

New documentary texts and the early Islamic state¹

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There has recently been much contention about the nature of the early Islamic state. With regard to its administration we have the contrasting views of Clive Foss and Jeremy Johns. In the eyes of the former 'the Islamic government was already highly organized and bureaucratic under the great leader Mu'āwīya (661–680)', whereas for the latter 'a centralized administrative and fiscal apparatus was absent under Mu'āwīya'.² And with regard to ideology a flood of recent publications has challenged the traditional view of the development of Islam and of the role that it played in the life of the young Muslim community. For example, Yehuda Nevo has argued that paganism and 'a very simple form of monotheism with Judaeo-Christian overtones' constituted the religious beliefs of the early Arab elite, and Christoph Luxenberg has sought to demonstrate that the Quran was not composed in Arabic or derived from Arabian religious traditions, but rather drafted in a mixed Aramaic-Arabic tongue and based upon Christian Aramaic texts.³

It is, of course, immensely difficult to document the early stages of a new religious tradition and a new regime, since events are moving swiftly and the fledgling community must constantly reinvent itself in response to these changes. In the case of early Islam this problem is compounded by a stalemate in the debate about the authenticity of Muslim accounts about Muḥammad and his successors⁴ and a paucity of material evidence. In such a situation one might expect that such documents as do exist would be fully utilized, and yet vast numbers of papyri remain unedited, inscriptions unrecorded and excavations unpublished, and even those that are known are often not taken into account by Islamic historians. These are issues too large to tackle in a short article, and my aim here is simply to present and elucidate a few additions to the corpus of non-literary sources relevant to this most contentious field of Islamic history, and, I hope, to show that by combining them with literary evidence, both Muslim and non-Muslim,⁵ some guidelines and landmarks can be established.

The scarcity of documentary evidence for the first seventy years of the Muslim polity, and in particular the rarity of overtly Islamic content and the lack of any mention of Muḥammad, has led some scholars to infer that either

¹ This article began its life as a lecture given in French at the Collège de France (January 2005) at the invitation of Dr Arietta Papaconstantinou. I am immensely grateful to her for the initial impetus to write this article and for her very helpful comments during its progress. The figures are taken from *Arabia Revue de Sabéologie* 1, 2003, 295–8, 301, by kind permission of Professor Christian Robin and with gratitude to Dr 'Alī al-Ghabban, gifted epigrapher and special advisor for culture and heritage in Saudi Arabia.

² J. Johns, 'Archaeology and the history of early Islam', *Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient* 46, 2003, 422; C. Foss, 'A Syrian coinage of Mu'āwīya', *Revue Numismatique* 2002, 353.

³ (With Judith Koren), *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (New York: Prometheus, 2003), 10–11; *Die syrisch-aramäische Lesart des Koran* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000).

⁴ For an excellent summary of the problems of the source material for this period see P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: the Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), 3–17.

⁵ This is an approach I strove to advocate and illustrate in my *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton: Darwin, 1997), esp. 545–98.

Islamicization was as yet shallow,⁶ or that Islam itself was as yet little developed,⁷ perhaps no more than a pietistic belief in God and the imminence of the Day of Judgement⁸ or only 'of a general monotheistic nature'.⁹ The material that exists (and is dated to 1–70 AH/622–90 AD) does tell us more than sceptics allow for:¹⁰

God is 'compassionate', 'merciful', no partner (i.e. documents only in his name), 'lord of the heavens and the earth', 'lord of the worlds', human action only done 'by His permission' and 'by Allah's might and His power', 'lord of Gabriel, Michael and Serafiel'.

His people are united by a new calendar (i.e. all dated documents use the same new calendar beginning 1 AH = 622 CE), a new name (*muḥājirūn*, appears on earliest papyri of 20s AH, and known from Greek and Syriac sources), a script and a language (use of Arabic script and language prevalent); appeal to Allah for forgiveness, compassion and blessings, praise Him, say Amen (i.e. they have common rituals of invocation and worship). Their ruler is commander of the believers, the servant of Allah and he benefits the believers.

And yet it is none the less true that such Islamic declarations as we do have for this period are very few and very non-committal in comparison with the abundance and assertiveness of those for the ensuing period, as though Islam had now found its voice. The most obvious example for the ensuing period are the mosaic texts emblazoned on the Dome of the Rock, completed in 72/691–2 by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik, which give a full profession of the Islamic faith and pontificate to Jews and Christians about not compromising their monotheism. But even the small space accorded by gold and silver coins is crammed with text, declaring to all that use them, and use them they must, that God is 'the one, the eternal, He did not beget and was not begotten' (= Quran 112) and that 'Muḥammad is the messenger of God whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth that He might make it prevail over all religion' (= Q 9:33). Before this innovation, which occurred in the 70s/690s, only imitations of Byzantine and Sasanian coins were used, often still with Greek and Persian formulae on them, and with only the most minimal of Islamic expressions (just *bism Allah* and an epithet). So what are we to make of this striking contrast? Of course, since only three per cent or so of inscriptions are dated, it may be that many of the undated ones belong to the early period. And yet there are enough dated to the early period that share the same reticence about Islam and the silence about Muḥammad to make it likely that this was a real feature of the documents of this time. So why was this?

1. *Propaganda*

In the first place we should remember that such texts were not intended as historical reports. When Muḥammad does appear in the material record, it

⁶ S. Ory, 'Aspects religieux des textes épigraphiques du début de l'Islam', *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 58, 1990, 36.

⁷ M. Sharon, 'Arabic inscriptions from Sede Boqer', in R. Cohen, *Archaeological Survey of Israel. Map of Sede Boqer West* (167) 12–03 (Jerusalem: IAS, 1985), 31–35* (cf. idem, 'The Umayyads as Ahl al-Bayt', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14, 1991).

⁸ F. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins* (Princeton: Darwin, 1998), esp. 64–97; see the thorough critique by A. Elad, 'Community of believers of "Holy Men" and "Saints" or community of Muslims', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 47, 2002, 241–308.

⁹ Y. Nevo, 'Towards a prehistory of Islam', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17, 1994, esp. 110; idem and J. Koren, 'Methodological approaches to Islamic studies', *Der Islam* 68, 1991, 104.

¹⁰ For a list of the inscriptions and their content see Excursus F in my *Seeing Islam*, and see Figures 1 and 2 ab in this article.

is not to note his existence or to detail the events of his life, but to make use of him as a propaganda weapon. He makes his debut on two Arab-Sasanian silver coins, on the margin of which is inscribed a truncated Muslim profession of faith: 'In the name of God, Muḥammad is the messenger of God' (*bism Allah Muḥammad rasūl Allah*). Both were minted at Bishapur in Fars and bear the usual Sasanian imperial bust on the obverse and a Sasanian fire-altar on the reverse. They are dated to the years 66 and 67 AH, which correspond to 685–86 and 686–87 CE, and the issuing authority is named as 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abd Allah (ibn 'Āmir), who was married to Hind, sister of the rebel caliph Ibn al-Zubayr, who was fighting to oust the incumbent caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān.¹¹ This means that the earliest attested Islamic profession comes from an opposition party. This is not implausible. That the revolt of Ibn al-Zubayr had religious implications is confirmed by a contemporary Christian source, which says of him that 'he had come out of zeal for the house of God and he was full of threats against the Westerners, claiming that they were transgressors of the law'. And an Arab apocalypse maintains that through Ibn al-Zubayr, Islam 'will become firmly rooted'. Moreover, other insurrectionary figures of a religious hue flourished during this civil war, such as the enigmatic Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, hailed by some as the messiah (*mahdī*), the 'cudgel-bearers' (*khashshābiyya*) of Mukhtār ibn Abi 'Ubayd known for 'their zeal for righteousness', and another pretender to the caliphate, the Kharijite leader Qaṭarī ibn al-Fujā'a, who struck coins asserting that 'judgement belongs to God alone' (*lā ḥukma illā lillāh*) and declaring himself to be 'servant of God' and 'commander of the believers'.¹²

The lack of overtly Islamic declarations from before the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik, the proliferation of them issued by him and his successors, and the religious causes espoused by the various opposition movements of the intervening civil war, all lead us to the conclusion that it was pressure from rebel factions that induced 'Abd al-Malik to proclaim Islam publicly as the ideological basis of the Arab state.¹³ But the soundness of this move must have been patent to him, for it offered a way to rally the competing parties of this divisive civil war and to steal the thunder from his opponents. The enthusiasm with which he and his successors pursued the policy illustrates that they saw in it a means of strengthening their own legitimacy, styling themselves as God's deputies on earth with the right and responsibility to determine matters of religion.¹⁴

The exact mechanics of this policy change on the part of the Marwanids will remain opaque until we have studied the coinage and events of the second civil war in greater depth, but that they achieved such a shift seems irrefutable. This then begs the question of what they were changing from, that is, what had been the rationale of the Arab polity before 'Abd al-Malik? As is clear from

¹¹ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Muḥabbar*, ed I. Lichtenstädter (Hyderabad, 1940), 67 (married to Hind). We first hear of him at the beginning of the second civil war when he was called upon by the Basrans to be their governor after the flight of 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyād and the killing of his deputy Mas'ūd ibn 'Amr al-Azdi (al-Tabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901, 2.463/64 AH, who says he held this position for one month).

¹² For the references to the literary and numismatic material cited in this paragraph and further discussion see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 552–3, and also the very useful overview provided by C. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2005).

¹³ Note also that the first coin struck by a governor of 'Abd al-Malik, namely in 71/690–1 by Khālīd ibn 'Abdallah, was struck in Bishapur and bears the truncated profession of faith, in both respects like the two dirhams struck by the Zubayrid 'Abd al-Malik ibn 'Abdallah.

¹⁴ Note that this is in stark contrast to texts of earlier Muslim rulers, which at most use the terms 'servant of God' and 'commander of the believers'.

non-Muslim testimony and papyri, there was a recognizably Islamic cult at this time,¹⁵ but, as is evident from the extant archaeological evidence, it was not publicly proclaimed. So what exactly was happening? Did the nascent Muslim state not need or desire to disseminate propaganda or did it simply not have the means or opportunity to do so?

2. *A weak state?*

It has become almost a dogma now that the pre-ʿAbd al-Malik Muslim state was very decentralized, a consequence of its constant war footing. Certainly it is true that although writers of the eighth century and later would regard the definitive defeat of the Byzantines and Iranians to have been achieved with the battles of Yarmuk and Qadisiya in the 630s or very shortly thereafter, this was not the case for contemporaries. During the first Arab civil war (656–661) a large Muslim contingent in Egypt evidently thought that their period of suzerainty was over, for ‘they negotiated with the king of the Greeks, concluded a peace with him and went over to his side’. A Christian inhabitant of Damascus at the time of Muʿāwiya conceded that the Byzantine Empire was embattled, but certainly not defeated. The monks John bar Penkaye, writing in Mesopotamia during the second Arab civil war (684–691), and Anastasius of Sinai, writing in Sinai/Palestine in its aftermath, seem confident that Arab rule was on the wane. And up until the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, revolts continued to be launched in the east of Iran and the coastal cities of Syria and Palestine passed in and out of Muslim hands.¹⁶

The conclusion many modern scholars draw from this is that the Islamic state of the first few decades did not possess a sufficiently centralized infrastructure and sufficiently developed institutions to maintain political unity or to disseminate religious propaganda. Thus one frequently hears of ‘a very loose tributary state’, ‘a loose confederation of Arab tribes’, ‘politically independent communities of *muʾminūn* (believers)’, and it is emphasized that ‘the concept of strong central authority is entirely anachronistic where the early caliphate is concerned’.¹⁷ This might seem eminently sensible. Generals in the field would, one might reasonably think, not have been able to check constantly with a central authority, and while conquests were still ongoing a central authority could surely not have established itself very firmly.

Yet, though it might seem to make good sense, it is difficult to confirm this model for the early Islamic polity, and there are a number of indications to the contrary. Contemporary non-Muslim sources, for example, acknowledge that there was a ruler (usually just ‘king’) above the generals. Thus the Armenian chronicler known as Sebeos, writing in the 660s, distinguishes between Muʿāwiya, the ‘prince (*ishkhan*) of the army who resided in Damascus’, and the ‘king’ (*arkʿay* or *tʿagawor*, usually applied to the Persian and Roman emperors respectively), who ‘did not go with the sons of Ishmael’ (meaning the Muslim Arabs) from ‘the desert of Sin’ (meaning Arabia), but still seems to formulate at least the more major decisions.¹⁸ They also record that the emir of Egypt wrote to ‘king’ ʿUmar while he was in Palestine, which

¹⁵ For the documentation see *Seeing Islam*, 547–9.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 559, for the references for this paragraph.

¹⁷ C. Robinson, *Empires and Elites after the Muslim Conquest* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 166; Johns, ‘Archaeology’, 418; Sharon, ‘The Umayyads at Ahl al-Bayt’, 124; A. Noth (with L. I. Conrad), *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition. A Source-Critical Study* (Princeton: Darwin, 1994), 56.

¹⁸ Sebeos, *The Armenian History*, trans. R.W. Thomson (Liverpool: TTH, 1999), 144, 135 n. 836, 101, 135, 143; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 124–32, and cf. 156, 196–7.

suggests some communication system as well as recognition of an overall authority.¹⁹ And they note that the caliph 'Uthmān sent an embassy to China, and, what is particularly interesting, that the caliph Mu'āwīya tried to introduce coins without the cross on them, but had to withdraw them in the face of the refusal of the Christian population to accept them.²⁰

The material record, too, credits the pre-'Abd al-Malik state with a fair degree of central authority. Quite a few Arab-Sasanian coins are stamped with Mu'āwīya's name, and five in particular proclaim him in Persian as 'commander of the believers' (*amir i-wruishnikan*); they are dated 41 AH, the year of his formal accession, which makes it likely that they were struck to celebrate this event.²¹ The striking of coins is always a sign of, or at least a claim of, political control, and the fact that these coins were struck in far-away Darabgird (south central Iran) indicates the reach of his influence. The same conclusion may be drawn from the bilingual papyrus protocol (the protective cover at the beginning of a papyrus roll bearing the marks of officialdom) from Palestine that accords him the same title, now imparted in Greek and Arabic (*abdella Mouaouia amiralmouminin* / 'abd Allah Mu'āwīya amīr al-mu'minīn).²² The restoration of the baths of Hammat Gader in Palestine and construction of two dams in Arabia (see Figure 2b), all commemorated by monumental inscriptions (the former in Greek, the latter two in Arabic), was carried out at Mu'āwīya's behest by means of various overseers, indicating a proper chain of command.²³ And again they recognize him as 'commander of the believers', making it clear that he was accepted as such across the whole Muslim realm.

As noted above, Clive Foss has recently written in support of this view,²⁴ but his claims have been countered in an important and stimulating article by Jeremy Johns, who maintains that 'a centralized administrative and fiscal apparatus is absent under Mu'āwīya, and is first introduced under 'Abd al-Malik and his successors', and he asserts this to be the reason for the lack of ideological statements from the first caliphs—'because there was not yet any state to commission the coins, documents and inscriptions through which such declarations could be made'.²⁵ This he illustrates by recourse to the corpus of

¹⁹ Ibid., 156 (in the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu*, though there may be later interference in this text). Early evidence of a postal system is also given by a papyrus of the Merton collection (P. Mert. II 100 = SB VI 9232) that mentions a postal station (*stablōn*) and is dated to 669 CE (for the date see J. Gascou and K.A. Worp, 'Problèmes de documentation apollinopolite', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 49, 1982, 88).

²⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 245 and 252 (embassy of 'Uthmān), 136–8 (Mu'āwīya's minting of coins). One could take this to mean that Mu'āwīya certainly wished to do what 'Abd al-Malik subsequently would do, namely proclaim Islam publicly, but lacked the will or power to see it through.

²¹ J. Walker, *A Catalogue of Muhammadan Coins* (London: British Museum, 1941), 1.25–6.

²² A. Grohmann, 'Zum Papyrusprotokoll in früh-arabischer Zeit', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 9, 1960, 6–13.

²³ J. Green and Y. Tsafir, 'Greek inscriptions from Hammat Gader', *Israel Exploration Journal* 32, 1982, 94–6 (abdalla Maavia amēra almoumenēn); G. Miles, 'Early Islamic inscriptions near Tā'if', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 7, 1948, 237, 241. The second dam, from the Medina area, was built by Abū Raddād, client of 'Abdallah ibn 'Abbās and overseen by Kathir ibn al-Ṣalt and Abū Mūsā (see Appendix no. 4 and Figure 2b).

²⁴ Foss, 'A Syrian coinage of Mu'āwīya'. His inference that the numerous undated Arab-Byzantine coins must therefore belong to Mu'āwīya's time is plausible, but requires proof.

²⁵ Johns, 'Archaeology', 422, 418. I wish to stress that my criticisms here are directed at what we can legitimately infer from the Nessana papyri and not at Johns' article in particular, which I genuinely found very helpful and thought-provoking. Moreover, he is unfortunately taking the brunt of my objection to an idea that has started to become almost a mantra, especially among Islamic historians, that the Muslims introduced no changes into the administration of the Middle East until the time of 'Abd al-Malik. Cf. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, 63, 65: 'the Sufyanids ruled minimally and indirectly ... Uninterested in the dirty task of administering, the task of ruling was delegated to intermediaries ... There was in any case little point in building a state during the 640s, 650s, 660s and 670s, what with all the conquest booty still circulating'.

papyri found in Nessana, southern Palestine, which, he says, 'tell a very different story, in two episodes, one set before, and one after, the accession of 'Abd al-Malik' (in 685).²⁶ However, these documents simply cannot support such a precise dating. Not only is the latest dated papyrus only from 689, perilously close to Johns' 685 watershed, but also the others which Johns has assumed to be firmly dated are in reality not so. For example, he cites no. 76 as the 'first evidence for a census', but it is not dated at all, and is only assigned to '689?' by Kraemer, its editor, because it shares some names in common with no. 57 (regarding a divorce), which is dated to 689, but it is clear that this could only date it approximately, and certainly could not exclude a date before 685. Nos 70 (order for poll-tax payment) and 74 (order for labour),²⁷ which Johns adduces respectively as the first occurrence of a poll-tax demand and as 'the first evidence that Nessana was now fully integrated into the administrative structure of the whole province', are also undated and are assigned to 'c. 685' by Kraemer because they both mention 'George, administrator of Nessana', who also appears in no. 68, which is written on the other side of no. 69, which bears an indiction year that equates to 680–681(!).²⁸ Finally, nos 55 and 59, which Johns cites as evidence for the first occurrence of 'receipts for payment of both the poll-tax and the land-tax (*dēmosia*)', are actually dated by Kraemer to 682 and 684, so before 'Abd al-Malik, though only on the basis of an indiction year, not an absolute date. And in any case we do have a number of examples in papyri for such receipts considerably before this date: for the poll-tax (here *diagraphon*, also *andrismos* and *epikephalion*) at least by 653 (= PERF 565 = SB VIII 9756) and for the land tax (*dēmosion*) by 668 (P. Vindob. G 20796).²⁹

But even if the evidence he picked is not very reliable, is Johns still right in his claim about the rudimentary nature of the Islamic state before 'Abd al-Malik? Obviously, the answer to this is relative (how rudimentary is rudimentary). It is certainly irrefutable that, with the passage of time, the Muslims increased their administrative grip over their conquered lands and that 'Abd al-Malik, who comes across as a particularly effective ruler, was instrumental in that process and was responsible for a number of important changes, such as the introduction of a single uniform coinage throughout the

²⁶ Ibid., 421; C.J. Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*. Vol. 3: *Non-Literary Papyri* (Princeton: PUP, 1958).

²⁷ Kraemer labels Nessana papyrus no. 74 a 'letter concerning compulsory public service', but the word *bastaxai* that he translates as compulsory service in connection with 'two camels and two labourers' more likely means acting as transporters of goods (a possibility he offers in his commentary to the translation).

²⁸ The reason Kraemer picks this equivalence (rather than 665–66, 695–96, etc) is that he believes this George 'very probably received as headman of the village the entagia which were addressed *tois apo Nestanōn* [to the people of Nessana]; these are dated 674–77', but there is no support for this belief in the entagia (= nos 60–67). It is also unclear why Kraemer dates no. 68 to 'about 680' and nos 70 and 74 to 'c. 685', since the only evidence for a date is the mention in all three of 'George administrator of Nessana'.

²⁹ Both documents are discussed in J. Gascou, 'De Byzance à l'Islam: les impôts en Egypte après la conquête arabe', *Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient* 26, 1983, 101–02. It follows that no. 75, 'letter organizing tax protest', which Johns sees as a response to 'the new taxes' (i.e. post-685 in his view), might also be earlier, since 'there is no date and no clue can be discovered from the name or the handwriting' (Kraemer, *Nessana* 3, 213). Note that the Arabic fiscal terms *jizya* and *kharāj* appear already on two papyri in the Louvre from the 40s AH (Y. Raghib, 'Les plus anciens papyrus arabes', *Annales Islamologiques* 30, 1996, pl. 2, shows one of them, dated 44/664–5, on hide, which records a payment of money for the *jizya*), but the exact sense of the two terms is unclear.

empire and of Arabic as the language of the bureaucracy (though this took decades to achieve fully).³⁰ But it is also irrefutable that Mu'āwīya established a framework for governing his newly acquired lands: at the top level a governor of the West based in Egypt, a governor/two governors of the East based in Iraq, and himself in the centre, based in Syria/Mesopotamia (in the new capital of Damascus), in overall charge, and below that a network of tribal leaders (*ashrāf*) who liaised between the ruling elite and their tribesmen, the basis of the regime's military muscle.

However, I would like to take issue not with how rudimentary/sophisticated or decentralized/centralized was the early Islamic state, which is, as I said, a relative matter, but rather with the notion of a sudden dramatic transformation brought about by 'Abd al-Malik. Even leaving aside the question of whether we could ever reliably document it, this notion is problematic for a number of reasons. The most important of these to my mind is that it is too dismissive of what went before. It promotes a model that is too formulaic—full continuity of pre-conquest practices before a certain date and large-scale revocation/reworking of those practices after the determined date—and too lacking in reality. Did the Muslims really come up with no new ideas for running a state in sixty odd years? Would they not to some extent have drawn on their own traditions and consulted allies and locals from different traditions?³¹ And would not the new circumstances occasioned by their conquests have necessitated new solutions, albeit often *ad hoc* rather than premeditated?

In the end this notion envisages a model that conflicts with such evidence as we do have. And unsurprisingly, therefore, papyrologists agree, in direct opposition to the picture painted by most Islamic historians, that 'from the beginning of their rule the Arabs managed closely the activity of the offices of the local finances and their position in Egypt was not that of occupiers content to pocket passively taxes, rather they knew well how to administer'.³² By which he means, he says, that they strove to make the vocabulary of their institutions accessible to the conquered peoples by using translations into their languages (e.g. the Greek title *symbolos* for *amīr*)³³ and introduced a number of

³⁰ Well presented by Robinson, 'Abd al-Malik, esp. 66–80.

³¹ It is noticeable that lists of the elite of this early period include many members of tribes powerful before Islam and/or allied to Byzantium, such as Ghassan, Kalb, Himyar and Kinda (e.g. Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 93–104), and it is tempting to think that these would have been to the young Muslim state what the Uighurs and the Khitan were to the Mongol one, but this awaits further investigation. The Mongols provide an interesting comparison in that they also had little experience in managing an empire, but the very fact that they could, given that they held power, be eclectic in their choice of advisors and decisions (drawing on traditions of their own, of tribes who had worked for imperial powers and of the imperial powers themselves) and that they had to respond to new situations thrown up by the conquests meant that they did create a distinctive polity (see D. Morgan, 'Who ran the Mongol Empire?', *JRAS* 1982, 124–36).

³² Gascou, 'De Byzance à l'Islam', 101. There are far more extant Greek and Coptic administrative and fiscal documents for the decades after 640 than for before it, which may not necessarily be attributable to the vagaries of survival. Note also the reference of Sebeos (*History*, 147) to a 'chief tax-collector (*ishkhan harkapahanj*) of the king of Ishmael' whom the Medes killed in a rebellion (c. 654) against 'the burden of tax imposed upon them'.

³³ Possibly this was an attempt to Hellenize the term 'consul', since the same epithets are used in both cases, namely 'most praiseworthy' (*paneuphēmos*) and 'most marvellous' (*hyperphyestatos*), as are, for example, applied to the *symbolos*/governor Qurra ibn Sharik in P.Lond IV 1494 (I am grateful to Arietta Papaconstantinou for this suggestion). Here it means provincial governor (cf. Kraemer, *Nessana* 3, nos 58, 72–3 and 75, and the Hammat Gader inscription of Mu'āwīya), but Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 355, also uses it in the sense of advisors (emir used further on), and on the next page even uses the term *prōtosymbolos* (first counsellor?) for the caliph, which is also found in papyri (e.g. CPR VIII 82, dated 699–700 CE).

'incontestable innovations', such as the re-forming of administrative districts.³⁴ He also cites the poll-tax as a Muslim innovation, arguing that the Greek term for it (*diagraphon/diagraphē*) does not occur before Islam with the sense of poll-tax (rather it meant a supplementary land tax in the early Byzantine period). If this is proved true, then it would imply much greater administrative input from the early Islamic state than has previously been allowed for.³⁵

Many other likely candidates come to mind. One that has recently been put forward is the system of forced labour that is found in the late seventh-century papyri for building and operating a navy, and that must also certainly date back to c. 650 when the Muslims were launching major naval offensives in the Mediterranean using light, highly manoeuvrable, battleships.³⁶ It is a system that seems to have been widely deployed, as we know from other papyri and from non-Muslim sources,³⁷ and even from Muslim sources, where it is attributed to Mu'āwīya: 'He constructed buildings and he used forced labour

³⁴ Gascou and Worp, 'Problèmes', 90; Gascou, 'De Byzance à l'Islam', 101. This idea is also supported by Ruyi-Lin Chang who gives more examples (the use of '*dianomē* with *chōria* as unities of tax base', 'the palaeographical evolution in Fayyum', ending of 'the conferring of the title of *domesticus*' and instigation of the era of Diocletian) in a paper presented at Berkeley in November 2005 and to be published (as 'P. Stras. inv. gr. 1025: un reçu de fournitures des fournitures militaires de la haute époque arabe') in P. Sijpesteijn et al. (eds), *From Andalusia to Khurasan: Documents from the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). In a paper given with Professor Gascou at the Third Conference of the International Society for Arabic Papyrology (Alexandria, March 2006) he suggests interpreting PERF 556 1.4 as an instruction from 'Amr ibn al-'As to assign the products mentioned in ll. 2–4 to 'districts that have been created' (*chōria pepoimēna*) and to 'not burden one district over another' (rather than Grohmann's odd translation in his *From the World of Arabic Papyri*, Cairo 1952, 116: 'send this man to a reserved place and do not trouble this place by [billeting] others').

³⁵ Gascou *Ibid.*, 102. I am particularly grateful to Petra Sijpesteijn for first drawing my attention to this issue, which will be further developed, along with other examples of Muslim administrative innovations, in her forthcoming papers: 'The Arab conquest of Egypt and the beginning of Muslim rule', in R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), and 'New rule over old structures: Egypt after the Muslim Conquest', in H. Crawford (ed.), *Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt* (London: British Academy, 2006). See also CPR XXII 1 (ed. F. Morelli; letter from Athanasius, a pagarch both before and after the Muslim conquest, stating that 'on the order of the most glorious emir it has been determined that the poll-tax will be levied in the Hermopolite and I am worried lest they take fright and flee', so implying that the measure is new); C. Zuckerman, 'Learning from the enemy and more: studies in "Dark Centuries" Byzantium', *Millennium* 2, 2005, 80–4 (Constans II, 641–68, introduces poll-tax in imitation of Muslim practice). Note also the censuses of adult males mentioned in early Islamic papyri (see Appendix no. 3 for two examples) that are presumably related to the collection of poll-tax (and perhaps also to forced labour; see next note). One would like to see a thorough study of this question, however, as there are a number of undated Greek papyri that use the term *diagraphon* (and *diagraphē*), and to say that they are Islamic-period because in the pre-Islamic period 'the term(s) referred to a tax that was probably different from the capitation tax introduced by the Arabs' is a self-fulfilling argument (N. Gonis, 'Five tax receipts from early Islamic Egypt', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 143, 2003, 150).

³⁶ Zuckerman, 'Learning from the enemy', esp. 108, 115–17. Note the description of the contemporary chronicler, Sebeos, *History*, 144: 'Mu'āwīya ordered 5,000 ships to be built, and he put in them [only] a few men for the sake of speed, 100 men for each ship, so that they might rapidly dart to and fro over the waves of the sea around the very large ships'. For references to this in papyri and other texts see F. Trombley, 'Sawir ibn al-Muqaffa' and the Christians of Umayyad Egypt' in P. Sijpesteijn and L. Sundelin, *Papyrology and the History of Early Islamic Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 199–226.

³⁷ Many papyri of Qurra ibn Sharik use the term *aggarestai* ('it is imposed upon') and request a certain number of labourers from each village in a district, making it clear that this was not about voluntary labour (see F. Morelli, 'Legname, palazzi e moschee', *Tyche* 13, 1998, 165–90, and *idem*, *Olio e retribuzioni nell'Egitto tardo*, Florence, 1996, esp. 81). The seventh-century writer Anastasius of Sinai (quoted in my *Seeing Islam*, 100) narrates the trials of Christians doing forced labour near the Dead Sea in southern Palestine (working on the systematic sowing of public land/*tōn katasporōn tou dēmosiou*) and at Clysma in Sinai (under someone appointed *epistatē epanō tēs ergateias*, which A. Binggeli, 'Anastase le Sinaïte: récits sur le Sinai et récits utiles à l'âme' (Paris IV: Ph.D., 2001), 1.229, translates as 'inspecteur de corvée').

(*sakhkhara al-nās*) to build them—nobody had used forced labour before him'.³⁸

There are two other innovative facets of the documents of the first few decades of Islam that are perhaps not given enough attention, namely that they are dated to the same new era (beginning in 622 CE) and written in an Arabic language and script that is startlingly uniform. A chart of all the different letter forms of these writings reveals considerable consistency. Moreover, there is also a system of diacritical marks that is used on papyri and inscriptions already in the 20s AH/640s CE (Figures 1 and 3), though only to obviate confusion rather than as a standard feature.³⁹ Now such marks do not appear at all on any of the four sixth-century Arabic inscriptions from Syria (Zebed, Jabal Usays, Harran and Mount Nebo). The most reasonable conclusion is that these marks were introduced as part of a reform of the Arabic script by the early Medinan caliphate. Presumably it was deemed necessary because of the considerable amount of correspondence generated by the waging of a war across such an extensive area, in particular ensuring supply lines for the troops, but in any case such rigorous harmonization of the script and its obviously successful implementation (given the small degree of deviance in the written record) bespeaks a considerable degree of central control.⁴⁰

3. Early Islamic religion

So to return to the question of the reticence about the religion of Islam in the documentary record of the first sixty or so years of the Muslim state, we can say that it did not result from a lack of state power. If Mu'āwiya could ensure that he was acclaimed 'commander of the believers' throughout the conquered lands, he could surely have seen to it that a reference to Muhammad be included had he so wished. The next question to ask, then, is does this reticence have something to do with the nature of the religion of Islam and/or its status vis-à-vis the state in this early period?

Some scholars would argue that the religion of Islam was indeed very different in its formative years. Of course most, including many Muslim thinkers past and present, would accept that the early Muslim conception of their Prophet and their faith evolved over time, and that they therefore held a different conception from that of later Muslims, but a number of revisionist

³⁸ Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. M.T. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883), 2.276 (the root s-kh-r, with the sense of corvée, is used in a mid-eighth-century papyrus from Khurasan being edited by Geoffrey Khan and so is evidently a technical term for forced labour). Note that Ya'qūbī also credits Mu'āwiya with instituting a police-force, a caliphal bodyguard, door-keepers and the chancellery (*dīwān al-khātīm*), though that could (at least in part) be because they are seen as signs of secular rule and Mu'āwiya was deemed the first secular ruler in contrast to the divinely guided rule of the four caliphs before him.

³⁹ A. Jones, 'The dotting of a script and the dating of an era: the strange neglect of PERF 558', *Islamic Culture* 72, 1998, 95–103. Though the dots are not used all the time as in later Arabic, they are used on the same letters as in later Arabic, and so it is evidently the same system.

⁴⁰ The reform also entailed a move to standardize the writing of *tā-marbūta* (as a *hā* rather than a *tā* even in construct) and of *ā* (by means of *aliph*, which was freed up by the decline in the use of *hamza*, which *aliph* had originally represented; e.g. Harran inscription: Sharahīl for Sharah'il). Whereas in pre-Islamic Arabic texts, medial *ā*s are never written (e.g. Harran: Zlmw for Zālim; Usays: al-Hrth for al-Hārith; Zebed: Mnfw for Manāf and al-'lh for al-'Ilāh), this changes under Islam and medial *ā* becomes more commonly denoted by *aliph*. Final *ā* is written by an *aliph* or a *yā* in pre-Islamic times, and this remains much the same in the Islamic period. The pre-Islamic practice of not writing medial *ā* is followed in early Qurans (though sometimes *yā* and *wāw* are used), presumably because no one wanted to change the practices of its first transcription, an indication that the Quran had already been written down before the reform of the Arabic script. See W. Diem, 'Some glimpses at the rise and early development of Arabic orthography', *Orientalia* 45, 1976, 251–61; C. Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe à l'époque du califat médienois', *Mélanges de l'Université de Saint Joseph*, forthcoming.

scholars would go much further and posit a discontinuity between nascent Islam and classical Islam. For example, they have postulated that Mecca was not Muḥammad's birthplace or the Hijaz Islam's home,⁴¹ that the Quran was not compiled in the seventh century or written in Arabic,⁴² and even that Muḥammad and the Arab conquests were a later invention.⁴³ Most of the impetus for such radical theories stems from the sense that a major world religion could not have been born in such a remote corner of the Middle East and from a desire to root Islam's origins and early development more fully within the world of late antiquity, and so to argue against the traditional Muslim perspective that Islam's birth was ontogenetic, untainted by alien wisdom and foreign creeds. While one sympathizes with these aims, one might be wary of such a wholesale rewriting of the later Muslim historical accounts about this period. But if we are not to trust these accounts, as revisionists urge, then we have to fall back on non-Muslim sources and documentary evidence, which are particularly unforthcoming regarding religious matters. They do at least record a new era (starting in 622 CE) and new name for the Arabs (Arabic *muhājirūn*/Syriac *mhaggrāyē*/Greek *magaritai* or *mōagaritai*), an emphasis on the One God, a sacred place in Arabia, a head of state entitled 'commander of the believers', and a 'guide' and 'instructor' called Muḥammad, which allows us to infer that the newcomers did possess a distinctive cult.⁴⁴ Furthermore, there have been new discoveries and many known texts could fruitfully be milked much harder for insights:

(a) *Religious leadership?*

A fascinating inscription belonging to this early period was published recently. It was found seventeen kilometres south of Mada'in Salih, in north-west Saudi Arabia, and reads simply: 'In the name of God, I, Zuhayr, wrote this at the time when 'Umar died, the year twenty-four' (Figure 1).⁴⁵ It seems all but certain that this refers to the caliph 'Umar, second ruler of the Muslim polity, since 24/644 was indeed the year of his death and it is hard to imagine any other 'Umar being famous enough to be alluded to thus without the need for any further clarification. And yet the absence of any epithet or title is striking. One is reminded of the picture presented of 'Umar in the Muslim sources as being of ascetic tendencies, spurning the luxuries and vanities of this world, as in the following:

The kings of Persia and Byzantium marveled at the Muslim ruler and the fact that he went out, dressed in rags, to vanquish tyrants, people of entrenched kingship, skilled administrators, politicians and financiers. It reached them that treasures were being brought to 'Umar and that he distributed them instead of storing them up and that somebody had said:

⁴¹ E.g. J. Wansbrough, *The Sectarial Milieu* (Oxford: OUP, 1978), 99: 'the elaboration of Islam was not contemporary with but posterior to the Arab occupation of the Fertile Crescent'; G. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 13: 'we need to rethink more drastically our ideas about when and where Islam emerged', for 'it is easier to envisage such an evolution occurring in those regions of the Middle East where the tradition of monotheism was firmly established'; P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), 21–3: 'the location of the Hagarene Schechem in Mecca is demonstrably secondary ...'; cf. P. Crone, 'How did the quranic pagans make a living?', *BSOAS* 68/3, 2005, 387–99.

⁴² J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 1977); Luxenberg, *Die syrisch-aramäische Lesart des Koran*.

⁴³ Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*.

⁴⁴ These and further references given in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 547–50.

⁴⁵ A very thorough and detailed discussion of this text is provided by its discoverer and editor, 'Ali Ghabban ('Naqsh Zuhayr: aqdam naqsh islāmī', *Arabia* 1, 2003, 293–342).

Oh commander of the believers, would it not be a good idea to store up this wealth for emergencies that might arise, and that 'Umar had replied: This is an idea that Satan has put into your head. It would not affect me adversely, but it would be a temptation for those who come after me.⁴⁶

But what was the nature of 'Umar's office, and of the early Islamic ruler in general? Crone and Hinds have collected numerous Muslim sources that give 'the official title of the Umayyad head of state', from 644 onwards, as *khalīfat Allah*, 'deputy of God', which, as they note, 'implies a strong claim to religious authority'.⁴⁷ They oppose the claim of these same sources, however, that Abū Bakr and 'Umar took the title *khalīfat rasūl Allah*, 'deputy of the messenger of God' (i.e. deputy of Muḥammad) and rejected that of 'deputy of God', averring that they were successors of Muḥammad and no more than that. It is true that this does sound like a pious attempt to contrast the humility of the first two Muslim rulers with the arrogance and presumption of the Umayyad dynasty.⁴⁸ However, there are some oddities about the title *khalīfat Allah* too. If it was really the most basic title of the Muslim ruler, why was it so rarely used in inscriptions and documents (Crone and Hinds put literary and documentary evidence on the same footing, so this disparity does not stand out in their survey of the use of the title). For example, in the first 200 years of Islam it was only used by one ruler, 'Abd al-Malik, and then only on one medium, coins;⁴⁹ even rebels who minted coins in this period only aspired to be 'commander of the believers' (thus the Kharijite Qaṭarī ibn Fuḡā'a). Crone has generally argued, very persuasively, in favour of the gradual evolution of Islamic institutions and against the idea of institutions emerging in full bloom at the beginning of Islam, so should we not assume the same here? Would not a claim to an all-powerful religio-political office from as early as 644, one that superseded prophethood,⁵⁰ have seemed somewhat presumptuous and been difficult to establish when the memory of Muḥammad was still so recent? Certainly, the absence of titles in the aforementioned epigraphic reference to 'Umar (assuming it is genuinely about him) bespeaks a modest conception of rule, but it is unique, and so there is little more we can say at present.

Contemporary sources portray 'Uthmān as being in overall charge of military planning (e.g. 'the treaty between Constans and Mu'āwiya, prince/ishkhan of Ishmael, was broken; the king/ark'ay of Ishmael ordered all his troops to assemble in the west and to wage war against the Roman empire so that they might take Constantinople')⁵¹ and of diplomatic/propaganda matters (sends letter to the emperor Constans calling upon him to accept the faith and suzerainty of the Arabs, dispatches embassy to China).⁵² However, we have

⁴⁶ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, ed. A.-K. 'Uthman (Beirut, 1966), 328–9.

⁴⁷ *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 11, 5.

⁴⁸ Though there are also references (collected by A. Hakim, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and the title *khalīfat Allah*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30, 2005, 207–30) to 'Umar and Abū Bakr accepting the title *khalīfat Allāh*.

⁴⁹ On buildings, milestones and documents he used 'commander of the believers' and others referred to him thus; e.g. S.'A. al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya min Makka al-mukarrama* (Riyad, 1995), no. 59: 'May God incline unto (ṣallā Allah 'alā) the servant of God 'Abd al-Malik commander of the believers'.

⁵⁰ See Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, ch. 3, for this vision of the caliphate. Crone and Hinds do note that Abū Bakr and 'Umar may have been different from their successors (ibid., 111–15), but perhaps one should extend the formative period of the office of the caliphate to the time of 'Abd al-Malik (so was he the first to use the title *khalīfat Allah* as the numismatic record implies?, as is argued by E. Landau-Tasseron, 'From tribal society to centralized polity', 24, 2000, esp. 212–3).

⁵¹ Sebeos, *History*, 143 (cf. 135).

⁵² Ibid., 143–4; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 245, 252.

no documents issued by or concerning him, so we do not have any hints of his or the Muslims' view of his status. By contrast we now have a good number of texts from Mu'āwīya that describe him as 'commander of the believers', and though this may fall short of 'deputy of God' it is nevertheless a distinctly religious title. His religious importance to his subjects is also hinted at by the entreaty in the Ṭa'if dam inscription that God 'benefit the believers through him' (*matti' al-mu'minīn bihi*). Whether his office was intended/perceived as a catholic one, that is, as leader of all believers in God and the Last Day, is impossible to say, though the idea is intriguing (see section c below). But these inscriptions do go some way towards dispelling the image so prevalent among Muslim historians, and followed by a good many modern Western scholars, of Mu'āwīya as a secular ruler only interested in 'the material trappings of kingship'.⁵³

(b) *Quranic piety*

In a very interesting book Fred Donner has emphasized the importance of the Quran to the earliest Muslims, proposing that 'the first Believers constituted a movement of militant personal piety, expressing itself in pious maxims and in the Quran itself as the essential guide required by the community to attain salvation'.⁵⁴ And indeed it has often been noted that the Quran seems to dominate early Islamic politics and theology, the body of knowledge comprising the sayings of Muḥammad and his Companions—which was so crucial to later Islamic thought—hardly figuring at all.⁵⁵

It also permeates early Islamic epigraphy. The religious devotional vocabulary of these early inscriptions is inspired by and suffused with the lexicon of the Quran. For example, the three most common wishes of these texts, particularly the graffiti, are to ask for forgiveness (*ghfr*), seek compassion (*rh̄m*) and to make a declaration of faith (*'mn*), each of these a prominent theme and root in the Quran (*ghfr* 234 times; *rh̄m* 339 times; *āmana*: 537 times; *mu'min*: 230 times). Moreover, the actual phraseology of the Quran is used from the very earliest times; for example:⁵⁶

⁵³ Johns, 'Archaeology', 424. For this attitude among Muslim scholars see P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2004), 44–7.

⁵⁴ *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 89. I should perhaps note here that there is a lively debate about whether the Quran had attained a fixed form in the earliest period of Islam driven by the lack of any unanimously-accepted extant early Qurans (see A. Grohmann, 'The problem of dating the early Qurans', *Der Islam* 33, 1958, 213–31). H.-C.G. von Bothmer, K.-H. Ohlig and G.-R. Puin, 'Neue Wege der Koranforschung', *Magazin Forschung* (Universität des Saarlandes) 1, 1999, 45, mention a Quran from San'a that allegedly yielded a fourteenth-century date within the range 657–90 CE, but Professor Sayfullah, of the Department of Nanotechnology at Cambridge University, informs me that carbon-dating of manuscripts is not very reliable. For an antidote to the sceptical position see M. M. al-Azami, *The History of the Quranic Text from Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003).

⁵⁵ E.G.M. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), 16: 'One of the most striking features of the early religious epistles is ... they abound in Koranic quotations, but they rarely, if ever, cite the ḥadīth'; P. Crone and F. W. Zimmerman, *The Epistle of Ṣālim ibn Dhakwān* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 27, speak of 'the dense quranicity of Ṣālim's epistle', a late 7th/early 8th century religio-political treatise.

⁵⁶ For the Arabic of these texts see Figures 2 ab (courtesy of Professor Ali Ghabban, 'Naqsh Zuhayr') and for full references and translations see my *Seeing Islam*, Excursus F, nos 2 (Aswan), 5 (al-Bāthā, Hijaz), 11 (Wadi Sabīl, Hijaz), 14 (al-Khashna, Hijaz), 16 (Ṭa'if, Hijaz) and 18 (Hafnat al-Abyad), except for the Medina dam text, for which see Appendix no. 4 below. Al-Harawi says that on a visit to Cyprus c. 1180 CE he saw a tomb inscription built into the wall of 'the eastern church', which contains the basmala, Sūrat al-Iklās (= 112) of the Quran and the commemoration: 'This is the tomb of 'Urwa ibn Thābit who died in the month of Ramaḍān of the year twenty-nine/ 650 CE (see Elad, 'Community of believers', 284–7). Unfortunately we only have his word for it, though note that he also mentions that in this 'eastern church' is 'the grave of Umm Ḥarām bint Milhān' (the Companion 'Ubāda ibn al-Ṣāmit's wife), who, interestingly, has long been commemorated at the Teke Mosque by Larnaca airport (cf. G. Mariti, *Viaggi per l'isola di Cipro*, Lucca, 1769, ch. 27).

Aswan (31 AH), Wadi Sabīl (46 AH), al-Khashna (52 AH):⁵⁷ *ighfir li...! / forgive...!* occurs 17 times in the Quran.

Aswan (31 AH): *adkhlil-hu fī raḥmatin min-ka / bring him into your mercy*: cf. Quran 4:175: 'As for those who believe in God and hold fast to Him, he will bring them into His mercy' (*yudkhlil-hum fī raḥmatin min-hu*).

Al-Bāthā (40 AH): *rahmat Allah wa-barakatuhu 'alā... / mercy of God and blessings upon... = Quran 11:73*.⁵⁸

Ta'if dam (58 AH): *bi-idhn Allah / 'by God's leave'* occurs 28 times in the Quran.

Medina dam (40–60 AH): *rabb al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ / 'Lord of the heavens and the earth'* occurs 12 times in the Quran.

Hafnat al-Abyaḍ (64 AH): *mā taqaddama min dhanbi-hi wa-mā ta'akhkharat / 'his sins past and to come' = Quran 48:2 (except dhanbi-ka)*.⁵⁹

As time passes, the use of the Quran in inscriptions becomes more inventive, beginning with the famous Dome of the Rock text (72/691), which does not just cite the Quran slavishly. Much has been made of these adaptations of/ deviations from the standard text of the Quran, often regarded as confirmation that the latter had not yet stabilized.⁶⁰ But though we cannot exclude the possibility that it reflects the fact that different versions of the Quran circulated in early times, there are many other possible, and arguably more plausible, explanations for such divergences. Sometimes they may be to serve the interests of clarity. Thus on 'Abd al-Malik's coinage of 77 AH, and on most inscriptions thereafter, Q 9:33 ('it is He who sent His messenger with guidance...') is slightly filled out to read: 'Muḥammad is the messenger of God whom He sent with guidance...'. Other divergences strike one as being the result of slight lapses/intrusions from other forms of Arabic (such as the spoken, the administrative, the literary, etc.) by those who were working from memory. Subtle variants would, therefore, be likely to creep in. One graffito from the environs of Mecca, dated 80 AH/699 (Figure 4), slightly adjusts Quran 38:26 from 'O David, we have made you a deputy on the earth, and so rule (*fa-ḥkum*)...!' to the more straightforward 'Oh David, we have made you a deputy on earth in order that you may rule (*li-taḥkuma*)...'. And another graffito from the same area, dated 84 AH/703 (Figure 5), attempts to render Quran 2: 21: 'Men, serve your Lord (*u'budū rabbakum*), who has created you and those who have gone before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil (*la'allakum tattaqūn*)', but introduces variants from 4: 1 (*ittaqu rabbakum*) and 2: 189/3:130/3:200/5:100 (*la'allakum tufliḥūn*).⁶¹

More commonly still, especially in the case of graffiti, an inscription will consist of a collage of phrases assembled from different verses of the Quran, it

⁵⁷ Rather than 56 AH, as its first editor had thought.

⁵⁸ With same orthography as the Quran, namely *rahma* spelt with *tā* rather than *tā-marbūṭa* and *barakāt* without *aliph*.

⁵⁹ This is a very common expression in early Arabic graffiti, usually appended to a request for forgiveness, as in Q 48:2. Note that the first part of this graffito conforms to one of the prayers said at the Muslim festival of the 'Id (Allahu akbaru kabiran wa-l-ḥamdu lilahi kathiran wa-subḥāna Allahi bukratan wa-aṣīlan); cf. Abū Zakariyyā al-Nawawī, *Al-adhkār al-muntakhaba* (Beirut and Damascus, 1971), 156. The graffito contains two small modifications: it begins *Allah w-kbr*, perhaps reflecting the pronunciation *Allahu-w-akbar*, and it ends with the addition *wa-laylan ṭawīlan*, drawing on Q 76: 25–6.

⁶⁰ See discussion of this issue and further illustrations in E. Whelan, 'Forgotten witness: evidence for the early codification of the Quran', *JAOS* 118, 1998, 1–14; and see my 'The content and context of early Arabic inscriptions', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21, 1997, 77–102, and the entry for 'Epigraphy' in J. D. McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Quran* 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 25–43.

⁶¹ al-Rashid, *Kitābāt islāmiyya min Makka al-mukarrama*, no. 2.

presumably having been considered that creative citation and handling of the Quran was acceptable. For example, the text from Medina 'my Lord, Lord of the heavens and earth and what is between them, there is no God but He, and so I adopt him as a protector' is put together from Q 26: 24 (or 37: 5, 38: 66, 44: 7, 38) and 73: 9, with a small amendment to personalize the quotation ('I adopt him' rather than 'you adopt him!').⁶² And the text 'I believe that there is no god except Him in whom the children of Israel believed, (believing as) a Muslim *ḥanīf* nor am I among the associators' quotes verbatim part of Q 10:90 and then adapts a statement about Abraham (3:67) to suit the inscriber.⁶³

There are two other ways the Quran plays a role in early inscriptions that are worth mention. One is brief allusion to a quranic topic, and this has the effect of clearly indicating one's allegiance to and membership of the community of those who understand the reference. A nice example is a short graffito found in the Hijaz on the Syrian pilgrimage route, dated 83/702, that states simply: 'I believe in what the residents of al-Hijr denied' (*āmantu bi-mā kadhdhaba bi-hi aṣḥāb al-Hijr*). This refers to Q 15: 80: 'The residents of al-Hijr denied the messengers', that is, the ones sent by God to exhort the people of al-Hijr to heed God's message. This graffito is clearly a profession of faith, but only decipherable as such to those familiar with the Quran.

A second way of using the Quran is to engrave on one's chosen, usually highly visible, rock face a single unadapted quranic verse, with no additional verbiage but one's name and a date. Onto a basalt rock face south of Mecca, for example, there have been etched, in a fine imperial Umayyad hand,⁶⁴ two verses of the Quran, 4:87 and 38:26, both by a certain 'Uthmān and dated 80 AH/699⁶⁵ (though, as noted above, the second text has the variant *li-taḥkuma* rather than *fa-ḥkum*; see Figure 4). What are we to make of this practice? Donner focuses on the religious content of these texts, observing that 'the Believers at first seem to have had little interest in leaving for posterity any reference to tribal ties, politics, confessionalism, or systematic theology, all of which paled into insignificance in comparison with their need to prepare for the impending Judgment through proper piety'.⁶⁶ This, however, does not take into account the fact that inscriptions are not mere statements of fact, but are public declarations intended to portray a particular image of their commissioners, thereby to obtain respect, status, prestige etc., via a display of virtue (however that might be construed in the pertinent culture) and, if well engraved, of wealth, for to hire a good stonemason was expensive.⁶⁷ However, Donner is right inasmuch as the very etching of a quranic verse was evidently perceived as symbolic of pious action and perhaps as a reminder/call to others of the word of God, without any need for further comment or elaboration. It was

⁶² Idem, *Kitābāt islāmiyya ghayr manshūra min 'Ruwwa' al-Madīna al-munawwara* (Riyad, 1993), no. 21.

⁶³ F. Donner, 'Some early Arabic inscriptions from al-Hanakiyya, Saudi Arabia', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 43, 1984, W1.

⁶⁴ It is the same script as is used for the coinage (note the long upright strokes of the *aliph* and *lām*), but differs from the so-called *Hijazi* or *mā'il* (slanting) style. Some consider the latter older (e.g. F. Déroche, 'Manuscripts of the Quran', in J. D. McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Quran* 3, Leiden: Brill, 2003, 258), but they could be contemporary with each other.

⁶⁵ S.'A. Fahmi, 'Naqshān jadīdān min Makka al-mukarrama mu'arrakhān li-sanat thamanīn hijriyya', *al-Manhal* 48, 1407/1987, 346–61.

⁶⁶ *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 88.

⁶⁷ And possibly also to demonstrate political allegiance; in general, individuals' inscriptions tend to adhere quite closely to the phraseology of imperial inscriptions, and it is possible that the verse about the caliphate of David was chosen to demonstrate support for 'Abd al-Malik's decision to publicize his caliphate on coins.

presumably also a declaration of religious allegiance in a world where one's Scripture was a badge of identity.

(c) *Catholicity and jihād*

It cannot be by chance that 'Abd al-Malik placed his Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem on a spot significant to both Jews and Christians, and it is also very striking that in his inscription on this building he seems to be speaking to, even trying to win over, Jews and Christians, and particularly the latter:

The Messiah Jesus son of Mary was only a messenger of God, and His word which He committed to Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not say 'three'; refrain, it is better for you. God is only one god; he is too exalted to have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and on the earth. God suffices as a defender (= Q 4: 171). The Messiah will never disdain to be God's servant, nor will the favoured angels. Whoever disdains to serve Him and is proud, He will gather them all to Him (= Q 4: 172). O God, incline unto your messenger and your servant Jesus son of Mary. Peace on him the day he was born and the day he dies and the day he shall be raised alive (Q 19: 15). Such was Jesus son of Mary; [we have said it as] a statement of the truth concerning which they are in doubt. It is not for Him to take a son, glory be to Him (= Q 19: 34–5).

It is as though the Jews and Christians are not yet considered totally separate communities from the Muslims and 'Abd al-Malik has some right as their ruler to address them.

One is reminded here of the so-called *Constitution of Medina*, the document Muḥammad drew up to provide a co-operative framework for the adherents of his newly-formed *umma*/community.⁶⁸ It offers a blueprint for a single politico-religious community uniting different religious denominations under the 'protection of God' (*dhimmat Allah*) to fight on His behalf (see Appendix below, no. 6, and note thereto). The only requirement was that every signatory 'affirm what is in this document and believe in God and the Last Day', accept God and Muḥammad as the ultimate arbiter for all parties, 'help one another against whomsoever fights the people of this document' and contribute to the war effort. This gives two indications for the future direction of the *umma*: that it should embrace people of different faiths and should be directed towards combating enemies of God.

Thus we might envisage the first caliphs as extending this policy, effectively running a 'jihād state', a politico-religious entity comprising fighting men of different religious affiliations whose overriding aim was the expansion of the state in the name of God and who shared a belief in the One God and the Last Day. Muslim sources tend to assume that non-Muslims who participated in the conquests must have converted at an early stage, but the prosopographical evidence suggests rather that many remained in their own religion until much later.⁶⁹ The religiously pluralist character of the community would explain why no Islamic pretensions were advanced and why the leader was designated by such confessionally neutral terms as 'servant of God' and 'commander of the

⁶⁸ For the text, discussion and defence of its authenticity see R. B. Serjeant, 'The Sunnah Jāmi'a, pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the Tahrīm of Yathrib', *BSOAS* 41, 1978: 1–42; J. Wellhausen, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten* (Berlin, 1889), 4.80–1; A. J. Wensinck, *Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina* (tr. W. Behn; Freiburg, 1975), 64–8; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 7.

⁶⁹ Some examples given in Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, n. 362 on pp. 237–8.

believers'. The latter would have replaced Muḥammad as the arbiter for all parties, and the Quran would at this time have been of significance only for the Muslim members, just as the Torah and Gospel were only binding for the Jews and Christians. 'Umar's grant to Jews of right of residence in Jerusalem and Mu'āwīya's pilgrimage to the Christian holy sites in that city might then be interpreted as moves to reassure the Jewish and Christian elements in the community of the leadership's impartiality.⁷⁰ And 'Abd al-Malik's innovation would have been to elevate Islam to the position of the official state religion as opposed to one of a number of creeds of equal standing.

Conclusion

The reticence of the early Islamic state with regard to religious declarations reflects the fact that the first Muslim rulers did not feel obliged or had no pressing need to proclaim publicly the tenets of their belief. 'Abd al-Malik did so because he was fighting to hold the polity together, trying to rally the Muslim community behind him and to find a rationale for their continued existence together in the face of a debilitating civil war (note that the next time the title *khalīfat Allah* appeared on coins was also in the aftermath of a civil war, in the reign of al-Ma'mūn). The rationale for the state before him may well have been conquest 'in the way of God', as sketched out above (all members of the Muslim polity being soldiers whatever their religion), and social cohesion was maintained by use of Arab tribal structures (all members were assigned to an Arab tribe/tribesman⁷¹ whatever their ethnicity). This system was disintegrating by 'Abd al-Malik's time, as is clear from the number of Arabs becoming civilians and the number of non-Arabs forming their own military regiments,⁷² and this was another factor behind the espousal of a new rationale for the young state, one based principally on religion, a step on the road to the 'Abbāsid dynasty's use of Islam as the sole source of legitimization.

The problem of the historiography of this period is certainly a very challenging one, and will remain so while no accepted criteria exist to verify the Muslim literary tradition. And yet there are grounds for optimism. Firstly, we do have a number of bodies of evidence—especially non-Muslim sources, papyri, inscriptions and archaeological excavations—that can serve as a useful external referent and whose riches are only just beginning to be exploited in a systematic manner.⁷³ Secondly, the historical memory of the Muslim community is more robust than some have claimed. For example, many of the deities, kings and tribes of the pre-Islamic Arabs that are depicted by ninth-century Muslim historians also feature in the epigraphic record,⁷⁴ as do

⁷⁰ References and further discussion given in my *Seeing Islam*, 127, 136, 555–6.

⁷¹ Thus the Persian cavalry corps known as the Asāwira were attached to the tribe of Tamīm (al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1866, 373–4).

⁷² See the discussion of this transition in Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 34–40.

⁷³ For example, 'of the tens of thousands of Arabic documents preserved in museum and library collections around the world only some two thousand have been published so far' and 'electronic and printed databases ... Arabic papyrology lacks' (www.ori.unizh.ch/isap/isapchecklist.html, as at 11.2005). And only some 850 of the Austrian National Library's 76,000-strong papyrus collection have been published! This is, however, being changed by such talented scholars as Petra Sijpesteijn, Andreas Kaplony and others involved in the newly-formed International Society for Arabic Papyrology.

⁷⁴ For kings and tribes see my 'Epigraphy and the emergence of Arab identity' in P. Sijpesteijn et al. (eds), *From Andalusia to Khurasan: Documents from the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). On the deities see, for example, C. Robin's 'Les "Filles de Dieu" de Saba à la Mecque', *Semitica* 50, 2000, 115–92. In the field of prosopography the extent of the recollection can be stunning; e.g. the Tha'laba ibn Salūl, who is mentioned as chief of the tribe of Iyad in a south Arabian inscription of 360 CE ('Abadan 1), is also recorded some four-and-a-half centuries later by the tribal historian Hishām al-Kalbī (*Jamharat al-nasab*, ed. W. Caskel, Leiden: Brill, 1966, 1.174).



Figure 1. Inscription of Zuhayr, Qā' al-Mu'tadil, 24 AH.

many of the rulers and governors of the early Islamic state. This makes it difficult to see how historical scenarios that require for their acceptance a total discontinuity in the historical memory of the Muslim community—such as that Muḥammad did not exist, the Quran was not written in Arabic, Mecca was originally in a different place etc.—can really be justified. Many of these scenarios rely on absence of evidence, but it seems a shame to make such a recourse when there are so many very vocal forms of material evidence still waiting to be studied.

Appendix: Recently discovered Arabic texts dated prior to AH 72/691 CE

(an updating of Excursus F in my *Seeing Islam*, 687–95)

1. Arabic graffito from Qā' al-Mu'tadil, N.W. Arabia (near al-Ḥijr), 24 AH/644 (see Figure 1):⁷⁵

Bism Allah anā Zuhayr katabt zaman tuwuffiya 'Umar sanat arba' wa-'ishrīn

In the name of God I Zuhayr wrote [this] at the time 'Umar died in the year twenty-four.

2. Arabic graffito from Wadi Khushayba, S.W. Arabia (near Najrān), 27 AH/648:⁷⁶

Tarahḥama Allah 'alā Yazīd ibn 'Abdallah al-Salūlī wa-kataba fī Jumadā [kadḥā] min sanat saba' wa-'ishrīn.

May God have mercy on Yazīd ibn 'Abdallah al-Salūlī and he wrote [this] in Jumādā of the year twenty-seven.

3. Two Coptic texts on behalf of 'Amr ibn al-'Ās (d. 43/663) in Pap. BM 1079:⁷⁷

I, Philotheos the *ape* (village headman, *protokometes*), son of the late Hourī, the man from Tjinela, swear by God Almighty and the well-being

⁷⁵ Ghabban, 'Naqsh Zuhayr'; next to it is a graffito which says: *anā Zuhayr mawlā ibnat Shayba.*

⁷⁶ M. Kawatoko et al., *Ancient and Islamic Rock Inscriptions of Southwest Saudi Arabia I: Wadi Khushayba* (Tokyo: Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan, 2005), 9. In *Atlat* 18, 2005, 52 and pl. 8.13a, Professor Kawatoko publishes another Arabic graffito from the same region, which reads simply *kataba Salma thalath wa-'ishrīn.*

⁷⁷ Translated by L. MacCoull, 'BM1079, CPR IX 44 and the Chrysargon', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 100, 1994, 141–2. The interest of these texts is that they show the Muslim governor's authority reaching right down to the lower echelons of rural Egyptian society even at this early date; they also suggest that censuses were carried out, presumably for purposes of collection of the poll-tax and/or requisition of labour. It is also worth noting that a large number of papyri were issued by or on behalf of 'Amr, and more have recently been located among the Strasbourg collection and are being edited by J. Gasco and R-L. Chang.

هذا السد لعبد الله معوية
 ناصر المومنين بنبيه عبد الله بن مطهر
 مآذر الله لسيده ثمر وخميسرا
 اللهم اغفر لعبد الله معوية
 صد المومنين وثبته وانصده ومخبرا
 [معدا] لمومنين به كتب عمرو بن حباب

تفريغ لنقش سد معاوية بالطائف (٥٨هـ).

- ١- بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
- ٢- هذا السد لعبد الله
- ٣- معاوية (١) أمير المؤمنين
- ٤- اللهم برك (٢) له فيه رب
- ٥- السموات (٣) والأرض
- ٦- بنه (٤) أبو رداد مولى
- ٧- عبد الله بن عباس بنحو
- ٨- ل الله وقوته
- ٩- وقام عليه كثير بن
- ١٠- لصلت وأبو موسى

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 وكذا السد لعبد الله
 معوية له مآذر المومنين
 اللهم لك الحمد
 السموات والأرض
 رب أبو رداد مولى
 عبد الله بن عباس بنحو
 ل الله وقوته
 وقام عليه كثير بن
 لصلت وأبو موسى

تفريغ لنقش سد الخنق بالمدينة المنورة (عصر معاوية).

- ١- بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
- ٢- الله وكبر كبيرا وا
- ٣- الحمد لله كثيرا وسبحنا
- ٤- الله بكرة وأصيلا وليلا
- ٥- طويلا . اللهم رب
- ٦- جبريل وميكيل واسر
- ٧- فيل اغفر لثبت بن يزيد
- ٨- الأشعري ما تقدم من
- ٩- ذنبه وما تأخر ولن قال
- ١٠- آمين آمين رب العالمين
- ١١- وكتب هذا الكتب في
- ١٢- شوال من سنة أربع و
- ١٣- ستين

سم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 الله وكبر كبيرا وا
 الحمد لله كثيرا وسبحنا
 الله بكرة وأصيلا وليلا
 طويلا . اللهم رب
 جبريل وميكيل واسر
 فيل اغفر لثبت بن يزيد
 الأشعري ما تقدم من
 ذنبه وما تأخر ولن قال
 آمين آمين رب العالمين

وكس هذا الصيغ
 سواد مرسته اربع و
 سلس

تفريغ لنقش حفنة الأبيض بكرلاء (٦٤هـ).

Figure 2b. Some key early Islamic inscriptions.



Figure 3. Examples of Arabic papyri with dotting, 20s AH.

of Amr not to have left out any man in our whole village from fourteen years (up) but to have accounted for him to your lordship. I, Ioustos, the *komogrammateus* (village scribe), swear by God Almighty and the well-being of Amr not to have left out any man in our whole village but to have accounted for him to your lordship.

I, Philotheos, together with Esaias, the *apes*, and together with Apatēr the priest, the men from the village of Tjinela, we write, swearing by the name of God and the well-being of Amr not to have left out any man in our village from fourteen years on; if you produce any we have left behind we will put them in our house. Sign of Philotheos the *protokometes*, he agrees. Sign of Esaias, he agrees. Apatēr, the humble priest, I agree.

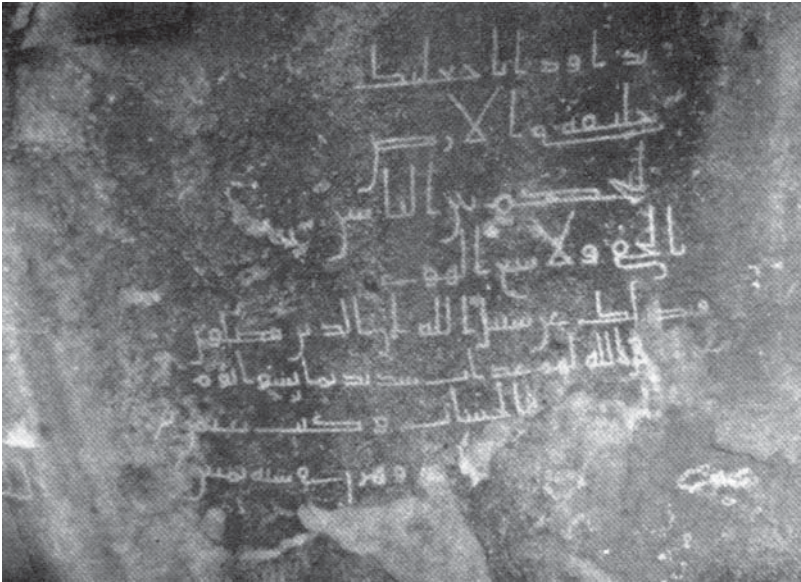


Figure 4. Quran inscription, Mecca, 80 AH.

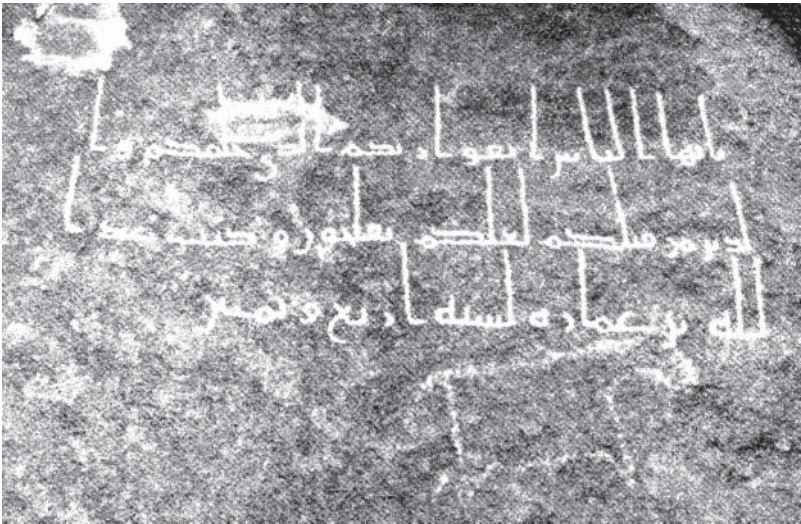


Figure 5. Quran inscription, Mecca, 84 AH.

4. Arabic inscription on a dam, Medina, Arabia, of Mu‘āwiya, 40–60 AH/ 661–80 (see Figure 2b):⁷⁸

Bism Allah al-rahman al-rahīm hadhā l-sadd li-‘abd Allah Mu‘awiya [kadhā] amīr al-mu‘minīn Allahumma baraka [kadhā] lahu fihi rabb al-samawat [kadhā] wa-l-ard banahu [kadhā] Abū Raddād mawlā ‘Abdallāh

⁷⁸ S.‘A. al-Rashid, *Diārsāt fī al-āthār al-islāmiyya al-mubakkira bi-l-madīnat al-munawwara* (Riyad, 2000), 46–60.

ibn ‘Abbās bi-ḥawl Allah wa-quwwatihi wa-qāma ‘alayhi Kathīr ibn al-Ṣalt wa-Abū Mūsā

In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate this dam is on behalf of the servant of God Mu‘āwiya commander of the believers. O God, bless him for it, Lord of the heavens and the earth. Abū Raddād client of ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Abbās built it by the power and strength of God, and Kathīr ibn al-Ṣalt⁷⁹ and Abū Mūsā oversaw it.

5. Arabic tax demand notice (*entagion*) on marble, Andarin, northern Syria, from the time of Mu‘āwiya (AH 40–60/661–80):⁸⁰

Bism Allah al-raḥman al-raḥīm min al-Layth bin al-Diyāl ‘āmil al-amīr Mu‘āwiya... ‘alā arḍ Qinnasrīn wa-ahlihi. takfī mukūs min iqīm...

In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate: from al-Layth ibn al-Diyāl agent of the amīr Mu‘āwiya ... over Qinnasrin and its people. You should meet in full the taxes of the district of...

6. Bilingual Greek–Arabic papyrus, release from labour contact, from Nessana, southern Palestine, 67 AH/687:⁸¹

Payment of money to release person from employ of al-Aswad ibn ‘Adī, who then returned part of the payment as alms: *ṣadaqa ‘alayhi bil echarisato*.

⁷⁹ Presumably this is the well known Medinan resident who, born in the time of the Prophet, was an aide of both ‘Uthmān and Mu‘āwiya (see M. Lecker, ‘*Kinda on the eve of Islam and during the Ridda*’, *JRAS* 4, 1994, 354–5; additional information on him in Ibn Shabba’s *Ta’rikh al-Madīna*).

⁸⁰ This was found in 2003 by Radi ‘Uqda, director of the Syrian team excavating the early Islamic baths of Andarin; we will be publishing this text together at a future date.

⁸¹ Kraemer, *Nessana* 3, no. 56. Obviously this is not new, but I wanted to highlight the use of the religiously-loaded word *ṣadaqa* (note that the first witness to this document, Yazīd ibn Fā’id, features in the Arabic verso of no. 77, reminded by his superior that ‘the people of Nessana are under the protection of God’, presumably *taht dhimmat Allah*—annoyingly Kraemer does not give the Arabic text—an expression that is found in the so-called Constitution of Medina) and to note that Professor David Wasserstein thinks he has located this document in the IAA stores, so there is hope of its future publication.