


Article

Ritualized Affective Performances: Syriac Etiquette Guides and Systems Intelligence in Early Christian–Muslim Encounters

Luis Josué Salés 

Department of Religious Studies, Scripps College, 1030 N Columbia Ave, Claremont, CA 91711, USA; lsales@scrippscollege.edu

Abstract: In 2009, Michael Penn published a transcription and English translation of two Syriac texts, *To the Rulers of the World* (ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܡܪܐ ܕܕܢܐ) and *Concerning the Entrance before a New Emir* (ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܡܪܐ ܕܕܢܐ ܕܥܡܝܪ ܕܥܝܢܐ). This essay proposes a new historiographical approach to these texts based on the concepts and theoretical apparatus of systems intelligence theory and affect theory. I show how these texts use key Islamic theological and cultural ideas that would affectively resonate with the Muslim authorities while remaining non-objectionable to the orthodoxy of the Assyrian Church of the East. Specifically, I argue that Christians sometimes sought to curry favor with Islamic authorities not so much through logical persuasion, but by creating a sense of affective coherence through attunement to the discursive and theological systems of Islam. Through this strategy, Christians perhaps hoped to gain some small measure of political and religious advantage, especially over and against other Christian jurisdictions, such as the Syrian Orthodox Church. I conclude by discussing what methodological prospects these approaches can offer to the subfield, particularly if combined with other theories that similarly remain underused.

Keywords: Syriac; Christian–Muslim relations; systems intelligence; affect theory



Citation: Salés, Luis Josué. 2023. Ritualized Affective Performances: Syriac Etiquette Guides and Systems Intelligence in Early Christian–Muslim Encounters. *Religions* 14: 1423. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14111423>

Academic Editors: Kristin M.S. Bezio and Samantha Dressel

Received: 26 September 2023
Revised: 20 October 2023
Accepted: 8 November 2023
Published: 14 November 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

A carefully ritualized affective performance must have unfolded when early medieval Middle Eastern Christians either wrote to Islamic authorities or were invited into their presence for an audience. However, the embodied affective flows that exceeded any scripting of these encounters are likely irretrievable. We had to be there to get it: the fluctuating tension in a room, a modest smile of admiration, perhaps a scornful scowl, or the unmistakable signs of mounting impatience drummed out by rigid fingers on a resonant table. Still, for the purposes of religious historiography, there must be at least spectral traces that bear witness to an ostensibly vital dimension for the study of Christian–Muslim relations in the early medieval Middle East, namely the reciprocal formation of their intersubjectivity through the microbehaviorally produced affect intrinsic to such encounters. In this study, I would like to suggest that some aspects of the effect of these engagements can be retrieved through a combined approach that leans on the analytical and conceptual resources of systems intelligence theory and affect theory (see Section 1), neither of which has yet seen much use in the study of early Christian–Muslim relations. Specifically, I argue that Christians inflected their address to Muslims in the interest of creating a sense of coherence that relied on a performative, even ritualized, attunement to systems of religious affect. To this end, this essay sketches a new approach which I offer in hopes that others will find it helpful for their own work on Christian–Muslims relations, and, more broadly, for historiography in general.

This essay joins, at a perhaps methodologically catachrestic angle, the ongoing scholarly conversation regarding the establishment and evolution of Christian–Muslim relations in the Middle East following the Arab conquests of the Persian Empire and numerous Roman provinces during the seventh century.¹ As such, it proposes a new method for

studying certain types of texts whose historical significance for constructing a Christian–Muslim society may otherwise be elusive to gauge. Over the last decade, and following earlier trends in other areas of religious studies, the subfield of early Christian–Muslim relations has begun to move away from essentializing religions owing to the belated introduction of some aspects of critical theory into the subfield. The result has been a (sometimes adamant) divergence in opinions about the evolving religious identities of Christians and Muslims (Dye 2011, 2014; Pohlmann 2013; Zellentin 2013; Segovia 2019; Neuwirth 2010, 2014; Donner 2010; Tannous 2018; Taylor 2015; Wood 2021). For example, Michael Penn’s *Envisioning Islam* uses an approach familiar to scholars of early Christian–Jewish relations championed, among others, by Daniel Boyarin, who explores the slow process of the “parting of the ways” between the two religions by deploying the analytical resources of studies of cultural difference (Boyarin 2004). From a similar vantage point, Penn makes the case that just as the boundaries between Christians and Jews in late antiquity were porous and ill-defined, those between Christians and Muslims in the earliest centuries of Islam were also the same.

Penn’s approach and findings have been met with some resistance. To take one example, Yonatan Moss criticizes Penn for failing to identify when, precisely, the ways of Christians and Muslims indeed parted and how (Moss 2016, pp. 252–53). There is of course a sense in which the question is legitimate, but only if it is not pushed too far, since boundaries between religious identities are more or less apparent depending on angles of perception, shifting politics, cultural situatedness, and the knowledge or ignorance of certain individuals; hence, the question seems to ignore that its locus of enunciation will itself in part determine the answer. Thus, there never has been a complete and final parting of the ways, and it is hard to imagine there can be one, given the inextricable entanglement of certain religious and even ethnic subjects with others. Romans, for example, struggled to differentiate Christians from Jews for several centuries, much as Christians in the early centuries of Islam frequently emphasized how their Christologies aligned them closer to the strict monotheism of Islam than to other “heretical” Christians. My point is that boundaries are not always self-evident, nor do they exist outside of the discursive structures that sustain them, and are therefore constantly fluctuating in their lived intensity.

Adding to Moss’s critique of Penn’s work, Philip Wood has more recently made the following comment about Christian–Muslim differences: “The fact that sources do not report, or choose to underplay, differences in practice or that members of religious communities shared ideas and practices does not mean that boundaries between communities did not exist.” (Wood 2021, p. 6). This objection is perplexing, since Penn does not deny the existence of boundaries and takes great pains to incorporate examples of ecclesiarches who were determined to impose boundaries, not only over and against Muslims, but even other Christian jurisdictions.² Rather, Penn merely interrogates the solidity of boundaries between Christians and Muslims in the first centuries of Islam. Hence, his references to “fuzzy boundaries”, “ambiguously defined religious boundaries”, and “a world where religious boundaries were often blurred and resisted” (Penn 2015a, pp. 4, 11, 56). It is clear that Penn believes there were boundaries of some type, but that does not mean they were not frequently transgressed—otherwise, if boundaries were so clear, self-evident, and respected, why was the extensive primary literature aimed at (re)establishing and policing them? For example, it appears to have been a legitimate question to ask whether a Christian married to a Muslim could continue to come to church.³ Ironically, the mechanism that Penn is speaking of is also at work in the title of Wood’s own book, *The Imam of the Christians*, in reference to Dionysios of Tel-Mahre’s self-designation as an “imam” to curry favor with Islamic authorities. Simply put, there certainly were boundaries of some sort between Christians and Muslims in the early centuries of Islam, as there are now, but they were not always self-evident and impermeable, and I believe that is Penn’s point.

If so, I am interested in the types of strategies available to Christians to disrupt the clarity of boundaries, but with the crucial difference that I am more concerned with what we may call a micro-level dimension of these disruptions than with the larger structures

that are often studied, such as taxation, civil laws, and other factors that created Christian dhimmitude at a macrosocial level. Concretely, I explore deliberate Christian efforts to elicit coherence between Christians and Muslims through sensitivity to the other's religious system. Thus, this chapter is as much a theoretical and methodological contribution to the study of early Christian–Muslim relations as it is an exercise in understanding a concrete pair of texts that might evidence the heuristic value of my approach for further uncovering the early lived dimensions between Christians and Muslims. For this reason, I allocate additional space to my theoretical and methodological approach, as it helps me to identify certain nuances that other approaches certainly detect, only with lower epistemological resolution. However, first, a word on the two primary sources at the center of this study to highlight the need for an innovative approach that unlocks their value for the religious historiography of the early medieval Near East.

In 2009, Michael Penn published a transcription and translation of two short Syriac texts contained in compendia, currently catalogued as *BL Add.* 14,653 and *BL Add.* 14,493, along with an excellent commentary; later, in *Envisioning Islam*, he offered a further and illuminating discussion of their significance for early Christian–Muslim boundaries (Penn 2009; 2015a, pp. 117–21). We cannot determine the precise date of composition of either piece, but they were likely penned during the early centuries of the 'Abbasid dynasty (750–1258 CE) and based on paleographic markers, were incorporated into their final collections around the ninth or tenth centuries (Penn 2009, p. 74, n. 11). The first text (*BL Add.* 14,653, ff. 77a–78a) is titled, *To the Rulers of the World* (ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ), and offers a type of blueprint for addressing an almost certainly Islamic suzerain in letter form. The second text (*BL Add.* 14,493, ff. 182a–182b), *Concerning the Entrance before a New Emir* (ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ), similarly provides the reader with a set of cues to follow if summoned into the presence of a recently appointed Emir. Penn suggests that these texts “may be the ancient analogue to the chapter in *Miss Manners* speaking about the etiquette of attending a dinner at the White House.” (Penn 2009, p. 76). I concur that these texts can function as attitudinal templates; however, I would like to delve further to unearth their significance for Christian–Muslim relations by specifically identifying the use of religiously affected resonances through which authors could foster Christian–Muslim coherence.

As Penn intimates (Penn 2009, pp. 71–72), the lion's share of scholarship on early Christian–Muslim coexistence has been predominantly informed by the theological-polemical genre widely designated as *majlis* (مجلس, or “session”)⁴ or *kalam* (كلام, “dialectic speech”).⁵ To be unforgivably but necessarily simplistic, this genre typically features a less-than-fully honest accounting of debates between Christian and Muslim intellectuals that invariably result in the ideological triumph of the representative of the religion to which the author of the treatise belongs. Certainly, this genre matters for retrieving some aspects of the earliest theological conversations among Christians and Muslims, and must reflect at least some dimensions of their exchange of ideas, particularly in a shared Aristotelian logical dialect; however, they are only witness to a niche interaction that cannot be universalized to all Christian–Muslim interactions.⁶ For this reason, Penn sees an important corrective, in the two texts introduced earlier, to an otherwise overrepresented genre in the scholarly literature that, when overemphasized, might skew contemporary perceptions of Christian–Muslim relations as an agonistic clash of civilizations.⁷ Thus, these two texts expand the repository of sources available for reconstructing the early relationships between Christians and Muslims east of the Mediterranean. Granted, we should not misconstrue these types of sources as somehow offering a panoramic vista of the early medieval Middle East in its full social complexity—they do not.⁸ However, that is not the point; the point is that they help us to obtain a higher resolution picture of one aspect of the early Christian–Muslim interactions through the inevitably small window of data that grants us access to it. Specifically, these types of sources complicate the adversarial, albeit often cordial, rapport exhibited in the *majlis*⁹ by inviting us to view a different kind of spectacle, one where coherence is elicited through the force of affect.

Where should these two documents be situated socially? Most scholars concur on the larger backdrop: Christians living under Islam were generally a protected demographic with moderate government intervention, with relatively reasonable regulation about marriage and offspring laws, and where religious identity on its own was rarely the grounds for chronic trouble (Wood 2021, pp. 11–12; Weitz 2018, pp. 63–105; Tannous 2018, pp. 260–399). To be sure, there were sporadic and isolated cases of tragic religious persecution, discrimination, and even martyrdom, and there is no denying that social structures undoubtedly advantaged Muslims (Sahner 2018, pp. 160–240; Robinson 2005). However, as أهل الكتاب (*ahl al-kitab*)—scripture people—Christians had rights and privileges that were generally respected by local, regional, and caliphal authorities, and under these largely guaranteed structures, Christians not only thrived, but were instrumental in the cultural and political success of the early Islamic dynasties (Griffith 2008, pp. 6–22, 106–28, 156–79; Tannous 2018, pp. 160–98). After all, the absolutely overwhelming majority of the people in the northwestern territories of the Islamic empires were Christians, and military garrisons and the specter of violence constituted poor and long-term unsustainable mechanisms for maintaining population compliance.¹⁰ Thus, it was in everyone’s best interest to practice generous and considered politics, even if the potential for religious discord remained a quiescent force that conditioned their interactions.

In this study, I would like to suggest that *To the Rulers of the World* and *Concerning the Entrance before a New Emir* offer a window onto this type of politicking, which is categorically different than the *majlis*. The *majlis* and its scholarship often prioritize rational discourse, persuasion, and the Aristotelian apparatus of logical demonstration¹¹, and I believe there is a different type of “logic” afoot here. Specifically, these two texts are carefully curated with simultaneous systemic attunement to the two religious traditions in the interest of fostering coherence by performatively affecting discourse.¹² We can think of them, in other words, as attempts to model and crystallize forms of affectively fine-tuned and ritualized conventions in the service of religiously and politically advantageous effects. As I read them, these texts are about a form of power that exceeds the discursive logic and linear causality deployed in the *majlis*. I would therefore like to offer a close reading of these texts informed by two theoretical traditions so far absent in the study of Christianity under early Islam, namely the systems intelligence theory and affect theory.

2. Systems Intelligence and Affect Theories

While the affect theory is well-established as a critical-theoretical approach to the study of politics, culture, history, and religion, the systems intelligence theory remains unknown in religious historiography, despite its rapid adoption in other fields (e.g., philosophy, psychology, organizational studies, architecture, etc.).¹³ Combining systems intelligence with the affect theory can provide the type of hermeneutical traction necessary to unlock the socio-religious significance of these otherwise understudied kinds of texts.

Systems intelligence (or SI) is a theory proposed and developed two decades ago by a philosopher, Esa Saarinen, and a systems engineer and theorist, Raimo Härmäläinen. Saarinen and Härmäläinen (2004, 2010) designed SI as a response to crucial dimensions of organic life that intelligence theories (e.g., intellectual quotient, emotional intelligence, triarctic intelligence, multiple intelligences) and systems thinking failed to capture. The fundamental claim is that organisms live and perform in systems in intelligent ways through attunement and effective responsiveness to feedback mechanisms, which attests to an “intelligence” beyond active cognition. Therefore, systems and their constituents reciprocally impact each other and generate products that exceed the sum of their parts. As Rachel Jones and James Corner put it, partly citing Saarinen and Härmäläinen, “Systems intelligence pays particular attention to socially constructed systems with boundaries that are able to be redrawn. It is a ‘capacity in the human being that involves instinctual, intuitive, tacit, subconscious and unconscious and inarticulate aspects that cannot be straightforwardly reduced to a full-fledged and transparent cognitive dimension’” (Jones and Corner 2012, p. 31). For its proponents, SI is as old as life itself—evolutionary adaptation can be understood, pre-

cisely, as a macro-structural form of SI, and therefore pervades not only every stratum of organic life, but the history of life itself. SI, in other words, is as much a constant in organic life as reproduction, nutrient exchange, and death. To be alive is necessarily to already be systems intelligent in some respect. If so, SI is inextricable from the fabric of history and thus constitutes a lived dimension of Christian–Muslim relations that can be unearthed as a type of micro-behavioral social history.

Let us illustrate SI by considering a case that is likely known to most scholars of early Christian–Muslim relations. During the early decades of the Arab conquest, the east Syrian bishop of Nineveh, Isho’yahb III, wrote *Letter 14B* to a group of monks to chastise them for an incident—the finer details of which are not entirely clear. It appears that somehow these monks failed to gain favor with the new Islamic conquerors, who seemingly provided preferential treatment instead to a group of Christians who were almost certainly Miaphysites. We can reasonably assume that Isho’yahb is referring to Miaphysites because he complains that the Arabs do not lend assistance to “those who attribute suffering and death to God” ([Penn 2015b](#), p. 33). This title would apply to all Christians who embraced the third ecumenical council at Ephesus in 431 CE. According to this council, suffering and death can be attributed to God in the person of Christ through the reciprocity of predicates (e.g., God experiences thirst in the flesh of Christ). The East Syrians, or the Assyrian Church of the East, disagreed with this resolution and broke communion with the other Christian jurisdictions, including those who would eventually be known as Miaphysites. For the purposes of SI, what I find significant is that the designation of “those who attribute suffering and death to God” is not meant to only identify a category of Christian difference, but to specify the reason why Muslims would be unlikely to help them. It appears that, even at this early stage of the conquest, Isho’yahb III had already gained sufficient knowledge about the faith of the conquerors, and he had found a way of leveraging theological similarities between his communion and Muslims to curry favor with them over and against other Christians. Specifically, he appears to be attuned to the Islamic theological system, such as it may have been at this early stage, and underlined the mutuality his confession shared with it in balking at the idea that God could either suffer or die. In brief, he would have been urging these monks to deploy, for a political advantage, the systems intelligence he had acquired by being attuned to the nuances of the earliest Islamic theology.

In the above example, there are multiple overlapping systems that Isho’yahb had to navigate intelligently. First, there were the three theological systems: Islamic, Miaphysite, and East Syrian. Second, Isho’yahb was also in a political system, with a drastic and rapid change in rulership unfolding in real time: he was no longer a subject of the Zoroastrian Persians, but of the Islamic Arabs. Third, he was a Christian bishop with a diocese under his care. Hence, in scolding the monks and making a subtle recommendation about how they might bring about Islamic favor for their cause, he is combining these three systems to achieve a positive outcome, namely the benefaction of the new rulers for those under his care by emphasizing theological similarities that just might elicit a sufficiently good will between himself and the powers that be. In this way, Isho’yahb III shows a sophisticated level of systems intelligence that allows him, and others close to him, to thrive. The monks, in contrast, are less systems intelligent because they do not know that they share important theological similarities with Muslims with which they might succeed in highlighting to gain favor.

Saarinen, Hämäläinen, and other proponents of SI have developed a conceptual apparatus for determining higher or lower systems intelligence that can be helpful in constructing a social historiography of micro-behavioral interactions, such as what we see with Isho’yahb and the monks. Among many others, these include the following: “Systemic Perception—our ability to see and feel the systems around us” and “Attunement—our capacity to connect with others and the systems we engage in” ([Jones and Hämäläinen 2013](#), p. 168). For the purposes of this study, these two dimensions of SI are conceptually helpful in framing the procedural dynamics of the two Syriac texts in question. Thus, I would maintain that the Syriac texts in question can perhaps be understood as something

like a ritualization of systems intelligence for navigating religious–political diplomacy systems in the ‘Abbasid empire by modeling some of the characteristics of systems-intelligent behavior, much as Isho‘yahb was attempting to model for his monks. For instance, systems-intelligent Christians must have strived for systems attunement and systemic perception to understand the nuances of Islamic thought and practice to carry out positive engagements with Muslim interlocutors.

Finally, in due course, SI becomes a sub-cognitive instinctual ability that no longer requires major cognitive investment to be performed well at every turn. Undoubtedly, at some point many Syrians learned Arabic, and acquired some familiarity with Islamic theology, presumably as mediated in large part through the Qur’an and conversations with Muslim intellectuals. At first, these processes must have involved considerable cognitive effort and deliberate thought, as well as a studied consideration of the acceptable theological overlap that could be shared in discussions with Islamic scholars without compromising one’s own orthodoxy. However, over time, speaking in Arabic and inflecting the language with loose references to or direct quotations from the Qur’an created a sense of respect and mutuality, in a word, acquiring a certain cultural and religious fluency in the discourses of the other came to constitute the very identity of Syrian Christians and required little active cognitive effort to be used. Thus, they had effectively discovered ways of navigating a new multivariable system intelligently, which largely preserved their evolving self-conceptions as Christians while showing a cultured appreciation for the beliefs of their political authorities. Engaging in this kind of system must have been predicated on the possibility of a Venn diagram with considerable spatial coincidence between Christianity and Islam that could be fomented through every day, microscopic interactions. But how?—Affect theory might partially answer this question.

The historical explanatory power of SI as an approach can be boosted further by combining it with the fine-grained nuance that the affect theory can provide.¹⁴ Affect theory, though, is tricky to bring onboard, particularly because, as Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg stated, “There is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be. If anything, it is more tempting to imagine that there can only ever be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, p. 3). They grant that this state of affairs might leave one feeling in a “methodological and conceptual free fall” when encountering affect theory for the first time (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, p. 4). Nonetheless, they try to provide a sense about what explorations of affect have the potential to do, as follows: “Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, p. 1). They add, “Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, p. 2). This is to say that much of the work of the affect theory is to scrutinize the kinds of non-cognitive force reverberations elapsing in and between bodies in the moment of their highly inflected and determined encounters, and how these, in turn, are part of the kaleidoscopic, microscopic panoply of variables that motivate action. In this sense, Donovan Shaefer notes, “As a method, affect theory asks *what bodies do*—what they want, where they go, what they think, how they decide—and especially how bodies are impelled” (Shaefer 2019, p. 2). Shaefer highlights that some of the work of the affect theory is concerned with the connection between affect and movement, often at a non-cognitive level. If so, perhaps we can know something about Christian–Muslim intersubjectivity by identifying at least some traces of the production of affect in our two Syriac sources.

At this stage of the discussion, the work of Sara Ahmed, in particular, becomes helpful.¹⁵ In her early essay, “Affective Economies”, Ahmed demonstrated how affect can be solicited by the linguistic register when examining affectively charged terms. She maintains that “emotions play a crucial role in the ‘surfacing’ of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs” (Ahmed 2004, p. 117). Specifically, affect can function “to align some subjects with some others and

against other others” through the use of signs that accrue a certain affective charge. Accordingly, it is not solely the propositional or cognitive content of statements, terms, or signs that aligns and contra-aligns subjects, but the affective response that certain signs have the power to elicit when they have circulated in ways that imbue them with affective value. To illustrate, let us briefly return to the example of Isho’yahb III offered above. Presumably, where one lands theologically on a statement such as “God suffers and dies” is not merely the province of logical propositions, but depending on one’s flavor of orthodoxy, the expression may also elicit strong affective responses, motivated (perhaps) from the perception of the statement as disrespectful, even blasphemous, to the deity.

Ahmed calls this mechanism “stickiness” or “adherence”, where affect becomes “stuck” to signs through “economic circulation”. Here, Ahmed is invoking the conceptual apparatus of Marxist critique and the accumulation of capital, but with an affective turn, according to which “emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation” (Ahmed 2004, p. 120). That is, value is the effect of affective purchase, and its circulation accrues to it. Ahmed clarifies this last point by stating, “What I am offering is a theory of ... that which is accumulated over time. Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an affect of the circulation between objects and signs (=the accumulation of affective value over time). Some signs, that is, increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more they circulate, the more affective they become, and the more they appear to ‘contain’ affect” (Ahmed 2004, p. 120). This is to say that the association between signs and affects is strengthened over time, and in the measure that it circulates among bodies. This dynamic simultaneously accrues to form the magnitude of the sign’s affect, which in turn aligns subjects with or against one another by virtue of the affective purchase the sign evokes for them. Thus, in the measure that a phrase such as “God suffers and dies” circulates, it accrues varied forms of affective resonance: for Miaphysites, one of solidarity among Miaphysites; for east Syrians and Muslims, one of mutual coherence as a function of a (likely visceral) rejection of the statement, which in turn alienates them from those who affirm it.

Now we can combine the systems intelligence and affect theories to form a clearer picture of my approach here. From this brief overview, some important resonances between the two theories are evident, such as the emphasis on the possibility of non-cognitive performance in systems and the significance of attunement to feedback mechanisms that go beyond the rational or logically discursive. From this vantage point, we can revisit the central claim, namely that the Syriac etiquette guides under consideration here may be understood as ritualized repositories meant to aid Christians in performing intelligently within systems of religious and political affect. As I read these texts, I will be looking for a certain looseness with shared signs that are used to create cohesion by stretching them over the frame of both East Syrian Christianity and Islam. These two theories also allow for forms of critique, by exposing, for example, ways in which these strategies of “adhesion and cohesion”, to use Ahmed’s language, are neither innocent nor haphazard, but serve to express political and religious purposes.

Hence, the difference between these types of texts and, for example, the *majlis* genre, is that in the *majlis*, logical persuasion usually results in a change of religious confession, or at least in the recognition that the other side’s beliefs are reasonable. Oppositely, these two texts tap directly into systems of affect to motivate not a change in religious confession, but in behavior or policy through high systems intelligence in the affective economy of religious politics. Thus, although both texts have trace amounts of religious differences, the texts never emphasize them, but rather share lineages to curry favor from the Islamic authorities. Such maneuvers, in turn, constituted a mechanism by which doctrinal chasms between Christians and Muslims were deliberately bridged. If so, we might keep alive (in the back of our minds) the following question, namely whether a system that emphasized coherence, similarity, and a shared affect was more politically and socially advantageous, and, indeed, more desirable and indispensable in the long term, than one inescapably

framed as a battle of the wits and whose outcome, deliberate or not, was the cognitive retrenchment of differences reified by the dialectical vanquishment of the religious other.

3. To the Rulers of the World

This text is meant in all likelihood to serve as the template of a letter to be sent by Christian authorities—probably bishops, maybe priests¹⁶—to an Islamic authority in order to wish the rulers well and remind them that virtuous leadership makes for virtuous citizenry. This apparently warm-natured greeting, however, is simply a way of insinuating from the outset that bad leadership begets bad citizenry, so it is best for everyone in the body politic to be on their best behavior. Tellingly, the opening paragraph sketches an analogy between the political state and the body, where the proper health of the body is contingent on the health of all its members. Note that, from the beginning, the guiding premise is that Christians and Muslims form a single body; hence, the analogy elicits affective cohesion by emphasizing corporeal unity.¹⁷ The analogy thereby accepts a state of hierarchical unity at the same time that it underlines the interdependence and mutual impact of the parts on one another: “For just as whenever the head is healthy all the members are also healthy, so too whenever the leader is healthy in knowledge and in conduct, so too those under him conduct themselves in accord with proper virtue” (Penn 2009, p. 79). The condition in the statement (“whenever”) cannot be posed without the possibility of its opposite. That is, from the beginning, this text establishes the commonality of Christians and Muslims as parts of a single body and implies that proper functioning is hierarchically determined.

The author next offers examples from shared religious and literary traditions, citing them as reference texts from the Biblical categories widely considered acceptable among Muslims, that is, the Hebrew Bible (especially the Torah and the Psalms) and the gospels.¹⁸ The author first offers the kings David and Hezekiah as examples of good kings whose subjects abided in virtue and the fear of God. For brevity, I focus on David, who receives more attention. David is a systems-intelligent choice, a choice attuned to the system of religious literature shared by Christians and Muslims, where the king features prominently and positively. In the Qur’an, David is mentioned some sixteen times as a king, prophet, and psalmist who received revelation (وحي) and guidance (هدى) from God (e.g., Q4:163; 6:84). The case of David also allows for another subtle affective insinuation: “And because of him, all the people under his power conducted themselves with the fear of God—and not only (his own) people, but also the other people he conquered” (Penn 2009, p. 79). Perhaps this line is a gamble on the author’s part, as the analogy had begun with the unity of the body, whereas this line hints at Christians as conquered subjects. However, the author reminds the authorities in the same breath that these subjects cohere together with their (virtuous) rulers through their shared “fear of God” and, further, that “In order to become pleasing to him [David], they [the people David conquered] familiarized themselves with the fear of God ... And in order to please the king, they traveled even on paths on which they had not previously walked” (Penn 2009, p. 79). I concur with Penn that the author wants to ensure that even though the memory of conquest and subjection still exists, the king should rest assured that Christians are good subjects, who fear God and who are (at least on parchment) willing to take new paths out of the desire to please their rulers (Penn 2015a, pp. 118–19).

This last point could perhaps be especially significant for its affective currency, depending on how the Christian figure in question might translate the Syriac template into Arabic. As Sydney Griffith has shown, it was not beyond Christians to inflect language with Qur’anic diction to produce a “felicitous Arabic expression” (Griffith 2018, p. 3) to curry favor with Muslims. Hence, a systems-attuned Christian author, familiar with Islamic practices and the Qur’an, might choose to render the term *ṣirāṭ* (i.e., “path”) in Arabic as *صراط* (*sirat*), even if the more etymologically precise term in Syriac for *صراط* would be *ܣܪܬܐ* (which Syriac obtained from Greek *στράτα*, itself a transliteration of the Latin *strata*, meaning street, way, or path). Importantly, the term *صراط* is religiously sticky be-

cause of its circulation among Islamic affective economies, as it appears twice in a rhetorically affected anadiplosis in the Surah al-Fatihah (Q1:6–7, *أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ*). The first Qur’anic surah is arguably the most recited given its centrality to daily prayer, ensuring its broad circulation, and thus its accumulation of affect. The term *صِرَاط* also appears more than thirty times in the Qur’an in the compound form *الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ* (*as-sirat al-mustaqim*) or “the straight path” (e.g., Q4:70, 174; 5:16; 6:126, 161; 15:42; 36:61; 42:52). Thus, this document’s use of the term seems hardly accidental, as it reappears in the equivalent formulation of *الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ* later. Therefore, if the affectively tinged sense of the Christian author here is that Christians ask God, as Muslims do, to “lead us on the straight path, the path of those on whom you have granted favor, not of those who have caused anger or those who have gone astray” (Q1:6–7), *عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ*) (Q1:6–7), a phrase that undoubtedly no Christian would object to, the effect is coherence through the affect of sharing God’s guidance on the straight path—even if the nature of the straight path needs not be specified lest it cause division. If so, Christians and Muslims become together those upon whom God has “granted favor” as the single body introduced earlier.

The next paragraph is a litany of the ruler’s great deeds, a well-trod motif in Christian literature directly extolling Islamic rulers,¹⁹ which, even though sounds descriptive, is likely meant with the expectation of fulfillment. Central to the paragraph is the ruler’s virtue, which has positive effects on the ruled: “the weak are strengthened, and the sick become strong, and the nobles are encouraged, and the poor are upheld, and the rich are strengthened, and the orphans and the widows are supported, and God is glorified, and your rule is honored” (Penn 2009, p. 80). The implication here, of course, is not really one of direct and linear logical persuasion, but of affective imprinting: the ruler’s governing is only honored because he conducts himself with virtue as attested by the positive outcomes in the socio-political system. The affect elicited here is intended as positive, no doubt, and again, there is no sense of alterity predicated along religious lines. However, there is always a subtle warning implied in the inverse of the state of affairs described. Should the ruler fail to meet this list of positive outcomes, his rule will not be honored. The tactic is of course subtle, but that is the point: what subject openly threatens rulers to their faces? Rather, the Christian offers a form of systemic feedback to attempt to sway the Islamic ruler at a non-cognitive level through an affective intervention that is likely to register without eliciting an outright negative response.

The final paragraph in this short text largely continues with a litany of positive social outcomes, but the word choice seems to be more careful in seeking affective coherence through Qur’anic signs that would not be found objectionable in the Christian religious system. Simply, the Christian must handle the religious apparatus of Christianity and Islam simultaneously to forge affective coherence through shared signs that work across religious boundaries. Consider, for example, the opening line of the final paragraph: “And you will have God as the helper for all the deeds of your governance” (Penn 2009, p. 81). Unsurprisingly, the fortunately vague idea of God as a helper is closely shared in Christian and Islamic traditions. In the Christian Bible, this notion features abundantly (e.g., Ps 54:4; Is 41:13; Heb 13:6, etc.), as in the Qur’an (e.g., Q3:150, 9:116, etc.). The overall affect, of course, is that God is the helper of the virtuous ruler and, by extension, of his subjects—unified *as* subjects and not differentiated into Christian and Muslim.

The next line continues the notion of the synergy between the ruler and God in leading the people: “And through you, he [God] will lead the people subjected to your honor on all the straight paths and the ways that lead to eternal life” (Penn 2009, p. 81). As intimated before, here we find once more the notion of the “path” on which the believers, in proper subjection to the ruler, are traveling under the guidance of God. This line continues the affective coherence introduced earlier surrounding the path (*sirat*) from the Surah al-Fatihah and expands on it: Christians and Muslims together, under the guidance of God, travel the paths that lead to eternal life. What is affectively charged about this line for the sake of interreligious coherence—depending on how a Christian might render the phrase in Arabic—are the specific expressions “lead” (*يَهْدِي*) and “straight paths” (*الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ*).²⁰

Earlier, I had called attention to the notion of a “path” in the first paragraph of the text and had suggested it might be alluding for an affective coherence to the Surah al-Fatihah, implying Christians and Muslims are both on the same path. Here, God’s direction is specifically invoked (أَهْدِنَا likely to be rendered in Arabic with the same root as أَهْدَى, that is, هدى) to “lead” the faithful along the “straight path”. If systems-intelligently executed, the phrase could cut quite close to the same phrase in the Surah al-Fatihah, where the faithful ask God: “lead us on the straight path” (Q1:6, اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ). If rendered this way, the sign can function once again to build affective coherence by using, in a Christian’s words, a term of broad Islamic circulation. However, there might also be a clever twist here: is the use of the plural, “straight paths” (عِصْمَةٌ هِدَايَةٍ) and, immediately after, “ways” (طَرِيقَاتٍ), meant to imply more than one path? Presumably yes, both of equal validity, as they both lead to “eternal life” (لَحْظَةٍ دَلِيلَةٍ), given that they are “straight” paths. Christianity and Islam are thus upheld as different, but ultimately salvific in nature. Given the circulation of the sign of the straight or narrow path in Christian and Islamic religious imaginaries, it would be hard to suppose that the phrase could somehow connote categorical exclusivity. Again, the sense is of affective cohesion, even if, or because, the religions run parallel to each other.

Finally, as this short text nears its end, the author commends the virtuous leader that “in the kingdom of heaven you will be seen as great because of your beautiful conduct” (Penn 2009, p. 81). Certainly, the phrase is meant as a compliment, but is the reference to the “kingdom of heaven” too stuck to the Christian affect? While perhaps not a common expression in Islamic theology, where the term جنة (*jannah*) is preferable, the phrase مَلِكُ السَّمَوَاتِ does appear in the Qur’an (Q5:120), and is probably the best rendering of the Greek original βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (kingdom of the heavens). Thus, while there may be preferences in linguistic expression, the use of shared signs again indicates a striving for coherence through affect. Granted, we cannot always know how such texts were received, or how a Christian might have translated them or changed the templates based on positive or negative feedback and word-of-mouth wisdom, and (even less) extract the specific affect the ruler experienced in the moment for our own review. As stated at the beginning of this essay, we needed to be there to understand it. However, that is beside the point; what matters is that the author of *To the Rulers of the World* assumed that the text was not a waste of ink, parchment, and time for ritualizing the intelligent navigation of systems of religious difference in the written form.

4. Concerning the Entrance before a New Emir

This text differs in its setting from *To the Rulers of the World*, but still intends to elicit affective coherence through shared signs. This much is clear from the beginning, where rather than the analogy of the body deployed in the previous text, the author uses the figure of Adam, from whom all humans are descended. In this way, the writer bypasses the religious difference by focusing on the shared biological descent of all peoples through the shared symbol of the forefather Adam. Thus, this text establishes affective coherence through the conjoined lineages of Christians and Muslims, who are yet again not identified separately.

Showing systemic perception (the greeting of a newly appointed emir), the author slowly builds a case for why authority is needed at all, presumably to legitimate the emir’s status. To do so, the author begins with the devil’s deception of Adam. The author seems familiar enough with the Qur’anic account of Adam’s deception by Iblis (cf. Q7:22) to stay within the lineaments of a shared Christian–Muslim protology, devolution into chaos, and structures instituted to curb it. For instance, the author only speaks of humanity as a single entity, punctuated by terms such as “our kind” (نَحْنُ). As a result, the religious difference becomes marginal, and differences are due to Adam’s children differing in “will and conduct” as “there are among them wise and foolish and keepers of the law and despisers of the commandments” (Penn 2009, p. 83). Significantly, differences here are the result of good and bad ethics, not religion, which implies that Christians and Muslims have largely

overlapping moral systems denoted by the conveniently vague terms: “law” and “commandments”. In this way, the author reaches the only plausible conclusion: “Therefore, our kind has come to be in need of rational leaders and wise governors who abolish inequity and teach righteousness” (Penn 2009, p. 83). This setup builds coherence once more through shared signs, such as Adam’s deception, joint biological lineage, and the justification for rulers to institute virtuous ideals. In contrast, consider that Theodore Abu Qurrah, a Christian bishop and renowned apologist, makes use of the same sign—Adam and the devil’s deception—to explain why Christianity is the “true faith” (الدين القويم) (Dick 1982, pp. 211–53; Lamoreaux 2005, pp. 6–23).

Having established a common ancestry and the need for rulers, the text next specifies the aim of good rulership, namely to show “to the sons of man the straight ways of the Lord (ܠܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܝܢ ܕܡܫܠܝܬ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ)” (Penn 2009, p. 83). The Syriac text is loosely based on Is 40:3, but what would ultimately matter is the rendition of the phrase in Arabic before an emir. Hence, a systems-attuned Christian could double down on the resonance of these words with the Surah al-Fatihah 1:6–7, or indeed, any of the other several dozen Qur’anic texts that reference the *sirat al-mustaqim*, the “straight path.”²¹ As with *To the Rulers of the World*, I take it that the use of this specific term is once again for affective coherence. Indeed, as both texts use the same expression in the opening lines, it is quite possible that Christians were aware of the importance of the *sirat al-mustaqim* in the Islamic religious imagination.

In the next paragraph, the author seems to have two main purposes: to establish that Christians recognize the authority of the emir and to subtly remind the emir that with authority come expectations. Perhaps surprisingly, the author chooses an unlikely figure to establish Christian respect for authorities, Paul, whose Rom 13:1 (“all authorities are ordained by God”) is cited along with his name. The use of Paul’s name here is surprising, and may in fact constitute a low systems intelligence moment, a courtly faux pas, that we may hope was understood better and perhaps corrected by later Christians if they were aware of Paul’s status as a persona non grata in Islam. After all, Paul was never mentioned in the Qur’an and seems to have quickly earned a negative reputation among Muslims as a corruptor of the *injl* (انجيل), or gospel.²² Perhaps the Christian might hope that Paul’s specific words prevailed in getting the point across that Christians regard authorities as instituted by God, hence the emphasis on Christians being “subjects” (مخضوعين) of an emir rightly raised up by God to rule over them with wisdom. Still, this episode indicates the obvious, namely that Christians had a shifting spectrum of systems intelligence vis à vis the inner workings of Islamic religious practice and sentiment.²³

We should also not lose sight of the fact that even if Paul’s name could trigger a negative and disjuncting affect, his appearance in the text is very brief, only half a sentence, and that the remainder of the document focuses almost entirely on shared ideas, figures, and literary traditions. In other words, if Paul’s name elicited affective turmoil, that turmoil could perhaps be mitigated. For example, in the very same sentence where Paul’s name is mentioned, the author also refers to Solomon and quotes from Wis 6:3 (“the world’s authority is through the power of the Lord”). Curiously, Solomon is not expressly mentioned by name here, but by a title shared by Christians and Muslims, “the wise one” (الحكيم), an especially common epithet in Islam, given how closely Solomon’s name is associated with wisdom (حكما), even in the Qur’an itself (e.g., Q21:78–79; 27:20–44). The intent here could well be to use a shared affective discourse, while subtly underlining the expectation that there are positive role models for rulership out there, jointly venerated by Muslims and Christians, that the emir should strive to emulate, such as Solomon, Moses, and David. Indeed, we had previously also seen David held up in *To the Rulers of the World* as a remarkable leader; thus, his appearance in this text also suggests the importance of David in the joint Christian–Muslim affective economy of rulership. However, the other two rulers are also no surprise, given their status as capable leaders and faithful prophets in Islam.

Of these three leaders, the author holds up Solomon as the ideal for “our own blessed emir” (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܝܬܐ). The paragraph that compares the emir and Solomon begins with a clever phrase: “For because he [i.e., God] gives us peaceful and kind leaders like you, we

therefore know that God is pleased with us" (Penn 2009, p. 83). This phrase of course achieves two primary aims: it subtly indicates that the people at large are virtuous and good because God has rewarded them with a good ruler, and it implies the expectation that the emir will, in fact, be peaceful and kind. However, there is more: the author is setting up a joint sense of the legendarily peaceful days of Solomon owing to his good rule, a reality that the Christian speaker, though undoubtedly engaged in fanciful hopes, would wish to see repeated now. In other words, the Christian author is pushing for a type of intersubjectivity between Solomon and the emir that implies the latter's imitation of the former's kingly virtue. The author all but spells it out by enumerating a litany of positive attributes, such as "praiseworthy conduct", "temperate reasoning", and "peaceful disposition" before drawing the comparison itself.

After these prefatory niceties, the author reaches the crux of the comparison between Solomon and the emir by playing on a story shared by Christians and Muslims, namely the visit of the queen of Sheba, known in Islam as Bilqis, to the Israelite king. The Qur'an offers an extended account of the visit of Bilqis to the Solomonic court (Q27:22–44) that seems familiar to the author, specifically the notion that Solomon intellectually outmaneuvers the queen through his wisdom, so that she also submits to God and worships him alone. In the Qur'anic account, she becomes a sign of submission to God that is underscored by her own confession: "And I submit myself alongside Solomon to God, Lord of the universe" (Q27:44, وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ). Of special significance is the term "submit myself" (أَسْلَمْتُ, *aslamtu*), since it is based on the same trilateral root (*s-l-m*/سلم) as Islam or Muslim (indeed, also Solomon), with the implication that she becomes Muslim, in the sense that she submits to God. A systems-attuned Christian could import this affective economy into the speech to the emir to emphasize their subjection to his wisdom, and thus their cooperation with the state on the presumption of wise rulership.

Most of the remainder of the brief text consists of a series of juxtaposed expectations and positive outcomes. Hence, with the emir the Christians are now wealthy, have a reputable name, and pride, in great part because their emir is "wise and understanding" (as Solomon) and comprehends that the goods of this world are transient and cannot be taken into the next world, unlike the nobility of one's deeds (a phrase likely meant to prophylactically curb greed). This last point can be underlined because it again presumes the shared belief of Christians and Muslims in the afterlife and the significance of deeds, rather than social status, for entry into paradise. Couched in this eschatological reminder, the author moves on what is probably the real motivation of the entire speech; however, unfortunately, the state of the manuscript is such that it is hard to make out what precisely that is, though the most likely reading of the blurred and missing script is a request for sustenance and benefaction (Penn 2009, p. 84, see nn. 47 and 48). As this would likely be an introduction, it is doubtful that the Christian would be specific just yet about the concrete needs of the people anyway.

What mattered, then, in this introductory moment, was the establishment of a certain reciprocity and positive rapport between the emir and the Christians in the hope of future, well-disposed audiences. As such, near the end of the document, the author uses an important, even nostalgic, title for the ruler, namely the "emir of the faithful" (ܐܡܝܪ ܕܡܘܡܝܢܐ), a clear Syriac rendition of the *amir al-mu'minin* (أمير المؤمنين). The title matters because it harkens back to as early as the second Rashidun caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644 CE), that is, to a time when "the believers" was an ill-defined term that comfortably housed eschatologically minded Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians (Donner 2010, pp. 39–89; Shoemaker 2012, pp. 118–78; 2018, pp. 116–79). By using this affected sign, the Christian author once more builds a sense of coherence and of the emir's implied duties as *amir al-mu'minin* to rule the believers with the wisdom and justice prescribed by the Qur'an.

In brief, as with *To the Rulers of the World*, this document also seems to engage in strategies of affective coherence through shared signs as a means of eliciting certain responses from the Islamic rulers. The strategy is not that of logical persuasion but of an affectively

motivated, systems-intelligent diplomacy that is more concerned with establishing a good rapport and a sense of mutuality through shared legacies than it is with coldly calculated quid pro quo haggling.

5. Conclusions

When weighing in on these two documents, Michael Penn concludes that “Even for those who would never write to a worldly ruler and never meet an emir (new or otherwise), these texts suggested what such encounters might look like and what would be the most practical Christian responses. A now hypothetical letter to a ruler or introductory speech to an emir was used not so much as a model for how to write or to speak to Muslim leaders as an exemplar for the proper Christian attitude toward them” (Penn 2015a, p. 120). I agree that the likelihood of most Christians ever writing to rulers or speaking before emirs was not especially high, and that the point of this type of literature was to model a type of attitude that Christians might adopt toward Islamic authorities. However, those who could read these documents, to begin with, were already also the most likely to find themselves in a position to converse with higher-ranking Islamic authorities. Thus, these templates may have perhaps seen some more use, however oblique, than Penn suggests. The affective lessons of documents such as these might also have extended beyond the admittedly unlikely encounter with high court functionaries by having a trickle-down effect for larger social groups. We know, for example, that Christians would have met lower-level Muslim functionaries quite regularly, perhaps especially in the forms of tax collectors, gendarmes, and other members of the Islamic apparatchik that were established to ensure a steady stream of revenue and to minimize social discontent. For these Christians, it may have been helpful to have in the back of their minds, as part of their growing systems intelligence for operating in the Islamic polity, the type of shared language, turns of phrases, key terms, or ideas contained in these templates, especially if certain parts of these manuals could be adapted for a more quotidian use.

After all, these types of templates attempted to ritualize a type of affective interreligious performance, somewhere just beneath active cognition and consciousness, by encapsulating some of the more putatively important aspects of cross-religion systems intelligence. Thus, their applicability may perhaps have been wider than the highly idiosyncratic occasions implied by their titles. If so, documents such as these represent only a fraction of a richly layered network of social interactions between Christians and Muslims that unfolded regularly and that, if at least amicable or agreeable, must have included a significant amount of give and take between interlocutors to foster not only good will, but affective cohesion as a multi-religious society and culture. In other words, the value of texts such as these, particularly when read with the approach I have attempted to make available in this study, is that they can detect (albeit faintly) the traces of the kaleidoscopic, religiously affected performances that determined the movement of bodies in the early medieval Middle East, perhaps more so than the elite theological debates that are somewhat overrepresented in the primary and secondary literature. Jack Tannous has made a similar observation, though arriving at it from a different vantage point: “we must recognize that, in a world where most religious believers belonged to the ‘simple,’ any ‘ecumenical’ behavior should not astonish” (Tannous 2018, p. 397).

The combined approach of the SI and affect theory I have used in this study is modest, and I would not like to overstate the significance of my findings, particularly because the sources I have used are equally modest. Nonetheless, I would maintain that this approach successfully helps us to retrieve one specific dimension of early Christian–Muslim encounters with greater nitidity in comparison to other methods currently used in the sub-field. As such, these theories offer a useful conceptual apparatus, a range of analytical terms, and a certain methodological reliability for investigating sources such as the two examined here. Hence, it is legitimate to grant greater consideration to the historiographical value of the affect theory and systems intelligence theory in reconstructing, as I have noted, an entire panoply of micro-behavioral interactions between Christians and Muslims that

other methods are simply not calibrated to detect with the same precision. This is not to say that these theories are historiographically superior or that they have rendered other approaches dated or useless. Rather, I regard them as historiographically complementary to those already in use, so that my goal in this essay should be primarily understood as making them available, with illustrating examples, to other scholars who might find them useful in their own work. Finally, because both theories were intentionally designed to be both flexible and interdisciplinary, they readily lend themselves to further integration with other approaches that remain underused in the study of early Christian–Muslim relations: one thinks of the feminist, gender, and queer theory, trauma studies, and disability studies, among others. The subfield will only be enriched if these various approaches are more systematically integrated into religious and cultural historiography, thereby aiding us in uncovering additional layers of the historical record about which we still know so appreciably little.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ For recent introductions to this subject, see (Donner 2010, pp. 56–144; Hoyland 2015, pp. 31–137).
- ² See, for example, Penn (2015a, p. 1), and the case of Jacob of Edessa.
- ³ See, for example, George I, *Canon 14*, in Penn (2015b, p. 75).
- ⁴ A note on transliteration: Syriac and Arabic are often transliterated into Latin-based languages through a complex system of diacritical marks that I avoid using here for reasons incomparably well-put by Robert Hoyland (2015, p. 7): “if you are an expert you do not need them and if you are not they will not help you”. As him, I do render the Syriac and Arabic letter marked by *olaph* (ܐ) and *hamza* (ء), which is a glottal stop marked as (') and the letter 'e' (ﻋ) or 'ayn' (ع), marked as ('), because they are considered consonantal sounds that we should at least attempt to represent. Thus: Qur'an and 'Abbasids. I do retain the diacritics if they are part of a quote or a title by another scholar.
- ⁵ On this subject, refer to (Cook 1980; Griffith 2007; 2008, pp. 45–74), and most of his chapters in *Beginnings of Christian Theology* (Griffith 2002; Beaumont 2018; Treiger 2014). *Kalam* and *majlis* are not exactly interchangeable, as *majlis* mainly connotes a context of discussion, whereas *kalam* has to do with a type of reasoning process.
- ⁶ See further: (Keating 2006, pp. 8–9; Salés 2017; Rudolph 1994). For more general context, see (van Ess 2006; 2017, pp. 55–64; Fowden 2014, pp. 127–63; Hughes 2015; King 2013, 2014).
- ⁷ See further, (Penn 2015a, pp. 2–4, 9, 19, and 78, and especially 183–86).
- ⁸ The most successful attempt, to my mind, so far to produce this kind of grassroots history is Tannous (2018) *Making of the Medieval Middle East*.
- ⁹ We see this type of cordial interaction, though I would often add it with a subtext of Christian fear in Syriac and Arabic sources, such as Mingana (2006), trans. *Debate on the Christian Faith*; Swanson, trans. “Apology”, in *Orthodox Church*, in Noble and Treiger (2014, pp. 40–59); Szilágyi, “Disputation of the Monk Abraham”, in *Orthodox Church*, in Noble and Treiger (2014, pp. 90–111), etc. Tannous underscores the precariousness that Christians often faced in some of these circumstances, such as in *Making of the Medieval Middle East*. (Tannous 2018, p. 397, especially n. 164). Compare with Sahner (2018, pp. 3–7 and 22–25), and *Three Christian Martyrdoms*, in Shoemaker (2017).
- ¹⁰ Tannous (2018, p. 398), estimates a few hundred thousand Muslims compared to some twenty to thirty million non-Muslims in the first centuries of the Islamic empires.
- ¹¹ For a list of references to this philosophical milieu, see Salés (2017, pp. 455–56, n. 5).
- ¹² For a lengthy and excellent study of how these shared lineages played out, see Gregg (2015).
- ¹³ For a list of entries under the umbrella of SI, see the working website of the SI research group here: <http://systemsintelligence.aalto.fi/> (accessed on 7 March 2024).
- ¹⁴ The affect theory can be traced to the early modern work of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), but it was more recently taken up again and greatly expanded by Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and Silvan Tomkins (1911–1991). Since Tomkins' work, arguably conducted earlier, the affect theory has splintered into what are often called “dialects” of the affect theory, where some proponents, notably Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi, to some extent looking to Bergson for inspiration, emphasize a certain openness or pure potentiality of affect, commonly encapsulated by the term “becoming”, while others, edging closer to the phenomenological or biopsychological traditions, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sara Ahmed, and to some degree Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick and Adam Frank, place more importance on certain recognizable structures that constitute affect's conditions of possibility in the body and between bodies, while remaining largely open to the potential these structures allow once

- in place. The literature on this subject is enormous. For a concise introduction to this specific disagreement, see (Shaefer 2019, pp. 6–42).
- Also see her larger and later work, (Ahmed 2014).
- The term “priest” often refers to bishops as well.
- This strategy is by no means unknown. See Griffith (2002) and Beaumont (2018).
- Compare with Kuhn (2018, pp. 150–51).
- See Penn (2015a, pp. 120–23), and the various primary sources at p. 231, nn. 82–99.
- For a broader perspective in Syriac–Arabic fluency, see Gutas (1998) and Troupeau (1991).
- For a thorough discussion of how Qur’anic diction impacted Christian discourse, including the Bible’s translation, see Griffith (2013).
- For more, see Anthony (2009); Kuhn (2018); van Koningsveld (1996); Akhtar (2018), and especially the magisterial work of Vevian Zaki (2021). An enormous thanks to Adam Bursi, Vevian Zaki, Stephen Shoemaker, and Peter Tarras for their assistance with this subject.
- Compare with Tannous (2018, p. 399).

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. Affective Economies. *Social Text* 22: 117–39. [CrossRef]
- Ahmed, Sara. 2014. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Akhtar, Shabbir. 2018. *The New Testament in Muslim Eyes: Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*. London: Routledge.
- Anthony, Sean. 2009. The Composition of Sayf. ‘Umar’s Account of King Paul and His Corruption of Ancient Christianity. *Der Islam* 85: 164–202. [CrossRef]
- Beaumont, Mark, ed. 2018. ‘Ammār al-Basrī: Ninth Century Christian Theology and Qur’anic Presuppositions. In *Arab Christians and the Qur’an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 83–105.
- Boyarín, Daniel. 2004. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Cook, Michael. 1980. The Origins of *Kalām*. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43: 32–43. [CrossRef]
- Dick, Ignace, ed. 1982. *Théodore Abuqurra: Traité de l’existence du Créateur et de la vraie religion*. Patrimoine arabe chrétien 3. Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale.
- Donner, Fred. 2010. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Dye, Guillaume. 2011. Le Coran et son contexte: Remarques sur un ouvrage récent. *Oriens Christianus* 95: 247–70.
- Dye, Guillaume. 2014. Réflexions méthodologiques sur la ‘rhétorique coranique’. In *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l’islam*. Edited by Daniel De Smet and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi. Paris: Cerf, pp. 147–76.
- Fowden, Garth. 2014. *Before and after Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. 2010. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gregg, Robert C. 2015. *Shared Stories, Rival Tellings: Early Encounters of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Griffith, Sydney. 2002. *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Griffith, Sydney. 2007. The Syriac Letters of Patriarch Timothy I and the Birth of Christian *Kalām* in the Mu’tazilite Milieu of Baghdad and Basrah in Early Islamic Times. In *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*. Edited by Han J. W. Drijvers, Gerrit J. Reinink and Alex C. Klugkist. Leuven: Peeters, pp. 103–32.
- Griffith, Sydney. 2008. *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Griffith, Sydney. 2013. *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the ‘People of the Book’ in the Language of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Griffith, Sydney. 2018. The Qur’an in Christian Arabic Literature: A cursory Overview. In *Arab Christians and the Qur’an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*. Edited by Mark Beaumont. Leiden: Brill, pp. 1–19.
- Gutas, Dimitri. 1998. *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsīd Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)*. London: Routledge.
- Hoyland, Robert G. 2015. *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hughes, Aaron. 2015. *Shared Identities: Medieval and Modern Imaginings of Judeo-Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, Rachel, and James Corner. 2012. Stages and Dimensions of Systems Intelligence. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 29: 30–45. [CrossRef]
- Jones, Rachel, and Raimo Härmäläinen. 2013. Esa Saarinen and Systems Intelligence. In *Elämän filosofi*. Edited by Frank Martela, Lauri Järvillehto, Peter Kenttä and Jaakko Korhonen. Helsinki: Aalto-yliopisto, pp. 163–71.
- Keating, Sandra Toenies. 2006. *Defending the “People of Truth” in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Ra’īṭah*. Leiden: Brill.
- King, Daniel. 2013. Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy? In *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*. Edited by Philip Wood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 61–82.

- King, Daniel. 2014. Continuities and Discontinuities in the History of Syriac Philosophy. In *De l'Antiquité tardive au Moyen Âge: Études de logique aristotélicienne et de philosophie grecque, syriaque, arabe et latine offertes à Henri Hugonnard-Roche*. Edited by Elisa Coda and Cecilia Martini Bonadeo. Paris: Vrin, pp. 225–43.
- Kuhn, Michael. 2018. Early Islamic Perspectives of the Apostle Paul as a Narrative Framework for Tahrīf. In *Arab Christians and the Qur'an from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period*. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 35. Edited by Mark Beaumont. Leiden: Brill, pp. 150–73.
- Lamoreaux, John C. 2005. *Theodore Abū Qurrah*. Provo: Brigham Young University Press.
- Mingana, Alphonse. 2006. *The Debate on the Christian Faith between Patriarch Timothy I and Caliph Mahdi in 781 A.D.*. London: W. Heffer & Sons.
- Moss, Yonatan. 2016. Review of Michael Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World*. *Der Islam* 95: 250–53. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Neuwirth, Angelika. 2010. *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang*. Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen.
- Neuwirth, Angelika. 2014. *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Noble, Samuel, and Alexander Treiger, eds. 2014. *The Orthodox Church in the Arab World 700–1700: An Anthology of Sources*. DeKalb: Northern University of Illinois Press.
- Penn, Michael Philip. 2009. Addressing Muslim Rulers and Muslim Rule. *Oriens Christianus* 93: 71–84.
- Penn, Michael Philip. 2015a. *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Penn, Michael Philip. 2015b. *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Pohlmann, Karl-Friedrich. 2013. *Die Entstehung des Korans: Neue Erkenntnisse aus Sicht der historisch-kritischen Bibelwissenschaft*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftlicher Buchgesellschaft.
- Robinson, Chase F. 2005. *ʿAbd al-Malik*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Rudolph, Ulrich. 1994. Christliche Bibelexegese und Muʿtazilitische Theologie: Der Fall des Moses bar Kepha (gest. 903 n.Chr.). *Oriens* 34: 299–313. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Saarinén, Esa, and Raimo Härmäläinen. 2004. Systems Intelligence: Connecting Engineering Thinking with Human Sensitivity. *Systems Intelligence* A88: 51–77.
- Saarinén, Esa, and Raimo Härmäläinen. 2010. The Originality of Systems Intelligence. In *Essays on Systems Intelligence*. Edited by Raimo P. Härmäläinen and Esa Saarinén. Aalto: Systems Analysis Laboratory, pp. 9–26.
- Sahner, Christian C. 2018. *Christian Martyrs under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Salés, Luis. 2017. 'Aristotelian' as a *Lingua Franca*: Rationality in Christian Self-Representation under the 'Abbasids. In *Studia Patristica XCII*. Edited by Markus Vinzent. Leuven: Peeters, pp. 453–63.
- Segovia, Carlos Andrés. 2019. *The Qur'anic Jesus: A New Interpretation*. Berlin: DeGruyter.
- Shaefer, Donovan. 2019. *The Evolution of Affect Theory*. Elements in Histories of Emotions and Senses. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shoemaker, Stephen J. 2012. *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Shoemaker, Stephen J., ed. 2017. *Three Christian Martyrdoms from Early Islamic Palestine: Passion of Peter of Capitolias, Passion of the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Saba, Passion of Romanos the Neo-Martyr*. Provo: Brigham Young University Press.
- Shoemaker, Stephen J. 2018. *The Apocalypse of Empire: Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Tannous, Jack. 2018. *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Taylor, David. 2015. The Syriac Baptism of St. John: A Christian Ritual for Protection for Muslim Children. In *The Late Antique World of Islam: Muslims among Christians and Jews in the East Mediterranean*. Edited by Robert Hoyland. Princeton: Darwin.
- Treiger, Alexander. 2014. Origins of Kalām. In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*. Edited by Sabine Schmidtke. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 27–43.
- Troupeau, Gérard. 1991. Le rôle des syriaques dans la transmission et l'exploitation du patrimoine philosophique et scientifique grec. *Arabica* 38: 1–10. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- van Ess, Josef. 2006. *The Flowering of Muslim Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- van Ess, Josef. 2017. *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Leiden: Brill.
- van Koningsveld, Pieter. 1996. The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origins of the Gospel of Barnabas. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20: 200–28.
- Weitz, Lev E. 2018. *Between Christ and Caliph: Law, Marriage, and Christian Community in Early Islam*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wood, Philip. 2021. *The Imam of the Christians: The World of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, c. 750–850*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zaki, Vevian. 2021. *The Pauline Epistles in Arabic: Manuscripts, Versions, and Transmission*. Biblia Arabica 8. Leiden: Brill.

Zellentin, Holger. 2013. *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.