

Creating Islam: Did It All Start with Abd al-Malik?  
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## Introduction

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. Revisionist scholars offer evidence to argue that this "intermediate monotheism" was codified and formalized by Abd al-Malik by the end of the 7th century. These Scholars suggest that this "commander of the believers" understood the need for legitimacy within his government, which had only been founded decades earlier by Muawiyah and was still becoming established. This explanation is offered because of the evidence of a sharp change in policy during Abd al-Malik's reign that made it unique from that of Muawiyah.

Jeremy Johns, for instance, argues that there is no evidence of a Muslim state before Abd al-Malik's reign. Muawiyah's empire functioned under a status quo approach with Byzantine administrators continuing their work and the Arab "believers" mostly living in garrison towns.<sup>1</sup> Abd al-Malik, however, both expanded and formalized his control over the region, squelching the rebellions of rival leaders such as Ibn al-Zubayr.

It is logical to deduce that some kind of unifying factor was needed at this point, and the evidence from coins, inscriptions, and non-Muslim chroniclers all points to a new emphasis on a religion that is clearly anti-Trinitarian and on its way to being Islamic rather than vaguely Christian or just monotheistic. Scholar Robert Hoyland explains "it was pressure from rebel factions that induced Abd al-Malik to proclaim Islam publicly as the ideological basis of the Arab state."<sup>2</sup> In this case, the evidence of the coins and inscriptions from the time of Abd al-Malik (685-705 AD) gives testimony to the formation of a government claiming divine authority, religious writings that proclaim dominion over all other religions, and a prophet who claims to be the "seal" of all other prophets.

All these things (a formalized religion, a holy book, and a prophet) would have solidified Abd al-Malik's position as "Commander of the believers," brought legitimacy to a new empire, and produced a new Arab identity. Therefore, it would not be presumptuous to say that in regard to Islam, "it all started with Abd al-Malik."

## The Claims by the Traditional Account

One historian has famously said, the life of Muhammad was lived out in the "full light of history." Thus, Muslims today believe that Muhammad was already a revered prophet and a model of moral conduct for his followers, that the Qur'an as a revealed book was written down

in Arabic within 20 years of Muhammad's death, and Islam as a religion was fully formed by the time Muhammad died (632 AD). However, as Robert Spencer quipped, "the more one looks at the origins of Islam, the less one sees."

## **Latest Developments in Islam**

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 Northern Arabia, or even Syria, was likely the birthplace of Islam instead of Mecca, which was probably not established until the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This represents a critique of the Man, the Book, and the Place in regard to what Islam claims for its origins.

## **New Evidence Disputing Islam's Origins**

Is it possible that the following two men could have created a new religion that became Islam?

Abd al-Malik bin Marwan (r. 685-705) was the fifth Umayyad "Commander of the Faithful" and the most powerful leader of the Umayyad empire. He reformed the currency, had the Dome of the Rock built, was possibly an anti-Trinitarian Christian, and had "Mahmed" (MHMD) inscribed in the Dome of the Rock. He also may have migrated from the city of Merv (Mawr), which is in present day Turkmenistan, rather than from the Hijaz where the Standard Islamic Narrative claims he was born in Mecca and grew up in Medina before he made his way to Damascus. Markus Gross, of the Inarah Institute, claims that the territory of emergence for Islam is NOT the Hijaz, so Abd al-Malik's origin from Merv could be more significant than scholars will admit.

Al Hajjaj bin Yusuf (661-714) was the Governor of Iraq under Abd al-Malik. Under the orders of Abd al-Malik, he led the army to subdue and kill Abd al-Malik's chief rival al-Zubayr. As a linguist, it is claimed that he developed an early system of adding diacritical marks to what became the Qur'an.

John of Damascus (675-750) was a Christian who worked as the chief tax collector under Abd al-Malik (695?-705), so he would have been familiar with the activities that were taking place in Damascus. He wrote the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites," which critiqued the pre-Islamic beliefs around 730 when he was a monk in the monastery of St. Sabas. In his treatise, he did not mention Islam or Muslims, so it is unlikely that either terms were in use at that time. In addition, he only knew of four separate "writings" (*graphie*): The Cow, the Women, the Table, and the She Camel (not in the Qur'an). He did not reference these separate writings as being contained in one book, which in time became the Qur'an.

## **Coercive Religion of the Ishmaelites**

In his treatise against the Ishmaelites, John wrote the following description of the one he called the "Mamed," along with a description of the heresies that were being taught.

“There is also a coercive religion of the Ishmaelites which prevails at this time and deceives the people, being the forerunner of the Anti-Christ. It originates from Ishmael, who was brought forth from Hagar unto Abraham, and for this very reason they are called Hagarenes or Ishmaelites.” He was also aware of a false prophet called “Mamed” who conversed with an Arian monk concerning the Old Testament and then “fabricated his own heresy.”<sup>1</sup>

### Evidence that the Muhammad of the Standard Islamic Narrative Did Not Exist in the 7<sup>th</sup> century

Nothing is known of the traditional “Muhammad” until the Abbasid period (from within Arab sources). Much of what we know of this “Muhammad” is written down hundreds of years later, and hundreds of miles away. In many ways, it looks like he is nothing more than a later redaction, possibly begun by Abd al-Malik! In addition, the first coin to mention *Mamed* in the shahada was minted by Abd al-Malik in 692 AD. Also, the first inscription with *Mamed’s* name on it is not until 690 AD.

Could the term “Muhammad” not refer to a person, but simply mean the “Praised One,” or the “Chosen one”? Let’s look at the term “MHMD,” since the vowels would not have been present at that time.

MHMD is the <i>rasm</i> , or the consonantal root of Arabic words. There were no vowel markings or diacritical marks yet to provide an accurate pronunciation.
محمد (DMHM): This is the consonantal form in Arabic.
حَمَد (hameda: to praise): This is the three-letter root of the word.
HMD: “praised one,” “chosen one”: This is the meaning of the root applied to a person. It is not a personal name.
Μάμεδ (John of Damascus, early 700s): The pronunciation of the word according to John of Damascus. This indicated the most likely pronunciation used at that time since Greek has the vowels.
מַחְמַד (מְחֻמָּד) Machmad: desirable, precious) – Songs 5:16 – “And he is wholly desirable”: The word “Machmad” is used in the Old Testament eleven times, but mostly as an adjective and not a proper noun referring to a person.

<sup>1</sup> “Therefore, until the time of Heraclius, they were clearly idolaters, and from that time until now, a false prophet, called Mamed, sprung up among them; who, after conversing with an Arian monk concerning the Old and New Testament, fabricated his own heresy.” Daniel Janosik, *John of Damascus*, 261.

## Abd al-Malik's Jesus is Mamed

According to the Inara Institute scholars, the beginning of Islam was a movement led by Abd al-Malik to unite all the Christians of the Arabian Empire (Monophysites as well as Nestorians). Jesus would be conceived as Abd-Allah, the servant of God and known as the *Mahmed* (“praised one”). This move would be similar to the position of Arius who claimed that Jesus was a created being (“Like-Arian”). This view of Jesus was promoted through the minting of coins and also etched on the walls of the Dome of the Rock.

## Evidence that the Dome of the Rock was Originally a Christian Church



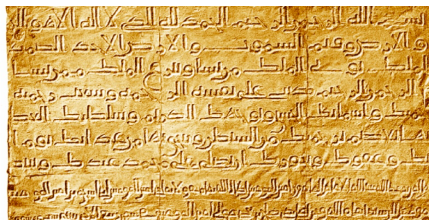
Why was the Dome of the Rock built?

Milka Levy-Rubin gives three possible reasons for the Dome of the Rock: First, he says the Dome of the Rock was possibly built for Abd al-Malik to gain superiority over his rival al-Zubayr, or second, it was due to a need to compete with local Christian monuments such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A third possibility may have come from a sense of rivalry with Constantinople to build a monument that would outdo structures such as the Hagia Sophia and demonstrate the superiority of the new regime.

Abd al-Malik builds the Dome of the Rock

The Dome of the Rock was built in 691-2 and was the largest Arab structure at that time. It also stood above the Christian Church of the Holy Sepulchre, perhaps as a way of showing the superiority of the new religion that was being formed.

## Dome of the Rock Inscription



## INSCRIPTIONS ON THE INNER OCTAGONAL ARCADE

س اسم الله الرحيم الرحيم لا اله الا الله وحده لا  
شريك له له الملك وله الحمد يحيى ويميت وهو  
على كل شيء قدير محمد عبد الله ورسوله  
س ارا الله وملكته بطور على اليه بانها الكبرامتوا

*Mamed*

1. **S** In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has
2. no associate. Unto Him belongeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He has
3. Power over all things. ~~Muhammad~~ is the servant of God and His Messenger.
4. **SE** Lo! God and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet.

*Mamed*

Note the underlined words below in order to discern what Abd al-Malik had inscribed concerning Jesus. They actually show that although the deity of Jesus was denied, as well as his sonship to Allah, he is still called the “Messiah” who is a “messenger of Allah,” as well as the son of Mary. In reference to his birth and death, his resurrection is also admitted (“being raised alive”). As Allah’s messenger, Jesus is also given the title of “*Mamed*.” Thus, according to this inscription, Jesus is the *Mamed*, the messenger of Allah, and the one who has conquered death through his resurrection.

### Inner Face: South Wall.

In the name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no God but Allah alone; He has no co-partner.

### South-East Wall.

The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is but a messenger of Allah and His word which He cast upon Mary and a spirit from Him. So believe only in Allah and of His messenger, but do not say “Three” (Trinity) and it will be better for you. Allah is only one God. Far be it from His glory that He should have a son.

### North-West Wall.

... the son of Mary and peace be upon him the day of his birth, the day of his death and the day of his being raised alive. That is Jesus, son of Mary – a statement concerning which you are in doubt. It is not for Allah to take for Himself any offspring, glory be to Him.

### West Wall.

There is no God but Allah alone. Praise be to Allah who hath not taken to himself offspring. To Him there has never been any person in the sovereignty. Mamed is the messenger of Allah, may

God pray upon him and accept his intercession. Praise be God who has not taken unto Himself a son and who has no partner in sovereignty nor has He any protector on account of weakness.

### **Christian texts in the Dome of the Rock**

Volker Popp asserts that “According to the inscription in the Dome of the Rock, Abd al-Malik’s Jesus is *Abdallah* (servant of God) and *Muhammad* [*Mamed*] (the praised one, [God’s] chosen one).” (Volker Popp, 63) Ohlig concludes that, “The inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock, actually concern Christian texts and symbols, which document Syrian-Arabian theological ideas: that God is one and single, and that the one he has sent (Jesus) is to be praised (*muhammad*)” [*Mamed*]. (Ohlig, 9)

### **Evidence of an 8<sup>th</sup> Century Qur’an**

Did Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjaj create the Qur’an? When Was the Qur’an Completed?

The Standard Islamic Narrative states that the Qur’an was written down within 20 years of Muhammad’s death (by 650 AD). However, there is strong evidence that demonstrates that the Qur’an was not completed until well into the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Stephen Shoemaker, in his book *Creating the Qur’an*, provides provocative evidence that the Qur’an is not a 7<sup>th</sup> century document. “On the basis of the available historical evidence, we conclude that the Qur’an’s final composition into the canonical form that has come down to us today seems to have taken place around the turn of the eighth century under the direction of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) and his viceroy al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf.” (13)

Chase Robinson concurs: “There is in fact a substantial body of evidence, from both inside and outside the Islamic tradition, identifying ‘Abd al-Malik as the one who, with the assistance of al-Ḥajjāj, standardized the Qur’an in the unvarying form that has come down to us today.” (43)

Canonical textus receptus of the Qur’an

Shoemaker claims “The bewildering confusion and complexity of the early Islamic memory of the Qur’an’s formation ... only reaches some level of clarity once we recognize ‘Abd al-Malik as the primary agent responsible for producing and enforcing the canonical textus receptus of the Qur’an. Under his supervision, a team of scholars wove together and honed the various sacred traditions that had entered circulation among Muhammad’s followers during the seventh century, creating a new imperial Qur’an that was imposed across the caliphate, displacing its antecedents in the process, often by force.”

On the other hand, other scholars claim that Abd al-Malik and al-Hajjaj only made minor improvements, such as adding diacritical marks. (44) However, Shoemaker argues, “Regardless of whether we embrace such a hypothesis or not, numerous reports from the early Islamic tradition indicate that the changes to the Qur’anic text introduced at the direction of ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Ḥajjāj were in fact substantial.” (49) For example, Shoemaker states that “Déroche, through careful paleographic and codicological study, has confirmed that the earliest extant Qur’ans were in fact produced in the imperial chancery during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik.” (68)

In a sense, then, Shoemaker concludes that “the Qur’an is a revision of an older Christian text.” (248) In addition, Shoemaker reminds his readers, “There is a well - attested tradition that al-Ḥajjāj sent codices containing his newly standardized text of the Qur’an to the various imperial centers of the caliphate — Egypt, Damascus, Medina, Mecca, Kufa, and Basra ... exactly as ‘Uthmān was said to have ordered in the canonical narrative.” (45) In response to his critics, Shoemaker clarifies that “the earliest non - Islamic sources that refer to Islamic sacred writings similarly describe these texts as existing in a fragmentary and independent state even as late as the beginning of the eighth century, when the Qur’an was first brought together under ‘Abd al - Malik and al - Ḥajjāj.” (50)

## **Evidence that the Early Believers were not Muslims**

### Community of Believers

Shoemaker also believes that Muhammad and his followers do not seem to have conceived of themselves initially as “a separate religious confession distinct from others” during the first several decades of their movement’s existence. Instead, the earliest “Islamic” community appears to have been a loosely organized confederation of Abrahamic monotheists “who shared Muhammad’s intense belief in one God and in the impending arrival of the Last Day, and who joined together to carry out what they saw as the urgent task of establishing righteousness on earth — at least within their own community of Believers, and, when possible, outside it — in preparation for the End.”

### **Who were the “Believers”**

Donner referred to this community as the “*mu-minun*” (believers)<sup>1</sup> Shoemaker says this was probably a “loosely organized confederation of Abrahamic monotheists.” (59) They shared an intense belief in one God and the impending arrival of the Last Day. They had a goal of establishing righteousness on earth in preparation for the End (59)

Shoemaker writes that, “Prior to ‘Abd al-Malik’s rule, the caliphate appears to have shown a remarkable degree of tolerance for other monotheist faiths; and, as noted above, there is even good evidence to suggest that they were welcomed within the fold of the Believers’ religious community, even as they remained in their own religious faiths ... Whether or not one agrees entirely with this hypothesis, the evidence on which it rests — which is substantial, particularly given the limitations of what we know about earliest Islam — indicates fairly broad tolerance and inclusion of other monotheists within the early history of the Believers movement.” (65)

## **Evidence of a New Christian Movement**

### 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.

### The Umayyad Empire was Christian (sort-of)

Volker Popp suggests that “The situation at the time of Mu’awiya was not a conflict between Arabian-Islamic conquerors and a Byzantine-Christian emperor, as the later, historicizing literature of the Abbasid period would have its readers believe. Rather, as shown by documents in the form of inscriptions by the Arabian rulers, the conflict involved the Christians of the former Byzantine east – natural allies of the Nestorian Christians of Iran and under the leadership of Arabian Christians of Iran – on the one side, and the Christians of the emperor in Constantinople (as leader of Greco-Roman Christianity) on the other.” (Ohlig, 48)

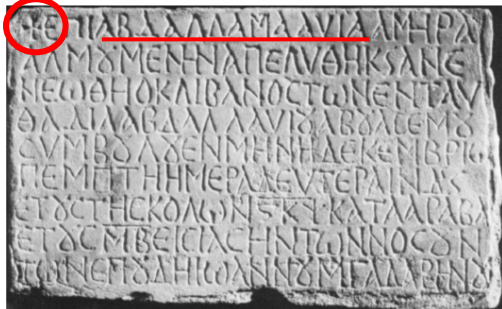
Was Mu’awiya a Christian?

Mu’awiya ibn Abi Sufyan (597-680), was the first bona-fide Arab leader and “caliph” (the first four may have been minor historical leaders or mostly made up in later writings) and it was under his leadership that the Arabs were unified and swarmed over the land. Mu’awiya was probably a Christian (there is an inscription at Gadara with a cross at the beginning). Muawiyah was known as the “Commander of the **Faithful**” (The title “Caliph” was not yet in use).

Was Mu’awiya a Christian?

The inscription begins with a cross indicating a Christian connection. Muawiyah is given the title Abd Allah, or “servant of Allah.

Abd Allah Muawiyah



The crosses on the coins would also support a Christian persuasion.



However, Abd al-Malik's coin lacks the cross, giving the impression that he is either not a Christian or an anti-Trinitarian Christian who does not accept the connection of the cross to Byzantine Trinitarian Christianity.



Byzantine coin

Coin minted by Abd al-Malik

### Abd al-Malik's New Religion

According to Ohlig, "Abd al-Malik wanted to strengthen the Arabian empire from within by erecting an Arabian Church of the Arabian Empire." (Ohlig, 57) "His goal was to unify, under the banner of the Muhammad motto, the adherents of the old Syrian theology who had been driven into the East." (Ohlig, 57) The new religion was neither Nestorian nor Arian, but it was influenced by the unorthodox views of Jesus represented by both belief systems, as well as the apocalyptic urgency of Abrahamic Syrian Arab Christianity that promoted orthopraxy over orthodoxy.

### A new Christian Movement

Volker Popp believes that under Abd al-Malik, "a new Christian movement, intended to unite all the Christians of the Arabian Empire, was announced by the demand that an understanding of Jesus as the Muhammad be adopted. This demand was preceded by another, namely, that Jesus be conceived as 'Abd Allah'" (servant of God). (Popp, HOI, 52) However, the movement would also claim that while Jesus was the "praised one" (*Mamed*), he would still be just a human messenger of God.

Abd al-Malik may have been an anti-Trinitarian Christian, but according to a number of revisionist scholars his use of "Mamed" is a reference to Jesus as the "chosen one" or "praised one." He also claims that this "chosen one" is the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary. Therefore, Ohlig claims the inscriptions Abd al-Malik had inscribed on the Dome of the Rock "actually concern Christian texts and symbols, which document Syrian-Arabian theological ideas." (Ohlig, Hidden Origins of Islam, 9) Ohlig also believes that 'Abd al-Malik was "the first to found the Arabian church in Jerusalem as a foil to the church of the emperor, as a defender of orthopraxy against Orthodoxy." (HOI, 21)

Was Abd al-Malik a Christian?

Volker Popp writes, “The contemporary epigraphic materials allow one to reconstruct the contents of Abd al-Malik’s *da’wa* (mission), namely, the understanding of Jesus as the *muhammad*, who as *rasul* is the apostle of the (Sasanian) Arabs.” As we saw with the original inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, MHMD probably referred to Jesus. However, the Jesus of Abd al-Malik may have been “Mahmed,” but he was not the Jesus of Trinitarian Christianity.

### **The Coming of the Apocalypse**

Volker Popp believes the coins of Abd al-Malik demonstrate his eschatological program: “from the very beginning of the history of Israel onwards history has run a course heading for an eschatological anticipation of the Messiah. The approaching apocalyptic end led to the construction of the Dome of the Rock and to the demand for a peaceful agreement (i.e., “islam”) with reference to the scripture, the original meaning of *islam* thus not being “submission,” but “concord”). For Abd al-Malik the place where the world would end was certain: Jerusalem. The time of the event was also certain: the 77<sup>th</sup> year of Arab rule. The 7<sup>th</sup> century since the birth of Jesus was coming to an end.” (*Early Islam*, Volker Popp, 82-83)

### **Abd al-Malik would usher in the return of the Messiah**

Abd al-Malik perceived himself to be a second Joshua who would lead his people, the Arabs, to the Promised Land. Volker Popp writes, “In Jerusalem, Abd al-Malik restored the temple. Within the framework of his eschatological ideas, he saw the place at the Rock as the location of the last judgment. Before Judgment Day comes, the unity of all Christians is to be restored. This is where Abd al-Malik’s Christological understanding becomes evident. The Muhammad (chosen one) is Jesus, son of Mary. He is the Messiah (al-masih). He is the servant of God (Abdallah) on the Iranian coin inscriptions from the year 40 to 49 of the Arabs.” Popp also believes that “Abd al-Malik lived in anticipation of the Messiah’s appearance.” (*Early Islam*, Volker Popp, 79)

### **Did Islam Start with Abd al-Malik?**

Abd al-Malik was a major force for the Arabs and had the most influence on early forms of Islam. It was during his reign that the need of legitimacy for their government was understood. In order to be a credible government, they needed a formalized religion (Islam), a scripture (Qur’an) and a prophet (Muhammad). “The evidence of the coins and inscriptions gives testimony to a government claiming divine authority, religious writings that proclaim dominion over all other religions, and a prophet who claims to be the “seal” of all other prophets. All these things would have brought legitimacy to a new empire while honoring the Arab people.” (Daniel Janosik, *The Guide to Answering Islam*, 59).

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