



Original paper



Constantin A. Panchenko

Destroying the Consensus: Interpretations of the Birth of Islamic Civilization in Modern Western Historiography

(prepared for publication by Elena Yu. Kovalskaya, priest Alexander S. Treiger)

Abstract

The last, unfinished article by Professor Constantin Alexandrovich Panchenko provides an overview of modern research on the origins of Islam from the 1970s to the present day, beginning with the provocative book *Hagarism* by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook and ending with the latest research by Stephen Shoemaker. The article is based on the professor's paper presented at the "Lomonosov Conference" in Moscow on April 2, 2024. The unfinished sections have been finalized by the editors based on the professor's notes as well as the new outline of the article prepared by him just prior to his death. In this outline, published in the appendix to the article, Constantin Panchenko accords a special place to Stephen Shoemaker's monograph *The Death of a Prophet*. Shoemaker accepts Fred Donner's theory, according to which early Islam was a supra-confessional Abrahamic movement of "believers," which included not only the followers of Muḥammad but also numerous Jews and Christians. This movement had a pronounced eschatological orientation, which explains its focus on the conquest of Jerusalem. Only during the reign of the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) did the Muslims become a separate religious community, and the impetus was given to the formation of an Arabian Islam, isolated from other Abrahamic reli-

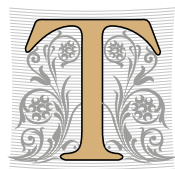
gions, with a center in Hijāz, rather than Palestine. It is in the works of the authors of the revisionist school and especially in Stephen Shoemaker's monograph *The Death of the Prophet* that Professor Panchenko found a scholarly paradigm based on which he hoped to forge a new consensus on the origins of Islam within the Russian academic community.

Keywords:

Origins of Islam, Modern Western Historiography, Qur'ānic Studies, Eschatology, Jerusalem

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The present article by Professor C.A. Panchenko is published here for the first time. It was the last project on which he worked during the final days of his life, though he did not live to complete it. The article is based on a paper with the same title, which Professor Panchenko presented on April 2, 2024, at the Institute of Asian and African Studies (Moscow State University) during the roundtable discussion “*The 7th Century as an ‘Axial Age’ of the Middle East: The Concept of the Birth of Islamic Civilization in Patricia Crone and Michael Cook’s “Hagarism” – Pros and Cons*” (“Lomonosov Readings”, subsection “*The Christian Orient*”). Professor Panchenko chaired both the subsection and the roundtable. In his opening remarks to the participants, he explained the reasons that had led him to propose for public discussion a topic seemingly unrelated to the Christian Orient:

“Today, we are focusing on the genesis of Muslim civilization and its interaction with surrounding peoples and cultures during the decisive decades of the new religion’s emergence. This was a liminal period when, it seems, the very course of history might have taken a different turn, if contingent events — such as the outcome of the Battle of Şiffin, which ‘Alī had nearly won, — had played out differently. Some of the colleagues objected that this topic did not fall within the purview of the Christian Orient. However, I believe that scholars of Middle Eastern Christianity must not confine themselves to narrow cultural frameworks. We must look to neighboring civilizations, especially considering that Islam determined the subsequent historical trajectory of the Christian Orient — and that Christians and other communities of the Middle East played a significant, perhaps even decisive, role in the formation of Arab-Muslim civilization. Indeed, the book around which our discussion is centered [Crone and Cook’s *Hagarism* — eds.]¹ is devoted largely to the interaction between the Hagarenes and the Syrians — an intercultural dialogue from which the civilization of classical Islam emerged. Having said that, the most radical and provocative part of the monograph is certainly the remaining quarter — specifically, the first 35 pages — which address the genesis of Islam and its first three generations head on...”².

Another reason on account of which Professor Panchenko proposed this topic for collective discussion was the evident neglect of modern Western scholarship on early Islam in contemporary Russian academia. In his words, the purpose of the roundtable was “to bring into scholarly discourse those uncomfortable questions posed by the “shakers of the foundations” Patricia Crone and Michael Cook”³. Here is what he said:

“We are gathered here to discuss a book published in 1977. At one point, I began to wonder whether we were making a mistake by focusing on Crone and Cook rather than on Fred Donner or Stephen Shoe-

¹ Crone P., Cook M. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

² Audio recording of the roundtable “The 7th Century — the “Axial Time”...” April 2, 2024 // Archive of C.A. Panchenko.

³ Roundtable at the IAAS MSU on New Interpretations of the Birth of Islamic Civilization in Western Scholarship // Telegram channel Oriens Christianus, April 4, 2024.

maker. *Hagarism* is yesterday's news in European scholarship, though for us it is, at best, today's. The finest contribution currently available in Russian Islamic studies on early Islam remains Oleg Bolshakov's *History of the Caliphate*⁴. As you know, it is written with full confidence in the Arabic tradition and adheres closely to the views of medieval Muslim historiography. Bolshakov does acknowledge that the chronicles on which he relied are biased and possibly obscure or omit certain matters. However, his critical approach to sources is in no way comparable to the revisionist stance adopted by the aforementioned Western scholars. ... Over the past three decades, Russian scholarship has largely ignored these debates and continues to view early Islam through the eyes of [Jalāl al-Dīn] al-Suyūfī or Montgomery Watt. I see two explanations for this. One is fear — what earlier generations might have called “fear of the Hagarenes”. ... But science is sacred, and no ideology should influence academic inquiry. The last thing a scholar should worry about is offending someone. ... The second explanation for the rejection of revisionist approaches is the instinctive aversion to radical attempts at rewriting history. I confess that I too have sometimes had such a reaction when reading texts by authors who proclaim their predecessors to have been blind, and see themselves as discoverers of the “true” or “hidden” history. Such behavior is, by definition, characteristic of charlatans and amateurs. A true scholar must be free of exaltation and the naïve delight of a discoverer — he is already saturated with sources and more psychologically balanced. And yet, I think no one could accuse Crone and Cook of amateurism. Patricia Crone was 32 years old when *Hagarism* was published — an age well suited to revolutionary endeavors in scholarship. When I first read *Hagarism*, my response was not rejection but rather exhilaration at the authors' intellectual audacity and their capacity to read between the lines of well-known sources what others had failed to see. I wanted to share my reading experience with colleagues—and it is that wish that has ultimately led to our roundtable today”⁵.

⁴ *Большаков О.Г. История Халифата. М.: Восточная литература, 1998–2010. 4 т.*

⁵ Eight Russian scholars — Arabists and Byzantinists — spoke at the Roundtable. One participant expressed the view that Crone and Cook's book de-

Professor Panchenko's presentation was essentially a concise historiographical review of Western literature on the subject. He did not address the work of Stephen Shoemaker, as the latter's major contributions were covered by Fr. Alexander Treiger⁶. However, in preparing the text for publication, Professor Panchenko decided to supplement it with an analysis of Shoemaker's *The Death of a Prophet* (2012)⁷, Guy G. Stroumsa's essay "Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins" (2015)⁸, and a fuller treatment of Fred Donner's publications. All he managed to do was to draft notes on these works and revise the article's structure accordingly⁹. On the eve of his passing, he remarked that he had finally finished reading Shoemaker and now knew exactly what the final version of the article should be.

In this publication, in addition to the author's late-stage revisions, we have included editorial summaries of the aforementioned works by Donner, Stroumsa, and Shoemaker, based on Professor Panchenko's notes. Editorial contributions are rendered in *italics*; minor insertions appear in [square brackets].

served translation into Russian, provided it is accompanied by scholarly commentary, including polemical in nature. Professor Panchenko supported the idea, noting that translating the first 35 pages — those dealing with the genesis of Islam — would suffice. In his summary, he emphasized: "... Most speakers were critical of the concepts of P. Crone and M. Cook, whose book was evidently an intellectual provocation that the academic community had to respond to. That response took place at yesterday's roundtable, which featured a lively and engaging discussion that, one would hope, has taken Russian Islamic studies a step further" (Round table at the IAAS of Moscow State University on new interpretations of the birth of Islamic civilization in Western scholarship // Telegram channel Oriens Christianus, April 4, 2024).

⁶ *Трейгер А. Палестиноцентричность раннего ислама: Гипотеза П. Кроне и М. Кука и ее развитие в исследованиях С. Шумейкера // Ломоносовские чтения. Москва, 2 апреля 2024 г. Доклад.*

⁷ *Shoemaker S.J. The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.*

⁸ *Stroumsa G.G. Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins // The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Ch. 8. P. 139–158.*

⁹ See Appendix.



Constantin Panchenko's presentation at the roundtable discussion "The 7th Century as an 'Axial Age' of the Middle East: The Concept of the Birth of Islamic Civilization in Patricia Crone and Michael Cook's "Hagarism" – Pros and Cons", Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University, April 2, 2024
From the archive of C.A. Panchenko

The 1970s revolution in Islamic studies

From their very inception, European Islamic studies have oscillated between trust and skepticism toward medieval Muslim historiography. A significant number of scholars accepted these texts as reliable sources on the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs – despite the fact that the earliest surviving sources date only to the second half of the 8th and the 9th centuries. By the standards of historical inquiry, such material cannot serve as primary evidence for events of the 7th century. When Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī wrote about the Prophet's life, they were not describing what had actually happened, but rather what *ought* to have happened, based on the religious and political values of the 'Abbāsīd-era 'ulamā'. Certainly, 'Abbāsīd chroniclers drew upon earlier, now-lost works – traces of which can indeed be identified in extant Islamic historiography. But, to the best of our knowledge, the earliest of these lost, hypothesized proto-histories date to around the year 700. They could hardly have appeared earlier, due to the technical limitations of the early Arabic script, which had not yet been capable of conveying

complex meanings or expressing extended narratives. In other words, between the Hijra and the emergence of the first Muslim historians lies a gap of no less than 80 years — an intellectual space filled with competing versions of oral tradition.

Many of the revisionist ideas now gaining traction were first proposed in the 18th or 19th centuries. The hyper-critical approach to Islamic sources was already exemplified in the late 19th century by Ignác Goldziher (1850–1921), who demonstrated that the corpus of *ḥadīth* had been a product of later myth-making by various religious and political factions within the caliphate¹⁰. However, researchers at that time did not attempt to revise the broader historical narrative of the 7th century. It was only in the 1970s that a true breakthrough occurred, with the emergence of a number of alternative theories challenging the sanctified account of Islam’s origins¹¹.

The present article does not aim to provide an exhaustive review of the polemics surrounding these theories in contemporary Western Islamic studies — a task beyond the scope of a journal publication. Instead, it focuses on a few key figures and works.

Among the first monographs to launch the so-called “revisionist” trend in Islamic studies was *Über den Ur-Qur’ān* (1974)¹² by the German theologian and Semitist Günter Lüling (1928–2014). Lüling was the first to propose that the original Qur’ān was a composite text comprising several layers, including Christian hymns used liturgically

¹⁰ *Goldziher I. Muslim Studies* / Trans. C.R. Barber, S.M. Stern. Ed. S.M. Stern. London: Allen and Unwin, 1967–1971. 2 vols.

¹¹ *Donner F.M. The Qur’ān in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata* // *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context* / Ed. G.S. Reynolds. London: Routledge, 2008. P. 29–30.

¹² *Lüling G. Über den Ur-Qur’ān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qur’ān*. Erlangen: H. Lüling, 1974; Eng. trans.: *Lüling G. A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: The Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal Hidden in the Koran under Earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003. See also: *Donner F.M. In Memoriam: Günter Lüling (1928–2014)* // *al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā*. 2017. Vol. 25. P. 229–234; *Gilliot C. Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur’ān: Is the Qur’ān Partly the Fruit of a Progressive and Collective Work?* // *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context* / Ed. G.S. Reynolds. London: Routledge, 2008. P. 88–108, esp. P. 96–97.

by a Judeo-Christian community in Mecca. He sought to identify and reconstruct these hymns — obscured by later Islamic reinterpretation — by drawing on scholarly methods developed for reconstructing early Christianity and Judaism. According to Lüling, the Qur’ānic text comprises four layers: the oldest stratum; Christian pre-Islamic (but later re-interpreted by Muslims) strophic hymns (which he believed made up nearly a third of the text); original Islamic material attributed to Muḥammad; and later editorial additions.

Another landmark in this revisionist trajectory was John Wansbrough’s *Quranic Studies* (1977)¹³, in which he argued that the Qur’ānic text had undergone a crystallization process lasting two centuries, and was finalized not in Arabia but in Iraq. Although Wansbrough’s provocative conclusion was rejected by almost all scholars, his work contained several important insights, the chief among them being the necessity of applying the critical methodologies of biblical studies to Qur’ānic scholarship¹⁴.

Yet the most influential contribution to this revisionist wave was undoubtedly *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977), co-authored by Patricia Crone (1945–2015) and Michael Cook (b. 1940)¹⁵. It is this work that warrants the most detailed examination.

Key theses of Hagarism by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook

The authors set aside the traditional Muslim historiographical narrative, deeming it both late and unreliable. Instead, they turn to authentic sources from the 7th and 8th centuries — predominantly non-Arabic due to the scarcity of early Arabic materials — including Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, and Armenian texts. The historical picture they reconstruct diverges significantly from the “canonical” version of the Arab-Muslim historiography.

¹³ Wansbrough J. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

¹⁴ Adams C.J. *Reflections on the Work of John Wansbrough // Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*. 1997. Vol. 9. P. 78–81.

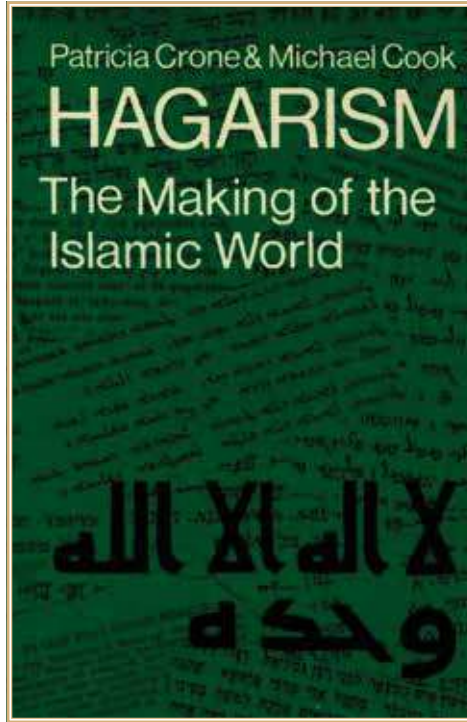
¹⁵ Crone P., Cook M. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Crone and Cook begin by exploring the Jewish influence on the origins of Islam — a theme long present in scholarly discourse, dating back to the 7th-century Armenian chronicler Sebeos¹⁶, and later developed by the 19th-century Islamicist Abraham Geiger (1810–1874)¹⁷. Second Temple Judaism, much like Christianity or Manichaeism, had initially been a proselytizing religion with genuine potential to evolve into a global religion and civilization. However, the failure of Jewish revolts against Rome curtailed these ambitions. Rabbinic Judaism subsequently became insular, focusing on survival within the Roman imperial order. With the Christianization of the Empire, tensions between the two monotheistic faiths intensified, culminating by the early 7th century in open antagonism — reflected, for instance, in Byzantine anti-Jewish polemics, the stance of Jews and Samaritans during the Persian conquests of the Near East, and a surge in apocalyptic literature within Jewish circles. Drawing upon Christian sources and Jewish apocalyptic writings that initially viewed the Arab conquests in a positive light, Crone and Cook argue that a group of Jewish scribes in Arabia instilled in Muḥammad the idea that he was the successor to the prophetic mission of Moses, tasked with restoring the faith of Abraham. This marked the emergence of a primitive Arab monotheism, which the authors refer to as “Hagarism”¹⁸. Added to this was the

¹⁶ Себеос. История императора Иракла: Сочинение епископа Себеоса, писателя VII века. СПб, 1862. Ч. 30. С. 115–117; see also: *Hoyland R. Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam // Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations / Ed. R.L. Nettle. Luxembourg, 1995. P. 89–102; Shoemaker S.J. A Prophet Has Appeared. The Rise of Islam through Christian and Jewish Eyes: A Sourcebook. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. P. 62–72.* According to this source, Arabs and Jews were united by their belief in a common Abrahamic origin, their rightful claim to the land promised to Abraham’s heirs, and their duty to liberate Palestine from the Christians (Romans) who had seized it unlawfully. Eds.

¹⁷ Geiger A. Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen: Eine von der Königl. Preussischen Rheinuniversität gekrönte Preisschrift. Bonn: F. Baaden, 1833; Eng. trans.: *Geiger A. Judaism and Islam / Trans. F.M. Young. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970.* Eds.

¹⁸ The earliest Christian and Jewish sources on the rise of Islam have been translated and analyzed by Shoemaker in the anthology *A Prophet Has Appeared*. These are essentially the same texts referenced by Crone and Cook in *Hagarism*, as well as by Shoemaker himself in earlier works: *Doctrina Iacobi*,



Patricia Crone and Michael Cook: *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (1977)

messianic mission of the new prophet: like Moses, he was to lead his people to the Promised Land and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. According to the authors, this idea provided both the impetus and the direction to the Arab conquests¹⁹.

This Judeo-Hagarene symbiosis proved short-lived, ending shortly after the capture of Jerusalem. Referring again to Sebeos, Crone and Cook suggest a rupture occurred when Caliph ‘Umar erected

the Armenian chronicle of Sebeos, excerpts from St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, the Syriac *Khuzistan Chronicle*, and several others. The anthology also includes some lesser-known texts, such as a passage from the Georgian translation of *The Spiritual Meadow* by St. John Moschus. Each chapter begins with a short introduction in which Shoemaker offers an overview of the text, its dating, etc., followed by translated excerpts. Although not explicitly stated, in most cases — if not all — the translations are Shoemaker’s own (he is proficient in Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, Latin, Armenian, and Georgian). At the end of each chapter, Shoemaker provides a detailed analysis of the text’s relevance to formative Islam, revealing new insights and discrepancies (if any) between these sources and the traditional Muslim historical paradigm. Eds.

¹⁹ Crone P., Cook M. *Hagarism*. P. 3–9.

a Hagarene mosque on the Temple Mount instead of rebuilding the Jewish Temple. Hagarism subsequently entered a phase of transformation, seeking to break free from its dependence on Judaism and to acquire the attributes of an autonomous religion. Through an appeal to the faith of Abraham, not only was monotheism presented as ancestral heritage, but the religious practices of Arab forefathers were also reinterpreted as monotheistic. This paved the way for a strong component of Arab ethnic identity to be integrated into Islam²⁰.

Christianity, too, had once sought to differentiate itself from Judaism, and this historical experience, it seems, intrigued the early Hagarenes. One may recall Mu‘āwiya’s prayer on Golgotha or the theological debates between Maronites and Jacobites at his court²¹. Nevertheless, the adoption of Christian elements was ideologically and politically unpalatable. Instead, Crone and Cook point to Samaritanism — another Abrahamic religion that had diverged from Judaism and was politically innocuous — as a more plausible source of influence. They argue that during the subsequent decades, the Hagarenes borrowed extensively from Samaritan doctrines as they constructed their distinct religious identity.

A central development in this process was the elevation of Muḥammad’s prophetic status. He was no longer seen merely as a restorer of monotheism and the ancient faith of Abraham, but, through a process of “nationalization of prophecy” (as the authors term it), was increasingly portrayed as a figure akin to Moses. This is evident in the Qur’ānic prominence of the prophet Mūsā, the narrative of the Exodus (mirrored in the Hijra), and the divine revelation delivered [to Muḥammad] on a holy mountain²². Just as the Samaritans distanced themselves from the Jerusalem cult and founded a rival sanctuary on Mount Gerizim, so too did Islam establish Mecca as its sacred center. In both religions, pilgrimage patterns developed involving movement

²⁰ Ibid. P. 10–14.

²¹ See: *Панченко К.А. Омейяды // Православная энциклопедия. М., 2018. Т. 52. P. 679. Eds.*

²² This refers to Jabal al-Nūr near Mecca, where the cave of Hira’ is located — the site of Muḥammad’s first revelation, according to Islamic tradition. Crone and Cook suggest that both Jabal al-Nūr and Mount ‘Arafāt (the site of a key ritual of the Ḥajj) were influenced by Mount Sinai. Eds.

from a holy city to a sacred mountain. The Israelites' wait for Moses at Mount Sinai finds echoes in the Samaritan pilgrimage to Mount Gerizim and the Muslim standing at Mount 'Arafāt²³.

In this regard, the authors advance the hypothesis that Mecca did not immediately become the sacred center of Islam. They posit the existence of an earlier Hagarene sanctuary in northern Ḥijāz, identified in the Qur'ān as Bakka (let us note that the name "Mecca" appears only once in the Qur'ān, without clear indication of its cultic centrality)²⁴. This now-forgotten sanctuary — not Jerusalem — may have been the original *qibla* [direction of prayer]. Supporting this theory are early records suggesting that the mosque of 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ in Fuṣṭāṭ and some early Iraqi mosques built under al-Ḥajjāj in the early 8th century were oriented in that direction²⁵.

With the relocation of the holy place to Mecca, the narrative of Exodus was reinterpreted. The conquest of the Promised Land gave way to the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Yathrib [later Medina], and the Jewish collaborators in the Palestinian campaign were recast as the Anṣār of Yathrib. Muḥammad's expulsion of the Jewish tribes from Medina is seen as a reflection of the post-Jerusalem rupture between the Hagarenes and the Jews²⁶.

A central issue, of course, is the canonization of the Holy Writ of the new religion. The Hagarenes had long resisted written scripture, favoring oral tradition. According to Crone and Cook, the final redaction of the Qur'ān occurred only during the reign of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), under the supervision of his Iraqi governor al-Ḥajjāj and his circle. The compilation process was evidently hasty and derivative, drawing from heterogeneous sources, resulting [according to the authors] in textual features such as unnecessary repetitions, contradictory verses, and fragmented phrases—elements that later commentators struggled to rationalize²⁷.

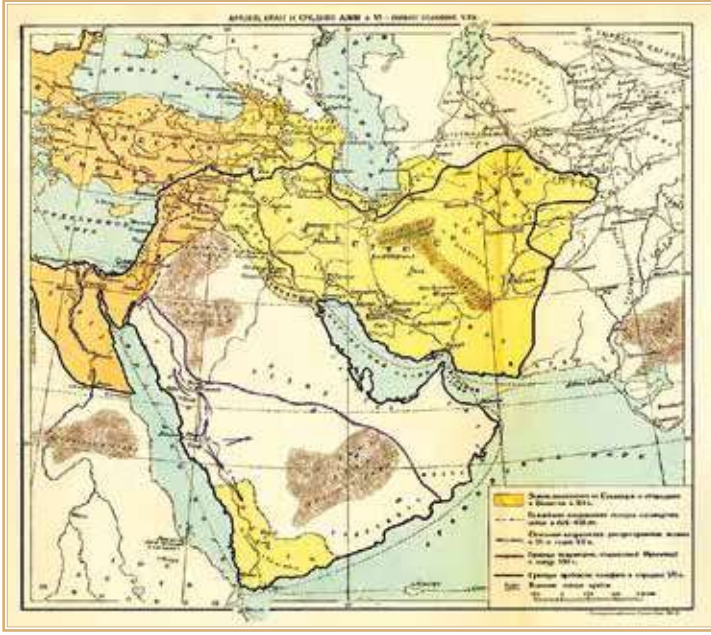
²³ Crone P., Cook M. Hagarism. P. 11–19, 25–26.

²⁴ Bakka: Qur'ān 3:96; Mecca: Qur'ān 48:24. Thus, Crone and Cook reject the traditional Islamic exegetical identification of Bakka and Mecca. Eds.

²⁵ Crone P., Cook M. Hagarism. P. 21–24.

²⁶ Ibid. P. 24–25.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 17–18.



The Arab conquests of the first half of the 7th century
Photo in public domain

Another possible borrowing from Samaritanism involved the sacralization of authority. Among the Samaritans, spiritual authority was hereditary, vested in the descendants of Aaron, who were viewed as bearers of esoteric knowledge and divine grace. The Muslim imamate, according to the authors, was modeled on this sacerdotal system — a theocratic structure where legitimate rule was based on both religious knowledge and sacred genealogy. This model is most evident among the ‘Alids (with Shi‘ī theologians noting the parallel between ‘Alī’s relationship to Muḥammad and that of Aaron to Moses). However, the idea of pontifical rule did not take root in [other forms of] Islam: Sunnīs did not attribute divine charisma to the caliph. Instead, supreme religious authority came to be vested in the *‘ulamā*, a class of lay scholars whose legitimacy derived from formal education rather than lineage. The authors draw an explicit analogy between this group and the rabbinic tradition, frequently referring to the *‘ulamā* as “rab-bis” and arguing that the institutionalization of this clerical class had occurred in ‘Abbāsīd Iraq, under the influence of Babylonian Judaism. Thus, Jewish influence re-entered the Hagarene religion after a long pause. In the same milieu, the Jewish messianic figure reemerged in



Slide from a presentation by Professor Panchenko, delivered at a roundtable during the Lomonosov Readings (Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University, April 2, 2024)
From the archive of C.A. Panchenko

Iraq in the guise of the Muslim Mahdī — a political leader and savior modeled not on the Christian Christ, but on his Jewish counterpart²⁸.

Thus, the evolution of Islam can be divided into several key stages: an initial phase of Jewish messianism, centered on reclaiming the Palestinian heritage; followed by a Samaritan phase, in which the high priest replaces the messiah, and the Abrahamic sanctuary in Arabia supersedes Jerusalem. However, unlike Samaritanism, Islam ultimately severed the link between the high priest and the sanctuary: political exigency dictated that the seat of power be located on conquered territory²⁹.

The authors situate the emergence of recognizably Islamic forms during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, at the turn of the 7th–8th centuries. Numismatic, architectural, and documentary evidence from this period reflects a new and confident religious identity. The reconstruction of holy places, disputes concerning the Mahdī and the imamate, and the birth of Islamic theology all belong to this transformative era. Yet what Crone and Cook describe as the “rabbinic tradition” in Islam (the institutionalization of the *‘ulamā*) and the formation of Islamic

²⁸ Ibid. P. 26–28.

²⁹ Ibid. P. 32.



Siege of a city by the Arabs.
 Miniature from the Madrid Skylitzes. 11th century.
Madrid National Library, MS Graecus Vitr. 26–2. Fol. 214 r.

law, emerged only in the subsequent classical phase, centered in Babylonia following the ‘Abbāsīd transfer of the capital to Baghdad³⁰.

The authors convey their ideas, *inter alia*, through striking metaphors. According to them, the transfer of the high priesthood [i.e., the Caliphate] to Iraq by the ‘Abbāsīds marked a further degradation of this institution, moving it toward becoming an exilarchate (drawing parallels with the Jewish “princes in exile”). Even the ‘Alids were taken from their “religious metropolis” (the holy cities of the Ḥijāz) into a kind of “Babylonian captivity”. The religious odyssey of Hagarism both began and ended with Judaism, discarding along the way the Samaritan-type holy place in Arabia and the Samaritan high priesthood in Syria (i.e., the Umayyad Caliphate). The atonement-based Judaism of Palestine gave way to the academic Judaism of Babylonia. The Hagarenes rejected the messiah—only to end up with an exilarch³¹.

All these ideas — the most important and controversial in the work of Patricia Crone and Michael Cook — constitute only the first quarter of the book. The remaining part is devoted to the historical fate of the peoples of the Near East and North Africa who were conquered by the Arabs and incorporated into the Caliphate. It examines models

³⁰ Ibid. P. 29–30.

³¹ Ibid. P. 32–33.

of their identity and the reasons for the weakness of these identities³², which made possible the subsequent Islamization and assimilation of the region's peoples — especially those of Greater Syria — and their contribution to the formation of the Arab-Muslim civilization.

Crone and Cook pose the age-old question of why the Caliphate did not follow the path of the barbarian kingdoms of the West, which assimilated into the framework of Christian civilization. The authors seek the answer to this question, among other factors, in the fact that during the first hundred years, the center of Islamic civilization — still malleable and unstable — was located in Syria, among a people who lacked a strong identity of their own and who, being unable to assimilate the conquerors, nevertheless enriched them with elements of classical culture (detached from their original context and reworked)³³.

Hagarism is written in vivid, metaphor-rich language, full of allusions. For example, at one point it claims that “Enkidu had once been seduced by a temple prostitute to [quit] his wilderness for civilisation; and for all its costs, the civilisation of Sumeria had been worth it. ... But by the seventh century after Christ the temples had been denuded of their prostitutes: it was monotheism that seduced the Arabs into leaving their wilderness, and the civilisation of Syria had lost its power to seduce”³⁴. The presentation is highly compressed and difficult to understand, requiring extensive commentary. In constructing bold, striking generalizations and contrasts, the authors, of course, cannot avoid numerous small factual errors. The question is whether these factual inaccuracies undermine the value of their broader generalizations.

As a specialist in the Christian Orient, I cannot ignore the authors' treatment of the Syrians. I am sympathetic to their claim that there was no unified Syrian ethnos, but rather a conglomerate of ethnic groups speaking Aramaic dialects and possessing various forms of self-identification. However, their assertion that the strongest identity among these groups belonged to the inhabitants of Adiabene, descendants of the Assyrians³⁵, seems rather unconvincing. There is no evidence

³² Ibid. P. 41–72.

³³ Ibid. P. 73–106.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 106.

³⁵ Ibid. P. 55–64.

that medieval East-Syriacs retained any memory of their pre-Christian past. The ancient Assyrians were seen only through the extremely negative lens of biblical narratives. Crone and Cook contrast the revival of Assyrian identity among modern Nestorians and Chaldeans with the Arab nationalism of Christian Syrians, who had abandoned their Aramaic roots and came to identify themselves as Arabs³⁶. However, this argument is problematic for at least two reasons: first, the Assyrian national idea is an artificial construct, largely shaped by Europeans, which replaced the traditional religious self-identification of East-Syriacs; second, among Arabophone Maronites of Greater Syria, one finds a parallel ideology of Phoenicianism, which likewise posits a non-Arab origin for its adherents.

Robert Hoyland: Seeing Islam as Others Saw It

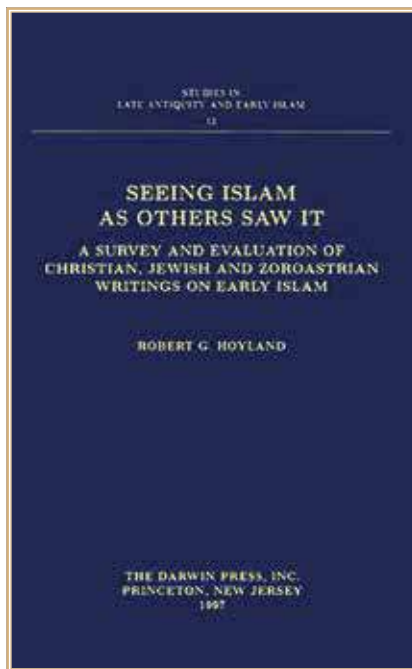
The so-called “revolutionary” books of the 1970s did not cause a major stir. Lüling’s work written in German faced a “conspiracy of silence” even within Germany, while the other two (Wansbrough’s monograph and the joint study by Crone and Cook), although written in English, were highly challenging to read³⁷. Nevertheless, these publications catalyzed a noticeable shift within Western Arabic and Islamic studies, provoking skepticism and debate that led to new approaches to the study of early Islam. In this context, Robert Hoyland’s 1997 monograph *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* stands out as a significant contribution³⁸. This nearly 900-page work presents a comprehensive view of early Islam based on non-Muslim sources — Christian, Jewish, and others — from the first centuries after the Hijra.

The critics of such an approach have argued that external observers could not possibly understand Islam better than its own adherents and inevitably interpreted it through the conceptual categories fa-

³⁶ Ibid. P. 87, 90–91.

³⁷ Donner F.M. The Qur’ān in Recent Scholarship. P. 30.

³⁸ Hoyland R.G. *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam.* Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997.



Robert Hoyland's *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (1997)

miliar to them, leading to distortion. In one of his later publications, Hoyland responded that contemporary Christian authors had written either from personal observation or based on direct communication with Muslims. Their accounts are generally precisely datable — something that cannot be said of the traditional Islamic historiographical material. Moreover, Christian authors of the 7th–8th centuries may have recorded stages in the evolution of Muslim doctrine that were, whether intentionally or not, omitted or forgotten by later Muslim theologians and chroniclers. Finally, one should not underestimate the extent of cultural contact and multifaceted interaction in the multiethnic society that was the caliphate, nor the level of interreligious knowledge that existed among its various religious communities³⁹.

Concluding his monumental study, Hoyland observes that while we have substantial evidence for the development of Muslim thought in the first half of the 8th century, there is a complete lack of data concerning the nature of Islam in the first century of the Hijra. Non-Mus-

³⁹ Hoyland R.G. *The Earliest Christian Writings on Muhammad: An Appraisal // The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources* / Ed. H. Motzki. Leiden: Brill, 2000. P. 276–295, esp P. 289–293.

lim sources (from as early as the 640s) provide a relatively clear picture of the religious practices of the Arab conquerors — practices that clearly distinguished them from other monotheistic traditions.

Yet prior to 72 AH (692 CE, the year the Dome of the Rock was constructed in Jerusalem), archaeological evidence is strangely silent regarding both Islam and the Qur’ān. Qur’ānic quotations and the name of Muḥammad appear in inscriptions rather suddenly. This abrupt emergence gives the impression that the Qur’ān likewise acquired canonical status suddenly and simultaneously. Had it circulated for an extended period in an uncanonized form, it would inevitably have undergone textual revision and substitution of obscure terms and concepts with clearer ones⁴⁰.

The earliest explicit Islamic formulas in coinage (*bismillāh* [“In the name of God”] and *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* [“Muhammad is the Messenger of God”]) appear in the 680s and, notably, do not originate from the Umayyads, but from the governors of Fārs appointed by the anti-caliph ‘Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr (r. 683–692). The period of the Second Fitna in general produced many prominent religious figures who opposed the Umayyads: the enigmatic Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya, the prophetic claimant Mukhtār ibn Abī ‘Ubayd and his devoted followers, as well as the Khārijite leader Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā’a, who minted coins bearing the slogan “There is no rule other than God’s”. The collective presence of these figures, the total absence of Islamic declarations from the Sufyānid Umayyads (661–684), and, in contrast, their sudden proliferation under ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705) and his successors, suggest a strategic co-optation of religious slogans. The pressure from rebellious factions appears to have pushed ‘Abd al-Malik to adopt Islam demonstratively as the ideological foundation of the state⁴¹.

Hoyland also addresses the topic of the early Islamic *qibla* orientation, previously discussed by Crone and Cook. The change in direction from Jerusalem to Mecca is acknowledged in the Qur’ān; medieval commentators differed only in estimating [the duration of] the former practice. The earliest mosques in Kūfa were oriented westward, while in

⁴⁰ Hoyland R.G. Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. P. 545–550.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 550–554.



A gold dinar of ‘Abd al-Malik. Syria, Damascus, 696/697.
 The shahāda in Arabic surrounds the figure of the caliph.
The British Museum

Fuṣṭāṭ they faced east. Only under caliphs ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Walīd I (r. 705–715) were these mosques rebuilt and more precisely reoriented toward Mecca. Early Muslim leaders, when constructing mosques, settled for approximate orientation and did not engage in complex astronomical or mathematical calculations. However, beginning with ‘Abd al-Malik, the orientation of at least congregational mosques gained more attention, and by the end of the 8th century, determining the *qibla* from any location became a central task for Muslim astronomers⁴².

This raises the broader question: What was the religio-political nature of the caliphate before the Marwānid period? Hoyland traces its origins to Muḥammad’s so-called “Constitution of Medina”, which declared a commonwealth of people of various faiths under Muḥammad’s leadership for the purpose of *jihād* in God’s name⁴³. The early caliphate, in Hoyland’s view, was precisely this: a *jihād*-state, a coalition of warriors from different religious backgrounds engaged in religiously motivated military expansion. Consider, for instance, the participation of Arab Christian tribes in the Muslim conquests and their privileged status under the Umayyads. At this stage, the Qur’ān held significance only for Muslims and did not yet function as a universal

⁴² Ibid. P. 560–573.

⁴³ See: Lecker M. The “Constitution of Medina”: Muḥammad’s First Legal Document. Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004. Eds.

legal code. It was only under ‘Abd al-Malik that Islam was elevated to the status of state religion. Hoyland argues that the early caliphate — prior to ‘Abd al-Malik — was typologically closer to pre-Islamic Arab kingdoms such as those of the Ghassānids and Lakhmids than to what was later established by the (late) Umayyads⁴⁴.

Fred Donner: Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam

This section consists of excerpts from several works by Constantin Panchenko, supplemented with selected ideas from Fred Donner that are not documented in the professor’s notes but are found in Donner’s review of Robert Hoyland’s book In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire, for which no summary by the professor has been found⁴⁵. The excerpts were selected in accordance with Professor Panchenko’s instructions as part of the revised plan for the article: “Donner — on al-mu’minūn. See Donner’s review [of Hoyland’s] In God’s Path, 2015”. No conclusions are provided. The author’s notetaking style has been preserved (with minimal editing). References have been compiled by the editors.

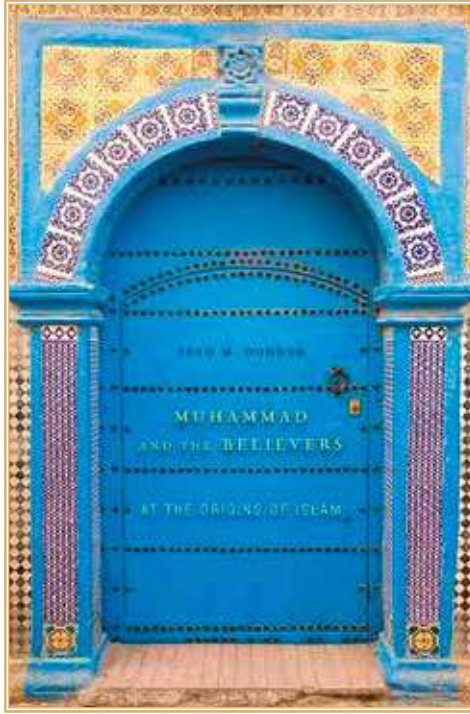
In early Islam, there is a marked absence of historical consciousness — a distinctly ahistorical perspective. The primitive Muslim tradition made no attempt to preserve the chronology of Muḥammad’s prophetic career⁴⁶. Only in the late 1st century AH do we find signs of a “historicizing impulse”⁴⁷, a tentative effort to structure the chaotic body of traditions chronologically. Dating by the Hijra appears in official documents from the 20s–30s AH. Al-Zuhrī was the first to establish a relative chronology of events; Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidi later

⁴⁴ Hoyland R.G. Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. P. 554–559.

⁴⁵ Donner F.M. Review of: Hoyland R. In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015 // al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā. 2015. Vol. 23. P. 134–140.

⁴⁶ Donner F.M. Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010. P. 51–52.

⁴⁷ Donner F.M. Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing. Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998. P. 231.



Fred Donner's *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (2010)

supplemented it⁴⁸. Early Muslims were not interested in history, possibly due to eschatological expectations.

Donner challenges the notion that early Islamic history was falsified. He argues that the foundational narrative of Islam's origins is accepted by all Muslim sects, despite their theological divergences⁴⁹. This implies that the basic circumstances surrounding the birth of Islam were preserved accurately. Furthermore, who could have falsified them without leaving any trace of the original tradition? Later copyists likely did not intentionally distort the past or seek to erase it; rather, they assumed that the truth commonly accepted in their own era must have reflected the beliefs of the earliest Muslims⁵⁰. No external party deliberately fabricated the core ideas. Rather, the beliefs and experiences of the early community evolved over time, reshaping the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. P. 26–28.

⁵⁰ Donner F.M. From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community // *Al-Abḥāth*. 2002–2003. Vol. 50–51. P. 9–53, esp. P. 39.

narrative about Muḥammad. Collective memory, as Donner notes, naturally changes over time.

Donner puts forward the theory that the original movement was a confederation of Abrahamic communities who believed in the imminent Day of Judgment and sought to establish divine justice on earth. Muḥammad's movement was not a distinct religious confession, but rather a monotheistic reform emphasizing piety shared across the Abrahamic faiths: prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and ritual purity⁵¹. Different communities may have had their own scriptures; thus, Christian and Jewish texts coexisted alongside Muḥammad's proclamations. The Qur'ān itself preserves traces of this interconfessional nature of the community of "believers"⁵². The "People of the Book" are repeatedly counted among the "believers". At the same time, the Qur'ān contains polemics against the Trinity. [The anti-Christian verses of the Qur'ān would seem to preclude any Christian participation in Muḥammad's early movement.] Donner attempts to explain this by suggesting that early Muslims had limited knowledge of the Qur'ān before its codification and [thus its influence was minimal]⁵³. Jewish involvement in Muḥammad's religious movement is documented in Islamic sources. In the *Constitution of Medina* (which Donner refers to as the *Umma Document*), [certain Jewish groups were granted full membership in the community; they were allowed to maintain their beliefs and customs]. Not all "People of the Book" within these communities were "believers"; there were also unbelievers among them. Thus, the community of "believers" lacked clearly defined confessional boundaries.

Muḥammad served as an arbiter within this interconfessional community, all members of which were destined for salvation⁵⁴. (7th-century Syriac sources do not portray Muḥammad as a prophet but rather as a leader or king.) The first caliphs presented themselves as leaders

⁵¹ Donner F.M. *From Believers to Muslims*. P. 10–11; Donner F.M. *Muhammad and the Believers*. P. 61–69; 87.

⁵² Donner F.M. *From Believers to Muslims*. P. 19.

⁵³ Donner F.M. *From Believers to Muslims*. P. 26–27; Donner F.M. *Muhammad and the Believers*. P. 77.

⁵⁴ Donner F.M. *From Believers to Muslims*. P. 17–24; Donner F.M. *Muhammad and the Believers*. P. 69–71, 74–77, 111–112.

of all their subjects, regardless of religious affiliation. This religious pluralism explains why no claims were made to an exclusive Islamic leadership, and why heads of state adopted neutral titles such as *amīr al-mu'minīn* (“Commander of the Believers”), positioning themselves as the ultimate arbiters for subjects of all confessions. Donner [emphasizes that the members of the early community did not refer to themselves as “Muslims” until around 700 CE]. He proposes that the term *al-mu'minūn*, “the believers”, in the 7th century referred to followers of monotheistic religions more broadly, and only later came to designate Muslims exclusively.

[Thus, this was a supranational movement. Donner writes that there is not a single inscription, papyrus document, or coin issued by the conquerors in the 7th century that referred to themselves as Arabs. (Such usage only appears in later Islamic chronicles.) To describe this movement as an “Arab conquest” is therefore deeply misleading, as it imposes modern nationalist terminology onto the distant past. The idea that Arab ethnogenesis was taking place at the time seems doubtful. Donner concludes that there is good reason to believe that the conquests were in fact driven by a religious (if not yet explicitly “Islamic”) impulse — i.e., by the movement of the *al-mu'minūn*⁵⁵.]

[Reasons for Jewish and Christian support of the new religious movement:] The Byzantine catastrophe of 614 CE⁵⁶ stimulated eschatological expectations among both Christians and Jews. Long dormant at the margins of religious consciousness, these expectations surged during this period of upheaval⁵⁷. There was widespread anticipation of the End Times. Early Islam was perceived by some as a kind of Jewish messianic movement, and Jewish eschatological hopes are traceable within the early Islamic community. For example, the caliph 'Umar's epithet *al-Fārūq* (“savior”) was likely given

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ In 614, the Byzantine Empire suffered a defeat by the Sasanids; Iranian troops captured Jerusalem. Eds.

⁵⁷ Donner F.M. *The Background to Islam // The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* / Ed. M. Maas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. P. 510–533. On 7th-century messianism, see: Stroumsa G.G. *False Prophet and False Messiah // The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Ch. 4. P. 72–85.

to him by the Jewish segment of the “believers”; they also promoted messianic ideas.

Donner notes Muḥammad’s strong and consistent interest in the territories to the north of Arabia. This is explained by eschatological expectations and Jerusalem’s role in apocalyptic drama as the site of the Last Judgment. According to Christian tradition, it is in Jerusalem that the “Last Emperor” will return worldly power to God⁵⁸. Muḥammad’s eschatological preaching was a key driver of the Arab conquests, which thus appear in a very different light. Donner reinterprets them as the “expansion of the authority of the believers”. Had the movement possessed a [unified, codified] religious doctrine and sought to impose it, it would likely have met with staunch resistance. But it was primarily a political expansion, demanding only the payment of taxes. [Its religious component was limited to a message of piety acceptable to all Abrahamic communities]—belief in the Oneness of God and in the Day of Judgment⁵⁹. The “believers” were not aiming to create a powerful empire to rival Rome, but rather to achieve salvation through piety and the destruction of impious political regimes⁶⁰. Their program resembled an effort to establish the “Kingdom of God on earth”⁶¹.

It was precisely the interconfessional nature of the “believer” community that explains the astonishing success of the Islamic conquests⁶² — their nonviolent character and the lack of substantial resistance. Later Muslim tradition (e.g., the anti-Jewish tone of the *Sīra* [the prophetic biography]) sought to obscure the absence of clear confessional boundaries within the community of “believers”. [Only later, presumably in the third quarter of the 1st century AH (ca. 670–690 CE), did the interconfessional community of *al-mu’minūn* reconceptualize itself as specifically Muslim, defining itself in opposition to Jews and Christians. How this transformation occurred remains a subject requiring further study⁶³.]

⁵⁸ Donner F.M. Muhammad and the Believers. P. 50, 81–82, 96–97, 125, 143–44.

⁵⁹ Ibid. P. 108–110.

⁶⁰ Ibid. P. XII, 80–82.

⁶¹ Ibid. P. 85.

⁶² Donner F.M. From Believers to Muslims. P. 50–51.

⁶³ Ibid. P. 12, 52.

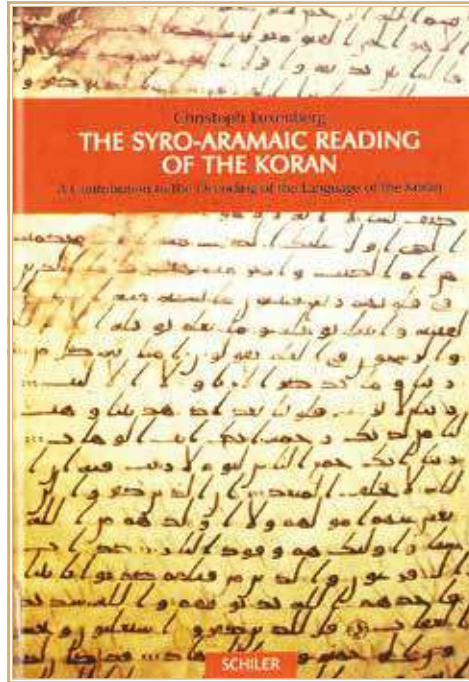
The main article continues below.

Christoph Luxenberg and Qur'ānic studies in the early 21st century

A notable development in contemporary Islamic studies was the publication of the controversial book by Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* (2000)⁶⁴. According to some scholars, the book was not significantly more revolutionary than earlier works mentioned above; in essence, Luxenberg adopted the approach of Lüling, albeit in a more systematic fashion. He developed the hypothesis that many Qur'ānic passages had originally been composed in Syriac – the state language of the Umayyad Caliphate during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik – and that these passages can only be properly understood when read in Syriac, which often requires amending the Arabic text. Luxenberg identified 75 such obscure passages in the Qur'ān and devised a multi-layered methodology for their interpretation. Among the most provocative of his hypotheses were the claims of an Aramaic proto-Qur'ān and the suggestion that the Meccans had spoken a mixed Syro-Arabic dialect.

Many of Luxenberg's interpretations were criticized as arbitrary and unconvincing, and were met with sharp scholarly opposition. Nevertheless, a segment of the academic community argued that it would be inappropriate to focus solely on the book's weaker examples; instead, all the Syriac loanwords identified by Luxenberg should be subjected to critical scrutiny. In principle, it is not implausible to suggest a significant Syriac influence on Arabic vocabulary, given the Arabs' sustained contact with Aramaic-speaking communities – both Christian and Jewish – and their limited native lexicon for expressing abstract metaphysical concepts and religious practices. Indeed, bilingual Arabic-Aramaic epigraphic inscriptions are known, lending

⁶⁴ Luxenberg C. (ps.). *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*. Berlin, 2000; Eng. trans.: Luxenberg C. (ps.). *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran. A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran*. Berlin, 2007.



Christoph Luxenberg's *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (2000)

plausibility to the idea of Syriac elements embedded in the Arabic Qur'ānic text⁶⁵.

The main weakness of Luxenberg's theory lies in its strictly philological orientation; the scholar made no attempt to place the Qur'ān's evolution within a broader historical context. Nevertheless, his book gained wide notoriety and elicited strong negative reactions from Muslim audiences, posing a potential threat to its author. Personally, I find the book's fame difficult to comprehend, as its appeal is quite limited: it delves into highly technical linguistic material that is inaccessible without proficiency not only in Arabic but also in Aramaic.

Professor Panchenko had intended to revise this section. In the margins of the draft, he noted: "critique of revisionists, including from anti-Orientalist positions". The following section, Issues in Qur'ānic Stud-

⁶⁵ Donner F.M. *The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship*. P. 33–34, 37–40; Baasten M.F.J. Review of: Luxenberg C. (ps.). *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*. Berlin, 2000 // *Aramaic Studies*. 2004. Vol. 2.2. P. 268–272. [See also: Jeffery A. *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938. Eds.]

ies, was to include an analysis of Fred Donner's article *The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship*⁶⁶, and Gilliot's *Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur'ān*⁶⁷. He also planned to discuss methodologies for studying *Christianity and Judaism in the context of Islam*. Unfortunately, the professor did not live to complete these revisions, though he recorded several important ideas in his notes⁶⁸.

Guy Stroumsa: external influences on Islam

*Professor Panchenko managed to summarize Guy Stroumsa's essay "Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins" from his monograph The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity (2015)*⁶⁹. Below we publish excerpts from the professor's notes. Authorial emphases have been rendered in **bold italics**. The original notetaking style has been preserved, with minimal editorial intervention. The footnotes and references have been added by the editors.

Hypotheses regarding the origins of Islam:

Over [the past 200 years], the search for *the roots* of Islam has oscillated between two *main paradigms*:

Judaism (Abraham Geiger, 1833)⁷⁰, followed primarily by Jewish scholars well-versed in the Rabbinic tradition;

[Christianity] (Theodor Nöldeke, who sought Christian sources for Islam; [his student Tor Andrae emphasized] the importance of con-

⁶⁶ Donner F.M. *The Qur'ān in Recent Scholarship*.

⁶⁷ Gilliot C. *Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur'ān*.

⁶⁸ First note: "F. Donner's view: ... the Qur'ān (7th c.) predates the *hadīths*, most of which appeared after the 1st century AH". (Donner holds to the traditional view of the Qur'ān's formation and attributes its content to Muhammad. He believes the Qur'ān was compiled soon after Muḥammad's death and codified no later than the First Fitna [656–661]). Second note: "Claude Gilliot: the Qur'ān is a collective work. Particularly [important is] the role of Muḥammad's "informants"".

⁶⁹ Stroumsa G.G. *Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins // The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Ch. 8. P. 139–158.

⁷⁰ Geiger A. *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen; Geiger A. Judaism and Islam*.

sidering alternative forms of Christianity, [especially Judeo-Christianity]⁷¹. Today, scholars such as Lüling and Luxenberg, following in this vein, look for Qur'ānic sources in Syriac Christian hymns (Arian, according to Lüling).

The topic of Gnosticism and Judeo-Christianity has become increasingly relevant. Key figures [include] theologian and historian of early Christianity Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930)⁷², Ernest Renan (1823–1892), and Daniel Chwolson (1819–1911)⁷³. Later contributions came from Adolf Schlatter (1918)⁷⁴, Hans-Joachim Schoeps (1909–1980)⁷⁵, and Shlomo Pines (1960s–80s), who published a series of articles on the survival of Judeo-Christian communities into the Islamic period⁷⁶.

It is essential to consider all Jewish and Christian — including heretical — traditions as potential sources of influence on Islam. There are *striking parallels* between Islamic and Judeo-Christian concepts: Ebionite views on Jesus and the Crucifixion (Docetism): Jesus was a prophet, not the Son of God. [According to Roncaglia], the Islamic prohibition of wine may appear “Elchasaitic”⁷⁷, [though this is unlikely], as no known Elchasaitic ban on wine exists, but Ebionite bans

⁷¹ See: Gilliot C. Les “Informateurs” juifs et chrétiens de Muhammad: Reprise d’un problème traité par Aloys Sprenger et Theodor Nöldeke // Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam. 1998. Vol. 22. P. 84–126.

⁷² Harnack A. Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte. Bd. 1. Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1888; Bd. 2. Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1909.

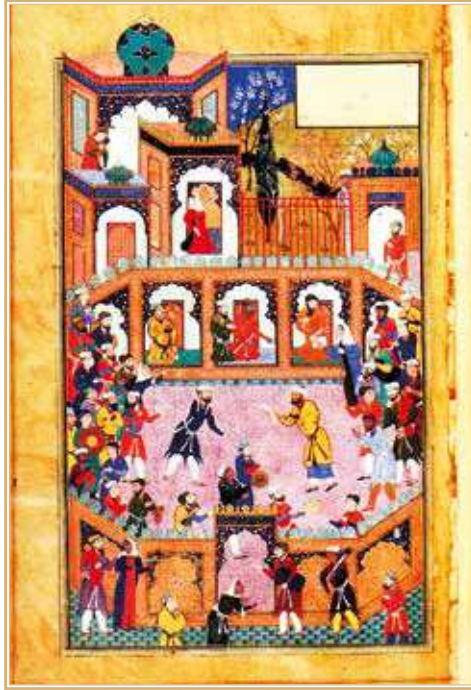
⁷³ Chwolson D. Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus. St. Petersburg: Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1856.

⁷⁴ Schlatter A. Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam // Evangelisches Missions-Magazin. 1918. Neue Folge 62. S. 251–264.

⁷⁵ Schoeps H.J. Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums. Tübingen: Mohr, 1949; Schoeps H.J. Jewish Christianity Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.

⁷⁶ Pines S. Studies in the History of Religion. The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines; 4 / Ed. G.G. Stroumsa. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996. [See also: Sánchez F. del Río. Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam: Papers presented at the Colloquium Held in Washington DC, October 29–31, 2015 (8th ASMEA Conference). Turnhout: Brepols, 2018; Crone P. Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān (Part One) // Journal of Near Eastern Studies. 2015. Vol. 74.2. P. 225–253; Crone P. Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān (Part Two) // Journal of Near Eastern Studies. 2016. Vol. 75.1. P. 1–21. Ed.]

⁷⁷ Stroumsa G.G. Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins. P. 151.



Debate Between Jews and Muslims
 Miniature from Saadi's *Gulistan*, 1258 (The British Library)
The British Library

are documented. The Ebionite notion of scriptural corruption closely resembles Islamic views. The Ebionites had a “chain of prophets” (the idea of ongoing prophecy), as well as the belief that certain parts of the Holy Scripture had been interpolated by Satan and must be removed (a notion also found in Marcion’s teachings and in the Islamic concept of *tahrīf* [the corruption of the Scriptures ascribed by Muslims to Jews and Christians])⁷⁸. There are correlations between the Qur’ān and the 2nd-century Judeo-Christian text *Didache* [*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*], particularly regarding ritual and legal practices. [The *Didascalia Apostolorum* (4th c., based on the *Didache*) emphasizes ritual purity.] [Pseudo-Clementines] contain elements resembling the *shahāda*. The term *al-mu`minūn* [“the believers”] may derive from the Greek πιστεύοντες — Jews who believed in Jesus but followed Jewish law⁷⁹.

⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 153.

⁷⁹ Ibid. P. 154.

A problem persists: *there is no trace of Judeo-Christianity after the 4th century*. How could [it] have survived into the Islamic era? [Rabbinic opponents of the Ebionites] may have deliberately erased them from the record (“*damnatio memoriae*”), hence the scant information about them. [However,] indirect evidence suggests that some Judeo-Christian communities may have survived into the early Islamic period, possibly even in the Ḥijāz.

John of Damascus refers to the Elchasaites in his time⁸⁰. Chwolson, in his seminal monograph on the Ṣābians⁸¹, noted some Manichaean elements in Islam. The sect in which Mani was raised [is referred to in Arabic sources as *muḡtasila*, “baptizers”]. This group was identified [as Elchasaites] following the discovery, in 1975, of the *Cologne Mani Codex* containing Mani’s biography. Parallels between Manichaeism and Islam gained renewed attention. Simon critiques the overemphasis on Jewish and Christian roots while underestimating Manichaean influences⁸². Parallels between Manichaeism and Islam include: a universalistic character of both religions, similar views of sacred scripture. The concept of the “Seal of the Prophets” is particularly striking. The prophetic model in both traditions derives from a shared Judeo-Christian substratum.

Choosing between the Jewish and the Christian influences as the sole source of Islam is methodologically flawed. *It is a mistake to choose only one option*. Ideas [circulated] freely, and religious structures were constantly reformulated — a “whirlpool” effect in which [it is impossible] to trace each individual element.

Arabia was not a periphery of Late Antique civilization. Hoyland calls it a “laboratory” for religious transformation⁸³. [This echoes] Max Weber’s description of ancient Hebrew prophets: they belonged to marginal societies, not too distant from political-religious centers, but

⁸⁰ Ibid. P. 142.

⁸¹ Chwolson D. Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus.

⁸² Simon R. Mani and Muhammad // Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam. 1997. Vol. 21. P. 118–141.

⁸³ Hoyland R.G. Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion // The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity / Ed. S.F. Johnson. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. P. 1053–1077, esp. P. 1069.

distinct enough to develop original forms⁸⁴. The same can be said of Late Antique Arabia — a hub of cultural influences from Iran⁸⁵, Byzantium, and Aksum, where religious ideas [circulated freely]. The eschatological fervor of the 7th century relates to a broader “prophetic movement” in Arabia. Epigraphic findings reflect a crisis in traditional Arabian beliefs and [the emergence of] a monotheism of indeterminate form. No evidence of Christian presence exists between ‘Aqaba and Yemen. The form of Judaism among Hījāzī Jews remains unclear.

A plausible hypothesis is that of a pre-Islamic Abrahamic trend: one or more groups identified themselves as followers of the “true religion of Abraham”, corrupted by Jews and Christians. Sozomen (5th c.) describes an interreligious Abrahamic festival in Mamre — attended by Christians, Jews, Arabs, and others⁸⁶. He notes that Arabs, instructed by Jews about their Abrahamic lineage, practiced circumcision, avoided pork, and followed other Jewish rituals⁸⁷. The same is attested by Sebeos (7th c.). Several studies have traced potential continuities from Abrahamic practices to Muḥammad, especially in connection to the Meccan sanctuary. In Late Antiquity, Abraham was a “cultural hero” for both Jews and Christians. Some scholars [have attempted] to identify an “Abrahamic cult” among the Negev Arabs in the 5th–7th centuries ([evident] in the Nessana papyri). However, this “Abrahamic identity” remains a hypothesis. In the Qur’ānic portrayal, Abraham is a *ḥanīf* — neither Jew nor Christian⁸⁸. This hypothesis differs from the one linking the Qur’ān directly to Judeo-Christian roots, but both theories associate the rise of prophetic activity in Arabia with the biblical tradition.

Concluding remarks: [Stroumsa] supports the idea that the survival of a peripheral Judeo-Christian group and its influence on

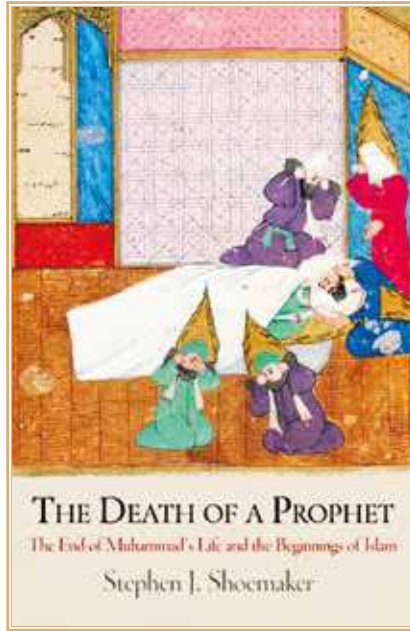
⁸⁴ Weber M. *Ancient Judaism*. Glencoe: Free Press, 1952.

⁸⁵ On the influence of Iranian-origin ideas on early Islam, see: Crone P. *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Wansbrough J.E. *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. London: Oxford University Press, 1978.

⁸⁶ Созомен. Церковная история Эрмия Созомена Саламинскаго. СПб., 1851. Кн. II. Гл. 4. Р. 88–89.

⁸⁷ Созомен. Церковная история. Кн. VI. Гл. 38. Р. 470–471.

⁸⁸ Qur’ān 3:67.



Stephen Shoemaker's *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (2012)

Muhammad's preaching is a plausible scenario. According to him, [Judeo-Christianity served] as the ideal "ferment" for Muhammad's message to develop within the rich humus of Late Antique religious traditions⁸⁹. But this was not the only source. The influence may have been indirect. The emergence of Islam was overdetermined and [shaped by numerous interlocking factors]. Clear-cut theories risk oversimplifying a complex historical process. The mystery of a religion's origin can never be entirely unveiled.

Stephen Shoemaker and *The Death of a Prophet*

Among the most recent contributions representative of what is often termed the "revisionist school" are Stephen Shoemaker's works. Over the past two decades, Shoemaker has assumed a position comparable to that once held by Patricia Crone, challenging foundational assumptions within Islamic historiography...

⁸⁹ Stroumsa G.G. *Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins*. P. 158.



First page of Professor Panchenko's notes
 on Shoemaker's *The Death of a Prophet*, 2024
 From the archive of C.A. Panchenko

*At this point, the article by Professor Panchenko is once again interrupted. The following section consists of excerpts from his notes on Shoemaker's *The Death of a Prophet* (2012)⁹⁰. In this monograph, Shoemaker re-evaluates key events of Islamic history of the 1st century AH: the formation of the early Muslim community, the death of Muhammad, the Arab conquest of the Holy Land, the construction of a religious complex in Jerusalem, and, later, the emergence of the Hijāz as the central Islamic sanctuary. His study is grounded in a critical analysis of both Muslim and non-Muslim sources.*

*For ease of comprehension, the notes have been divided into thematic sections. The author's original notetaking style has been preserved. Emphases in the original are rendered here as **bold italics**. Connecting phrases are enclosed in [square brackets].*

⁹⁰ Shoemaker S.J. *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

Survey of the sources

[Shoemaker points out that] the authorship of the [various components] of the corpus of Muslim oral tradition remains uncertain. (In his view, *isnād* analysis is insufficient for identifying when and by whom [particular] traditions were introduced.) There are no Muslim sources reliably datable to before the 2nd century AH⁹¹. Although the Qur’ān dates to the 1st century AH, it is “profoundly ahistorical” and thus offers little that is of value to historians. The canonical narratives of Islam’s origins were compiled in ‘Abbāsīd Baghdad, drawing on Medinan and Iraqi testimonies while ignoring the Syrian (pro-Umayyad) tradition⁹². [This] presents a fundamental challenge to reconstructing early Islamic history from Muslim sources alone.

[Shoemaker argues against] those scholars who regard the Qur’ānic text as a faithful transmission of Muḥammad’s preaching. First, [there is] ample evidence of textual instability in the Qur’ān — as seen in coins and, notably, in the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem — which suggests a later codification. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain the presence of these “non-canonical” [not present in the canonical Qur’ān] inscriptions in such a sacred site⁹³. Second, [according to Shoemaker,] the time that elapsed between Muḥammad’s death and the final redaction of the Qur’ān (which is likely to have taken place at the end of the 7th century, according to Shoemaker) allowed for [substantial revision of the text]. Third, the Qur’ān’s prophetic pronouncements are cast in a polished, rhymed prose, yet it seems implausible that Muḥammad, [preoccupied as he was with proclaiming the imminent end of the world], would have given so much emphasis to literary style⁹⁴. The Qur’ānic text is frequently disjointed, exhibiting repetitions and abrupt breaks, indicating a patchwork composition. [Shoemaker concurs with Claude Gilliot that] the Qur’ān is a collective work⁹⁵.

⁹¹ Ibid. P. 74.

⁹² Ibid. P. 67.

⁹³ Ibid. P. 148.

⁹⁴ Ibid. P. 142.

⁹⁵ Ibid. P. 147.

[Shoemaker contends that] the Qur'ān was not canonized under 'Uthmān [(r. 644–656), as the Muslim tradition claims and as Donner maintains], but rather under 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) and al-Ḥajjāj (governor of Iraq in 694–714). The legend of 'Uthmān's recension likely originated with the Umayyads to enhance their legitimacy ('Uthmān being one of their own) and was later canonized by al-Bukhārī [the author of the famous *ḥadīth* collection in the 9th century]. Given his short and unpopular reign, 'Uthmān is an unlikely candidate for initiating such a major codification project. The early Islamic polity was still rudimentary ([it remained so] even under Mu'āwiya), lacking coercive institutions and means of ideological dissemination (e.g., limited coinage, public buildings, and inscriptions). By contrast, 'Abd al-Malik had both the means and the incentive to undertake the canonization of the Qur'ān⁹⁶. The need for a fixed text only emerged once the anticipated End of the World failed to take place and the collective memory of Muḥammad began to fade. The now-canonical [Qur'ānic] text did not achieve dominance until the late 7th or early 8th century; it supplanted other versions through direct state intervention in a campaign to eliminate variant readings. Thus, the Qur'ān reflects the theological concerns of the late 7th – early 8th centuries. In societies undergoing rapid transformation (e.g., the Arab conquests [and the failure of] the Day of Judgment to occur as expected), oral tradition becomes less reliable, a fact reflected in the Qur'ānic revisions.

Lammens had already argued that the *Sīra* [the traditional biography of Muḥammad] was crafted to compensate for the Qur'ān's [lack of rich historical detail] and to insert it into a contextual narrative. Wansbrough, Crone, and others likewise approached the *Sīra* critically. [Shoemaker maintains that] early biographies of Muḥammad were compiled long after his death and portray an idealized version of the Prophet and his community that aligns more with early 2nd-century AH Islamic theology than with the realities of the 1st century AH. The earliest Muslim tradition did not aim to preserve a chronological account of Muḥammad's prophetic career. Information regarding his death in these early traditions is minimal. Even the date of the Hijra

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 149.

is not universally agreed upon, with alternate dates coexisting. [Shoemaker cites] Donner's conclusion that al-Zuhrī (d. 742) was the first to establish a relative chronology of events, and Ibn Ishāq (d. 767/68) later elaborated on it⁹⁷. Ibn Ishāq compiled a sequential narrative [of the life of Muḥammad] from fragmentary reports according to his own understanding. *Ḥadīths* are inherently unreliable, especially in their *isnād* references to the *Ṣaḥāba* [Companions of the Prophet] and the *Tābi'ūn* [Successors of the *Ṣaḥāba*]⁹⁸.

[Shoemaker agrees with] Wansbrough that historical knowledge of Muḥammad and his era has been lost and obscured by medieval Islamic imagination.

Nonetheless, traces of early historical memory — contrary to [established Muslim tradition] — can still be found in the Qur'ān and in a few early *ḥadīths*. These elements are unlikely to be later interpolations precisely because they conflict with the prevailing [later] orthodoxy and have likely survived out of respect for their antiquity. For instance, the so-called “Satanic Verses” could not have been inserted later, as they contradict the [later] idealized image of Muḥammad; rather, they are vestiges of a lost early tradition. If the Qur'ān is read in opposition to the traditional narrative of Islam's origins — [rather than in harmonization with it] — then Islam's most archaic strata may be uncovered⁹⁹. When such readings are corroborated by diverse evidence, especially when Muslim and non-Muslim sources converge, the likelihood increases that we are seeing remnants of an early tradition omitted from the canonical version¹⁰⁰.

Engagement with the non-Muslim sources is essential, given [as we noted before] the Qur'ān's “profoundly ahistorical” character. These sources must be used critically and in tandem with Muslim tradition, not in isolation. Early Christian history is reconstructed using

⁹⁷ Ibid. P. 102–103.

⁹⁸ Ibid. P. 73.

⁹⁹ Thus, the Qur'ān is a potential alternative to the information in the *Sīra* ([the latter reflects] 8th–9th-century Islam [and gives us no insight into 7th-century realities]).

¹⁰⁰ Like Wansbrough, Hoyland, and Donner, [Shoemaker] believes that non-Muslim sources alone are insufficient for a proper reconstruction [of early Islam].

the outside pagan and Jewish sources—why not apply the same method to early Islam? The temporal gap between Jesus and the Gospels is smaller than that between Muḥammad and the *Sīra*, and yet the Gospels themselves are inconsistent. We must interpret the emergence of Islam within the broader context of late antique Mediterranean culture, rather than restrict ourselves to the Hijāz. The critical methodologies developed in New Testament scholarship — studying the text apart from ecclesiastical tradition — should likewise be applied to the Qur’ān, independent of Muslim exegesis.

[Shoemaker endorses the methodology proposed by Hoyland] for assessing the evidentiary value of non-Muslim testimonies. What is the origin [of the report]? What is the nature of the observation? Who is the observer? Was the report heard from eye-witnesses? Are we dealing with rumors, factual records, apologetic narratives, or generalized explanations? Was the author reporting something readily observable? Something that concerned non-Muslims? Was it about Islamic beliefs or intra-Muslim matters? Next, these [non-Muslim] accounts must be compared with Muslim tradition to identify discrepancies and the interests that motivated them.

One of the key sources from Late Antiquity — especially on the supra-confessional character of the early Islamic community — is (pseudo-)Sebeos¹⁰¹. Some scholars have criticized Sebeos as anti-Jewish propaganda. However, the alliance between some Jews and Arabs around the idea of a shared monotheism and claims to the Holy Land is consistent with many other sources, including Muslim ones¹⁰². The main Jewish source on the interconfessional nature of the early Muslim community is *The Secrets of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai*, which describes the rise of the “Kingdom of Ishmael” in messianic terms, as an act of Divine Providence¹⁰³. A Palestinian Muslim text from ca. 640–650 [presumably

¹⁰¹ See: *Shoemaker S.J.* The Death of a Prophet. P. 199–203; *Себеос.* История императора Иракла. Гл. 30. С. 115–117; *Shoemaker S.J.* A Prophet Has Appeared. P. 62–72.

¹⁰² Hoyland also defends Sebeos, pointing to parallels in other sources, including Jewish ones. See: *Hoyland R.* Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam.

¹⁰³ *Shoemaker S.J.* The Death of a Prophet. P. 203–204; *Shoemaker S.J.* A Prophet Has Appeared. P. 138–143.

used by Sebeos] also provides insight into the emergence of Islam¹⁰⁴. Syrian sources from the 7th century are of further relevance.

One of the principal tasks, therefore, is to trace anomalies in Islamic tradition that align with the non-Muslim reports. Discrepancies between the non-Muslim accounts from the 7th–8th centuries and the traditional Islamic narratives from the late 8th–9th centuries must be subjected to critical scrutiny.

Inclusivity of the community of “believers”

[Shoemaker accepts Donner’s theory] that the early Islamic movement began as a confederation of Abrahamic communities united by belief in an imminent Day of Judgment and a shared commitment to justice on earth. [According to this theory, early Islam was] not a sect, but a supra-confessional movement grounded in biblical and para-biblical Jewish and Christian traditions, combined with some distinctively Arab elements. This was an interfaith community, all of whose members professed Abrahamic monotheism and anticipated salvation.

The “believers” [prayed together], for instance, in the Church of St. John the Baptist in Damascus. In Jerusalem, there is evidence of shared custodianship of holy sites and Muslim prayers conducted within Christian churches (e.g., the prayers of ‘Umar and later Mu‘āwiyā at the tomb of the Virgin Mary)¹⁰⁵. Muslims soon redirected their focus to the Temple Mount. ‘Umar’s building projects on the Mount were perceived by contemporaries as an effort to restore the Jerusalem Temple – a motif common in Jewish apocalyptic literature of the early Islamic era. Early Islam, in this sense, was seen as a kind of Jewish messianic movement. Traces of Jewish eschatological hope are discernible within the early Islamic community.

[The supra-confessional nature of the early community had endured roughly until the late 7th century, after which alternative currents were gradually suppressed.]

¹⁰⁴ *Shoemaker S.J.* The Death of a Prophet. P. 201–202.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* P. 215.

Eschatology

[Shoemaker, following Hoyland, further develops the theme of eschatology in early Islam, previously explored by Crone and Cook in *Hagarism*.] Early Islam was marked by strong eschatological expectations. Eschatology is the Qur'ān's second most prominent theme after monotheism¹⁰⁶. Of the 48 *sūras* classified by Nöldeke as early Meccan, most are eschatological in nature¹⁰⁷. A close reading of the Qur'ān and early *ḥadīths* reveals that Muḥammad was an eschatological prophet¹⁰⁸, preaching the return of control over the Promised Land to the children of Abraham in anticipation of the imminent Day of Judgment. Muḥammad and his Companions believed that the Day of Judgment would occur in their lifetimes. He did not designate a successor — political succession is absent from the Qur'ān — [precisely because he] expected the world to end soon. If Muḥammad were the pragmatic reformer imagined by [such scholars as] Montgomery Watt, how are we to explain the chaos and confusion following his death? A true organizer intent on building a just society would have made provisions for leadership. But if Muḥammad was an apocalyptic prophet, then concerns for social justice or equality would have been secondary — indeed, irrelevant in light of an imminent end.

When the End of the World failed to materialize and its expected timing was repeatedly postponed, the Muslim community was compelled to reinterpret the nature of its movement¹⁰⁹. This radical reshaping of early Islamic historical tradition occurred in the 2nd century AH. The ecstatic apocalyptic Meccan *sūras* that predicted an imminent end can hardly be late interpolations¹¹⁰ — unlike the Medinan *sūras*. Candidates for later additions include verses concerning the change of *qibla* and polemics with Jews and Christians.

The [later] reworking of Muḥammad's teachings was not the result of a conspiracy, but rather an almost unconscious re-reading of the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. P. 120.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. P. 131.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. P. 191.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. P. 192.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. P. 160.



Jerusalem on the Madaba Map, Jordan, 6th century CE
Photo in public domain

Qur'ān in light of evolving theological views concerning the delayed *Hour* [i.e., the Day of Judgment]¹¹¹.

Palestinocentricity of early Islam

[Following the arguments of Crone and Cook, Stephen Shoemaker also raises the question of] whether early Islam had a single sacred center. [While the authors of *Hagarism* pointed to the otherwise unknown Bakka, Shoemaker proposes an alternative hypothesis: according to him, it is Jerusalem that served as formative Islam's primary sacred focus.] Eschatological traditions across the Abrahamic religions identify Jerusalem as the site of the Last Judgment. This eschatological significance explains Muḥammad's desire to capture Jerusalem—the apocalyptic city *par excellence*—prior to the End of Times¹¹². According to Sebeos and other sources, Muḥammad's preaching emphasized the liberation of the Promised Land and its reclaiming by the sons of Abraham. At least eleven sources from the 7th–8th centuries assert that Muḥammad was still alive at the time of the conquest of Palestine.

¹¹¹ Ibid. P. 124.

¹¹² Ibid. P. 217.

Prior to the emergence of Muslim prophetic biography in the mid-8th century, no sources contradict this claim. These testimonies stem from diverse Christian sects, as well as Jewish and Samaritan communities¹¹³. Ibn Ishāq also recounts Muḥammad's military campaign in Palestine near the end of his life¹¹⁴. The convergence of these relatively independent sources suggests a [shared] early Islamic tradition. It is difficult to believe that such diverse witnesses all made the same error, especially given the absence of traces of the “correct” version [i.e., the one later endorsed by Islamic tradition] within them. [Furthermore,] most of these sources are free from overt polemical or apologetic agenda. The notion that Muḥammad died after the conquest [of Palestine] is presented neutrally, as an established fact. It appears that the tradition [locating] Muḥammad's death in Medina in 632 CE had not yet solidified until the early 2nd century AH. Reports that he lived to lead the conquest of Palestine likely reflect an authentic early Islamic narrative, later revised during the transformation of Islamic self-understanding, when the Prophet was dissociated from the conquest of the Holy Land.

[Shoemaker reinterprets] the Battle of Mu'ta (629) and the expedition to Tabūk (630) as [the opening stages of] a broader Palestinian campaign. These were aimed at Byzantine territories. The army assembled for the Tabūk expedition — reportedly 30,000 men — was unprecedented in size. This campaign marked the beginning of a far more ambitious northern offensive than traditionally assumed by most historians. The Arabs faced little resistance, with local populations submitting to their authority. It strains credibility to think that Muḥammad returned to Medina after such a show of force. Something important must have been omitted. Before his death, Muḥammad had reportedly planned another campaign across the Jordan and into Palestine, to be led by Usāma ibn Zayd. Whether or not Muḥammad personally lived to see the liberation of the Holy Land is ultimately less important than the desire to link his persona with its conquest. This tradition, portraying Muḥammad as leading the conquest of Palestine, survived into the 12th century and beyond.

¹¹³ Ibid. P. 217.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. P. 99.

literature such as *Faḍā'il al-Quds* (“Merits of Jerusalem”)] and show parallels with the Jewish Temple cult. Evidently, this site was not simply [one among many] sacred locales, but a uniquely exalted sanctuary. Under the Umayyads, the Dome of the Rock was not a rival to the Ka‘ba, but a site with its own eschatological aura and distinctive rites. The Rock was considered intrinsically sacred, independent of its associations with the Jewish Temple¹¹⁹. The shrine’s architecture and decoration reflect an apocalyptic atmosphere¹²⁰. Far from representing a theological innovation, it marked the last flourishing of Jerusalem-centered piety among the early “believer” movement in the formative decades of Islam. The shrine’s original meaning differed [substantially] from the way it was later interpreted within the Islamic tradition.

The *Night Journey* tradition is another narrative linking Muḥammad to Palestine. The reinterpretation of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf [the Temple Mount] shifted its significance from the *Jewish Temple* to the site of Muḥammad’s *night journey* (*Isrā’*). Originally (in the 1st century AH), however, [this journey] was not associated with Jerusalem. [The term] *al-Masjid al-Aqṣā* (“the farthest mosque”) was initially understood [to refer to] a celestial sanctuary. Notably, the Dome of the Rock’s inscriptions omit Qur’ān 17:1 — the verse of *Isrā’* and *Mi‘rāj* [the night journey and ascension of the Prophet]. Clearly, the Dome could not have been built as a memorial to that event.

References to pilgrimage to the three great mosques of Islam — Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem — in the first half of the 2nd century AH reflect debates about Jerusalem’s status and efforts to marginalize it¹²¹. [At that time,] was there even an established practice of an annual *hajj* to Mecca¹²²? There is no early evidence for pilgrimage to the Ka‘ba. The Qur’ān speaks only vaguely of pilgrimage to a *Bayt* [“house” or “sanctuary”, without specifying its location; in the earliest Islamic context, this may have referred to *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem)]. Pilgrimage to Mecca appears to be a later innovation. Mecca did not immediately displace Jerusalem as the primary site of pilgrimage. The

¹¹⁹ Ibid. P. 235–236.

¹²⁰ Ibid. P. 237.

¹²¹ Ibid. P. 229.

¹²² Ibid. P. 244.

Islamic tradition that elevates Mecca and the Ḥijāz is a later one¹²³. According to Wansbrough, the Qur’ān contains virtually no reference to the Ḥijāz. The veneration of Mecca emerged from sustained efforts by later commentators — the zeal of these efforts is noteworthy: it is as if they are expended in deliberate opposition to alternative views¹²⁴. This reorientation included attempts to integrate the Ḥijāz into biblical history, e.g., by modeling the *hajj* ritual on the sacrifice of Isaac. Following the Second Civil War (*fitna*), ‘Abd al-Malik took steps toward closer alignment with the Ḥijāz. It was during this period that the damaged Ka‘ba was restored. It is likely that this period also saw the formation of the specific rituals of *hajj* centered on the Ka‘ba¹²⁵.

An early, powerful tradition affirmed the sanctity of Jerusalem; later efforts sought to downplay this in favor of Ḥijāzī sacred geography¹²⁶. The holiness of the Holy Land and Jerusalem — so self-evident to the “believers” of the first Islamic century and to the Umayyads — is reinterpreted in later Islamic tradition as an Umayyad innovation detracting from the sanctity of the Ḥijāz. In traditional Islamic historiography of the 8th–9th centuries, Muḥammad’s religious focus is restricted to Mecca and Medina, with Jerusalem deliberately marginalized. By the end of the first Islamic century, Islam had shifted away from its original orientation toward the Holy Land and Jerusalem, *centering instead on a sacred geography of its own, the Arabian one. This shift* is a defining moment in the formation of Islam as a distinct religious tradition.

Part of this process may have included a *reimagining of Muḥammad’s death* to associate it with the Ḥijāz rather than Abrahamic eschatology or the Holy Land. Early Muslim graves were oriented toward Jerusalem, even during the Umayyad period. Burial in Jerusalem was [widely] regarded as spiritually meritorious. Might Muḥammad originally have been buried in Jerusalem¹²⁷? It would be strange if the culmination of his life had no connection with the liberation of the

¹²³ Ibid. P. 245.

¹²⁴ Ibid. P. 246.

¹²⁵ Ibid. P. 256.

¹²⁶ Ibid. P. 230.

¹²⁷ Ibid. P. 238.

Holy Land¹²⁸. As Islam developed its own sacred geography centered on the Hijāz, Muḥammad's death had to be radically reinterpreted.

The death of Muḥammad

The Prophet's death prior to the Last Judgment necessitated a rapid theological reevaluation among his followers. The *Sīra* includes strong refutations of the idea that Muḥammad would not die until the End Times, indicating how widespread that belief [initially] was. The delay in burial was due to the fact that part of the community denied his death, a fact confirmed by Christian sources as well. Early Christian polemics criticized the unfulfilled prediction of Muḥammad's bodily resurrection, which corresponds with Islamic traditions that report that 'Umar refused to allow Muḥammad's burial, expecting his resurrection¹²⁹.

The earliest sources offer minimal detail about Muḥammad's death. None describe its circumstances; information about its timing and location appears only in the first written biographies, circa the mid-8th century¹³⁰. Early Islamic tradition shows little interest in the specifics of Muḥammad's burial¹³¹, which are known only from Ibn Ishāq. Narratives about the Prophet's burial proliferated from the early 9th century onward, featuring increasingly elaborate details yet [lacking] historical context. The longer the interval from the actual events, the more "information" Islamic tradition acquired. Many details concerning Muḥammad's illness and death reflect sectarian struggles over his legacy rather than historical fact. [Most] sources converge on 632 CE as the date of his death, though some claim he lived thirteen years after the Hijra. Some Arab-Sasanian coins suggest dating the Hijra to

¹²⁸ Ibid. P. 239.

¹²⁹ Syriac versions of the Baḥīrā legend (8th–9th centuries) represent a counter-narrative of Islam's origins; see: *Roggema B. The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā. Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam.* Leiden: Brill, 2009. Eds.

¹³⁰ *Shoemaker S.J. The Death of a Prophet.* P. 75.

¹³¹ Ibid. P. 96.

624/625 CE. These variant chronologies imply that Muḥammad may still have been alive during the invasion of Palestine¹³².

It is possible that the Prophet's death was "relocated" to Medina later [in order to align with the shift in Islamic sacred geography from Jerusalem to the Hijāz]. Ibn Ishāq sets Muḥammad's death in an urban setting (i.e., not during a military campaign, a version that became canonical largely through his influence). In al-Zuhrī's account, Medina is not even mentioned¹³³. Theophanes the Confessor attempted to harmonize Christian and Islamic narratives, writing that Muḥammad died from a sword or wounds. The East Syriac tradition, which held that Muslims did not know the location of Muḥammad's grave, is evidently early and [predates] the consensus that he was buried in Medina. [The earliest accounts of the Prophet's mosque under Caliph al-Walīd I (705–715) also omit reference to his burial. The association between Muḥammad's tomb and the mosque in Medina was not firmly established until the mid-8th century, when the tradition of his death in 'Ā'isha's house had been introduced — nearly a century after the actual events.]

[Shoemaker suggests that Medina (and not Mecca or the Holy Land) was designated as Muḥammad's burial place not because he had actually been buried there, but because the earliest biographies were written and circulated by Medinan authors. Nearly all early Muslim biographers hailed from Medina and sought to enshrine its status as the birthplace of Islam and the "City of the Prophet" in collective historical memory.]

The narrative of Muḥammad's burial is an idealized memory, constructed to normalize Muslim funerary practices and distinguish them from others¹³⁴.

The transformation of Islam under 'Abd al-Malik

Following the Prophet's death and the deferral of the Day of Judgment—which dealt a critical blow to [early Islam's] eschatological ori-

¹³² Ibid. P. 105.

¹³³ Ibid. P. 90–93 (Ibn Ishāq on Muḥammad's death and burial), P. 93–99 (Muḥammad's death according to al-Zuhrī).

¹³⁴ Ibid. P. 98.

entation—a reconfiguration of its foundations became necessary. In the early reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, the interconfessional community of “believers” began to fragment, giving rise to a distinct “Islamic” variant of the movement. This version was characterized by rejection of [the Christian doctrine of] the Trinity and elevation of Muḥammad to a supreme prophetic status. The Qur’ān’s polemic against the Trinity can thus be read as a marker of an emerging Muslim communal identity. [A similar dynamic shaped the] evolution of the *shahāda*: its first half (“There is no god but God”) was universally acceptable, while the second (“Muḥammad is the messenger of God”) appeared later as part of confessional differentiation. Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 692) was the first to mint coins bearing the full double *shahāda* [with “Muḥammad rasūl Allāh”], signaling the emergence of a distinctly Arab monotheism¹³⁵.

The idea of Muḥammad as the “Seal of the Prophets” is a later development; the Qur’ān presents all prophets as equals. This concept emerged as part of the Muslim identity formation under ‘Abd al-Malik. [It also motivated] the codification of the Qur’ān as an exclusively Islamic Holy Writ in Arabic. The destruction of rival Qur’ānic versions attests to the success of the Islamic state¹³⁶. The standardization of Islam was the result of sustained efforts by the Umayyads and ‘Abbāsids.

As Islam began to take shape as a distinct religion, it required its own sacred geography (outside Palestine), its own prophet, scripture, and sacred language —each a marker of the emerging Islamic identity¹³⁷. It is likely that the Ḥijāz was only recognized as the [Islamic] Holy Land alongside Jerusalem in the early second Islamic century (8th century CE), as part of the Arabization of the new faith. The ‘Abbāsids undertook substantial efforts to sacralize the Ḥijāzī landscape¹³⁸, though these had likely begun under the Marwānids. The catalyst for this process was the Second Fitna (680–692). Competing

¹³⁵ Ibid. P. 254.

¹³⁶ Ibid. P. 158.

¹³⁷ Ibid. P. 250–251.

¹³⁸ The ‘Abbāsids completed the sacralization of the Ḥijāz by filling it with monuments to Muḥammad and his prophetic mission. Eds.



Professor Panchenko at the 3rd Syro-Arabic Symposium (Lebanon, Saint Joseph University of Beirut, February 2015). At this event, Panchenko’s attention was particularly drawn to a presentation by an independent researcher from Germany, who appeared under the initials N.N. and dealt with one of Christoph Luxenberg’s central themes: the interpretation of the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock.

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visions of pilgrimage and the sanctity of Mecca were central to this conflict. Ibn al-Zubayr’s promotion of Mecca was a direct response to the Umayyad religious orientation toward Jerusalem. Advocates of a southern, Meccan sacred geography rallied around him. This conflict between Jerusalem and Mecca was not merely political, but fundamentally religious — [it was a struggle over] the very nature of Islam and the localization of its Holy Land. ‘Abd al-Malik’s strategy was to fuse Islam with Arab statehood.

In sum, the early decades of Islam witnessed a radical transformation of its very nature: shifts in self-identification — from “believers” to “Muslims” — and in sacred geography — from Jerusalem to the Ḥijāz. From an interconfessional monotheistic movement with a sharply foreshortened eschatological horizon — centered on Jerusalem and the Holy Land and open to a broad circle of “believers” within the Abrahamic tradition — Islam gradually transformed into an imperial religion with a well-defined confessional identity, grounded in Arab ethnicity and centered around a specifically Islamic sacred geography in the Ḥijāz.

Conclusion

Constantin Panchenko did not live to complete his article. Of what appears to have been planned as a fairly extensive concluding section, only two paragraphs were written for delivery at a roundtable discussion. They are presented below verbatim.

“There is no longer scholarly consensus concerning the nature of the Qur’ān and, more broadly, the origins of Islam. Already in the 2000s, conferences were held and collected volumes were published in the West on Qur’ānic studies¹³⁹ where the following questions were actively debated: What did the Qur’ān originally consist of? Was it a statement of Islamic doctrine, or of something else? In what language was the proto-Qur’ān recorded? Was it transmitted orally or in writing, and how much was the text altered through later redactions? When and how did the codification and canonization of the Qur’ān take place¹⁴⁰? As Fred Donner wrote in 2005, Qur’ānic studies lack a consensus — they are in a state of turmoil, and this is a good thing, for it is far better than the previous state of “false consensus,” which in fact meant an inability or unwillingness to raise pressing questions in a critical framework—perhaps for fear of negative reactions from the faithful¹⁴¹.

In other words, Western Islamic studies are undergoing a period of fermentation and exploration. In stark contrast, Russian Islamic studies remain largely unaffected by these new intellectual currents”.

The reader can infer Constantin Panchenko’s view of the state of Russian Islamic studies from the quotations presented in the Editors’ foreword. He saw it as his mission to dismantle that very “false consensus” that followed the traditional Muslim paradigm. This old consensus, he believed, must give way to a new one. The question is: What did the new consensus look like in his view?

Some insight into this question can be gleaned from a revised outline of the article that he drafted shortly before his passing (see Appendix).

¹³⁹ See, for example: *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context* / Ed. G.S. Reynolds. London: Routledge, 2008.

¹⁴⁰ *Donner F.M. The Qur’ān in Recent Scholarship*. P. 31–43.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* P. 43.

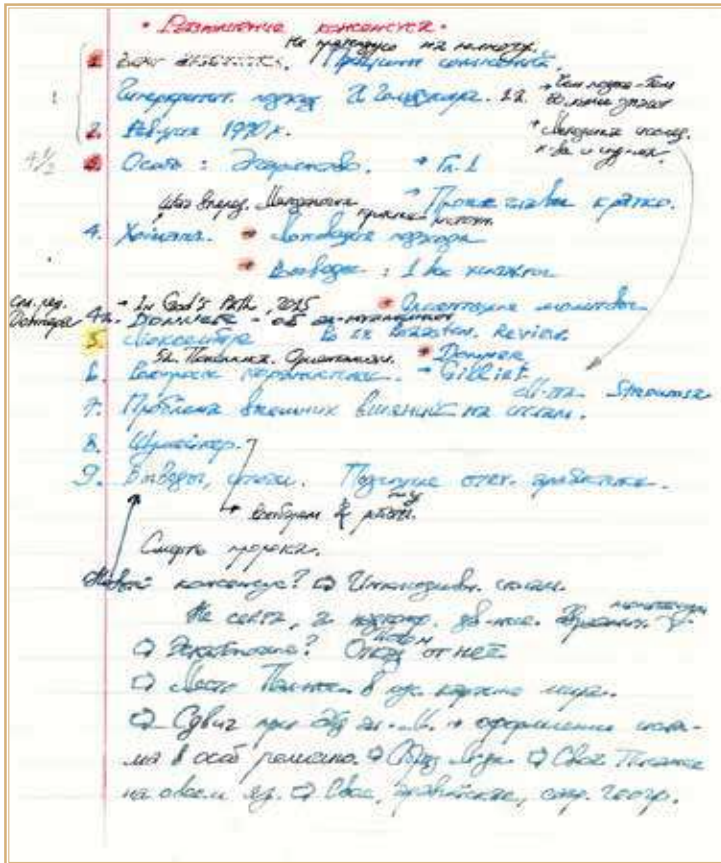
According to this plan, he intended to address the following aspects of the question:

- a. Islam as an inclusive, supra-confessional movement — Abrahamic monotheism, not a sect;
- b. Eschatology — initial emphasis, followed by its decline;
- c. The role of Palestine in the Muslim worldview;
- d. The shift under ‘Abd al-Malik: the formation of Islam as a distinct religion. The image of Muḥammad, a scripture in its own language, and a sacred geography centered in Arabia.

*It is clear that this outline reflects creative engagement with the conclusions of Stephen Shoemaker. In Shoemaker’s book The Death of a Prophet, Professor Panchenko must have found the **well-articulated and methodologically rigorous** new paradigm that he had long been seeking (in contrast to Hagarism, where that paradigm is only sketched out and presented in a deliberately provocative and polemical fashion). As already noted, it was only after reading Shoemaker’s monograph that he stated—on the eve of his death—that he finally realized what the concluding article should look like.*

Let us briefly summarize the key features of this new paradigm. The early Islam was a supra-confessional Abrahamic movement of “believers” (Shoemaker accepts Donner’s theory), which included not only the followers of Muḥammad but also numerous Jews and Christians. This movement was strongly eschatological in orientation, which explains its initial drive toward conquest — particularly of Jerusalem, where the apocalyptic events of the Last Judgment were expected to unfold. Thus, early Islam was centered on Palestine. It was there, not in Mecca or Medina, that the first Muslim holy sites arose.

In the Islamic historiographical tradition — formed about a century later, in the mid-8th century — these aspects were either forgotten or relegated to the background. (They can be reconstructed from 7th-century non-Muslim sources, the Qur’ān, and some “anomalous” Muslim traditions.) Since the End Times anticipated by Muḥammad’s contemporaries did not occur, the eschatological expectations gradually lost their relevance. Moreover, the Prophet’s biography was compiled primarily on the basis of memories from the inhabitants of Medina. Their worldview was overly focused on the Arabian context: all events — including



Revised outline of the present article by Professor Panchenko, 2024
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apparently later ones, such as the redirection of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca — were situated exclusively within the Arabian framework of Muhammad’s life. As a result, the historical chronology was compressed (relative to actual events), and a historical paradigm emerged that systematically marginalized and suppressed the Palestino-centric Islam of Muhammad’s immediate followers and the early Umayyads.

The Second Fitna of 680–692 CE, in which the Umayyads faced off against the Zubayrids of Medina, ultimately led the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) to shift his focus from Palestine — despite his initial alignment with Palestino-centric positions, as evidenced by his construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem — to the Hijāz. As Shoemaker argues, it was under his rule that the Qur’ān was codified. During this same period, Muslims definitively separated themselves into a distinct religious community, and the development of a specifically

Arabian form of Islam was set in motion — an Islam distinct from the other Abrahamic religions and centered not in Palestine, but in the Ḥijāz. This is the form of Islam familiar to us from later Islamic historiography.

Appendix

Revised outline of the article “Destroying the Consensus. Interpretations of the Birth of Islamic Civilization in Modern Western Historiography”:

1. Milestones in Arabic studies (non-exhaustive account)
 - a. Causes of skepticism
 - b. The hypercritical method of Goldziher
- 1a. The later the source, the more it claims to know
2. The 1970s scholarly revolution
3. Special case: *Hagarism*
 - a. Chapter 1
 - b. Summary of other chapters
4. Hoyland
 - a. A step forward: source-critical methodology
 - b. Approach and method
 - c. Conclusions regarding the first Islamic century
 - d. Prayer orientation
- 4a. Donner on the *al-mu'minūn*. See Donner's review of Hoyland's *In God's Path* (2015)
5. Luxenberg (including Baasten's review)
- 5a. Polemics. Orientalism
6. Questions in Qur'ānic studies: methods for studying Christianity and Judaism
 - a. Donner
 - b. Gilliot
7. External influences on Islam (Stroumsa)
8. Shoemaker: focusing on *The Death of a Prophet*
9. Conclusions and overview: the state of Russian Arabic studies
 - a. A new consensus? Inclusive Islam — not a sect, but a supra-confessional Abrahamic movement

- b. Eschatology, followed by its decline
- c. The role of Palestine in the Muslim worldview
- d. The shift under ‘Abd al-Malik: the formation of Islam as a distinct religion — Muḥammad as a religious figure, a scripture in its own language, and a sacred geography centered in Arabia

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.



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