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Sacred Orientation: The Qibla As Ritual, Metaphor, And Identity Marker In Early Islam

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Abstract

Scholars of early Islam often take for granted the title of this study—that facing the qibla (i.e. the geographic direction of worship) is an important Islamic ritual and that Muḥammad's turn toward the Kaʿba after facing Jerusalem for prayer marked the identity of his nascent community. This postulate is rarely questioned, but the mechanisms by which the qibla expressed and inscribed a collective Islamic identity remain largely unexplored. Rather, study of Islam's sacred direction tends to focus on either historical reconstruction of Islamic origins or on the science of qibla-calculation. The former seeks to question or establish the location of the original qibla, while the latter examines the mathematics, astronomy, and cartography used to ascertain the direction of prayer with growing precision from around the Muslim oikumene. This dissertation probes, instead, the discursive and ritual processes through which qibla-rhetoric and qibla-practice fostered a sense of group belonging and marked boundaries between Islam and other religious communities (mainly Christians and Jews). Through four interlocking projects—spanning Islam's emergence in Late Antiquity through the Early Middle Ages—this study explicates the subtle ways in which the qibla served as a potent and durable symbol in the construction of Islamic collective identity.

Chapter 1 considers the Qurʿān's presentation of the qibla (Q Baqara 2:142-150) as part of the late antique discourse around liturgical orientation and group identity in the Near East. Chapter 2 explores the semantic usage of the term "People of the Qibla" (ahl al-qibla) to express a kind of "big-tent" view of Islamic community, and traces its earliest recorded usage to Iraq in the late Umayyad period. Chapter 3 studies scholarly (and often polemical discussions of abrogation (naskh) among Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the tenth century, where a change in the qibla became a metaphor for divine election of one people over others. The final chapter takes up the interpretive challenge of supposedly misaligned mosques and what they may tell us about the formative period of Islam. This study concludes by reflecting on the challenges of examining collective identity in premodern societies, and we propose three lenses for doing so that can benefit scholars of early Islam: namely, that we study identity as imagined, identity as a process, and identity as inexhaustible.

Subject Categories
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SACRED ORIENTATION: THE QIBLA AS RITUAL, METAPHOR, AND

IDENTITY-MARKER IN EARLY ISLAM

Ari Michael Gordon

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ARI M. GORDON

For Shu, who is my *qibla* and my compass

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"Ben Zoma used to say, 'Who is wise? One who learns from all people…Who is honorable? One who honors all.'" (Pirqei Avot 4:1)

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Finally, my completion of this dissertation is most attributable to Shuli. She has been my unflagging partner through the vicissitudes and dramas of the past years. She has taught me that often the best things in life require perseverance and that there is no fun quite as enjoyable as that which comes at the end of a full day's work. Shuli is my *qibla* and the compass that I use to find it—this achievement is hers, too.

ABSTRACT

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IDENTITY-MARKER IN EARLY ISLAM

Ari M. Gordon

Joseph E. Lowry

Scholars of early Islam often take for granted the title of this study—that facing the *qibla* (i.e. the geographic direction of worship) is an important Islamic ritual and that Muḥammad's turn toward the Kaʿba after facing Jerusalem for prayer marked the identity of his nascent community. This postulate is rarely questioned, but the mechanisms by which the *qibla* expressed and inscribed a collective Islamic identity remain largely unexplored. Rather, study of Islam's sacred direction tends to focus on either historical reconstruction of Islamic origins or on the science of *qibla*-calculation. The former seeks to question or establish the location of the original *qibla*, while the latter examines the mathematics, astronomy, and cartography used to ascertain the direction of prayer with growing precision from around the Muslim oikumene. This dissertation probes, instead, the discursive and ritual processes through which *qibla*-rhetoric and *qibla*-practice fostered a sense of group belonging and marked boundaries between Islam and other religious communities (mainly Christians and Jews). Through four interlocking projects—spanning Islam's emergence in Late Antiquity through the Early Middle Ages—this study explicates the subtle ways in which the *qibla* served as a potent and durable symbol in the construction of Islamic collective identity.

Chapter 1 considers the Qurʾān's presentation of the *qibla* (Q Baqara 2:142-150) as part of the late antique discourse around liturgical orientation and group identity in the Near East. Chapter 2 explores the semantic usage of the term "People of the *Qibla*" (*ahl al-qibla*) to express a kind of "big-tent" view of Islamic community, and traces its earliest recorded usage to Iraq in the late Umayyad period. Chapter 3 studies scholarly (and often polemical discussions of abrogation (*naskh*) among Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the tenth century, where a change in the *qibla* became a metaphor for divine election of one people over others. The final chapter takes up the interpretive challenge of supposedly misaligned mosques and what they may tell us about the formative period of Islam. This study concludes by reflecting on the challenges of examining collective identity in premodern societies, and we propose three lenses for doing so that can benefit scholars of early Islam: namely, that we study identity as imagined, identity as a process, and identity as inexhaustible.

Note on Transliteration

Arabic transliteration follows the system adopted by *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with modifications: "q" for "ḳ," and "j" for "dj." I have tried to keep transliteration of Hebrew and Aramaic terms and passages close to this system. Occasionally, the letter "s" appears after an Arabic word in the singular form to denote the plural: e.g. "*qibla*s."

Note on Qurʾān Citation

Verses from the Qurʾān are referred to using *sūra* (chapter) names in Arabic as well as numbers, although all definite articles are dropped from the Arabic. For example, the fifth chapter of the Qurʾān is called "*al-Māʾida*" ("the Table"), and its forty-eighth verse would be referred to as follows: Q *Māʾida* 5:48.

Note on Dates

In general the dating of major events and birth and death dates of important figures are given according to both the hijri (i.e. Islamic) calendar as well as the Julian/Gregorian, except when they preceded the advent of Islam.

Abbreviations

BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
EI2	*Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2ⁿᵈ Edition*
EQ	*Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IJMES	*International Journal of Middle East Studies*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
PAAJR	*Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*
ZGAIW	*Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften*
ZMDG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*

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Introduction

The *qibla*, or sacred direction of worship, first caught my attention in an Arabic reading

class that focused on one of al-Shāfiʿī's (d. 204/820) works on legal theory, *Ibṭāl al-*

Istiḥsān. His essay is an extended rebuttal against *istiḥsān*, an (in his view)

unconstrained and therefore unacceptable legal hermeneutical tool. By contrast, al-

Shāfiʿī argues for *ijtihād*, which restricts the scope of legal interpretation by requiring the

application of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) to revealed texts. Arguments in favor of

ijtihād as a valid form of legal interpretation appear throughout al-Shafiʿī's writings, and

in each case, he justifies the application of *ijtihād* and lays out its epistemological

principles with reference to the process of orientation towards the *qibla*.[1]

Al-Shāfiʿī reasons as follows: the Qurʾān requires that prayer be oriented towards

the Kaʿba in Mecca when it states, "From wherever you head out, turn your faces towards

the Sacred Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it" (Q Baqara 2:150).

This is easy enough to achieve for one within eyeshot of the Kaʿba, but the obligation

applies to all Muslims, regardless of their location. Thus, those at a distance from Mecca

must attempt to determine the proper direction of prayer using God-given signs such as

the position of the sun, stars, mountains, wind directions, etc., and this too has a qurʾānic

basis—"He made the stars as signs so that you might be guided by them" (Q Anʿām

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[1] See al-Shāfiʿī, *The Epistle on Legal Theory/* al-Risāla, ed. and trans. J. Lowry (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 16-17; See also references to the *qibla* as metaphor for *ijtihād* and *qiyās* in *Risāla*, 33, 69, 342-45, 348-51, 357. See also references in his *Kitāb Ibṭāl al-Istiḥsān* in *Kitāb al-Umm*, 11 Vols. (al-Manṣūrah, Egypt: Dār al-Wafāʾ, 2001), vol. 9, 71-2 & 78; and *Kitab Jimāʿ al-ʿIlm*, in idem., 15-17 & 41. An analytic discussion of al-Shāfiʿī's theory of *ijtihād* appears in Joseph E. Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risāla of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 142-63, and his treatment of the *qibla* metaphor appears at 145-48. See also, reference to the *qibla* metaphor in Ahmed El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 81-86. For a brief overview of Shāfiʿī's life and works see, Joseph E. Lowry, "Muhammad ibn Idris al-ShafiʿI (767-820)," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Arabic Literary Culture 500-925* eds. M. Cooperson and S. Toorawa (Detroit: Gale, 2005), 309-317. See also Kecia Ali, *Imam Shafiʿī: Scholars and Saint* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2011).

6:97).[2] For al-Shāfiʿī, the process of approximating the *qibla* constitutes both an instance

of legal interpretation (*ijtihād*) as well as the authority to apply it in other cases of Islamic

law. Just as God created indicia by which to establish the direction of prayer when it is

unknown, so too when the ruling in a particular case is not apparent one must derive it

from God-given sources, i.e. the Qurʾān and Sunna (practice of Muḥammad).

　　　　Al-Shāfiʿī references other examples, but each time he seeks to justify the practice

of *ijtihād* the *qibla* serves as his first and most fully elaborated paradigm. Al-Shāfiʿī

likely chose the *qibla* as his arch-metaphor for legal interpretation because the real

experience of orientation illustrated several other elements of his theory: there is only one

correct answer, the truth of one's determination is uncertain, and the results among

various practitioners may differ from one another. The fine details of legal hermeneutics

are beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, the repetition of this example makes

clear that facing towards the *qibla* is more than a precondition for valid worship. Rather,

the repeated ritual performance created a mental and bodily experience that could be used

to explicate the contours of other phenomena; it became an embodied metaphor.

　　　　This dissertation argues that in Islam's formative period the experience of

orientation towards a single center from distant parts of the Islamic world—i.e. facing the

qibla—became a similarly effective metaphor for expressing and inscribing collective

identity, or the experience of belonging to a single Islamic community.[3] Through four

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[2] He also cites Q Naḥl 16:16, [and he cast onto the earth] "signs. And they can guide themselves by the stars."

[3] "Identity" is an oft-used and rarely-defined term in contemporary scholarship in the humanities and social sciences today. A brief and helpful "state-of-the-field" appears in Martin Ehala, *Signs of Identity: The Anatomy of Belonging* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 16-41. In the final chapter of this study (pp. 208-25) I lay out my own working definition of collective identity and some guidelines for its study with regard to premodern Islam. In short, I argue that identity is most usefully seen as 1) an *imagined* sense of belonging among groups of people who may never meet and may be in several other ways quite diverse; 2) a *process*,

interlocking projects—spanning Islam's emergence in Late Antiquity through the Early

Middle Ages—this study explores the subtle (and overt) ways in which the *qibla* served

as a potent and durable symbol in the construction of Islamic collective identity. Each of

the four chapters (described in greater detail below) are, in some sense, discreet

philological studies: one pertains to a short passage in the Qurʾān (Q Baqara 2:142-150);

another to a curious turn of phrase ("*ahl al-qibla*"); a third to works on abrogation of the

law (*naskh*); and a fourth to early Islamic architecture. What binds them together,

however, is the *qibla* and our contention that although it was certainly not the only

symbol of Islamic communal affiliation, liturgical orientation was positioned uniquely as

a metaphor for identity.[4] But what do we mean by metaphor and how did the *qibla*

become a vehicle through which collective identity was expressed?

In their groundbreaking work *Metaphors We Live By*, the philosophers of

language George Lakoff and Mark Johnson demonstrate that metaphor is not merely an

amusing way of speaking or writing, but that it is a tool of human reasoning by which we

make sense of the world around us. Furthermore, they argue, our metaphorical reasoning

is shaped by our experiences of reality: both cultural and physical. For example, since

our bodies exist in space, "up" and "down" shape our conceptions of the world, as in the

following sentence: "although her productivity rose, her salary still fell below that of her

male colleagues." The productivity did not involve upward travel of any kind, nor did

her compensation move downward, but the change is conceived of with regard to

physical spatial orientation. In an example from culture they point out that Western post-

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meaning that it is performed in action and changes over time; and 3) *inexhaustible* in that it can never be fully described, recovered, or encompassed.

[4] Metaphor and identity are vague terms and both require further delineation. Metaphor is considered presently, while a brief word about identity appears as a "disclaimer" at the end of this introduction. See also n. 3, above.

industrialist capitalism has led many to conceive of time as a financial commodity that can be "spent," "saved," "budgeted," and "wasted." In the first example money is conceived in terms of space, and in the second it is time that is money. In each case, the experience of one kind of thing, spatiality or the accrual of capital, shapes the understanding of another.[5]

This dissertation is premised on the contention that the act of orientation towards a particular site for worship created the kind of experience that lent itself remarkably well to becoming an embodied metaphor for Islamic community. The process whereby some experiences enter the symbolic imagination of a society can be elusive. However, the *qibla* sits at the crossroad between three general areas that are significant in the development of socio-religious identity: 1) ritual performance, 2) sacred geography, and 3) interreligious encounter. Rituals are embodied, repeated, and structured acts through which an identity is expressed and inscribed; sacred geography and the manifold tools of its construction—built environments, narratives of sacred history, and, of course ritual— also foster a sense of belonging through the experience of place; and at points of interreligious encounter we can discern the self-definition of an "us" in contrast to a "them," with ritual as a primary tool for drawing symbolic boundaries. The *qibla* tapped into all three dimensions of identity-formation. Bodily orientation towards the Kaʿba 1) became a prerequisite for the performance of several ritual acts; 2) emplaced Mecca (and its sacred history) as the center of the Islamic oikumene; and 3) distinguished Islamic community by contrast with the *qibla*-practices of Jews, Christians and others. Ritual performance, sacred geography, and interreligious encounter set the background for this

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[5] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Time as money metaphors are treated at 7-9 and referenced throughout the work; metaphors of spatial orientation appear at 18-21.

dissertation, and account for the effectiveness of the *qibla* as metaphor for community.

Let us briefly consider the theoretical underpinnings of each of these three areas with

regard to the practice of facing the *qibla*.

Ritual Performance

In his work on social identity, the sociologist Richard Jenkins explores the processes

through which identities are constructed and expressed. Regarding the institution of

fixed behavioral forms—what in the study of religion we call ritual—he writes,

> Institutions are among the more important contexts within which identification
> becomes consequential. Institutions are established patterns of practice,
> recognized as such by actors, which have force as 'the way things are done.'
> Institutionalised identities are distinctive due to their particular combination of the
> individual and the collective.[6]

Jenkins recognizes that there is something potent about individuals performing

predetermined and repeated activities alongside others who are doing the same. In part

through those rituals, individuals express and reinforce their association with other

members of a collective who utilize and practice the same symbolic actions. This is not

to say that identity-formation is the goal of ritual; indeed, many religious actors would

say that the primary purpose is to execute a sacred duty in service of God's divine will.

However, acknowledging the social function of ritual allows us to highlight that when

individuals perform certain predetermined patterns of activity, they are participating in a

system of signs that demonstrates their identification with the group. Likewise, the

reproduction of those signs can reverberate inward and foster the experience of

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[6] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, fourth ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 47.

identification with the collective onto their very person.[7] Najam Haider recently argued

for "the potency of ritual practice in allocating identity" in the formation of distinct Shiʿī

communities in early Islamic Iraq.[8] This study assumes that ritual played a similarly

effective role for early Muslims in forming the sense of belonging to a unified Islamic

collective.[9] Specifically, orientation towards the Kaʿba for a variety of ritual practices

made the posture an ever-present experience in the lives of Muslims.

The legal obligation to pray towards the *qibla* traces back to the qurʾānic mandate

to "turn your faces towards the Masjid al-Ḥarām" (Q Baqara 2:144,149,150) and to the

prophetic practice of Muḥammad recorded in *ḥadīth*.[10] However, facing the *qibla* also

extended to a number of other daily ritual activities. For example, in addition to prayer,

some jurists recommended that Muslims orient their bodies for the ablutions preceding

prayer and that the muezzin turn toward the *qibla* for the call to prayer.[11] A ritual

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[7] On identity as a system of signs see Ehala, *Signs of Identity*. This is also akin to what ritual theorist Roy Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1979), 192, wrote about ritual, "A peculiarity of ritual communication […is that] the transmitter is always among the receivers […and that] the transmitter-receiver becomes fused with the message he is transmitting and receiving." Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), offers an important cautionary critique that scholars of religion not overread rituals and recognize both the power structures that often accompany rituals as well as the scholarship analyzing them.

[8] Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 215-30, quotation appears at 216.

[9] Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 403-419, suggests that rituals became "emblems of belonging" in the process of community-formation around Muḥammad and his message.

[10] All citations of *ḥadīth* from the six collections and the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal follow the standard numbering system that appears in the editions with English translation produced by Darusalaam publishers in Riyadh, and are cited as follows: Collection/Compiler Name (vol. #:page #, "Book name"), *ḥadīth* # . So, for example, the reference to Muḥammad's instruction to face the *qibla* appears in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (8:349, "*al-Aymān wal-Nudhūr*"), #6667. Other Arabic editions that were consulted in making my own translations of quoted *ḥadīth* appear in the bibliography of this dissertation.

[11] Facing the direction of prayer in ablution is recommended by some in the Shafiʿī school, see al-Khaṭīb al-Shirbīnī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj ilā Maʿrifat al-Maʿānī al-Minhāj*, 4 Vols., ed. M. Kh. ʿAytānī (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1997), vol. 1, 107. *al-Majmuʿ* 1:189. See also G.H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007)*, 667. On adhān towards the *qibla* see al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm*, vol. 2, 188; and Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim al-*Islām, 2 vols., ed. A.A.A. Fyzee (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1963) Vol. 1, 144; and translated in *Pillars of Islam*, 2 vols. trans. A.A.A. Fyzee and Ismail Poonawala (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), vol. 1, 181. References to this work will be annotated as *Daʿāʾim* vol. # Arabic p.# /English p.#. For example, the previous citations would appear as *Daʿāʾim,* vol. 1 144/181.

slaughterer was to manipulate the animal to face the *qibla* during the act, possibly

harking back to reports of Muhammad's practice of facing the Eid sacrifice towards the

Kaʿba.[12] Some jurists commend sacred orientation for recitation of Qurʾān, and one

pedagogical work even suggests that one face the Kaʿba during scholarly study, stating

that "a jurist masters the study of law [in part] through the blessing of turning in the

direction of the *qibla*."[13] By contrast, facing the *qibla* for certain mundane acts, such as

intercourse and the elimination of bodily waste was prohibited, demarcating those

behaviors as profane and honoring the Kaʿba by avoiding alignment with it.[14] The *qibla*,

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[12] *Daʿāʾim,* vol. 2 /174/156-7 and *Daʿāʾim,* vol. 2 179/162. The turning of the animal towards the *qibla* applies to *dhabḥ*, the traditional method of slaughter for birds, sheep and most other animals, which involves cutting the throat. For the *naḥr* method of slaughter, stabbing the pit of the breast between the collarbones while an animal is standing (used for camels and sometimes cows), the slaughterer also faced his own body towards the *qibla*; see Daʿāʾim vol. 2 180/162. Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, 4 vols. ed. M. Ṣ.Ḥ Ḥalāq (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymīya, 1994), vol. 2, 474; Translated in *Distinguished Jurist's Primer*. 2 Vols. I.A.Kh. Nyazee (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 1996), vol. 1, 541**,** knows of a variety of opinions that span from recommending this act to finding it obligatory. See also references in Beate Andelshauser, *Schlachten im Einklang mit der Scharia: Die Schlachtung von Tieren nach islamischem Recht im Lichte moderner Verhältnisse* (Freiburg: Pro Universitate, 1996), 78-79. On possible influence of this practice on one Jewish group's practice of ritual slaughter see *Ritual of Eldad Ha-Dani*, ed. M. Schloessinger (Leipzig: Rudolph Haupt Verlag, 1908), 74-75. The Islamic practice may be based on Muḥammad's facing animals for hajj sacrifice towards the *qibla*; see *Sunan Abū Dawūd* (3:377, "Ḍaḥāyā,"), #2795.
[13] On reading Qurʾān see Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), *al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 24 vols. ed. ʿA.ʿA.M. al-Turkī. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2006), vol. 1, 48. On study see Burhān al-Islām al-Zarnūjī (d. 620/1223, *Taʿlīm al-Mutaʿallim Ṭarīq al-Taʿallum*, (Khartoum: al-Dār al-Sūdānīya lil-Kutub, 2004), 77-78, translated as *Instruction of the Student: The Method of Learning*, trans. G. E. von Grunebaum and T. M. Abel (Chicago: Starlatch Press, 2001), 44-45. In this work, a group of theologians and jurists reach this conclusion after following two students' careers in study, one of whom successfully becomes a jurist and one who does not.
[14] The practice of turning away from the *qibla* for elimination of bodily waste is complicated and should be the subject of a dedicated study in the future. *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* (1:140-42, "Wuḍūʾ"), #144, 145, 148 & 149, offers conflicting reports about which parts of the body may not face the *qibla* and whether one may face towards Jerusalem. See many other references to similar reports from other collections in Juynboll, *Canonical Ḥadīth*, 91, 581, 684. The divergent reports were featured as examples in a number of works of legal theory treating conflicting *ḥadīth* with a variety of answers being offered. See, for example, al-Shāfiʿī, *Risāla*, 214-17; and Ibn Qutayba, *Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadīth*, ed. M.M. al-Aṣfar (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1999), 148-49. See also Ibn Bābawayhi, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, 4 vols., ed. Ḥ. al-Mūsawī al-Khuraṣāni (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīya, 1970-71),vol. 1, 195, #852. See also *Daʿāʾim*, vol. 1, 104/129; al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim* vol. 1 149-50/184-5, also knows of reports that bar the hanging of weapons or pictures on the *qibla* wall of a mosque. The Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot*, 61b-62a, includes a variety of opinions about whether one may face towards the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and A.J. Wensinck, "Die Enstehung der muslimischen Reinheitsgesetzgebung," *Der Islam* 5 (1914): 62-80, saw the practices as connected. While Wensinck assumed a greater degree of "influence" than is provable, many

then, became incorporated into the choreography of bodily gestures that shaped religious (and mundane) practices in daily life. It is not here claimed that the *qibla* became a prerequisite for every relevant ritual action, or that we can trace with historical accuracy the process by which it became a prerequisite for rituals other than prayer. However, facing towards (and in some instances away from) the *qibla* grew into such an engrained and regular ritual posture that it fused with the very notion of what it meant to live and die as a Muslim.

In fact, the practice of facing towards the Kaʿba in rites of death and burial offers another compelling example of the deep connection between orientation and identity. It is the general custom to bury Muslims on their right sides with faces towards the *qibla*, and some of the earliest Muslim graves, such as the recently discovered eighth-century burials in southern France, appear to demonstrate this practice.[15] The Umayyad-era poet,

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aspects of toilet practice and cleansing appear to be in common. Rachel Neis has begun to treat the material in Rabbinic literature as triggering sacred space and memory by inverse performance; see her "'Their Backs Toward the Temple, and their Faces toward the East:' The Temple and Toilet Practice in Rabbinic Palestine and Babylonia," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012): 328-68; and idem., "Directing the Heart: Corporeal Language and the Anatomy of Ritual Space," in *Placing Ancient Texts: The Ritual and Rhetorical Use of Space*, eds. M. Ahuvia and A. Kocar (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck) (forthcoming).

[15] In general on burial in the direction of the *qibla* see Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 188-91. On the graves in southern France see Y. Gleize, F. Mendisco, M-H. Pemonge, C. Hubert, A. Groppi, B. Houix, et al. "Early Medieval Muslim Graves in France: First Archaeological, Anthropological and Palaeogenomic Evidence." *PLoS ONE* 11:2 (2016). Available at: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0148583 (accessed, August 20, 2018). Amir Gorzalzcany, "The Kefar Saba Cemetary and Differences in Orientation of Late Islamic Burials from Israel/Palestine," *Levant* 39 (2007): 71-79, noticed that the variety of orientations displayed in some cemeteries may be accounted for by the changing azimuth of the sun's rising and setting between the equinoxes. More archeological research is required, as not all graves demonstrated this practice, and some variations may be the result of topographic or other spatial concerns, shifting in the soil over time, ignorance of the custom, or perhaps intentional dissent. See Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 190 and 321 n. 99. Andrew Petersen, "The Archeology of Death and Burial in the Islamic World," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archeology of Death and Burial*, eds. L.N. Stutz and S. Tarlow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 248-49 suggests that recalculations of the *qibla* over time (see more on recalculations in my chapter 4) may account for variations in grave orientation, as appears to be the case in Tell el-Hesi (near the modern Israeli city of Qiryat Gat). It may also have been the custom to orient the bodies of Muslims in the grave so as to align their head or feet with the *qibla*, rather than the face with the body turned on its side; see St. John Simpson, "Death and Burial in the Late Islamic Near East: Some

al-Farazdaq (d. 112/730) is another early witness to the institution. The poet describes the Kaʿba as "The House that from all directions/ are directed the faces of those in the graves," and in another verse the poet takes an oath at the Kaʿba as the place "towards which all graves face."[16] In some oral traditions, the practice extends at least as far back as the pre-Islamic prophets Daniel and Ṣāliḥ, whose graves were oriented in this way.[17] Some jurists also advised that the bodies of dying Muslims be turned towards Mecca so that they might depart this world while facing the *qibla*.[18] In fact, a number of narratives about the deaths of notable figures—including Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima, and the Caliphs ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and al-Maʾmūn—portray this practice.[19] The custom of facing the *qibla* for burial may attest to the experience of orientation as an Islamic institution even for those Muslims who did not regularly participate in organized ritual. In his study of Islamic funerary rituals, Leor Halevi describes the function of the *qibla* in death and burial practices as "Islamicizing" those events and promoting "a sense of belonging to a single community […] whose members, no matter where in the world they died, would all seem equal to one another—yet manifestly different from outsiders."[20]

Insights from Archeology and Ethnography," in *The Archeology of Death in the Ancient Near East*, eds. S Campbell and A. Green (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), 245.

[16] Hamām b. Ghālib al-Farazdaq, *Diwān* 2 vols, (Beirut: Dār Bayrūt lil-Ṭibāʿa wal-Nashr, 1984), 1:283, ln 10, "*huwa l-baytu lladhī min kulli wajhin/ ilayhi wujuhu aṣḥāb al-qubūr*" and 1:338, ln 10, "*wa-iyyāha yuwajjahu kullu qabrin.*"

[17] M.J. Kister, "Sanctity Joint and Divided: On Holy Places in Islamic Tradition," *JSAI* 20 (1996): 56-7.

[18] Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim,* 347/341; he also prescribes turning the adulterer, who was to be stoned, towards the *qibla* based on a report from the sixth Imām, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, see *Daʿāʾim* 450/450-51.

[19] The narrative of Muḥammad requesting that ʿAlī turn his body towards the *qibla* appears in al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, translated into English as *The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams*, trans. I.K.A. Howard (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1981), 129, see also 449 for the burial of the eighth Imām facing the *qibla*. The narrative of Fāṭima's death appears in Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā (Biographien Muhammeds)*, ed. E. Sachau (Leiden: Brill, 1904-40), 8:17-18. The narratives of ʿUmar II and al-Maʾmūn appear in al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk (Annales)*, Ed. MJ. de Goeje et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901), 2/1372 and 3/1137, respectively. Some jurists actually protested against the practice, claiming that it indicated that one who did not die in that way was somehow not Muslim; see references in Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 245, n.4.

[20] Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 189.

In his discussion of the values invoked in identity-formation, Martin Ehala points out that "unity is characteristic of all collective identities […] without at least some sense of unity, there is no collective identity."[21] He goes on to write that although members of the group may disagree about core values, the collective is premised on the fact that there is a sameness and that this sameness can be signaled through concrete gestures: e.g. displaying a flag to signal affiliation with one's country. To be certain, orienting one's body towards the Kaʿba does not comment on the righteousness or sectarian affiliation of the person performing the act.[22] It is, however, a gesture that indicates that one belongs to the people who place the Kaʿba at their ritual center. A fascinating example of the phenomenon of common affiliation despite differences appears in a *ḥadīth* addressing whether one can participate in prayers led by a sinful *imām* who delays the start of prayer times. One version recorded by Abū Dāʾūd (d. 275/889) goes as follows,

> Qabīṣa b. Waqqāṣ said that God's Emissary said: After me you will be ruled by leaders who will delay the prayer and it will be [a credit] to you and [the responsibility] will be upon them. So pray with them *so long as they pray facing the qibla*.[23]

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[21] Ehala*, Signs of Identity*, 100.

[22] Of course, in polemical literature one could question the legitimacy of a group with reference to faulty *qibla*-practices. Ibn Taymīya, *Kitāb Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawīya fī Naqḍ Kalām al-Shīʿa al-Qadarīya,* 9 vols., ed. M.R. Sālim (Riyadh: Jāmiʿat Muḥammad b. Suʿūd, 1986), vol. 1, 25, for example, included "facing slightly away from the *qibla*" (*tazūl ʿan al-qibla shayʾan*) in his list of ways in which the Rāfiḍa (read: Shīʿa) are like the Jews.

[23] *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* (1:269, "Ṣalāt,") #434 (emphasis added). See also Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr/al-kubrā*, 11 vols., ed. ʿA.M. ʿUmar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), vol. 9, 54; al-Bukhārī, *al-Taʾrīkh al-Kabīr*, 7 Vols, ed. Hāshim al-Nadwī (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al- ʿUthmānīya, 1941), vol. 7, 173, #781. See also reference to this belief among the Zaydīya, in Abū Muṭiʿ al-Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-Bidaʿ* ed. M. Bernand in "Le Kitāb al-radd ʿalā l-bidaʿ d'Abū Muṭiʿ Makhūl al-Nasafī" *Annales Islamologiques*, 16 (1980): 89. The imam's facing the *qibla* as a minimal prerequisite for joining communal prayer became a fundamental matter of Ḥanafī theology; see Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī, *The Creed of Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī: al-ʿAqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah*, ed. and trans. H. Yusuf (Berkeley, CA: Zaytuna Institute, 2007), 68-69, #88; and Abū Ḥanīfa, *al-ʿĀlim wal-Mutaʿallim Riwāyat Abī Muqātil ʿan Abī Ḥanīfa, wa-yalīhi Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā ʿUthmān al-Battī thumma al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ riwāyat Abī al-Muṭiʿ ʿan Abī Ḥanīfa*, ed. M. Z. Kawtharī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Anwār, 1949), 22.

In a recent study of other versions of this *ḥadīth*, Stijn Aerts believed that the report

gained traction in response to those who, in protest against the ruling Umayyads, wished

to rebel and invalidate the prayers and mosques of the ruling elite.[24] In these accounts,

Muḥammad advises a quietist approach to communal divisions. In the version just cited,

outward orientation towards the *qibla* is a sufficient sign of identification to allow one to

overlook an individual's or group's other shortcomings. The symbolic power of this

ritual gesture is the likely reason that the *qibla* became emblematic of an inclusive vision

of Islamic community, as demonstrated by the study of the semantic usage of the phrase,

"People of the *Qibla*" in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. That inquiry uncovered that it

was not uncommon to treat political adversaries, sectarians, and sinners as Muslim as

long as they shared the Islamic *qibla*.

Johnson and Lakoff assert that "ritual forms an indispensable part of the

experiential basis for our cultural metaphorical systems. There can be no culture without

ritual."[25] The regular practice of facing the *qibla* for prayer and a number of other

activities meant that it entered the cultural repertoire of religious experiences that could

take on broader symbolic applications. However, the act of orientation towards a site is

merely a bodily performance, and one that does not obviously disclose its meaning.

Since our earliest sources most often simply mandate facing the *qibla* rather than

explicate its symbolism, the activity may carry any number of meanings that relate to the

Kaʿba's sacrality and ritual cult, the sacred history and narratives associated site, its

special spiritual qualities, or the God who identifies it as the focus of worship. Rituals

need not have a specific meaning, but remain open to modification and change from

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[24] See Stijn Aerts, "Pray with Your Leader": A Proto-Sunni Quietist Tradition," *JAOS* 136:1 (2016), 29-45.
[25] *Metaphors we Live By*, 234.

epoch to epoch and from individual to individual.[26] Chapter 1 of this dissertation

considers the description of the *qibla* in the Qurʾān and religions of Late Antiquity and

suggests one way for modern scholarship to probe the meaning imputed to ritual in

premodern times by exploring 1) the authority for its practice, 2) the sacred history it may

evoke, 3) the function that its performace serves, as portrayed in the relevant texts, and

especially 4) its role in constructing identity. These lenses were developed to suit the

study of liturgical orientation in Late Antiquity, but they may prove useful to scholars

studying ritual in other contexts as well. In any case, the significance of the *qibla* in the

formation of Islamic collective identity cannot be divorced from its role as a gesture

towards Islam's sacred geography, which placed the Kaʿba at the center of the universe.

Sacred Geography

The historian of religion, J.Z. Smith, wrote that "Ritual is first and foremost a

mode of paying attention"—as such, rituals are scripted performances that differentiate

mundane activities from their sacred counterparts.[27] So, for example, a sacrificial meal is

distinguished from the many thousands of meals one consumes in a lifetime, through

mandated patterns of behavior that mark it as a sacred rite and through its occurrence in a

special setting, causing one to "pay attention" to the action. Smith wrote a great deal

about place and the way that sanctified space directs attention in this way. Much of his

work exhibits the transportability of spatial sanctity that emerged in the late antique

Mediterranean milieu, as the importance of central temples became reduced with the

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[26] Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 178-223 and esp. 215-18, shows that ritual mastery can be form of empowerment that allows individuals to subvert a ritual's traditional meaning and replace it with other meanings.
[27] Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 103. For Smith, the term "sacred" is not intended to mean a metaphysical substance of which ritual is an expression or to which it responds, "rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual." (105)

fading of animal sacrifice there. The representations of temple-like rituals in other places (and in time), however, came to "re-place" and "dis-place" the sanctity that was experienced in the ancient cults of worship. When it came to space, then, sanctity became fungible and ambulatory. To my knowledge, Smith did not discuss the act of liturgical orientation, and it is a ritual of spatial consequence that requires interpretation.[28]

Smith identified places as "loci of meaning," sites that take on special significance through human engagement.[29] Any location can, in theory, become sacred, but in the Islamic religious imagination Mecca took on special status as the center of the earth, the birthplace of God's final prophet, and the target of sacred direction.[30] At first glance, the obligation to pray towards the *qibla* implies a bowing of periphery to the epicenter—a locative view in which the Kaʿba as center is privileged over the territorial margins. Indeed, it may be that in terms of sacred geography, the Ka'ba in Mecca has a larger "sacred footprint" than many other locations around the Islamicate world. Ritual and narrative—such as the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the narratives about Muḥammad's activities there, lore about the Kaʿba as omphalos, and traditions identifying it as the site of many biblical events—created an unparalleled "virtual

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[28] The corpus of Smith's work is vast, but on ritual and space see for example, *To Take Place;* "The Wobbling Pivot" in *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 88-103; "Earth and Gods," in idem., 104-28; and Constructing a Small Place," in eds. B.Z. Kedar and R.J.Z. Werblowsky, *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land: Proceedings of the International Conference in Memory of Joshua Prawer* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 18-31.

[29] Of course, on this view Smith (as well as this author) is explicitly at odds with Mircea Eliade's view that the sacrality is transcendent and somehow breaks into homogenous space only through hierophany or theophany at a central location, and renders all other spaces as profane, except inasmuch as the sacred flows from the center; see *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: Harvest Books, 1957), 20-65. Rather, when we view sacrality as the result of human engagement with space, we can appreciate that 'the holy' may be experienced in any number of locations and for a variety of reasons.

[30] References to works on the lore about Mecca appears below n. 135 & 149.

sacrality."[31] And yet, the ability to conjure that center from wherever one prayed,

slaughtered, or buried the dead, allowed for the performance of sacred geography in even

the most distant locations. The relationship was synergistic: through alignment with the

Kaʿba, one could convey the sacrality associated with the center to any location in the

world. At the same time, the multitude of individual acts of orientation towards the *qibla*

from across vast expanses of territory sustained its position as sanctified space.

The interdependence of the center and periphery is perhaps best seen in the many

world-maps organized *qibla*-wise, which became popular in medieval Islamic learned

and aesthetic cultures. These cartographic images depict a world divided into regions and

organized—often in a circle—around the Kaʿba. Some of them even divide each

individual region with images of a *miḥrāb*, the customary prayer niche in a mosque that

marks the direction of prayer, perhaps indicating that the maps were used to facilitate

proper orientation towards the *qibla*.[32] Of course the Kaʿba lies at the center of these

maps, but without the many surrounding territories, it remains a diagram in a vacuum; the

Kaʿba's centrality (and to some extent, its sacrality) is situated by means of the individual

locations that circumscribe it. The significance of *miḥrāb*s, mosques, and maps in the

formation of Islamic sacred geography is treated in depth in chapter 4 of this study. For

now, we can note that the orientation of bodies from across the Muslim world towards the

qibla caused the actors to "pay attention" to the rituals being performed in a way that

directed attention towards the Kaʿba in Mecca. In that sense, the *qibla* transformed

gestures performed locally into rituals that connected one with Islam, globally.

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[31] On the term "Virtual Sacrality" to describe the construction of sanctity through narrative see Paul M. Cobb, "Virtual Sacrality: Making Muslim Syria Sacred before the Crusades." *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue*, 8:1 (2002): 35-55.

[32] See more on *qibla*-maps in general and their possible utility below pp. 238-41.

Annemarie Schimmel suggested something similar when she wrote, "The one direction of prayer around which the people of the world are placed, as it were, in concentric circles has been and still is the most visible sign of the unity of the Muslims; it is, so to speak, the spatialization of their belief in one, and only one, God."[33]

In his *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi Fu Tuan, a herald of the spatial turn in the humanities, probed the experience of spatiality that living as a human with a body entails. He offered a fundamental distinction between 'space' and 'place' as follows:

> 'Space' is more abstract than 'place.' What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value […] From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in the movement makes it possible for location be transformed into place.[34]

In the first century after Muḥammad's death, Muslims came to inhabit a wide expanse of space, stretching from Spain and Morocco in the west to India in the east, from Uzbekistan and Georgia in the north to the southern tip of Yemen in the south. In the decades of expansion the cultural landscape of the Islamic world was ethnically and religiously diverse, and Muslims were likely a religious minority in many areas for the first centuries.[35] Eventually, an Islamic scholarly "discourse of place" would emerge, in

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[33] "Sacred Geography in Islam," in *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. J. Scott and P. Simpson-Housley, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) 164.

[34] Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

[35] The exact progression of the change in these areas to Muslim-majorities is difficult to retrieve from our sources. Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), attempted to do so using the record of names of inhabitants in a variety of locations to trace the patterns of conversion to Islam in the formative period. Albrecht Noth, "Problems of differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims: re-reading the 'Ordinances of ʿUmar' (Al-Shurūṭ al-ʿUmariyya)," in *Muslims and Others in Early Islamic Society, ed.* R. Hoyland (Aldershot:

which pride in one's homeland was expressed alongside affiliation with nearby cities and wider regions.[36] The narratives of conquest, the founding of cities, the building of local mosques, as well as the adoption and adaptation of pre-Islamic sacred sites all contributed to the construction of an Islamic sense of *place* within geographically sprawling and culturally diffuse *spaces*. However, orientation towards the *qibla* was a unique kind of place-making activity. Through bodily reference to the epicenter of all places, Muslims performed identification with the collective when- and wherever they aligned with Mecca for worship. In so doing they created the "pauses in space" that could transform any location into a sacred place.[37]

To be sure, an Islamic sacred geography mapped onto the oikumene and included sacred centers outside of Mecca—such as Jerusalem and Medina—as well as local shrines, martyr's graves, and sites from biblical and early Islamic sacred history.[38] Furthermore, Muslims who were able to undertake the journey to Mecca (for *ḥajj*, *ʿumra*, or some other purpose) could experience the Kaʿba first hand, and oral reports about the Prophet's biography and practice spread, further connecting Muslims to the history of the sacred center. However, Muslims living far from Mecca (or any sacred site) could plug into the whole network of sacred geography through liturgical orientation towards the

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Ashgate Variorum, 2004), 103-24, read the so-called "Pact of ʿUmar" as indicative of a context of a Muslim minority seeking to safeguard their culture and community from assimilation.

[36] On the emergence of an active "discourse of place" in the ʿAbbāsid period, see Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: the Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012).

[37] The interweaving of collective identity and ritual acts of "spatialisation" was recognized by Nick Hopkins and John Dixon, "Space, Place, and Identity: Issues for Political Psychology." *Political Psychology* 27:2 (2004): 176, "Researchers interested in space and place make the point that many social identities incorporate a spatial dimension. Most obviously, national identities are typically spatialised (such that it becomes possible to speak of the "national homeland") and reproduced through boundary-making practices. So too, religious identities frequently involve the sacralisation of space and are reproduced through a series of spatialised practices involving rituals of pilgrimage and purification. A simple, but key, insight in recent research is that our social identities constitute the interpretative frameworks through which space is transformed into meaningful place."

[38] Reference to a recent scholarship the topic of sacred space/place in early Islam appears below at n. 496.

center. The practice of facing the *qibla* during daily liturgy and life cycle events implied

that the Ka'ba in Mecca was the quintessential demonstration of the sacredness of place,

if not its very source.

Interreligious Encounter

The narrative of the change in *qibla* highlights the way in which sacred geography

and sacred history converge in the ritual act of liturgical orientation.[39] It is reported that

Muḥammad had been facing Jerusalem for some amount of time in Medina when God

revealed that the Masjid al-Ḥarām would become the new site towards which to direct

prayers. Mecca became the new *qibla* and emerged as the center of Islam's sacred

geography, even as Jerusalem remained venerated as "*ūlā al-qiblatayn*" ("the First of the

Two *Qibla*s"), the subject of much of its own sacred lore, and a site of spiritual

visitation.[40] The account of Muḥammad's change in *qibla* served as the authority upon

which the ritual was based and also imbued the practice with meaning and memory.

Along with the oblique reference to the change in the Qurʾān, several versions of the

narrative appear in biographies of the Prophet, Qurʾān commentaries, law books,

histories, works of *faḍāʾil* (praise literature), geography, and in many other genres. Each

time the story was written, recited, or heard it reinforced Islamic sacred geography by

invoking Mecca (and Jerusalem) as part of collective communal memory.

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[39] Angelika Neuwirth, "Jerusalem and the Genesis of Islamic Scripture," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,* ed. L. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), 315-25, offers an alluring theory of how the *qibla* exhibits the interweaving of communal memory, sacred geography, and identity-formation.

[40] The title "First of the Two *Qibla*s" goes back at least as far as Saladin's reconquest of Jerusalem; see Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān wa-Anbāʾ abnāʾ al-Zamān*, 8 vols., ed. I. ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1972), vol. 4, 232. As a site of visitation see the eleventh-century pilgrimage itinerary of Ibn Murajjā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis wal-Shām wal-Khalīl* ed. O. Livne-Kafri (Shafram: al-Mashrik, 1995), described in Amikam Elad, "Pilgrims and Pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the Early Muslim Period," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,* ed. L. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), 300-14. On Islamic views of Jerusalem in general see n. 136 below.

Accounts of the change in *qibla*, however, are not merely cultural resources in the construction of spatial sanctity. They also point to another significant element through which the *qibla* came to signify collective identity: the marking of symbolic boundaries between Islam and other religious groups. In most narratives of Muḥammad's adopting the Kaʿba as his *qibla* the change garnered a critical reaction from a group of non-Muslims. Many versions serve to elaborate a contentious encounter alluded to in the Qurʾān—"The fools among the people will say, 'what has turned them from the *qibla* that they used to observe?" (Q Baqara 2:142)—and identify the accusers as a group of Medinan Jews protesting the abandonment of the Jerusalem *qibla*. A typical retelling goes as follows:

> When God's Emissary emigrated to Medina, which was mostly populated by Jews, God commanded him to orient himself [in prayer] towards Jerusalem (*bayt al-maqdis*). And the Jews rejoiced at that (*fa-faraḥat al-yahūd*). And God's Emissary faced towards it for almost ten months. But God's Emissary loved the *qibla* of Abraham [i.e. the Kaʿba] and used to supplicate and look to the heavens [on this matter]. And so God sent down [the verse] "We have seen you turning about your face in the heavens, so we will turn you towards a *qibla* that pleases you. So turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque, etc." (Q Baqara 2:144). And the Jews had misgivings (*fa-irtāba min dhālika al-yahūd*) and they said, "What has turned them away from the *qibla* they used to observe" (v. 142) and God sent down "Say: To God belongs the East and the west…" (v. 144 or 115).[41]

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[41] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āya al-Qurʾān*, 26 vols., ed. A. al-Turkī (Cairo, 2001), vol. 2, 623 (and 450). Al-Ṭabarī knows of several versions of the story. See also Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr* 5 vols., ed. ʿA A. M. Shaḥāta (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Taʾrikh al-ʿArabi, 2002), vol. 2, 143-44, who has some elaborate details about the names of the Jews and an extended dialogue. Another prominent account appears in *al-Sīra al-Nabawīya li-Ibn Hishām*, ed. M. al-Saqqā, 4 vols. in 1 (Cairo, 1936), 551 and translated into English as *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*. A. Guillaume trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 258-59. Of course, the narrative appears in books of law, such as *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* (1:74, "Īmān"), #40 and Ibn Bābawayhī, *Man Lā Yaḥduruhu*, vol. 1, 178-79, #843; and histories, such al al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriīkh*, 1279-81 and Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt* (Sachau), vol. 2, 3-4. The story is also recorded in literature that features both Jerusalem and Mecca, such as al-Wāsiṭī, *Faḍāʾil al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, ed. I. Hasson (Jerualem: Magnes Press, 1979), 50, #76. In some versions of the story the "fools" who accuse Muḥammad are the pagans of Mecca, and in some cases they are the hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*). A number of versions of the account of the change in Muḥammad's *qibla* exist, and it is hoped that critical engagement with regard to their chronological and geographic context as well as literary variations will be the subject of a future study.

The ubiquity of this type of portrayal in the literary record of Islamic origins led several western scholars to label the event as Muḥammad's "break with the Jews," and to see it as a sign of the parting of ways between the two communities.[42] While there is no compelling reason to see Muḥammad's facing Jerusalem as a sign that he identified as part of a Jewish collective, from which turning towards Mecca constituted a censorious rejection, the symbolism of the narrative is telling. In the collective memory of early Islam the *qibla* marked a clear distinction between Muḥammad's practice, and that of others.

In (what this study refers to as) the Qurʾān's "*qibla* passage" (Q Baqara 2:142-50), Muḥammad's prayer direction is distinguished from that of "those who were given Scripture," i.e. Jews and Christians, who would not follow Muḥammad's orientation even if "they were given every sign" (v. 145).[43] Muḥammad is told, likewise, "Nor are you a follower of their *qibla*, nor do they follow one another's *qibla*s" (v. 145). The Prophet's *qibla* also marks his people as "central," "moderate," or "just" (*ummatan wasaṭan*), and separates "those who follow [God's] Emissary from those who turn away on their heels" (v. 143). Chapter 1 of this study explores this passage in depth and compares it with the textual record regarding the practices of liturgical orientation among Jews, Christians, and other religious cultures of the late antique Near East. In fact, the choice of Rabbinic Jews to mandate Jerusalem as the direction of prayer in the wake of the Temple's

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[42] Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qurʾān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 12; see many more references in n. 62 below. But note that the narrative need not be read as a break with Jews; in fact Fazlur Rahman, "Pre-Foundations of the Muslim Community" *Studia Islamica* 43 (1976), 5-24 vehemently protests the concept of a "break with the Jews," and reads the change in *qibla* as irrelevant to Muḥammad's relationship with the Jews of Medina, see pp. 6 and 22-24.

[43] al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 668-669 and Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 147 know of early reports that this verse refers to the Jews, who pray west towards Bayt al-Maqdis (i.e. Jerusalem) and the Christians who pray east.

destruction and that of early Christians to face East became one sign of the parting of ways between their communities. The Qurʾān, it is argued, communicated in the ritual idiom of the Near East at the time, in which sacred direction became an embodied metaphor for communal identity and interreligious difference. Chapter 3 demonstrates the durability of the *qibla* as a symbol for interreligious distinction in the context of tenth-century interreligious polemical literature.

It is perhaps, then, unsurprising that facing towards the Islamic *qibla* also became a way for one to cross interreligious boundaries to become a Muslim. A *ḥadīth* report that begins with Muḥammad saying, "I have been commanded to fight the people until…" helped to define who had rights and responsibilities as part of the Islamic collective, and appears in several different versions. The most minimalist accounts simply require the first *shahāda* (testimony of faith), "There is no God but God," while others include the double *shahāda*, adding, "And Muḥammad is the Emissary of God."[44] Later jurists understood these speech acts as guaranteeing the legal protections granted to all monotheists, but one still had to pay the *jizya* as a non-Muslim.[45] Another included the testimonies of faith but added the actions of "praying our prayers and offering *zakāt*

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[44] Examples of the *ḥadīth* with the first *shahāda* only include, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 12 vols., ed. Ḥ.R. al-ʿAẓamī (Beirut: al-Kutub al-Islāmī, 1983), #10020-21; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 16 vols., (Maktabat al-Rushd, 2004), #33643 #33646-48, #33650-2, #33657; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (1:116-8, "Īmān"), #33&35; *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī* (5:15, "Īmān"), #2606; *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* (3:276, "Jihād"), #2640; *Sunan al-Nasāʾī* (5:21-3, "Muḥāraba"), #3981-86; *Sunan Ibn Mājāh* (1:163-65, "Fitan"), #3929-3930 ; al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm*, vol. 5, 399, #1914, idem., 573, #2010, idem., 584-85, #2027 &2031 al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ Maʿānī al-Athār*, 5 Vols. eds. M.Z. al-Najjār and M. al-Ḥaqq (Beirut: ʿĀlim al-Kutub, 1994), #5115, 5117, 5129; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 14, 582-83 on Q Isrāʾ 17:33, vol. 21:308-9 on Q Fatḥ 48:26, vol. 21, 492 on Q Ḥujurāt 49:14 & vol. 24, 342 on Q Ghāshīya 88:21-22; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Madinat al-Salām*, 17 vols., ed. R. Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), vol. 10, 429 & vol. 14, 108. al-Ḥākim al-Nishābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, 5 vols., ed. M.ʿA.Q. al-ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 2002), #3926; and examples of those with the double *shahāda* include, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (1:117, "Īmān"), #34 *Sunan al-Nasāʾī* (5:23-4, "Muḥāraba"), #3987; al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ Maʿānī*, #5123. A first attempt to discuss the various *ḥadīth*s in the context of the development of the "Pillars of Islam" was made by Arent Jan Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1932), 17-36; a full study is required.

[45] See reference to al-Ṭaḥāwī below pp. 22-23.

(alms-tax)" as necessary minimal requirements for group membership.[46] Abū Hurayra is often the companion in whose name the above-mentioned prophetic reports are transmitted. However, a fascinating and widespread version that comes from the companion Anas b. Malik and that appears in several *ḥadīth* collections runs as follows:

> God's Emissary said: I have been commanded to fight the people (*al-nās*) until they bear witness that there is no God but God and that Muḥammad is the Emissary of God. And if they bear witness, and face our *qibla* (*wastaqbalū qiblatanā*) and eat of our slaughtered animals, and pray our prayer, then we are prohibited from shedding their blood and taking their property, except by due right. They will have rights to whatever the Muslims have and the obligations of the Muslims shall be upon them.[47]

A similar set of qualifications appears in some military and administrative letters—preserved in medieval histories—sent by Muḥammad or his generals to the people of Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria, offering them terms of truce and the opportunity to become Muslim. One representative example will suffice:

> God's Emissary wrote to the People of Yemen [as follows] "whoever prays as we pray, and faces our *qibla*, and eats from what we slaughter, he is a Muslim and he

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[46] Examples include, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (1:116-18, "Īmān"), #32&36; *Sunan al-Nasāʾī* (5:16-17, "Muḥārba"), #3974; *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī* (5:16, 18, "Īmān"), #2607 and 2609, which includes *Ramaḍān* and hajj as well; *Sunan Ibn Majāh* (1:123-4, "Sunna"), #71-72; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, #10022; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, #29426, #33656, #38051; al-Nishābūrī, *al-Mustadrak*, #1427-8. This version took on special significance during the *ridda* wars, when Abū Bakr had to confront groups who confirmed their devotion to the religious practices of Islam, but refused to pay *zakāt* to the political authorities. Some versions are explicit in this regard, framing the *ḥadīth* as a conversation between Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. See M.J. Kister, "…*Illā Bi-Ḥaqqihi*…A Study of an Early Ḥadīth," *JSAI* 5 (1984): 33-52.

[47] *Musnad Aḥmad*, #13056; this report and a few variations appear in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (1:259-60, "Ṣalāt"), #391-93; *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī* (5:17, "Īmān"), 2608; *Sunan Abū Dāwud* (3:277, "Jihād"), #2641; *Sunan al-Nasāʾī* (5:16, "Muḥārba"), #3973; (6:25, "Īmān"), #5000, al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 12 vols.,Sh. al-Arnāʾūṭ, (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2001), vol. 3, 409, #3414-16; al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ Maʿānī,* #5128; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 11 vols. ed. M.ʿA.Q. al-ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 2002), #2198-9; ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak, *Musnad*, ed. S.B. al-Samarrāʾī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1987), #240. al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 12, 237; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyāʾ wa-Tabaqāt al-Aṣfiyāʾ*, 11 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1996), vol. 8, 173; Al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan*, 6 vols. ed. Sh. al-Arnāʾūṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2004), #893-96; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 18 vols., ed. Sh. al-Arnāʾūṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1988), vol. 13, 215-16; Ibn Mandah, *Kitāb al-Īmān*, 2 vols., ed. ʿA. al-Faqīhī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1985), #195.

has the protection of God (*dhimmat Allāh*) and the protection of his Emissary.
And whoever rejects it (*fa-man abā*) is responsible [for paying] the *jizya*.[48]

These letters offer the *jizya* as a viable alternative to conversion, but for those who wished to become Muslim, turning towards the Islamic *qibla* was a prerequisite. Interestingly, records of an eighth-century conversion of a Christian deacon in Edessa may even attest to the realia of turning to the *qibla* as part of conversion ceremonies.[49]

The categorization, conversion, and boundary-crossing implied by all the versions mentioned above carry the potential to illuminate the process of Islamic identity-formation, and may even suggest that it occurred in a variety of context-specific ways. A historical-critical study is called for, but for the purposes of our present topic, the reports that included "facing our *qibla*" as a performed action to enter the Islamic community are telling.[50] The mere profession of faith was insufficient to declare one's affiliation with Islam; it required a demonstrative behavior that was a) visible, b) practiced with one's whole body, and c) a sign to distinguish Muslims from adherents of other religious

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[48] Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān* (Liber Expugnationis Regionum), ed. M.J. De Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1866), 69; and translated as *The Origins of the Islamic State*, 2 Vols., trans. by P. Kh. Ḥitti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), 106. See also *Futūḥ,* (De Goeje), 80-81/ (Hitti),123; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1/1600; Al-Azdī, *Futūḥ al-Shām,* ed. ʿA.M.ʿA. ʾAmīr (Cairo: Muʾassasat Sijil al-ʿArab, 1970), 117–18. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf,* #33175; Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, #52&129; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr*, 25 vols., ed. ʿA.M. al-Salifi (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymīya), #10291; al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-Zawāʾid wa-Manbaʿ al-Fawāʾid*, 10 vols., (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabīya, 1982); al-Malaṭī, *Kitab al-Tanbīh wal-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Ahwāʾ wal-Bidaʿ*, ed. M.Z.M ʿAzab (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1992), 109.

[49] After denying Christian beliefs and professing Islamic ones, he was forced to pray "southward," after which point a dove flew from his mouth, symbolizing the loss of his soul. See Chronicon anonymous pseudo-Dionysianum, II, ed. J.B. Chabot (Paris, 1933, CSCO 104 Scr. Syri 53) 389-92, 385. It is possible, however, that the Christian chronicler portrayed the conversion to Islam to reflect Christian conversion ceremony, which according to Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 19 and Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries* 2:7, involved renouncing Satan while facing west and turning toward Christ represented by east.

[50] The fact that there are versions with ritual prescriptions, some with Prayer and Zakāt (Ibn Saʿad) and some with *qibla* and slaughter, some with only the *shahāda* (e.g. Ibn Abī Shayba) may imply the developmental growth of the *ḥadīth* or it may imply different contexts. Those that hinge only on belief that there is no God but God may imply a pagan context, while those with *zakāt* may be about the *Ridda* wars. Those with prayer, slaughter, and *qibla* imply an interreligious context. Yohanan Friedmann *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 98-100, references al-ʿAynī who proposed a scheme for organizing the various reports using *naskh*.

groups. The tenth-century jurist and scholar al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933) suggests that by profession of faith in God's oneness, a person merely enters the status of the People of the Book. By affirming that Muḥammad is God's emissary "it becomes known that they have left Judaism, but their entrance to Islam is [still] not known, since it is possible that they adopt the position of those who say "Muḥammad is God's Emissary, but only to the Arabs."[51] For "it is established that Islam comes only by means of expressions that indicate entrance into Islam and the rejection of other religions. And it has been reported from Anas b. Malik from the Prophet what indicates these things."[52] Facing the *qibla* is among the visible bodily performances by which one identifies with Islam, as opposed to other faiths that may share the same beliefs.

The sociologist Michèle Lamont sees identity as fundamentally relational in nature, and that "exclusion is intrinsic to the constitution of identity." As such, to study identity

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[51] Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ Maʿānī al-Athār*, 5 Vols. eds. M.Z. al-Najjār and M. al-Ḥaqq (Beirut: ʿĀlim al-Kutub, 1994), vol. 3, 213-14. Al-Ṭaḥāwī's suspicion of those who declare "*Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*" but intend that he is only a prophet for Muslims/Arabs may not be purely theoretical. For example, Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār wal-Marāqib* ed. L. Nemoy (New York: Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1939-43), knew that the Jewish followers of a certain Abū ʿĪsā al-Iṣfahānī (known as the ʿĪsawīya in many sources, or ʿĪsūnīya according to al-Qirqisānī) believed that God sends prophets to nations other than the Jews, and that Jesus and Muḥammad are prophets for their people, and their revelations (Qurʾān and Injīl/Gospel) are the word of God for those people. Citations for this work throughout this dissertation appear as "*Kitāb al-Anwār* Treatise:Chapter:Section." So, for example, the report on the group just mentioned appears as *Kitāb al-Anwār* I:11:2, III:13:1-2, III:16:1,3 on the lore around Abū ʿĪsā, see I:2:12. Several medieval Islamic authors knew of this group and their belief in Muḥammad's prophethood to his own people; see for example, Abū Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq Bayna al-Firaq*, ed. M. ʿU. Al-Kisht (Cairo: Maktaba Ibn Sīnā, 1988), 29-30, who refutes the idea that one could be considered part of "*ummat al-islām*" with reference to the beliefs of the ʿĪsawīya and another group he knows as the Mūshkānīya. See several references and translations of relevant sections, including al-Baghdādī, al-Ghazālī, al-Isfarāʾīnī, al-Bāqillānī, Ibn Ḥazm, ʿAbd al-Jabbār, in Steven Wasserstrom, "A Species of Misbelief: A History of Muslim Heresiography of the Jews" (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1985), 357-59, 368-80. The same is implied by the pseudepigraphic *Secrets of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai*; see translation of the relevant section in Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 308-10. The belief that God sends each nation its own prophet is also explicit in the twelfth-century author, Netanel al-Fayyūmī, *Bustān al-ʿUqūl*, ed. and trans. D. Levine (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 65-69 (Judeo-Arabic), 105-9 (English). For more on the ʿĪsawīya see Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 71-89; and pp. 133-35 for the historiographical debates regarding Netanel al-Fayyūmī's position.

[52] Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ Maʿānī*, vol. 3, 215, #5127.

is to explore the "Meaning-making processes and categories through which group boundaries are constructed and how they are shaped by available cultural repertoires and the structural conditions in which people live."[53] Symbolic boundaries are essential to the experience of belonging, and in order to be effective, they must find expression in terms of the contemporary cultural discourse. In Late Antiquity and throughout Islam's formative period, the *qibla* served as a potent symbol to perform and reinforce an identity-boundary between an "us" and a "them."

The act of distinction need not be viewed as inherently antagonistic. Rather it was natural for groups who shared many theological attitudes, practiced similar forms of worship, and identified with a common biblical heritage to seek the means by which to differentiate from one another.[54] Orientation towards Mecca—as opposed to Jerusalem or the East—could externalize, in the form of physical action, the intangible and internal act of identification. The adoption of their own *qibla* distinguished Muslims from the People of the Book and shifted the socio-religious center of gravity from the biblical holy lands to Arabia.[55] The *qibla* easily entered the cultural reservoir from which each religious group drew to differentiate themselves and reinforce the boundaries of community precisely because it lay at a point of interreligious encounter and as a distinguishing shibboleth of Muslims, Christians, and Jews,.

In his comments on one version of the Anas b. Malik *ḥadīth* recorded by al-Bukhārī, Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449) understands the *qibla* in a similar way to what we have

[53] Michèle Lamont, "Culture and Identity" in *Handbook of Sociological Theory,* ed. J.H. Turner (New York: Springer, 2001)*,* 171-85; quotations appear at 173 and 172, respectively.
[54] Michael Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 445-47.
[55] Uri Rubin, "Between Arabia and the Holy Land: A Mecca-Jerusalem Axis of Sanctity" *JSAI* 34 (2008), 345-62; and idem. *Between Bible and Qurʾān;* Angelika Neuwirth, "Locating the Qurʾān and Early Islam in the 'Epistemic Space' of Late Antiquity," in *Islam and Its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity and the Qurʾān*, eds. C. Bakhos and M. Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 165-85.

described:

> And the matter of the *qibla* is magnified in this *ḥadīth*, and the mention of orientation after mentioning prayer (i.e. in al-Bukhārī's recording –AMG) is in order to emphasize it, for it is subsumed [under the heading] of prayer (*ṣalāt*) as one of its conditions. And through [facing the *qibla*] a person's affairs (*umūr*) are made manifest. For one who manifests the emblem of the religion (*shi'ār al-dīn*) brings upon himself the rules of its people, and one who does not manifest [the emblem of the religion] has the opposite effect.[56]

Ibn Ḥajar views liturgical orientation towards the Kaʿba as an "emblem of the religion." We argued that the *qibla* was primed to serve as an arch-metaphor for identification with Islam because of its role as a ritual that created a common experience of repeatable and meaningful gestures across the community of adherents. It tapped into the fundamental human experience of space and the rich cultural repertoire of sacred geography that fostered the sense of belonging to a single Islamic collective amidst geographic, ethnic, political, and theological dispersion. Finally, physical alignment with Mecca highlighted the symbolic boundaries between Islam and other faith communities, through distinction from their own sacred directions. For all of these reasons, facing the *qibla* developed into a kind of technology of the self in Islam's formative period—through the act of bodily alignment for worship, identity was both formed and performed.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 considers the Qurʾān's treatment of prayer direction, primarily found in Sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2:142-150), in the context of the practices of religions of Late Antiquity in the Near East. In this passage, Muḥammad is questioned about his change in

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[56] Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 17 vols. ed. N. al-Fāryābī (Riyadh: Dār Ṭība, 2005), vol. 2, 113, commenting on *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* (1:259, "Ṣalāt"), #391; see also his comments on idem. #392 at vol. 2 p. 114.

qibla, understood in Islamic tradition as replacing the Jewish sacred center in Jerusalem with that of Arabia. The many characterizations of groups in the passage—i.e. the fools (*sufahāʾ*) who question Muḥammad's change in direction (v. 142); the naming of Muḥammad's community as "a central people" (*ummatan waṣaṭan*)(v. 143); and the people of the book (*alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*) with their own *qiblas* (vv. 146-48)—are read with sensitivity to both intra-qurʾānic linguistic analysis as well as to the orientation practices of contemporary near eastern religious cultures. In particular, the writings of Rabbinic Judaism and the Church Fathers illustrate that facing "Jerusalem" for Jews and "East" for Christians was a performed expression of the "parting of ways" between those two communities. The literary structure of Surat al-Baqara and the content of its *qibla*-passage demonstrate that the Qurʾān, too, participated in the late antique "ritual koiné" developing around orientation and group distinctiveness, not unlike those involving food-ways, circumcision, or the liturgical calendar.

Late Antiquity is often characterized by a turn from local centers of cultic worship to religious cultures of a more global or imperial character. That religious communities could express their collective identities through divergent directions of prayer exemplifies this phenomenon. Pre-Islamic Arabian, Zoroastrian, and Samaritan practices are also considered. However, Rabbinic literature, Patristic writings, and the Qurʾān presents the most rich and expansive treatments of the subject, and allows for the fruitful application of four lenses of analysis to the practice of liturgical alignment within each tradition: 1) the authority used to ground the practice, 2) the sacred history it evoked, 3) its apparent function, and 4) the way in which it served as an expression of collective identity and interreligious difference.

To be sure, facing the proper *qibla* drew a boundary marking an "us" and a "them." However, in early Islamic sectarian discourse the shared *qibla* also became a metaphor for intra-communal inclusion. Chapter 2 considers the semantic range of the epithet "People of the *Qibla*" (*ahl al-qibla*) in various theological writings, books of law, and credal formulas, showing how it came to indicate a sort of "big tent Islam," which could include Muslims holding disapproved beliefs and practices. For example, while some of the early Khārijites labeled sinful Muslims as infidels, the emerging orthodoxy would offer a list of minimal requirements—such as proper belief and facing the right *qibla*—beyond which membership in the Muslim *umma* could not be questioned. In another example, after decades of fighting his theological rivals, the Muʿtazilites, the great tenth-century theologian al-ʿAsharī's (d. 324/935-6) last words reportedly were, "I do not call any of the people of our *qibla* an unbeliever; they all point toward the same object of worship; they differ only in expression."[57] Amidst the divisiveness of early Islamic sectarianization, the uniform practice of facing Mecca acted as a discursive resource and as a centripetal force for inclusive visions of Islamic community. The emergence of the phrase is traced to the context of late-Umayyad Iraq, as a way to express a sense of communal unity within a setting of socio-religious and ethnic diversity.

Chapter 3 focuses on the ʿAbbāsid period, in which law and theology became systematized fields of Islamic intellectual discourse. In that context the *qibla* persisted as an important theological metaphor to mark the boundaries between religious communities. This phenomenon appears most explicitly in medieval scholarly writing on

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[57] Abū al-Qāsim ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tabyīn kadhib al-Muftarī* (Damascus: Tawfīq Press, 1929), 149.

naskh, the abrogation of one law—or a whole religious system of laws—by the subsequent revelation of another. For Muslims, God's changing the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca proved that not only could God alter rulings within Muḥammad's revelation, but that the Deity's preference for previous religions could also be replaced. For their part, Jewish authors, such as Saʿadya Gaon (d. 331/942) and Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī (d. 349/960), argued that the *qibla* never changed, just as the Jews remained God's chosen people. Likewise, in their vigorous polemics with Muslims, Christians defended their eastward *qibla* as a symbol of God's favor. In the tenth-century, the common discourse of *kalām* (scholastic theology) enabled productive interconfessional debate in literary works as well as in personal encounters in the famous *majālis* sessions (interreligious convocations in the courts of rulers). In this shared intellectual milieu, the *qibla* was a handy proxy for theological disputes about changes in the divine will and God's manifestations in material space. The regular invocation of the *qibla* in interreligious polemical writings indicates its durability as a sign of communal distinction, but it also demonstrates a shared language of metaphor by which to engage with one another.

Finally, through the media of mosques, maps, and mathematical calculation, chapter 4 studies sacred geography as a feature of early Islamic identity. The performance of geographic orientation for ritual was a material emblem of Islamic belonging as well as an act of "place-making." In Islam's formative period, the alignment of mosques and the ornamentation of their *qibla*-walls also became an expression of religious piety and a tool to bolster imperial legitimacy. Likewise, religion and the sciences worked hand-in-hand to produce elaborate maps and sophisticated mathematical methods for determining the *qibla* with growing precision. While most

jurists did not require exactitude, the scientific endeavors that supported accurate orientation contributed to the scholarly discourse in which the *qibla* reinforced the experience of collective identity.

Chapter 4 presents an extended meditation on the study of collective identity in premodern Islam and how it might benefit from the lenses developed in this study: "identity as imagined," "identity as a process," and "identity as inexhaustible." The lenses open an innovative interpretation of the literary and archeological record, which indicates that several early mosques were not accurately aligned with the Kaʿba. In seeking to revise the narrative of Islamic origins, some historians of early Islam point to the orientations of these mosques as evidence that Islam did not emerge in the region of Mecca. The current study, however, suggests a variety of ways to understand the supposedly misaligned mosques as, nevertheless, reflecting an imagined identity whose center always lay in Mecca. Furthermore, the chapter considers mosque-realignments in later years as part of the ongoing process through which collective identity is shaped and fortified. A brief conclusion demonstrates the inexhaustibility of orientation, as technological advancements of the twenty-first century create new ways of constructing sacred geography.

A Disclaimer

Identity as a focus of this study is shorthand for the simple idea that before the seventh century there was no socio-religious group known as Islam, which would become the subject of so much literary production, legal regulation, theological discourse, etc. in the centuries that followed. I do not attempt to pinpoint when an entity we know as "Islam" definitively came into being, but rather to look at one symbol in the process by

which a religious collective formed around Muhammad—his legacy and community—and the Qur'ān. This collective was expressly distinct from Judaism, Christianity (and Zoroastrianism), even amidst "family resemblances." In fact, resemblance to contemporary religious cultures in practice and belief likely led to explicit signs of differentiation between Islam as an emergent community from others around it. The adoption of the Kaʿba as *qibla* and its reverberations as a theological metaphor for Islamic community were among the foremost signs of Islamic uniqueness and distinction. Those especially interested in the usage of the term "identity" in this study can skip to the final chapter of this dissertation, where it is treated more extensively and directly.

Additionally, to take Islam as a subject of study is to assume that there are people, texts, activities, art, and other cultural products that we can 'identify' as Islamic or Muslim in some way. As a work of history, this study does not imagine some platonic essence of Islam to which those cultural products correspond or against which they can be measured to a greater or lesser extent. Nor does the use of the term "sacred"—as in the title of this study or when used with regard to places, acts, or texts—imply a metaphysical status. This project is agnostic about issues of soteriology, eschatology, and whether the beliefs of religious actors and authors expressed in our texts are "True" in any ultimate or transcendent sense. On these and related matters the historian of Islam can only say, *Allāhu aʿlam* (God knows best). Rather, a more empirical approach is taken here, in which sacrality and religious identification are constructed human experiences that can be seen in the ways that religious actors make meaning of the world, and which can be discerned in the material culture and literary texts that have come down to us. The historical record is necessarily limited by the power structures—such as literacy,

orthodoxy, and economic patronage—that enabled some literary witnesses to be preserved and others destroyed, lost, or forgotten. A study of pre-Modern Islam, then, is always a partial view of a reality experienced by the Muslims whose lives, it is assumed, were in some way affected or represented by the texts under consideration. More than a disclaimer to be ignored summarily, these thoughts are meant as a cautionary note to not over-read our sources, to name what we can and cannot know, and to acknowledge that the pursuit of understanding Islam's formative period must be a collaborative scholarly endeavor that unfolds with greater clarity over time. It is my hope that this study participates in and enriches that conversation.

Chapter One
"Wherever you Turn, the Face of God is There"
Liturgical Direction in the Qurʾān and Religions of Late Antiquity

In the past half century, the *qibla* has become a subject of controversy in the study of

Islamic origins. Several western scholars have attempted to revise the traditional Islamic

narrative, which describes a change from facing Jerusalem to facing the *Kaʿba* in Mecca

during the lifetime of Muḥammad. They read archeological and literary evidence with

creative hermeneutical tools to claim that Mecca was not originally the sacred center, that

geographic prayer-direction was not originally intended by the term "*qibl*a," that the

change occurred much later, or some variation on these themes.[58] These interventions

pose varying degrees of challenge to the traditional Islamic narrative, and each demands

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[58] See, for example, Aziz al-Azmeh, *Emergence of Islam*, 419-28, who believes that a variety of *qibla*s presented themselves and that the early Muslims eventually settled on the Kaʿba as part a gradual solidification of Islamic identity; Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), ch. 4 and Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) Ch. 8, who argued that the early Islamic center was in northwest Arabia and not Mecca; Judith Koren and Yehuda Nevo, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origin of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), 194-5; 275ff, believe that Jerusalem's centrality as a *qibla* (as late as Umayyad times) presents a story of Arabian pagans influenced by a Judeo-Christian desert cult of the Negev. Suliman Bashear, *al-Muqaddima lil-Taʾrīkh al-Akhīr* (Jerusalem: N.P., 1984), 59-60 and "*Qibla musharriqa* and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," *The Muslim World* 81:3-4 (1991): 267-82, thought that even in the times of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644) we cannot speak of a single mandated *qibla* "but rather of several currents in search for one," and Bashear argued that a number of east-facing *qibla*s evidence Christianizing effects on the early Muslim community. Bashear, idem., and Moshe Sharon, "The Umayyads as *Ahl al-Bayt*," *JSAI* 14 (1991): 129-30, suggest an eastward *qibla* among the Muslims of Syro-Palestine. Fred Donner *Muhammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 115 and 214 sees a fluid *qibla* as support of the theory of an early "believers movement," with the change of *qibla* narrative as a "retouched, vestigial memory" occurring at a later date. More recently, two independent researchers have presented even more novel theories: A.J. Deus "Surah 2: Many Qiblas" (self-published, 2016) available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2831881 (accessed online 5 March 2017), wrote that the *qibla* changed many times, and was not Jerusalem or Mecca (for Jews or Muslims), but towards the current geographic seat of the Exilarch or another religious leader before becoming fixed on a geographic point in a sacred center. In his book-length projects, *Qurʾanic Geography* (Vancouver: Independent Scholars Press, 2011) and *Early Islamic Qiblas: A Survey of Mosques Built between 1AH/622 C.E. and 263AH/876 C.E.* (Vancouver: Independent Scholars Press, 2017), Dan Gibson devotes several chapters to demonstrating his theory that the earliest identifiable *qibla* was towards Petra and not towards Jerusalem or Mecca, and that this persisted until 708 CE, when the *miḥrāb* was introduced into some mosques to re-orient them towards Mecca, followed by a period of confusion over the proper *qibla* until Abbasid times, when all mosques faced Mecca. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam,* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 564-65, nt. 88 reviews some of the above theories and dismisses them on account of the very early Muslim inscriptions and construction apparent in the Mecca-Ṭāʾif area, "all of which would be inexplicable if Mecca was of little significance to the Muslims."

reckoning, some of which is taken up in chapter four. However, all of these studies begin with the questions: "What direction was the original *qibla*; did it actually change; if so, where was it changed to and when?" The current chapter departs from the grand project of positivist reconstruction to consider the meaning that the Qurʾān instills in orientation towards the *qibla* and its role within that text.

Rather than the positivist "where" of the *qibla*, I explore the "why" and "what." Why do religious communities choose to face in a particular direction? What does that direction signify? And what work does orientation perform? My goal is to articulate answers to these questions for the Qurʾān with reference to intra-Qurʾānic linguistic analysis. However, the qurʾānic approach to liturgical orientation is also best understood within the cultural context into which the Qurʾān emerged and in which it participated, namely the religious world of Late Antiquity. Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity receive the most attention in this regard. My approach aids an analysis of the Qurʾānic passage in several ways: First, the Qurʾān addresses directly the ritual practices of those communities, as it makes explicit reference to the orientation practices of the "scriptuary peoples" (*alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*) (most likely Jews and/or Christians; see below). Second, considering the three traditions in tandem helps to develop lenses of analysis that can tell us something about the phenomenological experience of ritual bodily orientation in Late Antiquity. Ultimately, considering religious traditions of the late antique Near East in comparison will suggest that sacred direction held a special role as an expression of socio-religious identity in that context.

At this point it is important to explicate what is intended by reading the Qurʾān alongside texts stemming from other religious communities of the late antique Near East,

and making minimal references to the rich and vast tradition of Islamic *tafsīr* (commentary).[59] I do not believe nor wish to imply that the Qurʾān is somehow a derivative of other texts, merely a reaction to Judaism or Christianity, or that early exegetes somehow corrupted the Qurʾān's "true and original" meanings. There are some instances, no doubt, in which the unpacking of certain words and phrases in the Qurʾān benefits from reference to Hebrew and Aramaic. However, demonstrating that point is also not the goal of this chapter. Rather, I compare the Qurʾān's approach to geographic orientation for ritual with those of other late antique religious cultures in order to show thematic similarities and differences with regard to the distinct analytic categories described below.

Furthermore, reading the Qurʾān in a broader cultural context supports the most salient argument of this chapter, namely that sacred direction became a symbol of communal distinction for Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity, and that the Qurʾān speaks in the contemporary ritual idiom. Close study of the *qibla* as a marker of collective identity in the Qurʾān sheds light on the phenomenon of prayer direction as a (oft-overlooked) sign of the "parted ways" between Judaism and Christianity. *Tafsīr*s offer important insights into the reception of the Qurʾān, and the many narratives of Islamic origins that expand upon ambiguous verses and fill their lacunae. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the exegetical tradition is only referenced where it serves to clarify local issues in the qurʾānic passages under consideration. For the most part, we interpret the Qurʾān with reference to its own internal vocabulary and thematic repertoire.

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[59] Travis Zadeh, "Qurʾānic Studies and the Literary Turn," *JAOS* 135:2 (2015): 329-42, reviews much recent writing on treating the Qurʾān as a literary text without exclusive reference to the commentarial tradition.

The term "*qibla*" appears in only two passages in the Qurʾān. Once in a verse describing a command to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt to "make your homes a *qibla* (or make them face the *qibla*) and hold prayers" (*wa-ajʿalū buyūtakum qiblatan wa-aqīmū al-ṣalāt*) (Q Yūnus 10:87). And it is mentioned six times in an eight-verse passage in *Sūrat al-Baqara*, which describes the leaving of one *qibla* and the mandate to turn towards another, the *masjid al-ḥaram* (Q Baqara 2:142-50). Some also see a reference to the *qibla* in two other verses in *Sūrat al-Baqara* that seem to downplay the importance of prayer direction: "To God belongs the east and the west, wherever you turn is the face of God" (v. 115), and "Righteousness does not consist of turning your face to the east or to the west…" (v. 177).[60] In all instances it is clear that *qibla* is a spatial term (i.e. "houses," "turning"), but none of the usages provide indisputable evidence for its precise meaning. In 2:142-150, referred to here as "the *qibla* passage", the *qibla* is a point of dispute with many groups: "the foolish ones" (*al-sufahāʾ min al-nās*) (Q2:142), "those who have been given the Scripture" (*alladhīna ūtū/ataynāhum al-kitāb*) (three times in vv.144-46) and various groups of miscreants. ("those who turn on their heels [away from the truth]" in v. 143; "the doubters" (*al-mumtarīn*) in v. 147 and "the evil ones" (*alladhīna ẓalamū*) in v. 150). In the face of these ambiguities, modern scholars have applied many approaches to understanding the *qibla* passage. Some look to the traditional commentarial literature for clarity, others to the late antique context.[61]

The majority of western scholars follow the most prevalent line of traditional Islamic interpretation, which portrays the dispute as arising between Jews of Medina and Muḥammad's community in the second year after his arrival there. They tend to view the

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[60] In this study vv. 115-177 will be considered "the extended *qibla* passage."

[61] All translations of Qurʾān are based on *The Qurʾān*, trans. A. Jones. (Exeter, UK: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007) with my own adjustments.

change in *qibla*—from Jerusalem to Mecca—is seen as part of a "break with the Jews"

and one of the earliest signs of a "parting of ways" between the two communities.[62]

Other scholars, who adopt the traditional narrative, read it with critical skepticism as

indicating a more drawn out process through which Muḥammad's community changed

allegiance from the biblical heritage and its holy lands and became a uniquely Arabian

monotheism with Mecca as its traditional center.[63] Some look to borrowing from

Rabbinic Judaism explicitly to explain the Qurʾānic practice of orientation, and even the

term *"qibla,"* while others see Christian conventions as its point of origin.[64] Samaritan

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[62] This reading is typified by Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qurʾān*, 12, when he says "What is known as 'the break with the Jews' occurred about March 624, shortly before the battle of Badr. The chief outward mark of this realignment of forces in Medina was that the Qibla or direction faced in prayer was changed from being towards Jerusalem, like the Jews to being towards Mecca. This was an indication that the new religion was to be specifically Arab, and that Muḥammad was going to rely more on the 'arabizing' party among his followers than upon the 'judaizing' party." See also Watt *Muḥammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 198-203; A.I. Katsch, *Judaism in Islam* (New York: Bloch Publishing for NYU Press*, 1954), 109-11; K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* vol. 1 pt. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 11-12. Joseph Rivlin *Gesetz im Koran: Kultus und Ritus* (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1934), 114-17 and S.D. Goitein, "Prayer in Islam," *Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 85-86 generally follow the tradition's timeline and see it playing out in the various verses that comprise the *qibla* passage, as well as vv. 115 and 177. They see an additional stage in which Muḥammad tried a number of *qibla*s (Goitein) or downplayed the importance of *qibla*s (Rivlin) based on Q2:115, 144, 177. Fazlur Rahman, "Pre-Foundations of the Muslim Community" *Studia Islamica* 43 (1976), 6 and 22-24, vehemently averred that the choice of Jerusalem or the turning away from it had anything to do with the Jews; rather, it was about differentiating from Meccan pagan worship. Angelika Neuwirth, "Face of God-Face of Man: The Significance of the Direction of Prayer in Islam," *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, eds. A. Baumgarten and G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998) sees both a rejection of Meccan polytheism and a turn towards Jewish Biblicism in the act of facing Jerusalem.
[63] Uri Rubin, "Between Arabia and the Holy Land," sees an oscillating process in which Mecca and Jerusalem are sometimes in a "balance" of sanctity and sometimes one receives greater attention than the other.
[64] Haggai Mazuz, *The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 21-23, takes the Jerusalem *qibla* for granted and as an implication that Medinan Jews were rabbinic Jews. Abdulla Galadari, "The *Qibla*: an Allusion to the *Shema*" *Comparative Islamic Studies* 9:2 (2013), 156-94, suggests a comparison between the rabbinic discussions of the *shemaʿ* prayer and its nickname "*qabalat ʿol malkhut shomayim*" ("acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven") as the origin of the term *qibla*. Holger Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture: the Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 63, sees the Syriac term *luqbāl*—used for prayer direction in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*—as a source for the term *qibla*. He goes on to note that it may indicate that east was the original Muslim *qibla* before the change, in keeping with S. Bashear, see above note 1. Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1909), 173-176, was unsure whether it was Jewish or Christian in origin, but is certain that facing Jerusalem is a borrowed practice. On Christians facing toward Jerusalem as an origin see also Tor Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum* (Uppsala:

allegiance to Mount Gerizim offers the precedent for one scholar, while pre-Islamic

Arabian practice is suggestive for others.[65] However, none of these studies asks what the

literary (and archeological) records of contemporaneous religious practice might tell us

about the phenomenological meaning of facing a *qibla*, and none consider the many

traditions altogether. Scholarly discourse about the *qibla* in early Islam is quite rich. It is

hoped that this study will break free of the positivist impulse to unearth the origins of

early Islamic ritual from out of the religions of Late Antiquity. Rather, we hope to

demonstrate that examination of the religious milieu into which the Qurʾān emerged can

enrich our appreciation of the significance of these rituals to their earliest practitioners.

But which religious cultures ought we consider? We need not trace the exact

points of interreligious contact with early Islam to know that geographic alignment for

ritual was found all around the Near east – Jews, Christians, Greeks, Romans,

Zoroastrians, Manichaeans and Samaritans all practiced some degree of ritual

orientation.[66] Three principles guide the choice of cultures studied in this chapter. First,

is the group mentioned explicitly in the Qurʾān's treatment of the *qibla*? Second, has

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Almqvist & Wiksells, 1926)*,* 4 and William St. Claire Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qurʾan*
(London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. 1911*)*, 55.

[65] On Samaritan origins see Crone, *Hagarism*, ch. 4. On pre-Islamic origins see David King,
"Astronomical Alignments in Medieval Islamic Religious Architecture," *Annals of the New York Academy
of Sciences* 385 (1982): 303-312; and Uri Rubin, "*Ḥanīfiya* and Kaʿba: An Inquiry into the Arabian pre-
Islamic background of *dīn Ibrahīm*," *JSAI* 13 (1990): 101-103.

[66] While Rubin, "*Ḥanīfiyya* and *Kaʿba*" seems confident to accept the veracity of Arabian *jāhilī*
orientational practices from *ḥadīth* literature, I am more skeptical. I have not succeeded in finding any such
evidence in pre-Islamic poetry or in Ibn al-Kalbī's *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*, ed. A.Z. Pacha (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-
Miṣrīya, 1995), often considered to contain much early material, makes no reference to *qibla* or any other
physical orientation for worship among the various pre-Islamic Arabian cults. It may, however, be possible
to excavate a sense of place-based identity in the early *qaṣīda*s in the form of nostalgia, such as that
expressed for *najd* and pointed out in the work of J. Stetkeyvich, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of
Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). See also his
"Spaces of Delight: A Symbolic Topoanalysis of the Classical Arabic Nasīb" in *Literature of East and
West* 25 (1989): 5-28. For an argument that pre-Islamic Arabian culture, and the *qaṣīda* in particular,
should be considered part of Late Antique culture see James Montgomery, "The Empty Ḥijāz," in *Arabic
Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed.
J. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters 2006), 37-97. Orientation around places in pre-Islamic Arabian cultures
as an aspect of this study requires further research.

previous scholarship considered the group as engaged with the Qurʾānic treatment of the

qibla? And finally, is the group represented by a sufficiently rich corpus of literature to

which can be applied our lenses of analysis (see below)? The communities characterized

by Rabbinic literature and the writings of the Church Fathers meet all three criteria. First,

in the Qurʾān those "who were given the scriptures" (Q Baqara 2:144-46) may refer to

Jews, Christians or both; second, these communities have been considered by previous

scholarship as points of contact for the Qurʾān's mandate to face the *qibla*; and finally,

each presents ample material for exploration and comparison.[67]

The comparative method can be useful only when its limitations and pitfalls are

acknowledged from the outset. No doubt, many projects of this sort fall prey to the

notion that if an element of the Qurʾān exists in a previous religious culture, it must have

been intentionally (or even duplicitously) appropriated by early Islam. However, the

debtor-creditor model of cultural exchange is too one-dimensional to be of great use here.

Simply identifying that a Qurʾanic story, practice, or idea also appears in a

(chronologically) prior scripture is grossly insufficient to inform us of its meaning within

the Qurʾān's system of signification and in its seventh-century Arabian context.[68]

Seeking mere transactions between static texts often obscures the complex dynamic of

religious communities in action and interaction. Rather, liturgical orientation developed

within the ritual lexicon of Late Antiquity, and therefore the act's horizon of meaning is

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[67] After looking at these two traditions I briefly consider the evidence for prayer-direction in Samaritan and Zoroastrian practice before turning to the Qurʾān.

[68] Michael Pregill has offered two nice surveys of past research on th notion of borrowing in "The Hebrew Bible and the Qurʾān: The Problem of Jewish 'Influence' on Islam," *Religion Compass* 1:6 (2007), 643-59 and "Some Reflections on Borrowing, Influence, and the Entwining of Jewish and Islamic Traditions," in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, eds. M. Daneshgar and W. Saleh (Leiden: Brill 2017), 164-97. An excellent articulation of the problem of influence including and beyond the period of Islamic origins appears in Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis in Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3-14.

best understood within that milieu. In this study, identifying points of contrast with other cultures will aid our understanding of the Qurʾān's usage as much as finding points of confluence. Likewise, we need not prove direct contacts between literary textual traditions to argue that a sort of ritual koiné developed around prayer direction in the Near East in Late Antiquity. In that context, mapping ritual acts onto geographic space emerged as an expression of group identity for the communities represented by Rabbinic literatures, Patristic writings and the Qurʾān.

Late Antique Background: Lenses

Almost sixty years ago, in an article entitled "Sacred Direction in Synagogue and Church," Franz Landsberger noticed that Late Antiquity (roughly the first five or six centuries of the common era) was a time during which the alignment of worship spaces in the Middle East and North Africa underwent a shift. Whereas religious temples had previously been positioned around the presence of the deity, sacred spaces (especially at the hands of Jews and Christians) now became oriented to direct the experience of the worshippers. So, for example, many ancient pagan temples had been constructed with the figure of the deity oriented towards the trajectory of the rising sun on an auspicious day of the calendar (such as the solstices or equinoxes).[69] Some scholars even suspect that this deity-centered orientation also informed the construction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, such that on certain auspicious days the rising sun shone directly onto the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.[70] By contrast, early synagogues and churches

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[69] Franz Landsberger, "Sacred Direction in Synagogue and Church," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957): 181-203.

[70] Landsberger, "Sacred Direction," 181; C.V.L. Charlier, "Ein astronimischer Beitrag Zur Exegeses des Alten Testaments" *ZDMG* 58 (1904): 386-94; and discussion of the issue in J. Glen Taylor, *Yahweh and the*

were constructed to serve the institutions of formalized communal prayer that were developing in both religions, and which included extensive consideration of the individual worshipper's physical orientation.[71] Although not without exceptions, for Rabbinic Jews the normative position was to face towards Jerusalem and for early Christians it was towards the East. By the time of Islam's emergence in the seventh century, ample rhetoric around orientation existed in Rabbinic literatures as well as in the writings of the Church Fathers.

Four lenses recommend themselves as particularly constructive for interrogating the practice of liturgical direction in each tradition: 1) Authority, 2) Sacred History, 3) Function, and 4) Identity. First, we must ask, by what **authority** is the practice of orientation imposed and justified? Second, does the ritual posture reference the **sacred history** of communal memory or hopes for the communal future? Third, what **function** does the performative act of facing a particular direction actually serve*?* Does it accomplish some metaphysical end or communicate a message to the performer of the act or to others? And finally, what role does sacred direction play in the construction and expression of communal **identity** for the three traditions under consideration. No doubt, these lenses may apply to many ritual practices across faith traditions, but I believe they

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Sun: Biblical and Archeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 79-86. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* III:6:3 and IV:305 also says as much.
[71] The shift in the architecture of worship spaces to reflect the experience of the worshipper is at the heart of Landsberger's argument. See also Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), on the development of prayer direction in conjunction with the emergence of formalized prayer. Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 1997), sees the appearance of orientation marked by a Torah niche on the Jerusalem-facing wall as corresponding to the sanctification of synagogues as spaces of prayer. See also John Wilkinson, "Orientation, Jewish and Christian," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 116 (1984): 16-30, who points out the initial variety of Synagogue and Church orientations but claims that both become fixed by the 3rd century CE. This chronology accords with Levine's findings regarding the development of prayer.

will prove especially fruitful for the study of orientation in Rabbinic Judaism, Early

Christianity, and Early Islam.

Rabbinic Judaism[72]

The shift in the meaning of facing a sacred direction from cultic to personal

worship is exmplified in the codification of Jewish prayer practice in the wake of the

destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Hebrew Bible does not provide a clear

directive on the subject of prayer orientation. However, Daniel's famous thrice-daily

prayers towards his open window facing Jerusalem (6:11), Zerubavel's "lifting his face

heavenward towards Jerusalem" in prayer in 1 Esdras (4:58) and other references to

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[72] The topic of prayer-direction appears across rabbinic literatures—in the halakhic as well as aggadic writings, in Palestine as well as in Babylonia, and in the teachings of Tanaʾim as well as Amoraʾim. There are several studies of the subject of prayer-direction in Rabbinic literature that pay special attention to the development of the practice, and analyze the wording of each version of the teachings across genre and within the manuscript history. See, for example, Uri Ehrlich, *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer: A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy*, Trans. D. Ordan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), esp. chs. 3, 4, and 12; David Henschke, "Directing Prayer To the Holy Place: The Plain Meaning of the Mishnah and Echoes in Talmudic Literature," *Tarbiz* 80:1 (2011): 5-27. (HEB) and "Prayer Direction: Towards the Miqdash or Other Directions?" *JSIJ* 12 (2013): 1-21. (HEB); Louis Ginzberg, *A Commentary on the Palestinian Talmud: A Study of the Development of the Halakhah and Haggadah in Palestine and Babylonia*, Vol. 3 *Berakhot* IV (New York: JTSA Press, 1941), 370-403 (HEB); Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshuta: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta, part I: Zeraʿim* (New York: The Louis Rabinowitz Research Institute, 1955), 43-45; Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Customs and Beliefs*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1987), 37-65; Alberdina Houtman, 'They Direct their Heart to Jerusalem:' References to Jerusalem and Temple in Mishnah and Tosefta Berakhot," in *Sanctity of Time and Space in Tradition and Modernity*, eds. A. Houtman, M.J.H.M. Poorthuis, J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill 1998), 151-66.; Y. Sapir, "Directing their Hearts and Turning their Faces: The Terminology Used to Depict Prayer-Direction in Rabbinic Literature," in *Shaarei Lashon: Meḥkarim ba-Leshon ha-ʿIvrit, ba-Aramit, uvi-Leshonot ha-Yehudim*, eds. Y. Breuer et al (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2007), 256-71. (HEB) and "Prayer Direction and the Placement of Doors in Ancient Synagogues," *Talelei Orot* 4, (1993), available at http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/taleley/kivun-2.htm (accessed 11 November 2015) (HEB). It is not my goal in this section of the chapter to reconstruct critically the history of prayer-direction among Rabbinic sources, but to develop lenses and context for better understanding the Qurʾān. As such, I will only call attention to textual variants and chronological/geographic diversity where it is relevant and draw from the studies just mentioned where it fits the goals of this section. The following discussion takes as a base text a passage from the Palestinian Talmud (Berakhot 4:5/8c) regarding orientation toward Jerusalem. The many teachings on the subject compiled there appear in other Rabbinic sources with variations. These will be noted as the excursus proceeds as follows: Mishnah = mTRACTATE; Tosefta = tTRACTATE; Palestinian Talmud = yTRACTATE; Babylonian Talmud = bTRACTATE. Various collections of midrash will appear in full the first time they are referenced with a listed abbreviation that will be used in subsequent notes.

worship towards the Temple may attest to an ancient practice that the rabbis built upon.

Indeed, the most common rabbinic dictum regarding prayer towards Jerusalem takes as

its prooftext Solomon's dedication of the Jerusalem Temple recorded in I Kings, ch. 8

and II Chronicles, ch. 6. The Temple was where God's Presence (*shekhina* or *kavod*)

dwelt in the world. In Exodus, the Israelites are commanded, "Make for Me a Sanctuary,

that I might dwell in it," (25:10) and Deuteronomy regularly identifies the site of the

Sanctuary as "the place I will chose to make my name dwell" (Deut. 12 and elsewhere).

God "sits between the Cherubim" (Psalms 80:2 and 99:1) and from there, God says, "I

will meet with you, and speak to you from the cover, which is upon the Ark of the

Covenant, from between the Cherubim" (Exod. 25:22). Jonah's supplication that "my

prayer should come to God at his Holy Sanctuary" (2:8) tallies with the Psalmist telling

that God answers prayers from upon His Holy Mountain (Psalms 3:5).[73] So, one praying

would face God's *Shekhina* (whether physically or in spirit) and create a space for

petitioning the Divine in an intimate and sacred setting. In the Hebrew Bible one orients

for prayer in order to encounter God's presence; by directing prayer towards God's house

one faces the manifestation of the divine, as one would face a mortal being in

conversation.

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[73] See also Psalms 134:2 "Lift your hands to the sanctuary and bless God." For more on the general importance of the Holy Mountain in biblical theology see Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 89-184, and Yaron Eliav, *God's Mountain: The Temple Mount in Time, Place and Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2005), 1-46. It is not clear whether the Bible prescribes the physical orientation towards the Temple for prayer, or merely spiritual orientation. Ehrlich, *Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 77, believes that Daniel 6:11 (and 1 Esdras 4:58) shows that the practice of facing Jerusalem had emerged before the rabbinic period.   However, Y. Kaufman, *Toldot HaEmunah HaYisraelit*, vol. II (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik 1960), 500, says that there was no geographic prayer orientation in biblical times, so references must be about directing intentions. Y. Sapir "Directing their Hearts" argues, similarly, that the earliest directive was merely to intend the site of prayer in one's mind, and the physical act of facing came later. This accords with Ginzberg, *Commentary*, 378-79.

It is not surprising, then, that the *Tanna'im* (rabbis of the first two centuries of the common era) found ample **authority** in the Hebrew Bible to underpin the practice of facing Jerusalem. While the reference in Daniel (6:11) is cited in some instances, the major authoritative reference comes from Solomon's dedicatory prayer upon completing the construction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.[74] Nearly the same teaching that references this proof-text appears in the Tosefta, halakhic and aggadic Midrash as well as in both of the Talmuds.[75] The version in the Palestinian Talmud will serve as the base of our discussion:

> A blind person and one who cannot determine the directions should pray towards the heavens, as it says, "and they shall pray to God" (*I Kings* 8:44). Those rising to pray outside of the Land should turn their faces towards the Land of Israel. Why? [It says] "And they shall pray to you by way of their land that you gave to their forefathers" (ibid v. 48). Those rising to pray within the Land of Israel should turn their faces toward Jerusalem. Why? [It says] "And they shall pray to You by way of the city that You have chosen" (ibid. v. 44) Those rising to pray in Jerusalem should turn their faces towards the Temple Mount, as it says "[and by way of] the Temple that I have built for my Name" (ibid.). Those rising to pray on the Temple Mount should turn their faces towards the Chamber of the Holy of Holies. Why? [It says,] "And they shall pray towards this place, and You shall hear it in heaven, Your dwelling place, and you shall hear and forgive" (ibid. v. 30). Consequently, one standing in the north faces south, one in the south faces north, one in the east faces west, and one in west faces east, so that all of Israel prays toward one spot. The same is meant [by the verse] "For My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations" (*Isa.* 56:7)[76]

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[74] One version of Solomon's prayer appears in I Kings 8 and another in II Chronicles 6. Texts citing Daniel as the authority for prayer direction towards Jerusalem include: *tBerakhot* 3:6(8) *editio princeps* but absent from Vienna MS; *bBerakhot* 31a; *yBerakhot* 4:1/7a and *Midrash Shmuel* (Buber) 2:10. Solomon's prayer can be read as mentally intending the Temple rather than physically facing it, whereas Daniel's orientation towards Jerusalem is unmistakably geographic. Nevertheless, Solomon's prayer likely predominates in halakhic literature because its language is prescriptive, while Daniel's is descriptive. Henschke, "Directing Prayer," 5, n. 1, believes Solomon's prayer was chosen because it nicely fit the schema of concentric circles of land→city→Holy Temple, whereas Daniel merely faces "Jerusalem."

[75] *tBerakhot* 3:14-16; *Sifrei Deuteronomy* (henceforth *SDeut*), Piska 29; *Song of Songs Rabbah* (henceforth *ShRab*), 4:4; *Tanḥuma* (Buber), Vayishlaḥ 21; *Pesikta Rabbati* (Henceforth *PR*), Piska 33 (in which the teaching appears without the prooftext); *bBerakhot* 30a; and *yBerakhot* 4:5/8c, which will be quoted in what follows.

[76] *yBerakhot* 4:5/8c. All translations of Rabbinic texts are my own unless otherwise noted.

This passage suggests a 'dynamic orientation' in which the exact direction one faces

shifts in accordance with one's geographic coordinates. The precision required of those

praying corresponds to their proximity to the Temple; the closer they are, the more

accuracy they must demonstrate.

To use Solomon's prayer as authority to ground the practice of liturgical

orientation fits the model in the Hebrew Bible of orientation as encounter with God's

presence. Immediately before Solomon's prayer in *I Kings* 8 (and *II Chron.* 5:13-6:2),

the priests situate the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies and the narrator

recounts:

> And when the priests exited the holy place the cloud filled the House of the Lord;
> and the priests could not stand to minister, for the Glory of God (*kevod YHWH*)
> had filled the house of the Lord. Then Solomon spoke: The Lord has said that He
> would dwell in thick darkness. I have surely built You a house of habitation—a
> place for You to dwell eternally" (vv. 10-13).

In the rabbinic framing, once God's Glory (*kavod*) filled the Temple, Solomon exhorted

all to pray in that direction, facing God's eternal presence.

However, the "house of habitation" would not stand eternally, and we must

remember that most works of Rabbinic literature (the Talmuds, midrashic collections,

etc.) were produced in a post-Second Temple context. So we must ask, what did the act

of orientation mean once God's house was destroyed? One can sense the Rabbis'

grappling with this question in many passages, and our lenses 2-4 as stated above offer a

useful guide to organizing some of their diffuse teachings on the matter.

The continuation of the passage in the Palestinian Talmud just cited serves as an

apt example of directionality as an engagement with **sacred history**: evoking memories

of the Temple and expressing hopes for its rebuilding:

R. Joshua b. Levi [made a nonliteral interpretation from the words of the text that
describe Solomon's Temple] "*ha-heikhal lifnai*" (literally meaning: "the
sanctuary in front") (*I Kings* 6:17) – *lifnai* [can be read as] *l'panim* (for faces), in
that all faces turn towards it. This makes sense during the time of its construction
[i.e. while the Temple stood], but what about after its destruction? R. Abun has
said [the verse "Your neck is like the tower of David] *banui l'talpiyyot* (built with
turrets)" (Song of Songs 4:4) [should be read] "*Tel-piyyot*", A mound (*Tel*) about
which all mouths (*piyyot*) pray. As in the blessings [after meals], in the recitation
of the *Shemaʿ* [prayer] and in [the standing] prayer. In the blessing [after meals]
one says "[Blessed are You…] [Re]builder of Jerusalem," in [standing] Prayer
one says "God of David" and "[blessed are You…] who [re]builds Jerusalem" and
[before] reciting *Shema* one says "[Blessed are You…] Who spreads the canopy
of peace upon His nation, Israel and upon Jerusalem."[77]

Each of these prayers in context refers to the restoration of Jerusalem as the holy city of

God and his people. R. Abun teaches that even after its destruction, when it is a mere

mound of earth, the Temple can be called the place towards which all prayer is directed,

for a person praises God as the builder/rebuilder of Jerusalem. The performance of

orientation, according to this teaching, is an act of prayerful memory and hope, an

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[77] *yBerakhot* 4:5/8c. Intiallity, R. Abun's statement in the Palestinian Talmud seems out of place. His
creative reading of the verse to mean *tel she-kol ha-piyyot mitpallelin ʿalav* (a mound *about which* all pray)
does not appear to answer the question of how to prove that one faces the Temple Mount even after the
destruction, but simply to describe the mountain as a place *about which* prayers for rebuilding are offered.
Contrast this with most versions of the Babylonian Talmudʿs statement (*bBerakhot* 30a) attributed to R.
Abin or R. Abina (not a major divergence): "*tel she-ha-kol ponim lo*" (a hill *towards which* all face) seems
to make more sense in the context of prayer direction. However, the latter teaching does not address
orientation after the Temple's destruction directly, and indeed in the context of the Babylonian Talmud it
does not appear as a response to the question asked in the Palestinian Talmud. Both versions appear
connected to prayer-direction in ShRab 4:4, the latter case is attributed to R. Bon and the former to R. Abin
although they each end with the particle *bo* (a mound *at which* all pray/turn). MS Paris of *bBerakhot 30a*
reads like the Palestinian Talmud. Ginzberg thought there must be a scribal error that meant to include
both teachings, and indeed his solution follows a reading found in the writings of the 15ᵗʰ c. Yemenite
Avraham b. Shelomo to I Kings 6:17.   See Ginzberg's discussion, *Commentary*, 398-99. However, in his
commentary on the Palestinian Talmud, *Marʾeh HaPanim,* 51a, Moses Margalit sees the wording
"*mitpallelin ʿalav*" in the Palestinian Talmud to fit the concept at play better, since it properly answers the
question about prayers towards the site after the destruction. Margalit reads this in the way that I do here,
saying that the action combines a gesture of memory and prayerful hope for rebuilding. Ehrlich, *Nonverbal
Language of Prayer*, 88, also reads this way: "Our concern is with this passage's conceptual signification.
PT sharply presents the quandary regarding prayer-orientation: if the reason for facing the Temple lies in its
indwelling divine presence, why continue to turn toward it if the Shekhina no longer dwells there? The
answer provided by Rabbi Abun's midrash is indeed that the primary reason for Temple-orientation is no
longer valid. Nonetheless, it is necessary to continue to turn in the direction of the Temple as a means of
expressing hope for the *Shekhina*'s return. Just as the people's frequent petitions to God to rebuild
Jerusalem encompass hope for the *Shekhina*'s return, similarly, in praying, the people face there in
expectation that their request will be fulfilled."

embodied nonverbal expression intertwined with the speech-act of petitioning God to restore the lost Temple.[78]

The continuation of the same passage offers a perspective on the **function** of facing the site of the Temple in the absence of the structure that once stood there. It takes the form of two arguments regarding God's relationship to the Temple Mount in the wake of the destruction:

> [There are two conflicting verses.] One says "I shall go and return to my place" (Hosea 5:15) and one says, "My eyes and My heart shall be there for all days" (I Kings 9:3). How can both stand? His face is above and His eyes and heart are below. [Furthermore, the Mishnah said] "And if one cannot [face the proper direction], one should direct his heart/mind to the Holy of Holies" Which Holy of Holies? R. Ḥiyya the Great said: To the Holy of Holies above [i.e. in heaven] and R. Shimon b. Ḥalafta said, to the Holy of Holies below [i.e. on earth]. R. Pinḥas said: There is no argument here, for the Holy of Holies below is aligned opposite the Holy of Holies up above, as [the verse] says, "*Makhon L'shivtekha* (lit: a place for Your dwelling)," [which can be read as] meaning aligned (*mekhuvan*) opposite Your dwelling.[79]

The verses appear to be contradictory: one indicates God's return to the heavens and the other God's eternal presence at the site of the Temple. Both of the recorded debates attempt to reconcile them attempt by making meaning of the gesture of orientation towards God's earthly dwelling place when God's house is no longer. Both find a way to salvage the aspect of encounter with God in the act of facing the Temple. In the first instance, we are told that although God may have retreated heavenward, God's eyes and heart are still upon the Temple, and hence it remains a conduit for prayers to reach Him. In the second debate, R. Pinḥas fuses the opposing views to say that prayers still reach

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[78] Eliav, *God's Mountain*, 189-236, points out that the significance of the Temple Mount to in Jewish tradition increased in the wake of its destruction and that the direction of prayer took on an important role in its commemoration. He believes that there are traces of this act of post-destruction commemoration in the wording of the *beraita* in *yBerakhot* cited above which reads "One standing in Jerusalem faces the Temple Mount" rather than "faces the Temple" as it appears in most other versions, see 203-05.

[79] *yBerakhot* 4:5/8c. Parallel passages to this one appear in *bYevamot* 105b and *ShRab* 4:4.

God's dwelling, since the earthly site of that House was always aligned opposite the heavenly site.[80] Even in the view of R. Ḥiyya the Great, who views heaven as the proper direction of prayer, one still faces God's presence there. The reality of the building on God's holy mountain may have shifted, but the function of orientation remains the same: directing ones prayers towards God's place of habitation.

We may also find some indication of the **function** of liturgical orientation from the language our sources use. There are two terms used across our sources to describe the act of orientation, which appear to be in tension. One appears with the participles *maḥazirin* or *hofkhin* (to make turn or simply to turn) with the noun *peneihem* their faces or simply *peneihem li-*(their faces toward…), while the other describes the action as *yekhavven et libo* (he directs his heart), and some texts even mix the usage of both terms.[81] In Rabbinic literature, k-v-n rarely means to physically direct something, and whenever it takes the object "heart" it always connotes mental intention (e.g. for fulfilling a commandment), and in no other usage does *kivven et libo* mean directing ones body. This complication led some medieval commentators to remove the words "*et libo*" (his heart) as false additions.[82]

Modern scholars tend to discern two layers of teaching about orientation for prayer. "Directing one's heart" represents an earlier stratum in which only mental and not

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[80] On the signification of the heavenly Temple in rabbinic literature see Victor Aptowitzer, "The Celestial Temple as Viewed in the Aggadah," in *Binah: Studies in Jewish Thought* ed. J. Dan, (New York: Praeger, 1989), 1-29, which is an English translation (A. Rubinstein) of his Hebrew article by the same name in *Tarbiz* 2 (1931): 137-153, 257-287; E.E. Urbach, "Heavenly and Earthly Jerusalem" in *Jerusalem Through the Ages: The 25th Archeological Convention 1967*, ed. J. Aviram (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society 1968),156-171 (HEB); and Shmuel Safrai, "The Heavenly Jerusalem," *Ariel* 23 (1969): 11-16.

[81] Those that refer only to "turning ones face" are *yBerakhot* 4:5/8c and *ShRab* 4:4; those that refer only to "directing ones heart" are *PR*, 33 and *Tanḥuma* (Buber) Vayishlaḥ 21; those that mix the usage of the two terms are *mBerakhot* 4:5-6, *tBerakhot* 3:14-16; *bBerakhot* 31a; and *SDeut,* 29.

[82] See Ginzberg, *Commentary*, 378-79 for references, but also his critique that it is unlikely to be an addition as the words "*et libo*" appears in all MSS.

physical orientation was required, while "turning ones face" appeared later once the

directive to physically orient for prayer had emerged.[83] Nevertheless, most of our texts

decided to marshal both terms to mean physical orientation, even if one phrase previously

suggested intention and not direction. Several modern scholars see a deliberate choice in

preserving both formulations in order to make a statement about the **function** of prayer-

direction.[84] The act of orientation is both physical and mental; it is physically facing the

site of the Temple and also intending God's dwelling in the "Holy of Holies," whether on

earth or in heaven.

Finally, turning towards the site of the Temple in prayer also took on a unique

role as a marker of social/communal **identity** for Rabbinic Judaism in Late Antiquity.

Within the first passage from the Palestinian Talmud examined above (i.e. that of

concentric circles of orientation towards the land, city, temple, etc.) one can discern a

shift in signification. The teaching as it appears in the Palestinian Talmud (with an

almost exact parallel in the Babylonian Talmud, Tosefta, *ShRab* and *SDeut*) diverges

from a version that appears in the *Pesikta Rabbati* (Piska 33), a collection of aggadic

Midrash. The *Pesikta* maintains the concentric circles of Land of Israel-Jerusalem-

Temple-Holy of Holies, but omits the closing passage that those in the north face south,

in the south they face north, etc. such that all Israel faced one place. Modern scholars,

such as Saul Lieberman and Uri Ehrlich, believed that the shorter version that appears in

the *Pesikta* represents the earliest and original teaching of R. Eliezer b. Jacob, who had

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[83] See Sapir, "Directing their Hearts," Ginzberg, *Commentary*, 378-79. Compare with Henschke "Directing Prayer," who sees the two phraseologies as representing two chronological layers, but "turning one's face" as the earlier of the two layers.

[84] See E. Urbach, *The Sages*, 58-59; David Amit, "Architectural Plans of Synagogues in the Southern Judean Hills and the Halakha" in *Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archeological Discovery*, eds. D. Urman and P.V.M. Fleischer (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 141.

seen the Temple and was known as an expert on its functioning.[85] The coda of the

passage, they claim, was added by a later redactor in a post-Temple context. Uri Ehrlich

suggests that the original incentive for facing the Temple was the presence of the

Shekhina, and given that so many believed that the *Shekhina* left when the Temple was

destroyed new reasons to continue the practice were required. Group unity as expressed

by facing a single geographic center served that purpose well. Ehrlich writes:

> By means of this addition the redactor imbues the *halakha* with a new meaning:
> we do not have orientation of the individual worshiper's prayer to the *Shekhina*,
> but rather the unification of all Israel in prayer towards one location. Prayer
> towards a single center strengthens national religious identity, creating unity in
> the context of religious activity; […] According to this version there is no
> necessity for the *Shekhina* to dwell in the Temple, for even if the *Shekhina* has
> 'moved from its place,' turning to a common destination still serves an important
> unifying function.[86]

To be sure, "All Israel facing a single point" served to reinforce the socio-religious

identity of the post-Temple Jews as a single colletive. In an interesting re-reading of the

passage from Isaiah, "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations"

(56:7), the redactors of the *Palestinian Talmud* reinterpret its original meaning. Whereas

the plain reading implies the "nations of the world," now the verse refers to the Jews,

dispersed among the nations, but still facing the site of their lost Temple.

The Talmudic model of concentric circles of orientation is probably the most

well-known teaching regarding Jewish prayer-direction, and the mode of practice that

stands among Jewish communities to this day. However, it is not the only opinion

regarding direction represented in Rabbinic literature. The *Babylonian Talmud*, in *Baba*

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[85] Ehrlich, *Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 87 and Lieberman, *Tosefta*, 45. See also the version in *Tanḥuma* (Buber), Vayishlaḥ 21, which also omits the final passage from the teaching quoted in the name of R. Eliezer b. Jacob. Identifying the shorter versions as early would also accord with their usage of "directing the heart" exclusively according to those who saw this as the earlier of the two terms for direction. On R. Eliezer b. Jacob's connection to the Temple see *bYoma* 16a ff; *mMiddot* 1:2, 1:9, 2:6.
[86] *Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 87.

Batra 25a-b, offers a whole menu of other options in the course of a discussion of where

one may place a tanning-yard (for animal hides) relative to a city. The *tanna* R. Akiva

opined that a tanning-yard may be placed on any side of a city except for the west side.

The Talmud offers an explanation for this ruling, saying that R. Akiva believed that the

Shekhina is in the west; as such he also believed that west should be the direction of

prayer. Another, claiming the authority of the *tanna* R. Ishmael, maintains that the

Shekhina is everywhere, and hence all directions are acceptable for prayer. As if to

complement this view, the *amora* R. Isaac suggests that "one who desires to become wise

should turn to the south [in prayer], and one who desires to become rich should turn to

the north." It is possible that Babylonian Jewry adopted a plethora of attitudes towards

liturgical direction in the wake of the Temple's destruction. However, the paucity of

archeological evidence and the absence of these teachings from any other Rabbinic

source suggests that they never gained widespread currency.[87]

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[87] What to make of this passage that presents so many options for directions of prayer that are not the traditional Jerusalem-centered orientation? Archeologists have identified several ancient synagogues that do not seem to be oriented towards Jerusalem, but most view these as anomalies that result from circumstantial building conditions such as uncooperative terrain, tight urban space or the repurposing of structures already built. For example, see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 304-06. By contrast Wilkinson, "Orientation, Jewish and Christian," and Amit, "Architectural Plans," believe that a westward facing trend was early and common in ancient synagogues before the 3rd/4th century. Yaʿqūb Al-Qirqisānī, in his *Kitāb al-Anwār wal-Marāqib*, ed. L. Nemoy (New York: Alexander Kohut Foundation, 1939-43), VI:18, records a tenth-century Jewish sectarian group praying towards true west; in the medieval commentaries of the Tosafot on *bBaba Batra* 25a, "*le-khol ruḥta Ukman,*" and *bEruvin* 18b "*ve-lo aḥorei,*" believe that there were valid Rabbinic practices to face directions other than Jerusalem. Sapir, "Directing their Hearts," 16, believed that the opinion to pray in any direction also appears in one textual version of a *beraita* that R. Jacob b. Aḥa quoted in *yBerakhot* 4:4, 8b, (that of Solomon Sirilio's MSS London and Paris): "One may turn in any direction [for prayer] but east." In Sapir's "Prayer Direction and the Placement of Doors in Ancient Synagogues" he takes the view of westward facing prayer as originally tannaitic, and in imitation of the Temple, which was itself oriented westward. Hence *tMegilah* 3:22 demands that synagogue doors be placed on the east, citing a biblical verse (Num. 3:38) that says this was the case in the desert Tabernacle. Henschke, "Prayer Direction," goes to great lengths to argue that the opinions that diverge from the traditional teaching of facing Jerusalem represent a fleeting moment among only one generation of Babylonian Amoraim. Stefan Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 117-19, is more open to seeing fluidity of prayer directions in rabbinic times, but notes the views of Fleischer and others who downplay the teaching.

Still, the discussion about the location of the *Shekhina* and prayer-direction may offer insight into how Rabbinic Jews grappled with the loss of the Temple. While a minority of rabbis asserted that the *Shekhina* remained on the Temple Mount even after the destruction (e.g. *bBerakhot* 61b), the majority found the *Shekhina* "following Israel into exile," "retreating heavenward (e.g. *bRosh Hashanah* 31a)" or "residing among those gathered in prayer, study and justice"(e.g. *bBerakhot* 6a). Likewise, in the wake of the tragic loss of Judaism's sacred center, the rabbis offered solace in the form of a debate about liturgical orientation. One says, "Yes, our Temple was destroyed, but God is everywhere," the other says, "Our Temple was not the center, but was itself oriented westward toward the *Shekhina*, a direction we too can face."

With regard to **identity,** it is fascinating that discussions of alternative directions of prayer show an aversion to facing east. In the passage in *bBaba Batra* just mentioned, the redactor offers the words of R. Sheshet, a third generation Babylonian *amora*, in support of the view that since the *Shekhina* is omnipresent, every direction is valid. He was blind and when rising to pray he used to tell his attendant, "Set me facing any direction except to the east, and not because the *Shekhina* is not there, but rather because it is what the sectarians (*minim*) prescribe." Rejecting east as a liturgical direction accords with a number of other Rabbinic teachings on prayer direction (e.g. *yBerakhot* 4:5,8b), the erection of synagogues (*tMegillah* 3:22) and Temple liturgy around the ritual drawing of water on Sukkot (*mSukkah* 5:4). Modern scholars offer many suggestions as to whom these teachings may be directed against. Some believe they are intended to refute Jewish sectarians, such as Josephus' Essenes or Philo's Therapeutae who extolled the rising sun each day.[88] Other suggestions include Manichaeans, Zoroastrians or Hellenistic pagan

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[88] Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 3:27,11:89; Josephus, *War of the Jews* II:8:5.

groups who likewise worshiped towards the sun.[89] However, the term "*minim*," which

often refers to early Christians, may indicate that the rejection of East was in contrast to

Christians who adopted it as their prescribed sacred direction. In this sense, the facing of

Jerusalem reinforced Jewish collective land-based identity, while turning away from the

East reinforced Jewish distinctiveness, in opposition to early Christianity.[90]

Early Christianity[91]

Christian prayer towards the east first enters the literary record with Origen in the late

2nd/3rd century and quickly becomes the normative and ubiquitous position in early

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[89] See Ehrlich, *Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 92-96, for those who take up each of these positions. However, Ehrlich believes that east is a generic association with idolatry and indicates Jews whose practice was influenced as such. On records of Manichaeans facing the sun in any place it appears see Augustine, *Against Fortunas* 3 and *Against Faustus* IV:11 and XX:5; on rabbinic polemic with Zoroastrians regarding orientation for worship see Yaakov Elman, "Who are the Kings of the east and west in Ber 7a? Roman Religion, Syrian Gods and Zoroastrianism in the Babylonian Talmud," in *Studies in Josephus and The Varieties of Ancient Judaism*, eds. S.J.D. Cohen et al. (Leiden: Brill 2006), 43-80. For Roman practice of worshipping eastward see Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, IV:5 and Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, "Vespasian" 5:6. For one text that implies Romans orientating towards Rome see Titus Livinius, *History of Rome* 6:20, on the trial of Marcus Manlius, in which he directs prayers towards the city.

[90] Many scholars also see the placement of Synagogue doors on the eastern side of synagogues as anti-Christian. For example Judah b. Barzillay, *Sefer ha-Ittim*, ed. J. Schorr (Krakow, 1903), 273 n.121; Lieberman *Tosefta ki-Fshuta, Moed*, 1200; Safrai, "Synagogues South of Mount Judah," *Immanuel* 3 (1973-4): 44-50 (HEB); Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1993), 343. Urbach, *Sages*, saw Christians as the target of R. Sheshet's words, although Ginzberg, 373-75, thought that the small number of Christians in Babylonia precluded this possibility. *Minim* often means internal sectarians, and not always Christians, although in the case of the blessing against sectarians, *birkat ha-minim*, many scholars are convinced that early Christians are intended. More research is required, but see Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Ruth Langer, *Cursing the Christians: A History of* Birkat HaMinim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Christine Hayes, "Legal Realism and the Fashioning of Sectarians" in *Sects and Sectarianism in Jewish History*, ed. S. Stern (Leiden: Brill 2011), 119-146, among others. Reuven Kimmelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity" in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, Vol. 2, eds. E.P. Sanders, A.I. Baumgarten and A. Mendelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980-83), 226-244, cautions against the overreading of "*min*" as Christian. Another reason to think Christians are referred to in *bBaba Batra* 25a comes from a textual variant in the words of R. Sheshet. In most versions R. Sheshet tells his servant to face him in any direction "*le-var mi-mizraḥ*" (except east) using the Hebrew word for east. MS Munich has the Aramaic "*le-var mi-madinḥa*," which is the word used in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* to name the obligatory direction of Christian prayer.

[91] These sources have been gathered in translations whose versions appear in the bibliography of this dissertation. The use of translation will naturally restrict my ability to analyze linguistic choices as a sign of the function of orientation. It is hoped that future research will allow me to explore the Syriac texts in their original language and to collaborate with scholars of the Greek and Latin Fathers to elaborate this section more fully.

Christian writings. However, at least one group of Jesus' early followers, led by

Elchasai, wished to maintain Jerusalem as the proper liturgical direction. However, the

practice does not appear to have been widespread, nor did it last.[92] Rather, references to

the East as the correct direction of prayer are scattered across the writings of the Church

Fathers and documents of the early Church. While I include a representative sample in

the present analysis—chronologically and geographically—the vast corpus of Patristic

literature cannot be exhausted in this study.[93] We will apply the lenses of 1) authority, 2)

sacred history, 3) function and 4) identity to sources from the 3rd through 8th centuries

from across Near Eastern and Mediterranean geographies.[94] This scope will help to

elaborate what motivated early Christian communities to turn eastward in prayer and

what it meant in the centuries leading up to the rise of Islam (and parallel to our Rabbinic

sources).

Authors of the early church writings are hard-pressed to find biblical verses that

explicitly stipulate facing East in prayer, but still offer many different sources of

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[92] Epiphanius, *Panarion* Book I, 19:3:4-6; see also Iraneus, *Against Heresies* 1:26:2 on the Ebionites who practiced this way.

[93] In recent years, Christian orientation for liturgy has reemerged as a live issue in Catholic discourse. Pope Benedict XVI addressed the topic in his "Homily for the Easter Vigil" in 2008, available online at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2008/documents/hf_ ben-xvi_hom_20080322_veglia-pasquale.html and continues to speak and write on the subject in connection with his desire to propagate a stricter interpretation of Vatican II's allowance of priests facing the congregation for the liturgy. This has led to a surge in scholarship both in support of and against priests' turning towards east and away from the congregation. Much of this literature appears in Uwe Michael Lang, *Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayers*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), who marshals the historical and archeological record of the early Church to support the theological supremacy of eastward orientation of both priest and worshippers during the mass. I do not plan to take up this controversy, but hope to learn from the increased scholarly attention that it has brought to the subject.

[94] John of Damascus (d. 730s), who lived after Islam's emergence, is included here for several reasons: 1) his work compiles many explanations for facing east found in previous sources, thus attesting to their persistence into the early Islamic context; 2) even if his work is a response to Islam's emergence, its spatial and chronological proximity still demonstrates the currents in late antique Christianity; 3) John's writings about orientation to the east may point to Islam's emergence as a watershed moment in the importance of prayer-direction for eastern Christian identity, which would bolster the argument for a ritual koiné around orientation, not detract from it. On the complicated nature of recovering details about John of Damascus see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 380-89.

authority for the practice of liturgical orientation. Two of our sources, John of Damascus

and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, both refer to the Septuagint translation of Psalms, "Sing

praises to God; to him who rides upon the heaven of heavens to the East" (68/67:34).[95]

Others try to establish eastward orientation in the practices of biblical forebears. For

example, the unknown author of *Trophies of Damascus* (c. 680) claims that he saw

Moses' prayer-space on Mount Sinai, and that it was directed eastward.[96] Origen, in his

Homilies on Numbers, suggests that facing East is among the many rituals whose

groundings are "covered and veiled," but which are accepted as traditions "handed down

and commended by the great high priest and his sons."[97] Likewise, John of Damascus

finds eastward orientation to have already been the practice of Moses' Tabernacle and

Solomon's Temple.[98] Origen suggests yet another justification. In his *On Prayer* he

claims that East is, by nature, the best of all the directions, although he does not elaborate

on what he means by this. As if in response to the absence of prescription of the practice

in the New Testament, Basil of Caesarea appeals to the accepted practice of the Apostles:

> Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly
> enjoined, which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from
> written teaching; others we have received delivered to us *"in a mystery"* by the
> tradition of the apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the
> same force… [For] what writing has taught us to turn to the East at the prayer?[99]

It is possible that early Christian communities simply adopted the practice for reasons

that are not recoverable, and the teachings followed as a post-facto justification. It seems

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[95] Respectively, John, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 4:12 and *Didascalia* XII "On Bishops." See also Augustine, *Homilies on Psalms* 68:38 on vv. 33-34. The Hebrew term translated by LXX as "east" is "*qedem*," a word that can also mean ancient, which is how most early Aramaic translations render the word, and which appears to be more fitting in the context of the verse.

[96] III.VII.11, cited and translated in A. Lukyn Williams *Adversus Judaeos: A Birds-Eye View of Christian Apologiae Until the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 165.

[97] 5.1.4

[98] *Exposition* 4:12.

[99] *De Spiritu Sancto* 27.66; see also John of Damascus, *Exposition* 4:12.

likely that the lack of a clearly mandated direction in scripture at a time when Christian

communities were spread out without a centralized power led to the great variety of

sources of authority for the choice of East.

Our sources make ample reference to the memories and hopes of **sacred history**

symbolized by the East. East symbolizes Jesus himself, and according to Justyn Martyr it

is one of Christ's names.[100] In the New Testament Jesus is compared to the light of dawn

(e.g. Matt. 4:16 and Ephesians 5:6-14), his messianic entry to Jerusalem is from the

Mount of Olives in the East, (e.g. Matt. 21:1,12; Mark 11:1,11), and his messianic return

shall be "Just as lightning comes from the East and flashes as far as the west" (Matt.

24:27). The last image, of Christ's coming as lightning, occurs in the writing of John of

Damascus and the anonymous "Teachings of the Apostles."[101]

Several of our authors, however, connect facing east with the memory of Paradise

in Eden, based on Genesis 2:8, "And the Lord planted a garden in Eden—eastward."[102]

The "Apostolic Constitutions" remembers both Jesus' resurrection as well as Eden in the

act facing a sacred direction. Its instructions for setting up a church directs worshippers

to

> pray to God eastward, who ascended up to the heaven of heavens to the east;
> remembering also the ancient situation of Paradise in the East, from whence the
> first man, when he had yielded to the persuasion of the serpent, and disobeyed the
> command of God, was expelled.[103]

Other narratives of pre-Abrahamic dispensations are also remembered by facing east.

Origen portrays the story of the sinful Tower of Babel as a departure from the east, a

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[100] *Dialogue with Trypho* 126; see also Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* 3.
[101] *Exposition* 4:12 and *Didascalia di Addai* 1.
[102] See Basil of Caesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto* 27.66, and Gregory of Nyssa, *De Oratione Dominica* V, John of Damascus, *Exposition* 4:12; Cyril of Jerusalem *Catechetical Lecture* 19. Some Rabbinic sources identify Eden in the west, perhaps as a contrary response to the connection between Eden and prayer direction to the east (see *Legends of the Jews* 5:13-14). Enoch 31 says Eden is the eastern-most extremity.
[103] II.7.57.

place where humans had kept God's divine language and mission.[104] Likewise,

Hippolytus of Rome has Noah's ark circling the world but always returning to the east as

a symbol of Christ's coming to earth and then returning to heaven. [105] Geographies carry

memory, and the symbolism of turning towards the East in prayer evokes those memories

and, for many of our authors, engenders the hope for redemption in the future.

But what did the Church Fathers see as the **function** of liturgical orientation?

There were those who believed that Jesus' return would literally be from the East, and so

orientation was as an act of welcoming and expectant waiting.[106] However, for others the

performative act of physical orientation served to demonstrate a spiritual commitment to

Christ who is represented by the light. Origen tells us that in facing East in prayer "the

soul looks upon the dawn of the true light."[107] In addition, Cyril of Jerusalem reports that

in conversion ceremonies, one first faces west to renounce Satan and his darkness, and

then turns eastward to express commitment to Christ who is the way and the light.[108]

Augustine is explicit in connecting the spiritual with the physical in the act of turning to

the east:

> Does God not say, 'Be converted to me'? The scriptures are full of it: 'Be
> converted to me, be converted to me.' Indolence is beginning to be stirred. For
> what does this mean: 'Be converted to me?' It does not just mean that you, who
> were looking toward the west, should now look toward the East—that is easily
> done. If only you also did it inwardly, because that is not easily done. You turn
> your body around from one cardinal point to another; [so] turn your heart around
> from one love to another.[109]

And in his commentary *On the Sermon on the Mount* he says:

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[104] *Against Celsus* 29-32.
[105] *Fragments on the Pentateuch*, Sec. 5 on Gen. 8:1.
[106] John of Damascus, *Exposition* 4:12.
[107] *On Prayer*; See also Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7:7.
[108] *Catechetical Lecture* 19; see also Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries* 2:7 and the anonymously
authored martyrdom text, *Acts of Sharbil*.
[109] *New Sermons* (Dolbeau) 19:12.

> when we stand at prayer, we turn to the East, whence the heaven rises: not as if God also were [only] dwelling there […] but in order that the mind may be admonished to turn to a more excellent nature, meaning God, when [the mind's] own body, which is earthly, is turned towards a more excellent, i.e. heavenly, one.[110]

Orienting eastward in prayer was a performed anticipation of Christ's return and a commitment to the "enlightenment" that his message brought. Turning away from the west demonstrated a commitment to the light of God's truth and repudiation of the darkness of evil. The physical gesture was edifying in that it called to mind the spiritual transformation that the heart must undergo.

Christian sacred direction did not only express symbolic and spiritual meaning. The cultures and societies of late antique polytheistic and Jewish worship also appear to have impacted the choice of east. It is in contact with the orientations of others that Christian directionality reflects the development of their early collective **identity**.

The similarity between Christianity's eastern orientation and that of various cults of antiquity in the Mediterranean cannot be ignored. The act of orientation itself exhibits no distinction between one who intends to face Christ or Eden from one intending to worship the sun. The blurred lines motivated Leo the Great to rail against those Christians who enter St. Peter's Basilica (which is aligned westward) and turn eastward to bow to the rising sun. He says, "we must abstain even from the appearance of this observance: for if one who has abandoned the worship of [false] gods finds it in our own worship, will he not hark back again to this fragment of his old superstition, as if it were allowable, when he sees it to be common both to Christians and to infidels"?[111] The

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[110] 2:18.
[111] *Sermons* 27:4.

virulent rejection of sun-worship, seen throughout the writings of the early Church, takes on added significance in light of the eastward liturgical direction.[112]

Some Church Fathers, however, embrace the verisimilitude with pagan worship practice and turn it into an advantage. Clement of Alexandria says that "since the dawn is an image of the day of birth, and from that point the light which has shone forth at first from the darkness increases […] prayers are made looking towards the sunrise in the East, also the most ancient temples looked towards the west, that people might be taught to turn to the East when facing the images."[113] Unlike Leo the Great, who saw a threat, some saw a missionary opportunity in the closeness of pagan and Christian practice. On more than one occasion Tertullian appeals to worshippers of celestial bodies by emphasizing their common direction of prayer with Christianity and adoption of Sunday as a day of rest.[114] That east was shared with other communities as the direction of worship presented challenges and opportunities. However, the adoption of east also marked Christian identity as superseding that of the Jews and their insistence upon facing the earthly Jerusalem.

In several places the New Testament promotes the spiritual and heavenly Jerusalem to a status above that of the earthly city. Perhaps the most prominent example appears in Paul's letter to the Galatians, in which the preference for heavenly over earthly

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[112] E.g. *Didascalia Apostolorum* XXI "on the Pascha and the Resurrection of Christ the Savior" and see **n. _____** above on Augustine's criticisms of Manichaean sun-worship. It is also worth noting that the approach to the intrinsic holiness of certain spaces is shared between Roman religious practice and Christianity in Late Antiquity. See Sabine MacCormack, "Loca Sancta: The Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity" in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, R. Ousterhout ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 7-40.

[113] *Stromata* 7:7.

[114] *Apology* 16 and *Ad Nationes* 1:13.

Jerusalem signified the replacement of the old covenant for the new one.[115] One scholar

of New Testament has even commented that scripture gives the impression that

> The work of the Spirit amongst the Gentiles confirmed that God's purposes had
> taken a new direction and encouraged the conclusion that the old particularities
> associated with Jerusalem and Judaism were being eclipsed by the long-awaited
> emphasis on the 'universal.[116]

For our patristic authors, it followed that Jesus was the replacement for holy city, the

Temple, and its sacrifices.[117] After Jesus' coming, references to Zion or God's Holy

Mountain in the Hebrew Scriptures are to be read spiritually as referring to knowledge of

God and His Son.[118] Furthermore, Epiphanius declaimed "the craziness of the fraud" of

one who rejected the Temple and its sacrifices but persisted in facing Jerusalem.[119]

Christians who faced Jerusalem "as if it were the house of God" were seen as too "Judaic

in their style of life" for "Jerusalem had its time from David until the New Covenant, just

as the law did from Moses until John."[120]

In this chapter we considered the Jewish choice to face Jerusalem in the absence

of God's house (and Divine presence) as a continuity of practice, although with an

unavoidable disruption in the act's "meaning." Jews believed that God's covenant with

them remained intact, as did God's concern for Jerusalem. Hence facing Jerusalem

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[115] Galatians 4:21-31. See also Hebrews 11:10-16, 12:19-22; Revelation 21.

[116] P.W.L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Eerdmans 1996), 304. By contrast, see R. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven: Yale 1992), 46-64, who argues that the New Testament includes a land tradition of a restored Jerusalem. However, Wilken, 65-83, agrees that starting with Origen, a spiritualized reading of Jerusalem becomes dominant in Christian thought. Eusebius is also a complicated figure for Walker and Wilken, in that he has much writing that spiritualizes Jerusalem, e.g. *Commentary on Psalms*, but was also central to the re-Christianization of the city under Constantine and his building projects. To see a contrast between Origen and rabbinic readings of Jerusalem in scripture see Reuven Kimmelman, "Rabbi Yohanan and Origen on Song of Songs," *HTR* 73 (1980): 585-88. See also Urbach, "Heavenly and Earthly Jerusalem," who sees the contrast between Christian and Jewish readings of a heavenly city.

[117] E.g. Clement of Alexandria, *Fragments* 12:3 based on John 2:19-21; see also Melito of Sardis *On Pascha* 44-45.

[118] Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on Psalms* 99:5,9.

[119] *Panarion* 1:19:3.

[120] Irinaeus *Against Heresies* 1:26:2 and 4:4:2.

performed a Jewish collective identity that could thrive amidst dispersion, even as it signaled towards a past and future that included the sacred center. "For Christians, by contrast," Landsberger writes:

> the destruction of the Temple was the ultimate proof that God had forsaken the Jews and had conferred all of His grace upon the 'True Israel,' the Christians. From this, the conclusion followed that Jerusalem, as a direction of prayer, should be discontinued and a new direction chosen.[121]

One wonders if the adoption of a cardinal direction rather than another terrestrial site signified a theological dislocation of God from land in general in the first few Christian centuries. In any case, we have demonstrated that 'east' served as a symbolically powerful alternative to Jerusalem as the locus towards which to direct Christian prayers. To be sure, commemoration of Jerusalem remained important in early Christianity, notably in the form of pilgrimage, relics, and rituals.[122] To believing Christians, however, the adoption of east signified the new dispensation ushered in by the absent Son of God and served as a marker of communal boundaries between them and their late antique Jewish counterparts.

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[121] Landsberger, "Sacred Direction," 194. See also Wilkinson "Orientation, Jewish and Christian." 29, who sees the choice of east for Church orientation as directly engaging with a Jewish choice to orient synagogues westward. A recent work has shown how early Church Fathers in Jerusalem saw the destruction of the Temple as God's abandonment of Jerusalem and the old covenant; see Adam Gregerman, *Building on the Ruins of the Temple: Apologetics and Polemics in Early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 17-148.

[122] For example, on relics commemorating Jerusalem from afar see Georgia Frank, "Telling Jerusalem: Miracles and the Moveable Past in Late Antique Christianity," in *Objects in Motion: The Circulation of Religion and Sacred Objects in the Late Antique and Byzantine World*, ed. H. Merideth (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), 49-54. Example of pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land as well as monastic ritual invoking Jerusalem appears in J.Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 75-117.

Other Religious Cultures of Late Antiquity

Our study gives the most attention to Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity on the criteria mentioned above: 1) they appear to be a subject of engagement for the Qurʾān's treatment of the *qibla*, 2) they are seen by several modern scholars as influencing Qurʾānic practice, and 3) they offered a substantial corpus of literature on the subject that lends itself to the nuanced readings just undertaken. These appear to be the only cultures of Late Antiquity that meet all three conditions, but at least two others merit a brief mention here: Samaritans and Zoroastrians.

Samaritan liturgical orientation presents a challenging piece of the late antique puzzle. Samaritans, who adhere to the Pentateuch, may be included in the Qurʾānic phrase "those who have been given scripture" (Q Baqara 2:145) and at least one modern work (i.e. Crone and Cook's *Hagarism*) portrays them as a source of influence over early Islamic sacred geography. However, Samaritan literature from Late Antiquity regarding orientation is meager if not wholly lacking.

On the one hand, their identity is clearly defined by sacred geography, and in contradistinction to that of the Rabbinic Jews, their Pentateuchal counterparts. The veneration of Mount Gerizim appears as the last of the Ten Commandments in the Samaritan *Pentateuch*, and likewise, Moses commands Joshua to set up an altar and chisel the text of the law atop Mount Gerizim (not Mount Eibal as in the Masoretic version).[123] Likewise, each of the twenty-one times the Masoretic version of Deuteronomy says "the place I *will* choose" the Samaritan Bible has "the place I *have*

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[123] See Exodus 20:14, Deuteronomy 5:18 and Deuteronomy 27:4 compared in *The Israelite Samaritan Version of the Torah: First English Translation compared with the Masoretic version*, ed. and trans. B. Tsedaka (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).

chosen" (i.e. Gerizim, which was already described as a site of sacrifice).[124] Rabbinic

literature, too, identifies Samaritans with veneration of Mount Gerizim, invalidating their

circumcision as only "for the sake of Gerizim" and demanding of Samaritan converts that

they "deny Mount Gerizim" before they can be considered Jews.[125] Likewise, the New

Testament bears witness to this oppositional and place-based identity when the Samaritan

woman says to Jesus, "Our fathers worshipped at this mountain, but you say that in

Jerusalem is the place that men ought to worship" (John 4:22) and when the people of a

Samaritan village do not receive Jesus because he is "headed towards Jerusalem" (Luke

9:51-53). Josephus, likewise, knows of Samaritan veneration of Shechem/Gerizim and a

Temple built on that site going back to Seleucid times, which he says is in imitation of

that in Jerusalem and in opposition to the Jews.[126] There is no question that Samaritans

used the authority of the Torah to embrace Mount Gerizim as a sacred center and that it

was definitive of their identity, especially in opposition to their 'Jerusalem-centric' fellow

Israelites, the Rabbinic Jews.

On the other hand, no evidence exists that can clearly and definitively point to

Samaritan prayer-direction in Late Antiquity. All basis for such an assertion comes either

from non-Samaritan sources in a polemical context or from Samaritan sources of

Medieval times. For example, in the 4th century Epiphanius writes:

> The hearts of the Samaritans were led by this error to bow down to Mount
> Gerizim, where they concealed and hid their idols, and from every side, wheresoever
> they be, they bow down to their idols: from the north, from the south, from every

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[124] E.g. Deut. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23-25; 16:6-7.

[125] On circumcision "in the name of Gerizim" see *tAvodah Zarah* 3:13, *bAvodah Zarah* 26b-27a, *yShabbat* 19:2, *yYevamot* 8:1 *mKutim* 1:9. On the need to disown Gerizim as a precondition to convert see *mKutim* 2-8. For a general treatment of Samaritans in Rabbinic literature see Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinical Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 99-105.

[126] See, for example *Antiquities of the Jews* 11:4:1-9, 11:8:6, 12:5:5, 13:3:4 and *Wars of the Jews* 1:2:6.

side, wheresoever they be, they bow down to their idols, for these were on Gerizim.[127]

Samaritans would likely have rejected the claim that they venerate Gerizim for idolatrous

purposes, and so we cannot be sure that the claim that they faced there was accurate,

either. Later Samaritan chronicles unequivocally portray a prayer direction towards

Gerizim, and they even use the Arabic term *qibla* to signify that site.[128] But these first

appear several centuries after the Qurʾān. Likewise, archeology does not aid in the

picture; of the few late antique synagogues that can be identified as Samaritan, some face

toward Gerizim and others do not.[129] Samaritan religious culture is, no doubt, important

to the study of religions of Late Antiquity and requires further research to determine its

possible interaction with the Qurʾān and the practices of the earliest Muslims.

Zoroastrian orientation appears to be towards the sun, the sacred fires, the moon,

or another source of light. Worship towards luminous bodies represents devotion to the

supreme deity, *Ahura Mazda*, or to the hypostasis of 'righteousness,' *Asa Vahista*.[130] The

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[127] *De XII Gemenis* #11 (trans. Blake and de Vis), 190-91. See also Epiphanius, *Panarion* "Against the Samaritans" 1:9:2. Some Rabbinic sources also identified Gerizim as the site of idols; see references in Stern, *Jewish Identity*, 99-105. In writings of the Church fathers see also Procopius of Gaza, *Commentary on Deuteronomy* on 11:29 and Anastasius Sinaita, *Quaestiones et responsiones*; both translated in Reinhard Pummer, *Early Christian Authors on Samaritans and Samaritanism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 231. W. H. Brownlee, "Son of Man Set Your Face," *HUCA* 54 (1983): 83-110, raises (and then rejects) the possibility that the conflict between Jesus and Samaritans in Luke 9:51-53 may be because they saw Jesus "facing Jerusalem."

[128] See Abū al-Fatḥ, *Kitāb al-Taʾrīkh* (ed. Stenhouse), Introduction, 1, ch. XIX "The Debate about the *qibla* before Surdī the King," ch. XXIV, ch. XLI, ch. LIII. See also John Bowman, *Samaritan Documents* (Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1977), 126-35, and *Memar Marqah* (ed. MacDonald) 1:46-49.

[129] See Reinhard Pummer, "Samaritan Material Remains and Archeology," in *The Samaritans*, ed. A.D. Crown (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 140-42 and his "Synagogue" in *Companion to Samaritan Studies*, eds. A.D. Crown, R. Pummer and A. Tal (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 222 and L. Michael White, "The Delos Synagogue Revisited: Recent Fieldwork in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora," *HTR* 80 (1987): 139; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 300.

[130] See Mary Boyce, "On the Zoroastrian Fire Cult," *JAOS*, 95:3 (1975): 454-465, 455 on orientation. On the symbolism of sacred fire in Zoroastrianism see Boyce, "On the Sacred Fires of the Zoroastrians," *BSOAS* 31:1 (1968), 52-68 and Albert de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 343-46. Yaakov Elman, "Why is there no Zoroastrian Central Temple? A Thought Experiment," in *The Temple of Jerusalem: From Moses to Messiah*, ed. S. Fine (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 151-170. Suggests that the Fire may even be a symbol of imperial power. On the symbolism of *Ahura Mazda* and the fire, see the early Avestan *Yasna* collection of Gathic hymns 36:1-5 "To Ahura and the Fire".

literature, however, also poses some challenges to our analysis. While some modern

Zoroastrians make prayer-orientation a point of catechetical faith, and even refer to it

using the Arabic term "*qibla*," the late antique record on the issue of alignment for

worship is sparse.[131] Our sources show several indications of liturgical orientation in

Persian religious practice, but most come from outside observers and from time periods

significantly removed from the Qurʾān. For example, in the fifth century before the

common era Herodotus describes King Xerxes performing cultic rites at sunrise and

praying to the sun, and Xenophon sees sun-worship in the religious practices of Cyrus

around the same time. However, these are ancient reports, they come from outside

observers, refer only to the king, and remain somewhat ambiguous. Nothing about

Zoroastrian prayer practices in Late Antiquity can be deduced from these accounts.[132]

The late antique Zoroastrian source that speaks to our subject with clarity and

relevance appears in the 6th c. Sassanian text, *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad* (*Judgments of the

Spirit of Wisdom*):

> The wise man asked the Spirit of Wisdom (*Mēnōg ī Xrad*): How should one pray
> and praise the gods? The Spirit of Wisdom answered: One should stand three
> times every day facing the sun and *Mithr*—for the two run together. And similarly
> one should pray and praise and be grateful to[133] the moon and the *Vahrām* fire or
> the *ādarōg* fire in the morning at noon and in the evening.[134]

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[131] See *A Guide to the Zoroastrian Religion: A Nineteenth Century Catechism with Modern Commentary*.
ed and trans. F.M. Kotwal and J.W. Boyd (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982), chs. 5, 8 and 9.

[132] Heroditus, *Histories* VII:54; Xenophon, *Cryopaedia* 8:1:23 and also 8:7:2, 6:3:9. It is not clear from the
translations whether they describe sun-worship with or without facing the sun. A report closer to our
context and less ambiguous comes from the sixth-century Byzantine court historian, Procopius, *The
Persian Wars* I:3, in which he identifies a common Persian practice of praying towards the sun. Yaakov
Elman, "Who are the Kings of the East and West," argues that the Rabbinic sources (i.e. *bBerakhot* 7a)
attest to Sassanians facing the sun in prayer at sunrise, but his reading remains speculative. In the 4th c.
Epiphanius sent a "Letter to Basil of Caesarea" in which he knows that the Magians consider fire to be
divine.

[133] In some translations "opposite the moon…"

[134] #53. Aḥmad Tafazzoli, "Dadestan ī Menog ī Xrad," *Encyclopedia Iranica* VI/5, 554-55. Available
online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dadestan-i-menog (accessed online 1 Jan 2017), believes this
to be an authentically 6th c. Sassanian text and so it is a good attestation to practice in Late Antiquity. The

The **authority** comes from the revelatory character of the "Spirit of Wisdom" and the

function of the action appears to be supplication towards a divinity or its representation

in the world. More work is required in this area (as is the case with much study of

Zoroastrian ritual), but as this culture does not meet any of our three criteria, we will

leave it at that and turn to the Qurʾān.

Islam and the Qurʾān

An eight-verse passage in the Qurʾān's second chapter (Q Baqara 2:142-50)

discusses a change in *qibla*, which Islamic tradition widely identifies as Muḥammad's

replacing Jerusalem with the *Kaʿba* in Mecca as the sacred direction of prayer. While

Jerusalem would remain a venerated city, the centripetal focus of Muslim prayer shifted

to another ancient center, in Arabia.[135] This section argues that the Qurʾān's *qibla*-

passage bisects *Surat al-Baqara* as a literary turning point from the biblical past to a new

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9th c. *Denkard* (Collection of Wisdom) employs this teaching in several mentions of orientation towards the sun or a light-source as well (e.g. III:8; V:21, 30). However, the *Denkard* is chronologically distant from our present context. The ancient *Yasna* liturgical text (13:5) may also attest to the practice, saying "And therefore as Thou, O Ahura Mazda! didst think, speak, dispose, and do all things good (for us), so to Thee would we give, so would we assign to Thee our homage; so would we worship Thee with our sacrifices. So would we bow before Thee with these gifts, and so *direct our prayers to Thee* (emphasis added - AMG) with confessions of our debt." At least one Islamic author was aware of the Zoroastrian practice of orientation: see al-Thaʿālibī, *Ghurar Akhbār Mulūk al-Furs*, trans. and ed., H. Zotenberg (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1900), 259, who says, "[Zoroaster] imposed three prayers in which they turn (*yadūrūn*) with the sun in its revolution at sunrise, noon, and evening."

[135] The literature on Mecca and Jerusalem is vast, and so we offer here only some introductory works from a variety of perspectives on the early centuries. See Jacob Lassner, "Muslims on the Sanctity of Jerusalem," *JSAI* 31 (2006): 164-195; S.D. Goitein, "Al-Ḳuds" in *EI2;* M.J. Kister, "Sanctity Joint and Divided;" Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Jerusalem and Mecca," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. L. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), 287-99; and Angelica Neuwirth, "Jerusalem and the Genesis of Islamic Scripture," in idem., 315-25; and idem., "The Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Islam," in *City of the Great King: Jerusalem from David to the Present*, ed. N. Rosovsky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 93-116; Rubin, "Between Arabia and the Holy Land;" and the annotated anthologies of F.E. Peters *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginning of Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 176-250 and *Mecca: A Literary History of the Muslim Holy Land* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1994.

covenant with Muḥammad's community. The physical turning from Jerusalem to Mecca is the embodied ritual metaphor for the change. It is further suggested that two verses in the chapter that include the clause "To God belongs the east and the west" (vv. 115 and 177)—a phrase that appears in v. 142, opening the *qibla*-passage—frame the pericope that addresses the change in sacred direction. Q Baqara 2:115-77, then, represents a literary unit that grounds the rituals of the Qurʾān's community in the biblical past (e.g. Abraham's building of the *Kaʿba*), even as it differentiates that community through unique rituals (e.g. the *qibla*). More details are included below, but keep in mind that vv. 142-150 are referred to here as "the *qibla* passage" and vv. 115-177 as "the extended *qibla* passage."

Late Antiquity was a time during which orientation for prayer became a significant marker of communal distinctiveness, often in contrast to the practices of other communities. Judaism and Christianity demonstrated this trend in the meaning they attributed to their sacred directions and in their purposeful rejection of the practices of the other. So, it should not surprise us that in the 7th c., the Qurʾān frames the act of liturgical orientation largely as an expression of collective identity. Our analysis will begin with that lens and return later to 'Authority,' 'Sacred History,' and 'Function.'

It is clear that the *qibla* is definitive of the **identity** of Muḥammad's community. The qurʾānic passage contains several elements in this regard: 1) oppositional, or exclusivist, identity (i.e. our *qibla* differs from yours); 2) inclusive acceptance of the *qibla*s of other peoples; 3) facing Muḥammad's *qibla* as expressive of a unique identity. We will treat each in what follows.

In the Qurʾān, facing their own *qibla* distinguishes Muslims as a community, especially from the biblical peoples and their chosen liturgical orientations. Excerpts from the passage will suffice to illustrate:

> The fools among people will ask you: what has turned you from the *qibla* that you used to follow? And you should respond: To God belongs the east and the west, He guides whom He wills to the straight path.[…] and we only appointed the *qibla* you used to follow in order to know who would follow the Apostle and who would turn on his heels […] those who were given the scriptures know that this [i.e. the new *qibla*] is the truth from their Lord […] And even if you brought all sorts of signs to those who were given the scriptures they would not follow your *qibla*, nor can you follow theirs […] and those whom We gave the Scripture know this as they know their own sons, but a group of them knowingly conceals the truth[…](Q Baqara 2:142-46)

The "fools among people" (*al-sufahā min al-nās*) are disturbed by Muḥammad's change in *qibla*, but God only commanded the old direction to sift the Prophet's followers from his deniers. Islamic tradition tends to see this group as a faction of Jews in Medina, but the term is applied more diversely in the Qurʾān. Words based on the *s-f-h* root in the Qurʾān are often, although not always, used pejoratively to single out a group of people for criticism. Sometimes it is launched as a personal insult (Q Aʿraf 7:66-67), and it has been used to refer to heretics (Q Baqara 2:13), polytheists (Q Anʿām 6:140), as well as foolish Jinn (Q Jinn 72:4). It is even used, occasionally, to refer to people with diminished legal capacities and to commend extra care for them (Q Baqara 2:282, 4:6). However, another important reference appears in the extended *qibla* passage (Q Baqara 2:115-177) in the context of describing Abraham's building of the *Kaʿba*. One who rejects the religion of Abraham (*millat Ibrāhīm*) is "fooling himself" (*safiha nafsahu*). It is possible that this refers to the Jews, but it could just as easily refer to Jews and Christians, or even Meccan pagans who refuse to acknowledge the Abrahamic origins of the *Kaʿba*. In any case, "the foolish ones among people" (*al-sufahāʾ min al-nās*) may not

implicate an entire group but the fools among each group. The idea that Muḥammad's

qibla is distinctive with regard to all peoples is bolstered by the following verse, which

claims that God caused Muḥammad's community (*umma*) to be "witnesses to the people"

(*li-takūnū shuhadāʾ ʿalā al-nās*) and closes with "indeed God is Kind and Merciful to the

people" (*inna Allāha bil-nās la-raʾūfun raḥīmun*) (v. 143). Finally, the *qibla* passage (Q

Baqara 2:142-50) ends with another reference to all humanity when it repeats the

command to turn towards *al-masjid al-ḥarām* from wherever one departs "so that none

among the people have grounds for argument against you" (*li-allā yakūna lil-nās

ʿalaykum ḥujjatun*) (v. 150). The passage under consideration, then, begins and ends by

conveying a sense of the *qibla* as a marker of Muḥammad's people in relation to

humanity in general.

Between these opening and closing verses, however, the *qibla* stands as a point of

conflict between the Qurʾān's people and a particular community: "those who were given

the Scripture" (*alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*) (vv. 144, 145, 146). Though they know it is

truthful, they will not face your *qibla*, nor do they all follow the same *qibla*, themselves.

In the Qurʾān "*ahl al-Kitāb*" or "*alladhīna ūtū l-Kitāb*" usually refers to Jews and/or

Christians, and both are identified independently and together as characterized by

receiving scripture (e.g. Q Baqara 2:213).[136] If one wished to argue for the Jewish

character of "those given Scripture" here, one could point to the criticism that "a group of

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[136] A comprehensive study of the Qurʾān's approaches to "*ahl al-kitāb*/People of the Book" remains a desideratum. For initial treatment of the subject see Moshe Sharon, "People of the Book," *EQ*. Ismail Al-Bayrak proposes an apologetic reading intended explicitly to support current interfaith endeavors in "The People of the Book in the Qurʾān" *Islamic Studies* 47:3 (2008): 301-25. Treatments of early exegetical interpretations of the "People of the Book" also exist in small number. For example, Friedman, *Tolerance and Coercion*, 54-86, argues that the term can encompass Zoroastrians and even some polytheistic groups in; Hikmet Yaman, "The Criticism of the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) in the Qurʾān: Essentialist or Contextual?" *Gregorianum* 92:1 (2011): 183-98 argues that the early exegetes saw qurʾānic criticism of biblical peoples as limited to the specific groups at Muḥammad's time and in the Arabian context.

them knowingly conceals the truth" (*wa-inna farīqun minhum la-yaktumūna al-ḥaqq wa-hum yaʿlamūn*) (v. 146). The Qurʾān frequently criticizes the Jews of *taḥrīf*, alteration of scripture, as a means to either disqualify their claim to genuine revelation or to account for differences between Muḥammad's message and their own.[137] However, the accusation of concealment or alteration against scriptuary peoples also appears in the Qurʾān without exclusive reference to Jews. In the context of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, both Jews and Christians are criticized for "concealing testimony" (*katama shahādatan*) in support of their own claims to the biblical heritage against that of Muḥammad (v. 140). Thus, the Qurʾān does not clearly indicate the identity of the community in the *qibla* passage as one or the other.

As we saw, a variety of orientation practices existed among both Jews and Christians. It is possible that the Qurʾān refers to that variety within one of these communities or between them when it says that although they would not follow Muḥammad's *qibla* "nor are they followers of one another's *qibla*" (*wa-mā baʿḍuhum bi-tābiʿin qiblata baʿḍin*)(v. 145). What is clear, however, is that a) the scriptuary people know the truth about the *qibla*, b) some knowingly conceal it, c) they would not even acknowledge the new *qibla* in the face of clear signs to do so, and d) if Muḥammad takes on their *qibla* he will become "among the wrong-doers" (*la-min al-ẓālimīn*). The Qurʾān,

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[137] References to *taḥrīf* (alteration) and *tabdīl* (substitution) of the true revelation on the part of other biblical peoples abound in the Qurʾān. See, for example, Q Baqara 2:59 & 75, Nisāʾ 4:46, Māʾida 5:13 & 41, Aʿrāf 7:162. The subject was also a major theme in medieval Muslim-Jewish polemics; see Hava Lazarus Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19-35ff; and Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 223-48. Medieval Arab Christian authors, too, defended against the criticism that their scripture had been adulterated. See, for example, Sidney Griffith, "ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*: Christian *Kalām* in the First Abbasid Century," *Le Muséon*, 46 (1983): 165-68; and Pope Leo III's response to the claim in Arthur Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between ʿUmar II and Leo III," *HTR* 37 (1944): 269-332.

then, assumes that each religion espouses its own *qibla* as a defining feature of their community.

The literary structure of the *sūra* also reflects the notion that geographic orientation signifies Muslim distinctiveness from Jews and Christians. [138] The *qibla*-passage serves as a caesura between two rough halves within the chapter. Up to this point, the surah's main subject was a retelling of biblical stories, including Abraham and Ishmael's building the Kaʿba (Q Baqara 2:125-27, and in 14:37, 22:26).[139] In the verses leading up to the *qibla* passage, there is increased polemical engagement with Jews and Christians, marking a transition from biblical peoples to the Qurʾān's community as a new biblical people. Twice we are told that the biblical ancestors are "a nation that has passed on (*tilka ummatun qad khalat*)" (vv. 134 and 141). The *qibla*-passage is a literal and literary "turning point," which introduces the first of a series of laws (extending through v. 177) that distinguishes Muḥammad's community from those that came before them, including *ḥajj* (pilgrimage) and food laws. [140] The second half of the *sūra* focuses

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[138] This reading of *sūrat al-baqara* is based on Joseph E. Lowry, "Law Structure and Meaning in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*," in *Journal of the International Qurʾānic Studies Association* (forthcoming). A similar perspective appears in Kees Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 48-49, who sees *sūrat al-baqara* as portraying the development of Muḥammad's relationship with the Jews of Medina, with the *qibla*-passage representing the split.

[139] A loose breakdown of the sūra's first half, that mainly traces Lowry's reading, is as follows: Creation and Adam in vv. 30-39; Exodus in vv. 40-73; tales of sin of the biblical peoples, their punishment and theological polemic with them vv. 74-123; Abraham and Ishmael building a Temple for worship vv. 123-133; polemical transition from "the community that has passed on" to the Qurʾān's community vv. 134-141. On the significance of Abraham and Ishmael building the Kaʿba see Angelika Neuwirth, "Locating the Qurʾān and Early Islam in the 'Epistemic Space' of Late Antiquity," in *Islam and Its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity and the Qurʾān*, eds. C. Bakhos and M. Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 178-183; and Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 80-93; and Joseph Witztum, "The Foundations of the House (Q 2:127)" *BSOAS* 72:1 (2009): 25-40 and his "The Syriac Milieu of the Qurʾān: Recasting Biblical Narratives" (PhD Dissertation, Princeton, 2011), ch. 6. On the Kaʿba as an Abrahamic *qibla* even before Muḥammad's time see Uri Rubin, "*Ḥanīfiyya* and Kaʿba," based on ḥadīths about Zayd b. ʿAmr; esp. 101-103, 106.

[140] On food laws in the Qurʾān as a polemical boundary-marker with the People of the Book see Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food*, ch. 9. On *ḥajj* as a distinguishing ritual see *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī* "whoever dies without performing the *ḥajj*, dies a Jew or a Christian," referenced in Christiaan Snouck

on obligations and laws that are constitutive of Muḥammad's community, such as torts,

wills, fasting, and war among others. The *sūra* moves deliberately from the biblical past

to the qurʾānic community with the *qibla* as the symbol of the change. Facing towards the

new *qibla* signifies the preeminence of the Qurʾān's revelation over those that came

before. In the structure of *Sūrat al-Baqara* as a single unit, narrative, law, and polemic

come together to reflect the character of Muḥammad's community as distinct from

others—an "us" that is unique from the Jewish and Christian "them"—but also as a

community with laws that are constitutive of what it meant to be a member in a

positive/internal sense.

The *qibla*-passage, however, also contains a more conciliatory approach to the

various communities and their *qiblas* that bears mentioning. Verse 148 states, "Each has

a direction towards which he turns (*li-kullin wajhatun huwa muwallīhā*), so strive

together (as in a race) towards good works. Wherever you may be, God will bring you all

together. God has power over everything."[141] The term "Strive together in good works"

(*fa-stabiqū al-khayrāt*) after acknowledging diversity of practice among religions

parallels a similar usage in Q Māʾida 5:48:

> To you [Muhammad] We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the Scripture that
> came before it and guarding it […] to each of you We gave a Law and a Way. If
> God had willed it He would have made you one nation, but [His will is] to test
> you by what He has given you. So strive together (as in a race) towards good
> works (*fa-stabiqū al-khayrāt*), for all of you will return to God, and He will
> clarify that about which you disagreed.

Hurgronje, *The Mecca Festival*, ed. and trans. W. Behn (Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 2012), 8. Al-Azmeh,
Emergence, 358-419, gives an excellent portrayal of the ways in which various rituals of early Islam
became constitutive of communal identity.

[141] Some modern scholars believe that this verse should be read differently, to reflect a period in which
Muḥammad himself tried out many prayer-directions before settling on Mecca. They read "*li-kull-i
wajhattin huwa muwalīhā*" (he has turned towards every direction). See Goitein "Prayer," J. Rivlin *Gesetz*,
114-17; al-Azmeh, *Emergence*, 419-20.

The embrace of diverse communal practices in the Qurʾān often appears side-by-side

with more polemical portrayals of the relationship (e.g. the following verse says "do not

take Jews or Christians as allies (*awliyāʾ*)" (Q Māʾida 5:49)).

Two other verses that frame the "extended *qibla* passage" may also soften the

concrete communal boundaries embodied in facing one direction or another. Verse 115

claims "To God belongs the east and the west, wherever you turn, God's face is there"

and verse 177 states "Righteousness does not consist in turning to the east or to the west,

but righteousness is belief in God and the Last Day, etc." In these verses God cannot be

constrained to a single direction; God is anywhere that one faces, and God is also

"located" in righteous acts and beliefs. One need not read verses 115 and 177 as

referring to the *qibla* exclusively, but the repetition of the phrase "To God belongs the

east and the west" is suggestive. In any case, the presence of verse 148 destabilizes the

clear assignment of supersession to the practice of liturgical orientation. After all, "To

God belongs the east and the west and He guides whomever He wills to a straight path"

(Q Baqara 2:142).[142]

Some scholars see the conflicting trends as emerging from different strata of

Muḥammad's relationship with Peoples of the Book, the more conciliatory usually

representing the earlier phase.[143] We may also view them as representing differing voices

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[142] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 455, knows of a *sabab* for Q Baqara 2:115, in which Muḥammad offers a funerary prayer on behalf of the Christian Negus, and when questioned that he prayed, in life, to a different *qibla* than the Muslims, the verse is revealed as a response.

[143] The chronological alignment of qurʾānic verses according to the biography of Muḥammad is a traditional view adopted by exegetes and the driving force behind the exegetical genre *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). On the genre see Andrew Rippin, "The function of 'Asbāb al-Nuzūl' in Qurʾānic Exegesis," *BSOAS* 51:1 (1988): 1-20. For an example of a scholar who assumes that polemical material in a *sūra* is a sign of its Medinan character, see Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "An Exegesis of Sura Ninety-Eight," *JAOS* 97:4 (1977): 519-30; see esp. 524.

among Muḥammad's community, and so the passage speaks to a variety of approaches.[144]

Whether reflecting diachronic or synchronic diversity, the inclusivist and exclusivist

trends within the *qibla*-passage say something profound about the interplay between

ritual and identity in the Qurʾān. As David Friedenreich has said of dietary practice,

> The identity of the Qurʾan's community of believers rests not only on establishing the difference between this community and its redressors, but also on establishing the relationship among these communities. […] Not from a dichotomy of us and them, but rather from the existence of a continuum[.]"[145]

The Qurʾān uses spatial metaphors to position Muḥammad's community along the

continuum. It distinguishes them as an "*ummatan wasaṭan* (a central/ moderate/ just

people) and as a witness to humanity, just as Muḥammad is a witness to them(v. 143).[146]

This special mission required the obedience of those who are "rightly-guided" and

imposing the *qibla* reveals "who would follow God's emissary and who would turn

away" (v. 143). The **identity** reflected by each community's practice of facing the *qibla*

admits of unique significance within its own system of symbol and meaning. Our other

analytic lenses as applied to the *qibla*-passage within the broader qurʾānic system will

help to flesh out that significance.

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[144] Reuven Firestone, *Jihād: The Origins of Holy War in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 4, believes that differing approaches to warfare in the Qurʾān reflect a variety of simultaneously held views among the early Muslim community, rather than later views abrogating earlier ones. Neuwirth, "Epistemic Space," offers a model of community-formation that is also fluid, although following a definite progression that tracks traditional accounts of Muḥammad's biography.

[145] *Foreigners and Their Food*, 142.

[146] W-S-Ṭ in the Qurʾān is almost always associated with a sequential ordering: either the middle prayer of a day (Q Baqara 2:238); the average quality of a meal one would serve (Q Māʾida 5:89); or a spatial center (Q ʿĀdiyāt 100:5). In one instance it seems to connect to moral value: in the parable of the garden in which the "most upright among them said, didn't I tell you we should have praised God" (*qāla awsatuhum alamm aqul lakum lawlā tisabbiḥūn*)(Q Qalam 68:28). See also, Frank Griffel, "Moderation" in *EQ*. On the same verse Al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ l-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 2, ed. al-Turkī (Beirut: Muwassasat al-Risāla, 2006), 433, suggests that the metaphor implied by "*ummatan wasaṭan*" is that the Muslims occupy a middle position spiritually, between the prophets and the rest of the world. Al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī*, ed. M.ʿA.R. al-Murʿashlī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1998), vol. 1, 110, identifies the use of *wasaṭ* as analogous to human characteristics, in which the middle way is preferred; e.g. bravery is what is between recklessness and cowardice. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 144-45, sees "*wasaṭ*" as "just," and a reponse to Jewish accusers who claim to be more just than Muḥammad. On center as a symbol of value see J.Z. Smith, "Wobbling Pivot," 98-99.

In the Qurʾān, the Islamic prayer-direction is grounded upon the **authority** of the

unequivocal command of the God of "the east and the west."[147] Three times in the short

passage, God instructs Muḥammad's community to "turn your faces towards the Sacred

Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Ḥaram*)" from wherever they "go out" (Q Baqara 2:144, 149, 150).

The Sacred Mosque—or sometimes the "Sacred House" (e.g. Q Māʾida 5:2, 97), the

"Ancient House" (e.g. Q Ḥajj 22:29,33) or just "The House" (e.g. Q Baqara 2:125-27)—

refers to the Kaʿba in Mecca, the Temple that keeps the Black Stone and which Muslims

circumambulate during the hajj festival.[148] In the context of the *qibla*-passage itself the

site is not associated with any apparent significance in **sacred history**. However, other

references to the site in the Qurʾān are suggestive.

The Kaʿba is named as the first temple given to humans as a site of worship (Q Āl

ʿImrān 3:96), which gave rise to a plethora of legends about Adam worshipping at the

original structure on the site.[149] It is from the Sacred Mosque that Muḥammad takes his

famous night journey to "the Farthest Mosque," (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*)—usually identified

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[147] Recall that this was not the case for the texts of Rabbinic Judaism or early Christianity, which had to resort to interpretive means for understanding scripture or tradition as mandating the practice of orientation for worship.

[148] The term Kaʿba is only used twice in the Qurʾān at Q Māʾida 5:95, 97.For reading all the varied references as designations of the Kaʿba see J. Vecchi's, "The Kaʿbah ca. 500-700: A Window into the Origins of Islam" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago (forthcoming)). See also Gerald Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge, UK: Camrbidge University Press, 1999), 20-26ff and his "The Origins of the Muslim Sanctuary at Mecca," in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G.H.A. Juynboll (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), 23-41; and his "Kaʿba" in *EQ*.

[149] Some accounts of Adam's creation in Mecca, building the Kaʿba, and performance of *ḥajj* appear in al-Azraqi, *Akhbār Makka*, 72-86. See references in M.J. Kister "Ādam: A Study of Some Legends in Tafīr and Hadīt Literature," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 113-74, esp. 170-71. The connection between Adam and Mecca/the Kaʿba in early Islamic sources is the subject of Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); A.J. Wensinck, *Ideas of the Western Semites Concerning the Navel of the Earth* (Amsterdam: Johannes Muller, 1916), 18-21 shows the adoption of a central temple of worship (Kaʿba or Beit HaMiqdash) and Adam created before the world as both a Jewish and early Islamic teaching about Jerusalem and Mecca, respectively; Loren Lybarger shows how early exegetes also place Adam's burial site in Mecca, see "The Demise of Adam in the 'Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ:' The Symbolic Politics of Death and ReBurial in the Islamic 'Stories of the Prophets'," *Numen*, 55:5 (2008): 497-535.

as the site of the Temple in Jerusalem—"whose precincts God did bless" (Q Israʾ 17:1).

However, the Kaʿba most commonly evokes the story that connects it to the biblical past:

its founding by Abraham and his son Ishmael (Q Baqara 2:125-27, Ibrāhīm 14:37, Ḥajj

22:26).[150] This memory also connects to identity, in that the Qurʾān regularly frames the

qurʾānic community as the true heir of the Abrahamic legacy (e.g. Āl ʿImrān 3:64-70). It

is possible that turning towards the Kaʿba in prayer symbolizes a connection with these

communal memories and their sacred geography. The *qibla*, then, would represent

turning away from the sacred histories propagated by the biblical peoples and re-turning

towards the Abrahamic center, now located in Arabia.

Allusions to Abraham are readily apparent in the "extended *qibla*-passage" (Q

Baqara 2:115-177).[151] Abraham's building of the *bayt* in verses 127-28 should be read

within the broader narrative and theological context in which it appears: one that sees

Abraham as simultaneously grounding the identity of Muḥammad's community and

challenging Jewish and Christian claims to God's exclusive favor. Abraham builds the

bayt with Ishmael, and not Isaac (v. 127), asking that they be accepted as "muslims" (v.

128), and he prays that God send a *rasūl* (Emissary), a term used to refer to

Muḥammad.[152] Just a few verses later, and leading up to the *qibla*-passage,

Muḥammad's Abrahamic heritage attests to the obsolescence of Judaism and

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[150] See references in note 136 above.

[151] There appears to be a distinct literary unit that makes an argument using Abraham's religion (*millat Ibrāhīm*) as a justification for Muḥammad's community that begins and ends with "That is a nation that has passed on, it will have its desserts as you will have yours, and you will not be asked about what they used to do." ("*tilka ummatun qad khalat lahā mā kasabat wa-lakum mā kasabtum wa-lā tusʾalūn ʿammā kānū yaʿmalūn*") (in Q Baqara 2:134 and 141) The unit immediately precedes the *qibla*-passage and demonstrates the connection between the narrative of the Kaʿba's construction and the command to face it.

[152] While it is not clear from the context whether the verses refer to "Muslims" as a proper noun or as a participle of "submitter," "*muslim*," the resonance is not greatly affected. The same tone occurs in Abraham's request of his sons and of Jacob just a few verses later, "Indeed, God has chosen this religion for you, so die not except as muslims," and in their affirmative response (Isaac, Ishmael and Jacob together) (Q Baqara 2:132-33).

Christianity: "They say, 'be Jews' or 'be Christians' so that you might be well-guided.

You should say 'the religion of Abraham was [just] to be a *ḥanīf*, and not to be among the

polytheists" (Q Baqara 2:135).[153] God instructs Muḥammad to say that his people should

believe in the revelations of the biblical forebears, making no distinction, "for we submit

to Him" (*lahu muslimūn*) (v. 136). Finally, the Qurʾān says that if those peoples believe

as Muḥammad's community does then they have been rightly-guided, as opposed to if

they "turn away" (*wa-in tawallaw*)(v. 137). The spatial metaphor, and indeed the entire

passage, from the building of the *bayt* up to the *qibla*-passage, connect the act of turning

towards *al-masjid al-ḥaram* with the Abrahamic heritage, which is said to be neither

Jewish nor Christian. The Qurʾān asks, "who would reject the religion of Abraham

(*millat Ibrāhīm*) except one who fools himself (*man safiha nafsahu*)" (Q Baqara 2:130).

And, of course, it is the fools (*al-sufahāʾ*) who disparage Muḥammad over the change in

qibla.[154]

The **function** of facing a sacred direction is not discussed in the passage (other

than to express identity). In fact, the closing of the extended *qibla* passage seems to

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[153] See also v. 140 "Or do you say that Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob and the tribes were Jews or Christians etc."
Eight of the twelve times "*ḥanīf*" is used in the Qurʾān it is associated with Abraham or Abrahamic religion
(i.e. *millat Ibrāhīm*)(Q Baqara 2:135, *Āl ʿImrān* 3:67 & 95, *Nisāʾ* 4:125, *Anʿām* 6:79 &161, and *Naḥl*
16:120 &123). While the term's origin is debated, it appears to be contrasted with the Aramaic/Syriac
usage of the cognate term, "*Ḥanpè*," used to refer to pagans. It is possible that the Qurʾān appropriates the
term for its own purposes using its Arabic meaning, to incline towards something. On the term *ḥanīf* and
its meaning in the Qurʾān and early Islamic literatures see Andrew Rippin, "RḤMNN and the Ḥanīfs," in
Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams, ed. W.B. Hallaq and D.P. Little (Brill: Leiden, 1991), 153-
168; Uri Rubin "Ḥanīf" in *EQ* and "*Ḥanīfiyya* and *Kaʿba;*" N.A. Faris and H.W. Glidden, "The
Development of the Meaning of the Koranic Ḥanīf," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 19 (1939): 1-
13; Arthur Jeffries, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Koran* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 112-15; Charles
Lyall, "The Words 'Ḥanīf' and 'Muslim'" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1903): 771-84, who
responds to D.S. Margoliouth, "On the Origins and Import of the names Muslim and Ḥanīf" at 467-93 of
the same publication.
[154] Play on the Q-B-L root in the extended qibla-passage also sews together the connection between the
qibla and the Abrahamic heritage. Muḥammad's turning his face in the heavens ("*taqallub wajhika fī al-
samāʾ*" (Q Baqara 2:144))—which leads to God's directive to face the *Kaʿba*—may play on the words of
Abraham and Ishmael's petition that God "accept from us" (*taqabbal minnā*) the building of the *bayt* (v.
127). Indeed both terms carry linguistic echoes of the term "*qibla*" itself, as is likely the case with "*mā
jaʿalnā al-qibla allatī kunta ʿalayhā illā li-naʿlam […] mimman yanqalibu ʿala ʿaqibayhi*" (v. 143).

eschew that orientation could serve a religious function: "Righteousness does not consist in turning to the east or the west [i.e. any direction], but righteousness is to believe in God and the Last Day […] and to spend your money, out of love for Him, on your kin, and the orphans, and the needy, etc." (Q Baqara 2:177). Nevertheless, the verbs used in the passage to denote 'turning' and 'facing' appear throughout the rest of the Qurʾān as metaphors for the proper (and improper) spiritual orientation towards God. So, after rejecting the divinity of celestial bodies Abraham says, "I turn my face to the one who separated heaven from earth" (Q Anʿām 6:79). And turning away from God is seen negatively, as in "when you mention the Lord—Him alone—in the Qurʾān they turn away in disgust" (Q Isrāʾ 17:46).[155] In fact, the verse in chapter 2 that begins the extended *qibla* passage connects turning and facing to show a divine-human meeting: "To God belongs the east and the west, wherever you turn, there is the face of God" (v. 115).[156] We might discern the function of facing in the Qurʾān, then, as demonstrating commitment to God and perhaps even encountering God.

Words using the *h-d-y* root and the phrase "upright path" (*sirāṭ mustaqīm*)—as in v. 142—appear throughout the Qurʾān as spatial metaphors for proper spiritual orientation.[157] The *qibla*-passage cleverly continues to interweave embodied practice

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[155] On uses of facing and turning to denote those who turn away from God and Muḥammad, see Q Baqara 2:137, 205; Anfāl 8:20, 23; Dukhān 44:14; Layl 92:16, in which those who turn away are contrasted with those who give charity "seeking God's face." The term "setting ones face to God" (*iqāmat al-wajh*) is absent from our passage but shows actions of the face as a metaphor for proper religious orientation at Q Yūnus 10:105, Rūm 30:30, 43; and submitting ones face (*islām al-wajh*) appears at Q Luqmān 31:22.

[156] On encountering God's face in the Qurʾān see Andrew Rippin, "'Desiring the Face of God.' The Qurʾānic Symbolism of Personal Responsibility," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qurʾān,* ed. I.J. Boullata (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2000), 117-24 and Angelika Neuwirth, "Face of God—Face of Man."

[157] See, for example, Q Baqara 2:213, where divine guidance to a *sirāṭ mustaqīm* is also associated with the disputes among the scriptuary peoples. Of course, the petition in the prayer of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, "*ihdinā sirāṭ al-mustaqīm*" comes immediately to mind. See also Q Baqara 2:120, where "*ittibāʿ*" and "*hudā*" are similarly used to contrast the practice of the Jews and Christians with what Muḥammad ought to practice. See also Q Anʿām 6:153 where the upright path is compared to other wayward paths.

with moral devotion as a test of those who would follow the Emissary and those that would turn away (v. 143).[158] Even the designation of Muḥammad's people as "*wasaṭ*," central and/or moderate, persists in the line of spatial metaphor. The orientation towards a physical site, the Sacred Mosque, cannot be detached from the spiritual and socio-religious **functions** that it serves: it expresses one's commitment to God's religion, even as it **identifies** its practitioner as one of Muḥammad's people, signified by fidelity to the **sacred history** of Abraham that unfolded there.[159]

Conclusion

The three traditions we have explored in depth exhibit divergent approaches in terms of the authority used to bolster the obligation of prayer-direction, the sacred histories that the performances evoke, and to some extent, the function served. The most salient element in common, however, is that in each culture the direction of prayer marks communal identity: both in terms of the internal experience of belonging and the external feature of boundary-marking. The Qurʾānic sources were most explicit in this regard, and facing the *qibla* represented a performance of one's commitment to the God who commanded the action and a visible sign of association with the collective whose world centers on the Kaʾba. As we saw, analogous currents were present in Rabbinic and early Christian sources, as well. Indeed, the divergence in prayer direction had been one ritual metaphor for the "parting of ways" between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity.

In Late Antiquity the direction one faced for liturgy was indicative and formative of socio-religious identification. The phenomenon of liturgical orientation also expressed

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[158] The phrase "*inqilāb ʿalā wajhihi*" is employed similarly at Q Ḥajj 22:11.

[159] See Witztum, "The Syriac Milieu of the Quran," ch. 6 on the site of the near sacrifice of Abraham's son in Q Ṣaffāt 37:100-112 as the same as that referred to in Q Baqara 2:127.

a belief about the three-fold relationship between God, people and terrain. For Jews, facing Jerusalem indicated God's ongoing relationship with that important historic site, and with them. It also served to engender an experience of spiritual unity amidst physical dispersion. For Christians, the adoption of east represented an eschewal of the need for a centripetal prayer direction, probably attached to beliefs about God's dwindling relationship to Jerusalem and to land in general, and conjured hopes for a messianic return to an Edenic state. Islam joined an already lively discourse around direction and identity, and the Qurʾān readily and effectively distinguished its emergent community using the *qibla*. In fact, the Qurʾān's explicit engagement with the *qibla*s of "those who were given the scripture" demonstrates how important this ritual marker of identity had become in Late Antiquity. We can speak of several communities participating in a ritual koiné of orientation, not unlike that around purity, circumcision, and dietary law.[160] Although the three chose different options, they shared concern for establishing divine **authority** on which to base the practice; they each found symbolic significance in memories and/or hopes of **sacred history** evoked by their direction; and they found **functional** work done by the act of alignment. How they arranged these various factors was essential for how the practice of orientation would shape and express their communal **identities**.

Late Antiquity was a time during which geographic orientation for prayer inscribed and expressed communal belonging to the exclusion of other collectives.

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[160] On koiné of purity see M. Katz *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunnī Law of Ritual Purity*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 8 and 29-58. On dietary koiné see Michael Cook, "Magian Cheese: An Archaic Problem in Islamic Law," *BSOAS*, 47 (1984), 462-66. Although he does not call it as such, see also Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food*. On circumcision and Sabbath as places that the Qurʾān demonstrates connection with late antique Christian motifs see Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture*, 105-10. For an informative discussion of circumcision in early Islamic law and its relationship to the practice in Late Antiquity, see Lena Salaymeh, *Beginnings of Islamic Law: Late Antique Islamicate Legal Traditions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 105-135.

However, for each of the pre-Islamic traditions we discussed their sacred directions also signify the commemoration of absence—absence of and from the holy temple, for rabbinic Jews, and devotional expectation for the return of the absent Son of God, for early Christians. The Qurʾān, likewise, appears to commemorate absence through the requirement to face the *qibla*. Nicolai Sinai has pointed out that one feature of the "Medinan Qurʾān" is the notion of exile from home and from sacred center.[161] The *qibla* enters this setting, not only as an identity-marker, but also as a commemoration of communal absence from the *masjid al-ḥarām*. In fact, the repetition of the phrase "from wherever you go out" in the command to face the *qibla* implies that one is away from the Kaʿba, as can be seen from other uses of verbs derived from the root kh-r-j in the Qurʾān.[162] In fact, Q Mumtaḥana 60:1 uses the root twice, in apparent reference to Muḥammad's being driven out of his home for his beliefs and to those who leave their homes to fight in God's cause.[163]

Interestingly, the only reference to the *qibla* outside of *Sūrat al-Baqara* may also imply a commemoration of absence from home and center. In Q Yūnus 10:87 God tells Moses and Aaron, "settle your people in houses in Egypt, and make your houses face the *qibla*" (*wa-ajʿalū buyūtakum qiblatan*). Although this passage is generally considered Meccan, the command to face homes towards the *qibla* while in Egypt—away from the Holy Land—is suggestive. And while absence and identity may be common to the *qibla* practice of all three traditions, the Qurʾān distinguishes itself. For Jews and Christians

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[161] Sinai, "The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qurʾān" in *Mélanges* 66 (2015-16), 54-56.

[162] See, for example, Q Nisāʾ 4:66, "*akhrujū min diyārikum.*"

[163] "*…yukhrijūn al-Rasūl wa-iyākum an tuʾminū bi-llāhi rabbikum in kuntum kharajtum jihādan fī sabīlī…*" See another reference to being chased out, presumably from Mecca, using the verb in Q Anfāl 8:30 and Q Tawba 9:40.

liturgical orientation signified facing God's home, God's presence or the place from which He would return, whereas the Qurʾān eschews any such notion. In fact Q Baqara 2:177 tells us that it is not any form of righteousness to face east or west (i.e. any particular direction), but righteousness lies in proper beliefs and good works. Likewise, v. 115 says, "To God belongs the east and the west, wherever you turn, the face of God is there." The *qibla* is not about righteousness or facing God. Rather, facing the proper *qibla* demonstrated pure commitment to God's command, even as it shifted. Likewise, facing the proper *qibla* demonstrated membership in the community to whom God's favor had relocated.

A characteristic feature of Late Antiquity is the spread of imperial and diasporic religions, which transcended geographic boundaries and local cultic loyalties.[164] It is perhaps no surprise, then, that during this period sacred direction emerged as a potent symbol of socio-religious belonging. By facing towards a single *qibla* (whether Mecca, Jerusalem or east), individuals spread over wide expanses of territory could perform a common act of collective identification. In this sense, spatial orientation expressed and inscribed spiritual orientation on individual and communal bodies. To study Islam as a late antique religion does not mean viewing it as the product of late antique cultures. Rather, Arabia was a part of the late antique world, and, as we have seen, Islam was fluent in its ritual idiom.

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[164] See Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity 200-1000 A.D.* Revised Edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 189: "Large Christian groups, Chalcedonians quite as much as Monophysites, were prepared to forget ancient loyalties to their cities. Religion provided them with a more certain, more deeply felt basis of communal identity. Even when they lived in villages and cities where their own church predominated, they had come to see themselves first and foremost, as member of a religious community. They were fellow-believers. They were no longer fellow citizens." See also Robert Hoyland "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. S.F. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012),1059-62.

Chapter Two

Becoming 'The People of the *Qibla*'
The Semantic History of an Expression of Collective Belonging

Chapter 1 ("Wherever you Turn") demonstrated that the Qurʾānic obligation to face the

qibla helped to define Muslim identity during the lifetime of Muḥammad. For late

antique Jews and Christians, the practice of praying in the direction of Jerusalem or

east—respectively—expressed the parting of ways between those communities.

Orientation for ritual is not only a religious obligation, but in the formation of Islam it

served as primary marker of the boundaries between an "us" that worships towards the

masjid al-ḥarām and a "them/s" that align their bodies differently. In this sense, the *qibla*

is not unique as a ritual marker of communal boundaries. The distinctively Islamic

practices of purity, food-ways, fasting, and others would come to circumscribe the

religious character of Islam by contrast to the forms in which other groups performed

these acts of religious devotion.

The *qibla*, however, unlike any other ritual occupied a unique place as an

embodied metaphor for collective identity by the end of the first Islamic centuries. For

example, many Muslim heresiographers came to view a group's *qibla* as a basic feature

of its definition as a religion. And so, al-Bīrūnī (d. *c.* 442/1050) differentiates between

"true" Ṣabians and Ḥarrānians by mentioning that one group faces the North Pole in

prayer while the latter faces the South Pole.[165] Interestingly, al-Kindī (d. *c.* mid-3rd/ 9th

c.)—also using the *qibla* as a synecdoche for religion—argued that Ḥarrānians and

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[165] Abū al-Rayḥān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *al-Athār al-Bāqiya ʿan al-qurūn al-khālīya*, ed. E. Sachau (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1878), 206; English translation appears in *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, trans. E. Sachau (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1879), 188. See also *al-Athār* 331, *Chronology*, 329, where al-Bīrūnī repeats the distinction between Ḥarrānian and Ṣabian *qibla*s, but is aware of an author "from among them" who criticizes facing any specific *qibla* when petitioning God. Still, the inclusion of this latter voice still implies that many defined religions by *qibla*.

Ṣabians constituted a single group whose "practices and laws do not contradict. They have adopted a single *qibla*, which they have asserted is towards the North Star in its course."[166] Furthermore, several Muslim heresiographers know that Rabbanites and Karaites were both Jewish sects who shared the Jerusalem *qibla*, and readily point out that the Samaritan *qibla* differs (i.e. they face Mount Azūn/Gerizim in Nāblūs/Shekhem), a fact that became relevant for jurists who argued about whether Samaritans should be considered Jews for the purposes of collecting the *jizya* (non-Muslim tribute tax).[167] A final example where the *qibla* stands in for the whole of a religion appears in al-Azdī's (d. 334/945) *History of Mawṣil*. Apparently, Abū Jaʿfar—who would become the first ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775)—issued an order of protection (*amān*) to ʿAbdāllah b. ʿAlī (d. 146/764), which preserved the latter's authority in his region "over the people of Islam, the contracted peoples (*al-muʿāhidīn*), and the people of every religion (*milla*) and *qibla*."[168] Many more examples of the *qibla* as a marker of religious and interreligious distinction appear in medieval polemical writing, which is the subject of Chapter 3 ("Does God's Mind Change?").

The current chapter, shifts our focus away from the ways in which Islamic collective identity formed by differentiation from the practices of other religious

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[166] The excerpted passage quoting al-Kindī is from Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī, but appears in Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, vol. 2, ed. A.F. Sayyid (London: Muwassasat al-Furqān, 2009), 358. A Translation that, in this instance, mainly keeps to the original text appears in Bayard Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 746.

[167] See Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wal-Niḥal*, vol. 2, ed. ʿA.ʿA.M. Al-Wakīl (Cairo: 1968), 24; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, eds. Y.b.A. al-Bakrī and Sh.b.T. al-ʿĀrūrī (al-Dammām: Ramādī lil-Nashr, 1997), 228-30; Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshāʾ fī Kitābat al-Inshā*, vol. 13 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīya, 1922), 268-70; Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ wal-Iʿtibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Āthār*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīnīya, 1967) 476-79.

[168] Abū Zakārīyā Yazīd b. Muḥammad al-Azdī, *Taʾrīkh al-Mawṣīl*, ed. ʿA. Ḥabīb (Cairo: 1967), 169. On the events surrounding this declaration see Said Amir Arjomand, "ʿAbd Allah Ibn al-Muqaffaʾ and the ʿAbbāsid Revolution" *Iranian Studies* 27:1 (1994): 9-36. A translation of the full Amān appears at p. 33.

communities. Rather, we now explore how the *qibla* became a cultural resource to express and enable a common sense of belonging among Muslims, even across sectarian lines. To do so this chapter traces the semantic use of the term '*ahl al-qibla*,' or People of the *Qibla*, an expression that came to signify a "big tent" Islam, one that was expansive enough to include grave sinners as well as political and theological adversaries.[169] The term, it will be argued, likely emerged in Iraq by the late-Umayyad period (i.e. *ca.* late 1st/early 8th century). Its early deployment came in reaction to those who wished to exclude other Muslims from the community, either for sinful beliefs, practices, or political affiliations.[170] In response, one could point to the external action of that person or group—symbolized by ritual worship in the direction of Mecca—as a sign that they belonged to the Islamic collective, and as a way to overlook questions regarding political loyalties. Socio-religious "belonging" took concrete form through legal communion between the so-called offenders and their Muslim peers with regard to institutions such as inheritance, ritual slaughter, burial, and other practices (to be

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[169] In this chapter I use singe inverted commas (quotation marks) around the phrase '*ahl al-qibla*' and capital letters when translating it (i.e. "People of the *Qibla*") because I am tracing its semantic history as a technical term in early Islamic discourse about theology, community, and difference. Occasionally, it will be referred to as "the *qibla*-phrase;" my choice to use one or the other designation is purely stylistic. I am not aware of any focused academic treatment of the phrase's history and varied usage. Josef Van Ess is aware of the term's meaning as including diverse Muslim beliefs, and he often translates it as "Großgemeinde;" see his "Schicksal und selbstbestimmtes Handeln aus der Sicht von Ḍirār b. ʿAmr's *K. al-Taḥrīsh*," in *Kleine Schriften des Josef Van Ess*, 3 Vols. ed. H. Biesterfeldt (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 2517. See also his brief discussion of '*ahl al-qibla*' and the related term '*ahl al-ṣalāt*' in Josef Van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere: Beobachtungen an islamischen häresiographischen Texten* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2011), 1269-70. Since the phrase appears in a wide variety of literatures and periods, it is difficult to make generalizations. This chapter aims to serve as an opening for future scholarship on the *qibla*-phrase that can be more sensitive to its uses in individual contexts.

[170] For many early Muslim authors the social and religious were interwoven. As a result, acknowledging the right to rule of one party or another also reflected theological outlooks with regard to the God-given authority and leadership of the community. In this writing we favor the term 'socio-religious' to reflect the reality of communal and political affiliations intertwined with religious outlooks in such a way that one cannot easily separate one from the other, nor may there be any benefit in doing so.

discussed below).[171] Geographic orientation towards the sacred center of the Muslim oikoumene performed an external affiliation with Islam that allowed other Muslims to leave one's internal beliefs to God. The act of naming a reprobate as among the '*ahl al-qibla*' implied that people ought to treat him as a Muslim and a Believer, even if God knew otherwise about his true status and ultimate fate.

The expression '*ahl al-qibla*' is just that, an expression that conveys meaning. It did not perform the feat of incorporating into the polity of believers Muslims whom an author deemed to be of questionable status.[172] As such, there are not, to my knowledge, any direct treatments of the term in pre-Modern Islamic literature. Its very first usage was probably, as so many figures of speech, both oral and impossible to date. The modern discipline of semantics is the study of key words or technical terms within the whole worldview in which those terms appear. The semantic analysis of '*ahl al-qibla*,' which is the subject of this chapter, demonstrates the idiom's ability to communicate an existing socio-religious position regarding those whose beliefs or behaviors jeopardized their status as Muslims.

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[171] It is difficult to find efficient and accurate terminology to reflect the phenomenon by which an author or group sees another individual or group as valid to participate in rituals and other social institutions, despite apparent differences. For example, stating that an individual is a legitimate partner for marriage, despite association with a different denomination. "Commesality" is a term often used to describe only the habit of eating together, and "mutuality" implies more similarity between parties than I would like to reflect here. With some hesitation, I have chosen "communion," despite its connotations as a Christian term for an offering of Christian worship. Instead, I use its sense of groups or individuals in a relationship of mutual participation in rites and social institutions with another group. For example, "In 2012 the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA) entered a pact of full communion; their members may receive the Eucharist at one another's churches." On this usage see "communion, n.". OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press. http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2817/ view/Entry/37318?redirected From=communion& (accessed August 28, 2018).

[172] It is argued in this chapter that the term *ahl al-qibla* is most often used by our authors in the context of the inclusion of individuals or groups whose status is suspect in the perspective of the author or his school of thought. Historians must take great care not to label Islamic beliefs, communities, and individuals as legitimate or questionable, righteous or dubious, or any other valuation that implies an ontological status, or impute a normative/heterodox paradigm in any objective sense. In this chapter, when terms such as "of questionable status" are used, they should always be taken to imply "as deemed by the author."

The term appears in a variety of literary genres, from the earliest theological epistles and later systematic theological writings to doctrinal creeds to *tafsīrs*, histories, and legal manuals. In most cases '*ahl al-qibla*' indicates an author's broadest definition of Islamic community, including Muslims of dubious status, and in some cases it refers specifically to the questionable sub-group. This chapter draws upon a very wide sampling of authors and genres, and it proceeds in two parts. First, we will consider the conceptual workings of the *qibla*-phrase: the types of sins it applied to, the way it came to expand the theological boundaries of Islamic community, its slightly different uses in Shiʿi writings, and its practical implications for legal communion between Muslims. Most of the sources in this section come from the ninth- through twelfth-centuries, when Islamic theological writing began to flourish and take on issues systematically. Second, we will argue for the historical origins of the term in the Umayyad period, most likely in Kūfa and/or Baṣra. In this context—the civil strife of the first century, extremist Khārijites who named Muslim adversaries as infidels, an increasingly diverse polity in the post-conquest era, and the abiding sovereignty of leaders of doubtful legitimacy—the drive to maintain religious unity became expressed with reference to all Muslims as People of the *Qibla*.

In the first Islamic centuries, then, the *qibla* became a key cultural resource for expressing an expansive and inclusive Muslim identity. As discussed in the introduction, the act of facing the *qibla* invoked three factors of importance to the formation of collective identity in early Islam: interreligious boundaries, sacred geography, and ritual performance. By facing the Meccan *qibla* one a) demonstrated that one was a Muslim and not a Jew, Christian, or anything else; b) aligned one's political allegiance with a

land that was neither the seat of Umayyad leadership, nor their ʿAlid-cum-ʿAbbāsid adversaries in Iraq; and c) performed fealty to Islam, bodily, which solidified one's status as Muslim despite other causes for exclusion. The *qibla* did not *do* the work of unifying Muslims across sectarian lines. However, for those who wished to hold together the social structures of religious community amidst political and theological divides, orientation towards the *qibla* proved to be a potent and persistent symbol in the performance of collective identity.

Sinners Among the '*ahl al-qibla*:' The Mechanics of the Term as used in Tafsīr

One of the earliest theological divisions to arise in Islamic history concerned whether a grave sinner (*murtakib al-kabīra*) could be considered a Muslim. As we will demonstrate, most Islamic schools of thought in the ʿAbbāsid period would find a way to accept sinners as a part of the 'People of the *Qibla*.' However, the origin of the question lies much earlier, in the Khārijite movement's response to the civil wars over caliphal succession.[173] Discussed in greater detail in the following section, the Khārijites originated the notion of *takfīr*, or labeling fellow Muslims as unbelievers (*kāfir*/*kuffār*), whom they were obligated to fight and whose lands they must abandon (*khārijī* meaning literally "one who leaves"). After the Battle of Ṣiffīn—in the wake of the murder of the third Caliph, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān—the Khārijites identified both contenders for the caliphate, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Muʾāwiya, as *kāfir*s who favored human judgment over

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[173] The Khārijites, or Khawārij, will be discussed in greater detail below. For general background on the movement, its history, theology, and sub-groups see Patricia Crone and Fritz Zimmerman, *The Epistle of Sālim Ibn Dhakwān*, trans. and eds. P. Crone and F. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) "The Khārijites," 195-217; Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 54-64; Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2005), 1-16; Gerald Hawting,"The Significance of the Slogan *lā ḥukm illā lillāh* and the References to the *Ḥudūd* in the Traditions about the *Fitna* and the Murder of ʿUthmān," *BSOAS*, 41 (1978): 453–463; Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 473-88 (2.1.4).

judgment by the Book of God (i.e. the Qurʾān). Furthermore, those who supported these wrongful leaders were also *kāfir*s for committing the grave sin of supporting them. The extremists among the Khārijites lived in isolation and took every opportunity to implement their beliefs, ultimately leading to the assassination of ʿAlī and regular violent rebellions against the Umayyads.[174]

In the post-conquest empire, diverse peoples joined the community and the conflicting loyalties and identities required justification in Islamic terms; the non-Muslim *kāfir*s could no longer shake the stability of the imperial polity from without, but internal dissent threatened to tear it apart. The rise of the Khārijites was a manifestation of this uneasiness.[175] Many groups rebelled against the Umayyads, but the norm appears to be a theology of quietism towards the authorities and inclusive communion with rival Muslim groups. The movement most recognized in this regard was the *Murjiʾa*, who professed the postponement of judgment (*irjāʾ*) regarding the political leadership and their supporters.[176] As we will see, though, a quietist doctrine similar to *irjāʾ* existed among moderate Khārijites, and became a part of mainstream Sunni theology, as well.[177] Reactions to the Khārijite rupture led to sharper definitions of what constituted "faith" (*imān*), whether "works" (*ʿamal*) were a part of faith, and whether there were sins which could consign to the category of unbeliever someone practicing Islam and professing

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[174] See references to various Khārijite disturbances in Gerald Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2000), 66, 82, 84, 100; M.A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation vol. 1 A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132)*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 95-7ff; 106-7; K.V. Zetterstéen & C.F. Robinson, "Shabīb b. Yazīd" *EI2*.

[175] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 215-17, attribute the failure of Khārijism as a movement to its inability to move beyond tribal homogeneity and react to the diversity of the expanding Islamic polity. See also Izutsu, *Belief*, 9-10, who makes a similar insight.

[176] For more on early Murjiʾism see Wilfred Madelung, "Murdjia," *EI2*; and idem., "The Early Murjiʾa in Khurāsān and Transoxania and the Spread of Ḥanifīsm," *Der Islam* 59:1 (1982): 32-39; Crone & Zimmerman, *Sālim* 219-50, Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 173-210; Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source Critical Study*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 23-47.

[177] On quietism in general see Patricia Crone, *God's Rule*, 136-39.

faith.[178] We will return to the eighth-century in the next section, but suffice it to say that the Khārijites' excommunication of grave sinners ensured that sin would be the subject of theological discussion and doctrinal creeds for centuries.

Faith was essential to one's membership in the Muslim community, and so the prospect that some sins invalidated one's faith was severe. The Qurʾān provides a scriptural basis for the category of grave sins: "and those who avoid the greatest transgressions and abominations" (*wa-alladhīna yajtanibūna kabāʾir al-ithm wal-fawāḥish*)(Q Shūrā 42:37). However, the list of misdeeds that populated the category appears to have been more fluid. In one *ḥadīth*, when asked which sins God considered most egregious (*ayyu al-dhanb aʿẓam ʿind allah*), Muḥammad said "equating anything with God [though] He is your creator." When asked about the next most grievous, the Prophet replied, "Killing your children for fear that you must feed them." When asked what followed this transgression in severity, Muḥammad said, "To fornicate with your neighbor's wife."[179] In other accounts Muḥammad offered other lists. Among the wide range of actions considered grave in these reports are polytheism (*shirk*), murder (*qatl al-nafs*), magic (*al-siḥr*), disobedience to ones parents (*ʿuqūq al-wālidayn*), making false testimony (*shahādat al-zūr*), misappropriating the orphan's money (*akl māl al-yatīm*), profiting from usury (*akl al-ribā*), retreating when the army advances (*al-tawallī yawm al-zaḥf*), and slandering chaste women (*qadhf al-muḥsanāt al-ghāfilāt al-muʾmināt*).[180] Another *ḥadīth* relates that one cannot be considered a *muʾmin* (believer) during the act

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[178] On debates about works as part of faith see Izutsu, *Belief*, 159-93. Wensinck, *Muslim Creed*, 36-57; A.J. Wensinck and L. Gardet, "Khaṭīʾa" *EI2*.

[179] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, (1:174-5, "Īmān), #141 & #142; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (9:87, "Diyāt"), #6861 & (9:97, "Tawḥīd"), #7532; Interestingly, these three transgressions parallel a list of three sins in the *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 74a-b, for which Jews are expected to give up their lives rather than transgress: idolatry, murder, and adultery.

[180] See for example, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, (1:176-7, "Īmān), #143-146; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (4:34, "Waṣāyā"), #2766, and (8:18, "Adab"), # 5973.

of fornication, stealing, or drinking wine.[181] The class of 'grave sins' was contested for

some and open to interpretation according to others.[182]

In any case, Muslim theologians from most schools of thought found ways to

include in the community those guilty of grave sins (other than *shirk*): the grave sinner's

status in the eyes of God and the afterlife was uknown, but in this world they could not be

labeled or treated as *kāfir*s.[183] The *qibla*-phrase expressed the incorporation of offenders

without passing judgment on their ultimate status as believers (*muʾminūn*) or Muslims.

In what follows in this section we will first present the basic mechanisms and semantic

application of the *qibla*-phrase, then demonstrate its standard use in Sunni creeds and

theological debate. Next we will turn to an alternative usage in some Shiʿi sources, and

finally we will explore some practical implications of being considered one of the People

of the *Qibla*. The second section of the chapter considers the historical context in which

'*ahl al-qibla*' first emerged as an inclusive term for Islamic socio-religious identity.

'*Ahl al-qibla*' is used in several exegetical reports collected by al-Ṭabarī (d.

310/923) to describe grave sinners and others whose status as Muslim may have been in

question. For example, he records that Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687) identified those guilty of

fornication, described in Q Nūr 24:3, as "from among the People of the *Qibla*" ("*al-zānī*

min ahl al-qibla" and "*al-zāniya min ahl al-qibla*"). Their illicit sex could only ever be

with another fornicator or an idolater, since that behavior "is forbidden to the believers"

(*wa-ḥurrima dhālika ʿalā al-muʾminīn*)(Q Nūr 24:3). Fornication (*zināʾ*) was listed

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[181] *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, (1:152, "Īmān"), #100; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (7:281, "Ashriba"), #5578.

[182] Abū Zakariyā al-Nawawī rehearses several divergent approaches to the concept of grave sin in *Sharḥ al-Nawawī ʿalā Muslim,* (Riyāḍ: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawlīya, n.d.); 148-49.

[183] On grave sin and the theological fault-lines around it see Wensinck, *Creed* 36-49; Izutsu, *Belief*, 35-56. On God's ability to punish or forgive. See also Wilfred Madelung, "Early Sunnite Doctrine concerning Faith as Reflected in the *Kitāb al-Īmān* of Abū Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839)," *Studia Islamica* 32 (1970): 233-254.

(above) as one of the grave sins. The verse contrasts this activity with that of the 'believer' (*muʾmin*), but the fornicator is not an 'unbeliever' or 'polytheist' (*kāfir* or *mushrik*); they are among the *ahl al-qibla*.[184]

In another example, al-Ṭabarī's cites al-Suddī's (d. 127/745) interpretation of Q Tawba 9:34, "O you who believe, many of the rabbis and monks consume people's possessions in vanity […] Those who hoard gold and silver and do not spend it in God's way—give them the tidings of painful torment." Al-Suddī says that unlike the rabbis and monks who are obviously not part of the Islamic collective, the second half of the verse refers to "the People of the *Qibla* […] who withhold *zakāt* (alms-tax)."[185] Refusal to pay *Zakāt*, a major obligation of Islamic practice, may even constitute the grave sin listed above, "misappropriating money rightfully belonging to orphans." In any case, al-Suddī did not wish to identify them as believers (*muʾminūn*) or Muslims, but these transgressors, too, were People of the *Qibla*.

The commentary on a verse describing those who come to faith only after witnessing divine signs will serve as a final example of the mechanics of '*ahl al-qibla*.' The verse states that on the day that divine signs arrive, "belief will not benefit a soul that

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[184] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān,* vol. 17, 159. See also Abū Muḥammad Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, al-Qaysī *al-Hidāya īlā Bulūgh al-Nihāya,* eds. Majmūʿat Bāḥithī Jāmiʿat al-Shāriqa (Sharjah: University of Sharjah, 2008), p. 5031. In this instance, the phrase "*lā yankiḥ*," which apparently meant "should not marry" is interpreted by Ibn ʿAbbās to mean "would not have intercourse with." Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wal-Bayān*, ed. A.M. b. ʿĀshūr, vol. 7 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2002), 65-66, knows of this interpretations and offers another from ʿIkrima, which preserves "*yankiḥ*" as a reference to marriage: in pre-Islamic times destitute people often married prostitutes for the room and board it provided. The verse says that for Muslims, the only people who may take advantage of such an arrangement are other fornicators among the People of the *Qibla*. The same usage and interpretation is offered in the name of Ibn ʿAbbās by Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Māturīdī al-Samarqandī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-Sunna: Tafsīr al-Māturīdī*, ed. F. Y. Al-Khaymī, vol. 3 (Beirūt: Muwʾassasat al-Risāla, 2004), 429.
[185] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 11, 426. See a similar report from al-Suddī in *al-Kashf wal-Bayān*, vol. 5, 41 and Abū al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī, *Al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-ʿAzīz*, vol. 1, ed. Ṣ. ʿA. Dāwūdī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1995), 462. Al-Suddī, a Kūfan whose scholarly life fits squarely in late Umayyad Iraq (d. 127/745), appears to have commonly used the *qibla*-phrase in his qurʾānic exegesis. See more on him in the next section.

has never previously believed or has "not amassed some good in belief" (*aw kasabat fī īmānihā khayran*)" (Q Anʿām 6:158). Al-Ṭabarī cites al-Suddī again, who identifies those who have not amassed some good in their belief as possessing faith without good works (*ʿamalan ṣāliḥan*). Their profession of belief (*taṣdīq*) means that—unlike those whose faith came only after witnessing divine signs—they are not infidels. However, the Qurʾān's description of their depravity makes it impossible to describe them unqualifiedly as believers. Al-Suddī is content to say, "they are the People of the *Qibla*," and leave their ultimate desserts to God.[186] In these examples the term '*ahl al-qibla*' allowed the commentator to depict even grave sinners as a part of the Islamic collective, while remaining agnostic about their fate in the afterlife.

For most Sunni theologians, anyone who died without having repented of their sins (other than disbelief and polytheism) might be punished for a time, but would eventually enter paradise. Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 438/1037) rails against the Khārijite view that a single sin could condemn one to eternal hellfire, and Muḥammad al-Shahrasṭānī (d. 548/1153) vilifies a Muʿtazilite group known as the *Waʿīdīya*, who also believe in unending damnation for Muslim sinners.[187] Furthermore, humans cannot know whether God even punishes such infractions or chooses to overlook the wrongful acts. A clear-cut prophetic report states that if one commits a grave sin and is not punished in this world, "it is up to God to forgive or punish him."[188] Many of our authors found the term '*ahl al-qibla*' to be a helpful way to express the ambiguity regarding the status of sinners

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[186] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 28.

[187] Imām al-Ḥaramayn Abū l-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawāṭiʿ al-Adilla fī Usūl al-Iʿtiqād* eds. M. Mūsā and A. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maktaba al-Khānijī, 1950), 385-89 and Muḥammad Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-aqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām* ed. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Maktaba al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniya, 1931), 470-74.

[188] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (1:62-3, "Īmān"), #18.

in the afterlife.   For example, in the theological dialogue *al-ʿĀlim wal-Mutaʿallim*, attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), the student asks whether God punishes people for any sin other than improper faith (*shirk*) or if they are all forgiven. The teacher responds:

> The Teacher said: I don't know anything about disobedience other than *shirk* for which God punishes, and it is impossible to testify definitively whether God punishes *any* one of the people of disobedience among the People of the *Qibla* (*ahl al-maʿāṣī min ahl al-qibla*) for something other than attributing partners to God.[189]

For Abū Ḥanīfa, those who have improper faith (*shirk*) will certainly be punished. Transgressors among the Muslims who believe, however, are People of the *Qibla* and only God knows their fate in the afterlife.

The consignment of sinners and unbelievers to hell is among the most common themes of the Qurʾān, so it is no surprise that a similar deployment of '*ahl al-qibla*' appears among the early exegetes. Q Nabāʾ 78:23 describes the state of sinners condemned on judgment day to hell, "in which they will remain forever." Al-Ṭabarī reports that Khālid b. Maʿdān (d. *c.* 103/721) qualified this verse using the clause of another verse, which adds, "except those whom God wills [otherwise]" (Q Hūd 11:108). Eternal damnation applies to all the sinners, he says, but God may except from that state "the monotheists (*ahl al-tawḥīd*) among the People of the *Qibla*."[190] The phrase People of the *Qibla* clearly includes sinners, as is implied by their position in hell, but their proper belief makes it impossible that they dwell there for eternity.

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[189] From a collection of Abū Ḥanīfa's writings, *al-ʿĀlim wal-Mutaʿallim*, 16. Most scholars are skeptical of the authenticity of this work, and see it as representing Abū Ḥanīfa's positions as remembered in early Ḥanafite circles. See Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, vol. 1, 221 (2.1.1.7.3.1); Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 30, Joseph Schacht, "An Early Murjiʾite Treatise: The *Kitāb al-ʿĀlim wal-Mutaʿallim*," *Oriens* 19 (1964): 96-117.

[190] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 24, p. 26.

This usage of '*ahl al-qibla*' matches that of the great scholastic theologian, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935). In his *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn*, al-Ashʿarī lists varying opinions among theological schools about whether grave sinners (*fussāq*) remain in hellfire forever: "The Muʿtazila and the Khārijites hold that their [damnation will be] eternal (*bi-takhlīdihim*) and that one who enters hellfire will never leave." However, his own group, the "*ahl al-sunna wal-istiqāma,*" believe that "God will remove the monotheists among the People of the *Qibla* (*ahl al-qibla al-muwaḥḥidūn*) from hellfire, and not allow them to remain there eternally."[191]

Similar deployment of '*ahl al-qibla*' appears in al-Ṭabarī's comments on Q Ḥijr 15:2, reported from Abū Mūsā (al-Ashʿarī) (d. second half of 1st/7th c.). The verse states, "the unbelievers (*alladhīna kafarū*) will wish that they were Muslim." Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī situates the verse as referring to the Day of Resurrection, when all of the inhabitants of hellfire gather together, and the unbelievers will also see "those among the People of the *Qibla* whom God willed [to be there]" alongside them. On that day

> The unbelievers (*kuffār*) will say to those in hellfire among the People of the *Qibla*: "Are you not Muslims […] and was your Islam of no benefit to you—for you ended up in hellfire alongside us?" They will respond, "We committed sins and were taken [here] because of them" (*fa-ukhidhnā bihā*). And God will hear

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[191] Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul 1929-33), 474. Al-Ghazālī makes the belief that monotheists will not remain in hell forever a principle of faith in his *ʿaqīda* without using the term '*ahl al-qibla*;' see Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, 9 vols. (Jedda: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011), "Kitāb Qawāʾid al-ʿAqāʾid," vol. 2, 340; translation in Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection*, trans. M. Watt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 78. See also al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 385-89, who expresses the same view without using the expression under consideration. In general, al-Ghazālī attempts to reign in excessive accusations of *kufr* in his *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islām wal-Zandaqa*, ed. M. Bayjū (Damascus, 1993), where he takes an expansive view towards Islamic community and those who will (eventually) receive salvation. In one place he says that the details of what can and cannot be considered *kufr* are too extensive to list, but offers the following word of advice (*waṣīya*): "To the extent possible, hold back your tongue [from indicting] the People of the *Qibla* as long as they say, 'there is no God but God and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God' without contradicting it outright" (61). See an English translation of this work, with slightly different section numbering, in Sherman Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); quote appears at 112. On the extent of theological tolerance for diverse beliefs in al-Ghazālī's thought see Jackson's introduction, esp. at 64-66; and Izutsu, *Belief*, 29-42.

what they have said and order that every one of the People of the *Qibla* should be taken out of hellfire. And those unbelievers in hellfire will say, "would that we were Muslims!"[192]

Given the background the commentator provides for the qurʾānic verse, the goal of employing 'ahl al-qibla' is clear. By contrast with the unbelievers in hell, the Muslims who have sinned are People of the *Qibla*, and they will be saved at the end days.

A final example from the *tafsīr* of Abū Muḥmmad Makkī (d. 437/1045) will suffice. The Qurʾān describes hell (*jahannam*), as a place that "has seven gates, with each gate assigned to a group of [errant ones]." (Q Ḥijr 15:44). Makkī comments that the first gate of hell is reserved "for the People of the *Qibla* among those who have committed grave sins (*ahl al-kabāʾir*) and who have died without repenting."[193] It is clear that one can commit grave sins and still be considered among the 'ahl al-qibla.' That one could not pass judgment on either the status or fate of Muslim sinners was so fundamental and widespread a belief that we find it occupies a tenet of belief in many of the classical Sunni creeds. The creeds often use the *qibla*-phrase to describe this precarious group, and so they help us to understand further its semantic horizon.

'Ahl al-qibla' in the Sunni Creeds

Islamic creeds (*ʿaqīda*/*ʿaqāʾid*), like those of other traditions, are a series of brief statements that present essential doctrines and beliefs. There was no centralized ecclesiastical authority or ecumenical councils, and so no single set of dogmas was ever accepted by all Muslims, despite significant overlap among the various creeds. Rather,

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[192] *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 14, p. 8.
[193] Makkī, *al-Hidāya*, 3901.

these itemized statements of faith laid out the character of individual (or even individuals') legal and theological schools of thought and set the boundaries of their religious orthodoxy.[194] A creed's authority rested solely on the community's acceptance of its content and the scholarly clout of the person under whose name it was disseminated. Dogmatic creeds persist into the modern period, but the pre-modern form can be read as a kind of prerequisite for communal membership, and most include a statement regarding the status of grave sinners. The *qibla* became an apt metaphor for an inclusive model of community professed by creedal authors and theologians. What follows is a presentation of the common deployment of the expression '*ahl al-qibla*' from a sample of dogmatic statements representing major Sunni legal schools as well as the theological schools of al-Ashʿarī and al-Māturīdī.

Of course, the *shahāda* (profession that "there is not God but God and Muḥammad is God's Emissary") is a sort of creed that drew an external faith boundary between Islam and other religious cultures.[195] However, the earliest creed to arise out of internal struggle between dissenting positions among Muslims appears to be a text with the title *al-Fiqh al-Absāṭ* (also known as *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*) of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), transmitted by his student, Abū Muṭīʿ (d. 99/814). The very first tenet reads, "You may not attribute unbelief (*lā tukfir*) to any of the People of the *Qibla* on account of sin, nor can you exclude them from [the category of] faithfulness (*lā tanfi aḥadan min al-*

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[194] For more on Creeds, see Montgomery Watt, "Introduction" in *Islamic Creeds*, 3-21 and M. Watt "Aḳīda," *EI2*; E.E. Elder, "Introduction" in *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī*, ed. and trans. E.E. Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), ix-xxi. On creeds and orthodoxy see Norman Calder, "The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy," in *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, ed. F. Daftary (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 66-86.

[195] On the *shahāda*, in general, see Wensinck, *Creed*, 17-35 and 270-4 and Andrew Rippin, "Witness to Faith," *EQ*. The Qurʾān appears to contain several creedal lists, which refer to the believers as those who believe in some combination of God, the Emissary, the Book, the Last Day, the angels, etc. See, for example, Q Baqara 2:285, Nisāʾ 4:136 and Ḥujurāt 49:15.

īmān)."[196] We will return to this and other writings of Abū Ḥanīfa when we consider the origins of the expression '*ahl al-qibla*.' For now, it is worth underscoring that the very first principle of the first recorded Islamic creed protects the socio-religious status of the sinner. If creedal statements tend to decide on matters of controversy, distinguishing correct from erroneous beliefs, then it is remarkable that the Sunni creedal tradition commences by excluding the exclusion of sinners. It is clear that by the time that dogmatic statements arose, the sinner was to be incorporated as member of the People of the *Qibla*.

Two centuries later, another popular creed emerging from the school of Abū Ḥanīfa retained the inclusive stance toward sinners: the expansive and poetic ʿ*aqīda* of the jurist Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933).[197] After many principles of belief about God, the character of Divinity as well as the nature of revelation and commandments, al-Ṭaḥāwī turns to required beliefs about Islamic community. He employs the expression '*ahl al-qibla*' several times when expanding the boundaries of communal belonging to include those who might otherwise be suspect. For example, "we name as Believers and Muslims all the People of our *Qibla* (*ahl qiblatinā*) as long as they acknowledge what the Prophet [Muḥammad] brought, and believe in all that he said

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[196] *al-ʿAlim wal-Mutaʿallim*, 40. The provenance of this work, and even the title, are a matter of some debate. Wensinck, *Creed*, 122-3 saw the *Fiqh Absāṭ* as genuinely representing the voice of Abū Ḥanīfa, and uses it to verify material in what he calls *Fiqh Akbar I*. Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 237-41, describes the confusion about the name and dating of the work. However, Van Ess is confident that the first five statements in the creed (including the one cited above) form a unit, and are likely authentically Abū Ḥanīfa's response to his student, even if other accretions were added later. Joseph Schacht, "Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nuʿmān" *EI2* believed it came from the circle of Abū Ḥanīfa's students, and that the opinions, if not the text itself, could be seen as authentically attributed. Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 30, suspects that due to its approach to traditions, the work may be of later manufacture.

[197] On the creed in general see Hamza Yusuf, "Introduction" to *Creed of Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī*, 13-24 and on al-Ṭaḥāwī's biography see 25-39. All translations of the ʿ*aqīda* are my own based on the Arabic text of Yusuf's edition. For a recent treatment of al-Ṭaḥāwī's approach as a jurist see Carolyn Brunelle, *From Text to Law: Islamic Legal Theory and the Practical Hermeneutics of Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad Al- Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933)* (PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2016).

and reported;" and a few lines later, "we do not call anyone among the People of the *Qibla* an unbeliever for any sin, as long as they do not declare [the sinful act] to be lawful."[198] Likewise, al-Ṭaḥāwī demands that his community take an agnostic stance on the fate of sinners among the People of the *Qibla* in the afterlife.[199] The minimal requirement for identification as a Muslim is belief in Muḥammad's revelation; as long as one acknowledges the behaviors in question as sinful, no misdeeds can expel one from the collective. In the same way, '*ahl al-qibla*' entered the creedal statements of other Sunni schools as a technical term that signaled a more inclusive vision of Muslim socio-religious affiliation.

Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176) records in his *Tahdhīb* that in the year 225/840, the traditionist Muḥammad Ibn ʿUkāsha al-Kirmānī came to Baṣra and recited an ʿaqīda. He claimed to represent the views agreed upon by all of the "*ahl al-sunna wal-jamāʿa*" that he heard from learned men (*min ahl al-ʿilm*) such as the jurists/ traditionists Wakīʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812), Sufyān b. ʿUyayna (d. 198/813-14), ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/827) among many others. In his short list of principles he includes, "We cannot say whether any of the People of the *Qibla* are in heaven or hell, nor can we call any one of them an infidel, even if he commits a grave sin (*wa-in ʿamila bil-kabāʾir*)."[200] '*Ahl al-qibla*' is used to describe all Muslims but especially to include serious offenders, whom one might have excluded from the collective.

The Mālikī jurist Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996) shared a similar sentiment. He prefaces his *Risāla*—a synopsis of Mālikism and an exemplary legal work

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[198] *Al-ʿAqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah*, #71 & #75, (p. 64-5).
[199] *Al-ʿAqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah*, #89, (p. 68-9).
[200] Abū al-Qāsim ʿAlī b. Ḥasan Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb Taʾrīkh Dimashq al-Kabīr* vol. 3, ed. ʿA. Q. Badrān, (Beirut: Dār al-Masīra, 1979), 134.

studied and commented upon by Mālikī jurists to this day—with an itemized list of fundamental beliefs.[201] In the section on the definition of faith (*arkān al-īmān wa-shurūṭuhu*) he describes faith as a declaration of belief (*al-qawl bil-lisān*), sincerity in the heart (*ikhlāṣ bil-qalb*), and good works performed with the body (*wa-ʿaml bil-jawāriḥ*). While this may appear to place several limitations on who may own the label of believer, he concludes the sections by saying that one "may not call anyone among the People of the *Qibla* an infidel for any sin (*bi-dhanbin*)."[202] Even those who wished to narrow the definition of who was a Muslim, such as some Ḥanbalīs, used the *qibla*-phrase to denote their vision of the community's widest margins.

Several Ḥanbalī creeds have come down to us in the prosopographic work *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* of al-Qāḍī Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Farrāʾ, also known as Abū Yaʿlā (d. 458/1066). While the Ḥanbalīs were known for their vehement opposition to Ḥanafī thought—indeed, this is reflected in some tenets of the creeds—their position on the status of sinners tracks that seen in the other schools. A creedal statement attributed directly to Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) states:

> We do not abandon [the funerary] prayer on behalf of any of the People of the *Qibla* for any sin he has committed, small or great (*bi-dhanbin adhnabahu ṣaghīran aw kabīran*), except those innovators whom the Prophet [Muḥammad] excommunicated (*akhrajahum…min al-islām*): the Qadarīya, the Murjiʾa, the Rāfiḍa, and the Jahmīya.[203]

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[201] For more on Ibn Abī Zayd, his life, and works see Sayeed Sajjadur Rahman, *The Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (310-386 A.H. /922-966 C.E.)* (PhD Thesis, Yale University, 2009). See also H.R. Idris, "Ibn Abī Zayd al-Ḳayrawānī," *EI2*.

[202] Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, *Risāla*, ed. A.M.Q. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, 2005), 21. For a complete English translation of this creed see Watt, *Islamic Creeds*, 69-72.

[203] Muḥammad al-Farrāʾ Ibn Abī Yaʿlā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. M.H. al-Fīqī, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Sunna al-Muḥammadīya, 1952), 311-12. For a brief description and annotated translations of various Ḥanbalī creeds from this work, see Watt *Islamic Creeds*, 29-40.

And later in the list of required beliefs we find, "We do not consign any of the People of the *Qibla* to Paradise or Hell, except him about whom God's Emissary has testified that he is in Paradise: Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, etc."[204] Similarly, a longer version of the Ḥanbalī creed demands agnosticism regarding the final judgment of the *ahl al-qibla* for their sins, but it also contains an expanded statement that includes sinful Muslims as part of the community:

> [It is incumbent] to hold back [from fighting] the People of the *Qibla* (*wal-kaff ʿan ahl al-qibla*), and one cannot declare any of them an unbeliever (*lā nukfir*). Nor can one excommunicate them from Islam for any action, unless there is a *ḥadīth* in that respect […] such as abstaining from prayer (*tark al-ṣalāt*), drinking wine (*shurb al-khamr*), and the like, or if one innovates on a matter that relegates one to unbelief and excommunication from Islam.[205]

In contrast to the more unrestricted statements above, Ibn Ḥanbal knew of several groups whose beliefs put them outside the pale. Likewise, this longer (and likely later) statement of Ḥanbalī dogma excludes certain offenses from the protection against *takfīr*. Nevertheless, the authors of Ḥanbalī creeds still found it incumbent to defend the membership of those on the boundaries of an Islamic collective identity—i.e. all the sectarian groups and sinners not named—and found that the *qibla* served as an apt metaphor for association with those people as Muslims.

A creed written by a student of al-Shāfiʿī, Abū Ismāʿīl b. Yaḥyā al-Muzanī (d. 264/878), parallels the deployment of '*ahl al-qibla*' that we have seen. The creedal statement in his *Sharḥ al-Sunna* includes the injunction "to refrain from labeling as an unbeliever or dissociating from any of the People of the *Qibla* in any of their mischievous

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[204] *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, 312-13. The names that follow come from a prophetic *ḥadīth* listing ten people whom Muḥammad states will merit Paradise; see *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*, (5:409, "Manāqib"), #3747.
[205] *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, 26-27.

behaviors (*fimā aḥdathū*)." However, as was the case for the Ḥanbalī creeds, there are

limits. For al-Muzanī adds,

> as long as they do not innovate heretically (*mā lam yabtadiʿū ḍalālan*); for one
> who innovates heretically, breaks away from the People of the *Qibla*), and deserts
> religion (*ʿalā ahl al-qibla khārijan wa-min al-dīn māriqan*), and approaches God
> having dissociated from Him, etc.[206]

The proliferations of the *qibla*-phrase among the creeds emerging from legal schools may

have had a similar popularity in the creeds of theologians of the formative period,

perhaps the most well known of which appears in the writing of Abū Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d.

324/935-6).[207]

Al-Ashʿarī adopted the inclusive use of the expression '*ahl al-qibla*' throughout

his writings. Although he professed to follow the views of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal on many

matters and was read widely by Shafiʿī theologians, al-Ashʿarī's creedal statement lacks

the restrictive qualifications just described. Al-Ashʿarī began his life as a Muʿtazilite

rationalist, but in the year 300/911-12, he experienced a kind of conversion.

Nevertheless, in his writings he took the scholastic approach of *kalām* favored by the

Muʿtazilites in order to argue against them on a number of issues such as the nature of

God, revelation, human free will, and our current subject: the character of the grave

sinner.

The Muʿtazilites were famous for their opinion that humans could not name the

grave sinner as either a *kāfir* or a *muʾmin*, preferring the term *fāsiq* for such people. For

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[206] Ismāʿīl b. Yaḥyā al-Muzanī, *Sharḥ al-Sunna: Dirāsa wa-Taḥqīq*, ed. J. ʿAzzūn (Riyadh: Dār al-Minhaj, 2009), 85. Compare with the *ʿaqīda* of another Shāfiʿī, Abū Isḥāq al-Shirāzī, *ʿAqīdat al-Salaf*, in *Kitāb al-Maʿūna fī al-Jadal*, ed. A.M. al-Turkī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1988), 91-102, in which item #28 (p. 100) says that the '*ahl al-qibla*' do not remain in hellfire.

[207] For a general background on al-Ashʿarī's life and thought see, Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962), 82-90; Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology from Muhammad to the Present*, trans. T. Thornton (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, 2000), 148-70; A.S. Tritton, *Muslim Theology* (Bristol: Royal Asiatic Society, 1947), 166-77.

them, the sinner occupied a position between the two (*al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn*).

Only God can know the *fāsiq's* true nature, and God will either grant him eternal

paradise, as a believer, or condemn him to damnation, as an unbeliever. [208] Predictably,

we do not find the *qibla*-phrase applied as extensively in Muʿtazilite writing to include

these offenders in the faith community, since they know that the grave sinner may be an

unbeliever. However, there are some instances where the term is applied when

discussing treatment of these sinners as Muslim, in distinction from the treatment of the

known *kāfir*.[209]

By contrast, al-Ashʿarī maintained that the sinners remained believers, although

they might be punished with hellfire. This sentiment is reflected in al-Ashʿarī's list of

principles upon which all of the *ahl al-sunna* agree:

> We do not label any of the People of the *Qibla* as an unbeliever (*lā nukfirūn*) for
> any sin he has committed, such as fornication, stealing, [the drinking of wine] and
> the like among the grave sins. As long as they have faith (*īmān*), they are
> believers, even with their grave sins.[210]

Al-Ashʿarī's inclusion of sinners within the community of believers is not unbounded;

one must have faith. However, unlike the longer Ḥanbalī creed, which named certain sins

to exclude their perpetrators from the *ahl al-qibla*, or the creed of al-Muzanī, which railed

against unlawful innovation, al-Ashʿarī includes grave sinners explicitly among the

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[208] On *al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn* as one of the five principle beliefs of the Muʿtazila see Abū al-
Ḥusayn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Muḥammad al-Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, ed. H.S. Nyberg (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub
al-Miṣrīya, 1925), 126-27, 164-65. See also al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 270-71; Izutsu, *Belief*, 47-50.
[209] Al-Khayyāṭ, *Intiṣār*, 166. "It is an agreed upon practice that the people of disbelief (*ahl al-kufr*) do not
pass on inheritance nor are they buried in the graveyards of the People of the *Qibla*, and this is not the
practice regarding the grave sinner (*ṣāḥib al-kabīra*)."
[210] al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 293. See also Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Ibāna ʿan Uṣūl al-
Diyāna*, ed. F. Ḥ. Maḥmūd (Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1966), 26, which differs slightly, such as in including "the
drinking of wine" in the list of named sins.

People of the *Qibla*.[211] Perhaps unsurprisingly, one version of al-Ashʿarī's last words

reads, "I do not call any [who are] of this *qibla* an unbeliever, they all point to one object

of worship, there is only a difference of terms."[212] The one *qibla* that all Muslims face

from various directions is the perfect metaphor for their belonging to the sacred collective

of the one God.

The popular creed of the Māturīdī scholar, Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142),

contains a pronouncement on sin similar to those we have considered: "A great sin does

not remove from Belief the creature who believes, nor does it lead him into Unbelief[.]"

God may forgive the grave sinner, but if she is punished, it will not last for eternity.[213]

Al-Nasafī omitted the *qibla*-phrase, but the Māturīdī polymath, al-Taftāzānī (d.

792/1390) makes use of it in his influential commentary on the creed. He writes:

> The third point is the agreement of the Muslim people (*al-umma*) from the time of
> the Prophet till now that [funerary] prayer (*al-ṣalāt*) be performed over any one of
> the People of the *Qibla* who dies unrepentant [...] although it is understood that
> this is not permissible in the case of one who is not a Believer.[214]

Another Māturīdī scholar with the *nisba* "al-Nasafī," Abū Muṭīʿ Makḥūl (d. 318/930)

also used the term '*ahl al-qibla*' in the inclusive way we have been considering.[215] In his

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[211] While the editor of *al-Ibāna* (p. 26 nt. 6) knows of an MS that reads more like the Ḥanbalī creed—
"except if they have been explicitly recorded [in writing] (*mā lam yusjal*), such as fornication, etc."—most
of the MSS leave this clause out, and Ritter, *Maqālāt* makes mention of no such variant.

[212] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī* (Damascus: Tawfīq Press, 1929), 149. The text reads: *ashhadu
ʿalā annī lā ukfir aḥadan min ahl hādhihi al-qibla li-anna al-kull yushīrūn ilā maʿbūd wāḥid wa-innamā
hādhā kulluhu ikhtilāf al-ʿibārāt.* It is worth noting that Ibn ʿAsākir knows of other decidedly less
ecumenical final words attributed to al-Ashʿarī: "God curse the Muʿtazila, they are feeble liars!" (*laʿana
Allahu al-Muʿtazila muwwahū wa-makhriqū*), *Tabyīn*, 148.

[213] Saʿd al-Din al-Taftazānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqīda al-Nasafīya*, ed. M. Marzūqī (Algiers: Dār al-Hudā, 2000), 87.
Trans. from E.E. Elder, *al-Taftāzānī*, 107.

[214] Al-Taftazānī, *Sharḥ*, 88. trans. in *al-Taftāzānī* 109, and see similar usage of the *qibla*-phrase at 161.

[215] Al-Nasafī would have been a contemporary of al-Māturīdī and does not self-define, and so it is left to
scholars to identify him based on his theological writings. Marie Bernand, who edited his heresiography
lined his views up with the school she calls Ḥanafī-Māturīdīs, see *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-Bidaʿ*, ed. M.
Bernand, *Annales Islamologiques*, 16 (1980), 41-44, 49. However, Ulrich Rudolph felt that affiliation
between the author and the *Karrāmīya* school fit better; see his *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī
Theology in Samarqand*, trans. R. Adem (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 85-97.

heresiography, *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-Bidaʾ*, he uses the term liberally to distinguish his

view on the inclusion of sinners from the wrong beliefs of the other groups. For example,

he differentiates his own views from those of the Azāriqa, a radical Khārijite faction that

professes killing all those who disagree with their views "and therefore label as

unbelievers (*akfarū*) the People of the *Qibla*." Abū Muṭīʿ says that all Muslims agree that

"they must profess that all the People of the *Qibla* are believers and not label them as

unbelievers on account of sin, and they should leave the secrets of individual worshippers

to God."[216] Abū Muṭīʿ also deploys the term in refuting the Ibāḍīya faction of Khārijites,

who believe that their adversaries are not believers or unbelievers, but hypocrites

(*munāfiqūn*). He writes that only God or his Prophet can see into people's hearts to

identify hypocrisy (*nifāq*); but "we must consider the People of the *Qibla* to be believers

since the[ir] statement [of faith] is apparent and known, while sincerity and hypocrisy are

unseen."[217] Heresiographers commonly apply '*ahl al-qibla*' when writing about the

Khārijites, and we will note several of these instances in the next section.

Creedal statements are often perceived as exercises in exclusion in that they favor

certain theological principles over others, argue for the heterodoxy of errant beliefs, and

even bar those who hold those beliefs from the community of faith. In the texts above,

however, we saw that the Islamic creedal tradition does not always or only serve a

restrictive function. The first tenet of the earliest list of faith statements, that of Abū

Ḥanīfa, expanded the boundaries of community. The dogmatic enfranchisement of

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[216] *Al-Radd*, 69.
[217] *Al-Radd*, 70.

Muslims of questionable status in the socio-religious collective became a matter of Sunni

orthodoxy, as demonstrated by the common semantic application of 'ahl al-qibla' among

Ḥanafīs, Mālikīs, Ḥanbalīs, Shāfiʿīs, al-Ashʿarī and followers of al-Māturīdī. In this

context, facing the *qibla* was an effective metaphor for belonging, as the term '*ahl al-*

qibla' signaled the widest boundaries of inclusion.

'*Ahl al-qibla*' in some Shiʿi Writings

Until now we have considered the writings of Sunni authors, for whom the

inclusion of grave sinners in the community was fundamental to their beliefs about the

nature of Islam. Resolving the grave sinner's status did not command the same

importance in Shiʿi theological writings. The nature of sin in Shiʿi theology—as is the

case with many topics with regard to the study of Shiʿism—remains a desideratum and

lies beyond the scope of this chapter. For our purposes, it is worth noting a few

exemplary Shiʿi authors and their application of the epithet '*ahl al-qibla*.'[218] Both the

Imāmī/Twelver Qurʾān commentator, al-Qummī and the Ismāʿīlī jurist, al-Qāḍī al-

Nuʿmān deploy '*ahl al-qibla*' to designate Muslims with whom they disagree. However,

unlike our Sunni authors, who use the expression exclusively to incorporate sinners or

theological opponents, our Shiʿi authors show some departure from that semantic usage.

As we shall see, they often identify those whom they exclude from the collective—i.e.

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[218] Discussions about grave sins tend to apply to the status of the Imāms; e.g. see L. Gardet, "Fāsiḳ," *EI2*.
Several traditions listing the grave sins appear in Ibn Bābawayh; see the translation in A.S. Tritton,
"Popular Shiʿism," *BSOAS* 13:4 (1951): 832-36. Some Shiʿi authors were suspicious of naming all '*ahl
al-qibla*' as believers, seeing it as a way of justifying ʿAlī's killers and Umayyad rule. See al-Ḥasan b.
Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul: Matbaʿa al-Dawla, 1931), 6, and a similar
statement by Saʿd b. ʿAbdallah al-Ashʿarī al-Qummī, *K. Al-Maqālāt wal-Firaq*, ed. M.J. Mashkūr (Tehran:
Muʾassasat Maṭbūʿātī ʿAṭāʾī, 1923), 5.

heretical Muslims, erring Muslim adversaries, or sinning Muslim—with the designation '*ahl al-qibla*.'

It is not here argued that Shiʿi Muslims would more easily label their theological adversaries as unbelievers or that their socio-religious discourse reflects more (or less) exclusivist tendencies than the other writings we reviewed. There is no shortage of virulent polemical treatises by Sunni authors proving the misguidedness of the "Party of ʿAlī," and the Ḥanbalī creed may even exclude them from the People of the *Qibla* under the qualification "except those whom the Prophet excommunicated, such as […] the Rāfiḍa."[219] The topic of grave sinners and communal boundaries in early Shīʿism requires its own study. However, Shiʿi sources can shed light on the semantic field of the *qibla*-phrase in a few ways: 1) It was a term that was not exclusively used by Sunnīs, but entered the writings of major Shiʿi authors by the tenth century. Exemplary writings below will show the application the *qibla*-phrase in Imāmī (Twelver) as well as Ismāʿīlī circles, and in the next section we will see its appearance in writings attributed to Zayd b. ʿAlī, the eponymous founder of a third major Shiʿi group, the Zaydīs. 2) In keeping with our Sunni authors, the term is used to denote Muslims of questionable status alongside those identified as legitimate. 3) Unlike our Sunni authors, though, the term was not generally deployed to incorporate errant Muslims into the collective, but more often when their exclusion was asserted immediately thereafter, whether in the form of eternal damnation or with the label "unbeliever."

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[219] Abū Yaʿlā, *Tabaqāt*, 340-41. On "Rāfiḍa" as meaning either Imāmī or other Shiʿi groups, see Etan Kohlberg, "al-Rāfiḍa" *EI2*. An example of Sunnī polemics against Ismāʿīlīs is al-Ghazali, *Faḍāʾiḥ al-Bāṭinīya wa-Faḍaʾil al-Mustaẓhirīya*, ed. M.ʿA. al-Quṭb (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAsrīya, n.d.); al-Ghazālī also criticizes Imāmī views as well; see his *Faysal al-Tafriqa*, (Jackson), 119. See also Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7-10,101-3.

One of the most important early Imāmī (Twelver Shīʿī) exegetes, ʿAlī Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. *c.* 4th/10th c.), utilizes '*ahl al-qibla*' several times in his Qurʾān commentary.[220] When he uses the term, it usually denotes Muslims with beliefs or practices that are problematic in his view. However, whereas our Sunni authors tended to use the term to include these transgressors in the category of believers, al-Qummī makes no indication that he wishes to preserve their status as anything but sinners. For example, he explains that when the Qurʾān describes "the greatest losers in their works," who "go astray in the life of this world, when they think they are doing good deeds," (Q Kahf 18:103-4) it refers to "the Christians, their priests and monks, as well as the people of confusion and whimsy (*ahl al-shubuhāt wal-ahwāʾ*) [i.e. heretics] among the People of the *Qibla*, such as the Khārijites (*al-ḥarūrīya*) and the innovators (*ahl al-bidaʿ*)."[221] The designation as '*ahl al-qibla*' does not indicate an inclusive stance towards these people, nor does al-Qummī go on to say that they will be saved. Indeed, the next verse declares that "Their works are in vain, and We shall not assign any weight to them on Resurrection Day" (Q Kahf 18:105).

Al-Qummī interprets several other verses that explicitly describe the final punishment of unbelievers and sinners as referring to deviant Muslims and without qualification. These are "the people of confusion and error (*ahl al-shubhāt wal-ḍalālāt*)

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[220] Little is known about al-Qummī's life, but he may very well have been a teacher of the *ḥadīth* compiler Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), who transmits regularly from someone named ʿAlī Ibrāhīm. For more on al-Qummī and his *tafsīr* see Meir Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī-Shiʿism* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 33-56. All quotations of al-Qummī come from Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, ed. Ṭ. Al-Jazāʾirī, 2 vols. (Qumm: Muʾassasat Dār al-Kitāb, 1984).

[221] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, 46. "*Al-Ḥarūrīya*" was an early name taken by the Khārijites, who withdrew from ʿAlī's army to the village of Ḥarūrāʾ, near Kūfa; see G. Levi Della Vida, "Kharidjites," *EI2*. A broader translation of "al-ḥarūrīya" as "schismatics" may be possible see E.W. Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), 539. See also *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (3:118, "Zakāt"), #2456 which comments on a heretical group that would arise out of Muḥmmad's people who would "stray from religion the way an arrow strays from its target."

among the People of the *Qibla*," "the [Sunnī] imposter (*al-nuṣṣāb*) among the People of

the *Qibla*," and "the iniquitous (*fasaqa*) among the People of the *Qibla*."[222] Similarly, the

hypocrites and unbelievers whose "refuge is the fire" (Q Ḥadīd 57:15), al-Qummī tells

us, "refers not to Christians or Jews, but to the People of the *Qibla*."[223] Our author only

once uses our key term in the positive sense, to designate the community of devout

Muslims. He considers Q ʿAnkabūt 29:47, "those who believe in [the Qurʾān]," to refer

not to the ones who received scripture before or to the unbelievers (*kāfirūn*), but rather it

"intends the believers among the People of the *Qibla*."[224] The generally negative

connotations in the examples from al-Qummī's *tafsīr* may demonstrate the breadth of the

semantic field of '*ahl al-qibla*' among medieval Muslims. They also may indicate that the

inclusivist application of '*ahl al-qibla*' persisted mainly in Sunni theological discourse.

Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān is the most important jurist of Ismāʿīlī law, and may even be

seen as its founder. From 337/948 up to his death in 363/974 he acted as the supreme

judge of the Fāṭimid empire (296-567/909-1171), and he served as one of its intellectual

champions during the expansion and establishment of the Ismāʿīlī state.[225] Two of his

most important works, *Ikhtilāf Uṣūl al-Madhāhib* (Disagreements of the Jurists), a work

of legal theory, and *Daʿāʾim al-Islām* (Pillars of Islam), a collection of positive law, will

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[222] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, 260-61 (on Q Ghāfir 40:75), vol. 2, 227 (on Q Ṣaffāt 37:177), vol. 1, 312 (on Q Yūnus 10:50). "*Nuṣṣāb*" is used as a technical term in some Shiʿi writing to designate the adversaries of ʿAlī or those who deny his place above the other companions. See Mohammed ʿAlī Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 278-79.

[223] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, 301. In one instance al-Qummī uses the term to refer to various parties among the People of the *Qibla* who disagree about matters of religion and fight one another over them, see vol. 1, 204, (on Q Anʿām 6:65).

[224] *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, vol. 2, 150.

[225] For more on his biography and contributions see Devin Stewart, "Introduction" to *Kitāb Ikhtilāf Usūl al-Madhāhib/ Disagreements of the Jurists: A Manual of Islamic Legal Theory*, ed. and trans. D. Stewart, (New York: NYU Press, 2015), ix-xxxviii; Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis,* 167-72; Asaf A.A. Fyzee, "al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, the Fatimid Jurist and Author," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1934): 1-32; and Ismail K. Poonawala, "Editor's Introduction" to *Daʿāʾim al-Islām/ Pillars of Islam* vol. 1, trans. A.A.A. Fyzee and Ismail Poonawala (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xxv-xxxiii.

broaden our study further. In the *Ikhtilāf*, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān sets out to refute several

hermeneutic methods articulated in Sunni works of legal theory that flourished at the

time. He takes on the principles of consensus (*ijmāʿ*), submission to authority (*taqlīd*),

analogy (*qiyās*), speculation (*naẓar*) and various types of independent legal interpretation

(i.e. *ijtihād, istiḥsān, istidlāl*). He repeatedly disputes the probabilistic and subjective

nature of these procedures. Rather, he argues that any legal gaps left by the Qurʾān and

Prophetic Sunna ought to be filled with recourse to the teachings of the rightful Imāms.[226]

In the *Ikhtilāf*, Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān employs the phrase '*ahl al-qibla*' ten times to

designate the entirety of the Muslim people across sectarian difference. The term is

never applied in the way of our Sunni authors, to enfranchise questionable groups or

individuals within the community of believers. Rather, as was the case with al-Qummī, it

is merely descriptive of "all those to whom the religion of Islam can be ascribed."[227]

Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān opens by telling his readers that he composed the work

because

> Although they agree upon the clear text of the Qurʾān and believe in the
> Emissary, the People of the *Qibla* nevertheless disagree regarding many legal
> rulings, some fundamental principles, and many matters of interpretation, and
> they have divided into various schools and sects.[228]

In a similar context, our author identifies as '*ahl al-qibla*' those who agree with him on

the authority of the Qurʾān and Sunna, but whom he opposes in their support of

speculation (*naẓar*).[229] We might be tempted to consider this application of '*ahl al-qibla*'

as establishing a minimal Muslim identity based in two primary sources of law, whereas

the other disagreements may be considered minor. Indeed, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān omits his

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[226] A short summary of this view is offered at al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Ikhtilāf*, 350-51.
[227] This phrase, "*man yuʿzā ilā dīn al-Islām*," appears in al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Ikhtilāf*, 126-7.
[228] Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Ikhtilāf*, 4-5.
[229] Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Ikhtilāf*, 182-3.

view as to whether he considers his disputants unbelievers who are damned to hell.

However, he does share some choice words about them near the end of his work that

clarify that 'ahl al-qibla' carries no ecumenical connotation. They (i.e. Sunnīs)

"stubbornly insist on error;" they are "too arrogant to concede the truth;" "fanaticism has

taken hold of them (istaḥkamat fīhi al-ḥamīya)," and they "have taken their whims and

desires as gods (wa-ittakhadh ilāhahu hawāhu li-shahwatihi)."[230]

The phrase also aids al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān in depicting his opponents' arguments

about consensus (ijmāʿ). They disagree whether "consensus [about a ruling of law] must

be agreement among all of the People of the Qibla." One group, he tells us,

> does not see consensus as binding proof until the matter is agreed upon by all of
> the People of the Qibla, including the various sects: those who are rightly guided
> and follow the truth as well as those who have gone astray by adopting some
> [heretical] innovation.[231]

Others, however, believe that consensus is only when "those who adhere to the truth from

among the People of the Qibla agree, even if they are opposed by those among the People

of the Qibla to whom the labels unbelief and immorality apply." Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān

accepts that consensus among the followers of truth is compelling, but "every sect among

the People of the Qibla claims to be in the right and attributes unbelief and heresy to their

opponents." (Hence, every group can claim a proof from this kind of consensus, and so it

is not incontrovertible.)[232] Without delving into the details of his argument we may make

an observation about what al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān means when he uses the qibla-phrase. In

common with the semantic field of the term we have seen until now, our author intends a

wider group than would be understood from the word "believers." However, unlike the

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[230] al-Nuʿmān, Ikhtilāf, 352-3.
[231] al-Nuʿmān, Ikhtilāf, 124-25. The end of the passage reads "jamīʿa ahl al-qibla min al-firaq al-mukhtalifa al-muhtadiya bi-ittibāʿ al-ḥaqq wal-ḍālla bi-baʿd al-bidāʿ" See a similar usage at 136-7.
[232] al-Nuʿmān, Ikhtilāf, 138-39.

usage of the Sunni authors, he includes individuals and sects labeled with unbelief, and whom he does not accept as Muslim.

Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's foundational work of Ismāʿīlī positive law, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām* (Pillars of Islam)—where '*ahl al-qibla*' appears six times in the reports from the Imāms and in the author's editorial comments—evinces a somewhat more nuanced application of the expression. In some instances it is clearly opposite the Sunni usage. In the "Book of *Walāya*" (allegiance to ʿAlī and the Imāms), for example, he argues that Abraham's supplication on behalf of his progeny (Q Ibrāhīm 14:35-37) refers only to Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and the Imāms. "Those who show loyalty to them belong to the people (*umma*) God described in the Book (i.e. the Qurʾān) and those who do not recognize their superiority over them (*ʿalayhi faḍlan*) are among those who did not accept Muḥammad."[233] Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān goes on to say that many verses describe the people Ishmael and Abraham prayed for as "a people (*umma*) from among you who will summon [people] to good, command what is right and forbid what is wrong" (Q Āl ʿImrān 3:104). "This verse," the author tells us, "labels People of the *Qibla* as unbelievers due to acts of disobedience (*wa-fī hādhihi al-āya takfīr ahl al-qibla bil-maʿāṣī*)." God's *umma* must be limited to those who enjoin what is right, etc., whereas "they [the Sunnīs?] claim that all Muslims are Muḥammad's people."[234] This interpretation and application of '*ahl al-qibla*' may be intentionally subverting the usage in Sunni theological literature, which claimed that sinners among the '*ahl al-qibla*' were

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[233] All references to *Daʿāʾim* come from Abū Ḥanīfa al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān b. Muḥammad, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, 2 vols., ed. A.A.A. Fyzee (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1963), and translations are my own. An English translation was made by Fyzee and revised by Poonawala, see n. 225 above, although "*ahl al-qibla*" is only rendered as People of the *Qibla* in one place. Again, references to this work will be annotated as *Daʿāʾim* vol. # Arabic p.# /English p.#. For example, the line just quoted is *Daʿāʾim* vol. 1 34/45. See almost the same wording on the same Qurʾānic passage in *Ikhtilāf*, 114-17.

[234] *Daʿāʾim*, vol. 1, 34/45.

believers. Likewise, al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān knows that the verse "We made you a moderate

people (*ummatan wasaṭan*) to be witnesses for all humanity" (Q Baqara 2:143) cannot

include "all of the People of the *Qibla* who simply believe. For how could God call a

group to be witnesses over all humanity on the Day of Resurrection that cannot even be

trusted in this world to bear witness over a half-peck of dates!"[235] One section in his

"Book on *Jihād*" is even entitled "Those Among the People of the *Qibla* that it is Lawful

to Fight."[236] These instances of our key term do not signify inclusive belonging to his

conception of '*umma*.' On the contrary, they designate the entirety of those who self-

identify as Muslim, in order to highlight those who cannot be treated as part of the

community of believers.

On the other hand, several occurrences of '*ahl al-qibla*' in *Daʿāʾim* are more

equivocal, or even outright inclusive. For example, when discussing the requirements for

valid witnesses over a legal will (*waṣīya*) he cites a ruling from the Sixth Imām, Jaʿfar al-

Ṣādiq (d. 148/765):

> If one's death approaches while he is traveling in a foreign land with no Muslims
> around, he may take as witness those from outside the People of the *Qibla* for his
> legal will, and make them take an oath to God[.][237]

In this case, '*ahl al-qibla*' is a synonym for Muslims who are valid as witnesses, and

hence appears to be an inclusive usage. (i.e. If any of the People of the *Qibla* are present,

then they would be acceptable witnesses.) In another instance, the "Book on *Jihād*"

quotes ʿAlī as saying, "Rebels (*ahl al-baghy*) should be fought the same way that one

fights polytheists (*mushrikūn*), and one should seek the help of whomever one can [to

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[235] *Daʿāʾim*, vol. 1, 35/45. See the same argument in *Ikhtilāf*, 116-17. The argument may be that the
"*umma*" intended in this verse refers only to the Imāms, but the usage of the *qibla*-phrase is still exclusivist.
[236] Daʿāʾim, vol. 1 398/493.
[237] *Daʿāʾim*, vol. 2, 513/520.

fight them] from among the People of the *Qibla*."[238] The '*ahl al-qibla*' are included here among those who can join "the good fight," as it were. A final example will provide the most nuanced usage of the *qibla*-phrase. When ʿAlī was asked whether "those among the People of the *Qibla* who fought against him are unbelievers (*a-kāfirūn hum*)," he responds:

> "They have disbelieved in the ordinances and in [God's] blessings, but not like the disbelief of the polytheists who reject prophecy and do not affirm Islam." [al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān commented:] Had they been like [the polytheists], then we would not be permitted to marry them, or to trust their slaughter, or inherit from them. But they, even if they are not polytheists, are as ʿAlī has said, "only connected to Islam in name, and by their verbal affirmation." By means of that [affirmation] marriage to and inheritance from them is permitted.[239]

There is no question that for al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān the *qibla*-phrase signals those who are not Shiʿi, rather than those who have committed grave sins. In several instances, he denies that these people should be part of the *umma* of Muḥammad; they are Muslim in name only. And nevertheless, some amount of intergroup communion existed between his group and the People of the *Qibla*—he trusted them as witnesses on legal documents (when necessary), they were to be sought out for alliances against rebels, marriages between his children and theirs were valid, the slaughter of their butchers could be trusted, and inheritance laws applied across sectarian lines. These practical implications

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[238] *Daʿāʾim*, vol. 1, 393/487.
[239] *Daʿāʾim* vol. 1 388/480. An interesting counter-tradition bearing further study is transmitted by Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq—recorded by both al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān and the great Imāmī collector of traditions, al-Kulaynī—Muḥammad said: "Whoever dies without recognizing the Imām in his day dies as a pagan (*māta mīta jāhilīya*)." *Daʿāʾim* vol.1 25/36; and Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, vol. 1 ed. ʿA. A. al-Ghaffārī. (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīya, 1944), 376-77. The traditions from the Imāms that we have labeled as "inclusivizing" do not appear in al-Kulaynī's collection.

of the designation as among the '*ahl al-qibla*' track closely with those that our Sunni

authors mention.[240]

Implications of Inclusion Among the '*ahl al-qibla*'

Repentance was always open to errant Muslims during their lifetime, but the

death of Muslims who failed to atone for grave sins raised a number of practical

questions. These are the ones most often mentioned in our sources. For example, al-

Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān quoted ʿAlī as allowing inheritance among the various groups of the '*ahl*

al-qibla.' Al-Ashʿarī goes further to make the proper treatment of the dead among the

ahl al-qibla a matter of creed: "We profess [that one must recite the funerary] prayer over

the dead among the People of the *Qibla*, whether pious or sinful (*al-birr wal-fājir*), and

one inherits from them."[241] In a rare Muʿtazilite usage of the *qibla* phrase, al-Khayyāṭ (d.

*c.*300/913) writes, "It is an agreed upon practice that the people of unbelief (*ahl al-kufr*)

do not pass on their inheritance nor are they buried in the graveyards of the People of the

Qibla, but this is not the practice regarding the grave sinner (*ṣāḥib al-kabīra*)."[242]

Likewise, both Ibn ʿUkāsha and al-Ṭaḥāwī include, in their statements of faith, the

injunction to offer funerary rites over the dead of the '*ahl al-qibla*.' As far as practical

implications while living, both also add that one may worship behind any prayer leader

among the '*ahl al-qibla*.'[243] Other implications include feeding the needy among them as

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[240] I have not undertaken a comprehensive study of Imāmī (or Ismāʿīlī) law, but it is interesting to note that the term '*ahl al-qibla*' does not seem to appear at all in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*.

[241] Al-Ashʿarī, *al-Ibāna*, 32; *Maqālāt*, 296.

[242] Al-Khayyāṭ, *Intiṣār*, 166.

[243] *Al-ʿAqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah*, #88, 68-9 and Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb*, vol. 3, 134. The connection between orienting rites of death towards the *qibla* and the injunction to treat the *ahl al-qibla* as Muslim in burial and funerary prayers requires further exposition. On the former, see references in the introduction to this dissertation, pp. 8-9 above. Likewise, on praying behind any prayer leader who faces the *qibla* see pp. 9-11.

well as the prisoners taken from their ranks.[244] Of course, the prohibition against labeling

any of the *ahl al-qibla* as a *kāfir*—the most common usage of the term—also carried

another practical implication of major importance: protection of their right to life.[245]

Each author and school of thought might approach the legal ramifications of

considering someone to be among the People of the *Qibla* differently, and the above is

simply an enumeration of issues to consider. For example, Abū Manṣūr al-Baghdādī (d.

429/1037) takes a nuanced approach in the first chapter of his polemical heresiography

al-Farq bayna al-Firaq. Some improper beliefs remove one from the status of Muslim

("*ummat al-Islām*") and put one into the category of unbelief, but other deviations from

the professed orthodoxy—e.g. Muʿtazilism, Khārijism, Imāmism, Zaydism and others—

are to be considered among the "*ummat al-Islām*" for some purposes and not for others.

For example,

> he may be buried among the graves of Muslims, if he raids (*in ghazā*) alongside
> the Muslims his portion of booty may not be withheld, and he may not be
> prevented from praying in mosques.

However,

> [funerary] prayer on his behalf is forbidden, as is being led in prayer by them.
> That which they slaughter is not licit to you, and they may not marry a Sunni
> woman. Likewise, a Sunni man may not marry a woman from among them if she
> holds their beliefs.[246]

Although al-Baghdādī does not use the phrase '*ahl al-qibla*,' his definition of the Muslim

community ("*ummat al-Islām*") requires proper beliefs about God, Muḥammad,

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[244] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 23, 243-45 and al-Thaʿlabī, *Kashf al-Bayān*, vol. 10, 96.

[245] While in actual practice the execution of polytheists may have been rare, on the right to life after professing faith and facing the *qibla* see the discussion in the introduction of the prophetic report beginning, "I have been commanded to fight the people until …" pp. 20-24, above.

[246] al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, 27-31; quotation appears at 31.

revelation, "and that the Kaʿba is the *qibla* towards which one is obligated [to face for] prayers."[247] The mention of this individual obligation alongside basic faith commitments would be peculiar if we did not recognize it as an allusion to identifying Muslims as People of the *Qibla*.

The purpose of this section has been to show that by the tenth-century the designation of Muslims as '*ahl al-qibla*' became a well-established socio-religious metaphor that many scholars deployed when expressing their broadest definition of an Islamic collective. We demonstrated the term's conventional usages through examples from exegetical remarks about sin and punishment. We then considered the theological commitments of major Sunni schools of thought, all of which refused to call sinners unbelievers so long as the offenders met certain minimal requirements and considered them People of the *Qibla*. After pointing out the expression's varied application in some Shiʿi writings, we considered practical implications of being designated as part of or outside of the '*ahl al-qibla*.' In all cases, it is clear that the ritual act of facing a single *qibla* became a way for our authors to portray a unified Islamic identity, without validating the beliefs of those they included within the community. It seems that the *qibla* served as an apt metaphor for inclusivity at the margins—just as those physically far from the central Islamic lands could affiliate with the collective by orienting towards the *qibla*, those on the outskirts of belief or practice could, with the minimal proper spiritual orientation, join the community of faith, the People of the *Qibla*. In the next section of this chapter, however, we will attempt to uncover how the term '*ahl al-qibla*' first emerged into scholarly discourse from out of the context of political unease with Umayyad leadership.

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[247] Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, 30; "*wa-anna al-Kaʿba hiya al-qibla allatī tūjib al-ṣalāt ilayhā.*"

The Origins of the 'People of the *Qibla*'

While systematic theology and philosophy would become hallmarks of medieval

Islamicate intellectual culture, in the first Islamic century distinct theological outlooks

emerged, in part, from debates about the legitimate leadership of Muḥammad's

community after his passing in 11/632.[248] The assassination of the third Caliph, ʿUthmān

ibn ʿAffān in 35/656, garnered divergent reactions among the growing community, and a

split developed among the followers of each of two claimants to the mantle of leadership.

On the one hand, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib was the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet and had

many supporters based in Iraq and Medina, and on the other hand Muʾāwiya, a kinsman

of ʿUthmān, was the powerful governor of Damascus and the Levant. As ʿAlī's party

was about to claim victory at the Battle of Ṣiffīn in 37/657, Muʾāwiya asked that their

dispute be arbitrated peacefully. The arbitration split ʿAlī's followers into two groups,

those who were loyal to his claim to the caliphate (and accepted his decision) and the

Khārijites ("Secessionists"), who considered ʿAlī's agreement to arbitration to be an

arrogant flouting of the judgment by God's Book, favoring human judgment in its stead.

For the Khārijites, the sin was grave and delegitimized ʿAlī's claim to the caliphate.[249]

Many Khārijites came to espouse a theology in which grave sinners were considered

infidels (*kuffār*, sg. *kāfir*), outside of the Muslim community, and without rights and

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[248] For an overview of the relationship between theology and politics in early Islam see, Khalid
Blankinship, "The Early Creed," in *Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic* Theology, ed. T. Winter
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 33-54; and his "Imārah, Khilāfah, and Imāmah: The
Origins of Succession to the Prophet Muḥammad," in *Shīʿite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern
Traditions*, ed. L. Clark (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications/Binghamton University, 2001), 19-44.
[249] On the emergence of the Khārijites in response to the first Civil War see Wilfred Madelung, *The
Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press,
1997), 232-65. On the memory of the Battle of Ṣiffīn in the centuries that followed see Aaron Hagler, "The
Echoes of Fitna: Developing Historiographical Interpretations of the Battle of Ṣiffīn" (PhD Thesis,
University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

privileges as Muslims.[250] For many Khārijites it was incumbent to fight these "Muslim

infidels," and to depose their leadership by force. They did not see lineage as the criterion

by which to appoint leaders, but thought instead that authority lay in the hands of the

legitimate Muslim (Khārijite) community to decide upon the Caliph based on criteria of

righteousness; at any time if the selected caliph transgressed the bounds of proper

behavior, he must be removed from his position or killed. They implemented this activist

doctrine with the murder of ʿAlī in 40/661 at the hands of a Khārijite assassin.

Meanwhile, ʿAlī's party (Ar. *shīʿat ʿAlī*) became known as the *Ahl al-Bayt*, or "People of

the House" (i.e. of the Prophet), because they identified the rightful caliph as stemming

from the Prophet's family.[251]

Khārijite rebellions continued to disrupt the rule of the Umayyads, but theirs were

not the only ones. Many groups expressed discontent with Umayyad control in the form

of armed resistance, some with the support of Khārijites. Some of the most notable

among these are Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī's bid for the caliphate, which ended with the tragic

massacre of his family at Karbala (61/680); Ibn al-Zubayr's short-lived competing

Caliphate based in Mecca (61-73/680-92); the ʿAlid uprising in Kūfa led by al-Mukhtār

al-Thaqafī in the name of ʿAlī's son, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīya (66-7/685-87); the revolt

of Ibn al-Ashʿāth (81-82/700-3); the takeover of Baṣra and some eastern areas by Yazīd

b. al-Muhallab (101-2/720); the futile revolt of ʿAlī's great grandson, Zayd b. ʿAlī b. al-

Ḥusayn (122/740); and ultimately, the overthrow of the Umayyad's by the Hāshimīya

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[250] A recent critique of the history of Khārijites as always, only, and ever violent excommunicators see Adam Gaiser, *Shurāt Legends, Ibāḍī Identities: Martyrdom, Asceticism, and the Making of an Early Islamic Community* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), 169-75.

[251] On the early history of Shiʿism in the first Islamic century see Wilfred Madelung, "Shīʿism in the Age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs," in *Shīʿite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions*, ed. L. Clark (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications/Binghamton University, 2001), 11-18.

(130-33/747-50), who came to rule as the ʿAbbāsids.[252] At the same time as the activist

rebellions took place there were those who, despite their disapproval of the Umayyad

leadership, promoted quietism. The group that became most closely associated with

political quietism is known as the Murjiʾa, or those who practice *irjāʾ*, which is

"postponement" of judgment about the participants in the first Civil War and eventually

postponement of judgment about sinning Muslims.[253] However, there were also quietists

among more moderate Khārijite and ʿAlid groups, who may have felt that Umayyad rule

was sinful, that those who supported it were sinners, but that this did not create an

obligation for active rebellion.[254] It stands to reason that the activist-quietist debates were

dynamic and shifted regularly throughout the Umayyad period.[255]

In their conflicts and alliances, the ongoing unrest laid bare the diversity of the

polity under the Umayyad Caliphate, which by its end stretched from Spain to China.

These disruptions only highlighted an ongoing challenge to maintain a collective Islamic

identity that could include a wide range of ethnic and political loyalties across many

different lands.[256] In this section we argue that the *qibla* emerged as an effective and

durable metaphor for identification as a single collective amidst the socio-religious

turmoil resultant from the Khārijites, the ʿĀlids, and other revolts based in the eastern

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[252] On Ibn al-Zubayr see Hawting, *First Dynasty*, 46-57; on Yazīd b. al-Muhallab see Hawting *First Dynasty*, 73-76; on Zayd b. ʿAlī see Haider, *Origins of the Shīʿa*, 193-99.

[253] On the doctrines of *irjāʾ* and Murjiʾites see n. 173 & n 176 above.

[254] Crone & Zimmerman *Sālim*, 214-15**.**

[255] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 236-43 show that the historical record of the Murjiʾa, typically seen as the arch-quietists, is "as notable for its instances of collaboration as it is for those of rebellion." (P.242)

[256] On ethnic diversity in post-conquest Iraq see Marony, *Iraq* 167-274. Peter Webb has recently attempted to uncover the process of identity-formation during this period with special attention to ethnic diversity. See his *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) and "Identity and Social Formation in the Early Caliphate" in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam* ed. H. Berg (New York: Routledge, 2017), 129-158. Sarah Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Memory, Tradition, and Conversion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), traces the process through which Islamic identity developed in the eastern caliphate to aver and adapt local pre-Islamic memory and culture.

Caliphate.

It may appear that the problem of succession is purely political, but for those involved, the question of who best served as the successor to God's Apostle was deeply religious. Any political-religious binary is out of place in early Islamic discourse about authority, as the two were intricately interwoven (at least in our sources). The Khārijites emerged as a political movement in the sense that they first applied the belief that sin implied the illegitimacy of "erring leaders" and their supporters. However, the natural progression of this idea when applied to the Muslim polity constituted a drastic shift in the character of the community. The question of whether a grave sinner can be called a believer flowed easily from the original Khārijite question: "Can followers of Muʾāwiya and ʿAlī be considered believers or must they be treated as *kāfir*s?" The answer to the theological question could only be answered by defining belief and infidelity better.

As we saw in the previous section, the term '*ahl al-qibla*' became emblematic of an inclusivist position that could enfranchise Muslims whom an author deemed to be of questionable status. In this section, we will attempt to identify its origins in the contentious context of Umayyad rule. However, this is a difficult task, as scholars have achieved little consensus on the extent to which authentic texts from the period are preserved. Furthermore, if the term '*ahl al-qibla*' only began to take on the meaning illustrated above in Umayyad times, then we cannot expect it to appear in all of the texts from that period. To get at the term's origin we will consider four types of works in which it appears. First, we will consider the ways that Khārijite and Murjiʾite sects were remembered in ʿAbbāsid era heresiographies; these works use the *qibla*-phrase consistently when describing these groups. Second, in the histories of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn

Saʿd, the expression appears almost exclusively in narratives attached to conflicts in the Umayyad period. Third, we note that the term hardly if ever appears in prophetic *ḥadīth*, and that the figures recorded as first using the term are Umayyad-era Iraqīs. Finally, we will demonstrate varied usage in several theological works that likely date to the Umayyad period in Iraq: the *Epistle of Sālim b. Dhakwān*, Zayd b. ʿAlī's *Kitāb al-Ṣafwa*, and several works attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa. The authenticity of an Umayyad-era reality portrayed in any of these sets of sources can be questioned, but it is hoped that the accumulation of evidence will be increasingly suggestive.

ʿ*Ahl al-Qibla* in Heresiographical Descriptions of Khārijites and Murjiʾites

As they were remembered in the ʿAbbāsid period, Khārijite activism and Murjiʾite quietism are intricately linked with the identification of erring Muslims as People of the *Qibla*. Heresiographies (*firaq* literature) present the historian with an essential resource for reconstructing the socio-religious contours of the groups and their various sub-groups, but they are far from perfect sources of information. Several features of the genre pose a challenge when used to reconstruct the development of doctrine. First, many of these works commence with a prophetic *ḥadīth* in which Muḥammad predicts that his community will be split into seventy-three (or sometimes seventy-two) sects, with some versions of the report adding, "seventy-two of which will be in hell and one in paradise."[257] Certain heresiographies carry an explicit agenda of justifying the author's

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[257] See discussions of this tradition as used by heresiographers in Keith Lewinstein, "Studies in Islamic Heresiography: The Khawārij in Two Firaq Traditions" (PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 1989), 2-4 and Kate Chambers Seelye, "Introduction" in Abū Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Kabīr Ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *Moslem Schisms and Sects (*al-Farḵ Bain al-Firaḵ*) Being a History of the Various Philosophic Systems Developed in Islam*, trans. K.C. Seelye (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920); Josef Van Ess, "Constructing

school of thought as the one "saved" Muslim group. Others, which appear to take a more purely descriptive approach, are nevertheless driven to justify the tradition and name seventy-three distinct groupings. Another challenge inherent to the genre is that they tend to portray sectarianization as a problematic departure from the supposedly unified practice of Muḥammad's community, and hence "authentic doctrine" is frozen in time.

Furthermore, our authors often borrow from one another or draw from the same wells of early materials, but heresiographies tend not to ground their information in *isnāds* and rarely name their sources. However, when the same descriptions appear across a spectrum of works it may indicate a reliable memory of the group or at least an early line of tradition about them.[258] In this sense, it seems beyond question that the various Khārijite and Murjiʾite sub-groups were defined by their stance towards co-religionists whose beliefs or behaviors they considered abhorrent. It is noteworthy that heresiographers frequently employ '*ahl al-qibla*' as a technical term when describing each of the sub-groups' positions on errant Muslims: while, the term is rarely, if ever, applied when describing the beliefs of other groups. This phenomenon may indicate that the term emerged explicitly in the context of the Khārijite/Murjiʾite stance towards Islamic socio-religious identity.

"Muḥakkima," is often used in this literature as a general term for the Khārijites, who first seceded from the Islamic collective in protest to ʿAlī's acquiescence to human arbitration with Muʾāwiya.[259] Their refrain, "*lā ḥukma illā li-Llah*" ("there is no

Islam in the Classical Period: '*Maqālāt*' Literature and the Seventy-Two Sects," in *Kleine Schriften*, 480-90. An example appears in al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbīh*, 38.

[258] See Cook, *Dogma*, 95-99 for an example of how one might chart out a heresiographic tradition regarding Khārijites and Murjiʾites emerging from earlier sources. Cook takes a skeptical approach, but the description is instructive.

[259] See Moktar Djebli, "Taḥkīm," *EI2*.

judgment but God's") came to define the early Khārijites as the name Muḥakkima

suggests. Abū Ḥusayn al-Malaṭī (d. 377/987) introduces his section on Khārijites saying

that they would enter the marketplaces with their swords crying out these very words and

fight until they killed all opponents or were killed. He knows that the Khārijites—whom

he also calls by another early self-designations, "*Shurāt*"—"declare sinners as

unbelievers (*yukfirūn aṣḥāb al-maʿāṣī*) and those who go against their ways and protest

their positions."[260] In his response to their position he says that the life of a believer only

becomes forfeit for three grave sins—fornication after chastity, renunciation of faith, or

unlawful killing—"beyond which the killing of any of the People of the *Qibla* is

forbidden." All agree, al-Malaṭī says, that the status of the grave sinner is unknown, "but

[the Khārijites] declare the grave sinners among the People of the *Qibla* as

unbelievers."[261]

Many heresiographers also employ the *qibla*-phrase when describing Khārijite

sub-groups who express some degree of tolerance towards Muslims outside of their own

community. So we are told that in lands where one cannot express one's (Khārijite) faith

openly (i.e. *dār al-taqīya*) the Akhnasīya "refrain (from killing) those who claim to be

Muslim and People of the *Qibla* […] and that before killing the rebellious (*ahl al-baghy*)

among the People of the *Qibla*, one must call them to faith."[262] A group known as the

Ḥamzīya (followers of a man called Ḥamza) believe only in the right to kill the Sultan,

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[260] Al-Malaṭī, *Tanbīh*, 39. See also al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 86 and al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, vol. 1, 114-15. Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, 72-3, mentions that not all Khārijites believe in calling sinners unbelievers.
[261] Al-Malaṭī, *Tanbīh*, 40.
[262] al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 97-8. See also al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, vol. 1, 132. al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, 94. On the concept of *baghy* in general, among various schools of Islamic thought, including the widespread position that rebellious Muslims (*ahl al-baghy*) must first be called to faith, see Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); see 141-42, where he cites Abū Yūsuf who uses the terms *ahl al-qibla* and *ahl al-baghy* interchangeable in the section of his *Kitāb al-Kharāj* regarding how to act in warfare against the People of the *Qibla*.

but "they do not hold of killing the People of the *Qibla*."[263] Another account describes a

group of Khārijites who "do not believe in pursuing those People of the *Qibla* who flee

from them."[264] In addition, Abū Muṭīʿ al-Nasafī (d. 318/930) remembers the Ibāḍī

Khārijites as saying:

> we do not declare as believers any of the People of the *Qibla* except our affiliates (*illā man akhadha bi-maḥabbatinā*), but likewise we refrain from calling them unbelievers, since they do not [openly] deny God and His Emissary. Rather, we bear witness to their hypocrisy (*nashhad ʿalayhim bil-nifāq*), since they affirm some things and deny others.

Al-Nasafī goes on to say that all agree that hypocrites among the '*ahl al-qibla*' must be

treated as believers, since only God and Muḥammad know the inner feelings and ultimate

fate of people.[265] Later in this section we consider the dozens of references to legal

toleration of the '*ahl al-qibla*' in the late first-/early eighth-century Ibāḍī treatise of Sālim

ibn Dhakwān. It is conceivable that in their use of the *qibla*-phrase, al-Nasafī and the

other heresiographers reflected historically genuine discourses active among moderate

Khārijism.

Heresiographers also used the *qibla*-phrase to describe Khārijite sects

remembered for their exclusionary approach towards other Muslims. Al-Nasafī says the

Azāriqa believed that simply acting as a Muslim was an insufficient basis upon which to

ascribe faith; therefore they could "declare the People of the *Qibla* unbelievers." Al-

Nasafī is quick to retort, however, that everyone agrees to "bear witness to the faith of all

of the People of the *Qibla*, and to not declare them as unbelievers due to any sin, leaving

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[263] al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 93-4.
[264] al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, 99.
[265] Al-Nasafī, *al-Radd*, 69-70. On Ibāḍī approaches to rebellious Muslims and the lines of unbelief, in general, see Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence*, 306-19. See also Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 195-203.

their innermost thoughts to God."[266] Likewise, al-Ashʿarī knows of a Khārijite group

among the Bayhasīya, who declare about their opponents, "If their leader is a *kāfir*, then

so is his flock. Their lands are lands of polytheism, and all of its people are [considered]

polytheists." This group will only pray with those who recognize the proper faith, "and

they hold of killing the People of the *Qibla*, taking their property […] and enslaving

them."[267] Khārijites who narrowed the boundary of the faith community, it appears, were

comfortable excluding Muslim people who simply faced the *qibla* outwardly, but lacked

proper ideology internally.

The usage of our key term is also fairly common in heresiographical depictions of

the Murjiʾites. As a response to Khārijite excommunication of the participants in the first

Civil War, Murjiʾites suspended judgment on whether those participating were right or

wrong. Just as the Khārijites were known for their exclusion of 'People of the *Qibla*,' the

Murjiʾites were often described in terms of their inclusive stance. For example, al-

Ashʿarī knows of Murjiʾite factions "who do not label sinners among the People of the

Qibla as '*fāsiq*' even after their actions have been judged as such," while most of them

believe that "the grave sinners (*al-fussāq*) among the People of the *Qibla* are believers

due to their faith, but they are *fāsiqūn* in that they carry grave sins." Ultimately, "Their

fate is left to God, who will punish or forgive them at will."[268] There were, however,

those among the Murjiʾites who were certain that God's threats of punishment applied

only to polytheists, and that "none of the People of the *Qibla* would enter hellfire."[269]

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[266] Al-Nasafī, *al-Radd*, 69. For more information on the Azāriqa see Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 203-206.

[267] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 116, 126. On the existence of Bayhasīya in 2nd c. Kūfa see Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 474-5 (2.1.4).

[268] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 141, 299.

[269] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 147-8.

Still others, who believed that God would punish "evil-doers among the People of the

Qibla" (*fujjār ahl al-qibla*), debated whether they would remain in hellfire eternally.[270]

In a Shiʿi heresiographical tradition, Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ashʿarī al-Qummī (d. 300/912)

explains that the Murjiʾite movement was formed when the majority of ʿAlī's followers

abandoned his cause and joined Muʿāwiya's camp after ʿAlī's murder:

> Together they were called the "*Murjiʾa*" because they affiliated with all of the
> disputants [in the first Civil War] (*tawallaw al-mukhtalifīn*), and they claim that
> all of the People of the *Qibla* are believers on account of their external affirmation
> of faith, and they anticipate (*rajaw*) the forgiveness of them all.[271]

In both writings, the Murjiʾites are defined at least in part through their attitude towards

the 'ahl al-qibla.'

Two conflicting beliefs are implicit in the genre of heresiography. Diversity of

affiliation is often portrayed as a deviation from an original and authentic Islam, on the

one hand, and at the same time, by virtue of inclusion in the works, all of the sectarian

groups described are seen as somehow Islamic. The portrayals of both the Khārijites and

Murjiʾites are bound up with questions about communal boundaries. Our authors all

wrote in a period after the emergence of Khārijism and Murjiʾism in the Umayyad period,

but they often drew on earlier heresiographical traditions. The widespread usage of 'ahl

al-qibla,' which features in the portrayals of these two groups, may simply be a

projection onto sectarian groups of the past to work out contemporary questions of

identity using a terminology contemporaneous with the authors of these texts. However,

the fact that it appears in unique heresiographical traditions to describe the same groups

may suggest that the historical memory of groups from the first Islamic century traveled

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[270] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 149.
[271] Saʿd b. ʿAbdallah al-Qummī, *al-Maqalāt wal-Firaq*, 5. See also al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*, 6.

to our authors along with the terms used to describe them.[272]

'*Ahl al-qibla* in Ummayad-Era Revolts as Seen in Historiographical Literature

The early histories of the Umayyads may offer another set of data to confirm that '*ahl al-qibla*' became a designation for all Muslims during the factionalism of that period. When early ʿAbbāsid historians record a figure using the *qibla*-phrase, it is almost always in the context of intergroup tensions in the Umayyad east. A fuller survey of early histories is called for to confirm this finding, but here we will consider al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) *Taʾrīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk* and Ibn Saʿd's (d.230/845) *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*.

The first Civil War dates back to a division between the devotees of ʿUthmān and the followers of ʿAlī. During ʿUthmān's caliphate, the people of Kūfa sought to replace their appointed governor, Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ, on a day that would come to be known as the "Day of al-Jaraʿa" (34/655). Al-Ṭabarī records an incident on the same day in which two companions of Muḥammad, Abū Masʿūd and Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān were in the mosque of Kūfa discussing the situation. Abū Masʿūd was in a severe mood, certain that the affair would end with blood. Ḥudhayfa, however, declares that the matter would end, "without even a cupping-glass (*miḥjama*) of blood […] one professes Islam one day, in the evening nothing of it, the next day fights the People of the *Qibla*, and God kills him[.]"[273] The response is largely obscure, but it appears to indicate that God will take care of the situation. However, a few facts of the context being portrayed are relevant to

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[272] Arguing for two divergent origins of heresiographic traditions regarding the Khārijites, of which al-Nasafī and al-Ashʿarī come from separate lines, is the subject of Lewinstein, "Islamic Heresiography." With regard to separate traditions on the Azraqites in particular see Keith Lewinstein, "The Azāriqa in Islamic Heresiography," *BSOAS* 54 (1991): 251-68.
[273] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 1/2934-35.

our study. First, the removal of Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ is associated with the rise of a Kūfan

entity known as the Qurrāʾ, who would constitute the base group of those who rose

against ʿAlī as Khārijites.[274] Second, Ḥudhayfa was adopted as a hero by the Khārijites

and Shīʿa alike for his protests against ʿUthmān.[275] Third, 'ahl al-qibla' in this passage

indicates fighting between factions of Muslims. The memory of this term in the mouth of

a proto-Khārijite hero is suggestive.

After ʿAlī submitted to arbitration at the Battle of Ṣiffīn (37/657), the earliest

Khārijites departed from his camp and took him as an enemy. The following year, ʿAlī

achieved a major victory over them at Nahrawān (east of the Tigris), killing all but a few

hundred of the remaining Khārijite fighers.[276] Al-Ṭabarī tells us that in the year 42/662,

Muʿāwiya appointed a governor at Kūfa who did not question people's sectarian

identifications, either as ʿAlids or as Khārijites. In the context of relative calm, the

Khārijites would regroup. Al-Ṭabarī recounts:

> The Khārijites used to meet one another and recall the place of their compatriots
> (*yudhākirūn makān ikhwānihim*) at Nahrawān, and they considered it deceitful
> and wrong to stay put (*fī al-iqāma al-ghabn wal-wakaf*), and saw that in *jihad*
> against the People of the *Qibla* lies virtue and reward (*fī jihād ahl al-qibla al-faḍl
> wal-ajr*).[277]

Again, the usage of the term '*ahl al-qibla*' is associated with both fighting among

Muslims and is placed into the mouths of Khārijites.

A number of usages of '*ahl al-qibla*' appear in descriptions of the aftermath of the

ʿĀlid rebellion of al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd al-Thaqafī. Al-Mukhtār's rebellion (66-

[274] Martin Hinds, "Kufan Political Alignments and Their Background in the Mid-Seventh Century
A.D.,"*IJMES* 2:4 (1971): 357-60, 363-65. See also T. Nagel "al-Ḳurrāʾ" *EI2*. A linguistic analysis of the
term appears in G. H. A. Juynboll, "The Qurrāʾ in Early Islamic History," *Journal of the Economic and
Social History of the Orient* 16:2/3 (1973): 113-29.
[275] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 84-5, 187, 257.
[276] See Madelung, Succession, 251-62 and M. Morony, "Nahrawān" *EI2*.
[277] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2/20.

7/685-7) against Ibn al-Zubayr claimed to be in support of the Imāmate of ʿAlī's son,

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīya. It may have been the first time that non-Arab non-born

Muslims took a leadership role in such a rebellion, and in this sense, it is often seen as a

pre-cursor to the ʿAbbāsid revolution.[278] One of these Arab clients (*mawālī*), Bujayr b.

ʿAbdallāh commanded many fighters and was taken to Muṣʿab b. al-Zubayr after al-

Mukhtār's defeat. He begged for the lives of his men:

> Praise be to God who has tested us with captivity and tests you with forgiveness
> […] whoever forgives is forgiven by God, and whoever punishes is not safe from
> retaliation (*lam yuʾman min al-qiṣāṣ*). Oh, [Muṣʿab] Ibn al-Zubayr, we are people
> of your *qibla* and religion (*naḥnu ahl qiblatikum wa-ʿalā millatikum*). We are not
> Turks or Daylamites […] you have won power over us, so forgive us.[279]

Bujayr appeals across ethnic and political lines, begging that one should show mercy to

those who share the same *qibla*. Al-Ṭabarī tells us that Muṣʿab was moved by the plea,

but nevertheless kills them at the behest of Ibn al-Ashʿath (who would later lead a

rebellion against the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj). Upon his return to Mecca, al-Muṣʿab

met up with ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar (b. al-Khaṭṭāb), who was al-Mukhtār's brother-in-law

and who had previously interceded on al-Mukhtār's behalf with both the Umayyads and

Zubayrids.[280] In response to al-Muṣʿab's greeting, ʿAbdallāh scolded him, "you are the

man who in a single morning killed seven thousand People of the *Qibla*; live as long as

you are able!"[281] Ibn Saʿd shares a different report regarding the *mawālī* of al-Mukhtār,

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[278] Hawting, *First Dynasty*, 51-3 and "al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd," *EI2*.

[279] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2/740. "Turks or Daylamites" ("*lasnā Turkanan wa-lā daylaman*") likely refers to foreign non-Muslim soldiers, and hence not part of the same socio-religious group. People who shared a *milla* and *qibla* is used in another appeal across enemy lines in al-Ḥajjāj's call to the rebels who followed al-Muṭarrif in 77/697 asking, futilely, that they not fight. See Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2/998 and al-Balādhurī *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 13 vols., eds. S. Zakkār and M. Zarkalī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), Vol. 7, 402.

[280] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2/522 and 2/600.

[281] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2/745. See a similar report of the incident also with ʿAbdallāh using the term '*ahl al-qibla*' in Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī Taʾrīkh al-Mulūk wal-Umam*, ed. M. ʿA.Q. ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1992), vol. 6, 66.

known as the *Khashshabīya*, which expresses slightly more ambivalence towards them.

The Kūfan traditionist, Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (d. 96/717) reflects on them, saying, "If I were

to allow the killing of any of the People of the *Qibla*, it would be of the

Khashshabīya."[282] These reports may reflect that the killing of the non-Arab followers of

al-Mukhtār was taken too lightly. In that case, the metaphor of a shared *qibla* came as an

appeal to confessional unity across political and ethnic lines.

In a final example from the historiographers, the Umayyad Caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd

al-ʿAzīz (ʿUmar II; r. 99-101/717-720), often seen as more virtuous and less militant than

other Umayyad leaders, appears to have used the *qibla* to speak across party lines on

several occasions. Ibn Saʿd reports that upon hearing of his appointment as caliph after

the death of Sulyamān b. ʿAbd al-Malik he publicly declared:

> I didn't want or hope for this [position]. Fear God and give rightfully (*Aʿṭū al-ḥaqq*) of yourselves and protest evil (*ruddū al-maẓālim*). Verily, I do not have any resentment against (*mā aṣbaḥat bī mawjida ʿalā*) any of the People of the *Qibla* except those who extravagantly expend of themselves (*dhawī al-isrāf*) until God returns them to frugality.[283]

In another incident, the governor of Khurāsān, al-Jarrāḥ b. ʿAbdallāh (d. 112/730) was

criticized for being an Arab partisan and exacting tribute from non-Arab soldiers. ʿUmar

II then wrote to al-Jarrāḥ saying, "Whoever before you prays towards the *qibla*, need not

pay tribute (*jizya*)."[284] In the recorded memory of ʿUmar II's words, the *qibla* was a

pacifying symbol and may represent a stage at which the *qibla*-phrase had so thoroughly

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[282] Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, ed. ʿA.M. ʿUmar, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), vol. 8 p. 386.

[283] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt* (ed. ʿUmar), vol. 7, 383-4. The problem of *isrāf* may refer to the complaint about great expenditures on military endeavors, on which ʿUmar II was known for cutting back; see Hawting, *First Dynasty*, 72-3. It may refer to the general sin of profligacy; see M. H. Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qurʾānic Principle of Wasaṭiyyah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 145-157.

[284] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 2/1354. Umar II's suppression of charging non-Arab Muslims the *jizya* was also the case with regard to the Berbers/Amazigh of North Africa, see Hawting, *First Dynasty*, 84.

penetrated public discourse that even an Umayyad Caliph could use it to signal

reconciliation.

Martin Hinds suspected that the earliest Khārijite and Shiʿi unrest in Kūfa under

Muʿāwīya emerged as much from discomfort with tribal hierarchies as with ideological

protest.[285] Ethnic factionalism was certainly an ongoing challenge under the Umayyads,

and dissatisfaction in this regard was one cause for the success of the ʿAbbāsid

revolution. Our examples from Umayyad history also show that the *qibla* was a useful

metaphor for cutting across the lines of Khārijite, ʿĀlīd, and tribal diversity. Of course,

the representations captured by these historians are merely echoes of the past.

Nevertheless, in the reverberations of schism and dissent, we may be able to discern the

emergence of the People of the *Qibla*.

'*Ahl al-qibla*' in the Teachings of Umayyad-Era Traditionists

It is noteworthy that Muḥammad seems to never have uttered the *qibla*-phrase.[286]

The existence of the phrase '*ahl al-qibla*' was not of legal consequence, per se, such that

its usage required prophetic authority; and yet the expression became so common that

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[285] Hinds, "Kūfan Political Alignments," 346-67.

[286] Electronic searches in the collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, al-Nisāʾī, Mālik, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Dārimī (al-musnad), al-Bayḥaqī (al-sunan al-Kubrā), al-Ṭabarānī (al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr) and others show no prophetic *ḥadīth* using the term. I have found a single example in this regard, Abū Muṭīʿ al-Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Radd*, 83, in his refutation of the Zaydī practice of not praying behind any imam other than those from the family of the Prophet quotes a *ḥadīth* from an ʿAbd Allāh b. Yazīd who reported that al-Ḥasan said, "I knew three hundred of the Prophet's companions, and all of them told me that God's Emissary said, 'Pray with whoever prays towards the *qibla* and say the [funerary] prayer over the dead among the People of the *Qibla*." The *isnād* stands out and the polemical context may call the authenticity of this report into question. Al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan*, #1765 and #1868 cites a similar version to the end of this report "say the [funerary] prayer over the dead of the People of the *Qibla*," from Muḥammad through ʿAlī. Al-Dāraquṭnī immediately adds, "nothing of [the report] is sound." The phrase regarding funerary prayers in both of these instances appears to be an addition to a prophetic report discussed in the introduction to this dissertation regarding prayers behind a sinful imam. **See pp. _____ for further discussion.** The development of this report requires further critical study, but at the outset, the use of the *qibla*-phrase appears to be a later interpolation.

one might have expected its occurrence in some instances. It seems likely that traditionists were well aware of the post-prophetic origins of the designation of Muslims as People of the *Qibla*, and so its appearance in the mouth of Muḥammad would be a shibboleth of inauthenticity. In non-prophetic reports, however, the term first comes into use among those of the late first century, when we argue it emerged.   More research is required, but a few representative examples serve to illustrate the term's early usage in Umayyad-era Iraq.

Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/728), the former *mawlā* of Anas b. Mālik, was a respected traditionist and dream interpreter in Umayyad Baṣra. Ibn Sīrīn is reported to have said, "I don't know any one among the people of learning (*ahl al-ʿilm*) or the followers (*al-tabiʿīn*) who forsook the [funerary] prayer on behalf of the People of the *Qibla* for any sin."[287] In addition, Hishām (b. al-Ḥasan) "didn't know anyone more hopeful about the fate of the People of the *Qibla* than Ibn Sīrīn."[288] Ibn Sīrīn appears to be among those who advocated that the funerary prayer be said over sinful and errant Muslims, because one could hope that God may forgive them.

Another Baṣran who used the *qibla*-phrase (as cited in several Qurʾān commentaries) is Abū al-ʿĀliya (d. *c*. 93/712), who said that "those who will quarrel before your Lord on the day of Resurrection" refers to the People of the *Qibla* who will dispute the grievances among them (*maẓālim baynahum*).[289] Abū al-ʿĀliya is said to have laid down his arms at the Battle of Ṣiffīn after hearing both sides proclaim the *takbīr* ("God is Great!") and *tahlīl* ("There is no god but God!"). Although he followed

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[287] Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*; A similar report appears in ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanʿānī *Muṣannaf* #6624.
[288] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt* (ed. ʿUmar), vol. 9, 167. For more on Ibn Sīrīn see T. Fahd, "Ibn Sīrīn" *EI2*.
[289] Q39:31. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 20, 202; al-Thaʿlabī *al-Kashf*, vol. 8, 235; Makkī, *al-Hidāya*, 2337; see also al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt*, vol. 4, 565 on Q50:28, who cites the interpretation but without ascription.

Muʿāwiya's forces into Transoxania, he was known to have great sympathy for the *Ahl al-Bayt* (i.e. ʿAlids).[290] He is also one of those who first circulated the prophetic *ḥadīth* declaring that one should pray behind an Imam regardless of their political affiliations or sinfulness.[291] It seems fitting that his would be among the earliest recorded usages of '*ahl al-qibla*' as a term to describe Muslims across sectarian lines. In the mortal realm Muslims of opposing parties could constitute a single community; resolution of their disputes would have to wait until the end of days.

A final example of an Umayyad-era Iraqī using the inclusivizing *qibla*-phrase comes from several exegetical comments attributed to the popular Kūfan preacher, Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī (d. 127/745). As cited above from al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, al-Suddī often referred to sinning Muslims as '*ahl al-qibla*.' In addition, he comments that God intended "the People of the *Qibla* who fought one another" when the Qurʾān says "Do not be like those who split apart and differed after clear proofs came to them" and from among whom God will sort the punished from the saved (Q Āl ʿImrān 3:105-7). Al-Suddī may have had ʿĀlid sympathies, as well, and he was known to have made some critical comments about the first two caliphs and to have attributed miracles to al-Ḥusayn.[292] Al-Suddī's regular invoking of the phrase '*ahl al-qibla*' is suggestive of its early application to the political rifts in his own day. His sympathies with Umayyad opponents may explain his gravitation towards usage of the catch phrase that would include them in the Islamic collective.

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[290] Abdol Amir Salim "Abū al-ʿĀliya" trans. Rahim Gholami, *Encyclopedia Islamica*, eds. W. Madelung and F. Daftary. Consulted online 10 August, 2018 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_SIM_0098>

[291] See Stijn Aerts, "Pray with Your Leader: a Proto-Sunnī Quietist Tradition," *JAOS*, 136:1 (2016): 29-45, see esp. 32-8.

[292] See G.H.A. Juynboll, "al-Suddī" *EI2*; and Muḥammad Aḥmad b. ʿUthmān al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, ed. Sh. al-Arnaʾūṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1996), vol. 3, 291.

Late First-/ Early Eighth-Century Theological Texts Using '*ahl al-qibla*'

The works we have looked at until now—heresiographies, histories, and

transmitted reports—may suggest that the term People of the *Qibla* emerged to describe

diverse groups of Muslims during a time when there were those who wished to designate

rival factions as non-Muslim unbelievers or as polytheists. We further proposed that it

was among the diverse populations of Kūfa and Baṣra in which the expression first took

on its semantic connotations. At least one work exists from the period and context in

question that can demonstrate the deployment of the expression '*ahl al-qibla*' to indicate

socio-religious inclusion across factional divide: the so-called *Sīrat Sālim* or "Epistle of

Sālim b. Dhakwān."

Sālim b. Dhakwān's *Sīra* (Epistle) uses the *qibla* as a symbol for an inclusive

Islamic identity more extensively than any text considered so far in this study. Modern

scholarship debates the Epistle's exact provenance, but the consensus places its

composition in the late-first/early-eighth century in Kūfa or Baṣra.[293] Sālim's epistle is

an Ibāḍī work, and amounts to an extended reflection on the political division in his day

as well as the theological outlooks that prompted them. It is of Khārijite character in the

sense that its major preoccupation is with defining socio-religious boundaries and seeking

to do so with reference to Khārijite readings of early history. In that he promotes a

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[293] Cook, *Dogma*, 89-103, felt that if authentic the *sīra* was written in 71-2/691-3, and if pseudonymous then a product of the late-Umayyad period; in his review of Cook, Wilfred Madelung argues that the work corresponded best to the revolt of Ibn al-Ashʿath in the year 82/701; see his review of *Early Muslim Dogma* by Michael Cook, *Journal of Theological Studies* 33:2 (1982): 628-33, and again briefly in Wilfred Madelung, "The Early Murjiʾa in Khurāsān and Transoxania and the Spread of Ḥanifīsm," *Der Islam* 59:1 (1982): 32-33, n. 1a. Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 196-99, argues that the revolt of al-Muhallab in 101-2/720 is the most likely context of the epistle's composition. Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 266-300, are skeptical of both the early dating and the geographic location of Iraq, favoring instead the second half of the eighth century CE in an eastern locale. Nevertheless, they believe that the Murjiʾite sections date to a source no later than 101-2/720, see 296-7. This section alone contains nine references to Muslims as all those who face the *qibla*.

political quietism and affirms a great degree of socio-religious communion with theological adversaries should lead us to see his epistle as offering a form of "moderate Khārijism." Sālim rejects the radical and activist Khārijism of the Azāriqa and Najdīya as a departure from the original Khārijites and as controverting Muḥammad's own treatment of "those who faced his *qibla*." Conversely, he denounces the Murjiʾites as contravening judgment by God's book in their inability to condemn the participants in the first Civil War. He carves out a middle ground by asserting the protected legal status of his Muslim opponents even as he refutes their beliefs and condemns their actions.

Sālim begins his epistle with an enjoinder to piety (*taḥmīd*) and then turns to a recounting of history up to his day. After describing Muḥammad's mission to all humanity and his charge to part ways with the polytheists and to take up armed struggle against them, he says that God divided Muḥammad's adversaries into different groups with differing rulings:

> God allowed things in respect of some [groups] that He prohibited in respect of others; to people entitled to rights by [acceptance of] some of his command he granted a legal status that He did not grant <to people not> so entitled.[294]

So, for example, the Arab polytheists (*mushrikī al-ʿarab*) who refused to accept Islam were to be fought, their possessions became booty, lines of inheritance with them were severed. Muslims were not allowed to marry them, eat of their slaughtered animals (*akl dhabāʾiḥihim*), or honor their contracts (*wafāʾ bi-ʿuhūdihim*). Zoroastrians (*al-Majūs*), on the other hand, "claimed some remnant of knowledge" (*iddaʿaw athāratan min ʿilmin*) on account of which Muḥammad spared their lives and property through payment of the *jizya* (tribute tax). Nevertheless, Muslims were forbidden to marry them, eat of their

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[294] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 68-9. Translations of *Sīrat Sālim* follow Crone and Zimmerman with minor adjustments.

slaughter, or maintain inheritance lines with them. As for the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*), they could also protect their lives and property through payment of the *jizya*.

However, because "they professed some of what God revealed to them" (*bi-iqrārihim bi-baʿḍa mā anzala Allah ilayhim*) their women could marry Muslim men and their

slaughter could be trusted.[295]

Muḥammad's treatment of those who had the outward appearance of following

Islam (*yuẓhirūn ahl al-islām dīnahum*) while doubting its central tenets—i.e. the

hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*)—would become Sālim's guide for how his own Muslim

opponents should be handled. They were to be treated as fully Muslim:

> They were entitled to legal rights by their use of their *qibla* (*bistiqbāl qiblatihim*).
> That gave them benefits with the Muslims, who would intermarry with them,
> maintain lines of inheritance with them, eat their slaughtered animals, and honor
> their contracts, instead of [Muslims] disowning [the Hypocrites] and deeming it
> lawful to shed the blood of many of them[…] while forbidding [Muslims] to
> collect the *jizya* from them [...] this was the conduct (*sīra*) of God's Emissary
> with mischief-makers among the People of the *Qibla* (*muḥdithīn min ahl al-qibla*)
> (and that is) the precedent (*sunna*) he set for dealing with them."[296]

For Sālim, the act of facing the same *qibla* as the Muslims constitutes identification as

part of the common collective. Muḥammad mandated that Muslims treat all those who

showed this minimal outward sign of affiliation the way that they would pious believers.

Whenever Sālim wishes to signify the inclusion of Muslims of questionable status in the

mandate of equal treatment, he either points to the action of facing the *qibla* (*istiqbāl al-qibla*) or identifies such persons as people of the same *qibla*.

It followed for Sālim that the killing of ʿUthmān and some of his followers was

legitimate not because their sinful practice made them unbelievers, but "according to the

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[295] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 68-71.

[296] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 70-73. The translation of "*muḥdithīn*" as "mischief-makers" follows Crone and Zimmerman, a choice they explain at 151.

judgment passed by God's Emissary on people of his *qibla* (*ahl qiblatihi*) who had committed a capital offense." This is the reason why they "did not enslave their offspring, treat their property as booty, sever lines of inheritance with them, or bed their women before they had completed their waiting periods."[297] Likewise, those who fought against ʿAlī on the Day of the Camel on account of ʿUthmān's death, i.e. Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, were treated according to the ruling of God's emissary regarding "mischief-makers among the people of his *qibla*," (*muḥdithūn min ahl qiblatihi*) and not as polytheists, per se.[298] His criticism of the extreme Khārijite groups, the Azāriqa and the Najadāt, is precisely that they treat their own people (*qawm*) as idol worshippers (*ʿabadat al-awthān*). Even those who separated from them, (the followers of Dāwūd, ʿAṭīya, and Abū Fudayk) did not forsake "enslaving the People of the *Qibla*, killing their offspring, bedding their women, etc."[299] All of these groups "are wrong because they act against the *sunna* of the Prophet in dealing with them <and> fail to follow the conduct of people to whom they affiliate [i.e. Khārijite ancestors]."[300]

The content of Sālim's arguments against the stance of the Murjiʾa need not overly concern us here. Suffice it to say that Sālim goes to great lengths to point out the inconsistencies in their logic regarding suspension of judgment about anything that they have not observed first hand or that is agreed upon by all Muslims. In his discussion of the Murjiʾites the author uses the *qibla* as a symbol ten times to describe the community of Muslims and their disagreements: four times through the action of orientation towards

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[297] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 90-1.
[298] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 92-3.
[299] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 99-113, the quote appears at 110-13. Interestingly, when discussing the extremist Khārijites Sālim does not make reference to their Muslim adversaries using the *qibla*-phrase, but continuously refers to them as *"qawmuhum."* This may be because the groups he is discussing do not use the inclusive term, 'ahl al-qibla,' or include their fellow Muslims in the collective, and so Sālim does not wish it to be mistaken as their own rhetoric about their adversaries.
[300] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 112-3

the *qibla* and six times with the *qibla*-phrase.[301]

In his closing section, Sālim b. Dhakwān lays out his doctrinal stance of fair treatment of one's opponents as Muslims. He claims to follow the path of the Muslims when they still had unanimity: i.e. before the killing of ʿUthmān, the Battle of the Camel, and Ṣiffīn. He professes the obligation to care for relatives, orphans, widows, travelers, and the poor regardless of their piety. All Muslims are granted safe passage and protection, even if their wickedness (*ḍalāla*) is beyond doubt and squarely judged as wrong (contra the Murjiʾites, they are not seen as having a status between right and wrong).[302] Furthermore, he writes, "we do not believe in the destruction of our people or assassinating them in secret" (*lā narā al-fatka qawmanā wa-qatlahum fī al-sirr*); this was not a practice of Muḥammad even with respect to the polytheists, "so we may not do it to People of the *Qibla*."[303] Marriage and inheritance are permitted with any of our people (*qawm*) "as long as they face our *qibla*" (*mā dāmū yastaqbilūn qiblatanā*), since this was the practice of the ancestors with regard to the Hypocrites, who "commit more sins than can be seen (among) the majority of our people today."[304] One may not accuse of fornication any who face the *qibla*; in war, indiscriminate massacre of any who face the *qibla* is banned, as is killing minors or any offspring of enemies among the People of the *Qibla*.[305]

Sālim b. Dhakwān's socio-religious outlook is remarkable for our study. He lays out a practical and intricate systematic theology that responds to the politically diverse

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[301] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 114-27.

[302] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 130-3.

[303] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 132-5

[304] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 134-5.

[305] Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 134-9. For a more extensive discussion of Ibāḍī laws of war and battle with rebellious Muslims see Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence*, 306-19.

and tumultuous setting of Umayyad Iraq. Although Sālim believes his position is correct,

he makes room for the treatment of Muslim adversaries as legal equals. In modern

terminology we might say that he is ecumenical without being pluralistic. It is difficult

(if not impossible) to determine whether Sālim's approach garnered wide support in his

context. However, it seems to reflect the impulse to maintain a sense of communal unity

amidst decades of political unrest and growing theological fragmentation. The external

action of worshipping in the same direction—South in his case—served as the ideal

metaphor for upholding an expansive collective identity while maintaining one's

sectarian affiliation.

To be certain, the usage of '*ahl al-qibla*' as a technical term in "moderate

Khārijite" discourse is well-attested in ʿAbbāsid-era Ibāḍī writings.[306] However, the term

does not appear in either of the two letters of Ibn Ibāḍ to ʿAbd al-Malik.[307] This is

perhaps unsurprising since the brand of Ibāḍism represented in those works is of a less

quietist character than that in *Sīrat Sālim*. Indeed, the author calls those who follow

sinful leaders *ahl al-ghulū fī al-dīn* (people who exceed proper bounds) and he says "I

testify by God and His Angels that I am among those who are the enemies of them (i.e.

Muʿāwīya, Yazīd and those who followed ʿUthmān - AMG) with our hands, our tongues,

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[306] Some examples appear in *al-Siyar wal-Jawābāt li-ʿulamāʾ wa-Aʾimmat ʿUmān*, 2 vols., ed. S.I. Kāshif (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wal-Thaqāfa, 1986): in *Sīrat Abī Qaḥṭān Khālid b. Qaḥṭān* (d. late 3rd/9th-early 4th/10th c.) vol. 1 119, 121; Anonymous epistle to Imām al-Salṭ b. Mālik (r. 237/851 - 272/886), vol. 1, 208,229-30; *Sīrat Wāʾil b. Ayyūb* (d. *c.* 190/805) vol. 2, 47, 53, 59. See also the usage of '*ahl al-qibla*' in Abū al-Faḍl ʿĪsā b. Furāk's (writing between 215/830 and 218/833) polemic with the creed of a Sistānī Khārijite extremist, recorded in Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kindī, *Bayān al-Sharʿ*, (Muscat: Wizārat al-Turāth al-Qawmī wal-Thaqāfa, 1984), vol. 3, 289-90. See also the many usages of the phrase in *Kitāb al-Futyā* of the early Ibāḍī theologian, ʿAbd Allah b. Yazid al-Fazārī, in the recently published collection of his works found in the Maghrib in *Early Ibāḍī Theology: Six Kalām Texts by ʿAbd Allāh B. Yazīd Al-Fazārī*, eds. W. Madelung and ʿA.R. al-Salimi (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 148-52.

[307] Cook, *Dogma*, 6, notes that these texts are said to date to 76/695. Of the first letter of Ibn Ibāḍ, an eastern recension appears in Kāshif, *Siyar*, vol. 2, 325-45 and a western version in Abū al-Qāsim Faḍl b. Ibrāhīm al-Barrādī, *Kitāb al-Jawāhir*, litho. (Cairo: 1885), 156-67. On dating these letters see Cook, *Dogma*, 51-67, who thought they were forgeries, but suggests a late first-century context for their composition.

and our hearts; we live and die by this [opposition]."[308] However, the term also does not

appear in the early theological epistles often associated with Murjiʾite quietism, such as

the *Kitāb al-Irjāʾ*.[309] In fact, the *qibla*-phrase appears in only two of the early writings

that Cook compared with *Sīrat Sālim*, the *Kitāb al-Ṣafwa* attributed to Zayd b. ʿAlī and

the *Risāla ilā ʿUthmān al-Battī* of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767). We shall now turn to these

two works.

The writings attributed to Zayd b. ʿAlī (d. 122/740) are many, and are "too

disparate in style and doctrinal positions to be the work of a single author," but they may

be seen to represent currents among the early Kūfan Zaydīya.[310] The *Kitāb al-Ṣafwa* is

no exception, and Madelung believed it to be of Kūfan origin, and to represent the early

views of the Jārūdī followers of Zayd.[311] The *Kitāb al-Ṣafwa* includes many instances of

the expression 'ahl al-qibla.' While we cannot know for certain whether the *qibla*-phrase

was operative in Zayd's lifetime, its deployment fits the tendency we saw above among

some Shiʿi authors to diverge from the Sunni (and Ibāḍī Khārijite) usage. Instead, the

term is used to fit the author's sectarian purpose, namely to describe all Muslims who

believe that political authority can lie outside of the Prophet's family, but not for the

purposes of inclusion.

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[308] First Letter of Ibn Ibāḍ in Kāshif, *Siyar*, 340 and *Jawāhir*, 164-5.

[309] The term is also not used in most of the early theological "tracts" that have come down to us, including, the so-called "Anti-Qadarite Letter of ʿUmar II," transcribed in Josef Van Ess, *Anfänge Muslimischer Theologie: Zwei AntiQadaritische Traktate Aus Dem Ersten Jahrhundert der Higra*, (Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1977), 43-54 (of the Arabic texts); the "Epistle of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī" transcribed in Helmut Ritter, "Studien zur Geschichte der islamischen Frömmigkeit. I. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī," *Der Islam* 23 (1933): 67-82. On comparisons between *Sirat Sālim* and the *Kitāb al-Irjāʾ* see Cook, *Dogma*, 27-33 and Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*, 251-63.

[310] W. Madelung, "Zayd b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn," *EI2*.

[311] Wilfred Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), 54. On Jārūdīs see Haider, *Origins of the Shīʿa*, 18-19, and 207-13, where he argues for a late second-/eighth-century dating for the emergence of Jārūdism.

The *Kitāb al-Ṣafwa* offers an extended argument that the rightful leadership of Muḥammad's community should emerge from the members of his family (*Āl Muḥammad*). The descendants of Muḥammad are "the elect" (*al-ṣafwa*), and they are the truest preservers of the Qurʾān and its proper interpretation as law.

In most instances that '*ahl al-qibla*' appears in this work it refers to fractious Muslims who, misinterpreting the Qurʾān, claim the mantle of leadership, when it rightly belongs to Muḥammad's family. For example, the author describes the state of the community as follows:

> There is a great deal of controversy among the people, and everyone simply interprets the Qurʾān as they wish in order to support their whimsical opinions (*bi-raʾyihim ʿalā ahwāʾihim*)[312] […] Each believes that theirs is the rightly-guided way and others are misguided, heretical, or polytheistic *(ʿalā ḍalālatin aw kufrin, aw shirkin)* […] And all the people of whimsy (i.e. those unsound theological views - AMG) (*ahl hawā*) among the people of this *qibla* (*min ahl hādhihi al-qibla*) claim that they are the foremost with regard to the Prophet and his family and the most learned in the Book that he brought, and that they are the rightful [referents] (*aḥaqq*) of those verses that ascribe election, a gift, or guidance (*ṣafwa aw hibwa aw hudā*) to Muḥammad's people. […]But how can anyone gain understanding of religion (*al-fiqh fī al-dīn*) if all of these people are called Believers (*muʾminūn*) while they absolve themselves of one another, a single nation on the right and correct path.[313]

Zayd b. ʿAlī knows that the Qurʾān (Āl 3:103-5) describes the Israelites as divided after seeing clear proofs, and he says that this was despite the fact that "they all followed Moses, believed in his Torah, and faced a single *qibla*" (*yastaqbilūna qibalatan wāḥidatan*). Likewise, "this [i.e. Muslim] people has split up into many peoples after its

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[312] Misinterpretation of the Qurʾān as a polemical accusation was often present in polemics against Khārijites, and so may indicate that the Khārijite sectarian context is intended by this writing. On the accusation see Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān: the Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1999), 150-57.

[313] Zayd b. ʿAlī, *Kitāb al-Ṣafwa*, ed. N. Ḥasan (Baghdād: Matbaʿa al-Īmān, n.d.), 16. This edition is based on the British Library MS, BL Zaidis 203.

Prophet just as the Israelites did after Moses."[314] Facing the same *qibla*, it appears, is not

an indicator of unity.

What is worse, for the author, is that "each faction from the people of this *qibla*

sets their own religion, interpreting it [as they wish]" (*naṣabū adyānan yataʾawwalūn*

ʿalayhā). These people believe that:

> anyone from Muḥammad's *umma* who faces the *qibla* (*kull man istaqbala al-qibla*) and reads the Qurʾān—whether Believer or Hypocrite, Bedouin or Emigre, Foreigner or Arab—is allowed to interpret the Qurʾān according to his positions […] and then he and his followers claim, 'We are the most learned among people with regard to the Qurʾān and the most rightly-guided in it.'[315]

However, there is nothing that should make them believe that God gives preference to

some *ahl al-qibla* over others. Rather, the prophets have always been God's favored, but

not all of those who follow the prophets are God's elect. Rather it is the People of the

House (*ahl al-bayt*) of the prophet whom God has distinguished with his preference and

blessings, although it is well known "that some ignorant people interpret the Book to say

that none among the people of this *qibla* is superior" (*laysa li-ahl hādhihi al-qibla*

faḍl).[316] After rehearsing the history of the prophets (Noah, Abraham and Ishmael) and

interpreting Qurʾānic verses to show the election of their families, he reiterates:

> I have only described all of this to you in order to teach you that God does not render upright the one (*lā yastaqīm li-man*) among the people of this *qibla* who contravenes the family of Muḥammad saying, 'We are the elect ones of God mentioned in the Book, not the Family of Muḥammad.'[317]

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[314] *Al-Ṣafwa*, 17.
[315] *Al-Ṣafwa*, 18-19. For the Form V verb, "*yataʾawwalūn*" taking the meaning of the Form II, "*awwala*," "to interpret, expound, or explain," see E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), 126, s.v. "*awwalahu ilayhi*."
[316] *Al-Ṣafwa*, 20-22. Quotation appears at 22.
[317] *Al-Ṣafwa*, 30.

A final, usage of the *qibla* as indicator of all Muslims occurs in the closing: "We dissociate from those among the people of this *qibla* who dissociate from us, and we associate with those who associate with us according to the truth we have described."[318] Throughout the *Kitāb al-Ṣafwa* the act of facing the *qibla* and the people identified with "this [i.e. our] *qibla*" is used to identify rival political factions and the errant theologies that undergird them, but not to include them in the community of believers or among God's elect.

Many writings attributed to Zayd b. ʿAlī are of questionable provenance. If *Kitāb al-Ṣafwa* is of a later period, then it is best read alongside the Imāmī and Ismāʿīlī writings above, as simply another indication that Shiʿi usage was not locked into the inclusivizing semantic application that developed in Sunni theological writing. However, two points are worth noting regarding the usage of the *qibla* as a broad metaphor for peoplehood in *Kitāb al-Ṣafwa*. First, the language used—"those who face the *qibla*" and "people of this *qibla*" rather than the more standard fixed phrase 'People of the *Qibla*'—may imply that it had not yet become a technical term. These forms parallel the majority of appearances in *Sīrat Sālim*, where the qualified variants were far more common than the fixed '*ahl al-qibla*.' Second, the application of the term to describe socio-religious factions rather than sinful individuals fits the earlier stage of the *qibla*-phrase's application, in that it refers to factions and political strife rather than individual sins and sinners.

The final theological writings we will consider from this period come from the eminent jurist and theologian Abū Ḥanīfa Nuʿmān b. Thābit b. Zūṭā al-Taymī (d.

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[318] *Al-Ṣafwa*, 60. "*fa-man bariʾa minnā bariʾanā minhu wa-man tawallānā ʿalā mā waṣafnāhu min al-ḥaqq tawallaynāhu min ahl hādhihi al-qibla.*" On the usage of *walāya* and *barāʾa* with a focus on Ibāḍī thought see Gaiser, *Shūrāt Legends*, 155-60.

150/767).[319] As a jurist, Abū Ḥanīfa left no writings, but only his rulings and teachings recorded by his students. However, several doctrinal writings attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa appear to be genuinely early, as will be discussed below. In these writings, one can see his usage of the *qibla*-phrase both in the sectarian application of the Umayyad period, as well as in the individual designation of sinners in what would become the creedal tradition. In this sense Abū Ḥanīfa's life likely represents the point at which the inclusive semantic connotations of the term '*ahl al-qibla*' became fixed for Sunni tradition.

Abū Ḥanīfa is said to have travelled frequently to Baṣra to engage in discussions with Ibāḍīs and (proto-)Muʿtazilites there. Although he distanced himself from the designation as such, Abū Ḥanīfa appears to have been a Murjiʾite.[320] His epistle, sent to a certain Baṣran ʿUthmān al-Battī (d. 143/760), is widely seen as authentic, and in it he uses the *qibla*-phrase several times.[321] The letter from ʿUthmān al-Battī is lost, but he sought clarification about whether Abū Ḥanīfa was among the Murjiʾa and considered the sinner to be an errant believer (*muʾmin ḍāll*). Abū Ḥanīfa commences by asserting that he does not diverge in his beliefs from the Qurʾān or from the practice of Muḥammad and his companions before they became divided. The early community, he tells us, held that one who demonstrates a verbal affirmation of faith (*taṣdīq*) is considered a believer and must be treated as such. Of course, actions (*ʿamal*) must follow faith, but those who falter in the required actions do not leave the category of "believer;" their judgment is left

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[319] On the controversies surrounding Abū Ḥanīfa and his legacy as well as some of the challenges in reconstructing his life, see Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 213-18 (2.1.1.7.2). See also J. Schacht, "Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nuʿmān," *EI2*.

[320] Van Ess says, "it is unambiguously clear that he was a Murjiʾite;" see *Theology and Society*, 219 (2.1.1.7.3) On his trips to Baṣra mentioned above see refs in n. 3.

[321] On the authenticity of the attribution to Abū Ḥanīfa see Cook, *Dogma*, 30; Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 221 (2.1.1.7.3.1). See also Schacht, "Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nuʿmān," *EI2* and "An Early Murjiʾite Treatise," 100, n. 4. On the death-date of ʿUthmān al-Battī see *risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā ʿUthmān al-Battī*, ed. M. Z. al-Kawtharī, 33.

to God. To consider them unbelievers, as the Khārijites wish to do, or even to say that

they are neither believers nor unbelievers, as do the Muʿtazilites, is to commit an

unlawful innovation (*bidaʿ*) against the words and practices of the Prophet.[322] In this

sense, Abū Ḥanīfa lays the groundwork for an expansive vision of socio-religious

belonging.

Abū Ḥanīfa's inclusive view of collective identity, though, raises some challenges

when considering the place of the Muslims who fought in the First Civil War. ʿAlī was a

believer and he called his opponents believers, so one cannot call either side unbelievers

(indeed, the Khārijite solution would be to label both as such). And yet the problem of

in-fighting looms large for Abū Ḥanīfa, "for what greater sin among the sins of the

People of the *Qibla* can there be than to kill and spill the blood of Muḥammad's

companions?!" The only proper approach, he argues, is to say "God knows best"—a true

Murjiʾite response.[323] To confirm his position that sinning Muslims are believers he

writes, "Know that I hold that the People of the *Qibla* are believers, and neglecting any of

their duties does not detach them from their faith," (*lastu ukhrijuhum min al-īmān bi-*

taḍyīʿ shayʾin min al-farāʾiḍ) rather they are sinning believers (*muʾmin mudhnib*). God

can act towards them as God wishes.[324] The unequivocal enfranchisement of sinners

among Muslims who have professed faith matches the first tenet of the so-called "Fiqh

al-Absaṭ/Akbar," mentioned above: "You may not label as an unbeliever anyone among

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[322] *Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa*, 34-6.

[323] *Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa*, 36.

[324] *Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa*, 37. Abū Ḥanīfa does not take up the question of whether sinning believers can be punished in hell for eternity or if only for a time. Interestingly, Abū Ḥanīfa mentions several *ṣaḥāba* on whose practice he also based his belief. Of those, ʿAṭā and Saʿīd b. Jubayr both used the term '*ahl al-qibla*' regarding the proper treatment of prisoners. See comments of al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* and al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf* on Q Nabāʾ 76:7-8. Another person he mentions is ʿUmar II, whom we saw used the designation of all Muslims as '*ahl al-qibla*' to demand equal treatment for them, as well.

the People of the *Qibla* for any sin."[325] In the *ʿĀlim wal-Mutaʿallim*—although it is

likely a later reconstruction of Abū Ḥanīfa's positions—the *qibla*-phrase is deployed as a

technical term in a similar way: "I may not profess that any of the disobedient among the

People of the *Qibla* are punished definitively for any sin other than associating partners

with God."[326]

Abū Ḥanīfa lived in Kūfa at the turbulent end of the Umayyad period and the

beginning of the ʿAbbāsid period. His inclusive approach to the collective of believers

would certainly apply to warring political factions, but he expresses his views with regard

to individuals, as well. His community of believers could embrace sinners of all kinds; as

long as they professed faith and faced the Muslim *qibla* their ultimate fate would be left

to God. Other schools of thought might expand the types of sins or erroneous beliefs that

would exclude one from the People of the *Qibla*. Nevertheless, socio-religious

communion based on common fundamental beliefs and the minimal external practice of

geographic orientation for worship gained wide acceptance to unify Islam as a single

community, despite its growing diversity, now spread across the Middle East, North

Africa, and beyond.

Conclusion

Aziz al-Azmeh argued for the essential symbolic quality of the *qibla* as an

emblem of belonging in early Islam. He sees the introduction of the *miḥrāb* (prayer-

niche indicating the direction of the *qibla*) as a watershed moment in the process of early

Islamic identity-formation:

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[325] *Al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, ed. M.Z. al-Kawtharī, 40. On the dating of the work in general and Van Ess' early
dating of the first five articles see n. 196 above.
[326] *Al-ʿĀlim wal-Mutaʿallim*, ed. M.Z. al-Kawtharī, 16. See also 18 and 22.

> With the architectural canonization of the *miḥrāb* under the Umayyads, the conclusion was reached of the process by which Paleo-Islam identified and garnered the sacred spaces and sacred centre of the new religion, an *axis mundi* now relayed iconically across the empire. This point of arrival was more or less coeval with the beginnings of Muslim theology, this being understood as the elaboration of faith in a variety of directions […] within the boundaries of an established religion.[327]

Al-Azmeh makes the same connection we have advocated for here, between ritual and spatial unity as an anchor for theological diversity. The introduction of the first prayer-niche under the Caliph al-Walīd (r. 86-96/705-15) corresponds to the period in which we argue that the *qibla*-phrase first emerged as a symbol of Islamic belonging, even amidst ideological, political, and territorial dispersion. Further refelction on architectural features of the mosque and mosque-orientations are taken up in chapter 4. The next chapter considers some of the ways in which the *qibla* persisted as a symbol of interreligious difference and as a spatial metaphor for belonging within the shared intellectual discourse of ʿAbbāsid-era *kalām*.

In his study of the process of sectarian differentiation, Najam Haider argued—with reference to Imāmī emergence—that ritual and geographic factors play a major role in the formation of distinctive communities.[328] He notes the ways in which the frequenting of certain mosques and avoidance of others, the introduction of new sites of pilgrimage, and the practice of particular liturgical forms indicated and expressed a communal identity that diverged from other Islamic affiliations. It should, then, not surprise us to find ritual and geographic factors at play in the expression of a broad Islamic collective identity that, by highlighting inter-religious difference, could incorporate intra-religious dissent. The countervailing impetus towards inclusion in

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[327] Al-Azmeh, *Emergence of Islam*, 428.
[328] Haider, *Origins of the Shīʿa*.

response to theological difference ought to be considered in tandem and as an integral part of the study of sectarianization.

Chapter Three

Does God's Mind Change?
The *Qibla* in Tenth-Century Jewish-Christian-Muslim Polemic

The ʿAbbāsid period stands as one of fruitful symbiosis among Jews, Muslims, and

Christians in the Islamicate world. Arabic literary production from this era displays a

common linguistic and intellectual discourse from which these groups drew and within

which they interacted. The theological agenda of *kalām*, (Islamic scholastic theology)

was open to all, and *mutakallimūn* (theologians) of all three communities addressed many

of the same issues, such as the nature of prophecy, messianic redemption, the afterlife,

and others.[329] Even works of interreligious polemic—often seen as signs of communities

at odds with one another—demonstrate a common epistemic framework in which ideas

were shared and debated.

The external and apologetic aspects that characterize polemical writing exist in a

dynamic relationship with internal processes of communal self-definition. It is often

difficult to tease out one from the other, and, in truth, there is no need to do so. Authors

of polemical works tend to identify with one community even as they confront another

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[329] Studies of the shared intellectual context abound in research about this period. See, for example, Joel Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival During the Buyid Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); David Sklare, "Ch. 4 Jewish Culture Outside the Yeshivot" in *Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon and Cultural World: Texts and Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 99-141; Sidney Griffith "Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion" in *Christian Arabic apologetics during the Abbasid period: (750 - 1258)* ed. Kh.S. Samir, J.S. Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 1-43; and by the same author "The First Summa Theologiae in Arabic: Christian Kalām in Ninth-Century Palestine" in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. M. Gervers and R.J. Bikhazi (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), 15-32. An overview of Jewish thinkers and their participation in the discourses of *kalām* also appears in Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15-56.

through religious writings, in personal encounters, and by inhabiting a cultural context with shared symbols. In the arena of polemics, ritual often served as a signifier of convergence and divergence between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Likewise, overlapping sacred geographies (e.g. Jerusalem) also marked internal religious identities even as they stood as points of conflict between groups. In the tenth century, orientation towards the *qibla* (direction of worship) was a particularly potent symbol for collective identity, since it lay at the junction between ritual, topographical sanctity, and interreligious encounter.

This chapter explores the various ways that changes in the prescribed direction of worship came to represent God's replacement of one chosen people with another. Furthermore, Arabic writing from the tenth-century among Jews, Christians, and Muslims illustrates the enduring power and fluidity of spatial metaphor as a symbol of collective religious identity. The insistence in *kalām* on the doctrine of God's absolute unity raised questions for those wishing to locate God in physical spaces. This led to Christian apologetic responses with regard to divine incarnation and may even have impressed the same questions upon Jews who wished to see God's divine presense, the *Shekhina*, inhabiting the known world. In this context, a seemingly obscure issue that animated three Jewish Islamicate thinkers points to a nexus between Islamic supersession of Judaism and the change in *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca.

Did Jews Change their *qibla*?

In the third treatise of his *Kitāb al-Amānāt wal-Iʿtiqādāt (Book of Beliefs and Opinions)* Saʿadya (Gaon) b. Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī (d. 330/942) discusses the nature of commandment and prohibition, laying out a dichotomy of reason- and revelation-based

commandments (*ʿaqlīya* and *samʿīya*, respectively), a heuristic common to Islamicate thinkers.[330] In chapters 7-10 of this treatise, Saʿadya addresses arguments offered in favor of the doctrine of *naskh* (abrogation) and refutes them. *Naskh*—the notion that God could exchange one revelation or law for another—was a subject of major concern in medieval interreligious polemic. For, while Christians and Muslims both acknowledged the validity of the Torah, they also espoused the replacement of that dispensation with the divine revelation given to their own community. By the tenth century, *naskh* had also long since entered Islamic legal theory as a tool for resolving contradictions between rulings in Islam's revealed texts by allowing that the chronologically later of two rules could abrogate and replace the earlier rule.[331]

In the ninth chapter of the third treatise Saʿadya entertains and counters arguments in favor of *naskh* from both reason and from scripture. Among the latter is the claim that the Jews changed their *qibla*, and therefore must admit of the possibility of *naskh*. He writes:

> And the tenth [problem] is as follows: *They* say that the original *qibla* was the Tabernacle (*al-mishkan*). Then, [God] transferred it and turned it towards the Holy Temple (*naqalahā wa-wallāhā al-bayt al-maqdis*). This too does not constitute abrogation (*naskh*), since it had only ever been commanded that the *qibla* be toward [the direction of] the Holy Ark. And while the Ark was in the wilderness, the *qibla* was located there, and when the Ark was brought [successively] to Gilgal, Shiloh, Nob, Givʿon, and the Holy Temple the *qibla*

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[330] On Saʿadya's engagement with *kalām* see Sarah Stroumsa, "Saadya and Jewish *kalām*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, eds. D. Frank and O. Leaman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71–90. For background on Saʿadya more generally see Robert Brody, *Saʿadyah Gaon*, trans. B. Rosenberg (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013) and Henry Malter, *Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1921).

[331] Some works bearing the title *al-Nāsikh wal-Mansūkh*, and the like have come down to us in the name of eighth century scholars, such as al-Zuhrī and Qatāda b. Ḍiʿāma. However, these tend to take the form of lists of the verses in which abrogation occurs. The first engagement with the subject from the perspective of legal theory appears to come from Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *The Epistle on Legal Theory*, ed. J. Lowry (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 80-111; 175-191. For more on the development of *naskh* as a tool of legal hermeneutics see extensive references in n. 350 below.

followed it. And this is truly what is meant by the maxim that effect follows cause (*an yatbaʿ al-maʿlūl li-ʿillatihi*).[332]

Proper orientation for prayer goes largely unaddressed in the Hebrew Bible, and certainly not before the existence of a central Temple in Jerusalem.[333] However, Saʿadya counts prayer among the 613 *mitzvot* (commandments) that Moses conveyed at Sinai, and prayer is a mandate that one can discern from pure reason, without the aid of revelation.[334] Therefore, the fact that prayer was first directed towards the travelling Tabernacle (i.e. during the wanderings of the Israelites in the dessert and in Canaan) and then changed to the site of the Temple, poses a genuine problem for Saʿadya. He responds that Jews never altered their *qibla*, but always faced the Holy Ark of the Covenant, and no matter its location (wilderness, Shiloh, Nob, Gibeon) it remained the locus of orientation.

The Karaite legal scholar and polemicist, Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī (d. 348/960)—a contemporary and sectarian adversary of Saʿadya's—appears to engage the same question in the sixth volume of his magisterial work on Karaite law, *Kitāb al-Anwār wal-*

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[332] *Sefer haNivḥar be-Emūnōt uva-Deʿōt: Mekor ve-Targum* ,Y. Qāfiḥ (Qiryat Ono: Mechon Mosheh, 2011), 142 (Judeo-Arabic with Hebrew translation); *Kitāb al-Amanāt wal-Iʿtiqādāt*, ed. S. Landauer (Leiden: Brill, 1880), 138 (Arabic); and in the translation of Landauer's text, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. S. Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 171. Translations of Saʿadya are my own, and references to his *Beliefs and Opinions* will cite treatise and chapter followed by page numbers in all three works: e.g. "III.9 Qāfiḥ, 142; Landauer, 171; Rosenblatt, 142. The maxim that Saʿadya invokes may have been generally known, but reference to ʿilla (contingency) was common to debates about *naskh*, see for example the fragment of a work on *naskh* by Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām in *Vingt traitès théologiques d'autears Arabes Chrètiens*, ed. L. Cheiko (Beirut: Imprimeri Catholique, 1920), 68, 69, in which it is used to describe the contingent nature of "wisdom" within God's decrees, which can change. The fragment also appears with English translation in A.S. Tritton "Debate Between a Muslim and Jew," *Islamic Studies* 1:2 (1962): 60-64. John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006), 110-12, also translated the fragment. Wansbrough, 114, points out the varied application of the term *ʿilla/* contingency in Saʿadya's writing on *naskh* explicitly.
[333] See above pages 41-42.
[334] See *Siddur Rav Saʿadya Gaon: Kitab Jamiʿ As-salawat wat-tasābih*, eds. I. Davidson, S. Assaf, B.I. Joel (Jerusalem: M'qise nirdamim, 1963), 29 on the obligation and 157, where he includes prayer in his poetic rendering of the commandments. In *Beliefs and Opinions*, III.3 Qāfiḥ 122-23; Landauer 118; Rosenblatt 145, Saʿadya notes that prayer is an obligation that one would know from reason, but that revelation fills in the details such as specific times, liturgy, conditions and direction (*wistiqbālan khāṣṣan*). See also Saʿadya's *Kitāb Wujūb al-Ṣalāt* (Book of Prayer Obligations), in M. Zucker, "A Fragment from 'The Book of Prayer Obligations' of Saʿadya Gaon," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 43 (1976): 31-32.

Marāqib (the *Book of Lights and Watchtowers*). In a chapter entitled "Regarding the

Direction towards which Prayer should turn; i.e. the *qibla*," al-Qirqisānī refutes the many

false *qibla*-practices he observes among the Jews, such as that of the Samaritans who

orient towards Mount Gerizim just outside of Nablus.[335] He also rebuts the Jewish

sectarian Mīshawayhi al-ʿUkbarī, who instructed his followers that they must pray

westward from wherever they are, and compares their folly to that of the Christians, who

face due east in prayer.[336] Ultimately, al-Qirqisānī argues that one must face towards the

Shekhina (manifestation of God's divine presence) wherever it may be. This was in the

sanctuary that held the Ark of the Covenant, first in the Tabernacle and then in the

Temple in Jerusalem:

> And so it is established that the *qibla* is towards the Sanctuary (*al-haykal*)
> wherever it may be. This was towards different directions (*jihāt mukhtalifa*)
> before the Temple's (*al-bayt*) construction. And when the Temple was built and
> the Sanctuary was within it, the *qibla* was towards it to the exclusion of all other
> [sites] […] And the situation remains such even after the Temple's destruction
> and until the end of time.

And in the next section he writes:

> Prayer needs to be towards the site at which [God] informs us that His

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[335] All references are from Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār wal-Marāqib* ed. L. Nemoy (New York: Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1939-43), 5 vols. Citations reference "*Kitāb al-Anwār* Treatise:Chapter:Section." For example, the current chapter appears at *Kitāb al-Anwār* VI:18:1-14. Samaritans faced toward Mount Gerizim, the site at which an altar was built and God's covenant of blessings and curses took place upon the Israelites' entrance to the Land of Canaan. Al-Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār* I:5, also references Samaritan prayer practice in his first treatise, which is a sectarian history. Recently, Stefan Schorch, "Is a *qibla* a *qibla*? Samaritan Traditions about Mount Garizim in Contact and Contention," Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton) https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2018/schorch-samaritan-traditions (accessed June 9, 2018), demonstrated that Samaritan *qibla*-rhetoric and practice participated in the broader Islamicate discourse on the subject. More study is required to determine their exact place in the present topic of discussion. For more on Samaritan prayer direction in general see above pp. 61-63. An English partial translation and summary of al-Qirqisānī's chapters on prayer appears in Leon Nemoy, "Studies in the History of the Early Karaite Liturgy: The Liturgy of al-Qirqisānī" in *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in Honor of I. Edward Kiev*, C. Berlin ed. (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1971), 305-32.

[336] *Kitāb al-Anwār* VI:18:1 and 7 and I:17; On westward prayer in Rabbinic writings see above n. 87; on early Christian direction of prayer see pp. 52-61 above and pp. 175-93 below.

Shekhina (*sakīnatahu*) is located. As He said regarding the Tent [of Meeting] "and I will meet with you from there [and I will speak with you from above the Ark cover from between the two cherubim..]" (Exod. 25:22). […] And this also contradicts the first position that the *qibla* must be to the west (*ilā jihat al-maghrib*) and confirms our position that it is towards the Sanctuary.[337]

Just as Saʿadya claimed that Jewish prayer be directed towards the Holy Ark, wherever it may be found, al-Qirqisānī espouses the same view with regard to the Sanctuary in which the Ark was housed. It was ambulatory while the Sanctuary moved around and before it settled in Jerusalem, which would remain the eternal *qibla*.

Finally, the same general question and response can be found in the writings of the great Karaite biblical exegete, Yefet b. ʿAlī (d. 369/980), in his comments on Genesis 28:17-19. The patriarch Jacob, upon waking from a dream of angels ascending and descending the ladder to heaven, names the site upon which he slept "Beit-El," for this was "The House of God (Beit Elohim) and the gate of heaven (v. 17)." In his comments on the verse Yefet seeks to refute those who claim a) that God cannot have two *qibla*s in the world at the same time and b) that the *qibla* cannot move from place to place. The latter view cannot be correct, he asserts:

> For it cannot be disputed that God's Tabernacle moved about in the wilderness and likewise in the Land, from Gilgal to Shiloh to Beit El to Givʿon to Jerusalem, and they certainly did not turn their backs on the Tabernacle. The truth regarding the *qibla* is that […] whatever place the glory of God (*kavod*) moved to, the *qibla* moved with it. This is the condition that applies to it when it dwelt in the Land. However, after the glory of God ascended to the heavens [seemingly, after the destruction of the Temple – AMG], the *qibla* never again moved from that place.[338]

These three authors (Saʿadya, al-Qirqisānī and Yefet) all espouse the idea that the

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[337] *Kitāb al-Anwār* VI:9-10.
[338] Paris, Biblioteque Nationale MS Heb 278 fol. 75 r-v. A translation of this text appears in Shimon Shtober, "*'Lā Yajūz an Yakūn Fī Al-ʿĀlam Li-Llāhi Qiblatayn'*: Judaeo-Islamic Polemics Concerning the Qibla (625-1010)" *Medieval Encounters* 5 (1999): 95.

Jewish *qibla* follows God's manifestation in the world, (whether the Holy Ark, the *Shekhina* or the *Kavod*). The implication is that just as God never changed the *qibla,* God's favor for the Jews and the Mosaic revelation, likewise, never altered. The extensive treatment of the issue is unusual for several reasons. First, Israelite prayer orientation before the Temple was built has not, to my knowledge, been discussed in any extant Jewish literature before the tenth century. Second, that both Rabbanites (such as Saʿadya) and Karaites (al-Qirqisānī and Yefet), who engaged in vigorous intra-Jewish polemics with one another, make the same rare argument on this topic is surely significant. Finally, neither Saʿadya nor Yefet name the adversary against whom they are disputing, while al-Qirqisānī names several, but none of whom are Muslims.

In general, Jewish writings on *naskh* from Muslim lands often carry ambiguity with regard to their audience. On the one hand, Muslims made up the majority culture and their theologians and jurists produced the most sophisticated treatments of the doctrine. On the other hand, Christians had preceded Islam in claiming that the Jewish religion had been superseded, and Christian authors writing in Arabic use the term comfortably. For their part, Jews in this period reject *naskh*—whether because they found it to be rationally impossible that God's mind could change or because Moses had assured the Jews that such a change would never occur. From the perspective of reason, Jews were known to argue that *naskh* 1) entailed *badāʾ*, a change in will, which implied regret or lack of knowledge on God's part; 2) implied that the eternal Deity, who transcends time and space, was subject to change; or 3) required the logical impossibility of an inherently "good" act becoming "repulsive" or vice versa, something that all agreed could not be predicated of the Deity. Those who derived the impossibility of *naskh* from

mosaic tradition tended to identify certain biblical verses that indicated this or pointed to

a well-transmitted oral report (*khabar mutawātir*) from Moses that his *sharīʿa* would

never change.[339] Christian and Muslim scholars alike authored polemical writings in

favor of *naskh* and against the well-known Jewish rejection of the doctrine.[340] As a

result, a certain amount of modern scholarly debate has arisen around the topic of the

audience of Saʿadya's writings on *naskh*. Most assume that Saʿadya addressed Islamic

challengers, while Daniel Lasker has made a strong case for considering Christians as the

[339] The term "*sharīʿa*" is common in Judeo-Arabic, and takes on the meaning of an individual religious law, a system of religious law, or the entirety of the laws of the Torah. See Joshua Blau, *A Dictionary of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* (Jerusalem: The Academy of Hebrew Language, 2006), 334-35. Saʿadya, *Beliefs and Opinions*, III.7, Qāfiḥ 132; Landauer 128; Rosenblatt 157-58, does not argue for the impossibility of *naskh* from reason, but presents a unanimous tradition (*naqlan jāmiʿan*) that it could not occur as well as several biblical verses that indicate the same. Al-Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār* IV:54, discusses the problem of *badāʾ* as it relates to *naskh* and also arguments about the changing nature of acts at IV.55. Al-Qirqisānī is aware that most Karaites reject *naskh* on rational grounds, but he also refutes a widespread position that rejects *naskh* based in the argument that the commandments are eternal at IV.51-53 and 57. On the eternality of the commandments in Karaite thought and arguments against *naskh* see Yoram Erder, "Karaite Conceptions about Commandments Given before the Revelation of the Torah" *PAAJR* 60 (1994): 101-140; and David Sklare, "Are the Gentiles Obligated to Observe the Torah? The Discussion Concerning the Universality of the Torah in the east in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Beʾerot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. J. Harris (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 311-346. Samuel b. Ḥofnī in his *Kitāb Naskh al-Sharʿ* knows of the general Karaite position that *naskh* is rationally impossible and the Rabbanite position that it is possible but that a well-disseminated report (*al-khabar al-mutawātir*) excludes that it could ever occur. A partial reconstruction of this work based on MSS fragments appears in David Sklare, "The Religious and Legal Thought of Samuel ben Ḥofnī Gaon: Texts and Studies in Cultural History", vol. 2 (PhD Thesis, Harvard University, 1992), 155-71. See also Samuel b. Ḥofnī's "Treatise on Commandments," Third Question, translated in Sklare (1996), 232.

[340] Many Muslim scholars were aware of the varying Jewish approaches to the rejection of *naskh*, and took on their arguments from reason and revelation. See for example Abū Manṣūr Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿa al-Dawla, 1928), 226-27; Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, R.J. McCarthy ed. (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Sharqīya, 1957), 160; ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wal-ʿAdl*, vol. 16, various editors, (Cairo, 1962-66), 97-137, and ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, ed. ʿA. al-Q. ʿUthmān (Cairo, 1965), 576-77 who knows of five types of Jews who reject *naskh*,; Imām al-Ḥaramayn Abū l-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 338-344 and *Kitāb al-Burhān fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh,* vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyah, 1997), 250-51; Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fīl-Iʿtiqād*, ed. A.M. ʿA al-Sharfāwī (Jedda: Dār al-Minhāj, 2008), 263-64 and *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl*, 2 vols., ed. Ibn ʿAbd al-Shakūr (Bulāq: al-matbaʿa al-amīrīya, 1904), vol. 1, 110; and Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-aqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām* ed. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniya, 1931), 496-98. Binyamin Abrahamov, "Some Notes on the Notion of *Naskh* in the *Kalām*" in *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation in Honour of Hans Daiber*. Eds. A. Akasoy and W. Raven, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 3-19, provides a good overview of varied Muslim engagement with *naskh* on rational grounds. On Christian engagements with Jews on the topic of *naskh* see below n. 382.

main adversaries in Saʿadya's polemics on the subject.[341]

The *qibla*, as it appears in the aforementioned texts offers an opportunity to expand the way we consider the question of audience in medieval writings about *naskh*. In Islam's formative period, geographic orientation for ritual came to signify and reinforce collective identity. The potent narrative of the shift in Muḥammad's *qibla* came to represent alterations in divine favor. Changes in one's *qibla* had to be fruitfully interpreted or answered-for by all who would claim the mantle of monotheism. This was true for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Intellectual discourse from the tenth-century shows the ways in which ritual performance was absorbed into learned discussions at the boundaries of interreligious encounter between all three communities. We need not choose one tradition as the primary target of these polemics, but the *qibla* leads us to consider a context of shared symbols from which each community drew and with which each engaged in various ways. Before considering the evidence from within the corpora of our three Jewish authors, let us first turn to the broader context of *qibla*-symbolism.

The *qibla* as a Symbol of *Naskh* in Early Islamic Literature:

The historical development of legal *naskh*, the idea that later rulings from Muḥammad's prophetic career could replace earlier ones, remains obscure. Verses in the Qurʾān often used as proof-texts by medieval jurists (e.g. Q Baqara 2:106, Raʿd 13:38-39, Naḥl 16:101) are hardly explicit on this account. On the other hand, interreligious *naskh*—as a concept even if not as a term of art—regularly appears in the Qurʾān with

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[341] See discussion below pp.199-200 and n. 439.

regard to the revelations of previous communities.[342] By interreligious *naskh* I mean the idea that the Islamic revelation supersedes previous systems and replaces them as God's favored dispensation for believers. At the turn of the tenth-century, however, both types of *naskh* had already entered learned circles of Muslim theologians and jurists as subjects of dedicated literary consideration. The account of a change in *qibla,* a) as a passage in the Qurʾān, b) as a foundational narrative of Islamic origins, and c) as an arch-example of both types of *naskh* in Islamic scholarly writing, offers essential background to understanding Jewish engagement with the subject of the change in their own *qibla*.[343]

The polemic with biblical peoples about the *qibla* recorded in the Qurʾān is well-known; excerpts from the *qibla*-passage (Q Baqara 2:142-52) will suffice to illustrate:

> The fools among people will say: what has turned them from their *qibla* that they used to follow? And you should respond: To God belongs the east and the west, He guides whom He wills to the straight path.[…] and we only appointed the *qibla* you used to follow in order to know who would follow the Emissary and who would turn on his heels […] those who were given the scriptures know that this [i.e. the new *qibla*] is the truth from their Lord […] And even if you brought all sorts of signs to those who were given the scriptures they would not follow your *qibla*, nor can you follow theirs […] and those whom We gave the scriptures know this as they know their own sons, but a group of them knowingly conceals the truth[…]

In addition to distinguishing Muḥammad's community from "those who were given the scriptures," the literary placement of this pericope suggests it was to be emblematic of the new dispensation heralded by the Qurʾān. Joseph E. Lowry suggests that the *qibla*-

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[342] In Q Āl ʿImrān 3:50, Muḥammad acknowledges that in addition to confirming the traditions that came before him, his mission also includes permitting what had been forbidden ("*wa-li-uḥilla lakum baʿḍa alladhī ḥurrima ʿalaykum*"). In another example, Q Baqara 2:286 is a petition that God not lay the same burdens (presumeably of the law) upon Muḥammad's community that were laid upon "those who came before us." The Qurʾān's relationship with laws of previous revelations is complex and requires a dedicated treatment. An initial attempt, which compares the Qurʾān with early Christian approaches to law, appears in Zellentin, *Qurʾān's Legal Culture*, 55-75.

[343] The *qibla* in the Qurʾān is the subject of chapters 1. It is treated here briefly—along with the relevant ḥadīth reports about the change—with attention paid to the implications for discussions of legal and interreligious *naskh*.

passage serves as a caesura between two rough halves within *sūrat al-baqara*.[344] Leading

up to the *qibla* passage the surah's main subject is a retelling of biblical stories, and in v.

124 the *sūra* continues this theme by turning to Abraham and the religion of his

descendants.[345] After building the Kaʿba with his son Ishmael, Abraham engages in a

prayer on behalf of his progeny asking, "O Lord, make us submitters to you (*muslimūn*

laka) and make of our descendants a submitting nation (*ummatan muslimatan*)" (Q

Baqara 2:124-128; see also vv. 132-33). Isaac, Ishmael and Jacob are likewise described

as submitting (*muslimūn*) (vv. 132-33), at which point the Qurʾān says "That was a nation

that has passed on" (*tilka ummatun qad khalat*)" (v. 134), indicating the entry of a new

religious dispensation. The *sūra* now returns to Muḥammad's interactions with his

contemporaries and says, "They say 'be Jews or Christians and you will be guided'[…]

and you should say 'we follow the religion of Abraham'[…]" (v. 135). The theme of

following Abraham's religion, which is neither Jewish nor Christian, continues leading

up to the verse just before the *qibla* passage. Once again we are told, "that is a nation that

has passed on" (*tilka ummatun qad khalat*)" (v. 141).

   The *qibla* passage serves as a "turning point" in the chapter as the first in a series

of laws that distinguishes Muḥammad's community from those that came before them,

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[344] Joseph, Lowry, "Law, Structure, and Meaning in Sūrat al-Baqara," *Journal of the International Qurʾānic Studies Association*, (forthcoming). Ahmad Hasan, "The Theory of Naskh" *Islamic Studies* 4:2 (1965): 189-90, divides the chapter in a similar way in order to argue that Q Baqara 2:106 refers to interreligious *naskh* and not legal *naskh*: "The first half of *Sūrat al-Baqara* in which this verse (i.e. v.106) comes, comprises a long disputation with the Jews, which culminates in the Divine order, change the *Qiblah* from Jerusalem to the *Kaʿbah* at Mecca, signifying a complete break with the abrogated laws of Judaism." Kees Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran* (Leiden: Brill 1968), 48-49 saw a similar literary structure with the *qibla*-passage as a turning point, but saw this as indicating chronological development, rather than literary-theological organization.

[345] A loose breakdown of the sūra's first half, that mainly traces Lowry's reading, is as follows: Creation and Adam in vv. 30-39; Exodus in vv. 40-73; tales of sin of the biblical peoples, their punishment and theological polemic with them vv. 74-123; Abraham and Ishmael building a Temple for worship vv. 123-133; polemical transition from "the community that has passed on" to the Qurʾān's community vv. 134-141.

including *ḥajj* and food laws. This section of identity-marking rituals is closed in v. 177

with a reprise of the *qibla*-passage stating "It is not righteousness (*al-birr*) that you turn

your faces to the east or the west, righteousness is rather for those who believe in God

and the last day, etc." The second half of the surah follows with great focus on other

obligations and laws that are constitutive of Muḥammad's community.[346] The literary

structure of *surat al-baqara* moves very intentionally from biblical revelation to that of

Muḥammad with the *qibla* as the tangible sign to mark the change. It is no wonder that

the change in *qibla* would come to represent God's ability to supplant one practice with

another and substitute one revelation with that of a successor.[347]

Through the Qurʾān's treatment, then, the *qibla* became a central and embodied

symbol of differentiation. Thus, it reverberates as such throughout the *sīra* and *ḥadīth*

literatures as well as in the Qurʾān's commentarial tradition. The foolish people asking

about the change in *qibla* are usually portrayed as the Jews of Medina arguing with

Muḥammad about praying towards Jerusalem and then towards the Kaʿba. Such is the

case in a *ḥadīth* reported from Ibn ʿAbbās and recorded by al-Ṭabarī:

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[346] E.g. Torts, wills, fasting, war, and pilgrimage (in greater detail).

[347] Lowry argues that reading a structure of caesura and two halves is only one possibility, but one which helps explain the legal passages of the *sūra*. I apply the same structure for theological analysis of the chapter, although we cannot know how the earliest audience of these verses understood them. Another way of understanding "the nation that has passed on" it is to say that it refers to Abraham's family, who were proper Muslims and that the Jews and Christians don't have anything to do with that true practice. This would be signaling a return to the religion of Abraham with the change in *qibla*, and not a replacement of Judaism and Christianity. While the latter reading may not be an exact equivalent of *naskh*, the idea of the *qibla* as a symbol of Islam's replacement of Judaism and Christianity remains. Another theme that emerges in the first half of the chapter closely connected with *naskh* is that of *taḥrīf*, namely that the People of the Book knowingly concealed or replaced verses in their scripture that would testify to the truth of Muḥammad's revelation. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu,* 109, sees references in Q Baqara 2:42, 58, and 75 that inform later portrayals of the theme of *taḥrīf* and *naskh* in the *sīra* literature. On the *qibla* as a key to understanding the development of *naskh* in the Qurʾān see John Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 1990), 179-84. David Powers, identifies the *qibla* as the single ruling that the Qurʾān explicitly identifies as a case of abrogation, although not by the term *naskh*. See Powers, "The Exegetical Genre *nāsikh al-Qurʾān wa mansūkhuhu*" in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān,* ed. A. Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 119 fn. 7.

When God's Emissary emigrated to Medina, which was mostly populated by Jews, God commanded him to orient himself [in prayer] towards Jerusalem (*bayt al-maqdis*). And the Jews rejoiced at that (*fa-faraḥat al-yahūd*). And God's Emissary faced towards it for almost ten months. But God's Emissary loved the *qibla* of Abraham [i.e. the Kaʿba] and used to supplicate and look to the heavens [on this matter]. And so God sent down [the verse] "We have seen you turning about your face in the heavens, so we will turn you towards a *qibla* that pleases you. So turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque, etc." (Q Baqara 2:144). And the Jews had misgivings (*fa-irtāba min dhalika al-yahūd*) and they said, "What has turned them away from the *qibla* they used to follow" and God sent down "Say: To God belongs the east and the west…" (v. 144 or 115).[348]

Here again, Abraham, who built the Kaʿba and took it as a *qibla*, authorizes the change from Jewish practice. When Muḥammad adopts Jerusalem as his *qibla* the Jews rejoice, and when he turns away from it they are disappointed. In this *ḥadīth* the rejection of Jerusalem signifies a distancing from actual Jews rather than from the Jewish revelation. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine how the description of the shift to a Meccan *qibla* came to symbolize the abrogation of Judaism. The ubiquity of this narrative in Medieval Islamic literature suggest that Jews were likely aware of the connection between God's ability to change the *qibla* and both types of *naskh*.[349]

Early Islamic authors take up interreligious *naskh* with different goals than when

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[348] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 2, 623; see also 450. Another prominent version of the story appears in *al-Sīra al-nabawīya li-Ibn Hishām*, ed. M. al-Saqqā, 4 vols. in 1 (Cairo, 1936), 551 and translated into English as *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*. A. Guillaume trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 258-59. A number of versions of the account of the change in Muḥammad's *qibla* exist, and it is hoped that critical engagement with regard to their chronological and geographic context as well as literary variations will be the subject of a future study.

[349] Shtober, "Lā Yajūz," saw in these narratives the beginning of a Muslim-Jewish polemic around the *qibla*, which continued unbroken until the time of our Jewish authors. The variety of versions of the narrative, i.e. those in which it is the polytheists who protest the change, make a reconstruction of the original context difficult. Still, the polemic would be prominent in the transmitted memory of Islamic origins, and so is certainly part of the symbolic valence of the *qibla* as a sign of intercommunal tension. It should not be missed, however, that some found room to interpret the *qibla* passage as embracing a variety of acceptable orientations for the various peoples, based on Q Baqara 2:148 "to each, there is a direction towards which He turns them (*wali-kullin wijhatun hū muwallīhā*), so race towards good works." See for example Sahl al-Tustari, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, eds. Ṭ ʿA Ruʾūf Saʿd and S. Ḥ Muḥammad ʿAlī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram lil-Turāth, 2004)**,** 99. Of course, these interpretations do not make any kind of argument against *naskh*, but simply show that that there was room to embrace a diversity of *qibla*s despite the inherently polemical nature of the symbol.

they address legal *naskh*. In the former case, they aim to defend the theological validity

of the principle and explain its mechanics. In the latter case, however, they tend to focus

on actual abrogation of Qurʾānic rulings, by listing the occurrances of *naskh*, describing

its types, or both. Works on legal *naskh* sought to rectify contradictions in the body of

revelation by determining which of the two was chronologically later, and hence replaced

the former. By the ninth-century at the latest, full compositions appeared that performed

this work, often by citing the events in Muḥammad's prophetic career that led to each of

the two rulings. In this sense, the genre of *nāsikh al-Qurʾān wa-mansukhuhu* was

intricately linked to that of *sīra* (Muḥammad's biography) and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions

of revelation). [350] Jurists describing the change in *qibla* as an example of legal *naskh*

drew from the same body of exegetical *ḥadīth* to place the relevant Qurʾānic verses in

space and time. We will first explore the *qibla* as an instance of legal *naskh* and then as a

symbol of interreligious *naskh*.

Interestingly, medieval writing on interreligious *naskh* does not quote the

exegetical narrative of a changed *qibla*, though it is referenced on many occasions (see

more below). By contrast, the growing body of work dedicated to legal *naskh* takes it up

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[350] The mechanics and development of legal *naskh* is not the subject of this chapter, and the following are just a few of the many works on the subject: John Burton, *Sources* and his introduction to *Abū Ubaid al-Qāsim b. Sallām's K. al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh* (Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1987), 1-42, lays out his theory of how *naskh* came to justify the Qurʾān as a canonized text; Powers, "The Exegetical Genre," offers a very helpful overview of the structure of works dedicated to legal *naskh* as well as a survey of their content; Andrew Rippin, "Al-Zuhrī, 'Naskh al-Qurʾān' and the Problem of Early Tafsīr Texts" *BSOAS* 47:1 (1984): 22-43, discusses the challenges in dating *naskh* works of late provenance attributed to early figures; Christopher Melchert, "Qurʾānic Abrogation across the Ninth Century: Shāfiʿī, Abū ʿUbayd, Muḥāsibī and Ibn Qutaybah," in *Studies in Islamic Legal Theory*, ed. B. Weiss (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 75-98, attempts to trace the development of the genre over the course of the ninth-century when dedicated legal works (or sections thereof) began to emerge. Joseph Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risāla of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 87-102, also offers a clear overview with excellent analysis of al-Shāfiʿī's approach to *naskh* and several of the examples he uses in the *Risāla*; and a concise and accessible introduction to *naskh* with special attention on Modern reception of the hermeneutic appears in Daniel Brown, "The Triumph of Scripturalism: The Doctrine of Naskh and its Modern Critics" in *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman*, eds. E.H. Waugh and F. M. Denny (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 49-66.

as "the first thing abrogated in the Qurʾān."[351] These treatises portray an instance of a

Qurʾānic verse (Q Baqara 2:144 "turn your faces towards the Sacred Mosque") as

abrogating a previous ruling from within the Islamic revelation. There was some

disagreement as to whether the abrogated ruling was a Qurʾānic verse or simply a

prophetic practice (*sunna/fiʿl*), but none viewed the change of *qibla* as abrogating a ruling

from the Jewish or Christian revelations.[352]

Most of those who found Q Baqara 2:144 to abrogate another verse from the

Qurʾān identified the abrogated verse (*al-mansūkh*) as Q Baqara 2:115. This was the case

in one of our earliest extant works dedicated to legal *naskh*, that of Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim

b. Sallām (d. 224/838):

> ʿAlī reported that Abū ʿUbayd said…that Ibn ʿAbbās said: The first thing
> abrogated in the Qurʾān was the matter of the *qibla*, for God had said, "To God
> belongs the east and the west, wherever you turn the face of God is there" (Q
> Baqara 2:115). He said that God's Emissary prayed towards Jerusalem, when he
> stopped facing the Ancient House (i.e. the Kaʿba), then God turned him back
> towards the Ancient House. [353]

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[351] The designation "first" in our texts likely refers to the canonical order of the Qurʾān rather than a chronological first. To this effect some of our texts have "the first matter abrogated in the Qurʾān *from surat al-baqara*." See, for example, al-Zuhrī's *Naskh al-Qurʾān* in Rippin ,"al-Zuhrī," 29 (another edition of the same text has been edited by A.Ṣ. Ḍāmin (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1988)). It is possible that some of the reports, outside of the context of works on legal *naskh*, intended that the abrogation of the *qibla* was chronologically first, but this would be difficult to prove.

[352] Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory*, 103-4, notes that "assertions of abrogation seem to have attached very early on to certain texts and rules" such that all authors writing on the subject would have to include them. The *qibla* is certainly one of these instances, but it is also plausible that it became such an example explicitly because it was seen as initiating the process of supersession (interreligious *naskh*). This would imply a time period in which the boundaries between legal and interreligious *naskh* were fluid. A rigorous study of the instances to which Lowry refers could go a long way in teasing out the early development of *naskh* before it emerged as a genre of Islamic legal writing.

[353] Ed. Burton (1987), 6-7. Abū ʿUbayd follows this opening with two narratives of the change in *qibla* that attribute the change to God's saying "turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it" (Q Baqara 2:144). Others who read Q Baqara 2:115 as the abrogated include al-Zuhrī, see Rippin "al-Zuhrī," 29; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Nāsikh wal-Mansūkh fīl-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, ed. al-Bandarī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmīya, 1986), 21-22; the work attributed to Qatāda b. Diʿāma, *Kitāb al-Nāsikh wal-Mansūkh fī Kitāb Allah Taʿālā*, ed. Ḥ.Ṣ. al-Ḍāmin (Bierut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1998), 32; and referenced in Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad al-Naḥḥās, *Kitāb al-nāsikh wal-mansūkh* (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Falāḥ, 1988), 423; and Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Salāma, *al-Nāsikh wal-Mansūkh* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1967), 12-14; Abū ʿAbdallah Shuʿla, *Ṣafwat al-Rāsikh fī ʿIlm al-Mansūkh wal-Nāsikh*, ed. M.A. Fāris

Muḥammad's facing Jerusalem was validated under the rubric of v. 115, but the

revelation of v. 144 forbade facing any direction but the Kaʿba.

Al-Naḥḥās (d. 328/939) reports a dispute as to whether Muḥammad faced

Jerusalem because "God commanded him to do so" or whether "it was merely his action

that was abrogated, since God did not command him as such, but the Prophet followed

the practice of prophets before him until such time as it was abrogated by God's

command."[354] Al-Naḥḥās sees the former possibility as more correct, rejecting the

reliance on the practice of previous prophets or Muḥammad's free choice of the

Jerusalem *qibla*. Likewise, after noting the same disagreement, al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857)

writes, "Although the people do not agree regarding this position, all agree that God

obligated [facing Jerusalem] by means of the Prophet [Muḥammad's] command to them

[…] even if it cannot be found in an explicit text in the Book of God [i.e. the Qurʾān]."[355]

The fact that works on legal *naskh* fail to connect practice of facing Jerusalem to biblical

revelations is unsurprising for several reasons. First, they viewed *naskh* as a legal

hermeneutic meant to treat contradictions that arise from within the corpus of Islamic

texts—admitting the legal validity of previous revelations would contribute little to that

task.[356] Second, there were those medieval Muslim scholars who did regard rulings of

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(Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniya, 1995), 102. Seemingly, al-Shāfiʿī would also adhere to this position since he does not believe in intersource abrogation, and hence the Qurʾānic command to face the Kaʿba would have to be abrogating another verse from the Qurʾān. However, al-Shāfiʿī does not identify the *mansūkh* explicitly in the *Risāla* in any of the places he discusses *naskh* or the *qibla* as an example of it. See al-Shāfiʿī, *Risāla,* 80-87, 96-98.

[354] Al-Naḥḥās, *al-nāsikh*, 459-60.

[355] *Al-ʿAql wa-Fahm al-Qurʾān*. Ed. Ḥusayn Quwwatlī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1971), 414.

[356] The early *naskh* works attributed to al-Zuhrī and Qatāda do not state a goal of resolving contradictions. Even if their purpose was merely to determine the dating of revelations, identifying Muḥammad's early *qibla*-practices in a Qurʾānic verse would still be more endemic to the task than attributing it to biblical revelation.

previous traditions as in force for Muslims until they were abrogated.[357] Our authors may

have intentionally separated themselves from that view. It is also possible that our

authors found it important to distinguish between the two types of *naskh* (interreligious

and legal), and the *qibla* presented a particularly ambiguous example and one that

required setting boundaries between the two.

In any case, the change in *qibla* is ubiquitous in works on legal *naskh* and is often

described as "the first thing abrogated." Indeed, it may be the only case of a changed law

that is explicitly referenced in the Qurʾān.[358] We do not know the extent to which Jews in

Islamic lands were familiar with the texts referenced here, but it seems impossible that

they were unaware of Islamic legal *naskh* or the centrality of the *qibla* as an instance, if

not the emblem of the hermeneutical tool.[359] Let us now turn to instances in which the

qibla became a symbol of interreligious *naskh*.

Medieval Muslim polemical treatises generally discuss interreligious *naskh* by

making reason-based arguments; since it was on common epistemological ground that

intellectual victory over a Jewish or Christian adversary could be achieved. As such,

ritual practice is rarely invoked as proof of one's position. Nevertheless, the *qibla* often

exemplifies Islam's preeminence in the face of biblical religions in these works. To that

effect, in a section of his *Kitāb al-dīn wal-dawlā* entitled "Refutation of those who

criticize that Muḥammad contradicted Moses and Jesus in changing practices of the

Torah and Gospel," Ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. 256/870) writes that "all of the prophets are

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[357] See, for example, Kevin Reinhart, *Before Revelation: The Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 134-35.

[358] Powers , "Exegetical Genre," 119. nt 7.

[359] Sklare (1996), 53, points to the similar lexical discussions of *naskh* in al-Naḥḥās and in Samuel ben Ḥofnī's *Kitāb Naskh al-Sharʿ* as an indication that the latter had read the work of the former or "that they are all participating in the same world of discourse."

in agreement with [Muḥammad] regarding the *qibla*, divorce, circumcision, etc."[360] By claiming that the Kaʿba was the site towards which previous prophets directed their prayers, Ibn Rabbān follows the position that it was Abraham's *qibla* (and even Adam's!).[361] He does not mention *naskh*, but the *qibla* presented an obvious example in championing the primacy of Islamic practices where they differed from those of Judaism and Christianity.

Many authors explicitly employ the *qibla* as a sign of interreligious *naskh* in their theological and polemical writings. Al-Bāqillānī (d.403/1013), for example, argues that *naskh* of previous religious law rests on obvious rational grounds. For just as eating and drinking are beneficial when one is hungry or thirsty and detrimental at other times, "it cannot be denied by any reasoning mind (*jamīʿ al-ʿuqalāʾ*) that revealed ritual practices (*al-ʿibādāt al-samaʿīya*), such as fasting, prayer and *turning towards Jerusalem*, can be beneficial at one time and detrimental at another—correct practice at one time and disobedient foolishness at another."[362] The change in *qibla* reverberated as a symbol of interreligious *naskh* in writings of the centuries that followed as well. Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) defends the viability of *naskh* against the Jewish charge that *naskh* equals *badāʾ*—a logically impossible change in Divine Will—with an empirical metaphor and the example of the *qibla*. He writes that the Jews believe that *naskh* is impossible (*al-naskh muḥālun fī nafsihī*), because it indicates innovation and change in God's divine

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[360] ʿAlī b. Rabbān al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-Dīn wal-Dawla*, ed. ʿA. Nuwayhiḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1982), 201-2, Translated by A. Mingana as *Book of Religion and Empire* (Manchester: The University Press, 1922), 158-59.
[361] On the connection between Adam and the Kaʿba see above n. 149.
[362] Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd,* 185, emphasis added. See an almost identical statement in Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Nāsikh wal-Mansūkh*, 7-8. For Medieval Muslim polemical writing on interreligious *naskh* more generally, see Hava Lazarus-Yafeh *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Biblical Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992), 35-41 and Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 192-222.

will. But this is misguided, for just as a master may command a slave to stand while knowing that he will eventually tell him to sit, so too God may command a practice for a time while knowing that it will only be in effect for a certain duration. And just as the slave must stand until told otherwise, humans must follow God's commands and then change when charged to do otherwise. Furthermore, he writes, "The Prophet's revelation does not abrogate the laws that came before in their entirety […] but only some of them, *such as changing the qibla* […] and the benefit involved differs in each time and age."[363] In the lengthy section of his *Mustaṣfā* that proves the plausibility of *naskh*, al-Ghazālī points to the wide-spread consensus (*ijmāʿ)* among Muslims about interreligious *naskh* as well as to emblematic and indisputable examples of where Islamic law abrogated previous practice. Among them, he writes "is the changing of the *qibla* from Jerusalem (*bayt al-maqdis*) to the Kaʿba […] and so there is widespread agreement among the people (*al-umma*) that the term *naskh* applies to the law."[364] Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), likewise, used the *qibla* as an emblem of the priority of Muslim practice over those of other faiths. After he lays out arguments for the validity of interreligious *naskh* from both reason and tradition, he concludes with a flowery locution affirming the uniqueness of Islam: "We are contented (*raḍīnā*) with God as our master; with Islam as our religion; with Muḥammad, the chosen one, as our prophet; with the Qurʾān as our guide (*imām*); with *the Kaʿba as our qibla*; and with the believers as our brothers."[365]

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[363] Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād fīl-iʿtiqād*, 263-4, emphasis added.

[364]Al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaṣfā*, vol. 1, 111-12. Abū ʿAbdallah Shuʿla, *Ṣafwat al-Rāsikh*, 91, also identifies the supersession of previous religions with the change in *qibla*. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān (fī) ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Qurʾānīya (Medina: Majmaʿ al-Malik Fahd, 2005), 1438, too, identifies the *qibla* as one of a few examples of abrogation of previous religions, what he calls "figurative *naskh*" (*naskh tajawwuz*).

[365] Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-aqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām*; the section on *naskh* begins at 496, and the expression quoted appears at 500-01; emphasis added. The same formulation appears in an account regarding Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān's conversion. When asked to return to Judaism by Jews of Medina,

In the case of interreligious *naskh* we can be more certain of a shared context of discourse between Muslims and Jews in the Middle Ages. Our authors write about common examples to prove or rebut the existence of *naskh* from both reason and revelation. We also know of formal oral contexts of discussion, the *majālis*, sessions in which Jews and others came together—often in the courts of rulers—to discuss and debate theological topics and humanistic concerns. Likewise, one-on-one encounters between Jews and Muslims also occurred in which *naskh* was often a topic of discussion.[366]   And yet, none of the extant Islamic literature on *naskh* or on the *qibla* raises the question to which our Jewish authors appear to be responding, namely: ""You Jews deny *naskh*, claiming that God's mind never changes, and therefore we Muslims cannot have a true revelation. However you, too, have changed your *qibla*; after all, it was not always towards Jerusalem. Therefore you must admit of the validity of *naskh*." The absence of this question in Islamic literature will be addressed below, but there is at least one tenth-century author who seems to be aware of the Jewish claim that Jews face towards God's divine presence: Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī.

Abū Muslim b. Baḥr al-Iṣfahānī (d. 322/934), a Muʿtazilite thinker and prominent figure in the ʿAbbāsid administration, was infamous for his position that legal *naskh* does not exist. His writings (among them a Qurʾān commentary and a work on *naskh*) have not been preserved in the original, but were available to medieval authors who quote them regularly.[367] In his reading, the Qurʾānic verses traditionally used to justify legal

Ḥudhayfa offers the locution just quoted. Translated in Michael Lecker, "Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān and ʿAmmār b. Yāsir, Jewish Converts to Islam," *Quaterni di Studi Arabi*, 11 (1993): 150.

[366] On the *majālis* and Jewish-Muslim encounters on *naskh* see below pp. 201-4.

[367] On the widespread knowledge of Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī's writings and the ire that they drew from orthodox thinkers see Mazaheri, Masʿud Habibi, Rabbani, Azar and Negahban, Farzin, "Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī (or Iṣbahānī)", in *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, eds. W. Madelung and F. Daftary. (Accessed on 23 June 2017) http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2097/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_COM_0112.

naskh refer, rather, to the replacement of previous revelations. Regarding Q Baqara 2:106 ("Whatever signs We abrogate or cause to be forgotten…") Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) reports:

> Abū Muslim b. Baḥr [al-Iṣfahānī] said: [*naskh* of Qurʾān] does not exist, and most people (*al-jumhūr*) argue for its existence in many ways, one is from this verse [2:106….] Abū Muslim responded [to claims that the verse refers to legal *naskh*]: First, the intention is that the abrogated signs (*ayāt*) are the laws in the earlier scriptures, i.e. the Torah and the Gospel, such as the Sabbath *and prayers to the east and the west* that God imposed and our obligations that differ from them. The Jews and the Christians would say "You only believe in one who follows your religion!" And God nullified their position with this verse."[368]

Likewise, al-Iṣfahānī rejects the traditional reading of verse Q Naḥl 16:101 ("When We replace (*baddalnā*) one sign in place of another") and denies that it refers to abrogation of Qurʾānic rulings. Rather, the intent here is "'When We replace one sign with another' in the previous scriptures (*al-kutub al-mutaqaddima*), such as *His changing the* qibla *from Jerusalem (*bayt al-maqdis*) to the Kaʿba*[.]'"[369]

Like the other Muslim polemical writers mentioned here, al-Iṣfahānī adopts the *qibla* as a sign of Islamic supersession of other religions. However, on Q Baqara 2:115 ("To God belongs the east and the west, wherever you turn the face of God is there"), the verse that many jurists viewed as abrogated by the command to face the Kaʿba, al-Iṣfahānī suggests a remarkable setting of interreligious confrontation:

> The Jews and the Christians each say that Paradise [in the afterlife] (*al-janna*) is theirs and no one else's, and God refutes them with this verse (i.e. Q Baqara 2:115). For the Jews orient (*istaqbalū*) towards Jerusalem (*Bayt al-Maqdis*) as they believe that God ascended to heaven from the Rock. And the Christians

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[368]Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 248-9, emphasis added. In the same passage, al-Rāzī states that when asked how he can deny legal *naskh* when all know that Jerusalem was an injunction for Muslims and then changed to the Kaʿba in Mecca, Abū Muslim replied that when Muslims are in doubt (*al-ishkāl*) about the true direction of the Kaʿba or if they have some other reason (*hunāka al-ʿadhar*) Jerusalem remains a viable option as a *qibla*!

[369] *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 20, 118. Emphasis added.

orient towards the east since Jesus was born there, according to what God has told in his saying, "And mention in the Book, Maryam when she withdrew from her people to a place to the east." (Q Maryam 19:16) And each of these groups describes their object of worship [i.e. God] as occupying a [physical] place (*bil-ḥulūl min al-amākin*). But this [renders the God that they locate in those spaces] a creation and not a Creator. And how can they attain the Garden when they can't even distinguish between creator and created?!"[370]

For many *mutakallimūn* the assertion of God's indwelling in physical bodies posed a major problem for the principle of God's absolute unity. It became a regular issue in Muslim-Christian polemic over the doctrine of divine incarnation, and, one assumes, for Muslim-Jewish polemic in the idea of divine indwelling in the Temple, in the form of the Shekhina.[371] In a quite inventive way, al-Iṣfahānī introduces this charge against Jews and Christians, specifically with regard to their chosen *qiblas*.[372] He unequivocally associates the proper *qibla* with the claim to God's exclusive salvation. But even more importantly,

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[370] *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 4, 20. Abū Muslim also emphasized the *qibla* as a point of debate between Muslims and the People of the Book in his comments on vv. 142 and 143, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 4, 102 and 119.

[371] L. Massignon, "Ḥulūl," *EI2*. The topic of indwelling in *kalām* is too vast to treat in this chapter, but see for example, Al-Ashʿarī's remark in refuting one solution to problem of free will, where he denies that humans can be a "*maḥall*" (locus) for the Divine in *The Theology of al-Ashʿarī: The Arabic Texts of al-Ashʿarī's Kitāb al-Lumaʿ and Risālat Istiḥsān al-Khawḍ fī ʿIlm al-Kalām*, R.J. McCarthy ed. and trans. (Beirut: Impr. Catholique, 1953), 39-40. On the use of the term "*ḥulūl*" in Christian writing about Jesus and the problematical nature of the doctrine of incarnation in Islamic *Kalām* see Najib George Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abū Qurrah's Theology in its Islamic Context* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 459-79. A more sanguine approach to the idea of *ḥulūl* among certain Muslim mystics is also discussed there. For general references to debates about God's occupying space see Josef Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 426-28 (2.1.3.3.7.2.2.2). I hope to conduct a study of Islamic responses to Jewish conceptions of Divine Indwelling at a future date. Diana Lobel, "A Dwelling Place for the Shekhinah" *JQR* 90:1/2 (1999): 103-25, makes a modest start with attention specifically on the writings of Judah HaLevi.

[372] Critique of the Christian identification of God's presence in Mary's womb was not uncommon, and It appears in an anonymous pamphlet identified as a tenth-century text of "The Letter of ʿUmar" in his pseudonymous exchanged with Pope Leo. "In your error, your ignorance and your presumption in the face of God you still pretend that God came down from His Majesty […] even to the point of entering into the womb of a woman in suffocating grief, imperfection, in narrow and dark confines and in pain, that he stayed in her during nine months to come out as do all the sons of Adam […] Well then: who was ruling the heavens and the earth? Who was "holding" them? [etc….] in Jean-Marie Gaudeul, "The correspondence between Leo and ʿUmar: ʿUmar's Letter re-discovered," *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984): 144-45. A broader discussion on the place of the doctrine of incarnation in the context of *kalām* appears in Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 304-49.

his argument undermines our Jewish authors' claims as to the location of their chosen direction. Yefet and al-Qirqisānī each identified the correct Jewish *qibla* as contingent upon God's presence in that site (*kavod* and *Shekhina*, respectively). Saʿadya identified the *qibla* with the Holy Ark, the place where God's presence rests. Al-Iṣfahānī takes this view and uses his commentary on the Qur'ān to show how it is refuted by God's word.

For both Saʿadya and for Yefet linking the *qibla* with God's presence in the world was not confined to their polemical remarks with which this chapter opened. In his Arabic translation of the Hebrew Bible, Saʿadya renders "the site that God chooses to make His name dwell" (Deut. 12:5, 11) as "making his divine light (*nūr*) dwell," which for Saʿadya is identical to God's *Shekhina*.[373] Furthermore, in *Beliefs and Opinions*, Saʿadya explicitly uses the term "indwelling of light" (*ḥulūl al-nūr*) to refer to the mode in which the Divine inhabited Mount Sinai, the Burning Bush, and other physical sites.[374] For Yefet, when Solomon brings the Holy Ark to the Temple in Jerusalem it is accompanied by a cloud of God's glory (*kavod*).[375] Both read the exhortation to "worship towards God's footstool" (Heb. *ve-hishtaḥavū le-hadom raglav*) (Psalms 99:5) as a reference to facing the *Shekhina*. Yefet translates it as "prostrate to the dwelling-

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[373] Translation of Deut. 12:5 and 11. The equation of *nūr* with *Shekhina* appears in *Beliefs and Opinions* III.10, Qāfiḥ 146; Landauer 143; Rosenblatt 176. See also Saʿadya al-Fayyūmī *Commentary on Exodus*, ed. and tr. Y. Ratzaby (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1998), on vv. 28:31-34 where he equates *kavod* and *Shekhina* as well.

[374] *Beliefs and Opinions* II.7, Qāfiḥ 95, Laundauer 91, Rosenblatt 109-10. The statement is in the context of a Christian group who makes an analogy from those instances of divine indwelling to Jesus. Saʿadya argues that if their logic is correct, then they should also worship Mount Sinai, etc., as God. He makes no indication, however, that he disagrees with the idea of *ḥulūl*, and in fact, uses similar terminology in describing the *Shekhina*. The same appears in his *Tafsīr Kitāb al-Mabādī/ Commentaire sur le Séfer Yesira, ou, Livre de la Création*, M. Lambert, ed. (Paris: Bouillomn, 1891), 39. Both Saʿadya and Yefet must have been aware of the challenge that the idea of God's indwelling posed for the idea of God's absolute unity, and so they framed the *Shekhina*, the Glory of God, and God's Light as attributes of the divine; see *Tafsīr Kitāb al-Mabādī*, 72. For an instance where Yefet makes this clear see Yefet b. ʿAlī, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. and trans. D.S. Margoliouth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 56.

[375] Yefet b. ʿAlī, *Commentary on the Book of Kings*, British Library MS Or. 2500 f58r, lns 1-8 and 16-21. Saʿadya also identifies the cloud that Moses left on Mount Sinai as equated with the *Shekhina*, see *Commentary on Exodus*, on vv. 32:15-16.

place of his *Shekhina*" (*wasjadū li-waṭan sakīnatihi*) and Saʿadya renders it "prostrate to the *qibla* of his *Shekhina*" (*wa-sjadū ilā qiblat sakīnatihi*).[376] In another example, when God appeared to Abraham in the Plains of Moreh, promising the land of Canaan to his descendants, Abraham built an altar there (Gen. 12:6-7). Yefet comments on these verses, "It indicates that God made his *kavod* appear [...] to show him the nobility (*sharaf*) of that site. Therefore [Abraham] built an altar there and made it his *qibla*."[377] For these authors, the *qibla* is intricately linked to the Divine presence, even as it moves from place to place.

A final example, and one which solidifies the connection with Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī's critique, arises in the continuation of Yefet's comments on Genesis 28 cited at the opening of the chapter. As quoted, Yefet said that "the truth regarding the *qibla* is that it must be in any place to which God's Glory (*kavod*) moves, as long as [God's Glory] was present in the land. But after it *ascended to the heavens* the *qibla* never moved again."[378] Yefet offers three reasons why Jews continue to face Jerusalem after God's presence has left that site (apparently at the time of the Temple's destruction). The second reason uses almost the same language as al-Iṣfahānī, namely

> that God determined that the place from which [His *kavod*] moved to the heavens [...] would be a place that is eternally holy, in which the Glory of God

[376] Yefet b. ʿAlī, *Kitāb al-Zubūr li-Dāʾud al-Malik wal-Nabī*, ed. J.J. Burges (Paris: B. Duprat, 1861) Saʿadya b. Josph al-Fayyūmī, *Psalms: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Y. Qāfiḥ (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Studies, 1966), 220. See a similar sentiment, although without the use of the term *qibla* in his comments on Psalms 132:7, (p. 267) and in Yefet's translation of the same verse. Saʿadya translates "His footstool" as "the place of his *Shekhina*" (*maḥall sakīnatihi*) in Isaiah 60:13 and 66:1 and Lamentations 2:1, see *Kitāb al-Istiṣlāḥ* (*Tafsīr Yeshaʿya li-Rav Saʿadya Gaon),* ed. Y. Ratzhavi (Qiryat Ono: Makhon Mishnat HaRambam, 1993), 91 & 98**;** and *Ḥamesh Megillot*, ed. Y. Qāfiḥ (Jerusalem: The Society for the Preservation of Yemenite Archives, 1962), 337. Saʿadya also connects the idea of God's "footstool" to his *kavōd*, *nūr* and *Shekhīna* in *Beliefs and Opinions* II.10 Qāfiḥ 102-4; Landauer 99; Rosenblatt 120-21.
[377] *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Abraham Narratives (Genesis 11:10-25:18)*, ed. and trans. M Zawanowska, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), Arabic at 19 lns 11-12.
[378] Paris, Biblioteque Nationale MS Heb 278, 75r, ln 20-75v, ln3. Emphasis added.

would dwell and to which it will return, as it is stated: "For now have I chosen and hallowed this house, that My name may be there forever; and Mine eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually."(2 Chron 7:16)[379]

Al-Iṣfahānī appears to be keenly aware of the Jewish belief in God's dwelling at the site of the Temple, which was already a biblical notion. Furthermore, although he died when Yefet was likely still a young man, Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī appears to be aware of the teaching just cited, that God's ascent to the heavens from the Temple preserves the site as the place towards which Jews direct their prayers. While many of these ideas have echoes in earlier Jewish literature, they gained a special currency for ninth/tenth century Islamicate Jews for whom the unabrogated *qibla* became a symbol of God's enduring love for them.[380] Al-Iṣfahānī only subscribed to the institution of *naskh* as supersession of previous revelations. Thus, in other verses pertaining to the *qibla* (Q Baqara 2:115 and 142) he finds opportunities to interpret them as disqualifying the chosen directions of Jews and Christians.[381]

We began this chapter by attempting to determine the interreligious context in which Jews meaningfully defended against charges that their changed *qibla* indicated that God's favor shifted from the Jews to another people. To that end, we explored the

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[379] MS Heb 278, 75v, lns 6-9. See also Yefet's commentary on I Kings 8:12-13 where he makes a similar argument about the perpetuity of God's presence at the site. See f58r lns 16-21.

[380] For one account of facing the *Shekhina* in rabbinic literature see Ehrlich, *Nonverbal Language of Prayer,* 81-88. On the question of prayer direction after the ascent of God's presence to heaven after the destruction see *yBerakhot* 4:4-5/8b-c and *bYevamot* 105b. Rabbinic literature is far from univocal on the location of the *Shekhina* in the wake of the destruction, but two texts that record the opinion of its ascent to heaven appear in *Tanḥuma* (Buber) Shemot 10 and *Shemot Rabbah* 2 alongside several other opinions.

[381] On Q Baqara 2:142 "the fools among the people will say what has turned them from their *qibla* that they used to follow," al-Iṣfahānī comments that the fools are "the Jews and the Christians, [faced] to the east and the other to the west, and there was no other *qibla* than this. And when the Apostle of God turned towards the Kaʿba they took exception and said 'how can someone turn to a *qibla* other than these two?' and God refuted this by saying 'to God belongs the east and the west…;' see the reconstruction of his commentary in *Jāmiʿ al-Taʾwīl li-muḥkam al-tanzīl*, ed M. Sarmadī (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārat-i ʿIlmi va Farhangi, 1968), 98, and quoted from *al-Tahdhīb fī al-Tafsīr* of Ibn Karrāma al-Jishumī al-Bayhaqī (d. 1101).

symbolic importance of the change in *qibla* from Jerusalem to the Kaʿba in Medieval

Muslim discussions of *naskh*. We showed that in the Qurʾān the "*qibla*-passage" (Q

Baqara 2:142-52) is positioned as a signifier of the re-placement of the dispensation of

biblical peoples with that of Muḥammad's community. Major *ḥadīth* collections of law,

history and exegesis feature a narrative that contextualizes these verses as part of a

conversation with the Jews of Medina, who were disappointed that Muḥammad had

"turned away" from their religion. The account of a change became ubiquitous as an

illustration of legal *naskh* as that genre of juristic literature emerged in the following

centuries. Furthermore, in polemical literature, the change in *qibla* was emblematic of

interreligious *naskh*, a sign of Islamic supersession of previous revelations. We even

found one medieval scholar who demonstrated keen awareness of the Jewish claims

about the *qibla*; he used them to argue against Jewish and Christian claims to salvation.

It may seem prudent to end our discussion here. We could assert that Islamic adoption of

the *qibla* as a symbol of supersession prompted our Jewish authors to safeguard the

soundness of their own sacred orientation, and by extension, their defense of Torah's

eternal validity. However, we would be remiss to ignore contemporary Christian

engagement with the *qibla* in interreligious polemic and discussions of *naskh*.

The *qibla* as a Symbol in Medieval Islamicate Christian Literature:

To be certain, Christian-Jewish polemic about interreligious abrogation remained

lively in Islam's formative period. New Testament themes of supersession persisted in

which Jesus mediated "a better covenant […] a new covenant by which he hath made the

first one old" (Hebrews 8), a covenant that "made disappear the ordinances by which you

would have been judged as sinners" (Colossians 2:14). Likewise, verses from the

Hebrew Bible that heralded a new covenant (e.g. "not the covenant that I made with their

fathers" (Jeremiah 31:31-32)) became proofs of *naskh* for Medieval Arab Christians, and

their Jewish contemporaries, in turn, offered counter-interpretations. Jewish and

Christian authors alike dedicated sections of polemical treatises to engage on the topic of

naskh in their debates with one another. [382] Furthermore, Jews and Christians had "parted

ways" around the issue of liturgical orientation in Late Antiquity. While Jews faced the

site of their Holy Temple, commemorating its absence, Christians largely adopted east as

their prayer direction, in anticipation of the absent Messiah's return.[383] In Chapter 1 we

suggested that in the first centuries of Christianity, the choice to face east was

emblematic of the replacement of earthly Jerusalem with the heavenly Jerusalem, and the

people of the flesh (Jews) with those of the spirit (Christians).[384] However, the *qibla* does

not arise as a major symbol in Islamicate Christian literary discussion with Jews and

Judaism, but more so in the context of Christian-Muslim polemics.[385]

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[382] See, for example ʿIsā Ibn Zurʾā's response to the Jew Bishr b. Finḥās in *Vingt Traites Philosophiques et Apologétiques d'Auteurs Arabes Chrétiens*, ed. P. Sbath (Cairo: H. Friedrich et Co, 1929), 22-31; Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rāʾiṭa al-Tikrītī, "Essay Regarding the Soundness of the Christianity and the Holy Trinity" in *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb ibn H̱idma Abū Rāʾiṭa*, CSCO vol. 130, ed. G. Graf (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1951), 158; Eutychius of Alexandria, *The Book of Demonstrations (*Kitāb al-Burhān*) Part I*, CSCO vol. 192, ed. P. Cachia (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1960), 177-78. Jeremiah 31:31 also comes up in Jeffery, "Correspondence between ʿUmar II and Leo III," 314-15, to claim that God, and not humans, ordained that Christian practice diverge from Jewish practice. The Muslim theologian Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām, (L. Cheiko ed.), 69, also uses Jeremiah 31:31 to prove the existence of interreligious *naskh*. For their part, Saʿadya III.8 (Qāfiḥ 138, Landauer 135; Rosenblatt 166-67) and al-Qirqisānī al-III.15.9 offer alternative interpretations to this and other verses from the Hebrew Bible commonly used to prove the supersession of Judaism. On Christian-Jewish polemic in Islamic contexts more generally see Daniel Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity Under Islam in the Middle Ages," *PAAJR* 57 (1990-91): 121-53; and Sarah Stroumsa "Jewish Polemics Against Islam and Christianity In the Light of Judaeo-Arabic Texts," in *Judaeo-Arabic Studies; Proceedings of the Founding Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, ed. N. Golb (Amsterdam, 1997), 241-50.
[383] See chapter 1 on Jewish ambivalence towards the east and Christian rejection of Jerusalem as a direction of prayer.
[384] See above pp. 58-60. This metaphorical dichotomy is most apparent in Galatians 4:21-31.
[385] Al-Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār* VI:18:13, is aware of Christian eastward orientation, and refutes the proofs for it, but the topic does not arise in his extensive discussions of *naskh*. Shlomo Pines is aware of a Jewish polemical treatise written in Arabic (MS Vatican Ar. 135 fol 84b) that criticizes Christian adoption of east as a divergence from Jesus' own practice. He could not establish a clear date for this work, and

In the centuries leading up to the rise of Islam the Church Fathers offered

numerous reasons for and interpretations of Christian orientation. In the eighth century

John of Damascus catalogued many of the explanations for the eastward *qibla*:

> And so, since, God is spiritual light, and Christ in sacred Scripture is called "Sun of Justice" (Malachai 4:2/MT 3:20) and "Orient," the east should be dedicated to His worship. […]Also the divine David says […] "sing ye to the Lord; who mounteth above the heaven of heavens, to the east." (Psalms 68:33-34) And still again, Scripture says, "And the Lord had planted a paradise in Eden to the east ; wherein he placed man whom he had formed," (Gen 2:8), […] Thus, it is that, when we worship God, we long for our ancient fatherland and gaze toward it. The tabernacle of Moses had the veil and the propitiatory (mercy seat) to the east (Lev. 16:14); and the tribe of Judah, as being the more honorable, pitched their tents on the east (Numbers 2:3); and in the celebrated Temple of Solomon the Gate of the Lord was set to the east. As a matter of fact, when the Lord was crucified, He looked toward west, and so we worship [towards the east], gazing towards Him. And when He was taken up [into heaven] He ascended to the east, and thus the Apostles worshipped Him, and thus He shall come in the same way in as they had seen Him going into heaven (Acts 1:11); as the Lord Himself said, "As lightning cometh out of the east and appeareth even into the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt 24:27). And so, while we are awaiting Him, we worship towards the east.[386]

Many details of John's life are unknown, and some have questioned his authorship of the

chapter on Islam in his *Heresies*.[387] However, one can easily imagine John's writing on

facing east in worship as a response to the Islamic context around him. As early as the

Qurʾān, the *qibla* marked Islamic identity and symbolized Islam's replacement of

previous dispensations. That the first Muslim sacred direction was almost universally

understood to be Jerusalem must have posed a further challenge to Christians making

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believed it to stem from a prior Judeo-Christian source. The work requires further study. See "Judaeo-Christian Materials in an Arabic Jewish Treatise," in *The Collected works of Shlomo Pines Vol. IV: Studies in the History of Religion*, ed. G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996), 285-315; references to facing east at 293-94.

[386] John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, in *Writings: The Fathers of the Church: Saint John of Damascus*, trans. F.H. Chase (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), IV.12, 352-54. On the dating of John's writings see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 480-89.

[387] The citation above is not part of the section on Islam. On John's life in general, his writing on Islam, and its provenance see Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites,"* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

sense of the emergent religion. Christians were caught between the claims that a) their religion had been superseded, just as they claimed Christianity replaced Judaism[388] and b) that their practices did not even resemble the authentic biblical religions that had come to be replaced by Islam. In this context it is easy to envision John of Damascus marshaling many biblical proofs for the authenticity of the Christian *qibla*—from Genesis and Psalms to Jesus' Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles—to counter to the challenges.

A similar response to the early Islamic context appears in the *Dialogue of the Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and the Arab Notable*, a Syriac apologetic work that traces back to the eighth-century.[389] The Monk invites the Arab to raise any doubt he possesses about Christianity. In response to a question about prayer-direction the Monk says that Paradise is in the east, Christ prayed towards the east and all Churches are built to face that direction. He follows up with a number of proof-texts from the Hebrew Bible to shore up his argument.[390] As in the case of John of Damascus, the author of this text offers a catalogue of reasons to demonstrate that east was the original prayer direction: stretching from when Adam left the Garden through Jesus' own practice. This text emerged from a Christian author, and the "Arab Notable" makes his challenge regarding the *qibla* somewhat innocuously: "Why do you reject all [other] directions and prostrate

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[388] Ibn Rabban, *Religion and Empire*, trans. 158-60, makes this critique; Ibn Zurʿa, (ed. P. Sbath), 22ff, in his argument on *naskh* with the Jews feels the need to argue for the logical possibility that interreligious *naskh* occur at one time, but then never again.

[389] For background on this text see Sidney Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and a Muslim Emir," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3:1 (2000): 29-54; Barbara Roggema, "The Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable" in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History. Volume 1 (600–900)*, ed. D.Thomas and B. Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 268-273; and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 465-72.

[390] See Barbara Roggema, "A Christian Reading of the Qurʾān: The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā and its Use of Qurʾān and Sīra" in *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. D. Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 65. Another list of reasons for facing east appears in *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 164, pars. 307-8.

in the direction of the east?"[391] However, Muslim authors writing on the subject were not so gentle.

Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī, as mentioned above, saw the choice of east as related to Christian belief in the Son of God's physical birth in that location. The presence of God in a physical space was patently absurd to Abū Muslim, since it rendered the Creator as created.[392] Al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) later argued that the claims of a Christian scholar and his choice of east as a *qibla* came from ignorance, by demonstrating that the place of sunrise was, in fact, not the place of paradise.[393] However, the strongest arguments against the eastern *qibla* involved the claim that Jesus had faced Jerusalem, and that east was an erroneous Christian innovation introduced after Jesus' death.

The eighth-century Muslim historian, Sayf ibn ʿUmar (d. ca. 180/796) suggests that Christian practice differs from the religion of the Torah due to the devious infiltration of Paul, who sought to lead the Christians astray. Paul's surprising conversion to Christianity and his role as a foundational figure of Christian practice had invited Jewish anti-Christian polemic, represented by the *Toledot Yeshuʿ* tradition. These writings are a retelling of Jesus' history that often conclude with a section describing Paul's role as a double-agent sent to ruin Christianity from within by introducing innovations of all kinds. However, the insertion of the change in *qibla* appears to be a uniquely Islamic contribution to the motif.[394]

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[391] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 468.

[392] *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 4, 20 on Q Baqara 2:115. See above n. 371 on *ḥulūl*.

[393] Abū al-Rayḥān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *al-Athār al-Bāqiya*, 249; Eng., 238-39.

[394] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 166 fn. 119, sees a direct quotation from the Toldot Yeshu tradition when Sayf ibn ʿUmar says, "Everything between the bedbug and the elephant is permitted [to eat]" (since all are creatures of God's creation). Interestingly, the same locution appears in al-Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār* I:8, where he describes Paul's place in the foundations of Christianity and abolishing of many laws. On the presence of *Toldot Yeshuʿ* texts in Muslim-Jewish relations see Philip Alexander, "The

In Sayf ibn ʿUmar's telling, Jesus had seven hundred dedicated followers at the time of his death, and Paul feigned conversion to become their leader in order to corrupt their practice and lead them astray.[395] He had the Christians build him a temple that they venerated. He would lock himself inside the temple and emerge on several occasions with a revelation that altered fundamental practices or beliefs. On the first such appearance he changed the *qibla*:

> I have seen a vision that I will present to you. If you think it is correct then adopt [the practice] and if it is mistaken then refute me. They said: Let us hear it! (*hāta*)[396] Have you ever seen cattle out to graze that was not sent from its master? They replied: No. He said: Well I have seen the night and the morning, the sun and the moon and star all come from over there (*hāhunā*) [i.e. the east]. They have been sent from that direction that is the most proper direction (*aḥaqq al-wujūh*) towards which one should pray. They responded: You are correct! And so he turned them away from their *qibla*. Then he locked himself away again for two days[…][397]

Sayf ibn ʿUmar saw in Christian eastward orientation a false change. Insult is added to the injury in that the shrewd double-agent who corrupted the practice was a founding figure of Christian tradition. In this text the change in *qibla* was not a sign of abrogation, but a symbol of the perversion of Christian tradition from Jesus' own practice.

A parallel Christian counter-narrative existed that undermined the Islamic *qibla* in Mecca by appropriating a figure from Islam's foundation story: the Christian Monk Baḥīrā. In early Muslim writings, Baḥīrā acts as an external witness to Muḥammad's legitimacy and carries the weight of doing so as a Christian sage. In many *sīra*

Toledot Yeshu in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Debate," in Toledot Yeshuʿ: *("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited*, eds. P. Schäfer, M. Meerson, and Y. Deutsch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 137-58.

[395] "*fa-labasa libāsahum thumma atbaʿuhum li-yuḍillahum ḥatā intahī ilā askarihim fa-akhadhūhu.*" The narrative appears in Sayf ibn ʿUmar al-Tamīmī, *Kitāb al-Ridda wal-Futūḥ*, ed. Q. Sāmirāʾī (Riyāḍ: Dār Umayya, 1997) 136-39.

[396] On this phrase see W. Wright, *Arabic Grammar* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2005), i:296B.

[397] *Kitāb al-Ridda*, 137. See also the fragment in P.S. van Koningsveld, "The Islamic Image of Paul and the origin of the Gospel of Barnabas," *JSAI* 20 (1996): 222-23.

collections Baḥīrā recognizes a young Muḥammad as the prophet whose coming had

been predicted in the Bible. Christian versions of the story appear in Arabic and Syriac

sources as early as the eighth-century. In these retellings it is not God but Baḥīrā who

imparts Muslim scripture and practice to Muḥammad, in an attempt to bring his Arabian

followers closer to Christianity.   The narrative also served as a handy apologetic to

dispose of Muslim claims to Muḥammad's prophethood based in his illiteracy.[398]

In one particularly lengthy version, Baḥīrā teaches Muḥammad the times of

prayer and their manner, which he instructs should be towards the east:

> [Muḥammad] said to me "Towards what site should I command that they
> turn their faces while they surround the House praying to idols (*wa-humm hawla
> al-Bayt yuṣallūn lil-aṣnām*)?" So I said to him, "Make them pray to the [place of]
> sunrise, since all light shines forth from there, and every luminary and star sets
> forth from there, and the Garden of Eden and the rivers that flow from Paradise
> are under it […] Then he returned to me and mentioned that he commanded them
> to prostrate and pray to the east, but they arose against him and said, "We will not
> follow you, while [you] rebuff the *qibla* that we and our ancestors before us have
> known and we pray to a different one." And they reproached me (*shaʿathū* [sic]
> *ʿalayy*).[399] So I said to him, "Tell them 'God has commanded me that you should
> pray towards Mecca.'" And he prayed with them towards it.[400]

The narrative serves several purposes. In the first place, it demonstrates that the original

and authentic *qibla* is towards the east. It further undercuts the claim that God chose the

Kaʿba in Mecca, and instead the order came from Baḥīrā. Finally, it portrays facing the

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[398] Barbara Roggema, "A Christian Reading of the Qurʾān," 57-73. See also Sidney Griffith, "Muḥammad
and the Monk Baḥīrā: reflection on a Syriac and Arabic text from early Abbasid times," *Oriens Christianus*
79 (1995): 146-74. An edition and German translation of the text under consideration was prepared by
Richard Gottheil, "A Christian Baḥīrā Legend," in *Zeitschrifte für Assyriologie* 13, (1898): 189-242; 14
(1899): 203-68; 15 (1901): 56-102; and 17 (1903): 125-66. The text referenced below appears at Gottheil
(1901) 67-69 and in German translation in (1903) 144-45.

[399] Gottheil's text reads "*wa-shaʿatū*," but this is either a feature of the pronunciation of Middle Arabic (*ta*
seems to be exchanged for *tha* in several places in Gottheil's text), a mistake, a peculiarity in the MS, or an
error in its transcription. The word is most likely a form II imperfect verb with the root *Sh-ʿ-Th*, which
when used with the particle "*ʿalā*" can mean "to reproach or censure;" see E.W. Lane, *An Arabic English
Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), 1558.

[400] Gottheil (1901) 68-69.

Kaʿba as a concession to the needs of the pagan Arab community to which Muḥammad preached, and not a part of genuine monotheistic practice. The significance attributed to the change of *qibla* in Islamic sources is subverted: rather than signifying interreligious *naskh* of biblical religions, it is made to testify to Islam's abandonment of the true *qibla*.

Two centuries later, the eastern *qibla* remained a sign of Christianity's departure from Jesus' practice and beliefs for some Muslim polemicists. The Muʿtazilite doyen ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024-25) dedicated a sizeable portion of his *Tathbīt Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwa* to refuting Christianity. He first criticizes all of the ways in which Christian practices differ from those of Christ: first among them is the *qibla*. He writes, "They turn in their prayer to the east, whereas Christ, up to the time that God took him, always prayed turning to the west, Jerusalem, the direction of David, the prophets, and the Children of Israel."[401] Rather than attribute the changes to a surreptitious founder, however, he sees the adoption of Roman customs over time as the corrupting force.[402] He points out that "the Romans pray towards the rising sun" and that "Constantine made an outward [show] of magnifying Christ and the Cross. Yet he affirmed the Roman religions as they were. Thus, with praying to the east and other things that have been mentioned."[403] He coined a phrase for the phenomenon, "it was the Christians who Romanized, not the Romans who became Christian" (*al-naṣārā tarawwamat wa-lam*

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[401] ʿAbd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamdānī al-Asadābādī, *Tathbīt Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwa*, vol. 1, ed. A.K. ʿUthmān (Beirut: Dār al-ʿArabīya, 1966), 149. The section of this work dedicated to refuting Christianity is the subject of Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*. See also S. Stern, "ʿAbd al-Jabbār's Acount of How Christ's Religion was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs," *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968): 128-85; and Shlomo Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source," 211-86 and "Studies in Christianity and Jedaeo-Christianity based on Arabic Sources," 334-71 in *Collected Works Vol. IV*.

[402] *Tathbīt*,152, "wa-aʿalam an dīn al-masīḥ wa-diyānāt al-rusul lam tataghayyar wa-lam tatabaddal jumlatan wāhidatan. Wa-lākin shayʾan baʿda shayʾ wa-fī kull ʿaṣr wa-fī kull ḥīn ḥāqqa takāmmul taghyīrihā."

[403] *Tathbīt*, 158 and 162, respectively.

tanaṣṣara al-Rawm).[404]

ʿAbd al-Jabbār offers a fascinating and exact account of how the direction of prayer changed from Jerusalem to the east:

> After Jesus, the disciples of Christ were with the Jews and the Israelites. They prayed together in their synagogues and celebrated holidays together, they just disagreed about the nature of Christ. Now the Romans were their rulers, and the Christians would complain to the rulers of Rome about the Jews […] But the Romans would often tell them "there is a treaty between us and the Jews that we not change their religion. However, if you leave their religion and separate from them and *pray towards the east* as we pray, eat what we eat and permit what we permit, then we can strengthen you and help you to gain victory over them. They will have no way against you, but you will become dominant over them.[405]

In what follows, the Romans help the Christian interlocutors to defeat those Christians who refused the change by hunting the latter down and killing many. ʿAbd al-Jabbār knows of some Christian justifications for facing east: that God addressed the prophets from the east and that Christ was crucified in that direction. However, he retorts, "Who knows better which is the right way to act, you or Christ? You know perfectly well that he did not turn to the east in prayer, but you have adopted the religious practices of the Romans and forsaken the religion of Christ."[406] In ʿAbd al-Jabbār's account of Christian origins the change of *qibla* does not signify Christian abrogation of Judaism, but rather testifies to the speciousness of Christian practice. Authentic *naskh* comes by way of revelation from God, not through a choice made for political gain.

Two types of responses to the criticism that the adoption of east was a false change emerge in Christian polemical literature. The first, with which this section opened, claims that east was in fact the original and authentic prayer direction, and hence

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[404] *Tathbīt*, 173.
[405] *Tathbīt*, 152. Emphasis added.
[406] *Tathbīt*, 197.

Jesus and Moses both faced that way. A second response embraces the change but seeks

to justify it. The author of *Kitāb al-Burhān* (*The Book of Demonstration*)—a work

attributed to either the tenth-century Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria, Eutychius (ar. Saʿid

ibn Baṭrīq) or the ninth-century deacon, Peter of Bayt Raʾs (ar. Buṭrus al-Shammās ibn

Nasṭās al-Bayt Raʾsī)—takes the first route. Several paragraphs of this learned

apologetic treatise discuss the subject of the Christian *qibla*. The author claims that the

east was the original *qibla* of Adam:

> For the east is the original *qibla* that God set up for Adam, the Father of
> Humanity, in the Garden, and He graced him with it until he transgressed and was
> exiled from there […] and he prayed to God toward (*mustaqbil*) the Garden,
> where his Lord had made the covenant with him. […] And one who wishes to
> pray to his Lord must orient towards him (*yastaqbiluhu*) with his face. […] and
> turn his back towards the west and his face oriented towards the east. Not in
> order to prostrate towards the Garden which is in the east, and not to the light of
> the luminaries, the sun, the moon, and the stars, which shine forth their light from
> the east. Rather, to the Master of all these things towards his Creator, as David
> said in the Psalms: "Prostrate towards the one who arises to the heaven of heavens
> in the east" (LXX 68:33 MT 68:34). And what testament to the east could be
> more eloquent than this?[407]

Above we saw that John of Damascus and the Monk of Bēt Ḥālē argued that since the

Garden was in the east, it was proper to face that way for prayer. *Kitāb al-Burhān* goes

even further, saying that Adam faced east while he yet inhabited the Garden, and that

facing towards the place where God struck a covenant with Adam is like the act of facing

God. Moses cannot have commanded otherwise, since David, too, attests to the

obligation of prostrating eastward. If east is and ever was the correct direction for prayer,

then it cannot be a corruption of Jesus' practice.

The depiction of an unchanging *qibla* is reminiscent of the arguments our three

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[407] *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 162-3. On the debate about the authorship of the work and other references see
Christian-Muslim Relations (2009), 902-906.

Jewish authors made regarding their own continuous orientation towards God's divine presence. The author of *Kitāb al-Burhān* certainly believes that "the new covenant came to break the old covenant of the Law of the Torah (*naqaḍa ʿahd nāmūs al-Tawrāt al-ʿatīq*)," and he even mentions that it was in Jerusalem, "the center of all creation and its navel," that God chose to break his covenant with the Jews via Jesus' crucifixion.[408] Given his views on the ancientness of the east as *qibla* it is unsurprising that he does not mention a Jerusalem *qibla*. However, his identification of Jerusalem as a witness to Jesus' ushering in the new covenant may carry a subtle polemic against the Jews and their *qibla*.

The second type of response to the claims that Christians changed their *qibla* argues that the change was not erroneous, but justified. This was the approach of the ninth-century Jacobite theologian and apologist, Abū Rāʾiṭa al-Tikrītī. Little is known about his life, but he was a prolific apologist for Christianity against Muslim polemics. He was closely engaged with his intellectual milieu, and his argument that the three persons of the Trinity are attributes of God (*ṣifāt*) is reminiscent of Islamic conceptions of the deity.[409] Abū Rāʾiṭa is aware of the Muslim challenge that Christians changed their *qibla* from Jerusalem to the east. He agrees that all the prophets prayed towards Jerusalem, but it was because "God would appear in His incarnation, become human, and would carry the saving cross" at that site. Yet the Christians commenced facing east because it was the site of the beginning of creation, the Garden, as well as its end, when

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[408] *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 177-80. Quote appears at 180.
[409] On the attributes of God see Sandra Toenis Keating, "An Early List of the Ṣifāt Allāh in Abū Rāʾiṭa al-Takrītī's "First Risāla 'On the Holy Trinity'," *JSAI* 36 (2009): 339-55. Keating, *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Rāʾiṭah* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 32-65, provides a thorough attempt at reconstructing what can be known of Abū Rāʾiṭa's life based on his writing and the few references to him in external sources. She has prepared excellent Arabic editions and translations of several of his works. See also *Christian-Muslim Relations* (2009), 568-80.

Jesus would return from there.[410] He does not appear to address the topic of *naskh* and the change directly. However, in the paragraphs that follow, he launches an extended consideration of laws of the Torah that Christ abolished, proofs of the Christ's new covenant (e.g. Jeremiah 31:31 and Ez 16:60), and the claim that "The New Covenant […] is the pure Gospel, whose laws abrogate the Torah laws" (*al-nāsikh bi-sharāʾiʿhi sharāʾiʿ al-tawrīya*).[411] It is clear that for Abū Rāʾiṭa the substitution of *qibla*s was both justified and a sign of the new dispensation, shepherded by the coming of Christ.

Interestingly, the Patriarch Timothy I offers responses of both types in his famous dialogue with al-Mahdī.[412] Timothy, well aware of Muslim claims to interreligious *naskh*, declares that if the Gospels had ever mentioned Muḥammad "I would have left the Gospel for the Qurʾān, as I have left the Torah and the Prophets for the Gospel." Furthermore, Muḥammad would have had to come with miracles like those that Jesus performed in order to abrogate the Gospel's message. But, according to Timothy, there are no such signs of the veracity of Muḥammad's abrogation.[413] Al-Mahdī also asks Timothy the question we have been discussing: "Where did Jesus Christ worship and pray in the years that elapsed between His birth and His ascension to Heaven? Was it not in the house of holiness and in Jerusalem? […] Why then do you worship God and pray

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[410] Ed. Graf (1951), 155. Keating, *Christian Apologies,* 134-37. See also Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian,* 221 fn. 127. Abū Raʾiṭā also refers to the cross as a *qibla* in his defense against the claim that veneration of the image constitutes idolatrous worship. See Keating, *Christian Apologies*, 130-35.

[411] Keating, *Christian Apologies*, 136-43.

[412] There are several versions, Arabic and Syriac. I follow the Syriac here in "Timothy's Apology for Christianity," in *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshuni* II, trans. A. Mingana (Cambridge, 1928), 1-162. For brief background on Timothy and the provenance of the exchange see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 472-75. For an analysis of Timothy's approach to Muḥammad see Samir K. Samir, "The Prophet Muḥammad as Seen by Timothy I and Other Arab Christian Authors" in *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. D. Thomas (Leiden: Brill 2001), 75-106. For an edition, translation and analysis of the Arabic text see Clint Hackenburg, "An Arabic-to-English Translation of the Religious Debate between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Mahdī" (Masters Thesis, Ohio State University, 2009).

[413] Mingana, 36-38; quotation appears at 36. See discussion on the annulment of circumcision as a sign of abrogation at 27-28.

in the direction of the east?"[414] Timothy offers responses of both types, defending the

change as well as asserting the biblical authenticity of the eastern *qibla*.

Timothy first claims that paradise is in the east, and the image of the Kingdom of

Heaven; therefore, it is right to worship in that direction. Then, he acknowledges that the

qibla changed in the lifetime of Jesus:

> There is also another reason for our conduct: Jesus Christ walked in the flesh
> thirty-three years on the earth, O King. In the thirtieth year he repaid to God all
> the debt that human kind and angels owed to Him. […] After having then paid to
> God the debt of all the creatures and abrogated, annulled, and torn the contract
> containing it, He went to the Jordan, to John the Baptist, and was baptized by him
> […] From the day of His baptism to that of His ascension to heaven there are
> three years, and it is in these three years that He has taught us all the economy of
> the Christian religion: baptism, laws, ordinances, prayers, *worship in the direction
> of the east*, and the sacrifice that we offer. All these things He practiced in His
> person and taught us to practice ourselves.[415]

In this statement, the change to face east constitutes a part of the abrogation of the

previous dispensation explicitly. Facing Jerusalem represented a stage in the practice of

the law, but for Timothy turning eastward is also a return to the original *qibla*. As he

goes on to say,

> the worship of God started at the beginning in the east; it is indeed in that
> direction that Adam and his children worshipped God, because Paradise is in the
> direction of the east. Moreover, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses used to
> worship God and to pray while turning towards the east and Paradise, […] It is for
> this reason that Jesus Christ taught His disciples to worship God and pray towards
> the east. Because Adam transgressed the commandment of God […] he was
> thrown on this accursed earth. Having been thrown on this accursed earth, he
> turned his face away from God, and his children worshipped demons, stars, sun,
> moon and graven and molten images. The Word of God came then to the children
> of men in a human body, and in His person paid to God the debt that they were
> owing Him. To remind them, however, of the place from which their father was

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[414] Mingana, 29.

[415] Mingana, 29-30. Emphasis added.

driven because of his transgression of the commandment, He made them turn their faces towards Paradise in their worship and prayer, because it is in it that God was first worshipped. [...] This is also the reason why the angel Gabriel, when announcing to Mary the conception of Jesus Christ, appeared to her from the direction of the east as it is written in your book. (i.e. Q Maryam 19:16)[416]

east was Adam's original direction of prayer as well as that of the forefathers of the Hebrew Bible. The turn away represented the debt that humanity owed to God for their sinfulness. When Jesus repaid that debt, he commanded a return to the original direction. The *qibla* became an emblem of the renewal and redemption of humanity that only occurred through the person of Jesus Christ.

For their part, Christians also took the offensive in interreligious conversations about the *qibla*, seeking to undermine the "false" orientation practices of others. They adopted various strategies that demonstrate creativity in engaging the subject, without suggesting a particular trend of argumentation. Above, for example, we saw the ways in which Christians used the foundation-narrative of Baḥīrā to portray the choice to face the Kaʿba as a concession to idolaters. In a more philosophical critique, *Kitāb al-Burhān*'s author concludes his discussion of the Christian *qibla* by censuring the practices of others around him:

> And to seal [this discussion] (*wa-khātim dhālika*) regarding the *qibla* of the east is that it is a non-delineated (*lā tuḥadd*) *qibla*, which needs no alterations when he winds up [facing] it (*untuhiya ilayhā*). For any *qibla* that is limited to a particular spot changes and is [therefore] deficient (*tantaqiṣ*) when he ultimately [faces] it. And the east, as a *qibla*, is not limited [in this way] because the goal (*ghāya*) of one who prays facing it is not towards some created thing on the earth or in the sky. But rather as David the Prophet said: 'Towards the Lord, the Creator, who sits in the heaven of heavens in the east" (Psalms 68:34). The east, which bounds all things, but is bound by no thing.[417]

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[416] Mingana, 30.
[417] *Kitāb al-Burhān*, 165.

Interestingly, *Kitāb al-Burhān*'s argument could easily rebut the critique of his

contemporary, Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī, even as it launches its own assault on the Jewish

and Muslim *qibla*s. Abū Muslim found flaws in the Jewish and Christian *qibla*s because

they were identified with the presence of God, which effectively called God a created

thing and not the Creator. Similarly, *Kitāb al-Burhān* criticizes those who face towards a

site on earth as deficient, since they pray towards something bounded in space, a thing

created (and not the Creator). He clarifies that when Christians face east they do not face

any earthly point, but towards God in a non-delineated place, "in the heaven of heavens

to the east." Above we demonstrated that the presence of God's Glory on earth was

essential to our Jewish authors' understandings of the *qibla* and appeared to be the

subject of Abū Muslim's criticism. *Kitāb al-Burhān* does not address the idea of God's

presence in Mary's womb in the east. Nevertheless, the connection of the Divine

presence with terrestrial sites animates his approach. Our authors from all three religions

are concerned not only with the reason *why* one faces in a direction, but also *what* is

present in that location.

The subject of what was present at the Kaʿba inspired the criticism of the author

of the Correspondence between Pope Leo III and the Caliph ʿUmar II (b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz).

While the text appears in various forms and languages, the ones under consideration

appear to date at least as far back as the ninth-century.[418] This famous exchange of letters

portrays a discussion between the two religious leaders on various theological topics (e.g.

the nature of Jesus) and ritual practices (e.g. circumcision) that divided the two religions.

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[418] Gaudeul, "ʿUmar's Letter Rediscovered," 109-57; Jeffrey,"Ghevond's Text," 269-332. For general background and partial translation of the text see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 490-501. For background as well as lists of MSS, editions and studies see *Christian-Muslim Relations* (2009), 381-85.

In the course of their discussion Leo criticizes the Muslim choice of the Kaʿba as a *qibla*:

> Then you reproach us for not turning, when we pray, to the region indicated by "the Code," (i.e. the Qurʾān) […] This objection is completely vain and full of folly. The region to which the Prophets turned when they made their prayers is not known. It is you alone who are carried away to venerate the pagan altar of sacrifice that you call the House of Abraham. Holy Scripture tells us nothing about Abraham having gone to the place, which afterwards, according to the order of Muhammad, became the centre of adoration of your co-religionists.[419]

And later, in defending the veneration of the cross, Leo turns to criticize the Kaʿba as an object of veneration, saying:

> But you, do you feel no shame to have venerated that House that is called the Kaʿba, the dwelling of Abraham, which as a matter of fact Abraham never saw nor so much as dreamed of, in its diabolical arid desert? This House was existing long before Muhammad, and was the object of a cult among your fellow citizens, while Muhammad, far from abolishing it, called it the dwelling of Abraham.[420]

Here, as with the "Legend of Baḥīrā," the Christian author undermines those who would place the origins of the Kaʿba in Abrahamic worship and connects it squarely with pagan devotion. The site towards which Muslims pray is not only inauthentically biblical, but praying in that direction also cosntitutes idol worship. The criticism may have originated in the work of John of Damascus, who conveys a similar idea:

> They misrepresent us as idolaters because we prostrate ourselves before the cross, which they loath. And we say to them: "How then do you rub yourselves on a stone at your Kaʿba and hail the stone with fond kisses?" […] This, then, which they call "stone," is the head of Aphrodite, whom they used to worship[...][421]

Traditional Islamic sources address, extensively, the presence of idols and other objects

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[419] Jeffrey, "Ghevond's Text," 310

[420] Jeffrey, "Ghevond's Text," 322-23. A defense of the choice not to face east appears in a text that carries ʿUmar's response, and identified as part of the "original" exchange text studied by Gaudeal, "ʿUmar's Letter Rediscovered," 153. In it, ʿUmar raises the critique that Jesus faced Jerusalem, and so the choice of east is also a departure from biblical practice.

[421] *The Heresies*, 101; translation appears in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 486-87. Another translation, with refutation of the Abrahamic connection to the Kaʿba appears in trans. F.H. Chase *Writings*, 156-57.

of veneration in the Kaʿba; although they usually portray an iconoclastic cleansing of the Kaʿba in the time of Muḥammad. Medieval Jews, however, also pointed to pagan remnants of the pre-Islamic cult of Mecca in their polemics against Islam.

In the twelfth-century, Jewish luminaries such as Judah HaLevi (d. 535/1141), and Maimonides (d. 600/1204), were aware of the pagan origins of the rituals surrounding the Kaʿba, but claimed that Muslims had extinguished any idolatrous vestiges.[422] While Maimonides found Muslim rites of the *ḥajj* to be monotheistic practices with a pagan origin, HaLevi felt that the exaltation of the Kaʿba's Black Stone fit a biblical description of pagan worship, "thou will serve there other gods of wood and stone" (Deut. 28:36). In the tenth-century, however, Rabbanite and Karaite authors alike regularly found reference to idols in the Kaʿba in the prophetic visions of Daniel. For example, the Karaite scholar Daniel al-Qumisī (d. 334/946) believed that the end of Daniel 11 described Muḥammad and Islam. While "he shall not regard the gods of his fathers" (Daniel 11:37) refers to Muḥammad's monotheism, the next verse says, "but he shall honor the god of the stronghold in its place (*vele-elōhah maʿūzzīm ʿal kōnō*), a god that his fathers knew not" (v. 38). For al-Qumisī the "god of the strongholds" refers to

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[422] *Teshubot ha-Rambam,* vol. 2, ed. J. Blau and A. Freiman (Jerusalem: Meqīṣē Nirdamīm, 1961), 725-77 (Judeo-Arabic); Juhad HaLevi, *Kitāb al-Radd wa-'l-Dalīl fī 'l-Dīn al-Dhalīl : (al-Kitāb al Khazarī)*, ed. D.H. Baneth, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), IV.11, 162. Maimonides and Halevi connect the *qibla* with the Divine Presence in ways that resemble our tenth-century Jewish authors. Their writing is beyond the historical scope of this chapter, but I hope to take up their approaches to the *qibla* in future research. See HaLevi, *Kitāb al-Radd*, I.96-97, II.23, IV.3,8-13 and Maimonides, *Dalālat al-Ḥāʾirīn* (Guide of the Perplexed), ed. S. Munk (Jerusalem: Azriel, 1928), 107-11 (I:64-66 on the *Shekhina*); 121-22 (III:45 on the *qibla*); *Mishneh Torah* (Code of Jewish Law), 15 vols., ed. Sh. Frankel (Jerusalem: Hoṣaʾat Shabse Frankel, 1975-2007), "Laws of the Foundations of the Torah" ch. 9 (*naskh*); "Laws of Prayer" ch. 4, 5:6, 11:2 (*qibla* and *Shekhina*); *Mishnah ʿim Perush Rabbenu Moshe b. Maimon* (Commentary on the Mishnah), ed. and trans. Y. Qāfiḥ, 6 vols (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1964-69), *mBerakhot* 4:2, *mZevaḥīm* 14:8, intro to *mSanhedrin* ch. 10 ("9th principle of faith") *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, #216; *Igeret Teman* (Epistle to Yemen) ed. A. Halkin and trans. B. Cohen (New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research 1952), where abrogation is treated in a number of places. See another discussion of the matter by Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 1167) in his commentary on Daniel 11:30 in *Miqraʾot Gedolot: Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah* (Lublin: Otzer HaSefarim, n.d.), 105-6.

the pre-Islamic Arabian worship of al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā, "since [Muḥammad] left [the

gods] there unharmed, as it is said that the people of the environs of Mecca came to him

and made a covenant with him that he should not destroy the local god of strongholds but

should leave him in his place."[423] For his part, Saʿadya Gaon, a Rabbanite, reads the

verses similarly. The passage refers to idolatrous worship, some of which "Edom's

Associate [i.e. Ishmaelites] has cast off in the place that [the idols] are found, even

though they have not moved them from there. And with all of this, they honor that holy

site and venerate it and have not neglected it."[424] Neither of these tenth-century Jewish

authors directly connects idols in the Kaʿba to polemics about the *qibla*, but it is easy to

imagine that the perceived pagan remnants tainted all rituals associated with that site.

Yefet b. ʿAlī, however, is explicit regarding the *qibla*.

Like Saʿadya and al-Qumisī, Yefet also asserts that the end of Daniel 11 probably

refers to Muḥammad and the Arab kingdom. He acknowledges the opinion that "the God

of the strongholds" may refer to al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā, in that "they have an object of

worship and a religion that he sees fit to honor and not to eliminate."[425] However, on the

previous verse Yefet connects an idol in the Kaʿba with the change of *qibla*:

> "And he shall not regard the gods of his fathers" - if this refers to *Pasūl*

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[423] The text and English translation appears in Haggai Ben Shammai, "Fragments of Daniel al-Qumisī's Commentary on the Book of Daniel as a Historical Source" *Henoch* 13 (1991): 227 (Heb), 280-81 (Eng). A translation also appears in Leon Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 40.

[424] Saʿadya, *Commentary on Daniel*, ed. and trans. Y. Qāfiḥ (Jerusalem: Ha-Vaʿad le-Hoṣaʾat Sifrei Rasag, 1981), 207. Edom's associate is one of Saʿadya's terms for the Kingdom of Ishmael, i.e. Muslims. In *Beliefs and Opinions*, VII:2; Qāfiḥ 222-23; Landauer 215-16; Rosenblatt 270-71, Saʿadya is explicit in stating that these verses refer to "the Arab Kingdom" (*mamlakat al-ʿarab*). For many chronologically later references to the idea of the idolatrous worship at the Kaʿba in Jewish and Christian polemics see Bernard Septimus, "Petrus Alfonsi on the Cult at Mecca," *Speculum* 56:3 (1981): 517-33.

[425] English translations of this work are my own based on Yefet b. ʿAlī, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (ed. and trans. D.S. Margoliouth) The quotation appears at 131 (Arab), 70 (Eng). Ben-Shammai, "Fragments," 269, felt that Yefet was dependent on al-Qumisī for his comments. See also Ben Shammai's discussion of idols in the Kaʿba in "The Attitude of some Early Karaites Towards Islam," in ed. I. Twersky, *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 12-16.

[i.e. Muḥammad] then it intends the ways of his ancestors who used to worship idols. […] and His saying "and neither the desire of women" – intends that he abolished (*abṭala*) Jerusalem (*Bayt al-Maqdis*) as the *qibla*, which people and nations exalt (*tuʿaẓẓimuhā al-nās wal-umam*). Rather, he turns away from it (*yastadbiruhā*) and faces the site to which they make pilgrimage […] and very likely "the desire of women" also indicates that their object of worship is a male figure, because men are the desire of women for pleasure (*shahwat al-nisāʾ al-rijāl lil-mutʿa*), and this figure is in their *qibla*.[426]

Depicting veneration of the Kaʿba as pagan worship was common among Jews and Christians in their polemic with Islam. For Yefet b. ʿAlī, as in the letter of Leo, the characterization served to invalidate Muslim practice of facing towards that site as a *qibla*. If Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī had condemned Jews and Christians, who worshipped towards the circumscribed presence of God in the world, then the claim that Muslims oriented towards pagan icons could serve as a fitting rejoinder.

In Medieval conversations about *naskh* Christians found themselves in a difficult position. They asserted that Christianity had superseded Judaism, and hence a change in the Divine Will was clearly possible. However, they defended against the claim that they too could be replaced by Islam. Furthermore, Muslim polemicists found many practices of Christianity to be incongruous with those of the biblical religion that Muḥammad adopted and/or changed. The eastward *qibla* came to the fore as a symbol in both of these debates. Some Christians understood the change in *qibla* from Jerusalem to the east as a sign of the new dispensation that they came to supersede, as was the case for the Patriarch Timothy. Others sought to ground the eastward *qibla* in the practices of biblical figures, as did the author of *Kitāb al-Burhān*, or in biblical verses, as did so many

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[426] *Commentary on Daniel*, 131 (Arab), 70 (Eng.).

Christian authors. Attempts to undermine the *qibla*-practices of the other religion were common in early Muslim-Christian polemical encounters.

It is curious that we do not find much reference to the *qibla* in Jewish-Christian polemical writing from this context, and this brings the discussion back to our Jewish authors. It is clear that the *qibla* and *naskh* were closely related in both Christian and Muslim religious discourse in the tenth century. It is easy to imagine either community challenging the Jews on their own *qibla* in Jerusalem as a change from some other location, and that Jews must, therefore, believe in *naskh*. So with whom did our Jewish authors polemicize?

Revisiting Three Jewish Authors on the *qibla*

It is difficult to trace the origins of Jewish usage of the word *qibla*, but by the time of our authors (c. 10th c.) it was a commonplace in Judeo-Arabic to refer to the direction or site towards which Jewish prayer was directed.[427] Rabbanite and Karaite Jews alike located the *qibla* at the site of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Although al-Qirqisānī was aware of a variety of orientational practices among small Jewish sects, our authors all adopted Jerusalem as their *qibla*. Not only that, but they drew from many of the same verses to substantiate the custom, including Daniel 6:11, Psalms 99:5, Ezekiel 8:16 and others. Perhaps of greatest interest is the ways in which our Karaite authors utilize a

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[427] As with Arabic geographic writing, it could also refer to the cardinal direction, South. This usage likely developed in ʿAbbāsid times, when geographic discourse emerged, since the Islamic *qibla* would have been south of the centers in Baghdād, and maps from this period place South at the top. On Saʿadya's use of the term *qibla* as a translation of the Hebrew "*negba*" ("South") see *Commentary on Genesis*, ed. and trans. M. Zucker (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1984), on vv. 12:9; 13:1,3; 20:1; 24:62. Yefet does so, as well; see his *Commentary on the Book of Joshua*, ed. J. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2014), on vv. 18:5, 14, 16. For many later references to the term in Judaeo-Arabic see Shimon Shtober, "The Qibla between Islam and Judaism: From Polemics to Reception and Assimilation," in *Heritage and Innovation in Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Culture: Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, eds. J. Blau and D. Doron (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), 227-242. (Heb)

common Rabbinic interpretation of I Kings 8 to ground the practice.[428]

The Rabbinic reading used verses from Solomon's dedicatory prayer for the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to create the obligation for prayer direction: one outside the land of Israel faces the land, one in the land faces Jerusalem, one in Jerusalem faces the Temple and one in the Temple faces the Holy of Holies. It is unsurprising that Rabbanites such as Saʿadya Gaon would adopt the rabbinic formula. However, Yefet, in his commentary on I Kings 8, deploys a similar formulation of concentric circles, and his son, Levi b. Yefet, codifies the interpretation in his "Treatise on Prayer." Likewise, al-Qirqisānī uses the passage from I Kings 8 as his basis for facing towards the site of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.[429] The consistency across sectarian lines may indicate Karaite adoption of a Rabbinic-cum-Rabbanite biblical reading of I Kings 8, or it may be that the interpretation preceded both streams of thinking. It is also possible that a shared means of grounding the Jewish *qibla* emerged by necessity to confront the orientational practices of other communities in Late Antiquity and into the early Islamic period. The commonality of approach, as we saw, extended to their articulations of the minute detail of facing towards God's presence in the Tabernacle even before the Holy Temple was built in Jerusalem.

The extant Islamic and Christian sources do not address the issue that animated our Jewish authors. They do not make the challenge to which the Jewish authors all appear to be responding: "You Jews claim that *naskh* cannot occur and that your practices are authentic and unchanging. You see our facing a direction other than Jerusalem as an

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[428] e.g. *tBerakhot* 3:14-16; *bBerakhot* 30a; *yBerakhot* 4:4-5/8b-c; *Pesikta Rabbati* 33; *Ginzei Shechter* 1:99.
[429] Saʿadya's commentary on I Kings is not extant, but reference to the relevant verses appear in his *Commentary on Daniel*, 6:11, (p. 115). Yefet, *Commentary on Kings*, BL MS Or. 2500, 66v ln 6-67r ln 2; Levi b. Yefet's "Treatise on Prayer" is in St. Petersburg RNL Evr-Arab. 1:930 and 1:928. The interpretation of I Kings 8 appears in the section "fī al-qibla" at 23r and 144r respectively along with many other verses used by our authors including Psalms 99:9 and 132:7, Daniel 6:11, and Ezekiel 8:16. I am grateful to Professor Daniel Frank for the references to both Levi and Yefet and for his transcription of Levi's treatise. Al-Qirqisānī's codification of the teaching appears at *Kitāb al-Anwār* VI:18:2.

unsanctioned change. But you, too, have changed your *qibla*—it was not towards

Jerusalem before the Temple was built and then you adopted Jerusalem. Hence you must

admit of the validity of changing the *qibla* and the possibility of interreligious *naskh*."

One might be tempted to identify the intended interlocutors as Muslims simply based on

the prominence of the *qibla*-narrative in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* literature as well as the

rise of legal and theological writings that address *naskh* explicitly in our authors' context.

However, as we saw, contemporary Christian discourse also regularly adopted *qibla*-

rhetoric as a point of interreligious polemic. Ultimately, I believe that absent an explicit

source, there is no reason to identify a single community as the target of this argument.

Changes in the *qibla* were symbolically important to all three faiths, and Jews defending

against the claim that they changed their *qibla* may very well have had Christians as well

as Muslims in mind. In what follows, internal evidence from the writings of these

authors will bear this theory out. The authors will be treated in the reverse order that they

appeared in the opening of this chapter: Yefet, al-Qirqisānī and then Saʿadya.

Yefet's biblical commentary often serves as a venue for polemic with Islam, and

interreligious *naskh* is by no means absent from the discussion.[430] Yefet also considers

the change in *qibla* to be a point of Muslim-Jewish argument. As we saw above, in his

Commentary on of Daniel, Yefet wrote that Daniel 11:37 refers to Muḥammad and to

"Jerusalem […] arranging that it should no longer be the *qibla*, turning his back to it, and

faces the site to which they make pilgrimage." Likewise, in his comments on Daniel

7:24-25 Yefet knows that Muḥammad's change in *qibla* is a symbol for abolishing

Jewish practice. The "final king" described there is the one who believes that he has

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[430] See many references to Yefet's polemics in Daniel Frank, "Chapter 6: A Prophet Like Moses: Exegesis as Religious Polemic," in his *Search Scripture Well: Karaite Exegetes and the Origins of Jewish Bible Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 204-47 and in Ben-Shammai "Attitudes."

ascended to heaven (i.e. the *miʿrāj*), brings the Jews low, forcing them to wear special

garments (*ghiyār*), demanding that they not respond when reviled, and other strictures we

know to have been placed upon Dhimmis in some places. This king "thinks to change

the seasons and religious practice (*zimnin ve-dat*)," which Yefet says refers to the

observance of Sabbath and holidays as well as the *qibla*.[431] Furthermore, his remarks in

the Genesis passage cited in the beginning of this chapter are directed to one who

believes that God cannot have two *qibla*s in the world (*lā yajūz an yakūn fī al-ʿālam li-

Llāhi qiblatayn*). This sounds like an echo of the *ḥadīth* found in the collections of al-

Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Ḥanbal, and others "*lā taṣluḥu qiblatāni fī arḍin wāḥidatin*"–

"two qiblas in one land is no good."[432] However, Yefet is also aware of Christian *qibla*

practices and includes Christians in his polemics on *naskh*.

Elsewhere in his *Commentary on Daniel* Yefet knows about Muslim-Christian

debates about the *qibla*. Daniel 2:43 talks about iron mixing with clay, which may

mingle, but will not cleave together.   Yefet says this refers to Christians and Muslims

who mingle, because they do not mind intermarrying with one another. However, they

cannot cleave together since they disagree about fundamentals of religion (*aṣl al-dīn*)

such as the nature of Jesus and the *qibla*.[433] Likewise, in Proverbs 14:34, Yefet sees the

qibla as part of what distinguishes the righteousness of Israel from the sinfulness of both

Ishmael and Edom (Muslims and Christians). They believe that their practices—such as

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[431] Yefet, *Commentary on Daniel*, 79 (Arab), 37-38 (Eng).

[432] *Jamiʿ Al-Tirmidhī* (2:92, "Zakat"), #633, includes a second half to the report "*wa-laysa ʿalā al-muslimīn jizya*." See also *Sunan Abī Dawūd* (3:518, "Kharāj"), #3032**;** *Musnad Aḥmad* (2:269, "Ibn ʿAbbās), #1949; and (2:517, "Ibn ʿAbbās), #2577; interestingly #2576 replaces "*arḍin*" with "*miṣrin wāḥidin*." See also, Taqīʾ al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Fatāwā al-Subkī* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1990), vol. 2, 382-83, where the view of Ibn Jarīr (al-Ṭabarī) is recorded, in which this *ḥadīth* was used to forward the notion that Muslims should not live in the same cities as Jews and Christians. Al-Subkī says that it only applies in the Arabian Penninsula; see discussion of the matter in Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion*, 92-93.

[433] Yefet, *Commentary on Daniel*, 30 (Arab), 14 (Eng). See also 74 (Arab), 35 (Eng) on Daniel 7:11, where Yefet sees Daniel prophesying about the final king's destruction of churches and the *qibla*.

facing the *qibla*—are justified by revelation, but this is manifest error.[434] Yefet also sees

the intermingling of Christians and Muslims in Daniel 11:27, which mentions two kings

who speak lies at one table.   These two groups come together on many things, such as

sharing food and the idea that Judaism has been superseded:

> They all agree that the Torah has been abrogated and that another
> revelation has come down afterwards (*al-tawrā qad nusikhat wa-anna sharʿ*
> *ākhar warada baʿdahu*) and that it is a religion that will not be abrogated by
> another one. And when Islam arose they said of the Torah as the Christians had,
> and that the book of their master [i.e. Muḥammad] had abrogated the Christian
> religion.[435]

Yefet writes explicitly about Christian and Muslim belief in the supersession of the

Torah. Likewise, he is aware of the divergent *qibla*s of these communities. His writings

often invoke the *qibla* as a marker of communal identity, and his comments on Genesis

28 do not name either Christianity or Islam. It seems quite likely that he has both

communities in mind when he defends the Jewish *qibla* as unchanging.

Al-Qirqisānī also gives us reason to doubt that he has only a single opponent in

mind when he locates the *qibla* wherever the Divine Presence rests. His polemics with

Christianity and Islam appear throughout *Kitāb al-Anwār* and he is well aware of their

adherence to interreligious *naskh* and the replacement or abandonment of Jewish

practices.[436] However, even within his writing on the *qibla* one sees reference to both

Christian and Muslim interlocutors. Al-Qirqisānī mentions the Christian practice of

facing east explicitly. He cites and refutes the verse adduced by his Christian

interlocutors from Ezekiel "the Glory (*kavod*) of the God of Israel came by way of the

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[434] *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet Ben ʿEli on the Book of Proverbs*, ed. Ilana Sasson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 306.

[435] Yefet, *Comm on Daniel*, 125 (Arab), 65-66 (Eng.).

[436] See *Kitāb al-Anwār* I:8 and III:15-16. A Translation of the former section appears in Leon Nemoy, "Al-Qirqisānī's Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity," *HUCA* 7 (1930): 364-76.

east" (43:2), by saying that the Glory of God, an attribute of the Divine, is ambulatory. It

does not stay stagnant in the east but rather, approached from the east. Thus, one behind

the Glory when it moved would not face east, but west. He likens it to verses that

mention God coming from Mount Paran (Deut. 33:2; Habakuk 3:3).   Many Muslim

polemicists see Mount Paran in the Hebrew Bible as referring to Mecca and annunciating

Muḥammad's prophethood. Medieval Islamicate Jewish exegetes often interpret these

verses in response to Islam.[437] In her broad study of Muslim writers on the Hebrew

Bible, Hava Lazarus-Yafeh cites many Muslim authors on these verses "to the effect that

the Bible foretells the religious history of humanity and the abrogation of Judaism (Sinai)

and Christianity (Seir) by the final and perfect divine revelation of Islam to the son of

Ishmael who dwelled in Paran."[438] Citing these verses is a kind of "dog-whistling" to

those familiar with Muslim-Jewish polemic that although al-Qirqisānī mentions

Christians directly, the target includes Islam.

For his part, Saʿadya never mentions Muslims or Islam in *Beliefs and Opinions*,

and in fact, he mentions several groups of Christians and engages in direct polemic with

them in various sections of the work. Daniel Lasker maintains that Saʿadya's extensive

arguments against *naskh* intend Christians as the primary target. He points to the many

biblical verses quoted and parallel anti-Jewish interpretations that appear in patristic

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[437] See Ibn Rabbān, *Kitāb al-Dīn*, 168-69, trans. in *Religion and Empire*, 119-20; and reference to Ibn Qutayba on the same subject in Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 268. See also Saʿadya, *Beliefs and Opinions* III.8, Qāfiḥ 137-8, Landauer 133-34, Rosenblatt 164-65; and Bernard Septimus, "A Prudent Ambiguity in Saadya Gaon's 'Book of Doctrines and Beliefs'" *HTR* 76:2 (1983), 252-53, who reads these references as proof of Saʿadya's engagement with Islam in his chapters on *naskh*. In his *Commentary on Deuteronomy* 33:2, Yefet also proffers a polemical reading of the verse in response to Christianity on Mt. Seʾir and Islam on Mt. Parān, see Frank, *Search Scripture Well*, 228-230. In his *Epistle to Yemen*, (ed. A. Halkin, trans. B. Cohen), 36-38 and ix in the English translation. Maimonides also offers an alternative interpretation of this verse in response to Muslims who believe it refers to Mecca.
[438] Yafeh *Intertwined Worlds*, 109.

writings.[439] At the end of Saʿadya's eighth essay, "On (Messianic) Redemption" ("*Fī al-*

Furqān"), which is explicitly against Christian beliefs on the subject, he writes, "these

refutations against them are equal to what is against them regarding the abrogation of the

law (*sawiya mā ʿalayhum fī naskh al-sharʿ*).[440] Nevertheless, Saʿadya employs

terminology and examples in the sections on abrogation (including the *qibla* discussion)

that have convinced many scholars that Saʿadya intended Islam as his major opponent.

Among those are John Wansbrough, Andrew Rippin, and Eliezer Schlossberg.[441]

Bernard Septimus has even identified an ambiguous reference in *Beliefs and*

Opinions, which he believes indicates that Islam is a subject of Saʿadya's polemic on

naskh. In the second essay, Saʿadya mentions four groups with whom he engages about

their beliefs in the nature of Jesus as human and/or divine. He claims, "the first three are

quite old, but the fourth has emerged only recently" (*thalātha minhum aqdam wal-arbaʿa*

kharajat qarīban). The first three have various ways of framing the divine nature of the

Messiah,

> But as for the fourth, they assign him the rank of prophet only. They interpret
> "the sonship" that they mention, as we interpret "Israel is my son, my firstborn"
> (Exod. 4:22): it is just honor and esteem (*tashrīf wa-tafḍīl faqaṭ*). It is just as
> those other-than-us (*ghayrunā*) interpret "Abraham is the friend of God" (*Ibrāhīm*
> *khalīl allah*). And as for this last group, it is subject to everything I have written
> as a refutation in the third essay regarding abrogation of the law and everything I

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[439] Daniel Lasker, "Against Whom did Saadia Polemicize Concerning Abrogation of the Torah," in *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 32/33 (1994): 5-11. (Heb) and "Saadya Gaon on Christianity and Islam," in *Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society and Identity: Proceedings of an International Conference Held by the Institute of Jewish Studies, University College, London 1992*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 165-78.

[440] *Beliefs and Opinions*, VIII.9, Qāfiḥ 260, Landauer 254, Rosenblatt 322.

[441] See Eliezer Schlossberg "R. Saadia Gaon's Attitude Toward Islam," *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 25 (1990): 21-51 (Heb); Andrew Rippin "Saʿadya Gaon and Genesis 22: Aspects of Jewish-Muslim Interaction and Polemic" in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic traditions: papers presented at the Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies*, eds. W.M. Brinner, S. Ricks (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1989), 33-47; Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 109-114 is aware of the Christian origins of the doctrine of interreligious *naskh* but he still sees "the concept of abrogation [as…] a symbol of confessional authority, and its defence or rejection the primary expression of Judaeo-Muslim Polemic." (p. 110).

mentioned in the eighth essay regarding the coming of the Messiah.[442]

Septimus sees in the description of the fourth group a veiled allusion to Islam. Muslims were well-known for believing in Jesus' prophethood while denying his sonship. The group who is "other-than-us" who refer to Abraham as *khalīl allah* may also be Muslims, as the Qurʾān uses this term explicitly (e.g. Q Baqara 2:125).[443] Finally, it is suggestive that Saʿadya singles out this group to say that the section on *naskh* and messianic redemption applies to it while leaving out the other three Christian groups. It seems quite likely that Saʿadya wanted to avoid naming Islam as a polemical target, while still including them for discerning readers to recognize.

As we saw, the argument for a Jewish *qibla* that is unchanging even as it moves from place to place appears in polemical, exegetical, and legal literature across sectarian boundaries. Several approaches are possible in trying to make sense of this peculiar phenomenon. First, we might consider that it was a common Jewish stance that predates both Rabbanism and Karaism. However, the argument's absence from ancient and late antique Jewish literature makes this option unlikely. It is far more likely that the opinion emerged within the early Islamic context of debate about the *qibla* and its importance as an indication of *naskh*, both legal and interreligious. One can imagine that as Muslims and Christians defended their own adopted *qibla*s it was only natural that Jews would do the same. If Solomon's prayer implemented orientation towards Jerusalem, then Jews would need to explain what direction they had faced beforehand, and why. The shared

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[442] *Beliefs and Opinions* II.7 Qāfiḥ 94-95, Landauer 90-91, Rosenblatt 109. Aruing that this passage refers to Islam is the subject of Septimus, "A Prudent Ambiguity."

[443] Isaiah 41:8, II Chronicles 20:7 and James 2:23 all use similar terms. While Saʿadya does not translate Isaiah 41:8 with the term *khalīl*, he uses the Arabic *muḥabbī* for Hebrew *ōhavī*. It would be worthwhile to check medieval Arabic Bibles and exegetes on these verses to see how Christians translated biblical uses of the phrase.

conception about God's ambulatory *Shekhina* would serve as a handy tool for answering anticipated question about the moving of their *qibla*.[444]

It is also possible, however, that they responded to an actual question raised by a Christian or Muslim interlocutor. There does not appear to be any extant writing (polemical, theological or exegetical) that challenges the Jews regarding a change in their *qibla*. However, absence of evidence is far from evidence of absence. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/ 990) knows of several treatises on *naskh* that have not come down to us— conceivably one of these writings carries an accusation that Jewish practice was abrogated when they adopted Jerusalem as a *qibla*.[445] Even lacking literary witness, we may imagine the challenge emerging from the lively context of oral exchanges between Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the tenth century. Besides an assumed exchange of ideas that occurs when communities live and function side-by-side, we know of many formal encounters between individual scholars and in the interconfessional salons (*majlis*, pl. *majālis)* in the courts of rulers.

In a now oft-cited account of the interreligious convocations, al-Ḥumaydī (d. 488/ 1095) shared a report about the conservative Andalusian jurist, Abū ʿUmar (Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Saʿdī), who traveled to Baghdād in the latter half of the tenth century. Abū ʿUmar was appalled that at the *majālis* sessions in that city Muslims, Jews, Christians, and "unbelievers of all kinds" gathered to discuss theological matters on purely rational grounds, eschewing the Qurʾān or Sunna as admissible evidence.

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[444] In her discussion of Yefet's *Commentary on Proverbs*, 113, Ilana Sasson notes that in polemics against non-Jews the Rabbanite-Karaite debates are muted, and "Yefet projects the sense that he belongs to and represents in his writings the entire Jewish people not one sect or another."

[445] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 1:516, 566, 595, knows of polemical works by al-Aṣamm (d. ca. 815), Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir (d. 825) and Abū al-Hudhayl (d. ca. 841) all with the title "*Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-Yahūd*." Abū Muslim was a contemporary of Saʿadya's and as mentioned, he was aware of Jews facing God's presence, his *Nāsikh wal-Mansūkh* has not come down to us, but it also may be a source to which the Jews responded.

Members of each community gathered together, and all paid respect to each religion's

representative. Abū ʿUmar could stomach no more than two of these gatherings, but his

report attests to their regularity and their rules.[446] We also know that Jews participated in

majālis sessions in the Fāṭimid realm, such as in the court of the *wazīr*, Yaʿqūb ibn Killis

(d. 380/ 991)—a Muslim convert from Judaism—where Jewish prayers were one subject

of criticism.[447] There are also explicit reports that *naskh* was a topic of interreligious

debate, as in a discussion between the Muʿtazilite theologian, Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d.

319/ 931) and a Jew in the *majlis* of Abū Yaḥyā al-Munājjim, reported by Ibn al-

Murtaḍā.[448] Christians were also regularly present in the gatherings, and we can imagine

a context in which all three groups responded to the same questions and challenges.[449] In

addition, Jews were often portrayed as interlocutors in polemical works on *naskh*, as was

the case for the Muslim Muʿtazilite Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām's discussion with the Jew Yassā

b. Ṣāliḥ and for that of Christian polemicist ʿIsā Ibn Zurʿa with the Jew Bishr b.

Finḥās.[450] These literary depictions may reflect similar one-on-one encounters outside of

the *majlis* setting. Jewish works on *naskh* were likely composed exactly for the purpose

of engaging more effectively in such debates: for example, Samuel b. Ḥofnī (d. 403/

1013) writes that he composed his *Kitāb Naskh al-Sharʿ* "to be a weapon in the hands of

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[446] Abū ʿAbdallah Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr al-Ḥumaydī, *Jadhwat al-Muqtabis fī Taʾrīkh ʿUlamāʾ al-Andalus*, ed. I. al-Ibyārī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīya, 1983), 175-76.

[447] Mark R. Cohen and Sasson Somekh, "In the Court of Yaʿqūb Ibn Killis: A Fragment from the Cairo Genizah," *JQR* 80 (1990): 283–314; and by the same authors, "Interreligious *Majālis* in Early Fāṭimid Egypt" in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, ed. by H. Lazarus-Yafeh, M.R. Cohen, S. Somekh and S. Griffith (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999), 128-36.

[448] Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazila*, ed. S. Diwald-Wilzer (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1961), 88-89.

[449] On Christians in *majālis* see Sidney Griffith "The Monk in the Emir's *majlis*" in *The Majlis*, 13-65

[450] Ibn Zurʿā also had a relationship with a Jewish friend (*kāna fī al-yahūd rajul min al-mutakallimin lī ṣadīq*) with whom he discussed revelation, see Griffith, "The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*," 47.

our compatriots who are fighting with the nations."[451] Furthermore, each of our three

Jewish authors (Saʿadya, Yefet and al-Qirqisānī) appears to be aware of or to have

participated in such direct discussions.

Yefet, operated in a context of Ismāʿīlī propaganda and missionary work in which

the *majlis al-naẓar* presented an opportunity to win converts.[452] In his commentary on

Daniel, Yefet projects the *majālis* back in time onto the court of King Nebuchadnezzar.

On verse 1:20 ("In all matters of wisdom that the King asked them about he found

[Daniel, Ḥananya Mishaʾel and ʿAzarya] to be ten times better than all the magicians and

enchanters in his kingdom.") he imagines an interreligious gathering in which the king

asked each participant questions about theology in an even-handed disputation. The Jews

proved to be victorious above all.[453] Again in Daniel 3—when the three Jews who refuse

to serve idols are saved from the fiery furnace and Nebuchadnezzar decrees that their

God never be mocked—Yefet sees reference to the forced interreligious *majlis*. He

writes that all who witnessed that miracle acknowledged the power of the Creator and

that the King decreed (v. 29) "to abolish the meetings of speculation regarding the

religions in which they challenge the religion of the monotheists."[454] Finally, in his

commentary on Psalms 31:21 Yefet knows that many are converted by rational proofs

and argument (*naẓar* and *jadal*) that they were unable to refute. Throughout his writings

he interprets verses in such a way as to give Jews responses to their personal encounters

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[451] David Sklare, "Responses to Islamic Polemics by Jewish Mutakallimūn in the Tenth Century" in *The Majlis*, 146. Sklare has found some references to indicate that Samuel debated with Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī face-to-face. See p. 148 and fn. 39. He also refers to works by the Karaite Yūsuf al-Baṣīr written to refute Muslim polemical challenges on the subject 153ff.
[452] See S.M. Stern, "Fāṭimid Propaganda Among the Jews According to the Testimony of Yefet b. ʿAlī the Karaite," in *Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), 84-95. Stern refers to the *majālis* specifically at 94-95.
[453] Yefet, *Commentary on Daniel*, 12 (Arab), 5 (Eng).
[454] *Commentary on Daniel*, 42 (Arab), 19 (Eng). "*fa-amara an yubṭal majālis al-naẓar fī dhikr al-madhāhib alladhī yaṭʿan bihā ʿalā madhāhib al-muwaḥḥidīn.*"

with Muslims.[455] It is quite possible that his comments in Genesis, a response to one who wishes to claim that "God cannot have two *qibla*s in the world," emerged from just such a real encounter regarding the *qibla*.

Al-Qirqisānī was also clearly involved in face-to-face conversations with Muslim interlocutors, knew of the *majālis*, and read the works of Muslim polemicists.[456] He knew that contemporary Muslim theologians (*muḥdathūn min mutakallimī al-muslimīn*) claimed that Moses annunciated Muḥammad's coming in the Hebrew Bible. Likewise he read about it in the polemical works of older Mutakallimūn (*qudamāʾ al-mutakallimīn*) such as Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, whose work has not come down to us, and Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām, a fragment of whose work we have.[457] In the *Kitāb al-Anwār* he refers to a book he wrote in response, to disprove the prophecy of Muḥammad (*kitāban fī ifsād nubuwwat Muḥammad*) and many issues that arose from conversations he had with Muslim theologians.[458] In the same chapters he claims to draw from this work, and he makes several arguments countering the claims of *naskh* alongside those about Muḥammad's prophethood. He quotes Qurʾānic verses fairly accurately, knows of the *maghāzī* (i.e. *sīra*) of Ibn Isḥāq, and seems quite familiar with Islamic doctrines regarding miracles and *taḥrīf*.[459] The style of his sections refuting the prophecy of Muḥammad and that of Jesus proceed in the question and answer form that would be needed for one

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[455] Yefet's commentary on Psalms (31:21) offers a fascinating window into this phenomenon. In one instance he says that Jews are attacked for their beliefs but "are unable to argue against [Muslims] at length, fearing for their lives." This would argue against the notion that in-person disputations existed in his context. However, Yefet refers to his comments on another passage (39:2) in which he expands. He refrains from argumentation against his accusers "so long as I am among them in the markets and in their quarters. But where Jews gather and assemble together I will not be silent but will produce arguments refuting the way of this wicked one." See discussion and translations in Frank, *Search Scripture Well*, 213-14.

[456] Al-Qirqisānī does not claim to have attended a *majlis* session explicitly, but he is aware of those taking place in the time of al-Maʾmūn. See *Kitāb al-Anwār* III:16:6.

[457] *Kitāb al-Anwār* III:16:4.

[458] *Kitāb al-Anwār* III:13.2, III:15.1, III:15:16, and III:16:4.

[459] Ibn Isḥāq is referenced at *Kitāb al-Anwār* III:15:16.

participating in a live interreligious debate. He does not mention the *qibla* here or in his section dedicated to the philosophy of *naskh* and the eternality of commandments. Al-Qirqisānī's reference to the unchanging—but itinerant—*qibla* appeared only in his section on laws of prayer. We demonstrated the polemical nature of that section, however, and it is quite possible that the argument appears in the work he refers to that has not come down to us. In any case, he was well immersed in interreligious discussion, and it is plausible if not probable that his defense of the Jewish moving *qibla* emerged from something he read or someone who posed the question to him directly.

In Saʿadya's case, testimony to his interreligious encounters come from outside of his writing. In his *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wal-Ishrāf*, the historian al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/ 956) discusses many Jews whose acquaintance he had made. Among them is a certain Abū Kathīr al-Kātib of Tiberias, whom he identifies as a teacher of Saʿadya Gaon, and with whom al-Masʿūdī discussed the topic of *naskh* and *badāʾ* on many occasions. Likewise, he reports that he knew Saʿadya and that "[Saʿadya] attended the *majlis* of the court of the ruler ʿAlī b. ʿIsā and others among the rulers and judges and the people of learning (*al-wuzarāʾ wal-quḍāt wa-ahl al-ʿilm*) to discuss what distinguished [the religions]."[460] In another work, al-Masʿūdī also reports on Christians attending interreligious *majālis* in the court of Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 270/ 884), and this may be one that Saʿadya attended as well.[461]

In *Beliefs and Opinions* Saʿadya takes on (in his view) misguided positions of all kinds, and he always aims for comprehensiveness. So, for example, he refutes seven

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[460] Abū al-Ḥasan Alī Al-Masʿūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wal-Ishrāf*, ed. M.J.D. de Goeje *BGA* VII and VIII (Leiden: Brill, 1894), 113.

[461] Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab wa-Maʿādin al-Jawhar*, vol. 1, ed. K. Ḥ Marʿī (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣīrīya, 2005), 266.

wrong opinions about the nature of the soul and twelve about the creation of the world.[462]

In his writings on *naskh* he includes seven basic arguments refuting *naskh*, seven

arguments brought in favor of it and their refutations, ten arguments brought from

scripture and their refutations, and then several others that he does not number but which

he sees fit to include. Given his comprehensiveness, it seems probable that in the context

of interreligious debate about the *qibla* Saʿadya also defends against the full spectrum of

detractors. As we have demonstrated, this would include both Christian and Muslim

claims about the change in *qibla*. Al-Masʿūdī includes a final detail about Saʿadya's

attendance of the interreligious *majālis*, namely that "al-Fayyūmī won them all and they

yielded to him."[463] Whether or not the *qibla*-challenge ever actually arose, Saʿadya seems

to have anticipated all possible arguments as well as their refutations.

The *qibla* took on elevated importance in tenth-century polemical writings of both

Jews and Christians due to its centrality in Islamic discourse on both interreligious and

legal *naskh*. Conversely, at the time of Islam's emergence, prayer direction had already

become an important symbol of the parting of ways between Christianity and Judaism.

Chapter 1 demonstrated that it was within the ritual koinè of Late Antiquity that the *qibla*

took on its multifaceted features as a marker of Islamic identity. When communities hold

ritual forms in common the differences between them become particularly charged as

markers of identity—physical orientation for prayer was well disposed in this regard.

The symbolic importance of geographic centers (or their rejection) and issues as

important as God's manifestation in the world made the *qibla* a particularly ripe and

electric signifier of collective identity. In the tenth-century context Jewish, Christian, and

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[462] *Beliefs and Opinions*, VI.1-2 Qāfiḥ 193-198, Landauer 187-193, Rosenblatt 235-41; and I.3 Qāfiḥ 44-72, Landauer 41-70, Rosenblatt 50-83.
[463] Al-Masʿūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh*, 113

Islamic identities were formed in confluence and contrast with one another. Reciprocal

relationships between religious communities imply a whirlpool of symbols and ideas in

which all three participated, from which all three drew, and to which all three

contributed. The symbiosis can be seen not just in ideas shared across communities, but

in the conflicts that arose between them as well.

Chapter Four

New Directions for *Qibla* Studies: A Reconsideration of Alignment and "Misalignment" of Early Mosques

It has been the purpose of this dissertation to articulate the consistent and often complex ways in which the *qibla* came to establish, inscribe, and express collective identity throughout Islam's formative period. We have seen how the seminal text of Islam's emergence, the Qurʾān, spoke in the ritual koiné of late antique religions (Chapter 1). In that context, the direction a community adopted for worship signaled its distinction from other religious groups. The choice of Jerusalem for Rabbinic Jews was a sign of the parted ways between them and their Christian counterparts, who chose east, literally "orienting" in that direction. The Qurʾānic *qibla* was how Muslims "bore witness to the people (of the world)" in explicit differentiation from "those who had previously been given scriptures," and the practice sorted between "one who follows (God's) Emissary from the one who turns away on his heels."[464] In the centuries that followed Muḥammad's life, the *qibla* was promenent in the vocabulary of symbols by which Islamic self-definition was expressed.

Some time in the late Umayyad period the *qibla* shared by all Muslims came to represent an inclusive religious collective, as the term "*ahl al-qibla*" (People of the Qibla) entered the literary record of dogmatic discourse (Chapter 2). In that milieu, authors who wished to treat political and theological opponents as Muslims appealed to the shared *qibla* as a symbol that could extend across sectarian lines, just as facing towards the Kaʿba was a unified practice across the geographically expansive and increasingly diverse Islamic caliphate. Into the ʿAbbāsid period, the term "People of the Qibla"

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[464] Q Baqara 2:143

appeared in creedal statements, Qurʾān commentaries, and other works to signify an author's broadest definition of who could be considered Muslim.

Medieval Islamicate Jews and Christians, too, took up the *qibla* as a point of interreligious debate about *naskh* (abrogation/supersession) with Muslims and with one another (Chapter 3). Proving God's ability to alter the *qibla* could demonstrate that divine law could change from one religious dispensation to another. Rabbanite and Karaite Jews who held that God's law could never change, had to explain why their *qibla* had moved from place to place before the Temple in Jerusalem was constructed. Within the shared epistemological discourse of *kalām*, the *qibla* was a spatial stand-in for the whole of one's revelation and God's favor towards one's religious community. In Islam's formative period, then, facing the *qibla* for worship was not merely fulfillment of a ritual obligation; orienting one's body towards the Kaʿba expressed membership in a religious collective of Muslims whose revelation superseded those that came before.

The topics of the previous chapters, however, are just a few of the ways in which the *qibla* contributed to the formation of Islamic identity. This writing is not the first scholarly examination of the *qibla*, or even the first to consider its relevance for collective identity. However, the *qibla* is most often studied with regard to the issue of precision of geographic alignment—as either part of the history of Islamic science or with regard to the architecture of early mosques. Those who take up the former approach tend to raise questions about the relationship between religion and scientific discovery, while those who attend to the latter most often do so as part of a project to upend or defend the traditional narrative of Islam's origins in the vicinity of Mecca. To be certain, scientific and architectural study of the *qibla* has much to offer, as will be seen below. In

fact, enough dedicated writing exists that we might even argue for an emerging sub-field of Islamic studies dedicated to the *qibla*.   However, these investigations pay insufficient attention to the symbolic function of the *qibla* and its role in the formation of collective identity as an organic, ongoing, and disparate process that occurred over centuries.

The current chapter offers some "new directions for *qibla*-studies" that take identity-formation and its cultural mechanisms as a focal point. After a brief consideration of what is and is not intended herein by the vague term "identity," we will explore three aspects of the study of collective identity that can be applied fruitfully to the study of early Islam. In particular, this chapter considers the *qibla* as a feature of religious architecture and scientific study. The archeological and literary record of Islam's formative period shows that a number of early mosques were not oriented towards the Kaʿba with exactitude, and that some of these mosques were reoriented at a later date. In recent decades, some revisionist scholars have pointed to the so-called misaligned mosques as evidence of their accounts of Islamic origins, which radically revise the traditional narrative. They tend to use this "hard evidence" as more reliable than our literary records that were only first put into writing a century or so after the events they portray. By reading the alignment of early mosques through the analytic lenses proposed in this chapter, it will become clear that they too were features of the formation and expression of collective religious identity. Far from affirming any revisionist account of Islam's emergence, the supposedly aberrant orientations and their corrections further the central thesis of this dissertation: namely, that the *qibla* was a potent and continuous symbol of Islamic belonging whose expression took a variety of literary and material forms.

Identity

Identity is a term that carries dozens of meanings. For the mathematician it connotes the equality of two expressions in an equation; for the philosopher it may indicate the belief that ideas fully correspond to the material objects they represent; and for the psychologist it means that the patient who attends therapy sessions is a constant self and not a different person from week to week. In each case the idea of sameness between things obtains.[465] The term "collective identity" used here (and nearly all uses of "identity" in this writing refer to the collective type) implies that we can name and explore some kind of "meaningful sameness" for a group of individuals, notwithstanding differences that may persist among them. To speak of "Islamic identity" or an "Islamic community," then, does not mean that the authors of writings that we label as Islamic or Muslim were all the same in any given time or across time. Neither does it imply that there is a platonic or metaphysical idea of "Islam" to which individual Muslims correspond in some way or in which they participate. Rather, it is merely a descriptive term to highlight those activities (speech, writing, ritual, etc.) that evoke the experience among a group of people participating in the same meaning-making endeavor across space and time.[466]

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[465] "identity, n.". OED Online. Oxford University Press. http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2817/view/Entry/91004?redirectedFrom=identity (accessed June 06, 2018).

[466] This is generally the approach to the concept of "*umma*" laid out by Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 141-43; and Ahmet Karamustafa, "Community," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. J. Elias (Oxford: One World, n.d.), 93-103. See Karamustafa's caveats for further qualification of the term *umma* when used as a tool of political power.

In our case, that group of people would self-define as Muslim and do so as part of

a larger collective they might call the *umma*.[467] That said, they may question the status of

others as Muslim, and definitions of *umma* may vary widely or even go unarticulated.

However, the existence of terms for collective Islamic belonging implies that when, for

example, ʿAbd al-Malik built the Dome of the Rock, when al-Shāfiʿī composed his

Risāla, and when individual Muslims attended a retelling of the life of Muḥammad in a

mosque or madrasa in later centuries, they engaged in activities that shared a kind of

"sameness." That vague sameness is what we mean by identity. To maintain that a group

is a human collectivity whose members recognize its existence and their membership

within it is not to assert their homogeneity, to draw rigid boundaries, or to imply that

identity motivates actions.[468] To use "collective identity" as an analytic lens, though,

may aid our understanding of the process through which a socio-religious entity known

as Islam emerged, formed, varied, and changed in the lives of those who adopted it as a

meaning-making structure. The extended endeavor of this dissertation has been to

demonstrate that facing the *qibla*, writing about the *qibla*, and even calculating the *qibla*

were actions that carried a symbolic importance in forming and expressing Islamic

collective identity. The current chapter aims to demonstrate some of the fine mechanics

of how that works. To do so, let us consider a few further qualifications regarding the

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[467] The use of the term "*umma*" should not be taken to imply that it is the exclusive way of self-defining as a Muslim community, but it is chosen due to its appearance in the Qurʾān to define the people of Muḥammad's *qibla* (Q Baqara 2:143). The range of terms for collective categorization is vast. A brief exploration based in medieval Arabic usages is offered in Peter Webb, "Identity and Social Formation in the Early Caliphate" in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam* ed. H. Berg (New York: Routledge, 2017), 132-36.

[468] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 8-10, suggests something similar as the simplest definition of "group" from a social science perspective.

study of identity in Islamic history: identity as "imagined," as "process," and as "inexhaustible."[469]

Identity as Imagined

The study of modern nationalism has popularized the term "imagined communities," by which is meant the experience of connectedness/group-ness among people who may never meet one another: such as when an individual identifies as a member of a nation, religion, or professional group. Use of the term "imagined" implies the socially constructed nature of the experience of being bound together as a collective, and it eschews the ontological reality of such a community as a metaphysical essence. In these studies the term "imagined" is distinguished from "fabricated" in order to reject a dichotomy of true/false or genuine/artificial. Consequently, scholars can study the ways in which those perpetuating or performing the "imagined boundedness" appeal to context-specific cultural resources such as shared language, history, territory, or other materials.[470]

The study of modern nationalism is of limited use when attempting to understand the distant context of early Islam. However, the idea of communities as imagined can help qualify and guide the study of premodern Islamic identity in fruitful ways. First, it isolates the subject of analysis. We seek to understand better the socio-religious

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[469] Even in the field of sociology there are those who, due to its ambiguity and overuse, question the usefulness of the term 'identity' as an analytic category; see, for example, Rogers Brubaker and Fred Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1-47 and Sinisa Malesevic, "Identity: Conceptual, Historical, and Operational Critique," in *Making Sense of Collectivity: Ethnicity, Nationalism and Globalisation*, eds. S. Malesevic and M. Haugaard (London: Pluto Press, 2002)195-215. This study accepts the cautionary note, but asserts that 'identity' can still be useful when given fine definition and qualified appropriately.

[470] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006); Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 8-12, 136-42; among many others.

phenomenon by which people from vastly different geographic, ethnic, and even

theological affiliations (most of whom would never meet one another) could perceive

themselves to be part of a shared collective called "Islam."[471] It was in this sense that we

asserted in chapter 1 that facing the proper *qibla* marked the collective identity of all

"those who follow the Emissary" (Q Baqara 2:143), as the Qurʾān stated, and that the use

of the term "people of the *qibla*" indicated an expansive Islamic identity, in chapter 2.

Second, welcoming the idea of identity as "imagined" allows us to sidestep judgment

about the historical truth of traditional narratives and the soteriological efficaciousness of

ritual. We need not comment on whether Muḥammad traveled bodily from the Sacred

Mosque to the Farthest Mosque (Q Isrāʾ 17:1) to appreciate that the story's wide

circulation among early Muslims says something important about their collective

attachment to Mecca and Jerusalem.[472] Likewise, one can assert that burying a Muslim

towards the Kaʿba exemplifies a performance of socio-religious belonging, and remain

agnostic as to whether the orientation increases the chances of a pleasant afterlife for the

grave's occupant.[473]

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[471] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 53-54 names this experience in a relevant example: "The strange physical juxtaposition of Malays, Persians, Indians, Berbers and Turks in Mecca is something incomprehensible without an idea of their community in some form. The Berber encountering the Malay before the Kaaba must, as it were, ask himself: 'Why is this man doing what I am doing, uttering the same words that I am uttering, even though we can not talk to one another?' There is only one answer, once one has learnt it: 'Because *we . . .* are Muslims.'"

[472] Muslim writers in the classical period also debated whether the Night Journey and Ascension actually took place or if it was only a revelatory dream. For example, Ibn Isḥāq already knew about of a divergence of opinions among the early reporters as to whether the Night Journey occurred physically or in a vision. See the rescension of Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawīya* (ed. al-Saqqā), 400, (tr. Guillaume, 183) and of Ibn Bukayr, *al-Sīra wal-Maghāzī* ed. S. Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1978), 295. Abū al-Qāsim al-Qurayshī (d. 465/1072), *Kitāb al-Miʿrāj*, ed. ʿA.Ḥ. ʿAbd al-Qādir (Paris: Dār Byblion, n.d.), 25-26, disputes those who believe that Muḥammad did not travel bodily, believing it to be the opinion of the Rāfiḍa (read: Shīʿa) and the Muʿtazila.

[473] Zayd b. ʿAlī, *Majmūʿa*, (ed. Griffini), pp. 77-78, #336, says that God and the angels will receive into paradise one whose grave faces the *qibla*. On burial toward the *qibla* see above, pp. 8-9.

Finally, understanding identity to be "imagined" encourages researchers to focus on cultural resources rather than the agency or consciousness of individual actors. Our premodern authors drew upon a wide variety of textual, ritual, and other materials to shape the character of the religious collective. Rather than attempting to recover their experience of identity, we can probe the overlapping and varying ways in which they received, deployed—and even at times subverted—rhetoric about the *qibla* to articulate what it meant to be a Muslim.[474] The narrative of Muḥammad's change from the Jerusalem *qibla* and its association with Jewish practice; the lore surrounding the sanctity of sacred centers in the biblical holy lands and in the Hejaz; and even the *qiblas* of other religious communities could all be marshaled by religious scholars seeking to define the boundaries of Islam. For example, in chapter 3 we demonstrated that in the ʿAbbāsid period, these and other aspects of *qibla*-practice and *qibla*-rhetoric entered Muslim-Jewish-Christian polemics about salvation history and the divine preference for their own religious collectives. We cannot claim that any individual Muslim felt he or she was asserting God's election by praying towards the Kaʿba. However, through creative engagement with the histories of their given orientations, scholars from each community demonstrated its importance in distinguishing a we;;-defined "us" from a distinct "them." As a result, this project takes a generally retrospective approach, noting that regardless of the historicity of our sources, their reception into ʿAbbāsid times shows how they entered the imaginative by which a Muslim collective was conceived and constituted.

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[474] Uri Rubin seems to take this approach to biblical materials as they entered early Islamic religious discourse in *Between Bible and Qurʾān: The Childern of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1999), as does Fred Donner, in approaching theological and social themes present in Muḥammad's biography in *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), see esp. "Themes of Community," 160-73.

Identity as a Process[475]

The idea of identity as a process also supports a retrospective approach, i.e. one that can raise questions about Islamic origins without being bound to a definitive resolution of the built-in challenges to that project. Modern historians have, of late, taken an interest in the identity of the polity that came out of Arabia and conquered the late antique Near East. Ambiguities in the historical record—i.e. the shortage of written material firmly dated to this period, the paucity and complex nature of narrative history in the Qurʾān, along with uncertainty about how to read the religious histories of the period of Islamic emergence—has led to a wide variety of theories about the nature of the collective. Fred Donner has supported the idea of a non-sectarian believers movement; Crone and Cook famously advocated an Arabian messianic group identifying as ancestors of the biblical Hagar; and Peter Webb recently proposed that Arab identity only emerged in the context of the empire outside of Arabia.[476] Aziz al-Azmeh has suggested that we think of the early community as "proto-Muslim" or as developing a "paleo-Islam," and Youshaa Patel traces how the shifting contexts of political power affected the ways the community assimilated and/or rejected identification with other religious groups.[477] These and similar studies of early Islam are useful in that they approach collective identity as something dynamic that unfolds over time, and they acknowledge that in the first centuries of Islam some aspects of belonging may have been more fluid. However, I

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[475] This section is inspired by Jenkins' fundamental claim that identity is a process and the various implications of that contention. See *Social Identity*, 2, 11 and throughout.

[476] Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhath* 50-51 (2002-3): 9-53; and his *Muhammad and the Believers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and Peter Webb, "Identity and Social Formation," and his *Imagining the Arabs*.

[477] Al-Azmeh, *Emergence of Islam* and Youshaa Patel, "Muslim Distinction: Imitation and the Anxiety of Jewish, Christian, and Other Influences," (PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 2012).

remain skeptical as to whether we can as historians pinpoint the moment when a group that would self-identify as Islam emerged, because, as one scholar puts it, "the present state of our evidence does not allow us to reconstruct this transition or ascertain when it occurred."[478]

We need not, however, think of Islamic collective identity as all or nothing, present or absent, but instead as something that evolves, grows, and changes in varying contexts, rather than as an entity that was created in a single moment. This study does not attempt to isolate an exact event before which there was no such collective called "Islam" and after which it did exist. Rather, this study sees identity as a process, and one in which the *qibla* is continuously implicated as a sign—in both thought and performance— that is wrapped up with the emergence and expression of communal self-definition. The narrative of Muḥammad's change to the Meccan *qibla* after facing Jerusalem, Friday as a holy day rather than Saturday or Sunday, and the institution of Ramaḍān are not definitive moments after which one can claim, "this once was a Jewish, Christian, or Judeo-Christian sect, but now it is Islam." Shared ritual forms do not necessarily imply sameness or influence. Instead, the modification of ritual drill over the lifetime of the Prophet indicates the—quite intuitive—notion that what constitutes a community's identity can shift and change over time. We may, instead, be able to say that the *qibla* entered the symbolic vocabulary of Islamic self-definition *because* the change in *qibla* was of primary importance in the narratives of Islamic emergence. To that end, chapter 3 examined the idea of a changing *qibla* as an important symbol in debates about *naskh*: an essential institution for understanding the nature of the Qurʾān as well as its relationship to previous revelations. *Naskh al-Qurʾān* as a genre and institution acknowledges the

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[478] Hoyland, "Identity," 131.

progressive nature of revelation (i.e. its process), and so it is fitting that the change in

qibla was an arch-example for our Muslim authors of works that explored qurʾānic

abrogation.

"Identity as process" can also shift our analysis from locating the presence or

absence of 'identity' to observing performances of 'identification.'[479] Muslim is not

simply something that one is, but an identity that one enacts and reinforces through deed

and word. Indeed, the Qurʾān rarely uses *islām* or *muslim* as a noun, but rather as

something one does.[480] This is evidenced by the myriad ways in which Muslims

expressed their participation in the shared cultural endeavor of Islam through actions:

legal, scholarly, artistic, social, and others. For our study of the *qibla* as a symbol of

identity, this insight is most useful. It means that the requirement to face the Kaʿba for

prayer, burial, slaughter, and other acts can be seen not only as fulfillment of a religious

obligation, but as performances of communal belonging. When we see a figure facing the

qibla in a narrative, it serves to identify the actor as a Muslim. And when mathematics,

astronomy, and cartography are applied to calculate the *qibla* with precision, they

demonstrate that an author is engaged not only in a scientific pursuit, but in the process of

identification with a Muslim collective. And even when one intentionally avoids facing

the Kaʿba in the mundane act of expelling waste, one's body is likewise performing

Islam.[481]

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[479] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 7, 47, 93-95. Using a similar notion, Adam Gaiser, "A Narrative Identity Approach to Islamic Sectarianism," in *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, eds. N. Hashemi and D. Postel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 61-75, urges for a shift in the study of sectarian identity. Rather than see it as something that one has or does not have he suggests we consider the actions and circumstances involved in the process of constructing intra-group difference, a process he labels "sectarianization." The same approach can be applied to all collective identities.

[480] Hoyland, "Identity," 130 addresses this fact and the ways that it was read by Crone and Cook.

[481] See above, n. 14.

Finally, seeing identity as a process encourages us to observe identity-construction as connected to the material world—as much a product of politics and power as piety and spirituality. So, the spread of *ḥadīth*s listing the relative value of prayers in Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, and even Kūfa can be read as teaching about the economy of salvation but also as assertions about the importance of the lands from which the Rashīdūn, Umayyads, Zubayrids, and ʿAbbāsids governed.[482] The same hermeneutic of power may be used to read discussions of whether Muḥammad faced Jerusalem or the Kaʿba during his Meccan period.[483] And we can see the imperial commissioning of finely ornamented *qibla*-maps and astrolabes as both tools to aid in the fulfillment of a ritual obligation and as assertions of authority over the territories represented.[484] Seeing identity as a process does not demand that we choose politics over piety. However, it should urge scholars of social history and religious studies to probe the specific contexts of both religion and power in which performances of collective belonging are produced and promoted.[485] The semantic analysis of the phrase "People of the *Qibla*" in chapter 2 regarded identity as a product of both power and piety by tracing the phrase's emergence as a moniker for Islamic community to the late-Umayyad context of both political division and theological diversity. Furthermore, we showed the ways in which the phrase's horizon of meaning shifted and persisted in a wide range of historical, creedal, exegetical and other writings in the ʿAbbāsid period. When we consider identity-

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[482] Kister "Sanctity Joint and Divided."

[483] Al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 111, was aware of both options. Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 175-76, n. k, discusses the implications as well.

[484] David King, *World-Maps for Finding The Direction and Distance to Mecca: Innovation and Tradition in Islamic Science* (Leiden: Brill 1999), discusses many of these with focus on two particularly ornamented Safavid examples. Yossef Rappoport, *Maps of Islam* (Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, forthcoming), ch. 6, offers an accessible description and analysis of *qibla*-maps as well as devices used for calculating the *qibla*, with attention to the socio-religious contexts of their construction.

[485] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 127-130.

formation as a process, we begin to understand the intertwined nature of administrative and religious authority in Islam's formative period.

Identity as Inexhaustible

Richard Jenkins has argued that the idea of membership in a collective "depends upon the symbolic construction and signification of a mask of similarity which all can wear, an umbrella of solidarity under which all can shelter."[486] This dissertation has highlighted the *qibla* as one consolidating symbol in imagining communal similarity, in part because it lies at the boundary of difference with other communities. That said, a word of caution is in order regarding the assumption of homogeneity among a group. As scholars, we must accept the almost boundless diversity of ways across space, time, and cultures in which individuals and collectives express identity—it is as inexhaustible as the human experience.

In his posthumously published treatise *What is Islam*?, Shahab Ahmed launches a take-all-comers challenge to scholars of Islam and to the common analytic approaches applied in the field of Islamic studies. He finds flaws with all those who characterize Islam primarily based on fixed institutions: whether normative Sunnī legal teaching developed during the formative period in the Arabic heartlands, or the social and civilizational structures of government, or even religion, per se, when seen as an unchanging cultural system. These modes of definition all fail to account for oft-ignored Islamic settings (his arch-example is the Persian context of "Balkans-to-Bengal" from 1350-1850) and outright contradictions (e.g. a Mughal emperor drinking wine

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[486] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 137-39.

"Islamicly"). Rather, he sees Islam as a "historical and human phenomenon" that is constantly expressed by actors who are hermeneutically engaged with Islamic tradition (Ahmed's "text") to respond to the questions of ultimate meaning-making ("pre-text"), within the multiplicity of situations ("con-text") in which they find themselves.[487] Instead of defining Islam, he argues, scholars should aim to identify phenomena, objects, and statements as "Islamic" when they are made meaningful in terms of Islam.

The fine details (of which *What is Islam?* has many) aside, Ahmed's argument that we embrace exploratory discourses and contradictions as part of the study of Islam is instructive for our study of identity. Our sources will always be underdetermined and overflowing with meanings that affected the experience of collective identity in innumerable ways. Furthermore, it is useful to acknowledge that identifying a collective group does not imply homogeneity, a singular definition of Islam, or any fixed sense of what it meant to be a part of the collective. The work will always be incomplete and every study will have shortcomings; as a result, scholarship on Islamic identity must be ongoing, collaborative, reflective, and corrective.

Therefore, we must also be careful when using the *qibla* to describe any kind of cohesive Islamic collective. It is true that for many Muslims the *qibla* became a synecdoche for a unified Islamic community, but we ought to leave room for diversity, highlight subversions of the symbol, and embrace contradictions. For example, in chapter 2 we saw that while "People of the Qibla" was used as an inclusivizing term in a wide expanse of Islamic discourse, we also pointed out the Twelver Shiʿī writings of Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, who used the expression to target a particular group of Muslims for

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[487] Ahmed, *What is Islam?*.

exclusion from the collective.[488] Likewise, Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī, who featured as a

critic of non-Muslim *qibla*s in chapter 3 also taught that praying towards Jerusalem

remained a viable option for Muslims who, for some reason, could not face towards

Mecca.[489] Al-Ṭabarī even reports that the Qarmatians—an Ismāʿīlī revolutionary

movement who later refused to acknowledge the Fāṭimid rulers—did take Jerusalem as

their *qibla*.[490] While the description may simply be a polemical slight against this group

of anti-ʿAbbāsid rebels, it is an unusual reference to the *qibla*.[491] These examples remind

us that the *qibla* was not used in a singular way, and that a range of views existed among

those who drew from it in their definitions of Islamic community.

We also ought to consider the *qibla*'s place in art, architecture, mysticism, and

literature with a special eye towards subversions and playfulness that can tell us

something about identity. For example, a humorous anecdote is reported by Ibn Qutayba

(d. 276/889) in which the ʿAbbāsid general, al-Ḥusayn b. ʿUmar al-Rustumī, was visited

in his home. When the time for prayer arrived his guest asked him, "Which direction is

the *qibla*," to which he responded, "How should I know, I have only been here a

month?!"[492] This episode is not about the *qibla*, but it is funny because one who was

expected to know which direction faced Mecca for daily prayers was ignorant of it.

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[488] See above pp. 107-8.

[489] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 248-9.

490 The term "Qarāmiṭa" can be used to refer to all those Ismāʿīlīs who continued to believe in the occultation of the Mahdī, following Ḥamdan Qarmaṭ's rejection of the claim of ʿUbayd Allah (the late Fāṭimid caliph, al-Mahdī) to the imamate. They did not acknowledge the Mahdī-ship of any of the Fāṭimid caliphs, and a segment of that group established sovereignty in Baḥrain from the time of their initial revolt in Iraq in 286/899 and only definitively ending in 470/1077-8. For more on the Qarmatians see Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, 116-26 and 147-55, and idem. "Carmatians" *Encyclopedia Iranica* VI/7, 823-32. Available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/carmatians-ismailis (accessed online 20 Aug 2018); Wilfred Madelung, "Ḳarmaṭī," *EI2* and idem. "Fatimiden und Baḥrainqarmaṭen" *Der Islam* 34:1 (1959):34-88.

[491] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 3/2128. It is interesting to note that in 318/930, shortly after al-Ṭabarī's death, the Qarmatian's would sack Mecca and steal the Black Stone.

[492] Abū Muḥammad Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī, *ʿUyūn al-Akhbār*, 4 vols., ed. A.Z. al-ʿAdawī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1925-30), vol. 2, 59.

Further research about how al-Rustumī was remembered, or generally about lax practices

around prayer in his time might shed light on real historical circumstances that underlie

the humor of this anecdote.[493] Whatever the interpretation, unusual uses of the *qibla* such

as this one ought to raise our antennae and also help shape our understanding of what was

understood be Islamic identity.

Until now we have considered the *qibla* as a metaphor for identity, but one that was

embodied in the practice of orienting towards the Kaʿba in Mecca as a physical site. But

in mystical thought the physical *qibla* could also map easily onto spiritual counterparts.

For example, the ninth-century ascetic and early mystic, Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) was

known to say, "God is the *qibla* of intention; intention the *qibla* of the heart; the heart the

qibla of the body; the body the *qibla* of the limbs; and the limbs are the *qibla* of all

existence."[494] The exact meaning requires careful study, but it is clear that al-Tustarī

oriented the universe around the self as its center, rather than the Kaʿba. A similar

replacement of the Kaʿba with the self can be seen in a poem questioning those who

traverse physical space to go on *ḥajj*. Rūmī writes:

> Oh, you pilgrims of *ḥajj*, where have you gone, where?
> The Beloved is right here, come, come
> Your Beloved is your neighbor, next door
> What are you thinking lost in the desert?
> If you see the faceless face of the Beloved

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[493] Amikam Elad, "The Armies of al-Maʾmūn in Khurāsān (193-202/ 809 — 817-18): Recruitment of its Contingents and their Commanders and their Social-Ethnic Composition" *Oriens* 38 (2010): 41-42, 58, briefly describes his role in al-Maʾmun's military, and also knows of another suspicious story in which al-Rustumī was a witness in a trial against another commander who had allegedly cursed al-Faḍl b. Sahl's mother.

[494] See Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīya*, ed. ʿA.Q. ʿAṭā (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, n.d.), 168: "*Allahu qiblat al-nīya wal-nīya qiblat al-qalb wal-qalb qiblat al-budn wal-budn qiblat al-jawārikh wal-jawārikh qiblat al-dunyā.*" A similar move is made by the marginal commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's *Risālat al-Aḥadīya*, MS 123 (Dār al-Kutub al-Ẓahirīya) cited in Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architechture in Premdoern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany: SUNY Press 2005), 170.

The master, the house and the Kaʿba are all you yourself.[495]

Those who think of God (i.e. "the Beloved") as located at the Kaʿba miss the experience

of God that lies within the human soul. The legal norms commend the practitioner to

travel to, circumambulate, and to orient toward the Kaʿba, but the mystical tradition was

able to use the spatial as a metaphor for spiritual development in subversive ways. A

great deal of the *qibla*'s potency as a symbol of identity lies in its ability to be employed,

applied, and even undermined in the production of Islamic thought.

Identity is elusive and dynamic and varies from individual to individual within a

collective. As such it cannot ever be exhaustively described. However, we can begin to

understand the processes through which it is formed and expressed, the means by which

it is produced and reproduced, by focusing on certain sites where it tends to show up.

This study considered one embodied symbol of collective identification in the formative

period of Islam, the *qibla*, which touches upon three such areas: interreligous encounter,

ritual performance, and sacred geography. An Islamic "us" emerged by drawing identity-

boundaries with other religious cultures. The act of facing the Kaʿba for prayer,

slaughter, and burial (among other rituals) performed identification with an Islamic

collective. It also served to reinforce a uniquely Islamic mapping of the world, whose

very center lay in Mecca. What follows is a close look at the last of these categories,

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[495] Translated in Ghomi Haideh, "The Land of Love: Rumi's Concept of 'Territory' in Islam," in *The Concept of Territory in Islamic Law and Thought*, ed. H. Yanagihashi ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 73. Compare this with a similar anecdote about one who, upon returning from *ḥajj*, was criticized by Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. late 3rd/early 10th c.) for going through the actions without corresponding acts of spiritual growth: e.g. one ran between the hills of Ṣafā and Marwa without attaining purity (*ṣafā*) and virtue (*muruwwa*); see Reynolds Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, reprinted edition (Sacramento: Murine Press, 2006), 46-47. Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 202-4 raises another atypical metaphorical usage of the *qibla* in the mystical poetry of Amīr Khusraw who, when he saw Sayyid Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā wear his hat crookedly—a sign of affiliation with the madhhab-i ʿishq—recited "For every people its path, its *dīn*, and its *qibla*// I have set my *qibla* straight, in the way of the crooked-hatted."

sacred geography, with special attention given to the benefits of studying spatial orientation and the *qibla* through the lenses of identity just described.

Sacred Geography and Identity in Early Islam

Land and the process of collective identification were interwoven in Islam's formative period. Of course, the grand significance of the sacred centers in Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, and other sites is apparent in the tradition and modern scholarship. At these sites, identification with the history and religious traditions of Islam took place as much through expansive building programs as it did through the construction and spread of narratives about those cities in the lives of the biblical prophets and in Muḥammad's life. However, a broad identification of Islam with place emerged in which the locations of important conquests, pacts, and burials mapped onto the expanding territory under Islamic rule. Local shrines would commemorate the graves of saintly Muslims in the former Byzantine and Sassanian territories, even as formerly Christian and Zoroastrian sacred sites became absorbed into a new Islamic sacred topography.[496] The ʿAbbāsids had works of geography translated from Greek and Sanskrit, and before

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[496] The processes through which Muslims have used narrative and ritual to construct sacred topographies in the formative period has become a popular topic of late among scholars of Islam. See, for example, Josef Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Nancy Khalek, *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest Text and Image in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*; Michael Lecker, "On the Burial of Martyrs in Islam," in *The Concept of Territory in Islamic Law and Thought*, ed. H. Yanagihashi (New York: Routledge, 2001), 37-50; Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Roy Mottahedeh, "The Eastern Travels of Solomon: Reimagining Persepolis and its Iranian Past," in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought*, eds. M. Cook, et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 247-67; Najam Haider, *Origins of the Shīʿa*, 231-53. Of course, M.J. Kister, "Sanctity Joint and Divided," remains an excellent catalogue of the cultural tools through which sacrality became attached to lands in the literature of early Islam.

long, Muslim scholars composed learned geographic works of their own, in which descriptions of landscapes and local populations appeared alongside religious lore and tales of miraculous occurrences. *Faḍāʾil* literature also became a popular way to tout the merits of particular places and collect oral reports about them that were otherwise dispersed. The joining of the spiritual and material worlds in the constructions of sacred topography (both literary and architectural) may have been a feature that spanned the cultures of the late antique Near East.[497] However, Zayde Antrim has shown convincingly that by the ʿAbbāsid period a uniquely Islamic "discourse of place" had emerged in which home, cities, and regions became an important part of the self-understanding of many Muslims.[498] Of course, the orientation towards the Kaʿba from across the vast Islamic oikumené contributes to the "discourse of place" and demands focused analysis.

Thinking about space, place, and belonging with regard to the practice of facing the *qibla* in the post-conquests Islamicate world, however, poses a problem. Most theoreticians of place and human geography take as their subject the experience of a land in which one resides. Scholars of diaspora studies, likewise, address groups of people who look towards a homeland from which they originate and/or to which they dream of

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[497] Sabine MacCormack, "Loca Sancta: The Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity" in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, R. Ousterhout ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 7-40.

[498] Antrim, *Routes and Realms*. Travis Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers Across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation, and the 'Abbāsid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), also shows the ways in which the known world became a part of Islamic self-understanding in the writings, even miraculous and fantastical, of early Islamic geographers. Of course, the monumental four-volume classic of André Miquel, *La Geographie Humaine du Monde Musliman Jusqu'au Milieu du 11e Siécle*, 4 vols. (Paris: Mouton, 1967-88), takes a comprehensive look at the way that Islamic geography was an expression of literary arts as much as one of scientific exposition, a new and unique form of encoding knowledge by geographic organization, intended for entertainment and for learning alike. In that sense, Miquel views geographic writings as a contribution to humanistic understanding of the world, starting in the ʿAbbāsid period and proliferating in the 10th and 11th centuries. More recently, James Montgomery has also taken up the genre of geographic literature and analyzed it in terms of language, form history, and literary devices; see his "Traveling Autopsies: Ibn Fadlān and the Bulghār," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 7:1 (2004): 3-32; and "Serendipity, Resistance and Multivalency: Ibn Khurradādhbih and his *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik*," in *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. P.F. Kennedy (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 177-230, among many other articles.

return in some way. Islam may have first emerged in a particular land and among a

particular group of peoples, but it soon spread widely to include a vast expanse of

territory far beyond its origins in West Arabia. In fact, some of the earliest documents to

name the conquerors as they entered new territories identify them using *muhājir*

(emigree), a term that in Muḥammad's biography referred to his community's emigration

from Mecca to Medina. Of course, the Islamic calendar's first year begins with this

emigration. While some revisionist scholarship would read the Greek and Syriac

cognates of this term (Gr. *magaritai* or *mōagaritai*; Syr. *mhaggrē* or *mhaggrāyē*) to imply

an identity connected to the biblical Hagar, this is inconsistent with the usage in the

Qurʾān and early Islamic poetry, where it often referred to those who, striving on "the

path of God," were expected to leave the tribal or nomadic lifestyle of Arabia to settle in

garrison cities on the frontier.[499] In the new outposts, some of the first mosques were

built as gathering spaces and places of worship for the *muhājirūn*. Far from home, the

orientation of these Mosques towards the Kaʿba was an expression of socio-religious

belonging in architectural form. The performance of orientation that these buildings

faciliated created an experience of place that plugged the local site into a global network

of sacred geography, whose center lay in Mecca.

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[499] On the former see *Hagarism*, 9. On the identity of the early Muslims as soldier-settlers see Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 102 and "Identity," 122-24 and 132, where he asserts that coming up with one term for the conquerors and early community seems futile since they could have been *muhājir*s, Muslims, Arabs and believers without any contradictory sense of those terms. It is unclear whether those in the frontier towns were called *muhājirūn* due to their having participated in the emigration from Mecca to Medina, or whether it was their leaving the Hejaz for the garrison cities. On the varied uses of the term in the Qurʾān see Muḥammad al-Faruque"Emigration," in *EQ* and Montgomery Watt, "Hidjra," in *EI2*.

The expansion in the decades after Muḥammad's death was undertaken by a collective of Arab groups with distinct tribal affiliations.[500] Concurrent with and subsequent to the territorial expansion, a great deal of ethnic diversity was introduced to the *umma*, such that Islam cannot be accurately defined as an Arab religion (even if still a religion that prized the Arabic language).[501] By the time they became a majority population, most Muslims in the vast oikumene would likely never make it to Mecca and did not see Arabia as their homeland.[502] And yet, that territory, the sacred history it evoked, and the centralized focal point it presented could serve to unify the *umma*.

Orientation towards a single geographic point became a symbolic act of identification with the collective, a way to perform one's membership in an imagined community at a time when geographic diffusion and ethnic diversity were centrifugal forces. Even if some Muslims could not trace their genealogies back to the Hejaz, the ideological lines of descent all pointed towards the land in which Muḥammad lived, preached, and prophesied.[503] In chapter 2 we argued that it was due to the *qibla's*

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[500] See, for example, the tribal diversity at Kūfa described by Marony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest*, 239-43.

[501] Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, argues that it was explicitly in the context of ethnic diversity of Islamic expansion that Arab identity actually emerged.

[502] Dating the process through which any location came to contain a Muslim majority is likely irretrievable. In his innovative approach to tracing conversions, Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*, found that in Iran the rate of conversion was slow at first, but that the time by which a majority would have become Muslims lies between 150-300/767-912. Bulliet's results are from a limited sample and remain unverifiable (especially his extension from Iran to other contexts); they also do not take many factors into account, such as emigration and birth rates. Kennedy, *Conquests*, 5-6, believes that it was in the tenth- or eleventh-century. See also the essays of Bulliet and Shaban in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. N. Levtzion (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979). Nevertheless, at some point in the formative period the absence from Mecca would have been the experience of the vast majority of Muslims, and this would likely have affected the experience of orientation towards the Kaʿba.

[503] Arab genealogies were claimed by many in non-Arab lands, and this phenomenon continues to this day. Genealogies served as another way that one could connect with the Arabian heartland even amidst diasporic spread. On this phenomenon in India among the Alawi Sayyids see Engseng Ho, *Graves of Tarim: Geneology and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Ho's emphasis on diaspora as an experience based in absence merits further study and potential application to the performance of identity through orientation towards the absent Kaʿba. One wished, that with so much

symbolic function as a centripetal force that the term "People of the Qibla"—and the collective solidarity across difference it implied—emerged in late Umayyad Iraq, a setting in which the range of ideological, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds was quite pronounced. The insight that the *qibla* became a literal and metaphorical focal point in the imagining and construction of a collective sense of belonging in Islam's formative period may offer an important intervention into the fields in which the *qibla* is traditionally studied: namely mosques, maps, and mathematical calculation.

Traditionally, each field examined the subject of orientation with regard to the degree of precision with which the *qibla* was calculated. For several historians, what appears to be a lack of precision and/or uniformity among early mosques contrasts strongly with the great deal of mathematical and cartographic acumen going back to at least the ninth century. For some revisionists, this directional diversity was cause to reject as spurious the traditional narratives that placed the Kaʿba in Mecca as the center of Islamic sacred geography. However, when reading the *qibla* through the lenses of collective identity laid out above, a different picture emerges. What follows is an example of how the idea of collective identity as "imagined," as "process," and as "inexhaustible," might offer new insights into thinking about calculation of the *qibla* and sacred geography in early Islam.

Early Mosque Orientations: The Hermeneutics of Architecture and Identity

Mosques are an essential part of the sacred topography of Islam—they are architectural expressions of collective religious identity as well as spaces within which it

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treatment of graves and diaspora, that Ho would have shared a bit about the orientations of the Alawi tombs he studied.

is performed. Whether a small neighborhood mosque intended for daily worship or the grand congregational structures of metropolitan centers, all were to be constructed to direct prayer towards the *qibla*. To be certain, proper orientation was a prerequisite for the fulfillment of a religious duty. However, it also altered the built environment of each site, mapping it into the sacred topography of Islam, whose central pivot was the Kaʿba. In particular, congregational mosques—*Jāmiʿ Masjid* or *Masjid al-Jāmiʿ* in Arabic, and often called " Friday Mosques" in English—were expressions of both communal affiliation as well as administrative power, and so their orientations require special consideration.

The earliest congregational mosques likely emerged in the garrison towns (*amṣār*) founded during the first century of Islamic expansion and in imitation of the prayer space in Muḥammad's house in Medina. Fusṭāt, in Egypt, Kūfa and Baṣra in Iraq, Qayrawān in Tunisia, and Shirāz in Iran are among the most famous and successful examples.[504] At the time Muslims were the minority population in these areas, and the *amṣār* were often built on the outskirts of established cities where they served as both military and cultural fortresses from which the soldier-settlers could govern as well as preserve their distinctive religious practices.[505] In other instances, mosques were built in the midst of

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[504] On the foundations of the *amṣār* see Paul Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together: Cities in Islamic Lands, Seventh through Tenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 100-1; Sylvie Denoix, "Founded Cities of the Arab World from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century," in *The City in the Islamic World*, 2 vols., eds. S. Jayyusi, et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), vol. 1, 116-29. Baber Johansen, "The All-Embracing Town and Its Mosques: al-Miṣr al-ğāmiʿ," *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 32 (1981-2): 136-61, shows how early Ḥanafī law can be used to show the development of the *amṣār* into cities, and that the earliest definition was a settlement with a single congregational mosque. A good example of integrating narrative and archeological materials appears in the historical reconstruction of Fusṭāṭ's founding and development in Wladyslaw Kisliak, *Fusṭāṭ: Its Founding and early Urban Development* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1987), 58-95. On the founding of the mosques at Kūfa and Baṣra in particular see, K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), vol. 1, 23-26.

[505] Donner, who has studied the conquests extensively, presumes both purposes for the *amṣār*. For example, in *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 267, Donner writes that the garrison towns were a means by which the

older cities that had become centers of Islamic political administration, such as at

Damascus, Córdoba, Rayy, and Merv. In the centuries following the initial expansion,

caliphal cities—such as Baghdad, Sāmarrāʾ, and Cairo—were also constructed from

scratch, and their congregational mosques were placed more deliberately within the city

plans.[506] In other cases, as Muslims settled in already inhabited cities and towns,

mosques grew out of and into existing urban street plans.[507]

The history of each city and its mosques requires individual study in terms of its

specific archeological and literary record, but when comparing the *qibla*s of the earliest

mosques, a problem arises: there appears to be no uniformity in orientations. For

example, in the medieval period five distinct directions are reported to have been in use

in Córdoba, five in Samarqand, and seven in Cairo.[508] Furthermore, several early *qibla*s

appear to be misaligned with the Kaʿba with a greater degree of inaccuracy than one

might expect, considering the importance of orientation as a sign of communal belonging.

Some examples will demonstrate the point.

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soldier-settlers could "serve as instruments of state control and state expansion;" in *Muhammad and the Believers*, 137, he portrays the *amṣār* as "an expression of the Believers' concern for piety and righteous living" and the reason why those adhering to Qurʾānic teachings did not vanish through acculturation into the local populations.

[506] The suggestion that some of these cities and their street patterns may have been oriented with reference to the *qibla* was made by David King, "Architecture and Astronomy: the Ventilators of Medieval Cairo and their Secrets," *JAOS* 104 (1984): 97-133; and David King, "The Sacred Direction in Islam: a Study of the Interaction of Religion and Science in the Middle Ages," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 10:4 (1985): 324-25; and then tested for Morocco in Michael Bonine, "The Sacred Direction and City Structure: A Preliminary Analysis of the Islamic Cities of Morocco," *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): 50-72; and for Tunisia in Michael Bonine, "Romans, Astronomy and the *Qibla*: Urban Form and Orientation of Islamic cities of Tunisia," in *African Cultural Astronomy – Current Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy Research in Africa*, eds. J. C. Holbrook, R. T. Medupe and J. O. Urama, (Berlin: Springer, 2008),145-178.

[507] For a concise introduction to the evolution of mosque architecture in general see Renata Holod, "Approaching the Mosque: Birth and Evolution" in *Mosques: Splendors of Islam*, (New York: Rizzoli, December, 2017), 14-21.

[508] David A. King, "The Sacred Direction in Islam," 324-25. On Samarqand see al-Bazdawī, *Risāla fī samt al-qibla*, par. 9; edited and translated in David King, "al-Bazdawī on the Qibla in Early Islamic Transoxania," *Journal for the History of Arabic Sciences* 7:1&2 (1983): 3-38.

Several early Umayyad congregational mosques appear to be facing farther southward than the Kaʿba, such as at Córdoba, Qayrawān (*Jāmīʿ ʿUqba b. Nāfiʿ*), and Damascus. In Egypt, literary evidence shows an early *qibla* facing due east, and the mosque of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ—supposedly founded in the presence of eighty companions of the prophet—was later reoriented to correct for this error.[509] Similarly, in one account of the founding of the mosque at Kūfa we are told that the highest point in the area was chosen, and the site was marked by arrows shot to the north, south, east, and *qibla* directions, implying that the *qibla* was due west.[510] In another case, an early eighth-century mosque, constructed purely out of slag from smelted copper at Beʾer Ora in the Negev desert, shows two *qibla*s to have been in use, due east and South by south-east.[511] If the *qibla* is, as we have claimed, a symbol of central importance to Islamic collective identity, and the architecture aligned towards Mecca positions the Kaʿba at the center of Islamic sacred geography, then what to make of the several mosques that appear to face in other directions?

In the past half-century, some scholars have marshaled the supposedly wayward *qibla*s to challenge the traditional narrative of a change from Jerusalem to Mecca in the lifetime of Muḥammad. For example, Crone and Cook used the orientation of the

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[509] See Creswell, E*arly Muslim Architecture*, vol. 1, 37 and 150. Description of the eastward *qibla* appears in al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawāʿiẓ wal-Iʿtibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Āthār*, 2 Vols (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīnīya, 1967), vol. 2, 247, who says "*fa-sharraqat jiddan*" and in Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār li-Wāsiṭat ʿIqd al-Amṣār/ Description de l'Égypte par Ibn Doukmak*, ed. Vollers (Būlāq: al-Matbaʿa al-Kubrā al-Amīrīya, 1891-92), vol. 4, 62, who says likewise. Compare with Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, 4 vols., ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1869), vol. 3, 899, who says, "*musharriqa qalīlan*."
[510] Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, (De Goeje), 275-76; trans. (Ḥittī), vol. 1, 434-35. Other versions of the story appear without the arrows. See al-Tabarī, *Taʾrīkh,* 1/2489 and references in Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, vol. 1, 24, nt. 2.
[511] On Beʾer Orah see Gideon Avni, "From Standing Stones to Open Mosques in the Negev Desert: The Archaeology of Religious Transformation on the Fringes," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 70:3 (2007): 124-138; on the perception that the eastern *qibla* was early see Moshe Sharon, Uzi Avner, and Dov Nahlieli, "An Early Islamic Mosque near Beʾer Ora in the Southern Negev: Possible Evidence from an Early Eastern Qiblah?" *Atiqot* 30 (1996): 107-14.

mosques at Wāṣit and Uskaf Banī Junayd (both in Iraq), which appear to be

approximately 30º off from the Kaʿba in Mecca, to locate the Qurʾān's "Sacred Mosque"

(*al-masjid al-ḥaram*) in northwest Arabia.[512] Based on the more easterly *qibla*s, Bashear

and Sharon wished to support a *qibla musharriqa* (eastward sacred direction) in use

among Muslims of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt— in their view a product of Christian

influence. Sharon and Basheaer also regarded the variety of orientations as evidence that

a single *qibla* did not prevail until many decades after Muḥammad's death: rather there

were "several currents in the search for one."[513] Still others, selectively interpret

archeological and literary evidence of "misalignment" as proof that Jerusalem remained

the *qibla* of Muḥammad's community of believers through the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik.[514]

Each of the studies just mentioned locates the intended *qibla* outside of Mecca in

such a way that supports their alternative theories regarding the origins of Islam.

However, several assumptions underlie these approaches to the *qibla*. First, they tend to

assume that achieving precision was mathematically possible and desirable for the

builders of each of the "misaligned" mosques, and hence accuracy should be measured

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[512] Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 23-24 and Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 188, nt. 131. On Wāsiṭ see K.A.C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, J. Allan rev. (Aldershot, UK: Scolar Press, 1989), 40-41, on Uskaf Banī Junayd see Creswell, *Short Account*, 268 and Fuʾād Safar, "Archeological Investigations in the Areas of the Main Irrigation Project in Iraq," *Sumer* 16 (1960): 97-98. Crone and Cook also wished to see the comments of Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) in response to John the Stylite that the Muslims in Iraq face west, as evidence of a due west *qibla,* which would also point to north-west Arabia. However, this is likely either lack of exactness in Jacob's language or a reflection that the act of orientation did not require such great precision. The latter is the opinion of Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 567.

[513] Moshe Sharon, "The Umayyads as *Ahl al-Bayt*" *JSAI* 14 (1991): 128-130 and his *"*The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land," in *The Holy Land in History and Thought*, ed. M. Sharon (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 230; and Suliman Bashear, "Qibla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," *The Muslim World* 81:3-4 (1991): 267-82; and Wilhelm Barthold, "Die Orientierung der ersten muhammedanischen Moscheen," *Der Islam* 18 (1930): 245-50.

[514] For extensive references to these and other theories about *qibla*s other than the Kaʿba see 58 above. It bears restating, however, that upon reviewing several of the above-mentioned theories, Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 564-65, nt. 88, dismisses them on account of the presence of the earliest Muslim inscriptions in the Mecca-Ṭāʾif area, as well as the significant construction work apparent from the first century, "all of which would be inexplicable if Mecca was of little significance to the Muslims."

against the results of scientific calculation. Second, they assume that a mosque could be oriented in whatever direction one wanted without regard to existing urban constraints. Third, they do not pay attention to topographical considerations that may have altered the precision with which a mosque could be oriented. And finally, they must dismiss all of the traditional accounts of a change in *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca during the lifetime of Muḥammad as unreliable, viewing the narrative's widespread propagation as no more than a cover up for the true (in their eyes) story of Islamic origins. As stimulating as these alternative accounts may be, however, there is no compelling reason to implicate the *qibla* as corroborating evidence. In fact, the features of identity described above offer some ways of understanding the so-called misalignments as expressions of collective belonging that all adopt the Kaʿba in Mecca as the center of their sacred geography.

First, the notion of identity as imagined foregrounds the experience of unified orientation towards the *masjid al-ḥarām*, regardless of the actual uniformity or precision of orientation. As David King has demonstrated repeatedly, medieval *qibla*s were calculated in a variety of ways, even though mathematical methods were available to achieve a remarkable degree of accuracy as early as the ninth century. Folk astronomy— a means whereby directions were determined by the rising and setting of the sun or stars at certain times of year—was often employed to calculate the *qibla*. Likewise, the blowing of known winds may have been associated with finding particular directions.[515]

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[515] Al-Shāfiʿī, *Risāla* (ed. Lowry), 16-17, indicates that among the folk ways of determining the *qibla* were mountains, known winds (*arwāḥ maʿrūfa*), and various astronomical signs, and that these methods of orientation are commended by the Qurʾān, e.g. *Anʿām* 6:97 and *Naḥl* 16:16; see also al-Shāfiʿī, *Jāmiʿ al-ʿIlm*, 41, and *Ibṭāl al-Istiḥsān,* 78. This method is also attested to by al-Bazdāwī, *Risāla*, #6, for the early conquerors of Transoxania and Khurasān, who used sunrises and sunsets and zodiacal signs to determine the *qibla*. See also al-Birūnī, *Kitāb al-Tafhīm li-Awāʾil Sinaʿat al-Tanjīm* (Book of Instuction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology), ed. and trans. R.R. Wright (London: Luzac & Co., 1934), 130, 163. The Talmud, *bBaba Batra* 25a, indicates that the association of winds with particular directions was already present in the late antique Sassanian context. Works on folk astronomy were common from early on in the

King has also demonstrated that the Kaʿba was, itself, astronomically positioned, and surmises that the builders of some early mosques used the Kaʿba's own astronomical alignment to determine their *qibla*s. He writes:

> The astronomical alignments of the sides of the Kaʿba may also be quite fortuitous. They may have been noticed by the early Muslims and used to facilitate *qibla* determinations. The first Muslims—who built mosques as far apart as Andalusia and Central Asia—could not have known the actual direction of Mecca, but they were aware, I think, that the Kaʿba, which they wanted to face, was oriented in a certain way. Thus, they knew that when facing a particular wall or corner of the Kaʿba in Mecca, one was facing a particular solar or stellar rising or setting point; they assumed that, away from Mecca, if one faced in that same astronomical direction one would still be facing the same wall or corner of the Kaʿba. Each wall or corner of the Kaʿba was associated with a specific region of the world, and so the *qiblas* in these regions were astronomically defined.[516]

As such, it is worth noting that the Mosque of ʿAmr, in Fusṭāṭ, whose original *qibla* was identified as too easterly by medieval and modern historians alike, aligns with sunrise at the winter solstice, as was the case for one of the *qibla*s in use in Cordoba. Medieval sources on the *qibla* also place the *qibla* in Yemen as towards the direction from which the north wind blows and in Cairo towards the rising of the star Canopus.[517] These and other descriptions indicate the many ways that folk astronomy was used to determine the *qibla*. Furthermore, they suggest that even when a mosque appears to be misaligned from a mathematical perspective, the designers of early mosques and their worshippers still intended the Kaʿba in Mecca as the direction of prayer.

ʿAbbāsid period, and astral risings and settings are often called in early Arabic texts "*anwāʾ*" (s. *nawʾ*), and they appear to have been used in pre-Islamic times for determining seasons; see discussion of this literature in Daniel Martin Varisco, "The Origin of the *anwāʾ* in Arab Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 74 (1991): 5-28.

[516] King, "Astronnomical Alignments," 309-10. See also David King and Gerald Hawkins, "On the Orientation of the Kaʿba," *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 13 (1982): 102-109; and King, "Sacred Direction," 325-27.

[517] King, "Astronomical Alignments," 309.

Precedents, such as facing south as Muḥammad did at Medina, may also have influenced the setting of early *qibla*s without reference to mathematical means.[518] Likewise, the earliest *qibla*s within a region, which were often determined by the companions, may have set local standards whose authority exceeded that of mathematical calculation. Michael Bonine assumed this to have been the case in Tunisia, where most of the early mosques are oriented along the lines of the Grand Mosque of Qayrawān/ Mosque of ʿUqba/ Mosque of the Companions, around 150º, which is roughly 40º degrees further south than Mecca by calculation.[519] An account of the miraculous founding of the *qibla* at Qayrawān by the companion ʿUqba b. Nāfiʿ (d. 63/683) appears to confirm this conjecture. We are told that ʿUqba

> laid out the mosque but was uncertain about the direction of the *qibla* … in the night [he] heard a voice saying, "Tomorrow, go to the mosque and you will hear a voice saying '*Allāhu akbar*.' Follow the direction of the voice and that will be the *qibla* God has made pleasing for the Muslims in this land." In the morning he heard the voice and established the *qibla* and all the other mosques copied it.[520]

This narrative is not unique in grounding a Companion's *qibla* in a miraculous event, and the phenomenon may reflect an apologetic impulse with regard to orientations that do not accord with the mathematically precise methods of later times.[521] However, the legend corroborates the notion that many other mosques of the region took the companions' *qibla* as a precedent.

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[518] King, "Sacred Direction," 319, suggests this possibility and sees the prophetic statement, "What is between east and west is the *qibla*," as evidence of this position; see *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī* (1:360, "Ṣalāt"), #342 and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (2:122, "Iqāmat al-Ṣalawāt"), #1011. The statement is sometimes associated with Q Baqara 2:177 "It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the east and the west..." as setting broad parameters (i.e. due east and due west) within which the *qibla* can be sought. As will be seen below, this is not the only way to read the *ḥadīth*. However, since many of the laws of mosques were derived from Muḥammad's mosque in Medina, the theory seems quite plausible.

[519] Bonine, "Tunisia," 153-56.

[520] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, vol 4, 213; Translated in Hugh Kennedy, *Conquests*, 210-11

[521] On the preservation of companions' *qibla*s at Fusṭāṭ, Qayrawān, and Damascus in later restorations, see Khoury, "Miḥrāb: From Text to Form," 15-16.

Al-Ḥakam II's (r. 350-65/961-76) sentiment during his expansion of the Great Mosque of Cordoba also attests to the possibility that a misaligned *qibla* can still be experienced as facing Mecca. He refused to change the overly southward orientation claiming, "Our way is that of precedent" (*madhhabunā al-ittibāʿ*).[522] Likewise, at least one medieval treatise on mathematical calculations for determining the *qibla* reports that "most of the imams of the first generations avoided thinking about the matter of the *qibla* and were content to follow the authority of others."[523] Although the statement comes as a critique of reliance on precedent, it attests to the confidence of many in the accepted *qibla*s of tradition, even where they contravened mathematical accuracy.

The narrative of the founding of the mosque at Qairawān offers another detail that cautions against overreading the misalignments of early architecture: ʿUqba built the mosque before he determined its *qibla*. We cannot always determine the direction faced by worshippers inside a mosque based solely on the orientation of its external walls: building orientation and prayer direction can diverge. Such a divergence appears to be the case in the congregational mosque of Baghdad built by al-Manṣūr where, according to al-Ṭabarī, in order to face the proper *qibla* one had to turn one's body somewhat away from the building's structural alignment.[524] In another example, many Mamluk mosques in Cairo built between the 13th and 16th centuries are oriented externally towards the companions' *qibla* (with the street plan) but internally towards the mathematically computed *qibla*.[525] *Miḥrab*s placed in the corners of prayer halls, rather than in the center

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[522] N.N. Khoury, "The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Codoba in the Tenth Century," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 83.
[523] Al-Bazdawī, *Risāla fī Samt al-Qibla* #4.
[524] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 3/322.
[525] King, "Sacred Direction," 326.

of a *qibla* wall, may also attest to the phenomenon of worship orientations that differ

from that of their buildings.[526]

In an example removed from the Islamic context but quite illustrative of the point,

we might consider the Church of St. Paulinus of Nola, excavated at ancient Primulacium

(today's Cimitile-Nola, a municipality of modern Naples). It is a rare instance where

literary evidence exists that controverts the most intuitive reading of the architectural

plan. The main basilica lies on a north-south axis, with seats for the presiding clergy on

the north end. However, in his *Letter* 32, 13, Paulinus of Nola makes it clear that the

building was oriented that way to highlight the presence of St. Felix on the north end, but

that when the priest offered the Eucharist he and all those praying would turn to the east.

If all we had was the remains of this 4th/5th century church, we would surely see it as an

example of aberrant Christian prayer orientation, since it does not face east.[527] Although,

removed in space, time, and religious culture from the Islamic context of our discussion,

the Basilica of St. Paulinus of Nola stands to show that one cannot rely solely on a

mosque's external form when determining the *qibla* used within.

In our consideration of so-called misaligned *qibla*s, we must also address the

question of how much precision was expected in the first place. Several jurists

recognized the challenge of achieving precision as overly restrictive, and they adopted

the notion that one need only face the general direction (*jiha*) of the Kaʿba rather than its

exact location (ʿ*aynihi*).[528] Many of those who accepted facing only the general direction

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[526] This may be the case for the old mosque at ʿAnjar, Lebanon, whose *miḥrāb*, east of the center of the wall, would more closely direct prayers towards Mecca. For the plans of the mosque and descriptions see, Creswell, *Short Account*, 123-24.

[527] Wilkinson, "Orientation, Jewish and Christian," 116-17 and fig. 6.

[528] See for example, Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *al-Bayān wal-Taḥṣīl*, 20 vols. Ed. M. Ḥajjī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1988), 17:319-22; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. M. ʿA. Q. ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 2008), 1:64-65; Ibn Taymīya, *Sharḥ al-ʿUmda*, ed. M.A. al-Iṣlāḥī, 5 vols. (Mecca: Dār ʿĀlim al-

of the Kaʿba referred to a prophetic ḥadīth in which Muḥammad declares, "That which is between east and west is the *qibla*."[529] In one preserved manuscript of al-Dimyāṭī's 6th/12th-century treatise on the *qibla*, two diagrams laid side-by-side illustrate the two opinions: one requiring greater precision and the other allowing for one to face any direction that would place the Kaʿba in one's field of vision when standing in front of it.[530] Greater leeway in the accuracy of orientation may also help to explain a letter from Jacob of Edessa (d. 89/ 708) that describes the *qibla*-practices of Muslims (and Jews) in Syria, Egypt, and Iraq as due south, east, and west, respectively. For Crone and Cook this letter constituted evidence of a site other than Mecca as the aim of the Islamic *qibla*; however, it seems just as likely that these cardinal directions reflected an acceptable level of precision at the time.[531] All of this is to say that when we consider identity as something imagined by a collective, we can allow for a variety of alignments in early mosques, all of which could be experienced as a single *qibla* aligned with the Kaʿba.

That the *qibla* creates an imagined sacred geography arranged around the Kaʿba may also help to explain the popularity of medieval *"qibla* maps." These cartographic renderings portray the world organized into regional *miḥrābs* around the sacred center in Mecca.[532] The Islamic geographic tradition appears to have always included maps and

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Fawāʾid lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ, n.d.), 2:449-552. Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*, 1:274-75, knows of the debate among scholars as to whether exactitude is required, but his own opinion is that that degree of precision is only possible with mathematics, and therefore it cannot be required of all Muslims.

[529] Al-Tirmidhī, #342; Ibn Mājah, #1011. Al-Bazdawī, *Risāla*, #5, says that this ḥadīth was used by the Shāfiʿīs of Khurasan and Transoxania to justify their miscalculation with regard to the *qibla*, which they established as "between the [rising point] of the sun at [mid-]winter and its setting."

[530] See MS Bodl. Marsh 592; relevant pages reproduced by King, "Discussion Article," 259 fig. 5.

[531] This was suggested by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 567, and in his "Jacob and Early Islamic Edessa," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. B. t. H. Romeny (Leiden: Brill 2008), 20-21. It is also possible that Jacob simply did not apply "literary precision" when describing the directions, and just referred to them in general to make his point that Jews do not face south from Syria, but towards Jerusalem and Muslims towards the Kaʿba.

[532] On maps that may have been used for finding the *qibla* see David King, *World Maps*, 89-99, and David King and Richard Lorch, "Qibla Charts, Qibla Maps, and Related Instruments," in *The History of*

cartographic images, thousands of which are extant in medieval and early modern manuscripts.[533] Medieval *qibla* maps often accompanied geographical or astronomical works, and divided the world into four, eight, eleven, twelve, or seventy-two sectors surrounding and facing the Kaʿba. We cannot be certain that these maps were used to perform orientation (of persons, buildings, or *miḥrāb*s), but the fact that the sectors are usually partitioned behind the graphic depiction of a concave *miḥrāb* is suggestive. First, these mapping traditions may imply that facing the *qibla* within a particular region allowed for a margin of error corresponding to the divisions of the world.[534] For example, Ibn Khurradādhbih (d. 299/912) describes a four-sector schema of the world, each with its own *qibla*.[535] In his scheme of sacred geography, then, any prayer trajectory that came within the 90º quadrant of the Kaʿba was an acceptable *qibla*. In this sense, the maps may have been used as diagrams that would help one align with the Kaʿba (or even a particular corner of it) without requiring mathematical precision.[536]

Cartography, vol. 2 bk. 1, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, eds. J.B. Harley and D. Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 189-205.

[533] Pinto, 1 nt. 1. There is some unclarity to what extent the maps that have come down to us in later medieval and early modern MSS may reproduce the tenth-century originals. Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, pp. 109-10 and nts 12-13, is more sanguine about the consistency of the cartographic tradition of copying than Pinto, *Medieval Maps*, 12 and nt. 17. For a good overview of the questions involved in the production of the cartographic artifacts see Ahmet Karamustafa, "Introduction to Islamic Maps," in *History of Cartography Series* vol. 2 bk. 1*: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies,* eds. J.B. Harley and D. Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 4-7.

[534] Many of these are described in King and Lorch, "Qibla Maps." See also King, "Sacred Direction," 320-24, and his "Discussion Article: The Orientation of Medieval Islamic Religious Architecture and Cities," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 26 (1995), 257-58. On these charts, see also, Zayde Antrim, *Mapping the Middle East* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018), 53-57.

[535] Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik wal-Mamālik, BGA* VI, ed. M.J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1889), 5. A translation of the relevant passage appears in Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 99.

[536] Emilie Savage-Smith, "Memory and Maps," in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honor of Wilferd Madelung*, eds. F. Daftary and J.W. Meri (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2003), 109-27, argues that medieval Islamic mapmakers may have aimed to produce aids to memory and navigation rather than accurate representations of the world. The idea that maps can be read as enabling actions is appealing when considering that maps organized regionally around Mecca may have actually been used to orient ritual acts towards the *qibla*. See also, Sonja Brentjes, "Cartography in Islamic Societies," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, vol. 1, eds. R. Kitchin and N. Thrift. (Oxford: Elvasier, 2009), 414-27, who makes a similar argument about the simplicity of *qibla* maps and their likely function as a didactic and

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the cartographic images portray a world organized *qibla*-wise, and this tells us something about those who made and used them. J. B. Harley, for example, argues for a more skeptical reading of maps, one that pays attention to the ways in which maps tell us as much about the societies that produce them as they do about the terrain they depict. Mapping is a tool for collapsing vast expanses of space into a visually consumable form: maps can aid in navigation, but they also produce an experience of self-location within the territory being represented. They inscribe a perspective of reality onto their viewers, in as much as that viewer believes that they are navigating a reality represented by the map.[537] Zayde Antrim espoused this view of *qibla* maps when she wrote:

> the popularity of this mapping tradition lay in its ability to evoke in visual terms the concept of the *umma*, or world community of Muslims…The *qibla* charts suggest that the 'Realm of Islam' may in fact be the whole world and that the concept of the *umma* is not restricted by political vicissitudes, cultural difference or physical distance from the Arabian Peninsula.[538]

To be certain, the *qibla* maps were representations of geography in that they portray regionally organized toponyms. They may have been technically imprecise in achieving orientation towards the *qibla*, but they enabled the visualization of a unified Islamic collective, all of whose members prayed towards a single sacred center. In this sense, they are tools that employ the *qibla* as a symbol in the imaginative representation of collective identity.

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mnemonic device; at 422 she makes the argument specifically about a schema that accompanied a copy of Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Kitāb al-Masālik wal-Mamālik*.

[537] J.B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica* 26:2 (1989): 1-20. This perspective was also taken by Karen Pinto, *Medieval Islamic Maps: An Exploration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 280.

[538] Zayde Antrim, *Mapping the Middle East*, 56-57; see also Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 99-100.

Innovative responses to the question of early mosque alignments also emerge when we consider identity as a process. As noted above, the development of early mosques occurred in the context of territorial expansion and social dispersal. In this setting, congregational spaces served an especially important socio-religious function for Muslims, who often constituted a minority in the lands they governed. While the first mosques arose outside the confines of settled towns, many of the earliest imperial mosques were repurposed buildings that had been in use by local Byzantine and Sassanian populations in established cities. For Christian religious sites, which often faced due east, the existing architectural footprint (often embedded within an existing street plan) was more likely to have determined the orientation of a building than the need to fae the *qibla* with mathematical precision. The need to reorient existing structures might help to explain the many mosques in Syro-Palestine and North Africa that appear to have overly southward *qibla*s. For example, the Great Umayyad Mosque of Damascus had been the church of St. John the Baptist (and may even have housed his head as a relic).[539] As such, the Christian building, which was oriented with its long side on an east-west axis was likely renovated by sealing the relevant entrances and creating new ones such that it could face south, the direction most aligned with the *qibla*. The same process of transformation is evidenced by the Great Mosque of Ḥamā—converted from "The Great Church," or *Kanīsat al-ʿUẓmā*, in ca. 15/636-37 by changing the three western doors into windows and opening doors on the north side.[540] A similar method of

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[539] Finbarr B. Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: The Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill 2001), 122-23, 225-26; King, "Sacred Direction in Islam," 319; Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, vol 1, 17. Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, and Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 68-71; Khalek, *Damascus After the Muslim Conquest*, 85-97ff.

[540] Creswell, *Short Account*, 6.

walling off the apse in the eastern wall and placing a *miḥrāb* in the southern wall was

likely deployed in the conversion of Churches into mosques in Umm al-Surab and Samā

in northern Jordan.[541] In some cases, such as at al-Ruṣāfa and Aleppo, mosques built

within tight urban spaces were erected next to an existing church, using one of the walls

to align on a perpendicular angle to the church's major (east-west) axis.[542] In all

likelihood, the orientation of the al-Aqṣā Mosque, which also faces further southward

than the mathematically calculated *qibla*, can be explained as a product of placement

within the existing north-south footprint of the Jewish Temple Mount plaza.

In eastern Islamic territories, Mosques were also created by repurposing existing

Sassanian structures, as appears to be the case at Istakhr (Persepolis).[543] In fact, there is

reason to believe that the mosques at Wāsiṭ and Uskaf Banī Junayd, the two buildings

used by Crone and Cook in their study, are examples of builings repurposed from

previous uses.[544] The aforementioned should not be taken as definitive proof that all

mosques with imprecise *qibla*s simply resulted from architectural constraints; however

we must acknowledge that the process by which an Islamic collective was formed

unfolded within existing urban spaces, and in the context of other imperial and religious

cultures.[545] As such, our expectations of the orientation of religious architecture, which

constituted an important expression of Islamic collective identity in diffuse territories,

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[541] G.R.D. King, "Two Byzantine Churches in Northern Jordan and their Re-Uses in the Islamic Period," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 1 (1983): 111-36.

[542] Mattia Guidetti, *In the Shadow of the Church: The Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 172.

[543] See Creswell, *Short Account*, 7 and Roy Mottahedeh, "The Eastern Travels of Solomon." This also may have occurred at Bukhāra, where a Sassanian fire temple was converted into a mosque by closing up the *qibla* wall and adding a *miḥrāb*, see Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 101.

[544] On Uskaf Banī Junayd see Hugh Kennedy, "Inherited Cities," 101; on the Sassanian columns at Wāsiṭ, see Creswell, *Short Account*, 40-41.

[545] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 3/322 reports that even in Baghdād, which was built on open terrain, the *qibla* of al-Manṣūr's mosque was off because it was built adjoined to the palace and after the palace was already built.

need to account for these material realities. Islam's emergence into the cultural milieu of Late Antiquity was a process to which the orientations of some of the earliest mosques bear witness.

The reorientation of mosques to face Mecca with greater accuracy in the centuries after their initial construction led some of the historians we mentioned to see the adoption of a Meccan *qibla* as a later convention altogether. However, this phenomenon also takes on a different character when seen as part of the process through which political legitimacy was often expressed in religious terminology. For example, literary evidence tells us that al-Ḥakīm (r. 386-411/ 996-1021) had a mosque in Fusṭāṭ destroyed and rebuilt so as to better align with the *qibla*, and the Mosque of al-Ḥakīm and the Azhar mosque are aligned with the newly calculated *qibla* of Ibn Yūnus, rather than that of the *Saḥāba*.[546] Likewise, at Yazd the *qibla* was recalculated and reset a number of times with the arrival of new rulers.[547] The Caliph al-Walīd I (r. 86-96/705-715), whose extensive building projects included the construction of al-Aqṣā and the rebuilding of al-Masjid al-Ḥaram, appears to have corrected more than one *qibla*, as well: such as the mosques at Wāsīṭ, Ṣanʿāʾ, the mosque of ʿAmr in Fusṭāṭ, and in a well-known occurance, at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. On the latter, al-Ṭabarī reports that al-Walīd wrote to his cousin ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who governed Medina at the time, telling him exactly

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[546] Ibn Duqmāq, *Intiṣār*, vol. 4, 78. See also Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics and the City*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 55 nt. 103; King, "Sacred Direction," 324; and David King, "Aspects of Fatimid Astronomy: From Hard-Core Mathematical Astronomy to Architectural Orientations in Cairo," in *L'Égypte Fatimide*, ed. M. Barrucand (Paris: Sorbonne, 1999), 509-11.

[547] For the various periods see Renata Holod, "Yazd," in *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, eds. L. Golombek and D. Wilber (Princeton, 1988), catalogue 221, pp. 414-418; and Holod, "Monuments of Yazd, 1300-1450: Architecture, Patronage and Setting" (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 1972), ch. 3. See also descriptions of the various construction phases and placements of the *miḥrāb* in Maxime Siroux, "La Mosquée Djumʾa de Yezd-i-Khast," *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 44 (1944): 101-118.

how to rebuild Muḥammad's mosque, including, "move the *qibla* wall if you are able,

and you are able on account of [the authority of] your maternal uncles."[548]

Some modern scholars view the reorientations of al-Walīd's reign—and the

criticism that they garnered by certain medieval Islamic historians—as a sign that the

Meccan sanctuary only became the single Islamic *qibla* after the Second Civil War (60-

72/680-92). However, many medieval critiques, such as that of al-Jāḥiẓ on the

reorientation at Wāsiṭ,[549] may be the polemics of ʿAbbāsid-era historians against their

Umayyad predecessors. In all likelihood, something did change after the Second Civil

War, but it was not the *qibla*. Rather, it was a dynastic expression of governance, which

manifested itself through wide-spread administrative changes: the adoption of Arabic

over Greek as the imperial language, the striking of uniquely Islamic coins, the

restoration of irrigation canals and pilgrimage routes, but also a massive program of

architectural patronage that conveyed the ascendancy and permanence of Islamic

religious and governmental presence.[550] Al-Walīd built and restored mosques as a

centerpiece of his construction efforts, and reorienting them towards his preferred

calculation of the *qibla* became what Flood calls "a dynastic stamp" of his rule. It seems

likely that the fractiousness of the early civil wars, regular Khārijite rebellion, and an

expanding caliphate led the Umayyad rulers to seek signs of unity. The term "People of

the *Qibla*" also entered Islamic rhetoric at this time as a unifying sign. It does not indicate

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[548] Tabarī *Taʾrīkh*, 2/1192-93. It is also possible that the narrative does not entail a change in *qibla*, but simply moving the *qibla* wall ("*qaddim al-qibla*"). The question of ʿUmar's authority to do so, then, would apply to all of the changes being made to the Propeht's mosque, not just the change with regard to the *qibla*-side.

[549] Al-Jāḥiẓ, "al-Risāla fī al-Nābita," in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, 4 vols, ed. A.S.M. Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1964), vol. 2, 16. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 568, suggests that al-Jāḥiẓ's critique reflects not only anti-Umayyad sentiments, but also the kind of accuracy people had come to expect in al-Jāḥiẓ's day.

[550] Jeremy Johns, "Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46 (2003): 418. Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 68-73.

that before this time Muslims had several sacred directions. Rather, highlighting the

shared *qibla* served as an apt response to the potentially divisive phenomena of

theological disagreement, ethnic diversity, and territorial spread.

The conjoining of earthly and divine authority can also be seen in other features

of mosque architecture that highlight the *qibla*. First, it should come as no surprise that

the *miḥrāb* was introduced into the standard vocabulary of mosque architecture as part of

al-Walīd's building project.[551] The *miḥrāb* is an empty prayer niche that marks the

direction of worship, and so it is usually positioned on a mosque's *qibla*-facing wall.

Modern scholars debate the origins of the *miḥrāb* as an institution, with many suggestions

offered, including: the standing place of Muḥammad in his own mosque in Medina, a

secular "ruler's niche" adopted from Sassanian or Arabian tribal practice, the apse of

early churches, or even synagogue arks.[552] In any case, the introduction of the *miḥrāb*

was unnecessary for marking the direction of prayer, since the *qibla* wall did so in most

mosques. Rather it should be seen alongside the institution of a growing number of

features that highlight the *qibla* wall, including the *minbar*, the ruler's *maqṣūra*, and the

construction of an anterior domed space. In each case the material patronage of political

authority took on religious expression in these ornamented features of mosque design.

The mosques were aligned with Mecca, submitting their rule to divine authority, even as

their internal arrangement testified to imperial resources. In this sense, the intensification

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[551] Flood, *Great Mosque of Damascus*, 184-89. Buildings such as the Khirbat al-Minya mosque in
Tiberias, the Grand Mosque of Cordoba and many others appear to face the same direction as the Great
Mosque of Damascus, which also might imply that it was taken as a dynastic *qibla* to be used in all
settings. See also Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule*
(Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), 142.

[552] Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 45-46, 80-81; "Miḥrāb" in *Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and
Architecture*, J.M. Bloom and S. Blair eds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), vol. 2, 515-17. Jean
Sauvaget, "The Mosque and the Palace," in *Early Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. J. Bloom (Burlington,
VT: Ashgate-Variorum, 2002), 25-30, is convinced that it was a ruler's apse and that this function persisted
into Umayyad times.

of the *qibla* wall's decorative program can be seen as expressions of both piety as well as power.[553]

Increased decorative activity on the *qibla* wall of medieval mosques should probably be read in conjunction with the convention by which the governmental palace, or *dār al-imāra*, were often built in front of the *qibla* wall of a city's mosque. This was the case at Kūfa, Wāsiṭ, ʿAnjar, al-Aqṣā, Qayrawān, Ruṣāfa, Raqqa, Baghdad, and many other sites.[554] Some medieval historians offer that the governors did so because they saw the regular presence of worshippers in the mosque as inherent protection for their treasuries. However, either of these would have been achievable with the palace on any of the other three walls. So, it seems quite possible to view the intentional alignment of governmental residence in front of the worshippers' *qibla* as a subtle message that while worship was directed towards the God whose revelation came through the Meccan Prophet, prayers first had to travel through the earthly rulers.

At the same time, the investment in building grand mosques and ornamenting their *qibla*-sides especially, lent religious legitimacy to their administrative authority. Investment of imperial resources in *qibla* ornamentation and calculation need not be read as politics exploiting religion. The separation between the two would likely have felt artificial to medieval ears. Muslim rulers were expected to govern in a way that enabled the fulfillment of private religious duties and may themselves have even been sources of religious legal authority; at the same time, the use of religious symbolism testified to their

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[553] It should be noted that by contrast, Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 121, saw the shift in mosque function from mainly political space to mainly religious space as the explanation for growing architectural emphasis on the *qibla* wall.

[554] Jere L. Bacharach, "Administrative Complexes, Palaces, and Citadels: Changes in Loci of Medieval Muslim Rule," in *the Ottoman City and its Parts: Urban Structure and Social Order*, eds. I. Bierman, R.A. Abou-El-Haj, and D. Presziosi (New Rochelle, NY: A. D. Caratzas, 1991), 111-128.

legitimacy. The relationship between temporal power and religious piety in early Islam is complex, but we can be sure that caliphal power helped to shape the character of Islamic community, just as pious movements shaped the character of the administration.[555] The *qibla* lay at the junction of earthly and divine authority, and further study of political interventions that led to the reorientation of early mosques may illuminate the intertwined processes through which Islamic collective identity was formed.

The development of sciences that honed prayer orientation with mathematical precision represents another site at which we can explore identity as a process. Developments in mathematics, astronomy, and cartography in the ʿAbbāsid period enabled calculation of the *qibla* with increasing acumen and precision.[556] By the ninth century, astronomical observatories were built for ʿAbbāsid caliphs and we begin to see tables that offer the direction of the *qibla* for various sites using calculated latitudes and longitudes.[557] Several methods for determining the *qibla* appear to have been in use by the time al-Birūnī wrote *Taḥdīd Nihāyat al-Amākin*, and scientific treatises that take up the calculation of sacred direction proliferated throughout the middle ages and into modern times.[558] Treatises on astronomy and navigational sciences were often the

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[555] The relationship between social/political and theological concerns was a major through-line of chapter 2, "Becoming the People of the Qibla." A general treatment of the topic appears in Khalid Blankinship, "The Early Creed," 33-54; The idea that the Caliph was initially a source of religious authority is argued by Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[556] The various models of calculation are laid out concisely by David King, "Ḳibla," *EI2*.

[557] An extensive description of these appears in David King, *World Maps*, 65-88.

[558] See al-Birūnī, *Taḥdīd Nihāyāt al-Amākin li-Taṣḥīḥ Masāfāt al-Masākin*, ed. P. Bulgakov (Cairo, 1962), 241-255 and translated as *The Determination of the Coordinates of Positions for the Correction of Distances between Cities*, trans. J. ʿĀlī (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1967), 241-261; see also al-Bīrūnī's magisterial *al-Qanūn al-Masʿūdī*, 3 vols., ed. M. Niẓām al-Dīn (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif, 1954-56), vol. 2, 522-28; the text describing the analemmic method of calculating the *qibla* of Ḥabash al-Ḥāsib al-Marwāzī (d. late 9th c.) is no longer extant but a reference to the treatise and a summary appears in a letter of al-Bīrūnī, see E.S. Kennedy and Yūsuf ʿId, "A Letter of al-Bīrūnī: Ḥabash al-Ḥāsib's Analemma for the Qibla," *Historia Mathematica* 1 (1974): 3-11; al-Bazdawī, *Risāla fī Samt al-Qibla*, (ed. and trans. King); al-Battānī, *Kitāb al-Zīj al-Ṣābiʾ* (*Opus Astronomicum* pt. 3) ed. C.A. Nallino (Milan: Ulrich Hoepli,

product of imperial patronage, and many of these included the application of their

methods to calculating the *qibla*.[559] Starting in the eleventh century the *muwaqqit* was

introduced as a governmental office responsible for the calculation of prayer times, but

also the *qibla*.[560] As early as the fourteenth century, magnetic compasses indicating the

qibla for various locations were produced, and two excellent Safavid examples, likely

commissioned by the Shah, have been studied at length by David King.[561] These subjects

usually fall under the purview of historians of science, who tend to describe the methods

employed by each development and evaluate the accuracy they would have enabled.

However, the lens of identity as process can help us to appreciate these tools as

expressions of sacred geography that use the vocabulary of *qibla*-sciences and also as

instruments by which administrative authority communicated its own religious

legitimacy.

1899) 206-7; the treatise of Ibn al-Qāṣṣ, *Kitāb Dalāʾil al-Qibla*, British Library, MS Or. 13315, appearing in Fuat Sezgin, ed., *ZGAIW* 4 (1988):7-81 (Arabic) and *ZGAIW* 5 (1989): 1-45 (Arabic); and the treatises described in Julio Samsó and Honorino Mielgo, "VI: Ibn Isḥāq al-Tūnisī and Ibn Muʿādh al-Jayyānī on the Qibla," in ed. J. Samsó *Islamic Astronomy and Medieval Spain* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate/Variorm), 1-25. On the various scientific methods for calculating the *qibla* that appear in these works see, David King "Kibla" *EI2* and A. Jon Kimberling, "Cartographic Methods for Determining the *Qibla*," *Journal of Geography* 101:1 (2002): 20-26. A contemporary look at the question of calculation with regard to Muslim prayer in North America appears in Aḥmad Massasati, "Mapping the Direction to Mecca: A Cartographic Perspective," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 19:2 (2002): 87-94.

[559] For example, al-Bīrūnī's many scientific and historical works were the product of patronage by rulers, such as *al-Āthār al-Bāqiya* for the Ziyārid ruler of Jurjān and Ṭabaristān, Qābūs b. Washmakir (r. 387-402/ 997-1012) and *al-Qanūn al-Masʿūdī* was commissioned by the first Ghaznavid Sultan, Maḥmūd (r. 392-421/ 1002-30) and later dedicated to his son Masʿūd. See Syed Ḥasan Barānī, "Introduction to *al-Qanūn al-Masʿūdī*, v-x.

[560] George Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories in the Golden Age of Islam* (New York: NYU Press, 1994), 60-61; Aydin Sayili, *The Observatory in Islam* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 24-25; David King, "On the Role of the Muezzin and the Muwaqqit in Medieval Islamic Society," in *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation: Proceedings of Two Conferences on Pre-Modern Science*, eds. F.J. Ragep and S.P. Ragep (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 286-344. Paul Heck, *The Construction of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization: Qudāma b. Jaʿfar and his* Kitāb al-Kharāj wa-ṣināʿat al-kitāba (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 111-23, demonstrates nicely the ways in which the production of geographic knowledge could serve administrative needs.

[561] King, *World Maps*; a nice description of many devices used for finding the *qibla* appears at 100-124, while a description of the Safavid examples is the subject of 197-254. An accessible introduction to some of these devices and how they function appears in Rappoport, *Maps of Islam*, ch. 6.

Let us take astronomical observatories as a case in point: these buildings were often constructed under the patronage of rulers, and they aided in scientific development as well as in orienting imperial mosques. For example, in the 5th/11th c. Mālik Shah employed the scientists at a local observatory when building his mosque in Baghdad and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭusī's (d. 672/ 1274) observatory at Maraghah (Iran), aided in Ilkhānid recalculations of the *qibla* as well.[562] The first Islamic astronomical observatories were likely built by the Caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 198/813-218/833), who commissioned scientists to simultaneously observe lunar eclipses in Baghdad and Mecca, in an effort to determine the latter's exact latitude (a necessity for *qibla* calculation).[563] The observatories aided in the development of cartography, navigation, and land surveying. As such, they shaped the experience of land and empire—their function in *qibla*-calculation, however, became part of the collective experience of Islamic religion and its unique sacred geography. While observatories were probably not built in order to calculate the *qibla* explicitly, their scientific fruits were applied easily and early to compute the direction of prayer with incredible exactitude.

Religious scholars, as mentioned above, did not always require the degree of precision afforded by the sciences, accepting instead the methods of folk astronomy or the existence of local precedent. To be certain, some among the "common people" rejected the religious applications of scientific developments, getting "goosepimples at

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[562] The observational notes of Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad al-Maghribī conducted at Marāgha include a section on calculating the *qibla*; see George Saliba, "An Observational Notebook of a Thirteenth-Century Astronomer," *Isis* 74:3 (1983): 388-401. See also Sayili, *Observatory in Islam*, and esp. 164. On the extensive work of the observatory at Maraghah in general see Saliba, *Arabic Astronomy*, 245-90.
[563] al-Birūnī, *Taḥdīd,* 175-6. Al-Birūnī's works may also have been used to recalculate the *qibla* mathematically for Ghaznā, where he equipped an observatory, and Bust in Afghanistān; see Barani, "Introduction" to *al-Qanūn al-Masʿūdī*, xv and xxix**.**

the mere sight of computation of scientific instruments."[564] Nevertheless, in debates

about the religious validity of astronomy, calculating the *qibla* (and accurate prayer

times) validated the exact sciences as a handmaiden of Islam, even as those sciences set

new standards of precision in fulfillment of religious obligations.[565] So, after laying out

several methods for calculating the *qibla* in his *Taḥdīd*, al-Birūnī writes:

> Thus the work we have presented, concerning the verifications of the longitudes
> of towns and their latitudes, is beneficial to the majority of Muslims because it
> helps them to determine the direction of the *qibla* accurately and to hold their
> prayers accordingly, free from the blemish of a misconducted investigation.[566]

Unlike astrology, which many traditional scholars shunned, astronomy was shown to be

useful in the fulfillment of religious duties.[567] The establishment of the *muwaqqit*'s

office (under the Mamluks) for the scientific calculation of prayer times and the *qibla*

further attests to the integration of science and religious practice. These "professional

religious astronomers" represented an imperial integration of science with sacred

geography (and sacred time).[568] In short, imperial patronage of *qibla*-sciences attests to

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[564] Al-Birūnī, *Exhaustive Treatise on Shadows*, trans. E.S. Kennedy (Beirut: Institute for the History of Arabic Sciences, 1976), 75-76. Apparently, al-Bīrūnī developed a Roman time-keeping device for the congregational mosque at Ghaznā, which was rejected by the imam for being based on the secular calendar. See Barani, "Introduction" to *al-Qanūn al-Masʿūdī*, xv.

[565] On the *qibla* as a socio-religious validator of astronomical science see Sayili, *Observatory in Islam*, 14-15, 24 and Saliba, *Arabic Astronomy*, 60-61. Some, such as Muzaffar Iqbal, *Islam and Science* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), have argued that study of the natural sciences developed organically from traditional Islamic sciences of law, theology, and Qurʾān interpretation, but this position is far from proven. A critique of the idea that Islam has agency to be the motivator of scientific discovery appears in Dimitri Gutas "Islam and science: a false statement of the problem." *Islam & Science*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2003, p. 215. Academic OneFile, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A119627469/AONE?u=upenn_main&sid=AONE &xid=3f34bea0. Accessed 23 July 2018. See Iqbal's response in, "Islam and Science: Responding to a False Approach" in the same issue p. 221. Academic OneFile, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A119627475/AONE?u=upenn_main&sid=AONE&xid=bf8ddbc3. Accessed 23 July 2018.

[566] al-Birūnī, *Taḥdīd*, 258. See also 12-14.

[567] In al-Birūnī's *Treatise on Shadows*, 8, he writes, "the learned in religion who are deeply versed in science know that Muslim law does not forbid anything of what the partisans of the craft of astronomy [concern themselves with] except the lunar crescent."

[568] Saliba, *History of Arabic Astronomy*, 60-61; Sayili, *Observatory in Islam*, 24-25, 241-43; See also David King, "Muezzin and the Muwaqqit," 286-344; and idem. "Mamluk Astronomy and the Institution of the

the role of piety in the expression of both temporal authority and collective religious identity. Recalculations of the *qibla* signaled a right to govern, but they also demonstrated the execution of a legitimate ruler's responsibility to enable his people to carry out their obligations with the highest degree of observance.

The ongoing process of *qibla*-calculation tracked technical advances and technological developments in the sciences. When an imperial mosque is built with greater precision in orientation than those in the area, or when a mosque's orientation is corrected, it need not indicate that all prior *qibla*s were facing somewhere other than the Kaʿba. Rather, when identity is seen as imagined, we can allow that Muslims experienced a variety of alignments as a single *qibla*. At the same time, the alignment of mosques towards the *qibla* does not have a fixed method, and the definition of precision fluctuated. The introduction of increasingly accurate techniques in mosque orientations is best read as part of an ongoing process inherent in the formation of collective identity: a process that unfolded over time, included political considerations, and developed along the with the sciences. Some western scholarship that wishes to question Islam's origins in Mecca does so by assuming that literary accounts were not unambiguous and fixed statements about early Islam, but reflections of a process of formation—they would do well to apply a hermeneutic of similar flexibility and sophistication to its architecture.

The Inexhaustible *qibla*: A Kind of Conclusion

Ritual orientation towards the Kaʿba both expressed identification with Islam and inscribed it onto the very body of Muslims in prayer, burial, slaughter, and other

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Muwaqqit," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, eds. T. Phillip and U. Haarmaan (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 153-62.

regulated acts. The Islamic *qibla* was distinct from those of other religious communities—the Qurʾān and in narratives of Muḥammad's prophethood are explicit in this regard—and so orientation was an embodied sign to differentiate an Islamic "us" from all of the other "thems" with their own *qibla*s: be they towards Jerusalem, Gerizim, east, or the Sacred Fire. As a specific physical site, perceived as the center of the world, the *qibla* helped to ground a sense of communal belonging in the sacred geography of Islam. The *qibla* became a potent symbol of collective identity for Muslims in the formative period because it was a prerequisite for religious worship, a marker of interreligious distinction, and a tool by which the Kaʿba in Mecca exerted centripetal force upon Muslims living across a vast expanse of territory.

The previous section of this chapter took up the topic of identity and sacred geography with regard to the alignment of early mosques, the adornment of their *qibla* walls, *qibla*-focused world maps, as well as mathematical sciences and devices used for calculating the *qibla*. We laid out ways to view the construction of supposedly misaligned mosques as (nevertheless) a part the collective identification with the Kaʿba in Mecca. We also demonstrated that modifications of the *qibla* in early mosques—to orient them with greater precision—might be read as part of the historical processes through which a collective Islamic identity unfolded in the formative period. The so-called misalignments pointed us to the conversion of pre-existing architecture into mosques in the first centuries of expansion, the expressions of political legitimacy through the intertwining of imperial power and religious piety, and the religious applications of scientific discovery. The lenses of identity as imagined and as a process enabled an innovative hermeneutic for studying the *qibla* in the development of Islam's

sacred geography. And yet, identity is inexhaustible, and so this dissertation must conclude with new modes through which the *qibla* is calculated and experienced.

In the first place, *qibla*-sciences did not end in the formative period, and the latest technology is regularly applied to calculating orientation towards Mecca. As mentioned above, elaborate and ornate devices for calculating the *qibla* were fabricated for wealthy patrons, two excellent examples of which were created for Safavid nobility in the seventeenth century.[569] In the late-twentieth century, with the development of industrial mass production, miniature magnetic *qibla*-compasses became widely available, and were even distributed at one time to passengers on Saudi Airlines.[570] In the twenty-first century the wide-spread availability of GPS technology has made precise *qibla* calculation available to laity of all kinds. Digital clocks, like the watches made by the AlFajr Watch & Clock Company, carry a feature for indicating five daily prayer times and the *qibla* for thousands of cities across the world. Anyone with access to the Internet can determine the *qibla* from anywhere on the planet through websites like www.eqibla.com and www.qiblaway.com, which, taking the curvature of the earth into account, offer exact vectors to the Kaʿba from one's location.[571] Dozens of *qibla* applications ("apps") have been designed for smartphones. Many of these include the times for five daily prayers, and some even include an *adhān* (call to prayer). Others allow one to locate nearby mosques, while still others use "augmented reality" to indicate the direction of prayer. The Qibla-AR app, for example, engages a smartphone's camera

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[569] King, *World-Maps*.

[570] King, "Muezzin and *Muwaqqit*," 321. As of this writing, one can purchase prayer rugs from Amazon with a sown-in magnetic compass for finding the *qibla* with the help of an accompanying booklet listing thousands of locations.

[571] For example, from the University of Pennsylvania's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations in Williams Hall, eqibla.com offers an image of a map overlaid with directive line towards the *qibla* and suggests "32.28° from East toward North" and qiblaway.com offers the same type of image and advice, but describes the same angle as "57.72°" (i.e. from 0°).

feature and superimposes an image of the Kaʿba onto the screen, such that when one

faces the Kaʿba on the phone's screen, one is facing the actual Kaʿba. With programs

like "Makkah 3D" that enable one to perform a "digital *ḥajj*" and others by which one

can livestream video feed of the Kaʿba twenty-four hours a day, the experience of sacred

geography is changing drastically.[572] On the multi-user virtual environment, "Second

Life," Islamic religious spaces exist, in which designers insist that users observe space-

apprpriate behavioral norms, such as removing their avatars' shoes.[573] Like the *qibla*-

maps that collapsed the world into visually consumable form and organized it around the

Kaʿba, the smartphone must also be seen as a tool that places an entire world at ones

fingertips. We may wish to study these technological engagements with the Kaʿba as

digital representations of "real" spaces, or we might consider the Internet as a kind of

space in itself that becomes sacralized, in a manner that parallels the sacralization of

physical territory. In all cases, scholars should look to the *qibla* and the means used to

orient prayers toward it as a window into the experience of belonging to the global

religious collective known as Islam.

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[572] Gary R. Bunt, "Surfing the App Souq: Islamic Applications for Mobile Devices," *CyberOrient* 4:1 (2010), available online: http://www.cyberorient.net/article.do?articleId=3817 (accessed July 20, 2018). See also, livestream videofeed from Mecca with Qurʾān recitation and liturgy at https://makkahlive.net/tvcamera.aspx and the virtual hajj platform at http://makkah3d.net/#.
[573] See Krystina Derrickson, "Second Life and The Sacred: Islamic Space in a Virtual World," *Digital Islam* 2008. http://www.digitalislam.eu/article.do?articleId=1877 (accessed July 20, 2018).

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Note: For the purposes of alphabetization this list ignores the Arabic definite article ("al-"), and the letters *hamza* and *ʿayn* are both treated as the letter "A." Arabic and Hebrew names are listed according to the element in the name by which, in my judgment, the author is most commonly known.

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