

Contested Coexistence:

Insights on Arabic Christianity
from Theology to Migration

Proceedings from the Summer School “Arabic Christianity:
History, Culture, Language, Theology, Liturgy”
(Münster, July 18–August 12, 2016)

Edited by
Vasile-Octavian Mihoc and Ryann Craig

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Preface

The Christian cultures of the Orient build—next to its Greek and Latin expressions—one of the three most important traditions of Christianity,¹ which unfortunately is threaten to be uprooted from the very soil where it was born. Ongoing tensions between Christians and Muslims in the last century in some regions of the Near and Middle East created circumstances in which Christians are no longer a self-evident presence among the political, social, and cultural actors in the public sphere. The phenomenon of migration, especially to Europe and North America, generated strong intercultural and interreligious tensions due to fears of diluting or even losing cultural and religious identity. These realities brought special interest to the history of relations between Christian and Muslim communities and their coexistence, as well as proliferating both social-political and academic dialogue initiatives. Looking at Arabic, Syriac, Aramaic, Armenian, and Greek sources from early Islamic contexts, one discovers a variety of reflected and reconceived coexistence models, but also reports about great tensions and uncertain tolerance. These sources, which are various in their literary forms and genre, provide insights into the complex interactions between members of two major religions of the Orient. Political, social, and cultural turns challenged Christians to respond to tensions not only between different religious convictions, but simultaneously within their own communities, which were strongly influenced by the majority Islamic context. Conversion to Islam or rejection of specific confessional practices (e.g., veneration of the cross and of the icons) owed to social pressure through restrictive Christian participation in public life and exclusive Islamic claim of designing the public sphere, urged Christian theologians to formulate plausible responses and to develop a persuasive contextual theology.

Literary sources reveal the most disputed topics between Christians and Muslims, and how Christian theological discourse moved from Greek- or Syriac- oriented patterns to an Arabic model. The Arabic language thus became not only the main medium of social, cultural, religious, and theological understanding between Christianity and Islam, but also an organic component of Eastern Christian cultural identity.² Arabic Christianity's theological discourse is characterized by a self-evident consideration of religious otherness, either through dealing with the same controversial topics Muslims themselves engaged in (e.g., God's essence and His attributes) or through direct or indirect references to qur'ānic verses. Religious otherness became an integrative part of argumentation, when Christian theologians first sought common terminological or thematic grounds, then dissociated themselves from commonalities through critiques, contrasts, or antithetical assertions, and finally tried to

1 See S. Brock, *The Syriac Orient: A Third 'Lung' for the Church?*, OCP 71 (2005), 5–20.

2 See R. Coquin, *Langue et littérature arabes chrétiennes*, in M. Albert / R. Beylot / R.-G. Coquin / B. Outtier / C. Renoux / A. Guillaumont (ed.), *Christianismes Orientaux. Introduction à l'Étude des Langues et des Littératures*, Paris 1993, 35–106; A. Shboul / A. Walmsley, *Identity and Self-Image in Syria-Palestine in the Transition from Byzantine to Early Islamic Rule: Arab Christians and Muslims*, MA 11 (1998), 255–287; R. Coquin, *Langue et littérature arabes chrétiennes*, in M. Albert et. al., *Christianismes Orientaux. Introduction à l'Étude des Langues et des Littératures*, 35–106.

legitimate Christianity as the true religion legitimated by miracles. This method shows that any religious discourse was at the same time both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. In their efforts to define Arabic Christianity, Christian scholars could not avoid the most important religious source in the Arabic language, the Qur'ān, considered by Muslims as the authorizing source for all discourse about God. Christians started to translate into Arabic biblical books as well as writings of the Church Fathers, liturgical, and hagiographical texts. In the ongoing cultural and religious exchange, a specific Christian identity emerged, one which is unimaginable without Islamic influences and challenges. In the middle of the ninth century, Islam reach its classical form just as Arab Christian culture and theology began to bloom, finding their characteristic forms in the new *lingua franca et sacra* in *dār al-islām*. The ability to adapt to the new cultural-religious situation assured Christians survival in the world of Islam.

The present collective volume tries to give some insights into different aspects of the Arabic Christianity: Christian awareness of developing Islam and early responses to it (Ryann Elizabeth Craig), incipient narratives in early Copto-Arabic historiography about the new religion of Islam (Ionuț Băncilă), translation of liturgical texts among the Melkites (Martin Lüsttraeten), theological education and religious practice among the East-Syrian Christians in Qatar in sixth–seventh centuries (Martin Tamcke), comparative christology between Melkite, Coptic and Nestorian theologians (Bishara Ebeid), the context of medieval Islamic kalām (Youssef Madrari), interreligious pilgrimage in late antiquity (Ovidiu Ioan), pilgrims and custodians of holy places in the Holy Land in the fourteenth century (Jon Paul Heyne), poetic lamentation among Neo-Aramaic speaking Chaldean Christians of Northern Iraq (Shawqi Talia), mission engagement in today's Lebanon (Evi Voulgaraki), mystical traditions in comparative perspective (Robin Flack), migration and interreligious dialogue in Germany (Werner Kahl), resilience strategies among Syrian refugees (Önver Cetrez and Nazlı Balkır Neftçi), and, finally, today's interreligious coexistence in the autonomous region of Kurdistan, Northern Iraq (Jan Gehm). Their commonality lies in the cultural and religious encounter between Christians and Muslims from different times and spaces. These represent contributions of the international Summer School “Arabic Christianity: History, Culture, Language, Theology, Liturgy,” held at the Faculty for Roman Catholic Theology of the University of Münster between July 18–August 12, 2016. The Summer School brought together Ph.D. and M.A. students from Germany, Austria, Syria, Turkey, the United States of America, and Morocco, with Christian and Muslim backgrounds. The title of the Summer School, as well as that of the present volume, alludes to the fact that the contributions are diverse in their topics, fields, and methods. Because of this diversity, in which there are different formal practices concerning bibliographical references and transliterations, we saw no need to harmonize styles.

We want to warmly thank all the lecturers during the Summer School: Prof. Dr. Dr.h.c.mult Martin Tamcke (Göttingen), Prof. em. Kees Versteegh (Nijmegen/Batenburg), Prof. Dr. Heleen Murre-van den Berg (Nijmegen), Prof. Dr. Anja Middelbeck-Varwick (Berlin), Prof. Dr. Fabian Wittreck (Münster), Prof. Dr. Werner Kahl (Hamburg), As.-Prof. Dr. Dany El-Obeid (Beirut), Dr. Shawqi Talia (Washington, D.C.), Dr. Clare Wilde (Groningen), Dr. Claudia Rammelt (Bochum), Dr. Ionuț Băncilă (Berlin), Dr. Ovidiu Ioan (Marburg), Dr. Bishara Ebeid (Rome), Dr. Evi Voulgaraki (Athens), Dr. Dina El Omari (Münster), Dr. Martin Lüsttraeten (Mainz), Dr. Magdi Guirguis (Kafr El Sheikh), Dr. Wageeh Mikhail (Cairo), and Dr. Önver Cetrez (Uppsala). This international Summer School could

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Vasile-Octavian Mihoc
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Muslims and Syriac Confessional Concerns: An Analysis of Jacob of Edessa's Response to Islam*

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Abstract: Through the lens of Jacob of Edessa's remarks on the Eucharist, this study aims to address when and how Muslims were recognized as a distinctive religious group. This article statistically analyzes Jacob's use of particular terminology applied to Muslims, Arab rulers, and other adversaries. His careful distinction between ruling powers and faithful adherents demonstrates that Syrian Christians were keenly aware of Muslim religious identity by the late-seventh century.

Keywords: Muslim-Christian, Muslim-Christian engagement, Arab conquests, religious identity, Syriac, late antiquity, Islamic Studies, Eastern Christian Studies, liturgy, political, ecclesiastical

Introduction

Research on the Middle East in the Late Antique period must wrestle with two primary methodological issues and how scholars approach these questions: (1) When was there an 'Islam'? and (2) When and how were its adherents recognized by others? This project presents a counterweight to both traditional and revisionist approaches with a systematic, statistical analysis of terms and their use, codified by context. By addressing the second consideration—how Muslims began to be seen as a distinct group of monotheists following the revelation of the Qur'ān by their non-Muslim contemporaries—these findings have implications for the first question, and further implementation of this approach may help inform scholars of when there was a historical recognition of Islam.

The fields of Islamic Studies, Eastern Christian Studies, and Syriac and early Arabic literature studies, as well as Qur'ānic Studies, have explored the trajectory of early Muslim self- and external identification as a distinct religious community along the following lines: acceptance and integration of traditional historical (i.e., Islamic sources) accounts of the early Muslim community as immediately recognizable in the Qur'ān; the controversial revisionist position of John Wansbrough, followed by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, which removed the emergence of the Qur'ān and the Islamic community from the traditionally-accepted historical setting of Arabia and encouraged the removal of Arabic as the primary language of the Qur'ān and Muḥammad a historical figure; and the current trend of maintaining a

* This paper was originally presented at the North American Syriac Symposium hosted by the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, June 2015. Since then, Michael Philip Penn's *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015) and *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) were published. *When Christians First Met Muslims* also records Jacob's writings with reference to Muslims—although at times I disagree with Penn on what texts should be included as such. I have kept my original appendix with references to existing (if somewhat antiquated) translations of Jacob of Edessa's texts but have updated and expanded my findings based on Penn's works.

‘historical kernel’ from the traditional narratives while also noting the problematic historicity of those sources.¹ Recent works include the presentation of the development of a ‘believers’ community’ (Fred Donner) and the compilation of selected sources in large (Robert Hoyland) or single-text translations, all contextualizing the Qur’ān, Muḥammad, and the nascent Muslim community into the larger Late Antique setting.²

What drives this is the lack of any evidence in the Qur’ān or early Islamic chronologies of Muslims calling themselves Muslims. Any exercise to evaluate when Muslims themselves identified as a distinct religious community is limited to speculative analysis of Islamic sources. While the scholars above certainly do not ignore what Christians in the early Islamic milieu thought of Muslims, none of them carefully examine *how* and *in what contexts* Syriac-speaking Christians identified their new neighbors and rulers. Penn’s recent works, while noting that Jacob of Edessa—“of all seventh-century authors”—comes “closest to depicting Islam as an independent religious tradition” but he then qualifies this as “one with extremely ill-defined borders.”³ Even those that claimed to champion the call to non-Muslim sources (Cook and Crone, in particular) fail at offering any statistical analysis on how terminology was used in particular contexts by (a) particular author(s).

The following provides a corrective model to this gap in scholarship. This article will examine the writings of one particular Christian Syriac author, Jacob of Edessa, and his use of identifying terminology when speaking about religious adversaries—particularly focusing on his use of *mhaggrāyê*—and statistically compare the use of terminology in political and ecclesiastical contexts. The findings indicate that Jacob deliberately differentiated between the politically-ruling Arabs, who may or may not have practiced their faith, and his Muslim neighbors, who held distinct beliefs in contrast with his Christian community, even as they intermarried, co-celebrated festivals, and participated in community life together. What this suggests is that even at the early spread of the Arab conquests, Christians coming under Islamic rule recognized a religiously characteristic Muslim identity—and perhaps even a plurality of identities—among political and religious rulers, soldiers and mercenaries, and community members.

- 1 For traditionalist scholars, see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*, reprint (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007). Major shifts in Qur’ān Studies began with the publication of two works by Wansbrough: *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford, 1978). Cook and Crone are most known for *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For a current assessment of the field of Qur’ānic Studies, see Gabriel Said Reynold’s introductory chapter to his edited volume, “The Crisis of Qur’ānic Studies,” *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
- 2 Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (SLAEI 13; Princeton, N.J: Darwin Press, 1997).
- 3 Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, 14; idem, *Envisioning Islam*, 66. Penn’s work on challenging the standard narratives is critically necessary and appreciated. Where I disagree with him is in the details of what he argues is the “substantial and long-lasting overlap between Christianity and Islam,” in the definition of a “slow” differentiating Islam from Christianity, and in the presumption that continuity between communities implies blurred borders; *Envisioning Islam*, 10–11. In the fleshing out of his arguments, Penn’s analysis is far more nuanced and accurate than in his introductory frameworks, and I recognize that his terminology is no doubt particularly chosen to push back against previous scholarship.

Jacob of Edessa

Jacob of Edessa's life coincides with the early Islamic conquests and he presents some of the first Christian observations of Islam, capturing daily interactions with the church's new Muslim neighbors. The polymath of the Syriac Orthodox monastery at Qenneshrin, Jacob was born in 633 CE, one year after the death of Muḥammad. His life, which coincides with the early Arab conquests, ended just after the reign of Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (d. 705) in 708. Jacob, therefore found himself under the ruling power of Islam, at odds with this new political leadership but also with the majority Byzantine Church. Beginning under Severus Sebokt (d. 666) and the translation of Greek philosophical and theological texts into Syriac, the Jacob's community represents a flourishing of Syriac Orthodox intellectual thought. Although Qenneshrin was anti-Chalcedonian, its scholarship remained rooted in Greek theology and philosophy. Known for his unwavering adherence to church rules and regulations which put him in tension with other bishops, Jacob would come to resign his first post as bishop of Edessa in 688.⁴ In his letters, Jacob—grammarian, translator, commentator, and philosopher—was particularly attentive to proper practice and belief. He wrote extensively on legal decisions, in the manner of *responsa*, often in the form of correspondence.⁵ Although the topics are assorted, much of the material covers matters of purity, “both in liturgical and social practice.”⁶ It is Jacob's insistence on purity, executed pragmatically, that shape Jacob's response to Islam.

What initiated this present research was the observation that Jacob's remarks on Islam are not systematic refutations. Nor are they like his contemporaries' apocalyptic or apologetic works. His comments come sprinkled in letters, chronicles, and canons—with only thirteen texts with clear references to Muslims or to the new Islamic leadership.⁷ His notations reflect interactions in both ecclesiastical and political settings, with quick glimpses into daily life that are often only a few lines of text, offering little detail but enough to give the reader a snapshot of an interreligious community. Situating Jacob's response to Islam requires a methodological framework attuned both to his concern of maintaining doctrinal integrity in the face of confessional differences with Chalcedon and the Church of the East, and to the vocabulary used in Jacob's milieu when speaking about Muslims.

This article first looks at Jacob's confessional concerns, with attention paid to the presence of the Eucharist in proximity to religious adversaries. Given that six of Jacob's thirteen references to Islam or Muslims come in proximity to the altar, the holy elements, or the Eucharistic liturgy, this study proposes that the Eucharist, as a confessional identity marker and indicator of an ecclesiastical setting, provides a focal lens for evaluating Jacob's impressions of his new Muslim neighbors.

4 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 160. Jacob takes the bishopric again, briefly, from 704 to his death in 708.

5 David M. Freidenreich, “Muslims in Canon Law, 650–1000,” in *Christian Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History* (ed. David Thomas; vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 189.

6 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 161.

7 See the appendix for the complete lists of texts. Thirteen texts were included as having clear references, as opposed to generic titles for authorities, based on three terms: *ṭayyāyē*, *arbāyē*, and those derived from the root *h-g-r*. Penn includes an additional five that are, in my opinion, too vague to definitively include as clear references to Muslims, Islam, or distinctly Islamic leadership. I have outlined this in further detail below.

Next, an overview of the terminology available to Jacob is given, including a challenge to the scholarly opinions about the etymology of Jacob's favored term when indicating adherents to Islam, *mhaggrāyē*. Did this term refer to the entire Islamic community: military, political, and religious, as Crone and Cook suggest⁸? Or was there more nuance involved? Careful attention to Jacob's lexical usage will inform us of the distinctions Jacob himself was, in fact, making between his community, his Muslim neighbors, and the Arab ruling powers.

After the overview of confessional concerns with the Eucharist as our guidepost, and keeping in mind the complexity of the terms involved, we will finally turn our attention to the six passages about Muslims in proximity to the Eucharist. This article demonstrates that by understanding Jacob of Edessa's response to Islam through this framework, one sees his steady concern with confessional identity, and his deliberate efforts to categorize his Muslim contemporaries, using *mhaggrāyē* exclusively to identify the Muslim confessional community—in distinction from the Arab conquerors.

Confessional Concerns & the Eucharist as Identity Marker

By Jacob's time, Edessa had returned to prominence as a center for instruction; Jacob is heavily involved in translation projects and educating priests through his instructive letters. Jacob's writings provide a clear definition of what he deemed a Christian: adherence to the historical Orthodox faith, and proper expression of that faith through the sacraments, with the Eucharist serving as an external symbol of confessional purity. For Jacob, the Eucharist was the external signifier—perhaps the primary one—that the common man could employ, should he so choose; it marked “the visible boundary” between the Syriac Orthodox and Chalcedonians.⁹ Lest this be seen as only a concern of the clergy, there were credentials, letters of fellowship or peace, given to the layman when transferring from church to church. These served as a modest “guarantee that the boundaries of the orthodox confession will not be transgressed. Credentials are naturally only acknowledged by a bishop if they are issued by a man in church fellowship with him.”¹⁰ This notion applied to all—not just Chalcedonian churches—even the “unorthodox churches next door.”¹¹

For the miaphysites, the Eucharist symbolized not just the right practice of Christianity, but the core of their communal identity with regards to the still-present Christological controversies of their time. Furthermore, this was not just or solely an identity marker. It is evident from Jacob's description below that the sacraments of the Eucharist and baptism are essential to his vision of the right Christian life. Jacob's definition of Christianity is:

God's covenant with humanity that is fulfilled through orthodox faith in God, and through this knowledge and confession of that providence which God the word bore on our behalf when He became incarnate, and through the rebirth from water and spirit and the sharing in the suffering and death of the only begotten word, our Lord Jesus Christ, and through the receiving of His holy body and blood, and through pure

⁸ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 9.

⁹ Volker Menze, “Priests, Laity and the Sacrament of the Eucharist in Sixth Century Syria,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, vol. 7 (2007): 129–146, 130. For more historical context, see Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 134.

¹⁰ Elert, 134.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

conduct and the holy imitation of Christ—however much it is possible for humans to imitate (Him)—which is achieved by keeping God’s laws and commandments, and through the hope and expectation of the resurrection of human bodies from the dead and (the hope and expectation) of the judgment and reward in the world to come.¹²

The right Eucharist meant administration by the right clergy: priests that held to orthodox beliefs and were recognized as such. Because the Eucharist was a particular identifying marker—placing one within or outside of the Orthodox community—it will highlight the ecclesiastical nature of settings when we come to evaluating Jacob’s comments on the emerging Islamic community. As a frame of reference, we will briefly look at Jacob’s comments about his Christian heterodox neighbors in proximity to the holy elements.

Non-Muslim Adversaries and the Eucharist

For all of his tenacity in defending Orthodox practice and belief, Jacob also displays the capability for pragmatic realism—but not at expense of the sacred mysteries. He acknowledged that many priests, out of sheer numerical necessity, had to hold multiple Eucharistic liturgies in several communities in a single day.¹³ But he shows concern for confusion of confessional identity in his sixty-fourth reply to Addai, when he states that: “the Orthodox priest may not administer the Eucharist to Chalcedonians in the absence of their own priest, even if these heretics are *in the possession of their own host*.”¹⁴ Where Jack Tannous sees this as fluid confessional lines among the laity, clergy, and Jacob himself, he misses that Jacob is actually concerned with contamination of the elements: Jacob wants the proper host to be administered by the proper clergy to the proper flock.

When Jacob’s pupil Addai enquires about sharing everything “save the Eucharist,”¹⁵ Addai explicitly understood this was the demarcation line for Jacob. Elsewhere, Addai asks what to do with a presbyter who took the altar and its vessels from the Chalcedonians but then returned them.¹⁶ Jacob responds that if they were returned voluntarily, the clergy should be removed from his office.¹⁷ These inquiries illustrate that there was some sense that the Eucharist—in proximity to religious adversaries—was categorically unique.

12 Michael Philip Penn, “Jacob of Edessa’s Defining Christianity: Introduction, Edition, and Translation,” *J. East. Christ. Stud.* 64, no. 3–4 (2012): 175–99. In the introduction to Penn’s translation of what he titles *Defining Christianity*, he argues that Jacob “is particularly concerned to emphasize that faith alone does not a Christian make. Rather, he cites passages from 1 Timothy and from John Chrysostom suggesting that one must have both orthodox faith and practice in order truly to be Christian” (179). Penn maintains that Jacob went on to define proper practice since no suitable definition could be found elsewhere. For information about the manuscripts of this text, BL Add 12,154 and BL Add 17,193, see 176–177. Penn also notes that the dating of *Defining Christianity* to Jacob’s stay at Mar Jacob’s of Kayshum corresponds to the second Arab civil war at the rise of ‘Abd al-Malik.

13 Jack Tannous, “Syria Between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak” (Princeton University, 2010), 221.

14 Konrad Jenner, “The Canons of Jacob of Edessa in the Perspective of the Christian Identity of His Day,” in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. R. B. ter Haar Romeny (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 107. fn. 18; emphasis mine.

15 Tannous, “Syria Between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak,” 209.

16 Arthur Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, I, vol. 367/368, CSCO (Peeters Publishers, 1975), 236.

17 Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, I. Answer 4: “If he gave them these voluntarily, it

Terms for Muslims used by Contemporaries

Now that we have seen how the Eucharist severed as a marker of confessional identity, and Jacob's concern with maintaining its integrity as such, we turn to how Muslims were addressed in Jacob's environment. The terminology available to Jacob covered Arabic, Syriac, and Greek. However, for one so involved in the Greek translation movement, Jacob never employs *Hagarenoi* (meaning 'Hagarene'). Chronicles in Greek, Latin, and Armenian employ 'Hagarenes' in reference to military encounters with Arab armies *and* religious differences with Muslims. This labeling of Muslims with Hagarene is genealogical and theological, biblical and qur'ānic, connecting Hagar with her son's descendants. For example, a Syriac New Testament colophon dated to 682 explains that the *mhaggrāyê* are "the sons of Ishmael, the son of Hagar, the son of Abraham."¹⁸

A Syriac favorite, *ṭayyāyê*, referred to a pre-Islamic tribe of Arabs, *at-ṭayy* (Ar.), who were regular sojourners in Syriac-speaking areas. By the first century of Abbasid rule, the most common term in Syriac apologetic texts applied to Muslims was *ḥanpê*, meaning 'pagan.'¹⁹ Sidney Griffith describes the conceptual and linguistic links between *ḥanpê* and the qur'ānic Arabic word *ḥanīf*, a moniker which "Muslims apparently fairly commonly called themselves [...] at least in the early years of the Islamic era."²⁰ *Ḥanīf*, in Q Āli 'Imrān 3:67, is most positively applied to Abraham as a proto-Muslim believer—one who would have believed in Muḥammad's message had he come after him—and a monotheist. Griffith concludes that Syriac apologists must have been "pleased with the *double entendre* inherent in the meanings of the words in the two languages, and that they exploited the nuisance [*sic*, nuance] potential[ly] inherent in the mutually exclusive sense of the two nouns."²¹

Words are used to situate oneself in relation to one's rhetorical, and often actual, opponent. From the writings of this early Islamic period, there is a recognizable 'Islam.' G. J. Reinink presumes that since it took longer for Christian apologetic writing to weave in the heresy of Islam, there must not yet have been an identifiable expression of Islam.²² But the presence of a distinguishable, albeit developing, form of Islam does not necessitate its appearance in apologetic literature. If there was no recognizable expression of Islam, whether social, political, or theological, it is difficult to understand how Jacob can utilize what Reinink subsequently describes as "polemic expressions" against the Jews with the comparative to Muslims as "allies."²³ There has to be some substance with which to ally, and against which another element can be compared.

is right that his deposition (ܡܫܝܚܐ) shall take place." Jacob uses the Greek term, καθάρσις.

18 William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838*, vol. I, III vols. (London, 1870), I.92, no. 142.

19 Sidney H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad: His scripture and his message according to the Christian apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the first Abbasid century," in *La Vie du prophète Mahomet*, ed. Bibliothèque des Centres d'Etudes Supérieures Spécialisées, Université des sciences humaines (Colloque de Strasbourg) (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1983), 118.

20 Ibid., 119–120.

21 Ibid., 120.

22 G. J. Reinink, *Syriac Christianity Under Late Sasanian And Early Islamic Rule* (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate Pub Co, 2005), XII; 165.

23 Ibid., 170.

For Jacob's part, he was always—ever the philologist—particular about the identity nomenclature chosen for his adversaries.²⁴ In the below examples, he remains consistent in using the terms orthodox (in this case, Syriac Orthodox) used to describe the heterodox:

Source

<i>Second Letter to John the Stylite</i> , Q. no. 6	<i>ḥanpê</i>	pagans
<i>Sixth Letter to John the Stylite</i>	<i>yudāyê</i>	Jews
<i>Replies to Addai</i> , Q. no. 56	<i>heretîqâ</i>	heretic
<i>Canons</i>	<i>calqîdonāyê</i>	Chalcedonian
<i>Canons</i>	<i>nestorînô</i>	Nestorians
<i>Epistle to the Malakites of Harrân</i>	<i>al-malakîyâh</i> ²⁵	Melkites

In many of these examples, the terms appear in lists containing two or more: pagans and Muslims; Jews and Muslims; and Chalcedonians, Church of the East, and Armenians.²⁶ The only setting where Jacob uses one of these terms “interchangeably” comes in Addai's Q. no. 56, where Addai inquires about a situation where a *heretical authority* (*shalîṭâ heretîqâ*) has ordered an orthodox priest to dine with him. Jacob's change from the posed *shalîṭâ* to *shulṭânâ* in his response shows that he himself identifies this ruler as a political ruler, and his decision to allow the meal has as much to do with worldly power as it does with theological orthodoxy.

Jacob's Usage of Terms Applied to Muslims²⁷

What makes Jacob a useful case study is that, almost as a rule, he does not mix terms in different contexts. In his twenty-eight references to Muslims, Islamic doctrine or practice, or Arab-Islamic rulers, Jacob uses terms derived from the Syriac root *h-g-r* twenty times, particularly employing *mhaggrâyê* for Muslims. Jacob's lexical use might shed light on the debated etymology of *mhaggrâyê*, and it is worth the time to summarize the primary two scholarly camps of thought here, as they relate to the methodological considerations raised above. The common stance most scholars take is for an Arabic underpinning to *mhaggrâyê*, linking the word to the Arabic term *muhājirūn*. Contrary to this is the position that *mhaggrâyê* is from Syriac, associated with the biblical figure of Hagar.

24 Jack Tannous, “Syria Between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak” (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2010), 159ff. Tannous notes Jacob's concern with scribal practices in his day, and his annoyance at the laxity with which many scribes engaged in their profession.

25 William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838* (vol. I, III vols.; London, 1870). This term is recorded in Garshuni in a much later manuscript; very little is known of the underlying manuscript tradition. If this is a reflection of a document originally writing in Syriac, it is one of the very earliest references to the Melkites using this term. The Garshuni is vocalized in such a way to make it clear it corresponds with the word “Melkite.”

26 Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, I, 249; F. Nau, *Lettre de Jaques d'Edesse Sur La Généalogie de La Sainte Vierge* (ed. Recueil Trimestriel; Revue de L'Orient Chrétien VI; Paris, 1901), 517–522; Kayser, *Die canones Jacob's von Edessa*, 35; Syriac, 3–4.

27 There are thirteen texts/passages with twenty-eight word-occurrences/references. I have distinguished throughout.

Robert Hoyland does not include separate entries for *ṭayyāyē* or *mhaggrāyē* in his extensive volume of works, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (1997). *Ṭayyāyē* redirects to ‘Arabs’ while *mhaggrāyē* is listed in conjunction with *muhājirūn* and *magaritai* (Gr.). Observing that “it is only from the Islamic tradition that we learn of its primary significance, namely emigration (*hijra*) from the homeland to man the new garrison cities being established in the conquered lands,” he links the participle *muhājirūn* via *hijra* to *mhaggrāyē*.²⁸ With the Arab conquests, we do find papyri and inscriptions bearing *muhājirūn* with dating designations connected to the rule of the Arabs.²⁹ But Hoyland equates *mhaggrāyē* with *muhājirūn*, with very little evidence that the two terms are used synonymously by those employing them.

There is, however, an alternative understanding of the prevalent use of *mhaggrāyē*, as proposed by Griffith in his article, “The Prophet Muḥammad: His scripture and his message according to the Christian apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the first Abbasid century.”³⁰ Griffith sees *mhaggrāyē* as the verbification of the name Hagar. Hagar’s name, along with Muḥammad’s followers called ‘Ishmaelites’ and ‘Sons of Hagar,’ does appear in Syriac treaties and legends, alongside participle forms of *h-g-r*, denoting Muslims.³¹

Given that the earliest attestation of Muslims calling themselves *muslimūn* is dated to 691, Crone and Cook proposed that *mhaggrāyē* in Syriac must correspond with the earlier Arabic term *muhājirūn*.³² While they do note the genealogical import of connecting the Syriac term to Hagar, they favor the connection to *muhājirūn* as those who take part in *hijra*—“an exodus” or, emigration—because of its preservation in Islamic tradition. Two observations can be made from their statement. First, the dismissal of the genealogical import of the term is perplexing, as this heritage is not just genealogical but theological, and utilized in theological writings. Second, this line of thinking led Crone and Cook to presume the term in question (*mhaggrāyē*) must have an Islamic significance, or at least a presence within the Islamic tradition for it to be a credible naming of the Muslim community, even though the application of it came from outside said tradition. While this serves the proposed thesis of *Hagarism*, this position removes

28 Hoyland, 548. Hoyland notes that the “earliest literary attestation of the name is in Syriac (rendered *mhaggrē*) from a letter of the catholicos Isho’yahb III (Ep. 48B, 97), written in Iraq ca. 640s,” fn. 13. He previously notes that “Syriac writers before this time usually referred to their overlords as Arabs (*ṭayyāyē*), and then used *mhaggrāyē* if they wanted to specify Muslims as opposed to Christian Arabs,” 148.

29 Hoyland, 547, fn. 13.

30 Griffith, “The Prophet Muhammad: His scripture and his message according to the Christian apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the first Abbasid century,” 121–124. Published in 1983 from a talk given in 1980, partially in response to the claims of *Hagarism*, it seems current scholarship has often ignored his observations.

31 Ibid., 122–123. Griffith notes, “Hagar’s name too appears in these same treatises. In the Syriac *Bahārā* legends, for example, Muhammad’s people are often called both ‘Ishmaelites,’ and ‘Sons of Hagar.’ In the text that reports the Syriac Orthodox patriarch John’s meeting with the Muslim official, the Muslims are called *Mahgʿrāye*/*Mʿhaggʿrāye*, a term that was to be widely used in later Syriac writings to mean ‘he became a Muslim,’ is ‘devotees of Hagar,’ or ‘followers of the way of Hagar.’”

32 Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 8–9. They write: “There are two notions involved here. The first, rather lost in Islamic tradition, is genealogical: the ‘Mahgrāye’, as an early Syriac source informs us, are the descendants of Abraham by Hagar. But alongside this ascribed status there is also an attained one which is fully preserved in the Islamic tradition: the *muhājirūn* are those who take part in a *hijra*, an exodus.”

the employment of the term in question from the context in which it was being employed—i.e., among Syriac-speaking Christians.

These suppositions also led to the position that *mhaggrāyê* referred to the entire conquering religious community, with the Arab armies indistinguishable from the religious Muslim community, and the *hijra* an invading emigration:

The *muhājirūn* of the Islamic tradition are by the time of the invasion of Palestine only the leading element of the conquering religious community; and yet the Greek and Syriac sources use the terms ‘Magaritai’ and ‘Mahgraye’ with every appearance of referring to the community as a whole. Secondly, the Islamic tradition preserves examples of the use of *hijra* and related terms in contexts where the emigration is not within Arabia but from Arabia to the conquered territories.³³

Yet some Syriac writers used *mhaggrāyê* to differentiate Muslims from Christian Arabs.³⁴ If they were all Arab overlords—*muhājirūn* conquering by *hijra*—why make the distinction? More to the point, as evidenced with Jacob of Edessa, the term is used to specifically refer to Muslims in an ecclesiastical setting, doubtless carrying a theological connection important to Christians.

Is, then, *mhaggrāyê* a calque on *muhājirūn*, meaning ‘one who emigrates,’ or ‘one who becomes Muslim by joining the *hijra*,’ or does it allude to the biblical Hagar, and ‘to become a Hagarene’? Noting Griffith’s observations, a surface-level similarity, without any textual evidence that Syriac-speaking Christians thought of *mhaggrāyê* as ‘those who become Muslim by joining *hijra*’ suggests that these Christians utilized the graphical equivalent of *muhājirūn* but with a noticeably different meaning.³⁵ It is far more likely the case that *mhaggrāyê* comes from the contextually-familiar biblical Hagar and the *mem*-prefix designates a participle in the D- or C-Stem, meaning ‘acting like a Hagarene,’ thus preserving the meaningful theological significance for Christians and the textual evidence linking the ‘Sons of Hagar’ with those participating in Muslim religious practice.³⁶

Analysis of Jacob’s Comments: Muslims in the Presence of the Eucharist

Observing that the etymological connection between *muhājirūn* and *mhaggrāyê* is weak at best, and that there is evidence to support a direct connection between *mhaggrāyê* and the genealogical/theological expression of ‘one acting like a Hagarene,’ we look now to how Jacob employed *mhaggrāyê*, noting that he did not apply the term to the community as a whole as Crone and Cook once suggested but regularly distinguished between the conquering

33 Ibid., 9.

34 Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, 148.

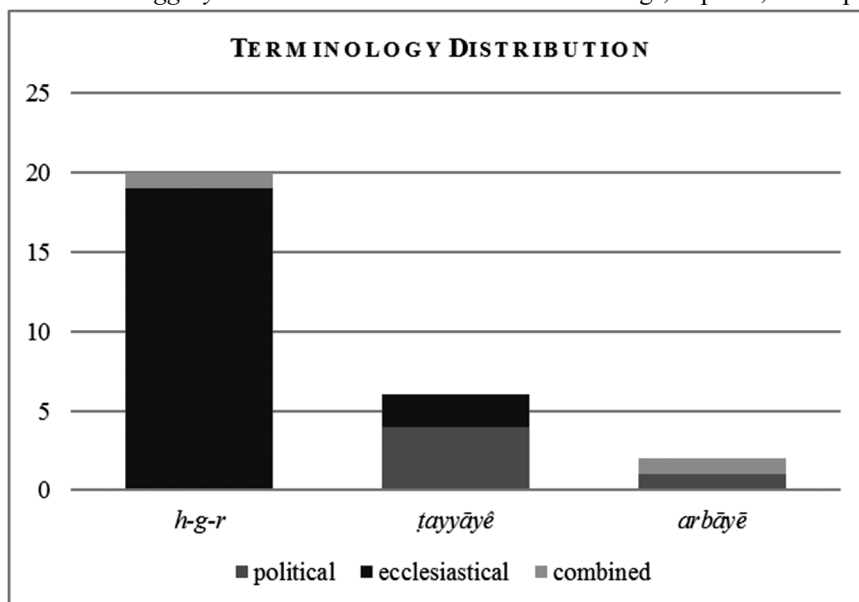
35 Griffith, “The Prophet Muhammad: His scripture and his message according to the Christian apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the first Abbasid century,” 122. He notes: “It seems completely gratuitous, therefore, for a modern observer to notice a mere graphic, or etymological similarity between the Christian Syriac word *mahgʿrāyê* and the Muslim Arabic word *muhājirūn*, and then, lacking any mutually acceptable context of meaning in which such a proposal might find a place, to suggest that Christian Syriac writers borrowed the Muslim Arabic word, and then used it in a completely different sense from the one intended by Muslims.”

36 As seen in the variant vocalizations of the term, we have evidence for both stems. Either participle form can function as a *nomen agentis*.

Arabs and the confessional community of Muslims. The chart below summarizes all instances where Jacob utilizes *mhaggrāyē*, *ṭayyāyē*, and *arbāyē* in ecclesiastical and political contexts, i.e., where it is clear that his referents were Muslims or Arab-Islamic rulers.³⁷ The distribution of usage shows that Jacob employs the term *mhaggrāyē* almost exclusively in an ecclesiastical context, and he is 5:2 times more likely to use an *h-g-r* derivative than other terms in that same context. However, in political settings like the *Chronicles*, his favored term is *ṭayyāyē*. Jacob clearly distinguishes between the political and military ‘conquering-by-emigration’ powers of the Arabs and the religious adherents to Islam.

Terminology Distribution indicating Muslims, Islam, or Islamic Rule³⁸

Eighty-three percent of the time, Jacob uses *h-g-r* in an Ecclesiastical setting, and seventy-one percent of the time, it is his favored term in all ecclesiastical contexts. To note, the ten other occurrences of *mhaggrāyē* come in the contexts of saint’s blessings, baptism, and explaining



37 There are thirteen passages with clear references and twenty total occurrences of the *h-g-r* root within these texts: *ṭayyāyē* and *arbāyē* appear in one passage together. There are seven additional passages identified by Penn (and others) intentionally excluded: (1–4) *Replies to Addai* nos. 56–57 mention those in leadership positions but the titles indicated are commonplace; Penn also includes nos. 79 and 96 but these references strike me as rather vague (“those bearing arms,” 165, and “rulers, whether they are heretics or pagans,” 167) (5) Jacob adds a notation about the *ṭayyāyē* to Severus’s Cathedral Homilies (*Hom* 30). Because the context is original to Severus, it is excluded; (6) Canon 30, as labeled by Penn, notes those who “dared to bring the [legal] suit before outsiders,” 173; and (7) Bar Hebraeus cites Jacob’s prohibition against altar coverings bearing the Muslim creed in his *Nomocanon* (Bedjan; Paris 1898). Because this is secondhand, it is excluded.

38 Political context was identified by references to military actions, political leadership, or historical dating. Ecclesiastical context was identified by references to liturgy, religious practices, or festivals. Combined contexts contained elements of both political and ecclesiastical contexts.

different theological positions. He uses *h-g-r* twenty times in ecclesiastical contexts and one combined context, compared with eight total occurrences of *ṭayyāyê* and *arbāyê*. Where other Syriac authors might pose a political identification with the *mhaggrāyê*, Jacob is decisively not.

While acknowledging integrated communal life, Jacob places Muslims as theological adversaries, just as he does with Chalcedonians and the Church of the East, noting differences and similarities in beliefs, and discouraging their participation in Orthodox practices. Twice Jacob uses an *h-g-r* derivative with *hanpê*, both in the second letter to John, regarding inquiries about saints' blessings and rebaptism of converts:

(a) Is it right that a priest gives from the blessing of the saints to the Arabs (ܐܪܒܝܐ) and pagans (ܡܢܚܪܝܡ)...?³⁹

(b) When a person becomes a Mohammedan (ܡܡܚܡܕܝܐ) or turns pagan (ܡܢܚܪܝܡ) and after some time returns and repents and comes back from his paganism, is it right that he be baptized or not?⁴⁰

In both instances, it is clear that the questioner, John, assumes Jacob will understand that Muslims are a distinct community from pagans, even if John is placing them as theological equals.⁴¹ In the second example, the question uses a simple imperfect for 'becoming a Muslim' and 'becoming a pagan,' whereas Jacob's reply uses a participle form for both. Whether or not the paralleling of terms came from John, Jacob, or a compiler, what is notable is that there is a consistent use of grammatical forms, indicating these two groups of actors were distinct in composition but alike in verbal action.

In addition to the favoring of the *h-g-r* root when identifying Muslims in a theological context, Jacob uses it only once in a combined context, where the situation is both of ecclesiastical concern and contains political elements. And, as seen in the chart above, while there are two instances where *ṭayyāyê* is used in ecclesiastical contexts, *h-g-r* is never used in a solely political context.⁴²

Perhaps his refined use of terms was because Jacob had an astute awareness of basic Islamic tenets. He knew their beliefs were particular and distinguishable from both Christian and Jewish beliefs, especially when it came to Jesus. In a letter defending the Davidic lineage of Mary, Jacob recounts Christian, Jewish, and Muslim expressions of belief about the Messiah:

That the Messiah is from the seed of David is acknowledged by all—the Jews, also the *mhaggrāyê* and also the Christians—all of them [the Christians] confess that he

39 Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, I, 249. CSCO Vol. 367/368; Q. no. 6. Vööbus translates *mhaggrāyê* as 'Arabs.'

40 Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, I. CSCO Vol. 367/368; Q. no. 15. Note there is often a discrepancy with the numbering of Jacob's letters and questions from source to source.

41 Penn similarly observes this phenomenon of verbal parallels, noting that "Jacob and his correspondents considered Hagarenes and Christians as belonging to separate religious categories as well," *Envisioning Islam*, 67.

42 Contrast with Penn's analysis that Jacob "used nouns such as *ṭayyāyê* or Hagarenes to refer to people we would categorize as Muslims," *Envisioning Islam*, 68; emphasis added. My findings suggest that Jacob used these terms deliberately differently, and that only 'Hagarenes' would exclusively denote Muslims.

became incarnate and became man. Then this is, therefore, that the Messiah is by flesh from the seed of David, just as the confession preceded and written from the holy prophets, and as a foundation which is something for all of them—Jews, *mhaggrāyê* or Christians...

And the *mhaggrāyê*, too, even if they do not know or do not want to say ‘God’ or ‘Son of God,’ that this is the true Messiah who came and is confessed by the Christians, nevertheless, [they say] he is the true Messiah that was to come and was foretold by the prophets. All of them [the Muslims] confess firmly and there is no contention among them against us concerning this. Rather, they speak against the Jews with regard to this.⁴³

Here, too, in a theological context, Jacob repeatedly uses *h-g-r*. He observes that Muslims and Christians are more closely aligned than the Jews but also knows the limits of their similarities. Muslims will not go so far as to call the Messiah ‘God’ or ‘Son of God.’ Elsewhere, Jacob notes the direction of prayer and his familiarity with why Muslims pray in a particular direction:

Your question is vain ... for it is not to the south that the Jews pray, nor either do the Muslims (*mhaggrāyê*). The Jews who live in Egypt, and also the Muslims there, as I saw with my own eyes, and will now set out for you, prayed to the east, and still do, both peoples—the Jews towards Jerusalem and the Muslims towards the Ka‘ba. And those Jews who are to the south of Jerusalem pray to the north; and those in the land of Babel, in Hira and in Bašra, pray to the west. And also the Muslims who are there pray to the west, towards the Ka‘ba; and those who are to the south of the Ka‘ba pray to the north, towards that place. So from all this that has been said, it is clear that it is not to the south that the Jews and Muslims here in the regions of Syria pray, but towards Jerusalem or the Ka‘ba, the patriarchal places of their races.⁴⁴

His knowledge suggests more than superficial interactions with Muslims; he knows the types of information that an informed, engaged bishop should know about the members of his broader community.

As demonstrated earlier, because the Eucharist was such a defining practice, what Jacob says with regard to it in proximity to Muslims parallels his general confessional concerns. Of the nine texts where Jacob uses an *h-g-r* root, five come in direct comments pertaining to the Eucharist. In addition, two accounts involving the communion altar use *ṭayyāyê*. I will examine each vignette closely; translations may be found in the appendix.

First, Jacob’s correspondence includes two epistle ‘commentaries’ on the Eucharist, *The Epistle of Jacob of Edessa to Thomas the Presbyter*⁴⁵ and *The Commentary on qūrōbō* by

43 F. Nau, *Lettre de Jaques d’Edesse Sur La Genealogie de La Sainte Vierge*, ed. Recueil Trimestriel, Revue de L’Orient Chretien VI (Paris, 1901), 517–522. Translation mine.

44 *Letter 14 to John the Stylite* (BL MS Add. 12,172); Hoyland, 565–566; trans. from *Hagarism*, 173 n. 30, with Hoyland’s corrections, 566 n. 91. Penn = *Letter Four*.

45 Baby Varghese, “The Anaphora of Saint James and Jacob of Edessa,” in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day* (ed. R. B. ter Haar Romeny; Leiden: Brill, 2008). Varghese cites the English translation by Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western* 1, 490–494.