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OLD MARTYRS, NEW MARTYRS AND THE COMING OF ISLAM: WRITING HAGIOGRAPHY AFTER THE CONQUESTS

Introduction

Around the year 775, a monk known as Joshua the Stylite completed a four-part history of the world in Syriac. The text, surviving in a unique manuscript, is known to scholars today as the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*.[1] The fourth and final section of the *Chronicle* details the social and economic hardships facing Christians in the Jazīra (northern Mesopotamia) in the aftermath of the 'Abbasid revolution (ca. 750–775). It was a time of extreme suffering, when rapacious officials of the new regime taxed, intimidated, and beat the Christian population into submission.[2] Through Joshua's rich descriptions of everyday life, we can witness the kinds of indignities that greased the way for large-scale conversions to Islam in the years to come.

Two-thirds of the way through Part IV, Joshua describes the punishments inflicted on individuals who disobeyed the 'Abbasids.[3] Officials would strike them with rods and planks, crushing their heads, hands, and flanks. At other times, they would rip away their arms and breasts, forcing them to march naked into the snow. Joshua also mentions a device called the 'walnut', which Muslim officials would place over the eyes of their victims, causing them to nearly pop out of their sockets.

Joshua's litany of tortures calls to mind the theatrical punishments inflicted on the martyrs of early Christian times. His allusion was far from accidental. As he wrote:

[1] For orientation on the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, especially Part IV, which covers events in the seventh and eighth centuries, see: *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn, Parts III and IV, A.D. 488–775,* A. Harrak (trans.), Toronto 1999, pp. 1–33; D. Thomas and B. Roggema et al. (eds.), *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographic History. Volume 1 (600–900),* Leiden 2009, pp. 322–326. The only surviving manuscript of the *Chronicle*, MS Vat – Syr. 162, is thought to be an autograph of Joshua, cf. Harrak, *Chronicle*, pp. 1–2. The name 'Joshua the Stylite' can be found in a colophon of the ninth century inserted into the manuscript.

[2] For more on economic and social conditions in the Jazīra at the time of Joshua the Stylite, cf. C.F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia*, Cambridge 2000; C. Cahen, 'Fiscalité, propriété, antagonismes sociaux en Haut-Mésopotamie au temps des premiers 'Abbāsides d'après Denys de Tell-Maḥré', *Arabica* 1 (1954), pp. 136–152.

[3] *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, J.-B. Chabot (ed.) [= *Incerti auctoris Chronicon anonymum pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum.* Vol. II: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vol. 104 (Scriptores Syri, Vol. 53)], Louvain 1952, pp. 314–316.

> Indeed, if only Christians were singled out in this persecution, it would have been incumbent on me to praise the martyrdoms of [these] days [more] than all the martyrdoms of the past, because a quick death by the sword is [better] than constant torments which do not cease.[4]

The chronicler's only caveat in comparing the sufferings of the present day to those of the early church was that these persecutions were 'all mixed up'[5] – the 'Abbasids did not discriminate in their choice of victims. They affected not only Christians, but also 'pagans, Jews, Samaritans, worshippers of fire and the sun, [...] Magians [as well as] Muslims and Manicheans.'[6] Everyone was a martyr of the 'Abbasid tyranny, whether they prayed to the north, south, east or west.

Despite Joshua's warning about the scope of the persecutions, we find in his remarks a striking sense of parallelism between the martyrdoms of the Roman past and the Muslim present. These lift the veil on a much wider change happening among certain Christians in the early Islamic world, who ceased to imagine themselves as heirs of a triumphant Constantinian Christianity. Rather, they came to see themselves as heirs to a more militant tradition of Christian suffering, that of the martyrs of the early church. After a respite of nearly four hundred years, during which Christianity enjoyed status and security as the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christians were watching history repeat itself. Gone were the prefects and packs of lions who had tortured the martyrs long ago. In their place stood what some regarded as a new and pernicious form of paganism, but whose particular form of idolatry was no less threatening.

This change in mentality, hitherto unexplored in studies of Christianity in the early Islamic period, was among the most important of its day.[7] It not only reflected a new vision of history among Middle Eastern Christians, in which the persecutions of the early church became a touchstone for processing the sufferings of the present. Martyrs also conveyed a message of resistance at a time when Christians faced mounting pressure to abandon their faith and embrace Islam.[8]

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[4] *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, p. 316; all translations are my own unless otherwise noted. The chronicler repeats the same observation later in the text: 'Those monks, who had gathered in holy assemblies in the cells of the monasteries gather[ed] in a modest and holy fashion, endured sufferings, torments, and bitter castigations, worse than anyone else, on account of the judges' tributes. The reader shall know and understand that never on earth has there been seen a persecution which is worse than this year's. If this persecution were not general, and all the nations were not oppressed and subjugated more than anything before, I would have to praise these martyrdoms of our own day'; ibidem, p. 343.

[5] The Syriac reads, *ḥbīkā*, from the verb, *ḥbak* (to mix, mingle) implying that the persecution was general, affecting all groups without distinction.

[6] Ibidem, p. 316; the passage distinguished between *ḥanpe* – the traditional Syriac work for pagans, often used for Muslims as well – and *mshalmāne* – referring to Muslims, specifically; for more on the lexical range of the term *ḥanpā*, especially its relationship to the Qur'anic term *ḥanīf*, meaning a pre-Islamic monotheist, see: F. de Blois, 'Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἐθνικός) – studies on the religious vocabulary of Christianity', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002), p. 23. De Blois points out that a *ḥanpā* could refer to a non-Jew or non-Christian who was righteous, much like the Muslim Arabic definition. The passage is as remarkable for its message about martyrdom as its rich inventory of religious groups living in the Jazīra in the mid-eighth century.

[7] For a helpful introduction to Christian identity in greater Syria in the post-conquest period: M. Morony, 'History and identity in the Syrian Churches', [in:] J. J. van Ginkel, M.L. Murre – Van den Berg, and T.M. van Lint (eds.), *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Leuven 2005, pp. 1–33.

[8] On the role of martyrs and other symbols of 'primordial Christianity' in the formation of identity in Late Antiquity, cf. R. Markus. *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 97–106; T. Sizgorich, *Violence*

In what follows, I hope to track the emergence of this new martyrological discourse. I am especially interested in how Christians living under Muslim rule redeployed long-dormant concepts of history and identity to confront new social realities, and in turn, how these considerations shaped the writing of a new genre of texts, neomartyrologies. Above all, I am concerned with exploring how the intellectual and cultural traditions of Roman late antiquity were revived and altered to face another post-Roman late antiquity, that of Islam.

Reviving martyrology

It may come as no surprise that Christians who died under Islam were considered martyrs in the eyes of their communities. In many Middle Eastern cultures, it remains common to refer to the heroic dead, Muslim and Christian alike, as martyrs (*shahīd*, pl. *shuhadā'*).[9] Furthermore, saints had been an important feature of Christian life in the region long before the coming of Islam. For centuries, Christians had venerated them, grounding a sense of group identity in their heroic suffering.[10] In the neomartyrs, we witness one of many ancient traditions that kept on keeping on after the dawn of Islam. That said, we should not underestimate the revolutionary quality of what took place in the post-conquest period: Churches throughout the greater Middle East came to regard their co-religionists who ran afoul of the authorities not as criminals or renegades (as the authorities did), but as martyrs and saints.[11]

Sanctity is in the eye of the beholder, and no matter the period, there is an important imaginative leap from seeing someone as a murdered Christian to seeing him as a martyred Christian; an executed man dies in punishment for his crimes, but a martyr dies on behalf of a cause. Thus, to call an individual killed by Muslims a 'martyr' was to infuse him and his struggle with a sense of divine purpose, to insert him into the slipstream of salvation history by comparing him to heroes past. The texts that emerged from this process during the early Islamic period – known as martyrologies[12] – have received limited scholarly attention. Aside from critical editions of several texts, the

and Belief in Late Antiquity, Philadelphia 2009, pp. 46–80; also: D.K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*, New York 2005, chs. 1–2.

[9] For an introduction to the term 'martyr' in Muslim culture, see: E. Kohlberg, 'Shahīd', [in:] H. Gibb et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, 13 vols., Leiden 1954–2005, here: vol. 9, pp. 203–207. Ancient Christianity, with informal process of recognizing saints, was generally more discriminating in deciding who counted as a saint, but not by much: in the early period, the consensus of the community, paired with demonstrable miracles could vault a dead Christian into the ranks of the numinous. It opened the title to a far wider array of peoples than would probably pass scrutiny before the church committees who oversee the process of canonization today. On the history and process of canonization in the Roman Catholic Church, cf. P. Delooz, 'Towards a sociological study of canonized sainthood in the Catholic Church', [in:] S. Wilson (ed.), *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 189–216.

[10] For intelligent comment on this theme, cf. Buell, *Why This New Race,* p. 52; cited in: Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, p. 57. For interesting parallels in Reformation-era Europe, where Catholics and Protestants used martyrologies to configure new sectarian identities: B. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1999.

[11] C.C. Sahner, 'Between persecution and prosecution: Christians and the law of apostasy in early Islamic society', [in:] A. Nef and V. Prigent (eds.), *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, Princeton (forthcoming).

[12] Or according to their Latin names, *vitae* ('lives') and *passiones* ('passions'), which I will use throughout this paper.

bibliography is still in its infancy.[13] In particular, most existing studies have avoided engaging with wider questions of history and identity.

There are a relatively large number of these texts from the early Islamic period. We have biographical information for more than two hundred martyrs who died between the seventh and tenth centuries. Some biographies are conventional *vitae*, some as long as forty pages. Others are potted biographies in longer chronicles, liturgical texts, and sermons. The documents were written in a kaleidoscope of medieval languages, including Greek, Arabic, Latin, Georgian, Armenian, Syriac, and Ethiopic. Most of the corpus was composed inside the caliphate, though certain texts were translated and survive only outside it. Often these were public documents, produced by monks and clergy for recitation in a refectory or in a church – especially on the saint's feast day. Christian sources furnish nearly all of our direct information about the martyrs, though there are a few corroborating accounts from contemporary Muslim texts.[14]

What does hagiography tell us about the persecution of Christians in the early Islamic period? First, martyrs died in practically every region of the caliphate with large numbers of Christians – from Spain to North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, the Jazīra, and Iraq. Second, they belonged to a range of denominations – including the Melkite (Chalcedonian), Jacobite (Miaphysite), and Nestorian churches. Melkites produced the lions' share of our texts, though it is not clear whether this was because Melkites faced higher levels of persecution, or because of deeper ideological reasons. Indeed, it seems likely that the Melkites – notionally cut off from the Byzantine Church to which they remained loyal after the Arab conquests – had to invent for themselves a new identity based not in their connections to the empire, but to new ideas, such as the perception of persecution and heroic martyrdom. By contrast, their counterparts among the Jacobite and Nestorian churches may not have felt the same pressure to adapt to the new circumstances, given that they had fallen on bad terms with the church of Constantinople long before the coming of Islam and, therefore, had already developed alternative notions of ecclesiology and identity. Third, persecution rarely erupted systematically against large groups or as a result of state-wide edicts. Instead, it tended to occur spontaneously against individuals. In this respect, it never approached the scale of the Roman or Sasanian persecutions, when Christians experienced spasms of violence often at the prompting of government decrees.[15] Fourth, there were a few tried and

[13] R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, Princeton 1997, pp. 336–386; S.H. Griffith, 'Christians, Muslims, and Neo-Martyrs: Saints' Lives and Holy Land history', [in:] A. Kofsky and G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land, First-Fifteenth Centuries CE*, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 163–207; D.H. Vila, 'Christian martyrs in the first Abbasid century and the development of an apologetic against Islam', unpublished PhD disst., St. Louis University 1999; C. Foss, 'Byzantine saints in early Islamic Syria', *Analecta Bollandiana* 125 (2007), pp. 93–119; A. Binggeli, 'Converting the caliph: A legendary motif in Christian hagiography and historiography of the early Islamic Period', [in:] A. Papaconstantinou, M. Debié and H. Kennedy (eds.), *Writing 'True Stories': Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, Turnhout 2010, pp. 77–103.

[14] Among the rare examples is that of Layth b. Maḥaṭṭa, the chief of the Banū Tanūkh and the only male member of the tribe to refuse the order of the caliph al-Mahdī (ca. 780) to convert to Islam. Records of the tribe's apostasy, as well as the martyrdom of Layth, survive in several Christian and Muslim sources; for discussion, cf. I. Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, Washington 1984, pp. 400–407, 418–432.

[15] Historians now agree that violence against Christians before the mid-third century was unsystematic and usually a result of local pressures in a given area, as opposed to any empire-wide edicts; even the so-called 'great persecutions' of the late-third and early-fourth centuries seem to have reflected wider

true ways of becoming a martyr. Most saints were either: Christians who had converted to Islam then returned to Christianity; Muslims who converted to Christianity; children of mixed marriages who chose Christianity over Islam; prisoners of war and local aristocrats who refused to convert to Islam; or blasphemers who ridiculed the Prophet in public. For these various offenses, Christians could be considered criminals by the Muslim authorities and venerated as saints by their co-religionists.

The causes of martyrdom are important to understand, but so is the manner in which martyrdom was depicted. Hagiography is a notoriously formulaic genre, and our early Islamic material is no different.[16] Longer texts usually begin with a summary of the saint's virtues and childhood. They then explain the reason for the saint's martyrdom – apostasy, blasphemy, etc. – then detail his/her capture and interrogation by Muslim officials. The officials – whether *qāḍīs*, *amīrs*, or caliphs – usually offer the individual a chance to repent and go free by renouncing Christianity, but the saint invariably refuses. Thereafter, he/she is subjected to torture and dies. His/her body is typically displayed in public and sometimes destroyed, at which point the faithful recover the remains, bury them, and witness several posthumous miracles. Aside from the particulars of the saints' biographies, their *vitae* hew closely in structure to the acts of early Christian martyrs. Indeed, scholars have explored how Christian authors of the early Islamic period sometimes composed new *vitae* with an eye to older literary models, as is to be expected with such a conservative genre as hagiography.[17]

conflicts in Roman society about religious obligations and political responsibility, rather than opposition to Christianity *per se*.

[16] Suspicious of the many tropes and pious fictions in medieval hagiography, the medievalist Bruno Krusch referred famously to the genre as *kirchliche Schwindelliteratur*: B. Krusch, 'Zur Florian- und Lupuslegende: eine Entgegnung', *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 24 (1899), pp. 533–570, at p. 559; cited in: J. Kreiner, 'Social functions of Merovingian hagiography', Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University 2011, p. 3. On the perils and virtues of using hagiography for social history, cf. É. Patlagean, 'Ancient Byzantine hagiography and social history', [in:] S. Wilson (ed.), *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 101–121; on the historical methodology of the Bollandists, founders of the modern study of hagiography: F. van Ommeslaeghe, 'The *Acta Sanctorum* and Bollandist methodology', [in:] S. Hackel (ed.), *The Byzantine Saint,* San Bernardino (CA) 1983, pp. 155–163. On the state of the field, more generally: P. Geary, 'Saints, scholars, and society: the elusive goal', [in:] P. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages,* Ithaca (NY) 1994, pp. 9–29; F. Lifshitz, 'Beyond positivism and genre: Hagiographical texts as historical narrative', *Viator* 25 (1994), pp. 95–113; and J. Dubois and J.-L. Lemaître, *Sources et méthodes de l'hagiographie medievale*, Paris 1993. Also the new and important guide to Byzantine hagiography: S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography: Periods and Places*, Farnham 2011.

[17] Among several specific examples: K. Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Cambridge 1988, pp. 77–107; P. Peeters, 'La passion de S. Pierre de Capitolias († janvier 715)', *Analecta Bollandiana* 57 (1939), p. 313. D. Woods argues that the Latin *passio* of Maximilian of Tebessa – a Roman soldier who died in North Africa in 295 – was actually written in the eighth or ninth centuries, well after the Muslim conquest. If this is the case, it furnishes further evidence for the recycling of old martyrological *topoi*. At the same time, Woods' dating seems dubious, given the lack of literary production in Latin in post-conquest North Africa, not to mention his tenuous identification of Maximilian's *signaculum* with the lead seals worn by *dhimmīs*: D. Woods, 'St. Maximilian of Tebessa and the Jizya', [in:] P. Defosse (ed.), *Hommages à Carl Deroux, Vol. V – Christianisme et Moyen Âge, néo-latin et survivance de la latinité,* Brussels 2003, pp. 266–276.

The development of the term 'neomartyr'

Such are the macro-level indicators of a change in mentality among the Christians of the early Islamic period. To understand this process at a deeper level, though, we must delve into the texts themselves. A good place to start is by tracking the evolution of the term 'neomartyr', by which many of these saints were known.

The term 'neomartyr' is deceptively complex. Scholarly studies of the neomartyrs have focused almost exclusively on the Greek Orthodox saints of the Ottoman realms who, like our subjects, were executed for apostasy or blasphemy against Islam.[18] Scholars have also noted the veneration of neomartyrs in connection with the Byzantine--Seljuk wars between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, the sectarian conflicts in the Levant in the mid-nineteenth, and the Communist persecutions in Russia in the twentieth.[19]

Despite the scholarly consensus, however, the term 'neomartyr' is not originally Ottoman. Rather, it comes from the Umayyad and 'Abbasid periods,[20] when Christian authors began using it to refer to individuals killed under Islam. The term is attested

[18] None of the studies of the Ottoman neomartyrs indicate awareness of the late-antique or early-medieval use of the term in the Middle East; for more: H. Delehaye. 'Greek Neomartyrs', *The Constructive Quarterly* 9 (1921), pp. 701–712, which states only that the term 'neomartyr' was applied to martyrs who died during Iconoclasm. The most important collection of the lives of the Ottoman neomartyrs was compiled by Nikodemos the Hagiorite (d. 1809), a monk of Mt. Athos: *Neon martyrologion: ētoi, martyria tōn neophanōn martyrōn tōn meta tēn halōsin tēs Kōnstantinoupoleōs kata diaphorous kairous kai topous martyrēsantōn*, Venice 1794. The neomartyrs of the Ottoman period have been the subject of much scholarship; noteworthy contributions include: T. Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Balkans*, Stanford 2011 pp. 121–164; N.M. Vaporis, *Witnesses for Christ: Orthodox Christian Neomartyrs of the Ottoman Period, 1437–1860*, Crestwood (NY) 2007; E. Gara, 'Neomartyr without a message', *Archivum Ottomanicum* 23 (2005/2006), pp. 155–176; Ph. Kotzageorgis, '„Messiahs" and neomartyrs in Ottoman Thessaly: some thoughts on two entries in a Mühimme Defteri', *Archivum Ottomanicum* 23 (2005/2006), pp. 219–231; M. Saryanis, 'Aspects of "neomartyrdom": religious contacts, "blasphemy," and "calumny" in 17th century Istanbul', *Archivum Ottomanicum* 23 (2005/2006), pp. 249–262; S. Faroqhi, 'An Orthodox woman saint in an Ottoman document', [in:] *Syncrétismes et hérésies dans l'Orient seljoukide et ottoman (XIVe–XVIIIe siècles): Actes du colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001*, Paris 2005, pp. 383–394; R. Gradeva, 'Apostasy in Rumeli in the middle of the sixteenth century', *Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies* 22 (2000), pp. 29–74; M. Balivet, 'Chrétiens secrets et martyrs christiques en Islam Turc: quelques cas à travers les textes (XIIIe–XVIIe siècles)', [in:] M. Balivet (ed.), *Byzantins et Ottomans: relations, interaction, succession* [collected essays], Istanbul 1999, pp. 231–254 [published original in: *Islamochristiana* 16 (1990)]; E.M. Walsh, 'The women martyrs of Nikodemos Hagiorites' Neon Martyrologion', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36/1 (1991), pp. 71–91; D. Constantelos, 'The "neomartyrs" as evidence for methods and motives leading to conversion and martyrdom in the Ottoman Empire', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 23 (1978), pp. 216–234.

[19] D. Brady and D.J. Melling, 'New Martyrs', [in:] K. Parry, D.J. Melling, D. Brady, S.H. Griffith, J.F. Healy (eds.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, Oxford 1999, pp. 341–343.

[20] The neomartyrs in the Islamic world emerged concurrently with a new group of martyrs inside the Byzantine Empire: the saints of the Iconoclastic controversy. To my knowledge, none were called 'neomartyrs' in the same way, though the two phenomena deserve comparison, given their contemporary dates. For an introduction to the sources, see: I. Ševčenko, 'Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period', [in:] A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, Birmingham 1977, pp. 113–131; A.-M. Talbot (ed.), *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints' Lives in English Translation*, Washington 1998; L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (ca *680–850): The Sources, An Annotated Survey*, Aldershot 2001, pp. 199–231. I thank Lilly Stammler for her input here. Occasionally, the genres overlapped, as we see in the life of Romanus, an iconodoule monk from Galatia who was imprisoned in Baghdad and was executed in the Syrian city of Raqqa in 780; his *vita*, written originally in Greek (or Arabic, but surviving only in Georgian translation) includes many interesting details

almost exclusively in Greek (*neomartus* or *neos martus*), though we have a smaller number of references in Arabic, Georgian, and Syriac.[21] In fact, the overall number of saints bearing the title 'neomartyr' is rather small. These include the Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem, members of a Byzantine military delegation who died in Palestine in 725;[22] Abo of Tbilisi, a Muslim perfumer originally from Baghdad who converted to Christianity in Georgia and was killed for apostasy in 786;[23] Elias, a young farmer and saddle-maker from Heliopolis who was killed for apostasy in Damascus in 779;[24] Bacchus-Ḍaḥḥāk, the child of a mixed Muslim-Christian marriage who eventually became a monk and died in 786/7;[25] Theophilus, a Byzantine naval commander who died in captivity in the 780s;[26] Romanus, a monk from Galatia who died in al-Raqqa in Syria in 780;[27] and George-Muzāḥim, the son of a Bedouin father and Coptic mother who was executed for apostasy in 978.[28]

The earliest attestation of the term comes from the *Narrationes* of Anastasius of Sinai (d. ca. 700), a Greek-speaking monk who traveled extensively throughout the eastern Mediterranean in the decades after the conquests.[29] As such, the *Narrationes* contains some of our oldest datable accounts of Christian persecution under Islam. In particular,

about the Iconoclastic controversy in the Byzantine Empire: P. Peeters, 'S. Romain le néomartyr († 1 mai 780) d'après un document géorgien', *Analecta Bollandiana* 30 (1911), pp. 393–427.

[21] The number of Syriac references to the term is small, though the passion of the Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem (see below), a Greek text containing the term, was probably written first in Syriac. Among the only explicit references in Syriac comes from the thirteenth-century Maronite calendar of Rabban Ṣlība: P. Peeters, 'Le martyrologe de Rabban Sliba', *Analecta Bollandiana* 27 (1908), p. 174, in reference to one 'Elias of Beth Qūsaynā, which is near Ḥaḥ'. An anonymous Elias also appears in the calendar on December 30; Peeters presumed this was the same as Elias of Heliopolis (see below), but this seems dubious to me: Ḥaḥ is a village 40 miles northeast of Mardin. Beth Qūsyānā is a place in Tur Abdin, but aside from that, no information exists. The modern Turkish name is Alagöz. Needless to say, these are not especially close to Damascus or Heliopolis (Ba'labakk). For more on this village and its history, cf. Z. Joseph, *Beth Qustan. Ein aramäisches Dorf im Wandel der Zeiten*, Glane 2010.

[22] A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, 'Mučeničestvo šestidesjati novych svjatych mučenikov', *Pravoslavnij Palestinskij Sbornik* 12, 1 (1892), pp. 1–7, here: p. 1 [hereafter: Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem*].

[23] D.M. Lang (trans.), *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, London and New York 1956, p. 132; G. Shurgaia, *La spiritualità georgiana: Martirio di Abo, santo e beato martire di Cristo di Ioane Sabanisdze*, Rome 2003, p. 247.

[24] A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Sbornik palestinskoj i sirijskoj agiologii / Syllogē Palaistinēs kai Syriakēs Hagiologias*, 2 vols. St. Petersburg, 1907–1913, here: vol. 1, pp. 42–59 (reprint, Thessaloniki 2001); references to neomartyrs at: pp. 42, 43, 44, 45, 54, 55 [hereafter: Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Elias of Heliopolis*].

[25] F. Combefis (ed.), *Christi martyrum lecta trias*, Paris 1666, pp. 61–126; here: p. 61 [hereafter: Combefis, *Bacchus-Ḍaḥḥāk*].

[26] H. Delehaye (ed.), *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e Codice Sirmondiano* [= Acta Sanctorum, vol. 63], Brussels 1902 [hereafter: Delehaye, *Synaxarium of Constantinople*]; here: January 30, p. 434; note an alternative version of Theophilus' life, printed immediately below the main recension in Delehaye's edition, which states that he was a *strategos* assigned to a frontier theme, and not a naval officer.

[27] Peeters, 'S. Romain le néomartyr', p. 409.

[28] R. Basset, 'Le synaxaire arabe jacobite', *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. 5, 1923, pp. 578/1120 – 581/1123 [hereafter : Basset, *Synaxarium of the Coptic Church*, vol. number: the *Synaxarium of the Coptic Church* appears across five editions of the *Patrologia Orientalis*, which I number as follows for the purpose of citation: 1907 (vol. 1), 1909 (vol. 2), 1915 (vol. 3), 1922 (vol. 4), 1923 (vol. 5)]. I have not yet consulted the complete *vita* of George, which exists in a fourteenth-century manuscript: MS Cairo, Coptic Museum – Hist. 469.

[29] For orientation on the life of Anastasius, as well as his views of Islam: J. Haldon, 'The works of Anastasius of Sinai: a key source for the history of seventh-century East Mediterranean society and belief', [in:] A. Cameron and L.I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, Vol. 1: Problems in the Literary*

throughout the text, we witness violence arising in the context of captivity, slavery, and other hardships engendered by war.

It is worth noting that only one of Anastasius' Christians actually died as a result of apostasy: a slave from Damascus known as George the Black. Interestingly, Anastasius did not refer to him as a martyr.[30] The individual he *did* identify as a 'neomartyr', Euphemia, was an elderly slave owned by a Muslim aristocrat in Damascus.[31] According to the *Narrationes*, this 'Jezebel' used to bar Euphemia from going to church, threatening her with two-hundred blows if she caught her taking communion. Despite the threat, Euphemia never missed a Sunday mass. On one occasion, however, someone spotted Euphemia leaving church, and straightaway, her fellow servants caught and beat her ferociously. Euphemia's mistress ordered them to concentrate their lashes on a single part of her body – thereby increasing the pain. When the tortures ended, several Christian women of the palace took Euphemia to dress her wounds. They were shocked to find her free of injury – proof of God's love for her. It seems that a local Christian eventually purchased Euphemia, allowing her to live out her days in freedom and in peace. Significantly, although Euphemia was the first to bear the name 'neomartyr', in fact, she did not die from her tortures. Technically, she was what churches today would call a confessor, not a martyr. The confusion over what to call her may reflect the ambiguity surrounding the title 'neomartyr' at this time, so soon after it was first coined.

The use of the term 'new martyrs' immediately calls to mind its opposite, namely, 'old martyrs.' By labeling Euphemia a 'new martyr', Anastasius was a drawing an explicit comparison between the saints of his world and the saints of the early church. The juxtaposition of 'new' and 'old' gestured toward a perceived revival of ancient Christian piety. Since the time of Constantine, Christianity had enjoyed the protection of the Roman state. Indeed, it was Constantine who brought an end to the sporadic persecutions that had erupted under Nero, Diocletian, and others. While Christians continued to suffer at the hands of pagan kings outside Roman lands (as in the Sasanian Empire),[32]

Source Material, Princeton 1992, pp. 107–147; B. Flusin, 'Démons et Sarrasins: l'auteur et le propos des *Diègèmata stèriktika* d'Anastase le Sinaïte', *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991), pp. 381–409.

[30] Although Anastasius did not call George a 'martyr' or 'neomartyr,' he stated that the people of Damascus buried him in a *martyrium* near the entrance to the city. They also celebrated a memorial feast in his honor – suggesting that they considered him a saint, even if Anastasius did not identify him as such explicitly: A. Binggeli, 'Anastase le Sinaïte: *Récits sur le Sinaï* et *Récits utiles à l'âme*. Édition, traduction et commentaire', PhD disst., Université Paris IV 2001, p. 252.

[31] Ibidem, p. 251; the full passage is as follows: 'We have seen these things with our own eyes, we have considered them, and our hands have touched them in order to give a faithful account. Nevertheless, not overlooking those who have hope in him, God no longer forgot our holy neomartyr Euphemia'.

[32] It bears underlining, however, that persecution of Christians in the Sasanian Empire declined in the sixth century: S. Brock, 'Christians in the Sasanian Empire. A case of divided loyalties', *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982), pp. 1–19. Interestingly, the Islamic-era neomartyrologies are based little, if at all, on the lives of the Persian martyrs (written mostly in Syriac by members of the Church of the East). Perhaps this was a result of linguistic and cultural change: for reasons that are unclear, Syriac-speaking Christians did not write a single stand-alone neomartyrology after the conquests. Other forms of hagiography are represented in Syriac in this period, but not in great numbers. Therefore, the community best positioned to appropriate models and themes from the Sasanian Christian world did instead leave us with a corpus of texts in Arabic, Greek, and Latin that communicate almost exclusively with Greco-Roman traditions from the Mediterranean world, and not from the Persian world. For a guide to the Christian martyrologies of the Sasanian world: S. Brock, *The History of the Holy Mar Ma'in with a Guide to the Persian Martyr Acts*, Piscataway 2008, pp. 77–95. For

and interconfessional strife brewed among different Christian denominations[33] – especially in North Africa and the Middle East – the age of large-scale state-sponsored violence in the empire was over.

The end of the persecutions posed an unintended threat to Christian spirituality. For many years, the church had closely associated militancy and sanctity: to witness for Christ was to sacrifice one's life on the blood-stained floor of the Roman circus or before the feet of a pagan magistrate.[34] The Peace of the Church brought an end to all this, and Christianity was forced to create alternative models of holiness that did not rely on the faithful undergoing violent death. Thus, we witness a transition from what scholars refer to as 'red martyrdom' to 'white martyrdom'.[35] Henceforth the heroes of the church would fight the devil in the arena of the heart, instead of pagans in the arena of the town square. In this way, the monk became the heir of the martyr – embracing extreme fasting and prayer, rather than the literal martyrdom of bloodshed.

To speak of 'neomartyrs' in early Islamic times was thus to return to an older 'ur-Christianity'. It was to revive a practice that pious Roman emperors had rendered null over the past four-hundred years, but which became active once again thanks to the rule of 'pagan' Arabs.

The rhetoric of martyrdom

Titles were not the only way hagiographers made saints of dead men. They also nurtured a sense of connection between the past and present through direct allusions to older generations of saints, as well as through use of recognized martyrological *topoi*.

Among the most common strategies was to draw explicit parallels between the sufferings of the neomartyrs and their forerunners. For example, the Muslim aristocrat Anthony-Rawḥ al-Qurashī – who was executed in 799 before Hārūn al-Rashīd after converting to Christianity and refusing to repent – died after receiving a vision of another famous martyr, the soldier-saint Theodore, who exhorted him to leave Islam.[36] Likewise,

an overview of hagiographical writing in Syriac after the Arab conquests, see: J. Tannous, 'L'hagiographie syro-occidental à la période islamique', [in:] A. Binggeli (ed.), *L'hagiographie syriaque* [= Études Syriaques 9], Paris 2012, pp. 225–245.

[33] For an example, see accounts of violence between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites in greater Syria during the reign of Justinian: *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, pp. 21–41 [which refers to 'new martyrs' (*sāhhde ḥate)*, though not in the same technical sense, p. 33]; or between Catholics and Donatists in North Africa: M. Tilley (trans.), *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, Liverpool 1996.

[34] The literature on early Christian martyrdom is vast. For several key introductions, see: G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, Cambridge 2002; W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*, Oxford 1965; C.R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom*, Oxford 2010.

[35] For a general survey of this transformation, E.E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr*, Washington 1950.

[36] I. Dick, 'La passion arabe de S. Antoine Ruwaḥ néo-martyr de Damas († 25 déc. 799)', *Le Muséon* 74 (1961), pp. 109–133, here: p. 122 [henceforth: Dick, *Anthony-Rawḥ*]; the *vita* was reprinted recently in: E. Braida and C. Pelisseti, *Storia di Rawḥ al-Qurašī. Un discendente di Maometto che scelse di divenire cristiano*, Turin 2001, pp. 95–113. Saracen attacks against icons of St. Theodore figure prominently in martyrologies and legends from the period; see also: J.B. Aufhauser (ed.), *Miracula S. Georgii*, Leipzig 1913, pp. 65–89 (the martyrdom of Pachomius / Joachim-Malmeth), 90–93 (the anonymous Muslim nobleman of Diospolis); A. Binggeli, 'Anastase le Sinaïte', pp. 219–220; for discussion: idem, 'Converting the caliph', pp. 99–103: A.

the Sixty Martyrs of Gaza, who died in ca. 639 not long after the Muslim conquest of Palestine, were encouraged by their leader to 'imitate the Forty Martyrs' of Sebaste, another group of soldier saints who had died in 320 in northeastern Anatolia.[37] The Sixty Martyrs were even interred in a chapel outside the walls of Jerusalem dedicated to St. Stephen the proto-martyr, creating a sense of continuity between the neomartyrs of the Arab conquest and the earliest generation of Christian saints.[38]

A later group of soldiers who died in Palestine, the Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem (d. 725), were also said to have followed apostolic models: according to their biographer, 'they surrendered their souls into the hands of Christ, imitating the saints and the heads of the apostles, Peter and Paul, and those who spill their noble blood on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ, our true God, and on behalf of the beautiful profession [of faith].'[39] Likewise, the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba, who died in a Bedouin raid on their monastery in 796/97, were said to resemble John the Baptist and the Maccabees, important Biblical figures who died violent deaths.[40] The martyrs of Cordoba – a group of forty-nine Christians who were killed for blasphemy and apostasy during the 850s – were often referred to as heirs of early Christian saints. Indeed, many were associated with a famous group of nineteen martyrs who had been killed in Cordoba centuries before under Diocletian. There are even texts which compare Muslim persecutors of certain neomartyrs to Roman persecutors of early Christian saints: for example, the *Chronicle* of Theophanes likens the torture of Christians in Emesa (Arabic *Ḥimṣ*) in 779/80 by the general Ḥasan b. Qaḥṭaba to the torture of Christians by the Roman persecutors Lusias and Agrikolaos, who are thought to have lived under Diocletian.[41] Such references established a sense of continuity between martyrs past and present. They reflected the 'theology of imitation' at the heart of many medieval saints' cults – a tendency to depict the saints as manifestations of a single *bios angelikos*. In constantly alluding to older, established models of Christian piety, hagiographers united the new martyrs to an ancient tradition dating back to the time of Jesus.[42] We find this view summed up con-

Papaconstantinou, 'Saints and Saracens: on some miracle accounts of the early Arab period', [in:] D. Sullivan, E. Fisher, and S. Papaioannou (eds.), *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*, Leiden 2012, pp. 323–338.

[37] H. Delehaye, 'Passio sanctorum sexaginta martyrum', *Analecta Bollandiana* 23 (1904), pp. 300–303 [hereafter: Delehaye, *Sixty Martyrs of Gaza*]; here: p. 301.

[38] Ibidem, p. 302; for the martyrdom of St. Stephen, see Acts 6 and 7. The martyr Abo of Tbilisi was imprisoned on December 27th, which the author of his *vita* identified as the feast of St. Stephen. As the hagiographer wrote: 'Thus it fittingly befell that the prince of all the martyrs, together with all the martyred host, should intercede for him, that this latest witness for Christ might not be prevented from being numbered among their glorious company'; Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, p. 125.

[39] Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem*, p. 6.

[40] A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.), *Sbornik Palestinskoj i sirijskoj agiologii / Syllogē Palaistinēs kai Syriakēs Hagiologias*, 2 vols., St Petersburg, 1907–1913; vol. 1, pp. 1–41 (reprint, Thessaloniki 2001); here: p. 30 [henceforth: Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba*].

[41] C. De Boor (ed.), *Theophanis chronographia*, 2 vols. Leipzig 1883–1885; here: vol. 1, pp. 452; for discussion: C. Mango and R. Scott (trans.), *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, A.D. 284–813*, Oxford 1997, p. 626, citing some confusion regarding their exact dates, whether it was the reigns of Diocletian, Trajan, or Licinius. For a pre-Islamic story retold with Islamic-era references, see below, note 101. The identification of the generals as Hasan b. Qaḥṭaba comes from: P. Peeters, 'Glanures martyrologiques', *Analecta Bollandiana* 58 (1940), pp. 104–125, here: pp. 104–109.

[42] As Gregory of Tours remarked in the introduction to his *Vita patrum*, he had set out to write a single life of the holy fathers, not many; in: Gregory of Tours, *Liber de vita patrum* [= Monumenta Germaniae Historica,

cisely in the *vita* of Abo of Tbilisi: 'But now, beloved, it behooves us all the more to cherish the memory of those first blessed martyrs, that through what we have witnessed of this new martyr, we may believe also in those proto-martyrs [...]'.[43]

Hagiographers drove the point home by deploying familiar literary *topoi*. As in early Christian hagiography, the coronation of a martyr was an especially popular scene. A good example comes from the *vita* of Elias of Heliopolis, who described to the *qāḍī* the following dream, which had come to him as he sat in jail:

> I saw myself in a bridal chamber, sitting in an illustrious spot. [And I saw] some other chamber, braided with flowers spread about, and crowns hanging around me. And turning around, I saw a black Ethiopian standing beside me, showing me a cross and threatening me with death, swords, fire, and many other fearsome things, which bellowed at me. But I laughed [at the sight of this]. I was rejoicing – as it seemed – sitting and delighting in the crowns of flowers.[44]

The crown, of course, refers to the Crown of Thorns in the Bible, as well as to the victor's crowns of ancient Greek and Roman games. Ever since the second century, Christians had deployed this symbol of military and athletic achievement to represent the victory obtained by persevering unto death. In both hagiography and iconography, the crown was the calling card of the martyr. Coronations figure prominently in other texts from the period, too, including the *vitae* of Anthony-Rawḥ[45] and the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba.[46]

In reading the hagiography of the early Islamic period, one senses occasionally that the neomartyrs were greeted with deep skepticism, even hostility by some of their contemporaries. They were regarded sometimes as reckless provocateurs who risked incurring the wrath of the state upon the entire church.[47] For these skeptics, it was better to endure subjugation in quiet than to proclaim one's faith out loud. In response to these charges, hagiographers sometimes went to great lengths to build their subjects into perfect models of Christian piety. Again, the *vita* of Elias of Heliopolis provides a good example of this defensive posture. In the opening paragraphs, we read:

Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 1/2], B. Krusch (ed.), Hannover 1885, p. 662 (I thank Jamie Kreiner for this reference); for discussion of these themes, see: P. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man*, Berkeley 1983, pt. 1, pp. 1–65. Again, the hagiographers of the early Islamic period relied on exemplars from Roman antiquity, not on the Persian martyrs of the Sasanian world. For more, see above, note 97.

[43] Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, p. 132; Shurgaia, *La spiritualità georgiana*, p. 247.

[44] Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Elias of Heliopolis*, p. 50; the presence of an Ethiopian was a common hagiographic motif in late-antique hagiography – it was considered a symbol of the demonic.

[45] Dick, *Anthony-Rawḥ*, pp. 124–125.

[46] Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba*, pp. 10, 19, 29, 30, 40.

[47] Scholars have explored this issue with respect to the Cordoba Martyrs, some of whom provoked their own deaths. In early 852, a group of Spanish bishops convened a council which, under pressure from the Umayyad *amīr*, 'Abd al-Raḥman III, anathematized the martyrs (for more on this theme, see below, note 51). We can find traces of the controversy about the martyrs among Christians in other hagiographical works. Indeed, any martyr who provoked his own death invariably faced the skepticism of his own community. In the *vita* of Peter of Capitolias, for example, the Umayyad authorities gathered everyone in the city to witness the execution – including men, women, children, priests and monks – presumably to teach them what many already felt, that offending the authorities was not worth the steep price of death; Peeters, 'La passion de S. Pierre de Capitolias', p. 310. For a much later example of a Christian martyr whose family attempted to dissuade him from seeking death: J. Zaborowski, *The Coptic Martyrdom of John of Phanijōit: Assimilation and Conversion to Islam in Thirteenth-Century Egypt*, Leiden 2005.

> Then Jesus said to the woman: 'Your faith has saved you, go in peace'. Therefore, even if the woman was a sinner, as you have heard, benevolent Jesus forgave all of her sins on account of those tears and the anointing with ointment, do you not suppose, therefore, that the sins of those neomartyrs, both big and small, would be forgiven on account of their many afflictions and the spilling of their own blood? You decide – whichever ones [of you] take stock like the Pharisees – whether the transgressions of the neomartyrs are forgiven.[48]

The writer continued to single out the neomartyrs for their exceptional faith, writing in the voice of Christ:

> Now these neomartyrs, through their tears and torrents of blood wipe down [Christ's] feet and his flesh. And kisses of love for one another you have not given me, whereas these [neomartyrs] have laid down their own souls on behalf of the faith. Nor have you anointed my head with oil of benevolence, even out of a sense of mercy for those of common descent, whereas the heads [of the neomartyrs] were cut off by the sword for sake of me.[49]

Of course, such praise was *de rigeur* in late-antique hagiography, whether it came to martyrs or confessors. But in the early Islamic period, when Christian authors were struggling to activate a dormant tradition, like that of martyrdom, such praise had a specific apologetic goal: to establish the martyrs as worthy heirs of those who had come before them.

This process of negotiation was not always successful. The Spanish churchman Eulogius, for example, who chronicled the lives of the martyrs of Cordoba, wrote numerous tracts in defense of the martyrs – specifically to answer skeptical Christians who looked upon these men and women less as saints than unwelcome rabble-rousers.[50] Even for those who accepted the martyrs as genuine, many feared that they were chasing self-glorification rather than the glory of God. We find a curious anecdote along these lines in the potted biography of the martyr George-Muzāḥim in the *Synaxarium of the Coptic Church*, which notes that as George languished in prison waiting to die like the martyrs of old, his wife had to check his pride:

> [...] His wife fortified him, and instructed him to believe that all he had suffered was because of his own sins, lest the Enemy snatch him away when he felt pride at the prospect of becoming like the martyrs.[51]

[48] Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Elias of Heliopolis*, p. 43; alternately, one is tempted to interpret the passage as an exhortation to a complacent audience to imitate the neomartyrs' militancy in order to ensure the forgiveness of their own sins.

[49] Ibidem, p. 44.

[50] See, for example, how Eulogius addresses his audience in the *Memoriale sanctorum*: 'Even the most prudent readers then have been able to see how deservingly this little work occupies itself in the praises of the blessed, placing barriers against the *diffident* and the *doubtful* [CCS: emphasis added] who deny that they ought to be venerated as martyrs'; J. Gil (ed.), *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, 2. vols, Madrid 1973, here: vol. 2, p. 378; translation: E.P. Colbert, 'The *Memoriale Sanctorum* of Eulogius of Cordova: a translation with critical introduction', MA Thesis, Catholic University of America, Washington 1956, p. 45. See also, J. Gil, vol. 2, p. 382: 'There are however, many of the faithful and (sad to say) even priests, who are unwilling for them to be received into the roll of the saints, fearing to take away the glory of these confessors by chance, and asserting this kind of martyrdom to be unusual and unconsecrated' (Colbert, p. 51).

[51] Basset, *Synaxarium of the Coptic Church*, vol. 5, p. 581/1123. Compare with the description of Abo of Tbilisi in prison: Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, p. 126.

It was a stunning admission: about to earn the crown of eternal life, George had to be reminded that he was becoming a martyr by no virtue of his own. He was suffering for offenses *he* had committed against God, whatever his resemblance to the saints of old.

Anachronisms in the martyrologies

Another striking feature of the Islamic-era hagiographies is their occasional and puzzling anachronisms. It is not uncommon to find mentions of pagan priests, temples, sacrifices, and other tokens of a bygone world – one that would have been familiar to 'old martyrs', but not to the 'new martyrs'.[52]

Take, for instance, the short biography of Peter of Capitolias in the *Menologion of Basil II*, a liturgical calendar from Constantinople written around the beginning of the eleventh century.[53] As we know from a longer *vita* surviving in Georgian, Peter was a devoted husband-turned-monk, who spent his life in Bayt Rās, today in north-western Jordan near the Syrian border. He was executed in 715 after insulting Islam before local officials, as well as before the caliph, al-Walīd I. According to his entry in the *Menologion*, however, Peter was born a 'Hellene', or pagan. After converting to Christianity with his wife and children, he became a master of Christian learning, serving as the bishop of his home town. There he taught many pagans (again, 'Hellenes') and succeeded in converting them to Christianity. His outspokenness earned him the attention of 'idolaters', who tortured and presented him to a pagan magistrate. Peter was invited 'to sacrifice to idols', but after refusing, he was executed.

Aside from the title of the entry in the *Menologion*, it is impossible to recognize this as Peter of Capitolias. The synaxarist has transformed the Umayyad-era martyr into a rather generic pagan convert to Christianity, killed by a Roman governor after repudiating the pagan idols. Gone are all references to Muslims and Arabs, indeed, any sense that Peter lived in an Islamicate society.

Much the same could be said of Theophilus, a Byzantine naval commander who died as a prisoner of war in the 780s after refusing to convert to Islam.[54] His biography survives in the *Synaxarium of Constantinople*, a festal calendar compiled for the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in the mid-tenth century. According to his seventeen-line biography, Theophilus had been wallowing in prison for four years when 'he was forced to perform some foul sacrifice (*thusias musaras*) for [the Saracens], but not willing to take part, he lost his head.' The meaning of the phrase is clear – Theophilus was made to worship with his Muslim captors – but the motif is utterly anachronistic.

[52] Several of these 'pregnant' anachronisms also appear in Byzantine hagiography written in response to Iconoclasm. Perhaps the best example is from the *vita* of Stephen the Younger (d. 764–65; written ca. 806/7), in which the iconoclast emperor Constantine V is depicted observing pagan rituals, including the festival of Brumalia, during which he prayed to Dionysios and Broumos! For more: M.-F. Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre. Introduction, édition, et traduction*, Aldershot 1999, pp. 262–263, 266; I thank Lilly Stammler for the reference.

[53] J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 117, cols. 85–86, C–D; it is worth noting the considerable confusion surrounding the precise identity of Peter of Capitolias, who is often confused with two other 'Peters' from later eighth-century Syria – Peter of Maiouma and Peter bishop of Damascus. For discussion, cf. P. Peeters, 'La passion de S. Pierre', pp. 316–333; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 354–360.

[54] Delehaye, *Synaxarium of Constantinople*, January 30, p. 434.

No rite of conversion to Islam ever included sacrifice. Rather, the synaxarist seems to be appropriating a familiar trope from late antique hagiography – the Christian refusing to sacrifice to pagan idols – and applying it to a neomartyr standing before a new pagan enemy, the Arab Muslim. It is unclear whether the synaxarist did this on purpose, or merely misunderstood the nature of Islamic ritual, but the conflation is telling all the same.

Sacrifice is often paired with another anachronistic trope: idolatry. According to a recension of the life of Anthony-Rawḥ that was copied in the seventeenth century, the saint states his eagerness to die as expiation for three grave sins:[55]

> The first [was] when I passed into Byzantine territory and performed a terrible sin by shedding their blood. The second [was] when I went to the house of idols [*bayt al-aṣnām*]. The third [was] when I slaughtered and sacrificed [*naḥartu wa-ḍaḥḥaytu*]. [Now] I beg deliverance from these three, and forgiveness by the shedding of my [own] blood.

Interestingly, an older version of the *vita* – which comes from a tenth-century manuscript – clarifies the meaning of this 'house of idols' as well as the 'sacrifice' which Rawḥ performed:[56]

> As for the first, it's that while I was a *ḥanīf*,[57] I prayed in Mecca at the *Masjid al-Ḥarām*[58] many times. In truth, it is as it is called; [i.e.] it is forbidden by God for those who believe in Christ [to enter]. The second is that I sacrificed on the Day of Aḍḥā. The third is that I raided in Byzantine territory, and killed people who believed in my Lord Jesus Christ, the same as me. And after all this, I pray that the Lord erases these from me by my decapitation, and that he baptizes me with my blood.'

The first passage is a corrupted version of the second: The house of idols (*bayt al-aṣnām*) is the Great Mosque of Mecca, and the sacrifice which Rawḥ performed is the ritual slaughter of the sheep on *Td al-Aḍḥā*, when Muslims commemorate Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son, Isaac.[59] All the same, the manner in which the hagiographer conflates the rites of Islam with ancient paganism is telling. At a surface level, they reflect the popular conviction among many Christians that Islam was simply another manifestation of ancient heathenism.[60] But at a deeper level, the conflation of Islam with paganism shows how the author has collapsed the vast middle-ground between

[55] P. Peeters, 'S. Antoine le néo-martyr', *Analecta Bollandiana* 31 (1912), pp. 410–450; here: p. 450; this later redaction of the *vita* is also reproduced in: Braida and Pelissetti, *Storia di Rawḥ al-Qurašī*, pp. 115–127.

[56] Dick, *Anthony-Rawḥ*, p. 126.

[57] That is, a Muslim; for more on the etymology of this term, cf. above, note 6.

[58] That is, the Great Mosque of Mecca.

[59] The mention of 'Īd in Anthony-Rawḥ's *passio* raises the remote possibility that the 'foul sacrifice' was none other than the ritual slaughter of a sheep for 'Īd al-Aḍḥā. That said, it strikes me that the term *thusias musaras* may be more of a literary anachronism than a technical description of a Muslim ceremony for the reasons stated above. The author of the potted biography of the martyr John, who died with his sons in North Africa between 875 and 886, described his death at the hands of a Muslim *amīr* using the verb *epēxen*, which in ancient Greek carries connotations of 'sacrifice' or 'ritual slaughter': Delehaye, *Synaxarium of Constantinople*, September 23, p. 73.

[60] This is a popular theme in polemical literature of the period; for introductory discussion: D.J. Sahas, 'Eighth-century Byzantine anti-Islamic literature', *Byzantino-Slavica* 57 (1996), pp. 229–238, here: pp. 235–236; in which Sahas cites a letter from the patriarch of Constantinople Germanus (715–730) to Thomas of Claudiopolis, which denounces Muslims as idol worshippers. Specifically, he states that Muslim pilgrims to Mecca offered worship to a stone. Anastasius of Sinai also describes the rites of pilgrimage to Mecca as involving a pagan sacrifice, though it is unclear what kind of sacrifice he meant, other than the polemical

the Roman and Islamic-era persecutions. Anthony-Rawḥ is meant to resemble a martyr of the second or third centuries, giving his final testimony before a Roman magistrate.

We see much the same in the *vita* of the Sixty Martyrs of Gaza, a Greek text of the seventh or eighth century which survives only in Latin translation in two later medieval manuscripts. In the penultimate section of one Latin version, Florian, the leader of the Sixty Martyrs, is hauled before the 'temple' in Jerusalem and made to worship the Saracens' 'gods'. Miraculously, the day before his execution, the temple is said to have collapsed and all its idols to have been reduced to dust.[61]

The preceding anecdotes are part of a wider strategy aimed at discrediting Islam by identifying it as a garden-variety heathenism. Early Islam was itself adamantly monotheistic, its self-image shaped in opposition to the Arab polytheism it had replaced. Indeed, early Muslims went out of their way to ridicule the idolatry of their ancestors.[62] Christians happily played into these stereotypes of Arab religion, arguing that the old idols, sacrifices, and temples had survived in a new form with the coming of Islam.

One suspects that this polemic was more successful among Christians living outside the caliphate than those inside it who had a deeper knowledge of Muslim beliefs, and therefore might have found the 'idolatry' trope somewhat hollow. Indeed, what is striking about each of the preceding examples is that they come from martyrologies that were written relatively late inside Islamic lands (the seventeenth-century recension of the *vita* of Rawḥ al-Qurashī) or written outside the caliphate altogether (the biographies of Peter of Capitolias, Theophilus, and the Latin translation of the passion of the Sixty Martyrs). Thus, one is tempted to see the grossest anachronisms as a result of the polemical ignorance of outsiders but, by the same token, we do find striking examples of anachronism in texts produced by Christians living under early Muslim rule. Two examples will suffice.[63]

The first is the *vita* of Michael of Mar Saba, which was probably written in Greek in the Monastery of Mar Saba around the turn of the ninth century, and which survives in later Georgian, Greek, and Arabic recensions.[64] In the Greek and Arabic versions,

association between Islam and the paganisms of old; for more: A. Binggeli, 'Anastase le Sinaïte', p. 231 (Greek text), p. 546 (French translation).

[61] H. Delehaye, 'Passio sanctorum sexaginta martyrum', *Analecta Bollandiana* 23 (1904), pp. 303–307, here: p. 306 [*n.b.*, this comes from the *Legend of St. Florian and his Companions*, a still later redaction of the *Passion of the Sixty Martyrs of Gaza*]; for more on the relationship between the two texts, both contained in Delehaye's 1904 article, cf. E. Pargoire, 'Les LX soldats martyrs de Gaza', *Échos d'Orient* 8 (1905), pp. 40–43; D. Woods, 'The 60 Martyrs of Gaza and the Martyrdom of Bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem', *ARAM* 15 (2003), pp. 129–150.

[62] According to a famous anecdote preserved in the *Ma'ārif* of Ibn Qutayba, the tribesmen of the Banū Ḥanīfa used to worship an idol made of cured butter and dates – that is, until famine hit and they were forced to eat their god; such anecdotes are typical of how later generations of Muslims viewed the religion of the pagan Arabs; cited in: P. Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton 1987, p. 238. Hawting argues that discussions of idolatry and paganism in the Qur'ān disguise the fact that early Muslims used such language against those they regarded as 'soft monotheists' – not against actual pagans; cf. G. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 45–87; Crone has argued in the same vein recently, contending that the *mushrikūn* of the Qur'an may have been pagan monotheists, or even Jews: P. Crone, 'The religion of the qur'ānic pagans: God and the lesser deities', *Arabica* 57 (2010), pp. 151–200.

[63] See also the highly rhetorical introduction to the *vita* of Bacchus-Ḍaḥḥāk, which contains references to chariot races, stadia, and Olympic Games: Combefis, *Bacchus-Ḍaḥḥāk*, pp. 61–65.

[64] The transmission and survival of the text is a complicated matter; scholars have long presumed that the text was written in the early ninth century in Greek at Mar Saba monastery. This Greek text was presumed to be lost and to survive only in a medieval Georgian translation (possibly through an Arabic intermediary).

the caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, who kills Michael, is described as the 'king of the Persians' over and over again.[65] 'Abd al-Malik, who reigned from 685 to 705, was no Persian, but an Arab who spent most of his life in Syria. Historians have argued that the title is an anachronism of the ninth century world in which the *vita* was written, when the center of political power in Islam had moved to the Persian-speaking regions of Iraq and Iran. Given this, one can see how 'Abd al-Malik might have been regarded as a member of the 'Abbasid royal family, the latter-day dynasty based in the 'Persian' east.

That said, there seems to be something greater lurking behind the anachronism. Elsewhere, a recension of the *vita* surviving in a text known as *The Life of Theodore of Edessa* speaks of Muslim religious functionaries as *archimagoi*, using the same term as the Zoroastrian priests of pre-Islamic times.[66] Likewise, the caliph is said to come from the city of Babylon,[67] the great harlot of the Old Testament, and Michael is offered the chance to become a *satrap*, or provincial governor under the old Iranian system.[68] What is happening here? It seems that the author of the *vita* has added these anachronisms in order to draw parallels between the suffering of the martyr Michael and the suffering of the Israelites under the Persians in pre-Christian times.[69] By reimagining Michael's Umayyad tormenter as a Persian despot, he successfully inserts the events into an established narrative of salvation history: on the one hand, glorifying Michael's victory through death, and on the other, demonizing the Muslim enemy by linking them with the pagans of old.

We see much the same at work in the *Memoriale sanctorum*, a lengthy account of the lives and deaths of the martyrs of Cordoba. At one point, the author Eulogius describes how a Muslim eunuch responsible for the death of a martyr suffered the same fate as the heresiarch Arius: 'burning within in a fiery fever, and (as some say) corrupted by a poisonous potion, before death, when, because of urgent bodily need, he was seeking

A Greek version reappeared in a separate work, the *vita* of Theodore of Edessa, a hagiographical fiction of the ninth or tenth centuries. This also yielded an Arabic translation. It was long supposed that the Greek version of the *vita* of Michael in the *vita* of Theodore of Edessa was a translation of the Georgian translation of the Greek original, given the steady flow of monks passing between Georgia and the Byzantine Empire at the time. That said, this scheme seems needlessly complicated: the Georgian and Greek versions (as contained in the *vita* of Theodore) are remarkably similar, and no linguistic feature of the Greek text would lead one to suppose it came first from Georgian. Therefore, I believe that the text contained in the *vita* of Theodore is a complete, or near-complete version of the original ninth-century composition, both written at Mar Saba (or a related monastery). For background on the history of the text: S. H. Griffith, 'Michael, the martyr and monk of Mar Sabas monastery, at the court of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik. Christian apologetics and martyrology in the early Islamic period', *ARAM* 6 (1994), pp. 115–148; idem, 'The *Life of Theodore of Edessa*: history, hagiography, and religious apologetics in Mar Saba Monastery in early Abbasid times', [in:] J. Patrich (ed.), *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, Leuven 2001, pp. 147–169.

[65] For example, cf. I. Pomjalovskij, *Žitie iže vo svjatych otca našego Theodora archiepiskopa Edesskago*, St. Petersburg 1892, pp. 1–119 [hereafter: *Theodore of Edessa*; martyrdom of Michael of Mar Saba at pp. 17–31; sections 23–36], here: pp. 17, 21, 22, 23, 25, *int. al.*; interestingly, the Georgian version of the text does not identify 'Abd al-Malik as a Persian; there is only one reference to Persians in this text: M. Blanchard, 'The Georgian version of the Martyrdom of Saint Michael, monk of Mar Sabas Monastery', *ARAM* 6 (1994), pp. 149–163, here: p. 154, in a very different context, which appears to indicate that the author understood the distinction between Arab and Persian Muslims.

[66] Pomjalovskij, *Theodore of Edessa*, p. 93.

[67] Ibidem, p. 17; although references to Persia are rare in the Georgian version, Babylon does make an appearance: Blanchard, 'Martyrdom of Saint Michael', p. 150.

[68] Ibidem, p. 22.

[69] Griffith, 'The *Life of Theodore of Edessa*', p. 155.

the private cubicle for purging his insides, his bowels burst forth'.[70] As with the allusions to pagan Persia in the *vita* of Michael of Mar Saba, this reference both discredits the Muslim foe by associating him with Arius, and celebrates the victory of the saint, who is depicted as the latest in a long line of martyrs stretching back to the victims of heretics in the early church.

One might argue that these anachronisms reflect the ignorance of our Christian authors, especially their lack of interest in the actual beliefs of Muslims. This may play a role in some texts, especially those written outside the caliphate, where anti-Islamic polemic could be crude and rather simplistic. For the rest, however, the anachronisms had a specific didactic purpose: to instill a sense of timelessness in the lives of the martyrs. As we have seen, Christian authors of the early Islamic period went to great lengths to establish a sense of continuity between martyrs past and present. What better way of accomplishing this than through deliberate ahistoricism? Idolatry, sacrifice, and temples lived on not because Muslims were themselves pagans. Rather, they lived on because the trials of the neomartyrs were seen as encores in a great drama that had begun under the Romans emperors. Put succinctly, the sufferings of Christians under the caliphs were no different than the sufferings of Christians under the Caesars. This was a dream world in which history was folding back upon itself.

New alongside old: manuscripts and liturgical calendars

The hagiographers of the early Islamic period were not interested only in new martyrs. We can track the rise of a martyrological discourse also by examining how they mingled the lives of new saints with those of the old, whether in manuscript collections, liturgical calendars, or in the translation and re-writing of old *vitae*.

We tend to read medieval hagiography in isolation from its original context. In the case of the neomartyrs, this means forgetting that our *vitae* often survive in much longer hagiographical collections, containing information about saints new and old. Take, for instance, the most important manuscript for Greek martyrologies of the early Islamic period: Bibliothèque Nationale de France Coislin 303, a tenth or eleventh-century manuscript, probably from one of the monasteries in or around the Holy Land.[71] The manuscript contains the only known copies of the *vitae* of Elias of Heliopolis and the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba, along with a shorter version of the passion of the Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem.[72] Along with these neomartyrologies, the manuscript contains another late text, the life of Stephen of Mar Saba, who died in 794 and was a nephew of

[70] Gil, *Corpus scriptorum Muzarabicorum*, vol. 2, p. 401; translation from: Colbert, 'The *Memoriale Sanctorum* of Eulogius', p. 81. The earliest accounts of Arius' death come from Athanasius of Alexandria, as well as the historians Rufinus and Socrates. The story circulated widely in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages; for more: R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition,* Grand Rapids (MI) 2002, p. 81, 303, n. 250 (I thank Jamie Kreiner for this reference).

[71] Information on the contents of Coislin 303 can be found on the website of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France: www.bnf.fr; cf. also: R. Devreesse (ed.), *Le fonds Coislin*, Paris, 1945, pp. 286–288.

[72] *Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba*, fols. 99v–135 (preceded by *Life of Stephen of Mar Saba*; followed by *Life of George of Choziba*); *Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem*, fols. 177–181v (preceded by *Life of George of Choziba*, followed by *Martyrdom of Athanasius of Clysma*); *Elias of Heliopolis*, fols. 238v–249v (preceded by *Life of Paul of Elousa*, followed by *Life of Syncletica*).

St. John of Damascus. The manuscript is packed, however, with information about saints of different eras. These include Syncletica, a fourth-century desert mother from Egypt; Arsenius of Scetis, considered among the great desert fathers, who died in 445; and the monk George of Choziba, who died in Palestine in 625. Judging from the contents of the manuscript alone, the compiler did not perceive a major distinction between the neomartyrs and these earlier saints: their *vitae* were not bound separately, much less filed in different chapters of the same book, and there does not seem to be much logic to their ordering in the manuscript. They appeared together, emphasizing the similarity of their subjects – despite the very different circumstances under which they died.

The same can be said of Beirut Bibliothèque Orientale 625, a seventeenth-century Arabic manuscript which contains the life of Anthony-Rawḥ.[73] His is the only biography of a neomartyr in the manuscript, though it appears amidst the biographies of older Christian saints. These include the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (d. 320), along with the martyrs Julian of Emesa (d. 312), Barbara (third century), Sergius and Bacchus (fourth century), Cosmas and Damian (third century), Ananias (first century), Pantaleon (d. ca. 303/5), and George (d. ca. 303). The effect is the same as in Coislin 303: The editors of these works did not seem to perceive a major difference among saints of different generations. The martyrs of the Islamic period were heirs to a tradition dating back to earliest Christian times, so much so that their biographies were inserted seamlessly together.[74]

The same phenomenon is in evidence in liturgical calendars. The oldest, a Syriac text from the Melkite community of Jerusalem, includes an extensive list of feasts connected to biblical figures, patriarchs of Jerusalem, Palestinian monks, and shrines in the Holy Land. Nearly all these commemorations are connected to events that happened or individuals who died before the Arab conquests.[75] That said, the calendar does include references to three neomartyrs: Bacchus-Ḍaḥḥāk, born to a mixed family of Muslims

[73] Information on the contents of *Bibliothèque Orientale 625* can be found in: L. Cheikho, 'Catalogue raisonné des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Orientale. Vol. 5 : Patristique, conciles, écrivains ecclésiastiques anciens, hagiologie', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 11/5 (1926), pp. 280–281/ 374–375; the *Life of Anthony-Rawḥ* is preceded by the *Life of Barlaam*, an ascetic who lived in the mountains around Antioch and was martyred ca. 304 (fols. 90–98); and followed by the *Life of St. Alexis* (fols. 104–107).

[74] We observe the same phenomenon in other manuscript collections containing the lives of neomartyrs, including: Sinai Arabic 542, with the *Life of 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Ghassānī*, also containing the martyrdom of the monks of Sinai and Rhaithou. For the manuscript: A. Binggeli, 'L'Hagiographie du Sinaï en arabe d'après un recueil du IXème siècle', *Parole de l'Orient* 32 (2007), pp. 163–180; for the life of 'Abd al-Masīḥ: S. Griffith, 'The Arabic account of 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Naǧrānī al-Ghassānī', *Le Muséon* 98/3–4 (1985), pp. 331–374. The Georgian manuscript containing the life of Michael of Mar Saba (Passionary 57, Iviron Monastery, Mt. Athos) also includes translations of the *vitae* of two other neomartyrs: Anthony-Rawḥ (d. 799) and Romanus (d. 780); cf. O. Wardrop, 'Georgian manuscripts at the Iberian Monastery on Mount Athos', *Journal of Theological Studies* 12 (1911), 603; R.P. Blake, 'Catalogue des manuscrits géorgiens de la bibliothèque de la laure d'Iviron au mont Athos', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* Series 3, 8 (1931–32), p. 318. Likewise, a later Georgian translation of the *vita* of the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba is the only neomartyrology in a collection which otherwise contains early Christian martyrologies; these include the *vitae* of the Ten Martyrs of Crete (d. ca. 250), Eugenia (d. ca. 258), and Marcellus (d. ca. 298), among others: R.P. Blake, 'Deux lacunes comblées dans la *Passio XX monachorum Sabitarum*', *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950), pp. 27–43, here: pp. 29–31.

[75] A. Binggeli, 'Un ancien calendrier melkite de Jérusalem (Sinaï Syr. M52N)', [in:] F. Briquel Chatonnet and M. Debié (eds.), *Sur les pas des Araméens chrétiens. Mélanges offerts à Alain Desreumaux*, Paris 2010, pp. 181–194; for the neomartyrs, pp. 190–192. For an interesting parallel, note the tepid reception of the newly martyred (though not by Muslims) in Merovingian liturgical calendars from the turn of the eighth century: Jamie Kreiner, 'The social functions of Merovingian hagiography', p. 231.

and Christians in Palestine, who died an apostate in 786/87; Christopher, a Muslim who converted to Christianity and became a priest during the reign of al-Mahdī, probably in 778[76]; and Anthony-Rawḥ (remembered according to his baptismal name). As André Binggeli notes in his study of the text, here we can see new cults in the process of becoming 'official'. One way of accomplishing this was by incorporating the feasts of neomartyrs alongside those of well-known saints. It created a sense of continuity between traditions past and present.

A similar mentality shaped the *Synaxarium of Constantinople*, which was compiled around the same time in Greek, though outside the caliphate in the Byzantine Empire.[77] Among the thousands of entries in the text, we find five martyrs from Islamic lands: Peter of Capitolias (d. 715),[78] Bacchus (d. 786/87),[79] Theophilus (d. 780s), whom we have met, along with Michael, abbot of the Zōbē monastery in central Anatolia, who died in the 780s after refusing to convert to Islam[80]; and Andrew, John, Peter and Antoninus, who were killed in North Africa between 875 and 886 (after serving in the bureaucracy of what is probably an Aghlabid *amīr*) while continuing to practice Christianity in secret.[81]

From the fourteenth century, we also possess the *Synaxarium of the Coptic Church*, written in Arabic, but redacting older material composed in Coptic and Greek. The number of neomartyrs in the text is relatively small; they include Thomas, bishop of Damascus, who enraged the *amīr* of the city after engaging in a theological dispute with him (death date unknown)[82]; Mīnā, a monk who debated an Arab general at the time of the conquest of Egypt (d. ca. 640s)[83]; Dioscorus of Alexandria, a Christian who converted to Islam only to repent under the pressure of a disapproving sister (death date unknown)[84]; the aforementioned George-Muzāḥim (d. 978)[85]; and Mary the Armenian,

[76] The only other reference to Christopher the Persian comes from a brief reference in the *vita* of the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba: Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba*, pp. 40–41.

[77] On the compilation of the *Synaxarium of Constantinople*: A. Luzzi, 'Note sulla recensione del Sinassario di Constantinopoli patrocinata da Constantino VII Porfirogenito', *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici, n.s.* 26 (1989), pp. 139–186; P. Odorico, 'Idéologie politique, production littéraire et patronage au Xème siècle: l'empereur Constantin VII et le synaxariste Évariste', *Medioevo Greco* 1 (2001), pp. 199–219; cited in: S. Efthymiadis, 'Hagiography from the 'Dark Age' to the age of Symeon Metaphrastes', [in:] S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, pp. 129–130.

[78] Delehaye, *Synaxarium of Constantinople*, 4 October, pp. 105–106.

[79] Ibidem, 15 December, pp. 310–312.

[80] Ibidem, 1 October, p. 98.

[81] Ibidem, 23 September, pp. 72–74; it is worth noting that the Synaxarium includes a number of new saints, most of whom were not killed by the Muslims. These include large numbers of Persian martyrs (see below, note 97) and many confessors from the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. Among the saints in this category whose *vitae* feature contact with Muslims: Peter the Venerable (feast: October 9; d. ca. 829–42; who suffered under 'Ishmaelite' raids in Anatolia), John bishop of Polybotos (feast: December 4; d. ca. 813–820; who punished Saracens for disturbing his relics), among others; I thank Nick Marinides for his help with these references. We observe much the same in lists of Syriac saints, in which it is difficult to find neomartyrs associated with Muslim rule, but relatively easy to find new non-martyr saints of the post-conquest period; for more, see various entries in: J. M. Fiey, with L. Conrad (ed.), *Saints Syriaques*, Princeton 2004.

[82] Basset, *Synaxarium of the Coptic Church*, vol. 2, p. 175/251; for general remarks on the neomartyrs in the Synaxarium: Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 367–369.

[83] Ibidem, vol. 3, pp. 797/831–798/832.

[84] Ibidem, vol. 4, pp. 203/845–205/847.

[85] Ibidem, vol. 5, pp. 578/1120–581/1123.

the slave of a high-ranking soldier in Cairo who refused her master's repeated entreaties to become a Muslim (d. 1270).[86]

Synaxaria are important documents for several reasons: through them, we can witness the creation of saints' cults in 'real time' – the process of transforming a dead Christian into a martyr. More specifically, synaxaria provide a unique vantage-point for understanding how medieval authors perceived the full sweep of salvation history, from the time of Jesus of Nazareth to the present. What emerges in all three calendars is a clear sense that the martyrs of the post-conquest age belonged in the company of recognized saints. They were the latest incarnation of a model of Christian piety that dated back to the foundation of the church, standard-bearers of a tradition left dormant by Constantine and the Christian emperors, but revived under the perceived tyranny of the Arabs.

Translation and rewriting of old texts

Neomartyrs are not the only way to track the emergence of a martyrological discourse. I would like to conclude by showing how we can witness the emergence of a new discourse among Christians through the translation and compilation of *vitae* of saints who lived long before the conquests.

Scholars of Coptic have noted that the great flowering of martyrological literature in that language took place *after* the Islamic conquests, not before.[87] Manuscripts containing martyrs' acts, for example, are exceptionally rare before the seventh century, but abound thereafter. Indeed, most of the martyrological cycles which describe the deeds of the early saints were not written within the century or two after they took place, but in the eighth century and beyond.[88] This is not to say that martyrologies were not written in Egypt prior to the conquests – far from it. Rather, it is that the conquests provoked the most intensive period of hagiographical production in the history of Christian Egypt – especially strange since the individuals commemorated in these works were not contemporaries of the authors, or even near contemporaries, but almost entirely victims of persecutions under the Romans.

There have been various explanations for this. In his famous 1972 study, *Martyr invictus*, Theofrid Baumstark contended that the texts manifested what he called the 'koptischer Konsens,' a latent spiritual and cultural mentality among the Copts that extended from the present back to pharaonic times.[89] This was Baumstark's way of explaining the striking similarity between themes and motifs in ancient Egyptian and

[86] Ibidem, vol. 5, pp. 754/1296–755/1297; for further discussion of martyrdom in Egypt in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: T. el-Leithy, 'Coptic culture and conversion in medieval Cairo, 1293–1524 A.D.', PhD disst., Princeton University 2005, pp. 126–131.

[87] For an introduction to Coptic hagiography, with special emphasis on the post-conquest period: A. Papaconstantinou, 'Hagiography in Coptic', [in:] S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, pp. 323–343.

[88] For the dating of Coptic martyrological cycles to the post-conquest period, see the summaries in: T. Orlandi, 'Cycle', [in:] A. Atiya (ed.), *Coptic Encyclopedia*, New York 1991; here: vol. 3, pp. 666–668; and T. Orlandi, 'Hagiography', vol. 4, pp. 1191–1197.

[89] T. Baumstark, *Martyr invictus: Der Martyrer als Sinnbild der Erlösung in der Legende und im Kult der frühen koptischen Kirche. Zur Kontinuität des ägyptischen Denkens,* Münster 1972.

Coptic literature, especially the dismemberment and reassembling of the martyr's body which, according to him, recycled elements of the old Osiris myth. Challenging this, Arietta Papaconstantinou has argued that the sudden interest in martyrs reflected a crisis of identity among Copts after the Islamic conquests, when the church was forced to redefine itself as the heir of 'primitive Christianity' against the claims of its Chalcedonian rivals.[90] In this light, the writing of martyrologies stressed the institutional and cultural continuity between the earliest Christians and the latter-day Copts.

Neither of these explanations suffice to explain why the flowering of martyrology took place in the eighth century and not earlier. Indeed, the Coptic Church had fallen on bad terms with the Chalcedonians long before the Arabs arrived. Rather, in my judgment, the sudden focus on martyrdom may reflect wider changes underway among Christian communities elsewhere in the early Islamic world.[91] For the first time in centuries, the Copts found themselves facing circumstances that – at least superficially – resembled the ones they had confronted in the first, second, and third centuries, when Christians suffered under the thumb of another pagan state, that of ancient Rome. Furthermore, like the pagan Romans, the Muslims offered Christians relief from their suffering – especially the despised *jizya* – by conversion to their 'godless' faith. Whatever freedoms the Copts enjoyed under the new Muslim power, Egyptian Christians saw in those early saints a version of themselves. It fed into the narrative we have examined above, namely, a desire to comprehend a radical present through the stories of a traditional past, and to encourage resistance to conversion by venerating past heroes who had resisted another 'pagan' enemy.

While the production of new hagiography was most apparent in Egypt, Christians in other parts of the Islamic world attempted to process their new circumstances using similar strategies. For example, there was a modest but important cluster of martyrologies translated from Greek into Arabic at the time.[92] Notable texts include the Martyrdom of the Forty Fathers of Mt. Sinai (d. late fourth century) and Rhaithou (d. ca. 491–518)[93] and the Martyrdom of Elian of Philadelphia (d. 290s),[94] along with biographies of confessors such as Stephen of Mar Saba (d. 794)[95] and Cyriacus (d. 557),[96] written originally by Cyril of Scythopolis. It is unclear why these texts were translated and others were not, especially the *acta* of the earliest, most famous martyrs. Still, we can

[90] A. Papaconstantinou, 'Historiography, hagiography, and the making of the Coptic "Church of the Martyrs" in early Islamic Egypt', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 60 (2006), pp. 65–86.

[91] In more recent work, Papaconstantinou has commented on the role of the Islamic milieu in shaping Coptic martyrologies; cf. 'Hagiography in Coptic', pp. 334–335, concurring with Orlandi (see above, note 87).

[92] For a helpful overview of Arabic hagiography, with special emphasis on its role as a 'catchment field' for texts written originally in other languages: M.N. Swanson, 'Arabic Hagiography', [in:] S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, pp. 345–367; for translation, specifically: pp. 348–350.

[93] Sinai Arabic 542, fols. 7v–15; cf. Binggeli, 'L'Hagiographie du Sinaï', pp. 169–170; Griffith, ' 'Abd al-Masīḥ', 341ff; for a description of the Sinai martyr tradition and dating of the martyrdoms: D.F. Caner (ed.), *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai; Including translations of Pseudo-Nilus' Narrations, Ammonius' Report on the Slaughter of the Monks of Sinai and Rhaithou, and Anastasius of Sinai's Tales of the Sinai Fathers*, Liverpool 2010, pp. 51–63.

[94] G. Garitte, 'La Passion de S. Élie de Philadelphie ('Amman)', *Analecta Bollandiana* 79 (1961), pp. 412–446.

[95] J.C. Lamoreaux (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas*, Louvain 1999; G. Garitte, 'Le début de la Vie de S. Étienne le Sabaite retrouvé en arabe au Sinaï', *Analecta Bollandiana* 77 (1959), pp. 332–369.

[96] G. Garitte, 'La version géorgienne de la *Vie de S. Cyriaque* par Cyrille de Scythopolis', *Le Muséon* 75 (1962), pp. 399–440.

broach an answer by identifying certain parallels between the circumstances of a saint's martyrdom and the conditions faced by Christians in the post-conquest period.

A good example is the Syriac life of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ of Sinjār, who died in 389, and whose *vita* is thought to have been written in the eighth century and later translated into Arabic.[97] It tells the story of a Jewish boy named Asher in Sasanian Mesopotamia, who every day took his small flock of sheep to a watering hole. There he would meet other young shepherds, some of whom were Christians, others of whom were Zoroastrians. The Christians eventually convinced Asher to convert, taking the name ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ('servant of Christ', Syriac *ʿAbdā da-Mshīḥā* / *ʿAbd Mshīḥā*; Greek *Christodoulos*) and pierced his right ear to mark the change.[98] Upon returning home, ʿAbd al-Masīḥ converted his mother, but his father discovered the boy's apostasy (partly by his new earring) and killed him.

For an Arabic-speaking Christian in the early Islamic period, the story might have conjured up memories of accounts of conversion from Christianity to Islam. Indeed, it was not uncommon to find families like ʿAbd al-Masīḥ's whose members were split between two religions.[99] What is more, we know that conversions to Islam often involved discarding distinguishing pieces of clothing, such as the *zunnār*, a belt which marked an individual as a Christian, much as ʿAbd al-Masīḥ had converted by piercing his ear.[100] Like the Jews and Christians of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ's time, violence between Muslims and Christians could erupt in the context of very mundane affairs, such as an

[97] The *vita* of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ is among the only Persian martyr acts that was translated from Syriac into Arabic, according to Brock's inventory; cf. *Holy Mar Maʿin with a Guide to the Persian Martyr Acts*, p. 82. For the Syriac original, cf. J. Corluy, 'Acta sancti Mar Abdu'l Masich aramaice et latine; edidit nunc primum ex cod. Londinensi (Addit. Mss. 12174)', *Analecta Bollandiana* 5 (1886), pp. 5–52; also: P. Bedjan (ed.), *Acta sanctorum et martyrum*, Paris 1890, vol. 1, pp. 173–201. For the Arabic translation, cf. P. Peeters, 'La passion arabe de S. ʿAbd al-Masiḥ', *Analecta Bollandiana* 44 (1926), pp. 270–341; the text comes from a sixteenth-century manuscript, though the dating of the original translation is unclear; a Georgian translation of the same text appeared in 873, and it seems likely that the Arabic translation happened around the same time (Peeters, p. 289). Peeters posits a late-eighth century date for the Syriac original (p. 289), though this dating does not seem to rest on firm ground in my opinion; Peeters does not offer evidence that would rule out a dating to before the coming of Islam.

[98] Corluy, 'Acta sancti Mar Abdu'l Masich', p. 14: 'Therefore, one of the children had in his ears two golden earrings. And thus, he said to his companions: 'You know that Jews do not pierce the ears of men, but if it is acceptable in your eyes, let's pierce the ear of our little brother ʿAbd al-Masīḥ to make sure he stays a Christian, and he cuts off all his illusion[s] of Judaism, and he becomes famous. So, let us place in his ear one of the earrings which [are in] my ears. And thus, let it be a pledge and an offering, and may he become strong in God. Let him become the one we place our trust in, because he is a Christian'. For the Arabic translation of this passage, see: Peeters, 'La version arabe', pp. 302–303.

[99] This is certainly the evidence from the lives of the neomartyrs, several of whom came from families split between Christianity and Islam, such as Bacchus-Ḍaḥḥāk, George-Muzāḥim, and several martyrs of Cordoba; for references, see above. For discussion of this theme in the life of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ and other martyrs of the Sasanian Empire, see: J. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq*, Berkeley 2006, pp. 237–239.

[100] Christians would often discard the *zunnār* (Greek, *zōnarion*) as a way of indicating their conversion to Islam; see the telling passage in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, p. 391; for commentary: A. Harrak, 'Christianity in the eyes of the Muslims of the Jazīrah at the end of the eighth century', *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995), pp. 337–356, here: pp. 342–343. The unintended removal of the *zunnār* is precisely what got the martyr Elias of Heliopolis into trouble with the Muslim authorities in Damascus; cf. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Elias of Heliopolis*, p. 46. Related to this, Levy-Rubin has argued recently that the *ghiyār* code of the early Islamic period, through which the state forced non-Muslims to wear distinguishing dress, was inherited from the practices of the Sasanian Empire. While interesting, this seems to be overstating the fact, as such practices existed in the

encounter between father and son. One suspects that the translator felt the *vita* had something useful to say to Christians of his own time, who faced a similar crisis of religious choice, encouraging them to remain steadfast in their faith, even in the face of persecution.[101]

Whatever the case may be, these examples demonstrate the manner in which martyrological writing remained hugely popular after the Islamic conquests. In particular, old saints could be repurposed for a world that knew the meaning of apostasy, torture, and death much like its forebears in ancient times.

Conclusions

We often imagine the early Islamic period as a time of exceptional change – social, political, religious – and indeed it was. Yet in our enthusiasm to find examples of innovation, we may overlook the essential conservatism of the moment, especially the ways in which communities across the Middle East relied on old-fashioned models to configure new understandings of the individual and the group. Nowhere is this more apparent than among the Christian churches of the caliphate, who turned increasingly to martyrdom (as both a practice and literary motif) to make sense of their place in the new cosmos of Islam. Specifically, by lionizing the martyrs, hagiographers endeavored to provide Christians with a model of sanctity rooted in resistance. This was a tradition that stretched back to Roman times, when instead of resisting conversion to Islam, Christians resisted conversion to paganism. It was not about creating new identities *per se*, but about shoring up existing identities, exalting the courageous Christian who stubbornly rejected the temptations of the world, and condemning the cowardly Christian who succumbed to them. In so doing, hagiographers stigmatized one of the gravest threats facing Christian communities in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries – apostasy and the flight to Islam.

That Christians would turn to the idea of martyrdom to do this may strike us as perfectly understandable. After all, churches across the centuries have raised up new generations of martyrs during periods of hardship as a way of shoring up their flocks and encouraging them to be steadfast in their faith – whether under Ottoman dominion in the Balkans or in the gulags of Soviet Russia. But to enter the world of Christianity in the post-conquest Middle East was to step into a brave new world facing very old circumstances. For the first time since the reign of the emperor Diocletian,

Byzantine world as well; cf. M. Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 88–98.

[101] A remarkably similar tale appears in the *Pratum spirituale* of John Moschos (d. 619), who describes a young Jewish boy who would pasture his family's sheep with the other Christian boys of the village. On one occasion, the boys held a pantomime Eucharist, during which they baptized the Jewish boy. Holy fire came down upon the altar and left the boys in a state of shock for three days. Upon returning to his senses, the Jewish boy explained to his father that he had converted to Christianity. The father flew into a rage, and according to a later retelling of the story – most certainly written after the Islamic conquests – he brought him to 'the magistrate of the area whom they call the emir.' Upon encountering the boy and learning of his conversion, the emir became angry and threw him into the furnace of the town bath. Miraculously, the boy was spared any harm. Here we see an example of a pre-Islamic quasi-martyrology that has been re-written with attention to the author's new Islamic environment: John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, J. Wortley (trans. and ed.), Kalamazoo 1992, pp. 205–210; I thank Nick Marinides for this reference.

many Christians came to imagine themselves as a persecuted minority.[102] As such, they turned to resources in their own tradition – long dormant, thanks to the beneficence of four hundred years of Christian rulers – that helped anchor themselves in the ideal of militant suffering.

Things could have been different. Christians did not have to turn to martyrdom as a notional anchor in the post-conquest period. Indeed, we see Christian authors of the late seventh and early eighth centuries experimenting with alternative forms of literature to help process their radical shift in fortunes. Among the most important of these were apocalypses, which imagined the arrival of Muslim rule as a portent of the endtimes, a fulfillment of prophecies contained in the Old Testament, especially the Book of Daniel.[103] Through these, we can catch that briefest of historical moments, a time of possibility when the looming threat of a final judgment gave a sense of coherence to a community in transition.

Of course, for Christians and Muslims alike, that apocalypse never came. Thus, by the middle of the eighth century, precisely when martyrological writing took off in earnest, Christians found themselves searching for new literary and historical models to make sense of their surroundings. Unlike apocalypses, martyrological literature modeled on the *acta* of the early Christian saints made no promises of eschatological deliverance. But it did lend logic, dignity, and purpose to a period of suffering Christians felt they had not faced on a mass scale since the turn of the fourth century.

[102] See above, note 33 for comment on 'martyrdom' arising in the context of intra-Christian violence.

[103] The arrival of Islam was thought to mark the death of the fourth and last kingdom in world history, that of Rome, following the scheme laid out in the Book of Daniel. This biblical blueprint is apparent in certain apocalyptic texts of the early Islamic period, such as the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, written in Syriac around 692, and in modified form in the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, also composed in Syriac near the city of Edessa. In the later eighth century, by which time apocalyptic expectations had cooled, it became popular to see Muslim suzerainty in the light of Old Testament narratives. According to this scheme, Christians of the Middle East were reliving the trials and tribulations of the people of Israel, a cyclical vision of history that stressed the church's role as the chosen people of God. This model is also evident in passages in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*. For general remarks on biblical narratives and Christian identity after the conquests, cf. Morony, 'History and identity', 1–9ff; for more on the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*: G.J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodsius*, 2 vols., Louvain 1993; for the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*: H.J.W. Drijvers, '*The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*: a Syriac apocalypse from the early Islamic Period', [in:] A. Cameron and L. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, vol. 1: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, Princeton 1992, pp. 189–213; for the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*: A. Harrak, '"Ah! The Assyrian is the rod of my hand!" Syriac views of history after the advent of Islam', [in:] J.J. van Ginkel, M.L. Murre – Van den Berg, and T.M. van Lint (eds.), *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Leuven 2005, pp. 45–65.