

The Nazarean Legacy: Religious Conflict in Pre-Islamic Arabia as Seen through Greco-Roman Eyes

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After Pompey Magnus's conquest of the Hellenistic East in 64 B.C., the Roman administrators of Asia Occidentalis divided the Arabian peninsula into three realms: *Arabia Petraea* (Rocky Arabia), which stretched from Greater Syria to the Gulf of Ayala (Aqaba), and whose capital in Petra (the Rock) was carved out by the Nabateans from sandstone on the slopes of Ain Musa; *Arabia Deserta* (desert Arabia) with Bostra (Busra) as the commercial capital in Hawran; and *Arabia Felix* (happy Arabia) or Yemen with the capital city of Mariaba (Ma'rib). *Arabia Petraea*, despite its wilderness, played a significant role in the political life of the empire.¹ Because of the natural supply of pure water in the barren land, it was a midpoint on the ancient caravan route from Hadramaut to Egypt and Syria. A variety of goods—the myrrh and frankincense of the Sabaeans, *Arabia Felix*, ivory, gold, and slaves of East Africa, spices, gems, and precious wood of India—were transported via Petra and Gerasa (Jerash) to Damascus, Alexandria, and Rome. In *Arabia Petraea*, the Prophet Yusuf was cast into a well by his brothers from which he was found and brought to Egypt, where he was sold. Many readers of the Bible believe that Ain Musa near Petra is the spring that the Prophet Musa caused to gush forth.² In the time of the Prophet Sulayman, *Arabia Petraea* was populated by the semitic tribes of Edom and Moab. During the rule of the Babylonian Nabuchadnezzar who sacked Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and deported Judean rebels to Babylon, the Edomites established a kingdom of Sela in the land of Seir. But at the end of the sixth century B.C., the Nabateans forced them to migrate to Idumea. Under the Nabatean rule, Petra was recognized as the ancient “duty-free” city. The Nabatean desert kingdom survived as an independent state until the con-

quest of northern Arabia by the post-Alexandrian Seleucids of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt. The Roman emperor Trajan annexed Nabatean Arabia in 106 C.E. and incorporated the new *Provincia Arabia* with Bosra as its capital to his vast empire. He had tried, unsuccessfully, to control the lucrative incense trade between Yemen and the Phoenician coast (modern Lebanon).³

It has often been suggested that the Christian religion that developed in Palestine overpowered the pagan cults of Rome long before Emperor Constantine's declaration of Pauline Christianity as the Church Triumphant. But there are so many historical records favoring the opinion that the Mediterranean cults of Rome suppressed the teaching of the Prophet Isa (Jesus), not only within the Roman Empire but also within the frontiers of Arabia. These cults, which Romanized Christian churches of the East and West, influenced profoundly the pagan religion of Arabs long before the advent of Islam. The Roman Christian and pagan texts can be used to illustrate the religious transformation of the peripheral "third world" of ancient Arabia into the pivotal region of the "de-Romanization" of Jesus's faith, where the message of Islam conclusively crushed the power of Imperial Rome. However, the truthfulness of these texts, which are our main sources for the pre-Islamic centuries, must be meticulously verified. The clash of religions in post-Hellenistic and proto-Islamic Arabia, divided by the Roman and Persian spheres of influence, evoked a rich literature in both Greek and Latin, much of it biased and distorted by the cultural or religious affiliation of the authors. How meticulous and how deceptive are the Greco-Roman sources? Any exegesis of these texts must face the fundamental inconvenience that the primary, as well as secondary, sources of the Roman and Greek annalists are lost or obscure to us. The archeological and numismatic evidences—an inscription, a relic, or a coin—are too reticent to produce convincing testimony, so only a discord between the parallel authors are an effective criterion of their reliability. Moreover, the sociopolitical milieu of the late Roman Empire was highly charged with religious emotions, which often blur historical occurrences. No reader of these texts can doubt that their authors were personally involved in shaping the cultural frontiers of their world.

The Making of Christianity

Religious prejudice was an inescapable result of Emperor Constantine's decree to adopt Nicaean Christianity as the state religion in Imperial Rome. Two of the main points in which this new creed diverged from the old pagan pluralism were its authoritarian dogmatism and the supremacy it gave to the Greek patriarchs. The first logically led to persecution of polytheism, the second to suppression of "deviations" or

"heresies." Constantine's religious reformation was perhaps the most conspicuous act ever committed by a Roman emperor in its disregard and defiance of at least 90 percent of the population. Retaining the pagan title of Pontifex Maximus, he supervised the religious state institutions. Constantine presided over the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E., where Jesus's divinity and dogma of the holy trinity were established by a vote. Three hundred and thirteen bishops out of 318 voted for it. Followers of Bishop Arius were silenced by the emperor, who said that the question of Jesus's nature is not open for theological debate, and those who had a "problem" accepting the democratically elected "son of God" and formulated doctrine of universal church in toto risked being excommunicated and imprisoned as deviants threatening the social stability of the empire. In some parts of the empire Christian extremists took advantage of the new imperial order to demolish pagan temples and, of course, the "heathens" were distressed. But it was Theodosius who inflicted a massive blow on the ancient idolatry of Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians, and Romans. He appointed Cynegius, Christian Praetorian Prefect of the East, to the task of executing a new religious policy in Asia and Africa. The fanatical Greek Christian monks destroyed the great temple of Edessa (Urfa) and burned down the Serapeum, the famous library at Alexandria, under the command of Archbishop Theophilus in 389 C.E.⁴

This library was established by Ptolemy I (323-285 C.E.) and expanded by his successor Ptolemy II. Before the Christianization of Egypt, the total collection of volumes was estimated at more than a half million scrolls. On March 23, 415, the rioting monks led by a man called Peter stoned or hewed to death a learned pagan woman named Hypatia, who lectured in the library.⁵ She was murdered after an anti-Jewish riot ignited by a massacre of Christians. One year earlier, in 414, the Jews of Alexandria slaughtered more than two thousand Christians during Passover.⁶

Nineteenth century writers asserted that Caliph Umar destroyed the library. They even fabricated an aphorism concerning it. According to Christian gossip, the Caliph ordered the collection destroyed because, if the books contained knowledge which contradicted the Qur'an, they would have to be burned; likewise, if the ancient scrolls contained knowledge that supported the wisdom revealed in the Qur'an, they should be burned because the wisdom of the Qur'an needs no support.⁷

Bishop Porphyrius of Gaza and the empress Eudoxia ordered the temple of Marnas torn down. Theodosius II, shortly before his death in 448, ordered all anti-Christian books written by Celsus and Julian the Apostate burned. Old gods and the Homeric pantheon of heroes were replaced by new Christian martyrs and saints. The worshippers of Athena, Astarte, Isis, and Aphrodite-Cybele could shift their veneration to the Virgin Mother. Those who prayed to Poseidon, Neptune, and

Oceanos could call upon St. Nicholas (the modern day Santa Claus of Christmas). Those who worshipped Apollo paid homage to St. Elias.⁸ By an edict promulgated in 321, Emperor Constantine ordered the day of the Invincible Sun or *Sol Invictus* to be a day of rest. The Celtic solar deity of Sun adopted by Romans from Gaul intertwined conveniently with the popular cult of Persian Mithra. The Christian holiday of Nativity associated with a winter solstice was conveniently fixed to coincide with the birthday of the Persian deity Mithra, and the Celtic feast *Natalis Invicti*, on December 25.⁹ In accordance with Constantine's edict, all Roman citizens adopted Sunday as their new day of leisure. Until the reign of Constantine, the Christians celebrated Christ's birthday on January 6 (Epiphany), but for the new Celtic cult of Sun, the most important day of the year was December 25, the "holy day" *Natalis Invictus*, or rebirth of the sun, when the days in Europe began to grow longer. The aureole of light crowning the head of the god-Sun and the cross in circle became the official Christian symbols of Christ and the holy signs of his saints.¹⁰

In 525, Pope John I commissioned the monk Dionysus Exiguus to establish a new Christian calendar that every Roman citizen could agree on. The Romans still calculated their years in accordance to the emperor Diocletian's reformed old calendar, which dated the years *ab urbe condita*. Dionysus "corrected" Diocletian's calendar and decided to place Jesus's birth in the 753th year of the old Roman system. But Herod the Great, king of Judea, died 750 years after Rome was founded, and according to the authors of the New Testament, Jesus was born in Herod's reign. In Matthew's Gospel, Mariam with the newborn Jesus and Yusuf fled to Egypt. They returned at Herod's death, when Jesus was 2 years old.¹¹

The Religious Pandemonium in Judea

By 38 C.E., Jesus was being proclaimed as the Messiah—not the son of God—by several Jewish religious parties from Galilee. In 54 C.E., the Zealots or the Jewish fundamentalists launched a ferocious terrorist campaign against the Sadducees, the high Jewish priests who had collaborated with the Roman colonial administration. Several Sadducees were stabbed to death by the Sicarii, an extremist wing of the Zealots (in Aramaic: *qannai*), who slit the throat of their victims with a sica, a curved sharp knife favored by ancient Jewish terrorists for political assassinations. The pro-Pharisaic rural guerrillas called *Lestai* (outlaws) attacked Roman military posts and waged a low-intensity war against the imperial cohorts stationed in Palestine.¹²

The Roman governors of Judea were arresting and ruthlessly crucifying both the Qannai and Sicarii but the Judaistic insurrection did not decline. Around 65 C.E., James, the leader of moderate fundamentalist

Nazareans or Essenes (Zadokites?), was captured and executed. Simeon, the new leader of the Nazarean urban party, or the so-called first Christians in Jerusalem, led them out of Jerusalem. They established their new base at the town of Pella, on the east side of the Jordan River. Later, they emigrated to the Tigris-Euphrates basin between modern Syria and Iraq. In northern Mesopotamia, the Nazareans (Qur'anic *nasara*?) separated themselves from Hellenized Pauline Christianity.¹³

In the spring of 66 C.E., a serious Jewish riot led by the Zealots broke out in Cesarea and Jerusalem, which was recaptured by the Jewish rebels. Judas of Galilee, one of the commanders of the anti-Roman Jewish extremists, seized the stronghold of Masada, where his group committed mass suicide in 73 C.E. By 70 C.E., the Roman troops took Jerusalem, and Emperor Titus ordered the city razed to the ground. The Fifth, Tenth, and Fifteenth legions stationed in Emaus, Jericho, and Cesarea restored *Pax Romana* over Palestine.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the Romans discovered horrible war crimes committed by John of Gishala and his hit men. Their Sadducean opponents, among them the priests Ananos and Jesus, were sadistically murdered in the dungeons under the temple of Jerusalem, after long and horrible tortures.¹⁴

This holocaust did not satisfy the Idumean appetite for blood. Turning to the City they plundered every house and killed anyone they met. The fall of the City began with Ananos' death and the destruction of the Jewish state dated from the day. . . Simon ben Gioras and his 25,000 well-armed men by a surprise attack captured the little town of Hebron, the town older than Memphis in Egypt, its age is reckoned as 2,300 years. They affirm that it was the home of Abraham, the ancestor of the Jews, after his migration from Mesopotamia, and that his descendants went down into Egypt from there. . . From there he advanced through the whole country, not only sacking villages and towns but ravaging the countryside . . . His brutal nature and vindictiveness against Idumean people were major reasons for the devastation of their land . . . The people found the Zealots more terrifying than the Romans, and more savage than others. Their passion for looting was insatiable, they murdered men and raped women for fun, and drank their spoils washed down with blood. Through sheer boredom they shamelessly gave themselves up to effeminate practices, adorning their hair and putting on women's clothes, steeping themselves in scent and painting under their eyes to make themselves attractive. They copied not merely the dress but also the passions of women, and in their utter filthiness invented unlawful pleasures; they wallowed in slime, turning the whole city into a brothel and polluting it with the

foulest practices. Yet though they had the faces of women, they had the hands of murderers.¹⁵

Edward Gibbon wrote:

Humanity is shocked at the recital of the horrid cruelties which the Jews committed in the cities of Egypt, of Cyprus, and of Cyrene, where they dwelt in treacherous friendship with the unsuspecting natives . . . In Cyrene they massacred 220,000 Greeks, in Cyprus 240,000, in Egypt, a very great multitude. Many of these unhappy victims were sawed asunder, the Jews devoured the flesh, licked the blood, and twisted the entrails like a girdle around their bodies.¹⁶

The Romans were forced to intervene and to halt the Jewish atrocities. Tacitus narrated that “the Roman legions were attended by twenty cohorts of allied infantry and eight regiments of cavalry, as well as by the two kings Agrippa and Sohaemus and the supporting forces offered by King Antiochus. Then there were strong levies of Arabs, who felt for the Jews the hatred common between neighbors.”¹⁷

Prophet Sulayman’s sanctuary was demolished. It was rebuilt as the Al-Aqsa mosque in 16 A.H. (635 C.E.) by the caliph Umar. He himself worked like a mason to construct the mosque at a place known as “Sakhra,” proposed by the local Greek bishop.* It was exactly the place where the great temple of the Prophet Sulayman was built** and where the Prophet Yaqub—identified by the Jewish rabbis as Jacob and also known as Israel—received the Divine Message. Saul of Tarsus, a zealous Sadducean agent, participated so vehemently in suppression of the Nazarean-Zealot uprising that he was accused of stoning Stephen (the first recognized Judeo-Christian martyr) to death. But in Damascus, after journeying to the Arabian desert, Saul (alias Paul), began preaching his own hellenized version of the Nazarean faith. Protected by the imperial law as a Roman citizen, he survived the serious conflict with the Nazarean church of Jerusalem. St. Paul died probably between 64 and 67 C.E.

From Paul’s cult of the divine Christ, a new Christian religion emerged as a rival and ultimately as an adversarial sect to the historical Prophet-Messiah Yeshua’s teaching. Roman-occupied Palestine or ancient

*The issue of who built the Aqsa Mosque is a controversial one. Al-Tabari in *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, 3 (661) reported that ‘Umar bin Al-Khattab built the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Ibn al-Athir in *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* 4 (483), on the other hand, attributed this to ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan, while Al-Maqdisi in *Ahsan al-Tagasim fi Ma’rifat al-Agalim* (162) attributed it to Al-Walid bin ‘Abd al-Malik. Raif-Najm in *Kunuz al-Quds* (75) tends to accept the suggestion made by some historians that ‘Abd al-Malik started the project and Al-Walid completed it in 87 A.H. [Editor’s note.]

**Raif-Najm reviewed various Jewish sources on the place of the temple and concluded that no one knows the real location of the first or the second temple; all the excavations made by Jewish authorities in Jerusalem pointed to Islamic, Byzantium, or Roman antiquities [Editor’s note].

Canaan proclaimed as "the Promised Land" by Jewish messianists was never really a Jewish homeland. The majority of the Jews preferred to live in Egypt, Crete, Cyprus, and Babylon. In Egypt, which was ruled by Ptolemean clients of the Roman empire, more than one million Jews lived in Alexandria and other large cities. They worshipped Jahve-Addonai in their great Egyptian temple of Leontopolis. According to Tacitus's records, the Jews or Iadei "were refugees from the island of Crete, the people dwelling around the famous Mount Ida, who settled in the remotest corner of Libya."¹⁸

They were expatriated from Egypt to Palestine under the leadership of Hierosolymus and Judas. But many other ancient sources "assure us that the Jews are descended from those Ethiopians who were driven by fear and hatred to emigrate from their home country when Cepheus was king. There are some who say that a motley collection of landless Assyrians occupied a part of Egypt and then built cities of their own, inhabiting the lands of the Hebrews (Children of Israel) and the nearer part of Syria."¹⁹

Most ancient Greek and Roman sources agree that during the reign of Pharaoh Bocchoris of the Twenty-Fourth Dynasty (c. 721-715 B.C.), when Egypt was plagued by a disease which caused horrible bodily deformation (leprosy?), Moses, the Hebrew leader of the victimized nomads, led them "into the unknown."²⁰ According to Tacitus, they traveled across the Sinai desert for six days without a break, and on the seventh they expelled the previous inhabitants of Canaan. They seized their land and built a holy temple in Jerusalem.²¹

Moses prescribed for them a novel religion quite different from those of the rest of mankind . . . They avoid eating pork in memory of their tribulations, as they themselves were once infected with the disease to which this creature is subject. They still fast as an admission of the hunger they once endured so long. The other practices of the Jews are sinister and revolting, and have entrenched themselves by their very wickedness . . . and other reasons for their increasing wealth may be found in their stubborn loyalty and ready benevolence towards brother Jews. But the rest of the world they confront with the hatred reserved for enemies. They will not feed or intermarry with non-Jews . . . Among themselves nothing is barred. They have introduced the practice of circumcision to show that they are different from others . . . and they think that eternal life is granted to those who die in battle or execution. For them the Most High and Eternal cannot be portrayed by human hands and will never pass away. For this reason they erect no images in their cities. They live in the country bounded on the east by Arabia, on the south by Egypt, and on the west by Phoenicia and the sea; of the north they have a distant view on the side towards Syria.²²

Tacitus was convinced that the Jews are self-centered enemies of all nations (*adversus omnes alios hostile odeum*).

There were two main branches of the Hebrews—Sephardim and Ashkenazim. The Sephardim or the southern Hebrews claim their origin from the tribe of Judah which, like the Banu Benjamin, vanished in the wilderness of history. They were divided into three clans: Cohen (Arabic: *kahin*) or “sorcerers,” Levi or the priests, and Ammon Israel or “the circumcised.” Josephus in his *Antiquitates Judaicae* wrote that whenever the Hebrews slaughtered an animal, the Cohen received the tongue, half of the head, and one shoulder. The Levi took the maw, the breast, and the right shoulder. The rest of the sacrificed animal was left for the Israelites. During the so-called Babylonian captivity, when the faith of the Prophet Musa (Moses) almost extinguished among the deported Hebrews, the Ten Tribes were mixed among themselves to such an extent that it was impossible to distinguish them.²³

The Ashkenazim, or the northern “white” Jews, derive their name from Ashkenaz ben Gomer, a grandson of Japheth and great grandson of the Prophet Nuh (Noah) who, according to the biblical book of Genesis (10:3), populated Armenia and the northern Caucasus. They were not present in Palestine during the second construction of the Temple of Jerusalem by Zorobabel in 520 B.C. The Ashkenazim were divided into Parushim (Pharisees or “Separatists”), Hasidim or Cabalists (strict followers of Talmud and the teachings of *Sadikim*; in Yiddish: *Gute Yaden* or “righteous men”), and Khabadim or the Messianic Jews, who held the great teacher of Nazareth to be the Messiah of the Jews. Khabadim were members of the Nazarean and Ebonite communes.²⁴

After the Roman victory over the Judaeen rebels, the orthodox Jews, who emigrated to Persia, formed a new rabbinical sect called Karaim (Caraites), or the “Puritans.” These literalists rejected the Talmud and all books following the Mosaic Law and the words of the Prophets. The Karaim claim descent from the Ten Tribes who did not participate in the Palestinian wars against Rome; they were scattered throughout Arabia and Mesopotamia. Karaim missionaries successfully converted the Turkic Sabirs and Khazars, and probably some of Alanic Sarmatians (Sauromates), into their brand of reformed Judaism. During the reign of Persian king Kavad (486-531 C.E.), the Khazars controlled Armenia, Djurdjan (Georgia), and Albania (modern Azerbaidjan). In the tenth century C.E., after the fall of Khazaria and the Islamization of the Tatars, the Karaim emigrated from the steppes of Kipchak to Western Russia, Lithuania, Crimea, and Poland.²⁵

Jewish legend ascribes the conservation of the Oral Law to Rabbi Yohannan ben Zakkai, who realizing that total defeat of the Jews was inevitable, declared himself to be dead. His “dead” body was sneaked out of Jerusalem during a Roman assault. Carried to Emperor Vespasian, he

asked him for permission to establish a new moderate Jewish school of thought at Jamniyah.²⁶

After the Roman victory over the Idumean rebels, the Jewish Senate or Sanhedrin was transferred from demolished Jerusalem to Javneh and later to Sephores (*Saffuriyyah*), which was entirely pro-Roman. During the reign of Emperor Antonius Pious (138–161 C.E.), the Sanhedrin was moved to the Galilean city of Tiberias. It was presided over by Rabbi Yahuda Ha-Kodesh, who was declared the *Nashi*, or *dux Iudaeae*. He “ruled” from a cave, where he compiled the *Mishnayoth*, or “repetition” of the Mosaic *Halakah* (the law). His son Gamaliel succeeded him as the *Nashi*. Under his guidance, the commentaries to *Mishnah* became a special study of *Midrash* (in Arabic: *dars*, a lesson), and the notes added by “Jewish saints” formed the *Massorah* (Tradition). The second rabbinical school or *madrash* was established at Safed in Galilee. The distinctive strictness of the Safed *Madrash* resulted from the domination of the Banu Ismail (Ishmael) who inhabited the barren hills of upper Galilee.²⁷

The *Mishnayoth* was further interpreted by rabbis, who established Babylonian academies at Surah and Pumpedita. Following the fall of Palestinian school of *Halakah* at Tiberias, orthodox rabbis from all over the Jewish diaspora consulted the Jewish elders of Iraq. At the end of the fourth century C.E., the Babylonian collection of commentaries to *Mishnah*, the Babli Talmud or Babylonian Doctrine, became the fundamental regulations of Jewish life. It was written in the eastern Aramaic language. Talmudic Judaism had been divided into two main sects, namely, Hillelism and ultra-orthodox Shammaism. The followers of both sects dominated the Jewish communities of Egypt and Iraq. Abercius, a Phrygian bishop who crossed over the Euphrates river to the east bank in the second half of the second century, reported a large Jewish community in the region of Adiabene, where a local queen mother and her children had become Jewish converts in the third decade C.E.²⁸

The Jews were very numerous in Nisibis, which was recaptured by Romans from the Parthians in 165, and in Dura Europos, the Roman military fort on the Euphrates. At Dura, the Jewish synagogue looked much more impressive than the Christian house-church.²⁹

In the southern Iraqi desert lived the Nazareans and Ebonites under the nominal control of the Parthians. They were followers of the Jewish “saint” Elchesai who had preached a respect for the Prophet Jesus in Mesopotamia c.100 to 110 C.E. According to the Judeo-Christian legend from Edessa (Urfa), a man named Thomas had seen Jesus Christ in a vision and had been sold as a slave to the Parthian king, Gundophar of Taxila in the Punjab. He preached the gospels in India. Since the first and second centuries until the advent of Islam, Taxila was a rich Buddhist town, and if there is any truth in the legend, we would have to believe that Thomas did not accomplish his mission. In the late fourth century,

several Mesopotamian towns attracted the Christian, Nazarean, and Jewish refugees from Palestine who had fled persecution during the reign of Emperor Hadrian. They were quickly influenced by Manicheism and a lavish Persian lifestyle.³⁰

According to Hegemonius—a Christian author mentioned in Eusebius's *Chronicon*—Manichaeus preached in the desert town of Arabion, in the hope of converting a rich Christian man named Marcellus. Manichaeus introduced himself to Marcellus as the apostle of Jesus Christ. His three chief apostles, Thomas, Addas, and Hermas, preached to the Egyptians and Scythians. In Arabion, Mani was challenged by two other Persian “saints,” Parcus and Labadcus, “the sons of Divine Mithra.” His names Mani, Manes, or Manichaeus (Greek: *Manichaios*) seem to be variants of the Hebrew name Menahem (Holy Comforter).³¹

The Pagan Anxiety

In his treatise *The True Word* written probably in 179 C.E., the Roman conservative writer Celsus attacked the Christians and the Jews as immoral and subversive Oriental sects. The book has been lost but a theological refutation of it, written by the Christian apologist Origen, is available. Celsus was not a rumormonger and had read both the Christian and Jewish sacred books. He knew very well the differences between Judeo-Christianity and Gnostic teachings. Celsus firmly defended the traditional ethos and conservative values of Rome against the encroaching Judeo-Christian totalitarianism. Like Tacitus, Celsus regarded the Jews as runaway slaves of Egyptian origin who were adherents of the magicians. He wrote that Jews and Christians argued with one another over “the shadow of a donkey.”³²

In general, Celsus characterized the Jewish and Christian theological conflict as a very silly squabble of intellectually inferior people. “The Jews are fugitives from Egypt who never performed anything worthy of note and were never held in any reputation.”³³ He was particularly harsh in his condemnation of Pauline Christianity. Celsus argued that the Hebrew prophets described in the Old Testament never specifically foretold the coming of Jesus. For him, the gospels about the resurrection and crucifixion of Jesus were cruel lies based “on an hysterical account of female spectators.”³⁴

In his opinion, Christians insult God when they assert that through sonship He took on human form. “Demons might come down to earth, but God and His son would not. The Christian son of God was a very weak god if the angel had to move the stone from his tomb. Their god needed help.”³⁵

Celsus was very disturbed by the Christian teaching that God wanted to save mankind by the cruel and senseless act of self-execution and a three-day-long death. He believed that the cult "of the son of God" is blasphemous. "Christians deified Jesus in order to enshrine him and not to pay a special reverence to God."³⁶

Celsus concluded his refutation of Christianity by a fierce and often arrogant denigration of its followers, resembling today's onslaught of the "experts on Islam" against "Islamic fundamentalism." According to Celsus, the Christians and Jews were peoples of destitute minds, and their religion "attracted only the uneducated and narrow-minded common folk. Their arguments failed to impress intelligent persons, and in their ignorance, Christians misunderstood the truth expounded by Greek philosophers. They vulgarly discuss fundamental principles and make arrogant pronouncements about matters of which they know nothing."³⁷

Celsus accused Christians of trying to destroy families by pitting children against their parents and teachers. "When they present their doctrine they avoid the company of tolerant men, but instead preach in the market places, in crowds of slaves, and among the fools. They ridicule the worship of Zeus because his tomb is exhibited in Crete, but they themselves worship one who had supposedly risen from the dead. They separate themselves from the rest of mankind. They are obscure and fanatical bands of boorish, backward people suffering from the disease of sedition."³⁸ He also pointed out the similarities between Christianity and the Mithraic mysteries.

Despite Celsus's anti-Christian propaganda, the Oriental Judeo-Christians won the souls of Romans and Greeks, and the Roman empire was totally Christianized. Celsus's rationalist paganism perished.

Pauline Christianity began to develop itself as a new religion in area where pagan cults of Phoenicia, Asia Minor, Greece, Syria, Egypt, and Persia were well-rooted. The male deities Tammuz, Osiris, Attis, Adonis, Dionysus, Zoroaster, and Mithras had been born of virgin mothers, died with wounds, and after three days rose from the tomb. In the temple of Bethlehem, Tammuz was worshipped until the birth of Pauline Christianity. Mithras, the Persian god of orientalized Roman legionists, preached: "He who shall not eat of my body nor drink of my blood so that he may be one with me and I with him, shall not be saved."³⁹

Tertullian, one of the Church Fathers insisted later that satan tried to mock the Christian Holy Communion (Eucharystia) in order to belittle the church teaching.

In 132 C.E., Palestinian monotheists again rose up against the Roman occupation. Simeon bar Kohba, a leader of the revolution, was a Nazarean who believed in the Coming of the Last Prophet or Messiah. His revolution failed, and once again Jerusalem was sacked. As a result of the failed Judean revolt, the Jews were banished from Palestine.

The Jews, Judeo-Christian Ebionites, and the Nazarean survivors of the Roman fury fled into Mesopotamia, Syria, *Arabia Desertae* (the Khaybar settlement near Yathrib—later to be Madinah), and *Arabia Felix* (Yemen). The Nazareans divided themselves into several sects of Sabians, Mandaneans, Nestorians, Elkasaites, and Jacobites.

The “desert” Christian communes rejected the Pauline teachings as an error and called St. Paul an apostate of the Law.⁴⁰

In 1960, the Jewish medievalist Schlomo Pines penetrated a rare collection of Arabic manuscripts in the old Osmanli library at Istanbul (made inaccessible to Muslims by the Kemalist regime until the end of the 1980s). The collection, dating from the third century A.H., also contains fifth-century C.E. texts written in Syriac by anonymous al-Nasara from the Nazarean community in Khuzistan, in southwestern Iran. In these texts Jesus is described as a man, not a god. Paul and his “Christians” are said to “have abandoned the religion of Jesus and turned toward the hellenistic doctrines of the Rum.” The New Testament is dismissed as refutable and a forgery of Greek bishops.⁴¹

The Ebionites, an ancient Christian sect, did not deny that Jesus was born of a virgin and the Holy Spirit, but they refused to acknowledge Jesus’s pre-existence as God, the Word and wisdom. “They held that the epistles of Paul ought to be rejected altogether, calling him a renegade from the Law, and using only the Gospel of the Hebrews.”⁴²

The first serious clash of Romans and Arab bedouins or “Saracens” took place during the reign of the emperor Pescennius Niger (the Black) who waged a war in Egypt from 193 to 194 C.E. When his frontier troops called *limitanei* were defeated by Arab warriors, they made excuses that they were routed by a lack of wine. “Likewise when the men, who had been defeated by the Saracens, were in uproar and were saying: ‘We haven’t had wine, we cannot fight,’ he (Niger) replied: ‘Blush for shame, for the men who are defeating you drink water.’”⁴³

Cassius Dio, the Bithynian Greek author of *Roman History*, wrote that Cornelius Palma, the governor of Syria, conquered *Arabia Petrae* in c. 130, making it a Roman province under the reign of the emperor Hadrian (117–138). Emperor Macrinus (217–218) fought the Arabs of Arabia Felix “no less bravely than successfully.”⁴⁴

There is reason to believe that the appearance of the Romanized Christian communities in the frontier areas of Syria, Arabia, and Palestine in the later Roman empire may simply be due to the migration of the Judeo-Graeco-Oriental Christians and not to the conversion of the Arab bedouins to Christianity. The Christian inscriptions began to appear in the Arabian heartland after Emperor Constantine had defeated Licinius in the East. In Roman Palestine, Syria, and further south at *Arabia Petrae*, the urban population became Christian under the strain of legislation rather than by religious ardor. This conviction was expressed

by the sixth-century historian Procopius of Caesarea, a native of Palestine, in his *Anecdota*. The amazing swiftness of conversion of Syrian Christians to Islam during the reign of Heraclius is easier to understand if we bear in mind that the Roman Christianization of Palestine and Syria had never been successful. In Syria and Palestine, conquered by the Muslim warriors of Khalid ibn Walid, Christianity was not deeply rooted.⁴⁵

There are a large number of pre-Constantinian inscriptions in Arabia, Syria, and Palestine which bear the Greek utterance *Eis Theos* (There is One God).⁴⁶

Under the reign of the emperor Gordian (238–244 C.E.), Beryllus, bishop of Bostra in Arabia, rebuffed the Nicæan doctrine of the trinity and “tried to bring an alien idea to the Christian faith, asserting that Jesus did not pre-exist and had no divinity of his own.”⁴⁷ During the rule of Emperor Philip (244–249), “a new group appeared in Arabia, known as the Helekesaites. They refute some part of every book of the Bible. The Apostle Paul is rejected altogether. They produce a book, alleging that it fell from heaven.”⁴⁸ Later, during the reign of Decius, Sabellian “heretics” and Bishop Novatus propagated at Ptolemais in Libya “utter disbelief in the only begotten son and the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁹

During the reign of the emperor Justinian, the Ghassanid puppet-king Arethas (Al-Arith) of the Kinda clan attacked Diomedes, the *silentarius dux* of Palestine, but he was forced to withdraw. In 560, the Lahmidian leader Al-Mundhir, Arab collaborator of Persians, sacked Syria as far as Antioch. The Arab Monophysite chieftains camped at Gabija in the Golan Hills, where they appointed as a bishop the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch Theodosius. Their center of political power was in Batanea. Monophysitism was a dominant sect in Syria since the ordination of James Bar’adai and Theodore of Arabia at the request of Al-Harith.⁵⁰

The Monophysite anti-Chalcedonian movement in Syria and Arabia was a clear expression of local resistance to Pauline Christianity. The Monophysites were strongest in regions where the Arabic and Aramaic languages were predominant, but they did not create a separate church. Officially, they were loyal to the Roman emperors, but unofficially they favored Persian authority. The Monophysites also expressed strong anti-Jewish sentiments, particularly after the conversion of the Jewish synagogue of the seven Maccabee brothers at Apamea into a church. In 592, the Jews were evicted by the Monophysites from Antioch, which was the cradle of Hellenistic Judeo-Christianity during Paul’s mission. In 638, the Muslim troops entered the city without resistance.

The Spread of Christianity and Judaism in Arabia

Eusebius, the bishop of Cesarea in Palestine during the reign of Constantine, wrote essentially nothing about Christian sects in Arabia. He described only five Arab towns with Christian communities, namely, Petra, Bosra, Anaia, Jetheira, and Kariatha, but he does not inform us about their creed.

Ebonites and Nazareans believed that Jesus was a human being and the Messiah. Epiphanius, a Nicaean Christian apologist, wrote an antiheretical refutation against them because they were not "ashamed" to denounce St. Paul as a "false apostle."⁵¹

In the fifth century Pauline Christianity was shaken by serious crises of its own dogmas. Major sects and "heresies" such as Nestorianism, Eutychianism, Monothelitism, and Pelagianism wrecked the fragile *oikumene* (ecumen) of churches in Asia Minor, Africa, Arabia, and Europe. They attacked the use of the word *theotokos* (mother of God), applied to the Virgin Mary. Heresiarch Nestorius preached that God could not be born of a woman who could not bear a son older than herself. She was Christotokos or the mother of Christos (Isa). Mariam is literally and truly the mother of Jesus; therefore he is true man. In 435, Nestorius was exiled to the Arabian desert, which served as a haven for Nazarean theology. The Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon held in 451, the year of Nestorius's death, condemned him as a dangerous heretic and deviationist. His church, destroyed within the Roman Empire, survived in Persia, India, Arabia, and Central Asia until the fourteenth century. It won converts among the ruling Sassanids in Persia. Before the advent of Islam, Nestorian churches were being founded in Turkestan, Khurasan (Merv, Herat, Samarkand), and in Socotra (an island near Yemen). The Hephtalites or "White Huns" of North Afghanistan asked for Nestorian missionaries in 549. There was a Nestorian community in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Edessa, and later in Baghdad under the Abbasids. In the Christianized Roman Empire, the persecution of "deviationists" was more severe than the persecution of polytheist pagans. The unity of Pauline Christianity was considered of supreme importance. Pope Leo I wrote: "Varietatem veritas, que est simplex atque una, non recipit" (Truth is simple and does not admit of variety). The combined efforts of popes and emperors were successful in practically wiping out Arianism, Eunomianism, and Nestorianism in Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor.⁵²

In 420, the Bedouin shaykh Aspebet and his clan accepted Pauline Christianity. He took the baptismal name Peter, and in 430, he was consecrated as a bishop of *Arabia Desertae* by Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem.⁵³

In 473, an Arab shaykh, Amorcesus, betrayed his Persian overlords and seized the Roman-held island of Iotabe in the Red Sea. According to Malchus of Philadelphia, he became a Christian.

The kingdom of the Ethiopians (Axumites), who controlled Yemen and the Somali coast, established close commercial relations with the Romans. Christian missionaries had been at work in those lands since the reign of Constantinus II, when an Arian bishop, Theophilus, organized the churches in Yemen and the island of Socotra. The Ethiopian ruler Aizan (Sazan) invited Christian bishops to Southwestern Arabia, founding churches at Safar and Aden. There, Jewish rabbis converted several Arab clans to Judaism. Medieval Dominican hagiographer Jacobus de Voragine (1230–1298) fabricated a *legendae sanctorum* about St. Andrew's mission to the Ethiopians. In his *Golden Legend* he wrote that Andrew Apostle

after the Lord ascension into heaven went to Scythia (Southern Russia), and Matthew went to Murgundia, also called Ethiopia. But the Ethiopians, refusing to follow Matthew's gospel, plucked out his eyes, put him in shackles and threw him into prison. Meanwhile an angel appeared to Andrew and ordered him to liberate Matthew. The angel guided him to Ethiopia and restored Matthew's vision, who immediately departed for Antioch. Andrew was also tortured in Ethiopia.⁵⁴

Dimnos, the Judaized Arab king of the Himyarites, killed many Greek and Roman merchants as an act of revenge for alleged mistreatment of Jews in the Roman Empire. The Roman emperor Justinian urged the Ethiopian king Andas to invade Yemen, who then captured and executed Dimnos. Andas had promised that, if he were victorious against the Judaized Yemeni ruler, he would accept Christianity. He fulfilled his vow before his death. Andas was succeeded by Tazena, "the king of Axum, Himyar, Reydan, Sheba and Salhen." He and his son Elesboas were also Christianized. The "people of the Synagogue" came from Syria and Palestine after the wars of Emperors Titus and Hadrian, and they settled themselves near Yathrib (Madinah). They were strong enough to murder the amir of the Tubā. A new Judaized leader of the Himyarites, Dhu Nuwas, defeated the Ethiopians and massacred the Christians in Yemen between 519 and 520. After the victory over the Ethiopian troops, he attacked the Arab Christians in Najran. Again, he ruthlessly massacred about 280 Christians of the amir Harith ibn Kāb. Dhu Nuwas acquired the name of "Master of the Burning Pit," because at the instigation of the Jews, he burned alive thousands of Christians in a trench filled with combustibles. Later he threatened Al-Mundhir (Alamoundaros) of Hira that if his tribe tolerates the Christians, he will invade Al-Mundhir's camp in Ramla. And again, the Ethiopian army of Ela Atzbeha invaded Yemen

to avenge the massacred Christians (c. 524). The Ethiopians routed the Jews and killed Dhu Nuwas. The triumphant king Ela Atzbeha made a Himyarite Christian, Esimphaios (Al-Samayfa), a vassal of Axum. A Himyarite inscription found at Husn-Gurab recorded these events.

Aelius Gallus was the first Roman who visited Najran (in 24 C.E.).

When Emperor Justinian sent Julian, his *agens in rebus*, to open the Byzantine embassies in the courts of Ethiopia and Himyarite Yemen, he considered a new regional war against increasingly bellicose Persians. Ethiopia's King Ela Atzbeha—who received Julian on a four-wheeled platform moved by four elephants—vehemently promised to support Constantinople against Persia. As sovereign of Yemen, Ela Atzbeha intervened in the tribal conflict between his vassal Al-Samayfa (Esimphaios) and Kays, the amir of an Arab tribe of Mād in the Nejd. Both Himyarites and Mādites agreed to ally themselves with the Roman-Ethiopian coalition, but when Persians effectively ruined the Ethiopian market economy by buying all payloads of Chinese silk in Ceylon, the Arab shaykhs shrewdly retreated. The Byzantine ambassador responded in accordance to the old Roman art of aggressive diplomacy. Soon after the Arab withdrawal from the anti-Persian coalition, a rebellion broke out in Yemen. Ethiopian puppet Al-Samayfa was deposed and arrested. A man called Abram or Abraha, a former slave of the Roman denizen at Adulis in Ethiopia, seized power in Ethiopia.⁵⁵

Abraha, who was a new Christian, had been recognized as the chief of the Yemeni junta by the Ethiopian ruler Ela Atzbeha. Kays, the Arab amir of Nejd, was forced to send his own son Muaviyyah as a hostage to Constantinople. Later, when Kays resigned as the chief of Nejd, he was appointed phylarchus of Palestine.⁵⁶

When Abraha was set upon the throne of Yemen, the Greek monk Gregentius of Ulpiana was sent from Alexandria to be bishop of Safar, the capital city of the Himyarites.⁵⁷ He debated with Jewish rabbi Herbanus on the superiority of Pauline Christianity over the Judaic faith. Gregentius prepared a Code of Law for Abraha, who is known to the Muslims from the Qur'an (105:1–3). In San'a', Abraha erected a huge church, using the stones of a demolished ancient pagan temple of Ma'rib (Mariaba, Merab). The church was called by the Arabs *al-Qullays* (deformed Greek word: ecclesia, or "church"). Abraha's army was destroyed by a flock of birds with small stones (*sujjil*) in their bills, when he rode an armored elephant called Mahmoud. The divine extermination of Abraha's army took place in the year of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in 570/571 C.E., named *'am al-fil* (the year of the elephant). The arrogant "king" of the subjugated Himyarites attempted to destroy the Ka'ba and build a Christian church in Makkah. His mission ended in disastrous failure. During his reign a terrible catastrophe destroyed the

cultivated fields and villages of Yemen, when the great dam of Ma'rib suddenly collapsed.⁵⁸ The ruins of Ma'rib's Dam are still visible today.

The missionary fanaticism of Justinian and Theodora was halted and miraculously reversed. Their Ethiopian "allies" refused to participate in the Persian wars, and the Persians counterattacked in Syria and Palestine. The Byzantine effort to break down the Persian control over the Silk Road and Arabian trade routes was thwarted by the new mercantile power in the Hijaz. After the outbreak of the Persian-Byzantine war in 540, the silk companies of Beirut (Berytus), Tyre (Sur), and Acre (Akka) went bankrupt. In order to hinder the Persian traders from taking advantage of competition to raise the price of silk and spices from Sinhaladwipa or "the Island of Lions" (the Arab traders called the island *Seilan*, *Serendib*, *Silan*; the ancient Greeks called it *Taprabana*; the Indian called it *Tamraparni*), all merchandise purchased from the Makkan and Madinan retailers. The deep economic crisis of the 540s ended in 552, when two Christian monks who lived in Cathay (China) smuggled to Constantinople silkworm cocoons hidden inside the bamboo canes. They also demonstrated to the Roman emperor the whole process of cultivating silkworms. Justinian and Theodora developed the European silk industry, and Syria and Palestine were planted with mulberry trees.

Beyond the Wilderness

Marcellinus Ammianus, the Roman soldier-historian from Antioch, described the third century *Provincia Arabia*—namely, the Negev desert with economically important Khalasa (Elusa), Palaestina Salutaris (Tertia), Sinai Peninsula, and the Nabataean Petraea annexed by Trajan in 106 C.E.—as a new Roman province extending from Al-Arish (Rhinocolura) and Aqaba-Eilat (Aila) to Jerash (Gerasa) and Amman (Philadelphia). According to Ammianus, Arabia had numerous fortified strongholds which protected Via Nova Traiana and Strata Diocletiana, the two strategic roads from Hatra in the desert of Upper Mesopotamia to Clysma (Suez) in Egypt, "*ad repellendos gentium vicinarum excursus*," i.e., against the ferocious desert nomads.⁵⁹ Client Arab sheikhdoms evolved into Roman districts and nomadic clans into Romanized gentility. In the fourth century C.E., Roman Arabia had more towns than Britannia.

The Roman emperor Philip (244–249) was born in the Arab town of Shabha (Philopolis, Djabal Druz) in Auranitis (Hawran). He was a son of *pater nobilissimo latronum ductore* (the respectable criminal), and Emperor Severus made Bostra his favored place of relaxation. But it was not a place of amusement for the Pauline Christianity. In 249, Bishop Bercellus of Bostra declared the divinity of Jesus a false teaching. Of

course, the patriarchs of Jerusalem, Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria excommunicated him and exiled him. Heresiarch Bercellus vanished from the history of Pauline Church.⁶⁰ Another important city of *Arabia Deserta*, Tadmor (called by the Romans Palmyra), became “the mistress of Rome.” Septimius Severus (193–211 C.E.) liked to see it as a Roman market town.

Petra, the majestic Nabatean capital of *Arabia Deserta*, carved out from the pink rocks of Wadi Musa (the valley of the Prophet Musa), came into close relations with the Romans during the reign of Julius Caesar in 47 B.C., who asked Malchus I (Malik?) for auxiliary Arabian horsemen. From Petra, the Nabatean ethnarch of Harithath (Arethas) IV ordered to arrest Saul alias Paul in Damascus.⁶¹

In 105 C.E., the emperor Trajan annexed the Nabatean realm to his empire under the name of *Provincia Arabia*. Petra flourished under the Roman occupation as a stronghold against Parthia. It had a “rival Black Stone” or Dusares (Dhu-sharah) worshipped by the Nabatean Arabs as the deity *Allat*, identified by Herodotus with the Roman female goddess Urania.

Tadmor (Palmyra), a splendid city of the Syrian desert, reached its zenith of political and economical power under the reign of Amir Odenatus (Arabic: Udhaynah), who helped the Romans oust from Syria the Persian troops of Shah Shapur I, who in 260 C.E. had captured the emperor Valerian. In 262, Odenatus was designated by the emperor Gallienus as the prince of the East (*dux Orientis*). Four years later he was assassinated at Hims (Emesa, Homs). His wife, Bathzabbay (Arabic: al-Zabbah, Zainab, Latinized form: Zenobia) ruled with two Arab commanders, Zabbay and Zabd, on behalf of her immature son Athenodorus (Arabic: Wahb-Allath) until 272 C.E., when the emperor Aurelian defeated them. Zenobia, an arrogant “desert queen,” was chained to the chariot of the triumphant emperor as a slave woman of Rome.⁶²

In Ammianus's *Res Gestae*, the desert Arabs are called “Saracens.” He described them as the fiercely independent warriors equal to each other, *omnes pari sorte bellatores*. They performed sexual intercourse with a savage lust—*incredibile est quo ardore*—with unmarried women,⁶³ and they lived on milk, herbs, and wild birds. This *natione pernicioso* controlled the trade routes and intimidated passing caravans. Strabo called them *Skenitai*, the camel-drivers who extorted tolls for passage through their domains. Each *Skenitai* shaykh possessed his *dunasteia*, or tribal pasture, through which Roman merchants had to pass. Pliny the Elder wrote of numerous Arab tribes who were equally engaged in trade and banditry.⁶⁴ The long-haired and half-naked (*seminudo corpore*) Saracens venerated their tribal goddess Al-Uzza, identified by the Roman historians with Venus. The “Scenitas Arabs” *quos Saracenos nunc appellamus* lived near the coast of Red Sea.⁶⁵ In the fourth century the *Scenitas*

(Greek: *skenai*, or “living in tents”) formed a powerful Bedouin confederation which had migrated northwards to the Syrian desert town of Umm al-Jimal near Bostra, where the leader of the confederation, Shaykh Jadhima, established the “kingdom of Tanukh.” His successors, Amr ibn Adi and Imru al-Qais ibn Amr, ruled over the Roman-Arabian frontier from Nemara in the Hawran.⁶⁶

The fifth century Christian writer Sozomen narrated that during the reign of Emperor Valens, a Saracen woman named Mavia (Arabic: Mawiya) was a “queen of Arabs.” After the death of her husband, she “led the saracen *bellatores* against the *magister militum* of the *Arabia Romana*.” Her daughter married the Roman Master of Soldiers and Mavia embraced Christianity. The miraculous conversion of the fictional “queen” Mavia is rather a fabricated and Christianized version of the legend about Queen al-Zabba (Zaynab, Zenobia) than the historical truth.⁶⁷

After the collapse of the Ma'rib Dam in Yemen, the Christian Bedouin qabilah of Banu Ghassan led by Amr Muzayqiya ibn Amr Ma'al-Sama (*phylarchus Saracenorum Assanitarum*) migrated to Hawran (Bashan, Auranitis). The Greek title *phylarchus* was used to identify those Arab shaykhs whose tribal leadership was recognized by the Roman government.⁶⁸

Saraceni Assanitae dislodged the ancient tribe of Salih, and they embraced the Monophysite Christianity. In 529, the Byzantine emperor Justinian appointed Alamundarus (Al-Mundhir III), the malik of Banu Ghassan, as the overlord of Syrian desert in a rank of phylarch et patriicius. Al-Mundhir III defeated the Arab tribe of Lakhmids and burned their capital al-Hirah.⁶⁹

The regional power of the Christianized Bedouins of Syria was destroyed by the Sassanid Shah Khusrow (Chosroes) Parvez, who captured Damascus and Jerusalem in 613 C.E. The Jews of Galilee joined the Persian army led by Khusrow II and massacred the Nazareans in Mar Sabe, but the emperor Heraclius was able to restore Byzantine rule over Syria in 629, seven years after the Prophet Muhammad's Great Hijrah. Jabalah ibn al-Ayham, the last ruler of Banu Ghassan, embraced Islam after the victory of the *Sahabah* at Yarmuk in 636.⁷⁰

Jabalah recognized that *si simul congregarentur homines et daemones, ut facerent aliquid simile huic alcorano, nunquam id essicere possint, etiamsi mutuo sese ad hoc adjuverent*.⁷¹

But many clans of the Banu Ghassan embraced either Nestorian or Roman Catholic Christianity. Facing the mounting pressure from the Byzantine Empire, a large group of Ghassanids Syrianized themselves and adopted the Aramaic language. The emperor Constans II Pogonatos (641–668) resettled many of them in Macedonia, where they protected via Ignatia against the invading Avars, Slavs, and Bulgars. Some Arab

historians insist that the old name of the medieval Albanians (Arbers or Arbens) suggests that at least some of the Albanian tribes were descendants of the Arab settlers.⁷² The Yemanite-origin Tanukh tribes, Christianized according to the Nestorian rite, migrated from Mesopotamia to Western Syria. Most of them settled down in the Lebanon mountains. They were the proto-Maronites called by the medieval Arab authors *ibad* or *mesihyyin*.⁷³ Among the Lakhmids only one ruler accepted Christianity. Their last king, Al-Numan III Abu Qabus (ca. 580–602), joined the Monophysite church. Christianity had never struck deep roots in *al-Sham* (contemporary Syria, Palestine, and Jordan), and the proto-Islamic monotheism of the *hanifs* was not of the Christian origin. In Hejaz and Najran the Nestorian or Jacobite Christian communities disappeared during the rapid Islamization of *Arabia Petraea et Arabia Deserta* under the rule of the Khulafa al-Rashidun. In Yemen, Christianity vanished completely by the end of fourteenth century.⁷⁴ Almost all Nestorians, Nazareans, and Jacobite Catholics embraced Islam.

Abbreviations:

CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i> , ed. W. Dindorf (Bonn 1829-1831)
JNES	<i>Journal of Near East Studies</i>
NT	New Testament
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , ed. J.P. Migne
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J.P. Migne

Notes

1. Cassius Dio, *Romaikē historia (Historia Romana)*, ed. V. P. Boissvain (Berlin 1895), vol. LIII:29, LIV:6. Strabo, *Geographica*, ed. A. Meineke (Bonn 1852), XVI. Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, ed. C. Mayhoff, 1875–1906, VI, 28, 29.

2. J. Huxley, *From an Antique Land. Ancient and Modern in the Middle East* (Boston 1966), 131.

3. For more details on the historical geography of pre-Islamic Rocky Arabia, see B. Issac, "Trade Routes to Arabia and the Roman Army," in *Roman Frontier Studies*, vol. 1 (1980), 889–901; M. A. Murray, *Petra, the Rock City of Edom* (London 1939); G. Dalman, *Petra und seine Felsheiligtümer* (Leipzig 1908); A. Kennedy, *Petra, its History and Monuments* (London 1925); F. E. Hoskins, *The Jordan Valley and Petra* (New York 1905); R. E. Brunnow and A. von Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia* (Leipzig 1908); and A. Kammerer, *Petra et la Nabatene* (Paris 1929).

4. *Eunapius, Vita Aedesii, Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, ed. C. Miller, vol. IV (Paris 1851), 43.

5. Hypatia (370–415) was a daughter of Theon, a rector of the Neo-Platonic Museum in Alexandria. She was also loved by Orestes, the prefect of Egypt who was her patron. The monks and Homousians incited by Ciril, the newly appointed Patriarch of Alexandria and a nephew of Patriarch Theophilus, "hewed her in pieces and burned fragments of her body," vide; E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of Roman Empire*, ed. J. Bury, vol. IV (London 1909), 117, "scraped her flesh from her bones," vide;

Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Oxford 1844), 24. Cf. J. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire From the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian*, vol.1 (New York, 1958), 219. Prof. James Bury described Patriarch Cyril as the "ecclesiastical tyrant of the most repulsive type," vide; J. Bury, vol. 1, p. 218.

6. J. Bury, vol.1, p. 218.

7. See A. J. Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt* (Oxford, 1902), 401–426; E. Gibbon, *Decline*, vol. 5, 452–455. The anecdote that Caliph Umar ordered Amr ibn al-As to use the volumes of Alexandrian Library as a fuel for the city's public baths is "one of those tales that make good fiction but bad history." See P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London, 1970), 166. The Ptolemaic Library Museum was burnt by Julius Caesar's invading legions in 48 B.C. The Library of Serapeum was destroyed by the Emperor Theodosius in 389 C.E.

8. J. Bury, vol. 1, p. 373.

9. Ibid.

10. J. J. Hatt, *La Vision de Constantin au Sanctuaire de Grand et l'Origine Celtique du Labarum* (Lotomus 1959), 425–428. M. Black, "The Chi-Rho Sign: Christogram or Staurogram?" in *Biblical Essays*, ed. F. F. Bruce (New York 1970), 318–319, R. L. Fox, *Pagans, and Christians* (New York 1989), 613, 616, 657, 676–677. Like other religious symbols of the Romans, the "chi-rho," "crux," and "chreston" had a double meaning, one for pagans, one for Christians. The Romanization and barbarization of the Prophet 'Isa's teachings by Emperor Constantine was criticized by the medieval Muslim scholars. See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidayat al-hayara min al-yahud wa'l nasara* (Cairo 1323 A.H. [1905]), 135–149; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Jawab al-Sahih* (Cairo 1323 A.H. [1905 C.E.]); S. M. Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbar's Account of How Christ's Religion Was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs," in *History and Culture in the Medieval Muslim World* (London 1984), 136–176. Abdullah al-Turyuman (former Christian priest Anselmo Turmeda) was convinced that the Romans were not Christianized, but vice versa, the Christians were Romanized and Arameized. See M. De Epalza, *la Tuhfa, autobiographia y polemica islamica contra el christianismo de Abdallah el-Turyuman (Fra Anselmo Turmada)* (Rome 1971).

11. The Gospel according to Matthew, 2:13–19 (King James and New International translation), in: *Parallel Bible (Protestant version)* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 1201. Also *The New American Bible for Catholics with Revised New Testament*, Nihil Obstat; S. J. Hartdegen, O.F.M., S.S.L., *Censor Deputatus, et Imprimatur*; J. A. Hickley, S.T.D., J.C.D. Archbishop of Washington, 1986, Matthew, 2:13–19, 1011.

12. Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*, ed. G. A. Williamson (New York 1985), 393–408.

13. Eusebius, *The History of Church*, tr. G. A. Willimson (New York 1965), 99–101, 123; cf. M. Walsh, *Roots of Christianity* (London-Glasgow-Toronto-Sydney-Auckland 1986), 110.

14. A. Krawczuk, *Rzym i Jerozolima (Rome and Jerusalem)* (Warsaw 1974), 104–108.

15. Josephus, IV, 550–577.

16. E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall* (London 1985), 264.

17. Tacitus, *Historiae*, ed. and Eng. tr. K. Wellesley (London 1978), 271.

18. Ibid., 271.

19. Ibid., 273.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 272. Tacitus's account evidently differs from the Qur'anic and Judaic traditions. According to the Torah (The Book of Numbers, 33:38), the Banu Israil led by the Prophet Musa and his brother Harun reached the land of Canaan after forty years of wandering in the wilderness of Sinai. See Tanakh, *The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society 1988), 267. In Christian scripture of the Old Testament; *The New American Catholic Bible*, op. cit, 158. *Parallel Bible* (NIV and KJ), 220. The story of the wandering of the Israelites between Egypt and Palestine is narrated in the four *surahs* of the Holy Qur'an (7:137–138, 20:77–96, 26:65, and 28:43–80), but the Holy Book does not specify how many years, months or days passed between the crossing of the Red Sea and the arrival in the land of the Canaanites. The consecutive narrative as such is no purpose of the Qur'an's edification.

22. Tacitus, *Historiae*, 274.

23. Josephus Flavius, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, ed. H. St. J. Thackeray (London-New York 1926-1965), vol. 1, 34-35.
24. J. Gill, *Notices of the Jews and their Country by the Classic Writers of Antiquity*, being a Collection of Statements and Opinions translated from the *Works of Greeks and Latin Heathen Authors previous to A.D. 500* (London 1872), *passim*.
25. I. Buxtorfius, *Liber Cosri continens colloquium seu disputationem de religione habitam ante nongentos annos inter regem Cosareorum et R. Isaacum Sangarum Judaeum recensuit, Latina versione et notis illustravit* (Basileae 1660), *passim*.
26. A. Krawczuk, *Rzym i Jerozolima*, 131.
27. Safed was heavily fortified during the medieval Latin crusades against Islam and turned into a castle of Militia Templi (Templar Knights). After the second eviction of the crusaders by the sultan Baybars, the fortress at Safed served as a military base for Kurdish Muslim troops.
28. E. Peterson, *Heis Theos* (London 1926), 227-240.
29. R. L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 277.
30. In the midst of the third century, a new powerful missionary religion, the Gospel of Light, was preached by the Persian priest Mani (Manicheus). He and his apostles were using Greek, Persian, Latin and Arabic to teach their creed in Western Asia. Mani was probably born on April 14, 216, near the Persian capital at Ctesiphon beside the Tigris river. His father, Pattak, was a follower of the Gnostic sect of the Elkesaites, who preached east of the Jordan river. Mani's mother was Mais-Utacin or Mar Mariam. When Mani was twelve years old, he had a vision. He believed that the Holy Ghost, or Paracletos, revealed to him a new gospel. On April 19, 240, Mani had a second vision, he recognized himself as a prophet of a renewed covenant and he sent his witnesses to Europe. Mani himself went to India. After his return in 275 to Iran, he was arrested, flayed alive, and crucified in two halves by the Zoroastrian priests (herbedes). Zoroastrians (atesh-parastan) were known to the Greeks as pyrsolatrai (fire worshippers). Some later sources narrated that Mani was crucified by the shah Shapur I. Others hold that he was martyred by the shah Bahram. According to his followers, he was resurrected and raised to the Heavens. His teachings attracted many Christians and pagans in Arabia, Africa, and Europe. St. Augustine of Hippo was an ardent follower of Mani's gospel before his conversion to Roman Catholicism. For more information on Manicheism, see J. P. Asmussen, *Xnastvaniit; Studies in Manicheism* (Copenhagen 1965).
31. J. M. Robertson, *Pagan Christs* (New York 1966), 85-95.
32. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, ed. H. Chadwick (Cambridge 1953), 5.25, 41, 24, 3.1.
33. *Ibid.*, 3.4.
34. *Ibid.*, 2.55.
35. *Ibid.*, 5.52.
36. *Ibid.*, 7.14.
37. *Ibid.*, 3.50.
38. *Ibid.*, 36.
39. M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, The Secret God* (London 1963), 104.
40. Ireneus, *Adversus omnes haereses, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church*, ed. B. J. Kidd (London 1928), vol. I, 116 (1:25).
41. S. Pines, "The Jewish Christians According to a New Source," *Proceeding of the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 2 (1968): 237.
42. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 28.1, ed. E. Schwartz, GCS 1903-1909.
43. *Augustan History*, 7.8. *Augustan History* is an obscure work composed by anonymous author or authors in the late third and early fourth centuries C.E., under the emperors Diocletian and Constantine. The name of the work was given by the seventeenth century editor Issac Casaubon. See *Lives of the Later Caesars*, ed. and English tr. A. Birley (London 1976), 231.
44. *Augustan History*, 13.4, 279.
45. The recent archaeological excavations in Syria, Palestine, and Jordan allow rejection of A. von Harnack's convictions that rural Christianity was ponderous before the fourth century C.E. The obscure origin of the Maronites who appeared in the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the late eleventh century still divides opinions of historians. See K. S. Salibi, "The Maronites of Lebanon under Frankish and Mamluks Rule (1099-1516)," *Arabica*, (Leiden 1957) 288-303.

46. H. J. Drijvers, *Edessa und das jüdische Christentum, 'Vigiliae Christianae'* (Amsterdam 1970), no. 24, 3–44. See also J. E. Coulton and H. Chadwick, *Alexandrine Christianity* (London 1954), 428–431.
47. Eusebius, HE, 32. 2.
48. *Ibid.*, 37.38.
49. *Ibid.*, 7.1.
50. Procopius of Caesarea, *Opera, Bella, I* (Bellum Persicum), ed. J. Haury (London 1905), vol. 1, 17.48, 18.36–37.
51. Ehiphanus, *De epiphani episcopi Constantinae Cypri contra octoaginta haereses opus* (Basileae 1578), 44–45.
52. See T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London 1973), 28–38, and P. Hughes, *A Popular History of the Catholic Church* (New York 1975), 43–67.
53. Cyrili Scythopolitani, *Vita Euthymi, Fragmenta Hist. Graec.*, vol. IV, 10, 15.
54. J. de Voragine, *Legenda aurea vulgo historia lombardica dicta, recensuit Th. Graesse*, editio secunda (Leipzig 1850), 15.
55. Gregentius, *Homeritarum leges, et Disputatio cum Herbano, Patrologia Graeco-Romana*, ed. J.P. Migne (Bonn 1886), vol. LXXXVI, passim. Also see Procopius, *Opera*, ed. Haury (London 1913); *Bellum Persicum*: 3.8.
56. Miller, FHG (1870) vol. IV, 179.
57. Vita Gregentii, Sinaitic MS, Migne, PGR, vol. LXXXVI.
58. Qur'an, 34:15. Procopius, *Bellum Persicum*, I, 19, 20.
59. Ammianus, Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Fulda MS (V), the Vatican Library, lat. 1873. The best editions of Amm.; Clark, Seyfarth, also Gardthausen 1874, English tr. W. Hamilton (London 1986), 14.8.11–13. Eusebius, *Onomastikon*, 16.8.10, ed. Klosterman, GCS, 168.
60. Ioannis Ephesianus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. R. P. Smith (Oxford 1860), 284–286.
61. *The Bible*, NT, Corinthians 11:32.
62. J. Wolski, *Historia Powszechna, Starozytnosc* (Warsaw 1971), 503; E. Gibbon, *Zmierzch Cesarstwa Rzymskiego*, Polish tr. S. Krynski (Warsaw 1975), vol. 1, 239–241.
63. Ammianus, 14, 4.4.
64. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, 6.162.
65. Ammianus, 23.6.13.
66. G. Bowrock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge 1983), 137–140.
67. G. Bowrock, "Mavia, Queen of Saracens," *Studien zur Antiken Sozialgeschichte: Festschrift Friedrich Vittinghof* (Koln-Wien 1980), 477–495.
68. G. Bowrock, "A report on Arabia provincia," *JRS* (1971): 219–243, and I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington 1984), 239–240. See also F. E. Peters, "Byzantium and the Arabs of Syria," *Annales Archeologiques Arabes Syriennes*, nos. 27–28 (1977–78): 97–113.
69. J. B. Segal, "Mesopotamian Communities from Julian to the Rise of Islam," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1955): 109–139.
70. F. E. Peters, "Romans and Barbarians in Southern Syria," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 37 (1978): 315–326.
71. "Neither men nor demons, though they should unite all their talents, would be able to compose anything that could be like the Qur'an" (Qur'an, 17:88).
72. See P. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 78–81, and Al-Sayyid Ahmad bin al-Sayyid Zayni Dahlan, *Al-Futuh al-islamiyya ba'ad mudiyyi al-futuh al-nabawiyya* (Cairo 1323 A.H. [1905 C.E.]), 80–83. Evliyya Chelebi, the seventeenth century Osmanli explorer of the Islamized Rumelia, described "Kara Arapi" (Black Arabs) who lived in Bosnia, Hercegovina, Montenegro, and Albania since the reign of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (610–641). The Slavic people called them "Crne Arapi." See E. Chelebi, Ptepis, Bulgarian tr. S. Dimitrov (Sofia 1972), 223. The Christianized "Black Arabs" were later identified as the *Karavlahi* or *Morovlahi* (Black Vlachs or Moorish Vlachs). Who were the semi-nomadic Vlachs practicing the so-called transhumance, and where they came from is one of the most enigmatic questions in European history. The Byzantine emperor Nicephorus I (802–811), slayed by the Bulgars, was himself descendant of Banu Ghassan. For more details on ethnogenesis of the Black Vlachs, see S. Dragomir, *Vlahii si Morlacii: studiu din istoria romanismului balcanic* (Cluj 1924); B. Gusic, "Wer sind die Morlachen im adriatischen Raum?" *Balkanica*, vol. 4 (1973): 453–463, M. Gyoni; "La Transhumance des Vlaques balkaniques au moyen age,"

Byzantinoslavica, vol. 12 (1951): 29–42; P. S. Nasturel, "Les Valaques balcaniques aïux Xe-XIle siecles (mouvements de population et colonisation dans la Romanie grecque et latine)," *Byzantinische Forschungen*, vol. 7 (1979): 89–112; R. Rohr (ed.), *Die Aromunen: Sprache-Geschichte-Geographie* (Hamburg 1987); A. Wace and M. A. Thompson, *The Nomads of the Balkans: An Account of Life and Customs among the Vlachs of Northern Pindus* (London 1914); and T. J. Winnifrith, *The Vlachs: The History of a Balkan People* (London 1987).

73. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 84.

74. L. E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia* (Cambridge 1933), passim; see also At-Tabari, *Tarikh al-rusul wa'al muluk*, ed. de Goeje (Leiden 1881), vol. 2, 700–719. L. Caetani, *Studi di Storia Orientale*, Milano 1911, vol. 3, 813–814. W. Muir, *The Caliphate, Its Rise, Decline and Fall* (London 1891), 120–122.