

Exposing Myths of Early Islam

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Exposing Myths of Early Islam

- Forensic science, archaeology, and first-hand written documents are revealing a very different picture of the first 100 years of Islam. The Traditional Islamic view states that an Arab named Muhammad received revelations from Allah through the angel Gabriel in a city called Mecca, and within 20 years after Muhammad's death these revelations were written down in a book called the Qur'an. However, new information is turning this traditional view upside down.

Exposing Myths of Early Islam

Friday from 2:35 pm - 3:25 pm, B208

- We are learning that the Muhammad of traditional Islam was probably an invention of a later Arab leader, that the Qur'an was probably not collected and written down until the early 8th century (from many sources, including Christian and Jewish liturgy), and that the city of Petra in Northern Arabia was likely the birthplace of Islam instead of Mecca, which was probably not established as a city until after the death of Muhammad.

“The more one looks at the origins of Islam, the less one sees.”

Robert Spencer, Did Muhammad Exist?, p. 2

The Claims by the Traditional Account

- The life of Muhammad was lived out in the “full light of history”
- Muhammad was already a revered prophet and a model of moral conduct for his followers
- The Qur'an as a revealed book was written down in Arabic within 20 years of Muhammad's death
- Islam as a religion was fully formed by the time Muhammad died
- The Arabs were pagans before Muhammad came to convert them to Islam

Claims by Muslims

Muhammad

1. Muhammad lived in Arabia between 570 and 632 AD. left the city of Mecca in 622 and settled in Medina until his death

Muhammad Exposed

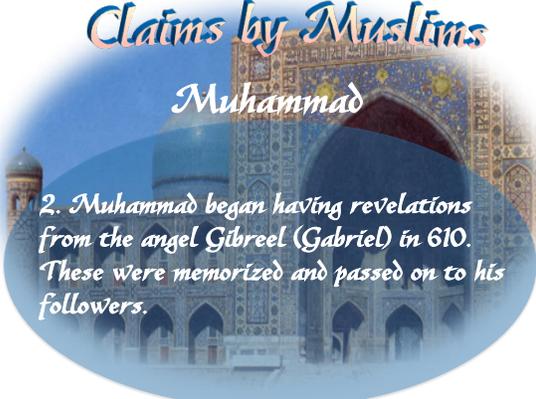
1. There are no records of Muhammad's birth, death or place of residence until over 100 years after his supposed death



Claims by Muslims

Muhammad

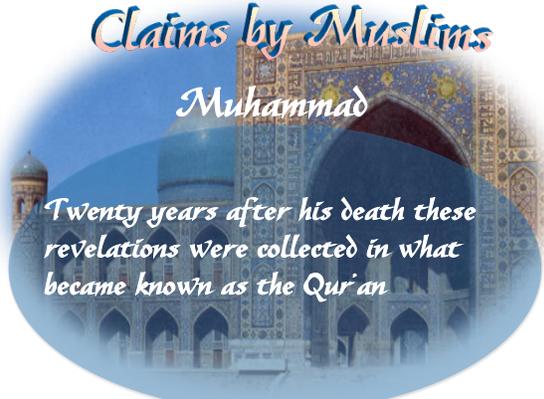
2. Muhammad began having revelations from the angel Gibreel (Gabriel) in 610. These were memorized and passed on to his followers.



Claims by Muslims

Muhammad

Twenty years after his death these revelations were collected in what became known as the Qur'an



Muhammad Exposed

2. The earliest mention of Muhammad is in 691 AD in the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock. He may have been the Muhammad inscribed on a coin in 687 AD.



Possible References to Muhammad

Non-Muslim Sources	
Year	Reference
Late 630s	Christian document mentions an unarmed and still-living Arabian prophet "armed with a sword" (<i>Doctrina Jacobi</i>)
638	The bishop of Jerusalem, Sophronius, writes about the invasion of Jerusalem and describes the invaders as barbaric and unreligious. He never calls the invaders "Muslims" and never refers to Muhammad, the Qur'an, or Islam.
Early 640s	Thomas, a Christian priest, mentions a battle between the Byzantines and the "tayyaye d-Mhmt" east of Gaza in 634
660s/670s	Armenian bishop Sebeos gives a semi-historical account of an Arab preacher named "Mahmet," who taught his people to worship the God of Abraham, and who let 12,000 Jews, along with Arabs, to invade Palestine Armenian bishop Sebeos gives a semi-historical account of an Arab preacher named "Mahmet," who taught his people to worship the God of Abraham, and who let 12,000 Jews, along with Arabs, to invade Palestine

Possible References to Muhammad

Non-Muslim Sources	
Year	Reference
680	Anonymous chronicler identifies Muhammad as the leader of the "sons of Ishmael," whom God sent against the Persians "like the sand of the sea shore"
685	Abdullah ibn Az-Zubair, a rebel opposed to Abd al-Malik, mints coins proclaiming Muhammad as the prophet of Allah. (figure of person)
690	Coptic Christian bishop John of Nikiou makes the first extant use of "Muslims" (although this is from an Ethiopic copy dated 1602, which was probably altered when translated from the Greek to the Arabic and then to Ethiopic)
730s	Christian writer John of Damascus refers to Islamic theology in detail, and to the "writings" of Muhammad, although he does not refer to a Qur'an by name (which seems to still not be canonized at this time)

Possible References to Muhammad

Earliest references to a "Muhammad" on coins	
Year	Reference
640s-650s	Coin in Palestine bears the inscription "Muhammad" but depicts a figure holding a cross (perhaps to "the praised one")



Possible References to Muhammad

Earliest references to a "Muhammad" on coins	
Year	Reference
660s/670s	Coin depicts Muawiya holding a cross topped with a crescent



Possible References to Muhammad

Earliest references to a "Muhammad" on coins	
Year	Reference
Early 680s	Coins apparently depicting Yazid feature a cross

Possible References to Muhammad

Earliest references to a "Muhammad" on coins	
Year	Reference
Late 680s	Coin minted by Zubayr mentions Muhammad



Possible References to Muhammad

Earliest references to a "Muhammad" on coins	
Year	Reference
Early 790s	Coins depicting Abd al-Malik still feature a human figure: Arabic writing states "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his prophet"



Possible References to Muhammad

Earliest references to a "Muhammad" on coins	
Year	Reference
696	First coins appear that do not feature an image of the caliph, and also features the <i>Shahada</i>



Possible References to Muhammad

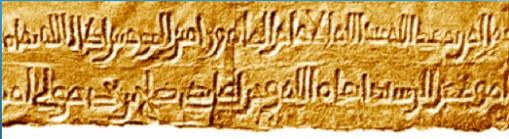
Earliest mention of "Muhammad" by Muslims (other than on coins)	
Year	Reference
691	The Dome of the Rock inscription declares that "Muhammad is the servant of God and His messenger"



Dome of the Rock Inscription



Dome of the Rock Inscription

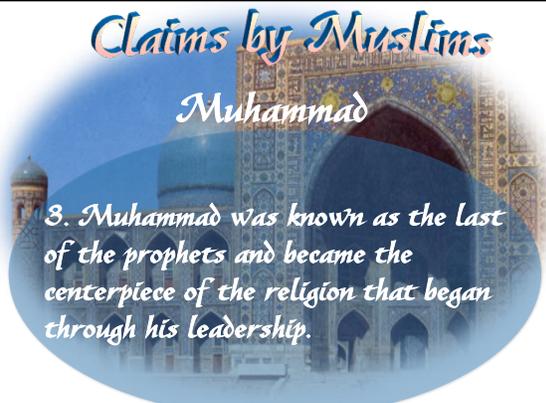


- From the servant of Allah ‘Abdullah al-Ma'mun al-Imam, Commander of the Faithful, may Allah prolong its duration! In the rule of the brother of Commander of the Faithful Abu Ishaq, son of Commander of the Faithful al-Rashid, that Allah will make it last. And (this work) had been put in place by the hands of Salih b. Yahya, the *mawali* of Commander of the Faithful, in the month of *Rabi' al-Akhir* of year 216.

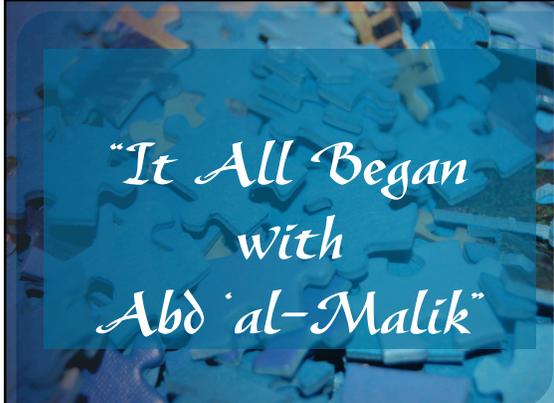
Claims by Muslims

Muhammad

3. Muhammad was known as the last of the prophets and became the centerpiece of the religion that began through his leadership.



"It All Began with Abd 'al-Malik"



Muhammad Exposed

3. It all started with Abd al-Malik:

- It is likely that Muhammad is mostly the invention of the Caliph Abd al-Malik (685-705).



Muhammad Exposed

The Caliph needed a prophet to be the mouthpiece of the scripture for his new religion.

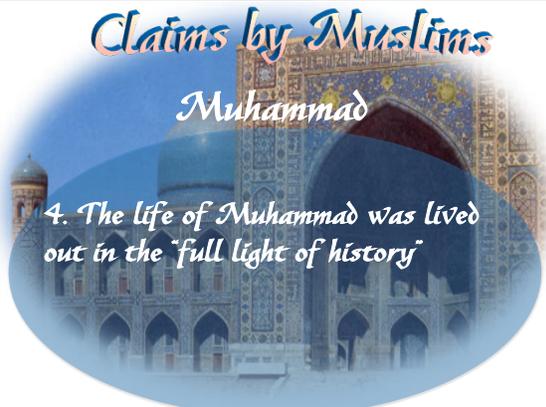
The Qur'an became the scripture and Islam became the religion.



Claims by Muslims

Muhammad

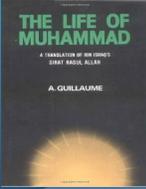
4. The life of Muhammad was lived out in the "full light of history"



Muhammad Exposed

4. The earliest biographical information about Muhammad dates from over 125 years after his reported death.

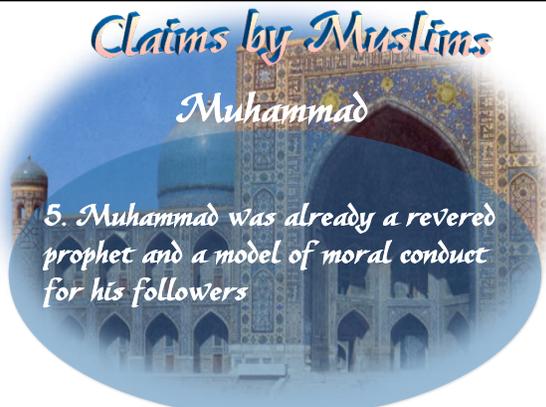
The first biography of Muhammad, by Ibn Ishaq, is probably just "pious fiction" that sought to give context to the Qur'an.



Claims by Muslims

Muhammad

5. Muhammad was already a revered prophet and a model of moral conduct for his followers



Muhammad Exposed

5. Most, if not all, the deeds and the sayings of Muhammad were fabricated hundreds of years after his death

- These sayings were recorded in the Hadith



Muhammad Exposed

- The name Muhammad appears in the Qur'an only four times and three of these instances could be used as a title ("praised one")
- "messenger of Allah" (rasul Allah) appears around 300 times, and "prophet" (nabi) 43 times.
- Are these all references to Muhammad?

Muhammad Exposed

- Muhammad probably was an historic person, perhaps even prophetic in the desert way, but probably nothing more than a magghazi leader who was later used by Abd al-Malik for his propaganda.

The Development of the Qur'an

- What if the Qur'an is not divine?
- If the Qur'an is not directly from God, then it is a human document; and since it claims a perfect, divine source, human authorship would undercut its authority.
- In fact, Humphreys states boldly, "If the Qur'an is a historical document, then the whole Islamic struggle of fourteen centuries is effectively meaningless."

Toby Lester, "What is the Koran?," chap. in *What the Koran Really Says: Language, Text, and Commentary* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002), p. 110.

True Origins of the Qur'an?

- "In his groundbreaking and complex work, Wansbrough postulated that the Qur'an was developed primarily to establish Islam's origins in Arabia and the the Hadith were fabricated in order to give the Arabian Empire a distinctive religion so as to foster its stability and unity."
- Spencer, *Did Muhammad Exist?*, 12

- "If Abd al-Malik built up the Islamic religion for political purposes, then the earlier silence from all quarters about Muhammad, Islam, and the Qur'an can be explained very simply: There was no reference to these things because Muhammad, Islam, and the Qur'an did not exist yet, or did so only in an inchoate state."

- Spencer, *Did Muhammad Exist?*, 60.

Claims by Muslims

Qur'an

1. Muhammad began having revelations from the angel Gibreel (Gabriel) in 610. These were memorized and passed on to his followers.

Claims by Muslims

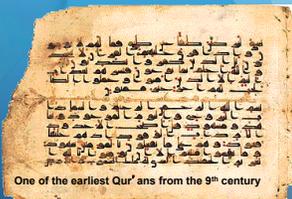
Qur'an

These revelations were collected in what became known as the Qur'an



The Qur'an Exposed

- The Qur'an probably took its present shape not in the middle of the 7th century, but probably not until late in the 8th century, if not into the 9th (over 200 years after Muhammad's death)

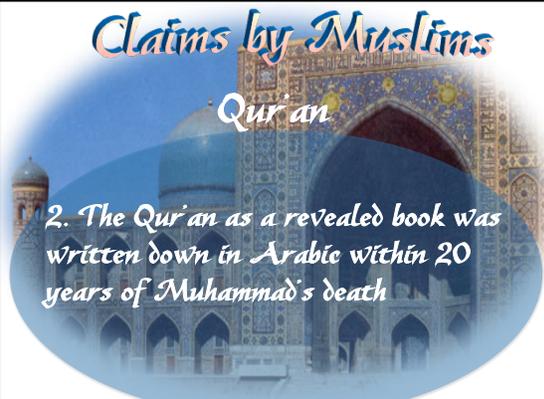


One of the earliest Qur'ans from the 9th century

Claims by Muslims

Qur'an

2. The Qur'an as a revealed book was written down in Arabic within 20 years of Muhammad's death



The Qur'an Exposed

- The Arabic alphabet in which the Qur'an is written did not exist until the end of the 7th century, six decades after Muhammad died.

Name	Phonetic	Isolated	Final	Medial	Initial
alif	ا	ا	ا		
ba	ب	ب	ب	ب	ب
ta	ت	ت	ت	ت	ت
tha	ث	ث	ث	ث	ث
jim	ج	ج	ج	ج	ج
ha	هـ	هـ	هـ	هـ	هـ
haa	ح	ح	ح	ح	ح
dal	د	د	د	د	د
dhal	ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ
ra	ر	ر	ر	ر	ر
ze	ز	ز	ز	ز	ز
sin	س	س	س	س	س
shin	ش	ش	ش	ش	ش
saad	ص	ص	ص	ص	ص
daad	ض	ض	ض	ض	ض
za	ز	ز	ز	ز	ز
tan	ط	ط	ط	ط	ط
ghan	ق	ق	ق	ق	ق
ka	ك	ك	ك	ك	ك
qaaf	ق	ق	ق	ق	ق
ga	غ	غ	غ	غ	غ
khay	خ	خ	خ	خ	خ
dal	د	د	د	د	د
ba	ب	ب	ب	ب	ب
meem	م	م	م	م	م
ha	هـ	هـ	هـ	هـ	هـ
noon	ن	ن	ن	ن	ن
ha	هـ	هـ	هـ	هـ	هـ
ayn	ع	ع	ع	ع	ع
ya	ي	ي	ي	ي	ي

The Qur'an Exposed

- Earliest form of Qur'an was derived from Christian liturgy and Jewish commentary (Targum), at first in Syriac and other foreign languages.



The Qur'an Exposed

- These were carried orally and subsumed in Arabic formats, though retaining much of the former structure and phraseology.
- Some of the foreign words remained in the amalgamations.

The Qur'an Exposed

- Early forms of written Arabic came from two possible sources, Christian missionaries producing a script from Syriac liturgy and merchants developing that script for simple economic transactions.
- Both forms of the script probably were based on Syro-Aramaic (Syriac) and Nabataean scripts, which were both developed from Aramaic.

The Qur'an Exposed

“Gunter Luling maintains that the original Qur’an was not an Islamic text at all but a pre-Islamic Christian document.... Luling believes that the Qur’an reflects the theology of a non-Trinitarian Christian sect that left traces on Islamic theology, notably in its picture of Christ and its uncompromising Unitarianism.”

(Spencer, 13)

In the 1999 Atlantic Monthly article referenced below, Gerd Puin is quoted as saying that

- “My idea is that the Koran is a kind of cocktail of texts that were not all understood even at the time of Muhammad. Many of them may even be a hundred years older than Islam itself. Even within the Islamic traditions there is a huge body of contradictory information, including a significant Christian substrate; one can derive a whole Islamic anti-history from them if one wants. The Qur’an claims for itself that it is ‘*mubeen*,’ or clear, but if you look at it, you will notice that every fifth sentence or so simply doesn’t make sense. Many Muslims will tell you otherwise, of course, but the fact is that a fifth of the Qur’anic text is just incomprehensible.

Gerd Puin, cont.

- This is what has caused the traditional anxiety regarding translation. If the Qur’an is not comprehensible, if it can’t even be understood in Arabic, then it’s not translatable into any language. That is why Muslims are afraid. Since the Qur’an claims repeatedly to be clear but is not—there is an obvious and serious contradiction. Something else must be going on.”

• The Atlantic Monthly, January 1998; What is the Koran?, Volume 283, No. 1, pages 43-56.

Claims by Muslims

Qur'an

3. The Qur'an is written in "Arabic, pure and clear" (16:103)

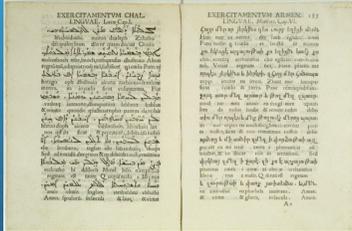
The Qur'an Exposed

- There are over 100 non-Arabic terms in the Qur’an. (Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek, Syrian, Akkadian, Ethiopian, and Persian words are used)
- Even the word “Qur’an” probably comes from the Syrian word “Quryana,” which means “lectionary” (and usually refers to Christian lectionaries).



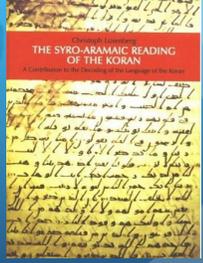
The Qur'an Exposed

"Almost all the religious terms in the Qur'an are derived from Syriac." (Mingana, q. in Spencer, 156)



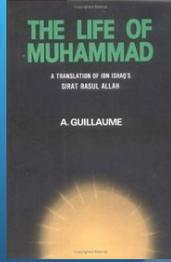
The Qur'an Exposed

- 20% of the Qur'an is not understandable, even to experts in Arabic!
- Luxemburg demonstrates that it makes more sense when it is translated "back" into Syriac.



The Qur'an Exposed

- The earliest biographies seem to be written to give context to the Qur'an and provide details that are not in the Qur'an. The Hadiths were invented later to provide more context to Qur'anic verses.



The Qur'an Exposed

- It may be "that the Qur'an was not originally written in Arabic at all but was eventually rendered in Arabic as the new religion was being developed." (Spencer, 160)
- "The Qur'an itself betrays evidence of having been adapted from a Christian text." (Spencer, 162)

The Qur'an Exposed

- Luling states that about a third of the Qur'anic text is based on an originally pre-Islamic Christian text. (Spencer, 166)

The Qur'an Exposed

- Luxemburg: "hur" (hour), usually translated as "virgins" ("large eyed," "wide eyed," or "lustrous eyed") really should be read as "white grapes" (white raisins)



Claims by Muslims
Qur'an

4. There are no variant readings, lost verses or conflicting readings on various texts (i.e., the Qur'an is perfect)

The Qur'an Exposed

- There are many variant readings
- Arthur Jeffery gives 90 pages of variant readings
- The Yemeni Qur'ans reveal that the Muslim claim of a uniform text can no longer be made

The Qur'an Exposed

There are many textual variants in the Qur'an.

Claims by Muslims
Islam

1. Mecca was the birthplace of Islam

Islam Exposed

- 1. Probably in northern Arabia - perhaps Petra

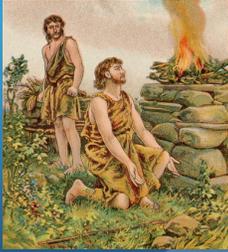
Claims by Muslims
Islam

2. Islam began through a series of revelations to Muhammad

Islam Exposed

2. Probably began out of apocalyptic Judaism - at least an intermediate monotheism that was neither Judaism or Christianity

-- Centered on Abraham and his son Ishmael



Claims by Muslims

Islam

3. Islam as a religion was fully formed by the time Muhammad died



Islam Exposed

- Islam was fashioned for political reasons. In the time of Abd al-Malik, the need of legitimacy for their government was understood. To be a credible government they needed a formulized religion, a scripture and a prophet



Intermediate Monotheism

- In the early 700s there was an intermediate monotheism forming that was an amalgamation of Jewish and Christian influences that over time, because of influence from heretical/unorthodox Christian views (Monophysite and Nestorian) incorporated a strong animosity for central Christian doctrine such as the deity of Christ and the Trinity.
- There was also a stronger Jewish element that pushed this agenda, but, after the conquests started up, was also marginalized and in time vilified in later writings.

Islam Exposed

- The Intermediate monotheism could have risen out of an Ebionite influence or from a form of Arianism.



Claims by Muslims

Islam

4. The Arabs were pagans before Muhammad came to convert them to Islam



Islam Exposed

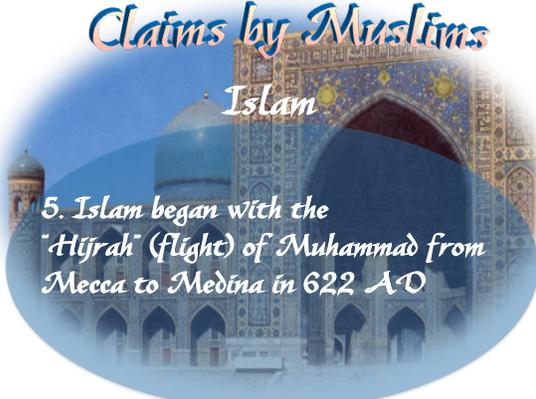
- Inscriptions from the 7th century demonstrate that many Arabs were not pagans, but monotheists who believed in one God, the Creator of heaven and earth (DME, x)



Claims by Muslims

Islam

5. Islam began with the "Hijrah" (flight) of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD



Islam Exposed

- "Hijrah" also means "emigration" and in 622, after the Byzantines conquered the Persians, they abandoned some of the land back over to the Arabians, who began to emigrate northward into Syria.

Early Conquests

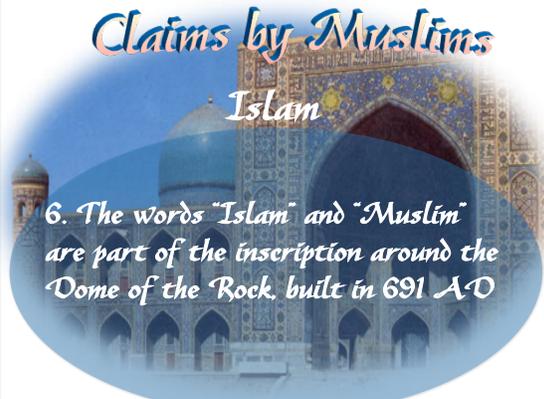
- The early conquests of the Negev, Egypt, Palestine and southern Syria were probably growing raids and emigration of the Arabs into those areas due to the pulling out of the Byzantine troops (laying the land wide open) and the abandoning of the *foederati*, who were no longer receiving tribute from the Byzantine government for guarding the borders.



Claims by Muslims

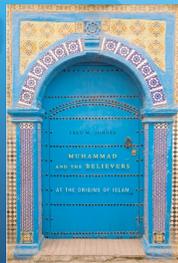
Islam

6. The words "Islam" and "Muslim" are part of the inscription around the Dome of the Rock, built in 691 AD



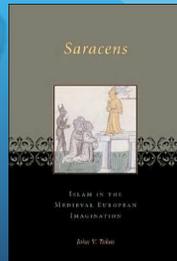
Islam Exposed

- They were called "Mahgraye" for the Arabic term, "Muhajirun," or "emigrants."
- They were also known as "mu'minin," or "believers" (believers in what?)



Islam Exposed

- The Arabs were not called "Muslims" until the middle of the 8th century. They were known as the "Muhajirun," "mu'minin," "Saracens," "Hagarenes," or "Ishmaelites."



Islam Exposed

- The Dome of the Rock inscriptions "could be an expression of a theologically uncomplicated Arab monotheism that is deeply concerned with Christ and Christianity - to the point of polemicizing against claims of Christ's divinity. This preoccupation with Christ leaves us far short of Islam in any clearly recognizable form as the religion of Muhammad and the Qur'an. By that point in history, the specifics of that religion still had been nowhere elaborated." (Spencer, 57)

Conclusion

- The best evidence we have today seems to reveal a slow development of the Qur'an from non-Muslim sources, primarily Syriac, that were adopted and incorporated into an intermediate monotheism that was neither Christian nor Jewish, but which was influenced by beliefs from both.

Conclusion

- At first it was the religion of the elite, but as the Arabs became more successful and began to settle in their conquered cities, the leaders recognized that they would need to fortify their hegemony by establishing their religious beliefs, authorizing their own scriptures and supporting their own prophet.

Conclusion (cont.)

- For many Christians at that time, like John of Damascus, this new religion was understood as just a heresy of Christianity with anti-Christian beliefs and a false prophet.

Conclusion (cont.)

- As time went on, however, written Arabic, as well as the scripture written in Arabic, became standardized and Muhammad became established in a religion that would soon rival Christendom.

