3

The First Age of Christian–Muslim Interaction (–c. 830/215)

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO THE COMING OF ISLAM

There is no denying the impact made by the Islamic community on world history in the few decades after the death of Muḥammad in 632/11. A community which, in the course of the ten years since the Hijra in 622, had made its mark by becoming the dominant force in Arabia, very quickly also made its mark on the wider world in pretty much the same length of time. By 642/21 the Muslim state had conquered and established its control over the majority of the Sassanian Persian Empire, following the battles of Qadisiyya [637/16] in Iraq and Nihawand [642/21] in Iran, and a large part of the Byzantine Empire, following the battle of the River Yarmuk [636/15] in Syria and a campaign in Egypt in 640/19. The Sassanian Empire was destroyed, its emperor Yazdagird III finally meeting an ignominious end in central Asia in 651/30, and the Byzantine Empire lost roughly one half of its territory: according to Arab tradition, following the battle of the Yarmuk, the emperor Heraclius was driven to say 'Farewell Syria. What a good country for the enemy.'[1]

Within the next century, the Islamic state continued its expansion, so that by 750/133 it had become the largest state seen up until that point in human history, having incorporated north Africa, Spain, the most fertile parts of central Asia, and much of what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan.[2] After 750/133 the process of expansion, it is true, came to a halt for several centuries, and a process of, on the one hand, consolidation, and, on the other, fragmentation began, but there is no denying the initial impression made by the Islamic community.

One obvious difference between the situation confronting Muslims during the lifetime of Muḥammad and the new situation after 632/11 is that, as we have seen, the prophet himself did not have very much first-hand encounters with Christians, whereas his followers, as a result of their success, suddenly had a great deal of contact with Christians, as well as other religious groups: the vast majority of the population of the conquered Byzantine provinces was Christian, belonging to one church or another, and in the Sassanian Empire too there was a significant Christian minority presence, consisting mostly of Nestorian Christians. The interaction between the Christian and Muslim communities in this first period of their mutual encounter is therefore

extremely significant and interesting, and my suggestion is that the initial phase of this encounter should be seen as lasting for roughly 200 years, that is until the first half of the ninth/third century.

In the wake of the initial impact of the Muslim community upon the Middle East, the first Christian reaction to this new phenomenon was to interpret it in terms of certain statements of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible which seemed highly pertinent to some of the development of the 630s/10s and 640s/20s. In particular, some of the statements of the Book of Genesis at the start of the Old Testament seemed to offer some kind of key to explain what was happening, as it was there that an attempt was made to allocate significance to the two sons of Abraham – Ishmael, chronologically the first-born, but born to Abraham's concubine Hagar, and Isaac, born second in time but eventually declared Abraham's heir since he was born to Sarah, Abraham's wife. In the course of the narrative, it is stated that certain promises were made by God to Ishmael:

> But God said to Abraham: '. . . I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman [Hagar] also, because he is your offspring' (Genesis 21: 12–13)

and this is elaborated later in the same chapter (Genesis 21: 18), where a further promise is made by God:

> 'I will make him a great nation.'

Later in the book of Genesis, in Chapter 25, when the descendants of Abraham are being listed, Ishmael's sons are listed before Isaac's, and the fact that there are twelve of them has traditionally been interpreted as signifying that like the twelve tribes of Israel, they made up some kind of sacred unit.[3]

When, therefore, the Islamic community burst onto the scene, one interpretation which was put onto its appearance was that it was the fulfilment of these scriptural promises. The Armenian bishop Sebeos, writing before 661/41, for example, explains Muḥammad's career as follows: 'Being very learned and well-versed in the Law of Moses, he taught them [the Arabs] to know the God of Abraham.' He also, according to Sebeos, told his hearers that God was going to realise in them the promise made to Abraham and his successors, and it was for this reason that the Ishmaelites set out from the desert towards the land around Jerusalem.[4]

John Moorhead comments: 'Sebeos reports that both Jews and Arabs accepted that the Arabs were descended from the patriarch

Abraham . . . [and] . . . seems to have accepted this connection between God's Old Dispensation and the Arabs of his time.'[5] Equally, the chronicle of an anonymous Nestorian monk, written in Iraq during the 670s/50s, testifies that the Ishmaelites have been making conquests, and that this is in part a result of their following in the footsteps of Abraham who, when he went to live in the desert, built a place for the worship of God and the offering of sacrifices; in worshipping God, therefore, the Arabs are doing nothing new, but simply following an old custom. He also suggests an interesting etymological connection, whereby Yathrib's new name, Medina, is derived from the name of Midian, the fourth son Abraham had by Keturah (cf. Genesis 25: 1).[6]

In recent years an entire thesis concerning the origins and early development of Islam has been elaborated on this basis by the Western scholars Michael Cook and Patricia Crone in their book *Hagarism*, which suggests that Islam should be interpreted as being self-consciously a movement involving the descendants of Hagar.[7] The early pages of the book refer to both of the texts which have just been discussed, but rather than taking them as what they actually are, namely Christian interpretations of the coming of Islam, the authors seem to suggest that they should be taken as more valuable descriptions of early Islamic history than the traditional Muslim accounts. This seems to be going too far.[8]

This first level of interpretation of Islam, however, was fairly quickly subjected to a number of challenges, as it began to become clear that the Islamic community was not only convinced that its coming was part of God's will, but also saw itself as having a mission to be a kind of corrective to, or even fulfilment of, the message of the Christian community. Rather than its coming simply being the fulfilment of an ancient promise, therefore, it began to appear to the Christian community as rather more of a challenge; in other words, the Christian community, which had hitherto seen itself as the bearer of God's final revelation to humankind, began to become aware that this was not an idea which was acceptable to the Ishmaelites.

As a result of this, it is not long before we see a shift to a second layer of interpretation of the coming of Islam, and in this second period the divisions of the Christian world at the time begin to become evident and to make their presence felt. Clearly in the initial encounter of Christians and Muslims after the time of Muḥammad, the Christians involved were all Eastern Christians. It was only later, after the expansion of the Muslim community into North Africa and Spain, that Western Christians began to formulate their rather different interpretations of Islam, which we will look at below. But, as we have seen, the Eastern Christian world of the day was itself also divided,

with the main difference being between those who accepted the definitions of the Council of Chalcedon and those who did not, and, with respect to Islam, the different judgements which began to emerge at this time reflect that split fairly clearly.

Among the non-Chalcedonian Christians, first, the way in which Islam came to be understood after the initial Abrahamic interpretation was that its coming was in some way a judgement of God, a movement whose purpose was to bring judgement on people who had erred. This view is one which can be found in the writings of both Monophysite and Nestorian Christians, as illustrated by the Coptic editor of the Egyptian *History of the Patriarchs*, Severus of Asmounein, who wrote: 'The Lord abandoned the army of the Romans as a punishment for their corrupt faith, and because of the anathemas uttered against them by the ancient fathers, on account of the Council of Chalcedon.'[9] And the twelfth/fifth century Monophysite writer Michael the Syrian commented:

> The God of vengeance . . . raised up from the south the children of Ishmael to deliver us from the hands of the Romans . . . It was no light benefit for us to be freed from the cruelty of the Romans, their wickedness, anger and ardent cruelty towards us, and to find ourselves in peace.[10]

For all their differences these two groups are thus united in their view that Islam is God's judgement, not on themselves (of course!), but rather on their theological and ecclesiastical foes, the Christians who accepted the Christological definitions of the Council of Chalcedon. Again a Biblical analogy is called into play at this point, the analogy of the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed Jerusalem in 587 or 586 BCE, and whose action was interpreted by some of the Old Testament prophets, such as Jeremiah, as bringing God's judgement on a decadent Israelite community.

It was not only theological factors which were involved here. Not only had Nestorians and Monophysites each differed theologically with the church authorities in the Byzantine capital Constantinople, they had also each been on the receiving end of some fairly harsh treatment from the Byzantine authorities in Egypt and Syria, encouraged by those bishops who accepted Chalcedon. So, for example, the Copts in Egypt had been fairly harshly persecuted by Cyrus, who had been appointed by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius to be both governor of Egypt and patriarch of the church in Egypt in 631/10. Between his appointment and the Arab conquest of Egypt Cyrus succeeded in alienating the vast majority of Egyptian Christians from both the

definitions of the Council of Chalcedon and allegiance to the Byzantine Empire; '"The Caucasian", as he was called, opened a reign of terror the like of which the Egyptians had not experienced since the Great Persecution. In the six years 635/14–641/20 whatever loyalty had been felt towards Heraclius and the Roman Empire ebbed away.'[11] Not only that, between 608 and 629/7 the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire had been occupied by the Persians. During that interlude the non-Chalcedonian Christians had found themselves treated with a greater degree of tolerance and respect than had been the case under the Byzantines, so that when the representatives of Islam first appeared, many of the non-Chalcedonian Christians welcomed them, seeing them, like the Persians, as liberators from the cruelty of the rule of Byzantine emperors and ecclesiastical authorities. 'What the Persian era showed was that a foreign overlord was not necessarily a persecutor, but a Chalcedonian nearly always was.'[12]

Among those Christians who, even under the rule of Islam, retained their loyalty to the Council of Chalcedon, later coming to be known as Melkites because of their adherence to the Byzantine liturgy and the suspicion that their political loyalty was to the Byzantine Emperor, a rather different interpretation of the coming of Islam emerged during the first century or so of Islamic rule.[13] As a figure representative of this point of view we may take John of Damascus.

As his name indicates, John's family came from Damascus, where they had had considerable influence for some time, as seen in the fact that it was his grandfather, Manṣūr ibn Sargūn, who surrendered the city to the Arab invaders in 635/14.[14] Sahas observes that this name is not Greek in form, being closer to the name patterns of Syrian Christians of Arab descent, which is evidence of the diffusion of population from Arabia into Syria and the wider world. John was probably educated with Muslims until the age of twelve, so that he knew Arabic as well as Greek, and like his father and grandfather before him he went on to achieve a high position in the administration of the city in which they lived. Some sources speak of John himself as being secretary to the prince of the city, and others speak of him having some special financial responsibility. The last twenty-five years or so of his life, however, he spent in the monastery of Saint Sabas in Palestine, having retired from his work for the Muslim rulers of the city. He is commonly regarded as the last of the Fathers of the Eastern Church.[15]

On the basis of his experience and his theological reflection, John was able to articulate a novel interpretation of Islam, and the kernel of this interpretation was that Islam should be understood as a Christian heresy. As a result of his encounters with Muslims, at different levels and in different contexts, John had been able to acquire at least a

reasonable first-hand knowledge of Muslim beliefs and religious practices, including some acquaintance with the Qur'ān, and it was on this basis that he concluded that Muslims had at least some convictions in common with those of Christians, even if on other points the two communities differed. The simplest way to account for this combination of commonality and distinctiveness was, in John's view, to describe Islam as a Christian heresy.

This view is outlined in two of his works. The first is an Appendix to his *De Haeresibus* (On Heresies), which was itself a supplement to his *De Fide Orthodoxa* (On the Orthodox Faith). The work on heresies lists 100 established Christian heresies, in the discussion of which John is heavily reliant on the work of earlier Christian heresiographers, and then Islam is referred to as the one hundred and first heresy. In his description John manifests both a theoretical and a practical knowledge of Islam, so that he knows, for example, about the following things: the idolatrous character of pre-Islamic religion in Arabia; Muḥammad's preaching of the message of monotheism in that context (and here John gives a fairly accurate summary of Sura 112 of the Qur'ān to the effect that there is one God, creator of all, who is neither begotten nor has begotten); some of the contents of the Qur'ān, since he quotes the titles of four Suras from it – Sura 2 (the Heifer), Sura 4 (Women), Sura 5 (The Table), and also a title which is not generally recognised, 'the she-camel of God', which Sahas thinks may refer to Sura 7 or Sura 26; and Muslim practices such as the kissing of the Black Stone in the corner of the Ka'ba in Mecca, which John describes as being extremely passionate, circumcision, not keeping the Sabbath, and abstention from some foods and wine.[16]

John also knows what the Qur'ān says about Jesus – that he is a word of (from) God, His spirit, and a servant, miraculously conceived, but not crucified – and it is perhaps on the basis of this point that he constructs his main interpretation of Islam as a Christian heresy: Muḥammad, John alleges, came across the Old and New Testaments by chance, and with the help of an Arian monk, constructed a heresy of his own. John himself makes no mention of Baḥīrā at this point, but Sahas, following Tor Andrae, suggests that this is an allusion, at least, to Baḥīrā as an agent of transmission to Muḥammad, and if Arianism was a Christian heresy it is easy enough to see how Islam might be interpreted in a similar way. Muḥammad thus claimed, according to John, that a book was sent down to him from heaven, but the resulting claim to prophethood is rejected by John, who describes Islam as 'a deceptive superstition of the Ishmaelites' and 'the fore-runner of the Antichrist'. The latter of these phrases, particularly, seems to demonstrate a particularly negative evaluation of Islam, but as Sahas makes

clear, it is not a manifestation of any special animus against Islam but rather the phrase which is used as a matter of course to refer to anyone whom John considers to be a heretic; it is thus used earlier in the work with respect to Nestorius, and its usage can, indeed, be traced back to the New Testament itself:

> By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already. (1 John 4: 2–3)

The original target of these verses was probably Gnosticism, which leaned in the direction of denying Jesus's humanity rather than his divinity, but in later Christian thought, as exemplified by John of Damascus, the term 'antichrist' came to be used of anyone who 'does not confess that the Son of God came in flesh, is perfect God and He became perfect man while at the same time He was God.'[17]

Very importantly, John does not use the term 'forerunner of the Antichrist' to refer to Muḥammad personally, but to Islam in general. In this he differs from some later Christian writers who do personalise the epithet. Sahas therefore concludes:

> The author . . . presents the facts about Islam in an orderly and systematic way, although not at all complimentary; he demonstrates an accurate knowledge of the religion . . . he is aware of the cardinal doctrines and concepts in Islam . . . he knows well his sources and he is at home with the Muslim mentality. Chapter . . . 101 is not inflammatory of hatred, neither grandiloquent and full of self-triumph; it is an essay on Islam, in a book of Christian heresies. In this simple fact lies its significance and its weakness![18]

This assessment of Islam as a Christian heresy is also demonstrated in another work commonly attributed to John of Damascus, the *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani* (The Disputation of a Muslim and a Christian). There is some uncertainty concerning the authorship of this document, with some suggestions being made that it comes from the pen of John's disciple Theodore Abū Qurra rather than from John himself, but Sahas is content to treat it as a product of his thought if not of his own pen.[19]

The form and format of this work is quite different from Chapter 101 of the *De Haeresibus*, in that this work is intended not so much as a

theological evaluation of Islam but rather as a kind of manual of guidance for Christians who find themselves entering into theological discussion with Muslims. Two main themes are discussed; firstly the question of the relationship between divine omnipotence and human free will, and secondly the question of the identity of the 'word of God'. As has been suggested by a number of Western scholars, notably M. S. Seale in his *Muslim Theology*, these questions were among the most important in the development of the tradition of *Kalām* (Islamic Theology), and John's opinions may therefore have had some influence on the form which that tradition took. But whatever the extent or otherwise of direct influence, the *Disputatio* 'is a valuable source of information about the earliest stage of Muslim–Christian dialogue', and 'allows one to assume that John of Damascus . . . had participated in formal or informal debates [with Muslim theologians]'.[20]

These were the three main strains of Christian interpretation of Islam before the ninth/third century – fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham and his son Ishmael, judgement from God on those Christians who accepted the Christological definitions of the Council of Chalcedon, and Christian heresy. During that century, however, new, more negative interpretations of Islam begin to emerge, and they take us into the next phase of Christian–Muslim encounter which will be looked at in more detail in the next chapter. Briefly, however, what changes is that a considerably more negative view of Islam begins to emerge, firstly among Christians outside the world of Islam, in the Byzantine Empire, but shortly afterwards among Christians, both Nestorian and Monophysite, too, within the world of Islam. The ninth/third century therefore does seem to mark a transition to another stage in Christian–Muslim relations.

MUSLIM TREATMENT OF CHRISTIANS I

As has been hinted above, the way in which Christians responded to and interpreted the coming of Islam was, naturally enough, considerably influenced by the way in which they were treated by the Muslim conquerors. Here too, as in most other aspects of Christian–Muslim relations, there was no single Muslim attitude, but rather a range of attitudes which shifted over the course of time and displayed a considerable amount of diversity.

During the course of his lifetime, Muḥammad, as we have seen, had some contact with Christians and rather more contact with Jews. Out of these contacts came a number of precedents for inter-communal relations, varying with respect to the Jews from the relatively liberal model of the Constitution of Medina to the rather harsher model of the treatment of the Jews of Khaybar. An intermediate position was seen in

the negotiations which took place with some of the people of South Arabia, including Jews and Christians, who were allowed to retain their faith provided that they submitted peacefully to Islamic rule.

After the death of the prophet in 632/11, therefore, when the Muslim community began to encounter Christians and, to a lesser extent, Jews in much greater numbers, as it expanded into the wider Middle East, it was these different incidents from the career of Muḥammad which provided guidance for the Muslim community as to how to treat Christians and Jews. In the two centuries or so after Muḥammad's death, these various precedents seemed to result in two main attitudes being taken: the first was seen in a fairly short phase, which involved raids outside Arabia and the expulsion of Jews and Christians from Arabia itself, and was thus rather antagonistic and confrontational; the second, which was much longer-lasting, devolped once the raids had evolved into more permanent conquests, and demonstrated more settled and conciliatory attitudes.

Towards the end of his career, as we have seen, Muḥammad's message seems to have developed a more critical approach towards both Jews and Christians, as seen in a Qur'ānic verse such as 9: 29. After his death, therefore, it was this approach, with its reference to fighting the People of the Book, which predominated. Military raids were launched into the areas bordering on Arabia, and Crone and Cook draw attention to the fact that the earliest raids seem to have displayed a particular hostility towards Christianity. This can be seen in such things as the choice given to the Byzantine garrison in Gaza, whose members were invited to abandon their faith, deny Christ and participate in Muslim worship: when they refused they were all martyred.[21] Crone and Cook point to a number of other examples of particular antipathy towards Christians in this period, such as the burning of churches, the destruction of monasteries, the profanation of crosses (as seen when the Arab raiders reached Mt Sinai), and other blasphemies against Christ and the church.

In Arabia itself, too, in the decade after Muḥammad's death, some revision of the prophet's own attitude towards Jews and Christians took place, in that the Jewish and Christian communities of Arabia were expelled from Arabia. The Muslim sources differ on the exact detail of how and when this was done, but al-Wāqidī tells of the second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, expelling the Jews of the Hijaz, and al-Ṭabarī refers to 'Umar expelling the Jews from Khaybar and dividing the land there between the Muslims.[22] Al-Ṭabarī does not indicate that all the Jews were expelled from Arabia, and later sources point to the continuing existence of Jewish communities in both the Hijaz and the area around Khaybar, so the commands of the caliph were not necessarily executed thoroughly, but clearly these measures resulted in the marginalisation of the Jews who remained in Arabia.

As regards the Christians of Arabia, Muslim sources speak of an order of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb to the effect that they too must leave Arabia, and there are accounts of the Christians of Najrān migrating to Iraq, but the historicity of these events is not absolutely reliably established, and there is some evidence of a continuing Christian presence in Najrān for at least 200 years.[23] Again, therefore, we see a trend towards the establishment of religious uniformity in Arabia, which parallels the emergence of the tradition that Muḥammad, as he was dying, said that two religions could not exist together in Arabia.[24] But measures to implement that advice were clearly not put into place immediately.[25]

During the same period in the wider Middle East, as the Muslim community moved from undertaking raids to a situation where longer-term conquests and settlement were envisaged, the model for the relationship between the Muslims and the conquered population, which was largely Christian, began to change again, and it did so in the direction of the precedent provided by the behaviour of the delegation sent to Najrān under the leadership of Khālid ibn al-Walīd in 631/10. The fact that Khālid was one of the leaders of the main Muslim army in Syria during the time of the conquests is not irrelevant here. There was some evolution from that precedent, however, in that in Najrān the population had been summoned to accept Islam or be attacked, though the Jewish and Christian elements of the town had been assured that they would not be turned from their faith. In Syria and many other conquered areas, by contrast, Christians were not a minority but a majority of the population, and the terms of the discussion were somewhat different.

There are variations between the different Muslim historical sources concerning the exact pattern of events around the conquests, and particularly as regards the agreements which were made between the Muslim leaders and the cities of the conquered territories.[26] In general terms, what seems usually to have occurred is that the population of cities such as Damascus was given a choice: the people could either surrender, in which case they would be given an assurance that their lives, their property and their places of worship would be secure, or they could resist. If the cities were then forced to surrender, the terms would be much less generous, so that their places of worship would be liable to be taken over and converted into mosques, and they would not be permitted to construct new places of worship. Not surprisingly, many cities such as Damascus chose to submit peacefully, and we have seen already that it was the grandfather of the

theologian John of Damascus who negotiated the surrender of the city in 635/14.

Other cities, however, resisted, including Jerusalem and Caesarea, but Jerusalem sued for peace in 640/19, and Caesarea fell in the same year. The events surrounding the surrender of Jerusalem are particularly interesting, in that it was the Greek Orthodox Archbishop Sophronius who negotiated the surrender and the second caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who personally visited the city in order to consolidate its conquest. While there he visited the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, which was then desolate, commanded that it be cleaned, and established it as a place of Muslim prayer. Crone and Cook use these actions as evidence for their thesis that Islam, or Hagarism, was in some sense a messianic movement, with ʿUmar here behaving like a messiah, but what is certain is that the result of his actions is a major shift in the sacred geography of the city whereby the religious focus moves back from the city's western ridge, where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and many other Christian churches and monasteries are situated, to its eastern ridge, where the Jewish Temple had been situated and where the Muslims built their main places of worship in the city.[27]

Once the situation had settled down, therefore, in the sense that the Byzantines had more or less resigned themselves to the loss of Syria and the civil administration had been set up under the leadership of Abū ʿUbaida ibn al-Jarrāḥ, some kind of stability emerged in the relationships between the Muslim conquerors and the mainly Christian population of the province. The main essentials of this relationship were that political and military power were to be firmly in the hands of the Arab rulers, but the non-Muslim population, provided it had submitted peacefully to Muslim rule, was to be given freedom of religion, in the sense of being able to worship freely in its own places of worship, in return for the payment of a special tax called the *jizya*. This was the term used in the Qur'ān in 9: 29, where the Muslims were instructed to fight against those among the People of the Book who did not believe in God and the Last Day, did not forbid what God had forbidden through Muḥammad, and did not follow the religion of truth, until they paid the tribute (*jizya*), being brought low. It was also the term used by Ibn Isḥāq as part of the negotiations between Muḥammad and the people of Ḥimyar and Najrān.[28]

The detail of these arrangements came to be enshrined in the Covenant of ʿUmar, which was named after the second caliph, ʿUmar, because it was claimed to be a record of the agreements made between ʿUmar and the conquered population, but in fact almost certainly comes from a much later period. It can be found in different forms

in some of the early Islamic historians, and Tritton gives two main versions, both found in the *History* of Ibn ʿAsākir. The first takes the form of an extract from a letter from ʿUmar in which he quotes from a letter from some Christians, as follows:

> When you came to us we asked of you safety for our lives, our families and property, and the people of our religion on these conditions: to pay tribute out of hand and be humiliated; not to hinder any Muslim from stopping in our churches by night or day, to entertain him there three days and give him food there and open to him their doors; to beat the gong [used in eastern churches in lieu of a bell] only gently in them and not to raise our voices in chanting; not to shelter there, nor in any of our houses, a spy of your enemies; not to build a church, convent, hermitage, or cell, nor repair those that are dilapidated, nor assemble in any that is in a Muslim quarter, nor in their presence; not to display idolatry nor invite to it, nor show a cross on our churches, nor in any of the roads or markets of the Muslims; not to learn the Qur'ān nor teach it to our children; not to prevent any of our relatives from turning Muslim if he wish it; to cut our hair in front; to tie the *zunnār* [a special belt] round our waists; to keep to our religion; not to resemble the Muslims in dress, appearance, saddles, the engraving on our seals [i.e. not to engrave them in Arabic]; not to use their *kunyas* [titles]; to honour and respect them, to stand up for them when we meet together; to guide them in their ways and goings; not to make our houses higher than theirs; not to keep weapons or swords, nor wear them in a town or on a journey in Muslim lands; not to sell wine or display it; not to light fires with our dead at a road where Muslims dwell, nor to raise our voices at their [?our] funerals, nor bring them near Muslims; not to strike a Muslim; not to keep slaves who have been the property of Muslims. We impose these terms on ourselves and our co-religionists; he who rejects them has no protection.[29]

The form of words used here in the first sentence clearly repeats the language of the Qur'ān (9: 29) in its references to paying the tribute/*jizya* and being humiliated, but there is considerably more detail given as to what this means in practice. It is clear that political loyalty is expected, as seen in the promise not to entertain anyone spying for an enemy; military involvement is rejected, as seen in the declaration that swords will not be kept; Christian worship is permitted, but it is clear that it is only to happen surreptitiously, with no public display of

crosses and only quiet musical accompaniment; the building of new churches is prohibited, and those which are dilapidated are not to be repaired; Christians undertake to retain their religion, yet paradoxically also undertake not to prevent any of their relatives who wish to convert to Islam from doing so; and they are to distinguish themselves from Muslims in what they wear.

The second version quoted by Tritton again consists of a quotation from a letter, this time from the Christians of Damascus to Abū ʿUbaida. It adds a little more detail concerning some things which Christians promise not to do, such as carry a cross or the Bible in a procession, especially at Easter or on Palm Sunday, or seek to entice a Muslim to Christianity or invite him to it, or use Muslims' language, or ride on saddles or make Christian houses higher than Muslim ones.[30]

Some of these measures seem intended to demonstrate Christians' second-class status as compared to Muslims; neither they nor their houses, for example, may look down on those of Muslims. But Tritton concludes that although the documents are attributed to ʿUmar, in all probability they actually come from the second Islamic century, and although they may reflect some of the policies and attitudes towards the conquered population which began to become evident in the period of the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (717/99–720/101), the texts were only collected together in the form in which they exist today some time after that. 'The covenant was drawn up in the schools of law, and came to be ascribed, like so much else, to ʿUmar I.'[31]

Whatever the history of this text and whatever the precise date when its measures were first introduced, it clearly reflects a much more generous attitude towards the conquered population than the rather aggressive one which we have seen in the first decade or so after the death of Muḥammad. It therefore reflects a change in the situation from one where the Muslims were raiding the areas bordering Arabia and displaying a considerable animus towards Christians and their religious symbols, to a situation where efforts are being made to establish Muslim rule and there is therefore a need to adopt a more conciliatory approach to the existing population. It is in this context, therefore, that the *ahl al-kitāb*, the People of the Book referred to in the Qur'ān as having in the past received scriptures from God, in other words Jews and Christians, also become known as the *ahl al-dhimma*, the People of the Covenant, or simply *dhimmīs*.

Dhimma is a word which is used twice in the Qur'ān (9: 8 and 10), in the context of Muḥammad's dealings with idolaters (*mushrikūn*), who are accused of not honouring their covenants or agreements with the prophet; as a result the prophet is also released from his commitments,

and their position becomes rather more vulnerable. But in the period of the conquests the term comes to be used more with reference to the agreements made between the conquered population and their Muslim rulers, and therefore becomes more specific.

It has recently been suggested that many of the detailed regulations concerning what the *ahl al-dhimma* were and were not permitted to do come from an earlier historical precedent, namely the regulations which existed in the Sassanian Persian Empire with reference to its religious minorities in Iraq. Here there was a highly developed Jewish community, and separate Monophysite and Nestorian Christian communities, and during the late Sassanian period the rulers experimented with arrangements by which efforts were made to ensure the loyalty of the population by granting military protection and some degree of religious toleration in return for the payment of taxes. This tribute was even applied as a kind of poll-tax, for the collection of which the leaders of the different communities were held responsible.[32] So the detail of the agreements between the Muslims and the conquered Christian population was therefore not completely novel and original.

Having looked in some detail at the Muslim treatment of the Christians who found themselves under Muslim rule in the first period of Christian–Muslim interaction, we need to remember that not all the Christians of the day, of course, were in this situation. Most particularly, the Byzantine Empire, even if it lost roughly half of its territory, that is Egypt and Syria, to the new Muslim state, remained a powerful force, and the frontier between the caliphate and the Byzantines stabilised around the Taurus Mountains fairly quickly. Political and military rivalry continued, however, both on the land frontier and in the form of naval engagements at sea, but contemporary with some of the military confrontations it is also important to remember that more positive cultural and intellectual exchanges also took place.[33]

Thus on the one hand, naval raids were organised by the Arabs against Constantinople itself in 669/49 and 717/98, the Arab fleet on the latter occasion being rowed to the city by Coptic Christians. Yet on the other, the first mosque in Constantinople was established during the reign of Leo III (717/98–741/123), and the Byzantine emperor Justinian II, during the second period of his rule (705/86–711/92), sent craftsmen to help the caliph al-Walīd (705/86–715/96) with the decoration of not only the Great Mosque in Damascus but also the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina. There is also an account in Byzantine, though not in known Arabic sources, of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (685/65–705/86) being provided with columns for the mosque in Mecca by Justinian II, at the instigation of some of the Christians of

Jerusalem who wanted to prevent 'Abd al-Malik removing some columns from one of the churches in Jerusalem.[34]

During the first period of Christian–Muslim interaction, therefore, there was a considerable range of opinion and attitude in both communities. Christian interpretations of Islam varied from seeing it as: a fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham and Ishmael; a judgement of God on Christians who had erred in their Christological formulations; or quite simply as a Christian heresy. Muslim attitudes towards Christians also varied, from a fairly militant antagonism, for a relatively short period, to a much more tolerant and conciliatory attitude which still imposed certain restrictions on Christians, along with other non-Muslims, but gave them security of life and property and permitted them freedom of worship, though not freedom of religion in the modern sense.

NOTES

1. See F. Gabrieli, *Muḥammad and the Conquests of Islam*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, p. 150.
2. Ibid., pp. 180–223.
3. G. Von Rad, *Genesis: a Commentary*, London: SCM, 1961, p. 258.
4. J. Moorhead, 'The Earliest Christian Theological Response to Islam' in *Religion*, 11 (1981), pp. 265–6.
5. Ibid., p. 266.
6. Ibid., pp. 266–7.
7. P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, esp. pp. 3–15.
8. See the discussion in N. Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'ān*, London: SCM, 1996, pp. 47–59.
9. Quoted in W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysites*, Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 353.
10. Quoted by J. Moorhead in 'The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions' in *Byzantion*, 51 (1981), p. 585.
11. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysites*, p. 351. The Great Persecution was the programme of repression which was inaugurated by Roman Emperor Diocletian in 303 and which lasted until 312.
12. Ibid., p. 337.
13. The title originally derived from the Syriac word *malka*, meaning 'king'. In modern times 'Melkite' has commonly become used to refer to the Roman Catholic Christians of the Middle East who use the Byzantine rite rather than the Latin rite, and who are sometimes referred to as Greek Catholics.
14. D. J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 1972, p. 7.
15. Ibid., pp. 38–48.
16. The full Greek text of Chapter 101, with English translation, may be found in Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 132–41, and there is commentary and discussion in ibid., pp. 67–95.
17. Ibid., p. 69, quoting John of Damascus's *De Fide Orthodoxa*.
18. Ibid., p. 95.
19. The full Greek text, with English translation, may be found in Sahas,

John of Damascus, pp. 142–55, with commentary and discussion in ibid., pp. 99–122.

20. Ibid., pp. 121 and 122. See also Seale's *Muslim Theology*, London: Luzac, 1964, and 'John of Damascus: a Dialogue between a Saracen and a Christian' in Seale's *Qur'ān and Bible*, London: Croom Helm, 1978, pp. 63–70.
21. Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 6 and 120.
22. G. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988, p. 99.
23. J. S. Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in pre-Islamic Times*, London: Longman, 1979, p. 307.
24. Newby, *Jews of Arabia*, p. 99.
25. For fuller discussion of the historicity of the tradition, as well as of the course of events, see S. Ward, 'A Fragment from an Unknown Work by al-Ṭabarī on the Tradition "Expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula [and the Lands of Islam]"' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 53 (1990), pp. 407–20.
26. The texts have been collected and discussed by D. R. Hill in his *The Termination of Hostilities in the Early Arab Conquests A.D. 634–656*, London: Luzac, 1971. See also F. M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton University Press, 1981, and W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
27. See Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 5 and pp. 154–5. On Jerusalem, see L. I. Levine (ed.), *Jerusalem: its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, New York: Continuum, 1999, p. xxiii.
28. See Chapter 2 above.
29. A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their non-Muslim Subjects: a Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar*, London: Cass, 1930, pp. 5–6.
30. Ibid., pp. 6–8.
31. Ibid., p. 233.
32. See M. G. Morony, 'Religious Communities in Late Sassanian and Early Muslim Iraq' in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 17 (1974), pp. 113–35. See also the same author's 'The Effects of the Muslim Conquest on the Persian Population of Iraq' in *Iran*, 14 (1976), pp. 41–59, and 'Conquerors and Conquered: Iran' in G. H. A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, South Illinois University Press, 1982, pp. 73–87.
33. See C. E. Bosworth, 'Byzantium and the Arabs: War and Peace between Two World Civilizations' in his *The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran*, London: Variorum, 1996, Article XIII.
34. See H. A. R. Gibb, 'Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad caliphate' in his *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, (ed. S. J. Shaw and W. R. Polk), Boston: Beacon Press, 1982, pp. 47–61, esp. pp. 51–8 and 61.

A History of Christian–Muslim Relations

Hugh Goddard

NEW AMSTERDAM BOOKS
Ivan R. Dee, Publisher
Chicago