CHAPTER 6

The Founding and Consolidating of the Community in Medina

1 The "Constitution" of Medina

I will start this chapter with the "Constitution" of Medina, since this text appears to stem from the earliest years of the community in Medina. Hence, it is probably older than much (but not all) of the Qurʾānic material classified as Medinan. I subscribe to the view that the document is early Medinan, that is, drafted soon after the *hijra* (1/622).[1] The text is important evidence for the Medinan community, which included, in the main, gentile and Jewish believers. All depictions of the Jews in the document are positive (or neutral): they are full and equal members of the Medinan coalition. Interestingly, the treaty does not mention Christians at all.

The word "Constitution" is a modern and misleading name, but since it is conveniently used to refer to the document, I will also use the term, though in quotation marks.[2] A better word to characterize the text would be "treaty,"

1 Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, ed. Shākir Dhiʾb Fayyāḍ, 3 vols., Riadh: Markaz al-Malik Fayṣal li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya, 1986, ii, 466 and 472–473, remarks that the document was drafted immediately when the prophet Muḥammad came to Medina. We do not have to take Abū ʿUbayd at his word, though this is a plausible suggestion. See also Lecker, Michael, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's first legal document*, Princeton NJ: Darwin Press, 2004, 182, for the date of the text and Lindstedt, "'One community'" for a comparison of the discourse of the treaty with different Qurʾānic strata. This section reproduces some passages from the latter study.

2 The document has generated quite a bit of modern scholarship. See, e.g., Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* 221–226; Serjeant, Robert B., "The Constitution of Medina," in *Islamic Quarterly* 8 (1964), 3–16, and "The *Sunnah Jâmiʿah* pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the *Taḥrîm* of Yathrib: Analysis and translation of the documents comprised in the so-called 'Constitution of Medina'," in *BSOAS* 41 (1978), 1–42; Gil, Moshe, "The Constitution of Medina: A reconsideration," in *IOS* 4 (1974), 44–65; Denny, Frederick Mathewson, "*Ummah* in the Constitution of Medina," in *JNES* 36 (1977), 39–47; Rubin, Uri, "The 'Constitution of Medina': Some notes," in *SI* 62 (1985), 5–23; Humphreys, *Islamic history* 91–99; Arjomand, "The Constitution of Medina"; Munt, *The holy city* 54–64; Lindstedt, "'One community.'" The most important study on the text in recent years is undoubtedly Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina."* However, as will be seen here, my interpretations differ markedly from his. Lecker reads the whole document in a supposed context of legislation on homicide and bloodwite. This misrepresents the text, which is much more diverse in themes. For a critical take on the interpretations of the "ori-

which I will also use (without quotation marks) to denote the text. The text itself uses the words *al-kitāb* and *al-ṣaḥīfa* to refer to itself. Both *al-kitāb* and *al-ṣaḥīfa* can be translated as "document."

Though the text does not survive on parchment or papyri, but only as cited in later Arabic historiography, there are good grounds to suppose that the text is authentic and goes back to the time of the prophet. To begin with, the style and vocabulary of the document is archaic and often difficult to interpret; in accordance with the Qurʾān, the text refers to the in-group as "believers"; and, moreover, Jews are included in the community of the believers described in the text. For these reason, most modern scholars have accepted the text as authentic and early.[3] To quote Watt:

> No later falsifier writing under the Umayyads or ʿAbbāsids would have included non-Muslims in the *ummah*, would have retained the articles against Quraysh, and would have given Muhammad so insignificant a place. Moreover the style is archaic, and certain points, such as the use of "believers" instead of "Muslims" in most articles, belong to the earlier Medinan period.[4]

In the same breath, it must be acknowledged that the document survives in two versions that somewhat, or in some passages considerably, differ from each other. First, it is cited in Ibn Isḥāq's *Maghāzī* in the recension of Ibn Hishām: this is the longer version of the text.[5] Second, it is also preserved in Abū ʿUbayd's *Kitāb al-Amwāl*.[6] This version is shorter, omitting, it appears, a few passages. However, in some parts, Abū ʿUbayd gives arguably better and more original readings than Ibn Hishām. There are also some references to the treaty in other works, though the complete text is adduced in only these two. The text of the two versions has been critically evaluated and discussed by Michael Lecker.[7] It is not known exactly how the text was preserved, in how many copies, or how it

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entalists" on this text, see al-Faruqi, Maysam J., "*Umma*: The Orientalists and the Qurʾānic concept of identity," in *JIS* 16 (2005), 1–34.

3 E.g., Crone, *Slaves on horses* 7: "The Constitution of Medina is preserved in Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīra*, in which it sticks out like a piece of solid rock in an accumulation of rubble."

4 Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* 225 (though note that, as I argue in this chapter, the appellation "believers" is the primary one throughout the Qurʾān, up to the very latest strata, such as *sūra* 5).

5 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 341–344.

6 Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 466–470, with an interpretative commentary by Abū ʿUbayd in ii 471–473.

7 Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina."*

reached Ibn Isḥāq and Abū ʿUbayd, but the little information there is suggests that it was preserved as an heirloom of the caliph ʿUmar I and his progeny.[8] In fact, as Sean Anthony notes, Ibn Isḥāq was criticized for including documents such as the "Constitution" in his work. This ran counter to the norms of Muslim scholarship, which emphasized the importance of hearing (*samāʿ*) texts in lectures and study circles rather than consulting written works and documents.[9]

The treaty mentions and articulates different social categories. As an in-group term, the *muʾminūn*, "believers," are mentioned. This word is, I suggest, used on two different levels: first, it refers in particular to the gentile believers of the community. Second, as will be seen, in some parts of the text, a more general meaning is entailed in the word. The more general usage of the word categorizes also the Jews (*yahūd*) of different Medinan tribes as part of the community of the believers. The treaty also mentions a number of tribes that are singled out as taking part in it. The text also mentions, among others, associators (in the singular, *mushrik*) and disbelievers (*kāfir*). Moreover, "the emigrants from Quraysh" (*al-muhājirūn min quraysh*) are referred to.[10]

The text begins by invoking the authority of the prophet.[11] Immediately after, it describes the community around him, mentioning that the treaty is "between the *muʾminūn* and the *muslimūn* of Quraysh and Yathrib [i.e., Medina] and those who follow them, join them, and fight/struggle alongside them (*jāhada maʿahum*): they are one community to the exclusion of other people (*umma wāḥida min dūn al-nās*)."[12] The superordinate identity of "one community," delineated from all other people, is articulated at the outset.

The phrase "the *muʾminūn* and the *muslimūn* of Quraysh and Yathrib" has generated some discussion, and perhaps also confusion, in the scholarship. The *muʾminūn* and the *muslimūn* are often taken to be two distinct groups, the one perhaps coming from Mecca (Quraysh), the other from Medina (Yathrib).[13]

8 Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina"* 7. This is how, it appears, many early Arabic documents survived; see Anthony, *Muhammad and the empires of faith* 106.

9 Anthony, *Muhammad and the empires of faith* 168.

10 On the different social categorizations and meanings attached to them in the text, see, in more detail, Lindstedt, "'One community.'"

11 Called *al-nabī*, "the prophet," in Ibn Hishām's version (*Sīra*, i, 341), and *al-nabī rasūl allāh*, "the prophet, the messenger of God," in Abū ʿUbayd's (*Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 466).

12 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 341. Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 466, has *ahl yathrib*, "the people of Yathrib," as opposed to simply *yathrib*; his version also adds "(those who) reside with them" (*fa-ḥalla maʿahum*) after "(those who) join them."

13 For discussion, see, e.g., Denny, "*Ummah* in the Constitution" 43–44; Serjeant, "The *Sunnah Jâmiʿah* pacts" 12–13; Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina"* 40–45.

This appears somewhat unlikely to me. Two solutions are possible: 1) The construction is, as it were, a hendiadys: the word *muʾminūn* refers to the partakers characterized as believers, while *muslimūn* emphasizes another facet, their obedience to God and the law. 2) It is also possible that the word *muslimūn* was added later to the text by a copyist working in the second/eighth century when that word was the primary one used to refer to the group (see chapter 8 for this development in the labels of the category). As mentioned above, the text is not preserved in its original form but adduced over a century later by Arabic writers. That said, *muslimūn* appears in both versions: Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and Abū ʿUbayd's *Kitāb al-Amwāl*.

Next, the text moves to discuss the tribes partaking in the treaty. It underscores that the tribes, though they participate in a new superordinate identity, keep their old tribal organizations (*ribʿatihim*) and are responsible for the previous bloodwites (*maʿāqilahum al-ūlā*).[14] I would suggest that the point of this is to underline that the treaty does not endanger the existing tribal system, finances, or customs of retribution. Members of the tribe do not lose their tribal identities.

Having articulated common ground between the participating tribes, the text then discusses some regulations that the individuals and groups in this community of the believers should accept:[15] This is a theme that the text returns to toward the end. Various rules are mentioned. The text now refers to the group as "the God-fearing/revering believers (*al-muʾminīn al-muttaqīn*),"[16] noting that they are to be against sinners and criminals among them (*ʿalā man baghā minhum aw ibtaghā dasīʿat ẓulm aw ithm aw ʿudwān aw fasād*), even if the sinner is someone's child (*wa-law kāna walad aḥadihim*). However, the text does not mention what is to be done with the sinner and criminals. After this, the "disbelievers" (sing. *kāfir*) are mentioned: probably, the reference is to people outside Medina and, hence too, this treaty. The text notes: "a believer shall not kill [another] believer in retaliation for a disbeliever, nor help a disbeliever against a believer." The treaty articulates a somewhat strict delineation between the believers and the others, the disbelievers. The lives of the former are more valuable than the lives of the latter. Indeed, the text notes soon after: "the believers are allies (*mawālī*) to each other to the exclusion of other peo-

14 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 341; Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 466–467. The point about bloodwites might also be understood as denoting that the tribes should pay the bloodwites that are currently owed to the other tribes of the Medinan coalition.

15 What ensues is from Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 342; Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 468.

16 Thus in Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 342. Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 468, adds the word "and" between the two words: *al-muʾminīn wa-l-muttaqīn*.

ple," which should be compared with Q 3:28: "The believers should not take the disbelievers as allies (*awliyāʾ*) to the exclusion of the believers." The text also mentions that the "peace" (*silm*) between the believers is unwavering. In this context, the treaty also mentions that "who knowingly kills a believer—there being evidence of this—will be killed in retaliation for him if the relative of the killed is not content with bloodwite."[17] Related to this, the text later notes that the interior (*jawf*) of Medina (Ibn Hishām: *Yathrib*; Abū ʿUbayd: *al-Madīna*) is an inviolable and sanctified area (*ḥaram*) for the participants of this treaty (*li-ahl hādhihi al-ṣaḥīfa*).[18] The believers are not to shed each other's blood: Medina is a safe space, at least for those who take part in the coalition.

The Jews are mentioned for the first time in this part of the document. The text stipulates: "Those Jews who follow us shall have succor (*al-naṣr*) and help (*al-iswa*); they shall not be wronged nor [shall their enemies be] helped against [them]."[19] The word "us" denotes either the gentile believers or, alternatively, the prophet, with a plural of majesty employed in reference to him. The Jewish members of the Medinan community are mentioned later in the document as well. Here as elsewhere, they are treated as respected members of the community. This part of the document ends by defining the partakers as those who "believe in God and the last day" (*āmana bi-llāh wa-al-yawm al-ākhir*).[20] Moreover, if the believers should disagree on something, they should "refer it to God and Muḥammad," who are the ultimate arbiters of judgment.

The next section deals mostly with the Jewish subsets of the tribes belonging to the treaty.[21] Interestingly, the text makes clear that most tribes mentioned in the early part of the treaty as partaking in it had Jewish members. The Jews were a sizable religious group in Medina. Not only that, but they were regular members of the tribes of Medina: according to this document, at least, they did not form a group of their own, their own tribe or tribes. As mentioned in chapter 2, the Jews of Western Arabia appear to have been mostly Arabic-speaking. The "Constitution" mentions numerous partaking tribes, such as al-Aws, one of the

17 The last word, *bi-l-ʿaql*, "bloodwite," is only present in Abū ʿUbayd's version (*Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 468), but the context requires it so I suggest that it was part of the original wording of the document.

18 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 343; Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 469.

19 Thus in Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 342. Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 468, has, instead of *al-naṣr*, *al-maʿrūf*, which could be translated as "amicability" or "fairness."

20 This is a common Qurʾānic refrain and definition of the minimal requirements for being a believer (e.g., Q 2:126 and 2:232).

21 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 342–343; Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 469.

leading tribes of Medina, as having Jewish members.[22] Whether or not these tribes were majority Jewish cannot be known with certainty, but it is possible.

The treaty specifies that the Jews shall "spend money" (*yunfiqūna*) with and for the believers as long as the Medinan coalition is at war.[23] Then, the different tribes and their Jewish subgroups are mentioned. Here, the versions of Ibn Hishām and Abū ʿUbayd differ in the preposition that they use characterizing the Jews:

– Ibn Hishām: "The Jews of the tribe X are a group (*umma*)[24] alongside with (*maʿa*) the believers."
– Abū ʿUbayd: "The Jews of the tribe X are a group (*umma*) from among (*min*) the believers."

There are good reasons to accept Abū ʿUbayd's reading as the original one.[25] It places the Jews explicitly as part of the believers' community: it is difficult to see why Abū ʿUbayd or a copyist before him would have made the change from *maʿa* to *min*.[26] It is much easier to see reasons for the modification of *min* to *maʿa*, which makes a delineation (somewhat) between the Jews and the believers. In Ibn Hishām's version, Jews are merely "alongside with" the believers. They are not, strictly speaking, equated with them. Abū ʿUbayd's reading also makes more sense in the light of the rest of the text, which characterizes

22 Viz.: *yahūd banī al-najjār, yahūd banī al-ḥārith, yahūd banī sāʿida, yahūd banī jusham, yahūd banī al-aws, yahūd banī thaʿlaba*, and *biṭānat yahūd* (Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 342–343; Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 469).

23 Later, the document returns to the question of expenses, probably in the context of warfare: *ʿalā al-yahūd nafaqatuhum wa-ʿalā al-muslimīn nafaqatuhum*, "the Jews have [at their responsibility] their expenses, and the *muslimūn* have [at their responsibility] their expenses" (Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 343, Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 469).

24 Despite the fact that the word *umma* later comes to denote the Muslim community in a broad sense, in the "Constitution" and the Qurʾān *umma* signifies groups of varying sizes. See, e.g., Q 3:104, where the word is used to denote a group among the community of the believers.

25 Rubin, "The Constitution of Medina" 20. On the other hand, Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina"* 139–147, claims that we should replace the word *umma* with *amana* and translate: "The Jews of the Banū ʿAwf are secure from (*amana min*) the Muʾminūn." But this is based on extremely poor textual evidence and, frankly, special pleading. Lecker's contention in his study is that the Jews and believers were distinct groups and, moreover, that the Jews were not really part of the "one community." As far as I know, Lecker is the only scholar to have put forward this; the suggestion does not seem to have been accepted by other scholars.

26 Though Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila has noted to me in a personal communication that one could hypothesize that a copyist, used to seeing (in the Qurʾān and elsewhere in Arabic literature) a very common phrase *min al-muʾminīn*, might have accidentally changed *maʿa al-muʾminīn* to *min al-muʾminīn*.

Jews as full members of the Medinan coalition: the Jews are helped by the other believers, and vice versa. Uri Rubin goes further and suggest that the preposition *min* is used here *li-l-bayān*/*tabyīn*, to make clear or elucidate the preceding indefinite word *umma*. In his understanding, the Jewish groups are called an "*umma* of believers," and not only "from among the believers."[27] However, the difference in the two translations is not enormous.

Ibn Hishām's version also presents an inferior reading in what ensues. Abū ʿUbayd's text continues: *li-l-yahūd d-y-n-hum wa-li-l-muʾminīn d-y-n-hum*, while Ibn Hishām, on the other hand, has *muslimīn* instead of *muʾminīn*.[28] As mentioned above, there might have been a tendency to place the word "Muslims" in the text during the second/eighth century, when it became the primary designation of the group. Be that as it may, how is the phrase *li-l-yahūd d-y-n-hum wa-li-l-muʾminīn d-y-n-hum* to be understood? The first option would be to read *daynuhum*, and translate: "The loans owed to the Jews [are to be upheld], and the loans owed to the [gentile] believers [are to be upheld]." This is not necessarily wrong, but perhaps the other option, *dīnuhum*, is preferable. If so, the passage reads: "The Jews have their law, and the [gentile] believers theirs." As mentioned later in this chapter, the Qurʾān (e.g., 5:48) notes that, though the different subgroups in the community of the believers should agree on basic principles, they can follow their own legal systems in some respects. Interestingly, here the word *muʾminīn* is used to denote only the gentile believers. The text notes that this right is not extended to those members of the community who sin or commit wrong deeds. However, this is further qualified that such criminals only bring calamity to themselves and their family (*fa-innahu lā yūtighu illā nafsahu wa-ahla baytihi*). A Jew doing wrong would not incriminate the wider category of Jews.

I have so far only mentioned in passing an important topic in the treaty: that of warfare. This topic is key in the "Constitution." I have noted that one of the goals of this treaty text was to found a community of believers in Medina, which included gentiles and Jews.[29] They are to help each other; shedding the blood of or harming another believer is strictly forbidden. However, this is not a pacifist document. The community is menaced by an enemy without. The text notes that, should Medina be the target of a sudden attack (the verb *dahama* is used), the members of the community should help each other. The group members should not be laggards; rather, every fighting unit (*kull ghāziya*) among the community shall follow at the heels of another (*yaʿqubu baʿḍuhā*

27 Rubin, "The Constitution of Medina" 14.

28 Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 469; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 342.

29 See also Donner, "From believers to Muslims" 31–33.

baʿḍan) in battle.[30] They should contribute to the community's financial means by paying the *nafaqa*.[31] Moreover, the believers shall avenge the blood of those community members who were killed in the path of God (*inna al-muʾminīn yubīʾu baʿḍuhum ʿan baʿḍ bi-mā nāla dimāʾahum fī sabīl Allāh*).[32] This is, indeed, a community at war.

Toward the end of the text, some closing formulae are put forward. The phrase *inna al-birr dūn al-ithm*, "devotion is better than sin," occurs here, but it had already appeared earlier in the text, functioning as a sort of refrain. The individual responsibility of the believers is then underlined: every person is responsible for her or his deeds and their repercussions (*lā yaksibu kāsib illā ʿalā nafsihi*), adding that God is the most trusted fulfiller of this treaty. The treaty, it is noted, does not help a wrongdoer or sinner (*wa-innahu lā yaḥūlu hādhā al-kitāb dūna ẓālim aw āthim*). Remarkably, the next statement notes that people are free to leave Medina (and, I would suggest, the treaty). Participating in it is not mandatory: "Who leaves (*man kharaja*) is safe, and who remains (*man qaʿada*) is safe in Medina, except whoever does wrong and sins." Then comes the very last statement of the document: "God is the protector (*jār*) of those who are pious and revere [God] (*li-man barra wa-ittaqā*), and Muḥammad is the messenger of God."[33]

In my interpretation, what the treaty endeavored to do (with some success, it would seem on the basis of the Qurʾān) is to formulate a common in-group identity[34] as God-fearing believers. The Medinan coalition included people from different tribes and religious affiliation. Both the Jewish and the gentile believers are included in this big-tent community that has a positive and distinctive identity as "one community to the exclusion of other people." Importantly, former identities (tribal affiliations, religious identities) of the Medinan coalition of the believers are not effaced or rejected but understood

30 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 342; Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 468.

31 Serjeant, "The *Sunnah Jâmiʿah* pacts" 26, astutely notes that the document presents the Jews and other believers as equals payers of the *nafaqa*.

32 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 342. This clause is missing in Abū ʿUbayd, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*.

33 This appears only in Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, i 344, but it makes sense as a closing statement. Abū ʿUbayd's version (*Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 470) ends differently: "the best partaker of this document is the pious doer of good" (*inna awlāhum bi-hādhihi al-ṣaḥīfa al-barr al-muḥsin*). In both Ibn Hishām's (*Sīra*, i 341) and Abū ʿUbayd's (*Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ii 466) versions the document began by mentioning its source and authority as the prophet. It would make sense to expect the "Constitution" to end with a mention of Muḥammad as well.

34 For the common in-group identity model, see Gaertner, Samuel L. and John F. Dovidio, *Reducing intergroup bias: The common ingroup identity model*, Philadelphia PA: Psychology Press, 2000.

as sub-categories.[35] In the work of modern social psychologists, such a common in-group identity has been demonstrated to facilitate a sense of belonging together and aid to the members of the novel identity (though they might have been, in the past, viewed as enemies).[36] The topic of mutual succor is one that the treaty comes back to time and again. Moreover, the role that the leaders (and aspiring leaders) play in this articulation of common in-group identity has been noted in various studies. In fact, "it is by becoming emblematic of a new sense of 'us' that leaders acquire their transformational power."[37] In drafting and negotiating the treaty agreement, the prophet Muḥammad united the gentile and Jewish believers of Medina as one community set apart from other people and placed himself as its leader. The "Constitution" is a remarkable early witness to the processes that made him the head of a city state.

One of the significant features that arises on reading the "Constitution" is the fact that the presence (indeed, heavy presence) of Jewish individuals and groups among the tribes mentioned in the text is taken for granted and matter-of-factly. In chapter 2, I mustered the epigraphic evidence on Jews around Medina, which fits nicely with the picture presented by the "Constitution." Why Christians are not mentioned in the treaty is somewhat of a mystery. The Qurʾān indicates that they were readily present in the environment. Perhaps, in Medina, Christians existed mostly as sole individuals, without forming tribes that would have been majority Christian. Perhaps another treaty, now lost, was forged with the tribes with sizeable Christian sections. Or perhaps they were so embedded among Muḥammad's followers, the believers, that they did not have to be mentioned.[38] With the evidence at hand presently, one simply does not know.

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35 Gaertner and Dovidio, *Reducing intergroup bias* 86–87, 97, 146–148, 163–168, note that the common in-group mode works best if the previous identities are not rejected but rather treated as legitimate sub-identities.

36 Gaertner and Dovidio, *Reducing intergroup bias* 7.

37 Haslam, Reicher and Platow, *The new psychology of leadership* 89. Siegel and Badaan note with regard to modern sectarian speech online: "We find that elite-endorsed messages that prime common religious identity are the most consistently effective in reducing the spread of sectarian hate speech. Our results provide suggestive evidence that religious elites may play an important role as social referents—alerting individuals to social norms of acceptable behavior." (Siegel, Alexandra A. and Vivienne Badaan, "#No2Sectarianism: Experimental approaches to reducing sectarian hate speech online," in *American Political Science Review* 114/3 (2020), 837–855, at 837.)

38 If this is the case, then my proposal that, in this text, the word *muʾminūn* denotes in particular the gentile component in the community of the believers will have to be revised.

2 The Believers in the Medinan Qurʾān

2.1 *Core Beliefs and Rituals*

It is a feature of the Medinan strata of the Qurʾān[39] that the key beliefs and rituals of the believers are articulated in more detail than in Mecca. It is in particular such Medinan verses that I will discuss in this section, though some Meccan ones are incorporated as well (I will mark them where they appear). The point of this section is to dig deeper into the social categorizations put forward in the Qurʾān. I have noted so far that the Meccan Qurʾānic communication appears to categorize most Jews and Christians as believers; the "Constitution," a Medinan-era document, continues this discourse, though it only deals with the gentile and Jewish believers. If explicit statements do not place Jews and Christians beyond the pale, perhaps the Qurʾān mentions beliefs and rituals that would part ways with them? However, as will become clear, such is not the case.[40]

According to the Qurʾān and the "Constitution," merely believing is not enough for group membership: one must also carry out the duties and practices of the community. As the Meccan verse 29:2 mocks: "Do people think that

39 In contrast to the Meccan layer of the Qurʾān, the Medinan one consists of, by and large, longer *sūra*s, some of which are compilations of diverse materials stemming from various years of the prophet's life; see Neuwirth, "Vom Rezitationstext"; Sinai, "Processes of literary growth." *Pace* Shoemaker, *Creating the Qurʾan*, I opine that the bulk of the material goes back to Muḥammad's proclamation. As for Reda, Nevin, *The al-Baqara crescendo: Understanding the Qurʾan's style, narrative structure, and running themes*, Montreal, 2017, and "The poetics of Sūrat Āl ʿImrān's narrative structure (Q 3)," in Marianna Klar (ed.), *Structural dividers in the Qurʾan*, London: Routledge, 2021, 27–53, she suggests that even longer *sūra*s such as Q 2 and Q 3 can be interpreted as single units with meticulous organization. Reda's idea is not necessarily incompatible with Neuwirth, Sinai, and other scholars' view that the longer *sūra*s consists of distinct, non-contemporaneous pericopes: it can be suggested that whoever edited the passages into single *sūra*s (in my opinion probably a post-prophetic process) paid attention to the format and organization of these units. For an excellent introduction to the Medinan Qurʾān, see Sinai, Nicolai, "The unknown known: Some groundwork for interpreting the Medinan Qurʾan," in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 66 (2015–2016), 47–96; however, as will be seen, my interpretation of the religious groups and social categorizations in the Medinan layers of the Qurʾān differs substantially from Sinai's reading.

40 The theoretical background that I put forward in this section is that identities can be understood to be "signaled" through, for example, clothing, practices, or discourse, as articulated by Ehala, Martin, *Signs of identity: The anatomy of belonging*, London: Routledge, 2018. On this, see also Lindstedt, "Signs of identity in the Quran." Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qurʾan* 91–101, compares Qurʾān and Jewish notions of prayer and fasting, though his conclusions diverge from mine.

they are left alone and not tested if they simply say: 'We believe'?" Another Meccan passage, Q 49:15 defines the believers: "The believers are those who believe in God and his messenger without doubting and who strive in God's path with their wealth and lives. They are the truthful." Being a group member, then, entails both espousing the core beliefs but also performing the core rituals and practices. The latter include fighting for the community (implicitly in Q 49:15 too), which is elucidated in the next section.

Selecting the core beliefs and practices as articulated in the Qur'ān is, naturally, a somewhat subjective matter.[41] Some of the aspects, such as obedience to God and the law, have been dealt with elsewhere in this book. Here, I will note the following core beliefs and practices, which, I suggest, arise somewhat naturally from the Qur'ān, given their numerous occurrences in the text:

- Belief in God and the last day
- Belief in the prophets and scriptures, including Muḥammad and his revelations
- Doing good deeds and being pious
- Praying and giving alms
- Fasting and performing the pilgrimage

Notably, in a few verses of the Qur'ān, the core dogmata and praxes are also ascribed to Jews and Christians, at least a minority among them. The importance, in the Qur'ānic discourse, of belief in God and the last day is clear in all strata of the text. For example, Q 2:4 notes that the believers are those who are sure of the afterlife (*bi-l-ākhira hum yūqinūn*). In the previous chapter, I noted that Meccan passages quite often classify the People of the Book as believers, not only as believers in God and the last day but also in the authenticity of Muḥammad's revelations (e.g., Q 13:36, 28:52–55). This discourse is continued in some Medinan passages, for instance in Q 3:199:[42]

> Among the People of the Book are those who believe in God and what has been revealed to you [pl.] and what has been revealed to them. They are humble before God. They do not trade God's signs/revelations (*āyāt*) for a small gain. They will receive their reward with their Lord. God is swift in reckoning.

41 See, e.g., Fazlur Rahman, *Major themes*, who emphasizes *taqwā*, piety or God-consciousness, over other aspects of the Qur'ān.

42 For a treatment of the narrative structure of Q 3 (an important *sūra* regarding the social identity of the Medinan community), see Reda, "The poetics of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān."

Some verses, such as Q 5:82–86, differentiate between the Jews and the Christians: while the latter are classified as believers in this passage, the Jews are not. The discourse is varied, then, but it must be acknowledged that, throughout the Qurʾānic strata, there are verses that state that some Jews and Christians believe, though, in the Medinan period, the overall picture is more critical toward them.

Doing good and pious deeds (indicated with Arabic words from the roots *ḥ-s-n*, *kh-y-r*, and *ṣ-l-ḥ*) is mentioned in the Qurʾān as a requirement for entry to paradise (e.g., 3:133–134, 10:26). Such benevolent actions are an important part of the cementing of the in-group solidarity in the Qurʾānic message. They are attributed to Jews and Christians too. Q 3:114 notes that some People of the Book are quick to do good deeds (*yusāriʿūna fī al-khayrāt*) and are to be classified among the pious (*al-ṣāliḥīn*).

As for praying and giving alms, it should be noted that the Qurʾān does not communicate in detail how they should be carried out, though prostration (*sajada*, e.g., 7:206) and kneeling down (*rakaʿa*, e.g., 3:43) are mentioned as part of prayer.[43] It appears obvious that Jews and Christians in Arabia, as elsewhere, prayed and gave alms. Indeed, the words in the Qurʾān indicating prayer (*ṣalāt*, written *ṣ-l-w-t*) and alms (*zakāt*, but written *z-k-w-t*) were borrowed from some form of Aramaic.[44] In themselves, prayer and alms-giving cannot be taken to delineate groups. As for alms, there are no explicit Qurʾānic statements saying whether the People of the Book are carrying out their duties or not concerning alms, they are simply commanded to do this (e.g., 2:43, 98:5). However, Q 4:162 notes that some among the Jews are upholding the prayer and paying alms.

The important question regarding prayer is, are there Qurʾānic passages that would note that Jews or Christians prayed differently than the believers or that the prayer of the People of the Book is invalid? In fact, the following Meccan passage notes that the People of the Book pray similarly to the general Qurʾānic portrayal of prayer:

> Q 17:107–109 (Meccan): Say [prophet]: 'Believe (pl.) in it or do not.'[45] When it [the revelation] is recited to those who have been given knowledge

43 On this, see also Rubin, Uri, "Morning and evening prayers in early Islam," in *JSAI* 10 (1987), 40–64, who also treats later Arabic literature on this question.

44 Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary* 153, 198–199.

45 This appears to be addressing the gentiles, who consist of both believers and disbelievers and who are contrasted with the believing Jews and Christians ("those who have been given knowledge before").

> before, they fall on their faces in prostration (*sujjadan*) and say: 'Glory to our Lord! The promise of our Lord has been realized.' They fall on their faces weeping—it increases their humility.

Moreover, the Medinan Q 3:113 notes that some among the People of the Book are upright, reciting God's words (*āyāt*) while prostrating (*wa-hum yasjudūn*). Prostration—that is, the bodily and physical aspect of prayer—does not appear to delineate the believers, Jews, and Christians. Prostration in prayer is attested in the poetic corpus as well since, in a poem, al-Aʿshā swears by "the Lord of those who prostrate themselves in the evening" (*wa-rabbi l-sājidīna ʿashiyyatan*), referring to Christians praying.[46]

As is well known, in the medieval era and nowadays Muslims consider it a religious duty to pray five times a day; the Shīʿīs often combine the prayers, performing the prayer three times a day, though carrying out all five prayer cycles.[47] However, the Qurʾānic text appears to suggest two or three daily prayers, instead.[48] If the early community prayed three times a day, this could be another instance of shared practices between the religious communities. Indeed, thrice a day is the usual Jewish practice of praying.[49] Though, as far as I know, there is no evidence that late antique Christians upheld an idea of the number of daily prayers, an earlier Greek text, probably from the first century CE, *The Didache*, notes that Christ-believers should pray three times a day.[50]

Regarding the prayer direction, *qibla* in Arabic, *sūra* 2[51] contains verses discussing it and its possible signification. Verses 2:142–144 note that the prayer direction of Muḥammad's group changed at some point, and verse 145 adds that the People of the Book pray toward a different direction. However, the importance of prayer direction as a boundary marker is qualified by 2:115 and 2:177. To quote the former: "To God belongs the east and the west. Wherever you turn, the face of God is there. God is all-encompassing, knowing." Verse 2:114 mentions "God's places of worship" (*masājid Allāh*), so it makes sense to assume that

46 Sinai, *Rain-giver* 51.

47 This is, naturally, prescriptive. It is safe to say that there have been, in the past as well as today, a large number of Muslims (perhaps the majority) who do not pray five times a day.

48 See Q 2:238, 6:52, 7:204–206, 11:114, 17:78–79, 18:28, 20:130, 24:58, 25:64, 50:39, 52:48–49, 76:26.

49 Jaffee, *Early Judaism*, 196; Stroumsa, *The making of the Abrahamic religions* 161.

50 Ehrman, *After the New Testament* 460.

51 For an important reading of the style and structure of *sūra* 2, see Reda, *The al-Baqara crescendo*.

2:115 is indeed dealing with the direction(s) of prayer. As chapters 7–8 will note, there is (post-prophet) archaeological evidence from two places in the Near East, the Kathisma church and the open-air place of worship in Be'er Ora, suggesting that Christians and Arabian believers prayed in the same building, each community facing toward its prayer direction. Moreover, there is literary evidence proposing that Jews and Arabian believers prayed together in the place of worship built on the Temple Mount before the Dome of the Rock (though prayer direction is not discussed in these reports).

Though prayer habits appear not to have created any kind of firm boundary between the believers and the People of the Book, the issue of the pilgrimage and fasting present more complex cases. The pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), probably to the Kaʿba, and the fast (*ṣawm*) in Ramaḍān are discussed in some detail in the Qurʾān (see 2:158, 183–185, 196–200, 5:97, 22:26–29). A few things should be noted, however. First, the Qurʾān decrees fasting in many different contexts, not only during Ramaḍān (see e.g., Q 4:92: as a means of repenting after killing another believer; 5:95: after hunting during the pilgrimage; 5:89: after breaking an oath). Fasting is, in the Qurʾānic message, a broad concept; that the fast of Ramaḍān later emerges as one of the so-called pillars of Islam blurs this message. Moreover, it is not entirely clear what role the Qurʾān assigns to the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*). Note, for instance, that Q 2:158 says that performing the *ḥajj* is not blameworthy for the one doing it (*lā junāḥ ʿalayhi*)—hardly a wholehearted espousal.

As for the pilgrimage and fasting, the Qurʾān never ascribes these practices to the People of the Book. On the other hand, it should be noted that the Qurʾān never states that Jews and Christians are *not* participating in them. Indeed Q 2:183 suggests that the fasting practices of the believers are similar to those of the previous communities.[52] It was noted in chapter 3 that the poetic corpus suggests that the pilgrimage to the Kaʿba was an established (though local) practice in the pre-Islamic era and, moreover, some Christian Arabic poets, too, appear to have celebrated Mecca.[53] Further research on pilgrimage and fasting practices in late antique Arabia is a desideratum, but until new epigraphic, archaeological, or other material evidence comes to light, the topic remains somewhat in the realm of speculation.

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52 On verses Q 2:183–186, see also Sinai, "Towards a redactional history," 368–371. He suggests that Q 2:183–184 and Q 2:185–186 form two distinct utterances. He notes that Q 2:183–184 embrace and endorse a type of fasting that was in line with existing Jewish custom, though Q 2:185–186 (a later insertion) offered "a more autonomous practice," according to Sinai. It is true that Q 2:185 proclaims the month of Ramaḍān as the (a?) month of fasting. However, the Qurʾān does not articulate this in contrast to Jews or Christians.

53 Miller, *Tribal poetics* 104; Sinai, *Rain-giver* 52.

All in all, when looking at the core beliefs and practices that the Qurʾān enjoins the believers to follow, interesting conclusions emerge: In fact, most of the dogmata and deeds are also ascribed to Jews and Christians as well. The Qurʾān explicitly acknowledges that (at least some) Jews and Christians carry out the core practices and espouse the core beliefs. Moreover, as a matter of fact, one should note the difference between the two discourses: generally speaking, whereas the Qurʾānic instructions to the believers are *prescriptive* (indicating what the believers should be doing and believing, though at the present they might not), the Qurʾānic communication about the People of the Book is oftentimes *descriptive* (indicating what the Jews and Christians are actually doing).

2.2 *The Persecuted Emigrants* (*muhājirūn and* muhājirāt)*, Fighting for the Community*

The Medinan passages of the Qurʾān (e.g., Q 60:10) portray the community as including persecuted emigrants (*muhājirūn* and *muhājirāt*). The concept of being an emigrant is connected with the notion of the community being at risk and under attack, and for the defense of which the emigrants (and Medinan believers) should fight. The Qurʾānic category of the *muhājirūn* is, in later Islamic interpretive tradition, understood to signify those Muslims who emigrated (performed the *hijra*) from Mecca to Medina, but as Mette Mortensen has shown, the original Qurʾānic notion is also connected with spiritual secession, ascetism, and physical fighting.[54] She describes the Qurʾānic *muhājirūn* as follows:

> Going out, however, is not without cost or sacrifice, which leads to what I would argue is an essential concept in the definition of the Qurʾānic *muhājirūn*: asceticism. Emigrating in the way of God is encouraged in the Qurʾān, but this emigration entails deprivation and sacrifice in terms of loss of wealth, property, and possibly even the lives of the emigrants, a fact which the Qurʾān acknowledges (Q8:72; Q9:20). However, the understanding of the concept of asceticism that I would like to make use of here is not primarily centered on deprivation, but on the original Greek meaning of the word (*áskēsis*): "exercise" or "training."[55]

The Medinan community, on the basis of the Qurʾānic text and the "Constitution," was a community which was menaced by outsider forces. The Qurʾān

54 Mortensen, *A contribution* 159–171.

55 Mortensen, *A contribution* 171.

notes that some of the believers had been expelled from their homes (Q 3:175, 59:8). It was a community that had to be prepared to fight. Being a *muhājir*, emigrant, entailed that one had to be ready for fighting, *qitāl*, and striving, *jihād*.

Warfare in the name of and defense of religion was a rather popular concept in the Near East of late antiquity, as chapters 2 and 3 have mentioned. The pre-Islamic South Arabian inscriptions evidence that God was adduced as providing victory on the battlefield by both the Jews and Christians. It is also attested in the early sixth-century Ethiopic inscription that begins, "God is power and strength, God is power in battles."[56] Contemporary with the life of the prophet, the emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641) invoked the idea of holy war against Sasanid Persia. It appears that Heraclius proclaimed that those who fall while fighting are to be regarded as martyrs. Tommaso Tesei has recently suggested that Heraclius' war propaganda might undergird the Qurʾānic discourse on war, which shows similar features.[57] The idea that God not only condones but also helps in warfare appears to have been commonly accepted in late antiquity.

Fighting, *qitāl*, and striving, *jihād*, are rather important costly signals that the Medinese community of believers is encouraged to carry out in the Qurʾān (and also in the "Constitution," as noted above).[58] Fighting is often directly connected with the *hijra*, emigration or flight to Medina. Qurʾān 2:218 states: "Those who believe and those who emigrate (*hājarū*)[59] and strive (*jāhadū*) in God's path, aspire for the mercy of God." On evidence, it appears that much of the community that was forming in Medina was fleeing for its life. The community was fighting to defend itself—though occasionally also to expand. The activities of *qitāl* and *jihād* are often said to be done *fī sabīl allāh*, "in God's path" (e.g., Q 8:74), or even *fī allāh*, "in God" (Q 22:78 cf. Q 29:69). They are depicted as arduous tasks but nevertheless as something commendable—there is no Qurʾānic passage that states generally that fighting or striving are deeds that should be avoided (that is, if carried out by the believers, not the enemy). *Jihād*, which sometime later becomes the most common designation for religious (or

56 RIÉth 191, quoted in Robin, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm" 155. There is a cross engraved before "in battles."

57 Tesei, Tommaso, "Heraclius' war propaganda and the Qur'ān's promise of reward for dying in battle," in *SI* 114/2 (2019), 219–247. See also Sarris, *Empires of faith* 266–267.

58 The literature on religious warfare and Islam is immense. For orientation, see Cook, David, *Martyrdom in Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Demichelis, Marco, *Violence in early Islam: Religious narratives, the Arab conquests and the canonization of jihad*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2021; Firestone, Reuven, *Jihad: The origin of holy war in Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

59 For the words *hijra* and *muhājirūn* and their probable connection with fighting (in later evidence at least), see Crone, "The first-century concept" and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 548.

sacred or just) warfare, is not necessarily always synonymous with *qitāl* in the Qur'ān; it can also refer to other forms of exertion. But in many verses the synonymity can be supposed. The expression *fī sabīl allāh*, moreover, is perhaps not automatically related to fighting in the Qur'ān, even if this later becomes the primary context for it, as can also be seen in the epigraphic evidence of this study. Let me next give an exposition of the Qur'ānic verses. The discussion is thematic: it is very difficult to come up with a chronology of the ethics of war.

I will start with *qitāl* and *qātala*. Verse 2:216 states that "fighting (*al-qitāl*) has been decreed to you (pl.), although it may be loathsome to you" (see also Q 4:77, 47:20). In a much-discussed verse (Q 9:29), it is commanded: "Fight those who do not believe in God and the last day, who do not deem illicit what God and His messenger have proclaimed to be such, and who do not follow the law of justice (*dīn al-ḥaqq*) from those who have been given the Book, until they humbly pay the *jizya ʿan yad*."[60] It should be noted that "those who have been given the Book" (that is, the People of the Book) are not mentioned as an enemy category all and sundry. Rather, only those among them who do not believe in God or who are not law-observant should be fought. As I have endeavored to argue, the Qur'ān does not categorically suggest that Jews or Christians are not believers or law-observing.

Fighting is sometimes connected with "spending money" (*anfaqa*) in God's path (Q 57:10). The enemy is mentioned as an active partner in fighting too, although usually left anonymous: "fight (pl.) in God's path against those that fight against you" (Q 2:190; see also 3:13). The Qur'ānic discourse on war, in general, includes the notion that warfare should be continued (only) as long as the enemy does too. The Qur'ān mentions different preconditions for fighting: the believers should not fight at the sacred precinct (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) if they are not attacked first. If that happens, they can kill the enemy since "such is the recompense of the unbelievers" (Q 2:191; see also 2:217). Furthermore, hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*) and unbelievers should be fought only as long as they fight against the believers. If the former leave the latter at peace, God has not allowed fighting (Q 4:90; cf. 9:7–13).

However, not all present in the Qur'ānic milieu are willing to fight: the hypocrites (*alladhīna nāfaqū*) are said to have rejected the command, pretending not to know how to fight (Q 3:167). Those who take part in fighting are also con-

60 The interpretations of the phrase *al-jizya ʿan yad* vary. The word *al-jizya* refers to tax or tribute, but *ʿan yad* is somewhat mysterious. It could mean "willingly," "readily," "in kind," "for each person," "out of their own property," or something else. For interpretations, see Bravmann, *The spiritual background* 199–212; Rubin, Uri, "Qur'ān and poetry: More data concerning the Qur'ānic *jizya* verse (*ʿan yadin*)," in *JSAI* 31 (2006), 139–146.

trasted with those who stay behind (*qaʿadū*, e.g., Q 3:168, 9:81). In one verse, the Qurʾān (4:75) asks the audience why they are not fighting in God's path and for the weak men, women, and children. Citing Firestone, the copious verses that display opposition to God's commands to fight suggest "that the Muslim community was far from unified in its view on warring on behalf of religion and the religious community."[61] In some instances (e.g., Q 48:16), those unwilling to fight are described as "nomads" (*aʿrāb*). In the Qurʾān, "hypocrites" (*munāfiqūn*) and "those who stay behind" are particularly clear examples of free-riders that were not willing to perform costly deeds, such as fighting, for the in-group. Their existence is seen in the Qurʾān as a problem for intragroup cohesion and solidarity.[62] Often, Islamic exegesis and modern scholarship treat the *munāfiqūn* as a group wavering in *faith*[63] but it is perhaps better to interpret them as purported free-riders that waver in *deeds*.

This aversion toward fighting is said to have been usual in earlier communities as well: after the life of Moses, the Israelites are commanded to fight but most of them turn away (*tawallaw*, Q 2:246). However, the prophet Muḥammad is somewhat more successful in conveying the command to fight, leading the believers to their battle stations and victory at Badr (Q 3:121–127). Elsewhere the Qurʾān (8:65) enjoins him to encourage the believers to fight, and many people are indeed said to have fought steadfastly on the side of the prophets (in plural, Q 3:146).

As stated above, *jihād*, "striving," in the Qurʾān did not necessarily always signify physical fighting to the original audience of its message. However, later it became the standard appellation for holy war. Since both *qitāl* and *jihād* are often said to be done *fī sabīl allāh*, clearly the Qurʾān is somehow locating the two concepts in the same context, and in some cases it is rather clear that the Qurʾān is in fact portraying *jihād* as physical struggle (Q 8:70–75, 9:14–20). This is connected with otherworldly rewards: *jihād* is connected with the entrance to paradise in Q 3:140–143. Above it was stated that those who fight

61 Firestone, *Jihad* 77. However, in contrast to Firestone, I do not think that the in-group described in the Qurʾān can be called "the Muslim community."

62 For more on the "free-rider problem" in religious groups, see Stark, Rodney, *The rise of Christianity: How the obscure, marginal Jesus movement became the dominant religious force in the Western world in a few centuries*, San Francisco CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997, 174–176.

63 For orientation, see the valuable survey by Adang, Camilla, "Hypocrites and hypocrisy," in *EQ*, ii (2002), 468–472. The Arabic *munāfiq* derives from the Ethiopic *manāfeq*, which has meanings related to hypocrisy, doubt, dividing the community, and causing schisms. See Dost, *An Arabian Qurʾān*, 227–229. Once again, the connection to Southern Arabia and its religious map and vocabulary is palpable.

are contrasted with those who stay behind, and the same is the case for those who strive (*al-mujāhidūn*) as well (Q 4:95, 9:81, 9:86). In Q 9:73 and 66:9, the prophet himself is addressed: "O prophet, strive against the unbelievers and hypocrites (*jāhid al-kuffār wa-l-munāfiqīn*) and be tough against them. Their refuge is Hell." In some verses (e.g., Q 49:15), striving with willingness to spend one's money and even life is mentioned as one of the conditions for being a believer, alongside believing in God and His prophet. As for the enemies of the believers, they strive too, but only to try to convince the believers that they should associate other beings with God (Q 29:8, 31:15).

Killing (*qatala*) is in itself negative in the Qur'ān: to give some examples, historical communities such as the people of Moses are described as having killed prophets (Q 2:61)[64] as well as other individuals (Q 2:72). In a recurring Qur'ānic reproach, humanity is admonished because every time God has sent messengers bringing something that people do not like, they either disbelieve them or kill them (e.g., Q 2:82).[65] One of Adam's sons killed the other, which was a calamity (Q 5:27–30). People are instructed not to kill each other (Q 4:29), or their children (Q 6:140 and 151), and a believer should not kill another believer, lest he face Hell (Q 4:92–93). Pharaoh is portrayed in a negative vein as killing and ravaging (Q 7:127, 7:141, 40:26); what is more, Joseph's brothers scheme to kill him (Q 12:9). There are some instances, however, where killing (*qatala*), not just fighting (*qātala*), is required. In Q 2:190–191, believers are commanded to kill those who fight against them, since "discord is worse than killing" (*al-fitna ashadd min al-qatl*; this phrase also occurs in Q 2:217). Hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*) too should be captured or killed (Q 4:88–89) as well as associators (*al-mushrikīn*), if they do not repent (Q 9:5). The text of Q 8:17 describes a battle between the believers and unbelievers and states "it was not you (pl.) who

64 Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qur'an* 51, asserts: "The Bible does not attest to either [Q 2:61 and Q 5:70] of these accusations from the Qur'an, nor to any instance of the specific charges they inspired; namely, that the Jews killed some particular prophet or another." However, the reader is confused since Bar-Asher then goes to list Biblical passages that *do* mention the killing of the prophets (1 Kings 19:19 and Jeremiah 2:30, and, from the New Testament, Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34, Romans 11:3, 1 Thessalonians 2:14–15, to which one should add Luke 11:48 and Matthew 23:29–31). It would seem to me, then, that the idea that some Jewish individuals or groups had at some point killed some (anonymous) prophets was current among the Jews themselves. For the idea that the New Testament books can be read as evidence for *Jewish* (rather than Christian) notions and narratives, see Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels*.

65 This harks back to Luke 11:49, where Jesus says: "Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute'"; el-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 121–125.

killed them, but rather God killed them." Elsewhere too, God is shown as taking an active part in the fight between believers and unbelievers (Q 8:36–39, 9:14).

Whereas the Qurʾānic attitude towards killing is context-specific, being killed (*qutila*) for God is usually portrayed as commendable: "Do not say to/about those killed in God's path (*li-man yuqtalu fī sabīl allāh*) that they are dead. Rather, they are alive" (Q 2:154; see also 3:169). It is furthermore stated that falling in God's path is a better bargain than amassing fortunes in this world (Q 3:157–158). Indeed, mercantile terminology is usual in these passages describing one's willingness to sacrifice oneself for God's cause: "Let those of you who are willing to trade the life of this world for the life to come fight in God's path. To anyone who fights in God's path, whether killed or victorious, We shall give a great reward" (Q 4:74). "God has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties in exchange for [the promise] that they will have Paradise. They fight in God's path, so they kill and are killed" (Q 9:111; see also 61:10–12). Paradise is, then, the explicit Qurʾānic reward for those who fall while fighting as it is for other groups who do good (Q 3:195): their deeds will not come to naught (Q 47:4). This promise naturally only applies to the believers and not their enemies: the latter will be killed or expelled and then face painful punishment, except for those who repent (Q 5:33). In the Qurʾān, words of the root *sh-h-d* seem to relate to witnessing rather than martyrdom. Over 150 occurrences of such words appear in the Qurʾān but perhaps only Q 3:140 and 4:69 could have anything to do martyrs.[66]

This book has argued that Muḥammad's community was an eschatological one: he and his followers believed that, since the end was nigh, people should repent and (if they had not already done so) acknowledge God as the only divine being, recanting associationism (*shirk*) and any traces of idolatry (e.g., *al-maysir*). In my opinion, what is remarkable in the Qurʾānic discourse on warfare is that it has *nothing* to do with this eschatological belief: though the discourse is a rather important theme in the Medinan strata, I am not aware of any passage that would state that warfare, fighting, or conquests would initiate the end times. The Qurʾān, I would suggest, is the reaction to the specific context of the Medinan community, which was obliged to fight the enemies. It is true that a paradisal reward is promised to those who fall on the battlefield. But this promise is *individual* and not connected with the eschaton that was upon all.

It needs to be emphasized that there are no Qurʾānic passages that suggest that Muḥammad's believers were engaged, first and foremost, or categorically,

66 See also el-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 87–88.

in war with Jews and Christians; even in the case of Q 9:29, the People of the Book are mentioned only in passing, as a sidenote. In addition to Q 9:29, there are two other passages that need to be discussed in this connection. The first is Q 3:111, which notes that "if they [the sinners among the People of the Book mentioned in Q 3:110] meet you in battle (*wa-in yuqātilukum*), they will flee and have no helpers." Here, as in Q 9:29, the statement hardly appears to include categorically all Jews and Christians but rather a transgressing segment among them. Moreover, the expression "*if* they meet you in battle" (*wa-in yuqātilukum*) appears to signify a possible event rather than a certain or recurring one. Another important passage is Q 33:25–27, which depicts a battle between the believers and the disbelievers which ends in the triumph of the former. Q 33:26 explicitly mentions "those from among the People of the Book who aided them [scil. the disbelievers]" (*alladhīna ẓāharūhum min ahl al-kitāb*). According to this pericope, in one clash at least, some People of the Book were supporting the disbelievers—but this, again, explicitly concerns only a portion of them and, more importantly still, Q 33:25–27 makes a clear difference between the disbelievers and the People of the Book, which are mentioned as distinct social categories. All in all, the battle lines are, hence, not "Muslims" versus Jews and Christians in the Qurʾān, but believers versus disbelievers; what is more, the latter should be fought only as long as they themselves are belligerent. As will become clear in what follows, the Medinan Qurʾānic strata accept some Jews and Christians as part of the believer community: one supposes that this would mean that they also took part in the fighting for the in-group. The "Constitution," as mentioned above, quite clearly supposes, or at least demands, that the Jews are fighting against the enemy alongside the other believers.

3 The People of the Book in the Medinan Period

Though scholars might acknowledge that the Meccan Qurʾānic discourse represents a stage when the People of the Book could be considered group members, it is still common in scholarship to suggest that a reified, distinct Islam must have been present in Medina, at least in the last years of the prophet.[67] However, as will be argued in what follows, the Meccan kerygma of gentile believers co-existing with Jewish and Christian believers is continued in the Medinan

67 Sinai, *The Qurʾan* 125, for instance, argues that verses such as 5:12–19, 41–86, and 116–118 "betray an explicit demarcation of the Qurʾanic community from Judaism and Christianity and harshly criticise Jewish and Christian beliefs."

layers, notwithstanding the criticism that is directed toward some Jews and Christians and some Jewish and Christian dogmata.[68]

It is true that certain Medinan Qurʾānic passages appear to equate, categorically or in part, the People of the Book with the disbelievers and the associators. For instance, Q 2:105 notes that "the disbelievers among the People of the Book" and "the associators" do not want good for the believers. Q 3:186 is similar in content, mentioning that the associators and the People of the Book will say hurtful words about the believers. Verses 4:51–52 note that some People of the Book still worship idols (*al-jibt wa-l-ṭāghūt*) and, because of this, have been cursed by God. Like the *mushrikūn*, associators, they are not, then, monotheist enough, though the exact reason for the claim of Q 4:51–52 is unclear. The passage Q 3:98–99 enjoins the prophet to ask the People of the Book why they deny God's signs or revelations (*āyāt*) and, furthermore, divert the believers from God's way. Moreover, a group among the People of the Book endeavors to revert the believers to disbelief (Q 3:100; similarly, Q 2:109). Verses 3:187–188 and 5:12–14 represent passages of supersession: earlier in history, God made his covenant (*mīthāq*) with the People of the Book, but, as a group, they have lost the covenant, which now belongs to the believers.

Sūra 5 consists of many polemics about the People of the Book.[69] Verse 5:65 notes that "if only (*law*) the People of the Book believed, We would absolve them of their bad deeds and make them enter the gardens of bliss." The word *law*, introducing the conditional sentence, suggests that most of them do not believe. The verse does not describe, however, a completely hypothetical or impossible situation, since Q 5:66 notes that some of the People of the Book are upright (for a similar *law* sentence, which is then modified, see Q 3:110). Q 5:51 goes as far as noting that the believers should not take Jews or Christians as *awliyāʾ*, friends or allies.[70] This appears to be qualified by Q 5:57–58, which notes that the believers should not take as *awliyāʾ* those among the People of the Book who mocked the believers' law (*dīn*) and call to prayer.

There are various Qurʾānic passages that bewail the fact, or at least the imagined notion, that the Jews and the Christians are vehemently arguing with each

68 See also Sachedina, *The Islamic roots* 26: "the Koran's theology of religious tolerance cannot be ascribed [merely] to the earlier Mekkan period of the revelation when Muslims lived as a minority in the midst of a hostile majority of the unbelievers, as some modern Muslim apologists have tried to argue."

69 For its structure, see Sinai, "Towards a redactional history," who views both Q 4 and Q 5 as having been subject to quite a lot of redaction, though he does not argue that these instances of redaction are necessarily post-Muḥammadan.

70 On this verse, its exegesis, and late antique Christian parallels, see also Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 411–415.

other. In Q 2:113, the two groups claim that the other does not have anything to stand on. In Q 2:111, furthermore, they are portrayed as claiming that only their own group will get to paradise, a notion that the Qur'ān rejects.[71] Q 5:18 has them argue over which group is "the children of God and His loved ones."[72] Q 3:65 shows them debating who owns the patriarch Abraham. According to my reading, these passages do not say that the Jews or Christians will not get to paradise or that they have no claim to the Abrahamic pedigree; rather, the Qur'ān asserts that the Jews and Christians are not the only ones to do so. The gentile believers also have a potential to accomplish these things.

Sūra 98 proffers an interesting case, first adopting a censuring and then apparently a more confident stance vis-à-vis the People of the Book.[73] It starts by noting that a disbelieving group among them (*alladhīna kafarū min ahl al-kitāb*) and the associators were unhinged until clear evidence came to them: a messenger of God, reciting pure scrolls, in which there are upright writings (*kutub qayyima*) (Q 98:1–3). The wording of these verses might suggest that they accepted this evidence and messenger, but the opposite is true, the Qur'ān asserts: they actually became more divided (Q 98:4). The fate of the associators and the disbelievers among the People of the Book is certain: the eternal fire of hell (Q 98:6). However, those who believe (of the People of the Book?) are "the best of creatures" (Q 98:7): they will enjoy the eternal grace of God in paradise as a reward for their reverence for God (Q 98:8). The critical pronouncements surveyed in this section are, indeed, highly remarkable and there is no need to try to hide the fact that they exist in the Qur'ān. As will become clear in what follows, however, they are far from being the sole message or tone among the Medinan Qur'ānic passages.

It is worth underscoring that the Medinan Qur'ānic communication also includes very positive statements about the People of the Book. The idea that the description of Jews and Christians becomes increasingly sour, with a final and decisive "parting of the ways" occurring toward the end of the prophet's life, and with the word *al-islām* being understood as reified Islam, is not tenable, in my opinion, and will be discussed in more detail below in this chapter.

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71 This appears to be because verses such as 2:62 and 5:69 articulate a more universalistic understanding of paradise. For more on the social groups in the Qur'ānic conceptualization of the afterlife, see below in this chapter.

72 According to both Jewish and Christian texts, the late antique Jews and Christians *did* quarrel with each other about who the people and sons of God are; el-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 95–96; Jaffee, *Early Judaism* 222. This Qur'ānic argument should be understood in this context.

73 On it, see also Sinai, *The Qur'an* 130–132.

For instance, Q 5:66 notes that among the People of the Book there is an *umma muqtaṣida*, "moderate community," though most of them are evil-doers. The concept of *umma muqtaṣida* can be connected with another concept, *umma wasaṭ*, "middle community," which in Q 2:143 is an appellation used for the in-group. Furthermore, Q 3:113 notes that among the People of the Book is an *umma qā'ima*, "upright community." Verse Q 3:75 notes that some of the People of the Book are indeed trustworthy. The importance of the passage Q 3:110–115 should be emphasized. It is clear proof that, in the Qur'ān, the development is not simply one of growing hostility toward the People of the Book. Rather, in this case, Q 3:110–112 paint a very bleak picture of those that have been given the Book before: though some of them are believers (*minhum al-mu'minūn*), most of them are sinners (*aktharuhum al-fāsiqūn*, Q 3:110). Not only that, Q 3:111 describes them as enemies (though cowards) in battle, and Q 3:112 says that they have invited the wrath of God because they have disbelieved His verses and killed prophets, being disobeying and transgressing. The tone changes drastically in Q 3:113, which, I would suggest, marks a later interpolation suffixed to Q 3:110–112. Verse 3:113 proclaims that some of the People of the Book recite God's verses and prostrate throughout the night. Q 3:114 notes that they believe in God and the last day, race to do good things, and are righteous. For this, they will receive the reward—in all likelihood to be understood as the heavenly reward (Q 3:115).

A similar pronouncement in tone, and possibly a similar a process of Qur'ānic development, can be found in Q 2:120–121. Verse 2:120 begins very critically by noting that the Jews and Christians will not be satisfied with "you" (the prophet) until the prophet follows their *milla*, probably to be understood here as "their discourse/understanding of faithfulness (toward God)." The verse draws a line between the Jews, Christians, and the prophet's community. Verse 2:121, which could be a later interpolation because of the drastic change in tone, suggests a very different situation: "Those who We have given the Book [before] recite it as it should be recited. They believe in it. As for those who disbelieve in it, it is they who are losers." Here, the People of the Book are true believers in and readers of the scripture. It is some other people, apparently outside the category of the People of the Book, who reject the revelation(s).

The Medinan discourse is open for the Jews and Christians to join the group (as Jews and Christians) or, at the very least, act as allies to the prophet's community:

> Q 3:64: Say: "People of the Book, come to a common word (*kalima sawā'*) between us and you—that we worship none except God, do not associate anything/-one with Him, and do not take one another as lords instead of

> God." But if they [the People of the Book] turn away, say: "Bear witness that we are obedient (*muslimūn*)."

As the Meccan Qurʾān noted, the People of the Book can be and indeed are obedient (*muslimūn*, Q 28:53, 29:46). In the Medinan Q 3:64, the point is not that the People of the Book are automatically not *muslimūn*, or that the *muslimūn* form a different social category, it is that if they do not agree on the basic premises of monotheism, they also lose their status as law- and God-obeying people.[74] Similarly, Q 2:139 notes that God is the Lord of all—there is no need to debate this.

One of the interesting aspects of the Qurʾānic representation of the People of the Book is that some verses claim that at least some of them have rejected (*kafara*), hid (*katama* or *akhfā*), or misconstrued (*ḥarrafa*) parts of the scripture. As has been seen in connection with other features of the Qurʾānic communication, this discourse also has its earlier precursors in Christian literature. Claims and accusations about the corruption of the scriptures or their interpretation were rather widespread in late antiquity. For instance, Tertullian writes the following about his opponents (the "heretics") around 200 CE:[75]

> We ["the orthodox"] are of them [scil. the scriptures], before there was any change, before you mutilated them. Mutilation must always be later than the original. It springs from hostility, which is neither earlier than, nor at home with, what it opposes. Consequently, no person of sense can believe that it is we who introduced the textual corruptions into Scripture, we who have existed from the beginning and are the first, any more than he can help believing that it is they, who are later and hostile, who were the culprits. One man perverts Scripture with his hand, another with his exegesis. If Valentinus seems to have used the whole Bible, he laid violent hands on the truth with just as much cunning as Marcion. Marcion openly and nakedly used the knife, not the pen, massacring Scripture to suit his own material.

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74 On this verse and its context, see also Günther, Sebastian, "O people of the scripture! Come to a word common to you and us (Q. 3:64): The ten commandments and the Qurʾan," in *JQS* 9/1 (2007), 28–58, who reads the verse as referring to the allusions of the Decalogue in Q 17:23–39 and Q 6:151–153.

75 Tertullian, *Prescription of the Heretics* 38, trans. in Ehrman, *After the New Testament* 247–248.

Moreover, the pseudo-Clementine works articulate the idea that Satan has slipped some pericopes into the scripture.[76] Such intra-Christian accusations of "mutilating" and "massacring" the scripture were often, I suggest, more heated and intense than what the Qurʾānic accusation of *taḥrīf*, "misconstrual of the scriptures," contained. It should also be noted that some late antique Christians had argued that the Jews' scripture was, in effect, falsified, since the original one had been destroyed during the Babylonian captivity.[77]

As regards this point, as many others, the Qurʾānic portrayals of the People of the Book, earlier scriptures, and current revelation received by the prophet disagree with each other. The previous chapter noted that Qurʾānic verses explicate that the People of the Book actually believed in Muḥammad's message and accepted his mission. Moreover, Medinan passages such as Q 4:163 note that his revelation is identical, or similar, to earlier revelations: "Indeed, We reveal to you [the prophet] similarly as (*ka-mā*) We have revealed to Noah and the prophets after him; and We have revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon; and to David We gave Psalms (*zabūran*)."[78] In this, the prophet Muḥammad is pictured as akin to other prophets of the sacred history (given in the verse in no chronological order). Indeed, in some passages of the Qurʾān (e.g., Q 5:48, 5:68), the People of the Book are enjoined to believe in their scriptures and the revelation of Muḥammad, the latter being a confirmation of the earlier books.

These are rather positive passages on the prophetical books and, by extension, the People of the Book. However, Q 5:15 paints a different picture, noting that the prophet Muḥammad has come to explain matters the People of the Book have hidden from the scripture. This verse, as well as Q 5:19, emphasizes that the prophet has come specifically to the People of the Book after a long hiatus without a messenger or a warner. Hence, though the prophet underscored his gentile (*ummī*) credentials, as explored in chapter 5, his message is also for the People of the Book to adopt. Verse 2:75 notes that "a group of them [scil. the People of the Book]" misconstrues God's word (*yuḥarrifūnahu*) after hearing and understanding it; Q 2:79 even notes that some people "write the scripture with their own hands, claiming it is from God" (*yaktubūna al-kitāb bi-aydīhim*

76 Stroumsa, *The making of the Abrahamic religions*, 153. As Zellentin, "'One letter *yud*'" 222, notes: "according to Mani's teaching, even the true Scriptures are interspersed with falsehoods, a teaching that was widespread among Marcionites and Manicheans alike, and will find another iteration in the so-called Clementine Homilies."

77 Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 414.

78 Similarly, see Q 2:275. On the chain of prophets, see el-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 78–113; Sachedina, *The Islamic roots* 37.

thumma yaqūluna hādhā min ʿinda allāh). Verse 2:85 notes that they believe in part of the scripture, while rejecting (*takfurūna*) the rest. Verse 2:101 continues this theme by noting that a group among the People of the Book have "cast … the Book of God behind their backs." Though this misrepresentation of or the refusal to believe in the whole of the Book is usually ascribed to an anonymous group among the People of the Book, Q 4:46 notes that it is specifically the Jews who "misconstrue the words out of their proper places" (*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima ʿan mawāḍiʿihi*).

In any case, the Qurʾānic accusation that the People of the Book have rejected or misapprehended part of the scripture can be characterized as rather mild.[79] There is no talk of them having "massacred" the scripture, as Tertullian remarked concerning his opponents. Nor is there any talk that the Torah, the Evangelion, or other books would be corrupt as such. What is important to note here is that there is no scriptural supersessionism in the Qurʾān: it does not claim that the previous holy books have become undone or that they themselves are fraudulent.[80] Indeed, Q 5:68 propounds that the faith of the People of the Book is not based on anything if they do not follow the Torah and the Evangelion. Rather, the Qurʾān claims, it is merely that some People of the Book have misconstrued some interpretations concerning the scriptures. What these errors in interpretation might be is left unexplained by the Qurʾān, but one suspects that what is meant is the reluctance by some People of the Book to accept Muḥammad's revelation as being of divine origin, claiming that their own scripture is full and complete and cannot be added to. Verse 2:146 could hint at this: it notes that though the People of the Book should and indeed do recognize the current revelation as true, they hide the truth.

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79 For a different interpretation, see Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qurʾan* 48–50.

80 Shoemaker's formulation is apt, "A new Arabic apocryphon" 34–35: "we certainly may not presume that the Qurʾān was understood from the beginning as a new revelation intended to supersede and displace these previous dispensations. When and how the Qurʾān attained this status among those who followed Muḥammad is still not entirely clear. Accordingly, we should remain open to the possibility that until later in the seventh century, the Qurʾān may have been understood as having a more supplementary, rather than supplanting, relation to the biblical traditions." However, I would perhaps place the point in time even after that, perhaps in the early eighth century. As I will elucidate in chapter 8, a distinctive Islamic identity is not well attested before the early eighth century. Scriptural supersessionism was definitely one of the important means through which such an identity and positive distinctiveness was articulated. As far as I know, no seventh-century source suggests that the Qurʾān was interpreted as having supplanted other scriptures: certainly, the Qurʾān, the "Constitution," or surviving early Arabic inscriptions or papyri do not. The seventh-century non-Arabic sources do not ascribe this view to the Arabian believers either.

To finish this section, I should ask (and try to answer) how we are to account for the Qur'ān's conflicting portrayals of the People of the Book. I have already argued that there is no simple development from the positive toward the negative description since passages such as Q 2:120–121 and 3:110–115 suggest that, in some cases, more positive material was interpolated into a more negative, and earlier, one. Moreover, the very late *sūra*s, such as Q 5, also include positive portrayals of Jews and Christians (for instance, Q 5:62, 5:66).

It could be claimed that the Qur'ān's positive descriptions of the People of the Book are wishful thinking—as if the Qur'ān was keeping the door open for the People of the Book to join the group though they never did—and the more negative ones describe the situation on the ground more accurately. I am arguing for the exact opposite: it makes more sense to suppose that the Qur'ān's positive and neutral portrayals of the Jews and Christians describe the inter- and intra-group situations[81] more truly, whereas the pejorative passages are due to the rhetorical polemical style and the common phenomenon of categorizing social groups simplistically, with a tendency to minimize (real and empirically observable) inter-group similarities and to emphasize (supposed and construed) inter-group differences.

My line of thought as regards this issue is informed by similar readings of the early and late antique Christian literature,[82] as well as the social identity theory, which posits that, in their discourse, people strive for clear-cut categories, though the social world is made up of a much more diverse reality.[83] The scholars of early and late antique Christianity have noted in their respective studies that the tendency of many early Christian texts to polemicize against, e.g., the Jews is not always because the Christian-Jewish identities were clear and separate, nor that the inter-group relationships were categorically fraught but because the authors of these Christian texts endeavored to create distinct social categories and paint the Christians in positive colors. The texts are proof that the elites have started to articulate the difference by polemics, not that such differences were widely accepted by the believers. Such a reasoning is rarely considered in the context of the Qur'ān's polemical passages.[84] Otherwise put: though some Qur'ānic passages polemi-

81 With the word "intra-group," I draw attention to the fact that, according to my reading of the Qur'ān, some of the People of the Book are accepted as in-group members.

82 E.g., Boyarin, *Border lines*; *The Jewish Gospels*; Fredriksen, *Paul*; *When Christians were Jews*; Hakola, *Identity matters*; *Reconsidering Johannine Christianity*; Wilson, *Related strangers*.

83 See Tajfel, Henri, *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, and *Differentiation between social groups*.

84 Though see el-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic gospel traditions*, 114–143.

cize against the Jews and Christians and appear to draw a distinction from them, this might mean the (very early) *beginning* of the process of differentiation rather than its completion. However, even this budding process did not proceed on a clear trajectory, since later Qur'ānic passages are sometimes milder in tone and qualify earlier, more polemical ones. Few scholars of early Christianity nowadays see Christian identity as "ready" or distinct from Judaism when, for example, the Gospel of Matthew was written (approximately 80–100 CE, decades after the life of Jesus), *though* it contains some anti-Jewish, in particular anti-Pharisaic, polemics. Rather, the Gospel of Matthew was written for and by Jews. In contrast, many scholars of early Islam see Islamic identity "ready" and distinct from the People of the Book already during the life of the prophet, *since* the Qur'ān contains some anti-Jewish and anti-Christian passages.

This section has surveyed the Qur'ānic passages on the combined group "the People of the Book," with some references to those mentioning "Jews" or "Christians" in particular. Though the mentions of Jews and Christians often go hand in hand in the Qur'ānic discourse, there are some differences in how they are portrayed. In the next sections, I will discuss these specifics.

4 The Jews in the Qur'ān

In the Medinan Qur'ānic communication, descriptions of the Jews and Israelites[85] are more negative than the those of the Christians. For instance, Q 5:82, which will be discussed in more detail below, juxtaposes Jews and associators, while depicting the Christians as the allies of the believers and the prophet. Verse 5:64 notes, in a somewhat obscure way, that the Jews claim that "the hand of God is chained," a statement which is, naturally, rejected by the Qur'ān.

Verses 9:30–31 notes that Jews say that ʿUzayr is the son of God, while the Christians say the same of Jesus (*al-masīḥ*). Both groups are denigrated for these views. The identity of this ʿUzayr has perplexed commentators: he is often understood to be Ezra, but others have suggested that he might be interpreted as Azazel, one of the "children of God," that is, angels, or in this case, a fallen angel.[86] However, such a derivation appears etymologically problematic, if it

85 As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Qur'ānic category "the Israelites" is somewhat ambiguous and is sometimes used in reference to Christians as well.

86 See Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qur'an* 44–48; Wasserstrom, Steven M., *Between Muslim and Jew: The problem of symbiosis in early Islam*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, 183.

is not supposed that the last *r* of ʿUzayr should actually be read as a *z* and the name be vocalized differently.

However, not all descriptions of the Jews are censorious. Verse 5:44 notes that the Torah has been sent as a guidance and light to the people; with the Torah, the obedient prophets have judged among people. The Jewish rabbis and scholars (*al-rabbāniyyūn wa-l-aḥbār*) safeguard and confirm the Torah, according to which they should judge. This is, then, an affirmative depiction of the Jewish religious authorities.[87] Verse 2:122 enjoins the Israelites to remember the favors of God to them, while Q 2:39–47 contain a longer exposition on the covenant and God's favors to Israel. The undertone is indeed very positive. Verses 2:83–85, however, contain a much more negative narrative on the covenant that Israel has lost. This is connected with other Qurʾānic verses of supersessionism, mentioned above, according to which Jews and Christians, as groups, have lost the covenant with God: they no longer automatically belong to the righteous ingroup, but they might as individuals.[88]

In the previous section, it was noted that 3:110–115 contain what I suggested to be an earlier, polemical passage on the People of the Book (Q 3:110–112) and a later interpolation, the tone of which is more positive (Q 3:113–115). The same appears to be the case of Q 4:160–162, which begins negatively but then, suddenly, the message becomes very benevolent toward the Jews, or at least a faction among them:[89]

> 160 Because the Jews did wrong and hindered many [people] from God's path, We forbade them some good foods (*ṭayyibāt*) that had been permitted to them [before].[90] 161 [This was also because they] took interest though this had been prohibited and unjustly consumed people's property. We have prepared a painful punishment for the disbelievers among

87 See also Zellentin, Holger M., "*Aḥbār* and *Ruhbān*: Religious leaders in the Qurʾān in dialogue with Christian and Rabbinic literature," in Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells (eds.), *Qurʾanic studies today*, London: Routledge, 2016, 258–289.

88 Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qurʾan* 31, claims that "in contrast to the Mosaic text and the book of the prophets, which constantly reiterate that the various divine punishments visited upon Israel do not call into question God's unconditional fidelity to it, in the Qurʾan the people's conduct justifies that they be stripped of election." However, this is a rather optimistic interpretation of the prophetical books of the Hebrew Bible. The idea that Israel has, at some point of its history, broken the covenant and lived without it and the election can also be found in the Hebrew Bible. See Jeremiah 11, Ezekiel 44:7, and Isaiah 24:5.

89 See also Sinai, "Towards a redactional history" 387, who notes that Q 4:153–154 might have originally formed a unit with Q 4:160–162. Verses 4:155–159 would then be a later addition.

90 El-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 115, suggests that a similar verse, Q 3:93, signifies that the Jews "have lost their scripture" and that "their dietary prohibi-

> them. 162 But those among them who are well-versed in knowledge and believers[91] believe in what has been revealed to you [scil. the prophet] and what has been revealed before you—and those who keep the prayer and pay the alms and believe in God and the last day: to them We shall give a great reward.

Verse 4:162 depicts some Jews as believers in God, the last day, and all the revelations—including Muḥammad's. They also signal the important group rituals of praying and giving alms. Not for nothing are they explicitly identified as "believers" (*al-muʾminūn*) in this verse.

In a similar vein, verse 4:46 notes that few (*qalīl*) Jews are believers. At first blush, this is a negative characterization. But it must be emphasized that the verse notes that some Jews are indeed believers, that is to say, group members. Similarly, Q 2:83 notes that the Israelites have "turned away" from God's covenant, "except for a few" (*illā qalīlan*). Rather than categorical denunciation of the Jews, these verses can be read as an explicit avowal that there was a continuous presence of *some* Jews in Muḥammad's group, beginning with Mecca, through the early years of Medina—as the "Constitution" makes abundantly clear—to the later period there. In fact, as chapter 8 will elucidate, Jews belonging to the community of the Arabian believers are attested in texts written after the death of Muḥammad as well.

An interesting, recurring narrative in the Qurʾān is the one which states that some people have been turned into apes because they broke the Sabbath. In the later Islamic interpretive traditions, and in particular today, this narrative has become a trope in anti-Semitic hate speech.[92] But, I would argue, this is more due to spiteful interpretation of the text of the Qurʾān than what it actually says and how it was understood by the first audience. Let us look at these passages:

> Q 2:63–66: Then We made a covenant with you [pl.] and raised the mountain above you: "Hold tight to the strength that We have given you, remember it [scil. the covenant], so that you might revere [God]." After this, you

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tions are a fabrication," but this appears to me to be a tortuous interpretation which does not take into account that the Qurʾān never categorically censures the Torah or the Jewish conceptualization or observance of the law.

91 In this verse, "believers" refers to the Jewish lay believers in my interpretation. They are contrasted to the Jewish scholars, those "well-versed in knowledge."

92 On the passages and later Muslim interpretive traditions, see Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qurʾan* 53–55; Esack, "The portrayal of Jews"; Reynolds, *Allah* 168–171; Rubin, Uri, "Apes, pigs, and the Islamic identity," in *IOS* 17 (1997), 89–105.

> turned away and you would have ended up as losers were it not for the grace and mercy of God. You surely know those of you who broke the Sabbath! We said to them: "Become disgraceful apes!" We made them an example to the present and later generations and a lesson to those who revere.

> Q 7:163–166 (I omit verses 164–165): Ask [sing.] them about the town that was by the sea and whose inhabitants broke the Sabbath, when the fish would surface only on the day of the Sabbath, but on other days they would not surface. Thus, We tested them, because they had transgressed … When they exceeded the bounds of what was forbidden to them, We said to them: "Become disgraceful apes!"

Uri Rubin has argued that these narratives in the Qur'ān, and in particular Q 7:163–166, appear to reflect the Jewish interpretive traditions concerning Numbers 11, a narrative about the Israelites complaining to Moses in the desert about, among other things, the lack of meat;[93] the story ends with God sending quails from the sea, which the people eat, angering God, who strikes the people with a plague.[94] In later Jewish Bible exegesis, this punishment is developed to include all sorts of physical ailments. Rubin concludes: "The people who became apes (*qirada*) seem to represent the lustful quail eaters who, in Jewish Midrash (*Leviticus Rabbah*), are said to have been punished with various kinds of nasty bodily inflictions. In the Quran they are transformed into apes, a species that represents the loss of human dignity due to over-indulgence in food and drink."[95] This appears to me to be a very good interpretation of the background of the Qur'ānic passages in question.

A few additional comments are in order from the point of view of social groups. Q 2:63–66 and 7:163–166 do not mention that turning people into apes was because they belonged to the categories of the Israelites or the People of the Book. It was a punishment because they broke their requirement to observe the Sabbath, which is, then, portrayed as something positive and commendable. The "people of the Sabbath" (*aṣḥāb al-sabt*), mentioned in Q 4:47 as having been cursed by God, appears to refer specifically to those who broke the Sab-

93 In Q 2:61, the Israelites are complaining about eating the same food over and over again: however, instead of meat, they ask for vegetables, cucumbers, garlic, lentils, and onions.

94 Rubin, Uri, "'Become you apes, repelled!' (Quran 7:166): The transformation of the Israelites into apes and its Biblical and Midrashic background," in *BSOAS*, 78 (2015), 25–40.

95 Rubin, "'Become you apes, repelled!'" 39.

bath rather than observe(d) it. Moreover, the passages explicitly note that the punishment only targeted "some of you" (as in Q 2:63–66) or one town (Q 7:163–166). In their original context, it is difficult to understand these verses as being anti-Jewish or anti-People of the Book.

To sum up, the Qurʾān contains many references to Jews (*yahūd* or *man hādū*), some of which (but not all) are negative.[96] This is in contrast to the "Constitution" of Medina, which does not contain anything except positive statement on Jews. Today, we read the Qurʾān as the scripture of a religion, Islam, and a group, Muslims. The anti-Jewish passages in the Qurʾān (as in the New Testament) read as repugnant and, at times, incendiary. However, it has to be remembered that a different social context obtained in the 620s–630s. Contemporary evidence, including Qurʾānic passages, suggests that there were some (perhaps many) Jews in the prophet Muḥammad's movement, which was not called Islam back then. How can this be reconciled with the fact that the Qurʾān contains anti-Jewish passages? How were they heard and understood by the Jewish sub-group in the community of the believers?

The following point, though important (I think) and referred to in the previous chapter, I make with some hesitation:[97] there was, among Jews, a centuries-old tradition of self-criticism of Israel. This was propounded in the Bible and the post-Biblical literature. This is, of course, nothing novel in itself—these passages are well known. But the existence of these passages is somewhat rarely, as far as I know, noted in Qurʾānic studies. Consider, for instance the following verses from Isaiah, a book heavy in censure of Israel, in which God is cited as saying:

> Israel does not know,
> my people do not understand.
>
> Ah, sinful nation,
> people laden with iniquity,
> offspring who do evil,
> children who deal corruptly,

96 El-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 115, claims that in the Qurʾān *al-yahūd* "is never used in a positive light." But surely this is oversimplifying matters: Q 2:62 and 5:69 promise a heavenly reward to them (on this, see what follows in this chapter) and Q 4:46 and Q 4:162 note that some Jews, though a minority of them, are to be counted as believers.

97 Hesitation, since I understand that this line of thought could be used to buttress anti-Semitic hate speech.

> who have forsaken the Lord,
> who have despised the Holy One of Israel,
> who are utterly estranged!
>
> Why do you seek further beatings?
> Why do you continue to rebel?
> The whole head is sick,
> and the whole heart faint (Isaiah 1:3b–5).

This is just to quote a few verses from that book; almost *any* prophetical book of the Hebrew Bible could be opened and similar scathing remarks, ascribed to God, about Israel could be found: they are legion. Israel has sinned, lapsed in law-observance, and committed crimes such as killing prophets, these verses state. Now, it must repent.

The same point has been made about anti-Jewish statements in the New Testament, for instance those found in Matthew. As Paula Fredriksen notes:

> Matthew could appeal to a popular *Jewish* tradition that Israel had always rejected and persecuted God's prophets. Complaints frequently appear in scripture, and particularly in the classical prophets, that Israel obdurately resists the divine call issued through these prophets do to tshuvah—to turn from sin and return to Torah. Jews of the late Second Temple period inferred from such passages that their unrepentant people had resisted to the point of actually murdering God's messengers.[98]

Hence, the Qurʾānic narratives and statements that are critical of Israel and Jews were, perhaps, not interpreted as attacking Jews categorically, since they were repeating ideas that were also current among Jews themselves. I make this point with some caution, however, since it is impossible to reconstruct in detail how the Jewish component in Muḥammad's audience understood his revelations and since these Qurʾānic passages were and are customarily invoked in medieval and modern Islamic anti-Semitic discourse.

Earlier in this book, I cited the four "basic markers" of Jewish social identity in antiquity and late antiquity, as construed by Martin S. Jaffee. These were: 1) belief in one God; 2) dietary and purity restrictions; 3) circumcision of male Jews; 4) observing the Sabbath.[99] Does the Qurʾān rebuff these four aspects or rather espouse them? On evidence, the latter is more likely to be the case.

98 Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ* 188, emphasis in the original.
99 Jaffee, *Early Judaism* 132–133.

The first one (monotheism) is *the* central message of the Qurʾān. As for the second (food and purity), this will be discussed in more detail below, but it can already be noted that the Qurʾān shares many of the same ideas as present in Jewish tradition, though the former gives the dietary and purity restrictions a certain gentile twist (itself a Jewish notion). As for the third (male circumcision), the Qurʾān does not explicitly mention it at all.[100] But, as is well known, later Muslims practiced male circumcision. As for the fourth (the Sabbath), the Qurʾānic portrayal is multivocal: On the one hand, the Sabbath is said to have been "imposed on those who argue about him [scil. Abraham]"[101] (Q 16:124), a somewhat pejorative statement; on the other, those who broke the Sabbath are cursed (e.g., Q 2:65, 4:47), which would indicate that the Sabbath should be observed, by Jews at least. Indeed, Q 4:154 notes that the Sabbath is one of the signs of the covenant that God made with Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai. All in all, the Qurʾānic depiction of the Sabbath leans toward positive; in any case, there is no verse in the Qurʾān which would say that observing the Sabbath is wrong or should be rejected.

As the "Constitution" makes clear Jews (*qua* Jews) were an important part of Muḥammad's community. They did not have to "convert" to a new religion or recant Judaism. Nor is such a requirement present in the Qurʾān. Moreover, the practices and beliefs present in the Qurʾān do not, by and large, differ from those of Judaism but rather overlap with them. The basic markers of antique and late antique Judaism are not rejected but either passed over in silence or approved of. Though the Qurʾān appears to be less welcoming to Jews than it is to Christians, it has to be remembered that the Qurʾānic discourse is, in fact, rehashing many features and motifs of *intra*-Jewish criticism of Israel (and some Christian ones as well). This qualification is important to be borne in mind when contextualizing the Qurʾānic communication and community. The Qurʾānic notions that the Jews/Israel had sinned and transgressed were, perhaps, not as distasteful to the Medinan Jews as they sound today.

100 However, cf. Carmeli, "Circumcision in Early Islam," who sees Q 2:124–130 as referring to the habit.

101 The word "him" would refer here to Abraham, who is the subject of the verses before Q 16:124. However, it is also possible to render this as "the Sabbath imposed on those who argue about it [scil. the Sabbath]," but this does not seem to me to be the preferable interpretation.

5 The Christians in the Qur'ān

So far in this chapter, I have endeavored to argue that the Medinan characterizations of the People of the Book are more negative than the Meccan ones, though even the very late layers of the Qur'ān accept some People of the Book as in-group members. As for the category Jews, most Medinan descriptions are pejorative, though the situation is not categorical. The case of the Christians (*naṣārā*) in the Qur'ān is interesting: they are depicted in a rather positive sense, though the Qur'ān attacks Christological doctrines that were prevalent, one supposes, among the Christians of the Near East.

The Qur'ān's tone toward Christianity has been described in various ways in scholarly literature. Some have argued that since it vehemently and directly attacks *the* Christian dogmata of the incarnation and triune Godhead,[102] it must be understood as attacking Christianity and the Christians categorically.[103] However, a variety of views on God and Jesus existed among late antique Christians, and this is probably true as regards seventh-century CE Arabian Christians.[104] Christians with low Christological beliefs (or little care for Christology to begin with) would have had few problems joining the group around the prophet Muḥammad, should they wish to do that. Moreover, the Qur'ān, in fact, explicitly mentions some Christians as being believers, that is to say, members of the community of the believers. The characterization of the Christians is more positive than that of the Jews. As in the case of the Jews, nowhere does the Qur'ān mention that, to be considered believers, Christians should recant Christianity as a religion or identity.

Since the verses discussing Christians almost always occur in connection with matters concerning the Jews, some of the relevant passages have already been adduced. However, one should still note verses 5:82–85, which contain a very positive description of the Christians and their religious authorities, that is, priests and monks (*qissīsīn wa-ruhbān*):[105]

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102 Though it never mentions trinitarianism as articulated in Nicaea and later church councils as consisting of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

103 See, e.g., Reynolds, *Allah* 12–14, for a discussion. For the later interpretive traditions, see McAuliffe, Jean Dammen, *Qur'ānic Christians: An analysis of classical and modern exegesis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

104 See chapter 3 for this.

105 As noted by Sahner, the Qur'ānic discourse on monks is somewhat ambivalent (Sahner, Christian C., "Islamic legends about the birth of monasticism: A case study on the late antique milieu of the Qur'ān and Tafsīr," in Robert G. Hoyland (ed.), *The late antique world of early Islam: Muslims among Christians and Jews in the East Mediterranean*, Princeton NJ: Darwin Press, 2015, 393–435). In this passage, however, the depiction is very positive.

> You [prophet] will certainly find that the worst in enmity toward those who believe are the Jews and those who associate. And you will certainly find that the closest in affection toward those who believe are those who call themselves Christians. This is because there are priests and monks (*qissīsīn wa-ruhbān*) among them; they are not arrogant. When they hear what has been revealed to the messenger, you can see their eyes flowing with tears, because they recognize the truth in it. They say: "Our Lord, we believe! Count us among the witnesses. Why would we not believe in God and what has come to us of the truth. We hope that God will make us enter [Paradise] with the righteous people." God will recompence them for their belief with gardens beneath which flow rivers, where they abide forever. That is the reward of the doers of good.

Moreover, Q 5:47 says that the "People of the Evangelion" should judge by the Evangelion. Their revelation (as the Qurʾān conceptualizes it) is valuable and the Christians should follow it in matters of law and praxis.

Since the Qurʾānic depiction of Jesus is often understood to have signified a clear parting from Christianity,[106] I will discuss and problematize this notion in some detail.[107] I will concentrate on the question of what the Qurʾānic Jesus might have meant for the audience of the revelations and its social makeup, not how the narratives of Mary and Jesus are construed and what earlier texts they might echo—topics of utmost scholarly importance but somewhat irrelevant for my present purposes since I discuss the social identity of the burgeoning movement.

As is well known, according to the Qurʾān, Jesus was a prophet and messenger who received revelation (Q 2:87, 19:30), but he was no God incarnate (Q 5:72).[108] Moreover, the idea of God having a son or offspring is denied (Q 19:34–40, Q 112).[109] However, in a sense, the Qurʾānic Jesus is more than simply a prophet: he is, in fact, called the Christ/Messiah (*al-masīḥ*, Q 3:45, 4:157, 4:171–172, 5:17, 5:72, 5:75, 9:30–31)[110] and, in contrast to most prophets of the Qurʾān, he was a miracle-worker (Q 3:48–52, 5:110). Indeed, he is the prime performer of miracles in the Qurʾān.[111] One of his miracles, it can be interpreted, is

106 E.g., Reynolds, *Allah* 12–13; Sinai, *The Qurʾan* 200–202.

107 In this connection, see also Donner, "From believers to Muslims" 25–27.

108 Most recently on Jesus in the Qurʾān, see Costa, "Early Islam as a messianic movement"; Dye, "Mapping the sources of the Qurʾanic Jesus."

109 El-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 105–107.

110 For a discussion of the term *al-masīḥ* in the Qurʾān, see Costa, "Early Islam as a messianic movement" 48–75.

111 Reynolds, *Allah* 55.

his prediction that a new prophet, whose name is *aḥmad*, "most venerated," a clear nod at Muḥammad, will emerge (Q 61:6).[112] Jesus is also called God's word (*kalima*, Q 3:45, 4:171)[113] and was of virgin birth (Q 3:42–47, 19:16–34).[114] Moreover, he represents a new Adam (Q 3:59).[115] Interestingly, he does not render the Torah redundant but rather comes to confirm (*muṣaddiq*) it (Q 5:46, 61:6). He is taken up to God (Q 3:55, 4:157–159),[116] apparently to return during the eschatological era. Though this is not elucidated in detail in the Qur'ān, passages such as Q 43:57–64 suggest that he has an important part to play in the last events.[117] It would be, then, completely wrong to call the Qur'ānic Jesus merely a prophet. He is a prophet, but also the Messiah and the most significant miracle worker of the Qur'ān. To give in full some of the important passages concerning Jesus:

> Q 5:72–75: They have disbelieved who say: "God is the Messiah, son of Mary." The Messiah himself has said: "Israelites, worship God, your Lord and my Lord!" God has denied Paradise to those who associate, and their abode will be the hell-fire. The wrongdoers do not have a helper. They have disbelieved who say: "God is the third of the three."[118] There is no god but one God. If the disbelievers among them do not cease to talk of

112 It is, then, not only Abraham that foresees Muḥammad in the Qur'ān (see the previous chapter), Jesus does too. Note the New Testament parallels of these predictions: in John 8:56, Jesus is quoted as telling the Jews that Abraham has foreseen him. Paul, in Galatians 3:16, claimed that Jesus is the seed (in singular) of Abraham.

113 El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 157–159; this translates the Greek *logos* of John 1, though it is reinterpreted in the Qur'ān, which disagrees with the ending of John 1:1, "the Word was God."

114 Note the important study Anthony, Sean W., "The virgin annunciate in the Meccan Qur'an: Q. Maryam 19:19 in context," in *JNES* 81 (2022), 363–385, which discusses the interesting wording in Q 19:19. In the verse, the angel says: "I am the Messenger of your Lord, I have come to give you (*li-ahaba laki*) a pure son." Here the Qur'ān does not differ from some Christian late antique interpretations of the conception: Gabriel was seen as an agent of sorts in this, having perfumed Mary or having entered her womb via her mouth.

115 This idea is also present in Paul, see el-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 79.

116 The question of whether the Qur'ān suggests that Jesus was crucified or not is beyond the theme of the present inquiry. On this question, see Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic* 37–38, 88–89. Recently, Juan Cole has emphasized that the Qur'ān Q 4:157 exonerates the Jews of blame for having killed Jesus (Cole, Juan, "'It was made to appear to them so': The crucifixion, Jews and Sasanian war propaganda in the Qur'ān," in *Religion* 51/3 [2021], 404–422).

117 For the eschatological Jesus, see Reynolds, *Allah* 70–71.

118 On this expression, see Griffith, Sidney H., "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'ān': Who were those who said 'Allāh is third of three' according to al-Mā'ida 73?" in Meir Bar-Asher et al. (eds.), *A word fitly spoken: Studies in mediaeval exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai*, Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 2007, 83–110.

> such things, they will face a painful punishment. Why do they not turn to God, repenting, and ask for His forgiveness? God is merciful, compassionate. The Messiah, son of Mary, was merely a messenger; before him there have been other messengers. His mother was virtuous, and they both ate food.

> Q 4:171: People of the Book, do not transgress your law (*lā taghlū fī dīnikum*)! Do not say anything but the truth about God! The Messiah, son of Mary, was the messenger of God, and His word that He gave to Mary, and a spirit from Him. Believe in God and His messengers and do not say: "Three!" Desist; it is better for you. God is one God; He is above having a son. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and earth. He is the best trustee.

Note that neither of these passages claims that Christians hold such beliefs. Indeed, Q 5:73 talks of "disbelievers among them," suggesting that certainly not all Christians are beyond the pale. As far as I am aware, only one Qurʾānic verse, 9:30 (discussed in the previous section), actually attributes to the Christians Christological beliefs that the Qurʾān censures (in the case of Q 9:30, Jesus' sonship). The possible reasons for this should be probed in some detail.

Let me start by looking at verses 5:110–120, which mention a narrative about Jesus, his disciples, and the table (*māʾida*).[119] It is this narrative that gives the surah its name. It might be mentioned here that, in verses 5:116–118, Nicolai Sinai sees one of the examples in the Qurʾānic communication of drawing a clear boundary with Christianity and of harsh criticism of Christian dogmata.[120]

Since food and dietary regulations are an important topic of surah 5, it is perhaps no coincidence that the surah ends with a narrative where Jesus' disciples ask God to send[121] them a table (*māʾida*)[122] from heaven. Verse 110 ascribes to Jesus many superhuman characteristics: he was helped by the Holy Spirit, he resurrected the dead, and gave life to a clay bird; he healed the blind and the lepers; and God taught him multiple scriptures: the Torah and Evangelion, but

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119 For these verses, see the important comments in Azaiez et al. (eds.), *The Qurʾan seminar commentary: A collaborative study of 50 Qurʾanic passages*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016, 111–117.

120 Sinai, *The Qurʾan* 125.

121 The verb used is *anzala*, which is often used in the Qurʾān in the context of God giving the prophets revelation or scripture.

122 This word appears to be a loanword from Geʿez, where its cognate is related to the Eucharist; see Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary* 255–256.

also "the Book" and "the Wisdom." What is more, Qurʾān 5:111 adds that the disciples of Jesus were also given inspiration[123] by God, and that they were obedient (*muslimūn*, perhaps to be understood as law-observant).

The table narrative is recounted in verses 5:112–114, where the disciples first ask Jesus to ask God to send them "a table," and Jesus does this, specifying that the table would provide for a "feast" (*ʿīdan*) for "the first and last of us." At this point, God makes the miraculous table descend from heaven. This Qurʾānic passage appears to echo the Christian last supper narratives[124] and, as verse 5:109[125] connects the passage to eschatology, the expectation of the eschatological second coming of Jesus might be implied at the end of surah 5. The phrase "the first and last of us" might also be understood in an eschatological context.

After the table narrative, the Qurʾān once again comments on Jesus' nature. In verses 5:116–117, God interrogates Jesus, asking if he is to be blamed for the idea that Jesus and Mary[126] are considered gods in addition to God. Jesus denies this idea. Since such a trinitarian (or perhaps better, tritheist) dogma of God, Mary, and Jesus as the three persons of the Godhead was not a common one among late antique Christians, it is difficult to see these verses as generally denouncing Christianity or Christians.

Was the Qurʾānic locution on Jesus—as a messenger-cum-prophet, as a man, though the Messiah—completely outside the late antique Christian discourse? Not really. After all, he is called a prophet, for instance, in some New Testa-

123 The verb used in this verse is *awḥā*. This is rather remarkable: the disciples/apostles were God-inspired. It shows how far the Qurʾān sometimes goes to embrace the Christians.

124 Azaiez et al. (eds.), *The Qurʾan seminar commentary* 113–117, discuss different possible subtexts for this Qurʾānic narrative that appears to echo the narratives of the last supper: Matthew 14:13–21 and 15:32–39; Acts 10; John 6:22–71 and 10. However, Reynolds rejects this association and rather connects the passage with the story of Moses and the Israelites in the desert and the Ethiopic translation of Psalm 78:19 (Reynolds, Gabriel, "On the Qurʾān's Māʾida passage and the wanderings of the Israelites," in Carlos A. Segovia and Basil Lourié (eds.), *The coming of the comforter: When, where, and to whom? Studies on the rise of Islam and various other topics in memory of John Wansbrough*, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012, 91–108).

125 "On the Day when God assembles all the messengers and asks, 'What response did you receive?' they will say, 'We do not have that knowledge: You alone know things that cannot be seen.'"

126 This is not, naturally, the "orthodox" understanding of the Trinity or of Mary, as has been pointed out by modern scholars. For these Qurʾānic statements and their context, see the lucid study by Sirry, Mun'im A., "Reinterpreting the Qurʾānic criticism of other religions," in Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Sells (eds.), *Qurʾanic studies today*, London: Routledge, 2016, 294–309.

ment texts (Matthew 21:11, Acts 3:22).[127] Naturally, high Christology is (though very rarely) present in the New Testament as well, such as in the pre-existing Christ/Logos, equated with God, of John 1. Paul is often adduced as an early example of high Christological thinking (in the sense: Jesus = God), but this appears to resort to special pleading.[128] It is only with the later church councils (discussed in chapter 3 of the present study) that we encounter the canonization of such high Christological beliefs; before them, a variety of opinions and beliefs about Jesus existed on equal footing. A variety of Christological beliefs also existed naturally after Nicaea (in 325 CE), but low Christological ideas were now the butt of attack and, one supposes, became minority opinions. In the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, we also encounter Jesus the prophet. Clemens is quoted as saying:

> Then, however, a priest or a prophet, being anointed with the compounded ointment, putting fire to the altar of God, was held illustrious in all the world. But after Aaron, who was a priest, another is taken out of the waters. I do not speak of Moses, but of Him who, in the waters of baptism, was called by God His Son. For it is Jesus who has put out, by the grace of baptism, that fire which the priest kindled for sins; for, from the time when He appeared, the chrism has ceased, by which the priesthood or the prophetic or the kingly office was conferred.[129]

Earlier in the work, the figure of the true prophet is introduced. This appears to be a recurring figure, manifesting himself in many individuals, including but not limited to Jesus. The pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, then, appear to include the notion of the chain of the prophets:

> He, therefore, whose aid is needed for the house filled with the darkness of ignorance and the smoke of vices, is He, we say, who is called the true Prophet, who alone can enlighten the souls of men, so that with their eyes they may plainly see the way of safety. For otherwise it is impossible to get knowledge of divine and eternal things, unless one learns of that true Prophet; because, as you yourself stated a little ago, the belief of things, and the opinions of causes, are estimated in proportion to the talents of their advocates: hence, also, one and the same cause is now thought just,

127 See also el-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 78–83.

128 As argued by Fredriksen, *Paul* 131–145, who deconstructs conventional interpretations of Romans 1:3–4 and Philippians 2:6–11.

129 Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 1:48.

> now unjust; and what now seemed true, anon becomes false on the assertion of another. For this reason, the credit of religion and piety demanded the presence of the true Prophet, that He Himself might tell us respecting each particular, how the truth stands, and might teach us how we are to believe concerning each.[130]

Because of such prooftexts, it is not entirely true that Jesus as a/the prophet would have been anathema to all Christians in antiquity and late antiquity.

Heikki Räisänen approached the question of the Qurʾānic Jesus in 1971 with a novel interpretation, comparing the Jesus of the Qurʾān with the Jesus of the synoptic gospels.[131] To mention a few details that Räisänen brings up, let me note the following: Like the Qurʾān, Matthew and Luke espouse the idea of Jesus' virginal birth without attributing the idea of divine incarnation to him. In Luke-Acts, Jesus is God's Christ and servant; his miracles are due to God's power, not his own. The Qurʾān echoes such language. The Jesus depictions of the synoptics are, naturally, internally varied, but one can still note these affinities to some of their aspects in the Qurʾānic discourse.[132] Though not in any way identical, "the Qurʾanic portrait of Jesus is not *so* remote from the NT [New Testament] as might seem to be the case at first glance."[133] As Räisänen notes, the differences between the Muslim and Christian Jesus understandings are not so much due to the Qurʾān and the Bible as to their different interpretive traditions.[134] The majority of Christian communities started, post-Nicaea, to espouse a high Christological doctrine. Early Islamic exegesis of the Qurʾān, on the other hand, belittled the role of Jesus, insisting, for example, that his title in the Qurʾān, *al-masīḥ*, is more or less empty of specific signification. However, it is difficult to accept that the earliest audience of the Qurʾānic revelations, which included Jews and Christians, would have thought that the figure of "the Messiah" was meaningless.

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130 Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 1:16.

131 Räisänen, *Das koranische Jesusbild*. He continued to write on the topic sporadically until his death in 2015: see Räisänen, "The portrait of Jesus" and the articles collected in his *The Bible among scriptures and other essays*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017.

132 Räisänen, "The portrait of Jesus" 126–128.

133 Räisänen, "The portrait of Jesus" 129, emphasis in the original.

134 Sarris, *Empires of faith*, 266, makes an important point: "The respect in the Qurʾan for the Virgin Mary, but its denial of Jesus' divinity and crucifixion, chime closely with shades of contemporary Christianity, both 'orthodox' and 'heterodox' … What Muhammad's austere monotheism cut through were the complexities and controversies of Christian Trinitarian and Christological doctrine. In that sense it was itself a fulsome response to contemporary Christian debate."

As regards what follows, let me start with two premises arising from the Qur'ān, the first being generally agreed upon, the second being something that I have argued for at some length in this book: 1) The Qur'ānic "Christology" is of a relatively low type. 2) Some Christians accepted the Qur'ānic revelations as authentic and joined Muḥammad's movement. If both are true, how do we account for this? I think two answers are possible. In fact, they might both be true, reflecting the different circumstances in the lives and contexts of different Christians:

i) The first solution to the dilemma would be that the Qur'ānic notions of Jesus were, in fact, similar or identical to what some Christian groups or individuals already endorsed in Mecca, Medina, and neighboring areas. This can be understood in two ways: a) in the context of group variation (what we might call "the Jewish Christian thesis"), or b) individual variation (Tannous's "simple believers thesis").

i a) The Jewish Christian thesis has been advocated by a number of writers[135] and, it appears to me, is rather popular among scholars. However, it has had its critics too.[136] I myself would be willing to accept the Jewish Christian presence as *one* of the factors in the background of the Qur'ān, although, since tangible evidence is lacking, this is somewhat speculative. There are some indications that such groups might have indeed been present in the seventh-century Near East (John of Damascus, d. 749 CE, notes that the Elkesaites are "still now occupying that part of Arabia above the Dead Sea"),[137] though there is no such evidence from Arabia; but given our lack of knowledge of varieties of Christian belief in Arabia more generally this is not surprising. Furthermore, the patri-

135 E.g., Crone, "Jewish Christianity"; Pines, Shlomo, "Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity," *JSAI* 4 (1984), 135–152; Stroumsa, *The making of the Abrahamic religions* 5, 139–158; Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew* 37–41. For more on this, including critical viewpoints, see the articles collected in Francisco del Río Sánchez, (ed.), *Jewish Christianity and the origins of Islam: Papers presented at the colloquium held in Washington DC, October 29–31, 2015* (*8th ASMEA Conference*) (Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme 13), Turnhout: Brepols, 2018.

136 E.g., Dye, "Mapping the sources of the Qur'anic Jesus" 158–162; Shoemaker, Stephen, "Jewish Christianity, non-trinitarianism, and the beginnings of Islam," in Francisco del Río Sánchez (ed.), *Jewish Christianity and the origins of Islam: Papers presented at the colloquium held in Washington DC, October 29–31, 2015* (*8th ASMEA Conference*) (Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme 13), Turnhout: Brepols, 2018, 105–116; Stern, Samuel M., "'Abd al-Jabbār's account of how Christ's religion was falsified by the adoption of Roman customs," *Journal of theological studies*, N.S. 19/1 (1968), 128–185; Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 247–249.

137 Cited in Roncaglia, "Ebionite and Elkesaite elements" 349. For other evidence, see Crone, "Jewish Christianity (part two)" 1–3.

arch of the Church of the East, Mar Aba (d. 552), reportedly met a student of Christian theology who emphasized that he was both Jewish and Christian, a possible indication of the longevity of such groups in the Near East.[138] Patricia Crone has argued that the Qurʾān proves the existence of such a group or groups in the Qurʾānic milieu: "All in all, a full seven doctrines,[139] several of them central to the Qurʾān, point to the presence of Jewish Christians in the Messenger's locality."[140] For example, the Qurʾān notes that Jesus does not annul the Torah but rather confirms it (Q 5:46, 61:6), which could point to the possibility that the Christians around the prophet considered Torah-obedience important.

There were, as noted above, late antique Christians whose view on Jesus was similar to the Qurʾānic one. Whether or not they existed in sixth-seventh century CE Arabia is up for debate (since no palpable evidence is available). It should be remembered that non-trinitarian Christian groups, such as Bogomils and Catharists, popped up in medieval Europe. After Nicaea and Chalcedon, trinitarian and incarnationist Christianity was the mainstream;[141] but perhaps other options existed in the Near East and, more specifically, Arabia too. As mentioned in chapter 2, the inscriptions commissioned by Abraha, the Ethiopian king of Yemen in the mid-sixth century, have been interpreted by Carlos Segovia as putting forward low Christological formulae.[142] Two of Abraha's surviving inscriptions[143] do not mention the trinity, nor do they mention Jesus' sonship but refer to him, instead, as God's messiah (*ms¹ḥ-hw*). Segovia suggests that Abraha came with these formulae to appease his subject people, who were majority Jewish.

I think it would be hasty to dismiss the group variation thesis altogether. The fact of diversity, then as now, signifies diversity as regards individuals but also groups that the individuals form. We do not necessarily have to call these hypothetical low Christology groups "Jewish Christians," or give them a genealogy to

138 Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 245.

139 These are identified by Crone as: a) Jesus is a prophet sent to the Israelites; b) Christians are Israelites too; c) Jesus is second to Moses and confirms the Torah/law rather than supplants it; d) Jesus was a human being, not God incarnate; e) Muḥammad's opponents held that both Mary and Jesus are divine; f) docetic crucifixion, though Jesus' death is otherwise accepted; g) virgin birth of Jesus. Some of the points are not as strong as others, but it must be acknowledged that a-d closely resemble the beliefs that we know different Jewish Christian groups were espousing.

140 Crone, "Jewish Christianity (part one)" 229.

141 Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 77, notes that, post-Chalcedon, "all of the major competing and rival churches" agreed upon the trinity and incarnation.

142 Segovia, "Abraha's Christological formula."

143 Sigla DAI GDN 2002–2020, dated to 548 CE, and Ry 506, dated to 552 CE.

such a group from earlier centuries, such as Ebionites. However, the Qurʾān's relationship (discussed at more length below) with the *Didascalia* and the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, which manifest, in some passages, low Christology (Jesus as a prophet) and emphasize purity regulations, is too unmistakable to pass over.[144] The obvious conclusion is that there were a group or groups of Arabian Christians who espoused and transmitted (perhaps orally) teachings that resembled the contents of these texts. Otherwise, it is difficult to account for the aspects of the gentile law in the Qurʾān, which show striking similarities with the *Didascalia* and the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*.

i b) Though scholars of late antiquity sometimes forget that diversity of beliefs (even as regards the central dogmata) and practices permeated the vernacular religion of the Christians and other communities,[145] this has recently been emphasized by Jack Tannous in his "simple believers thesis." According to him, we are misled if we only take into account the views of the bishops and other elites. It is naturally true that, by the seventh century CE (and, actually, even some two centuries earlier), all Christian churches that we have any evidence of held trinitarian and incarnationist beliefs (which the Qurʾān refutes)—in fact, they advocated them *as the very essence* of the Christian faith. But does this signify that all Christians actually considered them central to how they lived, acted, and worshipped as Christians? I think not. Tannous has argued for this comprehensively in his well-documented book. As he notes: "just as one can believe in gravity without understanding the finer points of Einstein's Theory of General Relativity, or indeed, without ever having

144 See also Stroumsa, *The making of the Abrahamic religions* 97, 154. The pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 16.7.9, has, moreover, an interesting formulation on God: "God is one, and there is no God but Him." This is very similar to those found in the Qurʾān.

145 Religious studies scholars working with modern "lived" or "vernacular" religion take diversity and variation in, as well as indifference toward, doctrine and practice as natural and given. There is nothing to suggest that such a situation did not obtain in the pre-modern era as well. In chapter 3, I noted that according to the 2020 State of Theology survey (https://thestateoftheology.com/), 30% of US evangelical Christians agreed with the (low Christological) notion "Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God." A study on Finnish religious identities and beliefs noted that, in 2019, 60% of the surveyed Finns identified as Christian and 51% as Lutheran. Despite this, only 25% of Finns said they believed in "the God of Christianity." Interestingly, however, 33% affirmed the belief that Jesus was resurrected and 38% that Jesus is the Son of God; Ketola, Kimmo, "Uskonnolliset identiteetit ja uskomusmaailma moninaistuivat," in Hanna Salomäki et al. (eds.), *Uskonto arjessa ja juhlassa: Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko vuosina* 2016–2019 (Kirkon Tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja 134), Helsinki: Kirkon Tutkimuskeskus, 2019, at 70, 74, 79. Apparently one can believe in the "Son of God" without believing in "the God of Christianity"; such notions are among the interesting paradoxes of vernacular religious beliefs. One should expect to find as many, if not more, such contradictions in the pre-modern world as regards beliefs.

heard of Einstein; so, too, one could believe in Jesus without having a coherent view of the Incarnation or a strong opinion on Chalcedon (or any view at all on these matters)."[146] There is, in fact, much evidence that there was variation among all the denominations of the late antique and early medieval Near East, in particular among the laity but sometimes clergy as well. The variation among Christians included, for instance, divergent Christological views, interest in divination, or acceptance of polygyny.[147] Tannous notes that, to understand Qur'ānic Christological statements, there is no need to refer to hypothetical Jewish Christian groups, since diversity of beliefs was a fact even within the churches that deemed themselves orthodox: there is no need to speculate about this or that fringe group that might have survived on the fringes of the Roman empire.[148] He notes:

> when the Qur'ān seems to suggest that Christians understood Mary to be part of the Trinity (5:116), we can, as scholars have done, invoke the possible existence of an exotic heretical group like the Collyridians in western Arabia to explain such a curious claim. But in this instance, and in other places where the Qur'ān speaks of Christianity in unfamiliar ways, rather than looking for fourth—or fifth—century groups which held low Christologies, exalted views of Mary, or some other view not typical of the Christian communities most familiar to us now, or seeking to find individual passages in Syriac texts written by theological elites in northern Mesopotamia or Greek writers somewhere in the Mediterranean world which seem to bear resemblance to this or that idea put forth in the Qur'ān, a more fruitful way of understanding the image of Christianity presented therein is to see it as a reflection of and reaction to Christianity as it existed on the ground in the seventh-century Ḥijāz—or wherever it is that one wants to argue is the Qur'ān's original context.[149]

However, one wonders why the group aspect should be recanted altogether. Individuals have a habit and aptitude to affiliate with those whom they view as likeminded. It is certainly true that there was much individual variation within, say, the (Miaphysite) Syriac Orthodox church as regards doctrinal matters and praxes.[150] But did they only exist as individuals or did some members of the

146 Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 235.
147 Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 226–229, 256.
148 Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 247–249.
149 Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 252.
150 Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 78, 251–252, gives the example of Jacob

church meet with others that agreed with their views and practices, perhaps forming prayer or study circles or other social groups where they interacted? The latter is likely. This, then, takes us into the sphere of group variation: subgroups, as it were, inside a larger collective. Were there, moreover, smaller or larger Christian groups that operated outside the hegemonic churches of the Near East? Also likely. Moreover, though I very much sympathize with Tannous's argument, it has to be pointed out that, like the group variation thesis, a limited amount of evidence exists as regards the individual variation thesis. They are, then, both hypotheses, though credible ones at that.

ii) The second solution to the dilemma would be to state that though the Qurʾānic "Christology" was (perhaps much) lower than what the west Arabian Christians upheld, they joined the believers' movement nonetheless, perhaps lowering their Christ beliefs, perhaps simply ignoring the discrepancy with the Qurʾānic communication on Jesus and what they earlier believed in (or at least had heard in sermons). This is not impossible. Many Christians might have changed their view on Christ, while others might have simply overlooked what the Qurʾān said on him. Naturally, one should also question the extent to which all the Qurʾānic pericopes were known among the believers around Muḥammad since the revelatory corpus was still being produced and not yet collected in a book.[151]

Modern religious-studies theory on conversion includes the idea that change in religious beliefs and practices happens throughout one's life, regardless of whether one thinks of this in connection with the concept "conversion" or not.[152] Some of these developments are sudden, some more gradual: there is much individual variation in how people experience and undergo religious change or conversion.[153] This solution is in line with Tannous's "simple believers thesis," noted above. The religious views and praxes of Christian and other believers were (and are) in a constant state of flux, though they might self-identify in the same way throughout their lives. One could have learned by

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of Edessa (d. 708) as disapproving of some members of his churches who were following the Jewish law (however they understood it); and the East Syrian patriarch Timothy I (d. 823) discussed the question of whether a "heretic" joining the Church of the East can be rebaptized. Among the categories of heretics that he mentions are those who believed that Jesus was a human and rejected his divinity. This points toward the possibility that there were, before and after Islam, Christians who held low Christological beliefs.

151 See Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 307–308, for narratives, in Arabic literature written by Muslims, of Muslims who did not know a single verse of the Qurʾān.

152 See, in particular, Rambo, Lewis R., *Understanding religious conversion*, New Haven CT: Yale University, 1993.

153 Rambo, *Understanding religious conversion* 170–171.

heart and believe in the standard Christological formulae of one's church and community before coming into contact with a new religious movement (in this instance, Muḥammad's) that one joins. In reaction, one could start to emphasize (or not) new facets in the realm of religious dogmata and beliefs.

A thought experiment now arises regarding those Christians who held *high* Christological beliefs (the majority, one assumes, in the Near East on the eve of Islam, and probably in Arabia too), accepting the incarnation and triune Godhead:[154] would these Christians, if they joined the prophet Muḥammad's movement, have felt that they *converted* from Christianity to another religion? Would they have felt that the Qurʾānic discourse on Jesus would be so *opposed* to what they knew from their scripture, the interpretive tradition, and general Christian discourse that they did *not* consider themselves Christians anymore, but something else? Though the Qurʾānic evidence can be read in divergent ways, I would suggest that the answer is no. If my reading of the Qurʾānic social categorizations is correct and the Christians of Muḥammad's movement did not have to recant their earlier identity, then it follows that they considered themselves no less Christians than, say, Ebionites did.[155] There is simply no Qurʾānic evidence to suggest that conversion—in the sense of recanting one's previous religious affiliation in lieu of a new one—was required for or expected from the Jews or Christians joining the believer group. These people would have, then, identified as both Muḥammad's followers and Jews/Christians. For some, this might have meant that they saw themselves as having a dual or hybrid identity in this regard.[156] Other Muḥammad-believing Jews or Muḥammad-believing Christians did not necessarily think of themselves as being doubly-affiliated: they self-identified simply as Jews or Christians. Both options are possible and might indeed have been operative in the mind and discourse of a single individual, with a variation and fluctuation throughout her life.[157]

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154 There was naturally a diversity of opinion on the miaphysite-dyaphysite continuum among the clergy and, one assumes, even more so among the laity (if they cared about such matters to begin with). In any case, many churches around Arabia were non-Chalcedonian in their orientation (miaphysite or East Syrian).

155 Or no less Jewish than Jesus or Paul.

156 Such dual identifications have been noticed among modern-day believers by scholars. According to one poll, 6% of Americans state that they belong to more than one religion (https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/26/few-americans-identify-with-more-than-one-religion/). As regards late antiquity, above it was noted that the Mar Aba (d. 552) reportedly met a theology student who identified as both Jewish and Christian; Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 245. Such examples could be multiplied. Though this type of phenomenon is and, in all likelihood, has been somewhat rare among the people of the world, these examples suggest that it is not non-existent.

157 See also Lindstedt, "One community," where it is suggested that the believer affiliation rep-

I am naturally not suggesting that all or the majority of the west Arabian Christians accepted the Qurʾānic revelations and joined Muḥammad's movement. But the Qurʾānic evidence certainly suggests that some did, regardless of the Christological polemics present in the Qurʾān's message. One could even suggest that it was more difficult for the Jews to accept the Qurʾānic Jesus than for the Christians. But join the movement the Jews did, as the Qurʾānic evidence and the "Constitution" suggest.[158] It must be remembered that Jesus is more rarely mentioned than, for instance, Moses or other patriarchs. Hence, it appears that the relatively few occurrences of Jesus the Messiah in the Qurʾānic revelations did not deter some Jews from joining the community of the believers.[159]

A further question suggests itself: was the idea that prophecy continued and was present in Muḥammad so problematic that Christians would have been repelled from following him? For many, perhaps.[160] For some, probably not. After John and Jesus, a number of Christians actually claimed the mantle of prophecy and, in some cases, were successful in attracting followers.[161] Most famous were Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla (of the late second century Montanist movement), and Mani (d. 270s). The latter actually never called himself a "prophet"; rather, he was "the apostle of Jesus." However, his elite followers, the *electii*, were known as prophets.[162] The Montanist movement appealed not only to the laity but also some of the clergy: the famous church father, Tertullian, joined it.[163] The group was apparently still alive in the eighth century CE Byzantine empire.[164]

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resented a superordinate identity which accepted sub-identities as Jewish, Christian, or gentile. A similar phenomenon has been suggested for early Christianity; see, e.g., studies by Esler, *Galatians*, and *Conflict and identity*, in which it is suggested that Paul envisioned the early Jesus group as comprising Jewish Christ-believers and gentile Christ-believers; Christ-believerness was a superordinate identity in which the Jews and others did not have to forsake their Jewishness or other ethnic identity.

158 See also the texts written by Jews and Christians discussed in the next two chapters.

159 Dye, "Mapping the sources of the Qur'anic Jesus" 154–156, has rightly called the portrayal of Jesus paradoxical.

160 See, e.g., Shoemaker, *A prophet has appeared* 214. In Luke 16:16, Jesus is depicted as saying: "The law and the prophets were in effect until John came," which was quoted in late antique Christian discourse to suggest that prophecy does not continue.

161 See Crone, Patricia, *The nativist prophets of early Islamic Iran: Rural revolt and local Zoroastrianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 281–301; Stroumsa, *The making of the Abrahamic religions* 59–71, 87–99.

162 Stroumsa, *The making of the Abrahamic religions* 96–97.

163 Stroumsa, *The making of the Abrahamic religions* 164.

164 Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 478–479.

It is true that, after these figures, no Christian prophet who gained a significant group of followers is attested in the late antique Near East, though one supposes that minor Christian prophets popped up sporadically (as they do nowadays). The Christian prophets could always refer to Biblical prooftexts. In Matthew 23:34, Jesus is cited as saying that he is "sending you prophets and sages and teachers"; clearly prophecy is not something that has come to an end with Jesus. Moreover, Paul exalts ecstatic worship and prophecy, in which every believer can take part, in 1 Cor 14:26–31:

> What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.

In their scripture and lived tradition, Christians had earlier examples of prophecy continuing after Jesus. One should also note that, as discussed here and in the previous chapter, there is considerable Qurʾānic evidence stating that Christians (and Jews) gladly acknowledged and accepted Muḥammad's revelations. This runs counter to the notion that unending prophecy was, in itself, distasteful to Arabian Christians.

Related to this discussion, I should note that modern scholars sometimes make much of the fact that the Qurʾān speaks of *al-Injīl*, "Evangelion" or "Gospel," in the singular.[165] Hence, so the argument goes, the Qurʾānic *al-Injīl* cannot be taken as a reference to the Gospel*s* (in plural) that the Christians considered sacred. Moreover, the argument sometimes continues, the Qurʾānic embrace of the earlier scripture is mostly but lip service and cannot have meant much to the Jews and Christians in the context of the audience of the Qurʾān. But is this so? I very much doubt it. As regards *al-Injīl*, it is and has been naturally common for Christians to speak of "the Gospel" in the singular when referring to the good news about Jesus, or the narrative(s) about him, or the Christian teaching more generally.[166] What is more, late antique Christians produced a

165 See, e.g., Reynolds, *Allah* 36–40.

166 For instance, the *Didascalia* refers to Jesus' message as well as the narratives about him as "the Gospel" (*ʾwnglywn*), in the singular; Zellentin, "'One letter *yud*'" 241.

number of gospel harmonies, which rendered the story presented in the four Gospels (and their interpretive tradition) into one book. The most important of these was Tatian's *Diatessaron* (ca. 160–175), which was written in Syriac or Greek and which Tatian himself apparently called, simply, "the Gospel."[167] Many manuscripts of the Syriac text as well as translations of it into other languages are extant which are testimony to the popularity of this "Gospel" in late antiquity.[168] Though we do not naturally have to understand that *al-Injīl*, in the Qurʾān, refers to the *Diatessaron*—things are not so simple—the case of Tatian's work serves as an example that there would in all likelihood be nothing surprising or distasteful to Christians to hear the Qurʾān talk about the Gospel in the singular. I suggest that it is highly unlikely that an Arabian Christian, upon hearing the Qurʾānic revelations referred to *al-Injīl* (always in a positive sense, it should be underscored), would have been put off by the singular noun. Rather, she would in all likelihood have felt her scripture honored and validated. An average late antique Christian would not, in any case, have *ever* read the Bible himself:[169] Did he know or care how many Gospels there were within or without the canon (a concept that warrants problematization in itself)? It is doubtful.

The "Constitution" of Medina can be used as extra-Qurʾānic evidence for the position and categorization of the Medinan Jews in the believers' movement, but there is no similar text depicting the Medinan Christians. Nevertheless, in this connection it is warranted to mention a poem attributed to al-Aʿshā, who was possibly Christian, as discussed in chapter 3. The poem is written in

167 Crawford, Matthew R., "Diatessaron, a misnomer? The evidence from Ephrem's commentary," in *Early Christianity* 4 (2013), 362–385.

168 Wood, Philip, "Syriac and the 'Syrians,'" in Scott F. Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of late antiquity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 170–194, at 174. Note, though, that the work was banned by some bishops; Wood, "Syriac" 182.

169 This is emphasized in Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 3, 26–34, noting that there are a number of instances in literary texts that bewail the fact that even the priests could not read or did not know the contents of the Bible. As Tannous notes on p. 21: "Even if we were to assume that there were well-trained, highly literate and informed clergy in urban and rural areas alike throughout the Middle East, we would nevertheless have to consider the question of whether people actually went to church and what, if anything, they got out of their attendance. But levels of church attendance in our period are impossible to gauge. And, if we suppose they were high, frequent complaints about congregants' misbehavior—doing everything from making business transactions, to talking during the service, to gawking at women, to shoving and kicking as they lined up to take the Eucharist—should give us pause before assuming any kind of correlation between church attendance and levels of Christian knowledge or seriousness of engagement with Christianity."

the praise of the prophet Muḥammad and mentions the city of Yathrib (Medina).[170] In the poem, Muḥammad is called "the prophet of God (*al-ilāh*)" and is characterized, among other things, as having "given advice and called [people] to witness" (*awṣā wa-ashhada*).[171] The poem does not contain any indication that al-Aʿshā would have considered Muḥammad as having proclaimed a new religion called Islam. It hence squares with my analysis of the Qurʾānic evidence presented in this book, according to which some Jews and Christians joined the group without a need for conversion.

However, further research is needed on this particular poem and its possible authenticity as well as al-Aʿshā's corpus more generally. According to Shahîd, the last six verses of the poem are spurious, because they in Shahîd's opinion mention Islamic dogmata and praxes in a suspicious way, but otherwise the poem should be treated as an authentic composition of al-Aʿshā: for example, the toponyms (Ṣarkhad, Yathrib rather than al-Madīna) mentioned in the poem appear to ascertain its genuine nature.[172] If so, and if al-Aʿshā was in fact Christian, then we would have an extra-Qurʾānic piece of evidence for Christian praise of Muḥammad as a prophet.

In fact, I would be willing to go so far as to accept, at least tentatively, the last six lines of the poem as authentic too. Shahîd is correct in stating that they contain Islamic notions, but they are actually markedly *Qurʾānic*: there are no post-Qurʾānic anachronisms in the poem as far as I can see. Similar arguments have been used to ascribe authenticity to the "Constitution," and they should be given full weight in this case, too.

I give in what follows my translation of the last six lines of the poem and then discuss their meaning and importance. In this part, al-Aʿshā addresses the hearer of the poem as if he[173] were a potential or actual believer group member:

> Be careful not to eat carrion (*al-maytāt*),
> and not to use an iron arrow to slit a vein [of an animal and drink its blood or sacrifice the blood on a cult stone] (*li-tafṣada*);
>
> and not to devote yourself to the [deity] of the erected cult stone (*dhā al-nuṣub al-manṣūb*),
> and not to worship the idols (*al-awthān*)—rather, worship God!

170 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān* 135–137 (no. 17). This poem should be compared with al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān* 329–331 (no. 66), which also contains monotheist beliefs.

171 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān* 137.

172 Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the sixth century*, ii/1 275–277.

173 The implied reader/hearer is clearly male in the verses.

Pray during the evening time and the morning (*ḥīn al-ʿashiyyāt wa-l-ḍuḥā*),
do not praise Satan—rather, praise God!

Do not turn away a poor beggar
on his heels nor a shackled prisoner.

Do not scoff at a harm that brings a loss (*baʾs dhī ḍarāra*),
do not think that man has an ever-lasting day (*yawman mukhalladan*).

Do not approach a female neighbor (*jāra*); indeed, her secret (*sirrahā*)
is forbidden to you. Either marry or become celibate![174]

In this part (or other parts) of the poem, there is no mention of a reified Islam or Muḥammad as having formed a distinct, or new, religion. It aligns well with my reading of the social categories in the Qurʾānic evidence and the "Constitution" of Medina. Moreover, *pace* Shahîd, the last six verses could well be authentic, since they adduce rather the nascent Qurʾānic legislation than the later Islamic and much more detailed regulations and decrees. The dietary and purity notions present in the poem (no carrion, no blood, no cult stones), is similar to Q 5:3, for example, considered in the next section. Interestingly, too, the poem appears to refer to two daily prayers (*ḥīn al-ʿashiyyāt wa-l-ḍuḥā*). This matches some Qurʾānic evidence (Q 6:52, 11:114, 18:28, 24:58), which indicates that the community of the believers prayed, at some point of its history, two times a day, in addition to being recommended to observe nocturnal vigils. Taking all this into consideration, the poem reads in my opinion as a possible contemporary witness to a Christian poet's ideas about Muḥammad and the message he was proclaiming.

6 *Inna al-dīn ʿinda Allāh al-islām*

Verses 3:19, 3:85, and 5:3 are often cited as evidence for the idea that, in the Medinan period, the Qurʾān already names the religion of the in-group as "Islam" and, furthermore, this religion is characterized as the best and perhaps the only one.[175] However, such an understanding simply reflects conventional Islamic readings of them. These verses become, in classical Islamic exegesis, significant

174 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān* 137.

175 E.g., Friedmann, Yohanan, *Tolerance and coercion in Islam: Interfaith relations in the Mus-*

prooftexts for the notion of Islamic superiority and hegemony, as insightfully discussed by Mun'im Sirry.[176] One of them, Q 5:3, is even known in later tradition as the "verse of the perfection of religion" (*āyat ikmāl al-dīn*) and, according to the majority of interpretations, as being revealed during the farewell pilgrimage of the prophet.

I suggest another reading, however, translating, as in the Meccan kerygma, *al-islām* consistently as "obedience" (to God, the prophet, and the law).[177] In the previous chapter, it was noted that the word (*al-*)*dīn* often refers to "judgment" (in particular, "the last judgment") but, sometimes too, to "law," as in Q 12:76, where *dīn al-malik* signifies "the king's law." It is the meaning "law" (broadly understood) that, according to my interpretation, becomes common in the Medinan stratum. However, the signification "(the last) judgment" is still operative. This is the case, for instance, in Q 3:24, where the context indicates this to be the intended meaning. In this verse, the disbelievers claim: "'the (hell-)fire will only touch us for a certain number of days.' Their concoctions have misled them regarding their judgment! (*wa-gharrahum fī dīnihim mā kānū yaftarūn*)." Here, the Qur'ān notes that the judgment that the disbelievers will receive (*dīnihim*) on the last day is different—namely, eternal—than what they falsely think. Relatedly, Q 4:146 mentions the repentant among the *munāfiqūn*, "hypocrites," namely those who hold fast to God and "relinquish the [matter of] their judgment to God" (*akhlaṣū dīnahum lillāh*).

When considering the Medinan occurrences of *dīn* in the sense of "law," let us begin with verse 5:3. The wider context of the beginning of Q 5 is dietary and purity regulations (which are also addressed in verse 5:3). Here is my rendering of the verse, which is very long indeed (I leave the key words untranslated):

> You are forbidden to consume carrion, blood, pork, anything dedicated to other than God, any [animal] strangled, hit or fallen fatally, gored, eaten by wild animals—unless you have slaughtered it [properly]—or anything sacrificed on idol stones (*al-nuṣub*). [Moreover, you are forbidden] to draw divining arrows (*al-azlām*)—that is transgression. Today, those who

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lim tradition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 33–34. For a different view, see, e.g., Donner, "From believers to Muslims" 14–16.

176 Sirry, *Scriptural polemics* 65–99. As Sirry notes, in modern Muslim exegesis the hegemonic understanding of these verses has been questioned. See also Lamptey, *Never wholly other* 26–35.

177 Somewhat similarly, see Esack, *Qur'ān, liberation & pluralism* 126–134; Sachedina, *The Islamic roots* 38–39. El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic gospel traditions*, 59–60, 66–74, on the other hand, derives the Arabic *al-islām* from Syriac *mashlmānūtā*, "tradition," here to be understood as "prophetic tradition."

> reject (*kafarū min*) your *dīn* have lost hope. Do not fear them, fear Me. Today I have perfected (*akmaltu*) your *dīn* for you, completed (*atmamtu*) My blessing upon you, and favored (*raḍītu*) *al-islām dīnan* for you.[178] But if anyone is forced [to eat illicit food] because of hunger, not intending to sin, God is forgiving and merciful.

This verse and other similar ones have been in the forefront in Islamic exegesis and theology as prooftexts for the conventional exclusivist interpretation of other religions.[179] However, it is hard to see *al-islām* signifying a reified and distinct religion, Islam, in Qurʾānic Arabic, here or elsewhere. The word, after all, simply means "submission" or "obedience" to God and the law, as has been surveyed in the previous chapter.[180] Nor should we translate *dīn* as "religion" here,[181] but go with the usual Qurʾānic meaning of "law" or "judgment."[182] Indeed, the rest of verse 5:3, as well as the neighboring verses, have

178 All "you" pronouns are plural here.

179 Sirry, *Scriptural polemics* 65–99.

180 This is indeed how some classical exegetes understand this as well: see, e.g., the view of al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, viii 84, who explains that in verse 5:3 the phrase *al-islām dīnan* means "submission to My [God's] command, holding onto My obedience, according to what I have decreed of limits and ordinances." He then doubles down and paraphrases *dīnan* as *ṭāʿatan minkum lī*, "in your obedience toward Me." Clearly, al-Ṭabarī's understanding of *dīn* relates the word to the law, and *al-islām* does not refer to the name of a religion, but to obedience toward God and the law. Compare my treatment of the word *al-islām* with Baneth, David H., "What did Muḥammad mean when he called his religion 'Islam'? The original meaning of *aslama* and its derivatives," in *IOS* 1 (1971), 183–190; Cole, Juan, "Paradosis and monotheism: A late antique approach to the meaning of *islām* in the Quran," in *BSOAS* 82/3 (2019), 405–425. Bravmann, *The spiritual background* 8, basing the interpretation on Arabic poetry, suggests that the original meaning of *al-islām* was "defiance of death, self-sacrifice (for the sake of God and his prophet)." But the examples from poetry are of dubious authenticity (stemming, for example, from the work of Ibn Hishām). Moreover, the interpretation of *aslama* (elliptically for *aslama nafsahu*) as "defy death" or "give up one's life" might fit some poems but, in my opinion, does not really fit the Qurʾānic prooftexts; Bravmann, *The spiritual background* 7–26.

181 Classical exegesis often supplies the plural to the reading of the text; see, e.g., al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʾwīl*, 2 vols., i, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 2008, 255, who suggests that Qurʾān 5:3 means that God has chosen Islam as *the* religion "over all other faiths" (*ʿalā al-adyān kullihā*). The goal of these pre-modern exegetes was to solidify the hegemonic understanding of Islam as the best (indeed, the only authentic) religion.

182 For a detailed treatment of these words, see Donner, *"Dīn."* My understanding of Q 3:19, 3:85, and 5:3 differs from his, however. According to Donner, these verses evidence the name of the religion, Islam, in the reified sense, and hence could and should be considered later interpolations. In my interpretation, *al-islām* signified "obedience" throughout in the Qurʾān.

to do with dietary and other regulations.[183] On the basis of the context, translating *dīn* here with anything other than "law," and *al-islām* as "submission" or "obedience" would be strained. Thus, I suggest that the most straightforward translation for this passage would be: "Today I have perfected your law for you, completed My blessing upon you, and favored for you obedience in/as regards law." In fact, as the next section will elucidate, the law mentioned in 5:3 is the gentile purity law—a concept familiar to Jews and Christians of the late ancient Near East.[184]

It should be noted that, in Qurʾānic and later Arabic, the expression "submit to something" is *aslama li-*, that is to say, it requires the preposition *li-* (e.g., Q: 3:83). However, in Q 5:3, as in Q 3:85, considered next, I would suggest that the accusative *dīnan* is a *tamyīz* accusative, which determines and limits the predicate. In such Arabic expressions, the accusative noun should be translated into English as "in/with/as regards (noun)." On this usage, Wright, for example, adduces the following sentences in his grammar, which are very similar in structure to the expression found in Q 5:3, *raḍītu lakum al-islāma dīnan* (I give the full vocalization in what follows):

> *rafaʿtu l-shaykha qadran*, "I raised the chief in dignity" (or, as one could also translate, "as regards dignity")
> *gharastu l-arḍa shajaran*, "I planted the land with trees"
> *allāhu ʿaẓīmun qudratan*, "God is great in might" (or: "as regards might")
> *huwa ḥātimun jūdan*, "he is [like] a Ḥātim in generosity" (or: "as regards generosity")[185]

Note that, in these sentences, the *tamyīz* noun is a *maṣdar* (verbal noun) or non-participle noun—just like *dīnan*. What I am arguing here is that, as in the examples cited above, in Q 5:3 *dīnan* functions as a determination or specification for the object of the clause, *al-islām*, "obedience," answering the question, "as regards what, or in what, is obedience being favored for you (*raḍītu*

183 For an attempt to understand the redaction history of Q 5:3–5, see Sinai, "Processes of literary growth" 87–88. For another discussion of Q 5:3, see Donner, "*Dīn*" 133–134, who argues that the passage "Today I have perfected (*akmaltu*) your *dīn* for you, completed (*atmamtu*) My blessing upon you, and favored (*raḍītu*) *al-islām dīnan* for you" is out of place. But Donner understands the phrase *al-islām dīnan* in the conventional fashion ("favored for you Islam as religion"), which I do not think is warranted.

184 See Zellentin, Holger M., *Law beyond Israel: From the Bible to the Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, 35–128.

185 Wright, William, *A grammar of the Arabic language*, 2 vols., ii, Cambridge: The University Press, ^{3}1896–1898 (rev. ed.), 122.

lakum)?"[186] Hence, the expression *raḍītu lakum al-islām dīnan* can be rendered into English as "I have favored for you obedience in/as regards law." This grammatical interpretation also explains why *dīnan* is indefinite, since *tamyīz* accusatives are, according to the general rule, indefinite.

Similar *tamyīz* accusatives can be found elsewhere in the Qurʾān. For example, *ʿadlu dhālika ṣiyāman*, "the same equivalent in fasting" (Q 5:95); *ishtaʿala l-raʾsu shayban*, "the head has become glowing with grey hair" (Q 19:4); or *fajjarnā l-arḍa ʿuyūnan*, "We have caused the earth to burst with springs" (Q 54:12). As for verse 11:7, it states that God has created the universe "to test which one of you is best as regards deeds" (*li-yabluwakum ayyukum aḥsanu ʿamalan*). In these expressions, the nouns *ṣiyāman*, *shayban*, *ʿuyūnan*, and *ʿamalan* modify the predicate and, naturally, are in the accusative because of their role as *tamyīz* nouns, not because they serve as an object of the verb or verbal noun. I would suggest that is the case with the phrase *raḍītu lakum al-islām dīnan* of Q 5:3, too.

In this connection, it is pertinent to remark that Nicolai Sinai has put forward the interpretation that verse 5:3 consists of two distinct utterances.[187] According to him, the middle of the verse is a later addition. Understood this way, we would originally have had the locution a), which was then glossed with b):

a) You are forbidden to consume carrion, blood, pork, anything dedicated to other than God. But if anyone is forced [to eat illicit food] because of hunger, not intending to sin, God is forgiving and merciful.

b) [Forbidden is] any [animal] strangled, hit or fallen fatally, gored, eaten by wild animals—unless you have slaughtered it [properly]—or anything sacrificed on idol stones (*al-nuṣub*). [Moreover, you are forbidden] to draw divining arrows (*al-azlām*)—that is transgression. Today, those who reject (*kafarū min*) your *dīn* have lost hope. Do not fear them, fear Me. Today I have perfected (*akmaltu*) your *dīn* for you, completed (*atmamtu*) My blessing upon you, and favored (*raḍītu*) *al-islām dīnan* for you.

Sinai's suggestion is based on the fact that a) corresponds to Q 2:173. The middle part of the verse, that is b), would have been a later interpolation glossing and commenting on a). However, in contrast to my interpretation, Sinai translates the phrase under consideration as "today I have perfected your religion for you,"[188] which he suggests could be a post-Muḥammadan insertion because of

186 Though I might be stating the obvious, the preposition + suffix *lakum* is connected with the verb *raḍītu* and not, for example, *al-islām*.

187 Sinai, "Processes of literary growth" 79–84.

188 Sinai, "Processes of literary growth" 80.

its meaning. However, as I argue in this section, this is unlikely to have been the significance as understood by the earliest audience of the Qurʾān. In any case, Sinai's suggestion of the redacted nature of Q 5:3 is interesting and worth pondering. It should be noted in this connection that the famous Qurʾānic manuscript of *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, Arabe 328(a), actually breaks down Q 5:3 in to two verses, with an "additional" verse-ending marked after the word *al-azlām*,[189] which is notable but does not (and naturally need not) correspond with the division suggested by Sinai.

In line with my interpretation of the meaning of Q 5:3, I would translate 3:85 (*wa-man yanbaghi ghayra l-islām dīnan fa-lan yuqbala minhu wa-huwa fī l-ākhira mina l-khāsirīn*) as: "Whoever desires non-obedience (*ghayra l-islām*) in law (*dīnan*)—it will not be accepted from them, and they will be among the losers in the hereafter."[190] In this verse, as in 5:3, the word *dīnan* in *yanbaghi ghayra l-islām dīnan* functions as a *tamyīz* noun that specifies the predicate. It indicates with respect to what in particular one is pursuing *ghayra l-islām*, non-obedience. Note that here the concept of *dīn*, law, and submission to it, is directly connected to the idea of paradisal reward (or more precisely the lack of it). Q 3:85 should be read in conjunction with verse 3:83, which states: "Do they pursue anything other than the law of God (*dīn Allāh*)? Everyone in heaven and earth submits to Him (*aslama lahu*), willingly or not; they will all be returned to Him." Verses 3:83 and 3:85 are not talking about "a religion" called "Islam," but rather about submission to God and the law. Verse 2:132, mentioned in the previous chapter, notes that Abraham, as well as Jacob, advised their children to follow the *millat ibrāhīm*, Abraham's promise of faithfulness toward God, adding: "God has chosen for you the law (*al-dīn*); do not die except as obedient [to God and the law] (*muslimūn*)."

The expression *inna al-dīn ʿinda allāh al-islām* in (the equally famous) verse 3:19 should be considered in this connection. This is usually understood to mean "the religion of God is Islam," but, as I have argued in this study, it does not appear warranted to understand the Qurʾānic expression *al-islām* as meaning Islam, with a capital letter; nor does *al-dīn* refer to "religion" as much as "judgment/law."[191] First, we must consider which noun the expression *ʿinda allāh*,

189 See https://corpuscoranicum.de/de/verse-navigator/sura/5/verse/3/manuscripts/13/page/21r; Déroche, *The one and the many* 203.

190 See also Amir-Moezzi and Dye (eds.), *Le Coran des historiens*, ii a 154: "Les termes *islām* et *dīn* au v. [3:]85 ne doivent pas être interprétés comme une référence à une 'religion' spécifique, puisque *dīn* peut aussi signifier 'jugement' (voir par exemple Q 1:4) et *islām* 'conformité' à, et donc 'acceptation de', la volonté divine."

191 The way out of this would be, perhaps, to note that while *al-dīn* cannot be rendered as

"with/in the presence/sight of God," specifies: is it *al-dīn* or *al-islām*? If the latter, *inna al-dīn ʿinda allāh al-islām* could be understood to mean: "the judgment/law is submission in the presence of God." However, this is not preferable, since, elsewhere in the Qurʾān, *ʿinda allāh* follows, rather than precedes, the noun that it specifies (e.g., Q 2:89, 2:94, 2:103, 6:109). Hence, as is indeed usually understood, *ʿinda allāh* is connected to *al-dīn*, with *al-islām* being the predicative of the clause: "*al-dīn ʿinda allāh* is *al-islām*." But things are not so simple. As in the example adduced above regarding *tamyīz*, that is, *huwa ḥātimun jūdan*, "he is [like] a Ḥātim in generosity," it is possible that, in an Arabic nominal sentence, the meaning should be understood as "is like," "is tantamount to," or "signifies," rather than simply "is."[192] This, I suggest, would fit the expression *inna al-dīn ʿinda allāh al-islām* in Q 3:19. The predicative *al-islām* explains what the "judgment/law with/in the presence/sight of God (*al-dīn ʿinda allāh*)" is, is like, or signifies. It is "submission," in the sense that it ("judgment/law") must be submitted to.

Another example of the word *al-islām*, in the definite form and from the Medinan period, occurs in Q 61:7, which reads: "Who is more wrong (*aẓlam*) than those who invent lies about God while being summoned to obedience (*yudʿā ʿalā al-islām*)? God does not guide the wrongdoers (*al-ẓālimīn*)." The meaning of "obedience" seems rather straightforward in the context of this *sūra*, which, incidentally, attacks (some?) believers for saying one thing while doing another (Q 61:2–3). When considering the Qurʾānic polemics on the People of the Book, it should be remembered that the Qurʾān is sometimes critical of the category "the believers" too.

It is significant, I should add here, that the plural of the word *dīn* never appears in the Qurʾān, though it exists in later stages of Arabic (*adyān*).[193] This, too, points to the Qurʾānic *dīn* being something other than *a* religion, at least in the countable sense. In this connection, verse 22:78, mentioning the key words *al-dīn*, *milla*, and *al-muslimīn*, is also of importance. I would render it as follows:

"religion" in the modern (and possibly Protestant Christian) sense of the word, it could be understood as "law and religion," combined. In German, for instance, the combination *Rechtsreligion* is sometimes used, though, I should note, the term and usage are pejorative (which I do not intend when translating the Qurʾānic *al-dīn* as "the law").

192 For a somewhat similar verse, where one must understand the nominal sentence as meaning "is like" or "is tantamount to," see Q 9:28, which states literally that "the associators are filth" (*innamā al-mushrikūn najas*).

193 As Sirry, *Scriptural polemics* 98, notes: "Even the word '*al-dīn*' is never used in the Qurʾān in its plural form, *adyān*, which indicates that religious life at the time was not yet fully reified." This has also been noted by Esack, *Qurʾān, liberation & pluralism* 145. However, both authors understand *al-dīn* primarily as "religion."

> Strive in God's way as He deserves. He has chosen you [pl.] and has not made the law (*al-dīn*) burdensome to you [pl.], because of the *milla*[194] of your [pl.] father Abraham. He has called you obedient (*al-muslimīn*) before and in this [pericope]. May the messenger be a witness over you [pl.] and may you [pl.] be witnesses over [all] the people. Uphold the prayer, give alms, and hold fast to God. He is your guardian—what an excellent guardian and helper!

Here, as in the verses treated above, it is natural to translate *al-dīn* as "the law," and *al-muslimīn*, the obedient, refers to the community of the believers who obey God, the messenger, and the law. Later in the verse, the key precepts of the law are mentioned—prayer, alms, and piety. Once again, Abraham is adduced as a prototypical figure who also supplies a lofty pedigree to the believers, whatever their background. What does the word "before" in "He has called you obedient (*al-muslimīn*) before and in this [pericope]" refer to? I would suggest that it harks back to verse 2:128 (supposing that it is earlier than Q 22:78), where Abraham and Ishmael pray God to make them obedient (*muslimayn*) to God, and, furthermore, to raise from their offspring (*dhurriyyatinā*) an "obedient nation" (*umma muslima*). This could be the earlier pericope mentioned in Q 22:78 where the current community of the believers is characterized as "the obedient." Moreover, this might be the "promise" (*milla*) given to Abraham: that a new, righteous, obedient nation following a gentile prophet will emerge. Through Abraham's promise and the new revelation given to Muḥammad, the gentiles will reach purity and, through purity, salvation.

7 Gentile Purity and Dietary Regulations

If the arguments of this book are accepted—that the Qurʾānic word *dīn* should be translated as "law," while *milla* might be rendered "faithfulness" or "promise"—what does it mean for those verses in the Qurʾān that state that the *dīn* and *milla* are to be followed *ḥanīfan*, gentile-ly?[195] More specifically:

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194 Here, I understand the accusative *millata* as the "*motive and object* of the agent in doing the act, the *cause or reason* of his doing it," Wright, *A grammar*, ii 121. As elsewhere in the Qurʾān, I argue that the word *milla* should be understood as Abraham's word/promise of faithfulness and obedience toward God.

195 See, e.g., the following (Meccan) verses: Q 10:105: "Direct yourself toward the law (*dīn*) as a gentile (*ḥanīfan*)"; Q 16:123: "We revealed to you, 'Follow the *milla* of Abraham as a *ḥanīf*. He was not an associator'"; Q 30:30: "Direct yourself toward the law (*dīn*) as a gentile (*ḥanīfan*) according to the disposition (*fiṭrat*) of God that He has created."

what is the *gentile way of following the law*? Though this might sound surprising, even bizarre, at first blush, it is exactly this detail that provides clinching evidence for my case.

Holger Zellentin has studied the issue of the Qurʾān's legal discourse and its connections with Jewish and Christian literature comprehensively; the issue was surveyed in chapter 3 of this book.[196] He points out that the Qurʾānic dietary and purity regulations resemble what some Jewish and Christian texts of antiquity and late antiquity put forward as regards the gentiles. In Christian literature, we should start with the so-called Apostolic decree in Acts, which forbids i) food offered to idols (and perhaps idolatry more generally); ii) sexual "depravity"; iii) meat coming from animals that are not properly slaughtered ("whatever has been strangled"); and iv) blood. It is important to note that the category of "strangled" was understood more broadly to mean meat that was improperly slaughtered.[197] "Things strangled" signified, to many Christians, all sorts of carrion.

The Qurʾān, then, follows what the Christians and Jews[198] of the early era and late antiquity viewed as the gentile purity and dietary regulations. Important passages in the Qurʾānic communication on dietary regulation are 2:173, 5:1–5, 6:145–146, and 16:115.[199] The Qurʾān forbids carrion, pork, blood, and idol meat, and is skeptical of wine.[200] The injunction to avoid pork, in particular when compared with Qurʾān 5:5 ("the food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them"), suggests to me that, in addition to Jews, some Arabian Christians eschewed pork.[201] Importantly for the arguments of

196 Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's legal culture*; "Judaeo-Christian legal culture", and *Law beyond Israel*. See also Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qurʾan* 88–107, for a comparison of the Qurʾānic law and Jewish law. He notes (p. 101): "Apart from the fact that Islam and Judaism share dietary prohibitions regarding certain animals, their resemblance in this area is minimal. The dietary laws of Islam—at least in the stratum reflected in the Qurʾan—are simple and few in number." However, Bar-Asher does not notice that the Qurʾānic dietary law follows the Jewish (and early Christian) conceptions of the food and purity regulations that the *gentiles* are expected to follow.

197 Zellentin, "Judaeo-Christian legal culture" 131, 136–137.

198 Zellentin, "Judaeo-Christian legal culture" 155, suggests that the Qurʾān is more in dialogue with Leviticus than with late antique Christian literature.

199 These passages are dealt with in Zellentin, "Judaeo-Christian legal culture" 149–158.

200 Though blanket prohibition of wine (and more generally alcohol) is nowadays associated with Islam, this does not represent the diversity of opinions and practices among medieval Muslims (or modern ones, for that matter); Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 278–287.

201 Cf. Sinai, "Processes of literary growth" 85–89, who suggests that Q 5:5 could be understood as abrogating the pork taboo of Q 5:3. However, Sinai does not address the fact that

this book, it also suggests that the believers did not distinguish them from the People of the Book on the basis of dietary praxes (an important and common way of drawing a group boundary in late antiquity).[202]

Though the Qurʾānic communication, I argue, suggests that there were actually many shared notions and norms between the gentiles and the People of the Book, it should be noted that, even in the case of disagreements, the Qurʾān does not necessarily see them as an insurmountable problem. Q 5:43–50 advises, in a somewhat winding prose, that Jews and Christians should follow their own laws. Of importance is, in particular, Q 5:48, which notes: "We have assigned a law (*shirʿatan*) and a path (*minhājan*) to each of you [pl.]." Above in this chapter, it was noted, moreover, that the "Constitution" proclaims: "The Jews have their law (*dīnuhum*), and the [gentile] believers theirs."

One interesting fact in the Qurʾānic purity regulations is the juxtaposition of a) food sacrificed to idols and b) divining arrows (*al-azlām*). As mentioned in, for example, Q 5:3, cited above, prohibited is "anything sacrificed on idol stones (*al-nuṣub*). [Moreover, you are forbidden] to draw divining arrows (*al-azlām*)—that is transgression." Moreover, these are connected to wine (*al-khamr*) and *al-maysir*, often translated as "gambling," for instance, in Q 2:219 and 5:90–91.[203] In chapter 3, it was pointed out that two late antique Christian texts, the *Didascalia* and the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, censure wine because it might have been used in libations to idols or false deities or because drinking wine and becoming intoxicated might lead to participating in eating idol meat or general depravity. The pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 8:19 connected this to the demons who lead humankind astray (or, more specifically, those people who already have decided to obey the demons). This devilish connection is also present in Q 5:90, which notes: "You who believe: Wine, *al-maysir*, idol stones (*al-anṣāb*), and divining arrows (*al-azlām*) are filth, Satan's doing (*rijsun min ʿamali l-shayṭān*)! Eschew them so that you might prosper."[204] Neither the *Homilies* nor the Qurʾān forbid wine outright but note that it can lead it to impure actions.

(the majority of) the Jews would not have eaten pork, so his reasoning is difficult to follow here, supposing that these verses were revealed in Medina; Medina had a sizeable Jewish population; and that the Qurʾānic references to the People of the Book (such as in Q 5:5) also included the Jews.

202 See also Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 351, for later Muslim views that Jewish and Christian meat was fine, whereas Zoroastrian meat was not.

203 Sinai, "Towards a redactional history," 383, understands Q 5:90–93 as supplementing and commenting on Q 5:3.

204 Note also the avoidance of wine in a supposedly pre-Islamic poem by a certain ʿĀmir al-Khaṣafī from the tribe of Muḥārib; he and his tribe appear to have been Christian. In the

In any case, the Qur'ānic injunction to avoid *al-maysir*, if understood generally as "gambling," appears original in this respect. But perhaps "gambling" gives a wrong sense. It must be noted that later Arabic lexicographers and Qur'ānic commentators had different explanations for the word *al-maysir*: clearly, they struggled with it, having lost the original context and the exact meaning of the word. Let me cite the entry of al-Fīrūzābādī:

> *Al-maysir*: a game with arrows (*al-qidāḥ*). [The verb used is] *yasara yaysiru*. Or it denotes the animal fit for slaughter (*al-jazūr*), which they [the people taking part in the *maysir*] would gamble (*yataqāmarūna*) on. If they wanted to play *maysir*, they would buy [together] one animal fit for slaughter (*al-jazūr*) on credit. They would slaughter it before they would play *maysir* and divide it into 28 pieces or 10 pieces. Then they would draw, one at a time [the arrows/lots used in this game], which [i.e., the arrows/lots] would have the names of each man, indicating victory of the allotted share to the one whose lot would be drawn. The one whose arrow/lot would be empty (*al-ghufl*), would have to pay [for the slaughtered animal that was bought on credit]. Or *al-maysir* denotes backgammon (*al-nard*) or any game of gambling.[205]

The pre-Islamic Arabic poetry suggests that the game of *maysir* was usually played with a camel being the sacrificed animal.[206] The famous poet ʿAlqama boasts, however, that he would participate even if the stake was a horse:

> And oft-times have I played *Maisir* when hunger burdened the gaming-arrow of *nabʿ*-wood bound round with a sinew, marked with a notch by the teeth;

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poem, the poet addresses his tribe's enemy, saying that they had wrongfully waged war. Moreover: "And we were not with you at your debauch, when ye drank down (*khamrakum idh sharibtum*), bereft of reason—by God!—an ill-omened draught"; al-Mufaḍḍal, *Mufaḍḍalīyāt*, i 625, trans. ii 258. Have we here an example of a pre-Islamic Arabic-speaking Christian person who eschewed wine (or at least pagan wine)?

205 al-Fīrūzābādī, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, 4 vols., ii, Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Ḥalabī, n.d. 163.

206 See the explanation given by the editor, Lyall, in al-Mufaḍḍal, *Mufaḍḍalīyāt*, ii 28, who notes that the game was "played with arrows by seven players for portions of a slaughtered camel (or camels, for the rules of the game frequently involved the slaughter and cutting-up of successive victims). The arrows, ten in number, of which only seven carried shares in the stakes and three were blanks, bore different names, and were marked with notches denoting their value. They were shuffled in a leathern quiver, and the shuffler and dealer (*mufīḍ al-qidāḥ*), having it in his power to influence the throw."

> If they played the game with horses (instead of camels) as the stake, I would play it for the same stake: and whatsoever people stake is bound to be paid.[207]

While the exact rules and context of *al-maysir* are somewhat lost, it appears that, in the context of the late antique and Qurʾānic gentile regulations, it makes sense to assume that the thing that the Qurʾān wanted to prohibit was not gambling in general but that *al-maysir* should also be understood as a form of idol meat.[208] That *al-maysir* is connected with slaughtering an animal and then gambling on it was, then, connected with sacrificing rites on cult stones, as Q 5:3 clearly suggests.

Connected with this, I would suggest that verse 2:256, regardless of its later uses and readings, should probably be understood in this context: "There is no compulsion in the law (*lā ikrāh fī al-dīn*).[209] Guidance and error have been distinguished from each other: Who rejects idols (*yakfur bi-l-ṭāghūt*)[210] and believes in God has grasped the firmest handhold, which will not break. God is hearing, knowing." In Q 2:256, as elsewhere, the law, *al-dīn*, is specifically connected with the rejection of idols and, by extension, idol meat and drink.

The Qurʾānic concern for purity extends to other things as well. Ablutions (attaining purity) before praying are mentioned in verse 5:6. Much as we could with hindsight detect a distinctly "Islamic" set of requirements for ritual purity (washing oneself before prayer) here, things were probably not so simple in the seventh century when the first followers of Muḥammad (and probably others in the audience as well) would have heard him recite his revelations. The late antique Christian texts mentioned above, the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and the *Didascalia*, contain references to Christian groups that practiced washing themselves before praying and after having sex. Similar injunctions are

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207 Al-Mufaḍḍal, *Mufaḍḍalīyāt*, ii 337 (trans. Lyall).

208 In this connection, it should be noted that the late antique Christian sources are also fixated on the idea that the Arabians ate unclean meat and worshipped idols, though this appears to have been a literary motif first and foremost; Fisher et al., "Arabs and Christianity" 297, 302.

209 Hence, not "There is no compulsion in *religion*," as is commonly translated (and indeed understood in medieval interpretative tradition, see Crone, Patricia, *God's rule: Government and Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 373–382).

210 The Qurʾānic word *ṭāghūt* appears to be derived from the (Western Palestinian) Aramaic *ṭāʿūthā* or Ethiopic *ṭāʿot*, both meaning "idol;" see Kropp, "Beyond single words" 209. Once again, as in many other religious concepts that the Qurʾān uses, the connection with the surrounding Christian cultures is clear, though the exact process and manner of derivation is not known.

also attested in rabbinic texts.[211] In the case of verse 5:6 too, it is unclear if the Qurʾānic message actually puts forward norms and rules that would have set its community apart from Jews and Christians. Rather, the opposite could be the case: the Qurʾān accepts and acknowledges dietary and purity regulations that were perhaps widely followed in its context.[212]

The goal of this subsection was not to claim that Qurʾānic legal discourse and reasoning lacks originality or is fully borrowed from Jewish understanding of the gentile Noahide laws or the Christian Apostolic decree. There are varied legal ordinances and arguments in the Qurʾān that cannot be traced back to a Jewish or Christian exemplar. And, in any case, the Qurʾān presents a unique combination of injunctions. However, the point remains that the Qurʾānic prohibitions and instigations come close to Jewish and Christian understandings of those laws that the *gentiles* should follow. The Qurʾān prompts, for example, "Say, 'My Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright *dīn*, the *milla* of Abraham, as a *ḥanīf*, he was not an associator'" (6:161). That the law should be followed *both* Abrahamic-ly *and* gentile-ly is not, in fact, incongruous. It is the very point. Once again, the eschatological context of the Qurʾānic kerygma has to be remembered (see also what follows). The gentiles of the Qurʾān are "eschatological gentiles"[213] who need to adopt dietary, purity, and other regulations and to recant idolatry, totally and completely, to be saved, since the end is near. The Jews and Christians have already accepted the law, though their law includes superfluous aspects and their beliefs sometimes include views that are incompatible with the Qurʾānic portrayal of stringent monotheism. In fact, Q 98:5 suggests that Jews as well as Christians would be better off if they followed the law in its gentile form. However, other passages, such as Q 5:43–48, note that Jews and Christians are free to (and indeed should) follow their own legal systems.

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211 See the detailed discussion in Zellentin, *The Qur'ān's legal culture* 86–105, with references to rabbinic literature as well.

212 Zellentin, *The Qur'ān's legal culture* 81, notes: "the entirety of the enhanced Judaeo-Christian lawcode that we find in the Qurʾān—including the prohibition of pork, and the injunction to wash after intercourse and before prayer, as well as abstinence during the menses—was equally endorsed by Judaeo-Christians within the Didascalia's community, as well as by the gentile followers of Jesus in the Clementine Homilies." See also Zellentin, *Law beyond Israel*, 118, n. 191: "I do not share the assumption of many previous scholars that all Christians must surely have eaten pork, which seems to be the major point of contention when trying to contextualize this verse [5:5]. Such an assumption does not square with the patristic records about Arabian practices, which, in the aforementioned case of Sozomen, discuss the conversion of Arabians to Christianity without mentioning any changes in their custom of avoiding pork."

213 I adopt the expression from Fredriksen, *Paul* 73.

It is, moreover, possible that the gentiles in the audience also had already adopted many of the norms and practices advocated by the Qurʾān: comparisons to late antique Christian rhetoric suggest that the claim that there are pagans who consume impure food and drink was a common, and exaggerated, literary motif.[214] In the Qurʾānic context, there was, in fact, a very small difference between the pagan way of slaughtering an animal and the Qurʾānic-ly sanctioned one, in which God's name would have to be mentioned and the slaughtering could not be made on cult stones of any sort (in any case, the evidence suggests that such stones were no longer widely used in the sixth and seventh centuries).[215]

It is, I suggest, in the context of dietary and purity regulations that the Qurʾānic portrayal of the community of the believers as "pure" should be understood. For instance, Q 35:18 notes that the prophet is sent to warn those who fear God, pray, and follow the purity regulations (*man tazakkā*). In verse 2:129, Abraham and Ishmael pray to God that He will send a later messenger (probably a reference to Muḥammad) to, among other things, "purify them." Q 9:108 speaks of a prayer place (*masjid*) that has been founded on *al-taqwā*, piety, remarking that "in it are men[216] who love to be pure (*yataṭahharū*); and God loves the pure."[217]

8 The Eschaton Postponed?

The Meccan strata of the Qurʾān are replete with apocalyptic eschatology. The point appears to have been to get the gentiles, who were already monotheists of sorts or at least henotheists, to accept the imminence of the end and the reality of the hereafter. This was to make salvation accessible to gentiles too.

214 Maxwell, "Paganism" 854–856; Stroumsa, *The making of the Abrahamic religions* 23–41. Safaitic inscriptions, written by ancient (for the most part "pagan" and nomadic) people living in Jordan and Syria, already contain references to ritual cleansing and purity; see al-Jallad, *The religion and rituals* 44–46.

215 Compare this with the situation in the late antique Byzantine empire where, as Maxwell, "Paganism" 856, notes, there was a small difference between a "pagan" meat-centered feast and a "Christian" one.

216 In Arabic, this is *rijāl*, which is indeed gendered. This is related to the more general Qurʾānic androcentric style, see Hidayatullah, *Feminist edges*, 119–121, though, in fact, the Qurʾān often uses gender neutral words such as *al-nās* to refer to humankind (notwithstanding the fact that some translators of the Qurʾān render these words in a gendered way).

217 Q 35 is Mecca III, while Q 9 is Medinan, according to Nöldeke's scheme. For repentance in the Qurʾān, see also el-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* 99–100.

Since this appears to have been achieved by the Medinan period—there is, after all, a much clearer sense of a community of believers in Medina—there was no longer so much need for this discourse. What is more, the Medinan environment had, it appears on the basis of the Qurʾān, a much stronger Jewish and Christian presence than Mecca; these People of the Book did not have any doubts about the eschaton and the afterlife, so other Qurʾānic themes could be pursued. Naturally, the Meccan pericopes of the Qurʾān did not disappear anywhere; they were memorized (probably also written down to an extent) and recited among the community.

However, though not numerous, there are some Medinan verses that proclaim the end times. Consider, for instance, Q 22:55: "Those who disbelieve, will be in doubt until the (last) moment comes suddenly upon them; or (*aw*)[218] the punishment of a barren day comes to them." The verse communicates a very pressing sense of the end and judgment that are coming, as does Q 3:9, which notes that "God will not break His promise" concerning the coming of the final judgment. More, but not completely, ambivalent is another Medinan verse, Q 33:63: "People ask you (sing.) about the (last) moment. Say: 'Knowledge of it is with God.' What could make you (sing.) know [it]? Perhaps (*la-ʿalla*) the (last) moment is near (*qarīban*)!" In Qurʾānic discourse, the expression *la-ʿalla* often denotes a wish (not just potentiality) that something may come true, so here too, the expectation of the impending end is present.

It seems to me that rather than supposing that the eschatological belief was watered down in the Medinan community, it lived on.[219] Establishing a community and expecting the eschaton are not incongruous, as the historian of early Christianity Paula Fredriksen has pointed out: "It is harder to wait and do nothing than it is to wait and do something";[220] a similar situation may have existed in the Medinan community in 1–11/622–632. Though a (or, *the*) community of believers was founded, with a more developed sense of regulations and requirements, and though it was waging a war against an earthly enemy, this does not exclude the likelihood that they were avidly waiting for the end times to begin. That Muḥammad did not, it appears, appoint a successor suggests that he and his community were expecting the end to come any minute.[221]

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218 The conjunction "or" is peculiar here, since one would expect these two things (the eschaton and the punishment) to be interrelated events. But *aw* rather than *wa* appears in all early manuscripts available at https://corpuscoranicum.de/handschriften/index/sure/22/vers/55.

219 Also, Costa, "Early Islam as a messianic movement" 47.

220 Fredriksen, *When Christians were Jews* 131.

221 Shoemaker, *The apocalypse of empire* 131.

To be a believer, according to the Qurʾānic social categorization, one had to accept the leadership and prophetical role of Muḥammad (at least to some degree). But is the hereafter more pluralistic? Could one attain paradise without accepting Muḥammad? It would seem so, though the Qurʾānic communication on this point is somewhat ambivalent.[222]

Much of the Medinan society (perhaps in contrast to that of Mecca)[223] were believers in God *and* the last day, whatever their background. Rather than propounding depictions of the approaching end, the Medinan Qurʾānic teaching puts forward discourses on the corporeal resurrection, the promise of paradise, and the threat of hell—talking points that would have been utterly acceptable to, not to say acknowledged by, Jews and Christians. Significantly, while the Medinan pericopes (contra the Meccan ones) often suggest that the majority of the Jews and Christians were unfit to be considered true believers and members of the prophet's community, late Qurʾānic verses (e.g., 2:62, 2:277, 3:199, 5:69) still promise a paradisal reward[224] to all and sundry among them provided that they fulfill the minimal requirements of believing in God and the eschaton and performing good deeds. In these verses, faith in the prophet Muḥammad's message and revelation is not even mentioned as a requirement for the paradisal rewards.[225] There are some verses which indicate the opposite—for instance, Q 9:80 says that God will not forgive those who do not believe in Muḥammad. Hence, the picture emerging from the Qurʾān is not completely clear, but it still seems to me that the eschatological promise of 2:62, 3:199, and 5:69 is meant to incorporate a larger group than simply those who believe in Muḥammad. In fact, looking at verse 9:79, it appears to contextualize 9:80 more, mentioning those who actively scorn and ridicule the believers. An important verse in this

222 On this question and the later interpretive tradition, see the rich discussion in Reynolds, *Allah* 66–88, 135–154.

223 As I have pointed out in this book, the gentile monotheists and henotheists of western Arabia appear to have been skeptical of the final judgment and afterlife.

224 That the "reward" (*ajr*) mentioned in these verses is of the paradisal sort is clear from other Qurʾānic passages, such as 18:30–31, which explicitly elaborate that the reward signifies paradise. See also Donner, "From believers to Muslims" 19.

225 See Sachedina, "The Qurʾān and other religions," 297–305, for later developments in the Islamic interpretive tradition toward supersession and exclusive understandings of the afterlife. Note in particular p. 301: "in the sectarian milieu of seventh-century Arabia early Muslims encountered competing claims to authentic religiosity as posed by other monotheists like the Christians and Jews. This encounter, which produced extended interreligious polemics, led to the notion of the independent status of Islam as a unique and perfect version of the original Abrahamic monotheism." This is to the point, although I would add that this exclusivist discourse should perhaps be better placed in the eighth than the seventh century CE.

connection is Q 74:31, which appears to be a later (probably Medinan) addition to a Mecca I *sūra*.[226] In the verse, the People of the Book are depicted as alongside the believers and in contrast to the disbelievers:

> We have appointed angels as guardians of the fire. Their number is a test for those who disbelieve so that those who have received the Book may be certain and those who believe might increase in faith; and so that those who have received the Book and the believers would not have any doubts; and so that those who have sickness in their hearts and the disbelievers would say: "What does God mean by this simile?" Thus, God leads astray who He wills and guides who He wills. None knows the hosts of your Lord except He. And it [the fire] is a reminder to humankind.

According to this verse, on one side are the People of the Book and the believers: the coming judgment does not perplex them but only lessens their doubts. On the other side, there are the disbelievers and "those who have sickness in their hearts." This verse is one of the clear examples in the Qurʾān that the People of the Book are not categorized as disbelievers; rather, they are with the believers (and, as other verses propound, some of them are actually to be included in the social group of the believers).

A (somewhat) inclusivist afterlife would fit rather well some of the ancient and late ancient semi-universalist discourses of the last judgment, according to which salvation was not merely constrained to the in-group.[227] The gentiles who fear God will earn a portion of heaven, opined the rabbis (e.g., Sanhedrin 105a). An earlier Jew, the apostle Paul, develops a prolonged argument of Israel's sin, redemption, and their place vis-à-vis the gentiles in Romans 9–11, contending that "all Israel" will be saved and "the full number of" gentiles will come to Zion to experience and profit from the eschaton (Romans 11:25–26), though it is unclear whether or not Paul thought that belief in Christ Jesus is required. Origen (d. 254) also argued for an inclusivist afterlife, even letting, in

226 The verse is significantly longer and different in content than the verses before and after it; Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorâns* i 88.

227 Jewish and Christian scholars of the ancient and late ancient world sometimes opined that the people of the other faiths will receive at least a portion of the eschatological reward. Some of these scholars were of the opinion that the "others" would convert (whatever that might mean in context); others remarked that a full conversion would not be required. For examples in Second Temple Judaism (including the Jesus group), see Fredriksen, *Paul* 5–7, 26–31, 73–77, 160–164.

the end, Satan there—a doctrine condemned as heretical by the Second Council of Constantinople (553 CE).[228] The Qur'ānic promise of salvation being a multi-group enterprise is remarkable, but it is not, then, completely novel. This difference of present and future characterizations (critical comments toward the "others" in the context of this life but optimistic notions about their salvation at the eschaton) is attested in Jewish and Christian literature and theology as well.

9 Excursus: Arabic Historiography and the Medinan Era

The blurred boundaries are not entirely absent from the biographies of the prophet even as regards the Medinan era. It was indeed Ibn Hishām who decided to include the "Constitution" of Medina in his work. Moreover, there are some narratives mentioning Jews *qua* Jews as members of the in-group, though it is more frequent to see Medinan Jews portrayed as a clearly distinct group from Muḥammad's believers.[229] There are also numerous interesting contacts between the communities, though they are often hostile. Both Muḥammad and Abū Bakr are portrayed as having gone to a (Medinan?) *bet midrash* to argue with the rabbinic scholars there.[230] More benevolent contacts can be seen in the fact that Arabic literature notes that some of Muḥammad's wives were Jewish (Ṣafiyya bint Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab and Rayḥāna bint Shamʿūn ibn Zayd) and, at least one, Christian (the concubine Mary the Copt).[231] If this is based on real recollections of events and figures, it signifies that not only were the prophet's followers composed of Jews, Christians, and gentiles, his family was too. Though the later literature notes that Ṣafiyya and Rayḥāna converted to Islam, there are reasons to doubt these conversion stories.[232] Significant in this connection is also the case of the famous Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, who is, in the Arabic sources, described as a *ḥibr* (Jewish rabbi, though a Christian religious

228 Reynolds, *Allah* 149. That the Second Council of Constantinople had to take issue with this stance shows that it was debated and, in all likelihood, embraced by some Christians.

229 See, e.g., Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 334: though a Medinan Jew is first to spot Muḥammad when he is doing his emigration from Mecca to Medina, the former is quoted as having made a distinction between the Jews and those who expect Muḥammad (the Khazraj and Aws). For an insightful study on the narratives on Jewish-Muslim (often hostile) interactions in the Medinan era, see Roohi, "The murder of the Jewish chieftain," who argues that many of the stories belong to the stuff of fantasy.

230 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 383–384, 388–389; Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qur'an* 16.

231 See Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 438–439.

232 Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam* 70–71.

scholar could also be so denoted) before his conversion; later, he was one of the companions who collected a (pre-ʿUthmānic) version of the Qurʾān.[233]

Another interesting anecdote takes place at the battle of Uḥud, where a certain learned Jew, called Mukhayrīq, fights on the side of Muḥammad's community and dies. Only a few sources assume that he converted before his death: most sources present him as a Jew, though Ibn Hishām makes the implausible claim that he rejected the Sabbath.[234] Toward the end of the narrative, Muḥammad is quoted as saying: "Mukhayrīq is the best of the Jews." According to the story, Mukhayrīq, the rabbi-cum-fighter, bequeathed his wealth to Muḥammad and his community.[235] Mukhayrīq is a reversed God-fearer, so to speak, in the story: a Jew who associates with the gentile monotheists. Though not becoming a full member of the Muslim group (a category that the biographical literature retrojects to the time of the prophet), he fights for it and bequeaths his earthly belongings to it.

The double-affiliated Mukhayrīq is cited as a positive example. Usually, however, such group bending or crossing figures represent a threat or a negative model in the *sīra* narratives. No one exemplifies this better than the leader of the Khazraj tribe, ʿAbdallāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl. Though he is notionally a Muslim, on the side of Muḥammad and his followers, he sometimes schemes with their opponents—according to the *sīra* reports, that is—the Jews.[236] He is a paradigmatic *munāfiq*, a hypocrite who only feigns loyalty and belief. In the famous *ḥadīth al-ifk*, the account of the lie, that is, the narrative about the events that led some people wrongly to accuse ʿĀʾisha, the prophet's wife, of infidelity, ʿAbdallāh ibn Ubayy is described as one of the most vehement spreaders of these false rumors.[237] Despite all this, he dies a Muslim, with the prophet praying over his grave. The tales of his life form a narrated cluster of overlapping, hybrid identities that exist in tension. ʿAbdallāh ibn Ubayy is a liminal Muslim, now affiliating with Muḥammad, other times with the Jews.

Narratives on Ethiopia and the Negus extend to the Medinan period. ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, who went, so we are told, to Ethiopia as an envoy of the Quraysh during the 610s CE to ask the Negus to relinquish Muḥammad's believers to them,

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233 The case of Ubayy ibn Kaʿb is discussed in Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam* 136–137.

234 Implausible, that is, if Mukhayrīq represents an actual historical figure. On Mukhayrīq and his religious identity, see also Roohi, "The murder of the Jewish chieftain" 10–12.

235 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 578, trans. Guillaume 384; the story is also in al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* 262–263, trans. Faizer Rizvi (ed.), *The life of Muḥammad: Al-Wāqidī's Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, trans. Rizvi Faizer, Amal Ismail and Abdulkader Tayob, London: Routledge, 2013, 128.

236 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 653.

237 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 734.

goes to Ethiopia again. In the narrative, he is still a polytheist and opponent of the prophet, siding with the Meccan Quraysh, though he is later known as an important general of the Muslim armies. After the battle of the trench (*al-khandaq*), he opines that it is better to go to Ethiopia and stay there and sit the war between Muḥammad and the Quraysh out. While in Ethiopia, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ spots ʿAmr ibn Umayya, the prophet Muḥammad's envoy there. ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ asks the Negus for permission to kill his namesake, but the Negus vehemently denies this, noting that Muḥammad is a true prophet who has received the same great law (*al-nāmūs*) that has come to Moses. Hearing this, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ undergoes a moment of fundamental change, and decides to convert to Islam: "I asked him [the Negus] if he would accept my allegiance to Muhammad in Islam, and he stretched out his hand and I gave my allegiance."[238] Not only is the Ethiopian king a Christian-cum-Muslim, he can act on Muḥammad's behalf and apparently accept conversions to Islam. Moreover, the connections with Muḥammad's believers and the Negus continue to exist long after the emigrations, during the Meccan period, there. Though it strains credibility, from a historical point of view, that the Ethiopian king would have given his time or energy to hear about an Arabian prophet, much less to acknowledge him, it is certainly possible that some of Muḥammad's believers went to Ethiopia. Once there, they would have had long-lasting and intimate contacts with the Ethiopian Christians.

In fact, the same report notes that the prophet had sent ʿAmr ibn Umayya to Ethiopia specifically "concerning Jaʿfar and his companions."[239] That is to say that ʿAlī's brother Jaʿfar and a group of other Arabian believers are still lingering in Christian Ethiopia, even after the battle of the trench, when Muḥammad's community was well established in Medina. Since no details of their stay are given in the literary evidence, how are we to imagine their stay in Ethiopia over all these years (either in historical or literary terms)? If, as the narratives tell us, Jaʿfar and the others went there in the fifth year of Muḥammad's mission in Mecca (ca. 615 CE), and if they were still there after the *khandaq* battle (ca. 5/626–627), this would mean that a community of Arabian believers stayed in Ethiopia over ten years. What did they do all that time? Where did they live? Where did they pray? Which scripture did they read (or hear)? I have suggested in this book that some believers in Muḥammad's community self-identified, in fact, as Christians. The narratives about the Ethiopian exile might be a memory about these blurred lines in the early period. If there is any authentic informa-

238 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 717, trans. Guillaume 484.
239 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 716 trans. Guillaume 484.

tion in the stories of Jaʿfar and his companions in Ethiopia, one would suppose that they prayed in churches alongside the Ethiopian Christians.

It was noted in the previous chapter that the Arabic narratives on the Meccan period, in particular the trip to Ethiopia and back, display the affinity, but also the threat, of Christianity with Muḥammad's believers. This is not entirely absent in the stories dealing with the Medinan period either, though they usually concentrate on discussing and drawing a boundary vis-à-vis the Jews (culminating in the violent massacre of the Jewish tribe of Banū Qurayẓa). The Christian aspect is present in, for example, the story about the history of the call to prayer.[240] First, Muḥammad entertains the idea that, according to the Jewish custom, a trumpet should be blown when it was prayer time. This is carried out for some time, until Muḥammad rejects the idea. Then, he orders the use of clappers (*nawāqī*s), as was the wont of Near Eastern Christians. After this, one ʿAbdallāh ibn Zayd ibn Thaʿlaba has a dream in which the proper call to prayer is told to him. The prophet hears about this dream, acknowledges it as an authentic vision from God, and orders his community to call to prayer by using the human voice only. This is a remarkable story, which portrays Muḥammad's believers trying out the practices of both Jews and Christians. The true vision indicating how the call to prayer should be given is not even received by Muḥammad but, as far as we know, a minor member of the community, ʿAbdallāh ibn Zayd ibn Thaʿlaba.

The delegation of the Christians of al-Najrān should also be mentioned here.[241] Though the narrative as presented by Ibn Hishām endeavors to draw a firm line between the Christians and the Muslims, and, moreover, Ibn Hishām appends a long passage where he adduces arguments and Qurʾānic passages ostensibly proving the falsity of Christianity,[242] what sticks out amid all this is the fact that, in the narrative, the Christians of al-Najrān insist that they are *muslimūn*, submitters to God.[243] Moreover, their deputation is depicted in glowing terms: they are, for example, knowledgeable about religion. Not only that, but they prayed in the prophet's mosque in Medina, the prophet ordering that they should be free to do so.[244] Though the narrative ends in a Christological dispute between Muḥammad and the Christians, the story fails to portray Christians and Muslims as wholly other.

240 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 347.

241 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 401–403. On this, see also Ibrahim, *Conversion to Islam* 152–153.

242 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 403–410.

243 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 403.

244 Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* 402. As we will see in chapters 7 and 8, there is extensive evidence of Jews, Christians, and Arabian gentile believers sharing a place of prayer.

10 Conclusions on the Medinan Era

In this book I have tried to argue that the community and message of Muḥammad fits seamlessly into the late antique world of Arabia. Rather than supposing that early Islam was *sui generis*, from a historical perspective it makes more sense to assume that new phenomena and social groups arise in contexts where the group beliefs and practices are in relationship with those present in the time and place already.[245] The "Constitution" and the Qurʾān's willingness to accommodate and include Jews and Christians in the believer group only makes sense if a) there were Jews and Christians around; b) they themselves (or some of them) were willing to join the group, not seeing it as totally alien.

Much as the early Jesus movement comprised, in the first century CE, both Jewish and gentile members, the community of believers around Muḥammad consisted of gentiles, Jews, and Christians.[246] This somewhat inclusive situation did not really change in Medina, according to the Qurʾānic evidence and the "Constitution,"[247] though there is more criticism of the People of the Book in the Medinan strata. Yet, there is no sign of a specific or formal conversion rite that people should undergo to join the group, nor is there a demand to forsake earlier ethno-religious identities.[248] Granted, Medinan Qurʾānic communication is, at times, suspicious of the "Jews" and "Christians" as broader social categories,[249] but the suspicion is not total. Even the very latest strata of the Qurʾān, such as *sūra* 5, does not indicate that Muḥammad's community would have "parted" from the Jews and Christians. Naturally, since we do not really have identifiable texts produced by these Jews and Christians at the time of the prophet Muḥammad, with the possible exception of the poem by al-Aʿshā,[250]

245 Stark, Rodney, "Why religious movements succeed or fail: A revised general model," in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11 (1996), 133–146, at 136, has noted that new religious movements are more likely to succeed if they "*retain cultural continuity with conventional faith(s) of the societies in which they seek converts*" (emphasis in the original).

246 Rather surprisingly, Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East* 394–396, disagrees with this idea, though the evidence mustered in his book seems to me to support it rather than disprove it. The disagreement appears to be the result of the insistence, on the part of Tannous, on treating social categories such as "Christian" and "Muslim" as clear and stable, though the categories might themselves include a variety of different people, with their manifold beliefs, praxes, and ideas. However, I have argued in this book that the social categories should also be analyzed and problematized.

247 *Pace*, for example, Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qur'an* who suggests that Islam and Judaism parted ways during the Medinan period.

248 Donner, "From believers to Muslims" 49.

249 Lindstedt, "'One community'" 367–368.

250 After his life, we have some texts that seem to be produced by such members of the community of the believers, as I discuss in the following chapters.

it is difficult to say how they themselves understood their affiliation with the believer movement: perhaps some of them only considered themselves allies or auxiliary members. But the Qurʾān and the "Constitution" appear to suggest more than that: these Muḥammad-believing Jews and Christians were indeed part of the community.[251]

The eschatological urgency, indeed the already-arrived presence of the eschaton, of the Meccan Qurʾānic revelations is toned down somewhat in the Medinan strata, though it is still present and operative. The belief in the last day is one of the core principles of the community in the Qurʾān and the "Constitution" of Medina. The threat of hell and the promise of paradise are at the center of the Qurʾānic proclamation, and late key verses (Q 2:62, 5:69) reiterate that the believers, whatever their background—gentile, Jewish, Christian, or Sabian—are eligible for paradise. In the Medinan pericopes, the significance of the law (*al-dīn*) and its observance (*al-islām*)—which is synonymous with obeying God and the prophet—is underscored. The Jews and Christians, within (and without?) Muḥammad's community of believers, ought to follow their own dietary and purity regulations, while the gentile believers should take up the law *ḥanīfan*, gentile-ly (in any case, Q 5:5 notes that the gentile conception of licit and illicit foods are more or less the same as those of the People of the Book). The community of the believers fights against a common enemy: this enemy, however, cannot be simply equated with the People of the Book. Moreover, fighting or conquests do not seem to be related to any eschatological or imperial drama in the Qurʾān[252] (though this idea might be prevalent in the later, but still emerging, Islamic community after the death of the prophet). However, the eschaton was still deemed to be at hand, though the urgency of it in the Qurʾānic portrayal is not so pronounced as in Meccan pericopes. The fact that there were early and rancorous disputes about the *khalīfa*, heir or follower, of the prophet after his death seems to denote that he did not pick one, which I take to mean that he thought that the world was going to end before his demise.[253]

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251 This is also suggested by texts written by Jews and Christians themselves after the life of Muḥammad; see chapters 7 and 8.

252 *Pace* Shoemaker, *The apocalypse of empire*. The only possible references I can see to such a notion in the Qurʾān are verses 30:2–5, but this does not suffice as evidence for the more general "conquest eschatological" outlook of the community.

253 Following Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet* 178–188, 195–198. It should be noted that the eschatological outlook of the early community did not die out with the first generation but continued strong throughout the first/seventh century and (in a more muted form) later. See, e.g., Cook, David, *Studies in Muslim apocalyptic*, Princeton NJ: Darwin Press, 2002; Lindstedt, "The last Roman emperor."

When the prophet Muḥammad breathed his last, what he left behind was a community of gentile, Jewish, and Christian believers. People from different ethno-linguistic and religious backgrounds had joined the movement. Soon after his death, the Arabian believers conquered much of the Near East, North Africa, and Central Asia. But the social categorizations were still in a state of flux. The next two chapters look at two different but interlinked topics: first, how people who did not become part of the community of the believers viewed it and its prophet; and, second, how the community itself began, in the second/eighth century, to articulate and understand its distinctive identity as "Muslims." Through this, somewhat slow, process, a new social category was born.