

Title: Religious Communities of the Near East from Roman to Islamic Rule: Sectarianism and Identity in an Age of Transition (5th-8th C)

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This study endeavors to set Christian writing about Islam from the period of the Islamic expansion in the broader context of Christian theological development in Late Antiquity. To this end, this study traces elements of continuity in Christian thought from the Christological debates of the fifth and sixth century, particularly from the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and the resulting emergence of the communities of Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites as the dominant strands of Christianity in the Near East at the rise of Islam. In order to understand how Christians began to integrate the Islamic expansion into their thinking, this study focuses particularly on Christian writings about Islam and the descriptions of Muslims in Christian writings from the rise of Islam, through the seventh and early eighth centuries, up to the Abbasid revolution in 750. It also considers the contemporary descriptions of Christians in the Qur'ān, in order to illustrate that these descriptions have both a different starting point and a different focus, suggesting that both Christian discussions about Muslims and Muslim discussions about Christians were internal discussions, taking place within each tradition, and do not represent true inter-religious dialogue. In this way, this study attempts to illustrate how the rise of Islam, the emergence of the caliphate and the resulting separation of the Near Eastern churches from the Christian hierarchy in Rome and Constantinople influenced Christian identity in the Near East. The writings of the seventh century, and the Christian identity they preserve, emerge as a hybrid, integrating elements of the competing, pre-Islamic concerns of doctrinal purity versus church unity, but also attempting to address, in a variety of ways, the initial fear over Muslim victory and the eventual acceptance of Muslim rule as the new status quo in the Near East.

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Religious Communities of the Near East from Roman to Islamic Rule: Sectarianism and Identity in an Age of Transition (5th-8th C)



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To Sarah, for her patience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to set Christian writing about Islam from the period of the Islamic expansion in the larger context of Christian theological development in Late Antiquity. To this end, this study demonstrates the elements of continuity from the Christological debates of the fifth and sixth century, focusing particularly on the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and the resulting emergence of the communities of Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites as the dominant strands of Christianity in the Near East at the rise of Islam. In order to understand how Christians began to integrate the Islamic expansion into their thinking, this study focuses particularly on Christian writings about Islam and the descriptions of Muslims in Christian writings from the rise of Islam to the Abbasid revolution in 750. It also considers the contemporary descriptions of Christians in the Qur'ān, in order to illustrate that these descriptions have both a different starting point and a different focus, suggesting that both Christian discussions about Muslims and Muslim discussions about Christians were internal discussions, taking place within each tradition, and do not represent true inter-religious dialogue. In this way, this study

endeavors to illustrate how the rise of Islam, the emergence of the caliphate, and the resulting development of a new, mixed society influenced Christian identity in the Near East.

1.1 Structure

The present study is divided into five chapters. This chapter outlines the background and basis for this study, giving the structure of the work (section 1.1), the chronological period under consideration (section 1.2), the methodological basis (section 1.3), and the source basis (section 1.4) for the research. It closes with a discussion of the intended impact of the study (section 1.5), placing it in the larger context of modern secondary scholarship on the transition from the Christian Near East of Late Antiquity to the Muslim Near East of the Medieval period. Although there are numerous studies on the first two Islamic centuries in both the field of Late Antiquity and the field of Islamic studies aimed at situating the rise of Islam in the broader context of the Late Antique Near East, many of these studies have focused on the political and military history of the period or the sociological effects of Muslim rule. It is not the intention of the present author to dismiss or downplay the importance of the political and military history of the Islamic expansion. However, this study argues that this academic focus gives only half of the picture. The Islamic expansion instituted lasting changes to the political, social and cultural image of the Near East, but also significantly influenced theological thought in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Chapter two focuses on the historical background for the development of Christian theology in the seventh and eighth centuries. As will be discussed in detail in section 1.2, the general chronological period for this study is the seventh and early eighth centuries. However, as this study tracks developments in Christian identity that arose out of a pre-existent system of thought, it is important to consider this historical background, in particular the history of the Church Councils

of the fifth and sixth centuries that gave rise to the major Near Eastern sects. This chapter outlines the broader theological and political context for the calling of the Council of Chalcedon, in particular the ongoing struggle for authority between the capitals of Rome and Constantinople, both between one another and with the major regional centers of thought, especially Antioch and Alexandria. It also discusses how resistance to the Christological definition set at Chalcedon began to influence both theology and Christian identity in the fifth and sixth century, as the intellectual movements opposing and defending the doctrine slowly coalesced into distinct sects. Finally, this chapter outlines the attempts, both from within the church and by the Byzantine emperor, to end the schism and preserve correct doctrine in the fifth and sixth century, ending with a discussion of the Monoenergist controversy, which served as the immediate context for Muslim incursion into the Near East.

Chapter three discusses some examples of Christian writings about Islam, focusing particularly on works produced by members of the church hierarchy and Near Eastern monastic communities among both the Chalcedonians and the anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites. It focuses particularly on authors about whom at least some biographical evidence survives, as well as using the lives of these authors as a starting point to discuss the potential context for these work's composition, in order to understand the works' intended reception by contemporaneous Christian communities. Thus, this chapter discusses the works of Sophronius of Jerusalem, Anastasius of Sinai, and John of Damascus as examples of Chalcedonian writing about Islam and Athanasius of Balad and Jacob of Edessa for the Monophysite side. These authors also cover the chronological period of the present study, in order to demonstrate how Christian conception of Muslims and Islam began to change with time, as the indigenous Christian communities of the Near East began to accept Muslim rule as the new status quo.

Chapter four focuses on how Christian conceptions of Muslims and Islam were influenced by the emergence of genres of Christian writing that addressed both directly, and how, in turn, these genres created tropes about Muslims and Islam that further defined Christian identity in this period. To this end, this chapter considers the genres of apocalypses, martyrologies and apologetics, considering the common themes of several examples of each for how these works characterized Christians and Muslims. Having discussed the broad common characteristics about Christian writings about Islam in chapter three, this chapter also gives further details of how those broad trends varied in response to specific contexts, in particular the potential danger to Christianity in the Near East of mass conversion to Islam.

Thus, apocalypses paint a graphic and horrific image of Christian conversion to Islam, describing it as a sign of the End Times, lending cosmic significance to its Christian audience's current suffering. Martyrologies stress the righteousness of persevering in Christian faith even in the face of execution, while simultaneously illustrating that conversion was not actually required for Christians in most contexts. Finally, Christian apologetic responses to Islam, a genre that only begins to emerge at the very end of period for this study, offered direct responses to Islam, often highlighting both the superiority of Christianity and the security offered by Muslim rule, effectively defending both conditions as experienced by their potential audience. In this way, these genres demonstrate how Christian authors used imagery about Muslims to address directly Christian concerns about maintaining their identity under Muslim rule.

The final chapter of this work discusses Muslim sources about Christianity in the seventh century. Unfortunately, whereas for Christian sources, there is both a well-understood context of Church Councils and imperial policy which can be used to consider Christian responses to Islam and a large corpus of texts generally agreed to date to this period, neither point is true of Muslim

sources. Thus, this chapter also discusses the limitations in applying a similar methodology to the development of early Islamic thought, before turning to discuss imagery of Christians in the Qur'ān, a text generally, although not universally, dated to the period of the seventh century in modern scholarship. It gives some preliminary discussions of the Qur'ānic conception of Christians, both the contemporary communities and the historical community of Jesus, illustrating how these images appear to address the early community of believers rather than any real, current community of Christians. In this way, this chapter is intended to further demonstrate that the predominate source for Christian conceptions of Islam and Muslim conceptions of Christianity, at least in the case of the Qur'ān, was internal. For Christians, these ideas emerged out of the existing competing narratives of preserving the unity of the church versus the correct formulation of doctrine that had emerged in the fifth and sixth centuries, and for Muslims, these ideas emerged in part for the Qur'ān's larger definition of prophetic office and revelation, which attempted to reclaim the Biblical narrative of revelation in order to explain the need for the Qur'ān's own revelation as a correction to both Christianity and Judaism, while simultaneously accepting the continuation of both communities in the period of the text's compilation.

Thus, the overall structure of this study endeavors to frame the relevant issues regarding the development of Christian and Muslim theological thought in a historical context, comparing the available sources against the larger backdrop of the Islamic expansion. As will be discussed in more detail in section 1.4, it considers sources as intellectual or literary creations of specific time periods that give evidence of the concerns of the communities which produced them. For this reason, it is structured to demonstrate the development of thought across the seventh and early eighth centuries, focusing on chronological progression and intellectual continuity to give context to the available sources. This chronological progression is repeated from chapters two, three and four to

chapter five, moving from the established indigenous Christian communities, who were forced to integrate the rise of Islam into their existing theological methodologies, to the nascent Islamic community, for whom the period of the Islamic expansion was also the foundational period of theological thought. In this way, the structure of the work is intended to frame the available source material and the theological mindset of the period in the larger context of the Islamic expansion, and the resulting social and political changes throughout the Near East.

1.2 Chronology

In order to understand how the rise of Islam influenced the writing of theology in the Near East, both among the indigenous Christian communities and the nascent Islamic tradition, the primary chronology period of focus is the period c. 600-750 CE, that is, the period from the rise of Islam to the end of the Abbasid revolution. However, one central aspect of this line of study is to compare the dual foci of contemporary Christian thought in this period – addressing the rise of Islam and the success of the Muslim expansion on the one hand, and continuing the sectarian debates that had framed much of Christian theological thought throughout the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, on the other. For this reason, chapter two of the present work will start in the fifth century with the Council of Chalcedon and its immediate context, and focus on tracing the development of theological thought from 451 to 610, in order to give sufficient background on the theological concepts which will be the central focus of the remaining work.

There are several reasons to focus on the period of the seventh and eighth centuries in order to study the effects of the rise of Islam on Near Eastern theological thought. The start date of the present study is naturally dictated by the rise of Islam itself, c. 610, when, according to Muslim tradition, Muḥammad, then around 40 years of age, saw a vision of the Archangel Gabriel, who told

him, *Iqrā!* (*Recite!*), and instructed him to transmit what would become the earliest verses of the Qur'ān. However, “the rise of Islam” does not represent a single year, or even a clearly-delineated, discrete period of time. Again according to Muslim tradition, the revelation of the Qur'ān extended across the next twenty years, until the Prophet's death c. 632 and the codification of the Qur'ān was not undertaken until after his death, and at the earliest only took place in the caliphate of Uthmān (644-656). Moreover, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter five, modern Western scholarship has often approached this traditional Muslim dating with skepticism, suggesting instead that the codification of the Qur'ān could have extended throughout the seventh century or even taken place in the Abbasid period.

Calculating a start date for the first interactions between Christians and the nascent Muslim community is similarly complicated, due to the relatively limited source material from the first half of the seventh century. The first references to interactions with Christians in the Muslim tradition come from the Qur'ān, and as will be discussed in detail in chapter five, assume the presence of Christians in Arabia with whom the Muslim audience should already be familiar.¹ However, the oldest manuscript to reference the Muslims in Christian sources only dates from c. 640, a brief reference to the conquest of Gaza in the works of Thomas the Presbyter,² and this passing reference reveals no awareness of Islam as a religion, but rather presumes that the Muslims were a group of Arabian raiders, as had been experienced by the settled communities of the Levant in earlier centuries. As will be discussed in chapter three, according to the extant Christian literary sources,

¹ Thus, for example, “And thou wilt find the nearest to them in affection to those who believe those who say: Lo! We are Christians...” (Q. 5:82), which presumes a pre-existent tradition of interaction between Christians and the pre-Islamic Arabians, giving permission for this tradition of interaction to continue. Similarly, there are numerous verses which instruct the Muslims to address Christians (2:139-142, 5:14-15), again presuming that such instruction is possible.

² Thomas the Presbyter, *Chronicle* = CSCO 3-4, pp. 77-154 at p. 148, as dated in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 118-20.

it is the period from 630-650/8-29, corresponding with the Muslim incursion into the Levant, Egypt and Mesopotamia, when Christian authors began to discuss Islam and Muslims with reference to the theological significance for the rise of Islam and the Muslims' military victory.

However, in order to consider how the growing awareness of Islamic religious thought impacted Christian theology requires focusing on a much longer chronological period. These earliest sources generally do not demonstrate any awareness of Islamic religious thought. Perhaps the earliest example of any source giving evidence of an awareness of the theological claims of Islam comes from a brief homily in Coptic on the child saints of Babylon, which Robert Hoyland has argued should be placed in an Egyptian context in the early 640s, contemporary with the first Muslim incursion into that territory. The short text argues for the value of true – that is, Christian – piety over the false piety of the Muslims who “give themselves to prostitution, massacre and lead into captivity the sons of men, saying: ‘We both fast and pray.’”³ The text hardly represents an in-depth consideration of Muslim theology, but nevertheless does show an awareness both of some of the rites and rituals of the Muslims – fasting and praying – as well as of the theological significance of these actions – that the Muslims claim, however wrongly in the view of this author, to be deeply pious and devoted to their faith and the asceticism it required.

It is only in the second half of the seventh century that the first Christian responses to Islamic theology appear. Perhaps the first source to demonstrate any awareness of the writings of the Qur'an is Anastasius of Sinai, writing in the late seventh century, nearly fifty years after the first Muslim incursion into the Levant.⁴ It would be another half-century before John of Damascus

³ *Homily on the Child Saints of Babylon* = Henri de Vis (ed.), “Panégyrique des Trois Saints Enfants de Babylone” in de Vis (ed.), *Homélie coptes de la Vaticane* (Copenhagen, 1929), v. 2, pp. 58-120, translation in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 121.

⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 93

would attempt to engage Islam in a theological debate, however polemical. Even in his attempts to understand Islam, John still defines Muslims in Christian terms, accusing them of Arianism for their failure to accept the divinity of Christ. As will be discussed in chapter three, even John of Damascus devotes only one short chapter of his lengthy heresiography to Islam.⁵ Christian apologetic responses dedicated exclusively to refuting Islamic thought would similarly not appear until the early eighth century.

The present work will outline the long arc of this gradual development of Christian thought on Islam, in order to demonstrate how Christian authors in the Late Antique period struggled to integrate the rise of Islam and the subsequent success of the Muslim expansion into their existing heuristic model. Thus the Abbasid caliphate and the appearance of the first Christian-Muslim apologetics mark the end-point for the current study. Again, this is a loose rather than a specific period, although the date of 750 often appears in this work as a convenient shorthand for this end-point. The Abbasid caliphate and the so-called “Golden Age of Islam” signals several important changes in Muslim-Christian relations, which makes it a useful endpoint for this study.⁶

In particular, the Abbasid caliphate saw the start of significant changes to the political environment of the Near East, changes which had repercussions for theological exchange. One of the most visible changes was the shift of the Muslim capital from Damascus to the new city of Baghdad, a visible representation of a larger change in the new caliphate, that of the drift of

⁵ For a full discussion of how the sections of Islam fit into *The Fountain of Knowledge*, as well as an argument for the text’s authenticity as part of the larger work, see Daniel J. Sahas (ed.), *John of Damascus on Islam: The “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 51-66.

⁶ The Golden Age of Islam is a problematic concept, one that was at least partly created by scholars of Islamic studies, but it is still the case that the ninth and tenth centuries were very different environments for Muslim-Christian relations. The existence of the concept of “the Golden Age of Islam,” however, probably owes a great deal to the mid-twentieth century historians who wrote about the Abbasid caliphate and the Islamicization of the caliphate, who tended to rely rather uncritically on the narrative of continuity and development found in late Abbasid and early Medieval histories and travelogues; in particular M. Lombard’s *The Golden Age of Islam* (Amsterdam, 1975). See, by way of a comparison, Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World: The Rise and Fall of Islam’s Greatest Dynasty* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. xix-xxiv.

attention and culture eastward, away from the Levant and Syria and their Byzantine-influenced communities to the eastern, Persian-influenced territories of the Iranian plateau and Central Asia.⁷ The core of the Abbasid revolution began in Khurāsān, and in their new capital of Baghdad, the Abbasid caliphs began to draw on Sassanian court traditions, shifting the political and cultural focus away from the Byzantine-influence territories of the Levant and Syria.

Moreover, the Abbasid shift of the caliphal capital from Damascus to Baghdad affected the Muslims' relationship with the Byzantines and the character of the Byzantine-Islamic border by effectively putting the two capitals out of reach of one another. The Byzantines remained the most visible enemies of Islam throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, and the Umayyad caliphs could easily conduct attacks against them from their capital of Damascus, sending bi-yearly raids into Anatolia throughout the late seventh and early eighth century, and even managing to besiege Constantinople twice.⁸ Similarly, many of the Christian authors discussed in this study still felt themselves part of the same religious community as the Byzantines, with many being directly involved in Byzantine theological disputes, such as the role John of Damascus played in Byzantine iconoclasm. The situation was rather different from Baghdad – although the Abbasids continued the traditional raids, only a handful of Abbasid caliphs were reported to have visited the Anatolian frontier personally – and as will be seen particularly in the first examples of Christian apologies, the

⁷ For a broader discussion on the eastern drift of the Abbasid revolution and the early Abbasid caliphate, see Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, 1979), Salih Sa'id Agha, *The Revolution which toppled the Umayyads: Neither Arab nor 'Abbāsīd* (Leiden, 2003) and J. L. Ehinger, "Less is More: Islamic Theology as a Tool of Large-Scale Territorial Control" in the forthcoming proceedings of the 2010 conference *Authority and Control in the Countryside*.

⁸ Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (eds. and trans.), *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284-813* (Oxford, 1997), p. 447. Theophanes actually gives the date of the siege as 674 - for issues regarding dating in the chronicle, see Mango and Scott's introduction, pp. lxiii-lxxiv, Marek Jankowiak, "The First Arab Siege of Constantinople," *Travaux et Mémoires* 17 (2013) pp. 237-330.

Christian communities of the Near East similarly appear to come to accept Muslim rule as the new status quo, focuses instead on the potential benefits to be found in Abbasid patronage.⁹

Thus, a rough chronological period appears from the rise of Islam to the end of the Abbasid revolution, one that encompasses the gradual development of Christian awareness of Islam, as well as the earliest examples of Islamic theology and religious thought. It is a period marked by changes, both political and social, with the establishment of a new ruling class throughout the Near East, as well as the appearance of two similar but competing world-views, both of which claimed to be the final revelation to humanity before the End, both of which claimed relevance to the whole of humanity, and both of which understood themselves and their message as the completion of a cosmic history that had begun with Creation. This period corresponds roughly to the period of the Islamic expansion, which had slowed considerable by the period of the Abbasid revolution. By the early decades of the eighth century, the Muslim army had successfully taken territory from the tip of Spain, across North Africa, the Near East and the Iranian plateau. Although in the centuries that followed, they would capture several of the Mediterranean islands, the borders of the Islamic world would remain largely the same from the end of the eighth century until the Crusader period. Thus this study is concerned with a period of rapid expansion, with corresponding rapid changes in politics, society and theology.

⁹ For the Abbasid relationship to the frontier, see al-Tabari, Bonner, Salih Sa'id Agha, *The Revolution which toppled the Umayyads: Neither Arab nor 'Abbāsid* (Leiden, 2003) and J. L. Ehinger, "Less is More: Islamic Theology as a Tool of Large-Scale Territorial Control" in the forthcoming proceedings of the 2010 conference *Authority and Control in the Countryside*.

1.3 Methodology

As will be demonstrated in this work, the rise of Islam and the Islamic expansion affected Christian identity in many ways, influencing not only the social and political structures of the Near East, but how the Near Eastern communities understood their own identity and their relationship to God, as well. This study arises out of a modern corpus of secondary literature in Islamic studies aimed at cataloguing the existing evidence for Christian responses to Islam, such as Robert Hoyland's *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (1997) and David Thomas and Barbara Roggema's *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographic History* (2009), works that intend to give the full corpus of Christian or non-Muslim sources which mention or describe the rise of Islam or the Islamic expansion. However, due to this very large corpus, these works offer only minimal analysis on the broader themes or development of thought found in these sources. For this reason, the present study endeavors to focus on one particular thematic element of these writings, how these authors defined their own character and that of the religious Other, and trace the development of this element across the seventh and eighth centuries.

Discussions which aim to give more insight into how the nascent Muslim community and the indigenous Christian communities of the Near East began to interact in the seventh and eighth centuries have become increasingly more common in the academic fields of Islamic studies and Late Antiquity. In particular the 1990s and 2000s have seen a proliferation of works about the interactions between Christians and Muslims in this period. This recent interest in the subject is due in no small part to political events of these two decades, which have added a sense of urgency to understanding the relationship between the two communities, both for those within these academic fields, as well for those outside of it. It has also pushed to the forefront of that discussion

some very particular aspects of the political, cultural, social and intellectual interactions between Christians and Muslims. In particular, there are works which focus on the social aspects of day-to-day life between these religious communities, such as W. M. Watt's 1991 work *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* or Hugh Goddard's 2000 work *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*. There are also those works that focus on the theological rationale of warfare and martyrdom, such as in the works of James Turner Johnson, *Just War and Jihad* (1991, edited jointly with John Kelsay) and *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions* (1997) and Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Border* (1996) and *Jihad in Islamic History* (2006).

The practical implications for these works in the modern day are obvious – for the first type, to offer models or alternatives for the current day-to-day interactions between Christians and Muslims, and for the second, to offer counter-arguments and defenses against those claiming the mantle of martyrdom today. However, as useful as these works are, they offer only a partial view of the interactions between Christianity and Islam. In general, more scholarly attention has been paid to the interactions between Christians and Muslims – that is, the sociological perspective of how the people of these two communities survived, interacted and eventually, in many cases, merged, to make up the character of the modern Middle East – than has been paid to the interactions between Christianity and Islam as intellectual and spiritual communities concerned with maintaining the true path to God.

This same socio-political focus applies to studies of the Islamic expansion, as well. The military, political and social history of the Islamic expansion has been written about extensively, both in academic works, such as Hugh Kennedy's *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphate* (2004, 2nd edition) and the Darwin Press series *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* (1992-2006), as well

as in works intended for a more lay audience, including Kennedy's *The Great Arab Conquest* (2007) and Robert Hoyland's *In God's Path* (2014), works whose purpose is to create a continuous narrative for the Islamic expansion. It is not the intention of the present work to question the significance of these works – indeed, the established narrative for the Islamic expansion plays a central role in this study, as providing the context in which the relevant theological sources are analyzed. However, this study does endeavor to demonstrate that this military and socio-political focus gives only part of the story of the Islamic expansion. In many ways, this work attempts to bridge the two existing corpuses discussed so far, reconsidering the catalogued corpus of early Christian writings on Islam in the broader context of the Islamic expansion.

Thus this consideration of Christian identity stands as part of a growing field of intellectual histories focused on the period of the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries. As will be discussed in section 1.5, it is also part of a growing range of works focused on the seventh century, concerned with understanding the period of transition from the Late Antique world to the Islamic caliphate. There has been a growing interest in close readings of Late Antique texts, not only for their narrative of the events, but for their historiographical and intellectual assumptions. The emergence of new sources, such as Robert Hoyland's reconstruction and translation of Theophilus of Edessa (2012), has further expanded the available source basis for these close readings.

At the same time, more and more works have relied on close readings to start to connect the Late Antique world with the early Islamic world, either in demonstrating the strands of political and social continuity from the fifth and sixth centuries, like in James Howard-Johnston's *Witnesses to World Crisis* (2010), or, as will be discussed in chapter five, using the context of Late Antique culture as offering perspectives on the emergence of Islam and the Qur'ān, as in Gabriel Said Reynold's edited volume *New Perspective on the Qur'ān* (2011). These studies all stem from a close

reading of their respective sources, in order to understand the underlying historiographic assumptions of these work, and to discuss, in turn, how the unique historical climate in which these work were composed influenced their perspective.

This study employs the same basic methodology, using close readings to discuss the underlying assumptions of the author, but focuses particularly on seventh and eighth century authors' assumptions about their own identities and those of the Other, be it Christian or Muslim, a subject that has not received as much consideration in the existing corpus. There have been some work on specific aspects of this intellectual exchange, in particular on the possible use of the Bible or other early Christian writings in the Qur'ān.¹⁰ Similarly, there is a growing corpus of secondary literature discussing the development of religious thought in the Abbasid period.¹¹ But the question of how the institution of Muslim rule altered how the communities of the Near East understood their own identity as religious communities in the seventh century has been largely neglected.

For this reason, this study focuses on the question of how the rise of Islam impacted on the writing of Christian theology. Although there is a robust corpus of secondary literature discussing Christian theology in the seventh century, these works have generally not considered the rise of Islam alongside the effects of the sectarianism from the Church Councils of the fifth and sixth century or the ethnic and regional variations of the Byzantine empire, focusing instead on a single vector of impact or interaction. This study is intended to expand the work already available

¹⁰ See, for example, Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (London, 2001), the works of Kenneth Cragg, including *The Arab Christian: A History of the Middle East* (London, 1992) and *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* (Oxford, 1999), as well as the growing corpus of works dealing with the Bahira legend and the contemporary claims for a Christian source to Islam, in particular the recent works of Elizabeth Key Fowden, *The barbarian plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, (Berkeley, 1999) and Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira: Eastern Christian apologetics and apocalyptic in response to Islam* (Leiden, 2009).

¹¹ For example, Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: 'Abd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden, 2004) and David Thomas (ed. and trans.), *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam: Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's "Against the Trinity"* (Cambridge, 1992) and *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's "Against the Incarnation"* (Cambridge, 2002).

regarding Christian identity, such as David Olster's *Roman Defeat, Christian Response* (1994), which focuses predominately on Chalcedonian responses to Islam and, in particular, the effects of the rise of Islam on anti-Jewish polemics, or Phil Booth's *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (2013), which considers the rise of Islam as part of the political and social climate for the Monoenergist and Monothelite debates within Chalcedonian Christianity. As has already been said, a similar focus on a single kind of interaction has also been applied to works on the initial Christian responses to Islam, focusing on ethnic or political categories,¹² rather than addressing the question of how the rise of Islam and interactions between the variety of Christians and the early community of Muslims impacted on Christian identity among the various sects of the Near East.

Again, this is not to question the importance of these focused studies – rather, the present study is possible only because this work has already been done, and it makes significant use of this vast corpus of secondary literature in order to support arguments for the context and audience for the works considered here. In this way, this study asks broader questions about how Christian perspectives on Christian identity evolved over time, relying on a range of voices from among both the Chalcedonian and Monophysite communities of the Near East. Indeed, in terms of Christian identity, the most significant factor for change which emerges in this study is time, as Christian authors first integrated the rise of Islam into identities previously based on the Christological debates of the past centuries, and then came to accept Muslim rule as the new status quo, with a new identity of what it meant to be Chalcedonian or Monophysite within the Muslim caliphate emerging in the early eighth century.

¹² See, for example Brock, "Syriac views of the Emergence of Islam" in Juynboll, *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*; Cameron, "The eastern provinces in the seventh century AD: Hellenism and the emergence of Islam" in S. Said, *Ἑλληνισμός: Quelques jalons pour une histoire de l'identité grecque*; Griffith, "Melkites in the Umayyad Era," in *Patterns of Communal Identity in the Late Antique and Early Islamic Near East*.

However, although the broadest current of change over time in this study arises out of Christian acceptance of Muslim rule, the aspects of this strand of Christian identity are by no means consistent across all writers within any given sect or region in this period. For this reason, the variety in kinds of sources considered here – and the supporting corpus of second literature which allows for the discussion of these sources' context and audience – also allows for further discussion of how this slow process of acceptance of Muslim rule varied depending on the author's sectarian allegiance or background, as well as how characterizations of both Christian and Muslim identity were influenced by a work's genre and intended audience. Thus, many of the characterizations of both Christians and Muslims considered here are presumed to be literary creations, and considered not for what they convey about the day-to-day life of Christians and Muslim in the seventh century, but for what they demonstrate of that author's expectations or fears for the survival of Christianity under Islam.

1.4 Sources

As the focus of this study is theological, the source basis can also be broadly defined as theological – that is, works that claim to be interested primarily in illustrating religious principles, such as sermons, homilies, apocalypses, apologetics and saints' lives. However, although these works claim to focus on religious principles, this is not to say that this is their only concern. Instead, these works use religious principles to discuss contemporary history, politics, and the social and cultural changes of their own time. For the Christian sources, this link between religious thought and political and social history is often indirect, with authors drawing on Biblical imagery and eschatological parallels to make their point. Indeed, as will be discussed in chapters three and four,

it is in this context that references to Islam first appear, with the Muslims serving as a motif of divine punishment, rather than being addressed directly in the text.

As chapter two is intended to demonstrate the evolution of Chalcedonianism and anti-Chalcedonianism from intellectual movements to distinct communities, most of the sources treated there are used to illustrate the ongoing changes in thinking among leaders on both sides, and therefore span a range of genres and types – Council Acts, letters, sermons, homilies, and hagiographies are cited to illustrate the ways in which concerns over correct Christology were incorporated into broader questions of Christian identity and Christian practice. It is also intended to demonstrate the development of the movements for and against Chalcedonianism from the fifth century to the seventh, and so covers works across this chronological period. It is of course impossible to give a full account of all of the competing voices in the church in the fifth and sixth centuries in a single study, let alone in a single chapter, and thus, it is important to stress that this chapter is intended as an overview, not an exhaustive study, highlighting some themes, particularly with regard to Christian identity among both Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians, which would develop further in the seventh century.

It introduces the context for Chalcedon through the lens of the Acts of the Councils of First and Second Ephesus, the Acts of Chalcedon themselves, and the historical accounts of the religio-political circumstances as preserved in the chronicles of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor and Theophanes the Confessor. It progresses through some of the major voices on both sides, discussing the early formulations of anti-Chalcedonian thought in the works of Philoxenus of Mabbug and Severus of Antioch, again considering these works against the political climate of Zeno's *Henotikon*, the late fifth century support of anti-Chalcedonianism, and the later reversal of imperial support, as well as the emergence of neo-Chalcedonianism, focusing particularly on Leontius of Jerusalem's early

attempts to develop a positive definition of Chalcedonian theology. In moving through the sixth century and early seventh century, it includes a discussion of early community formation of both sides, focusing particularly on the emergence of distinct hagiographic traditions, characterized by John Rufus and John Moschus. It closes with the immediate context for the rise of Islam, considering both the religious context of Monoenergism and the political context of the Byzantine-Persian war and Heraclius' coup, as well as the attempts by Heraclius and the anti-Chalcedonians at reconciliation, as explained in the letters of the Patriarch Sergius and denounced in the letters of Sophronius of Jerusalem.

Chapters three and four are focused on this issue of Christian identity in the seventh century, and again, a range of sources are considered in order to illustrate how questions of Christian identity varied between sects, regions, as well as the work's intended audience and style. As the issue of intended audience is especially important for understanding communal identity, these chapters consider sources from two different perspectives. As has already been mentioned, chapter three focuses on works which come from authors about whom there is at least some biographical information, and are also all explicitly addressed to a Christian audience, written for Christians, by Christians. These works still span a range of genres, and much of the discussion on each focuses on how intended audience and reception might have affected the work's conception of Christian identity.

For Chalcedonian works, this chapter examines two sermons by Sophronius of Jerusalem, which appear to have been written framing the Muslim siege of Jerusalem; the *Vitae Dux* and collection of questions and answers of Anastasius of Sinai, and John of Damascus' *De Haeresibus*, which offers insights not only on his perspective on Islam, but also for the continued development of Chalcedonian thought about anti-Chalcedonians. Unfortunately there are fewer sources from

known Monophysite authors which have been consistently shown to date from this period and from the Near Eastern branches of Monophysitism; however, in order to give some conception of how figures of Monophysite authority addressed the rise of Islam, this chapter also discusses a patriarchal letter from Athanasius of Balad, composed while he was Patriarch of Antioch, and the collections of questions and answers of Jacob of Edessa, one of the most influential works for the formation of post-Islamic Monophysite and Syriac identity.

In order to discuss how elements of literature further influence Christian descriptions of both Christians and Muslims, chapter four treats works by genres, in particular genres of Christian writing which presented particular views of the Muslims, Islam, and Muslim rule – apocalypses, martyrologies, and the earliest Christian apologetic responses to Islam. It is in these works that some of the most striking images of Muslims arise – in apocalypses, as God’s Wrath, standing in the armies of the Danielitic apocalypse; in martyrologies as human, but destructive, serving as foils for the pious Christians; and in Christian apologetics characterized with strongly positive characteristics as rulers, while still diminishing Islamic theology. In this way, these works illustrate the image of the Muslims was developed or manipulated depending on the works’ intended purpose, whether that purpose was lending cosmic significance to the expansion, illustrating the righteousness of Christian practices, or illustrating how Christians had prospered under Muslim rule.

Because this chapter is particularly interested in how issues of genre and literary elements influenced Christian accounts of Islam, it considers a number of works, focusing especially on those works that had multiple recensions, discussing how the variant versions of these works might preserve competing views of Christian identity. For apocalypses, it focuses particularly on the Syriac tradition, discussing the apocalypses of Pseudo-Ephraem, Pseudo-Methodius, and *The Gospel of the*

Twelve Apostles. For martyrologies, it considers both works describing the passion of single holy figures and the mass execution of groups of Christians, examining the various lives of Peter of Capitolias and the various recensions of what was perhaps once a single story of the mass execution of sixty Christians in Palestine, but which is preserved in multiple recensions of two major versions, one of sixty soldiers martyred in Gaza and the other of sixty Byzantine pilgrims martyred in Jerusalem. As for the genre of Christian apologetic responses to Islam, these were only beginning to appear in the early eighth century, with the best known examples coming from the Abbasid period, and so this chapter closes with a discussion of the earliest prototypes for the genre, examining the apologetic elements in the writings of John of Damascus and the set of letters supposedly exchanged between the emperor Leo III and the caliph 'Umar II.

As has already been said, the source basis for Islam in the seventh century is significantly more problematic than that of Christian writings about Islam, to the point that it is not really possible to write a parallel study of the same development of Muslim identity and Muslim conceptions of Christianity. In particular, the continued divergence within the field of Islamic studies on questions of source skepticism and a reasonable chronology for the development of distinctly Islamic writing makes it nearly impossible to establish an acceptable context and potential audience for early Islamic writing. For this reason, this study treats only the Qur'ān, as the mostly widely agreed early Islamic text and one generally, if not universally, dated to the seventh century. It focuses specifically on some examples of the Qur'ānic descriptions of Christians, not in order to draw conclusions about Muslim identity, but instead to illustrate that the Qur'ānic conception of Christianity and Christians has both a different starting point and different concerns which do not appear to parallel the identity formation taking place among seventh century Christians, implying that this identity formation, although using Muslims for illustration, was

nonetheless taking place within Christianity, and was not the result of direct inter-religious interaction.

In addition to the chronological limitations set out earlier, the works for this study have also been selected to fit particular geographic limitations, as well. As the central focus of this study is concerning how Near Eastern Christian identity was affected first by the Council of Chalcedon and the resulting doctrinal debates, and second by the rise of Islam and the beginnings of Muslim rule in the Near East, the works under consideration here have all been generally associated in the secondary literature with the territories of Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq, with the majority coming from either Syria or Palestine. This geographic limit is particularly important in discussing the formation of Monophysite identity, as the Monophysite and anti-Chalcedonian churches of the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries remained a set of diverse communities who, while they shared many doctrinal and religio-political concepts, they were still divided by language and culture. Thus, it is not the intention of this study to speak to Coptic or Armenian identity in this period – although both communities identified as anti-Chalcedonian at the rise of Islam, the differences in language, culture, and politics between these communities and the Syriac- and Greek-speaking communities of the Near East are too complicated to treat effectively in this study.

The texts considered in the present study include material in Greek, Syriac and Arabic, and for this reason, it is worth making some introductory statements about transliteration and language usage. For the sake of clarity, Anglicized words are used for those terms in common usage, such as “heresy,” “orthodoxy,” and “caliph.” The terms “Abbasid” and “Alid” are considered Anglicized terms in this work, as well, and therefore are written throughout without diacritical marks. Greek passages have not been transliterated, but rather are presented in Greek script, as neither the characters nor the reading direction of Greek distract from the flow of English text.

As for Arabic and Syriac, passages in these languages have been transliterated throughout, with the exception of citations from the Qur'ān. The passages from the Qur'ān cited in Arabic and analyzed in chapter five appear in Arabic script, both due to the centrality of the text itself for discussion and out of respect for the Muslim conception of the Qur'ān as existing only in Arabic. For all other Arabic passages, the *Qalam* model of transliteration has been followed, with the *ta' marbūṭa* marked as a short 'a'.¹³ The majority of Syriac sources considered in this study stem from the West Syriac communities, so for this reason, Syriac terms are transliterated throughout this work in the West Syriac pronunciation, with the *olaf* marked with a long 'ō'.¹⁴

The sources for this study are intended to represent broad, mainstream viewpoints of the communities who composed them. Many were authored by figures of political or religious authority – for example, the official accounts of the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, the writings of Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the Qur'ān itself. Many more arise from members of the intellectual elite of the period, figures who were directly connected to the religio-political disputes of the period, such as the writings of John of Damascus and Anastasius of Sinai. On the other hand, not all of the material considered here should be understood as elite in viewpoint, as several of the sources discussed in this study are addressed both to the religious elite and laymen – sermons, martyrologies and apocalypses. Indeed, considerations of the audience for the works discussed here, and how similar concepts were presented differently to elite versus lay audiences, makes up a major aspect of this study.

¹³ For the full *Qalam* transliteration system, see Mushira Eid, Alaa Elgibali, Kees Versteegh, Manfred Woidich, Andrzej Zaborski (eds.), "Reference tools for Arabic linguistics." *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*. Managing Editors Online Edition: Lutz Edzard, Rudolf de Jong. Brill Online, 2013. Reference. Harvard University.

22 June 2013 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-arabic-language-and-linguistics/reference-tools-for-arabic-linguistics-SIM_0001a>

¹⁴ For a full discussion of Syriac transliteration, see J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Eugene, 1902), pp. i-ii.

1.5 Significance

As has already been said, the purpose of this study is to set Christian writing about Islam from the period of the Islamic expansion in the larger context of Christian theological development in Late Antiquity. To this end, continuity and innovation remain the major themes. On the one hand, Christians continued to define themselves based on the Christological debates of the fifth and sixth century, particularly the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and the resulting development of the communities of Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites as the dominant strands of Christianity in the Near East. On the other, hand, innovations in the new social and political structures that formed under Muslim rule alongside the emerging structures of the Chalcedonian and Monophysite church forced both communities to address new questions about their understanding of themselves, both as compared to the Muslims and to the other Christian sects.

Thus, many of the concerns that emerge in Christian writings about Islam in the seventh century represent the continuation of discussions and debates from the fifth and sixth century and the Church Councils – for the Christian communities of the Near East, particularly the Council of Chalcedon. In the century and a half from the Council of Chalcedon to the rise of Islam, the two sides of the Chalcedonian schism had already begun to evolve from intellectual movements into distinct religious communities, with separate church hierarchies and communions, and their own internal narrative of church history, with their own heroes and villains. The Council of Chalcedon had been in part called in a spirit of reconciliation and unity, yet the resulting debates, fueled by the regional, ethnic and linguistic divisions of the provinces, as well the alternative imperial policies of acceptance and repression of anti-Chalcedonianism, led to the creation of two distinct communities in the Near East.

Elements of true sectarianism do appear in writings of the late sixth and early seventh centuries, particularly in the emergence of separate church hierarchies and in their competing claims for the correct form of communion. However, there is little evidence to suggest a complete division between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians at the rise of Islam. The Monoenergist and Monothelite debates in the late sixth and early seventh century, as well as attempts at reunification by both Chalcedonian church leaders and the Byzantine emperor Heraclius suggest that even at the rise of Islam, the complete schism of Monophysites from the imperial, Chalcedonian church was not seen as entirely unavoidable.

Of course, it is impossible to speculate whether Heraclius' interventions or the Chalcedonian attempts at reconciliation with the Monophysites would have been successful if many of the Monophysite provinces had not be lost to the Muslims in the decades that followed. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that, even in the early seventh century, some Chalcedonians wrote against the contamination of imperial doctrine with quasi-Monophysite thought, suggesting that they understood Monoenergism and Monothelitism as attempting to alter doctrine for the sake of reunification with the Monophysites, even as the rise of Islam began to feature in Christian writing. In this way, these works suggest that true separation and division into distinct sects was further influenced by the Islamic expansion itself and the resulting separation of the Near Eastern communities from the Christian authorities in Rome and Constantinople. Thus the writings of the early seventh century maintain the two colliding foci for this study – on the one hand, the continuation of the theological debates of the fifth and sixth century, and on the other, the sudden intervention of Islam into both the political and religious climate of the Near East.

These would remain the foci of many Christian authors throughout the seventh century, although their view of both sectarianism and Muslim rule would also continue to evolve. The rise

of Islam and the introduction of the Islamic caliphate in the Near East would lead to innovations that spanned the political, social and cultural climate of the regions. Perhaps the grand scale of change helps to explain why the concerns of Christian authors ranged from the practical to the intellectual to the fantastic, some predicting mild inconvenience, while others announced the End Times. Nonetheless, despite this range, underpinning all of these works are the parallel interests of understanding the significance of Muslim victory in the Near East and preserving the doctrinal divisions of the fifth and sixth century. In this way, Christian authors of this period can be understood as seeking continuity with the traditions of Christian history, despite the barriers to direct engagement with Rome and Constantinople created by the rise of Islam and the beginnings of Muslim rule, as well as the tremendous social and political upheavals of the intervening decades. Indeed, this process of integrating Islam into the existing climate of Christian thought was further expanded by the development of genres of Christian writing specifically about Islam and the significance of both the Muslims' military victory and their rule in the Near East.

Thus, by setting the rise of Islam and the emergence of the caliphate in the context of Late Antique Christian theology, this study intends to demonstrate how these factors further influenced the nature of Christian identity and sectarianism in the Near East. It is worth stressing again that these evolution in thought is not envisioned to arise out of direct interaction with Islamic thought, at least for the period of the seventh century, but resulted from the new social and political structures that accompanied the Islamic expansion. This separation and segregation, both between Chalcedonians and Monophysites and from the Christian church farther west, was, of course, gradual. As will be discussed later in this study, many Near Eastern Christians were still engaged with theological debates farther west throughout the period under consideration here, from Sophronius' role in the Monoenergist controversy to John of Damascus' writings on Byzantine

iconoclasm. However, their role in these discussions had changed – indeed, John of Damascus was able to contest imperial iconoclasm in part because of his living outside direct imperial influence.

The separation between the sects was similarly gradual in its development. Elements of true separation into distinct churches can already be found in the hagiographies of the sixth and early seventh centuries, with both communities claiming their own hierarchy, the need for separate communions, and their own interpretations on the narrative of Christian history. Nonetheless, the attempts at reunification by both Heraclius and the Chalcedonian hierarchy in the early seventh century suggest that they believed reunification might still be possible. Instead, the appearance of Islam pushed Christian conceptions of sectarianism in a different direction, with authors struggling to define the identity of their own community over the other sects, while simultaneously attempting to define the superiority of Christianity and discourage conversion to Islam. In some cases, these competing interests appear to have encourage exclusivism, as will be seen in the writings of near contemporaries Athanasius of Balad and Anastasius of Sinai. In other cases, it appears to have led to an appreciation for more lax regulations, as in the new canons of Jacob of Edessa, which often suggest leniency both for apostasy and doctrinal variation. In all of these cases, however, the appearance of Islam as a competing worldview appears to have complicated the Christian sects' definitions of themselves and their use of the traditional markers of doctrinal definitions and segregated communion for participation in their community.

It is, of course, unreasonable to speculate at what the Near East would be without Islam. Although the Levant, North Africa and Mesopotamia had been centers of Christian thought and Christian identity, and were home to the Christian Holy Land and the cities and regions which had often served to create and define Christian identity up to the seventh century, the Near East of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries would become distinctly Islamic, both in its people and its culture.

In this way, it seems reasonable to believe that without the Islamic expansion, the Near East would have remained essentially Christian in its society and culture, but it is impossible to know whether the goal of church unity, which appears to still be relevant to the communities of the early seventh century, truly had any chance of success without the disruption caused by the Muslim incursion. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the writings of the seventh century, and the Christian identity they preserve, emerges as a hybrid, integrating elements of the competing, pre-Islamic concerns of doctrinal purity versus church unity, but also attempting to address the initial fear over Muslim victory and the eventual acceptance of Muslim rule as the new status quo in the Near East.

Thus, this study stands as part of the larger academic tendency, discussed earlier, interested in joining up the Late Antique period with the Islamic period, by illustrating one aspect of how the Christian Near East of Late Antiquity transformed into the Islamic Near East of the Mediaeval world. Although the clearest example of this transition, the conversion of the majority of the Near East from Christianity to Islam, is generally accepted to take place in the centuries that followed, this study focuses on one aspect of this transformation, namely, how Christian communities of the Near East integrated the rise of Islam and Muslim rule into their worldview, and how this new worldview affected their own identity and their conception of Christian sectarianism.

It was a shift in worldview with important and far-reaching ramifications, evidenced by the use of cosmic and apocalyptic language by Christian writers to explain the significance of what was going on. It was also a shift that may have supported the eventual mass conversion of Christians to Islam, as Near East Christians came to accept Islamic rule as the new status quo and to accept a new social and cultural climate, one that blended the Christian traditions of the past seven centuries with the social standards and culture of the new Muslim ruling class.

Chapter 2: Christian sectarianism and religious politics post-Chalcedon

When the Muslims first conquered the Near East in the first half of the seventh century, they established rule over several groups of Christians whose relationship to one another had developed out of the theological debate of the previous centuries. In order to understand the various ways that Near Eastern Christians came to address Islam and Muslim rule, it is therefore necessary to take a step back and consider the doctrinal debates of the fifth and sixth centuries, in order to illustrate some of the intellectual motifs that would remain central in the Christian responses to Islam. As this study is concerned primarily with the responses to Islam that arose within the Near East, this chapter focuses on the period from the Council of Chalcedon in 451 to the rule of Heraclius in the early seventh century, in order to illustrate how the intellectual movements of pro- and anti-Chalcedonians coalesced into two communities, the Chalcedonians and the anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites.

This chapter discusses the purpose of the Council and the political circumstances that make up its context (section 2.1) and the early responses to the Council in the fifth and early sixth century

and the initial anti-Chalcedonian reactions in the works of Severus of Antioch and Philoxenus of Mabbug, as well as the responses of the so-called 'neo-Chalcedonians' (section 2.2), illustrating the themes of Christian identity which would develop in the following centuries, particularly the complex balance between the desire to maintain church unity while also maintaining the correct doctrinal construction. This chapter also discusses the early stages of church formation by both sides in the sixth century and the emergence of pro- and anti-Chalcedonian Christian narratives, illustrated by the writings of John Moschus and John Rufus, respectively (section 2.3), in order to highlight the elements of Christian identity formation that would continue into the seventh century, such as the construction of competing narratives of Christian history, and the emergence of parallel and competing church hierarchies and communions. It ends with a consideration of the immediate context for the initial Christian responses to Islam, namely the emergence of Monoenergism, the reign of Heraclius, and the early seventh century attempts at reunification (section 2.4).

2.1. Chalcedon and its Context

The Council of Chalcedon was called in 451 CE to address questions of doctrine that had arisen out of the Council of Nicaea. Indeed, two attempts at addressing the question of the nature of Christ on earth had already been undertaken, at Ephesus in 431 and again in 449. At the two councils of Ephesus, and in the debates leading up to Chalcedon, the central question was how the fully divine Son as defined at Nicaea could also be meaningfully human, without compromising divine immutability and impassibility – if Christ is truly *homoousios* with the Father, the question arose if he could still be *homoousios* with humans in the Incarnation. It was a debate that had begun in earnest with Nestorius and Cyril, but which proved difficult to resolve. Although Cyrillian

theology had won out at the first Council of Ephesus, debates continued through both the Western and Eastern churches regarding the correct doctrinal formulation for the nature of Christ.¹⁵

Indeed, as Patrick Gray has argued, the continued theological debates that led to the calling of the Council of Chalcedon stemmed in part from a desire to expand and extemporize correctly on Cyrillian theology, in particular Cyril's use of the phrase ἐκ δύο φύσεων to describe Christ.¹⁶ The intervening context for the Council, however, were the claims of Eutyches, the 'robber' Council of Ephesus in 449, and finally, the call for trial of Dioscorus, as well as the circulation of the *Tome* of Pope Leo I from the West. Again, the focus on Cyrillian theology in this intervening context remains clear, with both Eutyches and Pope Leo claiming a Cyrillian basis for their position, and both understanding themselves as developing their doctrine as a defense against Nestorianism.¹⁷

However, in both the Second Council of Ephesus and in the Council of Chalcedon, the competing impulses of the church councils became apparent. As noted by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis in the introduction to their translation of the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, to be discussed in more detail shortly, the church councils of the fifth century suffered from two incompatible imperatives – on the one hand, to reconcile important religious voices to the theological mainstream in the interest of maintaining church unity and stability, and on the other hand, to exclude heresy for the sake of protecting the correct practice of faith.¹⁸ The Second Council of Ephesus demonstrated the importance of the cause of church unity, with Dioscorus, Patriarch of

¹⁵ A full account of Ephesus or Cyrillian Christology is well beyond the range of the present study. However, as the use of rhetoric for defining Christology is particularly important for what followed in the fifth century, some general notes should be given. In particular, see Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of Saint and Heretic* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 183-90 and John A. McGuckin, *St Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 175-227.

¹⁶ Patrick T. Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (451-553)* (Leiden, 1979), pp. 2-4, 10-12.

¹⁷ *Idem.*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁸ Richard Price and Michael Gaddis (trans.), *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Liverpool, 2005), v.1, p. 5. It should be noted that the Acts of Second Ephesus survive in Greek only from the first session, as these are embedded in the Acts of Chalcedon. A translation of a single version of the Syriac was undertaken by the Synod of Canterbury in 1881, but since then, no attempt has been made to create a full edition of the Acts.

Alexandria, attempting to remove Flavian from his patriarchate at Constantinople, highlighting the uncertain stability between the major Christian centers. Yet it was the second impulse, to defend the faith from heresy, which would serve as the intellectual defense for the Christian leaders on both sides of the debate, who continued to risk that unity by perpetuating the theological debates in the sixth and seventh centuries.

Not surprisingly, accusations of Nestorianism remained the main feature of the debates following Ephesus and at the Latrocinium Council. According to the Acts of Chalcedon, although removing Flavian remained a central issue for the Latrocinium Council, the second day was mostly comprised of the condemnation of other priests and bishops who were accused of disseminating Nestorian-like doctrines regarding the nature of Christ. Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus, features particularly predominately, with the Acts of Second Ephesus claiming he was specifically prohibited from attending by imperial decree, being instead “commanded to confine himself to his own Church, we forbid to proceed to the Holy Synod, unless first it should seem fit to the whole assembled Synod for him also to go and take part in that Synod.”¹⁹ Several priests and bishops gave evidence against Theodoret, and the Synod also heard sections of Theodoret’s writings, which discuss the apparent contradictions in Cyril’s writing, attempting a corrected version of Cyril’s definition of Christ’s nature, in language similar to what would become the Chalcedonian Creed:

We confess our Lord Jesus is perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable Soul and Body subsisting, Who, as to His Divinity, was begotten of The Father before the Worlds; but in the latter times, the Same was, as regards His Humanity, for us and for our Salvation, born of the Virgin Mary – Co-essential with the Father as to His Divinity and Con-substantial with us as to His Humanity. For, a Union took place of the Two Natures.²⁰

¹⁹ S.G.F. Perry (ed. and trans.), *The second synod of Ephesus together with certain extracts relating to it, from Syriac mss. preserved in the British Museum*, (Dartford, 1881), p. 7. For more on the various transmissions of the Acts, see Fergus Miller, “The Syriac Acts of the Second Council of Ephesus (449) in Richard Price and Mary Whitby (eds.), *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils 400-700* (Liverpool, 2009), pp. 45-69.

²⁰ Perry, *Second Synod of Ephesus*, p. 223.

Based on this definition, the assembled bishops followed Dioscorus in voting to remove Theodoret from his office and excommunicated him, understanding his description of how union took place in Two Natures to be heretical.²¹ In this way, the Council served both to exert Alexandrian political authority over church hierarchy, and reestablish Alexandrian supremacy in the doctrinal dispute, as well.

In addition, regional, ethnic and linguistic distinctions also served in part to delineate the intellectual factions that emerged out of Chalcedon. The linguistic divisions between the participants had already affected the theological debates surrounding the nature of Christ even before the Council was called. Eutyches' doctrine had stemmed in part from a division in the meaning of *physis* in Cyrillian thought, and whether it more closely approximated the Latin concept of *persona* or *natura*.²² The *Tome* of Leo was similarly problematic – several bishops were hesitant to accept the *Tome's* definition of the Incarnation as it appeared to them to imply a duality in the Incarnation, a problem that arose in part from the text's translation into Greek.²³ The translation of the *physis* concept into Syriac was even more problematic, with several attempts relying on language of appearance, that struck some as docetist, thus discouraging Syriac-speaking communities from aligning with the doctrines of the fifth-century Councils.²⁴

The theological debates surrounding Chalcedon also reveal the depth of the regional disputes in the fifth-century Christian world. The Latin church had continued to advocate for the

²¹ For how the accusations against Theodoret influenced Chalcedon, see Sandra Leuenberger-Wenger, "The Case of Theodoret at the Council of Chalcedon," *Studia patristica* 62 (2013), pp. 371-382.

²² Gray, *Defense of Chalcedon*, pp. 10-11.

²³ Idem., p. 9. See also Georg May, "Das Lehrverfahren gegen Eutyches im November des Jahres 448: Zur Vorgeschichte des Konzils von Chalkedon," *Annuario Historiae* 21 (1989), pp. 1-61.

²⁴ Roberta C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford, 1976), p. 2. For more on the role of language in Syrian anti-Chalcedonian community formation, see Fergus Miller, "The Evolution of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the Pre-Islamic Period: From Greek to Syriac?," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 21.1 (2013), pp.43-92 and David Taylor, "Bilingualism and Diglossia in Late Antique Syria and Mesopotamia" in J.N. Adams, M. Janse and S. Swain (eds.), *Bilingualism in the Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Word* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 298-331.

pope as more than simply the Patriarch of Rome, arguing instead that his authority stemmed from his role as the spiritual successor of Peter, a role that they believed should give Rome preeminence over the Eastern Patriarchates.²⁵ This interest of the Latin West to define doctrine for the entire Christian world is expressed in the *Tome* of Leo and by the Pope's declaration of the Second Council of Ephesus as *latrocinium*.²⁶ However, the reality of Leo's position played out in the Latrocinium Council, with Leo's failure to secure Flavian's position and stop Dioscorus from holding the Council without his approval, as well as his inability to convince the emperor to convene a new council in Italy.²⁷

A similar territorialism played out among the Eastern churches, as well. The recent division between the Alexandrian and Antiochene approaches can be seen in the debates of the Council of 449 and the conflict between Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria, and Domnus, Patriarch of Antioch. As W. H. C. Frend recounts, in the Latrocinium Council, Dioscorus displayed impressive political savvy, so that, "with a rare unanimity that included even the Latin-speaking bishops from Illyricum, Dioscorus had been able to secure the unequivocal condemnation of the Antiochene approach."²⁸ It was the Alexandrian approach that was vindicated at Second Ephesus – "Alexandria had proved its claim to be 'the city of Orthodoxy.'"²⁹

²⁵ For more on Leo's role in defining the papacy, see Susan Wessel, *Leo the Great and the Spiritual Rebuilding of a Spiritual Rome* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 325-308 and George E. Demacopoulos, *The Invention of Peter: Apostolic Discourse and Papal Authority in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia, 2013), pp. 43-45.

²⁶ For more on the justification or inappropriateness of this designation, see Mark S. Smith, "A 'Robber's Den'? A Fresh Look at the Second Council of Ephesus, AD 449," *Studia Patristica* 52 (2012), pp. 295-304.

²⁷ W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Century* (Cambridge, 1972), pp.35-45 and Fritz Hofmann, "Der Kampf der Päpste um Konzil und Dogma von Chalkedon von Leo dem Grossen bis Hormisdas (451-517) in Aloys Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht (eds.), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon* (Würzburg, 1951), v. 2, pp. 13-94. For more on Leo's Rome, see Demacopoulos, *Invention*, pp. 39-41.

²⁸ Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, p.43.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

However, the Alexandrian victory of doctrine was short-lived, as it was the capital that would come to exert control of church politics in the years immediately prior to Chalcedon. The death of Theodosius II and the appointment of Marcian as emperor shifted the balance of power back to Constantinople. He rejected the appointments of patriarchs made at Second Ephesus and had the body of Flavius brought back to Constantinople for a proper burial.³⁰ Yet even in the emperor's calling of the Council, the traditional divisions of the great sees remained apparent, with no one see or its Patriarch emerging as the clear leader of the Council.

The Council itself began in October at Chalcedon. The initial intention of the Council was to resolve the disputes of hierarchy from the Councils of Ephesus. Thus, Dioscorus, who had overseen the Latrocinium Council, was not declared a heretic at Chalcedon, but rather was condemned for having deposed Flavian and incited schism in the church.³¹ According to the Acts of the Council, the first four sessions were devoted to questions pertaining to the resolution of problems of the Ephesus Councils, including the trial of Dioscorus and the public reading of the *Tome of Leo*.³²

Indeed, Frend has argued that the statement of faith defined at Chalcedon, which would become the central focus of the Council in the late fifth and sixth centuries, should be understood, at least in part, as an excursion from the central point of the Council, that "most of those present did not regard the Chalcedonian formula as a Symbol of Faith."³³ He notes that in there was an attempt in the second session to propose a statement of faith, which was rejected by the

³⁰ Idem., 46. See also Hagit Amirav, "Political and Social Networks in the Council of Chalcedon: The Imperial Commission," *Studia Patristica* 45 (2010), pp. 139-146.

³¹ Frend, *Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, p. 47. See also Silvia Acerbi, "Jerarquías eclesíásticas y abusos de poder en las Iglesias de Oriente: un análisis a partir de las Actas de los Concilios de Éfeso II (449) y Calcedonia (451)," *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 4 (2007), pp. 23-40.

³² Price and Gaddis, *Acts*, v. 1, pp. 43-6.

³³ Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, p. 48. See also Richard Price, "The Council of Chalcedon (451): A Narrative," in Whitby and Price, *Chalcedon*, pp. 70-91, particularly at p. 81.

congregants as creating a creed “over and above” that taught by the Fathers and defined at Nicaea.³⁴ The same point was put forward again in the fifth session, and it was out of that debate that the doctrine which would come to be known as the Chalcedonian formulation on the nature of Christ was defined.

The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon have been translated in their entirety in a 2005 Liverpool publication by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, in a work that also does a great deal to set the Council in its contemporary religious and socio-political context. As Price and Gaddis have noted, the Acts appear broadly authentic in their presentation of the debates of the Council, preserving evidence of dispute and disagreement that parallel the arguments that would begin to appear in the anti-Chalcedonian movement in the decades that followed. However, the Acts are not free from evidence of bias and redaction. In the case of the fifth session, this distortion appears primarily in the form of omission – the debate surrounding the draft Creed is remarkably short, and little consideration is given to explain the changes from the draft to the final version, suggesting that the authors of the Acts chose to omit the intervening debate.³⁵ However, the overall tone of the Acts reveals an important reality of the Council itself, that even within the Council, and in the succeeding decades in which the Acts were compiled and circulated, no clear sense of church unity emerged, with the resulting Chalcedonian Creed remaining, at best, a middling correction for the problems at the Ephesus Councils.³⁶

The fifth session began with a presentation of a draft creed that was prepared after the failed attempt to develop a statement of faith in the second session. Although the draft itself does not

³⁴ Price and Gaddis, *Acts*, v. 2, pp. 10-11, Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, p. 49.

³⁵ Price and Gaddis, *Acts*, v. 2, pp. 185-6. See also Evangelos Chrysos, “The Synodal Acts as Literary Products,” *L’icône dans la théologie et l’art* 9 (1990), pp. 85-93.

³⁶ Dirk Krausmüller, “Making sense of the formula of Chalcedon,” *Vigiliae christianae* 65 (2011), pp. 484-513.

appear in the text, Price and Gaddis have argued persuasively that the draft was essentially the same as the confession of faith Flavius had read at the Home Synod in 448:

We hold and have always held that our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God, is perfect God and perfect man made up of a rational soul and body, begotten from the Father without beginning before the ages in respect of the Godhead, and the same at the end and in the last times for us and for our salvation born from Mary the Virgin in respect of the manhood, consubstantial with the Father in respect of the Godhead and consubstantial with his mother in respect of the manhood. For we confess that Christ is from two natures after the incarnation, as we confess in one hypostasis and one person one Christ, one Son, one Lord.³⁷

The submission of Flavius' confession of faith may have been intended to help dismiss any lingering concerns over his status within the church after the debacles of the Latrocinium Council, but the Roman legates present did not accept the draft, as they held it did not sufficiently emphasize the continued subsistence of the Two Natures after the union, and thus was not sufficiently in agreement with the *Tome* of Leo.

The resulting debate highlighted the sensitivity to precise language that would come to characterize much of the anti-Chalcedonian movement, as well. Much of the debate centered on the use of the phrase ἐν δύο φύσεσιν versus ἐκ δύο φύσεων – as Price and Gaddis put it, a dispute of a single letter,³⁸ with neither formulation offering a more stable option in terms of the potential for interpretation and misinterpretation. In the end, it was the former statement that was accepted, perhaps in part because the “from two natures” formulation had been used by Dioscorus to rehabilitate Eutyches' doctrine of Christ,³⁹ so that by championing the “in two natures” formulation, the bishops at Chalcedon were simultaneously stressing their intellectual distance from both Eutyches and the Council of 449.

³⁷ *Idem.*, v. 2, p. 187.

³⁸ *Idem.*, v. 2, p. 186.

³⁹ Gray, *Defense of Chalcedon*, p. 13. See also André de Halleux, “Le dyophysisme christologique de Cyrille d’Alexandrie” in H.C. Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer: Der Osten bis zum Ende der homöischen Reichskirche* (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 411-28.

The proceedings of the fifth session also reveal the same regional disputes that had characterized the build-up to Chalcedon, both in its division between East and West and in the division between imperial power and the provinces. The Roman delegates refused to accept the original draft of the creed and demanded that it be brought into line with the *Tome* of Leo, attempting again to assert Roman and Latin authority for crafting doctrine.⁴⁰ Anatolius, the newly appointed Patriarch of Constantinople, was unable to resolve the disputes between the delegates, and was forced to turn again to the emperor to push through a resolution.⁴¹ It was in an attempt to appease the Roman delegates that the descriptors of Chalcedonian Christology were added to the Creed.

Perhaps the most important point of division between the assembled church officials, however, was the division regarding the intended significance of the Creed, and whether the Creed constituted a new statement of faith to which Christians should be obligated to adhere in their teaching and their preaching. As has already been noted, although the Acts give no direct reference to this dispute, aspects of it are implied in the text, first in the refusal to discuss the Creed in the second session, and again in the finalized Creed itself. The issue of writing a new creed to explain the true nature of Christ was problematic, as any elaboration of the Nicene Creed had been expressly banned by Canon 7 of the Council of Ephesus in 431.⁴² Thus the authors of the Chalcedonian Creed were on tenuous ground in creating a new formulation that explicitly addressed elements of doctrine not addressed at Nicaea or First Ephesus.

⁴⁰ Karl-Heinz Uthemann, "Zur Rezeption des Tomus Leonis in und nach Chalkedon. Wider den dogmenhistorischen Begriff 'strenger Chalkedonismus,'" *Studia Patristica* 34 (2001) p. 572.

⁴¹ Price and Gaddis, *Acts*, v. 2, p. 188.

⁴² Idem., v. 3, p. 190. See also Henry Chadwick, "The Chalcedonian Definition," in Festugière (ed.), *Actes du Concile de Chalcédoine: Sessions III-VI* (Genf, 1983), pp. 3-12 and Patrick Gray, "'The Select Fathers: Canonizing the Patristic Past,'" *Studia Patristica* 23 (1989), pp. 21-36.

The authors of the Chalcedonian Creed did not address this problem directly, but instead attempted to circumvent the issue entirely by including Canon 7 of Ephesus in the final version of the Creed, thus implying that the regulation against future alteration protected the Creed, rather than prohibited it.⁴³ In doing so, the leaders at Chalcedon also claimed to have ended the debates over the nature of Christ, giving what they understood as the final, and only, acceptable doctrine, one that all other members of the church would follow. Having expounded on the nature of Christ, the creed ends by stating:

Now that these matters have been formulated by us with all possible care and precision, the holy and ecumenical council has decreed that no one is allowed to produce or compose or construct another creed or to think or teach otherwise. As for those who presume either to construct another creed or to publish or teach or deliver another symbol to those wishing to convert to the knowledge of the truth from paganism or Judaism or from any heresy whatsoever, the council decrees that, if they are bishops or clerics, they are to be deposed, bishops from the episcopate and clerics from the clerical state, while, if they are monks or laymen, they are to be anathematized.⁴⁴

Despite the harsh language of the text itself, the history of the creed's reception was not one of strict obedience, or even of strict enforcement by church officials. Although the assembled bishops at Chalcedon accepted the Creed and presented it to the emperor to be adopted by the church universally, contemporary sources imply a much more varied response to Chalcedon throughout the Christian world. A central concern of many church leaders, particularly the Alexandrians, had been Nestorianism, in particular the slow encroachment of Nestorian thought back into 'correct' Christian doctrine. The dyophysite definition set at Chalcedon struck many as precisely this kind of gradual Nestorianism corrupting 'orthodox' Christian thought.⁴⁵ However, in the decades immediately following Chalcedon, this resistance to the Chalcedonian Creed remained

⁴³ It is worth noting that the bishops also presented the Canons of Constantinople as a precedent in 'clarifying' Nicaea; Price and Gaddis, *Acts*, v. 1, p. 58.

⁴⁴ Price and Gaddis, *Acts*, v. 3, pp. 204-5.

⁴⁵ Allen K. Shin, "The Images of Nestorius and the Factionalism after Chalcedon," *Studia Patristica* 39 (2006), pp. 125-130.

a matter of intellectual division, not an organized movement or distinct Christian sect. It was the continued debates, and the varied periods of imperial acceptance and persecution, that pushed the anti-Chalcedonian movement from an intellectual debate to a Christian sect.

Thus, the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, as well as the continued debates both before and after the Council, preserve the inter-related pressures of maintaining church unity and defending doctrinal purity. The continued debates following the Council also demonstrate that neither impulse had superseded the other – doctrinal variation remained throughout the Near East, without any implication that these variations disqualified members of the rival communities from claiming the shared title of Christian. Indeed, as demonstrated in the rivalries between cities, regions, and between the Pope, emperor and other patriarchs, the division between those who accepted the Chalcedonian Creed and those who did not remained one vector of a range of rivalries and differences that characterized Christians in the Near East.

2.2. Post-Chalcedonian Theology

The focus of this section is the immediate responses to Chalcedon, and the historical developments and responses of the fifth and early sixth centuries. For much of this period, the opposition movement that emerged in response to the Chalcedonian Creed could best be characterized as “anti-Chalcedonian,” that is, opposing the imperial attempt to enforce the Creed as a requirement of faith for all Christians. Although the voices in this movement discussed in this section would come to be considered founding members of what would come to be termed generally Monophysitism by later generations – in particular, Severus of Antioch and Philoxenus of Mabbug – for much of first decades that followed the Council of Chalcedon, the opposition movement remained simply an opposition movement.

Indeed, particularly under the protection offered by the emperor Zeno's *Henotikon*, the anti-Chalcedonian movement continued to evolve, and two competing imperatives appeared in anti-Chalcedonian writing – on the one hand, how to bring imperial doctrine back in line with a 'correct,' pre-Chalcedonian formulation of the nature of Christ; and on the other hand, how to maintain the internal coherence of the anti-Chalcedonian community, such as by keeping anti-Chalcedonian priests and bishops from being deposed. The shift from imperial protection to persecution of anti-Chalcedonian doctrine in the lifetime of Severus of Antioch created a further change in anti-Chalcedonian identity. At the same time, the emergence of neo-Chalcedonianism, particularly in the works of Leontius of Jerusalem, marked the start of a new attempt by Chalcedonians in the sixth century to create a positive definition of Chalcedonian doctrine.

As has already been said, one element of the anti-Chalcedonian movement's transition from intellectual opposition within the imperial church to a distinct sect was the imperial policy towards Chalcedon. The emperor Marcian had played a major part in convening and overseeing the Council of Chalcedon, but the imperial policy towards the Chalcedonian Creed in the decades immediately following the Council suggests an awareness of how controversial the Creed was. Although the Creed itself had integrated Canon 7 of the First Council of Ephesus in order to require an anathema against anyone who refused to accept Chalcedon, there is little evidence to suggest that this strict requirement of obedience was following in reality. Instead, criticisms of the Chalcedonian Creed appeared regularly in correspondence from members of the church hierarchy.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Pauline Allen and C.T.R. Hayward, *Severus of Antioch* (London, 2004), pp. 3-4. See also Heinrich Bacht, "Die Rolle des orientalischen Mönchtums in den kirchenpolitischen Auseinandersetzungen um Chalkedon (431-519)" in Grillmeier and Bacht, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, v. 2, pp. 193-314 and José María Blázquez Martínez, "La violencia religiosa originada por las decisiones del Concilio de Calcedonia (451) en los monjes de Oriente" in Gozalo Bravo (ed.), *Formas y usos de la violencia en el mundo romano* (Madrid, 2007), pp. 291-303.

Immediately following the Council and during the remainder of the reign of Marcian, two key regions of resistance emerged – Jerusalem and Egypt.⁴⁷ Juvenal, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, had been named in the first session of Chalcedon as a co-conspirator, along with Dioscorus, in the Latrocinium Council, but managed to avoid condemnation and keep his see. According to letters from the emperor Marcian, Juvenal wrote to his monks and bishops, misrepresenting the already-complicated Chalcedonian definition as teaching “two Sons” and “two Christs,” implying that the Council had turned to Nestorianism.⁴⁸ The 450s were marked by a series of depositions and reappointments in Jerusalem, with Juvenal fleeing to Constantinople in 451, and being forced to reassert his allegiance to Chalcedon, before being re-appointed Patriarch. By 453, the resistance among the Palestinian monasteries to Juvenal and Chalcedon was so strong that monks at Neapolis were massacred for refusing to communicate with Juvenal. With his relationship to the monasteries deteriorating, Juvenal attempted to correct the misinformation he had spread, circulating letters to the monasteries that argued for Chalcedon as essentially in line with Nicaea, but with little success.⁴⁹

The resistance to Chalcedon in Egypt was even stronger, and indeed, would prove more lasting. The power of the Alexandrian influence on church politics had already been demonstrated at second Ephesus, and in the hierarchical decisions made at Chalcedon, the assembled bishops revealed a consciousness of this influence. They attempted to circumvent it by condemning Dioscorus and replacing him with Proterius.⁵⁰ The policy backfired, however, with almost all of the Egyptian bishops refusing to accept Proterius as Patriarch. The death of Marcian in 457, and the

⁴⁷ As will be discussed below, this resistance also demonstrated the continued division between the church hierarchy and the regional monasteries; see Charles A. Frazee, “Late Roman and Byzantine Legislation on the Monastic Life from the Fourth to the Eighth Centuries,” *Church History* 51 (1982), pp. 263-79.

⁴⁸ E. Schwartz (ed.), *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* (Berlin, 1914-), II, 1, iii, pp. 131-2.

⁴⁹ Geoffery Greatrex (ed.), Robert R. Phenix and Cornelia B. Horn (trans.), *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity* (Liverpool, 2011), pp. 114-5; see also E. Honigmann, “Juvenal of Jerusalem,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950), pp. 209-279.

⁵⁰ Greatrex, *Pseudo-Zachariah*, pp. 130-2. See also Richard Burgess, “The Accession of Marcian in the Light of Chalcedonian Apologetic and Monophysite Polemic,” *ByzZ* 86-7 (1993-4), pp. 47-68.

corresponding end of imperial support in Alexandria, gave the anti-Chalcedonians the opportunity to depose Proterius and appoint Timothy Aelurus in his place.⁵¹ The new emperor, Leo I, managed to defuse the situation, but Alexandria would remain a center of anti-Chalcedonian thought throughout the fifth century, and beyond.⁵²

Antioch, the other major center of Christian thought in the provinces, also produced strong opposition to Chalcedon. As Patrick Gray has noted, there is less direct textual evidence for Antiochene thought in the mid-fifth century, but some information can be derived from an imperial decree of 471, forbidding monks to leave their monasteries or to live in Antioch, which suggests that the emperor was concerned with growing Antiochene opposition infecting the pro-Chalcedonian monasteries.⁵³ There was also an ethnic and linguistic component to the Antiochene resistance – although, like elsewhere in the empire, the church and urban elite spoke Greek, the surrounding region functioned primarily in Syriac. As has already been mentioned, the precise language of Chalcedon did not translate effectively from Greek to Syriac, a problem which may have fueled the Syriac resistance to accepting the Creed. This division of Greek and Syriac usage is well-illustrated by two of the leading voices in the anti-Chalcedonian movement who emerged from Syria in the late part of the fifth century – Severus of Antioch, Patriarch of the city, who spoke and understood Syriac, but wrote predominately in Greek, and Philoxenus of Mabbug, later bishop of Hieropolis,

⁵¹ R.Y. Ebied, “Timothy Aelurus: Against the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon” in D. Laga, J.A. Munitiz and L. van Rompay (eds.), *After Chalcedon: Studies in Theology and Church History* (Leuven, 1985), pp. 115-66.

⁵² Idem., p. 132; see also G. Downey, “Coptic Culture in the Byzantine World: Nationalism and Religious Independence,” *Greek and Byzantine Studies* 1 (1958), pp. 119-135.

⁵³ Paulus Krueger, *Corpus Iuris Civilis* (Zuerich, 1967), v. 2, 1.3.29, p. 22. This purpose is not specified in the decree, but both Gray and Downey suggest anti-Chalcedonian sentiment as a reasonable context; G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton, 1961) and Gray, *Defense of Chalcedon*, p. 23. For more on the rural/urban divide in Syria, see Philip Wood, “The Chorepiscopoi and Controversies over Orthopraxy in Sixth-Century Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 63.3 (2012), pp. 446-457.

who wrote exclusively in Syriac.⁵⁴ As with Alexandria, the Antiochene and Syrian resistance to Chalcedon would continue throughout the next two centuries.

However, in the second half of the fifth century, the anti-Chalcedonian movement was briefly reunited with the Constantinopolitan church, through the efforts of the emperor Zeno. The *Henotikon*, or instrument of unity, of Zeno was a masterful attempt at reunification, and highlights many of the elements of calls to Christian unity that would arise in the following centuries, both before and after the rise of Islam. In the first instance, the *Henotikon* focused particularly on the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, largely omitting references to the Ephesus councils or Chalcedon. It declared “that both we [the emperor] and the church everywhere neither have held nor hold nor shall hold” a creed other than that at Nicaea, whilst making clear affirmation of the Cyrillian theology of Ephesus, particular with regard to the doctrine of the *Theotokos*.⁵⁵ In the confession of faith, the *Henotikon* declared that Christ “is incarnate from the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin and *Theotokos*, is one and not two, for we say that both his miracles and his sufferings which he willingly underwent in the flesh are of one person,”⁵⁶ and further declared all those who hold differently should be anathematized.

The compromise of the *Henotikon* satisfied some of the anti-Chalcedonian leaders, but at the cost of the pro-Chalcedonians, particularly among monastic communities. Under the protection of the *Henotikon*, moreover, anti-Chalcedonian thought continued to evolve, and the first elements of a unified religious community began to emerge.⁵⁷ In the Near East, one such voice was the aforementioned Philoxenus of Mabbug, who, as has already been mentioned, represents the

⁵⁴ Chesnut, *Three Monophysite*, pp. 1-3.

⁵⁵ Greatrex, *Pseudo-Zachariah*, pp. 198-200.

⁵⁶ *Idem.*, p. 200.

⁵⁷ Hanns Christof Brennecke, “Chalkedonense und Henotikon. Bemerkungen zum Prozess der östlichen Rezeption der christologischen Formel von Chalkedon” in Hanns Christof Brennecke (ed.), *Ecclesia est in re publica* (Berlin, 2007), pp. 259-290.

ethnic and linguistic component of the Chalcedonian divide. Indeed, as Roberta Chesnut has noted, much of the resistance to Philoxenus' thought seems to have stemmed in part from the language barrier.⁵⁸

Several of his letters to monastic communities have survived, and give evidence for his conception of the significance of correct doctrine. Two such letters were edited and translated in a published edition by Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde in 1902 – a letter to an unspecified community of monks and a letter to the monks at Bēth-Gaugal – along with Philoxenus' letter to the emperor Zeno, defending his formulation of doctrine. There is only one extant manuscript for the letter to the monks at Bēth-Gaugal, in Vatican Syr. Ms. 135. The letter itself must date from before 491, as Philoxenus discusses the power of orthodoxy as having aided the reigning emperor Zeno. Vaschalde suggests a date of 485, based on Philoxenus' reference to the defeat of the enemies of orthodoxy, which he argues persuasively is a reference to the persecution of pro-Chalcedonian bishops.⁵⁹ Indeed, the power of orthodoxy features as a major motif throughout the letter. In describing the importance of the monks' continued vigilance for correct doctrine, Philoxenus says:

For you are with God, and also with my humble person, and with all the cenobites of Syria, your brethren. Moreover, the faithful and just Emperor Zeno and the archbishop of the capital return you thanks for the anaphoras which you have sent. And the same Christ-loving (Emperor) has openly declared that he gained the victory over his enemies with (the help of) your prayers, and he is ready - to give us ample reward for the work which we have under-taken for the peace of the churches, and to drive away from them the enemies of the Cross.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies*, p. 2. For more details on modern scholarship about Philoxenus, see David A. Michelson, "Introduction to *Hugoye* 13: A Double Issue on Philoxenus of Mabbugh," *Hugoye Journal of Syriac Studies* 13.1 (2010), pp. 1-8.

⁵⁹ Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde (ed. and trans.), *Three Letters of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbogh (485-519): Being the Letter to the Monks, the First Letter to the Monks of Beth-Gaugal, and the Letter to the Emperor Zeno* (Rome, 1902), p. 88.

⁶⁰ Vaschalde, *Three Letters*, p. 115.

Thus, although it is the emperor who defeats the enemies of the Cross, he does so through the power of the monks' correct beliefs. However, this victory is not permanent, but instead requires constant and continual vigilance against the encroaching of wrong beliefs.⁶¹ Philoxenus notes the need for this constant vigilance, but adds that it should be no challenge for true believers by the monks, because blasphemy is like an open sore that must be treated:

Now the disciple who knows Christ and delights in Him cannot fail to experience sorrow when he hears a blasphemy against Him. For as our body naturally suffers when a wound is inflicted upon it by iron, or a stone, or anything else, so also does the soul of the true disciple suffer when witnessing a blow and an insult against Christ.⁶²

In this way, Philoxenus' letter to the monks of Bēth-Gaugal demonstrates the early elements of the anti-Chalcedonian movement's transition into a distinct religious sect, in particular through the demarcation of 'true' and 'false' believers, and the requirement that individual members remain watchful of false doctrine in order to maintain this exclusivity. This basic concept of exclusivity was not different from the impulse that drove the calling of the Council of Chalcedon, but in the letter of Philoxenus, there emerges the idea of the pro-Chalcedonians as the wrong-thinking Other from whom the true believers need to separate. In this way, this letter demonstrates a shift in the priorities of the community – whereas, in the calling of the Council, the concern had been both to eliminate wrong thinking and to maintain the unity of the church, here Philoxenus appears to prioritize purity of doctrine over the unity of the church, apparently allowing for the separation of this wrong-thinking Other from the rest in order to maintain 'true' doctrine.

⁶¹ Indeed, this intersection of constant meditation over right belief and continuation of right practice was one of the major roles Philoxenus understood monks to play; David Michelson, *The Practical Christology of Philoxenus of Mabbug* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 178-202.

⁶² *Idem.*, p. 107. Regarding Philoxenus' conception of the role of asceticism in the church, see Robert A. Kitchen, "The lust of the belly is the beginning of all sin: A practical theology of asceticism in the *Discourses* of Philoxenus of Mabbug," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 13.1 (2010), pp. 49-63.

One of the clearest examples of the emerging sectarian identity within the anti-Chalcedonian movement was Severus of Antioch. Like Philoxenus, Severus and his theology first became influential under the *Henotikon*, although his appointment as Patriarch came only one day before the abdication of the emperor Anastasius and the beginning of the repression of anti-Chalcedonianism.⁶³ However, throughout his career – both before and after the repression, as well as before and after his eventual exile – Severus maintained a position of staunch opposition to Chalcedon, appearing largely indifferent to the compromise offered by the *Henotikon* and calling instead for the complete condemnation of the Chalcedonian Creed.⁶⁴

In much of his writing, moreover, he appears to understand the community of anti-Chalcedonians as a distinct church, separate from the pro-Chalcedonian community or even the compromising imperial church of Zeno and Anastasius. Much of his writing focused on managing the operations of the anti-Chalcedonian community, including calling for anti-Chalcedonian bishops to remove the names of certain pro-Chalcedonians from the diptychs in Antioch,⁶⁵ petitioning for the appointment of anti-Chalcedonian bishops and chastising bishops for ordaining clergy outside of their own territory,⁶⁶ and calling upon his fellow anti-Chalcedonians to draft and conform to their own Creed.⁶⁷ Thus, the writings of Severus can be understood as early indicators of the anti-Chalcedonian movement's transition into a distinct sect.

Severus addresses the issue of appointing anti-Chalcedonian bishops and maintaining the correct organization of sees and hierarchy of church officials in a letter to the bishop Nicias,

⁶³ Allen and Hayward, *Severus*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁴ *Idem.*, p. 8.

⁶⁵ E. W. Brooks (ed. and trans.), *The Sixth Book of the Select Letters of Severus Patriarch of Antioch in the Syriac Version of Athanasius of Nisibis* (London, 1902), v. 2.1, p. 68.

⁶⁶ "Letter to Nicias" in Brooks, *Select Letters*, v 2.1, pp. 38-9.

⁶⁷ "Synodical Letter to Theodosius," J.B. Chabot (ed. and trans.), *Documenta ad origenes monophysitarum illustrandas* (Louvain, 1908), pp. 12-34, reproduced in Allen and Hayward, *Severus of Antioch*, pp. 158-168 at pp. 166-7.

composed during his tenure as Patriarch. As the context for the letter involves both the appointment of bishops and the need to maintain doctrinal exclusivity, the text is useful as several themes of Severus' writing come together in a particularly meaningful way. According to Severus, certain unnamed people from the areas of Minidus and Uaris "have presumed to sail westwards, and to receive an unhallowed ordination from those who hold the opinions of Nestorius and cut our one Lord and God Jesus Christ into a duality of natures after the ineffable union."⁶⁸ Although he describes the ordination as by "Nestorians," both the reference to dividing Christ into a duality and the fact that the people moved westward to receive this ordination imply that the "unhallowed ordination" (*ōylin d'matri'īn hulīn*) Severus refers to was by the pro-Chalcedonians. Thus, it would appear that at least for Severus, the actions of the pro-Chalcedonian church were invalid due to their doctrinal construction of the nature of Christ.

However, Severus does not simply chastise the people of Minidus and Uaris for having taken a Chalcedonian ordination, but uses the opportunity to remind the bishop Nicias of the sanctity of church law regarding territories:

[It was] an ordination which is invalid not in one way only but in many, and is reckoned as if it had never taken place since, even if those who laid the presumptuous hand upon these men had been orthodox, they ought not to have ordained in another parish or rather in one outside their boundary, in violation of discipline; and that while we by the grace of God are not charged with any heresy. This the holy canons plainly declare both in intention and in words.⁶⁹

He echoes this focus in another letter, written to the bishop Solon during his episcopacy, in which Severus criticizes Solon and some of his fellow bishops for using the subjugation of anti-Chalcedonian thought as an excuse to act contrary to church law.⁷⁰ In this case, it is particularly the

⁶⁸ Brooks, *Selected Letters*, v.2.1, p. 38. See also James George, "Severus of Antioch's Response to Heresy and Religious Promiscuity," *Studia patristica* 42 (2006), pp. 133-138.

⁶⁹ Brooks, *Selected Letters*, v.2.1, pp. 38-9.

⁷⁰ "Of the same to the same Solon the bishop," *idem.*, I.4, pp. 23-34.

issue of ordained persons working within their own parishes that is of concern to Severus. He calls on Solon to consider the infinite mercy of God when considering those who have left their posts, because “what mercy therefore can one admit in the case of men who are so foolish, and have unreasonably abandoned their flock on account of base and unhallowed passions, while the sacred canons do not give them any forgiveness.”⁷¹ It seems plausible that these people did not leave their post due to some flight of fancy, but fled either due to persecution or because they thought they could be of more use somewhere else. Yet again, Severus calls upon the principles of church building and hierarchy, stressing to his fellow anti-Chalcedonians the importance of maintaining a hierarchy of ‘correct’ Christians, even in the face of repression. In this way, the structure of an anti-Chalcedonian church begins to emerge in Severus’ writing.

Perhaps the clearest evidence for Severus’ understanding of the anti-Chalcedonian movement as a distinct sect that should not easily rejoin the imperial church is his call for an anti-Chalcedonian creed. While still Patriarch of Antioch, he wrote a synodical letter to Theodosius, Patriarch of Alexandria, which may have been intended in part to help motivate the same Alexandrian authority that had fueled the Second Council of Ephesus.⁷² Indeed, he calls upon this imagery, saying of Theodosius that “if anyone should call your holy church the root of orthodoxy, he has not dropped away from the standard of the truth. For that Athanasius, valiant in his teachings and in his struggles on behalf of religion, used to stand at the right hand of the reverend Alexander of blessed memory, the head of the holy convocation of the three hundred and eighteen Fathers [at

⁷¹ Idem., p. 29. W.C. Frend, “Severus of Antioch and the Origins of the Monophysite Hierarchy” in D. Neiman and M. Schatkan (eds.), *The Heritage of the Early Church* (Rome, 1973), pp. 261-75.

⁷² On the various purposes for this letter, see Pauline Allen, “The Syrian Church through Bishops’ Eyes: The Letters of Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Severus of Antioch,” *Studia Patristica* 42 (2006), pp. 3-22.

Nicaea].⁷³ He speaks generously of Theodosius himself and his religion, comparing him to Aaron and even Moses.⁷⁴

The grandiose language, however, is tempered by the underlying purpose of the letter, seeking to have Theodosius confirm Severus' theology as the standard for 'orthodox' Christianity. Thus, Severus uses as a starting point a synodical letter that Theodosius had sent to him, again lauding his fellow Patriarch that, "Your Holiness has affirmed right well and fittingly that the body of our Lord and Saviour was consubstantial with us and suffered natural and voluntary suffering like us, but without sin,"⁷⁵ before moving to discuss the points that Severus believes Theodosius has under-emphasized. Of Chalcedon, Severus says:

Now along with these afore-mentioned profane teachers of anthropolatry we must number and anathematize also the Synod of Chalcedon and the blasphemous *Tome* of the impious Leo of the church of the Romans, whom the same Synod called 'the pillar of orthodoxy': for outside the canon of the divinely inspired Fathers, it established a definition of faith, and after the inexpressible union divided the divine and indivisible incarnation into a duality of natures along with their activities and their particular properties, as the *Tome* itself also indicates to those who read it – since openly and at length it expounds what it means that the one, our Lord Jesus Christ, should be acknowledged as existing in two natures. But we receive and declare praiseworthy the upright confession of the *Henotikon* document, which the worthy Emperor Zeno of blessed memory uttered.⁷⁶

Although Severus references the *Henotikon* in the final line, the overall tone of this passage is not the compromising and conciliatory tone the *Henotikon*. Instead, Severus call upon a strict view of orthodoxy and heresy.⁷⁷ Having anathematized those who denied Cyril – the "profane teachers of anthropolatry" – he turns his attention to Chalcedon, beseeching Theodosius to maintain the same stringent rejection of the pro-Chalcedonians as the Nestorians.

⁷³ Allen and Hayward, *Severus of Antioch*, p. 166.

⁷⁴ *Idem.*, pp. 159-60.

⁷⁵ *Idem.*, p. 162.

⁷⁶ *Idem.*, p. 167.

⁷⁷ George, "Severus of Antioch's Response," pp. 133-7. See also Pauline Allen, "Severus of Antioch as a source for lay piety in late Antiquity" in Mario Maritano (ed.), *Miscellanea Ottorino Pasquato* (Rome, 2002), pp. 711-721.

Moreover, though Severus criticizes the assembled bishops at Chalcedon for having violated church law by creating a new Creed, he fails to address that he himself is effectively creating a definition of faith, as well, one that requires the rejection of the *Tome* and Chalcedon and accepts a pre-Chalcedonian construction of the nature of Christ. It is worth noting that the language Severus attaches to the *Henotikon* is much more noncommittal – he stresses his support of the Emperor Zeno’s compromise, but does not mark it out as a required position. Instead, his focus remains of returning his fellow Christians to what he understands to be a purely Cyrillian doctrine.

Thus, it is possible to see in the letters of Severus the early foundation of an anti-Chalcedonian church. Severus does not describe his community in these terms, but nevertheless, he views his fellow anti-Chalcedonians as an orthodox minority that has separated from the majority out of necessity. It does not appear that Severus is seeking a compromise that will allow the two sides of the Chalcedonian debate to be reconciled, as Zeno had done, but rather expects the pro-Chalcedonians to accept his position in order to be considered part of his community.

Moreover, Severus demonstrates his interest in maintaining the borders of his community, and seeing them adhere to Christian law, in particular in terms of the church hierarchy and the regulation of parish borders.⁷⁸ This preoccupation with religious jurisdictions most likely stemmed in part from the anti-Chalcedonians’ precarious position within the formally pro-Chalcedonian Byzantine church. If monks and clerics strayed too far from their correct parishes or violate church law by ordaining people outside of their territory, they risked losing their seats, and being replaced by a pro-Chalcedonian. Yet Severus does not rely on this pragmatic argument to chide his fellow

⁷⁸ Pauline Allen has published several articles on the importance of pastoral care and church regulation for Severus; see, for example, P. Allen, “Severus of Antioch and pastoral care,” in P. Allen, W. Mayer, and L. Cross (eds.), *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church* (Brisbane, 1999), v. 2, pp. 387-400 and “Severus of Antioch as pastoral carer,” *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001), pp. 353-68.

anti-Chalcedonians, but instead, focuses on the unorthodox nature of their actions. In this way, he reinforces the idea of the anti-Chalcedonians as uniquely orthodox, chastising them to act correctly with regard to all aspects of church law.

Taken together, the writings of Severus and Philoxenus suggest that in the decades that followed the Council of Chalcedon, resistance to the Chalcedonian Creed began to take on a significance beyond simple variation in thought. It is clear that for Philoxenus, anti-Chalcedonianism as a doctrine carried a significance for the Near East both as Christians and as part of the Byzantine empire. Although he does not explicitly define anti-Chalcedonianism as exclusively correct, or as requiring a separate hierarchy or communion from Chalcedonians in order to preserve its purity and victory, nonetheless his letters suggest an early conception of a distinct, anti-Chalcedonian identity, one that was distinct from being “Christian” generally. This same conception was further sharpened by Severus, as well as by the beginnings of imperial persecution of anti-Chalcedonianism. In Severus’ preoccupation with borders and hierarchy, it is possible to see early elements of an exclusive anti-Chalcedonian identity, one that defined itself in part by its association with only other anti-Chalcedonians, and one that, in the following century, would turn inward, defining itself not only through opposition to Chalcedon, but by allegiance to specific anti-Chalcedonian thinkers, Severus among them.

The writings of Severus and Philoxenus are important for another reason, as it was in response to their writings that the so-called ‘neo-Chalcedonians’ emerged at the beginning of the sixth century. As Patrick Gray has noted, the term ‘neo-Chalcedonian’ is problematic, as it implies the emergence of a new, distinct Christology.⁷⁹ On the contrary, the neo-Chalcedonians offered a range of responses to anti-Chalcedonian thought, attempting to meet directly the Christology that

⁷⁹ Gray, *Defense of Chalcedon*, p. 104.

had developed under the compromising imperial policy of the *Henotikon*. Like with Severus and Philoxenus, although the neo-Chalcedonians did not understand themselves as a separate church, their writings do demonstrate some elements that would become important markers for the pro-Chalcedonian church later in the sixth century.⁸⁰

As has already been said, although both the pro- and anti-Chalcedonians understood themselves as defending Cyrillian theology, the anti-Chalcedonians had drawn heavily on Cyril to defend their position. It was difficult for the neo-Chalcedonians to address the Cyrillianism of anti-Chalcedonism directly because the unity of Christ featured so centrally in Cyril's writing.⁸¹ Perhaps the most successful attempt, however, was in the writings of Leontius of Jerusalem.⁸² He did so by focusing on the "one hypostasis" formulation of Chalcedon, and by drawing a precise distinction between hypostasis and nature, thus, as Gray puts it, "providing, for the first time, a really coherent vocabulary for Cyrillian Chalcedonians."⁸³ In doing so, he also provides an important example of how the two sides of Chalcedon came to define themselves through distinctly different theology, while relying on the same source basis for their thought.

In addressing the anti-Chalcedonian position, he draws on the parallels with his own doctrine and Cyril, saying:

According to a pious opinion – and rightly so, in our view – [the union] is called both φυσική and ὑποστατική... We say the union in Christ is natural, as of natures united in him... We say the union in Christ is hypostatic, but in the opposite sense to that used concerning the

⁸⁰ Although from the mid-twentieth century, Moeller's definition of neo-Chalcedonianism is still worth noting: C. Moeller, "Le Chalcedonisme et le nép-Chalcedonisme en Orient de 451 à la fin du Vie siècle," in Grillmeier and Bacht, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, v. 1, pp. 637-720. See also Dirk Krausmüller, "Conflicting Anthropologies in the Christological Discourse at the End of Late Antiquity: The Case of Leontius of Jerusalem's Nestorian Adversary," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 56.2 (2005), pp.415-449.

⁸¹ Gray, *Defense of Chalcedon*, pp. 135-139; Patrick Gray, "Through the Tunnel with Leontius of Jerusalem: the Sixth-Century Transformation of Theology" in Pauline Allen and Elizabeth Jeffreys (eds.), *The Sixth Century: End or Beginning?* (Brisbane, 1996), pp. 187-96 and Dirk Krausmüller, "Leontius of Jerusalem, a theologian of the seventh century," *JTS* 52 (2001), pp. 637-657.

⁸² The early editions of Leontius' work in the *Patrologia Graeca* attributed his work to Leontius of Byzantium; however, Patrick Gray has argued persuasively for his works as the product of a different author than the more well-known Leontius of Byzantium. Gray, *Defense of Chalcedon*, p. 139.

⁸³ *Idem.*, p. 133.

natural union. This is not the union of hypostasis, but rather a union of the Word's hypostasis.⁸⁴

Leontius draws upon the Cyrillian definition of hypostasis to tie his theology to Cyril's theology, while simultaneously implying that the anti-Chalcedonians were complicating his thought by overanalyzing his terminology.

In Leontius' writing, as in the neo-Chalcedonian movement more generally, there emerges a clear response to the anti-Chalcedonians. However, more than simply being a defense of Chalcedon, Leontius draws on Cyrillian imagery to develop a more fully-formed conception of Chalcedonian dyophysitism. Thus, he describes the distinction between hypostasis and nature, expanding on the rather limited description at Chalcedon:

Thus, the nature of the Word does not assimilate the nature of the flesh; though he dignifies the flesh late, the divinity in the hypostasis, because of natural divine characteristics, is also separate, according to certain characteristics. The former divinizes, in that it is a divine-making nature; the latter is divinized, in that as a nature, it is made divine. The former is an exalted nature; the latter is not. The former gave the properties; the latter received the natural gifts. Therefore, nothing of what we have said indicates that the union of persons destroys the difference of the natures.⁸⁵

Here Leontius expands on the characteristics of the two natures of Christ, and attempts to explain how they interact with one another within the unchanging hypostasis.⁸⁶ In this way, he also gives a positive definition of dyophysitism, explaining the necessity of the doctrine for understanding the correct nature of God.

In many ways, the definition set at Chalcedon had been essentially a negative definition, created to correct existing errors, and the precise language of the Creed, and in particular the Chalcedonian adverbs, reflect this fact. It was in the writings of the neo-Chalcedonians that the

⁸⁴ "Adversus Nestorianos," attributed to Leontius of Byzantium in J. P. Minge (ed.), *PG* 86.1 (1860), Coll. 1512C4-1513A10, translation mine.

⁸⁵ "Adversus Nestorianos," Col. 1748A, 5-15, translation mine.

⁸⁶ Patrick Gray, "Leontius of Jerusalem's case for a 'synthetic' union in Christ," *Studia Patristica* 8 (1986), pp. 151-4.

Creed was developed into something more positive. The Creed was not simply a compromise between Roman and Eastern doctrine, intended to repair the divisions created by the Ephesus councils, they argued. It was a necessary doctrine of faith, one that further illustrated the true nature of Christ. Most importantly, in the writings of Leontius of Jerusalem, it was essentially Cyrillian. By establishing a more definite distinction between the language of nature and hypostasis, Leontius offered a new Cyrillian core to the pro-Chalcedonian community.

Thus, by the early decades of the sixth century, both the opponents and proponents of Chalcedon had begun to coalesce into distinct communities, with both sides developing a broader theology to support their position on the Chalcedonian Creed. Among the anti-Chalcedonians, several more elements of sectarianism had also emerged – an exclusionary view in which individuals needed to evidence their anti-Chalcedonianism, and an interest in maintaining the internal integrity and operations of the church in the writing of Severus, and a belief in the power of ‘orthodox’ belief to offer victory to the empire in the writings of Philonexus. Chalcedonian identity remained more nebulous in this period, with neo-Chalcedonianism emerging as, at least in part, an intellectual exercise about Chalcedon. Several aspects of neo-Chalcedonian thought, however, would come to characterize a more positive, distinct, and exclusive kind of Chalcedonianism in the next century. Moreover, it was these same concepts that would allow both the Chalcedonian and the Monophysite churches of the seventh century to explain the rise of Islam and the success of the Muslim expansion, as effectively a failure of orthodoxy. However, it was in the intervening period of the sixth century that these concepts were disseminated and set, and the Chalcedonian and Monophysite churches began to emerge.

2.3. Sectarian Politics and Identities

This continued development of the anti-Chalcedonian and pro-Chalcedonian movements into more concrete communities, with their own formulae, traditions, and rituals, was also heavily influenced by imperial action, and in particular, the imperial repression of the anti-Chalcedonians by Justin and his successors. Although the imperial church was not entirely against reconciliation with the anti-Chalcedonians in the sixth century, the intermitted periods of repression helped fuel the cohesion of the anti-Chalcedonians and pro-Chalcedonians into distinct sects, a development seen in part in the emergence of distinctly pro- and anti-Chalcedonian writings beyond theological texts in this period.

The appearance of pro- and anti-Chalcedonian hagiographies in the sixth and early seventh centuries, illustrated in this section by the writings of John Moschus and John Rufus, respectively, is a particularly important example, as these works demonstrate how both sides of the Chalcedonian schism began to re-appropriate a narrative of Christian tradition inherited from Nicaea and Ephesus, as both sides began to understand themselves as the inheritors of this tradition. Moreover, the religio-political history of the period, in particular the Western attempts to enforce the *libellus* of Pope Hormisdas, the reigns of Justin and Justinian, and the calling of the Fifth Council of 553, served to further integrate Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian identities as part of the continued divide between Western and Eastern Christian identity, and between the Near Eastern provinces and Constantinople.

In the sixth century, the religio-political climate changed substantially, particularly with regard to the significance of Chalcedon. The Council itself had been an attempt at compromise, and much of the reaction to the Council in the fifth century echoed that sense of compromise, culminating in the emperor Zeno's *Henotikon*. Under the protection of the *Henotikon*, the anti-

Chalcedonian movement was able to coalesce into a more cohesive community and to develop their opposition to the Chalcedonian Creed into a more coherent theology. The neo-Chalcedonian response grew in parallel to the changes of the early sixth century, in which the anti-Chalcedonians began to face repression by both the church and imperial authorities. This renewed interest in enforcing Chalcedon strengthened the neo-Chalcedonian movement, as the pro-Chalcedonians began to prioritize correct doctrine over maintaining church unity, in a way similar to the effect of the *Henotikon* on anti-Chalcedonian writing.

The repression of the anti-Chalcedonian movement began in the early decades of the sixth century with the death of Anastasius and the abolition of the *Henotikon*. After a brief revolt in the city of Constantinople, Justin, the captain of the Imperial Guard, was declared emperor. As noted by Frend, the pro-Chalcedonian party in the city met the new emperor with calls for an anathema on Severus, signifying perhaps that the pro-Chalcedonian community had accepted Justin with the understanding that he would enforce the Council.⁸⁷ At the same time, Hormisdas, the new pope in Rome, was pushing for increased control of the Eastern churches, in the form of a papal decree regarding the removal of names from the diptychs in the East. As has already been mentioned, this was not the first attempt post-Chalcedon for one group to demonstrate authority by removing names from the diptychs – Severus had already attempted to do the same with the names of pro-Chalcedonians in Antioch. However, like with the *Tome* of Leo and the calling of the Council, the papal decree also demonstrates the continued interest of the Latin West to exert control over the Eastern patriarchates, and reveals the extent of the divide between them.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Coll. Avell. 147, Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (trans.), *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* (Oxford, 1997), p. 251-2; Frend, *The rise of the Monophysite movement*, pp. 233-4.

⁸⁸ Claire Sotinel, "Emperors and Popes in the Sixth Century: the Western View," in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 267-90.

The papal decree also demonstrated the increasingly exclusionary view of Chalcedon which characterized much of the writing of the sixth century. Hormisdas' *libellus* described how the intention of the Council had been to restore orthodoxy in the face of the "plagues" of Eutyches and Dioscorus, and how the vanity of figures in the East in ignoring the Council had allowed these plagues to spread.⁸⁹ Despite, or perhaps because of the harsh language of the *libellus*, the eastern sees continued to resist the Roman attempt to direct religious politics, and it was not immediately accepted in the East. Indeed, as Volker Menze has noted, as with Severus' attempt to rewrite the diptychs a few decades earlier, the eastern resistance was not simply political – the communities of the Near East demonstrated a resistance to the underlying doctrine, namely, that they would be condemning posthumously those who had died in communion with the church.⁹⁰ Although the pro-Chalcedonian movement in the East still opposed the influence that living anti-Chalcedonians enjoyed, in particular the influence Severus had had with the late emperor Anastasius, by the 510s, they still resisted back-projecting that opposition to accuse the dead.

The new emperor Justin's relationship to Chalcedon was similarly complicated. Traditionally, modern historians have viewed Justin as a convinced Chalcedonian, but, as Menze notes, have done so without significant evidence to support this belief.⁹¹ For the most part, it would appear that historians like Vasiliev assumed that Justin was strongly pro-Chalcedonian because the persecution of anti-Chalcedonians began in his reign and under his authority. Menze, on the other hand, has made a detailed study of the available accounts of Justin's reign in his 2008 work, and argues persuasively that Justin's pro-Chalcedonian position was at least partly a political decision.

⁸⁹ *Coll. Avell.* 120.8.

⁹⁰ Menze, *Justinian*, p. 82. See also Kim Bowes, "Ivory Lists: Consular diptychs, Christian Appropriation and Polemics of Time in Late Antiquity," *Art History* 24.3 (2001), pp. 338-57.

⁹¹ Menze, *Justinian*, p. 18. See also Milton V. Anastos, "The Emperor Justin I's Role in the Restoration of Chalcedonian Doctrine, 518-519," *Byzantion* 13 (1985), pp. 125-39.

Although before his election, Justin had maintained close relations with several eminent anti-Chalcedonians, his election pitted him against the powerful anti-Chalcedonian faction in the court. Finding himself cut off from his previous connections, he was forced to give his vocal support to Chalcedon in order to appease the Goth leader Vitalian, who was threatening to march on Constantinople and depose Justin if he denounced the Council.⁹² Thus, although the emperor formally and publically supported the repression of the anti-Chalcedonians, including the enforcement of Hormisdas' *libellus*, he did so in part to bolster his own tenuous position as emperor.

Considering the indigenous trepidation regarding the diptychs and the emperor Justin's pragmatic relationship to Chalcedon, it is perhaps not surprising that the repression of anti-Chalcedonianism in his reign varied significantly in different areas and at different times. Although Justin had acted to bring the *libellus* to the East, and thus support reunification with Rome,⁹³ he demonstrated more leniency with regard to the appointment of church officials. He refused to force the anti-Chalcedonian bishop Paul out of his seat at Edessa, and accepted the appointment of another anti-Chalcedonian as his successor. Though Severus was chased out of Antioch and into exile in Alexandria, and replaced with the pro-Chalcedonian Paul, Paul's mistreatment of the Syrian monasteries caused so much resentment that Justin supported his removal in 520.⁹⁴ Severus, for his part, continued to correspond with his fellow anti-Chalcedonians and his remaining supporters in the court, maintaining an important link to the broader political scene. For these reasons, the anti-Chalcedonian movement was able to continue to develop despite the repression.

⁹² Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, p. 250.

⁹³ Frend, *Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, pp. 236-8.

⁹⁴ *Coll. Avell.* 241, Scott and Mango, *Theophanes*, p. 250. See also Frend, *Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, pp. 242-3.

Justin's nephew Justinian continued the repression in a similarly complicated manner. Although he continued to recognize Chalcedonianism as the imperial church, he attempted to reach a compromise with the anti-Chalcedonians in order to return them to unity with the imperial church. In c. 532, he called for a debate between eminent thinkers from both groups to convene in Constantinople. The debate, or "conversation" as it was termed by Sebastian Brock in his 1981 discussion of the work, was not an apologetic event, but rather, in Justinian's formulation of the terms of the discussion, consciously intended to devise a compromise between the two sides.⁹⁵

The emperor's diplomatic approach to the anti-Chalcedonians was not a sign of his disinterest in church policy. He remained pro-Chalcedonian, although he also remained committed to the cause of maintaining church unity.⁹⁶ In particular, the empress Theodora acted as patron to several eminent anti-Chalcedonians. Moreover, he began his reign by pronouncing severe legal penalties on "heretics," including Manicheans, Montanists, Samaritans, gnostics, and the followers of Nestorius, Eutyches and Apollinarius. The emperor's edicts resulted in the execution of several nobles accused of Manicheanism.⁹⁷ Therefore, his relatively diplomatic treatment of the Monophysite delegation in 532 should be understood as a conscious choice by the emperor to value compromise with the anti-Chalcedonians over theological exclusivity.

Although arguably the burden to find a solution to the schism fell more heavily on the anti-Chalcedonians than the Chalcedonians,⁹⁸ the emperor consistently treated the anti-Chalcedonian bishops as schismatics, not as heretics.⁹⁹ They were offered absolute protection under the emperor's

⁹⁵ Sebastian Brock, "The Conversations with the Syrian Orthodox under Justinian," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47 (1981), pp. 87-121 at p. 114.

⁹⁶ For more on Justinian's shift from compromise to separation from the anti-Chalcedonians, see Peter N. Bell, *Social Conflict in the Age of Justinian: Its Nature, Management and Mediation* (Oxford, 2013), particularly p. 165.

⁹⁷ Frend, *Rise of the Monophysite movement*, p. 257. See also Fergus Miller, "Rome, Constantinople and the Near Eastern Church under Justinian: Two Synods of C.E. 536," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 98 (2008), pp.62-82.

⁹⁸ Menze, *Syrian Orthodox*, p. 59.

⁹⁹ Brock, "Conversation," p. 95.

invitation to the capital, with the understanding that they would be allowed to voice their beliefs without persecution, and would be free to leave whether or not the two parties had reached a compromise.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the protection offered was sufficient to convince John of Tella, who had been in hiding in Persia for a decade, after refusing to conform to Hormisdas' *libellus*, to attend as one of the anti-Chalcedonian representatives.¹⁰¹

The 532 debate would not be the emperor Justinian's last attempt to define doctrine and reinstate the unity of the church. His more significant attempt would be the Fifth Church Council in 553. Reconciliation with the anti-Chalcedonians appears to have been a major purpose for calling the Council, as its actions included the condemnation of the Three Chapters, that is, the person and works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the letter of Ibas of Edessa to Mari, and some of Theodoret of Cyrillus' dogmatic writings.¹⁰² Condemnation of the Three Chapters had been a requirement for reunification by the anti-Chalcedonians at the 532 debate, and so by calling the Fifth Council and satisfying this demand, it would appear at first that the Council was, as G.L.C. Frank put it, "a serious theological attempt to heal the schism on the basis of the common Cyrillian tradition."¹⁰³

However, in the intervening two decades, the anti-Chalcedonian communities had already begun to form into their own distinct sect, one that had reclaimed the narrative of Christian history, particularly in seeing themselves as the inheritors of oppression by a ruling authority, like the early church under Roman oppression. Although Justinian succeeded in gathering 400 anti-Chalcedonian leaders in Constantinople in the early 550s, none of them agreed to participate in the

¹⁰⁰ *Idem.*, p. 60.

¹⁰¹ *Idem.*, p. 58.

¹⁰² Richard Price (ed. and trans.), *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553 with the related texts of the Three Chapters* (Liverpool, 2009), v. 1, pp. 16-23.

¹⁰³ G.L.C. Frank, "The Council of Constantinople II as a Model Reconciliation Council," *Theological Studies* 52 (1991), pp. 636-50 at p. 647.

Council itself or agreed to its Acts and Justinian's revised definition of Chalcedonianism.¹⁰⁴ On the surface, the Council was an act of reconciliation, but one that still privileged Chalcedonianism – it was, essentially, a correction to Chalcedonian theology, not a rejection of it -, and thus the anti-Chalcedonians rejected it in part because it failed to address the differences in communal narrative between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians. In particular, although it rejected the Three Chapters, the Fifth Council still accepted both the Chalcedonian Creed and the *libellus*, “the abandonment of which,” as Menze notes, “the revered non-Chalcedonian saints like Severus or John of Tella had sought their whole life.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, while the Council addressed some of the doctrinal differences between the Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians, it failed to address the growing social and cultural divisions between the two sides of the schism.

Indeed, throughout both Justin's and Justinian's reign, the anti-Chalcedonians remained in exile, and as they and the Chalcedonians continued to develop independently, the separation allowed both sides to stress Chalcedon as a breaking point of 'true' religion.¹⁰⁶ The continued, separate development of the two communities can be seen not only in the theology of both sides, as both continued to hone their teachings, but also in the appearance of new genres of community and church building. One of the most important examples from the anti-Chalcedonian side were the hagiographies of John Rufus. Unfortunately, as noted by Cornelia Horn, John Rufus is only known from his works, and the contemporary context for his writings have received only limited scholarly attention until the end of the twentieth century, with several mid-twentieth century scholars disputing his authorship of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, pp. 312-3.

¹⁰⁵ Menze, *Syrian Orthodox*, p. 269.

¹⁰⁶ Jeffrey MacDonald, “Leontius of Jerusalem's *Against the Monophysites* as a Possible Source for Justinian's *Letter to the Alexandrian Monks*,” *Byzantium* 67 (1997), pp. 375-82.

¹⁰⁷ Cornelia B. Horn, *Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-Century Palestine* (Oxford, 2006), p. 11. The first modern study of the person of John Rufus was by Schwartz in 1912, but much of his work was

Horn has developed a rough biography of John, based on the sparse references to himself in his works, that he was likely from Arabia, but traveled to Antioch, where he met Peter in the early 470s, traveling with him first as a guide, and then being made a monk and a priest by Peter, probably in 475 or 477.¹⁰⁸ After Peter's death, John succeeded him as bishop of Maiuma.¹⁰⁹ Some elements of the context for his writing can be derived from the life of Peter, as well. Like many of his anti-Chalcedonian predecessors, John Rufus was from the East, and his writings often demonstrate an eastern focus, describing the provinces of Syria, Palestine and Egypt as maintaining 'orthodoxy' in the face of Constantinopolitan and Western innovation. This eastern focus was preserved in the works' transmission, as well – although his life of Peter was composed in Greek, it was transmitted and preserved in Syriac, thus enforcing its eastern relevance.¹¹⁰

Hagiography as a genre was a particularly powerful tool for the nascent Monophysite church for community building – and indeed, as will be discussed in chapter four, would remain a powerful tool throughout the sixth and seventh century. The writing of saints' lives allowed for the development of distinctly anti-Chalcedonian history, one that could build a narrative of conscious opposition to the innovations of Chalcedon, allowing the early anti-Chalcedonians to claim direct lineage from the pre-Chalcedonian Cyrillian church. It also allowed for the creation of distinctly anti-Chalcedonian saints, ones who could be held up as later emulators of Cyril and the other early

subsequently rejected by Baumstark and Sauget and Orlandi; see Edward Schwartz, "Johannes Rufus, ein monophysitischer Schriftsteller," *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Heidelberg, 1912), pp. 1-28; Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1922), particularly p. 184, and J.M. Sauget and Tito Orlandi, "John of Maiuma (John Rufus)" in Angelo Di Berardino (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (New York, 1992), pp. 445-6. The aforementioned volume by Cornelia Horn, as well as recent work by Jan-Eric Steppa, has done much to confirm John Rufus' authorship and shed light on his own life and milieu; see also Steppa, *John Rufus and the World View of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture* (Piscataway, NJ, 2002).

¹⁰⁸ Horn argues for this date based on the dates of Peter's term as bishop in Antioch and his first exile, which seems reasonable; Horn, *Asceticism*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁹ Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R.P. Phenix (ed. and trans.), *The lives of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem, and the Monk Romanus: John Rufus, Bishop of Maiuma, fl. 476-518* (Ann Arbor, 2008), pp. lxii-lxiii.

¹¹⁰ Horn, *Asceticism*, pp. 13-14. See also Volke Menze, "Die Stimme von Maiuma: Johannes Rufus, das Konzil von Chalcedon und die wahre Kirche," in Barbara Aland, Johannes Hahn and Christian Ronning (eds.), *Literarische Konstituierung von Identifikationsfiguren in der Antike* (Tübingen, 2003), pp. 215-32.

fathers. Indeed, this process of mythologizing the works of anti-Chalcedonian thinkers of the fifth and sixth century was already well-underway by the time of John Rufus. The writings of Severus, for example, had taken on supernatural characteristics, including stories of volumes performing miracles or being magically spared from destruction or redaction.¹¹¹

John Rufus' use of hagiography also demonstrates an important aspect of literary development in the Late Antique period, more generally. As described in the quintessential work of Peter Brown, the "Holy Man" was a major intellectual focus of the Late Antique period, one that represented a constant and continuous bridge between this world and the divine, through individuals who were capable of direct encounter with divine providence.¹¹² Hagiographies, in turn, contextualized the Holy Man and Holy Woman, attaching the divine acts to a specific time and region, and often lending personal, regional or ethnic significance to the saint's life. As Averil Cameron has argued, although several genres flourished in the Late Antique Christian world, narrative played a major role in all of them. Although this literary focus developed out of Classical literature, Cameron argues for a particularly Christian kind of narrative, one that develops from the Gospels and Acts through the stories of the martyrs and persecution of the church into the hagiographies and narrative biographies of the fourth, fifth and sixth century.¹¹³

Thus, the works of John Rufus present a Monophysite construction of this Late Antique, Christian narrative, one that clearly understands the anti-Chalcedonian movement as the inheritors of true Christian tradition. John Rufus composed three works in the 560s, all celebrating the leaders of the anti-Chalcedonian movement – a biography of Peter the Iberian, an account of the death of

¹¹¹ Menze, *Syrian Orthodox*, p. 135.

¹¹² Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Religious Studies* (1971), pp. 80-85.

¹¹³ The effects of the Islamic expansion on this Christian narrative will be discussed in chapter four. Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 91-93.

Theodosius of Jerusalem, and a collection of pro-monastic, anti-Chalcedonian stories known as the *Plerophories*.¹¹⁴ As Jan-Eric Steppa notes, although all hagiographical, these works are also largely realist, with minimal reference to supernatural abilities or events. Instead, John Rufus relied heavily on both Hellenic biographical motifs and Biblical parallels to demonstrate the righteousness of his heroes, again stressing the anti-Chalcedonians as the rightful inheritors of those traditions.¹¹⁵ Thus in his life of his teacher, Peter the Iberian, he describes Peter as a new Paul, traveling from city to city in order to strengthen their faith. Although it is reiterated throughout the work that Peter would prefer a solitary existence, he is continually compelled to stay in cities, as in one of his frequent visits to Alexandria, the great city of orthodoxy, where “when Peter, the servant of God and equal in zeal to the great Moses, saw the toil of the believing brothers, left behind from [the experience of] death and the desolation of those who were building them up and supporting them, and [as they were] running the risk of being shaken from the truth of the faith, he took on a divine zeal, straining himself to the point of death.”¹¹⁶

Having spent several years in Alexandria, Peter eventually returns to Palestine in order to support the anti-Chalcedonian movement there:

While he was dwelling there, many were coming to him from every place; some he strengthened, and some he enlightened [and in this way] added to the orthodox church. Others he incited to renounce the vanity of the church entirely, and persuaded [them] to run after perfection, to distribute their possessions to the poor, and to take up the cross of Christ to cleave to him alone.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of anti-Chalcedonian Culture* (Piscataway NJ, 2002), pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

¹¹⁵ Steppa, *John Rufus*, p. 64. See also Kathleen Hay, “Evolution of Resistance: Peter the Iberian, Itinerant Bishop” in P. Allen, R. Canning, and L. Cross, *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church* (Everton Park, 1998), pp. 159-68.

¹¹⁶ Horn and Phenix, *Lives of Peter*, p. 146, translation mine. See also Cornelia Horn, “Peter the Iberian and Palestinian Anti-Chalcedonian Monasticism in Fifth- and Early Sixth-Century Gaza,” *Aram* 15 (2003), pp. 109-28.

¹¹⁷ Horn and Phenix, *Lives of Peter*, pp. 156,8, translation mine.

In this way, John Rufus marks out Peter the Iberian as a new leader for the anti-Chalcedonian church, who, like Moses, led his community to a better, spiritual home, through his teachings on monasticism and asceticism.¹¹⁸

John Rufus may have had a particular loyalty to Peter the Iberian because he had been his teacher, but he is not the only hero of the anti-Chalcedonian movement who emerges in his writing. In his *Plerophories*, he develops a narrative of the movement which highlights the stalwart commitment to 'orthodoxy' of all anti-Chalcedonians, both in the face of oppression, as well as in the face of worldly reward. In doing so, he also stresses several important elements for the community's continued cohesion, which may have been intended as lessons for his anti-Chalcedonian audience. He stresses the importance of community formation, in particular in the form of teaching from elder anti-Chalcedonians:

Brother Anastasius, a monk from Edessa who had been a scholastic, had a similar dream. When he lived in Beirut and still adhered to the apostates, he saw a holy and honorable old man who said to him: 'If you want to be saved, take a horse and keep in close company with the bishop Peter the Iberian. Then you will receive the true light and be saved.'¹¹⁹

Maintaining the structure of the community was an issue for many of the anti-Chalcedonian leaders, Severus in particular. John Rufus appears to share this concern, but unlike Severus, does not expect his fellow anti-Chalcedonians to keep to their appointed territories. Instead, he lauds exile as an ascetic act:

The Abba Stephanus, who was a monk and finally became a deacon in Jerusalem, wanted to go off to strange lands because of his love of God, to participate in the perfection of exile. Thus he went to Zeno to consult him and to ask if God would approve. Zeno foretold him the following, before the Council of Chalcedon: 'Go and stay in peace, since a persecution

¹¹⁸ Indeed, rituals of veneration, both those devised by Peter and those made to him after his death, were also integrated into wider anti-Chalcedonian practice; see Horn, *Asceticism*, p. 17. See also S. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church in Syria: the hermeneutics of early Syriac monasticism," in V. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 220-45 and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Asceticism in Adversity: An Early Byzantine Experience," *BMGS* 6 (1980), pp. 1-11.

¹¹⁹ F. Nau (ed. and trans.), *Jean Rufus. Plérôphories, témoignages et révélations contre le concile de Chalcédoine* (Paris, 1912), p. 126, translation mine.

and a rebellion of heretics will shake the churches as regards the orthodox faith. If you love the orthodox faith, keep wandering.' And this was what he did. He went off to strange lands and died in this state because of the Council of Chalcedon.¹²⁰

It is apparent from Severus' letters that even in his time, the anti-Chalcedonians were struggling to keep their positions within the official hierarchy.

John Rufus' belief that exile could serve an ascetic function may represent a more pragmatic position, as exile was proving unavoidable for his fellow anti-Chalcedonians.¹²¹ This exile could be accepted, so long as the person was already well-trained in 'orthodox' doctrine. Above all, John Rufus' focus remains the protection of 'orthodoxy,' even over and above protecting the heroes of his own works. Thus, on his deathbed, Peter the Iberian instructs his students to protect anti-Chalcedonian doctrine against all creeping compromise, even if it were to come from him:

In the same way as I have witnessed to you many times, before you and all people, when I said: If you ever see me, being by your own words and in your eyes a saint, changing my mind and saying to you that there is no harm in the council of Chalcedon, you will separate yourselves from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit if you do not separate from my face and escape from me as from an unbeliever and a person that has a part of the traitor Judas.¹²²

Despite the generally realistic tone of John's writing, here, like Philoxenus, John Rufus speaks through Peter to Iberian to demonstrate how the correction of doctrine could have supernatural abilities. Similarly, in his *Commemoration of the Death of Theodosius*, he describes the rebellion in Palestine after Chalcedon, that the Patriarch Juvenal was forced to reinstate the anti-Chalcedonian bishops because the territory was plagued by drought and starvation.¹²³ However, in their shared endeavor to protect true doctrine, he understands his fellow anti-Chalcedonians as

¹²⁰ Nau, *Jean Rufus*, p. 20-1, translation mine.

¹²¹ A. Kofsky, "Peter the Iberian: Pilgrimage, Monasticism and Ecclesiastical Politics in Byzantine Palestine," *Late Antiquity* 47 (1997), pp. 209-20.

¹²² Horn and Phenix, *Lives of Peter*, p. 147, translation mine.

¹²³ Steppa, *John Rufus*, p. 72. See also Horn, *Asceticism*, pp. 347-50 and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Remembering Pain: Syriac Historiography and the Separation of the Churches," *Byzantium* 58 (1988), pp. 295-308.

forming a distinct community, one with its own heroes and leaders, following in the Biblical tradition of leadership, and one with its own requirements for teaching and performance in order to be considered a member.

For their part, the Chalcedonians also continued to form into a distinct community throughout the sixth century.¹²⁴ As has already been mentioned, one major aspect of their communalism was the Council of Constantinople in 553, at which the emperor pushed to form a more positive definition of Chalcedonianism, one that attempted to connect the community with Cyril while simultaneously distancing them from the conciliatory history surrounding Chalcedon. As will be discussed in a moment, in the decades that followed, the Chalcedonians began to produce their own distinct narratives, claiming the inheritance of Christian tradition just as anti-Chalcedonians were doing.

Despite these developing narratives of a united, Chalcedonian church, however, much of the late sixth and early seventh century was characterized by continued theological division and schism. In the first instance, denouncing the Three Chapters controversy, which had served as one of the main purposes for calling the 553 Council, served to further distance the Constantinopolitan and Roman church. As Menze notes, Justinian failed to prove his case against the Three Chapters doctrinally, and ultimately relied on political power to obtain the Pope's acceptance of the Council's decision.¹²⁵ Not only did this leave many in the Latin church feeling as though the Council had acted wrongly, but it further highlighted the distance between the Latin church's belief that the Pope and See of Rome held a position over and above the other Patriarchates, and the reality of the See's relationship to the East and the emperor. Similarly, the North African church refused to denounce

¹²⁴ Richard Price, "The Development of a Chalcedonian Identity in Byzantium (451-553), *Church History and Religious Culture* 89.1 (2009), pp. 307-25.

¹²⁵ Menze, *Justinian*, p. 266.

the Three Chapters, demonstrating the reality of the continued lack of church unity on the pro-Chalcedonian side.¹²⁶

Continued attempts to disseminate and expand on the positive definition of Chalcedonianism set at the Council in 553 also created tensions within the pro-Chalcedonian community. In particular, as will be discussed in the next section, discussions of Christ's operation further divided Chalcedonian thought. Indeed, although modern scholars had focused on the Monoenergist controversy as primarily a political move by the emperor Heraclius, a point that will be discussed shortly, several recent studies have suggested that the language of operation arose more organically out of continued Chalcedonian discussions over the meaning of Chalcedonian Christology in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. The term "operation(s)" appears in the writings of a handful of Patristic theologians, but as noted by Eileen Rubery, although these citations would be drawn on in the Monothelite debate of the late seventh century, most were taken out of context and had little to do with Christology.¹²⁷ Post-Chalcedonian writing yields more useful references, however, as the question of Christ's operation arises more naturally from the question of simultaneous unity and duality in Christ.

In the midst of these continued debates within the pro-Chalcedonian side, however, there remained an interest in defining a positive Chalcedonian identity. As the anti-Chalcedonians had done a half-century earlier, one aspect of this identity formation arose from hagiographies. One of the most important examples of the Chalcedonian narrative is the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus, a collection of edifying tales and short saints' lives, focused around ideas of righteous

¹²⁶ Yves Modéran, "L'Afrique reconquise et les Trois Chapitres" in C. Chazelle and C. Cubitt (eds.), *The Crisis of Oikoumene: the Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth-Century Mediterranean* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 39-82.

¹²⁷ Eileen Rubery, "Papal Opposition to Imperial Heresies: Text as Image in the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua in the Time of Pope Martin I (646-54/5), *Studia Patristica* 50 (2011), pp. 3-30.

living, correct practice, and correct doctrine. The text dates from c. 630, and, at least according to its author, represents several decades' worth of collected stories from his travels through the Near East.¹²⁸ Indeed, as argued by Henry Chadwick, the collection offers considerable insight into John Moschus' life – Chadwick suggest a Cilician origin or lineage for Moschus based on the repeated references to the area in the *Spiritual Meadow*, noting that most of other repeated locations are ones Moschus notes as having lived at in the work's prologue, including several monasteries in Palestine, as well as references to visits to Alexandria, Apamea, and Jerusalem.¹²⁹

The work itself consists of more than two hundred stories that, while many parallel John Moschus' travels, do not represent a coherent narrative of their own. In addition to multiple versions of the Greek original, translations survive in Latin, Greek, Georgian and Arabic, although notably not in Syriac or Coptic.¹³⁰ Although translations into these languages may simply be non-extant, it is also plausible that these stories did not find readership in these communities, as Chalcedon features heavily in the work. Several important Chalcedonian leaders are mentioned for their good and righteous lives, including Flavian and Pope Leo. Like the writings of John Rufus, John Moschus emphasizes the righteousness of monastic life, but unlike the anti-Chalcedonian author, he also lauds service to the church through holding church offices. Also like Rufus, the *Spiritual Meadow* is largely realist, focusing on human action rather than supernatural abilities, although miracles of prophecy and visions feature regularly. As Henry Chadwick has argued, this motif of

¹²⁸ For more on these stories' dating and compellation, see Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2014), p. 232, n. 21, John Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow (Pratum Spirituale) by John Moschus (also known as John Eviratus)* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1992), p. xvi-xx. See also Pachomios Penkett, "Palestinian Christianity in the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschos," *Aram* 15 (2003), pp. 173-84.

¹²⁹ H. Chadwick, "John Moschus and his friend Sophronius the Sophist," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 25 (1974), pp. 41-74 at pp. 55-6.

¹³⁰ For a complete analysis of the work's transmission, see *idem.*, pp. 41-47.

revelation may have been intended to strengthen the work's pro-Chalcedonian message to a lay audience, who would have remained unswayed by philosophical debates.¹³¹

The desire to demonstrate the correctness of Chalcedonianism remains the central focus of many of the stories. This righteousness manifests in the form of miracles and divine revelation, but John Moschus also regularly stresses continuity and unity as signs of religious righteousness, arguing that the failure of anti-Chalcedonianism can be seen in their schism and separation from the apostolic, catholic church. This emphasis on church unity is nicely summarized in an aphorism attributed to Abba Palladios, concerning heresies:

By way of injunction the elder said to us: 'Believe me children; heresies and schisms have done nothing for the holy church except to make us love God and each other very much less than before.'¹³²

This implicit association of schism with heresy is echoed in several stories regarding the anti-Chalcedonians. Thus, in a story regarding a monk's encounter with an anti-Chalcedonian monk, the Chalcedonian laments that the other is good and kind, and practices his religious life well, but still refuses to return to the apostolic, catholic church. The Chalcedonian monk is distraught, and begs God to show him the other man's faith, which he witnesses as a soot-covered pigeon. The story also repeatedly emphasizes the anti-Chalcedonian's Syrian character – including that he taught the Bible in Syriac – perhaps implying that he is choosing his ethnic identity over religious righteousness.¹³³

Not surprisingly, the issue of schism is regularly stressed by reference to the holy communion. Stories of miracles or disasters surrounding the Eucharist could resonate with Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians alike, and John Moschus draws on this shared tradition to

¹³¹ *Idem.*, p. 72.

¹³² Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, p. 56.

¹³³ *Idem.*, pp. 85-6.

highlight the importance of continuity and unity. In his short *Life of Isidore the Monk of Melitene*, the monk recounts how, in the market in the Cyprus town of Tadaï, near Philonexus, he found a man crying hysterically and saying that he had committed the most awful sin. When the monk tries to comfort him, he says:

‘Believe me, brethren, I have found no sin amongst men which I have not committed, whether I have learnt it from writing or by hearsay. If you think that I am accusing myself unjustly, hear my sin so that you can pray for me. In the world,’ he said, ‘I had a wife and both she and I were of the Severan persuasion. One day when I came home I could not find my wife, but I heard that she had gone to a neighbour’s to take communion. Now he was a communicant of the holy catholic church, so I ran immediately to stop my wife. As I entered the neighbour’s house, I found my wife exactly at the point of receiving the holy portion and making her communion. I grabbed her by the throat and forced her to emit the holy portion. I seized it and threw it up and down and it fell in the mud. All at once I saw a flash of lightening take up the holy communion from the spot where it lay. And two days later I saw a black-faced one wearing rags who said to me: ‘You and I are alike condemned to the same damnation’, and I said: “Who are you?” The black-faced one who had appeared to me replied: “I am he who struck the cheek of the Creator of all things, our Lord Jesus Christ, at the time of his passion.”¹³⁴

In this passage, John Moschus effectively likens the anti-Chalcedonian refusal to commune with the Chalcedonians with the rejection of Christ, a powerful image that could imply that they are no longer Christian, at all. Although within the story, this comparison is tied to the physical abuse of the Eucharist, the implication for the capacity for misdeeds by the anti-Chalcedonians in defense of their doctrine is striking.¹³⁵

However, John Moschus not only discusses schism as a marker of wrong religion; the significance of heresy appears, as well. In a story aimed against the Nestorians, a Nestorian argues

¹³⁴ *Idem.*, pp. 21-2.

¹³⁵ Indeed, miracles involving the Eucharist features in several stories about the anti-Chalcedonians. Moschus also recounts a story of the destruction by boiling of anti-Chalcedonian Eucharist, but not the Chalcedonian Eucharist (no. 29, *idem.*, pp. 21-2), Chalcedonian Eucharist from Maundy Thursday that sprouted green shoots, serving as a sign to an anti-Chalcedonian bishop (no. 79, *idem.*, pp. 63-4), and an anti-Chalcedonian monk who received a vision from God to change his theology after refusing communion with a Chalcedonian brother (no. 106, *idem.*, pp. 85-6). For the broader Byzantine conception of the Eucharist, see Vincent Déroche, “Représentations de l’Eucharistie dans la haute époque Byzantine,” *Travaux et mémoires* 14 (2002), pp. 167–80, and Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, pp. 130-3.

with the Chalcedonian monk Theophanes, who tells him that, “there is no other way of salvation that rightly to discern and believe that the holy Virgin Mary is in truth the Mother of God.” The Nestorian departs, unconvinced, but is visited by an apparition, who takes him through the Dead Sea, and shows him a vision of the pits of Hell, in which he sees Nestorius, Theodore, Eutyches, Apollinarius, Evagrius and Didymus, Severus, Arius, and Origen. The apparition informs him:

This place is prepared for heretics and for those who blaspheme against the Holy Mother of God and for those who follow their teachings. If you find this place to your liking, then stay with the doctrine you now hold. If you have no wish to experience the pains of this chastisement, process to the holy catholic church in which the elder teaches. For I tell you that if a man practice every virtue and yet not glorify <God> correctly, to this place will he come.¹³⁶

Although the story focuses on saving a Nestorian from his heresy, the inclusion of Severus in the hellfire leaves little doubt that John Moschus understood the apparition’s words as being levied against the anti-Chalcedonians, as well. In this way, John Moschus leverages the two strengths of the Chalcedonian position, that their doctrine was in keeping with the Church Councils and had preserved the unity of the Church, whereas both the Nestorians and anti-Chalcedonians had denied the Councils and splintered the Church. John Moschus demonstrates no interest in compromise with the anti-Chalcedonians in order to coax them to return – instead, he stresses repeatedly how conciliatory politics would weaken the Chalcedonian doctrine. Thus he recounts a story regarding the death of the emperor Anastasius, stressing how the emperor’s concessionary doctrines had harmed his fellow Christians:

One of those who loved Christ told us about the Emperor Anastasios who dismissed Euphemios and Macedonios, Patriarchs of Constantinople, and exiled them to Euchaita in Pontus on account of the holy synod of the fathers at Chalcedon. In his sleep, the Emperor Anastasios saw a man of striking appearance, dressed in white and standing before him, carrying a written book from which he was reading. He turned over five pages in his book, read out the emperor’s name and said to him: ‘See, because of your faithlessness I am expunging fourteen <years>,’ and they say he erased them with his own finger. Two days

¹³⁶ Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, p. 18.

later there was a severe outburst of thunder and lightning. In deep terror <the emperor> surrendered his spirit, greatly distressed. This was his reward for having despised the most holy Church of Christ our God and having exiled her shepherds.¹³⁷

Thus, it would appear that for John Moschus, the compromises of Zeno and Anastasius were not worthwhile attempts to keep the anti-Chalcedonians within the fold and maintain church unity, but compromises on 'true' Chalcedonian doctrine. Church unity is important, but that unity must go hand-in-hand with correct doctrine. Not surprisingly, John Moschus sets this duty to maintain correct doctrine on the church hierarchy, as well. He narrates a story supposedly from Amos, the Chalcedonian Patriarch of Jerusalem, who at his consecration was joined by the higoumens of the Palestinian monasteries. Amos expresses fear at being consecrated Patriarch, and tells the other how the Pope Leo remained in the tomb of Peter for forty days after his consecration, praying for remission of his sins, until, "when forty days were fulfilled, the apostle appeared to him, saying: 'I prayed for you, and all of your sins are forgiven, except for those of ordinations. This alone will be asked of you: whether you did well, or not, in ordaining those whom you ordained.'"¹³⁸

This story undoubtedly stems from the real challenges by both Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians to control the important religious offices in North Africa and the Near East. Throughout the sixth and early seventh century, the ability to hold office and ordain priests remained central to both sides' ability to spread their doctrines and cohere as a community. However, as the writings of Severus and John Rufus reflect, the anti-Chalcedonians had been consistently losing their control of these offices in the sixth century, and by the time of John Moschus' writing, they had already taken to appointing a rival hierarchy. The stories of the *Spiritual Meadow* give glimpses of these changes – with the emphasis on true, Chalcedonian ordination and

¹³⁷ Idem., p. 28.

¹³⁸ Idem., p. 122.

the anti-Chalcedonian refusal to take communion from Chalcedonians, it is easy to read into these passages the existence of an anti-Chalcedonian hierarchy, ordaining priests and administering the Eucharist for their followers, largely independent from the authority of Rome and Constantinople.¹³⁹

The continued evolution of Christian identity in the sixth century centered in part on the emergence of these new institutions. The appearance of separate hierarchies and communion illustrate the severity of the division between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians. In addition to preserving the shifting realities of life between the two groups, the works of John Rufus and John Moschus also preserve how each author integrated Chalcedon and the changes of the fifth and sixth centuries into the larger narrative of Christian hagiography. In the case of John Rufus, although there are elements of both of the inter-related concerns of church unity and doctrinal purity, in his stories of Peter the Iberian and his followers, it appears that the issue of doctrinal purity has nearly eclipsed church unity, as the Peter of Rufus' stories is neither concerned with reconciliation with the Chalcedonians, nor interested in the continuation of his own community if there were any risk of doctrinal contamination. Writing several decades later, the stories of John Moschus similarly preserve a concern for doctrinal purity over church unity, but in Moschus' view, unity was willingly sacrificed by the anti-Chalcedonians, who, with their corrupted doctrine, distanced themselves from Chalcedon and, by associate, the Chalcedonians. In this way, the stories told by these authors paint an image of Christian identity in which the titles of Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian imply distinct communities.

¹³⁹ As has already been said, elements of this separation may have already emerged as early as Severus' writings, which would fit well with John Moschus' implication that the separation between hierarchies was already fairly entrenched by the time of his travels; see Frend, "Origins of the Monophysite Hierarchy" and Allen, "The Syrian Church through Bishops' Eyes."

2.4. Heraclius and the Quest for Union

Thus, in the late sixth and early seventh century, both Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians had begun to produce works claiming a doctrinally-exclusive conception of the church, both claiming true inheritance of the Christian tradition set by Nicaea and First Ephesus, and both understanding the other as essentially at fault for the schism of Chalcedon. Although it appears that only a few representatives of either community were absolutely against reconciliation, both Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian writers appear to understand reconciliation as possible only at the cost of the other side's doctrine. Nevertheless, church unity remained a focus of imperial policy throughout this period, although many of the efforts by the Byzantine emperors, Popes, and Patriarchs of Constantinople in this period served to demonstrate just how ingrained the divisions around Chalcedon had become.

These movements in favor of reconciliation worked in parallel with the rise of Monoenergist language among both Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian thinkers, although attempts to use this language for the cause of reconciliation met with resistance among some Chalcedonians, in particular Sophronius of Jerusalem. Sophronius remains a central figure for understanding the changes of this period for many reasons, not only for his role in the debates of Christ's operation, but as one of the church leaders who were also forced to address the rise of Islam and the Muslim armies' incursions into Palestine in the early decades of the seventh century.

As has been mentioned, the apparent spirit of reconciliation surrounding the Fifth Council in 553 failed to sufficiently address the differences in how anti-Chalcedonians had begun to identify themselves in the sixth century, while simultaneously further alienating the Western church. Despite this apparent failure, the same spirit of reconciliation was continued by Justinian's nephew, Justin II, who drafted an edict in which he acknowledged only the first three Councils, with

Chalcedon conspicuously missing, and included both a recognition of Severus and an anathema of the Three Chapters.¹⁴⁰ This edict failed to elicit the support of anti-Chalcedonians, however, and in 571, Justin released a second edict which amended some of the language used by Justinian in 553, again apparently as an act of reconciliation with the anti-Chalcedonians.¹⁴¹ The purpose of these edicts have puzzled some scholars, as shortly after the second, Justin began a period of fierce repression of anti-Chalcedonianism in the empire.

However, the picture becomes clearer when Justin's relationship to the West is considered. In the late 560s, the emperor was also struggling to maintain good relations with the West, which required that he appear determinedly Chalcedonian, leading him to, as Cameron puts it, "[walk] a tightrope" in order to garner support from both sides of the empire.¹⁴² In the midst of his repression of anti-Chalcedonianism, Justin went mad, and was eventually succeeded by his general Tiberius II.¹⁴³ Tiberius had gained fame for his successful campaigns against the Persians, and military action seem to have been the main focus of his time as emperor, as well. He appeared to rely heavily on his administrators, and did not share the Justinianic precedent of the emperor taking a direct role in church doctrine.¹⁴⁴

However, without direct imperial intervention, the late sixth century still witnessed the further development of Chalcedonian thought, with debates arising over the correct formulation of, first, Christ's operation, and in the mid-seventh century, Christ's will. Indeed, the assertion of Christ's single *energeia* appears to serve as a central principle in anti-Chalcedonian writing, and it

¹⁴⁰ A. Van Roey, "La controverse trithéite jusqu'à l'excommunication de Conon et d'Eugène (557-569)," *Orientalia Louvaniensia Periodica* 16 (1985), pp. 141-65 at p. 157; see also P. Allen, "Neo-Chalcedonism and the Patriarchs of the Late Sixth Century," *Byzantion* 50 (1980), pp. 5-17.

¹⁴¹ Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, (Pauline Allen and John Cawte, trans.), (London, 1995), v. 2, pp. 486-90.

¹⁴² Averil Cameron, "The Early Religious Policies of Justin II" in *Studies in Church History* 13, (1979), pp. 51-67 at p. 54.

¹⁴³ John of Ephesus, *HE*, book III, caps 2.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Sarris, *Empires of Faith: the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam 500-700* (Oxford, 2011), p. 237.

is perhaps for this reason that the claim that imperial Monoenergism was enacted for the political gain of church reunification has been so widely accepted by modern scholars. By speaking of Christ as possessing a single operation, Monoenergist Chalcedonians were using language very similar to that employed by anti-Chalcedonians to delineate the importance of Christ's single nature. As demonstrated by Cyril Hovorun, Severus of Antioch in particular appears to understand Christ's single nature as being represented in his single *energeia*, and he dismissed the *Tome* of Leo for failing to accept this starting point for defining Christ's nature:

If [Leo] in spirit were to hold and confess the hypostatic union, he could not say that each of the two natures keeps its property without detraction, but he would say, like Cyril, that the Logos now and then permitted the flesh to suffer what is proper to it and to operate according to the laws of its nature. Thus the Logos would bear that as its own which is of the flesh, and still not relinquish what he has according to his essence (*ousia*), also not the superiority to suffering and his highest nobility.¹⁴⁵

In this way, it would appear that for Severus, the correct conception of Christ's nature is comprehensible by observing his operation, which, like his nature, is singular.

However, evidence from the neo-Chalcedonians reveals that far from borrowing from the anti-Chalcedonians, seventh-century Monoenergism appears to arise out of the sixth century attempts to define a positive Chalcedonian Christology. Indeed, it is not surprising that questions of Christ's operation and will should arise among the neo-Chalcedonians, since, as with Severus' definition of Christ's nature, operation and action were understood to serve as the visible representation of his nature. Thus, in attempting to construct a positive definition of Chalcedonian Christology, the neo-Chalcedonians were naturally struck by the need to define how the undivided natures of Christ manifested in his actions, particularly his actions in the Passion. It is more difficult, though, to pin down a particular definition of Christ's operation among the neo-Chalcedonians, as

¹⁴⁵ Cyril Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 16-7.

the concept is not discussed explicitly by many of these authors.¹⁴⁶ This diversity of thought would correspond closely with the limited evidence for the early Monoenergist controversy in the seventh century – questions of Christ’s operation and will were a natural extension of the question of Christ’s nature, but no succinct definition had yet emerged for how these concepts fit with the developing Chalcedonian assertion of two subsisting natures.

The Monoenergist debates, focusing on Christ’s *energeia* and the attempt to declare the single *energeia* as doctrinally correct, also reveal the continuation of the same competing interests that characterized Chalcedonianism in the sixth century – on the one hand, a desire to maintain church unity and bring the anti-Chalcedonians and perhaps even the Nestorians back into communion with Constantinople, as seen among the Chalcedonian leaders who supported Monoenergism, and particularly in Heraclius’ attempts at reunification, and on the other hand, a desire to maintain the doctrinal purity of Chalcedonian thought and to free imperial doctrine from perceived corruption from heresy, as seen among those leaders who rejected the doctrine.

However, as argued by Phil Booth, modern study of the Monoenergist movements and countermovement has been hindered by the later redaction of the limited contemporary sources which discuss divine operation, often clouding the origins and purpose of the initial Monoenergist movement.¹⁴⁷ In particular, many Late Antique scholars have accepted the thesis that appears to stem largely from late seventh century anti-Monothelite propaganda that both Monoenergism and Monothelitism were conceived by Sergius I, Patriarch of Constantinople, under the patronage of

¹⁴⁶ Karl Uthemann has argued for a Monoenergist and Monothelite conception behind some neo-Chalcedonian theologies, whereas Demetrios Bathrellos has argued for an implicit dyoenergist position in the works of Leontius of Jerusalem; Karl Uthemann, “Der Neuchalkedonismus als Vorbereitung des Monothelismus: Ein Beitrag un eigentlichen Anliegen des Neuchalkendonismus” *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997), pp. 373-413; Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 51-54. See also Christian Lange, *Mia Energeia* (Tübingen, 2012), pp. 428-434.

¹⁴⁷ Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, pp. 190-1.

Heraclius, as a means to reunify Chalcedonianism with the anti-Chalcedonians.¹⁴⁸ Thus, for example, Frend notes in reference to the two doctrines, “the great merit of Segius’ idea also was that it proposed unity on the basis of a positive notion that was emerging almost simultaneous on both sides, rather than on the condemnation of the work of long dead theologians.”¹⁴⁹

In parallel with these developing disputes within Chalcedonianism, and the communal shifts illustrated by John Moschus’ works, the 580s also witnessed another shift in imperial dynasties, this time to the Armenian general Maurice, a strict Chalcedonian, who oversaw the persecution of Monophysites both in the capital and the provinces.¹⁵⁰ This imperial policy was similarly short lived, as in 602, Maurice was deposed and executed by the general Phocas amidst rioting in Constantinople. Although Phocas had support from the military and at least some of the public for having lowered taxes and increased military wages, the transition to his rule was not a peaceful one.¹⁵¹

In addition to internal resistance, the Persian shah, Khosrau II, declaimed Phocas a usurper and traitor and swore vengeance for the murder of Maurice, launching a massive military action against Byzantium.¹⁵² Claiming Phocas’ inability to halt the Persians as reason for his removal, Heraclius, the exarch of Africa, sent an army, under the direction of his son, Heraclius the Younger, to Constantinople. The latter reached the capital in 610, by which time, many of Phocas’ supporters had defected. After a brief siege, Heraclius took the city, executed Phocas and was declared emperor.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, p. 199.

¹⁴⁹ Frend, *Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, p. 344.

¹⁵⁰ Idem., p. 332.

¹⁵¹ Walter E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the early Islamic conquests* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 31. See also David Olster, *Politics of Usurpation* (Amsterdam, 1993), pp. 139-42.

¹⁵² Kaegi, *Byzantium*, p. 32.

¹⁵³ Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, pp. 425-28. See also Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, pp. 242-5; Phil Booth, “Shades of Blues and Greens in the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiou,” *ByzZ* 104 (2011), pp. 555-601.

The early decades of the seventh century also saw some success by the emperor Heraclius to reunify the Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian churches. This process of reunification may account for the modern conception of Monoenergism as a political device, as language of operation does feature in several of the reunification accounts. In particular, Heraclius appears to have been aware of movement in the Armenian church to accept the Canons of Chalcedon, without the Creed, as orthodox. A nearly-contemporary view can be found in the Armenian history attributed to the bishop Sebeos. As argued by R. W. Thompson and James Howard-Johnston in their translation and commentary on the history, although there is no physical evidence to date the Armenian history from earlier than 900 CE, the history itself ends with the first *fitna* and the ascension of Mu'awiya,¹⁵⁴ and it is perhaps not unreasonable to accept the author in his claim to be an eye-witness to the events of the seventh century.¹⁵⁵

The history mentions the Armenian Catholicos Ezr being forced to accept Chalcedon by a Byzantine general, and eventually receiving a statement of faith from Heraclius, "in the king's hand, anathematizing Nestorius and all heretics; but it did not anathematize the council of Chalcedon," after which Ezr met the king and took communion with him.¹⁵⁶ Although the author of the *Armenian History* gives no further details about this statement of faith from Heraclius, there are variant versions of the story which have a council of Armenian bishops approving Chalcedonian Christology, as well.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Although as argued by Thompson and Howard-Johnston, this conclusion may be a later addition, and the 'real' history should be understood as ending at the outbreak of the first *fitna*; R. W. Thompson (ed. and trans.) and James Howard-Johnston (historical commentary), *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* (Liverpool, 1999), p. 1, n. 61.

¹⁵⁵ Thompson and Howard-Johnston, *Armenian History*, pp. xxxviii-xxxix.

¹⁵⁶ Idem., p. 91.

¹⁵⁷ Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, p. 200.

Heraclius' interest in reunification also played out in Alexandria. The city had continued to play a major role in the creation and dissemination of anti-Chalcedonian thought, as often in conflict with Syrian anti-Chalcedonianism at Antioch as in agreement. The anti-Chalcedonian leadership in the two cities had struggled to exert control over anti-Chalcedonian theology throughout the second half of the sixth century, especially since the appointment of Paul the Black as Patriarch of Antioch in c. 557, whose unpopularity led to the appointment of Jacob Baradeus and the partial separation of his followers, later termed "Jacobites," from the rest of the Syrian anti-Chalcedonian community. Paul was eventually anathematized by Damian of Alexandria, and the Jacobites took control of the Antiochene patriarchate, appointing Peter of Callinicum in 581, who continued to fight against Alexandrian anti-Chalcedonian thought.¹⁵⁸ The anti-Chalcedonian Alexandrian and Antiochene schools achieved reunification in 616 under the Patriarchs Anastasius and Athanasius Gammal, respectively. According to later accounts, the definition of Christ's operation may have served as a point of agreement in bringing about the reunification, although as with much of the history of the monoenergist movement, the reality of the doctrine's impact is blurred somewhat by the assumptions of later historical accounts.¹⁵⁹

If it is the case that a monoenergist definition featured in the anti-Chalcedonian reunification of 616, that may help to explain why the doctrine was included, albeit in passing, in the so-called *Pact of Union* of 633, which Heraclius, Sergius I and the newly-appointed Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria Cyrus drafted after Cyrus' success in bringing some of the Egyptian anti-

¹⁵⁸ Pauline Allen, *Sophronius of Jerusalem and Seventh-Century Heresy* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 10-11.

¹⁵⁹ D. Olster, "Chalcedonian and Monophysite: The Union of 616," *Bulletin de la Societe d'Archeologie Copte* 27 (1985), pp. 93-108.

Chalcedonians back into communion with Chalcedon.¹⁶⁰ The *Pact* consists of nine articles of faith, the seventh of which confirms both Chalcedonian and Monoenergist Christology:

If someone in saying that our one Lord, Jesus Christ, is discerned in two natures, does not confess that the same is one of the holy Trinity, God the Word begotten eternally from the Father, that in the last times of the age the same became incarnate, and was born of our Lady, the all-holy and undefiled and ever-virgin Mary, but knows him to be this one and another, and not as one and the same according to the most wise Cyril, the same being perfect in Godhead and perfect in humanity, and in that respect and in that alone discerned in two natures, the same on suffering and not suffering in two distinct respects, as the same Cyril, [now] among the saints, said, suffering in human fashion in the flesh as a human being, but remaining impassible as God amidst the sufferings of his own flesh, and that one and the same Christ and Son performed things befitting God and things human by one theandric activity, according to Dionysus [now] among the saints, distinguishing in contemplation alone the elements from which the union came about, and mentally considering these in remaining without change and without confusion after their natural and hypostatic union, and recognizing in these the one and the same Christ and son without confusion and without separation, as he mentally considers the two to be brought together mutually without confusion, holding the contemplation of them as a matter of reality and not of lying illusion, but he does not separate them in any way, since rending into two has already been undone because of the union which is ineffable and unconfused and inconceivable, saying according to holy Athanasius: ‘At the one time there is flesh, at the one time there is the flesh of God the Word; at the one time there is flesh ensouled and rational, at the one time there is flesh of God the Word endowed with a rational soul;’ but takes such an expression as dividing into parts, let him be anathema.¹⁶¹

The specific inclusion of Monoenergist language into the description of Chalcedonian Christology, stressing that Christ “performed things befitting God and things human by one theandric activity” before outlining the union according to the Chalcedonian adjectives, may have been intended to integrate the one activity as an element of Chalcedonian Christology.

Given the similar description of Christ as acting with one operation in the 616 anti-Chalcedonian reunification, it is plausible that this reference was also a nod to anti-Chalcedonian theology intended to bring some of the remaining anti-Chalcedonians in Alexandria back into communion. However, as noted by Christian Lange, “although on the pro-Chalcedonian, imperial

¹⁶⁰ Allen, *Sophronius*, p. 25.

¹⁶¹ Idem., pp. 170, 172; English translation at pp. 171, 173.

side, the text omits any explicit mention of the Council of Chalcedon (451), it still specifically includes the Chalcedonian terms ἀσυγχύτως and ἀτρέπτως and remains committed to the one, fully divine and fully human, Hypostasis of God the Logos,¹⁶² thus making it difficult to see how compromisingly it could have been read by the remaining anti-Chalcedonians in Egypt. Indeed, if the authors of the *Pact* intended the inclusion of Christ as one operation to appeal to anti-Chalcedonians, however, this intention remains an entirely unspoken one.¹⁶³

That the *Pact* and Sergius' subsequent letters supporting the unification represented a contamination with anti-Chalcedonian thought was the interpretation of at least a handful of Chalcedonian leaders at the time, as a small, but vocal resistance emerged to the one operation definition, being opposed by Sophronius, a pupil of the aforementioned John Moschus, as well as by Maximus the Confessor. Sophronius was appointed Patriarch of Jerusalem one year after the *Pact*, and used the opportunity of his new position to speak out against Monoenergism, composing a lengthy synodical letter in late 634, despite having been ordered by Sergius to refrain from speaking about either the one or two activities of Christ in late 633.¹⁶⁴

This injunction may help to explain the tone of the letter, which is that of an intellectual exercise about Monoenergism, demonstrating how one operation would contradict true Chalcedonian Christology. In doing so, Sophronius follows the same pattern as the *Pact*, integrating language of Christ's operation into Chalcedonian Christology by pairing it with the Chalcedonian adjectives:

But each nature, with the participation of the other, did what was proper to it, and avoided division, and did not recognize alteration, and preserved the difference with respect to the other, and kept the participation and composition undissolved and unbroken. We,

¹⁶² Lange, *Mia Energia*, p. 579.

¹⁶³ For more on the inclusion of this line, see Allen, *Sophronius*, p.28 and Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, p. 206.

¹⁶⁴ Allen, *Sophronius*, p. 30. See also F. Carcione, "Energheia, thelema e theokinetos nella lettera di Sergio, patriarca di Costantinopoli, a papa Onorio primo," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 51 (1985), pp. 263-76.

therefore, believing piously and staying within the boundaries of orthodoxy, say that the one and the same Christ and Son performed both acts, since the same one existed as God and a human being, and we do not entertain the idea of any confusion.¹⁶⁵

Again, this is not an explicit defense of dyoenergism, but rather a subtle extension of the two-in-oneness defined at Chalcedon to Christ's action, in the same ways as his natures.

Similarly, Sophronius does not outright anathematize those who say one operation, but instead likens the doctrine to those of Nestorius and Eutyches, implying that it is similarly damaging to correct Christology:

Counting these men [Nestorius and Eutyches] as nothing, we know that each activity of each nature (I mean the essential and natural and corresponding activity) proceeds indivisibly from each essence and nature according to its innate natural and essential quality, and [we know] that the inseparable and simultaneously unconfused cooperation of the other essence was brought in with it. For it is this which makes the difference also in the activities of Christ, just as too the existence of the natures [makes a difference] in the natures.¹⁶⁶

He goes on to outline how the two operations play out in the life and miracles of Christ, again without explicitly stating that his intention is to refute Monoenergism. In this way, the synodical letter appears to serve as a philosophical teaching device as much as a polemic, laying out the counterargument slowly and systematically in order to demonstrate the inherent danger in Sergius' continued support of Monoenergism.

Despite the potential theological repercussions from either doctrine, however, it appears that the immediate interest of Constantinople was to avoid further schism over the question of Christ's operation. Shortly before Sophronius' synodical letter, Pope Honorius had written to Sergius, urging him to avoid discussing either one or two operations. As part of his call to unity, the Pope also wrote that "we confess one will (*thelema*) in our Lord Jesus Christ," a statement that would

¹⁶⁵ Allen, *Sophronius*, p. 100, translation mine.

¹⁶⁶ Idem., p. 102, translation mine.

ultimately result in further division.¹⁶⁷ After the publication of the synodical letter, according to a letter to Sergius, Honorius again wrote to Sophronius, ordering that both he and Cyrus, Patriarch of Alexandria “should not appear to side with or adhere to the recent term, that is, the expression of one or a double activity, but, once the expression of a new term has been excluded – of whatever kind – they should proclaim with us one Christ and Lord.”¹⁶⁸ Honorius informed Sergius of his communication in late 634 or early 635;¹⁶⁹ however, it is uncertain if the communication would have reached Sophronius, as the city of Jerusalem was besieged by the Muslim army from Christmas 634, who would emerge as rulers of the city in the next several years.

Indeed, the appearance of the Muslim army in the Near East and Egypt marked the next major shift in the interactions between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians. Whereas much of the fifth and sixth centuries had been characterized by attempts on both sides to distance themselves intellectually from the other, the Islamic expansion left both groups in the Near East physically cut off from much of the Christian world, including Rome and Constantinople. Although the border between the caliphate and Byzantium was neither stable nor solid at any point in the seventh century, the collateral damage caused by the expansion, as well as the emergence of the caliphate and the Muslim ruling class, affected the priorities in both Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian identity.

It is, of course, impossible to know if the attempts at reunification would have been successful, or how the debates over Monoenergism would have progressed if Sophronius and Sergius had both been able to communicate with Rome uninterrupted. However, the interest in reunification, between the subjects of anti-Chalcedonians and from both Sergius and Heraclius,

¹⁶⁷ Honorius' *First Letter to Sergius*, Allen, *Sophronius*, p. 196.

¹⁶⁸ Honorius' *Second Letter to Sergius*, Allen, *Sophronius*, p. 206, translation mine.

¹⁶⁹ Allen, *Sophronius*, p. 33.

suggest that church unity remained a central issue for both communities. Thus, at the rise of Islam, the identity of Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian were still flexible – on the one hand, separate hierarchies and communions had emerged, suggesting complete segregation, but on the other hand, there remained both Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians who considered church unity both necessary and possible. To these complex identities, Christians of the Near East were forced to address the rise of Islam and the emergence of Muslims rule in the seventh century, as well.

2.5. Conclusion

In the century and a half from the Council of Chalcedon to the rise of Islam, the two sides of the Chalcedonian schism had begun to evolve from intellectual movements into distinct religious communities, with separate church hierarchies and communions, and their own internal narrative of church history, with their own heroes and villains. The Council of Chalcedon had been called in a spirit of reconciliation and unity, with the intention of addressing concerns over creeping Nestorianism left from First Ephesus. Yet the resulting debates, fueled in part by the regional, ethnic and linguistic divisions of the provinces, led to the creation of two distinct communions in the Near East.

Although the language of what would come to be known as the Chalcedonian Creed was exclusionary, incorporating canon 7 of the Council of First Ephesus in order to require allegiance to the Creed, the reaction to the Council in the second half of the fifth century was not one of strict adherence to the Council's doctrine. Instead, both the capital and the provinces continued to waver on their support of Chalcedon. Under the protection of the emperor *Zeno's Henotikon*, the intellectual resistance of the anti-Chalcedonians began to coalesce into a more organized and

distinct sect. In the anti-Chalcedonian writings of the late fifth and early sixth century, several themes that would remain central to the anti-Chalcedonian church emerge – an interest in maintaining both doctrinal exclusivity and internal coherence in the writings of Severus of Antioch, and an understanding of correct doctrine as dictating imperial victory or defeat in the writings of Philoxenus of Mabbug.

In the sixth century, a shift in imperial policy towards strict enforcement of Chalcedonian doctrine fueled the evolution of the anti-Chalcedonian movement into the distinct communities of the Monophysites. The repression of anti-Chalcedonians also supported the continued development of the pro-Chalcedonian movement, and in the neo-Chalcedonians, the first elements of a positive form of Chalcedonianism emerged, establishing a Cyrillian basis for Chalcedonianism, in particular the works of Leontius of Jerusalem, who highlighted the Cyrillian basis for the Chalcedonian Creed by effectively defining the distinction between *hypostasis* and *physis*. Imperial concern for ending the schism was not absent from the sixth century – indeed, such a concern can be seen in the dialogue called by Justinian and in the Fifth Council. However, reconciliation was already unlikely by this period, as both sides of the schism were forming into distinct churches, with separate hierarchies and communions.

The depth in the division is reflected in part by the appearance of distinctly Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian writings in genres beyond theological discussions. Thus, first in the hagiographies of John Rufus and later in the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus, there emerged two distinct and competing narratives of the life of the church since Chalcedon, with both authors claiming inheritance of the religious tradition of Nicaea and Ephesus. Both authors also reflect the realities of their own time and context – in John Rufus' writing, through his emphasis on exile as a form of monastic life, suggesting that by his time, exile was sometimes unavoidable for the anti-

Chalcedonians, and in John Moschus' work, in his repeated admonitions for the anti-Chalcedonians to return to communion with the Chalcedonians, implying that by his time, the anti-Chalcedonians had developed its own hierarchy of priests and bishops to serve their communities.

The early decades of the seventh century witnessed four further changes which would make up the context for much of the theological development in the seventh and early eighth centuries – the establishment of the Heraclian dynasty, imperial attempts at reunification, the Chalcedonian debates over Monoenergism, and the rise of Islam. It is impossible to know if Heraclius' attempt at reconciliation with the Monophysites would have been successful if many of the Monophysite provinces had not be lost to the Muslims, but it remains clear that at least some Chalcedonians did understand the emperor as attempting to alter imperial doctrine for the sake of the Monophysites, and thus, Sophronius wrote against the contamination of imperial doctrine with quasi-Monophysite thought, even as the rise of Islam began to feature in Christian writing. Thus the writings of the early seventh century maintain two inter-related focuses – on the one hand, the continuation of the theological debates of the fifth and sixth century and on the other hand, as will be discussed in the next two chapters, the sudden intervention of Islam into both the political and religious climate of the Near East.

In the first instance, Christian leaders in the Near East were forced to address the significance of the rise of Islam, the military losses by the Byzantines, and, as the seventh century went on, the potentially-indefinite continuation of Muslim rule. Furthermore, living under Muslim rule also altered how Christians perceived themselves and the schisms of the fifth and sixth centuries. On the one hand, the emergence of the caliphate may have solidified the divisions between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians, ending the attempts at reunification from Constantinople and Rome in the early decades of the seventh century. On the other hand, however,

both communities were forced to engage directly with the ideas of what it was to be a Christian, and what significance to give doctrinal divisions in the face of Islam's rival political, religious and cultural claims.

Chapter 3: Early Christian Responses to Islam

In the first half of the seventh century, Muslim forces expanded into a Near East that, although majority Christian, was characterized by several deeply entrenched sects. The theological writings of the previous centuries, since the Council of Chalcedon in 451, had focused on divergent claims of continuity from the Nicene and Cyrillian church. For the anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites, this narrative of continuity developed shortly after the Council, as opponents of the Council's Creed began to frame their opposition in Cyrillian terms, claiming the Chalcedonian Creed as an innovation. The narrative of continuity developed more slowly among the Chalcedonians, but emerged more strongly in the sixth century, in particular in the Council of Constantinople, as pro-Chalcedonian authors developed a positive definition of Chalcedonianism as a necessary evolution of Cyrillian Christology.

However, despite the divisions between them, communities on both sides of the divide faced the rise of Islam and the rapid military success of the Muslims together, and several similar

motifs and themes emerge from both Chalcedonian and Monophysite responses to Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries. This chapter begins with a brief overview of the early expansion and the context for these works' composition (section 3.1), and discusses the works of several important voices among the Chalcedonian (section 3.2) and Monophysite (section 3.3) communities. The purpose of this chapter is to consider how these writers attempted to understand and explain the rise of Islam and the Muslims' rule in the Near East, while simultaneously continuing the development and delineation of their own communities and of the correct form of Christian doctrine.

In order to demonstrate how these ideas developed across the seventh and eighth centuries, the authors discussed in this chapter span this chronological period – Sophronius (d. ca. 639), Anastasius of Sinai (d. ca. 700), and John of Damascus (d. ca. 754) as representing Chalcedonian views, and Athanasius of Balad (deathdate unknown, Patriarch of Antioch 683-687) and Jacob of Edessa for the Monophysite perspective (d. 708). This sample of authors is not intended to encompass the totality of Christian responses to Islam in this period, but rather are used as particularly acute and representative examples for discussing the range of responses, and how those response appear to change over time, as Christian authors began to accept Muslim rule as the new status quo. In this way, this chapter is intended to give a broad outline of how the rise of Islam and the emergence of Muslim rule affected both Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian religious identity.

3.1 Christian Responses to Islam

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce some of the themes about Islam, Muslims, and Muslim rule that emerge in Christian writing in the seventh century. The works treated here span a range of genres and styles, but share the general characteristics of being addressed to a Christian

audience, and not being specifically or exclusively about Islam. In other words, all of these works were written for Christians, by Christians, with some purpose besides addressing or responding to Islam exclusively. Moreover, these works come from authors about whom there is at least some biographical information, and so these works can be discussed in the context of their authors' lives and experiences. This chapter is meant as a contrast to chapter four, which will treat works by genre, rather than by author, focusing on works that address directly either Islam or Christian life under Muslim rule, and which come predominately from anonymous or pseudo-epigraphical authors, giving the works no clear context beyond a rough dating and proposed audience.

There are several advantages of discussing a range of works by author to start. By focusing on authors about whom there is some biographical information, this chapter aims to illustrate the continuity from the theological debates of the fifth and sixth centuries, and how Christian authors began to integrate Islam and Muslim rule into their thinking. The authors discussed in this chapter span the period of the present study, with Sophronius, who was also discussed in chapter two, serving as an example of one of the earliest responses to Islam, as well as one example of the intersection of the new Christian interest in explaining the rise of Islam with the continuation of the theological debates discussed in the last chapter. Similarly, Jacob of Edessa and John of Damascus, who wrote in the early eighth century, demonstrate the later development of Christian thought on Islam, writing with some knowledge of Muslim theology and practice, as well as addressing the realities of Christian life under Muslim rule. Not surprisingly, the emerging sectarianism discussed in chapter two also plays a major role in Christian works of the seventh and eighth centuries, and so this chapter is also intended to demonstrate some of the differences found in Chalcedonian versus anti-Chalcedonian works.

References to the Muslims' presence in the Near East appear in sermons, letters, collections of questions and answers, and collections of saints' lives and edifying tales. These references appear in both Chalcedonian and Monophysite sources, and although the Muslim expansion serves as the context for their creation, many of these sources continue to discuss the theological divisions that arose after Chalcedon. In this way, Christian authors in the seventh century attempted to integrate the rise of Islam into their existing worldview. Initially, these Christian works used the rise of Islam and the success of the Muslim expansion as a literary motif, often painting the Muslim victory in Biblical or apocalyptic terms in order to make a point regarding Christian sectarianism and heresy. Over time, however, more Christian works began to engage directly with Muslim belief, both in the form of direct rhetorical responses, as well as more practical analyses and integrations of questions of Christian conversion and apostasy into canon law and collections of questions and answers.

The slow process of Christian engagement with Islam has already been discussed in chapter one, but it is worth revisiting certain elements of that process of engagement with specific reference to the authors discussed in this chapter, all of whom occupied slightly different roles within both the Christian religious hierarchy and the developing Muslim state. Although this chapter will attempt to develop some general themes in how Chalcedonians and Monophysites engaged with the significance of the Muslim expansion and, in the case of later authors, with Islamic theology, these themes are broad strokes that are often underpinned by significant variation. It is natural that Christian authors struggling to give a broader meaning to the Muslim expansion demonstrate a variety of positions depending on influencing factors for that specific author.

Thus, much of the imagery of the Muslims was innovative for Christian writing. Although Arabs had featured in theological discussions prior to the rise of Islam, the realities of the Islamic expansion altered significantly how Christians viewed the inhabitants of Arabia in this period. This

point is illustrated in part by the lack of consistent language to describe the Muslims. None of the authors discussed in this chapter use the terms Muslims or Islam to differentiate this group from pre-Islamic or Christian Arabs. In fact, the terms “Muslim” and “Islam” are not even common in Muslim writing of this period, who refer to their community instead as believers.¹⁷⁰ At the same time, Christian authors continued to cling to a range of terminology, most of which failed to distinguish Muslims from Arabs more generally. Among Christian authors, several terms remain common throughout this period - “Saracens,” a Greek term that would remain a standard term for the Muslims well into the Crusader period, as well as “Ishmaelite” and “Hagarenes,” both quasi-ethnic terms which refer to the Arabs’ supposed descent from Ishmael, the child of Abraham and Hagar.¹⁷¹ Christian authors also continued to use the generic descriptor “Arab.” All of these terms imply that these authors either were not concerned with confusing the Muslims with Christian Arabs, or, as will be discussed below in reference to Anastasius of Sinai, perhaps used them intentionally to blur the lines between Christian Arabs, who were predominately Monophysite, and the Muslims.

Thus, the images of, and even terminology for Muslims, Islam, and the Muslim expansion that appear in Christian writing in the early decades of the seventh century are often confusing and vague. These works are naturally more focused on illustrating and discussing the effects of these events on their Christian audience, as well as speculating over both the theological significance and the long-term political impact of these changes. For this reason, the images of Islam and Muslims that emerge from these works can be considered not only as historical reference points for the

¹⁷⁰ This subject will be revisited in chapter five; see also Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 39-89.

¹⁷¹ For more on the varied language used by Christian authors to describe Muslims in this period, see Daniel Sahas, “The seventh century in Byzantine-Muslim relations: Characteristics and forces,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2.1 (1991), pp.3-22 and Nadia Maria El Cheikh, “Muhammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy,” *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999), pp. 5-21.

expansion of Islam, but as literary creations, illustrating particular issues and concerns of the Christian communities which created them.¹⁷² As has already been said, one influencing factor on how Christian authors framed discussions of Islam was the on-going doctrinal debates between Monophysites and Chalcedonians, as well as debates of Christ's operation(s) and will(s) for the latter community. As will be discussed in chapter four, genre also played a role in shaping Christian writings about Islam – particular images and conceptions appear regularly in specific genres, as they served the broader purpose of the works themselves.

One of the other important reasons for changes in Christian writing in this period was the simple passage of time, and the gradual accommodation and eventual acceptance of the permanence of Muslim rule. The earliest author discussed in this chapter, Sophronius, wrote during the first decade of the Muslim advance into Palestine. His writing is characterized by graphic and hyperbolic language, a characterization that may represent a focus on the day-to-day experience of a besieged city, with only limited knowledge of what was happening elsewhere in the area, and a resulting tendency to believe more extreme stories, and, at the same time, the genuine feelings of many of the Christian inhabitants of the Near East that the appearance of the Muslims signaled the beginning of a violent upheaval for local society.

The severity of the language used to describe the Muslims appears to soften over time, and, simultaneously, more practical questions of how Christians should live under Muslim rule appear in Christian writing in later decades. Both the Chalcedonian author Anastasius of Sinai and the Monophysite Athanasius of Balad were writing in the final decades of the seventh century, and both

¹⁷² Averil Cameron, "New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature: Seventh-Eighth Centuries" in A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Volume One, Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 81-105, J.L. Ehinger, "Biblical History and the End of Times: Seventh Century Christian Accounts of the rise of Islam" *Studies in Church History* 49 (2013), pp. 52-62.

authors liken the Muslims to demons, suggesting continued strong resistance and resentment among Christians for the Muslims' presence in the Near East. However, neither author matches Sophronius' tone in terms of graphic horror, and both authors discuss practical issues regarding life under Muslims rule – whether Christians should be seeking to make social and financial partnerships with the Muslims, the importance of continued practice of Christian ritual despite the Muslims' presence, and even how Christians should begin to respond to Islamic belief.¹⁷³

The latest authors treated in this chapter, the Chalcedonian John of Damascus and Monophysite Jacob of Edessa, wrote at the end of the period under consideration for this study, and demonstrate another further development in Christian thought. Both authors appear to write from a position of accepting the presence of Islam and Muslim rule as the new status quo, a conception that appears to accept that the Muslims would continue to rule the Near East for the perceivable future. For John of Damascus, this status quo is manifested in his integration of Islam into his heresiography, lending the faith a certain historical permanency by likening it to other Christian and non-Christian heresies, rather than ignoring or dismissing outright the religious claims of Islam. In the case of Jacob of Edessa, his collections of questions and answers continue the pragmatic trend of Christian writing, addressing many important points for Christian interaction with Islam, including suggesting leniency in cases of Christian apostasy and conversion. In this way, these later authors give a more humanized view of Islam, one that presumably stems from the experiences of several generations of Christians living under Muslim rule.

3.2 Chalcedonian Responses to Islam

¹⁷³ It is worth noting that Sophronius is not alone in using graphic language to describe life under Muslim rule; as will be discussed in the next chapter, this literary motif is particularly common in Christian apocalypses in this period. Maximus Confessor employs this imagery in his *Letters*, as well – Maximus Confessor, *Letters* 14, PG 91, 540A-541B. See also Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, p. 278.

3.2.a Sophronius

As was discussed at the end of chapter two, for Chalcedonian leaders of the early seventh century, the rise of Islam occurred simultaneously with the emperor Heraclius' pushes for reunification and the Chalcedonian debates over Monoenergism and Monothelitism, and these pressures, external and internal, remained inter-related throughout the seventh century. Monothelitism, in particular, would remain imperial policy in some form or another until the Council of Constantinople in 681. It is perhaps not surprising then that many of the leading Chalcedonian voices who produced works discussing the rise of Islam were also important players in these debates. For example, Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem from 634 to his death circa 639, has already been introduced in chapter two in reference to his resistance to Monoenergism.

Indeed, his opposition to the emperor Heraclius' theological policies was sufficiently severe as to lead some scholars to debate whether he should be characterized as a loyal Byzantine Chalcedonian. Walter Kaegi has argued that, although there was tension between the Patriarch and the emperor, this was a minor consideration in his appointment of Patriarch,¹⁷⁴ whereas David Olster has gone so far as to say that Sophronius had never been a "strident imperialist," but that both the Byzantine military failures and his conflicts with Sergius over Monoenergism had pushed Sophronius from moderate disapproval of imperial policy to a call from a Christian identity "that was Roman no longer."¹⁷⁵ Kaegi's position is supported in part by the reality of the circumstance that Heraclius did allow Sophronius to be appointed as Patriarch of Jerusalem, although the

¹⁷⁴ W. E. Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 269. See also Cyril Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 91-2.

¹⁷⁵ David M. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia, 1994), p. 99.

emperor's control over Palestine was limited and quickly lost to the Muslims. Indeed, as was discussed in chapter two, although Sophronius had been a vocal opponent of Monoenergism, his direct involvement in imperial and church policy was interrupted by the Muslim siege of Jerusalem, which complicated lines of communication between Jerusalem, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome.¹⁷⁶ It is impossible to say if his continued opposition to Monoenergism would have worsened his relationship with either Sergius or imperial rule, or if he would have kept his position had Palestine remained under Byzantine rule.

The rise of Islam serves as the immediate context for two of Sophronius' sermons, one delivered for Christmas Day in 634 and one delivered for the Feast of Epiphany in c. 637. Both sermons represent an attempt to explain why the Muslim military incursion had been successful, and how the siege of Jerusalem represented God's will. Both express the horror of the Islamic invasion in stark and graphic terms, a horror that was undoubtedly honestly felt by the Patriarch, who as a monk had already fled Palestine once before, during the Persian invasion a few decades earlier.¹⁷⁷ As sermons, both texts focus on the theme of the sacred day, as well – therefore, the Christmas Day sermon recounts the Nativity story, and the Epiphany sermon discusses the power of the Holy Baptism. Indeed, in both sermons, the Patriarch's descriptions of the Muslims are presented as an incursion, not just of his own time, but as a disturbance in the cosmic, Biblical history. In this way, Sophronius uses the Muslims' victory as a literary image to represent God's Wrath for Christian failure.

¹⁷⁶ For more on the life and early career of Sophronius, see Pauline Allen, *Sophronius of Jerusalem and Seventh-Century Heresy* (Oxford, 2009) and Christoph von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem: Vie Monastique et Confession Dogmatique* (Paris, 1972), pp. 53-98.

¹⁷⁷ Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, pp. 97-8.

To turn to the Christmas Eve sermon first, Sophronius begins by giving an account of the Nativity, focusing particularly on the phrase “glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill to men” (δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη, ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκία).¹⁷⁸ He sets up this image of peace between mankind and God as the proper course of history, how the story should have run. Christ in His Incarnation “descended from on high to lowliness to make you high and heavenly rather than earthly, and gave peace to us who were struggling in an unseen war, bringing us to his own Father.”¹⁷⁹ He speaks in wonder of the gift of the Incarnation, “God among us” (θεὸς ἐν ἡμῖν), telling his audience that in the Incarnation, mankind has been given the chance at holiness, highness and divinity, and exhorting them to “rise up and in communion let us fulfill His high and far-reaching Will.”¹⁸⁰ All of this is possible, Sophronius reminds his audience again and again, because of the birth of Christ, in which there was “glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill to men.”

What follows, however, is not the story as it should be, and it is in the next section of the sermon that the fear and terror, which Sophronius as Patriarch of Jerusalem undoubtedly must have felt upon witnessing the Muslim incursion, become palpable. Sophronius moves on to discuss the current condition of the Christian community in Jerusalem, prevented from traveling to Bethlehem as was customary on Christmas Day, “because of our infinite sins and serious faults . . . bound not by bodily bonds but bound by fear of the Saracens.”¹⁸¹ Thus one aspect of the theological significance of the Muslim incursion becomes clear, with the Muslims serving as an inhuman punishment from God. This analogy becomes clearer as Sophronius goes on, comparing his congregation to Adam,

¹⁷⁸ H. Usener (ed.), “Weihnachtspredigt des Sophronius,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 41 (1886), p. 503, translation mine.

¹⁷⁹ Usener, “Weihnachtspredigt,” p. 504, translation mine.

¹⁸⁰ Idem., p. 505, translation mine.

¹⁸¹ Idem., p. 506, translation mine.

banished from Paradise, by “the wild and barbarous Saracen sword, which is filled with every diabolical savagery”¹⁸² and to Moses and David, banned from the living waters of Bethlehem.¹⁸³

This construction is complicated by Sophronius’ repeated theme, the significance of the Nativity, “glory to God in the Highest, peace on earth and goodwill to men.” Not only has the Biblical peace created by Christ’s birth been shattered, but evidentially, the goodwill created in the manger does not extend to the “wild and barbarous” Saracens. Sophronius develops his understanding of Islam by considering the contemporary significance of the Nativity story for his audience – the cosmic history that unfolded in the Nativity, bringing mankind to God through God’s act of Incarnation, has been disrupted by the incursion of the Muslims.¹⁸⁴ Thus the Muslims are placed outside of the cosmic, Biblical history, absent from the Nativity story and the history of salvation that arose out of Christ’s birth.

In both sermons, he explains in detail how the people have brought God’s Wrath upon them, and what exactly they have done to incite God to act against them. In the Nativity sermon, after comparing his congregation to Moses and David, he goes on to say:

Therefore it is not without grief that we lead this assembly, closed in within the walls and celebrating the festival in the holy temple of the Theotokos. Thus I pray and plead and beseech you to desire for Christ God, in order that each of us, whatever our power, might reform ourselves and adorn ourselves with repentance, and turning around (ἐπιστροφή), we purify and we curb the flow of deeds which are hateful to God. For if we were to live as is dear and pleasing to God, we might laugh at the fall of our adversaries the Saracens and not before long we might make their ruin feeble and behold their final destruction. For their blood-loving swords will enter into their hearts, their bows will shatter, and their weapons will ensnare them, and they will provide for us a way free from fear.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Idem., p. 507, translation mine.

¹⁸³ Idem., p. 511.

¹⁸⁴ For the broader view of how this construction of the Nativity story fits with Sophronius’ doctrine of the Fall, see Schönborn, *Sophrone*, pp. 144-151.

¹⁸⁵ Idem., p. 515, translation mine. For Sophronius’ conception of sin, see also Walter Kaegi, “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest,” *Church History* 38.2 (1969), pp. 139-149.

It is also worth noting now that apparently as of 634, the Patriarch still considered it a possibility that his congregation might be saved from the Muslims, if only they would repent and change.¹⁸⁶

These failures of the Christians become clearer in Sophronius' sermon on the Holy Baptism, most likely delivered two years later, in January 637. After describing the gift of the Holy Baptism, Sophronius turns to the current condition of his audience, asking:

Why do barbarian raids abound? Why are the troops of the Saracens attacking us? Why has there been so much destruction and plunder? Why are there endless outpourings of human blood? Why are the birds of the sky devouring human bodies? Why have the churches been pulled down? Why is the cross mocked? Why is Christ, who is the dispenser of all good things and the provider of this joyousness of ours, blasphemed by pagan mouths (ἔθνικοῖς βλασφημεῖται τοῖς στόμασι) so that he justly cries out to us: "Because of you my name is blasphemed among the pagans," and surely, this is the worst of all the terrible things that are happening to us. That is why the vengeful and God-hating Saracens, the abomination of desolation clearly foretold to us by the prophets, overrun the places which are not allowed to them, plunder cities, devastate fields, burn down villages, set fire to the holy churches, overturn the sacred monasteries, oppose the Byzantine armies arrayed against them, and in fighting, raise up trophies and add victory to victory. Moreover, they are raised up more and more against us and increase their blasphemy of Christ and the church, and utter wicked blasphemies against God. These God-fighters boast of prevailing over all, assiduously and unrestrainedly imitating their leader, who is the devil, and emulating his vanity because of which he has been expelled from heaven and been assigned to the gloomy shades.¹⁸⁷

In this passage, Sophronius draws on the imagery of the divine war between God and the powers of evil to paint the Muslims as demons, describing them as God-haters (θεομισεῖς) and God-fighters (θεομάχοι), following the devil. This passage is undoubtedly meant in part hyperbolically, but the Patriarch's description of the Muslims as following the devil, the one who "has been expelled from heaven and been assigned to the gloomy shades," must have created a clear connection between the Muslims and the powers of Hell in the minds of his audience. Despite the cosmic imagery of the passage, Sophronius still stresses that the current events represent a deviation from

¹⁸⁶ For more on the Patriarch's role in the political life of Jerusalem, see M. Gil, "A Political History of Jerusalem during the early Muslim period," in J. Prawer and H. Ben-Shammai (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem: the Early Muslim Period 638-1099* (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 1-37.

¹⁸⁷ A. Papadopoulous-Kerameus (ed.), "Tou en hagiois patros hēmōn Sōphroniou archiepiskopou Hierosolymōn logos eis to hagon baptisma," *Analekta Hierosolymitikēs Stachyologias* 5 (1898), pp. 166-7, translation mine.

the true, salvational history of mankind, ending the passage by saying that God “takes no pleasure in evil, being the fount of kindness and not wishing to behold ruin and destruction of men.”¹⁸⁸

In this way, again he stresses that the separation of mankind from God evident in the Muslims’ victory is not the intended course of history, as laid out in the Nativity and in the Baptism of Jesus, further emphasizing that, as in the “goodwill to men” offered in the Incarnation, the Muslims are apparently not part of the “mankind” that now faces ruin and destruction. The term “mankind” is repeated in the passage in his description of the outpouring of “human blood” (ἄνθρωπίνων αἱμάτων) and the “human bodies” (ἄνθρώπεια σώματα), both lines in which the Patriarch obviously intends Christian blood and Christian bodies, again emphasizing that the ἄνθρωποι of whom he speaks do not include the Muslims.

Indeed, it is arguable that in these passages, he is speaking not of humans generally or Christians generally, but actually of only his own community of Chalcedonians, as only through correct doctrine is the true Christian baptism possible. He describes the people’s befouling of the holy Baptism just after giving a long list of figures that the audience is undoubtedly supposed to recognize as heretics, including Nestorius, Eutyches, and Mani, arguing that their doctrine of the Trinity would make the gift of baptism impossible because, without a truly human nature, Christ could not have been baptised.¹⁸⁹ In this way, Sophronius links the themes of right doctrine, cosmic history and salvation, showing how, in the past, true Christians had been spared God’s Wrath because they avoided sin and preserved the one true construction of doctrine, the one which allowed for the power of salvation through baptism.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ “To hagion baptisma,” p. 167, translation mine.

¹⁸⁹ “To hagion baptisma,” pp. 160-162. For more on Sophronius’ use of heresiologies, see Allen, *Sophronius of Jerusalem*, pp. 54-62.

¹⁹⁰ For more on the role of purification in Sophronius’ conception of Jerusalem’s redemption, see Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, pp. 244-249 and Schönborn, *Sophrone*, pp. 126-129.

In this way, Sophronius' sermon on the Holy Baptism follows the same logical pattern as his synodical letter discussed in the last chapter, working like a philosophical teaching device, laying out a systematic argument rather than openly attacking the other sects. Yet the tone has shifted entirely. The letter was directed to Sophronius' brothers in the church, attempting to convince them as part of an ongoing dialogue. It clearly preserves an interest in both church unity and doctrinal purity, but the only urgency stems from Sophronius' own concern over doctrinal correctness. It is in the sermons that the true danger of doctrinal failure manifests, and by the time of Sophronius' sermon on the Holy Baptism, it is distinctly unclear if even a return to correct doctrine would be enough to save Christians from God's Wrath as performed by the Muslims.

Thus, although the Muslim siege of the city serves as the context for Sophronius' sermons, in attempting to explain the Muslims' victory, the Patriarch harkens back to the sectarian debates of the pre-Islamic period. In particular, that he addressed the rise of Islam specifically on the Feast of Epiphany and in reference to the Holy Baptism demonstrates the same focus on the sanctity of the sacraments as discussed in reference to other Chalcedonian authors in chapter two, emphasizing the schism caused by the Monophysites appointment of their own hierarchy. Indeed, as these sermons were delivered publically, it is plausible that Sophronius would have been addressing an audience of mixed denominations, and the emphasis on the purity of doctrine that should underpin baptism could have been addressed to an audience that included people who were baptized by a 'schismatic' hierarchy.

The sermons of Sophronius demonstrate one of the earliest attempts by a Christian author to explain the rise of Islam and its significance for Christian identity. It is an attempt that integrates the real experiences of Sophronius and his congregants – the besieged city, and the congregation unable to take their annual pilgrimage to Bethlehem – with an imagined future, in which the streets

run with blood and suffering is everywhere. Although the Muslims appear as one of the subjects of these sermons, Sophronius' focus remains inward, illustrating the effects of the siege, not just on the day-to-day lives of his congregation, but on the entire Biblical narrative, describing the Muslims' siege and imminent victory as an upheaval of cosmic proportions. However, the repeated emphasis on correct doctrine, as expressed through baptism and communion, in the sermons further illustrates the inward-looking nature of Sophronius' concept of Christian identity. The true root cause of the Muslim victory remains Christian sectarianism, with the Muslims themselves serving as the embodiment of divine wrath, rather than as actors in their own right.

3.2.b Anastasius of Sinai

The same concept of the rise of Islam as serving as a visible punishment for Christian heresy is further expanded in the late seventh-century writings of Anastasius of Sinai. A member of the Mt. Sinai monastic community, Anastasius is often credited as the first Greek-speaking author to make direct use of Islamic thought, but despite his apparent awareness of Islamic sources, Anastasius never produced a direct refutation of Islam, and the majority of his work remained focused instead on addressing variant Christian belief, in particular the Monophysite and Monothelite theologies that permeated throughout the Levant. Born in Cyprus in the early seventh century, Anastasius first entered the monastery at Sinai with Stephen the Cypriot in 649, but according to his own account of his life, he left the monastery for several years, and traveled extensively throughout the Near East during the early centuries of the Islamic expansion, visiting several important conquered cities, including Alexandria, Clysma, Damascus and Jerusalem.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 92 and Karl-Heinz Uthemann (ed.), *Anastasii Sinaitae Viae dux* (Leuven, 1981), pp. CCXIV-CCXVII.

In this way, Anastasius' own life parallels the realities of Christian life in the Near East under Muslim rule, as he witnessed firsthand the effects of Muslim rule on the once-Christian cities of the Near East. Yet his work remains focused predominately on Christianity, in particular the importance of defending true doctrine against variation, with the Muslims remaining background figures. He returned to Sinai in the 680s in order to write works based on his experiences traveling, including his *Hodēgos* ("Guide") – more often referenced by its Latin title of *Viae Dux*, a guide for right living that included a refutation of heresy – his collection of questions and answers, as well as several homilies and collections of edifying tales. Although many of these works address the dangers of heresy, either directly or indirectly, and the Muslims feature in all of them, Anastasius' writing remained focused on Christian heresy, with the Muslims serving as representations of God's Wrath, rather than as a heretical sect in their own right.¹⁹²

However, modern study of Anastasius' corpus has been complicated by confusion between Anastasius of Sinai and Anastasius, Patriarch of Antioch from 559 to 570 and again from 593 to 599. Anastasius of Sinai's work often lacks internal historical references that could be used for consistent dating, and, as will be discussed in detail shortly, many aspects of his theology relate to post-Chalcedon theology, and he often speaks as though the Near East were the same as it had been before the Islamic expansion, and therefore could easily be attributed to an author of the sixth century. A complete analysis of this debate is beyond the scope of the present work; however, with regard to the works to be discussed in this section, Karl Uthemann has argued persuasively for these works as genuinely composed by Anastasius of Sinai.¹⁹³

¹⁹² For further discussion of the circulation of Anastasius' writing, see John Haldon, "The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: A Key Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief" in Cameron and Conrad, *Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, pp. 107-148.

¹⁹³ A general summary of this scholarly debate can be found in Clement A. Kuehn and John D. Baggarly, *Anastasius of Sinai: Hexaemeron* (Rome, 2007), pp. xiii-xxiii. See also Marcel Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses' d'Anastase le Sinaïte," *Bulletin de l'Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes* 15 (1967-8), pp.

The *Viae Dux* is the only work of Anastasius' that can be read as directly addressing Islam. Anastasius explains that the work is intended to give guidance to his fellow Chalcedonian Christians regarding the refutation of heresy, based on his own experiences refuting heretics in his travels throughout the Near East.¹⁹⁴ Although it is plausible that Anastasius would have debated belief with Muslims in his travels, reference to such debates occur only once in the work:

Before any discussion first we must anathematise all false notions which our adversaries might entertain about us. Thus when we wish to debate with the Arabs (Ἀραβας), we first anathematise whoever says two gods, or whoever says that God has carnally begotten a son, or whoever worships as god any created thing at all, in heaven or on earth.¹⁹⁵

At first glance, it would appear that in this passage, Anastasius is giving guidelines for the correct manner of refuting Muslim belief. However, only two of the three anathemas are reasonably applicable to Muslims – although anathematising “whoever says two gods” (τόν λέγοντα δύο θεούς) could be a reference to the Muslim accusation that Christians worship Christ as a God separate from God the Father, and anathematising “whoever says that God has carnally begotten a son” (τόν λέγοντα, ὅτι ἐγέννησεν ὁ θεὸς σαρκικῶς υἱόν) could be a reference to the Qur’ānic verses from sura 112, “He begetteh not nor was begotten,”¹⁹⁶ which may have appeared on Muslim coinage as early as the 690s,¹⁹⁷ the final anathema, against those who “worship as god any created thing at all” (τόν προσκυνοῦντα ὡς θεὸν οἰονδήποτε κτίσμα ἐν οὐρανῷ ἢ ἐπί γῆς) would seem

39-56, Anastasius of Sinai, *Viae dux*, Karl-Heinz Uthemann (ed.) (Leuven, 1981), pp. CCXIV-CCXVII, and Haldon, “The Works of Anastasius of Sinai,” pp. 107-47.

¹⁹⁴ S. H. Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai, the Hodegos, and the Muslims,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32 (1987), pp. 341-358.

¹⁹⁵ Anastasius of Sinai, *Viae dux*, I.1, p. 9, translation mine.

¹⁹⁶ Q. 112:3.

¹⁹⁷ It is less clear if a strictly Greek-speaking scholar like Anastasius would have been able to read these coins; Luke Treadwell, “Qur’anic Inscriptions on the Coins of the *ahl al-bayt* from the Second to the Fourth Century AH” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 14 (2012), pp. 47-71, and Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, pp. 209-11. Similar language also appears on the Dome of the Rock, but the same issues regarding accessibility remain; see Omer Grabar, “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), pp. 33-62.

to be nonspecifically pagan, with no obvious root in Muslim belief or practice, which were at this stage still broadly monotheist.¹⁹⁸

It would appear that in this passage, only the reference to carnal begetting stands as a clear reference to Muslim belief. However, even this accusation becomes less clearly directed at Muslims later in the *Viae Dux*, when, in recounting a debate in which he participated in Alexandria, Anastasius applies this same language to the Monophysites:

When they [the Severans] hear “nature,” they think of shameful and unbecoming things, the sexual organs of the bodies of men and women. Because of that, they avoid this word as if they were the students of the Saracens. For when the latter hear of the birth of God and of His genesis, they at once blaspheme, imagining marriage, fertilization and carnal union.¹⁹⁹

Here again, Anastasius addresses Muslim belief, but the real focus of his ire is clearly the Monophysites, with the Muslims serving as a model of wrong belief being aped by the supposedly Christian Monophysites. He goes on to compare Severus of Antioch, and by implication, his followers, to Arabs, Jews and Manicheans, without any further illustration of the similarities, presumably to further stress the supposedly extreme nature of Severan theology.²⁰⁰ Indeed, Anastasius gives no additional guidance regarding how his reader should refute Muslim belief, apparently assuming that the wrongness of their belief is blatant enough, but continues instead to focus on refuting Monophysite theology, so that the section as a whole remains focused on correcting the errors in Christian belief, not on directly refuting Islam.

None of Anastasius’ other writings address Islam directly, although the Muslims feature heavily in all of them.²⁰¹ In fact, considering the full corpus of his works, Anastasius’ description of

¹⁹⁸ As will be discussed in chapter five, there is little scholarly agreement about the nature of early Islamic practice, but monotheism emerges as a common theme in a number of the leading theories; see also Donner, *Muhammad*, pp. 90-144.

¹⁹⁹ Anastasius of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, X.2, pp. 169-70, translation mine.

²⁰⁰ *Idem.*, VII.2, p. 113.

²⁰¹ Although which references refer to Muslim versus pagan or Christian Arabs is still a point of some scholarly debate, as well; Sahas, “The seventh century in Byzantine-Muslim relations,” pp. 3-22.

the Muslims closely resembles the description found in his co-religionist Sophronius. For Anastasius, like Sophronius, the Muslims represent the visible manifestation of God's Wrath, a wrath brought about by Christians' doctrinal failures, and like the Patriarch, Anastasius compares the Muslims to Biblical suffering and demons. In this way, the Muslims serve as literary devices for Anastasius' larger themes of righteous behavior and belief, rather than as real actors or defenders of their own faith. However, despite the terrifying roles played by Muslims in his works, the Muslims in Anastasius' writing lack the graphic horror of Sophronius' work. This distinction parallels the differences in the two authors' experiences of Muslim rule – for the most part, Sophronius only experienced the Muslims as a military force, dying only a few years after the siege, whereas Anastasius lived most of his life under Muslim rule. Thus, while Anastasius portrays the Muslims as monsters, they remain largely benign monsters, revealing the reality of his own experiences, where Muslim rule had not significantly impaired the practice of his own religion.

Anastasius composed three collections of edifying tales, the first, completed around 660, focused on the lives of his fellow monks at Sinai and later two, completed around 690, collections of stories from the surrounding regions. Not surprisingly, the Muslims feature more regularly in this second set, although there is passing reference to their invasion of Sinai in the first.²⁰² In the second and third collections, the Muslims regularly appear as obstacles to Christian worship and religious practice. In doing so, they are also regularly compared to demons, an image which Anastasius employs in order to highlight the most crucial aspects of Christian belief. In one particularly strange

²⁰² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 99. There is no published edition or translation of the complete third, or “C” collection. It is preserved in a single manuscript, Ms. Vaticanus gr. 2592, fols. 123-35, and to date, summaries or translations of only three of the eleven stories have been published (very brief summaries of all eleven can be found in Flusin, “Démons et Sarrasin,” pp 386-88; C11 was edited by F. Nau, “Le texte grec des récits du moine Anastase;” partial translations of C1, C4 and C11 can be found in *Seeing Islam*, pp. 96-99). However, an edition and French translation has been prepared by André Binggeli for his doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne. My thanks go to Dr. Binggeli for providing a copy of this excellent work, as well as Dr. Philip Booth for his assistance in obtaining a copy and Iliaria Ciolli of the Vatican library for assistance with the original manuscript.

account, Anastasius tells of a Syrian man named Sartabias, who was cured of demon possession when his demon left to serve alongside the Muslims in their naval campaign against Constantinople:

There was a man called Sartabias among the inhabitants of Damascus. By God's permission, a spirit came to dwell in him; it terribly oppressed him daily with agonizing, shaking seizures. As the Saracens were preparing to go to sea through the Strait of Abydos, which leads to Constantinople, the demon appeared to Sartabias and said, "Our leader sends us as soldiers to help our companions, the Saracens, in their contest against Constantinople, and I too have received orders to leave. Thus, you have nothing to fear, and no one will bother you further, until our return from this contest." And so it was: before the Lord, the man remained free from abuse until the Saracens had returned.²⁰³

According to the demon, it would appear that the demons of the Near East were prioritizing their actions, being ordered to travel with the Muslims and attack Constantinople as presumably causing more evil than possessing individual Christians. In this way, the story implies that the demons needed the Muslims to attack the Christian capital, as without their presence in Syria, the demons would have continued attacking individual Christians through possession and torture.

Indeed, Anastasius makes this mutually-beneficial relationship between demons and Muslims more explicit, as the story ends by addressing the audience directly, explaining how and why Muslims and demons work together:

But you, take note of this: the demons do call the Saracens their companions, and rightly so. Perhaps they are even worse than demons, as demons are often much afraid of many of the mysteries of Christ, I mean his holy body, which was Incarnate and died, as has been written, the cross, the saints, relics, holy oils and many other things. But these demons of flesh and bones, all this they trample down under their feet, mock it, set fire to it and destroy it. How then can we call them righteous?²⁰⁴

In this passage, the Muslims transform from companions of demons to demons of flesh and bone.

There are strong similarities to Sophronius in this passage, in particular in the imagery of Muslims trampling and setting alight the mysteries of Christ, something that even the demons were

²⁰³ C1, Ms. Vaticanus gr. 2592 123v-124r = II.2, André Binggeli (ed.), *Anastase le Sinaïte: Récits sur le Sinaï et Récits utiles à l'âme* (Université Paris IV- Sorbonne, 2001), p. 221, translation mine.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., translation mine.

incapable of doing, and like Sophronius, Anastasius implies that victory over the Muslims and their demon companions would come not from military force, but from Christian ritual.²⁰⁵ However, the tone in Anastasius is notably different. The story of Sartabias bears none of the graphic imagery of Sophronius – although he states that Muslims trample the mysteries of Christ under their feet, he provides no examples of them doing so, nor does he go into any detail about the pain such acts has caused Christians. Indeed, the story as a whole is almost humorous – no holy figures feature at all, and Sartabias is ‘cured’ of his possession by the same demon who possessed him. The only graphic imagery employed is the painful seizures experienced by Sartabias, and the only moral lesson is that the Muslims work with and are like demons, without any clear implication of what this should mean for Anastasius and his fellow Christians, who had, at this point, lived under Muslims rule for several decades.

Indeed, even demons are not presented as a constant threat in Anastasius’ stories. In one of the final stories from this collection, Anastasius tells of the holy John of Bostra, who had traveled to Damascus to help resolve disputes between the Syrian churches. The governor of Antioch called for him to help with a case of possession – four girls had been possessed by demons and were “uttering words inspired by the devil.” Rather than exorcising the demons immediately, John talked with them about how demons attack Christians:

Blessed John, of whom we have just spoken, he heard the demons speak many words by the mouth of the girls in the language of Syria, and for his part, he asked them on many different issues about things that are useful to the soul, and I want to relate these here because of the weakness of the majority of people, that they might serve for the edification of all... The Holy John cut short a discussion on [another] topic and asked them this question: what objects found among Christian servants do you fear? They answered him: Verily, you possess three things: first, what you wear around your neck, second, the place where you bathe in the church, and finally, what you eat when you gather together. The servant of Chris, John, knew

²⁰⁵ For an interesting discussion on Anastasius’ understanding of salvation and the supernatural, see Matthew Dal Santo, “Text, Image, and the “Visionary Body” in Early Byzantine Hagiography: Incubation and the Rise of the Christian Image Cult,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 4.1 (2011), pp. 31-54.

they were talking about the venerable cross, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, and he asked them again: and these three objects, which do you fear most? And they said to him, Verily, if you partake of the Communion, none of us can do harm to a Christian.²⁰⁶

This description of the need for the correct communion by the demon-possessed girls implies that a weakening in ritual practice which both predated and predicted the demonic possession. The story does not appear to be saying that the four girls possessed specifically lacked the cross, baptism or communion, but that failures in correct practices among the Syrian churches generally, in particular in communion, allowed for demons to possess Christians. Indeed, particularly by setting these stories in Syria, Anastasius very subtly implies that the breakdown of orthodox belief is actually responsible for the rise of Islam, as well as an influx of demons who possessed the people of Syria. In this way, heresy and the failure of Christian belief arises as the true source of the current punishment being inflicted on Christians by the Muslims.

However, it is worth noting that the demons of this story are neither ferocious nor terrifying, and although the girls are described as speaking words inspired by the devil, those words prove to be a condemnation of Christian sectarianism and a call to doctrinal purity. Although there is nothing in the text to suggest that the demons in Syria did not pose a genuine threat, again the text lacks the palpable horror of Sophronius' writings. The Muslims are similarly absent – although it would seem plausible that the Islamic expansion was the cause of the disruption among the churches that first called John to Syria, Anastasius fails to address their presence directly. In this way, Anastasius appears to write from a position of imagined continuity, developing a narrative that could just as easily come from the pre-Islamic period, one in which 'orthodox' Christians were threatened by supernatural evil brought into this world by sectarianism and false doctrine.

²⁰⁶ C11, Ms. Vaticanus gr. 2592 130r-131r = II.20, Binggeli, *Anastase le Sinaïte*, pp. 249-50, translation mine.

Like his co-religionist Sophronius, Anastasius' concept of Christian identity remains inward-looking, defined by Christian failures, in particular with regard to Christology, which in turn has allowed for Muslim victory. Also like Sophronius, Anastasius' conception of Christian identity is one that integrates elements of the real day-to-day lives of his community. However, the image which emerges of this day-to-day life varies considerably from the Biblical horrors the Patriarch of Jerusalem predicted a few decades earlier. It appears that already in Anastasius' lifetime, the Near East was a place in which debates with Arabs seemed plausible, and in which the suffering caused by the Muslims' victory was something to be explained, but not necessarily a current influence on Christian lives. Instead, elements of acceptance can be seen in Anastasius' writing, as he struggles to explain how Christians should continue to practice their religion in the new world of Muslim rule, focusing particularly on the need to maintain vigilance against sectarianism, perhaps fighting against a concurrent desire to create a universal Christian identity that could be held up as preferable to Islam.

3.2.c *John of Damascus*

As can be seen with Sophronius and Anastasius, Chalcedonian identity was still developing in the seventh century, and indeed would continue to morph for several centuries as part of the community, which had once defined itself in part by its continued communion with Constantinople, found itself cut off from Byzantine and the rest of the Chalcedonian church. Although one of the most significant aspects of this change – the shift from Greek to Christian Arabic as the primary church language – would not occur for several more centuries, and thus falls outside the chronological scope of the present study, elements of the eventual transformation of Near Eastern Chalcedonian identity can still be seen in works of the seventh and eighth centuries,

in particular through Chalcedonian authors' continued revision of the history of the church council to define their own continuity from the Nicene and Cyrillian church.²⁰⁷

The evolution of the Chalcedonian conception of the Muslims most likely stems from the realities of their experiences living under Muslim rule in the seventh century. Sophronius, witnessing the capture of Palestine and the siege of Jerusalem, had predicted a terrifying and potentially apocalyptic future, but the reality was far more mundane. Chalcedonian writers from the early decades of the eighth century speak to a community living under the rule of a minority of Muslims, but one that was still predominately Christian, and one that had been allowed to continue many of its pre-expansion institutions, including the training of priests and monastic communities. At the same time, however, the Near Eastern community was partly cut off from the Byzantine church and its politics, a division that allowed for some variation in Chalcedonian religious traditions as compared to those of the Byzantine church.²⁰⁸

This division became particularly important at the end of the seventh and early eighth century with the first period of Byzantine iconoclasm, from which the Near Eastern Chalcedonian church was largely separated. Indeed, iconoclasm makes up part of the context for the writings of John of Damascus, who was able to remain a staunch supporter of icons in part because he was beyond the reach of the Byzantine authorities. However, his importance to the understanding of Christian responses to Islam stems from the appearance of Islam in his book of heresies. Indeed, John's description of Islam as a Christian heresy has shaped much of the modern scholarly view of

²⁰⁷ For more on the long-term development of Chalcedonian identity, see Sidney Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic," *The Muslim World* 78 (1988), pp. 1-28 and David Vila, "The Struggle over Arabisation in Medieval Arabic Christian Hagiography," *Al-Masaq* 15.1 (2003), pp. 35-46.

²⁰⁸ The journal *Al-Qantara* recently ran an excellent special edition on the conversion of Chalcedonian identity; see in particular Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, "Entre Helenismo y Arabización, sobre la formación de una identidad etnolingüística de las comunidades melkitas en el seno del poder islámico," *Al-Qantara* 33.2 (2013), pp. 445-471, Sidney Griffith, "The Melkites and the Muslims: The Qur'ān, Christology, and Arab Orthodoxy," *Al-Qantara*, 33.2 (2013), pp.413-443.

Christians' response to Islam. It is not surprising that John's work would stand out for modern scholars among the available early Christian responses to Islam - John was extremely knowledgeable about Islam, having been either himself a scribe to the Umayyad court in Damascus or the son of a court scribe.²⁰⁹

Indeed, although there is still significant scholarly debate regarding the details of John's life, which survive in an Arabic *Life*, several Greek redactions, and incidental references from several late eighth century sources,²¹⁰ the general picture which emerges from these sources is of a figure who, in many ways, encapsulates the changes to Chalcedonian identity in the early eighth century. His Arabic *Life* stresses his family's close association with the caliphal court in Damascus, and a later, anonymous *Life* claimed that John had been educated with the children of the Muslim elite in Qur'anic studies, possibly even studying alongside the crown prince Yazīd I (647-683).²¹¹ As will be discussed below, his writing does suggest that he had made a study of the Qur'ān, and as will be discussed in the next chapter, he was clearly interested in responding directly to Islam, producing a brief dialogue of answers to Muslim accusations about Christianity.

Yet despite this interest in Islam and connection to the developing Muslim milieu in Damascus, John appears to have understood himself connected to Byzantium and the wider community of Chalcedonianism, as well, engaging directly with Byzantine iconoclasm and,

²⁰⁹ For a full account of the various versions of John's Life, see Daniel J. Sahas (ed.), *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 17-25 and Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, (Oxford, 2002), pp. 3-14.

²¹⁰ The Arabic life and its Greek redactions all give John a role in the Umayyad court; however, as Sahas notes, the Greek redactions are fanciful and clearly not intended as historical documents; see Constantine Bacha (ed.), *Sīrat al-qiddīs Yūḥanna al-Dimashqī al-aṣḥiyā* (Harissa, 1912), particularly p. 15, Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 35. By comparison, Theophanes, who provides the earliest extant reference to John of Damascus, calls him simply a presbyter and monk, although it is also reasonable that Theophanes was either unaware of John's role in the caliphal court or intentionally omitted this information; Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, p. 565. See also Louth, *St John*, pp. 6-7.

²¹¹ A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias* (Brussels, 1963), v. 4, pp. 271-302 at pp. 272-3.

according to some sources, leaving the court later in life in order to join the monastic order at Mar Saba.²¹² In this way, his biography remains a blending of the new integration with Islam and the connection to Byzantium, and his writing preserves this complex, inter-related identity, one that could both defend a united identity of “Christian” against Islam, while still defining that identity through the lens of doctrinal purity.

His heresiography, *De haeresibus*, which is actually a subsection of his larger philosophical work, *The Fount of Knowledge*, is also a unique source among Christian works discussing Islam, and it is not surprising that it has received special attention from Western scholars. The work aims to give a full account of the variety of heresies which beset the Christian world, set in contrast to the right belief, which makes up the third and final section of *The Fount of Knowledge*, *De fide orthodoxa*.²¹³ It is *De haeresibus* that has stood out in modern scholarship, however, because the author addresses Islam directly, not only claiming that Muslims should be understood as heretics, but actually going so far as to argue that Islam should rightly be understood as the perpetuation of the Christian heresy of Arianism.

Robert Hoyland has argued that it is incorrect to understand John as describing Islam as a Christian heresy, and points to the important fact that John also treats twenty other non-Christian “heresies,” including Barbarism, Hellenism and Judaism.²¹⁴ But whereas these heresies are treated

²¹² John’s retirement to Mar Saba appears only in the problematic Greek redactions of his Arabic *Life*, but both Daniel Sahas and Joseph Nasrallah accept it as plausible, noting in particular the contemporary abandonment of the Muslim court by many Christians in the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik (684-705), due to the caliph’s demands for conversion by those in caliphal service; Sahas, *John of Damascus*, p. 44, Joseph Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas, sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris, 1950), p. 81. Andrew Louth also supports the idea that John retired to a monastic life, but suggests a later date of 706, in the reign of the caliph al-Walid, and while he stresses that John probably retired to a monastery in the area of Jerusalem, he notes that it was not necessarily Mar Saba; Louth, *St John*, p. 6. Indeed, it is worth noting that John does not appear on a ninth century list of past Mar Saba luminaries, for which Hoyland dismisses the association as an invention of the Greek hagiographies; Michael the Sabaite, *Passion*, in K. Kekelidze (ed.), *Monumenta hagiographica georgica I* (Tbilisi, 1918), pp. 165-73; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 483.

²¹³ For a full discussion of how the sections of Islam fit into *The Fount of Knowledge*, as well as an argument for the text’s authenticity as part of the larger work, see Daniel J. Sahas (ed.), *John of Damascus on Islam: The “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 51-66.

²¹⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 484.

first, Islam comes last, after the author's description of Monothelitism. Obviously the arrangement is, in part, chronological, and therefore the author correctly places Islam in his own period. But more than being purely chronological, the heresies are also arranged as a series of syntheses, with Barbarism, Hellenism and Judaism serving as the basic roots from which later, Christian heresies arise. In this way, these heresies are understood as essentially outmoded – ancient formats that reappear from time to time in modern perversions of Christianity, but which are not necessarily themselves current threats to true orthodoxy.

Islam, on the other hand, was a current threat, and is treated as such in the work. Rather than being an ancient, misguided way of thinking, which was corrected by the rise of Christianity, Islam was a modern event, one that grew out of the misguided versions of Christianity – namely the ultimate heresy of Arius – just as those misguided versions of Christianity had grown out of Hellenism and Judaism centuries before. In this way, John does appear to understand Islam as a Christian heresy, albeit a bastardized version, an even-further perversion of the already-perverse beliefs of Arius. It is not surprising, then, that John should attach the title “Arian” to Islam, drawing upon the first great heresy that threatened ‘true’ Christianity in the fourth century, in order to emphasize Islam's continuity from the fundamental errors of Christian history, as well as to place it within a recognizable class of heresiological polemic.

This attribution of Arianism to Islam is unusual, and significant, but Hoyland is certainly correct in attempting to temper the significance applied to it in modern scholarship. The comparison is not completely unexpected, moreover, as both Arianist Christology and the Islamic conception of Christ focus on the issue of Christ's divinity, and the tension between Christ's createdness and the pure transcendence of the divine. However, if this is the logic by which John likens Islam to Arianism, which it most likely is, this analysis is absent from the chapter itself. To

put it more correctly, John draws upon the contemporarily well-known story of a monk, Bahira,²¹⁵ who was supposed to have met the Prophet and trained him in Christian scripture, saying that “a false prophet appeared among [the Arabs], surnamed Mameḍ, who, having stumbled across the Old and the New Testament and supposedly having encountered an Arian monk, formed his own heresy.”²¹⁶ From this perspective, and from the story which follows, which attacks the credentials of Muḥammad’s prophethood and the legitimacy of the rituals of Islam, the text begins to read much more like a more evolved version of those of his fellow Chalcedonian Anastasius:

These [Arabs], then, were idolaters and venerated the morning star and Aphrodite, whom notably they called *Habar* in their language, which means “great;” without a doubt, until the time of Heraclius, they were idolaters. From that time on, a false prophet appeared among them, surnamed Mameḍ, who, having stumbled across the Old and the New Testament and supposedly having encountered an Arian monk, formed his own heresy. And after, by pretense, he managed to make the people think of him as God-fearing, and he spread rumors of a scripture that was brought down from heaven. Thus, having drafted some pronouncements in his book, of only laughable value, he handed it down to them in order that they should comply with it.²¹⁷

Firstly, it is worth noting that John’s account of the rise of Islam is both less apocalyptic and less supernatural than most of the other works discussed thus far. Neither demons nor Satan feature in the training and victories of Islam, and there is no reference to the rise of Islam’s potential role in the End Times. Islam is still treated as essentially false and misguided, but as succeeding through wholly human means, predominately through the ingenuity of Muḥammad who, “by pretense, managed to make the people think of him as God-fearing” (καὶ προφάσει τὸ δοκεῖν θεοσεβείας τὸ ἔθνος εἰσποησάμενος). Intriguingly, John also implies that Muḥammad achieved his position of

²¹⁵ For the transmission of the Bahira legend through Muslim and non-Muslim sources, see Elizabeth Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plane: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley, 1999), Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira: Eastern Christian apologetics and apocalyptic in response to Islam* (Leiden, 2009) and R. Gottheil, “A Christian Bahira Legend,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898), pp. 189-242.

²¹⁶ John of Damascus, “De Haeresibus” = P. Bontifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* (Berlin, 1981), v. 4, p. 60, translation mine.

²¹⁷ Idem., v. 4, pp. 60-61, translation mine.

authority prior to the composition of the Qur'ān, relying on “rumors of a scripture.” John certainly demonstrates more knowledge of the Qur'ān than any other Greek writer of this period,²¹⁸ an unsurprising fact given his reported role as a court translator, and this conception of the Qur'ān as postdating Muḥammad's rise to power may imply that John was also aware of some of the history of the work's compilation, and is here making light of the fact that the Qur'ān as a written text was not compiled until after Muḥammad's death.²¹⁹

It is also worth noting that in his description of Islam, John would appear to speak of a more generalized “Christian,” rather than exclusively for his fellow Chalcedonians. Thus he addresses the most common accusations that Muslims make against Christians generally, saying:

What's more, they call us *Associators*, because, they say, we introduced an associate to God by saying that Christ is the Son of God and God. To which we answer that this is what the prophets and the Scripture have handed down to us; and as for you, you claim to accept the prophets. If, therefore, we wrongly say that Christ is Son of God, then they, too, were wrong, who taught it and handed it down to us.²²⁰

John does not take the opportunity to follow his co-religionist Anastasius and discuss the variant sects and how more or less correct their Christology may be, or accuse the Monophysites of fueling the Muslim belief that Christ was carnally begotten. Instead, he suggests a universality to his statements in order to imply the superiority, and indeed the universality, of Christian thought, suggesting that even Muslims should accept Nicene Christology, if they accepted the prophets as they claim.

²¹⁸ Issues regarding the dating of the Qur'ān will be discussed in chapter five. However, it is useful here to note recent evidence for the existence of the Qur'ān in John's contemporary environment: Yasin Dutton, “An Umayyad Fragment of the Qur'an and its Dating,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9 (2007), pp. 57-87.

²¹⁹ Indeed, as will be discussed in chapter five, John's references to the Qur'ān are quite important for the ongoing modern debate regarding the Qur'ān's dating and context for composition. John references the names of three known *surāt*, and although he does suggest the text may have been compiled after Muḥammad's death, he gives no suggestion that the text was composed recently or that Muslims are falsely implying a much older date for the text; see Sahas, *The Heresy of the Ishmaelites*, p. 89-93, 138, 140.

²²⁰ Kotter, *Johannes*, v. 4, p. 63, translation mine.

However, John's conception of this Christian "we" becomes more complicated when considered in relation to his entry on Monophysitism. Of the Monophysites, the *De haeresibus* says:

The Egyptians, also known as schismatics or Monophysites, they took the Chalcedonian Creed as a pretense to separate from the orthodox Church. They joined with the Egyptians first during the rule of Marcian or Valentinius.²²¹

The Monophysites are clearly a separate sect, who John understands as essentially at fault for creating schism in the Near East, having used the Chalcedonian Creed as a pretense to separate from the 'orthodox' church. Far from relying on an ecumenical or inclusive, pre-Chalcedonian vision of "Christian," John here outlines a clear delineation between Chalcedonians and Monophysites, one that stems from a basic theological disagreement:

Those corrupt doctrines were promulgated and asserted by Severus of Antioch, and elaborated by John of Tritheita, who denied communion of the holy mysteries and all of the doctrines put down by the seven hundred and thirty holy fathers at Chalcedon, destroying the apostolic agreement that had been obtained, and instead telling and scandalizing the holy Trinity.²²²

Thus, taken together with the other entries in the *De haeresibus*, John's use of "Christian" in discussing Islam takes on a different tone. Although the final chapter does stand alone, with distinct headings and a different overall format than the rest of the *De haeresibus*, its inclusion in the larger work would seem to imply that John's discussion on Islam is intended to be read in the light of the history of Christian heresies, and in this context, the "Christian" that emerges to address Islam is one that has already been whittled down to Chalcedonianism through his rejection of the preceding one hundred heresies.

Indeed, it is worth noting that John also wrote a response to Monophysitism, which echoes and expands his description of the community's origins and intentions from *De haeresibus*. Much

²²¹ Idem., v. 4, p. 49, translation mine.

²²² Idem., pp. 49-50, translation mine. For more on how John's conception of "Christian" overlaps with "Chalcedonian," see Louth, *St John*, pp. 103-5.

like the sermons of his co-religionist Sophronius, John begins his response to Monophysitism by laying out a history of Christian heresy, illustrating how the doctrines of Arius, Nestorius and Eutyches would have destroyed ‘correct’ Christian practice by misrepresenting God the Son, the Incarnation, and the Trinity.²²³ In this way, when he turns to address Monophysitism, and in particular Severus of Antioch directly, he does so within the larger framework of the text, essentially labelling Severus as the next step in his history of heresies. Thus, much like the *De haeresibus*, John ‘proves’ Chalcedonianism by negatives, demonstrating how each of the ‘heretics’ he discusses separated themselves and their community from the ‘real’ history of the Church Councils.

In this way, John subtly creates a narrative of Chalcedonian supremacy. Like Sophronius and Anastasius, he does so by negatives, by highlighting the heresies to which Chalcedonians have not fallen prey to and by stressing how those heresies, if accepted, would have corrupted Christian tradition, particularly communion. He also creates a parallel history of heresies, founded by the ancient heresies of paganism, Judaism, and Hellenism, of which each new corrupting doctrine in a part, with each new community, including the Monophysites and the Muslims, being pulled into this anti-history of heresies.

Thus, in the seventh century, Chalcedonian authors continued to develop their conception of their own identity. However, unlike their pre-Islamic counterparts, their association to and continued communion with Constantinople was no longer an aspect that they could emphasize. For many of these authors, this did not result in a diminished emphasis on the evils of sectarianism and schism, but instead, there emerges a sense of a spiritual continuity with pre-Islamic Christianity. In this way, these works also betray a focus on re-establishing Christian history for Near Eastern Chalcedonians. For Sophronius, this focus emerges as a fixation on a Biblical history

²²³ John of Damascus, “Contra Jacobitas” = Kotter, *Johannes*, v. 4, pp. 109-153, particularly pp. 110-114.

gone wrong, corrupted by the rise of Islam, whereas both Anastasius and John appear to be attempting to re-instate a corrected version of history, in which both Monophysites and Muslims are merely the most recent in a line of heresies and false beliefs, but in which the lives and practices of Chalcedonian Christians remain the same as before the expansion.

This new identity, attempting to re-instate Chalcedonian Christianity as a norm, would appear to parallel somewhat the experiences of these authors, as Muslim rule had become the new status quo, complicating their connection to Byzantium but not cutting them off entirely, nor preventing them or the Monophysites from continuing in their own practices. Indeed, this continuity can also be seen in Chalcedonian authors' continued participation in Byzantine theological debates – both Sophronius' writings and Anastasius himself were involved in debates over imperial Monothelitism, and John was deeply involved in the iconoclasm debates, demonstrate a view of Chalcedonian Christianity that was neither wholly internal nor wholly external, but which was shaped by local events and the continued imperial religious policies in Byzantium. Muslim rule even protected these authors from persecution for their refusal to adhere to imperial doctrine, and yet the Muslims and Islam remain the Other in these works. There is a clear evolution of thought over time as Chalcedonian authors came to access Muslim rule as the new status quo. Yet these authors maintain a sense of distance from the Muslims, perhaps even an overemphasized or imagined distance in the cases of Anastasius, whose monasticism was seemingly undisturbed by Muslim rule, despite his implication of the Muslims as a kind of divine wrath, and depending on the accuracy of his *Lives*, certainly in the case of John of Damascus, who fails to address in any substantial way his own role within the caliphate.

Thus, the works of Sophronius, Anastasius, and John all demonstrate some aspects of how Chalcedonian church leaders in the Near East attempted to address the rise of Islam for their

congregants. These authors also demonstrate how Christian conceptions of Islam evolved over time, from the apocalyptic interpretation of Sophronius's sermons to the practical responses to both Islam and Monophysitism of Anastasius and the rhetorical responses of John of Damascus. The themes of Muslims as representatives of God's Will survive across the seventh and eighth centuries, and these authors employ this Biblical imagery for a number of reasons, such as to cast the current suffering and oppression of their congregants in a cosmic light, making it part of the same divine history as the Children of Israel and the early church. They also often call their audience's focus back to sectarian divisions of the previous centuries, exhorting them to extra vigilance even in the midst of the Muslim invasion. In this way, these works demonstrate a continuity from the works of the previous centuries, attempts to maintain the doctrinal and communal distinctions between Monophysites and Chalcedonians at the same time as they address the tremendous upheavals of their own time.

3.3 Monophysite Responses to Islam

This perception of the rise of Islam as representing a larger cosmic shift in the Near East is found not only among Chalcedonian authors, but among Monophysites as well. At the same as the Chalcedonian communities of the Near East were struggling to identify themselves without direct communion with Constantinople, the Monophysite communities were continuing to develop their identity as a distinct communion, separate from that of Constantinople or Rome. As outlined in chapter two, the Monophysite community had begun to coalesce around a distinctive identity in the first decades after the Council of Chalcedon, with the first anti-Chalcedonian voices, such as Severus of Antioch and Philoxenus of Mabbug, defining their co-religionists as the true successors of Cyrillian Christology.

In parallel, however, Monophysite identity developed concurrently with the development of a new and separate church hierarchy. As seen in the works of John Rufus and John Moschus, the emergence of a Monophysite hierarchy was understood by both sides as a new development that potentially signaled a lasting separation between pro- and anti-Chalcedonians. The rise of Islam helped solidify this division, cutting off the Monophysite communities of Syria and Egypt from uninterrupted interaction with Rome and Constantinople, and effectively putting an end to attempts at reconciliation in the first decades of the seventh century. At the same time, this nascent hierarchy continued to develop under Muslim rule. One point of particular concern for Monophysite church leaders was conversion, and an interest in maintaining the boundaries of the community echoes through many Monophysite works of the seventh century.

This section focuses particularly on the Syriac-speaking Monophysite community, as the geographic and contemporary parallel to the Chalcedonian leaders of Syria and Palestine already discussed. Indeed, as has already been discussed with the Chalcedonians, Chalcedonians and Monophysites continued to live alongside one another in the Near East throughout the seventh and early eighth centuries, with debates between them – both real and imaged – featuring in the writings of Anastasius of Sinai and John of Damascus. Like their Chalcedonian counterparts, these Syriac Monophysite works demonstrate continuity with their co-religionists in the fifth and sixth centuries, attempting to continue to hone the definition of anti-Chalcedonianism and to resolve the disputes between the Jacobites, Severans, and other disparate groups that had arisen in the late sixth century. This desire for continuity and unity may also help account for the repeated theme of resisting conversion and maintaining boundaries.

3.3.a Athanasius of Balad

Unfortunately there are fewer examples of extant sources from members of the Syrian Monophysite community which directly address the Muslims. A number of the surviving examples mention the presence of the Muslims in the Near East, but give no further details about how their presence has impacted the lives of Christians or what the theological importance of the invasion may be.²²⁴ Moreover, as will be discussed in the next chapter, there are a number of anonymous or pseudoepigraphical sources which appear to have Monophysite allegiance. Included in this anonymous corpus are the number of saints' lives about Monophysite bishops and patriarchs who served during the seventh century. Although these texts often claim to preserve the beliefs and opinions of the Monophysite leaders they write about, the works themselves often stem from a much later period, in which Muslim rule had already been accepted as the norm.²²⁵

One extant example that does survive from the Syrian Monophysite community and which appears to come directly from the leader himself is a letter from Athanasius of Balad, Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch from 683 to 687. Born in the early decades of the seventh century, Athanasius grew up in a Monophysite church already under Muslim rule. He spent much of his life at the monastery of Ṭur 'Abdin translating the works of Porphyry and Severus and helping to develop a Syriac canon for his fellow Monophysites.²²⁶ He was appointed Patriarch of Antioch in 683, and

²²⁴ There is, for example, a fragment from Thomas the Presbyter from c. 640 which mentions the Muslim invasion, but gives no further information about them (*CSCO* 3-4, pp. 77-154) and a short *Life* about Gabriel of Qartmin (d. 648), abbot of the Qartmin monastery (Andrew Palmer, *Tash'ita d-qadisha* (Glane, 1983)), which mentions the abbot negotiating poll tax, but has no further discussion of the Muslims as individuals or a community, and which cannot be dated to earlier than the late eighth century.

²²⁵ Again, the *Life* of Gabriel of Qartmin is a useful illustration, as it presumes the poll tax is being enforced throughout the caliphate and that the abbot could serve as an intermediary with the Muslim governor to negotiate the monasteries' taxes.

²²⁶ For more on the role of Syriac in developing thought of the period, see Sebastian Brock, "Syriac views of the Emergence of Islam" in G. H. A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Edwardsville, 1982), pp. 9-21, reprinted in Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1984) v.8, pp. 199-203 and Daniel King, "Grammar and Logic in Syriac (and Arabic)," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 58.1 (2013), pp.101-120.

appears to have harbored a particular interest in his community's interactions with the Muslims during his three year tenure.²²⁷ Only one patriarchal letter survives, an epistle addressed to his archbishops and inspectors, which focuses almost entirely on their community's relationship to their Muslim rulers.²²⁸

The letter serves as a useful source because it focuses particularly on social interactions with the Muslims, specifically taking meals with them, suggesting perhaps that by the late seventh century, important figures within the Monophysite community had begun to reach out to their Muslim rulers in an attempt to cull favors. Considering this circumstance for the letter's composition, it is not surprising that Athanasius also draws on parallels with Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, admonishing the Corinthians for attending pagan festivals (1 Cor. 8). Announcing to his audience of archbishops that he writes to them to put an end to a sin "practiced now in the church of God," he explains that:

Greedy men, who are slaves of the belly, take part in feasts together with the pagans at any occasion, unrestrained, while wretched women join indiscriminately with the pagans, unlawfully and indecently, and finally, at any time, they eat with the pagans from what they have sacrificed, forgetting, in their bewilderment, the orders and exhortations of the apostles, who often would cry out to those who believed in Christ, that they flee from fornication, from what is strangled and from blood, and from the food of pagan sacrifices, lest they become associates of demons and their unclean table.²²⁹

Thus, he claims that, far from benefiting the Monophysites by attempting to improve their relationship to their Muslim rulers, these men and women are endangering themselves and their community by accepting food from idols and thus acting as associates to demons.

²²⁷ Omert J. Schier, "Chronological Problems Concerning the Lives of Severus bar Masqa, Athanasius of Balad, Julianus Romaya, Yohannan Saba, George of the Arabs and Jacob of Edessa," *Oriens Christianus* 75 (1991), pp. 62-90, particularly 78-80.

²²⁸ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 147-8.

²²⁹ Nau, "Littérature canonique syriaque inédite," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 14 (1909), pp. 1-49, 113-30 at pp. 128-129, translation mine.

In this way, as has already been said, Athanasius draws heavily on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, reminding his fellow Monophysites of Paul's admonition that to participate in pagan feasts and in the communion is to share the communion table with demons. It is worth noting that there is probably no direct parallel to the Corinthian church, as Islam has only a handful of religious feasts, and these were still developing and would only come to be codified in the late Abbasid period.²³⁰ Even in their codified form, these feasts took place only a few times a year, so it is perhaps more reasonable to presume the context for Athanasius' letter was general association between Christians and Muslims.

Indeed, it is worth noting that Athanasius does not address Muslims directly, speaking only of "pagans" (*hanpē*) throughout the letter. It is certainly the case that there were still groups that Athanasius could describe as pagans in the Near East in this period, to whom this letter could refer.²³¹ However, it is unclear why Athanasius would choose to address these pagans at this time, or why there would have been a sudden increase in Christians' attending pagan festivals or, as the passage below discusses, having relations with the indigenous pagan communities. Moreover, as this letter is composed in the late seventh century, approximately forty years after the Muslim conquest of the Antioch, it would seem reasonable that a second generation of Christians, who had grown up under Muslim rule, might be testing the opportunities for social and financial advancement through improved relations with their rulers. For this reason, both the timing of the letter and Athanasius' admonition make more sense in the context of Christian interactions with Muslim rulers.

²³⁰ The main sources for the development of Islamic law remain Norman Calder, *Studies in Early Islamic Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1993) and Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge, 2005). On the development of the feast rituals in particular, see Hallaq, *Origins and Evolution*, pp. 56-58, as well as Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Muslim Festivals" in Gerald Hawting (ed.), *The Development of Islamic Ritual* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 317-31.

²³¹ For more on the continuation of paganism in the Near East, see Peter N. Bell, *Social Conflict in the Age of Justinian: Its Nature, Management, and Mediation* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 235-246.

In drawing on the Pauline parallel, Athanasius also reveals less of an understanding of Muslim tradition than his near-contemporary Anastasius of Sinai, as in reality, the quality of the sacrifice of Muslim meat should not be a point of concern for Christians, as Muslim food purity laws were similar to Jewish law, and forbade the consumption of food sacrificed to idols, as well as the consumption of carrion and blood.²³² Athanasius remains either unaware or unconcerned with this point, consistently referring to the Muslims as pagans (*hanpē*), rather than the more common Syriac term *taiyoyē*, presumably in order to stress the Muslims' status as pagans on a theological level.²³³ Like his Chalcedonian near-contemporaries, he also links the Muslims' presence with supernatural evil. Like the early community in Corinth who tempted demons by joining in pagan feasts, the Monophysites courting Muslim favor are in fact courting evil. In this way, the Muslims again serve as a literary motif, representing evil, but without any clear attachment to real events or genuine Muslim traditions.

In responding to the perceived threat of the Muslims, Athanasius actually echoes many of the themes of pre-Islamic Monophysite writing discussed in the last chapter, in particular a dual interest in maintaining the internal exclusivity of his community and maintaining its doctrinal purity. He reminds his archbishops of their obligation with regards to any members of their congregation that are suspected of association with Muslims, an obligation that differs depending on the certainty of the charge:

You should therefore take care ... to stop and wipe out entirely this evil and deadly negligence in the very midst of your Christian brothers, who together have invoked the

²³² Indeed, Marion Katz has argued that food purity laws regarding blood and carrion may have predated the rise of Islam, and thus potentially be characteristics of Arabians generally, which Athanasius and his audience might have known from interactions with the Arabian population prior to the expansion; see Marion Hohmes Katz, *Body of Text: the Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity* (Albany, 2002), pp. 9-12.

²³³ The term may also have been in wider usage as Syriac interacted with Arabic, which was developing its own concept of "hanif" – C.J. Lyall, "The Words "Īanif" and "Muslim,"" *Journal of the Asiatic Society* (1903), 771–84 and Mun'im Sirry, "The Early Development of the Quranic Ḥanīf," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 56.2 (2011), pp. 345-366.

name of the Savior. As for those who you know have truly succumbed to such a sin, remind them of the rules and canons of the Church, for you know what they order in such cases, and deprive them of participation in the divine mysteries, and also act with caution towards them, according to wisdom, skill and power of each, in the manner of the wise and vigilant commandments of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, exhort them, reprimand them and warn them – especially the women who are joining with these men, that they keep from the food of their sacrifices, from their flesh, and from their illegal trade, as in doing so, they also stain the baptism of the children which they have had from these unions.²³⁴

Athanasius is clearly aware of the potential risk of such a strict stance, that they will be distancing themselves from their brothers and, presumably, reducing their numbers, but like the Chalcedonian authors already discussed, he continues to prioritize the purity of his community's doctrine, in particular in the Eucharist and baptism.

However, Athanasius' focus is not exclusively on the Muslims. Indeed, despite interactions with Muslims making up the majority of the content of the letter, he chooses to close the letter by reminding his archbishops of their requirements with regards to other Christians:

No Orthodox priest should give, knowingly and willingly, holy baptism or participation in the divine mysteries to Nestorians, Julianists, or any other heretics. It is sufficient to sentence the anathemas of the saints of the East and of the bishops, our brothers, upon any priest who dares to do so.²³⁵

In this way, he stresses that the current circumstances – the appearance of the Muslims and their rule in the Near East – has not overridden the conflicts of the fifth and sixth century. Even whilst their community's numbers might be dwindling due to interactions with Muslims, Athanasius censures his co-religionists not to relax the doctrinal divisions of the previous centuries.²³⁶ Indeed,

²³⁴ Nau, "Littérature canonique," p. 129, translation mine.

²³⁵ Idem., p. 130, translation mine.

²³⁶ For more on the balance between Monophysite identity in relation to Islam versus other Christian sects, see Bas ter Haar Romeny, "From religious association to ethnic community: a research project on identity formation among the Syrian orthodox under Muslim rule," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 16.4 (2005), pp. 377-399 and Bas ter Haar Romeny, N. Atto, J.J. van Ginkel, M. Immerzeel and B. Snelders, "The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project," *Church History and Religious Culture* 89.1-3 (2009), pp. 1-52; W. Pohl, "Introduction: Ethnicity, Religion and Empire" in Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner and Richard Price (eds.), *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 1-27 and Bas ter Haar Romeny, "Ethnicity, Ethnogenesis and the Identity of Syriac Orthodox" in Pohl, Ganter and Price, *Visions of Community*, pp. 183-204.

the specific inclusion of Julianists highlights the continued variation within the Monophysite community.

Thus, although short, this official epistle from Athanasius offers an important example of how the Monophysite community integrated the rise of Islam into their existing conception of church community. The Antiochene Monophysites' shared connections to Syria might have offered them a special opportunity to gain favor with the new ruling party, as the Umayyads also had familial ties to Syria, and established their capital at Damascus. The Patriarch pushes back against this idea, arguing for the importance of exclusivity and purity, in particular with regard to the purity of baptism and communion. This exclusivity does not apply simply to the Muslims, however, as Athanasius reminds his bishops to remain vigilant against including in their services any member of a different sect. Thus, he integrates both the present concerns of the Muslims with the Monophysites' traditional concerns regarding doctrinal purity.

3.3.b Jacob of Edessa

One of the most influential voices in this continued development of Monophysite identity was Jacob of Edessa. Raised in Syria near Antioch, Jacob studied at the monastery of Qenneshre and later in Alexandria, developing an extensive knowledge of both Greek language and the church canons, both of which played a central role in his later writings. He returned to Syria, being appointed bishop of Edessa in 684, but his obsession with church law put him in conflict with the patriarch, and after four years, he retired to the monastery of Mar Jacob at Kayshum.²³⁷ Jacob was notorious for his dual preoccupations of canon law and Greek studies, and was eventually forced

²³⁷Alison Salvesen, "Jacob of Edessa's Life and Work: A Biographical Sketch" in Bas ter Haar Romeny, (ed.), *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 1-10.

out of the monastery at Kryshum because of his constant attempts to revive Greek studies among his brothers.²³⁸

His literary output similarly reflects these dual interests. Among his vast corpus, Jacob produced the first collection of canons to address the appearance of the Muslims directly, often drawing parallels between the treatment of pagans in the Greek canons, and the potential laws to be applied to the Muslims in his own time. He also produced several collections of questions and answers that similarly reflect his interest in demarcating and maintaining the boundaries of his own community.²³⁹ Jacob's work also expresses the evolving realities of life under Muslim rule. Although the Muslims feature in both positive and negative roles, their actions, and Jacob's discussion of them, are distinctly pragmatic, outlining the real social pressures faced by his community and giving recommendations as to how they could both preserve their identity and survive under Muslim rule.

The Muslims feature regularly in his collections of questions and answers, as undoubtedly their presence had significantly altered the social, political and cultural landscape for the Monophysites. As with his co-religionist Athanasius, social interaction and conversion feature centrally in many of the questions about Muslims. The diversity of Near Eastern Christianity is also a common feature in Jacob's writing, with the variant sects often featuring alongside the Muslims in discussions of marriage, inheritance, burial and apostasy, sometimes falling into the same category of the Other as the Muslims, and at other times serving to mark a distinct hierarchy of acceptable and unacceptable beliefs.

²³⁸ Konrad Dirk Jenner, "The Canons of Jacob of Edessa in the Perspective of the Christian identity of his day" in Haar Romeny, *Jacob of Edessa*, pp. 101-112. On Jacob's language use, see Haar Romeny, "Jacob of Edessa on Genesis: His Quotations of the Peshitta and his Revision of the Text," in idem, *Jacob of Edessa*, pp.145–158. A breakdown of the extant and edited works of Jacob is available in Sebastian Brock, "Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac culture of his day," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61.1 (2010), p.168.

²³⁹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 602-8.

Muslims feature in four of the extant collections of questions and answers, two of which are addressed to a priest called Addai, and the other two of which are called letters to John the Stylite of Litarb. Unfortunately no complete edition or translation of the questions and answers exists. A collection of seventy-one of the responses to Addai was edited and translated into Latin by Thomas Lamy in 1859, and while this collection includes most of the material found in other manuscripts, it is missing an additional 25 rulings found in Ms. Harvard syr. 93, an eighth-century manuscript which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, also includes the only extant version of the Syriac apocalypse *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*.²⁴⁰ Seventeen of these responses to Addai, along with the two collections to John the Stylite were edited by Arthur Vööbus for the CSCO series, which also includes a comparison of the available manuscript traditions.²⁴¹

Like most question and answer collections, the order of questions seems slightly random, and it is unclear if the answers are meant to be read together or in isolation.²⁴² Also like many question and answer collections, although the questions claim to be a second author, asking questions of Jacob, it seems reasonable to assume that he wrote both sections, and thus both the question and the answer often reveal useful information about how Jacob understood the roles that Muslims could and did now play for his community. For the most part, Jacob's answers are short and direct, giving specific answers, including caveats for acceptable divergences from the given answer. The Muslims often feature in these caveats, emphasizing the sense of their presence as an aberration in the Near East. Thus, for example, in one of the replies to Addai, Jacob recommends

²⁴⁰ Jacob of Edessa, *Replies to Addai*, Thomas J. Lamy (ed.), *Dissertatio de Syrorum fide et disciplina in re eucharista* (Leuven, 1859); see also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp.602-8.

²⁴¹ Arthur Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition I* (Leuven, 1975).

²⁴² For considerations on how to read the questions and answers, see Jack Tannous, "You are what you read: Qenneshre and the Miaphysite Church in the Seventh Century," in P.J. Wood (ed.), *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*, (New York, 2013), pp. 83-102, Bar Haar Romeny, "Question-and-Answer Collections in Syriac Literature" in A. Volgers and C. Zamagni (eds.) *erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context*, (Leuven, 2004) pp. 145-163; and for the reconstruction of the sources, see C. Kayser (ed. and trans.), *Die Canones Jacob's von Edesa übersetzt und erläutert* (Leipzig, 1886), pp. 1-6.

against Monophysites eating with non-Monophysite laity or clergy, unless ordered to do so by a Chalcedonian or Muslim governor.²⁴³

Another area in which the Muslims, as well as other Christian communities, regularly feature in the questions and answers is with regard to the issues of conversion and apostasy. Like Athanasius and the Syriac apocalypses to be discussed in chapter four, Jacob seems particularly concerned that his co-religionists will convert to Islam or be forced to join in communion with the other Christian communities due to a lack of trained church officials. However, whereas Athanasius focused on preventing his community from converting to Islam or loosening their doctrinal rules, Jacob specifically addresses the other side of this problem, giving advice on how Monophysite priests should cope with conversion and apostasy. In doing so, he also demonstrates a pragmatism that may reflect the realities of Muslims and Christians living in close proximity in the Near East.

In one of the two collections of the *Replies to Addai*, he allows Monophysite priests to teach the children of Chalcedonians and Muslims,²⁴⁴ and to bury apostates if no bishops or leaders of their community are available.²⁴⁵ Jacob offers similar leniency for conversion. For those who had converted to Islam and were then willing to rejoin the Monophysite flock, Jacob instructs his priests to treat them mercifully:

We do not need to rebaptise a Christian who becomes a Muslim or pagan and then returns, but the prayer of penitence should be said over him by the bishop, and a period of penance should enjoined upon him.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ *Replies to Addai*, Lamy, *Dissertatio*, pp.154-57. See also Robert Hoyland, "Jacob of Edessa on Islam" in Gerrit J. Reinink and Alex Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in honor of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers* (Leuven, 1999), pp. 149-60.

²⁴⁴ *Replies to Addai*, Lamy, *Dissertatio*, 158-59.

²⁴⁵ *Replies to Addai*, 21, Arthur Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, (Louvain, 1972), p. 261).

²⁴⁶ *Replies to John*, 15, Vööbus, *Synodicon*, p. 253, translation mine.

Similarly, one of the collections of *Replies to Addai* includes a recommendation that a priest offer consideration even for a woman who has married a Muslim and threatens to convert to Islam if she is not given the Eucharist, as being better for her and the community:

Q: Concerning a Christian woman who of her own free will marries a Muslim (*mhaggriyii*), is it appropriate for priests to give her communion and is there known a canon regarding this? And if her husband threatens to kill the priest if he does not give communion to her, is it right for him to consent temporarily while he (the husband) is seeking that he (the priest) be killed, or is it a sin for him to consent? Or is it better that he give her communion lest she become a Muslim, since her husband IS compassionate towards the Christians?

A: All these doubts of yours, you have resolved them [yourself] in that you have said it is appropriate that communion be given to her lest she become a Muslim; [just] so that she does not then become a Muslim - even if it be that the priest is sinning when he gives [it] to her and even if her husband is not making threats - it would be right to give her communion and it would not be a sin for him because he gives [it] to her. As for the other thing that you say, is a canon known regarding this, you should conduct yourself [according to what I have said] even if there is no fear of her apostatising and her husband is not making threats. So that other women fear lest they too stumble and for the rebuke of that particular woman, it is right, however much she supplicates those in authority, that she suffer under the canons whatever she is able to bear.²⁴⁷

Intriguingly, in this particular exchange, the potential caveats to the woman's treatment appear in the question, and vary across the range of obvious, real-life potentialities that Monophysite priests must have faced living under Muslim rule – on the one hand, that the Muslim husband has threatened to kill the priest if he does not acquiesce, and on the other hand, that the Muslim husband has been compassionate towards the Christians, with perhaps the underlying assumption that if the wife could be kept as part of the Monophysite flock, she could act as intermediary. In this way, the unknown Addai points to a range of different answers, depending on the precise circumstances in which a priest should find himself.

²⁴⁷ This question and answer admittedly only appears in the Harvard 93 manuscript of the second collection of Jacob's *Replies to Addai*, but Robert Hoyland has argued persuasively for these and the other additional replies of this collection as genuine; Harvard Ms. 93, fols. 16b-18a as edited and translated in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 602-3.

The answer, however, is absolute, assuring the asker that the proper course of action would remain the same regardless of outside circumstance – the woman should be given the Eucharist, even if her Muslim husband has not threatened the priest, even if the priest does not believe her in her threat to convert to Islam, and even if the priest himself thinks it's a sin, because in actuality, there is no sin for him. In this way, Jacob addresses a range of arguments which, more likely than not, arose regularly among his fellow Monophysites in Syria. As Muslim law would come to allow men to marry women without requiring conversion, it would seem reasonable that a significant portion of the community would become married to Muslims whilst still wanting to maintain their former religious identity.²⁴⁸ At the same time, there was the continued tradition from the fifth and sixth century, focused on exclusivity and doctrinal purity, even at the cost of creating schism and discord in the church community, a tradition witnessed in Athanasius' injunction to his bishops to offer communion only to individuals whom they know have not deviated in their doctrine or practice at all.

In this way, Jacob provides a pragmatic view on the issue of Monophysites colluding with Muslims, giving only a limited theological explanation for his decision. He mentions how the priest's actions could impact on the other women in the congregation, and how the actions of one member of the congregation could cause others to stumble, but otherwise, Jacob remains largely silent on questions of the theological implications for his answer. Similarly, he makes no reference to how the woman should be given the Eucharist or whether she should be expected to adhere to a

²⁴⁸ The marriage of Muslim men to women from the protected communities actually has Qur'anic sanction (Q. 60:10), and so may have started from the earliest years of the expansion. The regulations regarding these marriages developed as part of the larger development of Islamic family law; see Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Women and Citizenship in the Qur'an" in Amira El Azhary Sonbol (ed.), *Women, Family and Divorce Laws in Islamic History* (Syracuse, 1996), pp. 23-38.

specific doctrinal statement. There is also no reference or caveat for what a priest should do if a woman in his congregation has married into another Christian sect.

Moreover, it is worth noting that Jacob specifically rejects the questioner's request for a canon to apply in this circumstance. Instead, he states that his answer is applicable regardless of the existing canons, although he does add that the priests in question should use the existing canons in order to set a punishment or requirement of practice for the woman. Since Jacob himself had produced collections of canons, it is intriguing that in this instance, he does not at least take the opportunity to cite his own canons, which had integrated the Muslims into existing canons regarding marriage, inheritance, baptism and services for the dead. From this point of view, it is tempting to read this question and response – both of which were most likely composed by Jacob – as a form of resistance to a staunch reliance on canons for guidance.²⁴⁹ Again, given a Monophysite community that was living alongside their Muslim rulers, it is easy to imagine that the reliance on canons could be a point of contention among Jacob's co-religionists – on the one hand, canons offered a sense of continuity with the pre-Islamic church, but on the other hand, were not strictly relevant to the Muslims – and perhaps it is possible to see in this passage Jacob's position on this issue.

Although Jacob stresses in the response that his answer applies regardless of circumstance, the other point left without a direct response is the questioner's suggestion of whether the Muslim husband had treated the Christians with compassion might affect the priest's decision. Again, this is not an unreasonable caveat – although the Monophysite community seemed particularly

²⁴⁹ Indeed, Jacob does not even appear to use Biblical citations as authoritative decisions in his canons, relying predominately on vague allusions to Biblical precepts, rather than exact citations and exegesis - see Konrad D. Jenner, "The Canons of Jacob of Edessa in the perspective of the Christian identity of his day" in Romeny, *Jacob of Edessa*, pp. 101-112.

concerned about their flock converting to Islam because of the cultural and social connections between the Umayyads and Syriac-speaking communities in Syria, these same connections also offered the opportunity for greater cooperation between the communities. This omission is more surprising because this scenario is one that has strong textual support from both Christian and Muslim sources as a reality of Christian life under Muslim rule.

At least according to Muslim sources, the Muslims preferred to rule through capitulation and cooperation, relying heavily on the Christian communities of the Near East to self-rule, and allowing local religious practices to continue unabated.²⁵⁰ These accounts of Muslim rule are obviously problematic, as the Muslims would have had every reason to prefer accounts that portrayed them as fair and just rulers, but it seems unlikely that in this passage, Jacob is simply repeating Muslim propaganda. Instead, the questioner presents the possibility of the Muslim husband acting generously towards Christians as just another possible scenario that could make for a caveat to Jacob's response, and his response, in turn, does nothing to refute the plausibility of that scenario.²⁵¹

Even in some of the scenarios in which the Muslims serve as a caveat to allow for variation in the law, Jacob refrains from portraying them as particularly evil or dangerous, emphasizing instead their position as rulers over the Christians. Thus, in one further questions of Addai, he

²⁵⁰ Perhaps the most important illustration of this point is the so-called Pact of 'Umar, in which the caliph instructed his troops, "do not break any agreement which you make with the enemy and after peace do not tear up your treaties. Remember that you will also meet such people who have undertaken monasticism in their monasteries, thinking this to be for the sake of Allah. Do not interfere with them for as long as they choose this isolationism – do not destroy their monasteries and do not kill them;" Al-Imām al-Wāqidī, *The Islāmic Conquest of Syria: A Translation of Futūḥushām*, Mawlānā Sulaymān al-Kindī (trans.), (London, 2005), p. 13. Unfortunately the pact only survives in later works, and so may not be relevant to discussions of the seventh century. See also Philip Isaac Ackerman-Lieberman, "The Muhammadan Stipulations: Dhimmī Versions of the Pact of 'Umar" in Arnold Franklin, Roxani Magariti, and Marina Rustow (eds.), *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in medieval and early modern times: a festschrift in honor of Mark R. Cohen* (Boston, 2014) pp. 197-206.

²⁵¹ Robert Hoyland, "Jacob and Early Islamic Edessa" in Romeny, *Jacob of Edessa*, pp. 11-24; Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur 'Abdin*. (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 1-8.

suggests leniency for priests who were forced to go to war by their Muslim rulers and who killed a man in battle, but the Muslims remain largely irrelevant figures in both the question and answer:

Q: When our bishop of Mardin was attacked by those from the outside, the Arabs, who are ruling on the inside, ordered that everyone go out to the wall to fight and did not exempt anyone from going out, not even the priests. Then a priest or a deacon, when the battle was in full swing, threw a stone from the wall and struck and killed one of the fighters attempting to scale the wall. How is it right to deal with him as regards the canons? And I want to learn whether it is a sin for him [alone] or [also] for other priests and monks inasmuch as it was not their wish to be pulling the rope of machines of war and to be throwing stones and killing fighters outside. And is it right that they serve in the priesthood, and is it right for a short time that they be subject to the law?

A: The fact that they have been forced to go out against their will shows that they are free [of recrimination] from these things which have been committed. Thereafter it is in the hands of their bishop, that is, that he shall deal with them compassionately and allow them to serve when it seems proper to him. [Regarding] the matter of a priest who has thrown a stone from a wall and has killed while his own eyes looked upon the one killed, after a specific time when he is suspended from service for the sake of penitence, it is right that it is left to the conscience of the priest himself whether he shall serve or not. As for whether there is a sin or not, it is not right that this should fall under [the heading of] questions [to me], rather this should be handed over to the righteous Judge, who is not partial, for God is the discernor and examiner of all.²⁵²

Again, both the question and answer offer several interesting insights into Jacob's community, but very little insight into that community's relationship with the Muslims. Indeed, the questioner even fails to give any context for who was attacking, and whether the priest in question killed a Christian or non-Christian enemy.²⁵³

The Muslims serve as the context for the story, but as has already been said, Jacob's description of them is only mildly negative. The questioner emphasizes that the priests were forced to go into battle with the rest of the city – they were not singled out for military service; they were simply not excused. The questioner also refers generally to “the priests” of the city and a priest

²⁵² Harvard Ms. 93, fols. 16b-18a as edited and translated in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 602-3.

²⁵³ As it happens, a Christian enemy is probably more likely – Mardin had been conquered by the Muslims in the 690s, but its area in southern Anatolia was the location for numerous raids by Byzantines and counter-raids by the Muslims; see Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Harlow, 1986), pp. 90-102 and Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and holy war: studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine frontier* (New Haven, 1996).

throwing stones, leaving it unclear if the priests involved were all Monophysite. As many cities in Anatolia had mixed populations, and the questioner emphasizes that everyone was forced to serve, it seems plausible that Monophysite and Chalcedonian priests were both forced into military service.

The questioner again gives Jacob a range of caveats to apply in his answer. In particular, the questioner stresses the issue of contamination, and whether a single priest's killing of an enemy soldier could contaminate all of the priests and monks who were present. The questioner also again asks for a specific canon to answer his question. In this case, Jacob ignores the issue of canons entirely, giving an absolute answer that focuses on compassion. He fails to address the issue of canons, although he does admit that he cannot decide if the priest has sinned or not, recommends that the questioner address this aspect of the question to "the righteous Judge."

Jacob's reliance on compassion as his guiding principle for his answer may offer a useful perspective on the concerns of his contemporary co-religionists. Although the call to compassion has ample Biblical basis, it would appear to stand in the face of other Monophysite writers from both the pre- and Islamic period, for whom contamination, collusion and conversion were major points of concern. The difference in position may stem from the context of the question – the questioner is concerned that all of the priests, monks, and the bishop of area may be contaminated. If this were the case, it would leave the city devoid of Monophysite, or possibly even Christian, guidance. Thus, Jacob's call to compassion may serve as a theological explanation for a pragmatic solution – if the priests were declared contaminated and were no longer available to guide their flock, this void could increase the risk of Christian conversion to Islam. As much of the church hierarchy had been disturbed by the Muslim expansion, the city probably could not know for certain when new priests would arrive, thus furthering endangering them to conversion.

Indeed, the question and answer format is particularly well suited to address these issues, as it allows Jacob to mediate how much or how little background information to provide his audience.²⁵⁴ In the case of intermarriage, Jacob speak through the questioner to provide a variety of reasons why the woman in the question might be brought back to the church or not, allowing his answer to be as broad as possible without having to address each aspect separately. In the case of the city priests going to war, the answer is again general, excusing all of the priests except the one who killed a man, and even for his deeds, Jacob defers to God as to the question of whether it was a sin. In this way, it is easy to see how these questions could have been used to resolve disputes on a range of topics, as giving general guidelines for how the community should behave under Muslim rule.

In this way, Jacob offers an important example of how Muslim rule affected Christian identity, not directly as a rival religious system, but through the complex realities of day-to-day life under Muslim rule. As with his co-religionist Athanasius of Balad, Jacob's answers about association with Islam suggest a community in which interactions with Muslims were already becoming common, through the sharing of traditions and especially through intermarriage. However, whereas Athanasius' letter to his priests suggests a perspective in which maintaining the strict exclusionism of pre-Islamic Monophysitism was still the intention, Jacob's answers imply that there could be an acceptable level of inter-mixing between Monophysites and Muslims, in which continued membership in the Christian congregation was based in part on the individual's choice and desire to remain in that community.

²⁵⁴ For more on the genre of questions and answers, see Yannis Papdogiannakis, "Encyclopedism' in the Byzantine question-and-answer literature - the case of Pseudo-Kaisarios" in Peter van Deun (ed.), *Encyclopedic Trends in Byzantium? Proceedings of the International Conference held in Leuven, 6-8 May 2009*, (Leuven, 2011), pp. 29-44.

This conception of identity would appear to parallel the experiences of Christians living under Muslim rule, in which remaining Christian or converting to Islam were both individual choices, with the latter potentially offering significant social and financial benefits. In this way, Jacob's answers suggest a desire to highlight the conscientious nature of Christian identity under Islam. Thus, although only the works of two authors, the writings of Athanasius and Jacob reveal a particular focus, which would seem to be both distinct from the interests of Chalcedonian authors and particularly relevant to social dynamics of Syriac Monophysite communities. Though anti-Chalcedonian writers in the fifth and sixth century had helped to shape a distinctly anti-Chalcedonian identity, with a separate hierarchy and communion and a distinct narrative of Christian history, in which they had inherited the oppression of a ruling elite from the early church, and elements of this separate identity are visible in these seventh century authors, at least from these examples, it appears that the Monophysite community struggled to maintain that sense of distinction, and that church leaders fought integration both with other Christians and with the Muslim ruling elite.

3.4 Conclusions

Thus, several currents of thought emerge in the writings of Christian religious leaders in the first century of Muslim rule. As has been discussed, many of these works demonstrate the sometimes contradictory interests of the Christian communities of the Near East – on the one hand, to maintain the doctrinal exclusivity that had defined them in the fifth and sixth centuries, and on the other hand, to find stability and security under Muslim rule, an interest which sometimes benefited from cooperation, both with other Christian communities and with the Muslims themselves.

The authors discussed in this chapter also demonstrate an evolution in Christian thought over time, one that parallels the slow acceptance of Muslim rule as the new status quo in the Near East. The graphic violence and abject horror expressed in the sermons of Sophronius was undoubtedly sincerely felt, particularly by the author himself, who had already been forced to flee his home once due to invading foreign forces. However, the horror he predicted failed to come to pass. Christians of the Near East were not massacred to the point of extinction, nor did they abandon their faith *en masse*. However, the latter point would remain a central theme of Christian writing throughout this period, suggesting that while mass conversion had not taken place, it remained a fear for both Chalcedonians and Monophysites.

The Chalcedonian works discussed in this chapter appear to approach Islam and the Muslims from a more abstract position – the Muslims serve as God’s Wrath and as demons tempting humanity, and even as a religious community in the works of John of Damascus, but the only direct engagement with Islamic thought is in the form of polemic responses. In this way, the Chalcedonian works considered here engage more with Islam – as an enemy and as a religion – than with Muslims. Although all three authors considered here did compose works answering questions about Christian practice and doctrine, those works do not address the Muslims, but only correct Chalcedonian practice in comparison to the doctrine and praxes of other Christian sects. Both Anastasius of Sinai and John of Damascus offer guidance on how Christians should address Muslims and answer some of the most common accusations Muslims might lay against Christians, but this is the extent to which Christians and Muslims can be seen to be interacting in their works.

It is in the Monophysite works considered in this chapter that this issue of direct, personal interactions arises. It is clear from the two examples examined here that opinion within the Monophysite community varied over how much collusion with the Muslims should be allowed,

with the patriarchal letter of Athanasius of Balad giving the extremely conservative view that Monophysite bishops should continue to administer the Eucharist only to Christians whose doctrinal allegiances could be confirmed and who had not been engaged recreationally with the Muslims. By comparison, Jacob of Edessa encouraged leniency and compassion in several of his questions and answers, with the text of the questions themselves often revealing several layers of potential causes for such leniency, including both the potential for violent retribution by Muslims, as well as the possible benefits of improved relations with Muslim rulers.

In this way, these works serve to demonstrate the numerous concerns faced by Christians in the first century of Muslim rule. These concerns ranged from the practical to the intellectual to the fantastic, but underpinning all of these works are the parallel interests of understanding the significance of Muslim victory in the Near East and preserving the doctrinal divisions of the fifth and sixth century. Accordingly, Christian authors of this period can be understood as seeking continuity with their religious forebears, despite the massive social and political upheavals of the intervening decades. Indeed, as will be discussed in chapter four, this process of integrating Islam into the existing climate of Christian thought was further expanded by the development of genres of Christian writing specifically about Islam and the significance of both the Muslims' military victory and their rule in the Near East.

Above all, these works preserve the ongoing struggles of Christian leaders to understand how to define Christian identity in the face of Islam as both the ruling political community and as a competing religious and cultural community. In doing so, these works also preserve some elements of the experiences of Christians living under Muslim rule, with issues of inter-mixing, both between the Christian sects and of Christians with Muslims – and the related concern of Christian conversion to Islam – featuring heavily in these texts. Like many of their pre-Islamic forebears, many of these

authors appear to define their identity through their definition of doctrinal correctness – Anastasius of Sinai and John of Damascus both wrote treatises against the Monophysites, Sophronius traced the correct path of Christian history through definitions of Incarnation and Baptism, and Athanasius of Balad ordered his priests to maintain the purity of communion in terms strikingly reminiscent of pre-Islamic anti-Chalcedonianism.

Yet church unity plays a role in their identity, as well, particularly in the underlying fears over Christian conversion to Islam. It is in the answers of Jacob of Edessa that this element becomes the clearest. In his call to compassion and forgiveness in questions of conversion and apostasy, it is easy to read those answers as addressed to congregations who were seeing more and more of their membership mix with the Muslims, who may have begun to fear that this inter-mixing represented the slow deterioration of the church in the Near East. It was a not a wholly unfounded fear, and one that further fed the need for Christians, both Chalcedonian and Monophysite, to define what it was to be a Christian under Muslim rule. It is this question which also underpins many of the emerging Christian genres which addressed Islam, with genres appearing to comfort, strengthen, and chide Christians living under Islam.

Chapter 4: Genres of Christian Writings on Islam

In addition to references to Muslims in the varied works of Christian religious leaders in the seventh century, this period also witnessed the continued development of several genres of Christian writing which presented particular views of the Muslims, Islam, and Muslim rule. This chapter treats three of these genres – apocalypses (section 4.1), which began to circulate almost immediately after the first appearances of the Muslims in Syria and Palestine; martyrologies (section 4.2), some of which featured the same Christian leaders as discussed in chapter three; and Christian apologetic responses to Islam (section 4.3), which first began to appear just at the end of the Umayyad caliphate, as Christians began to accept Muslim rule as the new status quo. All three genres also demonstrate how the rise of Islam and the resulting separation of Near Eastern Christians from Byzantium and the West played in the minds of Christian writers, both through their imagination of what Christendom was under Muslim rule, and how Muslim rule had affected Christian practice and belief.

As with the last chapter, the texts cited here are not intended to give the full scope of Christian genres about Islam, but instead are intended to illustrate some of the major aspects of how the style and purpose of Christian works affected their descriptions of Islam, the Muslims, and Muslim rule. Thus, in the apocalypses, the Muslims represent God's Wrath, standing in for the Beasts and armies of the Danielitic apocalypse. The Muslims in martyrologies are more human, but no less destructive, serving as foils for the pious Christians. Only in Christian apologetics are the Muslims given strongly positive characteristics – these works often speak positively about Muslim rule, while still diminishing Islamic theology. In this way, the image of the Muslims was developed or manipulated depending on the works' intended purpose, whether that purpose was lending cosmic significance to the expansion, illustrating the righteousness of Christian practices, or illustrating how Christians had prospered under Muslim rule. In this way, these works illustrate how conceptions of Christian identity were influenced both by Christians' fears for a horrific future under Muslim rule and by the realities of that future, which was not as horrific as predicted, and which Christian authors slowly began to accept as the new status quo.

4.1 Apocalypses

One particularly interesting set of sources for perspectives of Christians on the rise of Islam are the apocalypses which began to circulate, predominantly in Syriac, in the mid-seventh century.²⁵⁵ This chapter considers three examples of this genre – the apocalypse of Pseudo-

²⁵⁵ For more on the seventh century date and the feature of Syriac apocalypses as a genre, see Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Sources for Seventh Century History," *BMGS* 2 (1976), pp. 17-36, particularly pp. 33-36. It is worth noting that there is also an active Coptic apocalyptic tradition in the early eighth century, including the apocalypses of Pseudo-Shenute and Pseudo-Athanasius, which share many characteristics with Syriac apocalypses, including their focus on false doctrine as bringing about the End and their emphasis on the importance of a believing Christian remnant, perhaps suggesting that these characteristics were particularly important for anti-Chalcedonian audiences more generally. However, these texts fall outside the geographic range for this study and have not been discussed here. For further information, see B. Witte, *Die Sünden der Priester und Mönche. Koptische Eschatologie des 8. Jahrhundert nach Kodex M 602 pp. 104-154 (ps. Athanasius) der Pierpont Morgan Library*

Ephraem, the apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, and the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*. The earliest versions of these three texts have all been consistently dated to the seventh or early eighth century and to the Syriac-speaking communities of the Near East, and they all represent attempts to integrate the rise of Islam into the Biblical narrative of the End Times. Although Chalcedon and the resulting sectarianism in the Near East features in each of these works, it is more difficult to describe them as strictly adhering to a particular sectarian interpretation of why the Muslims have been successful, as all Christians are often shown as suffering alongside one another, regardless of sectarian identity. Above all, these works remain focused on offering comfort to Christians, lending a cosmic significance to their suffering by marking it as part of the cosmic history of the Bible.

This association in these works of the Muslims as harbingers of the Biblical End Times is, in part, due to the character of apocalypses as a genre.²⁵⁶ Apocalypses as a whole served to expand the apocalyptic material of the Bible, and for the Eastern churches the Book of Daniel, in particular, using current events as signposts for the imminent End.²⁵⁷ In doing so, these works can be read as comforting their audience that their suffering was both part of a larger divine plan and essentially

(Altenberge, 2002), W. Beltz, 'Ethos und Ordination - zum Problem des rituellen und moralischen Wohlverhaltens der koptischen Kirche im 8. Jahrhundert', in W. Beltz (ed.), *Die koptische Kirche in den ersten drei islamischen Jahrhunderten. Beiträge zum gleichnamigen Leucorea-Kolloquium 2002* (Halle, 2003), pp. 29-39, and T. Orlandi, 'Un testo copto sulla dominazione araba in Egitto', in T. Orlandi and F. Wisse (eds), *Acts of the second international congress of Coptic studies* (Rome, 1985), pp. 225-33.

²⁵⁶ A complete discussion of the development of apocalypses as a genre is beyond the scope of this study; however, some useful sources for understanding how the genre developed in the Late Antique period include Martha Himmelfarb, *The apocalypse: a brief history*, (Chichester, 2010); John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: from antiquity to the empire of modernity*, (Cambridge, 2009); Casey Starnes, "Ancient Visions: The Roots of Judeo-Christian Apocalypse" in Carolyn Kinane (ed.), *End of days: essays on the apocalypse from antiquity to modernity*, (Jefferson, NC, 2009), pp. 27-46; Jane Baun, "The moral apocalypse in Byzantium," *Apocalyptic time* (2000), pp. 241-267; H. Möhring, *Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit. Entstehung, Wandel und Wirkung einer tausendjährigen Weissagung*, (Stuttgart, 2000); Claude Carozzi, *Apocalypse et salut: Dans le christianisme ancien et médiéval* (Paris, 1999), and B. McGinn, *Visions of the end. Apocalyptic traditions in the middle ages*, (New York, 1979).

²⁵⁷ For discussion on the study of these works despite their pseudo-epigraphical authorship, see Paul J. Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources," *American Historical Review* 73 (1968), pp. 997-1012 and S. Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature" in M. Siddiqui (ed.), *Islam* (Los Angeles, 2010), v. 1, pp. 279-290. It is also worth noting that apocalyptic themes and imagery are in no way unique to the genre of apocalypses, and indeed have already been encountered in the sermons of Sophronius. The texts under consideration here, however, differ in that, more than simply employing apocalyptic imagery, they claim to preserve visions and prophecies about the End Times and how the events of the End will progress.

temporary. Indeed, Christian apocalyptic material had already been composed in reference to both the Council of Chalcedon and the political and military turmoil of the fifth and sixth century, with the Persians featuring as the representatives of God's Wrath, such as in *The Oracle of Baalbek*, most likely composed in the first decade of the sixth century, which implies that Anastasius' loss to the Persians stemmed from his support of anti-Chalcedonianism.²⁵⁸ However, writers of seventh century apocalypses faced new challenges in addressing the rise of Islam, both because the wars between Persia and Byzantium had not resulted in the long-term loss of Byzantine rule in the Near East, and also because Persia had never represented a threat to the religion of the Near Eastern Christian communities. Thus, seventh century authors were forced to address these issues directly, stressing the tyranny of Muslim rule, its inevitable end as marking the beginning of the Biblical End Times, and by reminding their audience of the importance of remaining Christian in the face of this oppression.

Like many apocalyptic works, the apocalypses discussed in this section are anonymous and pseudo-epigraphical, attributed to Biblical figures and saints, and so it is difficult to know precisely their authorship, context or audience.²⁵⁹ However, these texts demonstrate several similar literary motifs to the Christian works discussed in chapter three, including incorporating Islam into a Biblical narrative and using the Muslims as representatives of divine judgment. Finally, as these

²⁵⁸ Paul J. Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress* (Washington D.C., 1967), pp. 19-20.

²⁵⁹ Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses," pp. 998-9. For the period of the seventh and early eighth century, the three texts considered in this chapter are also those most consistently dated to this period by modern scholars. There are a handful of other apocalypses that either claim to date from this period, but have generally been read as later creations by modern scholars, or apocalypses which may have had a seventh-century root, but survive only in later redactions. Examples include a series of apocalypses about the monk Bahira, which, although all claim to come from the monk himself, exists only in related 11th century Arabic and Syriac manuscripts and a 13th Latin manuscript, all three of which were either written in those times or heavily redacted to match the history of those periods; see Richard Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1989), p.189-210 and Jeanne Bigname-Odier and Giorgio Levi Della Vida, "Une version latine de l'apocalypse syro-arabe de Serge-Bahira," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 62 (1950), pp. 125-48.

works originate in Syriac, many would appear to come from the Monophysite community, and share with the Monophysite authors Athanasius of Balad and Jacob of Edessa a particular interest in discouraging their Christian audience from converting to Islam, often by discussing the importance of a Christian remnant who would survive Muslim oppression and welcome the rule of Christ.

These apocalypses also demonstrate two, somewhat disparate, interests – to highlight the terror of the expansion and to emphasize its necessity as an element of the End. Thus the Pseudo-Methodian apocalypse, one of the original Syriac versions of an apocalypse which would come to be transmitted in Greek, Latin and Slavonic,²⁶⁰ presents a direct, Scriptural link between the expansion and the End, comparing the Muslims to the punishment described by Paul in the second letter to the Thessalonians as the harbinger to the revelation of the “Son of Perdition” (II Thess. 2,3).²⁶¹ The text is problematic, in that, although it most likely dates from the seventh or early eighth century and comes from a Mesopotamian context, there is still a great deal of scholarly debate as to whether it dates from the first decades of the Muslim incursion, as argued by Paul Alexander,²⁶² or from the late 680s or early 690s, as argued by Sebastian Brock and Andrew Palmer.²⁶³ The anonymous author’s confessional identity is also still under debate, as well, with different scholars arguing for a Chalcedonian, a Monophysite, or a Nestorian identity as potentially the most representative of the work’s theology.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley, 1985), p. 49.

²⁶¹ Alexander, *Byzantine*, p. 46.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁶³ Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 235; see also Marek Jankowiak, “Notitia 1 and the impact of the Arab invasions on Asia Minor,” *Millennium* 10.1 (2013), pp. 435–462.

²⁶⁴ Sebastian Brock argues Melkite, Paul Alexander argues Monophysite, although he questioned his own translation and argument later in life, and Michael Kmosko a Nestorian origin, although this was more of an argument for a cultural milieu than sectarian allegiance, as Kmosko attributed the text to the pro-Chalcedon Nestorian theological school at Nisibis; see S. Brock, “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam,” in G. H. A. Juynboll, *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Edwardsville, 1982) pp. 19-20, Alexander, *Byzantine*, p. 29, and Michael Kmosko, “Das Raetsel des Pseudo-Methodius,” *Byzantion* 6 (1931), pp. 287-291, respectively. Intriguingly, although Paul Alexander questioned his work late in his career, Benjamin Garstad in his recent edition of the text follows Alexander in suggesting a Monophysite identity, noting the emphasis on the Last Roman

In terms of dating, for the purpose of the current work, it is sufficient to note that the text comes from the period of the seventh century. As for a confessional identity, the main point of debate within modern scholarship stems from the author's vision of the End, in particular the apocalypse's use of the myth of the Last Roman Emperor, "a king from the Greeks" who would destroy the Muslims, casting them down into a servitude "one hundred times more severe than their yoke [had been]"²⁶⁵ before settling in Jerusalem and ruling over an age of peace which would anticipate the rise of the Antichrist.²⁶⁶ Unfortunately, without further evidence to confirm the confessional allegiance of the author, it is almost impossible to discern because, as argued by Alexander, the use of the myth of the Last Roman Emperor is not confined to Chalcedonian Christians allegiant to the Byzantine empire, but could potentially be the creation of a Monophysite or Nestorian writer, as well.²⁶⁷

As a theological construction regarding authority over Christians, the myth of the Last Roman Emperor is worth considering. Among the Pseudo-Methodian apocalypse and the alternate versions which would circulate in the centuries that followed its original creation, remarkably little is said about the figure of the Last Roman Emperor himself. Indeed, it is this dearth of description which, in no small part, has fueled the swirl of scholarly intrigue surrounding the confessional alignment of the anonymous author. As enemy to the Muslims, the Last Roman Emperor is vicious and merciless; as a ruler, he is kind and peace-bringing, but his confessional allegiance, theological and religious background, and even his political agenda remain unmentioned.²⁶⁸

Emperor as of Ethiopian descent; Benjamin Garstad (ed. and trans.), *Apocalypse Pseudo-Methodius, An Alexandrian World Chronicle* (Cambridge MA, 2012), pp. viii.

²⁶⁵ G. J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des pseudo-Methodius*, (Lovanii, 1993), p. 45.

²⁶⁶ Reinink, *Syrische Apokalypse*, p. 50.

²⁶⁷ Alexander, *Byzantine*, p. 29.

²⁶⁸ For more on the myth of the Last Roman Emperor particularly in a Syrian context, see L. Greisiger, "Ein nubischer Erlöser-König: Kūš in syrischen Apokalypsen des 7. Jahrhunderts," in S.G. Vashalomidze and L. Greisiger (eds.), *Der Christliche Orient und seine Umwelt* (Wiesbaden, 2007), pp. 189-213.

In fact, of the multiple versions of the apocalypse, only one, a Greek translation most likely compiled in Sicily in the ninth century, makes any mention of the reinstatement of church unity and the ending of schism as being part of the peace and goodness created by the Last Roman Emperor's rule.²⁶⁹ In this way, the Last Roman Emperor's importance remains almost entirely eschatological. It is he who will cast down the Muslims and it is his rule which anticipates the rise of the Antichrist and the End Times as described in Scripture. Although taking the form of a perfect ruler, his role in the author's creation is not to play out a theological claim regarding unity and schism, but rather to serve as a measure for the timing and schematics of the End.²⁷⁰

Thus the dual interests of these apocalypses becomes clear: to show the terror of the expansion, but also to emphasize its importance in bringing about the End. In part, this point of view may have served a practical purpose for the works' Christian audiences, to reassure them about the failures of both the Byzantine and Sassanian state militaries in the face of the apparently less-developed Muslim forces. Their military defeat was tragic, but also necessary, as with the tribulation foretold in Paul's address to the Thessalonians. Not only was it not necessary for the Byzantine army to attempt to defeat the Muslims, it actually would have been counterproductive to the loftier purpose of bringing about the End and the age of peace overseen by the Last Roman Emperor.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ *Idem.*, pp. 64, 161.

²⁷⁰ A full discussion of the various literary purposes of the myth of the Last Roman Emperor is beyond the scope of the present work. However, a broad analysis of the myth can be found in Paul J. Alexander, "Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs: the Legend of the Last Roman Emperor," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 2 (1971), pp. 47-68 and H. Suermann, "Muhammad in Christian and Jewish apocalyptic expectations," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 5.1 (1994), pp.15-21. Further details on the topoi of the Last Roman Emperor in later redactions of Pseudo-Methodius can be found in András Kraft, "The Last Roman Emperor *Topos* in the Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition," *Byzantion* 82 (2012), pp. 213-257.

²⁷¹ For more on Pseudo-Methodius' engagement with historical context, see G. J. Reinink, "Pseudo-Methodius: A Concept of History in response to the Rise of Islam: Problems in the Literary Source Material" in A. Cameron and L. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: I: Problems in the Literary Sources* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 149-188 and G.J. Reinink, "Early Christian reactions to the building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," *Xristianskij Vostok* 2 (2001) pp. 227-41.

As part of this cosmic history, and like the writings of church leaders in the seventh century discussed in chapter three, the apocalypses of the seventh century understood the expansion as showing God's displeasure at the majority of Christians for having followed the wrong doctrine. The Pseudo-Ephraem apocalypse has been described by Robert Hoyland and Gerrit Reinink as the first Syriac apocalypse to appear after the rise of Islam.²⁷² This very short text survives in two Syriac manuscripts, and describes the rise of Islam as immediately preceding the appearance of Gog and Maggog. Reinink initially described the text as a redaction of a pre-Islamic text that was revised immediately following the Muslim incursion, largely due to its lack of any discussion of taxation or burdens being placed on Christians by their Muslim rulers, which appear in the majority of later apocalypses.²⁷³ Although this is not a definitive marker of the text's date, both its lack of discussions of taxation and its generally short and simple nature have led scholars to generally accept Reinink's dating.²⁷⁴

In the first appearance of the Muslims, the author describes God as answering "the clamour of the persecuted," the Monophysites being persecuted by the Byzantine Chalcedonians, by sending the Arabs to destroy the Byzantine empire.²⁷⁵ Unlike the myth of the Last Roman Empire, the author of this apocalypse addresses sectarian division directly, clearly understanding God's Wrath as coming down upon the Chalcedonians. However, despite this explanation, there is no further elucidation for why the punishment struck the Monophysites as well as the Chalcedonians. Instead

²⁷² Hoyland follows Reinink in claiming the work is actually a pre-Islamic work that was redacted immediately after the rise of Islam to serve a new purpose; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 261, Gerrit Reinink, "Pseudo-Ephraem's 'Rede über das Ende' und die syrische eschatologische Literatur des siebenten Jahrhunderts," *Aram* 5 (1993), pp. 437-63.

²⁷³ Reinink, "Pseudo-Ephraem," pp. 437-63.

²⁷⁴ In addition to Hoyland and Reinink, see also H. Suermann, "The use of biblical quotations in Christian apocalyptic writings of the Umayyad period," in D. Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, (Leiden, 2007), pp. 69-90.

²⁷⁵ Ps-Ephraem, "Sermon on the End Times" in E. Beck (ed.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones III Textus* Louvain, 1972), pp. 61-62.

the work focuses on both the terrors claimed to be perpetrated by the Muslims, as well as the eschatological significance of the events.²⁷⁶

A particularly interesting example of this concept of the rise of Islam as punishment for sectarianism comes from a brief work entitled *the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles together with the Revelation of Each of Them, translated from Hebrew to Greek and from Greek to Syriac* (*eyangeliwun d-tar'ašr šalihe qadiše wa-geloinoho d-kulhad had minhum, d-tfiq min 'brayo l-ionioyo w-min ionioyo l-suriyoyo*).²⁷⁷ The emphasis that the work has come down into Syriac from Hebrew and Greek is most likely intended to stress its dating from the time of the Twelve, emphasizing its prophetic nature. The Gospel survives in only one manuscript, the aforementioned Harvard Syr.MS.93, which also includes a selection of the Letters to Addai of Jacob of Edessa. It was first edited by J. Rendell Harris in 1900, but since its publication, it has received relatively little scholarly attention. Sebastian Brock mentions the text in his catalogue of seventh-century West Syriac works, as does Robert Hoyland,²⁷⁸ but in both cases, the authors draw no particular conclusions from the text, mentioning it as just one further example of the larger genre of the Syriac apocalypse. Even Rendell Harris fails to supply any particular explanation for his edition beyond its inherent interest as part of the Syriac apocalyptic tradition.

Part of the reason for the relatively limited scholarly attention paid to the work may relate to the difficulties in dating the text. Rendell Harris was very conservative, taking all portions of the

²⁷⁶ Hendrik J.W. Drijvers, "Christians, Jews and Muslims in northern Mesopotamia in early Islamic times" in Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (eds.), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe-VIIIe siècles* (Damascus, 1992), pp. 67-74.

²⁷⁷ The term '*d-tar'ašr*' is only partly visible in the manuscript, but as the word clearly ends in *r-'a-š-r*, Rendell Harris' rendering of 'twelve' is undoubtedly correct; Cod.Syr.Harris.85 now Harvard Syr.MS.93, f. 47r-51v, Houghton Library, Harvard Special Collection at 47r, Rendell Harris, *Gospel*, p. a. My thanks to Emilie Hardman of the Houghton Library in Harvard for her assistance retrieving this manuscript for comparison.

²⁷⁸ Brock, "Syriac Sources," pp. 35-6 and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 267-270, respectively. Brock mentions only the John the Little apocalypse as applying to the seventh century, noting that it is included in the larger text of the Gospel. Hoyland also argues that the three texts should be treated separately, but without offering a date for the other two.

text to be dated together and relying primarily on the manuscript itself. As the manuscript included the Letters to Addai, Rendell Harris argued for a date between 708 and 750 CE – that is, the traditional window for the works of Jacob of Edessa.²⁷⁹ However, he did note that the text itself has only limited historical signposts for internal dating, and that each of the three individual apocalypses appears to end in a period appropriate to the particular focus of that section. In this way, the text is presented as a series of three apocalypses, tied together by a general frame story about the Apostles. Aside from a short introduction describing the Spirit descending upon the speaker, presumably intended to take place in the first century CE, the apocalypse of Simon only deals with events from the fifth century,²⁸⁰ the apocalypse of James ends with the ascension and rule of Khurso I,²⁸¹ and the apocalypse of John begins with a brief account of the rise and fall of the kings of the Romans and the Persians, before turning to the Muslims, thus acting as a reiteration of the earlier works.²⁸²

It is possible, therefore, that the text represents the combination of three apocalyptic tracts, with the third building from the first two. Although short, both the apocalypse of Simon Cephas and that of James could stand on their own, giving no internal hint of what is yet to come. As for the apocalypse of John, the only clear internal marker for dating it is the rise of Islam. Rendell Harris argued that the author's assertion that there would be twelve caliphs could be used for dating it to the mid-eighth century, but noted that the seventh was also possible.²⁸³ Although the line of caliphs is somewhat complicated by the two *fitnāt* (civil wars) in the seventh century, the twelfth caliphate

²⁷⁹ Ter Haar Romeny, "Jacob of Edessa on Genesis: His Quotations of the Peshitta and his Revision of the Text," in idem, *Jacob of Edessa*, pp.145–158, Sebastian Brock, "Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac culture of his day," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61.1 (2010), p.168.

²⁸⁰ Indeed, the apocalypse of Simon has no clear historical signposts, but can be dated from internal quotations of Severus of Antioch, Rendell Harris, *Gospel*, pp. i-ib.

²⁸¹ Idem., pp. ig-ih.

²⁸² Idem., pp. ih-ka.

²⁸³ A seventh -century date is accepted by both Brock and Hoyland – see n. 278. Rendell Harris, *Gospel*, pp. 21-22.

would roughly translate to that of ‘Umar II in 717. It seems unlikely that any author would have composed an apocalyptic work that postdates the fall of the enemy without simply picking a later date for the End, and so the decades after the 710s can safely be discounted as viable dates for the works composition.

Moreover, the problems with using this reference to twelve caliphs for dating are two-fold. Firstly, the claim that there will be twelve caliphs has an obvious Biblical root, as Rendell Harris himself admitted, with the author assuming that the rule of the Muslims will follow the pattern of the twelve kings of Israel. The second complication is the author’s description of factionalism among the Muslims, that “they make and become two parties, and each one shall seek to call himself king, and there shall be a war between them.”²⁸⁴ Rendell Harris assumes this passage is a description of the Abbasid revolution,²⁸⁵ again suggesting an eighth-century date, but the terminology, in particular the repeated use of the word “party” (*gabō*) is more obviously reminiscent of the conflicts between the Umayyads and the Alids, in particular the emphasis on the competing groups as political parties, as well as the Arabic use of the term “party” (*shī’a*).

In the same passage, there is another statement that may suggest that the author is describing the first *fitna* (civil war), that “there shall be many murders by them and among them,” potentially a reference to either the murder of ‘Uthmān or ‘Alī, depending on whether the author and his community harbored a pro-Umayyad or pro-Alid sentiment.²⁸⁶ The murders of the caliphs which began the first *fitna* remain a unique signifier for the civil war, one that does not correlate

²⁸⁴ Idem., p. kk, translation mine.

²⁸⁵ Idem., p. kk, translation mine.

²⁸⁶ As Andrew Palmer argues with regard to the Maronite chronicle, as the author is most likely West Syriac, an Umayyad bias is far more likely; Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993), p. 38.

with the Abbasid revolution, which began with dissatisfaction over the *ma'āwli* (client) system in the eastern provinces.²⁸⁷

The other possibility would be the second *fitna*, which chronologically is an appealing choice, as occurring just a few decades before the twelfth caliphate. Indeed, Han Drijvers has suggested this dating, or more specifically c. 700, noting that the anonymous author also references an otherwise unknown Sibylline prophecy that “much blood shall be shed among them at the fountain of waters which is the place which was spoken of beforetime in the Book of the Sibyl,” which could be a reference to the Umayyad caliph Yazid refusing water to the army of the Shīʿī leader Hussayn b. ‘Alī at the Battle of Karbala in 680.²⁸⁸ This dating is certainly more persuasive than Rendell Harris’ suggestion of the Abbasid revolution. However, it is not wholly satisfying, as the text makes it clear that the bloodshed at the fountain would mark the absolute end of Muslim rule, after which they would be defeated by a King of the North and retreat back to the place “from whence they came out.”²⁸⁹ Drijvers fails to address why he understands the author of the apocalypse as composing the text twenty-five years after the work’s prophetic end of Muslim rule. Presumably this would have significantly reduced the impact of the work, as Muslim rule had certainly not ended with the conflicts with Yazid and Hussayn. Therefore, it may be more reasonable to understand the Gospel, or at least the apocalypse attributed to John, as dating from the mid-to-late

²⁸⁷ Erling Petersen, *‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya in early Arabic tradition: studies on the genesis and growth of Islamic historical writing until the end of the ninth century* (Copenhagen, 1964), pp. 23-52; Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, 1979), and for the argument in favor of conversion accompanying the movement, see Salih Sa’id Agha, *The Revolution which toppled the Umayyads: Neither Arab nor ‘Abbāsīd* (Leiden, 2003).

²⁸⁸ Han J. W. Drijvers, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: A Syriac Apocalypse from the Early Islamic Period” in A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Volume One, Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 189-214 at p. 207, Kraft, “The Last Roman Emperor *Topos*.”

²⁸⁹ Rendell Harris, *Gospel*, p. kk.

seventh century, recalling the events of the first *fitna* and perhaps some references to the early parts of the second, to show the violent splintering of the demonic Muslims.²⁹⁰

The significance of the Gospel for the present work lies in its clear conception of heresy and sectarianism as the root cause for the Muslim expansion, as well as its clear Monophysite allegiance. Because the accusations of the apocalypse attributed to Simon Cephas are addressed primarily at the Nestorians, it offers useful insight into how the presence of the wrong doctrine affects the individual's and the community's relationship to God, a concept which is then integrated into the final apocalypse, either by the same author or by a later redactor. The author of the Simon Cephas apocalypse moves on from the Gospel story, which frames the entire work, to describing the actions of the martyrs, the conversion of the empire and then finally, the splintering of the community:

And after all these things have come to pass, the faith shall fail from the earth and orthodoxy [*triṣwothō*] shall come to an end: and those who are named as being baptised in our Lord and as confessing his name shall be the most miserable of all men; and they shall trample the faith and talk perversely, and they shall divide our Lord; and in that time, there shall be reckoned many teachers, as the Spirit of the Father does not speak in them, and they shall divide our Lord; and the father of lies and the calumniator, that is, Satan, shall enter into them and disturb their minds; and their faith shall fail. And it will come to pass that when they rise up and tear it, and when every man in his place will say that I am superior in the fear of God, and I confess him more correctly, that they shall seek our Lord and shall not find him, and they will call to him and he will not answer them.²⁹¹

In this brief section, the author gives an interesting description of the inherent dangers of heresy and sectarianism. Firstly, as has already been mentioned, the repeated reference to those who “divide our Lord” (*naflagūnihe l-marn*) could be a reference to either the Nestorians or the Chalcedonians – indeed, the passage remains distinctly ahistorical, perhaps intentionally blurring

²⁹⁰ It is worth noting that knowledge of the second *fitna* does appear in the East Syriac tradition as early as the late 680s, in the history of John bar Penkaye; however, this does not prove that a West Syrian author, like that of the *Gospel*, would have been aware of these events this early in the period; see G.J. Reinink, “East Syrian historiography in response to the rise of Islam. The case of John bar Penkaye’s *Ktābā d-rēš mellē*” in J.J. van Ginkel, H.L. Murre-van den Berg and T.M. van Lint (eds.), *Redefining Christian identity. Cultural interaction in the Middle East since the rise of Islam*, (Leuven, 2005), pp. 77-89.

²⁹¹ Idem., p. ia, translation mine.

the distinction between the two most likely candidates for those who “divide our Lord.”²⁹² This passage is preceded by a description of the pre-Constantinian martyrs, and so the author appears to compare the persecution of the martyrs to the schisms of the Church Councils, moving from the former to the latter without any clear reference to the period of conversion that should lie in between. On the one hand, this is a very dark construction of Christian history, one that may in part represent the position of the Monophysite author, who would most likely understand the Roman empire, as contemporarily represented by the Byzantines, as a problematic entity, easily led astray. On the other hand, the passage lays a particular emphasis on the unity of the early community, though small in number and facing persecution, a unity which only ended with the Church Councils and the corruption of ‘orthodoxy.’

This passage also gives a clear account of how the author understands false doctrine and sectarianism as affecting the cosmic, Biblical history which lays out man’s relationship to God. By failing to keep unified and by failing to uphold the correct doctrine, mankind has angered God, so that He turns away from them, no longer answering their calls and pleas for help. However, a complication emerges in where the author understands his own community as standing in relation to the larger community of Christians. On the one hand, it is clearly the separation and sectarianism that has angered God, as in the passage treated above: “when every man in his place will say that ‘I am superior in the fear of God, and I confess him more correctly,’ that they shall seek our Lord and shall not find him.” But at the same time, God’s Wrath is still clearly upon the heretics, those who have failed to keep to the right doctrine, as seen in the final line, that “*they* shall seek *our* Lord and

²⁹² Idem., p. 7. Han Drijvers has argued that the Simon Cephas apocalypse should be understood as really aimed against the Chalcedonians. While this may be true, it is important to stress that at least in terms of the historical account of the apocalypse, there is no real historical marker to differentiate, as the period of the Church Councils is omitted entirely from Simon Cephas’ history of the church; see Drijvers, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles,” p. 194.

shall not find him, and *they* will call upon to him and he will not answer *them*.” It appears that while it is the sectarianism of the Christians that has angered God, it is still the Other that God will ultimately reject. Yet as with the apocalypses discussed earlier, it is still the whole of the Christian community which is punished at the moment, the right-thinking and the misguided alike.

This complicated construction of “Christian” is only made slightly clearer by the apocalypse of John the Lesser, the final apocalypse of the three, dealing with the rise of the Muslims:

But there will be deniers of the truth, and men that do not know God, and that do corruptly in their lasciviousness, those who provoke God, and then suddenly shall be fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel the pure and the desired, which he spake, that God shall send forth a mighty wind, the Southern one; and there shall come forth from it a people of deformed aspect, and their appearance and manners like those of women; and there shall rise up from among them a warrior, and one whom they call a prophet.²⁹³

What is clear from this passage is that those who “denied the truth” (*kafre b-sharirō*) and “had known not God” (*d-lō yad’in l-alōhō*) are not the Muslims, but rather the Muslims are again cast as the punishment sent by God, in fulfillment of the Daniel prophecy (Daniel 11:14). It is possible that, rather than being the Muslims, these figures are either the Romans or the Persians, who are described in the brief summation of the first two apocalypses, which opens the John the Lesser apocalypse. But in both cases, the author describes both the rise and fall of both empires, with the story of the rise and fall of each following closely the text of the Simon and the James apocalypse,²⁹⁴ and so, it would seem instead that the author is returning to the theme with which the apocalypse begins, “for there shall rise up the kings of the north and they shall become strong and shall shake the whole world, and there shall be from among them a man who subdues all the peoples by the

²⁹³ Rendell Harris, *Gospel*, p. iz-ih, translation mine.

²⁹⁴ For further discussion on the potential readings of the first two apocalypses with the introduction of the third, see Edgar J. Goodspeed, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles. Together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them by J. Rendel Harris,” *The American Journal of Theology* 5.1 (1901), pp. 155-156 and Drijvers, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles.”

marvelous sign which appeared to him in heaven, and he shall be prosperous and it shall go well with him.”²⁹⁵ Because the author has outlined the borders of “Christian” to include the whole of the Christian world created under the conversion of Constantine, which would include the Monophysites as well as the Nestorians and the Chalcedonians, the deniers of truth could potentially refer to the whole of the Christian world, including his own community. In this way, the author clearly demonstrates that although sectarianism is God’s Wrath against the wrong-thinking Other, the effect of this Wrath is against all Christians.

In addition to offering further evidence for how Christian writers integrated the rise of Islam into their conception of Christian identity, several key themes emerge that appear particularly well suited for the genre of apocalypses. Based on these texts considered here, in addition to explaining the Muslim expansion as divine Wrath for Christian sectarianism, one issue which appears to be of particular concern to the authors of apocalypses is the issue of Christian apostasy. Whereas the letters, sermons, and collections of questions and answers of the seventh century were written with the expressed purpose of reaffirming the people’s faith and keeping them from turning away from Christianity and joining Islam, the apocalypses of this century appear to take for granted that mass apostasy would take place. This has added to the scholarly debate in dating these texts, a debate which focuses on how much these claims of mass apostasy should be taken as an expression of a contemporary historical reality.²⁹⁶

In some cases, there does seem to be a legitimate, historical reason cited for apostasy, generally a desire to escape the *jizya*, the poll-tax levied on non-Muslims. The Pseudo-Methodian

²⁹⁵ Rendell Harris, *Gospel*, p. io, translation mine.

²⁹⁶ Brock and Hoyland have both argued for a late seventh-century dating for the Pseudo-Methodian apocalypse in part because of its reference to taxation, whereas Alexander maintained that this was simply a trope used by the anonymous author to stress the Muslims’ tyranny as rulers; see n.263.

apocalypse, for example, uses Romans 9:6 as a starting point to argue for the mass rejection of Christianity by so-called Christians, who in reality will turn to Islam and deny Christ in order to free themselves from their subjugation by Islam.²⁹⁷ On the surface, it would seem obvious that the taxes levied against non-Muslims would encourage conversion to Islam. However, two problems with this theory must be considered.

The first is that, as noted by Robert Hoyland, it does not appear that mass conversion started in the Near East until well into the eighth century.²⁹⁸ Yet the tax reforms of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik, which, in theory, sparked these conversions, were implemented in the late seventh century, contemporary with these apocalypses, and so mass conversion should not have yet begun by the time of their composition. The second complication is that noted by Daniel Dennett, that, in practice, the change of status from *ahl al-kitāb* to Muslim might not have been as financially beneficial as it appeared on paper, in particular for non-Arab converts.²⁹⁹ The complexities of the early Islamic practice of taxation are beyond the scope of the current work; however, it is worth emphasizing that while in theory, conversion might have been understood as being encouraged through financial benefit, the practice was far more complicated.

From this point of view, it is worth reconsidering the preoccupation of these apocalypses with the issue of apostasy, in particular with apostasy for social or financial gain. It may be the case that rather than representing the real situation on the ground during the mid- and late seventh century, these apocalypses represent the issues and concerns of the religious leaders who were crafting and, presumably, circulating these works. That the taxes imposed by the Muslims, which

²⁹⁷ Alexander, *Byzantine*, pp. 46-7.

²⁹⁸ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 343.

²⁹⁹ As Dennett argues, the usage of *jizya* and *kharāj* (land tax) is complicated in the early centuries, therefore it is far more difficult to understand correctly how the tax reforms would have worked on a day-to-day basis; Daniel C. Dennett, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge, 1950).

in theory could be escaped through conversion, would cause their flock to stray, must have been a primary fear of many religious leaders of the seventh century.³⁰⁰ In this way, the apocalypses' particular focus on apostasy may represent their authors' fears for the future.

Thus these apocalypses provide useful evidence for how Christian authors in the seventh century attempted to integrate Islam into the existing Christian worldview. They also draw on the same conception of the Muslims as the manifestation of God's Wrath as seen in some of the direct references to Islam in this period, often taking this imagery even farther by likening the Muslims to the stages of the Biblical End. In this way, these works reaffirm the horror most likely really experienced by Christians during the Islamic expansion, while offering solace, in the form of the eventual age of peace ushered in by the Last Roman Emperor and Christ.³⁰¹ In some cases, this Biblical link is more strongly emphasized. Thus, in the previously-mentioned Pseudo-Methodian apocalypse, the author likens the suffering of the Christians to the labor pangs of the End described by Paul.³⁰² He goes on to describe how the Last Roman Emperor's defeat of the Muslims will transition to the Biblical End, saying:

Because it is the son of Cusheth, daughter of King Pīl of the Cushites, who will deliver himself over to the hand to God. And immediately the Holy Cross will be raised to heaven, and the King of the Greeks will release his soul to his creator. And immediately every leader and authority and all powers will come to an end. And so will the Son of Perdition be revealed.³⁰³

A similar, cosmic significance is employed by other apocalypses by associating the Muslims to Danielitic imagery. Indeed, the early Syriac apocalypses represent an important development in the larger genre of Christian apocalypses, as the Arabs had not generally featured as apocalyptic

³⁰⁰ Alan M. Guenther, "The Christian experience and interpretation of the early Muslim conquest and rule," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10:3 (1999), pp. 363-378.

³⁰¹ J.L. Ehinger, "Biblical History and the End of Times: Seventh-Century Christian Accounts of the Rise of Islam," *Studies in Church History* 49 (2013), pp. 52-62.

³⁰² Reinink, *Syrische Apokalypse*, p. 21. See also Suermann, "The use of biblical quotations."

³⁰³ Idem., p. 45, translation mine.

actors. In the seventh century, apocalyptic writers were forced to find apocalyptic imagery that could suit the Muslims, both literarily and geographically. Thus, in the aforementioned *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, the anonymous author focuses particularly on geographical reference, describing the Muslims as the sons of the Kings of the South, who “shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall advance like a flood” (Dan. 11.10). According to the third part of the apocalypse, attributed to John the Lesser, the author recounts the defeat of the Byzantines and Persians by the Muslims, saying that “God shall send forth a mighty wind, the Southern one; and there shall come forth from it a people of deformed aspect, and their appearance and manners like those of women; and there shall rise up from among them a warrior, and one whom they call a prophet.”³⁰⁴

This image of the Kings of the South reveals several important characteristics which help to frame the seventh-century motif of the Muslims. In the Daniel apocalypse, the Kings of the South are described as supernaturally powerful and destructive, a characterizing that may have been intended to explain the Muslims’ rapid victory over both the Byzantine and Persian army. This characterization may also have been intended to release these armies from blame for their failures, by painting the Muslims in a supernatural light.³⁰⁵ Perhaps most importantly, the Kings of the South are also the final evils to appear in each of their respective sections of the Daniel apocalypse. By drawing on these images, seventh-century apocalyptic authors were implying an end date for the Muslim expansion.

It may be for this reason that, although these apocalypses often associate the Muslim expansion with sectarianism, it is less clear if these authors believe that their success can be reversed

³⁰⁴ Rendell Harris, *Gospel*, p. 12-13, translation p. 36.

³⁰⁵ David M. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia, 1994), p. 44.

by ending the sectarianism in the Near East. The apocalypses treat the progress of events as inevitable, but also essentially temporary, as the contemporary violence of the Muslims must give way for the final battles of the End, just as the separate sections of the Daniel apocalypse appear and then give way to the next. Indeed, in some cases, these apocalypses give a precise calculation of the end of Muslim rule and the beginning of the Biblical End. According to the Pseudo-Methodian apocalypse, Muslim rule would end in seventy years,³⁰⁶ whereas the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* gives their rule as that of twelve caliphs, giving the Islamic expansion yet another Biblical parallel, this time to the generations and kings of the Children of Israel.³⁰⁷ Moreover, by attaching a specific limit to Muslim rule, these seventh-century apocalypses could offer solace to the Near Eastern Christians that Muslim rule would not last forever, while also dramatizing their suffering by connecting it to the Biblical End.

In this way, apocalypses illustrate the inter-related concerns of Christians in the early decades of the Islamic expansion, with apocalypticists attempting to explain both the Muslims' victory and the continuation of Christian sectarianism by demonstrating how the two were essentially connected. Like the sermons of Sophronius, the apocalypses discussed here likened the Muslims to Biblical suffering, elevating the significance of the expansion by tying it to the cosmic, Biblical history. The apocalypses discussed here are also predominately Monophysite, and like their co-religionists Athanasius of Balad and Jacob of Edessa appear particularly concerned with Christian conversion to Islam, emphasizing strongly the importance of the remnant of true Christians who would weather the tribulation of Islamic oppression. Thus, through their emphasis on Christian doctrinal purity and the integrity of a true Christian remnant in the face of cosmic

³⁰⁶ Alexander, *Byzantine*, p. 20, see also Witold Witakowski, "The eschatological program of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: does it make sense?," *Rocznik orientalistyczny* 53.1 (2001) pp. 33-42.

³⁰⁷ Rendell Harris, *Gospel*, p. 21.

suffering, these works developed an image of Christian identity that could serve to support wavering Christians despite Muslim political and social successes, integrating them into the larger narrative of Biblical history, and reminding them of both their own importance in that story and the temporary nature of Muslim rule.

4.2 Martyrologies

The Syriac apocalypses of the seventh century would appear to serve a cathartic purpose for their Christian audience, recounting the Muslim expansion in horrific, but cosmic terms, thus lending their suffering a terrible significance. Yet these accounts must have also aged quickly, as Christians experienced Muslim rule and discovered that it was neither tyrannical nor temporary, as these apocalypses had claimed. Thus, in the same period, new examples of the pre-Islamic genre of hagiographic martyrologies began to appear, as well. These works were often less supernatural than the apocalypses, presenting the Muslims in a range of roles. Although often serving as foils to Christian practice, and as would-be converts, the Muslims in some of these stories are not universally evil, but instead, are presented as being forced to reprimand and execute Christians for outlandish behavior. In this way, these works may represent an attempt by Christian writers to marry the desire to liken the experiences of contemporary Christians to those of the early church with the real experiences of life under Muslim rule, in which forced conversion was not commonplace. Wayward and wavering Christians also feature in many of these stories, serving as a reminder of the importance of continued vigilance by Christians against religious weakness.

This section discusses three works, which span the two major kinds of martyrologies found in this period – first, there are those that describe the mass execution of a large group of Christians, illustrated below by what appears to be a single story of 60 martyrs killed in Palestine, but which

survives in two major versions, one of sixty soliders martyred in Gaza and the other of sixty pilgrims executed in Jerusalem. Second, there are those that describe the religiosity of a single figure, who, driven by their love of God and desire to spread His message, are eventually martyred by the ruling authority, illustrated here by the *Lives* of Peter of Capitolias. As will be discussed in more detail in a moment, due to the repetitiveness of the imagery and narrative found in many martyrologies, dating these texts remains a challenge, and so these examples have been selected in part because they have most consistently been dated to the period under consideration here. They also all seem to be widely received, being circulated both within and outside of the Near East, with versions in Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Georgian. They also share a surprisingly forgiving view of both Christians and Muslims – unlike Syriac apocalypses, these texts lack even passing references to points of Christian doctrinal dispute that could be used to assign a sectarian identity to their anonymous authors, with the Christian actors in the stories remaining simply, generically Christian. Similarly, the Muslim characters are clearly the villains of the story, executing the Christians because of their faith, but they remain largely neutral in their behavior and attitudes, often seeming to have no more commitment to their task of forced conversion or death than to the completion of some kind of bureaucratic oversight.

Like apocalypses, martyrologies were a pre-existent genre at the rise of Islam, arising out of the Passion story of the Gospels and the Book of Acts, and having been composed since the writings of the early church. Closely related, and heavily overlapping in their narrative and imagery with the genre of hagiographies, martyr stories could serve a range of functions – connecting communities to the suffering of the early church, demonstrating the monstrosity of their enemies and adversaries,

and offering comfort to their audience by lending their suffering a broader voice.³⁰⁸ Indeed, as mentioned in chapter two, stories of martyrs had already played a major role in shaping early Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian identity through their use in hagiographies. These martyr stories allowed their authors to characterize both side simultaneously, outlining the religiosity of their side and the brutality of the other. They also overlapped heavily with the Holy Man narrative, and its imagery of a single individual capable of direct encounter with divine providence, who could address the suffering of his community either by being killed himself or by healing the suffering left from the deaths of others.³⁰⁹

Thus, in the aforementioned *Life of Peter the Iberian* of John Rufus, the author describes how Peter was forced to abandon his nomadic lifestyle and settle in Alexandria because so many of the anti-Chalcedonians in the area had been killed by the Chalcedonian authority. John Rufus goes into great detail about both the brutality of the Chalcedonians and the pain they had caused Peter and his fellow co-religionists, saying, “[the Chalcedonians] did not cease at all in their machination[s] and their evildoing, until after a great deal of bloodshed and torment, they had banished the blessed

³⁰⁸ The history of martyrologies in the early and Late Antique church is far too broad a topic to give a complete bibliography for here; however, some excellent starting points are J. Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London, 1995), E. A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Church Culture Making* (New York, 2004), Sebastian Brock and Susan Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley, 1998). For martyrologies’ intersection with hagiography, see Averil Cameron, “Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of Constantine” in M. J. Edwards and S. Swain (eds.), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 145-74, and “Form and Meaning: The *Vita Constantini* and the *Vita Antonii*” in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000), pp. 72-88. For some useful recent interpretations on the how various factions within the early church used martyrs and martyrdom for identity formation, see also D. Riggs, “The Apologetics of Grace in Tertullian and Early African Martyr Acts,” *Studia patristica* 65 (2013), pp. 395-406, Anthony Dupont, “Augustine’s Homiletic Definition of Martyrdom. The Centrality of the Martyr’s Grace in his Anti-Donatist and Anti-Pelagian Sermones ad Populum,” in Peter Gemeinhart (ed.), *Christian martyrdom in late antiquity (300 - 450 AD)* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 155-178, and Oliver Nicholson, “What Makes a Voluntary Martyr?,” *Studia patristica* 65 (2013) pp. 159-164.

³⁰⁹ Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Religious Studies* (1971), pp. 80-85.

Timothy [the Archbishop].³¹⁰ Peter decides to stay after seeing the heartbreak in his co-religionists. In this way, John Rufus offers a view of both the Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians, the former bloodthirsty and cruel, the latter kind and gentle, but still willing to stand up for their faith. Given this pre-Islamic model, then, it is interesting to note the generally mild characterization of Muslim rules in the post-Islamic martyrologies, suggesting that while authors like John Rufus were willing to describe their fellow Christians as violent and bloodthirsty, authors in the Islamic period felt that a more careful characterization was necessary.

As has already been mentioned, martyrologies can also be generic and repetitive in their narrative and imagery, a characteristic of those composed in the Islamic period, as well.³¹¹ As will be seen below with the stories of the 60 martyrs in Palestine, this generic character could allow these stories to be recycled for different cities and communities, so that each city or region could claim a personal connection to those who had died for their faith. However, it also significantly complicates the dating of these works, as multiple stories can all share the same narrative and imagery, and without internal markers for dating, it can be difficult to discern which, if any, of the extant versions was the original, or for what audience it was originally composed. One marker for the dating of these works appears to be the religious affiliation of the martyr, as the only extant martyr stories which feature Muslim converts to Christianity, who are subsequently executed for

³¹⁰ Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R.P. Phenix (ed. and trans.), *The Lives of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem, and the Monk Romanus: John Rufus, Bishop of Maium, fl. 476-518* (Ann Arbor, 2008), p. 145, translation mine.

³¹¹ Like apocalypses, stories about martyrs also appear in other works, as well, although these texts are not martyrologies themselves. Anastasius of Sinai tells the story of George the Black, a Christian slave who converted to Islam as a child, apostasized as an adult, and was eventually killed by his master; C13, Ms. Vaticanus gr. 2592 132r-133v. Similarly, an eighth century account of a massacre of the brothers at Sinai appears to be an account of a real historical event to which miraculous events were attached, both before and after the brothers' death – the brothers were killed by raiding bedouin, not by a member of the Muslim authority, and the stories include no suggestion that they could have converted to save their lives; A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Syllogē Palaistinēs kai Syriakēs hagiologias*, (St Petersburg, 1907-13), v. 2, pp. 1-41.

their conversion, date from the Abbasid period or later.³¹² As will be discussed in reference to Peter of Capitolias, it does appear to be the case that Christians were not supposed to missionize to Muslims, but it remains unclear why stories of Muslim converts only begin to appear in the Abbasid period.

As will be seen in several of the examples discussed below, martyrologies of the seventh and early eighth centuries were also shaped by the real experiences of Christians living under Muslim rule. In particular, many of these stories give specific reasons for the martyr's execution, stressing their roles as real or expected threats to Muslim rule, rather than showing them as martyred merely for being Christians. This focus on the particulars of why these figures were executed may demonstrate something of the real life of Christians under Muslim rule. As will be discussed in more detail shortly, it does not appear to be the case that Muslim leaders expected mass conversion by their Christian populations or routinely punished Christians for their religion.

For example, two remarkably similar accounts of the mass execution of 60 Christians in Palestine appear as *The Sixty Soldiers of Gaza* and as *The Sixty Pilgrims of Jerusalem*, and in both cases, the martyrs are killed in part because of their outsider status. In the *Gaza* version, 60 soldiers who were garrisoned in Gaza are executed, but the citizens of the area appear to remain Christian, and in the *Jerusalem* version, the story emphasizes that the pilgrims were from Byzantium, traveling under a truce between the empire and the caliphate which expired before they reached safety. Due to the similarities of the two accounts, George Huxley has suggested that the *Jerusalem* account is a

³¹² For example, an anonymous life of a St Anthony, supposedly a converted nephew of Hārūn al-Rashīd, who, in the midst of desecrating a church, was pierced through the hand by a spear thrown by an icon of St Theodore and converted, becoming a monk, who was the executed by his uncle for apostasy. The story appears in multiple manuscripts, but must date from the early ninth century or later, due to its association with the Abbasid caliph; E. Braida and C. Pelissetti, *Storia di Rawḥ al-Qurayshī. Un discendente di Maometto che scelse di divenire cristiano*, (Turin, 2001). See also David Vila, *Christian Martyrs in the First Abbasid Century* (PhD Dissertation, St Louis University, 1999) and S.H. Griffith, "Christians, Muslims, and Neo-Martyrs. Saints' Lives and Holy Land History" in A. Kofsky and G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Sharing the Sacred. Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land. First-fifteenth Centuries CE* (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 163-207.

redaction of the *Gaza* story, produced by a Palestinian Christian in order to attach holy status to the church and cemetery of St Stephen, near Jerusalem.³¹³ Huxley theorizes that the two stories might share a common source, most likely a Greek original composed shortly after the reign of Heraclius, with the *Gaza* version as an earlier redaction that was eventually translated into Latin in the seventh century, while the *Jerusalem* version represents a repurposed transmission, possibly through Syriac, in the early eighth century.³¹⁴

Although there is no historical evidence to support either story, both focus on the military strength of the Muslims and a growing pressure to convert to Islam, themes that would speak to a Christian audience in this period. Moreover, both stories demonstrate a strong understanding of contemporary military and political events: the *Gaza* account in its understanding of the Muslims' path through Palestine during the expansion, and the *Jerusalem* story in its setting during negotiations between the caliph Sulaymān I and the emperor Leo III in 717, prior to the second Muslim siege of Constantinople, suggesting that these stories were written close to the historical period which they describe. In particular, David Woods has argued persuasively for the existing Latin manuscripts of the *Gaza* story as preserving a much older account, presumably in Greek, noting that the martyrology demonstrates an awareness of an earthquake that damaged the first mosque constructed on the Temple Mound and provides a dating for the soldiers' imprisonment and execution that maps effectively to contemporary events in the Muslim expansion, suggesting it might be the product of contemporary witnesses in Palestine.³¹⁵

³¹³ George L. Huxley, "The Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 18 (1977), pp. 369-74.

³¹⁴ Huxley, "Sixty Martyrs," p. 374.

³¹⁵ David Woods, "The 60 Martyrs of Gaza and the Martyrdom of Bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem" *Aram* 15 (2003), pp. 129-50. It is also worth noting that Robert Hoyland dates both texts internally, the *Gaza* story to c. 638 and the *Jerusalem* to the 720s, although he gives no particular argument for their authenticity beyond those already discussed; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 347-8 and 360-3, respectively.

The *Sixty Soldiers of Gaza* relies on the Muslim siege of the city for its context, and, in both of the existing Latin recensions, focuses on the importance of maintaining one's faith in the face of death. In addition to the internal dating offered in both recensions by their reference to the year of Heraclius' rule and knowledge of contemporary events in the expansion, both versions also demonstrate an awareness of the leading figures of the period – the Muslim general 'Amr b. al-As, rendered as "Ambrus" in both recensions, and the Patriarch Sophronius, who appears to support the martyrs in their opposition to conversion, called Sophronius in the earlier recension and Florianus in the later, demonstrating that some corruption has taken place in the reception of the text.³¹⁶ Based on the internal markers in the text, David Wood not only argues for the *Gaza* story as authentically dating to the seventh or early eighth century, but suggests that its account of Sophronius' subsequent execution after his support of the sixty soldiers, supposedly for baptizing 'Amr's guards, "provides a brief glimpse into a poorly documented phase in the history of the patriarchate of Jerusalem."³¹⁷

Similarly, Huxley has argued for the *Gaza* account as the earlier of the two versions, due to its being the more realistic of the two – that there were soldiers stationed at or near Gaza is plausible, although there are no contemporary sources which confirm it.³¹⁸ Moreover, the *Jerusalem*

³¹⁶ However, as Woods notes, "Florianus" is not a terribly significant corruption, and is fairly clearly an attempt to 'correct' the name into something more familiar sounding to a Latin audience; Wood, "60 Martyrs," p. 137. See also Daniel Sahas, "The face to face encounter between Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem and the Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab" in Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson and David Thomas (eds.), *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Leiden, 2006), p. 32-44.

³¹⁷ Woods, "60 Martyrs," p. 137.

³¹⁸ Woods, "60 Martyrs," p. 130. Hoyland notes the lack of supporting evidence for a garrison at Gaza as a possible argument against the text's authenticity, but Wood notes that this is not necessarily significant, as there is no complete accounts of Byzantine garrisons in the region after the *Notitia Dignitatum* c. 410, and moreover, it is clear from the text that the force was dispatched to Gaza to fight the Muslims, and were not a permanent garrison of the city, so would not be recorded as such; see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 347-51, Wood, "60 Martyrs," p. 130, n. 3. For discussions on the conquest of Gaza, see F.-M. Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la Conquête d'Alexandre jusqu'à l'Invasion Arabe II* (Paris, 1952), pp 403-4; A. Guillou, "Prise de Gaza par les Arabes au VII Siècle," *Bulletin de Correspondence Hellenique* 81 (1957), pp. 396-404, and Walter Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 58-9.

text claims that there was a truce between Byzantium and the caliphate that allowed the pilgrims to pass into Muslim territory. It uses as its frame story accounts of Leo the Isaurian conspiring with the Muslims to gain access to Constantinople in exchange for installing him as emperor. This story only appears in some historical sources, and in none of them is a formal truce discussed, rendering the entire context of the story irrelevant.³¹⁹ Finally, the pilgrims in the *Jerusalem* story are described as heavily armed, a characterization that seems illogical for pilgrims, and one that suggests the story was redacted from an account about soldiers.³²⁰

Although it would seem reasonable that soldiers stationed in Gaza by the Byzantine emperor were expected to be read as Chalcedonian and pro-Byzantine, they do not serve as representatives of any particular religious sect or political faction. Instead, the author focuses on their characterization as Christians, and on Gaza as a Christian city:

It happened at that time concerning the godless Saracens that they were besieging the Christ-loving city of Gaza. Forced by need, the city sought an agreement, and this was done. They gave their word to the Saracens, and apart from the soldiers who were captured in the same city. Entering the city and capturing the most Christian soldiers, [the Saracens] sent them to prison. On the following day, Ambrus forced the holy soldiers of Christ to be brought forward. He tried to force those brought before him to desert their confession of Christ and the precious and life-giving cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, when they did not submit, Ambrus ordered them to be separated from their wives, sons and weapons, and to be sent to prison again.³²¹

Intriguingly, although the martyrs are soldiers, they do no fighting in this story. Instead, the author emphasizes that the people of the city were willing to capitulate to the Muslims because they were “forced by need,” and that the Muslims were willing to offer the people protection, but not the soldiers. The Muslims require the soldiers to convert, but this requirement does not appear to

³¹⁹ Huxley, “Sixty Martyrs,” p. 369. The story of Leo’s betrayal of the city and subsequent betrayal by the Muslims is found in Theophanes – Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, pp. 545-6, but again, without any reference to a truce between Byzantium and Islam.

³²⁰ Huxley, “Sixty Martyrs,” pp. 370-2.

³²¹ “The Early Recension of the Passion of the 60 Martyrs of Gaza (BHL 5672m)” in Woods, “The 60 Martyrs of Gaza,” p. 144.

extend to the rest of the city, or even to the soldiers' families. This distinction in treatment may have been a necessity to maintain the realism of the story, as forced conversion does not appear to have been common in the cities which capitulated. Instead, as has already been discussed, the Muslims encouraged Christians to rule themselves, and to produce new canons and legal systems to this end.³²²

Moreover, the author of the martyr story notes that it was the governor Ambrus who called to soldiers to convert, perhaps intending to highlight that the soldiers were not being coerced under an existing law from the Muslim caliph, but rather through the actions of one specific Muslim governor. Thus, by stressing that the governor's requirement that the martyrs "desert their confession of Christ" was an anomaly, one that applied specifically to the soldiers and not to the city as a whole, the anonymous author of the account is able to present the soldiers as martyrs in a manner which would have seemed reasonable to a contemporary audience, one who potentially experienced the Islamic expansion and had witnessed first-hand that forced conversions had generally not taken place.

The governor holds the soldiers in Gaza for thirty days, and then transfers them between several prisons, before eventually sending them to Jerusalem, where they meet Sophronius, who was continuing to serve as patriarch in the now Muslim-ruled city. He encourages the soldiers to become martyrs, "implored each one with tears, and reminded them of their faith in Christ."³²³ The governor brings a group of them, along with "nine other martyrs" and executes them outside the gates of Jerusalem. Sophronius has their remains buried at the church of St Stephen, and then

³²² See n. 250; also Philip Isaac Ackerman-Lieberman, "The Muhammadan Stipulations: Dhimmi Versions of the Pact of 'Umar" in Arnold Franklin, Roxani Magariti, and Marina Rustow (eds.), *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval and Early Modern Times: a Festschrift in honor of Mark R. Cohen* (Boston, 2014) pp. 197-206.

³²³ Woods, "60 Martyrs of Gaza," p. 145.

eventually joins the remaining soldiers in martyrdom. The martyrology closes with a recitation of their names, explaining that the Christians in the city paid to have the remaining bodies buried at the church of St Stephen.³²⁴

The story of the *Sixty Pilgrims of Jerusalem* has the same basic story, focusing on a large group of martyrs who repeatedly defend their faith and are eventually martyred near Jerusalem, but relies on accounts of a brief truce between the Byzantines and Muslims in 717 as the context for the pilgrims presence in Jerusalem. The story survives in two versions, which vary slightly in their descriptions of the martyrs. In both, a group of pilgrims travel to Jerusalem for worship and are seized and brought before the Muslim governor of Caesarea, who orders their execution unless they convert. In one version, seven of the initial group of seventy convert, but are then struck by dysentery and die, presumably as divine punishment for having wavered in their faith. In both versions, the group is eventually whittled down to sixty,³²⁵ who are repeatedly charged by the governor to convert, and eventually martyred outside of Jerusalem, and their bodies are brought to Caesarea for burial:

Then the governor summoned [the sixty] and had them brought from prison, to swear before God that they were rebels. They refused to address him, though, and instead they spoke as if with one mouth, saying, 'We, Christians, will not renounce the orthodox faith of our fathers. We believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; we testify to the consubstantial Trinity, the Three that are One, to baptism and the resurrection of the dead, and also we testify to the forgiveness of sins, everlasting life and resurrection. This is the one true confession, and there is no other true faith. Behold, you hold the opposite and we pray for you.' When the governor heard all of this, he decreed and coaxed and made all possible means to threaten and urge them, but he was unable to force them to abandon their faith in the holy Christ, and so he ordered that they should be killed by sword or by hanging.³²⁶

³²⁴ Idem, pp. 145-6.

³²⁵ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 360-1.

³²⁶ Papadopoulos-Kerameus, (ed.), "Sylloge palaistines kai syriakes hagiologias," *Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik* 19.3 (St. Petersburg, 1907), p. 5, translation mine.

Like the *Gaza* story, the pilgrims remain nonspecifically Christian. That the pilgrims were able to travel due to the truce suggests that they came from Byzantine territory, which would imply a Chalcedonian allegiance. However, the author emphasizes simply that they were Christian, and visiting Jerusalem as pilgrims, without associating them to any particular denomination or pilgrimage route. Likewise with the *Gaza* story, the governor's order to convert is applied very specifically to the pilgrims, but not to the city as a whole. The anonymous author seems to imply that the pilgrims' status as pilgrims was the cause of their forced conversion, noting that the truce had expired just after the pilgrims had entered Palestine. However, this explanation is not wholly satisfactory, and raises further questions about the pilgrimage they undertook, in particular if pilgrims were covered under the truce, or if the pilgrims were simply arrested for being Byzantine and traveling without authorization from the local governor.³²⁷ It also implies an impressive level of bureaucratic communication within the caliphate that the local governor would have immediately been informed that the truce was over and that a group of Christian pilgrims were traveling in his territory.

It is also worth noting that there is very little historical evidence to support either version of the sixty martyr story. Although the execution of the remaining combatant regiment after the capitulation of a city would be understandable, there is no evidence in historical sources that there was a unit stationed at Gaza.³²⁸ Moreover, even if there had been soldiers left in the city, there is no reason to expect the newly appointed military governor to hold them for several months, repeatedly

³²⁷ Indeed, the idea of the border as a largely impassible wasteland has been persuasively labeled as later propaganda as part of the historical narrative building around the Islamic expansion by both Muslim and Christian authors; see A. Asa Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier* (London, 2015), particularly pp. 4-12. The story of the pilgrims also contradicts existing evidence that Christian pilgrimage was accepted by the Muslims as an important economic source; John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977), pp. 203-4; Adrian R. Bell and Richard S. Dale, "The Medieval Pilgrimage Business," *Enterprise and Society* 12:3 (2011), pp.601-627.

³²⁸ See n. 317, also Wood, "60 Martyrs," p. 130, n. 3.

offer them the opportunity to convert, and then send them off to Jerusalem to be executed in the holy city, when presumably their continued life and inherent threat of armed resistance would be what prompted their execution in the first place.³²⁹

Similarly, the sudden appearance of a group of pilgrims in the brief period of the 717 siege of Constantinople who had made it just to the city of Jerusalem when the truce ended, so that they, too, could be executed near the holy city whilst again actually being held in another city, this time Caesarea, approximately seventy miles away, would appear highly suspect. Both Jerusalem and Caesarea still had large Christian populations, as did nearly all of the cities on the route back to the Byzantine border, making it very easy for the pilgrims to hide and flee, presuming a Muslim governor would even be able to tell the difference between a group of Christian pilgrims from Byzantium and the Chalcedonians already residing in his territory. These inconsistencies in these stories, as well as their transmission in Greek and Latin, may suggest an audience both within and outside of the caliphate, with some elements, like the uniqueness of the charge to convert, representing the experiences of Christians within the caliphate, and other aspects, like the pilgrims' inability to escape or hide among the local Christian population, preserving an outsider imagination of Christian experiences under Islam.

This rather problematic narrative would seem to serve a similar purpose as the limitation of the martyrs in Gaza specifically to soldiers, namely, to allow for martyr stories, in particular stories of large groups of martyrs, under Muslim rule. As the intended audience for these stories would presumably include the local Christian communities – although the translation of the *Gaza* story to Latin suggests that this story found a broader audience, as well – a certain amount of circumlocution

³²⁹ Indeed, even their execution could be questioned, as captured soldiers were often political useful, as they could be exchange for one's own soldiers; H.A.R. Gibb, "Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958), pp. 219-233.

was most likely necessary in order to produce martyr stories that would ring true for communities of Christians living under Muslim rule who knew that forced conversion was not a common decree by Muslim governors.

Indeed, at least in the case of the Jerusalem story, this complicated narrative appears to have been successful for finding a local audience, as the relics of the pilgrims were enshrined at the Church of St Stephen, just outside the gates of Jerusalem, being renowned by the local community for their ability to lift curses, suggesting that the appropriation of the sixty martyr story as successful in realigning the association of those martyred with the Church of St Stephen.³³⁰ Moreover, although no evidence survives for the *Gaza* story as circulating in the Near East, Huxley has theorized the existence of a non-extant Syriac recession of the *Jerusalem* story, based on the language of the existing versions, composed in the mid-eighth century and serving as an interim version between the Greek original and the extant versions, suggesting that this recession continued to circulate among the indigenous Christian population, and potentially among a Monophysite readership.³³¹ Consequently, these stories could serve to create a local connection to the larger narrative of the Islamic expansion and the changes taking place in the Near East. It does not appear, however, that these stories are intended to encourage the local communities of Christians to seek martyrdom. Instead, these stories rely on the special status of the martyrs, lauding their actions, but without suggesting that these actions should or even could be repeated by the local Christians.

Indeed, one of the most interesting examples of what local Christians would need to do in order to be martyred under Muslim rule is also a particularly acute example of how the Holy Man model was used to maintain a link to the larger narrative of Christian martyrdom under Muslim rule

³³⁰ Huxley, "Sixty Martyrs," p. 371.

³³¹ Idem., p. 374. See also C. Foss, "Byzantine Saints in Early Islamic Syria," *AB* 125 (2007), pp. 93-119.

- the *Passion* of Peter of Capitolias, a work that preserves a vision of Muslim rule in which the martyr is compelled to seek martyrdom, acting out against the Muslim government in order to demonstrate the strength of his own religion. The story may also serve as an argument against mass martyrdom, emphasizing instead the importance of remaining Christian under Muslim rule, despite the benefits of conversion. Accounts of the saint's deeds in the late seventh and early eighth centuries appear in several sources, including a *Passion* attributed to John of Damascus, mentioned by Theophanes.³³² Although there is no real reason to accept the attribution to John, it has been suggested that the attribution, as well as the text's apparent familiarity with the Syria of the period, suggests an early eighth-century date.³³³ Huxley similarly suggests an early eighth-century date for the *Passion*, suggesting that stories of Peter's staunch opposition to Islam as a religion may share a Syrian Christian milieu with the *Jerusalem* martyr stories.³³⁴ Moreover, like the *Gaza* story, the text reveals an intimate familiarity with life under Muslim rule in the period it claims to date from, in particular in its understanding of the emerging Muslim court system and the specific laws dictating Christian behavior regarding proselytizing and speaking out against Islam.

The *Passion* was transmitted in Georgian, most likely from a Greek original, and edited and translated by Paulus Peeters. In his brief introduction, Peeters argued for the Georgian as stemming from this same early eighth century Greek version as that attributed to John.³³⁵ This narrative would seem plausible when compared with other Christian sources of the early eighth century, such as Jacob of Edessa or the Christian apologetics to be discussed shortly, as it would appear that proselytizing to Muslims, although not encouraged, was also not specifically a capital offense for

³³² Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, pp. 577-9.

³³³ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 358.

³³⁴ Huxley, *Sixty Martyrs*, p. 374.

³³⁵ Peeters, "Pierre de Capitolias," p. 299

Christians.³³⁶ Instead, Christian apologetics often relied on a context of open religious dialogue for their setting, implying that it would seem completely plausible to their readers for a Christian and a Muslim thinker to debate religion in a public setting without either incurring any kind of punishment. Thus, by necessity, the Peter of the story must go beyond proselytizing to insulting the person and prophethood of Muḥammad in order to obtain martyrdom.

There are few details regarding Peter's early life; a brief account is included in the *Passion* attributed to John, but this is most likely an invention of the *Passion's* author.³³⁷ He states that Peter entered a monastery and then served as a priest under the bishop of Bostra in Syria before his execution by the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd I,³³⁸ but no writings survive from his office, and thus the accounts of his life and martyrdom serve as the only account of his Christianity. In developing his character of Peter, the author of the *Passion* also clearly associates the martyr with the early Christian martyrs who demonstrated their faith by actively resisting participating in pagan society and by aggravating authority figures in his community in order to achieve martyrdom. This association both highlights the importance of continued resistance by Christians against integrating into Muslim culture and gives their resistance a continuity from early Christianity. It also gives a clear, if probably inaccurate, view of Muslim rule, presenting the Muslim caliph al-Walīd as bloodthirsty and cruel, and essentially excusing Peter from responsibility for creating the atmosphere for his own execution.

³³⁶ Both Ibn Hanbal and al-Mālik agree that four things can put a non-Muslim outside of the law – to blaspheme God, His Book, His Religion or His Prophet; A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar* (London, 1970), p. 16.

³³⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 358.

³³⁸ Paul Peeters, "La Passion de S. Pierre de Capitolias (13 Janvier 715)" *AB* 57 (1939), p. 301. That Peter's execution takes place under Walid I may also suggest that the text dates from the early eighth century, as this is also the milieu that Louth suggests as the context for John of Damascus' retirement from the caliphal court; Louth, *St John*, p. 6.

Indeed, both the language that the author uses and the course of the story itself are interesting in view of the story as one of martyrdom. The framing of the story claims that Peter's actions are intended to convert his Muslim friends, yet the language he uses is predominately inflammatory, calling Muḥammad the Antichrist and the Qur'an fables, and anathematizing Muslims.³³⁹ It is difficult to interpret this language as intended to convert a Muslim audience, rather than simply insult and enrage them. Moreover, it remains unclear what sect of Christianity Peter was attempting to convert them to, as his language regarding Christianity is distinctly general, omitting entirely any reference to the Christological debates which defined the sects of the Near East. Instead, he simply invites the Muslims to accept "the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the consubstantial and life-giving Trinity within a unity."³⁴⁰

In the story, Peter's friends convince the judge, who was sent by the caliph to pass judgment on Peter, that his actions were the result of a severe illness, but having been returned to health, he continues to speak out against Islam:

The next day, Omar [the judge], had the accused brought before him, as he had warned the day before, and addressed him: 'I have learned that, being sick, you behaved wrongly. I have attributed this to a weakening of your reason. But here you are recovered to health, and you fall into the same mistake. Humanely, I am offering you the chance to escape punishment: acknowledge your fault, and chose life over death.' To this proposal, the martyr responded in such a tone that Omar was overcome with fury, and returned immediately to the caliph. Walid, whose illness had made him even more ferocious than usual, began to interrogate the prisoner with accusations and remarkable precision.³⁴¹

It is worth noting that it remains clear throughout the *Passion* that Peter was seeking martyrdom, often despite the attempts of the Muslims to offer him mercy. The Muslims he was

³³⁹ These themes were common in numerous Christian writings of the period, as demonstrated in chapter three, particularly with regard to Anastaius of Sinai and John of Damascus.

³⁴⁰ The repeated emphasis on the unity of the Trinity could be a response to Muslim polemic, although this kind of direct transfer is difficult to prove. See A. Charfi, "Polémiques islamo-chrétiennes à l'époque médiévale," in Peter Lang (ed.), *Scholarly Approaches to Religion, Interreligious Perceptions and Islam* (Berlin, 1995), pp. 261-274 and O. Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959), pp. 33-62.

³⁴¹ *Idem.*, p. 310, translation mine.

attempting to convert are consistently referred to as his friends, and attempt to protect him from the caliph, arguing with Omar that Peter is too sick to be taken prisoner and that his blaspheming against the prophet was a result of his fever. His interactions with the judge Omar are similarly forgiving of the Muslims, stressing that the judge wanted to treat him leniently. Omar does not require Peter to convert, but only to ask forgiveness for attacking the prophet. It is clearly Peter himself who seeks martyrdom, and appears cogent of the repercussions for his actions.

Again, this emphasis on Peter's active attack on the prophet may be intended to lend believability to the *Passion*, as threats of forced conversion or execution do not appear to be common in the caliphate. Indeed, only al-Walīd himself is presented as bloodthirsty, and even his behavior is explained in part as a result of his poor health. These details, as well as the saint's continued stalwart resistance to the Muslims' attempts at compromise, may have made the story more believable for a Christian audience living under Muslim rule, who would have known that martyrdom was not a common occurrence. In some ways, it also serves as a deterrent, suggesting that Christians needed to go considerably out of their way to become martyrs.³⁴² Although martyr stories as a genre were useful for creating parallels between contemporary Christians and the martyrs of the early church, Christians seeking martyrdom also had negative political ramifications for the Christian community as a whole, potentially serving to weaken social and financial relations with Muslim rulers. By stressing that Peter's martyrdom was both righteous and unusual, these stories could help to maintain this careful balance of religious identity and political practicality.

³⁴² Although there is still scholarly debate over whether Muslim rulers ever executed anyone for failing to convert or for apostasy; see Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Religious freedom and the law of apostasy in Islam," *Islamochristiana* 20 (1994), pp. 75–91 and Declan O'Sullivan, "The Interpretation of Qur'anic Text to Promote or Negate the Death Penalty for Apostates and Blasphemers," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 3:2 (2001), pp. 63-93.

The general tone of these stories, and particularly the lack of confessional identity attached explicitly to the martyrs, may have allowed stories of martyrdom and mass martyrdom to be transmitted through a variety of communities, with multiple versions appearing as different communities claimed the martyrs as their own. The 'Holy Man' model and its emphasis on the continuity of the Christian tradition was similarly flexible, allowing communities to claim a connection to the early church while accepting the realities of life under Muslim rule, which had not proven to be as terrifying or horrible as other Christian works, like the apocalypses, had predicted. These martyrologies are also important for the visible role played by Muslim rule, particularly as part of the frame stories for the 60 martyr stories. The effects of Muslim rule also feature in the various lives of Peter, with Peter's martyrdom being tied to his overstepping the acceptable public behavior of a Christian toward Muslims and Muslim rulers. In this way, these works also demonstrate how Christians in this period preserved their own memories and experiences of the changes brought about by Muslim rule.

Thus, martyrologies can be understood as an attempt by Christian authors to integrate elements of the real experience of Christian life under Islam into the broader narrative of Christian identity. Whereas apocalypses appear to rely predominately on metaphor and graphic imagination – monstrous hoards, beaten back by the appearance of the Last Roman Emperor and the beginning of the End – martyrologies remain grounded in reality.³⁴³ In particular, the real experiences of seventh-century Christians feature heavily – the recently defeated Byzantine armies, the new Muslim ruling authority, and the day-to-day realities of discussing one's faith with friends and

³⁴³ Indeed, it is arguable that these works rely less on graphic imagery than seventh century apocalypses or their own pre-Islamic predecessors, which often focused on imagery of torturous pain with regards to martyrdom in order to stress the authenticity of the martyrs' faith; see Lucy Grig, "Torture and truth in late antique martyrology," *Early Medieval Europe* 11 (2002), pp. 321-336.

neighbors. Furthermore, like apocalypses, martyrologies likened contemporary communities of Christians to the larger narrative of Christian history, specifically the long tradition of Christian martyrdom, such as those who had suffered death under Roman rule.

However, although the martyrs from the Muslim period are lauded in these works for defending their faith to the death, it remains less certain if the reader is meant to emulate them, or simply laud them alongside the narrator. Indeed, the stories discussed here all focus on figures who were martyred for specific reasons beyond their faith – for being enemy combatants, for violating the laws of travel and pilgrimage, or for breaking Muslim laws regarding blaspheming the prophet. The special circumstances behind these martyr stories appear also to reflect the real experiences of contemporary Christians, both because it does not appear to be the case that Muslim rulers executed Christians merely for being Christians and because the larger and looming threat to Christianity in the Near East in the late seventh and early eighth centuries was conversion, and so it was important to encourage Christians to continue in their faith, as living embodiments rather than as memorials.

It is perhaps for this reason that sectarianism does not feature heavily, at least in the stories discussed here. Whereas apocalypses attribute Muslim victory at least in part to the weakening of church unity and the evils of sectarianism, the martyrs discussed here seem to remain Christian without further specification. These works' circulation in Greek and the association of both groups of sixty martyrs to Byzantine, as either soldiers or pilgrims, imply a Chalcedonian identity for these figures, but their religion remains under threat from Islam, not Monophysitism. This is not to say that sectarianism could not feature in these stories as retold locally or in prayers and services to these martyrs – martyrologies, like the larger genre of hagiography, could serve as templates to be redesigned to fit a variety of purposes – but it is worth noting that even in these recensions, which

seem to come from Byzantium, the emphasis remains on Christian versus Islam, perhaps again serving as an example of how these works preserved the real experiences of seventh century Christians, and the need to preserve Christianity in an increasingly Islamic Near East.

4.3 Christian Apologetics

One genre in which the Muslims play a clear and distinct role was also the first genre of Christian writing addressed directly at Islamic religious belief, namely the genre of Christian apologetic responses to Islam. These responses emerge only in the early eighth century, although some elements of their arguments have already been encountered, particularly in the writings of Anastasius of Sinai. Christian apologists faced a serious challenge in addressing Islam, as Muslims had the political and military successes of the previous century to bolster their claims to have the superior religion. In view of these claims, the Christian apologetic responses considered here – the apologetic works of John of Damascus and a set of letters which claim to preserve correspondence between the Byzantine emperor Leo III and the caliph ‘Umar II – develop arguments for the philosophical and spiritual superiority of Christianity. Although it is not readily apparent how these arguments would sway Muslims to convert to Christianity, they seem more reasonable when read as addressed to an audience of wavering Christians, reminding them of the spiritual benefits inherent in Christianity.

As has already been mentioned, although theological attacks on Islam appear to have been acceptable under Muslim rule, so long as they did not devolve into open attacks on Muḥammad, these attacks on Islam were rhetorically complicated, as the Muslims still had the very powerful evidence of their own military and political success to defend their beliefs. But a philosophical defense of Christianity was not impossible, and the early eighth century witnessed the development

of the Christian genre of apologetics against Islam.³⁴⁴ The genre was not entirely new, as some of its basic motifs and tropes appear to grow out of the Christian polemics written against Judaism in the sixth and seventh century,³⁴⁵ but this model was only partially effective, as the Jews were never in a position of political authority over the Christians.

Thus Christian apologists in this period were forced to create a new method for debating the strength of their religion. This method generally relied on showing the more complete nature of Christian doctrine, which had had seven hundred years' of debate and discussion, which had honed Christian argument. By comparison, Islamic doctrine was still evolving, and Christian apologists drew upon its nascent nature to bolster their own claims. At the same time, Christian apologists had no choice but to address their current condition and the basic fact of Muslim political superiority. To this end, they drew upon the benefits of Muslim rule, while simultaneously arguing for the universal nature of the Christian church, in order to argue that Muslim rule had not actually hindered their own religion.

Unfortunately the study of these texts is hindered somewhat because it is difficult to estimate the size of the original corpus – although there are references to non-extant texts in other Christian writings of the ninth century and later, because many apologetics follow the same basic pattern, in terms of both frame-story and content, it is difficult to discern between discrete texts and redactions. However, it is plausible that the corpus was once fairly large, as the surviving works span the linguistic and confessional range of the Near East, including examples in Greek, Coptic,

³⁴⁴ Gerrit Reinink, "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam," *Oriens christianus* 77 (1993), pp. 165-87; Sidney Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts" in Averil Cameron (ed.), *Doctrine and Debate in the Eastern Christian World* (Burlington, 2011), pp. 173-96.

³⁴⁵ For the nature of Christian apologetic representations of Judaism, see Vincent Déroche, "Anti-Jewish Polemic and the Emergence of Islam" in Cameron (ed.), *Doctrine and Debate*, pp. 85-108; Averil Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium," *Byzantium and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996), pp. 249-274 and idem., "Texts as weapons: polemic in the Byzantine dark ages," in A. K. Bowman and G. Wolf (eds.), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 198-215.

Syriac, and Arabic, with redactions in Armenian and Latin,³⁴⁶ and from Chalcedonian, Monophysite and Nestorian origins, suggesting that it was a genre produced throughout Muslim-controlled territory.³⁴⁷

A further difficulty in studying these texts lies in understanding their intended audience. In general, “apologetics” are directed outside of the author’s own community, apparently intended to convince members of other religions of the truth of Christianity. However, there is little evidence that the works discussed in this chapter were read by Muslims – indeed, none were written or redacted in Arabic, implying that they were intended instead for Christian audience, particularly for community living within the caliphate, drawing upon the historical circumstances of Muslim victory and the day-to-day realities of life under Muslim rule for relevance.³⁴⁸ Moreover, many of these works appear to address an audience of wavering Christians, as these works aim to argue against the slow progress of conversion for political, social or financial considerations, but the works themselves explicitly address Islam and Muslims, claiming to argue for the truth of Christian doctrine and the soteriological power of Christianity over that of Islam.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ The letters between the Emperor Leo III and the Caliph ‘Umar II have survived in an Armenian and Latin version, but the text is believed to have been composed in Greek originally; Jeffery’s introduction, Arthur Jeffery, “Ghevond’s Text of the Correspondence between ‘Umar II and Leo III” in Newman, *Dialogue*, pp. 57-8.

³⁴⁷ S. H. Griffith, “From Patriarch Timothy I to Hunayn ibn Ishaq: philosophy and Christian apology in Abbasid times; reason, ethics and public policy,” Martin Tamcke (ed.), *Christians and Muslims in dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages* (Würzburg, 2007), pp. 75-98.

³⁴⁸ There is also, of course, no absolute distinction between “apologetic” and “polemic” in this period; see Averil Cameron, “Disputations, Polemic Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byzantine Period” in G.J. Reinink and H.L.J. Vanstiphout (eds.), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East* (Leuven, 1991), pp. 91-108 and “New Themes and Styles in Byzantine Literature, 7th-8th Centuries” in Cameron and Conrad, *Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I*, pp. 81-105, and Alan Cameron, “The Probus Diptych and Christian Apologetic” in Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romney (eds.), *From Rome to Constantinople* (Leuven, 2007), pp. 191-202.

³⁴⁹ This is particularly true of apologies where a Christian discusses his faith with a figure of Muslim political authority, such as a caliph or a governor, as there is very little implication in these texts that the Muslim figure is meant to convert at all, as clearly benefiting from his religion. Instead, their presence serves as a starting point for the Christian to discuss the importance of the continuity of Christianity under Islam; see André Binggeli, “Converting the Caliph: A Legendary Motif in Christian Hagiography and Historiography of the Early Islamic Period” in Arietta Papaconstantinou, Muriel Debié and Hugh Kennedy (eds.), *Writing ‘True Stories’: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 77-104 and S.H. Griffith, *The church in the shadow of the mosque. Christians and Muslims in the world of Islam* (Princeton, 2008), pp. 75-104. Unfortunately there is only one example of this kind of apology that even potentially dates from before the

An additional problem faced by modern scholars for understanding these works is whether they should be understood as the records of historical events, as many purport to be, or whether they are literary creations. There is not space here to discuss this debate in full, but there is solid evidence to support both sides of the debate, and so it is perhaps best to assume a solution somewhere between the two, that these are literary re-imaginings of real historical events.³⁵⁰ For the most part, Christian apologetics take one of two forms, that of the public debate or that of a series of letters, and while it is reasonable to assume that works of both of these types existed in this period, it is nearly impossible to discern if the texts as they have survived represent an accurate account of these original works.

In part, the historicity of these texts is difficult to gauge because the authors of these works remain largely invisible, as they are generally pseudepigraphic, attached to figures of rhetorical, scholarly, or political importance, a fact which hinders scholastic considerations of dating and authenticity. Although there has been an extreme school of thought among those who defend the

Abbasid period, a very short interaction between a Muslim governor and a Monophysite priest named John, and the date of the text is suspect. The manuscript itself dates to the ninth century, and the text has been dated to the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries; see F. Nau, "Un Colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens," *Journal Asiatique* (1915), p. 225-279 at pp. 226-7; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 459-465, and Barbara Roggema, "The debate between Patriarch John and an Emire of the Mhaggraye: a reconsideration of the earliest Christian-Muslim debate" in Tamcke, *Christians and Muslims*, pp. 21-40.

³⁵⁰ Although the historicizing school which argues for the authenticity of these texts is no doubt correct that the circumstances which would have allowed for public debate of religious beliefs did exist under Abbasid rule, there is insufficient evidence to prove that the extant versions of these exchanges corresponds to real debates staged in the Abbasid court, in particular because the texts are obviously biased towards the Christian participants, have little internal historical marking, and are often perceivably mistaken in their claims. The historicizing school is also the older of the two, as most of the nineteenth century scholars who first edited and translated these works in the West accepted them as authentic. Thus Alphonse Mingana in his edition of *The Dialogue of the Patriarch Timothy* argues for it as a basically accurate translation (from Arabic to Syriac) of a real exchange between a religious head and a political head: A. Mingana, (ed.), *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni, Edited and Translated with A Critical Apparatus*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1928), 11-13. In the same work, he also argued for the authenticity of *The Apology of al-Kindi*, as did both Sir William Muir and Anton Tien in their 1882 edition; William Muir, 'The Apology of al-Kindi: An Essay on its Age and Authorship, Read Before the Royal Asiatic Society', in N. A. Newman, ed., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632-900 AD)* (Hatfield, PA, 1993), 376-9. By comparison, N. A. Newman, who compiled brought together many of these apologies in his 1993 edition, generally argues for them as literary creations, citing the same irregularities and problems discussed in the current work as sufficient evidence against the nineteenth-century consensus. See also J.L. Ehinger, "Was Anyone Listening? Christian Apologetics against Islam as a Literary Genre," *Studies in Church History* 48 (2012), pp. 35-46.

historicity of these texts, which has argued that these texts were actually penned by the figures from whom they claim authorship, the lack of corresponding historiographical evidence for their composition, as well as the lack of historical grounding in the works themselves, suggests a pseudepigraphic attribution.³⁵¹ At the same time, the pseudepigraphic nature of these works has similarly complicated the dating of these texts, many of which lack clear historical references for internal dating. Nevertheless, the arguments employed by these anonymous authors, and their positions on controversial issues such as iconography or iconoclasm, as in the emperor Leo's apparent support of icon worship in the supposed correspondence with caliph Umar, often suggest a potential dating, as it seem reasonable to presume that had these sources been written significantly later, these controversial positions would have been corrected or omitted altogether.

However, one particularly clear example of Christian responses to Islam as actually addressed to a Christian audience is also an exception to this general rule of pseudepigraphic apologies – as mentioned briefly in the last chapter, John of Damascus wrote an extensive response to Islam in the *De Haeresibus*, and there is also extant a dialogue between a Christian and Muslim which has been convincingly linked to John. In order to explain the roots of Islam as a heresy, the final chapter of *De Haeresibus* also offers responses to some Islamic beliefs, including, as has already been mentioned, direct references to three identifiable *surāt*, as well as suggested responses for a Christian audience on defending certain aspects of Christian belief and worship, including the Incarnation, Christ as the Word of God, and the veneration of icons and the Cross.

³⁵¹ Again, A. Mingana in his original 1928 edition of the apology of the Patriarch Timothy argues for the authenticity of both that and the apology of al-Kindī, emphasizing the potential legitimacy of the historical circumstances that they preserve; see A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies*, v. II, pp. 11-13. As for the rebuttal, arguing for these works as literary creations, N. A. Newman in his brief introductions to the works he has reproduced generally argues for their being literary works, citing most often the general fact that the Christian participant inevitably wins. See N. A. Newman, *Dialogue*.

Thus, one apparent purpose of the chapter in *De Haeresibus* seems to be to offer guidance to Christians on how to respond to Islamic beliefs, as well as how to respond to some Muslim accusation against Christianity.³⁵² However, the guidance offered by John would probably not have been convincing to a Muslim audience. He references only a handful of Islamic beliefs, and offers some completely inaccurate interpretations of Islamic practice, including associating the phrase *allah al-ākhbar* (God is the greatest) and the Black Stone in the Ka'ba to worship of Aphrodite:

This, then, that they call “stone,” is the head of Aphrodite, whom they used to venerate (and) whom they called *Habar*, and even now, those who can understand it exactly can see traces of an engraving.³⁵³

As was discussed in chapter three, details of John's early life are available only in the later Greek redactions of his *Life*, and so it is difficult to know if he spoke Arabic, and of what quality, or if he worked predominately with translations of Arabic texts. In any case, however, it would seem highly unlikely that he would not understand the phrase *allah al-ākhbar* or not be aware of the much more common meaning of the term *khābīr*. It seems similarly unlikely that any Christian who attempted to use this argument against a Muslim who was attacking his faith would make any kind of significant impact on that Muslim's beliefs, and would probably just sound ridiculous.³⁵⁴

In this way, although the last chapter of *De Haeresibus* presents itself as, in part, a guide for Christian apologetics, providing answers for Christians to Muslim attacks, this presentation remains unsatisfactory, especially if John did know Arabic or was engaged professionally in the Umayyad

³⁵² For more on the apologetic purposes of John's work, see Marios P. Mpegzos, “Inter-religious dialogue in Byzantine thought: the philosophical and theological contribution of John of Damascus,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 55 (2010), pp. 49-62.

³⁵³ Kottler, *Johannes*, v. 4, p. 64, translation mine.

³⁵⁴ For more on John's potential milieu, see Sidney Griffith, “John of Damascus and the Church in Syria in the Umayyad Era: The Intellectual and Cultural Milieu of Orthodox Christians in the World of Islam,” *Hugoye* 11:2 (2008), pp. 207-237.

court, and could have had access to a much wider range of Islamic thought.³⁵⁵ However, John's accusations against Islam do have characteristics in common. In particular, many are accusations which might have appeared unseemly to a Christian audience – that Muslims venerate a pagan shrine, that men can take multiple wives and that divorce without grounds is legal, that both men and women should be circumcised, that they should not observe the Sabbath or be baptised, that they are forbidden to eat certain foods, and that they are forbidden from drinking wine.³⁵⁶

This list of practices imply several characteristics about Muslim practice – that it is burdensome, as demonstrated by circumcision, food laws, and prohibition; that it is worldly, as demonstrated by their marriage law, and that it separates practitioners from Christianity, by likening their practices to pagan worship and by noting specifically that Muslims should not observe the Sabbath or be baptised. Again, it is difficult to see how these accusations would have any effect on Muslims as either an attack on Islam or as a defense of Christianity, as, aside from the accusation of paganism, Muslims would most likely view these as simple facts, not as disparaging comments about their faith.

However, these accusation make sense if John's work was being read by Near Eastern Christians, in particular by Christians who might have been considering conversion to Islam for social or financial benefits. Against this possibility, John here stresses that practicing Islam is both more burdensome and more worldly than Christianity, with the implication that conversion would be an overall loss for Christians, as taking on new, difficult practices while sacrificing the spiritual superiority of Christianity. Perhaps more interesting is the statement that Muslims cannot observe

³⁵⁵ Sidney H. Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam" in J.J. van Ginkel, H.L. Murre-van den Beng and T.M. Lint, *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam* (Leuven, 2005), pp. 91-126.

³⁵⁶ Kotter, *Johannes*, pp. 64-5. See also Pim G.B.M. Valkenberg, "John of Damascus and the theological construction of Christian identity vis-à-vis early Islam" in Henk J.M. Schoot (ed.) *Thomas Instituut Utrecht Jaarboek* (Herent, 2000), pp. 8-30 at p. 19.

the Sabbath or be baptised, which closes the chapter. Again, these points would likely have had no relevance to a Muslim audience, but instead imply a level of separation between the faiths that would seem far more relevant to wavering Christians, who might have wanted to maintain a connection to both communities. It also stands in stark contrast to the implication of intermixing between Christians and Muslims, particularly as suggested in the questions and answers of Jacob of Edessa and the stories of Peter of Capitolias, which suggest that by the early eighth century, movement between the communities was already common. In this way, it is possible to understand these passages as fighting against this climate of intermixing, with John stressing instead the separation and change that would come with conversion.

Along with his response to Islam in *De Haeresibus*, there is also a dialogue, attributed to John of Damascus, between an anonymous Christian and Muslim participant, which addresses many Muslim claims against Christian doctrine, in particular with regard to Christology and the Incarnation. The Greek text survives in one extant and one partial manuscript, with the latter being accompanied by a Latin translation. The Latin translation was edited by Michael Lequien in 1712, and was published along with a similar dialogue attributed to the ninth century Christian apologist Theodore Abū Qurra.³⁵⁷ The similarities between the two texts, which both feature anonymous participants discussing the differences between Christ as the Word of God and revelation and whether revelation requires predestination, led some scholars to understand the John Damascus text as a variation of the Abū Qurra dialogue. However, Daniel Sahas has argued persuasively for the text as correctly being attributed to John of Damascus, with a possible later redaction by Abū Qurra, noting that the two Greek versions are identical, both including material not found in the

³⁵⁷ Michael Lequien, *Sancti Patris Nostri Joannis Damasceni Monachi et Presbyteri Hierosolymitani, Opera Omnia quae extant* (Paris, 1712), v. 1, pp. 467-9.

Abū Qurra dialogue, and that the John dialogue uses many of the same topics, and even some of the same phrases, as the chapter on Islam in *De Haeresibus*.³⁵⁸

The text itself has no frame story or explanation for the dialogue. Instead, it reads as an impromptu exchange brought on by the Muslim's question, "whom do you say is the cause of good and of evil," by which the Christian is surprised.³⁵⁹ The Muslim participant remains the passive partner throughout the dialogue – he asks questions or gives prompts for the Christian to address particular topics, but offers almost no details of his own beliefs or the practices of Islam. Despite John of Damascus' references to specific *surāt* in *De Haeresibus*, citations from the Qur'ān are wholly absent from the dialogue. Indeed, the focus of the text remains defending Christian belief, not discrediting or disproving Islamic belief, as in the book of heresies.

As the text does not directly address any Islamic beliefs except insofar as they differ from Christian doctrine, it would seem unlikely to persuade a Muslim audience. However, the Muslim participant is consistently shown to be convinced by the Christian's argument. In response to the question of whether Christ suffered willingly or unwillingly on the Cross, the Christian explains that all humans can act against God's Will, but that this does not disprove the existence of divine Will:

You yourself agreed with me that none of us can, without God, stand or move, and that God does not want us to steal or to commit adultery. If, right now, I get up and leave and steal or commit adultery, what do you call this? "Will" of God, or "tolerance" or "forbearance" or "magnanimity?"³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 99-102. Bonifatius Kotter and Pim G.B.M. Valkenberg similarly supports the authenticity of the work as a product of John of Damascus – Kotter, *Johannes*, v. 4, p. 421 and Valkenberg, "John of Damascus," pp. 19-20. Andrew Louth has said of the text that "the material in it cannot be much later than John" and "the *Dispute* is based on John's oral teaching," but gives no further argument for why it could not have been composed by John himself; Louth, *St John*, p. 77.

³⁵⁹ John of Damascus, "Disputatio Christiani et Saraceni" = Kotter, *Johannes*, v. 4, pp. 427, translation mine.

³⁶⁰ Idem., v. 4, p. 432, translation mine. See also Sandra Toenies Keating, "'Say not three': some early Christian responses to Muslim questions about the Trinity," *The Thomist* 74 (2010), pp. 85-104.

Although the claim that Christ, as God, could suffer on the Cross was a major point of division between Christian and Islamic thought, and the Christian participant failed to address the issue of Christ's divinity in suffering, the Muslim participant was apparently swayed, and "having understood and being impressed, said: That is the way of it, indeed."³⁶¹

The text closes as abruptly as it opens – the Christian participant realizes that the Muslim is trying to force him to say that the one who consecrates is greater than the one that is consecrated, implying that Christians should worship John the Baptist for having baptized Jesus in the Jordan, and answers instead that the story of the Jordan signifies the roles of servant and master:

And parabolically, the Christian said to the Saracene: When you go to the bath with your servant, and he bathes you and makes you clean, whom do you say is greater? That miserable servant whom you have bought with money, or you, who were cleansed by him? In the same way also, he (Christ) being the Sovereign was cleansed by the servant. You are saying that I am greater, the one who "created" rather than the one who "was created" for my sake?, the Saracen replied to the Christian. And the other replied, after giving thanks to God, saying to the Saracene: In the same manner understand John, as servant and attendant, serving Christ in the Jordan, in which my Saviour, by being baptised, crushed the heads of the evil demons who were hidden there.³⁶²

Again, the Christian's answer would appear unsatisfactory, particularly because he failed to address the issue of createdness, a repeated theme in the dialogue, and introduced the new concept of demons, despite having told the Muslim participant at the beginning of the dialogue that evil is created by the devil, acting through the free will of humans, not by the direct intervention of demons.

However, the Muslim participant is apparently wholly satisfied, as the dialogue closes, saying only, "the Saracene, who was very much amazed and surprised, and having nothing more to

³⁶¹ Ibid., translation mine.

³⁶² Idem., v. 4, pp. 437-8, translation mine.

reply to the Christian, departed without challenging him anymore.”³⁶³ In this way, the dialogue maintains a tone of both patience and detachment – unlike the martyr stories, there is no implication that conversion, either willing or coerced, is at stake for either participant. Instead, the dialogue feels like an impromptu conversation between neighbors or colleagues, a style that could easily have resonated with a Christian audience in the early eighth century, who were beginning to engage directly with Muslims and, perhaps, were contemplating conversion for the sake of social advancement.³⁶⁴ Thus, the dialogue gently reminds the audience of the essential superiority of Christian theology, not by attacking or even addressing Islamic thought, but by outlining the philosophical elegance of Christian doctrine.

It is perhaps due to this focus on the superiority of Christian thought that Christian sectarianism is also absent from John’s dialogue. The issue of Christology does arise, in response to the Muslim’s question if the Christian understood God as eating, drinking, and sleeping, to which the Christian gives a short doctrinal statement:

The pre-eternal Word of God, who created the universe, as my Scripture says, as well as yours, the one who became a perfect man from the flesh of the holy Virgin Mary, sensible and living, this is the one who ate and drank and slept, but the Word of God did not eat, nor did he drink, nor did he sleep, or was he crucified and so on. You should know also that Christ is believed to be double with regard to natures (φύσεων), but one with regard to hypostasis. For the pre-eternal Word of God is one, hypostatically and physically, even after he assumed flesh; because there could not be a fourth person added to the Trinity after the unspeakable union with the flesh.³⁶⁵

The reference to Christ as “double with regard to nature, but one with regard to hypostasis” demonstrates a Chalcedonian perspective, and would not be acceptable to a Monophysite

³⁶³ Idem., p. 438, translation mine.

³⁶⁴ Although focused predominately on the Monophysite churches, a useful discussion on the potential roles for the church in these kinds of day-to-day interactions between Christians and Muslims can be found in Dietmar W. Winkler, “Christian responses to Islam in the Umayyad period” in Dietmar W. Winkler (ed.), *Syriac Churches encountering Islam* (Piscataway, N.J., 2010), pp. 66-84.

³⁶⁵ Kotter, *Johannes*, v. 4, pp. 435-6, translation mine.

audience. However, the dialogue does not address the sectarian allegiance of the Christian participant, but instead implies that the statement would apply to any Christian. In this way, the text develops an identity for the anonymous Christian participant in which “Chalcedonian” and “Christian” are implied to be the same, but without addressing the long history of division between the Near Eastern sects. Indeed, this identity is almost entirely ahistorical, drawing neither on the history of Christian sectarianism nor on the contemporary history of the Islamic expansion.

Thus, while the underlying theological claims of these apologies betray a particular confessional identity, in terms of their explicit assertions, they argue from a position of the essential unity of Christianity and the Church. As will be demonstrated below with the letter of Leo, this unity is most often brought up in comparison to the Muslims, who, the apologists argue, are characteristically bent towards divisiveness. This idea of the essential unity of Christianity appears to stem, at least in part, in response to a Muslim claim, that Christians had divided into seventy-two sects. This belief has its roots in the *ḥadīth*, in a story which purports to come from the very end of the Prophet’s life, in which he warned against sectarianism, saying that there were seventy-one sects of the Jews and seventy-two sects of the Christians, but that the Muslims would divide into seventy-three sects, and only one of these would see Paradise.³⁶⁶ This concept, of the essential divisiveness of all three of the major Abrahamic faiths, would come to form the basis for much of the Muslim writing of heresiography, with Muslim writers attempting to count up to the numbers the Prophet had set.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Indeed, the letter from Leo mentions the seventy-two sects specifically; Jeffrey, “Ghevond’s Text,” p. 295. See also L. Massignon, “L’umma et ses synonymes,” *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 15 (1941-6), p. 151-7.

³⁶⁷ John Taylor, “An Approach to the Emergence of Heterodoxy in Mediaeval Islām,” *Religious Studies* 2.2 (1967), pp 197 – 210.

Intriguingly, at least one Christian source appears to be aware of this tradition, as well - a pair of letters, supposedly exchanged between the Muslim caliph 'Umar II and the Byzantine emperor Leo III. As with many early Christian apologetics, dating the text is complicated by the limited extant versions and citations for the works. Arthur Jeffery, who edited an Armenian version of the letters in 1944, accepted the possibility of their authenticity, claiming that "there is no a priori ground for rejecting the possibility of such an exchange of letters between the two potentates,"³⁶⁸ but also suggested a late ninth century date for the letters, based on the age of the manuscript itself.³⁶⁹ He also noted that a number of references to the letters survive in later histories, including Theophanes and Agapius, as well as the later Armenian histories of Thoma Ardzruni (d. c. 936) and Kirakos of Gandzac (d. 1272),³⁷⁰ which include the text of Leo's letter, suggesting that at least the story of the polemical exchange between the two rulers enjoyed a wide circulation in the Near East and surrounding territories.

The letters themselves survive in two versions, one in the history of Ghevond edited by Jeffrey and a second in Latin, misattributed to the Byzantine emperor Leo VI and thus dated to the early eighth or late ninth century in Migne.³⁷¹ However, as noted by N. A. Newman in his reprinting of the letters, there is little reason to assume the letters need to be dated to the Ghevond manuscript. In particular, the letter from Umar confuses several Biblical passages and fails to mention either the statement of faith or the ḥajj as required practices for Muslims, suggesting an early stage of both Islamic ritual and polemic at the time of its composition.³⁷² Moreover, both Umar's accusations

³⁶⁸ Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text," v. 3, p. 270.

³⁶⁹ Jeffrey, "Ghevond's Text," p. 273. Jeffrey does also note that there is some dispute over the date of Ghevond, with some scholars arguing for a mid-to-late eighth century dating, but says that he prefers a ninth or tenth century date as it "would better suit the information he has about Islam" without further explanation; *idem.*, p. 275.

³⁷⁰ Theophanes = Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, p. 550, Agapius = A. Vasiliev, *PO* 8.9, p. 503; Ardzruni = Patmoui Arcroumeac, *History of the Ardzrunids to 966* (Constantinople, 1852), p. 116; Kirakos = Patmoui iuroy, *History of his own Times* (Venice, 1865), p. 37. Jeffrey, "Ghevond's Text," pp. 269-70.

³⁷¹ Migne, "Epistola Leonis Imperatoris Augusti," *PG* 107, pp. 315-34.

³⁷² Newman, *Dialogues*, p. 50.

against Christianity and Leo's responses match closely to John of Damascus' polemic instructing Christians how to respond to Muslims, suggesting that the Greek originals of the letters may have been an expansion of that work, or at least date from the same period.³⁷³ Indeed, if the letters did emerge from the same polemical circles in Syria as John of Damascus, this may also explain why the emperor Leo is made to defend the Christian use of icons,³⁷⁴ something that almost certainly would have read as inaccurate to a later author.

The letters are significant in part because the character of Leo III, in addressing the story of the seventy-two sects, turns the accusation against the caliph:

As for yourself, have you no thought that by exterminating those who differ a little from your opinions, you commit a crime against God? If such acts take place among you, who form one single people speaking a single language and having at your head a single person, who is at the same time chief, sovereign, pontiff and hangman, would it be astonishing that the Christian faith, were it the invention of some human wisdom, should become worse than yours? Yet it is now eight hundred years [sic] since Jesus Christ appeared, and His Gospel has been spread from one end of the earth to the other, amongst all peoples and all languages, from the civilized countries of Greece and Rome to the furthest countries of the barbarians, and if there is found some divergence among Christians, it is because of the difference of languages. I have said divergence, because there has never been among us that bitter hostility such as one see deeply rooted among you. It would appear that under this number seventy-two you must include all the voluptuous, impure, filthy, impious people who conduct themselves like pagans, and among whose number you count us. But these are people who disguise under the name of Christ their own abominations, giving themselves out to be Christians, but whose faith is only a blasphemy and their baptism only a soiling. When such manifest their intention of abandoning their detestable life, the Holy Church receives them into her bosom only after administering baptism to them, just as to pagans. Indeed, God has long since caused them to disappear completely, so that one no longer sees them.³⁷⁵

At first it would appear that the emperor is developing a concept of "Christian" that is doctrinally-exclusive, relying on a particular doctrine and a particular baptism, discounting all

³⁷³ Idem., p. 52. See also John Boojamra, "Christianity in greater Syria after Islam," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991) pp. 223-239.

³⁷⁴ Newman, *Dialogues*, pp. 93-4.

³⁷⁵ Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text," pp. 295-6.

others, in a manner similar to fifth- and sixth-century theologians. But the end of the passage, and the author's claim that "God has long since caused them to disappear completely," makes it difficult to see how he could be speaking of the sectarian divisions between the Chalcedonians, Monophysites and Nestorians, particularly because, at least in terms of the frame-story for the apology, he would be addressing a caliph who had all three of these communities residing within his caliphate.

Instead, it would seem that the emperor is harking back to an older construction of "Christian," one that is held in contrast to "pagan," into which category he also lumps some ancient form of heresy, which in his contemporary community no longer exist.³⁷⁶ The more current divisions between Christians are chalked up to the divergence of language. To be fair, as discussed in chapter two, this is a perfectly accurate understanding for many of the divisions of the fifth and sixth century, as the doctrinal debates, which raged in Greek over the subtle connotations of terms like *physis* or *hypostasis*, rarely translated well into other languages.³⁷⁷ However, the main thrust of the emperor's argument seems to lie in the comparison he makes between the essential unity of "Christianity" and the essential divisiveness of the Muslims, which he understands as showing the divine nature of the Christian faith, whereas Islam, in his estimation, maintains whatever unity it has simply because of its shared language, government, and leadership.

This is a construction of "Christian" and "Muslim" which effectively responds to the Muslims' claim for religious truth due to their military and political victories. Although they were militarily and politically successful, they were still a community led by "the invention of human

³⁷⁶ For more on the evolution of the Near Eastern concept of Christian history under Islam, see Amir Harrak, "Ah! the Assyrian is the Rod of My Hand!: Syriac View of History after the Advent of Islam" in van Ginkel, Murre-van den Berg and van Lint (eds.), *Redefining Christian Identity*, pp. 45-66.

³⁷⁷ Indeed, violence and divisiveness were a common occurrence in the fifth and sixth century, violence which was often justified as not contradicting the concept of Christian brotherhood; Michael Gaddis, *There is no crime for those who have Christ: religious violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley, 2005), pp. 208-250.

wisdom,” and, as such, had fallen victim to the same divisiveness to which humans are normally prey. By comparison, Christianity had survived, apparently united, throughout its eight-hundred-year history. This argument would have even greater resonance addressed to Christians living within the Islamic empire, as it would attach a theological significance to Christianity’s continued existence in the face of the Muslim incursion and Muslim rule.

It is worth noting that there are works where it appears that the apologist’s understanding of the theological significance of Muslim rule is similarly designed to highlight a theological significance in Christianity’s continued survival within the Islamic empire.³⁷⁸ For the most part, apologetics are positive about Muslim rule, stressing the advantages and benefits Christians have enjoyed since the Islamic expansion. They are also generally positive about the prophet himself, arguing that the theological significance of the rise of Islam lay in his abolition of paganism in the Near East. As has already been discussed with regard to martyrologies, there may be a practical element to this positive attitude – although it appears that in the *majlis* and other public forums, protection was offered to those speaking, so that they could offer the most complete defense of their faith or ideology possible, without fear of insulting the caliph, there were limitations to this open-mindedness, and Islamic law regularly cites serious punishments for anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim, who blasphemes the Prophet or the Qur’an in public.³⁷⁹ As many of the martyrs of this

³⁷⁸ Unfortunately no examples of this style of apology survive that can be dated to the pre-Abbasid period. The earliest extant version is a dialogue between an anonymous monk and the Muslim general of Jerusalem, in which the monk lauds Muslims and Muslim rule, saying they “are the sons of Islam, and the light in its darkness, the moon of its esteem and the sword of its power; in this rests its science and the security of its (non-Muslim) subjects and the paradise of its products;” Kurt Vollers (ed. and trans.), “Hypothetical Discussion between a Jacobite Monk and an Amir of Jerusalem written c. 800 AD,” *Zetschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 29 (1908), pp. 29-71 at p. 40. There are no internal markers in the text, but was dated to c. 800 by Vollers based on the date of the manuscript and the name of the Muslim governor, ‘Abdarrahān b. ‘Abdūl Malīk b. Šālīh al-Hāshimī, a real general, but not one known to have any connection to Jerusalem or Palestine. However, the description of the general as a member of the Hāshimī family would at least suggest an Abbasid association, and a post-750 date.

³⁷⁹ Tritton, *The Caliphs*, p. 16. See also Sydney Griffith, “The Monk in the Emir’s *Majlis*: Reflections on the Popular Genre of Christian Literacy Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period,” in H. Lazarus Yafen, M. R. Cohen, S. Somekh and S. H. Griffith (eds.), *The Majlis, Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam* (Wiesbaden, 1999), pp. 13-65.

period achieved their martyrdom by doing just that, it would seem plausible that these topics are avoided in apologetics in part in order to maintain the realism of the frame story, as any Christian speaker who blasphemes the Prophet in public could have expected death.

In this way, apologetics express the continued desire of Christian authors to marry Christian identity in the Near East with the real experiences of Christians living under Muslim rule. Like apocalypses and martyrologies, these works reference the larger history of Christianity, in particular in order to stress the continuity and consistency of the Christian tradition, as compared to the divisiveness they claim Islam has experienced in the first century of its existence. However, the central tie to this tradition is not historical, casting contemporary Christians in the same roles as the early martyrs of the church or the final remnant at the End, but doctrinal and theological, stressing the purity of Christian thought, which has remained uncorrupted for seven centuries. In some cases, as with John of Damascus, this purity is despite attempts within the tradition to corrupt it, whereas others, like the Leo of the letters, claim sectarianism as only an ancient threat. In all cases, however, in addressing Islam, the claim is the same, that Christianity, as practiced by that author, is both doctrinally pure and communally united.

Thus, Christian apologists were able to address and even applaud the generosity and fairness of their Muslim rulers, as these positive characteristics were exactly what had allowed the pure truth of Christian thought to continue in the Near East. This was an identity that could map directly to the lives of contemporary Christians – comfortable under Muslim rule, willing to defend their faith in conversations with Muslim friend and neighbors, and armed with arguments by eminent thinkers like John of Damascus, in order to remain Christian, and not succumb to the worldly benefits of converting to the theological inferior Islam. Moreover, like the early eighth-century canons of Jacob of Edessa, apologies created a concept of Christian identity which would

allow for considerable flexibility, with the identity itself stemming predominately from the audience's own desire to be Christian. Association with Muslims or even benefiting from Muslim rule over other Christians was no barrier for claiming to be a good Christian, as John of Damascus could potentially evidence from his own role in the Umayyad court. Detachment from the Christian world farther west was similarly no obstacle, as the true value of Christian identity was transmitted in its theological traditions, which the Near Eastern Christians could foster and preserve. Thus, early apologies may preserve an early attempt to establish a stable, inward-looking Christian identity, one that accepted both the continuation of Muslim rule and the continuity of Near Eastern Christianity within the caliphate, as the status quo.

4.4 Conclusion

Thus, Christian perspectives on Islam in the seventh and early eighth centuries were influenced not only by their own experiences of Islam and Muslim rule, but by the genre and purpose of the works themselves. These works undoubtedly draw on the real, lived experiences of Christians of the period, but cast these experiences in a particular light in order to fulfill a particular purpose for the work itself. These experiences clearly changed over time as the Muslim expansion shifted from contemporary events to memory, and as Christian communities of the Near East came to accept Muslim rule as the new status quo.

Syriac apocalypses were one of the first genres to address the Islamic expansion after the rise of Islam, and along with the sermons and homilies discussed in chapter three, comprise some of the earliest sources for Christian responses to Islam. As such, it is not surprising that the image of the Muslims in these texts is often graphically terrifying, drawing on the images of destruction in the Danielitic apocalypses, such as the sons of the Kings of the South, in order to convey the terror

of the Muslim conquest. This imagery also served to emphasize both the inevitability and the temporary nature of Muslim rule, by likening the Muslims to the final aspects of the stages of the Daniel story, stressing that their success was necessary as a harbinger of the End Times, and that their rule would end with the beginning of the End. In this way, these works could serve a polemic purpose, explaining the failures of the Byzantine and Persian armies at defeating the Muslims, and give solace to their Christian audience at the same time, by stressing that their suffering was necessary for the greater purpose of bringing about the End.

The Muslim characters who appeared in martyrologies in the seventh and early eighth centuries had lost the apocalyptic and superhuman elements of the apocalypses, being portrayed as essentially humans, albeit humans in positions of power and authority, often wielding that authority against the Christians they ruled. The Muslims in these works are often portrayed without the pure terror of the apocalypses, as well. They often serve as foils to the Christian saints, but are described as possessing logic and reason which underpin their actions. They were also often demonstrated as possessing leniency and mercy, with martyrs needing to go to great lengths to force their own execution, particularly in the case of Peter of Capitolias, who was clearly martyred not simply for being a Christian, but for repeatedly blaspheming Muḥammad. It also appears that he was offered considerable clemency by the Muslims, with his eventual execution being attributed to one particularly tyrannical Muslim, rather than as the result of general Muslim malice.

This tempered view of Muslims most likely represents a new attempt to marry the fears and concerns of Christians with the realities of life under Muslim rule. Creating stories of new martyrs offered a connection to the early Christian church, thus implying that the continuity of Christianity under Muslim rule was as important a cause as the defense of Christianity in the Roman empire had been. However, the emphasis on the extraordinary nature of these events most likely resonated

with the experiences of their Christian audience, as forced conversion did not appear to be a common occurrence, and so a simple conversion-or-death martyr story would have rung untrue to a community living under Muslim rule.

It is Christian apologetics, however, that this pragmatic view of Muslims, developed by a community that had lived under Muslim rule for several generations, witnessed the most positive expression. The Muslim participants in these stories are portrayed as friends and neighbors, genuinely interested in learning more about Christianity and consistently impressed by its philosophical and spiritual superiority. It seems unlikely that these apologies could have successfully converted many Muslims, as they fail to address many of the most central claims for superiority within Islam – including lacking an entirely satisfying answer for the Muslims' military and political victories – but as polemical works intended to convince wavering Christians to maintain their faith, this positive view of Muslims could be quite powerful. In particular, it implied that Christians living under Muslim rule had already received as much benefit as they could from the presence of the Muslims, and that the remaining righteousness was to be found in Christianity.

The emergence of Muslim rule and the continued evolution of the Muslims as a distinct religious and cultural community feature both implicitly and explicitly in these text – explicitly in the frame stories for the martyrologies and the apologies, and implicitly in these texts' attempts to create connections for the Near Eastern Christians living under Muslim rule to the early Christian church and the cosmic history of the Bible. The views of Muslims found in these works naturally evolved over time, as Christians began to recognize that Muslims were not tyrannical as rulers, despite their ferociousness in battle, and began to accept Muslim rule as the new status quo.

In this way, the genres composed by Christians in the seventh and early eighth centuries as direct responses to Islam demonstrate how Christians began to integrate the real experiences of

Christian life under Islam into questions of Christian identity. Through these texts, it is possible to see the progress of Christian thinking about Islam, from the horror of apocalypses, coupled with their emphasis on the temporary nature of Muslim rule; to martyrologies' emphasis on the realistic reasons behind the martyrs' deaths, implying that in general, conversion to Islam was not required to escape death; to the early apologists' focus on the intellectual superiority of Christianity, which they describe as flourishing under Islam. Although the issue of doctrinal purity does feature in some of these works, it is church unity which appears as the uniting theme, in particular the need to resist the social and financial benefits of conversion to Islam. In this way, these texts would appear to address an audience of waning Christians, illustrating the need for Christians to maintain their faith.

Chapter 5: Near Eastern Christianity and the Qur'ān

The final chapter of this work turns to consider early Islamic thought, in particular as preserved in the Qur'ān. Unfortunately, the study of the development of Islam as a religion and culture in the seventh and early eighth century is hindered by many methodological challenges. Nevertheless, it is important to offer some considerations on how Muslims characterized Christianity, Christians, and the continuation of the other Abrahamic religions under Islam, in order to reflect on whether the images of Muslims and Christians could be the result of early inter-religious dialogue, and to explore the similarities and differences in the ways in which the early Muslims thought about and with their Christian neighbors. As will be outlined below, although this discussion depends on a single source to understand early Islamic conceptions of Christians and their religion, the evidence suggests that the early Muslims did not conceive of either "Muslim" or the religious Other, in the form of the other Abrahamic traditions, in a manner similar to their Christian contemporaries, a conclusion which problematizes any attempt to think in terms of a meaningful inter-faith dialogue in either direction in this period.

The Qur'ān serves as a useful source for this discussion as being one of the few Muslim works generally dated to the seventh century. Moreover, although it is clear that the Qur'ān knows about Christians, and reveals some understanding of the major narratives of the New Testament, in its discussions of Christianity, there is little similarity to the Christian sources already discussed. In particular, the Qur'ān does not preserve an expectation of mass conversion from Christianity to Islam, despite this being a major fear among Christian leaders, and even in its discussions of Christian sectarianism, which the Qur'ān clearly understands as a sign of Christians' failure to maintain the historical community who received true revelation from Jesus, the Qur'ān betrays little understanding of the contemporary sectarianism of the Christian Near East. Thus, the Qur'ānic conception of Christianity and Christians suggests not inter-religious debate between the religions, but an internal discussion, meant as a teaching tool for the Muslim community only.

As outlined in chapter one, the majority of this study has focused on Christian sources – Christian sources demonstrating the evolution of Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian thought in the fifth and sixth century; Christian sources illustrating how those intellectual communities continued to develop after and, in some cases, in response to the Islamic expansion and the emergence of the caliphate, and Christian sources indicating the various ways Christian authors attempted to integrate the rise of Islam and Muslim rule into Christian thought. This focus on Christianity at the rise of Islam is useful for two reasons – to start with, it is easier to demonstrate the continuity from pre-Islamic Christianity to Christianity under Muslim rule because the central elements of Christianity – its theology, practice, and church structure – remained largely the same for at least the period of the seventh and eighth centuries.

Of course, all three elements did change under Muslim rule, but these changes appear more like variations on a theme than complete innovations, making it possible to speculate over how the

social, cultural and political changes caused by the rise of Islam might have caused or influenced these change. In addition, Christian sources from the seventh century have been rigorously studied and edited, and there is now a considerable corpus of sources that are widely regarded as authentic representations of seventh-century Christian thought. In this way, as this study has endeavored to do, it is possible to use this large corpus as a starting point to ask broader questions about Christian identity, and how that identity varied from region to region, from sect to sect, and in the various periods of reaction to and gradual acceptance of Muslim rule.

Both circumstances are considerably different with regard to Islamic sources. In the first instance, although Islam incorporated elements of Christian and Jewish tradition, as well as some of the indigenous practices of pre-Islamic polytheism, it was essentially an innovation in the seventh century, and therefore, the issue of continuity is a more complex one than with Christianity. In particular, as will be discussed throughout this chapter, although Islam adopted stories from both the Hebrew and Christian Bible, it often employed them to very different purposes than the original, imparting new perspectives, and often significantly altering the stories themselves in order to create an original narrative framework for Islamic thought. Similarly, as will be discussed shortly (section 5.1), although there is evidence to suggest that elements of ritual practice from pre-Islamic Arabia were incorporated into Islamic practice, at least according to the Muslim tradition, this incorporation was often accompanied with an emphasis on the difference from pre-Islamic practices, for example, in the adoption of the Ka'ba as a holy site in Islam, which the Muslim tradition understands as coming about in parallel with the Muslims' destruction of the surrounding idols and attempts to eliminate polytheist worship of them. In this way, although there may be elements of continuity from both Abrahamic monotheism and pre-Islamic polytheism in early Islam, this continuity itself is mitigated by Islam's own claims of innovation.

As for the second point, the source basis for Islam in the seventh century is also more problematic than that of Christian writings about Islam. As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, the modern field of Islamic studies remains largely divided on questions of source skepticism and a reasonable chronology for the development of distinctly Islamic writing. Although disagreements regarding acceptable dating exist also for the Christian corpus, as has been shown in the last two chapters, these differences are generally a difference of a few decades, whereas for Islamic sources, various datings for a single source may span centuries.³⁸⁰ Indeed, even the authenticity of texts is often highly debated by modern scholars.³⁸¹ Moreover, modern Islamic studies as a field is similarly characterized by ongoing methodological debates about the nature of Islamic theology, and at what point truly theological debates emerge in Islam, with suggested datings again spanning centuries.³⁸² For all of these reasons, it is incredibly difficult to establish a corpus of authentically seventh-century Islamic texts which could be used to discuss larger questions of how Muslim identity varied from region to region, or how that identity might have been affected by on-going interactions with Christians in the seventh and eighth centuries.

³⁸⁰ This range of datings includes dating for the Qur'an itself, as will be discussed in section 5.2.

³⁸¹ See, for example, the *Futuh ash-Shām* of al-Wāqidī; S. Leder asserts in his article for the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* that the *Futūḥ ash-Shām* should be considered “legendary” and a later creation, but fails to offer evidence as to why. William Nassau Lees in his original edition of the work admitted to its heavily redacted nature, noting that the text reads as a later edition of al-Wāqidī, who serves as the final link in many of the *isnād*, suggesting that the work was a collection of his sayings, not a work by him personally; see S. Leder, “al-Wāqidī, Muḥammad b. ‘Umar b. Wāqid,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (eds), Brill, 2011, [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-7836), Oxford University libraries 29 April 2011; http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-7836 and W. Nassau Lees, *The Conquest of Syria commonly ascribed to Aboo ‘Abd Allah Mohammad b. ‘Omar al-Waqidi* (Calcutta, 1854), pp. i-xxiv

³⁸² Such as the *sīra* of Muḥammad b. Muslim b. Shihāb al-Zuhrī, composed in the early eighth century, but alternate dated to the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, as well; see M. Lecker, “al-Zuhrī,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), Brill, 2011, [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-8204), Oxford University libraries 04 September 2011; http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-8204 and A. A. Duri, “Al-Zuhri: a study of the Beginnings of Historical Writing in Islam,” *BSOAS* 19.1 (1957), pp. 1-12.

However, as the rise of Islam makes up the basis for this study, it would be remiss to omit Muslim thought entirely from the discussion. Moreover, it is important to consider the description of Christians in the Qur'ān in order to demonstrate that this imagery has both a different background and focus than the Christian identities encountered in Christian sources. In this way, this chapter illustrates that the Christian conception of Islam and the Muslim conception of Christianity developed independently, and were probably not the result of inter-religious dialogue in this period.

With the complexities of studying Muslims in the seventh century in mind, this final chapter focuses on the Qur'ān, both as the basic source of Islamic thought and as a text that has been generally, albeit not universally, dated to the seventh century (section 5.2).³⁸³ More specifically, this chapter focuses on discussions and descriptions of Christians in the Qur'ān. Not surprisingly, there is little similarity between Muslim identity in the Qur'ān and their characterization in Christian sources – Muslims do not consider themselves plagues or demons, although many later Muslim authors would describe the political and military successes of the early expansion as acts of divine intervention. More importantly, there is little parallel between the Qur'ānic descriptions of Christians and Christian descriptions of Muslims – the Qur'ān does not generally characterize Christians as evil or as outsiders, but rather maintains a sense of familiarity with Christians, and Jews, albeit a familiarity tainted by the failure of the other Abrahamic traditions to accept the message of Muḥammad.

³⁸³ The continued debates in Islamic studies regarding the dating of the Qur'ān will be discussed later in this chapter. At this juncture, it is worth just noting that of the numerous analyses of the Qur'ān published in Western languages in the nineties and naughts, only Nevo and Koren continue to argue for a date later than the Abbasid revolution; see Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Keron, *The Crossroads to Islam: the Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, 2003).

This familiarity is particularly apparent in the passages in which the Qur'ān appears to speak directly to the existing population of Christians (section 5.3). There are also passages which speak about Christians, in particular the historic community of Christians who followed Jesus, and how they fell victim to sectarianism and wrong beliefs, which appear to be directed exclusively at a Muslim audience, with the Christians serving as the basis for analogy (section 5.4). In this way, the descriptions of Christians in the Qur'ān would appear to be largely separate from Christian writings about Islam, not engaging in similar debates or discussions, but instead focusing on issues that were predominately of internal importance for the nascent community of Muslims.³⁸⁴

5.1 Islam and Seventh Century Arabia

As has already been said, several differences between both the nature of Islam in the seventh century and the nature of the Muslim corpus hinder direct comparisons between Christian writing and Muslim. At the same, several methodological challenges must be discussed in order to clarify why it is not entirely possible to discuss the intellectual milieu of the Qur'ān in the same way as this study has sought to do for Christian sources. First, as has already been said, there is little information about central Arabia independent from Islam in the lifetime of Muḥammad, and so it is difficult to establish to what degree the practices and beliefs of the Qur'ān paralleled those of its native environment, and to what degree it revolutionized central Arabia.

In turning to the issue of the broader context for the composition or circulation of the Qur'ān, it is important to stress, however obvious it may be, that Christianity in the early seventh

³⁸⁴ The reader will note that the Arabic text of the Qur'ān has been included in this chapter, although full transcriptions of texts have not appeared elsewhere in this study. As noted in chapter one, this is both due to the centrality of the language itself for the present study and in deference to the Muslim belief that the Qur'ān is only the Qur'ān in Arabic.

century had already undergone six centuries of development, whereas Islam was still in its infancy. Therefore comparisons across the two communities must be made with care, as the interests and concerns rarely coincided – by the seventh century, Christianity in the Near East, North Africa and Mesopotamia was an established community struggling to fit the rise of Islam into a pre-established cosmology that was based on six centuries of theological debates. Islam, by contrast, was a nascent community that had grown out of the Arabian peninsula, which was based initially in the social structure of the partially-settled, partially-nomadic communities of Mecca and Medina, but which was also over-riding those social and cultural traditions in many ways, before expanding into the Near East, North Africa and Mesopotamia.

Moreover, as already mentioned, Islam was essentially an aberration in Arabia, with no obvious antecedent to use to help give context to why the movement began when it did or why it was successful. Christianity and Judaism were both present in the Arabian Peninsula, and some of the northern Arabian tribes had played roles in both the religious and political history of the fifth- and sixth-century Near East.³⁸⁵ However, there is limited evidence for the religious character of central Arabia, an absence which has spurred a wide range of theories among modern scholars about the nature of the community who followed Muḥammad.³⁸⁶ Indeed, as will be discussed in the

³⁸⁵ Perhaps the most important of the northern Arabian tribes was the Ghassanids, who migrated north to Jordan and served as embassaries between the Byzantines and Arabia and the East. The Ghassanids are generally described as Monophysites, but since they had migrated out of Arabia before the rise of Islam, it remains unclear how aware those in central Arabia would have been of their religious identity or its relationship to fifth and sixth century sectarianism; see Yasmine Zahran, *Ghassan Resurrected* (London, 2006), pp. xi-xiii, and Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, (Washington D.C., 2002), v. 2.1, pp.1-20. In south Arabia, there were both Christians and Jews, with political connections to both Byzantium and the Christian empire of Ethiopia. According to the Muslim tradition, these tribes were among the first to convert to Islam, but further work is needed regarding how their former religion might have influenced the formation of Islam; see Irfan Shahid, “Byzantium in South Arabia,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 33 (1979), pp. 23-94; Patricia Crone, “Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad period political parties?” in Patricia Crone, *From Arabian tribes to Islamic Empire*, (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 1-57, and Claire Hardy-Guilbert, “L’islam au Yémen, du VIIe siècle au milieu du XVe siècle,” *Les dossiers d’archéologie*, 263 (2001), pp. 68-71.

³⁸⁶ Robert Hoyland has made a thorough investigation of the inscriptions of central and southern Arabia, providing evidence that polytheism was still being practiced by at least some portion of the population at the rise of Islam, as new shrines were still being created at this point. However, this provides little information about the demographic makeup of the area; see Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs* (London, 2001), pp. 139-145.

next section, it is not even universally accepted among Western scholars that the Qur'ān should be used as a source about this seventh-century Arabian community, arguing instead for the work as a later creation which served to project back an imagined history of Islam as an innovation, when in fact the Arabians had been some variety of monotheist consistently, with Muḥammad's movement being a purely political one.³⁸⁷

It is certainly the case that the innovative nature of Islam is of central importance for the Muslim tradition, and so it is understandable that some scholars would look on this emphasis on Islam arising miraculously in the desert as more propaganda than history. As will be discussed below, many Qur'ānic passages focus on the ongoing struggles between the nascent community of believers and the traditionalist, polytheist authority in Mecca, who sought to end Muḥammad's mission. This struggle often focused around the Ka'ba, which, in the Muslim narrative, was already a shrine worshipped by the Arabian polytheists. The main reaction against the Arabian faith by the early community of Muslims was a reaction against the idols which stood around the Ka'ba. In the polytheist construction, *allah* was too all-powerful to be concerned with the problems of humanity, and so believers prayed to the idols, who acted as intercessors between the individual and *allah*. Muḥammad rejected this system and ordered that believers pray directly to the Ka'ba.³⁸⁸ In this way, the Muslim tradition offered a physical manifestation of what is essentially a theological concept, that intercession was not necessary and that monotheism could only be practiced as a direct link between believer and God. This formulation is also heavily dependent on the

³⁸⁷ The nature of Arabian monotheism varies in these works, as will be seen below, but the general claim that the Qur'ān does not represent the seventh-century community who invaded the Near East is central to the arguments of Patricia Crone and John Wansborough; see Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977); John Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977).

³⁸⁸ For the Prophet's relation to pre-Islamic worship in Mecca, see Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, pp. 76-99 and Fazlur Ralman, "Pre-Foundations," in Peters, *Arabs*, pp. 185-204.

characterization of the local Meccans as polytheists, offering the counterpoint to Muḥammad's claims and serving as the model for the outmoded form of worship he was rejecting.

However, this strict dichotomy of believers versus polytheists in the religious identity of the pre-Islamic Meccan community is far from universally accepted in modern scholarship. In particular, although the Muslim tradition has stressed the polytheist character of pre-Islamic Meccan religion, many Western scholars have theorized various potential Jewish and Christian influences on Meccan identity as a possible context for the Qur'ān's creation. Moreover, G. R. Hawting has extensively analyzed the Qur'ānic and Muslim conception and narrative of pre-Islamic polytheism, arguing persuasively for its similarity to similar narratives in both Christianity and Judaism.³⁸⁹ As Hawting demonstrates, the concept of Mecca as polytheist was employed by Muslim theologians to give credence to the idea of the Qur'ān as divinely-inspired, that "if the Koran and Islam, with their monotheistic faith and detailed knowledge of monotheist tradition, originated in a pagan Mecca devoid of a Jewish or Christian presence, then it is difficult to account for it other than by divine intervention."³⁹⁰

Although Hawting is most likely correct about the importance of the narrative of polytheist Mecca in Muslim tradition, and there are ample examples of the use of the dichotomy between believers and polytheists in the Qur'ān itself, it is not the case that Qur'ān describes an Arabia populated exclusively by Muslims and polytheists. As argued by Uri Rubin, the *ḥanīf* (God-fearers) feature regularly in the early Muslim tradition, generally as antagonists to Muḥammad and the early Muslim community, strongly suggesting both that there was a local awareness of Judaism and Christianity and that early Islam did not consider this monotheist awareness to contradict or

³⁸⁹ Hawting, *Idea of Idolatry*, pp. 67-87.

³⁹⁰ *Idem.*, p. 151.

damage claims of the Qur'ān as divine revelation.³⁹¹ Moreover, as will be discussed throughout this chapter, the Qur'ānic references to Christianity often imply a contemporaneous community with whom its audience is familiar, perhaps even personally familiar. Indeed, the kind of Judaism and Christianity conceived of in the Qur'ān has been one of the major aspects of modern debates over the correct methodology for studying the text, as the context for the work's compilation and circulation remain widely debated, allowing for a significant range in the potential communities of Christian to whom the text could be speaking.

Indeed, many of the Qur'ānic injunctions about how the Muslims should interact with these other communities parallels what evidence is available from non-Muslim sources, in particular with regard to the Muslims ruling over the conquered communities and not requiring conversion from their subjects. The presence of these other communities in the Qur'ān, however, does lead to another and related complication, namely the question of whether the Qur'ān should be read as describing its contemporary environment or dictating it. To put it another way, in discussing how the Qur'ān sees Christians and the guidance it offers to Muslims as to how to interact with them, it remains unclear if the Qur'ān is recording interactions that have already taken place or giving instructions that then shaped the character of Muslim rule in the Near East.

Unfortunately, as will be discussed in the next section, it is nearly impossible to date the Qur'ān independently, as there is neither sufficient material evidence nor reliable textual evidence that could not have been altered later by the Muslim authority, and so any suggested dating remains circular, linked to a particular period because it echoes the historical evidence from that period. Since the Qur'ān is a religious document, designed to give instruction for Muslim behavior, these datings could either mean that Qur'ān dates from that period and is recording events or that it dates

³⁹¹ Uri Rubin, "Hanifiyya and Ka'ba," *JSAI* 13 (1990), pp. 85-112.

from just before and is dictating Muslim behavior. Indeed, the Qur'ān is also, in the words of Stefan Wild, “probably the most self-referential text in the history of world religions,”³⁹² and in its own internal datings and in the Muslim tradition, whether the text pre- or postdates the events it describes varies from *sura* to *sura*.³⁹³ As there is also no set date for when those in central Arabia who followed Muḥammad first came into contact with Christians – and indeed, there is every reason to believe that they were already familiar with some Christians by the early seventh century – it is incredibly difficult to state with any certainty if the Qur'ānic descriptions of Christians and its injunctions to Muslims on how to treat Christians pre- or postdates these first interactions.

A similar problem of circular dating applies to early Muslim sectarianism. Many of the Qur'ānic descriptions about Christians and the Abrahamic traditions more generally focus on the schisms that followed the initial revelations to Moses and Jesus, using the history of the Abrahamic traditions as models for how sectarianism could corrupt true revelation and the community of believers around it. For this reason, it is tempting to want to date these passages against the concurrent history of Muslim sectarianism, but again here, no widely-accepted dating exists. According to Muslim sources, the *shī'a 'Alī*, literally the party or faction of 'Alī, not only held that the Prophet's nephew and son-in-law was the more reasonable choice for his successor, they felt that the community had been led astray from its correct obedience to God by its appointment of Abū Bakr as the first caliph, and especially by its allegiance to the Umayyads over the Alids.³⁹⁴ In the

³⁹² Stefan Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an* (Wiesbaden, 2006), p. 5.

³⁹³ So, for example, the Qur'ān offers prophecies about future events, such as the outcome of the Byzantine-Persian war (Q. 30:2-4), and gives instruction based on those prophecies, but also addresses recently past events, often as a means for rescinding or amending previous instructions, such as in the case of the abrogation of the rule that *'idda* (period of mourning by a wife) must be carried out in the deceased's home (Q. 2.234), which, according to the Muslim tradition, was abrogated by Q. 6.55, which was revealed after an old woman in the community found it too difficult to stay in her deceased husband's house, and wanted to return to her family home to perform the rite.

³⁹⁴ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Harlow, 1986), pp.50-81, and G. R. Hawting, *The first dynasty of Islam: the Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750* (London, 1986), pp. 26-7.

same way, the community that broke away from the Shi'a after the Battle of Siffin (657) argued that the decision of 'Alī and Mu'āwiya to negotiate rather than go to war was a violation of God's Will, denying the right of God to select leaders through the outcome of battles. The ever-more-splintered communities that would arise out of this initial splinter-group, termed generally the *Khawārij* (lit. those who separated), would maintain an understanding that piety must be the basic measure for authority, a theological argument which would lead to the endless further division of the community as each new leader claimed to be more pious than the last, a claim which could only be proven by the victory of the new leader over the old in battle.³⁹⁵

However, the Muslim sources which preserve this history date from several centuries later, and suffer problems from prolonged periods of oral transmission and heavy redaction, making them less than ideal for either authenticity or dating.³⁹⁶ A handful of contemporary Christian sources reference some of the events relevant to Muslim sectarianism, in particular the Maronite chronicle, which describes the first *fitna*, and, as has already been mentioned, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, which may contain references to both the first and second *fitnāt*.³⁹⁷ However, these sources reveal no knowledge of Muslim sectarianism as the root cause for these disputes. This omission is not

³⁹⁵ Jeffery Kenney, *Muslim Rebels: Kharijites and the Politics of Extremism in Egypt* (New York, 2006), pp. 21-26; Martin Hinds, "Kufan Political Alignments and Their Background in the Mid-Seventh Century A.D.," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2 (1971), pp. 346-67; and "The Siffin Arbitration Agreement," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1972), pp. 93-129.

³⁹⁶ For more on the modern discussions over dating Muslim histories as it applies to early Muslim sectarianism, see Gordon Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia, 1989); G. R. Hawting, *The first dynasty of Islam: the Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750* (London, 1986), particularly 1-25; Lawrence Conrad, "Historical Evidence and the Archaeology of Early Islam" in S. Seikaly, R. Baalbaki and P. Dodd (eds.) *Quest for Understanding: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Malcolm H. Kerr* (Beirut, 1991), pp. 263-282 and "The Conquest of Arwād: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East" in A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Volume One, Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 317-402; G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), particularly p. 39f; David S. Powers, *Studies in Qur'an and Ḥadīth: The Formation of Islamic Law of Inheritance* (Berkeley, 1986), pp. 1-20; A. Rippin, "Literary Analysis of *Qur'an*, *Tafsīr* and *Sīra*: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough" in R. C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson, 1985), pp. 151-163.

³⁹⁷ Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993), p. 38 and Rendell Harris, *Gospel*, p. kk.

necessarily significant, though, because, as this study has discussed, there is little evidence for direct inter-religious exchange until the early eighth century, as seen in the writings of John of Damascus, well after the dating in the Muslim tradition for the formation of the major sects.

Given this lack of evidence to either date the Qur'an to Muslims' early encounters with sectarianism and inter-religious interactions or vice versa, modern scholarship has developed a considerable range of potential datings. On one extreme, Fred Donner has argued for a history of the seventh century which is informed first and foremost by the Qur'an, arguing for a community of "Believers" who formed in Mecca under Muḥammad's authority, and who expanded into the Near East, accepting the indigenous population into their community so long as they acquiesced to some basic tenants, particularly the monotheist worship of the God of Abraham.³⁹⁸

Donner's thesis is satisfying for its compliance with the Muslim tradition, as there is no available evidence from non-Muslim sources that directly contradicts the Muslim tradition. However, his characterization of the early community, and in particular his understanding of their relationship to Muslim sectarianism and the other Abrahamic traditions, fails to address the major methodological problem of circular dating. Despite his acknowledgement of their late date, he accepts the historical account of the early sects with only minor revision, and dismisses the "violent conquest" account of the early expansion, such as that found in Sophronius, arguing instead that "if the Believers already embraced a clearly defined and distinct new creed and had tried to demand that local communities observe it, those populations of the Fertile Crescent would have resisted their arrival stubbornly, in word and deed. But no significant Christian or other polemics against the Believers' doctrines appear for almost a century."³⁹⁹ However, the same argument could be made

³⁹⁸ Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, 2010).

³⁹⁹ Donner, *Muhammad*, pp. 108-9.

if the “Believers” had no religious doctrines at all, or if direct interaction was hindered by linguistic and cultural divisions, as does appear to be the case for all the authors considered in this work with the exception of John of Damascus.

Marking perhaps the opposite extreme is Robert Hoyland, who has composed a history of the “Arabs” in the seventh century, rejecting altogether the use of religious terminology to describe the early community.⁴⁰⁰ Hoyland notes that his focus on “Arabs” instead of “Muslims” is due precisely to the methodological problems outlined here, that “the ninth-century historians wanted to create a distinctly Arab Muslim history,” but that the Arabs of the seventh century were really just one of a number of peripheral kingdoms found scattered around the Byzantine and Persian empires – “they retained their own distinctiveness – using their own language among themselves, preserving their own style of dress, burial rites and other customs” – like the Avars and Turks.⁴⁰¹

Again, elements of this narrative are highly persuasive – the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula did have some regional kingdoms that interacted regularly with both the Byzantine and Persian empires. It is also undoubtedly the case that the later Muslim historical tradition was engaged in creating a narrative of Muslim history, even if they claimed to preserve the general history of events. However, as it focuses only on the seventh century, this narrative again fails to address sufficiently the methodological problems of Muslim interactions with other religions and of Muslim sectarianism. As has been illustrated by a number of the sources in this study, there is evidence that by the early eighth century, Christians were reacting to Islam as a religion, and there is no suggestion in these sources that the Muslim community had just recently acquired a religious identity. Similarly, although the Muslim tradition also understands the early sects as arising out of political

⁴⁰⁰ Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire (Ancient Warfare and Civilization)* (Oxford, 2014).

⁴⁰¹ Hoyland, *In God's Path*, p. 17.

disputes for authority, it is certainly the case that these political groups took on religious identities over time, and Hoyland's focus on the seventh century similarly fails to address how or why this might have taken place.

It is not the intention of this chapter or this study to resolve these methodological problems, but rather to use them to frame a discussion about the Qur'ān. In discussing the Qur'ānic passages that treat Christians, either in terms of the contemporary Christian communities or the historical community of Jesus as a lesson about sectarianism, this chapter considers how these passages might either have been used to inform Muslim behavior, or if they preserve an account of Muslim history, why and how that history is being told.

5.2 The Qur'an as Source Material

In turning to the Qur'ān itself, in addition to these general complications in studying the source bases for early Islamic history, many modern scholars have raised questions about the nature of the Qur'ān itself which complicate its use as a source for the seventh century. Indeed, as will be discussed in more detail below, even a seventh century date for the work's compilation is not universally accepted by modern Western scholarship. Unfortunately, modern investigations of the text have proven divisive, with no one methodology or chronology emerging as accepted. Indeed, many modern studies of the Qur'ān remain essentially contradictory, both with regard to the date of the text and the religious identity of the community who first received it. The purpose of this section, then, is to outline some of the major schools of thought on the nature of the Qur'ān, which will then be discussed in more detail in the remainder of this chapter with specific reference to Qur'ānic passages about Christians and Christianity. In this way, this chapter considers how the various theories about the Qur'ān's context and chronology might demonstrate what community of

Christians the work could have been addressing, and, at the same time, outlines the differences between how Christians are addressed in the Qur'ān and the themes of Christian identity formation outlined in chapters three and four.

According to Islamic tradition, the first revelation of the Qur'ān was around 610, when the archangel Gabriel appeared to Muḥammad and gave him the instruction *īqrā* (*Recite!*). The revelation continued until the Prophet's death in 632, in both Mecca and Medina. During this period of revelation, individual *surāt* were both memorized and preserved in writing by the *ṣaḥāba* (Companions of the Prophet), but no complete written edition was created. Indeed, the complete Qur'ān was preserved orally before and after the death of the Prophet, and although the process of codification was begun under the first *Rāshidūn* (Rightly-guided) caliph, Abū Bakr, after many of the Qur'ān preservers were killed in battle, the first complete written edition was only undertaken by the third of the *Rāshidūn* caliphs, 'Uthmān.⁴⁰²

This tradition of a long period between oral and written codification, and the complexities of the text itself have led some scholars to question how closely the Qur'ān, as it exists now, corresponds to the Qur'ān as it was received by the early community. Perhaps the most influential work to address this question was that of Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism* (1977). As Crone and Cook argued, "there is no hard evidence for the existence of the Koran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century, and the tradition which places this rather opaque revelation in its historical context is not attested before the middle of the eighth. The historicity of the Islamic

⁴⁰² See for the complete account of Muslim account of the revelation and codification of the Qur'ān, see Pickthall's introduction, Pickthall, *Qur'an*, pp. iii-xvii. See also Gabriel Said Reynolds' introduction in *New perspectives on the Qur'an* (London, 2011), pp. 1-23 and Fred Donner, "The Historian, The Believer, and the Qur'an," Said Reynolds, *New perspectives*, v. 2, pp. 25-37.

tradition is thus to some degree problematic: while there are no cogent internal grounds for rejecting it, there are equally no cogent external grounds for accepting it.”⁴⁰³

A similar and contemporary argument was posited by John Wansbrough. Drawing on the same lack of extant material evidence for a seventh-century Qur’ān, Wansbrough focused on the development of the broader Islamic written tradition, in particular the biographies of the prophet and the codification of Islamic jurisprudence. Because these works had been codified in the Abbasid period, Wansbrough argued for the Abbasid caliphate as a more fitting intellectual context for the development of Islamic thought, with the Qur’ān arising out of the developing Muslim state as a form of communal identity. For Wansbrough, the composition of the Qur’ān was essentially the culmination of Islamic identity formation, rather than its starting point, and, he argued, “logically, it seems to me quite impossible that canonization should have preceded, not succeeded, recognition of the authority of scripture within the Muslim community.”⁴⁰⁴

Recent archaeological finds have diminished the impact of both Crone’s and Cook’s and Wansbrough’s datings for the Qur’ān, by giving evidence for at least significant portions of the Qur’ān as dating to the Uthmanic period.⁴⁰⁵ In particular, the discovery of upper and lower level Qur’āns in the palimpsest known as Ṣan’ā’-1, with the lower level having been washed off and the manuscript reused, and being rediscovered in 2007 through the use of x-ray fluorescence imaging, authenticates several aspects of the Muslim tradition regarding the codification of the Qur’ān. The manuscript and its lower level dates from the Uthmanic period, preserving a distinct version of the Qur’ān which does not match the codified Uthmanic version said to arise out of the caliph’s attempts

⁴⁰³ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁴ Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies*, p. 202

⁴⁰⁵ Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, “The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur’ān of the Prophet,” *Arabica*, 57:4 (2010), pp. 348-354, Behnam Sadeghi and M. Goudarzi, “Ṣan’ā’ and the Origins of the Qur’ān,” *Der Islam*, 87.1-2 (2012), pp. 1-129, and Yasin Dutton, “An Umayyad Fragment of the Qur’an and its Dating,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 9 (2007), pp. 57-87.

at limiting variation in the text. However, the differences between the lower level and the Uthmanic Qur'ān suggest a mix of oral and written transmission, "since differences among the codices remain the exception rather than the rule, even when it comes to minor elements of language."⁴⁰⁶

Despite this new evidence, however, the underlying premise of Cook's and Crone's and Wansbrough's works, that the Qur'ān, as compiled and canonized, could be the product of a very different cultural milieu, in Wansbrough's terms, than the one claimed by the Muslim tradition, remains a central point of focus of Western scholarship on the text. Indeed, in a 2011 Brill collection on *The Qur'ān in Context*, Angelika Neuwirth and Nicolai Sinai echoed the sentiments of Fred Donner in noting the effects of this continued lack of methodological agreement on the field of Qur'ānic studies as a whole, that it has left the field "in a state of disarray."⁴⁰⁷

Again, this disarray is not simply in the divide between revisionist and moderate scholars, but between the revisionists themselves, as many of the more recent source skeptical contributions to the field of Qur'ānic studies remain contradictory between one another, as well as to the Muslim tradition. For example, in a 1974 study, Günter Lüling argued that what the field of Qur'ānic studies needed was more of an emphasis on close textual reading.⁴⁰⁸ Employing methods similar to those of Biblical criticism, Lüling claimed to have identified four strata in the Qur'ān's composition, each representing a different period of redaction, with the earliest strand being the liturgy of a community of Tritheist Christians living in Mecca in the early seventh century. Lüling's interpretation relied heavily on linguistic analysis of both the Qur'ān and the Bible, such as in his

⁴⁰⁶ Sadeghi and Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet," p. 344.

⁴⁰⁷ Fred Donner, "The Qur'ān in recent scholarship: challenges and desiderata" in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an in its historical context* (London, 2008), pp. 29-50 at p. 29, as quoted by Angelika Neuwirth and Nicolai Sinai, "Introduction," in Neuwirth, Sinai, and Michael Marx (ed.), *The Qur'ān in Context* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 1-24 at p. 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qur'ān* (Erlangen, 1974), republished in English as *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation* (Delhi, 2003).

interpretation of the Qur'ānic *zabāniya* (Q 96.18) as a variation of the Aramaic *rabbouni*, as in Mark 10:51 and John 20:16, which he then interpreted not as the traditional “Lord,” but as reference to a class of angels of divine council, from which he developed a Meccan Tritheist theology in which Jesus was worshiped as an angel.⁴⁰⁹

Not only did the field as a whole not accept either Lüling's dating of the strands of the Qur'ān or his identification of the pre-Islamic Meccans as Tritheist Christians, his methodology of close reading, akin to Biblical criticism, has also not found general acceptance. Indeed, on the far opposite spectrum of methodological bases, Yehuda Nevo proposed a study of the Qur'ān based exclusively on material evidence, in particular inscriptions from the Neghev expeditions. His work, which was expanded, edited, and published posthumously by Judith Koren, argued for the essentially corruptible nature of textual evidence and the superiority of epigraphy for solving the disputes of Qur'ānic studies because “a rock inscription presents no problems of transmission history.”⁴¹⁰ Despite the claimed methodological basis, the research itself applied this skepticism only to Islamic sources – Koren, speaking on behalf of Nevo, states that “non-contemporary literary sources are, in our opinion, inadmissible as historical evidence,”⁴¹¹ but goes on to reconstruct the imperial reign of Heraclius and proposed context for the rise of Islam based on the ninth-century chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor, the tenth-century *Annales* of Eutychius, and the thirteenth-century history of Nikephorus Gregoras,⁴¹² all without reference to any contemporary sixth or seventh archaeological or epigraphical evidence to support these later sources.

⁴⁰⁹ Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān*, pp.73-5.

⁴¹⁰ Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Keron, *The Crossroads to Islam: the Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, 2003), p. 8.

⁴¹¹ Idem., p. 9.

⁴¹² Idem., p. 49, 60, and 50, respectively.

This is not a criticism of those sources, it is worth noting, but rather an illustration of the essentially impossible nature of Nevo's and Koren's proposed methodology – a stone inscription may be difficult to change to fit later generations' ideologies, but it will also never provide all of the information needed to create a full view of a work's context, or produce a complete narrative of historical progression. Nevertheless, in *Crossroads to Islam*, Nevo and Koren attempted to do just that, at least with regard to the Muslim sources, arguing for a late Umayyad date for the Qur'ān and a Judeo-Christian identity for the early community of believers, based on the generally Abrahamic tone of the Muslim inscriptions. Like Wansbrough, Nevo and Koren cite the rise of Islamic jurisprudence for the codification of the Qur'ān, as requiring a formalized scripture to which the jurisprudential system could be attached, but they understand the seventh century as being a long period of Byzantine withdrawal from the Near East, with the final exit of the Byzantines after the Council of 680 marking the turning point for Muslim rule.

Thus, Lüling, Wansbrough, and Nevo and Koren represent three very different interpretations of the text, the nature of pre-Islamic Arabia, and the dating of the Qur'ān, all with no obvious method to join their variant theses into one coherent narrative. Due in part to this lack of internal coherence, the revisionist theories have met with a number of challenges. In particular, Fred Donner has argued for the essentially problematic nature of Crone's and Cook's thesis and the later revisionist school, which he describes as the "skeptical approach" to Islamic historiography, that "it asks us to accept on faith – since there is no surviving evidence – that the true origins of Islam are different than what is portrayed by Islamic tradition – perhaps radically different."⁴¹³

⁴¹³ Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writings* (Princeton, 1998), p. 26

As has already been noted, the recent discovery of Qur'ānic material dating to the Uthmanic period has supported arguments for an early date for the Qur'ān. In addition, while these concerns over the accuracy of transmission, particularly the accuracy of oral transmission, are reasonable, as Donner has argued, the most important evidence to support the position that the extant version of the Qur'ān does correspond to the Islam practiced by the early community is the lack of alternative Qur'āns from the period of the Islamic expansion.⁴¹⁴ Along the same lines, as argued by Hugh Kennedy in his 2007 study, although Christian sources which discuss Islam do so only in passing, these references are still often largely consistent with later Muslim writings.⁴¹⁵ Indeed, as demonstrated by many of the sources discussed in chapters three and four of the present study, despite a range of Christian sources intended to discredit Muslim belief, a late date for the Qur'ān does not arise in these sources to demonstrate the inferiority of Islamic belief.

In particular, as has been mentioned briefly, John of Damascus, writing in the early eighth century, engages directly with the Qur'ān, describing Muḥammad as having a “scripture” and referring to four *surāt* by their titles.⁴¹⁶ Only three of the four are identifiable with existing Qur'ānic *surāt* (Q.4 – the Women, Q.5 – the Table Spread, and Q.2 – the Heifer), with the fourth, which John says is entitled “the She Camel,” being the story of the Arabian prophet Ṣāliḥ and the she-camel that served as proof of his prophetic office. The story appears in several *surāt*, although the version given by John is particularly similar to Q.26.⁴¹⁷ However, more than simply providing evidence for the state of the Qur'ān in his own time, John's writing is also relevant to the broader question of the work's composition. Although he denies the Muslim claim of divine origin for the Qur'ān, he still

⁴¹⁴ Donner, *Narratives*, pp. 36-40.

⁴¹⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live in* (London, 2007), pp. 22-3.

⁴¹⁶ Daniel J. Sahas (ed.), *John of Damascus on Islam: The “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden, 1972), p. 89-93, 138, 140.

⁴¹⁷ *Idem.*, pp. 89-93.

dates the text to the lifetime of Muḥammad, that “have drafted some pronouncements in his book, worthy (only) of laughter, he handed it down to [the Arabs].”⁴¹⁸ Thus, although he does disparage the origins of the Qur’ān, he does not suggest anything but an early seventh century date for the text, nor does he declaim Islam for creating a false history for the text.

Similarly, as noted by Neuwirth and Sinai in the previously mentioned Brill volume, although placing the Qur’ān in its Late Antique context is of indisputable importance, some of the more extreme examples of the revisionist school have developed theories that appear to read the Qur’ān as nothing more than a variant Christian or Jewish text. As they put it, “it simply will not do to garner a few arbitrary Qur’ānic verses with a Christian or Jewish ring to them and then deduce from such a haphazard collection of snippets that the most significant thing to be said about the Qur’ān is that it is an epigonal product of Christian or Jewish influence.”⁴¹⁹ Representing the Qur’ān as a Christian or Jewish text both diminishes the importance of the text itself, and misrepresents the available sources for the variant sectarian identities the revisionists attach to pre-Islamic Arabians, be it Lüling’s Tritheist Christians or Crone’s and Cook’s Messianic Jews.

Nevertheless, the continued discussions which these revisionist theories have inspired within the field of Qur’ānic studies regarding the religious and sectarian identity of the early community of believers is undoubtedly one of the most lasting and useful elements of the revisionist school. As will be discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter, because the Qur’ān so often presumes an audience who is aware and even familiar with Jews and Christians, and the traditions

⁴¹⁸ P. Bontifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* (Berlin, 1981), v. 4, p. 60, translation mine.

⁴¹⁹ Neuwirth and Sinai, “Introduction,” p. 13. Perhaps the most egregious example of this is the modern work of Ibn Warraq (pseud.), which, as Andrew Rippin has noted in his contribution to the Cambridge Companion, although it relies on standard scholarly structure and language, employs those elements to what can only be described as a modern polemic against Islam, “by juxtaposing Muslim dogma and modern scholarly investigation, the former is subject to ridicule as ‘unscientific’ and not worthy of belief;” Andrew Rippin, “Western Scholarship and the Qur’an” in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 245.

of both, the possible interpretations for these passages changes considerably depending on to which period of Islamic history they are applied. These arguments are also undeniably circular – using the potential audience for the Qur’ān to date the Qur’ān to the period of that audience - but still useful for considering how the early community of Muslims might have experienced the text.

5.3 Images of Christians in the Qur’ān

As has already been mentioned, Jews and Christians both feature regularly in the Qur’ān. Many of these are references to both groups as historical communities, predominately as references to the communities of the Old and New Testament prophets and the first generations that came after the lifetimes of these prophets, such as the Children of Israel as the community who followed Moses and the early church as the followers of Jesus. These references appear to serve as analogies for the contemporary community of believers in Mecca, giving guidance on how that community can avoid the pitfalls to which the earlier communities fell prey. However, there are also passages of the Qur’ān which speak more directly to Jewish and Christian communities, exhorting them to a corrected form of their own practice, but without a clear implication that the correction of their religion is joining in the faith of Muḥammad.⁴²⁰ Moreover, many passages appear to give guidance to Muḥammad and the Meccan believers on how to behave and interact with Jews and Christians, implying that the Qur’ān understood the other Abrahamic communities as continuing in its own period and beyond.

Because the Qur’ān stresses that Islam is the continuation and culmination of the earlier Abrahamic traditions, it is hardly surprising that it makes regular reference to Christians and Jews.

⁴²⁰ Jane D. McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1-2.

The *sura al-baqara* (The Cow), which, according to Muslim tradition, dates from the Medinan period, circa 622-3, and which has, as part of its context, the conversion of the Jewish tribes of Medina, speaks at length about the relationship between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and about God's relationship to all three.⁴²¹ In particular, the *sura* stresses that all three will be judged by God, and that membership in no one of the three is sufficient for God's favor. It begins by describing the basic requirements of belief, which are not particular doctrinal constructions, but rather a general attentiveness to God, which would apply equally to all of the Abrahamic faiths:

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ
 الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ
 وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ

This is the Scripture wherein there is no doubt, a guidance unto those who ward off (evil): Who believe in the unseen, and establish worship, and spend of that We have bestowed upon them; And who believe in that which is revealed unto thee (Muḥammad) and that which was revealed before thee, and are certain of the Hereafter.⁴²²

With this basic conception of worship and belief in mind, the *sura* goes on to discuss the relationship of Jews, Christians and Muslims to God. For all three, the focus remains not on what the individual claims to be, but what they believe and how they have followed God's command. For the Jews, the Qur'ān chastises them for failing to keep God's command:

وَ إِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَ بِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَ الْيَتَامَىٰ وَ الْمَسْكِينِ وَ قُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا
 وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَ آتُوا الزَّكَاةَ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّوْا لَلْأَقْلِيَاءِ مِّنْكُمْ وَ أَنْتُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ

And (remember) when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel, (saying): Worship none save Allah (only), and be good to parents and to kindred and to orphans and the needy, and speak kindly to mankind; and establish worship and pay the poor-due. Then, after that, ye slid back save a few of you, being adverse.⁴²³

For the Christians, their failure was a lack of faith in God's message:

⁴²¹ Mahmoud Ayoub, "Islam and Christianity between tolerance and acceptance," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2.2 (1991), pp.171-181.

⁴²² Q. 2:2-4.

⁴²³ Q. 2:83.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَفَقَّيْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ بِالرُّسُلِ وَآتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ أَفَكُلَّمَا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهْوَى أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَسْتَكْبِرْتُمْ فَفَرِيقًا كَذَّبْتُمْ وَفَرِيقًا تَقْتُلُونَ

And verily We gave unto Moses the Scripture, and We caused a train of messengers to follow after him, and We gave unto Jesus, son of Mary, clear proofs (of Allah's sovereignty), and We supported him with the holy Spirit. Is it ever so, that, when there cometh unto you a messenger (from Allah) with that which ye yourselves desire not, ye grow arrogant, and some ye disbelieve and some ye slay?⁴²⁴

After addressing God's relationship to the Jews and the Christians, the *sura* then turns to the

Muslims, telling them:

قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ
فَإِنْ آمَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ فِي شِقَاقٍ فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

Say (O Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then are they rightly guided. But if they turn away, then are they in schism, and Allah will suffice thee (for defence) against them. He is the Hearer, the Knower.⁴²⁵

Therefore, although God chastises both Jews and Christians for having failed in their religious duties, He does not pass the right to chastise them along to the Muslims, but instead instructs the Muslims only to question the Jews and Christians about their beliefs, in particular about that tradition which the three share in common. If the Muslims find that the other two still hold to these common traditions, they are to consider them “rightly guided” (*ihhtadau*). With the exception of the Jews refusing to consider Jesus a Messenger alongside Moses, the *sura* presents what could potentially be considered common ground between the three faiths, and thus these verses serve to emphasize what Muslims understood as the essential link between the three traditions.⁴²⁶ Above all, these verses stress that God and the Muslims do not, and cannot, play the

⁴²⁴ Q. 2:87.

⁴²⁵ Q. 2:136-7.

⁴²⁶ Ayoub, “Islam and Christianity,” pp. 171-181.

same role in the treatment of Jews and Christians, as only God is “the Hearer, the Knower” (*as-samī‘ al-‘alīm*). It is God’s role to judge the legitimacy of all three systems of belief; it is the Muslims’ role to maintain and stress the traditions they hold in common.

Thus, in this passage, the Qur’an appears to assume the continuation of both Judaism and Christianity, both in Muḥammad’s time and beyond. Moreover, although these passages can be read as an exhortation to Jews and Christians to accept the prophethood of Muḥammad, it does not appear to be a direct call to conversion to Islam. Rather, the Qur’an admonishes Jews and Christians for failing in their own covenants with God.⁴²⁷ This admonition does imply that Christians and Jews should be practicing Islam, as here and elsewhere the Qur’an emphasizes that the religion of Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad are the same. However, as argued by Fred Donner, the lack of a direct call to conversion and the emphasis instead on Jews and Christians correcting their own religions again implies a continuation of these faiths, that these communities continued to have their own particular relationship to God, at least in part independent from the new covenant with the believers in Mecca.⁴²⁸

Perhaps the most often cited example of this implied continuation of the Abrahamic faiths is the Qur’anic obligation of the *jizya* (poll tax) to be paid by conquered peoples. The obligation of Muslims to demand the *jizya* is laid out in *sura at-tauba* (Repentance), one of the few *sura* to carry a precise date and context for its revelation in the Muslim tradition – dated to c. 631, it was revealed as a special message to those undertaking the ḥajj under the leadership of Abū Bakr.⁴²⁹ Focused predominately on outlining the correct relationship with both the Arabian polytheists and the

⁴²⁷ Jason Dean, “Outbidding Catholicity. Early Islamic Attitudes toward Christians and Christianity,” *Exchange*, 38.3 (2009), pp. 201-225.

⁴²⁸ Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, 2010), particularly pp. 90-144. See also Francis Peters, “Alius or Alter: The Qur’anic definition of Christians and Christianity,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 8.2 (1997), pp.165-176.

⁴²⁹ Pickthall, *Qur’an*, p. 178.

Abrahamic religions, the *sura* is also understood in the Muslim tradition as celebrating the end of idolatry in Mecca.⁴³⁰ Of the Abrahamic faiths, it says:

قَاتِلُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّى يُعْطُوا الْجِزْيَةَ عَنْ يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ

Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low.⁴³¹

Again, the Qur'ān draws a clear division between the Abrahamic religions based on both belief and practice, and distinguishes this exhortation as applying to those who have received Scripture, but “follow not the religion of truth” (*la-yadinūna dīna al-ḥaqq*). Yet the directive is not to force or even coerce conversion, but rather demand a tribute, a requirement that nearly requires the continued existence of the other Abrahamic religions alongside Islam, in order to be satisfied.

Similarly, this directive does not apply to all peoples, and cannot be read simply as a call to conquer and rule all peoples regardless of religion, as the Qur'ān makes clear in the lines which immediately precede it:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْمُشْرِكُونَ نَجَسٌ فَلَا يَقْرَبُوا الْمَسْجِدَ الْحَرَامَ بَعْدَ عَامِهِمْ هَذَا وَ إِنْ خِفْتُمْ عَيْلَةً فَسَوْفَ يُغْنِيكُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنْ شَاءَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

O ye who believe! The idolaters only are unclean. So let them not come near the Inviolable Place of Worship after this their year. If ye fear poverty (from the loss of their merchandise) Allah shall preserve you of His bounty if He will. Lo! Allah is Knower, Wise.⁴³²

As has already been mentioned, if the context for the revelation of these verses was the truce with the Meccan polytheists, this passage would appear to speak very specifically to the believers' relationship with them. Although the Qur'ān requires the believers to honor their truce with the Meccans for “their year” (*‘āmihim*), the eventual outcome of the relationship is absolute, requiring

⁴³⁰ Ibid. See also G.R. Hawting, “Al-Hudaybiyya and the Conquest of Mecca: a Reconsideration of the Tradition about the Muslim takeover of the Sanctuary,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986), pp. 1-23.

⁴³¹ Q. 9:29.

⁴³² Q. 9:28.

that the Meccan polytheists be banned from Mecca and cut off commercially and potentially socially from the believers because of their unclean status. In this case, there is no reference to tribute or submission, and the implication is one of either exile or elimination, with no suggestion that the polytheists should be allowed to continue in their religion after the end of the truce.⁴³³

Indeed, this distinction in treatment between Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic communities conforms closely with the evidence of Muslim rule in the seventh century. As discussed throughout the present work, Christian sources of the seventh and eighth centuries do imply that the Qur'anic requirement of political submission without conversion was followed for the Jewish and Christian communities of the Near East, as evidenced by the diverse range of Christian authors discussed in chapters three and four. Although conversion, both by force and for social or financial gain, remained a major point of concern for Christian authors throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, the continued production of new theological works throughout the Near East suggests that conversion remained, at least in part, an imagined conclusion and not a contemporary outcome of the expansion.⁴³⁴

However, although this regulation was militarily and politically advantageous, and allowed the Muslim caliphate to expand rapidly across the Near East and North Africa, it is also theological problematic, in that it implies God's tacit acceptance of the continuation of false belief and wrong religion despite the appearance of a new Message and a new Messenger. There is no hesitation in

⁴³³ Uri Rubin, "Muhammad's Curse of Mudar and the Blockade of Mecca," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 31.3, pp. 249-264 and "The Ka'ba: Aspects of its ritual function and position in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic times," in F.E. Peters, (ed.), *Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam* (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 313-347.

⁴³⁴ For more on the period of conversion, see also Michael G. Morony, "The Age of Conversion: A Reassessment" in Michael Gervers and Ramzi Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and Continuity: indigenous Christian communities in Islamic lands*, (Toronto, 1990), pp. 135-50.

the *sura* that Christian and Jewish belief is wrong, as it goes on to explain their failures, both in terms of their theology and their practices:

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ عِزَّىٰرُ أَبْنُ اللَّهِ وَقَالَتِ النَّصْرَى الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُمْ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ يُضَاهَوْنَ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ قَتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ
 اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا لَأِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ سُبْحٰنَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ
 يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى اللَّهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يُنِيرَ نُورَهُ وَ لَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they! They have taken as lords beside Allah their rabbis and their monks and the Messiah son of Mary, when they were bidden to worship only One God. There is no God save Him. Be He glorified from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him)!⁴³⁵

Here again the Qur'an draws on the shared Abrahamic traditions, particularly the shared belief in the prophets, the Messiah, and in adherence to the first commandment, in order to reaffirm that the religion of the Jews and Christians should be the same.

This passage also stresses the God's Judgment is upon Christians and Jews for their failures, that God "fighteth against them" and that they sound like disbelievers (*kafarū*). The use of a variation of *kafara* is particularly interesting, as unmitigated, it would mean that the other Abrahamic communities are as bad as the Meccans. Admittedly, the usage here is tempered somewhat, perhaps to emphasize that in their beliefs, Jews and Christians are as wrong as the Meccans, the enemies of the early community. However, this judgment remains with God.⁴³⁶

It is perhaps also worth noting that Muslim scholars in the Abbasid period would come to view these passages as describing the historic communities of Christians and Jews. As argued by Abdulaziz Sachedina, this evolution in Muslim thought appears to grow directly out of this complicated view of Abrahamic religion in the Qur'an, with later Muslim scholars attempting to

⁴³⁵ Q. 9:30-31.

⁴³⁶ An old, but still useful analysis of *kafara* is available in Marilyn Robinson Waldman, "The Development of the Concept of Kufr in the Qur'an," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88.3 (1968), pp. 442-455.

simplify the Qur'ānic conception of Abrahamic religion and assert instead that these passages describe the historical setting into which the Qur'ān was revealed, superseding all previous Abrahamic revelations.⁴³⁷ This attempt by Muslim scholars in the ninth century to reinterpret the Qur'ān as revelation superseding all other revelations may suggest that the Muslim community itself was aware of the difficulties inherent in the Qur'ānic construction, with its lack of a clear hierarchy of religious righteousness.⁴³⁸

The Abrahamic communities are, in part, judged for their failure to follow correct leadership. Here, the Qur'ān goes farther, arguing that Jews and Christians have begun to worship their rabbis and monks, as “lords beside Allah.” It is understandable that the Qur'ān would accuse Christians as worshipping Jesus as a God alongside God, as a misrepresentation of the Christian concept of Jesus as the Incarnate Son in the Godhead. The inclusion of monks as objects of false worship is more complicated. As demonstrated in the discussion of Chalcedonianism and anti-Chalcedonianism in chapter two, monks had played a significant role in shaping Christian worship, particularly in the debates surrounding the church councils, as well as the day-to-day role they played in Christian worship, receiving confession and offering communion, both roles which could be understood as the priest serving as intercessor between the Christian and God.⁴³⁹ In this way, it

⁴³⁷ Abdulaziz Sachedina, “The Qur'ān and other religions” in Dammen McAuliffe, *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 291-309.

⁴³⁸ Sachedina, “Other religions,” p. 298. As noted in chapter four, early Christian apologetics appear to have made good use of the Islamic idea of Abrahamic familiarity, something that may feature in the continued evolution of Qur'ānic interpretation, as well; see also J.L. Ehinger, “Was Anyone Listening?: Christian Apologetics against Islam as a Literary Genre,” *Studies in Church History* 48 (2012), pp. 35-46 and André Binggeli, “Converting the Caliph: A Legendary Motif in Christian Hagiography and Historiography of the Early Islamic Period” in Arietta Papaconstantinou, Muriel Debié and Hugh Kennedy (eds.), *Writing ‘True Stories’: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 77-104.

⁴³⁹ Indeed, this was also a role played by saints after their death through the worship of saints, although it remains unclear in this passage if the Qur'ān is addressing living or deceased monks; see also Claudia Rapp, “‘For next to God, you are my salvation:’ reflections on the rise of the holy man in Late Antiquity” in James Howard-Johnston (ed.), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 63-81 and Chase Robinson, “Prophecy and holy men in early Islam” in idem., pp. 241-62.

is somewhat understandable that the Qur'ān would accuse monks of being worshipped by their fellow Christians for the major role they played in shaping both Christian theology and practice.

However, the Qur'ān's position on Christians and the monastic communities of the Near East is not exclusively negative. In another often-cited passage from *sura al-ma'ida*, traditionally dated to the post-truce period in Mecca, the Qur'ān speaks highly of Christians and monastic life:

لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَ لَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصْرَى ذَلِكَ بَانَ مِنْهُمْ فَسَيُتَسَبَّحُونَ وَ رُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews, and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest to them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud.⁴⁴⁰

The rejection of Judaism in the first half of the passage has often been related to the contemporary history in Mecca. Although the Jewish communities in Medina had played a major role in the survival of the Muslim community after their ejection from Mecca, the pressure towards universal Arabian conversion to Islam fueled the disintegration of the relationship between the Meccan believers and the Medinan Jews.⁴⁴¹

In the first instance, it is worth noting that the supporting evidence for the nature of Judaism in Arabia is mixed. As with the larger fields of Qur'ānic and Islamic studies, there has been a tendency to accept the Qur'ānic narrative and to use that as the starting point for analyzing the existing evidence. Thus, Charles Torrey could speak of a community of Jews in Medina linked “with the learned centers in the greater world outside of Arabia,”⁴⁴² an analysis that has allowed later scholars to argue for the Jews response to Muḥammad to be based on their knowledge of Biblical and Talmudic interpretation. However, modern revisionist discussion of the Qur'ān has also

⁴⁴⁰ Q. 5:82.

⁴⁴¹ J. Horowitz, “Judeo-Arabic relations in pre-Islamic times,” *Islamic Culture* 3 (1929), pp. 161-99 and Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān*, pp. 59-60.

⁴⁴² C.C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York, 1933), p. 26.

encouraged new investigation into the nature of Judaism in Arabia. Robert Hoyland has made an extensive study of the extant inscriptions of Jewish or potentially Jewish origin, pointing to their relatively limited number and simple linguistic structure in a range of Semitic languages to suggest that it is perhaps more reasonable to understand this community as “substantially integrated within Arabian society and barely in touch with non-Arabian Jewish communities.”⁴⁴³

As has already been said, it is problematic to rely on the evidence of inscriptions for building a broader context regarding a community and its identity, as only limited aspects of that identity are likely to find their way into inscriptions. Nevertheless, Hoyland’s interpretation of the Medinan Jews as having only limited access to the broader world of Jewish thought does parallel many of the Qur’ān’s discussions of Judaism and the contemporary Jewish community, as the Qur’ān fails to create a substantial basis for its accusations of Jewish religious failures, relying on vague accusations and insults, as in *sura al-ma’ida*, as well as drawing on the Jews failure to recognize Jesus as proof of their religion having gone astray, something unlikely to sway a Jewish audience.

The Qur’ān makes a similar argument in its description of Jesus and Mary, particularly the description of Mary as descending from Aaron (Q 3:33-36), apparently as addressed to the Medinan Jews and their continued refusal to recognize Muḥammad’s prophethood, essentially intended to demonstrate that their rigid mindset had already once failed to recognize a true prophet, despite Jesus receiving both the Word of God and inheriting the Aaronic priesthood.⁴⁴⁴ This would appear to be a slightly unconvincing argument, simply because it is unclear if the Medinan Jews would consider the continuing Jewish rejection of Jesus’s importance to be a sign of their own religious

⁴⁴³ Robert Hoyland, “The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur’ān and in their inscriptions” in Reynolds, *New Perspectives*, v. 2, pp. 91-116 at p. 111.

⁴⁴⁴ Angelika Neuwirth, “The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism” in Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, *Qur’ān in Context*, pp. 499-531 and David Marshall, “Christianity in the Qur’ān” in Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Islamic Interpretation of Christianity* (Richmond, 2001), pp. 3-29.

failure. It seems equally plausible that they would understand their community's skepticism over Jesus's role as Messiah to be the same kind of religious righteousness that they were practicing by rejecting Muḥammad's claims of prophethood. However, in either case, the use of Mary and Jesus in the Qur'an to craft a distinctly Islamic narrative of prophethood and religious righteousness was possible in part because they were historical figures, and, as will be discussed shortly, the Qur'an consistently delineates between the righteous early church who followed Jesus and the sectarian and divisive contemporary church.

The defense of Christianity in *sura al-ma'ida*, and in particular the institutions of priests and monks, is more complicated. The Muslim interpretation often focuses on priests and monks as admirable for their devotion to God, that although their religion was wrong, they were still like the believers in their devotion, modesty, and humility.⁴⁴⁵ Pragmatically, this defense of Christian leaders could also be advantageous – in reality, it appears that Muslim rulers often did call upon Christian religious leaders to act as leaders for their own community, as with Sophronius' reported role in handing over the city of Jerusalem to the caliph. However, this acceptance of monks and priests again implies a Qur'anic acceptance of the continuation of Christianity despite the revelation of Islam, even going so far as accepting the presence of Christian leadership.

One possible explanation for this complication is offered by the revisionist scholars discussed previously, namely that these passages could have actually been written or redacted during the Islamic expansion, and genuinely represent the experiences of that community. However, although it does appear to be the case that Muslims worked with Christian religious

⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, this brief passage has been the focus of any number of academic studies; for example, Mahmoud Ayoub, "Nearest in amity: Christians in the Qur'an and contemporary exegetical tradition," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 8.2 (1997), pp.145-164, McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, pp. 160-2, and S. Sviridov, "Wahbānīyatan ibtada'ūhā: an Analysis of Traditions concerning the Origin and Evaluation of Christian Monasticism" *JSAI* 13 (1990), pp. 195-208.

leaders in securing rule, it is less clear why the Qur'ān, if it were a product of the expansion, would want to record that fact as a positive characteristic of Christians, rather than of the Muslims themselves. At least in this case, the *sura* remains focused on the Muslims as its audience and the Christians as the subject. If the *sura* were composed during the expansion in order to discourage excess bloodshed or tyrannical rule, it could have easily been framed to focus on the Muslims and their righteousness in treating the conquered people fairly, as in the case of the *jizya*, and avoid entirely the problematic issue of assigning divine approval to one of the other Abrahamic religions.

Thus, it appears that in these passages, the Qur'ānic conception of the relationship between the Abrahamic religions is one more complicated than the simple superiority of Islam above all others. Although this remains the underlying assumption, the Qur'ān also appears to accept the continued practice of the other Abrahamic traditions in the Near East. There are places where the text can be read to require universal conversion, but these injunctions appear to fall very specifically on polytheists, or even more specifically on Arabian polytheists. Subjugation and political allegiance are both required for the Abrahamic communities, but the Qur'ān allows them to continue their religion, despite descriptions of both their theology and practice as wrong, and implies that their communities will continue alongside Islam for some time, thus requiring regulations about their coexistence.

Although in practice, this view of the Abrahamic religions as continuing under Muslim rule parallels the evidence from Christian sources, the Qur'ānic understanding of the relationship between the Abrahamic faiths would appear to have little connection to the relationship between Muslims and Christians as preserved in Christian works of the seventh century. In particular, mass conversion to Islam, which remained a central point of concern for so many Christian authors, is not encouraged by the Qur'ān, which argues instead for each community retaining its own

Scripture. As has already been said, conversion from Christianity to Islam for social or financial benefit may have appealed to Christians as they interacted more regularly with Muslims, but a similar expectation that Christians would slowly begin to join Islam is not clear in the Qur'ān, suggesting that this concern was one that arose from within Christian circles, based on shared experiences, and not from engagement with the Muslim conception of the Abrahamic religions as preserved in the Qur'ān.

5.4 The *umma* and Abrahamic sectarianism

In addition to the passages of the Qur'ān that appear to address the contemporary church, there are also a range of references about Christians', particularly the historic community of Christians who followed Jesus and established the early church. These passages often discuss the early church as an analogy for religious righteousness in the community generally, using the Christians historically splintering into sects to illustrate how sectarianism can affect even communities who follow a true prophet like Jesus. Thus, the vision of the early community outlined in the Qur'ān is one that grows organically out of the conception of prophethood as establishing both religious and political authority. Defined as the community who accepted the prophet's authority, the Qur'ān often appears to speak directly to the early community of Arabian believers, exhorting them to outward, public allegiance in order to be part of the *umma*, the universal community of believers. This conception of *umma* was one that could potentially have limited sectarianism and factionalism within the early community by stressing that any divisiveness could violate the prophet's authority and force others out of public allegiance.⁴⁴⁶ However, there are also passages in which the Qur'ān appears to present schism as an unavoidable outcome of revelation,

⁴⁴⁶ Rahman, *Major Themes*, p. 38.

again relying on the model of the earlier prophetic communities and the resulting schisms in Judaism and Christianity, suggesting that a similar schism was inevitable for the early community of Muslims.

In discussing the Qur'ān's descriptions of the historical communities of Jews and Christians, it is also important to note again the complicated relationship in the text between Abrahamic influences and audience. As demonstrated by the range of revisionist interpretations about the nature of pre-Islamic Arabian religion, there is significant evidence, both in the Qur'ān and in the archaeological record, to suggest a pre-Islamic Abrahamic influence on Arabia, including Mecca. If Mecca is accepted as the locational source for the Qur'ān, it remains unsurprising that there is significant evidence for both Christian and Jewish influence on the Qur'ān as a text. Samir Khalil Samir has made a careful study of the subject, and pointed not only to distinctly Jewish and Christian narratives and story-telling techniques, but also key terms from both religions that appear in numerous *surāt*, such as the Qur'ān's use of the term "sign" (*āya*) to describe revelation, something found 287 times in the Qur'ān and 77 times in the Gospel of John.⁴⁴⁷ Although these examples of shared narratives and key terminology are not enough to demonstrate direct access, they do suggest a milieu that was aware of and even conversant in the Abrahamic traditions.

However, establishing the nature of the potential contemporary milieu does not necessarily establish an audience for the text. Even if the historicity of the Jewish tribes of Medina is accepted, that does not necessarily make those Abrahamic traditions the intended audience of the Qur'ānic passages that address them, as discussed with the Qur'ān's apparent defense of Christian monasticism. This complex question of to whom the Qur'ān is addressed is even more important

⁴⁴⁷ Samir Khalil Samir, "The theological Christian influence on the Qur'ān: a reflection" in Said Reynolds, *Historical Context*, pp. 141-162 at p. 145.

for understanding its view of the historical communities of Jews and Christians. Although many of these passages also appear to address the Abrahamic traditions themselves, recounting a continuous narrative of divine intervention through revelation, in many cases, it seems more reasonable to read these passages as using the historical Abrahamic communities as metaphors for religious righteousness and the dangers of sectarianism, as addressed to the early community of believers, who might still have time to learn from these stories and avoid the pitfalls of sectarianism.

Thus, by using the model of the Abrahamic religions, who also had prophets, who were followed by the believing and denied by the nonbelieving, the Qur'an draws a link between God's message and leadership. The Qur'an also chastises those who deny true leadership and divide the community, reaffirming the significance of the *umma*. The *sura al-hujurat* (The Private Apartments), which the Muslim tradition dates to the end of the Medinan period, when deputies from the Arabian tribes had begun to appear in Medina to offer their allegiance to Muḥammad, and deals specifically with how the new and growing community should demonstrate its allegiance:

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ فِيكُمْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ لَوْ يُطِيعُكُمْ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْرِ لَعَنِتُّمْ وَ لَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَ زَيَّنَّهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَ كَرَّمَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكُفْرَ وَ الْفُسُوقَ وَ الْعِصْيَانَ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الرَّشِدُونَ

And know that the messenger of Allah is among you. If he were to obey you in much of the government, ye would surely be in trouble; but Allah hath endeared the faith to you and hath beautified it in your hearts, and hath made disbelief and lewdness and rebellion hateful unto you. Such are they who are rightly guided.⁴⁴⁸

The *sura* goes on to speak directly to the issue of sectarianism:

وَ إِنْ طَافَتِنِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَاصْلَحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِنْ بَغَتْ إِحْدَهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَى فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّى تَفِيءَ إِلَى أَمْرِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ فَاءَتْ فَاصْلَحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَ أْقسَطُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

And if two parties of believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them. And if one party of them doth wrong to the other, fight ye that which doth wrong till it return unto the ordinance of Allah; then, if it return, make peace between them justly, and act equitably. Lo! Allah loveth the equitable.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ Q. 49:7.

⁴⁴⁹ Q. 49:9. For a discussion of the use of this passage in writings of the first centuries of Islam, see Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 37-40.

These lines establish one of the main bases for the disputes which would arise after the prophet's death. In verse seven, the Qur'ān establishes that it is the Messenger of God who must lead the community for it to remain on the correct path. In verse nine, it argues that those who separate themselves and refuse to make peace with their fellow believers have broken God's law, and instructs the believers to fight against the side "that which doth wrong" (*allatī tabghi*). However, the first line of verse nine would appear to be addressed to the prophet himself, commanding him to make peace between the warring factions (*āṣliḥū bīnahuma*), implying that it is the leader who knows who is right.

It is not surprising, with these verses in mind, that according to the Muslim tradition, the first and most lasting dispute that would arise after the death of the prophet centered on the leader whom the community should follow. As these verses make clear, God commands the community to follow the correct leader. Furthermore, this leader has a particular role to play as arbiter of disputes. Finally, the party which splinters from the correct leader and does wrong has done wrong against God. The central question remains who this leader should be and how the community should identify him after the death of the prophet. Unfortunately, this question is not addressed in the Qur'ān, and it is not surprising that the community could not develop a consensus decision regarding it.

However, although the Qur'ān represents divisiveness and sectarianism as essentially damaging true religion by potentially separating believers from right authority and the correct worship of God, in discussing the models of prophethood in the Old Testament, it also presents sectarianism as unavoidable and, potentially, natural. In the *sura ash-shura* (The Council), the

Qur'an addresses Muḥammad, reminding him of the kind of community he shall lead by accepting the call to prophecy:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَهُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ يُدْخِلُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ وَالظَّالِمُونَ مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ
 أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ فَإِنَّهُ هُوَ الْوَلِيُّ وَهُوَ يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ
 وَمَا اخْتَلَفْتُمْ فِيهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَحُكْمُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ ذَلِكَمُ اللَّهُ رَبِّي عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ
 فَاطِرُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ أَزْوَاجًا يَذُرُكُمْ فِيهِ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ
 الْبَصِيرُ
 لَهُ مَقَالِيدُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ إِنَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Had Allah willed, He could have made them one community, but Allah bringeth whom He will into His mercy. And the wrong-doers have no friend nor helper.

Or have they chosen protecting friends besides Him? But Allah, He (alone) is the Protecting Friend. He quickeneth the dead, and He is Able to do all things.

And in whatsoever ye differ, the verdict therein belongeth to Allah. Such is my Lord, in Whom I put my trust, and unto Whom I turn:

The Creator of the heavens and the earth. He hath made for you pairs of yourselves, and of the cattle also pairs, whereby He multiplieth you. Naught is as His likeness; and He is the Hearer, the Seer.

His are the keys of the heavens and the earth. He enlargeth providence for whom He will and straiteneth (it for whom He will). Lo! He is Knower of all things.⁴⁵⁰

The first of these verses would seem to imply that diversity of belief was part of God's plan, and that some level of plurality is acceptable among the community of believers. Indeed, the statement "had Allah willed, He could have made them one community" was often cited in the developing fields of *ḥadīth* studies and Islamic law, as explaining the minor variations between acceptable *ḥadīth*.⁴⁵¹ However, this variation was not understood to exist without purpose – drawing on the *sura*'s reference to mercy and friendship, later analysts of the verse often coupled this acceptable variety with the concept of *ijmā'* (consensus), stressing that variation was acceptable only so long as it did not create disagreement or schism within the community of believers.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Q. 42:8-13.

⁴⁵¹ Shady Hekmat Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 24-28; Christopher Melchert, "The Relation of the Ten Readings to One Another," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 10.2 (2008), pp. 73-87.

⁴⁵² Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, (Chicago, 1979), p. 39.

In this way, this short statement was understood to provide the basis for acceptable variation within the community. On the one hand, this interpretation would seem in part pragmatic, particularly for a community which expanded rapidly and had only limited written sources for its traditions for the first two centuries. Muslims began to inhabit the lands that they conquered in the first decades of the expansion, and by the early eighth century, there were Muslims living in Spain, North Africa, Egypt, the Near East and Iran. However, it would be another century before a codified system of behavior was implemented, and even the system of Islamic law cannot be seen as purely a standardization of practice, given the significant variation between the various regional schools.⁴⁵³

On the other hand, the *sura*'s analysis of how this acceptable variation played out in the other Abrahamic faiths complicates the picture somewhat:

شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّىٰ بِهِ نُوحًا وَ الَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَ صَدَّقْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَ مُوسَىٰ وَ عِيسَىٰ أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَ لَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ
كَثِيرٌ عَلَى الْمَشْرِكِينَ مَا تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَ يَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يُنِيبُ
وَ مَا تَفَرَّقُوا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَعْثًا بَيْنَهُمْ وَ أُولَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِنْ رَبِّكَ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى لَقَضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَ إِنَّ الدِّينَ أَوْرَثُوا
الْكِتَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مُرِيبٍ
فَلِذَلِكَ فَادْعُ

He hath ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah, and that which We commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish the religion, and be not divided therein. Dreadful for the idolaters is that unto which thou callest them. Allah chooseth for Himself whom He will, and guideth unto Himself him who turneth (toward him).

And they were not divided until after knowledge came to them, through rivalry amongst themselves; and had it not been for a Word that had already gone forth from thy Lord for an appointed term, it surely had been judged between them. And those who were made to inherit the Scripture after them are verily in hopeless doubt concerning it.

Unto this, then, summon (O Muḥammad).⁴⁵⁴

Once again, the Qur'an emphasizes Muḥammad's position as part of the line of prophets established in the Old Testament, in this case apparently stressing the figures that were leaders of their

⁴⁵³ Sami Zubaida, *Law and Power in the Islamic World*, (London, 2003), particularly p. 13.

⁴⁵⁴ Q. 42:14-15.

communities, as well as those who accepted covenants with God on behalf of humanity – Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and now, by implication, Muḥammad.

Interestingly, it also stressed that “they were not divided until after knowledge came to them” (*wa mā tafraqū ilā min ba’di mā jā’ahumu al-‘ilm*). Consequently, more than simply saying that there was no divisiveness between peoples prior to divine revelation, the Qur’ān would appear to be stressing a particular kind of divisiveness, one that can only arise after revelation, namely schism. Because the communities that followed the earlier prophets had received divine guidance, they suffered a particular kind of divisiveness. The Qur’ān does not make explicit in this passage whether this divisiveness manifested itself in the lifetimes of the prophets or after their death, but it does stress that the schisms became engrained in the communities, so that “those who were made to inherit the Scripture after them are verily in hopeless doubt concerning it,” suggesting that, if the schisms did begin in the lifetime of the prophet, they either could not be stopped by the prophet or became more severe after his death.

In this way, *sura ash-shura* would appear to stress that while variation is natural and divinely-created, there is a kind of divisiveness – schism – which is particular to communities of believers. Schism is not a sign of false belief, but rather arises out of true divine revelation. It is no less dangerous than false belief, however, as it also divides the community and leads believers away from true belief. Indeed, the reference to “those who were made to inherit the Scripture” implies that schism endangers all of those in later generations who wish to follow the Word of God, not only those who accept wrong practices or false leadership, perhaps because it creates confusion and casts doubts in the minds of the entire community.

The prophets themselves play an uncertain role in this conception of the source of schism, in particular Muḥammad, to whom the *sura* is addressed. Presumably the *sura* was intended to be

directed at the community of believers, and not just Muḥammad, and yet there is little in its tone to suggest that it should be read as instructions for avoiding schism. Instead, the dangers of schism are presented as part of the story of the Old Testament prophets and, in that way, part of the larger narrative of the continuity of the prophets and of God's revelation, down to Muḥammad. In particular, there is no suggestion in the *sura* that the appearance of schismatics among the Jewish and Christian communities was a sign of failure in their prophetic office by those who came before Muḥammad. The implication is that schism will be similarly unavoidable but dangerous for the developing community of believers in Mecca.

Indeed, this idea of schism as being part of the history of the other Abrahamic traditions is echoed in *sura ar-rum* (The Romans), which Muslim accounts understand as revealed in response to the Persians defeat of the Byzantine armies in 613, which had been championed by the Meccans as proof of the weakness of Abrahamic monotheism.⁴⁵⁵ Although the *sura* defends the Christian army and gives a prophecy of their eventual defeat of the Persians, it does not excuse entirely Christian failures, but rather again reminds Muḥammad of the dangers facing his own community:

فَاقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَ لَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ
 مُبِينًا إِلَيْهِ وَ انْقُوهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَ لَا تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
 مِنَ الدِّينِ فَرَقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَ كَانُوا شِيعًا كُلُّ جَزْبٍ بِمَالِدِهِمْ فَرَحُونَ

So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright – the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not—

Turning unto Him (only); and be careful of your duty unto Him, and establish worship, and be not those who ascribe partners (unto Him):

Of those who split up their religion and became schismatics, each set exulting in its tenets.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 24-27 and “Surat Al-Rūm: A Study of the Exegetical Literature,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 118.3 (1998), pp. 356-364.

⁴⁵⁶ Q.30:30-32.

Although “those who ascribe partners” (*al-mushrikīn*) could potential refer to the Meccan polytheists, who worshiped other, lesser deities alongside Allah, it is also employed in the Qur’ān to refer to Christians, for attributing divinity to Jesus, whom the Qur’ān holds was only a prophet and human, making the Christian worship of him idolatry.⁴⁵⁷

Indeed, Sidney Griffith has argued that on a broader scale, the Qur’ān employs repeated terminology for Jews and Christians and their theological beliefs “often with a seemingly ironic or even a satirically polemical intent, conveyed in the very wording of its allusions and echoes,”⁴⁵⁸ suggesting that even the term *an-naṣārā* might be one such polemical marker, rather than a reference either to Jesus as Nazarene or to the heretical Jewish-Christian sect of the Nazorean. If Griffith’s interpretation is accepted, it would suggest that the Qur’ān uses the term to emphasize the continuity of contemporary Christian sects from the *anṣār*, the helpers or early apostles of Jesus, even using the term itself to reiterate the connection of contemporary Christianity to the righteous religion of Jesus.

This *sura* further develops this idea of *mushrikīn* by arguing that, by worship Jesus as the Son, Christians were also guilty of altering the true religion and breaking divine law, possibly in reference to the first commandment. Moreover, the *sura* understands Christians as having further failed to practice the right religion by “splitting up their religion” and “becoming schismatics,” further wrong which the *sura* exhorts Muḥammad to avoid. Again, however, no guidance is given as to how schism can be avoided, or how true religion can be identified in disputes. Instead, the

⁴⁵⁷ Indeed, Hawting has argued that the term *shirk* should be read as one aspect of monotheist polemic that was integrated into Muslim thought; Hawting, *Idea of Idolatry*, pp. 67-87.

⁴⁵⁸ Sidney Griffith, “Al-Nasārā in the Qur’ān: A hermeneutical reflection” in Said Reynolds, *New Perspectives*, v. 2, pp. 301-322 at p. 321.

Qur'ān notes the apparent genuineness of the worship of all of the Christian schismatics who exult their own tenets.

Moreover, in both *sura ash-shura* and *sura ar-rum*, it is the prophets themselves who are called upon to monitor and guide their communities away from schism. Muḥammad is called upon to learn from the history of the Old Testament prophets, but no guidance is given to the community that would come to spread the Word of God after him. Instead, both *surāt* imply that otherwise well-meaning people who have succumbed to schism suffer from lack of both true leadership and right religion. Again, this imagery is significant when considered against the history of factionalism according to the Muslim tradition. As has already been mentioned, the statement, “had Allah willed, He could have made them one community, but Allah bringeth whom He will into His mercy” in *sura ash-shura* was used in the developing schools of Islamic law to explain variation between the schools and within *ḥadīth* collections. However, despite the acceptable range of variation delineated by the schools of Islamic law, the underlying theme of these *sura* remain the inherent danger of schism.

As with the Qur'ān's emphasis on the evils of sectarianism and the importance of true leadership, it is easy to see how this conception of schism as following inevitably from revelation may have actually fostered divisiveness in the early community. In particular, this emphasis on schism may explain why, according to the Muslim tradition, the early factions so quickly abandoned attempts at reconciliation. The murder of the caliph 'Uthmān and the repression of 'Alī and his followers was not simply a political dispute; instead, it was the visible manifestation of the same sectarianism that had claimed the other Abrahamic communities. In the Qur'ānic model of schism, moreover, the appearance of sectarianism would have cast all belief into question, just as it had for the earlier communities.

Thus the early sects were confronted not only with having created schism and sectarianism, but with creating the same division in practice and theology that had beset the Jews and Christians before them. In this mode, however, the Qur'ān is not actually addressing Jews and Christians – who have already succumbed to sectarianism – but rather, using a polemical conception of these communities to build up a narrative of how even the religious righteousness of divine revelation is not protection against sectarianism, but potentially a path to schism. Indeed, the omission of any instruction for how the community should appoint leaders may be a sign that at least these passages do predate the expansion of the early community. It is a rather glaring omission, and would be more so for a community who were debating how succession should be identified. Similarly, if these passages were composed or redacted after Muslims had begun to interact with Near Eastern Christians, the history of Church Councils and the resulting sectarianism in the Near East would seem to support the Qur'ānic conception of sectarianism as deriving from the desire to maintain true revelation, and so omitting any reference to this contemporary sectarianism would also seem a surprising omission.

In this way, although sectarianism is an important theme in both the Qur'ān and Christian works of the seventh century, there is little evidence for interaction between the two. In particular, Christian sectarianism as conceived in the Qur'ān would appear to focus more on the early church as a generic metaphor for revelation and schism than on the actual sects of Christians in the seventh century Near East. Indeed, the division between Chalcedonians and Monophysites did not date to the community of Jesus, and by the seventh century, was not exclusively or even predominately represented by differences in scriptural interpretation, but through the practice of separate sacraments by separate church hierarchies. Issues of practice and ritual are absent from the

Qur'ānic account, further suggesting that its conception of sectarianism was not based on interactions with actual Christians in the seventh century.

5.5 Conclusions

The Qur'ān naturally serves as the basis for Islamic theology, but the nature of the text – its complicated writing style, lack of a continuous narrative, and repetitive references to Abrahamic figures – makes a complete study of the text in this study impossible. However, some arguments can be developed, particularly from its repeated references to Biblical figures. In particular, the Qur'ān's assumption of its audience's previous knowledge of Biblical stories implies that many of its references can be read as conscious constructions, relying on the familiar material in order to highlight particular aspects of the stories. Moreover, the Qur'ān speaks not only to the community of believers or to the population of Meccan polytheists, but appears at points to speak to the existing communities of Jews and Christians, as well.

Understanding the text is complicated by the nature of Islamic sources in the seventh century, as well as the history of the field of Qur'ānic studies. The lack of a larger corpus of Islamic sources with an agreed dating means that there is no agreed context to the Qur'ān's creation or compilation, so that discussions of the intended audience are often essentially circular. These complications in reading the Qur'ān have fueled, and in part been fueled by, the rise of revisionist interpretations of the text in Western scholarship starting in the late twentieth century. The varied theses of the revisionist school have not created a new, coherent narrative of the work's compilation, and some of the arguments within the revisionist school remain incompatible. However, these new ways of reading the Qur'ān have offered new avenues of questioning for

particular aspects of the text, such as how the text's references to Christians, both apparently contemporary and historic communities, should be understood.

Both from the structure and implied audience of many of these passages, it appears that references to Christians in the Qur'ān often served a metaphorical purpose, as analogies for how the nascent community of Muslims should behave. However, there are also passages which appear to speak to Christians directly, presuming the continued existence of Christianity in the Near East and instructing Muslims in how they should treat the indigenous Christian communities they encountered. Again, these passages parallel the evidence from Christian sources, with the Muslims serving as a ruling class over indigenous Christian communities in the Near East and North Africa, expecting submission and tribute from Christians, but not conversion to Islam. However, this position is also somewhat theologically complicated, as it implies divine acceptance of the continuation of false belief in the Near East. It also suggests a disconnect between the Qur'ān and contemporary Christian works, which often perceived Christian conversion to Islam as a continual and imminent threat throughout the seventh and early eighth centuries.

Similarly, the Qur'ānic conception of leadership and sectarianism is perhaps not surprising, given that sectarianism between the other Abrahamic traditions may have been well known in Arabia. Yet in discussing sectarianism among the other Abrahamic traditions, the Qur'ān also makes clear that allegiance to a true prophet or reception of a true revelation is not enough, as the earlier communities of Jews and Christians had also followed the Word as given by a true prophet, and had still fallen prey to schism and sectarianism. Indeed, the Qur'ān implies that schism might be an unavoidable outcome of revelation, that communities of believers fight over the true meaning of revelation and authority, and in this way, fall into schism. However, no guidance is given as to how the early community of Muslims should avoid this pitfall. Nor does it reveal any awareness of

the existing Christian sectarianism in the Near East or the history of how the Church Councils, in attempting to preserve true doctrine, produced further sectarianism.

Thus, the Qur'ān can be seen to establish a worldview which effectively parallels the early Muslim community, both in terms of its outward priorities of expansion and conquest, and its inward concerns regarding sectarianism and factionalism. Unfortunately, without a broader corpus of contemporary works to compare it to, it remains difficult to say how much the text was revised to match the history of the community or how much an observant community was shaped by the text. In either case, many of the issues faced by the early community also appear to arise from the lack of direct guidance offered by the Qur'ān, in particular the lack of specific instruction on how leaders should be selected after the death of the prophet. These gaps were addressed by the developing factions in the seventh century and beyond, and the various answers and claims they developed fueled the development of the earliest genres of Islamic writing.

At the same time, there appears to be little evidence for the ongoing Christian definitions of Christian identity in the Qur'ānic conception of Christianity. Although sectarianism is a major theme in the Qur'ān, the descriptions of sectarianism in the Qur'ān bear little resemblance to the real divisions between the Near Eastern Christian sects, and the Qur'ān demonstrates little awareness of doctrinal correctness as a root for that sectarianism. Instead, sectarianism is presented as an unfortunate, but potentially unavoidable result of revelation, a definition that would appear directed at the early community of believers, rather than Near Eastern Christians, who would have found little familiar in such a definition. Perhaps even more striking is the difference between the Qur'ān's understanding of Christian conversion to Islam and that preserved in seventh-century Christian texts. The fear of conversion to Islam is palpable in nearly all of the Christian works considered in this study, and yet the Qur'ān strongly implies that Christianity would continue

unabated under Muslim rule, and that Christians and members of all the Abrahamic traditions should not convert, but rather follow their own Revelations.

For this reason, although Christians feature regularly in the Qur'ān, it is difficult to read the text as addressed to the real communities of Near Eastern Christians or as influenced by their writing. Its concept of Christian identity, both for the pre-Islamic period and for Christian identity under Muslim rule, does not parallel the Christian works considered in chapters three and four in any significant fashion. Thus, taken in comparison to Christian sources discussed earlier, the available evidence from the Qur'ān strongly suggests that both Christian writings about Islam and the Qur'ān's conception of Christianity represent internal dialogues, taking place within these communities, rather than as the result of inter-religious dialogues between the two faiths.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This study has endeavored to set Christian writing about Islam from the period of the Islamic expansion in the larger context of Christian theological development in Late Antiquity. To this end, continuity and innovation have been major themes throughout - continuity from the Christological debates of the fifth and sixth century, particularly the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and the resulting development of the communities of Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites as the dominant strands of Christianity in the Near East, and innovation in the new social and political structures that formed under Muslim rule alongside the emerging structures of the Chalcedonian and Monophysite churches.

In order to understand how Christians began to integrate the Islamic expansion into their thinking, this study has focused particularly on Christian writings about Islam and the descriptions of Muslims in Christian writings in the seventh century. It has also considered the contemporary descriptions of Christians in the Qur'ān, in order to illustrate that these descriptions have both a different starting point and a different focus, suggesting that both Christian conceptions of Muslims

and Muslim conceptions of Christians were internal discussions, taking place within each tradition, and were not the result of true inter-religious dialogue. In this way, this study has attempted to illustrate how the rise of Islam, the emergence of the caliphate, and the resulting mixed society of a variety of Christian communities and a minority of Muslims living under Muslim rule influenced Christian identity in the Near East.

This study has relied heavily on the modern corpus of secondary literature in Islamic studies aimed at cataloguing the existing evidence for Christian responses to Islam, but has endeavored to focus on one particular thematic element of these writings, how these authors defined their own character and that of the Other, and trace the development of this element across the seventh and eighth centuries. Although the military and socio-political history of the Islamic expansion has made up the background for this study, this work has attempted to bridge the two existing corpuses of modern works on early Islam, reconsidering the catalogued corpus of early Christian writings on Islam in the broader context of the Islamic expansion. To do so, it has relied on close readings to discuss the underlying assumptions of these author, focusing particularly on seventh and eighth century authors' assumptions about their own identities and those of the Other, be it Christian or Muslim.

As has already been said, many of the concerns that emerge in Christian writings about Islam in the seventh and early eighth centuries represent the continuation of discussions and debates from the fifth and sixth century and the Church Councils – for the Christian communities of the Near East, particularly the Council of Chalcedon. In the century and a half from the Council of Chalcedon to the rise of Islam, the two sides of the Chalcedonian schism began to evolve from intellectual movements into distinct religious communities, with separate church hierarchies and communions, and their own internal narrative of church history, with their own heroes and villains.

The Council of Chalcedon had been called, in part, in a spirit of reconciliation and unity, yet the resulting debates, fueled in part by the regional, ethnic and linguistic divisions of the provinces, led to the creation of distinct communities in the Near East.

However, although elements of a complete division between Chalcedonian and Monophysite appear in the late sixth and early seventh century, particularly in the emergence of separate church hierarchies and in their competing claims for the correct form of communion, this division was also influenced by the Islamic expansion and the resulting separation from the Christian authority in Rome and Constantinople. The debates in the late sixth and early seventh century surrounding Monoenergism, as well as attempts by both Chalcedonian church leaders and the emperor Heraclius at reunification suggest that even at the rise of Islam, the complete schism of Monophysites from the imperial, Chalcedonian church was not assumed to be unavoidable.

It is impossible to know if Heraclius' attempt at reconciliation with the Monophysites would have been successful if many of the Monophysite provinces had not been lost to the Muslims, but it is clear that at least some Chalcedonians did understand the emperor as attempting to alter imperial doctrine for the sake of the Monophysites, and wrote against the contamination of imperial doctrine with quasi-Monophysite thought, even as the rise of Islam began to feature in Christian writing. Thus the writings of the early seventh century maintain two inter-related foci – on the one hand, the continuation of the theological debates of the fifth and sixth century and, on the other hand, the sudden intervention of Islam into both the political and religious climate of the Near East.

These would remain the competing foci of many Christian authors throughout the seventh and early eighth centuries, although their view of both sectarianism and Muslim rule would continue to evolve in the next century and a half. As has been shown, the concerns of these Christian authors ranged from the practical to the intellectual to the fantastic, but underpinning all

of these works are the parallel interests of understanding the significance of Muslim victory in the Near East and preserving the doctrinal divisions of the fifth and sixth century. In this way, Christian authors of this period can be understood as seeking continuity with their religious forebears, despite the massive social and political upheavals of the intervening decades and the emergence of the caliphate and a Muslim ruling class. This desire for continuity was clearly particularly strongly felt among Chalcedonian authors, as illustrated by these authors' continued role in Byzantine theological debates – Sophronius' writings on Monoenergism, Anastasius of Sinai's role in the Monothelitism debate, and John of Damascus' writings on iconoclasm. A more complicated view of continuity arises among the Monophysites, as among these communities it appears to blend into the issue of resisting mass conversion to Islam. Yet in both cases, these authors speak to a need among their communities to preserve a distinctly Christian identity.

Moreover, the seventh and early eighth century witnessed the composition of genres of Christian writing which served as direct responses to Islam. These works demonstrate how Christians began to integrate the real experiences of Christian life under Islam into questions of Christian identity. Through these texts, it is possible to see the progress of Christian thinking about Islam, from the horror of apocalypses, coupled with their emphasis on the temporary nature of Muslim rule; to martyrologies' emphasis on the realistic reasons behind the martyrs' deaths, implying that in general, conversion to Islam was not required to escape death; to the early apologists' focus on the intellectual superiority of Christianity, which they describe as flourishing under Islam. The views of Muslims found in these works naturally evolved over time, as Christians began to recognize that Muslims were not as tyrannical as rulers, despite their ferociousness in battle, and began to accept Muslim rule as the new status quo. Conversion from Christianity to Islam remained an underlying concern in many of these works, but how each source portrays

conversion again varies based on genre, from apocalyptic to pragmatic, again highlighting how the genre itself impacts the narrative and tone of the work.

Because Muslims remain central to many of these narratives, it is tempting to look to the early Islamic tradition for comparable discussions of Christianity, in particular to the Qur'ān as the source for Islamic belief, and to understand these interactions as the early elements of inter-religious dialogue. Unfortunately, however, several limitations exist for this model. Firstly, study of the text itself is complicated by the nature of Islamic sources for the seventh century, as well as the history of the field of Qur'ānic studies. The lack of a larger corpus of Islamic sources with widely-agreed dating means that there is no agreed context to the Qur'ān's creation or compilation, so that discussions of the intended audience are often essentially circular. These complications in reading the Qur'ān have fueled, and in part been fueled by, the rise of revisionist interpretations of the text in Western scholarship starting in the late twentieth century. The varied theses of the revisionist school have failed to create a new, coherent narrative of the work's compilation, with many of the arguments within the revisionist school remaining distinctly contradictory. However, these new ways of reading the Qur'ān have offered new avenues of questioning for particular aspects of the text, such as how the text's references to Christians, both apparently contemporary and historic communities, should be understood.

Christians and Christianity do appear frequently in the Qur'ān, both in references to the historical community of Jesus and to contemporary communities of Christians. However, these references often appear to serve a metaphorical purpose, serving as analogies for how the nascent community of Muslims should behave. Passages which speak to Christians directly, presuming the continued existence of Christianity in the Near East and instructing Muslims in how they should treat the indigenous Christian communities they encounter, do appear to parallel the evidence from

Christian sources, with the Muslims serving as a ruling class over indigenous Christian communities in the Near East and North Africa, expecting submission and tribute from Christians, but not conversion to Islam. This expectation that Christians would continue in their own tradition under Muslim does differ significantly from seventh-century Christian sources, however, which often focused on the danger of conversion to Islam, suggesting that these works were not interacting directly with one another.

Similarly, the Qur'ān does not appear to engage with Christian sectarianism in such a way to suggest any awareness of contemporary Christian sources. Instead, although the Qur'ān can be seen to establish a worldview which effectively parallels the early Muslim community, both in terms of its outward priorities of expansion and conquest, and its inward concerns regarding sectarianism and factionalism, there is little material to suggest interaction with contemporary Christian discussions of those concepts. In this way, it appears that most, if not all of the sources discussed in this study represent internal responses to the rise of Islam, with Christian authors addressing Christian concerns and the Qur'ān at least addressing Muslim concerns.

Thus, by setting the rise of Islam and the emergence of the caliphate in the context of Late Antique Christian theology, this study has shown how these factors further influenced the nature of Christian identity and sectarianism in the Near East, not necessarily through direct interaction with Islamic thought for the period of the seventh and early eighth centuries, but due to the new social and political structures that accompanied the Islamic expansion. This separation and segregation, both between Chalcedonians and Monophysites and from the Greek- and Latin-speaking churches, was a slow one. In the seventh century, it is clear that many Christians in the Near East were still engaged with theological debates farther west, including John of Damascus' writings on Byzantine

iconoclasm. However, their role in these discussions had changed – indeed, John of Damascus was able to contest imperial iconoclasm in part because of his living outside direct imperial influence.

The separation between the sects was similarly slow to develop. Elements of true separation into distinct churches can already be found in the hagiographies of the sixth and early seventh centuries, with both communities claiming their own hierarchy, communion and narrative of Christian history. Nonetheless, the attempts at reunification by both Heraclius and the Chalcedonian hierarchy in the early seventh century suggest that they believed reunification might still be possible. Instead, the appearance of Islam cast Christian writing about sectarianism in a different direction, with authors struggling both to define the identity of their own sectarian community and to define the superiority of Christianity and discourage conversion to Islam. In some cases, these competing interests appear to have encouraged exclusivism, as in the writings of Athanasius of Balad and Anastasius of Sinai. In others, it appears to have led to an appreciation for more lax regulations, as in the new canons of Jacob of Edessa. In all of these cases, however, the appearance of Islam as a competing worldview appears to have complicated the Christian sects' definitions of themselves and the markers for participation in their community.

It is, of course, impossible to speculate about the character of the Near East without Islam. Although the Levant, North Africa and Mesopotamia had been the center of Christian thought and still housed many of the cities and locations which had been used in the first seven centuries of Christian history to define Christian identity, the Near East of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries would become distinctly Islamic, both in its people and its culture. It seems reasonable to believe that without the Islamic expansion, the Near East would have remained essentially Christian in its society and culture, but it is impossible to know whether the goal of church unity, which appears to be so important in the early seventh century, truly had any chance of success without disruption

caused by the Muslim incursion. Nevertheless, it does remain the case that the writings from Near Eastern Christians of the seventh and early eighth centuries, and the Christian identity they preserve, emerge as a hybrid, integrating elements of the competing, pre-Islamic concerns of doctrinal purity versus church unity, but also attempting to address the initial fear over Muslim victory and the eventual acceptance of Muslim rule as the new status quo in the Near East.

Abbreviations

AB = Analecta Bollandiana

BMGS = Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies

BSOAS = Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies

ByzZ = Byzantinische Zeitschrift

Hoyland, *Seeing Islam = Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, 1997).

JTS = Journal of Theological Studies

JSAI = Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam

PG = Patrologia Graeca

Q = Muhammad M. Pickthall (trans.), *The Glorious Quran* (New York, 2004)

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