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ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE HISTORY OF EARLY ISLAM: THE FIRST SEVENTY YEARS

BY

JEREMY JOHNS*

Abstract

The rarity of material evidence for the religion of Islam during the first seventy years of the hijra (622-92 CE) has been used to attack the traditional positivist account of the rise of Islam. However, the earliest declarations of Islam are to be found on media produced by the early Islamic state. It is therefore mistake to read too much significance into the absence of such declarations prior to the formation of that state by ʿAbd al-Malik (685-705 CE). There is little prospect that archaeology will uncover new evidence of Islam from the first seventy years.

Le manque de données matérielles sur la religion de l'Islam pendant les sept premières décennies de l'hégire (622-92) a été utilisé pour réfuter la théorie positiviste traditionelle de l'essor de l'Islam. Cependant, les premières déclarations de l'Islam sont à trouver dans des oeuvres produites par l'Etat islamique à ses débuts. Il est donc erroné d'attribuer trop de sens à l'absence de telles déclarations avant la formation de cet Etat par ʿAbd al-Malik (685-705). Il y a peu de perspectives de nouvelles découvertes archéologiques sur l'Islam des sept premières décennies.

Keywords: Epigraphy, Numismatics, Papyri, Religion, State Formation

In 1991, Judith Koren and the late Yehuda Nevo issued a methodological challenge to historians of early Islam. They were encouraged to do so by their reading of the so-called 'revisionist' historians, including Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, Gerald Hawting, Moshe Sharon, and John Wansbrough, whose work, Koren and Nevo believed, had completely undermined the foundations upon which the traditional positivist account of the rise of Islam had been constructed. None of the written Islamic sources for the first two hundred years of the hijra could be used as evidence for what had actually happened. Archaeology, which in any case consisted of objective facts that were always to be preferred over subjective written sources, was therefore almost the only evidence available, and should be used to compose a new account of the origins of Islam

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that would be radically different from the traditional historical narrative. The polemical style permitted historians to dismiss this article as not worth an answer, while Nevo's unorthodox interpretation of material evidence embarrassed archaeologists into silence (Fig. 1).[1] What, it was widely asked, could have persuaded *Der Islam* to waste space in this manner?

The editor, the late Albrecht Noth, was himself one of the radical historians.[2] He, as much as any, was keenly aware of the problematic character of the Islamic literary sources.[3] This has rarely been described more judiciously and succinctly than by Stephen Humphreys (1991: 69-70):

> If our goal is to comprehend the way in which Muslims of the late 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries understood the origins of their society, then we are very well off indeed. But if our aim is to find out 'what really happened'—i.e., to develop reliably documented answers to modern questions about the earliest decades of Islamic societies—then we are in trouble.
>
> The Arabic narrative sources represent a rather late crystallisation of a fluid oral tradition. These sources can become an adequate foundation for 'scientific' history only when we have learned a great deal more than we presently know about this oral tradition: its origins, the social and cultural institutions by which it was shaped and transmitted, the variations and transformations it underwent in the course of transmission, the circumstances in which it was first committed to writing, the degree of alteration suffered by early written versions before they at last achieved their definitive form in the mid-3rd/9th century, etc. Questions of this kind have been discussed over and over by modern scholars, but so far their conclusions remain more in the realm of speculation than of demonstration. The evidence is such, in fact, that reasonable certainty may be beyond our grasp.
>
> ... The first seventy years of Islamic history command our attention, therefore, not only because of the enormous interest of this period, but also because of the extraordinary methodological problems posed by our principal sources for it.

Noth, a pioneer of new methodological approaches to the Islamic literary sources, was attracted by the methodological terms of the challenge issued by Koren and Nevo, and believed that *Der Islam* should give archaeologists a chance to air their views (personal communication). A similar respect for

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[1] See also Nevo and Koren (1990: 23-44), Nevo (1994; 1993; 1991). For a critique see Foss (1995: 231-33). The publication of Nevo's *Crossroads to Islam* was halted by his death in February 1992, but it was published in June 2003 by Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, ISBN 1591020832. This essay was already in press before it appeared. Unlike his interpretation of the excavations at Sde Boqer, Nevo's epigraphic studies demand to be taken seriously.

[2] The first part of his *Habilitationsschrift, Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung, I. Themen und Formen* was published by the Department of Oriental Studies in the University of Bonn in 1973, and was read and cited with approval by Cook, Crone, Hawting, and Wansborough. Although the second part, on *Tendenzen*, was never published, a revised English edition subsequently appeared as Noth and Conrad (1994).

[3] For an up-to-date and wide-ranging introduction to the controversy, see Berg (2003).

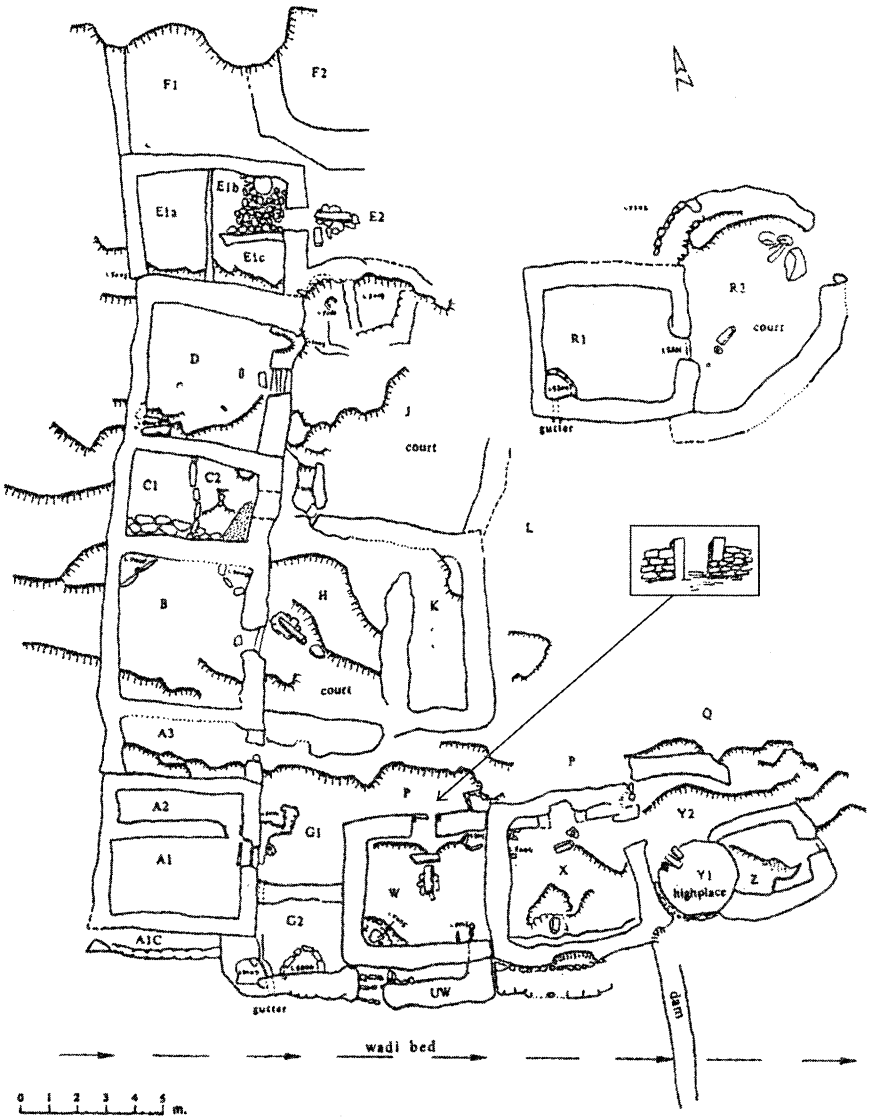


Figure 1: Ground plan of eighth-century (?) domestic structures from Area J at Sde Boqer (Naqab); the inset shows an elevation of a doorway (after Nevo 1990: figs 3 & 7b). Nevo interpreted such structures as part of a "pagan sanctuary," analogous to the Meccan *ḥaram*; each structure (for Nevo, a *ḥijr*—cf. Mecca) contained shards of ceramics and glass, grinding stones, animal bones, ash, etc., i.e. ordinary domestic refuse, which Nevo interpreted as ritually deposited fragments or *ḥaṭīm* (cf. Mecca), while he identified the jambs of the doorways as "*anṣāb*" or stelae.

archaeology as a sovereign discipline that is not the mere slave of history clearly informs the initiative by *JESHO* to which this essay is a contribution (Yoffee 2002).

Koren and Nevo were not the first to turn to archaeology for evidence in support of a radical reinterpretation of the rise of Islam. For example, in *Hagarism*, Crone and Cook (1977: 3) had explored the possibility that one way around the historiographical problem posed by the Islamic sources was "to step outside the Islamic tradition altogether and start again." Although their account of the formation of Islam as a religion was based for the most part upon non-Islamic written sources, they occasionally cited archaeological evidence in corroboration of it. For example, the proposition that the original sanctuary of the primitive Muslims (*muhājirūn*) was not Mecca but Bakka (Qur'ān 3.90), an unidentified site in north-western Arabia well to the north of Medina, was "dramatically confirmed" by the eccentric orientation (*qibla*) of the mosques excavated at Wāsiṭ (Fig. 2) and Uskāf Banī Junayd (both in Iraq).[4] *Hagarism* is perhaps now best regarded as a highly entertaining and provocative thought-experiment which, "with a certain recklessness" to use the authors' own words, attempted extensive reconstruction at a time when the task of deconstruction was still underway. The authors made no attempt to collect systematically all the evidence independent of Islamic tradition for the rise of Islam. That was left to Robert Hoyland, a pupil of Crone. Again, his principal concern was to survey and evaluate the non-Islamic written sources, but he did make extensive use of archaeological evidence and, in an appendix, listed all securely dated Islamic writings from the hijra to 72/691-2, and all religious declarations attributable to caliphs from then until the fall of the Umayyads (Hoyland 1997: 545-90, 687-703). To what does this amount?

From as early as 22/643, coins, papyri, building inscriptions, tombstones, travelers' graffiti, and possibly (but probably not) a *ṭirāz* silk, were written *bism Allāh* ("In the name of God"), and some were dated according to a new calendar corresponding to the era of the hijra. Some of the formulae used are identical to those which are later characteristically Islamic—e.g. *bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* ("In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"), and *amīr al-mu'minīn* ("Commander of the Believers," i.e. the caliph)—and a phrase common in graffiti, and first securely attested in 64/683-4, also appears in the Qur'ān—*mā taqaddama min dhanbihi wa-mā ta'akhkhara* ("May God forgive him for his sins, the earlier and the later ones" Qur'ān 48.2). It is remarkable,

[4] See Crone and Cook (1977: 23 and n. 26) and Crone (1987: 198, n. 131). For a balanced discussion of the question, see Robert Hoyland (1997: 560-73).

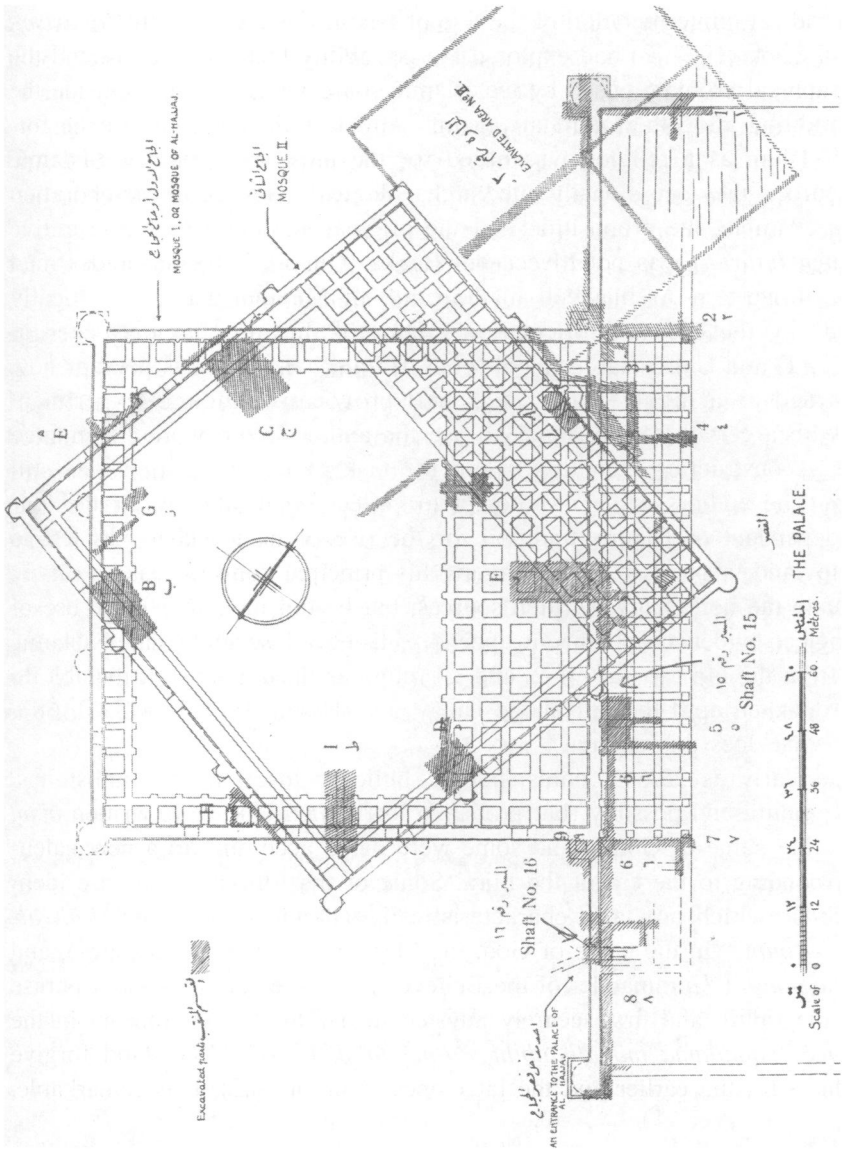


Figure 2: Ground plan of the excavations at Wāsiṭ, showing Mosque I (probably 703 C.E.), oriented on a *qibla* of 231° from magnetic north (1942), laying beneath Mosque II which is aligned on 197°, close to the true *qibla* (after Safar 1945: fig. 5).

however, that none of these early religious writings mentions either the Prophet Muḥammad or his religion, Islam. Thus, for example, the earliest tombstone of a Muslim, dated 31/651-2, from Egypt (Fig. 3), makes no reference to the Prophet, an omission that almost never occurs after 72/691-2 (el-Hawary 1930; Hoyland 1997: 689, n. 5). The first clear and detailed proclamation of Islam and of the role of Muḥammad is in the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, built by ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (65-86/685-705) and dated 72/691-2.[5] This marks a watershed, and immediately thereafter religious declarations become common, and only exceptionally do religious inscriptions fail to mention the Prophet. And yet, even before the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, non-Muslim observers already perceived the Arabs to constitute a distinct religious community with Muḥammad as its leader (Hoyland 1997: 549).[6] The problem is therefore how to account for the absence of Islam and the Prophet from the archaeological record.

Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and it is certainly possible that new research will uncover explicit declarations of Islam earlier than 72/691-2. Possible but not, I believe, probable. All of the earliest declarations of Islam are found on coins, documents, and monumental inscriptions produced under ʿAbd al-Malik and his successors. After 72/691-2, such media become increasingly common; before, they are extremely rare. But it is not just that coins, documents, and inscriptions are so scarce. Not one single public monument built under the conquerors has yet been found that can be securely dated before the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik. The earliest religious building is the Dome of the Rock itself, and a century of increasingly intensive archaeological excavation and survey has found no mosque that can be shown to be earlier. In the first half of the eighth century, mosques suddenly abound.[7] New mosques of this

[5] For the Dome of the Rock inscriptions see van Berchem (1920-27, vol. 2: 223-55), Kessler (1970), Grabar (1996: 184-86, figs. 42-49), and Nuseibeh and Grabar (1996: 78-96). For the argument that the date of 72/691-2 records the foundation of the Dome of the Rock, not its completion, see below.

[6] An analysis of early Arabic poetry, one of the few Muslim sources that can be shown to be contemporary with the events to which it refers, leads to the same conclusion.

[7] See Johns (1999). What little material evidence there is regards Kūfa and Jerusalem. At Kūfa, the re-entrant angle between the *qibla* wall of the mosque and the outer wall of the Governor's palace (*Dār al-Imāra*) are said "to be one piece of work." This has never been satisfactorily documented and, in any case, the palace cannot be securely dated, although it is generally ascribed on historical grounds to Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān in 50/670. In a long-awaited study, Julian Raby will argue that the earliest traces of the Aqṣā mosque—Robert Hamilton's Aqṣā I—are earlier than ʿAbd al-Malik, and should be attributed to Muʿāwiya (early 40s/660s). There does seem to have been a mosque on the Temple Mount by *circa* 639, but the evidence is all literary (see note 20 below). Only a relative sequence can be

Figure 3: The tombstone of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr al-Ḥajrī, Egypt, Jumādā II 31 / January-February 652 (after el-Hawary 1930: plate IIIb): *bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm hādhā l-qabr / li-ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr al-Ḥajrī allāhumma ghfir lahu / wa-dkhulhu fī raḥma minka wa-ātinā maʿahu / istaghfir lahu idhā qurīʾa hādhā l-kit[ā]b / wa-qul āmīn wa-kutiba hādhā / l-kit[ā]b fī jum[ā]dā l-ā- / khar min sanat idhā wa- / thal[ā]-thīn.* "In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate. This tomb / belongs to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr al-Ḥajrī. God forgive him / and admit him to Your mercy, and make us go with him. / Ask pardon for him, when reading this writing, / and say 'Amen.' This writing was written / in Jumādā / II in the year one and / thirty."

date continue to be discovered (Almagro and Jimenez 2000; Walmsley 2003). The earliest palace is perhaps that at Kūfa which is attributed on the weakest of historical grounds to Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān in 50/670, although there is not a shard of archaeological evidence to support that attribution. Kūfa was first excavated seventy years ago, but since then no earlier palace has yet been found. Soon thereafter, throughout Bilād al-Shām, there was a boom in palace construction. Indeed, new examples from the first half of the eighth century of both the urban

established for the archaeological remains of the Aqṣā, and the argument for absolute dating is again purely historical.

governor's palace (*dār al-imāra*) and the luxury rural villa (*qaṣr*) are found so frequently that it is difficult to keep up to date.[8] The question to be answered, therefore, is not why proclamations of Islam are absent, but why the media that carry such proclamations after 72/691-2 are so rare in the preceding period.

The answer, I suggest, is that the polity that found itself ruling the conquests was a loose confederation of Arab tribes, not a hegemonic state. It might be argued that the rulers of the Arab polity, based as it was upon Arab kinship, required no legitimization for their rule beyond the fact of conquest. But that would be to ignore the testimony of Arabic poetry that from the time of ʿUthmān, if not of ʿUmar, the Arab leader claimed to rule as "the Deputy of God" (*khalīfat Allāh*) (Crone and Hinds 1986: 30-42). Well into the Marwānid period, and beyond, poetry remained the primary medium through which the rulers of Islam proclaimed the ideological basis of their rule, but only from the eleventh century do we find legitimatory verses inscribed on palaces. Archaeology has to date furnished no evidence for the ideological basis of the early caliphate because there was not yet any state to commission the coins, documents, and inscriptions through which such declarations could be made. Only during and immediately after the Second Civil War (680-92) did a series of significant advances in the process of state formation lead to the adoption of material culture as the medium for a "new rhetoric of rule."[9] We shall examine shortly the material evidence for the nature of Marwānid state formation, but first we need to focus more closely upon the caliphate of Muʿāwiya.

Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān, the first Umayyad ruler in Syria (661-80), figures largely in both the Islamic literary tradition and the non-Islamic sources (Hinds 1991; Hawting 1986: 24-45). He also stands out in the archaeological record as the first Muslim ruler whose name appears on coins (Fig. 4) (see Walker 1941, vol. 1: 25-26; Album 1992: 178; Album and Goodwin 2000: 15 and plates 17.245-6, 18.269; Foss 2002: 360 and n. 28), documents,[10] and monumental

[8] A probable *dār al-imāra* has been located, but not yet excavated, next to the Umayyad mosque in Jarash, see Walmsley (2003: 18). An Umayyad *qaṣr* with extraordinary wall-paintings has come to light 2 km south of Bālis (Syria), see Leisten (2002; 1999-2000).

[9] For the nature of the Arab polity and the crucial role of the Second Civil War in the formation of the Marwānid state, see Robinson (2000). He writes of "a very loose tributary state," "the Arab kinship state," "the nascent Islamic state," etc., and I too have elsewhere referred to "the early Islamic state," but the seminar that we convened on "ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān and the Marwānids" at the Oriental Institute, Oxford, in Hilary Term 2003, has persuaded us that the term must be used with greater precision.

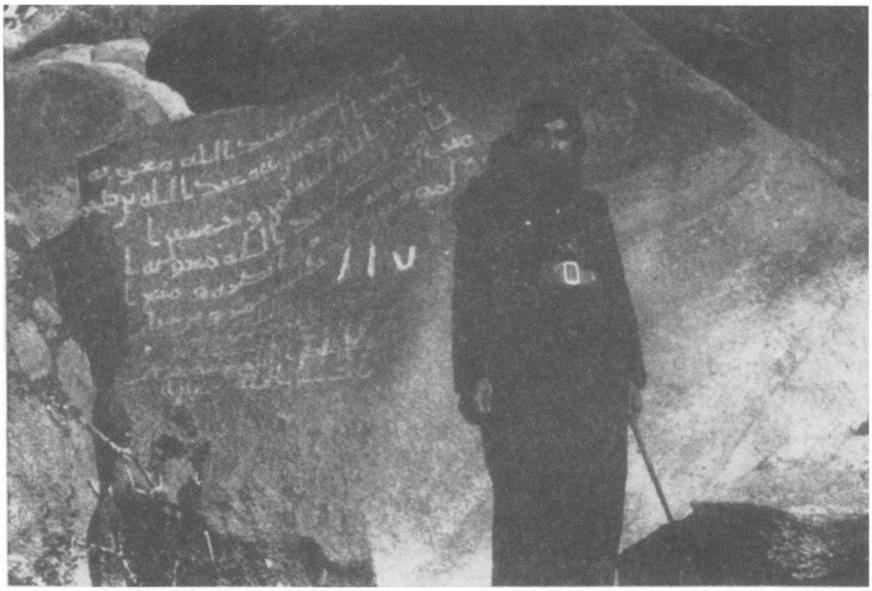
[10] A single protocol bearing the ruler's name in Greek and Arabic—*abdella Mouaouia amiralmoumnin / ʿabd Allāh Muʿāwiya amīr al-muʾminīn*. See Grohmann (1960: 6-13). That Muʿāwiya's name appears only on this protocol, and never in the text of the papyri, indicates how limited was central influence upon the provincial administration of Egypt.

Figure 4: Drachm of Muʿāwiya, Dārābjird, circa 54-55/674 (Shamma Collection 7481, after Album and Goodwin 2002: plate 17.245). Obverse field: typical late Arab-Sasanian bust with name of Muʿāwiya *amīr al-muʾminīn* (in Middle Persian). Obverse margin: *bism Allāh*. Reverse field: typical Arab-Sasanian fire-altar with attendants with mint (abbreviation) and date in Middle Persian, i.e. frozen year 43 (circa 54-55/674). Reverse margin: plain.

inscriptions (Fig. 5).[11] (After Muʿāwiya, the name of the ruler again disappears from these media until ʿAbd al-Malik.)[12] In a recent article, Clive Foss has argued that Muʿāwiya governed a "highly organized and bureaucratic" realm and that, because "a sophisticated system of administration and taxation employs coinage," the Arab-Byzantine bronze types with bilingual inscriptions and mint-marks, and a few rare gold coins, all of which were assigned to ʿAbd

[11] A Greek inscription dated 42/662-3 recording the restoration of the baths at Ḥammet Gader (Palestine) by the governor (*symboulos*) ʿAbd Allāh b. Abī Hāshim "in the days of the servant of God Muʿāwiya, the commander of the believers"—*abdalla Maavia amēra almoumenēn*. See Green and Tsafrir (1982: 94-96). An Arabic inscription dated 58/678 recording the construction of a dam near Ṭaʾif (Arabia) "on behalf of the servant of God Muʿāwiya, the commander of the believers . . . O God, forgive the servant of God Muʿāwiya, the commander of the believers, strengthen him and help him, and let the faithful profit by him." See Miles (1948: 237, 241, plate XVIIIA, also 239, n. 18 for a possible third inscription of Muʿāwiya).

[12] An Arab-Sasanian drachm bears on the reverse margin the legend in Persian "Year one of Yazīd," i.e. Yazīd I b. Muʿāwiya, 61/681. See Mochiri (1982). A silk *ṭirāz*-inscription in the name of *[ʿAbd] Allāh Marwān amīr al-muʾ[min]īn* has been attributed to Marwān I (64/684-65/685) by Day (1952). It is more probably in the name of Marwān II (127/744-132/750) as was originally thought by Grohmann (1967-71, vol. 2: 81).



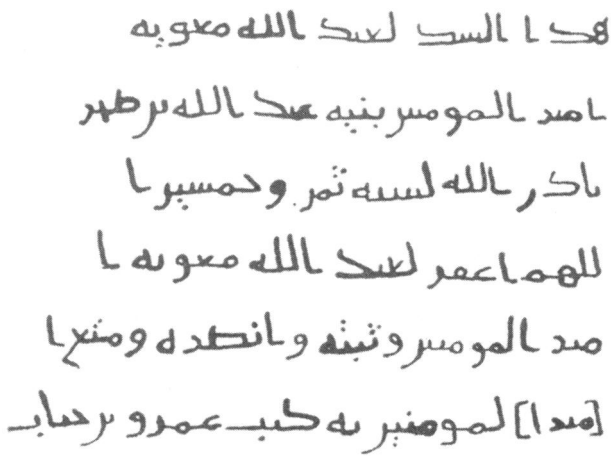


Figure 5: Inscriptions from the dam of Muʿāwiya, east of Ṭāʾif, Saudi Arabia (after Miles 1948: plate XVIIIA and fig. 1). The inscription in the name of Muʿāwiya is uppermost; beneath it is an undated graffito, assigned to the late first or early second century, invoking "the peace of God and His blessing" for three generations of the same family, al-Ḥakam, his son Muḥammad, and his grandson ʿAbd Allāh.

al-Malik by Michael Bates, must in fact have been minted in Syria under Muʿāwiya (Foss 2002: 356-57). Although it is now increasingly likely that the Muslims did mint coins in Syria during the reign of Muʿāwiya, just as they did in Iraq, the case is being made, and will have to be proven, upon purely numismatic grounds.[13] Fortunately for Foss, it does not depend upon demonstrating the sophistication of Muʿāwiya's administrative and fiscal apparatus—because that he fails to do.

Foss assumes that the clear evidence in the papyri from Nessana in the Naqab (Palestine) for the continuity of pre-conquest administrative institutions at the local level in the 670s implies that Muʿāwiya governed through a sophisticated central administration and bureaucracy (Foss 2002: 356-57). This is the view of a Byzantinist, seeing through the eyes of an ʿAbbāsid historian. In fact, the Nessana papyri tell a very different story, in two episodes, one set before, and one after, the accession of ʿAbd al-Malik.

The "abrupt demands"—the phrase is Foss's own—made in the years 674-77 by the Arab governor of Gaza to the villagers of Nessana are not for taxes to be paid in money, but for *rizq* (Greek *rouzikon*), the "food allowance" paid in kind to local Arab troops.[14] The rizq, consisting of equal numbers of units of wheat and oil, was payable in advance, usually at periods of two months. But the amounts varied widely from a maximum of 310 to a minimum of 90 *modii* of wheat and *sextarii* of oil. This, as the editor points out, is clear evidence that these were not regular taxes collected as part of a uniform and centralized fiscal system, but "irregular requisitions demanded as needed" (Kraemer 1958: 178). There is no suggestion that any of these demands originated in a central administration at Damascus, or anywhere except in Gaza. The rizq was delivered not to fiscal officers, but directly to individual representatives of the Arab tribes. These irregular requisitions were not a heavy burden on the villagers. An account of the rizq requisitioned from Nessana in one complete year (indiction IX, possibly 680-1), when converted into money for accounting purposes, amounted to $86^4/_5$ *solidi*, a modest sum compared with the $1444^2/_3$ solidi paid by the village as annual taxes in the mid-sixth century (Kraemer 1958: 199-201, no. 69; cf. 119-25, no. 39).

All this changed under ʿAbd al-Malik. The first evidence of intervention by

[13] See Morrisson (1992), Treadwell (2000), Foss (2002: 360-64), Album and Goodwin (2002: 99-107) and Oddy (2003). In addition to the numismatic evidence, see the famous passage in the *Maronite Chronicle* (quoted below) and the discussion of this passage in Hoyland (1997: 136-8).

[14] See Kraemer (1958: 175-87, 190-95, nos. 60-63, 67-6; 188-90, no. 64, is not from Nessana).

the central administration in the affairs of the Naqab comes in a Greek day-book that records the names of individual Arab soldiers against their duties and/or the payments made to them. For each entry, the name of the authorizer is also noted, including the *amīr al-mu'minīn* ʿAbd al-Malik, and his brother ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, the governor of Egypt.[15] From the same time, comes the first evidence that Nessana was now fully integrated into the administrative structure of the whole military-province (*jund*) of Filasṭīn, in the form of an order for two laborers and two camels to perform unspecified public service on the road between Caesarea and Scythopolis, 200 kilometers distant from the village (Kraemer 1958: 209-11, no. 74). The first evidence for a cadastral survey of Nessana's lands dates from the 680s.[16] And a register of households liable for the poll-tax (*epikefalion*), dated *circa* 687-9, provides the first evidence for a census of the population (Kraemer 1958: 215-221, no. 76). Demands for payment of the poll-tax (Kraemer 1958: 202-203, no. 70), and receipts for payment of both the poll-tax and the land-tax (*dēmosia*), also first occur at this time (Kraemer 1958: 153-55, no. 55 and 172-74, no. 59). The annual poll-tax paid by Nessana may be calculated at 1044 solidi (Kraemer 1958: 219); with the land-tax, this would have amounted to a far heavier burden than the irregular tribute in kind levied in the 670s. So onerous were the new taxes, that four or more villages, including Nessana, planned to send a joint delegation to the governor in Gaza to protest and to seek remission.[17]

The evidence from Nessana matches the far more extensive testimony of the Egyptian papyri, and the varied evidence—including that of Islamic sources—for northern Mesopotamia: a centralized administrative and fiscal apparatus is absent under Muʿāwiya, and is first introduced under ʿAbd al-Malik and his successors.[18] A contrast between the two reigns is also drawn by non-Muslim authors, who howl in protest at the administrative and fiscal reforms instituted by ʿAbd al-Malik.[19] The reign of Muʿāwiya, in comparison, they remembered as a golden age, when the Arabs exacted only the tribute (Syriac *madattā*) and

[15] See Kraemer (1958: 290-9, no. 92). There is nothing to connect the day-book with Nessana and the editor suggests that it may have been "compiled in another fort town in the Naqab and thrown away by the commandant or an adjutant while passing through Nessana." For the date, see below.

[16] Kraemer (1958: 168-71, no. 58): "the land survey of the Saracens" (*gēōmetria tōn Sarakēnōn*).

[17] See Kraemer (1958: 212-14, no. 75). The letter bears no date, but is post-conquest.

[18] For Egypt, see Morimoto (1981) and the relevant sections in Simonsen (1988); for northern Mesopotamia, see Robinson (2000).

[19] See the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, pseudo-Methodius, and pseudo-John the Less, all conveniently in Robinson (2000: 45-8). See the discussion of all these in Hoyland (1997: 263-7, 267-70, 409-14).

allowed the conquered population "to remain in whatever faith they wished," "justice flourished . . . and there was great peace in the regions under his control; he allowed everyone to live as they wanted," harvests were plentiful, and trade prospered (Brock 1987: 61; Hoyland 1997: 194-200, 263 n. 14; Robinson 2000: 47).

And yet, although Muʿāwiya did not govern by means of a sophisticated and centralized administration, he did attempt to found his own monarchy. The following much quoted passage from the *Maronite Chronicle* may have been written by a near contemporary of these events:

> Many Arabs gathered at Jerusalem and made Muʿāwiya king . . . In July of the same year the emirs and many Arabs gathered and gave their allegiance to Muʿāwiya. Then an order went out that he should be proclaimed king in all the villages and cities of his dominion and that they should make acclamations and invocations to him. He also minted gold and silver, but it was not accepted because it had no cross on it. Furthermore, Muʿāwiya did not wear a crown like other kings in the world. He placed his throne in Damascus and refused to go to the seat of Muḥammad. (Palmer, Brock, and Hoyland 1993: 31-32; Hoyland 1997: 136-39).

As we have already seen, it was Muʿāwiya who introduced his name or the title *amīr al-muʾminīn* on coins, documents, and monumental inscriptions—clear evidence of his royal pretensions (see above). He also built or repaired public buildings, including the mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem,[20] a church in Edessa,[21] a bath-house in Palestine, and a dam (or two) near Ṭāʾif (see above). Significantly, the non-Islamic sources suggest that he was a ruler to not just the Arabs, and that he arbitrated in disputes between his non-Muslim subjects (Palmer, Brock, and Hoyland 1993: 30-31; Adomnan 1965: 192-94). But,

[20] Anastasius of Sinai, apparently writing at the time of construction of the Dome of the Rock (*circa* 691) witnessed demons clearing the "Capitol" for the Muslims 'thirty years ago,' i.e. *circa* 661. See Flusin (1992: 25-26). In the 670s, the pilgrim Arculf saw a 'house of prayer' (*orationis domus*) built by the Saracens on the site of the Temple, see Adomnan (1965: 186). *The Jewish Apocalypse on the Umayyads* prophesizes that Muʿāwiya will "restore the walls of the Temple," see Levi (1994). The tenth-century Muslim author, Abū Naṣr al-Muṭahhar b. al-Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī, also reports that Muʿāwiya restored the Temple, and adds that it was there that the Muslims swore the oath of allegiance to him, see al-Maqdisī (1899-1919, vol. 4: 87; trans. 82). There was apparently a mosque (Georgian *midzgitha* from Arabic *masjid*) on the Temple Mount before the death of the Patriarch Sophronius (*circa* 639), see Flusin (1992: 19-22). (See the discussion of these sources in Hoyland [1997: 61-5, 101, 219-23, 316-7].) For possible archaeological evidence, see note 7 above. There is no published archaeological evidence for or against the suggestion that Muʿāwiya may have begun the palatial complex to the south of the Temple Mount, see Hoyland (1997: 222-3).

[21] See the sources cited in Hoyland (1997: 646 n. 96) and in Robinson (2000: 41 and n. 47).

although the evidence for his rule is distributed from Egypt to Iraq and from the Ḥijāz to northern Syria, it was in Jerusalem and Damascus that he based his kingdom, and he is reported to have "favoured the people of the West over those of the East, since the former had submitted to him".[22] The surviving evidence is admittedly sparse and patchy, but it suggests that Muʿāwiya attempted to found his monarchy in Syria upon the material trappings of kingship rather than upon the business of government. He sought to look like a king, rather than to build solid administrative foundations for his kingdom. Again, all this was to change under ʿAbd al-Malik.

The Greek day-book, discussed above, which shows the *amīr al-muʾminīn* ʿAbd al-Malik assigning duties and authorizing the pay of Arab soldiers stationed in the Naqab, dates from the year of his accession, 66/685, or immediately thereafter.[23] The other Nessana papyri that attest to the increasing intervention of the central administration in the affairs of Nessana all belong to the early years of his reign. This dating is highly significant for it establishes, on archaeological evidence, that ʿAbd al-Malik's administrative reforms in Syria and Egypt were initiated immediately upon his accession.

That ʿAbd al-Malik's fiscal reforms date from as early as 66/685, offers a new perspective upon the debate over the date of the Dome of the Rock. It had always been assumed that the dating clause at the end of the mosaic inscription on the outer façade of the octagonal arcade recorded the completion of the building:

> There built this dome the servant of God ʿAb[d al-Malik, commander] of the believers in the year seventy-two, may God accept it from him and be pleased with him. Amen. Lord of the Worlds, to God belongs praise.

Until, that is, Sheila Blair (1992) argued forcibly that the date referred to the building's inception, and should be regarded as the *terminus a quo* for its construction. The testimony of the Nessana papyri significantly weakens her initial objection that the Dome of the Rock could not have been built in a period "not conducive to financing major construction" (Blair 1992: 62).[24] Her principal

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[22] See the sources cited in Hoyland (1997: 644 and n. 76).

[23] See above. The account was written after indiction XII. During the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, indiction XIII corresponds to either 684-5 or 699-700. If the *Assoun* in line 15 is to be identified with Ḥassān b. Mālik b. Baḥdal—see Kraemer (1958:298 n. 14[c] and n. 23)—who governed Filasṭīn until 64/683-684, then the year in which it was written must be 685.

[24] That ʿAbd al-Malik was not short of ready cash is also suggested by the tribute he is said to have agreed to pay Constantine IV in 685, see Hoyland (1997: 647 n. 102). (But such a hæmorrhage of gold to Byzantium might rather strengthen Blair's point.)

arguments—epigraphic, numismatic, and artisanal—are entirely circumstantial and may, or may not, be right. It is the historical case that is decisive.

A persistent report has it that ʿAbd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock as part of his struggle with ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. The latter had taken control of Mecca and, during the *ḥajj*, "used to catalogue the vices of the Marwānid family, and to summon [the people] to pay homage to him." ʿAbd al-Malik therefore forbade the Arabs of Syria from performing the pilgrimage, and built the Dome of the Rock "in order to divert their attention from the ḥajj [to Mecca]." Before beginning construction, ʿAbd al-Malik consulted widely in order to draw the sting of the inevitable criticism from Ibn al-Zubayr. Nonetheless, the rebel added the Dome of the Rock to his list of charges against ʿAbd al-Malik, claiming that he had "transferred the *ṭawāf* (ritual circumambulation) from the House of God [in Mecca] to the *qibla* of the Children of Israel." The fullest and most circumstantial account, from which I have quoted here, is based upon the testimony of, amongst others, Muḥammad b. al-Sāʿib, whose father was a supporter of Ibn al-Zubayr and died fighting alongside his brother, Muṣʾab b. al-Zubayr, against ʿAbd al-Malik.[25]

In 1950, Shlomo Dov Goitein argued that this report should be rejected as anti-Umayyad Shīʿite propaganda, and most recent historians of the Dome of the Rock have accepted his view (Goitein 1950; 1966; Rabbat 1989; 1993). Undoubtedly, the report is anti-Umayyad propaganda. Indeed, the harshest criticism of ʿAbd al-Malik is put into the mouth of Ibn al-Zubayr. There is good reason, therefore, to distrust the charge that ʿAbd al-Malik was seeking to supplant Mecca with Jerusalem. However, since Amikam Elad published the fullest and most circumstantial version of the report yet known, together with a new study of the historiographical and historical circumstances, it has become increasingly difficult to dismiss the whole episode as fiction. In particular, it is becoming increasingly clear that the context in which the foundation of Dome of the Rock must be seen is the ideological contest between ʿAbd al-Malik and his opponents during the Civil War.[26] Moreover, if Blair were right, then the propagandists would be extraordinarily incompetent. For, by moving the date of the inception of the Dome of the Rock back to 69/688-9, to the height of the Civil War, when Mecca was securely in the hands of Ibn al-Zubayr, the

[25] See Elad (1992). The quotations are from 53 (trans. 34) and 54 (trans. 35)—with full references to the primary sources and secondary literature.

[26] Before the fall of the Umayyads it was already claimed that ʿAbd al-Malik had "destroyed the Sacred House of God and revived the way of the foolish [Jews?], then he gave the Rock a form like that of the Place [of Ibrāhīm], to it the rough Arabs of Syria go on pilgrimage!" Elad (1992: 49-51).

propagandists would have provided ʿAbd al-Malik with the perfect excuse for his actions—that Ibn al-Zubayr prevented pilgrimage to Mecca—an excuse that, by all accounts, he used.[27] Whereas, had the propagandists left the date of construction unchanged, so that ʿAbd al-Malik began to build what they claimed to be a counter-Kaʿba only after his victory over the rebels in Iraq and a few months before he regained control of Mecca and defeated and killed Ibn al-Zubayr, then there would have been no mitigation for his diverting the ḥajj to Jerusalem.

For the moment, therefore, I shall carry on believing that the Dome of the Rock was completed in 72/691-2. If so, ʿAbd al-Malik began the formation of his state with administrative and fiscal reforms, and, some three years later, proceeded to build the Dome of the Rock. This was only part of a far more ambitious project that in time included: the development of the entire Ḥaram al-Sharīf, including the Aqṣā Mosque, a number of minor structures, its walls, and its gates; the foundation of the palatial complex to the south; and the construction of a network of roads leading to Jerusalem. Whether or not ʿAbd al-Malik intended Jerusalem to replace Mecca as the destination of the ḥajj, the redevelopment of the city on such an ambitious scale clearly issued a challenge to the lord of Mecca, his opponent Ibn al-Zubayr. What makes this interpretation so attractive is that the rebels had already begun to use material culture as a weapon for ideological conflict.

In 66/685-6, the year after ʿAbd al-Malik's accession (Ramaḍān 65/April-May 685), the Zubayrid governor of Bīshāpūr, ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbd Allāh [b. ʿĀmir], issued a silver drachm (Fig. 6) that bore the so-called "short" *shahāda—bism Allāh Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* ("In the name of God, Muḥammad is the messenger of God"). The issue was repeated in 67/686-7 (Walker 1941, vol. 1: 96-97; Gaube 1973: 62; Album and Goodwin 2002: 25, plate 11.151-55). In 69/688-9, another rebel, Qaṭarī b. al-Fujāʾa, had control of Bīshāpūr, and there struck a drachm bearing the Khārijite slogan *bism Allāh lā ḥukma illā li-llāh* ("In the name of God, judgment belongs to God alone"), and his own name and titles in Middle Persian—"the Servant of God, Katari, Commander of the Believers" (Walker 1941, vol. 1: 112-13; Album and Goodwin 2002: 30, plates 3.32-34, 13.193-95, 18.265-66, 22.320). In 72/691-2, the Zubayrid governor of Sīstān, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbd Allāh, struck a unique drachm with a version of the "long" shahāda in Middle Persian (Fig. 7) (see Mochiri 1981; Sears 1989; Ilisch 1992; Album and Goodwin 2002: 27). No Umayyad coin had pre-

[27] See also the theological justifications that al-Yaʿqūbī puts into ʿAbd al-Malik's mouth, and the discussion of them by Elad (1992: 43-4).

Figure 6: Drachm of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbd Allāh, Zubayrid governor of Bīshāpūr, 66/685-6 (Shamma Collection 7496, after Album and Goodwin 2002: plate 11.152). Obverse field: typical late Arab-Sasanian bust with name of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbd Allāh (in Middle Persian). Obverse margin:—/ *bism Allāh* / *Muḥammad rasūl* / *Allāh*. Reverse field: typical Arab-Sasanian fire-altar with attendants with mint (abbreviation) and date in Middle Persian, i.e. 66/685-6. Reverse margin: pellet at 7h30.

viously borne any religious declaration except the *basmala*, but the first gold and silver coins struck in Syria by ʿAbd al-Malik, and the first silver issues by his governors in Iraq, all carried one version or other of the shahāda (see Treadwell 1999: 243-45 and table 3; Album and Goodwin 2002: 27-28). It seems highly probable, therefore, that the Marwānids learnt from their opponents to use the coinage in this way (Hoyland 1997: 550-53, 694-95 following Crone and Hinds 1986: 25-26).

We shall come back shortly to the Marwānid coinage, but first it is necessary to return briefly to the Dome of the Rock. The inscriptions on the outer and inner façades of the octagonal arcade, dated as we have seen to 72/691-2, contain the earliest securely datable occurrence of passages which also appear in the Qur'ān. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the implications of these inscriptions for the debate over the date at which the text of the Qur'ān began to crystallize. Suffice it to say that both those who favor a date before 72/691-2, and those who argue that the text was only fixed later, have cited the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock in their support (Whelan 1998).

Figure 7: Drachm of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn ʿAbd Allāh, the Zubayrid governor of Sīstān, Sijistān, 72/691-2 (after Mochiri 1981: plate I). Obverse field: typical late Arab-Sasanian bust with Middle Persian inscriptions, (left) "May his glory increase," (right) "ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Āmir." Obverse margin: *–? / bism Allāh / al-ʿazīz*, "? / In the name of God / the glorious." Reverse field: Middle Persian inscription on five lines, "Seventy-two / One God, except He / no other god exists / Muḥammad [is] the messenger of God" (cf. Arabic "There is no god but God alone, Muḥammad is the messenger of God"). Reverse margin: plain.

Attention has tended to focus upon the inscription on the inner façade of the octagon, which is principally concerned with defining the position of Jesus within the Islamic scheme. In the context of Marwānid state formation, it is the inscription on the outer façade that is of greater interest. Here, it is the figure

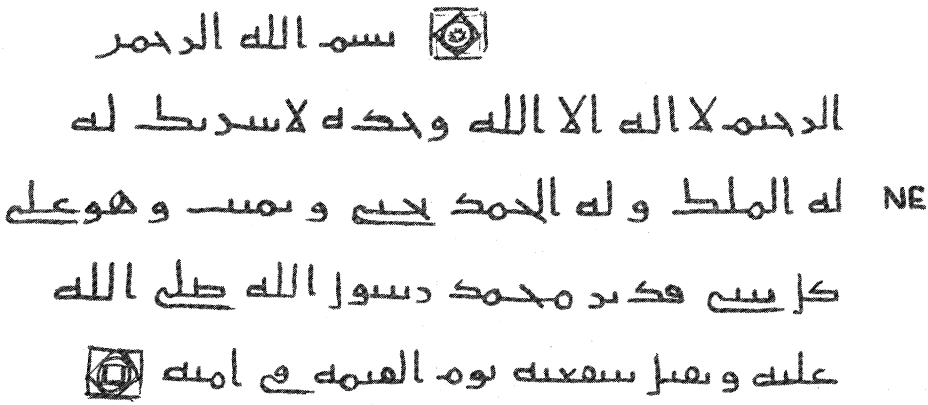

Figure 8: Transcription of part of the mosaic inscription from the outer octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock, north-east side (after Kessler 1970: 9). For photographs of the same inscription, see Nuseibeh and Grabar (1996: 98-99; mislabelled 'Southeast').

of Muḥammad that dominates. The inscription consists of four unitarian and/or anti-trinitarian verses, punctuated by five invocations to Muḥammad. The invocation on the north-east side particularly attracts attention (Fig. 8): "Muḥammad is the messenger of God. May God bless him and accept his intercession on the day of the resurrection on behalf of his [His?] community" (*Muḥammad rasūl Allāh ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-taqabbala shaf[ā]ʿatahu yawm al-qiy[ā]ma fī ummatihi*). It calls upon God to accept the intercession of Muḥammad for the Muslims on the Day of Judgment. The idea is not Qurʾānic, for nowhere in the Qurʾān does Muḥammad appears as an intercessor.[28] What is more, the idea of Muḥammad as intercessor does not fit comfortably with the Umayyad conception of the caliphate, according to which the most direct path to salvation led through the caliph (Crone and Hinds 1986: 27-42). After this appearance in the Dome of the Rock, Muḥammad does not again appear in the role of intercessor for some 150 years. This particular venture was an experiment that failed. Nor was it the only one.

For five to seven years after 72/691-2, ʿAbd al-Malik in Damascus and his governors in Iraq introduced an extraordinary series of images on their coinage, including the "Standing Caliph" (Fig. 9), the "Caliph Orans" (Fig. 10), and the

[28] See Hamza (2002: 124-49) for a detailed discussion of the early history of the Prophet as intercessor.

Figure 9: "Standing Caliph" dinar with transformed cross-on-steps reverse, presumably struck at Damascus, and produced each year from 74/693-4 to 77/696-7 (Ashmolean purchase, Peus. 24.3.71, lot. 1029, after Album and Goodwin 2002: plate 45.705). Obverse: normal standing caliph figure, surrounded by *bism Allāh lā ilāha illā Allāh waḥdahu Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* ("In the name of God, there is no god but God alone, Muḥammad is the messenger of God"). Reverse: transformed cross-on-steps, surrounded by *bism Allāh ḍuriba hādhā l-dīnār sanat sabʿ wa-sabʿīn* ("In the name of God, this dinar was struck in the year seventy-seven").

Figure 10: So-called "Caliph Orans" drachm, Baṣra 75AH/694-5CE (Bibliothèque Nationale 1969.75, after Treadwell 1999: 266, B1). Obverse field: typical late Arab-Sasanian bust with the name of Bishr ibn Marwān (in Middle Persian). Obverse margin: legend in quarters 1-3: *AN*? (in Middle Persian) / *bism Allāh Muḥammad* / *rasūl Allāh*. Reverse field: within three beaded circles, three standing figures. The large central figure, flanked by two attendants, has traditionally been identified as the "Caliph orans," but more probably represents the Marwānid *khaṭīb*, either the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik or his brother Bishr, delivering the Friday *khuṭba* with both hands raised. Mint-name and date (in Middle Persian): Baṣra, seventy-five.

"Miḥrāb and ʿAnāza" (Fig. 11). Such a variety of images over such a short period demonstrates that this was a phase of intense experimentation, which came to an abrupt end when all representational imagery was dropped from the coinage, and the purely epigraphic dinar was introduced in 77/696-7 (Fig. 12), followed by the dirham in 79/698-9. The meaning of these images has been much discussed and is beyond the scope of this essay (see Jamil 1999; Treadwell 1999; Treadwell forthcoming). What matters here is the experiment, its failure and abandonment, and then the prodigious success of the epigraphic coinage which was to be the model for Islamic coinage for the next half millennium.

Figure 11: The so-called "Miḥrāb and ʿAnaza" drachm, no mint or date, but probably struck in Damascus in the mid-70s AH (sold Sotheby's 12th July 1993, no. 167, after Treadwell 1999: 269). Obverse field: within two dotted circles, right facing bust flanked by standard Middle Persian inscriptions "May his glory increase / *Khusraw*." The bust is an extensively modified version of the Sasanian prototype; note, in particular, the cap, the visible arms, and the sheathed sword held in his right hand. Obverse margin: *bism Allāh lā ilāha illā Allāh waḥdahu Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* ("In the name of God, there is no god but God alone, Muḥammad is the messenger of God"). Reverse field: within three dotted circles, two columns supporting a ribbed arch (the "*miḥrāb*"), framing a spear (the "*ʿanaza*"), and flanked by inscriptions: (left) *amīr al-muʾminīn*, "the Commander of the Believers," (right) *khalīfat Allāh*, "the Caliph of God," (flanking spear) *naṣara Allāh*, "May God aid [him]" or *naṣr Allāh* "the victory of God." Treadwell (forthcoming) argues convincingly that the arch on columns of the reverse should be seen as a *sacrum*, not as a *miḥrāb*. Reverse margin: Middle Persian inscription, perhaps *AF[D]*, "praise."

Figure 12: Epigraphic dinar, anonymous (ʿAbd al-Malik), Damascus, 77/696-7. Obverse field: *lā ilāha illā Allāh waḥdahu lā sharīka lahu*, "There is no god but God alone, He has no associate." Obverse margin: *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh alladhī arsala rasūlahu bi-l-hudā wa-dīn al-ḥaqq li-yuẓhirahu ʿalā al-dīn kullihi*, "Muḥammad is the messenger of God whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth that He might make it prevail over all religion" (Qurʾān 9.33). Reverse field: *Allāh aḥad Allāh al-ṣamad lam yalid wa-lam yūlad wa-lam yakun lahu kufuwan aḥad*, "God is one, God the eternal, He did not beget and was not begotten" (Qurʾān 112). Reverse margin: *bism Allāh ḍuriba hādhā l-dīnār sanat sabʿ wa-sabʿīn*, "In the name of God this dinar was struck in the year seventy-seven."

The evidence of the Dome of the Rock and of the coinage confirms what we might expect—that the process of articulating public declarations of the religious basis of the Marwānid state was not without difficulties. Unlike the Byzantine emperor, who could draw upon more than half a millennium's experience of bending material culture to the service of the state, ʿAbd al-Malik was a complete beginner. The ideological basis was already there, and al-Farazdaq and other poets show themselves to be masters at its manipulation, but poetry was more equivocal than lapidary and numismatic inscriptions; it had a more limited audience, and did not circulate as widely as did the coinage amongst the population at large.

During the Civil War, two Zubayrid governors had already attempted to use the medium of coinage to claim that Muḥammad fought on their side. After their victory, the Marwānids used all available state media to broadcast their counter-claim to the Prophet. But, in giving such new prominence to Muḥammad, the Marwānids forged new weapons for their opponents—not only for those who claimed descent from Muḥammad but, ultimately, also for those who sought to interpose the figure of the Prophet between the caliph and God (Crone and Hinds 1986: 33). We can only speculate why ʿAbd al-Malik allowed Muḥammad

to appear in the role of intercessor in the Dome of the Rock, but in doing so he weakened his own claim to be the best path to salvation. We can only guess what forces caused ʿAbd al-Malik to drop his own image and titles from the coinage in favor of religious inscriptions that proclaimed the centrality of Muḥammad and omitted all mention of the caliph, but—purely numismatic considerations aside—it is difficult not to see this as an ideological compromise that was forced upon him. Nor do we know what pressures led his son, Sulaymān—of all names!—to turn his back on Jerusalem and build his new capital at Ramla, but his abandonment of the city in which his father and brother had invested such energy and wealth was a clear victory for Mecca in her ongoing struggle with Jerusalem for dominance over the new sacred geography of Islam.

This essay has argued that the shortage of archaeological evidence for the religion of Islam during the first seventy years of the hijra is not surprising. It is only with the formation of the state that produced the media that preserve the evidence for the religion that archaeology begins to be able to contribute to what is essentially a historical, and above all historiographical, debate. This is unlikely to change. With every year that passes without new material evidence being found for the emergence of Islam before 70/690, despite the intensification of archaeological fieldwork, the more likely it becomes that such evidence simply does not exist. This absence of evidence is frustrating, but it cannot be used to argue that a cult bearing the essential characteristics of Islam had not already emerged—on that, the testimony of non-Muslim authors is clear (Hoyland 1997: 548-49). It is particularly frustrating that there has been no archaeological investigation of the Arabian environment traditionally associated with the life of the Prophet and the early development of Islam. Nor will there be. The Mosque of the Ḥaram at Mecca and the Mosque of the Prophet at Medina have been razed to the ground and completely rebuilt in such a manner as to deny any possibility of archaeological excavation, even were it to be permitted. Outside the precincts of the two Holy Mosques, archaeological investigation of sites in Saudi Arabia that might yield evidence for the nature of religion in the sixth and seventh centuries is actively discouraged. Historians cannot expect any *deus ex cavea.*

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