

Islam and Christianity

A comparison

Ewen Todd

March 27, 2022

Tribes in the Middle East before Islam



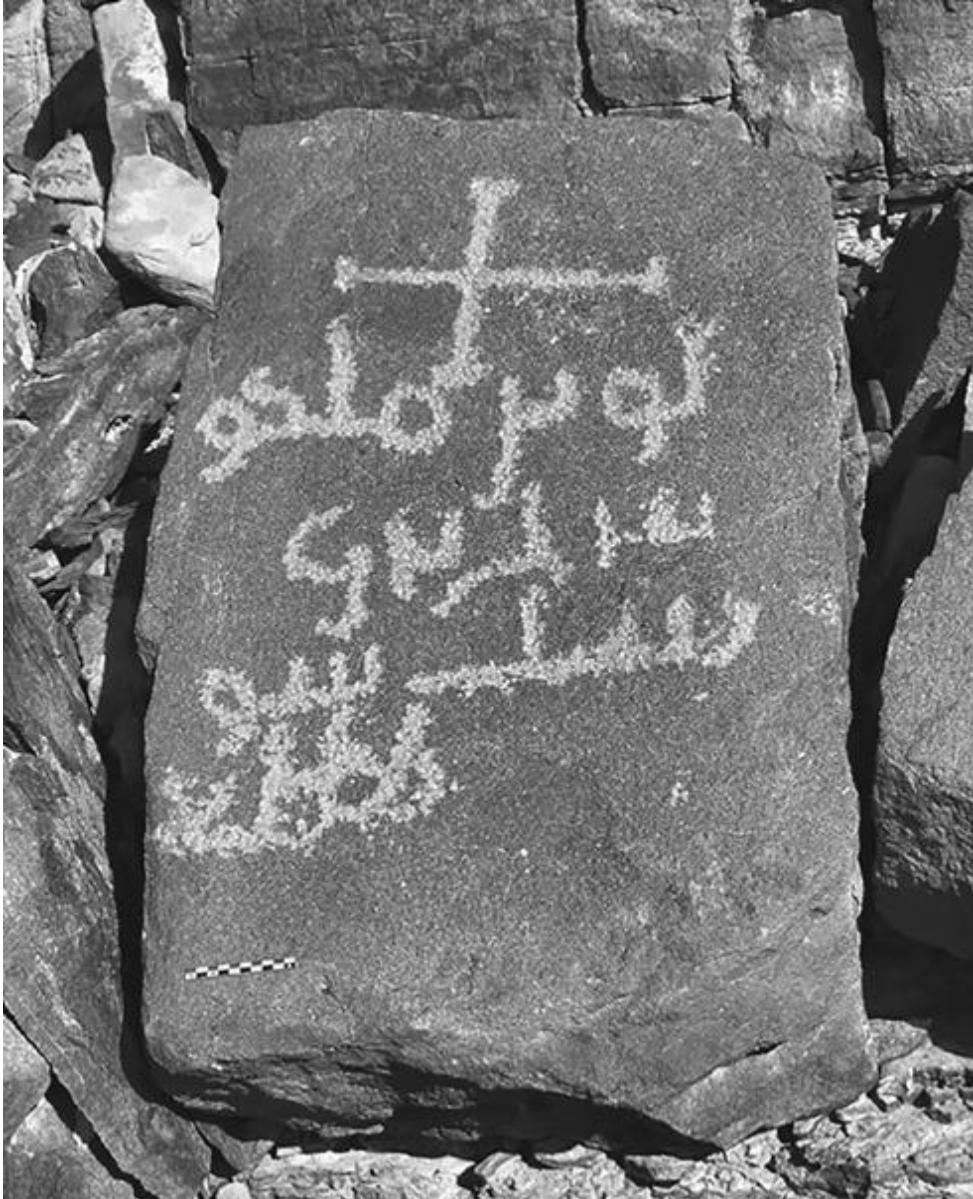
Before Mohammad

- Jerome writes in the 4th century about St. Hilarion and the Arabs of Elusa (also known as Halutza), a trading center located southwest of the Dead Sea in the Negev desert. These “Saracens,” as he described them, were devoted to the cult of the Morning Star (Venus). According to the tale, St. Hilarion began to work miracles, which caused the Arabs to abandon their idols and come to him to receive blessings. St. Hilarion called them to worship God alone; then he christened a former pagan holy man as their priest and sent them on their way. (BAR, spring 2022)

Before Mohammad

- By the sixth century Christianity seems to have been firmly established across the peninsula, most notably in the city of Najran in southern Arabia, more than 1,200 miles from Elusa
- The Quran, our primary source for the religious landscape of early seventh-century Arabia, often speaks to and engages with an Arabian Christian community
- Jesus is one of the most referenced biblical figures in the Quran

Early Christians in Arabia



- THE EARLIEST ARABIAN CHRISTIANS left their unmistakable traces around the city of Najran, in southern Arabia.
- Dating to 470 C.E., this particular rock inscription, written in early Arabic script, commemorates one Thawban son of Malik and features a large cross
- It attests to missionizing efforts among the Arabians that until recently have been known only from literary sources written by outsiders.

4th century Jesus in Arabia?



- JESUS WAS (WORSHIPED) HERE. Among the inscriptions found in Wadi al-Khudari was this memorial text.
- Its author, Wahb-El, closes his remembrance with a prayer invoking a divine entity called 'sy, likely pronounced Īsay
- Such spelling corresponds to the name of Jesus as found in the Quran. Is this the earliest known reference in Arabia to Jesus?
- **h 'sy nṣr-h m-kfr-k, "O Īsay ('sy) help him against those who deny you."**
- While the pagan gods are frequently invoked for deliverance, Jesus would have been distinguished by the redemptive aspect of his salvation.

Islam: What Non-Muslims Should Know

John Kaltner, Professor of Muslim-Christian Relations at Rhodes College, Memphis TN

Fortress Press, 2016

History of Islam

- Muhammad (570-632) had revelations beginning in 610 in Mecca
- Qur'an means recitation; Islam means submission (to the word of Allah)
- Because the words were given directly from God via Gabriel, nothing can be changed or challenged in the text – it is called the clear book
- In 622 Muhammad had to flee 200 miles north to Yathrib (soon to be called Medina, city of the Prophet) called the *hajirah* (migration)

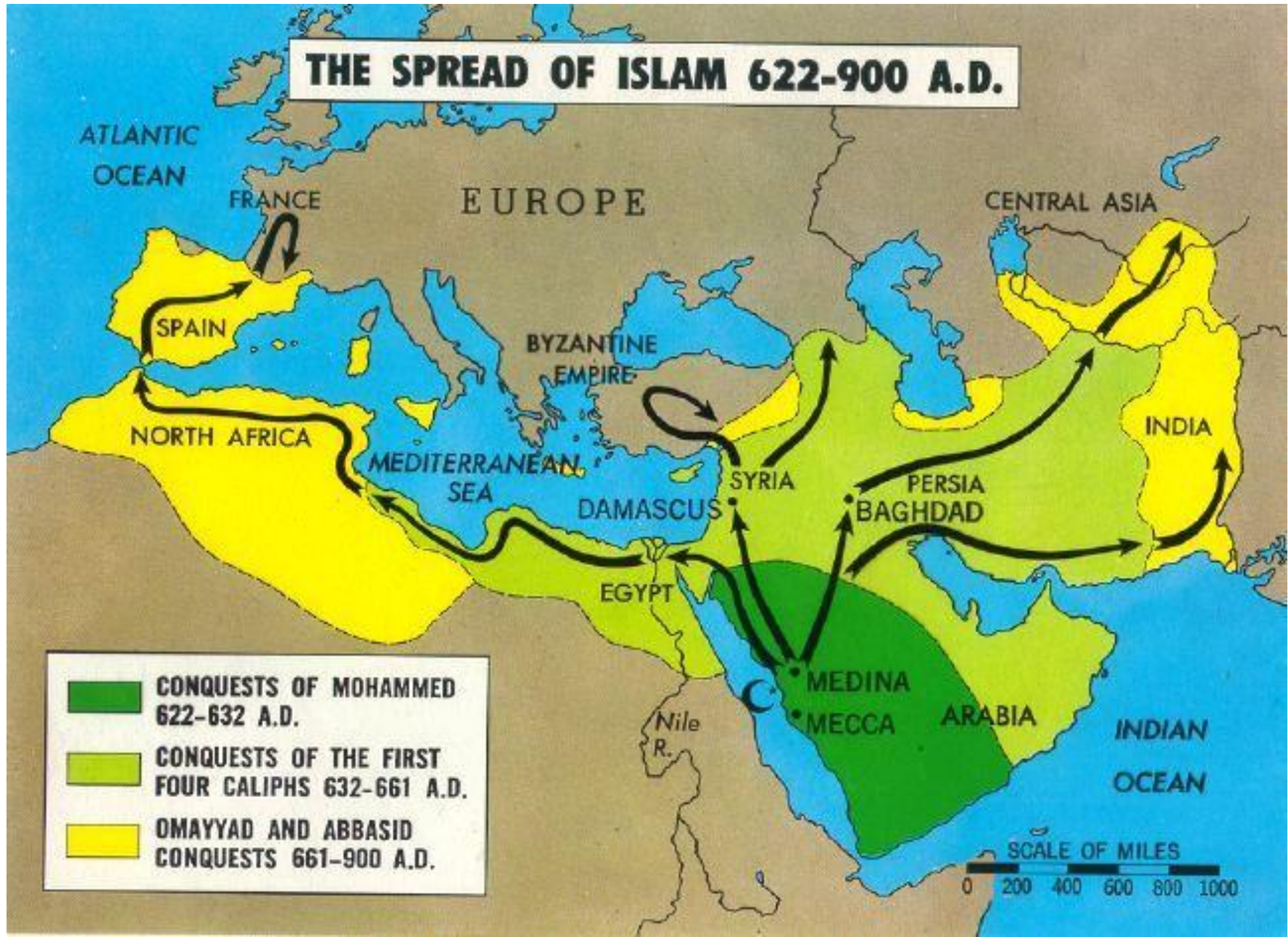
History of Islam




- In Medina, Mohammad was initially friendly with People of the Book, Jews and Christians, and had pacts with local tribes.
- They had similar religious practices (prayer, fasting, professing one's faith, and pilgrimage) but conflict grew in time he had some Jews there killed or enslaved as well as dealing with raids from Mecca.
- The Quran allows for a defensive war and in 630, Mohammad took over Mecca, and removed all the idols from the Kabbah
-

History of Islam

- Like Christianity, and unlike Judaism, Islam is expansionist, and soon all of Arabia was converted
- After his death in 630, the right-minded califs ruled from 632 to 661; these were leaders personally known to Mohammad.
- Then another dynasty took over, the Umayyad, from 661 to 750, and ruled from Damascus, a former Byzantine city.
- This was overthrown by the Abbasid caliphs who ruled from Bagdad, 750-1258 when the Mongols destroyed the city.
- The Mongols themselves eventually embraced Islam
- After some time, different Muslim groups emerged: **Safavid** (Persian 1502-1922); **Mughal** (Indian, 1526-1707); **Ottoman** (Turkish. 1301-1922); **Almoravid/Berber** (Al-Andalus/Spain, 711-1492).

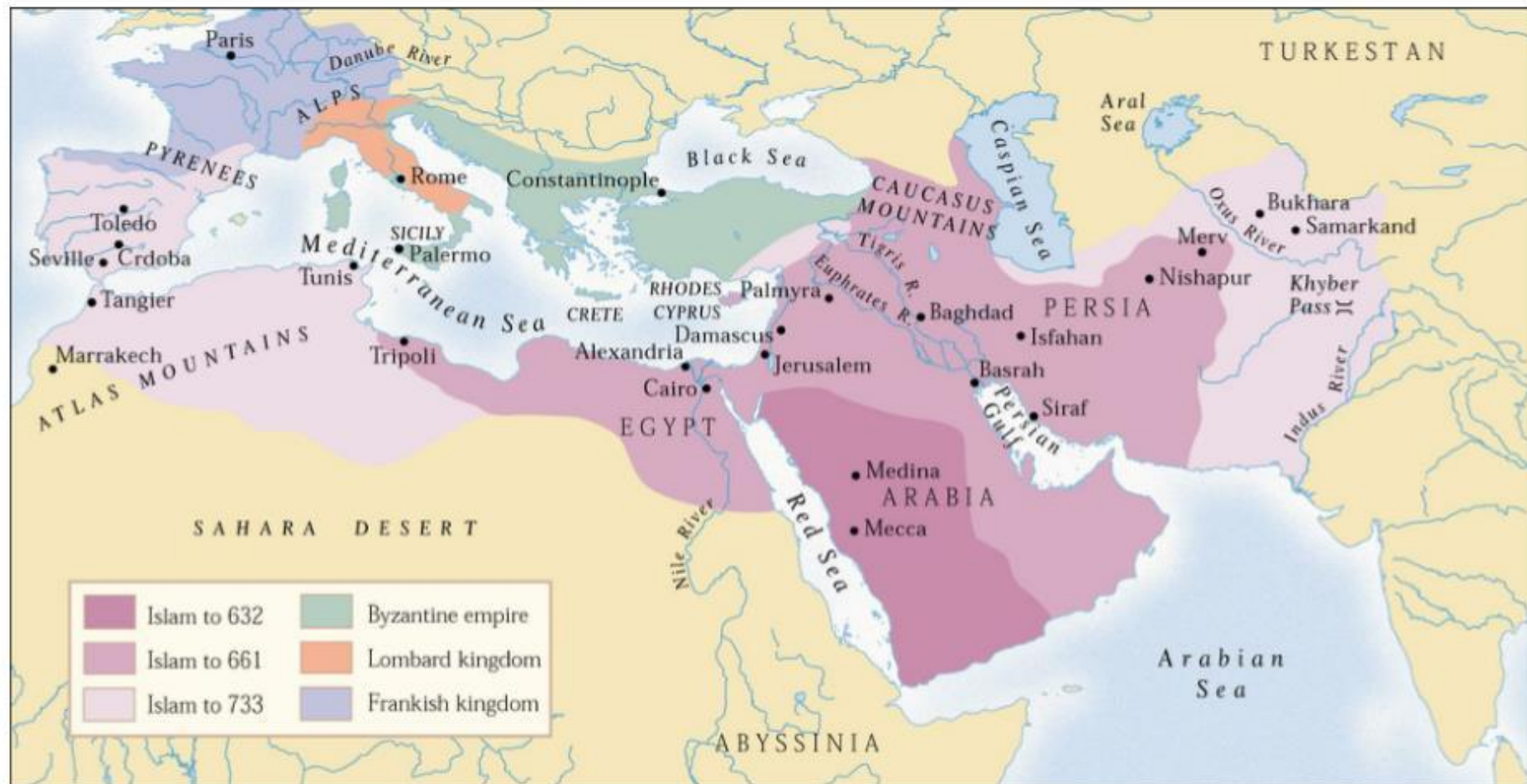
THE SPREAD OF ISLAM 622-900 A.D.



-  CONQUESTS OF MOHAMMED 622-632 A.D.
-  CONQUESTS OF THE FIRST FOUR CALIPHS 632-661 A.D.
-  OMAYYAD AND ABBASID CONQUESTS 661-900 A.D.

Dar al-Islam

- The Expansion of Islam
 - The Early Caliphs and the Umayyad Dynasty










Islamic Empires in 1683



Expansion of the Islamic World to 1500



	Islamic world at the end of the Umayyad dynasty		Area reconquered by Christians 1250		Extent of Christian crusading principalities in 12th century
	Extent of the Islamic world 1250		Area reconquered by Christians 1500		
	Extent of the Islamic world 1500		Site and date of important battle		

Extent of Muslim hegemony

History of Islam: Sunni or Shi'i?

- The Shiites wanted the Islamic ruler to be descended from Mohammad, and Ali (Mohammad's son-in-law) and his son Husayn were killed by those supporting the Sunni cause, which chose different leaders, not family
- The Shi'a form is now mainly in Iran, Iraq and some parts of Lebanon (Hezbollah), about 15% of Muslims
- The main difference between the two is about leadership and authority, but the Shi'i like to revere the holy people and go on pilgrimages.
- Compare with Protestants and Catholics. The Shi'a believe that there were 12 imams who originally ruled and the last hidden one will return in the future.

Conversion of the Conquered or Colonized Nations

- Conquered people had choices: 1) convert to Islam, 2) remain People of the Book and pay a head tax (*jizyah*), lower in society, 3) be killed.
 - Most chose to convert.
 - Because Islam spread so quickly and into countries far removed from Arabia, local customs mix in with Islamic traditions
 - , e.g., in India, holy cards will have the face of Mohammad on them (never seen in any mosques here)
- Therefore, Islam is a diverse and complex faith.

Top 10 Countries with the Largest Number of Muslims (2021)

1. Indonesia (231,000,000)
2. Pakistan (212,300,000)
3. India (200,000,000)
4. Bangladesh (153,700,000)
5. Nigeria (95,000,000–103,000,000)
6. Egypt (85,000,000–90,000,000)
7. Iran (82,500,000)
8. Turkey (74,432,725)
9. Algeria (41,240,913)
10. Sudan (39,585,777)

Country	Muslim Population	2022 Population	Muslim % of Total Population	Muslim % of World Population
<u>Indonesia</u>	229,000,000	279,134,505	87.20%	12.70%
<u>Pakistan</u>	200,400,000	229,488,994	96.50%	11.10%
<u>India</u>	195,000,000	1,406,631,776	14.20%	10.90%
<u>Bangladesh</u>	153,700,000	167,885,689	90.40%	9.20%
<u>Nigeria</u>	99,000,000	216,746,934	49.60%	5.30%
<u>Egypt</u>	87,500,000	106,156,692	92.35%	4.90%
<u>Iran</u>	82,500,000	86,022,837	99.40%	4.60%
<u>Turkey</u>	79,850,000	85,561,976	99.20%	4.60%
<u>Algeria</u>	41,240,913	45,350,148	99.00%	2.70%

Hadith

- Apart from the Quran, there is the *hadith*, a work to sort out the traditions of the faithful as sound, acceptable or weak (rejected)
- The *hadith* is like the Jewish Tanakh: WWMD vs. WWJD
- Many Muslims prefer to go back to the time of Mohammad (700s) and therefore appear to us to be very conservative in their customs, but this is more cultural than religious
- Nothing in Quran about wearing hijab to cover up, just the opposite. *“O, Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to have their outer garments hang low over them. That way, they will be recognized and not harassed”* (33:59)

Sufism

- Sufism is an offshoot of Islam
- While all Muslims believe that they are on the pathway to Allah and hope to become close to God in Paradise—after death and after the Last Judgment—Sufis also believe that it is possible to draw closer to God and to more fully embrace the divine presence in this life.
- Sufism recognizes one central truth, it is the unity of being, that we are not separate from the Divine
- This is opposed to mainline Islam thinking that one can never fully know the transcendent Allah or his true nature.

Sufism

- Poem by Rumi (died 1273)
- *A craftsman drew a reed from the reed bed,*
- *Cut holes in it and called it a human being.*
- *Since then, it has been wailing a tender agony of parting,*
- *Never mentioning the skill of its maker who gave it life as a flute.*

Orthopraxy vs. Orthodoxy

- What you do is more important for others to see than what you believe (faith into action).
- Five pillars
 1. Profession of faith, there is no other God but Allah. Recite the creeds daily. Have no association with anything that takes you away from God (*shirk*, the unforgivable sin)
 2. Pray 5 times a day, mosque only required on Friday; they may also have prayer beads to recite the 99 names of God
 3. Almsgiving, not charity or donation, but a debt owed to the community; suggested 2.5% of assets.

Orthopraxy vs. Orthodoxy

4. Ramadan, fasting from dawn to dusk, *iftar* breaks the fast each evening for families to gather and celebrate. End of Ramadan is *id al-fitr* (Feast of the Fast Breaking) with gifts, meals and prayers

5. Pilgrimage to Mecca to remember Abraham and Hagar's journey to the Kabbah and the miraculous spring of water, all according to prescribed ritual

- The Shi'a also follow these but add veneration of the holy men who were martyred.

Respect for Judaism and Christianity

Allah

- *“He revealed to you the book in truth and confirmation of what came earlier. He revealed to you the Torah and the Gospel before this as a guide for humanity.” (3:3)*
- Muslims claim it is the same God that Christians and Jews worship
- Muslims have respect for the Old and New Testaments but disagree with some of the basics of faith. They agree on God (Allah) being creator, judge, to be worshiped, merciful, helper, guide, but disagree on some of the contents of the books (Torah and Gospels). These have been corrupted over the years and should be rewritten to reflect what the Quran says

Opening Prayer for All Muslims

• *“(1) In the name of God (Allah), the Compassionate and Merciful. (2) Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, (3) the Compassionate and Merciful, (4) Master of the Day of Judgement. (5) Thee we worship and from Thee we seek help. (6) Guide us upon the straight path, (7) the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those who incur wrath, nor of those who are astray.”*

Angels

- Gabriel, Michael, and other angels (which stand at the doors of the mosques and know who goes in and listen to what the imam says)
- But there also evil spirits, jinni (we get the name genie from this)
- The jinn can be found in various stories of the One Thousand and One Nights,
- One fallen angel is Iblis because he refused to bow down to Adam

More on the Jinn

- Jinn (Arabic: جنّ, jinn) – also romanized as djinn or anglicized as genie (with the broader meaning of spirit or demon, depending on source) – are supernatural creatures in early pre-Islamic Arabian religious systems and later in Islamic mythology and theology
- Like humans, they are created with *fitra*, neither born as believers nor as unbelievers; their attitude depends on whether or not they accept God's guidance
- Since jinn are neither innately evil nor innately good, Islam acknowledged spirits from other religions, and was able to adapt spirits from other religions during its expansion
- Jinn are not a strictly Islamic concept; they may represent several pagan beliefs integrated into Islam.

Supposed Impact of Jinni

- Jinn are believed to interfere with political affairs, like the Gaza–Israel conflict. Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Namir states that he believes many hardships among Muslims are caused by Jewish jinn possessing Muslim Palestinians
- Sleep paralysis is understood as a "jinn attack" by many sleep paralysis sufferers in Egypt, it is generally associated with great fear in Egypt, especially if believed to be supernatural in origin
- Iblis is seen as a tempter who takes advantage of humanity's weaknesses and self-centeredness and leads them away from God's path.
- Iblis and his fellow devils can only operate with God's permission, and thus the existence of evil has been created by God himself

Origin of Iblis

- When God created Adam, He ordered the angels to bow before the new creation
- All of the angels bowed down, but Iblis refused to do so, arguing that since he was created from fire, he is superior to humans, who were made from clay-mud, and that he should not prostrate himself before Adam
- As punishment for his haughtiness, God banished Iblis from heaven and condemned him to hell

Origin of Iblis

- Later, Iblis requested the ability to try to mislead Adam and his descendants
- God granted his request but also warned him that he would have no power over God's servants
- Theology (Kalām) discusses Iblis' role in the Quran and matters of free-will. Some emphasize free-will and that Iblis freely chose to disobey. Others assert that Iblis was predestined by God to disobey

Messengers (*rasul*) and Prophets (*nabi*)

- A messenger is sent to rule in a region becoming a lawmaker, and a prophet preaches and warns. However, it is not always easy to separate them as they are described.
- **Main messengers:** Noah, Lot, Ishmael, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad; only the last three were given a book (also 3 preislamic names we know nothing about).

Messengers (*rasul*) and Prophets (*nabi*)

- Islamic tradition holds that God sent messengers to every nation. Muslims believe that God sent only Muhammad to convey the divine message to the whole world, whereas he sent other messengers (*rusul*) to convey their messages to a specific group of people or to an individual nation.
- Muslims regard Adam as the first prophet and Muhammad as the last prophet; hence Muhammad's title *Seal of the Prophets*
- Islam regards Jesus as a *rasul* (and sometimes as a *nabi*) because he received *wahy* (revelation) from God, through which God revealed the *Injil* (Gospel) to him

Five Imams

- Islamic theology recognizes as many as 124,000 prophets. Five of them (sometimes known as *Ulul Azmi* or the Imams — literally: "leaders" — of the *Rasuls*) receive the highest reverence for their perseverance and unusually strong commitment to God in the face of great suffering, namely:

1. Nuh (Noah)

2. Ibrahim (Abraham)

3. Musa (Moses)

4. Isa (Jesus)

5. Muhammad

Other Prophets not of the Book

- Numerous other historical figures may rank as prophets, but debate and contention surround this matter. Such figures include: Zoroaster, Gautama Buddha, Socrates, Merlin, Laozi, Confucius, Krishna, and Rama.
- However, Muslims will argue that one cannot know this for certain, since the Qur'an does not mention them by name. Those in favor of counting such men as prophets often argue that they came with the word of God, but that it later became corrupted, which accounts for the differences between Islam and the various religions and philosophies associated with which each man.

Prophets

- 25 Prophets include: Adam (with Hawa), Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Aaron, Jethro, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Job, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, Zechariah, Jesus, Mohammad (but not Isaiah, Jeramiah)
- To clarify, Zechariah was the father of John the Baptist, the guardian of Isa's mother Mary, and a righteous priest who lost his life for his faith
- John the Baptist was a witness to the word of Allah, who would herald the arrival of Isa.
- Isa (Jesus) is considered a messenger of truth in the Quran who preached the straight path.
- All prophets taught the message of Islam - to find peace in your life through submission to the One Almighty Creator; to believe in God and to follow His guidance. Every prophet is also a messenger, but not every messenger is a prophet.

Prophets

- *“We believe in Allah what has been revealed to us, what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and what was given to Moses, Jesus and the prophets from their lord, and we make no distinction among any of them, and to Him we submit.” (3:84).*
- A Prophet generally appears in the nation with the prediction of upcoming Prophet. For example, John the Baptist told the people of Judea regarding the coming of Jesus (Esa or Isa).
- Similarly, the advent of Holy Prophet Muhammad was predicted in both New and Old Testaments.

Noah as an Example of a Prophet/Messenger

- The messenger Noah says very little in Genesis 9 (curses his Ham, his son), but in the Quran, he gives warnings of impending doom for the people around him because he is also a prophet.
- *In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful.*
- *1. We sent Noah to his people: “Warn your people before there comes upon them a painful punishment.”*
- *2. He said, “O my people, I am to you a clear warner.*
- *3. Worship God and reverence Him, and obey me.*
- *4. And He will forgive you of your sins, and reprieve you until a stated term. God’s term cannot be deferred once it has arrived, if you only knew.”*
- *5. He said, “My Lord, I have called my people night and day.*
- *6. But my call added only to their flight.*
- *7. Whenever I called them to Your forgiveness, they thrust their fingers into their ears, and wrapped themselves in their garments, and insisted, and became more and more arrogant.*

Noah as an Example of a Prophet/Messenger

- *23. And they said, “Do not give up your gods; do not give up Wadd, nor Souwa, nor Yaghoos, and Yaoq, and Nassr.*
- *24. They have misled many, so do not increase the wrongdoers except in confusion.”*
- *25. Because of their wrongs, they were drowned, and were hurled into a Fire. They did not find apart from God any helpers.*
- *26. Noah said, “My Lord, do not leave of the unbelievers a single dweller on earth.*
- *27. If You leave them, they will mislead your servants, and will breed only wicked unbelievers.*
- *28. My Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and anyone who enters my home in faith, and all the believing men and believing women; and do not increase the wrongdoers except in perdition.”*

Jesus as a Prophet

- About Jesus, he speaks in the Quran *"It is not for me to say that of which I have no right. If I had said it, You surely would have known it. You know what is in my mind, but I do not know what is in Your mind. You are the knower of all hidden things."* (5:116).
- Thus, Muslims reject a trinitarian God and Jesus as divine, as this is being *shirk* (not worshiping one God).

Prophets

- Muslims read about, learn from, and respect all of the prophets
- Many Muslims name their children after them.

Day of the Lord

- The Day of Resurrection, The Day of Judgment, The Last Day mentioned many times in the Quran. Paradise is reward for the faithful being in a lush garden, with rivers of pure water as well as milk and honey. Unbelievers will be tortured and scorched with fire. Each person is accountable for his/her actions.
- *“If the People of the Book had believed and been pious, we would have granted them pardon for their offenses and allowed them to enter the garden of comfort. If they followed the Torah and the Gospel and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have eaten of good things from above them and under their feet. Among them are some who are moderate, but many of them do evil.” (5:65-66).*

Hierarchical Structure

- Islam has no centralized structure (except for the Shi'a in Iran) for issuing edicts. No one voice is heard on an issue (like the 9/11 attack). It is up to the local congregations how to follow the rope of Allah, which can be defined as an agreement or covenant with God. In Iran, the Ayatollah makes the final decisions over and above parliament.
- No separation of religion and state as demonstrated by Mohammad when he was invited to rule over Yathrib. Shariah law is barely mentioned in the Quran. It was developed much later under 4 schools one of which Muslim countries choose to adopt.
- Strict Shariah law is followed by few such as Saudi Arabia and Iran
- Most Muslim countries use a combination of civil law and Muslim law. Many Muslim states follow Middle Ages patriarchal customs with women having domestic rights but not in business or finance

Hierarchical Structure

- For Muslims, to deal with a legal issue there is an order.
 - 1. Listen to what God, the messenger, and the authorities say
 - 2. Follow what is in the *hadith*
 - 3. Consensus of the community
 - 4. Comparing what is analogous. For instance, wine is prohibited in the Quran but not whisky, but by deduction all spirits are forbidden to Muslims
- Typically, Muslim law applies only to families for marriage, divorce, and inheritance; and civil law for criminal and other offenses.
- Imams for Sunni Muslims do not need any formal training although many do
- In Iran, Shi'a leaders are always well-trained in the law
- Each Islamic congregation exists independently from others

Jihad

- Greater Jihad is striving personally to follow the precepts of the Muslim faith.
- Lesser Jihad is striving to expand the Muslim community
- Although martyrs for the faith are honored and allowed to enter Paradise, suicide is warned against in the Quran.

Commonality

- Both Muslims and Christians have in common love of God and neighbor
- But who is our neighbor in this context?
- How do we love Muslims?

The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims

Mustapha Akyol

St. Martin's Press, 2017

Mustapha Akyol

- A Turkish journalist and author, he studied political science and history at Bogazici University and contributes to the New York Times
- At the Cato Institute, Washington D.C. he is a senior fellow at the Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity, to work on the intersection of public policy, Islam, and modernity
- Through his careful reexamination of the currents of Muslim thought, Akyol discovers a flourishing of liberalism in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and the unique "Islam-liberal synthesis" of present-day Turkey. Only by accepting a secular state, he powerfully asserts, can Islamic societies thrive.
- Islam without Extremes, 2011, banned in Malaysia for questioning religious orthodoxy

The Book of James

- In reading through the New Testament Mustapha Akyol was struck by the similarity of the passage in James 4:13-16 and a passage in the Quran about going about your daily business without thinking about tomorrow.
- “If you took the Book of James, gave it to a Muslim and didn't inform him of its origins, he'd think another Muslim wrote it.”

NT and the Quran

- **James 13** *Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.*
- **Quran** "And never say of anything, "Indeed, I will do that tomorrow, except, "If God wills" (InshaAllah). And remember your Lord when you forget [it] and say, "Perhaps my Lord will guide me to what is nearer than this to right conduct."
{18:23-24}

Jeffrey Bütz, The Brother of Jesus and the Lost Teachings of Christianity, 2005

- James can serve as a desperately needed “missing link” between the children of Abraham
- Using the Gospels, the Church Fathers, and apocryphal texts, Bütz argues that James is the most overlooked figure in the history of the Church.
- He shows how the core teachings of Jesus are firmly rooted in Hebraic tradition; reveals the bitter battles between James and Paul for ideological supremacy in the early Church; and explains how Paul's interpretations, which became the foundation of the Church, are in many ways its betrayal
- Bütz reveals a picture of Christianity that is sometimes at odds with established Christian doctrine and concludes that James can serve as a desperately needed missing link between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to heal the wounds of centuries of enmity

Akyol's View of Jesus

- As a Muslim, Akyol sees the historical Jesus as much more than a zealot aspiring to confront Roman authoritarianism.
- He contends that the Jesus of Christianity sought to revive and reform the faith of his Jewish followers
- Jesus's ideas for reform focused on moral teachings and on one's personal conduct of motives, actions, and intentions in life
- Jesus led a revolution calling for his followers to lead a spiritual life of good deeds, which transcended Jewish law and moved beyond specific religious boundaries so that he could reach Gentiles as well the Jews

Akyol's View of Jesus

- This reformist message, Akyol says, is what made Jesus's appeal so endearing over time.
- He would say that the Jewish disciples first saw Jesus as a redeemer of Israel, and not as a divine Son of God
- Today's Christianity comes more from the efforts of Paul than from the way James sought to preserve Jesus's legacy
- Akyol explains how Muhammad, similar to Jesus, did not seek to invent a new faith, but rather he shared the truth of wanting his people to return to worshipping the one true and almighty God in the Abrahamic tradition of monotheism

Akyol's View of Jesus

- The Quran accepts Jews and Christians as “People of the Book” and the Qur’an also confirms the importance of the Torah and the Gospels
- Akyol sees the Quran as between the Jews who see the need for a legitimate Messiah, but not as a Son of God, and the Christians who honor Jesus for carrying the Word of God, but also as a divine person.
- Akyol shows how the Quran’s “Islamic Christology” distinguishes Jesus as possessing the “Word” of God and the “Spirit” of God as a messenger on Earth.
- In Islam, Jesus is a son of God’s message, not the literal Son of God. He is divinely inspired and breathes divinity, but he still remains mortal

Questions?

