

Manolis Ulbricht, Jens Scheiner (Eds.)

From *Oriens Christianus* to Islamic Near East

Historiographical, Theological,
and Cultural Cross-Pollinations
in Late Antiquity and Early Islam

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The present volume has been finalized for publication in the context of my position as postdoctoral researcher in the project “Late Antiquity and Early Islamic Studies” (LAESSI) at the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies I of Georg August University Göttingen, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (2022-2029) and directed by professor Jens Scheiner. I am thankful for his close reading and his detailed remarks on the volume’s manuscript. Professor Reinhold F. Gleis (Bochum) generously covered part of the printing costs for the publication of this volume. I am grateful for this financial support for finalizing this project.

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Manolis Ulbricht

Transliteration

Arabic Transliteration:

The transliteration of Arabic follows the *International Journal of Middle East Studies Guidelines*.

Greek Transliteration:

A, α	A, a
B, β	B, b
Γ, γ	G, g
Δ, δ	D, d
E, ε	E, e
Ϛ	St, st
Z, ζ	Z, z
H, η	Ē, ē
Θ, θ	Th, th
I, ι	I, i
K, κ	K, k
Λ, λ	L, l
M, μ	M, m
N, ν	N, n
Ξ, ξ	X, x
O, ο	O, o
Π, π	P, p
P, ρ	R, r
Σ, σ, Ϛ	S, s
T, τ	T, t
Y, υ	Y, y
Φ, φ	Ph, ph
X, χ	Ch, ch
Ψ, ψ	Ps, ps
Ω, ω	Ō, ō
Αι, αι	Ai, ai
Ει, ει	Ei, ei
Οι, οι	Oi, oi

Αυ, αυ Au, au

Ευ, ευ Eu, eu

Ου, ου Ou, ou

spiritus asper: H, h

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Introduction

What is perhaps needed is a more integrative approach, one that takes account of all the different participants in the making of a new civilization in the Middle East from the seventh to the ninth century, for non-Muslims were not only affected by the actions of the new rulers but also had an effect upon the policies of these rulers and contributed materially and intellectually to the religious and cultural transformation of the region. One could achieve this in many ways, by highlighting that this was a “shared world” [...] or by treating it as an “imperial society” [...], which, as we know from other empires, tend to be melting pots of peoples, the new rulers drawing on talent from all sectors of their territories without much discrimination.

These visionary words are taken from the closing remarks of Robert Hoyland in the Preface to the reprint of his magnum opus *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton 1997). With this spirit in mind, a growing appetite has emerged across many of the rich scholarly fields that deal with the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean during Late Antiquity, the Early Islamic, and the Medieval periods.

The present volume also follows this pattern by bringing together a diverse group of scholars with the aim of striking up meaningful dialogue that helps us to better understand the Near Eastern milieu during Late Antiquity and Early Islamic times. The volume was born out of a two-day workshop organized by Manolis Ulbricht and Adam Walker in collaboration with the Chair of Byzantine Studies at Freie Universität Berlin (Dec. 7th-8th, 2017). The title of the workshop was “From Oriens Christianus to the Islamic Near East – Theological, Historical, and Cultural Cross-pollination in the Eastern Mediterranean of Late Antiquity”. Its primary objective – in following Peter Brown as well as Glen Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar’s *Late Antiquity* (Cambridge/MA 1999), and others – was to encourage discussion that sheds new light on the coexistence and crossroads at which the Late Antique world of the Eastern Mediterranean heralded diverse exchanges between Eastern Christendom, Byzantine culture, and the Islamic world. The workshop wanted to discover on how these exchanges impacted the development of diverse regions, cultures, languages, and religions.

The idea of publishing this volume was taken up by Manolis Ulbricht in the frame of the research project “Late Antiquity and Early Islamic Studies” (LAESSI) funded by the Volkswagen Foundation. The project is directed by professor Jens Scheiner at the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies I of Georg August University Göttingen and aims at establishing *Late Antique and Early Islamic Studies* as an interdisciplinary epochal framework and, thus, to institutionalize a new subdiscipline of historical studies in Germany. Rather than extending present definitions of Late Antiquity to ca. 750 CE (as previous scholars did), this new designation analyses historical processes that dominated a period of ca. 600 years, starting with the Christological controversies in the early 300s and ending with the relative decline of the Early Islamic Empire under al-Muqtadir (d. 932).

Exploring transcultural and interreligious phenomena of the period around 300-930 CE in their *longue durée* will allow new research of how these exchanges impacted the development of geographical regions, cultures, languages, and religions. Also sharing the objectives of the LAESSI project at Göttingen, the present volume aims to provide inter-disciplinary glimpses on various perspectives emerging from the Eastern Christian, Byzantine Orthodox, and Early Islamic approaches to this area of research. It thus brings together papers on different intercultural and interreligious aspects of historiographical, theological, and cultural themes of that period.

Much research has been done on the interactions, exchange, and cross-pollinations in Late Antiquity and Early Islam. Over the past decades, a considerable number of scholars, starting with Peter Brown (History of Christianity), David Thomas (Theology), John Wansbrough (History), Patricia Crone and Michael Cook (both Islamic Studies), focused on the Late Antique world and endeavored to contextualize formative and early classical Islam within this cultural frame. A second generation of mostly Anglo-American scholars, like Averil Cameron, Lawrence Conrad, Fred Donner, Robert Hoyland, and Aziz al-Azmeh, took up these perspectives and presented further insightful results.

Structurally, these endeavors were paired with the institutionalization of thematic book series, like *Christian-Muslim Relations* (edited by David Thomas et al., Leiden 2009ff.), and the rewriting of the political and cultural history of the Near East in handbooks, such as *The New Cambridge History of Islam* (edited by Michael Cook, Cambridge 2010). In addition, the first professorial chairs in this emerging field (i.e., Robert Hoyland who is Professor of Late Antique and Early Islamic Middle Eastern History at New York University) and a model MA degree program (i.e., MSc in Late Antique, Islamic and Byzantine Studies) at the University of Edinburgh were established.

However, these groundbreaking developments have unfolded so far only in the United States of America or in the United Kingdom. In Germany, the field is noticeably underdeveloped: Only a few scholars are involved (e.g., Lutz Berger, Isabel Toral-Niehoff), no degree program exists and the only structural implementation along these lines of research is the well-known *Corpus Coranicum* at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, led by the distinguished scholar Angelika Neuwirth. She, however, focusses on the Qur'ān and its *Umwelttexte*, while her volume *Denkraum Spätantike* (Wiesbaden 2016) edited together with her disciples Nora Schmidt and Nora Katharina Schmid also serves as one of the starting points in exploring debating cultures in Late Antique and Early Islamic times.

The present volume offers a new contribution to this research field through an interdisciplinary perspective on Christian-Muslim coexistence from the fourth to tenth century CE. A unified and holistic approach to *Late Antique and Early Islamic Studies* (LAESSI) shall help to understand the cross-pollinations the region underwent in its development *From Oriens Christianus to Islamic Near East* (OCINE). In this sense, the volume's title shall not suggest a linear or strictly temporal development from a Christian region to a mainly Muslim cultural environment. The title rather reflects the