

Odon Lafontaine

# THE GREAT SECRET OF ISLAM

*Science unveils the origins of Islam*



Cover description: the making of the Quran, starting from its roots in the Torah, progressing through the legendary camel shoulder blades of Islamic tradition, and culminating in the calligraphed manuscripts. The prominent image in the foreground is of the first surah of the Quran, known as "The Opening" or "*al fatiha*" (Wikimedia Commons: [1](#) – [2](#) – [3](#) – [4](#) – [5](#)).

For those who prefer it, a print edition of the book is also available;  
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While exploring the Quran, the life of Muhammad, the traditional Islamic narrative, and through his discussions with Muslims, Odon Lafontaine encountered a series of contradictions that led to his confusion and unease. Eager to understand the roots of these inconsistencies, Lafontaine delved deeper into the origins of Islam, which led him to the works of Édouard M. Gallez. Their subsequent collaboration allowed Lafontaine access to many fascinating historical studies. However, the complexity of these studies and their sensitive nature meant that they remained largely within scholarly circles and dense academic publications. How could this knowledge be shared with the greater public? This question prompted Lafontaine to publish *Le grand secret de l'islam* with Édouard M. Gallez, which achieved significant success in France. What follows, that being *The Great Secret of Islam*, is its updated English adaptation.

### Odon Lafontaine

Odon Lafontaine is a popular historian specializing in the early history of Islam. Born in 1978, he has a background in business strategy which honed his critical thinking and analytical skills, employing the scientific method—also used by scholars studying the origins of Islam—which informed his writing of *The Great Secret of Islam*. Odon also presides over EEChO, a French scholarly society dedicated to studying the origins of Christianity ([www.eecho.fr](http://www.eecho.fr)). Since 2010, Odon has been studying Islam as an independent researcher under the mentorship of Édouard M. Gallez. He has developed a comprehensive and synthetic approach to understanding its emergence, further enhancing his research through collaborations with other scholars.

<https://essec.academia.edu/OdonLafontaine>  
<https://thegreatsecretofislam.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/@thegreatsecretofislam>  
<https://www.youtube.com/@OdonLafontaine> (French channel)



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### Dr. Édouard Marie Gallez

Born in 1957, Édouard M. Gallez, C.S.J., holds a Ph.D. in theology and history of religions from Strasbourg's University, France. He is the author of pivotal works in Islamology, including *Le Messie et son Prophète* [The Messiah and his Prophet] (2005) and *Le malentendu islamo-chrétien* [The Christian-Muslim Misunderstanding] (2012)<sup>1</sup>. His scholarly contributions also extend to various academic journals such as *Oriens Christianus* and *Inârah*, as well as online publications. A trained exegete, he is also an accomplished scholar on early Christianity and a co-founder of EEChO.

<https://independent.academia.edu/GallezEdM>  
<http://rootsofislamtruehistory.com/>

<http://lemessieetsonprophete.com/> (French website)



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[www.eecho.fr](http://www.eecho.fr)

<sup>1</sup> Édouard Marie Gallez, *Le messie et son prophète*, Studia Arabica vol. I & II, Éditions de Paris, 2005-2010, Versailles & *Le malentendu islamo-chrétien*, 2012, Salvator, Paris.

## What is Islam ?

It is curious how both non-Muslims and Muslims alike experience an **uneasiness** towards Islam. Even Muslim leaders are starting to acknowledge that there is something concerning about the religion. Egyptian President Al-Sisi has indeed recently called upon top Islamic scholars in aims to introduce reforms encouraging non-violence within Islam: “*a religious revolution [is] needed*”<sup>2</sup>. Questions arise such as: Why do Muslims engage in constant conflicts with each other? Why is there a trend of intolerance toward other religions within Islam? Why, when there are acts of violence committed by Muslims in the name of Islam, do their coreligionists react in near silence? However, the preeminent question remains: Why is it so controversial, and in some instances prohibited, for Muslims to discuss these topics? Is there something within Islam that must remain concealed?

There is no doubt that an observer may identify certain shortcomings in Islam as both a religion and a political system. In its normative and social dimensions, as a code and a law, Islam has not (yet) created the ideal society it aspires to establish globally—a failure further accentuated in regimes that claim God’s law as their foundation. One could attempt to elucidate and rationalize these shortcomings by pointing out contradictions in Islamic doctrine, paradoxical injunctions, or dogmas that could conflict with human nature or common sense. However, the key to understanding Islam lies in scholarly efforts and historical research on its **actual origins**. By determining the truth about its beginnings without religious or ideological bias, one can comprehend what is Islam’s deep nature, what it truly represents, and thus explain its flaws, failures, as well as its strengths and successes. This research has been underway for quite some time, yet it continues to face relative indifference, predictably ignored or contested by Muslims, and also by non-Muslims, including the media, journalists, (most) academics, historians, educators, moral authorities, and even some non-Muslim religious leaders. The reason for this reluctance is simple: most of these individuals unquestioningly accept and repeat what Islam says about its own origins and history. Its standardized narrative is largely taken at face value as historical truth, incorporated into textbooks, taught in schools, and propagated by the media. Consequently, few dare to challenge its legitimacy.

Whether legitimate or not, this narrative is undoubtedly fascinating as it inadvertently reveals, through its logic and discernible mechanisms, remnants of historical truth about the origins and development of Islam as both a religion and a political system. However, the plain truth remains elusive. Despite claims that Islam was born “*in full light of history*”, its authentic story remains concealed, encrypted, and off-limits—considered “*haram*” and taboo. Thus, in order to reconstruct an accurate historical account, we must first familiarize ourselves with the story that Islam tells about itself (on page 6). This will subsequently enable us to discern and comprehend the “**great secret**” that Islam strives so diligently to hide (on page 15), a secret that historical research is gradually uncovering, and which, as we will explore in the final part of this book, Islamic texts still preserve traces of (on page 110): evidence hidden in plain sight.

**NB:** For the sake of readability, every reference to a page or note number within this document is a clickable hyperlink. We use simplified scripts for Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew transliterations, which are written in italics and enclosed in quotation marks. A detailed bibliography is provided at the end of these pages.

**Disclaimer:** In this text, numerous hyperlinks are provided for illustrative or explanatory purposes, many of which link to articles from the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. However, readers are advised to exercise caution regarding the historical accuracy of these articles, especially those related to Islamic history. Due to Wikipedia’s consensus-based validation process among its contributors, it can be challenging to access the most current or relevant research. While these articles are often useful in relation to the references and sources they cite, it is important to note that in the field of Islamic history, many articles tend to mirror standard Islamic narratives. Readers will have the opportunity to discern for themselves the differences between these narratives and actual historical facts.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Economist*’s “[Reforming Islam in Egypt](#)” (Feb 18, 2017; archived version available [here](#)).

# WHAT DOES ISLAM CLAIM ABOUT ITSELF?

...or the “standard Islamic narrative” according to Islam

## MUHAMMAD<sup>3</sup>

The narrative commences in 6<sup>th</sup> century CE Arabia, specifically in the [Hejaz](#), the western region of present-day Saudi Arabia that borders the Red Sea. Here, we encounter a population of merchants and warriors belonging to the Arabs. Arabs were believed to be descendants of the Biblical [Abraham](#) through the lineage of [Ishmael](#), the son he fathered with his servant [Hagar](#). As per Islamic history, the ancient Arabs lived under a system of clans and tribes, practiced a vague form of polytheism and pagan worship, and adhered to harsh customs. For instance, they were known to mistreat women<sup>4</sup> and reportedly buried their young daughters alive<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the region was beset by lawlessness and perpetual clan warfare, partly fueled by their obscure religious practices. This era was known as the “[jahiliyyah](#)” (literally “ignorantism”), or the Age of Ignorance, a dark age associated with ancient pagan times.

In this setting, Muhammad was purportedly born in 570 in [Mecca](#), a small caravan city in the region, belonging to the [Qurayshis tribe](#). Having been orphaned, he was raised first by his grandfather and later by his uncle, both of whom were tribal chiefs. Around the age of 9, during a caravan expedition to Syria that Muhammad joined with his uncle, a Christian monk named [Bahira](#) identified him as a future prophet. However, Muhammad initially had to make a living. He worked as a caravan laborer, traveling throughout Arabia and the Middle East. Eventually, he married his employer, [Khadija](#), a wealthy widow, with whom he had four daughters.



The angel Gabriel appearing to Muhammad  
(Persian miniature)—[Wikimedia Commons](#)

In the year 610, while meditating in a cave, Muhammad experienced a voice and a vision of the angel Gabriel<sup>6</sup>. The angel revealed to him the word of Allah<sup>7</sup>, some verses of the [Quran](#) that He instructed Muhammad to read and recite (the initial verses of surah 96). Allah had previously sent his word to a series of [prophets and messengers](#)—Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus being the most prominent. However, those who had listened to these prophets preach God’s word, namely the Jews and Christians, had since gone astray. They had received sacred scriptures from their prophets (the Scrolls of Abraham, the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David

<sup>3</sup> Our synthesis of Muhammad’s life is derived from examining the traditional biographies, particularly the “*sira*” of [Ibn Hisham](#), a 9<sup>th</sup>-century Muslim historian, and the “*tafsir*” (exegesis of the Quran) by [Ibn Kathir](#), a highly influential 14<sup>th</sup>-century Muslim traditionist.

<sup>4</sup> Islam claims to have freed women of the unworthy condition in which they were held before its revelation.

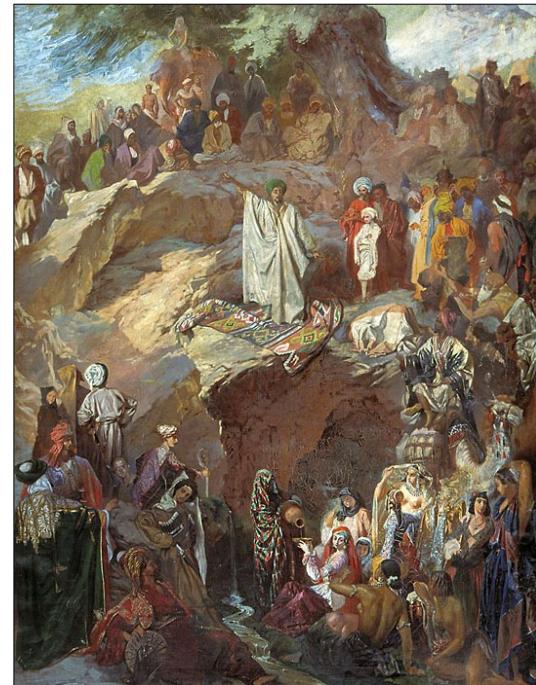
<sup>5</sup> This is the Islamic interpretation of Q16:58-59 and Q81:8-9. We provide another explanation in note 255.

<sup>6</sup> This episode is surprisingly similar to the “angel” vision that Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, alleged he had in 3<sup>rd</sup> century Mesopotamia.

<sup>7</sup> Allah: God, the Arabic name for God (the one God). It remains uncertain whether the word Allah comes from the Arabic “*al ilah*” (الله), meaning “the god”, i.e. God, or if it is derived from the Aramaic “*allaha*” (אֱלֹהָה), also meaning “God”.

and the Gospel of Jesus<sup>8</sup>) and should have followed their commandments. Yet, they deviated from their teachings and altered their scriptures. Consequently, Allah needed to complete His revelation by sending a final prophet to restore order and reestablish the true religion, to correct all prior and corrupted revelations, primarily Judaism and Christianity, by providing new believers with just and ultimate commandments. Included in this plan was the mission to submit the entire world to His divine will, so that Allah may be pleased to see all of humanity conform to His law, obeying Him in every aspect of life, from sunrise to sunset, between spouses and friends, in peace and in war, and in all daily activities.

Muhammad shared his vision with his wife, who then relayed it to her cousin [Waraqah](#), a priest<sup>9</sup> portrayed as a Christian. Both validated Muhammad's revelation. Consequently, he became a preacher to proclaim what he envisioned—since he was illiterate<sup>10</sup>, he could not write it down himself. He then preached about the one God to the pagan polytheists of Mecca. Not only did he manage to communicate his message to some of them, but he also gained recognition as a prophet. As a result, he gathered his first followers, whom he convinced with his proclamations and divine signs. One notable miracle was the "[Night Journey](#)", or [the isra and miraj](#) ("the journey and the ascent"), during which he was transported overnight from Mecca to Jerusalem and back, riding al-Buraq, his winged horse. Incidentally, after leaving Jerusalem (his horse took off from the rock of the [Dome of the Rock](#)), he may have visited hell (traditions vary on this point), and then ascended through the seven heavens. The Heavenly Quran was presented to him, referred to as the "Mother of Scripture", the divine model that authenticated the earthly revelation propagated by Muhammad.



**Muhammad preaching**  
(Grigory Gagarin)–Wikimedia Commons

Despite these signs, the enmity towards Muhammad of the authorities of Mecca and its influential citizens grew. They were disturbed by the Prophet in their business and their polytheism. After the death of his wife and of his protectors, the persecution of Muhammad and the early Muslims worsened. Some believers even crossed the Red Sea to take refuge in Christian Abyssinia. Muhammad was eventually driven out of Mecca. He found refuge with his followers in Yathrib, a prosperous city in a desert oasis 250 miles north of Mecca, populated by Jewish and Arab tribes. Thus ended the Meccan period of Muhammad's life. The date of his flight is used for the beginning of the Muslim calendar: the year 622 is the beginning of the [Hegira](#) ("hijrah") era ([exile, emigration](#)), the foundation of the first Islamic state and the first year of the new Islamic times.

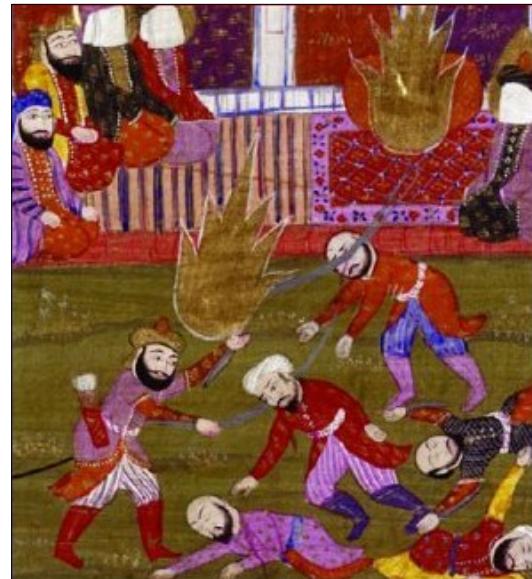
<sup>8</sup> Islam does not mention the four Gospels but "the Gospel" ("al injil") in the singular.

<sup>9</sup> According to the study of the Islamic tradition proposed by Joseph Azzi (a.k.a. Abu Musa al Hariri), *The Priest and the Prophet*, The Pen Publishers, 2005. See also note 19

<sup>10</sup> The Islamic tradition places great emphasis on the supposed illiteracy of Muhammad for apologetic reasons. This would indeed prove he could not be the author of the Quran, and therefore that it came from God. However, we have other explanations for the Quranic references to this "illiteracy", on page 140.

Its new host city was later renamed Medina (“the city”, as in “the city of the Prophet”). The Medinan period in the life of Muhammad began here. He concluded a [pact](#) with his Arab and Jewish hosts (called the “Constitution of Medina”) and had amicable relations with them, as displayed in their initial benevolent behavior towards him. He kept on preaching the revelation of Allah, verse after verse, a word that now established him as a political leader. During all this time, the angel Gabriel continued to manifest himself regularly to him. This is how he was led to give up on some of the original practices very similar to Jewish customs—such as the prayer towards Jerusalem. He would have modified it during his time in Medina, directing it towards Mecca instead. It is said that there was an [ancient sanctuary](#) here, **the Kaaba**, whose construction is attributed to Abraham himself. But the polytheists of Mecca had since deviated from Abraham’s true religion and polluted the Kaaba with the pagan idols of their cults.

To meet the needs of the community, as he was facing the hostility of the Meccans and the sceptics, Muhammad, the peaceful prophet who had become the political and religious master of Medina, now became a war chief: despite his initial reluctance, the ongoing divine revelation enjoined him to use all forms of violence, to advocate holy war, and to have expedition after expedition carried out against the caravans of Mecca (raids, or “ghazw”). He eliminated his political adversaries, his opponents, and satirists also. However, Medina was nonetheless experiencing a “golden age of Islam”. Muhammad decreed the rules of a just peace, freeing women, for example, from the unworthy status in which polytheists were supposed to have confined them. He led a humble and exemplary life despite his numerous wives (according to tradition, at least 13 wives<sup>11</sup>, not counting slaves and war prisoners). Thus, more and more followers were recruited, even though Muhammad had to fight against the opposition of the skeptical and hypocritical believers, the “[munafiqun](#)”. He also had to face the betrayals of his Jewish guests in Medina who no longer respected the initial pact. He ended up expelling two of their tribes and had the third one massacred and enslaved in 627 (the [Banu Qurayza tribe](#)).



Ali and Muhammad during the  
Banu Qurayza massacre

(Persian miniature)—[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>11</sup> 13 wives according to Ibn Hisham. Muhammad benefitted from a special permission from God, freeing him from the limit set at 4 wives in Islam, to which slaves, servants and war captives can be added. Lebanese scholar Joseph Azzi (a.k.a. Abu Musa al-Hariri) identified 35 of Muhammad’s women by name in the various Muslim sources he consulted—not counting anonymous captives and slaves—in *La vie privée de Mahomet* [Muhammad’s private life] (Éditions de Paris, Versailles, 2007).

Muslims are supposed to comply with Q4:3: “*Marry what seems good to you of the women: two, or three, or four*” whereas God specifically governed Muhammad’s harem with the revelation of Q33:50: “*Prophet! Surely We have made lawful for you your wives to whom you have granted their marriage gifts, and what your right (hand) owns from what God has given you [slaves], and the daughters of your paternal uncles and paternal aunts, your maternal uncles and maternal aunts, who had emigrated with you, and in any believing woman if she gives herself to the prophet, and if the prophet whishes to take her in marriage. (That is) exclusively for you, apart from the believers*”. Despite the size of his harem and his legendary vigor, Muhammad had only one son, who died in infancy (according to Muslim historians), and only one child survived him, his daughter Fatima (married to the future “Caliph” Ali), from his marriage to his first wife Khadija.

NB: We are using Arthur J. Droge’s English translation of the Quran (The Quran: A New Annotated Translation, Equinox Publishing, Bristol, 2013). Alternatively, for enhanced understanding, we may also refer to the literal translations available on “The Quranic Arabic Corpus” initiative (<https://corpus.quran.com/>), translations and analytics from the “Qur'an Tools” scholarly initiative (<https://qurantools.mst.edu.au/>) or our own translations.

Having thus strengthened himself, Muhammad was able to take over Mecca. He entered there in 629, taking advantage of the [truce of Hudaybiyyah](#), then took the city definitively in 630. The Kaaba was cleansed of its pagan idols and became this empty cube which we still see today<sup>12</sup>. Mecca definitively gained its status as the holy city of Islam. The conquests continued in the Hejaz, new territories were won, populations converted to this new religion, Islam. Arabia was unified in the same language, the same religion and gradually identified itself with the [Ummah](#) (“*umma*”), the community of Muslim believers. The conquest and conversions thus continued to extend to the Middle East.

In 632, Muhammad embarked on his final pilgrimage to Mecca, transforming this age-old polytheistic tradition into a major component of Islam and thus cementing it as a pillar of the nascent religion. Shortly after, on June 8, 632, he passed away in Medina, where he was subsequently laid to rest.



**Muhammad advancing on Mecca**

16<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman miniature  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

## ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

...still according to Islam

After him, [Abu Bakr](#), a companion of Muhammad and the father of Aisha, his young and favored wife, assumed the role of Caliph. The title “caliph” in Islam signifies the successor to Muhammad, holding religious, political, and military leadership over the “*umma*”. During this period, the caliphate operated as an elective system, with a consultative council known as the “*mushawara*” (consultation). This council consisted of companions of Muhammad, including three future caliphs—Umar, Uthman, and Ali—along with individuals like [Ubayy ibn Kaab](#) and [Zayd ibn Thabit](#). Zayd served as the personal secretary of the Prophet, and he was entrusted with an initial compilation of the Quranic revelation, transcribed by Muhammad’s companions. Meanwhile, Abu Bakr continued military conquests, engaging in conflicts with certain Muslim tribes that rejected him as the successor of the Prophet—known as the wars of “*ridda*” or wars of apostasy. Abu Bakr passed away in Medina in 634, his authority being passed on to [Umar ibn al Khattab](#).

Umar, the second caliph, distinguished himself as a formidable conqueror. He expanded the Islamic empire to include present-day Tunisia, traversing Egypt, the entire Levant, Iraq, and extending to the boundaries of contemporary Iran. Umar captured Damascus in 634, and his troops entered [Jerusalem](#) around 637-638, breaking it away from the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium). There Umar oversaw the construction of the “Mosque of Umar” on the current

<sup>12</sup> The Kaaba had already faced many challenges, and many more were to come, most notably the flood of 1620, which swept away its walls. Sultan Murad IV subsequently oversaw its complete reconstruction around 1631. This rebuilding marked the 11<sup>th</sup> iteration of the Kaaba, as per the Islamic narrative.

esplanade of the mosques, situated on the site of the ancient Temple of the Jews<sup>13</sup>. Later, Caliph Abd al-Malik replaced it with the Dome of the Rock, erected towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

During this period, those who had witnessed Muhammad—his companions, scribes, and secretary—reportedly continued to commit his revelations, the very word of Allah, the Quran, to memory, recite it, transcribe it (even on improvised materials like camel's bones), and disseminate it. They also aimed to preserve the example of his life. However, as time passed and the witnesses of Muhammad passed away, coupled with **emerging differences** within the “*umma*”, the risk of compromising the integrity of the revelation allegedly increased.

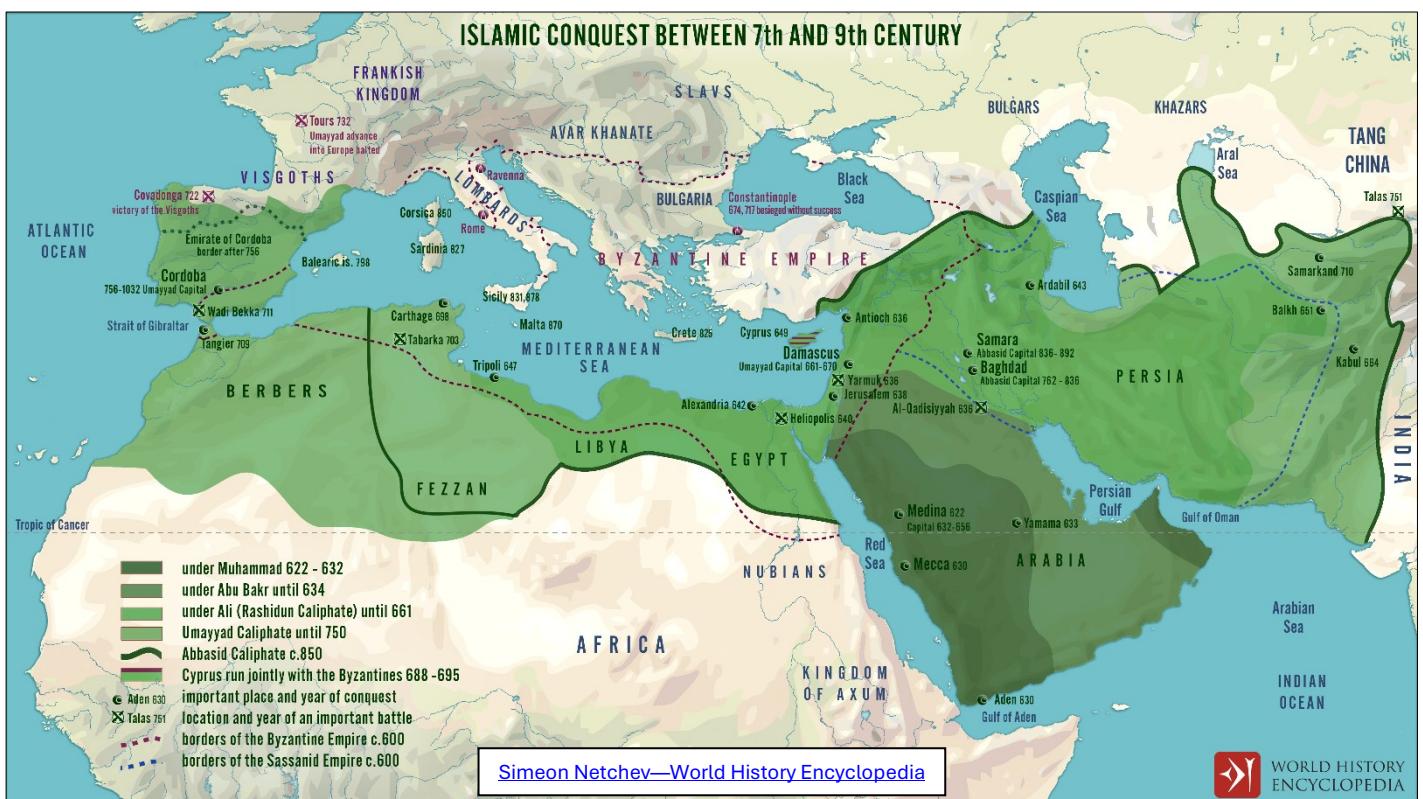
The process of collecting Quranic fragments scattered among Muslims had begun under Abu Bakr, continued under Umar with the assistance of Zayd, but it was not deemed sufficient. After Umar's assassination in Medina in 644, [Uthman ibn Affan](#), his successor and the third caliph, took on the task of [compiling a unique and official version of the Quran](#) between 647 and 653. Uthman classified and roughly ordered the surahs from the longest to the shortest. Allegedly, Uthman ordered the destruction of all earlier collections and fragments throughout the caliphate. He then distributed the official version of the Quran, in the form of reference copies, in various locations such as Medina, Damascus, Kufa, Basra (in present-day Iraq), and Mecca. This version, theoretically endorsed in the 1924 Cairo edition, remains a reference for Muslims. Following Uthman's assassination in 656, his successor [Ali ibn Abi Talib](#), the cousin, son-in-law, disciple, and historical companion of Muhammad, faced a severe civil war within the “*umma*” known as the **first “fitna”**.

In its [turmoil](#), Ali was assassinated in 661 by some of his former supporters, the [Kharijites](#). This event marked a significant turning point in Islamic history, leading to the end of the “[rashidun](#)” (the “rightly-guided” caliphs), the first successors of Muhammad, whom Sunni Islam recognizes as models and (almost) divinely inspired leaders. Ali's assassination further amplified the civil war with the quarrel over his succession, both over the nature of Muhammad's legacy and the clash of political ambitions already observed earlier. This event catalyzed the major division within the Muslim community into different branches, primarily Sunnis and Shiites, and others.

The Sunni Muslims supported a political succession, initially accepting [Hasan](#), Ali's son, as the caliph. He reigned less than a year as the real power soon shifted to [Muawiya](#), Uthman's cousin and the governor of Syria, who imposed himself over Hasan and thus became the new caliph. On the other hand, the Alids, Ali's partisans, the Shiite Muslims, sought a successor with religious legitimacy. They wanted their leader to be an imam and a direct descendant of the Prophet. They acknowledged Hasan, son of Ali and grandson of Muhammad, as their leader. After Hasan's death in 670, rumored to have been poisoned by his own wife under Muawiya's orders, the Shiites turned to his brother [Husayn](#). He became the third Shiite imam following his brother Hasan and father Ali, and stood in opposition to Muawiya. The latter, a long-standing [adversary](#) of Ali and his sons, had then proclaimed his caliphate, having moved the capital from Medina to Damascus. This marked a shift from the elective caliphate to a hereditary one, as Muawiya appointed his son Yazid to succeed him after his death (in 680), thus founding the **Umayyad dynasty**. Yazid faced then a strong opposition from the Alids (the second “*fitna*”), waged wars during which Husayn was killed, and the Umayyads reigned until 750.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Muslim tradition holds that Umar permitted a converted Jew, named Ka'b al-Ahbar, to construct a place of worship on the site. This is documented in al-Tabari's *History of the Prophets and Kings*, as referenced in the American edition, *The History of al-Tabari*, Vol. XII (State University of New York Press, New York, 1992, pp. 194-195). But then, what was this “mosque of Umar”, built by a Jew on Judaism's most sacred ground, actually like?

They secured an immense empire, warring against the Persians, Byzantines, Berbers, other North African groups, and the Visigoths in Spain. Their conquests even reached the Franks and Central Asia. Despite these external successes, internal conflicts persisted as a new “*fitna*” (the [third one](#)) erupted in the 740s between the Umayyads and a coalition of opponents, the **Abbasids**, including some Alids, Arabs and Persians—their leader [al-Saffah](#) claiming to be a descendant of the uncle of the Prophet. They defeated the caliph at the [battle of the Zab](#) (750), slaughtering almost every Umayyad. Al-Saffah became caliph and established the [new Abbasid dynasty](#). He chose Kufa in Iraq as his capital, signaling the rise in Persian influence within the empire. His successor, al-Mansur, later relocated the capital to the new city of Baghdad in 762. Even though the Abbasid coalition included Shiites, it nevertheless laid the foundations for Sunni Islam, which enjoyed a new “golden age” until the 10<sup>th</sup> century, after which the empire gradually declined. Indeed, the Sunni Caliphate was then overpowered and ruled by its Alid part (the [Buyids](#)), whereas other Alids, the [Fatimids](#), had already founded a rival Caliphate in Northern Africa, expanding to Egypt up to Arabia (its western shores, including Medina and Mecca). The empire kept on crumbling until it underwent a dramatic transformation in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, marked by the devastating massacres and destructions caused by the Mongols. They obliterated Baghdad and executed the caliph. This tumultuous period was later followed by the rise of the Ottomans, who reestablished a Sunni Caliphate.



The early history of Islam was thus marked by great turbulence: three of the first four caliphs and the Prophet’s descendants Hasan and Husayn were assassinated, recurrent civil wars within the “*umma*” and also wars of conquest against non-believers. The new “religion of peace”<sup>14</sup> did not bring about tranquility. Nevertheless, the word of Allah was remarkably

<sup>14</sup> Apologists for Islam often interpret the word “*islam*” (إِسْلَام) as meaning “peace”, despite “*salam*” (سَلَام) being the actual Arabic word for peace. However, “*islam*” fundamentally signifies “submission”, which traditionally conveys a notion quite distinct from peace and understanding. While “*islam*” and “*salam*” share the same Semitic root,

preserved in its entirety, along with the accounts of the Prophet's actions and teachings, even though there are no contemporary Muslim historical accounts of the early events of Islam. This formed the Sunna, the "tradition", built upon the transmission of **Hadiths**—testimonies passed down through generations via oral traditions from Muhammad's companions. The earliest biography of the Prophet, the **Sirah** ("sira") was thus written in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by **Ibn Hisham**, based on an earlier, now-lost work by **Ibn Ishaq**.

Muslims piece together the divine message by integrating the Quran, the "sira", and various hadiths. Muhammad himself is thus seen as a sort of revelation as he transmitted it not only through his words (when dictating the Quran as revealed by angel Gabriel) but also through his behavior as a "beautiful model", a **perfect and normative example** in his actions and inactions. From this understanding, the divine law, "**sharia**", was established. It was codified into its near-final form around the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (and thereafter) and slightly varies according to different legal schools within Sunni and Shiite Islam. The Sharia interprets, explains, and codifies this divine message, guiding Muslims to live according to Allah's will. Thus, all elements of Islam and its worldview were established and recorded, providing this comprehensive synthesis of its faith:

## THE ESSENTIALS OF MUSLIM DOGMA

There is **only one God, Allah**, who is the creator and supreme ruler of everything. This encompasses all aspects of life and existence: nature, time, scientific phenomena, the fates of both Muslims and non-believers, everything exists and occurs solely because Allah wills it and actively determines its happening at each moment.

**The very word of Allah** was revealed to the first believer and first prophet, Adam. Subsequently, it continued to be conveyed to a rebellious humanity through a succession of prophets and messengers. Their mission was to guide humanity back to divine order and to rectify any deviation. These repeated communications of Allah's same word called for complete submission to Him, in accordance with the laws He has set. Islam recognizes the major monotheistic faiths as "religions of the Book", deriving from three principal prophets, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, each one having been sent to a specific community according to a same pattern:

- The **Jews**, descendants of Abraham, prophet and messenger of Allah, to whom Moses, prophet and messenger of Allah, gave a holy book, the Torah, containing the revelation of Allah. It announced the coming of Jesus, prophet and messenger of Allah, and featured the Islamic commandments according to which the Jews were supposed to live. But the Jews falsified their scriptures, corrupted the divine message and rejected the commandments of Allah given by Moses.
- The **Christians**, a community descended from the Jews (that is, also from Abraham) to whom Jesus, prophet and messenger of Allah, gave a holy book, the "*injil*", containing the revelation of Allah rectifying the deviation from the Torah made by the Jews. It announced the coming of Muhammad, prophet and messenger of Allah, and featured the Islamic commandments according to which Christians were supposed to live. But the Christians falsified their scriptures, corrupted the divine message and rejected the commandments

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SLM, their meanings diverge significantly. How, then, was the concept of "peace" associated with a term that essentially means "submission"? Édouard M. Gallez proposes this explanation:

[http://www.lemessieetsonprophete.com/annexes/Muslim\\_the\\_Word.htm](http://www.lemessieetsonprophete.com/annexes/Muslim_the_Word.htm)

of Allah given by Jesus. He nevertheless holds a special role among the prophets of Islam, since he is recognized as the Messiah, who did not die on the cross but was taken away by Allah and kept back for the end of time.

- The Arabs, a people ultimately chosen by Allah, descendants of Abraham, and by extension the **Muslims**, a community stemming from the Arabs through their conversion, to whom Muhammad, prophet and messenger of Allah, gave a holy book, the Quran, containing the revelation of Allah rectifying the deviations from the Torah and the “*injil*” made by Jews and Christians. This revelation ends all revelations (no more prophet will come), and features the Islamic commandments according to which Muslims are supposed to live. For their part, Muslims have kept their scriptures intact and still observe the true commandments of Allah given by Muhammad.

Muslims are the rightful guardians of Allah’s unaltered message. Their paramount duty is **to bring themselves and the entire world under Allah’s law**. This law encompasses the “five pillars” of individual Islamic practice<sup>15</sup>: the declaration of faith (“*shahada*”), the prayer (“*salat*”), the observance of Ramadan, ritual almsgiving (“*zakat*”), and pilgrimage to Mecca (“*hajj*”). It involves a complete submission to Allah’s will, entrusting oneself fully to Him and His law as revealed. Following this law is considered essential for achieving happiness on earth and eternal paradise after death. Conversely, neglecting it may result in damnation in hell or earthly penalties as specified in the “*sharia*”. This law includes the mandate to free the world from unbelievers (“*kuffar*”), who are seen as an affront to Allah, to His divine plan, and thus to Islam itself. In this grand mission of submitting the entire world to divine will, women are often viewed as secondary to men, potentially distracting militants from their objectives with reminders of other responsibilities, such as those of husband and father. Thus, they are considered naturally subordinate to men, who are expected to subdue them to their will and that of Allah<sup>16</sup>.

Remarkable events will occur at **the end of times**. There will be a “Day of Judgment”, a “Day of retribution” for all mankind: “Messiah-Jesus” will physically descend from heavens, joining the “*mahdi*”, envisioned as a kind of supreme leader for all Muslims. Together, they will battle against the forces of evil, bring all non-believers under the law of Allah (and kill those who resist submission), and establish Islam eternally. The dead will rise on this “Day of resurrection” and will then be judged by Jesus, either to be cast in hell forever, or to enjoy Allah’s paradise.

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<sup>15</sup> There are also “collective pillars” or collective obligations (“*fard al kifaya*”, “*communally obligatory acts*”), imposed on Muslim communities and codified in the Sharia: learning the Quran by heart, being under the rule of Muslim leaders, judges and authorities, communally “*commanding the right and forbidding the wrong*”, participating in the collective effort of “*jihad*”, feeding the hungry, etc. See Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, Amana Publications, Beltsville, Maryland, 1994-2017, pp.32-34.

<sup>16</sup> Q64,14-15: “O you who believe! Surely among your wives and your children (there is) an **enemy** to you. So beware of them, therefore (...) Surely your wealth and your children are a **trial** [“*fitna*”, temptation, discord], but God – with him (there is) a great reward.”

Q4,34: “**Men are supervisors of women**, because God has favored some of them over others, and because they have contributed from their wealth. Righteous women are obedient, watching over (affairs) in the absence (of their husbands) because God has watched over (them). (As for) those women who you fear may be rebellious: admonish them, avoid them in bed, and (finally) strike them. If they obey you, do not seek (any further) way against them.”

This is how Islam describes itself, encompassing its origins and fundamental principles. It reveals a coherent system driven by an **unwavering internal logic**. Within this framework, historical events are intricately linked, governed by consistent factors and adhering to the same Islamic mandates. It presents a comprehensive worldview that seeks to organize and assign everything to its appropriate place, explaining even what could be seen as contradictions. Why do Jews, Christians and non-believers exist since they obviously do not fit Allah's plan? They simply did not implement Allah's perfect will. Why do unrest and turmoil sometimes happen between Muslims or in Muslim countries? This is due to the misapplication of Allah's perfect will. Why do some criticize Islam? Because they lack understanding, or ignore Allah's perfect will. Etc.



Calligraphy showing the word Allah in Arabic in Hagia Sophia, Istanbul  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

This worldview is all the more effective because it remains unchallenged. It just happens that Islam strictly forbids any questioning of it. Nonetheless, we aim to examine this perspective, this narrative, and this system by introducing an alternative history. This is a history largely unknown to contemporary Muslims, one that early Muslims concealed: **the history of the “great secret” of Islam.**

# THE GREAT SECRET OF ISLAM

As we mentioned in the introduction, for the most part, our world has known Islam only by what it says about itself, taking the Islamic narrative as granted, stripping it if need be of its marvelous aspects (an almighty God who speaks Arabic, a divine revelation in the form of a book descended from heaven through an angel, a flying horse, a celestial Quran, etc.). As Ernest Renan said it his time: *“Instead of the mystery under which other religions wrap their origins, [Islam] is born in the midst of history; its roots are right on the ground. The life of its founder is as well known to us as that of any 16<sup>th</sup>-century reformer”*<sup>17</sup>. Most “TV Islamologists” and certified speakers still explain Islam this way nowadays.

However, everything has changed in this area in recent years. We are witnessing a **revolution** in scholarship over the origins of Islam. **Significant breakthroughs** have been made: new factors, like non-Muslim sources from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, have been considered, along with archaeological discoveries, ancient Quranic manuscripts, and the use of advanced linguistic and codicological techniques. Additionally, there has been an essential focus on the Jewish and Christian Aramaic context, which was crucial to the emergence of Islam and the formation of the Quran, as well as thorough analyses of Muslim texts and many other advancements. Globalization and the Internet have facilitated worldwide networking among scholars, fostering a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to their research. As a result, longstanding beliefs about early Islam are being profoundly challenged and, for many, definitively laid to rest. The historicity of Muhammad is disputed, as is the assertion that the Quran solely originated from his preaching. The notion that Arabia was predominantly pagan, and even the specific locations of Islam’s origins, are all matters of debate. The traditional narrative of Islam’s emergence and its rapid expansion under the caliphs is being reconsidered in light of new insights into the reality of the Middle East in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. This period was marked by apocalyptic expectations, anticipation of an imminent end of time, the decline of great empires, significant geopolitical shifts, and the rise of the caliphal powers. However, in the midst of such **intellectual upheaval**, it remains challenging to discern a clear thread of history.

In 2004, Édouard M. Gallez<sup>18</sup>, C.S.J., defended a doctoral thesis in theology and history of religions at the University of Strasbourg II, France. His work builds upon the analyses of Arabic and Aramaic-speaking scholars from the Middle East almost unknown in the West<sup>19</sup> and

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Renan, “Mahomet et les origines de l’islamisme [Muhammad and the origins of Islam]”, in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol.XII, n°6, 1851, p.1065: “Au lieu de ce mystère sous lequel les autres religions enveloppent leurs origines, celle-ci naît en pleine histoire; ses racines sont à fleur de sol. La vie de son fondateur nous est aussi bien connue que celle de tel réformateur du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle”.

<sup>18</sup> See Édouard M. Gallez’s bio on page 4.

<sup>19</sup> Among others, the Lebanese priest and scholar Joseph Azzi (a.k.a. Abu Mussa al Hariri) who we mentioned in note 9). In 1979, he published an impressive study on the Islamic tradition regarding the relationship between Muhammad, Waraqah ibn Nawfal and the “Nazarenes”, “Qass wa nabiy: bahth fi nas’ati l-islam” [The priest and the prophet: research on the rise of Islam] (Dyar Aql, Beirut), that was translated into English and published in the US in 2005 (*The Priest and the Prophet*, The Pen Publishers, 2005). Let us also cite Yussef Dorra-Haddad (“Coran, prédication nazaréenne” [The Quran as a Nazarene preaching], in *Proche Orient Chrétien* n°23, Jerusalem, 1973), J. M. Magnan (“Notes sur l’ebionisme” [Notes on Ebionism], in *Proche Orient Chrétien*, reprinted separately, Jerusalem, 1979) and, last but not least, Antoine Moussali, another Lebanese priest and scholar, who taught Arabic at Algier’s University and was Édouard M. Gallez’ mentor. His proficiency in Arabic enabled him to uncover that the “Nazarenes” (“nasara”) mentioned in the Quran were not Christians, but rather a long-forgotten Jewish sect (refer to “Interrogations d’un ami des Musulmans” [Questions from a friend of Muslims] in Annie Laurent (dir.)’s *Vivre avec l’Islam ?* [Living with Islam], Saint-Paul, Paris, 1996, pp.235-242).

suggests new directions for the exegesis of the Quranic text. His thesis also incorporates the author's personal research, particularly the continuation of the novel and **comprehensive exegesis of the Quran** initiated by these middle-eastern scholars, and revitalizes a vast array of prior research. Notably, we can highlight the progress made by Western Islamology, following the orientalist precursors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Austro-Hungarian school, German school). Remarkable discoveries were made by the pioneers in this field in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Paul Casanova, Henri Lammens and Alphonse Mingana, and their successors, Régis Blachère, Günter Lüling, Alfred-Louis de Prémare, Gerd Puin, John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, Gerald Hawting, Robert Hoyland (those forming the backbone of the "[revisionist school of Islamic studies](#)" starting from the years 1970). Let us also specifically acknowledge Christoph Luxenberg for his groundbreaking work on the Aramaic background of the Quran. Additionally, there were numerous other intellectuals, historians, archaeologists, geographers, linguists, scientists, and religious figures who made significant contributions. Gallez also took into account the historical and religious traditions, starting, of course, with the Islamic ones, and also Jewish traditions and those of the Eastern Churches, as well as a new approach to early Christianity, informed by a reflection on the history of ideas (the history of the idea of "salvation", or soteriology), and in particular by the analysis of the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#). Gallez then assembled the various isolated aspects like a jigsaw puzzle into a coherent synthesis, incorporating what was known about early Islam back then in 2004. He could thus propose **a scientific and comprehensive explanation for the emergence of Islam** and its rise as a new religion and empire, pioneering the interdisciplinary studies that emerged in the 2010s and beyond<sup>20</sup>. By doing so, this approach enabled a very deep understanding of the true nature of Islam.

Scholarship in early Islam continued to advance rapidly thereafter. There never has been such an influx of new discoveries and deeper studies conducted by leading scholars such as Guillaume Dye, Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Fred Donner, Manfred Kropp, Robert Kerr and the "German school", Mehdi Azaiez, David Powers, Dan Gibson, Michael-Philipp Penn, Hela Ouardi, Jean-Jacques Walter, Stephen Shoemaker, Christian Julien Robin, François Deroche, Frédéric Imbert among so many others. Although some of them might hold differing views from Gallez, the core of their research aligns with the comprehensive hypothesis he put forth in his thesis. Their work serves to confirm, clarify, and occasionally correct his ideas as necessary.

*The Great Secret of Islam* aims to present Édouard M. Gallez' new, comprehensive explanation for the creation of Islam, enriched, clarified, and refined by us with the latest research findings, and supported and proofread by Gallez.

Naturally, in historical research, where scientific methods are employed as we claim to use, there is no absolute truth. Scholars engage in a continuous process of searching, discovering, explaining, refuting, and revising in an effort to approximate the truth as closely as possible. Therefore, such scientific inquiry should not be seen as antagonistic towards Muslims. They have everything to gain from the pursuit of historical truth. Similarly, Christians have also benefited from similar research into the historical origins of Christianity, initiated long ago.

Let us take a deep dive then into the story of the "great secret" of Islam.

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<sup>20</sup> One must acknowledge the significant contributions made by institutions like the [Inārah Institute for Research on Early Islamic History and the Quran](#), affiliated with Saarland University in Germany. Similarly, the scholarly endeavors of individuals such as Guillaume Dye and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi come to mind. They produced the monumental synthesis, *Le Coran des Historiens* [[The Qur'an of the historians](#)], published by Le Cerf in Paris in 2019, which stands out with its over 4,000 pages and the collective contributions of 30 scholars, all under their direction.

## FROM “DIVINE REVELATIONS” TO POST-CHRISTIANITY

### Israel, year 30

To understand the profound secret within Islam’s history, it is essential to trace back far beyond its emergence, delving into the ancient traditional history of Israel, which dates back many centuries. Originally, Israel referred to a community, the Hebrews or Israelites, shaped fundamentally by their religion. As per the Biblical tradition, approximately 3,800 years ago, Abraham heeded a divine call and departed from Mesopotamia for a land promised to him, eventually identified as Israel. This **“divine promise” to Abraham** encompassed the bequest of a land and innumerable descendants. The Israelites regard themselves as descendants of Abraham, thereby considering him as their patriarch, essentially the first individual in the lineage of the Jewish people<sup>21</sup>. His son Isaac is viewed as the next significant figure in this lineage.

Thus, the Hebrew people claim to have been part of a **divine covenant**—or rather, multiple covenants—from the time of Abraham, where God allegedly revealed himself to them and chose them as the bearers of this revelation. This relationship evolved gradually through a historical process as the Israelites built their connection with a God who demonstrated a teaching spirit towards them. Over time, they came to recognize him as the sole and exclusive deity, embracing faith in him, renouncing idolatry, and thus establishing a unique religion in a predominantly pagan world. They worshiped their “one true God”, the creator and protector, known as “the Eternal”. Throughout their tumultuous history, a series of patriarchs and prophets, including Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and Daniel, emerged. They guided the people, educated them, admonished them, and reminded them of their obligations to God. These figures’ calls for adherence, commandments, laws, and the age-old traditions of the Hebrew people were gathered and compiled into a collection of texts.

Among these texts, the Torah is particularly significant. Comprising five books, it narrates the world’s creation, the history of the Hebrew people, and lays out a comprehensive law that governed the lives of Israelites at the time. This law covered moral conduct, their relationship with God, and the strict distinction between Israelites and non-Israelites, a practice that enabled them to maintain and pass down their religious heritage in an often-hostile ancient world. The Torah also includes detailed codifications of daily life, rites of purity, and other behavioral rules. Tradition holds that God dictated the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai during the Hebrews’ exodus from Egypt. It occupies a central place in Hebrew life, with many knowing it by heart, along with other sacred texts like the Psalms and the Books of the Prophets. This knowledge is transmitted within families and communities, primarily in Aramaic, the common language used for understanding and interpreting these sacred texts (as seen in the Targum). Of all the divine commandments prescribed for observance, one holds supreme importance: the devotion to the **Temple of Jerusalem**.

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<sup>21</sup> Referring to them as “Jews” or “Jewish” would be anachronistic, given that these terms originated from the Latin “*judeus*”, initially denoting a member of the tribe of Judah, later an inhabitant of Judea. Over time, the term came to be associated with the authorities of Jerusalem—particularly in the Gospels, where it references political authorities like the Herodian party and religious authorities such as the Temple party, the Sanhedrin, and even the Pharisees. From there, it extended to refer to the people as a whole. However, it’s important to note that the term “Jew” only came into widespread use during the Middle Ages. As such, in a historical context, it’s more accurate to use the terms “Hebrew” or “Israelite” to describe these people, though “Jew” will also be used for the sake of familiarity.

The Temple holds a unique significance for the Hebrew people, representing the physical manifestation of God's presence on Earth. In Semitic languages, the term "temple" is not used; instead, it's referred to as "house", signifying God's dwelling place. Here, worship is conducted through various ritual practices such as prayer and sacrifice. Visiting the Temple is a minimum annual obligation for every Jew and serves as a focal point for pilgrimage. Originally, according to Biblical tradition, the Temple housed the "Ark of the Covenant", which contained the tablets of Moses' Law. This sacred chest was lost following the destruction of the first Temple. Jerusalem eventually boasted a second Temple: [Herod the Great's Temple](#). Like its predecessor [Solomon's Temple](#), it stood on [Mount Moriah](#), the Temple Mount, believed to be the site of [Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac](#). The Temple's architecture was imposing, with a footprint resembling a large "T". The priests entered through the horizontal bar, or pediment. The bottom of the "T", **a large cube**, was separated from the entrance by a curtain. This was the Holy of Holies, believed to be God's earthly residence within the Temple. Entry into the Holy of Holies was strictly forbidden under penalty of death, with the exception of the High Priest, who entered only once a year. Outside the Temple, in its courtyards, offerings and animal sacrifices were performed in God's name. This Temple, one of the wonders of its time, was a source of immense pride for the Hebrew people.



**Model of the Temple of Herod**

(Israel Museum in Jerusalem)

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

In the year 30 CE, Israel was not just a nation but also a land of "divine promise". Despite a significant diaspora spread across Egypt, Persia, Rome, and as far as China, encompassing major trading cities and constituting about half of the Jewish population, the connection to this **"promised land"** remained profoundly strong. However, during this period, the land of Israel faced several challenges. It was politically fragmented, divided into various kingdoms and provinces under the rule of different monarchs, known as tetrarchs. Central to this division was Samaria, a territory populated by Samaritans. These inhabitants were considered non-Jews or heretical Jews by the observant Jews, particularly the Judeans, who were in control of Jerusalem and its Temple and often looked down upon other Jewish groups. Surrounding Israel were kingdoms and peoples practicing idolatry, further complicating the region's religious and political landscape. Moreover, the land of Israel has been occupied for several centuries, **subjected to foreign**



**Situation of Israel in the year 30**

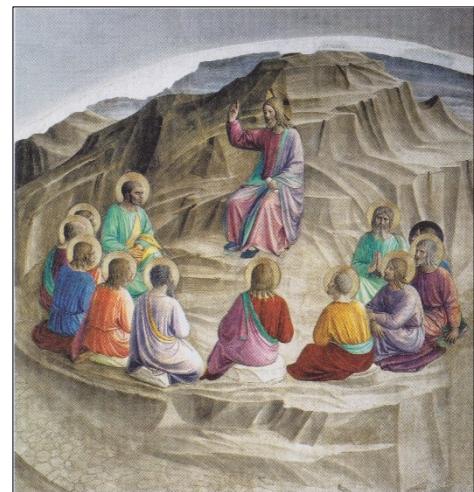
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

**powers:** Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and now the Romans. The Romans, in particular, governed through local Jewish authorities, especially those with religious roles. In Roman [Judea](#), which includes the regions of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea, the Roman prefect was Pontius Pilate. Despite these occupations, the *Pax Romana* granted a level of leniency to the Hebrew people. Traditional religious and political structures were preserved, and the practice of their faith, including Temple worship and monotheism, was respected. This tolerance even extended to Rome, where many Hebrews freely practiced their religion. However, a fervent desire for independence and national reunification lingered, especially in Judea, fueled by memories of the reigns of great Jewish kings like David and Solomon and the era of a unified Jewish land under divine law. This aspiration was further strengthened by interpretations of the sacred scriptures. Prophetic promises of ultimate triumph, with foreign kings serving Israel, were a source of hope<sup>22</sup>. The **expectation of a messiah** was prevalent—a divinely sent [savior](#), a descendant of King David<sup>23</sup> who would restore the kingdom and liberate Israel. This period saw the rise of many such messianic figures, rebels, and liberators, echoing a long tradition of revolt against foreign rulers, such as the [Maccabean Revolt](#) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and [Judas the Galilean](#)'s uprising in 6 CE against the Roman legate Quirinius, which ended with the crucifixion of 2,000 of his followers. However, under Emperor Tiberius, there appeared to be a superficial calm in the region, aptly described by Tacitus as “*sub Tiberio quies*” (peace under Tiberius).

### Jesus, his message, his followers

Beginning with this Hebrew backdrop, unraveling the “great secret” of Islam necessitates a thorough exploration of how certain innovative aspects of Christian preaching influenced mindsets and historical developments.

Around the year 27 in Israel, Jesus<sup>24</sup> begins a three-year journey of itinerant preaching. As a descendant of David, he is known as a “**Nazarene**” (cf. note 23) and is a rabbi deeply versed in the Torah and scriptures. He teaches outdoors, in synagogues and in the Temple of Jerusalem, offering a renewed interpretation of these texts. His teachings are revolutionary. Claiming to be the one that was prophesied (at first as the “Son of Man” and then, during his trial, as the Messiah and “son of God” himself), he forgives sins in God’s name and is reputed to perform miraculous signs, captivating the masses and attracting a diverse following of



**The Sermon on the Mountain**  
(Fra Angelico)—[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, [chapter 60 of the Book of Isaiah](#).

<sup>23</sup> “Then a shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse [father of King David], and a **branch** from his roots will bear fruit.” (Isaiah 11:1). The word “branch” or “netser” is derived from the NTsR / נֶצֶר root, also forming the word “Nazarene” (“natsraya” in Aramaic), implying a “brancher”, thus specifically denoting a “descendant of David”, and thereby “Prince”, or even “Messiah” if one acknowledges a descendant of David as the Messiah. Consequently, “Nazareth” might be understood as the “city of the descendants of David” (see Etienne Nodet & Justin Taylor, *Essai sur les origines du christianisme*, Cerf, Paris, 2002, pp.255-261). This interpretation renders Nathanael’s question, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (John 1:46), highly ironic.

<sup>24</sup> Details and historical context of the life of Jesus are taken from the New Testament as well as French historians: René Laurentin, *La Vie Authentique de Jésus Christ*, Fayard, Paris, 1996; Etienne Nodet & Justin Taylor, *op. cit.* ; Pierre Perrier, *Évangiles de l’Oral à l’Écrit*, Fayard - Le Sarment, Paris, 2002, and *Les colliers évangéliques*, Fayard - Le Sarment, 2003; Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Jésus*, Fayard, Paris, 2011.

curious onlookers, fervent supporters, disciples, and apostles. He addresses **the issue of evil** and the possibility of salvation from it, introducing ideas that were radically new and psychologically profound compared to the pagan cults of the time. This is a significant departure from the existing Hebrew religion, which had already laid the groundwork in its laws and notions of purity and impurity. Jesus introduces indeed the idea of salvation, breaking away from the fatalistic acceptance of “natural” evil as an immutable part of the world’s order. His teachings challenge the cyclical view of history, where individuals and societies are doomed to perpetual repetition, and instead open up the possibility of personal and collective destinies, and the attainment of happiness and liberation from evil’s grasp. The salvation he offers encompasses both **personal salvation** through a relationship with “God the Father” via “Jesus the Son”, and **collective salvation** through relationships with others. His teachings include messages like “*Blessed are the pure in heart*”, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*”, and “*Blessed are the peacemakers*”, emphasizing the construction of a better world. He proclaims, “*The kingdom of heaven is near*”, seemingly indicating the imminent arrival of **God’s reign**.

Could he be the **Messiah** that the Hebrew people had long awaited? Some see in him the prophesied king who would free Israel from foreign rule and restore its political grandeur. Yet, others recognize that his messianic role, linked to his Davidic lineage, is to be played out on a religious, rather than political, stage, particularly in relation to the high priesthood of the Temple. The latter had been usurped by a family descended from the Hasmoneans, who were also compromised by their collaboration with the Roman occupiers. Additionally, the traditional role of prayer, assigned to the Levites—Israel’s priests—is being increasingly overtaken by the **Pharisaic movement**, which has ties to the Temple. Jesus openly criticizes the corruption of faith and religious practices, especially those pertaining to the Temple and its officials. Furthermore, he speaks of the Jewish faith in an unprecedented manner, interpreting the texts to reveal renewed meanings, and rejecting legalistic and hypocritical readings. His teachings are firmly rooted in the “ancient covenant” with God, and he even suggests that this covenant should extend to non-Jews, to pagans, a notion that scandalized many, especially the Pharisees. Amidst the growing accounts of his miracles, the Temple authorities, fearing the need to acknowledge him as the Messiah, conspire to have him killed. Recognizing him as the Messiah would mean that they have to submit to his authority and relinquish their power—a prospect most found inconceivable. Thus, a plot is hatched to arrest him. His claimed relationship with God becomes the pretext used by the Temple authorities, who convene at night to **condemn him to death**. They then collaborate with the Romans to carry out the execution on Friday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, in the year 30<sup>25</sup>, nailing him to a cross in a torturous and most disgraceful manner typically reserved for slaves.



**The Crucifixion**

(Nikolai Gay)—[Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

<sup>25</sup> Based on the analyses of contemporary historians using the Gospel accounts, it’s determined that the crucifixion occurred on the eve of the Sabbath, a Friday, which also coincided with the preparation day for the Jewish Passover. This places the event on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan in the Hebrew calendar. These details align with the year 30 CE, corresponding to April 7<sup>th</sup> in the Julian calendar.

However, despite his execution, Jesus' followers, who had initially fled or hidden at his arrest due to fear of reprisals, now boldly show themselves in public. Reportedly, an extraordinary event would have occurred at dawn on the third day after Jesus' death, compelling his disciples to reappear in broad daylight and continue his teachings, despite the risk of severe persecution—a fate that will eventually befall them. This event, stirring up controversy ever since, soon becomes a pivotal moment in history, possibly **the key to the centuries** that follow. From the Sunday after the crucifixion, news starts to spread indeed that various individuals have seen Jesus. For the next forty days, more sightings are reported, coinciding with the discovery that his tomb is empty. This alarms the religious authorities at the Temple. They attempt to suppress the belief in Jesus' resurrection by concocting a story, bribing the soldiers guarding the tomb to claim they had seen Jesus' disciples stealing his body<sup>26</sup>. The anxiety intensifies for these authorities as they come to realize that many Biblical prophecies might align with these events. This is particularly the case if Jesus, who is said to have “risen from the dead”, is indeed the foretold “*Holy one*” whose body did not “see decay”<sup>27</sup> after having initially been “rejected”<sup>28</sup> by the rulers of the people and suffered on the cross<sup>29</sup>. The Pharisaic institution, having played a crucial role in this rejection, is also deeply troubled. If Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Pharisees' religious authority, already deemed fraudulent by many, stands to lose all its legitimacy among the Hebrew people.

Jesus' disciples, however, do not call for hostilities against the Temple authorities or the Pharisees. Neither Peter nor the other apostles seek vengeance against those who plotted and organized Jesus' death. Nor do they call for any political uprising. On the contrary, their testimonies reveal a message focused on the transformation of hearts and minds. They proclaimed, “*You rejected the holy and righteous one (...) God raised the prince of life from the dead, as we are witnesses (...) You acted in ignorance, as did your leaders (...) Convert!*”<sup>30</sup>. Even in the presence of those responsible for Jesus' death, their message is clear and devoid of retribution: “*The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead, whom you had executed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him by his right hand as prince and savior, to give Israel conversion and forgiveness of sins*”<sup>31</sup>. However, most in positions of power refuse to admit their mistake, fearing for their political and religious authority. They meet the apostles' message with animosity, even as an increasing number of Israelites embraces it. This growing group gradually forms a **new community**, becoming known as “Nazarenes”, since they followed “Jesus the Nazarene” (see note 23), and “messians”, i.e. disciples of the messiah (in Aramaic, “*meshiha*”, in Hebrew, “*mashiach*”, and in English, “Christians”, derived from the Greek term “*christos*” translating the Aramaic or Hebrew).

In Jerusalem, the community gathers under the authority of [James](#), a cousin of Jesus<sup>32</sup>, as the other apostles are forced to leave Jerusalem from the year 37, due to persecution by the Temple authorities. Another James, the blood brother of John, is indeed murdered around 41. Meanwhile, it seems that the Jewish king Herod Agrippa had already succeeded in convincing the Roman Senate to declare the Christian community illegal through his connections in

<sup>26</sup> According to Matthew 28:12-14

<sup>27</sup> Psalm 16:10

<sup>28</sup> Psalm 118:22-23

<sup>29</sup> Psalm 22; Isaiah 53:3-7

<sup>30</sup> Acts 3:14-19 (“Peter's Discourse to the People”)

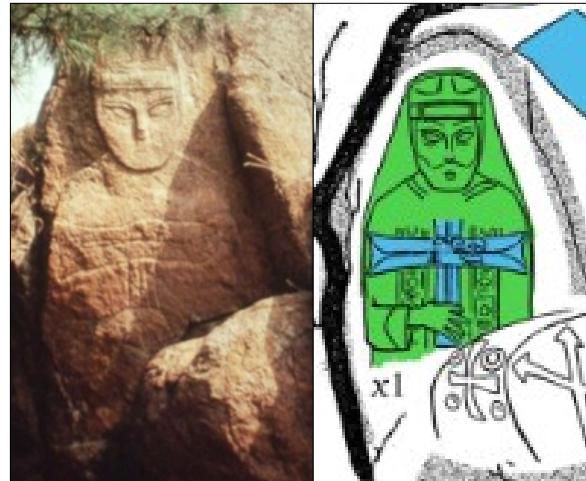
<sup>31</sup> Acts 5:30-31 (“Peter and John before the Sanhedrin”)

<sup>32</sup> James the Lesser or James the Just in the Christian tradition; his genealogy is easy to establish despite the polemic that wanted to make him a blood brother of Jesus, according to the terminology of Flavius Josephus and the New Testament: the term “brother” or “sister” in fact encompasses a broad cousin in the Semitic languages.

Rome<sup>33</sup>. The dispersion of the apostles necessitates the documentation of their oral teachings, which have been recited by heart in Jerusalem according to the Jewish calendar and religious holidays. The apostle Matthew is tasked with this, and his compilation would later be known as **“the Gospel according to Matthew”**<sup>34</sup>.

The dispersion of the apostles not only allows them to visit nascent Christian communities within the Jewish diaspora but also to encourage and organize new ones during their travels. Archaeological remains testify to the early and remarkable structuring of the Christian movement, reaching as far as China<sup>35</sup>. Various Hebrew communities around the world, embracing the “good news” (the meaning of the word “gospel”), spread it among the local populations. Gradually, a growing number of non-Jews joins the Christian Jews. However, the “Great Church of the East”, which continues to speak Aramaic nowadays, will remain committed to preserving its Jewish roots.

The rapid and widespread dissemination of the apostles’ message can be attributed to the presence of Jewish communities in the commercial cities and commercial routes of the world at that time (the considerable diaspora). However, its primary strength derives from its revolutionary approach to **addressing the issue of evil**, as documented in the earliest Christian texts. Biblical tradition holds that humans, created by God, were not meant to die. Yet, by choosing evil, they supposedly brought upon themselves corruption and death. *“Through the fault of one [Adam], death reigned”*, as Paul, the former Pharisee, concisely states<sup>36</sup>. Portrayed as the mediator between God and mankind, Jesus, by *“rising from the dead”* and paving the way for life after death, *“frees those*



**Apostle Thomas on the sculptures of Kong Wan Shan** (China, dated the year 70)

<http://www.eecho.fr/category/christianisme-apostolique/thomas-en-chine/>

<sup>33</sup> This refers to a “*senatus consultus*” (senatorial decree) from the year 35, which declared Christianity a “*superstitio illicita*” (illegal superstition, illegal religion). This decree remained in effect until Emperor Constantine revoked it in 313 (refer to Ilaria Ramelli & Marta Sordi, “Il senatoconsulto del 35 contro i Cristiani in un frammento porfiriano” [The 35 *senatus consultus* against the Christians according to Porphyry of Tyre], *Aevum* 78, Milano, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> For a long time, the Gospel according to Matthew was considered the primary gospel in Christian liturgy. Its translation into Greek is believed to have occurred around the year 42, and it likely was also translated into Latin. The prevailing Western perspective, as exemplified by [Wikipedia’s “Aramaic original New Testament theory” page](#), suggests that the Greek version of Matthew takes precedence over the Aramaic Gospel. However, this view is contested. The Aramaic Gospel is still read and transmitted in its original form by the Chaldean and Assyrian Churches, known as the “Peshitta”. This Western viewpoint is contradicted by the accounts of ancient ecclesiastical writers. Moreover, it does not withstand scrutiny when specialists, proficient in both ancient Greek and Aramaic, directly compare the Greek and Aramaic versions, as did Pierre Perrier (*op. cit.*) or Joachim Elie & Patrick Calame (*Les évangiles traduits du texte araméen* [The Gospels translated from the Aramaic text], Desclée De Brouwer, Paris, 2016).

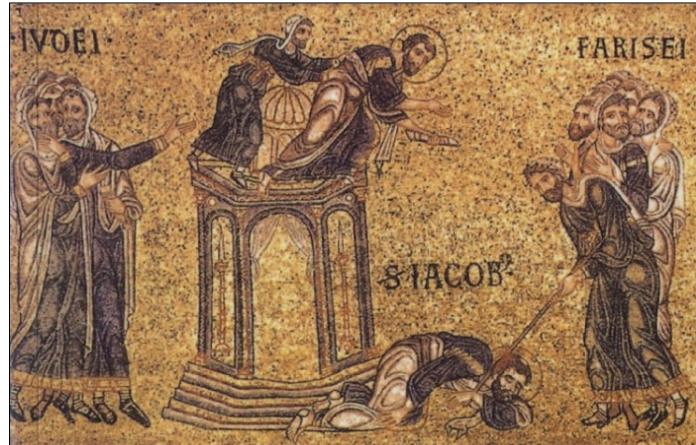
<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the presentation of the Kong Wang Shan sculptures at Lianyungang harbor on EEChO’s website: <https://www.eecho.fr/frise-kong-wang-shan-dessin/> or Pierre Perrier’s *Kong Wang Shan, Apostle Thomas and Prince Ying: The evangelization of China from 64 AD to 87 AD* (Kindle, 2020, adapted from the French edition, *Kong Wang Shan - L’Apôtre Thomas et le prince Ying*, Jubilé, Paris, 2012). In 2021, the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences organized [an international scholarly conference](#) in Rome, which addressed this topic and many others related to the widespread dissemination of the Gospel starting in the 1st century. The proceedings are expected to be published soon.

<sup>36</sup> Romans 5:17

who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death”<sup>37</sup>. This interpretation suggests that death, the ultimate evil, and corruption, are potentially conquerable for all humanity<sup>38</sup>. This new perspective on evil not only reshaped individual existence but also redefined humanity’s collective destiny. It resonated profoundly within the human psyche, capturing the interest of various groups who reinterpreted these ideas to suit their own purposes. Their distortions of the apostles’ teachings shifted the role of the “world’s savior” from Jesus to themselves. These groups coalesced around **Gnostic and Messianic movements**, post-Christian developments that would significantly influence the course of history, particularly in the emergence of Islam, a subject to be further explored later.

Before reaching that point, a series of dramatic events left a significant impact. Herod Agrippa rises to power in Judea in 41 and claims to be the “Messiah King”, but meets a miserable end in 44, after orchestrating the assassination of the apostle James, brother of John. It is believed that he was responsible for placing inscriptions in three languages in the Temple forecourt, which stated: “Jesus, who did not reign, was crucified by the Judeans for having predicted the destruction of the city and the ruin of the Temple”<sup>39</sup>. The issue of divine royalty bestowed upon the descendants of David remains central, especially in opposition to Jewish powers considered illegitimate and seeking to be revered by the people. Indeed, the apostles’ message turns the Hebrew people away from them. Additionally, Greeks, Romans, and non-Jews convert to the Christian faith in significant numbers. They are (almost) recognized as Jews by the Christian Jews in their new community, defying the strict rules that separate Jews from non-Jews. Consequently, tension escalates in Jerusalem and throughout Judea.

In 62, the Roman procurator Porcius Festus passes away. Seizing the opportunity presented by this power vacuum, the High Priest of the Temple orchestrates the murder of James, the bishop of Jerusalem, after a sham trial before the **Sanhedrin** (the supreme court of Jewish law). James is thrown from a height, stoned, and beaten to death. The new Roman procurator later dismisses this High Priest for what he deems a grave offense: James, known as “the Just”, was universally regarded as an exemplary religious figure. Following James’ death, there is thus nothing to curb **the spread of politico-religious movements** and messianic fervor. Simon, the new bishop of Jerusalem (also a cousin of Jesus), can only watch, helpless, as the situation across the country continues to deteriorate.



**The Execution of James the Just**

Mosaic of St Mark's Basilica, 13<sup>th</sup> century, Venice

**IUDEI**: Judean religious authorities, priests - **FARISEI**: Pharisees  
(in Otto Demus, *The Church of San Marco in Venice*, Dumbarton Oaks

Research Library and Collection, Washington, 1960)

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<sup>37</sup> Hebrews 2:15

<sup>38</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:26

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Ilaria Ramelli, “Jesus, James the Just, a Gate and an Epigraph: Reflections on Josepus, Mara, the NT, Hegesippus and Origen” in Tiwald Markus (Hrsg.) *Kein Jota wird vergehen* [Not one iota will be lost], Kolhammer, 2012. Jesus’ predictions of the coming destruction of the Temple (Mt 24:1-2) had not yet come true.

## The destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem

The concept of a Jewish kingdom, destined by God to achieve victory and dominion over the entire world, gains more and more traction. At the same time, seditious groups, backed by the financial support of various Temple authority factions, increasingly confront the Romans. This politico-religious unrest eventually ignites into a conflict. In 66, [the Great Revolt](#), also known as **the first Jewish-Roman War**, begins, prompting a severe crackdown by the Roman occupiers. The legions, led by Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian and a future emperor himself, gradually overcome the opposition. By 68, they [besiege](#) Jerusalem. In response, all the Christian Jews leave the city, heeding Jesus' warning: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies"<sup>40</sup>. Starting in April of 70, the legions commence their offensive to reclaim the city from the increasingly divided insurgents (with the most fanatical even fighting among themselves, similar to modern-day jihadists). In August, according to the ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, a fire accidentally starts, and engulfs the Temple where the last holdouts have fortified themselves. The defeat is total, save for the episode at the fortress of Masada, which falls three years later.



**Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem**

(Francesco Hayez)—[Wikimedia Commons](#)

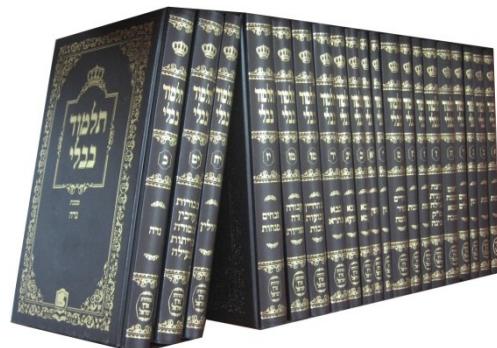
Shortly after the Romans capture of the city, the Christian Jews return, along with other inhabitants who had not participated in the war and had left Jerusalem in time. Life gradually resumes, as the city has not suffered excessive damage. However, the Temple—the center of God's presence, worship, and sacrifices—is looted and destroyed. Due to its association with Jewish nationalism, the Romans are opposed to its reconstruction. Consequently, the kingdoms and governorates of Israel lose their political autonomy and are incorporated into the Roman Empire as the province of Judea. For non-Christian Jews, the loss of the Temple is a **monumental catastrophe**, a sentiment that persists [to this day](#), particularly evident at the [Wailing Wall](#). This calamity profoundly affects and reshapes the various religious factions that have been at odds since the preaching of Jesus and his apostles.

What becomes of **Christianity**? From the Christian perspective, the loss of the Temple signifies a definitive turning point, marking the end of God's presence in this ancient site. This event ushers in the "new covenant" envisioned by Jesus and prophesied by the prophets, a covenant intended for all humanity. Within this inclusive covenant, Christian Jews hold a special role as the foundational element of this new "body". They are no longer distinguished from others by the stringent laws of purity and impurity, kosherliness, and endogamy. Consequently, the Churches established by the apostles in Rome, across the East, and around the known world, grow in the legacy and fulfillment of historic Israel, a belief central to all apostolic ecclesiastical communities.

<sup>40</sup> Luke 21,20

What becomes of **non-Christian Jews**? With their national aspirations crushed by Roman power, they find themselves disillusioned, bereft of the Temple and its worship, lacking a High Priest, and witnessing the decimation and flight of the priestly caste. They are deeply affected by the considerable number of Jews embracing Christianity (contemporary studies estimate that up to 80% of the Jewish population converted to Christianity between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries<sup>41</sup>). Their remaining solace lies in the sacred texts, adherence to the “Law”, and conducting weekly liturgies in small groups. Alternatively, some invest in new, radical politico-religious projects. A second confrontation with the Romans erupts in Judea in 132, following [a series of riots and revolts](#) from 115-117 (Kitos War), fueled by the Jewish diaspora within the Parthian Empire and across the East. The messianism in this [second Jewish-Roman war](#) is more pronounced than in the first: Bar Kokhba ([Shimon Ben Koseba](#)), its leader, hailed as the “true messiah” by his followers, envisions to re-establish a Jewish state in Judea and rebuild the Temple. His movement notably exhibits strong anti-Jewish-Christian sentiments, with Bar Kokhba going so far as to crucify Christians, including the entire (Jewish Christian) hierarchy of the Church of Jerusalem. This second Jewish war, funded by the Parthians, proves even more devastating than the first. It results in the desolation of Israel due to the Romans’ scorched earth tactics and culminates in the definitive expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem, which was leveled in 135. The city is subsequently rebuilt in a Roman style, featuring a temple dedicated to Jupiter at the former site of the Jewish temple. Jews are then barred from Jerusalem under penalty of death. In response to these events, non-Christian Jews gradually polarize into distinct groups.

The first and most significant development is within the [Pharisaic movement](#), which reorganizes itself from the end of the first century, possibly around the alleged [Council of Yavneh](#), and then again after the second Jewish-Roman war in Babylon, within the Parthian Empire. Here, it centers around the [Exilarch](#), a Jewish leader in exile since the times of deportation. Deprived of their traditional worship, this group reluctantly accepts the end of the Temple religion, including sacrifices to God, the High Priest, and the priesthood. In its place emerges the synagogues and rabbis. This movement focuses entirely on the “Law” and its commentaries, marking [the reform of rabbinic Judaism](#). Christianity is severely condemned within this context. The figure of rabbi Jesus is vilified, and his interpretation of the ancient texts is rejected. [This current](#) even goes as far as establishing daily prayers cursing everything non rabbinic, including the “*notrim*” (נָזְרִים), meaning the Nazarenes and referring to all Israelites who recognize Jesus as the Messiah, whether Christians or not (the [Birkat haMinim](#), or “blessing on the heretics”). Rabbinic Judaism thus makes no distinction in its condemnation between the Nazarenes who fully embraced Christianity (Christian Jews), and those who rejected the foundational beliefs of Christianity, such as the divinity of Jesus, while continuing to adhere to Jewish Law (often called Judeo-Christians by academia scholars, even though they were not Christians). Claiming adherence to an [Oral Torah](#), ancient



A Contemporary Edition of the  
Babylonian Talmud  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>41</sup> Sergio DellaPergola estimated a massive decline of approximately 3 to 3.5 million individuals during this period, from a total population of around 4.5 million people in the first century BCE. He wrote, “*Most of this decrease was presumably due to the loss of a distinct Jewish identity and the assimilation of large masses of Jews into the surrounding cultures, under the hegemony of Christianity*” (“[Some Fundamentals of Jewish Demographic History](#)” in S. DellaPergola & J. Even (eds.), *Papers in Jewish Demography* 1997, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University, 2001, p. 16). His estimation is also included in Elie Barnavi’s *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People* (Schocken, New-York, 1994-2003), to which he contributed as a demographics expert.

interpretations of the sacred scriptures are then either preserved or altered by rabbinic Judaism, leading to the creation of the Mishnah (written collection of these oral teachings) and subsequently the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds, which are commentaries on the Mishnah. Written during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, these texts, alongside the Torah and other sacred writings, become central to rabbinic Jewish religious life, sometimes even taking precedence (by “covering” the other texts—a detail of great significance, as will be discussed later).

Another lesser-known Jewish group centered around the priestly families who, not supporting the first Jewish war, are believed to have withdrawn to the Jewish communities in Crimea. The connection between this group and the eventual Khazar kingdom (centered around the Volga in the south of present-day Ukraine and Russia) is a topic of much debate and sensitivity<sup>42</sup>, particularly because this group long rejected the Talmuds. Khazaria developed into an empire that lasted until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, comprising various peoples, including the Khazars of Mongolian origin. However, the empire was governed by Jewish families, which led to the widespread adoption of Judaism as the official religion among many Khazars. The “conversion” of the Khazar kings in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to a non-Talmudic form of Judaism is [a highly controversial subject](#), often regarded as a late legend devised to obscure a problematic historical reality: the purported ancestry of these Khazars with the Ashkenazi Jews, many of whom now reside in Israel. Setting aside these extremely sensitive debates, it is important to note that portraying Judaism as a homogeneous entity throughout the history of the Israelites—before, during, and after the time of Jesus, and distinct from Christianity—is an oversimplification and misrepresentation of historical complexities.

However, the way we’ve described the development of Christianity and various forms of Judaism does not fully capture the religious turmoil of the time. In the wake of the preaching of Jesus and his apostles, and in response to the death and destruction resulting from the Jewish wars, various **post-Christian phenomena** began to take shape, both within and beyond these new currents.

## Post-Christian phenomena

Let’s take a step back. We have observed how profoundly the apostles’ message resonated with humanity. It quickly becomes an object of desire, especially after the destruction of the Temple, during a period marked by an intense quest for meaning. The figure of the “savior”, the “Messiah-Jesus”, is co-opted and distorted: the savior of humanity is no longer seen as Jesus himself, but rather those who profess to assist him in his mission, effectively claiming to be his representatives, if not his substitutes. A key characteristic of post-Christian movements is their consistent claim to possess the true interpretation of the Christian message, which they allege has been corrupted by Christians following the apostles. Two such post-Christian movements emerge from the end of the first century. While the second movement will be our primary focus, a brief discussion of the first is necessary.

The first of these movements consists of **the Gnostic currents**, often collectively referred to as Gnosis (a Greek term meaning “knowledge”, but which Greek Christian apologists have interpreted as a counterfeit of Christian faith). According to Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyon (died in 202), their roots can be traced back to an interpretation of the Christian message, even

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<sup>42</sup> The publication of Shlomo Sand’s controversial book *The Invention of the Jewish People* (Resling, 2008, Tel Aviv, for the Hebrew edition, Verso Books, 2009, London/NY for the English one) has thus given rise to a [lively debate](#).

though they may have pre-Christian origins. These movements all pursue **personal self-realization**: the belief that one can be their own savior and save themselves from evil. In this view, Jesus is seen merely as a forerunner, the one who paved the way. The appeal of Gnosis, or [Gnosticism](#), lies in its promise of direct access to the divine, independent of the history and narrative of a specific people. After all, didn't Jesus promise to fill his followers with a divine spirit, a spirit of freedom, known as "the Holy Spirit"? Aren't there sometimes surprising phenomena observed in Christian gatherings? This quest to harness the divine manifests in various rival movements, some focused on systems of pseudo-knowledge, others on magical practices, but all invariably exalting freedom as an absolute value, with sexual liberty often promoted as a means of self-realization. Organizationally, these Gnostic groups are diverse, ranging from those structured around a few "gurus" emulating Christian organization, to those embodying complex ideological constructs<sup>43</sup>.

The other significant post-Christian development is **global-political messianism**<sup>44</sup>: the ambition to establish a collective salvation on Earth, either immediately or in the near future. This aspiration has manifested in various forms throughout history<sup>45</sup>. It originated from the initial **desire to extend the "Kingdom of God" across the entire earth**, a concept that emerged when some sought to monopolize the new teachings preached by Jesus and his apostles. Regardless of its specific incarnations, this desire is invariably justified by the claim to possess a revelation or a key program for a bright future, the "key to history". While this trend draws inspiration from the apostles' preaching of collective salvation, it diverges significantly from their teachings. The apostles did not advocate for any political means to establish a perfect world on Earth. And while Jesus hinted at collective salvation, he always tied it to the prophecy of his "return in glory" (on the "Day of Judgment"). Believers are called to prepare for this return, and while their actions in this world may yield peace and progress, these are merely preludes to a future kingdom—imperfect and often temporary glimpses of a society liberated from evil. For the apostles, and subsequently for Christians, only God is believed to have the power to eradicate evil, not humans, regardless of how well-intentioned they may be. Faith in God and patience for the fulfillment of the present time are essential. However, messianists reject this approach. They are not content to wait for a hypothetical salvation: they seek to expedite, instigate, and even construct it here and now.

The original global-political messianic movement emerges within the first Jewish-Christian communities. Here, some individuals recognize Jesus as the awaited Messiah of the Hebrew people but struggle to reconcile this with his role as a servant who died on the cross. Contrary to accepting this, they cling to their interpretations of Biblical prophecies, anticipating a messiah who would become king, liberate Israel from Roman rule, and elevate the nation above others. Their worldview equates evil with the violation of Jewish law, impurity, and anything non-Jewish. This perspective leads to a distortion of the concept of salvation, interpreting it as liberation from evil and impurity. Similarly, the divine promise of supremacy for Israel is

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<sup>43</sup> Gnosticism is not a thing from the past. For example, our consumerist culture is deeply imbued with a gnostic spirit, characterized by individualism and elitism, contempt for future generations, and a self-centered attitude.

<sup>44</sup> We shall also use the term "messianist" instead of "global-political messianic" as it is much easier this way.

<sup>45</sup> The Jewish nationalism that led to the Jewish-Roman wars prefigured global political messianism, though it did not yet embody all of its characteristics, notably lacking the dimension of being driven by a "key to history". Throughout history, various forms of messianist currents have developed: for example, the millenarian movements, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Anabaptist movements, the messianism of some Puritan settlers in the Americas (among the "Pilgrim Fathers"). There was also the Jewish messianist frenzy surrounding [Sabbatai Zevi](#) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Enlightenment, the republican messianism of the French Revolution, some variants of American Exceptionalism, Communism and its various forms, Nazism, ideologies of progress and scientism, Globalism, certain extreme variants of Zionism (notably some of those fixated on rebuilding the Temple of Jerusalem), and, as will be discussed, [Islam](#).

gradually twisted into **a religious-political agenda focused on eradicating the wicked**. This task is seen as the responsibility of God and his messiah, and by extension, those acting in His name<sup>46</sup>.

The **destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem** was a pivotal event in the development of the messianist ideology. This event profoundly affected some Jewish Christians who witnessed it and were left feeling disillusioned by the absence of the return of Messiah-Jesus. He indeed had prophesied that he would rebuild the Temple following its destruction<sup>47</sup>, leading to questions about why the “Day of Judgment” had not materialized even though the prophetic conditions, such as the destruction of the Temple and the displacement of its corrupted authorities, appeared to have been met. The Romans even punished the rebels, especially the **Zealots**, and the Temple authorities, who had exploited God for their own ends and were responsible for the deaths of Messiah-Jesus, James the Just, and others. These events could be interpreted as divine retribution against these transgressors, raising questions about why Jesus had not yet returned. They had thus a profound impact on some Jewish Christians and their Jewish peers. The conclusions they reached greatly fueled their messianic beliefs and significantly influenced their political and religious agendas.

During the first Jewish war, some Hebrews in Jerusalem perished, but many managed to escape. It's important to recall that in 68-69, the Romans had allowed non-combatant Jews to leave Jerusalem before they besieged the city. Among those who left were the Jewish Christians, led by Bishop Simon, the successor of James. Alongside them were messianists from the Jewish-Christian cauldron of Jerusalem. They collectively sought refuge in the north, heading towards the Golan Heights in Syria. The destruction of the Temple in 70 marked a significant turning point for these groups: following this event, the Jews who closely identified with Christian beliefs returned to settle in Jerusalem, Judea, and other areas. However, some, steadfast in their beliefs, chose not to return and separated from the Christian community, remaining in exile and solidifying their break from Jewish Christianity<sup>48</sup>. Their expectation of the “Day of Judgment” took on a dramatic, even extreme, character. Contradicting the teachings of the apostles—who were not all deceased at that time—they began devising a salvation plan for the entire world from a political-religious, and therefore warlike, standpoint. This plan focused on **the restoration of the destroyed Temple**. These early “believers” in a comprehensive messianist faith deviated from the apostolic faith and crafted their own concept of salvation. In their vision, they saw themselves as precursors and collaborators of the “Savior”, the “Messiah of God” destined to save and rule the world with him by eradicating the wicked. These individuals were **the Judeo-Nazarenes**.

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<sup>46</sup> This is one of the findings resulting from the analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish Apocrypha, as proposed by Édouard M. Gallez in *Le Messie et son prophète*, notably in his first volume (*op. cit.*). Some messianic texts among these (particularly the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*) have been discovered in different versions, indicating a process of rewriting that attests to the emergence of messianists ideas and the development of Jewish messianist currents. An overview of his analysis can be found [on his French website](#).

<sup>47</sup> “*Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up again*”, a formula found almost identically in Mark 14:58, Matthew 26:61 and John 2:19. John indicates just afterwards that the Temple that Jesus intended to raise up was his own body (the resurrection), as the Christians profess. This precision, which is not found in the other Gospels (Matthew and Mark, cited above), indicates very clearly that there was then an expectation of the physical reconstruction of the Temple by Jesus himself, returning to earth for this purpose.

<sup>48</sup> According to the historical writings of Eusebius of Caesarea and especially those of Epiphanius of Salamis.

## Who are the Judeo-Nazarenes?

Historical research has progressively unveiled detailed information and evidence about this significant yet elusive group<sup>49</sup>. Its importance stems from its pivotal role in the development of early Islam and the making of the Quran with the main evidence of its existence and of this role found in the Quran and the Sunna, as we will discuss later. Yet this group has remained obscure in ancient historical accounts, primarily due to its small size and the tendency of contemporary observers to overlook it, frequently confusing it with one of the numerous Nazarene or Judeo-Christian sects (the various groups of Jews who recognized Jesus as the Messiah without fully embracing Christianity, and continued to adhere to Jewish Law)<sup>50</sup>.

As it adopted the name “Nazarene” for itself, and given that this term became ambiguous in ancient literature, a more precise designation, “Judeo-Nazarene”, was deemed necessary. This term serves several purposes: it distinguishes this group from other Nazarene or Judeo-Christian sects, so as to highlight its future significant role in the formation of Islam; it differentiates it from the Christian Jews, who were also referred to as Nazarenes in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, as previously mentioned; and finally, while emphasizing its Israelite origins, it sets it apart from rabbinic Judaism, which strongly condemned the Nazarenes. The Judeo-Nazarenes are therefore a small group that originated within the Jewish-Christian community of Jerusalem, and separated from it due to their messianist beliefs being incompatible with mainstream Christian faith. Forming eventually an alliance with certain Arab groups, they would set in motion a cascade of events that would ultimately reshape the course of world history.

Their religious doctrine stems from an elaborate system of justification: the Judeo-Nazarenes considered themselves to be the **only true Jews** and the **only true followers of Jesus**.

<sup>49</sup> Mostly thanks to Édouard M. Gallez's *Le Messie et son prophète* (*op. cit.*).

<sup>50</sup> These Judeo-Christian sects were described by numerous ancient authors, including historians, Church Fathers or Christian theologians who wrote about the various heresies. Jerome of Stridon (4<sup>th</sup> cent.) encountered some of them and described them to Augustine of Hippo: “...there still exists among the Jews in all the synagogues of the East a heresy which is called that of the Mineans [“Minim”, as in the “Birkat haMinim”], and which is still condemned by the Pharisees; [its followers] are ordinarily called Nazarenes; they believe that Christ, the son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary, and they hold him to be the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate and ascended to heaven, and in whom we also believe. But while they pretend to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither” (*Epistle 75 to Augustine*). Epiphanius of Salamis (4<sup>th</sup> cent.) detailed many such sects in his *Panarion*, notably the “Ebionites” and “Nazoreans” [Nazarenes], who sought to restore Israel’s kingship. “Ebionites” initially described a specific sect, but over time, the term broadened in Church Fathers’ writings to refer generically to “heretic Jews”.

Western academia has largely concluded that these Judeo-Christian sects vanished around the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries, or maybe a bit later (cf., among many, Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, Leiden: Brill, 1988-1992; Stephen Shoemaker, “Jewish Christianity, Non-Trinitarianism and the Beginnings of Islam”, in F. Del Rio Sanchez (Ed.), *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2018; Jan Van Reeth, “Les courants judéochrétiens et chrétiens orientaux de l’Antiquité tardive [Judeo-Christian and Eastern-Christian currents of Late Antiquity]” in *Le Coran des Historiens*, 2019, *op. cit.*). Dominique Bernard made a significant case on the influence of Judeo-Christians on early Islam based on a thorough and comprehensive study of ancient sources and also of Islamic tradition (D. Bernard, *Les disciples juifs de Jésus, du 1er siècle à Mahomet, recherches sur le mouvement ébionite* [Jesus’ Jewish followers, from the 1<sup>st</sup> century to Muhammad, research on the Ebionite movement], Le Cerf, Paris, 2017).

However, Western academia generally still harbors a partial view of early Christianity, overlooking its fundamental Aramaic dimension and its eastern scope. This oversight fosters the mistaken impression that it is solely a Roman or Mediterranean religion. Additionally, academia has yet to fully embrace the critical insights of Édouard M. Gallez’s comprehensive study on the Judeo-Nazarene influence on early Islam (*Le Messie et son prophète*, *op. cit.*). His Quranic (and Sunna) research provides compelling evidence of a small Nazarene group persisting into the 7<sup>th</sup> century, with a crucial influence on the emergence of Islam and the making of the Quran (as will be detailed and developed later, p.125 and beyond).

As Jews, they scrupulously preserve the customs and the ancestral law articulated in reverence for the sacred scriptures, the Torah. They also preserve the veneration of the Temple of Jerusalem, although destroyed for the time being, the veneration of the “Promised Land” and of the Jewish “ethnic” people, the people chosen by God. This election, however, comes down to them alone, because they see themselves as **the only and true Jews**, in continuity with what they are “ethnically”, but in opposition to the Pharisaic movement that will give the rabbinic reform we have already mentioned. In fact, unlike the latter, they recognized Jesus as the messiah prophesied in the scriptures, who came to liberate the Holy Land, re-establish the monarchy, restore true faith by expelling the corrupt Jewish authorities, and reinstate authentic Temple worship: in short, to liberate Israel and save the world—tasks he was unable to complete. Betrayed by “unfaithful Jews” (Jerusalem authorities and Pharisees according to them), unjustly condemned, he was prevented from accomplishing his mission. However, he was fortunately taken up by God to “Heaven” from where he will return to lead the armies and complete his mission when the time comes, when the conditions are fulfilled. This is how the “kingdom of God on earth” will come about. The Judeo-Nazarenes want to see proof of the truth of their belief and the correctness of their reproach to the “unfaithful Jews” in the failure of successive insurrectional follies against the Romans and the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem: these “fake Jews” have incurred **God’s anger**, leading him to disown and punish them.

They also consider themselves as **the only true followers of Jesus**, in contrast to those who followed his apostles. They acknowledge him as the “son of God” (in a figurative sense, as God’s deputy on Earth) but refuse to believe in his resurrection<sup>51</sup>, and therefore, in the “divine presence” truly being within him—that he is God “visiting his people”, as Christians profess. They believe God took Jesus away and await his return so that he may fulfill his mission, including rebuilding Jerusalem’s Temple (see note 47). This view completely challenges the apostles’ accounts. Consequently, they accuse Christians of misunderstanding, of having deviated from the truth, of **being astray**. Yet the Judeo-Nazarenes had access to the apostles’ testimonies. Evidence suggests that they used the Gospel of Matthew, in Aramaic, for their liturgy<sup>52</sup>—similar to that used by Jewish Christians and the Church of the East even today.



**Studying the sacred scriptures**

Fantasy illustration generated by OpenAI's DALL-E, 2024, used with permission

<sup>51</sup> It is unclear whether the Judeo-Nazarenes believed Jesus died on the cross, as most of our knowledge about them comes from the Quran, which is ambiguous on this matter. On one hand, it seems to suggest Jesus was not killed or crucified (Q4:157: “...they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him”). On the other hand, it literally mentions his death (Q5:117: “[Jesus talking to God] ...You took me in death [‘tawaffaytani’]”, which is often, albeit incorrectly, translated as “You raised me [in Heaven]”). Q3:55 and 19:33 also refer to Jesus’ death. Islamic tradition developed theories such as Jesus’ abduction from the cross or the illusion of his crucifixion (e.g., “false pretense”, use of a look-alike). These theories, suggesting alternatives to the crucifixion narrative, had circulated well before Islam, especially among certain Judeo-Christian groups, possibly including the Judeo-Nazarenes, and notably among the Gnostics—as evidenced by texts like *The Apocalypse of Peter* found at [Nag Hammadi](http://NagHammadi) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>52</sup> The Church Fathers refer to it as the “Gospel of the Nazarenes”, or the “Gospel according to the Hebrews”. Theodoret of Cyrrhus (5<sup>th</sup> cent.), in particular, identified it as the Gospel of Matthew, which he believed had been altered by its preservation within the Judeo-Nazarene milieu.

However, they had it adapted to support their doctrine, which diverges from the Christian preservation of this gospel and the other three. None of these texts anticipate a Messiah returning to “finish the work” he started—rebuilding the Temple, leading true believers against evil, brutally enforcing God’s law worldwide, and establishing the political kingdom of God’s justice on Earth. The New Testament, including the four Gospels, heralds indeed a different vision of Jesus’ “glorious coming”. Unlike a terrestrial return, this event is envisioned as a celestial and universal phenomenon, visible to all. While the specifics of such an occurrence are hard to grasp, its link to a “judgment” is clear. According to the apostles, this undeniable vision will compel everyone to take a stance, thereby bringing about the judgment of Jesus, the “just judge”. In stark contrast, the Judeo-Nazarenes reject the divine aspect of Jesus, criticizing Christians for “**associationism**”—the attribution of a Son and a Holy Spirit as “assistants” to God. Instead, they declare: “**God is one and there is no god but Him**”<sup>53</sup>. This marks a profound divergence from the apostolic teachings to the Judeo-Nazarenes’ altered version of Christian messianism. Moreover, there seems to be a noticeable similarity between this altered belief and the Islamic declaration of faith.



**A fantasy vision of the Messiah descending onto Jerusalem, leading his armies**  
 (background: David Roberts)—[Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

As both true Jews and true Christians, the Judeo-Nazarenes skillfully set rabbinical Jews and Christians against each other by positioning themselves above both groups. Claiming to be the genuine heirs of Abraham, they regard themselves as the “pure” ones. Their settlement in Syria, including the Golan Heights, and later extending as far north as Aleppo as well as in the south among the Nabateans and in Transjordan, is seen as a **new exodus** to the desert. This migration mirrors the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt under Moses’ leadership, symbolizing a period of purification and preparation. Accordingly, wine is forbidden to all those consecrated to God until the Messiah returns. Their “masses” are conducted by their priests with water instead of wine. This practice might have been what Clement of Alexandria was referring to in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century when he criticized “*the sects which deserted the primitive*

<sup>53</sup> Such assertions can be found in the late ancient Judeo-Christian literature, such as the *Clementine literature*, where the apostle Peter makes these proclamations in *Homilies*, XVI, 7:9 and also states that Jesus himself made similar assertions in XVI, 15:2 (see Édouard M. Gallez, *Le Messie et son prophète, op. cit.*, on this matter for more details; he also wrote an English article quoting his book: “[Which Primitive Islamic Shahâdah?](#)”). The same types of assertions are engraved on very old door lintels from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries in Syria.

*Church*”, “*heretics*”, “*which employ bread and water in the oblation, not according to the canon of the Church*”. He noted, “*For there are those who celebrate the Eucharist with pure water*”<sup>54</sup>.

Purification is merely the first step for the Judeo-Nazarenes in their mission to cleanse the world of evil and injustice. Under their messiah’s leadership, the Judeo-Nazarenes aim to rescue the world from its malice and unfairness, even if it means opposing the world itself. This vision sets up a **confrontation between two segments of humanity**: those striving for salvation and those obstructing it, categorized as the pure and the impure, the “good guys” and the others. Within this ideological framework, morality is redefined: actions supporting this mission are deemed good, just, and noble, while any obstruction is considered evil, false, and reprehensible, warranting elimination. Deviations from this project, including behaviors deemed distracting, like women purportedly seen as temptresses, are also vilified, potentially leading to their subjugation<sup>55</sup>. Similarly, any deviation from the “pure faith” or dissenting opinions are to be vehemently opposed. Furthermore, this messianist worldview fosters a distorted **system of self-justification**: “I am pure in an impure world; it resists my purifying efforts, making me its victim and proving my purity against its impurity”. This mindset mirrors schizophrenia: denying reality, retreating into a fantasy world, a “**surreality**”<sup>56</sup>, which leads to dangerous delusions of persecution and the formulation of grandiose and irrational schemes.

Thus, believing themselves to be God’s chosen and auxiliaries, and impatient with their messiah’s return delay, the Judeo-Nazarenes resolve to hasten it by actively working to meet the prerequisites for his coming. This shifts their approach from passive waiting to **active engagement** in reclaiming and sanctifying the sacred land (Israel) and city (Jerusalem). By taking matters into their own hands—accessing holy sites, reconstructing the Holy Temple to meet purity standards, and conducting the necessary rites and sacrifices<sup>57</sup>—they believe they can expedite the Messiah’s return. By doing so, they partially take on his role, undertaking the work of rebuilding the Temple in his place. This action fully embodies the term “messianist”: not only are they messianic in their anticipation of a messiah to fulfill his mission, but they also assume the role of messiahs themselves. In this way, they become auxiliaries of God, “God’s helpers”<sup>58</sup>, integral to his plan for establishing his kingdom on earth. Their doctrinal lens gives them thus a reading key for the march of centuries: a **dark past** marked by the rejection of God’s messengers, a **radiant future** promised by their restoration of the Temple, the triumph of the true religion, and the Messiah’s return.



A modern replica of Jerusalem’s Temple menorah, symbol of God’s presence (Temple Institute, Jerusalem) [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

<sup>54</sup> Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata*, I,19:96. These matters concerning wine were passed onto Islam (cf. note 207).

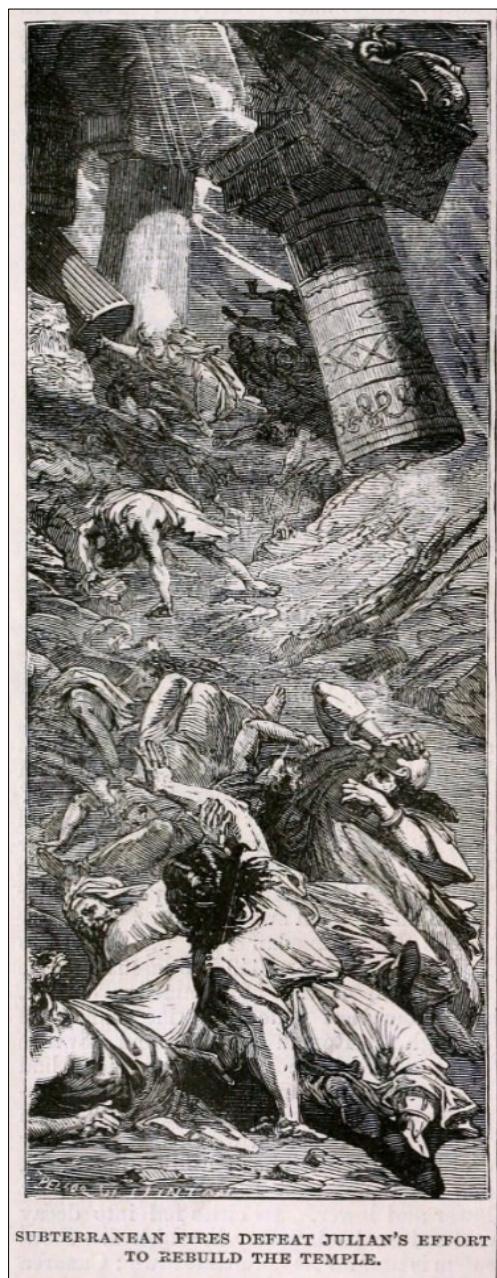
<sup>55</sup> This is clearly seen in the document “The Seductress” (a.k.a. “The Wiles of the Wicked Woman”) found in the Qumran caves among the Dead Sea Scrolls, written in the environment that gave rise to Judeo-Nazarenism.

<sup>56</sup> “**Surreality**” is a term coined by Soviet dissidents to describe the fantastical version of reality promoted by the socialist regime. It represents a false reality imposed on people, a deceptive perception claimed to be more genuine than empirical reality itself. “Surrealities” can be found in all messianist ideologies (refer to those mentioned in note 45). Each aims to create a perfect world, envisioned by enlightened leaders who believe they hold the “key to history”—the key to eradicating evil, even if it means subjugating mankind.

<sup>57</sup> The Quran contains many traces of this, as we will see later (on page 147).

<sup>58</sup> This expression found numerous times in the Quran (“*ansar allah*” / أَنْصَارُ اللهِ – see page 50), has carried over deeply into Islam. Pious Muslims see themselves as such, and this name has been adopted by many Islamist organizations. We believe it to have been invented by the Judeo-Nazarenes to portray themselves and their allies, as detailed in our explanation of [Q61:14](#) (see on p.134 and refer also to note 266).

Presently, they see a hostile world filled with faith's enemies, wars, and conflicts, all of which, they believe, only fortify them. This perspective is particularly reinforced by the confrontation between the Persians ([Parthians](#)) and the Romans. The Judeo-Nazarenes are appalled by the rabbinic reform. With the creation of the Talmuds, rabbinic Jews added new manuscripts to the sacred scriptures, rewriting and obscuring ancient texts that mentioned the Messiah ("covering" these scriptures<sup>59</sup>). Following the Jews' expulsion by the Romans, many returned to Judea, but their focus shifted towards the Persian Empire, where they had long been established. There, they play a role in its millennia-long struggle against the Mediterranean empires (initially Greek, then Roman) for control over the Middle East. The rabbinic Sanhedrin settles in Persia in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, joining the Jewish Exilarch, and enjoying relative autonomy under imperial rule, leading the Judeo-Nazarenes to conflate their Jewish archenemies with the empire that hosts them. Meanwhile, the Roman Empire had become Christian, soon transformed into the [Eastern Roman Empire](#), following [Diocletian](#)'s partition, the future Byzantine Empire. It is thus seen as heretical by the Judeo-Nazarenes. The ongoing wars between these two heretical empires, between their two main adversaries, the rabbinic Jews and the Christians, are seen as a sort of divine intervention, further justifying their beliefs. Additionally, throughout these years, Jewish uprisings inspired by varying degrees of messianic hope occur (e.g., the [revolts of 351-353](#) in Galilee under Gallus Caesar and of 529 led by the "false messiah" [Julianus Ben Sabar](#)), along with continual failed attempts to rebuild the Temple—most notably the effort from 360-362's rabbinic Jews supported by Emperor "[Julian the Apostate](#)". These events only affirm the Judeo-Nazarenes' conviction that **they alone are destined to liberate the holy land, claim Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.**



1877 depiction of Julian the Apostate failed attempt at rebuilding Jerusalem's temple

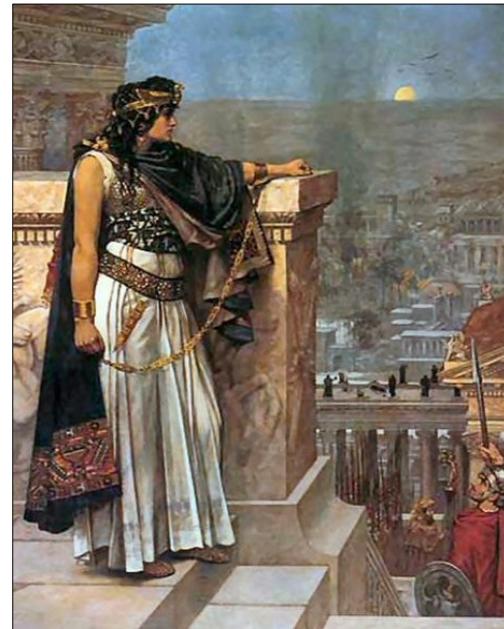
(James Dabney McCabe)  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>59</sup> In Biblical Hebrew, the verb "to cover" is based on the KPR root (כִּפֵּר), equivalent to the KFR Arabic root (كَفَرَ), giving the Arabic verb "kafara", which leads to the term "kafir" (with the plural form "kuffar"), literally meaning "coverer". Islamic tradition has interpreted this term to denote a "denier", "unbeliever", or "infidel", a change we will explore later (see on page 117).

## THE CONQUEST OF JERUSALEM

### The indoctrination of the Arabs

The Judeo-Nazarenes embark on the ambitious endeavor of conquering Jerusalem, despite their limited numbers. Historical records might hint at a probable initial attempt between 269 and 272, through the enlistment of Queen [Zenobia of Palmyra](#), in Syria. Her kingdom had capitalized on the Persian-Roman conflicts, notably benefiting from the defeat of Emperor Valerian by the Persians in 260, and subsequently finds itself in a position of strength after defeating Gallien, Valerian's successor. Chronicles from that era recount how Zenobia was influenced by a certain [Paul of Samosata](#). "**Judaized**", as described by the Church Fathers, was the term used to condemn Ebionite or Judeo-Nazarene propaganda<sup>60</sup>. Intriguingly, this Paul, a deposed bishop, is excommunicated for messianic heresy in 269. Zenobia then expands her conquests across the Middle East, including Judea and as far as Egypt, only to be ultimately defeated by Emperor Aurelian. He expels her from Palmyra in 272 and takes her to Rome as a captive. This bishop, who diverged from the apostolic faith, fades into obscurity thereafter. This might have been an unsuccessful attempt by the Judeo-Nazarenes to seize the "Land". At the very least, it highlights the potential of leveraging local Arab auxiliaries as effective mobile fighters against the formidable Roman army. Their effectiveness seems notably enhanced when they are properly motivated, as it appears Aurelian had managed to undermine their loyalty through bribery. Therefore, a deeper level of conviction and thorough indoctrination are deemed necessary to secure them as steadfast allies. The Judeo-Nazarenes will learn this lesson well.



Queen Zenobia - A last look at

Palmyra (Herbert Schmalz)

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

We are now in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, examining the locations of Judeo-Nazarene groups. Some have settled in Transjordan, within the Nabatean kingdom (annexed in 106 to the Roman province of [Arabia Petraea](#), with Petra as its capital)<sup>61</sup>. Others have made their homes in Syria. Archaeological discoveries and historical studies enable us to identify some of their settlement centers there. The study of Syrian toponyms has preserved the memory of ancient Judeo-Nazarene inhabitants. Names still in use today, such as "Nasiriye", "Ansariye", "Wadi an Nasara" (meaning "the valley of the Nasara", i.e., the Nazarenes), and the "Djebel Ansariyeh"

<sup>60</sup> According to the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea, Philastrius of Brescia, Athanasius, Photius and Theodoret of Cyrrhus. The Christian historian Sozomen (5<sup>th</sup> century) mentions the existence in the Levant of Arab populations ("Saracens", i.e. nomads) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century who, "*happening to come in contact with the Jews*", had also been "judaized" (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book VI, 38).

<sup>61</sup> This seems a reasonable hypothesis, considering the ancient writings that describe the settlement of 1<sup>st</sup>-century "Nazarenes" beyond the Jordan River and the future significance of Petra in early Islam (as we shall discuss later).

(Mount of the Nazarenes), attest to their historical presence<sup>62</sup>. Archaeological excavations in the Golan Heights reveal the coexistence of Judeo-Nazarenes and nomadic Arab groups<sup>63</sup>, united for trade—a common occupation for these nomads—as well as for preaching and religious practices. The Judeo-Nazarenes have thus abandoned their ethnic isolation, with a goal: **to enlist neighboring nomadic Arab tribes in their messianist project** to reconquer Jerusalem and the “promised land”. The project takes precedence over the religious “impurity” attributed to the Arabs (as non-Jews and camel herders, the latter considered an impure animal according to the Torah). The weakening of Roman power (now Byzantine), coupled with a prevailing apocalyptic mood in the Middle East—fueled by the tense geopolitical context and widespread millenarian preachings from both Jewish and Christian traditions<sup>65</sup>—suggests that their goal is more attainable than ever. Simplifying this task, these Arab tribes, which were recently christianized<sup>66</sup> or judaized (see note 60) in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, have yet to develop strong religious convictions. Having recently ceased their raiding practices, as documented by historians, some also serve as auxiliaries to the Byzantine military, playing a crucial role in controlling the Empire’s borders<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> According to Édouard M. Gallez’s *Le Messie...* (op. cit.), with the exception of a small town in Iraq, northwest of Basra (Nasiriyah), all Nazarene toponyms are located in three zones, in Syria (around Hama and Aleppo) and around the Golan Heights (refer to the map on page 37).

<sup>63</sup> Excavations in the villages of Farj and Er-Ramthaniyyeh led by Claudine Dauphin show both Arab Christian and Judeo-Christian artefacts. See Gallez’ comprehensive study “Archéologie Judéonazaréenne [Judeo-Nazarene archeology]” in *Le Messie et son prophète*, vol.2, op. cit., p.389 ff. He particularly refers to Dauphin’s “Encore des judéo-chrétiens au Golan ?” (in *Early Christianity in context. Monuments and documents*, coll° maior n° 38, Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), and “De l’Église de la circoncision à l’Église de la gentilité” (in *Liber Annuus* n° 43, Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 1993, and “Des découvertes récentes au Golan”, in *Archeologia* n° 297, 1994).

<sup>64</sup> We note that archaeological evidence of pre-Islamic Arabic writing has been found primarily in Syria and Jordan (*Arabia Petrea*), rather than in the Hejaz. This was notably exposed by Afred-Louis de Prémare (*Les Fondations de l’Islam* [Foundations of Islam], Seuil, Paris, 2002-2009, p.241) and developed by Robert M. Kerr in his article “[Aramaisms in the Qur’ān and their Significance](#)” (in *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion n°II: Von der Quranischen Bewegung zum Frühislam*, [The emergence of a world religion: from Quranic “emigration” to early Islam], Inārah volume 6, Schiler, Berlin, 2012; also in Ibn Warraq (Ed.), *Christmas in the Qur’ān, Luxenberg, Syriac, and the Near Eastern and Judeo-Christian Background of Islam*, Prometheus Books, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> As is particularly remarkable in Stephen Shoemaker’s *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

<sup>66</sup> The Christianization of the Arabs in the Middle East began at Pentecost (Acts 2:11) and continued, experiencing renewal over the centuries. It was marked by figures such as [Euthymius of Melitene](#) in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and [Aspebet-Peter](#), an Arab chief of the tribe baptized by Euthymius. Aspebet became known as the “bishop of the Arabs” and attended the Council of Ephesus in 431. This endeavor was primarily carried out by Aramaic-speaking Christians, especially from the Assyrian-Chaldean Church (often referred to in the West as “Nestorian”) and, even more so, by the Jacobites (Syriacs), who systematically established nomadic parishes (the Paremboläe Church, “Church of the tents”). Ancient Christian traditions also suggest that the apostles Matthias and Simon were evangelizing in Jordan and Arabia, respectively (cf. Pierre Perrier, *Évangiles de l’Oral à l’Écrit*, op. cit.).

**This process of Christianization culminated in the 6<sup>th</sup> century** when Al-Nu’man III ibn al-Mundhir, described as the “*king of all the Arabs of the empires of Persia and Byzantium*”, was baptized in 594. As the leader of the Lakhmid Arabs, who were traditional allies of Persia, he extended his authority over “*all Arabs*”, including the Ghassanids, the traditional allies of Byzantium, before being assassinated by the Persians shortly after his baptism, according to the *Chronicle of Serts* (also known as *Nestorian History*) (cf. Robert Hoyland, *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p.35).

Archaeological evidence of this ancient Christianization is prevalent throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Christian Robin’s work, for example, challenges the portrayal of pre-Islamic pagan Arabia described by Islamic traditions as “[totally contradictory to what can be observed from archaeological sources](#)”, though he does not comment on Mecca, adhering instead to traditional accounts of a pagan city (see also his study “*L’Arabie préislamique [pre-Islamic Arabia]*” in *Le Coran des Historiens*, op. cit.).

<sup>67</sup> See Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, Prometheus Books, 2003, and R. Hoyland, *In God’s Path*, op. cit.

Among these mixed groups, one in particular draws attention: in northern Phenicia, approximately 20 miles northeast of Latakia (today Al Ladiquiyah, on the coast north of Damascus), the ruins of a halting site or caravanserai were still visible around 1920. This site served as the base for a tribe of nomadic caravan traders. It was visited by French orientalist, archaeologist, and epigrapher [René Dussaud](#) who mentioned it under the name of “Khan el-Qourashiyé”, Quraysh’s caravanserai, located along the “*nahr al quraysiy*” river, “Qurayshis’ river”<sup>68</sup>, a tributary of the Orontes. He underlined its ideal location for trade, as the first step on the road from Latakia to Antioch<sup>69</sup> (see map next page). Undoubtedly, **the Qurayshi tribe was settled there**. Its presence in the region is documented up to the present day<sup>70</sup>. The Qurayshis are also noted further east, towards Mesopotamia, by the Assyrian chronicler Narsai of Nisibis. In his 485 chronicles, he laments the devastating raids conducted by this tribe, their looting and destruction, including one raid described as “*crueler than famine*”. Their conversion to Christianity appears to have pacified them and integrated them into the Silk Road’s trade network, explaining the establishment of their caravanserai near the port of Latakia, a gateway to the Mediterranean (see our map on page 39). From there, they extend their influence across the Levant, intersecting caravan routes as far as Nabataean Arabia—where Judeo-Nazarene communities have settled—and into Mesopotamia. This recent christianization, besides pacifying them, also turned them into fertile ground for the Judeo-Nazarene indoctrination project.

How did the Judeo-Nazarenes accomplish this? The following can be gleaned as the central theme of their preaching, aimed at winning over the Arabs to their cause. This is based on a critical analysis of contemporary accounts of the Arab conquest and the Quranic text itself<sup>71</sup>: “*We, the Judeo-Nazarenes, are Jews, descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac. You Arabs are also descendants of Abraham, but through Ishmael*<sup>72</sup>. *Therefore, we share the same illustrious ancestor, the founder of the true religion. We are cousins; we are brothers. We belong to the same community, the same ‘umma’, and thus, we should adhere to the same true religion. We are bound to follow the same laws derived from the sacred texts handed down from Moses, the Torah* [preserved within the Judeo-Nazarene community, which might have evolved differently from that of the rabbinic Jews]. *We must obey the commandments of Messiah-Jesus and the Gospel* [specifically, the gospel according to Matthew, which was preserved and modified by the Judeo-Nazarenes, as mentioned earlier]. *Therefore, we are committed to the*

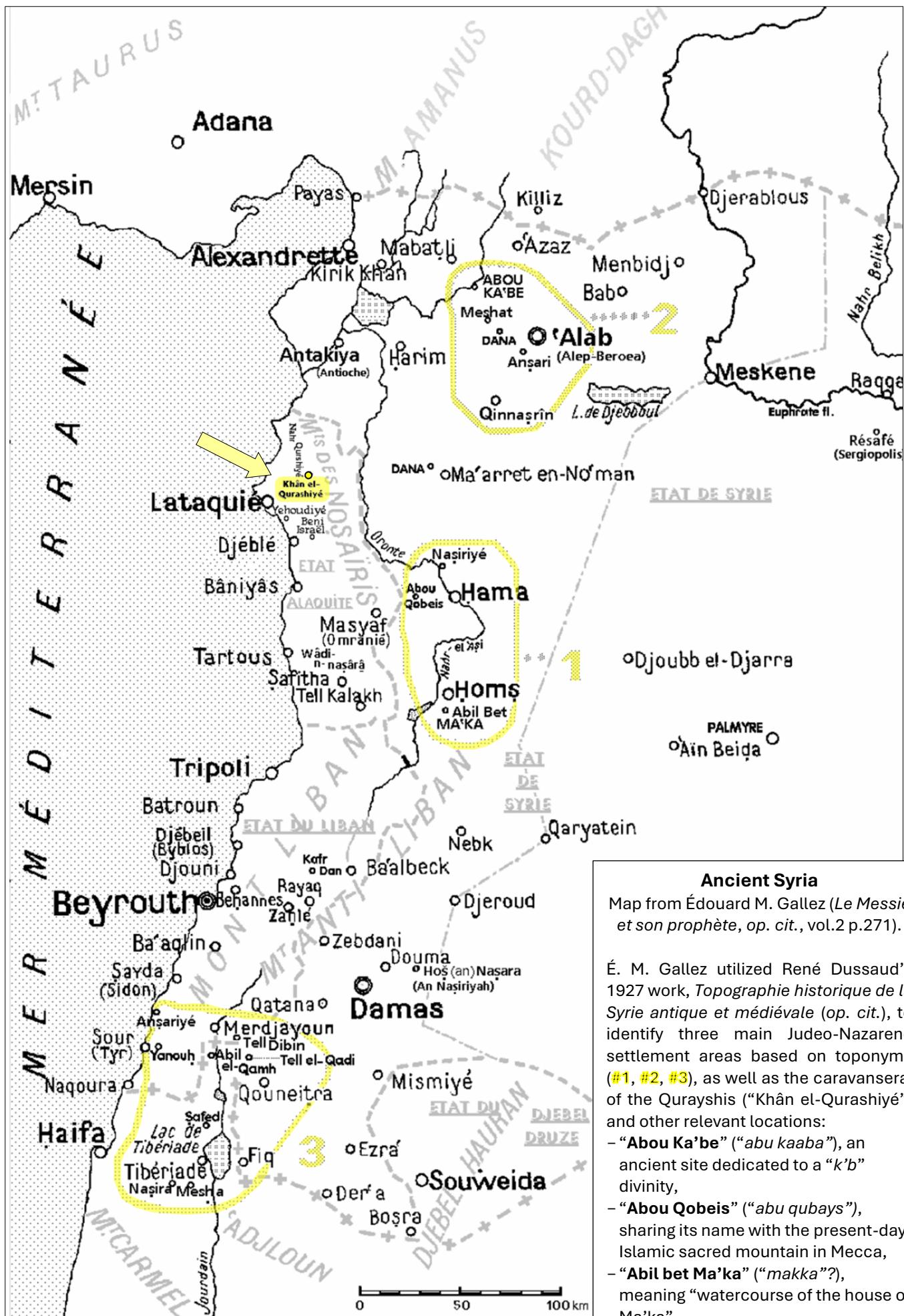
<sup>68</sup> Old British maps of Syria from [1843](#) and [1851](#) (“Syria to Sinai” and “Syria”, from the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection), also mention a “Ras Korash” (meaning “Quraysh’s headland” or “Quraysh’s cape”) on the seaside near Latakia, indicating the ancient presence of the Qurayshis in that area.

<sup>69</sup> René Dussaud, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale* [Historical Topography of Ancient and Medieval Syria], Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1924 ; “Khan el-Qourashiyé” is mentioned on p. 153 ff. Dussaud also quotes the 12<sup>th</sup> cent. Muslim scholar and Syrian geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi who wrote that the people who lived there were “*banu Quraysh*” (Qurayshis).

<sup>70</sup> Descendants of the ancient Qurayshis still reside in Syria today. As an interesting anecdote, the actor [Taim Hasan](#), a Syrian celebrity native of Tartus in the Latakia governorate, claimed his Qurayshi origins in [an interview on Syrian television](#).

<sup>71</sup> We will explore some of these accounts later, particularly how the Quran still preserves detailed traces of this preaching (on p. 125 ff.). For example, Q2:125 explains the sacred alliance between God, the Judeo-Nazarenes and the Arabs, Q2:127 urges to the rebuilding of the Temple, while Q48:20-22 addresses the promises of war spoils from Jerusalem’s conquest.

<sup>72</sup> Ishmael’s Arab descent is not strictly a Biblical narrative. It first appears in [The Book of Jubilees](#), which contains ideas typical of the Judeo-Nazarene tradition. Flavius Josephus later mentioned it in his [Antiquities of the Jews](#), and it was subsequently referenced by some Christians and Church Fathers, including Jerome of Stridon. Sozomen even used it to argue for the evangelization of the Arabs, framing it within anti-Jewish polemics by suggesting that the Arabs, as the legitimate descendants of Abraham’s eldest son, were entitled to Abraham’s legacy, which would be the Christian faith according to the author—a legacy purportedly “hijacked” by Isaac and his rabbinic Jewish descendants.



#### Ancient Syria

Map from Édouard M. Gallez (*Le Messie et son prophète*, op. cit., vol.2 p.271).

É. M. Gallez utilized René Dussaud's 1927 work, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale* (op. cit.), to identify three main Judeo-Nazarene settlement areas based on toponyms (#1, #2, #3), as well as the caravanserai of the Qurayshis ("Khân el-Qurashiyé") and other relevant locations:

- "Abou Ka'be" ("abu kaaba"), an ancient site dedicated to a "k'b" divinity,
- "Abou Qobeis" ("abu qubays"), sharing its name with the present-day Islamic sacred mountain in Mecca,
- "Abil bet Ma'ka" ("makka"?), meaning "watercourse of the house of Ma'ka".

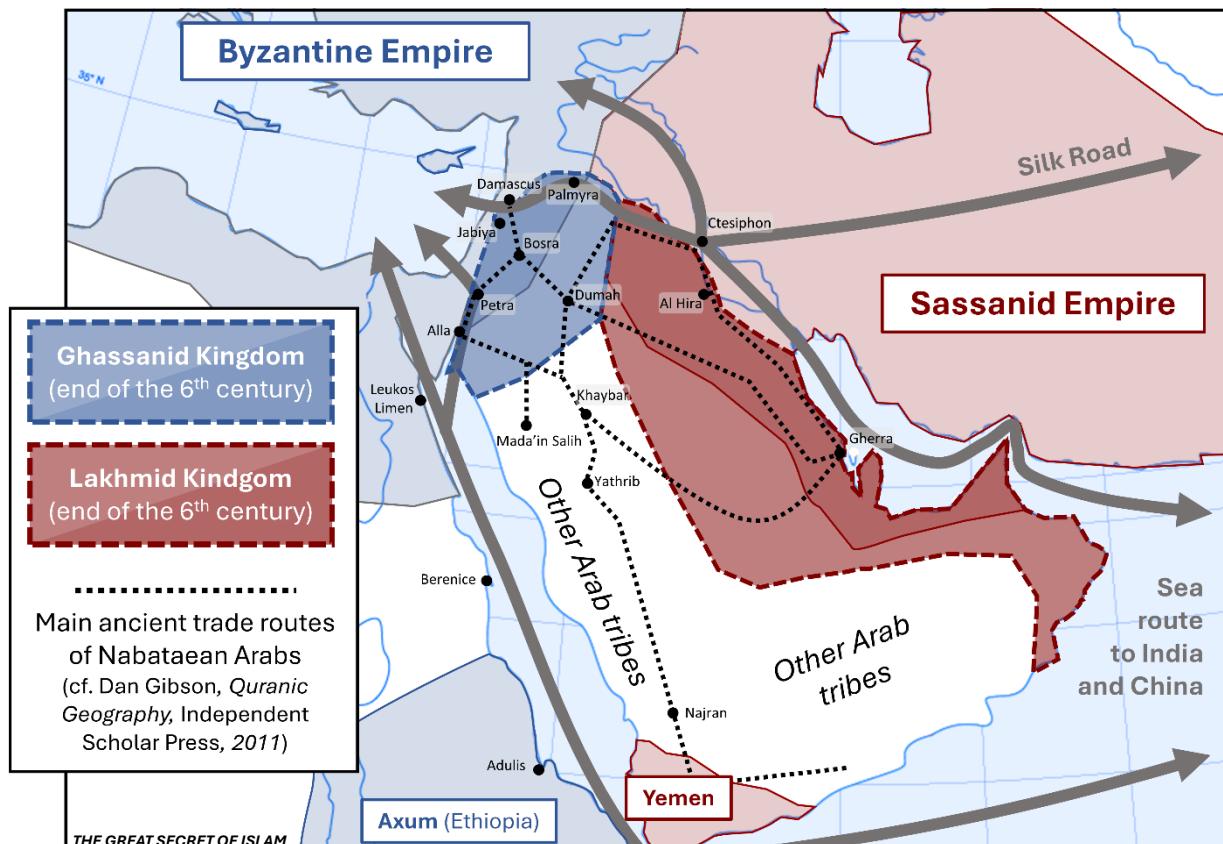
same mission of conquering the Promised Land, Jerusalem, and rebuilding the Temple. **God wants a sacred alliance between us** to fulfill his grand scheme. You Arabs should thus pledge allegiance to us—your cousins by blood, your elder brothers in the true faith. Convert, leave Christianity, abandon your traditional way of life, ‘emigrate’, and join us on God’s path. We will lead you, and together, we can save the world by initiating the ‘Day of Judgment’, bringing Messiah-Jesus back to earth to vanquish evil at the helm of our armies. We, the sons of Isaac, and you, the sons of Ishmael, are his vanguard. His return will designate us, as his chosen ones in his new kingdom”. This presents a powerful messianic promise for the chosen, pure ones: the prospect of earthly rewards in the messiah’s new kingdom. Incidentally, it entails amassing God-given spoils from the conquests leading to Jerusalem, epitomizing what might have been the archetype of rhetoric that seduced so many revolutionaries throughout subsequent history.

To this end, Judeo-Nazarene propagandists not only have to preach to the Arabs, but also have to explain their sacred texts to them. The Judeo-Nazarene are Aramaic-speaking Jews, also versed in liturgical Hebrew. Only a few are proficient enough in Arabic. Thus, **they train Arab preachers** to communicate with their Arab peers more effectively. To support this effort, they create Arabic texts by translating and adapting their own Aramaic and Hebrew sacred scriptures. This process results in anthologies that encompass the key texts of their Torah and Gospel, along with prayers, hymns, customs, laws, specific practices (such as circumcision<sup>73</sup>), rites of purity, dietary laws, and other obligations. These materials are then assembled into a sort of conversion manual for Arabs—an **Arabic Judeo-Nazarene lectionary** designed to be used by Arabs to learn about and adopt their new religion. A lectionary is a liturgical book that features passages of the sacred texts, with reading instruction and commentaries, along with prayers and exhortations, ordered according to a liturgical calendar. Its use is a widespread practice in Christian and Jewish traditions. Aramaic speaking Christians, such as those who christianised the Arabs, also have lectionaries too. In the Aramaic language, the word lectionary is called “*qorono*” or “*qeryana*”, which transposes into Arabic as “*quran*” i.e. **“Quran”** (although this Judeo-Nazarene Arabic lectionary is not the Islamic Quran, as we shall see in a bit). However, the Arabic language is not suited for written communication in this time, and as a result, Arab Christians do not possess scriptures in Arabic, whether translated gospels or Christian Arabic lectionaries. Instead, they rely on Aramaic scriptures—many Arabs of late Antiquity are also familiar with Aramaic—and primarily depend on their memory, having learned the Christian teachings and some Christian texts (either oral Arabic translations or Aramaic texts, given the close relationship between the two languages). A primary goal of the Judeo-Nazarene propagandists is then to have the Arabs adopt the Arabic Judeo-Nazarene lectionary. This is the task for the Arab preachers they trained: to persuade their fellows to abandon Christianity (for example, by accusing them of “associationism”), to introduce the new Judeo-Nazarene “*quran*”, explain its contents, and convince them to join the new religion and its great endeavor of conquering Jerusalem and triggering the end of times.

These Arab preachers, along with some Judeo-Nazarenes, thus preach to their Qurayshi neighbors. They settle among them and join them on their caravan journeys. Consequently, their message spreads orally among the Arabs of the Middle East, along the trade routes and at halting sites, reaching hubs such as Damascus, Petra or Bosra, and from there to Mesopotamia (especially the region of al-Hira, the stronghold of the Lakhmid tribe), the Ghassanid Levant (see note 66 about Lakhmid and Ghassanid Arabs), and through “Deserted Arabia” (*Arabia Deserta*) with its ancient caravan routes (Khaybar, Yathrib, Najran) which had by then fallen into disuse (due to competition from the Red Sea maritime route, with halting sites on its western

<sup>73</sup> Among the Jews, circumcision was the sign of the covenant with God (Abraham was the first to be circumcised, according to Jewish tradition). The same was true for the Judeo-Nazarenes.

shores), and through the Yamama (central region of Arabia) to “Happy Arabia” (*Arabia Felix*, present-day Yemen). This propaganda thus intertwined with other apocalyptic preachings<sup>74</sup>, mainly Christian millenarian messages—Aramaic-Christian, Arab-Christian, Baptist, among others—and also Jewish heralding of the end of times (as we shall see after), forming **movements of “armed Arab prophetism”**<sup>75</sup>. These movements are more or less supported in Arabia and Mesopotamia by Persian imperial power, which sees this as a means to gain control over the Arabs and Arabia and, at the very least, to disrupt the connections between Byzantium and Ethiopia, and to destabilize the Arab allies of Byzantium. By the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, just as war breaks out between Persia and Byzantium, a heavy climate of religious tension emerges, marked by a crescendo of apocalyptic and messianic preaching: **a sense of an impending end of the world**<sup>76</sup>.



**The Arabs in between the two great Empires** (beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century) – © Odon Lafontaine

<sup>74</sup> We already cited Stephen Shoemaker’s remarkable work *The Apocalypse of Empire*, *op. cit.*; see also Muriel Debié, “Les apocalypses syriaques [The Syriac apocalyptic texts]”, in *Le Coran des Historiens*, *op. cit.*

<sup>75</sup> Tunisian author Hela Ouardi has highlighted the existence of several “anti-prophets” in the Islamic tradition (*Les derniers jours de Muhammad* [Muhammad’s last days] Albin Michel, Paris, 2016) and in her series *Les Califes Maudits* [Cursed Caliphs], especially volume 2, *A l’ombre des sabres* [In the Shadow of Swords], Albin Michel, Paris, 2019); see also Habib Tawa’s scholarly study, “Faux prophètes et rapports de force au sein du proto-Islam, éléments pour un examen critique de personnages relégués dans l’ombre [False Prophets and Power Dynamics in Early Islam: Elements for a Critical Examination of Characters Relegated to the Shadows]”, in *Inârah* volume 10 (*op. cit.*, 2020).

<sup>76</sup> French scholar Paul Casanova already pointed at this context more than a century ago (*Mohammed et la fin du monde* [Muhammad and the End of the World], Geuthner, Paris, 1911). This was further developed by Patricia Crone & Michael Cook (*Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge University Press, 1977), or Édouard M. Gallez (*Le Messie et son prophète*, *op. cit.*). Since then, an increasing number of scholars have continued to explore this theme, including Stephen Shoemaker and Muriel Debié, as we have mentioned (refer to note 74). Additionally, “Le Shi’isme et le Coran [Shia Islam and the Quran]” by Mohamad Ali Amir-Moezzi, especially the chapter “Entre l’Apocalypse et l’Empire [Between Apocalypse and Empire]” in *Le Coran des Historiens*, provides valuable insights through a compelling synthesis.

## The "Muhammad of History"

Let us now examine the figure who will be presented as the great prophet of Islam, known as the “*muhammad*” or **Muhammad**, the preacher and warchief among some Qurayshi Arabs at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. History has not preserved his actual name; only the title “*muhammad*” has been retained, which later became his distinctive name in Islamic tradition. We will explore how and why this name was attributed to him, and probably to others.

Very little is definitively known. The Muslim literature about him (the Islamic tradition), only begins to appear at least 100-150 years after his lifetime, and there are no manuscripts from that period. Moreover, the vast majority of this literature is even more recent. It was produced and disseminated under the strict supervision of the dominant caliphal authority, motivated not by a commitment to historical accuracy but by hagiographic and exegetical purposes<sup>77</sup>, aiming to justify the authority itself by justifying Islam, which, in turn, reinforces the authority. We will provide further details on this matter. Contemporary documents (and thus non-Islamic) are rare, with many intentionally destroyed, leading some researchers to even question the actual existence of Muhammad<sup>78</sup>. However, it appears that a historical Muhammad did exist, albeit significantly different from the “Prophet of Islam” depicted in later literature. The historical Muhammad likely led a faction of Qurayshi Arabs during the early armed Arab incursions into the Middle East, suggesting his existence as such factions typically imply a distinct leader. A critical reevaluation of the Islamic tradition, informed by discoveries regarding the Judeo-Nazarenes, allows for a more nuanced understanding.

The task is challenging, as the Muslim tradition has deeply embedded certain categories and images about him into both the conscious and unconscious mind, making them difficult to discard when **attempting to understand history anew**. However, the scientific method, fundamental to our historical-critical approach, demands this reevaluation. Essentially, we must start from scratch, investigating Muhammad’s historicity through a comprehensive review of all testimonies, including non-Muslim sources<sup>79</sup>, and placing them within the actual

<sup>77</sup> As explained in Patricia Crone’s article “[What do we actually know about Muhammad?](#)” (OpenDemocracy, 2008); Belgian orientalist Henri Lammens had already demonstrated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that the traditional Islamic biography of Muhammad (and the entire Sunna) was not composed as historical testimony but rather as a means to construct an Islamic interpretation of the Quran, essentially acting as a contrived exegesis. Consequently, it cannot be considered an independent source since it is derived from the Quran. This has resulted in a **circular interpretation** that has ensnared both Muslims and many academic scholars: the Sunna is needed in Islam to understand the Quran according to Islam, yet the Sunna itself is derived from the Quran (see “Qoran et tradition [Quran and tradition]”, in *Recherche de science religieuse*, vol. 1, Paris, 1910). This predicament should have prompted academic scholars to attempt understanding the Quran without relying on the Sunna, yet very few have undertaken this challenge. Notable attempts include those by Henri Lammens, a precursor in this effort, as well as Alphonse Mingana, Gunther Lüling, Patricia Crone, Christoph Luxenberg, and more recently, to our knowledge, some of the insightful works by Guillaume Dye, Mohamad Ali Amir-Moezzi, and Stephen Shoemaker. Accordingly, a major contribution from Édouard M. Gallez, along with our subsequent collaboration with him, has been the development of a renewed and comprehensive exegesis of the Quran, which forms the basis of our hypothesis regarding the emergence of Islam, as presented in these pages.

<sup>78</sup> See Robert Spencer’s *Did Muhammad exist?* (Bombardier Books, 2021), and Stephen Shoemaker’s “Les vies de Muhammad [The many lives of Muhammad]” in *Le Coran des Historiens* (op. cit.) for up-to-date studies on the quest for a “historical Muhammad”. However, it should be noted that these authors have yet to acknowledge Édouard M. Gallez’s groundbreaking discoveries regarding this subject and the emergence of Islam.

<sup>79</sup> Since the 1970s, a significant achievement of academic scholarship has been the collection, review, and consideration of non-Muslim sources. Patricia Crone & Michael Cook’s *Hagarism* (op. cit.) marked a milestone, followed by their subsequent work, including Crone’s later research, such as *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Gorgias Press, 1987) and her articles. Robert Hoyland, a student of Crone, undertook extensive work in collecting and reviewing these sources (*Seeing Islam as others saw it*, Darwin Press, 1997). Other scholars, among many,

context of their emergence in history. This necessitates a rigorous critical examination of Muslim sources, including the Quran, which in some respects offers an almost firsthand account of the preaching and events of “proto-Islam”. In this light, several long-held assertions must be reconsidered. It can no longer be simply stated that “Muhammad was the founder of Islam”, given the complex history of Islam’s formation that we are beginning to uncover. Similarly, the claim that “Muhammad preached the Quran” oversimplifies the Quran’s complicated history. The assertion that “Muhammad was born in Mecca” is also doubtful, as he likely never visited the city, should it have even existed during his time. Furthermore, the ideas that “Muhammad was the leader of the first Muslims” or “Muhammad proclaimed himself a prophet of Islam” are inaccurate reconstructions by the later Muslim tradition. Therefore, we invite you to read with an open mind, freed from these preconceived notions, to truly understand who the historical Muhammad was and his role in history.

The exact year of his birth is uncertain<sup>80</sup>, likely toward the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, among the Qurayshis who were settled in the Latakia region of Syria. Whether he was born into a Christian family, or one already influenced by the Judeo-Nazarenes remains unclear, with such indoctrination presumably beginning around this time. Islamic tradition has preserved a fragmented and distorted account of the **propagandist environment** of that era, marked by peculiar, if not somewhat implausible, events in view of its hagiographic motivations. These events include Muhammad’s marriage to his “Nazarene” employer and benefactress, Khadija (a wealthy, influential, and older widow), the genuine significance and Biblical roots of the title “Muhammad”, or the episode of Muhammad baptizing Umar<sup>81</sup>. These, among other episodes, align with the “criterion of embarrassment” utilized in historical criticism. Additionally, the tradition features more or less symbolic figures of Judeo-Nazarene religious leaders, clerics, priests, or monks. Notably, **Waraqah ibn Nawfal**, who is said to have been a teacher and mentor to Muhammad; **Salman al-Farisi**, a Persian Jew who would have “converted to Christianity” (Judeo-Nazarenism) before traveling to Syria and joining Muhammad; and monk **Bahira**, depicted as recognizing his future “prophetic” role, are prominent figures in these accounts (see also on page 122). Some figures were linked to the town of Bosra, situated on the route to southern Judeo-Nazarene communities, including Petra and northern Hejaz, and possibly Yathrib. Yathrib, a remote oasis halting site, was part of the ancient and then disused southern Silk Road caravan itinerary, as we mentioned. **Zayd ibn Thabit**, an Arab convert to Judeo-Nazarenism, was also from the town of Bosra (according to Muslim traditions, he received a “Jewish” education in Yathrib). A proficient reader and writer of Aramaic and Hebrew, Zayd served as a scribal intermediary between the Judeo-Nazarene and Arab communities. Particularly, we find more detailed evidence of this propagandist environment and the climate shaped by religious tensions and apocalyptic, messianic preaching through a critical reevaluation of the Islamic tradition regarding **other Arab preachers**. This tradition conveys a distorted memory of figures it labels as “anti-prophets” or “false prophets” in

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also merit mention, such as Stephen Shoemaker (*The Death of a Prophet*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012; *The Apocalypse of Empire, op. cit.; A Prophet Has Appeared: The Rise of Islam through Christian and Jewish Eyes, A Sourcebook*, University of California Press, 2021) or Michael P. Penn (*When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam*, University of California Press, 2015, and his other contributions). Édouard M. Gallez could only take into account what was available at the time of his thesis (before 2004), which we aim to update with this publication.

<sup>80</sup> The date of 572 is a reconstruction by 19th-century Western Orientalists, based solely on Islamic tradition.

<sup>81</sup> Hela Ouardi, *Les Califes maudits, vol.3, Meurtre à la mosquée* [Murder at the Mosque] Albin Michel, Paris, 2021, p.47; referring to Islamic tradition, she wrote that when Umar supposedly converted to Islam, Muhammad “poured water on his head”.

contrast to the Islamic “true” prophetic figure of Muhammad. These individuals, like Muhammad, appear to have been leaders of various movements of armed Arab prophetism<sup>82</sup>.

Young Muhammad likely started his public career within Qurayshi trading activities, securing employment with Khadija, who had either converted to Judeo-Nazarenism or was possibly a Judeo-Nazarene herself. Islamic tradition identifies her as the cousin of the Judeo-Nazarene cleric and priest Waraqah, who is said to have officiated their marriage. Waraqah is portrayed as having played a significant role in Muhammad’s life<sup>83</sup>, whether as a real historical figure or a symbolic one reconstructed by tradition<sup>84</sup>. His origins remain ambiguous—being possibly an Arab, a Jew, or of mixed heritage, especially given reports that he “became a Nazarene”. He was an expert in the sacred scriptures and could translate Hebrew and Aramaic into Arabic. Tradition attributes to him the statement, “**we are the lords of the Arabs and their guides**”, highlighting the Judeo-Nazarenes’ substantial influence over the Qurayshis. Waraqah, even more so than Zayd, thus acted as a crucial link between the two communities. Muhammad’s marriage to Khadija was relatively brief, lasting about four or five years since it produced four daughters before he became a widower. This left him wealthy and ready for the adventure of his life.

## Persia and Byzantium’s “Great Game” and the failed conquest of Jerusalem

Great history makes its ways to the Arabs, the Qurayshis, the armed prophets, Muhammad, and the Judeo-Nazarene masters. Central to this narrative is the lesser-known event of the brief restoration of Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem from 614 to 617<sup>85</sup>. This episode, part of [the millennia-long confrontation](#) between the Persian-Sassanid and Byzantine empires for dominance in the Near East, had very significant repercussions on millenarian Jewish, Judeo-

<sup>82</sup> Refer to Habib Tawa’s “Faux prophètes...” (*op. cit.*) for more details. He discusses the figures of Maslama ibn Habib Abu Thumama, described as the “chief” of Yamama and a Persian agent of influence, and the “prophetess” Sajah bint al-Harith ibn Suwayd ibn Uqfan, who was native to and influential in Mesopotamia and eventually allied with Maslama. Both are suggested to have “probably practiced a form of Christian syncretism of Mesopotamian origin, blending Christian-Nazarene beliefs with messianism”. He also discussed Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid ibn Nawfal al-Asadi, who might have been related to Waraqah ibn Nawfal (potentially his nephew). Tulayha claimed to treat Muhammad as an equal, with tradition suggesting he proposed dividing Arabia into two halves, one for himself and one for Muhammad. After being defeated by an expedition launched by Abu Bakr, he reportedly sought refuge in Syria and later aligned with Umar. It is more plausible to suggest that he led his troops into Syria, marking one of the first armed Arab incursions. Additionally, the figure of Aswad ibn Kaab al-Ansi, a Yemeni of Persian descent and a Persian agent of influence, is noted to a lesser extent. Habib Tawa’s study provides a rich and detailed account of “the parallel action of these armed millenarian preachers [including Muhammad], accompanied by the greed of tribal predators”, who were “operating between the three great powers of the time [Persia, Byzantium, and Ethiopia] and largely influenced by the policies of these giants”.

<sup>83</sup> See the dossier compiled by Abu Musa al-Hariri, also known as Joseph Azzi, in *The Priest and the Prophet* (*op. cit.*), which presents a detailed critical examination of the Muslim tradition relating to Waraqah ibn Nawfal. This includes many Sirahs, particularly “*al sira al halabiya*” (Sirah of Al-Halabi, or “Aleppo’s Sirah”) and the hadiths, such as [Sahih al-Bukhari 3392](#) ; [Sahih al-Bukhari 4953](#) ; [Sahih al-Bukhari 3](#) ; [Sahih al-Bukhari 6982](#) ; [Sahih Muslim:160a](#) (“Nazarene” is consistently translated as “Christian” in these hadiths, due to Islamic tradition’s contrived interpretation. The literal Arabic word for “Christian” is “*masihi*” / مسيحي, while “*nasara*” (ناصرى) literally means “Nazarene”).

<sup>84</sup> The Arabic word “*waraqah*” (ورقة), meaning “folio”, “leaflet”, “sheet”, or, in modern terms, “paper”, lends further support to the interpretation of him as a symbolic figure.

<sup>85</sup> This episode is particularly recounted in Jewish traditions (see Ben Abrahamson & Joseph Katz, “[The Persian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 CE Compared with Islamic Conquest of 638 CE: Its Messianic Nature and the Role of the Jewish Exilarch](#)”, Alsaqiqin Institute, Jerusalem, 2004), as well as in chronicles like the *Chronicle of Sebeos*. Traces of this event can also be found in the Quran, as we will explore later (refer to page 145).

Nazarene, and Arab-Nazarene movements. It occurred as a new and decisive chapter of this confrontation opened in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, as the Persians decided to support the rebellion of the Byzantine governor of Mesopotamia in 602 against the newly proclaimed emperor (Phocas the “[usurper](#)”), **reigniting a total war between the two empires**, despite the fact that previous conflicts had concluded barely a decade earlier.

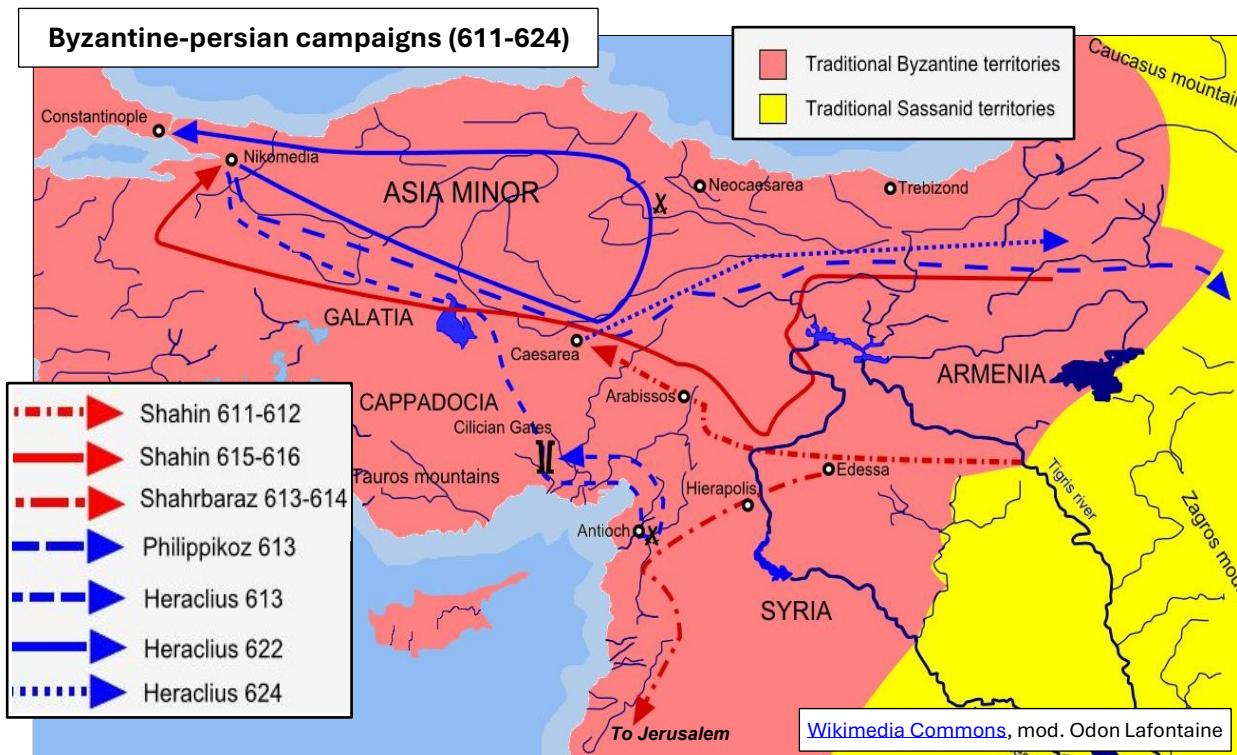
This crucial, yet often overlooked, **global geopolitical context** lays the groundwork for the Arab rise to power, the formation of proto-Islam, and its subsequent expansion. Situated at the crossroads of the Byzantine and Persian empires, Arabia—along with regions like Mesopotamia and the Levant, where Arabs had established themselves—had become a pivotal arena for the dynamics of power, war, trade, influence, and control over the Silk Road among Persia, Byzantium, Egypt, and Ethiopia. This includes both the sea route from the south of Arabia and the Red Sea, and the overland route from Mesopotamia and the northern Levant (refer to the map on page 39). The Arabs thus played a crucial role in the interplay between the two empires, as these two historically relied on them for border management and proxy wars—the Lakhmids for Persia and the Ghassanids for Byzantium, as previously noted. However, the geopolitical landscape shifted dramatically just before the war. Persia had managed to gain control over a federation encompassing “all Arabs”, supposedly including both Lakhmids and Ghassanids, under the leadership of the Arab Christian king of Lakhmid Al-Hira (near Kufa in Iraq), Al-Nu’man III ibn al-Mundhir (refer to note 66). Fearing his growing power, the Persian empire eventually orchestrated his assassination in 602 and annexed Al-Hira. This act led to widespread “*revolt and dispersion of all Arabs*”<sup>86</sup>, causing significant turmoil: some Arabs reverted to their traditional allegiance to Byzantium, others remained loyal to Persia, and many became uncontrollable. As a consequence, Persia lost the support of most Lakhmids, who had been protecting its borders against various Arab tribes incursions and other threats from the West for centuries (hence, probably, Persia’s strategy of warmongering and support for armed Arab prophetism). However, this account will not delve into all the war’s twists and turns until Persia’s complete defeat in 627. Instead, the focus is on highlighting elements relevant to understanding the formation of Islam.

The onset of the conflict sees the Persians making significant advancements and winning battles. Sensing the Byzantine Empire’s vulnerability and motivated by certain Jews in Persia who harbor nationalist (and even apocalyptic) aspirations—including their exiled king in Babylon, the Exilarch Nehemiah aligned with the Sassanid emperor, the “King of Kings”—Persia embarks on a major offensive towards Palestine, a region strategic not only as an access point to the Mediterranean Sea but also as the gateway to Egypt and its potential conquest. To bolster their forces, the Persians enlist additional troops from Arab tribes. A Jewish force from Babylonia and across Persia, reportedly numbering 20,000 men supposedly led by Nehemiah, also joins this campaign aiming to retake Jerusalem. Their ultimate goal is to reestablish a sovereign Jewish state in the ancestral land of Israel, notably including the **rebuilding of the Temple** in Jerusalem and the restoration of the ancient religion of Moses.

Their armies advance into Syria from northern Mesopotamia, conquering Damascus, Apamea, and Homs in 613, and then venture into Palestine. A diverse Arab contingent, inspired by Judeo-Nazarene preaching joins the Persians as auxiliary forces. This presents the perfect opportunity for the Arab-Nazarene alliance to enter Jerusalem, overcoming its predominantly Christian population that had previously barred exiled Jews and Judeo-Nazarenes alike from pilgrimage access. This group includes Qurayshis, Judeo-Nazarenes, and likely Muhammad himself, along with possibly other “prophets”. Palestine, with a vast majority Christian population including many of Jewish descent, also has a significant minority of Jews and Judaized Arabs. Many seize

<sup>86</sup> According to the *Chronicle of Serts*

this moment to rise up against Byzantine rule, collaborating with the Persians and Babylonian Jews to facilitate the Persian advance—marking the event as [the great 614 Jewish Revolt](#).



Consequently, a coalition forms among Persian troops, Arab auxiliary forces (primarily Christian), Palestinian and Levant Jews, Persian Jews, and the Arab-Nazarene alliance, albeit a small one, under the leadership of Persian general Shahrbaraz. The Arab-Nazarene alliance undertakes a daring mission: **to leverage the general war effort to advance their goal of accessing the Temple Mount** and then performing the necessary rites there to trigger Jesus' return. Rebuilding the Temple under the supervision of the Arab-Nazarene alliance seems out of reach given the balance of power within the Persian coalition; the other Jews involved also aim to access the Temple Mount and reconstruct the Temple. The Arab-Nazarene alliance will have to act quickly. It's important to remember that Judeo-Nazarenes view these other Jews as their archenemies for vehemently rejecting Jesus' messiahship. This holds true for the Babylonian Jews, who have recently completed the compilation of the Babylonian Talmud, as well as for the Levantine Jews who did the same with the Jerusalem Talmud. Both acts are viewed by the Judeo-Nazarenes with profound disdain as the creation of "man-made sacred scripture" that "cover" the real sacred scriptures. Navigating this diverse coalition thus requires the Judeo-Nazarenes to exercise significant caution. Although a pact might have been forged between these Jews and the Arab-Nazarene alliance<sup>87</sup>, they still need to clarify to their Arab allies the distinction between "good Jews"—Nazarenes who believe in Messiah-Jesus—and "bad Jews" (rabbinic Jews) who denied him. This differentiation is delicate since both "good" and "bad" Jews share the same ethnic background, are part of the "People of the Torah", and largely follow the same religion, adhering to the Mosaic law, including similar dietary restrictions and religious practices like praying towards Jerusalem<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>87</sup> This emerges from Q8:55-60 & Q8:70, which mention such a pact and its breach, when viewed in the context of actual history and our comprehensive exegesis of the Quran (see page 147 ff.).

<sup>88</sup> These clarifications between "good" and "bad" Jews are highlighted in the Quran, which specifically emphasizes the need to differentiate between the majority of Jews who are termed "coverers" (kuffar) and "evildoers", and the "few" who are not (see examples in Q3:110; Q3:113; Q3:199; Q7:159). Further details are provided on p.131 ff.

In 614, Jerusalem is taken. The Persians soon establish a Jewish governor, the first instance of Jewish rule since the Temple's destruction in 70 (Nehemiah, according to rabbinical traditions). He initiates proceedings to rebuild the Temple, and rejuvenate ancient Judaism, including plans for a new High Priest<sup>89</sup>. The Judeo-Nazarenes and their Arab allies attempt to preempt the rabbinic Jews by establishing their own religious practices first, signified by shaven heads as a devotion act (presumably reviving the ancient Nazirite vow of special consecration to God outlined in the Torah<sup>90</sup>), and preparing animals adorned for sacrifices. They aim to perform rituals on the Temple Mount that they believe will trigger the Messiah's return. However, as they near Jerusalem, rabbinic Jews impede their access to the Temple, "obstructing the way of God", and "keeping the believers from going to the sacred place of worship"<sup>91</sup>. Disputes escalate into physical confrontations. The pact is no more. **The Judeo-Nazarenes and their Arab allies are expelled from Jerusalem** and ultimately from Palestine<sup>92</sup>. They already despised rabbinic Jews for being "coverers", but this expulsion likely exacerbates tensions and hatred between the groups.

The turmoil in Jerusalem escalates sharply. The local Christian population realizes that the new Jewish rulers are serious about rebuilding the Temple. Riots break out, violent clashes between Jews and Christians erupt in the streets. The Exilarch and his council, along with the High Priest candidate and numerous Jews, are lynched and thrown from the city's walls, culminating in the expulsion of all Jews. The Jewish response is swift and brutal: their forces retake the city, unleashing severe massacres on the Christian inhabitants, including looting and the destruction of churches and holy sites. Casualties range from 17,000 to 60,000, with up to 35,000 Christians deported or enslaved, according to various accounts<sup>93</sup>. These reprisals against Christians spread throughout Palestine and even prompt retaliatory actions by Western Christians against Jews, as decreed at the "Council of Paris" in 614 and enforced by King Clotaire II of the Franks through the Edict of Paris that same year.

**The effort to revive the Temple by the Jews ultimately fails.** The ritual preparations have been destroyed by Christians, the High Priest candidate is dead, so is the king, and, moreover, the Jews eventually lose their control over Jerusalem. The Persians, dismayed by the behavior of their allies and concerned about alienating Christians (Christianity was then a state religion in Persia), assume direct rule over the city in 617. Despite their major setback, the Judeo-Nazarenes are emboldened: history's demonstration of the rabbinic Jews' failure reinforces their conviction that they are "God's chosen"—the sole group capable of rebuilding the Temple and the ones he selected to execute his grand apocalyptic design.

Adapting to normal life eventually proves challenging for the Judeo-Nazarene religious leaders and their Arab affiliates after their heightened religious fervor from the Jerusalem expedition.

<sup>89</sup> Still according to rabbinic traditions, cf. Ben Abrahamson & Joseph Katz, *op. cit.*

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Numbers 6; note also that consecration to God according to the rule of the Nazarite requires abstention from wine and all fermented beverages (cf. note 207).

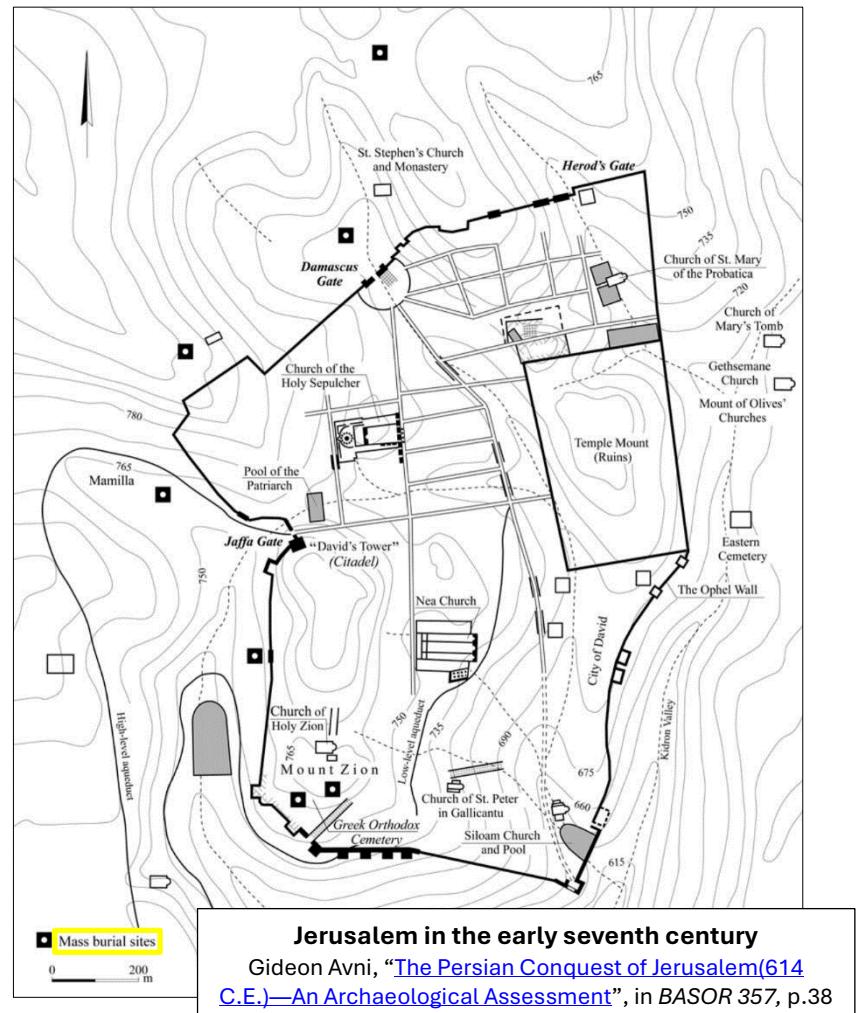
<sup>91</sup> In the Quran, the themes of "obstruction", of being "kept from the path to the sacred mosque" ("masjid al haram", which literally means the "sacred place of prostration", i.e. the site of Jerusalem's Temple— see on page 101) are repeatedly associated with the condemnation of the "coverers" ("kuffar") responsible for this obstruction (see examples in Q8:34-35; Q22:25; Q48:25).

<sup>92</sup> This is literally written in the Quran. See on page 145 ff. for detailed exegesis.

<sup>93</sup> Recently, archaeologists discovered the remains of thousands of individuals in mass graves, including the pool of Mamilla in Jerusalem. These findings corroborate historical accounts, such as those in the *Chronicle of Sebeos* (which attributes the massacres to Persian forces). For more details, see Gideon Avni, "[The Persian Conquest of Jerusalem \(614 C.E.\)—An Archaeological Assessment](#)", in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 357, 2010, p.35-48. As for the killing of Nehemiah and the High Priest candidate, there seems to be no mention outside of rabbinical tradition, which could have made that up to justify the massacres.

They had come so close to fulfilling their sacred mission. Upon their return, the everyday life of villages, caravanserais, tribal routines, and caravan travels seem alien. Their fellow locals who had stayed behind likely struggle to accept or even comprehend these warriors' experiences and aspirations. Tensions and rivalries also increase among the "armed prophets", their movements, and the various Arab factions, necessitating forceful action to preserve some unity within the Arab "confederation"<sup>94</sup>.

Muhammad notably strengthens his position as both a political and religious leader among Arabs united by the Judeo-Nazarene cause and the growing prospect of the Apocalypse's imminence. Initially supported by his core group of Qurayshi companions from Jerusalem—the first "emigrants"—he gradually attracts followers from neighboring tribes and other converts committed to the "path of God" leading to the reconquest of Jerusalem. Acting as a channel for indoctrination among Christianized Arabs, with support from Judeo-Nazarene leaders (symbolized by Waraqah in Islamic tradition) and possibly other mentioned Arab preachers, Muhammad effectively uses this backing, multiplying condemnations against the rabbinic Jews for their perceived treachery in Jerusalem. The Judeo-Nazarenes pin their hopes on this extensive indoctrination, recognizing the strategic benefit of using the military capabilities of Arabs for their cause. Their objective of reclaiming Jerusalem has never seemed closer.



<sup>94</sup> This interpretation emerges from a critical reexamination of the so-called "wars of apostasy" (*hurub al-ridda*) as described by Islamic tradition, purportedly occurring in the brief period of 632-633 following the death of the "Prophet" and under the leadership of his "successor", the "Caliph" Abu Bakr. However, the inconsistencies in these accounts suggest they stem from deeper, earlier conflicts. It's plausible to hypothesize that **the historical Muhammad's death came in the years following the unsuccessful attempt to capture Jerusalem**. This could account for the disrepute and condemnation attributed to him by Islamic tradition both before and after his demise (refer to Habib Tawa, *op. cit.*, and Hela Ouardi, *op. cit.*—the latter specifically discusses the unusual tradition depicting Muhammad's final days marked by disgrace due to a failed attempt at conquering the Levant, an alternative narrative of his death at the Battle of Uhud in 625, and the dishonorable circumstances of his funeral, his body being left unburied for three days while his companions quarreled over his succession).

Similarly, this might explain the perceived change in character and actions between the "peaceful Muhammad of Mecca" and the "warchief Muhammad of Medina" as depicted by Islamic tradition. It's conceivable that another individual (or individuals) subsequently adopted the title of Muhammad. This hypothesis is worth considering, but we will set it aside in our subsequent discussion, as it has minimal impact on the historical narrative we are presenting. We shall treat "Muhammad 1", who perished in the 620s, and any subsequent figures assuming his identity up until 638, as a singular entity under the name and title of Muhammad.

It is conceivable that during this period, the Arab chieftain **adopted the title of muhammad**. While Islamic tradition interprets it as “he who is worthy of praise”, “the praised one”, or “the most praised”, it overlooks the deep messianic significance of this unique title<sup>95</sup>. On one hand, it mirrors the appellation given to the prophet Daniel in the Bible. “muhammad” is indeed the Arabic rendition of the Hebrew “[ish]-hamudot” (ישׁ-הָמָדֹת) = Arabic “[mu]-ahmad”), meaning “highly esteemed”, “coveted”, “precious” (to God), and so “greatly beloved”, “adored”, “expected”. This is the moniker the Angel Gabriel uses to address Daniel three times (Dan 9:23; 10:11; 10:19), who acted as the Messiah’s precursor since he foretold his coming. On the other hand, recent linguistic studies have shown that this title was also attributed to the Messiah himself in ancient literature, especially from the perspective of Syriac Christianity<sup>96</sup>. This interpretation aligns with the notion of a “precursor Muhammad”, who also assumes aspects of the Messiah’s supposed role. This includes undertaking the rebuilding of the Temple, thereby becoming an integral part of the Messiah’s mission and, in essence, **a messiah himself**. Hence, could it be mere coincidence that this title was bestowed upon an Arab warchief who was actively heralding and striving for the imminent descent of the “Messiah-Jesus”?

### “Emigration”

History continues to unfold as the Arabs and their messianist preachers move forward. The tumultuous events and horrors of the Persian-Byzantine conflict have intensified the sense of an impending apocalypse. The Persian conquests of Egypt, the Levant, Anatolia, and Armenia, marked by widespread devastation, massacres, looting, enslavement, and uprisings, notably among the Jews, have heightened this feeling. The events in Jerusalem, its subsequent ruin, and the Persians’ removal of Christianity’s “True Cross” to their capital, Ctesiphon, along with other sacred relics and treasures, have further contributed to an escalating apocalyptic fervor. As a result, there is a significant surge in prophetic declarations that herald the return of the Messiah, further intensifying the belief that the end of days is more imminent than ever<sup>97</sup>.

<sup>95</sup> The reinterpretation of “Muhammad” as “worthy of praise” can be seen in the context of Muslims’ eagerness to find a prophecy about Muhammad in the Gospels, stemming from a concordist reading of the Quranic text (Q7:157, see page 140). This interpretation was likely influenced by the fact that the meaning of the root HMD in South Arabian languages also relates to the concept of “praise”. Anyhow, the redefinition seeks to align with the Greek term “periklutos” (περικλυτός), meaning “praised”, which is falsely believed to be mentioned in John’s Gospel, purportedly prophesying Jesus’ announcement of someone to come after him. However, the term used numerous times in John 14 & 16 is “parakletos” (παράκλητος), meaning “advocate”, “comforter”, “helper”, not “praised” (the word is the same without the vowels).

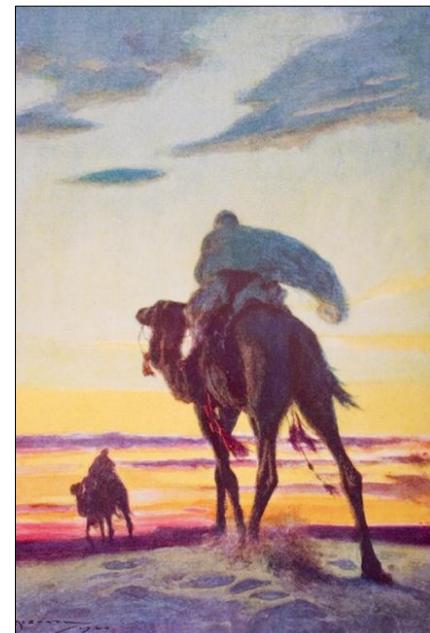
This reinterpretation is part of a broader attempt to link Islamic prophecy with Christian texts, suggesting a lineage of revelations that each foretells the next, culminating in the Quran as the final and perfect revelation. This approach has historical precedence: the Manicheans in the 4<sup>th</sup> century similarly attempted to associate their prophet, Mani, with passages from John’s Gospel, already identifying him with the announced “parakletos”. The Islamic adoption of this narrative contributes to the development of a theology of successive revelations, as detailed by Édouard M. Gallez in *Le Messie et son prophète* (vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p.335 ff.) and further discussed in “[References to Muhammad in the Quran: Lost Years since 1949? History of a Research](#)” in *Inârah volume 10, op. cit.* Gallez also wrote [an article on his website](#) about this.

<sup>96</sup> Robert M. Kerr, “[Du désir à la louange. À propos de la racine hmd et de la « préhistoire » de Muhammad](#) [From Desire to Praise: On the Root hmd and the ‘Prehistory’ of Muhammad]” in *Acta Orientalia Belgica XXXV*, Bruxelles - Lille, 2022, p.223; he also points out that the original Arabic spelling in the 7<sup>th</sup> century was “**mahmad**” and not “**muhammad**”, which was redone later.

A sixth occurrence of the root hmd is often overlooked because it seemingly cannot refer to the Prophet of Islam—Q17:79, “*It may be that your Lord will raise you to a **praised** position* (or a “praiseworthy station”) [“maqaman mahmudan”]”. Islamic interpretation relates this to Muhammad’s intercession on the Day of Judgment; our exegesis suggests it refers to Jerusalem’s Temple, as indicated in [Isaiah 64:11](#) (“all we held dear”).

<sup>97</sup> See Shoemaker’s *Apocalypse of Empire* (*op. cit.*).

Persia and Byzantium's "Great Game" is however on the verge of a significant shift with Heraclius's ascension to the Byzantine throne in 610. Starting in 620, Heraclius initiates preparations for **a grand reconquest**. His forces draw in traditional Arab Christian allies such as the Ghassanids, positioned between Syria and Mesopotamia, alongside other Arab Christian groups. Gradually, Byzantium starts reclaiming territories previously lost to the Persians. By 622, Heraclius's counteroffensive is well underway, achieving significant victories against the Persians in Cappadocia (bordering northern Syria), which paves the way for an advance into Persia. By 624-625, Heraclius penetrates deep into Mesopotamian territory, and by the end of 627, he strikes a decisive blow, leading to his complete victory and the capitulation of Persia. This turn of events poses a serious threat to the Qurayshi and Judeo-Nazarene factions that had allied with the Persians during their foray into Palestine. It also jeopardizes various movements of armed prophetism that had received Persian support, riding on the coattails of its initial conquests. Fearing Byzantine retaliation, the Qurayshis and Judeo-Nazarenes who stayed behind begin to distance themselves from the Jerusalem veterans, indicating they no longer belong. Consequently, these veterans find themselves forced to depart<sup>98</sup>, seeking refuge from the reach of Byzantine forces by **fleeing south to Arabia**, where they join Arab and Judeo-Nazarene comrades in regions beyond Byzantine control.



**Muhammad's flight to Medina**

(A.C. Michael) — [Wikigallery](#)

The "exodus" unfolds along the caravan routes, reaching Petra, a formidable sanctuary for the Nabataean Arabs and a location of a Christian bishopric (which should prove then less receptive to Judeo-Nazarene advocacy). It possibly included Hegra<sup>99</sup>, another ancient Nabataean city with significant troglodyte elements akin to Petra, and perhaps extended to Yathrib, an oasis city in the Hejaz desert. Yathrib is notable for its long-standing settlement by Judeo-Nazarenes<sup>100</sup>, although the specifics of Muhammad's presence there remain a topic of debate among scholars. The conversion to Judeo-Nazarene teachings had already transformed Arabs into "**emigrants in the path of God**" ("*muhajirun fi sabili llahi*" in Arabic<sup>101</sup>). Their flight to Arabia then took on a deeper, both literal and religious, significance, transforming this phrase

<sup>98</sup> This theme of "expulsion" appears in numerous instances in the Quran. Some references undoubtedly concern the expulsion from Jerusalem in 614 (as in Q2:217), while others highlight how "emigrants" were "expelled from their homes" (as in Q3:195).

<sup>99</sup> Hegra is also known as Mada'in Salih, literally meaning the city of the "righteous" or the "pious". It is also a reference to Salih, an Islamic prophet who is mentioned numerous times in the Quran. The Quran also refers to this location as Al-Hijr, which means "the stone" or "the stone city" (very similar to Petra), due to its troglodyte nature (Al-Hijr / الحجر also sounds very close to "al hijrah", the "emigration" / الهجرة even though the two words do not share the same Arabic root). The city seems to have been very well-known to the audiences of the Quranic preaching.

<sup>100</sup> The Jewish presence in Yathrib is attested to for a very long time (among others by Pliny the Elder and Ptolemy) but according to A. L. de Prémare (*Les Fondations de l'Islam*, *op. cit.*, p.102), the existence of a Jewish rabbinic home in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries is denied by the Jewish sources themselves. Who were these non-rabbinical Jews living in Yathrib then? Judeo-Nazarenes?

<sup>101</sup> The expression has remained in the Quran in many instances, with a sense of conversion, change of life, consecration to the divine project, and also warring, as in Q22:58: "**Those who have emigrated in the way of God and then were killed or died, God will indeed provide them with a good provision**". While the Quran does not explicitly associate the notion of "emigration" with its depiction of the events of Jerusalem in 614 (see on page 145), the term could logically include the combatants involved in them.

into a symbol of a foundational event: the “pure” do not merely flee; they prepare themselves. This moment echoes the Biblical exodus of the Jewish people, led by Moses away from Pharaoh’s Egypt towards the “promised land”, now re-envisioned as the act of an all-powerful divine envoy in the Judeo-Nazarene interpretation. In the Biblical tradition, the Hebrews’ desert journey was a time of purification and divine formation, preparing them to enter the “promised land”. This narrative serves as a blueprint for the Emigrants, a model to be emulated and even surpassed, reenacting and fulfilling Biblical history. From the desert—the place of purification—begins **the reconquest of the Holy Land**, mirroring Joshua’s Biblical ancient conquest. Thus, the city associated with Muhammad (Yathrib? Hegra? Petra?) is renamed Medina, echoing the city from which the Maccabean revolt for liberation of Israel sprang (an uprising for the liberation of Israel in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE)<sup>102</sup>. From this point, the world’s submission unfolds, culminating in the descent of the new Moses, Messiah-Jesus, God’s deputy on earth, onto the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This reconquest follows the trajectory of Biblical history, passing through Petra—the iconic site associated with Moses and the Exodus<sup>103</sup>—before crossing the Jordan River into the Holy Land, just as Joshua did<sup>104</sup>, then proceeding to Jerusalem, and ultimately, rebuilding the Temple at the very “Place of Abraham”<sup>105</sup>. Hence, the exile of this Judeo-Nazarene-Arab collective marked the dawn of a new era, initiating its own calendar. This period starts with **the year 1 of the Hijra**, symbolizing exodus, exile, emigration, and consecration in God’s path<sup>106</sup>.



**Joshua and the Israelites crossing the Jordan river** (Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld)

[Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

<sup>102</sup> First Book of the Maccabees 2:23

<sup>103</sup> According to ancient Jewish and Christian traditions, Petra could very well be **Kadesh** (also spelled Cades), the site of the Israelites’ last encampment near the end of their Exodus wanderings, from which they commenced the conquest of the “holy land”. Today, there is still a Wadi Musa, or “Valley of Moses”; this name has also been given to the town serving as the gateway for tourists visiting the Petra archaeological park.

These traditions suggest that **Miriam**, the sister of Moses and Aaron, was buried in this vicinity (referenced in Numbers 20:1). Jerome of Stridon, citing Eusebius of Caesarea regarding Kadesh and mentioning Miriam’s tomb, notes its existence near Petra in the 5<sup>th</sup> century in his *Biblical Onomastica*. Miriam occupies a significant role in Judeo-Nazarene traditions and early Islam, since she is one of the few women mentioned in the Quran. She is analogously linked to Mary, the mother of Jesus (Q3:35-45; 19:27-28; 66:12), suggesting a parallel between the duo of Miriam-Moses and Mary-Jesus (see Édouard M. Gallez’s *Le Messie et son prophète, op. cit.*, vol.1, p.17 ff. and his article “[Les « deux Marie » du Coran, Guillaume Dye et l’iconographie](#) [The “two Marys” of the Quran, Guillaume Dye and iconography]”).

Similarly, Aaron is highly esteemed in the Quran. His final resting place is associated with Mount Hor (referenced in Numbers 21), now known as Jebel Haroun, near Petra. Aaron’s tomb continues to be a site of veneration in Islam. Contrary to Aaron who became a prophet within Islam, Miriam was largely overlooked by later Islamic tradition

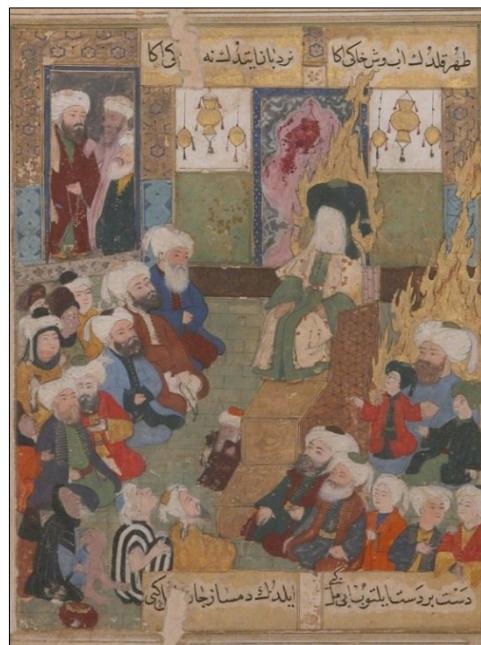
<sup>104</sup> Book of Joshua 3

<sup>105</sup> According to Jewish tradition, Mount Moriah is the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It is the site where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac, who was ultimately spared at the last moment with a ram provided as an alternative (cf. Genesis 22). This location is quintessentially associated with Abraham. The Quran mentions it in Q3:97 (see page 136).

<sup>106</sup> There is no evidence that the Hijra calendar was established during the actual Hijra. The only references available indicate that Arab leaders (Umar) used such a system around the years 639-640. It is very possible, therefore, that the calendar was instituted retroactively, as a means of reinterpreting past events to justify the new authority.

The settlement in Medina significantly bolsters the strength of the new community. Local Judeo-Nazarenes and Arabs join it, a unification formalized by the [Constitution of Medina](#). They become known as the “*ansar*”, “God’s helpers”, a title celebrated in Islamic tradition (refer to page 32 and note 58 for a detailed explanation on the Judeo-Nazarene origin of this expression). The mission to preach the return of the Messiah to Jerusalem, along with its promises—both messianist salvation of the world and material gains (such as spoils and power)—attracts more followers to the cause. The community grows powerful enough to subdue other tribes, which are more or less stripped of their Christianity. Islamic history recounts the resistance led by women from Arab tribes, such as the aforementioned Sajah (see note 82), highlighting the notable status of women in the then-Christianized Arabia (see note 66).

Additionally, lesser-known historical sources from the period, such as the [Armenian] *Chronicle of Sebeos* (also known as *Pseudo Sebeos* or *History of Heraclius*), provide accounts of Muhammad’s preaching: “*At this time [about 625-627] there was an Ishmaelite called Mahmet, a merchant; he presented himself to them [the Arabs] as though at God’s command, as a preacher, as the way of truth, and taught them to know the God of Abraham, for he was very well-informed, and very well-acquainted with the story of Moses...* [Mahmet, speaking to the Christianized Arabs] **God has promised this land** [the “promised land”] **to Abraham and his posterity after him forever (...)** **Now you, you are the sons of Abraham and God fulfills in you the promise made to Abraham and his posterity. Only love the God of Abraham** [reject the Christian Trinitarian vision of God], **go and take possession of your country which God gave to your father Abraham**<sup>107</sup>, and none will be able to resist you in the struggle, for God is with you”. A source that should be approached with caution, as with any historical source<sup>108</sup>, yet it remains one of the very few contemporary or near-contemporary accounts of Muhammad accessible to historians, dating from around 660<sup>109</sup>. This is significant, considering Muslim sources originate almost two centuries after Muhammad’s time. Its content stands in stark contrast to the traditional Muslim narrative, a discrepancy that will be explained later.



**Muhammad preaching**

Ottoman miniature, 16<sup>th</sup> cent.

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

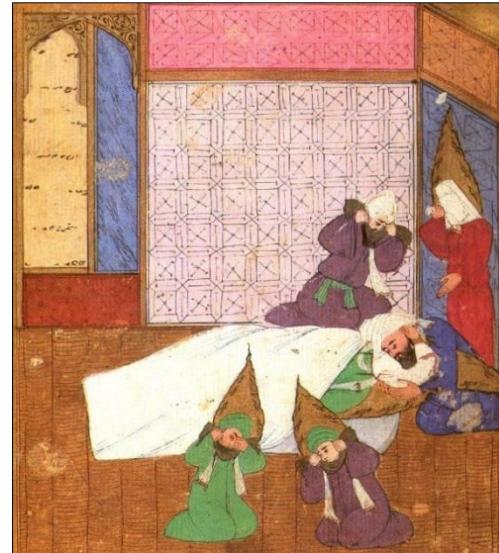
<sup>107</sup> Echoes of this preaching can be found in the Quran in Q19:40: “*We shall indeed inherit the earth and all that is therein*” (see page 143)—it is also found in Q5:21.

<sup>108</sup> Patricia Crone & Michael Cook particularly explored their interpretation of this passage in *Hagarism* (op. cit., pp. 6-8); Robert Hoyland has critically reviewed Sebeos’s writings, incorporating an analysis of other early sources in “*Sebeos, the Jews and the rise of Islam*” (in *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations*, Routledge, London, 1995), and then in *Seeing Islam as others saw it* (op. cit., pp.24-132). See also Stephen Shoemaker and Michael Penn’s work, as referenced in note 79.

<sup>109</sup> We should also give special attention to the *Doctrina Jacobi* (634), or *Teaching of Jacob*, a Greek anti-Jewish tract (refer to R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam...*, op.cit., p. 55). It mentions that “*the prophet*” (understood in the Jewish context as the **precursor of the Messiah of Israel**) had “*appeared coming with the Saracens [Arabs]*”, “*armed with a sword*” and “*was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Messiah who was to come*”. Another indication that the historical Muhammad was in fact heralding the imminent coming of the Messiah.

Gradually, Muhammad and his “colleagues”—other Judeo-Nazarene preachers and religious leaders (or those trained by them)—rally Arab clans and tribes to their cause. They effectively focus the apocalyptic expectations of many Arabs and their anticipated imminent arrival of the Messiah-Jesus on their project for Jerusalem, despite the failure of the 614 attempt. This effort leads to the formation of a significant military force. **The time for conquest is now.** Raids are launched into Persia, the Levant, and other areas, in a more or less coordinated effort by the various leaders. However, the initial skirmishes toward Palestine yield no significant success beyond the spoils<sup>110</sup>. The raid of 629, however, becomes memorable: the [Chronicle of Theophanes](#) recounts how an Arab expedition once again sets out to conquer the “promised land”. Emperor Heraclius has just expelled the Persians from Palestine and Syria and recaptured Jerusalem (he would soon return the “true cross” taken by the Persians), but his armies are depleted by this [never-ending war](#). Observing the mutual exhaustion of the two great empires contending for control of the Middle East, the Arab leaders and Judeo-Nazarene masters likely see a strategic opportunity. Their plan to conquer Judea from Arabia via Petra, and then to follow the Jordan River, crossing it to mimic the Biblical account of the Exodus, meets a harsh setback in [Mu'ta](#) against the Byzantine army, bolstered by Ghassanid contingents<sup>111</sup>. The defeat is harsh, with three of their top generals killed and the army of the “umma” severely weakened. Forced to retreat to Arabia, Muhammad and the religious leaders intensify their preaching to boost their troops’ morale and to launch further expeditions<sup>112</sup>.

Despite all his efforts, Muhammad does not witness the capture of Jerusalem. He dies<sup>113</sup> supposedly in Medina after ordering a final expedition to Syria around 632 (Usama ibn Zayd’s expedition, another significant failure<sup>114</sup>), and perhaps even after 634 (he is said to have led his troops this year during the Battle of Gaza<sup>115</sup>). Thus, the commonly accepted date of 632 for his death is not entirely certain. Following his demise, Muhammad’s influence wanes amidst the rivalries of emirs and chiefs. He likely attracted strong enmities within his troops due to the rigidity of his rule, especially among the tribes that were forcefully won over to his project. Moreover, Islamic tradition curiously retains several accounts suggesting that Muhammad died in a state



**The death of Muhammad** (Ottoman miniature; Ali is on the right, with a veiled face)  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>110</sup> In the [Chronicle of Jacob of Edessa](#), there is a reference to the expeditions of the Emigrants: “*the kingdom of the Arabians [arbaye], those whom we call Arabs [tayyaye], was established in the year when Heraclius, the king of the Romans, was in his eleventh year of reign, and Khusrau, the king of the Persians, was in his thirty-first year [620-21]*”. It further mentions, “*the Arabs began to conduct raids in the land of Palestine*” (*Chronicle*, 326, as cited in Hoyland’s *Seeing Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 160).

<sup>111</sup> The Battle of Mu’ta in 629, as mentioned by Theophanes, stands as one of the few events in Muhammad’s life attested by non-Muslim sources. This historical episode is often underemphasized in Islamic tradition, likely due to its nature as a defeat. It raises a pertinent question: **What was Muhammad’s objective in Palestine in 629, when, according to the Islamic narrative, his focus should have been entirely on Mecca?**

<sup>112</sup> The Quran preserves echoes of this in surah 30 (and probably 105). For further details, see page 148.

<sup>113</sup> Some Muslim traditions claim that he was murdered (poisoned by a Jewish widow).

<sup>114</sup> An event related by Muslim tradition, but very little known (cf. Hela Ouardi, *Les derniers jours...*, *op. cit.*, p.64 ff.).

<sup>115</sup> According to the *Chronicle* of Thomas the Presbyter, dated 640, which records a battle in 634 between the Romans (Byzantines) and the “*tayyâyé of MHMT*” near Gaza; this document represents the first explicit mention of a 7<sup>th</sup> century “MHMT” (“*muhammad*”, or “*mahmad*”). However, it raises questions about the reference: does “MHMT” indeed refer to Muhammad? Was the title “*muhammad*” attributed to another individual, or did it signify a symbolic authority under whose name the battle was waged? These hypotheses warrant further investigation.

of opprobrium and with his authority in question. Could this be a repercussion of **his overall failure to capture Jerusalem** and to fulfill the promises associated with his title? Reports even suggest that Umar prevented him from writing his will, and that his body laid unburied for several days while his companions contested for power (refer to note 94).

According to the Islamic narrative, military command then presumably passes to one of the generals, **Abu Bakr**, who is likely a rival of Muhammad and Umar, the future great leader. Abu Bakr's identity as the "first caliph" remains ambiguous in Muslim traditions, with a most odd name and no external sources mentioning him apart from the Islamic narrative. It appears more plausible that command among the Arabs is not unified at this time (such a unified command would not emerge until the Umayyad Caliphate, at the earliest). Instead, we are likely looking at a somewhat loose confederation of tribal chiefs, warlords, and "armed prophets" who are relatively independent and possibly competing with each other (refer to the figures of Maslama, Sajah, Tulayha, and Aswad mentioned in note 82), and are partly influenced by Judeo-Nazarene religious leaders. Despite this, the apocalyptic-messianist propaganda does not diminish, fueled more than ever by the evolving geopolitical context.

Abu Bakr's death in Medina around 634 remains shrouded in uncertainty, much like his whole figure<sup>116</sup>. Following his death, another Arab leader, possibly his rival, **Umar ibn al-Khattab**, assumes command of the army tasked with seizing Jerusalem. The campaign to capture the Holy Land, indeed, continues. This army includes the Emigrants and Arabs who had joined their cause, while other factions, perhaps less persuaded by Judeo-Nazarene aspirations, direct their raids toward Persia or Syria. Consequently, Arab incursions in the Levant intensify, facing little effective resistance from the Byzantine army. The prolonged Byzantine conflict, concluding around 629, had severely depleted Byzantium's human, military, and economic resources, leaving it increasingly unable to counter Arab advances. The raiding factions are joined by Arabs from the invaded territories, including traditional Arab federations allied with Byzantium, its auxiliary troops, and possibly the Jewish Arabs of the Levant, in a prevailing apocalyptic atmosphere. The conquest of Syria is notably facilitated by the presence of local Qurayshis and Judeo-Nazarenes who, already sympathetic to the cause but hesitant to join the Hijra ten years earlier due to fear of the Byzantine army, are now swayed by the momentum of conquest. This change in circumstances leads previously skeptical groups to join the movement and its ideological fervor, also celebrated in Muslim tradition as "ansar", or "God's helpers", alongside the initial ones from Medina.

More broadly, we observe Byzantium's gradual acquiescence, albeit not without resistance, to the shifting of its authority and power to its Arab auxiliary forces (its "federates"). They are already tasked with administrative duties in the Levantine territories reclaimed from the Persians (a similar phenomenon is observed in Persian territories to the East). In effect, these forces become autonomous from the empire, influenced by the Emigrants and various factions. Following the loss of Damascus in 634 and **the decisive defeat at Yarmuk** in 636 in Syria by a formidable Arab contingent, the emperor orders his forces not to engage in open conflict. He chooses to retreat to address other threats in the North and, presumably, to

<sup>116</sup> Some scholars suggest that Muhammad passed away in 634 (or possibly later), proposing that Umar was his immediate successor. According to this viewpoint, Abu Bakr may have been merely one of the military generals, without ever officially bearing the title of Caliph. This title was anyway retrospectively conferred upon him when Islamic history was being recorded, since the term "Caliph" was not observed prior to the reign of Abd al-Malik (starting in 685). Such a historical reinterpretation might have been intended to obscure Muhammad's attempts to conquer Jerusalem, thereby avoiding difficult questions about the "non-Islamic" objectives he pursued at the time. One could also hypothesize Muhammad living until the final conquest of Jerusalem in 638, with or without Umar, whose figure would then also have been rewritten and reinterpreted in the same way. Or also hypothesize that Umar also bore the "Muhammad" title (along with others?).

prepare for a large-scale reconquest, thereby consenting to a transfer of power. It is also important to highlight the resurgence of devastating plague epidemics in the Levant during this period (a recurrence of [Justinianic Plague](#), which will persist into the 8<sup>th</sup> century). These epidemics further discourage the Byzantines from resisting the handover of control to their auxiliaries. The plagues disproportionately spare the nomadic Arabs, unlike the sedentary populations in the Levant's agricultural regions and cities, helping to explain the nomads' relative resilience<sup>117</sup>.

Persia finds itself even more unable to resist the Arab advance, having been weakened more significantly than the Levant by the Persian-Byzantine war. Heraclius, with the aid of Turkish allies, had invaded its territory, causing a major upheaval in the Sassanid imperial order. The "king of kings", Khosrow II, had been forced to flee, and one of his sons seized power (after eliminating all his brothers), ultimately agreeing to Persia's surrender to Heraclius in 628. Khosrow is assassinated the same year, sparking a civil war amidst clashes among the major Persian feudal lords. [The empire begins to collapse](#), and the rise of Khosrow's grandson, Yazdegerd III, to the throne does little to stem the tide against the Arabs. Their incursions from Arabia in the 630s also gain momentum with the support of local Arabs, notably the federates Byzantium had positioned in Persia to help control and defeat its age-old foe, and Persia's own federates (Lakhmids). The [battle of Qadisiya](#) in 636 marks a turning point similar to the "Yarmuk" for Sassanid Persia, succeeded by the fall of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 641, and the battle of Nihavend in the subsequent year<sup>118</sup>. Mesopotamia capitulates to the Arabs and their allies, who then divide power with the feudal lords. The emperor retreats to the East, to Parthia (present-day Iran), which eventually falls to the Arabs as well.

The events historically referred to as the "Arab conquest" (especially in Islamic narratives) are far more complex than a simple invasion by Arab forces from the desert. Although such an assault did take place, marked by violence, it was part of a broader process where Arab factions, who were already settled across the Middle East, ascended to power amid an overarching apocalyptic atmosphere, as both imperial powers had become unable to oppose them, and even accepted the shift of power to their former allies in some way. These events are better understood as part of a "decolonization" process akin to those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during which Western imperial powers withdrew, handing over power to local elites with whom they had previously collaborated. It's also crucial to highlight the millenarian and notably Judeo-Nazarene motivations of the faction that would ultimately capture Jerusalem.

This backdrop sets the stage for the Emigrants to advance towards Palestine and approach Jerusalem. After numerous sieges, battles, and massacres, the city, once reclaimed for the Christians by Heraclius, finds itself unable to mount any defense. By 634, the Arabs have already encamped between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, effectively hindering Christians from practicing their devotions, a situation lamented by the city's bishop, Sophronius, in his



**Khalid ibn al-Walid fighting the Byzantines in Yarmuk**  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>117</sup> See Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path...*, op. cit., p.94.

<sup>118</sup> See Parvaneh Pourshariati's *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire, the Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2008.

Christmas sermon. He ultimately decides to open the city's gates to them. The exact date of this momentous event, occurring between 635 and 638, remains uncertain. However, its significance is undeniable: the Emigrants have captured Jerusalem, bringing their long-held aspirations closer to realization—**the rebuilding of the Temple and the anticipated return of the Messiah**.

### The Messiah does not return

Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, the Emigrants, under the guidance of their Judeo-Nazarene leaders, make a beeline for the Temple Mount, eager to initiate their mission. “*When they (the Arabs) came to Jerusalem, they were with them men from among the sons of Israel who showed them the place of the Temple*”, an account reveals<sup>119</sup>. Their objective is unmistakable: to **rebuild the Temple**, an endeavor they undertake with evident zeal. Theodore, an eyewitness, recounts, “*running quickly they reached the place that is called the Capitolium [the Temple Mount]. They took some men, some by force and some willingly, to clean the place<sup>120</sup> and to build that accursed thing, which is for prayer and which is called by them a ‘mizgita’ [a place of prostration, equivalent to Arabic ‘masjid’, eventually leading to the term ‘mosque’]*”<sup>121</sup>. Despite resistance from figures like Sophronius, the fervent group commence their work, not awaiting the arrival of Umar, the military leader who would only reach Jerusalem in 638. Nevertheless, Umar would retroactively be credited with the Temple’s reconstruction, as indicated in the *Secrets of Rabbi Ben Yohai*, which mentions a “*second king who will arise from Ishmael [Umar]*” and “*will repair the breaches of the Temple*”<sup>122</sup>. A significant structure of stone, marble<sup>123</sup>, and wood is erected, mirroring the [Holy of Holies](#) from the ancient Jewish Temple, though this detail would fade from Muslim memories, which long identified it as the “*Mosque of Umar*”<sup>124</sup>. This term would also be applied to the subsequent structure that Caliph Abd al-Malik will build in its stead fiftyish years later, namely the Dome of the Rock, which still stands today in an octagonal rather than cubic shape.

As fervor reaches its peak, marked by Umar’s establishment of the Hijra calendar around 639, sacrifices and rites are poised to be conducted. The Judeo-Nazarenes invoke the figure of the Messiah, anticipating his return. However, he does not appear. The Judeo-Nazarene priests

<sup>119</sup> Mid-11<sup>th</sup> cent. “Letter from the academy of Jerusalem to the diaspora communities in Egypt”, in Robert Hoyland (*Seeing Islam...*, *op. cit.*, pp.529-530).

<sup>120</sup> Besides the 614-617 Jewish rule, the site served as a dumping ground.

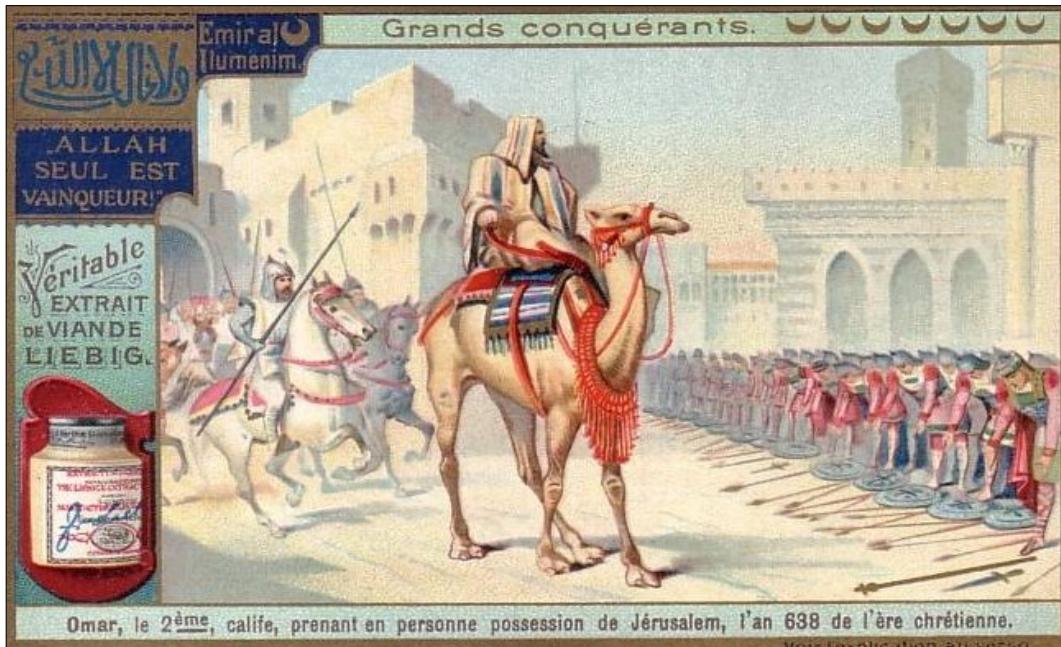
<sup>121</sup> John Moschius’s Georgian version of his *Pratum spirituale*, in Shoemaker’s translation (*A Prophet has appeared*, *op. cit.*, p.76); also in Robert Hoyland (*Seeing Islam...*, *op. cit.*, p.63).

<sup>122</sup> 8<sup>th</sup>-cent. Jewish writing cited by Crone and Cook (*Hagarism*, *op. cit.*, p.10). Further evidence supporting the reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem can be found in various sources. Arculphus’s account (or Arculf) from his 670’s visit to Jerusalem, detailed below, provides one such testimony. The *Chronicle of Sebeos* references an alliance between Jews and Ishmaelites for the reconstruction. Anastasius of Sinai, a 7<sup>th</sup>-century monk who witnessed this reconstruction, mentioned a “*multitude of Egyptians*” working on it, along with references to “*demons*” (as referenced in Shoemaker’s *A Prophet has appeared*, pp. 106-107). Islamic tradition also describes this alliance and reconstruction, albeit through a distorted narrative. According to this narrative, the “*Jew*” Ka'b al-Ahbar, a rabbi from Yemen purportedly converted to Islam and a companion of Umar during his visit to Jerusalem, was involved in the construction of what is described as a “*synagogue*” or oratory on the Temple Mount. Significantly, the Quran also describes the Arab-Nazarene alliance and its project of rebuilding the Temple, and some passages even seem to relate to the reconstructed Temple (see p.145 ff.).

<sup>123</sup> Theodore wrote about the role of a marble mason who would have been excommunicated by Sophronius for his part in the reconstruction.

<sup>124</sup> Leading to a confusion with the future “[mosque of Umar](#)” built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, located opposite the Holy Sepulcher.

attempt to placate the Arab warriors and their leaders, who are eager to be recognized as the chosen ones in the new kingdom of Messiah-Jesus. Yet, as time passes, it becomes undeniable that **the Day of Judgment has not arrived**, and they have been misled. Beginning in 640, the Arabs start to harbor doubts, gradually realizing that the Messiah will not return as the Judeo-Nazarenes had promised, having deceived them. Their leaders are thus branded as swindlers and traitors. The “*umma*” blows up, leading to a dramatic purge where many are executed since they have neither Messiah nor divine kingdom to offer.

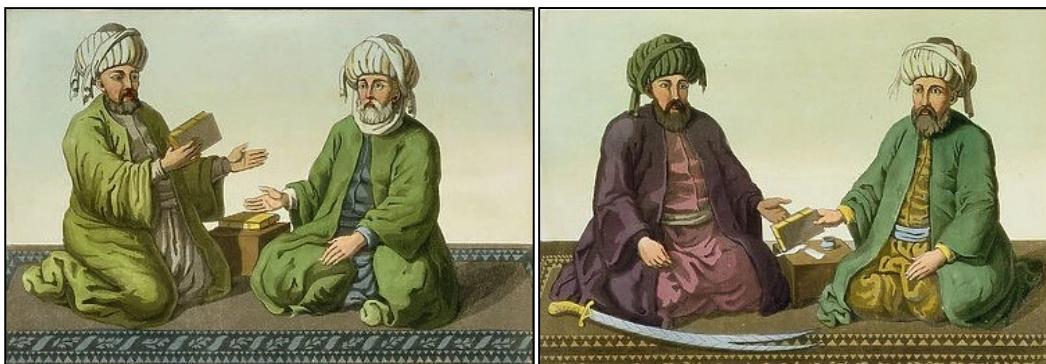


**Umar ibn al Khattab entering Jerusalem**  
 (promotional campaign for the Liebig brand, circa 1920, public domain)

Still, there is a divine kingdom for the Arabs: the one they just made for themselves. The apocalyptic expectation does not fade; rather, it intensifies. It is closer than ever because God has indeed established his reign, as evidenced by the recent conquests “in the name of God”. By 640, leveraging the Byzantine Empire’s exhaustion and the gradual transfer of power to Arab control, the various Arab factions, including Umar’s, have achieved substantial military dominance over a vast portion of the Middle East. The Byzantine Empire, significantly weakened by Arab advances, is confined to the borders of Anatolia and cut off from its North African territories, with an Arab warlord, Amr ibn al-As, who is notably influenced by Ethiopian interests, invading Egypt as early as 639. Moreover, Persia, having been subdued by Heraclius, is also progressively coming under Arab dominion. By ousting the Judeo-Nazarenes, Umar kills two birds with one stone: he not only claims the conquests and power for himself but also aspires to seize religious leadership. **This moment marks the nascent intuition of Islam.** Yet, it would take nearly a century for the foundational elements of its doctrine to crystallize, and at least two more centuries for it to firmly establish and structure itself.

## ANARCHY IN ARABIA

Let us now focus to the historical narrative of the rise of Arab dominance in the Middle East, purportedly “in the name of God”, leading to the establishment of Islam. This period is notably challenging to unravel due to the loss or destruction of many documents, particularly the “proto-Islamic” literature up until the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, later traditions aimed to craft an idealized account of the early days of Islam, contributing to inaccuracies in the chronology we are about to explore (see note 77). This later tradition, as discussed previously, sought to establish Abu Bakr as the “first caliph”, whose allegedly rule lasted for two years (632-634), followed by Umar, who assumed the caliphate until his assassination in 644. He was then succeeded by Uthman, termed the “third caliph”, until his assassination in 656. Ali then assumed the role of “caliph” until 661, when he too was assassinated. Subsequently, Muslim historiography retrospectively designated these four leaders as “rightly guided”, or “*rashidun*”. Following this period, the Umayyad dynasty emerged, led initially by Muawiya and his successors, amidst a backdrop of civil unrest that eventually subsided with the ascension of Abd al-Malik in 685.



**The four “rightly-guided caliphs”**

(Engraving by V. Raineri in *L'Histoire des Nations*, 19th c., [out of copyright](#))  
 From left to right: Abu Bakr, Umar, Ali (with his “Zulfiqar” sword) and Uthman

However, in reality, it is inaccurate to speak of caliphs or a caliphate before Abd al-Malik during this tumultuous period. No contemporary sources mention the four “rightly guided” caliphs; they, at most, refer to an “Arab king” and Arab factions leaders. Moreover, one cannot assert the existence of a genuinely unified Arab authority before Muawiya or even before Abd al-Malik. Similarly, there is no clear notion of a Muslim empire in the Middle East until the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate, which began in 750. The decline of the two great Persian and Byzantine empires, along with the simultaneous ascendancy of Arab power, actually marked the onset of **a period characterized by varying degrees of violent anarchy lasting at least forty years**. Arab factions established themselves as territorial baronies, engaging in conflicts and internal strife. Leaders were frequently assassinated, leading to further internal conflicts and massacres. Amidst this chaos, there emerged a politico-religious competition driven by the ongoing prospect of the Apocalypse and the aspiration to rule “in the name of God” or as “God’s envoy”, invoking divine authority to establish the long-awaited “kingdom of God”.

We shall examine this period with a particular focus on its religious aspects. We’ll explore the fate of the Judeo-Nazarenes and their doctrine, the evolution of Arab beliefs, and **the gradual formation of Islam**.

## The Apocalypse without the Messiah

Acknowledging the failure of the Messiah's anticipated arrival as per the Judeo-Nazarenes plan, and thereby their betrayal, Umar decides to eradicate their influence<sup>125</sup>. Their leaders are eliminated, their families expelled, and the remaining Judeo-Nazarenes in Syria face relentless disdain<sup>126</sup>. The original “*umma*” consisting of Judeo-Nazarenes, Emigrants, and supportive Arabs is disbanded as Umar seeks to consolidate and enhance his own rule. He takes control of the reconstructed Temple, denying access to all Jews and banishing them from Jerusalem (and Arabia). Yet not all Arabs agree with Umar: some continue to believe in the Judeo-Nazarenes’ vision and the Arab-Nazarene sacred alliance, leading to disputes over the Temple’s occupation and internal conflicts within the Arab faction in Jerusalem<sup>127</sup>. Meanwhile, those in regions far from Jerusalem, such as Syria and Egypt, appear more focused on their own conquests. This leads to a **phase of uncertainty and reformation of apocalyptic expectations**, now free from the doctrinal oversight of the Judeo-Nazarenes. New visions and initiatives emerge, driven by the creativity, interests, and ambitions of the different Arab leaders involved.

Chroniclers like Jacob of Edessa, archaeologists, and historians<sup>128</sup> indeed note a significant disorder in the orientation of buildings used by Arabs, indicating a general indecision in the direction of prayer (“*qibla*”). The earliest buildings, such as the Medina “mosques”<sup>129</sup>, seem to have been oriented towards Jerusalem<sup>130</sup> (North at least). However, some newer constructions deviate, pointing towards different directions for prayer<sup>131</sup>. This shift has led Édouard M. Gallez

<sup>125</sup> Our hypothesis regarding the fate of the Judeo-Nazarenes is notably derived from a critical analysis of historical records from the early days of Islam. This includes a reevaluation of Islamic traditions about the collaboration between Muslims and “Jews” and the tragic outcome for the “Jewish” tribes of Medina, as outlined in our introduction. They were, in fact, the Judeo-Nazarenes, whose legacy within Islam has been almost erased. It survived through altered and redacted memories in Islamic tradition, a process we will elaborate on. The curse that befell the Judeo-Nazarenes also affected their rabbinic Jewish relatives in Jerusalem, who had managed to return after the city’s capture by the Arabs. Due to their association with the failed Judeo-Nazarene project, they faced temporary expulsion from Jerusalem but eventually returned, as documented by Moshe Gil in *A History of Palestine, 634-1099* (Cambridge University Press, 1992). Furthermore, our hypothesis concerning the breakdown of the Arab-Nazarene alliance draws upon a critical examination of contemporary accounts that record a “Jewish”-Arab partnership aimed at the reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem and its subsequent failure, particularly noted in the *Chronicle of Sebeos*. However, our argument benefits mostly from a thorough exegesis of the Quran, providing further insight into these historical dynamics, as will be detailed later.

<sup>126</sup> The remaining Judeo-Nazarenes in Syria may have been the precursors to the Nusayri (Alawite, or Nusayriyya) sect. They originate from the very same regions in Syria (refer to our map of Syria on p. 37). The term “Nusayri” is derived from “Nazarene” (Arabic: “*nasara*”), meaning “small ‘*nasara*’” (a pejorative expression), and they are viewed with considerable contempt by Sunni Muslims. Joseph Azzi, in his book *Les Nousaïrites-Alaouites: histoire, doctrine et coutumes* [The Nusayrites-Alawites: History, Doctrine, and Customs] (Publisud, Paris, 2002), indicates that their religion developed in the 8-9<sup>th</sup> cent. as a form of syncretism between ancient Christianity and devotion to Muhammad, Ali and Salman al-Farisi, who we identified as a Judeo-Nazarene figure. Today, this group holds power in Syria, as exemplified by the Assad dynasty.

<sup>127</sup> Those disputes are related in Q8 and Q9, as will be detailed later. Sebeos also mentions them in his *Chronicle*.

<sup>128</sup> Notably Patricia Crone and Michael Cook (in *Hagarism...*, *op. cit.*), and most recently Dan Gibson (cf. note 131).

<sup>129</sup> Be cautious of anachronism! In its literal sense, a mosque (Arabic: “*masjid*”) means a place of prostration, not exclusively “an Islamic place of worship”. Historically, there were Christian mosques, and with our revised understanding of early Islam, it’s not accurate to automatically categorize a 7<sup>th</sup>-century mosque as “Islamic”.

<sup>130</sup> See p. 141 for an exegesis of the Quranic verses concerning the “*qibla*” towards Jerusalem.

<sup>131</sup> According to Dan Gibson’s research and measurements (see his latest book to date, *Let the Stones speak, Archaeology Challenges Islam*, Canbooks, Saskatoon, 2023; he also set an online database presenting mosques and buildings orientation: [https://nabataea.net/explore/founding\\_of\\_islam/qibla-tool/](https://nabataea.net/explore/founding_of_islam/qibla-tool/)), every “pre-rashidun” (built up to 630) mosque points in the general direction of Jerusalem (or Petra, as it happens that the directions to

to speculate a reversion to Syria based religious practices, where it could be that Qurayshi Arabs had a religious shrine dedicated to Abraham<sup>132</sup>. It might have been a temporary structure erected by the Judeo-Nazarenes after their 1<sup>st</sup>-century exile from Jerusalem (see the map on page 37). Moreover, there is increasing evidence suggesting a **devotion towards Petra**, the ancient Nabataean capital. This city, notable for its role in the caravan network and its symbolic significance in the Emigrants' Biblical reenactment of the "Holy Land" conquest, seems to become a focal point for several Arab factions. Numerous religious structures from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, including "mosques", are actually precisely oriented towards Petra. This indicates a significant cultic activity organized by prominent Arab factions, though details about these practices remain scarce until the second civil war (i.e. late 7<sup>th</sup> century). Arabs explore (or revert to) alternative forms of devotion, diminishing the importance of the Judeo-Nazarene failure and the Arab-Nazarene alliance, and the messianic significance previously attached to Jerusalem.

Yet, for some, Jerusalem's association as the "place of Abraham", the "place of the Messiah", and thus the location for the "Day of Judgment" remains crucial. This is notably true for an Arab group or faction referred to as the "*ahl al bayt*". A critical reevaluation of Islamic tradition leads us to conclude that their existence is not merely as the "people of the house [of Muhammad]", as traditionally stated within the Islamic narrative, but rather as the **"people of the Temple"**. This group, potentially including surviving Judeo-Nazarenes (Islamic tradition declared Salman al-Farisi a member of "*ahl al bayt*"), also encompasses Muhammad's family and descendants. Among them are his daughter Fatima, her husband Ali ibn Abu Talib—who was purportedly one of Muhammad's companions and cousin, according to tradition, but also a leader of an al-Hira (Lakhmid) Arab faction—their sons, and other figures of future Shiism. They were indeed "people of the Temple", steadfast in their commitment to the Temple's significance<sup>133</sup>.

Ultimately, the issue at hand involves **transcending the Judeo-Nazarene failure and offering an alternative**. The "religion of Abraham, Moses, and the Messiah-Jesus" could no longer be practiced as it had been under the guidance of Arab preachers operating under Judeo-Nazarene authority, especially since the Messiah failed to appear. By excluding the Judeo-Nazarenes, Arab leaders positioned the Arab nation as the new "*umma*", for being the legitimate descendants of Abraham through Ishmael, his eldest son, claiming divine selection over the Jewish lineage from Isaac. This led to the denunciation of Nazarenes as Jews, alongside rabbinic Jews, as evidenced in the Quranic text (refer to note 142). The faith was thus "Abrahamized" and "Ishmaelized": claiming direct descent from Abraham, the new chosen people, the Ishmaelites, now rulers of the Near East, asserted their divine right to dominate the world in God's name, enforce His law, and save it from evil. Some Arabs even assumed the

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Petra are kind of the same as to Jerusalem from every particular location of these mosques). The majority of the other 7<sup>th</sup> cent.-buildings point to Petra. None points to Mecca.

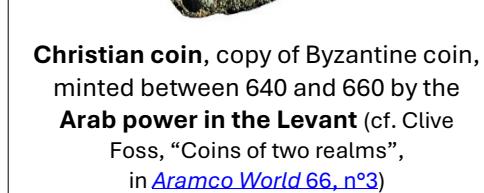
<sup>132</sup> Several traditions mention a "*masjid ibrahim*" (Abraham's prostration place) on top of a hill called Abu Qubays, in Syria, near Hama/Homs (Abu Qubays is the name of a city in its suburbs today), as documented by Édouard M. Gallez (in *Le Messie...*, vol.2, *op. cit.*, p.283 & 422). We shall see a little further on (on page 82) under what circumstances a hill near Mecca could also be named Abu Qubays.

<sup>133</sup> The term *bayt*, meaning "house" in Semitic languages, also conveys the notion of "temple" or "house of God", especially when referring to the Temple of Jerusalem in Hebrew and Aramaic contexts. This layered meaning is reflected in the Quranic text as well, where it actually means "Temple of Jerusalem" (refer to page 136). Following this tradition, the conquerors named the reconstructed Temple of Jerusalem "*bayt al-maqdis*", which translates to "holy house" or "holiest temple". The interpretation of "*ahl al-bayt*" in Islamic tradition to mean "the people of the house", referring to Muhammad's friends and relatives, seems forced upon considering that "*ahl*" initially means "tent" (and considering that "*bayt*" is also used in the context of the Kaaba, underscoring its significance as a "temple"). "*ahl*" historically denotes a shared living space or household. It then broadens to imply a family or community of relatives, and by extension, a group united by a common characteristic (as in "*ahl al kitab*", the "people of the scripture", or "*ahl al madinat*", the "people of Medina"). Consequently, translating "*ahl al bayt*" simply as "people of the house" results in an absurd tautology, effectively meaning "household of the house".

messianist role they previously ascribed to the Messiah, especially their leaders. This is reflected in Umar's illustrious title, “*al faruq*”, “**the savior**”<sup>134</sup>, and similarly in Ali's legendary “Zulfiqar” sword, which also symbolizes his role as a “savior” (an indication of the rivalry between these two Arab leaders?)<sup>135</sup>. Likewise, Ali's very name (literally the “High One”, or the “Exalted”) hints at a messianic title. This phenomenon mirrors later historical messianist movements that claim to act under a higher principle, whether it be God, his Messiah, Reason, the sense of History, or “Manifest Destiny”, to establish a utopian world. When the principle is found lacking, they feel justified to act in its stead, hence adopting grandiose titles. Do Umar or Ali then see themselves as saviors in lieu of the absent Messiah? Or do they propose a new method to beckon his return, perhaps through a renewed temple cult? The faction comprising Emigrants and supportive Arabs, initially united to seize Jerusalem and initiate the Day of Judgment, crumbles with the Judeo-Nazarene project's failure. The prospect of restoring this unity becomes increasingly illusory as the Arab expansion in the Middle East amplifies the power of warlords and faction leaders, thereby exacerbating their disagreements. Consequently, Umar is assassinated in 644.

A new contender for messianist power, **Uthman ibn Affan** from the Umayyad clan, seems to emerge. Historically aligned with Ethiopian interests, he swiftly appoints one of his loyalists to lead Egypt, which had already been captured from the Byzantines, while his cousin Muawiya

has taken control of conquered Syria, establishing his base in Damascus. Together, they dominate the Mediterranean edge of the Middle East—essentially the former territories of Byzantium. Muawiya even launches multiple campaigns against Byzantium. Despite this violent opposition, the Arab leaders in the Levant do not advocate for a radically new order. Instead, they remain within the Byzantine sphere of influence, assimilating into its imperial power structures, and minting coins that follow Byzantine designs, complete with the Emperor's image. As previously mentioned, the transition of power in this region resembles more of a shift from the empire to its erstwhile allies than a traditional conquest<sup>136</sup>.



<sup>134</sup> See Robert Kerr's “« Farüqter Heiland »...” et le Hajj original à Jérusalem, quelques remarques sur le messianisme de l'islam naissant [The “*faruq* savior” and the original “*hajj*” in Jerusalem, some remarks on the messianism of early Islam]” in *Inārah* volume 10, *op. cit.*; Kerr explained the Christian Aramaic origins of “*faruq*”, meaning “the divider”, “the one who separates” (right from wrong, good from evil), as a title given to the Messiah. He points out that lesser-known Islamic tradition has also bestowed this title upon Muhammad and Ali.

<sup>135</sup> “Zulfiqar” originates from “*dhu al faqar*”, “the one who divides, who separates”, sharing the same *frq* root as “*faruq*” (see note 134). Early tradition describes a “double edged sword”—this suggests a connection with the description of the Apocalypse's Messiah (Revelation 1:16, “a sharp double-edged sword came from his mouth”, and Revelation 19:21, “and the rest were killed with the sword that proceeded from the mouth”). Later traditions have significantly altered its deep messianic symbolism, transforming “Zulfiqar” into a sword with a double tip.

<sup>136</sup> This is what happened for most of Western countries' colonies which gained independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the existing power structures were largely maintained; civil servants simply switched allegiances; monetary systems continued to be controlled by the former colonial powers to a certain extent (for example, the CFA Franc in Africa, which remains under the control of the Bank of France); and the destinies of these nations remained interconnected (as illustrated by the British Commonwealth and its dominions)—cf. Habib Tawa, *op. cit.*



**Ali holding Zulfiqar**  
Detail of an Ottoman miniature  
[Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

Furthermore, there is no actual “Islamic power” yet, even in the case of Uthman: on the contrary, his coins, which should bear the personal insignia of his rule, feature **Christian symbols** of Byzantium, such as the cross. Moreover, Arab coins minted in Jerusalem with Jewish symbols, including a [menorah](#)—a sign of divine presence in the Temple of Jerusalem—have been discovered<sup>137</sup>. Contemporary accounts may criticize the Arabs, yet they do not identify them with Islam. References to the Quran or the Prophet are absent; at most, there are mentions of a “unorthodox” Christology. This divergence is exemplified in the 644 controversy between Mar John Sedra, the Jacobite Patriarch of Homs, Syria, and its emir, the Arab governor (according to Islamic tradition, he might have been Said ibn Amir al-Jumahi, purportedly a companion of Muhammad, or Umayr ibn Sa'd al-Ansari, another companion—raising the question, was the latter among the historical “ansar”? ). The debate focuses on Jesus, including prophecies about him in the Torah, his divinity, and his messianic role, without mentioning Muhammad, any Arab prophet, Islamic prophecy, divine revelation, or the Quran<sup>138</sup>. What’s even more intriguing is that the emir called in “*a Jewish man who was considered by them [the Arabs] an expert of scripture*” to respond to Mar John. Could their expert have been a Judeo-Nazarene?

Similarly, Islam is not apparent in Mesopotamia at this time. Arab governors and chiefs mint their coins using symbols from the Persian empire, their power gradually surpassing that of the imperial authority and significant Persian feudal lords, until they assumed control over all of Western Persia by the 660s. They integrated into the imperial frameworks, even continuing to mention the name of the Emperor on their currency. Additionally, their coins featured **symbols of Zoroastrianism**, the religion of the imperial power. However, the earliest expressions of Arab dominion “**in the name of God**” started to appear on the coins, with an Arabic inscription (the “[basmala](#)”) indicating the Arab chiefs’ claims to power. In this way, the new Arab leaders presented themselves as proxies for the empires, or even as the new emperors, gradually embedding divine justifications into their establishment of power.



**A coin minted by an Arab governor in Persia (656)**, modeled after Sassanid Persian drachms. The obverse features the name of Emperor Yazdegerd III (in Pahlavi) and his effigy, which is inspired by that of Khosrow II (Yazdegerd III died in 651). The reverse showcases Zoroastrian symbols associated with the cult of the sacred fire [in green], including [fire burning on an altar flanked by two priests](#). Crescents and stars, symbols representing the fire on the altar, appear on both sides of the coin. The Arabic inscription “*bsm llh*”, meaning “in the name of God” [in red], is found on the obverse. It is also noteworthy that there is no mention of Uthman. (CNG - <https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=119041>)

<sup>137</sup> Cf. [https://www.coinbooks.org/v21/esylum\\_v21n06a28.html](https://www.coinbooks.org/v21/esylum_v21n06a28.html); the coin would however date from after 661.

<sup>138</sup> This discussion has been translated and commented by Michael P. Penn in his books *When Christian first met Muslims* (op. cit., pp.200-208), and *Envisioning Islam* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, pp. 70-72 and 125-126); see also Robert Hoyland’s *Seeing others...* (op. cit. pp.459-465), and Édouard M. Gallez’s *Le Messie...* (vol.2, op. cit., pp. 105-107).

These coins illustrate the **competitive rivalry and power struggle among Arab faction leaders**. In response to Uthman's claims, other chiefs assert their own. Islamic tradition explains how **Ali** also claims the right to govern "in the name of God," justifying this by proposing a transfer of Jesus' messianic role onto himself. Since Jesus did not return to Jerusalem, Ali positions himself as the voice of divine authority. This essentially casts him as a new Messiah, supplanting Jesus, or rather as Jesus' second coming (the *Parousia*)<sup>139</sup>, offering an argument of authority even more compelling than his familial connection as Muhammad's son-in-law. Interestingly, Muhammad appears to have been largely forgotten or discredited at this time, as there is no mention of him in any Arabic text or inscription from the latter half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The reference to Ali's family ties might best be seen as highlighting his connection to Judeo-Nazarene propaganda circles and his commitment to the messianist goal of establishing a "kingdom of God" with himself as the Messiah<sup>140</sup>. Meanwhile, another Arab faction leader, **Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr** consolidates his power in Petra (see note 159). As the son of a celebrated Emigrant initially allied with Uthman, he too seems to have claimed divine authority, as evidenced by his role in the second civil war (to be detailed later) and the veneration by many Arabs of the cult established in Petra.

Most likely, it is during this period, following the disillusionment with the Judeo-Nazarene project, that the early concepts of what would later become known as Muhammad's "**night journey**" in late Muslim tradition begin to take shape. Among the various Arab chiefs who profess to speak in the name of the Messiah and claim to wield his divine power—possibly including Ali?—some declare themselves to embody that role. Mirroring the expectations with Jesus, a candidate for messiahship might thus claim that he "ascended to Heaven" and subsequently "descended from Heaven" onto the Temple Mount, leveraging the sanctity of the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, and bolstering his own messianic claims and ambitions. It is only much later that this story becomes associated with the prophetic figure of Islam (for an analysis of its development, see below on page 101).

One can also imagine that from this moment on, Arab leaders seek to legitimize their rule by referring to their own sacred texts. Indeed, Islamic tradition emphasizes Uthman's compilation of the Quran and the distribution of reference copies throughout the vast territories under Arab control—known as the "Qurans of Uthman"<sup>141</sup>. Similarly, Shiite tradition asserts that Ali, too, writes down sacred texts at the same time. The primary concern is **to control the texts left by the Judeo-Nazarenes**, which supported the millenarist preaching of the Messiah's plan to return to Jerusalem and still form the basis of the divine power claimed by Arab rulers. The authorities are thus determined to recover them. Moreover, in their conquest and establishment of power, the Arabs encounter Christian and Jewish religious figures, whose faiths are more systematically organized than the Arab Christianized tribes. They possess books and pose challenging questions, as did Mar John Sedra with the emir of Homs. It becomes imperative to gather all texts associated with the Judeo-Nazarene teaching: the

<sup>139</sup> Mohamad Ali Amir-Moezzi highlighted the lesser known Shia tradition which details Ali's claims to messiahship; see *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant* [the silent Quran and the speaking Quran], CNRS Editions, Paris, 2010; "Le Shi'isme et le Coran [Shia Islam and the Quran]" in *Le Coran des Historiens* (op. cit.) ; *Ali, le secret bien gardé* [Ali, a well kept secret], CNRS Editions, Paris, 2020.

<sup>140</sup> There are no sources for these family connections outside of Islamic tradition, which may have later fabricated them to justify Ali within Islam's orthodoxy. The historical Muhammad appears to have been a Qurayshi from Syria, while Ali seems to have originated from al-Hira, in Mesopotamia, where his partisans particularly prosper. It is also possible that Ali could have been a "Muhammad" himself, leading to the creation of his familial ties to the future Prophet of Islam when the sacred history of the latter was being constructed.

<sup>141</sup> It seems far more likely that this story was rewritten later on, when Abd al-Malik produced his own version of the Quran around 700 and presented it as if it were that of his Umayyad relative, Uthman—see Stephen Shoemaker's *Creating the Quran, A Historico-Critical Study*, University of California Press, 2022.

Judeo-Nazarene instructions for their preachers (“say this”, “do that”), the personal notes and memory aids of the Arab preachers (to prepare their sermons), verbatim notes taken by the Emigrants during the discourses of the preachers, and original Judeo-Nazarene texts (their Torah, Gospel, and the Arabic lectionary they created for the Arabs, as previously detailed). This endeavor aims to filter these texts to affirm the Arabs’ identity as God’s chosen descendants of Abraham for his grand plan. Conversely, any material that undermines this new narrative of power, including explicit mentions of the Arab-Nazarene alliance or commendation of past Judeo-Nazarene leaders, must be purged. Their condemnation must also be justified. This involves modifying, correcting, and reinterpreting the texts, and, if necessary, composing new ones<sup>142</sup>. This is how the **proto-Quran** (or more likely proto-Qurans), which will lay the groundwork for the future Islamic Quran, gradually takes shape.

What could be the meaning and scope of such texts during the years 650-660 and beyond? They are certainly not regarded as “divine revelation” at the time, as no testimonies mention this before the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, they likely serve a dual purpose: as catechetical material for the new conquerors and as a basis for claims against Jews and Christians (and their own texts). Furthermore, they are intended to justify the divine authority of the leaders, leading to the highly plausible hypothesis that various factions (such as those led by Uthman, Ali, Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr, etc.) compiled **different collections**<sup>143</sup>. Each faction aimed to monopolize the Judeo-Nazarene legacy, the heritage of the Emigrants, and most of all the messianist legacy.

The rivalry among leaders is intensifying. **Territorial conquests** elevate the competition to a new level, providing leaders and factions with additional resources and power, fueling their ambitions for dominance “in the name of God.” The prophesied apocalypse seems to be indeed unfolding as Arab expansion relentlessly overwhelms the Persian and Byzantine empires, weakened by centuries of conflict. An impressive and efficient system is established to support and solidify the new Arab rule: the expansion campaigns are decentralized, led and organized by autonomous emirs at the helm of their armies. They exploit divisions among kings and local chiefs, resentment towards the imperial rule, negotiating surrenders and securing tributes. They incorporate local troops, mostly Christian, who become apocalypse warriors. To aid them, garrison towns known as “amsar” are constructed from scratch to serve as bases for

<sup>142</sup> The beginning of Q9 as well as passages from Q8 truly could be such new compositions, given their distinct nature from the rest of the Quranic text (see our exegesis on page 145). Moreover, the need to condemn the former masters led to the Judeo-Nazarenes being conflated with the dogmatic condemnations of rabbinic Jews, which were already a part of the original Arab-Nazarene preaching, as recorded in the preachers’ notes. For instance, the conspicuous addition of the phrase “*and the Nazarenes*” to what would become Q5:51 verse “*Do not take the Jews and the Nazarenes [‘wa al nasara’] as allies/friends. They are allies/friends of each other*” may have been intended to warn the Arabs against any lingering influence of the Judeo-Nazarenes. This inclusion leads to significant contradictions in its Islamic interpretation, portraying Nazarenes as Christians and compelling Muslims to believe that Jews and Christians were allies and friends, despite their animosity towards each other in the 7<sup>th</sup> century; moreover, “Christians”(Nazarenes) are thus depicted as enemies, even though other verses present them as friendly. This logic applies similarly to all seven occurrences of the phrase “*the Jews and/or the Nazarenes [‘nasara’]*” in the Quranic text (see a more detailed analysis in note 254).

Ongoing research by specialists has led to the identification of numerous other such insertions and interpolations, as exemplified by Guillaume Dye’s insightful articles “Le corpus coranique: contexte et composition [The Quranic corpus: context and composition]” and “Le corpus coranique: questions autour de sa canonisation [The Quranic corpus: questions regarding its canonization]” in *Le Coran des Historiens, op. cit.*, among his other articles. Future studies could significantly benefit from considering our “Judeo-Nazarene hypothesis” to further explore the making process of the Quran through the manipulation and reinterpretation of proto-Quranic texts and Arab-Nazarene preachers’ notes. Our critical examination of the Quranic text, inspired by Édouard M. Gallez’s work, is set to be published soon (working title: “A Judeo Nazarene reading of the Quran”; presentations are already available on the website <https://thegreatsecretofislam.org> and a preprint will be published there).

<sup>143</sup> This emerges from the critical examinations of Islamic tradition regarding the constitution of the Quran, and of the first Quranic manuscripts, in particular the palimpsest manuscript of Sana'a (see below on page 111 ff.).

further expansion. These towns enable the consolidation of Arab forces, their families, and their servants, isolating them from the conquered populations and facilitating control, leading to the creation of cities such as Kufa and Basra in present-day Iraq, and Fustat in Egypt<sup>144</sup>.

A system of **military domination based on predation** is organized to sustain the troops: this includes the codification of spoils distribution based on seniority, and imposing a compulsory tax, the “*jizya*”, on conquered populations to support army maintenance<sup>145</sup>. The aim was not to convert these populations to any particular religion, especially since what would later be known as “Islam” had not yet been formalized. Initially, religion and its practice were tied to the dynamics of expansion and, to some extent, to ethnic origin: the Arab warrior, as a member of the chosen people, naturally embraces the conquering faith, the “religion of Abraham”. Christian-like apocalyptic millenarianism blends with Judeo-Nazarene- “Abrahamism”, whose origins and Jewish connections are progressively obscured. Thus, it supersedes local beliefs (various Christian denominations, Zoroastrianism, etc.). At its core, it is a messianist faith, believers being convinced that they are chosen to combat evil on Earth, under the loosely defined standard of Messiah-Jesus and the much more tangible leadership of the commander who acts “in the name of God”. When necessary, the fight includes the support of locally recruited troops, who might not share these beliefs but could be persuaded by them. This **conviction to establish God’s reign on Earth** galvanizes all efforts and facilitates the acquisition of fabulous spoils of war—wealth, land, and slaves—spoils that hold a significant seductive power over those not fully captivated by apocalyptic mysticism. The faith, however, is reserved for God’s chosen ones only.



Arab expansion up to 656—[Wikimedia Commons](#)

Arab rule expands then as a steamroller, in Egypt and North Africa, throughout Persia and beyond. Resisting such a **formidable, mobile, and implacable military force** is particularly courageous, especially since it offers the territories under its control a certain degree of freedom, including religious freedom, provided they pay the tribute, or “*jizya*”<sup>146</sup> (for the time being—this has not prevented some massacres, as in Egypt). Consequently, many people ultimately surrender despite their initial resistance to the conquerors. As the Arabs advance, they further increase their military power, which in turn fuels the messianist frenzy and ambitions of their leaders, intensifying the competitive dynamic among them.

Uthman’s authority then logically faces rejection as rivalries among factions deepen: disputes arise among the Emigrants, the Arabs who have joined them, and across clans, families, and affiliations. These conflicts are driven by varying levels of commitment to the messianist project of Jerusalem, territorial ambitions of chieftaincies across Arabia, the Levant, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, differing stances towards imperial powers (notably Byzantium), and rulers’

<sup>144</sup> See Robert Hoyland, *In God’s Path...*, *op. cit.* for a detailed relation of Arab expansion.

<sup>145</sup> “*jizya*” is originally a typically Persian system. It may have been set up in the Levant by the Persians during their occupation at the beginning of the 7th century. At first it was not a “religious” tax, but a simple tribute. The “*jizya*”, as such (i.e. the tax on dhimmis, mainly Christians and Jews), was instituted much later, in Baghdad under the Abbasids.

<sup>146</sup> John of Fenek (John bar Penkaye), a Syrian monk, wrote about the Arabs at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century that they only sought to raise taxes and had no interest in the religions of the people: “*Of each person they required only tribute, allowing him to remain in whatever faith he wished*”; “*There was no distinction between pagan and Christian; the faithful [Christian] was not known from a Jew*” (cf. Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam...*, *op. cit.*, p.196 ).

claims to divine authority, which they assert through religious symbols and justifications, including mystical narratives, coinage, monumental constructions like the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, destruction and rewriting of sacred scriptures. Accusations of being a “*munafiq*”, or a traitor to the faith, are rampant, perpetuating the relentless “*fitna*”, or **civil war**, that plagues the “*umma*”. Islamic tradition marks the assassination of Uthman in Medina in 656 as the start of the first “*fitna*”. Considering the actual history as we have explored, a religious-political assassination by his rivals seems all too logical. The deep-seated roots of civil war are indeed intrinsically linked to the ambition to dominate the world “in the name of God”, a hallmark of the political messianism instilled in the Ishmaelites by the Judeo-Nazarenes.

### Who is to rule “in the name of God”?

The assassination of Uthman ignites rivalries among various factions, each now strong and bold enough to vie for total power. The Alids, supporters of Ali (retrospectively labeled as Shiites), coalesce around a diverse group that includes Arabs from Arabia and Persia, as well as Emigrants. They find themselves in opposition to the Umayyads and their allies, who control the Levant, parts of Persia, and Egypt, as well as to the followers of Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr, who likely commands Petra and also holds portions of Arabia (possibly Medina) and Persia.

Sebeos provides a concise account of these events in his *Chronicle*: “*Then God sent discord into the army of the sons of Ishmael. Their unity dissolved, they clashed with each other and divided into four parts (...) They began fighting with each other and destroyed each other with endless killings. Now the troops who were in Egypt united with those in the Tachik area [Arabia] and they killed their king [Uthman] and took the multitude of treasures as loot. They enthroned another king [Ali] and returned to their places. Now when their prince Muawiya, who was in Asorestan [Mesopotamia] and was second to their king, saw what had happened, he united his troops, and he too went to the desert. He killed the king whom they enthroned [Ali], battling with and severely destroying the troops in the Tachik area. He then returned to Asorestan in triumph (...) The bloodshed of countless multitudes increased and intensified among the Ishmaelite armies. They engaged in frantic battles and killed each other. Nor were they able to stop even somewhat from wielding swords, taking captives and intense battles on land and sea, until Muawiya grew strong and conquered all of them. He subdued them, ruled as king over the property of the sons of Ishmael and made peace with everyone*”<sup>147</sup>.

Sebeos’ account aligns, to some extent, with Islamic tradition, which presents a murky recollection of Ali and the first “*fitna*”. As presented in our introduction, tradition holds that Meccan born Ali, a distinguished Qurayshi figure and a companion of the Prophet of Islam, was Uthman’s successor and served as the third of the “Rashidun caliphs” from 656 until his assassination by rebels (Kharijites) amid the confusion of an unexplained civil war. Actual history, however, is somewhat more nuanced. Ali emerges as a Lakhmid Arab faction leader with a much more assertive claim to total power—“in the name of God”—than his main rivals, including Uthman, possibly Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr, the Umayyad clan and its rising leader, the governor of Syria, Muawiya. Importantly, Ali is an historical Emigrant with ties to the circle of Judeo-Nazarene Arab preachers. He might even have been such a preacher considering Islamic

<sup>147</sup> In retrospect, Sebeos appears to notably reference the Umayyads, the faction led by Abd-Allah ibn al-Zubayr established in Petra and Arabia, and the Alids. Within the latter group, which was initially affiliated with Ali, the chronicler seems to differentiate the Kharijites. According to Islamic tradition, Ali was supposedly killed by the Kharijites, yet Sebeos asserts that it was Muawiya who had him killed.

tradition attributes to him the authorship of parts of the Quran (or even the entire Quran along with “Shia surahs” later excised by Sunni Islam). His deep involvement in the apocalyptic vision of the era, **positioning himself as the new Messiah-Jesus**, frames his opposition to the Umayyads and other adversaries as the ultimate battle against the [Antichrist](#)—a pivotal figure in Judeo-Nazarene thought, adapted from Christian prophecy (known as “*al masih al dajjal*” in Arabic, the “false messiah” or “deceptive messiah”, derived from the Christian Aramaic “*meshiha daggala*”, as in [1 John 2:18](#)). Later Islamic tradition has distorted this into laudatory accounts of Ali’s devotion to Islam, underscored by his familial ties to the Prophet of Islam and his unwavering commitment to him. Thus, he is celebrated as exceptionally pious and righteous, with his future followers (Shiites) recognizing his substantial challenge to the Quranic and religious interpretations by Umar and Uthman. Nevertheless, the Islamic narrative conceals the actual messianist nature and the complexities of the **ambition-driven disputes** among these early Arab leaders. Ali and his supporters are not merely victims of the “*fitna*” that fragmented the “*umma*”, but central figures in it, up to the point of Ali’s logical assassination. Ultimately, by systematically defeating his rivals, Muawiya, leading the Syrian faction of Emigrants and its rallying Arabs, emerges victorious through force. He establishes himself as the leader in 661, dubbed “king of the Arabs” by Christian chroniclers, after repelling Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr and overcoming the faction of Ali and his two sons, Hasan and Husayn. On their part, they assert their right to their father’s messianist legacy, a claim that would later lay the groundwork for Shiism.

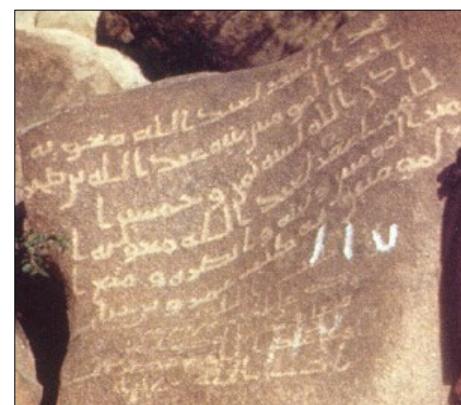


**Arab expansion until 661**

(light green areas under Umayyad control)

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

**Muawiya** emerges as the first “actual” leader to command a significant portion of the Arab world, according to actual contemporary sources. He reigns over Egypt, the Levant (areas predominantly ex-Byzantine), Northern Arabia, and Mesopotamia, extending to modern-day Iran, but his opponents remain very active in Arabia and Persia. He establishes Damascus as the capital of his realm, succeeding his cousin Uthman as **the second Umayyad strongman and ruler**, eventually founding the dynasty. Throughout his reign, he concentrates on strengthening central governance, aiming to unite a deeply fragmented “*umma*”, and reducing the “*fitna*”. He introduces a centralized administration, notably drawing on the expertise of Christian and Jewish civil servants from the Byzantine Empire. Note that the “*fitna*” marginally affected the indigenous populations, primarily impacting them as collateral victims. Like his predecessors, who capitalized on messianist hopes for their own benefit, Muawiya undertakes politico-religious initiatives to legitimize his leadership. Echoing Uthman, and in the manner of his adversaries, he declares his rule as divinely sanctioned “in the name of God”. He further elaborates this idea by casting himself as a mediator between God and humanity, thereby assuming the role of a new messianic figure, since he distinctively adopts the association of both titles **“servant of God”** and **“commander of the believers”** (“*muminun*”, meaning “faithful” or “the true believers”). However, he does not seem to go as far as Ali, portraying himself as a “new Jesus”.



**Arabic** inscriptions commemorating the construction of a dam in Taif (678)

by Muawiya, describing him as a

**“servant of God”** and

**“commander of the believers”**

<https://www.islamic-awareness.org/history/islam/inscriptions/muwinsc1.html>

We cannot, therefore, refer to Muawiya's religion as Islam. The term is not even used for this purpose at this time. While he seems involved in the development of the proto-Quran, pursuing the destruction of “heterodox” texts and the reworking and selection of “approved” ones throughout his reign, his religion remains very close to Christianity. Christian chroniclers, despite criticizing his lack of (Christian) faith, note that Muawiya makes his devotions in the Christian holy sites of Jerusalem, including the Garden of Gethsemane (the site of “Jesus’ agony” before his arrest) and the Holy Sepulcher (his tomb)<sup>148</sup>. Sebeos also mentions Muawiya’s challenge to the Byzantine Emperor Constant: “*If you want to spend your life in peace, abandon that foolish faith which you learned from childhood. Deny that Jesus and turn to the great God whom I worship, the God of our father Abraham* (...) Otherwise, how can that Jesus whom you call Christ—who was unable to save himself from the Jews—possibly save you from me?”. This remarks on the divergence of Muawiya’s “Abrahamism” from the original Judeo-Nazarene concept regarding Jesus’ messianist role. Does he still anticipate the imminent arrival of the Messiah? After an earthquake damages the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem in 661, Muawiya eventually organizes its basic repair, signaling a lingering belief in its significance. He might thus still be awaiting the descent of Messiah-Jesus, albeit without immediate expectation, and does not prioritize Jerusalem, having established his capital in the Umayyad stronghold of Damascus. A Frankish pilgrim who visits Jerusalem in 670 testifies to the dismal condition of Muawiya’s repair of the Temple and notes the continued veneration it receives from some Arabs<sup>149</sup>. Meanwhile, Muawiya keeps on ruling as a mediator between God and his Arab believers, as well as his predominantly Christian subjects, suggesting his religious practice is much closer to Christianity than Islam would later be.



**Arab coin with Christian crosses**, copy of Byzantine coin, minted between 661 and 684 by Muawiya (cf. Clive Foss, “Coins of two realms”, in [Aramco World 66](#))

Despite opposing the Emperor on many grounds, Muawiya still models his reign after the Byzantine imperial tradition, adopting its insignia, including Christian symbols, on his coins. This **alignment with the Byzantine model** is further illustrated in the “[Gadara Inscription](#)” (or Hamat Gader), dated to 663. Found in northern Israel, this marble plaque refers to Muawiya as “servant of God” and “commander of the believers”. It also reveals, through various indicators, his integration into the imperial framework: the use of the Greek language, the inclusion of a cross, dating by the imperial calendar (alongside a Hijra-like dating: “42<sup>nd</sup> year according to the Arabs”), and the mention of a Greek civil servant. Thus, Muawiya’s rule appears to navigate a complex relationship with Byzantine authority, oscillating between dependence and aggressive assertion of autonomy. This dynamic is punctuated by a series of

<sup>148</sup> Future Islam will assert that Jesus did not die on the cross (see note 51) and, therefore, was not buried there, while maintaining a paradoxical attitude of respect towards the “holiness” of the site.

<sup>149</sup> Frankish bishop Arculphus witnessed the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem in 670. He wrote: “*In that famous place where once stood the magnificently constructed Temple, near the eastern wall, the Saracens [Arabs] now frequent a rectangular house of prayer which they have built in a crude manner, constructing it from raised planks and large beams over some remains of ruins. This house can, as it is said, accommodate at least 3000 people*” (Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam...*, *op. cit.*, p.221).

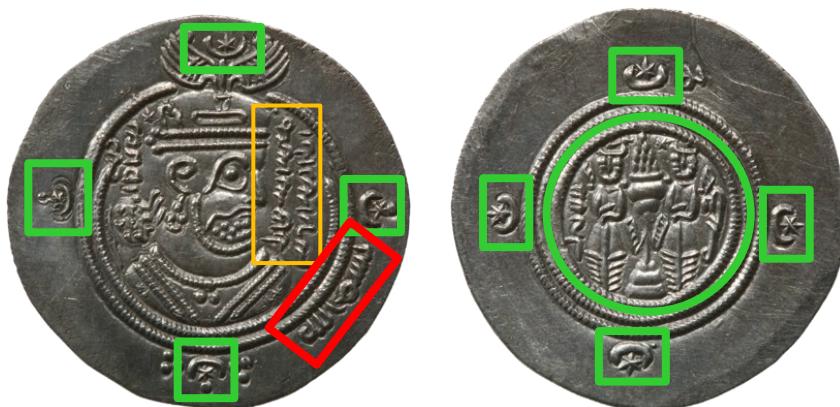
military engagements and expeditions against Byzantium, such as the campaign of 674 that brings Muawiya's forces to the gates of the Byzantine capital, as well as to successive treaties and the payment of tributes to the Emperor described by the chronicler Theophanes.

A similar phenomenon is observed in the eastern part of Muawiya's realm, within the territories of the former Persian Empire. He appoints loyal governors who utilize the remaining administration infrastructure of the fallen empire and commissions the minting of coins in Muawiya's name. These coins, while bearing his name, also feature Sassanid and even Zoroastrian religious symbols. Nonetheless, similar to the coin minted under Uthman that we've illustrated on page 60, the Arabic inscription "in the name of God" appears, signifying the divine basis of the authority claimed by the Damascus ruler. This, however, did not prevent him from embedding his rule within the Persian imperial tradition.



**Inscription from Gadara (Hamat Gader)**, dated to 663, mentioning Muawiya. The text is prefaced by a Christian cross and refers to him as ΑΒΔΑΛΛΑ ("abdalla") and ΑΜΗΡΑΑΛΜΥΜΕΝΗΝ ("amheraalmumenhen"), which are direct transliterations in the Greek alphabet of the Arabic expressions "abd allah", "servant of God" and "amir-al-muminun", "commander of the believers"

[\(Wikimedia Commons\)](#)



**Coin minted by a governor under Muawiya** in the Fars region of Persia (673/674), imitating a Sassanid Persian drachm. The obverse side features the Persian inscription "Muawiya, **commander of the believers**" [in orange] alongside an effigy modeled after Khosrow II. The reverse side displays Zoroastrian symbols of the sacred fire [in green], with the fire burning on an altar flanked by two priests. Crescents and stars, symbolizing the sacred fire, adorn both sides of the coin. The Arabic inscription "bsm llh" ("in the name of God") [in red] is also present on the obverse. The year of minting is denoted as "43", still referencing the era of Emperor Yazdegerd III (632-651)

(David Collection, Denmark - <https://www.davidmus.dk/islamisk-samling/umayyaderne/coin/28>)

Muawiya's "Abrahamism" thus remains somewhat ambiguous. It is initially non-proselytizing and exclusive to the Arab conquerors and new rulers. Islamic tradition recounts that Muawiya severely punishes those who attempt to openly convert non-Arab Christians. It only very slowly and gradually begins to include some non-Arabs: some servants (the "mawali"), and possibly some trusted allied fighters. This emerging religious framework still resembles an altered form of Christianity, combining "the religion of Abraham" with veneration for the Umayyad leader's divine authority, and the enduring worship of Messiah-Jesus as a distant eschatological figure.

Religion, however, emerges as a structural vulnerability within an otherwise strong rule. Despite efforts to consolidate his power, Muawiya’s claim to divine authority never fully gains acceptance among those still yearning for the apocalypse, the arrival of the Messiah, and the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. As a result, he is unable to unite or eliminate the various messianist Arab factions proliferating across the vast territories beyond his complete control. The strength of his rule—like his assassination of Hasan, Ali’s first son in 670—thus acts as a catalyst for creative, oppositional religious (and thus politico-religious) discourse among those questioning his legitimacy. On the surface, the Umayyad power structure appears robust. Yet, beneath this facade, the “*umma*” experiences unprecedented strife. With Muawiya’s death in 680, his kingship is transferred to his son Yazid. He becomes the first Arab ruler who has nothing but his birthright to assert his legitimacy. The stage is then set for **a new “*fitna*” explosion**, the [second one](#), as termed in Islamic tradition.

### An “envoy of God” to reign “in the name of God”

Yazid’s authority is immediately challenged by many factions: Qurayshis questioning Yazid’s legitimacy despite his own Qurayshi heritage, families and supporters of leaders assassinated prior, especially followers of Ali and his sons Hasan (previously assassinated) and Husayn (to be killed during this “*fitna*”), Ali’s supporters who have turned against him (the Kharijites), those loyal to Ali but not to his sons, supporters of the prominent governors acting as regional powers, seceding warlords, beneficiaries of the regime as well as the ones displeased with the Umayyad tyranny, and all of those still holding onto grand messianist expectations. Everyone seems to have a reason to oppose Yazid. Understanding that these conflicts are inherently tied to the failed project of Jerusalem, upon which the “religion of Abraham” or early Islam was founded, and have been exacerbated by successive manipulations, helps elucidate this endlessly recurring pattern of civil strife.

Specifically, the authority of the one posing as the “servant of God” and “commander of the believers” as per birthright, faces challenges from the emergence of new figures claiming to be **“muhammads”**, “praised ones”, “favored by God”, who openly declare their messianist status as **“envoys of God”**.

In the 680s, the first Arabic references to a “*muhammad*” surface among Ghassanid Christian Arab tribes in eastern Syria, and possibly among the Lakhmids. A notable discovery, a series of Arab coins modeled after Byzantine currency, introduces this term alongside Christian symbols (crosses). This juxtaposition prompts questions about the meaning of “*muhammad*” (or “*mahmad*”—see note 96) at the time. Firstly, this tangible evidence starkly challenges the Islamic portrayal of Muhammad as the Prophet of Islam, who opposed Christianity and its crosses<sup>150</sup>. Secondly, as for most coins, there is a depiction of the ruling sovereign, along with the insignia of his power—the Ghassanid chieftain who commissioned them, styled after a Byzantine emperor. Could he be claiming a legacy linked to the historical Muhammad? How would the Christian Ghassanids have interpreted his message of the original Judeo-Nazarene

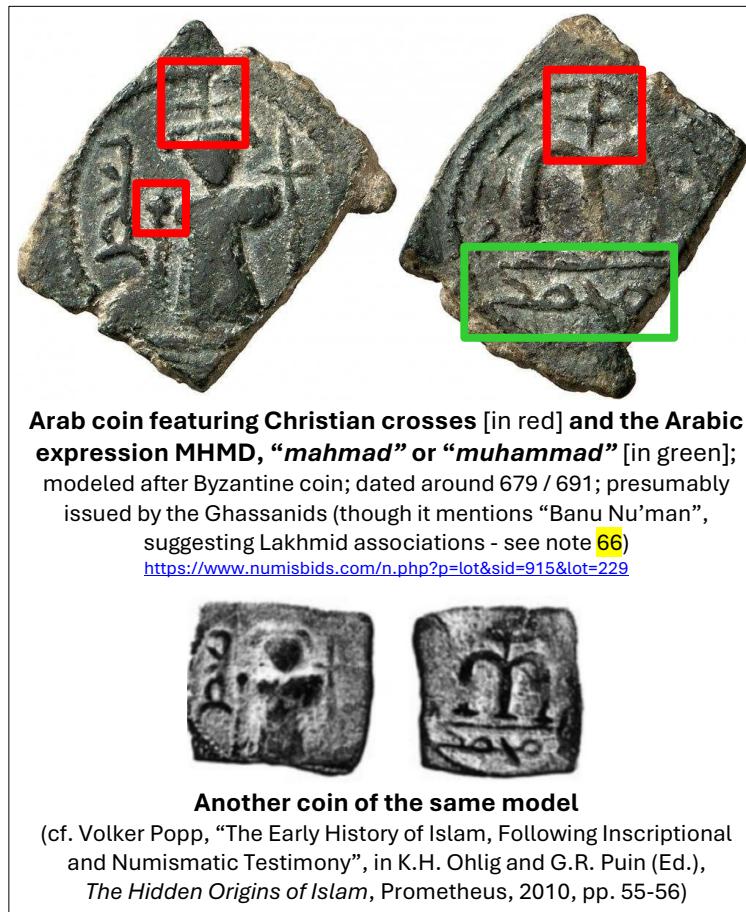
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<sup>150</sup> “God’s Messenger said, “The Hour will not be established until the son of Mary [Jesus] descends amongst you as a just ruler, **he will break the cross**, kill the pigs, and abolish the Jizya tax” ([Sahih al-Bukhari 2476](#), among [many other condemnations of the cross](#)).

“religion of Abraham”, which has been considerably altered over time? Recall that the historical Muhammad’s contributions were not novel but echoed the teachings of the Judeo-Nazarenes. His legacy appears to have waned, presumably due to his unsuccessful messianist endeavor. We’ve previously noted the striking absence of early references to Muhammad: no mention of him in the 644 controversy between Mar John Sedra and the emir of Homs; Sophronius of Jerusalem, despite his extensive writings and interactions with the Emigrants, makes no mention; Sebeos’ Chronicle references him just once in the 620s, with no further mentions; and there is no “muhammad” on rock inscriptions until before the 690s<sup>151</sup>. It, therefore, seems more plausible that the term “muhammad” on these coins series does not directly refer to the historical Muhammad.

Instead, it likely signifies another “muhammad”, another “beloved one” or “praised one” (see note 95), Messiah-Jesus himself, or maybe **a new precursor to the Messiah and a harbinger of the “reign of God”**—possibly even adopting the Messiah’s role. Might the Ghassanid chieftain depicted on the coin view himself in this light, or is he pledging allegiance to such a figure? And if so, who could this figure be? Regardless, this position sets him in opposition to those who claim roles as divine intermediaries, such as the Umayyads, or those asserting to be the Messiah or a reincarnation of Jesus, like Ali and his lineage<sup>152</sup>. These coins at least prove that compelling and innovative arguments have entered the fray, markedly escalating the competition among those vying for divine authority.

Meanwhile, Ali’s faction endures significant setbacks. Ali himself had been assassinated in 661, followed by the assassination of his first son, Hasan, in 670, and the brutal execution of his second son, Husayn, in 680 (details to follow). Ali’s role as akin to a second Messiah, or the “Jesus of the end times”, underpinning his claim to supreme authority “in the name of God”, naturally transitions to his sons. Their successive deaths compel their followers to innovate to fulfill their grand messianist aspirations. This era likely sets the stage for what future Shiism will eventually redefine as Imamah—the continuation of Muhammad’s divine Islamic revelation through the imams. As Ali’s claim to messianist status and total power had passed to his descendants, it shifts then from them to other leaders, foreshadowing the concept of succession among Imams. Rather than the concept of Jesus reincarnating in Hasan, Husayn, and subsequent figures—a view increasingly deemed implausible—the emphasis shifts to God



<sup>151</sup> We shall detail these later. Anyhow, these early “muhammad” inscriptions likely refer to Jesus or Caliph Abd al-Malik.

<sup>152</sup> We have no evidence of Ali having borne the “muhammad” title, even though he could have.

selecting distinct individuals to manifest his divine intent. Initially Ali, then his sons, and subsequently their successors. This is the emergence of **a new form of Arab prophetism**, wherein God sends his chosen one to speak on his behalf and establish his "kingdom of justice on Earth". Messiah-Jesus would then have been one of God's main envoys on earth, but his second coming is no longer needed since God now sends other envoys to fulfill his plan (in Arabic "rasul allah" / رَسُولُ اللَّهِ, God's envoy, or apostle). This development significantly deepens conflicts within the "umma", energizing claims to authority among competitors. Some assert themselves as "rasul allah" to contest the Umayyad leadership's intermediary role between God and humanity (in reaction, the Umayyads eventually proclaim their dominion to be above that of any "rasul"<sup>153</sup>). Simultaneously, divisions among Ali's followers arise, as they choose sides among various leaders, each with their distinctive claims to his succession.



Ali, enveloped in a "divine aura", wielding Zulfiqar  
(15<sup>th</sup>-cent. Iranian illustration)  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

As the competition escalates, another contender, **Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr**<sup>154</sup>, introduces a significant religious innovation. At that time, he rules over former Sassanid territories (notably the Fars region, in modern day Iran). Islamic tradition also labels him as the "governor of Mecca", though it's more plausible that he controlled Medina and Petra, not Mecca (the later invention of Mecca will be discussed shortly). Early on, he had distanced himself from the Umayyads during the first "fitna" and leaned towards the Alids, showcasing his ambition for personal power. He outright rejects Yazid's authority, claims divine power for himself, and initiates a conflict against him. Abd Allah's faction, the Zubayrids, and its allies expand their influence on Arabia, Yemen and modern day-Iraq, aligning with Ali's supporters, and even gain footholds in Syria, challenging the Umayyads in their stronghold along the Mediterranean coast of the Near East, and posing a serious threat to their rule. Abd Allah is the first to explicitly justify his rule by claiming to be both a "muhammad" (or "mahmad") and a "rasul allah", combining the two titles as evidenced by the coins he mints (see next page).

The interpretation of the novel expression "muhammad rasul allah" is notably compelling. Traditionally, within Islam, Muhammad is recognized explicitly as the Prophet of Islam's unique name, suggesting the phrase means "Muhammad is God's envoy" or "God's messenger"<sup>155</sup>. However, as with our earlier discussion on the Ghassanid coin, the term "muhammad" likely does not refer directly to the historical figure of Muhammad (again, an "actual" Islamic coin

<sup>153</sup> According to our review of a letter from al-Hajjaj, great minister of the future Caliph Abd Al-Malik, transmitted (and very likely redacted) through late Islamic tradition (see Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds' *God's Caliph*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 28-29).

<sup>154</sup> According to Islamic tradition, Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr was a young companion of Muhammad. He could have been connected to the Judeo-Nazarenes through his father (al-Zubayr) who was supposedly an early Emigrant. Abd Allah is said to have been born at the beginning of the Hijra.

<sup>155</sup> "rasul" (رسول) literally translates as "envoy" or "apostle". Islamic theology has expanded this into the concept of a "messenger" (and also an "apostle"), which is then associated with the role of a "prophet". However, there is another term for "prophet" in Arabic: "nabi" (نبی), with the same semitic root and meaning as the Hebrew "nabi" (נָבִי), "prophet", which literally means "informer", "announcer", or "herald", i.e., "messenger". Islamic theology elaborates on this by explaining that a "rasul" goes beyond being merely a "nabi", as a "rasul" is sent by God with a specific mission (for example: to deliver sacred scriptures, defeat the Antichrist, or judge mankind). The "religion of Abraham", as preached by the Judeo-Nazarenes, acknowledged only two "rusul" (plural form of rasul): Moses and Jesus. Islam introduces additional figures into this category, with Muhammad being the foremost among them.



Historian Tom Holland presents a coin of the same model in his documentary ["Islam, the untold story"](#) (Channel 4, UK, 2012)

Coin minted by Abd al-Malik Ibn Abd Allah, a Zubayrid, who was **Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr**'s brother-in-law (685/686, Bishapur mint, in Fars region under Abd Allah's rule). This coin still follows the Sassanid-Persian drachms pattern (see p. 60), featuring the effigy of Khosrow II on the obverse and Zoroastrian fire-worship symbolism on the reverse. On the obverse, "*bsm llh*" ("*bism allah*", "in the name of God") is inscribed on the right [in red], and "*mohmd rsl llh*" ("**muhammad rasul allah**") on the left [in green].

(cf. Clive Foss, "Coins of two realms", in [Aramco World 66](#); a coin from the same model was sold recently on Sixbid Numismatic Auctions: <https://www.sixbid-coin-archive.com/#/en/single/I36134218>)

would not depict symbols of Zoroastrianism). A more reasonable understanding might be that "*muhammad*" and "*rasul allah*" specifically denote the ruler of Bishapur, where this coin was minted, such as Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr. By doing so, he claims his authority "in the name of God" refers to a "*muhammad*" and a "*rasul allah*". This could allude to Messiah-Jesus or, more fittingly in this context, suggest the leader views himself as a messianic figure in the mold of Jesus, sent by God. Furthermore, combining these terms could also interpret as "coveted / greatly beloved / adored / praised is the envoy of God", "may God's envoy be praised" or "praised be the envoy of God", echoing the messianic phrase from the Bible, "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord**". This is the acclamation Jesus was hailed with by Jerusalem's inhabitants, acknowledging him as the prophecies' Messiah upon [his triumphant entry into Jerusalem](#) before his crucifixion, according to the Gospels<sup>156</sup>. Employing such an exalted statement, to say the least, suggests that Abd Allah, synthesizing and surpassing the messianic innovations of his rivals, came to regard himself as the Messiah, divinely dispatched to Earth, ostensibly to usher in the apocalypse and establish God's rule. The ambition might appear extravagant, yet it captivately appeals to many Arabs during these apocalyptic times, leading to a sort of religious fervor that is still evidenced today by the orientation towards Petra

<sup>156</sup> "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 21:9); "Hosanna ["save us", "God saves"]! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Mark 11:9); "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord" (Luke 19:38); "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel" (John 12:12). Jesus then assigns this phrase a particular significance, **potentially referring to his return**: "For I tell you, you will not see me from now on until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matthew 23:39). Additionally, our discussions with Christoph Luxenberg have reinforced that the expression "*muhammad rasul allah*" closely aligns with the meaning of these Gospel quotations in Aramaic, especially within its 7<sup>th</sup>-cent. Mesopotamian dialects. In his article "A new interpretation of the Arabic inscription in Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock", Luxenberg also suggests that "*muhammad rasul allah*" should not be interpreted as "Muhammad is the messenger of God" but as "praised be the messenger of God". He points out that the synonymous expression "*mubarak(un)*", meaning "blessed be", is still used in Arabic (including Christian Arabic), exemplified by the Biblical and liturgical hymn: "*mubarak(un) al-ati bismi al rabb*", which translates to "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord" (see K.H. Ohlig & G.-R. Puin (eds), *The Hidden Origins of Islam*, Prometheus, 2010, p.130).

in many of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Arab structures (“mosques”—refer to note 129—, palaces, etc.)<sup>157</sup>. Petra, the stronghold of Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr, and the ancient capital and religious center for Nabataean Arabs, had also emerged as a key site for the Arab-Nazarene alliance and the Emigrants’ epic. It might have been elevated as an alternative “shrine of Abraham” (or another type of shrine) to the “cube” of Jerusalem, where the ancient veneration of a **black meteorite stone** (betyl) is either restored or continued<sup>158</sup>. The possession of such an artifact can easily be seen as leveraged by Abd Allah to bolster his messianic claims, branding it as the “divine stone” to authenticate the “envoy of God”. This, however, is not related to the veneration occurring in the future sanctuary of Mecca, Hejaz, which does not yet exist at this point. Nonetheless, **the concept of an Arab-centric sanctuary**, serving as a focal point for the devotions of the “religion of Abraham” and substituting the Temple of Jerusalem—the initial aim and endeavor of the Emigrants—is already taking shape.

Yazid’s reign proves to be rather tumultuous, marked not by territorial expansion but by a notable retraction, primarily due to the turmoil of civil war, especially his conflicts with Abd Allah and the Alids. He tasks his governor in Mesopotamia, Ubayd Allah Ibn Ziyad, to lead a devastating campaign against the Alids in their stronghold of Kufa, culminating in the tragic event known as the “[battle of Karbala](#)” in 680. Here, Husayn, Ali’s son and successor, meets a brutal end, beheaded along with the massacre of his family and entourage. Damascus receives the chained prisoners and severed heads as trophies, cementing the deadly rivalry between Alids and Umayyads and setting the stage for the eventual emergence of Shiism (and the future retaliatory slaughter of the Umayyads by the Abbasids, in 750). Islamic tradition recounts another dreadful Umayyad campaign the following year in Medina. This assault targets more Alids and Zubayrids, seen as “close to the Prophet”, involving mass rapes of their wives, looting of the city, and the forceful subjugation of the region to Umayyad rule. This event, known as the “[massacre of the Ahl al-Bayt](#)” (cf. page 58), reveals Damascus’s intent to eradicate the



**The Battle of Karbala** (by Persian Painter Abbas al-Musavi, Brooklyn Museum, based on a 19th century Iranian painting)—  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>157</sup> See Dan Gibson’s *Let the stones speak...* (op. cit.); he hypothesizes that Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr was actually the commander of Petra rather than Mecca, based on a critical review of Islamic tradition’s accounts of the second “*fitna*”. We find Gibson’s hypothesis relevant, although we do not concur with all of his conclusions.

<sup>158</sup> The Semitic peoples of Syria had been worshipping these aeroliths for centuries, especially in Palmyra and Petra. It is reported that one of these stones (a very big black stone) was transported with great pomp from Emesa (Homs), where it was worshipped in a form of solar cult, to Rome in 219 by the Syrian-born Emperor [Marcus Aurelius Antoninus](#), who worshipped it in an “obscene” cult (according to Christian commentators, hence his “Heliogabalus” nickname, a Latinized form of “El-Gabal”, meaning “The God [El-Gabal](#)” in reference to this sun deity).

lingering Judeo-Nazarene influence in Arabia: the reverence for the Temple of Jerusalem, the messianist anticipation of Jesus' imminent descent there to initiate the Day of Judgment, and the evolving hopes among the Alids and the Zubayrids. Furthermore, the subsequent year witnesses another expedition, this time against Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr in Petra. The divine authority claimed by the Umayyads thus asserts that opposition, whether political or religious, is not to be tolerated, **demanding total submission from all**.

The Umayyad leader's death in 683, after falling from his horse following a battle with the Zubayrid faction, marks the beginning of a particularly tumultuous period, the historical details of which remain uncertain. The Islamic traditions recounting these events are difficult to untangle, having been extensively embellished retrospectively to serve later justifications. Yazid's son, [Muawiya II](#), succeeds his father but quickly abdicates just four months into his reign, due to his reluctance to confront Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr and his aversion to fratricidal conflicts. He soon dies, allegedly of "natural causes". [Marwan](#), his first cousin and also a cousin of Uthman, then assumes control, signifying a shift in the ruling faction within the Umayyad dynasty. His reign, too, is brief and shrouded in mystery, possibly ending in murder by his wife. The limited information from Muslim sources about these two elusive figures illuminates the extensive historical revisionism undertaken by later Muslim "historians". Their main objective appears to be mitigating the early Islamic era's harsh realities, especially by disguising the actual causes of the "*fitna*", using a logic of backward construction. Overall, Marwan is particularly remembered for his son and successor, [Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan](#), who takes the helm in Damascus in 685. Abd al-Malik's tenure, up until his death in 705, is notable for his significant contributions to unifying the Arab empire and establishing the foundations of what would eventually be recognized as "Islam".

### Abd al-Malik and the foundations of Islam

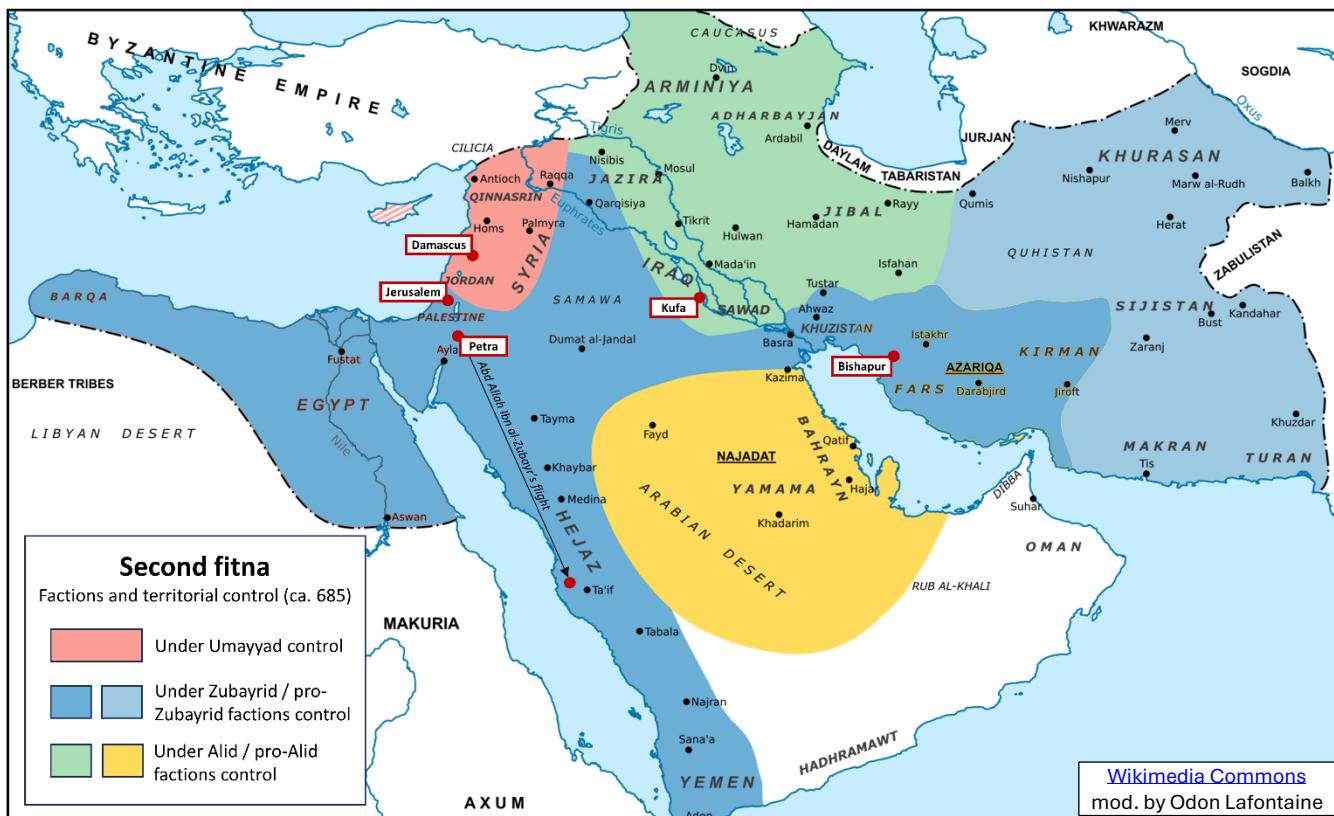
Abd al-Malik emerges as a formidable sovereign who significantly impacts the history of the Arab conquerors and of future Islam. From the outset of his reign, he asserts himself as the sole leader of the Arabs, striving to reclaim control over the "*umma*".

He solidifies his initial territories, establishing control from Damascus to Egypt and Jerusalem. After fortifying these key positions, he sets out to counteract the Alid and Zubayrid factions. [Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf](#) becomes instrumental in Abd al-Malik's strategy, acting as both a key minister and a skilled military commander. Successfully leading a campaign against Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr's brother, Musab, who exerted influence over Mesopotamia (now Iraq), al-Hajjaj is then tasked with confronting Abd Allah in Petra. For years, the Umayyad forces have pursued him. They now lay siege to Petra, inflicting severe damage on its "shrine", possibly destroying it with their ballistae<sup>159</sup>. Abd Allah retreats to the Hejaz, far from Damascus's reach, south of Medina, and off the main caravan routes—the future site of Mecca. In this secluded spot, he establishes **a new "shrine"** and sets up his black stone. The rationale behind choosing this specific location is subject to speculation; it likely offers safety and potentially the support of Ethiopian

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<sup>159</sup> In the documentary "[The Sacred City](#)" and his book *Quranic Geography* (*op. cit.*), Gibson presents evidence, such as ballista projectiles found in Petra, suggesting that historical events traditionally associated with Mecca during the second "*fitna*" actually occurred in Petra. This reinterpretation is supported by a critical study of Islamic tradition, which retroactively names Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr as Mecca's governor, despite descriptions matching Petra more closely. However, his global theory about Petra being the city of the origins of Islam is not accurate in our view, as will be discussed later.

allies<sup>160</sup> due to its proximity to the Red Sea, facilitating secret naval activities. Al-Hajjaj finally apprehends him in 692. The main opponent to the Umayyads, who defied their claim to total power over the Arab conquests, declaring himself a new Messiah and “envoy of God”, is beheaded and crucified, with his followers slaughtered without mercy. Abd al-Malik then asserts control over most Arabs, effectively silencing the opposition. He also seizes Petra and the Hejaz sanctuary. The Umayyad leadership pushes for **the Ummah's political and military unification as a new and independent empire**, even managing to resume its expansionist campaigns, particularly in North Africa and against Byzantium. This is the end of the second “*fitna*”, though challenges persist from various factions, notably the Alids, on the marches of Abd al-Malik dominion.



Abd al-Malik asserts a new kind of authority aimed at distancing from Byzantine and Persian influences. This shift is vividly symbolized by the minting of new coins from the 690s onwards. While these coins retain inspiration from Byzantine (or Sassanid) models, they replace the Christian cross<sup>161</sup> and the emperor's effigy with Abd al-Malik's likeness and proclamations of his divine authority. Demonstrating ingenuity, Abd al-Malik doesn't invent new claims for himself (not yet), but rather amalgamates all the religious innovations of previous Arab leaders. Aligning with his very messianic name (“servant of the King”, meaning God), he adopts the titles “servant of God” and “commander of believers” and further identifies himself as both “*muhammad*” and “*rasul allah*”, thereby positioning himself as **a new messianic figure comparable to Jesus**, and outstripping the claims of his vanquished rivals (he even orders

<sup>160</sup> The historical connections between the Emigrants and Ethiopia (Axum) are well-documented and precede Islam. Islamic tradition recalls this through narratives of early Muslims fleeing to Christian Abyssinia (Ethiopia) seeking refuge from persecution by Meccan polytheists. This account highlights the geopolitical ties and mutual support, although the circumstances under which these Islamic traditions were composed will be discussed further.

<sup>161</sup> The cross has been replaced by a pole topped with a sphere, whose signification still puzzles specialists; refer to them in Tony Goodwin's “Standing Caliph Imagery Revisited”, in Tony Goodwin (Ed.), *Coinage and History in the Seventh Century Near East*, Archetype Publications, London, 2017, p.122 ff.

the destruction of their coins, although some originals have survived, attesting to their rarity). His initial coins depict him poised to draw his sword, a whip at his belt, embodying a martial and apocalyptic stance.



**Umayyad fals** (copper coin, 690-696)

David Collection, Denmark - <https://www.davidmus.dk/islamic-art/the-umayyad-caliphate/coin/32?culture=en-us>

**Umayyad dinar** (gold coin, 694-95)

Creative Commons

Both coins follow the same design, showcasing the effigy of Abd Al-Malik, depicted with a whip and a sword, known as the “standing caliph”. While the inspiration remains Byzantine, there are no more Christian symbols. The traditional Byzantine cross on the reverse is substituted with a pole topped with a sphere (possibly a betyl; maybe the Black Stone?). The inscriptions on both coins are nearly identical.

*li abd Allah abd al malik  
amir al muminin*

“For the servant of God, Abd al-Malik commander of believers”

*bism Allah  
la ilah illa Allah wahdahu  
muhammad rasul Allah*

“In the name of God  
no divinity but God unique  
praised be the envoy of God”

*bism Allah  
la ilah illa Allah wahdahu  
muhammad rasul Allah*

“In the name of God  
no divinity but God unique  
praised be the envoy of God”

*bism Allah duriba hadhal  
dinar sana khamas wa  
sabin*

“In the name of God, this  
dinar has been minted in  
the year 75”

It is around this time that **Abd al-Malik likely adopts the title “caliph”**, a title with Judeo-Nazarene origins reflecting Messiah-Jesus’ expected earthly role—specifically “*khalifat Allah*”,



**Umayyad drachm** (silver coin, 694-695)

<https://www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=lot&sid=3764&lot=2>

The coin follows the Sassanid design, still showcasing the effigy of Khosrow II on the obverse, encircled by Arabic inscriptions (see below). On the reverse, the image of the “standing caliph”, similar to those on previous Umayyad fals and dinar, is framed by Arabic inscriptions (see below). Zoroastrian crescents and stars remain, although depictions of priests and the fire altar are absent.

*bism Allah  
la ilah illa Allah wahdahu  
muhammad rasul Allah*  
“In the name of God  
no divinity but God unique  
praised be the envoy of God”

*amir al-muminin* [in red]  
“commander of the  
believers”  
*khalifat Allah* [in purple]  
“God’s deputy”

**Umayyad drachm** (silver coin, 694-95)

<https://www.numisbids.com/n.php?p=lot&sid=1937&lot=3>

The coin maintains the Sassanid design, but with notable modifications. On the obverse, the effigy of Khosrow II appears to have been replaced by that of Abd al-Malik, who is depicted in a similar manner but wielding his sword. This is surrounded by the same Arabic inscriptions as seen previously (coin on the left). The reverse features an image of a vertical barbed spear, set within an arch and accompanied by the same Arabic inscriptions as the coin on the left, with the addition of “*nasr Allah*”. Zoroastrian crescents and stars are still present.

*bism Allah  
la ilah illa Allah wahdahu  
muhammad rasul Allah*  
“In the name of God  
no divinity but God unique  
praised be the envoy of God”

*amir al-muminin* [in red]  
“commander of the  
believers”  
*khalifat Allah* [in purple]  
“God’s deputy”  
*nasr Allah* [in green]  
God’s helper / God’s help

or “deputy of God [on earth]”<sup>162</sup>. This distinction marks him as the first Arab ruler to lay claim to such a significant title, as evidenced by its mention on some of his coinage (see previous page)<sup>163</sup>. For Abd al-Malik, this signals the beginning of the awaited messianic era: the Umayyad realm is now a caliphate, effectively the “reign of God”, since it is governed by the caliph, “God’s deputy”, whom God has “sent” for this very purpose.

When Byzantium receives the new “standing caliph” gold coins as tribute in 692, the message is unmistakable: Abd al-Malik is making a bold declaration of independence from Byzantine monetary standards, political control, religious frameworks, and Christian references. Faced with this affront, the Byzantine Emperor, who himself claims to be “God’s vicar on earth”, finds the situation intolerable. His refusal to accept these coins as tribute leads to the severance of treaties with the Umayyad state. The ensuing conflict ends in a Byzantine defeat, consolidating **the caliphate’s dominance in the Middle East** and affirming Abd al-Malik’s position as the caliph “sent by God”.

One event, in particular, epitomizes and encapsulates the new political and religious order that Abd al-Malik establishes: the construction of **the Dome of the Rock** in Jerusalem, on the Temple mount. It is built towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (debates persist whether 692 marks the start of construction or its completion), on the site that was previously occupied by the “*masjid umar*”, Umar’s place of worship, also known as the “cube” constructed by the Arab-Nazarene alliance on the alleged site of the ancient Jewish Temple of Jerusalem. This first edifice saw restoration during Muawiya’s time, as we detailed earlier. An Umayyad ruler, most likely Abd al-Malik, eventually decides to shift the anticipated site of Jesus’ descent from this Temple to the Umayyad stronghold in Damascus. This relocation centers on the “minaret of Jesus”<sup>164</sup>, the bell tower of the former Church of John the Baptist, which had been repurposed into a “*masjid*” for the new rulers (later known as the Great Umayyad Mosque of Damascus). The immediate return of Jesus is no longer deemed necessary or desired in Jerusalem, given that Abd al-Malik now presides over the divine kingdom Jesus was meant to establish. Indeed, there is no mention of his return in the many



**The Dome of the Rock**—[Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

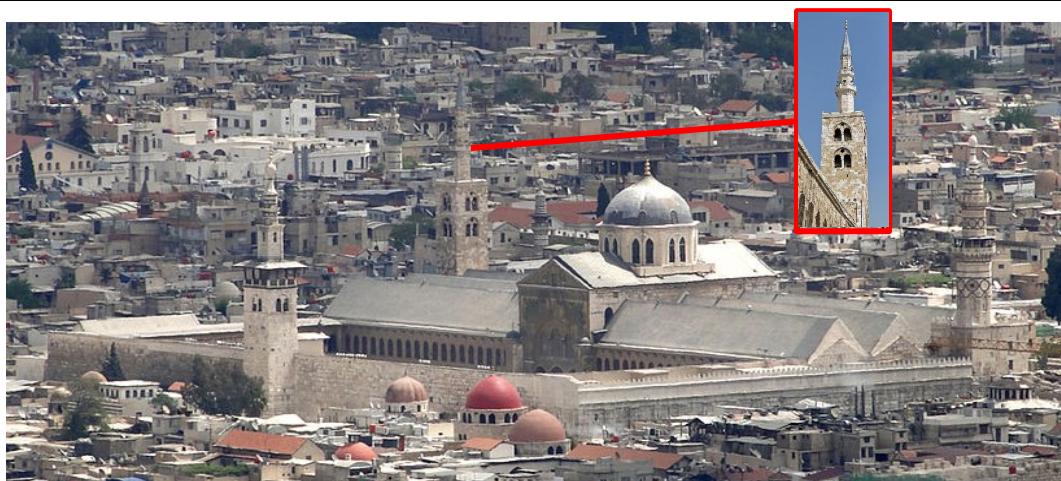
Its dome was gilded in 1993 (the grey dome in the foreground belongs to Al-Aqsa Mosque). Despite [numerous restorations and parts replacements](#), the building’s appearance and structure have remained largely unchanged since the 7<sup>th</sup> c.

<sup>162</sup> In Arabic: “*khalifat* [caliph] *allah fi al ard*”; with the development of the concept of Islamic prophethood in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning evolved towards that of “successor of the Prophet”. However, the Quran still preserves the sense of “God’s deputy”, as notably seen in Q38:26, which states: “*David* [the Bible Jewish king, whom Islam takes over as prophet]! Surely, We have made you a ruler [‘*khalifa*’] on the earth”. Obviously, David cannot be considered a successor of Muhammad.

<sup>163</sup> Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds provided a detailed survey on the “God’s Caliph” title. Late Islamic tradition has it that every Umayyad ruler used it, starting with Uthman. However, Abd al-Malik is the first Umayyad ruler to display it on his coinage, hence the first of which we have actual tangible evidence that he used this title. See *God’s Caliph, op. cit.*, particularly pp.6-8.

<sup>164</sup> As detailed in Islamic tradition about the end of times, such as *Sahih Muslim 2937a*: “(...) it would be at this very time that Allah would send Jesus, son of Mary, and he will descend at the white minaret in the eastern side of Damascus”.

inscriptions to be found in the Dome of the Rock. Instead, Jesus' return is postponed to a different end of times, aligned with the Day of Judgment. Meanwhile, **the caliphate claims the present era, its divine ruler acting as God's new messiah.**



**The “Minaret of Jesus” of the Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus,**  
 (before the Syrian War destructions of 2013)—[Wikimedia Commons](#) & [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The freshly built Dome of the Rock emerges as a remarkable monument that eclipses all other religious structures in Jerusalem in terms of splendor and location<sup>165</sup>. Its preeminence overshadows the surviving Christian churches and sanctuaries from the tumultuous 7<sup>th</sup> century, in a predominantly Christian region. This edifice heralds **the advent of a new religion intended to transcend Christianity and Judaism, subsuming them under the caliph's authority**, as suggested by the Dome's inscriptions. It marginalizes the “Abrahamic” narrative, central to both Jewish and Christian traditions, as well as for the Judeo-Nazarenes and the Emigrants<sup>166</sup>, which locate the sacrifice of Isaac on the summit of the Temple Mount (equated with Mount Moriah). Indeed, there is no reference to this narrative in the Dome, despite its central location atop this historical site. The Dome notably does not designate a “*qibla*” (direction of prayer); instead, worshippers are directed towards the exposed rock at its heart, believed to be the peak of Mount Moriah. This arrangement strongly indicates that prayers are not directed towards Mecca, which at this time does not yet exist as a recognized religious focal point (Petra might possibly be still prevalent). Instead, prayers are offered to God and his caliph, glorifying his authority, his divine status and his dominance over Jews and Christians.

The inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock, alongside Abd al-Malik's coinage and other contemporary inscriptions<sup>167</sup>, are often cited as the earliest concrete evidence for the emergence of Islam. Indeed, they frequently reference the Arabic expressions “*muhammad*” and “*rasul allah*” (“God's envoy”)—interpreted as referring to the Prophet Muhammad—and the phrase “*muhammad rasul allah*”, which is seen as part of the Islamic declaration of faith, stating “Muhammad is God's messenger”. The Dome of the Rock even displays the inscriptions

<sup>165</sup> In 1992, archaeologists excavated the remains of a 5<sup>th</sup>-cent. monumental church, [the Church of the Kathisma](#), between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Featuring the same triple octagon design centered around a rock as the Dome of the Rock, it's suggested that Abd al-Malik may have drawn inspiration from this building. Initially a church, it was later converted into a mosque, [oriented towards Petra](#), before its destruction in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

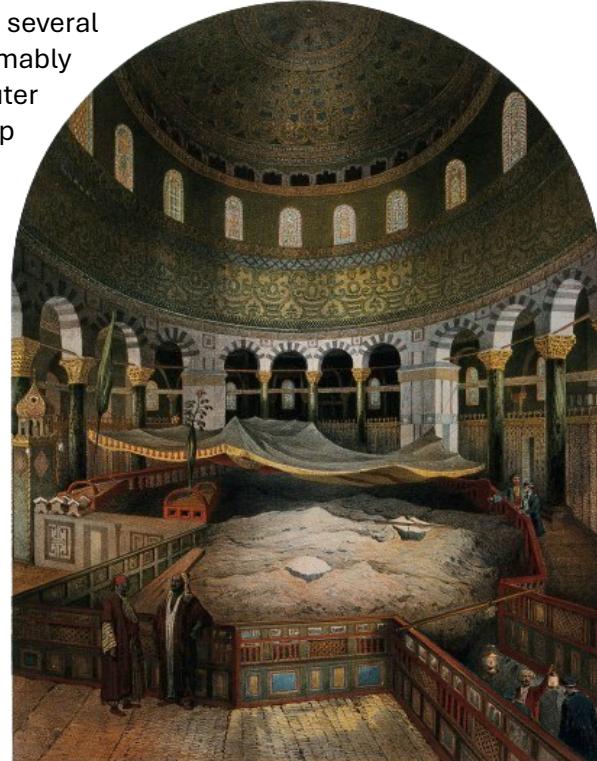
<sup>166</sup> The narrative about Abraham and the “place of Abraham” as being the Temple Mount, originating from Judeo-Nazarene teachings, has nevertheless persisted in the Quranic text, as we will explore later.

<sup>167</sup> See Frédéric Imbert's “Le Coran des pierres [a Quran on stones]” in *Le Coran des Historiens, op. cit.*

“islam” and “muslim”. However, a closer examination, particularly of the Dome of the Rock’s inscriptions, tells a divergent story: there is yet neither mention of “muhammad” as a proper name, nor mention of a prophet in the sense of Islamic tradition, hence no fully formed Islam. Despite the clear rejections of Christianity and Judaism, what emerges is the portrayal of an all-powerful caliph who claims divine status for himself, as equal to Jesus. At this juncture, the Arabs’ religion remains in a state of flux, still evolving towards its eventual Islamic identity, with Abd al-Malik’s reforms marking **a crucial turning point by dissociating from its Christian and Jewish roots** (i.e. Judeo-Nazarene origins).

Among the Dome of the Rock’s inscriptions are several bronze plaques and mosaic friezes, presumably dating back to the time of Abd al-Malik (outer mosaic tiles were added in later centuries, up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century). These inscriptions explicitly condemn Christianity with statements such as “*No divinity but God, he has no partner*”, “*He does not beget nor is he begotten*”, and “*May he [God] be exalted over what associators associate [with him]*”—alluding to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and emphasizing God’s supremacy over the “Christian Jesus”. The condemnation of Christianity constitutes a significant portion of these inscriptions, with Jews also being vilified and warned against God’s wrath: “*Whosoever covers the verses of God, indeed God is swift in reckoning*”, and “*Those who disdain serving him [Jesus] and are arrogant, he [God] will gather all to himself*”. Most inscriptions glorify God for his omnipotence and mercy, urging that believers be “*preserved from the devil*” and “*saved from [God’s] punishment on the Day of the Resurrection*”. Some inscriptions request

God’s “*blessings*” for two distinct figures: **Jesus**, referred to as “*servant of God*” and “*envoy of God*” (both titles also claimed by Abd al-Malik, as evidenced by his coinage); **and another character**, bearing the “*muhammad*” title or described as such (“*praised be the envoy of God*”). This second figure is also called a “*servant of God*” and an “*envoy of God*”, similar to Jesus, and depicted as a “*prophet*” (“*nabi*”, meaning “*informer*”—see note 155), blessed by “*God and his angels*”, and specifically “*sent*” by him “*with guidance and the religion of truth to proclaim it over all religions*”—mirroring Abd al-Malik’s intention with the construction of the Dome of the Rock. Unlike Jesus or a hypothetical Islamic Muhammad, the inscriptions portray this “*muhammad*” character as someone currently alive, in need of God’s blessings, mercy and support (“*May God bless him and grant him peace and the mercy of God*”), and whom believers are urged to bless and salute properly (“*O you who believe, send blessings on him and salute him with a full salutation*”). It is even suggested that believers should specifically submit to him (“*Let us believe in God and what was descended onto the praised one [muhammad] and in what was given to the prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between one and another and*



Inside the Dome of the Rock—[Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

The “rock”, or “[foundation stone](#)” is situated right under the dome (Chromolithograph by H. Clerget and J. Gaildrau after Francois Edmond Pâris, 1862)

we are submissive [muslim] to him"). Considering the context already discussed, this character is likely "the commander of the believers", Abd al-Malik himself<sup>168</sup>.

The message conveyed is unequivocal to all, whether they are Christian, Jewish, or Arab: the site once dedicated to Messiah-Jesus' descent, with all its Biblical undertones, has been repurposed as the "Temple of Abd al-Malik". The anticipated return of the Messiah to Jerusalem and the imminent Day of Resurrection are deferred. In place of the Messiah, a new figure arises as God's deputy, his servant, his messenger, his herald—the "commander of the believers", who assumes the divine mission formerly attributed to Messiah-Jesus. This development signifies a definitive break from the Judeo-Nazarene-Christian foundation. The dominion of God is now manifest in the form of the new caliphate, **supplanting the apocalyptic expectations of the era with the establishment of a new empire**.

Accompanying the ideological transformation, power undergoes significant restructuring through centralizing reforms, notably influenced by the Byzantine Empire's administrative practices and the enlistment of Christian and Jewish civil servants. Key initiatives are the establishment of a postal system and the adoption of Arabic as the official language for court and administrative affairs. Together with ongoing monetary reforms, these changes allow the caliph to govern the empire comprehensively, unifying its formerly separate western (Byzantine) and eastern (Sassanid) regions. Previously, these regions had been managed independently, often through Arab governors in Persia, each adhering to the imperial and cultural norms of their former rulers. Consequently, the Caliphate evolves into a unique blend of Persian, Byzantine, and Arabic elements, fulfilling the ancient ambition of bridging the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean. **Arab identity thus emerges as the defining characteristic of the new empire**, gradually encompassing all non-Arabs who pledge loyalty to the Caliphate and embrace its language and political-religious doctrine. This amalgamation of elements will contribute to the relative longevity of this new empire<sup>169</sup>.

Accordingly, religious texts must also support the ideological transformation and help unify the Ummah under a shared doctrine, emphasizing the "divine election" of the Arabs and the divine authority of their leader. Hence, al-Hajjaj is tasked with **a new initiative to edit and revise proto-Quranic texts**. In his possession are documents previously assembled by the Umayyads, including Uthman's efforts to create a religious Arabic compilation. He launches an aggressive operation to confiscate any remaining manuscripts, particularly the diverse folios preserved by the heirs of the Emigrants who conquered Jerusalem<sup>170</sup> (the preserved Arabic texts

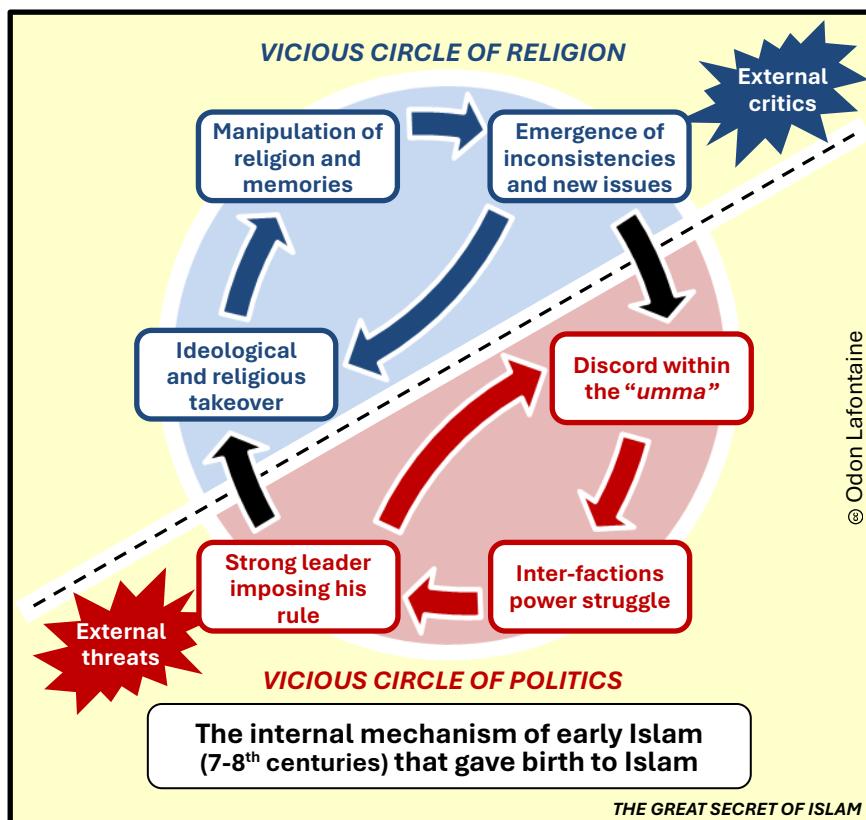
<sup>168</sup> See Oleg Grabar's *The Dome of the Rock* for an exhaustive English translation of these inscriptions (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA & London, 2006, pp.91-95). See also Christoph Luxenberg's "A new interpretation of the Arabic inscription in Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock" (*op. cit.*). Luxenberg convincingly explains how "muhammad" relates to Jesus; he doesn't highlight the connection to Abd al-Malik, focusing instead on his examination of the inscriptions without incorporating the broader context that we did, including deep historical and ideological background, coinage, and other inscriptions. A translation aligned with Islamic interpretations can be found on the apologetic Islamic website "Islamic Awareness": <https://www.islamic-awareness.org/history/islam/inscriptions/dotr> and <https://www.islamic-awareness.org/history/islam/inscriptions/copper>

<sup>169</sup> History offers numerous examples where newly established political entities that conquered territories of an existing empire were eventually reabsorbed or assimilated back into its cultural sphere, as seen with the Kingdom of the Franks in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, ruled by a former federate of the Roman army ([Clovis I](#)). The "Arabness" of Abd al-Malik's empire allowed it to forge an original identity, preventing its re-absorption into the cultures of Byzantine or Persian empires—see Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path* (*op. cit.*), particularly his conclusion.

<sup>170</sup> According to Theophanes' *Chronicle*, a letter from Byzantine Emperor Leo III († 741) to Caliph Umar II († 720), as discussed by Robert Hoyland in "[The correspondence between Leo III \(717-741\) and 'Umar II](#)" (in *Aram*, 6, 1994), suggests that the Quran was composed by Umar, Ali and Salman al-Farisi—a presumed Judeo-Nazarene. All three seem to have been implicated in the Jerusalem faction that rebuilt its temple around 638.

and notes, as described on p.61 ff., and their probable compilations). The process, as revealed by the structure of the Quran that eventually emerges from al-Hajjaj's efforts, likely includes compiling manuscripts from various factions that submitted to the caliph. These texts are meticulously selected, corrected, blended and integrated into a unified corpus, while texts deemed heterodox are systematically eliminated. Texts derived from Christian and Jewish works, including homilies and midrashim, as well as apologetic, literary, and historical writings, are incorporated<sup>171</sup>. This endeavor results in a text intended to be universally acceptable to all former autonomous factions, each contribution to the unified text being hardly distinguishable from the others<sup>172</sup>. Abd al-Malik then strategically attributes this composite version to his late Umayyad relative Uthman, leveraging his legacy to lend credibility and enhance the Umayyad claim as the originators of the Quran. This may account for the non-existence of the purported original 7<sup>th</sup>-century "Uthmani Qurans", suggesting either their destruction by al-Hajjaj or the invention of their existence by Abd al-Malik. This compilation is then broadly disseminated<sup>173</sup>.

The reign of Abd al-Malik marks **a pivotal foundation for what would become Islam**: establishing God's kingdom on earth, redefining the end times, transitioning "divine election"



<sup>171</sup> Western scholarship has made considerable progress in identifying the various layers and components of the Quranic corpus. Pioneers such as [Günter Lüling](#) with works like *Über den Ur-Koran* [On the early Quran] (On the Early Quran), published in German editions in 1974 and 1993, and the 2003 English reedition *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation* by Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers in Delhi, India, along with [Christoph Luxenberg](#)'s *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* (Schiler, Berlin, 2007, first German edition in 2000), have demonstrated that many Quranic passages notably originate from a Christian-Aramaic background. These scholars showed how the Quran adapted Christian hymns, prayers, homilies, and narratives into Arabic (notably [Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns on Paradise](#)). *Le Coran des Historiens* (op. cit.) further revealed the Quran's composite nature, highlighting its Syriac inspirations (as seen in Muriel Debié's article) and its layered structure (as discussed in Guillaume Dye's articles).

<sup>172</sup> This hypothesis seeks to explain the Quran's complex and heterogeneous structure, characterized by its fragmented and dispersed narratives. This aspect was analyzed by Richard Bell (*Introduction to the Quran*, Edinburgh University Press, 1953, and 1970 revised edition by W. Montgomery Watt—notably its 5<sup>th</sup> chapter). He suggested it underwent extensive editing that fragmented stories and interspersed them throughout the text.

<sup>173</sup> See Stephen Shoemaker's [Creating the Quran](#) (op. cit.) for a detailed analysis of Abd al-Malik's Quran edition.

from the Jewish people to the “community of believers”, detaching from Biblical and Judeo-Nazarene roots, deepening the “Arabization” of the religion, nurturing Arab prophetism, and crafting a nearly final version of the Quran. A coherent narrative emerges, for the first time since the collapse of the Judeo-Nazarene project, ending decades of political and religious chaos: each succession of leadership attempted to assert their dominion by reshaping religion and history, accumulating layers of innovations. This chaos had set a **political-religious process feeding on discord, violence, and self-contradiction**, characterizing the emerging Islam as inherently conflictual, as figured in our diagram in previous page.

Through his strong leadership, Abd al-Malik significantly tempers the internal mechanism of early Islam. He utilizes the consolidation of caliphate power—establishing a strong, centralized, and well-organized government that could effectively manage internal discord and unify the empire into a formidable power. Simultaneously, he develops a religious corpus that caters to ideological-political needs by incorporating rather than outright opposing the religious innovations of his adversaries. Thus, under Abd al-Malik’s rule, **the future Islamic religion begins to take form**, laying down the foundational elements and worldview that would define and sustain it for centuries, despite the absence of the prophetic figure of Muhammad, the absence of Mecca in its later religious context, and the Quran not yet achieving its eventual status within Islam. The ideological framework coalesces around the notion of divine will, executed by an “envoy of God” acting as the intermediary with believers, God’s chosen community tasked with manifesting this will globally. This allows the Caliphate to officially use its religion both as a symbol of its authority and as a rationale for its dominance. Abd al-Malik’s 697 monetary reform broadcasts this ideology worldwide (“empirewide”, at least) through coins that forgo human imagery in favor of **religious commandments, symbolizing a new form of power**. These commandments are accordingly adapted within the Quranic text.

### Umayyad dinar (gold coin, 697-698)

(David Collection, Denmark - <https://www.davidmus.dk/islamic-art/the-umayyad-caliphate/coin/34?culture=en-us>)

Former symbols of power such as Caliphal portraits and motifs from Byzantine or Sassanid cultures are supplanted by religious messages condemning Christianity and asserting the Caliph’s rule (also found on the Dome of the Rock’s inscriptions, and in the Quran). This shift elevates religion as the primary emblem of authority.



#### Centre

*la ilah illa  
“No divinity but...”  
allah wahdahu  
“... God unique”  
la sharik lahu  
“he has no partner”*

#### Margin

*muhammad rasul allah arsalahu bi'l-huda  
wa din al-haqq li-yuzhirahu 'ala al-din kullihu*

**“Praised be the envoy of God** who sent him with guidance and the religion of truth to proclaim it over all religions”



#### Centre

*allah ahad allah  
“God is one. God...”  
al-samad lam yalid  
“...is eternal, he  
does not beget...”  
wa lam yulad  
“... nor is he begotten”*

#### Margin

*bism allah duriba hadha'l-dinar fi sana thaman wa  
sab'in*

**“In the name of God**, this dinar was minted in the year 78 [697-698].”

The era of “proto-Islam”, marked by the allegiance of Arabs to the Judeo-Nazarenes, has definitively ended. We are now moving beyond the “proto-Islam” period, characterized by the struggle among Arab leaders and factions to legitimize their rule. With the establishment of the caliphate as a new empire that claims to embody the “reign of God”, **the time of Islam is about to come**.

## THE INVENTION OF ISLAM

We will now examine how the Islamic religion emerged from the legacy of Abd al-Malik. Over the next three to four centuries, Islam developed the system of dogmas, traditions, and sacred history that are familiar to us today. Its seemingly unwavering internal coherence results from a backwards construction process, adhering to the logic of retrospective justification we've previously noted. Here's an overview of this process.

### The invention of Mecca

Abd al-Malik passes away in 705. Consequently, Jerusalem's significance as the central hub for the three major religions, deeply influenced by the great caliph's rule, begins to diminish. The city's sanctity and the Dome of the Rock's symbolic importance to the Arabs are closely tied to Abd al-Malik's distinctive leadership, regarded as God's chosen ruler. Thus, its importance naturally and gradually decreases within the broader context of Arab religiosity. Focus shifts back towards **Arab-centric holy sites**, notably Petra, possibly shrines in Syria, and the emerging site of Mecca. The latter had appeared during the turbulence of the second "fitna" when Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr sought refuge there and established his "divine" black stone.

In 713, a significant earthquake severely damages Petra and its essential water supply system, leading to the city's abandonment (and eventual oblivion, up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Subsequently, the first mosques facing the site of Mecca begin to emerge, with the earliest known example built in 727 in Banbhore, present-day Pakistan, near Karachi (the region was conquered by the Arabs in 711)—the Jamia Masjid<sup>174</sup>. This mosque is the first Islamic structure we know of to direct the "qibla" towards Mecca. Before this, **none of the surviving mosques and religious buildings are oriented towards Mecca**; many actually face Petra or its vicinity, and some built after 727 will still face Petra (or elsewhere). However, from this point onwards, mosques and Islamic buildings increasingly align with Mecca, including significant sites like the Umayyad Mosque in Amman (730), Qasr Bayir palace in the Jordan desert (743), al-Mansur Mosque in Baghdad (762), and Qasr Ukhaydir palace near Kufa (764). By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, new mosques uniformly adopt Mecca as their "qibla" direction<sup>175</sup>.

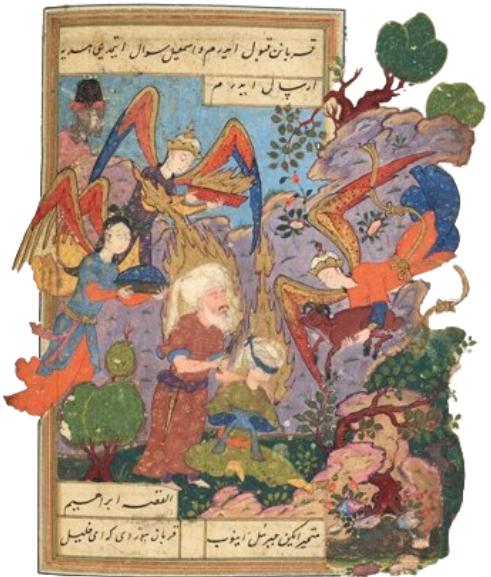


**Jamia Masjid's ruins, in Banbhore (Pakistan),**  
built in 727 and rediscovered in the 1960s—[Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Banbhore_Mosque_Ruins,_Pakistan.jpg)

<sup>174</sup> See Dan Gibson's website: [https://nabataea.net/explore/cities\\_and\\_sites/banbhore-mosque/](https://nabataea.net/explore/cities_and_sites/banbhore-mosque/); and also <http://archnet.org/sites/3976>

<sup>175</sup> According to the examinations of Dan Gibson (*Quranic Geography; Early Islamic Qiblas ; Let the Stones speak, op. cit.*) and updated on his website [https://nabataea.net/explore/founding\\_of\\_islam/qibla-tool/](https://nabataea.net/explore/founding_of_islam/qibla-tool/); while Gibson's orientation surveys regarding "qibla" directions towards Petra haven't been disputed, his hypotheses are controversial. He essentially reinterprets the traditional Islamic narrative by replacing Mecca with Petra, overlooking significant historical records, the Arab-Nazarene alliance, the significance of Jerusalem's Temple, Quranic analyses, and evidence for Islam's gradual development (see also note 159).

Such a shift likely stems from directives by the caliphal authority. It marks a move to establish the Arabs' own religion, independent and distinct from Judaism and Christianity, by **giving the Arabs their own sacred place**. The significance of Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock had already diminished. The place had failed to witness the prophesied end of times. Its location is still deeply associated with Biblical traditions about Abraham. Jews continue to worship there despite the absence of their temple, believing the site to be that of [Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac](#). With the severance of the Arab religion's Jewish roots (Judeo-Nazarene), Arab devotions in this place become increasingly irrelevant: believers of the "true religion of Abraham" emphasize their Ishmaelite heritage and so assert Ishmael, not Isaac, as the intended sacrifice of Abraham. Without Abd al-Malik enforcing belief, the Dome of the Rock thus cannot satisfy their need for a purely Arab and Abrahamic sanctuary. Since Petra is not usable anymore, **devotions to Abraham develop in Mecca**, introducing new narratives that position its site as the exile refuge of Hagar, Abraham's servant wife, and their son Ishmael, whom Abraham visited periodically<sup>176</sup>.



**The sacrifice of Abraham's son**  
 (tradition says Ishmael), Gabriel stopping him at the last moment (Ottoman miniature detail from *Hadikat as-Suada*, 17<sup>th</sup> c.)

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

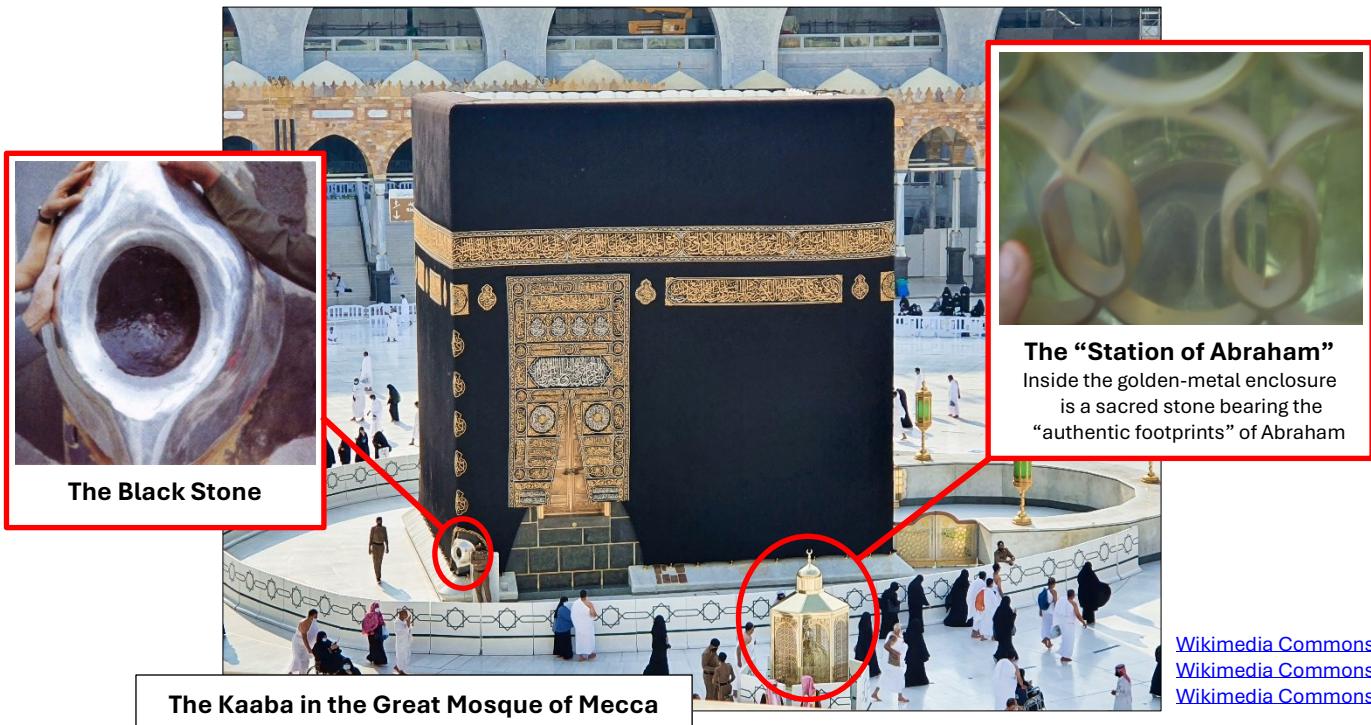
The central issue is **the legitimacy of the Arabs as God's chosen people** from the outset, assigned with the divine mission to dominate the world and "*proclaim God's true religion over all religions*", especially over Judaism and Christianity. Judeo-Nazarene original doctrine portrayed Jews as originally chosen—"Good Jews", meaning the Judeo-Nazarenes, contrary to the rabbinic Jews who had supposedly "corrupted" God's religion. It evolved within the turmoil of the 7<sup>th</sup> century: both rabbinic Jews and Judeo-Nazarenes had failed at God's plan. Anticipating this, God had already prepared the Arab people as a future replacement—Abraham's descendants also—to whom he eventually gave the same mission. To affirm the Arabs' divine selection, an authentic Arab shrine of Abraham predating Jewish Jerusalem is necessary, ideally situated in an Arab territory untouched by external influences. Thus, the Caliphate initiates the creation of Mecca in a remote Arabian desert as a new center for Abraham-focused worship, diverging from Jerusalem, Petra, and possibly other locations, establishing a uniquely Arab and Abrahamic sanctuary symbolized by **a cubic temple**.

Over time, the Quran is reinterpreted to forcefully align its Jerusalem's descriptions and other narratives with the Meccan site—such as naming the new temple as "Kaaba"<sup>177</sup>, or declaring it

<sup>176</sup> Those narratives will later develop into Islamic tradition, such as [Bukhari's hadith 3365](#).

<sup>177</sup> The term "Kaaba" (meaning "cube" in contemporary Arab), appears just twice in the Quran, specifically in Q5:95 and Q5:97. Its use is not exclusively tied to Mecca's Kaaba; historically, "Kaaba" might have had other meanings, and referred to many sacred structures, mostly due to their cubic shapes, including Jerusalem's Tomb of Mary in the Kidron Valley (mentioned on Jerusalem's map, on page 46), [Petra's Kaaba](#) (possibly a cubic construction facing the Temple of Dushares), [Zoroaster's Kaaba](#) in Naqsh-e Rustam, Iran (a cubic temple amidst temple ruins and tombs, reminiscent of Petra), and the "Abu Kaaba" in Syria (refer to É. M. Gallez's map on page 37). In the Quran, "Kaaba" likely signifies "shrine", with the context of Q5:95-97 suggesting a reference to Jerusalem (same as in Q3:96—see page 136).

The term "Mecca" is uniquely mentioned in the Quran in Q48:24. However, surah 48 narrates events occurring in a different location than traditionally interpreted by Islamic tradition, which later introduced this mention to associate it with Mecca (see our Quranic exegesis on page 145 ff.). Interestingly, "Mecca" closely resembles the [Hebrew Biblical name](#) "Ma'ă-kāh" (Ma'ka) and is remarkably similar to "Abil Bet Ma'aka" ("watercourse of the house [or temple] of Ma'ka"), located near Homs, Syria (refer to É. M. Gallez's map on page 37), suggesting potential etymological or geographical connections.



to have been (re)built by Abraham and Ishmael<sup>178</sup>. Nearby places are named to forcefully align with historical memories, Biblical locations and Quranic descriptions, Mount Arafat and Mount Abu Qubays (originally in Syria, visible on É. M. Gallez's map, on page 37), Marwa and Safa hills (originally [Mount Moriah](#) and probably [Mount Scopus](#)<sup>179</sup> in Jerusalem and mentioned in [Q2:158](#)—see their situation on page 89), or the “*maqam ibrahim*” (“[station of Abraham](#)”)<sup>180</sup>. The development of devotions and Meccan pilgrimages (Arabic: “[hajj](#)”) incorporates ancient pagan customs like the devotion to the Black Stone<sup>181</sup>. It also includes the re-invention of rites described by the Quran that originally applied to Jerusalem pilgrimage (sacrifices, circumambulation, shaved heads)<sup>182</sup>. With the later invention of Muhammad as the Prophet of Islam, Abrahamic Mecca will then be transformed into his birthplace. Religious traditions and narratives about Mecca will develop, staging Muhammad in Mecca and further legitimizing the Islamic sanctuary—we shall detail this later.

<sup>178</sup> Aligning Q2:127 (“*Then is raising Abraham the foundations of the temple* [“bayt”, “house”] *with Ishmael*”) with the Meccan narrative; however, Q2:127 does not literally state that Ibrahim and Ishmael built the Kaaba in Mecca 4,000 years ago, but that they **shall** rebuild the temple (which temple?). We will see this in detail on page 141.

<sup>179</sup> Flavius Josephus named Mount Scopus “Sapha” in his *Jewish Antiquities* (11:329)—refer to Robert Kerr's article “*Farüqter Heiland...*”, *op. cit.*

<sup>180</sup> Q3:96-97: “*Surely the first House (temple) laid down for the people was indeed that at Becca* [alternatively Bakka, understood within Islamic tradition as Mecca, though it refers to a valley near Jerusalem's Temple traversed by pilgrims and described in Psalm 84], *blessed, and a guidance for the worlds. In it are clear signs* [var.: clear verses]: ***the standing place of Abraham*** [“*maqam ibrahim*”] (...) *Pilgrimage to the temple is (an obligation) on the people to God*”. We shall explain this on page 136.

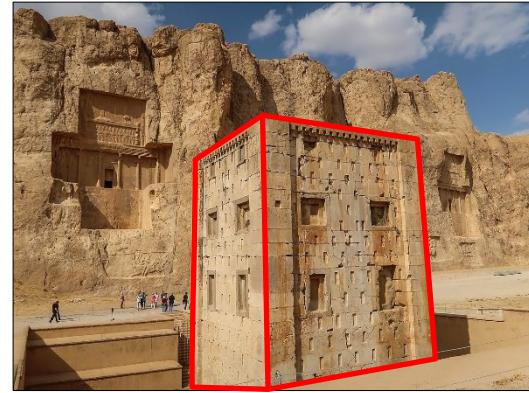
<sup>181</sup> The Black Stone is encased in a manner that recalls ancient depictions of femininity, reminiscent of the Eastern [Yoni tradition](#), whereas the “three pillars” used in the pilgrimage rite of the “[stoning of the devil](#)” could symbolize masculinity, akin to the [Lingam tradition](#). Recently, the Saudis have replaced these pillars with much larger structures to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims.

<sup>182</sup> Jerusalem was a key pilgrimage site for Jews and, by extension, Judeo-Nazarenes, where rituals like circling the Temple (circumambulation) and offering sacrifices took place. Some of these rites, attributed to Abraham, are detailed in the *Book of Jubilees*, such as Abraham's seven circumambulations around the altar of sacrifices (Jubilees 16:41). Our Quranic text analysis on page 136 ff. discusses remnants of these rituals.

The invention of Mecca and its Islamic narrative represent **a major religious innovation**. As figured in our previous diagram, many inconsistencies and new issues logically emerge due to the sheer amount of history rewriting it represents. They result in discrepancies that trigger a cascade of questions about the relevance and authenticity of the Mecca claims.

First of all, the nature of Mecca—**desert, arid, lacking in game, vegetation for livestock, arable land, and sufficient water resources**—challenges the notion that a city could have been established and thrived there since ancient times. Still today, and even more as Mecca develops, it must import all essentials like food, fodder, firewood, and building materials. Water has to be supplied by building huge reservoirs and aqueducts, like those constructed by Queen Zubaidah in the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>183</sup>. The nearest settlement is the oasis of Taif, about 60 miles away, from which some resources could be provided. Supplying Mecca however demands centralized power, such as a state or empire—as exemplified by the construction of Queen Zubaidah's aqueducts—particularly since it's off traditional caravan routes (unused in the 7<sup>th</sup> century) and located significantly lower than the surrounding areas, with a vertical drop of 5,250 feet between Mecca and Taif. It is unimaginable for traders to have considered establishing their caravanserais, rear bases, warehouses, and camel farms in such a place<sup>184</sup>. Contemporary critic John of Damascus already highlighted these logistical improbabilities, arguing that it would have been impossible for Abraham to find the necessary wood for his son's sacrifice in such an inhospitable environment<sup>185</sup>. He could have added that Hagar, Ishmael and Abraham could never have sustained themselves in such a place.

Moreover, the chosen site for the sanctuary, a basin encircled by hills and mountains, is not only inhospitable but also particularly prone to danger.



**Zoroaster's Kaaba** (Naqsh-e Rustam, Iran)

Darius II's mausoleum stands in the background. Observe the abundant niches, intended for displaying statues and idols.

[Wikimedia Commons](#)



**Probable vestiges of the Kaaba of Petra**

(Jordan); ruins of the Qasr al-Bint temple dedicated to Dushares (al-Uzza?) in the background; according to Dan Gibson, the square construction marked in the foreground would have been the "Kaaba of Petra" (it could also have been the base of a sacrificial altar)

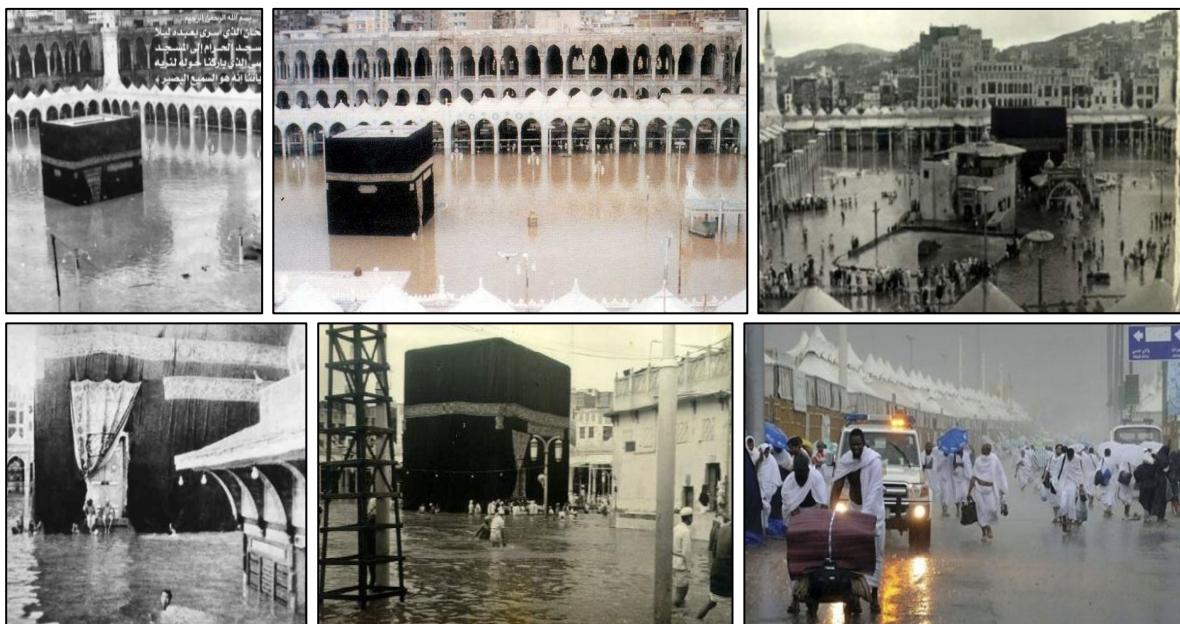
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>183</sup> Queen [Zubaidah](#), wife of Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid, commissioned the construction of [aqueducts and reservoirs](#) to ensure the survival of pilgrims in Mecca, where the only water source was the very limited Zam-zam well. These ancient water systems, drawing from very distant sources, were in use up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later, Saudi Arabia developed new reservoirs and large desalination plants to meet Mecca's water needs, including supplying what is labelled today as "[Zam-zam water](#)".

<sup>184</sup> This is also Patricia Crone's conclusion after her thorough study of the Meccan trade (*Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam, op. cit.*).

<sup>185</sup> [John of Damascus](#) († 749), also known as Yuhana ibn Mansur ibn Sarjun, was a civil servant under the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus, who eventually became a Christian priest. He is known for his writings on "heresies", including the work *Concerning Heresy* (746). Its last chapter focuses on Islam, particularly criticizing the Meccan Abraham narrative (let's note that this narrative then identified Isaac, not Ishmael, as the intended son for the sacrifice). However, there's scholarly debate about dating some of the writings of this chapter, with some suggesting there may have been apocryphal additions in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (refer to note 212).

When heavy rains occur, water runoff is very problematic. During occasional very heavy rains the site can suddenly flood or be ravaged by torrents of water and mud. Record show floods in the early centuries of Islam occurred in years such as 738, 800, 817, 823, 840, 855, 867, 876 and 892, showcasing the site's vulnerability. In 960, a caravan of pilgrims from Egypt was even engulfed in these torrents as it approached. We saw earlier how the Kaaba was destroyed by one of these disasters in 1620 (see note 12). It had to be completely rebuilt by Sultan Murad IV, starting from its bare rock foundations. And even though the Saudis have since tried to deal more or less effectively with the problem, the cube is still **regularly flooded**, to the point that specialists mobilized by the Saudis have expressed their concerns about the possibility of a major disaster due to extensive urban development and concretization<sup>186</sup>. It seems unimaginable that such a sanctuary could have survived the centuries since Abraham, who is said to have lived approximately between 1900 and 1600 BCE according to Islamic tradition.



**The 1941 Mecca flood (plus a more recent one)**

(Fair use for educational and non-commercial purposes)

Beyond these tangible discrepancies, the invention of Mecca introduces numerous **historical inconsistencies**. The Islamic narrative depicts Mecca as a bustling city, thriving on caravan trade activities<sup>187</sup>. It also portrays Mecca as a pre-Islamic pagan religious center, where Arabs regularly gathered for pilgrimage to the purported ancient Kaaba—echoing the veneration of Jerusalem and its pilgrimages during the early Arab-Nazarene alliance. However, this portrayal does not align with historical records.

<sup>186</sup> 2014 study from [Oxford Concilium Ltd](#) commissioned by Saudi Al Selouly Group stated : “Makkah’s current expansion project, the largest in its history, will enable the accommodation of a greatly increased number of pilgrims. But the increased flood risk seems to have been insufficiently considered. This may create conditions for a **flood crisis more severe than the major flood of 1941**, when water could still slowly infiltrate the remaining barren soil not far from the Kaaba, and when the number of pilgrims was almost thirty (30) times lower. A similar extreme event to that of 1969 is currently entirely probable. In 1969, the city’s central area alone had accumulated 40.1 million cubic metres of water. Scientists Mirza and Ahmed have estimated in 2001 that this extreme flood type has a return period of 46 years (Mirza et al., 2001) as also recently highlighted in another international study (M. Mirza and B. Ahmed, “Winter Weather and Climate Conditions in Makkah” (in Arabic), Geographic Messages, Kuwait Geographic Association, Kuwait, Vol. 253, 2001, cited in G.M. Dawood et al., 2011, p.226).”

<sup>187</sup> 14<sup>th</sup>-century Islamic traditionist Ibn Kathir hints at a city of more than 20,000 people, capable of supplying the considerable Meccan armies mentioned in the Islamic biography of the life of Muhammad.

Indeed, there is no mention of this city, its ancient sanctuary, its trade or the pilgrimages that should have sustained it<sup>188</sup>, until the 8<sup>th</sup> century (at least). No chronicler, ancient geographer or witness mentions it<sup>189</sup>. Notably, it is omitted from the [Constitution of Medina](#)<sup>190</sup>, Islam's earliest claimed document. In contrast, Yathrib (Medina) is well-documented, with archaeological findings that elude discovery around the Kaaba, despite **extensive excavations** by the Saudis<sup>191</sup>. Furthermore, the so-called "Islamic" rock inscriptions from the 7<sup>th</sup> century in Saudi Arabia fail to acknowledge this city or its sanctuary. For instance, the 678 inscription in Taif (on page 65), despite its proximity, does not mention Mecca.



**The gigantic scale of the works (and therefore the excavations) recently undertaken in Mecca**  
*(Fair use for educational and non-commercial purposes)*

However, **the most critical inconsistencies with the Meccan narrative stem from the Quran** itself. Even though its text has undergone numerous revisions, including Abd al-Malik's edition, it largely reflects the situation of the early 7<sup>th</sup>-century Arab-Nazarene alliance.

<sup>188</sup> Mecca was not situated on the incense route or at the crossroads of major trade routes. According to Islamic traditions, Mecca engaged in trade involving Yemeni perfume, leather, camels, possibly donkeys, clarified butter, and Hejazi cheese, though there is no evidence to support these claims. The perfume and leather industries were well-developed in Byzantium, and Syria was rich in food and livestock products. They had no need for remote Meccan traders. Patricia Crone addressed these discrepancies and explored the implausibility of Meccan trade in her work, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (*op. cit.*). She also attempted to conceptualize a hypothetical trade scenario for Mecca, regardless of the numerous challenges she herself pointed at, such as the absence of sources, the unsuitability of Mecca's location, and competing Syrian locations theories, in "[Quraysh and the Roman army: making sense of the Meccan leather trade](#)", *Bulletin of the SOAS*, 70, 1, 2007, pp. 63-88.

<sup>189</sup> Today, some Muslims are keen to find evidence supporting Islam's historical narrative, even attempting to interpret the name "Maccoraba" mentioned by Ptolemy (2<sup>nd</sup> century) as referencing Mecca, following the pattern of backward logic that has historically shaped Islam. Patricia Crone has already critically addressed and refuted such claims in her book *Meccan Trade...* (*op. cit.*).

<sup>190</sup> A.L. de Prémare highlights that in the earliest layers of Islamic tradition, Muhammad, as the author of this charter between the Emigrants and the inhabitants of Yathrib, does not mention Mecca (in *Les Fondations de l'islam*, *op. cit.*, p.89).

<sup>191</sup> In a 2015 Aljazeera online article (now offline) titled "*The man who dreams of old Mecca*", by Basma Atassi, Saudi architect Sami Angawi criticized the Saudi authorities for their disregard for "collective Islamic memory" as they demolished about 95% of Mecca's oldest buildings to make way for modern constructions, without uncovering any pre-Islamic artifacts. He noted finding "traces of buildings that had existed before the Abbasid era [before 750]" and "traces of floors that existed during the Abbasid era". See an archived version of this article:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20151028120259/http://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2015/man\\_who\\_dreams\\_of\\_old\\_mecca/](https://web.archive.org/web/20151028120259/http://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2015/man_who_dreams_of_old_mecca/)

Specialists have noted that the Quranic text suggests its intended Arab audience were likely Christians or Judaized Arabs, since they were familiar with sophisticated religious concepts, including the one God, “messiah”, “holy spirit”, or “Judgment Day”, and Biblical figures like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Jesus, or Mary, without needing explanations, indicating they were not pagans<sup>192</sup>. Yet, there is no evidence of Christian or Jewish presence in the Mecca region.

Even more striking is the depiction in the Quranic text of **Arabs engaged in farming and fishing**, cultivating wheat, dates, olives, vines, pomegranates, and tending to herds of goats, sheep, cows, and camels. They are also described as consuming freshly caught fish and shellfish. These activities align with the Mediterranean shores of the Middle East, particularly Syria, rather than the desert and mountainous terrain of Mecca. Furthermore, the text refers to navigation in both “fresh water” and “salt water”, a geographical feature not present in Arabia but found in the Levant<sup>193</sup>.

Another notable inconsistency in the Quran pertains to the remaining explicit references to Jerusalem’s sanctity. Esteemed figures in Islam, including prophets like Zacharias, as well as Mary, the mother of Messiah-Jesus, are described as visiting the Temple in Jerusalem (Q19:11; Q3:35-39), with the term “sanctuary” (“*mihrab*”) being used to denote this sacred place. However, from the perspective of Islamic tradition, the legitimacy of the Temple in Jerusalem is questioned due to the belief that Jews erroneously built it there, following a false claim that it was the site associated with the “*maqam ibrahim*” (“station of Abraham”), whereas, according to Islamic teachings, Abraham’s “true station” is in Mecca. This interpretation leads to a paradox within the Quran, presenting **two conflicting sites associated with Abraham’s place** that seem irreconcilable<sup>194</sup>.

Anyhow, the “mother of all inconsistencies” in the Quran is found elsewhere: **all Quranic references to Mecca, according to Islamic interpretation, still align with Jerusalem as well**<sup>195</sup>, which is very logical since the Meccan narrative was notably created by forcefully reinterpreting the Quranic original descriptions of Jerusalem. Notable examples include the “*maqam ibrahim*” (Abraham’s station, or standing place), described with “clear signs”—a term that, in Arabic, also means “clear verses”. This is reminiscent of the Torah’s account (Genesis 22) of Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac in Jerusalem (according to Jewish tradition), thus referred to by “clear verses” in the Torah. The term “mother of all cities” resonates with Jewish (and Judeo-Nazarene) understanding of Jerusalem’s preeminence. A “valley of Becca” is located close to Jerusalem according to Psalm 84 (see note 180). Similarly, references to the

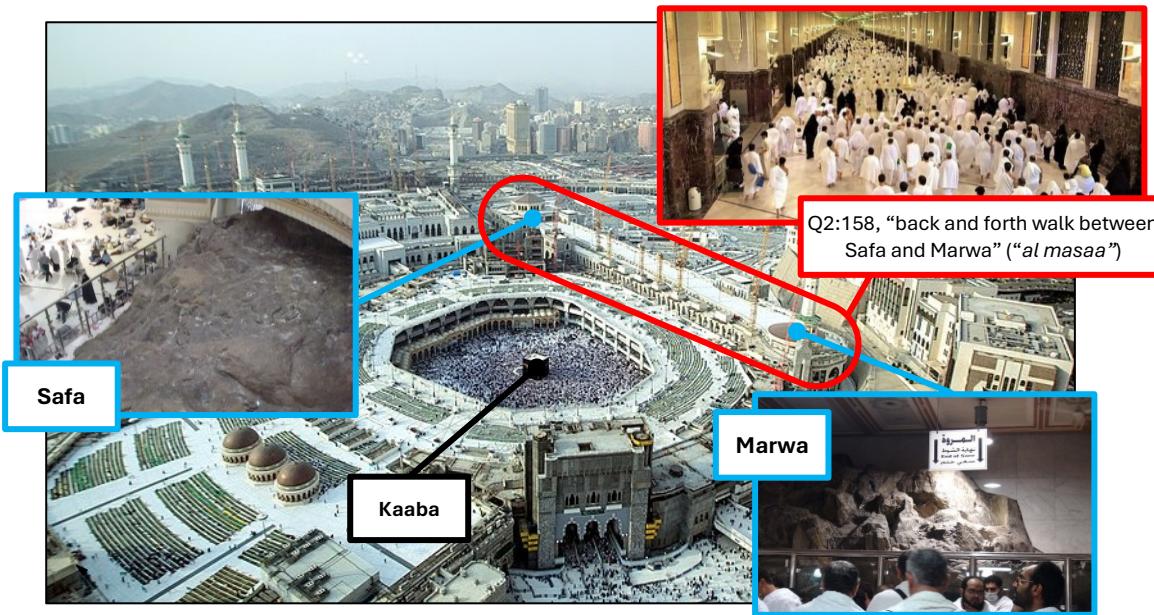
<sup>192</sup> Mohamad Ali Amir-Moezzi pointed at this in “Le Shi’isme et le Coran [Shia Islam and the Quran]”, notably in his chapter “Muhammad et le milieu biblique [Muhammad and the Biblical milieu]”, in Le Coran des Historiens, *op. cit.* See also *Ali, le secret bien gardé* [Ali, a well-kept secret], *op. cit.*

<sup>193</sup> Édouard M. Gallez highlighted the impracticalities of Meccan activities in his work *Le Messie...* (vol.2, *op. cit.*). Patricia Crone further elaborated on these issues in her article “[How did the Quranic pagans make a living?](#)” (in Bulletin of the SOAS, Vol. 68, 3, 2005, pp.387-399). For discussions on the Quranic references to “fresh water” and “salt water” (Q25:53; Q35:12; Q55:19-20; Q55,22), see our article: “[La barrière entre les deux mers](#) [the barrier between the two seas]” (Academia, 2020), discussing the hypotheses of the “fresh water sea” being Lake Homs in Syria or Lake Tiberias in Israel (which, by the way, were settlement areas for Judeo-Nazarenes).

<sup>194</sup> See our article for further details: “[Où est le lieu d’Abraham ?](#) [Where is Abraham’s place?]” (Academia, 2023).

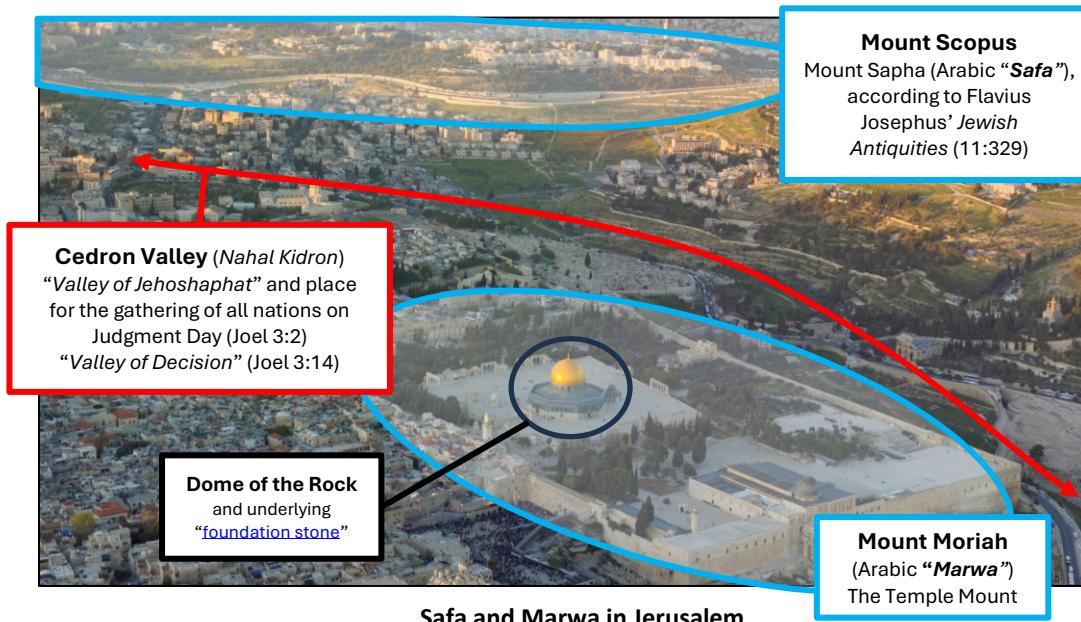
<sup>195</sup> Édouard M. Gallez was a pioneer in this area of study, as discussed in his work *Le Messie...* (vol.2, *op. cit.*). Subsequent scholars, including Robert Kerr in “« Farüqter Heiland »...” (in *Inârah 10, op. cit.*), Paul D. D’A. Ellis in “[Jerusalem, City of Islam](#)” (Academia, 2022) and Stephen Shoemaker in “The Quran’s Holy House: Mecca or Jerusalem?” (in M. Gross & Robert M. Kerr, Ed., *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion VII, Inârah 11*, Schiler, 2023), have explored the notion that some or most Quranic Meccan references actually pertain to Jerusalem. Following Gallez’s insights, our own critical examination of the Quranic text will be published in an upcoming academic paper (“A Nazarene Reading of the Quran”), with preliminary presentations available at <https://thegreatsecretofislam.com>, where a preprint will also be published. This paper elucidates every Quranic reference to Jerusalem.

“house” (temple) of God or the “first temple”, the “*hajj*” site (which linguistically echoes the [Hebrew word “\*hag\*”](#) (חג), for the [three main Jewish pilgrimages](#) to Jerusalem), the places of Safa and Marwa (see below), and especially the “*masjid al haram*” (“sacred mosque” or “forbidden place of worship”— see page 101) can also be interpreted as pointing to Jerusalem. Further exploration of these and other references, such as the “*qibla*” commandments towards the “*masjid al haram*”, will be provided.



**Safa and Marwa in Mecca**

Wikimedia Commons: [1](#) – [2](#) – [3](#) – [4](#)



**Safa and Marwa in Jerusalem**

Wikimedia Commons

Scientifically, this suggests two hypotheses, and only two when examining the Quranic text: either two 7<sup>th</sup>-century cities—Mecca and Jerusalem—shared identical characteristics, which seems highly unlikely, or **the Quranic text solely refers to Jerusalem**, and thus ignores Mecca.

In the end, by establishing a place of Abrahamic origin in the Hejaz desert as its religious foundation, the Caliphate had aimed to solidify Islam's legitimacy and God's choice of the Arabs and their caliph to rule the world. The creation of Mecca suggests that Islam emerged from the desert, out of nothing, implying God's direct intervention—a powerful apologetic assertion. However, this narrative introduced numerous inconsistencies, which Islamic tradition spent centuries addressing and concealing. Modern historical-critical research makes them increasingly difficult to ignore.

### The invention of the Prophet and the Quran

The invention of Mecca and its Islamic narrative indeed represented a major religious innovation. However, the primary innovation of Islam is the creation of its central figure, Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, along with his divine revelation. This development unfolded gradually as the influence of Abd al-Malik waned, giving rise to **a need for a more substantial religious legitimacy** than his legacy could offer. The Abbasids' ascent to power (750) was a pivotal step in this process, although the development of Muhammad's figure likely began earlier.

The “servant of the King” Abd al-Malik had proclaimed himself “*muhammad*”, a “prophet”, and “God’s caliph [deputy] on earth”, positioning himself as equivalent to Jesus, as we have detailed. His stature and power were sufficient for his subjects to genuinely believe his claim as “sent from God”. His eldest son, al-Walid, naturally took on his father’s legacy as “God’s deputy”, becoming the “successor of the *muhammad*” as he succeeded him. However, as time passed, while his subsequent successors might have assumed these titles, not all possessed the aura and charisma of their illustrious predecessor to the extent of proclaiming themselves “sent from God” and taking on the entire political-religious edifice. Therefore, the formalization of religion and the proclamation of the divine origin of caliphal rule gradually necessitated **the invention of a direct divine revelation for legitimization**. Consequently, a specific prophet who would have revealed it was needed, loosely based on the model of Biblical prophets. This need became particularly acute when the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in 750. Indeed, the Abbasids could not claim direct inheritance of Abd al-Malik’s legacy to legitimize their rule as “God’s caliphs on earth” since they had massacred almost every Umayyad. The early promotion of the duo “*muhammad*”-Jesus and the caliph as “successor of the ‘*muhammad*’-Abd al-Malik” was then replaced by the duo of the Islamic figure Muhammad and the caliph as his successor, with the character of the Prophet of Islam being gradually constructed. We do not know exactly when this shift occurred, but we do know that the new Abbasid rulers officially adopted both titles—“God’s caliph on earth” and “*khalifat rasul allah*”, “successors of God’s envoy [Muhammad]”<sup>196</sup>.

The character of the Prophet of Islam is not purely a work of fiction; it was also inspired by **distant memories of the historical Muhammad**. Indeed, certain narratives within Islamic tradition about Muhammad are grounded in early 7<sup>th</sup>-century historical reality. Yet, the total lack of references to this historical figure by Arabs from the 630s until the 8<sup>th</sup> century implies that his real influence on history may not be as profound as Islamic legend suggests. His failure in implementing the Judeo-Nazarene messianist project in Jerusalem was most certainly the

<sup>196</sup> As described by P. Crone and M. Hinds, “whereas ‘*khalifat rasul allah*’ [“successor of God’s envoy”] seems to have been unknown to the Umayyads, it makes an appearance under the Abbasids” (in *God’s Caliph*, *op. cit.*, p.16). Given the context of Abbasid opposition to the Umayyads, it seems very unlikely that “*rasul allah*” here mentioned refers to Abd al-Malik; it rather points to the Islamic figure of Muhammad.

cause of his temporary “*damnatio memoriae*” (condemnation of memory). Nevertheless, choosing the historical Muhammad as the basis for the Prophet of Islam was a constrained decision, driven by the need to conform to Abd al-Malik’s legacy, especially his adoption of the phrase “*muhammad rasul allah*”. As a result, the Prophet had to be named “Muhammad”, hence the choice of the historical Muhammad, and depicted as “sent by God”, so as to correspond with Abd al-Malik’s self-image. Consequently, many aspects of the Prophet of Islam’s standardized biography seem to mirror aspects of the life of Abd al-Malik (or possibly his relatives<sup>197</sup>). The identity of the Prophet may be a composite of several historical figures, including the historical Muhammad, Umar, and Ali, and possibly others, all of whom could have been linked with the title “*muhammad*” (or “*mahmad*”—see note 96) during the Arab-Nazarene alliance era. Messiah-Jesus also had been called a “*muhammad*” during this period. However, it seems unrealistic to suggest that his figure directly contributed to the creation of the Prophet of Islam’s identity (the creation and standardization of Muhammad’s Islamic biography will be further examined).

Naming the Prophet of Islam “Muhammad” also retrospectively aligned all previous mentions of “*muhammad*” (or “*mahmad*”) in Arabic sources with him—such as Umayyad coinage and the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock, and early rock inscriptions (leading Muslims and some scholars to mistakenly believe these references originally pertained to the Prophet of Islam). Consequently, the strong original messianic flavor of the 7<sup>th</sup>-century “*muhammad*” mentions gradually gave way to their Islamic reinterpretation as “praiseworthy” and as referring specifically to the Prophet of Islam (see note 95).


  
 MHMD  
 “mahmad” or  
 “muhammad”



www.alsahra.org / 2007

**One of the earliest rock inscriptions to mention “*muhammad*”,** potentially the first found outside of coins and monumental inscriptions. Dated between 699-700, it was discovered in 2018 on the Hisma Plateau in northwestern Saudi Arabia, approximately 100-120 miles from Petra. The discovery was made by Fariq Al Sahra (“The Desert Team” - source : <http://alsahra.org/?p=19281>)

“O God bless (the) muhammad and accept his intercession for his community (\*). And have mercy on us in the hereafter, just as you have mercy on us in this world. Bakr ibn Abi Bakra al-Aslami wrote at the end of the year 80”.

(\*): an invocation very similar to the inner inscription of the Dome of the Rock, “bless him muhammad, your servant, your prophet, and accept his intercession in his community”

<sup>197</sup> The Prophet of Islam indeed shares [several intriguing coincidences](#) with Marwan, the father of Abd al-Malik: both had a mother named Amina, and both had wives named Aisha and Zaynab (Abd al Malik also had two wives named Aisha). Marwan was a vehement opponent of the Alids, a stance that was mirrored by Muhammad’s Aisha, portrayed as having [fought against the Alids](#) after his death. This leads to the hypothesis that the figure of Muhammad’s Aisha might have been crafted to legitimize memories associated with Marwan’s Aisha, which were later incorporated into Hadiths as those pertaining to Muhammad’s Aisha. The narrative that depicts Aisha as being born in 614 and married to the Prophet at the early age of six might have been deliberately created. This portrayal could serve to emphasize her years of marital life with him, establishing her as his “favorite wife” and “the mother of the believers”. Consequently, Muhammad’s Aisha would appear contemporary to Marwan’s Aisha, who was born in 626—too late to have married and known the Prophet of Islam. The similarity in names could easily lead to confusion between the two Aishas. Additionally, Marwan had another son, who was Abd al-Malik’s brother and named [Muhammad](#) († 720). Apart from [Ali’s fourth son](#) and fifth imam in Shia Islam, this Muhammad appears to be the first “Islamic” figure to bear this name. He was the father of [Marwan II](#) († 750), the last Umayyad Caliph, who was killed by the Abbasids. Marwan II, therefore, might have played a role in establishing elements for an early biography of the Prophet, drawing from his father’s, uncle’s, grandfather’s and step-grandmother’s personal lives to support his own claim as a “successor of the *muhammad*” (which “*muhammad*” then?).

The new prophetic figure is therefore tasked with the revelation of the new religious doctrine that, by force of circumstances, must be grounded in something tangible—an **Arabic holy book**. This endeavor utilizes existing material, specifically the collection assembled by Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjaj. Their main goal was to create a unique corpus that would unify the “*umma*” and strengthen caliphal authority. They consolidated various religious Arabic writings, most of which originally stemmed from the 7<sup>th</sup>-century preachers notes (verbatim notes from sermons, preparation notes, and instructions for Judeo-Nazarene preaching to the Arabs, as described earlier). These sermons and instructions aimed to mobilize Arabs for the conquest of Jerusalem and covered various other topics, including religious instruction, Biblical education, and parabiblical commentaries. While some last-minute corrections or adaptations may have been made to Abd al-Malik early 8<sup>th</sup>-century corpus<sup>198</sup>, it largely remained unchanged after it had been disseminated (we shall delve into the reasons for this in further detail later).

The text was subsequently reinterpreted to reflect the evolution of the religion, highlighting the new Prophet’s role, his efforts in Mecca (rather than Jerusalem), and presenting numerous other Islamic features. This led to the early biographies of the Prophet being written in a process of retrospective construction. This backward justification strategy aligned the interpretation of the text with its intended meaning: the “religion of Abraham” was thus named “Islam” (meaning “submission”, as explained in note 14), in accordance with Q5:3<sup>199</sup>—a useful concept for any caliph aiming to legitimize the submission of all under his authority—and **its sacred book was definitively called the “Quran”**, in line with its repeated references to the Arabic word “*quran*”.

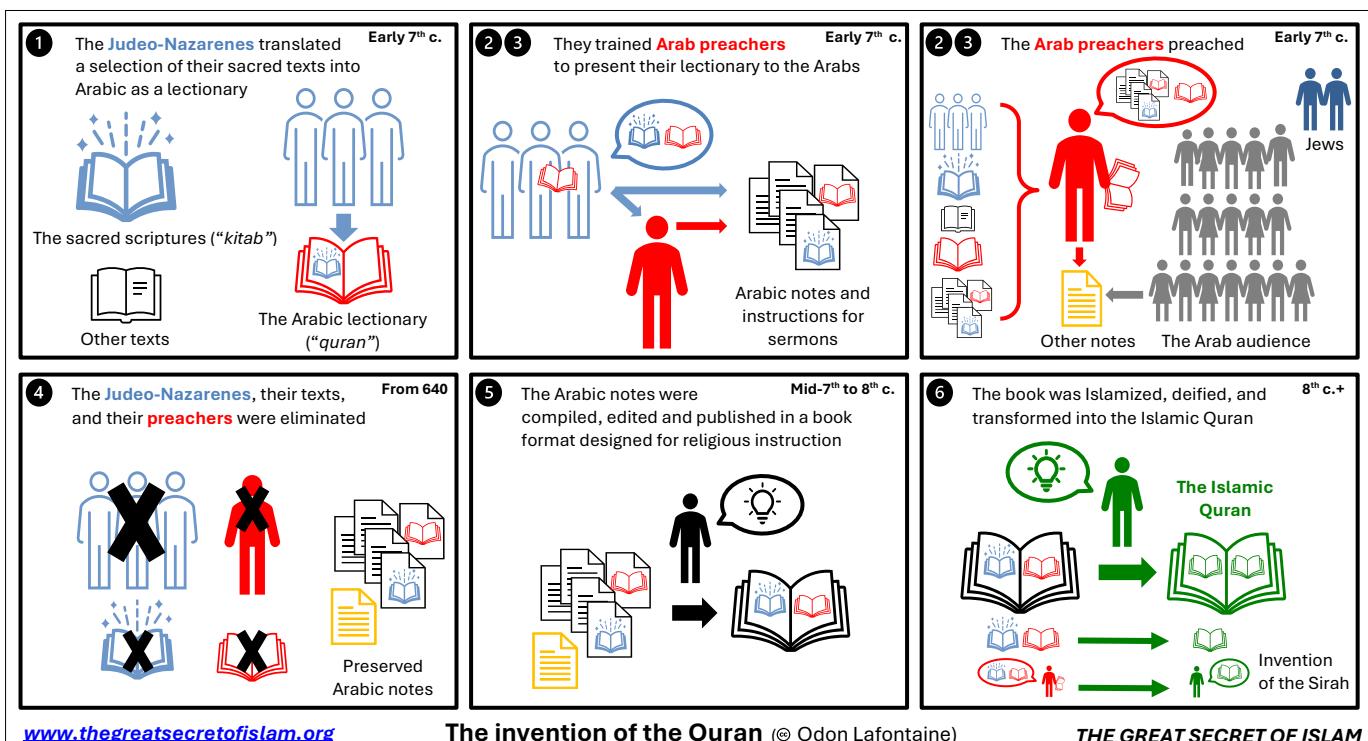
As detailed earlier (see page 38), **the term “*quran*” referred not to the Islamic Quran but to an Arabic lectionary developed by the Judeo-Nazarenes for Arab audiences**. This early 7<sup>th</sup>-century lectionary comprised collections of sacred Judeo-Nazarene texts (Torah, Gospel, and other texts) translated into Arabic. The notes from sermons and instructions mentioned this lectionary since the Judeo-Nazarenes and their Arab preachers aimed to encourage Arabs to adopt it for their religious practices. To achieve this, preachers had to effectively communicate its significance and contents to their audiences. For instance, they presented this Arabic lectionary as the first translation of these sacred texts into Arabic, intended for Arabs who lacked an Arabic Bible at the time. Or they commented on its content,

<sup>198</sup> Édouard M. Gallez demonstrated that the four Quranic mentions of “*muhammad*” (Q3:144; Q33:40; Q47:2; Q48:29) and the mention of “*ahmad*” (Q61:6) are interpolations specifically designed to refer to Muhammad as the Prophet of Islam, in his article “[References to Muhammad in the Quran: Lost Years since 1949? History of a Research](#)” (in *Inārah* volume 10, *op. cit.*). These interpolations imply the existence of an almost complete collection of the Quran that did not refer to Muhammad at the time. This leads to our hypothesis that they were added after Abd al-Malik had compiled his collection and as the figure of the Prophet of Islam was being formulated.

<sup>199</sup> Q5:3 states: “Today, I have perfected your **religion** for you, and I have completed my blessing upon you, and I have approved **Islam** for you as a **religion**”. Islamic interpretation suggests that “**God**” established **Islam** as a complete religion for Muslims. However, a literal translation of the Arabic text reveals a different nuance. Firstly, “religion” is a misleading translation of the Arabic “*din*” (دين), which means “justice” or “judgment” (as in “*yawm al din*”, يوْم الدِّين, the “Day of Judgment”), reflecting the Hebrew “*din*” (דִין) with a similar meaning. “*din*” refers to a set of religious commandments to be followed (Sharia law, according to Islam). Accordingly, “justice” indicates adherence to these commandments, and a “Just” is one who complies with them, paralleling the Jewish concept in relation to the Torah. Secondly, Arabic “*islam*” literally means “submission”. With this in mind, and considering the context of religious instructions in Q5:1-8, which include dietary (kashrut-like) laws, marriage, prayer, and ritual purification, the verse could be understood as: “Today, I have completed my **religious instruction** to you, and I have fulfilled my favor upon you, and I have approved your **submission** to my **religious instruction** [var.: I am pleased with you abiding by this instruction]”. If one also considers that the speaker is not directly “God” but a **preacher** imparting Judeo-Nazarene teachings to an Arab audience, it becomes plausible that this verse, and indeed the entirety of Q5:1-8, could originate from verbatim notes taken during a sermon. Further explanation of Q5:5 can be found on page 139.

such as its Biblical stories. This was thus reflected in their notes, and then passed into the Quran, as exemplified in Q12:1-4, which states, “*Those are the verses of the clear book [the Judeo-Nazarene Hebrew Torah from which the Arabic lectionary was translated]. Surely, we [the Judeo-Nazarenes] have sent it down as an Arabic ‘quran’ [an Arabic lectionary] so that you may understand [so that you may understand the Hebrew Torah]. We shall recount you the best of narrations in what we have revealed to you of this ‘quran’ (...). Remember when Joseph [the Biblical character] said to his father...*”; in Q27:1, “*These are the verses of the ‘quran’ and a clear book*”; and in Q43:2-3, “*By the clear book! Surely we have made it an Arabic ‘quran’ so that you may understand*”<sup>200</sup>. The Islamic reinterpretation of the text later shifted the meaning of “*quran*” to refer to the Islamic sacred book, instead of the Judeo-Nazarene Arabic lectionary. This reinterpretation also altered the meaning of “*clear book*” to refer either to the Islamic Quran itself or to the concept of a “*celestial Quran*” (its heavenly archetype). Additionally, the perspective of the narrator was changed, **imposing the notion that God himself is speaking in most verses**, rather than a Judeo-Nazarene master instructing his apprentice-teacher (or a preacher addressing his audience, sometimes impersonating God as a common rhetorical tactic), as is evident in the examples provided (refer also to our exegesis on p. 127 ff.). The entire Quranic text was reinterpreted in this way, transforming the “*quran*” references from being about a collection of Judeo-Nazarene sacred texts in Arabic to being about a divine revelation described directly by God as “the Quran”.

The making process of the Quran thus emerged as quite complex, which is why we have chosen to illustrate its main steps through this comic strip<sup>201</sup>.



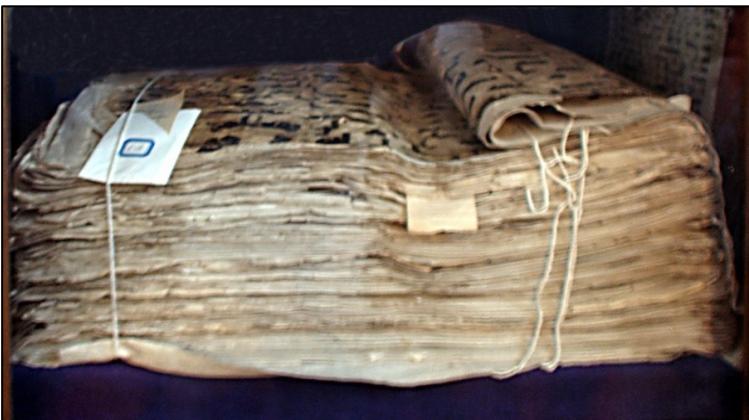
<sup>200</sup> The Quran frequently emphasizes that the “*quran*” (understood as the Judeo-Nazarene Arabic lectionary) is in clear Arabic (as seen in Q12:2; Q20:113; Q39:28; Q41:44; Q42:7; Q43:3; Q26:192), thus distinguishing it from other non-Arabic “*qurans*” (see on page 127 ff.). Our extensive study builds on Édouard M. Gallez’s work and further explores this aspect. For more information, please see our presentation titled “What is the Quran?”. This is the fourth part of our “A Nazarene Reading of the Quran” series, available at <https://thegreatsecretofislam.org/2021/05/31/a-nazarene-reading-of-the-quran/>

<sup>201</sup> This comic strip is adapted from a presentation based on our extensive study of the Quran’s creation process, available at <https://thegreatsecretofislam.org/2022/11/27/the-making-process-of-the-quran>

As with the invention of Mecca, the invention of the Quran involved numerous manipulations and forceful reinterpretations, resulting in anomalies and inconsistencies in the Islamic interpretation of its text. For example, the Quran often refers to itself as “clear” (cf. Q15:1: *“These are the verses of the book and a clear Quran”*), despite its verses often being considered ambiguous, including within Islamic scholarship—which leads us to understand the original meaning of the text referred not to itself but to another book, an actual “clear *‘quran’*”. Inconsistencies then become serious logical issues—ones that cannot ostensibly exist within “God’s perfect religion”—and thus raise complex theological questions. For instance, how does a text that was disclosed progressively (as it was gradually “revealed” by God through his prophet) describe itself as complete, suggesting a state different from its ongoing “revelation”? In response to such questions, the concept of a “celestial Quran” was introduced, seen as the heavenly archetype of the scripture, the “mother of scriptures” referred to in the text—originally alluding to the Judeo-Nazarene Hebrew and Aramaic scriptures<sup>202</sup>. This case illustrates how the invention of the Prophet and the revelation of the Quran led to the emergence of numerous contradictions, inconsistencies, and discrepancies, **prompting a continuous cycle of creating and re-creating Islamic narratives** to resolve these questions.

**Two ancient copies of the Quran, referred to as “Uthman’s Quran” (dating however from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and later)**

According to Islamic tradition, each is (mistakenly) considered as one of the Qurans disseminated by Uthman throughout his “Caliphate”. Nonetheless, they are among the oldest collections known.



**Quran from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, housed at Tashkent’s Mosque, Uzbekistan**

This incomplete collection represents about one-third of the Quran. However, there is division among Muslims regarding its origin (attributed to either Uthman or Ali), and controversy surrounds its dating, with some suggesting it dates to the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

<https://www.islamic-awareness.org/quran/text/mss/samargand.html>



**Quran from the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century, housed in the Al-Hussein Mosque in Cairo, Egypt**

This is an almost complete Quran (99%). The photo, taken from Arte’s documentary [“The Koran - Journey To The Book’s Origins”](#), showcases its impressive size (1087 folios).

<https://corpuscoranicum.de/en/manuscripts/170/page/1v?sura=1&verse=1>  
<https://www.islamic-awareness.org/quran/text/mss/hussein>

To avoid criticism, reading the texts of the “new religion of Abraham” was prohibited for Jews and Christians. Moreover, the Quran was initially scarce (even unknown to many<sup>203</sup>), hard to access due to its extensive volume and cost, and remained a closely guarded collection that

<sup>202</sup> Q3:7, 13:39, and 43:4 refer to a literal “*mother of scripture*”, described as the origin of the verses of the “*quran*”, or as being a divine scripture (which is how Judeo-Nazarenes envisioned their own scriptures). Similarly, Q56:78 refers to a “*concealed scripture*” and Q85:22 to a “*guarded tablet*”. See also our exegesis on page 127 ff.

<sup>203</sup> According to Ignacio Olagüe in *Les Arabes n’ont jamais envahi l’Espagne* [The Arabs Never Invaded Spain] (Flammarion, Paris, 1969), who quotes Eulogius of Córdoba (857) and John of Seville (858), the 8<sup>th</sup>-century conquest of Spain occurred without the presence of the Quran or any collection of religious texts.

was not widely known before the end of the Umayyad era. However, some phrases and formulas were well-known, as evidenced by their presence on rock inscriptions, coinage, and the Dome of the Rock<sup>204</sup>. Anyhow, for Arabs and converts, especially soldiers, the religion focused less on structured indoctrination and more on celebrating victory, providing messianist justification for the Arab divine rule, and promising rewards. In the late 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the mere existence of these texts primarily served as the ultimate validation of faith.

### The invention of history

Throughout the centuries following Abd al-Malik and his successors, Islamic history was continually written and rewritten to reflect various developments that arose within the original Judeo-Nazarene “religion of Abraham”. These included the elimination of the Judeo-Nazarenes, the Arabization of the faith, the marginalization of Messiah-Jesus’ second coming, claims of divine power for the caliphs (and, by extension, the Ummah), the invention of Mecca, the creation of the Prophet figure, and the formulation of divine revelation in the form of the Quran. To incorporate these elements, an extensive tradition was established, running parallel to the Quran, in an effort to endow its text with Islamic significance through the creation of “**prophetic mythology**”.

The “religious vicious circle” we previously described (see our diagram on page 80) perpetuated itself, compelling the caliphs to delve deeper into the invention of religion. This process followed the same logic of backward construction: the new rulers of the Middle East claimed a sacred book that must validate their divine right to dominate. To legitimize such claims, the book had to be presented as a divine revelation delivered by an authentic prophet of God, thus assigning Muhammad this role. Subsequently, to align Muhammad’s life with the Quran, it became necessary to fabricate events in his life that matched the text with relevant circumstances for this revelation<sup>205</sup>. Scribes, storytellers, and tradition writers thus faced a significant challenge: the Quranic text was not originally composed, compiled, selected, and edited to narrate a divine revelation received by Muhammad. They had to creatively craft the “circumstances of the revelation” to make the text appear as a prophetic revelation—it even became a distinct genre within Islamic tradition, known as “*asbab al nuzul*”. This endeavor required coherence and logic across various dimensions: theology, history, geography, genealogy, plausibility, connection with real events remembered by people, consideration of oral traditions, and remnants of actual history (for example, reinterpreting the function of the Dome of the Rock to fit the “night journey”, as we shall detail later). This lengthy process involved the construction, deconstruction, and accumulation of layers of prophetic narratives, supported by **the burgeoning of a hadith industry**. It led to the formation of a substantial tradition beyond the Quranic text, providing explanations that aligned with Islamic interpretations—essentially, constructing Islam itself.

The prominent role ascribed to Muhammad and his status as the model for Islam spurred the embellishment and even recreation of events from the proto-Islamic period, retrospectively shaping perceptions of his character as the “prophetic figure”. This process did not start from

<sup>204</sup> Given the absence of very early Quranic manuscripts, one cannot definitively prove which came first: the Quran (or early proto-Quran compilations) or certain oral phrases and formulas that were reproduced in epigraphy and on coins and later passed into the Quran—such as “*He does not beget nor is he begotten*” or “*O people of the Book, do not go beyond the bounds of your religion and do not say about God except the truth*” (appearing on coins or on the Dome of the Rock, and in Q112:3-4, and Q4:171). Nonetheless, it’s highly probable that these phrases and formulas have originated from the same Judeo-Nazarene teachings from which the Quran ultimately derives.

<sup>205</sup> We already hinted at this in note 77, referring to the pioneering work from 1910 by Henri Lammens.

nothing but was based on distant memories of the historical Muhammad and possibly other figures who might have carried this title, as previously described. All these figures purportedly spoke the “word of God” or were involved in the crucial events of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Their stories were then adapted to fit the narrative of the newly crafted history. Some truths remained discernible through the criterion of embarrassment, albeit distorted as for example in Bukhari’s hadith stating, “*Waraqah (...) wrote the Hebrew book [the Torah]. He was writing from the Gospel in Hebrew what God wanted him to write*”, and “*Waraqah died, and the divine inspiration was stopped*”<sup>206</sup>. Furthermore, the necessity of justifying the Quranic text, which became even more difficult to understand as its Islamic interpretation developed and as many of its original Aramaic (Judeo-Nazarene) meanings were lost<sup>207</sup>, added complexity to the prophetic narratives. Moreover, the Caliphate utilized Muhammad’s example to justify its actions, leading to additional fabrications about the Prophet’s life. These inventions were designed, for instance, to dictate the size of the caliphs’ harems, the age of their youngest wives, their right to marry their daughters-in-law, or their approach to satirists and political opposition. This also included the vast administrative challenges of governing the Empire—challenges that were beyond anything the historical Muhammad actually faced<sup>208</sup>.

Consequently, the Prophet of Islam’s portrayal evolved into **a character that became almost fictional**, a literary construct, a composite of distorted historical memories and inventions based on the behaviors of the caliphs, the needs of empire governance through Islam, and, mostly, the drive to explain, invent, and restore coherence to the religion. Each invention, such as attributing a gesture or fact to Muhammad, indeed required justification through new hadiths and traditions, which in turn necessitated their own justifications. This process inevitably led to difficulties and inconsistencies, necessitating further inventions. These too needed validation through additional hadiths and traditions, thereby generating new inconsistencies and perpetuating the cycle.

The **case of the “Satanic verses”** vividly exemplifies this process. Originally, Abd al-Malik’s Quran included Q53:19-22 as follows: “*Have you seen al-Lat and al-Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other? These are the high-flying cranes [“gharaniq”, deities]; verily their intercession is hoped for. Do you have male (offspring) while He (God) has female? Then that (would be) an*

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<sup>206</sup> [Sahih al-Bukhari 3](#); as is frequently the case with this website, its English translations are “adjusted” to fit the Islamic narrative.

<sup>207</sup> Among the numerous examples of words whose original Judeo-Nazarene meaning in Aramaic has been obscured and replaced by arbitrary Arabic interpretations is “*maysir*” (ميسير), as found in Q2:219, 5:90, and 5:91. Originally, it referred to the Biblical “*mishrah*” (מִשְׁרָה), derived from the same MSR root, meaning any form of unfermented grape juice forbidden to those consecrated to God (Nazirites, as described in Numbers 6:1-4). Wine, grapes, raisins and vinegar were also prohibited. Misunderstandings of this Biblical root in the Quranic context transformed “*maysir*” into a term for a mysterious “game of chance”, likely named as such by analogy with the magical practices condemned in 5:90. This prohibition is consistently associated with that of wine across its three Quranic mentions. Over the centuries, various hadiths and commentaries have been devised to attribute “prophetic” significance to this “game of chance”, such as in [Bukhari 1601](#), where Muhammad is reported to have revealed that neither Abraham nor Ishmael ever participated in a “game of chance with Azlams [meaning arrows, a divination game]”. (see Édouard M. Gallez’s analysis at [http://www.lemessietsonprophete.com/annexes/Messie\\_de\\_Mahomet-1.htm](http://www.lemessietsonprophete.com/annexes/Messie_de_Mahomet-1.htm) for further explanations).

Christoph Luxenberg has also significantly shown in *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Quran (op. cit.)* that the meanings of certain Quranic words can only be fully understood by referring to Aramaic, and to their Aramaic cultural and religious contexts. Continuing the work initiated by Alphonse Mingana (among his contributions is “*Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kur'an*”, published in the 11th Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 1927), he is now joined by other contemporary scholars exploring the Aramaic roots of the Quran, such as Robert Kerr (see among others his article “[Aramaisms in the Qur'ān and their Significance](#)”, *op. cit.*).

<sup>208</sup> As explained by Patricia Crone in her article “[What do we actually know about Muhammad?](#)” (OpenDemocracy, 2008).

*unfair division!*” (as reported by al-Tabari<sup>209</sup>—see below for an overview of this 10<sup>th</sup> century Muslim historian). Given its actual context (the preceding verses), this passage could be interpreted as the verbatim of a monotheist preacher (Muhammad?) mocking his Arab Christian audience for its enduring devotion towards al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat, three traditional Arab deities from the era of ancient Arab polytheism. However, when the concept of the Quran as a divine revelation was invented, this passage became very upsetting: since “monotheistic God” is supposed to speak directly in the Quran, harshly condemning polytheism as the worst of offenses, how could he or his messenger encourage the worshipping of false deities? Al-Tabari found a solution: he invented (or reported the invention) that **Muhammad had been inspired by Satan**, writing, “*Satan cast on his [Muhammad] tongue two phrases: These are the high-flying cranes; verily their intercession is to be desired*”.

This new invention reassured the Quran as God’s authentic word, referencing the peculiar verses in Q22:52-54. These verses state that God may allow Satan to inspire his messengers as a means to test the faith of their audience—a notion that could have been devised to rationalize the “Satanic verses”. But this solution introduced a significant inconsistency: how could Muhammad, the “Messenger of God”, be trusted if he could have been inspired by Satan instead of God? **The cure was worse than the disease**, casting doubt in the Quran’s authenticity as the word of God. In response, subsequent authorities decided to redact the Quranic text, removing the passage about the “*false deities*”. As a result, this passage is found only in the works of al-Tabari, as well as in those of 9<sup>th</sup>-century traditionists [al-Waqidi](#) and [Ibn Sa'd](#). Many “authentic” hadiths [were also written](#) to explain how Muhammad condemned the devotion towards al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat, asserting the uniqueness of God in place of these deities. Consequently, modern editions of the Quran do not contain the contentious passage. Most Muslims were unaware of it until novelist Salman Rushdie titled one of his books [The Satanic Verses](#), bringing to light a narrative that should not exist within Islam, and thereby generating significant controversy.

In the end, this process resulted in the formation of **a legend that is largely artificial**, significantly diverging from historical facts and often entirely disconnected in various aspects. Consequently, the scholarly pursuit of the “true historical Muhammad” becomes an impossible task if one relies solely on Islamic tradition. A broader perspective, such as the one we adopted in our study, is necessary (refer also to our reflections on this topic on note 78 and page 40 ff.).

The number of hadiths was **multiplied to an extreme**, reaching an extravagant total estimated at over one and a half million. Assuming the Prophet’s “active life” spanned 30 years, this translates to 137 hadiths for each day—however, the actual number should be lower since some hadiths do not directly pertain to Muhammad but to contextual elements, history, or his entourage, and many are repetitive. To establish credibility, Sunni Islam classifies hadiths according to their reliability, assessed based on the supposed “strength” of their oral transmission chains (“*isnad*”). Yet, given that these chains are merely declarative, their reliability is especially questionable. Even more so since traditionists did not conduct a

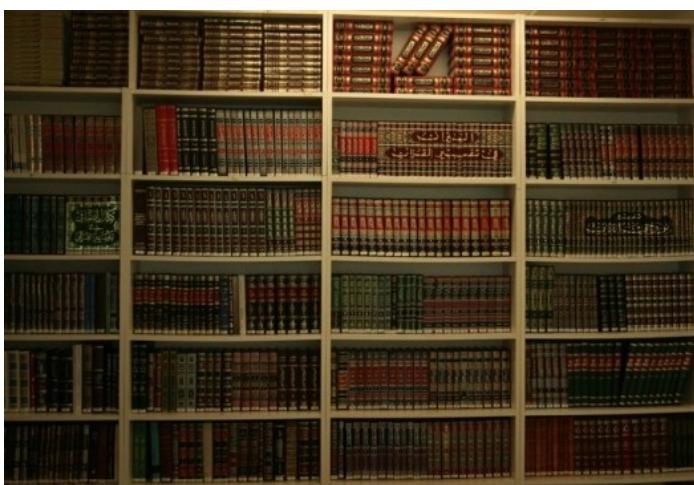


**The ancient Arab deities al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat**  
1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE,  
Iraq Museum in Baghdad

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>209</sup> [History of the Prophets and Kings](#), Volume VI, *op. cit.*, p.107-112; the “Satanic verses” are mentioned on page 111.

thorough scientific and historical examination of the hadiths' contents<sup>210</sup>. Bukhari and Muslim, the most revered hadith compilers, documented about 17,000 hadiths between them. After removing duplicates, this leaves approximately 7,000 unique hadiths, equating to one hadith for every day of Muhammad's active life. Other collections by Al-Nasai (*Sunan al-Sughra*), Abu Dawud, Al-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Majah are also deemed highly reliable, though to a slightly lesser extent than the first two. These authors produced their works in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries and seemed to perform censorship and correction of earlier traditions, especially those of Malik ibn Anas, who died in 796 and is known chiefly through the revisions by Bukhari and Muslim. As a result, there are almost no Muslim texts (actual manuscripts) from before the 9<sup>th</sup> century, apart from early Quranic manuscripts<sup>211</sup>. This **historical “black hole”**—a prolonged absence of Islamic writings or documents (since Muhammad)—may be explained by the gradual creation of Islamic history. As the new historical narrative was still being developed, rewritten, and refined, it became necessary to eliminate narratives that had become outdated by newer revisions.



A collection of hadiths and books of Islamic tradition



Islamic scholars and their books



A commented edition of Bukhari's "authentic hadiths" ("sahih al bukhari")

### A brief insight into the vast scope of Islamic tradition

(Fair use for educational and non-commercial purposes)

This can particularly be inferred from the writing of the "sira", the official biography of Muhammad. The compilation of this "historical" narrative was overseen, influenced, and financed by the politico-religious caliphal authorities, especially those in Baghdad following the Abbasids' rise to power in 750. It paralleled the work on the "circumstances of the revelation",

<sup>210</sup> Almost every hadith shows signs of invention or significant alteration. For instance, any hadith depicting Muhammad as the "Prophet of Islam", or staging events in Mecca, has likely been rewritten to include these historically inaccurate elements. Additional criteria, such as calendar discrepancies, also suggest late invention or modification of hadiths. It appears that Arabs utilized a 360-day solar calendar in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, a system not reflected in the hadiths, which instead reference a lunar calendar. This discrepancy indicates that they were composed or modified in a later period after the calendar had been changed.

Despite these issues, from a historical-critical and scientific standpoint, such sources should not be outright dismissed. They warrant consideration and analysis for their content and for what they can reveal, even through their inaccuracies and alterations (and sometimes because of their inaccuracies and alterations).

<sup>211</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>-century dates attributed to the hadith collections of Bukhari and Muslim, which are considered nearly sacrosanct within Sunni Islam, have recently come under significant scrutiny. Critics suggest that these collections may have been finalized much later than previously thought. The publication of Rachid Aylal's book, *Sahih Al-Bukhari: The End of a Legend* (Dar al Watan, Rabat, 2017; Arabic title: (صحيح البخاري نهاية أسطورة), stirred considerable controversy in the Maghreb, leading to its eventual ban in Morocco. Aylal argues that the oldest manuscript of Bukhari's collection was composed 240 years after his death. He also contends that Bukhari's hadiths are largely fabrications that, moreover, contradict the Quran.

including the genealogy of the Prophet and all events of his life, presented as keys to the Islamic interpretation of the Quran. The scribes commissioned by the Caliphate to write the “*sira*” engaged in a gradual process of narrative construction, along with other traditionists, inventing episodes and events and then revising them to resolve inconsistencies. This method created a **“layered” narrative**, where each “verified” layer could then support additional layers. For example, John of Damascus, writing in 746, observed that Muhammad was said to have received the revelation during his sleep. This indicates that the concept of Islamic revelation was already forming, even though the detailed description of it being delivered by the angel Gabriel had not been invented at that point<sup>212</sup>.

Among these scribes, history has particularly noted the work of [Ibn Hisham](#) in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. His work is believed to be based on the earlier work of [Ibn Ishaq](#), which has only reached us through Ibn Hisham’s version—raising questions about potential censorship and correction of Ibn Ishaq’s. The work of [al-Tabari](#) (died in 923), who served as a court historian under the Abbasids, also deserves mention. In [The History of the Prophets and Kings](#), among his other works, he presented an idealized account of the early events of Islam that aligned with the narrative favored by the ruling powers. This included the portrayal of a glorious Islamic conquest of the Middle East originating from Mecca instead of the actual geopolitical and religious context of empires at war and apocalyptic expectations, and the invention of the figures of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs in place of the anarchy detailed in our study. His work remains one of the primary sources of official Muslim history, including Muhammad’s. Specifically, al-Tabari wrote an early “*tafsir*”, or exegesis, offering an explanation of the Quran in line with the very discourse he helped craft. His “*tafsir*” still serves as a reference today.

Given these considerations, viewing these works as historical chronicles without a critical perspective proves challenging, much less accepting them as accurate representations. Predominantly written in a Persian (Abbasid) setting, markedly different from the original Arab-Nazarene foundation in Syria, Arabia, along the caravan routes, and in Jerusalem, and also distinct from the Syrian-Arab cultural backdrop of the Damascus Caliphate, these works are more than two centuries removed from the events they claim to describe. They seek to legitimize Abbasid rule by discrediting the Umayyads, even though they depend on the Umayyads for their purportedly unblemished transmission of Islam. They aim to elucidate the Quran, yet paradoxically, they were constructed based on this very Quran to provide clarification. This presents a **classic case of circular reasoning**, as we mentioned earlier (see note 77).

In the end, the rise of the Abbasid dynasty significantly shaped the formation of Islam. Their armies, under the leadership of [Abu al-Abbas Abd Allah](#) (known as al-Saffah, “the bloodthirsty”—literally, “the (blood)shedder”), defeated the forces of Caliph Marwan II, leading to the collapse of the Damascus-based Umayyad Caliphate and the near extinction of the Umayyads. Most were slaughtered by the Abbasids, except for one who fled to Spain and whose descendants founded another Caliphate. This conflict, referred to as the third “*fitna*” in Islamic tradition, underscored the persistent strife within the Ummah. Despite (and also because of) Abd al-Malik and his successors’ stringent governance and efforts to reform the religion, internal conflicts continued. The challenge to Umayyad authority remained acute, further complicated by the intertwining of politics, religion, and the manipulations we have described.

<sup>212</sup> Refer to Raymond Le Coz, *Jean Damascène, Écrits sur l’islam*, Sources Chrétiennes n°383, Le Cerf, 2016, pp. 216-217. In note 185, we referenced John of Damascus’s work, *Concerning Heresy* (746), and highlighted the scholarly debate about the dating of some of his texts on Islam (cf. *Jean Damascène...*, op. cit., chapter VI, p. 183 ff.), with scholars suggesting a 9<sup>th</sup>-century origin rather than 746. Consequently, the concept of a revelation received by Muhammad (in his sleep) might have been developed well after 746. Its transformation into the narrative of Gabriel transmitting this revelation would then be an even later addition.

The Umayyads continued to suppress rebels, in an effort to maintain their rule. They also persistently sought to eradicate alternative Qurans (compilations different from Abd al-Malik's) and dissent among believers. The introduction of the term "Islam" (meaning submission) around 720 to denote the religion, and "Muslim" (meaning one who submits) for its followers, highlighted the intensity of caliphal rule and the deep-seated nature of Islam: **a faith, a religion and a system crafted by "God's deputy on Earth" that meant submission to his rule as it required submission to God.**

Opposition to caliphal authority naturally developed, especially among those historically opposed to the Umayyads. These opponents primarily included the former supporters of Ali, their descendants and allies, located in Persia and among the Qurayshis and other Arab factions hostile to the Umayyads. From these groups, the Abbasid branch emerged. Led by al-Saffah, who claimed a family connection to Muhammad, the Abbasids formed alliances with most Alids, Arab and non-Arab Muslims, including Persians from the significant feudal factions of the old Empire. Together, they mounted a rebellion against the Umayyads, achieving a decisive victory in 750. It marked another pivotal moment in the centuries-long conflict between the Persian empire and the Mediterranean empires (Ancient Greece, Rome, and then Byzantium), now succeeded by the new Abbasid Caliphate. Al-Saffah's brother and successor, al-Mansur, founded a new capital for the Caliphate in Mesopotamia (Baghdad), a new city for a new religion. **The Abbasid dynasty was established.** It endured until the Mongol invasions in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which led to the city's complete destruction and the massacre of all its inhabitants, including the Caliph.



**Fantasy depiction of Abbasid Baghdad**

In the center, the al-Mansur mosque (facing Mecca)  
 Illustration generated by OpenAI's DALL-E, 2024,  
 used with permission

Islam truly emerged under the Abbasids. They notably promoted equality between Arab and non-Arab converts, being significantly supported by non-Arab, especially Persian, factions. Thus, **Islam acquired a truly universal dimension, transitioning from a religion that primarily symbolized Arab domination to one with a global scope**<sup>213</sup>.

<sup>213</sup> Of course, the term "Arab domination" did not apply to the entire Arab populace.

It's also important to note that, initially, in high antiquity, "Arabness" did not refer to an ethnic reality but rather to a social condition: that of the Semitic nomads. Since they developed their own Semitic language, "Arabness" was thus identified with it, even for sedentary Arabs. The emergence of Islam led to the conception of "the Arabs" as a unified ethnic group and necessitated the classification of conquered populations, on whom the Arabic language was imposed, as "Arabs", regardless of whether they converted to Islam or remained Christian. Therefore, **"Arabness" is distinct from Islam.**

Additionally, it should be highlighted that the majority of the populations within the Islamic empire remained predominantly non-Muslim until the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (mostly Christian). Some historians even argue that it was not until the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, following the great massacres of Eastern Christianity, India, and Central Asia by the Mongols, notably [Tamerlane](#), that these populations became predominantly Muslim.

## The invention of the “night journey”

The continuous cycle of creating and re-creating Islamic narratives has yielded one particularly significant tale: the “night journey” of the Prophet. Amidst the plethora of questions arising from the religious inventions, the elevation of Mecca as the holy city of Islam presented numerous challenges and contradictions. Originally designated as a substitute for Abraham’s place in Jerusalem, the narrative surrounding the “circumstances of revelation” established Mecca as the Prophet birthplace, the site of the “revelation” alongside Medina, and the focal point for the Emigrants’ war effort, supplanting Jerusalem—thus effectively repurposing Judeo-Nazarene teachings within the Quran by transforming Jerusalem’s Temple into Islam’s Kaaba in Mecca. Among the many contradictions, **the status of Jerusalem demanded resolution**: if Mecca was Islam’s birthplace, how could Jerusalem be reconciled with its enduring sacred aura within the believers? What could explain the distant memories of the Emigrants’ early visits there, including Muhammad? What of the traditions regarding heaven from Jerusalem by messianic figures of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Messiah-Jesus who was supposed to descend from there, and possibly Ali who claimed the same—see page 61)? What significance lied in the Dome of the Rock, and what stood on the Temple Mount before its construction? How could the Arab efforts to conquer Jerusalem be interpreted? Should al-Quds (Jerusalem’s Islamic name), Islam’s third holiest city, be ceded to Jews and Christians?



**The night journey of Muhammad**  
(16<sup>th</sup> century Persian miniature)-[Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

The status of Jerusalem was then reinforced by a pivotal invention in Islamic tradition: “**the Night Journey and the Ascension**” (“*al isra wa'l miraj*”). Probably conceptualized during the 9<sup>th</sup> century, this narrative plays a crucial role in Islam, as introduced earlier. Islamic scholars of the time presented this story to explain a verse at the beginning of surah 17—that would give this surah its “The Night Journey” title. This verse indirectly references the intriguing journey of a “servant”—God’s servant—supposed to be Muhammad: “*Glory to the one who sent his servant on a journey by night from the sacred mosque [‘masjid al haram’] to the distant mosque [‘masjid al aqsa’], whose surroundings we have blessed, so that we might show him some of our signs. Surely he, he is the hearing, the seeing*”. According to those Islamic scholars, and thus to Islamic tradition, this verse described how Muhammad flew by night on a winged horse (“al buraq”) from Mecca to Jerusalem, landing on the Temple Mount, and from there to the Heavens where God showed him “some of his signs”, meaning a “celestial Quran”; and then back to Mecca. This new narrative held importance in many ways.

It interpreted the “sacred mosque” (“*masjid al haram*”—مسجد الحرام) here mentioned as the Kaaba in Mecca, thus **further integrating Mecca into the Islamic interpretation of the Quran** in a way that the text itself does not explicitly do. Literally, “*masjid al haram*” does not mean “sacred mosque” but “forbidden mosque”, with “*masjid*” meaning a “place of prostration”—essentially, a place of worship, hence a mosque. The term “forbidden place of

worship” was actually associated with the Temple Mount by the Judeo-Nazarenes for several reasons: the Christian authorities in Jerusalem prohibited Jews from making pilgrimages there. Secondly, they believed that God had destroyed it through the Romans due to the corruption of “bad Jews” and that God thereafter forbade their return, entrusting this sacred mission only to the “good Jews”, meaning the Judeo-Nazarenes themselves. Moreover, the Temple Mount was the most sacred place for Jews, since it included the “Holy of Holies”, the place of God’s presence on Earth, making it definitely an “*haram*” place. The many mentions of a “*masjid al haram*” in the Quran originally referred to the Temple Mount, as we already hinted at and as we shall provide examples later.

Additionally, this narrative affirmed **the Prophet's connection to Jerusalem**, highlighting the city’s sacred status. It transformed the vague memories of the historical Muhammad(s) visiting there with the Emigrants in 614, and possibly again in 638, into a direct association with the Prophet, thereby precluding any potentially awkward questions such as “what was he doing in Jerusalem at that time?”. Moreover, it wove remnants of 7<sup>th</sup>-century tales of heavenly ascents and descents into his legend, thus elevating his own sanctity. Furthermore, it provided a basis for the reverence of the Dome of the Rock, and of the rock located at its center. According to the new narrative, the rock was identified as the spot from which Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven. This interpretation imbued it with Islamic significance, even though these ideas (such as the rock being the “*navel of the world*” or God’s “*throne*”<sup>214</sup>) originally stemmed from Jewish and Judeo-Nazarene traditions.

Significantly, **it resolved certain inconsistencies** within the Islamic interpretation of the Quran that we previously highlighted. By depicting the Prophet ascending to heaven and being presented with a “celestial Quran”, this narrative accomplishes multiple objectives at once. It imbues the Quranic references to a “mother of the scriptures” with a distinctly Islamic significance. Specifically, Islamic interpretation of Q43:2-4— “*By the clear book! Surely we have made it an Arabic ‘quran’ so that you may understand. And surely it is in [or from] the mother of the book [“umm al kitab”, or “mother of scriptures”, also in Q3:7 and Q13:39], with us, most high, wise*”—suggests that these verses refer to **the creation by God of the Quran in Arabic from its celestial archetype**, the “[Heavenly Quran](#)”, which was presented to Muhammad. This narrative also lends Islamic coherence to the various mentions of “*quran*” within the Quran itself, as we observed earlier, explaining how the Quran can describe itself as both complete and continuously being revealed<sup>215</sup>. In fact, the “mother of scriptures” referred to the Hebrew scriptures of the Judeo-Nazarenes, from which they selected passages to translate into an Arabic lectionary. This is echoed in Q3:7, which suggests that the “clear

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<sup>214</sup> Credits must be given to Guillaume Dye for uncovering these references of Jerusalem and its rock’s veneration within geographical and historical Islamic scholarship, notably in Islamic “*fada'il*” traditions, which emphasizes the “virtues” of sacred places:

Ibn al-Murajja, in *Fada'il [virtues] Bayt al-Maqdis* [the sacred temple, one of Jerusalem’s Islamic names] *wa-al-Khalil* [Hebron] *wa-Fada'il al-Sham* [greater Syria] (10<sup>th</sup> century): “The rock of Jerusalem is one of the rocks of paradise”; “We find in the Torah that [God] said to the Rock of Jerusalem: ‘You are **my lowest throne, and from you I ascended into heaven**, and below you the earth is extended, and all the water that flows from the tops of the mountains comes from below you’”; “The fresh water and the winds that bring rain come from a source [located] below the rock of Jerusalem”.

Ibn al-Faqih, in *Mukhtasar Kitab al-Buldan* [Summary of the Book of Lands] (10<sup>th</sup> century): “**The rock is the navel of the world**”; “Jerusalem is the land which God has chosen from among the other lands”; “Whoever chooses to die in Jerusalem dies as if he died in heaven”; “God will destroy Gog and Magog in Jerusalem”; “The gathering and resurrection of the dead will take place in Jerusalem”; “All fresh waters have their origin under the rock (of Jerusalem)”.

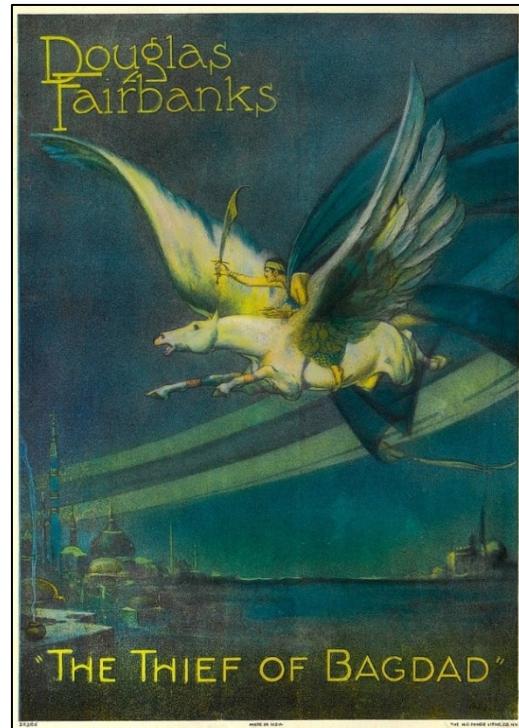
<sup>215</sup> It’s important to remember that, according to Muslim tradition, the Quran was episodically revealed to Muhammad, who then gradually preached its messages. It was learned and written down under his direction by his scribes and companions between the years 610 and 632.

verses" of the Arabic lectionary originate from the "mother of scriptures", and in Q13:39, which highlights the divine nature of the "mother of scriptures" (see also note 202 and our Quranic exegesis overview on page 127 ff.).

Various Islamic traditions developed from this premise, expanding the "night journey" narrative and adding details. As with every invention, this one indeed prompted another cycle of further innovations to address the resulting discrepancies, employing the same logic of **backward construction**. Some innovations sought to explain why Muhammad did not have prior knowledge of the Revelation despite contemplating the "Heavenly Quran"; others attempted to provide evidence supporting the reality of his miraculous flight. Some even rationalized the event as merely a "vision" or a "spirit journey". Not all of these issues could be resolved, and some discrepancies remain apparent even today.

For example, one could draw parallels between Muhammad's "night journey" and narratives found in Jewish and Christian apocryphal texts, which describe various prophets ascending to heaven. Besides, the rich Persian cultural backdrop, known for its magical and mythical creatures, including flying horses like the one in *The Ebony Horse* from *The Arabian Nights*, adds depth to the tapestry of stories that influenced Islamic narratives. This includes the "journey to the heavens" undertaken by *Kartir*, a highly influential 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Zoroastrian priest<sup>216</sup>.

Chiefly, the concept of a "night journey" undertaken by a "servant of God", during which God reveals his "signs"—a term that uses the same Arabic word, "ayat", as "verses"—bears a striking resemblance to ancient Jewish traditions about Moses (pre-Islamic traditions). Such similarity is too significant to dismiss. Indeed, the Torah describes how Moses ascends Mount Sinai (symbolically referred to as "heaven") to meet God and receive the "Tablets of the Law" (analogous to "verses"). Various Jewish traditions developed on this story, having Moses ascending to heaven where God showed him a "celestial Torah"<sup>217</sup>. Another Jewish tradition, on Exodus 19:14<sup>218</sup>, depicts **Moses' "night journey"**, during which he is taken by night from Egypt (Pelusium) on eagles' wings to the "sanctuary" (Aramaic: "beit muqdashah"—בֵּית מָקוֹדֶשׁ—، بَيْتُ الْمَقْدِسِ—، identical to the Arabic "bayt al maqdis"—بيت المقدس—، "sacred house", used in Islamic tradition to refer to Jerusalem), and then back to Egypt. This narrative closely parallels that of the Islamic "night journey" about Q17:1. Moreover, Q17:2 does not mention Muhammad but Moses—who is also God's servant according to Islam—receiving sacred scriptures ("We gave Moses the scriptures"). The remainder of the surah does not discuss Muhammad's night journey either. Thus, one could hypothesize that Q17:1-2 originally described not Muhammad's, but Moses' "night journey". Furthermore, the Quran also



A 1924 silent film inspired by *The Arabian Nights* and its theme of a flying horse  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>216</sup> For a detailed study about these traditions, see Marion Duvauchel, *Jérusalem, la Bouraq et le vol mystique* [Jerusalem, the Buraq, and the Mystical Flight], Les Acteurs du Savoir, Le Coudray-Macouard, 2018.

<sup>217</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Menachot* 29b, from <https://www.sefaria.org/Menachot.29b.3?lang=bi>

<sup>218</sup> Targum Jonathan, *On Exodus* 19:4, from [https://www.sefaria.org/Targum\\_Jonathan\\_on\\_Exodus.19.4?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Exodus.19.4?lang=bi)

describes another famous “night journey” involving Moses, namely, the crossing of the sea during the Exodus from Egypt (Q20:77; 26:52; 44:23).

**The main discrepancies, however, are once again tangible:** the Dome of the Rock, built around 692, retains no evidence of the “night journey” narrative. None of the inscriptions from the era of Abd al-Malik, found on the monument, mention the “night journey”, suggesting the narrative might have been developed later. Additionally, Muhammad’s “night journey” is described as occurring between a “sacred mosque”—presumed to be the Kaaba in Mecca—and a “distant mosque” (“*al aqsa*”—presumed to be in Jerusalem. However, the actual al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem was constructed in 709, 88 years after Muhammad’s supposed journey (refer to its image on page 76). Besides, according to Dan Gibson, this mosque’s “*qibla*”, or prayer direction, points towards Petra, not Mecca<sup>219</sup>. This discrepancy could suggest that the reference to an “*al aqsa* mosque” was an interpolation intended to link the narrative to Jerusalem within an Islamic frame<sup>220</sup>. In fact, without this specific mention, Quran 17:1 would very closely parallel the Jewish tradition regarding Moses’ “night journey”, as follows: “*Glory to the one who sent his servant on a journey by night to the sanctuary, whose surroundings we have blessed, so that we might show him some of our verses*”.

Even with the assumption of such interpolations, it must be recognized that direct alterations to the Quranic text faced increasing challenges due to Abd al-Malik’s reforms. His endorsement of Arabic as the official language, alongside the standardization and dissemination of the Quran and efforts to eliminate non-conforming Quranic manuscripts—policies that his successors continued—had a significant impact. Therefore, to advance the development of the religion, the focus shifted to expanding narratives around the existing text rather than modifying the text itself. The invention of the “night journey” exemplifies how traditions evolved alongside the Quranic text, seeking to interpret it in ways that fulfilled objectives of coherence and the justification of Islam. Even without changing the fundamental essence of the text, **they embedded Islamic concepts so deeply that other interpretations of the Quran became increasingly inconceivable**, overshadowing the quest to understand its original meaning. The strict governance of the caliphate also played a role in this process.

## The petrification of Islam

To conclude our examination of the origins and early formation of Islam, we must now turn our attention to the process that led to its consolidation, up to its “petrification”. This process began as the various phenomena we’ve discussed had established the general discourse of Islam’s self-representation (the same discourse introduced in our preamble). Central to this discourse is the Quran, which, as we’ve noted, offers limited insight into Islam without its “authorized commentaries” and other “Islamic interpretations” found in the Sirah, the so-called “oral traditions” committed to writing (the Hadiths, particularly those deemed most reliable), and a distinctively Muslim “historical” account of the context in which Islam emerged. This includes descriptions of Mecca’s situation, pre-Islamic history, explanations of

<sup>219</sup> [https://nabataea.net/explore/cities\\_and\\_sites/al-aqsa-mosque/](https://nabataea.net/explore/cities_and_sites/al-aqsa-mosque/)

<sup>220</sup> Western scholars suspect even bigger interpolations. For further reference, see Guillaume Dye’s “[La théologie de la substitution du point de vue de l’Islam](#) [The substitution theology from the perspective of Islam]” in *Judaïsme, christianisme, islam* (Didier Devillez Editeur, Bruxelles, 2010), pages 101-102. There, he refers to Claude Gilliot’s analysis of possible interpolations and supports John Wansbrough’s hypothesis that the “servant” mentioned could be Moses instead of Muhammad.

polytheism and ignorance (“*jahiliyya*”), Muhammad’s genealogy, key events of his life, “circumstances of the revelation”, the history of the “conquest”, and the early caliphs, all revised to conform to legend. Concurrently, [Sharia](#), Islamic law derived from the Quranic text and tradition, was formalized. This period of consolidation followed the reigns of “liberal” Baghdad caliphs like [Harun al-Rashid](#) and [Al-Ma'mun](#), who are celebrated today for fostering the arts, science, and intellectual discourse during what is known as the “golden age of Islam”, despite the harshness of the Caliphate’s rule and the intensive use of slaves. In that era, the [Mu'tazilite movement](#), a rationalist school of thought that considered the Quran a “created” book, initially found acceptance. But it faced a severe backlash from the opposing [Ash'arite movement](#), which eventually won caliphal support, particularly that of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (who reigned from 847 to 861). The Ash'arites not only suppressed the Mu'tazilites—who also had [persecuted](#) their own adversaries during their ascendancy (the 18 years Mihna period)—but also established their dogmatic movement as the preeminent theological stance within Islam.

The need to halt the endless cycle of religious innovations became increasingly urgent as it posed a threat to the integrity of the Empire. Consequently, as the expanding Islamic narrative seemed consistent enough, theologians and authorities advocating strict obedience enacted three major decisions between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> century that still exert influence today:

- **The declaration of the Quran as uncreated** under Caliph al-Mutawakkil: its text was deemed divine and definitive, effectively labeling any other Quranic collection as “*kufr*” (disbelief, “heresy”). This decisively echoes Muhammad’s supposed original proclamation of the Quran as the direct word of God given to him by the “*tanzil*”, the “Islamic revelation”<sup>221</sup>.
- **The doctrine of abrogation** (“*al nasikh wa al mansukh*”, “the abrogating and the abrogated”): it holds that a surah or verse revealed later has greater authority. Specifically, if two surahs or verses are contradictory, the later one is deemed superior. This principle aids in distinguishing between the directives found in the Medinan surahs and verses, known for their “war injunctions”, and the teachings of “peace and tolerance” in the Meccan surahs and verses, attributed to the earlier phase of Muhammad’s life according to traditional narratives. In instances of interpretive conflict, the Medinan surahs or verses, assumed to have been revealed after the Meccan ones, are prioritized. Allegedly rooted in the Quran (Q2:106 and 16:101), this doctrine necessitates a chronological understanding of the Quranic revelation, surah by surah and verse by verse, thereby referencing the “circumstances of revelation” for clarity. As a result, passages that advocate arbitrariness, violence, and submission—conveniently aligning with the caliphs’ interests—are almost invariably emphasized<sup>222</sup>.
- **The “closure of the doors of ‘ijtihad’”**, symbolically signifying the cessation of reflective thought (“*ijtihad*”) and interpretative work on religion; the “formative phase” of Islam was considered complete, with further contemplation viewed as a threat to the empire’s unity due to diverse interpretations among the four schools of jurisprudence

<sup>221</sup> Thereby altering the meaning of the term “*tanzil*”, traditionally more akin to “descent”—it could also primarily be understood as a form of “teaching”, or “comprehension”—and even “inspiration” without the concept of an active “revelation” from God.

<sup>222</sup> According to this doctrine, one might expect the “abrogated” portions of the Quran to be disregarded. However, this is not the case: even though they have been superseded by the so-called Medinan surahs, the Meccan surahs can still be relevant. This has led to the development of a “contextual” interpretation of the Quran: when Muslims find themselves in a minority, as Muhammad was believed to be in Mecca, they are encouraged to adopt the approach outlined in the Meccan surahs. Conversely, in positions of strength, akin to Muhammad’s situation in Medina (be it numerical superiority, a favorable balance of power, or within Muslim governed countries), the directives of the Medinan surahs are to be applied.

within Sunni Islam. Consequently, religious criticism was discouraged, favoring imitation (“*taqlid*”) and consensus (“*ijma*”) over innovative reasoning. Subsequent theologians developed and nuanced the role of independent thinking, striking a balance between tradition, reason, and textual interpretation. Ultimately, however, critical thinking was largely reserved for “authorized” scholars, with other believers mostly confined to a “*haram/halal*” mindset—“forbidden/authorized”—which severely hinders reason, as one is supposedly not allowed to entertain “forbidden” thoughts.

The debates among Muslim specialists have nonetheless continued, focusing on several key issues: the correct version of the final text, its divine nature (despite already being declared as such), the process of its composition, or the concept of its revelation in multiple canonical forms<sup>223</sup>. Significantly, discussions have persistently addressed the “circumstances of revelation”—a critical element in Islamic scholarship that influences essential aspects such as the Quran’s authority over tradition, the definitive list of abrogated verses, text inconsistencies, and the justification of Sharia based on these factors. The documented existence of these debates<sup>224</sup> highlights the ambiguity of Islam as it has developed: on one hand, it presented itself and continues to be seen as “God’s given religion”, a coherent doctrine supported by seemingly robust internal logic; on the other hand, its scholars have wrestled and continue to wrestle with numerous issues arising from its complex construction process, many of which prove difficult—to say the least—to reconcile within the Islamic framework.

These specialist debates, largely unknown to the general Muslim public, could not prevent these three major decisions from “petrifying” the foundations of Islam: the imposition of **the Quran’s absolute sacredness and that of the figure of Muhammad**, and the veneration of the early days of Islam (including reverence for the Rashidun caliphs within Sunni Islam). Since then, Islam’s fundamental doctrines and discourses have seen minimal change. Practices, however, may have varied over time, influenced by factors such as living under caliphal authority, being a minority in foreign territories, facing hostility, or being embraced within a liberal context, not to mention the very different cultural backgrounds in which Islam expanded—we shall revisit the distinction between Islamic doctrine and Muslim practice in our conclusion. Despite this, the course of Islam’s historical evolution has established a paradigm seemingly immutable for Muslims.

## Sunni and Shia Islam

Finally, the opposition between Sunni and Shia Islam must be addressed. Nearly all Muslims belong to these two branches, with Sunni Islam comprising about 85% of the Muslim population today. Originating with the Alids in Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia, who historically opposed the Umayyads, Shiism shares its foundational elements with Sunnism: the same Quran and core principles, despite Shiite beliefs in Sunni-led falsification (allegedly omitting the “surahs of Ali”), a shared devotion to Muhammad, a similar Sirah, and comparable Sharia. Both Sunni and Shia accounts trace these similarities back to the earliest days of Islam,

<sup>223</sup> The Islamic science of “*arhū*” (versions) and “*qira’at*” (readings) aims to retrospectively explain the existence of multiple Arabic versions of the Quran. It attempts to reconcile these variations with the traditional belief in the Quran’s “revelation” and its perfect preservation, right down to the letter. Given the strong adherence to this belief, facing the reality of the complex and laborious historical process behind the development of Islam and the Quran “*in-depth*” proves to be significantly challenging.

<sup>224</sup> These debates, as documented in Muslim tradition, indicate that the Quran cannot have emerged from a single instance of preaching and early editing, but rather from a long and complex process. See the contributions of Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye in *Le Coran des Historiens* (*op. cit.*) for further reference.

during the time of Prophet Muhammad, before the sects distinctly parted ways during the second “*fitna*” over conflicting claims to the “Prophet’s succession”. However, our historical analysis reveals a more nuanced and logically coherent narrative: the Sunni-Shia division did not solidify during this period, nor was it centered around an imaginary direct “succession to Muhammad” dispute, but emerged more significantly later, during the Abbasid caliphate. The similarities between Sunnism and Shiism are actually largely attributable to **the Alids’ complex relationship with Abbasid rule**, characterized by both opposition and collaboration. While the primary distinction between them is indeed the Shiite allegiance to Ali and his lineage, the actual historical origins of this divergence are quite distinct from the traditional Islamic narratives.

More profoundly, and from a historical perspective, this divergence is rooted in Ali’s response to the failure of the Judeo-Nazarene plan for Messiah-Jesus to descend upon Jerusalem and establish God’s kingdom on Earth. Ali, being one of the Emigrants, participated in the taking of Jerusalem and appears to have been deeply involved in the Judeo-Nazarene initiative, as suggested by his nickname “Zulfiqar”, passed upon his sword (refer to page 59). Following this project’s failure, he seemingly assumed the role of the awaited messiah himself, as we have discussed previously, claiming political and religious authority on this basis. This position put him at odds with the Umayyad clan, which primarily asserted its divine authority through military strength up to his demise. Consequently, Ali’s supporters maintained that they had **a direct link to “divine revelation”** through Ali’s successors, who were believed to have inherited his “messiahship”, or at least, a unique connection to God who continued to reveal his divine will through them.

As we noted, during the “*fitna*”, divisions naturally arose among Ali’s followers as they chose sides among various leaders, each asserting their claims to his succession and to being God’s spokespersons. This led to the emergence of various Alid factions. As Abd al-Malik and his successors established their new caliphal rule, the Alids sought to organize an opposition. Some joined the Abbasid coalition, while others distanced themselves from both the Umayyads and the Abbasids, establishing the Ismaili branch around the figure of [Ismail ben Jafar](#), who claimed to be Ali’s successor (and thus, indirectly, the successor to Messiah-Jesus as a recipient of divine inspiration). Ismailism formed in direct opposition to Abbasid authority, laying the groundwork for **the establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate in the 10<sup>th</sup> century**.

Meanwhile, other Alids remained central to the Abbasid coalition, playing a key role in defeating the Umayyads and contributing to the religious infrastructure of the new Abbasid caliphate. Given their mysticism, it’s plausible they developed certain secret religious practices, deepening their devotion to Ali and the belief that God continued to choose his divine inspiration recipients among them. This fostered the mystical bond between God, Ali, and his successors, laying the foundations for concepts like “*wilaya*” or [Walayah](#)—seeing Ali as “divinely appointed by God”, and as “*wali allah*” (ولی الله, God’s ally, or even friend)—and *Imamah*—seeing his successors as imams, perpetuating the divine revelation<sup>225</sup>. This evolution



Ali, his Zulfiqar sword, and his sons Hasan and Husayn

(from a Qajar manuscript, Iran, 1837-38)

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>225</sup> Refer to Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi’s *Ali, le secret bien gardé*, op. cit.

marked a shift toward a more profound spiritual engagement, underscoring Ali's crucial role in the Alids religious narrative. **The early Abbasid Caliphate was thus neither exclusively Sunni nor Shia.** For instance, Caliph al-Mamun styled himself as an "imam" and even sought to appoint one of Ali's successors (Imam Ali al-Rida) as his heir as caliph, indicating that the distinctions between Sunni and Shia were not yet precisely defined. The Caliphate at that time encompassed elements that would later distinguish the two main branches of Islam. This shared foundation explains their significant commonalities within Islam, since the religion's core narrative developed before Sunni and Shia Islam significantly diverged (highlighting how far the Umayyads were from what would eventually be recognized as Islam).

Nonetheless, opposition intensified until a **complete separation occurred around the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.** At this juncture, "Abbasid Alids" decisively broke away from the Abbasid caliphate and took control, placing it under their guardianship. They aligned themselves with one of their own, Ali ibn Buya, who established the Buyid emirate, ruling over the caliphate from 934 to 1062. This marked the foundation of his Alid dynasty, the [Buyids](#). This shift allowed the "Abbasid Alids" to openly forge their sacred narrative, which ultimately led to the formalization of Twelver Shiism with the Safavids' rise in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>226</sup>.

Thus, the clear distinction between the two religious branches, Sunnism and Shiism, each characterized by well-defined and coherent doctrines, became evident much later than the traditional narratives of both Sunni and Shia indicate. This division likely originated from deep-seated mistrust between the committed Alids and their Abbasid allies. An Ismaili Alid faction, the [Qarmatians](#), considering Mecca's pilgrimage as "un-Islamic", even launched raids against pilgrims in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and sacked Mecca in 930, stealing the Black Stone and poisoning the Zam-zam well. Mistrust rose into polarization, not only shaping the distinct Shiism and Sunnism identities but also leading to the development of narratives that justified their stances, using retrospective justification. This involved reinterpreting the actual "fitna"—the conflict between Alids, Umayyads, and various factions—as a struggle between a mythical early Sunni caliphate and its Shia adversaries, dating back to nearly Muhammad's time. One could also highlight differing perspectives in early Islam and identify factors that would later distinguish the two branches: Sunnism, with its connections to the military elite, historically emphasized land conquest, predation, and political dominance, while the foundations of Shiism, deeply tied to Ali's mysticism and eschatological visions, placed a greater importance on faith. This divergence is reflected in the organization of religion. To put it succinctly, Twelver Shiism is characterized by a highly centralized clergy that oversees political matters, whereas Sunni countries have traditionally established strong political leaders who oversee religious affairs.

The intense conflict that has historically divided—and continues to divide—Shiism and Sunnism is actually the result of dynamics inherent to all messianist ideologies and their logic of surreality. This conflict stems from a worldview that demands the pure fight against the impure in their political quest to eradicate evil: by this standard, nothing is considered more abhorrent than deviation from the mission; nothing more contemptible than a hypocrite, a "false pure"<sup>227</sup>. **Fighting one's neighbor's impurity is tantamount to asserting one's own purity.** Given that individuals will inevitably encounter others who claim greater purity,

<sup>226</sup> Alongside the Twelver Shiites (who comprise 90% of Shiites), there are the Ismaili Shiites (Seveners), who recognize only the first seven imams, and the Zaydi Shiites (Fivers), who acknowledge up to the fifth imam. Additionally, there are other, more minor sects that are either directly or indirectly associated with the Shiite tradition, such as the Druze, Qarmatians, Nizaris, Alevis and Alawites. Note 126 specifically discusses the Alawites for their particular connection to the Judeo-Nazarenes.

<sup>227</sup> This logic is prevalent in all messianist movements: for communists striving for the advent of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the greatest enemy is not the bourgeois but the "social traitor"; for Stalinists, it is not the capitalist but the Trotskyist; for jihadists, it is not the infidel but the "false jihadist".

the conclusion, as illustrated in our diagram on page 81, is logical: Islam, by its nature, is in perpetual conflict with itself.

A notable difference between Shiism and Sunnism, and one that is particularly interesting to examine, stems from the divergences that have emerged over centuries, partly due to the preservation of certain traditions from early Judeo-Nazarene times. While the two major branches of Islam have distinct visions of the end-times scenario, they share a common anticipation: both aim to establish God's reign on Earth by enforcing his law, awaiting the final judgment and the arrival of the world's savior, the Mahdi (the "rightly guided"), whom they will support in his battle against the forces of evil, led by the Antichrist ("*al masih al dajjal*", the "false messiah"), to be among the chosen in his kingdom. This Mahdi is expected to be joined by Messiah-Jesus, who, according to belief, is preserved by God for this mission. Shiites hold that the Mahdi will be their last imam, "the hidden imam"—the twelfth imam for Twelvers, [Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Askari](#), known as Muhammad al-Mahdi, whom God allegedly "hid" in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and preserved, same as Jesus, to prepare for his end-times role. Sunnis, on the other hand, envision the Mahdi as Muhammad's final successor, a kind of "super caliph" who will emerge at the end of times to unite the Ummah and lead the fight against the infidels—he might even have been devised to rule out the Shiite Mahdi. Interestingly, according to a hadith by Muhammad, Messiah-Jesus himself could be the Mahdi: "*And there is no Mahdi except Jesus*"<sup>228</sup>. Does this suggest that the differing perspectives on the Mahdi are but Shia and Sunni different interpretations of **the same original Judeo-Nazarene expectation of Messiah-Jesus' descent, the "true Mahdi"?**

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As we approach the conclusion of this chronicle on the origins of Islam, its "great secret" appears in full light: **a narrative markedly different and more complex than the traditional Islamic account suggests.**

We've explored its Judeo-Nazarene roots, closely aligned with early Jewish Christianity yet distinctly divergent. We've delved into its messianist expectations, the pivotal Arab-Nazarene alliance, the 7<sup>th</sup> century apocalyptic global context and its geopolitical underpinnings, the crucial takeover of Jerusalem, and the reconstruction of its Temple, which marked the downfall of Judeo-Nazarenism. We've traced the successive efforts to mask this failure, fostering alternative hopes. We've examined the civil war among Arab factions that replaced the ruling powers of the ancient Sassanid and Byzantine empires, leading to the eventual ascendancy of Umayyad, and subsequently, Abbasid caliphal power—both of which co-opted messianist aspirations for their advantage. We've dissected the gradual formation of Islam from the Judeo-Nazarene legacy and the apocalyptic context amid civil strife, religious chaos, and various inventions crafted to retrospectively justify the new religion and the claims of its proponents to establish themselves as divine rulers of the world and the ages.

Before risking a conclusion from such analysis, we aim to delve deeper into some mechanisms behind such manipulations. Through this examination, we shall uncover enduring evidence in the Quran that reveals truth about the origins of Islam.

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<sup>228</sup> "وَلَا مَهْدِيٌ إِلَّا عَيْسَى" ([Sunan Ibn Majah 4039](#)).

# KEYS TO THE ISLAMIC NARRATIVE

## ...in light of its real origins

Our overview has already illustrated the detailed process through which the Quran and the Islamic narrative were developed, with the Islamic narrative acting as a contrived guide to foster an Islamic understanding of the Quran.

We now understand that the Quran did not originate solely from Muhammad's preaching, nor solely from the preaching of various Arab preachers of the early 7<sup>th</sup> century. It evolved significantly, starting from what might be termed "proto-Qurans"—folios compiled by early Arab leaders from notes of Arab preachers trained by the Judeo-Nazarenes. The text underwent various stages of manipulation and evolution towards its Islamization, notably through Abd al-Malik's almost complete and decisive compilation, until it reached its final form around the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Similarly, the Islamic narrative developed over time, gradually imbuing the Quran with Islamic meaning. This evolution involved significant steps, starting with the foundational narratives of the Judeo-Nazarenes. Following the pivotal event of their project's failure and their subsequent demise, everything that seemed Judeo-Nazarene was retracted. God's religion was "Arabized" and severed from its Biblical roots, paving the way for the invention of a direct divine revelation to legitimize the new rulers "sent by God". The narrative then progressed to portraying the Quran as this revelation, thus necessitating the invention of the Prophet to "reveal the revelation" and therefore the creation of the "circumstances of the revelation". This meticulous process culminated in the emergence of a coherent narrative that presents a perspective on its origins and nature that is vastly different from historical reality.

Logically, while this narrative seems deeply rooted in the Quran, its literal text contradicts it, as it still reflects the actual events of the 7<sup>th</sup> century rather than their later reinterpretation within the Islamic narrative. We shall provide numerous examples in this part. Consequently, both the Islamic interpretation of the Quran and the broader Islamic narrative reveal numerous inconsistencies and discrepancies, noted by many scholars and observers. However, comprehending these discrepancies has been challenging for most, as their analyses often depend on the fundamental elements of the Islamic narrative to understand Islam and its origins. One first needs to grasp the larger picture, which entails understanding the global historical perspective on the emergence of Islam. Without this perspective, questions regarding the Quran's origin, nature, and composition, as well as those about the Prophet, details of his life and early Islam, while relevant, ultimately remain unanswered.

Nonetheless, significant progresses have been made in various aspects—isolated aspects—of Islam's history, narrative, and the creation of the Quran, especially in the last twenty years. **Research on the Judeo-Nazarenes casts new light on these developments**, integrating them into a coherent synthesis and enhancing our understanding of the "big picture". Much work remains for researchers to unravel the various layers of rewriting and manipulation within Islamic texts and narratives. However, our comprehension of the principles behind these rewritings and manipulations has significantly improved, as we shall present here. We hope that these recent insights will continue to enlighten these areas in the future.

## MANIPULATIONS AND TRANSFERS

Crafting Islam from a text and an actual history that were initially quite distant from Islamic principles posed a significant challenge. It necessitated numerous manipulations, primarily of two kinds:

- **Textual manipulations:** These included selecting texts adaptable to (proto-)Islamic perspectives during the compilation phase, sidelining irrelevant material, editing the text by changing words, sentences, or structure, and adding glosses. Other strategies involved reordering the verses and surahs, as well as writing and altering diacritic marks and vocalization.
- **Narrative manipulations:** This involved inventing new narratives, reshaping existing ones to be more suitable, and influencing the process of comprehension. Strategies included changing the context to emphasize certain aspects while downplaying others or introducing new elements to alter the audience's perception and interpretation of events, thereby affecting their collective memory. A crucial part was changing the meanings of key words and concepts in the Quran, with an archetypal example being the transformation of the term "nasara" — نَصَارَى — "Nazarenes", meaning "Judeo-Nazarenes" (نَصَارَى) into "Christians".

These manipulations occurred over a very lengthy process spanning several centuries, though the consonantal skeleton (or "rasm") of the Quranic text was largely established by the time of Abd al-Malik's compilation. Those involved in its various stages—especially the initial ones—likely had no idea of their contribution to the eventual emergence of Islam. Most might have been genuinely convinced that they were performing God's work, rather than altering history or tampering with "genuine sacred scriptures".

As we hinted at earlier, this considerable endeavor required coherence, logic, and consistency—especially in altering the Quran—across various dimensions. The task proved to be an impossible one. Each manipulation led to discrepancies, and addressing these discrepancies only gave rise to new ones, thus leaving a trail of many such inconsistencies that are still visible today, whether in the texts or in the narrative. These inconsistencies serve as clues in our process of "**reverse engineering**", employing tools like the criterion of embarrassment (refer to the introduction of our "Muhammad of History" chapter on page 40) and building on the achievements of modern scholarship, which guided us to formulate our main hypothesis of the "great secret of Islam".

### Textual manipulations to support narrative manipulations

The first significant textual manipulation occurred after the failure of the Judeo-Nazarenes' plan in Jerusalem was acknowledged. Those in authority decided to sideline the Judeo-Nazarenes and abandon their failed plan. This involved destroying their sacred texts, principally their Arabic lectionary. A new book was needed to legitimize the new direction, thus **collections of Arabic notes from the Arab preachers they had trained were compiled**. This interpretation emerges notably from a critical re-examination of Islamic traditions concerning the early compilation of the Quran. This compilation is oddly described as assembling makeshift writings on temporary supports, such as animal bones, shards of pottery, and palm leaves. The use of such transient materials is surprising, given their purpose in transmitting God's religion, especially considering that even according to the Islamic narrative, the Prophet

had many trained scribes in his entourage. He is also said to have dictated the revelation to such trained scribes like Zayd Ibn Thabit. These makeshift materials are more consistent with the types of notes we have described: **instructional notes from the Judeo-Nazarenes, sermon preparation notes, and verbatim transcription of sermons**. Moreover, the nature of most Quranic passages corresponds with these genres of notes. In particular, some passages provide obvious hints suggesting they were originally instructional notes from religious masters. These include explicit commandments, such as “say this”<sup>229</sup>, and tips and advices on how to respond to critics<sup>230</sup> or address specific demands, as we shall see in a bit. The Quran even describes the training process of preachers by the Judeo-Nazarenes, and the writing of their notes (as in Q25:5-6: “*And they say, ‘Tales of the ancients! He has written it down, and it is dictated to him morning and evening [by the Judeo-Nazarenes]!’. Say: ‘He [meaning God] has sent it down’*”—see also on page 143). Furthermore, the oldest Quranic manuscripts exhibit an early form of Arabic script, known as “*scriptio defectiva*” (“defective script”), which lacks vocalization and diacritic marks (see the example of the “*Sana'a Quran*” later in this text)<sup>231</sup>. However, some of these marks were already in use by the 7<sup>th</sup> century, as shown by the examples of Arabic writing, such as [papyri from the 640s](#). This indicates that the earliest Quranic manuscripts were intentionally written without these marks, suggesting they were transcribed from basic notes. By nature, such notes would not include the detailed features found in more developed scripts.

These compilations of copied notes constituted the “raw material” from which the Quran was primarily formed by early Arab leaders, up to Abd al-Malik. The initial “proto-Quranic” compilations were relatively easy to modify, as they had not yet been standardized and widely disseminated. Words and sometimes entire sentences (known as interpolations) were inserted into the text, as scholars have uncovered<sup>232</sup>. The scribes also engaged in text reorganization,



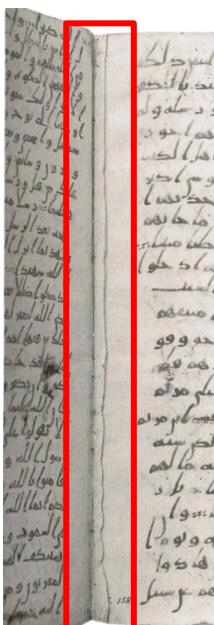
A modern reconstruction of a Quranic passage written on a camel shoulder blade bone.  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)

<sup>229</sup> Arthur J. Droege identified more than 300 imperative “*qul*” commands (meaning “say!” or “speak!”) scattered throughout the Quran in his translation, as noted in *The Quran: A New Annotated Translation* (op. cit.; see p. 9, note 92). Some of these commands appear to be instructions from a religious teacher, while others may have been added during the Quran’s editing process. This latter point suggests an effort to transform passages that could not have originally been seen as “divine revelations” into the words of God. This argument is further supported by Jean-Jacques Walter in *Le Coran révélé par la Théorie des codes* [The Quran Revealed through the Analysis of Textual Data] (Studia Arabica vol. XXII, Éditions de Paris, Versailles, 2014, pp. 162-163).

<sup>230</sup> See Mehdi Azaiez’s *Le contre-discours coranique* [The Quranic Counter-Discourse] (De Gruyter, Berlin, 2015) for an analysis of Quranic passages that cite opposition to Quranic preaching, covering 270 verses. He also examines the advice given in the Quran to address these critics—advice that, according to our hypothesis, originates from the Judeo-Nazarenes’ teaching, although the author does not venture as far as we do.

<sup>231</sup> Similar to liturgical Aramaic and Hebrew, Arabic “*scriptio defectiva*” is written using only consonants (and also the letter alif / ئ), without short vowel marks (vocalization). Additionally, many Arabic consonants share the same basic signs and cannot be distinguished from one another without diacritical marks—points and accents. Thus, a single sign can represent several different consonants, such as ba / ب, ta / ت, tha / ث, and nun / ن, depending on the diacritics applied. The definitive addition of vocalization and diacritical marks to the Arabic script was completed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>232</sup> We have already discussed the probable interpolations of “*nasara*” (originally meaning “Judeo-Nazarenes”) in some verses, interpreted to justify their condemnation as Jews, in note 142, along with other cases. Guillaume Dye has become an expert in this field, identifying many such interpolations. For example, in his article “[Ascetic and Nonascetic Layers in the Qur'an: A Case Study](#)” (*Numen* 66, pages 580–597, Leiden: Brill, 2019), he demonstrates how “sexual interpolations” were introduced into religious ascetic instructions, notably in Quran 23:1–11 and 70:22–35. In another article, “[Concepts and Methods in the Study of the Qur'an](#)” (*Religions* 2021, 12, 599), he



**Stub of an original folio cut-out of an ancient Quranic manuscript**  
(refer to note 233)

customizing the order of surahs and verses for various purposes, such as changing the meaning of a passage by changing its contextual verses, or preventing Quran authors (collection compilers) to recognize their earlier contributions in the final text (refer to note 172). Some collections even display traces of **missing folios**<sup>233</sup>—presumably destroyed—replaced by more suitable ones. Modifications also included rewriting over unsuitable sections, erasing, or scraping older texts if necessary (creating palimpsests). Diacritic and vocalization marks were also added on folios that did not mention them initially, occasionally changing the meaning of words.

This becomes increasingly evident in the study of ancient Quranic manuscripts. For example, the “**Sana'a Quran**” displays texts largely identical to the final Quran, albeit partial<sup>234</sup>. It is also a palimpsest: exposure to special lights and X-ray imaging reveals the existence of a primitive text (“*scriptio inferior*”) that was erased—washed off—and replaced by another more suitable text (“*scriptio superior*”). The erased text, though somewhat similar to the Quran, exhibits a different order of the verses<sup>235</sup> and significant discrepancies in regard to the canonical Quran<sup>236</sup>. Most likely, the “*scriptio inferior*” of the Sana'a Quran corresponded to an early compilation that was banned by Abd al-Malik and

exposes variations in the Adam-Iblees narrative across Q2, 38, & 15, and identifies the addition of the “*mizan*” gloss (“balance”) in Q55 as interpolations. See also his contribution in *Le Coran des Historiens* (*op. cit.*).

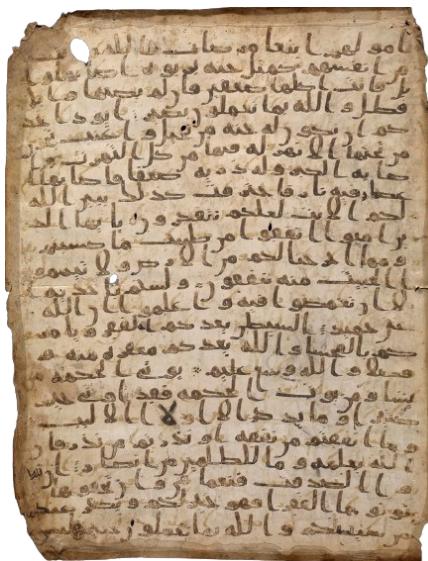
<sup>233</sup> As is still visible in the AR 328a manuscript (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris), presumably dating from the 7-8<sup>th</sup> century. Its original folio 20 has been cut out, leaving a visible stub between folio 19v and the current folio 20r. Refer to its picture on this page, taken David S. Power's *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), where he investigates a textual manipulation in sura 4. Refer also to from Édouard M. Gallez & Mohamed Lamsiah's article, “[Suspicious of Ideological Manipulation and Codicology: A Provisional Synthetic Approach](#)”, in Markus Groß & Karl-Heinz Ohlig (Ed.), *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion III*, Inārah volume 7, Schiler, 2014). The stub is also visible here: [https://corpuscoranicum.de/en/manuscripts/13/page/19v?sura=4&verse=150#manuscript\\_page](https://corpuscoranicum.de/en/manuscripts/13/page/19v?sura=4&verse=150#manuscript_page)

<sup>234</sup> The “**Sana'a Quran**” (referenced as Ṣan'a' 1 or DAM 01-27.1) ranks among the oldest Quranic collections known today, with around 36 folios (equivalent to around 20% of the final Quranic text). It was discovered in 1972 within the double roof of the Great Mosque of Sana'a in Yemen, amidst thousands of other Quranic manuscripts. German paleographer [Gerd Rüdiger Puin](#) was invited by Yemeni authorities to restore, catalogue, and investigate these manuscripts. Among them, he identified a specific collection—now known as “the Sana'a Quran”—and, along with his wife Elisabeth Puin, determined that it was a palimpsest. This manuscript exhibits layers of text, with the “*scriptio inferior*” revealing earlier writings beneath the main text, providing invaluable insights into the textual history of the Quran. Other folios have since been identified that might belong to the same collection, bringing the total to 81 folios (Refer to <https://www.islamic-awareness.org/quran/text/mss/soth>). Other, less significant collections of very old manuscripts from around the same period were discovered as well, showing evidence of text tampering.

<sup>235</sup> The different sequencing gives a different meaning to the text. As François Déroche put it, “*What's remarkable here, of all the Quranic variants, is that in Sana'a's Quran, we see textual continuity, whereas elsewhere, the differences appear only as salient, isolated peaks in a text otherwise identical to the canon. This time, we have a coherent ensemble*” (in an interview to Robin Verner; refer to his online article “*Le «palimpseste de Sana'a» ou la folle histoire d'un autre Coran* [The “Sana'a Palimpsest” or the wild story of another Quran]” in *Slate.fr*, June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015: <https://www.slate.fr/story/102373/coran-palimpseste-sanaa>).

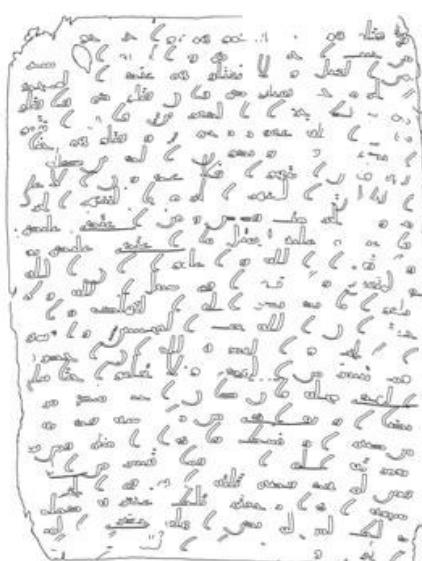
<sup>236</sup> Refer to the work of Asma Hilali in *The Sana'a Palimpsest: The Transmission of the Qur'an in the First Centuries AH* (Oxford University Press, 2017), who analyzed the two scripture layers of the “Sana'a Palimpsest”. A. Hilali detailed significant differences in the text contents of each layer, especially in the sequencing of the Quranic text, and highlighted disparities compared to the standardized Quranic reference text (Cairo Edition, 1924). She suggests that these manuscripts might have served as “learning drafts” of the Quran, created by a “student”, to explain its palimpsest nature and “heterodoxy” within the historical context defined by Muslim tradition. However, when considering the full historical record, the cost of parchment (which would have been prohibitive for student

thus later replaced with his compilation<sup>237</sup>. Furthermore, even its “scriptio superior” reveals anomalies<sup>238</sup>, notably a passage that is not “canonical”: surah 9 begins with an instruction for its proclamation (“Do not say ‘In the name of God’”<sup>239</sup>), indicating that the Quran was not considered at that time to be “God’s word”, since such instructions could be added to its text<sup>240</sup>. This is tangible evidence that the Quran underwent a process of editing and, importantly, that **it was not initially perceived as the very word of God**.



A “Sana'a manuscript” folio

Recto side of the “Stanford 07” folio, “scriptio superior”  
 The Arabic script shows no vocalization marks, and almost no diacritic marks.  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)



Lower text (“scriptio inferior”) of the same folio, recovered by X-Ray fluorescence imaging  
 The Arabic script shows no vocalization marks, and even less diacritic marks.  
[Wikimedia Commons](#)



Ultraviolet photography of a fragment from the “Sana'a manuscript”

Ultraviolet photography enhances the lower text (“scriptio inferior”), thus appearing darker than the upper text (“scriptio superior”)  
<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Mss/soth.html>

The “Sana'a Quran” is not the only manuscript collection to present **physical evidence of the Quranic text's progressive edition**. Increasingly, ancient manuscripts are reviewed and examined. The comparison of their contents to that of the “canonical Quran” (the

drafts typically made on cheaper materials like tablets), and text analysis, this hypothesis appears rather implausible—as notably discussed by François Déroche in *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle* [The Quran, a plural history] (Le Seuil, Paris, 2019, p. 201 ff.).

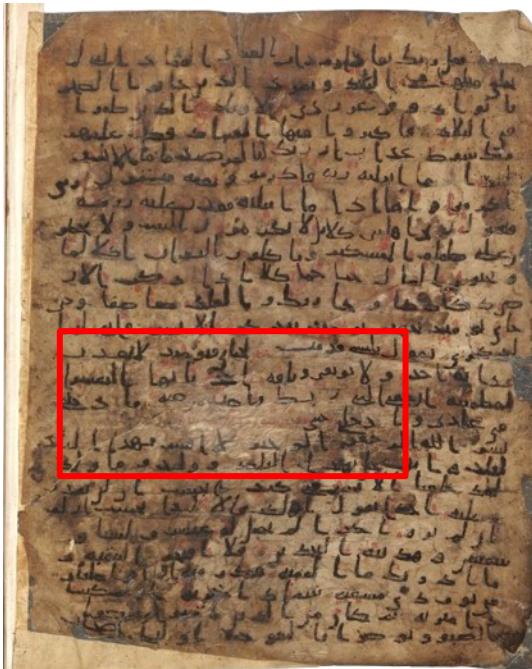
<sup>237</sup> François Déroche estimates the lower text “was written during the second half of the seventh century and erased at the earliest by the middle of the following century” (in *Qur’ans of the Umayyads*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, page 54).

<sup>238</sup> Many important Quranic passages are missing, such as the Q48:29 mention of “Muhammad” (Folio 32 ends at Q48:2, folio 33 starts at Q55:16). Another Quranic manuscript from Sanaa even provides evidence that this mention did not exist at the time it was written: according to Florence Mraizika-Chaussé in her article “Le rite islamique: des bicéphalies du harām et du pouvoir au puzzle coranique [The Islamic Ritual: From the harām and Power's Dual Leadership to the Quranic Puzzle]” in *Inārah 10*, op. cit.), a double-folio photograph published on UNESCO's 1995 CD-ROM *The Manuscripts of Sanaa* (referenced as “Dam 16 Sanaa Dār al-Maḥṭūṭāt”) goes directly from verse Q48:23 to 49:12, omitting the intermediate verses found in the final Qur’ānic text (Q48:24-29 and Q49:1-11). This omission is particularly significant because the missing “Muhammad” verse is a key statement relevant to Islamic dogma (cf. note 198 on the “Muhammad” interpolations).

<sup>239</sup> Refer to François Déroche in *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle*, op. cit., p. 208 ff.

<sup>240</sup> Does this instruction stem from the Judeo-Nazarenes? It might, although the context of surah 9, indicating events dating from after the 638 rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple (and thus approximately contemporaneous to the Judeo-Nazarenes sidelining), suggests otherwise, as we will discuss later.

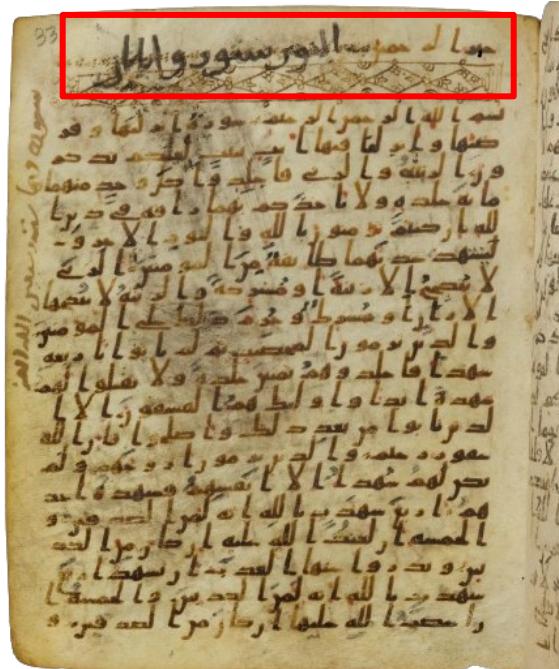
standardized Quranic reference text of the 1924 Cairo Edition) also reveals different Quranic versions and discrepancies<sup>241</sup>. Besides, some ancient manuscripts also reveal erasures, corrections, rewritings, patches and collages<sup>242</sup>, and parchments that have been scratched, washed, and rewritten, as well as missing folios. For example, the [MA VI 165 manuscript in the Tübingen collection](#) (7-8<sup>th</sup> centuries)<sup>243</sup> and the [Wetzstein II 1913](#) (Ahlwardt 305) collection (7-8<sup>th</sup> centuries)<sup>244</sup> demonstrate similar alterations.



**Folio 210v of the Wetzstein II 1913 manuscript showing rewriting of the parchment**

<https://corpuscoranicum.de/en/manuscripts/163/page/210v?sura=89&verse=6>

(Credits: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz)



**Folio 33r of the MA VI 165 Tübingen manuscript, showing additions to the text**

<http://idb.ub.uni-tuebingen.de/digit/MaVI165/0065>  
(Public domain)

<sup>241</sup> Édouard M. Gallez, along with Mohamed Lamsiah, compared 5 ancient manuscripts collections and highlighted numerous variants, revealing the editing process of the Quran. See their article, “[Suspicions of Ideological Manipulation and Codicology...](#)”, *op. cit.* Mohamed Lamsiah later published a detailed study that exhibited discrepancies in early Quranic manuscripts, which achieved significant success in the Maghreb (*Manuscripts of the Qur'an: An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Manuscripts*, Water Life Publishing, Seattle, 2017, in Arabic—Arabic title: مخطوطات القرآن: مدخل لدراسة المخطوطات القديمة).

Besides, the [Corpus Coranicum](#) project, a scholarly initiative aimed at publishing the first critical edition of the Quran by examining a vast collection of ancient manuscripts, has already documented **thousands of discrepancies** in comparison to the Quran's standardized 1924 edition. This ongoing examination reveals missing or added characters, text variations, and modified or erased words or passages. These discrepancies are detailed on its website, analyzed manuscript by manuscript, folio by folio, verse by verse.

<sup>242</sup> Refer to Daniel Brubaker's *Corrections in Early Qur'ān Manuscripts: Twenty Examples* (Think and Tell, Lovettsville, 2019).

<sup>243</sup> <http://idb.ub.uni-tuebingen.de/digit/MaVI165/0155>

<sup>244</sup> <http://www.corpuscoranicum.de/handschriften/index/sure/2/vers/30/handschrift/163>

This ancient and impressive Quranic collection, consisting of 210 folios and made from parchment carbon-dated to between 662 and 765, has undergone extensive rewriting. It includes palimpsests, numerous corrections, erasures (as in [folio 37r](#), on the 4<sup>th</sup> line from the bottom), traces of washed writing (still visible in [folio 25v](#)), and rewritings in both black and red ink (as in [folio 45v](#)). Some folios were scraped so thoroughly that, in one instance, the parchment was almost perforated and had to be patched (see [folio 15v](#) and [folio 15r](#)). These extensive modifications have resulted in some folios being left in poor condition due to the repeated washes and alterations (such as [folio 210v](#)). Florence Chaussy documented such evidence of the editing process in this particular Quranic collection in her article “Le rite islamique...” (*op. cit.*).

Moreover, **the gradual formation of the Quran is supported by quantitative analysis of the oldest manuscripts**. Notably, no surviving manuscript from the alleged “Qurans of Uthman” as mentioned on page 81, has been found. According to Muslim tradition, this edition should have represented the definitive text of the Quran (completed before 656). If such manuscripts ever existed, they likely were destroyed, most probably as a result of Abd al-Malik’s policy, despite their immense value to Muslims. The “Sana’a Quran” represents only about 41% of the “rasm” (consonantal skeleton) of the final Quran (including its alleged 81 folios). The Tübingen MA VI 165 manuscript accounts for 26%, the [Codex Parisino Petropolitanus](#) for about 46% (including AR328a, mentioned in note 233), and the Wetzstein II 1913 manuscript for 85%. The oldest complete Quranic collection is believed (arguably) to date from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, though corrections within the text suggest it underwent modifications at a later date<sup>245</sup>.

Besides this physical evidence of the editing process, **traces of early compilations that no longer exist**, and which differ from the final version of the Quran, have also been identified in Islamic tradition. We have already mentioned al-Tabari’s account of the “Satanic verses”, a testament to an early version of the Quran that was eliminated (see on page 96). Scholars are working on similar mentions and quotations of early compilations that rivaled Abd al-Malik’s version and presented significant differences<sup>246</sup>.

However, as Abd al-Malik mandated the use of Arabic throughout the Empire and enforced an assertive policy to promote his edition of the Quran, directly tampering with the text became very difficult. The widespread distribution of official Quranic copies across the empire meant that any major modification would require altering every copy—an exceedingly difficult task. Consequently, **textual modifications became increasingly rare**. Subtle changes, however, were still possible, such as adjusting vocalization, which could, for example, change a verb from active to passive voice (an illustration of this can be found on page 148). Changes were also made by slightly altering diacritic marks or, less frequently, by correcting or adding words or even lines in certain places<sup>247</sup>.

**The focus thus shifted to narrative manipulations**, including the invention of external discourses to explain and interpret the text as its manipulators desired, changing the meanings of certain words—for example, arbitrarily assigning names to places or persons to alter the text’s meaning. This was supported by the creation of hadiths and other traditional texts. The invented episode of the “night journey” serves as a prime example of how scribes and “historians”, under caliphal direction, utilized their creativity for narrative purposes. Such manipulations continue even today, notably through the efforts of concordists. These scholars of Islam aim to discover “[scientific truths](#)” within the Quran that, though established today,

<sup>245</sup> This would be the “Mushaf al-Sharif” manuscript of the Topkapi Palace library in Istanbul (“Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi”), which is an almost complete Quranic manuscript collection, accounting for 99% of the Quran across 410 folios (plus 3 extra folios), cf. <https://corpuscoranicum.de/en/manuscripts/52/page/1v>; Dan Brubaker has demonstrated that even this esteemed collection contains numerous corrections and additions, as detailed in *Corrections in Early Qur'an Manuscripts...* (op. cit., pp.28; 31; 64; 70).

The percentages of the Quranic text mentioned earlier—specifically those relating to the “Sana’a”, “Parisino Petropolitanus”, “Tübingen” and “Berlin” manuscripts—are sourced from the “Islamic Awareness” website at <https://www.islamic-awareness.org/quran/text/mss/> as of April 2024.

<sup>246</sup> French scholar Régis Blachère published a French translation of the Quran (*Le Coran*, Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1949–1977), in which he drew numerous comparisons between the canonical Quranic text and other versions, such as [Ibn Mas'ud](#)’s and [Ubayy ibn Ka'b](#)’s compilations, which are known through quotations in Islamic tradition. He frequently observed significant differences. Édouard M. Gallez notably based his hypothesis of the mention of “ahmad” (Q61:6) being an interpolation on his analysis of these comparisons (refer to “References to Muhammad...”, op. cit., and *Le Messie et son Prophète*, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 133 ff., as mentioned in note 198).

<sup>247</sup> As evidenced by Dan Brubaker in *Corrections in Early Qur'an Manuscripts*, op. cit.

would have been inconceivable during Muhammad's era, thereby attributing new meanings to the text. The endeavors to identify so-called "scientific miracles" in the Quran can sometimes appear forced, serving as vivid examples of the circular logic prevalent in the construction of Islamic discourse. This logic posits that the text is divine and therefore contains "scientific miracles"; this leads to interpreting the text in a manner that confirms these "miracles" (i.e. stretching its meaning), thereby reinforcing the text's perceived divinity (see an example in note 265).

Let's now examine emblematic examples of narrative manipulations, focusing on how believers are termed across various monotheistic religions and the historical and geographical reinterpretations that inform the true origins of Islam. Later, we will see how understanding these manipulations can shed light on the historical accuracy of Islamic discourse and the Quran.

### **Muslims, Christians, Jews, unbelievers, pagans and polytheists**

As we have observed, despite the Middle East, including Arabia, undergoing Christianization for six centuries and despite established interactions with Jews and Christians, Islam is claimed to have emerged in a predominantly pagan environment. This raises intriguing questions, especially since the traditional Muslim narrative acknowledges the conversion of many Arabs to Christianity (and Judaism). Scholars capable of critically analyzing Islamic tradition recognize that Arabs were broadly evangelized by the time of Muhammad (refer to note 66). Yet, Islamic tradition insists that the original environment of Islam was pagan, despite also insisting on Muhammad's significant relationships with "Jews" and "Christians". As the Prophet of Islam, he supposedly did not need to draw inspiration from their religions, since his message was believed to be directly revealed by an angel of God. Drawing on these elements of Islamic dogma, scholars in Western academia have sought to rationally understand the foundation of Islam by Muhammad, hypothesizing that he gleaned information from Christian and Jewish representatives to "create a new religion". This perspective, while rejecting divine intervention, aligns with Islamic assumptions by dismissing the possibility of direct Christian, Jewish, or Judeo-Christian (such as the Judeo-Nazarenes) influence on the Quraysh tribe. It suggests that **Islam emerged suddenly within a pagan—and notably, desert—environment**, seemingly from nothing. How could such an oversight occur?

Western rationality appears to have been significantly influenced by how effectively the caliphs, their scribes, and traditionists **almost completely erased the memory and traces of the Judeo-Nazarenes**, including the very mention of their name. While the narrative reconstructing the "circumstances of the revelation" mentions Christians and Jews, it barely acknowledges the Judeo-Nazarenes. To understand this approach, it's necessary to examine actual historical events, especially the alliance formed between the Judeo-Nazarenes and Arabs in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Arabia.

Here is how the Judeo-Nazarenes and affiliated Qurayshis envisioned the different types of believers in their neighborhood, according to Judeo-Nazarene doctrine: there were the **Christians**, predominantly Arabs (along with Aramaic and Greek-speaking Christians), labeled as "associators" or "associationists" ("mushrikun"<sup>248</sup>). The **rabbinic Jews** were

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<sup>248</sup> John of Damascus (see note 185), in *Concerning Heresy* (746), noted that the Arabs referred to Christians as "associators" (έταιροι στάχτας), because they introduced "an associate to the side of God by saying that Christ is the

labeled as “coverers” (“*kuffar*”), because they had “covered” the sacred scriptures with their Talmuds<sup>249</sup>, and were detested for this by the **Judeo-Nazarenes** (“*nasara*”). And there were the **Arabs** who had rallied them. The rabbinic Jews, along with the Judeo-Nazarenes, collectively formed the “**people of the Book**” (“*ahl al kitab*”, or “people of the scripture”). At the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which “book” could this refer to? Clearly, it was the Torah, the “book” par excellence<sup>250</sup> and the reference text for the Judeo-Nazarenes. Thus, “the people of the Book” encompassed all Jews of that era, the inheritors of the Torah. This designation applies primarily to the rabbinic Jews (or Talmudic), who were the vast majority. However, the much smaller group of Judeo-Nazarenes also shared this heritage with their rabbinic “ethnic” cousins, despite their texts and indoctrination efforts with the Arabs often vilifying these “*kuffar*”. Furthermore, the Judeo-Nazarenes, along with the Arabs who have pledged allegiance to them, sharing the same faith and messianist project, constituted the “**umma**”, a term that translates to “clan”, “tribe”, “community”, or even “nation”. The Arabic term “*umma*” is formed from “*umm*”, meaning “mother”. It is rooted in the Torah (אֶמְתָּה— “*ummah*”)<sup>251</sup>, where it refers to the twelve tribes of Israel, denoting the “chosen people”. The Judeo-Nazarenes, considering themselves the only true Jews based on their faith, adopted this term. They claimed to be the true Israel—the community of righteous Jews and the sole chosen ones. The Quran also attests to this concept, as we will explore. With the establishment of the alliance with the Arabs during the late 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Hebrew concept of “*ummah*” expanded to include them, attributing Arab descent to the patriarch Abraham. Thus, it evolved into the composite community of Judeo-Nazarenes and Arabs.

The sidelining of the Judeo-Nazarenes then occurred. To justify this move a posteriori, the first Arab leaders added (interpolated) the term “*nasara*” (equating to “Nazarenes” or “Judeo-Nazarenes”) to certain verses that express defiance towards rabbinic Jews. The formerly allied Judeo-Nazarenes were thus included in the condemnation of the “*kuffar*”. Such textual manipulation supported a narrative shift, which is straightforward to comprehend but challenging to detect (as hinted at in note 142). Initially, this aimed to justify the Arabs’ sudden animosity towards their former mentors. Later, as Islamic theology developed, the focus shifted to redefining the original “*umma*” exalted in the texts<sup>252</sup> into a new “*umma*” comprising solely Arabs, the community of true believers (the Ummah). It eventually expanded to include Muslims universally as Islam embraced inclusivity. It was likely in Baghdad, within a Persian context that had forgotten the original meaning of “*nasara*”, that this term came to be forcefully interpreted as “**Christians**”<sup>253</sup>. This interpretation, deduced from the juxtaposition

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son of God, and is God” (Jean Damascène, *Écrits sur l’islam*, op. cit., pp.216-217). This terminology echoed the indoctrination of the Judeo-Nazarene faith, interpreting the Arabic term “*mushrikun*” as literal “associators”. Thus, its broader implications as “pagans” or “polytheists” were developed at a later stage.

<sup>249</sup> We hinted at this very briefly in note 59. Édouard M. Gallez explored the original meaning of “coverers” for the term “*kuffar*” (and expressions derived from the root KFR) in his article “Racine KFR et philologie [The Root KFR and Philology]”, published in *Le texte arabe non islamique* [The non-Islamic Arabic text], *Studia Arabica* vol. XI (Editions de Paris, Versailles, 2009, pp.67-87), which is also discussed in *Le Messie et son Prophète* (op. cit.). An English adaptation of his article is available here: [https://www.academia.edu/4898782/The\\_root\\_kfr\\_and\\_philology\\_significance\\_and\\_Biblical\\_post\\_Biblical\\_and\\_koranic\\_meanings](https://www.academia.edu/4898782/The_root_kfr_and_philology_significance_and_Biblical_post_Biblical_and_koranic_meanings)

<sup>250</sup> Just as the word “Bible” originates from the Greek βίβλοι, or “*biblia*”, meaning “the books”; its roots can be traced back to the city of Byblos, a major center for book-making (and papyri).

<sup>251</sup> For example in Genesis 25:16 or 23 (translated as “nation”, “people”, “tribe”, “clan”).

<sup>252</sup> Q3:110—“*You are the best community* [“*umma*”] (ever) brought forth for humankind”.

<sup>253</sup> Indeed, until at least the 5<sup>th</sup> century, anti-Christian Persians in the Persian world continued to use the pejorative term “*nasraye*” to designate Christians, even though the Christians themselves had not used this name to refer to themselves for centuries. See Christelle Jullien and Florence Jullien’s, “Aux frontières de l’iranité: ‘Nāsrāyē’ et ‘krīstyōnē’ des inscriptions du mobad Kirdīr : Enquête littéraire et historique”, in *Numen* 49, Leiden: Brill, 2002.

of “yahud” (“**Jews**”) and “nasara” in certain contexts<sup>254</sup>, effectively altered the Islamic reading of the Quran and tradition, leading to the omission of the Judeo-Nazarenes. The interpretation of the term “kuffar”, originally aimed at vilifying rabbinic Jews as “coverers” of the sacred scriptures, was concurrently expanded to label all non-Muslims as “**unbelievers**”, maintaining its derogatory tone. Despite most not “covering” anything in a literal sense, they were metaphorically seen as “covering” the Quran by refusing to accept Islam. Thus, “kuffar” came to signify “deniers” or “infidels”.

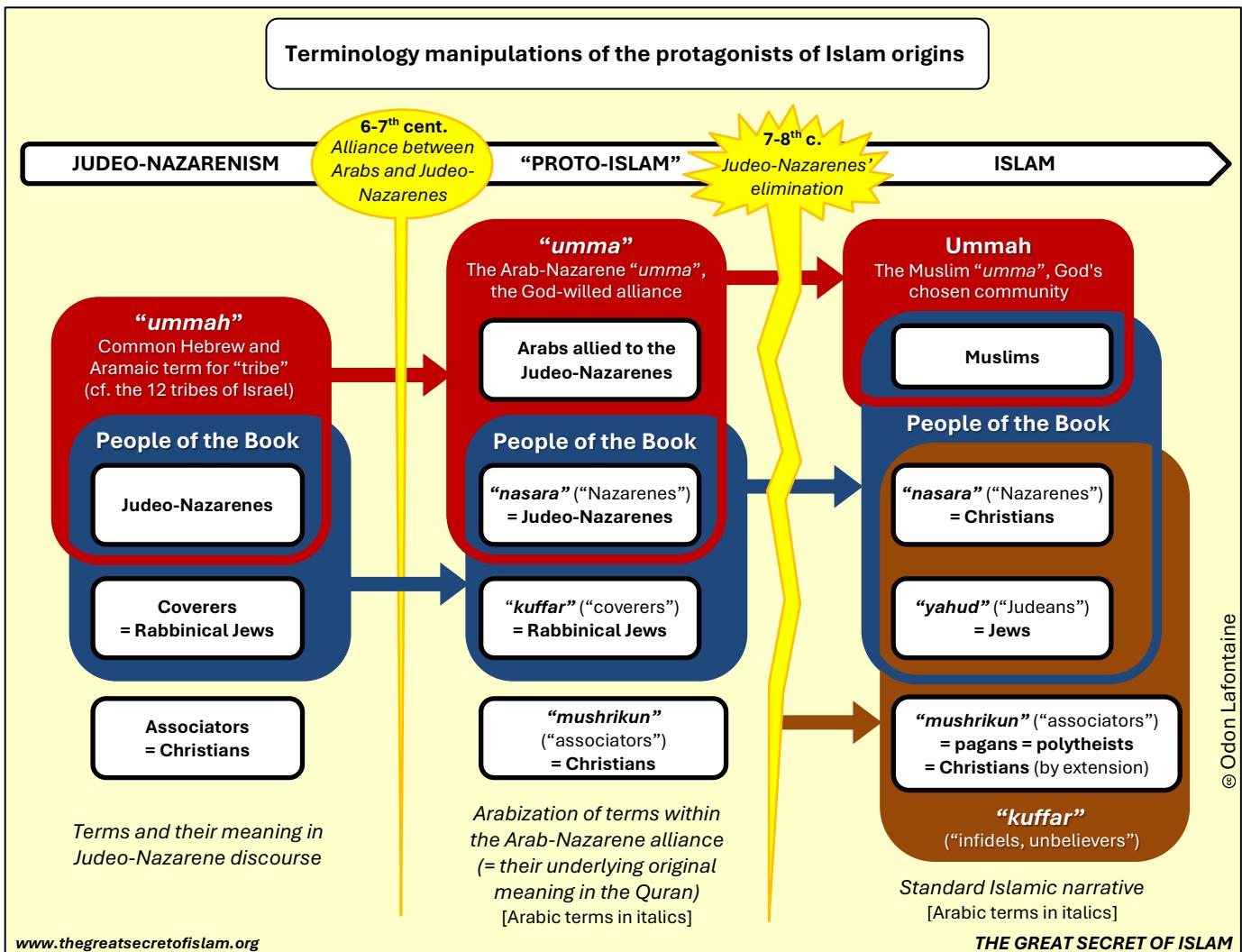
A completely new religion emerged, not justified by its actual historical past and its Judeo-Christian roots, but by a new revelation, a new divine choice. Since this choice must be unprecedented, the Arabs cannot be indebted to Jews and Christians. Islam and the Quran are portrayed as having emerged independently of previous Judaism and Christianity. Consequently, it became necessary to **create a pagan, idolatrous backdrop**, and to ensure that the Quran and its associated narrative acknowledged this foundation as the context for Islam’s revelation. The challenge, however, lied in the fact that the new narrative was mainly to be developed after the Quran’s text had been roughly established and disseminated, starting with Abd al-Malik and his successors. How, then, can a text’s interpretation imply what this text does not explicitly state? The solution involved reinterpreting the use of the word “*mushrikun*” (and derivatives of the root SRK), which originally referred to Christians accused of associating others (Jesus) with God, to now denote “**polytheists**” or “**pagans**”.

The portrayal of a false polytheistic-pagan backdrop played a significant role in the foundation of Islamic theology concerning successive divine revelations. These revelations were characterized as “books” conveyed by “messengers of God”, each correcting the distortions in the “messages” of their predecessors, with Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad being the main figures. By positing Muhammad’s emergence from a polytheistic setting, this narrative not only legitimized his role as a prophetic figure but also affirmed the divine origin of the Quran,

<sup>254</sup> There are **15 occurrences** of the term “nasara” (“Nazarenes”) in the Quran.

- Our exegesis, along with Édouard M. Gallez’s, identifies **four mentions** that originate **from the time of the Arab-Nazarene alliance** (Q2:62; 5:69; 5:82; 22:17), **plus another one** (Q2:113) we shall explain further. These four instances praise the “nasara”, a portrayal inconsistent with the later Islamic narrative, presenting an obvious case for the “criterion of embarrassment”. Notably, Q5:82 describes the “nasara” as the closest in affection to the believers, contrasting sharply with its description of Jews and “*mushrikun*” (“associators”, interpreted as Christians) as “*the most violent of people in enmity to the believers*”. This distinction suggests that “nasara” cannot be equated with “associators” and, therefore, is not synonymous with Christians. This also implies that these interpolations originated at a time when the Islamic interpretation of “nasara” as Christians had not yet developed.
- **Seven other mentions are interpolations:** Q2:111, 2:120, 2:135, 2:140, 3:67, 5:18, and 5:51, all of which use the phrase “*the Jews and (or) the Nazarenes*”, thus conveniently including the Nazarenes within the condemnation of Jews—the original focus of each of these verses. This is particularly evident when considering the verses in their Quranic context.
- **One verse**, Q2:113, displays **another interpolation** (“*and the Nazarenes say: the Jews have no ground to stand on*”) that exactly mirrors the preceding phrase mentioning the inverse (“*The Jews says the Nazarenes have no ground to stand on (...) though they recite the Torah*”, which in our opinion also dates from the time of the Arab-Nazarene alliance). This interpolation echoes that of “*or Nazarenes*” in 2:111, while the contextual verses are all about the condemnation of Jews.
- **The last “nasara” interpolation** is evident in Q5:14, which refers to a “covenant” between God and the Nazarenes that they failed to uphold. This is contrasted with the preceding verses that detail a “covenant” made between God and the “*Sons of Israel*”, which they violated. It appears that the mention of “nasara” in 5:14 may have originally referred to “*Jews*” or “*Sons of Israel*”.
- As for the **last occurrence** of “nasara” in Q9:30, it presents a very interesting case for their condemnation alongside the Jews. We believe this situation dates back to around 640 in Jerusalem (or afterwards), coinciding with the dissolution of the Arab-Nazarene alliance. A specific instance of textual manipulation concerning the Jews mentioned here has been detected. We will further develop this point (refer to our examination on p. 150), along with providing additional explanations for some of the occurrences of “nasara”.

attributing its revelation to him. Concurrently, the idea that Islam fulfills earlier divine revelations was introduced, positioning Muhammad in the lineage of Biblical prophets as their successor and the “seal of prophecy”. In this context, the Islamic concept of the “people of the Book” was developed to reinterpret the existing term that originally referred to “the people of the Torah”, assigning it a broader meaning. According to this reinterpretation, “the people of the Book” now encompasses **believers of the “three monotheistic religions”**, each possessing a holy book. This reconceptualization positions Islam as equally valid as Judaism and Christianity, presenting the Quran as a text comparable, if not superior, to the Bible.



In order to support these shifts in word meanings—to the extent of forcing interpretations within the Quran—an external discourse was developed to justify these changes. This involved the deliberate creation of hadiths and pseudo-historical chronicles, including narratives about the mythical *“jahiliyya”*, the dark “age of ignorance”, purportedly preceding the Islamic revelation<sup>255</sup>. Such efforts culminated in a comprehensive narrative manipulation—as

<sup>255</sup> The legend of little girls being buried alive in the pre-Islamic period has become emblematic of the *“jahiliyya”* narrative (mentioned in the preamble). The legend stems from the creative reinterpretation of Q16:58,-59 “When one of them is given news of a female (child), his face turns dark, and he chokes back his disappointment. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of what he has been given news about. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the dust?”. The Arabic phrase “dassa fi al turab”—literally “to hide/conceal in the dust”, or “to lay on the dust”—primarily meant “to abandon”, possibly referring to the practice of leaving girls at a

illustrated in our diagram—that almost erased the memory of the Judeo-Nazarenes. As with every Islamic invention It also laid **a trail of incoherences and discrepancies** that allows for an understanding of the manipulation, as we shall detail further. Why are “associators”—supposedly Christians according to the Islamic re-interpretation—also described as not belonging to the “people of the Book”? Why does the Quran portray Jews and “Christians” as allies in the 7<sup>th</sup> century? Why does it insist so much on distinguishing between “bad Jews” who “cover their texts” and “good Jews” who do not? Who is the community of “good Jews” described by the text as friends and allies of the believers?

### Transfers from real history to Islamic narrative

Parallel to the manipulations of terminology, supporting the fabrication of the Islamic narrative required significant alterations to the historical and geographical context related to the true origins of Islam. Consequently, new narratives were crafted to reinterpret actual historical evidence, aligning with the process of backward construction we have previously described.

Among the historical evidence was, of course, the Quran, whose verses had become very obscure and required a significant imaginative effort to interpret. Material evidence also included place names and buildings, such as the Dome of the Rock. Mostly, there were oral testimonies: memories conveyed through word of mouth (material for future hadiths), forming a **“collective memory”** of the actual events of the 7<sup>th</sup> century that contradicted the emerging Islamic frame.

Narrative manipulations could deal with physical evidence relatively easily, tampering with the proto-Quranic text (when it was still possible), changing place names, or reassigning new purposes to existing buildings, such as associating the Dome of the Rock with the “night journey”. Memories, however, proved much more challenging to manipulate. They could not be altered as drastically as the scriptures—it would have required the elimination of every bearer of these memories, just as heterodox Quranic compilations were destroyed. **Memories were distorted** as they were transcribed into hadiths and traditions. While the general essence might have remained, it was altered by adding details, changing names and places (for example, restaging events in Mecca) and systematically incorporating Islamic details (such as introducing Muhammad and qualifying him as “God’s messenger”, thus bringing every “muhammad” figure back to him), accompanied by the creation of numerous fabricated hadiths that reshaped the interpretation of these memories. The farther these “reports” strayed from the historical events they purported to recount, the more numerous and detailed they became, gradually constructing Islamic history and shaping Muhammad’s image as the Prophet of Islam. Thus, the narrative that emerged was not a mere invention but a profound alteration of memories, **transferring real historical events into the Islamic narrative**. Below are some particularly striking examples that illustrate the logic of this manipulation:

- **From a geographical perspective**, the most significant transfers involved relocating the setting of Muhammad’s tribe (initially near Latakia, in north-western Syria)—and its nomadic preaching sites along the caravan routes—to Mecca. This included place names, names of

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monastery door, who would then become nuns (Q16:57 indeed speaks of “assigning daughters to God”). Islamic reinterpretation transformed the phrase into “bury in the dust”, with “dassa” even becoming synonymous with “bury”. Q81:9, “*and when the buried baby girl [“al mawudatu”] is asked for what sin she was killed*”, has been similarly reinterpreted. Literally, “*al mawudatu*” does not mean “the buried baby girl”, but the “placed one”, the “entrusted one” (to a monastery?).

hills (Abu Qubays), the purpose of the pilgrimage (originally conducted in Jerusalem), and the direction of prayers. Similarly, events following the taking of Jerusalem—such as Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr's rule in Petra, veneration of the Black Stone, and his war against Umayyad power—were reattributed from Petra to Mecca.

- **From a historical perspective**, the events leading to the two surrenders of Christian Jerusalem in 614 and 638 (including the events regarding the Temple Mount), underwent a similar process of transformation and distortion in the Islamic narrative. They are depicted as numerous episodes of conflict between the Medina faction and the supposed adversaries from “polytheist” Mecca, culminating in the Emigrants’ capture of the city after the Hegira (including events regarding the Kaaba).
- **From the perspective of inspirational figures**, the influence of the Judeo-Nazarenes could not be entirely obscured. For instance, the figure of the Judeo-Nazarene priest Waraqah is encountered, whom Muslim discourse has transformed into a Christian cleric. Bahira emerged as a later figure within Islamic discourse, also appearing in Christian apologetics as a representation of the Judeo-Nazarene milieu that indoctrinated Muhammad (as “Sergius”). Islamic narratives reinterpreted him as a Christian monk who acknowledged Muhammad's prophethood (“*bahiyya*” meaning “teacher” in Aramaic). Similarly, Islamic tradition portrays “Jewish” characters who are likely echoes of Judeo-Nazarene individuals, such as Salman al-Farisi, instrumental in the compilation of the Quran, and Ka'b al-Ahbar, Umar's companion who constructed a “synagogue” on the Temple Mount during the capture of Jerusalem. Tradition has attempted to neutralize these characters by depicting them as “converts to Islam”. Likewise, it has addressed other Arab preachers of the Apocalypse—“armed prophets”—some associated with the Judeo-Nazarenes, by branding them as “false prophets” or “anti-prophets” (refer to notes 75 and 82).
- **From the perspective of Islamic anti-Judaism**, its true origins can be traced to the conflict between the Judeo-Nazarenes and rabbinic Jews. To recall, this conflict notably manifested during the conquest of Jerusalem in 614 when rabbinic Jews expelled their Nazarene cousins and their Arab allies from the city. In the Islamic narrative, this historical memory is distorted into the treachery of the “Jewish tribes” of Medina who did not uphold their pact with Muhammad (also distorted into Muhammad's expulsion from Mecca—the Hegira). Furthermore, the narrative ascribed to the Prophet of Islam events that actually occurred under Umar's leadership in 640. During this period, Arab chiefs severed ties with the Judeo-Nazarenes, leading to the massacre of their leaders and the expulsion of the remainder, along with every Jew. This Islamic narrative distorted these historical memories, perpetuating anti-Judaism, legitimized by referencing “Prophet Muhammad”<sup>256</sup>, who is inaccurately credited with expelling two of the “three Jewish tribes of Medina” (purportedly in 624-625) and massacring the third (allegedly in 627). This narrative might also have distorted the memory of the Ahl al-Bayt's massacre, “Muhammad's relatives”—actually a faction that remained closely connected to the Judeo-Nazarenes into the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (refer to page 58 and 72).
- **The theme of illegitimate challenges to the authority** of God's deputy on earth may have emerged during the time of the historical Muhammad, as we have discussed. However, extending his sacred status to his immediate successors (the “*rashidun*” or “rightly-guided” caliphs) served to legitimize the authority of subsequent caliphs. Thus, when Muhammad

<sup>256</sup> As in these hadiths: [Sahih Bukhari 3593](#), “I heard Allah's Messenger saying, 'The Jews will fight with you, and you will be given victory over them so that a stone will say, 'O Muslim! There is a Jew behind me; kill him!'””; [Sahih Muslim 2922](#), “The last hour would not come unless the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him; but the tree Ghraqad would not say, for it is the tree of the Jews”.

was described as suppressing opposition from the “*munafiqun*” (“hypocrites”) through force, this narrative targeted all present and future opponents—thereby legitimizing the wars of apostasy (“*hurub al ridda*”).

What, then, are the elements of reality that may have influenced the creation of hadiths and the shaping of Muslim discourse? Our diagram on the next page seeks to illustrate this. It highlights certain elements of historical reality and their transformation across space and time into what has nearly become the definitive Islamic narrative by the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Although detailed, it does not claim to be exhaustive. This narrative has evolved into a complex structure, striving for logic and internal coherence. In this process, **Muslim tradition has crafted a mythical past**, incorporating real memories altered by the imaginations of scribes and traditionists. Importantly, the “freezing” of the Quranic text necessitated a creative interplay between its interpretation and the “making of the past”, giving the illusion of a coherent history and text. Some Quranic verses are cited to affirm this perceived clarity to Muslims<sup>257</sup>, yet they actually refer to a completely different text—the “*quran*” of the Judeo-Nazarenes, their Arabic lectionary. In reality, no diligent reader of the Quran can deem it unequivocally clear. Therefore, the Islamic themes of clarity and the “miracle of the Quran” might appear ironic, considering that its successive manipulations have led to the loss of numerous meanings, thereby obscuring the clarity falsely attributed to the text by Islamic tradition. Nonetheless, the Quranic exegesis that we will present in the following pages aims to restore some of its clarity.

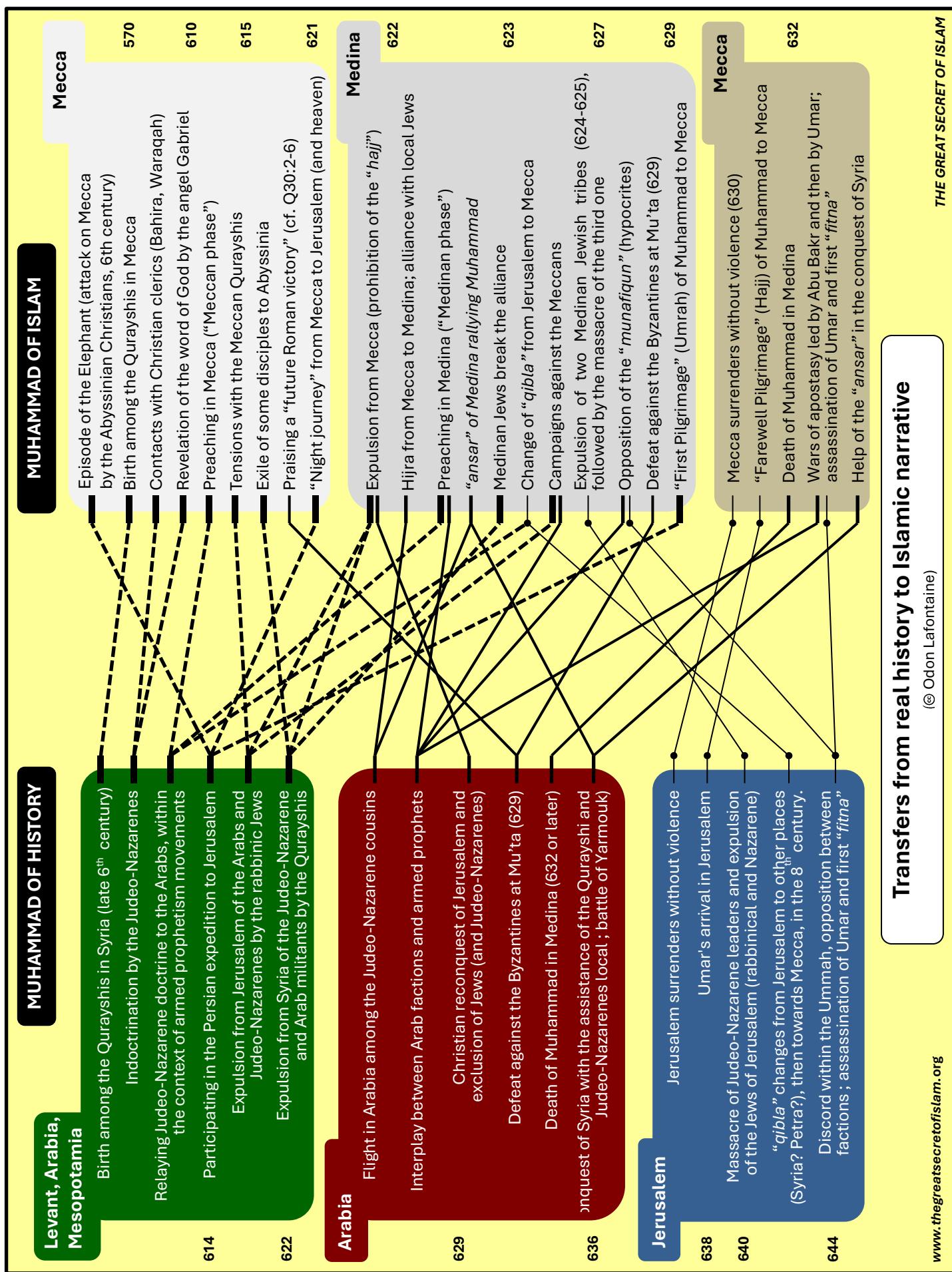
Despite their expertise, **the scribes serving the caliphs found maintaining overall coherence in such a vast text impossible** once they began to manipulate it and alter word meanings. Changing an expression’s meaning required harmonizing it across all occurrences in the 114 surahs<sup>258</sup> and 6,236 verses of the canonical version of the Quran. Moreover, if this new meaning conflicted with existing Quranic passages, further textual or interpretive manipulations became necessary, thereby initiating cycles of endless revisions.

Consequently, Muslims are expected to adhere to their faith without questioning or doubting, as doubt is considered a significant sin within Islam—contributing to the “*haram/halal*” mindset we mentioned as a key element for the [“petrification of Islam”](#). Muslims are warned of severe punishments in hell for those who stray from the faith, alongside earthly penalties for apostasy, as highlighted in a hadith which quotes Muhammad saying, “*If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him*”<sup>259</sup>. This environment compels believers to monitor and correct deviations within their community, an obligation that has been formalized within the “*fard al kifaya*” commandments (communal obligations) in Sharia law (refer to note 15). Since the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Islamic thought became more rigid, any [innovation](#) (“*bid’ah*”) has been viewed with suspicion, often labeled as heretical and banned. The resistance to critical reflection has fostered **a culture of submission to religious discourse and its logic**, especially focused on the idealized figure of Muhammad. Thus, any form of doubt or critique, not to mention caricature, is not only prohibited but also considered sacrilegious. Nevertheless, even a preliminary reading of the Quranic text raises numerous questions, which we will now explore.

<sup>257</sup> Among the many verses that praise the Quran for the clarity of its language and the great intelligibility of its verses are the following: Q5:15, “Now a light and a **clear book** from God has come to you” ; Q26:192-195, “Surely, it is indeed a sending down from the Lord of the worlds. The trustworthy spirit [Gabriel] has brought it down on your heart, so that you may be one of the warners in a **clear Arabic language**”; Q39:28: “an Arabic Quran, **without any crookedness**, so that they may guard (themselves)”.

<sup>258</sup> The number 114 is also the count of “*logia*”, or sayings, in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, a text that was widely circulated in the first centuries in Syria. This number might reflect an ancient Christian liturgical practice spanning two consecutive years, plus ten major feasts, calculated as 52 weeks plus 5 feasts per year, doubled to equal 114.

<sup>259</sup> [Sahih al-Bukhari 3017](#)



## EVIDENCE HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT IN THE QURAN

The cornerstone of our study is the Quranic text itself, serving as **an almost primary source**—actually derived from copies of primary documents—originally depicting real events of the 7<sup>th</sup> century that were crucial for the rise of Islam. We hypothesize that, despite the textual manipulations we described, the bulk of its content originates from the very first communities of believers, which, indeed, is the case. Our refined understanding of the 7<sup>th</sup> century's historical, religious, and geopolitical contexts enables a comprehensive exegesis of the text, overcoming the reluctance of many scholars who hesitated to engage with it, viewing the Quran as a “text without context”.

This comprehensive exegesis of the Quran, developed by Édouard M. Gallez and continued by us, is primarily grounded in the tradition of non-Islamic, Arabic-speaking, Eastern Christian scholarship introduced earlier (refer to note 19). This approach aims to understand the Quran based on its literal meaning, independent of the contrived interpretations derived from the Islamic narrative. Despite this tradition's relative obscurity in Western research circles, this method has been long-awaited by some and even pioneered by others (refer to note 77). As Patricia Crone wrote it, “...We have to start by **understanding the Quran on the basis of information supplied by the book itself**, as opposed to that of later readers, and to understand this information in the light of developments known to have preceded its formation rather than those engendered by the book itself (...) A primary source is one which takes us as far back as we can get; a secondary source is based on a primary one. Al-Tabari and the exegetes he cites are secondary sources in relation to the Quran, though they also preserve evidence which is primary to us. The primary and secondary information must always be kept separate. This rule has been so consistently violated for so long in the case of the Quran and the tradition that reading the Quran on its own is deeply de-familiarizing, at least to somebody coming to the book from history rather than Quranic studies. Few historians know the Quran as a primary source. It is with a view to reintroducing it as a primary source that I shall ignore the tradition in what follows, or at best refer to it as secondary literature like any other”<sup>260</sup>. This is precisely what we have done, building upon the advancements made by these Eastern Christian scholars and leveraging the groundbreaking work of Édouard M. Gallez, as well as the contributions of numerous scholars such as Patricia Crone.

This new insight uncovers **unprecedented evidence**, providing direct proof of a heterodox Jewish sect's existence and its critical influence at the inception of Islam and the Quran. This sect, opposed to mainstream rabbinic Judaism, identified itself as “Nazarene”. This evidence is the pivotal element supporting the Judeo-Nazarenes hypothesis we have explored in these pages, including their alliance with certain Arab factions, their ambitions concerning Jerusalem's Temple, and the subsequent fracture of this alliance. It also unveils the formative process of the Quran: the initial preachings, references to an external Judeo-Nazarene Arabic lectionary, and the original materials—predominantly teaching notes, sermon drafts, and verbatim records—that were compiled to create the Quran.

Subsequently, our exegesis also gains from a **historical-critical approach** that compares and incorporates the findings from various research fields such as codicology, archaeology, numismatics, epigraphy, linguistics, and history. For instance, linguistic analysis has revealed that the religious vocabulary of the Quran, including its theological concepts, is largely derived

<sup>260</sup> Patricia Crone, «The Religion of the Qur'anic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities», in *The Qur'anic Pagans and Related Matters*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, page 53. Originally published in *Arabica* 57, 2010.

from Aramaic, eventually Arabized through transliteration (e.g., “*salat*”, “*zakat*”, “*hajj*”, “*masih*” [messiah], “*gehenna*” [hell], etc.)<sup>261</sup>. Historical analysis, on the other hand, has uncovered testimonies from around the time of Jerusalem’s capture in 638, indicating that the conquerors were led by individuals identified as “Jews”, who also participated in the reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem. The challenge lies in integrating these findings. What insights do they offer about the formative events of Islam? In this context, our new exegesis proves to be crucial: it demonstrates that the Quran’s earliest stratum, in its original interpretation, exhorted Christian Arabs to form an alliance with “Nazarene Jews” (Judeo-Nazarenes) for a monumental war project, culminating in the restoration of Jerusalem’s Temple, thereby triggering the end of times, the “Day of judgment”, and the establishment of God’s kingdom. This overview illustrates how historical research can evolve and progress, how such discoveries can set the stage for “assembling the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle”, as suggested in our introduction. And so, step by step, the “great secret of islam” unveils.

We now provide an overview of our exegesis of the Quran<sup>262</sup>, highlighting the numerous textual and narrative manipulations we’ve identified. We offer selected verses for the reader’s discernment, arranged according to the key themes of the Judeo-Nazarenes’ preaching, and decoded with the appropriate interpretive lenses. Confronted with the traditional Islamic narrative and the actual history we believe to have unveiled, it is up to the astute reader to decide which version appears more plausible.



### “Deconstructing” the Quran

...tracing its evolution backwards from a 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscript to the earliest ones, camel’s bones, and ultimately to the Torah—highlighting the decisive influence of the Judeo-Nazarenes on the Quranic text.

Wikimedia Commons: [1](#) – [2](#) – [3](#) – [4](#) – [5](#)

*NB: The Quranic verses are presented in tables that detail their meanings within Islamic tradition and offer interpretations by dissecting previously described manipulations. As mentioned earlier (refer to note 11), we mostly employ A.J. Droke’s English translation, along with the literal translations from the “[The Quranic Arabic Corpus](#)” Islamic initiative, translations and analytics from the “[Qur'an Tools](#)” scholarly initiative, or our own translations as needed. Texts within parentheses are translators’ glosses, typically reflecting Islamic interpretations. Additionally, we have included our own commentary in square brackets, which encompasses Arabic terms and reading notes. “Islamic narrative” explanations stem mostly from Ibn Kathir’s “tafsir”. We also consulted the works of Ibn Abbas, Ibn Hisham, al-Tabari, al-Wahidi, al-Qurtubi, and al-Sadi.*

<sup>261</sup> Refer to Robert Kerr’s “[Aramaicisms in the Qur'an and their Significance](#)” (op. cit.).

<sup>262</sup> Our detailed exegesis of the Quranic text will be featured in an upcoming publication titled “A Nazarene Reading of the Quran”. Preliminary presentations are already available at <https://thegreatsecretofislam.org>, where a preprint of the paper will also be published.

## Persuading the Arabs to adopt the Judeo-Nazarene lectionary

Comparing the many instances of the word “*quran*” in the Quranic text has led us to understand that it actually refers to an Arabic religious lectionary—a book different from the Quran—that preachers presented and praised to their Arab audiences to facilitate their conversion to Judeo-Nazarenism. **The Quran explicitly describes this Arabic lectionary** as a “*clear*” translation of selected texts from the original sacred scriptures (the Torah and the Gospel), preserved by the Judeo-Nazarenes (the “*mother of scripture*”). This represented a first for the Arab audience—a previously bookless people (Q2:78, “*they do not know the Book, only wishful thinking and they only conjecture*”—who had been converted to Christianity by Aramaic-speaking Christians using Aramaic scriptures and, most likely, Aramaic Christian lectionaries.

The preachers maintained various notes: some were dictated by their masters, who provided their preachers with instructions and practical advice to persuade the Arab audience to adopt their lectionary. Others were personal reminders of these instructions. Additionally, they prepared notes for sermons and exhortations aimed at the Christian audience, with verbatim notes taken during these presentations. Consequently, each preacher likely had his own collection of notes, resembling a catechetical leaflet. These collections of Arabic notes came to form the bulk of the Quran, along the complex making process we explained. The Quran thus still reflects its early “proto-Islamic” history, evidenced by its frequent references to the former Arabic lectionary and its detailed accounts of the Judeo-Nazarenes and their preachers’ efforts to persuade the Arab audience to embrace it.

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>Made Distinct</b> (“<i>fussilat</i>”) Q41:44</p> <p>(44) <i>If we had made it a Quran in a foreign language, they would indeed have said, “Why are its verses not expounded? Is this a foreign (book) with an Arab? Say: “It is a guidance and healing for those who believe, but those who do not believe — (there is) a heaviness in their ears, and for them is a blindness”.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>Muhammad faces opposition from stubborn Meccans who refuse to acknowledge Islam, even though God has sent an Arab prophet specifically for them. God takes due note and advises His prophet, equipping him with arguments for future sermons that praise the qualities of the <b>Quran</b>. He then explains to Muhammad that despite all his efforts, he will always encounter some who refuse to believe.</p>	<p>The Judeo-Nazarene master explains to the Arab preacher he is mentoring that there is a need for <b>a lectionary in Arabic</b>. This would enable him to preach to his audience without directly referencing sacred texts or a lectionary written in Hebrew or Aramaic, which they might not understand and could perceive as foreign to their culture. Furthermore, he provides arguments to persuade the Arab audience of the benefits of his lectionary, while also cautioning that there may still be resistance.</p>
<p><b>Jonah</b> (“<i>yunus</i>”) Q10:37</p> <p><i>This Quran is not the kind (of book) that it could have been forged apart from God. (It is) a confirmation of what was before it, and a distinct setting forth of the Book — (there is) no doubt about it — from the Lord of the worlds.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>God asserts the divine origin and authenticity of His <b>Quran</b>: It confirms the scriptures previously revealed to Jews and Christians. Alas, these earlier scriptures were falsified, and their originals have since disappeared. The <b>Quran</b> is a clear, detailed, and unmistakable earthly copy of its immutable model: <b>the celestial Quran</b>.</p>	<p>The preacher presents his <b>Arabic lectionary</b> to his Christian audience, asserting that it is on par with the sacred scriptures with which they are already familiar, albeit indirectly, since they do not read Hebrew or Aramaic. This lectionary contains passages directly excerpted from sacred texts, most notably <b>the Torah</b> — God’s word — and translated into Arabic.</p>

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Cow</b> (“al baqara”) Q2:1</p> <p>Alif Lam Mim.</p> <p>[Sometimes abbreviated as “ALM”, these Arabic letters appear at the beginning of six of the 113 surahs in the Quran. Similarly, other groups of letters are used as opening sequences in 29 surahs in total]</p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>These letters remain a lifelong enigma within Islam.</p> <p>Many <a href="#">commentators</a> regard them as one of the Quran's miracles, believing that only God knows their true meaning.</p>	<p>The Hebrew letters “ALM”, are short for “God of salvoes” (refer to Psalm 68:20<sup>263</sup>). This formula traditionally opens prayers and preaching among Jewish and Judeo-Nazarene groups. Its use at the beginning of surahs suggests a Jewish, or more specifically, Judeo-Nazarene origin. The complete neglect of these references in Muslim tradition reveals the depth to which they have been obscured by the Islamic narrative.</p>
<p><b>Joseph</b> (“yusuf”) Q12:1-4, 111</p> <p>(1) <i>Alif Lam Ra. Those are the signs [var.: verses] of the clear Book.</i></p> <p>(2) <i>Surely we have sent it down as an Arabic Quran, so that you may understand.</i></p> <p>(3) <i>We shall recount to you the best of accounts in what we have inspired you (with of) this Quran, though before it you were indeed one of the oblivious.</i></p> <p>(4) <i>(Remember) when Joseph said to his father...</i></p> <p>(...)</p> <p>(111) <i>...It is not a forged proclamation, but a confirmation of what was before it, and a distinct setting forth of everything, and a guidance and mercy for a people who believe.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>God expresses Himself through mysterious terms, embedding the miraculous “ALR” formula in <b>the Quran</b> that only He can fully understand.</p> <p>He then informs His prophet that the upcoming verses, naturally in Arabic, are integral to the Quranic revelation. These verses recount the most beautiful story in <b>the Quran</b> and all <b>previous revelations</b>: the story of Joseph (Yusuf). Indeed, Joseph was a prophet of God, whose persecution mirrors that of Muhammad by the Meccans. The prophet Muhammad was previously unaware of this narrative, as he was neither a Jew nor a Christian.</p> <p>After having recounted Joseph's story, God insists that He hasn't forged His own narrative and that His revelation is authentic, confirming <b>the original narrative of the Islamic Torah</b>, before the Jews corrupted it.</p>	<p>Similar to the formula “ALM”, “ALR” likely refers to another traditional Jewish overture invocation, used by the preacher to begin his sermon.</p> <p>He then presents his <b>Arabic lectionary</b> to his audience, which includes an Arabic translation of Joseph's Biblical story from the Book of Genesis, referred to as the “clear Book” (<b>the Torah</b>). Given their limited Biblical education, his audience is not very familiar with it. Therefore, to present Joseph in accordance with Judeo-Nazarene doctrine, the preacher begins with a lengthy parabiblical commentary, adapted from a traditional Jewish tale about Joseph. The remainder of the surah essentially consists of this commentary, which is primarily comprehensible to Arab Christians who are already somewhat familiar with the gist of the Biblical narrative.</p> <p>Lastly, the preacher concludes his narrative by asserting its authenticity, claiming that his interpretation aligns with <b>the Torah</b>'s account, even though what he presented is merely his own commentary, not <b>the Torah</b>'s account (which is included in <b>the lectionary</b>).</p>

<sup>263</sup> [Ps 68:20](#) states, “Our God is the God of deliverances [var.: salvoes]” אל למשועות (Eloheinu El lemosha'ot). In this phrase: A / א represents “alif”, the initial letter of the Hebrew word for “God” (“el”); L / ל is the preposition “for” in Hebrew (“lam”); and M / מ is the initial letter of “mosha'ot”, which means “deliverances” or “salvoes” in Hebrew (“mim”). Refer to Bruno Bonnet-Eymard, *Le Coran, traduction et commentaire systématique* [The Quran, translation and systematic commentary], Vol. 1, Éditions de la CRC, 1988, p. 21ff.

Quranic text	Meaning in Islam	Decoded reading
<p><b>Made Distinct</b> (“<i>fussilat</i>”) Q41:1-2</p> <p>(1) <i>Ha Mim.</i> (2) <i>A sending down from the merciful, the compassionate.</i> (3) <i>A Book — its verses made distinct — an Arabic Quran for a people who know.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>Once again, God employs a mysterious and miraculous formula to introduce another glorification of <b>the Quran</b>. He praises its Arabic nature and clarity, noting that its verses are clearly expounded and thus easy to understand.</p>	<p>Beginning with a traditional Jewish overture invocation, the preacher introduces <b>the Arabic Judeo-Nazarene lectionary</b>: an Arabic translation of a collection of verses from the divine <b>Torah</b> — God’s very word — now clearly expounded for Arabs who do not read Hebrew or Aramaic.</p>
<p><b>Decoration</b> (“<i>al zukhruf</i>”) Q43:2-4</p> <p>(2) <i>By the clear Book!</i> (3) <i>Surely we have made it an Arabic Quran, so that you may understand.</i> (4) <i>And surely it is in [var.: from] the mother of the Book [var.: mother of scripture], with us, most high indeed, wise.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>God glorifies the <b>celestial Quran</b> and its revelation in Arabic to Muhammad, so that Arabs — and subsequently all non-Arab people — can understand it. In the remainder of the surah, He exhorts the Meccans to convert by dismantling their criticisms and their false religion.</p>	<p>The Judeo-Nazarenes remind their Arab preacher that they have translated a <b>lectionary</b> into Arabic, consisting of selected texts from <b>the Torah</b> (the “<i>clear Book</i>”), originally written in Hebrew (the “<i>mother scripture</i>”, the sacred writing in the liturgical language). Thanks to this translated <b>lectionary</b>, Arabs will be able to understand the wisdom contained in this precious <b>Torah</b>.</p>
<p><b>The Human</b> (“<i>al insan</i>”) Q76:23-24</p> <p>(23) <i>Surely we — we have sent down on you the Quran once and for all [var.: “progressively”, or “a revelation”].</i> (24) <i>So be patient for the judgment [var.: command, decision, wisdom] of your lord [“rabbi”], and do not obey any sinner or ungrateful one [KFR — coverer] among them.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>God reminds His Prophet that He is the one who revealed <b>the Quran</b> to him. Therefore, Muhammad must adhere solely to God’s will and be wary of men, particularly sinners and unbelievers.</p>	<p>The Judeo-Nazarene master demands obedience from his preacher, having already taught him <b>the Arabic lectionary</b>. He instructs him to rely on his master’s [“<i>rabbi</i>”] command and wisdom — likely for its interpretation (refer to <a href="#">Q75:16-19</a>) — urging him to steer clear of the influence of sinners and, most importantly, of rabbinical Jews.</p>
<p><b>House of Imran</b> (“<i>al imran</i>”) Q3:7</p> <p><b>He</b> (it is) who has sent down on you <b>the Book</b>, of which some verses are clearly composed — they are the <b>mother of the Book</b> [var.: the foundation of the Book] — but other are ambiguous [var.: resembling one another, allegorical]. As for those in whose hearts (there is) a turning aside they follow the ambiguous part of it, seeking (to cause) trouble [“<i>fitna</i>”] and seeking its interpretation. No one knows its interpretation except God.</p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p><b>God</b> asserts to His prophet that He is the one who has revealed <b>the Quran</b> to him, distinguishing its verses between those that are unambiguously clear, and those that are ambiguous — yet still clear, since <b>the Quran</b> itself is clear. The unambiguous ones are foundational; they abrogate the lesser ones and include the major commandments. These are referred to as the “<b>mother of the Book</b>” (not to be confused here with the Celestial Quran, even though it is the same Arabic expression). Anyhow, God knows best and understands more than any malicious adversaries of Islam.</p>	<p>The Judeo-Nazarene master mentors his preacher. Indeed, he taught him <b>the Arabic lectionary</b>; however, since it conveys God’s word, <b>God</b> himself has found a way into the preacher’s heart. <b>The lectionary</b> is thus as good as God’s original word. The master then explains that the lectionary contains two types of texts: translated verses from <b>the original Torah</b> (the “<i>mother of scripture</i>”) and other texts (possibly Judeo-Nazarene creations) that may not be as clear as <b>the Torah</b>’s excerpts. Nonetheless, the preacher should not be troubled by these ambiguous texts; they also represent God’s will. Only malicious adversaries would contest this.</p>

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Resurrection</b>          (“al qiyama”)          Q75:16-19</p> <p>(16) <i>Do not move your tongue with it to hurry it.</i></p> <p>(17) <i>Surely on us (depends) its collection and its recitation</i> [lit.: “<b>quran <p>(18) <i>When we recite it, follow its recitation</i> [lit.: “<b>quran <p>(19) <i>Then surely on us (depends) its explanation.</i></p> </b></p></b></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>In verses 17 and 18, the word “<i>quran</i>”, which also means “recitation” or “proclamation” is interpreted as referring to the <b>Quran</b>—i.e. the Quran’s recitation. Consequently, by extension, all four verses are understood to refer to the Quran.</p> <p>According to Islamic commentary, Muhammad was so excited by the revelations from Angel Gabriel that he began repeating them even before Gabriel had finished transmitting them. Consequently, God had to correct His prophet, urging him to take his time, listen first, and then memorize the angel’s recitation of the <b>Quran</b>. These verses thus guarantee that Muhammad <b>preached</b> the exact revelation of God — no more, no less — since he obeyed God’s command, the only one who knows what the <b>Quran</b> is about. Indeed God also states in another verse that it is impossible for humans to interpret the <b>Quran</b>, especially its “difficult” verses. The interpretation belongs to Him alone: “<i>No one knows its interpretation except God</i>” (Q3:7, as explained previously).</p>	<p>The Judeo-Nazarene master teaches his preacher about the end of times — including the “Day of Resurrection” (as referenced in the preceding verses). The preacher is so eager about this event that he wishes to preach about it on his own, without adhering to the guidelines of <b>the Arabic lectionary</b>. Therefore, the Judeo-Nazarene master reprimands him: the “Day of Resurrection” will not be hastened by reckless exhortations. The preacher must first listen to and learn from his master as he explains <b>the lectionary</b> passages that refer to the end of times.</p> <p>The master is the one who understands the sacred scriptures — meaning God’s very will. Only he can elucidate the details of God’s plan for the end of times. Only after mastering this knowledge will the preacher be able to deliver a just and accurate <b>proclamation</b> about the “Day of Resurrection”.</p>
<p><b>Consultation</b> (“al shura”)          Q42:7</p> <p><i>In this way we have inspired you (with) an Arabic <b>Quran</b>, so that you may warn the Mother of Towns of the Day of Gathering — (there is) no doubt about it — (one) group in the garden [heaven], and (another) group in the blazing (fire).</i>          [similar to 6:92]</p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>God explains to His prophet that He reveals an Arabic <b>Quran</b> to him so that he can warn the Meccan Arabs about the impending end of times, and the hellish punishments awaiting those who do not convert to Islam — as well as the rewards for Muslims.</p>	<p>The Judeo-Nazarene master speaks of the “day of gathering” in the Cedron Valley of Jerusalem, where nations will be gathered for judgment by God at the end of times<sup>264</sup> (through his Messiah). He has tasked his preacher with warning his fellow Arabs of the “mother of towns” — either Petra, or, more likely in this context, Jerusalem — about its imminence. The fear of God’s judgment, as conveyed through <b>the Arabic lectionary</b>, should compel them to decide: either join God’s side with the Judeo-Nazarenes or risk eternal damnation.</p>

<sup>264</sup> Joel 3:2, “*In those days and at that time, when I restore Judah and Jerusalem from captivity, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat [Cedron Valley]. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my people*” — see also the Cedron Valley’s location on page 89.

## Distinguishing “good Jews” from “bad Jews”

Teaching the Arabs about the Bible meant instructing them about the Jewish people. The Judeo-Nazarenes had their preachers explain how their faith differed from that of the rabbinic Jews—claiming that they, the Judeo-Nazarenes, were the only “true Jews”. At first glance, this is not obvious: all are Jews, all claim descent from Abraham and his son Isaac, and all adhere to the same Torah. It was therefore necessary to delineate the “good ones”, those who followed the “true religion of Abraham” and believed in Messiah-Jesus, from the “bad ones”, those who denied him and “covered” the meaning of the sacred scriptures by prioritizing the Talmuds. The Quran is thus adamant about the condemnation of Jews, vilifying them as “coverers”, “wicked”, and those “upon whom God’s anger falls” (Q1:8). It also frequently makes it clear that **not all Jews are the same**: numerous mentions of them include a distinction, as already hinted at in note 88—some are “bad Jews”, while others, the Judeo-Nazarenes, belong to an “upstanding community” (Q3:113) and are the “closest in affection to the believers” (Q5:82).

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Spider</b> (“al ankabut”) Q29:46-47</p> <p>(46) <i>Do not dispute with the People of the Book except with what is better [var.: in the best way] — except for those of them who do evil. And say: “We believe in what has been sent down to us, and what has been sent down to you. Our God and your God is one, and to him we submit”.</i> (47) <i>In this way we have sent down the Book to you. Those to whom we have given the Book believe in it, and among these (people) (there are) some who believe in it. No one denies our signs [var.: verses] but the unbelievers</i> [root KFR; var.: coverers].</p>	<p>Meccan period</p> <p>God instructs Muhammad to teach Muslims the correct conduct towards other “People of the Book”, including <b>Jews</b> and <b>Christians</b>, even though they are scarce in pagan Mecca. They should be properly invited to Islam, except for those deemed wicked. These groups had previously received <b>revelations</b> similar to <b>the Quran</b> and thus believe in the same God, despite having falsified their sacred scriptures and corrupted their religions. Therefore, they might convert to Islam, just as some pagan Meccans did when Muhammad preached <b>the Quran</b> to them — although <b>most Meccans</b> continue to persist in their disbelief.</p>	<p>The preacher instructs his Arab audience about <b>the Judeo-Nazarenes</b>, describing them as <b>People of the Torah</b> who should be respected because they share the same God and the same sacred scriptures as the Arab converts — namely, <b>the Torah</b> and <b>the Gospel</b> on one hand, and <b>the Arabic lectionary</b> on the other.</p> <p>However, not all those who have received <b>the Torah</b> are alike: some “do evil”. These are the <b>“coverer” Jews</b> who deny God’s verses — likely those about Messiah-Jesus — namely, <b>the rabbinical Jews</b>.</p>
<p>Q29:61</p> <p>(61) <i>If indeed you ask them, “Who created the heavens and earth, and subjected the sun and the moon?”, they will indeed say, “God” [“allah”]. How then are they (so) deluded?</i></p> <p>[This theme is similarly addressed in Q31:25 and Q39:38]</p>	<p>God warns Muhammad against the <b>pagan polytheists</b> of Mecca who, even though they may appear to acquiesce to the Muslim faith, ultimately deviate from the divine commandments.</p> <p>A discerning mind might note that these are peculiar pagan polytheists who profess faith in <b>the one God</b> (“allah” — refer to note 7).</p>	<p>The preacher urges his Arab audience to be wary of <b>rabbinic Jews</b> (“them” refers to the “coverers” previously described in verses 47, 49 and 54). While they appear to profess the same faith in the same God as the Judeo-Nazarenes and converted Arabs — the Creator God as described in the Torah — they do not truly follow the “religion of Abraham”.</p>

The condemnation of rabbinic Judaism, as depicted in the Quran under terms such as “*yahud*” (Jews), “People of the Book”, and “*kuffar*” (“coverers”, originally meaning “Talmudists” but now commonly understood within the Islamic narrative as “unbelievers” in a generic sense), is one of the main themes of the Quran. This emphasis raises several intriguing questions: Why does a revelation, supposedly given to initially ignorant pagans in a place almost devoid of Jews, focuses so intensively on the Jews? What necessitates the distinction between “good Jews” and others? Who are these “good Jews”?

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Cow</b> (“<i>al baqara</i>”) Q2:75-79</p> <p>(75) <i>Are you eager that they</i> [Moses’ people, cf. Q2:67] <i>should believe you, even though a group of them has already heard the word of God</i>, (and) then altered it after they had understood it—and they know (they have done this)?</p> <p>(76) <i>When they meet those who believe, they say, “We believe”, but when some of them meet with others, they say, “Do you report to them what God has disclosed to you, so that they may dispute with you by means of it in the presence of your Lord [“rabi”]? Will you not understand?”</i></p> <p>(77) <i>Do they not know that God knows what they keep secret and what they speak aloud?</i></p> <p>(78) <i>Some of them are common people</i> [var.: Gentiles, unlettered] —they do not know <b>the Book</b>, only wishful thinking, and they only conjecture.</p> <p>(79) <i>So woe to those who write the Book with their (own) hands, (and) then say, “This is from God”, in order to sell it a small price.</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>After recounting some of the endeavors of Moses and <b>the “Sons of Israel”</b>, God reveals to His prophet that he must warn Muslims about the dishonesty of <b>some Jews</b>. Although Jews once received <b>the Islamic Torah</b>, which is the true word of God, they later corrupted it, adding <b>false writings</b> and baseless conjectures. Some even sold these falsified writings to Arabs.</p> <p>They deceive Muslims by pretending to believe in Islam and Muhammad, knowing well that Muhammad is God’s prophet, as their own scriptures have foretold (“<i>what God has disclosed</i>” is generally understood as pertaining to <a href="#">Q7:157</a> which purportedly asserts the existence of prophecies about Muhammad within the Torah and the Gospel). Privately, they acknowledge his prophethood, but they prohibit themselves from sharing the news of Muhammad’s foretold coming in the Torah with Muslims. Among them are also <b>some</b> who are unlettered, ignorant of <b>God’s sacred scriptures</b>, whether <b>the Torah or the Quran</b>.</p> <p>God then urges His prophet to tell Muslims that He curses those Jews who have engaged in these deceitful practices.</p>	<p>During a period when Arab believers came into contact with <b>rabbinical Jews</b> — probably during the 614 Jerusalem campaign — the Arab preacher educates the Arab believers about the history of <b>the “Sons of Israel”</b> with Moses (see preceding verses). He subsequently warns against <b>some of their descendants</b>. Despite apparent similarities in faith, he argues that convincing <b>rabbinical Jews</b> about the coming of Messiah-Jesus is futile since they have tampered with <b>the sacred scriptures</b>, notably altering prophecies about him and forging false revelations (the Talmuds).</p> <p>Moreover, he even claims that these Jews are fully aware of their alterations, discussing them privately among themselves. The presence of <b>Arab converts to Judaism</b> among them should not encourage Arab believers to befriend them; these converts to Judaism are purportedly ignorant of <b>the true sacred scriptures</b>. In any case, the preacher emphasizes that God will punish all involved in such wrongdoing.</p> <p>Conversely, the fact that only “<b>a group</b>” of the Jews altered the sacred scriptures and produced false writings attributed to God suggests that others did not and remained faithful to him. These faithful adherents are likely the Judeo-Nazarenes, who have maintained God’s unaltered sacred scriptures.</p>

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>House of Imran</b> (“al imran”) Q3:78-79</p> <p>(78) <i>Surely (there is) indeed a group of them [the “People of the Book”, cf. verse 75] who twist their tongues with the Book [var.: distort the Book with their tongues] so that you will think it is from the Book, when it is not from the Book. And they say, “It is from God”, when it is not from God. They speak lies against God, and they know (it).</i></p> <p>(79) <i>It is not possible for a human being that God should give him the Book, and the judgment [var.: wisdom], and the prophetic office, (and) then he should say to the people “Be my servants instead of God’s”. Rather (he would say), “Be rabbis by what you have been teaching of the Book and by what you have been studying (of it)”.</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>God instructs Muhammad to teach Muslims about the perfidy of some of the “People of the Book” (traditionally referring mostly to the Jews of Medina), who attempt to turn Muslims away from the true faith by cunningly criticizing the Quran — or possibly the Torah, though traditions on this point are unclear — and attributing false quotations to these texts that are nothing but lies.</p> <p>Later, Muhammad welcomed Jews and Christians into his home in Medina, where he invited them to embrace Islam. When they asked him if they should worship him as an associate of God, God revealed verse 79 to His prophet, reminding him that no one should be worshipped but God Himself. This revelation enabled Muhammad to clarify the situation and set things right with his guests.</p>	<p>The Arab preacher explains to his audience that there are two types of Jews. One group, <b>the rabbinical Jews</b>, has produced writings and commentaries beyond the Torah, namely the Talmuds, which they attributed to God. They have thus knowingly committed a grave sin by positioning themselves, particularly their “rabbis”, as equivalent to God, who is the sole author of sacred scriptures. As Q9:30 rephrases it, “they have taken their rabbis as Lords instead of God” (refer to page 150).</p> <p>Conversely — again — the fact that only “a group” of Jews engaged in this behavior implies that others did not and remained faithful to God. These faithful are likely the Judeo-Nazarenes, to whom God has entrusted, wisdom, prophethood and his untampered <b>sacred scriptures</b>, so that they can teach the unlearned people as “rabbis”.</p>
<p><b>The Prophets</b> (“al anbiya”) Q21:30-32</p> <p>(30) <i>Do those who disbelieve [root KFR; var.: those who cover] not see that the heavens and the earth were (once) a solid mass, and we split the two of them apart, and we made every living thing from water? Will they not believe?</i></p> <p>(31) <i>We have placed on the earth firm mountains, so that it does not sway with them (on it), and placed in it passes (to serve) as (path)ways, so that they might be guided.</i></p> <p>(32) <i>And we have made the sky as a guarded roof. Yet, they still turn away from its signs [var.: our verses].</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>God mocks the futility and disbelief of the ignorant Meccan pagans. They should already be aware of how He created everything, down to the minutest details<sup>265</sup>, and be amazed by this miracle. Why haven't they already converted to Islam? What, then, is the reason for their continued disbelief?</p>	<p>The preacher, using a common rhetorical tactic common in religious exhortations, impersonates God to deliver his message. He castigates the rabbinic Jews, labeling them as “those who disbelieve” because they have “covered” the Torah with the Talmuds. Indeed, by acknowledging the grand narrative of creation in the Torah, they implicitly recognize God’s omnipotence. Therefore, he challenges them: why do they fail to believe in the rest of the Bible, especially the prophecies concerning the Messiah?</p>

<sup>265</sup> These details led some Muslim concordists to claim a “scientific miracle” in the Quran (refer to page 116 ff.). They believe that “firm mountains” actually hold down the earth. For more on this interpretation, see the article “5 Scientific Miracles of the Quran” at: <https://understandquran.com/5-scientific-miracles-quran/>

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Lines</b> (“al saff”) Q61:14</p> <p>(14) <i>You who believe! Be the helpers [“ansar”] of God, as Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples, “Who will be my helpers to God?” The disciples said, “We will be the helpers of God”. One contingent of the Sons of Israel believed, and (another) contingent disbelieved</i> [root KFR; var.: covered]. So we supported those who believed against their enemy, and they were the ones who prevailed.</p> <p>[NB: Q61 reveals significant textual manipulations that date well after the initial proto-Quranic compilations, as detailed in notes 198 and 246].</p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>God enlightens His prophet to better understand the complexities of his interactions with the Jews. Upon his arrival in Medina, he was welcomed by valiant Jews who recognized him as a prophet and came to be known as “ansar” (“helpers”), thus “God’s helpers”. During Jesus’ time, <b>some Jews</b> also recognized him as a prophet of God, followed his teachings, and joined God’s cause, becoming “ansar”, while <b>others denied</b> him. Unfortunately, by the time of Muhammad, Jews had come to <b>disbelieve</b> and falsify their scriptures, corrupting God’s religion. But they will not prevail.</p>	<p>The preacher explains to his Arab audience the primary reasons for the division among Jews, emphasizing the need to differentiate between <b>the good</b> and <b>the bad</b> — “those who believe” and “their enemy”. Some Jews followed Jesus, while others denied him.</p> <p><b>The Judeo-Nazarenes</b> assert that they are the true followers of Jesus, cleverly using a play on the word for their name (“nasara”) to claim lineage from Jesus’ early disciples, who are portrayed as “God’s helpers” (“ansar”)<sup>266</sup>. Conversely, the other Jews who are said to “cover” the sacred scriptures (namely <b>the rabbinic Jews</b>) are depicted as the “enemy” — thus, by extension, God’s enemy.</p>
<p><b>Jonah</b> (“yunus”) Q10:94</p> <p><i>If you are in doubt about what we have sent down to you, ask those who have been reciting the Book before you.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>Even though Muhammad fully believes in the authenticity of the revelations received from the angel Gabriel, God explains he can still consult with Christians and Jews, who might offer reassurance. Historically, these groups received revelations similar to those in the Quran — <b>the Islamic Torah and Gospel</b>. They should theoretically be able to confirm the Quran’s divinity. However, this might prove challenging because they have altered <b>these earlier scriptures</b>.</p>	<p>The Judeo-Nazarene master advises his preacher to consult directly with <b>the Judeo-Nazarenes</b> in case of any doubts. Having extensively studied the Torah, their trustworthy rabbis are well-equipped to clarify its teachings (as detailed in Q3:78-79), as well as the principles of the new religion that the preacher is learning from his master.</p>

<sup>266</sup> The Arabic words “nasara” نَصَارَةٌ and “ansar” أَنْصَارٌ (with the singular form “nasir”) appear similar yet differ profoundly. “ansar” relates to the Arabic root NSR (ن ص ر), meaning “help” or “support”, hence “ansar” refers to “helpers”. In contrast, “nasara” (“Nazarenes”) is a direct transliteration from the Hebrew “notsrim” (נִצְרָם) or Aramaic “natsraya” (נִצְרָאֵי or نَصَارَى) into Arabic. Since Arabic lacks the Semitic tsade letter (צ—“Ts”), it substitutes with “s” (س). Historically in Judaism, “nazarene” was first associated with Isaiah’s prophecy (see note 23). It then denoted early Jewish Christians who quickly started identifying themselves as “messians” (see page 21). Over time, “Nazarene” came to refer to Jews who recognized Jesus as Israel’s messiah but rejected Christianity (see page 25 about rabbinic Judaism’s condemnation of “notsrim”, and further developments on page 29 ff. about Judeo-Nazarenes, including note 50). The Islamic narrative forcefully identifies “nasara” as “Christians”, even though the term does not literally mean this—the literal Arabic word for “Christians” is “masihyun”, formed on the term “masih” (“messiah”). The Quran also refers to Christians as “ahl al injil” (“people of the Gospel”) in Q5:47. Thus, Islamic tradition tried to link “nasara” with the Arabic root NSR, despite their unrelated origins. Consequently, the original play on the words “nasara” and “ansar” mentioned in Q61:14 has become incomprehensible within Islam. For more details, refer to Robert Kerr’s [“Aramaisms in the Qur’ān and their Significance”](#) (op. cit., p.189 ff.).

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>House of Imran</b> (“al imran”) Q3:113-116</p> <p>(113) (Yet) they are not (all) alike. Among the People of the Book (there is) a community [“umma”] (which is) upstanding [var.: righteous]. They recite the signs [var.: verses] of God during the hours of the night and prostrate themselves. (114) They believe in God and the Last Day, and command right and forbid wrong, and are quick in the (doing of) good deeds. Those are among the righteous. (115) Whatever good they do, they will not be denied (the reward of) it. God knows the ones who guard (themselves). (116) Surely those who disbelieve [cover] — neither their wealth nor their children will be of any use against God — those are the companions of the Fire.</p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>God explains that some of the <b>People of the Book</b> have converted to Islam and should not be condemned along with the others; instead, they should be praised. Although they may not be acquainted, they nevertheless form a <b>community</b>. They practice Islam, engaging in nightly prayers and adhering to God’s commandments, thereby pleasing God.</p> <p>In contrast, the <b>unbelievers</b> — polytheists as well as People of the Book — will not escape the fires of hell.</p>	<p>The Arab preacher advises his Arab audience to distinguish among the Jews, the <b>people of the Torah</b>, between the good and the bad. The good among them belong to the <b>clan</b> (“umma”) of the <b>Judeo-Nazarenes</b>. They adhere to the divine law contained in the Torah, believe in the return of the Messiah, and they rise at night for prayers. God is pleased with them. They form an “upstanding community” (“umma qaima”—أمة قائمة—, or “standing”, signifying they stand before God, adhering to his command. This is similar to how Abraham stood obedient when asked to sacrifice his son, hence the expression “standing place of Abraham”.</p> <p>On the other hand, those considered the “bad Jews” are known as “coverers” (“kuffar”), the <b>rabbinic Jews</b>. God will punish them severely.</p>
<p><b>The disbelievers</b>  (“al kafirun”)  Q109: 1-5</p> <p>In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate</p> <p>(1) Say: “You <b>disbelievers</b>!”  (2) I do not serve what you serve,  (3) and you are not serving what I serve.  (4) I am not serving what you have served,  (5) and you are not serving what I serve.  (6) To you your religion [“din”] and to me my religion [“din”].</p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>While preaching Islam in Mecca and challenging the local authorities’ pagan beliefs, Muhammad was offered a compromise: wealth, a woman, and a position as a leader in exchange for allowing a division of religious practice between <b>Meccan paganism</b> and Islam.</p> <p>It was then that this surah was revealed to the resolute Muhammad, instructing Muslims not to yield to the religion of the <b>pagans</b>, their rites, or their idols.</p>	<p>The Judeo-Nazarene master instructs his Arab preacher to clarify for the Arab audience the differences between their belief in God’s true religion and that of the <b>rabbinic Jews</b>, particularly concerning “din”. This term encompasses concepts of justice, which is the behavior demanded by God, as well as judgment and retribution between the just and the unjust, as exemplified in “yawm al din”, the “Day of Judgment” (refer to note 199).</p> <p>While Judeo-Nazarenes (and thus, believers) and <b>rabbinic Jews</b> adhere to a very similar Law derived from the Torah — worshiping the same one God, following the same Torah, observing similar rites, and nearly identical kashrut — their divine retribution will differ significantly. This difference stems from the role attributed to Jesus by the Judeo-Nazarenes and the hopes they place in him (“what I serve”), contrasted with the <b>rabbinic Jews’</b> veneration of the Talmuds (“what you serve”), which they view with the greatest disdain.</p>

## Teaching the Judeo-Nazarene faith

The Judeo-Nazarenes imparted their faith to the Arabs, utilizing Arab preachers they had specifically trained for this mission. Their beliefs had much in common with those of the Arab Christian audience, including references to Jesus, the Torah, and the Gospel. Yet, they also introduced radically different concepts that necessitated further explanation. In particular, **converting Arabs to Judeo-Nazarenism meant integrating them into the chosen people** (the Jewish people), educating them on its history (which led to the extensive parabiblical commentaries in the Quran), and ensuring adherence to the Law of Moses. This law was modified and tailored to facilitate the Arabs' conversion, making it more accessible to them.

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>House of Imran</b> (“al imran”) Q3:96-97</p> <p>(96) <i>Surely the first house</i> [“bayt”] <i>laid down for the people</i> was indeed that at Becca, a blessed (House) and a guidance for the worlds.</p> <p>(97) <i>In it are clear signs: the standing place of Abraham. Whoever enters it is secure. Pilgrimage to the house is (an obligation) on the people of God—(for) anyone who is able (to make) a way to it.</i></p> <p>[see also Q2:125-128 on page 141]</p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>God reveals the long-forgotten history of the origins of <b>the Kaaba</b> in Mecca (also referred to by another name, Becca), the first and sole true temple of God, eternally established for humanity. This is evidenced by its very location, including a tangible sign: <b>the sacred stone of the “standing place of Abraham”</b> (the “Station of Abraham”), which continues to be venerated in Makkah<sup>267</sup>.</p> <p>Additionally, God mandates <b>the pilgrimage to the Kaaba</b> as an essential duty for every devout Muslim.</p>	<p>The preacher emphasizes the significance of the <b>Temple of Jerusalem</b>, situated near “Baka”—a term referenced in Psalm 84 (אֶבֶן), signifying a valley near the temple site, deeply associated with pilgrimage traditions among Jews<sup>268</sup>.</p> <p>The phrase “clear signs” (“ayatun bayyinatun”) might also be interpreted as “<b>clear verses</b>”<sup>269</sup>, directly alluding to the Biblical account of Abraham who “stood” on Mount Moriah. According to Jewish (and Judeo-Nazarene) tradition, this site, where Isaac’s sacrifice was intended and later selected by David for the construction of the Temple (eventually built by Solomon), holds profound significance.</p> <p>It is incumbent upon every Jew to undertake the <b>pilgrimage</b> [Hebrew “hagg”—refer to note 270 on next page] to the <b>Temple of Jerusalem</b>, a duty extended to every Judeo-Nazarene and Arab convert as well.</p>

<sup>267</sup> Adjacent to the Kaaba stands a “sacred stone”, claimed to bear the “authentic footprint” of Abraham’s feet, currently protected under a gilded metal pavilion (see its photo on page 84). Is this artifact evidence corroborating the historical claims of the Quran, or does it rather illustrate the depth of devotion among some Muslims? The survival of such an artifact at this site for approximately 4,000 years could indeed be viewed with skepticism.

<sup>268</sup> As detailed by Stephen J. Shoemaker in “The Qur’ān’s Holy House: Mecca or Jerusalem?”, *op. cit.*, page 180 ff., and by Robert Kerr in “Farüqter Heiland...”, *op. cit.*—in its appendix, on page 503 ff.

<sup>269</sup> As is the case according to the Islamic reading of the Quran in other occurrences of the same lemma (AYY + BYN), e.g. in Q24:34; 26:2; 27:1 or 28:2.

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Cow</b> (“al baqara”) Q2:158</p> <p><i>Surely al-Safa and al-Marwa are among the symbols of God. Whoever performs pilgrimage [“hajj”] to the House or performs visitation [“i’tamara”, same root عر as “umra”]— (there is) no blame on him if he goes around both of them.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p><b>Safa</b> and <b>Marwa</b> are two sites near the <b>Kaaba</b> (essentially <u>rocky mounds</u>), previously pagan worship sites where polytheists performed rituals. This practice was integrated into Islamic tradition when God revealed this verse that included going between <b>Safa</b> and <b>Marwa</b> as one of the <b>pilgrimage</b> rites in Mecca. This rite commemorates Hagar’s search for water there, as later explained by His prophet (see note 176).</p> <p>Additionally, God delineates two types of pilgrimages to Mecca: the <b>minor pilgrimage — Umrah</b>, which can be undertaken any time of the year, and the <b>major pilgrimage — Hajj</b>, conducted during specific days in the Islamic month of Dhu al-Hijjah. The <b>Hajj</b> is a personal obligation for every Muslim who is physically and financially capable of performing it.</p>	<p>The preacher urges his Arab audience to take Jerusalem, explaining the layout of its holy sites along the rites of <b>the Judeo-Nazarene pilgrimage to the Temple</b>: he details <b>Mount Scopus</b> and <b>Mount Moriah</b>, the latter being the <b>Temple</b>’s foundation. Between them lies the Cedron (or Kidron) Valley, seen as the “place of gathering” for the final judgment of nations by Messiah-Jesus at the end times (as we previously mentioned it on page 130).</p> <p>A true believer, fearless of this judgment, should thus cross the valley with confidence, <b>proceeding</b> onto the Temple Mount to perform the pilgrimage rites. These include the “hajj” (circumambulation around the Temple’s site) and the “umra” (which could refer to the Jewish “omer” offering, or more likely to the ritual Temple service)<sup>270</sup>.</p>
<p><b>Women</b> (“al nisa”) Q4:136</p> <p><i>You who believe! Believe in God and his messenger, and the book he has sent down on his messenger, and the book (scripture) which he sent down before (this).</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>God commands belief in Islam, meaning faith in <b>Muhammad</b> and the <b>Quran</b> as revealed to him (even before it was written down and ultimately compiled into a book, after Muhammad’s death).</p> <p>Belief in earlier sacred scriptures (the <b>Islamic versions of the Torah and the Gospel</b>) is also required, provided they haven’t been altered — which they had according to the Quran.</p>	<p>The preacher enjoins Arabs who have converted to Judeo-Nazarenism to believe in God and in <b>Messiah-Jesus</b> — Jesus as depicted by the Judeo-Nazarenes.</p> <p>They are also urged to believe in the <b>Gospel</b> as revealed and preserved by the Judeo-Nazarenes, while simultaneously adhering to the <b>Torah</b> and its laws, which they are encouraged to continue practicing.</p>

<sup>270</sup> Robert Kerr explained in his article “[Aramaicisms in the Qur’ān...](#)” (*op. cit.*, p.178 ff.) that “hajj” transliterates from Hebrew *חג* (“hagg”), via Aramaic, meaning a “dance in a circle” or “procession”, which derived into ritual circumambulations around the Temple. This concept evolved to refer to ritual circumambulations around the Temple, eventually denoting a religious “feast”, “festivity” or “festival” associated with Jewish Temple pilgrimages. Furthermore, Kerr suggests that “umra” may be connected to Syriac-Christian ascetic rites of consecration to God. Besides, “umra” could also relate to the Jewish *omer* (“[omer](#)”, meaning a “sheaf”, a Biblical unit of measure), a Temple offering during Passover (Leviticus 23:10). In his French translation of the Quran (*Le Coran*, *op. cit.*, p. 557), Régis Blachère also suggested that “umra” might be related to a form of priestly service at the Temple (refer to Q52:4, on page 142).

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Cow</b> ("al baqara") Q2:143-145</p> <p>(143) <i>And we established the direction (of prayer) ["qibla"] to which you were (facing) only so that we might know the one who would who follow the messenger ["rasul"] from the one who would turn back on his heels. Surely it was hard indeed, except for those whom God guided. But God was not one to let your belief go to waste.</i></p> <p>(144) <i>We do see you turning your face about in the sky, and we shall indeed turn you in a direction ["qibla"] which you will be pleased with. Turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque ["masjid al haram"], and wherever you are, turn your face in its direction. Surely those who have been given the Book know indeed that it is the truth from their Lord. God is not oblivious of what they do.</i></p> <p>(145) <i>Yet even if you bring every sign to those who have been given the Book, they will not follow your direction ["qibla"]. You are not a follower of their direction ["qibla"] (...) If indeed you follow their (vain) desires, after the knowledge which has come to you, surely then you will indeed be among the evildoers.</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>Two years after his arrival in Medina, <b>Muhammad</b> is commanded by God to change the direction ("qibla") of the ritual prayer from Jerusalem, which has initially served as a test for the Meccan converts to Islam, to the <b>Kaaba</b> in Mecca ("masjid al-haram").</p> <p>Consequently, the <b>Jews</b> in Medina, who are acquainted with both the Torah and Muhammad's teachings about the new "qibla", become obviously aware that the <b>Kaaba</b> is now the designated direction for prayer. Despite this, they, along with the <b>Christians</b>, knowingly reject Islam's truth, led by their wrongful desires and indifferent to the warnings and evidence presented by its prophet.</p> <p>God thus advises him to be cautious of <b>Jews and Christians</b> and, importantly, not to emulate their practices (a guidance that holds from the time of the Hijra in Medina to the present).</p>	<p>The preacher instructs Christian Arabs, who revere <b>Jesus</b> (God's envoy, his "rasul") that their conversion to Judeo-Nazarenism requires them to abandon the ancient Christian tradition ("qibla"<sup>271</sup>) of praying towards the rising sun ("about in the sky") in favor of turning towards Jerusalem and <b>the Temple Mount</b> ("masjid al haram").</p> <p>He acknowledges that adopting a practice also observed by the <b>Jews</b>, "those who have been given the Book [the Torah]", may pose a challenge for Christians. To ease the concerns of the converts, the preacher explains: adopting the Jewish direction of prayer does not entail a wholesale adoption of Jewish religious traditions. Each group has its own reason for facing Jerusalem — <b>Jews</b> (rabbinical Jews) out of reverence for the Temple, and Judeo-Nazarenes and Arab converts out of reverence for the Messiah.</p> <p>Therefore, mirroring a Jewish practice is acceptable if done with the correct intention (the correct "tradition") and without succumbing to "following [the Jews] vain desires", such as rejecting Jesus' messiahship or adhering to the Talmuds. Regardless, <b>Jews</b> could not be persuaded to worship Jesus, even if presented with every verse ("sign").</p>

<sup>271</sup> The term "qibla" is commonly understood as "direction of prayer", yet its significance is much broader. Rather than merely denoting "direction" or "orientation", it conveys the notion of "that which is before", "what preceded", and, by extension, "tradition" and "transmission". This concept traces back to the Hebrew word נַעֲלָה—"qabalah" ("tradition handed down by ancestors"), which is the origin of the later term "kabbalah". Refer to Robert M. Kerr's "Die islamische Kabbala : eine Neuorientierung [The Islamic Kabbalah: a new orientation]", in K.-H. Ohlig & M. Gross (Ed.), *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion V, Inârah volume 9*, Schiler & Mücke, Berlin, 2020.

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Table</b> (“al maida”) Q5:5</p> <p><i>Today the good things are permitted to you, and the food of those who have been given the Book is permitted to you, and your food is permitted to them.</i></p> <p><i>(Permitted to you are) the chaste [var.: virtuous] women among the believers, and the chaste [var.: virtuous] women among those who have been given the Book before you, once you have given them their marriage gifts, taking (them) in marriage, not in immorality, nor taking (them) as secret lovers.</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>God permits Muslims to consume the food of <b>Jews and Christians</b>, although certain Christian foods, such as pork, remain forbidden and should not be consumed. God also allows <b>Jews and Christians</b> to eat <b>halal food</b>. This might seem unexpected, given that Jews and Christians do not follow Islamic teachings, and Jewish dietary laws (kashrut) prohibit some foods that are permissible for Muslims, such as camel meat.</p> <p>Moreover, while Muslims are encouraged to prioritize marrying a chaste Muslim spouse, they are also permitted to marry chaste <b>Christian</b> and <b>Jewish</b> women. However, it is forbidden for Muslim women to marry Christian or Jewish men, even the chastest ones.</p>	<p>The preacher advocates for tangible methods to strengthen the alliance between Arabs and <b>Judeo-Nazarenes</b> and establish the necessary underlying bonds. Sharing the same food and forming cross-familial ties have always been foundational for fostering assimilation within the same community (“umma”). He had already described a kashrut-like dietary law, specifically adapted for the Judeo-Nazarenes and Arabs alliance (see Q5:3). Thus, they can <b>share a table</b> with the Jews, namely the <b>Judeo-Nazarenes</b>, who can, in turn, consume the food prepared by the Arab converts.</p> <p>As their conversion also associates them with the chosen people (Jews), believers can marry Jewish women (<b>having received the Torah</b>), the virtuous ones being <b>Judeo-Nazarene women</b> (according to the likely example of Muhammad’s marriage to Judeo-Nazarene Khadija). Christians do not belong to the “umma”, thus it is forbidden to marry them.</p>
<p><b>The Cow</b> (“al baqara”) Q2:221</p> <p><i>Do not marry <b>associator women</b> [“mushrikat”] until they believe. A believing slave girl is better than a (free) <b>associator woman</b>, even if she pleases you. And do not marry <b>associator men</b> [“mushrikun”] until they believe. A believing slave is better than a (free) <b>associator man</b>, even if he pleases you.</i></p> <p><i>(similar prohibition in Q24:3<sup>272</sup>)</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>God emphatically forbids marrying associators unless they convert to Islam, thus including <b>pagans</b>, <b>polytheists</b> and <b>Christians</b>, even though he also permits marriage to (chaste) Christian women.</p>	<p>The preacher exhorts his formerly Christian audience to maintain the principles of the Arab-Nazarene alliance: no marriage outside of the “umma” is permitted, suggesting that bonds with former Arab <b>Christian</b> communities must be severed. In particular, marriage with <b>Christian</b> women or men, who are depicted as especially vile, “adulterous”, or “fornicators”<sup>272</sup>, is forbidden. Only true believers are considered suitable marriage material.</p>

<sup>272</sup> Q24:3 also strongly prohibit marrying “associators”, which, according to the Islamic narrative, includes Christians (originally, “associators” specifically referred to Christians, as explained on page 117 ff.). This, along with Q2:221, suggests that the “people of the Book” referred to in Q5:5 (and elsewhere) cannot be Christians, as marrying their (virtuous) women is permitted. This is one of many discrepancies in the Islamic interpretation of the Quran, stemming from narrative manipulations (refer also to the contradiction of the Islamic interpretation of Q5:82 as explained on p. 144—also referred to in notes 142 and 254).

“The adulterous man shall marry no one but an adulterous woman or an **associator woman** [“mushrikat”], and the adulterous woman—no one shall marry her but an adulterous man or an **associator man** [“mushrikun”]. That is forbidden to the believers” (Q24:3).

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Heights ("al araf")</b> Q7:156-158</p> <p>(156) <i>He [God] said [to Moses], "... I shall prescribe it [mercy] for the ones who guard (themselves), and give the alms, and those who — they believe in our signs [var.: verses] — (157) those who follow the messenger [Lit.: envoy], the prophet of the common people [var.: the illiterate prophet], whom they find written in their Torah and Gospel. He will command them what is right and forbid them what is wrong, and he will permit them good things and forbid them bad things, and he will deliver them of their burden and the chains that were on them". (...)</i></p> <p>(158) <i>Say: "People! Surely I am the messenger [Lit.: envoy] of God to you — all of you — the (messenger of the) one to whom (belongs) the kingdom of heavens and earth. (There) is no God but him (...) so believe in God and his messenger, the prophet of the common people [var.: the illiterate prophet], who believes in God and his words, (and) follow him, so that you may be (rightly) guided".</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>God recounts the episode within the story of Moses, where He informed him about the future arrival of <b>Muhammad</b>, a true <b>messenger</b> and <b>prophet</b> of God. <b>Muhammad</b>'s coming is to be foretold in the Torah and the Gospel, even though these scriptures were not written during Moses' time<sup>273</sup>. He is destined to be the future leader of Muslims, freeing them from the chains of ignorance and false religion. A clear sign of <b>Muhammad</b>'s genuine prophethood will be his <b>illiteracy</b>: an uneducated man could not have fabricated the Quran. Therefore, it will be God speaking through him.</p> <p>God subsequently urges <b>Muhammad</b> to proclaim his role as the divine <b>messenger</b> and guide of the believers, and to declare that God is one. <b>Muhammad</b> is also commanded to affirm his <b>illiteracy</b> as proof of his prophethood.</p>	<p>After presenting various prophets of God who were sent to specific peoples — including Noah, Hud, and notably Moses, who was sent to the “sons of Israel” (refer to previous verses) — the preacher introduces his portrayal of <b>Jesus</b>. He is depicted as <b>God's envoy sent to the Gentiles</b>, including the Arabs in this context<sup>274</sup>. Jesus is the one prophesied in the Torah and the subject of the Gospel. He represents God's plan to extend the divine message beyond the strict Jewish framework and notably to reach the Arabs. Jesus will play a pivotal role in the end times as the breaker of chains, and believers are thus called to follow his righteous guidance. The preacher then details his presentation of the “<b>Judeo-Nazarene Jesus</b>”, emphasizing his strict observance of the Jewish Law (adapted within the Judeo-Nazarene context) and insisting that he is not the “Christian Jesus”, as he is not God but his <b>apostle</b>, who believes in God and acts solely according to his word (John 14:31: “<i>I do exactly what the Father has commanded me</i>”).</p> <p>Q7:158 might be an interpolation<sup>275</sup>. It would appear to be an instruction given to the preacher to interrupt his previous narrative about Moses and Jesus, the “prophet to the Gentiles”, in order to present himself as <b>another envoy of God</b> — distinct from Jesus — and to bolster his preaching about the “true Judeo-Nazarene Jesus”. Portraying himself as God's envoy is logical, since he purportedly teaches God's will to his audience according to <b>Judeo-Nazarene doctrine</b> (see also <a href="#">Q25:4-5</a> on page 143).</p>

<sup>273</sup> The Islamic interpretation of the mention of an “*illiterate prophet*”—purportedly “*written in the Torah and Gospel*”—has compelled many Muslims to relentlessly seek traces of Muhammad in the Bible, even if it involves completely distorting the meaning of the Biblical texts, which in fact announce nothing of the kind (refer also to note 95).

<sup>274</sup> A. J. Droege states that “*al nabi al umi*” (النبي الْأَمِيُّ) does not signify “*the illiterate prophet*” but “*the Gentiles prophet*”, although he ultimately chose to translate it as “*the prophet of the common people*” (see footnote 152, page 102 of his translation, *op. cit.*). Other translators, such as Régis Blachère, also recognized that “*umi*” refers to a “member of the clans-nations”, i.e., “Gentile” in the Biblical sense of “non-Jewish”. The Arabic term “*ummiyun*”, the emphatic plural of “*umma*”, literally corresponds to the Aramaic word used in the book of Daniel to denote “nations”, i.e., “non-Jews” (Daniel 3:4, 7, 31; 5:19; 6:26; 7:14). However, the mainstream Islamic narrative has forcefully portrayed Muhammad as an “*illiterate prophet*” for apologetic and concordist reasons (see note 95), leading most Islamic translations and explanations to adopt this interpretation.

<sup>275</sup> Régis Blachère identified the Q7:157-159 passage about the “*prophet to the Gentiles*” as an interpolation in *Le Coran* (*op. cit.*, page 194). Indeed, the introduction of “*Say:...*” signifies a shift to a different theme, interrupting the preceding narrative about “*Moses and the sons of Israel*”, which resumes thereafter—see also pp. 79 ff. and note 172 regarding the editing process of the Quran.

## Winning the Arabs over to the messianic project

The indoctrination of the Arabs was strategically planned to harness their military potential for the project of conquering Jerusalem, rebuilding the Temple, and triggering the end of times. This effort was propelled by the Judeo-Nazarenes' messianist beliefs, asserting that Messiah-Jesus would then return and establish a new earthly kingdom devoid of adversaries and evil where true believers would enjoy eternal delight and bliss. The Quran supports this grand vision, **explicitly describing the mandate to rebuild Jerusalem's Temple**. It correlates with various historical and traditional sources we have examined, which detail the construction carried out by an alliance of Arabs and "Jews" around the year 638.

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Cow ("al baqara")</b> Q2:125; 127-128</p> <p>(125) <i>And when we made the House a place of meeting and security for the people, and (said), "Take the standing place of Abraham as a place of prayer", and we made a covenant with Abraham and Ishmael: "Both of you purify my House for the ones who go around and the ones who are devoted to it, and the ones who bow, (and) the ones who prostrate themselves".</i></p> <p>[see also <a href="#">Q3:96-97</a>, p.136]</p>	<p>Medinan period</p> <p>As Muhammad has left Mecca for Medina, God reveals to him the long-forgotten history of the <b>Kaaba</b>, which is currently overtaken by the pagan religion of the Meccan "associators". In the era of Abraham and Ishmael, it served as a temple dedicated to Him. <b>Both acted on His command to keep it pure</b>, free from idols, carnal relations, false oaths, and all other impurities, ensuring that believers could perform their devotions there according to God's religion. God's teachings thus highlight the enduring sanctity of the <b>Kaaba</b>, from Abraham's era to Muhammad's and beyond.</p>	<p>The preacher revisits the Torah's accounts of Abraham and Ishmael, intertwining the Biblical narratives with the Judeo-Nazarene project of rebuilding <b>Jerusalem's Temple</b>. Impersonating God, he frames <b>the alliance between the Judeo-Nazarenes and the Arab converts as a divine covenant</b>. The Judeo-Nazarenes are depicted as true Jews in the likeness of Abraham, while the Arabs are portrayed in the image of Ishmael, their purported patriarch. They are divinely tasked to "take the standing place of Abraham as a place of prayer", which he explicitly defines as <b>purifying and securing the Temple Mount</b> for believers — effectively <b>conquering</b> it from the Christians ("associators") — so that <b>God's Temple</b> can be rebuilt. This will allow them to resume the ancient Jewish rites.</p>
<p>(127) <i>And when Abraham raised up the foundations of the House and Ishmael (with him) [var.: Then Abraham will raise<sup>276</sup> the foundations of the House with Ishmael]: "Our Lord, accept (this) from us. Surely you — you are the Hearing, the Knowing. (128) Our Lord, make us both submitted to You, and (make) from our descendants a community ["umma"] submitted to you.</i></p>	<p>Continuing His narrative, God teaches Muhammad that Abraham and Ishmael also <b>rebuilt the Kaaba</b>, likely before purifying it, <b>on the foundations of a previous Kaaba</b> (built earlier by Adam, presumably). Besides, by fulfilling <b>their forefathers prayer</b> to God, Muslims are their true and sole successors in God's authentic religion, thus forming God's <b>Ummah</b>.</p>	<p>The preacher keeps on praising the divine alliance between Judeo-Nazarenes and Arabs, using the same rhetorical tactic of impersonating God and confusing Abraham and Ishmael with their claimed descendants. He explicitly mentions the purpose of the alliance: <b>rebuilding Jerusalem's Temple from its ruins</b>. He then <b>urges his Arab audience for a tighter alliance</b> with the Judeo-Nazarenes, explaining they would then fulfill their illustrious patriarchs' prayer to God.</p>

<sup>276</sup> "yarfa'u" (يرفع) is conjugated in the imperfect tense, which typically refers to an ongoing or incomplete action, usually translated as "is raising" or "will raise" (Cf. "yarfa'i", "will raise", in Q58:11). This tense does not conventionally imply a completed past action. However, most translations render it as "raised" to align with the Islamic narrative. Given the context, we interpret "yarfa'u" to suggest a future action.

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Fig</b> (“<i>al tin</i>”) Q95:1-6</p> <p>(1) <i>By the fig and the olive!</i></p> <p>(2) <i>By Mount Sinai!</i></p> <p>(3) <i>By this secure land</i> [var.: city]!</p> <p>(4) <i>Certainly we created the human in the finest state.</i></p> <p>(5) <i>Then we return him to the lowest of the low (6) — except for those who believe and do righteous deeds. For them (there is) a reward without end.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>Evoking the territories of the fig and olive (<b>Jerusalem</b> and, more broadly, <b>the Levant</b>), where God sent Prophet Jesus; Mount Sinai, where God spoke to Moses; and <b>Mecca</b>, where God sent Muhammad, God alludes to the three monotheistic revelations to elevate Islam among His creations, mankind. He initially created man “<i>in the finest state</i>”, inherently as a Muslim, exhorting it to embrace Islam and fulfill His divine will to attain heavenly paradise.</p>	<p>The preacher evokes the <b>Mount of Fig</b> in Syria, symbolizing the garden-paradise<sup>277</sup>, and the <b>Mount of Olives</b>, a <u>hill in Jerusalem</u> facing the Temple Mount (refer to page 89). This site is prophesied as the place of Messiah-Jesus’ return, from which he will cross the Cedron Valley to approach the Temple. He also references Mount Sinai, the site of Moses’ divine encounter where the Torah was received, and <b>the “holy city”, Jerusalem</b>.</p> <p>Through these sacred places, the preacher outlines the destiny of the believer: taught by Moses in the “true religion of Abraham”, each follower is called to fulfill God’s will by aiding the return of Messiah-Jesus and to enjoy the delights of earthly paradise as a reward.</p>
<p><b>The Mountain</b> (“<i>al tur</i>”) Q52:1-13</p> <p>(1) <i>By the mountain (2) and a book written (3) on parchment unrolled.</i></p> <p>(4) <i>By the inhabited</i> [“<i>al mamuri</i>”, same root as “<i>umra</i>”] <b>House!</b></p> <p>(5) <i>By the roof [heavens] raised up (6) and the sea surging!</i></p> <p>(7) <i>Surely the punishment of your Lord is indeed going to fall!</i></p> <p>(8) <i>(There is) no one to repel it.</i></p> <p>(9) <i>On the Day when the sky will shake, (10) and the mountains fly away, (11) woe that Day to the ones who called it a lie (...)</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>God describes <b>the end times</b>, mentioning <b>Mount Sinai</b> where He delivered the revelations to Moses, followed by the future complete unveiling of the Celestial Quran. He then speaks of <b>the Celestial Temple</b>, of which the Kaaba is an earthly representation, and which Muhammad visited during the “night journey”.</p> <p>Subsequently, God addresses the cosmic events of the <b>“Day of Judgment”</b>, also known as the <b>“Day of Retribution”</b>. He elaborates on this theme throughout the remainder of the surah, detailing the punishment of evildoers and the heavenly rewards for believers (including <a href="#">Houris</a>).</p>	<p>The preacher outlines <b>the end times</b> for his Arab audience, detailing the events that will occur.</p> <p>He celebrates the complete fulfillment of sacred scriptures with the restoration of <b>the Temple Mount</b> in Jerusalem, where <b>the Temple</b> has been rebuilt and is now <b>serviced by rightful priests</b> (refer to note 270).</p> <p>As cosmic events begin to unfold, Messiah-Jesus is prophesied to return and initiate <b>the judgment of nations</b>. Unbelievers and evildoers will be condemned to the fires of Gehenna, while believers will revel in the rewards and delights of the messiah’s divine kingdom.</p>

<sup>277</sup> The “[Mount of Fig](#)” (Tal al-Tin), now known as Tal al-Bahra, is an island rising from the ancient artificial [lake of Homs](#) in Syria, within a major settlement area for Judeo-Nazarenes (refer to É. M. Gallez’s map on p. 37). The Mount of Fig has been well-documented over the years and is renowned for its lush and prolific nature (refer to Léonce Brosse, “[La digue du lac de Homs](#) [The lake of Homs’ dam]” in *Syria*, tome 4 fascicule 3, Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1923).

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>Mary</b> ("maryam") Q19:37-40</p> <p>(37) So woe to <b>those who disbelieve</b> [root KFR] on account of (their) witnessing a great Day! (38) How well they will hear on it! How well they will see on the Day when they come to us! But the evildoers today are clearly astray. (39) Warn them of the Day of Regret, when the matter will be decided while they are (still) oblivious and disbelieving. (40) Surely we shall inherit the earth [var.: the land], and whoever is on it, and to us they will be returned.</p>	<p>Meccan period</p> <p>Having previously described the story of Mary and Jesus, God condemns <b>the disbelieving Jews</b> who turned against them and denied Prophet Jesus, as well as <b>all other unbelievers</b>. They will be compelled to recognize their wrongdoing and will face severe punishment on the Day of Judgment. God instructs Muhammad to warn them of this impending fate.</p> <p>God then asserts <b>His dominion over the earth</b>, thereby affirming the destined supremacy of His religion, Islam, which is meant to eventually dominate and replace all other religions across the world, including those of <b>the unbelievers</b>.</p>	<p>After the Emigrants were expelled from Jerusalem by <b>rabbinic Jews</b>, the preacher galvanizes his audience by outlining the revenge they will exact on their archenemies when all face God's judgment (administered by Messiah-Jesus) at the end of times. They will deeply regret denying Jesus as they witness the triumph of the true believers over them.</p> <p>The preacher then encourages his audience to be patient, for they will witness the "Day of (their) Regret", during which the messiah will establish his kingdom on earth, notably in <b>the Holy Land</b>, which rightfully belongs to the believers.</p> <p>It is unclear whether the preacher here impersonates God or speaks on behalf of the believers ("we shall inherit the land, and whoever is on it, and to us they will be returned"). Regardless, the message is the same since God's inheritance of the land equates to the believers' inheritance.</p>

## Responding to Christian or Jewish objections

Convincing the Christianized Arab audience was not an easy task. Moreover, Jews also opposed the preaching, raising criticisms and objections. **Some even exposed the indoctrination process** that involved Arabs being trained by Judeo-Nazarenes. How did the Judeo-Nazarenes instruct their preachers to respond?

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>Discernment</b> ("al furqan") Q25:4-5</p> <p>(4) <b>Those who disbelieve</b> [root KFR; var.: those who cover] say, "This is nothing but a lie! He has forged it, and other people have helped him with it". So they have come to evil and falsehood. (5) And they say, "Tales of the ancients! He has written it down, and it is dictated to him morning and evening". (6) Say: "He has sent it down—he who knows the secret in the heavens and earth. Surely he is forgiving, compassionate".</p>	<p>Meccan period</p> <p>Muhammad faced criticism from <b>pagan Meccans</b> who unjustly mocked his preaching. They spread lies about him, slandering him by claiming that he does not receive God's revelation through the angel Gabriel; instead, they suggest it is an orchestrated deception and that the Prophet himself writes the Quran, despite being illiterate (refer to <a href="#">Q7:157-158</a>). In response, God comes to His Prophet's rescue, providing him with arguments to counter the critics and even offering mercy to those who would repent.</p>	<p>The Judeo-Nazarene master instructs his Arab preacher on how to counter criticism from <b>rabbinic Jews</b> ("those who cover"; given the context, this term may also encompass <b>some Christians</b>). These critics justifiably denounce the indoctrination process initiated by the Judeo-Nazarenes, accusing them of using a trained preacher to propagate their agenda among the Arabs. In response, the master offers strategic advice: "Portray yourself as God's envoy, and assert that your teachings are divine revelations sent down to you" (same as in <a href="#">Q7:158</a>).</p>

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Bees</b> ("al nahl") Q16:101-105</p> <p>(101) <i>When we exchange a verse in place of (another) verse—and God knows what he sends down—they say, “You are only a forger!” No! But most of them do not know (anything). (102) Say: “The holy spirit has brought it down from your Lord in truth, to make firm those who believe, and as guidance and good news for those who submit.” (103) Certainly we know that they say, “Only a human being teaches him”. The language of the one to whom they perversely allude is foreign, but this language is clear Arabic. (104) Surely, those who do not believe in the verses of God—God will not guide them, and for them (there is) a painful punishment. (105) Only they forge lies who do not believe in the verses of God—they are the liars!</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>After explaining the doctrine of abrogation to Muhammad, God instructs him on how to respond to the pagan Meccans' criticisms. Those who already have faith will continue to believe, recognizing Muhammad as the bearer of a true divine revelation, regularly visited by the “<b>holy spirit</b>” — whom some Islamic scholars identify as the <b>angel Gabriel</b>. God then expresses frustration over slanderous accusations that Muhammad is being taught by a <b>man</b> who does not speak Arabic and thus could not produce something as eloquent as the Arabic Quran. Nonetheless, God condemns all those who do not believe in His verses, declaring that they will remain ensnared in their lies forever, ultimately leading to their damnation, since He refuses to guide them.</p>	<p>The <b>Judeo-Nazarene master</b> advises his preacher. If Christian critics challenge him about variations in his instruction and changes in the verses he is proclaiming, he should claim that the “<b>holy spirit</b>” directly inspired him (thus confirming that his audience is either Christian or Christianized, as they understand the concept of the “holy spirit”). If accusations arise about his training under a <b>Judeo-Nazarene master</b>, he should deny them, asserting that he only speaks Arabic, not Aramaic.</p> <p>Regardless, <b>the master</b> counsels him not to take these criticisms to heart, as they likely come from adversaries who will never grasp the sacred scriptures or support the vision of the Temple's restoration. God will punish all such detractors.</p>
<p><b>The Table</b> ("al mai'da") Q5:82-83; 85-86</p> <p>(82) <i>Certainly you will find that the most violent of people in enmity to the believers are the <b>Jews</b> [“yahud”] and those who associate [“ashraku”, as in “mushrikun”]. Certainly you will find that the closest of them in affection to the believers are those who say, “We are <b>Christians</b> [“nasara”].” That is because (there are) priests and monks among them, and because they are not arrogant. (83) When they hear what has been sent down to <b>the messenger</b> [var.: envoy], you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they recognize of the truth (...) (85) So God has rewarded them for what they said (with) gardens through which rivers flow, there to remain. That is the reward for the doers of good. (86) But those who disbelieve [root KFR; var.: those who cover] and call our signs [var.: verses] a lie, those are the companions of the Furnace.</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>God warns Muhammad against <b>Jews</b> and <b>pagans</b>, the worst enemies of Muslims. However, <b>Christians</b>, particularly the humble monks and priests, are portrayed more favorably — probably because God “placed kindness and mercy in the heart of those who follow Jesus” (Q57:27). However, God explicitly forbids Muslims from making allies with Christians (Q5:51) and declares that all Christians are ultimately unbelievers destined for Hell (Q5:72-73). These Christians must then have been peculiar ones, whose exact identity remains a matter of debate among Islamic scholars. Anyhow, God asserts that these Christians recognized His revelation in Prophet <b>Muhammad</b>'s preaching and, therefore, He rewarded them with paradise. They must have converted to Islam, unlike <b>the disbelievers</b> who are destined to Hell.</p>	<p>The Arab preacher cautions his audience to be wary of <b>Jews</b> and <b>Christians</b> (“associators”), branding them as their worst enemies, in contrast to their closest allies, the <b>Judeo-Nazarenes</b> (“nasara”). Unlike the Jewish rabbis, who arrogate divine status by altering sacred scriptures (refer to <a href="#">Q3:78-79</a>), the Judeo-Nazarene priests and monks remain humble.</p> <p>The Judeo-Nazarenes are true believers, deeply moved by the revelation of <b>Messiah-Jesus</b>, God's envoy, especially the expectation of his return. They share God's promise of eternal paradise with the Arab believers.</p> <p>As for <b>the rabbinic Jews</b> and anyone who denies the Arabic lectionary, they will face severe punishment from God when the time comes.</p>

## Implementing the politico-religious project

The Quran preserves **enlightening accounts** of the attempts by the Arab-Nazarene alliance to conquer Jerusalem, rebuild its Temple, and precipitate the end times. It details the 614 expedition alongside the Persians and Jewish contingents from Babylonia, Persia, and Palestine. The battle of Mu'ta in 629 is also referenced. Furthermore, the text hints at events that occurred in Jerusalem after its capture in 638—possibly the fragmentation of the alliance and the beginning of the “*fitna*”.

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Victory</b> (“<i>al fath</i>”) Q48:20</p> <p>(20) <i>And God has promised you many (more) spoils to take, and he has hurried this for you, and has restrained the hands of the people from you. (This happened) so that it might be a sign to the believers, and guide you to a straight path.</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>After envisioning himself making a pilgrimage to Mecca in a dream (refer to Q48:27), Muhammad led an expedition there with his followers from Medina. This surah, revealed shortly after the expedition's failure, aims to comfort Muhammad and his companions. God alludes here to the earlier capture of <a href="#">Khaybar</a> in 629 and its spoils—a city north of Medina populated by Jews, including those expelled from Medina. This serves as a precursor to the <b>spoils expected from the conquest of Mecca</b>.</p>	<p>In 614, <b>Jerusalem</b> was captured by the Persians, supported by Jewish and Arab troops, including members of the Arab-Nazarene alliance. However, control of the city was eventually ceded exclusively to rabbinic Jews — those from Babylon, Persia, and Palestine who had joined the Persian coalition. The Arab preacher, likely addressing the armed faction from the Arab-Nazarene alliance involved in these events, seeks to reassure and motivate his audience. He indicates that the new rulers of Jerusalem will not enjoy their victory for long, as the subsequent verses will clarify (refer to <a href="#">Q48:25</a>).</p>
<p>Q48:21-22</p> <p>(21) <i>(And God has promised) the other (spoils) which you were not able (to take), God has already encompassed them. And God is powerful over everything. (22) If those who disbelieve [“<i>kafaru</i>”, formed on the root KFR, “those who cover”] fight [“<i>qatalakumu</i>”, formed on the root QTL, meaning “fight to death”] you, they will indeed turn their backs, (and) then they will not find any ally or any helper.</i></p> <p>[Surah continued on next page]</p>	<p>To reinvigorate Muhammad and his companions after their unsuccessful attempt to enter Mecca, God promises <b>its impending conquest</b>. He urges Muhammad to bolster the believers' spirits and not to fear the opposition of <b>the unfaithful Meccans</b>, who will ultimately be defeated.</p>	<p>The preacher reminds the Arab troops that the goal of Jerusalem's conquest in 614 was to trigger the end of times and the return of Messiah-Jesus, thereby establishing them as the chosen ones in his kingdom—a <b>prize beyond mere territorial gain</b>. Consequently, there is no need to fear the authority now held by <b>the rabbinic Jews</b> (“coverers”) over the city. Messiah-Jesus' return will defeat them, and they will find themselves without support from the Persians who had initially restored them to Jerusalem (their “ally” and “helper”).</p>

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Victory</b> (“al fath”) Q48:24</p> <p>(24) <i>He (it is) who restrained their hands from you, and your hands from them, in the heart of Mecca</i> [“bi-batni makka”]<sup>278</sup>, after he gave you victory over them—God sees what you do.</p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>The Meccans’ refusal to allow Muhammad and his followers to enter <b>Mecca</b> for pilgrimage nearly led to a pitched battle. The standoff was ultimately resolved with a truce between Medinans and Meccans, known as the <a href="#">Treaty of Hudaybiyyah</a>. Though difficult to accept at the time, this truce must be viewed as a “victory”, as God explicitly states in this verse since, it set the stage for the eventual bloodless surrender of Mecca in 630 (refer to Q48:27).</p>	<p>The preacher recalls an episode where rabbinic Jews opposed the Arab-Nazarene alliance. This conflict arose from the alliance’s efforts to gain access to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, aiming to restore ancient sacrifices. Access was obstructed by the rabbinic Jews, leading the alliance to decide against using force, as alluded to in Q48:25. This episode likely occurred <b>in one of the valleys leading to Jerusalem</b>, possibly the Baka Valley, located at the very gates of the city, as mentioned in <a href="#">Q3:96</a>.</p>
<p>Q48:25</p> <p>(25) <i>They are those who disbelieved</i> [root KFR], and kept you from the sacred mosque [“masjid al haram”], and (also) the offering, (which was) prevented from reaching its lawful place. If not for (certain) believing men and believing women, whom you did not know, or you would have trampled them, and guilt smitten you without (your) realizing (it) because of them—so that God may cause to enter into his mercy whomever he pleases — if they had been separated out (clearly), we would have indeed punished those among them who disbelieved [root KFR] with a painful punishment.</p> <p>[Surah continued on next page]</p>	<p>God recalls how <b>the pagan Meccans</b> denied Muhammad and his followers access to <b>the Kaaba</b>, along with the 70 camels they prepared for sacrifice. The presence of <b>unidentified Muslims</b> among the Meccans prevented Muhammad’s group from initiating a fight, as it risked harming these fellow Muslims in the confusion, potentially mistaking them for <b>infidels</b>. This situation led to the previously mentioned truce.</p>	<p>The preacher explains to the Arabs why the beasts they had prepared could not be sacrificed on <b>the Temple Mount</b> (“masjid al haram”, the forbidden place of prostration — refer to our explanation on page 101). Resuming this ancient rite was essential for the Messiah’s return, but <b>rabbinic Jews</b> obstructed these efforts. Rationalizing the alliance’s less-than-glorious retreat, he suggests that they were reluctant to risk the potential bloodshed of <b>friendly Jews</b><sup>279</sup> if they had forced their way into Jerusalem. Furthermore, they may have also feared defeat by <b>the rabbinic Jews</b>, who were bolstered by Persian support.</p>

<sup>278</sup> The mention of “Mecca”/ “makka”/ مَكَّةً (“rasm”) is a controversial topic among (very) critical scholars, as it is the only literal mention of Mecca in the entire Quranic text and could thus refer to something entirely different. Rather than indicating the city, it might originally relate to a context of “fighting” or “battle” (مُعرَكَةً)—as in “in the midst of the battle” instead of “in the heart of Mecca”. It could also denote the location of the episode recalled in Q48:24 as being a depression (a valley?). Note 177 discusses how Islamic tradition has exploited this verse to justify the mention of Mecca in the Quran.

<sup>279</sup> Let us recall that the Judeo-Nazarenes were not the only Jews intent on rebuilding the Temple. This was evident during the episode detailing the capture of Jerusalem in 614; it even appears that the Arab-Nazarenes had concluded a “treaty” with some of these Jews, as evidenced in surah 8 (see next page).

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p>Q48:27-28</p> <p>(27) <i>Certainly God has spoken the truth in the vision to his messenger: "You will indeed enter the sacred mosque, if God pleases, in security, your heads shaved, your hair cut short, not fearing". He knew what you did not know, and besides that produced a near victory. (28) He (it is) who has sent his messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, so that he may cause it to prevail over religion — all of it. God is sufficient as a witness.</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>God reassures Muhammad: the promise of conquering Mecca and its <b>Kaaba</b> still stands, as God cannot lie or abrogate a Medinan verse. The Treaty of Hudaybiyyah is merely a temporary pause. Victory is imminent and, in a sense, already secured.</p> <p>Furthermore, God outlines specific practices for the pilgrimage to Mecca that are still observed today.</p>	<p>Verses 26-29 of Q48 appear to have been tampered with<sup>280</sup>. Despite this, it can be interpreted that the preacher is reassuring the Arabs expelled from Jerusalem that God will soon deliver the "holy city" and <b>the Temple Mount</b> into their hands. To prepare for this, they are encouraged to devote themselves to God in the manner of the Nazirites from the Book of Numbers (<a href="#">Chapter 6</a>), who shaved their heads before presenting their offerings at the tent-temple (there are other references to Nazirite rites in the Quran, as evidenced in note 207).</p>
<p><b>The Spoils</b> ("al anfal") Q8:34-35 ;39 ;55-56</p> <p>(34) <i>But what (excuse) have they [“those who disbelieved”] who “were scheming against you”, cf. Q8:30] (now) that God should not punish them, when they are keeping (people) from (going to) the sacred mosque, and they are not its (true) allies [var.: guardians, protectors]? Its only allies [idem] are the ones who guard (themselves), but most of them do not know (it).</i></p> <p>(35) <i>Their prayer at the House is nothing but whistling and clapping of hands. (...)</i></p> <p>(39) <i>Fight them [root QTL, “Fight them to death”] until there is no persecution [“fitna”] and the religion [“din”]—all of it—(belongs) to God. If they stop—surely God sees what they do. (...)</i></p>	<p><i>34-35: Meccan period 39-56: Medinan period</i></p> <p>God curses <b>the pagan Meccans</b> for their harsh treatment of Muhammad. They monopolized <b>the Kaaba</b> for their own vain religious practices, and forced Muhammad to seek refuge in Medina. From there, the Prophet endeavored to fulfill God's plan for Mecca, but the pagan Meccans continued to obstruct him and his followers from performing their Islamic devotions at <b>the Kaaba</b> — an issue also highlighted in Q48. Despite this, their punishment is imminent. In defiance of <b>the previous truce</b>, God now commands Muhammad to engage them in battle. This directive aims to end the...</p>	<p>The 614 failure in Jerusalem has profoundly impacted the Arab-Nazarene alliance. The mention of <b>rabbinic Jews</b> who "obstructed the way of God" — or keep believers from accessing <b>the Temple Mount</b> — and "broke their <b>treaty</b>", recurs as a leitmotif in the preacher's exhortations, as seen here.</p> <p>In this passage, the preacher recalls the event, denouncing these "<b>bad Jews</b>" and disparaging their prayers at <b>the Temple Mount</b>. Their breach of the pact with the Judeo-Nazarenes and the Arab converts, likely <b>the military alliance</b> that enabled the capture of Jerusalem in 614, precipitated fratricidal conflicts among Abraham's descendants, referred to as "<i>fitna</i>". Consequently, the preacher instructs his fellow...</p>

<sup>280</sup> The term "messenger" mentioned in Q48:26-27 indeed appears to be a late interpolation designed to introduce Muhammad as God's messenger according to the Islamic narrative. The mention is absent from earlier verses, unlike in verse 28 where its mention as "*his messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth*" specifically characterizes "messenger Jesus" (as in the Dome of the Rock's inscriptions, where Abd al-Malik portrays himself as equivalent to him—refer to p.78). Verse 29, intended to conclude the surah, seems like a lengthy addition. It names Muhammad as the messenger instead of Jesus and presents his disciples as fulfilling prophecies from the Torah and the Gospel. The stylistic change in verse 29 suggests it is an addition to the surah, which likely originally ended at verse 28. Besides, it is absent in early Sana'a manuscripts, which also reveal other textual manipulations in surah 48 (refer to note 238 and to Édouard M. Gallez's "[References to Muhammad in the Quran](#)", *op. cit.*).

<p>(55) Surely the worst of creatures in the sight of God are <b>those who disbelieve</b> — and they will not believe — (56) those of them with whom you made a <b>treaty</b>, (and) then they break their treaty every time, and they do not guard (themselves).</p>	<p>...persecution of Muslims, unify all Arabs under Islam, and eliminate the fratricidal conflicts (“<i>fitna</i>”) among them.</p>	<p>...Arab converts to relentlessly oppose the formerly allied <b>rabbinic Jews</b> in order to fully enforce God’s “true religion” [“<i>din</i>” — refer to note 199 and <a href="#">Q109:1-5</a>], which he associates with the impending return of Messiah-Jesus.</p>
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Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>The Romans</b>  (“<i>al rum</i>”)  Q30:1-6</p> <p>(1) <i>Alif Lam Mim.</i>  (2) <i>The Romans have been conquered</i>  (3) <i>in the nearest (part) of the land</i> [var.: “in a land close”, “in the nearest of the land”], <i>but after their conquering, they will conquer</i>  (4) <i>in a few years. The affair (belongs) to God before and after, and on that day the believers will gloat</i>  (5) <i>over the help of God. He helps whomever he pleases. He is the mighty, the compassionate.</i></p>	<p><i>Meccan period</i></p> <p>Introducing His revelation with a mysterious formula (see <a href="#">Q2:1</a>), God recalls the Roman (Byzantine) defeats at the hands of the Persians, including the capture of Jerusalem in 614. The “nearest of the (Meccan) land” is presumed to be the Levant, which is nonetheless 800 miles away from Mecca. He then predicts the eventual defeat of the Persians that will begin from 624, leading up to Heraclius’s conquest of Mesopotamia and Jerusalem by 627.</p> <p>Muhammad is encouraged to rejoice over the victory of the Byzantine “associators” against the Persian “idolators”, as it will result in him winning four young and strong she-camels in a bet with pagan Meccans regarding this victory. Furthermore, since the Romans are People of the Book, their victory is preferable to that of the Persians. Thus, Muslims should also celebrate their success. Moreover, many pagan Meccans converted to Islam as they recognized God’s prophecy as a Quranic miracle when the Romans ultimately won.</p>	<p>Rather than presuming that Muslims would rejoice over a future Byzantine victory — which is paradoxical, given their status as adversaries — this passage should be understood in the context of the Arab-Nazarene alliance’s failed attempt to conquer <b>the “Holy Land”</b> in 629 at Mu’ta. The distinction between active and passive conjugation modes in Arabic indeed relies on vowel differences, which are absent in ancient manuscripts. The plausible reading, as recognized by western scholars, might be: <i>“The Romans have been victorious in the closest to the land [the “Holy Land”], but after their victory, they will be defeated, in a few years. The decision belongs to God in the past and in the future. On that day, believers will rejoice over God’s help”</i>.<sup>281</sup></p> <p>Thus, we see the preacher trying to boost the morale of Arab troops after their defeat at Mu’ta, a time when the Ummah was on the brink of reaching the “Holy Land”.</p>

<sup>281</sup> Refer to Régis Blachère in *Le Coran...* (op. cit., p. 429) and Jan Van Reeth’s examination of surah 30 in *Le Coran des Historiens* (op. cit., vol.2b, pp.1073-1074); in consonant script, the verb “to win” (gh-l-b) has identical root forms in both the active and passive voices in the present tense (غَلِبَث / “*ghulibat*” for “have been defeated” and غَلَبَث / “*ghalabat*” for “have won”) and in the future tense (سَيَغْلِبُون / “*sa-yaghlibuna*” for “will win” and سَيَغْلَبُون / “*sa-yughlabun*” for “will be defeated”). The distinction between these forms depends solely on the short vowels, which are not written in the proto-Quranic collections or the preachers’ notes. This textual manipulation aimed to conceal Muhammad’s failed attempt to conquer Judea-Palestine, thereby avoiding the need to explain its purpose (why wasn’t he focusing on Mecca?).

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>Repentance</b> (“<i>al tawba</i>”)<sup>282</sup> Q9:1-3; 7</p> <p>(1) <i>A renunciation from God and his messenger to those of the idolaters</i> [“<i>mushrikun</i>”], with whom you have made a <b>treaty</b>:</p> <p>(2) “Move about (freely) on the earth for four months, and know that you cannot escape God, and that God will disgrace the unbelievers”.</p> <p>(3) <i>And a proclamation from God and his messenger to the people on the day of the great pilgrimage</i> [“<i>hajj</i>”]: “God renounces the <b>idolaters</b>, and (so does) his messenger. If you turn (in repentance), it will be better for you, but if you turn away, know that you cannot escape God”. (...)</p> <p>(7) <i>How can the idolaters have a treaty with God and with his messenger, except those with whom you have made a treaty at the sacred mosque</i> [“<i>masjid al haram</i>”]?</p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>The <b>Treaty of Hudaybiyyah</b>, concluded in 628 between Muhammad and the <b>pagan Meccans</b>, initially allowed Muslims to return to Mecca for the <b>pilgrimage</b> at the <b>Kaaba</b>. However, God reveals to His messenger that this pact must now be abrogated, and the pagan Meccans forbidden from accessing the Kaaba, as they performed the circumambulations naked, which was not acceptable for God. He gives them four months to flee Mecca, never to be seen again. More broadly, God also instructs that no more agreements should be made with pagans, with the exception of those in Mecca who allowed Muslims to return for their devotions at the Kaaba—the very same he mentioned before.</p>	<p>Around 638, the Emigrants successfully took Jerusalem and accessed <b>the Temple Mount</b> (“<i>masjid al haram</i>”), initiating the rebuilding of the Temple. The day of the final rites is approaching, marking <b>the ultimate “hajj”</b> which is believed to trigger the end of times and the return of Messiah-Jesus.</p> <p>The Emigrants entered Jerusalem without bloodshed, in accordance with <b>the agreements made with Christian Patriarch Sophronius</b> (referred to as the “<i>treaty</i>”). However, aside from <b>the Christians associated with Sophronius</b>, the possibility of allowing others into the city or making pacts with them is dismissed — particularly the Byzantine Christians, who had previously clashed with and fought against various Arab factions. Nothing should obstruct the coming Messiah-Jesus.</p> <p>[refer also to note 282]</p>

<sup>282</sup> Examining surah 9 proves to be a very challenging task. It is evident that it has been composed of several different texts, as Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann duly notes (refer to “Sourate 9 [Surah 9]” in *Le Coran des Historiens*, op. cit., vol. 2b, p. 377). Furthermore, it has been tampered with after the original writings of these texts, including numerous “messenger” interpolations likely designed to forcefully refer to Muhammad, and at least one blatant textual manipulation in Q9:30 (refer to note 283).

The task proves all the more challenging as the historical context of some events depicted in surah 9 appears to differ significantly from that of most of the rest of the Quran (some elements of Q2 may pertain to this new context, and others might as well). The Islamic narrative recognizes this by staging some Q9 events in a reconquered Mecca (post-630, according to its timeline). Notably, there are references to the believers having finally accessed the “*masjid al-haram*”, as mentioned in Q9:7 and, presumably, in Q9:107. Besides, the strict terminology referring to Jews and Christians appears to blur, with “associators” accused of “covering” (as noted in Q9:4). Additionally, the “*nasara*” (Judeo-Nazarenes), previously portrayed as the closest friends and allies of the believers (taking into account the corrections for interpolations detailed in note 254), are here severely condemned alongside the Jews in a unique manner for claiming the messiah is the “son of God”, using the term “*ibn*” in Q9:30. This is the only instance in the Quran where “*ibn allah*” refers to Jesus—there are numerous mentions of Jesus as “*walad*”, i.e., “biological son” of God, an accusation aimed at “associators” (Christians) who wrongly assert that God would have a biological son, Jesus (see, for example, Q19:35 or Q112:3). The only two other occurrences of the “*ibn allah*” expression refer to Jews, in Q9:30 (“*aziz is son of God*”—refer to note 283) and in Q5:18 (“*the Jews say: ‘we are sons of God’*”). These elements suggest a significant shift in the Quran’s perspective on the Judeo-Nazarenes.

We propose that some of the events depicted in Q9 relate to the period following the 638 conquest of Jerusalem, including the eventual rebuilding of the Temple and the fragmentation of the alliance between the Arabs and the Judeo-Nazarenes. Alternatively, this could involve the emergence of independent Arab factions that opposed both the Judeo-Nazarenes and the Arabs loyal to them, as suggested by Q9:107-110. A plausible hypothesis is that the Quranic passages depicting these events were originally authored by an Arab from a faction that had severed ties with the Arab-Nazarene alliance. Another possibility is that these passages were later interpolated by an Arab from such a faction to assert their distinct perspective, notably condemning the Judeo-Nazarenes alongside Jews (as is likely the case of other condemnation interpolations—refer to note 254). Ultimately, both hypotheses lead to similar conclusions, outlined in our tables as the “decoded reading” of our selected passages of surah 9.

Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>Repentance</b> ("al tawba") Q9:30-33</p> <p>(30) <i>The Jews say, "Ezra is son of God" ["uzair"; var.: "aziz is son of God", or "cherished be the son of God"]<sup>283</sup>, and the Christians ["nasara"] say, "The Messiah is the son of God". That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved [root KFR] before (them). (May) God fight them [to death — root QTL]. How are they (so) deluded?</i></p> <p>(31) <i>They have taken their teachers ["rabi'"'] and their monks as lords instead of God, and (also) the messiah, son of Mary, when they were only commanded to serve one God. (There is) no god but him. Glory to him above what they associate!</i></p> <p>(32) <i>They want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God refuses (to do anything) except perfect his light, even though the unbelievers [root KFR] dislike (it).</i></p> <p>(33) <i>He (it is) who has sent his messenger [var.: envoy] with the guidance and the religion of truth, so that he may cause it to prevail over religion — all of it — even though the idolaters ["mushrikun"] dislike (it) [similar to Q48:28].</i></p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>God expresses anger towards the Jews and <b>Christians</b> for opposing Islam and attributing partners to Him — Biblical figure <u>Ezra</u>* for the Jews and Jesus for the Christians — thus perpetuating the errors of their disbelieving ancestors. It is puzzling how and when Jews supposedly did such a thing, but ultimately, God knows best. Additionally, God accuses both Jews and Christians of idolizing their rabbis and monks, despite Jews not having monks and Christians not having rabbis. He then instructs His Prophet to ask Him to fight them to the bitter end.</p> <p>Nevertheless, Jews and Christians will not succeed, as God has sent <b>Muhammad</b> to impose Islam among all, including <b>Jews</b>, <b>Christians</b>, <b>unbelievers</b>, and <b>pagans</b>.</p> <p>[*: interestingly, the <u>Book of Ezra</u> relates the construction of the first Temple in Jerusalem]</p>	<p>The return of Messiah-Jesus has not occurred, leading to a fracture in the Arab-Nazarene alliance — with at least some Arabs defecting.</p> <p>An Arab preacher from this dissenting faction then rebukes <b>the Judeo-Nazarenes</b> ("nasara") for their failure, issuing a condemnation similar to that of their <b>rabbinic Jewish</b> kin.</p> <p>Both Jews and Judeo-Nazarenes have devised flawed doctrines about the son of God, leading to the non-return of the messiah. Both groups have made a similar grave mistake: their rabbis and clerics have fabricated God's word, thereby assuming a status equivalent to God. The Jews did this by "covering" the sacred scriptures about Jesus, while the Judeo-Nazarenes devised a failed plan for his return.</p> <p>Yet, God's will shall ultimately prevail: he once sent Jesus, and despite the setbacks, Jesus may yet return to ensure that the religion of truth triumphs over <b>Judeo-Nazarenes</b>, <b>Jews</b> and <b>Christians</b>.</p> <p>[refer also to note 282]</p>

<sup>283</sup> A.J. Deus noted in his article "[Iran's poisoned qibla arrows](#)" (Academia, 2024, p. 40) that the rasm script for "uzair" (عَزِيرٌ) is identical to "aziz" (عَزِيزٌ), which means "precious", "dear" (and by extension, "beloved", "holy", or even "praised"). Ancient Quranic manuscripts such as [DAM 01-13.19, folio 70r](#); [DAM 01-18.14, folio 3v](#); [DAM 01-18.15, folio 6r](#); [DAM 01-20.3, folio 5r](#) (all discovered in Sana'a, alongside the "Sana'a Quran") display Q9:30 but lack diacritical marks or vowel signs, thus making it impossible to distinguish between "uzair" and "aziz". However, we discovered that manuscript [Wetzstein II 1913, folio 70v](#), seems to display an unequivocal "aziz" instead of "uzair", even though diacritical and vowel marks are not consistently applied in this manuscript. This, alongside the odd nature of the Quran's assertion about Ezra, supports the hypothesis that the phrase "Ezra is son of God" was originally "aziz is son of God", "aziz ibn allah" (عَزِيزٌ ابْنُ اللَّهِ), meaning "cherished is the son of God" or "cherished be the son of God". It would then signify a messianic formula somewhat analogous to the "muhammad rasul allah" phrase that the Judeo-Nazarenes likely used for Messiah-Jesus. This interpretation is intriguing as the Quran asserts that Jews claim to be the "sons of God" (Q5:18)—a common Biblical stance (as in Genesis 6:4) where "sons" is understood figuratively.

Interestingly, the "aziz" phrase parallels "the Nazarenes say: 'the Messiah is the son of God'" in Q9:30, also using the term "ibn" (different from "walad", which refers to a biological son—see note 282). This supports the explanation proposed in our "decoded reading" for Q9:30-33.



Quranic text	Islamic narrative	Decoded reading
<p><b>Repentance</b> (“al tawba”) Q9:107-108</p> <p>(107) Those who have taken a mosque [“masjid”] (to cause) harm and disbelief and division [“tafriqan”, signifying division among several factions] among the believers, and (to provide) a place of ambush for those who fought against God and his messenger before — they will indeed swear, “We wanted nothing but good!” But God bears witness: “Surely they are liars indeed!”</p> <p>(108) Never stand in it! A mosque [“masjid”] founded from the first day on the (obligation of) guarding (oneself) is indeed (more) worthy for you to stand in (...)</p> <p>(110) Their building which they have built will continue (to be a cause of) doubt in their hearts, unless their hearts are cut (to pieces). God is knowing, wise.</p>	<p><i>Medinan period</i></p> <p>Envious enemies of Muhammad, including a particularly hostile Christian who had previously waged war against him, constructed a mosque near the Prophet's mosque in Quba', a village on the outskirts of Medina. Their aim was to divert Muslims from their rightful place of worship and fragment the Ummah.</p> <p>In response, God warned His Prophet about their schemes and instructed him never to pray there, urging him to remain with his congregation at the mosque Muhammad founded in Medina upon his arrival.</p> <p>Subsequently, various episodes ensued, culminating in the demise of the wrongdoers and the resolution of the division.</p>	<p>The context of this passage is rather ambiguous, but it appears to relate to the underlying events described in Q9:30. <b>The Temple in Jerusalem</b> has been rebuilt, yet the anticipated end times did not transpire. Consequently, the Arab-Nazarene alliance splintered into several factions.</p> <p>One faction — probably the source of this passage — remained loyal to <b>the newly rebuilt Temple</b>, described as “a 'masjid' founded from the first day”. Another faction appears to have constructed a <b>competing place of worship</b>, or “masjid”, on the Temple Mount.</p> <p>This reflects accounts in Sebeos' Chronicle, which describe disputes between Arabs and “Jews” (likely Judeo-Nazarenes) over control of the Temple Mount, prompting these “Jews” to establish <b>their own distinct worship site</b> there.</p> <p>[refer also to note 282]</p>

Comprehensive and critical exegesis clarifies the Quran. Our approach decodes the somewhat complex meanings imposed by tradition and reveals the original intent of the text, which has been obscured by centuries of textual and narrative manipulations. Exploring the traditional Islamic interpretation highlights the creativity and dedication of the scribes and traditionists who tailored an external narrative to fit the Quranic text. Diving into the depths of numerous and often contradictory explanations from renowned Islamic scholars, which are illustrated with significant numbers of colorful anecdotes and a plethora of details, is indeed an experience on its own. This kind of exploration led Henri Lammens to conclude that the Islamic narrative regarding the Quran is a fabrication based on its own text (refer to note 77). It also outlines a **clear trail of discrepancies, awkwardness, and inconsistencies** that continue to expose narrative manipulations, even within the narrow selection of about 130 verses detailed here<sup>284</sup>. The reading we propose is far more straightforward, uncovering a

<sup>284</sup> Inspired by Édouard M. Gallez's research, the critical examination of the Quranic text we have conducted complements the insights presented in *The Great Secret of Islam* and encompasses 1,860 unique verses, along with numerous contextual passages. We have pinpointed key themes such as the Quran, the Nazarenes, Emigration, “associationism”, the Temple, “covering”, “Caliph”, the alliance, the gathering, and the pilgrimage,

distinctly different and coherent narrative that is supported by recent scholarly progress on the historical and religious context of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This includes the Judeo-Nazarenes' indoctrination of Arabs via the distribution of their Arabic lectionary, calls for the conquest of Jerusalem, and ultimately, the echoes of the events that sparked the political-religious process leading to the creation of Islam. The Quran still partially reflects the authentic history of its origins, embedding the "great secret" of Islam as **evidence hidden in plain sight**.

The significance of the Quran in Islam must, however, be put into perspective. While Islamic narrative portrays it as the cornerstone of the religion—the essence of divine revelation—the Quran is just one component of the broader Islamic faith. Islamically speaking, the revelation is indeed shared between the Quran and the character of Muhammad. Moreover, Muslims engage with the Quran through the lens of the Islamic narrative, which obscures deeper insights, including its "great secret". Historically, most Muslims have not read and understood the Quran extensively; instead, they recite verses necessary for ritual prayers and often receive only a general education about the broader Islamic narrative. We also realize that Islam developed long before the Quran was compiled, standardized, promulgated and explained as the literal word of God. This may seem paradoxical, yet it is straightforward: historically, and generally, **the Quran is not the source of Islam; rather, it is a significant byproduct** that serves to legitimize, formalize, and embody the fundamental aspirations of the faith, as is typical for every religious movement and its relationship with sacred texts. However, Islam is distinct among religions in having a sacred text that was not initially intended and designed to support its faith but was later forcefully reinterpreted (and also modified) to do so. Fundamentally, the Quranic text is not literally Islamic but rather pre-Islamic, or "proto-Islamic". This uniqueness might explain why understanding the Quran appears so obscure when one relies solely on the extensive external explanations provided by the Islamic narrative.

Today, despite technological advancements and increased literacy that have made the Quran more accessible, many Muslims still have limited familiarity with its contents, often hesitating to read and understand it due to its perceived sacredness. In fact, Islam primarily consists of a discourse external to the Quran, with the Quranic text serving as justification when needed. The Quran, alongside other sources of Islamic faith such as the Hadiths, the Sirah, Muslim history, and even the figure of Muhammad, supports a broader, much more significant notion: **the belief that Muslims have been singled out by God to establish his rule on Earth**. This messianist vision foresees an Islamic future where the world will be cleansed and saved by Islam, a promise underscored by the expected arrival of the Mahdi and the return of Messiah-Jesus at the end of time. Ultimately, God will grant this purified world to his chosen ones, who will then live in eternal bliss.

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This is the conclusion of history as viewed within Islam, beyond the impressive diversity of Muslims. At the end of these pages, however, a very different conclusion is in order.

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among others. For each theme, we meticulously analyzed every occurrence of pertinent Arabic roots and explored their interconnections with other selected themes. For example, we examined every occurrence of the root NSR, which includes "nasara" (Nazarenes) and "ansar" (helpers), examining their links to "scriptures", "people of the Book", "associators", "coverers", "alliance", and other themes we identified. This methodical approach leads to a profound understanding of the literal meanings, constituting a comprehensive exegesis. Our extensive findings are set to be published soon under the working title "A Judeo-Nazarene Reading of the Quran". Presentations are already available on the website <https://thegreatsecretofislam.org>, where a preprint will also be published soon.

## CONCLUSION

**The pieces of the historical jigsaw puzzle are aligning.** Critical exegesis of the Quran, combined with advances in research, unveil the “great secret” of Islam: its Judeo-Nazarene foundation, profoundly influenced by the tangible revolution brought about by Christianity, and the actual political-religious context of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This includes the pivotal construction of a “third Temple” in Jerusalem and the crucial Arabization of the religious movement that emerged from the Judeo-Nazarenes’ failure. This process continued until the rise of a power strong enough to implement the awaited “kingdom of God on Earth”, creating its own justification as a direct intervention by God, independent of its actual origins—an imperial religion for the new empire. Thus, the emergence of Islam is finally explained in a coherent manner, clearly exposing its profound nature.

Admittedly, there are still pieces missing from the puzzle, but researchers are gradually completing it. We should trust them to continue archaeological investigations, better understand the choice of Mecca, uncover the many influences exerted on the centuries-long formation of Islam, dissect layers of textual and narrative manipulations, produce a critical edition of the Quranic text, and carry out its comprehensive scientific exegesis alongside the Islamic narrative—a daunting task. They will undoubtedly shed light on many other topics as well. Nevertheless, the abundance of consistent and convergent clues and evidence already at hand is sufficient to fully illuminate the “great secret” of Islam with considerable certainty. The frame of the jigsaw puzzle, that is to say, the general framework of Islam’s emergence, has been uncovered, along with many details. From a scientific and historical standpoint, devoid of any religious or ideological bias, it can be now asserted that the Islamic narrative is a fabrication, and the Quran is fundamentally different from what Muslims claim. **There has never been a divine revelation given to a “Prophet Muhammad”** as Islam depicts. Instead, Islam has evolved from a long and complex process of historical revision, rooted in global-political messianism.

This gradual process gave rise to a new religion that has consistently pursued the messianist aspirations of its Judeo-Nazarene origins. Thus, these aspirations did not stem from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century invention of Wahhabism, nor did they arise from the [Islamic Modernism](#) of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that led to the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood and many movements considered extremist today. Rather, global-political messianism has always been the main driving force of Islam—even before Islam became Islam and after it developed other reasons to believe. It imposed a system of political domination on civil society that exploited religious sentiments to assert totalitarian control, perpetuating and developing Islam through the iron grip of Muslim rulers and regimes, fear of the sacred and hell, and social control exerted by the community over the individual, as embodied in Sharia law<sup>285</sup>. It demands, and continues to demand, the renunciation of all questioning and criticism. Submission is so essential for its continuation that it is even proclaimed as the fundamental principle of Islam—its very name. However, this total submission, which suppresses individuals, nations, and cultures, was never fully achieved; otherwise, it would have completely destroyed the civil society on which Islam relies for its continuation. As a result, **“true Islam” cannot be attained. It remains an ideal always to be realized in the future.** Nonetheless, Islam’s chronic failure to fulfill

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<sup>285</sup> We already mentioned the “communally obligatory acts” (“fard al kifaya”) as laid out by Sharia law (refer to note 15). It is particularly important to consider that even if many Muslims do not explicitly abide by these acts, largely because they are not familiar with them, they still originate from societies that have been shaped by centuries of Sharia law enforcement.

its messianist promises has not hindered its expansion: the allure of a better tomorrow continues to captivate many, whether Muslims or non-Muslims. For instance, billions had fervently believed in the dogmas of [class struggle](#) and the [dictatorship of the proletariat](#), with a third of the world's population still under communist influence in the early 1980s—despite the heavy toll this belief had incurred<sup>286</sup>.

Today's promises of technological progress, triumphant reason, and hedonistic consumerism echo these same aspirations. These ideologies, with their logic steeped in surrealism (refer to note 56), have tormented humanity ever since it began to believe in the possibility of eradicating evil. The political ambition to reshape the world according to a supposed divine plan or superior principle, including the notion of an “ideal society” and the dream of global Islamization, are roots of profound intolerance. Such ideologies cannot truly accept others as they are, deserving of respect. Instead, others are perpetually at fault, labeled either as “bad believers” or external foes. They are deemed inherently evil: at best, merely tolerated with the ultimate aim of elimination.

Some recognized the folly in attempting to eradicate evil from the earth. As Solzhenitsyn noted, **“the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart”**<sup>287</sup>. Who, then, could tear out a piece of their own heart? Any attempt to eradicate evil and create a perfect society based on the concept of the “New Man” is inherently doomed to failure, often resulting in re-education camps or even extermination. The world does not simply divide into the pure and impure, or the enlightened elect versus the obscurantist masses. This truth was acknowledged long before Solzhenitsyn by Jesus himself<sup>288</sup>, who addressed the issue of evil and was the first to introduce the possibility of salvation—“seek and you will find”<sup>289</sup>.

Of course, many Muslims—and non-Muslims alike—dream of an Islam characterized by peace and harmony among all people, cultures, and religions. The majority of Muslims are honest individuals who do not adhere strictly to commandments of violence and political domination, nor do they embrace views of a warlike and violent deity, as mentioned in the Islamic texts (Q61:4: “God loves those who go so far as to kill on his way”<sup>290</sup>). Fortunately, they are unaware of these harsher doctrines, focusing instead on the peaceful aspects of the faith, in which they find a source of hope, transcendence, and traditional values that resonate with common sense—such as respect for family, individual morality, and societal norms. They also take pride in belonging to “*the best of the communities ever brought forth for humankind*” (Q3:110)<sup>291</sup>,

<sup>286</sup> Communism shares many similarities with Islam. French scholar and Islamologist Maxime Rodinson described Islam as a movement similar to communism, “*with totalitarian aims*”, but distinguished by the inclusion of God and the afterlife (Maxime Rodinson, *Marxisme et monde musulman* [Marxism and the Muslim world], Le Seuil, Paris, 1972). Notably, both Islam and Communism have experienced manipulations of sources and narratives. For example, recall how Stalin erased Trotsky, his role, and his ideas to craft an official narrative that celebrated the glorious construction of the Soviet Union, aligning it with his interests as the “new Tsar”. This revisionism was driven by a logic of retrospective justification, similar to that which motivated the caliphs to distance themselves from the Judeo-Nazarenes and the actual origins of Islam.

<sup>287</sup> Refer to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (consulted in its French edition, Alexandre Soljénitsyne, L'Archipel du Goulag, Fayard, Paris, 2011, tome 2, p. 510).

<sup>288</sup> Matthew 13:24-30.

<sup>289</sup> Matthew 7:7.

<sup>290</sup> Q61:4 states: “God loves those who go so far as to kill” [“yuqatiluna”, formed on the QTL root meaning “kill”] *in his way* [i.e. for him], *(drawn up) in lines (for battle) as if they were a solid building*”. Translations often soften the original meaning of the Arabic verb by rendering it as “to fight”. However, its grammatical form, the third form, more accurately conveys the sense of “going to the extreme”, which implies “fighting to the death” or “killing”.

<sup>291</sup> The Islamic narrative identifies the “*best of communities*” with the Ummah, far from the original meaning of “the community of Judeo-Nazarenes and Arab believers”.

practicing what they believe to be the “best of all religions”, and holding onto the steadfast hope that God will ultimately ensure its triumph and theirs. This messianist hope, combined with a tradition of submission to divine will, has fostered a sense of fatalism encapsulated in the term “*maktub*”—“it is written”<sup>292</sup>, contributing to acceptance of political domination. This acceptance, prevalent throughout Muslim history, may induce perceptions of Islam as a religion capable of embodying ideals of peace and concord. Besides, if mystics and reformists derive a particular wisdom from their practice of Islam, it’s also possible to view this wisdom as emerging not only from intrinsic Islamic traditions but also from broader human experiences and influences, including Christian values. However peaceful Muslims and mystics do not have a say in the nature of Islam. **The religion itself is defined by its doctrine, messianist discourse, historical presence and dynamics, and foundational texts.** These elements establish the official boundaries and core teachings of Islam that go beyond individual interpretations. The full application of Islam, which moderate Muslims avoid, illustrates that attempts at a strict adherence inevitably lead to violence. Islam urgently requires a critical reassessment of its global-political messianism—thus necessitating a reevaluation of its foundational texts, including the untouchable Quran. The task is challenging, as evidenced by Egyptian President al-Sisi’s unsuccessful attempt (see note 2). Similarly, Saudi Prince Bin Salman has dared to question Islamic traditions, though he has not directly confronted issues related to the Quran and Muhammad. Both leaders have implicitly recognized that without introspection and adaptation, Islam will continue to adversely impact civil society, exacerbate internal conflicts, and face difficulties in engaging with the broader global context.

We are also witnessing **the greatest crisis Islam has ever faced**<sup>293</sup>. Western dominance, which began in the 17-18<sup>th</sup> century, has swept away traditional political and Islamic structures, such as the Caliphate. These structures had disciplined the Ummah or at least allowed for a certain balance between religion and politics<sup>294</sup>. The spread of Islam has been significantly impeded; its momentum of conquests, which seemed to validate its direction and meaning of history, has now faltered. Traditionally, Muslims have viewed the world as destined to be gradually Islamized, a vision aligned with Islam’s deep-seated global-political messianism, as illustrated by God sending his prophet “so that he may cause the religion of truth to prevail over all religions” (Q9:33). This shift has left many Muslims in disarray, while literacy and easy access to Islamic texts have enabled an unprecedented diffusion of the fundamentals of Islam right into the very heart of Muslim communities. The turmoil fuels the internal mechanism of Islam, which was never deactivated (as explained in our diagram on page 81). As a result, new currents are emerging and developing since the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism, Takfirism, attempts to re-establish the Caliphate, and other forms of Islamism. They all stem from an uncontrolled re-Islamization driven by the desire to restore what is perceived as Islam’s lost dynamics and supremacy, through a complete application of religion and a return to the sources. These currents now hold the main power structures within the Muslim world, as exemplified by the [publications](#) of the [Organization for Islamic Cooperation](#) (OIC), which groups the 57 Muslim countries.

<sup>292</sup> This expression has become proverbial, with “*maktub*” coming to be equated with “fate”.

<sup>293</sup> Refer to Michel Viot and Odon Lafontaine, *La Laïcité, mère porteuse de l’islam?* [Secularism as Islam’s surrogate mother?] with a foreword by Rémi Brague, de l’Institut (Éditions Saint-Léger—Les Unpertinents, Le Coudray-Macouard, 2017); this work provides an in-depth analysis of the existential crisis within Islam, dissecting Islamic Modernism and the interplay between contemporary Islam and the Western ideologies.

<sup>294</sup> “Life doesn’t care about abstract theories. To survive—even if only in slow motion—Islam has had to adapt to the same conditions faced by all living organisms. Like them, it has softened, adjusted to the environment and circumstances, embraced various temperaments, and made compromises” (Henri Lammens, *L’islam, croyances et institutions* [Islam: beliefs and institutions], Éditions du Trident, Paris, 1991, p. 171—1<sup>st</sup> edition in 1926).

On the other hand, we are also witnessing **a rise in skepticism among Muslims** about the same inconsistencies and obscurities that we have detailed. Moreover, various Islamic injunctions that lack the most basic humanistic approach, such as those concerning the status of women within Islam, are increasingly being questioned within civil society. Criticism, including historical criticism, is now freely accessible on the Internet and remains largely unrestricted. It might struggle against containment due to devout Muslims, social pressure, political correctness, accusations of “Islamophobia”, and prohibitions from national and international Muslim authorities, such as the OIC and various Islamic lobbies, or others influenced by Muslim militants. However, the cat is out of the bag.

This is a new phenomenon. Many Muslim grandparents no longer recognize “their Islam” and feel completely overwhelmed. Fracture lines are emerging in the new generation among absolutists, skeptics, relativists, and, increasingly, ex-Muslims. Ideally, one would hope to see Islam engage in a dialogue between liberals and radicals, employing reason and a critical perspective on the sacred texts to foster internal reform. However, such developments are **impossible within the strict framework of doctrinal Islam**.

This is why the future of Islam seems limited. It might fail to conduct its own critical examination, but it cannot prevent others from doing so. Historical research continues and is making progress. The Quranic text is currently being reconstructed with its Hebrew and Aramaic linguistic foundations. The truth about its origins has been unveiled and is spreading inexorably. Although it is very difficult for any devout Muslim to view his religion from a critical perspective, reality will increasingly assert itself beyond the veil of Islamic surrealism. This reality advances with the same strength as the nonviolence advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. We can already predict how it will be received by Muslims, as Gandhi himself described: first it is ignored, then it is mocked, then it is fought, and finally, it prevails. Moreover, “nonviolence” is only a partial translation of Gandhi’s original term “*satyagraha*”, which is more accurately rendered as “the force of truth”. Similarly, Jesus, the man of salvation, declared, “**The truth will set you free**”<sup>295</sup>. The truth transcends all forms of subjugation and bondage, including what Ernest Renan referred to as “*the heaviest of all of mankind’s chains*”<sup>296</sup>—Islam.

It now remains to **examine what our world has to offer to Muslims** as the Islamic edifice is shaken to its foundations. For many of them—and also for numerous non-Muslims—their genuine desires for a fairer world, respect for common sense, and a sense of God cannot be fulfilled in a society dominated by the supremacy of money, where everything and everyone is turned into products for sale, where distinction and traditions are lost, and where the pursuit of individual desires is considered the ultimate purpose. All these factors may only strengthen the allure of the Islamic system and its messianist promises, perceived as the sole remedy for the decadence of civilization. Thus risking a confrontation that the future collapse of Islam will only make more violent.

<sup>295</sup> John 8:32.

<sup>296</sup> Refer to the lecture he delivered at the Sorbonne on March 29, 1883, titled “*L’islamisme et la science* [Islam and Science]”: “*c’est la chaîne la plus lourde que l’humanité ait jamais portée*”.

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