Syriac Source-Material For Islam's Holy Book

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*(**Author's Note:** This is the first of a two-part piece on the Syriac origins of Islam. This essay (which discusses content) and "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text" (which discusses linguistic medium) have a symbiotic relationship. Here, we will see how the Koran and Hadith lifted much of their material from extant Syriac lore. This makes sense, as the point of departure for the Mohammedan movement was the gamut of Abrahamic material available at the time, in that particular region, amongst Syriac-speaking Bedouin who were steeped in a Syriac-based culture. Hence the present thesis is buttressed by the thesis of the other essay—which shows how Mohammedan scripture was originally composed in the same language as the source-material. In sum: That the new creed gestated within a Syriac meme-o-sphere is attested by the fact that, not only was it derived from Syriac folklore (as will be shown presently); it was initially conveyed in the Syriac language. Note: Mohammed of Mecca, considered the "Seal of the Prophets" in Islam, is denoted "MoM". Classical Arabic is denoted "CA".)*

A full understanding of the development of the Koran–and of the Mohammedan Faith in general–cannot be procured until one recognizes the percolating memetic environs in which it occurred. During the epoch of the religion's gestation (from the late 7th century through the early 9th century), cultures of the Middle East were suffused with a potpourri of Abrahamic folklore. This is made apparent by the Syriac basis for much of what eventually came to be Islam's sacred scripture. Here, I will assay the history of the CONTENT; while the next essay will be a linguistic analysis.

Predictably, the relevant history has been elided by Islamic apologists in an attempt to uphold even the most flimsy of historiographic claims. This laundering of history does not necessarily stem from perfidy; it merely requires that we not notice what the historical record shows. My aim here is to counter such dissimulation by highlighting some key points.

Let's start with the obvious. If the Koran were in any way derivative in nature, we would expect to find antecedent sources with distinct peculiarities that match the raft of distinct peculiarities found in the Koran. It turns out that this is–indeed–what we find. Upon surveying the contents of Islam's holy book, we encounter myriad idiosyncrasies that had been recycled from earlier material. That is to say: In recounting the things that it does (and in the particular manner that it does so), the "Recitations" inadvertently betray their earthly origins.

It only stands to reason that the earliest Mohammedans–engaged, as they were, in oral traditions–regurgitated much of what they'd heard from the sources that happened to be available to them at the time. Traces of this memetic cooptation remain. There are tell-tale signs of this, as they appropriated material replete with errancies. The source-material had been disseminated in a language that also happened to be MoM's native tongue: Syriac.

We might begin by looking at the deserts to the south. There was both a Jewish and Christian presence in Himyar / Hadramaut, thanks–in part–to the reach of the (Sabaean Christian) Aksumites (and Himyarites) in Yemen. Jewish and Christian communities were especially prominent at Zafar, Najran, and Ma'rib (present-day Sana'a). Just a few decades before MoM's birth, the king of Yemen became Christian. Meanwhile, Himyar's official religion had already been Judaism for CENTURIES–a fact attested in the ***"Throne of Adulis"***. Even more telling, the Himyarites were monotheists who worshipped the godhead, "Al-Rahman" [the Merciful], who was often equated with the Abrahamic deity. The moniker of this deity was based on the Syriac term for mercy, "ra[c]hma". {1}

Sabaitic (which gave rise to the Ethiopic script, Ge'ez) was also used in southern Arabia (spec. Yemen), which was eventually overtaken by the Himyarites c. 280 A.D. During the 4th century, the Himyarites became Abrahamic in Faith. They then became explicitly Judaic in the late 5th century under king Tuba Abu Karib[a] Asad. The Faith became theocratic under his son, Masruk (a.k.a. "Yusuf Dhu Nu'as"), who viciously persecuted local Christians as heretics. The (Christian) Aksumites of Abyssinia soon put an end to that Judaic regime, thus taking control of the major south Arabian cities of Karyat al-Faw, Nashan, Nashak, Kaminahu, Haramum, Karnawu (Ma'rib), Najran, Zafar, and Azal (Sana'a). The new dynasty was that of king Abraha, who would be featured in the fabled "Battle of the Elephants" (purportedly waged against Mecca c. 570, according to Mohammedan lore).

Up until c. 565 (five years prior to MoM's birth), the Himyarite / Sabaean ruler, Abraha al-Asram conquered Yemen and the Hijaz. He was a Christian zealot. Consequently, during his rule, people of the region would have been exposed to Christian dogmas in a fairly systematic way; as prodigious amounts of evangelism would have surely taken place. Al-Asram was responsible for the erection of the Christian church at Ma'rib known as Al-Qalis. And for generations leading up to MoM's birth, the Christian Kaaba at Najran was a major place of pilgrimage for the region's Christians.

There are even tales of MoM cursing ("bahala") the Christians of Najran for having rejected his message (that is: rejecting HIS rejection of the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth). MoM is said to have dictated a letter to the bishop of Najran, Abdul Haris ibn Alqama, in an attempt to sway him on the matter; but to no avail. (Ref. Ibn Isham's "Sirat Rasul Allah" and Ibn Ishaq's "Sirat al-Nabi"; though this apocryphal tale may have originated with Muqatil ibn Sulayman in the 8th century.)

Prior to Al-Asram, the zealous Himyarite ruler, Yusuf Dhu Nuwas (operating primarily out of Zafar c. 517-527) had aggressively imposed JUDAIC thinking upon the region–even going so far as to persecute Arabian pagans. Such Judaic influence seems to have also been in the northern part of the Hijaz. Sure enough, there are Jewish inscriptions at the Tayma oasis as well as at Umm Judhayidh (in Tabuk). And, of course, the presence of Jewish Arabians in Yathrib is well attested in Islamic lore.

In the pre-Islamic era, there was also an Abrahamic proselyte named Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl ibn Abd al-Uzza–a member of the Adi clan (part of the Quraysh). He would have been conversant in Syriac, as he gained much of his knowledge of Abrahamic lore from information-gathering sojourns to Syria. He needn't have been bi-lingual for this to have been the case.

MoM's great-grandfather, Hashim ibn Abd Manaf was known for leading Qurayshi trade caravans southward to Yemen (retroactively dubbed "Caravans of Winter") as well as northward into the Levant (retroactively dubbed "Caravans of Summer").

Suffice to say: The Abrahamic brand of monotheism was already quite familiar to Hijazis by the time MoM lived; and it would have primarily propagated via Syriac sources.

It is clear that an explicitly Ishmaelite brand of the Abrahamic creed began prior to the Mohammedan movement. Tellingly, the South Arabian version of the mother-goddess, Ishtar ("Athtar Hagar") was named after the mother of Ishmael. This onomastic exigency is attested by the fact that the Arabs were not only referred to as "Ishmaelites", they were often dubbed "Hagarenes" as well…even prior to the Mohammedan movement. {40}

Indeed, by the time MoM was born, the Banu As[s]ad was Abrahamic; and had already established a pilgrimage tradition to the Meccan cube. In fact, by the time MoM was undertaking his ministry, that Arabian tribe even boasted its own Abrahamic prophet: Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid ibn Nawfal.

(Note that once he had mobilized a large enough following, MoM promptly had Tulayha–along with other aspiring prophets like Saf ibn Sayyad of Yathrib and Musaylima[h] ibn Habib of Yamama–executed; thus eliminating the competition.)

It is clear, then, that by the time MoM would have undertaken his ministry, Abrahamic lore had taken on a palpable Ishmaelite pedigree on the Arabian peninsula. The aspiring prophet merely capitalized on certain (favorable) exigencies when he proffered his revelations. That is to say: Most of the memes of which his followers made use were already in place–a smorgasbord of narrative tidbits that were ripe for the picking.

And so it went: Rather than come up with revolutionary new ideas, the early Mohammedans simply harvested what was already there. As any charismatic leader would, MoM simply put a new twist on things, rebranding old tropes with a smattering of beguiling novelties–custom-tailored to suit the occasion. In doing so, there is no doubt that MoM struck a nerve–especially amongst the highly-fragmented, world-weary (and often disaffected) Bedouins of the Hijaz.

It is revealing that the authors of the Koran spoke of the "Sabians". For "sabi" means "baptism" in Syriac. (The sect was known for its emphasis on routine baptisms.) The appellation seems to have referred to the Mandaeans; but it may have also been an oblique reference to the Elkesaites, an Ebionite (Jewish) sect named after a prophet, Elkesai…who claimed to have received the revelations from an angel c. 100 A.D. (Sound familiar?) The Elkesaites thrived in southern Mesopotamia and northern Arabia.
In fact, there were numerous Ebionite sects in the region, including Essenes, Nazarenes, and Sampsaeans…some of whom performed a regimen of prayers each day while facing Jerusalem and uttering the phrase: There is no god but god ["eloah"]. (This proclamation should also ring some bells.)

Note that Ebionites considered Jesus of Nazareth to be a mortal prophet, and so were arguably more in keeping with the original movement around the fabled Nazarene preacher (known as "The Way"). {2} Ironically, the Mohammedans honored this fact more than did Pauline Christians!

The Mandaeans (a.k.a. the "Nasoreans"; perhaps a variation on "Nazarenes") were prevalent in the region; and spoke a variant of Syriac now referred to as "Mandaic". ("Manda" means "knowledge" in Aramaic.) Meanwhile, there was the (Christian) Ghassanid kingdom to the immediate northwest–on the periphery of Arabian lands. This would invariably have had notable influence on northwestern Arabia. The famous church at Aqaba dates from the late 3rd century. And the Dura-Europos church in Syria dates back to the 230's.

The Mohammedan prayer routine was likely adopted from the Mandaeans, who engaged in propitiations five times each day; and were known to have recited, "There is no god but god." They spoke Mandaic, which was an alternate variant of Syriac; so likely shared a vernacular (esp. liturgical terminology) with the Nabataeans and other north Arab peoples.

In Late Antiquity, some Arabs practiced a generic version of Abrahamic Faith—neither specifically Judaic nor specifically Christian. Most notable was the Banu Hanifa, who hailed from as far east as the Nejd (a.k.a. "Yamama"), in the center of the Arabian Peninsula. This syncretic creed may have served as yet another precursor to the Mohammedan movement.

It is important to bear in mind that, during Late Antiquity, centers of Syriac Christianity included Darmsuk (a.k.a. "Damascus") and even the Nabataean capital of Rakmu / Rakemo / Rekem (better known by its Greek name, "Petra"). {37} Starting in the 7th century, the Mohammedan movement would emerge in newly-established urban centers like Kufa and Basra (see my essay on "The Meccan Cube"). The key, here, is that—irrespective of the specific doctrines / theology embraced—all these communities were SYRIAC. It's no wonder, then, that the best perspective that we get of the embryonic Mohammedan movement (effectively, proto-Islam) is not from Islamic records, but from SYRIAC records, which were primarily Christian. {38}

Many—perhaps even the MAJORITY—of the people within the Umayyad and the early Abbasid domain were, it turns out, (Syriac) Jews and Christians—that is: those who lived under Muslim governance yet did not end up converting to Islam. (It was not Islamic FAITH that spread by the sword; it was Islamic RULE.) {39} In the late 8th / early 9th century, Nestorian patriarch Timothy of Adiabene was in on-going dialogue with Muslim rulers. In fact, there is a famous debate—perhaps apocryphal—between himself and the third Abbasid caliph, Al-Mahdi c. 782. What was documented is a mutually respectful exchange; and was recorded IN SYRIAC. (Only later was it translated into Arabic.) In fact, Timothy was given a ceremonial burial at the "Dayra Klila Ishu" [Monastery of the Wreath of Jesus] in Baghdad. (!)

So what of the standard Islamic narrative that, at the time of Islam's inception, the majority of people in the region were pagans worshipping all sorts of queer deities? This is largely a myth. The Nabataeans worshipped Dushara (with his consorts, Allat and Al-Uzza); but their alternate name for this god was "Allah" (as attested by inscriptions, which named Al-Uzza as his consort). {41} In any case, the region was festooned with Syriac Christians, who's godhead—the Abrahamic deity—was dubbed "Alaha".

By the 4th century, there were churches in Arabia as far east as Jubail (the ruins of which have been extensively vandalized by Arabians, and kept hidden by the Saudi government). The Mar Sarkis monastery at Maaloula, Syria dates to the 4th century. So does the Mar Mattai monastary at Mount Alfaf in Nineveh. We might also note the "Dair Mar Elia" in Nineveh–yet another Syriac church that predates MoM's ministry.

In the 6th century, significant parts of the Banu Kindah and Banu Taghlib (both of the Najd) had become Christian. Most notably, there was a major Christian presence at Al-Hirah, as attested by the "Chronicle Of Seert". In fact, as MoM came of age, he would surely have been aware of the Lakhmid Christian poet, Adi ibn Zayd (who hailed from Al-Hirah) as well as of the renown preacher, Abraham "the Great" of Kashkar (who did most of his proselytizing in Al-Hirah).

And all THAT was in addition to a swath of Nestorian Christianity spanning from the Levant, across Mesopotamia, and into Persia (ref. the monastery of Saint Thaddeus near Chaldoran, dating from the 2nd century). This would have all influenced the thinking in Nabataea–especially amongst the Lihyanites of Dedan, who spoke Syriac and used what would become known as the Nabataean alphabet.

Suffice to say: By MoM's lifetime, Arabia was TEEMING with Judeo-Christian memes, generally articulated in Syriac, and primed for being co-opted into a newfangled memeplex as the occasion warranted.

It should also be noted that there was even Zoroastrianism in Arabia–especially amongst the Banu Tamim and Banu Lakhm. (The Lakhmids were Arabs in northeastern Arabia who spoke both Syriac and Middle Persian–specifically in places like Hir[t]a.) It should be noted that Zoroastrianism was

monotheistic–replete with a Judgement Day, when all the world's dead will be resurrected in the midst of a whirlwind of apocalyptic mayhem. And they believed that "Paradise" in the hereafter was a verdant celestial luxury resort…equipped with a coterie of angelic virgins called "pari".

Myriad pagan rituals would be incorporated into the new Mohammedan liturgy. The ***"Kitab al-Asnam"*** [Book of Idols], composed by Hisham ibn al-Kalbi of Kufa in the late 8th century, described the deities and rituals of pre-Islamic Arab religions. Sure enough, virtually ALL the rituals used by the early Mohammedans had pagan precursors in Arabian culture. It is little wonder that we do not hear about this much anymore. For it would make plain the degree to which Islam co-opted extant Bedouin practices into its repertoire.

Overall, the eschatological—specifically, apocalyptic—literature that proliferated amongst the Arabs during the relevant period included the (Syriac) ***"Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius"***: material that was inspired by the prophecies in the Book Of Daniel concerning the End Times. The tract refers to the "sons of Ishmael" that will emerge from the desert of Ethribus to inflict god's punishment upon those who had "slipped into depravity" (be they wayward Christians or pagans). The tract refers to the foreboding legend of Gog and Magog; and speaks of a POLITICAL savior figure (a last emperor / prophet) who will come to restore the true word of god to those who'd been led astray by some sort of corruption.

All this should sound familiar.

Naturally, the Christian authors vilified the Ishmaelites (Arabs) in this narrative; and fashioned the last emperor / prophet as a (Christian) Roman. It does not follow, however, that Arabs (esp. those with Abrahamic predilections) would not have taken this prophecy as a queue. Indeed, the heady prognostication was a tacit invitation—nay, a provocation. As such, it would have been easily construed as a call to action on the part of disenchanted Arabs, seeing TRINITARIANS as those who were straying from the path. (Predictably, later Christians invoked this narrative to justify their enmity toward the hegemonic Saracens; as with the "Libellus de Antichristo" by Adso of Montier-en-Der c. 954.) Hence the nascent Mohammedan movement was furnished with a well-articulated casus belli. The movement would undergo a long metamorphosis—from its gestation in the 620's / 630's to its final codification more than a century later.

This brings us to the topic at hand: The authors of the "Recitations" appropriated selected tidbits from extant lore, then passed it off as a novelty. This is, after all, how appropriation typically works, especially when it comes to religion. (I explore numerous examples of this in my two-part series on "Mythemes".) Here, we are looking at more than just phrases / idioms; we are looking at signature motifs and specific plot points.

When it comes to Islamic scripture, the key is that extant lore was re-purposed, imbued with a distinctly Ishmaelite pedigree, then presented as if it had been that way ALL ALONG. Thus Abraham erected the Kaaba in the Hijaz (rather than on Moriah) at some point in the early 2nd millennium B.C.; and it was Ishmael, not Isaac, who was the anointed son. (The Akedah is moved from the hills of Canaan to the deserts of Arabia. And Beth Israel may be from the sons of Jacob ben Isaac, but Dar al-Islam is from the sons of Ishmael. The former had gone awry; and the latter had re-discovered the way, thanks to the Final Revelation.) This means that every Abrahamic prophet that ever existed was, in fact, Muslim—from Noah to Jesus of Nazareth. Any other narrative is errant. Consequently, the record needed to be corrected—bringing the theology back to the way it originally was (before corruption set in, yielding misguided creeds like Judaism and Christianity). {33}

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Once parallels between antecedent lore–specifically, from Syriac sources–and Mohammedan lore are elucidated, it becomes plain to see that the Koran's authors were re-purposing material that would have been familiar to people at that particular place and time (that is: in the Hijaz, al-Anbar, and al-Sham during the Dark Ages)…and readily available in their own language: Syriac. {3}

Before proceeding, it's worth noting that the authors of the Koran effectively reduced the New Testament to solely the "Injil" (Canonical Gospels) and the Old Testament to solely the "Tawrat" (Torah)…with one interesting exception: the so-called "Zabur" (the book given to King David, per 4:163 and 17:55; i.e. the Book of Psalms). As it turns out, Syriac Psalters proliferated in the region at the time; so this single exception makes sense.

Thus, as far as the early Mohammedans were concerned, the Hebrew Bible was effectively the Pentateuch. It's no wonder, then, that we do not find recognition of any of the (five) "Megillot" in Islamic lore. There are no traces of the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, or the Book of Ruth in Koranic verse; as those books were not as readily available in Syriac. {34} There WAS, however, a Syriac Targum written on the Book of Esther (the "Targum Sheni"); composed by a contemporary of MoM, nevertheless. Sure enough, we encounter some apocrypha from THAT work in the Koran; as we'll see.

There is a plethora of ineluctable signs that the Koran had Syriac origins which can be found IN THE KORAN ITSELF. Here are a dozen of the most obvious. Taken together, they betray the worldly nature of the source material:

ONE: The tale of Abraham ["Ibrahim"] being delivered from the fire in Babylon is, it turns out, based on a mistranslation. The mistake is repeated throughout the Koran (2:260, 6:74-84, 19:41-50, 21:60-69, 26:69-79, 29:13-16, 30:52-72, 38:81-95, 43:25-27, and 60:4). This scribal flub was based on Abraham having hailed from "Ur", which meant "city" in Assyrian. However, in the Semitic languages (both Ancient Hebrew and Aramaic / Syriac), the same lexeme means "fire". (It was later rendered "nar" in CA.)
So when the Hebrew scribe, Jonathan ben Uzz-i-El transcribed Genesis 15:7 (in which Abraham was said to have "been brought from Ur of the Chaldeans"), he mistakenly wrote it as Abraham having been delivered from THE FIRE of the Chaldeans–insinuating that he had endured a trial-by-fire (by god's grace) rather than simply hailing from a Chaldean city. This version of the tale made it into legends about the villainous Nimrod of Babylon, who was then said to have cast Abraham into a furnace…from which the prophet emerged unscathed, thereby validating his exalted status.

This piece of apocrypha also cropped up in the ***Midrash Rabba***; and would surely have been circulating in Syriac literature throughout the Middle East by the time MoM was born. {7} It is no wonder, then, that THIS version (the errant version) eventually wound up in the "Recitations". Are we to suppose that god ALSO mistranslated this word?

TWO: The tale of the liaison between Yusuf and Zuleika in Surah 12 was likely adapted from material found in the Aggadah (i.e. the Midrash regarding parables). Most notably, it wound up in the Semitic "Dibre ha-Yamim be-Aruk"–a work that would later be dubbed the "Sefer ha-Yashar" [***"Book of Jasher"***] during the Renaissance. Zuleika was said to have been the wife of the dashing Egyptian captain, Potiphar (Yusuf's master at the time).

The glitch in the Koran is obvious. The authors seemed to have been unaware of Zuleika's husband's name, and so were left to simply refer to him by the vague Semitic honorific, "aziz"–an appellation used at the time in both Mandaic and Syriac. (Further confusion surrounds these identities, as–according to conventional Abrahamic account–Yusuf eventually married a woman named "Asenath", who was the daughter of an Egyptian priest named Poti-Pherah.) Zuleika is not mentioned by name in the Torah, but she IS mentioned by name in the aforesaid Aggadah…which would likely have been circulating in Syriac

throughout the region. This is highly probable considering the Geonim were operating primarily out of academies in (Syriac-speaking) Mesopotamia. (There were also the Mandaeans in the region: Gnostics who spoke the neo-Aramaic tongue, Mandaic.) This glitch indicates that the Syriac literature, not the canonical account familiar to the Roman Church, served as the source material.

THREE: The tale of King Solomon, the talking hoopoe bird, and the Malkat of Saba (a.k.a. the Queen of Sheba)…involving a glass floor that appeared to be water…ended up in Surah 27 (verses 17-44). This was an adaptation of a piece of apocrypha uniquely found in the Judaic [second] "Targum of Esther". That work is not to be confused with the original ***"Book of Esther"*** ["Megillat Esther"], which was composed in Ancient Hebrew in the 4th century B.C. as part of the K-T-B-im [Writings; often rendered "Ketuvim"]. Lo and behold: THIS "Targum" [translation] was originally composed in Syriac at some point during MoM's lifetime. Naturally, THAT–rather than the ancient Hebraic texts about Solomon–is what would have been circulating amongst the (Syriac-speaking) Bedouins in the Hijaz. Lo and behold, THAT is the material found in the Koran. {4}

This anecdote is also found in the (Jewish) "Hekhalot" [Palaces] literature of the era, which were often rendered in Syriac. Believing a glass floor to be water (used as a litmus test for Faith) was a common Judaic trope at the time. It would have been odd for it to crop up in Islam's holy book had the authors not been appropriating material from extant lore. Again: This is NOT something that would have been available in any scripture that was being circulated in languages other than Syriac (or Mishnaic Hebrew, which was just another variation on Aramaic).

Note that the Sabaean queen (errantly referred to as "Bilqis" in Islamic scripture) is the woman with the most lines of dialogue in the Koran—more than even Miriam, the mother of Jesus (for whom an entire chapter is named). The woman given the second most to say is the wife of the (un-named) Egyptian pharaoh (who is given the name "Asiya" in extra-Koranic sources). These seem to be rather peculiar choices…until we realize what the source-material was. As it turns out, these two women had special prominence in extant SYRIAC lore.

FOUR: The tale of the virgin mother, Miriam stopping to rest–with the talking baby Jesus–under a date / palm tree in 19:22-26 was lifted from a Gospel entitled, ***"The Book Of The Nativity Of The Blessed Miriam And The Savior's Infancy"*** (a.k.a. "pseudo-Matthew")…which had been rendered in Syriac during MoM's lifetime. {12} In this recounting, Jesus of Nazareth even speaks to his mother from the womb–saying: "Shake towards you the trunk of the palm and it will drop down on you dates soft and ripe."

When it comes to Miriam (Romanized to "Maria"; rendered "Mary" in English), several other anecdotes found in Islamic lore were lifted from the (Syriac) ***Gospel of James***—most notably: being given nourishment by angels, weaving a curtain for the local temple, and the choice of Joseph as her guardian (selected via the casting of lots).

Meanwhile, the account of Miriam and Zacharias in 3:35-44 was ALSO likely adapted from a Syriac edition of **"pseudo-Matthew"**. In addition, we might note the account of Miriam venturing alone to "the East" (19:16). These tales did not appear in the canonical Gospel accounts (which were primarily circulating in Koine Greek). They ONLY occurred in Syriac source-material.

FIVE: The tale of an infant Jesus speaking from his cradle (19:29-34) was lifted from the ***"Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior"*** (a.k.a. "Syriac Infancy Gospel"), which dates back to the early 6th century. {5} The anecdote had been included in the "Peshitta"–which was itself based in part on the various oral traditions of antecedent Abrahamic lore: the "targumim" [translations]. Once we consider this tract's peculiar emphasis of the angel Gabriel, it is no wonder that it was THAT angel (rendered "Jibr[a]il") who came to play such a prominent role in Mohammedan lore. The choice of Gabriel as envoy was likely also

influenced by his having featured prominently in ***"The Demonstrations"*** by Aphrahat of Ashuristan, which was itself inspired by the Book of Daniel (also available in Aramaic). So it makes sense that it was not the archangel Michael who was cast in the role of divine emissary to the final Abrahamic Prophet.

Tellingly, the Dayro d-Mor Gabriel [Chapel of Saint Gabriel] was founded c. 397 in the "Tur Abdin" region by "Mor" Samuel (and his student, Simon). One or both of them had a dream in which the arch-angel, Gabriel delivered a message from god: build a house of worship here. Clearly, Gabriel was seen as a divine emissary in the Syriac tradition.

Had Michael featured prominently in the Abrahamic lore proliferating in Arabia at the time, then it likely would have been Michael ("Mikha'il" in Arabic) who visited MoM on the fabled "Night of Destiny" (a.k.a. "Night of Power"). As it happens, Michael–far more prominent in the canonical texts–is mentioned only once, in passing, in the Koran (2:98); and even then, in conjunction with Gabriel. The explanation for this is plain to see: It was Syriac material (in this case, the Syriac Infancy Gospel) that informed the Bedouins' knowledge of Abrahamic lore.

SIX: The tale of Jesus of Nazareth turning clay into birds (3:49 and 5:109-110) was lifted from the ***"Infancy Gospel of Thomas"*** (15:1-7), which had been rendered in Syriac by the time MoM had been born. After all, it is on THAT work that the aforementioned ***"Syriac Infancy Gospel"*** was based (see item 5). Interestingly, this piece of apocrypha was not in the canonical texts (scripture that was primarily composed in Koine Greek). It is notable that in both versions of this odd anecdote, the crowd scornfully dismisses Jesus as a mere magician, rejecting any conception of him as divine.

SEVEN: The tale of Alexander the Great (rendered "D[h]u al-Qarnayn" in the Koran) traveling to the end of the world to the place where the sun sets (18:86) could be found in the Christian hagiography, ***"The Deeds Of Alexander"*** (a.k.a. "The Romance Of Alexander"), a tract attributed to Callisthenes of Olynthus in the late 4th century B.C. (though was revamped by a Ptolemaic scribe in Egypt in the 2nd or 3rd century A.D. in either Greek, Coptic, or Aramaic). Claims about Alexander having traveled to the edges of the Earth (which wound up in Islamic lore) seem to be lifted from the legends propounded in this work. Of course, Callisthenes would have composed the text in Greek. However, a direct Syriac adaptation entitled "The Legend of Alexander" was composed in Mesopotamia c. 629 A.D. (!)
The Syriac version contained embellishments that were not in Callisthenes' work–including the tale of a wall built to stave off Gog and Magog…which, lo and behold, also wound up in Islamic lore (see example Twelve below). {6}

EIGHT: The tale of the "Sleepers of the Cave" (18:9-26) was a revamped version of the ***"Seven Sleepers Of Ephesus"***–a piece of folklore that had been propagated by the Syriac poet, Jacob of Serug[h] c. 500. The tale was surely known in the region during MoM's lifetime; but by then, it had already had a long history.

It originally stemmed from the legend of the Cretan prophet, Epimenides of Knossos, who—the story goes—fell asleep in a cave (possibly on Mount Ida, known for its significance to Zeus) for fifty-seven years, at the behest of the gods; and upon awakening, purified Athens. The tale was famously recounted by Plutarch c. 100; and was then adapted by the Roman author, Diogenes Laertius in the early 3rd century, whereupon it was circulated in Anatolia. (That's where the German theologian, Johann Karl Christoph Nachtigal eventually got the idea for Peter Klaus…which is where Washington Irving later got the idea for Rip Van Winkle.)

Considering all this, it comes as no surprise that, in Arabia, the Jews and Christians of Najran had started circulating the tale by the 5th century…a fact that confirms that, by the time the "Recitations" were composed in the 7th century, the tale had spread from Anatolia through Mesopotamia and Persia, and all the way down through the Hijaz.

But how did this ancient Greco-Roman legend make its way into Syriac folklore? To reiterate: Jacob of Serug[h] was the primary link—which makes sense, dwelling, as he did, in northern Syria. But we might also note that this piece of apocrypha was propagated by Gregory of Tours in the 6th century. The on-going memetic transmission is indicated by the commentary of Ishodad of Merv from the 9th-century, wherein he discusses a Cretan prophet referenced in the New Testament (whom Clement of Alexandria had identified as Epimenides in his "Stromata"). This demonstrated that the tale had proliferated along the Silk Road in the early Middle Ages; and—in the process—had been adapted for Christian audiences, eventually becoming a part of Syriac lore.

The fact that this (rather silly) tale crops up in the Koran is further proof that the "Final Revelation" lifted much of its material from local legends—that is: folklore that was prevalent in the region at that time. More to the point: It is a reminder that the book's contents are folkloric, not historic. For obviously, the authors of the Koran did not realize they were relaying an apocryphal tale about a Greek oracle from Crete.

In the Muslim world, we also find the tale relayed in Ibn Hisham's "Sirah an-Nabawiyyah" (c. 800)…and repeated in the "tafsir" of Al-Tabari (in the 9th century) and on through Ibn Kathir (in the 14th century).

What is most incriminating about the way that this tale is conveyed in the Koran is that the author seems unsure of what, exactly, really happened. Consequently, he is forced to speculate about the number of sleepers. 18:22 even begins with "Some say…" before providing possibilities–a peculiar thing to insert if this account is supposedly being provided BY GOD HIMSELF. The caveat is added that "only god knows" what the exact number was. (Was the purported author of the Koran being playful here–teasing his audience?) The pièce de résistance occurs at the conclusion of this verse, where the audience is instructed not to question the matter. 18:23-26 is simply further equivocation on the issue (offering what amounts to a daft litany of special pleading). {36}

NINE: The tale of the angel, "Iblis" (the nascent Satan) refusing to bow to Adam, and consequently being cast out of heaven for his insolence (7:11-18, 15:28-35, 17:61-64, 20:116-117, and 38:71-85).
This seems to have been lifted from an account found in the (Syriac) "The Cave of Treasure[s]" by the 4th-century theologian, Ephrem of Nisibis…which itself may have been an adaptation of antecedent Judaic apocrypha (e.g. the ***"Life of Adam and Eve"***; "Mastema" in the Covenant of Damascus; as well as accounts found in the Talmudic ***"Genesis Rabba"*** / ***"Bereshit[h] Rabba"***). Even Ephram's emphasis on abstaining from WINE (yet having grapes provided in Paradise) is echoed in the "Recitations".
All of Ephrem's work–including his hymns–were composed in Syriac; and were widely circulated throughout the Middle East.

The angels bowing to Adam (on god's command) is not mentioned anywhere in the Hebrew Bible, or in Greek Christian scripture; but it IS prominent in Syriac texts—most notably: ***"The Cave Of Treasures"*** by Ephrem of Nisibus (rendered "Ma'arah al-Kanuz" in Garshuni). Also likely influential on Islamic lore was the Syriac "Conflict Of Adam And Eve With Satan". (I discuss the history of Satan in my essay, "Nemesis", where I explore the tale of "Iblis" refusing to kneel before Adam.)

Another tell-tale sign of the Koran's Syriac origins: The motif of TWO trees (that of Knowledge and that of Life) in the garden of Eden does not occur in the Koran. Instead, we hear of a single tree (that of

Immortality), a leitmotif that was lifted directly from exegeses that existed in SYRIAC. Also, Eve is not implicated in the temptation to eat from the tree ("shajar[at] al-huld"), as she is in the conventional Judeo-Christian version. (The tree is dubbed "ilan[a] hayya" in Syriac.)

TEN: The tale of Abraham smashing all the idols except for the largest one (the moon-goad, Hubal), after which he is thrown into a fiery pit for his iconoclasm (21:51-71). This came from the Judaica circulating around the Middle East (in Syriac) at the time. The most notable source was the ***Midrash Rabba*** (i.e. the Aggadah), which was itself based on the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzz-i-El from the beginning of the 1st century. Later, Muslims would contemptuously refer to much of the Judaic lore propagating throughout Dar al-Islam as "Isra'iliyyat"…as if their own lore had nothing to do with it. This pejorative was ostensibly an attempt to distance themselves from material tied to the Jewish tradition.

ELEVEN: According to the Koran (3:55, 4:157-159, 5:117, and 19:33), Jesus of Nazareth did not actually die on the cross. Rather, it only APPEARED that he perished via crucifixion. In reality, he was simply taken up into heaven. Hence the Mohammedans were left to explain what "really" happened on Cavalry on that fateful Friday evening. Enter the tale of a figure named "Serges" (alt. "Sergius"). Who? In the 8th century, Ibn Ishaq sought to explain away the traditional crucifixion account. {8} His strategy was to reference an apocryphal version of the Passion derived from a 5th-century tale about two figures who were martyred by crucifixion: ***"The Passion of Sergius and Bacchus"***. Ibn Ishaq proposed that the man who was crucified c. 31 A.D. was not Jesus, but was actually Sergius.

This "just-not-so-story" seems to have ALSO been based on a misreading of the (Syriac) writings of John of Damascus in his discussion of Docetism—whereby it only APPEARED as though Jesus died on the cross. {9} The tale of Sergius and Bacchus was originally in Koine Greek, but was rendered in Syriac in the 4th century. It even became the basis for a popular cult in the Syrian city of Resafa (which was consequently re-named "Sergi-o-polis").

The Mandaeans—who spoke a dialect of Syriac (now referred to as "Mandaic")—believed that JoN would return to the heavenly realm (what they called the Kingdom of Light) after the Passion. The crucifixion, it turns out, was only an ILLUSION. Lo and behold, this peculiar idea is repeated in the Koran (4:157-159). We know that the Mandaeans were on the radar of the early Mohammedans, as they were alluded to in the "Recitations" (as "Sabians"; though the label could have referred to the Manicheans; or it may have even been a reference to the Aksumites, who were descendants of the Sabaeans). Though not a formidable presence, they operated within the Abrahamic orbit, spoke a variation of the same language, and dwelled in the same region.

The view of the crucifixion "only in appearance" was also broached in the Syriac "Apocalypse of Peter"; and by Ignatius of Antioch in his letter to the Trallians. Meanwhile, the Docetic theme of JoN as apparition was presented in the Syriac "Acts of John". {43}

It is little surprise, then, that this zany crucifixion tale was adopted by the early Mohammedans as an alternative to conventional accounts of the Passion of the Christ, which they were determined to obviate.

TWELVE: The Koranic reference of Gog and Magog [rendered "(y)Ajuj" and "Majuj" in the Koran] (21:96-97) was lifted from apocryphal (Syriac) sources. The tale is about Alexander the Great during his time in central Asia. As the story goes, the great Macedonian conquerer–who was reputed to have been a Muslim–built a defensive iron wall to keep nefarious peoples of faraway lands at bay (18:92-99). At the time, those peoples were alternately associated with the Scythians, Huns, and the Turkic-Mongol tribes beyond the Pontic Steppes. {10} The ORIGINAL reference to these peoples (who were equated with the Japhethites in Biblical lore) occurred in the Book of Ezekiel. However, the reference was ORIGINALLY "Gog OF Magog". Later versions mistranslated this as Gog AND Magog–notably: the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch (which was composed in the Samaritan variation of Aramaic).

The prophecy was as follows: In the End Times, this wall would be rent asunder, thereby unleashing these diabolical hordes onto the People of the Book. This menacing eschatological account was echoed in the (Syriac) "Aggadah". The role of Alexander the Great in this grand scheme was derived from the (Syriac) ***"Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius"***…which was originally composed in the 4th century, yet updated in the 7th century in response to Mohammedan hegemony. This particular account would also occur in the (Syriac) "Romance of Alexander" (see item 7 above)…which was contemporaneous with MoM's ministry.

Where was this fabled rampart located? It seems to correlated with the Wall at Derbent [from the Middle Persian "Dar-band", meaning "blocked gateway"]. Sure enough, medieval Arabs came to refer to Derbent as "Bab al-Hadid" [Gate of Iron]. {11} It also may have possibly referred to the Great Wall of Gorgan / Gurgan (Persian "Astara-bad"), a pass in the Alborz Mountains, to the east in Golestan (what the Greeks called "Hyrkania").

Al-Yaqub's geographical work, the "Kitab al-Buldan" references this pass (purported to be in Bactria / Sogdia) using the Pahlavi "Dar i-Achanii" ["Iron Gates"]. Clearly, he did not think of it in CA terms. It seems to correspond to a defile in the [g]Hissar Mountain Range known in Old Turkic as the "Temir Kapig" (ref. the Orkhon inscriptions).

Incidentally, the term for "Gog" is directly from the rendering in Syriac (using the aliph in front: "ya-" as the prefix), as was used by Jacob of Serug. (Note that "gog" was rendered "juj" in the same way that the Syriac "M-G-U" was rendered "majus".)

It is also likely that the idiosyncratic version of Noah and the Flood found in the Koran may have been lifted from the (first) ***Book of Enoch***, which includes citations from the (now lost) ***Book of Noah***. Again: This was widely circulated in Syriac throughout the Middle East during Late Antiquity; and so would have been the version with which the Bedouins of the Hijaz were familiar. It is entirely possible that this divergent version of the tale was co-opted into the Abrahamic lore circulating in Arabia during the formation of explicitly Mohammedan lore amongst the Ishmaelites. We find repeated references to such material throughout the Koran (as with 6:154-157, 7:157, 10:37, and 35:31), indicating that there was a familiarity with such material amongst the target audience. {13} And as we have seen, much of this came from non-canonical sources that were unique to Syriac-speaking precincts.

Other interesting discrepancies occur between the Torah and the Koran. For example: In the former, the emphasis is on Noah during / following the flood; whereas in the latter, the narrative centers on Noah (as a preacher) BEFORE the flood. Noah's antediluvian ministry—as found in the Koran—is of rather intriguing provenance. It does not exist in Occidental (Greek or Latin) sources. So from whence did it come? Lo and behold: This alternate version of the narrative occurs in the commentaries of the Syriac writers, Ephrem of Nisibis (4th century) and Jacob of Serug[h] (late 5th / early 6th century). There are lexical indications of the source material as well. Notably, the Koran's authors referred to the mountain on

which the ark came to rest as “al-Gurdi” (later rendered “al-Judi”) instead of “Ararat” (11:44). The term has its origins in Syriac lore (as “Djudi”; later rendered “Gardu” / “Kardu”), the term for the land of the Kurds.

Even more telling, it was in Syriac lore that we hear about Noah’s “lost son”, who perished in the flood. This is something that does not occur in Occidental versions; yet, sure enough, crops up in the Koran (11:42). This is no coincidence.

Tales are one thing, but what of TROPES? Throughout the “Recitations”, there are various statements that hint at dubious sources. Here are a dozen interesting examples:

Item One: The portrayal of Abraham in the ***Book of Jubilees*** (BoJ). Along with the Garima Gospels, this text was originally composed in Coptic, Ge’ez (based on Sabaean / Old South Arabian), and–of course–Syriac. This portrayal predominated in Abyssinia, and thus amongst the (Sabaean) Aksumites. Recall that in MoM’s lifetime, the Aksumite Kingdom–which embraced the Abrahamic tradition–encompassed both Abyssinia and southern Arabia (Yemen). Consequently its scriptural sources would have had influence in the Hijaz at the time. (The BoJ was later rendered the Ethiopic ***“Book of Division”*** by the “Beta Israel” movement in Abyssinia.) Sure enough, the treatment of Abraham in the Koran and the BoJ is strikingly similar.

Also in the BoJ, we find a familiar leitmotif: The decrees of the Abrahamic deity are inscribed on celestial tablets; and an angel reveals its contents to a prophet. (Ring any bells?) Moreover, Ibn Ishaq’s biography of MoM highlights key events in the prophet’s lifetime that mimic auspicious occasions commemorated in the BoJ. This is no coincidence.

Such folkloric affinities are unsurprising, as there were POLITICAL affinities between the early Mohammedans and the Christian Abyssinians. Indeed, there are tales of the earliest followers of Mohammed seeking sanctuary there.

Item Two: The reference to Jews being transformed into apes and swine in 2:65-66, 4:47, and 5:60. Ironically, this derogatory epithet seems to have been lifted from the Talmudic tradition. 7:163-166 makes a reference to a cursed Jewish town “by the sea”, the residents of which transgressed Mosaic law by fishing on the Sabbath. The townspeople were consequently transformed into the “despised” creatures by an angry god. The apocryphal tale was likely a distortion of the tale of the infamous Sabbath-breakers of “Bet[h] Mekoshesh” [House of the stick-gatherer] from Numbers 15:32-36. That tale was circulated in the Middle East during the Mishnaic era–especially via the “Tosefta”. In Judaic lore, this particular cursed house was associated with the family of the notorious Pharisee priest, “Caiaphas”…which doubled as the term for “ape” in Mishnaic Hebrew.

Item Three: The cooptation of extant material also included aphorisms. A prime example is the oft-cited exhortation in 5:32–an allusion to a command addressed to the “Children of Israel” after Cain had murdered Abel. It is plain to see that this was lifted from earlier sources. The Koranic passage is as follows: “For anyone who murders any person who has not committed murder or horrendous crimes, it shall be as if he murdered all the people; and for anyone who spares a life, it shall be as if he spared the lives of all the people.” As it turns out, this an adaptation of a passage from the Mishnah compiled by Judah ha-Nasi at the end of the 2nd century A.D. The relevant passage–which also pertains to Cain having murdered his brother–reads as follows: “Whosoever destroys a single soul of Israel, scripture imputes [guilt] to him as though he had destroyed a complete world; and whosoever preserves a single soul of Israel, scripture ascribes [merit] to him as though he had preserved a complete world.” (Note that “Israel” refers to a people, not to any particular place.)

Here's the thing. This passage does not appear in the Torah. Rather, it appears in the Babylonian Talmudic literature–much of which would have been circulating in Syriac during the time the "Recitations" were being composed. {14}

There is also the oft-touted 109:6 ("Unto you your way of life; unto me my way of life"). (Note: "din" is also sometimes translated as "religion".) This seems to be an echo of Isaiah 55:8 ("My beliefs are not your beliefs; my ways are not your ways"). {30}

Item Four: In 7:40, we are notified that "the gates of Heaven will not be opened for [non-Muslims]; nor will [non-Muslims] enter paradise until a camel enters into the eye of a needle." A version of this trope is most known from Matthew 19:24. However, the Mohammedan version was likely taken from the apocryphal ***"Acts of Peter and Andrew"***, which was widely circulated in Syriac.

Here's the problem: In the original version, the camel-through-the-eye-of-a-needle meme is used in reference to how difficult it would be for those who are AFFLUENT to get into heaven. (It would be easier to thread a needle with a camel.) In the Koran, the object of contempt was changed from the avaricious to those who are impious. (It is as likely for a non-Muslim to enter heaven as it would be to thread a needle with a camel.) Thus the authors contort Jesus' "camel through the eye of a needle" line from the Gospels–reframing it to be about Muslim vs. non-Muslim (instead of plebes vs. affluent).

Item Five: The trinity consisted of the father, the mother, and the son (5:116). This mis-impression likely derived from antecedent Semitic myths about the godhead, Baal and his consort, As[h]toreth / Asherah…coupled with the fact that Christians thought the Abrahamic deity (Y-H-W-H was an alternate of Baal) begat a son. Funny enough, the consort of "Baal Shama'im" was the Arabian goddess, "al-Lat" (as attested on Safaitic inscriptions in Nabataea). Moreover, the Palmyrenes worshipped "al-Lat" along with a god named "Rahim". Meanwhile, "Al Uzza" was considered the consort of the Nabataean godhead, Dushara…who's alternate moniker was "Allah". This should all sound oddly familiar.

Marian cults (notably, the Arabian "Collyridians") seem to have proliferated in the Middle East during Late Antiquity, which would have bolstered the impression that Christians deified the mother of Jesus of Nazareth. The inordinate emphasis in the Koran on Miriam, mother of Jesus, is likely a reflection of the Koran's own (Syriac) source material; as both Ephrem of Nisibis and Jacob of Serug[h] (both Syriac writers) devoted much focus to Marian lore. Also notable: At the time, the (monophysite) Church of Abyssinia was renown for its quasi-deification of Miriam, mother of Jesus.

This error may have also come from the Syriac proselytizer, Alcibiades of Apameia, who founded the Elkesaite sect in the 3rd century. Alcibiades equated the holy spirit with a mother figure. (It probably didn't help that Maronite sects at the time referred to Jesus' mother, Miriam, as the "Holy Mother", "Queen of Heaven", and/or "Mother of God"; and that they routinely worshipped effigies of the Madonna.).
To reiterate: Ephrem of Nisibis and Jacob of Serug[h] placed special emphasis on Marian lore, to the point of verging deification. It would have been hard not to notice this; and it surely caused a stir amongst the Syriac-speaking peoples of the Middle East. {15} The biggest influence on Middle Eastern impressions, though, may have been the polemic of Nestorius (eponymous founder of Nestorian Christianity), who denounced the Orthodox Church's use of the term, "Theotokos" [Mother of God] for the mother of Jesus. It is quite likely such an exalted moniker left the impression–amongst Syriac-speaking peoples who heard the arguments against this–that Miriam was considered by the Romans to be a partner with the godhead.

But why all the hubbub over this particular matter? Here, again, we encounter the influence of the Syriac Church during the germination of Mohammedan lore. In the Eastern Church, Mary was considered the mother of JoN, but most adamantly NOT the ***mother of god***. This was, to put it mildly, a contentious issue. (Mother of GOD? Perish the thought!)

Semantics was also a possible source of confusion on this point. For in Syriac literature, the Holy Ghost was generally given a feminine designation–sometimes even carrying the connotation of "Mother". To make matters even more slippery, the Syriac lexeme for "mother" ("mor") was similar to one of the Syriac lexemes for "our Lord" ("moran"). Hence Father, Son, and Holy Ghost could easily have been misconstrued as Father, Son, and Mother. Semantic slippage is not uncommon, especially when etymology tracks with cultural metamorphosis. (It was, after all, a botched translation that rendered the forbidden fruit in Genesis as an "apple"…and the mother of Jesus a "virgin".) The "catch" is that such etymological glitches leaves a trail. Hence errant translations can be traced back to their source.

And so it went: Mother as part of the Holy Trinity. Sure enough, this bit of misunderstanding found its way into the "Recitations"–as we find in 4:171 and 5:112-116. (The confusion on this point is also evident in 6:101, which asks rhetorically: How can god have a son if he has no wife? Of course, nobody ever said that Yahweh had a mate.) The misconception certainly did not come from the Koine Greek version of the New Testament; nor did it come from any Latinized texts from the late 4th century, as with those complied by the Dalmatian cleric, Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus of Stridon (a.k.a. "Jerome"). Rather, it spawned from lore that was circulating in Syriac…and so would have been the basis of understanding amongst those who spoke Syriac.

Item Six: The adjuration to pray three times each day (as specified in the Koran) originated during Classical Antiquity. This is attested by the ***"Book Of Daniel"*** (6:11), material of which would have circulated in Syriac, rendered the ***"Demonstrations"***–a tract composed by Aphrahat of Adiabene [Ashuristan] in the 4th century. This is not to say that the early Mohammedans got the idea DIRECTLY FROM those works; it simply shows that the practice was well-established in Syriac-speaking circles. As mentioned earlier, the Mandaeans (who spoke a variant of Syriac) had five daily propitiations.

Item Seven: The division of heaven into seven layers (2:29) had been well-known in Abrahamic circles since Classical Antiquity. This is attested in what is now referred to as the ***"Apocalypse of Abraham"*** , wherein Abraham makes a sojourn to heaven; and is given a guided tour of all seven tiers.

Would Arabians at the time have been familiar with that particular Syriac work? Lo and behold, we find reference to the "Suhuf Ibrahim" [scrolls of Abraham] in the Koran (87:19).

As it turns out, the "seven heavens" leitmotif was adapted from Mithraic cosmogony. Mithraism was rampant throughout the region during Late Antiquity. The cult would have proliferated across the Middle East in Syriac, though not in its (more widespread) Roman incarnation.

This celestial leitmotif can also be found in the ***Book of Enoch*** (wherein the eponymous protagonist is referred to as the "Son of Man"). Note that the Book of Enoch was—in large part—a regurgitation of the Babylonian myth of En-men-dur-ana (alt. "Emme-dur-an-ki"), the world's seventh king (who was associated with the all-seeing sun-god, Utu [Semitic: "Shamash"], source of divine judgement). Lo and behold, Enoch was considered the seventh patriarch. And like Emmeduranki, Enoch ascended to heaven at the end of his worldly life. The book also discusses how and why certain angels fell from heaven—a topic that became prevalent with the Islamic conception of "Iblis" cum "Shaytan".

We might then consider the fabled "Night Journey" (the "Mi'raj"), as recounted in Bukhari's Hadith 5/58/227 and 9/93/608 (as well as in the writings of Ibn Ishaq), which were purportedly based on the testimony of Ibn Abbas. And where might the tale of the magical sojourn come from? As it turns out, it is an almost exact duplication of a Persian tale: that of the fabled Zoroastrian prophet, "Arda" [Just] Wiraz[a] (a.k.a. "Arda Viraf"). {35} One night, Viraf goes on a "dream journey" to the next world, where he engages in dialogues with angels (notably: Atar) and past prophets (notably: Sraosha / Saoshyant); and even meets the godhead (Ahura Mazda). The godhead tells the prophet that Mazda-ism is the one true Faith; and the only way to salvation. Viraf is also given a glimpse of hell, so that he might witness the torments visited upon the damned. All this should sound very familiar.

Item Eight: The notion that the sun and moon are objects of approximately the same size, and move across the sky (13:2, 14:33, 21:33, 31:29, 36:38-40, and 39:5). Moreover, both of them are sources of light (10:5 and 25:61). Such misconceptions were probably lifted from the aforementioned ***Book of Enoch*** …which was circulated in Syriac at the time.

This mis-impression was nothing new; as it dated back to the Sumerian / Akkadian and Hittite word for the moon, "Iskhara" (meaning "maker of light"). The matter of geo-centrism is explored at length in my essay, "The Koran As A Miracle?"

Item Nine: The claim that Solomon could control the wind in 38:36. This was likely lifted from the ***"Testament Of Solomon"*** (ToS), a tract composed by a Palestinian sometime between the 1st and 4th century A.D. (This would have invariably been rendered in Syriac, considering it was composed in the Levant during Late Antiquity.) The ToS tells of Solomon subduing a wind demon; then marshaling those powers to perform formidable tasks (like erecting his temple). {16} A boy is then said to have bottled the wind-demon in a flask. This occurred after he'd been sent to…none other than…Arabia. (!) This indicates that the primary source for the Mohammedan conception of Solomon was the ToS…rather than having been derived from the portrayal in canonical tracts (e.g. First Kings and First Chronicles).

Solomon even seems to serve as the prototype for MoM himself. Interestingly, both are referred to as "rasul Allah" (messenger of god). This onomastic parity works quite well considering Solomon's storied relationship with the queen of the Sabaeans (the Queen of Sheba), who hailed from Abyssinia. Pace the Nestorians, the Aksumite / Himyarite influence on southern Arabia would have accounted for much of Hijazis' exposure to Abrahamic lore. {1} It is no surprise, then, that tales of Solomon were propagated in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and Himyar (now Yemen). Consequently, Bedouins in the area were most familiar with Solomonic hagiographies involving THOSE places.

Item Ten: The statement in 28:76 that "Kora[c]h" had so much wealth that it weighed down the bodies of strong men. This trope seems to have been adopted from a line in the Gemara by a 3rd-century "Amora"–possibly Shimon ben Lakish, who most likely composed his material in Syriac.

Item Eleven: The false statement that the Jews considered Ezra (rendered "Uzayr" in Arabic) the son of god in 9:30. This comically mistaken impression was likely derived from the ***"Jewish Apocalypse of Ezra"*** (a.k.a. the second "Book of Esdras"; alt. 4 Ezra), wherein Ezra plays the preeminent role in the Abrahamic narrative. The book had been rendered in Syriac–among other languages–during Late Antiquity; so its material would have been circulating in the Syriac-speaking world. {17}

In this apocryphal tract, Ezra is portrayed as the (anointed) restorer of Mosaic law, the dictator of the Hebrew Bible, AND the prophet of the End Times. Ezra is even said to have ascended to heaven. (!) In other words, he played the role of a Messiah. So it is easy to see how this misimpression would have emerged…and would up in the Koran. Note that the flub was repeated in the "Sahih" Hadith of Muslim (vol. 1, no. 352).

Item Twelve: The staunch position taken on pre-destination by Moses Bar Kepha is a theme that occurs throughout the Koran (as "qadar"). The earliest Canaanites worshipped the goddess of fate, "Ashima"–who was herself based on the Assyrian concept of fate, "shimti". At it turns out, Ashima's Nabatean counterpart was "Manat", a goddess that would appear in Arabian theology. (!)

Tropes like those listed here would have come not only from Syriac Christians, but from Jews promulgating Mishnaic (read: Rabbinical) material throughout the Levant and Arabia (notably: the Targums). It makes sense, then, that the authors of the Koran refer to Jews–with whom they were apparently quite familiar–as "Rabbaniyun" [Rabbanites] (3:79 and 5:44/63).

There are plenty of other examples of memetic appropriation. Take, for instance, the twelve disciples of JoN. They were based on the twelve major Judaic prophets. (Also recall the twelve tribes of Israel.) Sure enough, they were re-conceived as the twelve "aqaba" / "ansar" in Mohammedan lore. (Meanwhile, Shiism posits twelve imams.) And all of THAT was likely lifted from the Roman cult of Mithra[s]…which was likely basing this on the number of lunar cycles each year.

The use of "Gehanna" / "Ge-Hinnom" (rendered "Jahannam" in CA) to name a venue for punishing the wicked in the afterlife came not from the Hebrew Bible, but from the (Syriac) Targums. It was the Targum writers who took the name of the (Hinnom) valley in Jerusalem and rendered it the moniker for a bleak afterlife destination; so it is very telling that THAT was the name that the Mohammedans fell upon for hell. {32}

According to apocrypha about the so-called "Night of Destiny" ("Laylat al-Qadr"; when MoM was first visited by the archangel, Gabriel), the message was: "Read, read, read in the name of your god" (where "read" could also mean "recite": [i]K-R[a], the basis for "Koran"). That was the first line delivered to MoM (which was eventually rendered the opening verse of Surah 96); and seems to have been lifted from an anecdote found in "The Confessions" by the Numidian evangelist, Augustine of Hippo–a work composed at the end of the 4th century. Augustine (who was possibly Berber) wrote in Latin, but his target audience was the Manichaean community of which he had been a part for most of his life. That community existed across the Middle East, and was most conversant IN SYRIAC (along with Middle Persian; and, later, Sogdian). So surely his material was circulated accordingly.

Bear in mind that the appropriation of extant material for NEW scripture is not unheard of. Just as, say, the founder of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, Joseph Smith, clandestinely adapted Solomon Spalding's "Manuscript, Found" into his tall-tales, the authors of the Koran adapted material (at least, the parts of it they fancied) that was available to them.

Bottom line: The Koran is riddled with instances in which apocrypha from known sources are regurgitated. The shows that the "Recitations" were an ad hoc agglomeration of tid-bits from antecedent lore, which had been orally-transmitted and "tweaked" over time. So much, then, for the purported inimitability of the "Recitations".

Once we understand the historical context of this material, it makes sense that all this appropriation occurred as it did. When the "Recitations" were being cobbled together in the late 7th thru 9th centuries, the various amanuenses operated in what was essentially a roiling memetic soup of Zoroastrian (Persian)

and Judeo-Christian (Syriac) memes. Even in the Koran itself, it is admitted that Ishmaelites were already familiar with the lore that MoM was touting (8:31). Archeological evidence in the region attests to this fact.

As already mentioned: In the late 6th century–as MoM came of age–one of the most significant pilgrimage sites in the region was a church in Ma'rib (Sana'a, Yemen) known as "Al-Kalis". Also note that those who erected the Kaaba were already familiar with the eponymous Abrahamic prophet (i.e. Abraham). According to Ibn al-Kalbi's "Kitab al-Asnam", one of the idols of the pre-Islamic Kaaba was of "Abraham as an old man". This was so prevalent, early Muslims even had a name for those who honored that idol: the "Hanif"…which became the moniker for all "People Of the Book" (i.e. those who, in some way, partook in the Abrahamic tradition). {42}

The Syriac-speaking Lakhmids were located in northeastern Arabia; and had a major settlement at Al-Hasa (a.k.a. "Hadjar"; "[h]Agarum"). Syriac Christianity flourished amongst the Lakhmids—especially after their king, Al-Nu[a]man III [ibn Al-Mundhir IV] of Al-Hirah officially converted in c. 592. (His maternal grandfather was Jewish; his cousin was the famed Christian poet, Adi ibn Zayd al-Ibadi of Tamim.) All of these people were Syriac-speaking Arabs who were, of course, familiar with the Abrahamic tradition…at least the versions that were circulated in Syriac. Sure enough, those are the versions—idiosyncrasies and all—that wind up in Islamic lore.

So to what degree were Arabs familiar with Persian lore? Quite, as it turns out. This was not limited to the Lakhmids. Indeed, the inter-marriage of Sassanians and Arabs was so common that there was a term for their mixed progeny: "Al-Abna". In the generations leading up to MoM's ministry, Persian officials were garrisoned as far south as Sana'a—surely telling tales that were disseminated throughout the region. Generations were likely reared on tales of beautiful "houri" (angelic virgins in Zoroastrian theology) in an afterlife paradise, wherein they were lavished with accoutrements like "asawir" (the Persian word for "bracelets"), "istabraq" (the Persian word for "brocade"), "sundus" (the Persian word for "silk"), "namariq" (the Persian word for "cushions"), "zarabi" (the Persian word for "carpets"), "kanz" (the Persian word for "treasures"), and an endless supply of "rizq" (the Persian word for "bounty / provision").

Also noteworthy is the abiding prominence of the Syro-Persian Bakh-Y[e]shu ["Redeemed by Jesus"; alt. "Bukhtishu"] family: Nestorian scientists—mostly physicians—from Persia who played a significant role in the Muslim world from the 7th century thru the 9th century. This Syriac Christian clan was associated with the famed Academy at Gondi-shapur, which was renown for its medical school. It was likely the "Gondishapuri" scholars who ensured the Muslim world would be acquainted with Greek philosophy (Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle) as well as the Roman physician, Galen. Following the Saracen conquests, this group eventually expanded to the new Abbasid capital, Baghdad; and established a presence in the great school at Nisibis. Thereafter, they spread medical knowledge throughout the realm…IN SYRIAC (though they likely also used Middle Persian).

Meanwhile, the Tanukhids were Eastern Christians who engaged in monasticism throughout the region, and were especially smitten with the apostle, Thomas. Queen Mavia, their most famous ruler (who was known at the time as the queen of the Saracens), had converted to Christianity in the late 4th century. Notably, she sought to adapt Abrahamic lore to the sensibilities of her constituents, thereby imbuing it with a distinctly Arab identity. Sure enough, it was Mavia who first coined the Arabs' identification as "ISHMAELITES". This Arab queen proved to be extremely influential in the region–a legacy that surely affected the the perceptions of Bedouins of the Hijaz onward through MoM's lifetime.

Suffice to say, the narrative tid-bits enumerated above wound up in Islam's holy book simply because they were part of the memetic ecosystem in which the burgeoning Mohammedan tradition coalesced. Such exigencies invariably affected the new Faith during its gestation period. There was no revelation; there was only adaptation. NONE of it came out of thin air.

We now know that all the above accounts are apocryphal; but medieval Arabian scriveners would not have known any better. They would not have known Greek; so they were primarily restricted to Syriac sources. The evidence bears this out: In every case, the material was lifted from sources that were uniquely SYRIAC. This common Syriac substrate tells us not only from whence Koranic material came, but also from whence it did NOT come (i.e. from sources that were unavailable in Syriac).

The raft of signature idiosyncrasies–and errancies–leaves the distinct mark of parochialism on Mohammedan lore. And not just ANY parochialism; but parochialism that existed in a Syriac-speaking milieu.

The present thesis is not an ambitious one. The only claim being made here is that everything that has been adumbrated in this essay would have been lifted from sources composed in the lingua franca of the region (Syriac) rather than from sources that were in other languages (e.g. Koine Greek, the language in which the canonical texts of the New Testament were first composed). The material then would have been coopted without those doing the coopting REALIZING that they were simply incorporating pre-fab errancies into their own lore (which they naturally took to be perfectly authentic).

Given all this, the incorporation of material of dubious provenance into a newfangled theology was virtually inevitable–glitches and all. {18} Such eventualities bely the eternality of Islam's holy book, revealing it to be as much an accident of history as, well, any other book of sacred lore.

It is not far-fetched to suppose that the meandering process of incorporation included misconceptions that were popular at the time. The "catch" is that the inclusion of the above material reveals the eminently terrestrial origins of the Koran; and its flagrant fallibility. {19} It brings to mind the professor who catches a student having cheated on a test based on the fact that a quirky mistake was also made by a neighbor in the class. The exact repetition of a peculiar glitch is a dead giveaway that cribbing occurred. It is no wonder that the Arabians who didn't to believe the "Recitations" to be genuine revelation were said to have rebuffed MoM by noting he was merely relaying fables of old (16:24). For that was, indeed, exactly what he would have been doing.

The point cannot be emphasized enough: Mohammedan lore was formulated within environs steeped in Abrahamic lore–much of it apocryphal–of a CERTAIN KIND: whatever had been propounded in Syriac. It should come as no surprise, then, that all this happened as it did; and that the resulting scripture bears all the marks of cooptation that we find.

But there is even more to the story. For we can also look at the overarching theological features that prevailed during the Faith's gestation period. Mohammedan lore, it turns out, coalesced in a climate shot through with a contentious debate over the nature of the Abrahamic deity. The issue: Trinitarian or not? (And if trinitarian, trinitarian in what sense?) THAT point of contention was the hot topic during Late Antiquity–and so was surely at the forefront of people's minds. This is demonstrated by the focal point of the earliest statement we have concerning the new Faith: the inscription on the Dome of the Rock from the last decade of the 7th century. The inscription seems peculiarly fixated on the Abrahamic deity NOT being a trinity.

The monomaniacal fixation on the Abrahamic deity not having any "partners" didn't come out of the blue. According to Ibn al-Kalbi, the trope "god has no partners" was lifted from a pre-Islamic "talbiyya"

[acclamation]: “O Allah, here I am. You have no partner save the one who is yours” (reference the beginning of his “Book of Idols”). The acclamation was amended thus: “O Allah, here I am. You have no partner.” It seems that this was a major point of contention that prompted the transition to the Mohammedan Faith. Hence peculiarly specific statements that wound up in the “Recitations” (supposedly from an eternal, celestial book) like 4:171: “Don’t say three! For your god is one god.”

In the frenetic enterprise to debunk Trinitarianism, it was inevitable that further misconceptions would be countenanced–as with the mistaken notion that the Holy Trinity is the Father (Abrahamic deity as godhead), son (Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ), and mother (Miriam as worldly mother of the Christ). In their eagerness to explicate how untenable Trinitarianism was (and that it was incommensurate with monotheism), the early Mohammedans jumped the shark (see item FIVE above), and assaulted a straw man.

It cannot be overstated that there was a tendentious discussion about the triune nature of the Abrahamic deity while MoM was coming of age. The (Syriac) Patriarch of Antioch from 581 to 591 (that is: from when MoM was 11 years old to when he was 21) was Peter of Raqqa, who participated in the heated debate about whether or not monophysitism was tri-theistic…causing quite a stir. This was certainly a hot topic as MoM was reaching adult-hood.

Another likely influence during the gestation period of Islam’s holy book were the (Syriac) writings of Jacob of Edessa, who flourished in the late 7th century. His immensely popular writings on the Bible (esp. the “Enchiridion” and “Book of Treasures”) likely molded impressions of Judeo-Christian scripture that ended up being espoused by the earliest Mohammedans. Also circulating at the time was the (Syriac) “Book of Hierotheus on the Hidden Mysteries of the House of God” by Stephen Bar Sudhaile (late 5th century), likely very influential when the “Recitations” were being compiled. There was even the (Syriac) “Book of Perfection” by Sahdona of Halmon, who was a contemporary of MoM. We could go on and on.

AN EXPLORATION OF EXTA-KORANIC EVIDENCE:

Evidence for the appropriation of Syriac material is not limited to Islam’s holy book. Indeed, evidence for the Syriac origins of Islamic tenets is also rife in non-Koranic material. This is exactly what we would expect if the “Recitations” were being compiled concomitantly with the rest of Islam’s scriptures. As it turns out, meta-Koranic lore is suffused with reified dogmas from antecedent Syriac lore. There are numerable examples of this. If I had to make a TOP TEN list of the most glaring, it would be as follows:

Exhibit A: The tale of the noble Assyrian vizier, Ahikar (later rendered in Arabic, “Haykar”) and his nemesis, Nadan / Nadab, was first introduced to Arabia via the (Syriac) ***“Me-Arath Gazze”*** [the aforementioned “Cave of Treasures”] by Ephrem of Nisibis in the 4th century. The apocryphal tale is a spin-off of material found in the (Judaic) ***“Book of Tobit”***. The “Cave of Treasures” proved to be quite momentous; as its stories made their way into post-Islamic Arabian folklore. This is in large part due to the fact that it was THE ONLY work that attended to the Abrahamic genealogy from Ishmael: a key feature that made it not just appealing, but profoundly useful to the Mohammedan cause. Subsequently, the title was rendered “Ma’arah al-Kanuz” in Garshuni texts (manuscripts composed in a precursor to CA using Syriac script). Eventually, some of the material even appeared in the famed medieval anthology, “Arabian Nights” (which was not of Arabian origin, as it lifted most of its material from Persian sources). Ephrem’s work also spawned the ***“Conflict Of Adam And Eve With Satan”***, which would later be rendered in CA; and would likewise prove to be influential in the development of Islamic lore. {24} Alas, the earliest Mohammedans assumed, wrongly, that the farcical tale of “Haykar” was an authentic part of the Abrahamic record. It wasn’t. It was a flight-of-fancy the origins of which lay with either Ephrem himself or his immediate community.

Exhibit B: The version of the parable of the "Workers In The Vineyard" found in Bukhari's Hadith (vol. 1, no. 533; vol. 3, no. 468-471; vol. 4, no. 665) seems to have been lifted from the "memre" [homilies] of the famed Syriac writer, Narsai of Ma'alta (d. 502 A.D.) rather than from the Gospel of Matthew.
The canonical (Koine Greek) version is about laborers negotiating with an employer–whereby the employer's obligation to uphold an agreement trumps the obligation to treat people equitably.
The Mohammedan version, however, is about god's prerogative to favor those of the in-group (i.e. the pious), who are shown to be more blessed. Sure enough, that was the message conveyed by Narsai in his (Syriac) homilies.

Exhibit C: The Ishmaelite variation on the Abrahamic Faith coalesced in a memetic habitat where strident millenarianism abounded. Hence the Mohammedan creed was formulated in a climate of roiling messianic fervor. {20} Koranic eschatology is testament to this fact. The book's emphasis on a cataclysmic End Times (replete with the literal resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgement) was nothing new.
The sensational blood-and-thunder eschaton propounded in the Koran and Hadith is attributable to the popularity of a tract known as "The Demonstrations" composed c. 337-345 by Aphrahat of Adiabene [Ashuristan]. Aphrahat was especially preoccupied with the apocalyptic ***"Book of Daniel"***, replete with overwrought depictions of the Last Day. {21} This morbid preoccupation with cataclysmic spectacles came to undergird Mohammedan eschatology.

While the Aramaic version of the Bible (i.e. the "Harklean" redaction) included the Book of Revelation, it is important to note that the Syriac versions (the "Diatessaron" and "Peshitta") did NOT. So the apocalyptic mayhem of the anti-Roman screed by John of Patmos (exclusively rendered in Koine Greek) would likely NOT have been the source of the Koran's ominous depiction of the End Days.
Unsurprisingly, Aphrahat's primary source for Biblical quotations was the (Syriac) "Diatessaron". {22}
Lo and behold, the Islamic depiction of the End Times is shorn of the anti-Roman propaganda that characterized the phantasmagoric ramblings of John of Patmos; and exhibits many of the signature features of the apocalyptic-ism found in Syriac sources.

Exhibit D: The tale of Sarah being brought before a king…who is then foiled by her…and who subsequently opts to give her Hagar in her place. It seems that the Islamic version of this tale (with a few added touches, like Abraham's three lies and the anointing of Hagar as the mother of the Ishmaelites) was likely adapted from the "Pirke" of Rabbi Eliezer (from between the 1st and 3rd century) and/or the "Book of Jasher" (from between the 3rd and 5th century) and/or the "Genesis Rabbah" (from the 4th or 5th century). To ensure that the tale had the proper Mohammedan pedigree, it was retroactively attributed to Abu Hurayrah, thereby eliding its Syriac origins.

Exhibit E: Various discrepancies occur in Mohammedan lore that ALSO occur in the Syriac Bible: the ***"Peshitta"***. For example, the Ark of the Covenant was returned to Israel after (rather than before) Saul was anointed king. Also: Saul rather than Gideon tested his followers by having them drink from the Jordan river.

Exhibit F: The famed Syriac evangelist, Simeon Stylites, exercised profound influence on the Arabs (read: the Nabataeans) during the 5th century. Among other things, he was known for persuading Bedouins–who came to see him in large crowds–to smash their idols. This should sound familiar.

Exhibit G: The legend of "Sargis Bahira" (which was later rendered in Arabic) incorporated many of the apocalyptic themes of the aforementioned Syriac "Pseudo-Methodius" into the story of MoM's encounter with a Syriac monk ("Bahira") during his formative years. Most notable is the claim that this monk noticed a large birthmark on the prophet's back; and saw it as a harbinger of prophecy-fulfillment. This anecdote was recounted in Muslim's Hadith (no. 2344 and 2346).

Exhibit H: As mentioned earlier, the Syriac "Mor Gabriel" monastery of Tur Abdin in Nineveh (at the time, known as Oshroene) was built c. 397 at the behest of Mor Samuel. The (Syriac) legend surrounding the monastery should sound very familiar. One night, Samuel was visited by the arch-angel, Gabriel…who delivered a message from god: He was to conduct a ministry from that location.

Exhibit I: From whence did the designated year of the first revelation come? As it turned out, there was a major astronomical event that occurred in 610, tales of which made their way into Syriac and Persian folklore during the ensuing generations. The event involved what appeared to be the splitting of the crescent moon (what was, in reality, Mars appearing to break away from one end of the crescent). This was taken as an omen by the Persians, prompting a Sassanian attack on the Byzantines in Palestine.

In Islamic lore, the year occasioned an attack by those in Yemen on the Meccans…with elephants. The fabled "Battle of the Elephant" (retold as an Aksumite incursion on Mecca that occurred around the year MoM was said to have been born) was lifted from the Second Book of Maccabees, which recounted the Seleucid attack on the Levant. The Seleucids used elephants, just like their Persian forebears. Two things to note about this fabled battle, as recounted in Islamic lore:

First: There were no elephants used in the deserts of the Hijaz (for obvious reasons). The mis-casting of elephants in southern Arabia is reflected by the title of Surah 105 in the Koran—a flub that reminds us of the farce on which much of Mohammedan lore is built.

Second: The leader of the (farcical) incursion was referred to as—no kidding—"Ma-H-M-D". (Tellingly, there was a "w" inserted between the "M" and "D".) Note that the prefix "Ma-" (one who is) was the Semitic precursor to the Arabic "Mu-". In the Islamic re-telling of this battle, the leader designated as "Mahamwd" was re-cast as the Sabaean leader ["negus"], Abraha. After all, he could not be referred to by the ancient Semitic moniker due to the fact that it was being re-purposed to serve as the PROPER name for the Seal of the Abrahamic prophets.

Exhibit J: Other hints of Islamic lore's Syriac provenance include the story of "Ab-i M-L-K" and the basket of figs, which was recounted in the (Syriac) ***"Last Words Of Baruch"*** as well as in the (Syriac) ***"Cave Of Treasures"***. (Ab-i M-L-K can mean either "father of the king" or "father is the king"; and is typically rendered "Abimelek" / "Abimelech". It was a generic moniker for cynosures in Canaan–whether Philistine, Egyptian, Jebusite, Amorite, or Hebrew. The CA rendering would be "Abu Malek".)

There are myriad other examples. Manuscripts of the (Syriac) ***"Book of Protection"*** include illustrations of the angel, Gabriel, on a flying white horse. In the tale of the Mi'raj (the "Night Journey" of MoM to heaven), it was MoM himself who rode the winged steed ("Buraq"); and was accompanied by "Jabril".

All this cribbing is hard not to notice.

In addition to all this, there are various lexical clues from which we can infer Syriac origins. For example, in the Koran, Christians are referred to as "Nasara": a variation on the Syriac "Nasraye". There was no other language in which "Christians" were labeled in this way (i.e. as "Nazarenes"). Meanwhile, Islamic tales of spirits lurking about ("djinn") comes from the Nabataean Syriac "ginnaye". (I provide an extensive enumeration of the Syriac lexicon found within Islamic scripture in my essay on "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Verse".)

Recall that MoM (who, it cannot be reiterated enough, would have spoken a Hijazi dialect of Syriac) would not have read any of the extant source-material himself, as both he and his target audience were illiterate (a fact to which 62:2 attests). The material enumerated above would have been conveyed to him orally…IN SYRIAC. But HOW, exactly? Let's look at the record.

Ibn Hisham's recension of Ibn Ishaq's biography relays the fact that MoM used to regularly go to "Marwa" (a hill on the outskirts of Mecca) and sit with a young Christian slave-boy named "Jabr", who hailed from the Banu Hadrami (that is: from Hadhramaut in southern Arabia–a people referred to as Qahtanites in the Hebrew Bible, where both Judaism and Christianity were prevalent). {1} Ibn Ishaq himself noted that those conversations served as a primary source of MoM's knowledge of Abrahamic lore. This fact is obliquely alluded to in the Koran (16:103).

Indeed, Islam's holy book attests to the fact that MoM gained knowledge of Abrahamic lore from OTHER PEOPLE–namely other "People of the Book" who were relaying the tales to him orally, IN PERSON. 25:5 tells us: They say "It is just fables of the ancients, which he has had written down. They are dictated to him morning and evening." The next verse exhorts the audience to reject this explanation, insisting instead that MoM got his information exclusively via revelation. This entreaty comes off as special pleading. We then encounter even MORE special pleading in 87:18-19. The "don't believe the rumors; there's nothing to see here" protestation is, to put it mildly, suspect…if not downright incriminating. As Queen Gertrude would have said, "Thou doth protest too much" (ref. Shakespeare's "Hamlet").

It is quite telling that the Koran pleads that it is not a rehashing of fables told by the authors' Bedouin forebears. Moreover, the book is suspiciously adamant that its contents were not lifted from extant poetry. (The pleading is incessant. See for yourself. Refer to 6:25, 8:31, 25:4-6, 36:69, 46:17, 52:30, 68:15, 69:41, and 83:13.)

We shouldn't be surprise, then, that it eventually came to light that some of the material was taken from the 6th-century poet, Imru al-Qays [Junduh] ibn Hujr of the Banu Kindah. Imru al-Qays was an Arab Christian who served in the court of Ghassanid prince Al-Harish ibn Jabalah; and–as it turns out–was fond of writing about the Day of Judgement. His verses were ripe for the picking; and so it went.

We might also note that the impresarios of Mohammedan lore were fans of the writings of Umaiya [alt. Umayya] ibn Abi as-Salt of Ta'if–a contemporary Qurayshi who composed poetry about Biblical legends, as recounted by Ibn Kathir. His background seems to have been of the Banu Khuza'a, who were descendants of the Azd of Ma'rib…who worshipped a Sabaean moon-god named "Al-Maqah" and made pilgrimages to his temple. As it so happened, Ta'if was a place where people worshipped "Allat"…who was considered by many to be the feminine counterpart of the Semitic god, "El" (as attested in Hismaic / Safaitic and Palmyrene / Nabataean inscriptions).

Most tellingly of all are accounts of "Bahira" (mentioned above), a Christian monk who is said to have met with the adolescent MoM; and–so the story goes–foretold of the young Qurayshi's role in championing the Abrahamic Faith. The account of this propitious encounter is most well-known from the writings of Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari. However, it was also attested in the (Syriac) writings of John of Damascus–who, in his "Peri Ereseon" / "De Haeresibus" from the early 8th century, stated that MoM

“having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments, and…having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy” (ch. 101).

Recall that Arianism was the most prominent of ANTI-Trinitarian sects; so it surely would have resonated with anyone suspicious of Nicene Christianity’s ostensive flouting of monotheism. Scholars now concur that the monk (“Bahira”) was most likely the Arian / Nestorian (read: Syriac-speaking) cleric, Sergius (who would have ALSO downplayed the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth). It is no surprise, then, that John of Damascus considered the material as heretical…even as such material would have been embraced by the nascent “Last Prophet”. The “catch”, of course, is that MoM would have had to have heard all of Sergius’ discourse IN SYRIAC; because THAT is the language that Sergius spoke. (!) For more on this, see B. Roggema’s “The legend of Sergius ‘Bahira’: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptics In Response to Islam” (2009).

Even according to the most vaunted Hadith collections (those of Bukhari and of Muslim), it is clear that Syriac Christianity–and thus the Syriac language–was not uncommon in MoM’s own tribe. The cousin of MoM’s first wife (Khadijah) was an esteemed (Syriac) Ebionite / Nestorian preacher: Waraka ibn Nawfal (ref. Ibn Ishaq’s “Sirat Rasul Allah”). Both Kadijah and MoM held Waraka in very high regard, and surely had many conversations with him. It is an odd irony, then, that–according to Mohammedan lore–it was Waraka who first persuaded MoM to embrace his role as messenger of the Abrahamic deity. (See Bukhari’s Hadith 1/1/3, 4/55/605, and 9/87/111; as well as Muslim’s Hadith vol. 1, no. 301.)

It is quite likely that Waraka exercised significant influence over MoM’s understanding of Abrahamic lore. For the aforementioned Ebionites repudiated the Trinitarian conception of the Abrahamic deity. Consequently, of all Christian accounts, the Quraysh would have likely been most familiar with polemic that inveighed against the Nicene treatment of Jesus of Nazareth: the Christology propounded by the Romans pursuant to the Council of Nicaea (and the perfidious influence of Athanasius of Alexandria). The Ebionites’ opposition to Nicene Christiantiy is attested in the “Panarion” by Epiphanius of Salamis. In fact, MoM likely would have heard NOTHING BUT denunciations of–and compelling arguments against–Trinitarian theology, and how the Roman Church’s take on Abrahamic lore was a downright scandal (to wit: patently antithetical to monotheism). Nestorianism would have therefore held some appeal —as the creed was in Syriac, and it was monophysite—a departure from the dyophysitism of the Orthodox Church (the Christianity of the Byzantines).

To reiterate: By MoM’s lifetime, Syriac proselytes had become especially disillusioned with Roman orthodoxy (esp. after the Council of Chalcedon c. 451); and likely ROUTINELY assailed it in their perorations across the Middle East, pointing out all its errancies in their liturgy. The early Mohammedans would have understood Trinitarianism to be a betrayal of the original Abrahamic theology (and, thus, antithetical to monotheism).

This is not to say that Mohammedan lore lifted ALL of its material from Syriac sources. Indeed, some tidbits came from Persian literature–as the Sassanid Empire was directly to the northeast of Arabia (and influenced Arab culture, especially via the Lakhmids of Hir[t]a). One of the most obvious examples of this is the fabled “Night Journey” of Mohammed. As mentioned earlier (but it’s worth repeating here): T he “Mi’raj” was an adaptation of a fantastical tale found in the “Arda Wiraz Namag” [Book of Viraf the Just / Righteous], in which a Zoroastrian prophet (Viraf) is whisked away on a Dream Journey into the Next World, where he meets angels (e.g. Atar) and past prophets (e.g. Sraosha); and is then taken to hell to witness the torment of the damned. Finally, the prophet is notified by the godhead (Ahura Mazda) that Zoroastrianism is the one true Faith; and so the only way to salvation. The Mohammedan version of the tale is, of course, almost an exact replica of this plot-line.

It is reasonable to assume that the Sassanians promulgated the fantastical tale of Viraf, which would have been rendered in Pahlavi at the time. Several Syriac writers composed texts in both Pahlavi and Syriac; so

we know there was translation between the two literatures; and thus a regular exchange of folklore. The most notable of such writers was “Mar” Aba of Asorestan (a.k.a. “Abba The Great”), who converted from Zoroastrianism to Nestorian Christianity, and traveled widely in the 6th century. (He died 28 years before MoM was said to have been born.)

Bedouin pagans of the Dark Ages appropriated antecedent deities. For example, “Azizan” / “Azizos” was the Arabian equivalent of Mars. The goddess “Dhat-Zuhran” was associated with Aphrodite (alt. the Roman goddess, Venus). Nabataean equivalents proliferated (especially in Petra): “Allat” was equated with Athena; while “Al-Uzza” was equated with Aphrodite / Venus (and was likely an analogue of the Egyptian goddess, Isis). Al-Uzza had a cubic shrine (“kaaba”) dedicated to her at Nakhla.

Either of these Arab goddesses may have been inspired by the Semitic goddess, “Elat” (consort of the Semitic godhead, “El”), who was equivalent to the Ugaritic goddess, “Atirat”. Atirat was a variation on the Akkadian goddess “Ashratu[m]”, who was herself based on the Sumerian goddess “Asherah” (consort of Anu). The Hittites called her “Asherdu[s]”. (She seems to have been conflated with the Phoenician goddess, “Ashtarte”, based on the Assyrian / Akkadian “Ishtar”, whom the Greeks called “Astarte”.) It is interesting that the authors of the “Recitations” were preoccupied with this particular goddess; as she held sway in Nabataea, and possibly as far south as the mountain village of Ta’if.

Meanwhile, “Dushara” (Romanized as “Dusares”) was seen as the equivalent of the Roman god, Zeus; and might also be understood as a Nabataean instantiation of the Sumerian god, Ninhursag. As it turns out, Dushara was the son of a (virgin) mother-goddess, who’s name was “Kaabu”. (!)

The THEME of certain deities was also recycled. The godhead of the pre-Islamic Hijazis was the moon-god, “Hubal”–probably a correlate of the Palmyrene (Syriac) moon-god, Aglibol; counterpart of the sun-god, Malak-bel. This continued a long genealogy that began with the Sumerian moon-god, Nanna…who inspired the Semitic moon-god, “Sin” (associated with the Lord of Wisdom, “En-zu”), who–it turns out–was worshipped in southern Arabia by the Qahtanites, Hadhramites / Himyarites, and Minaeans. Hence the earlier Kaaba in Yemen (see my essay: “Mecca And Its Cube”).

Hubal’s consort was the goddess “Man[aw]at”, who was worshipped by the Khazraj and the Quraysh. She was likely inspired by the Canaanite / Phoenician goddess, Asherah / Athirat / As[h]tart / Ishtar (Greek: “Astarte”); who was an analogue of the Greek goddess, Nemesis / Adrasteia. (She was alternately referred to as “Menitu” by pre-Islamic Arabians.) Allat, Al-Uzza, and Manat were considered the three “gharaniq”—as stipulated in the (rescinded) verses in chapter 53 of the Koran (since derided as the “Satanic verses”; see Appendix 5 of my essay, “Genesis Of A Holy Book”).

The preponderance of memes that the Mohammedans adopted were from Syriac Christianity; but what of Judaism’s influence? Already mentioned was material from the Targums; but there were several other instances of cultural appropriation. For example, in Islamic tradition, auspicious occasions seem to have been variations on Judaic holidays:

- Ras as-Sana (the lunar new year): from Rosh Hashanah
- Yawm Ashura (a Shiite day of remembrance): from Yom Kippur (a day of atonement)
- Laylat al-Bara’at (Night of Salvation): from Pesa[c]h (Passover)
- Eid al-Fitr (the breaking of the fast): from Serfirat ha-Omer (a harvest celebration)

Parallel practices also exist—notably: circumcision and the proscription of consuming pork. There are even some Islamic dogmas that parallel Judaic dogmas—as with the peculiar belief that the coccyx (“luz” in Hebrew; “ajbu al-thanab” in Arabic) is the anatomical origin of homo sapiens.

The appropriation of Judaica can be found in some legends about Jewish prophets that would have circulated throughout Muslim world. In "The Formation of Islam" (p. 95), Jonathan Berkey notes that "the Jewish convert, Ka'b al-Ahbar is routinely cited as [someone who is] responsible for the introduction of pious lore about the Hebrew prophets–legends that the Muslim tradition came to know as the [oft-derided] 'Isra'iliyyat'."

The resulting creed, then, can be accounted for by syncretism–culling material from BOTH Pahlavi sources AND Syriac sources. But wait. Would it have been possible to incorporate elements of Persian myth (Zoroastrianism) and Syriac myth (Christianity) in tandem? To answer this, we might ask: Would these cultures have intermingled in a way that may have provided readily-available source-material for the (Syriac-speaking) Mohammedans?

As it turns out: yes. For evidence of the influence of Persian lore, note the Zoroastrian apocalyptic literature that was circulating at the time–most notably the "Zand-i Wahman Yasm" (a.k.a. "Bahman Yasht"). This is further evidenced by the PAHLAVI Psalter, a book of Psalms from the 7th century that was based on the SYRIAC writings of "Mar" Aba "the Great" from the 6th century. It makes sense that Syriac-speakers of northern Arabia would have been familiar with Pahlavi, as the (Arab) Lakhmids were (Persian) Sassanid vassals…who were CHRISTIAN and who's native language was Syriac. Indeed, the history of Syriac (i.e. Nestorian) Christianity in Persia dated back to the late 5th century, when the Sassanians permitted Babai of Seleucia [Ctesiphon] to proselytize in the the region.

Also in the 7th century (around MoM's lifetime), the Nestorian Psalter [Book of Psalms] was composed in Syriac; and then translated by those in the region NOT into CA, but into…PAHLAVI. How long did this linguistic / memetic nexus endure? Behold the "Frahang-i Pahlavig": a 9th-century manuscript that exhibits the intermingling of Syriac and Pahlavi. The book is effectively a Persian glossary of Syrio-Aramaic ideograms. Funny how, by that time, nobody in the region saw fit to produce such a glossary for CA!

This only makes sense if CA was not yet the lingua franca of the region. (If CA had been seen as a liturgical language, it surely would have been THE FIRST language in which important tracts would have been composed.) It seems that, at that point, there was not yet a reason to make a glossary for what would become Islam's liturgical language. This can only be explained by the fact that it had not yet developed into a full-fledged language.

What does all this tell us? First and foremost: The literary (read: memetic) confluence of (Nestorian) Christian and (Zoroastrian) Persian lore demonstrates that memes were being transmitted (and thus translated) between Syriac and Pahlavi material during the time that the Koran–and later, Hadith–were being collated; which means that lore was also being commuted across cultures. This memetic transference also demonstrates that even as late as the 9th century, post-Islamic Persians were STILL primarily concerned with Syriac (if not Pahlavi), NOT with the newly-developed CA. Indeed, at that time, there were no equivalent glossaries for CA terms by Persians. (!) I explore the hybridization of Syriac and Persian in my essay on "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text", specifically as it pertains to the portrayal of heaven in Islamic theology.

This cross-pollination of sacred lore also comports with the evidence that CA came from Syriac primarily via the Nabataeans and Tanukhids (Arabs who spoke Syriac)…and even via Lakhmid influence (as attested by Lakhmid inscriptions at Hir[t]a / Al-Hirah and Kufa). As mentioned, the Lakhmids were vassals of the (Persian) Sassanids; and so would have used some combination of Syriac and Pahlavi. So all this makes perfect sense.

Memetic facsimiles abound in sacred lore. {23} But for now, it should suffice to note that a raft of risible misconceptions proliferated around the Middle East during the Dark Ages. Such apocrypha were ubiquitous, not queer errancies propounded at the fringe. It is little wonder, then, that some of these tales made their way into the sacred scriptures of a religion that was created there. Moreover, the (re-)emergence of glaring errancies in Islamic scripture, reflecting identical errancies found in previous material, is a telltale sign that the resulting scripture was drawn from (fallible) worldly sources.

Let's inquire further: What other Syriac sources may have provided the Ishmaelites with fodder for their new Faith? The non-canonical "Gospel of Thomas" sheds further light on the sorts of material that likely proliferated in the Middle East during Late Antiquity. As it turns out, this Gospel includes NEITHER Jesus' crucifixion NOR his resurrection. NOR does it countenance a Christological (i.e. Pauline) conceptualization of Jesus. This turns out to be a foreshadowing of Mohammedan views. Textual analyses have revealed that this prominent "gnostic" Gospel was originally rendered in Syriac. Not coincidentally, it exhibits numerous parallels with Tatian's (Syriac) "Diatessaron". And some of its material even overlaps with the "Psalms of Thom[as]", which was ALSO rendered in Syriac.

Most notable here is the "Hymn of the Pearl"–which, it so happened, also turned up in Mandaean–and even Manichaean–folklore. Mandaeans were considered "People of the Book" in the Koran; and referred to approvingly as the "Sabi'un"; alt. "Sabians". They spoke their own dialect of Syriac–typically referred to as "Mandaic"; though they eventually adopted "Toroyo" as well. This illustrates the fact that such material was commuting from one realm of folklore (within the Syriac-speaking world) to another. And so we see that Mohammedism was not the ONLY burgeoning Faith that appropriated antecedent Syriac lore; it was happening with other burgeoning religions as well.

We find, then, that there is nothing mysterious about the regurgitation of CERTAIN PARTS of Abrahamic lore in Mohammedan lore. It is quite likely that an aspiring prophet in 7th-century Hijaz would have REGULARLY heard such material (i.e. whatever was available in Syriac) while growing up in Mecca…or in Petra…or wherever he may have lived in the region. For it was primarily in terms of the Syriac sources that Arabians first became acquainted with Judeo-Christian materials. {25} It could not have been otherwise, as SYRIAC was the language they spoke.

It's worth bearing in mind that memetic appropriation is not unique to Islam. Cynthia Chapman (of Oberlin College) has addressed the re-purposing of ancient tales by those who wrote the Hebrew Bible. For instance, when we read in Akkadian cuneiform that the Babylonian sun-god, Shamash gave the Amorite king, Hammurabi the divine laws, we know that we have encountered a precursor to the Mosaic legend of Sinai. (For more on the incidence of divine law being handed down to prophets on mountain-tops, see part 1 of my essay on "Mythemes".) Chapman's insight is not earth-shattering. We find memetic appropriation in many parts of Abrahamic lore—from tales of the Flood lifted from the Epic of Gilgamesh to the tale of Moses' beginnings lifted from the hagiography of Sargon of Akkad. So folkloric re-purposing should not come as a big surprise when it comes to Mohammedan lore.

Alas, there is an abiding reticence to attribute one's own tradition's (regurgitated) material to others' material from days of old; as there is an urge to fashion it as resplendently novel. Indeed, ALL traditions are, by nature, obliged to insist: "This is not derived from exogenous sources; it is unique to us. It is therefore authentic. Consequently, it must be treated as unimpeachable." To NOT make such an assertion is to implicitly concede that the material is, indeed, derivative; thereby bringing into question the credence of the claims being made.

The point, then, is to pass the consecrated material off as ORIGINAL, and thus as authoritative. This is all

the more imperative when one is dealing with religious tenets. Admitting that key elements of a creed are derivative only serves to challenge their authenticity, thereby undermining their status as inveterate—and thus inviolable. Considering this, the staunch resistance to the elucidations in the present essay is understandable. It shatters a necessary illusion. Sanctified dogmas are thus revealed to be spurious.

To reiterate: As we assay the origins of Islamic lore, we should bear in mind that there is nothing new about adopting material from antecedent sources. We encounter the phenomenon in ALL THREE major Abrahamic religions (as well as in the minor off-shoots: Manichaeism, Sikhism, Druze, and Baha'i)—a matter that I explore at length in my essays on Mythemes.

Bottom line: Arabian bedouins (i.e. MoM's target audience) were already familiar with Abrahamic lore by the time MoM would have undertaken his ministry; and certainly when the "Recitations" were actually composed. As F.E. Peters put it in the final remarks of his work, "Mohammed And The Origins Of Islam": "We can only conclude that Muhammad's audiences were not hearing these stories for the first time, as [Koran 25:5] suggests."

Syriac sources abounded in the region during Late Antiquity. In our survey thus far, we have seen the influence of ten key figures:

- Alcibiades of Apameia and the "amora", Shimon ben Lakish[a] of Bosra (a.k.a. "Reish Lakish") **(3rd century)**
- Aphrahat of Adiabene [Ashuristan] **(late 3rd / early 4th century)**
- Ephrem of Nisibus [primarily associated with Edessa] **(4th century)**
- Epiphanius of Salamis **(late 4th century)**
- Narsai of Ma'alta (a.k.a. "Narses"), affiliated with the schools of Edessa and Nisibis **(5th century)**
- Jacob of Serug **(early 6th century)**
- Adi ibn Zayd of Al-Hirah; "Abraham the Great" of Kashkar; and "Babai [Aba] the Great" of Beth Zabdai [Ashuristan] **(6th century)**

Several other Syriac writers would have likely had an influence on the strains of Abrahamic lore that proliferated in the Middle East–consequently molding Mohammedan lore during its embryonic stages. Here are FIFTY more prominent Syriac expositors who were likely influential in the region during the relevant period:

- **1st century:** Mar[a] bar Serapion of Samosata.
- **Late 1st / early 2nd century:** the Chaldean proselyte, "Mar" Addai of Edessa / Nisibis (a.k.a. "[Th]Addeus"); his student, Palut of Nineveh / Nisibis (a.k.a. "Mari"); and Ignatius of Antioch.
- **2nd century:** the satirist, Lucian of Samosata and the neo-Platonist, Numenius of Apameia.
- **Late 2nd / early 3rd century:** Bar Daisan of Edessa (rendered "Bardesanes" in Latin; "Ibn Daisan" in Arabic).
- **3rd century:** Saul of Samosata.
- **Late 3rd / early 4th century:** Jacob of Nisibis and the neo-Platonist, Iamblichus of Qinnasrin / Apameia.
- **4th century:** Cyrillona of Khalkis [alt. "Kyrillos"]; Diodore of Antioch / Tarsus; the originator of monasticism at Nisibis, "Mar" Awgin of Klysma; and the founder of the Syriac library on Mount Alfaf in Nineveh, "Mar" Mattai.
- **Late 4th / early 5th century:** Nestorius of Germanikeia [Mar'ash] and Theodoret of Antioch / Mopsuestia.

- **5th century:** Isaac of Antioch; “Mar” Theodoret of Cyrrhus; Stephan bar Sudhaile of Edessa; Ibas of Edessa; “Mar” Dadisho of Ctesiphon; Bar Sawma of Nisibis (who convened the Synod at Beth Lapat c. 484, and was affiliated with Beth Edrei on the Yarmuk River in Bashan); and Band Balai of Aleppo.
- **Late 5th / early 6th century:** Aksenaya [alt. “Xenaias”] of Beth Garmai (a.k.a. “Philoxenus of Mabbug”); Yohannan bar Aphtonia of Edessa; and Orthodox Christian, Simeon of Beth Arsham [Cilicia] (a.k.a. “Simeon Stylites”).
- **6th century:** Severus “the Great” of Pisidia [alt. Gaza] (patriarch of Antioch); Sergius of Resh-Aina; Mshiha Zkha of Adiabene; Yakub bar Addai of Constantina [Romanized to “Jacob Baradaeus”]; Qiyore [Cyrus] of Edessa; and Yohannan of Amida (a.k.a. “John of Ephesus”).
- **Late 6th / early 7th century:** Paul of Tella (who composed the Syriac version of Origen’s “Hexapla” c. 617); mono-thelitist / mono-energist Patriarch, Sergios of Constantinople; “Rabban” “Mar” Hormizd of Alkosh; and Severus Sebokht of Nisibis. NOTE: All four of these men would have been contemporaries of MoM.
- **7th century:** Marutha of Tagrit [Tikrit] (who was affiliated with the monastery at Beth Nuhadra, near Nineveh); Isaac of Nineveh; Abda of Hira[h]; Yuhanon III of Antioch (a.k.a. “John of the Sedre”, who was affiliated with the monastery of Eusebona); Yohannan “Saba” of Dalyatha; and Yohannan [John] bar Penkaye. {26}
- **Late 7th / early 8th century:** Yakub [Jacob] of Edessa; Yohannan of Damascus (a.k.a. “John Damascene”); Yohannan of Hdatta (a.k.a. “John of Daylam”); and George of the Arabs.
- **8th century:** Joseph Hazzaya of Nimrud and Theophilus of Edessa.
- **Late 8th / early 9th century:** Timataos of Hadyab (a.k.a. “Timothy of Adiabene”) and Theodoret bar Konai of Beth Garmai [Kirkuk]. {27}

Virtually all of these men were fastidious when it came to learning the important languages of the Middle East—studying not only the precursor to their own language (Syriac), Aramaic, but the other prominent languages of the Middle East (notably: Middle Persian and Koine Greek). Yet NONE were known to have studied a language known as “Arabic”. Why not? Because such a language did not yet exist. Had CA already been established, it would have been bizarre that NONE of these men ever mentioned having to deal with it.

It’s also worth noting the Syriac writers who were prominent in the **9th century**; as they would have been influential during the time the Hadith were being composed. Here are eight: Moshe [Moses] bar Kepha [Cephas] of Tagrit [Tikrit]; Dionysius of Tel Mahre; “Mar” Ishodad of Merv; John of Dara; Isho bar Nun of Nineveh; Anton [Anthony] of Tagrit [Tikrit]; Nonos of Nisibis; and Thomas of Marga (a.k.a. “the Great Zab”).

Another person of note is Sophronius of Damascus, a Syriac figure who would have been a contemporary of MoM (insofar as MoM existed). He moved to Egypt, then Constantinople, then Jerusalem, and—pursuant to his long tutelage under John Moschos of Damascus—adopted Hellenic (Byzantine) Christianity. Consequently, he learned Greek and saw things from the Chalcedonian (Orthodox Christian) point of view. Sophronius eventually became the Patriarch of Jerusalem—befriending the Saracen leader, Umar (touted as the second caliph) in the advent of the Arab (Mohammedan) conquest of Palestine. He wrote extensively on theological matters, so he gives us a window into the religious climate of the Middle East at the time. Notably, he referenced a “sacred cube” that he visited on his way to see the “Anastasis” (church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem). He was intrigued by this (rather peculiar) divine sanctuary…which he came across on a route that did NOT include the Arabian peninsula. (The sacred cube of which he spoke was likely the “Kaabu” in Petra; a matter I explore in my essay on “The Meccan Cube”.)

There are other clues pointing to the prevalence of Syriac in the region during the relevant period. The Palestinian Arian, Eusebius of Caesarea wrote his “Church History” in Koine Greek in the early 4th century; but even that was soon translated into Syriac. This would not have been done had there not been a

pressing need for the work to be rendered in that particular language. (Note, there was NO OTHER language that those in the region found the need to translate it into.)

The Acts Of Thomas from the 4th century propounded the heterodox theology, Docetism, which brought into question the divinity of the person, JoN. Adherents conjectured that the Messiah's bodily existence was mere semblance. This work was attributed to Epiphanius of Salamis; yet was later associated with "Mar" Addai (and/or his student, Mari); and seems to have originated at Edessa. Thus, the rejection of JoN as DIVINE was not unknown in the Middle East. Such arguments would have held sway over those who wanted to distance themselves from Nicene Christianity and its dubious version of monotheism.

Trinitarianism would have been inextricably linked with paganism by the Mohammedans, as there were several pre-Islamic triads in various (pagan) Arabian theologies. For example, the Qedarites in northern Arabia worshipped a moon god (Ruda), a sun god (Nuha), and a goddess associated with Venus (Atarsa-ma'in; alt. "Attar" / "Athtar[t]"). {31} Meanwhile, the Palmyrene Arabs worshipped the sky-god, Baal Shamin (their version of Hadad); the moon-god, Aglibol; and the sun-god, Malak-Bel [king-lord]. And the denizens of southern Arabia (esp. at Ma'in) worshipped a similar triad: Wadd / Sin, Yam, and Astarte. (I enumerate other pre-Islamic trinities that existed in the region in my essay, "Mythemes II".) Considering this, it would have been surprising had there NOT been an aversion to Trinitarianism amongst (nascent) monotheists the region. For Arabs, triads were associated with pagan theology.

After ***The Acts Of Thomas***, the use of Syriac for Abrahamic lore continued. Later in the 4th century, Frumentius of Tyre brought Christianity to the kingdom of Aksum in Abyssinia, transcribing the Bible into Ge'ez–a script that was derived from Old South Arabian. To be clear: Scribes in the region did not render the Old Testament in CA. This only makes sense if CA did not yet exist; for if it had, there would have been a pressing need for scribes to use it when circulating scripture.

It is even possible that "Against The Christians" by the 3rd-century Neoplatonist, Porphyry of Tyre was eventually translated into Syriac; especially after the book was banned–and ordered destroyed–by Emperor Theodosius II in the 5th century. By the end of the 5th century, the Nestorian proselyte, Babai of Seleucia [Ctesiphon] was convening councils in Sassanian Persia. The proceedings were conducted IN SYRIAC.

The question remains: When we consider the proselytization of these (mostly Christian) Syriac figures, what was the CONTENT? More to the point: Are there indications that what they said may have held sway during Mohammedan lore's gestation? As we've seen, the answer is incontrovertible: ***yes***.
The writings of such men DID have an impact on the perceptions of impressionable Arabians as they devised their own (Ishmaelite) brand of Abrahamic Faith.

Take, for example, Saul of Samosata. He promoted the anti-Trinitarian theology that was commonly known as "monarchianism" (based on the theory of "adoptionism"). Saul was a notable figurehead in the Middle East at the time (he served as the bishop of Antioch); so it is telling that he eschewed the Trinitarian conception of the Abrahamic deity that was so emblematic of the orthodox (Pauline) version of the Faith–the version of the Faith associated with the "Rumi" (the Byzantines). Indeed, Trinitarianism was a doctrine that Saul held in utter contempt; as he deemed it a form of tri-theism, and thus antithetical to genuine monotheism. Saul was eventually deemed a heretic by the developing Church for his strident anti-Trinitarian views.

Here's the clincher: Saul was given sanctuary by Zenobia, Arab Queen of Palmyra…in what was then the land of the Nabataeans–dubbed "Arabia Petraea" by the Romans. His hosts, the Palmyrenes, spoke a variation of Syriac; and used the (Nabataean) alphabet from which CA script was derived. His preaching surely held sway with the Levantine Arabs of the time. Surely, Saul's polemic denouncing Trinitarianism (as inimical to the Abrahamic legacy) would have made its way around the Middle East–IN SYRIAC–by MoM's day. This makes sense, as northern Hijazis of the 6th and 7th century were using the Nabataean

alphabet…which would morph into the precursor to CA script: Kufic.

Theodore of Antioch–who served as the bishop of Mopsuestia just over a century later–had devoted his entire career to the promotion of the anti-Trinitarian doctrine. His position became known as (the aforementioned) "Arianism". As we have seen from MoM's own encounters, Theodore's work ended up having profound reverberations in the region.

It is no wonder, then, that a strident repudiation of Trinitarian doctrine–and thus a rejection of the Nicene instantiation of Christology–turned out to be the focal point of the Ishmaelite movement. This is attested by the earliest surviving inscription of the new Faith: the passage found on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (purportedly made in the 690's). The inscription is written in a proto version of the nascent liturgical language: CA.

Unsurprisingly, the same fixation (the rebuke of Trinitarianism) can be found in the Koran–most notably in 4:171 and 5:73, in which we're told: "Say not three!" For a book that purports to be timeless, this admonition is suspicious in its specificity. Would a timeless message for all mankind (Native Americans with their totemism, Africans with their animism, Hindus with their heno-theism / polytheism, Buddhists with their pantheism, Shinto with their panentheism, et. al.) warrant such a stern rebuke of this particular point of contention?

The claim is that the Abrahamic deity's triune nature was asserted due to a infelicitous development–whereby the "Injil" of Jesus of Nazareth had been corrupted during the intervening centuries. Said corruption, the story goes, precipitated the fraudulent Trinitarian conceptualization of the Abrahamic deity that prevailed in Rome–pursuant to the Council of Nicaea and its further promulgation by its most ardent proponent, Athanasius of Alexandria, in the 4th century. Consequently, it would have seemed to be the main point of contention for the Syriac-speaking Middle East. And so it went that, so far as many audiences were concerned, the most urgent issue to address–in all the world–was the Pauline version of Christianity…as understood through a Syriac heuristic (spec. through the filter of the Judaic Targumim and Nestorian liturgy).

It was only natural that the new Ishmaelite version of the Abrahamic Faith saw itself as a rectification of an Abrahamic tradition that had gone egregiously awry (ref. 13:38). It makes perfect sense, then, that in its earliest days, the Mohammedan movement was most fixated on THAT PARTICULAR issue: the alleged irreconcilability of a triune deity with monotheism. The suspiciously specific–one might even say monomaniacal–focus on that singular issue.

Make no mistake: The adamant repudiation of Trinitarianism that was the hallmark of the new Mohammedan movement stands to reason. Be that as it may, in doing so, its proponents could not help but co-opt elements of the extant Abrahamic lore that it found amenable…even when those elements were demonstrably erroneous. It is the skein of ERRORS (spec. those that echo signature features of Syriac material to an uncanny degree) that is most revealing.

As Mohammedan lore coalesced over the centuries, nascent apocrypha gradually accreted…and eventually calcified. Much of this was the result of the lore of one Faith (clandestinely) appropriating hand-picked lore from other Faiths. It is important to recognize that this is not uncommon. Indeed, it has occurred in many places at many times.

Case in point: The medieval Christian legend of Barlaam and Josaphat. This fanciful tale was an obvious recycling of popular stories about Siddhartha Gautama of Lumpini (a.k.a. the "Buddha"), which proliferated throughout Christendom after the Georgian monk, Euthymius of Athos lifted it from an antecedent Manichaean adaptation in the early 11th century. Such memetic recycling is a reminder that nifty motifs are regularly coopted from other cultures–something that might be called "mytheme-milking".

One last question remains: What of Syriac writing FROM WITHIN ARABIA? As it turns out, there were several writers who hailed from the Arabian peninsula–stretching all the way to eastern Arabia (in what was known in Syriac as "Beth Qatraye" (now known as Qatar)–including Nestorian writers Dadisho, Gabriel, and Ahob from the 7th century (viz. around MoM's lifetime). There are even legends of the apostle, Thomas, ministering as far as Suqutra (alt. "Socotra"; an Island off the coast of Yemen). This accords with the archeological record, as texts composed in (Palmyrene / Nabataean) Syriac dating from the 3rd century have been discovered there. Moreover, the aforementioned Isaac of Nineveh was born in Beth Qatraye. This means that, during MoM's lifetime, Arabians were speaking Syriac even as far east as the Persian Gulf. (!)

It's worth noting that Islam's holy book was not the first mysterious tract that made its way across Arabia. The so-called "Emerald Tablet" (a.k.a. "Tabula Smaragdina"), later entitled "Kitab sirr al-Haliqa" ["Book of the Secret of Creation"], was a work of Hermetica originally composed by a writer from Anatolia: Balinas of Tyana. It dates to the early 8th century–that is: around the same time the Koran was being compiled. It was written in–you guessed it–Syriac. This is a prototypical example of supplicants trumpeting the divine origin of a book; as it was attributed (by ancient Egyptian Hermeticists of the time) to the quasi-mythical god-man "Hermes Trismegistus" of Memphis.

That this Syriac book was circulated in Arabia in the 8th century is further corroboration that SYRIAC was the lingua franca of the region; and that THAT is the language in which sacred texts of the time were composed / disseminated.

During the Middle Ages, there would be various programs of revisionist history that were implemented so as to legitimize the anti-Trinitarian theology that had come to prevail in the region (that is: the theology of the new Ishmaelite brand of Abrahamic monotheism). Part of this endeavor would surely have been the promulgation of the idea that EVERYTHING being claimed had come from "on high"–conveyed directly from the Abrahamic deity. Instead of blithely averring, "We finally figured everything out", the bold declaration was made: "GOD HAS DELIVERED HIS FINAL REVELATION"…thereby rendering all the other material that everyone else is reading obsolete (and, by implication, their doctrines null and void).

To conclude: Once we consider the incidence of the myriad idiosyncratic tid-bits that occur in BOTH antecedent Syriac sources AND Islamic scripture, the primary source of the latter becomes quite clear. That is: By noting the slew of signature tropes AND foibles in the Koran, it is incontrovertible that much of what we find in Mohammedan lore came predominantly from Syriac source-material, which ORIGINALLY contained those same signature tropes and foibles.

Before concluding, a few last thoughts. First, we might wonder what became of the Syriac-speaking communities from which the first Mohammedans lifted their catechism? While Chaldeans (Assyrian Christians and the Oriental Churches of the East) still exist, many of the oldest communities have been lost to history…some of them quite recently. There were Jewish and Christian Syriac communities in Barwar (northern Mesopotamia) until the early 20th century. (Their demise came from the Assyrian genocide during the First World War.)

It's also worth noting that, eventually, there WOULD be some influence from the Byzantines on the development of Islamic folklore. I explore the few linguistic influences (Greek lexemes that were adapted for CA) in my essay on "The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text". Some material was later inspired by Hellenic folklore—notably: The Captivity Of Dulic Ibrahim, which was simply a take-off on The Odyssey. This merely shows that cultural appropriation didn't just magically stop after the early gestation period of Islam; and there was no cosmic law that it could ONLY come from Syriac sources.

Another indication of the Koran's Syriac origins is in the phraseology ITSELF of the text. It is this that will be explored in the "The Syriac Origins Of The Koran", wherein I trace the development of CA vis a vis the extant language, Syriac. This will be done in order to ascertain the LINGUISTIC origins of Mohammedan lore, and of the Koran in particular.

As we've seen, the "Recitations" (what came to be the Koran) was originally just a bricolage of Syriac materials cobbled together as the need arose. Such materials were circulating throughout the Middle East during the relevant period, and was articulated in the lingua franca of the region. Most importantly, it served the purposes of those in power at the time.

It bears worth noting that there exists no manuscript of ANYTHING from the 7th or 8th century that was composed in CA. This should come as no surprise; as Syriac was the lingua franca of the Hijaz during MoM's lifetime–nay of the ENTIRE REGION until the 9th century. Consequently, it is THAT material, rather than the versions found in the canonical (i.e. Koine Greek) sources, that served as grist for the newfangled (Ishmaelite) creed. In this respect, the special pleading of the Koran about itself is revealing: "Surely, [what is recounted here can be found] in the most ancient scrolls; the scrolls of Abraham and Moses" (87:18-19). This was almost certainly referring to SYRIAC sources; not to Hebrew or Koine Greek sources–a fact that is made clear by what was and was NOT incorporated into the Mohammedan liturgy.

It is clear, then, that Islam did not emerge fully-formed from MoM's ministry. It underwent a gestation period; and existed in an embryonic form for many generations–gradually incorporating tid-bits as the occasion warranted–until the lore was formalized long after MoM's death.

In sum: The contents of the Koran belie its purportedly preternatural nature. It was all but inevitable that confabulations–and blunders–that were unique to Syriac liturgy were the confabulations–and blunders–that would end up in Islamic scripture. The conclusion here is unavoidable: Much of what we find in Islam's holy book points to SYRIAC sources, indicating that the "Recitations" were first spoken in that language. In my next essay, I will explore the evidence that Koranic text was, indeed, first rendered in Syriac; as CA did not yet exist.

FOOTNOTES:

{1 The Himyarites of southern Arabia were Jewish, Christian, and another form of monotheism known as Rahman-ism. Who was this godhead, Rahman? Unsurprisingly, he was a moon-god; and his name meant "The Merciful"…which turned out to be the most common appellation for the Koran's protagonist. As it so happens, the Himyarite language (Sabaic, language of the Sabaeans) was also Semitic–though it seems to have fallen out of use at some point around MoM's lifetime. But no matter: the moniker's ultimate origins were in Aramaic…which means it would have come to the region via Syriac intermediaries. For more on this subject, see Gordon Darnell Newby's "A History of Jews In Arabia From Ancient Times To Their Eclipse Under Islam", Michael Philip Penn's "Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World", Patricia Crone's "Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam", and the sources listed in footnote 13 below.}

{2 A clue that "The Way" was considered neo-Judaic by its earliest followers is that they were still referred to as (part of) "Israel"–as in Luke's "Acts of the Apostles" (2:22). The opening passage of the original Gospel (that of Mark) invokes premonitions from the Book of Isaiah. Later in that first chapter, we are told that Jesus of Nazareth even preached at a synagogue (at Capernaum).}

{3 "But wait," comes a retort. "Why would the Mohammedans have based their liturgical language on Syro-Aramaic when most of the Syriac sources were Christian–a religion with which the Mohammedans disagreed?" This would be analogous to a Romanian denying the Latin roots of his language because his Faith is (Koine-Greek-oriented) Eastern Orthodox rather than (Latin-oriented) Roman Catholic. Another version of this objection might be: "Why would the Mohammedans have derived their material from Syriac sources when those sources where Christian?" This would be like a Roman Catholic wondering how his religion, the liturgical language of which is Latin, derived its material from sources that had been composed in Koine Greek–which was the language of the heathens who worshipped the Olympian pantheon! There is nothing odd about any of this. Chinese Buddhists are Buddhist even though Classical Chinese had nothing to do with any of the Prakrit languages (and vice versa). They do not insist that therefore Siddhartha Gautama's native tongue must have been Chinese. The only comparison with the kind of Reality-denial we encounter in Islamic apologia is with hyper-dogmatic Jews who refuse to recognize that Abraham–insofar as he existed at all–would have spoken some variation of Ugaritic (the Semitic language of the Amorites), which predated their own liturgical language by over a millennium.}

{4 Note that the version of the Book of Esther that was translated into Coptic was not from the original Hebrew, but from the Koine Greek–which itself had discrepancies. When the Dalmatian (Illyrian) writer, Jerome of Stridon [Pannonia] composed the Latin Vulgate version c. 400, he incorporated tidbits from the Koine Greek version (the Septuagint) as he saw fit. As in most cases, subsequent versions were a bespoke melange of tid-bits–hand-picked to suit the didactic purposes of the time. Some of the narrative embellishments found in Islamic lore likely came from the Targum Sheni [Second], a Syriac elaboration of the Book of Esther that was riddled with apocrypha. Here's the kicker: In Muslim sources, the legendary Sabaean queen is often referred to as "Bilqis". Bilqis? Who's that? Well, THAT was the name of the figure to whom a temple IN YEMEN was affiliated: the Sabaean temple at Awwam, which was dedicated to the deity, "Al-Maqah". The site was also known as the "Mahram Bilqis" [sanctuary of Bilqis]…which explains why "Bilqis" may have come to be a stand-in moniker for the legendary "Malikah" of Saba. Tellingly, elsewhere, the queen is simply referred to as "the woman who was the queen of Saba"–indicating that early expositors were unaware of her given name…which explains why later scribes opted for "Bilqis".}

{5 For this, we can reference the Syriac writings of Ishodad of Merv from the 9th century. This Infancy Gospel seems to have derived much of its material from the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and the Infancy Gospel of James. Tellingly, the Syriac "Infancy Gospel" has often been re-labeled (read: MIS-labeled) the "ARABIC Infancy Gospel" so as to obfuscate the fact that the material existed at the time IN SYRIAC, not in CA; as CA had not yet been fully-developed. That Islamic apologists felt the need to engage in such obfuscation (when citing the source) reveals that there was a concerted effort to elide the fact that the material on which MoM (and the authors of the Koran) based their perorations was in Syriac (i.e. NOT in the liturgical language, which they deigned to assert was god's native tongue). The motivations here are obvious: Were these scribes NOT to do so, they would have had to concede that the language MoM spoke was, in fact, not CA. The implication of this would have been that their designated messenger could not have possibly been delivered revelations in CA.}

{6 The Mohammedan re-vamping of the Syriac legend of Alexander the Great included the spurious claim that he was Muslim. In the relevant Koranic passage (18:84-98), Alexander was not referred to by his actual name, but rather in the manner in which he happened to appear on coins that were in circulation at the time: as a man with horns. Hence the Koranic appellation "D[h]u" of "Qarnain" (rendered "Dhu'l-Qurnayn"). Again, we find that the Koran's authors' impression of things was limited to that of nescient Arabians in the Dark Ages–hardly a mark of sagacity, let alone of omniscience. Surely, had the author been all-knowing, he would have simply referenced this important historical figure by name. Another example of a naming foible is that of the prophet "i-D-R-S", who is assumed in conventional Islamic exegesis to be a reference to Enoch. However, it is more likely that the authors of the Koran were referring to a magical figure ("An-D-R-S") about whom they would have learned from the Syriac version of "The Romance of Alexander" (which had been rendered from the original Greek by the 3rd century A.D.) The Syriac version would have proliferated in the region over the course of the following centuries, on through MoM's lifetime. (Incidentally, "The Romance of Alexander" may have also been the source of the Koranic moniker for Alexander the Great: "Dhu'l-Qurnayn".) Again we must ask: If god had meant Enoch in this passage, why didn't he simply refer to him as "Enoch"? Upon further inspection, we find that it is unlikely that "i-D-R-S" was a reference to Enoch, as there ALREADY WAS a moniker for that particular prophet in CA: "Akhnuk". And if it had been an attempt to reference the Abrahamic patriarch, "Enos[h]", it would have been rendered "Anush" or "Yanish" in CA.The only alternative is the aforesaid character in the Syriac source. Interestingly, "An-D-R-S" may have well been an oblique reference to the mythic "Hermes Trismegistus" as found in the Syriac "Hermetica" during the same period–most notably in the "Tabula Smaragdina" [Emerald Tablet]…and, later, the "Book of Balinas the Wise [On The Causes]". We know this is a plausible explanation for the identity of "Idris" because the "Emerald Tablet" (along with the "Book of Balinas the Wise") was eventually rendered in CA. That it was rendered in CA means the material was seen as sufficiently important to Islamic expositors that it needed to be rendered in their religion's liturgical language. Sure enough: In the Koran (19:56-57), "Idris" [ibn Yard ibn Mahla'il] is considered the oldest Abrahamic prophet (after Adam). Who was he? The fabled "An-D-R-S" in Syriac sources.}

{7 This lurid leitmotif (men of Faith thrown into a fiery furnace by a despotic Babylonian ruler, only to emerge unscathed) is also found in the tale of Shadr-Ak[u], Mesha-Ak[u], and Abed-Nergal / Abed-Nabu (alt. "Shadrach", "Meshach", and "Abd-Negu")…who's names were rendered in Hebrew as Hanan-i-Yah, Misha-El, and Azar-i-Yah. (After all, a hero couldn't be named "servant of Nergal"!) This tale eventually made into the (Syriac) Book of Daniel (ref. chapter 3). The mistake of mistranslating "ur" as "fire" (and thus as "furnace") instead of "city" seems to have also occurred in Biblical references to an Egyptian "city of iron" as a FURNACE of iron (as a symbolic appellation for Egypt). In any case, the term eventually made its way into the Septuagint as "kaminos" (Koine Greek). Such mis-translation was not uncommon. A similar etymological flub occurred with "young maiden" (later rendered "virgin") and the forbidden "fruit" (later rendered "apple").}

{8 The Nicene version of Christianity was primarily based on Pauline theology (the version propounded by Saul of Tarsus), whereby Jesus of Nazareth was deemed the son of god (that is: the literal incarnation of the Abrahamic deity). Pursuant to the Council of Nicaea (commissioned by Emperor Constantine in 325), it became the official creed of the Roman Imperium; and continued to be promoted for the remainder of the 4th century–a cause spearheaded by the zealot, Athanasius of Alexandria. It should be noted that Christianity started out as "The Way", a neo-Judaic sect founded by Jesus, which was likely similar to the group that came to be dubbed the "Essenes". The most notable evidence comes from the Ebionites ["those who are poor"]–a version of neo-Judaism that considered Jesus of Nazareth a mortal prophet.
Though it was likely most in keeping with the teachings of the historical Jesus, this humble, communitarian sect was eventually eradicated; as it was the (proto-Christian) Pauline Christology that prevailed, and was eventually adopted as the official version of the Faith by the Roman imperium. Athanasius' dream would come true; and the Nicene creed would eventually become the Empire's MANDATORY religion pursuant to the Edict of Thessalonika, issued by Emperor Theodoseus in 380.}

{9 Docetism was initiated by Serapion of Antioch in the late 2nd century. It was based on the supposition that Jesus' "Passion" was illusory–a claim rationalized via an account of the Passion found in the (Syriac) Gospel of Peter. The theory of illusory crucifixion (ref. 4:157-158) was also put forth in the Epistle of Barnabas and the Gospel of Basilides–both of which had also circulated in Syriac during Late Antiquity. This was roughly in keeping with the (Syriac) Nestorian account of the Passion, whereby Jesus "was with us as long as he willed until god raised him to heaven." Accordingly, the Basilidians believed that it was Simeon of Cyrene who actually perished on the cross (in his place). Incidentally, the Epistle of Barnabas was also the source of the "Good Shepherd" leitmotif (i.e. the "Shepherd of Hermas"), an idiom which served as the basis for Docetism–whereby it was supposed that Jesus HIMSELF was merely an apparition.}

{10 The location of the wall likely corresponded to a place in Dagestan known as the Derbent pass; which is typically correlated with Darial Gorge. The place was referred to as "Dar-i Alan" [Gate of the Alans] by the Persians and as "Porta Caucasica" / "Porta Cumana" by the Greeks. In the 1st century, the Jewish historian, Josephus recounted the legend of Alexander the Great having built a giant iron gate at this fabled gorge in the Caucuses mountains. Clearly, those who wrote the legends of this key means of ingress (into the Middle East from the Eurasian Steppes) did not have the faintest idea about the wider geography of the region (i.e. that there existed land east of the Caspian Sea, offering ingress via Persia). For more on this, see footnote 11 below.}

{11 In Islamic lore, the more fantastical version of the tale was started by Caliph Al-Wathiq in the 840's. It invoked the timeless trope: Hordes of faceless barbarians lurking beyond the frontiers, waiting to strike; waiting to bring with them Armageddon. As the story goes, this iron barrier was erected across a mountain pass in order to keep this vaguely-defined nemesis at bay indefinitely; or at least until they finally breached the massive rampart as a precursor to the End Times. Thus we are expected to believe that this menace-to-humanity was held back by a wall built between two mountains somewhere in central Asia (beyond the land of the Maeotians). Are we to suppose, then, that for THOUSANDS of years, it never occurred to "[y]Ajuj and Majuj" to go around the mountain? Apparently not. For according to Mohammedan lore, MoM himself was under the impression that, before his own death, the wall had ALREADY been breached, and these Satanic forces were already on their way–an anecdote recounted in the Hadith of both Bukhari and Muslim. (See footnote 10 above.) This indicates that MoM believed the End Days were immanent. {20} In c. 842, at the behest of Caliph Al-Wathiq, "Salam the Interpreter" embarked on a quest in search of the fabled wall. This excursion was recounted by the Persian writer, Ubaydallah ibn Abdallah ibn Khordadbeh of Jibal (in his "Kitab al-Masalik w'al-Mamalik"; Book of Roads and Kingdoms). We know this legend was taken seriously throughout Dar al-Islam, as during the Late Middle Ages, Muslims were STILL searching for the fabled wall. Comically, in the 14th century, Ibn Battuta confused it for the Great Wall of China. As mentioned, the city of Dar-Band [Persian for "blocked gateway"; now dubbed "Derbent"] came to be the prime candidate; warranting the moniker "Bab al-Hadid" [iron gate]. For more on this legend and its influence on Mohammedan lore, see "Gog and Magog in Early Syriac and Islamic Sources" ed. Emeri van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt.}

{12 Such accounts were also probably lifted from the "[Infancy] Gospel of James" and "pseudo-Ambrose", both of which were circulated in Syriac throughout the Middle East. Also note that account of the holy family's flight to Egypt found in later Islamic lore curiously resembles the account found in the aforesaid (Syriac) Gospel of "pseudo-Matthew" more than it resembles the account found in the canonical Gospel of Matthew (2:13-23).}

{13 Over the last century, extensive work has been done on this matter–starting with Richard Bell's "The Origin Of Islam In Its Christian Environment" (1926) and Charles Cutler Torrey's "The Jewish Foundations Of Islam" (1933). For further reference, see: Patricia Crone's "Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World" (1977); J. Wansbrough's "The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History" (1978); J. Spencer Trimingham's "Christianity Among The Arabs In Pre-Islamic Times" (1979); Crone's "Meccan Trade And The Rise Of Islam" (1987); Reuven Firestone's "Journeys In Holy Lands: The Evolution Of The Abraham-Ishmael Legends In Islamic Exegesis" (1990); Albrecht Noth's "The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-critical Study" (1994); Michael Lecker's "Muslims, Jews And Pagans: Studies On Early Islamic Medina" (1995); Robert Hoyland's "Arabia And The Arabs: From the Bronze Age To The Coming Of Islam" (2001); Robert Hoyland's "Seeing Islam As Others Saw It" (1997); Robert Hoyland's "Arabia and the Arabs: From The Bronze Age To The Coming Of Islam" (2002); Jonathan Berkey's "The Formation Of Islam: Religion And Society In The Near East" (2003); "The Qur'an In Its Historical Context"; ed. G. Reynolds (2008); Gordon Newby's "A History Of The Jews Of Arabia" (2009); Amira El-Zein's "Islam, Arabs, And The Intelligent World Of The Jinn" (2009); and Neal Robinson's "Islam: A Concise Introduction" (2013). Also reference Robert Hoyland's "The Jews Of The Hijaz In The Qur'an And In Their Inscriptions" in "New Perspectives On The Qur'an: The Qur'an In Its Historical Context" ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds" p. 91–216 (2011). In sum: p reeminent scholars in this field include Gunter Luling, Peter von Sivers, Patricia Crone, Robert G. Hoyland, and John Wansbrough. Also worth consulting are works by F. De Blois, J. Gnilka, F. Van der Velden, S.H. Griffith, and the renown Swedish scholar, Tor Julius Efraim Andræ.}

{14 Regarding the tale of Cain and Abel, we might also note the Koran's anecdote about a crow / raven discovering the burial site of Abel (5:31). This tid-bit seems to have also come from sources that would have been available ONLY in Syriac. Specifically, it would have come from material found in the recensions of the Aggadah known as the "Midrash Tanhuma"; as well as from the "Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer". The source-material for both of these works predated MoM, and likely proliferated in the region (esp. due to the prevalence of Syriac-speaking Talmudic scholars in Mesopotamia at the time). The key point is that this particular anecdote (about the crow) cannot be found in the canonical scripture; and–like the other tales discussed in this section–must have come from sources that were likely not found in the original Hebrew texts OR in the Koine Greek texts; but instead EXCLUSIVELY in Syriac texts. That is: It MUST have been based on sources that came from a time and place wherein Syriac was the predominant language. Koranic material on Cain and Abel seems to have also been taken from the (Syriac) "Targum" of Jonathan ben Uz-i-El. Of course, one might also suppose that this information REALLY DID come directly from the Abrahamic deity; and that those who compiled the (earlier) canonical sources (in Classical Hebrew) were simply not made privy to such accounts. Or one might suppose that their original testimonials DID include this tid-bit, and so had existed in a bygone era, but had since been lost. But it would still be a massive coincidence that these newer sources (the material of which happened to be circulating in the Middle East during the time Mohammedan scripture was being composed) suddenly included such unique anecdotes…after such a lengthy epoch during which they could not be found. How is it that they suddenly re-appeared; and re-appeared only in SYRIAC?}

{15 It is especially notable that some early Christian sects did, in fact, worship Miriam as divine–notably the Collyridians, who were denounced by Epiphanius of Salamis for their deification of Jesus' mother. One might also note the various Gnostic Christian sects that posited a female divinity–as found in the "Pistis Sophia" and the "Apocryphon of John". The various Marian sects that cropped up in Late Antiquity–and during the Middle Ages–are enumerated in my essay on "Pilgrimage".}

{16 The parallels are striking. In the Koran (38:36-38), we are told about the powers of wind-demons being harnessed to perform tasks. There are other similarities. For example, MoM is said to have had a magical, engraved ring. Lo and behold, the ToS tells of Solomon having a magical, engraved ring (used to, among other things, summon demons to do his bidding). Also in the ToS, we find demons depicted as black dogs. Hence the association of black dogs with demons in Islamic lore.}

{17 References to this Syriac work can be found in the **Epistle of Barnabas***, the oldest manuscripts of which are found in the "Codex Sinaiticus" (4th century) and the "Codex Claromontanus" (6th century), both of which were themselves circulated in Syriac. The Jewish* **Apocalypse of Ezra** *(a.k.a. the second "Book of Esdras"; alt. 4 Ezra) was probably more well-known amongst Arabian Bedouins than many of the canonical books of the Hebrew Bible. (See footnote 28 below.) The mis-impression–as stated in 9:30, and reiterated in Bukhari's Hadith–that Jews and Christians believed Ezra to be the son of god seems to have come from an Abrahamic sect in Himyar–as attested in the writings of both Al-Tabari and Al-Qastallani. Final note: "Uzayr" did NOT correlate to the Egyptian god, Osiris (sometimes rendered "Usir" / "A[u]sir"), as some of the more mendacious Islamic apologists have contended. Such a claim is little more than special pleading–an evasion bordering on self-parody. Clearly, the authors of the book were talking about something JEWS (allegedly) believed…which, of course, had nothing to do with the (derided) Egyptian pantheon.}*

{18 John Wansbrough concurs that the Syriac version of Abrahamic lore suffused Hijazi culture during the time of MoM…and even into the 8th century, when the "Recitations" were still being curated. (Bear in mind that the first CA dictionary, the "Kitab al-Ayn", had only just been compiled at the end of the 8th century.) Wansbrough goes a step further, though, proposing that Syriac material saturated the Middle East to the degree that it trumped any influence that the indigenous (Arabian) pagan theology may have had on the gestating Mohammedan movement. Wansbrough therefore conjectures that the character of MoM himself (qua "Rasul Allah") may have been a post-hoc fabrication, an Ishmaelite patriarch contrived so as to rationalize the emergence of a newfangled Abrahamic Faith–imbuing the movement with a distinctly Ishmaelite (i.e. Arabian) pedigree.}

{19 For more on this, see Gabriel Said Reynolds' "The Qur'an In Its Historical Context" and "New Perspectives On The Qur'an", both from the Routledge Studies series. Other resources include those enumerated in footnote 13.}

{20 At any given point in history, many are apt to entertain the notion that they are teetering on the cusp of history. This impression is found in most Messianic movements. A discuss this phenomenon in my essay, "Brink Porn".}

{21 Note that Aphrahat exercised enormous influence over the region; and his strident advocacy for "khitan" [circumcision] may explain the mandate for the practice that would eventually wind up in the Sunnah. This is telling, as almost all other Christians had spent the previous six centuries DE-emphasizing circumcision. Such a reversal makes sense insofar as it was SYRIAC liturgy that held the most sway in the region during the formulation of the Sunnah.}

{22 The (Aramaic) "Harklean" version of the Gospels (named after the mono-physite theologian, Thomas of Harqel), was compiled in Alexandria, Egypt in Late Antiquity. This is not to be confused with the Syriac version of the Gospels done by the mia-physite theologian, Philoxenus of Mabbug (a.k.a. "Xenaias") in the Levant during Late Antiquity. The **"Diatessaron"** *was an even earlier Syriac version of the Gospels (compiled by the Syriac scribe, Tatian of Adiabene in the 2nd century). Other early Syriac versions include the "Evangelion Dampharshe" (comprised of the* **"Curetonian Gospels"** *and the* **"Sinaiticus"** *), which dates back to the 4th century. What we are primarily concerned with here is the* **"P[e]shitta"** *(Syriac for "Common" / "Simple"), which included BOTH the Old AND New Testaments (minus the Epistles and the Book of Revelation). For it was the Peshitta that was used by the (dyo-physite) Nestorians–whose ministry proliferated in the Middle East at the time (during the life of MoM, and during the period Mohammedan lore was coalescing). Other than the Peshitta, the* **"Rabbula Gospels"** *(an illuminated Syriac version of the scriptures created c. 585) may have been influential in the region during MoM's lifetime.}*

{23 Derivative material was not unique to Mohammedan lore. Indeed, the phenomenon has occurred in many other cases throughout the Abrahamic tradition. It might be noted that much of Judaic lore was derived from Canaanite antecedents. For example, Psalms 92:10 and 145:13 are ripped directly from the (Ugaritic) "Baal Cycle", where Baal is simply transplanted with the Abrahamic deity. Even the Mosaic covenant was inspired by the covenant between Assyrian King Esarhaddon and King Baal of Tyre in the early 670's B.C. (ref. the amulets from Hadatu). And the seventh day also seems to have been an auspicious time in Canaanite theology. We even find an admission of the Judaism's derivative nature in the Book of Joshua ("Has this not been written in the Book of Jashar?" 10:13) as well as in Numbers ("As it was said in the Book of the Wars of the Lord" 21:14). Finally: Second Chronicles notifies us that its account is taken from the records of "Shemaiah" and "Iddo" (12:15). I explore Abrahamic parallels with antecedent lore in my series on "Mythemes".}

*{24 The **"Conflict of Adam and Eve With Satan"** even became a classic text in (Ethiopic) Ge'ez; and eventually appeared in ancient Armenian lore as well. This tract was likely the basis of the idea that "The Fall" was Adam's fault, not Eve's: a signature feature of the Islamic version of Genesis. This work seems to have been related to two other apocryphal works that circulated in Syriac at the time: **"The Apocalypse of Moses"** and **"The Testament of Adam"**.}*

{25 Throughout most of MoM's life, Athanasius Gammolo was the Patriarch of the Eastern (Syriac) Church. But it was Athanasius' successor, "Mor" Yuhannon III of Antioch (a.k.a. "John of the Sedre") who ended up corresponding with the Rashidun caliphs in their native language: Syriac. According to the archeological / textual record, people in the region did not start using CA until the 9th century (a matter that will be explored in the next essay). We might wonder: If Yuhannon III conducted correspondence with the Rashidun caliphs, might it have been the case that either HE or THEY had to translate from a different language? Such an exigency is conceivable; but there is no evidence for it. For more on this, see footnote 26 below.}

{26 Athanasius Gammolo's **"Kataba d-Res Melle"** *[Book of World History] includes one of the best documentations of the conquests by the Arabs during the 7th century. Tellingly, it makes no mention of a holy book used by the Ishmaelites; nor of ANY text written in a distinctly Arabic language. (!) Nor do ANY OTHER Syriac writers of the 7th century make any such references (to either the Koran or to CA). Indeed, chroniclers like Marutha of Tagrit, Isaac of Nineveh, John of Daylam, etc. would have surely made SOME reference–at SOME point in their careers–to such a book AND/OR to such a language had either existed at the time. This is especially so considering the fact that Ishmaelite hegemony was one of the most pressing matters of their day (and surely the hot topic of conversation). Such silence on such a matter (having to deal with another language) ONLY makes sense if the Ishmaelites spoke (roughly) the same language as they themselves spoke. The absence of any mention of a holy book at the center of the movement can only possibly mean that such a book was still in-the-making.}*

{27 Theodore bar Konai is notable for having composed a (Syriac) treatise on the Old and New Testaments: **"Kataba d-Eskoliyon"** *[Book of the Commentaries] (a "scholion" is an extensive collection of in-depth annotations). Interestingly, those commentaries were composed during the very time that the Koran was beginning to take form: the 8th century.}*

*{28 The arch-angel, "[n]Ur-i-El" [Light of god] features prominently in the **Second Book of Esdras** ; and is one of the angels mentioned in the Syriac **"Book of Protection"**. "Uriel" also appears in the **"Book of Enoch"**, the **"Apocalypse of Peter"**, and the **"Life of Adam And Eve"** (see footnote 29 below)…all of which were originally written in the precursor to Syriac: Aramaic. Interestingly, manuscripts of the "Book of Protection" include illustrations of the angel, Gabriel, mounted on a flying white horse. This should ring some bells.}*

{29 The "Life Of Adam And Eve" dates from the 1st century; and was eventually translated into Koine Greek, Coptic, Masoretic Hebrew, Vulgar Latin, Armenian, Georgian, and Old Church Slavonic. Tellingly, it was never rendered in Arabic. The only explanation for this: By the time Arabic had become a language unto itself, there was no longer any demand amongst Arabs to translate such a work. Had CA existed before the 8th century, there can be no doubt that there would have also been a version of the "Life Of Adam And Eve" in Arabic.}

{30 While the Hebrew version seems to be descriptive (a simple acknowledgement of difference), the Koranic version seems to be prescriptive (to each his own). Either way, the statement does not constitute a clarion call for tolerance; as it in no way countermands the exaltation of the in-group. The Hebrew passage is a matter of alterity; the Koran version is more an expression of resignation: "It's YOUR soul on the line. It's not MY problem."}

{31 This goddess (Atarsa-ma'in / Attar / Athtar[t]) was later rendered "Alilat" / "Al-Lat"; as attested in Hismaic / Safaitic and Palmyrene / Nabataean inscriptions. She was the feminine counterpart of the Semitic god, "El"; and effectively the Arabian rendering of the Assyrian goddess, Ishtar (a.k.a. "Astarte"). There were major temples to her at Petra, Palmyra, Hatra, Emesa, and Hawran (ref. Jan Retso's "The Arabs In Antiquity"). An Arabian shrine existed for her at Ta'if (primarily for the Banu Thaqif)…which was destroyed in a raid by Abu Sufyan ibn Harb c. 630.}

{32 In Jeremiah 19:6, there is reference made to the "valley of slaughter", which likely referred to a historical event, not an eschatological description. The Book of Isaiah refers to it as "the burning place" (30:33 and 66:24): "Topeth". The Aramaic was "Gehanna", while the Mishnaic Hebrew was "Ge-Hinnom". The Septuagint renders the term "Ennom"; while the Greek New Testament opts for "Geenna". The Latin Vulgate rendered the term "gehennae" / "gehennam" (as it was used in the Synoptic Gospels). The valley was clearly associated with death, and even with the Canaanite god, Moloch (who was worshipped at a location referred to as "Topeth"). Elsewhere, writers opted for the Hellenic terms, "Tartarus" and "Hades".}

{33 There is a problem with this (purported) correction of Abrahamic scripture (namely: the Torah, Book of Psalms, and Gospels). For it is at the same time a validation of that scripture (as it originally existed) AND a correction of what it eventually came to be (in corrupted form). Yet the Koran makes appeals to such books as they existed AT THE TIME. The problem for Islamic apologists is that we have records of such material as it existed in the 7th century. We are thus presented with both a confirmation and repudiation of extant scripture from MoM's point of view—a quandary that I address in Appendix 3 of my essay, "Genesis Of A Holy Book".}

{34 Barring the Targum on the Book Of Esther, there were no Aramaic / Syriac Targum-im composed for the "K-T-B-im" [Writings]. The Targum on the Torah is the "Targum Okelos". The Targum on the "Nabi-im" [Prophets] is the "Targum Jonathan ben Uziel". That is the material with which Syriac-speakers would have been familiar at the time. The oldest Syriac renderings of the Bible seem to be comprised solely of the New Testament—as with the "Diatessaron" from c. 170, then the edition by Ephrem of Nisibis from the 4th century (dealing with the "Peshitta"). The Codex Sinaiticus Syriacus (which served as the basis for the Curetonian Gospels; a.k.a. the ***"Evangelion Dampharshe"****) is from the late 4th / early 5th century. Other codices of the "Peshitta" include the Codex Phillipps 1388 as well as the British Library's Add MS 12140, 14448, 14455, 14459, 14466, 14467, 14470, 14479, and 14669: all of which are New Testament texts from the 5th or 6th century. The illuminated* ***"Rabbula Gospels"*** *are also from the 6th century. The early Mohammedans would probably not have been familiar with the Book of Revelation; and their knowledge of Luke's Book of Acts and the Pauline letters would have also been rather limited. Hence, when they thought of the New Testament, they would have primarily had the "Injil" in mind. This explains the delimited scope of the appropriation.}*

{35 Meanwhile, in the **"Zardusht-Nama"***, there is a tale of Zoroaster himself ascending into the heavens and visiting hell (where he encounters Ahriman). Also, in the (Aramaic) Book Of Enoch, the titular protagonist goes on a magical journey to both Heaven and Hell.}*

{36 For more on this, see S. H. Griffith's "Christian Lore And The Arabic Qur?an: The Companions of the Cave in Surat al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian Tradition" (2008), Bartlomiej Grysa's "The Legend Of The

Seven Sleepers Of Ephesus In Syriac And Arab Sources: A Comparative Study", as well as Witold Witakowski's analysis in the Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary Of Syriac Heritage.}

{37 The city was an Edomite stronghold during the Iron Age. The Nabataeans established it was their capital as early as the 4th century B.C. The Occidental version of the name, "Petra" was coined by the Byzantines. This is not a translation of the Nabataean name for the city: "Rakmu" / "Rakemo" / "Rekem". Rather, it is simply the Greek lexeme for "rock" (basis for the name, "Petros; Anglicized to "Peter"). The Syriac term for "rock" would have been "Kepha". That's why the apostle, "Peter" is simply a revamping of the Aramaic "Kephas": the nickname that JoN gave to his follower, Shimon (Aramaic for "he who hears" or "he who is heard"; Anglicized to "Simon").}

{38 An excellent account of this was provided by Michael Philip Penn in his "When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook Of The Earliest Syriac Writings On Islam" and its follow-up work, "Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians And The Early Muslim World". Penn makes the point that, in its earliest era, Muslims (that is: participants in the Mohammedan movement) intermingled with other Syriac-based Abrahamic communities—inter-marrying, co-governing, and even fighting alongside each other.}

{39 So long as civilians were deemed to be fellow "people of the book" and did not engage in "fitna" (disruption; i.e. subversion of Islamic authority), they were allowed to subsist unmolested—that is, pace the "jizya" (tax on non-Muslims). This conciliatory protocol (limited to confessors in the Abrahamic tradition) was roughly in keeping with verse 256 of Surah 2—as well as Surah 109—in the Koran. Those who had the most difficulty persisting in their Faith were pagans, Mandaeans, Manichaeans, and Zoroastrians; and, of course, later: the Buddhists and Hindus of the Far East. The early Mohammedans primarily had an ax to grind with the Byzantines (Romans) and the Sassanians (Persians) insofar as those two groups were imperial adversaries.}

{40 During Late Antiquity, some Syriac writers referred to the Arabs as "[m]Hagraye" (Hagarenes / Hagrites), named after the mother of Ishmael. (The other terms for Arabs were "Saracens" and "Ishmaelites", both of which were used during the Middle Ages.) But the primary Syriac exonym for Arabs in Late Antiquity was "Tayyaye", as they were generally associated with the Banu Tayy [alt. "Ta'i"] of Al-Hirah (that is: by fellow Syriac speakers who were not Mohammedans / Ishmaelites). This label was used by the 7th-century Armenian historian, Sebeos of Bagratunis—who, incidentally, was one of the first to refer to an Arab cynosure known as "Mahmet". Why the Banu Tayy? That Arab tribe had recently become ascendent within the Gassanids, Tanukhids, and Lakhmids. Moreover, they seem to have been the most prominent tribe amongst the Sahabah / Salaf (the first Mohammedans). The Byzantines referred to the Arabs by the Greek term, "Sarakenoi" ["easterners"]; which was Romanized to "Saraceni" (Anglicized to "Saracens"). The Persians referred to the Arabs as "Tazi"; which prompted the Chinese to refer to them as the "Dashi". With respect to Faith, the most common exonym used for "Muslims" was "Mohammedans".}

{41 Gods like the storm- / sky-god, "Baal Shamin" (Hadad / Teshub); the sun-god, "Yarhibol" / "Malak-Bel"; and the moon-god, "Aglibol" were worshipped farther to the north, in Palmyra. It's worth noting that the primary Nabataean god, Dushara [Lord Of The Mountain] was born of a virgin mother—a goddess who was worshipped at a cubic shrine, known as the "Kaabu". Interestingly, another deified figure was known as the "K-T-B[a]" [the writer]. The key point here is that Syriac Christianity had a significant presence in Petra. The city even had its own Nestorian bishop. So Abrahamic lore was not unknown to the Nabataeans.}

{42 For further insights into the lore surrounding the Meccan cube, see "The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source Critical Study" by A. Noth; as well as "Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World" by M. Cook and Patricia Crone. I explore alternate theories about the "Kaaba" in my essay: "The Meccan Cube".}

{43 The illusory crucifixion narrative is actually rather interesting. Recall that the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, was reticent to condemn JoN; so he gave the disgruntled crowd the option of condemning someone in JoN's place. In the original Koine Greek sources, BOTH alternatives happened to be named "Iesous" (the Hellenized version of the Aramaic name, "Yeshua"): one was designated "Messia[c]h" (meaning "anointed one"), while the other was designated "Bar Abba[s]" (meaning "son of the Father). It was the former who was crucified, not the latter. It is possible, then, that there were TWO men named "Jesus" on trial—one who claimed to be a son of god, one who claimed to be "Rex Iudaeorum" [king of the Jews]. While the former was a common Judaic trope (alt. "son of man"), the latter would have been seen as heretical by the Pharisees and as treasonous by the Roman authorities.}

POSTSCRIPT:

As I hope to have shown, the formation of the Mohammedan creed was the result of gradual memetic accretion; as the folklore of neighboring communities tends to inter-penetrate one another. That was followed by memetic calcification. This meandering process lasted many generations. After the early formative period, sporadic bouts of confabulation persisted.

This process of memetic cross-pollination often goes un-acknowledged; as recognizing it entails conceding that one's culture is derivative…and thus an accident of history. The fact remains, though, that memes are adopted that seem–at the time–to buoy the fitness of the consecrated memeplex. Meanwhile, other memes are rejected when–at the time–they threaten the structural integrity of the dogmatic edifice.

To recapitulate: Islamic lore exhibits a plethora of signature traits of preceding Syriac texts. Questions arise. How? Why? Are we to suppose that this is some uncanny coincidence? Of course, Islamic apologists earnestly hope everyone will simply ignore the fact that both the Koran and Hadith are festooned with a plethora of thematic coinkydinks that were unique to Syriac sources. For they realize that acknowledging this would entail conceding the derivative nature of their creed. Far from a verbatim transcript from the Creator of the Universe, Mohammedan theology is a bespoke concatenation of rehashed Syriac lore that proliferated in the Middle East at the time.

We might consider, again, the environs in which the authors of the Koran would have lived. In Yathrib, there were three major Jewish tribes (the Banu Kuraydha, Banu Nadhir, and Banu Kaynuka), each of which would have spoken Syriac. Other Jewish settlements in the vicinity could be found at Khaybar and on the Gulf of Akaba (at the site of the ancient city of Elat[h], known as "Aila" to the Romans). {A} All of them would have been circulating the sort of Abrahamic lore with which MoM and his contemporaries would have been familiar. Notably, this did NOT include the Book of Revelation, which was never accepted by the Syriac Church. It should therefore come as little surprise that THAT book's zany prognostications do not play a role in Mohammedan eschatology.

This is quite telling; as this material—so prominent in Nicene Christianity—is absent even though there turned out to be an OBSESSION with Judgement Day in the "Recitations". If one were looking for cosmic mayhem, the Book of Revelation would have been the first place to look. This is especially striking when we consider that Jesus Christ ALSO makes a re-appearance in Islam's apocalyptic set-piece—further incentive to riff off of the anti-Roman author, John of Patmos.

Meanwhile, the perception of JoN as merely a prophet (i.e. a mortal man; a position known as "adoptionism") would have been well-established in Arab circles. Notably, Paul of Samosata, who served as bishop of Antioch in the 3rd century, had preached a form of adoptionism known as "monarchianism"—which would later inspire Arianism. As it so happened, Paul maintained a close relationship with the Arab queen of Palmyra, Bat-Zabbai (a.k.a. "Zenobia"), who would have spoken a dialect of Syriac. And, as it also happened, the catechetical school at Antioch was a hub for Nestorianism (the branch of Syriac Christianity best known for adoptionism). MoM and his contemporaries would have been well-acquainted with the (Syriac) arguments for the adoptionist view of JoN…which would become the MOHAMMEDAN view of JoN. Koran 4:171 could have just as well been written by an Arian or Nestorian. (For more on the relation between the Nazarenes and early Islam, see Joachim Gnilka's "Die Nazarener Und Der Koran: Eine Spurensuche".)

Another point worth considering. Had the material really been "sent down" from heaven (as the Koran insists it was), there would certainly have been something in it that wasn't already circulating amongst the people of the region–something novel and erudite (that is: something could not be explained by what was already available by the 7th century). Or there would have been some tid-bit of insight that could not possibly have been known by mere mortals at the time.

No such tid-bit exists.

Verses 4-6 in Surah 25 and verse 15 of Surah 68 give the game away–as they openly admit that contemporaneous skeptics pointed out that people were already familiar with what was being propounded. (They considered the "Recitations" a re-hashing of "the tales of our forefathers".) In other words: "None of this is anything new; we've heard all of it before." How, then, are we to suppose MoM got these ideas? The Koran actually tells us in verses 103-105 of Surah 16. It was not a revelation from god; it was regurgitated folklore.

And so it went. Judaic material would have been gleaned from the Jews of:

- Nabataea (the Kalb, Salih, and al-Qayn tribes)
- Yathrib-cum-Medina (the Alfageer, Shutayba, Qurayza, Qaynuqa, and Nadir tribes)
- The Tayma oasis (the Awf tribe)
- Ta'if (the al-Harith tribe)
- Himyar (esp. at Najran)

Meanwhile, Christian material would have been gleaned from Nestorians throughout the region.

As discussed, the cribbing was extensive. Other examples exist that were not adumbrated in the preceding essay. For, example, the account of Miriam (mother of JoN) having been raised in the temple–and being nurtured by angels–comes from the (Syriac) Infancy Gospel of James (the "Prot-Evangelion of James" in its Koine Greek version; rendered "Proto-Evangelium of James" in Latin). Then there's the account of a cow leaping from a fire (ref. Surah 7). That was lifted from from the aforementioned "Pirke" of Rabbi Eliezer.

It was almost entirely Syriac sources—Jewish and Christian—from which Arabs derived their knowledge of Abrahamic lore, as that was the language they understood. Tales about Abraham would have primarily come from the Midrash Rabba, which was circulated exclusively in Syriac. Note, for example that Abraham's father was named "Terah" in standard lore; yet is referred to as "Azar" in the Koran—a corruption of the moniker used by Syriac-speaking Jews: "Zara". {B}

Tellingly, Cain and Abel were not known by name, but simply as the "two sons of Adam" in the Koran. (Are we to suppose that the Abrahamic deity forgot their names?) In later Islamic lore, they would be designated as "Qabil" and "Habil". In the Islamic version, BOTH brothers offered sacrifices (rather than one, an animal; the other, fruits from his garden). The rejection of one brother was based on his lack of piety, not on his choice of offering.

We might also recall the matter of the Agagite [Amalekite] villain, Haman. In 28:38, the Egyptian Pharaoh conspires with this nefarious character from the book of Esther. The problem is that Haman was actually a Persian vizier who lived almost 8 centuries later (in the 5th century B.C.) How might such a massive chronological blunder have occurred? Denizens of the Middle East would have heard that both characters had plotted against the Israelites. The Koran's authors likely concluded that the two iconic malefactors must have known each other. A similar mistake (in 20:95) put the "Samari" (Samaritans) as contemporaries of Moses—casting them as errant Israelites guilty of "shirk". Such temporal discrepancies indicate that, amongst the Bedouin, a few things were conflated. To be fair, this is something to be expected over the course of several generations of oral transmission.

As it turns out, many of the claims encountered in Islamic lore simply reflect Arabian superstitions of the era. Note some of the more fantastical tales that made their way into the "sahih" Hadith collections:

- Tales of 30-meter-tall prehistoric men. This was likely taken from chapter 7 of the Book of Enoch, which describes the giant "Nephilim" as being 3,000 "ells" in height.
- Tales of a rock stealing Moses' clothes (while he was swimming) and then fleeing (with a naked Moses in pursuit). Lord knows where this came from.
- Claims of a fly carrying the cure for a disease on one wing while carrying the disease itself on the other wing. This was likely an extant Arabian superstition.

Thus the Mohammedan movement appropriated much of what was already circulating in the Hijaz at the time.

And so it went that Islamic lore became increasingly embellished over the ages, whereby certain apocrypha materialized…and eventually became reified as bona fide "history". When it comes to folklore, this process is standard–as embellishment has a ratcheting effect: once it catches on, it's difficult to un-do (just as it is difficult to un-do deletions).

We might note a few more examples of this–as it pertains to folk-heroes:

ONE: The Persian legend of "Amir" Hamza ibn Abdul-Muttalib (a.k.a. the "Lion of Paradise") who is purported to have been MoM's (long-lost) uncle. Tales of his exploits can be found in the "Hamza-nama" [Epic of Hamza] as well as in the "Dastan-i Amir Hamza" [Adventures of Amir Hamza]. Both works came out of the Persian story-telling tradition commonly referred to as "dastan".

TWO: In the Koran itself, we hear tales of an Arabian prophet named "Saleh" of Thamud / A[a]d (Hijaz). The character seems to have been co-opted–nay, re-purposed–into Mohammedan lore from antecedent Arabian lore.

THREE: The "Taghribat Bani Hilal" [a.k.a. "Sirat Abu Zeid al-Hilali"] has played a prominent role in Maghrebi folklore. It tells of a Fatimid caliph sending the (Arab) Banu Hilal to Tunisia in order to put down the Zirid [alt. "Zenata"; i.e. Sanhaja Berber] rebellion in the 11th century. For centuries, this tale was orally-transmitted. The degree to which it is historically accurate is anyone's guess.

FOUR: Shiites tell tales about their patriarchs (the heirs of Ali ibn Abi Talib): imams Husayn, then Ali "Zayn al-Abi-Din" [Adornment of the Worshippers; though "abi-din" literally means "fathers of the

creed"], then Muhammad "al-Baqir" [revealer of knowledge], and then Jafar "al-Sadiq" [the Truthful]. The vast majority of the Ummah–being, as they are, Sunni–downplay (or even outright deny) the salience of such figures.

FIVE: The Shiite Persian mystic, Shams ad-Din Mohammad of Tabriz (a.k.a. "Shams-i Tabrizi"; variously described as Sufi or Isma'ili) is said to have been the mentor of Jalal ad-Din Rumi during their time in Konya. He is best known for his "Maqalat" [Discourse]. (Shams-i Tabrizi was himself said to have been a disciple of a figure named "Baba Kamal al-Din Jumdi".) The purported existence of this figure is often downplayed by mainstream Muslims, though; as one of his beliefs was that his own tongue (Middle Persian) was so marvelous that the meanings and elegance found in that language could not be found in CA. This is a claim that does not sit well with CA-fetishists.

SIX: The legend of "Al-Khidr" is about a mystic who is never explicitly named in the Koran…yet who has cropped up in myriad Islamic folktales. The tale of Moses and Al-Khidr in Surah 18 (verses 65 to 82) exhibits influences from antecedent narratives, whereby a prominent figure is taught lessons from an old mystic, who takes him under his wing. He most famously features in Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari's "The History". Al-Khidr is also mentioned by name in the "Kitab al-Zuhd" ["Book of Abstinence"] by the 9th-century Abbasid expositor, Ahmad ibn Hanbal al-Thuhli of Baghdad. (He appears in both Bukhari's and Bayhaqi's writings as well.) The moniker is a variation on the Arabic term for "the Green One" ("Al-Akhdar"). That might explain why that particular color has often been accorded a prominent role in Islam.

This figure is likely a take-off on the Canaanite (Ugaritic) mystic, Kothar-wa-Khasis of Memphis–legends of whom date back to the late 3rd millennium B.C. We know that the Ugaritic tale likely proliferated in the region; as it is referenced on Sumerian tablets from Ebla, Syria.

A similar story was promulgated by the itinerant monk, John Moschus of Damascus, a contemporary of MoM who wrote at Mar Saba (a Syriac monastery overlooking the Kedron Valley) and at the nearby Mar Dosi (the monastery of Theodosius; later rendered "Deir Ibn Ubeid" in Arabic). It is mentioned in his "Leimon Pneumatikos" ["Spiritual Meadow", rendered "Pratum Spirituale" in Latin].

The (Syriac-speaking) Nabataeans were likely familiar with this figure.

SEVEN: Tales about Salman al-Farsi [Salman the Persian] in Islamic lore emerged during the Middle Ages. Salman was purportedly one of the Sahabah. He eventually came to be governor of the Mesopotamian city of Al-Mada'in. The credence of his historicity is anyone's guess. But, hey, it was surely fun to talk about; so the tale eventually caught on.

With all these additions to the lore, it is easy to see how there were also deletions. (Where there is self-serving commission, there is likely also self-serving omission.) One of those deletions is the Syriac origin of Islamic lore.

Thus we are forced to contend with both embellishment and obfuscation when trying to ascertain the origin of certain Islamic memes, neither of which announce themselves as such in the resulting material (i.e. the material that we now have to work with). Indeed, the standard Islamic narrative ABOUT ITSELF is incontrovertible…according to itself.

It is worth reiterating: There was nothing especially, well, special about the motifs found in Mohammedan lore. Even the practice of referring to the godhead as "the Merciful" was unoriginal. As it turns out, it was the name of one of the deities in (pre-Islamic) Yemen: "Ra[c]hman[an]". The moniker was also used in ancient Turkic theology: the creator-god was referred to as "Kayra" ("Merciful"; not to be confused with

"Kara", which meant "black"). It is not startling to find that people like to fancy their own godhead as merciful—even if the godhead turns out to be somewhat schizophrenic. {C}

Meanwhile, the cribbing goes on and on. Some ahadith refer to Satan as "Azazil" (the Arabic rendering): a moniker that was used in Leviticus (chapter 16) and in the Apocalypse of Abraham and the (Aramaic) Book of Enoch (as found in the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran). We are told that he dwells in a dark abyss—a depiction that may have served as the basis for Koranic references like 85:4 and 101:9.

The Book of Enoch explains why certain angels—specifically "Azazel" (the Aramaic rendering)—fell from heaven: a group of outcasts dubbed the Watchers. The head of the Watchers was named "al-Uzza" (alternately rendered "Ouza" or "Samyaza"; then "Samiarush" in medieval Arabic): a name that should ring some bells. (See my discussion of the Satanic Verses in Appendix 5 to "Genesis Of A Holy Book".) This was likely an inspiration for the account of the banishment of "Iblis" from heaven.

In Zoroastrianism, there is a sacred tree in Paradise called the "haoma", which seems to have served as the basis for the "Sidrah" [Lote Tree] mentioned in 34:16, 53:14-16, and 56:28. (In Persian lore, the "haoma" was also considered a Tree Of Life.) In the Book Of Enoch, we are also told about a Tree of Life—indicating that the leitmotif was not unique to Abrahamic lore.

And what of the pre-occupation with "drawing / tossing arrows" (stridently denounced in verses 3 and 40 of surah 5)? The concern about belomancy ["belos manteia"; a form of scrying] was attested in the Book of Ezekiel (21:21). Who engaged in this occult practice? As it turns out: some (Zoroastrian) Persians, some (Christian) Chaldeans, as well as some (pagan and Abrahamic) Nabataeans.

Outside of that era and that region, this would not have been seen as a significant problem for mankind; and it certainly would not have been a major concern for the Creator of the Universe…since the beginning of time.

Recall that the ***Book of Ezekiel*** also included references to Gog and Magog (chapters 38 and 39) that cropped up in Islamic lore (21:96-97 in the Koran). The book also gives an account of people made by having flesh put on bones (in the vision of "the valley of dry bones", chapter 37). This likely accounted for the misconception in the Koran, in which we are presented with botched embryology (2:259 and 23:14).

The notion that man was originally made from clay / mud (6:2, 7:12, 15:26-28/33, 17:61, 23:12, 32:7, 37:11, 38:71, and 55:14) likely comes from Zoroastrian etiology, where we are told that the first man, Gaya-Mart[an] (often rendered "Keyumars" / "Kayomart") was created from clay / mud at the behest of the godhead, Ahura Mazda. Homo sapiens did not come into being from clay / mud. Yet again, we find that the repetition of others' flubs is a dead give-away that the material-at-hand is derivative.

Just to recap a bit, throughout the Koran, we find tidbits that were unique to the (Syriac) ***Apocalypse of Moses*** (a.k.a. the "Life of Adam and Eve")—such as the Abrahamic deity promising Adam that he will eventually be allowed to return to paradise. Meanwhile, the tale of a particular angel (rendered "Iblis" in Mohammedan lore) refusing to bow to Adam is not found in Genesis. It occurs exclusively in Syriac Christian texts—most notably, in the (Syriac) ***Cave of Treasures***.

When it comes to the story of Cain and Abel, the Koran presents a brief dialogue between the ill-fated brothers, in which latter says to former: "God accepts only from the god-wary. Even if you extend your hand toward me to kill me, I will not extend my hand toward you to kill you. Indeed, I fear god, the lord of all the worlds" (5:27-28). Lo and behold, a similar account can be found in the "Targum Neofiti". The conversation between the two brothers presented in the Koran did not occur in either the Greek or Latin

Bible; but it proliferated in Syriac circles. Not only did it occur in the (Syriac) ***Targum Neofiti***; it occurred in the (Syriac) ***Targum of Jonathan ben Uziel*** and the (Syriac) ***Targum of Jerusalem*** (ref. Footnote 14 above).

A few verses later (5:32), a lesson is drawn from the murder that does not occur in the Torah: "That is why I decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul, without [being guilty of] corruption in the land, it is as though he had killed all mankind; and whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved all mankind." As stated earlier, this is nearly identical to a passage found in the (Syriac) ***Sanhedrin tractate***.

It seems that wherever the Koranic account differs from standard Judeo-Christian accounts, it is due to the fact that it is hewing to Syriac material that was circulating in the region at the time. (In other words: the versions with which the Nabataeans and their progeny would have been familiar.) When we are told where Noah's ark came to rest after the flood waters receded (verse 44 of Surah 11 in the Koran), it was Mount "Judi" (earlier known as "Mount Kardu"), which was located at the head of the Tigris River in Al-Sham. Lo and behold, this was the place specified in SYRIAC sources (in stark contradistinction to the location specified in canonical sources: Mount Ararat). "Judi" was a variation on the Syriac term for elevated place: "Gudo".

And as we saw earlier, the tale of the Queen of Sheba (the Sabaean queen dubbed "Bilqis" in Mohammedan lore) outlined in verses 20-44 of Surah 27 in the Koran does not at all resemble the accounts found in First Kings 10:1-13 and Second Chronicles 9:1-13. Rather, it seems to have been lifted from popular tales circulating in Syriac at the time.

Such appropriation trends were not limited to folklore. As might be expected, they occurred with rituals as well. The practice of fasting during a full lunar month was a Nabataean tradition; so it is no surprise that it carried over into the gestating Mohammedan movement. The Nabataeans did so in tribute to either Dushara or the moon-god, Hubal ["spirit of Baal"]. And there is evidence that the tradition may have even been adopted from Syriac Churches in the region (ref. Philip Jenkins' "The New Faces Of Christianity" and Paul-Gordon Chandler's "Pilgrims Of Christ On The Muslim Road".)

Regarding the relevant deities: animal sacrifices to Dushara are mentioned in various Safaitic inscriptions across the region; while Hubal is mentioned in various Nabataean inscriptions. As it so happened, an alternate appellation for both deities was a variation of "Allah". (For more on this, see John F. Healey's "The Religion of the Nabataeans".) None of these deities can be assessed in isolation—be it Dushar and Hubal or Allat, Al-Uzza, and Manat. They were all part of the same theological ecosystem—influencing each other in different ways in different places at different times, for a variety of reasons. THIS was the theological ecosystem in which the Mohammedan movement gestated; so it is through that meme-o-sphere that the origins of Islamic theology can best be understood.

In its earliest days, there was very little that was novel about the Mohammedan movement. Even iconography was appropriated. In Assyrian culture, a star (representing Shamash) was often shown alongside the crescent moon (representing Sin). The Persians used the two celestial bodies in their iconography as well. This symbolism should sound familiar.

In the 11th century, the Andalusian historian, Ibn Hazm of Cordoba noted that the "Sabians" of MoM's time engaged in ablutions, prayed five times each day, and fasted for an entire lunar month. They even venerated a cubic shrine somewhere in the Levant. (This should also ring some bells.) I dare say that if one were to remove all the elements of Islamic ritual / lore that were appropriated from antecedent cultures, there probably wouldn't be much left. {D}

Another indication that material—replete with mistakes—was inherited from Semitic precursors is the use of the lunar calendar. In considering the re-naming of the months, it is clear that the impression amongst the Mohammedans was that any given month occurred at the same point each year. (The lunar calendar falls about 11 days short vis a vis the Earth's revolution around the sun; so after a few years, one would think people would notice the cumulative temporal shift. The "catch" is that the climate in the region—only about 24 to 34 degrees north—does not have palpable seasons.) Hence the third month was known as early spring ("Rabi al-Awwal") and the fourth month was known as late spring ("Rabi at-Thani" / "Rabi al-Akhir"). Those months are followed by the early aridity ("Jumada al-Ula") and the late aridity ("Jumada at-Thaniyah" / "Jumada al-Akhirah"). The problem, of course, is that these months migrate from season to season over long periods of time. {E}

It's worth reviewing the Mohammedan nomenclature of the early Middle Ages. In the pre-Abbasid era, Syriac Christians—predominantly comprised of Jacobites and Nestorians—were referred to as "Melkites" by the (Muslim) Ishmaelites. These "Melkites" were considered fellow Arabs, and spoke the same language (Syriac); yet were of a different Abrahamic Faith. The moniker seems to have referred to these Arabs' association with Roman imperialists—a stigma that would have come from the Abgarids, Tanukhids, Salihids, and—later—the Ghassanids. It's worth nothing that this pejorative was a rough cognate of the despised "Amalekites" from the Torah—a group of Canaanites who'd gone awry, thereby running afoul of god's good graces.

Meanwhile, prior to the Abbasids, a "mu-S-L-M" was simply "one who submitted" to the Abrahamic deity. (Note: "aslama"—meaning "submit"—is not to be confused with "salam"—meaning "peace".) In the "Recitations", this was not a label for one who practiced a novel creed; it was used to identify a person who was pious—as with the description of Abraham in 3:67. Throughout the "Recitations", the preferred moniker for those who were sympathetic to the Mohammedan movement was "mu-min-een": one who believes (from the Syriac lexeme for Faith: "iman"). This was a general descriptor that was used on inscriptions and documents throughout the pre-Abbasid era (see the work of Fred Donner).

Such nomenclature reminds us that the Mohammedan movement was originally seen as a corrective to the Abrahamic Faith (as it had come to be by the 7th century). The idea was to bring the Faith back to how it had been prior to being corrupted by the Jews and Christians. So the movement was NOT (yet) seen as an entirely distinct religion. Demarcations were rather fluid at the beginning; and would have become more stark out of sheer practicality—that is: for the purpose of clarifying who was on which side as the creedal differences became increasingly contentious.

And so it went: The Ummah was initially conceived as ALL right-thinking "people of the book" (as stipulated in, say, 2:62), who were simply understood as "believers". For the time being, the Faith-in-question was nothing new; or, at least, it was not seen as anything unprecedented.

So to truly understand the embryonic stage of Islam, it is important to recognize that the Mohammedan movement began as a REVIVALIST movement. This is simply to say that it was an endeavor to bring people back to a Faith that had existed all along—from Noah, through Abraham and Moses and Solomon, to Jesus of Nazareth. In the process, exponents sought to validate the Arabs' Ishmaelite pedigree; as they (understandably) felt they'd been relegated to the margins of Abrahamic lore. While refuting the Trinitarian model of Nicene Christianity was the central theological aim, buoying the pride of Arabs fed into to their (rejuvenated) ethnic identity.

So WHAT OF the validation of the Ishmaelite pedigree? Legends of Hagar's tribulation proliferated amongst the Bedouin tribes who were sympathetic to Abrahamic lore. After all, she was their matriarch

(Ishmael's mother). A popular tale would have been about her finding succor at a well (referred to as "Zam-Zam"), which seems to have been located in Nineveh (referred to as "Beth Arbaye" in Syriac); probably somewhere near Lalish. In other words, pursuant to her banishment, Hagar would have fled northeastward, through Bashan (Aram), into Nineveh; not southward, through Arabah (Edom), into the Hijaz. In the Koran, the place where Hagar wept for her banished son, Ishmael, is referred to as "Bakkah"—though the exact location of that place went unspecified. As it turns out, during pre-Islamic times, Ishmaelite pilgrims would wander between two hills somewhere in Nabataea (probably near Petra). It is likely that they did so in memory of Hagar's frantic search for water, and the travails she endured as an outcast. Efforts to burnish the Ishmaelite pedigree surely predated the Mohammedan movement.

This all played well into Islamic lore. Sure enough, revisionists equated "Bakkah" with "Makkah". At some point in the early 8th century, a "Zam-Zam" well was promptly established near the new Hijazi temenos. And the two hills came to be dubbed "Safa" and "Marwa". (I explore this matter at length in my essay, "Mecca And Its Cube".)

A re-branding of the nascent Ishmaelite movement—as a revolutionary RELIGIOUS phenomenon—seems not to have occurred until the last decade of the 7th century. It was only then that there started to be some talk of a new holy book. Because orality was the norm for the target audience, it should come as no surprise that the sacred text came to be known as the "Recitations". For it was initially not written; it was merely spoken. The generalized Syriac term for a lectionary was "Kur[i]an[a]" (as opposed to, say, a Hellenic term like "[he]Irmologion"). That would be rendered "Qur'an".

Meanwhile, the Syriac term for the Abrahamic god was "Elah[a]", rendered "Allah". Terms like "nabi" and "rasul" were also retained; though "mu-H-M-D" was eventually treated as a given name (for the seal of the Abrahamic prophets) rather than as a general descriptor for a leader of the Ishmaelites (see Appendix 3 of my essay, "Genesis Of A Holy Book").

The last decade of the 7th century is precisely when the orthography suddenly underwent a metamorphosis—from the Nabataean alphabet to more distinctly Arabic characters (i.e. Kufic). Meanwhile, a new liturgical language was in the works—transitioning from Syriac to what was effectively proto-CA. New vernacular invariably came into fashion, as would be expected with the introduction of a revolutionary new creed. For example, the "amir al-mumineen" ["leader of the believers"] came to be known as the "khalifah"—a Koranic term that meant something along the lines of "successor" or "steward". Such an honorific would have made more sense because it referred to the carrying on of a hallowed legacy: a NEW legacy that was retroactively inaugurated at the so-called "Hijra" (migration from Mecca to Yathrib) c. 622.

For further reading, see "The Original Sources Of The Qur'an: Its Origin In Pagan Legends and Mythology" by the English philologist, William St. Clair Tisdall (1905). Other insights can be found in the "Routledge Studies In The Qur'an": "The Qur'an In Its Historical Context" published in two parts (the second of which is entitled "New Perspectives On The Qur'an"), edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds. Interestingly, the majority of useful work on this topic has been done by German scholars—from Harald Suermann and Karl-Heinz Ohlig to Gerrit Jan Reinink and Joachim Gnilka. Günter Lüling is probably the most famous. (Patricia Crone was Danish; Han J. W. Drijvers was Dutch.)

Again, the question arises: Why is there such vociferous—even militant—push-back when it is pointed out that the Mohammedan movement began as a SYRIAC movement? Infelicitously, there is a grave vulnerability built into Islamic doctrine. Recall that the story is that the Koran was a VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT of god's speech…down to every last phoneme. Such a brazen claim sets the entire dogmatic edifice up for a fatal fall. For the moment we find that the "Recitations" were NOT delivered in

unadulterated CA, the entire house of cards collapses.

And so it goes: In its attempt to bolster its sacrosanctity, the creed paints itself into a corner. In order for the standard Islamic narrative to hold up, the final revelation HAD to be delivered in CA. It couldn't be otherwise. This position cannot be abandoned, lest the credence of virtually everything else is brought into serious question. Consequently, this is a hill that obdurate Muslim apologists will inclined to die on.

In sum: The Achilles Heal of Islam is its Syriac provenance. The question, then, becomes: Is it possible for there to be a Reformed Islam that concedes this point, thereby accommodating Reality (instead of depending upon the perpetuation of bespoke delusions). Such a reformation would open the way for a non-dogmatic "cultural" Islam in which supplicants can be honest about the history of their Faith. Insh'allah.

{A Other tribes in Yathrib included the Banu Khazraj (a.k.a. the Banu Kayla, which had been displaced from Yemen when the Himyarites overtook the Sabaeans) and the Banu Aws. At that point in time, Khaybar had recently endured a rather fractious epoch. Three years before MoM was purportedly born (c. 567), the (Syriac Christian) Ghassanids seized the city and purged it of its Jewish inhabitants—an event that was commemorated in a Syriac inscription at Harran the following year (by Sharahil bar Zalim). Already, there was discord in the region due to disagreements about the Abrahamic legacy.}

{B Other onomastic mutations occurred from Syriac to Arabic—as with "Aza-El" in the Syriac "Midrash Yalkut", rendered "Azrail" in CA (thereby conflating this angel with "Azra-El", the Old Aramaic name for the angel of death). So when the Koran actually mentions the angel of death (in 32:11), it can't do so by name. Considering the memetic ecosystem in which the Mohammedan movement gestated, such mix-ups are understandable. Meanwhile the Hebrew "Esther" is a take-off on the Assyrian "Ishtar", who was associated with Venus (a.k.a. the north star). The name is rendered "Zuhrah" in Arabic, which—sure enough—doubled as the moniker for Venus.}

{C Abrahamic lore posits a godhead that is both vindictive AND merciful. A person who was simultaneously rancorous and compassionate would likely be diagnosed with some sort of mental disorder. How shall we characterize a super-being that (ostensibly) exhibits these two traits in extremis? Schizophrenic deities, in turns out, are rather commonplace amongst the world's motley theologies. When it comes to a "merciful" authoritarian deity, the idea is that, insofar as one gets with the program, one has nothing to worry about. As vindictive as he may be, so long as he is placated, the deity is willing to withhold punishment. This offer of (ultimate) mercy ensures that people will be motivated to fall into line. For no matter how flawed one might be, as long as one appeases him, he will show mercy on the appointed day of reckoning. That's a proposition that's tough to turn down.}

{D The Mandaeans and Manicheans aren't the only candidates. Centuries later, people were still trying to figure out who the "Sabians" might have been. In his "Fisal wa-Milal", the 11th-century Andalusian scholar, Ali ibn Ahmed ibn Sa'id ibn Hazm of Cordoba identified them as the "Harranians"—that is, denizens of the Syriac Kingdom of Urhay (a.k.a. "Osroene"), the capital of which was Edessa. Prior to the Mohammedan conquests, the kingdom had been ruled by the (Arab) Abgarids—who were alternately vassals of the (Zoroastrian) Parthians and the (Christian) Armenians. Ibn Hazm specified that these "Sabians" honored "the seven planets and twelve constellations", engaged in ablutions, prayed five times each day, fasted for an entire lunar month, and even venerated a cubic shrine. Meanwhile…the 14th-century Ayyubid historian, Abu al-Fida of Damascus cited Abu Ismail Maghribi's account of the "Sabians", whom the latter referred to as "the Syriac peoples": "The [Syrians] are the most ancient of nations, and Adam and his sons spoke their language. [Here, he's probably thinking of Old Aramaic.] Their religious community is that of the Sabians, and they claim that they received their religion from Seth and Idris [Enoch]. They have a book that they ascribe to Seth ["The Book of Seth"]. In it, good precepts are recorded—such as enjoin truth-speaking and courage, and give protection to the stranger; and evil practices are mentioned, from which they are commanded to abstain. The Sabians had certain religious

rites—among which are seven fixed times of prayer, five of which correspond with that of the Muslims." Abu Ismail Maghribi also noted that they fasted for a full lunar month. A final possibility is that "Sabians" was simply a rendering of "Sabaeans"—the people of Abyssinia and southern Arabia who played an integral role in Abrahamic lore. This makes sense, as they were precursors to the Jewish Himyarites and Christian Aksumites—who would have propagated the Abrahamic Faith up until the Mohammedan conquest of the region. Other theories about the identity of the "Sabians" can be found in Ibn al-Nadim's "Fihrist", Al-Shahrastani's "Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal", and Al-Masudi's "Muruj al-Dhahab". The fact that nobody knows for sure who this people may have been is testament to the fact that the "Recitations" is not nearly as "mubeen" as is often supposed.}

{E The Mohammedans likely opted to re-name the lunar months because the incumbent nomenclature—used by Syriac-speaking peoples, Jews and Christians alike—had been inherited from the (pagan) Assyrians / Babylonians: Nisan, Iyar, Sivan [Simanu], Tammuz, Ab[u], Elul[u], Tishri [Tashritu], etc. Once Mecca was established as the temenos (see my essay, "Mecca And Its Cube"), the seasons would not have seemed to have much relevance; as its location is barely above 21 degrees north (so has no significant weather changes from season to season). The problem, of course, is that much of the world lives in regions with a continental climate, where such a temporal shift WOULD become problematic. The twelfth month, for example, is the ***month of heat*** *("Ramadan"), which sounds odd when it falls during cold winters. Meanwhile, from one decade to the next, the purported* ***springtide*** *("Rabi") ends up falling at all times of the year. Was the Creator of the Universe unaware of this?}*