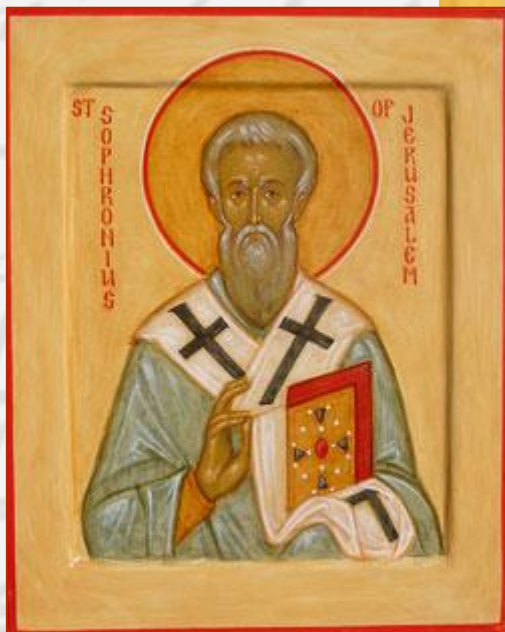




# The Islam Research Group

## *Who Wrote the Qur'an?*

### V. Early accounts of 'Islam'



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Many thanks to *Inquisitive Mind*  for contributions to this paper

## Introduction

The following is largely drawn from:

***Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam***, Robert G. Hoyland, 1997

***The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam***, Stephen Shoemaker, 2011,

***When Christians First Met Muslims***, Michael Philip Penn, 2015.

## Early references to Mohammed and the Arab conquest of post-Byzantine and post-Sassanian territories

### British Library Gospel Fragment c. 637 (currently at the British Museum)

#### Notes on battles at Galilee and Syria

A Syrian manuscript of the Gospel of Mark held at the British Library has been found with the following notes written on the fly leaf:



'... Muhamma[d] ...  
[p]riest Mar Elijah ...  
... and they ame ...  
... and ... and from ...  
... strong ... month ...  
... and the Romans fled ...

And in January assurances for their  
lives were received [by the people of]  
Emesa [Homs?] and many villages due  
to the killing by ...

... Muhammad and many people  
were killed and captives ...  
... from Galilee as far as Bet...

... Tayyaye camped by ...  
... and we [saw/rejoiced] everywhere  
and the [olive?] that they ...  
them and on the [twenty sixth?] of  
May the [Sacellarius] went ... from ...

the Romans pursued them ... and on  
the tenth [of August?] ... the Romans  
fled from Damascus ... many about  
ten thousand. The follow[ing year] the  
Romans came.

On August twenty in the year [nine  
hundred and forty] seven [636] there  
gathered in Gabatha ... the Romans  
and many people were [killed, from]  
the Romans about fifty thousand ...

In the year nine hundred and (forty?)  
killed. '<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translation, layout and suggested insertions of Sean W Anthony, **Muhammad and the Empires of Faith, the making of the Prophet of Islam**, 2020, save for ['Homs'], suggested by Hoyland, **Seeing Islam as Others Saw it**.

Michael Penn describes it as follows

*An anonymous author used a blank page in front of his Bible to jot down a brief commemoration of the events he had just seen. Like most ancient books, at some point this one lost its cover leaving the note unprotected. As a result, the opening page has been substantially damaged and the ink is often unreadable. Nevertheless, this five-by-nine-inch piece of parchment constitutes the world's oldest surviving artefact to mention Muhammad.<sup>2</sup>*

Nöldeke suggested that, since the account covers a significant period of time without any introduction or appearing to be part of a larger body of text, it may have been a monk copying out a passage from an existing chronicle that has now been lost, he suggests in order to try out a new pen.

From the details of dates and location, this note accords with Islamic histories of the Battles of Gabatha and Yarmouk. These describe the clashes in great but unreliable detail (Ahmed ibn Yahya Al-Baladhuri, d. c. 892, author of the most detailed account, putting the Byzantine army at two hundred thousand strong, whereas modern historians estimate the total number of troops available to the emperor across the Byzantine empire as just one hundred thousand).

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<sup>2</sup> *When Christians First Met Muslims*

## Chronicle of Thomas the Presbyter c.640

### *'Mohammed raids Gaza, 634'*

A chronicle kept by a priest, commonly referred to as Thomas the Presbyter, who was probably writing before 640 which includes a short entry concerning events that had taken place in 634:



*"In [634] on Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> February at the ninth hour there was a battle between the Romans and **the tayyaye of Muhammad in Palestine, twelve miles east of Gaza. The Romans fled leaving behind the patriarch Bryrdn, whom the tayyaye killed.***

***Some 4000 poor villagers of Palestine were killed there, Christians, Jews and Samaritans. The tayyaye ravaged the whole region"***<sup>3</sup>

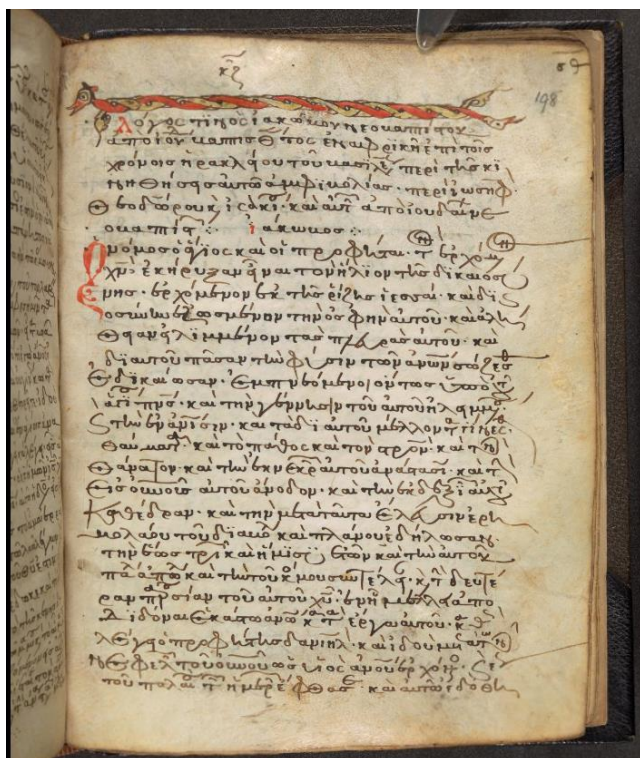
<sup>3</sup> From *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It: A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam* (1997), G Hoyland cited in *Muhammad and the Believers*, Donner.



## Doctrina Iacobi Nuper Batpizati (The Teaching of Jacob, the newly baptised)

### 'The prophet who comes armed with a sword'

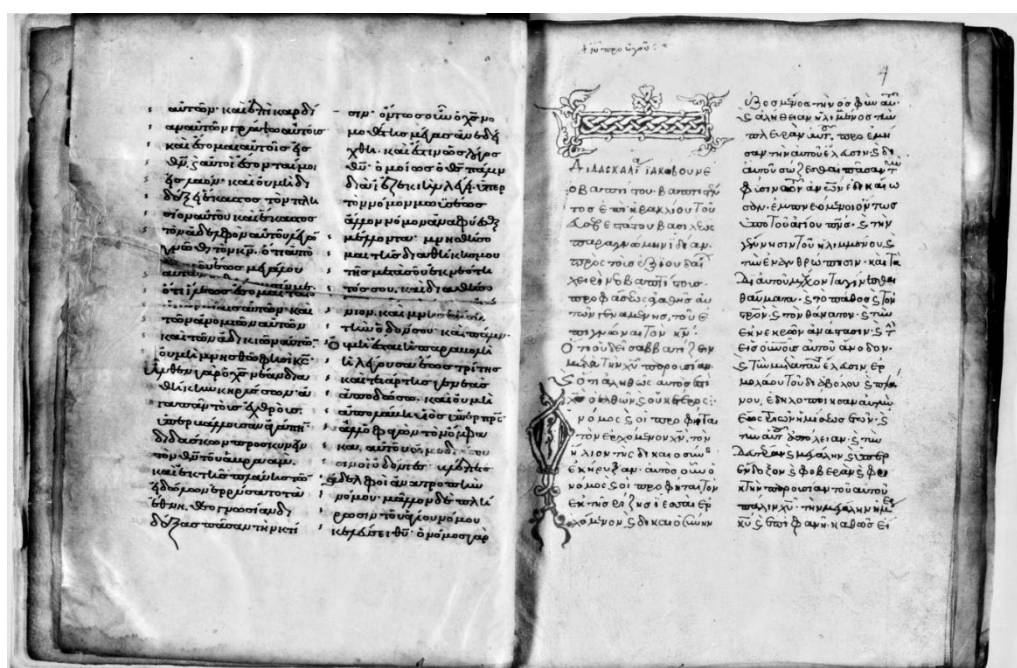
A Christian polemic text written 634-640 purporting to be the account of a Jew called Jacob who was forcibly converted to Christianity, who later came to willingly embrace his new faith. At one point he records the text of a conversation with one Justis, who informs him of a letter that he (Justis) had received from his friend, Abraham. In this letter, Abraham had referred to a prophet who, although unnamed, is likely to have been Muhammad.



The Doctrina Iacobi

← British Library

Biblíteque nationale Francais





*Justus answered and said: 'Indeed you speak the truth and this is the great salvation: to believe in Christ. For I confess to you master Jacob the complete truth. My brother Abraham wrote to me that a false prophet has appeared. Abraham writes:*

*'When the candidatus [i.e., Sergios, commander of the Byzantine army in Palestine] **was killed by the Saracens**, I was at Caesarea and I set off by boat to Sykamina. People were saying 'The candidatus has been killed', and we Jews were overjoyed.*

***And they were saying that the prophet had appeared, coming with the Saracens, and that he was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come.***

*I, having arrived at Sykamina, stopped by a certain old man well-versed in scriptures, and I said to him: 'What can you tell me about the prophet who has appeared with the Saracens?'*

*He replied, groaning deeply: '**He is false, for the prophets do not come armed with a sword.** Truly they are works of anarchy being committed today and I fear that the first Christ to come, whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God and we instead are preparing to receive the Antichrist. Indeed, Isaiah said that the Jews would retain a perverted and hardened heart until all the earth should be devastated. But you go, master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared'.*

*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 says also that he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible.***

## St Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (634-637)

### The fall of Jerusalem

St Sophronius, the newly appointed patriarch of Jerusalem wrote in an undated synodical letter prays to God for:

*a strong and vigorous sceptre 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 audacity.** More than ever, therefore, we entreat your Holiness to make urgent petitions to Christ so that he, receiving these favourably from you, may quickly quell their mad insolence and deliver these vile creatures, as before, to be the footstool of our God-given emperors.*

In his Christmas sermon 634 he lamented that he was unable to perform the Christmas mass at Bethlehem.

*'We, however, because of our innumerable sins and serious misdemeanours, are unable to see these things, and **are prevented from entering Bethlehem by way of the road.** Unwillingly, indeed, contrary to our wishes, we are required to stay at home, not bound closely by bodily bonds, **but bound by fear of the Saracens ... At once that of the Philistines, so now the army of the godless Saracens has captured the divine Bethlehem and bars our passage there, threatening slaughter and destruction if we leave this holy city and dare to approach our beloved and sacred Bethlehem***

It is worth noting that the Church of the Kathisma stood on this road. ***Christmas in the Qur'an: the Qur'anic account of Jesus's nativity and Palestinian local tradition*** Stephen J Shoemaker has made a compelling case that the Qur'an's account of the nativity of Jesus (especially the association with it of the miracle of the palm tree offering its fruit to Mary at the command of the infant Jesus) was written by somebody familiar with this church.<sup>4</sup>

Later in his Epiphany sermon in 636 or 637 Sophronius described the two-year siege of Jerusalem by 'Saracens' leading to the city's surrender and the subsequent desecration of Christian symbols and places of worship.

***Why do barbarian raids abound? Why are the troops of the Saracens attacking us? Why has there been so much destruction and plunder? Why are there incessant outpourings of human blood? Why are the birds of the sky devouring human bodies? Why have churches been pulled down? Why is the cross mocked? Why is Christ, who is the dispenser of all good things and the provider of this joyousness of ours, blasphemed by pagan mouths that he justly cries out to us: "Because of you my name is blasphemed among the***

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<sup>4</sup> See in this series: ***Who Wrote the Qur'an? IX: The Church of the Kathisma***

*pagans," and this is the worst of all the terrible things that are happening to us. That is why the vengeful and God-hating Saracens, the abomination of desolation clearly foretold to us by the prophets, overrun the places which are not allowed to them, plunder cities, devastate fields, burn down villages, set on fire the holy churches, overturn the sacred monasteries, oppose the Byzantine armies arrayed against them, and in fighting raise up the trophies [of war] and add victory to victory. Moreover, they are raised up more and more against us and increase their blasphemy of Christ and the church, and utter wicked blasphemies against God. Those God-fighters boast of prevailing over all, assiduously and unrestrainably imitating their leader, who is the devil, and emulating his vanity because of which he has been expelled from heaven and been assigned to the gloomy shades. Yet these vile ones would not have accomplished this nor seized such a degree of power as to do and utter lawlessly all these things, unless we had first insulted the gift [of baptism] and first defiled the purification, and in this way grieved Christ, the giver of gifts, and prompted him to be angry with us, good though he is and though he takes no pleasure in evil, being the fount of kindness and not wishing to behold the ruin and destruction of men. We are ourselves, in truth, responsible for all these things and no word will be found for our defence. What word or place will be given us for our defence when we have taken all these gifts from him, befouled them and defiled everything with our vile actions?*

Finally, he provides a description of the building of the first structure that the conquerors built on Temple Mount: <sup>5</sup>

*'The godless Saracens entered the holy city of Christ our Lord, Jerusalem, with the permission of God and in punishment for our negligence, which is considerable, and immediately proceeded in haste to the place which is called the Capitol. They took with them men, some by force, others by their own will, in order to clean that place and to build that cursed thing, intended for their prayer and which they call a mosque.'*

It is particularly notable that, despite the patriarch's religious outlook and proximity to events, he at no stage uses the terms 'Islam' or 'Muslim', refer to Mohammed or the Qur'an or say anything specific concerning the invaders' faith, other than describing them twice as 'godless'.

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<sup>5</sup> *Pratum spirituale*, a work originally composed by John Moschus (d. 619), but expanded by Sophronius (d. ca. 639),

## John Bishop of Nikiu (640s?)

### The fall of Jerusalem

There is a gap in the manuscript for the crucial years 611-39. It concludes ends with the capture of Alexandria in 641. In this, John attributes the Arab conquests to:

*'to the wickedness of the emperor Heraclius and his persecution of the orthodox through the patriarch Cyrus ... **And now many of the Egyptians who had been false Christians denied the holy orthodox faith and lifegiving baptism, and embraced the religion of the Moslem, the enemies of God, and accepted the detestable doctrine of the beast, this is, Mohammed,** and they erred together with those idolaters, and took arms in their hands and fought against the Christians. And one of them, named John, the Chalcedonian of the Convent of Sinai, embraced the faith of Islam, and quitting his monk's habit he took up the sword, and persecuted the Christians who were faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ.'*

## Fredegar, a Frankish Chronicler (650s)

**A fantastical account of the Battle of Yarmouk: the Hagarenes/Saracens are 'a circumcised people from the Caspian shore in a country known as Ercolia'**

*The Hagarenes, who are also called Saracens . . . —a circumcised people who of old had lived beneath the Caucasus on the shores of the Caspian in a country known as Ercolia—had now grown so numerous that at last they took up arms and threw themselves upon the provinces of the emperor Heraclius, who despatched an army to hold them. In the ensuing battle the Saracens were the victors and cut the vanquished to pieces. It is said that the Saracens killed in this engagement 150,000 men. Then they sent a deputation to Heraclius with an offer to send him the spoils of battle, but he would accept nothing because of his desire for vengeance on the Saracens.*

Hoyland summarises the following fantastical account of a battle, which he deems to be based around the battle of Yarmouk (636):

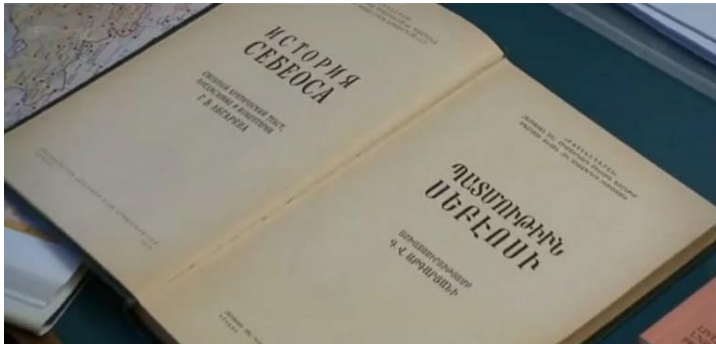
*Heraclius releases the demonic hordes locked up above the Caspian behind brass gates by Alexander the Great, 'and through them poured 150,000 mercenary warriors to fight the Saracens'. The latter, under two commanders, were approximately 200,000 strong. The two forces had camped quite near one another and were ready for an engagement on the following morning. But during that very night the army of Heraclius was smitten by the sword of God: 52,000 of his men died where they slept. When on the following day, at the moment of joining battle, his men saw that so large a part of their force had fallen by divine judgement, they no longer dared advance on the Saracens, but all retired whence they came. The Saracens proceeded, as was their habit, to lay waste the provinces of the empire that had fallen to them.*

It is interesting that in the allusion to the release of Gog and Magog and the overnight destruction of the army, Fredegar adopts Qur'anic themes to describe Arab conquest, and cases it within an apocalyptic paradigm.



## Pseudo-Sebeos's History (of Heraclius/Armenia) (661)

### The alliance of Jews and the Ishmaelites, under Mohammed:



The only early source to provide a political explanation for the rise of Muhammad is an Armenian chronicle kept by a monk who adopted the name of Bishop Sebeos of Bagratunis (an account commonly referred to as the *History* of '*pseudo-Sebeos*'). Since the chronicle records events until 661, it seems reasonable to assume that that was the time when the chronicle was made: within three decades of the events it describes in the passage below.

**Pseudo-Sebeos** describes the expulsion of the Jewish population of Edessa, and how these Jews joined Muhammad to form a mighty army to claim the Holy Land as God had promised to the children of Abraham.

### **[The Jews at Edessa]**

*I shall discuss the (line of the) son of Abraham: not the one (born) of a free (woman), but the one born of a serving maid, about whom the quotation from Scripture was fully and truthfully fulfilled: 'His hands will be at everyone, and everyone will have their hands at him' [Genesis 16.11,12]. Twelve peoples (representing) all the tribes of the Jews assembled at the city of Edessa. When they saw that the Iranian troops had departed leaving the city in peace, they closed the gates and fortified themselves. They refused entry to troops of the Roman lordship. Thus Heraclius, emperor of the Byzantines, gave the order to besiege it. When (the Jews) realized that they could not militarily resist him, they promised to make peace. Opening the city gates, they went before him, and (Heraclius) ordered that they should go and stay in their own place.*

### **[The Jews join the Arabs under the authority of Muhammad]**

*So they departed, taking the road through the desert to Tachkastan\* to the sons of Ishmael. (The Jews) called (the Arabs) to their aid and familiarized them with the relationship they had through the books of the (Old) Testament.*

*Although (the Arabs) were convinced of their close relationship, they were unable to get a consensus from their multitude, for they were divided from each other by religion. **In that period a certain one of them, a man of the sons of Ishmael named Muhammad, became prominent. A sermon about the Way of Truth, supposedly at God's command, was revealed to them, and (Muhammad) taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially since he was informed and knowledgeable about Mosaic history. Because the command had come from on High, he ordered them all to assemble together and to unite in faith. Abandoning the reverence of vain things, they turned toward the living God, who had appeared to their father—Abraham.***

***Muhammad legislated that they were not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsehoods, and not to commit adultery. He said:***

***‘God promised that country to Abraham and to his son after him, for eternity. And what had been promised was fulfilled during that time when (God) loved Israel. Now, however, you are the sons of Abraham, and God shall fulfill the promise made to Abraham and his son on you. Only love the God of Abraham, and go and take the country which God gave to your father Abraham. No one can successfully resist you in war, since God is with you.’***

**[The first encounter with the Byzantines]**

*Then all of them assembled together, from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt ... and they set out from the P’arhan desert (being) twelve tribes (moving) in the order (of precedence) of the Houses of the patriarchs of their tribe. **They were divided into 12,000 men, of which the sons of Israel were in their own tribes, 1,000 to a tribe,** to lead them to the country of Israel. They travelled, army by army, in the order (of precedence) of each patriarchy: Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah [see Genesis 25. 13-16]. These are the peoples of Ishmael. They reached Moabite Rabbath, at the borders of Ruben’s (land). The Byzantine army was encamped in Arabia. (The Arabs) fell upon them suddenly, struck them with the sword and put to flight emperor Heraclius’ brother, T’eodos. Then they turned and encamped in Arabia.*

**[A major battle with a Byzantine army (the battle of Yarmouk?)]**

*All the remnants of the sons of Israel then assembled and united, becoming a large force. After this they dispatched a message to the Byzantine emperor, saying:*

***‘God gave that country as the inherited property of Abraham and of his sons after him. We are the sons of Abraham. It is too much that you hold our country. Leave in peace, and we shall demand from you what you have seized, plus interest’.***

*The emperor rejected this. He did not provide a fitting response to the message but rather said:*

***‘The country is mine. Your inheritance is the desert. So go in peace to your country’.***

*And (Heraclius) started organizing brigades, as many as 70,000 (troops) giving them as a general, a certain one of his faithful eunuchs. He ordered that they were to go to Arabia, stipulating that they were not to engage them in war, but rather to keep on the alert until he could assemble his other troops and send them to help.*

*Now (the Byzantines) reached the Jordan and crossed into Arabia. Leaving their campsite on the riverbank, (the Byzantines) went on foot to attack (the Arabs') camp. (The Arabs), however, had placed part of their army in ambuscades [a place in which an ambusher conceals themselves] here and there, lodging the multitude in dwellings around the camp. Then they drove in herds of camels which they penned around the camp and the tents, tying them at the foot with rope. Such was the fortification of their camp. The beasts were fatigued from the journey, and so (the Byzantines) were able to cut through the camp fortification, and started to kill (the Arabs). But suddenly the men in the ambuscades sprung from their places and fell upon them. Awe of the Lord came over the Byzantine troops, and they turned in flight before them. But they were unable to flee because of the quicksand which buried them to the legs. There was great anxiety caused by the heat of the sun and the enemy's sword was upon them. All the generals fell and perished. More than 2,000 men were slain. A few survivors fled to the place of refuge.*

#### **[The Arab conquests]**

*(The Arabs) crossed the Jordan and encamped at Jericho. Then dread of them came over the inhabitants of the country, and all of them submitted. That night the Jerusalemites took the Cross of the Lord and all the vessels of the churches of God, and fled with them by boat to the palace at Constantinople. (The Jerusalemites) requested an oath (from the Arabs) and then submitted.*

*The emperor of the Byzantines was no longer able to assemble his troops against them. (The Arabs) divided their army into three parts. One part went to Egypt, taking (territory) as far as Alexandria. The second part went north (to war) against the Byzantine empire. In the twinkling of an eye they had seized (territory stretching) from the Farthest Sea to the shores of the great Euphrates river, as well as Edessa and all the cities of Mesopotamia, on the other side of the (Euphrates) river. The third part [of the Arab army] was sent to the east, against the kingdom of Iran. In that period the kingdom of Iran grew weaker, and their army was divided into three parts. Then the Ishmaelite troops who were gathered in the east, went and besieged Ctesiphon, since the king of Iran resided there. Troops from the land of Media, some 80,000 armed men under their general Rostom assembled and went against (the Arabs) in battle. Then (the Arabs) left the city and crossed to the other side of the Tigris river. (The Iranians) also crossed the river, pursuing them. And they did not stop until they reached their borders, at the village called Hert'ichan. [The Iranians] continued to pursue them, [eventually] going and encamping in the plain. Present were Mushegh Mamikonean, son of Dawit', the general of Armenia with 3,000 armed men, and also prince Grigor, lord of Siwnik', with 1,000 men. (The Iranian and Arab armies) attacked each other, and the Iranian forces fled before them. But (the Arabs) pursued them, putting them to the*

*sword. All the principal naxarars died, as did general Rostom. They killed Mushegh and two of his sister's sons, as well as Grigor, the lord of Siwnik', along with one son. Some [of the Iranian troops] escaped and fled back to their own land. The remnants of the Iranian forces assembled in Atrpatakan at one spot and made Xorhoxazat their general.*

*Then they hurried to Ctesiphon and took the treasury of the kingdom, the inhabitants of the cities, and their king, and then hurried to get back to Atrpatakan. But as soon as they had departed and gone some distance, the Ishmaelite army unexpectedly came upon them. Horrified, [the Iranians] abandoned the treasury and the inhabitants of the city, and fled. Their king also fled, winding up with the southern troops. Now [the Arabs] took the entire treasury and returned to Ctesiphon, taking the inhabitants of the cities along too. And they pillaged the entire country.*

#### **[The death of Heraclius]**

#### **[Further Arab conquests]**

*When the sons of Ishmael had arisen and issued from the desert of Sinai, their king Amrh [it is assumed, Umar ibn Khattab] did not accompany them. But when (the Arabs) had militarily routed both kingdoms, seizing from Egypt to the great Taurus mountain, from the Western Sea to Media and Khuzhastan, they then emerged with the royal army (and went) to the natural borders of the holdings of Ishmael. Then the (Arab) king gave an order to assemble boats and many sailors and to navigate southwardly, going east to Pars, to Sagastan, to Sind, to Srman, to the land of Turan and to Makuran as far as the borders of India. The troops swiftly prepared and implemented the command. They burned every country, taking loot and booty. They then turned and made expeditions on the waves of the sea, and reached their own places.*



## Account of the prisoners in Khuzhastan

*We heard this (account) from men (who had returned) from captivity in Khuzhastan Tachkastan, who themselves had been eye-witnesses to the events described and narrated them to us.*

***'Now I shall speak about the plot of the Jewish rebels, who, finding support from the Hagarenes for a short time, planned to [re]build the temple of Solomon. Locating the place called the holy of holies, they constructed (the temple) with a pedestal, to serve as their place of prayer. But the Ishmaelites envied (the Jews), expelled them from the place, and named the same building their own place of prayer. (The Jews) built a temple for their worship, elsewhere. It was then that they came up with an evil plan: they wanted to fill Jerusalem with blood from end to end, and to exterminate all the Christians of Jerusalem.***

*Now it happened that there was a certain grandee Ishmaelite who went to worship in their private place of prayer. He encountered three of the principal Jewish men, who had just slaughtered two pigs and taken and put them (in the Muslim) place of prayer. Blood was running down the walls and on the floor of the building. As soon as the man saw them, he stopped and said something or other to them. They replied and departed. The man at once went inside to pray. He saw the wicked (sight), and quickly turned to catch the men. When he was unable to find them, he was silent and went to his place. Then many (Muslims) entered the place and saw the evil, and they spread a lament throughout the city. The Jews told the prince that the Christians had desecrated their place of prayer. The prince issued an order and all the Christians were gathered together. Just as they wanted to put them to the sword, the man came and addressed them: 'Why shed so much blood in vain? Order all the Jews to assemble and I shall point out the guilty ones'. As soon as they were all assembled and (the man) walked among them, he recognized the three men whom he had previously encountered. Seizing them, (the Arabs) tried them with great severity until they disclosed the plot. And because their prince was among the Jews present, he ordered that six of the principals involved in the plot be killed. He permitted the other (Jews) to return to their places.'*

[\* = 'Tachkastan': According to Iranica Online, 'tadjik' was initially a Middle Persian word meaning 'foreigner' used particularly to refer to Arabs. As the Muslim conquest spread across Persia and further east and north, it came to be used more generally (especially by Turks) as a term for Muslim, leading it to be adopted as a name for the people of modern Tajikistan in Central Asia]

It is significant that pseudo-Sebeos records the Jewish tribes being divided amongst the Arab tribes. This arrangement accords with the evidence of the **Constitution of Medina**, as it is recorded by Ibn Ishaq. The **Constitution** sets out the terms by which eight tribes of Yathrib with Arab names (the Banu Awf, the Banu al-Harith ibn Khazraj, the Banu Sa'ida, the Banu Jusham, the Banu an-Najjar, the Banu Amir ibn Awf, the Banu al-Nabit and the Banu al-Aws) agree to live under oaths of mutual allegiance and under the leadership of Muhammad. It also sets slightly different terms for 'the Jews of' six of those tribes and one further tribe, the Banu Thalaba. Since in a tribal society one would normally expect a group united by ethnicity, culture and religion to form one or more distinct tribes, the apparent distribution of Jews amongst the tribes of Yathrib, evident in **the Constitution of Medina** is strong corroboration for pseudo-Sebeos's assertion that Muhammad divided the Israelites who joined him amongst the Ishmaelite tribes under his command.

## The Khuzistan Chronicle (c.660)

### Mohammed's conquest of Iran and the Dome of Abraham,

Contemporaneous with pseudo-Sebeos, but further east, the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (c.660) records the end of the Sassanian Empire two decades earlier as follows:

#### [The defeat of the House of Sassan]

*Then God raised up against them the sons of Ishmael, [numerous] as the sand on the sea shore, whose leader was Muhammad. Neither walls nor gates, armour or shield, withstood them, and they gained control over the entire land of the Persians.*

*And Yazdegerd, who was from the royal lineage, was crowned king in the city of Estakhr [June 16, 632 AD], and under him, the Persian Empire came to an end. And he went forth and came to Mahoze and appointed one named Rustam as the leader of the army.*

*Yazdgird sent against them countless troops, but the Arabs routed them all and even killed Rustam. Yazdgird shut himself up in the walls of Mahoze and finally escaped by flight.*

*He reached the country of the Huzaye and Mrwnaye [Merv of Margrave], where he ended his life. The Arabs gained control of Mahoze and all the territory. They also came to Byzantine territory, plundering and ravaging the entire region of Syria. Heraclius, the Byzantine king, sent armies against them, but the Arabs killed more than 100,000 of them.*

*When the catholicos Isho'yahb saw that Mal;toze had been devastated by the Arabs and that they had carried off its gates to 'Aqula (Kufa) and that those who remained were wasting away from hunger, he left and took up residence in Beth Garmai, in the town of Karka. ...*

#### 'The Dome of Abraham', Yathrib, Dumat Jandal & Yamama & Hira

*Regarding the dome of Abraham, we have been unable to discover what it is except that, because the blessed Abraham grew rich in property and wanted to get away from the envy of the Canaanites, he chose to live in the distant and spacious parts of the desert. Since he lived in tents, he built that place for the worship of God and for the offering of sacrifices. It took its present name from what it had been, since the memory of the place was preserved with the generations of their race. Indeed, it was no new thing for the Arabs to worship there, but goes back to antiquity, to their early days, in that they show honour to the father of the head of their people. l:la~or, which scripture calls "head of the kingdoms" [Joshua 11.10], belongs to the Arabs, while Medina is named after. Midi.an, Abraham's fourth son by Qetura; it is also called Yathrib.*

*And Dumat Jandal [belongs to them], and the territory of the Hagaraye, which is rich in water, palm trees and fortified buildings. The territory of J:latta, situated by the sea in the vicinity of the islands of Qatar, is rich in the same way; it is also thickly vegetated with various kinds of plants. The region of Mazon also resembles it; it too lies by the sea and comprises an area of more than 100 parasangs.*

*So [belongs to them] too the territory of Yamama, in the middle of the desert, and the territory of 'fawf, and the city of Hira, which was the seat of king Mundar, surnamed the "warrior;" he was sixth in the line of the Ishmaelite kings.*

Sean Anthony has observed (Twitter 2017) that the “*Dome of Abraham*” renders

ܩܘܒܬܐ ܕܒܪܗܡ (qwbth d-’brhm)

and adds ‘As Hoyland two decades ago, the word *dome* in Syriac was likely derived from the word *Ka’bah* in Arabic.’

Although ‘*ka’aba*’ is often rendered ‘*cube*’, the adjective ‘*kawā’ba*’ appears in the Qur’an at **{78.33}** to describe companions of the righteous in Paradise, which the author can hardly have intended to describe as cubic. Here the word might mean fulsome (it appears between references to appealing vines and a full cup) and, given the Qur’an’s later descriptions of *houris*, is often translated as buxom or similar. Consequently the Dome of Abraham may be a Dome, a Cube or some other squat structure.

## Jacob, Bishop of Edessa (installed 684, died 708)

Mohammed '*trading*' then '*raiding*' in Palestine as '*first king of the Arabs*',

Abu Bakr, and the Arab direction of prayer

Jacob, a distinguished scholar in the West Syriac Christian tradition and twice Metropolitan (bishop) of Edessa, maintained a detailed chronicle from which, very unfortunately, the account of the years 631-692, ie the last thirty years are missing. However, in a chart of rulers, written c.692, he wrote the following<sup>6</sup>:

<i>Isaiah is sent from the Persian Empire to Edessa (as?) Bishop.</i>  <i>In Alexandria, the faithful made Andronicus their bishop.</i>	Total	Of the Romans	Of the Persians	<b><i>Muhammad goes down on business to the lands of Palestine and of the Arabians, the Phoenicians and of the Tyrians.</i></b>  <i>There was a heavenly eclipse.</i>  <i>The Persians took captives and destroyed the entire land of the Romans as far as Bithynia, Asia and the Sea of Pontus.</i>
	293	8	28	
	294	9	29	
	295	10	30	
	296	11	31	

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<sup>6</sup> Replicating the chart in ***When Christians First Met Muslims***, Penn, with the insertion of the syriac tayyibe, as rendered by Hoyland.



<i>In Alexandria, Benjamin ruled as bishop to the faithful</i>	<b><i>Muhammad, the first king of the Arabs ruled, 7 years.</i></b>				
<i>Khosrau issued a command and Edessa went down into exile.</i>  <b>304</b>  <i>(940 of the Greeks)</i>	<b>Olympiad 350 [621-625]</b>				<b><i>While Heraclius the king of the Romans entered his eleventh year and Khosrau, the king of the Persians entered his thirty first, the kingdom of the Arabians [Tayyiye], those whom we call the Arabs began.</i></b>
	297	12	32	1	
	298	13	33	2	
	299	14	34	3	
	300	15	35	4	
<i>Cyrus carried out a persecution against the faithful in Alexandria.</i>  <i>The faithful in the east made John patriarch.</i>	<b>Olympiad 351 [625-629]</b>				<b><i>The Arabs began to make raids into the land of Palestine.</i></b>
	301	16	36	5	
	302	17	37	6	
	303	18	38	7	
<i>The years of Shahrbaraz, Boran, Khosrau [III] Peroz, Azarmig and Hormzidaas are approximately two.</i>	<b><i>#21 [of the Persian] Siroes, Son of Khusrow nine months.</i></b>				<i>The Persians killed Khosrau and made Shiroe their king, nine months</i>
	<b><i># 2 of the Arabs, Abu Bakr, two years, seven months</i></b>				<i>Those Edessenes who were alive returned from exile.</i>  <i>Heraclius made a covenant with Shahrbaraz and it was decided that the Per... the land [of the Romans] and go [back to their own land?] era</i>
	304	19	1	1	

When towards the end of his life Jacob became bishop of Edessa for a second time, he wrote a letter, **his fourth letter to John the Stylite**, containing the following comment about the prayer of the 'mhaggraye' (Haggarenes, or descendants of Hagar: i.e. Muslims):

*Your question is in vain... for it is not to the south that the Jews pray nor either do the (mhaggraye). The Jews who live in Egypt and also **the Muslims, there, as I saw with my own eyes, and will now set out for you prayed to the east and still do. Both peoples, the Jews towards Jerusalem and the Muslims towards the Ka'aba.** And those Jews who are to the south of Jerusalem pray towards the north and those in the land of Babel in Hira and in Basra pray to the west. And also **the Muslims who are there pray to the west towards the Ka'aba and those who are to the south of the Ka'aba pray to the north towards that place.***

*So from all this that has been said it is clear **that it is not to the south that the Jews and Muslims here in the regions of Syria pray, but towards Jerusalem or the Ka'aba the patriarchal places of their races.***

He also wrote a **Letter on the Genealogy of the Virgin**.

*'That the messiah is, in the flesh, of Davidic descent ... is thus professed by all of them, Jews, **Mahgraye** and Christians, and regarded by them as something fundamental ...*

*To the Jews ... it is fundamental, although they deny the true messiah who has indeed come.*

***The Mahgraye too, although they do not know nor wish to say that this true messiah (Jesus) who came and is acknowledged by the Christians is God and the Son of God, they nevertheless confess firmly that he is the true messiah who was to come and who was foretold by the prophets; on this subject they have no dispute with us, but rather with the Jews. They reproachfully maintain against them ...***

*that the messiah was to be born of David, and further that this messiah who has come was born of Mary. This is firmly professed by the Mahgraye, and not one of them will dispute it, **for they say always and to everyone that Jesus son of Mary is in truth the messiah, and they call him the Word of God as do the Holy Scriptures. They also add in their ignorance that he is the Spirit of God, for they are not able to distinguish between word and spirit, just as they do not assent to call the Messiah God or the son of God.***

## The 705 Chronicle

*In the year 932 of Alexander the son of Philip the Macedonian [620-621],  
Muhammad entered the land He reigned for seven years.*

*After him Abu Bakr reigned, two years.*

*After him 'Umar reigned, twelve years.*

*After him, Uthman reigned, twelve years.*

*They were without a leader in the war of Siffin, five and a half years.*

*After this, Mu'awoya reigned, twenty years.*

*After him Yazid the son of Mu'awiyah reigned, three and a half years*

*[in the margin it is said:] 'After Yazid they were without a leader for one year'.*

*After him Abd al-Malik reigned twenty one years.*

*After him Walid his son began to reign in the beginning of October 1017 [705].*

## **The ‘Syriac common source’ (The *Chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa*)**

**A common source of the chronicles of Theophanes, Michael the Syrian, Agapius and 1234**

The following sources,

the *Chronicle of Theophanes (814)*,

the *Christian Arabic Chronicle of Agapius of Manbij*,

the *Syriac Chronicle of Michael the Syrian (1195)* and

the *Chronicle of 1234*.

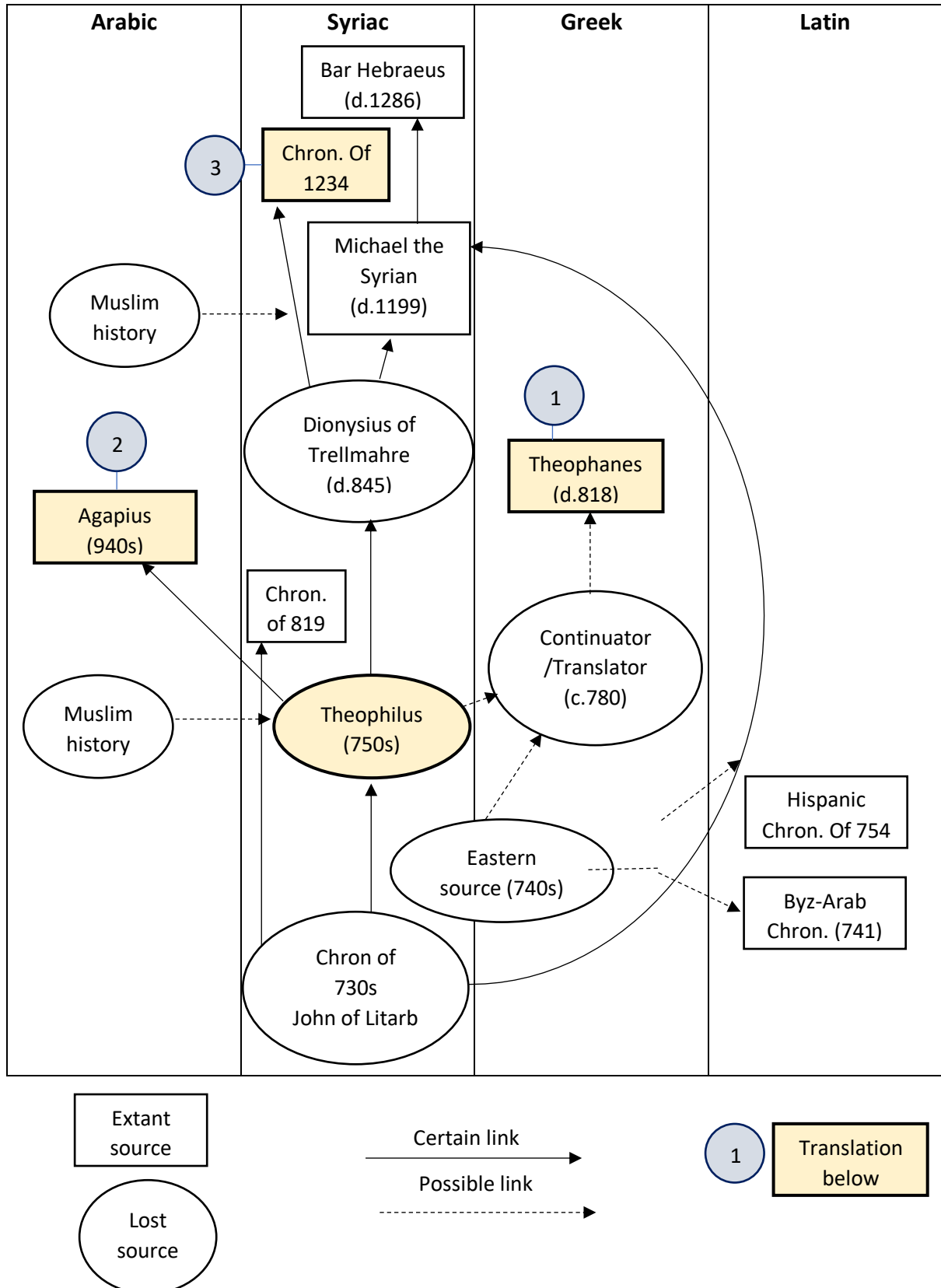
all appear to rely upon a (now lost) shared source, that Shoemaker calls the *Syriac Common Source*. Two of these, the *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian* and the *Chronicle of 1234* accessed this via the (also now lost) *Chronicle of Dionysius of Tellmahre*.

Robert Hoyland notes that the *Chronicle of Agapius* states that it has drawn upon books composed by **Theophilus bar Thomas of Edessa**, an adviser to Caliph Mahdi (775-785), and that Gregory bar Hebraeus (d.1286) referred to Theophilus having written a ‘*fine work of history*’, and from these facts concludes that Theophilus is likely to have been the author of the *Syriac Common Source*.

Hoyland has published a translation of all four of the above chronicles in *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*.

## Transmission to and from Theophilus of Edessa

Adapted from *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, Robert Hoyland.



### **The Chronicle of Theophanes (814),**

*Muhammad (Mouamed) died, the leader and false prophet of the Saracens after appointing his kinsman Abu Bakr (Aboubacharos) to his chieftanship. At the same time his repute spread abroad and everyone was frightened. At the beginning of his advent the misguided Jews thought he was the messiah who is awaited by them.*

At this point Hoyland adds a footnote: Theophanes recounts how ten Jews followed Muhammad but then realised he was not the messiah when they saw him eating camel meat; see **Seeing Islam...**

*I consider it necessary to give an account of this man's origin. He was descended from a very widespread tribe, that of Ishmael, son of Abraham. Being destitute and an orphan the aforesaid Muhammad decided to enter the service of a rich woman called Khadija (Khadija) as a hired worker with a view to trading by camel in Egypt and Palestine. Little by little he became bolder and ingratiated himself with that woman, who was a widow, took her as a wife, and gained possession of her camels and her substance;. Whenever he came to Palestine he consorted with Jews and Christians and sought from them certain spiritual matters. He was also afflicted with epilepsy. When his wife became aware of this, she was greatly distressed inasmuch as she, a noblewoman, had married a man such as him, who was not only poor but also an epileptic. He tried deceitfully to placate her by saying: 'I keep seeing a vision of a certain angel called Gabriel and being unable to bear his sight I faint and fall down. Now she had a certain monk living there a friend of hers, who had been exiled for his deprovaed doctrine, and she related everything to him, including the angel's name. Wishing to satisfy her he said to her 'He has spoken the truth for this is the angel who is sent to all the prophets.'*

*When she heard the words of the false monk, she was the first to believe in Muhammad and proclaimed to other women of her tribe that he was a prophet. Thus the report spread from women to men and first to Abu Bakr whom he left as his successor. This heresy prevailed in the region of Yathrib (Ethribos) in the last resort by war: at first secretly for ten years and by war another ten., and openly nine.*

*He taught his subjects that he who kills an enemy or is killed by an enemy goes to Paradise, and he said that this paradise was one of carnal eating and drinking and intercourse with women. And had a river of wine, honey and milk and that intercourse was long-lasting and the pleasure continuous, and other things full of profligacy and stupidity; also that men should feel sympathy for one another and help those who are wronged.*

### **The Christian Arabic Chronicle of Agapius of Manbij,**

*The Arabs mobilised at Yathrib. Head of them was man called Muhammad son of Abdallah and he became their chief and king he governed them for then years and his family, his relatives and his tribe joined with them.*

***He enjoined them to belief in one God, who has no partner; he rejected the worship of idols and singled out God alone for worship. He prescribed for them circumcision, abstention from drinking alcohol and eating pig, carrion or blood, and the practice of prayer and alms-giving.***

*Whoever accepted that was safe and saved; whoever rejected it and desisted from it he fought. He killed notables from among the Arabs of his tribe and others and he captured many cities belonging to neighbouring people. Christians from among the Arabs and other (people) came to him and he gave them guarantee of safety and wrote documents for them (to that effect). All the peoples in opposition to him did likewise I mean the Jews, Zoroastrians, Sabaeans and others; they gave allegiance to him and took from him a guarantee of safety on the condition that they would pay to him the poll tax.*

***He commanded the people to believe in the prophets, the messengers and what God had revealed to them, in the messiah son of Mary, whom they should say was a messenger of God. His word, his servant and His spirit in the Gospels, heaven and hell, and the day of reckoning. He claimed that in heaven there was food, drink, marriage river of wine milk and honey and black-eyed women unsullied by man or spirit. he imposed on them fasting, five (daily) prayers and other things that I shall not mention for fear of prolixity.***

Hoyland notes that the account contains two lists of Muhammad's teachings that are apparently from separate sources. Hoyland suggests that the passage beginning '*He enjoined them to belief*' derives from Islamic sources, whilst that beginning '*He commanded his people to believe*'. Probably derives from ***Dionysius***.

### **The Chronicle of 1234.**

*A man by the name of Muhammad of the tribe of Quraysh came out of the land of Yathrib and proclaimed himself a prophet. It should be noted that the collective name for Arabs [Tayyāyē] is Arabians [Arabāyē] so called after the general name Arabia the fertile (Arabia Felix) which as their homeland. It extends north-south and west-east from the Red Sea to the gulf of the Persian Sea. They have a great many names by which they called their ancient tribes. **Now Muhammad of whom we are speaking, while in the age and stature of youth, began to go up and down from his town of Yathrib to Palestine for the business of buying and selling. And whilst he was engaged in this region he encountered the belief in the one God, and it was pleasing to his eyes. When he went back to his tribesmen he set this belief before them and he persuaded a few, they became his followers. And at the same time he would also extol for them the bountifulness of this land of Palestine saying: 'Because of the belief in the one God, the like of this good and fertile land was given to them'. And he would add: 'If you will listen to me God will also give you a fine land flowing with milk and honey.'***

*To corroborate his word he **led a band of those who were obedient to him, and he began to go up into the land of Palestine, plundering, enslaving and pillaging.** And he returned laden (with booty) and unharmed, and thus he had not fallen short in his promise to them.*

*Since the love of possessions drives such behaviour to become a habit, they began continually going out and forth on raids. And when those who were not yet following him saw those who had submitted to him becoming wealthy, with an abundance of riches, they were drawn to his service without compulsion. And when after these (raids) the men following him became numerous and a main force **he no longer went forth but allowed them to raid while he sat in honour in Yathrib, his city. Once dispatched, it was not enough for them to frequent Palestine alone, but they ranged far and wide, killing openly, taking captives laying waste and pillaging. And even this was not enough for them, but they forced them to pay tribute and enslaved them.** Thus, they gradually grew strong and spread abroad. And they grew so powerful that they **subjected almost all the land of the Romans and the kingdom of the Persians under their sway ... they say that there is (carnal eating in it [Paradise] and copulation with glamorous courtesans, beds of gold to lie upon with mattresses of gold and topaz and rivers of milk and honey.***

*Hoyland notes the reference to Muhammad going to Palestine for trade is shared with Jacob of Edessa, whose own chronicle was probably available to his fellow Edessan Theophilus.*



Hoyland concludes (in *Seeing Islam...*):

*Theophilus' dependents give very different accounts of Muhammad and the rise of Islam, so it is difficult to be sure of Theophilus' own opinions on the matter.*

*Dionysius [source of 1234 and Michael] and Agapius do, however, follow the same basic outline, which is almost certainly that of Theophilus:*

- 1. In the year 933/935 of the Greeks, 11/12 of Heraclius, 30/31/33 of Khusrau, Muhammad appeared in the land of Yathrib.*
- 2. On journeys to Palestine, he had gained some religious knowledge.*
- 3. He now called the Arabs to the worship of the one God.*
- 4. Muhammad gradually won over all the Arabs.*
- 5. Muhammad's followers waged campaigns beyond Arabia, while he remained in Yathrib.*
- 6. Muhammad's teachings.*

*The last section concludes with a description of paradise, which was retained by all and which makes clear their dependency upon a common source:*

*[Theophanes: 'carnal eating and drinking and intercourse with women, and had a river of wine, honey and milk, and that the women were not like the ones down here, but different, the intercourse longlasting and the pleasure continuous']*

*Dionysius: 'carnal eating and drinking and copulation with glamorous courtesans, beds of gold to lie upon with mattresses of gold and topaz, and rivers of milk and honey.'*

*Agapius: 'food and drink, marriage, rivers of wine, milk and honey, and blackeyed women untouched by man or spirit.']*

*Except for this extract, Theophanes almost totally ignores Theophilus for his notice on Muhammad, drawing instead, indirectly, on Jewish and Muslim sources. Agapius abridges Theophilus, as he himself acknowledges, and supplements him with material from the Muslim tradition.*

*That leaves Dionysius [1234], who seems to me to preserve best Theophilus' entry...*

This final conclusion is shared by Stephen J Shoemaker in *Death of a Prophet*.

## **The 'Spanish Eastern Source'**

This is now, like the Syriac common Source lost, but Shoemaker suggests that it was possibly a Syriac chronicle, that was relied upon by two Latin chronicles later written in Andalusia: the **Byzantine Arab Chronicle of 741** and the **Hispanic Chronicle of 754**.

The former reads:

*When a most numerous multitude of Saracens had gathered together, they invaded the provinces of Syria, Arabia and Mesopotamia whilst one named Mohammed held a position of leadership over them. Born of a most noble tribe of that people, he was a very prudent man and a foreseer of many future events...*

*When Mohammed, the previously mentioned leader of the Saracens, had finished 10 years of rule, he reached the end of his life. He is the one whom they hold in such high regard and reverence until this day that they declare him to be the apostle and prophet in all their rituals and writings. In his place Abu Bakr of the Saracens from which his predecessor also arose was chosen by them. He organised a massive campaign against the Persians that devastated cities and towns and he captured very many of their fortifications.*

## The Zuqnin Chronicle



*The Zuqnin Chronicle*

← Vatican Library

*From that point [574] up to the present year I have not found a history concerning events which is composed on such solid foundations as the former ones ...*

***In 621 the Arabs conquered the land of Palestine all the way to the Euphrates River and the Romans fled and crossed over to the east of the Euphrates and the Arabs ruled over them in [Palestine]***

***Their first king was a man from among them whose name was Muhammad. They also called this man a prophet because he turned them away from cults of every sort and taught them that there is one God, the maker of creation. And he established laws for them because they were especially devoted to the worship of demons, the veneration of idols, and especially the veneration of trees.***

*And because he had shown them the one God and they had defeated the Romans in battle under his leadership and he had established laws for them according to their desire, they called him a prophet and a messenger of God<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> *The Death of a Prophet*, p.54

## **Book of Main Points by John bar Penkaye (late 7<sup>th</sup> C)**

### **'Victory without combat'**

John bar Penkaye, a monk in Fenek, Persia, writing in late 680s, reflected upon the rise of the Arab kingdom as a punishment for the sinfulness of the Christians and Persians:

[Book XIV]

*In the last days of their king, Khosrau, when the kingdom of the Persians came to an end **the kingdom of the sons of Hagar immediately spread over more or less the entire world.** For they seized the entire kingdom of the Persians and they overthrew all their warriors who had been exceedingly proud in the arts of war. Indeed, we should not consider their coming to be ordinary. For it was a divine deed. **Prior to summoning them God had previously prepared them to hold Christians in honour. Thus, there also carefully came from God a certain commandment that they should hold our monastic order in honour.** And when they came in accord with a divine commandment, they seized, not to say, the two kingdoms without war or difficulty. **With neither armour nor human wiles, in a despised fashion like a brand snatched from a fire God gave victory into their hands** so that what was written concerning them could be fulfilled 'One pursued a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight' [Deuteronomy 32.30] **For apart from divine aid how could naked men riding without armour or shield be victorious? He summoned them from the ends of the earth to devastate a sinful kingdom and with them to humble the arrogance of the Sons of Persia.***

*Only a little time passed and the entire land was handed over to the Arabs. They conquered all the fortified cities and they ruled from ocean to ocean, from east to west, Egypt and all of Methrain and from Crete to Cappadocia from Yehelman to the gates of Elan Armenians, Syrians, Persians Romans, Egyptians and all the regions in between. It was in accord with the prophet's word 'Their hand was over all' [Genesis 16.12]. Except for half of the Romans' kingdom, (nothing) remained from them. **Who can relate the slaughter they made in the Greek Empire in Kush, in Spain and in the rest of the distant regions, taking sons and daughters captives and reducing them to slaves.** Upon those who in peace and prosperity ceaselessly battled, with their creator there was sent a barbaric people who showed them no pity.*

[Book XV]

*... when (God) observed that there was no reform he summoned a barbaric kingdom against us, a people who knew no persuasion and had neither covenant nor pact, who accepted neither flattery nor supplication. This was their comfort, unnecessary blood. This was their pleasure, to rule over all. This was their desire, captivity and exile. This was their food wrath and anger. They were not appeased by anything that was offered to them. When they had flourished and did the will of Him who had summoned them they reigned and ruled over all the world's kingdoms. ... Then our Lord was appeased, consoled, and willing to have mercy upon his people **But because the Sons of Hagar***

**should also be punished for the action they instigated from their kingdom's beginning He made it have two leaders and split it into two halves, so that we might understand what had been said by our saviour. For they had unity until they conquered the whole world. But when they had recovered and recuperated from war, then they quarrelled with one another. The westerners were saying: 'Greatness should be ours, and the king should be from us' but the easterners contended that this should be theirs. From their dispute they were provoked into war with each other. When after much carnage amongst them they had ended their dispute, the westerners (those whom they call the sons of 'Ammaye, were victorious.**

**From the westerners a man named Mu'awiye became king and took control of the kingdoms both of the Persian and of the Romans. Justice flourished in his days, and there was great peace in the regions he controlled. He allowed everyone to conduct themselves as he wanted. For, as I said above, they upheld a certain commandment from him who was their guide concerning the Christian people and the monastic order. By this one's guidance they also upheld the worship of one God in accord with the customs of ancient law. And, at their beginning they upheld the tradition of their instructor Muhammad such that they would bring the death penalty upon whosoever seemed to have dared transgress his law.**

**Every year their raiders went to far off countries and islands and brought back captives from every people under heaven. But from everyone, they only demanded tribute. They allowed each to remain in whatever faith he wished., there being not a few Christians amongst them, some aligned with the heretics and some with us. But when Muawiyah reigned there was peace throughout the world whose like we had never heard or seen, nor had our fathers nor our fathers' fathers. ...**

**Considering the present time advantageous, instead of evangelising and baptising the pagans in accord with ecclesiastical canons, the accursed heretics began a perverse conversion, converting almost all of the Roman churches to their wickedness. They revived and restored what had been overthrown, The majority of the westerners were now using this [the heretical addition to the liturgy] 'The immortal who was crucified for us.' All the churches became like barren land.**

**... [wickedness of the church hierarchy] 'Indeed there was no distinction between pagan and Christian, the believer was not known from the Jew and truth was not distinguished from error.**

**When the days of Muawiyah ended and he departed from the world, his son Yazdin reigned after him. He did not walk in the ways of his father, Rather he loved children's games and worthless pleasures. He devoured men's power through his vain subjugation. For Satan devoured men's discipline through profitless exertion. But**

***God quickly took him, and when he too was passed from the world, one of the Arabs named Zubayr was found making his voice heard from afar. Concerning himself he taught that he had come out of zeal for God's house. He rebuked the westerners as transgressors of the law, He came to their sanctuary somewhere in the south and dwelled there. They prepared for battle against him. They defeated him and thus they also burned their sanctuary with fire and spilt much blood there.***

*From that time the kingdom of the Arabs was no longer stable. When ... died, they appointed his son to the emirate...*

Hoyland notes of the above:

*John is noticeably unhostile towards Arab rule. Despite a sprinkling of stock abusive phrases such as "a barbarian people" and "hatred and wrath is their food," John notes the leniency of the Arabs towards the Christian population.*

*Though the coming of the Arabs is conceived of in Biblical terms and as part of God's dispensation, John does use a number of non-scriptural notions. For example, he presents Muhammad as a guide ( mhaddyiinii) and instructor ( tar'ii), as a result of whose teaching the Arabs "held to the worship of the one God in accordance with the customs of ancient law." John also makes him out to be a legislator, observing of the Arabs that "they kept to the tradition of Muhammad ... to such an extent that they inflicted the death penalty on anyone who was seen to act brazenly against his laws ( niimosa wh)." The term "tradition" ( mashlmiiniitii) implies something handed down, but one doubts that a fixed corpus of rulings from Muhammad is meant. Most likely John is simply relaying the message given out by the Muslims themselves, that they adhere to and enforce the example of their Prophet.*

*Finally, he is acquainted with a number of news items of internal Muslim affairs, especially those relating to the second Arab civil war, which was taking place as he wrote. He is aware of the characterisation of the caliph Yazid, circulated by his opponents, as profligate and corrupt, and of the claim of the rival caliph 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr to be a champion of the House of God:*

## **Great Book of Conquests and Apostasy Wars by Sayf ibn Umar as analysed by Parvaneh Pourshariati**

**Sayf ibn Umar's Great Book of Conquests and Apostasy Wars** describes the first battles in the Arab invasion of Persia as having occurred in the reign of Abu Bakr, later battles in the reign of Umar. This fully accords with Islamic tradition, but Sayf's history was long considered in deep confusion over the chronology of events because his references to Sassanian rulers consistently failed to fit the accepted Islamic dates for the reigns of the second and third caliphs (632-634 and 634-644 respectively).

Parvaneh Pourshariati in ***The Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*** challenges this assessment of Sayf's history. She demonstrates that if the dates that now appear in editions of Sayf's text - which were likely added after Sayf's death - were to be disregarded, his description of the campaign is detailed, coherent and credible. Rather she concludes that it is the dates of Abu Bakr and Umar's reigns that fall to be revised, so that the invasion and Abu Bakr's reign both commenced in 628, four years earlier than the traditional narrative. This is precisely what is stated in the chronicle of **Jacob of Edessa** and the **705 Chronicle**. Pourshariati concludes her book as follows.

*Another, more crucial, leap of faith, however, has been argued in this investigation, a leap that, nevertheless, and in view of the new evidence presented here, must be taken seriously. The early conquest of Iraq did not begin at the inception of the reign of the last Sasanian king, Yazdgird III, in 632, as it is currently believed, but in 628, at a time that was most opportune for it: immediately after the devastating Sasanian-Byzantine wars of 30 years, at the end of Shīrūyih Qubād's reign, when, too little too late, the powers of late antiquity realized in fact that 'from the Arab regions strong winds were blowing.' The interregnum period of 628-632 was a time of utter confusion. As troops had been dispersed in the wake of the Byzantine-Sasanian war, resulting in the formation of three distinct armies of the Sasanian empire, and as the Pārsīg-Pahlav rivalry had intensified, the perfect power vacuum had been created in Syria, in Iraq, as well as on the Iranian plateau. The Arabs naturally took advantage of this chaotic situation. After we delete what we know to be the postfacto hijra, annalist, and caliphal chronological constructions of the futuh [conquests] literature, Sayf's traditions of the early conquest of Iraq synchronize perfectly well with the one chronological given that scholarship had hitherto systematically refused to reckon with: the Sasanian chronological indicators of the reigns of the ephemeral kings and queens of the period 628-632 CE. After all, as Bal'amī informs us, Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina (the hijra) did not become the calendar landmark of choice for all the various groups within the nascent Muslim community, even in later decades. For a group of Bal'amī's Shī'ite contemporaries, as the author underlines, insisted that the death of Husayn was a more decisive moment in the history of the early Muslim community than the hijra of the Prophet.*

*If the Shī'ites were too biased to lend credibility to this assessment, what ought we do with a tradition describing a group of Bal'amī's contemporaries who claimed Mu'awiya's assumption of the caliphate to be a more appropriate calendar marker for the Muslims than the hijra of Muhammad from his native city? While sometime in 16–18 AH/637–639 CE some might have decided to mark Muhammad's hijra as a watershed event in early Islamic history, therefore, up until the tenth century, there was still no consensus on the matter, albeit the dissent was probably voiced by a minority.*

*How will our chronological reconstruction of the early Arab conquests of Iran affect our reconstruction of early Islamic history, and our appreciation of the Islamic historiographical tradition, especially the futuh narratives, beyond the strides that scholarship has already made apropos these? If alive, where was the Prophet Muhammad when the early conquests were taking place? Why does his name not appear in the narratives of the conquest? And what was his relationship to Abu Bakr and 'Umar? The traditional Islamic narratives of origin cannot quite accommodate the picture that we have presented in this study.*



## Arab Conquests Overview

### Summary of sources

<b><i>BL Gospel Fragment</i></b>	637: Muhammad ravaging Syria, routed Byzantine army
<b><i>Thomas the Presbyter</i></b>	634: Tayyaye of Muhammad ravaging Gaza
<b><i>Doctrina Iacobi</i></b>	'A prophet has come with a sword', welcomed by some Jews. Killed Byzantine army commander.
<b><i>Sophronius</i></b>	634: Saracens blocked road Jerusalem to Bethlehem,  637: Jerusalem surrendered, Saracens built place of worship on capital.
<b><i>p-Sebeos</i></b>	Jews were expelled from Jerusalem during the Byzantine-Sassanian War, and then, after a siege, from Edessa, at the end of the war. These Jews met Ishmaelites under authority of Muhammad who preached the recapture of Holy Land in fulfilment of God's promise to children of Abraham.  Hagarenes routed the Byzantine army at Yarmouk, then captured Jerusalem, Alexandria, then Ctesiphon.  Jews began to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple but were expelled by Hagarenes.
<b><i>Khuzistan Chr</i></b>	Ishmaelites under Muhammad captured Persia  Reference to Dome of Abraham (believed built by Abraham) and Yathrib.
<b><i>Jacob of Edessa</i></b>	Muhammad 'trading' pre-621  621-625 Kingdom of Tayyiye founded under Muhammad, ruled 7 years  626-629 Tayyiye raid Palestine  c.629? Succeeded Abu Bakr (who ruled for 2 yrs 7 mm)
<b><i>Syriac Common source</i></b>	Muhammad first led, then sent out raiding parties from his home town Yathrib.  The <b>1234</b> version, dependent upon <b>Theophilus of Edessa</b> , refers to Muhammad earlier having 'traded' with Palestine, but this may be copied from Jacob of Edessa.

<b>Spanish eastern Source</b>	Muhammad ruled ten years, died and succeeded by Abu Bakr
<b>John bar Penkaye</b>	Muhammad won two kingdoms with little armour or need of fighting.  Zubayr was a zealot who went 'to a sanctuary in the south'
<b>Sayf ibn Umar's Great Book of Conquests and Apostasy Wars</b>	The Arab conquests of Iran commenced in 628 under the leadership of Abu Bakr, continuing under Umar.

Two distinct narratives emerge neither of which there is any obvious reason to doubt.

**Jacob of Edessa** and the **705 Chronicle** have Muhammad reigning 621/2-628/9 as a king over a 'kingdom of Tayyaye' that was founded in 621/622. **Jacob** was writing in Edessa about sixty years after these events, and his account is supported by the **705 Chronicle** and corroborated by the Arab Calendar. His account that Abu bakr succeeded Muhammad in 628 has recently been corroborated by Pourshariati's study of **Sayf ibn Umar's Great Book of Conquests and Apostasy Wars**, demonstrating the plausibility that Abu Bakr commanded the Arab conquests of Iran in 628, and the foundation of an Arab kingdom at that time is consistent with the adoption of March 622 as the date of commencement for the Arab calendar (now the Hijra Calendar)

Nor is there any reason to doubt the account of **pseudo-Sebeos**, writing just thirty or forty years after the events he describes, asserting that the expulsion of the Jews from Edessa (which probably occurred in 628) was a critical factor in Muhammad's rise to religious prominence. This account is corroborated by the **Constitution of Medina** and the Palestinian sources, and by the first hand evidence provided by the **BL Gospel Fragment**, **Thomas the Presbyter** and the **Doctrina Iacobi**, that Muhammad (or in the latter case an unnamed prophet) was leading a campaign around Jerusalem between 634-638, and this is consistent with the **Syriac Common Source**. And the statements by Sophronius.

It is suggested that if there is no reason to doubt either narrative, and the two narratives are not inconsistent with one another, then the two should be treated as both correct. The evidence, taken together, suggests that Muhammad was both a leader of an Arab polity (or 'kingdom', per Jacob of Edessa), probably based in Mesopotamia, possibly at Hirah, from 621/2-628/9. At the end of this period two major events came to pass: the victory of Heraclius and the expulsion of the Jews from Edessa.

As a result of these events Muhammad was succeeded as king by Abu Bakr and the Arab invasion of Iran commenced. Muhammad is then located in the west at Yathrib where he formalised an agreement with his followers (the Constitution of Medina) and thereafter commanded and dispatched raids into Palestine.

### Composite Chronology

Pre-621	Muhammad hometown = Yathrib	<i>Syr.C.S.</i>
	Muhammad engaged in 'trading' expeditions	<i>p-Seb JofE, Syr.CS</i>
622?	Muhammad founded a kingdom	<i>JofE</i>
626	Tayyaye began raiding Palestine	<i>JofE</i>
628	Heraclius victory over House of Sassan, Jews expelled from Edessa, formed alliance with Muhammad	<i>p-Seb</i>
634	Muhammad raids Gaza	<i>Tho. the presb.</i>
637	Muhammad routed Byzantine army Welcomed by Jews in Palestine	<i>BL Gospel fragment, Doctrina Iacobi</i>
638	Arabs capture Jerusalem Jews begin to rebuild temple but expelled by Arabs	<i>Soph, Pseudo-Seb</i>
	Arabs capture Ctesiphon	<i>Khuzistan</i>
Post 637	Muhammad succeeded by Abu Bakr	<i>JofE, Sp.ES</i>

## Early Post-Byzantine/Post-Sassanian Arab rule

### The Receipt of Herakleopolis ('PERF 555') (632)

Probably the oldest documentary witness to Islam, besides the Qur'an, is a:

*'Document concerning the delivery of sheep to the Magarites and other people who arrived, as a down-payment of the taxes of the first indiction.'*<sup>8</sup>

excavated at the ruins of Herakleopolis in Egypt.

The document begins with the Bismillah that precedes every verse in the Qur'an except one):

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.'*

It proceeds to record the payment of sixty-five sheep by the city to *Magarites* (also referred to as *Saracens*), apparently as tribute.

Interestingly the document is dated: 22 or AD 632. The dates do not tally with the now standard Hijrah calendar that dates (AH) years from Mohammed's migration from Mecca to Medina, traditionally dated to 622 (in which case 22 AH would be AD 644), but the reference to an alternative calendar originating in an event in the early seventh century is significant. 610 would be the time of Mohammed's first alleged revelation, arguably a more significant event in Islam's traditional narrative.

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<sup>8</sup> Held at the Erzherzog Rainer Papyrus Collection, Vienna

## ***Isho'yabb III of Adiabene (d. 659)***

### ***The Arabs do not force others to abandon their faith but only half their possessions***

Isho'yabb III was the catholicos (head) of the East Syriac Church. Michael Penn cites three extracts from his surviving letters, that allude to the Arab conquests, in the context of chastising Christians who give up their faith in the face of taxation. By the Arabs, Hoyland notes that these letters contain the earliest use of the term 'mhaggre', in one instance (tayyaye mhaggre), probably from the Qur'an's 'muhajirūn'.

#### **Letter 48**

*..And if it should happen that making false excuses you should say, or the heretics should deceive you into saying, that what happened happened through the Arab's command [know that this] is completely untrue. For the Arab Hagarenes do not help those who attribute their suffering and death to God., the Lord of all. If it should happen and for whatever reason they have helped them if you properly attend to this you can inform the Hagarenes and persuade them concerning this matter. This my brothers, do everything wisely. Give what is Caesar's to Caesar and what is God's to God. ...*

#### **Letter 14**

*For also these Arabs to whom, at this time god has given control over this world as you know they are with us. Not only are they no enemy to Christianity, but they are even praisers of our faith, honourers of Our Lord's priests and Holy Ones. And supporters of churches and monasteries. Indeed, how did your people of Mrwny abandon their faith on a pretext of [the Arabs?] And this when as even the people of Mrwny' [inhabitants of Merv] say the Arabs did not force them to abandon their faith but only told them to abandon half their possessions., and to hold onto their faith. But they abandoned their faith which is eternal and held onto half of their possessions which are ephemeral ...*

## First accounts of Arab Prayer and Pilgrimage

See above:

*Pseudo-Sebeos: 'Jews expelled from temple',*

*Doctrina Iacobi: a 'prophet armed with a sword',*

*Sophronius: building 'that cursed thing they call a mosque' at the Temple,*

*Jacob of Edessa : Direction of prayer, Arab attitude to Jesus*

*Khuzistan Chronicle: the Dome of Abraham, Yathrib, etc*

### ***De locis sanctis*, Arculf (c. 670)**

#### **Construction of the 'quadrangular prayer house' at Temple Mount,**

The abbot of Iona wrote down the account of a pilgrim monk Arculf in 670, entitled ***De locis sanctis*** including a reference to the Arab place of worship on Temple Mount.

*However, in the celebrated place where once the temple (situated towards the east near the wall) arose in its magnificence, the Saracens now have a quadrangular prayer house. They built it roughly by erecting upright boards and great beams on some ruined remains. The building, it is said, can accommodate three thousand people at once'.*

## ***Edifying Tales of Anastasias of Sinai (660-690)***

### **Arab worship of 'the stone'**

In his ***Edifying Tales***, (written sometime between 660 and 690) **Anastasias of Sinai** presents the Saracens as being in league with demons:

*Note well that the demons name the Saracens as their companions. And it is with reason. The latter are perhaps even worse than the demons. Indeed, the demons are frequently much afraid of the mysteries of Christ, I mean his holy body ... , the cross, the saints, the relics, the holy oils and many other things. But these demons of flesh trample all that is under their feet, mock it, set fire to it, destroy it ...*

[The following section is summarised by Robert Hoyland]:

*And he backs this argument with examples. At Damascus a possessed man named Sartabias was told by his demon that he would be taking temporary leave of him while he accompanied the Arab army on its expedition to the straits of Abydos of Constantinople, for*

*"our prince has sent guards in order that we help our comrades the Saracens on the trip to Constantinople."*

***Back in 660 Anastasius had himself witnessed demons participating in the clearing work commissioned by the Muslims on the Temple Mount.*** And ca. 670 a secretary at Damascus, John of Bostra, was sent on a mission by the governor (symboloulos) to interrogate possessed girls at Antioch. Via the latters' mouths the demons within them inform John that what they fear most from the Christians is their cross, baptism and the eucharist. When asked which among all the faiths of the world they prefer, they reply:

*"That of our companions ... those who do not have any of the three things of which we have spoken and those who do not confess the son of Mary to be God or son of God."*

*Again, some years earlier a number of Christian sailors*

***"arrived at the place where those who have reduced us to servitude have their stone and their cult,"***

*and where they sacrificed innumerable sheep and camels. At approximately midnight they awoke to witness*

*"an indecent and horrible old woman rise from the ground,"*

*gather up the heads and feet of the sacrificed animals and return underground. The sailors exclaim to one another:*

*"See their sacrifice! It did not go up towards God, but down. As for their old woman, it is their erroneous faith."*

## Three Apocalypses:

### I The Syrian Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius

#### Anti-Ishmaelite apocalypse

A **Syriac apocalypse, attributed to Methodius**, bishop of Olympus (d. 312), was composed, most likely in North Mesopotamia by a Melkite or Miaphysite author and around the year 690, presents the rise of the Sons of Ishmael as God's punishment upon the Christians for their sinfulness. This commences with a historical account of the Sons of Ishmael having come out of Yathrib in biblical times and of their being repelled, after sixty years by Gideon, who '*drove them away and expelled them from the cultivated land to the desert of Yathrib*'.

It continues to refer to the Arab Conquests of its current time as a prediction of future event, leading to its prediction of their being routed by a great Christian emperor.

*Those of them that remained swore peace to the Sons of Israel. Nine tribes went out to this outer desert. But they will again devastate the land, take control of it, seize countries, crossings and the entrances to cultivated land from Egypt to Kush, from the Euphrates to India, from the Tigris to that ocean called the Sun's Fire. For theirs is a double enslavement upon all the nations.*

*For ten weeks of years [ie seventy years] there will be no nation or kingdom under heaven that they battle whom they will not subdue. But afterwards they too will be subdued., by the kingdom of the Romans, and enslaved by it.*

Long lists of atrocities to be committed by the Sons of Ishmael after which '*the king of the Greeks will come out against them in great anger*', and the Arabs will be made to endure one hundredfold what they inflicted upon the Christians.

*"There will be joy on the whole earth; men will dwell in great peace; the churches will be renewed, the cities rebuilt, and the priests set free from tax." This "final peace" is disrupted by an onslaught from the northern peoples and the emergence of the Antichrist. As soon as the latter is revealed, the king of the Greeks will go up and stand on Golgotha, and the Holy Cross will be put in that place where it had been erected when it bore Christ. And this Last Emperor will put his crown on top of the Holy Cross and stretch out his hands to heaven, and he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father."*



## II The Edesene Apocalypse

### Earliest reference to Mecca

The *Edessene Apocalypse*, is described by Michael Penn as likely dating from the 690s, and ‘a substantially abridged and revised version the earlier *Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius*’. It’s main importance is that it contains the first reference to Mecca, which is where the Sons of Ishmael and others shall be driven to.

*Then the king of the Greeks shall out from the west and his son from the south. Ten the sons of Ishmael shall flee and assemble in Babylon. The king of the Greeks shall overtake them in Babylon. From there they shall flee to **the city of Mecca**. There their kingdom will end. The king of the Greeks shall reign over the entire earth.*<sup>9</sup>

## III The Apocalypse of John the Little

### Early allusion to Muhammad

A third apocalypse, in a similar vein to that of pseudo-Methodius and the Edessene Apocalypse, is called the Apocalypse of John the Little since it purported to have been a prophecy disclosed by an angel to St John, the younger son of Zebedee. Penn finds that its date of composition is unclear, although, since it alludes to Abd al-Malik’s defeat of Ibn al-Zubayr, it must have been after 692, and because it does not allude to the Abbasid revolution, it must have been written prior to 750.

In Penn’s view, it contains the harshest descriptions yet of the Sons of Ishmael and the suffering they inflicted upon Christians. Unlike the two earlier works, this briefly alludes to a figure identifiable as Muhammad: ‘A warrior, one whom they will call a prophet’.

*‘But there will be deniers of truth, those who do not know God, those defiled by wantonness who anger God. Then suddenly the prophecy of the beautiful pure Daniel will be fulfilled; ‘God will bring forth a mighty southern wind’ (Daniel 11.5) And from it will come a people hideous in appearance, whose appearance and conduct are like those of women. **A warrior, one whom they will call a prophet, will rise up among them.** And there will be brought into his hands ... none in the world are like or similar to them. For everyone who hears shall shake their head and mock ‘Why say this?’ and ‘God but averts (His eyes)’ And the South will prosper. They will trample Persia with the hooves of their armies’ horses and subdue it. They will devastate Rome. None will be able to stand before them, because this was commanded by the holy one of heaven.*

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<sup>9</sup> Penn *When Christians First Met Muslims*

## The Geography of Ananias of Shirak (Anania Sirakac'i)

Lived 600-670

His Geography exists in two forms, a longer form that now exists only in a French translation (by Arsène Soukry) and a shorter form (in a Latin translation by William & George Whinston in London and Russian translation by Kerovbe Patkanian in St. Petersburg). Both were translated by Robert Hewson and published 1992 in ***The geography of Ananias of Širak : Ašxarhac'oyc', the long and the short recensions.***

In the section dealing with Paran, in Arabia Petrae, the longer recension reads:

*'...and Pharanitis, where **the town of Pharan** [is located], which I think **the Arabs call Mecca**,*

and the shorter:

*'...and Pharanitis, which is foolishly called the home of Abraham.'*

## The Byzantine-Arabic Chronicle

### Mecca, between Ur of the Chaldees and Harran 'in the desert'

*In the seventh year of the aforementioned princeps, hostile Saracen rebels of the Roman provinces began causing disturbances, more secretly than by public incursions. Theodorus, the brother of Eraclius the Augustus, routed them in many battles. Having heard the news, Eraclius advised his brother that in no way should he be in conflict with such people, because he was no less familiar with knowledge of the discipline of astrology, and if anything should turn out by chance, he was not ignorant in any way.*

***A huge multitude of the Saracens brought together invaded the provinces of Syria, Arabia and Mesopotamia. Holding the principate over them was a man by the name of Mahmet, born of the noblest tribe of that people: he was a rather knowledgeable man and a foreseer of some things to come.***

In a later entry dealing with the reign of Abd al-Malik (685-705) we see possibly the earliest reference to Mecca:

*'Abd al-Malik achieved the apex of royal power and ruled for 20 years. In the first year of his reign, applying all his experience and the courage of his mind against 'Abd Allah, whom his father had attacked many times in various battles, **[he came] finally to Mecca, the home of Abraham as they think, which lies between Ur of the Chaldees and the city of Harran (Carras) in the desert.** When a clash was initiated, king 'Abd Allah was killed by the general of the army, Tahihis by name, appointed by the king 'Abd al-Malik, and the head of the aforementioned king 'Abd Allah was cut off and presented to 'Abd al-Malik, the son of king Marwan, by the army general Aiais in Damascus.*

*So in the sixth year of the aforesaid ruler, after the internal struggles had been settled everywhere round about, he very wisely turned upon the territory of external enemies, for he had made tributary to his authority the provinces, cities, estates, towns and forts of many peoples. And his brother ('Abd al-'Aziz), already mentioned above - to whom his father had handed over power from the borders of Egypt to the Gaditan straits and given orders that he be successor to the rule after him ('Abd al-Ma.lik)-was cut off by a fatal accident. He ('Abd al-Ma.lik), nevertheless, settled the rule on his own sons, [which meant] it had to be conferred three times (ter contradendum).*

*He handed over to Walid (Hulit), his firstborn son, the rule of his people after himself; also he ordered his (Walid's) brother, Sulayman (Zoleiman) by name, to follow him (Walid). Thus he arranged for his sons a suitable settlement, as he had learned from his father, and, having completed the [last] year of his reign, free from care he departed from this light*

## ***The Life of Patriarch Benjamin (before 717)***

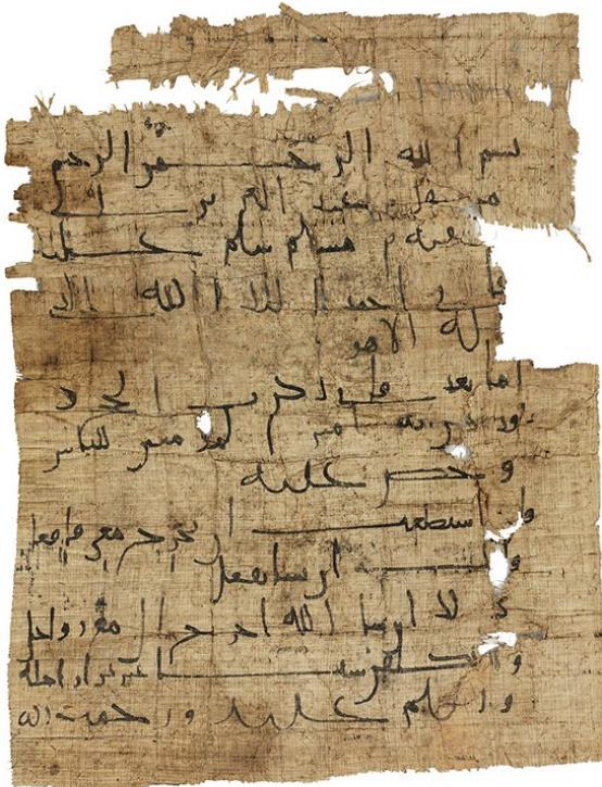
### **The Ka'aba in the South**

*And after a few days, there arose a man among the Arabs, from the southern regions, from Mecca and its vicinity, named Muhammad. And he restored the worshippers of idols to knowledge of the one God, so that they said that Muhammad is his messenger. And his nation was circumcised in the flesh, not in the law, and they prayed towards the south, orienting themselves towards a place they call the Ka'aba. And he took possession of Damascus and Syria, and crossed the Jordan and damned it up. And the Lord abandoned the army of the Romans before him because of their corrupt faith. And the excommunication that was brought against them and because of the Council of Chalcedon by the ancient fathers.*

## First mention of the Hajj?

(See rock inscription dated 710, *WWQ VI Inscriptions*)

Letter of a high-ranking Umayyad prince Sahl ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz containing his invitation to 'Uqbah ibn Muslim to participate in the Hajj<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Oriental Institute 17653 (Chicago), Arabic Papyrus. Petra Sijpesteijn dated the letter to 86-99 AH / 705-717 CE.

## Yathrib and Muhammad's campaign

Yathrib appears in **the Qur'an, {33.13}**, where its audience is (indirectly) addressed as '*people of Yathrib*'

Yathrib is also named in the document commonly referred to as the ***Constitution of Medina***.

It is also mentioned in:

***the Khuzestan Chronicle*** (c. 660) where it was given as an alternative name for Medina,

***the Syriac Common Source*** (where Muhammad's home town '*went up and down*' trading then raiding and finally where he no longer left but '*sat in honour*').

***the Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius*** (as the place from whence Arabs had emerged in biblical times and where they had been driven back to by Gideon, and from whence it 'predicts' the Arabs will emerge again.)

***Pseudo-Sebeos*** (c.660) describes

Jews '*met Ishmaelites after travelling through Tachkastan*'

*'set out from the P'arhan desert*'.

*'crossed the Jordan and encamped at Jericho*'

## Overview of early references to Mecca-Ka'aba and an Arab Abrahamic shrine

<i>The Qur'an</i>		<p><b>{28.24}</b> Valley of Mecca</p> <p><b>{5.95 &amp; 97}</b> Referenced to the <b>Ka'aba</b>:</p> <p><i>'Do not kill game while you are in the state of pilgrim sanctity or in the masjid al-Haram. Whoever of you kills it, then its recompense is the like of what he has killed, from livestock, to be judged by two men among you of equity and probity, and to be brought to the <b>Ka'bah</b> as an offering..</i></p> <p><i>God has made the <b>Ka'bah</b>, the Sacred House, a standard and maintenance for the people'.</i></p>
c.660	<i>Khuzistan Chr</i>	<p><i>'Regarding the '<b>Dome ('ka'aba') of Abraham</b>', we have been unable to discover what it is except that, because the blessed Abraham grew rich in property and wanted to get away from the envy of the Canaanites, he chose to live in the <b>distant and spacious parts of the desert</b>. Since he lived in tents, he built that place for the worship of God and for the offering of sacrifices. It took its present name from what it had been, since the memory of the place was preserved with the generations of their race. Indeed, it was no new thing for the Arabs to worship there...'</i></p>
660-690	<i>Edifying Tales of Anastasius</i>	<p><i>'the place where those who have reduced us to servitude have their stone and their cult'</i></p>
<670	<i>Geography of Anania Širakac'i</i>	<p><b>Mecca / House of Abraham</b> mentioned in Paran?</p>
680s	<i>John bar Penkaye</i>	<p>Ibn al-Zubayr was a zealot for the House of God, who fled to a <b>'sanctuary in the south'</b></p>
690s	<i>Edessene Apocalypse</i>	<p>Sons of Ishmael will be chased from Babylon to <b>the city of Mecca</b> (Edessene Apocalypse, 690s)</p>
<708	<i>Jacob of Edessa</i>	<p><b>Arabs pray to Ka'aba</b>, west of Egypt, east of Mesopotamia.</p>
<717	<i>Patriarch Benjamin</i>	<p><b>Ka'aba</b> <i>'in the south'</i></p>
741	<i>Byz-Arab Chr</i>	<p><i>'Mecca, the home of Abraham as they think, which lies <b>between Ur of the Chaldees and the city of Harran (Carras)</b> in the desert'.</i></p>

## The Qur'an

### Pope Martin denies informing the Saracens concerning their heresies (649-655)

Pope Martin I was elected to the papacy in 649. He accepted the position without seeking Byzantine approval, and denounced the imperially promoted doctrine of Monothelitism. Constans II issued a warrant for Martin's arrest which was executed in Rome in 653. Martin was taken to Constantinople but spared execution, although his death in 655 is regarded by the Church as a martyrdom. In a letter composed on his arrest he disclaims promoting any heresy or treason amongst the saracens.

*At no time did I send letters to the Saracens nor, as some say, a statement (tomus) as to what they should believe; neither did I ever despatch money, except only to those servants of God travelling to that place for the sake of alms, and the little which we supplied to them was certainly not conveyed to the Saracens.*

### Disputation between a monk of Bet Hale and an Arab notable ('early 720s')

#### First mention of the Qur'an

This 'disputation' (in reality a Christian polemic against Islam) features as its main character monk named Abraham of the monastery of Bet Hale answering the questions and objections of a Muslim who was in the monastery for ten days because of sickness. The text includes:

*I think that for you, too, not all your laws and commandments are in the **Qur'an** which Mohammed taught you; rather there are some which he taught you from the **Qur'an** and some which are in **Surat al-Baqrah** and in **gygy** and in **twrh**. So also we, some commandments the Lord taught us, some the Holy Spirit uttered through the mouths of its servants, the Apostles, and some (were made known) by means of teachers who directed and showed us the Way of Life and the Path of Life.*

**Sidney H. Griffith** writes:

*The writer shows an unusual familiarity with Islam. He quotes the Qur'an and names several Surabs, although he seems to think the latter are separate from the Qur'an. He quotes a tradition from Muhammad that speaks favourably of monks and hermits. He knows the story of Bahira, whom the Christians call Sargis. There is an extended discussion of the Christian practice of venerating icons, crosses and martyrs' bones that is unusual in the surviving Syriac dispute Text. The author even explicitly mentions the icon of Christ in Edessa that tradition claimed Jesus sent to King Abgar.*



## Letter from Emperor Leo III to Umar II (ruled 717-720)

### Reference to *The Furqan*:

*You admit that (the gospel) was written by God ... as you pretend for your Furqan, although we know it was Umar (presumably Umar bin Khattab) , Abu Talib (Ali) and Salman the Persian who composed it...*

*As for your book you have already given us examples of such falsifications and one knows, amongst others, of a certain Hajjaj, named by you as governor of Persia, who had men gather up your ancient books which he replaced by others composed by himself, according to his taste and which he propagated everywhere in your nation/. From this destruction nevertheless there escaped a few of the works of Abu Turab, for Hajjaj could not make them disagree completely.*

Yehuda Nevo cites Jeffry as having counted a possible fifty six allusions to the text of the Qur'an throughout Leo's letter, of which thirty relate to **Surahs 2-5**, and of the remainder most are 'doubtful' Nevo suggests that this indicates that Leo had Surahs 2-5 before him, and was relying upon memory or hearsay for the others. Nevo also links this to John of Damascus's paraphrasing of **Surahs 2, 4 and 5**, and draws the conclusion that these surahs in particular were in wider circulation than others that were only vaguely known.

## St John of Damascus (741-750)

***‘This Mohammed wrote many ridiculous books’***

In the eighth century, St John of Damascus wrote a book for a Christian readership called: ***Fount of Knowledge***. Part of this book addressed: ***Heresies in Epitome: How They Began and Whence They Drew Their Origin***.<sup>11</sup> According to an unknown Arabic source of John’s life, translated into Greek by an Arab monk, Michael in 1084, John had been born in Damascus in the third quarter of the seventh century and died in Jerusalem in 749. As such, according to the traditional Islamic narrative, he would have lived his life entirely under the rule of the Umayyad Caliphate, which was, throughout John’s life, based in Damascus. He is said to have been a senior official in the court of the Damascus emir.

In his ***Heresies***... John wrote of Mohammed:

*There is also the superstition of the Ishmaelites which to this day prevails and keeps people in error, being a forerunner of the Antichrist. They are descended from Ishmael, [who] was born to Abraham of Agar, and for this reason they are called both Hagarenes and Ishmaelites. They are also called Saracens, which is derived from ... the destitute of Sara, because of what Agar said to the angel: ‘Sara hath sent me away destitute.’ These used to be idolaters and worshiped the morning star and Aphrodite, whom in their own language they called Khabár, which means great. And so down to the time of Heraclius they were very great idolaters.*

***From that time to the present a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst. This man, after having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments and likewise, it seems, having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy. Then, having insinuated himself into the good graces of the people by a show of seeming piety, he gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven. He had set down some ridiculous compositions in this book of his and he gave it to them as an object of veneration.***

The aspect that is of greatest interest for our purposes is John’s understanding of the content of Islamic scriptures.

*As has been related, this Mohammed wrote many ridiculous books, to each one of which he set a title. For example, there is the book **On Woman**, in which he plainly makes legal provision for taking four wives and, if it be possible, a thousand concubines—as many as one can maintain, besides the four wives. He also made it legal to put away whichever wife one might wish, and, should one so wish, to take to oneself another in the same way...*

*Then there is the book of **The Camel of God**. ... About this camel he says that there was a camel from God and that she drank the whole river and could not pass through two mountains, because there was not room enough. There were people in that place, he says, and they used to drink the water on one day, while the camel would drink it on the next. Moreover, by drinking the water she furnished them with nourishment, because she supplied them with milk instead of water. Then, because these men were evil, they rose up, he says, and killed the camel. However, she had an offspring, a little camel, which, he says, when the mother had been done away with, called upon God and God took it to Himself....*

*... We plainly assure you that this wonderful camel of yours has preceded you into the souls of asses, where you, too, like beasts are destined to go. And there is the exterior darkness and everlasting punishment, roaring fire, sleepless worms, and hellish demons.'*

*Again, in the book of **The Table**, Mohammed says that the Christ asked God for a table and that it was given Him. For God, he says, said to Him: 'I have given to thee and thine an incorruptible table.'*

*And again, in the book of **The Heifer**, he says some other stupid and ridiculous things, which, because of their great number, I think must be passed over. He made it a law that they be circumcised and the women, too, and he ordered them not to keep the Sabbath and not to be baptized.*

It is interesting that John clearly knows something of the reported life of Mohammed, such as his marriage to Zeynab bint Jahsh, before the writing of Ibn Ishaq's first biography of Mohammed. However:

- he does not, at any point, use the terms '*Islam*', '*Muslim*' or '*Qur'an*';
- he treats the Mohammedan scriptures that he has read as separate books - three of which share titles with surahs of the Qur'an – *On Women* (**Surah 4**), *The Table* (**Surah 5**) and *The Heifer* (**Surah 2**), without being part of a canon;
- he mentions a fourth text, ***The Camel of God***, that refers to the story of Thamud that is referenced several points in the Qur'an but John has clearly read a much fuller account that includes many details that are not in the Qur'an;

- he exhibits no anxiety about deriding Islam and records discussions, that were presumably somewhat acrimonious, with believers in Mohammed, with no indication that the 'heresy' he disputed was associated with any political power, still less the dominant ideology within the court that he was attached to.

## Abbasid era documents

### *The Secrets of Rabbi Sim'on bin Yohai* (mid-eighth century)

In *The Secrets*, a mid-eighth century Jewish apocalypse, Metatron speaks to the Rabbi concerning the incursion of Ishmaelites:

*When he saw the kingdom of Ishmael that was coming, he began to say: 'Was it not enough, what the wicked kingdom of Edom did to us, but we must have the kingdom of Ishmael too?'*

*At once Metatron, the prince of the countenance, answered and said:*

*'Do not fear, son of man, for the Holy One, blessed be He, only brings the kingdom of Ishmael in order to save you from this wickedness. He raises up over them a Prophet according to His will and will conquer the land for them and they will come and restore it in greatness, and there will be great terror (enmity?) between them and the sons of Esau.'*

*Rabbi Simon answered and said: 'How do we know that they are our salvation?'*

*He answered: 'Did not the Prophet Isaiah say thus:*

*"And he saw a troop with a pair of horsemen, etc."?*

*Why did he put the troop of asses before the troop of camels, when he need only have said: "A troop of camels and a troop of asses"? But when he, the rider on the camel, goes forth, the kingdom will arise through the rider on an ass. Again: "a troop of asses", since he rides on an ass, shows that they are the salvation of Israel, like the salvation of the rider on an ass.'*

According to the *Third Book of Enoch*, when Enoch, the great grandfather of Noah, was raised to Heaven (*Genesis* 5.21-24) he was transformed into Metatron, said to have been the most powerful of all the angels. This book forms part of a Jewish mystical tradition, that may have outraged the Qur'an author and been the source of its accusation in **{9.30}**, that the Jews are guilty of idolatry for taking Ezra as the son of God.

The reference to *Isaiah* is to chapter 21 verse 7 in which Isaiah has a vision of two riders:

*And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he listened diligently with much heed:*

This verse is sometimes taken as a prophecy of Jesus and Mohammed (the riders of a donkey and a camel respectively).

## Thomas Artsruni (887)

### *‘Mecca in Paran’*

In *Petra In The Qur'an*, a paper written by Dan Gibson, reference is made to a document written by Thomas Artsruni in 887 AD:

*At that time, in a place of Petrea Arabia Pharan, named Makka - The Mecca - he showed himself to brothers bandits, warriors and band chiefs, who were worshiping in a temple the idols of Ammonites, Samam and Kabar.*<sup>12</sup>

Gibson comments:

*In this account, the writer, Thomas Artsruni tells us that the prophet Muḥammad was not born and raised in Mecca in Saudi Arabia, but that he lived in a city called Mecca in the general area of Paran, in Arabia Petraea. Here the writer clearly calls it - the Mecca - and places it in southern Jordan, where the two Petras (Rocks) existed. If this is so, then Petra was also identified as “Mecca” at one time. The existence of two Meccas would certainly clear up the reason why Petra is continually referred to as Mecca in the Islamic accounts.*

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<sup>12</sup> Gibson cites as his source Brosset, M., (translator) *Collection D’Historiens Armeniens*, L’Academie Imperiale Des Sciences, S. Petersbourg, 1894, Book II - 4. p.89.

## Conclusions

1. In 621 or 622 an Arab polity was established that Jacob of Edessa describes as a Kingdom of the Tayyaye. This was connected with March 622 being the commencement of the Arab (later 'hijrah') calendar. Muhammad was the first king, reigning for seven years.
2. In 628, following the victory of the Byzantine Empire over the Sassanian Empire, Heraclius expelled Jews from Edessa. These Jews met Muhammad who preached a message that the time had come for the children of Ishmael and the children of Israel to unite to realise God's promise to give the holy land to the descendants of Abraham. These events appear to have precipitated a change of leadership in the Tayyaye. Muhammad is succeeded by Abu Bakr who commences an invasion of Iran.
3. In the 630s Muhammad establishes a base in Yathrib and launched a number of raids into Palestine, besieging and eventually capturing Jerusalem (638).<sup>13</sup>
4. References to the nature of Muhammad's prophethood are few and unclear. Whilst the *Disputation between a monk of Bet Hale and an Arab notable*, the writings of St John of Damascus and letter from Emperor Leo III to Umar II all indicate that there was an Arab scripture in circulation, the lack of a clear reference to it by name, confusion over its contents and St John's overt contempt for it all indicate that the Qur'an did not receive recognition from the early Arab rulers as a sacred scripture, and that copies of it were very few and little understood.
5. The identification of the Ka'aba and Mecca from the early sources is also unclear. The Khuzestan Chronicle refers to the Ka'aba as an Abrahamic shrine (660) and Jacob of Edessa (<708) distinguishes it from Jerusalem and locates it somewhere between Egypt and Iraq. Anastasius refers to a place in the desert where a particular stone is revered but give no further details of its location, whilst John bar Penkaye states that al-Zubayr, who was 'zealous for God's house', fled to the Arabs' 'sanctuary in the south'.

The name Mecca is not mentioned until 690 (the Edessene Apocalypse) but its location is not given. It may have been included in the *Geography of*

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<sup>13</sup> It does not follow that there were major pitched battles with armies of the Byzantine empire as recorded by later Islamic narratives. On the contrary the absence of any accounts by non-Muslim sources of such battles suggest that there were none. Muhammad operated in a region from which Byzantium seems to have, for some reason (such as depopulation as a result of plague or financial collapse) withdrawn. This is consistent with the accounts of John bar Penkaye. In *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*, 2003 Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren suggest that the abandonment of Palestine for financial reasons by the Byzantine Empire had been long planned.

Anania Širakac'i (in which case it would have been located in Paran, south of Mount Seir) but the authenticity of the reference is unreliable. Much later, in 887, Thomas Artsruni refers to '*the*' Mecca (implying that he was aware of false Meccas) being in Paran. After 690 the next reference to Mecca comes in 741 where it is located on the Euphrates '*between Ur of the Chaldees and the city of Harran*'. In short, places called the ka'aba and Mecca are occasionally referred to but their locations are elusive and modern Mecca is unknown until some time after the Abbasid Revolution in 750 and the writing of what is now the standard Islamic narrative by ibn Ishaq.