

# Muhammad and the sources

# Hierarchy of sources

- Hadith and family traditions
  - Later Sira (Waqidi)
  - Ibn Ishaq
  - Qur'an
- 
- External reports
  - Epigraphy and archaeology?

# Cyril of Scythopolis

- *Life of Euthymius* 14

‘he let them depart no longer Hagarenes and Ishmaelites, but descendants of Sarah and heirs of the promise, transferred through baptism from slavery into freedom’ and ‘those who had been the wolves of Arabia have joined the rational flock of Christ’

# Sozomen

- This is the tribe which took its origin and had its name from Ishmael, the son of Abraham; and the ancients called them Ishmaelites after their progenitor. As their mother Hagar was a slave, they afterwards, to conceal the opprobrium of their origin, assumed the name of Saracens, as if they were descended from Sara, the wife of Abraham. Such being their origin, they practice circumcision like the Jews, refrain from the use of pork, and observe many other Jewish rites and customs. If, indeed, they deviate in any respect from the observances of that nation, it must be ascribed to the lapse of time, and to their intercourse with the neighboring nations. (6.38)

# Sebeos on Muhammad

- 'I shall speak of the stock of Abraham, not of the free one, but that born from the handmaiden... (Gen 16.12)
- Jewish rebellion against Heraclius in Edessa in environment of forced conversion
- 'Taking desert roads they went to Tachikstan, to the sons of Ishmael, summoned them to their aid and informed them of their blood relationship through testament of scripture. But although they were persuaded of their close relationship, they were unable to come to an agreement because their cults were divided from one another'
- At that time a certain Ishmaelite named Mahmet, a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher and the path of truth. He taught them to recognise the god of Abraham, now he was informed in the history of Moses. Now, because the command was from on high, they abandoned their many cults and turned to the one God that Abraham their father had followed.
- Mahmet legislated for them, telling them not to eat carrion, drink wine speak falsely or fornicate.
- He said 'with an oath, God promised this land to Abraham and his seed forever' (Genesis chp. 15)...Love the God of Abraham alone and go and seize your land which God gave your father Abraham.

# Doctrina Jacobi on Muhammad

- When the candidatus was killed by the Saracens, I was at Caesarea and I set off by boat to Sykamina. People were saying "the candidatus has been killed," and we Jews were overjoyed. And they were saying that the prophet had appeared, coming with the Saracens, and that he was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come. I, having arrived at Sykamina, stopped by a certain old man well-versed in scriptures, and I said to him: "What can you tell me about the prophet who has appeared with the Saracens?" He replied, groaning deeply: "He is false, for the prophets do not come armed with a sword. Truly they are works of anarchy being committed today and I fear that the first Christ to come, whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God and we instead are preparing to receive the Antichrist. Indeed, Isaiah said that the Jews would retain a perverted and hardened heart until all the earth should be devastated. But you go, master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared." So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood. He says also that he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible

# Khuzistan Chronicle on Muhammad

- (36) They then made Yazdgard, of royal stock, king in the city of Istakhr. With him the Persian Empire came to an end. He set off and came to Mahoze where he appointed a general called Rustam. Then God brought the Ishmaelites against them like sand on the sea shore; their leader was Muhammad, and neither walls nor gates, armour or shield, withstood them: they gained control over the entire land of the Persians
- (54) On the subject of the Dome of Abraham, we have been unable to discover what it is, except that, because the blessed Abraham grew rich in property, and wanted to get away from the envy of the Canaanites, he chose to dwell in distant and spacious parts of the desert; since he lived in tents, he built that place for the worship of God, and for the offering of sacrifices. It took its present name from what its [function] had been, since the memory of the place was preserved with the generations of the tribe; it was no new thing for the Tayyaye to worship there, but goes back to antiquity, to their early days, in that they show honour to the father of the head of their people.
- NOTE: Two different authors

# Crone/ Wansborough

- The Qur'an redacted over a long period of time. Reflects later interests.
- Squabbles with the Jews in the Qur'an reflect conflict in Jerusalem.



# Problems with the reconstruction?

# The Qur'an as history?

- Early Meccan suras:
  - Saj. Brief initial suras.
  - Divine creation (Q 90)
  - Imminent apocalypse and judgement: 'On that day, men shall become like scattered moths, and the mountains like tufts of carded wool' ( Q101, also Q71; 102)
  - Need for fair economic dealing and charity (Q104; 102)
  - Afterlife: 'Life shall hold a richer prize than this life' (Q93)
  - Warning to other peoples (Q 89)

# The Qur'an as history?

- Middle Meccan suras

- Greater use of OT imagery to elucidate earlier themes at greater length.
- Creation
- Imminent threat
- Charity

Also new themes

- Criticism of *shirk*: 'The Lord of the heavens who has begotten no children and has no partner in his kingdom' (Q 25); 'Has the Lord blessed you with sons and adopted daughters from among the angels!'
- Emphasis on Arabic: 'We have revealed the Koran in an Arabic tongue, and proclaimed its warnings and threats so that they may guard against evil' (Q20)
- Defence of Qur'an as greater than poetry (Q 36) and defence of sequential revelation (Q 25)
- Sense of Quraysh now regarded as a distinct group: 'God has already fixed the terms of the transgressors...do not regard their wealth with envy, for We seek only to try them with these' (Q 20)
- Focus on Jerusalem (?) 'Our servant goes by night from the sacred haram to the outer haram' (Q17)

# The Qur'an as history?

- Late Meccan suras
  - Emphasis on Hell and the suffering of unbelievers (Q 7)
  - Imagination of universal rule: 'We gave the persecuted people dominion over eastern and western lands' (Q 7)
  - Prominence of David and Solomon (Q 34)
  - Critics compared to the sorcerers who opposed Moses (Q 10)

- Medinan suras
  - Much longer, with greater political and legal content.
  - Inclusion of Jews in the 'state': The unbelievers who follow the Scripture and the pagans did not desist from unbelief until a scripture was given to them. ..the followers of Scripture were enjoined to attend their prayers and pay the alms-tax...but the unbelievers among them and the pagans shall burn in Hell, for they are the vilest of all creatures (Q 98)
  - Celebration of political victory: 'He brought down from their strongholds those who had supported the Quraysh from among the followers of Scripture [ie. The Jews of the Banu Quraydha]- some you slew, and others you took captive' (Q 33)
  - Legislation on the wives of Muhammad: Prophet, we have made lawful to you the wives who you have granted dowries and the slave-girls whom God has given you as booty, as well as the daughters of your uncles and aunts and other women who wish to give themselves in marriage. This privilege is yours alone, and not to be granted to any believer' (Q 33)

# The Qur'an as history?

- Medinan Suras (cont...)
  - Theological contestation with Jews and Christians: 'The Jews say Ezra is son of God, and the Christians the Messiah. They imitate the infidels of old. God confound them. They worship rabbis and monks, and the Messiah, son of Mary, as Gods beside God.' (Q 9) They say 'Accept the Jewish or Christian faith and be rightly guided. Say 'By no means. We believe in Abraham's faith and he was no idolater.' (Q 2) Jews and Christians say 'We are the sons of God, his beloved. Say then to them 'Why does God punish you for your sins?' (Q 5)
  - Complaints against munafiqin (Q 9)
  - Legislates on diet and dress for prayer.

# Ibn Ishaq

- d. 760. Use of earlier texts, but no use of isnads in the manner of *mutahadithin*.
- Reliant on reconstruction from Ibn Hisham and al-Tabari.
- Later Siras are much longer (al-Waqidi): evolution of oral texts
- Accused of interpolation by Ibn al-Nadim and 'shameful passages' by Ibn Hisham
- Exegetical role of the Sira
- Addition of 'miraculous' passages in the 'sectarian milieu'
- Issue of dating

# Sub-genres of Sira

- Maghazi
- Fada'il
- Mathalib
- Asbab al-nuzul
- Prophetic comparison
- Documents (lists; treaties; Constitution of Medina)



# The Sira as history

- Mecca as a pilgrimage centre: a hostel, pilgrimage rites, a well. Allusions to *ilaf* agreements.
- Trade and agriculture. Link to Axum implies a sea link. Vocabulary of the Qur'an
- Mecca sees persecution followed by temporary appeasement. Pressure resumes after rejection of the many gods, and becomes unbearable after death of Abu Talib.
- Failure of initial mission to market in Taif, but Medina provides a sanctuary.

# The Sira as history

- In Medina quickly engage in military struggle with Mecca: a source of unity for a divided city. Attempts to detach the tribes from Meccan alliance.
- Constitution of Medina
- Badr: interception of a relief force for a caravan.
- Uhud: small-scale victory on the edge of the Meccan oasis.
- The Trench: token siege of Medina that demonstrates Meccan superiority.

# Shah Ali's question: Waraqa

- A hanif linked to Khadija's family
- Unlike other hanifs, a convert to Christianity familiar with Aramaic/Hebrew
- 'Surely he is the prophet of this people'
- Some traditions have him as the first of the sahaba, most have him remain a Christian
- Term hanif used for a time as synonym of Muslim

# Constitution of Medina

- Imagines muhajirun as a clan on their own.
- Clauses discuss relations of clans of Aws and Khazraj to their Jewish affiliates
- Requirement of the clans to defend Medina
- Acknowledgement of M as arbitrator
- The 3 major Jewish clans are unmentioned: probably eliminated later.

# Constitution of Medina II

- Hadith on the scabbard of Ali, matches Serjeant's fieldwork in 1950s Yemen.
- Longstanding role of haram as a site for trading and diplomatic arrangements.

# Constitution of Medina III

- Some Jews known by name of an affiliated pagan tribe, others are members of their own clans.
- Jews are clearly members of the umma in the Constitution. So, at this stage, din is a distinct category from umma
- Inspiration for Donner's thesis: Qur'an's emphasis on mu'minin; focus on belief in the last days, joint marriage between all monotheists.

# Hudaybiyya

- Hudaybiyya allows Medinans to perform the pilgrimage, have contact with Mecca's nomadic allies and a ten-year ceasefire
- But Medinans only at a stalemate: Suhayl ibn Amr forces Muhammad to use his patronymic.
- An unstated concession by Muhammad to integrate Mecca into his belief system. Prompts the change of qibla from Jerusalem and the story of Abrahamic foundation in the later suras.
- Explains later requests of men of Taif

# The aftermath of Hdaybiyya

- Famine of 629 (same year that Kavad II dies of the plague)
- Defeat of Khaybar allows food for Mecca and Medina.
- Prestigious raid against Roman Syria.
- Stimulates Abu Sufyan's capitulation. But Quraysh all retain their estates and go on to provide leading families of the caliphate.



# Musaylima

- ‘Let there not be two religions in Arabia’
- Accused of imitation
- Defeated and killed by Abu Bakr in the course of the Ridda wars: context of threats against the authority of Medina.

# Source criticism

- Students will be marked on six criteria:
- setting out the source in its historiographical context, i.e. its relationship to other sources
- setting out the significance of the events described as part of the longer narrative.
- Assessing the transmission of the narrative and the effects of transmission on the narrative's contents (this question also includes some consideration of the narrative's audience).
- Drawing together 1-3 into a convincing analysis
- Clarity of expression
- Quotation of relevant passages

# Arabia among the Great Powers:

## Trade

- Trade in leather and wargear with Roman empire: Bostra and Umm el-Jimal
- Trading language of the Qur'an
- Interests of the Nasrid kigns stretches deep into the peninsula.
- Stimulation of economic and political hierarchy: development of cash crops like dates at Taif and Mecca
- Comparable to developments on the Rhine and Danube.

# Arabia among the Great Powers: Hierarchy and the technology of government

- Military technology? (khandaq; gold mining)
- Patronage pyramids: leaders need sources of wealth to reward followers
- Disappearance of Nasrids and Jafnids: the umma steps into the breach
- Musaylima's predecessor in Yamama a Persian client (Hawdha)
- Ukaydir almost Roman-appointed king in Mecca
- Experience of government: rapid use of dating systems and barid after conquests.

This exists in spite of a rhetoric of Arab 'primitiveness'

# Arabia among the Great Powers: Arabic

- Means the Qur'an is comprehensible
- Means that a notion of shared Arab identity is possible
- Stimulation of the Arabic script
  - Early examples at Mada'in Saleh: Roman base.
  - Epigraphic use in 'Jafnid' inscriptions
  - Disseminated by Hiran poetry.

# Arabia among the Great Powers:

## Religious ideas

- ‘Nativist reaction’
- Messianic expectation. Ibn Ishaq says prompts conversion among Jews and pagans
- Idea of Ishmaelite descent: Cyril of Scythopolis
- Heraclian doctrine of martyrdom and holy war (Q 4.74; 5.33; 9.29)
- Angels at Badr
- Notion of universal religion: Muhammad’s reply to Musyalima

# Arabia and the Great Powers:

## Religious ideas

- Food taboos
- Greetings
- Monotheism of the Romans, Himyarites and Nasrids
- Pilgrimage of different 'faiths' to Mecca [and possibly elsewhere]