

# The Syriac Origins of Koranic Text

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*(Author's Note: This is the second of the two-part piece on the Koran as an opus that was created in the Syriac language, based on Syriac source-material. The respective theses of this essay (pertaining to linguistic medium) and of "Syriac Source-Material For Islamic Lore" (pertaining to content) are mutually supporting. Here, we will see how the Koran was originally composed in Syriac—specifically: by a people who spoke Syriac (Nabataean Arabs). The present thesis is supported by the thesis of the other essay—which shows how Islamic lore is largely a regurgitation of Syriac lore. That the new creed emerged in the Syriac milieu of the Levant (from the 620's thru the 9th century) is made clear by the fact that, not only was it initially conveyed in the (Nabataean) Syriac language (as will be shown presently); its content was largely based on distinctly Syriac sources (as was shown in the companion essay). Mohammed of Mecca is denoted "MoM"; and Classical Arabic is denoted "CA".)*

In order to conduct our inquiry, it is necessary to perform a bit of linguistic forensics. This involves assaying the various neo-Aramaic tongues that became prevalent in Late Antiquity: Chaldean / Assyrian, Mandaean, Nabataean, Edessene, Palmyrene, etc.—all of which fell under the over-arching category: Syriac. The next step is to assess how they may have undergone a metamorphosis pursuant to the emergence of the Mohammedan movement.

The Semitic languages have a long history, going back to its earliest attested incarnation, Ugaritic (the language of the Amorites, dating to over four millennia ago). At some point around 1100 B.C., Phoenician and Old Aramaic would emerge from these Canaanite (a.k.a. "Sinaitic") origins. Many—if not all—of the earliest quasi-Abrahamic scriptures derived from Old Aramaic sources. (Such texts used a script that—like the language of the Aramaeans—was based on the Phoenician alphabet.) It is no surprise, then, that the earliest copies of Judaic texts (the books of Enoch, Lamech, Daniel, Ezra, Amram, etc.) were written using Babylonian Aramaic—so named because it is the dialect used by the Babylonian scribes during the Exilic Period (when Judaic scripture was first composed).

Only later would those scriptures be rendered in Classical Hebrew (a derivative of Samaritan, which was itself based on Old Aramaic), per the first Deuteronomist sources to which such scripture is attributed. Classical Hebrew (that is: Biblical Hebrew) was a spin-off of Mishnaic Hebrew—a more recent variation of Aramaic script. (Hebrew did not adopt the familiar "square script" until the 1st century A.D.)

The Aramaic basis for the earliest Abrahamic scripture continued to be evident into the Middle Ages—as with palpable traces in the Masoretic texts. The Jews of Mesopotamia persisted using variants of Aramaic into Late Antiquity. This is made apparent by documents like the "Book of Elc[h]asai" from the early 2nd century A.D. Hence the go-to language for the various Judaic sects that existed in Late Antiquity (the Essenes, Nazarenes, Ebionites, and Elcesaites) was the neo-Aramaic language known as "Syriac" (alt. Syro-Aramaic). The Judaic "Essenes" preserved such texts in the original language (as well as a Nabataean variation of it), as evidenced by the "Dead Sea scrolls"—parchments found hidden in ancient jars in the caves at Qumran.

And so it went: Aramaic eventually morphed into Syriac. This divergence seems to have occurred starting in the late 2nd century B.C.—specifically in the advent of the Kingdom of Urhay (a.k.a. the "Osroene Empire"), named after the Nabataean king: Osroes of Urhay. The capital of this kingdom, the city of Urhay, is what came to be called "Edessa". This explains why that city would become the epicenter of Syriac literary activity. Starting c. 314 A.D., the kingdom would become a (Syriac) province of the

Byzantine Empire—referred to in Greek as the “Heoa Dioikesis” [Diocese of the East].

In the 1st century B.C. through the 2nd century A.D., the (Arab) Emesene Dynasty ruled much of Syria. In the 1st century A.D., the Nabataean King Abgar V of Edessa (Osroene) was known as “King of the Arabs” (as attested by the Roman historian, Tacitus). The Abgarid Dynasty’s official language was Syriac; as was the language of most of its subjects. (It ruled until the mid-3rd century.) Through Late Antiquity, Syriac was inextricably linked with not only other denizens of the Levant, but with those known as Arabs. This makes sense, as the Syriac-speaking region (Nabataea) was referred to as “Arabia Petraea”. {48}

The Nabataean region stretched as far north as *Harran* and *Edessa*; as far south as *Hegra* (a.k.a. “Al-Hijr”; “Mada’in Salih”), *Dedan* (a.k.a. “Al-Ula”), and *Tabuk* (a.k.a. “Tayma”; “Umm Judhayidh”); and as far east as *Duma[tha]* (a.k.a. “Al-Jawf”; “Dumat al-Jandal”), and *Hir[t]a* (“Al-Hirah”)—all of which were located in what had formerly been the land of various Arab peoples (who had used variant scripts, all of which were Southern Semitic dialects). In the east, the Lakhmids used Syriac—specifically at *Hir[t]a* (on the Euphrates River just below the site where Kufa would be founded) and—even farther east—*Pit-Ardashir* (alt. “Al-[a]Hasa”/ “Al-Ahsa”) in Dilmun. The farthest south Nabataean linguistic influences may have gone were into the northern Hijaz. Arabs used a potpourri of variant scripts: Dumitic in the vicinity of *Duma* in the Wadi Sirhan, Dedanic in the vicinity of *Dedan*, Hismaic in the *Hisma* region...all the way up to Safaitic in the Al-Safa hills, in the vicinity of *Damascus*, farther to the north. These are now categorized as Southern Semitic dialects (sometimes misleadingly referred to as “Old North Arabian”).

Illustrative of the genealogy was the preposition that was used for “of” and “the”: the prefix “ha-“ in some inscriptions, and “al-“ in others. This discrepancy illustrates the continuum from older Semitic variants to CA. To call such languages / scripts “proto-Arabic” or “Old Arabic” is to invert causality. It would be like referring to Vulgar Latin as, say, “proto-Portuguese”. Since CA was created as a liturgical language, CA-fetishists are apt to indulge in such casuistry; just as those who fetishize Hebrew are apt to refer to Phoenician and Old Aramaic as “proto-Hebrew”—a retroactive categorization gimmick that is just as absurd. {67}

Recall that the Nabataeans overtook the northern Hijaz from the Lihyanites; who had built the cities of *Dedan*, *Duma*, and their capital, *Hegra* in the 7th century B.C. Of course, we never hear about these places in Abrahamic lore. (Evidently, they were ignored by the Creator of the Universe.) Even in the midst of Roman hegemony, Nabataean dominion ensured that their own lingua franca, Syriac, would predominate in the region throughout Late Antiquity...into the early Middle Ages. {68}

The first Mohammedans no more eager to acknowledge that they were former Nabateans than the Nabataeans broadcast that they were the descendants of the Lihyanites. This is not uncommon when ethnic identities shift; and is especially understandable after a transition is made to a new creed. {69}

The scope of Nabataean influence may have included north-central Arabia (the “Nafud”, which means the southern edge of Mesopotamia). It included the key port-city of Aqaba and the bustling capital, Petra. It is no coincidence that all the locations in which this family of scripts are found pay tribute to the Nabataean godhead, Dushara.

CA script exhibits clear vestiges of Syriac orthography—such as the “alif otiosum”. Also note the “ta marbuta[h]”, a suffix indicating femininity (entailing the need to place a pair of diacritical marks over the “ha”). Moreover, the script of the earliest Korans exhibits grammatical features that clearly derived from the Nabataean region; not from deep within the Arabian peninsula. Note, for example, signature traits like the “i’rab” (an unstressed, short vowel sound) and “alif maqsurah” (dotless “ya”): each of them ways to end words. Had CA—an abjad—come from Old South Arabian, these modifications would not have been

needed, as THAT script—an abugida—already contained the vowel sounds required. In sum: The eventual need for diacritical marks would not have existed had CA come from Old Arabian tongues.

Syriac would soon overtake its Semitic antecedent, becoming the predominant language from the Levant. This included the various Nabataean peoples, who were all Arabs: the Palmyrenes, Salihids, Tanukhids, and Ghassanids. It would become the lingua franca from Palestine, across Mesopotamia, to the fringes of Sassanian Persia...including northward into central Anatolia and, yes, southward into Arabia. The Lakhmids are the most obvious example of this.

When Bar-Sauma of Nisibis wrote his memoirs in the 5th century, it was in Syriac. When the “Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius” was written in the 7th century (about the goings on of the Middle East), it was in Syriac.

When MoM was about sixteen years old, an illuminated version of the Gospels was written in Mesopotamia. Even though it was composed at a Byzantine monastery located in Apamea (named “Bet[h] Zagba”), the language used to write it was Syriac. {1} MoM and his fellow Qurayshis—as well as most of the denizens of northwestern Arabia—would have spoken a Hijazi dialect of Syriac; as the Nabataean variant of the tongue was the lingua franca of the region until as late as the 9th century. This explains the myriad inscriptions from that time composed in Nabataean script. {2}

How can we so sure that Hijazis spoke Syriac? The 8th-century historian, Ibn Ishaq wrote that during a renovation of Meccan cube (which purportedly occurred just prior to MoM’s ministry), there was an inscription on a corner of the shrine’s foundation that was COMPOSED IN SYRIAC.

Testament to this fact is the conventional tale about MoM’s first revelation at Gar Hira c. 610. Immediately following that first “Laylat al-Qadar” [“Night of Destiny”], MoM was highly doubtful that the angel (Gabriel) was really speaking to him. So he came to his wife at the time (the elder Khadijah bint Khuwaylid al-Kubra) to seek council. Khadijah would soon encourage her husband to accept his role as messenger. However, before settling the matter, she urged her spouse to consult her cousin, Waraka ibn Nawfal, whom she esteemed for his prodigious wisdom. MoM obliged. Waraka met with the nascent prophet, and—as the story goes—upon hearing his testimony, validated Kadijah’s endorsement. This account is attested in the most vaunted Hadith: that of Bukhari (1/1/3, 4/55/605, and 9/87/111) as well as of Muslim (vol. 1, no. 301). The anecdote was also included in Ibn Hisham’s recension of Ibn Ishaq’s biography: the “Sirat Rasul Allah”.

Here’s the catch: Waraka was an Ebionite / Nestorian preacher of the Quraysh, meaning he would certainly have spoken Syriac (i.e. the language of the Ebionites and Nestorians). However, per Mohammedan lore (in which CA was the lingua franca of the region), Waraka would need to have spoken CA. YET... in broaching the topic of language, Mohammedan lore makes no mention of Waraka speaking any alternate tongues. This only makes sense if Waraka’s ONLY language was Syriac. Surely, Waraka’s native tongue would have been the same as MoM’s, as they belonged to the same tribe (the Quraysh). So Waraka would not have needed to undertake any translation. His source-material was Syriac liturgy; and so he—with his audience—would have been fluent in Syriac.

To suppose MoM was bi-lingual strains credulity. Ergo MoM spoke Syriac.

Unsurprisingly, the claim was later circulated that Waraka had translated the Old and New Testaments from Greek into Arabic. But this was obviously a post hoc fabrication—as Nestorian scripture was SYRIAC, not Greek. (Oops.) Here’s the catch: Such confabulation would not have been warranted lest the tale had to be re-written in order to accommodate the claim that CA had been in use all along.

Bear in mind that the Quraysh were not alone in having Syriac Christians amongst them. The most notable case of Syriac-speaking Arabians was the Banu Kalb [ibn Wabara], a large Arabian tribe that dwelled on land spanning from northwestern Arabia (notably in Tabuk and Al-Jawf)...through the Sirhan valley and the Nabatean land of *Badia*...and up into Hauran and Al-Sham (Syria). It is clear they all spoke a dialect of Syriac, as they were part of the Syriac Church.

This was the same Christian denomination as that of the Salihids, Tanukhids, and Ghassanids—all of which were Arab tribes that spoke some version of Syriac and used the Nabatean alphabet (on which the Kufic script would be based). This fact is attested by inscriptions at *Umm Judhayidh*, at *Umm al-Jimal*, and at *Namarah*. All of these show the the beginning of the orthographic genealogy from Syrio-Aramaic...through Nabataean...that would serve as the basis for the Kufic script (which would lead to Ma'il, then to Naskh). {2}

The emergence of a new (distinctly) “Arabic” language from antecedent Syriac sources is further attested by the absorption of the Qedarites into the Nabataean orbit at some point in the late 2nd century. To reiterate: During Late Antiquity, the Nabataean influence stretched down to *Hegra* in the northern Hijaz. So denizens of the Hijaz during MoM’s lifetime couldn’t NOT have been heavily influenced by both this language and the concomitant culture.

Other notable Arabians wrote in Syriac—including the Nestorian writers Dadisho, Gabriel, and Ahob from the 7th century. Isaac of Nineveh, who was born in Beth Qatraye, also wrote in Syriac. Tellingly, several of the Sahabah (companions of MoM) were from the Banu Kalb—most notably: Zayd ibn Harithah and Dihya Wahi. As mentioned, the Banu Kalb were known to have spoken Syriac. Yet NONE of these followers of MoM were known to have spoken a different language from the other contemporaries of MoM.

The only conclusion, then, is that ALL of the Sahabah—along with all their non-Mohammedan neighbors—spoke the same language as the Banu Kalb.

Another tidbit worth noting: According to the conventional Islamic narrative, in the last couple years of his ministry, MoM sent a letter to the Ghassanid ruler of Damascus, Harith ibn Abi Shamir...who, being of Nabataean ethnicity, would have spoken Syriac. {72}

So what of the Koran? As legend has it, it was the caliph Uthman who had collators compile the “Recitations” (see my essay: “Genesis Of A Holy Book”). What is interesting is that at one point, Uthman issued the following instruction: When there is any disagreement about a verse, render it “in the dialect of the Quraysh.” Uthman was clearly referring to something other than CA; otherwise he would have simply specified “Arabic” (or “god’s language”). In any case, he would have used some descriptor that was definitive.

It is likely that Uthman himself spoke a dialect of Syriac; and so was referring to an alternate dialect...which, at that point, did not (yet) have a distinct identity. In other words: It was not a language unto itself; and so did not have a unique name. Perhaps the caliph favored this variant of Syriac because it was associated with the Quraysh (who had enjoyed prestige in the region for generations).

In any case, THAT was the language the first compilers of the “Recitations” were instructed to use. By that point, the use of Syriac in the region had a long history. In the 6th century, the famed warrior-poet, Zuhayr ibn Janab [ibn Hubal] of the aforementioned (Syriac-speaking) Banu Kalb conquered the Taghlib, Bakr, and Ghatafan tribes on behalf of the (Christian) Aksumite viceroy, Abraha al-Ashram of Himyar. What makes this interesting is that it was his descendent, Bahdal ibn Unayf ibn Walja ibn Qunafa (of the Banu Haritha ibn Janab) who led the Banu Kalb during MoM’s lifetime. It is well-attested that Bahdal’s descendants would become an integral part of the Umayyad caliphate. There is no record of them making any transition to a new tongue during the intervening time.

Another clue: The most prized wife of the caliph Uthman, Na’ila bint Furafisa of Kufa, was from the Banu Kalb. Na’ila did not need to learn a new language when she married into the caliphate. In other words: They already spoke the same lingua franca.

Let’s inquire further: What else of note happened during the 7th century in the Middle East? As it turns out, the Nestorian Psalter [Book of Psalms] was composed. It too was written in Syriac. It was thereafter translated into Pahlavi (as evidenced by a manuscript from the time discovered at Turpan in Xin-jiang). In other words: After its Syriac version had been circulating in the region for generations, when it finally came time for people there—at that point, part of the Muslim world—to translate it into a new language, they did not translate it into CA. Instead, they opted to render it in the literary language of the Persians. This only makes sense if CA had not yet become a full-fledged language...in the Ummah or anywhere else. Clearly, Mohammedans would have wanted to render the text in the go-to literary language of the time. If not Syriac, then it was Middle Persian (written using Pahlavi script).

There’s yet another telling fact: At the time of the Mohammedan take-over of Jerusalem c. 637 A.D., the Byzantine patriarch of the city (Sophronius of Damascus) was a fellow Arab...who spoke the same language the conquerers: Syriac. It is plain from historical records that they were not speaking some foreign tongue.

There are tales of Abu al-Aswad Zalim al-Dua’Ali of Basra, a companion of Ali who is reputed to have established the diacritical marks for the developing CA (“i’jam” for consonants, “tashkil” / “harakat” for vowels). This is almost surely apocryphal, as there is no evidence for a fully-developed language (that is: a distinct “Classical Arabic”) until the 8th century. The inscription on the Dome of the Rock, at the end of the 7th century, had no diacritical marks; so clearly tales of Al-Du’ali establishing them earlier are farcical. {14}

Sure enough, we are told that the first CA dictionary (the “Kitab al-Ayn”; Book of the People) would not be compiled until the end of the 8th century. It was done by the Ibadi linguist, Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi of the (theretofore Syriac-speaking) Azd; during his tenure in Basra. That dictionary has been long lost; and we are only aware of it via sources from over two centuries later. The purported “isnad” (chain of narration) was first recounted by Abu al-Faraj Mu’ammad ibn Ishaq al-Nadim of Baghdad in his “Kitab al-Fihrist” at the end of the 10th century.

Here’s how that chain went, according to Al-Nadim: Al-Farahidi’s work was taken up by Al-Akhfash “al-Akbar” [the Great] of Basra...who’s student was Abu Bishr Amr ibn Uthman ibn Qanbar of Basra (a.k.a. “Al-Sibwayh”), who penned the fabled “Kitab al-Sibawayh”...which was later transcribed by his student, Al-Akhfash al-Mujashi’i. The transmission was then taken up by Abu al-Abbas Muhammad ibn Yazid of Basra (a.k.a. “Al-Mubarrad”)...who is known for his work, “Al-Kamil” [The Completion], composed at the end of the 9th century. {9}

Al-Nadim wrote about all of this a century after THAT.

To review: According to Al-Nadim, “Al-Kamil” had been written ABOUT the “Kitab al-Sibawayh”...which had been written ABOUT the “Kitab al-Ayn”...which, in turn, had (purportedly) been based on the work of the fabled Abu al-Aswad Zalim al-Dua’ Ali of Basra (mentioned above). The earliest available documentation of this chain of transmission is from the end of the 10th century. In other words, there is no ACTUAL DOCUMENT written in a fully-developed CA until the 9th century.

Tellingly, even by the 9th century, when a Persian glossary (the “Frahang-i Pahlavig”) was composed, it was used as a reference NOT for CA, but for Syrio-Aramaic ideograms. (!) This would not have made much sense had the prioritized language at the time been CA. Indeed, it only makes sense if Syriac, rather than (what would become) Islam’s liturgical language, was the lingua franca of the region.

The record makes clear that during the 8th century, works were still being composed in Syriac throughout the Middle East—which was, by then, under Islamic dominion. In other words: A tract in a fully-developed CA still had yet to be written, even within Dar al-Islam. {7} This has startling implications. For even a century after MoM’s death, Muslims were STILL writing important documents in Syriac. How does this make any sense given the conventional historiography?

This timeline was confirmed by the dealings of Syrian patriarch, Timataos of Hadyab (a.k.a. “Timothy of Adiabene”), who’s career spanned the late 8th and early 9th century. As it happened, Timothy was on considerably amicable terms with the Abbasid court in Baghdad—so much so that he moved to Baghdad and assisted in the translation of ancient Greek texts into...SYRIAC. Timothy even documented a debate he had with the caliph Al-Mahdi...IN SYRIAC. Whether or not the discussion he logged for posterity was partly contrived is beside the point. The point is that, in providing the account, the Nestorian patriarch was quite deferential toward the Mohammedan Faith; and at no point mentioned that he needed to have translated anything that Al-Mahdi said when making a record of it...in Syriac. This only makes sense if the caliph himself was speaking the same language.

(Supposing Timothy was bilingual would be rather far-fetched, as he would have likely made reference to the alternate language in which his interlocutor was couching his discourse. No such reference occurs. Nor does he intimate that he needed to speak a foreign tongue in order to conduct the conversation.)

Inscriptions of the “sanadjat” (coin weights) and “dinars” (coins) issued by the Umayyad dynasty were all in variations of Syriac (using Kufic script). {2} Recall that the Syriac monk, John of Damascus had a high-ranking administrative position in the regime—another circumstance that indicates there was a parity of tongues.

Perhaps most telling of all is how contemporaries referred to the Arabs and their language. During Late Antiquity, the Levantine peoples (Romans and Jews alike) labeled the Nabataeans and Arabians “Qedarites”, and referred to their language as the “tongue of the Qedarites” (where a “K” is often used for the “Q”). In other words: Those peoples spoke the SAME LANGUAGE; and that language was *Syriac*. (Note that even the Hebrew Bible refers to the relevant region as “Kedar”.) Referring to CA in this way would not have made any sense. Clearly, a distinctly “Arabic” language did not yet exist.

During the Abbasid era, while it seems the Mohammedan creed may have adopted what might be called an embryonic version of CA as its liturgical language, the lingua franca would have still been what it had been for centuries: Syriac. Note, for example, the “*Kitab al-Filaha al-Nabatiyya*” [“Book of Nabataean Agriculture”], a treatise written by the Arab scholar, Ibn Wahshiyya of Kufa in the late 9th century. The treatise was eventually translated into CA from its original version; which was—you guessed it—composed in (Nabataean) Syriac. It was eventually rendered in CA c. 904. Why not until then? The present thesis provides the only plausible explanation.

Given this timeline, it should come as no surprise that the earliest accounts of the Umayyad period that were composed in CA did not appear until the 9th century. Interestingly, both of those accounts were from Egyptian historians: Ibn Abd al-Hakam’s “*Futuh al-Misr wa’l-Maghrab wa’l-Andalus*” [Conquest of Egypt and the Maghreb and Andalusia] and Ibn Hisham’s “*Kitab al-Tijan li Ma’rifati Muluk al-Zaman*” [Book Of Crowns Regarding Knowledgeable Kings Of The Epoch]. { 11 } Both accounts were from well over two centuries after MoM’s ministry.

Al-Tabari’s “*Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*” [History of the Prophets and Kings] came even later. What might account for this extensive delay? Such a long postponement would be inexplicable BUT FOR the fact that the final version of these chronicles were (eventually) rendered in an official language that had not been established before then. To wit: These Arabic accounts did not appear any earlier because they COULDN’T HAVE appeared any earlier...lest they not have been in CA.

So we might wonder: When it comes to language, what was going on in Egypt UP UNTIL that time? The oldest surviving mosque in Cairo is the one built at Al-Qata’i (at the behest of the anti-Abbasid potentate, Ibn Talun in the late 870’s). All the inscriptions on that mosque were in Kufic script. Later, in the late 13th century, the Mamluks added inscriptions using an early CA script (Naskh, which had been developed in the 10th century). Those are the FIRST appearances of CA in Egypt.

Tellingly, the Kufic script was still being used BY MUSLIMS in the late 9th / early 10th century, as demonstrated by the ornate “mushaf al-azraq” [blue manuscript] from Cordoba, in Andalusia (though it may have originated in Tunisia). In other words: The Kufic precedent was so predominant in early Islam that it propagated all the way through Egypt and the Maghreb...and onto the Iberian Peninsula.

Initially, the Kufic script was used THROUGHOUT Dar Al-Islam—even in north Africa. Kufic inscriptions have been found on mosques from the 9th century—notably: the Great Mosque of Karaouine in Tunisia and the Karaouine Mosque in Fes, Morocco. This means that this script was the original form of Islam’s liturgical language.

For the duration of the 9th century, Kufic was ALSO still the prominent script used for material in Persia as well—another reminder of the origins of Islam’s liturgical language. Behold a cache of manuscripts for “Arithmetika” by Diophantus of Alexandria (originally composed in the 3rd century A.D.) excavated from the library of “Asta[n] Quds Raz[a]vi” at Mashhan, in Khorasan (which seems to have been founded in the 10th century). The texts were written in Kufic. The material seems to have been translated by the famed (Syriac) Melkite mathematician, Qusta ibn Luqa of Baalbek at some point in the 9th century...indicating that the script was still being used at that time.

The question naturally arises: If the original “Recitations” had been in Syriac, then why do we not have any “masahif” IN SYRIAC? In other words: Why are there no surviving manuscripts written in explicitly Classical Syriac vernacular, using Estralanga or Nabataean script?

Let's leave aside the fact that the "Recitations" were likely transmitted orally for the first few generations. As I outline in my essay, "Genesis Of A Holy Book", any manuscripts that might have existed in the pre-Abbasid era were systematically destroyed. It is BY DESIGN that no copies of the "Recitations" survive until they were finally rendered—in their final form—in Kufic (proto-Arabic) script. Hence no "mus'haf" would have survived until after the powers-that-be had settled on an "official" version; and had decided that CA was the language in which the Final Revelation should be (read: had originally been) delivered. In the interim, there would not have been many parchments circulating—and even then, only amongst the literate elite.

Here, we find that not only is history written by the victors; the language in which it is written is often dictated by the victors; and the (fabricated) HISTORY OF that language becomes part of their preferred historical narrative. {54}

An indication that there was a steady metamorphosis of writing during the pivotal (Rashidun and Umayyad) period is the existence of the "Garshuni" script—whereby a proto-Arabic vernacular was written using Syriac (Estralanga) script. This was warranted because the Arabic script was still being developed, and had not come into use beyond a few auspicious inscriptions (e.g. the Dome Of The Rock in the last decade of the 7th century). Suffice to say: Had CA existed from the beginning, and it had been the lingua franca ALL ALONG, there would have been no need for Garshuni to have been used.

It is instructive to note that during the time the Mohammedan movement was gestating, there was FURTHER ramification of neo-Aramaic scripts. Nabataean was merely one of many linguistic branches that gave rise to orthographic descendants. Nestorian and Chaldean Christians (a.k.a. Assyrians) started using a variant of Estralanga known as "Madnhaya" / "Swadaya" [Eastern]. Meanwhile, Jacobite and Maronite Christians developed another variant known as "Serta" / "Serto". Syriac also led to several Persian variants: Parthian, Sogdian, Manichaean, Bactrian, and Mandaic scripts; as well as early Taliq.

And so it went: After beginning with the Nabatean script (because they WERE predominantly Nabatean), Ishmaelites began using Garshuni out of practical necessity; and—due to the scribal activities in Kufa—developed Kufic. {6} Naturally, such scripts exhibited Safaitic influences, as they emerged in the midst of Old North Arabian, which could be found at more southern locals like Dumah and Dedan / Hegra (due to the vestiges of Lihyanite culture). As would be expected, as Arabic began to become a distinct tongue, it developed a distinct script. Kufic would be followed by the Ma'il script...which led to Naskh, followed by T[h]ulut[h] and Tawqi / Tevki, then the modern Persian variant, Nas[k]h-Taliq (which is now used for Farsi, Dari, Tajik, Pashto, Urdu, and other Persian-based languages).

We might note that, even by the time MoM would have lived, the Estralanga and Nabatean scripts THEMSELVES had a long history. They descended from Palmyrene, which was based on Edessan (the point at which Syriac became a distinct language). And THAT was based on Imperial Aramaic, which was based on Old Aramaic, which was based the Phoenician alphabet, the roots of which were proto-Sinaitic. (Old Aramaic also spawned the Samaritan script, and then Babylonian Aramaic...which eventually led to Mishnaic Hebrew [a.k.a. the "square" script known as Classical Hebrew], then to Masoretic Hebrew in the Middle Ages.)



Interestingly, the Kufic script did not always give rise to the “Nashk” script (which eventually came to be the official script of CA). Notably, a distinct Maghrebi Koranic script emerged in North Africa; and was used as late as the 14th century. (!) There, the Syriac of the first Mohammedan conquerors morphed into a medieval “Darija” rather than into CA. Maghrebi Korans were eventually rendered in the official liturgical language starting in the 10th century (that is: after CA had been fully developed). This was primarily due to the efforts of Abbasid vizier, Ibn Ali Ibn Muqla—who earned his renown for establishing the “khatt al-mansub” [proportioned script].

And what of the Far East at around this precipitous time (the 9th century)? Persian traveler, Suleyman al-Tajir of Siraf proselytized for Islam in Pala (Bengal) and Guang-zhou (southern China). Peculiarly, there are no written records from him. It is most likely that he would have written in Pahlavi. We can be fairly certain he would have been unfamiliar with (the not-yet mainstream) CA.

This peculiar vacuum in the textual record also exists with the Hadith. The “sahifah” [script] / “mushaf” [manuscript] of Hammam ibn Munabbih was a Hadith collection purportedly compiled in the first two decades of the 8th century. Yet, mysteriously, no copy of it survived. Strange. The same could be said of all the OTHER original Hadith collections. The “sahifah al-sadiqah” [Truthful Script] was purportedly compiled by MoM’s companion, Abd-ullah ibn Amr ibn al-A[a]s. That is ALSO suspiciously missing. Go figure. Sure enough, the earliest copies of Hadith don’t emerge until the late 9th century: after CA would have been fully developed as a literary language.

The first instances of the “Recitations” (i.e. Islam’s holy book) did not emerge in the historical record until the 8th century; and were composed in the Kufic script. Subsequent versions were typically composed using the earliest version of CA: “Ma’il”. Here are the ten oldest Koranic manuscripts that have been discovered:

1. The palimpsest (parchment on which there were over-writes of previous versions) from the Great Mosque of Sana’a, Yemen was composed in Kufic and dates from the 8th century.
2. The codex on display in Istanbul’s Topkapi Palace museum was composed in Kufic and dates from the 8th century.
3. The “Birmingham” codex (discovered at Fustat in Egypt; now housed in the “Alphonse Mingana” collection of Birmingham University’s Cadbury Research Library) was written in the “Ma’il” script and dates from the 8th century. {46}
4. The “Parisino-Petropolitanus” codices are housed in Paris. These are highly-fragmented segments of text that account for less than half of the Koran. All of it was written in the “Ma’il” script and dates from the 8th century. The most notable codex in the Paris collection is dubbed “BnF Arabe 328(ab/c)”.
5. The manuscript housed at the British Library in London was written in the “Ma’il” script and dates from the late 8th century.
6. The manuscript housed at the Tareq Majab museum in Kuwait City was written in the “Ma’il” script and dates from the late 8th century.
7. The manuscript housed at the Al-Hussein mosque in Cairo dates from the late 8th century.
8. The manuscript housed at the Turkish And Islamic Art Museum in Istanbul dates from the late 8th century.
9. The manuscript found at the Great Mosque of Damascus (now housed at the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum in Istanbul) dates from the late 8th century.
10. The Samarkand codex (a.k.a. the “Tashkent Koran”) has folios housed at the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg, Russia. It was composed in Kufic and dates from the early 9th century.

Notice a pattern?

Shall we consider it an incredible coincidence that ALL of the earliest Korans date back to the same threshold in history? Such a conclusive temporal convergence indicates historical origin. We should, of course, temper our speculation; but the fact is that the textual record begins quite suddenly at a certain point in history. {38}

The Sana'a manuscript—the oldest “mus’haf” found thus far—is a palimpsest. In other words: It is a folio on which something had been written, erased, then had another script written over it. The first draft seems to have been written in the last decade of the 7th century (around the time caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan commissioned the first inscription on the Dome of the Rock). That text was deleted, and—in the early 8th century—replaced by what we can now see. The updated (Kufic) text is markedly different from what had originally been there. In other words: The composition, which was still in its embryonic stages of development, was a work in progress; as was the creed it was articulating.

Over the course of Abd al-Malik’s tenure, the new language was undergoing a metamorphosis—both lexically and orthographically. (Yes, even the script underwent significant changes between the two layers of writing.) Clearly, the nascent language that was in use BEFORE Abd al-Malik was not the same as the liturgical language that came to be used by the end of his reign. This linguistic development was likely concomitant with a theological transformation. And the most significant phase of this transformation seems to have occurred while he was caliph.

The implication here is quite striking: Rather than the 620’s, the watershed moment for Islam was the 690’s.

It is no surprise that the germination of a new creed tracks with the creation of a new liturgical language. This is how it often works...with ANY new creed. Note, for example, the establishment of Old Church Slavonic as a new liturgical language for the Eastern Roman Church, as a way to accommodate the Slavic lands across which the Byzantine Empire—which was predominantly GREEK-speaking—was promulgating what became “Eastern Orthodox” Christianity (in contra-distinction to the Latin-based Roman Catholic Church).

A note on the Birmingham codex. Some have carbon dated the parchment to as early as the late 6th / early 7th century, making it contemporaneous with MoM...and even before he purportedly started reporting his revelations. (!) Were this to be true, it would further buttress the present thesis. The codex is comprised of small swatches of vellum (animal skin), containing just three passages: material that would wind up in the “Recitations” as verses 17-31 in Surah 18, verses 91-98 in Surah 19, and the first 40 verses of Surah 20. The content includes the Seven Sleepers Of Ephesus, the statement that the “Recitations” were rendered in “the language of the Arabs”, and the beginning of the account of Moses—in other words: the material we are presently contending was extant prior to the Koran, and circulating in the region (see Footnote 46).

However, such early dating is almost certainly false. How can we be so sure? The text includes chapter designations and dotted verse separations—features that were not introduced until the 8th century. Furthermore, the carbon dating pertains to the date of the death of the animal whose skin was used for vellum, not to the ink that was used. Hence the text may have been written much later, on vellum that had been stored and saved for many generations (something that was sometimes done). The (Kufic) orthography indicates that the fragments were likely contemporaneous with the above-mentioned Paris fragments—that is: BnF Arabe 328(ab) of “Parisino-Petro-politanus”. {51}

(For more on the earliest Koranic manuscripts, see “Observations On Early Koranic Manuscripts In Sana’a” by the German paleographer, Gerd R. Puin of Saarland University. Also worth consulting is

“A Challenge To Islam From Reformation” by Gunter Luling.)

The fact that distinctly “Arabic” texts very suddenly appear in the archeological record almost exactly when the Abbasids seized power (c. 750) is too much of a coincidence to blithely dismiss. As is often the case, religious developments track with geo-political developments.

Funny how the end of the 8th century was ALSO when the development of CA was reaching its culmination. For, not coincidentally, this was around the time that the first comprehensive book on CA grammar was produced. As the story goes, it was composed by the aforementioned “Al-Sibawayh”...which, as we have seen, was (dubiously) traced back to Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi. {12} Yet even THAT was not final. CA continued to be refined over the ensuing centuries:

- In the 9th century, the Abbasid lexicographer, Ibn Duraid of Basra compiled a crude dictionary of the burgeoning new language: the “Jamhara fi al-Lugha”.
- In the late 10th century, the Turkic lexicographer, Abu Nasr Ismail ibn Hammad al-Jawhari of Farab produced the foundational “Sihah” dictionary. Meanwhile, Al-Azhari produced the highly influential “Tahdhib al-Lugha”. This was a propitious time for CA, as it is when the earliest “Naskh” script was developed from the antecedent Kufic script.
- In the 11th century, the Andalusian lexicographer, Ibn Sidah of Murcia produced the “Muhkam” dictionary.
- In the early 13th century, the Persian writer, Al-Saghani produced the “Ubab al-Zakhir wa al-Lubab al-Fakhir”.
- Around c. 1300, the Tunisian philologist, Ibn Manzur of the Banu Khazraj produced the “Lis[h]an al-Arab” [Tongue of the Arabs], as the need to set the record straight still existed EVEN THEN. At around the same time, the famed Mamluk muhadith, Al-Dhahabi of Damascus produced the “Nihaya” dictionary, as some clarification of the new language was still in order.

It was not until the late 14th century that the Persian lexicographer, Muhammad ibn Yaqub of Shiraz / Firuzabad (a.k.a. “Al-Shirazi” and “Al-Firuzabadi”) compiled what would thereafter be considered the definitive CA dictionary: The “Qam[o]us al-Muhit” [Surrounding Ocean]. That would serve as the official resource for CA until the turn of the 20th century...when, in the advent of the Ottoman Empire’s collapse, the language was updated YET AGAIN. That last iteration was done by a cadre of “scholars” at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, who rendered the current “Cairo” version of the Koran in 1924. THAT is the Koran that is used by the vast majority of Muslims to the present day. (I assay the account of the Koran’s gestation period in “Genesis Of A Holy Book”, where I exclusively make use of Islamic source-material.)

This timeline explains why the EARLIEST commentary on the Koran [“tafsir”] that was written in CA (by Persian writer from Tabaristan known as “Al-Tabari”) was not composed until the early 10th century—almost THREE CENTURIES after the “Recitations” were purportedly delivered. Any earlier commentaries are gone. This is unsurprising; for any “tafsir” that may have been composed much earlier would have most likely been written in SYRIAC (using Kufic script or some variant of the Nabataean alphabet). {2}

Recall that Al-Tabari’s work was a redaction of Ibn Hisham’s redaction of Ibn Ishaq’s “Sirah Rasul Allah”...which was itself commissioned by Abbasid caliph, Abu Jafar al-Mansur in the 770’s. It’s worth noting that Al-Tabari (a Shiite from Amol) was born in northern Persia six years after Ibn Hisham (a Sunni from Basra) died in Egypt; so the two would have never met. (They probably would not have even met anyone who’d met the other.) So there would have certainly been a disjuncture in the chain of transmission.

As might be expected, medieval proselytes could not abide this exigency...that is, once CA was established as the putative language of the Abrahamic deity. For THAT meant that CA would have needed to have been the language in which the Final Revelation was delivered in the early 7th century to MoM

himself...which means it must not have been rendered in Syriac. The vacuum in the textual record is thus explained.

Bear in mind, in the early 8th century, the “Recitations” as a complete book did not yet exist. Accounts provided by Syriac historian, John bar Penkaye (from Nineveh, in northern Mesopotamia) about his experience of the Mohammedan conquests of the late 7th century make no mention of a sacred book...let alone any book composed in a distinctly Arabic language. (His writings were composed at the beginning of the 8th century, just before the career of Theodore[t] bar Kon[a]i.)

It is no coincidence that the earliest of the “Qisas al-Anbiya” [didactic “stories of the prophets”] was purportedly composed by the Persian scholar, Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Hamzah of Kufa (a.k.a. “Al-Kisa’i”)—the man who founded Kufa’s language school at the beginning of the 9th century. We should not be shocked to discover that there are no original manuscripts of Al-Kisa’i’s tract. We can surmise that, during the 9th century, versions of these “qisas” were primarily composed in Kufic script; and that the original exposition may well have even been—in part—in the Syriac language; as the lexical transition could have possibly still been in process. It was not until later that the material was rendered in unadulterated CA. As it turns out, the earliest CA renderings of the work are from the 11th century. One was by the Andalusian writer, Ibn Mutarrif al-Tarafi; the other was by the Persian writer, Abu Ishaq al-Thalabi (in his “Ara’is al-Majalis fi Kisas al-Anbiya”). By the time Al-Tarafi and Al-Thalabi were writing, it would have become unacceptable for important religious works to be composed in anything other than CA. Even so, the most famous rendition (by Ibn Kathir) would not be composed until the 14th century...seven centuries after MoM’s ministry.

This timeline only makes sense in light of the present thesis.

A question worth posing: What did the early Muslim scholars NOT study? Sometimes, what people didn’t do is more revealing than what they did do. Tellingly, when we hear about the exogenous languages that Muslims were inclined to learn in the first century or two of Islam’s existence, it was Koine Greek and Middle Persian. It seems that they never had any need to study Syriac. But why not? If they’d spoken Arabic, not Syriac, and Syriac was one of the most widespread languages, then surely Syriac would have been one of the primary second languages studied by Muslims—especially during the new religion’s earliest epoch.

The only explanation for this is quite straight-forward: They ALREADY SPOKE Syriac. If anything, Muslims would have needed to study the new liturgical language: CA. This is why we suddenly start seeing CA glossaries appear around the time the earliest Hadith (those of Bukhari and Muslim) were being composed; not any earlier. “Imam” Malik ibn Anas supposedly composed the “Muwatta” in the late 8th century; and THAT is the work that likely served as the basis for the first Hadith collections. (He is the namesake for the Maliki school for jurisprudence.) However, we only have a version of Malik’s work via a recension that was done by the Andalusian jurist, Yahya ibn Yahya al-Laythi of Algeciras in the 9th century...lo and behold: just before Muhammad ibn Isma’il of Bukhara and Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj of Nishapur compiled their Hadith collections—the earliest available. {63}

Obviously, denizens of Dar al-Islam were obliged to cultivate a full understanding of the new language if they were to be inculcated with the new lore. So the need arose THEN (in the 9th century) for pedagogy. But not before. Had CA been the language from the get-go, then a “Muwatta” would have appeared much earlier.

Sometimes, one betrays more from what one DOESN’T say than what one says. So another question worth posing: What did the early Muslims NOT talk about? Answer: the Nabataeans. If the Sahaba / Salaf

really hailed from the middle of the Hijaz, this would be rather bizarre; as the Nabataeans—fellow Arabs, mind you—were a formidable PAGAN tribe up until that time; and the early Muslims were assiduous in indicting any and all Arabs for their pagan ways...down to the most minor clan. Again, the explanation for this is quite straight-forward: The Sahaba / Salaf were THEMSELVES (former) Nabataeans. There is no other way to explain such silence.

But exactly when was CA invented? It's hard to say for sure; as the person who was charged with the task did not announce: "I have invented a new language for the new Faith!" Rarely are such announcements made. Notable exceptions include Mesrop Mashtots, who invented the Armenian script in 405; and Cyril of Thessalonika, who invented the Glagolitic script (for Old Church Slavonic) in the 860's. As with CA, these were for explicitly liturgical purposes.

From what can be adduced, someone working for Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan ibn al-Hakam (who ruled from the Syriac-speaking city of Damascus) created a new language—as a liturgical language—in the closing decade of the 7th century. Why then? Well, that was when a distinct Mohammedan creed was (officially) established. I present this timeline in my essay, "Mecca And Its Cube". If the current dating for the first inscription on the Dome of the Rock (erected on the "Haram al-Sharif") in Jerusalem is accurate, then THAT was the inaugural appearance of the Kufic (i.e. not yet Arabic) script. Be that as it may, this auspicious instance was a unique case—not an indication of an extant lingua franca. The new language was created for a special purpose: as a new (sacred) language to be used to articulate a new creed. As is typically the case with liturgical languages, it was INITIALLY intended to be used exclusively by clergy and "ulema". {61}

When we consider that first proto-Arabic inscription (inside the Qubbat as-Sakhra, atop the Haram al-Sharif), we find that even the wording was not yet in its final form. Behold: "There is no god but god. He is one. He has no associates" followed a few lines later by "The praised one [Mu-H-M-D] is the slave [abd] of god and his messenger (rasul)." This is notably different from both the Shahada and the Fatihah. Clearly, the phrasing was a work in progress. In fact, at the time, the moniker "Mu-H-M-D" was still being used as a general descriptor—a matter I address in Appendix 3 of my essay, "Genesis Of A Holy Book".

Just to keep things in historical perspective, during MoM's lifetime, Old Khmer was in wide use in southeast Asia, while the Siddham and Nagari scripts were in wide use in India. (And the Gupta and Pallava scripts were in use long before that.) In Germanic lands, Elder Futhark runes were in wide use even earlier. Too bad THOSE people never got a final message from the Creator of the Universe. Did god have something against Austro-Asiatic tongues? Against Sanskrit? Against Old Norse? {70}

We might note another interesting occurrence on the timeline of CA's development. The famed Syriac writer, Hasan bar Bahlul would not compile the first comprehensive Syriac-Arabic dictionary until the 10th century. Strange, if CA had existed ALL ALONG, that it did not occur to anyone that people might find such a dictionary useful. To reiterate: This was around the same time that the earliest "Naskh" script was developed from the antecedent Kufic script; which meant that the new language was just coming into its own.

The historical record makes it quite clear: CA was created for the liturgical material of the new-fangled Abrahamic Faith (that is: explicitly for Islamic liturgy; i.e. Koranic verse). It is NOT the case that CA existed, and the Koran was composed in it. Since it was—initially—only orally transmitted, it must have been in the lingua franca of the time. Only later was it rendered in the liturgical language (the first indication of which we find in the inscription on the Dome of the Rock from the last decade of the 7th century).

It is important to note that during the earliest stage of development, CA would have only been used in elite circles; as it was the new liturgical language of what was becoming an Abrahamic Faith in its own right. It was over the course of the 8th and 9th centuries that it would become a full-fledged language; and thus

the lingua franca of the Ishmaelites.

Once CA caught on in the 800's, its adoption as the lingua franca throughout Dar al-Islam would occur quite rapidly. This transition may well have been catalyzed by the deliberate establishment of the new holy book IN CA ...though still with a Kufic script.

The reasoning here is quite simple: If the liturgical language was seen as HAVING to have been CA (and CA was held as GOD'S language) then such a transition needed to be decisive and complete...even if the script was still evolving.

Consequently, an OFFICIAL rendering of scripture was undertaken so as to afford it distinction from antecedent Abrahamic liturgy—which, in that region, was primarily in Syriac. What better way to rationalize the UNIQUE nature of the Final Revelation (that is: to distinguish the Koran as inimitable) than to contend that the newly-minted language was the native language of GOD HIMSELF?! Naturally, there would have been a concerted program for everyone in Dar al-Islam to PROMPTLY learn the language that the Abrahamic deity was declared to have spoken...that is, once CA was finally established. This pivotal juncture would have roughly coincided with the aforementioned work of “Sibawayh”.

There is no official documentation of this sudden transition; but it is not difficult to connect the dots here.

(I explore this matter further in the Postscript.) There was a clear reason to christen CA as a liturgical language—just as the Sanhedrin had done with Classical Hebrew (descended from Babylonian Aramaic), just as the Christian monks of Egypt had done with the Sahidic / Thebaic dialect of Coptic (descended from Hieratic Egyptian), and just as the Vatican had done with Vulgar Latin (descended from Etruscan and Attic Greek).

For the impresarios of Islam, the trick would have been to hold that THAT was the language that the exalted “Seal of the Prophets” HIMSELF had spoken. This claim would require one to assert that it was the language in which the “Recitations” had been originally delivered...and so the language in which it had been recited ALL ALONG. Thus the oral transmission from MoM's mouth to the ears of the current listeners would have been maintained with perfect fidelity. Subsequently, there would have been a vociferous effort to re-write history—a process that, to the present day, requires obfuscation as much as confabulation. {42}

It might be noted that CA was not the only neo-Syriac tongue; as, over time, local Syriac vernaculars would coalesce into distinct languages throughout the region. For example, “Toroyo” was established in Osroene [Kurdistan]—from the northern Levant, across Nineveh, and into the plain of Urmia (that is: within the ambit of Assyrian neo-Aramaic and Chaldean neo-Aramaic communities). So the fact that Syriac also underwent a metamorphosis in Syria, trans-Jordan, and the Hijaz is unsurprising. After all, there were Syriac-speaking Arab tribes as far north as “al-Sham”—as with the “Quda'ah” and “Ma'ad[d]” (a.k.a. the “Sarakenoi”; from which the Occidental term “Saracens” was probably derived).

Syriac even lingered into the 9th century in the heart of the Muslim world. The “Sabian” mathematician / scientist, Thabit ibn Qurra of Harran (al-Jazira) was renown for having pioneered physics...IN BAGHDAD.

His go-to language was none other than...Syriac. (Many of the “Sabians” of Harran were Mandaeans. Others worshipped the Semitic / Assyrian moon-god, Sin...who's symbol was a crescent moon.) As might be expected, his works were soon thereafter translated into CA.

To recapitulate: During the 7th and 8th—and even into the 9th—centuries, it was into SYRIAC that scribes in the Muslim world translated the Ancient Greek texts, not into CA. This was for the singular reason that CA had yet to become a distinct language. Only once scribes began using CA for important texts (that is: once the powers-that-be christened it as the liturgical language of Islam) was the Koran rendered in a fully-developed CA.

One might say that the Koran was the first complete work composed in CA...BY DEFINITION. For CA was created IN ORDER TO BE the liturgical language of the Mohammedan creed. In other words: It came into existence as a (re-vamped) rendering of the “Recitations”; so naturally the “Recitations” is the first instance in which the exposition is entirely in CA. The “catch”, of course, is that the Arabic Koran couldn’t help but retain vestiges of its Syriac origins—both folkloric and linguistic.

The earliest book to document the emergence of CA from its Syriac precursors (and the derivation of Islamic lore from antecedent Abrahamic lore) was the aforementioned “Kitab al-Fihrist”. As discussed above, the tract was composed by Muhammad ibn Ishaq al-Nadim of Baghdad (a.k.a. “Abu al-Faraj ibn Abi Yaqub al-Warraq”) c. 959, which was at least 170 years after Al-Farahidi’s “Kitab al-Ayn” (which was purportedly composed during the 780’s). To reiterate: The majority of intermediate material referenced in the “Kitab al-Fihrist” no longer exists. Such texts having been either lost or destroyed. All we have is the aforementioned “isnad” account provided by Al-Nadim in the late 10th century.

Hence CONTEMPORANEOUS documentation of the transition from Syriac to CA during that pivotal time is no longer available to us. It is no wonder; as that would have provided a concrete record of when (and by what means), exactly, CA actually came into its own.

Nevertheless, it is not difficult to connect the dots; and surmise what probably occurred.

An obvious question arises: Given this timeline, what are we to make of the conventional claim that CA had existed as a lingua franca in the Hijaz since the 6th century; and as a liturgical language throughout the Umayyad—then Abbasid—realm since the 7th century, and into the 8th century? Can this long delay (up to the composition of the “Kitab al-Ayn” in the 780’s) be explained by the fact that CA took two or three centuries to “catch on”?

Put another way: If CA had already been in use during MoM’s lifetime, what were the Muslims waiting for?

One would think that, were CA to have ACTUALLY been the language in which the “Final Revelation” had been revealed (and had the first Mohammedans genuinely believed CA to be the language of GOD HIMSELF), the Muslims would have been doing NOTHING BUT meticulously recording and fastidiously dissecting the language...for themselves and for posterity. Indeed, they would have been doing so WITHOUT DELAY. Yet even in c. 848, the Abbasid court’s official astrologer (in Baghdad), Abu Ma’shar of Balkh (a.k.a. “Albumasar”) composed his magnum opus, the “Kitab al-Mudkhal al-Kabir” in the PERSIAN literary language: Pahlavi.

So we cannot avoid asking: Might this long delay be attributed to the fact that nobody saw fit to write down what had been deemed god’s tongue? And so nobody saw fit to use this new liturgical language over the course of the one-and-a-half centuries following MoM’s death?

Such a course of events would have been—to put it mildly—highly unlikely. The most straight-forward explanation is: The language in question *was not yet in use*.

The earliest bios of MoM were from the early 9th century: Ibn Hisham’s recension of Ibn Ishaq’s “Sira” (purportedly composed in Cairo in the 760’s), which was followed by Al-Waqidi’s recension.

~~Clearly, modification was rampant—both in medium and in content. (For details, see my essay, “Genesis Of~~

Original essay at: <https://www.masonscott.org/the-syriac-origins-of-koranic-text>

A Holy Book”.)

As mentioned, once CA was established by the powers-that-be, it caught on rather quickly; and spread like wildfire throughout Dar al-Islam. It is NOT as if CA was already being widely spoken in the 6th century (as MoM came of age)...and yet was simply held in abeyance for centuries as the new Faith gestated...at which time scholars finally got around to establishing its lexicon and grammar. Such an account makes no sense whatsoever.

Further archeological evidence points to the real explanation. Abbasid coins used SYRIAC inscriptions, not CA—as with the golden “dinar” for 8th-century Caliph Al-Mansur (a.k.a. the “Mahdi”). {10} Upon founding Baghdad, Al-Mansur commissioned scribes (primarily to interpret ancient Greek texts), all of whom were Syriac writers.

The literary record is also quite clear: Syriac continued to be ubiquitous long after MoM’s death; and was the lingua franca right up until, well, it suddenly wasn’t. While, prior to the 7th century, there were a few short inscriptions in what might be thought of as proto-Arabic, this does not mean CA as it eventually came to be had been fully-developed. Indeed, as we shall see, ALL those inscriptions were written using some variation of Nabataean script. {2}

Syriac continued as the prevailing lingua franca of the ENTIRE Hijaz long after MoM passed away. Use of the Palmyrene (Nabataean) script was widespread in the region. It was even used as far south as Socotra, the main island off the coast of Yemen. Nestorian (Syriac) Christianity was still prevalent on the island c. 880 when a bishop was consecrated there. And as late as the 10th century, the Arab geographer, Abu Muhammad al-Hasan al-Hamdani noted that—even by then—most of the inhabitants on the Yemeni island were Christian. Suffice to say: Those Christians were not new arrivals; they represented the vestiges of a bygone era—during which Syriac was well-known to the denizens of the Hijaz, even in the southernmost locals (where Sabaic / Hadramautic was the indigenous language).

For more on Old South Arabian script and its relation to the script of the Sabaeans (“Zabur”, as found at Ma’rib / Sana’a), see the work of the Austrian Arabist, Eduard Glaser. In addition to Sabaic, there were Qatabanic (as at Timna), Minaic (as at Dedan), and Hadramautic / Himyaritic (as at Zafar and Aden) variations of the script...all of which were cousins of the Ethiopic script used in Abyssinia: Ge’ez. This language family began with the Sabaeans, and continued on through the Aksumites. Meanwhile, Hijazi Syriac—which came from the Nabataeans—was used at Najran; meaning it was used throughout the Hijaz.

So when, exactly, did the crucial transition occur? As we’ve seen, it was rather abrupt; and corresponds to the sudden emergence of Koranic manuscripts. Evidence indicates that it happened over the course of just a few generations—starting toward the end of the 8th century and on through the 9th century. So by the END of the 9th century, even NON-Muslims in the Levant and al-Sham (e.g. the Melkite bishop of Harran, Theodore Abu Qurrah) were composing theological tracts in CA. This was a monumental transition; a significant shift that indicates something about the linguistic conditions within which the “dhimmi” community operated—under Islamic dominion—by that point in time.

The fact that even non-Muslims suddenly adopted this new language, and did so quite suddenly, and at THAT point in time, indicates that when it arrived, Islam’s liturgical language quickly dominated.



Alternative explanations strain credulity. That is: It is very unlikely that CA had already existed for centuries, yet had been inexplicably kept in abeyance by Mohammedan rulers all that time. This is especially clear considering that *even after* CA started being widely used, for centuries many “Arabic” texts will STILL WRITTEN using Syriac script (Serta / Psita in the western regions; Swadaya / Madnhaya in the eastern regions): a practice now referred to as “Garshuni”.

In his “The Formation of Islam”, Jonathan Berkey put it thus: “Certainly [the emergence of CA in the 9th century] reflects the astonishingly rapid progress of the adoption of [CA] by the inhabitants of the Near East, both those who converted to Islam as well as those who remained faithful to the older religious traditions” (p. 167). And so it went: After a millennium of widespread usage, Syriac almost vanished within just a few generations.

To reiterate: This sudden linguistic transplantation occurred well over two centuries AFTER MoM’s ministry.

The hasty dissipation of Syriac was concomitant with the abrupt emergence of CA...which was ALSO concomitant with the development of Mohammedan scripture. This was no coincidence; it was a deliberate linguistic shift, undertaken for perfectly understandable reasons. Every religion fancies its own proprietary LITURGICAL LANGUAGE, and the Mohammedans were no different. The protagonist of their holy book would not have delivered his final revelation IN SYRIAC: tongue of the pagans and Christians! Once Islamic dominion in the region was absolute, the transition was inevitable.

When the Sufi / Hanbali mu-hadith, [Abu Ismail] Khwaja Abdullah al-Ansari of Herat / Balkh penned his landmark work, the “Munajat Namah” [Book of Propitiation] in the 11th century, he wrote it in Pahlavi; not in CA. {45} Only later was it translated into medieval Arabic. (Note: If it had ORIGINALLY been in CA, scribes likely would have KEPT it in CA.)

By the 11th century, even Jewish thinkers in Andalusia were writing in CA—as demonstrated by Bahya ben Yuseph ibn Paquda of Zaragoza (a.k.a. “Rabbeinu Bachya”), who composed the first Judaic system of ethics c. 1040 IN ARABIC. The work was originally entitled the “Hidayah ila Faraid al-Qulub” [Guide to the Duties of the Heart], and was only later translated into Hebrew (as “Chovot Ha-Levavot”). Most notably, Maimonides (who lived in Muslim Andalusia) composed his “Guide to the Perplexed” c. 1185 in medieval Arabic. And so once CA caught on, we find that there was little inclination to write things in ANYTHING ELSE (within the Muslim world). That was the case even when it came to Judaic texts.

This should not distract us from the fact that there are many instances where books by early Muslims—which EVENTUALLY came to be known in their CA incarnations—were ORIGINALLY written in Syriac. Indeed, it should make us very suspicious that the original versions are now long-lost (quite possibly destroyed)—a peculiar eventuality considering such texts would have been highly valued.

A notable example is the “Kitab al-Hayawan” [Book of Animals; an adaptation of Aristotle’s work]. Also notable is the book on statecraft, the “Kitab Sirr al-Asrar” [Secret Book of Secrets; later rendered in Latin as “Secretum Secretorum”]. Both works were composed by Abu Yahya ibn al-Batriq in the late 8th century. Both works were eventually rendered from Syriac into CA; but not until—you guessed it—the 9th century. {8} This would only make sense if CA did not yet become an auspicious language UNTIL THEN. {9}

If CA had already been in usage during the 7th century, why were the most important books in the region—COMPOSED BY MUSLIMS—still being written in Syriac in the 8th century? {7}

Also telling: Greek works that were eventually rendered in CA were often translated from SYRIAC, not directly from the Greek—as the famed Abbasid translator, Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus of dayr Qunna

demonstrated in Baghdad when working for the Abbasids in the early 10th century. This Syriac philosopher translated Aristotle's works into CA from Syriac manuscripts—many of which were from Hunayn ibn Ishaq al-Ibadi of the 9th century. This begs the question: Had CA already existed, why is it that the scribes SKIPPED it, waiting centuries before finally deciding it was time to create editions in CA? And why did those manuscripts COME FROM Syriac?

Another historical fact worth noting: The city of Harran [alt. "Carrhae"] in Nineveh was home of the (Arab) Mudar tribe and the Mandaeans (referred to in the Koran as "Sabians"). In the 740's, the city served as the capital of the Umayyad caliphate. During the 8th and 9th centuries (that is: long AFTER it had fallen within the Mohammedan dominion), the city's scribes were translating ancient Greek works into...SYRIAC. As we've seen, only later was the material rendered in Arabic.

We might ask of this long delay: Why did the sudden inclination to translate such works into CA not arise UNTIL THEN? Answer: CA did not exist as a full-fledged language until long after the Mohammedan movement came into existence.

Alexandrian expositor, Claudius Ptolemy's "Mathematike Syntaxis" was translated into Syriac before it was eventually translated into CA, whereupon it was rendered "Al-Majisti" (Romanized to "Almagest"). The same went for the works of the Egyptian alchemist, Zosimos of Panopolis: Syriac first... THEN CA later on.

Other evidence comports with the above timeline. The first Arabic rendering of the New Testament did not appear until the end of the 8th century—a fact attested by Coptic patriarch, Tawadrus II of Alexandria. Arabic versions of the Torah did not appear until the 10th century. (!) This would not have made any sense had the earliest Mohammedans spoken CA. After all, they had familiarity with both the Torah and the Gospels, which means such material was being circulated at the time...if not in CA, then in something else.

What other important texts attest to this timeline? The first geographical tract to use CA would not be written until c. 870. It was the "Kitab al-Masalik w'al Mamalik" [Book of Roads and Kingdoms] by Ibn Khordadbeh. As it so happens, that is roughly when the "Recitations" began appearing in a fully-developed CA. Coincidence? Hardly.

We can venture back a bit further in history to make the present point. Let's look at literature in the region. Prior to MoM's lifetime, Arabia boasted a plethora of revered poets. Ten of the most prominent:

- As-Samaw'al ibn Adiya of the Banu Harith
- Ziyad ibn Muawiyah of the Banu Dhubyan (a.k.a. "Al-Nabigha")
- Alqama ibn Ubada of the Banu Tamim (a.k.a. "Alqama al-Fahl")
- Maymun ibn Qays al-Asha of the Banu Hanifa [at Hajr, in Yamamah, in the Najd]
- Tarafa ibn al-Abd of the Banu Bakr
- Harith ibn Hilliza al-Yashkuri of the Banu Bakr
- Abu Aqil Labid ibn Rabi'ah of the Banu Amir / Hawazin
- Imr[u] al-Qays ibn Hujr of the Banu Kindah
- Maymun ibn Qays "al-A'sha" of the Banu Hanifa [at Hajr, in Yamamah, in the Najd]
- Umaiya [alt. Umayya] ibn Abi as-Salt of the Banu Khuza'a [hailing from Ta'if; ostensive progenitor of the Umayyads via Sufyan]

*All of them would have written in Syriac.* In pre-Islamic Arabia, women were also accorded literary stature—as with the poetesses, Afira bint Abbad of Yamama (who earned renown in the 3rd century) and Layla bint Lukayz (who earned renown in the 5th century). They too would have composed their verse in Syriac.

By the time of MoM’s ministry, the famed Nestorian missionary, Alopen, was converting communities as far east as China to the (Syriac) Nestorian Faith. Within three years of MoM’s death, Alopen had established a Syriac church in China’s capital, Chang’an. This shows how widespread the language had become. During MoM’s lifetime, the Sassanian Queen (wife of Khosrow II) was a Syriac Christian from Khuzestan. (Shirin was likely from either Gundishapur or Susa.) Suffice to say: By the time MoM died, Syriac had reached far beyond Arabia.

During MoM’s lifetime, Arabian poets included:

- Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma of the Banu Muzaina (a.k.a. “Zoheir”)
- Hatim of the Banu Tayy
- Jabal ibn Jawwal of the Banu Taghlib
- Amr ibn Kulthum of the Banu Taghlib
- Uday [alt. “Adi”] ibn Zayd [alt. “Zaid”] of the Banu Lakhm, hailing from Al-Hirah
- Adi ibn Zayd of Al-Hirah
- Maymun ibn Qays al-A’sha

(Antar[ah] ibn Shaddad was likely more legendary than historical.) All of them would have written in one or another dialect of Syriac. Why? Simply because that was the lingua franca of the region at the time.

There were also plenty of female poets in Arabia during MoM’s lifetime—including:

- Safiyah bint Thalabah al-Shaybaniyah of the Banu Shayban (a.k.a. “Al-Hujayjah”)
- Qutayla ukht al-Nadr of the Banu Quraysh
- Hind bint al-Numan of the Banu Lakhm (a.k.a. “Al-Hurqah”)
- Tumadir bint Amr ibn al-Harith ibn al-Sharid al-Sulamiyah of the Najd (a.k.a. “Al-Khansa” [the gazelle])
- Al-Khirniq bint Badr
- Asma bint Marwan
- Jewish poetess, Sarah of Yemen [of the Banu Qurayza]

All of them would have written in Syriac as well, of course; for the same reasons. Had the works of such writers been in CA *all along*, the late issue of their CA editions would be utterly inexplicable. But the textual record makes perfect sense once we realize these writers would NOT have been composing their material in CA, as CA did not yet exist. Every one of these poets would have written their verse in Syriac.

Later there lived the Hashimite poet, Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi of Kufa (ref. his pro-Ali’d “Hashimiyyat”) and the pro-Zoroastrian poet, Bashar ibn Burd of the Banu Uqayl (who spent his life in Basra). Both of those men wrote in the 8th century; and both of were killed for their heretical views. No manuscripts of their material exist until AFTER c. 800 (that is: until after CA would have been fully-developed).

The natural question to pose is: Are there ANY manuscripts of ANY material by an Arabian poet who lived prior c. 800 (that is: manuscripts that date back to their lifetime)? As it turns out, NOT ONE such manuscript exists. Is this some bizarre coincidence? What could possibly explain this peculiar hiatus in the textual record?

Let's pose the question another way: If the Ishmaelites were so proud of their ARABIC literary heritage (that is: up to the time the Koran started being rendered in CA), then why doesn't the material (of ANY of the major writers listed above) survive?

In the Middle East, the 7th century was a high point in the history of translation from Greek to Syriac. This would not have made sense had CA been ascendent. In fact, those who spoke Greek would not encounter the need to translate their tongue into CA for centuries to come. Clearly, the hegemonic Ishmaelite empire spoke Syriac.

But what about the famed Persian writer, Abu Nuwas [al-Hasan] ibn Hani of Avaz ([k]Huz-i-stan), who wrote in the late 8th / early 9th century? Didn't HE write in Arabic? It's difficult to say for sure.

At the time, his hometown, Avaz, was known in Persian as "Huz" (alt. "[k]Haja"); and in Syriac as "Bet Huzaye" ["House of the Huz[i]"]. It was located on the site of the ancient Elamite / Achaemenid city of Taryana. (The city later came to be known in Arabic as "Ahwaz".) Abu Nuwas spent much of his early life in Basra; and was eventually taken under the wing of the (Syriac) writer, Abu Usama Waliba ibn al-Hubab al-Asadi of Kufa. The two became lovers. Abu Nuwas' material—most likely composed in Kufic script—was eventually compiled by another writer in Kufa: Abu Yusuf Yaqub ibn al-Sikkit. As we've seen, Kufa was where Syriac underwent the transformation into CA.

Abu Nuwas' material was eventually compiled / edited in the 10th century by the Turkic writer, Abu Bakr ibn Yahya ibn al-Abbas al-Suli of Astara-bad (located in Gol-i-stan, northern Persia; later named "Gorgan"). Al-Suli spent most of his career in Basra, and was renown for his commentaries on "shatranj" [chess]. It is Al-Suli who was probably the first to render Abu Nuwas' works in CA. He is also the primary source for the "Hamasah" (poetry) of the famed Arab (Tayy) poet, Habib ibn Aws al-Ta'i of Jasim (a.k.a. "Abu Tammam"). {49} Much of what we now know about Abu Nuwas is folkloric, as he eventually became a character in the anthology, "One Thousand And One Nights". What we DO know is that he was known for erotic poetry—often involving pedophilia (which was endorsed in the Sunnah). It is a stretch to simply assume he wrote in CA. In fact, he was writing during the Syriac-to-CA transition period; and—unfortunately—we don't have what HE PERSONALLY wrote; we only have Al-Suli's redactions of Al-Sikkit's redactions of whatever he actually wrote.

Rather than a treasure trove of literary achievements in CA, there is a startling absence—nay: a COMPLETE TEXTUAL VACUUM. It might be noted that this is a vacuum that occurs precisely when preserving texts in CA—purportedly god's favorite language—would have been of paramount concern. (!) It is unreasonable to suppose that ALL of the works of those authors were destroyed (presumably due to the fact that every last verse of the material was deemed heretical). It is more likely that none of the originals were preserved for reasons that had to do with the language in which they were written being supplanted. (In other words: The disappearance can be explained more by concerns about the medium than about the content.)

As it turns out, the only record of ANY of the aforementioned material is from later editions of anthologies...all of which were back-dated. (!) These anthologies (collectively known as "Hamasah" [tales of valor]) were not rendered in CA until the 9th century. The most renown of these were:

- The “Jamharat Ash’ar al-Arab” compiled by Abu Zayd Muhammad of the Quraysh [a.k.a. “Zayd ibn Al-Khattab”] (purportedly composed in the 7th century)
- The “Mufaddaliyyat” compiled by the Persian writer, Mufaddal al-Dabbi of Kufa (purportedly composed in the 8th century) {12}
- The “Mu’allaqat” compiled by Daylamite-Persian writer, Hammad “Al-Rawiya” [the transmitter] of Kufa (purportedly composed in the 8th century)
- The “Asma’iyyat” compiled by Abu Said Abd al-Malik ibn Qurayb al-Asma’i of Basra (purportedly composed in the late 8th century)
- The “Kitab al-Hamasah” compiled by Habib ibn Aws of the Banu Tayy [a.k.a. “Abu Tammam”]

The delay in the appearance of these editions is—to put it mildly—rather suspicious. There is no evidence of any poetry written in (fully-developed) CA prior to c. 800 because there is no evidence of ANYTHING written in (fully-developed) CA prior to c. 800. How might this glaring absence be accounted for?

The most plausible explanation is that such material was originally composed in a language that Islamic scribes were determined to supplant: Syriac (i.e. NOT the new liturgical language, which was supposed to be eternal). {39}

It was not until the Abbasid prince, Abd Allah ibn al-Mu’utaz of Samarra composed his magnum opus, the “Kitab al-Badi” c. 900 that we (FINALLY) find poetry composed in CA. And it was not until the 10th century that Abu al-Faraq of Isfahan (a.k.a. “Abulfaraj”) compiled the massive “Kitab al-Aghani” [Book of Songs] that a full anthology of Middle-Eastern poetry was finally rendered in CA. Had CA existed ALL ALONG, this delay would be utterly inexplicable. Supposing CA had been in wide use since the 6th century requires one to engage in a flight of fancy bordering on absurdity.

Note: It was also in the 10th century that Al-Walid ibn Ubayd’illah Al-Buhturi of the Banu Tayy composed his “diwans”. This timeline would be baffling if we were to suppose CA had already been in full use throughout the region since MoM’s lifetime. Given the present thesis, such bafflement is not warranted.

Meanwhile, the Persian “Khwaday Namag” [Book of Kings] was not translated into CA until the 13th century. That translation was done by Al-Fath ibn Ali al-Bondari of Isfahan, at the request of the Ayyubid Sultan, Al-Mu’azzam Isa of Damascus. But that was ITSELF an adaptation the “Shah-nameh” by Persian author, Ferdawsi...which would have been written in Pahlavi.

Shortly after the first Mohammedan conquests, there was a period of “silence” during which explicitly Persian literature temporarily ceased—roughly a century: from the late 7th to the late 8th century. The Persian language entered this period as Middle Persian (Pahlavi); and emerged from it in its modern form (strongly influenced by medieval Arabic). There was obviously some major linguistic revamping that occurred during this time. Lo and behold: It was during that “silent” (one might say: silenced) period that CA came into existence. As we’ve seen, this new liturgical language developed primarily from Syriac...though incorporated elements of extant Persian vernacular. The re-emergence of Persian material was facilitated by the (Islamic) Samanids; and was written in a (Persian) variation of Arabic script: “Taliq” (later, “Nas[k]h-Taliq”).

Before that transitional period, the Persian language had primarily been used for religious (Zoroastrian) literature—as with the Denkard, Bundahisn, Vendidad, and even the Avesta (which had originally been composed in Avestan). Pursuant to the Mohammedan conquests, such material was destroyed; as it was deemed heretical. Other material, such as the “Khwaday-Namag” [“Book of Lords”], was deemed subversive; so that was destroyed as well. Such abolition had enduring repercussions. Henceforth, Persian

could no longer be used for heretical material. It was not until the late 10th century that the Samanid author, Ferdowsi of Tus was able to compose the “Shah-nama”: the first major work in modern Persian; effectively a re-vamping of the Sassanian “Khwaday-Namag”—though a rendition that comported with Islamic sensibilities. By then, the writing was being done in Nastaliq; Pahlavi was no more. Shortly thereafter, Persian literature enjoyed somewhat of a Renaissance—as with Ursuli’s “Vamiku u Adhra” [“The Lover And The Virgin”] (based on the Greek work, “Metiochus and Parthenope”) c. 1000.

And so it went: Persian—specifically, Zoroastrian—culture (temples, literature, rituals, etc.) was eradicated because the entirety of Zoroastrian lands were overtaken. That meant that THAT religion no longer posed a threat to Dar al-Islam. By contrast, the Eastern Roman (Greek; Byzantine) and Western Roman (Latin; Roman Catholic) empires persisted; which meant that they remained somewhat of a threat. {52} Theologically, this entailed that Trinitarianism would continue to be a point of contention.

The question remains: How ubiquitous WAS Syriac in the Middle East prior to the 9th century? Was it really the predominant lingua franca at the time? Consider this: Even those in the region who were NOT in the Syriac “Church of the East” (that is: even those who were Orthodox Christians instead of Nestorians) STILL often became versed in Syriac—as with the Byzantine writer, Marutha[s] of Mayerqit [alt. “Martyropolis”], who lived during the late 4th / early 5th century (and was also conversant in Middle Persian). This is quite telling, as the liturgical language of the Byzantine Church was Koine Greek. Syriac needed to have been predominant if those in the Roman Church who lived in the Middle East found the need to use it in their liturgies (which were nominally in Koine Greek).

Needless to say, Marutha did not speak or write in CA; as it did not yet exist.

Some of the first poets to write using CA were Al-Masudi of Baghdad (in the 10th century) and Al-Tha’alibi of Nishapur (in the early 11th century). Al-Masudi’s “Muruj ad-Dahab wa Ma’adin al-Jawhar” [“Meadows Of Gold And Mines Of Gems”] seems to have been inspired by the work of the Persian writer, Abu Hanifah Ahmad ibn Dawood of Dinawar (who wrote using Kufic script during the 9th century; as he was a student of Al-Kisai’i and Abu Yusuf Ya’qub ibn as-Sikkit: prominent figures in the school at Kufa).

Retro-active onomastic adjustments were standard operating procedure for those seeking to elide the Syriac origins of lore within Dar al-Islam. The case of “Kalilah and Dimna” is perhaps the most revealing; so it is worth exploring this at length. We begin with the Persian writer, Roozbeh pur-i Dadoe hailed from the ancient city of Shahr-i Gor in Fars; and ended up spending most of his career in Basra serving the caliphate. His rendition of the tale was lifted from a previous version by the renown Persian polymath, Burzmihr / Bozorgmehr of Merv (a.k.a. “Borzuya”), which itself had been adapted from the Vedic “Panchatantra” *during MoM’s lifetime*.

In order to ascribe to Roozbeh pur-i Dado an Arab pedigree, his name was retroactively Arabized to “Abu-Muhammad Abd-ullah Ruzbeh ibn Daduya” (a.k.a. “Ibn al-Muqaffa”). This was done, we can only presume, to make it seem plausible that HIS rendition of the tale was originally composed in CA. Ibn al-Muqaffa died shortly before c. 760, long before CA had become a literary language, when Persians were still writing in Pahlavi.

When Ibn al-Muqaffa decided to translate the Pahlavi version of the tale in the 730’s / 740’s (over a century after MoM’s death), he translated it into SYRIAC, not into CA. The Indian story collection included the tale of “Karirak ud Damanak” (alt. dubbed the “Fable of Bidpai”). It was thus rendered “Kalilag va Damag” [alt. “Kalile va Demne”]—that is: IN SYRIAC. Why? Because, at the time, CA did not yet exist, so Syriac was the natural alternative to Pahlavi.

Unsurprisingly, the earliest version of this classic work that was composed in CA dates only to the 12th century. (!) ONLY THEN was the title rendered in the more familiar

Arabic: “Kalilah wa Dimna”. Why the long delay in the emergence of a CA version? The answer should be obvious.

Predictably, to this day, Islamic revisionists erroneously attribute the CA version of this romance to Roozbeh pur-i Dadoe (who they still refer to by his Arabized moniker). This enables them to pretend that CA was the language in which the work was originally composed (i.e. the language in which it had been rendered all along). Again: Why the obfuscation? As usual, it’s the attempted cover-up that serves as evidence for the boondoggle.

The explanation for such post-hoc onomastic tweaking is straight-forward. Why would Roozbeh pur-i Dadoe have bothered translating the work into Syriac if CA was the go-to language in the 8th century? Moreover, to concede that Persian was the language of choice for literary works at the time would be to concede that CA was NOT YET the exalted language that it eventually came to be.

Of course, it stands to reason that those who fetishize CA want to make it appear as though CA was the language that literati in the Middle East were using ALL THE WHILE. Clearly it was not; but that cannot be openly admitted...lest the rationalization for CA as a liturgical language collapses (i.e. that it was the language in which the Creator of the Universe delivered his final revelation in the early 7th century). The fact of the matter is: CA did not yet exist as a fully-developed language—let alone as a full-fledged lingua franca—at the time (i.e. until the late 8th century); so the ACTUAL historical record makes perfect sense.

Alas. Incontrovertible as it may be, this fact is routinely elided by apologists to the present day. {15}

So what are we to make of the Arabic “Kalilah wa Dimna” from the 12th century? As it turns out, the literary value of the CA version of the Pahlavi “Karirak ud Damanak” could not compete with the (superior) literary value of antecedent versions. Hence we should not be surprised to learn that versions of the classic Indian fable eventually found in Greece and western Europe (notably, “Calila e Dimna” in Old Castilian c. 1251) were translated NOT from the (inferior) CA, but instead directly from the earlier Pahlavi (Middle Persian)...and even from its Sanskrit precursors. {13}

Meanwhile, the version in medieval (Masoretic) Hebrew from the 12th century (an edition that is attributed to “Joel”) was most likely based on the Syriac version (“Kalilag va Damnag”), NOT on a CA version.

We can celebrate the Romance of Kalilah and Dimna as a great achievement of Arabic literature ‘til the cows come home; yet doing so does not attest to the language actually used in the Hijaz in the 6th / 7th century.

This was not an isolated case. The Persian epic “*Hamza-nama*” [“Book of Hamza”; alt. “Dastan-i Hamza”] was composed IN PAHLAVI. The original tale was about the Kharijite rebel leader, Hamza ibn Abdullah, who led an uprising against caliph Harun al-Rashid c. 800. Only later—when it was rendered in CA—was the tale re-vamped to be about a different Hamza: Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib (the fabled uncle of Mohammed of Mecca); and rendered the “Maghazi” of Amir Hamza. In the revamped (Islamic) version, the conflict was—implausibly—re-conceived as the fabled Battle of Uhud (c. 625). Once more, we see that it is the attempted cover-up that reveals what likely occurred. {47}

This timeline makes perfect sense considering the sequence of literature enumerated earlier.

It’s also worth noting that the “*Story of Ahikar*” was originally rendered in Aramaic, then in Syriac...and only AFTER THAT into Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Old Turkic, and CA. Why would something that had originally been in CA be translated into Syriac (with the original CA version lost); and then, later on,

from THAT into CA?

Yet another case-in-point is the forgery known as the “*Secretum Secretorum*” [Latin: “Secret of Secrets”], purported to have been a letter composed by Aristotle to his pupil, Alexander the Great (from the 4th century B.C.) In reality, the document was a hoax, eventually written in CA during the 10th century A.D. But what was THAT based on? The writers themselves admit that their rendition had been translated FROM SYRIAC. That this infamous document was not rendered in CA until the 10th century is very telling.

In fact, in ANY case where a work has been rendered in both Syriac and CA, it was ALWAYS in Syriac first (then translated into CA much later), not the other way around. If CA had been in use all along, this trend would be utterly inexplicable. As mentioned in the previous essay, another instance of this retro-active ascription was the Syriac “Infancy Gospel”, often erroneously labeled the “ARABIC Infancy Gospel” so as to obfuscate the fact that the material was originally composed IN SYRIAC (as CA had not yet been fully-developed when Arabians became familiar with it). Such mis-attribution is not uncommon—as it also occurred with “Arabian Nights” (Persian, not Arabian) and “Arabic numerals” (Indian, not Arabic).

Islamic historiography is rife with revisionism. For example, scribes rendered the name of the famed Persian (Karenid) scholar, Wuzurg-Mihr-i Bokhtagan (alt. “Dad-burz-Mihr” or “Zar-Mihr”) into “Bozorjmehr”...perhaps to elide the fact that he was named after “Mithra” (“Mihr”). (The first part of the original name was theophoric; the latter part was patronymic, and pertained to his father, “Bokhtagan” / “Sukhra”, who hailed from the Karen line.) Wuzurg-Mihr, it might be noted, would have been a contemporary of MoM.

One of the first scholars to bring Greek knowledge to the Middle East was Sergius of Reshaina, who—while studying in Alexandria in the early 6th century—translated Greek medical texts (esp. those of Galen) into Syriac. During the Islamic Golden Age, those works would eventually be translated into CA—starting with the scholar, Hunayn ibn Ishaq “Al-Ibadi”. As it turns out, Al-Ibadi wrote in Syriac AS WELL. Notably, he was one of the FIRST Muslim scribes to translate extant texts into the new Arabic language. That was in the 9th century.

By the end of the 9th century, Thabit ibn Qurra was still composing many of his works in Syriac, though he ALSO composed some works in the new language: CA. It was only in the 11th century that a glossary of Syriac terms *IN CA* was finally produced (by Elijah of Nisibis).

As late as the 12th century, we read accounts of Christian pilgrims referring to the script used by the Saracens (the Arabs / Syrians / Ishmaelites) as “the Saracenic alphabet”. We find this with other accounts, in which we are told about “Saracenic inscriptions” (see F.E. Peters’ “Jerusalem”; p. 320). Such expositors thought of CA as the peculiar new script of the Mohammedans; and did not know it as “Arabic” (that is: NOT as a lingua franca that had existed in the region all along). It was, in fact, a novel offshoot of Syriac. So what did medieval expositors call SYRIAC? The “Chaldean alphabet” (i.e. neo-Aramaic).

There is one other notable example of an important text originally composed in Syriac yet later rendered in CA...whereafter all the original Syriac source-material was systematically erased from the textual record. What, pray tell, might that example be?

The Koran.



## A LEXICAL ASSESSMENT:

To review: The Syriac influence emanated from “Al-Sham” (northern Levant), primarily from Edessa...and propagated down through Hauran, Nabataea, and the Nafud (northern Arabia)...into the Hijaz (western Arabia). All this occurred long before MoM’s lifetime. By the 1st century A.D., the Levantine Jewish chronicler, Yosef ben Matityahu (a.k.a. “Titus Flavius Josephus”) noted in his records that Aramaic—and its Syriac variant—was widely spoken and understood by the Parthians (Persians), Babylonians (Mesopotamians), AND the Saracens (Arabians). Indeed, even Josephus HIMSELF opted for Syrio-Aramaic instead of Hebrew, as that is what everyone was using.

During Late Antiquity, the region was primarily occupied by the Nabateans...who’s ancestors were the Lihyanites (spec. denizens of Dedan; present-day “al-Ula”). The Lihyanites used a North Arabian variant (now known as Dedanitic script), as attested at the “Umm Daraj” and “Al-Khuraybah” temples. It is interesting to note that there was a pilgrimage to these temples during Late Antiquity...and probably on into MoM’s lifetime.

Other Arab peoples included the Tanukhids (of al-Hasa; a.k.a. “Hadjar”) and Ghassanids (vassals of the Byzantines) in northwestern Arabia. Meanwhile, the Lakhmids (of al-Hirah) in northeastern Arabia were vassals of the (Persian) Sassanids, and so were also conversant in the Pahlavi (Middle Persian) of their Zoroastrian sovereigns. ALL of these peoples were Syriac-speaking. Even the Hamdanids of Al-Jazira in the 10th century were Syriac-speaking. (!)

There are also tell-tale signs of CA’s Syriac roots in etymology. Tellingly, the most distinctly Christian terms that occur in the Koran are distinctly SYRIAC terms. For example, the Syriac basis of “Rasul Allah” [Messenger of God] was the Syriac moniker, “Sheliheh d-Allaha”—as illustrated by its use in the (Syriac) “Acts of St. Thomas”.

Moreover, if we were to assume (for the sake of argument) that CA existed prior to the 8th century, we would be forced to explain the very peculiar fact that Arab communities that practiced—and proselytized—the Christian Faith never saw fit to compose any scripture in CA. It was ALL done in Syriac.

As I discussed in the previous essay (“Syriac Source-Material For Islam’s Holy Book”), by the time MoM would have lived, tidbits of Syriac lore had been circulating throughout the Middle East for many generations. It should come as little surprise, then, that myriad Syriac lexemes eventually made their way into the “Recitations”.

In other words: Distinctly Syriac terms are found in the Koranic lexicon, revealing that lexicon’s original form. Take, for instance, the term for heaven: “**jannah**” / “**jannat**”. The lexeme was from the Syriac “**gannta**” [garden], itself from Persian; though it is typically translated as “heaven”, as the Islamic heaven is synonymous with a cosmic seraglio—in keeping with antecedent lore.

Invariably, many words came to CA through Syriac from even earlier Semitic forms. For example, “hell” was “Ge-Hinnom” [Valley of Hinnom] in Classical Hebrew before it was rendered “**Gehanna**” in Syriac. It later became “**Jahannam**” in CA.

The most illustrative example, though, is the CA pejorative for a person who “conceals” [the truth]: “kafir”. Amongst the Ishmaelites, this term eventually came to have the connotation: one who refuses to believe. But from whence did it come? As it turns out, it derives from the Semitic root, K-F-R. Lo and behold: This was used by pre-Islamic Arabians as a term of alterity. For whom? For AGRARIANS (that is: those who were farmers as opposed to herders; which made sense, as Arabians were the latter). Thus “K-F-R” was synonymous with THE OTHER (i.e. those who covered seeds with soil when planting their crops; in

contradistinction to shepherds, who did everything out in the open).

Tellingly, this disparaging term was also used for “night” (when the sun was CONCEALED), and in various other contexts besides. Sure enough, when used in the earliest verses of the Koran, the epithet “K-F-R” simply connoted those who were not within the community of believers (“Ahl al-Kitab”; People of the Book)...which was seen as simply eliding the Final Revelation. Only in later verses was such alterity equated with blasphemers / non-believers (read: those who must be FOUGHT). Unsurprisingly, a similar onomastic convention was used in Judaism during the Mishnaic era. In the Talmudic tradition, “kofe[i]r” (alt: “kefira”) was also employed as a taxonomic means of other-ization (that is: as a term of disparagement).

Other examples corroborate the present thesis. The auspicious occasion known as “Yom Ashura” [Syriac for “the Tenth Day”] retained its nomenclature even after it was adopted by the first Mohammedans, who fasted on that day in keeping with antecedent Arabian tradition. Also note that some of the appellations for the Koran’s protagonist are Syriac loan-words—as with, say, “jabbaar” [mighty / powerful] and “ra[c]hman” [merciful]. Indeed, one of the (Sabaeen) deities in pre-Islamic Yemen was “Ra[c]hman[an]”.

Looking to the Koran, we find 16:103 to be a revealing comment. It states that non-believers believed that “it is only human beings who teach [Mohammed his tales of old]. The tongue of the ones to whom they refer is FOREIGN; and these Recitations are in the language of the Arabs.” This is not only an interesting accusation; it is worded in an interesting way. The language of MoM’s alleged source (for the tales of old) is clearly at issue (so far as the authors of the Koran were concerned). To whom were the complainants (those who didn’t believe MoM) supposedly referring? When they spoke of those who told MoM tales of old, THEIR language was “foreign” with respect to what, exactly? And what was the (supposed) language of the Arabs at the time (i.e. MoM’s native language)? That this matter was even brought up is rather intriguing.

The fact that language was a point of contention is somewhat of a red flag. Clearly, the language of the source-material was at issue for those who penned 16:103. We can read this as: “We, the believers (who are Arab), speak Classical Arabic; and those from whom MoM is accused of cribbing spoke something else (something that is foreign).” This all turns on what the “language of the Arabs” ACTUALLY was at any given time. Clearly, those who penned 16:103 wanted to distance themselves from their Syriac roots, so they found the need to address the matter. Hence the “everything’s been in Classical Arabic ALL ALONG” claim was established. As is often the case, the attempted cover-up ends up being incriminating.

The Nabataean lexicon offers further evidence for the roots of Mohammedan liturgy. Du-shara (“possessor of the mountain”; later rendered “Dusares” or “Orotalt”) was born of a virgin (the goddess referred to as “Kaabu”). He was the godhead worshipped at Petra and Hegra. The notion of a deified figure having been born of a virgin was surely associated with paganism. (For more examples of this, see part II of my essays on “Mythemes”.)

Before Islam, other North Arabian deities included the Assyrian moon-god, “Allah ta’ala” (Eblaite “Resheph”; Palmyrene “Arsu”; later rendered “Ruda”). Interestingly, the locutions “by Ruda” (an invocation) and “servant of Ruda” [“abd-Ruda”] (an appellation) were commonplace throughout Antiquity—especially amongst the Banu Rabi’ah ibn Sa’d. This would have given rise to similar locutions in the new Mohammedan idiom. Sure enough, that’s exactly what happened (with “bi-ism-illah” and “abd-ullah”). As Syriac morphed into CA, idiomatic expressions were retained.

Also telling are the variants of the Semitic term for “god”: “El”. The Nabatean pantheon included “Kos-allah” [Kos the god], a moniker that was based on the (much older) Edomite godhead, “Kaush”, who was—it just so happens—associated with a star and crescent moon. As mentioned in the previous essay, “Allat” was used as the female counterpart of “Allah”. And who was “Allah”? An alternate moniker for the Nabataean godhead, “Dushara”. How can we be so sure? Well, “Al-Uzza” is declared as the consort of Dushara in some places, and of “Allah” in others.

Lo and behold: All of these appellations are found in Nabataean inscriptions from Late Antiquity. (The ancient city of Hatra, in Mesopotamia, was even dubbed “Bet[h] Elaha”: Syriac for “House of God”.) This stands to reason, as the moniker “Allah” was derived from the Syriac, “eloah” / “alaha”...which was itself a variant the Aramaic “elah[a]”: a deity based on the Canaanite godhead “El”. (More on this later.)

Serendipitously, a cache of papyri discovered at Nasthan (a.k.a. “Nessana”; 70 kilometers south of Gaza City), which dates from c. 674 to c. 690 (the Umayyad period), serves as a “Rosetta stone” for translation. The material is written in Greek, Latin, and Nabataean (Syriac)—as would be expected. All versions use the phrase, “In the name of the lord, the master, Jesus Christ.” The leader of the Saracens is referred to as the “amir” of the “mu-min-in” (leader of the Faithful) rather than as the “kalipha” (successor); and there is no mention of “Muslims”. The Umayyads also used Coptic and Middle Persian (in addition to Greek and their native language, Syriac). The transition to CA did not come until later. (It came with the Abbasids in the 8th century.)

So what about the use of the term “Muslim”? That ALSO did not come until later. It’s worth noting that when the Koran insists that Abraham was neither Jewish nor Christian (3:67), we are told that he was a “hanif[an] mu-s’lim[an]” (an upright person who submitted), and not a “mu-shrik-in[a]” (idolator, which seems to have been the alternative). This distinction was more descriptive than onomastic (which is simply to say that “mu-s’lim[an]” was NOT an orthonym). The idea expressed here was that the TRUE (Mohammedan) “din” dated all the way back to the early Abrahamic patriarchs. The term “Muslim” had not yet been coined as the term for a member of a distinct religion. There are only six verses in the Koran that use the locution “mu-s’lim[an]” (one who submits). The other five instances are instructive:

In 3:52, the disciples of JoN address their Messiah, saying: “We believe in god; and you are our witness that we are “mu-s’lim-un” [those who’ve submitted].” In other words, the followers of the Christ characterize themselves as “mu-s’lim-un”. (!)

In 12:101, MoM beseeches god to ensure he dies as “mu-s’liman” (one who has submitted), and is united with “salihin[a]” (the righteous). There are various terms used for those who are righteous (rightly guided)—including: salihan, hanif[a], and rashid. What’s telling is that on five occasions, the first is used in the Koran as “mu-s’lihun[a]” / “mu-s’lihin[a]” (2:11, 2:220, 7:170, 11:117, and 28:19); thus using the same nomenclature as “mu-s’lim[an]” vis a vis “[a]s’lama” / “yu-s’lim[u]”. Clearly, these were general descriptors. An illustration of this is that 3:83 tells us that all that’s in the heavens and the earth have submitted [“as’lama”] to god.

In verses 31 and 38 of Surah 27, “mu-s’limina” is used to indicate a state of submission. God insists that people come to him in such a state, which is held in contradistinction to “be against” / “resistance”.

In 33:35, we’re told about all the men who submit and all the women who submit: the “mus’limina” and “mus’limati”. Had “Muslim” been a proper noun, there would have been no need to gender the term. Clearly, it was being used as a general descriptor. In modern Arabic, the orthonym is sometimes gendered as “Muslim” and “Muslima[h]”; but that is a recent development—analogueous to “Latino” and “Latina”. In

CA, a term was rendered feminine by appending a “t”.)

Note that “as’lam[a]” (Arabic for “submission”, using form IV of the verbal noun) and “sala[a]m” (Arabic for “peace”) derive from the same Semitic tri-root: S-L-M—an etymological parity that leads some to conflate the two lexemes. {50} The distinction is revealed by the fact that the former is also the basis for “Islam”—a lexeme that is used ten times in the Koran. In each instance, it is clear that the lexeme means “submission”. After all, “submission” is how the prescribed “din” is characterized. (“Islam” is not used as an orthonym for a distinct religion; it is a descriptor.)

Tellingly, 3:19, 3:83, 5:3, 6:125, 39:22, and 61:7 refer to the “din” of god (rather than using the term, “Islam”). Such phrasing would not be necessary if “Islam” was a proper noun. Moreover, they state that everything in the heavens and the earth has *submitted* [“as’lama”] to god. (In other words, everything is prostrate to him; and everything is under his control.) God then announces that he has perfected our way of life [“din”]; and has approved of *submission* [“is’lama”] as that way of life. We are also told that “is’lam[u]” is the “din” that is nearest to god. Finally, we are notified that god hardens people’s hearts **AGAINST submission** while opening people’s hearts **TO submission**. At no point is it stated that the proper name of the “din” is “Islam”. And none of this has anything to do with “peace”.

Additionally, the lexeme “[a]s’lim[an]” is used for *submission* (to god) in 4:65, 16:28/87, and 33:22. 4:65 goes so far as to exhort us to “submit in submission” [“yu-s’lim-u ta-s’liman”]. Verses 28 and 87 of Surah 16 both refer to contrite idolators who will offer capitulation / penitence (in vain) on Judgement Day, making use of “s’lam[a]” to convey the point. And 33:22 recounts how revelation increases “iman” (faith) and “ta-s’liman” (submission, using form II of the verbal noun) within the believers.

Ergo the misnomer that “Islam” has to do with “peace” stems from a hermeneutic mis-step.

In the 1930’s, the famed Assyrian scholar, Alphonse Mingana noted that overtly Syriac lexemes in the Koran account for much of its vocabulary; and Middle Persian lexemes account for the majority of the rest.

He also noted that the majority of early correspondences in Dar al-Islam were conducted IN SYRIAC—notably, the letter of a man (known as “Philoxenus”) to Abu Afr of Hir[t]a, dating from the late 7th / early 8th century. {64}

As we might expect, there are many terms in CA that reflect its lexical origins. Here are FORTY salient instances:

- “nabi” is from the Syriac “nabu”: **prophet** {16}
- “qiyama” is from the Syriac “qymt”: **resurrection**
- “furqan” is from the Syriac “purqan[a]”: **salvation**
- “ruh al-qudus” is from the Syriac “ruh q-d-sh”: **holy spirit** (“ruh” from the Syriac “ruha”, meaning breath / spirit)
- “nafs” is from the Syriac “naf[a]sh[a]”: **soul** (qua breath)
- “qassis” is from the Syriac “q-shysh” / “qassisa” / “qashisho”: **priest**
- “sadiq” is from the Syriac “z-diq”: **truthful**
- “muhaymin” is from the Syriac “m-hymn”: **faithful**
- “salih” is from the Syriac “sh-lih”: **valid**
- “aswar” is from the Syriac “aswar”: **horseman**
- “shahid” is from the Syriac “sahd”: **witness**
- “tanin” is from the Syriac “tannina”: **dragon**
- “salat” is from the Syriac “s-luta”: **liturgical prayer**
- “azaan” is from the Syriac “aza”: **call to prayer**

- “nur” is from the Syriac “naheer”: **light**
- “alam” is from the Syriac “alema”: **world**
- “jada” is from the Syriac “jada”: **road**
- “bayt” is from the Syriac “bayta”: **house**
- “suk” is from the Syriac “shekma”: **market**
- “qartas” is from the Syriac “khartes”: **paper**
- “ahmar” is from the Syriac “h-m-r”: **red**
- “arjuwan” is from the Syriac “argewana”: **purple**
- “zarkun” is from the Syriac “zargono” (alt. Persian “zargun”): **gold[en]**
- “quds” is from the Syriac “kudsha”: **sacred**
- “shamsa” is from the Syriac “shemsha”: **sun**
- “shirk” (idolator) is from the Syriac “sharaka”: **associator** (viz. god with idols)
- “buran” (ill-advised / ignorant people) is from the Syriac “bur”: **ill-advised / ignorant**
- “hayawa” is from the Syriac “hyut”: **life**
- “tufan” is from the Syriac “tupn”: **flood**
- “maa’a” comes from the Syriac “maya”: **water**
- “salaba” / “salib” from the Syriac “S-L-B[a]”: **crucify / cross**
- “ra’ina” from the Syriac “re’yono” / “re’yana”: **shepherd**
- “qusuran” from the Syriac “kusuran”: **fruits reaped from being righteous**
- “banat” from the Syriac “B-N-T”: **daughter**
- “salib” is from the Syriac “s[e]liba”: **cross**
- “sawm” is from the Syriac “sawma”: **abstinence** (viz. fasting)
- “zakat” is from the Syriac “z-kuta”: **alms**
- “furqan” is from the Syriac “purqana”: **salvation / redemption**
- “rahma[n]” is from the Syriac “rahamuta” / “ra[c]hma: **mercy**
- “jaddaf” from the Syriac “gaddef”: **blasphemy**

Meanwhile, “*siraj*” (star) and “*saraja*” (to shine) seem to come from the Syriac “shraga”. The Arabic term for worldly existence comes from the Syriac “*dunya*”. And “*surah*” (later used to designate chapters in the Koran) derives from the Syriac word for “writing”: “surta”.

The examples go on and on.

Note in this tabulation that I’m only listing lexemes with distinctly Syriac origins (ultimately from Aramaic); NOT terms that are generally Semitic (as with, say, “messia[c]h”, “nabi”, and “ab[a]” for savior, prophet, and father). Granted, “malik” is from the Syriac “malka”. But the use of “M-L-K” for a ruler goes all the way back to the Ebla-ite use of “M-L-K-M” in the 24th century B.C. Such lexemes permeate the Semitic family, so tell us little about specific etymological timelines.

We might also look to topography: “*sari*” for river, “*sihl[a]*” for stream, “*tur*” for mountain, and “*yamm[a]*” for sea: all variants of Syriac. (Not coincidentally, “Yamm” was the Canaanite god of the sea, indicating etymological origins in the Bronze Age.) The same goes for municipal terms—as with “*souq*” (from the Syriac “*shuqa*”; also used in Middle Persian) for marketplace. Also note quotidian terms like “*shawb*” (from the Syriac “*shawba*”) for heat. The Arabic term for “one of a pair” comes from the Syriac “*zawga*” (which was likely from the Greek “zeugos”). Also note objects like “acorn”: the Arabic “ballut” is from the Syriac “ballota”; as the oak tree played a prominent role in Palestinian lore. (For other examples, see “*Studies In The Grammar And Lexicon Of Neo-Aramaic*” ed. Geoffrey Khan and Paul M. Noorlander.) Prepositions in CA are also from Syriac—as with “*min*” (from “*men*”) meaning “from”.

There are other indications that Mohammedans culled their lore from Syriac sources. For “messenger”, “**rasul**” was used instead of a derivative of the Greek “apostolos” (one who is sent). As it turns out, this moniker is derived from the Syriac “**r-s[h]-l**” (to give way). And what of the appellation “rasul Allah”? As it turns out, the Syriac term for “messenger of God” (“sheliheh d-Allaha”) had been used throughout the “Acts of Thomas”. For those seeking an alternative to the “son of god” trope, this would have been the go-to phrase.

As mentioned earlier, an alternate variant, “**sheliheh**” (messenger) was used throughout the Syriac “Acts of Thomas”, which was circulating throughout the region during Islam’s gestation period. (The Hebraic “sheliah” is yet another variant.)

Meanwhile, “**kalimatuhu**” [his word] is used for god’s “word” instead of the Greek “logos”. That is derived from the Syriac “**k-l-m[a] thu**” [his voice].

Some common verbs in CA exhibit vestiges of their Syriac origins—as with:

- “dagash” (from the Syriac “d-gash”) meaning “**to show**”
- “nadar” (from the Syriac “n-tar”) meaning “**to watch over**”
- “faram” (from the Syriac “p-ram”) meaning “**to cut**”

Even “**qur’an**” (which is merely a variation on the CA term for “reading” / “recitation”, “qara’a[t]”) is derived from the Aramaic term for liturgical readings: “**qryn[a]**” (alt. “qeryana” / “qiriana”). During Late Antiquity, this was also used by Syriac speakers to refer to a sacred book (i.e. a lectionary). And, as mentioned earlier, the term for chapters IN that book was “**s[h]era**”, which came from “**surta**”: the basis for the Arabic “**sura**”. It’s also worth noting that K-R-N-a has the same Semitic basis as “Mikra”—the Aramaic name of the Hebrew Bible.

What about the word for BOOK? Sure enough, “**kitab**” is from the Syriac “**k-tobo**”. (Also note the Syriac lexeme, “asfar”.) This makes sense, as “K-T-B” was the Old Semitic root for “writing”. As it so happened, “Kutba[y]” was the Nabataean god of scribes. His consort was none other than the Arabian goddess, “al-Uzza” [Syriac: “Uzzay”]...who was worshipped by Hijazis during MoM’s lifetime (an Arabian shrine existed for her at Nakhla).

What about the term used for the new religion? Lo and behold: “Islam” is a variation on the Arabic term from submission, “**aslam**”...which is derived from the Syriac verb, “**ashlem**” (to submit) and noun, “**ishlama**” (submission)...which, it might be noted, has the same Semitic roots as “shalom” (peace qua deference) in Classical Hebrew.

In some cases, hermeneutic chicanery is afoot. For example, “**haqq**” is often translated as “truth”; but it is actually from the Syriac term for “decree” (“**h-q-q**”). So the Abrahamic deity doesn’t establish Truth, he simply issues edicts—as with a ruler to his subjects (alt. as a master to his slaves). Thus “haqq” is about authority, not epistemology.

Sometimes CA terms are the result of scribal errors. Such flubs are very revealing about the lexical origins of Islam’s liturgical language. For example, the use of the peculiar moniker “**zabur**” for the Psalms is likely from the Syriac “**zamuro**” / “**zamura**”. In Syriac, the lower-case “m” can be easily mis-read as “b” if it is written in a straight manner. (Interesting work on this has been done by Gabriel Sawma in “The Aramaic Language Of The Qur’an”.)

Other terms came directly from the Nabataeans. For example, “**djinn**” (genie) was derived from the Palmyrene “**ginnaye**”. And the etymology of “**masjid**” [place of prostration; i.e. mosque] came from the Nabataean term, “**masgida**” / “**masged[ha]**”: venue for prostration. This was related to the Syriac term

for bowing down in prayer, “**seghed[ha]**”. Sure enough, that yielded the Arabic verb, “**sajada**” (a variation of which was “salah”).

But wait. What about when the KORAN ITSELF seems to refer to CA? What’s THAT all about? Well, actually, it never mentions a distinctly Arabic language; it only alludes to a language affiliated with the Arabs. It does this in three places. In 16:103 / 26:195, we encounter the phrase, “lis[h]an-un Arabiyyun mubin-un” / “lis[h]an-in Arabiyyin mubin-in” [tongue of the Arabs that is clear]. In other words: a tongue used by Arab peoples. WHICH tongue? Well, one that was CLEAR. The Koran then refers to THIS BOOK [“K-T-B”]...which, it stipulates, confirms and warns by using “lis[h]an-an Arabiyyan” [tongue of the Arabs] (46:12). (Note: “**lis[h]ana**” is the SYRIAC term for language.) Question: Would CA disquisition have been “CLEAR” to the average Bedouin listener in the 7th century? Nope. Not even close.

Regarding the plea that the Koran was ORIGINALLY composed in CA, a passage occurs in Surah 16 that is laughably on the nose. Verse 103 brings to mind the retort by Gertrude in Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”: Thou doth protest too much. Why the need to make such a proclamation if the CA version of the “Recitations” was already a GIVEN?

Elsewhere, Islam’s holy book refers to itself as “qur’an[an]”, which it characterizes as “arabiyyan”. Thus: “recitations of the Arabs”—as in 12:2, 20:113, 39:28, 41:3, 42:7, and 43:3. In what language would that have been? Syriac. In 19:97 and 44:58, the book’s protagonist announces that he made the Recitations easy [“yassamahu”] for his target audience by rendering them “bi-lis[h]an-ika” [“in your tongue”]. And what was the “tongue of the Arabs” at the time? Syriac.

There is nothing in the Koran that indicates that there existed a cosmically-significant language that was unique to Arabia. And there is no reference to any alternative language—that is: such-and-such tongue AS OPPOSED TO “lisanun arabiyyun” (that is: a language that the Recitations were couched IN LIEU OF).

Interestingly, at no point does the book’s protagonist stipulate: “This is MY tongue.” So much, then, for the fetishization of CA...which seems to have become rampant only later on. The trope of CA being cosmically significant (that is: being god’s native tongue) seems to have gone into full swing by the 14th century...when, in the introduction to his “Lisan”, Ibn Manzur proclaimed that god had created CA superior to all other languages, revealing the Recitations in CA and thus making it the language of Paradise. (Gosh-golly!)

Here’s the problem. If god had composed the Recitations in an eternal language, he would not have ingratiated himself with a Bedouin audience by saying he delivered the final revelation in THEIR tongue [“bi-lis[h]an-ika”]. Instead, he would have notified them that they were blessed to be speaking HIS tongue. {72}

So what about when the Koran refers to OTHER languages? Regarding this matter, there are three verses that are quite telling. In 14:4, the book’s protagonist announces that he always sent his messengers with “lisani qawmihi” (the tongue of each messenger’s respective people). In 41:44, god proclaims that he would have never sent the Ishmaelites “qur’an[an] a’jamiyyun” (recitations of foreigners). Then—as if to illustrate how the terminology was being used—he distinguishes between “a’jamiyyun wa arabiyyun” (foreigners and arabs). And if this weren’t clear enough, 16:103 refers to “lisanu[n] a’jamiyyun” (tongues of foreigners). What might THOSE have been? Koine Greek. Classical Hebrew. Middle Persian. Ge’ez. (All medieval Arabs would have been privy to the existence of such languages.)

Effectively, the Koran only addresses why it was revealed in “YOUR” tongue (where the target audience was “arabiyyah”). This in no way attests to the existence of (what eventually came to become) CA. Interestingly, at one point, the Koran even refers to an Arab JUDGEMENT [“**hukm arabiyyan**”] (13:37). In other words: This qualifier was an ETHNIC designation, not an explicit linguistic demarcation.

At the time, Syriac did not refer to a particular people; it was known only as a language: “K-T-B-anaya” (which simply meant “that which is for writing”). {44} It is, of course, likely that different communities thought of Syriac in different ways. Hence Arabs’ use of “**lis[h]an-an Arabiyyan**”. {72}

Bear in mind that non-Syriac speakers sometimes referred to Syriac as “Arabiyyah” (language of the Arabs; spec. the Nabataeans), which did NOT correlate with what came to be CA (a.k.a. “Arabic”). (These were denizens of what the Romans called “Arabia Petraea”.) Similarly, Aramaic was referred to as “Aramaya” (language of the Arameans) and Syriac was referred to as “Suryaya” (language of the Syrians), “Atoraya” (Assyrian language), or even “Urhaya” (language of the Edessans), as Edessa (“Urhay” in Aramaic) was the home of Syriac. (Note: The 8th-century Mohammedan hagiographer, Ibn Ishaq, referred to Palestine as “Syria”. This seems to have been common practice. So “Suryaya” would have meant language of the Palestinian Arabs.)

Recall that, per Islamic scripture, the “Recitations” were originally composed in (what is referred to as) “the language of the Quraysh”: a peculiarly oblique description for a tongue that was supposed to be eternal—nay: the native language of the Creator Of The Universe. (Is this how god would have thought of his own tongue since the beginning of time?)

In the Koran, Christians are referred to as “**Nasara**”, which is from the Syriac moniker, “**Nasraye**”. There was no other language in which “Christians” were labeled in this way.

There is a caveat here. The existence of quasi-Syriac terms that ended up in the CA lexicon does not—in and of itself—reveal anything about when, exactly, CA emerged out of (Nabataean) Syriac; nor does the fact that such lexemes exist show for how long Arabs continued using Syriac after the Mohammedan movement had been inaugurated. Obviously, the fact that CA has Semitic roots makes it inevitable that it will have numerous cognates with Aramaic (i.e. the language from which ALL Semitic languages emerged) and its offshoots.

There are likely HUNDREDS of CA lexemes that share roots with Syro-Aramaic and/or with Classical / Mishnaic Hebrew (a different Semitic offshoot of Aramaic). Such cognates ALONE show nothing more than CA’s relation to its Semitic antecedents (and to its Semitic cousins). However, the fact that the terms listed here (distinctly Syriac lexemes that were important RELIGIOUS terms for the earliest Mohammedans) were still being used in the late 7th century...and on through the 9th century (that is: during Islam’s gestation period) reveals that Syriac was likely still an integral part of the lexicon. {10}

Other connections indicate that there was linguistic parity between the early Mohammedans and the Syriac peoples of the time. MoM’s foster sister, Huzafa / Shaima was the daughter of a man named “Al-Harith”. Who might that have been? Nobody knows for sure. But it’s worth noting that an Al-Harith ibn Jabalah was the leader of the Ghassanids until...amazingly...around the year MoM was (purportedly) born. The Ghassanids were Syriac-speaking, Christian Arabs who’s domain roughly coincided with Nabataea. (Al-Harith ibn Jabalah was later referred to as “Khalid ibn Jabalah” in Islamic lore: a rather suspicious alteration.)

Is this an odd coincidence? Perhaps. But it is also worth noting that three of MoM’s wives (Zaynab,



Barrah / Maymunah, and Juwayriya) were the daughters of a man named [Khuzaymah ibn] Al-Harith. And Islamic lore also tells of three brothers who were pre-Islamic Hijazi (Syriac) poets (Marhab, Yasir, and Al-Harith), who were the sons of a prominent man named Al-Harith. It was their sister—also named Zaynab—who fatally poisoned MoM (to avenge her family’s death at the hands of the Mohammedans). Another Hijazi, an “Ubaydah” from Ta’if, is recorded as being one of the first twelve men to convert to Islam. HIS father’s name was Al-Harith.

The name’s use by the Ghassanids attests to the fact that it was used by those who spoke Syriac. This indicates that those who were involved in the gestation of Mohammedan lore were likely a Syriac-speaking people.

Also worth noting is the Arabic term for pilgrimage, “Hajj”. The term is likely derived from the Semitic term used for an auspicious occasion: “Hag[g]”. (The transition from the hard “g” to a soft “j” was routine—as with, say, “Hagar” to “Hajar”, “Gabriel” to “Jibrail”, and “Gehanna[m]” to “Jahannam”.) Testament to the fact that this was originally a Syriac term is the (original) label for one who participates in it: “Haggag” (later rendered “Hajjaj”) rather than employing the Arabic nomenclature “mu-” for “one who is [associated with]”, yielding the more familiar “mu-Hajjir”. As it turns out, the name of the most renowned Umayyad governor in the Hijaz was Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf of Ta’if. Al-Hajjaj (that is: “Haggag”) served under caliph Abd Al-Malik in the early 690’s. Recall that Ta’if had been the site of a cubic shrine to the goddess, Al-Lat; so the name would make sense for someone hailing from that location. Clearly, this Mohammedan governor had a SYRIAC name. Had it exemplified a CA onomastic, his name would have not used distinctly Syriac nomenclature.

Other clues abound. “Abd El[ah]i” or “Abd Elaha” (meaning “slave / servant of god”) was the Syriac moniker for Jesus of Nazareth. That was later rendered “Abd-ullah” in CA, as it first appeared in the inscription on the Dome of the Rock (constructed at the behest of Abd Al-Malik in the early 690’s).

More research can be done on key terms found in the archeological and textual record (including the earliest Islamic sources) during this period. Especially salient are lexemes that resemble Syriac precursors more than they do their eventual CA incarnations. Such research would involve identifying terms in the vernacular of the early Mohammedan movement that had not yet reached their final form (in Classical Arabic). We know that some of the lexemes in inscriptions from the last decade of the 7th century—and through the ENTIRETY of the 8th century—differ from (what came to be) distinctly Arabic lexemes. {2} This indicates that the language being used at the time was still (predominantly) SYRIAC. In other words: the new tongue was STILL DEVELOPING. {31}

Another indication that CA came much later than the Ishmaelite’s new creed is that Mohammedan lore lifted some of its terminology from *PERSIAN* sources. {13} Given the geo-political landscape of the time, this linguistic synthesis makes sense. Again, we need to consider the cultural / linguistic landscape of the time—environs in which certain memes germinated and proliferated. Through Late Antiquity, there was much interaction between the Syriac (spec. Nestorian) communities of the Middle East and the (Sassanian) Persians. Illustrative of this is the fact that the (Nestorian) Synod of Bet[h] Lapat c. 484 was convened at Gund-i-Shapur, which was located in Elam (even as the primary cities for the Syriac tradition were Antioch, Nisibis, and Edessa). There was even a Syriac patriarch at Ctesiphon from the late 3rd century (with Mar Papa bar [g]Aggai). This position continued through Babai the Great, who presided during MoM’s fabled ministry. Meanwhile, the (Arab) Lakhmids, who spoke Nabataean Syriac, had been in a long geo-political relationship with the (Persian) Sassanians. This naturally entailed a linguistic nexus. In locals like Kufa and Hir[t]a, it is likely that most people were bi-lingual. Hence the lexical vestiges of both Syriac and Middle Persian in the Koran are unsurprising.

As the Mohammedans conquered the region, the great Syriac patriarch, Isho'yahb II was active in Ctesiphon (628 to 645). These patriarchs continued to operate out of Ctesiphon until 780 (with [k]Hnan-Isho II), at which point the Abbasids had them move their seat to the new capital: Bagh-dad (in the vicinity of the by-then-defunct Ctesiphon). It makes sense, then, that the emerging vernacular was a synthesis of Syriac and Middle Persian.

Note, for example, the term for the flying horse that whisked the prophet into the heavens on the fabled "Night Journey": "**Buraq**". This was likely based on the Persian term for "lightning": "barag". Even the CA term for religion, "**din**" is a loanword from Persian. Meanwhile, the Arabic word for blue sky, "**lazaward**" (which served as the basis for the Latin "lazul[um]") comes from the Persian "lajevard". And during the Middle Ages, a moniker commonly used for Christians, "**Tarsa**", was from the Pahlavi word "**Tarsag**".

There are even some Koranic onomastics that were lifted from Persian. In 2:96, we hear about a pair of angels: Harut and Marut. Who were they? They are likely corruptions of the Middle Persian Kurdad and Murdad: demigods of Mount Masis (which was the Persian name for Ararat). Meanwhile, Jewish scribes likely adopted the tale of these two angels from the Babylonians. In any case, the author(s) of 2:96 were evidently hearing (orally-transmitted) tales in one language, then rendering them in their own.

Bear in mind: As with Syriac script, Pahlavi script was based on the (much older) Aramaic alphabet...even as its vocabulary was derived from the antecedent Persian language: Avestan.

Pahlavi religious texts included the "Bundahishn" [Original Creation], the "Denkard" [Compendium], the "Zartusht Namah" [Life of Zartust], and the "Arda Wiraz Namag" [Book of Arda Viraf]. One will find a slew of loan-words in the Koran from these texts—as with, say, "junah" (sin) and "barzakh" (barrier / partition). And "ishq" (passion) was from the Persian term "isht" / "ishka".

In addition, we might note the term for storm, "**tufan**" (not to be confused with the monster from Greek mythology, the "typhon", the etymological basis for "typhoon"...which may or may not be related). Even "**dirham**" (the medieval Arab currency) was derived from the Persian "drahm" (itself a rough cognate of the Greek "drakhme"). Prior to Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, only the Byzantine dinar / follis [rendered "fals" in CA] was used; though even those continued to be used across the Muslim world through the 10th century.

Interestingly, the moniker for the vaunted "House of Wisdom" in Baghdad during Islam's "Golden Age" ("Bayt al-Hikma") was—it turns out—simply the term the Arabs had always used for the royal PERSIAN libraries. (The Abbasids fashioned that storied institution as their own version of a palace library.)

Through much of the Middle Ages, Ishmaelites continued to use the Pahlavi term for the godhead: "Khuda" / "Khoda". In Zoroastrianism, this was an alternate moniker for Ahura Mazda. It would be RETAINED in the advent of Islam, as documented by its usage in the "Frahang-i Pahlavig" c. 900, which illustrated how Persian (Pahlavi) and Semitic (Syriac) semiotics were being hybridized at the time.

This would make no sense had “Allah” been the original moniker—nay, proper name—used by the Mohammedans for the Abrahamic deity FROM THE GET-GO; as that would have precluded consideration of a Persian moniker later on. Tellingly, “*Khuda*” is STILL used by all Muslims living in regions east of Mesopotamia (that is: east of the Arab-speaking world), as in the expression “*Khuda Hafiz*”. And it remains in use in Turkish (vestiges from the Ottoman Empire) to the present day. Again, we see vestiges from the original Mohammedan vernacular...which, in the earliest period of the newfangled Faith, had not yet established a novel liturgical language.

Meanwhile, for the goddess, Venus, Ishmaelites opted for the Persian “*Zahra*” / “*Zoreh*” (alt. “[a]Nahid” when associated with “*Anahita*”) instead of EITHER the Syriac “*Ataratheh*” (a.k.a. “*Atargatis*”, likely derived from the early Semitic “*Asherah*”) OR the Old Arabian “*Al-Uzza*”, both of which had pagan connotations. (Such undertones likely hit too close to home for the burgeoning Mohammedan movement, which sought to eschew any lexemes with semiotic baggage.) This goddess was alternately rendered in Syriac as “*Uzza[y]*” by pre-Islamic Hijazis, for whom there was an Arabian shrine at Nakhla. It is THAT version of Venus that is referenced in commentary on the Syriac Bible by Theodore[t] bar Kon[a]ji (in the 8th century). This probably explains the hang-up with the notorious “*gharaniq*” known as “*Al-Uzza*”.

(Meanwhile, the “*gharaniq*” “*Man[aw]at*” was the consort of the moon-god, Hubal; while “*Allat*” was consort of the Semitic god, “*El*”. For more on the three “*cranes*” mentioned in the “*Satanic Verses*”, see Appendix 5 of my essay, “*Genesis Of A Holy Book*”).

And so we see that, even with respect to theonyms, CA was clearly not a fully developed language during Islam’s earliest period.

Looking at just the Koranic passages pertaining to heaven, we find a plethora of Middle Persian loanwords. Indeed, the accoutrements of Paradise, we are told, include “*istabraq*” (brocade), “*sundus*” (silk), “*namariq*” (cushions), “*asawir*” (bracelets), “*rawdah*” (luxurious garden), “*zarabi*” (golden carpets), “*kanz*” (treasures), and “*rizq*” (bounty / provision). We even encounter details like the contents of the chalices (“*mizaj*”) provided in heaven: musk (“*misk*”), camphor (“*kafur*”), and ginger (“*zanjabil*”)...ALL of them variations on extant Persian lexemes. Meanwhile, the Arabic “*zafaran*” comes from the Pahlavi “*zarparan*” (saffron). {26} (The coveted spices, “*murr*”—often rendered “*myrrh*”—came straight from the Aramaic.)

There are also “*houri*”: the coterie of angelic beings in heaven. That was a take-off on the Zoroastrian “*pari*” (fetching heavenly maidens populating Paradise). The appellation for the celestial luxury resort ITSELF (“*fir’daws*”), from the Avestan “*fairi-daeza*”. (Writers of both Syriac and Koine Greek texts also adopted the Persian lexeme for “*Paradise*”).

All this makes perfect sense, as the Mohammedan view of heaven was largely lifted from Zoroastrian theology—replete with its seven levels and buxom concubines. In other words: It is no coincidence that terms pertaining to heaven come from the Persian rather than Syriac vocabulary. As usual, the etymology of the relevant vernacular tracks with the origins of the (appropriated) lore. {24} To reiterate: The Lakhmids afforded the primary means by which other Arabians adopted Persian terms—especially ones that ended up being couched in an Abrahamic idiom. Even the CA term for “*reverence*” (“*khudu*”) is from the Persian term for “*that which is venerated*” (i.e. a deity): “*khoda*” / “*khuda*”.

There are myriad other clues to the Persian basis for certain elements of CA. It’s worth conjecturing that “*abi*” is an alternate version of “*abu*” because the Persian preposition, “*of*” (“*i*”) was at one point used to modify the Semitic word for father (“*ab*”). The same thing may have occurred with “*bani*” vs. “*banu*” for

“tribe of”.

Due to the fact that Muslims today are inclined to elide the origins of their liturgical language, it is rarely acknowledged that the etymology of the Abbasid capital, “Baghdad” was based on the Persian term for “god’s gift” (“boghu-dat”). This prompts the obvious question: Why in heaven’s name would the caliph at the time (Al-Mansur c. 762) have named his new capital city using PAHLAVI (which, it might be noted, was itself based on Babylonian Aramaic; and was the language of his NEMESIS)? If CA was already considered god’s language, such onomastics would not have made any sense.

The explanation is clear: The Mohammedans did not yet have their own (fully-developed) language...lest the city’s name would have instead been: “hiba” of “Allah”...instead of “boghu-dat”. {26}

It should come as little surprise, then, that early on, we encounter apocryphal tales about “Salmon the Persian”, who is purported to have rendered the “Recitations” in Middle Persian (i.e. Pahlavi) during Mohammed’s ministry. This attests to the fact that the “Recitations” did not need to be in CA, nor were the verses considered to have been in any one particular language at the time. To wit: There was no requirement that the Last Revelation be rendered in some (ostensibly) eternal tongue.

Another notable clue is Koranic morphology. As it turns out, the verbiage exhibits the kind of formulaic elocution that is endemic to orality (a signature feature of pneumonic devices used by those who would memorize verse in pre-literate societies). That is to say, the “Recitations” are indicative of material devised as an oral tradition rather than something that was (originally) written. It is apparent that the verse was contrived ad hoc, using stock phraseology (and other pneumonic gimmicks) to ensure catchiness / stickiness (for maximal contagiousness and memorability). A notably high incidence of formulaic elocution occurs in Surahs 61 and 63. (For more on this point, see Andrew G. Bannister’s “An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur’an”.)

Clearly, CA was almost entirely derivative—primarily an admixture of (Nabataean) Syriac with some Old South Arabian and a dollop of Middle Persian...which is exactly what we might expect for a language that emerged at the time and place that it did. We might note that CA was not the only language that was influenced by Old South Arabian. The ancient Ethiopic language, Ge’ez also incorporated elements.

(Recall the enumeration of Old South Arabian inscriptions earlier in this essay.) Of course, ALL of that was ultimately Sinaitic (read: Canaanite).

Make no mistake: The lexemes outlined here are not accidental cognates; they are exactly what we’d expect to find in the evolution of a morpheme along linguistic lineages...within a memetic ecosystem where ORAL transmission predominated. Such etymologies are unsurprising—especially in light of genealogies that shared a common Abrahamic heritage. Such rampant cooptation is, indeed, what occurred throughout the Middle East during the Dark Ages.

As is well-known, proto-CA (from Kufic texts to the inscription on the Dome of the Rock) did not have diacritical marks, leaving vowels “up in the air”, as it were. This is an omission indicative of Levantine Semitic languages, not of the Hijaz (nor of southern Arabia); as the latter script was already equipped with vowels. In other words, vowel-neutrality was a feature of (Nabataean) SYRIAC, not of Sabaic et. al. This fact makes plain the origins of Koranic verse. Had the Koran originally been composed in an Old Arabian language, it would not have required the later glyphic emendations found in the Garshuni script. It was clearly a LATER off-shoot of Syriac, with morphologic and orthographic features that clearly illustrate subsequent modifications.

One needn’t have a PhD in either paleography or philology to notice any of this.

In assaying the MORPHOLOGICAL aspects of relevant etymologies, we might also refer to the flawed onomastics involved with the establishment of proper names in CA. Take, for example, the etymology of the name of the arch-angel that visited MoM. The original Semitic term would have been “G-B-R[a]-El”, meaning “god my strength”. {32} In CA, this WOULD HAVE been rendered with the root “A-Z-R[i]” [my strength]. However early Mohammedans probably would have balked at a direct transliteration into CA given that “Azra-El” (which meant “help god” in an earlier Semitic lexical context) would have been associated with the angel-of-death, who went by that name. Consequently, the name Mohammedans ended up adopting for the angel was based exclusively on phonology. That is: They simply repeated what they HEARD (likely a phonetically tweaked version of “Gabriel”), thereby yielding “Jibr[a]il” (pronounced “Jibreel”). This etymological discrepancy must have arisen AFTER Aramaic bifurcated from Hebrew—that is: from a late offshoot of SYRIAC. {34}

So what does “Jibr[a]il” mean? Nothing. It’s just an onomastic adaptation based entirely on phonetics (as would be expected from orality) rather than on semiotics (which would have been honored had there been an understanding of the name’s Hebrew etymology). It is more morphology than etymology that propagates when the primary means of transmission is orality. Hence “Jibr-eel” rather than “Gabri-El” for the arch-angel in Islamic scripture.

Indications of the Syriac origins of CA can be found in the names of auspicious figures as well. In the Koran, JoN is referred to as “Issa”, which is a derivative of the Syriac “Isho” (which was itself based on the Aramaic name, “Yeshua”). Noah is referred to as “Nuh”, which is a derivative of the Syriac “Nu[k]h”. The “crane” [goddess] known as “Uzza” derives from the Syriac “Uzzay” rather than from the Greek moniker, “Ourania”. (She was worshipped primarily by the Banu Shaiban at Nakhla.)

Sometimes the CA moniker is the SAME as the antecedent Syriac—as with the CA name for “Eve” (“Hawwa”), which was simply a reiteration of the Syriac, a variant of which was the Hebrew “[c]Hawwah”. As it turns out, for Arab pagans, “Hawwa” was the (Syriac) name of the legendary ancestor of humanity, for whom there was a shrine at Jeddah. (This etymology makes sense, as “Hawwa” may have been a play on the Semitic word for life, “hayya”.) The CA term for John (“Yahya”) is from the Syriac “Yohanna[n]” via Kufic.

In a minor foible, “Yunus” (Jonah) is referred to as “Dhul-nun” [One of the fish] in 21:87; which is from the Syriac lexeme for “fish” (“nun”). In other words, the Creator of the Universe (putative author of the “Recitations”) seems not to have been aware of the prophet’s given name. That is: His knowledge was oddly limited to what happened to be available in Syriac source-material. All the authors of the Koran seemed to know is that he was the guy in the story about the big fish. {28}

According to Exodus (2:10), Moses was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter; yet according to the Koran (28:7-9), he was adopted by Pharaoh’s wife. In Islamic lore, Pharaoh’s wife is referred to as “Asiya” (who is then executed by her husband for converting to Islam). As it turns out, “Asiya” was the Syriac term for “healer” / “provider of solace”; and was commonly used in Syriac lore up through the Chaldean rite (ref. Paul Bedjan’s “Acta Martyrum Et Sanctorum”). The term was also used in Middle Persian. “Asiya” eventually came to be used as a term for a pious woman.

(Note that there is evidence of onomastic confusion on the part of later Islamic expositors; as “Asiyah” is referred to as the daughter of “Muzahim” by Al-Kisa’i; per Ibn Kathir. As is often the case, nobody could agree on the details of ancient folklore, including the parentage of an exalted figure like the Pharaoh’s pious wife.)

The name was clumsily rendered in Greek as “Asenath” (“servant of Neith”), as with the daughter of the royal priest, Potiphera of On (a.k.a. “Potiphar of Heliopolis”); who became the wife of Jacob’s heroic son, Joseph.

What makes all this even more interesting is that, elsewhere in the Koran (33:4), god forbids adoption...even as it emphasizes the fact that Moses was Pharaoh’s adopted son. The Koran also speaks of Joseph ben Jacob being adopted by Potiphera (referred to as “Al-Aziz” in 12:21). We are expected to believe, then, that god changed his mind on this issue; and did so exactly when it suited MoM’s (sexual) interests.

There are various other terms that serve as tell-tale signs of CA’s origins. We might also note that the Nabataean (Syriac) term “ka’abu” referred to the cubic shrine (comprised of stone blocks) at Petra. The shrine was used by the Nabataeans to pay tribute to their god, Dushara, at a shrine that was known as—you guessed it—the “Ka’abu”. Hence the term Mohammedans ended up using for the Meccan cube: “kaaba”. (For more on this, see my essay on “Mecca And Its Cube”.)

Thus: Simply by comparing certain words in the CA lexicon to Syro-Aramaic correlates, one can establish the etymology of key Koranic terms.

Predictably, many of the lexical limitations of Syriac translated to the discursive shortcomings found in Koranic verse. For instance, there was no word for “zygote” / “embryo” in Syriac, so the authors were forced to go with “blood-clot” when they opted for using CA (in their daft attempt to unsuccessfully explain embryology; ref. 96:2). As it turns out, the “blood-clot” meme for embryos proliferated in the region during Late Antiquity. Would god’s propitious disquisition have been so hamstrung by the crude vernacular of the Dark Ages? {33} And would he have also succumbed to the puerile superstitions that were popular amongst senescent Bedouins at that particular time? (Memo: A zygote is not a blood-clot.)

After scrutinizing the etymologies found in the Koranic lexicon, it becomes hard to ignore the fact that the “Recitations” exhibit distinctly Syro-Aramaic features. Indeed, the text often employs phraseology that is unique to Syriac; just as it is used to tell apocryphal tales that were unique to Syriac sources. {17}

It is telling that documents from the 7th century were first translated into Garshuni (proto-Arabic using a Syriac script), then to Armenian, then to CA. This would not have occurred in that sequence had CA already existed.

Given all this, it makes sense that the earliest scripts used for CA were Garshuni (i.e. the earliest iteration of CA using the Syriac alphabet), an offshoot of the Nabataean-influenced “khatt al-Kufi” (a.k.a. “Kufic”, which was named after the place where it was first found: the city of Kufa in central Mesopotamia). {2} To reiterate: Kufic was a proto-CA script which exhibited the orthography of the Nabataean alphabet; thus illustrating the new liturgical language’s Syriac roots. {3} As mentioned earlier, other intermediary scripts were Estrangela, Serta / Serto, and Madnhaya / Swadaya.

And as we have seen: The “Sana’a” Koran—the earliest surviving version of Islam’s holy book—was composed in the Kufic script. The codex was likely produced after Abd al-Malik’s reign, and ended up in the south-Arabian town of “Ma’rib”. In other words: pre-CA script was still used for compilations of the “Recitations” as far down as Yemen (per the Sana’a manuscript). That is: The script was being used from Kufa (present-day Najaf) down to Ma’rib (Sana’a); which entails the entirety of the Hijaz!

Unsurprisingly, Islamic authorities have been obdurate in limiting scholars' access to these manuscripts; thereby severely constraining OBJECTIVE evaluation of the text in each case. Clearly, there is much about such early manuscripts that they would much prefer remain verboten.

Another clue can be found in Islamic accounts of the "city of the prophet". In the writings of Al-Waqidi, there is reference to a Nabataean "souq" [market] in Yathrib during the pre-Islamic period, wherein he uses the label, "Nabati" for the patrons. This is very telling. Nabataeans evidently had a significant presence in the city that would become Medina. Odd that it is never mentioned that MoM had to contend with any foreign tongues when he arrived and became the city's cynosure. This only makes sense if everyone in Yathrib already spoke the same language.

There are other hints here and there. For example, in 11:79, the word used for the pronoun "you" is "ha'ula'i" (a variant of "hawila"), which is from the Syriac "hala'in".

The dialect of Arabic that—to this day—retains palpable traces of its Syriac antecedent is Lebanese Arabic. Notably: the vowel, "e" in Lebanese Arabic comes from the Syriac "rboso"—a feature that is not found in the medieval Arabic that became the basis for "fus[h]a". This phonetic vestige is preserved in the Lebanese pronunciation of their own country: "Lebnen" rather than the medieval Arabic "Lubnan".

In sum: Koranic vernacular offers plenty of clues as to its linguistic (esp. lexical) origins. {17}  
CA was, to be blunt, ANYTHING BUT a timeless language. As I hope is plain to see here, CA was an accident of history like ANY OTHER language that has ever existed.

If CA were, indeed, an eternal language (that is: the "native" language of the Creator of the Universe), then the Abrahamic deity would have been providing all his revelations to the Abrahamic prophets...starting with Adam, through Abraham, to Moses and thereafter...IN CLASSICAL ARABIC.

If that were the case, we are left to explain how CA's Semitic precursors inexplicably emerged (starting with Ugaritic, Ammonite, Eblaite, Phoenician, and Old Aramaic); as they would have been a divergence from an extent tongue: CA. Even more complicated, this millennia-long divergence from THE primordial language would have needed to continue on through Samaritan, Babylonian Aramaic, Mandaic, Syriac, Palmyrene / Nabataean...not to mention additional tangents like Mishnaic Hebrew and Chaldean / Madenhaya (as well as the variants in southern Arabia: Sabaic, Qatabanic, Hadramitic, Himyaritic, Sayhadic, and Minaic / Madhabic)...that is, before eventually coming BACK AROUND to the nominal language...which had existed since the beginning of time. (!)

Such a far-fetched "just so" story strains credulity to the breaking point.

The fact that proto-Sinaitic tongues also morphed into Ethiopic variants (like Ge'ez) as well as Kurdish variants (like Turoyo / Suroyo / Surayt, written in the Serto script) is further evidence that such a round-trip linguistic journey would have been inconceivable.

Another clue worth considering: Vestiges of Old Arabian persist to the present day—as with Faifi and Razihi (likely due to the fact that the Yemeni region was not quite as saturated with Syriac as was northern Arabia). Had CA been the tongue used by Hijazis all along (that is, during MoM's lifetime), Arabians would not have diverged from it after Islam's liturgical language had been established (viz. delivery of the Last Revelation).

As I hope to have shown, when it comes to evidence for—or, at least, indications of—the Syriac roots of CA, there is an embarrassment of riches. This goes beyond just that which is found in the Koran itself; the general liturgical language is festooned with vestiges of its Syriac beginnings.

The examples go on and on. The CA term for the Christian Gospels (“Injeel”) is an Arabization of the Syriac moniker found in the Peshitta, “awongaleeyoon” ... which was itself derived from the Koine Greek “eu angelion” [alt. “evangel”], which was derived from “*ef-aghelia*”, meaning “good message”.

It might be noted that, in exalting the “Injeel”, the authors of the Koran likely had in mind Syriac apocrypha rather than the canonical Gospels (i.e. material selected at the Council of Nicaea), which were primarily rendered in Koine Greek...pace the Syriac “Diatessaron” (later rendered the “Peshitta”), which would have been circulating in the Middle East at the time.

How so Greek? The Byzantine Empire was the neighbor to the northwest. The term used for the Gospels was not unique. The alternate name for Satan, “Iblis” is a variation on the Greek “diabolos”. Ten other examples of Arabic lexemes that came from Hellenic terms:

- “harita” (map) derived from “hartis”
- “kamous” (ocean) derived from “oukianous”
- “iklim” (region) derived from “kilma”
- “satara” / “ustura” (written history; legend) derived from “historia”
- “falsafa” (philosophy) derived from “philo-sophia”
- “al-kimiya” (alchemy; chemistry) derived from “khemeia”
- “iyaraj” (sacred) derived from “[h]iera”
- “namus” (law) derived from “nomos”
- “barbari” (barbarian) derived from “varvaros”
- “burj” (castle) derived from “purgos”

Even the Arabic term used for “Greek” ITSELF, “Yunani” derived from the endonym, “Ionas”. Clearly, CA was not a timeless language. That the Ishmaelites borrowed from the Byzantine lexicon FURTHER attests to the derivative nature of (what would eventually become) their liturgical language.

Are we to suppose that the Creator of the Universe clandestinely planted these terms in the Byzantine lexicon...in the hopes that they would eventually be coopted into the lexicon used by those to whom he would (later) deliver the Final Revelation?

As with any newfangled language, the earliest speakers of CA were appropriating terms from whatever languages happened to be impinging upon them. The result is a smattering of loanwords—primarily from its precursor, Syriac; but also from Persian (from the Sassanians) and Greek (from the Byzantines). CA is god’s native tongue? Don’t be ridiculous.

In the end, Syriac was the over-riding basis for CA, as THAT is what the Ishmaelites spoke; and it is from SYRIAC sources that they cribbed their lore. The CA term for messiah (“masih[i]”) is from the Syriac “mshyh”, which was itself derived from the Aramaic “meshiha” (another variant of which is the Classical Hebrew “mashia[c]h”). Thus “Masihi” was the Syriac term for followers of the Messiah. Recall how commonplace this moniker was—as during MoM’s lifetime, there were several other claimants propounding revelations—that is: claiming to be the latest Abrahamic prophet, sent to the Arabians by “allah” (most notably, Maslamah ibn Habib; a.k.a. “Musaylimah”).



MoM was merely the claimant who prevailed. This is yet another reminder that history is written by the victors. (Note that the modern Arabic term for Nazarene is “Nasiri”; while the term for Christian remains “Masihi”.)

We might also note the primary terms used for “Christian” in Dar al-Islam throughout the Middle Ages: “*Nasrani*”. THAT was the Syriac term for “*Nazarene*”. We’ve already discussed the CA term for a non-Mohammedan: “*kafr*”. It might be noted that this term of alterity was a variation on the Syriac verb for “deny”: “*kapar*”. As mentioned earlier, it took on the meaning “conceal” (that is: obfuscate) in its CA incarnation. Hence it is typically interpreted as “one who conceals [the truth]” (i.e. “denier”; one who obfuscates what is true). To suppose that this has nothing to do with Syriac antecedents is far-fetched.

The most obvious evidence for the Syriac origins of CA lay in the moniker used for the Ishmaelite godhead—a revamped conception of the Abrahamic deity. {18} As mentioned earlier, “allah” was derived from the Syriac, “eloah” (alternately rendered “alaha”)...which was based on earlier Semitic incarnations (i.e. the Aramaic “elah[a]”). {19}

Lo and behold, references to “allah” were used in material by the Arabian poet, Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma...who wrote his poems a generation before MoM’s ministry. (!) This stands to reason, as Jews and Christians in the region during Late Antiquity ALSO typically used “eloah” / “elah[a]” (as opposed to the Classical Hebrew: “El” / “Elohim”) when referring to the Abrahamic deity. It’s no wonder this ended up becoming the primary appellation for the Koran’s protagonist.

Again, some key terms can be directly traced all the way back to their Aramaic roots. For example, “*sajda*” / “sujud” comes from the early Semitic root “*S-G-D*” (meaning prostration)...via Syriac intermediaries. Thus the term “masjid” for the place of prostration. The term for “slay” (“*yuqatil*” / “*uqtul[u]*” / “[y]aqtul[u]”), which is used throughout the Koran, is from the early Semitic root “*Q-T-L*” ...via Syriac intermediaries. Etc.

It should be obvious from the present survey that the origins of Islam’s liturgical terms lay in the Levant, not in Arabia. (Old South Arabian was clearly not the primary source of the CA lexicon.) The supposition that CA is an eternal language is belied by its obviously derivative nature. What is telling is not merely THAT it is derivative; but FROM WHENCE it is derived, and WHEN that derivation occurred. But the evidence all points to a certain course of events. Even as recently as the 12th century, the Arab philologist, Abu Mansur Mauhub al-Jawaliqi of Baghdad was candid about “foreign terms found in the speech of the ancient Arabs and used in the Koran” (ref. his explanatory “*Kitab al-Mu’Arab*” [Book Of Words Used In Arabic]).

To conclude: The traces of the Koran’s Syriac origins can be found not only in its thematic content, but in its vernacular. It is a vernacular that—it turns out—was anything but timeless. This was no secret at the time.

The derivative nature of CA belies the claim that it is god’s native tongue...lest we suppose that the Creator of the Universe sporadically planted lexemes in alternate vernaculars (not only Syriac, but also Middle Persian) so that they might later be adopted by the Ishmaelites. To then claim that CA existed since the beginning of time is bonkers.

## A FURTHER EXPLORATION OF RELEVANT HISTORICAL EXIGENCIES:

When it comes to assaying the origins of Mohammedan lore, it is worth recapitulating some of the most notable Syriac sources adumbrated in my previous essay: “Syriac Source-Material For Islam’s Holy Book”. Here are thirty major works—all of which were available in Syriac during the relevant period. As I

showed in the previous essay, ALL of these works had palpable influence on Mohammedan lore...and thus on Islamic scripture:

1. The Conflict Of Adam And Eve With Satan {59}
2. The Genesis Rabba by Rabbi Hoshayah
3. The Mekilta by Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha
4. The Testament Of Solomon
5. The Covenant Of Damascus
6. The Jewish Apocalypse of Ezra (a.k.a. the second “Book Of Esdras”; alt. 4 Ezra)
7. The (first) Book Of Enoch
8. The Book Of Jasher (as well as the “Pirke” of Rabbi Eliezer)
9. The Book Of Jubilees
10. The Book Of Tobit
11. The Targum Of Esther (as well as various other Syriac Targum-im)
12. The Epistle Of Barnabas
13. The Gospel Of Peter
14. The [Infancy] Gospel Of James
15. The Infancy Gospel Of Thomas (and its derivative: the Gospel Of The Infancy Of The Savior)
16. The Book Of The Nativity Of The Blessed Miriam, And The Savior’s Infancy (a.k.a. “pseudo-Matthew”)
17. The Psalms of Thom[as]
18. The Acts of Peter and Andrew
19. The Apocalypse of Baruch (alt. 2 Baruch); The Last Words Of Baruch
20. The Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius {40}
21. The Apocalypse of Abraham
22. The Passion Of Sergius And Bacchus
23. The Romance Of Alexander by Callisthenes of Olynthus (and its Syriac offshoot: “The Legend Of Alexander”)
24. The Demonstrations by Aphrahat of Ashuristan (inspired by the Book of Daniel, which was itself originally composed in Aramaic)
25. The Cave Of Treasures by Ephrem of Nisibis
26. The Seven Sleepers Of Ephesus by Jacob of Sarug
27. The Enchiridion by Jacob of Edessa
28. The Book Of Treasures by Jacob of Edessa
29. The Book Of Perfection by Sahdona of Halmon
30. The Book Of the Scholion by Theodore bar Konai

Other major Syriac tracts included the Nedarim, Nazir, Me’ilah, Keritot, and Tamid. (To see the vast reach of Syriac Christianity, we might note the Nestorian Stele at Chang’an (now Xi’an) from c. 781.)

The most significant sources from which Mohammedan lore was cribbed were the Syriac versions of canonical scripture—that is: the holy books of the Syriac church. Hence the prevalence of the Diatessaron (along with its counterpart, the Evangelion Dampharshe); which was followed by the Peshitta (along with ancillary material like the illuminated “Rabbula” Gospels). The Diatessaron, commissioned by Tatian in the 160’s (copies of which include the Khabouris codex, the Sinaiticus codex, and the “Curetonian Gospels” from the 4th century) was rendered as the “Peshitta” [simple text] c. 508. (See footnote 34 of my essay on “Syriac Source-Material For Islamic Lore”.)

All THAT was in conjunction with other significant texts like the Nestorian Psalter (the Syriac “Book of Psalms”) mentioned earlier. EVERY ONE of these Syriac sources influenced Mohammedan lore (spec. with regard to the composition of the Koran and Hadith). {20}

As verse 5 of Surah 25 concedes: Much of MoM’s audience was already familiar with the material he was hawking. This long list explains how this was so.

There were, of course, other works of Abrahamic lore that likely circulated in Syriac—throughout the region—at the time. Notable were the Odes of Solomon and Psalms of Solomon, codices of which are housed at the John Rylands Library (also ref. the Nitriensis codex from Scetis, Egypt). The “Didascalia Apostolorum” from Antioch c. 230 had been based on the antecedent (Greek) “Didache” from the 2nd century. Other Syriac works circulating at the time included the “Apocryphon of John” (used by the “Audians” of Mesopotamia) and the (lost) Gospel of Bartholomew (a.k.a. the “Resurrection of Jesus Christ” by Bartholomew; and/or “The Questions of Bartholomew”).

Also of note is the (Syriac) “*Apocalypse Of James*”, which was likely composed in the early 8th century. This book excerpted material from Severus “the Great” of Gaza / Pisidia (who served as the patriarch of Antioch) and Jacob of Edessa (who served as the bishop of Edessa). It also included selected passages from the (Syriac) Doctrine of Addai. It seems to have been intimately related to the (Syriac) “Apocalypse Of John The Little”—a tract that actually addressed the (newly) emerging Mohammedan Faith. (!) Funny how this reaction—in the 8th century—comes a century LATE (with regard to the standard Islamic narrative; wherein the timeline begins with the “hijra” c. 622; and the major Ishmaelite conquests a decade later). According to the “Apocalypse Of John The Little”, the touchstone event for the Mohammedan movement was the reign of caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (c. 685 – 705). This comports with the timeline proposed in my other essays on the matter: “The Meccan Cube” and “Genesis Of A Holy Book”.

With regard to eschatology, the “*Apocalypse Of John The Little*” takes its inspiration from the Book of Daniel. In keeping with this, the tract seems to be in dialogue with other Syriac Apocalypses of the time—specifically those of pseudo-Methodius (as well as the tract from which the quizzical “Edessene fragment” comes). This is a reminder of how important it is to understand the Syriac milieu in which the Mohammedan creed germinated. NOBODY—including the Ishmaelites—was (yet) speaking the language that came to be dubbed “Arabic”. Everything was articulated in Syriac during the relevant period.

It would be one thing if the standard Islamic narrative de-emphasized these key factors; but it leaves them out entirely. This omission is peculiar. It’s as if those who crafted the (invariably self-serving) historiographies had something to hide. Put another way: If those propounding conventional wisdom had nothing to hide, there would have been no reason to so completely elide the integral role that Syriac played in the environs of early Islam. Such obfuscation is a red flag that the elucidation of Truth was not the sine qua non of those who composed the Hadith collections.

There are various cases in which the cover-up ends up being more incriminating than that which was being elided. Take, for instance, the so-called “Apocalypse of Samuel”—a tract that was falsely attributed to the 7th-century Coptic monk, Samuel of Kalamoun (a.k.a. Saint Samuel the Confessor). It was actually composed during the Fatimid period (10th thru 12th century). The tract addresses the shifting of Egypt’s lingua franca from Coptic to medieval Arabic—a process that was documented by Abu’l Qasim ibn Hawqal of Nisibis in the late 10th century. (Tellingly, the Apocalypse of Samuel came to exist in only Arabic translations.) {60}

In the region, it was common for practitioners of Abrahamic lore to misconstrue Syriac sources as original sources. Thus heterodox apocrypha crept into the lore. Possible Syriac influences in the region went on and on—as with the Acts Of Thomas / Judas [“Didymus”] from the early 3rd century as well as the Acts of

Andrew and Bartholomew from the 5th-century (to mention yet TWO MORE).

Most of these apocryphal texts were rendered in Aramaic and/or Syriac—as attested by the Dead Sea Scrolls, excavated from the caves at Qumran.

All this is in addition to the panoply of Syriac liturgical material that was available to the earliest Mohammedans—notably: the writings of Narsai of Ma'alta (who worked at the schools of Edessa and Nisibis). And recall the profusion of Talmudic material (i.e. the Aggadah and Gemara) circulating IN SYRIAC throughout the Middle East at the time—as with the Mekilta and the Genesis Rabbah. {21} One cannot even pretend to understand the memetic environment in which Mohammedan lore germinated without being familiar with these Syriac works.

To reiterate: It was not as if people throughout the Middle East were sitting around reading all these books. Rather, these books were the source of folklore that circulated orally, and propagated in a rather haphazard fashion (as is the case with oral transmission over the generations) throughout the region. {23}

We have looked at lexical parity; but we needn't limit ourselves to etymology. People also left a trail of CA's genesis in terms of orthography. Early Hijazi (a.k.a. "Thamudic") scripts had several variants—all of which were descendants of proto-Sinaitic. First, from the NORTH, was Safaitic (i.e. Levantine), which was based on the Nabataean incarnation of Syriac. THAT was the primary basis for proto-CA. Second, from the SOUTH, was the Sayhadic family of scripts, which were used for Old South Arabian (itself a Sinaitic language). To review, these included:

- Qatabanic (alt. Qatabanian)
- Sabaic (alt. Sabaean; as with the so-called "musnad")
- Hadramautic / Himyaritic (i.e. Yemeni)
- Hasaitic (i.e. eastern Arabian)
- Minaic / Madhabic (alt. Minaean)

Sayhadic (spec. Sabaitic and Minaic) scripts were used by the Kindah kingdom (esp. at their capital, Karyat al-Faw), which means that the spoken languages (Sabaean and Minaean) were Old South Arabian.

As mentioned earlier, inscriptions in Arabia (typically categorized as "ancient north Arabian") could be found in the Hisma desert, at the Tayma oasis, at Dadan [alt. "Dedan"; now known as "Al-Ula"], and at Dumah. {2}

It is important here not to confuse Old (north / south) ARABIAN for some earlier version of ARABIC. This taxonomic glitch is exacerbated by ill-defined terms like "Old Arabic"—which only elides the ACTUAL origins of CA. (Classical Arabic IS the oldest Arabic.) Another misleading term is "Nabataean Arabic"—which would be like saying "Romanized Castilian". (It would be inane to contend that Latin was just an early form of Spanish.)

While (Nabataean) Syriac was the primary basis for proto-CA, it might be noted that CA (in its fully-developed form) likely emerged after Syriac was infused with a few elements from the above (indigenous) Arabian languages / scripts, as one would expect. This admixture would have occurred during the time the Arabs (the "Saracens") adopted a distinctly Ishmaelite identity (starting at the end of the 7th century, and on through the 8th and 9th centuries)...and subsequently asserted their dominion. This would have been an ad hoc process.

It is THAT process that would initially lead to Kufic...and, eventually, to what finally came to be (what we now know as) “Classical Arabic”. Thus CA can best be thought of as a linguistic alloy of (Nabataean) Syriac and sparse vestiges of some of the Old Arabian languages. {43}

To reiterate: The script that was EVENTUALLY used for proto-CA was Nabataean—a variation of Syriac based on Aramaic. Thus CA script was a descendent of the Nabataean alphabet via the Kufic script—used during the embryonic stage of CA’s development (which, as we’ve seen, seems to have been inaugurated at Kufa in the early 8th century). {3}

Tellingly, some of these proto-CA inscriptions made use of Syrio-Aramaic lexemes rather than lexemes eventually used by CA—as with “bar” instead of “ibn”. This is attested by the Harran inscriptions at (Lihyanite) Dedan (a.k.a. “Hegra”) in northwestern Arabia...which, it so happened, was a place later ruled by the Nabataeans. This is very telling.

To be clear: Initially, Arabian inscriptions (esp. the Old North Arabian inscriptions listed above) simply used Aramaic-based vernacular...even as they were written in either Nabataean script (as with the Namarah inscription near Damascus and the various inscriptions at Sakakah) or epigraphic “Old South Arabian” script (as with the inscription at Qaryat al-Faw in the Nejd). {2}

In a few cases, the inscriptions would make use of some local vernacular that would later emerge in the development of CA (ref. the inscriptions at Ein Avdat in the Negev and at Umm al-Jimal in Syria). It would be a mistake, though, to interpret the incidence of cognates as evidence that CA already existed at those earlier times. That’s not how the evolution of language works. EVERY language has precursors. The existence of lexical / phonological antecedents with recognizable elements of the later language does not mean the later language existed AS SUCH at that earlier stage. To construe such similarities as evidence of the later language ALREADY existing (as a distinct language) is to reverse causation. It would be like a son noting that his father HAS HIS eyes. Not only is such inverted causality like saying the parent has the child’s eyes BECAUSE OF the child; it’s like taking the resemblance as evidence that the child ALREADY EXISTED (in an earlier form) at the time of the parent’s birth. (!)

An analogous mischaracterization would be, say, looking at the runes of northern Europe from the Dark Ages and taking that as evidence that “English” somehow existed (in an earlier form) well over a thousand years ago. In reality, English as we now know it was primarily based on an admixture of Norman and Old Saxon...which were both off-shoots of Frankish...which was itself an admixture of Vulgar Latin and Germanic tongues dating back to Late Antiquity. The use of Frankish during the Dark Ages is not evidence that English was already in use at the time. Though they served as a basis for English, it is not accurate to see Norman and Old Saxon (or even the Celtic “Old English”) as EARLY FORMS OF English.

CA emerged from Nabataean Syriac. Historical events explain why all this came to pass as it did. The Lihyanites, who preceded the Nabataeans, also established the city of Dedan (later called “Hegra” by the Nabataeans; referred to as “Al-Hijr” in the Koran; now known as “Mada’in Saleh”), at which was erected the massive “Qasr al-Farid” [“lonely castle”] in the early 1st century. {25}

Of course, Saudi archeology is like a Taliban bikini contest. It doesn’t exist; and it is prevented from existing for explicitly religious reasons. This should be obvious to even a casual observer. There are many things that Wahhabis (and Salafis) would very much prefer nobody ever found out about Islam’s ACTUAL history; as such disclosure would undermine the foundations of their ramshackle dogmatic edifice. The fragility of ANY house of cards demands that they be protected from even the mildest perturbation.

Consequently, we encounter an alluvion of legerdemain whenever it comes to this subject-matter. Disingenuous historiographers sometimes assign the descriptor “[early] Arabic” to Kufic inscriptions—and,

even more absurdly, to earlier Nabataean inscriptions—so as to retro-actively ascribe CA to an era that predates its genesis. {2} This is done so that they can pretend CA existed during MoM's lifetime. Such brazen dissimulation is risible, yet unsurprising. Short of engaging in such taxonomic gimmickry, they would be forced to concede that the "Recitations" were originally composed in a language other than Islam's liturgical language, thereby subverting the narrative on which their ideology depends.

Hence the charade persists in many circles to the present day. Even now, expositors in the Muslim world insist that the fabled writer, "[Abu Musa] Jabir ibn Hayyan" of the Azd (variously said to have been from Tarsus, Harran, Kufa, or Tus) wrote his mystical tracts IN CA in the late 8th century. This is complete farce. All the material has been proven to be from much later; and Jabir has been shown to have been a figment of later compilers' imaginations.

Retro-active attribution of liturgical material (for flagrantly ideological purposes) goes back to the Exilic Period, when the Babylonian scribes insisted—against all verisimilitude—that the Torah was first written by Moses himself (that is: over seven centuries earlier). How is it that Moses was fully apprised of the dialogue between, say, Noah...or Abraham...or Job...and the other characters? As if that were not absurd enough, we are also expected to believe that the Psalms were penned by King David...and that the Song of Solomon and Proverbs were penned by King Solomon...almost four centuries before the Exilic Period.

Alas, credulity knows no bounds when theological agendas are at stake.

In Dar al-Islam, retro-active attribution of authorship has been common practice. Take, for instance, the Ali'd (Shia) "Nahj al-Balaghah" [Peak of Eloquence], the classic treatise traditionally attributed to Ali ibn Abi Talib, the patriarch of Shiism (who lived in the early 7th century). Such attribution is complete farce. Though there were purportedly oblique allusions to (something like) the text starting in the late 9th century, the earliest compilation was (reputedly) done by Abul-Hasan Muhammad ibn Al-Husayn Al-Musawi of Baghdad (a.k.a. "Al-Sharif al-Razi") c. 1000. (No word yet on why there was still a need to COMPILE the material almost four centuries after it was supposedly written.) This odd historiographical quirk is blithely accepted without further comment.

(But wait. It is even more suspect than just this; for the earliest manuscript of THAT is from the late 12th century.)

Another example of retro-active attribution is the Ali'd book of propitiations known as the "Sahifa [al-Kamilah] al-Sajjadiyya", which is traditionally associated with the fourth imam: Ali ibn Husayn ibn Ali (grandson of Ali) from the late 7th century. That attribution is farcical as well. There is no record of the book until the 11th century.

If people had been composing (what are purported to be) the most important tracts in history since the 7th century, how is it that not a single manuscript survives in its original form? If such things HAD been composed as the story goes, and so HAD been preserved for posterity during the ensuing centuries, how is it that the ONLY source-material that is currently available was the final product...from hundreds of years after it was ostensibly created? This only makes the least bit of sense if no such manuscript existed in CA until the versions we NOW HAVE finally emerged in the historical record.

In terms of pre-Islamic Arabian poetry, we hear accounts of the so-called Arabian "qasida" [odes]—as with the famous "Banat Su'ad", written by Ka'b ibn Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulama. It is often claimed that such poetry was composed in "Arabic"; but this is fallacious. (There is an apocryphal tale of Ka'b's brother, Buzayr, meeting MoM and converting to Islam. Ka'b was eventually executed for heresy.) The earliest version of the "Banat Su'ad" in CA is from the 13th century—written by a Berber poet of the Sanhaja named Al-Busiri (who was also known for his "Qasidat al-Burda"). And it was in the 13th century that the Andalusian poet, Ibn Arabi penned "The Interpreter Of Desires". Moreover, the so-called "na'at sharif"

(encomia to MoM) and “hamd” (encomia to the Abrahamic deity) did not emerge until after CA had (actually) been established.

There are other residual traces of Syriac in general Islamic vernacular. The holiday, Eid al-Adha (from the Semitic lexeme for sacrifice: D[a]-H[a]) is alternately dubbed “Eid al-Kabir”. K-B-R[a] is the Semitic tri-root for “closeness” or “proximity” (with intimations of coveting a source of water). In Syriac, the lexeme was used to refer to “communion”; and—tellingly—is used as such by Syriac Christians to the present day.

During the Middle Ages, there surely would have been a campaign to systematically destroy Syriac (and other un-approved) versions of the Islamic scripture (esp. the Koran), as such editions of the texts—as we now know—eventually came to be considered an abomination. This would have been roughly analogous to the Nicene Christians’ destruction of non-Canonical texts during the 4th century. (Instead of the issue being objectionable CONTENT, though, the Islamic censure primarily pertained to the coveted scripture being written in an objectionable LANGUAGE.) It is therefore remarkable that we even have the sparse evidence of such early versions that we DO now have. Nevertheless, it is evidence enough to draw the present conclusions.

So what of relevant archeological discoveries? To the present day, there can be little doubt that the House of Saud routinely destroys ANYTHING discovered in the Hijaz that does not fit the desired narrative. (To reiterate: There is—quite literally—no such thing as Saudi archeology.) Indeed, there is only one thing that would happen if a Syriac Koran were to be dug up in Arabia: It would be immediately destroyed; no questions asked. (Syriac Koran? WHAT Syriac Koran?) It is also quite telling that so much development has occurred in Mecca without even the least bit of concern for archeological due diligence. With such extensive digging for the plethora of modern high-rises surrounding the “Majid al-Haram”, NOT A SINGLE ITEM of note has ever been discovered. This is—to put it mildly—outrageous.

It is outrageous UNLESS, that is, there is quite literally nothing to find that would confirm the standard Mohammedan narrative; and a plethora of countervailing evidence.

Undoubtedly, if a liberal regime had ruled over the Hijaz for the last couple centuries, there would now be a wealth of archeological discoveries available—many of which would almost certainly be extremely inconvenient to those who fetishize received wisdom, and have a staunch vested interest in upholding sanctified Islamic lore. This brings to mind the Vatican’s suppression of any and all material that undermines its own version of Christianity’s origins.

The question, then, is not: Why do we not have more evidence of the first incarnations of the “Recitations”? Rather, the question is: Why—after a programatic effort to expurgate Syriac versions of the Koran from the record—do we even have the scant evidence that IS now available? It’s a miracle we have as much as we have; and thank heaven for it. (After all, it’s what has enabled me to write the present essay.)

To reiterate: There is a natural course of memetic genealogy (vis a vis Mohammedan lore) to match the concomitant etymology of CA (as Islam’s liturgical language). This revisionist program operates within the ambit of the same theological heritage—in this case: that of the Abrahamic deity and the various prophets of extant Abrahamic lore. As discussed in the previous essay (on the Syriac-source material for Islamic lore), the cooptation of Syriac tropes into Islamic lore included tales that we now know to be confabulations. (There, I showed how scripture was rife with such tell-tale signs.) This is exactly the sort of thing that we would expect to have occurred in the Middle East during the Dark Ages...or, for that matter, anywhere else at any other point in history.

Indeed, the phenomenon was not unique to the gestation of Mohammedan lore; it's how things NORMALLY work—irrespective of the era, the region, or the dogmas being promulgated. In other words: There's nothing special going on here.

We've already looked at lexical clues. But there's more. Upon reading the Koran, we find that there are also residual traces of the original language of the "Recitations" in the PHRASEOLOGY of the text. As it turns out, several verses make more sense in Syriac than they do in CA, indicating that they were likely ORIGINALLY composed in Syriac. One of the most commonly-cited examples of this is 2:135. In CA, it reads: "We believe in the Faith of Abraham the Hanif; and he was not one of the mu-shrik-un." This is redundant, as a "Hanif" is a monotheist [one who is inclined exclusively toward the Abrahamic deity]; while "mu-shrik-un" means idolaters [those who engage in "shirk": the worship of entities OTHER THAN the Abrahamic deity]. Meanwhile, in Syriac, the line could be read: "We believe in the Faith of Abraham, who was a heathen YET not one of the idolaters"...which makes more sense. (This is echoed in 3:67.)

One might suppose that the Koran would have read far better in the original Syriac, whereby the raft of redundancies—and grammatical incongruities—with which the book is riddled may have not existed in its original Syriac incarnation.

There also seems to be evidence of residual Syriac prosody—a point made by Günter Lüling in his "On the Pre-Islamic Christian Strophe Poetical Texts in the Koran" [Toward Reconstruction of the Pre-Islamic, Syriac-Christian Strophical Hymnody Undergirding the Transmitted Koranic Verse]. This is just as we'd expect from an oral tradition that originated in an alternate tongue.

The emergence of at least seven Koranic text variants, using different dialects of proto-Arabic (hence the "ahruf": variations of early Koranic manuscripts) must also be addressed. Had CA already been fully developed (and, for that matter, deemed the eternal, perfect language of god), then the impresarios of the "Recitations" would not have allowed discrepant versions to form. A far more likely explanation for the occurrence of myriad "ahruf" is that CA was still developing from its Syriac antecedent. Due to the fact that this would have invariably been an ad hoc process, it was inevitable that variants would have arisen before one OFFICIAL version would have prevailed. Linguistic metamorphoses are not clean-cut, linear processes. This is especially when the process is limited to oral transmission...over the course of two centuries...amongst highly superstitious men with staunch ideological commitments.

One does not need a PhD in philology (or "comparative linguistics") to recognize the emergence of CA to be an eminently worldly phenomenon—as with EVERY OTHER CASE of new language formation.

Another question is worth posing: During the transitional period, how did the Ishmaelites THEMSELVES identify the language they were using? Tellingly, the term used for the (Syriac) language in which the first Mohammedan texts were composed was alternately "Suryani[yya]" [Assyrian] and "Nabati[yya]" [Nabataean]. (Assyrians / Aramaeans and Mesopotamians / Chaldeans were both referred to as Nabataeans by early Islamic expositors.) Even more telling, the eldest son of the Mohammedan patriarch, Ishmael (son of Abraham), Nebayoth (who was affiliated with the Assyrians) was often conflated with the moniker, "Nabat[i]" (the ethnonym for the Nabataeans)...thereby revealing (what amounts to) an exogenous perception of ethnic origins. That Ishmael was (implicitly) referred to as Nabataean by the pre-Islamic Ishmaelites is, to put it mildly, extremely revealing. It reveals that they saw themselves (qua Ishmaelites) as inheritors of a Nabataean LINGUISTIC legacy. (It certainly was not the religious or political legacy that they were embracing!)

Are there other clues? Let's look at city names. It is telling that during the Rashidun period, when the Mohammedans conquered the Byzantine city of Germanikeia [Caesarea] (located in the frontier zone



known as “Al-Awasim”; i.e. Cilicia) c. 645, they re-christened it “Mar’ash”—which was a SYRIAC name.

And instead of the Byzantine “Capitolias”, the conquering Arabs opted for the Syriac moniker (“Bet Reisha”), dubbing it “Beyt Rash”.

This also happened when they conquered the ancient Armenian city of Tigranakert in Cappadocia (named after Tigranes the Great; corresponding with the present-day Silvan). At the time, the city was referred to as “Martyropolis” by the Byzantines (a Greek moniker), yet it was referred to as “Mayperqit” in Syriac by—well—those who used Syriac. Sure enough: The Ishmaelites re-christened the city “Mayfarqin”.

These were not aberrations. For the same happened with Edessa. The Mohammedans referred to it not by its (Seleucid) Greek name, but instead as “*Ar-Ruha*” [alt. “Urfa”], a variant of its Syriac name: “*Urhay*”. When the Arabs established the “city of mosques” in Mesopotamia, they derived its name (“*Fallujah*”) from the (Palmyrene) Syriac, “*Pallgutha*” rather than referring to it by its historical name: “Nehardea” (which was located near the place that had been known in previous centuries for its famed Judaic academy: referred to in Aramaic as “Pumbedita”).

And when the the Arabs conquered the Sassanian-held “Peroz-Shapur”, the city was re-named “*Anbar*” : Middle Persian for “granary” / “storehouse”. If the conquerers were seeking to strip the city of its Persian pedigree by re-naming it, then why would they have opted to use a Pahlavi term? This only makes sense if, at the time, they did not have their own UNIQUE language to use (that is: if they did not yet have a CA term of which to avail themselves). If Arabic had already been the go-to language, and they wanted to refer to the place as “granary”, then Anbar would now be called “Makhzin”.

Something similar happened with monikers for Mesopotamia. The Old Aramaic “Erech” was based on the Sumerian “Uruk” (named after the Bronze Age city). “Erech” would later be the basis for both the Avestan and Syriac synecdoche for the region: “Eraq”. That eventually led to the Arabic moniker “Iraq” (subsequently used for the name of the modern nation-State). Bagh-dad was founded on the site of a Syriac-speaking, Nabataean settlement; in the vicinity of the old Persian city of Ctesiphon.

Were all these instances aberrations? Nope. Here are ten more place-names that illustrate the scope of Syriac influence in the medieval Arab world:

- “Yemen” comes from the Syriac for “place of strength”
- “Ajman” comes from the Syriac for “place of sadness”
- “Dubai” comes from the Syriac for “pleasant place”
- “Sharika” comes from the Syriac for “shining [place]”: “shraga”
- “Riyadh” comes from the Syriac for “excellent [place]”: “riath”
- “Basra” (founded c. 636) comes from the Syriac for “settlement”: “basratha”
- “Najran” comes from the Syriac “Nagrano”
- “Kuwait” comes from the Syriac “Koito”
- “Bahrain” comes from the Syriac “Beth Nahrain”
- “Qatar” comes from the Syriac “[Beth] Katroie”

And instead of the prevalent monikers of the time, “Khalpe” / “Khalibon” or “Beroea”, the Mohammedans referred to the city of Aleppo by its Syriac moniker: “Halab”. Also note the Syriac word for “elevated”: “ram”. This lexeme was used in “Ram-Allah”: a city in the highlands north of Jerusalem, possibly corresponding to the Samaritan “Beiroth[ah]” (rendering it “elevated god”). Alternately, “ram” was used for “thunder”. Thus Ram-Allah could have been a variant of the Syriac “Ram-ilah” (thunder god), which would share an etymology with the Hebraic “Ram-i-El” (thunder of god).

“Ram” was also used for the Galilean town of “Al-Ram[a]”. Caliph Sulayman ibn Abd al-Malik then founded “Ram-la” c. 715 (replacing Lydda as the provincial capital of Palestine), though the exact etymology of that name remains somewhat of a conundrum.

Generally speaking, there is nothing remarkable about the derivative nature of place-names; but this particular etymology reminds us that CA typography—and CA onomastics in general—was just as contingent as was any other language’s onomastic convention. Islam’s liturgical language was an accident of history, nothing more.

In sum: CA did not originate in Arabia. Accordingly, the moniker “Iraq” for Mesopotamia did not have its origins in Old South Arabian; it had its origins in Persian and/or the antecedent NORTH Semitic tongue: (Nabataean) Syriac.

Note that the distinction between Nabatean Aramaic and Nabatean Arabic (both are Syriac) is like that between, say, puma and cougar (both are mountain lions). This misleading linguistic taxonomy was coined to elide the fact that the primary language of the Arabs from the 1st through 8th centuries (in, say, Edessa, Palmyra, Petra, and Nessana) was a derivative of Aramaic (with bits of Old North Arabian thrown in when one ventures as far south as Hegra and Dumah). “Arabic” did not yet exist as a distinct language. The Arabs of the region spoke one or another form of Syriac and/or Old North Arabian (a descendant of Dedanic). Another distinction without a difference is “Koranic Arabic” vs. “Classical Arabic”: basically two different ways of thinking about the liturgical language of Islam, which—as we’ve seen—was developed starting in the last decade of the 7th century. (One may as well say “H<sub>2</sub>O” as opposed to “water”.) {53}

To the extent that people said / did things that Syriac-speaking would have said / done (and NOT what CA-speaking people would have said / done), it is reasonable to conclude—barring any as-yet-unknown factors—that they spoke Syriac (rather than CA).

Koranic onomastics provides EVEN MORE examples. In the Koran’s account of the Great Flood, Mount Ararat (the Greek and Hebrew renderings of “Urtu”; though the mountain itself was referred to by the ancient Greeks as “Nibaros”) is rendered “Gudi”. From whence might this alternate name have come? As it turns out, it is a variation on the Syriac version of the moniker, “Kardu”—an appellation that was used as late as the 10th-century in Dar al-Islam (as attested by Islamic historian, Al-Masudi in his “Meadows Of Gold And Mines Of Gems”). This only makes sense if the early expositors of Islamic lore were using Syriac. (The Kurdish moniker, “Agiri”, is yet another variation of the original Urtian moniker.)

And so it went: During the 7th and 8th centuries, the Ishmaelites used Syriac onomastics when staking their claim on newly-conquered places. Once we consider this, a question arises: If Muslims were already speaking CA, then why was it that distinctly Syriac monikers were routinely used?

The evidence attests to the fact that during MoM’s lifetime, virtually EVERYONE was using Syriac, and that the emergence of CA (as a fully-developed language) was still quite a ways off. The existence of sporadic inscriptions in proto-CA during the intervening time (i.e. prior to the 9th century) attests to the long gestation period of the new language. Such inscriptions are NOT evidence for its existence as a lingua franca at the time. Rather, they are evidence that CA was not concocted ex nihilo, but existed in embryonic form...in isolated instances. {2}

Tellingly, when a chronicler in the region opted to compose a chronicle of the events surrounding the Lakhmids in the late 6th and early 7th centuries (i.e. when MoM was purportedly conducting his ministry), he opted to do so IN SYRIAC—producing what we now refer to as the “Khuzistan Chronicle”. That was in eastern Arabia—much farther from the Levant than was the Hijaz. Clearly, Syriac was in wide

use; and was the go-to language for expositors across the region at the time.

In the 8th century, Ali ibn Hamid ibn Abi Bakr of Kufa wrote his chronicle about the Umayyad conquests in Sindh: the “Chach Nama”. Tellingly, he wrote it in Pahlavi (Persian), not in CA. Note that the author was from Mesopotamia; and even hailed from the city in which the EARLIEST SCRIPT (Kufic) of proto-CA emerged. If ANYONE would have been apt to use CA at the time, it would have been him. Yet he didn’t. There is no other explanation for this than that CA did not yet exist as a literary language in Dar al-Islam.

In the late 8th / early 9th century, Patriarch Timothy II of Baghdad was still using Syriac—even in his writings that were not liturgical. And across Eurasia at the time, the Sogdians (impresarios of the Silk Road) were still using Syriac script...which means that it was still the most useful language for merchants who were trading with the Ishmaelites. There is no mention of having to use some distinctly “Arabic” language. {72}

So it came to pass: Throughout the Middle East, Syriac (using various Hijazi scripts enumerated in footnote 2) would eventually be transplanted by its linguistic descendent (CA) during the late 8th / early 9th century. THAT is when the metamorphosis of CA was reaching culmination (as Islam’s liturgical language). This tells us that the development of Mohammedan scripture and the development of CA were coeval—that is: aspects of the same process (a process that occurred long after MoM had come and gone).

It should come as no surprise, then, that the earliest texts in fully-developed CA do not occur until the 9th century. And EVEN THEN, some texts continued to be composed in Syriac—as with the writings of Hunayn ibn Ishaq al-Ibadi of Al-Hirah, Ishodad of Merv, and Theodore Abu Qurrah of Edessa. This would not have made sense had CA been the prevalent language ALL ALONG.

Non-Muslims—living as “dhimmis” within the Islamic dominion—were ALSO still writing in Syriac on through the 9th century. This is an eventuality that would be difficult to square with the fact that the lingua franca of the region had already been CA for over two centuries. After all, dhimmis were subordinates to the established order, and so would have been obliged to defer to the preferred language of their rulers...ESPECIALLY if they were disseminating material that was meant for a general audience.

Even during the Islamic “Golden Age”, Syriac was STILL being used in the Muslim world—even if not by Muslims (for whom it was, by then, an eschewed language). For example:

- Theodore[t] bar Kon[a]i of Beth Garmai (modern Kirkuk) composed his “Scholion” in Syriac c. 792.
- Assyrian patriarch, Thomas of Marga [a.k.a. “the Great Zab”] composed “The Book of Governors” in the 9th century. {30}
- Eliya bar Shinaya of Bet[h] Nuhadra [a.k.a. “Elijah of Nisibis”] composed works in Syriac in the late 10th / early 11th century.
- Nestorian author, Elijah of Nisibis / Adiabene (Mesopotamia) composed his great chronicle in the 11th century.
- Jacobite author, Michael of Miletene (central Anatolia) composed his great chronicle in the 12th century.

The “response literature” (re: the Babylonian Talmud) coming from the great Talmudic Academies of Mesopotamia was primarily written IN SYRIAC from the 8th thru 10th centuries.

*In the late 8th and early 9th century*, the Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Timotheos of Adiabene conducted all of his correspondences with Muslim leaders—including the caliph in Baghdad—IN SYRIAC. This was also the case with Theodoros Abu Qurra.

*In the 9th century*, we might also note [Habib ibn Khidma] Abu Raita of Tikrit, Ammar of Basra, and Nonos of Nisibis. Another notable Syriac work was the “*Zuknin Chronicle*” by Dionysius of Tel Mahre. Meanwhile, the great Muslim polymath, Al-Kindi (from Kufa) was a patron of the Syriac thinker, Hunayn ibn Ishaq (from Hir[t]a). What were they interested in doing? Translating the great Greek and Persian into Syriac...and then Arabic.

Works like the “*Chronicle of Sireth*” [alt. “Siirt”] by Ishodnah of Basra, were eventually rendered in CA. We know that it was RE-written because, in its latest version, its accounts were given a flagrantly pro-Islamic bent...when, obviously, the original would have exhibited no such partiality. The updated version is infused with Muslim triumphalism and flagrant anti-Zoroastrian bias—something the original author would have never countenanced.

Granted, Syriac was the Nestorians’ liturgical language, so the fact that such chronicles were composed in Syriac isn’t all that startling. However, these were HISTORIES (i.e. books written for a wider audience), not liturgical texts (intended only for clergy). So there was no pressing reason to have used Syriac...if, that is, it were not also (still) the lingua franca of significant swaths of the Middle East. It is telling that such prominent works were only rendered in Arabic much later.

*In the early 10th century*, the Nestorian philosopher, Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus of Baghdad (affiliated with the monastery of Dayr Qunna) was the teacher of the great Muslim philosopher, Abu Nasr al-Farabi. The great Syriac thinker, [Abu Zakariya] Yahya ibn Adi, in turn, studied under al-Farabi. And HIS student, a Syriac Christian named Abu Ali Isa ibn Ishaq ibn Zura was a prominent teacher in Baghdad into the early 11th century. By that time, interlocutors were using medieval variants of BOTH Syriac and Arabic.

*In the early 11th century*, the Syriac thinker, Eliya of Nisibis (Adiabene) was renown for his discussions with the Hamdanid vizier, Abu al-Qasim al-Husayn ibn Ali al-Maghribi of Aleppo. The two men were conversant in Syriac and Arabic...something akin to, say, Dante being conversant in both Florentine / Tuscan and Vulgar Latin.

*In the 12th century*, Jacob bar Salibi of Amida / Melid[u] (a.k.a. “Dionysius”) wrote Syriac commentaries on the Melkites and Mohammedans. Indeed, Syriac writers continued to write about Islam into the High Middle Ages. The Chronicle of Michael Rabo (12th century) and the Chronicle of 1234 (both of which were based on the work of earlier chroniclers like Dionysios of Tel Mahre) include accounts of MoM and of the Mohammedan creed. (Also notable was apocalyptic Syriac material like the legend of “*Sargis Bhira*”, which would—of course—later be rendered in medieval Arabic and incorporated into Islamic lore.)

*In the 13th century*, the famed Syriac bishop, Mar Gregorios bar [h]Ebraya of Malatya (a.k.a. “Gregory bar Hebraeus”) produced an extensive corpus of material. He is most known for the theological commentary, “*Awsar Raze*” [Storehouse of Secrets]; the chronicle, “*Makhtbha-nuth Zabhne*”; and the memoir, “*Menarath Kudhshe*” [Lamp of the Sanctuary], which was later summarized as the “*Kethabha dhe-Zalge*” [Book of Rays]. “Mar” Odisho [alt. “Abdisho”] bar Berika of Nisibis wrote Syriac commentaries on the Bible in the late 13th / early 14th century. {58}

Interestingly, many of these works were given the imprimatur of the Abbasid caliphate. The issue was never raised that they'd been composed in some foreign—let alone un-approved—language. After all, they were being composed in the language that Dar al-Islam had originally used.

To reiterate: CA's germination was, in many ways, concomitant with the development—and codification—of the Mohammedan creed. This makes sense, as linguistic co-optation often tracks with prevailing memes whenever cultures transform.

Also telling: During the early Middle Ages, we find that SYRIAC was the linguistic substrate of each and every Arabic “am[m]iy[y]a”. The Arabic dialect of the Maghreb emerged from Syriac interacting with Berber. In Egypt, it was from Syriac interacting with Coptic. In Arabia, it was from Syriac interacting with Old Arabian. CA is simply a snap-shot of the language as it came to be in the Levant during the 8th century—effectively frozen in time during the course of its metamorphosis. This is not unique; as it is typically done pursuant to the creation of liturgical languages—be it Classical Arabic, Vedic Sanskrit, Koine Greek, or Vulgar Latin. In each case, after it forms, a sanctified version of the language is—effectively—fossilized. {65}

After such a snap-shot, the demotic language invariably continues to undergo a metamorphosis—eventually yielding an array of later versions. And so it goes: From Vedic Sanskrit, we now have modern Hindustani...as well as Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and a potpourri of other Indian tongues. From Koine Greek (common Attic), we now have “Nea [h]Ellinika”. From Vulgar Latin, we now have a wide assortment of Romance languages—from Galician to Romanian. The ramification of Arabic has been just as extensive—from Moroccan to Hadhrami. {66}

Tellingly, even the Maghrebi script was derived directly from the Kufic script. In other words, it is an alternate branch of the script's evolution into the CA script. The branching THERE seems to have happened in Tunisia in the 9th or 10th century; which means that—even then—Kufic was STILL the source-script for creating novel scripts.

Unsurprisingly, the Syriac substrate of the language is most palpable in its Mesopotamian version—coalescing, as it did, around Syriac hubs like Damascus, Harran, and Edessa...and later, the caliphate's first capital: Kufa. {73} The medieval Arabic of the Middle East would have more overtly exhibited its Syriac roots but for a series of linguistic infusions in the intervening centuries—notably, of Oghuz Turkic from the Seljuks in the 11th century, of Mongolian from the Il-khanate in the 13th century, and of (more) Middle Persian from the Safavids in the 16th century. {71}

It might also be noted that it is not uncommon for people to be completely unaware that some of the morphemes in their spoken tongue—even some of the most common and important—came from another language. The best example of this is the term for “tempura” in Nihon-go (Japanese language). As it happens, the word is derived from a Portuguese culinary term. This was due to the prevalence of traders from Portugal during the 16th century (esp. at Nagasaki). Unsurprisingly, few Nihon-jin (Japanese people) today are aware of the fact that they are uttering something derived from Europeans when they refer to the fried vegetables so often found in their cuisine. This is, of course, an isolated term in the vast Japanese lexicon; but it illustrates how quickly etymologies can be forgotten, and foreign lexemes reified. Of course, there is little motivation to elide the fact that items in a bento box have a “Western” name; yet this fact is nevertheless unknown.

(Surprisingly, there is no etymological relation between the respective terms for “thank you”: “arigato” and “obrigado”...in spite of the fact that they are morphologically similar.)

Another example is the (non-Germanic) Occidental lexeme for god...which actually originated with the Sanskrit term, “Dyaus-pitah”. That was rendered “Dyeus” in the Indo-Greek vernacular...which was rendered “Dios” (of which a variant is “Zeus”) in the Hellenic vernacular. That was eventually rendered “Deus” in Latin. When it comes to the Romance languages (and Tagalog), the rest was history. (English now uses the Frankish lexeme, which was based on the Old Saxon “gott”.)

It is commonplace for English-speakers to forget how many of their words originated in Greece, Arab lands, Persia, and even India. And very few are aware that “tornado” (a term for a severe Caribbean storm) is derived from an indigenous Puerto Rican language. Such myopia becomes even more pronounced when something is sanctified. For NOBODY wants to concede that their own language—let alone their liturgical language—is *derivative* (i.e. just another accident of history). When it comes to CA, such a concession would bely its purported timelessness. Surely, the Creator of the Universe did not adopt his own tongue from the Nabateans!

So what does the (final version of) the Koran ITSELF say about CA? Islam’s holy book seems to contradict the claim that CA is god’s language—and thus the ideal language by which his revelations are revealed—by being so clumsily written and haphazardly formatted. Much of the book betrays its Syriac origins—not only with its lexicon, but with its CONTENT (as adumbrated in the previous essay, on Syriac source-material).

Let’s look at a pertinent example. 16:36 and 35:24 say that the Abrahamic deity had already sent a prophet to every nation...EXCEPT Arabia, where MoM was the first prophet sent, per 6:155-157, 32:3, 34:44, and 36:2-6 (even though ALL THAT contradicts the supposition that Abraham and Ishmael dwelled in Mecca).

Here’s where the issue becomes even more interesting. In 42:7, the Koran’s protagonist declares that—after all those other revelations to all those other nations—he sent a “Qur’an Arabiyyan” to the Arabians. Why? So that the revelations may finally be relayed to the “mother of settlements” in a language that they would be sure to understand.

A Koran of the Arabs, you say? This is a rather peculiar specification to make about a book that, we are told, COULD ONLY POSSIBLY BE in Arabic: the native language of the Creator of the Universe. The CA rendering was a special measure taken to cater to the intended audience (the Ishmaelites), not the result of a timeless language that the Arabs just so happened to stumble upon.

Also note that, in order for the (ostensibly) “Arabic” Koran to have been eternal, we are expected to believe that the evolution of Semitic languages meandered for THOUSANDS of years—incorporating sporadic Persian terms along the way—before finally, at long last, arriving its pre-ordained linguistic destination. In other words: This particular linguistic lineage took millennia before eventually developing into a language that had existed in heaven all along. (So Phoenician, Samaritan, and Aramaic were just a means to THAT END.) Why the extraordinarily long delay? God only knows.

46:12 then goes on to stipulate that the Final Revelation confirms previous revelations IN ARABIC—as if this were a new development. Such comments indicate that CA was an adaptation (developed for a specific audience), rather than a timeless language. According to this narrative, a version of the “Revelations” was rendered IN CA for a newly-defined group of people: the (newly Mohammedan) Ishmaelites. This declamation comes off as special pleading. Such appeals are far more incriminating than they are validating—a lesson given to us by Gertrude in Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”. (I address this pleading in the previous essay: “Syriac Source-Material For Islam’s Holy Book”.)

Alas, merely broaching such matters is off-limits for even the most open-minded Islamic apologists.

A personal anecdote illustrates this point:

I once spent time with an affable scholar of Islamic scripture. A devout Saudi from Jeddah, he was a “hafiz” who was fluent in CA and had read EVERY PAGE of all the major Hadith collections. Suffice to say: He was incredibly knowledgeable. Fortuitously, he was eager to talk with a “kafir” (me) who showed sincere curiosity in the nuts and bolts of his Faith, and in the history of the religion. During the course of our lengthy conversations, he seemed quite open-minded, and exhibited a strikingly liberal attitude with respect to pluralism. However, the moment that I implied that Bukhari’s and Muslim’s Hadith MIGHT have initially been composed in Pahlavi (that is: in something other than Islam’s liturgical language), he became ornery. Inconceivable! From an amicable disposition (whereby he countenanced cosmopolitan ideals), he instantly transitioned to a posture of obdurate revanchism (whereby all he could muster was a harrumph). This was yet another reminder that mental acuity goes out the window whenever something is fetishized. (Delusion is symbiotic with obsession.)

Lord knows what paroxysms of vexation this gentleman may have undergone had I insisted the Koran was originally composed in Syriac. He would have surely become apoplectic had I broached the present matter. {35} For the very insinuation of this (indubitable) fact is currently unheard of in the Muslim world. There can be no discussion of such a thing. Ever. Period.

When dealing with Reactionaries, unwelcome truths are invariably met with consternation rather than open-mindedness. The mere suggestion that the “Final Revelation” was composed in Syriac by fallible men (and compiled after the purported “Seal of the Prophets” is said to have lived) is beyond the pale in most Muslim precincts. This is a problem. It is especially a problem for those seeking to come to terms with history; and who deign to find solid ground on which robust Reform can proceed.

To reiterate the point: Had the complete Koran been rendered in fully-developed CA since day one (i.e. since the caliph, Uthman allegedly commissioned its compilation), the archeological record would be OVERFLOWING with manuscripts. That is to say: There would be oodles of carefully-preserved Korans throughout the Muslim world that date from the late 7th century. As we have seen, there is literally NOT ONE in existence. Pray tell: What could have possibly accounted for the hold-up? The present thesis provides the obvious explanation.

This is a touchy subject. After all, conceding the “Recitations” were originally in Syriac means conceding that Islam’s holy book is not timeless. For—like any other holy book—it is a historical artifact; and must be treated as such. Once we consider the timeline of CA’s emergence in the literary record, we find that the book’s genesis post-dates the genesis of the Mohammedan creed. This would have occurred during a period when Syriac was the lingua franca of most of the Middle East—from Sinai to Chaldea, from Al-Sham to the Hijaz.

And once we consider the slew of Syriac lexemes with which Islam’s holy book is festooned, it is hard to ignore the fact that its verses were originally composed in Syriac. It is no surprise, then, that the esteemed scholar, Alphonse Mingana surmised that an aptitude in Syriac was the key to understanding the Koran. {36}

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

The Story Of Ahikar is a case study in how religionists tend to go awry when it comes to positing the origins of their scripture. The tale was originally composed in Aramaic in the 6th century B.C., and

proliferated during Classical Antiquity. During Late Antiquity, it primarily circulated in Syriac—whereby the protagonist’s name was rendered “Haikar”. This seems to have happened via the (Syriac) *Book of Tobit* and/or the (Persian) *Story of Sandbad the Sage*, wherein he is described as a wise man. {55}

The tale was translated into Classical Hebrew, Koine Greek, Old Armenian, and Middle Persian; then into medieval Arabic, Old Slavic, Old Turkic, and Ethiopic—during the Middle Ages. It eventually made an appearance in the super-popular “Arabian Nights” anthology. “*Ahikar the wise*” thus became “*Haikar al-Hakeem*”. And when the legendary figure finally made his way into Mohammedan lore, his name was rendered “Luqman al-Hakeem” (as found in Surah 31 of the Koran). {56}

Proverbs attributed the folkloric Arab hero, Luqman bear a remarkable resemblance to those of the fabled Ahikar. A couple are worth noting:

**First:** “The eye of man is as a fountain, and it will never be satisfied with wealth until it is filled with dust.”

**Second:** “O my son, bow your head low, soften your voice, be courteous, walk in the straight path, and be not foolish. Don’t raise your voice when you laugh, for were it by a loud voice that a house was built, the ass would build many houses each day.”

Both excerpts are almost a verbatim facsimile of antecedent (non-Abrahamic) lore. Thereafter, the impression throughout Dar al-Islam was that the tale stemmed from Ishmaelite sources.

In assaying this development, it’s worth recalling the Mohammedan agenda to destroy the oldest (Syriac) material it used during its earliest stages of development. Had this duplicitous endeavor been successful with regard to the Story of Ahikar, the earliest copies we would now have would be in CA. Consequently, some would suppose that it had originally been an Arabic work. Under such circumstances, such a (false) supposition would seem to be justified because MODERN Syriac versions of the book (that is: those rendered in Chaldean Syriac) were actually derived from medieval Arabic versions.

Felicitously, the early (Classical Syriac) manuscripts survived due to having been preserved in Jewish caches. So we know that the Mohammedans lifted the tale from Syriac sources, not the other way around.

Ask people of any religious tradition in which language their own scripture was originally composed, and many will not know the answer. The Hebrew Bible was originally composed in Babylonian Aramaic. So we can be forgiven for snickering when Jewish mystics engage in “gematria” (looking for secret codes embedded in the Hebrew rendering of the text)...as if there was a divine message hidden in the sequence of Hebrew letters.

The earliest copies of the New Testament books were ABOUT those who spoke Aramaic, and were composed in Koine Greek. So we can be forgiven for snickering when clergy in the Roman Catholic Church recite the liturgy in Latin...as if there was something preternatural about that tongue.

The thing about liturgical languages: proponents ascribe to them a beguiling cosmic significance based on a mis-understanding of history—a mis-understanding that is as self-ingratiating as it is self-serving. The same goes for those who fetishize Classical Arabic. One may as well suppose that the King James version of the Bible is a carbon copy of the text’s earliest form. In reality, it was a translation—into a florid style of English—that was done in 1604-11; which was based largely on research that had been conducted a half century earlier for the Geneva Bible...which had been roughly based on Koine Greek manuscripts...which had presumably translated with perfect accuracy the ARAMAIC spoken by the original Palestinian sources.

Yet the way Baptists and Pentecostals treat this 17th-century edition of their scripture, one would think they were quoting verbiage straight from god’s mouth. Such delusive thinking is typical. (Laughably, the



ancient Palestinian name, “Yehoshua” was revamped into a magnificently Anglo-Saxon “Jesus”; and votaries never looked back.)

We should not be surprised by this kind of errancy, as we all like to think that, whenever we cite from a favored source (often, to justify our position on an important matter), the citation is iron-clad. If a source is deemed sacrosanct, we ardently want to believe that we are citing its most authentic version. This is, after all, what makes our position seem unimpeachable; and the diktats found within sacred texts seem inviolable.

The resulting impression is as follows: “It’s our liturgical language; so the material we’ve designated was composed in that language from the beginning.” In other words: If we prefer scripture in a certain language, then we are inclined to suppose that it must have been in that language ALL ALONG. Otherwise, we’ve consecrated something that is derivative, thereby bringing into question the credence of our sacred doctrine. So the illusion has tremendous utility.

Such a spurious claim is made all the more imperative when the idea is that one’s holy book is a verbatim transcript of god’s speech (inscribed on celestial tablets when the universe was first created). To concede that the account of “Luqman al-Hakeem” in Surah 31 is just a take-off on antecedent lore would be to concede the derivative nature of Islam’s holy book. To acknowledge that the Koranic passage is just a regurgitation of the tale of Ahikar the Wise from the (Syriac) *Book of Tobit* and/or the (Persian) *Story of Sandbad the Sage* would be to effectively nullify the entire rationale for fetishizing CA.

In closing, we might note that this thesis would be very easy to disprove. All it would take is a SINGLE manuscript of a complete Koran—or the manuscript of ANYTHING—composed in fully-developed CA that can be conclusively dated to the late 7th century (e.g. during Uthman’s reign). If the Koran had ALWAYS existed in CA, and had not been rendered in ANYTHING BUT CA for the generation or two after MoM’s ignominious death, then SURELY there would be such a codex somewhere. This would be especially likely considering the fact that THAT BOOK was considered the most valuable text in the entire universe...by one of the world’s most powerful empires (Umayyad, then Abbasid) at the time. And, if we are to believe the legends, the Creator of the Universe would have INSISTED it be preserved for posterity. {57}

That no such artifact has ever been found is either dumfounding...or it is overwhelming proof that no such book existed during that time. Given what we know about the history of Syriac in the region, there is no reason for us to be dumfounded.

## FOOTNOTES:

{1 Confusingly enough, there were actually TWO cities named “Apame[i]a” at the time. One was a Persian city in Mesopotamia, on the Euphrates River across from Seleucia (Zeugma); named after the wife of Persian Emperor, Seleucus of Nikator (Queen Apama). The other was a Greco-Roman city on the Orontes River in Syria. Note that what are now dubbed the “Garima” Gospels had also been composed using Syriac...though much earlier (probably during the 5th century), in an area of the Levant that the Arabs would later refer to as “Al-Sham” / “Hauran”. While the Garima Gospels had originally been composed in Syriac, they were later rendered in the Ethiopic “Ge’ez” script (the Semitic script used in the Kingdom of Aksum) in Abyssinia—probably in the early 6th century.}

{2 The “Namara[h]” (alt. “Nimreh”) inscription used a variant of the Nabataean alphabet; and so was yet another reminder that Nabataean was a precursor to the Kufic script (see footnotes 3 and 67 below). It was a commemoration of the Lakhmid king, Imru al-Qays ibn Amr (c. 328). There are also several inscriptions at Bir Hima (near Najran) from the 5th and 6th centuries that used Old South Arabian (Sayhadic) script. There is an inscription at the Ma’rib dam (at Sana’a) commemorating the Christian

Himyarite ruler, Abraha al-Asram (from the 6th century) using Sabaean (Sabaic) script. There are also inscriptions commemorating Caliph Mu'awiya found at the dam near Yathrib-cum-Medina, as well as at the dam near Ta'if. Both were written in an early Kufic-like script. (Mu'awiya ruled until 680; but those inscriptions probably date from the early 8th century.) Also note the Nabataean inscriptions on the Wadi dam and in the Shuaib Caves (Al-Bada'a) at Tabuk. (Notable as well are the inscriptions at Al-Hasa in eastern Arabia.) For more on the relevant archeology, see Yehuda D. Nevo's "Ancient Arabic Inscriptions from the Negev".}

{3 Regarding the derivation of Arabic SCRIPT from the Nabataean alphabet (via the Kufic script), an important point should be made. Take the indigenous languages of societies A and B respectively. It does not follow from the fact that A adopted the script of B that A's language necessarily came from B's language. This is obvious from the myriad countries around the world that adopted the Roman alphabet to write languages which are not themselves Latin-based cultures (see footnote 4 below). Orthographic adoption from an un-related language usually occurs due to the influence of B (as the dominant culture) over A (as the subordinate culture). Thus the adoption is often the result of the former's asymmetric power—as in cases of imperialism (see footnote 37 below). This explains why Persians eventually adopted the quasi-Arabic "Farsi" script (rather than the Arabic-speaking world adopting Pahlavi). And it is why (Islamized) Pakistanis eventually adopted the quasi-Arabic "Urdu" script in lieu of deva-Nagari (which was more associated with a Hindu heritage)...even though their tongue (Urdu) is simply a variant of Hindi.

In both of THOSE cases, it was a hegemonic Dar al-Islam exercising influence over a subordinated culture (primarily during the Mughal era) that accounted for the orthographic disjuncture with the indigenous tongue (see footnote 5 below). Here's the key difference: In the 7th century, the Nabataeans (who spoke a variant of Syriac) did NOT conquer the Mohammedans; the reverse happened. YET...the script of CA was derived from the Nabataean alphabet. The only explanation for this is that the liturgical language of the conquering people (the Mohammedans) had its roots in a language that was (also) spoken by the subjugated people. That is: BOTH were part of the Syriac-speaking world. Obviously, the language of the conquering people would not have been subordinated to their new subjects. So this would have ONLY happened as it did if the conquerers were ALREADY using the language in question. Only LATER did they create a distinct liturgical language (so as to assert a unique Ishmaelite identity, and thus emphasize the cultural contradistinction). Note that this is not uncommon. Several ancient scripts have been replaced by modern scripts—as with, say, the Orkhon script of the Turkic peoples of Eurasia and the Old Norse Runes of northern Europe (both supplanted by the Roman alphabet).}

{4 The two best-known examples are Turkish and Vietnamese. The former Romanization was established pursuant to the fall of the Ottoman Empire—at the behest of Kemal Atatürk, who sought to emulate Occidental conventions (thereby bringing Turkey more in line with the Western World). The latter Romanization was established pursuant to French colonialism in Indo-China—primarily due to the efforts of Jesuit missionaries who sought to bring Christianity to the region. (The former was a willful adoption of a dominant culture so as to become more compatible with it; the latter was an imposition of the dominant culture onto the culture of the subalterns—indigenous people who were at the mercy of imperialistic forces seeking to promulgate an exogenous creed.) Other examples include Indonesian and Malay "bahasa" (which formerly used the Pallava script) and Tagalog in the Philippines (which formerly used the Baybayin script). Interestingly, the Afar people USED TO use Arabic script, but recently adopted the Roman alphabet in deference to Occidental predominance.}

{5 Other examples of Dar al-Islam exercising influence over the writing system of a native population is the use of the quasi-Arabic “Shah-mukhi” script by Punjabis (in lieu of Gur-mukhi), the quasi-Arabic “Jawi” script by Malays / Acehnese (in lieu of Pallava), and the quasi-Arabic “Wadaad” script by Somalis (in lieu of Ge’ez). Most Berbers no longer use the “Tifinagh” script, opting instead for Arabic script pursuant to the influence of Islam on the Meghreb.}

{6 Note that Al-Fahridi’s other famed student was the founder of the Kufa school: Al-Kisa’i. It is no wonder the Kufic script came to prominence, as this city seems to have been a center of liturgical activity for the burgeoning new creed.}

{7 How can we know if the originals were written in Syriac if the originals are long lost? Because Al-Batriq HIMSELF explicitly admits this fact...IN THE BOOK. (!) That a Muslim was still composing works in Syriac at this point is very telling. For more on this, see footnote 8 below.}

{8 Note that Al-Bitriq’s texts were translations of Aristotle’s zoological musings. Misleadingly, the “Book of Animals” is now often associated with Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr al-Kinani of Basra (a.k.a. “Al-Jahiz”), who’s redaction of the Greek work was done in the 9th century—probably in the newly-established liturgical language: CA. Not coincidentally, the first REFERENCE TO the work was made by Al-Kindi of Kufa, also in the 9th century, also in CA. Incidentally, Al-Kindi was one of the first scholars in the Muslim world to start translating Ancient Greek works into CA. It is quite possible he was either translating them into Syriac as well...OR was even working off of not Greek, but extant Syriac manuscripts. That he was the EARLIEST scribe to render Greek works in CA is very telling. Before that, the only languages into which Ishmaelites would have been inclined to translate Greek text would have been Syriac and Persian. Lo and behold: THAT is exactly what we find in the historical record.}

{9 The writings of famed 8th-century jurist, Abu Hanifa [al-Numan ibn Thabit] of Kufa would have been originally written in Syriac. There is also evidence that the works of 9th-century Maliki jurist, Asad ibn al-Furat were originally written in Syriac.}

{10 Golden dinars with Syriac (i.e. Kufic) inscriptions were used by the Umayyads—beginning with Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan at the end of the 7th century. Coins continued to exhibit such writing through the 10th century—most notably by the early Fatimids (as with the caliph, Al-Mu’izz). This would have made no sense had CA been the preeminent language—or the official script—of Dar al-Islam.}

{11 Another chronicler at the time was Ahmad ibn Yayha “al-Baladhuri” of Baghdad, who was loyal to the Abbasid caliphate. He was known for his “Kitab Futuh al-Buldan” [Book of the Conquests of Lands].}

{12 Al-Dabbi’s mentor was the Arab philologist, Abu Amr ibn al-Ala of Basra...who was, in turn, a student of Ibn Abi Ishaq of Hadram. It is Ibn Abi Ishaq (not to be confused with the famous historian, Ibn Ishaq) who is purported to have been the first grammarian of (the still-developing) CA. He was commissioned by Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan to systemize the new language c. 700. That was around the time the inscription on the Dome of the Rock was made (i.e. the last decade of the 7th century). There are no remaining copies of what Ibn Abi Ishaq wrote; yet his work would have surely provided insight into the genesis of CA at its earliest stage; as it would have occurred in an environment the lingua franca of which was Syriac.}

{13 Syriac was not the only language in Dar al-Islam that predated CA. There was also Middle Persian (i.e. Pahlavi). Note, for example, the 10th-century writer, Abu Abd Allah Jafar ibn Muhammad al-Rudhaki, who composed an epic poem about the legendary romance between Qais ibn Al-Mulawah (a.k.a. “Majnun”) and Layla Al-Aamiriya...which was itself from the 7th century. Here’s the kicker: Even by the 12th century, this love-story had not yet been rendered in CA. Evidence for this fact is the version of the

tale by Persian poet, Jamal ad-Din Abu Muhammad Ilyas ibn Yusuf ibn Zakki of Ganja (a.k.a. “Nizami Ganjavi”). It was not until *even later* that a CA version finally appeared.}

{14 The inscription on the Dome of the Rock is often touted as proof that CA existed during the 7th century. This is unsurprising, as it is THE FIRST instance of a script having emerged from Syriac with a distinctly Arab style. However, there are several problems with this contention. First, even if the stories are true (a big “if”), it would have been inscribed during the LAST DECADE of the 7th century. (Note: It was during the same decade that the “kan-bun” style of writing was established in Japan: The first step in the divergence of Nihon-go from Chinese to become a distinct language.) Second, the writing used in this inscription is quite crude; and is—in fact—NOT quite the same as the fully-developed CA script. Third, it is an isolated case; and is certainly not indicative of widespread usage. This may well have been the INAUGURAL usage of the (still-developing) script; which would thereafter be limited to liturgical material and other sacred contexts. It would have still been quite some time until it became a lingua franca for the Arabs.}

{15 Note that the Persian writer, Rozbih pur-i Dadoe of Firuzabad [Fars] (popularly known in Islamic historiography as “Ibn al-Muqaffa”) would have written in Pahlavi and/or Syriac. (See footnote 13 above.) Not only is he known for having written the aforesaid adaptation of “Kalila and Dimna”; he composed a version of the Sassanian “Khwaday-Namag” [Book of Kings] as well. He is also known for a tract on Sassanian court society (which was later referred to in Arabic as the “Adab al-Kabir”). All his writings were eventually rendered in CA. It was then (erroneously) assumed that those works had been in CA all along. They weren’t; and it is no mystery WHY they weren’t.}

{16 The Aramaic term was itself derived from Akkadian. The appellation likely emerged in Abrahamic lore during the Exilic Period, as “Nabu” was the Babylonian deity of scribes and wisdom. Bear in mind that the Torah was originally composed in Babylonian Aramaic.}

{17 It also seems that there are certain Koranic terms that can only be understood accurately (i.e. as INITIALLY used) in their original (Syrio-Aramaic) incarnation. There are numerous examples of this. In Surah 2, there is “ra’ina” (ayat 47 and 105) and “wasatan” (ayah 144). In Surah 25, there is “riss” (ayah 39). In Surah 20, there is “samiri” (ayah 86). And in Surah 83, there is “kalalat” and “sijjin” (ayah 9), “iliyyun” (ayah 20), and “tasnim” (ayah 28). Such terms are discursively awkward and/or hermeneutically vague. Other lexemes can have alternate meanings in CA—as with “ukhfi”, which could mean “to hide” or “to make manifest” (a confusion that would not exist in Syriac). For more on this matter, see Arthur Jeffery’s 1938 “The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’an”; as well as Emran el-Badawi’s “The Qur’an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions” (part of the Routledge Studies series).}

{18 The Syriac moniker for the Abrahamic deity was, in turn, a variant of the Aramaic “El” / “El[o]ah” / “Elah[a]” (in contradistinction to the Greek “Kyrios” / “Theos” and the alternate Semitic “Yah-weh” / “Jehovah”). The Ishmaelites’ apparent heedlessness of the chosen moniker’s etymology is demonstrated by their onomastic for the prophet, Elias / Elijah. That name was originally El-i-Yah[-u]; yet it is rendered “Ilya[s]” in Arabic; thereby eliding its etymological origins (ref. 37:123-132 in the Koran). Otherwise, there would be evidence that the original name for the Abrahamic deity: “El is Yah-weh”. A similar elision occurred with the Arabic onomastic for Jesus, “Issa”...which was a variant of the Syriac, “Isho”...which was, in turn, derived from the Aramaic “Yah-u-Shua” (alt. “Yeho-Shua”; later rendered “Yeshua”): “Cry out for Yah-weh”. Once “Allah” was reified as a proper name, it was necessary to obfuscate the fact that “Yah-weh” had preceded it. It is likely that the early Mohammedans referred to the godhead as “Allah” simply because that was a term often used for the supreme deity of the Kaaba: the moon god worshipped by many of the (pre-Islamic) pagans of Mecca. For some (though not all), “Allah” might have been just another appellation for “Hubal”—chief among the pagan gods in the Hijaz. Meanwhile, some of the inhabitants of the region may have also referred to the deity as “eloah”, since Syriac was the medium for the emerging Ishmaelite articulation of extant Abrahamic liturgy. (See footnote

19 below.) The first Mohammedans may have also adopted the moniker for the godhead by the Abrahamic peoples of southern Arabia: “The Merciful” (“Ra[c]hma”; rendered “Ra[c]him”). In any case, some variation on the Semitic moniker “Allah” was commonly used for the moon-god (i.e. high god) by the Quraysh (i.e. the tribe into which MoM was born). It was ALSO used by the Tanukhids and the Lakhmids...and Lihyanites / Dedanites long before that. It was even by Sabaeans (in southern Arabia). So it is not surprising that MoM decided to co-opt this particular appellation into his newfangled theology. For more on this, see footnote 19 below.}

{19 By appropriating a term with which denizens of the Hijaz were already familiar, MoM—or, as the case may have been, later impresarios of the new Ishmaelite Faith—could assign the Abrahamic deity a moniker that resonated with the target audience (thus effectively re-labeling “Yahweh” to comport with a more familiar idiom). Hence the Mohammedans embraced the SYRIAC (rather than distinctly Judaic) moniker, thereby making an (onomastic) contradistinction between the newfangled (Ishmaelite) monotheism and its Abrahamic antecedents. MoM could have then made the case that he was not depriving the pagans of their supreme god, but only asking that they eschew all the OTHER gods in the pantheon—thereby rendering their polytheism a monotheism. Ergo the Shahada: “There is no other god but god” (a nod to the henotheistic Hebrew commandment: “You shall recognize no other god’s before me”...which was interestingly NOT, “There do not exist any gods other than me”). In this way, the Mohammedan stratagem hit two birds with one stone. Aside from designating himself as the anointed spokesperson, MoM was only left with the task of making the case that this supreme god of the Kaaba (theretofore a moon god) was the same god that the Jews and Christians had been worshipping for centuries. Via a syncretic sleight-of-hand, the aspiring prophet could persuade people that “Allah” should henceforth be associated explicitly with the Abrahamic deity. (See footnote 18 above.) Note that, being the highest deity, Hubal was the largest statue in the Kaaba. 21:58 corroborates this—as it specifies that MoM smashed all the idols in the Kaaba EXCEPT FOR the largest one (i.e. that of Hubal; a.k.a. “Eloah” in Syriac). He did this so that the Meccans would be inclined to return to the Kaaba even under the auspices of the new Abrahamic Faith. For, as far as they were concerned, THAT idol was the godhead (soon to be anointed “Allah”). The point here is that the authors of the Koran were—naturally—working with what they had. It is what they happened to have available to them AT THE TIME that determined WHAT they ended up asserting (and HOW they ended up asserting it). The origins of the newfangled Mohammedan creed was, indeed, a matter of monolatry—a fact that is attested by the so-called “Satanic verses” incident.}

{20 Also reference the Codex Ambrosianus from c. 600 (that is: during MoM’s lifetime). We should bear in mind the palpable influence that (Pahlavi) Zoroastrian scripture had on Mohammedan lore—namely: the “Book of Arda Viraf [the Righteous]”. In my previous essay (“Syriac Source-Material For Islam’s Holy Book”), I discuss the connection of every one of these sources to Mohammedan lore.}

{21 Also notable are texts that, as it were, SKIPPED Syriac. That is: Scripture that was originally written in Greek or in Coptic (during Late Antiquity), and appeared in the Middle East only when communities speaking EVEN MORE RECENT languages eventually emerged. In such cases, it was much later (at some point in the Middle Ages) that some in the Middle East encountered the need to render certain material in CA. This is exactly what occurred with the “Testament of Abraham”. If CA was being used in Late Antiquity, then surely Syriac copies of this text would ALSO exist. But they don’t. Bear in mind that scripture was routinely being rendered in languages that were used AT THAT TIME across the Middle East. And there were plenty of Arab peoples in pre-Islamic times who practiced Judaism and Christianity. Therein lies the rub. The Greek version of this arcane text was from the 2nd century A.D. It was only MUCH LATER that it was finally translated by scribes who found the need to render it in younger languages: in new Slavonic (by Slavic Christians), in new Ethiopic (by the Jews of Beta Israel), and—sure enough—in medieval Arabic (by Arab Jews and Christians). It stands to reason that the “Testament of Abraham” did not hold sway in Arab lands any earlier than it did, as it portrays Sarah and Isaac (rather than Hagar and Ishmael) in exalted fashion, while giving a starring role to the archangel Michael (rather than to

Gabriel) in its recounting of Abraham's exploits. Be that as it may, as soon as Arabic had emerged as a lingua franca, it was inevitable that SOME would be moved to render it in that language. Had CA existed prior to MoM's ministry, then why wasn't this text rendered in Arabic significantly earlier than it was? The answer to the riddle lay in the fact that it was never rendered in SYRIAC, and so would have been unknown to those in Arab lands prior to the Middle Ages...at which point CA had been established.}

{22 During the late 8th / early 9th centuries, there were renown court "singers" like Mukhariq, Ishaq al-Mawsili, and Abu al-hasan Ali ibn Nafi (a.k.a. "Ziryab"), all of whom would have performed using Syriac. The most attested court singers were those of Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid. Other poets of the time—like Abu al-Atahiya—would have also used Syriac.}

{23 Notice that most of this source-material pertains to JUDAIC lore, not to Christian lore. We should bear in mind that much of the non-canonical (a.k.a. "apocryphal") literature from Late Antiquity was not composed in Syriac; it primarily existed in Koine Greek...along with some Coptic texts from Egypt (as with the Garima Gospels) and various Mishnaic Hebrew texts from the Talmudic academies in Mesopotamia (composed in Babylonian Aramaic and ITS derivative, Classical Hebrew). When it DID come to Christian lore, it was primarily Nestorian sources—and a panoply of apocrypha—to which the earliest Mohammedans would have been exposed; NOT the canonical texts with which Occidental Christendom is now familiar. In addition to the non-canonical "Gospels"... (those of the Ebionites, the Nazarenes, the Savior, Thomas, Judas, Mary, Peter, James, Philip, Truth, and all the rest), there was a plethora quasi-Christian material (much of it Gnostic) that was not included in the official "Nicene" canon. The key point is that these texts are seldom discussed outside of the Coptic and Eastern (Syriac) churches. Indeed, much of the time, the existence of such material is not even acknowledged in the Occident! So it is unsurprising that it rarely occurs to Islamic scholars to connect Mohammedan lore to these (systematically suppressed) sources. For more on this phenomenon (in a Christian context), see Bart Ehrman's landmark work: "Lost Christianities".}

{24 For a full adumbration of Middle Persian loan-words used in Islam's holy book, see Johnny Cheung's "On The Iranian Borrowings In Qur'anic Arabic". For more on other loan-words in Islam's holy book, see Arthur Jeffery's "The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran" (1938).}

{25 Unsurprisingly, the House of Saud kept this site off-limits to scholars until just recently. It's no wonder why. It is clear evidence that CA's origins lay not in what Mohammedan lore claims it to be, but elsewhere. The House of Saud in particular has a lot to hide, given that it is the custodian of sites that play the most auspicious role in Mohammedan historiography. Alas. Honest archeologists in Arabia are about as hard to find as zamboni drivers in the Hindu Kush or bacon vendors in Tehran. We've seen how religious fundamentalism treats archeological treasures with Daesh in Nineveh and Palmyra (and, before that, with the Taliban in Afghanistan): If it does not suit their purposes, it shouldn't exist.}

{26 Instances of lexical co-optation in the Dark Ages are not to be confused with more recent loanwords from Persian during medieval times. After all, Persian was the literary language of the Ottoman Empire. So while some Turkic words ended up in the Farsi vernacular ("thank you", for example...before that was transplanted by the French "merci"), many Persian words ended up in medieval Arabic: "sandal", "turban", "caravan", "k[h]aftan", "taffeta", "dervish", "bazaar", "pasha", "taj", "gharafa" (carafe, from "karaba"), "farsakh" (a unit of length, from "parsang"), "kandi" (sugar), "limun" (lemon), "naranj" (orange), "bab[a]gha" (parrot), "azure", "yasmin", and "za[r]faran" (saffron). The term for the region known as "Anbar" is the PERSIAN name. Due to commerce along the Silk Road, modern Arabic even picked up some Chinese terms—as with "satin". (See also footnote 29.) Interestingly "kabab" / "kebab" has its basis in Old Aramaic (Assyrian / Akkadian), so could have come from either Persian or Syriac. Be that as it may, the preponderance of Koranic terms have a Syriac basis.}

{28 In the Koran, Jonah is alternately dubbed “Sahib al-Hut” [Man of the fish]; again, a failure to refer to him by his proper name. The fact that there are TWO passages that refer to Jonah in such an oblique way (effectively: “the man the tales of whom involve a fish”), and yet do so DIFFERENTLY, indicates that he was ONLY known amongst the early Mohammedans (i.e. composers of the “Recitations”) as, well, “man of the fish”. Moreover, it indicates that the Koran incorporated the two passages from two different sources—composed by authors whose knowledge of Jonah’s identity was similarly limited. Only much later did Jonah come to be referred to as “Yunus” (in Arabic). Just as the authors of the Koran seem not to know the proper name of this auspicious figure, they also seem not to know the proper name of Alexander of Macedon (instead dubbing him “Dhul-Qarnayn”; one with horns) NOR of the Abrahamic prophet, Ezekiel (instead dubbing him “Dhul-Kifl” in 21:85 and 38:48). Such senescence is very telling. The convention “one with X” [“Dhul-X”] is used for Jonah (“Dhul-Nun”), Ezekiel (“Dhul-Kifl”), and Alexander the Great (“Dhul-Qarnayn”); but these are not the only instances of oddly vague monikers. There are also references to various INEXPLICABLE figures—as with “al-Khidr” in 18:60-82. One presume that an omniscient super-being would have foreseen this infelicitous eventuality. In other words: It would have occurred to the putative author of the Koran (the Abrahamic deity himself) that—in later eras—nobody would know who the heck he was talking about. Alas, prescience is not one of the defining features of Koranic text, or of its authors. }

{29 Meanwhile, the Mohammedan re-naming of “Azazel” (as “Iblis”) seems to have come from the Koine Greek “diabolos”. (Strange how the name of the fallen angel in Mohammedan lore was derived from the liturgical language of the Byzantines.) Again, we see what happens when transmission is primarily ORAL: morphology undergoes various mutations...and picks up memes from un-expected places. Memetic accretion rarely includes an account of each meme’s actual origins. }

{30 He proselytized at the same monastery (“Beth Abe”) as the famous Nestorian monk, John of Daylam from the late 7th / early 8th century. }

{31 For more on this topic, see Fred M. Donner’s “Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing”. Also see the work of German scholar, K.H. Ohlig. }

{32 Such nomenclature is in keeping with the Semitic names of other prominent arch-angels: “Gabr-i-El” / “Uzz-i-El” [strength of god], “Ram-i-El” [thunder of god], “Ur-i-El” [light / fire of god], “Sar-i-El” [prince of god], “Mik[h]a-El” [who is like god], “Azra-El” [god helps], and “Rafa-El” [god heals]. }

{33 Surely, many of the technical mistakes made in the Koran (regarding the natural sciences) were reflections of dogmas that proliferated in the Middle East during Late Antiquity...and on through the Dark Ages. In the Final Revelation to mankind, it seems that the Creator of the Universe was only able to avail himself of the woefully inadequate vernacular of those who first proffered the material. To wit: He was—embarrassingly—limited to the narrowly circumscribed understanding (read: the profound nescience) of Bedouins from the Dark Ages: embryos as blood-clots, the sky as a dome miraculously suspended over a flat Earth, geocentric tropes, and all the rest. }

{34 Such phonetic mimicry is comparable to the name given to the trumpet-blowing angel in Islamic lore: “Israfil”, which was likely a phonetically-tweaked version of “Rafa-El” (i.e. “Raphael”). (See also footnote 29 above.) Such an onomastic discrepancy is exactly what one would expect in a process of oral transmission, where the original semiotics was not understood by those transmitting the folklore based sheerly on morphology. }

{35 If such religious apologists were GENUINELY confident in the veracity of their convictions, they would wholeheartedly welcome such well-intentioned queries. The very fact that such discussion is verboten (in so many religious circles) reveals that a house of cards is being protected. We find the same

mandate-of-secrecy when ANY cult activity is afoot. My mild-mannered Saudi interlocutor would almost certainly have an aneurysm were he to read the present essay. For the entire dogmatic edifice on which he has based his esteemed career would be thrown into upheaval. Consequently, we find ourselves navigating a petrified latticework of sacrosanct propositions (rigged with a byzantine network of ultra-sensitive trip-wires, each connected to an array of detonators). Sycophants only survive by living in a mine-field of their own making; knowing that few who stray from the assigned script will manage to make it far onto the hallowed ground. (See footnote 41 below.)}

{36 Reference his “Syriac Influence On The Style Of The Koran” in the Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 11; 1927.}

{37 Historically, the sole exception to this rule seems to have been the Assyrians’ adoption of the language of the Aramaeans (Aramaic), even though it was the former who conquered the latter. However, the mystery is solved once we realize that the language of the Assyrians was itself influenced by Old Aramaic (from the time it was adopted by the Akkadians in the 9th century B.C.; who had previously spoken Sumerian and used cuneiform). Hence it was not a matter of the conquerors deciding to adopt the language of the subjugated peoples. For the Assyrians, it was a natural progression to Aramaic; hence the emergence of what came to be called “Babylonian Aramaic”. When the Achaemenids—who spoke Old Persian—eventually conquered Babylonia, it was for purely pragmatic reasons that they opted to incorporate (what came to be) “Imperial Aramaic” into their repertoire. For (Parthian) Persians, this ended up being the basis for Avestan (which used Pahlavi, a script derived from the Aramaic alphabet). Pahlavi continued to be used by the Sassanians, who spoke “Middle Persian”. It was Middle Persian, NOT CA, that was used as the literary language of the Ottomans.}

{38 As far as other examples from before c. 800 go, a few parcels of text have been discovered—though they have been assigned suspiciously dubious provenance (as with, say, the manuscript housed at the University of Tübingen). NONE of them are in CA. As with the others listed here, they were all written in either Kufic or “Ma’il” script, and they are significantly fragmented. It might also be noted that even by c. 900, Korans were STILL being rendered in Kufic—as with the “Mushaf al-Azraq” (the Blue Koran), rendered by the Fatimids at the Great Mosque of Kairouan in Tunisia; which, as mentioned earlier, ended up across the Mediterranean in Cordoba. It is only by the 10th century that Korans started to be consistently rendered in CA.}

{39 During the Middle Ages, the disappearance of Syriac originals was not unheard of. It happened in various other contexts. Take, for example, the “Chronica Byzantia-Arabica” and its sequel, the “Continuatio Byzantia-Arabica” (a.k.a. the “Chronicle of 741”). The latter was written by a pro-Umayyad author in the final year of Byzantine Emperor Leo III’s reign, yet seems to have been based on antecedent Syriac material. This makes perfect sense, as the author only rendered the sequel in Latin after the Byzantines defeated Umayyad Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik’s invading forces c. 741...when the Ishmaelites were likely still using Syriac. In other words, he culled his information about the Umayyads from SYRIAC sources, which would have only made sense if THAT had been the language used by the Umayyads. Interestingly, this is document in which the moniker, “Makkah” is used for the first time.}

{40 The Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius was originally composed in Syriac at the end of the 7th century. Tellingly, it referred to the Arabs as “Ishmaelites” rather than as “Muslims”. No religion called “Islam” is mentioned. No holy book is mentioned. This was also the case with Athanasius Gammolo’s “Kataba d-Res Melle” [Book of World History]: one of the best documentations of the conquests by the Arabs during the 7th century. (Yes: that was written in Syriac as well.) Gammolo makes no mention of a holy book used by the Ishmaelites...nor of any text that had been composed in a distinctly Arabic language.}

{41 Religious apologists are content to bask in intoxicating dogmatic quagmires; even as the rest of us are forced to trudge through them. For unscrupulous interlocutors, the idea is to ensure uncharted territory



remains off-limits to EVERYONE, FOREVER. All the while, they vociferously cling to whatever claims suit the sanctified narrative—no matter how unfounded those claims might be. Their convictions are rooted not in evidence, but in allegiance. (Biases evade awareness, and do so indefinitely; as biases rarely announce themselves as biases.) By contrast, those of us who prize perspicacity are obliged to enter into any critical inquiry with a hefty dose of DIS-confirmation bias. That is: We bend over backwards to find any and all evidence that might disprove whatever theory is being proposed. Short trying to find a reason to jettison that theory, we are doing ourselves a grave disservice. Hence we must ask: “What, exactly, would conclusively disprove this thesis?” After answering this question to the best of our ability, we go out of our way to find whatever that thing might be. If we have not managed to find it after a diligent search, we can then—and ONLY then—claim the theory to be worth anyone’s consideration. “Here’s the theory; and here’s how one would go about disproving it. Even after a concerted effort, I have STILL not managed to disprove it. But please—by all means—feel free to take a crack at it yourself.”}

{42 Throughout history, it has been common to coin a NOVEL language as a SACRED language in the event that a new Faith is established. Indeed, that’s precisely what the Eastern Orthodox Church did with Old Church Slavonic when votaries in Slavic lands wanted to use something in lieu of Koine Greek. The idea is to pretend that the liturgical language is timeless—and even has magical properties—in spite of the fact that it is derivative. Mandaean (a.k.a. “Sabians”) did so with the Mandaic dialect of Aramaic...while Manicheans did so with the Uyghur variant of Syriac (both of which exhibit significant Persian influences). Yazidis use the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish...as opposed to the practitioners of Yarsanism, who use the Gorani dialect of Kurdish. Zoroastrians did so with Avestan (descended from Old Iranian)...even as Persians use the Pahlavi script (descended from Old Aramaic) while Indians use the Gujarati script (descended from Sanskrit). Tengri-ists did so with Mongolian (descended from Syriac via Old Uyghur and Altaic influences). Even as Vedic Sanskrit is the original language of the region, Jains use the “Ardha-Magadhi” Prakrit, Sinhalese Buddhists use the “Elu” Prakrit, and Theravada Buddhists use the “Pali” Prakrit. Sikhs did so with the Lahnda dialect of Punjabi, which is also descended from Sanskrit. Tibetan Buddhists use the Ali Gali dialect of Old Tibetan while practitioners of Bon use the Zhang-Zhung dialect of Old Tibetan. Japanese Buddhists use the Man’yogana script, which is descended from Classical Chinese. Rarely is the liturgical language the ORIGINAL language. Perhaps the only two examples are non-Tamil Hindus (who still use Vedic Sanskrit) and Chinese Buddhists (who still use Classical Chinese). Of course, even Vedic Sanskrit was descended from Old Brahmi...which was based on Old Aramaic. }

{43 Note that other scripts—notably, the Ethiopic language, Ge’ez—shared the same Sinaitic origins as these Old South Arabian scripts. Consequently, Ge’ez shared many attributes with Old South Arabian. (Put another way: Old South Arabian was written in what was essentially a cousin of early Ethiopic script.)

This makes sense, as the Aksumites encompassed both Abyssinia and Yemen, making linguistic hybridization between the African Horn and southern Arabia inevitable. It was not until c. 960, when the (Christian) Kingdom of Aksum was conquered by the pagan Queen [n]Gudi[t], that the use of Ge’ez declined in Abyssinia. [n]Gudi[t] had virtually all the literature in the kingdom destroyed, as she was vehemently anti-Christian. As it happened, she allied herself with the Islamic Adal Sultanate (operating out of Zeila, Somalia), which—even by that time—was STILL not using CA. (Vestiges of Ge’ez survive in modern Ethiopic languages like Amharic, Tigre, Tigrinya, Oromo, Gurage, Chaha, and Argobba.) It was not until the 13th century that an Arabic adaptation of the region’s indigenous (Cushitic) languages was finally established: “Wadaad”. This timeline would not make any sense if CA had predominated in Dar al-Islam since MoM’s lifetime. }

{44 Similarly, in Malaysia / Indonesia, the national language is simply called “language” [“bahasa”]. Syriac (in its modern vernacular) is NOW referred to as “Leshana Suryaya” / “Leshana Ashuraya” [Syrian / Assyrian language] or “Suret” / “Surayt”; and alternately as “Siryon”. By contrast, Hebrew was a language as well as a people—as has been the case with MOST languages (which tend to be named after the people who speak them). Manichaean and Mandaean were religions as well as languages. Chaldean was a

religion, a language, AND a people. The Eastern / Nestorian Christian church came to be affiliated with its liturgical language—hence the moniker, “Syriac Christianity”. Lastly, we might note that “arabiy[y]ah” could alternately be translated as “Arabia”; since other places followed this nomenclature (e.g. “Ifriqiy[y]ah” for Africa.)

{45 A “munajat” is a special kind of “salat” [prayer] (typically referred to as “dhikr” / “zikir” in the Sufi tradition). It is primarily a matter of pleading to god by uttering his various appellations. The title of Al-Ansari’s book is sometimes rendered in English as “Dialogues With God”; though “munajat” are hardly dialogues; they are invocations / imprecations.}

{46 There has been some dispute as to the dating of this material; as alternate tests have placed their origin in the late 6th century. (!) But this only makes the problem WORSE. If we are to accept the earlier dating, the (Kufic) Birmingham folios are rendered the most glaring evidence against Islamic revisionism. For they include clauses that are found in the Koran; but date to BEFORE MoM’s ministry. This means that certain bits of Syriac verse pre-dated the (purported) “Final Revelation”, and were only later appropriated by those compiling the “Recitations”. That segments of text from the late 6th century eventually wound up in Islam’s holy book would mean that the book did not get its material from the alleged source (a messenger in the early 7th century). In that case, the corpus of revelations that MoM reputedly received during his lifetime were not unique after all. Put another way: The fact that pre-existing material was coopted into the newfangled (Mohammedan) scripture would entail that the traditional attribution (novel communiques from the Creator of the Universe conveyed exclusively via MoM) is false.}

{47 Malcom Lyons explains the clues to this retroactive transformation in his “The Arabian Epic: Heroic and Oral Story-Telling” vol. 1.}

{48 Peoples at the southern end of the Arabian peninsula (Himyarites, who operated out of Zafar and Sana’a) were considered off-shoots of the Abyssinians (Sabaeans, then Aksumites; who were Ethiopic); and were not referred to as “Arabs” at the time. For more on the association of Arab peoples with (Syriac-speaking) Nabataeans, and the etymology of “Arab” / “Arabia”, see the discussion in my essay: “Mecca And Its Cube”.

{49 Abu Tammam’s hometown, Jasim had previously been a (Syriac-speaking) Ghassanid city that had served as a seat for the (monophysite) Syriac church. This indicates that Syriac would have been his native tongue.}

{50 There are miscellaneous idiosyncrasies when it comes to transliterating Arabic. (Anyone who doubts this can refer to the myriad spellings of the name of the former Libyan dictator.) The issue here is the elision of disparate lemmas. As with many derivatives of Semitic abjads, the inference of vowel sounds sometimes leaves room for confusion. With regard to “salam” vs. “salaam”, we encounter a similar issue with “haram” (forbidden) and “hara[a]m” (holy), both of which derive from the Semitic tri-root “H-R-M” (set apart). In both cases, when transliterating the second vowel sound, the phonetic distinction is made by simply writing “a” in the first instance and either “?” or “aa” in the second instance. So it goes with the hermeneutics of “S-L-M”. In CA, this equivocal phonology was—eventually—addressed by the use of diacritical marks. But when it comes to prosody and gutturals, the Roman alphabet doesn’t always cooperate. (And navigating the IPA only adds to the confusion.) Consider the queer alphabetic modifications used in Turkish and Vietnamese. Glitches in transliteration are commonplace—as is the case when moving from, say, (Korean) Hangul to the Roman alphabet, or when dealing with the Romanization of Chinese phonetics (Pinyin, Wade-Giles, Zhu-yin, Guo-yu Luomazi, etc.) When it comes to Syriac, we can’t even agree on the difference between “sh” and “?” and “š” and “?”. But one thing that IS indubitable: “Islam” and “Muslim” are a matter of *submission*...just as we can be sure that “as-sala[a]m-u alayk-um” is

a greeting of *peace*.}

{51 The possibility of a palimpsest (where one thing was written on the parchment at one point in time, then was erased and replaced by something else at later point in time) was ruled out; though we hear this from those who performed the mis-leading carbon dating. In determining when the Birmingham codex was ACTUALLY composed, step #1 would be to carbon-date the ink. They might then ascertain how long the tannin (the compound extracted from galls) may have been stored after the death of the plant from which it was made. Medieval Arabs seem to have mostly used dye made from the gall found on oak trees in northern Syria (near Aleppo and Antioch).}

{52 In eastern Europe, the (soon-to-be Eastern Orthodox) Byzantines were in control of the Balkans, Greece, and Anatolia. In western Europe, the (Chalcedonian / Arian) Visigoths controlled the Iberian Peninsula, while the (Roman Catholic) Franks controlled the Rhineland, Gaul, and the Italic peninsula. The Byzantines were Papist until the Great Schism of 1054. Of course, other Christian denominations have existed since the 1st century. The Coptic Church was primarily located in north-eastern Africa; while the Syriac (Eastern / Oriental) Church was primarily located in what we now call the Middle East (including the Nestorian and Chaldean churches). By the early 8th century, both Coptic and Syriac Christianity existed in lands that had been incorporated into Dar al-Islam (meaning that many Copts and Assyrians ended up using Arabic as their lingua franca). Eastern Europe retained Koine Greek, though eventually adopted Old Church Slavonic as a (Slavic) liturgical alternative; while Western Europe retained Vulgar Latin for its liturgical language amidst the ramification of the various Romance languages.}

{53 There are some instances where hair-splitting is warranted—as with Epic Sanskrit vs. Classical Sanskrit: essentially the same language, yet with some stylistic differences.}

{54 Islam is not alone on this count. According to Jewish fundamentalists, Iron Age Hebrews (i.e. Jewish Canaanites) spoke—and wrote in—*Hebrew*. This is, of course, pure farce. (It is even a stretch to contend that a fully-codified Judaism existed prior to the Exilic Period.) The first language that was distinctly “Hebrew” was Mishnaic Hebrew (the familiar square script that characterizes Biblical Hebrew, which dates from the 1st century A.D.) Mishnaic Hebrew descended from some combination of Babylonian Aramaic and Samaritan (both of which date back to the beginning of the 6th century B.C.). Mishnaic Hebrew was not developed until the Middle Ages. In an attempt to exalt their chosen liturgical language as “las[h]on ha-kodesh”, Judaic historiographers concocted terms like “Classical Hebrew” and (the nonsensical) “Samaritan Hebrew”; while retro-actively labeling Phoenician and Old Aramaic “paleo-Hebrew” (which would be like calling Vulgar Latin “paleo-Norman”). The Jews of Classical Antiquity knew better. (I explore this point further in Footnote 67 below.) The Mishnah Megillah refers to the language of the Hebrews (eventually dubbed “Ivrit”) as “Ashurit” (Assyrian); likely referring to Babylonian Aramaic; and indicating that the Hebrews did not have a distinctly Hebrew language. Of course, any religion with a liturgical language is inclined to confabulate a fictional linguistic legacy. And so it went with Islam vis a vis Classical Arabic. Islamic apologists play the same ol’ taxonomic games—sometimes referring to Old North Arabian and even Nabataean Syriac as “Old Arabic”. Presumably, they would also refer to Vedic Sanskrit as “Old Braj”.}

{55 The etymology of “Lukman” is somewhat of a quandary. It might be based on the Semitic tri-root “K-M-N”, meaning “hidden in darkness”. Thus “Al-K-M-N” could have meant “the dark one”. This would make sense, as this folkloric figure was described as very dark-skinned. And it would also explain a book that is referenced as “Hikmat al-K-M-N”—typically translated as “Luqman’s Wisdom”, but more accurately translated as “wisdom of the dark-skinned man”. Luqman’s provenance is unclear, as Islamic texts cannot even agree on where he was from. He was of the “Ad” tribe. Or he was from “Al-Ahqaf” (place of the sand dunes; understood to be Yemen). Or he was from “Aylah”. Or he was from Ethiopia.

Or he was from Egypt. Or he was from Nubia. The path from Persian lore—through Syriac intermediaries—to Arabian lore seems to be the most likely genealogy of the tale. We DO know that the Story of Sandbad the Sage—later rendered “Sinbad the Sailor” in the European adaptation—was translated from Pahlavi (Middle Persian) to Syriac in the pre-Islamic Middle East. The name was eventually rendered in Arabic as “Sind[i]bad” in the 10th century (when it was adapted from Syriac sources). It is likely that tales about Sandbad were inspired by the much earlier tale of Ahikar the Wise, which originally circulated in Aramaic, then in Persian and Syriac (see Footnote 56 below). Tellingly, when the Byzantine writer, Michael Andreopoulos of Melitene translated the story of Sandbad into Greek (as Syntipas the Philosopher) in the 11th century, he did so from Syriac; not from Arabic.}

{56 The Story Of Ahikar the Wise is perhaps the oldest example of international literature, as the tale propagated from Nineveh (northwestern Mesopotamia), through the Levant, down to Elephantine island (northeastern Egypt), primarily through Syriac-speaking amanuenses—many of whom were Jewish. The story is about a chancellor of the Assyrian king Sennacherib; followed by his heir, Esarhaddon. The characters hail from the early 7th century B.C. (The account is likely apocryphal.) The eponymous hero of the famous tale is betrayed by his nephew, Nadab [alt. “Nadan”], for whom he had served as a mentor. For his insolence, Nadab ends up reaping what he sowed. As the tale propagated across cultures, it was re-written to comport with indigenous folklore—be it Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, Manichaean, or Mohammedan. Its appeal was universal, as it was an inspiring account of a wise man and his unappreciative student. The wider message is one of justice prevailing over treachery—a theme that would have surely resonated with anyone who heard it. In the Abrahamic pantheon, Ahikar was a sage, not a prophet. So his stature as a folk-hero was different from that of the “nabi-im”, who featured prominently in Hebrew scripture. Meanwhile, as the tale propagated across Christendom, it continued to undergo a metamorphosis. During the Middle Ages, “Ahikar” was Romanized as “Achicarus”, as the tale proliferated throughout the Holy Roman Empire. By then, the true origins of the material were—glibly—long-forgotten.}

{57 I explore the specific circumstances in which the “Recitations” were compiled in my essay: “Genesis Of A Holy Book”. There, I show how it is inconceivable that the book now known as “Al-Qur’an” is an exact replica of the verses conveyed orally by someone between c. 613 and c. 632.}

{58 For more on this topic, see S. H. Griffith’s “Disputes With Muslims In Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John To Bar Hebraeus” in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, ed. B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner; 1992.}

{59 This work seems to have been related to the “*Apocalypse Of Moses*” (a.k.a. the “Life Of Adam And Eve”) from the 1st century A.D.—the oldest extant version of which exists only in Greek (though it would have originally been composed in Syriac). This is considered one of the core texts of the “primary Adam” literature. In it, Satan states that he rebelled against the Abrahamic deity when he was ordered to bow down to Adam—a motif that was adopted in Islamic theology. “*The Conflict Of Adam And Eve With Satan*” was also likely related to the “*Testament Of Adam*” and the “*Apocalypse Of Adam*”—both of which are characterized as “Seth” literature (as they focused on Adam’s son). These were also originally composed in Syriac (by Jewish scholars), and were later translated to Garshuni (Arabic using Syriac script), then into medieval Arabic...as well as into Greek...and even into Ge’ez, Armenian, and Georgian. ALL of it had major influence on “*The Cave Of Treasures*”, which would have been composed (in Syriac) during MoM’s early lifetime. Interestingly, Garshuni continued to be used by some through the 16th century. Rarely did such material make it into Europe, which explains why these works were rarely translated into Latin...and remained largely unknown in the Occident.}

{60 Tellingly, non-Islamic material exists that REALLY WAS originally written in Arabic. Of course,

such works would have been composed no earlier than the 9th century. Case in point: the “*Apocalypse Of Peter*”...alternately known as the “Ru’ya Butrus” [Vision Of Peter] or the “Kitab al-Magall” [Book Of Rolls]; which was composed in the late 9th / early 10th century, though it was retroactively attributed to Clement of Rome. This is a reminder that, once Arabic had become the lingua franca, EVEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS were writing material in Arabic. Said transition is further testament to the fact that, when earlier works were written in Syriac, it was due to the fact that THERE WAS NOT YET ANY ARABIC. Otherwise, such works would have surely been written in Arabic...as were the vast majority of works composed in the Muslim world from the 9th century onward. For more on this, see the Postscript below.}

{61 The most famous example of this is the “Ktav Ashuri” [Assyrian script]: the familiar “square” script established by Jewish scribes in Late Antiquity (by the vaunted “Tanna-im”, likely at the behest of a “Nasi” of the Sanhedrin) to differentiate it from other Aramaic scripts of the region (Babylonian Aramaic, Samaritan, Palmyrene, Nabataean, etc.) This script is now known as “Mishnaic Hebrew”...which is, effectively, Classical Hebrew. (The “Ktav Ashuri” corresponded to the spoken “Leshon ha-Kham-im”; which was an offshoot of the Samaritan tongue.) In an amusing parallel with Islamic revisionists, some Judaic revisionists like to fancy the “original” Hebrew to have pre-dated this development, thus pretending that their liturgical language (Classical Hebrew) had existed ALL ALONG. (Ezra, insofar as he existed, would have spoken Babylonian Aramaic.) So we see that this gimmick was not unique to Islam; and that delusion accompanies many a liturgical language. (For more on liturgical languages, see Footnote 62 below.)}

{62 An even sillier variation of this gimmick occurred in Christendom, where it was supposed—throughout the Middle Ages—that the lingua franca of the west Roman Empire (Vulgar Latin) was the language in which god intended the entire Bible be rendered. This belief remained unchallenged until Martin Luther in 1522. CA was no anomaly; as there have been myriad liturgical languages created explicitly for the purpose of conveying a (new) sacred doctrine. The phenomenon occurred in the Middle East many times: Aramit (a variation on Old Aramaic) for *Samaritanism*, the Manichaean version of Syriac for *Manichaeism*, the Mandaic version of Syriac for *Mandaeism*, the Hawrami dialect of Gorani (a variant of Kurdish) for *Yarsanism*, and Kurmanji (another variant of Kurdish) for *Yazidism*. To differentiate themselves from Islam, subsequent Middle Eastern monotheisms employed later incarnations of Arabic: the *Druze* designed medieval Arabic as their liturgical language, while the *Baha’i* designated modern Arabic as theirs. In each case, it was presumed that the Creator of the Universe wanted his message to mankind to be rendered in that particular language ALL ALONG. The universe seems to have always been in sync with whatever was transpiring when THEIR OWN religion was founded. This is a reminder that some sort of conceit undergirds virtually every sacred doctrine. (And, as is usually the case, delusive thinking goes hand-in-hand with conceit.) In the Far East, this seems to have worked a bit differently. Preternatural qualities were ascribed to liturgical languages—as with, say, Vedic Sanskrit for *Hinduism*, the Ardha-Magadhi Prakrit for *Jainism*, the Elu Prakrit for *Sinhalese Buddhism*, and the Pali Prakrit for *Siamese Buddhism*. We also find this with Ali Gali (a.k.a. “Galik”; a variant of Old Tibetan) for *Tibetan Buddhism* and Zhang-Zhung (another variant of Old Tibetan) for *Bon*. Another notable case: the Lahnda dialect of Punjabi (a.k.a. “Lehndi”) is used as the liturgical language for *Sikhism*.}

{63 The “golden chain of narration” gets a bit sketchier from there. Malik ibn Anas was purportedly the student of a Persian named Nafi Mawla ibn Omar of Daylam—who hailed from the southern coast of the [k]Hazar Sea (a.k.a. the Caspian Sea). THAT Nafi evidently received the narration from the fabled “Nafi” of Medina...who, in actuality, was probably a Persian who hailed from Isfahan. And HE was purported to have received the narration from the son of Caliph Umar ibn Khattab. So once we get to Bukhari, over two centuries of “telephone” would have transpired; and, in the meantime, transitioned from Syriac to medieval Arabic.}

{64 Note that “Xenaias” (alternately rendered “Philo-Xenus”) was the Greco-Roman rendering of the Syriac name, Aksenaya. The letter was likely composed by the Syriac bishop of Mabbug at the time (a.k.a. “Philoxenus of Hierapolis”), a Miaphysite who’d studied in Edessa (and took exception to the Dyophysites in the Nestorian church). Incidentally, Hir[t]a—at the time, a small Lakhmid city just south of Kufa—came to be known as “Al-Hirah”. Up to c. 241, the region had been ruled by the (Arab) Kingdom of Hatra (who were vassals of the Parthians)...before being taken over by the Lakhmids (who were vassals of the Sassanians). The people of the region would have spoken Syriac. (The dialect of Syriac used at Hatra is now referred to as “Ashurian” [“Leshana Ashuraya”], as it seems to have originated in Ashur, in Nineveh.) Mingana’s translation was from a vellum manuscript found in Tur Abd-in (“Servant Hills”; a.k.a. “Osroene”), which had been ruled by the Abgarids (a Nabataean Syriac-speaking Arab dynasty) until the 3rd century. They had spoken Ashurian. That manuscript dated from between the 10th and 13th century; and had been based on a much earlier document. The text now resides at the Selly Oak Colleges Library at Birmingham.}

{65 Vedic Sanskrit came from Old Brahmi, which was based on Old Aramaic, itself a descendent of Phoenician. Koine Greek came from Mycenaean Greek, which descended from Phoenician as well (via a Hittite variant of Assyrian)...after interacting with the indigenous Minoan tongue. Vulgar Latin ALSO came from Mycenaean Greek...after infusing the indigenous Sabine and Etruscan tongues of the Italic peninsula (yielding Old Latin). Coptic script was based on Greek...after infusing the indigenous Egyptian Demotic. And Glagolitic script (precursor to Cyrillic) was a Slavic script based on Greek as well. It would make little sense to refer to the Phoenician alphabet as proto-Sanskrit, or proto-Greek, or proto-Latin, or proto-Coptic, or proto-Cyrillic...even though it was the ancestor of each. The same goes for CA vis a vis Syro-Aramaic (which, by the way, also influenced Mandaic, Sogdian, Manichean, and—of course—modern Assyrian). See also Footnotes 65 and 71 below.}

{66 The Egyptian dialect of Arabic (“Masri”) is the most common. Even the Maghrebi dialect of Arabic (“Der[i]ja”) ended up having several variants: “Hassaniya” (Mauritanian), Moroccan, “Suleimian” (Libyan), “Dziria” (Algerian), “Tounsi” (Tunisian), and “Hilalian”—all of which were influenced by Berber in some way. The hybridization of Arabic continued through the High Middle Ages. During the Moorish occupation of Andalusia, in a rare hybridization of Semitic and Romance languages, Maghrebi Arabic melded with Spanish—yielding “Mustarab” / “Mozarabic”. (The only other language that merged Arabic and Latin was Maltese.) For more on the ramification of Arabic, see the Appendix.}

{67 We should be wary of the linguistic conceit whereby a philological analysis of ancient languages is conducted through the lens of one’s own favored language (see Footnote 54 above). The Namara[h] (alt. “Nimreh”) inscription was composed in the Nabataean dialect of Syriac, using the Nabataean alphabet c. 328 (see footnote 2 above). This makes sense, as it was written by the Lakhmids—who were ethnic Nabataeans. (Their capital was the Syriac-speaking city of Hir[t]a—later known as “Al-Hirah”—just south of Kufa.) Calling that inscription “proto-Arabic” is like calling Phoenician “paleo-Hebrew”—as if the “Hebrew” was the language that Phoenician was destined to become. “Paleo-Hebrew” / “proto-Hebrew” is, of course, an utterly inane term. The Phoenician alphabet may just as well be considered proto-Greek. (See Footnote 65 above.) All retro-active categorization schemes are spurious. An analogy from evolutionary biology illustrates the point. Imagine referring to the Boreo-eu-therian ancestor as “proto-human”. While this is technically not wrong (it DID eventually give rise to—among thousands of other species—homo sapiens), such a characterization is tremendously misleading. (The same animal also led to gerbils and whales.) The Boreo-eu-therian ancestor could just as accurately be dubbed a proto-giraffe, enabling us to declare: “See! The giraffe has been around for over 100 million years!” Shall we take a giraffe-centric approach to evolutionary biology? (In theory, one COULD make zoology entirely about all mammals’ relation to giraffes.) CA-fetishists aren’t the only people who play this silly game. Hebrew-

fetishists insist that the liturgical language of Judaism has been around since the time of King David, treating Old Aramaic as an “earlier version” of the square script (from the 1st century A.D.) with which many are now familiar. (Hence they claim—absurdly—that the Gezer calendar and Ophel pithos—as well as the Siloam / Shiloah and the Shebna inscriptions—were written in “paleo-Hebrew”.) Such legerdemain would be comical if it weren’t taken seriously by so many. Ironically, the give-away is in the HEBREW name for the square script: “Ktav Ashuri” (meaning “Assyrian alphabet”). Imagine Chaldean Christians today insisting that Turoyo (contemporary Suryoyo) has been in use since the Bronze Age due to the fact that modern Assyrian, which was from Classical Syriac, itself based on Aramaic, has existed ALL ALONG.

And so it goes with ALL linguistic ramification. Noting that the Namara inscription uses a language that slightly resembles the language in which the Koran was written (almost four centuries later) does not mean that CA was already in use; it simply means that CA’s origins were in Nabataean Syriac...just as the giraffe’s origins were the Boreo-eu-therian ancestor. }

{68 Today, archeology is extremely limited in this region, as any research needs to pass muster with the (Wahhabi) House of Saud. Operating within the stringent constraints of a totalitarian theocracy is not easy...that is, if one is a genuine scholar (read: not an apparatchik). It is no secret that any excavation that might reveal unwelcome insights is promptly curtailed. (Investigations in the region are typically limited to material that predates Late Antiquity; which remains outside the purview of Mohammedan origin stories.) Nothing that might bring into question the traditional Islamic narrative is permitted. This explains why there was a deafening silence after the extensive excavations around the Kaaba (in the first decade of the 21st century) to make way for the massive construction projects in Mecca. Honest archeologists in Saudi Arabia are as unlikely as Zamboni drivers in the Congo. }

{69 Discontinuities in legacy often correlate with disjunctures in historiography. A prime example of this is found in Mesopotamia: The neo-Babylonians did not consider themselves progeny of the Assyrians, who did not consider themselves progeny of the Kassites, who did not consider themselves progeny of the Old Babylonians, who did not consider themselves progeny of the Gutians, who did not consider themselves progeny of the Akkadians, who did not consider themselves progeny of the Sumerians. They were, of course, ALL of the same haplo-group; but each had its own legacy to gild (and, of course, its own sacred history it wanted to tout). As it turns out, other than the obvious (a shared geography), the only give-away that there was ancestral lineage was the continuity in linguistic metamorphosis—from Sumerian to Babylonian Aramaic, precursor to Hebrew. The official record of a people is often crafted to suit their current agenda; especially when there is a shift in religion. So ETHNIC continuities tend to be elided, especially if they do not serve a historiographic purpose (e.g. the national origin myth). In “The Forgotten Diaspora”, I explore the possibility that the earliest Ashkenazim had [k]Hazarian (Turkic) provenance, yet—for understandable reasons—did not celebrate this fact. }

{70 I address this conundrum in my essay on “The History Of Sacred Texts”, where I note that tall tales regarding revelations—purportedly delivered in isolation—seem to always be limited to the exact place, time, and language that is convenient for the sacred history being touted. These just-so stories are concocted post hoc to serve as etiological justification for the current agenda. }

{71 Such linguistic elision is not uncommon. In my essay on “The Forgotten Diaspora”, I offer a philological inquiry into the origins of Old Yiddish, explaining how its origins in the Oghuric branch of Old Turkic have been occluded by Germanic and Slavic infusions during the intervening millennium. A similar occlusion occurred with the tongue of the Bulgars, which has undergone such a drastic metamorphosis that it is now characterized as Slavic. Meanwhile, modern Hungarians (i.e. Magyars) are reticent to embrace the Turkic roots of their Uralic tongue. }

{72 “But wait,” comes the response. “Perhaps there were translators.” This is, indeed, feasible.

However, consider the leaders with whom the Sahabah amicably corresponded who—according to them—spoke a foreign language. That list contains exactly ZERO people. (There was plenty of interaction with the Byzantines and Sassanians: both adversaries.) Plus, there is no mention at all of “different tongues” or the use of “translators” in any of these correspondences. Both parties spoke “lis[h]an-un Arabiyyan” (the tongue of the Arabs), which—at the time—was Syriac. (Ishmaelites referred to themselves as “al-Arabi”.) In the Koran, god himself notifies his audience that he make things easy for them by issuing the Recitations “bi-lis[h]an-ika” (in your tongue). Which tongue was that? “Arabiyyan”. To pretend that this meant CA is highly disingenuous.}

{73 After Petra, the original Mohammedan stronghold was Kufa...not the Hijazi town of “Medina”, as is held in the traditional Islamic narrative. According to Mohammedan lore, the first three Rashidun caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman) ruled from Yathrib-cum-Medina...before the new Ishmaelite empire suddenly, inexplicably, transitioned its capital to Kufa. This makes no sense. If everything had begun in “Medina”, then why would the fourth caliph (Ali) have moved the capital to Mesopotamia? What with Yathrib-cum-Medina (purportedly) being the home-base of the Faith (pre-Hijra), such a decision would have been quite strange. It is obvious why the historiography was revamped to retroactively designate “Medina” as the capital of the caliphate...as if it preceded Kufa (rather than the caliphs having ruled from Kufa all along). Had Abu Bakr taken over IN KUFA (as likely occurred), it would disrupt the just-so story confabulated later on (about the origins of the Faith being in Mecca), as it wouldn’t comport with Mohammed of Mecca hailing from the Hijaz. I explore the actual history of the first Mohammedans in my essay on “Mecca And Its Cube”.}

## **APPENDIX:**

The Koran has undergone a metamorphosis since its earliest days in Kufic script. So it comes as no surprise that, over the course of the Middle Ages, numerous versions of Islam’s holy book came into existence. Naturally, there have been different editions for different countries as the epochs progressed. Let’s look at a dozen of the most notable:

- The Andalusian Koran (based on Warsh an-Naafi’s narrative chain): 10th century \*
- The Persian Koran (most written in Pahlavi; others in eastern Kufic): 11th century \*\*
- The Latin Koran: 12th century \*\*\*
- The (Kara-Khanid) Turkic Koran: late 12th / early 13th century
- The (Almohad / Marinid) Berber Koran (written in the Maghrebi script): 13th century
- The Ilkhanid Koran of Khan Uljeitu: 14th century
- The (Bihari) Indian Koran: 14th century
- The (Bahriyya) Mamluk Koran of Sultan Baybars: 14th century
- The (Burji) Mamluk Koran of Sultan Faraj: 15th century
- The (Mughal) Indian Koran: 16th century
- The (Diwani) Ottoman Koran: 16th century
- The Chinese Koran: 17th century

In the 11th century, the Seljuk Turks were using eastern Kufic for their Korans. By c. 1300, the Seljuk Empire seems to have adopted the Naskh script, yet had retained eastern Kufic for chapter / verse designations. The first Urdu, Bangla, and Javanese Korans weren’t created until the 19th century. \*\*\*\*

Each was composed according to the exigencies of the place and time (language, culture, geo-politics, and the interests of the rulers). The differences are primarily a matter of stylization (rather than of substance).



It is quite remarkable that ANY of these alternate versions of Islam’s holy book have survived, considering that there would have certainly been a concerted attempt to systematically eradicate any and all texts that were different from the “official” version. (This is especially striking when it comes to the ten EARLIEST manuscripts listed in the preceding essay.)

*{\* Another Andalusian Koran, written in the Maghrebi script, was created in the 12th century.}*

*{\*\* There are claims—likely apocryphal—about the Samanid king, Mansur commissioning a translation in Pahlavi in the late 10th century. In the 11th century, the Persian writer, Khwajah Abdullah Ansari of Herat [Khorasan] and his student were composing “tafsir” [commentaries] in Pahlavi. (!) Tellingly, Persian Korans continued to be written in Kufic script into the 12th century. Starting in the 12th century, many illuminated manuscripts came out of Persia—the most famous of which was the illuminated Koran of the Persian prince, Baysunqur ibn Shahrukh, produced in the 15th century.}*

*{\*\*\* The first Latin Koran was done by Robert of Ketton during his time in Pamplona c. 1143 (modified by Theodor Bibliander in 1550). This served the basis for subsequent translations into other European languages—notably: Italian by Andrea Arrivabene in the 16th century and Castilian (Spanish) by Juan Andrés y Morell in the 18th century. The former was used to create Salomon Schweigger’s German translation in 1616. The first English translation was done by Scottish cleric, Alexander Ross of Aberdeen in 1649. George Sale then did a translation in 1734. Sale’s edition was the one Thomas Jefferson used (after he was prompted to procure a copy of Islam’s holy book while contending with the Barbary pirates). The first widely-esteemed English translations were done by Marmaduke Pickthall and Abdullah Yusuf Ali in the 1930’s. Interestingly, a Turkish translation was not done until the 1930’s (by Muhammed Hamdi Yazir), as the literary language of the Ottoman Empire had been Persian.}*

*{\*\*\*\* Though the Samudera Pasai Sultanate was established in Sumatra in the 13th century, there is no record of a Koran specific to Indonesia until the Javanese version. The Malacca Sultanate on the Malay peninsula was established in the 15th century. But it was not until the demise of the (Hindu) Maja-pahit dynasty in Java that Islam achieved supremacy in the region. In the 1520’s, the Sultanate of Demak re-christened Sunda Kelapa as “Jayakarta”; and the rest was history. The Padri uprising against Dutch colonialism in Sumatra (esp. in Minangkabau) in the 19th century—though unsuccessful—likely set the stage for the Javanese and Bahasa editions of the Koran.}*

\* \* \*

## **Postscript:**

There remains some question about how, exactly, the transition was made from Syriac to CA (and, concomitantly, the Nabataean alphabet to the earliest distinctly Arabic script: Ma’il); and what may have occurred in the relevant circles. During this transition period (much of which is lost to history), it is clear that there was extensive interaction between Syriac expositors (primarily Nestorians) and the early Mohammedans. This would have surely had nontrivial effects on the latter.

In adducing the evidence, it becomes apparent that Mohammedan theologians developed modes of religious apologia (the so-called “ilm al-kalam”) from their interactions with (Syriac-speaking) Christian theologians who operated in intellectual centers like Basra and Baghdad—especially during the 8th and 9th centuries. (See the work of M. Cook.) As we’ve seen, the primary location for the development of Arabic was Kufa; hence the Kufic script serving as the orthographic intermediary between Nabataean / Estralanga and Ma’il.

Gabriel Bokhtisho of Gondeshapur [Bet(h) Lapa?] made contributions to the Syriac version of Origen’s “Hexapla” in the late 8th / early 9th century. Interestingly, the “Syro-Hexapla” was originally composed by Paul of Tella [in Osroene]. That would have occurred during MoM’s early ministry in Mecca. Clearly, there continued to be a pressing need—across the Middle East—to render the Septuagint in Syriac for centuries after MoM’s lifetime.

Syriac Patriarch, Timotheos I provided an account—IN SYRIAC—of his dialogue with the caliph, Al-Mahdi in early 9th century. Those Syriac letters were only later translated into Arabic. Timotheos I even went so far as to move his residence from Seleucia-Ctesiphon to Baghdad, where he could engage in discussions at the caliph’s court. The famed debates were widely disseminated. He recounted his conversations with the court scholars in several of his Syriac letters.

(For more on this matter, see Alphonse Mingana’s “The Apologia of Timothy the Patriarch Before the Caliph Mahdi” from 1928. Also see S. H. Griffith’s “The Syriac Letters of Patriarch Timothy I and the Birth of Christian Kalam in the Muʿtazilite Milieu of Baghdad and Basrah in Early Islamic Times” in *Syriac polemics, Studies in Honour of G. J. Reinink*; ed. W. J. van Bekkum, et. al.; 2007.)

During the 9th century, even Christians who composed some material in CA were Syriac-speaking scholars who opted to learn the new liturgical language of the Ishmaelites in order to engage in apologia and debate.

This was the case with major figures like Melkite writer, Theodoros Abu Qurra; Jacobite writer, Habib ibn Khidma Abu Raʿita; and Nestorian writer, Ammar al-Basri. One of the first to start translating Syriac works into CA was Hunayn ibn Ishaq of Hirta [al-Hira] in the late 9th century. As mentioned earlier, Hasan bar Bahlul would compile one of the first comprehensive Syriac-Arabic dictionaries in the 10th century. That the need for such a glossary did not arise UNTIL the 10th century is quite telling. (Had CA been in common usage since the 6th century, this delay would have been inexplicable.)

Starting in the 9th century, Arabic became the lingua franca in the Middle East; and so the go-to language for most writers—as attested by, say, the “*Apocalypse Of Peter*” (a.k.a. the “Ru’ya Butrus” [Vision Of Peter]; the “Kitab al-Magall” [Book Of Rolls]; see Footnote 60 above). From then on, throughout the Muslim world, for most people the only alternative would have been Masoretic Hebrew (for Jews), Pahlavi (for Persians), Manichaean and Sogdian (for those living on the Silk Road), or Oghuz (for Seljuk Turks). Only Syriac Christians (e.g. Chaldeans and Nestorians) continued to use some form of Syriac script (whether Estrangela, Madnhaya, or Serta); and even then only for liturgical purposes.

From the late 8th- to the mid-11th centuries, Syriac-speaking Christians played an integral role in the so-called Graeco-Arabic translation movement, centered in Baghdad. In the late 9th / early 10th century, Syriac Christians like Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus of dayr Qunna and Yuhanna ibn Haylan were the teachers of the famed Abu Nasr al-Farabi. In the 10th century, the most prominent philosopher in Baghdad was the Syriac Christian thinker, Yahya ibn Adi—who was a student of Al-Farabi. And one of HIS students, Isa ibn Zur’a (another Syriac Christian who embraced Greek thought) ALSO earned renown in Baghdad.

By the beginning of the 11th century, Christians in the region were finally composing works in Arabic. Notably: Syriac prelate, Elijah of Nisibis opted to compose his response to Ya’qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi’s 9th-

century “The Art of Dispelling Sorrows” in CA. (However, Elijah still composed his magnum opus, the “Chronography” in Syriac.)

And in the 13th century, it was normal to compose major works in both Syriac and CA—as attested by Syriac thinkers like Abdisho bar Brkho of Sinjar [Beth Arbaye] and Bar Ebroyo. By then, it had become de rigueur for scholars in the region to be bi-lingual in these two languages.

The interaction was, of course, a two-way street. Medieval Syriac chronicles (notably: that of Mikho-El “Rabo” of Melitene, from the 12th century) incorporated the narratives of earlier Syriac chroniclers (esp. Dionysius of Tel Mahre). They even included tales of MoM and descriptions of the Mohammedan creed.

But things would not remain so. For over the course of the (European) Renaissance, it became increasingly apparent to Islamic apologists that the Syriac origins of CA (and of Islam ITSELF) must be elided in order to propound the myth that CA was god’s language...and that the ARABIC Koran was a verbatim transcript of god’s final message to mankind...which meant that MoM would have needed to have spoken CA...which would have entailed CA being the lingua franca of the region at the time...which meant that Syriac must NOT have been.

By the modern era, the systematic obfuscation of the Syriac basis for the Ishmaelite creed had taken its course. What we are left with, then, is not so much a “just-so” story as it is a “just-not-so” story: a contrived history—a SACRED history—of Islam that is more apocryphal than it is historical.