

6. SEBEOS, THE JEWS AND THE RISE OF ISLAM

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The Armenian chronicler Sebeos, writing in the 660s, relates the exploits of a number of Jewish refugees of the Byzantine-Persian war (602–28), who had sought asylum in Edessa. When they saw that the Persian army had withdrawn and left the town in peace, they closed the gates and barricaded themselves in. But soon, besieged by order of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius and realizing they could not win, they surrendered and were told to return to their own homes.

They set out into the desert and came to Arabia, among the children of Ishmael; they sought their help and explained that they were kinsmen according to the Bible. Although they (the Arabs) were willing to accept this close kinship, they (the Jews) nevertheless could not convince the mass of the people because their cults were different. At this time there was an Ishmaelite called Mahmet, a merchant; he presented himself to them 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. As the command came from on high, they all united under the authority of a single man, under a single law and, abandoning vain cults, returned to the living God who had revealed himself to their father Abraham . . . Then they all gathered together from Havila unto Shur and before Egypt; they came out of the desert of Pharan divided into twelve tribes according to the lineages of their patriarchs. They distributed among their tribes the twelve thousand Israelites, a thousand per tribe, to guide them into the land of Israel . . . All that remained of the peoples of the children of Israel came to join them, and they constituted a mighty army.¹

This account of Sebeos amounts to a theory of the origins of Islam and forms the crux of Crone and Cook's argument for what they call "Judæo-Hagarism", that is, Arab-Jewish involvement in the conquest of their birthright of the Holy Land, united by common descent from Abraham and motivated by Judaic messianism.² Other scholars, however, are generally dismissive. Gil simply says that "one need not ascribe any historical significance to this kind of story"; Wansborough declares that this *topos* of Jewish complicity "belongs to the standard ingredients of *historia ecclesiastica*" and so "does not really admit of historical conclusions"; and for Griffith the account "fairly seethes with anti-Jewishness" and "is not a trustworthy historical statement".³ Their supposition would seem to be that if a Christian asserts Jewish influence on or connection with some

object, he must be intending to discredit that object, and so his testimony is to be disregarded. Even accepting the first conclusion to be true, it does not follow that there is no historical basis to the assertion; distortion rather than fabrication is the more common form of polemic. Greater care may be required when handling such material, but it still merits our consideration. This essay will attempt to give the above report a fair hearing and to probe what, if anything, lies behind it.

Syriac chroniclers narrate two incidents involving Jews at Edessa. The first took place in 628 when Heraclius' brother Theodore "was going round the cities of Mesopotamia, informing the Persian garrisons of their duty to return to their country". The Persians in Edessa refused to comply, saying "we do not know Shiroi and we will not surrender the city to the Romans". The Jews resident in Edessa threw in their lot with the Persians, and began to insult the Byzantines and taunt Theodore. The latter was provoked to attack the city, subjecting it to a volley of rocks from his catapults. The Persians acknowledged defeat and agreed to leave, whereupon Theodore entered and began to kill the Jews and plunder their houses. Having anticipated such a reprisal, a Jew named Joseph had escaped to Heraclius and obtained his pardon for the Jews and a letter "by which he forbade his brother to harm them". Though it is not stated, one assumes that the Jewish community in Edessa was saved.⁴ The second episode follows upon the decree of compulsory baptism of Jews issued in 632, and, for all its brevity, constitutes almost our only notice on the effects of this decree in the east:

At this time the emperor Heraclius ordered that all the Jews in the lands of the Roman empire become Christian. For this reason the Jews fled the lands of the Romans. First they came to Edessa; when they were oppressed again there, they took refuge in Persia.⁵

The Jews in Sebeos' account are not native Edessans and so should belong to the second incident, but the Persians have now been gone four years or more. Probably Sebeos has conflated or confused the two events, but in any case there is some reality behind his description of Jews fleeing from Edessa.

Of Jewish participation in the Arab armies there is also some confirmation. The *Doctrina Jacobi*, a Greek anti-Jewish tract composed at the time of Heraclius' forcible conversion of Jews in 632, has the newly-baptised Jacob question Justus, whom Jacob has just won over to Christianity, saying: "If your brother or the Jews who mix with the Saracens turn you from the faith, what will you do?" In response Justus avers that "even if the Jews and Saracens take hold of me and cut me into little pieces, I will not deny the Christ the son of God".⁶ No more than one or two years later the theologian Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) was writing a letter to Peter, governor of Numidia, in which he briefly complained of the Arab predations and then ranted at length against "the Jewish people" for their part in "the evils which today afflict the world". In particular, he says, there can be nothing more terrible than "to see a cruel and alien nation authorised to raise its hand against the divine inheritance".⁷ His vituperative rhetoric is no doubt due to his prejudice against Jews, but his anger must have had some goad and this was evidently that Jews were joining the Arab armies in appreciable numbers. Such cooperation had

happened before during the Persian occupation of Palestine (614–28), when “Hebrews and Saracens” had roamed the Judaeian desert, terrifying the monks resident in the monasteries there.⁸ Possibly these were the Jews of Noara and Livias, two “bases of aggression” (*ormētēpica*) of theirs near Jericho.⁹ It is also worth noting that later Jewish sources attest the presence of Jews among the invading Arabs:

It was God’s will to have us find favour before the Ishmaelite kingdom at the time of its conquest of the Holy Land from the hands of Edom. When they (the Arabs) came to Jerusalem, there were with them men from among the children of Israel who showed them the place of the Temple . . .¹⁰

Such reports may, however, be influenced by Muslim traditions about the role of the Jewish scribe Ka’b b. al-Ahbār in helping ‘Umar establish his mosque on the Temple mount.¹¹

Of course, most Jews would not have risen up in support of the invading Arabs. In the city of Manuf in Egypt, for example, all the Jews gathered together and fled to Alexandria, “owing to their fear of the Muslims, the cruelties of (the general) ‘Amr and the seizure of their possessions”.¹² And we hear of Jews being killed and taken prisoner along with everyone else.¹³ But as Byzantine intolerance towards the Jews increased in the early seventh century and the Persian-Byzantine conflict escalated into all-out war, ever more Jews took advantage of the disorder:

When at Ptolemais the Christians fled on account of the arrival of the Persians, the Jews took the chance to burn the churches of the Christians and to plunder their houses, and they molested and killed many Christians.¹⁴

When the Persians marched on Jerusalem itself, thousands of Jews flocked to them in the hope of being allowed to restore the Temple. An apocalyptic poem written by Eliezer ben Qalir *c.* 630 bears witness to these expectations and their subsequent frustration:

The holy people will have a short respite, for Assur (the Persians) will permit them to found the holy shrine and they will build the altar and offer up the sacrifices. But they will not have time to establish the sanctuary . . . After three months the commander-in-chief will return and come against him (the Messiah son of Joseph) and will kill him in the little temple, and his blood will congeal upon the rock. And the land shall mourn, every family apart (Zacharia 12.12).¹⁵

This is confirmed by a second more well known apocalyptic work, the Book of Zorobabel, which mentions all the above ingredients and portrays the Persian ruler Shiroi as an anti-Christ for his complicity in the slaying of the Messiah son of Joseph.¹⁶

These and other apocalyptic writings make clear that it was not just the prevailing chaos that spurred many Jews into action. The events of the time evidently made many think that these were the “travails of the Messiah”, which heralded his imminent advent. Historical reality, indeed, seemed to come very close to eschatological reality in the early

seventh century. The Persian-Byzantine clash was on the scale of the expected war of Gog and Magog, and it concluded with Roman dominance "over the whole world" for a short time which, it was said in the Talmud, was required before the Son of David would come.¹⁷ When the emperor Heraclius decreed compulsory baptism of Jews, it was patent that the final showdown between the enemies of God's kingdom and the nation of Israel was at hand.¹⁸ So whereas Christians regarded the invading Arabs as God's rod for their chastisement, a number of Jews saw them rather as God's instrument for their salvation. For was it not said that "the end of Esau's (the Romans') reign will form the beginning of Jacob's (the Messiah's) kingdom"?¹⁹ Again, these sentiments are captured in a contemporary apocalypse, which was attributed to the second-century rabbi Simon ben Yoḥay:

When he (Simon) saw the kingdom of Ishmael that was coming, he began to say: 'Was it not enough what the wicked kingdom of Edom has done to us, but we (must have) the kingdom of Ishmael too?' At once Metatron, the prince of the countenance, answered and said: 'Do not fear, son of man, for the Almighty only brings the kingdom of Ishmael in order to deliver you from this wicked one (Edom). He raises up over them (Ishmaelites) a prophet according to His will and will conquer the land for them. They will come and restore it (to you) in greatness and there will be a great terror between them and the sons of Esau'.²⁰

Such a positive attitude towards the Arab invasions receives some confirmation from the comment in the *Doctrina Jacobi* that the Jews rejoiced when they heard of the killing of a Byzantine officer by the Arabs, and remains fossilized in the frequent depiction of Arab rule by Jews as "the little horn", which in Daniel 7.8-9 immediately precedes the Day of Judgement and Salvation.²¹ One might argue that, as after the unsuccessful Bar Kochba uprising, there would have been a period of passivity following the failure of the collusion with the Persians. But throughout the seventh and early eighth century cataclysmic events plausibly heralding the end of days spawned messianic pretenders, and in each case they were able to attract a considerable following. Particularly influential were Abū 'Īsā al-Īsfahānī, who appeared during the second Arab civil war (683-92), and a certain Severus, who appeared just after the Arab siege of Constantinople (715-17) at the time of Leo III's forcible baptising of Jews (721). Abū 'Īsā preached a syncretic message and portrayed himself as the last such prophetic messenger, sent to prepare for the advent of the Messiah;²² Severus claimed to be Moses, "sent again for the salvation of Israel and to lead you into the desert in order to introduce you then to the inheritance of the Promised Land which you will possess as before".²³

It is apparent, then, that Sebeos had at his disposal two reports, one of Jews fleeing from Edessa and another of Jewish participation in the Arab conquests, both having some substance to them. He directs not one word of abuse at the Jews and his tone is very matter-of-fact. His decision to connect the two reports should therefore be regarded as an attempt to make sense of his material rather than as a ploy to vilify Islam. But was Sebeos justified in making this association? Did Jews only muse at a distance on the possibility of the Arabs ousting the Byzantines and occasionally take advantage of the mayhem to loot and harass Christians, or did some of them have real involvement with Muslims?

Arabic sources allow us to take the Arab-Jewish intimacy postulated by Sebeos back into Muḥammad's Ḥijāz. We know from inscriptions that Jews settled in north-western Arabia at least as early as the commencement of the Christian era. A certain Shubayt, who installed a family tomb in Madā'in Ṣāliḥ in 42 AD, expressly designates himself as "a Jew" (*Yebūdāyā*). The name of Menasse son of Nathan appears inscribed on a sundial found in al-Ḥijr, and at al-Ūlā in 307 AD one Yaḥyā bar Shim'un erected a tombstone for his father.²⁴ A few graffiti comprise Jewish names such as Isaac and Samuel, and this epigraphic evidence can be supplemented with Talmudic references.²⁵ For the fifth and sixth centuries we have only the testimony of the Arabic tradition.²⁶ But the allusions in poetry, prosopographical data such as Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb's enumeration of Qurashis who were the sons of Jewish women, and the wealth of narrative material may at least be taken as evidence of a continuing Jewish presence in the Ḥijāz.²⁷ For example, the Talmud records one Simeon of Taima, a contemporary of Rabbi Akiba (early second century), as an authority, and the early seventh-century poet Shammām intimates that Taima was still a Jewish centre in his time, comparing a ruined dwelling with the writing of a rabbi of Taima.²⁸

We come now to a document which marks the foundation of Muḥammad's polity and is known most commonly as the 'Constitution of Medina'. It exists in two recensions, one of Ibn Hishām (d. 833) from Ibn Ishāq (d. 767), the other of Abū 'Ubayd (d. 838) from al-Zuhrī (d. 742).²⁹ The differences between them, however, consist only of minor scribal additions, omissions and changes, and the document is generally considered to have been faithfully transmitted and to be what it says it is:

This is a writing from the prophet Muḥammad between the believers and the Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who follow them, join with them and fight alongside them.³⁰

The principles it seeks to lay down are that those who adhere to this document are "a single community (*umma wāḥida*) to the exclusion of the (other) people" (§1) and that for them "the inner part (*jawf*) of Yathrib is sacred" (§ 39). Each clan is still responsible for its own affairs, but "they help one another against whoever fights the people of this sheet" (§ 37), and God and Muḥammad are the arbiters for all parties (§§ 23, 42).

Among its adherents are the Jews who are specifically catered for in a number of clauses:

§ 16: Any Jews who follow us shall have support and parity, without being wronged and without anyone supporting another against them.

§§ 24, 38: The Jews shall contribute to expenses along with the Muslims while they are at war.

§§ 25-35, 46: The Jews of Banū 'Awf . . . and of Banū 'l-Najjār, B. al-Ḥārith, B. Sā'ida, B. Jusham, B. al-Aws, B. Tha'laba and their clients, B. Shuṭayba, and close associates of the Jews . . . are a community (*umma*) with the believers. To the Jews their

religion and to the Muslims their religion, their clients and themselves, except he who acts wrongfully or treacherously.

§ 45 (Abū 'Ubayd): If the Jews call for a peace treaty with an ally of theirs, they (the believers) shall make peace with him.

A reading of the document alone leaves one with the impression that it was meant as a blueprint for a politico-religious community, uniting Muslims and Jews under the protection of God (*dhimmat Allāh*) so that they might fight "in the way of God" (§ 17). Most Islamicists, however, approach the text taking for granted the antipathy towards the Jews found in the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's biography (*sīra*),³¹ and are led to belittle the part of both the Jews and of religion.

Since the most prominent Jewish tribes in the *sīra* are Naḍir, Qurayza, and Qaynuqā', Wellhausen and Wensinck thought that they must be intended here. But Muḥammad subsequently fought and expelled these groups, and so these scholars were led to postulate perfidy on the part of the Prophet and to assert that the document did not represent an agreement with the Jews.³² Watt suggests that the clauses concerning Naḍir, Qurayza and Qaynuqā' might have been removed once they became inoperative, but since much of the treaty became superseded as the community expanded this seems an unlikely explanation.³³ Ahmad states that the articles pertaining to the Jews, the declaration of Medina as a protected area and the formation of an *umma* must have been added only after the expulsion of the three Jewish tribes was completed in 627/8.³⁴ He contends that only when Muḥammad had won victories and gained prestige could he have established a community and a sacred enclave. But this is the wrong way round; the document clearly seeks to found a community and a safe base for the purpose of attacking God's enemies, and so belongs at the beginning not at the end of Muḥammad's career.³⁵ Finally, Rubin's explanation for the lack of explicit mention of the three Jewish groups is that they lived outside Medina and so were not included in its Constitution. As the recension of Abū 'Ubayd notes, "this is a writing of Muḥammad between the believers . . . and those who followed and joined them and *resided with them*".³⁶

In a list of the Jewish antagonists of Muḥammad, Ibn Ishāq records not only Jews from Naḍir, Qurayza and Qaynuqā', who make up the bulk of the opposition, but also a Jew of the Banū 'l-Najjār and one from the Banū 'l-Hārith, two of the clans named in the Constitution.³⁷ Evidently, these clans were distinct from the three main Jewish groupings; the designation of them as 'the Jews of such-and-such an Arab clan' indicates that their relations lay more with the Arab tribes among whom they dwelt. As one Arabic source tells us, before Islam there existed between some Arab clans and Jews an alliance (*ḥilf*), fraternity and friendship.³⁸ So though the identity of the Jews mentioned in the Constitution is unclear, one can say that they had made common cause with the Arabs who were party to the agreement and had in some fashion affiliated with them.

The tendency to downgrade the community to an "exclusively political unity" that "served purely political ends" likewise seems to go against the text.³⁹ The very first line stresses that the believers and those who follow them are "a single community" (*umma*

wāḥida), a phrase which occurs nine times in the Qur'ān to denote a people who were, are or could have been one community under God.⁴⁰ Moreover, this "single community" is expected to "fight in the way of God" and to refer its disputes to God and Muḥammad. One should also remark the statement of al-Zuhri, the transmitter of Abū 'Ubayd's recension, that the Jews received the same booty as the Muslims when they raided together.⁴¹ The reason for the downgrading stems from the belief that the presence of the two religious groups excludes any one religious goal. Thus Gil argues that the document reflects Muḥammad's anti-Jewish policy and "had in view the expulsion of the Jews even at the moment of its writing". Wellhausen spoke of the document's "distrust of the Jews" and Denny holds that the Jews are treated as a "sub-*umma*".⁴²

Rubin endeavours to pay attention to what the text itself says, and he argues that the Constitution sets Jews on a par with Muslims, both "sharing the same religious orientation". The evidence he adduces is the reading of Abū 'Ubayd (§ 25): "the Jews . . . are a community of believers (*umma min al-mu'minīn*)" as opposed to the reading of Ibn Ishāq: "the Jews . . . are a community with the believers (*umma ma'a al-mu'minīn*)". He concludes that:

within the *umma wāḥida* which separated all monotheistic groups of Medina from other people, the Jews were given the position of 'umma of believers', thus being distinguished from all other monotheistic (Muslim) members of the *umma wāḥida*. Their recognition as *believers* provided them with the privilege to stick to their own Jewish *dīn* while enjoying complete protection.⁴³

But these privileges applied to both groups: "the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have their religion", and "the believers protect each other to the exclusion of the (other) people" (§ 15). Moreover, the term "believer" is used throughout (32 times), seemingly referring to all parties; Muslim (3 times) and Jew (6 times, excluding the term "Jews of Banū . . .") are only used when a distinction needs to be made. One should perhaps, then, regard the term as including the Jews among, rather than distinguishing them from, all other monotheists, "believers" being the general appellation and Muslim and Jew specific cases thereof. The *min* in *umma min al-mu'minīn* would then be partative (*li-'l-tab'īd*) rather than explicative (*li-'l-tab'yīn*), to be read "the Jews. . . are a community forming part of the believers". And the opening clause might be understood: "This is a writing of Muḥammad . . . between the believers, (namely) the Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who follow them . . .".

The possibility of different religious denominations subscribing to a single formula is suggested in the Qur'ān:

Say, O people of the Book, come to an agreement between us and you, that we shall worship none but God and ascribe no partner to him (3.64).

Say: I believe in whatever book God has sent down . . . God is our Lord and your Lord. We have our works (*a'mālunā*) and you have your works. There is no dispute between us and you (42.15).

And it is also known to have happened in practice:

The 'Īsāwiyya among the Jews and a part of the Shārakāniyya recognise that there is no god but God, that Muḥammad is His messenger and that his religion is true, but despite all that they do not belong to the Muslim community, because they believe that they are not bound by the prescriptions of Islam.⁴⁴

What this compromise formula was is hinted at in the Constitution where a believer is defined as "he who has affirmed what is in this sheet and believes in God and the Last Day" (§ 22). This also receives support from certain early sayings which give the basic duties of a believer as professing that there is no god but God and paying one's dues.⁴⁵

For our purposes it is sufficient to note — whether it provides for a single *umma* with two separate religious compartments or for two *ummas* acting in unison — that the Constitution bears witness to Arab-Jewish involvement and a certain coincidence of aims. A far more difficult matter is whether the Jews had any ideological⁴⁶ input into the nascent Muslim community. There are an enormous number of studies devoted to demonstrating and eliciting the Jewish ingredients that went into Islam,⁴⁷ but these could have made their entry at any point during the six or more centuries of cohabitation in pre-Islamic Arabia and for some time after Islam's appearance in the Near East.⁴⁸ The question is did the Jews have any influence upon Muḥammad's teaching, did they provide the spark, as implied by Sebeos, that kindled the Arab conquests?

Common descent from Abraham was the message of the Jews to the Arabs in the account of Sebeos. The fifth-century Church historian Sozomen, a native of Gaza, tells a remarkably similar story regarding the Arabs, how they had lapsed in their Abrahamic monotheism, but had heard once more of their true origin from the Jews and returned to the observance of Jewish laws and customs "up until the present day".⁴⁹ Thus this genealogical lesson had cultic ramifications;⁵⁰ and it also had, according to Sebeos, territorial implications:

Muḥammad preached, saying: "God has promised this land to Abraham and his posterity after him forever . . . Now you, you are the sons of Abraham and God fulfils in you the promise made to Abraham and his posterity. Only love the God of Abraham, go and take possession of your country which God gave to your father Abraham, and none will be able to resist you in the struggle, for God is with you".⁵¹

A similar report is found in the chronicle of the Jacobite patriarch Dionysius of Telmahre (817–42), where again some link is made with the Jews:⁵²

This Muḥammad, while in the age and stature of youth, began to go up and down from his town of Yathrib to Palestine for the business of buying and selling. While engaged with the Jews, he learnt from them the belief in one God, and seeing that his tribesmen worshipped stones and wood and every created thing, he adhered to the belief of the Jews, which was pleasing to him.⁵³ When he went back down to his tribesmen, he set

this belief before them, and he convinced a few and they became his followers. In addition, he would extol the bountifulness of this land of Palestine, saying: 'Because of the belief in one God, the like of this good and fertile land was given to them'. And he would add: 'If you listen to me, abandon these vain gods and confess the one God, then to you too will God give a land flowing with milk and honey'. To corroborate his word, he led a band of them who were obedient to him and began to go up to the land of Palestine plundering, enslaving and pillaging. He returned laden (with booty) and unharmed, and thus he had not fallen short of his promise to them.

That religion and conquest went hand in hand in Muḥammad's preaching is clear from many passages in the Qur'an which command: "fight those who do not believe in God and the Last Day . . . until they pay tribute" (9.29) and the like. But there is also an indication that the lands which they were about to conquer were their inheritance: "He made you heirs to their land (of the 'people of the Book') and their dwellings and to a land which you have not yet trodden (33.27).⁵⁴ And Arab generals are heard to justify their invasion to their Byzantine and Persian counterparts by saying that the lands were promised to them by God (*maw'ūd Allāh*).⁵⁵ It is easy to see how the Muslims might portray their conquests as the taking of what was rightfully theirs, but it is less obvious why Christian sources would do so. The Bible has Ishmael father many offspring who are to become a great nation (Genesis 17.20, 21.13), but there is no mention of an inheritance.

The evidence, if not conclusive, is suggestive. Unfortunately, not enough work has yet been done on these and other non-Muslim sources to allow assessment of their value for historical reconstruction. The issue here is, as Wansborough succinctly put it:

Can a vocabulary of motives be freely extrapolated from a discrete collection of literary stereotypes composed by alien and mostly hostile observers, and thereupon employed to describe, even interpret, not merely the overt behaviour but also the intellectual and spiritual development of helpless and mostly innocent actors?⁵⁶

Thus the references to Muḥammad as "proclaiming the advent of the anointed one who is to come"⁵⁷ and to Arabs as Israel's redemption might reflect only the preoccupations of Jews, among whom messianic expectations seem heightened at this time.⁵⁸ Then Sebeos' description of the Jews' flight into the desert and gathering together under Muḥammad's banner would signal only the enactment of a well-worn Jewish messianic fantasy.⁵⁹ And the fracas that takes place between Jews and Muslims over building plans on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem might be construed as a conflict between the Jews' wish to implement their messianic programme and the Muslims' practical needs.⁶⁰ There is, however, a plethora of apocalyptic material present in the Qur'an and Muslim tradition, which might suggest that the matter was not so one-sided.⁶¹

More research would need to be done on this and other issues touched upon in this essay before a final verdict could be given on Sebeos' theory of the rise of Islam. The foregoing has, I hope, shown that such investigation would be fruitful and that Sebeos' account

should not be dismissed as unworthy of consideration, for even if his own conclusions are suspect, the evidence from which they are derived may be of interest. The scarcity of sources for this period precludes any too profligate an approach for its historians.

Notes

1. K. Patkanian ed., *Patmut'iwn Sebēosi episkoposi* (St. Petersburg 1879), 103–4; F. Macler tr., *Histoire d'Héraclius par l'évêque Sebēos* (Paris 1904), 95–6. On Sebeos see M.K. Krikorian, "Sebeos, Historian of the Seventh Century", and Z. Arzoumanian, "A Critique of Sebēos and his History of Heraclius, a Seventh-Century Document", in T.J. Samuelian ed., *Classical Armenian Culture. Influences and Creativity* (Armenian Texts and Studies 4; Pennsylvania 1982), 52–67, 68–78 respectively.
2. P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge 1977), 6–8.
3. M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099* (Cambridge 1992), 61 n. 64; J. Wansborough, *The Sectarian Milieu* (Oxford 1978), 117; S.H. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century", *Jewish History* 3 (1988), 87.
4. This story is narrated by Agapius of Menbij, "Kitāb al-'Unwān", ed./tr. A. Vasiliev, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1912), 466; Michael Syrus, *Chronique*, ed./tr. J.B. Chabot (Paris 1899–1910), 4.409–10/2.409–10; *Chronicon ad annum 1234 pertinens*, ed. J.B. Chabot (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 81 *scr. syri* 36; Paris 1920). 235. They are relying upon a mid-eighth-century Syriac source, and ultimately the report derives from the contemporary Sergius Ruṣafāyā, a nobleman of Edessa (Michael Syrus, 4.408–9/2.411).
5. Michael Syrus, 4.413/2.414; the preceding entry notes the occurrence of an earthquake in September 633, which heralded the approach of the Muslims; Michael or his source clearly wished to link the three events.
6. G. Dagron and V. Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens dans l'Orient du VIIe siècle", *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991), 212–13; this study includes an edition and translation of this text, and a thorough discussion of its historical context.
7. Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 14, *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 537–41.
8. C. Houze, "Sancti Georgii Chozebitae confessoris et monachi vita", *Analecta Bollandiana* 7 (1888), 134.
9. Antiochus, *Epistula ad Eustathium*, PG 89, 1692A; see the comments of P. Mayerson, "Antiochus Monachus' Homily on Dreams: an Historical Note", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35 (1984), 51–6.
10. Mid-eleventh-century letter from the Academy of Jerusalem to the diaspora communities in Egypt: J. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fatimids* (Oxford 1920–2), 1.44, 1.164–5 (date), 2.189–91 (full text); cf. Gil, *History of Palestine*, 71, who is sceptical.
11. On which see H. Busse, "Omar b. al-Khattāb in Jerusalem", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984), 73–119.
12. R.H. Charles, *The Chronicle of John (c. 690 AD) Coptic bishop of Nikiu* (London 1916), 13.
13. *Chronicon miscellaneum ad annum 724 pertinens*, ed. E.W. Brooks (*Chronica Minora* 2; Paris 1904), 148: 4000 villagers of Palestine were killed, Christians, Jews and Samaritans. F. Nau, "Le texte grec des récits utiles à l'âme d'Anastase (le Sinaïte)", *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1903), 74–5: a young Jew, slave of a Saracen, flees to Cyprus and becomes a Christian.

14. *Doctrina Jacobi* in Dagron et Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens", 180-1. Other examples of Jewish activism in this period are given by J. Starr, "Byzantine Jewry on the Eve of the Arab Conquest", *Journal of the Palestinian Oriental Society* 15 (1935), 282-7; for the general situation see A. Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry* (London 1971), 42-60.
15. E. Fleischer, "Solving the Qiliri Riddle" (Heb.), *Tarbiz* 54 (1984/5), 414; Fleischer (*ibid.*, 403-4) argues that "the commander-in-chief" (*sar Lā-rōsb*) means the leader of the Persians. I am very grateful to Milka Levy-Rubin for advice regarding this *piyyut*.
16. I. Levi ed./tr., "L'apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Široès", *Revue des Etudes Juives* 68 (1914), 135/151. See further K. Hillkowitz, "The Participation of the Jews in the Conquest of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614 A.D." (Heb.), *Zion* 4 (1939), 307-16; M. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine* (Oxford 1976), 259-70. And there is possibly physical evidence: F. Dexinger and W. Seibt, "A Hebrew Lead Seal from the Period of the Sasanian Occupation of Palestine (614-29 AD)", *REJ* 140 (1981), 303-17 (a seal engraved with the words "Josian, *archon*, son of Ep . . . Shalom").
17. *Babylonian Talmud*, Yoma, 10a.
18. Eliezer is possibly alluding to this further on in the poem cited above, when he says: "And destruction/conversion (*šmad*) will be decreed upon them (the people of Israel), for He will ordain the one named Armilus (the last anti-Jewish king; see *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Armilus"), and He will appoint him to exterminate and annihilate. And he will set up an idol in his name and whoever does not prostrate (before it) will be destroyed" (Fleischer, "Qiliri Riddle", 415).
19. II Esdras 6.8, an interpretation from Genesis 25.26.
20. A. Jellinek ed., *Bet ha-Midrash* (Leipzig 1855), 3.78; this portion is translated by B. Lewis, "An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13 (1950), 321-2. Note that this apocalypse goes on to depict the caliph 'Umer as "a lover of Israel" into "restores their breaches and the breaches of the Temple".
21. *Doctrina Jacobi* in Dagron & Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens", 208-9; Gil, *History of Palestine*, 63-4. For some general comments see S. Leder, "The Attitude of the Population, especially the Jews, towards the Arab-Islamic Conquest of Bilad al-Shām and the question of their Role therein", *Die Welt des Orients* 18(1987), 64-71.
22. L. Nemoj, "Al-Qirqisānī's Account of the Jewish Sects", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 7 (1930), 328; he is also said to have been illiterate yet able to produce books, evidently emulating the career of Muḥammad.
23. The fullest account is in *Incerti auctoris chronicon pseudo-Dionysianum II*, ed. J.B. Chabot (CSCO 104 *scr. syri* 53; Paris 1933), 172-4; tr. R. Hespel (CSCO 507 *scr. syri* 213), 130-2. For discussion and further references see J. Starr, "Le mouvement messianique au début du VIIIe siècle", *REJ* 102 (1932), 81-92.
24. A. Jaussen and R. Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie* (Paris 1909-14), 1.148-51, 1.242-3, 2.231-3; see 2.641-4 for Hebrew inscriptions (only eight).
25. S. Krauss, "Talmudische Nachrichten über Arabien", *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 70 (1916), 321-53; *J.E.*, s.v. "Arabia".
26. Its unreliability for at least some events of Arab-Jewish history in Arabia was demonstrated by H.Z. Hirschberg, "Arabic Sources for the History of Jews in Arabia" (Heb.), *Zion* 10 (1945), 81-101; 11 (1946), 17-37.
27. M. Lecker, "A Note on Early Marriage Links between Qurayshīs and Jewish Women", *JSAI* 10 (1987), 17-39; I. Lichtenstadter, "Some References to Jews in Pre-Islamic Arabic Literature", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 10 (1940), 185-94; J. Horowitz, "Judæo-Arab Relations in Pre-Islamic Times", *Islamic Culture* 3 (1929),

- 161-99; S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York 1952-83), 3.XVI. The Jews of Arabia are mentioned as a diaspora community in a poem of Eliezer ben Qilir (d. c. 630s): E. Fleischer, "New Light on Qiliri" (Heb.), *Tarbiz* 50 (1980-1), 297.
28. D.S. Margoliouth, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites prior to the Rise of Islam* (Schweich Lecture 1921; London 1924), 58.
29. It is also found in the *Kitāb al-amwāl* of Ibn Zanjūya (d. 248) and the *Tārīkh* of Ibn Abī Khaythama (d. 279), but these would still seem to rely upon the recensions of Abū 'Ubayd and of Ibn Ishāq. See A. Goto, "The Constitution of Medina", *Orient* (Tokyo) 18 (1982), 1-4.
30. The 'Constitution' is found in Ibn Hishām = *Das Leben Muhammed's nach Muhammed ibn Ishāq, bearbeitet von 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām* ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen 1858-60), 341-4; Abū 'Ubayd ibn Sallām, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, ed. M.K. Harās (Cairo 1968), 290-4. It is excerpted, translated and commented upon by R.B. Serjeant, "The *Sunnah Jāmi'a*, Pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the *Tabrīm* of Yathrib: *Analysis and Translation of the Documents Comprised in the So-called 'Constitution of Medina'*", *BSOAS* 41 (1978), 1-42. Its authenticity is argued for by J. Wellhausen, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten* (Berlin 1889), 4.80-1; A.J. Wensinck, *Muhamad and the Jews of Medina* (tr. W. Behn; Freiburg 1975), 64-8; P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge 1980), 7. When referring to the document I follow the division into articles of Wellhausen and Wensinck, and the reading of Ibn Ishāq unless indicated otherwise.
31. Though both sources give evidence of at least some friendly Jews (e.g. Qur'an 3.113, 3.199, 4.46, 4.162; Ibn Hishām, 353-4), and so do not exclude Arab-Jewish involvement.
32. Wellhausen, *Skizzen*, 4.75, 81-3; Wensinck, *Jews of Medina*, 68-71.
33. W.M. Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford 1956), 227-8; I accept, however, his point that parts of the document may have been drafted at different times (*ibid.*, 225-6), though Serjeant's division of the Constitution into seven different documents seems to me excessive ("The *Sunna Jāmi'a*").
34. B. Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews: a Re-examination* (New Delhi 1979), 40-6.
35. Moreover, there is frequent reference to the Constitution in the *sīra* from soon after Muḥammad's arrival in Medina; cf. Ibn Hishām, 354, 388.
36. Abū 'Ubayd, *Amwāl*, 192; U. Rubin, "The 'Constitution of Medina' — Some Notes", *Studia Islamica* 62 (1985), 9-10.
37. Ibn Hishām, 351-2; noted by Watt, *Muhamad at Medina*, 227.
38. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-bari sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Bulaq 1883), 10.192; see Rubin, "Constitution of Medina", 7-9.
39. Wensinck, *Jews of Medina*, 52 n. 1, 68; cf. R.B. Serjeant, "The 'Constitution of Medina'", *Islamic Quarterly* 8 (1964), 12. Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 239-41, recognises the religious character of the *umma*.
40. Qur'an 2.213, 5.48, 10.19, 11.118, 16.93, 21.92, 23.52, 42.8, 43.33.
41. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaf* (Beirut 1970-2), 5.188 (*kāna Yabūd yagbzūn ma'a 'l-nabī fa-yushim lahum ka-sibām al-Muslimīn*).
42. M. Gil, "The Constitution of Medina: a reconsideration", *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974), 60-5; Wellhausen, *Skizzen*, 4.80; F.M. Denny, "Ummah in the Constitution of Medina", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36 (1977), 44; cf. Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews*, 49-50, whose Jews are "not in a position to play a significant role".
43. Rubin, "Constitution of Medina", 16-17.

44. M. Schreiner, "Note sur les Juifs dans l'Islam", *REJ* 29 (1894), 206–8 (citing al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*).
45. M.J. Kister, "... *illa bi-ḥaqqibi* . . . : a Study of an Early Ḥadīth", *JSAI* 5 (1984), 33–52.
46. Using the word in its widest possible sense.
47. They range from the broad works of A. Geiger, *Was hat Muḥammad aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen* (Bonn 1833) and C.C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York 1933), to investigations into individual Muslim practices, e.g. P. Crone, "Jāhili and Jewish Law: the *Qasāma*", *JSAI* 4 (1984), 153–201; M.J. Kister, "The Jews of Arabia — some notes" (Heb.), *Tarbiz* 48 (1979), 236–40 (on *istinjā*).
48. See the comments of J. Finkel, "Old Israelite Tradition in the Koran", *PAAJR* 2 (1931), 21.
49. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. R. Hussey (Oxford 1860), 2.671–2 (6.38); for the background to this report see F. Millar, "Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam", *JJS* 44 (1993), 23–45. In addition, one might note the mention in the *Mishna*, Nidda 7.3, of converts to Judaism in Reqem who, if this is to be identified with Petra (F. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine*, Paris 1967, 2.436), would presumably be Arabs; and also the appearance of the name Abraham 74 times on sixth-century inscriptions at Nessana near Gaza (A. Neger, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Neger*, Jerusalem 1981, 76).
50. The question of *dīn Ibrāhīm*, the cultic corollary to Abrahamic descent, is complex; for discussion see I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington 1989), 167–180; U. Rubin, "Ḥanīfiyya and Ka'ba. An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of *dīn Ibrāhīm*", *JSAI* 13 (1990), 85–112.
51. Patkanian, *Patmuti'wn*, 104; Macler, *Histoire*, 95–6.
52. The following has been reconstructed from Michael Syrus, 4.405/2.403, and *Chronicon ad 1234*, 227–8, who are both drawing on Dionysius. Agapius (d. c. 950) and the Greek chronicler Theophanes (d. 817) share with Dionysius a mid-eighth-century Syriac source for many of their notices on events in the East, but neither transmit this particular account so one cannot be sure if it is from their common source (see L.I. Conrad, "Muḥammad and the Faith of Islam in Eastern Christian Discussions under the Early Abbasids", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, forthcoming).
53. *Chronicon ad 1234* simply says, "while so engaged in the country, he saw the belief in one God and it was pleasing to his eyes", so Michael may be specifying Jews for polemical reasons.
54. Commentators on the Qur'ān consider this verse a reference to the Prophet's seizure of the lands of the Jews of Qurayza — e.g. Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qur'an* (Cairo 1903), 21.86; but Yahyā b. Ādam, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, ed. T.W. Juynboll (Leiden 1896), § 78, 18, says it intends "whatever the Muslims capture until the day of Resurrection".
55. E.g. Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje *et al.* (Leiden 1879–1901), 1.2254, 2284, 2289.
56. Wansborough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 116–7. The provision of a response to this question is the subject of my Ph.D. thesis: *Seeing Islam as Others saw it: an Analysis of the non-Muslim Sources relating to the Rise of Islam* (Oxford 1993).
57. *Doctrina Jacobi* in Dagron & Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens", 208–9. The report, related by a Jew, is said to be false and was probably included in order to defuse the rumours about a prophet that were circulating among Jews in Palestine.
58. For messianic feeling among Jews in Arabia see: H. Lammens, *L'Arabie occidentale à la veille de l'Hégire* (Beirut 1928), 89, 99; B. Heller, "Yoūscha' al-Akbar et les Juifs de Kheybar dans le roman d' 'Antar: un mouvement messianique dans l'ancienne Arabie", *REJ* 84 (1927),

- 113-37; H.Z. Hirschberg, "Traces of the Messiah in Arabia" (Heb.) in *id. ed., Vienna Rabbinical Seminary Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem 1946), 112-24.
59. *J.E.*, s.v. "Eschatology"; Crone & Cook, *Hagarism*, 8.
60. Patkanian, *Patmuti'un*, 109-10; Macler, *Histoire*, 102-3.
61. P. Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde: étude critique sur l'Islam primitif* (Paris 1911-13); M.J. Kister. "A Booth like the Booth of Moses: a Study of an Early *Ḥadīth*", *BSOAS* 25 (1962), 150-5; W. Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies in *Ḥimṣ* in the Umayyad Age", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 31 (1986), 141-85; S. Bashear, "Apocalyptic and other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: a Review of Arabic Sources", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, ser. iii, 1 (1991), 173-207; M. Cook, "The Heraclian Dynasty in Early Muslim Eschatology", *Al-Qantara* 13 (1992), 3-23; L.I. Conrad, Portents of the Hour: *Ḥadīth* and History in the First Century AH" (forthcoming in *Der Islam*).

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