

The Arab Prophet: Fact or Fiction?



Late antiquity



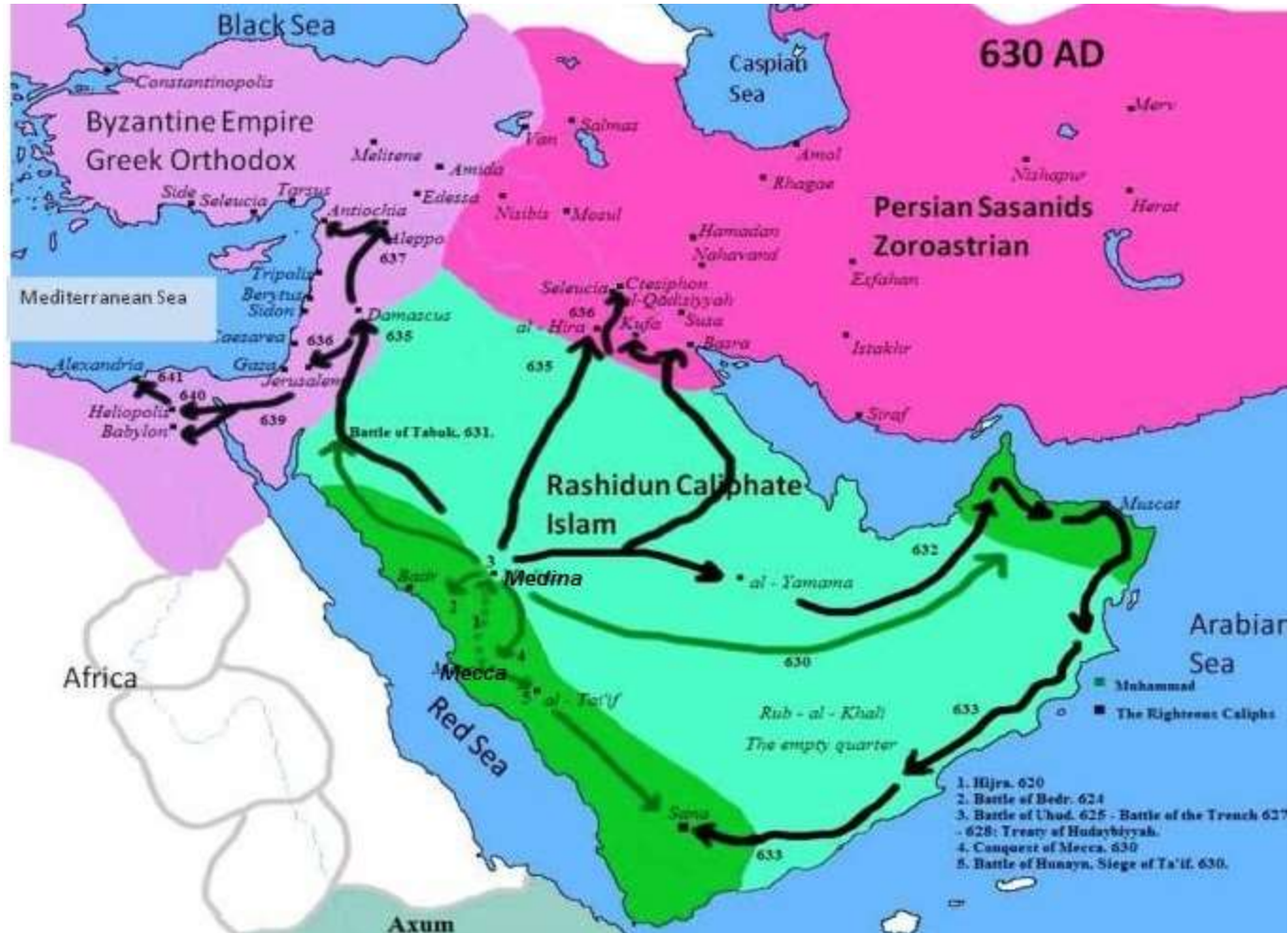
The Ghassanids and Lakhmids were Arab Christian kingdoms. The Ghassanids acted as border guards, *qurays* in Arabic, for the Romans. The Persian emperor Khosrow II, was married to a Christian, and had Christian courtiers.

Events of 600-630



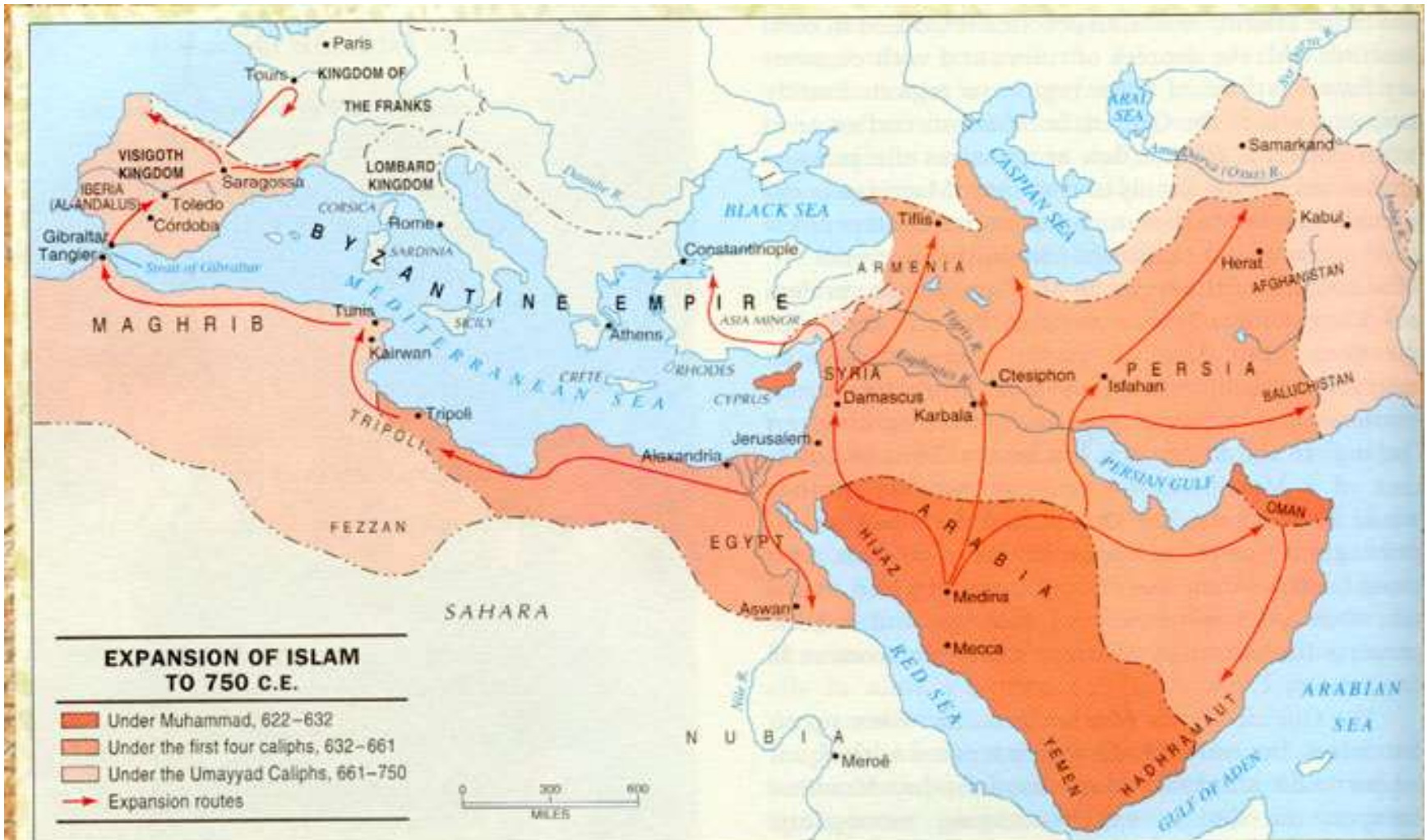
In 602, the Persian emperor Khosrow II launched an offensive against the Romans. Damascus and Jerusalem were conquered in 614 and Egypt in 618. Constantinople was then threatened. In 622 Byzantine emperor Heraclius led his troops to a decisive victory. He compared himself to Alexander the Great. A truce was made in 628. The Sassanian dynasty collapsed soon after.

The Islamic view of events



- 622 Muhammad moves from Mecca to Medina (The Hijra, start of Islamic calendar)
- 623 Begins insurgency against Mecca. Five year campaign, battles of Badr, Uhud, Trench
- 628 Treaty of Hudaibiya (same date as Byzantine - Sassanid treaty)
- 630 Conquest of Mecca, then the rest of Arabia and beyond

Expansion of Islam to 750 CE



The Islamic conquests were rapid and far-reaching. By 750 Islamic monarchs controlled kingdoms stretching from central Asia to Spain.

The Traditional Narrative

- The Prophet came from Mecca which was a centre of trade and pilgrimage
- His revelations from Allah via the angel Gabriel are recorded verbatim in the Koran
- His military exploits include insurgency, mass beheadings, battles and conquests
- His life and wives, including the six year old Aisha, are described in great detail
- Reports of his words and deeds, the Hadith, form the basis of Islamic law
- Most Muslims are not well informed about the full details of the Prophet's life or of the Koran
- The content of the doctrines motivates some Muslims to violent extremism

The Islamic Sources

The Koran

Contains or is derived from Arab Christian liturgical texts. Consists of anecdotes and exhortations, but little narrative. Moses mentioned 136 times, Jesus 24 times. Little or no mention of Muhammad. Earlier dated texts appear first. Mecca/Medina dating schemes derived from Sira.

The Sira - biography of Muhammad

Relies on the ninth century publication by Ibn Hisham, of Ibn Ishaq's eighth century description of the early seventh century events. Contains explicit brutality. Level of detail is implausible.

The Hadith, Sunna

Words and deeds of Prophet. Validated by chains of transmission. Voluminous, conflicting, motivated by sectarian disputes.

Non-Islamic source confirmation?

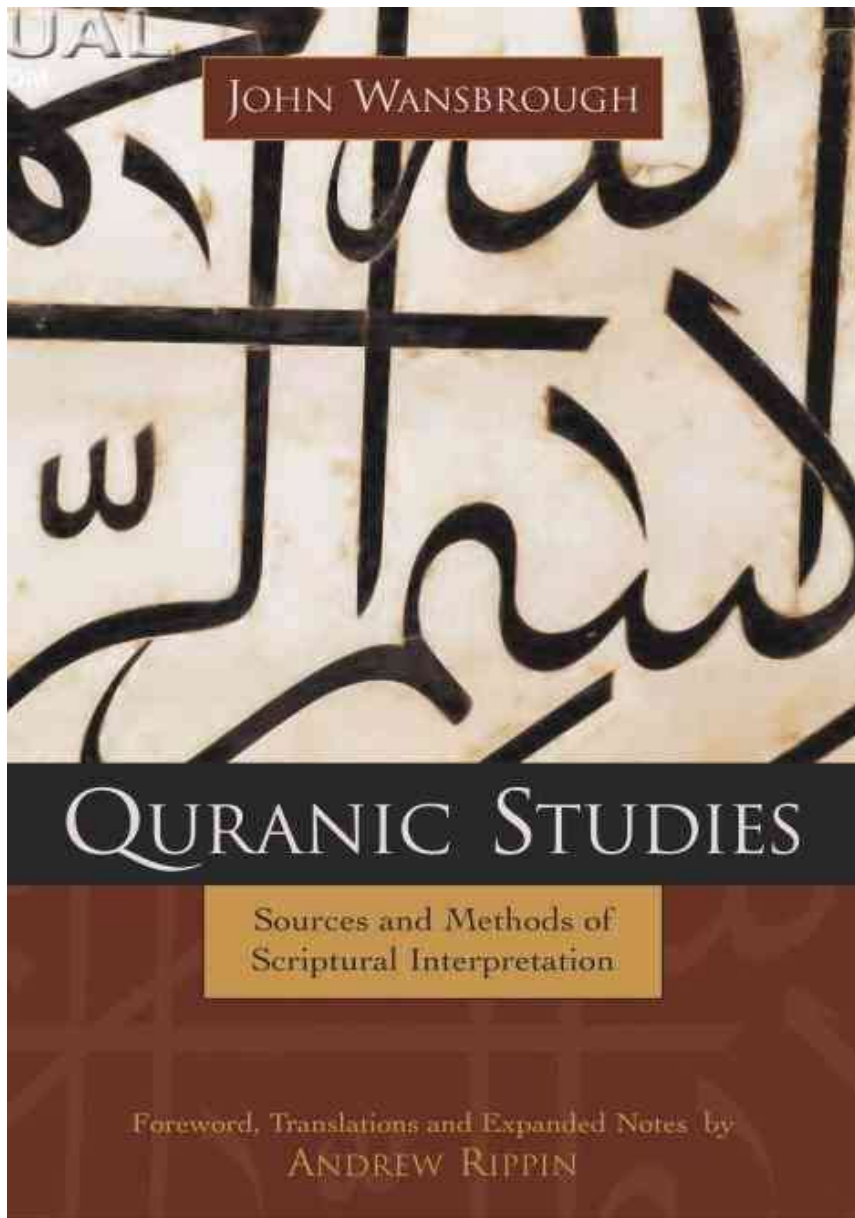
Docrina Jacobi, Thomas the Presbyter, John of Damascus. Do not confirm details of legend.

Reason for doubt

- All of this information dates from 100-200 years after the supposed events.
- None of it accords with contemporary historical records based on non-Islamic sources
- There is evidence that Mecca did not exist at the time of the alleged Prophet
- The Koran itself betrays its Judeo-Christian origins.
- The events of the Koran can be located to Jordan/Palestine
- Only two of the first ten Islamic leaders are historically attested.
- Historians divide between traditionalists, revisionists, historicists, mythicists

List of "Caliphs" from Wikipedia

<i>Abu Bakr</i>	632 - 634	<i>Father of Aisha, Muhammad's wife</i>
<i>'Umar</i>	634 - 644	<i>Father of Hafsa, Muhammad's wife</i>
<i>Uthman</i>	644 - 656	<i>Husband of Muhammad's daughters, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum</i>
<i>'Ali</i>	656 661	<i>Muhammad's cousin, Husband of Muhammad's daughter Fatimah</i>
<i>Hasan</i>	661	<i>Grandson of Muhammad. Son of 'Ali ibn Abi-Talib</i>
Mu'awiyah I	661 - 680	<i>Half-brother of Ramla bint Abu Sufyan, Muhammad's wife</i>
<i>Yazid I</i>	680 - 683	<i>Son of Mu'awiyah I</i>
<i>Mu'awiyah II</i>	683 - 684	<i>Son of Yazid I</i>
<i>Marwan I</i>	684 - 685	<i>First cousin of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan</i>
'Abd al-Malik	685 (680) - 705	<i>Son of Marwan I</i>
Al-Walid	705 - 715	<i>Son of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan</i>
Sulayman	715 - 717	<i>Son of Abd al-Malik and younger brother of Al-Walid I</i>
<i>Umar</i>	717 - 720	<i>Grandson of Marwan I. First cousin of Al-Walid I and Sulayman</i>
Yazid II	720 - 724	<i>Son of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan</i>
Hisham	724 - 743	<i>Son of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan</i>
<i>Al-Walid II</i>	743 - 744	<i>Son of Yazid II. Nephew of Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik</i>
Yazid III	744	<i>Son of Al-Walid II</i>
<i>Ibrahim</i>	744 (weeks)	<i>Son of Al-Walid II</i>
Marwan II	744 750	<i>Grandson of Marwan I</i>

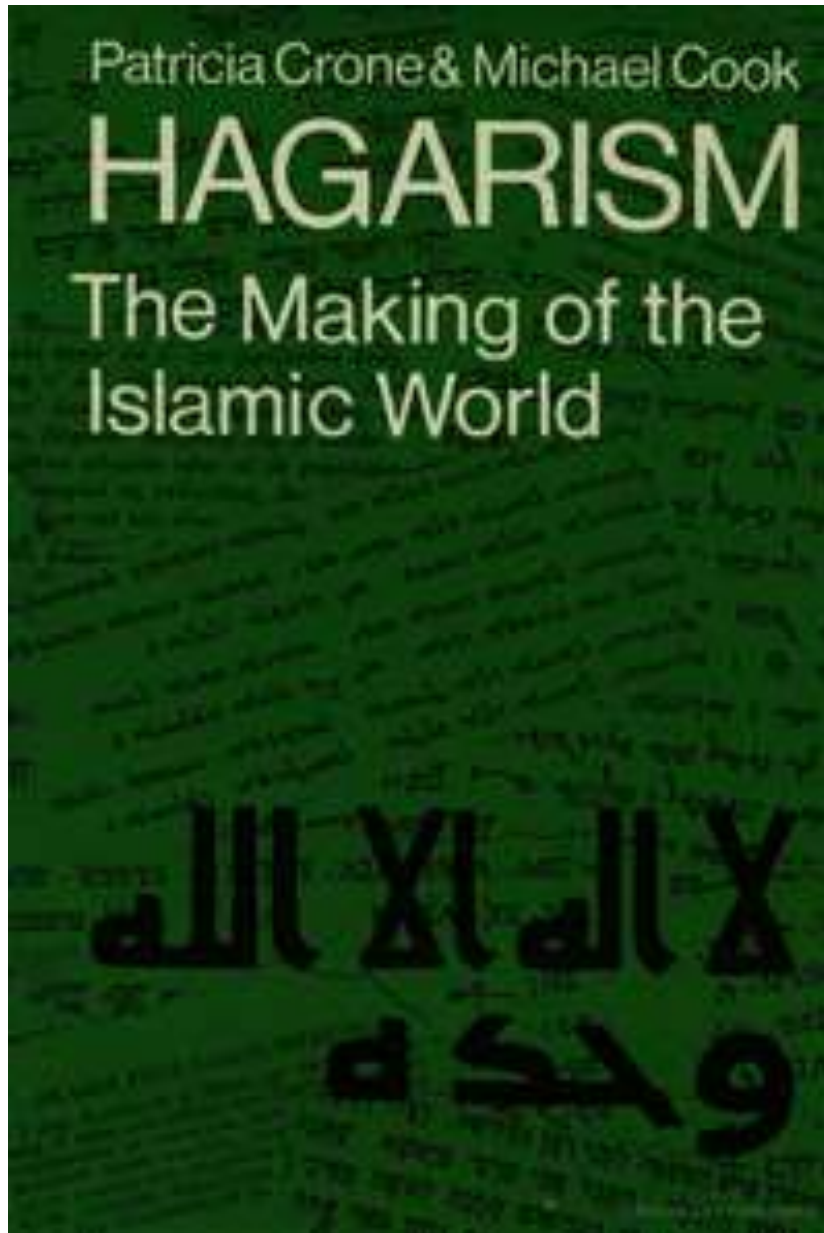


John Wansbrough 1977

Islam did not come into being as a new religion on its own but derived from conflicts of various Jewish-Christian sects.

The Quran was written and collected in a long process over 200 years and thus cannot be attributed to Muhammad.

The person of Muhammad would be a later invention.

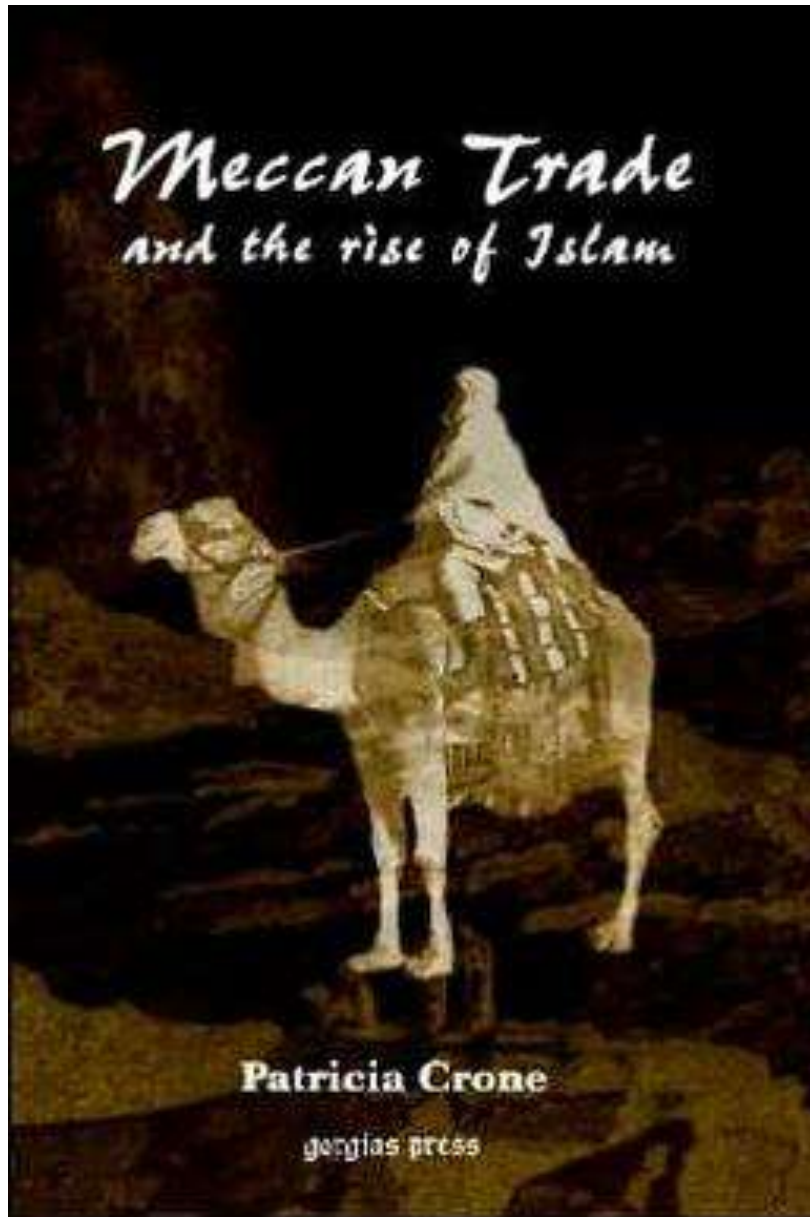


Patricia Crone & Michael Cook 1977

Historical scholarship on the beginnings of Islam should be based on contemporary historical, archaeological and philological data, as is done for the study of Judaism and Christianity, rather than Islamic traditions and later Arabic writings.

Islam evolved from a blend of Judaism, Samaritanism and Christianity, fashioned from Judaic mythology and symbology.

Early mosques have prayer niches oriented to the north - to Jerusalem, rather than to Mecca.

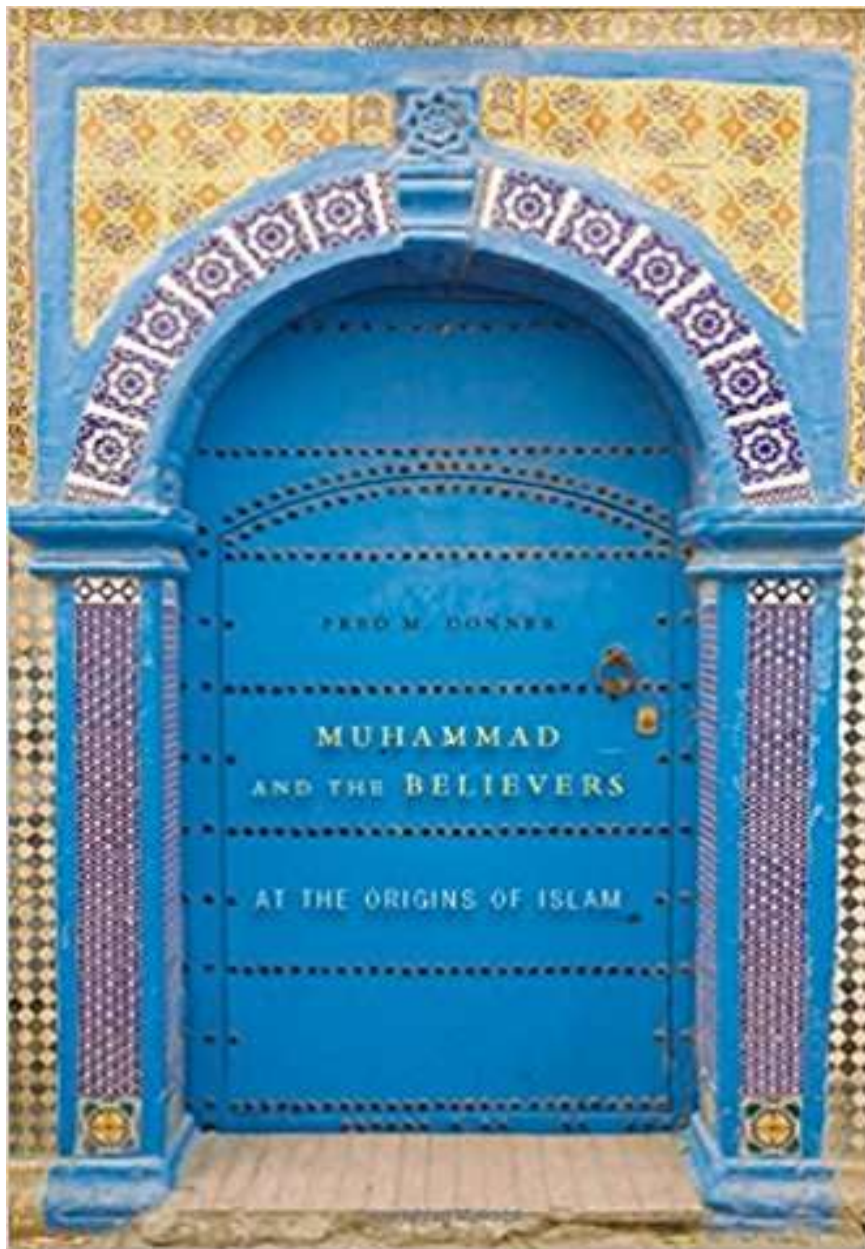


Patricia Crone 1987

There is no mention at all of the Quraysh (the tribe of Mohammed) and their trading centre Mecca in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Aramaic, Coptic, or other literature composed outside Arabia.

An examination of all available evidence and sources leads Crone to conclude that Mohammed's career took place not in Mecca and Medina or in south-west Arabia at all, but in north-west Arabia.

There was no Mecca.

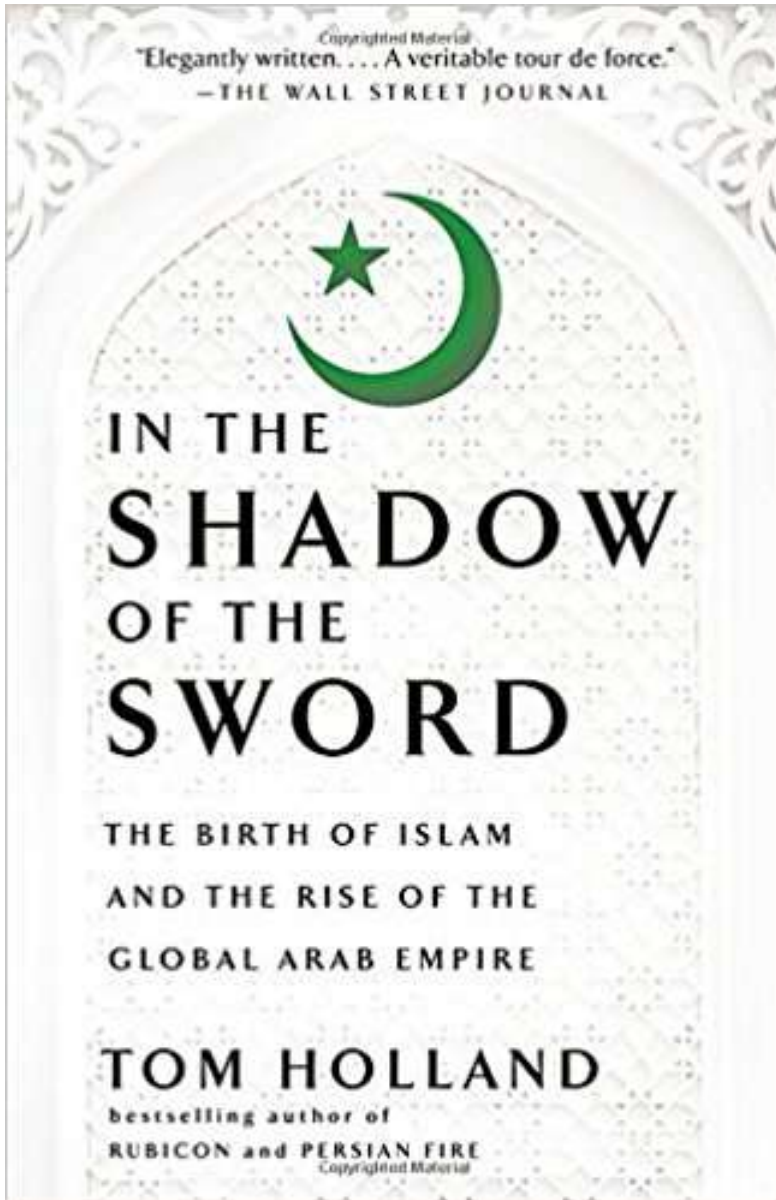


Fred Donner 2010

Donner argues that what came to be called Islam began as a monotheistic "Believers' movement" inaugurated by Muhammad which included righteous Christians and Jews as well as those monotheists who followed the teachings of the Qur'an. Only under the rule of Abd al-Malik (685-705) Islam began to separate from Christians and Jews.

Tom Holland

2012



Holland suggests that Islam, rather than originating in the arid deserts of Arabia, was born further north, "in the borders of Syria-Palestine, a region that had long been devastated by plagues and wars — the usual precursors of apocalyptic scenarios and millennial hopes."

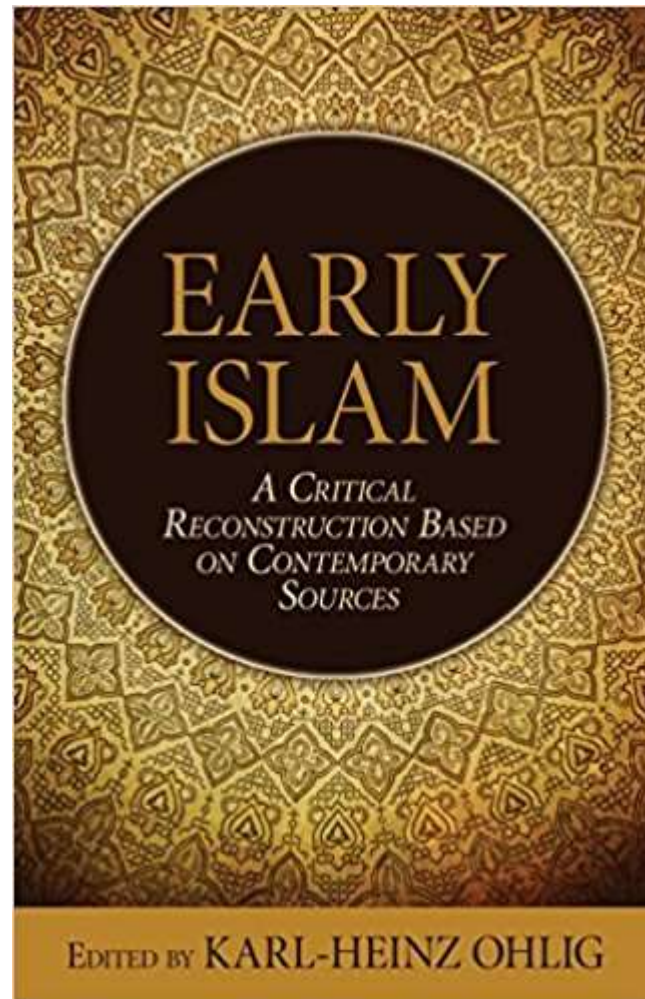
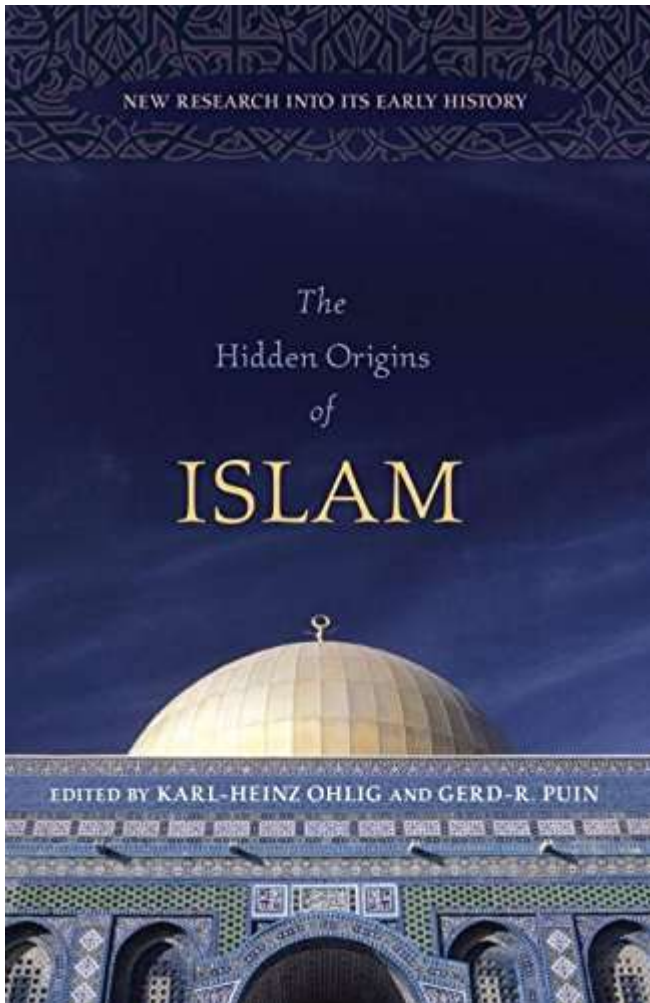
While researching the book, Holland found that the oldest extant biography of Mohammed was written nearly two hundred years after he had died, and that scholars were unsure on how much early Islamic history could be considered accurate.

Tom Holland, BBC4, 2012



The film suggests that there is little hard evidence for the origins of Islam. No mention of Muhammad for decades after his death. The city of Mecca may not have been the real birthplace of Muhammad and Islam. Much of the story of Islam's origin was later developed in the early years of the Arab Empire.

Karl-Heinz Ohlig et al., 2010, 2013



Inarah
Institute,
Saarbrücken,
Germany.

INARAH Institute



INÂRAH - Institute for Research on Early Islamic History and the Koran

Inârah, was founded as an incorporated charitable organisation (NPO) based in Saarbrücken (Germany) in 2007.

Our name is also our programme:

إنارة is used here in the sense of “Enlightenment.”

Our sole purpose is the scientific historical-critical, philological investigation into the Qur’an, the origins of Islam and its early history – something which has been sorely lacking until now. By

Karl-Heinz Ohlig: Professor of religious studies and the history of Christianity at the University of Saaland, chairman of Inarah, author of many books.

Volker Popp: Studied ethnology, African and Islamic Studies, Turcology and Iranian Studies in Mainz, Frankfurt, Ankara, and Tehran. For many years resident in Turkey, Kuwait, and the UAE. Helped to build up collections in Museums in Kuwait, Qatar and Riyadh.

Christoph Luxenberg: Studied Semitic Studies, Germanic Studies and History. Doctoral dissertation about a Syriac manuscript; for many years academic teacher of Arabic and Aramaic; author of “The Syro-Aramaic reading of the Koran”

Muawiya's inscription

36

Part I: The Early History of Islam

† ΕΠΙ ΑΒΔΑΛΜΑΛΑΝΙΑ ΑΜΗΡΑ
ΑΜΥΜΕΝΗΝ ΑΠΕΛΥΘΗΣΑΝ Ε
ΝΕΩΘΗΟΚΛΙΒΑΝΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΕΝ ΤΑΥ
ΘΑΔΙΑ ΑΒΔΑΛΛΑΝΙ ΔΑΒΘΑΣΕΜΥ
ΣΥΜΒΥΛΘΕΝ ΜΗΝ ΗΔΕΚΕΜΒΡΙΩ
ΠΕΜΠΤΗ ΗΜΕΡΑ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΑ ΙΝΔ'Σ
ΕΤΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΟΛΩΝ'Σ ΚΥ ΚΑΤΑ ΑΡΑΒΑ
ΕΤΟΣ ΜΒΕΙ ΙΑΧΗΝ ΤΩΝ ΝΟΣΘΝ
ΤΩΝ ΣΠΥΔΗ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΜΓΑΔΑΡΗΝ

Fig. 1: "The Greek inscription of Mu'awiya on the baths of Gadara, with a date following the "Era of the Arabians" (*arabas*)"

Bathhouse inscription translation

In the days of Muaauia, the servant of God, the leader of the protectors, the hot baths were preserved and renovated by the councillor (*emir*) ‘Addallah, son of Abuasemos, on the fifth of December, on the second day [of the week], in the sixth year of the indiction, in the year 726 from the founding of the city, **in the year 42 following the Arabs** [622/3], for the healing of the sick, under the supervision of Johannes, the Magistrate of Gadara.

Popp, 2010, p35.

Note: Roman style Christian Arab administration: no mention of an Arab prophet, no Islam, no Hijra. Cross reference of three dating systems, including year 42 of the era of the Arabs.

Muawiya timeline

- 641 20 Coins bearing the name of Muawiya are minted in Darabjird in Persia.
- 647 28 Muawiya referenced at this date by Byzantine historian Theophanes.
- 656 38 First coin bearing inscription "muhammad", from Shirajan (Popp)
- 658 Coin struck in Palestine bears the inscription Muhammad, with figure depicted carrying a cross
- 662 41 Coin bears name Muawiya, in Darabjird, Persia (Title "leader of the protectors", *Amir al-mu'minin*)
- 662 42 Muawiya's inscription, in Greek, on a bath house in Gadara in Palestine starts with a cross and refers to "the year 42 following the Arabs". No mention of the Quran or Islam.
- 663 Muawiya begins annual summer campaign against Byzantines in Asia Minor.
- 670s Coin depicts Muawiya with cross
- 672 52 Coin bearing inscription muhammad, from Rayy, near Tehran (Popp)
- 674 53 Arabs threaten Constantinople, Muawiya defeated.
- 677-8 58 Inscription at dam near Ta'if in Arabia, under Muawiya, refers to the year 58 and to Muawiya as "*commander of the faithful*". No mention of the Prophet or of Islam.

The word 'muhammad' on coins



Muhammad in Arabic script as per Google Translate.

MHMD

left to right

- * first appears in Persia, not Arabia
- * predates any reference to an Arab prophet
- * an honorific title meaning “praised one”
- * refers to Jesus

Christian Arab coin



Description as per auction house May 2014, auction 19, lot 274

ARAB-BYZANTINE: Standing Emperor, ca. 660s, AE square fals (5.01g), NM, A-3523A, Foss-31, muhammad left of standing figure / cross above and ba'd below cursive m, nice strike, without any weakness. VF. RRR. Foss has suggested a date

range of 647-658 but in my opinion, the 660s seem the most likely. In any case, this would

be the earliest Islamic coin to bear the name Muhammad in Arabic, which first appears on silver drachms in AH66 (type A-20 of 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Abd Allah, struck in Bishapur, AH66 = AD 685/686). This is most attractive example of this rare type we have seen.



Abd al-Malik Timeline

- 678 60 Coin bears his name Abd Al-Malik in Darabjird (reign of Abd al-Malik, Popp)
- 679 Visitor to Jerusalem describes coins with crosses.
- 679 Muawiya loses power, succeeded by Abd al-Malik (Popp)
- 683 66 First coin with inscription "mahammad rasul Allah" (Popp)
- 688 69 Inscription on a canal bridge in Egypt has no mention of Muhammad, the Quran or Islam.
- 686-7 Iranian coin bears the cross and the word Muhammad.
- 689 Work begins on Dome of the Rock
- 687 66 Earliest coin with mention of MHMT as rasul (apostle, messenger) refering to Jesus.
- 691 72 Dome of the Rock completed, Abd al Malik inscribes muhammad as Jesus. (Popp)
- 692 Defeat and death of ibn al-Zubayr, Abd al Malik then controls Arabia
- 693 74 Gold and silver coins with "muhammad rasul" in east of empire
- 698 77 Eschatological parousia (second coming) exepcted
- 696 First coins minted without images of a sovereign, *and bearing the shahada*, during Abd al-Malik
- 696 75 Coin from Merv names Abd al-Malik, as Marwan, indicates he was from there (Popp)

The Dome of the Rock



People of the Book, do not transgress the bounds of your religion. Speak nothing but the truth about your God. Jesus, son of Mary was no more than God's apostle and his Word which He cast to Mary: a spirit from Him. So believe in God and his apostles and do not say 'Three'. Forebear and it shall be better for you. God is but one God. God forbid that he should have a son! He is all that the heavens and earth contain. God is the all sufficient protector.

Dome inscription panel 3, and Koran 4:171.

Abd al-Malik gold coin



Depiction of ruler, or apocalyptic Jesus with flame sword, and (Jewish) religious symbol of the stone, Yegar Sahaduta. See Popp 2010, p63, 2013. Photo British Museum.

Homs copper coin

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Auction: 16005 – Ancient, British and Foreign Coins and Commemorative Medals including European Coins from the Peter Woodhead Collection

Lot: 1991

Arab-Byzantine (c.685-692), AE Fals, Emesa, crowned bust facing in imitation of Constans II, Kufic legend on right, rev. cursive m, emichc, star above, Kufic in exergue (BMC 69), full example, very fine

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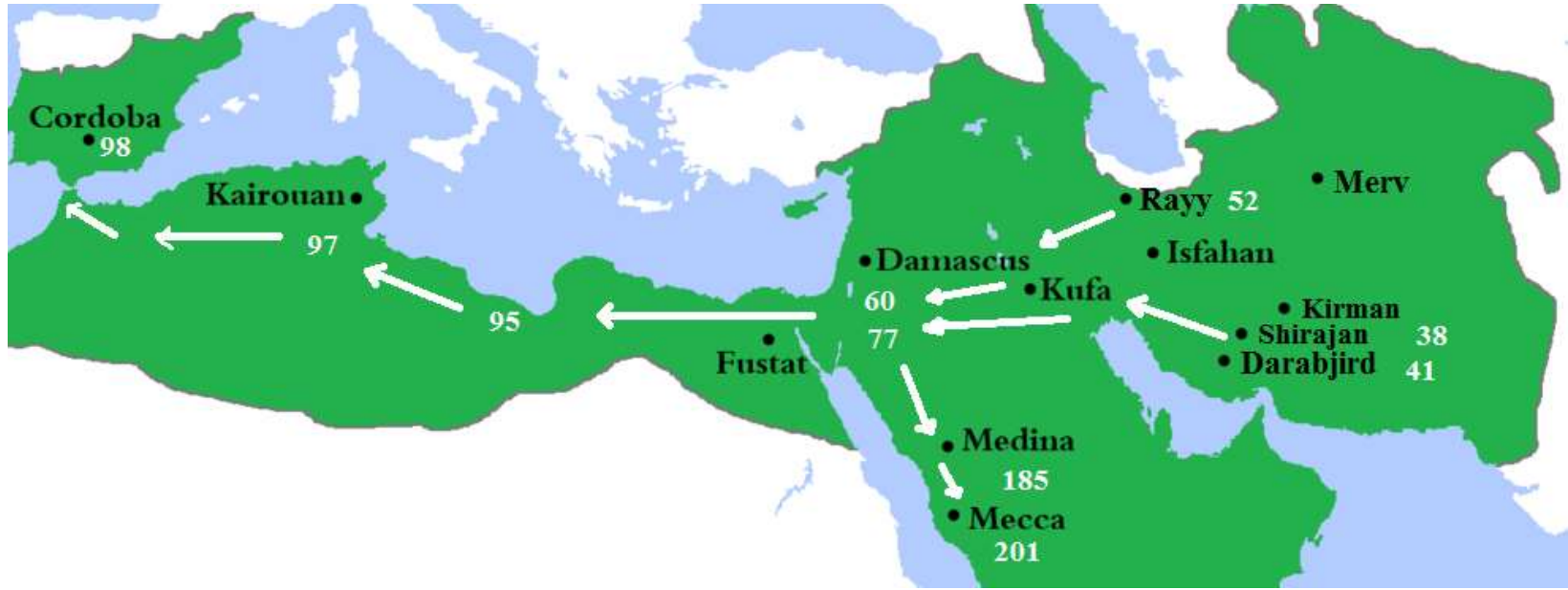
Emessa/Homs, Arabic and Greek script, figure with cross and globe cross, M denotes 40 numina. Kufic exergue means “good”. Time of Abd al-Malik.

The evidence from coins

Arab year	Location	Inscription
38	Shirajan	Includes <i>muhammad</i> . Pahlavi.
41	Persia	Includes <i>Abd Allah</i> (servant of god)
41	Darabjird	Names Muawiya. <i>Amir al'miminin</i> , Leader of the Protectors. Aramaic.
52	Rayy	Bears inscription <i>muhammad</i> . Pahlavi.
53	Darabjird	Names Al Zubayr as Emir.
60	Palestine	Bears legend Zion.
60	Darabjird	Names Abd al-Malik.
66	Persia	Uses <i>Muhammad rasul Allah</i> , chosen one apostle of god.
70	Persia	Amir is god's representative. Reverse has a fire altar with two attendants.
70	Kirman	<i>Wali allah</i> , Ali is god's, representative, another title of Jesus.
72	Palestine	Seven branched lampstand.
75	Palestine	Apocalyptic depiction of Jesus with a flame sword
75	Persia	"There is no ruler unless from God", questions Abd al-Malik's rule
77	Palestine	Aniconic coins, writing only. Period of iconoclasm in Palestine churches
95	Africa	Coins use Arab year
97	Africa	Inscription in Latin and Arabic
98	Spain	Al-Andalus. <i>Muhammadin rasul Allah</i> . Arabic and Latin.
185	Hijaz	Arabic
201	Mecca	Arabic. First coin evidence from Mecca.

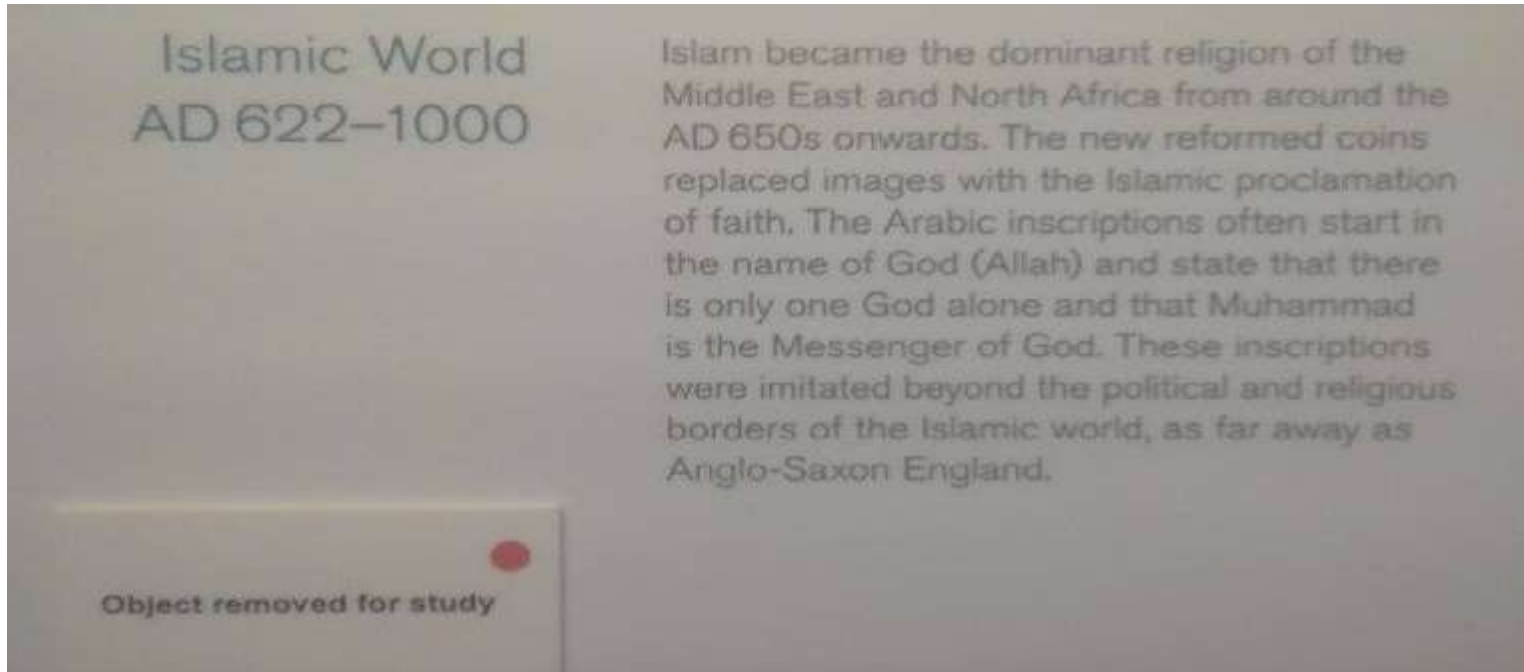
Source: Volker Popp, 2010, 2013.

The East-West progression of coins



- Coins indicate who held power, where, when, and the religious ideology they proclaimed
- The first coins of a new Arab-Persian entity are minted in Persia
- The first use of the word *muhammad* appears in Persia in the Pahlavi script
- The word *muhammad* appears on Christian coins
- The Arab-Persian leaders Muawiya and Abd al-Malik are first proclaimed in Darabjird
- The minting of Arab style coins spread across north Africa to Spain
- The last place that any coins were minted was in Mecca

Official revisions?



British Museum: “Islamic” coin removed for further study, Oct 2017.

Encyclopaedia Britannica on Muhammad: Since July 2017 no longer quotes Islamic sources, but now says “Biographical narratives about Muhammad are encountered only in texts dating from the 8th or 9th century or even later”

How did the myth arise?

- The Arabs needed a prophet of their own, to go with their new religion and empire
- The original meaning of the word *muhammad* was lost, but still persisted on coins and inscriptions
- The pre-independence Arab military detachment in Syria, *foederati*, in Arabic *qurays*, became *Quraysh*, the tribe of Muhammad
- The term *Amir al-muminin*, on coins, originally “Leader of the Protectors”, became “Commander of the Faithful”
- The Arab military protectors, now maintaining order in the new empire, could have later give rise to an impression that an invasion from Arabia had occurred.
- The Koran itself speaks of many Prophets. It was rendered into Arabic. It was not difficult to read the concept of an Arab Prophet into it.
- The myth could only be constructed long after any living memory from the times had disappeared.

The truth matters

- Acceptance of a post-truth, post-fact, postmodernist world is a threat to our future
- All religions are based on premises known to be false
- Religions hamper progress and cause suffering
- Critical evaluation of religion cannot be abandoned
- An alternative Arab history can be constructed, based entirely on evidence not dogma
- This evidence is of course ignored by pious Islamic scholars
- Western historians are generally ambivalent, disingenuous and negligent in their deliberations
- Only a dedicated group of German scholars are prepared to offer a truly evidence-based narrative.
- The reticence of most western historian has an underlying motive: fear

Final word on the legend of the Prophet

These events are not historic in the European or American tradition of historiography. In the spirit of respect for “religious feelings”, appeasement of fanatics and tolerance towards the narrators of a “special history”, a tacit agreement seems to be in force amongst Western historians, who refrain from applying the usual standard procedures when it comes to the history of the Middle East after the year 622 CE, commonly and erroneously labelled “Islamic history” (the term “muslim” appears very late!). In this field academic requirements and scientific scepticism have apparently been replaced by the uncritical adoption of narratives comparable to those of the “Arabian nights”. (*Volker Popp, 2013, p90*)