the so-called Pseudo-Shenoute's *Vision*. It is an anonymous apocalyptic document that describes a vision that was revealed to Shenoute, an ascetic from Upper Egypt. It was documented into a homily by his pupil, Visa. *The Prophecy of Shenoute* is a 7th C.E. or later text that discusses the Sassanid and Arab invasion of Egypt. Since it is a prophesy, it is set in 5th century Egypt. It is an apocalyptic text written on a Coptic perspective; for the author, the Chalcedonian patriarch (possibly Cyrus) is described as a deceiver, whereas there is an interesting description regarding the Arabs:

“After that shall arise the sons of Ishmael and the sons of Esau, who hound the Christians, and the rest of them will be concerned to prevail over and rule all the world and to [re-]build the Temple that is in Jerusalem¹¹⁴.”

The vision of Shenoute summarizes the main Coptic arguments regarding 7th century Egypt. The brief Sassanid occupation is described as a calamity. The religious program of Heraclius and the persecution of Cyrus are in detail portrayed. The coming of the Ishmaelites is the outcome of the orchestrated religious atrocities by Heraclius. It is interesting that the author(s) also mention the 7th century Jewish messianic expectations upon the Arab army arrival in Egypt, this attitude is also mentioned in other texts, such as *the Doctrina Jacobi*. According to the story, the Ishmaelites will bring destruction in Egypt, until the final salvation and the second coming. The text is reflecting the major events of the 7th century Egypt. It was written from a profound Coptic perspective, after the Arab invasions, since there is a *terminus post quem* in early 8th century. As Robert Hoyland mentioned, the text lacks any historical information

¹¹⁴ Pseudo-Shenoute, *Vision*, 340

regarding the early Islamic rule of Egypt, such as persecutions or high taxation, an indication that it was composed before the governance of Abdallah ibn Sa' d (646-56), who imposed the first taxation to the Christian population¹¹⁵. Interesting is also the reference to the temple, as the Muslims started building from 638. Despite the lack of information regarding the author, it seems as this apocalyptic text was probably composed during an early stage of the Islamic rule of Egypt. In general, the text reflects the Sassanid and Arab occupation of Egypt. It also stresses the dominance of the Arabs over the Jews and the Christians. But, there is no mention of a messiah, or savior, a factor that indicates the desperation of the Copts during the Early Islamic rule.

ii. Pseudo-Athanasius' *Homily*: Date, authorship and context

The next Apocalyptic source is the so-called Pseudo-Athanasius' *Homily*. It is a homily attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373) on the feast of Archangel Michael. The date of the text is probably after the 7th century. The sermon's topic is *Leviticus xxi.9*, discusses the clergy's responsibilities and behavior towards their duty and their flock¹¹⁶. In the last chapter, the author(s) addressed the signs that will follow the end of times: according to him, the God will divide the Roman nation because of the Monothelist controversy. After a brief Persian invasion, the Persians shall perish and God will bring the Arabs, which are seen as the fourth beast of Daniel. Moreover, there is a general description on the Islamic conversion of Christians, which shall rule from Damascus¹¹⁷. He also addresses the enemy, the Saracens:

*"The name of that nation is Saracen, one which is from the Ishmaelites, the son of Hagar, maidservant of Abraham"*¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁵ Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 280-1

¹¹⁶ Pseudo-Athanasius *Apocalypse* IX. 1-8

¹¹⁷ Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 284

¹¹⁸ Pseudo-Athanasius, IX.9, translation in R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 284-5

It is interesting that in this text the Copt author(s) discuss the origins of the prophet and the Arabs, which is not common in Coptic literature. It is another example on how the Christians saw the early Islam, as decedents of Abraham and Hagar. My opinion is that the Judo-Hagar model was quite popular in the early Christian literature, which was changed later on. The text resembles the vision of Shenoute. It is a brief history written by a Copt on which God is using the Arabs for his final plan, the Apocalypse. Robert Hoyland dated the text prior to 744, when the capital of the Umayyad caliphate changed from Damascus to Harran. In addition, the information from the text gives a possible date around 714/15. Unlike the vision of Shenoute, this text discusses some aspects such as the early Islamic taxation and the census of 724¹¹⁹. Moreover, Pseudo-Athanasius comments the monetary reforms of Abd-al Malik ibn Marwan (685-705). Abd-al Malik's revisionist program included the mint of golden dinars with the name of the prophet¹²⁰.

Apart from the historical information regarding the early Umayyad state, the text shows some further information on the Coptic eschatological expectations during the early Islamic rule. Unlike other apocalyptic texts, the salvation comes from faith and the figure of the messiah is missing. This is evident in later apocalyptic texts, such as the Vision of Samuel the Confessor (7th century)¹²¹. Moreover, the necessity of faith against oppression is the key element in this text. Unlike other apocalypses and visions, here the author does not believe on any God's plan to save the Christians but discusses the on-going Islamic suppression against the Christians, the latter will be saved by preserving their faith against the Islamic religion. The last apocalyptic texts in this thesis are the fourteenth vision of Daniel.

¹¹⁹ Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 284, see also c.78

¹²⁰ For the topic, see Philip Grierson, *The monetary reforms of Abd' Al-Malik: Their metrological basis and their Financial Repercussions*, JOSH, Vol. 3, No.3, 241-64

¹²¹ For Samuel the Confessor, see His Arabic vita, A. Alcock, *The life of Samuel of Qalamun by Isaac the presbyter*, 1983, 1-23

iii. The Vision of Daniel: Date, authorship and context

It is a 7th or later apocalyptic text that discussed the 14th vision of Daniel. The author is unknown, whereas there is little about the date of the text. The Vision of Daniel was saved in Arabic as the original Coptic text was lost. It is about the 14th Vision of Daniel regarding the four beasts of apocalypse, each one of them is explained as an empire and the four beasts are the following: Persian, the Roman Empire (Western Church), the Hellene empire (Byzantines) and the *Ishmaelite*. The 19 horns are explained as the first 19 rulers of the Ishmaelite kings. Research stated that they either represent the Fatimid or the Umayyad house. Robert Hoyland has stated the adversities of identifying the rulers. Like the Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse, the text mentions the coming of the Last emperor, and a fight between the Sarapis (Egypt) and the Pittourgos (probably nomads)¹²². The text was probably written originally in Arabic but re-composed during the 11th century and since there it is difficult to estimate the amount of information that was added later on.

iv. The apocalypse of Peter: Date, authorship and context

The Apocalypse of Peter is also a puzzling source. The original text is also lost and the surviving copy is in three Arabic recensions. The source is divided in three books: the first is a biblical history from the creation until the birth of Virgin Mary, the second discusses the miracles of Jesus and the early heresies and the third is an Apocalypse by Peter. In brief, it follows the same events of Egypt. Robert Hoyland discuss the text during 750's, whereas there are no deliberate references to the Arabs, it can be a later product¹²³. My overall estimation regarding these accounts is that they lack coherence and it is difficult to estimate when they written, but it is certain that they were composed during or after the 8th century. They represent

¹²² For more, see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 278

¹²³ *Ibid*, 292

Arabs as a God-sent calamity, which was common in other apocalyptic texts as well. Thus, they boldly describe the oppressions during the first century of Arab rule in Egypt. Moreover, they do not provide enough information on the Arabs, but they are seen as a religion in the Vision of Daniel. A further study must be done in these texts, which will indicate the 7th-8th century motifs from the later ones. However, they are strong indicators on the Arab oppression against the Copts during the early rule. Moreover, the Copts still consider the Arabs as a God-sent calamity on the aftermath of the religious conflict between them and the Chalcedonians.

In brief, the Coptic literature reflects the unstable situation in Egypt from the Sassanid occupation to the first fifty years of the Arab conquest. It seems as almost all the authors share some common thoughts regarding the Sassanid occupation, the religious policies of Heraclius and the invasions. In the next chapter, I shall discuss these concepts in detail along with the comparison of the sources I mentioned so far.

Chapter 4:

Sources' Comparison and Analysis

A. The character of the Prophet Mohammad in the Early Non-Muslim literature:

Challenges and Perspectives.

In the first chapter, I discussed the three early testimonies regarding the prophet and the birth of Islam. Moreover, I mentioned the scholarly debate between *Judo-Hagarism*, a model that was proposed by Crone/Cook and its rejection/reactions from various scholars. As mentioned, the main arguments about the untrustworthiness of the model are the following; first, there is no information on the texts' authorship and date, and it is likely that these texts were composed after the rise of Islam. Second, is on the scope and rhetoric: the main intention of the sources was to prove the religious dominance of Christianity over the other religions, thus their arguments are religious, often implemented with understatements. The majority of these understatements are related with the prophet and the Islamic doctrine. For example, the prophet is seen as the Anointed and Christ in *The Doctrina Jacobi*. Another example is found in the Jewish messianic expectations, which indicates the foulness of the Jews and the superiority of Christianity¹²⁴.

The model of Crone/Cook provided feedback, new perspectives and discussion, but modern research considers it obsolete and problematic, as the evidence on the sources is considered insufficient and unreliable¹²⁵. However, the majority of criticism on *Judo-Hagarism* rejects the sources such as *the Doctrina Jacobi*, the Sebeos account as unreliable.

However, most of the criticism does not take account on the newest editions of these texts, on

¹²⁴ This topic has been discussed by David Olster, *Roman defeat*, 30-51

¹²⁵ For a criticism the Crone, see S. Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 1-3

which there is further discussion about the authors and the 7th-8th centuries historiography¹²⁶. This rejection is not unbiased. In this chapter, I will start discussing some issues that need a re-evaluation, regarding the prophet in the Greek sources. Since this paper's chief objective is not to reconstruct the early Islamic religion or discover the Muslim-Jewish early relations but to discuss the attitudes of the non-Muslim authors on the prophet and the early Islam, this chapter will focus on three things; first, to summarize and compare the information on the prophet regarding the three sources. Second, I intend to discuss the general attitudes on Greek and Coptic texts about the prophet and Islam and last make a careful comparison of the sources.

The first interesting point regarding the prophet is the different approaches on the prophet's character. As we saw above, in *the Doctrina Jacobi* Mohammed is seen as an imposter, *The Secrets* describe him as a savior against the Byzantine oppression, whereas *the Sebeos' History* as a merchant and legislator with knowledge of Judaism. Thus, he is subjected to the main narrative of the text, and he is not the protagonist of the works. The prophet's mission did not concern much the Christian authors as their main topic of discussion was Judaism. On the other hand, the Jewish author(s) main target was the anti-Judaic persecutions of Heraclius. Sebeos' probably writes in the early 660's¹²⁷; the Islamic conquests were on their peak and he tries to portray the prophet as a merchant and not as the messenger of God. So, the texts represent three images of the prophet: the imposter, the savior and the merchant. These different approaches are strong indicators that the prophet's image was not formulated by then. Thus, he was depicted differently in every source.

¹²⁶ For the value of Sebeos' Chronicle, see *The Armenian History* attributed to Sebeos, lxi-v

¹²⁷ For the date of Sebeos, see *ibid*, xxxviii

The second interesting thing is the means of Mohammed in the works; sources highlight the violent conquests and the bloodshed. It is interesting that there is no testimony on forced conversions to Islam unlike the chronicle of John of Nikiu, which was composed a bit later¹²⁸. Moreover, the message of the prophet concerning the spread of the Islamic religion is absent in the texts. The only indirect reference is in Sebeos, on which the prophet is seen as following the plan of Moses, leading the Arabs into the promising land. This is an additional example that the prophet's description was not the main concern of the authors. The third thing is the date of Mohammed's death. Traditionally, his death was dated in Medina in 632. The earliest indications on the death of the prophet come from the 8th century texts; authors such as Stephen Shoemaker discussed in detail the date of prophet's death in the Islamic and Christian traditions. It seems as the Islamic tradition on Mohammed's death in Mecca is an 8th century concept, therefore these testimonies provide an early account on the prophet's death¹²⁹. On the contrary, the leadership of Mohammed in the conquest of Palestine was recorded in the non-Islamic sources. In *the Doctrina Jacobi* and the Secrets, he is seen as the leader of the Arabs in Palestine¹³⁰. From 630 to 800 there are more than ten non-Muslim sources that place the prophet's death after 632, while 9th century sources like Theophanes, which were influenced by the Arabic literature, place his death in 632¹³¹. The precise date of Mohammed's death is debated in these two traditions. Both the Muslim and Christian sources main objectives are not to present a historical accurate text, but rather argument on their religion. Thus, the author(s) of *Doctrina Jacobi* placed the prophet alive during the conquest of Palestine, and this alone was enough to prove the inaccuracy of his preaching. For them, he was not a prophet, as the author(s) of *the Doctrina Jacobi* stated “since

¹²⁸ For the date of John of Nikiu, see *Christian-Muslim relations* 211-12,

¹²⁹ S. Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 27

¹³⁰ For more, see page 16

¹³¹ For more, see S. Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 65-66

*prophets do not come with swords and arms*¹³²”. It is interesting that there is no effort on discussing the life and works of the prophet before the Arab invasions. The only aspect that sources discuss is the emergence of the Islamic doctrine, which is often seen as the Judo-Hagar amalgam. Thus, nothing is recorded about the prophet prior to 629 in the non-Muslim sources. The reasons might be simple; the author(s) had no interest in Mohammed’s life and works before the Arab invasion in Palestine. The early Christian Church in relation with Rome is interesting parallel example to this; the first Christians were hardly mentioned in the Latin literature until the Great arson of Rome in 54CE¹³³.

In general, these three non-Muslim sources see the Prophet from a strict Christian perspective. His depiction was subjected to the religious and political interpretations of every text. The negative characterization of the Prophet as false or harbinger of the end of times was related with the main ideas that the texts wanted to discuss (such as the malignity of the Jewish or the Byzantine state as an oppressive power). There was no homophony on the mission and character of Mohammed as his presence in the texts is subjected with the main idea of the text. However, the texts developed a different series of events in relation with the life of the prophet, as we mentioned above. This conflicted information does not necessarily cancel the Muslim historiographical tradition, but it is a different approach in the life and the early preaching of Mohammed.

B. The Greek and the Coptic sources: The initial thoughts on the Arab conquests.

In general, the Coptic sources are better-informed and organized than the Greek. The latter suffer from fragmentation and disperse, which was caused by the doctrinal dispute of

¹³² Doctrina Jacobi V.14

¹³³ For more, see Robert Van Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament: An introduction to the ancient evidence*, Michigan 2000, 19-20

Monothelitism. Thus, the Greek sources related with Egypt do not discuss much on the Arab conquests, as their main interest is to show that Heraclius' religious program was wicked and a failure. In general, unlike the Coptic sources, which were composed in Egypt, most of the Greek sources were not composed in Egypt, with the exception of Stephen of Alexandria and Anastasius of Sinai. In fact, authors that wrote from a distance from the battlefield such as Maximus the Confessor or Sophronius depicted the Arabs as less violent and not as a religion. On the contrary, authors such as Sophronius and Anastasius that witnessed the Arab conquests and Islamic rule are fiercer against the latter. A good example is the climaxed emotion of fear against the Arabs in Sophronius' sermons which was mentioned earlier in the thesis. Thus, the Greek sources have different and various approaches on the Arab conquests.

Overall, the Greek sources are negative towards Arabs. Anastasius the Confessor has the most concrete references on the Early Islam, since he resided in Sina during the early Islamic reign. It is the only testimony on the Arab conquest and the early Arab rule of the Sinai region. And, although full of anachronisms, he has the first historical analysis in Greek for the Arab conquest of Egypt. The Greek texts openly provoke the Chalcedonian Creed. Most of the related references to the Arabs are found in polemic tracts, speeches and religious texts, which have as an initial target to promote the Chalcedonian Creed; thus, the Arabs are not the main concept of the works, but they rather as an additional concern. Moreover, the texts written prior to the conquests do not describe the birth of the Islamic religion or the prophet.

In general, authors tend not to discuss the birth of a religion but to illustrate the atrocities of the Islamic conquest. Also, there is no indication on whether the Islamic rule will be brief or not. There is much difference between the hopes of Sophronius that God will crush the

Muslims that siege Jerusalem and the account of Anastasius. The latter was composed twenty years after the Arab conquests and after the Roman defeats at Yarmouk (632) and Phoenix (654), there was little hope that the Byzantine army would recover back Egypt and the lands of Syria and Palestine¹³⁴. In general, the sources indicate the religious fragmentation in North Africa on the eve of the Arab conquest. It seems as if the sources that are written from a Chalcedonian perspective indicate Heraclius as the main responsible for the Arab revolts. The Arabs prior to the conquests are described as a barbaric nation whereas after 650 they are seen as a religious group. The first polemic tracts against Islam are mentioned in 750, in general the Greek sources do not represent deliberate and solid ideas about the Early Islam but they are presenting some interesting Chalcedonian opinions on the Arabs and the conquests. Unlike the Greek sources, that were usually composed from distance the Coptic sources were initially instigated from the Arab conquests.

To begin with, the Coptic communities of Egypt, as mentioned above were persecuted from Heraclius from 622 onwards. The Arabs legalized the Coptic Church and promoted their patriarch into the legal leader of the Coptic flock. Moreover, they gave privileges to the Copts, whereas the majority of Coptic sources mention the good relationship between the patriarch and Umar. But the Arab conquest of Egypt was not all welcomed by the Copts neither it was a peaceful process. The violence that followed the conquest of Egypt was recorded in the anonymous sources. In fact, most of the anonymous texts represented the violence of the Arab conquests; thus, the Arabs as represented as Persians, who were notorious for their violence. These texts strongly indicate the intruders' malignity and the need for a savior that will triumph against the Arabs. The savior was described either as the

¹³⁴ For the aftermath of the battle of Phoenix, see R. Hoyland, *In God's path*, 107

Coptic people in the Cambyses story or as an individual in the Holy Selpuchre tale. Unlike the messianic expectations of the 7th century Jew, the Copts show have no interest on the arrival of a messiah; their expectations are not recorded; the Copts were organized in a religious circle; thus, they did not have a direct military or political organization. Older researchers such as Frend have associated Copts with a religious-social Egyptian nationalism, but this has been disputed by modern scholars¹³⁵. The messianic expectations were restricted since, the Coptic communities were never organized as a political group, but they always coexisted as a religious minority. It is difficult to reconstruct the ideology of the Copts from these anonymous sources. Yet, they provide some interesting information regarding the popular perception on the Arabs. From all Coptic sources, apparently, the Chronicle of John of Nikiu's is the least biased work. His chronicle is an ecclesiastical history of Egypt, and discusses some interesting points regarding the Arab conquest of Egypt. Nonetheless, he is writing from a Coptic scope. Like other Copts, he blamed the emperor Heraclius and the religious controversy for the conquests. For John, the Arabs are the aftermath of the religious dispute and not a new religion. Unfortunately, his work after 641 does not survive, but in general his account is far more descriptive than the anonymous sources or the apocalyptic texts.

In general, there seem to be two phases in the Arab rule of Egypt according to the Coptic sources. The first is the period of the conquest, which like the Sassanid conquest as a bloodshed. The second period is the establishment of the Arab rule. As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, the social, religious and political change in Egypt under the Arabs was a slow and non-violent process. Most of the institutions remained under Christian control

¹³⁵ For the Egyptian nationalism, see E. Wipiska, *Le Nationalisme* in, 83-6, she summarizes the study of Egyptian-Coptic nationalism so far.

for the first fifty years of the Arab rule. However, Coptic sources discuss a constant, ongoing Arab pressure against them during this period. In the Patriarchs' lives, there are both direct and indirect references that state this phenomenon¹³⁶; the taxation of the Coptic Church, the involvement of the Arab commanders in the election of the bishop and the promotion of the Islamic doctrine were the main problems in the Early Coptic-Arab relations. The later Apocalyptic texts also imply these theories, yet the idea of the savior is missing. In general, the Copts saw the Arab conquest as a God-sent calamity that emerged because of the religious disagreement concerning the Monothelite dispute. They initially saw the Arabs as liberators but soon were subjected to their yoke. There is no direct information on whether the Copts considered the Arabs as a brief conquest that will somehow end. It seems as there was not much hope in the Byzantine attempts of re-capturing Egypt (646-7, 654), but indeed the Copts never seek for political autonomy. The salvation for the majority of the Coptic authors was achieved through the apocalypse; the Copts do not regard themselves as a nation or a state but as the religion of God who is the harbinger of times. Thus, the Arabs are seen as the epitome of destruction and chaos in the majority of the Coptic sources. In brief,

**C. Towards an end? The prophet, the Greek and the Coptic sources in comparison:
a bilateral approach.**

In general, the reflection of the Christian sources regarding the prophet and the Arab conquest of Egypt is a complicated process. First and most important, sources seem

¹³⁶ For more, see also H. Suermann, *Copts in the seventh century*, 98-100

to disagree on who had the greatest responsibility for the Arab conquests; Greek sources, such as *Doctrina Jacobi* and Sophronius consider the Jewry as traitors and allies of the Arabs. Research stated that this idea became popular after the Arab conquests; its main intention is to characterize the Jewish as scapegoats and blame them for the loss of Syria/Palestine and Egypt¹³⁷. Moreover, this idea is related to the 7th century literary motif, which intends to portray the malignity of the Jew. This concept represents the Jewish stereotype in many anti-Jewish tracts and polemics. It was emerged after the Sassanid War against Byzantium and the Jewish revolts, such as the one in Jerusalem in 614¹³⁸. In other words, the Jews were an easy target to blame after the invasion of the Arabs.

On the contrary, the Chalcedonian sources blame Heraclius as the main responsible for the unfortunate wars. They indirectly stated that his religious doctrine, which is also known as Monothelism brought large dispute and fragmentation amongst Christians. As for the Arabs, they are seen as barbarian invaders that conquer the unprotected and fragmented ideologically Roman land. Just like the previous, these authors condemn Heraclius' family for the loss. Most of the times, as we saw these authors wrote after the conquests and the death of Heraclius, indeed he was an easy target, since he lost the war. Moreover, authors such as Anastasius writes from the Arab occupied Egypt, thus his criticism against Heraclius does not have any effect on his life. It is true that Heraclius' army was not effective against the Arabs. But, that is distant on the sources' intentions. The sources are writing from a religious perspective, their main

¹³⁷ This argument was used for criticizing the ideas of Crone and Cook, for more, see Sidney Griffith, *Jews and Muslims*, 87.

¹³⁸ For the revolt, see Hagith Sivan, *Palestine in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 2008, 8

scope is to provide a religious explanation on the Arab conquest. But, the Christian authors were not always far away from politics, as the patriarchs such as Sophronius or Cyrus were the chief negotiators of Jerusalem and Alexandria respectively. Thus, the scopes, motives and ideas of each source is highly affiliated with its religious sympathies.

Surprisingly or not, most of the sources included in this thesis do not regard the early Islam as a new religion. Since the texts mostly discuss the Christian matters, the Arabs usually play a secondary role; religious tirades view them as barbarians/uncivilized whereas the apocrypha/apocalypse texts as a Sin that comes from God. With the exception of Anastasius, the majority of authors did not concern the Early Islam as a religion. This is also evident on the ways they saw the followers of Islam; their names are different in every source (Saracens, Agarians, Ishmaelites). The prophet was also described as merchant in texts, such as Sebeos' History. So far, there has been no attempt by scholarship to discuss the different names on the sources. But, it is evident that the authors were not interested in representing the Arabs as an organized group or writing the history of the conquests. Except Mohammed, the contemporary to the conquests Greek and Coptic sources do not name the successors of Mohammed, or any other military commander. The only Arab leaders/commanders mentioned are in the John's Chronicle and the Patriarchs' Lives, which were composed after the conquests. In brief, unlike the 8th century where there was a high dispute on Islam and Christianity, the emergence of Islam was not welcomed as a new religion.

Overall, the sources discuss the prophet and the Arab invasion from a unique, religious, social, political perspective. All sources are written from a religious angle; thus, they are subjected to the religious views of the author, which is either Copt or

Chalcedonian and they are far from unbiased. This also applies for the anonymous texts, as it is easy to distinguish the religious sympathies of the author. On the contrary, the anonymous texts should be read with caution as sometimes they are difficult to be dated. In general, the sources this thesis discussed do not intend to represent objective testimonies regarding the prophet and the Arab conquest. As mentioned, this study is focusing on the ideological perspectives of these texts. Thus, the views on the prophet as an imposter or ally of the Jews or as the harbinger of the end of the world are concepts of the 7th century polemical dispute and not deliberate references to a new religion. These concepts differ from the traditional Islamic views of the 7th century. In fact, the concepts represent a different tradition, which is a part of the religious and social dispute of the 7th-8th centuries.

Conclusions

Overall, the sources' criticism on Islam is done within the context of a strict Christian mindset. The value of these testimonies is high; they represent a unique non-Islamic approach to the prophet and the conquests. Moreover, they are good indicators of the fragmentation of the 7th century and the unpopularity of the Monothelite doctrine in the Chalcedonian clergy and authors. In terms of understanding the Islamic conquests, the sources do not discuss any major event such as battles, but they have a unique Christian perspective that is different than the Islamic tradition. They are mostly seen as raiders or barbarians who fought against the Christian empire. But, this descriptions were not composed by historians. Sources are far from being described as official histories. They mostly describe the Arabs and the Early Islam from the Christian angle. The religious implications of the prophet's preaching are seen as an infusion between Jewish and Abrahamic elements.

These blended ideas are conflicted with the Islamic tradition which was composed at a later stage. Thus, these testimonies represent an alternative approach to the conquests. Furthermore, they describe the religious dispute after the Monothelist controversy and the troubled 7th century. In general, these sources should be treated like religious texts; their information contributes in the further understanding of the religious situation in the East during the last ten years of Heraclius. Their account along with the study of the Islamic tradition and other fields, such as archaeology can bring more light in understanding the concept and framework of the Arab conquests.

The recent steps towards this direction were made; works such as the careful study of Jodi Magness on the archaeological findings during the early years of Islam share some interesting ideas¹³⁹. Her work is the first modern approach on the archaeology of the early Christian churches in Palestine and their relation with the Arab conquest. The outcome of the book is that the Arab expansion in Syria was a product of mass migration¹⁴⁰. But more needs to be done, especially for Egypt, a comprehensive work that will combine archaeology and history in the same framework. Thus, along with the testimonies of the Copts, the arguments of the Chalcedonian Greek Christians and the modern research shall bring some new light in the Islamic conquests and the expansion of the Arabs in Syria, Palestine and North Africa.

¹³⁹ Since this thesis is limited in Egypt and the related sources with the Islamic conquest, I did not include Magness ideas; her book is about the archaeology of Palestine, it is an interesting study on the topic, for more see Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine*, Indiana 2003, introduction and page

¹⁴⁰ For more, see *ibid*, 196-204.

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