Christology and Prophetology in the early Umayyad Empire

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The building of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock in 691/692 as a monument for the declaration of an Arab Christology is increasingly recognized in scholarship as a crucial event in the formation of Islam. As a basilica with its 20-meter high cupola on the Temple Mound in Jerusalem, the Dome can be seen as the counter monument to the two most famous Byzantine basilicas, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Hagia Sophia, with their 35-m and 50-m high domes. The inscriptions inside and outside the Dome proclaim a Christology that was not only different from those of the late Roman Empire[1] but also incompatible with the Christologies of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. The inscriptions can be seen as proclamations of a new Arab imperial state theology within a wider Christian ecumenical context which John Wansbrough pertinently called the "sectarian milieu."[2]

Why the builder of the Dome, Caliph `Abd al-Malik (685-705), chose to elevate his administration's Christology into the central doctrine of a fledgling state religion is a question not easy to answer. Only recently, scholars such as Christoph Luxenberg, Volker Popp, and Karl-Herinz Ohlig, have drawn a distinction between the Christology of `Abd al-Malik on one hand and the subsequent rise of Islam on the other. I consider their distinction to be foundational for any contemporary discussion that seeks to overcome the well-known 150-year gap between the non-Islamic and Islamic sources concerning the origins of Islam. I realize, of course, that there are still many colleagues in the field of Islamic studies who either deny the existence of this gap or seek to minimize it. Within the scope of my brief analysis here I will have to leave this general source issue aside.

In this paper, my efforts will focus first on `Abd al-Malik's Christology and then, second, on the geographical context of the Middle East where this Christology emerged. A main difficulty in this analysis is the fact that on one hand `Abd al-Malik's Christology is unmistakably Judeo-Chrisitan[3] but on the other hand the presence of this Christology from Nicaea (325) to the beginning of the Arab calendar (622) is only sparsely documented in the non-Islamic sources. It is this documentation, limited as it is, that I want to review for their hints of Judeo-Christian survivals, thinking of them as the "milieu" out of which Islam developed.

(1)The Inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock and the Heresiology of John of Damascus

About a century and a half ago, Aloys Sprenger raised the question whether the word "Muhammad" was the proper name of the prophet of Islam.[4] With this question he wished to ask whether this name was not instead the epithet for someone with a different proper name. For the next seventy years a lively debate ensued, in which scholars opted either for the epithet or the

[1] I am following the more recent convention of drawing the dividing line between the Roman and the Byzantine Empires at 640 when the emperors switched from the title of *imperator* to that of *basileus*, to emphasize the empire's readiness for Christ's Second Coming, and reorganized the empire in defense against the Arabs. See, for example, Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium*, 96-98.

[2] *The Sectarian Milieu*. As I shall discuss below, in some important respects Wansbrough needs to be enlarged and reconfigured.

[3] In this essay, the conventional term "Judeo-Christian" is employed, to indicate Christian communities which adhered to varying degrees to the "Old Law" of the Hebrew Bible, considered Jesus the servant and not the son of God (following the doctrines of Monarchianism or Adoptionism), and rejected fully or partially cross, icons, baptism, sacraments, ecclesiastical ceremony, and hierarchy. In other words, these communities were "Old" Christian, refusing to adopt the theologies of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon and, therefore, distinguishing themselves from the Christians of Chalcedon (Greek Orthodox and Catholic), as well as the Monophysites and Nestorians.

[4] *Das Leben*, I, 155-162 ("Anhang zum zweiten Kapitel. I. Hieß der Prophet Mohammed?")

proper name.[5] Then, during most of the twentieth century, a hiatus followed without any new contributions to the debate: Scholars were satisfied with the Islamic tradition of Muhammad as the proper name of the prophet of Islam living during 571-632.[6] Only recently, Yehuda Nevo, Volker Popp, and Christoph Luxenberg have reopened the debate. According to Nevo, "Muhammad" (meaning "the Chosen") was an epithet introduced by Caliph `Abd al-Malik (685-05) for an unknown/unnamed preacher who might or might not have lived earlier in the century. The caliph, so Nevo, was the true architect of Islam by shaping the beginnings of an Arabic version of the Jewish and Christian revelations, centered around an Arab prophet and destined for the Arabs of Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Arabia.[7] Popp and Luxenberg went further by offering a new reading of the phrase *muhammad `abdu 'llah*, which figures prominently in the inscriptions of the interior of the Dome of Rock. In their reading this phrase does not mean "Muhammad, Servant of God," but "the Praiseworthy (Jesus), Servant of God."[8]

Luxenberg's reading has triggered some critical debate. Two scholars, Israel Sinai and Friedrich Erich Dobberahn, concentrate on alleged grammatical rules to deny the possibility of an epithet of Jesus, such as "Praiseworthy." They point out that the Arabic language requires either a determinate article in front of epithets, places the predicate of a nominal sentence at the end, or prefers a verbal sentence in the first place. They therefore come to the conclusion that the reading is "encumbered by a severe argumentative mortgage" or leads into a "cul de sac."[9]

A third scholar, Gabriel Said Reynolds, also discusses the grammatical objections but after a careful analysis of the Koran and the classical commentaries comes to the conclusion that epithets appear in the Koran both with and without determinate articles. For example, the Koran uses on one hand the epithet *al-`aziz* ("the powerful one") twice (12:30 and 51) in place of the name "Potiphar," that is, the Egyptian captain of the Pharao's palace guard who bought Joseph from his brothers.[10] On the other hand, there are the epithets *salih* ("obedient," 7:73 and 75; 11:61 et al.) for a non-scriptural prophet and *talut* (from *tala*, "being long or tall," 2:247 and 249) for Saul, the physically imposing first ruler of the united kingdom of Israel.[11] In view of this Koranic indeterminacy it seems that the grammatical objections concerning the missing article "al-" can be put aside.[12] Without even any recourse to Aramaic-Syriac as one of the possible substrates of the Koran, we can deduce from the plain Arabic of the Koran that epithets in it are employed both with and without definite articles.

Luxenberg has so far analyzed only the epithetical phrase *muhammadun `abdu 'llahi* in the interior of the Dome of the Rock. The bronze plaque formerly on or above the outside of the north door of the Dome also contains the phrase, but in addition uses the epithet in a different way, as I shall discuss in detail below. Max van Berchem provided a transcription of the Arabic text in 1927[13] and Oleg Grabar[14] and Gülru Neciopeğlu[15] included English translations in their recent studies of the Dome. While fairly well-known, the inscription of the north door has not yet found the full attention it deserves.

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[5] It would be interesting to explore the reasons for this hiatus which I am tempted to place into the intellectual climate of decolonization and postcolonialism in which it became unfashionable to challenge the cultural traditions of new countries in Asia and Africa.

[6] The debate is summarized in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an*, 189-192.

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[8] *Crossroads to Islam*, 254-255 and 260-267; Popp, "Die frühe Islamgeschichte," 16-123; and Luxenberg, "Neudeutung,"124-147. The book is available in an English translation: *The Hidden Origins*.

[9] Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 29, and Dobberahn, "Muhammad oder Christus?," 50.

[10] Reynolds, *The Qur'an*, 196-7.

[11] *Ibid.*, 197-8.

[12] In addition, both Sinai and Doberahn ignore the serious question that can be raised concerning the time gap between the Arabics of the Dome of the Rock inscription and the final redaction of the Koran sometime in the early 800s.

[13] *Matériaux*, 250 (#217).

[14] *The Dome of the Rock*, 94-95.

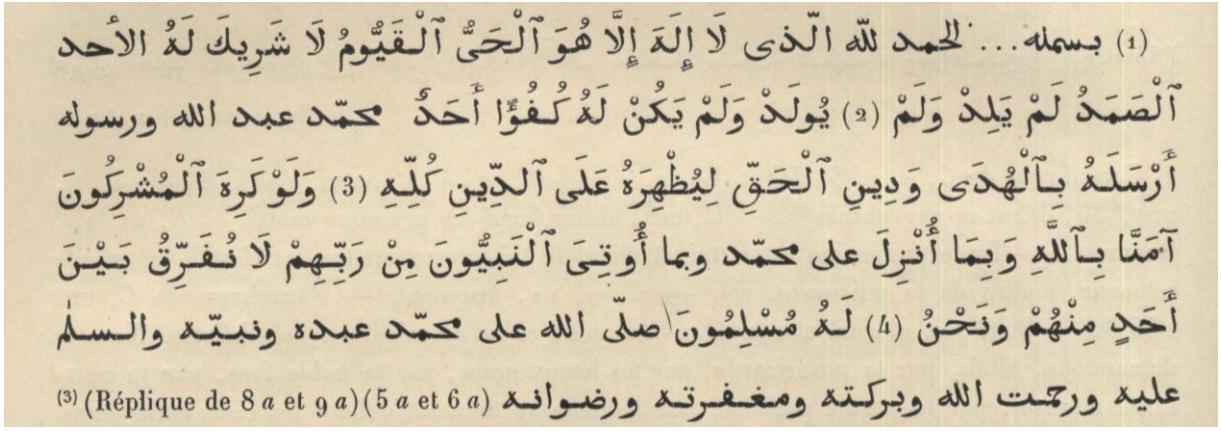
[15] "The Dome of the Rock as a Palimpsest," 48-9.

Unfortunately, no facsimile of the plaque exists. Grabar furthermore states that the plaque was removed to the Haram Museum during restoration work in the 1960s. Scholars accept the date of 691/692 for the plaque's origin and only recently Johannes Thomas asserted that a later date should be assumed.[16] Thomas cites H.R. Allen as his reference who in a 1999 essay stated that after 692 the Dome received a number of structural additions inside and outside, including porches in front of the four doors. From a figure supplied by Allen, however, it appears that the plaque was never affixed to the north porch as Thomas assumes. Allen, furthermore, does not even mention the north door or its porch, let alone the plaque.[17] For the time being, the date for the plaque has to remain the year of 691/692.

The relevant sentences in the inscription read as follows in Grabar's translation, except for the key terms, which are my renderings, indicated by parenthetical Arabic words:

> The Praiseworthy (or Chosen) Servant of God and his messenger (*muhammadun `abdu 'llahi wa-rasuluhu*) whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth (*din al-haqq*) to proclaim it over all religions (*al-din kullu*), even though the polytheists hate it. Let us believe in God and what was revealed to the Praiseworthy (or Chosen) and what was given to the prophets from their Lord; we made no difference between the one and the other and we are conformists (*muslimun*) with him. God bless his Praiseworthy Servant and Prophet (*muhammad `abdihi wa-nabihi*), and peace be upon him and the mercy of God, his grace, his forgiveness, and his pleasure.[18]

Below is a scan of van Berchem's reproduction of the text where the key terms can be seen in their Arabic context:[19]


(1) بسمله... الحمد لله الّذى لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ٱلْحَىُّ ٱلْقَيُّومُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ الأحد
ٱلْصَمَدُ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ (2) يُولَدْ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ محمّد عبد الله ورسوله
أَرْسَلَهُ بِٱلْهُدَى وَدِينِ ٱلْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى ٱلدِّينِ كُلِّهِ (3) وَلَوْ كَرِهَ ٱلْمُشْرِكُونَ
آمَنَّا بِٱللَّهِ وَبِمَا أُنْزِلَ على محمّد وبما أُوتِىَ ٱلْنَبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ
أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ (4) لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ صلّى الله على محمّد عبده ونبيّه والسلم
(3) (Réplique de 8 *a* et 9 *a*) (5 *a* et 6 *a*) عليه ورحمت الله وبركته ومغفرته ورضوانه

Popp's and Luxenberg's reading of the epithet *muhammad* as standing for Jesus seems to be confirmed in two of the three passages of the north door text above. It is the different second occurrence which is important for my analysis here because it casts doubts on the Jesus thesis. What if the epithet refers to a person who lived earlier in the 600s and exercised religious "guidance" among the Arabs and whom the inscription makes a prophet and servant of God, with the title "Praiseworthy" or "Chosen"? Given the context of all inside and outside inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, there is little question that the word *muhammad* is an epithet and not a name. But the reference to Jesus seems to be shaky.

Do the two Koranic verses 2:136 and 3:84 which overlap with the north gate inscription strengthen or weaken the thesis of the Jesus epithet?

> Say, [O believers], "We have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants and what

[16] "Hellenistische Traditionen im frühen Islam,"105-6.

[17] Allen, "Original Appearance," II, 197-212. For the figure see 202-204.

[18] Grabar, *loc. cit.* n. 11.

[19] van Berchem, *loc. cit.*, n. 12.

> was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him."
>
> Say, "We have believed in Allah and in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Descendants, and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [submitting] to Him."

In these verses, an unnamed speaker mentions Jesus directly with his name, not indirectly via any epithet. Two interpretations seem possible. Either the speaker affirms that *muhammad* is indeed an epithet of Jesus, with no Muhammad in the line of prophets, or he speaks as the epithetical Muhammad, extending the line of prophets from the Jews and Christians implicitly to himself as the prophet of the Arabs. Without taking any difference of dating into account – the Koranic verse could be either contemporary to the north gate inscription or as late as the 800s when the final redaction of the Koran is assumed by Wansbrough to have taken place – the Koran evidently does not help in clarifying the Jesus versus Muhammad possibility. The comparison between the north gate inscription and the Koranic verses nevertheless reveals an important Prophetological detail: Caliph `Abd al-Malik as well as the Koran establish a transfer in the sense that God chose/praised either Jesus or someone after him to join the Muslims to the Jews and Christians as recipients of Revelation.

What was ambiguous in 691/692 became clear half a century later. In the late 740s John of Damascus (d. 750) devoted a section in his treatise on Christian heresies to the heresy of the "Ishmaelites," with "Mamed" as their prophet. [20] This section of seven pages presents in some detail the content of three or four suras of the Koran in the making.[21] In addition, there are at least two references to an incipient extra-Koranic Tradition, that is, the hadiths that eventually, in the course of the 800s, served for both the composition of the Prophet's biography and the formulation of Islamic law. One of the references is to an "Arian monk," with whom Muhammad is said to have conversed in addition to "chancing" on the Hebrew Bible and New Testament to fashion his heresy[22] and the other is to male and female circumcision.[23] In other words, since a mere 50 years elapsed between the north gate inscription and the composition of the section on the Ishmaelites, we can assume that the process of the epithet becoming the name "Mamed" and providing the point of departure for the beginnings of a biography must have begun soon after 692, if it was not already underway then.

As far as the specific doctrines are concerned which John criticizes one can sense a Nestorian[24] background. In John's words, the Ishmaelites believe that the "Word and God and the Spirit entered into Mary and she brought forth Jesus, who was a prophet and servant of God."[25] The Spirit origin of Mary and Jesus poses no problem for John since this doctrine, originating in the Gospel of John, was retained in all branches of post-Nicaean Christianity down to the Umayyads. By contrast, the doctrine of Jesus' Servantship, dominant among the early Christians, was completely submerged after Nicaea (325) by the Trinitarian theology of Father, Son, and Spirit. No Christian theologian on record continued to espouse the Servantship doctrine after the 400s and modern scholars have found it exceedingly difficult to trace it after that time, as we

[20] Louth, *St. John Damascene*, 6 and 31-34. The mid-eighth-century authenticity of the manuscript *On Heresies* and the absence of later additions was ascertained by Kotter, the most recent editor of John of Damascus (*Die Schriften des Johannes Damaskos*, IV). See also Sahas, *John of Damascus*, 54.

[21] One sura, which John calls "The Camel of God" is not part of the canonical Koran, although verses in other suras (7, 11, 17, 26, 54, 91) speak about the she-camel in John's section on the Ishmaelites. John's "little camel" is not attested to in the Koran. Cf. Louth, *St. John the Damascene*, 79-80.

[22] St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. Chase, 153. Cf. Abel, Art. "Bahira," in *Encycl. of Islam.*.

[23] *Ibid*., 159. Cf. Wensinck, Art. "Khitan," in *Encycl. of Islam*, 2nd ed.. Consider also John's non-Koranic reference to the Ishmaelites accusing the Christians of idolatry for their veneration of the cross.

[24] I am using the terms "Nestorian," "Monophysite," and "Chalcedonian (Orthodox and Catholic)," in a conventional sense, without implying the negative stereotypes which have historically accrued to them. There is a considerable literature on the wisdom (or not) of this terminology.

[25] Trans. Chase, 154.

shall see below. Accordingly, the faithful Chalcedonian theologian John of Damascus finds the Umayyad notions of Jesus' Servantship abhorrent.

Servantship implies the subsidiary doctrine of Mary not merely as the Christ bearer (*christikos*) but also the God bearer (*theotikos*). In Chalcedonian as well as Monophysite Christianity, the *theotikos* formula was obligatory since the Council of Ephesus (431), which declared Nestorius' preference for the *christokos* notion heretical. In the Nestorian theological tradition, Servantship ceded place to Sonship in the later 400s, but *christokos* was replaced with *theotokos* only in the early 600s. It is the perpetuation of the latter formula among the Ishmaelites that provides an indicator for the specifically Nestorian "sectarian milieu," as opposed to more western Monophysite environments, as the place of origin of what eventually became Islamic Christology. In geographical terms, we have to focus on an Upper Mesopotamian-Armenian-northern Syrian milieu rather than central or southern Syrian, let alone western Arabian, origin of Ishmaelite Christology.

For the rest of his section, John of Damascus seeks to argue from the high ground of the doctrine of "two natures (*ousiai*) in one person (*prosopon*) and one (composite) existence (*hypostasis*)" with which the Greek and Latin speakers elaborated the Christology of the Orthodox/Catholic Church at the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). On the basis of this Trinitarian formula John advances his disagreement with the Ishmaelites' doctrine of Jesus' Crucifixion, which follows the passage on Mary: "And [Mamed] says that the Jews wanted to crucify Him in violation of the law, and that they seized His shadow and crucified this."[26] The crucial term in this quote is the word "shadow" (*skia*), the meaning of which is difficult to grasp, even within the context. One is not quite sure how one should understand – literally or even metaphorically – how the Jews would seize a shadow and nail it to the cross.[27]

Muhammad's alleged denial of the Crucifixion and the implied substitution of a shadow for Jesus on the cross in John's text – the so-called Docetic view of Crucifixion – are similar to a phrase contained in Koran 4:157. In most English Korans the phrase is translated as "but they killed him not, nor crucified him. Only a likeness of that was shown to them (*wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*)."[28] There are, however, a few more recent translations as, for example, that of Majid Fakhry in 1996, which renders the phrase as "[b]ut so it was made to appear unto them,"[29] or M.A.S. Abdel Haleem in 2004, which expresses the phrase as "[t]hough it was made to appear like that to them.[30] The most literal translation, as proposed by Gabriel Said Reynolds in 2009, is "but it was made unclear to them."[31] With this Reynolds means that the Jews boasted that they had crucified Jesus but that God made this apparent deed obscure to them. The implication here is that only the Almighty God giveth and taketh away life and that the Jews were mistaken if they thought that they possessed his power.

In the remainder of his article, Reynolds discusses the Muslim exegetes of the 800- 900s and later who in their majority tended to side with the shadow reading, rather than the obscurity interpretation of this highly allusive, if not incomprehensible, Koranic verse 4:157. He points out, that the shadow reading of the exegetes, however, does not fit well with the context of either Sura 4 or of the Koran as a whole which recognizes Jesus' death on the cross and ascension. Many classical Islamic exegetes as well as modern orientalists, so he charges, tend toward an atomistic rather than more contextual understanding of Scripture and hence tend to (mis)understand the passage in the same way as John of Damascus did.

What made John anticipate the Muslim exegetes of a century or more later, if that is how we have to read his polemic against the Ishmaelites' apparent adherence to the docetic view? In

[26] Trans. Chase, 154.

[27] Eichner, "Byzantine Accounts," 134, thinks that John did not understand the passage. But in the following I argue that he understood the Ishmaelites well – he followed their preferred exegetical reading.

[28] E.g., *The Holy Qur'an*, ed. The Presidency of Islamic Researchers, Ifta, Call and Guidance, King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex.

[29] *The Qur'an* (Reading: Garnet).

[30] *The Qur'an* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press).

[31] "The Muslim Jesus," 238.

classical Greek literature, *skia* was used, for example, for the shadowy, dark, and obscure inmates of Hades. In Christian contexts, *skia* was the translation of the Hebrew term "shadow of death" (*tsalmaveth*) and appears as such in Job and Psalm 23 as the "thick darkness."[32] Given these resonances of obscurity in the meaning of *skia*, John is perhaps still a step short of the later classical Islamic exegetes and we have to be careful not to read the full modern orientalist interpretation of docetism into the passage. He is definitely still some distance away from such meanings as "likeness," "phantom," and "illusion" which have led generations of orientalists into the cul-de-sac of allegedly docetic or even gnostic elements in Islamic Christology.[33]

John of Damascus follows his criticism of the Ishmaelite rendering of Crucifixion with a brief discussion of the subsequent soteriological events, according to Ishmaelite Christology. God, so John quotes Mamed from his book, took Christ after his crucifixion "to Himself into heaven" where he subjected him to questioning. He asked him whether he said of himself, as asserted by "sinful men," that he was the "Son of God and God." When Jesus denied the calumny and answered that he was but a servant, God was satisfied. After commenting on this divine dialogue, John concludes his section on the Ishmaelites by stating that there are many other "extraordinary and quite ridiculous things" in Mamed's book, presumably meaning again the Prophet's denial of Jesus' Sonship.

What is significant in this chapter is that John of Damascus notes with approval the special status which the Ishmaelites grant to the crucified Jesus. On the other hand, by declaring the Ishmaelite story of God testing Jesus on his status of Servantship versus Sonship "ridiculous," John passes in silence over the multiple references to Jesus the Servant in the gospels. In Chalcedonian theology, there was no room anymore for the Judeo-Christian concept of Jesus the Servant of God.

Two observations can be drawn from this analysis of John of Damascus' Section on the Ishmaelite heresy of the 740s. First, he is presenting an Ishmaelite Christology that is centered around a polemical insistence on Jesus' Servantship, denial of his Sonship, and opposition to the Christologies of the Chalcedonian as well as the Monophysite and Nestorian Churches. But John recognizes this Christology as still being located within the confines of the "sectarian milieu" of late Antiquity in which God's unity, the action of his Word or Logos in Mary as well as Jesus, the soteriological role of Jesus as the Christ or Messiah (including, his Crucifixion and Ascension), as well as God's Judgment at the end of the world are broadly shared. Within this milieu the Ishmaelites were thus decidedly not the generic monotheists among pagans which Yehuda Nevo and Fred Donner wish to make them in their recent publications.[34]

Given the rapidity with which the Ishmaelite Christology evolved towards a Prophetology – the evolution from "the Praiseworthy" to "Muhammad," taking barely a half century between the Dome of the Rock and John of Damascus – my cautious conclusion is that while it makes perfect sense to emphasize the epithetical meaning of the term *muhammad* in the Dome of the Rock one should not be surprised that its transformation into the name of a post-Jesus Arab prophet materialized so quickly. The fact that we can read the epithet clearly as a name already in 691/692 makes it easier to understand why in the 740s there was already an emergent Islam, complete with Koranic exegesis and a Muhammadan prophetic Sunna.

(2) Christianity in the Fertile Crescent during the 500s and 600s

As already alluded to above, Nestorian Christianity in Mesopotamia and Iran acquired its doctrinal orthodoxy more slowly than the Monophysite and Chalcedonian Christianities. The foundational theologians, such as Aphrahat (270-c. 345), Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373), and Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428), were the first to reform the traditional eastern doctrines of Jesus' Servantship and Mary's role as Christ bearer in the light of the Trinitarian formulations of the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Ephesus (341). Ephrem is said to have converted a large

[32] *dict.gr* (www.dict.gr), *skia;* Strong's Concordance (concordances.org/Hebrew/6757.htm, accessed 12-4-2012), *tsalmaveth*.

[33] E.g., Ali, *The Life and Teachings of Mohammed*, 484. Surprisingly, even one of the pioneers of critical Islamic Origins research, Michael Cook, retains this Docetism label in his otherwise careful short study *Muhammad*, 79.

[34] Nevo, *Crossroads*, and Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*. Concerning Donner, see the detailed review by Tannous, in *expositions*.

number of Sabellians, presumably in Mesopotamia, who adhered to the doctrine of God having adopted his servant Jesus for his mission of salvation.[35] Ephrem's contemporary Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315-403), the author of a tract on heresies, reports that the Sabellians were numerous in Mesopotamia and Rome.[36] The First General Council in Constantinople condemned Sabellianism in 381, which, however, seems to have continued to exist: In the early 400s Euthymius still preached against it.[37] In fact, the Third General Council of Constantinople in 681 continued the condemnation – an indication of the Sabellians apparently existing not only in Mesopotamia but also in what was now the Byzantine Empire, perhaps in southeastern Anatolia, on the border with Sasanid Mesopotamia.[38] The idea of Jesus as God's adopted servant proved to be a stubborn survivor.

Since there are no names of Sabellian theologians in this period of 300-600, one can assume that the doctrine of Jesus' adoption survived primarily on local congregational levels. The emerging doctrines of Jesus' Sonship and Mary's role as the God bearer could be found primarily on the higher level of the theologians writing tracts. This possibility of a difference between theologians and congregations can be gleaned from the conclusions of Michael Mitterauer, a leading researcher into the history of name-giving in Christianity. In his discussion of Christian names in early and late Antiquity he notes the frequency with which parents emphasized the idea of servantship to God, Jesus, or the saints in the names they gave to their children. [39] He demonstrates that this name-giving practice existed not only among the eastern Christians but also in the more westerly Christianities. Servantship remained a live idea in the substratum of popular piety.

While the traces of the Sabellians' survival between Nicaea and the Umayyads are faint, those of the Paulicians in the same period were more visible. Paul of Samosata (200-275), the possible namesake of the Paulicians, was a bishop of Antioch and Orontes in northern Syria. Like the Sabellians, Paul was an adherent of Monarchianism or Adoptionism , the Christology of which was centered on the absolute unity and sovereignty of God and Jesus his adopted servant. God could adopt any deserving sinless person, so Paul taught, and since this implied that he himself could potentially become similar to Jesus, Emperor Aurelian (270-275) deposed him in 273 for heresy. Little is known during the next few centuries about Paul's followers who in Armenia were given the derogatory suffix of *-lik* in their name, meaning "little Paulians." They appear in a source dating to ca. 478-490, but this mention might be a later interpolation. The first indubitable reference dates to 555 when the Armenian Council of Dvin passed an oath condemning the missionary efforts of the Nestorian Church, the "filthy" doctrines of which are being described as similar to those of the Paulicians.[40] Evidently, the Armenians were familiar with the Paulicians living among them, but were still unfamiliar with the Nestorian Church seeking to draw Armenians away from their own, Constantinople-affiliated Church.

Eastern Roman sources record the presence of Paulician communities in the later 600s in the Byzantine Empire where they came into touch with the Iconoclast Alovanians. Under the latter's influence they moved doctrinally into the direction of asceticism and world denial, both of which later observers (including modern ones) mistook as evidence of Gnosticism, particularly after the Paulicians established themselves in the Balkans during the 800s. Nina Garsoïan, however, the author of the definitive study on the Paulicians, is firm in her assertion of the Monarchian and Adoptionist origins of the Paulicians, citing Armenian sources hitherto not investigated.[41]

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[35] Butler, *The Lives of the Saints*, VII, 58. On monarchianism in general, among whom the Sabellians are included, see Decker, *Die Monarchianer*.

[36] Edwards, *The Biblical Repository*, 35-80.

[37] Roldanus, "Stützen und Störenfriede," 131.

[38] Riedlinger, *Concilium universale*, 220, 12; 228,8; and 482,9.

[39] *Ahnen und Heilige*, ch. 6; on Eastern Syriac Christian customs see his section "Indische und nestorianische Christen," 159-70.

[40] Garsoïan, 87-89.

[41] Ibid, 231-233.

The above evidence of active Monarchian/Adoptionist congregations in the region of the northern Fertile Crescent after 325 and into the 500s is of considerable importance. It contradicts the prevailing scholarly opinion, according to which the clerical establishments of the Chalcedonian, Monophysite, and Nestorian Churches had succeeded by the end of the 300s to eradicate Judeo-Christianity, from the Middle East. It once pitted the noted orientalists Shlomo Pines and Samuel Stern with increasing bitterness against each other, ending with Stern's seemingly definitive verdict of 1968 against a continuity of Judeo-Christianity between the Council of Nicaea and the rise of Islam.[42] Patricia Crone revisited the issue of a Judeo-Christian continuity in an important revisionist article of 1985 and argued that the Athinganoi in Upper Mesopotamia and the eastern Byzantine Empire during the 500s provided the missing link. [43] Crone's findings inspired John G. Gager in 2003 to call for a paradigm change in the study of Christianity in Late Antiquity, but Gabriel Said Reynolds takes Crone's admission of "uncertainty" in her article of having settled the issue of continuity as sufficient grounds for sticking with Stern's verdict. [44] If the evidence of the Athinganoi is indeed not substantial enough to permit the argument for a continuity of Judeo-Christianity in the area of Upper Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Northern Syria, certainly the evidence of the Paulicians should be more convincing.

The particular doctrinal evolution of nascent Islam outlined in the first part of this essay thus can be firmly grounded in John Wansbrough's concept of the sectarian milieu. Of course, for this grounding we have to enlarge his concept. To his official Christianities on the episcopal level we have to add Judeo-Christianity on the congregational level. Wansbrough was aware of the Ebionites, an early Judeo-Christian community disappearing in the mid-400s to which he devoted a few lines. He also knew that it was not enough to assert their legacies and that proof of a historical connection across the gap from the 400s to the 600s was necessary to explain a concrete influence on the formation of Islam – a task which he expressly avoided as too speculative.[45]

A further conclusion that can be drawn from the Sabellian and Paulician cases is that the circumstances in the regions where the Nestorian Church was predominant were particularly conducive to the survival of Judeo-Christianity, the Adoptionist doctrines of which became so crucial for the nascent Islam under the Umayyads. The main reason that can be considered responsible for this survival was the late formation of Nestorian orthodoxy which came about only in 612 after a protracted doctrinal struggle within the late Sasanid Empire, 150 years after orthodoxy had arrived in the Chalcedonian and Monophysite Churches.

The Nestorian struggle began in 585 when an East Syriac synod of sought to define the creed. After a lengthy definition of Trinity this creed concludes with:

> This is the unadulterated faith and, in brief, its corresponding meaning within the [above] context. In it, the person of Christ and the natures and his divinity and humanity are completely revealed, not only against those who deny his humanity but also against those who deny his divinity and confess him as mere human or compare him with some just one.[46]

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[42] Pines, *The Jewish Christians* and Stern, "Abd al-Jabbar's Account."

[43] "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," 83-95. Crone comments in passing on the Paulicians, for which she cites Garsoïan. But she finds Garsoïan's general conclusions "quite unacceptable" (85). Garsoïan draws four general conclusions (231-233), three of which deal with the early history and doctrines of the Paulicians. Presumably, Crone objects that Garsoïan does not demonstrate beyond any doubt the existence of a Monarchian/Adoptionist Judeo-Christian community rejecting cross, icons, baptism, sacraments, ecclesiastical ceremony, and hierarchy from Paul of Samosata (325) to the Council of Dvin (555). If this is indeed her objection, it is not clear where the problem of unacceptability lies. All scholars – Pines, Stern, Crone, Reynolds (see footnote 44 below) – agree that Judeo-Christian communities existed up to 450. The one century of non-documentation from 450 to 555 in the case of the Paulicians should not be disturbing since the documents of the 500s are considerably more crucial for an understanding of Islamic origins where the rejection of cross, icons, baptism, sacraments, ecclesiastical ceremony, and hierarchy continued to play a central part.

[44] This is the conclusion of Gabriel S. Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*, 4-15.

[45] *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 41,1 (1978), 155-156.

[46] *Synhados*, 204;Winkler, 74.

We can suspect that this creed was written with an Adoptionist minority in Mesopotamia in mind. Even after 612, this minority must have continued with its opposition if we trust Ishoyahb III, bishop of Adiabene in northern Mesopotamia during the middle of the 600s. In a letter to his flock he enumerates groups of unnamed doctrinal deviants, arguing that

> [t]he ones say that Christ is not God but only human. Others say: Christ is not human but entirely God. Others finally say that he is both God and human but not in truth God and not in truth human.

The two quotes sketch a much more mixed doctrinal and congregational landscape in Upper Mesopotamia – and, by extension, Armenia and northern Syria, as argued in the case of the Paulicians – than in Rome and southern Syria. Since the Sasanid shah-in-shahs were Zoroastrian, there was little state support for the clerical hierarchy and hence for the enforcement of doctrinal unity prior to 585.

The process of doctrinal unification in the Nestorian Church had begun with the three foundational theologians Aphrahat, Ephrem, and Theodore of the 300s, mentioned above, who sought to adjust eastern Christianity to the Trinitarian doctrine of the Council of Nicaea with its emphasis on Jesus' Sonship. A century later, the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) defined the concept of Sonship further, with the doctrine of Jesus' two natures in one person and one conjoined existence being adopted in the Roman Empire. In a defensive reaction, the Monophysitic theologians formulated their Christology of "one nature in one person and one existence" as their own orthodoxoy. The Nestorian Church, already alienated by the condemnation of Nestorius at Ephesus 431 and located, furthermore, beyond the reach of Constantinople in the Sasanid Empire, was initially unaffected by Chalcedon. Correspondingly, there was no defensive reaction similar to that of the Monophysites, who were concentrated in Roman Syria and southeastern Anatolia. The question of the one or two existences remained unresolved in the East Syriac Church.

In an important essay of 2009, Gerritt J. Reinink looked at Nestorian theological texts during the period from Chalcedon to the Nestorian council, that is, 451 to 612, in order to reconstruct the steps by which the Church arrived at its eventual, early seventh-century Christological orthodoxy of "two natures in one person and two (albeit conjoined human-divine) existences." [47] For the purpose of the present discussion, focused on a Jesus-as-Servant-of-God substratum in Mesopotamia, we do not need to get into the refinements of the *qnoma* (Syriac for hypostasis or existence) polemics within the Nestorian Church in the late 500s, which led up to the eventual enshrinement of the orthodox doctrine in 612 and to which Reinink devotes most of his analysis.

More important here is Reinink's general conclusion that it was the expansion of an aggressive Monophysite Church within the area of the still doctrinally fluid Nestorian Church and its monasteries in Mesopotamia and Iran in the 500s that provoked a defensive reaction among Nestorian theologians and led them to elevate their own diphysitic doctrine into orthodoxy. At the same time, the Nestorians began to remove the Monophysites from their congregations and monasteries, causing the latter to meet as separate communities.[48] Ironically, this diphysitism was very close to that of the Chalcedonian Roman Empire – conjoined versus merged human-divine existence of Jesus – but it came too late to help in healing the schism of Ephesus and had to await modern times.

In order to understand the process of the physical segregation between Monophysites and Nestorians beginning in the early 600s we need to be aware that Christianity in Mesopotamia and Iran, that is, in the Sasanid Empire (224-651), had grown gradually through emigration, conversion, and deportation. The relative numbers of people involved are impossible to estimate, but we know from the sources about their ethno-linguistic identities. Emigrés and deportés were for the most part Aramaic-Syriac and Arabic speakers from Syria, as well as Greek and Armenian

[47] "Tradition and the Formation of the 'Nestorian" Identity," in Romeny, ed., *Religious Origins of Nations?*, 217-50.

[48] For the history of the separation of East and West Syriac Christians into separate congregations, beginning in the early 600s, see Reininik, 249, who relies on Morony, "Religious Communities," 116.

speakers from Anatolia. Converts were for the most part Aramaean and Arab speakers. The former tended to be mostly urban and the deportés, furthermore, were settled in the urban centers of Mesopotamia and Iran (including what are today Turkestan and Afghanistan), while the latter were city dwellers, villagers, and nomads in Mesopotamia. Little is known about the assimilation process of the émigrés and deportés, although it can be assumed that it was slow in the relatively isolated Iranian centers. Altogether, Christians always remained a minority, although the involvement of Khosrow II during the early 600s in Church affairs demonstrates how close Christianity came to redefine the Zoroastrian Sasanid Empire.

A few examples, taken from recent historical research, document the importance of deportations, with the eventual growth of parallel Nestorian and Monophysite church structures. The first large-scale deportations of Christians from the Roman Empire into all provinces of the Sasanid Empire occurred in the wake of victorious campaigns against the Romans in 260.[49] Greek congregations formed alongside the existing Syriac congregations and these dual structures with different liturgies persisted into the fifth century.[50]

The next waves of war captives from the Roman Empire arrived about a century later, again in all parts of the Sasanid Empire.[51] Two of the deportés from Syria were "Bar Shewya" or "Bar Sabia" – churchmen and saints whose name Jean Maurice Fiey translates as "Son of Deportation." The first was abbot of a small monastery near Persepolis, suffering his martyrdom in 342 during a Sasanid anti-Christian persecution. The other was bishop of Merv during 370-424 where he converted the inhabitants of this large oasis city in Khorasan (modern Turkestan) to (Nestorian?) Christianity. [52] Further deportations occurred in 531 when Persians, victorious over the Romans in the battle of Callinium, sold their Syrian captives to the Hepthalite Turks in Khorasan,[53] and in 573 when the Sasanids conquered Nisibis and allegedly deported 292,000 captives from Syria.[54] While this figure, in spite of its seeming precision, appears exorbitant, we are nevertheless justified in assuming that by the early 500s Monophysite communities had grown into formidable competitors within a Nestorian Church that had yet to fully define its doctrinal identity.

The competition became sharper in the second half of the 500s when Jacob Baradaeus, the Monophysite bishop of Edessa from 541 until his death in 578, mounted his opposition to Emperor Justinian's efforts to enforce the anti-Monophysite decisions of Chalcedon. He secretly traveled not only through the eastern parts of the Byzantine Empire, where he had to evade the agents of the emperor, but also to congregations in Persia, seeking to countermand Roman as well as eastern Syria diphysitism.[55] By consecrating a Monophysite bishop in Takrit in 558/9 he laid the foundations of a separate church hierarchy, which was paralleled also by the rise of separate monasteries, among which Mar Mattai was the most important.[56] The members of the congregations were mostly recruited from among the deportés and refugees scattered across the Sasanid Empire, people who prior to this time had been in mixed congregations.[57]

As if the challenge from the Monophysite Christians was not enough, even within the Nestorian Church dissension arose toward the end of the 500s. The theologian who raised a dissenting voice was Henana of Adiabene, the headmaster of the prestigious theological school of Nisibis on the border with Byzantium from 571 to 610. Fully conversant with the Roman Christological literature of his day, this sophisticated theologian was ambiguous toward Theodore of Mopsuestia and thereby challenged his less versatile and more tradition-bound colleagues in

[49] Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 254-9.

[50] Baum and Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 9.

[51] Dignas and Winter, 259-61.

[52] Fiey, *Saints syriaques*, 50-1.

[53] Fiey, "Chrétientés syriaques," 93.

[54] Baum, *Shirin*, 20.

[55] di Berardino, *Patrology*, 200-1.

[56] Baum and Winkler, 38-9. See also Fiey, "Tagrit," 301-4.

[57] Baum, 42.

the Nestorian episcopate. Since most of Henana's writings are no longer extant, his Christological stance is difficult to pinpoint within the sectarian milieu.[58] For the Nestorian Church leaders, however, the mere suspicion of deviation was sufficient. In three synods (585, 596, and 605) they condemned the teachings of Henana. But the latter remained unrepentant and even introduced new statutes at his school in 590, strengthening his theological control. The accusations and counter accusations were so heated by 596/7 that 300 of the 800 students in Nisibis staged a mass exodus. The struggle for orthodoxy threatened to split the clergy.

A few years later, intervention by the Sasanid court in favor of Monophysitism made the disarray in the East Syriac Church complete. Khosrow II (590-628) had begun his career as a king deposed by Bahram VI (590-591), a Parthian-descended rebel general, and abandoned by both Sabrisho, his Nestorian catholicos (594-604), and his chief Arab ally, the Lakhmid king Nu'man III (582-ca. 602), whom Sabrisho subsequently converted to Nestorian Christianity. A decade after he had regained his throne with Roman help, Khosrow seized a golden opportunity to consolidate his power once and for all: A usurper had assassinated Khosrow's benefactor, Roman Emperor Maurice (582-602), and ascended the throne. Ostensibly to avenge the death of Maurice, the king decided to turn the long imperial competition between Romans and Persians decisively in his favor and ordered his generals in 603 to conquer Anatolia, Constantinople, Syria, and Egypt. Back in Persia he had Nu'man murdered (ca. 602) and abolished the Lakhmid kingdom, so as to have free reign in the Syrian desert disputed with Rome. After the death of Sabrisho (604), he refused to appoint a new catholicos for the Nestorian Church and left it leaderless during the remainder of his rule. In Anatolia and later in Syria he deposed the Roman bishops and appointed Monophysite bishops in their place. His queen Shirin, of Khuzistani Christian origin, converted from Nestorian to Monophysite Christianity, largely under the influence of her physician, Gabriel of Singar, who himself had switched churches when he was condemned for bigamy.[59] At the height of his power, Khosrow was close to being a caesaropope who hoped to unify the two Syriac churches of the Monophysites and Nestorians and make them dominant in the Middle East, beginning with the eastern shore of the Bosporus.[60]

The Persian conquests, of course, unraveled, when Emperor Heraclius (610-641) was able to turn the tables on Khosrow, beginning with his first victory over an Arab army and then a Persian army under the previously undefeated general Shahrabarz in Armenia, in 622. Whether the victories of Heraclius were connected with the beginning of the so-called era of the Arabs, beginning in 622, is difficult to determine. To judge by the custom of seventh-century Nestorian chroniclers to date the events of the 600s in the Middle East in terms of years "of the rule of the Arabs," and not *anno hijrae* or AH, the Arabs must have considered themselves independent from Sasanid overlordship as of the beginning of Heraclius' invasion of Mesopotamia.[61] Islamic Tradition speaks of the battle of Dhu Qar in Lower Mesopotamia, in which the Arabs avenged the destruction of their kingdom two decades earlier.[62] Modern scholars tend to date the battle to a span of six years ranging from 604 to 610. This dating is questionable, as are the dates of most "events" in the Islamic Tradition, and ignores the evident identity of the historical "Year of Arab Rule" with the theological concept of the hijra. Surprisingly, whether the battle of Dhu Qar can be taken as the decisive event underlying the concept of the Year of the Arabs or not, the great majority of scholars seem to unaware of the identity of the Year or the Arabs (622) with the *annus hijrae*.[63]

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[58] Reinink seeks to deemphasize Henana's departure from the emerging East Syriac orthodoxy,

[59] On these complex events see Baum, *Shirin*, 38-9.

[60] *Ibid*., 33-4.

[61] See, e.g., Brock, "North Mesopotamia," II, 68, and Braun, *Das Buch der Synhados*, 335.

[62] Tassaron summarizes the battle in her article "Dhu Qar," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, VII, 574-5. She follows earlier investigations by Gustav Rothstein (1912) and Clifford Bosworth (1983), who base their assumption of 610 as the date for the "year of the Arabs" on the Islamic Tradition. In his review of Ohlig, *Die dunklen Anfänge*, Hawting criticizes the identification of the year of the Arabs with the hijra of Islamic Tradition, evidently unaware of the widespread use of the "year of the Arabs" for dating events in the 600s.

[63] Notably Brock who devoted an entire article to "The Use of *Hijra* Dating."

After the murder of Khosrow in 628, the East Syriac episcopate ignored the requirement of imperial confirmation for the election of their catholicos. For a few months, until his death in the same year of 628, Babai the Great was the leader of a Nestorian hurch that sought to reconstitute itself after the turbulences of the past three decades. Babai was formerly a student who had exited the school of Nisibis under Hanana in 596 and was a main figure in the push for Nestorian orthodoxy in 612.[64] After his death, the most important figure in the Church was Ishoyahb III, bishop of Adiabene in northern Mesopotamia and eventually catholicos from 647 to 658 in Mesopotamia, Iran, and Khorasan. His letters, extant in a manuscript dating to the 900s,[65] are an important source for our understanding of the Nestorian Christians under Mu`awiya's (640-680) rising kingdom of the Arabs, the successor state of the Sasanids and Romans in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Iran.

Ishoyahb was on excellent terms with the Arab emirs in his territory and seems to have recognized them as people with a Christology not far from his: "They have commanded that lawful domination, that is, of one another in the love of Christ, be subject to us."[66] Apparently a number of bishops resented Arab rule since in the same letter Ishoyahb fumes at them: "These insane men have not learned and have not understood that they are subject to this worldly authority that now rules every land." These men were particularly resentful of the poll taxes and tributes to which the Arabs subjected them, causing the exasperated bishop to write that the Christians could do nothing against the collection of these taxes and had better pay.

It is doubtful however, whether these tensions between non-Arab Syriac Christians and the Arabs were widespread. Much more frequent – if we can believe Ishoyahb – were clashes between Nestorian and Monophysite Christians over Christological doctrine and the control of churches and monasteries, conflicts between congregations and bishops over the apportionment of taxes, and Christian tensions with Zoroastrians and Jews.[67] One set of these conflicts is significant because it might shed light on the question raised in the second half of this essay concerning the background from which the Arab Christology of 692-749 might have arisen. These conflicts concern the "defection" of, first, the Christians of Kerman in southeastern Iran, and Qatar, Bahrain, Dubai on the Persian Gulf, from their bishops and, second, in the case of Merv, a defection of Christians to the Arabs sometime in the 640s or 650s.[68]

In the first case, the defectors were definitively Arab since the region was inhabited by Arabs only. In the second case, the Christians of Merv, so we learn from an essay of Jean Maurice Fiey, were the descendants of two waves of Syrian deportés, one in the 400s and the other in the early 600s, the first becoming Nestorian and the second still remaining Monophysite in the later 600s.[69] It is tempting to conclude that the ethnicity of this second set of defectors was Arab. But we cannot be sure from the context since the sources focus on the turmoil within the Nestorian Church and not the upstart Arabs.

An East Syriac source that switches the focus to the Arabs is the *Ketabe rish melle* by John Bar Penkaye (d. ca. 687). In the last chapter of this Nestorian Church history, Penkaye comments on the rise of the Arab kingdom of Mu`awiya, which he describes as a visitation from God, in retribution for their deplorable disunity. Like Ishoyahb III, Bar Penkaye has no theological problems with the Arabs, noting that the advent of the "children of Hagar" was not something ordinary but "due to divine working." Before calling the Arabs to their task of taking over "both kingdoms (*malkuta* – that is, of the Romans and Sasanids)" God had prepared them "to hold Christians in honor."[70] They conquered the two kingdoms of Rome and Persia "in

[64] On his Christology see Chediath, "The Christology of Babai the Great," 205-14.

[65] Baum and Winkler, 43.

[66] Duval, ed., *Liber epistolarum*, 268-9; passage cited in English trans. by Payne, "Persecuting Heresy,"401.

[67] This is the thrust of Payne's essay.

[68] Wiatowski, *The Syriac Chonicle*, fn. 31.

[69] "Chrétientés syriaques," VI, 103-4.

[70] I am using the translation by Brock, "North Mesopotamia." At present, we still have only Mingana's edition, based on only one complete manuscript of the available ten (two additional manuscripts are incomplete).

concord" but subsequently quarreled, with the Arabs in the west demanding that the king should come from them. When the east disputed this demand, war broke out between them. The westerners were victorious and Mu`awiya became the king of both kingdoms, reigning with great justice, as Bar Penkaye emphasizes.

But Mu`awiya's son "Yazdin" (Yazid) proved to be incompetent and God removed him speedily from rule, so Bar Penkaye continues his historical account a few pages later. One of the claimants for his succession was the easterner Zubayr, who "made his voice heard from a distance" in his zeal for "the house of God." But the westerners overpowered him and destroyed his sanctuary located "at a certain locality in the south."[71] The westerners, so Bar Penkaye, also overcame an initial challenge from another easterner, Mukhtar from Kufa, whom they arrested. But the easterners, now with Ibrahim al-Ashtar at the head of an army of war captives liberated earlier in Kufa by Mukhtar, rallied their forces and defeated the westerners, who were allied with John of Dasen, the Nestorian metropolitan of Nisibis. Al-Ashtar was from the Nestorian Arab Tayy of lower Meopotamia, as Bar Penkaye mentions. The identity of the war captives and the circumstances of their capture are not revealed.

The defeat of the westerners thwarted John of Dasen's ambitions for the patriarchy of the Nestorian Church for the time being. But according to Jean-Maurice Fiey, he eventually succeeded in 693 to obtain his office, thanks to support from Caliph`Abd al-Malik who had ended the west-east wars among the Arabs in 685 in favor of the easterners.[72] The *Kitabe rish melle* ends with the victory of al-Ashtar, unfortunately right before `Abd al-Malik consolidated the hegemony of the easterners over the westerners. Although Penkaye lived for a few more years, the Arab reunification that was to last for 65 years remains outside his purview.

As is evident from the preceding, Bar Penkaye narrates the outlines of a long-standing Arab east-west conflict in northern Arabia, erupting twice within a span of about 25 years. This story contrasts remarkably with the Islamic Tradition of at least 150 years later – attributing the rise of the Arabs and Islam to western Arabia – and it is for this reason that I am inclined to consider it authentic. The crucial problem of the sources from the 600s is that they were often contaminated by interpolations from the hands of later copyists who wanted to "improve" the original reports with the help of the Islamic Tradition which they considered superior. Typical interpolations consist of such topoi of the Tradition as Muhammad, the Meccan sanctuary, the hijra to Medina, the establishment of the community in Medina, and the four rightly guided caliphs. Indeed, Bar Penkaye's chapter contains a few sentences on Muhammad as "the guide (*mhaddyana*) and instructor (*tar'a*) of the Arabs," who enforced the "old law." These sentences appear in the middle of the account on Mu`awiya and therefore could be viewed as insertions. Taeke Jansma's brief analysis of the extant manuscripts of the *Rish melle* and their history makes clear that there were ample opportunities for copyists to slip in interpolations.[73] On the other hand, the reference to the old law and the vagueness of the title "guide" could be taken as indicators of authenticity since they are not prominent in the prophetology of the Islamic Tradition. For the rest, since a large part of Bar Penkaye's chapter is taken up by the story of the east-west conflict among the northern Arabs the likelihood of inauthenticity is not very high – unless one calls the entire chapter inauthentic.[74]

Pending a more detailed investigation of the possibility of interpolations in *Rish melle* XV, it is intriguing that this text from around 685 uses the word *muhammad* not as an epithet for Jesus but as the name of a person who at the time of Mu`awiya was trailing a "tradition." This use dovetails with that of the north gate inscription a few years later, in 692, where *muhammad* also appears as the name of a person, even though this name might not be the person's given name but an epithet. Since Bar Penkaye mentions that a "tradition" had formed after Muhammad's death the north gate inscription can be interpreted as part of this tradition – a tradition which (evolving beyond Bar Penkaye) made Muhammad an integral part of the

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[72] *Nisibe*, 69-70.

[73] "Projet d'édition," 96-100. See also Kaufhold, "Anmerkungen zur Textüberlieferung."

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Ishmaelite Prophetology, from Adam and Abraham to Moses and Jesus. The program of `Abd al-Malik in the Dome of the Rock, thus, can be seen as directed toward the creation not only of a Christology but also a Prophetology for the Arabs in their kingdom.

On the basis of the preceding discussion in this essay, two tentative conclusions can be drawn concerning the rise of the Umayyad Arab kingdom and the rise of Islam. First, the kingdom arose in the years after 622, after the northern Arabs had gained their freedom from the Sasanid Empire, embroiled in its final showdown with Rome. Their vassal kings had already been dismissed a while earlier when the emperor and shah wanted to have free reign in their respective territories in eastern Syria and northern Arabia. Whether the years around 622 can be described as the active time of the religious guide and instructor named Muhammad depends on further study concerning the reliability of Bar Penkaye and other sources from the seventh century. What can be definitely concluded is that after an internal conflict between western and eastern Arabs around 650 Mu`awiya emerged as king in the free Arab lands of Syria and Iraq as well as the conquered lands of Iran and Egypt. Mu`awiya considered himself a Christian king, as evidenced by the inscription of the baths of Gadara in northern Syria. The inscription, identifying Mu`awiya as its sponsor, commemorates the completion of the bath's restoration. It shows a cross and bears the date of 42 "according to the era of the Arabs." To my knowledge, this is the earliest documentation of the Arab calendar by an Arab, a calendar which is attested to later about a dozen times in mostly Nestorian texts. Unfortunately nothing else can be said about Mu`awiya's Christianity, although it is safe to conclude from his use of the calendar that he must have emphasized the Arabness of his faith, as distinct from that of Monophysite and Nestorian Christians as well as Jews.

Second, when the easterner `Abd al-Malik succeeded Yazid following the second conflict between the western and eastern Arabs the new king articulated a Christology that bore a close resemblance to Adoptionism (bearing Paulician hues?). Adoptionism, as I hope to have demonstrated, was by no means a dead version of Christianity in the mid and late 600s but had existed continuously in the northern Fertile Crescent, growing out of Judeo-Christianity prior to Nicaea when Jesus was still both a Servant and a Son. As evidenced by the north gate inscription of the Dome of the Rock, `Abd al-Malik altered this Adoptionism by adding to it the beginnings of an Arab Prophetology, centered on Muhammad whose epithetial name might or might not refer to Jesus and who might or might not be the guide and instructor of the Arabs mentioned in Bar Penkaye. Clearly, further research is required.

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