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"Superiority is due to us, and the king should come from among us": The Arab Conquests and Conflicts of the Early Umayyad Era in a 7th-Century Syriac Universal History of Yoḥannān bar Penkāyē

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Abstract: The last few decades have seen considerable interest in non-Muslim sources that contain material on the earliest stage of Islam. This paper examines one such witness, *The Book of the Main Points* by Yoḥannān bar Penkāyē, a 7th-century Syriac universal history, that provides an account of the Arab conquests, the first decades of the Umayyad caliphate, with a special focus on the events of the Second Fitna. The paper includes a commentary on selected passages from the *History* concerning the conquests and early Muslim rule, a comparative study of Syriac Christian sources on the Second Fitna, and a lexico-historical sketch of the phenomenon of the *šurṭa* (slaves and prisoners of war) fighting on the side of al-Muḫtār during the Second Fitna.

Keywords: Arab conquests, Umayyads, Umayyad caliphate, early Islam, Christian sources, Syriac sources, contemporary witness, Yoḥannān (John) bar Penkāyē, Second Fitna, *šurṭa*, al-Muḫtār, ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr

Introduction

The significance of non-Muslim sources for early Islamic history does not need to be stressed anymore as it has become commonplace in scholarship since the publica-

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tion of Hoyland's monumental study *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*.[1] These sources, however, do not always provide clear-cut accounts; they often pose more questions than give answers and, due to their ambiguity, are open to various interpretations. A diligent and meticulous study of these primary sources, both highlighting dead ends and also contextualizing and clarifying the material, is a desideratum. In this essay, we reassess the evidence of one such witness, *The Book of the Main Points, or The History of the Temporal World*.

The Book of the Main Points (Syr. *kṭāḇā d-rēš mellē*) is a Syriac universal history written at the end of the seventh century in the monastery of Mār Yoḥannān of Kamul (close to Cizre in southeast Turkey) by Yoḥannān bar Penkāyē, a monk of the Church of the East. As Bar Penkāyē himself mentions in the work,[2] the ultimate goal of his writing is to provide a theological summary of world history and to answer the question of why his contemporaries found themselves in such severe need and distress. Most of Bar Penkāyē's narration is concerned with salvation history and represents an extended exegesis of the Old and New Testaments, followed by a brief outline of Church history, but the last chapter abandons this pattern and reports details about the events of the recent past, including a short account of the Arab conquests and the first decades of the Umayyad caliphate. The importance of Bar Penkāyē's report as a contemporary non-Muslim witness to the much-debated issue of seventh-century history in the Middle East was quickly recognized by scholars when the material was published and translated.

Thus, in 1908, Mingana edited the second part of the *History* and translated the concluding fifteenth chapter into French.[3] This chapter was later translated into German,[4] English,[5] and Russian,[6] receiving scholarly attention in not only individual publications but also various sourcebooks and studies focused on non-Muslim documentation of the Arab conquests and the Umayyad caliphate in the seventh century.[7]

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1 Hoyland 1997.

2 For example, Bar Penkāyē explains the goal of his book in the fourteenth chapter as follows: "Our goal is not to showcase mundane deeds – what happened in this or that time – but [to narrate] how our [matters] were administered by divine dispensation," Mingana 1908, 116:17–19.

3 Mingana 1908, 1–197.

4 The end of the fourteenth chapter and part of the fifteenth chapter are translated into German in Abramowski 1940, 5–8.

5 Brock 1987; Penn 2015b, 85–107.

6 Furman 2010.

7 Apart from the aforementioned translation and study of Sebastian Brock, the *History*, with a special focus on its last chapter, is discussed in the following papers: Suermann 1987; Bruns 2003; Reinink 2005a; Pinggéra 2006. The last chapter features in the studies by Hoyland 1997, 194–200;

Although the relevant parts of the fifteenth chapter have been commented on and analyzed in secondary literature, in connection with parallels from Syriac and Muslim Arabic sources, close reading still reveals obscure passages that require further investigation and raise new questions. In this paper, we turn again to Bar Penkāyē's intriguing account concerning early Islamic history, looking at it from new perspectives and offering new interpretations to old problems.

The paper consists of three parts. The first part is a commentary on selected passages from the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters concerning the Arab conquests and early Muslim rule that, on the one hand, summarizes previous scholarship on the subject and, on the other hand, provides new insights regarding vague and debated matters. The second part juxtaposes and compares the account of the Second Civil War, also known as the Second Fitna (60–72/680–692), found in Bar Penkāyē with accounts in later Syriac literature, in order to establish what sources were at Bar Penkāyē's disposal and how he might have used them. The third part investigates the phenomenon of *šurṭē* (slaves and prisoners of war) from *The Book of the Main Points* fighting on the side of al-Muḫtār during the Second Fitna, in order to ascertain what historical movement Bar Penkāyē might have been referring to and whether this phenomenon can be equated with *šurṭa*, a law enforcement unit known from later Muslim history.

Commentary

We first meet information about the Islamic conquest in Bar Penkāyē's *History* at the very end of chapter fourteen, which recounts briefly that, after "the sons of Hagar" (Syr. *bnay hāḡār*)[8] gained control over the Persian kingdom, the entire

Penn 2015a, 85–108; Shoemaker 2021, 185–202; Jakob 2021. A further bibliography on Bar Penkāyē and his *History* can be found in Debié 2015, 614–616.

8 Along with "the sons of Hagar," Bar Penkāyē refers to the conquerors as *bnay ʾišmāʿēl* "the sons of Ismael" and *ṭayyāyē*. All of these are old terms that occur in pre-Islamic Syriac sources. For a short summary of the history of the term *bnay ʾišmāʿēl*, see Jakob 2021, 147. The term *ṭayyāyē* is derived from the name of the Ṭayyiʾ tribal confederation and is traditionally translated as "Arabs" in Syriac literature, but this translation can be inaccurate and anachronistic, as Donner points out (Donner 2018, 15–17). Donner proposes another meaning for the term: "invaders from the desert" (ibid., 9). The matter is in fact even more complicated, with the semantics of the word evolving over time and acquiring new senses depending on the period and circumstances. A study of the term in Syriac literature is required in order to accurately describe its semantic evolution. See also the discussion in Jakob 2021, 148–149. As Shoemaker notes, "[t]here is little evidence, in fact, that Muhammad and his earliest followers referred to the members of their community as Muslims or

world fell under the sway of the new masters. Bar Penkāyē compares the rapidity of these changes with the spread of a disease (Syr. *malkūṭā da-ḇnay hāḡār ʾeḥdaṭ nomē b-kullēh ʿālmā bṣīr qallīl* "the kingdom of the sons of Hagar rapidly spread (like a disease) throughout the entire world"). The account gives no details of this initial stage of the conquest, only saying that God made it happen.

Bar Penkāyē adds that God gave orders to "the sons of Hagar" concerning Christians and the monastic "class" (Syr. *teḡmā īḥīḏāyā*) beforehand so that they should hold them in honor. The *Chronicle of Seert*, an East Syriac chronicle written in Arabic in the tenth century, preserves several reports regarding early treaties between representatives of the Church of the East and the Arab administration. Thus, for example, a certain holy man named Theodore is said to have petitioned for an exemption from the poll tax for priests and deacons in the times of the caliph ʿUmar.[9] In another situation, Saḇrīšoʿ, the metropolitan of Beth Garmai, asked the governor to exempt monks, priests, and students from the poll tax after he exorcised demons from the governor's daughters.[10] Finally, Īšoʿyaḇ II, the Catholikos of the Church of the East, sent a letter to Muḥammad asking him for privileges for his community. After Muḥammad's death, Īšoʿyaḇ negotiated with the caliph Abū Bakr, offering him a considerable sum of money, and then visited the caliph ʿUmar, who issued a letter proclaiming protection for Christians.[11]

Similar accounts of bargaining for privileges have reached us from other Christian communities too. The Life of Gabriel of Qarṭmin reports that Mār Gabriel, the abbot of the Qarṭmin monastery, visited ʿUmar ibn al-Ḫaṭṭāb in Cizre (southeastern Anatolia) and made a treaty with him that was favorable to the Syriac Orthodox community.[12] A treaty between Muḥammad and the Christians of Nağrān, presented in the *Chronicle of Seert* as a treaty between all Muslims and all Christians against the Jews and pagans can also be mentioned here.[13] However, scholars

their religious beliefs and practices as Islam" (Shoemaker 2021, 32–33). *Mhaggrāyē/mahgrāyē* is yet another term that shows up in Syriac sources; Bar Penkāyē probably did not know it. One of its first attestations occurs in a letter of Jacob of Edessa from the late 7th century. There is a debate concerning whether this term was formed from the name Hagar, indicating the common ancestor of the conquerors, or rather reflects the Arabic word *muhāğirūn.* According to some modern scholars, this was a self-designation of members of Muḥammad's movement (for recent discussion and further references, see ibid., 32 and Lindstedt 2015, esp. 68). It is, however, not clear whether such a borrowing could have taken place. A detailed semantic and morphological study is required here as well.

9 *Histoire Nestorienne (Chronique de Séert). Deuxième partie (II)*, 598–599.

10 Ibid., 632–633.

11 Ibid., 619–623. See the analysis of this episode in Wood 2013, 248.

12 Palmer 1989, 72; Hoyland 1997, 121; Brock 1987, 57.

13 Wood 2021.

consider these accounts to be examples of later fiction seeking to root the current status of Christian–Muslim relations back in the past.[14] Whether Bar Penkāyē's statement about God giving orders to Muslims concerning Christians and monastics, along with the widespread idea that such a treaty indeed took place, reflects this narrative strategy or goes back to a historical precedent is an open question. It should be noted that the Catholikos of the Church of the East later became an official spokesperson for all Christians in the caliphate. As for the Qurʾān, it contains contradictory information.[15] Griffith, for example, describes its attitude toward Christians as "guarded."[16] In any case, there are scholars who assume that Eastern monasticism was "observed, admired and inculcated for its quality and ideals" so that it "influenced, if not gave rise to, the earliest Islam."[17]

Bar Penkāyē tells us that the conquerors defeated the Sasanian Empire and pushed back the border of Byzantine territory to Anatolia "without any war or battle" (Syr. *dlā qrāḇā wa-dlā qērsā*), "without weapons or human cunning" (Syr. *dlā mānay qrāḇā wa-dlā ṭuḵnē ʾnāšāyē*). According to Bar Penkāyē, it was God's will to punish sinners among Christians: "without God's help, how could naked men riding with neither armour nor shield be victorious?"[18] This (along with many similar statements made by both non-Muslim and Muslim authors) can be seen as a unified monotheistic view of history under the rule of God, with the difference being that "for non-Muslim monotheists the events signalled a wrathful rather than a merciful God."[19]

Bar Penkāyē then proceeds to list territories that fell under the sway of Arabs or were raided by them. "They subdued all fortified (lit. strong) cities and ruled from the sea to the sea,[20] from East to West, Aegyptos (Syr. *ʾāḡeḇṭos*) and all of Egypt (Syr. *meṣrēn*), from Crete (Syr. *qrēṭē*) to Cappadocia (Syr. *qāpādoq*), from Yāhelmān to the Gates of Alan (Syr. *tarʿē d-ʾālān*), Armenians, Syrians, Persians, Romans, Egyp-

14 Morony 1984, 344; Hoyland 1997, 123; Metselaar-Jongens, 2016, 175–176.

15 For a favorable attitude, see, e. g., Q 5:82, 2:62 and 5:69. For a less positive and even hostile attitude, see, e. g., Q 3:110, 5:14, 5:51, 5:17, 57:27, 9:5 and 9:29. There is overall goodwill toward the Christians in the hadiths, especially the Sunni ones; see Ayoub 2017.

16 Griffith, "Christians and Christianity," 1, 311.

17 Sahas 2022, 88. On the possible influence of East Syriac mysticism upon Sufism, including a list of major studies, see Pirtea 2019, 367. On the generally favorable attitude of the Muslim authorities toward Christian monasteries in the early period of Islam, see Bowman 2021, 101–146.

18 Note Shoemaker's remark: "Moreover, it seems rather likely that the eschatological fervor shared by Muhammad and his earliest followers was a driving force behind the Islamic conquest of the Near East: their anticipation of the Hour was, it would appear, closely linked with the restoration of Abraham's descendants to the Promised Land" (Shoemaker 2011, 14–15).

19 Robinson 2011, 201. Also see Shoshan 2016, 53–54, 63.

20 That is, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf.

tians and all the lands that are in between." "The Gates of Alan" (Syr. *tarʿē d-ʾālān*) refers to the Darial Gorge, lying on the border between modern Georgia and Russia. The name comes from Persian *dar-i Alān* (Ar. *bāb al-lān*).[21] As far as we know, the Arabs came to the southern Caucasus in the middle of the seventh century.[22] "Bāb al-Lān was scarcely reached by the first wave of Muslim conquest";[23] one would suppose that Bar Penkāyē uses this well-known name to indicate the approximate northerly limit of the initial conquest.

One geographical term Bar Penkāyē uses has not been identified yet, namely Yāhelmān. To the best of our knowledge, Bar Penkāyē is the only Syriac source that mentions the name. It has been suggested that it was a place in Arabia[24] or further south,[25] in contrast to the Gates of Alan located in the Caucasus.[26] Neither Arabia nor Yemen make much sense here since they lie within the territories native to the conquerors, whereas Bar Penkāyē speaks in this passage of the lands that fell under Arab control in the initial Arab conquest. If we assume that Crete and Cappadocia are the outermost affected points of the Byzantine Empire in Bar Penkāyē's report, then perhaps the next pair – "the Gates of Alan" and Yāhelmān – both belong to the Sasanian realm.[27]

The exact meaning of the other two terms, Aegyptus (Syr. *ʾāḡeḇṭos*) and "all of Egypt (Syr. *meṣrēn*)," is also unclear. Since there is no explicit description of Egypt and its borders in Syriac sources, it is hard to determine which exact geographical region Syriac writers considered Egypt in Late Antiquity and early Islamic times. For example, in Bar Bahlūl's lexicon (10th c.) we find an entry on Eilat, which refers to it as a city in Egypt.[28] We can roughly assume that the borders of Egypt in Late Antiquity coincided more or less with those of modern Egypt. Thus, it stretched to Libya in the west, to Ethiopia in the south, to the Mediterranean Sea in the north, and to Palestine and the Arabian Peninsula in the east. The Sinai Peninsula was geographically a part of Egypt. By "*ʾāḡeḇṭos* and all of *meṣrēn*," Bar Penkāyē must have been referring to just one geopolitical unit. Both words can be used interchangeably in Syriac sources for the designation of the same territory. The former,

21 Dunlop, "Bāb al-Lān," *EI*², 1, 835–836.

22 See, e. g., Hoyland 2015, 111–115.

23 Dunlop, "Bāb al-Lān," *EI*², 1, 835–836.

24 Margoliouth, 1927, 152. Suermann speaks of Yemen (Suermann 1987, 61).

25 Brock 1987, 58, n. e.

26 Payne Smith, 1879, col. 211.

27 A somewhat similar toponym *yʾlmʾn* is mentioned in Rashīd Yāsimī's *History of Kurds*, where it is explained as an ancient Elamite region located in the northern part of the modern Iraqi province Diyala with no further references (Yāsimī 1940, 23). We would like to thank Artyom Badeev for bringing this reference to our attention.

28 bar Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum* (1901), col. 131.

ʾāḡeḇṭos, was a Greek loanword (Αἴγυπτος) that served as the name of the overall region as well as the Roman province, whereas the latter was a traditional Semitic term for Egypt (cf. Heb. *miṣrayim*, Ar. *miṣr*). The words can thus form a hendiadys to refer to Egypt.[29] In texts translated from Greek into Syriac, *ʾāḡeḇṭos* appears as a full synonym of Syriac *meṣrēn*.[30] If our assumption is correct, then Bar Penkāyē's account does not include territories lying further to the west of Egypt, in North Africa, which were raided or conquered by the Arabs up to the time of Bar Penkāyē. Already around 50/670, ʿUqba b. Nāfiʿ, appointed by caliph Muʿāwiya, reached the territory of modern Tunisia, conquered the Byzantine province of Byzacena and founded the garrison town of Kairouan.

The rest of the information provided by Bar Penkāyē – concerning the regions (Crete and Cappadocia) and peoples (Armenians, Syrians, Persians, Romans, Egyptians) that were attacked or conquered by the Arabs – is what we would expect to see for this period. Bar Penkāyē also relates that only half of the Byzantine Empire was left after the Islamic conquest. The author also mentions Ethiopia. One can assume that he means by the latter the Christian kingdoms of northern Sudan, which were raided by Muḥammad's followers from about 20–21/641–642.[31] Interestingly, Bar Penkāyē also mentions Spain among these conquered territories. Whereas there is widespread scholarly consensus that the first Arab attack on the Iberian Peninsula was carried out under the commandment of Ṭāriq b. Ziyād in 93/711,[32] a few Muslim historical works and even a Latin chronicle mention that some "Arabs" did in fact invade the peninsula in the second half of the seventh century.[33]

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29 Consider the following examples: *w-ʾeṯpallaḡ malkwāṯā bāṯar mawtēh d-sʔlwqws. W-nāšīn ʾamleḵ b-prs w-mdy. W-ḥrānē ʾamleḵ* ***b-mṣryn u-ʾygwpṭws****. W-ḥrānē b-mqdwny u-pnṭws. Hānnā den ʾnṭywkws ḥṭaf l-īhoḏ* "The kingdom was split up after the death of Seleucus. Some reigned in Persia and Media. Some reigned in ***meṣrēn*** **and** ***ʾygwpṭws***. Some – in Macedonia and Pontos. And this Anthiochus seized Judea." (*Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertninens I* (1920), 107:18–21). *B-hānna zaḇnā hwā* ***b-meṣrēn*** *kafnā rabbā w-ʿaššīnā wa-****ḇ-kullēh ʾaṯrā d-ʾygwpṭws*** *b-hāy d-ʾeṯklī nylws nahrā men da-lmessaq ʾaḵ ʿyāḏā wa-lmašqīyūṯāh l-ʾarʿā hāy* "At that time a great and severe famine happened **in *meṣrēn* and the entire land of *ʾygwpṭws*** because the river Nile had not overflowed and irrigated the soil" (*Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertninens II* (1916), 210:28–31).

30 Cf. one of the homilies of Severus of Antioch on the story of Joseph and its fulfilment in Jesus: *hāw* ***da-l-ʾgwpṭws*** *nḥeṭ ʾaykānā d-ʿmnwʾyl l-ʿālmā hānnā* "that (i. e., Joseph) who went to ***ʾgwpṭws*** is like Emmanuel [who came] to this world" (*Les Homélies de Sévère d'Antioche (Homélies LXXVIII à LXXXIII)* (1929), 328).

31 On the earliest military expeditions of Muslims against Nubia and the conclusion of an agreement between Muslims and Nubians, see, e. g., Ḥasan 1967, 17–28.

32 See, e. g., Moreno 2011, 581, 584.

33 See Ṭāha 2017, 84 and al-Maʿsumi 1964.

We next meet "the sons of Hagar" in the fifteenth chapter, when Bar Penkāyē speaks about the church in the Persian Empire. Once again, he affirms that God had called "the barbaric people" (Syr. *ʿammā barbrāyā*) to plunder and shed blood in order to punish western Christians (those living in former Byzantine territory) for their sins, specifically for their Miaphysite Christology, wherein (according to Bar Penkāyē) the divine nature of Christ was able to experience suffering. As Bar Penkāyē relates, after putting the Arabs in charge of Christians, God decided to repay the former for their violence during the conquest; thus, from the very beginning of their rule over Byzantine and Sasanian territories internecine conflict was kindled among them. In very few words, Bar Penkāyē describes the First Civil War between "Easterners," that is, supporters of ʿAlī, and "Westerners," that is, supporters of Muʿāwiya.[34] Most likely this approach to naming the two groups relates to the locations of their respective supporters. Muʿāwiya governed Syria for a long period of time, while most of ʿAlī's supporters were in Iraq. Bar Penkāyē confirms a widespread opinion that the issue in this initial confrontation concerned who could be a caliph, not what powers he should enjoy: "The Westerners were saying, 'Greatness should be ours, and the king (Syr. *malkā*) should be from us.' But the Easterners contended that this should be theirs."[35]

After this civil war, when Muʿāwiya, the first Umayyad caliph, came to power, peace and justice were spread over all the Muslim territories,[36] as Bar Penkāyē emphasizes in this chapter, twice saying that "he allowed everyone to conduct himself as he wanted."[37] Bar Penkāyē then speaks of the followers of Muḥam-

34 On the First Civil War among Muslims and Muʿāwiyah's rise to power, see, e. g., Hawting 1986, 24–33; Madelung 1997, 141–311; Donner 2010, 145–193.

35 See, e. g., Robinson 2011, 203.

36 Donner speaks of "two decades of relative calm" (Donner 2010, 170). Robinson states that "local authority was usually in the hands of non-Muslim authorities, and Muʿāwiya seems to have been considered a benevolent, hands off ruler" (Robinson 2011, 209).

37 At the beginning of the Umayyad period it seems likely that these conquered peoples were still relatively isolated from their conquerors in everyday life and as yet largely unaffected by the processes of Arabization and Islamization which were soon to be so powerful (Hawting 1986, 35), "[t]he other, larger population which the caliphs and their governors ruled was that of the conquered peoples, and, just as the Arabs were governed indirectly by means of their tribal notables, so the non-Arabs were generally administered through their own native authorities, priests, rabbis, nobles or others" (ibid., 37). Note also the following observation of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, which describes the complicated and loose state system of the Early Islamic empire, where significant power was given to governors: "Muʿāwiyah due to financial need attempted to increase the levy by a *qirāṭ* on every Copt, but his governor refused to do that, out of respect for familiar custom … … the paucity of information about the Umayyad age and the decentralised administrative system constrains and confuses the researcher wanting to distinguish the influence of the caliphs from that of their governors in these inconsistencies. The broad authority of the governors used to encourage them

mad under the direction of Muḥammad, worshipping one God[38] "according to the custom of ancient law" (Syr. *ʾyāḏā d-nāmosā ʿattīqā*).[39] Scholars point out the links made in Syriac sources between Muḥammad, his teaching, and the Jews.[40] This has led some to explain "ancient law" in this passage as a reference to the Torah.[41] This interpretation cannot be ruled out and the expressions "ancient law" (Syr. *nāmosā ʿattīqā*) and "ancient custom(s)" (Syr. *ʾyāḏā ʿattīqā*) are indeed used in *The Book of the Main Points* in relation to the Jews and their practices. However, it is not specifically the Torah that is implied in these instances. Each time Bar Penkāyē says this, he contrasts the old world order, governed by written and natural law, with the new world order after the coming of Jesus Christ, governed by mercy and grace. Moreover, Bar Penkāyē's work is loaded with heavy anti-Jewish polemics. If he had meant the Jewish law specifically, he probably would have stressed this connection using more trenchant wording.

As for the Arabs, some modern scholars suppose that a certain monotheistic faith distinct from Christianity and Judaism might have had deep roots in pre-Islamic Arabian society.[42] This religion might have something to do with the later Islamic concept of *dīn*/*millat Ibrāhīm* or *ḥanīfiyya*, a concept that continues to play an important role in Islam nowadays. This idea suggests that divine revelation was given through Abraham, who, together with his son Ismael, introduced the people of Arabia to monotheistic religion, but that later on the people forgot God's covenant with Abraham. The idea also connects Islam with Christianity and Judaism, since ancestors of Christians and Jews supposedly received the same divine law, corrupted later by those who followed after them. According to *dīn*/*millat Ibrāhīm*,

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to act recklessly and to needlessly squander the wealth of the state and its subjects" (Duri 2011, 108–109). Also see Hoyland 2015, 130–132.

38 That the unity of God was the key point of early Muslim piety is seen from early Islamic inscriptions. See Donner, 1998, 88.

39 When Ḫadīǧa consulted her cousin Waraqa about Muḥammad's visions, according to Ibn Isḥāq, Waraqa said: "… O Khadīja, there hath come unto him the greatest Nāmūs (Ar. *al-nāmūs al-akbar*, i. e., "law," although this word is glossed as "Gabriel" in other Muslim sources) who came to Moses aforetime" (*The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's "Sīrat Rasūl Allāh"* (1955), 107). The same wording is used by the Negus when he speaks of Muḥammad's messenger: "Would you ask me to give you the messenger of a man to whom the great Nāmūs (Ar. *al-nāmūs al-akbar*) comes as he used to come to Moses …" (Ibid, 484)

40 See, e. g., Brock 1982, 11–12.

41 See Reinink 2005b, 167 and Berkey following Reinink in Berkey 2003, 74.

42 See Rubin 1990. Note also Crone's assumption about Muḥammad's opponents: "If we base ourselves on the evidence of the Qurʾān alone, the *mušrikūn* were monotheists who worshipped the same God as the Messenger, but who also venerated lesser divine beings indiscriminately called gods and angels, including some identifiable as Arabian deities, and perhaps also in some cases the sun and the moon" (Crone 2010, 177).

Muḥammad merely reestablished what had been originally given but later distorted or forgotten over time. This concept would fit the context of Bar Penkāyē's narrative, if one could be certain that it was already in existence by the narrator's time.[43]

The neutral terms *mhaddyānā* "guide"[44] and *tārʾā* "instructor" used in relation to Muḥammad in this passage may indicate that Muḥammad had not yet taken the central place in the minds of his proponents that he would later take.[45] The question of Muḥammad's status among his followers at this early stage is highly debated in the literature. The key issue here is that he is not mentioned in any source datable earlier than the end of the seventh century.[46] As Hoyland notes, "[i]t is not just that documents are few, but also they are not really of the right sort … to yield information"[47] concerning the earliest stage of Muḥammad's *umma*. Available evidence gave rise to various interpretations ranging from the non-existence of Muḥammad[48] to the ecumenical character of his early community, which could embrace any monotheist if only he would struggle for the cause of the movement.[49]

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43 On this notion, see Hawting, 2010. On the existence of the concept of the so-called Abrahamic monotheism among the first followers of Muḥammad, see ibid, 490–497 and Shoemaker 2011, passim (see "Abraham" in Index).

44 Muḥammad is called *mhaddyānā* in the *Chronicle to 1234* (13th c.) as well where this word implies a covert polemical stance: "Muḥammad, their leader (Syr. *mhaddyānā*) whom some of them call the prophet (Syr. *nḇīyā*) and the messenger (Syr. *šlīḥā*) of God." (*Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertninens I* (1920), 227).

45 A common way to refer to a spiritual, temporal, and/or military leader in Syriac is the word *mdabbrānā* (< *dabbar* "to lead, guide"). Bar Penkāyē applies it to the leaders of the Jewish community (e. g., high priests, judges, and Hasmonean kings), Seleucid rulers, and Christian clergy of high rank. On the change in Muḥammad's status among his followers as a result of the Second Civil War, see, e. g., Donner 2010, 205–212.

46 Nearly the only exception is found in the *Chronicle of 640* ascribed to Thomas the Presbyter (see Hoyland 1997, 118). Nevertheless, notes Shoemaker: "The text, however, only refers to the 'Arabs of Muhammad' in the context of describing the initial assault on Palestine. While Hoyland writes of this phrase that 'the implication here is that Muhammad was a military leader of some kind,' this interpretation is not in fact clear from the text. It may be simply that these Arabs were identified as those 'of Muhammad' in order to distinguish them from other Arab groups" (Shoemaker 2011, 294, n. 162).

47 Hoyland 2017, 114.

48 See, e. g., Nevo and Koren 2003, 11.

49 The idea of the so-called Believers' community was initially suggested by Donner and has been refined in his many works. One of the most recent elaborations on this thesis can be found in Donner 2010, esp. 56–89. See also Shoemaker 2011, who, stressing the eschatological character of the earliest community, supports Donner's idea. For some critics on this theory, see, e. g., Elad 2002, 241–308 and Hoyland 2017, 113–140.

Bar Penkāyē proceeds by saying that they would sentence to death anyone who seemed to break Muḥammad's law. If the author means that the new authorities did not tolerate violation of this law by the new subjects of the Muslim state, then it is hard to assess if this severe punishment was widespread in the early period of Muslim rule, considering that there is "no evidence, either, of any effort by Christians or Jews to exploit the disarray among the ruling elite to break away or overthrow the Believers' hegemony."[50] Another possible interpretation of this passage is that Bar Penkāyē is describing violence against all kinds of political opposition toward the authority of the Umayyad caliphs, which was formulated in divinely absolutist terms in this period. Thus, any rebel against the Umayyad rule could be considered an apostate from God's law.[51]

Bar Penkāyē describes annual raids that the Arabs carried out to "distant regions" (Syr. *ʾaṯrāwāṯā maḇʿdē*) and "islands" (Syr. *gāzrāṯā*).[52] It is worth noting that he emphasizes once again that there was no practice of forced religion conversion. Conquered people, as Bar Penkāyē says, had to pay a tribute or tax (Syr. *maddaʾṯā*), after which they were able to continue professing their own religion. He points out that some of the conquerors were Christians, a point that is relevant to the lack of consensus in modern scholarship regarding the makeup of Muḥammad's community, including the armies of conquest, at this early stage. Hoyland stresses that "[t]he conquering armies had initially consisted principally of Arab tribes." Thus, these early armies included Arabic-speaking Christian tribes, a situation that only began to change during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik.[53] Hoyland's opinion is widely confirmed by Muslim sources, but "one must be careful when one approaches the historical reports that deal with Christian Arab tribes and not assume that discussion is always about Christians when mention is made of the Taghlib, Iyād, al-Namir b. Qāsiṭ, or other Arab tribes who were known to have been Christian at the beginning of the conquest."[54] There is also evidence of non-Arabic speaking groups, including various Christians, taking part in the conquest.[55]

50 Donner 2010, 193. On the generally tolerant attitude of Muslims toward non-Muslims in this period, see Berkey 2003, 91–101.

51 Hoyland leans toward this understanding (Hoyland 2015, 136–137). On the use of the term *ḫalīfat allāh* ("deputy of God") in reference to the first Umayyad caliphs and on the grounds of their authority, see Crone and Hinds 2003, 24–43. On the scale of brutality during the two civil wars and reasons for such brutality, see Donner 2010, 189–190.

52 On military actions of the Muslims in the Umayyad period, see, e. g., Hoyland 2015, 103–128 and 137–157. On the conquests becoming an established state policy during this period, see, e. g., Donner 2010, 171–172.

53 Hoyland 2015, 164–165.

54 al-Qāḍī 2016, 88–89.

55 Ibid., 94–121.

After enumerating the evil deeds done by his fellow Christians of the Church of the East during Muʿāwiyah's reign, Bar Penkāyē narrates how Yazīd (*Yazdīn*) son of Muʿāwiyah came to power.[56] He describes him as an inept and corrupt ruler fond of "childish games and vain pleasures" (Syr. *ʾeštaʿenyā da-ṭlāyē w-pūrgāyā da-srīqē*). It is worth noting that this opinion is in accord with one widespread in later Islamic historiography,[57] although "[i]t is probably impossible on the basis of the evidence available to make a judgement about Yazīd's ability or his character."[58]

After Yazīd's death, Bar Penkāyē describes the rebellion against Umayyad rule during the Second Civil War. In Muslim sources, the leader of the rebels is known as ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. By contrast, Bar Penkāyē gives him the name of his father Zubayr, a prominent follower of Muḥammad who died in the Battle of the Camel in 36/656, during the First Civil War. This report could be interpreted in various ways, to be discussed below. Apart from this discrepancy, Bar Penkāyē confirms information provided in Muslim sources, namely that Ibn al-Zubayr had religious zeal,[59] that he took refuge in "the sanctuary somewhere in the south" (i. e., in Mecca),[60] and that during the siege of Mecca in 683 the Kaʿba was set on fire.[61]

Since that time, Bar Penkāyē says, the Muslim state was no longer stable. Once again, he mentions the conflict between "Westerners" and "Easterners," this time speaking of confrontation during the Second Civil War between al-Muḫtār b. Abī ʿUbayd,[62] a leader of the pro-ʿAlid movement, and the pro-Umayyad general ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād, whom Bar Penkāyē refers to as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ziyād (Syr. *ʿaḇdaʾlraḥmān bar zāyaṭ*). This ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was a brother of ʿUbayd Allāh and a governor of Ḫurāsān for Muʿāwiyah and Yazīd.[63] Apparently, Brock was right that

56 Bar Penkāyē's rendering of his name (Ar. *Yazīd*) is obscure and may be a result of contamination from the name of the aristocratic family of Yazdīn, which was well-known among Eastern Christians of Iraq (see, e. g., Morony 1984, 171). See the discussion of the issue in the second part of the paper.

57 For an unflattering depiction of Yazīd's way of life in Muslim sources, see, e. g., *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (1990), 19, 198.

58 Hawting, "Yazīd (I) b. Muʿāwiya," *EI²*, 11, 310.

59 Ibn al-Zubayr claimed that he rebelled for the protection of God (Ar. *ġaḍaban li-llāh*) (Crone 2003, 63, n 33). On the appearance of the figure of Ibn al-Zubayr in a messianic context, see Madelung 1981.

60 Ibn al-Zubayr called himself "the fugitive at the sanctuary" (*al-ʿāʾiḏ bi-ʾal-bayt*) (see, e. g., Hawting 1986, 47). On the change in Muslim sacred topography in the 7th–8th centuries and the influence of Ibn al-Zubayr's rebellion on this development, see Shoemaker 2011, 241–257, esp. 253–257.

61 See, e. g., *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (1990), 19, 221–226.

62 On Muḫtār and his revolt, see, e. g., Hawting, "al-Muḫtār ibn Abī ʿUbayd al-Ṯaqafī," *EI²*, 7, 521–524; for a textual analysis of Muslim sources on this revolt, see Haider 2019, 26–115.

63 Al-Balāḏurī, *Ǧumal Min Ansāb Al-Ashrāf* (1996), 5, 401.

Bar Penkāyē mistook ʿUbayd Allāh for his brother ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, because there is no evidence that the latter was involved in the struggle with al-Muḫtār, as was his brother ʿUbayd Allāh, who was eventually killed in the confrontation.[64]

Here Bar Penkāyē introduces two otherwise unknown emirs: a certain Bar ʿUṯmān, who ruled over Nisibis and was a champion of the Umayyads, and someone by the name of Bar Nīṭron, who was "from the Easterners" and fought against him. Bar Penkāyē says that the "Westerners" claimed their right to the region in question based on the fact that the Byzantines had held it before the conquest. The other party contradicted this, saying that the region belonged to the Sasanians and therefore should be theirs. This rather strange report, which could be interpreted as if both sides were trying to delimit the power of the other, might refer to attempts by the "Westerners" and the "Easterners" to coexist, but that idea does not find support in Muslim sources. The passage also causes Robinson to conjecture "one has the impression that the controversy is a new one, and that the region was experiencing direct Islamic rule for the first time."[65] Subsequently, Bar Penkāyē narrates that the "Westerners" drove away the "Easterners," after which it is said that Bar Nīṭron gathered a large army to go to war with the Kufans, taking with him Yoḥannān, the metropolitan of Nisibis.[66] At the same time, Ibn Ziyād promised to give Yoḥannān the patriarchal throne. Indeed, this part of Bar Penkāyē's narrative is obscure, abrupt, and open to different interpretations, considering that we have an unknown person (Bar Nīṭron) with no indication of what happened to him and his army thereafter.[67]

In what follows, Bar Penkāyē speaks again of al-Muḫtār and his discontentment with the Kufans, resulting in an order to free all slaves so they could go fight a war instead of their masters. In Muslim sources an account has been preserved where al-Muḫtār says: "If any slave joins our cause, he will be free" (Ar. *man ǧāʾanā min ʿabdin fa-huwa ḥurrun*).[68] Hawting also notes that "[a]lthough they are rarely referred to explicitly or by name in the accounts of the fighting,[69] it seems that al-Muḫtār's forces included a significant number of non-Arab

64 Brock 1987, 64, n. a.

65 Robinson 2000, 44.

66 By which is meant Yoḥannān Garba "The Leper," anti-Catholicos of the Church of the East between 72/691 and 74/693.

67 The fact that these opposing parties offered the patriarchate to the same man, along with the mention of Bar Nīṭron the "Easterner" going against Kufa, suggested to Shoemaker that there is a mistake in the text and, instead of Bar Nīṭron in this passage, Ibn Ziyād should be read (Shoemaker 2021, 200).

68 Al-Balāḏurī, *Ǧumal Min Ansāb Al-Ashrāf* (1996), 5, 447.

69 This is the reference to the first conflict in 685 between al-Muḫtār's army and followers of ʿAbd ʾAllāh ibn Muṭīʿ, Ibn al-Zubayr's governor in Kufa.

mawālī."[70] "At this time, by the term *mawālī* we are mainly referring to prisoners of war and their descendants, brought to Kufa in the wake of the upheavals of the Arab conquests."[71] Bar Penkāyē proceeds, saying that al-Muḫtār put a general named ʾAḇrāhām in charge of these men. There is no doubt that Bar Penkāyē means Ibrāhīm ibn al-ʾAštar, whom Kennedy calls "the most talented commander Kūfa produced during the Marwanid period."[72] Al-Muḫtār sent this army against Ibn Ziyād. The text emphasizes that Al-Muḫtār's army consisted only of poorly-equipped foot soldiers. Interestingly enough, Bar Penkāyē mentions that some of them bore a stick, which might have something to do with the abusive name al-Ḫašabiyyah, by which al-Muḫtār's followers are known in Muslim sources.[73] This issue and that of al-Muḫtār's *mawālī* will be discussed below. The two forces met at the Khazir River (Syr. ḥāzar, Ar. al-ḫāzir) in the vicinity of Mosul. In the ensuing battle, the "Westerners" were severely defeated, and Ibn Ziyād was killed, which corresponds to what is found in Muslim sources.[74]

Then, as Bar Penkāyē goes on to relate, the *mawālī* captured Nisibis. After capturing Nisibis, Ibrāhīm al-Aštar put his half-brother, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd Allāh, in charge of the city.[75] Then according to Bar Penkāyē, the followers of al-Muḫtār in Nisibis rose up against the general and killed him and all his entourage because they did not wish Arabs to be over them. This report goes against what is otherwise known about al-Aštar's brother in Muslim sources, where it is said that he was killed on a battlefield in 67–8/687–8 by ʿUbayd Allāh b. al-Ḥurr.[76] After that, Bar Penkāyē says, Muḫtār's followers set over themselves a certain Abūqarab. Bar Penkāyē mentions the death of al-Muḫtār, which is believed to have occurred in 67/687, and the increasing power of the *mawālī* gathered in Nisibis.

The sequence of these events is not clear from Bar Penkāyē's report, but in Muslim sources a man named Abū Qārib (?) (Ar. *ʾbw qʾrb*) is mentioned, about whom it is said that he, together with al-Ḫašabiyya (Ar. *wa-maʿahu al-ḫašabiyya*), was crushed in Nisibis not much later than 67–8/687–8 by al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra, who was at that time a Zubayrid governor of northern Iraq.[77] Bar Penkāyē does not

70 Hawting, "al-Muḫtār," *EI²*, 7, 521–524

71 Hawting 1986, 51. On the meaning of the word *mawālī* at this time and the scale of *mawālī* involvement in al-Muḫtār's movement, see Watt 1960, 162–172.

72 Kennedy 2001, 23.

73 See van Arendonk, "Khashabiyya," *EI²*, 4, 1086–1087; and Crone 2000, 174–180.

74 The battle is said to have happened in 67/686; see, e. g., *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (1990), 21, 74–83.

75 See, e. g., *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (1990), 21, 83.

76 See, e. g., ibid., 145.

77 In this report, the al-Ḫašabiyya are explicitly depicted as slaves who bear sticks (Ar. *fa-innamā hum al-ʿabīd bi-aydīhimā* – probably mistaken for *bi-aydīhim – al-ʿuṣī*) (al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aġānī* (1905), 5, 147). See also Crone, "Al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra," *EI²*, 7, 357.

mention this defeat, but on the contrary is confident that the *mawālī* will put an end to the rule of the Ismaelites; together with other evidence, this has prompted scholars to date the composition of Penkāyē's book to "late 687 or 688."[78] The last reference to events related to the newly emerged Muslim state is the dating of the plague[79] to "the year 67 of the rule of the Arabs" (Syr. *w-ḇā-šnaṯ štīn wa-šḇāʿ l-šulṭānā d-ṭayyāyē*), which seem to refer to the Hiǧrī calendar used by Muḥammad's followers, the use of which is attested as early as 22/643.[80]

The Second Fitna in Syriac sources

The account of the Second Fitna is one of just a few historical and political events that Bar Penkāyē covers in a more or less detailed way. Betraying his main principle of dwelling on the milestones of world history, he reports on the current political situation and the nearby theatre of military operations. The report is enriched with the personal names of Arab generals, the locations and movements of troops, and peculiar characteristics. Sachau praises Bar Penkāyē's material as "außerordentlich lehrreich."[81] On the one hand, it completes and verifies the reconstruction of the events based on later (mostly Muslim) sources. On the other hand, it requires verification and clarification itself as a source. Since Bar Penkāyē gives us little direct evidence regarding his sources and the way he processes them, we have to turn to indirect methods of inquiry.

In what follows, we will survey the accounts on the Second Fitna preserved in later Syriac writings, paying particular attention to the content of these accounts, the narratives they endorse, and the way they handle personal names and important historiographical terms (e. g., the word *fitna* itself), in order to analyze Bar Penkāyē's material against this backdrop. Such a comparison is aimed to stimulate discussion about Bar Penkāyē's sources and his information environment, namely how he got access to news, what quality his sources were, and whether the later Syriac tradition and his *History* share the same sources and the same views on

78 Hoyland 1997, 200; and Penn 2015b, 88. See also the discussion in the second part of the paper.
79 Bar Penkāyē mentions a severe famine starting simultaneously or right after the epidemic of plague. Elias of Nisibis dates the famine to AH 68 (*Eliae metropolitae Nisibeni opus chronologicum. Pars prior* (1910), 149). On a pandemic in this region in the 7th century, based on available Arabic and Syriac sources, see Rotter 1982, 60–68; and Morony 2007, 59–87.
80 See, e. g., Robinson 2011, 187, n. 36.
81 Sachau 1908, 2, xi.

the events in question. The much-debated issue of dating the *History* will also be addressed.

The Chronicle of Zuqnin (the second half of the 8th c.)

The *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, also known as the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tell Maḥre*, is a universal history that was written by a resident of the Zuqnin monastery near Amid (modern Diyarbakır, Turkey) at the end of the eighth century.[82] The chronicle mentions the Second Fitna only in passing. Neither the details of the conflict nor the main actors are mentioned. The Fitna is said to have started during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik (AG 993 according to the *Zuqnin Chronicle*) and to have lasted for nine years: "In his days a fitna (*ptn*ʾ) 'knotted' for nine years."[83] The reason for the conflict was the unwillingness of the Arabs to be subjugated to one single leader.[84] Neither Ibn al-Zubayr nor his rivalry with the Umayyads is mentioned.

As is well known, the fourth part of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* was the product of the author's own creativity, in contrast to the other parts, which were compiled from earlier works like the *Chronicle of Eusebius*, the *Church History of Socrates Scholasticus*, and the *Church History of John of Ephesus*.[85] According to the chronicler himself, he found but a few reliable sources for the period 587–775. His account of the Second Fitna is extremely scarce, in contrast to his narratives starting in the first half of the eighth century. The author was active in the second half of the eighth century and witnessed himself and/or interviewed others who witnessed the events of the first decades of the eighth century. The Second Fitna was of no impor-

82 Edition: *Incerti auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum II* (1952); Latin translation: *Incerti auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum I* (1949); English translation of the third and the fourth parts: *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV: AD 488–775* (1999); Edition and English translation of the first and second parts: *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn. Parts I and II: From the Creation to the Year 506/7 AD* (2017). See also Witakowski 1987.

83 *Incerti auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum II* (1952), 154:5.

84 It should be noted that the First Fitna is described in the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* with the same wording and the same reasoning: "In the year 967, ʿUthman, the king of the Arabs, died. A fitna knotted, and the earth was stirred up. The Arab people were disturbed. Evil deeds multiplied on earth. There was massive bloodshed [caused] by them and [happening] among them because they did not want to follow one leader." (*Incerti auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum II* (1952), 152:19–23).

85 Witakowski 1987, 124–136; Witakowski 1996, xxv; *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV* (1999), 29–32.

tance to him, nor did he have adequate sources to accurately picture it. However, it is one of the first Syriac sources to name the Second Fitna with the name rooted in the Arabic historiographical tradition.[86] The language of the chronicle, especially in the fourth part, is famous for an unusually large proportion of Arabic words, compared to other writings in Syriac.[87] Indeed, when later Syriac historiographical writings mention the Second Fitna (see below), they use Syriac words for it instead. We can suppose that the author picked this name from one of his sources, most likely an Arabic one (and perhaps an oral one).[88]

The Chronicle of Elias of Nisibis

Elias, metropolitan of Nisibis, finished his universal *Chronicle* in 1018–1019.[89] The beginning of the work is lacking, and entries start from the year 25 CE. It was composed in both Syriac and Arabic. Based on the analysis of the single manuscript of the *Chronicle*, which could well be an autograph, it appears that the text was first written in Syriac and then translated into Arabic.[90] The material is organized chronologically, with each entry corresponding to one year, dated according to both the Hijra and the Seleucid era. Elias names his sources for each entry and then makes short notes on memorable events. Information on the history of the cali-

86 The First Fitna is called by both its Arabic name *ptn'* and its Syriac name *šgušyā* (*Incerti auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum II* (1952), 152:13). The author of the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* applies the word *ptn'* to the events of the Third Fitna as well (ibid., 177:19, 24; 181:22; 196:3; 200:17). He even uses a denominative verb *'apten* "to rebel" that is not attested anywhere else.

87 Harrak 1998.

88 The Syriac word *ptn'* in the sense of "tumult," as applied to the events of the Second Fitna, occurs in the *Chronicle to 724*, which is considered to be a translation of an Arabic Muslim source. The author betrays a knowledge of Islamic historiographical tradition and uses a lunar calendar for the regnal years of caliphs. Additionally, there are two Arabic words that are left untranslated: *rasūl* "messenger" and "fitna" (Hoyland 1997, 395–396; Palmer 1993, 50; Penn 2015b, 196–197). This could be an additional argument that the author of the *Zuqnin Chronicle* might have consulted Arabic sources. Moreover, the *Chronicle to 1234* uses the word *ptn'* for various events in the political history of the caliphate, including a coup against al-Walīd II in 744 (*Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertninens I* (1920), 316:16) and unrest in Syria following al-Manṣūr's rise to power (*ibid*., 18: 14). The *Chronicle* also uses the word in references to ecclesiastical history (*Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertninens II* (1916), 147:10).

89 Edition: *Eliae metropolitae Nisibeni opus chronologicum. Pars prior* (1910a); *Eliae metropolitae Nisibeni opus chronologicum. Pars posterior* (1909). Latin translation: *Eliae metropolitae Nisibeni opus chronologicum. Pars prior* (1910b); *Eliae metropolitae Nisibeni opus chronologicum. Pars posterior* (1910c).

90 Pinggéra 2006, 276; Hoyland 1997, 422.

phate is derived from two sources: an unidentified chronological outline of Arab history (Syr. *yubbāl zaḇnē d-ṭayyāyē*) and a lost historiographical work by Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī (Syr. *kw'rzmy'*). As HOYLAND notes, these sources add nothing new to the classical picture of Islam.[91] However, what Elias chose to communicate to his readers is of interest.

First, it is remarkable that almost nothing is said about the existence of a conflict between the Umayyads and Ibn al-Zubayr or other decentralized tendencies in the caliphate, such as al-Muḫtār's revolt in Kufa and the subsequent military success of his troops. Based on what Elias tells us, we can infer that there was tension and indeed conflict between the Umayyads and the Zubayrids (e. g., Muslim ibn ʿUqbah's campaign against Ibn al-Zubayr and the siege of the Kaʿba in 64/683, as well as the way in which ʿAbd al-Malik gained control over various territories). Elias avoids giving personal characteristics or showing any hint of favoritism. He does not provide a clear line of succession and the regnal years of the caliphs as straightforwardly as other Syriac sources do. Thus, it is said that Ibn al-Zubayr started reigning after the death of Muʿawiyah II in AH 64. Next year, Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam was proclaimed a caliph (Syr. *malkā* "king"), after whose death his son ʿAbd al-Malik took over. We can guess that both Ibn al-Zubayr and ʿAbd al-Malik were caliphs simultaneously until the death of the former. Neither al-Muḫtār and his allies nor the battle on the Khazir River are mentioned. The supposed diarchy ended in AH 73 when Ibn al-Zubayr was killed by al-Ḥağğāğ in Mecca.[92]

Such handling of the material is probably primarily a reflection of the genre of the chronicle. Concise Syriac chronicles of the seventh and eighth centuries[93] speak of this period also in a considerate way, either being silent about the Second Fitna and providing an uninterrupted line of succession (Yazīd I – Marwān – ʿAbd al-Malik) or carefully giving a period with "no ruler" (*d-lā malkā/d-lā rīšā*) after Yazīd's death and before Marwān's or ʿAbd al-Malik's enthronement.[94] The *Chronicle to 724*, which most likely derives from an Arabic Muslim source, is the only work in this line of Syriac short chronicles that mentions the Second Fitna as such.[95]

91 Ibid., 422.

92 *Eliae metropolitae Nisibeni opus chronologicum. Pars prior* (1910b), 147–151.

93 The *Chronicle to 705*, *An Account of the Generations, Races, and Years to 775*, the *Chronicle to 819*, and the *Chronicle to 846*.

94 Cf. the *Chronicle to 705* (*Anecdoton Syriacorum* (1868), 2, 11), the *Chronicle to 775* (*Chronica Minora. Pars Tertia* (1905), 348), and the *Chronicle to 846* (*Chronica Minora. Pars Secunda* (1904), 231).

95 Ibid., 155.

Later Syriac chronicles

In this section, we will consider the evidence of three much later Syriac historiographical works: the *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian* (d. 1199),[96] the *Chronicle to 1234*,[97] and the *Civil Chronicle of Bar ʿEbroyo* (d. 1286).[98] All these universal histories, varying in detail, contain essentially the same material on the Second Fitna. Bar ʿEbroyo seems to be dependent on Michael the Syrian (or the source used by Michael). The latter chronicle and the *Chronicle to 1234*, independently from one another, employed material from the *Chronicle of Dionysius of Tell Maḥre* (9th c.), who in his turn used the work of Theophilus of Edessa (8th c.).[99]

Michael divided his *Chronicle* into three columns: ecclesiastical history, civil history, and outstanding events and phenomena. The chapter that features the Second Fitna is called (among other things) "About the time when Muʿāwiya, king of the Arabs (Syr. *ṭayyāyē*), died and in which the kingdom split up (Syr. *ʾeṯpalgaṯ*)." The relevant events are discussed in the columns on civil history and outstanding phenomena. Right after Yazīd's death it is reported that al-Muḫtār rebelled in Kufa. He is characterized as a liar, an impostor, and a hypocrite (Syr. *gaḇrā daggālā wa-mṣadyānā w-nāseḇ bʾappē*) who proclaimed himself a prophet and affirmed he had visions. The Second Fitna is called a tumult (Syr. *šgušyā*), triggered by Yazīd's death and the fact that he did not leave grown-up successors. The Muslims (Syr. *mhagrāyē*) split up; those who were in Yaṯrib set up ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr as ruler, those in Damascus and Palestine set up Yazīd's son Muʿāwiya II, and those in Syria and Phoenicia followed al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays al-Fihrī (Syr. *dʾyk*).[100] It is not clear whether Michael considers al-Muḫtār's revolt as part of this tumult.

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96 Edition and French translation: *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)* (1899). English translation: *The Syriac Chronicle of Michael Rabo (the Great): A Universal History from the Creation* (2014). English translation of the books XV–XXI: *The Chronicle of Michael the Great (The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex): Books XV–XXI, from the Year 1050 to 1195 AD* (2019). See also Weltecke 2003.

97 The chronicle was initially composed in 1204, after which it was continued, breaking off in the year 1234. Edition: *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertninens I* (1920) and *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertninens II* (1916). Latin translation of the first part: *Anonymi auctoris Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens I* (1937). French translation of the second part: *Anonymi auctoris Chronicon ad A.C. 1234 pertinens II* (1974). See also Hilkens 2018.

98 Editions: *Gregorii Barhebræi Chronicon Syriacum* (1890); *The Chronography of Bar Hebraeus* (2010). French translation: *La Chronographie de Bar Hebraeus* (2013).

99 The histories of Dionysius of Tell Maḥre and Theophilus of Edessa are lost; their content has been reconstructed from the works of later historians, notably Michael the Syrian and the anonymous author of the *Chronicle to 1234*.

100 The *Chronicle to 1234* renders his name as *dḥk br qys*.

The situation caused by the lack of a mature heir in Syria was partly fixed by Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam, who came to Damascus from Yaṯrib and proposed to elect a caliph. After Marwān's death the caliphate was again divided among many rulers. When ʿAbd al-Malik was proclaimed caliph, ʿAbd Allāh was set up as ruler in Babylonia.[101] ʿUmayr ibn al-Ḥubāb al-Sulamī (Syr. *bar ḥwbb*)[102] rebelled and took Rēšʿaynā under his control, ʿAmr ibn Saʿīd (Syriac sources spell the name as if it were ʿUmar: *ʿwmr bar sʿyd*) took Damascus,[103] Zufar ibn al-Ḥāriṯ al-Kilābī (Syr. *zwpr*) took Circesium,[104] and a certain Burida (Syr. *bwrid*) took Nisibis.[105] ʿAbd al-Malik was forced to make a peace treaty with the Byzantines in order to eliminate his political enemies inside the caliphate. Ibn al-Zubayr fled to Mecca, and al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ (Syr. *ḥǧǧ*) pursued him to "the building where the Arabs used to pray" (i. e., the Kaʿba). Al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ uprooted a wall surrounding the praying house and killed Ibn al-Zubayr. The battle on the Khazir River, announced as having taken place "between the Arabs," is reported in the column on "natural phenomena and outstanding events." It occurred in year 995 of the Seleucid era, on the 2nd and the 3rd of the month Elul. The details of the battle are lacking except for a great number of casualties on both sides (40,000). Neither the parties that fought nor the cause of the battle are mentioned.[106]

The report on the Second Fitna in the *Chronicle to 1234* is almost identical to that in Michael's *Chronicle*, diverging only in minor details. Most importantly, the anonymous author shares the same interpretation of the events but provides additional information, such as personal names or the motivation of the main actors. Thus, the Second Fitna is called either a tumult (Syr. *šgušyā*) or a disorder (Syr. *bulbālā*). Regarding al-Muḫtār's revolt, the author notes that he was subject to neither Ibn al-Zubayr nor the Umayyads. After ʿAbd al-Malik made a peace treaty with the Romans, he sent Ibn Ziyād, Muʿāwiya's brother, to fight al-Muḫtār. Ibn Ziyād was killed during this campaign, and ʿAbd al-Malik took the initiative himself. Having heard that ʿAmr ibn Saʿīd had rebelled in Damascus, ʿAbd al-Malik returned to Syria. The final outcome of the campaign against al-Muḫtār and the fate of the latter are

101 Babylonia should be understood as Iraq. It is, however, not clear whether Michael means Ibn al-Zubayr here or another person.

102 On this episode, see Wellhausen 1902, 120.

103 ʿAmr ibn Saʿīd attempted a coup against ʿAbd al-Malik while the latter was in Mesopotamia fighting with Muṣʿab ibn Zubayr (ibid., 118).

104 Zufar ibn al-Ḥāriṯ al-Kilābī fought on the side of Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays in the battle of Marǧ Rāhiṭ in 684 and, after the defeat of the latter, fled to Circesium, which he held until 691, after which he negotiated with the Umayyads (ibid., 109, 119).

105 Wellhausen reports that Nisibis (unlike other Mesopotamian cities) was controlled by al-Muḫtār's former forces, called *Ḥašabiyya* "Knüttelträger" (ibid., 120).

106 *Chronique de Michel le Syrien* (1899), 444–446.

not mentioned. As soon as ʿAbd al-Malik noticed that Ibn al-Zubayr's opposition had grown stronger, he appointed his brother Muḥammad over Mesopotamia, Mosul, and Armenia, and al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ ibn Yūsuf (Syr. *ḥgg bar ywsp*) over Persia. Muḥammad took Edessa and then, in a short time, the entire Jazira, except for Nisibis, which was under the control of a certain Budayr (Syr. *bwdyr*). Al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ and Muḥammad went to Yaṯrib, destroyed Ibn al-Zubayr's army and killed his commander-in-chief Ibrāhīm ibn al-Aštar.[107] Ibn al-Zubayr fled and found refuge in the Kaʿba (*kʿbtʾ*) in Mecca. Al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ's army entered the Kaʿba, seized Ibn al-Zubayr, cut his head off and sent it to ʿAbd al-Malik. The report about the battle on the Khazir River is lacking.[108]

Bar ʿEbroyo must have consulted different sources from the other two chroniclers or, alternatively, interpreted the same sources in different ways. Although his account closely resembles that of Michael, the causal links between the events and even the chronological order are different. The material is organized chronologically rather than thematically. Thus, the report on the battle on the Khazir River on the 3rd of Elul in 996 of the Seleucid era follows Yazīd's death, al-Muḫtār's revolt, and the division of the caliphate into two domains (that of the Umayyads and that of the Zubayrids). What is striking in Bar ʿEbroyo's account is that he places Ibn al-Zubayr in the legitimate line of succession between Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam and his son ʿAbd al-Malik: "After Marwan bar Ḥakam, ʿAbd Allāh bar Zubayr [ruled] 8 years and 4 months. He was in Yaṯrib."[109] Neither al-Muḫtār's rebellion nor the division of the caliphate after Yazid's death nor the battle on the Khazir River between the Umayyads and al-Muḫtār's troops are recognized as a part of the ongoing internal conflict. A great schism (Syr. *seḏqā rabbā*) among the Arabs is said to have happened during the reign of Ibn al-Zubayr, when local emirs took control of cities and regions in Mesopotamia and Syria[110] for roughly 8 years.[111] The reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, who (according to Bar ʿEbroyo) succeeded Ibn al-Zubayr, is reduced to 13 years and 6 months. Given this interpretation, al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ's campaign against Ibn al-Zubayr and his subsequent murder in the Kaʿba looks all the more bizarre. Bar ʿEbroyo does not bother to provide a link between ʿAbd al-Malik's succession to Ibn al-Zubayr and a war between them.

107 Ibrāhīm ibn al-Aštar was killed at the battle of Maskin in 691.

108 *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertninens I* (1920), 289–293.

109 *Gregorii Barhebræi Chronicon Syriacum* (1890), 111:5–6.

110 Babylonia, Rešʿayna, Nisibis, Damascus, and Circesium (see above the account of Michael the Syrian).

111 Cf. the report of the *Zuqnin Chronicle*.

Juxtaposing these other Syriac accounts on the Second Fitna and carefully reading Bar Penkāyē's contribution, we can draw some conclusions regarding his sources, his "media" environment, and the date of the composition of the *History*.

Bar Penkāyē experienced the Second Civil War from northern Mesopotamia, a territory that was involved in the conflict but was not in its midst. At the time of the composition of his *opus magnum*, Bar Penkāyē resided at the monastery of Yoḥannān of Kamul, which was located in the vicinity of Gāzartā (modern Cizre in southeast Turkey). Thus, the main centers of confrontation that feature in the *History* are Mosul and Nisibis, ca. 170 km and 100 km from Bar Penkāyē's residence, respectively. The geography of Bar Penkāyē's narration is limited not only to the area in immediate proximity to the monastery but also to the territory which at that time was under the control of Ibn al-Zubayr and his allies (Mecca and Kufa). The last Umayyad caliph mentioned (but left unnamed) in the *History* is probably Yazīd's son Muʿāwiya II (see the discussion below). Although Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam had been proclaimed caliph in 64/684 in Damascus, followed by his son ʿAbd al-Malik in 65/685, it seems that this news for some reason had not reached Bar Penkāyē since he remains completely silent about both Marwān and ʿAbd al-Malik.[112]

As the above comparison has shown, the fifteenth chapter of Bar Penkāyē's *History* was not a source for the later Syriac accounts on the Second Fitna. Neither Bar Penkāyē nor the later accounts share a common source. Bar Penkāyē finished his book just at the outbreak of the Second Civil War and thus he was not able to put into writing the outcome of this struggle. For him it was an ongoing conflict that he anticipated would end with the collapse of the caliphate. He could therefore not evaluate it as a completed historical event.

It is worth noting that the later Syriac sources present different estimations of this period in the history of the caliphate. The *Zuqnin Chronicle* endorses the Umayyad perspective, saying that the Fitna unfolded during ʿAbd al-Malik's reign. Bar ʿEbroyo includes Ibn al-Zubayr in the legitimate line of succession and reports that "the great schism" happened between him and local emirs in Mesopotamia. Elias of Nisibis seems to recognize Ibn al-Zubayr as a legitimate ruler but leaves out any mention of the conflict. The *Chronicle* of Michael the Great and the *Chronicle to 1234* draw a more elaborate picture, mentioning other parties in the war. It is, however, not always clear whose interests they represent.

112 It is interesting that, when speaking about contemporary Katholikoi of the Church of the East around the time of the battle on the Khazir River (66/686), Bar Penkāyē mentions Giwargis I (41–60/661–680) and then Ḥnanišoʿ (66–79/686–698), omitting for some reason the short catholicosate of Yoḥannān I bar Mārṭā (60–63/680–683).

Bar Penkāyē lacks the view of his younger Syriac colleagues, who see the events from the distance of one or more centuries, generally cover a wider geographical area, and are more politically nuanced. He draws a strict line between "the Westerners" (the Umayyads) and "the Easterners," assigning al-Muḫtār the role of general of "the Easterners." Whether he considered Ibn al-Zubayr the leader of "the Easterners" is not clear, but it can at least be implied when he writes that Ibn al-Zubayr opposed "the Westerners," accusing them of violation of the law. The fact that al-Muḫtār had his own political agenda, which later Syriac chronicles were aware of, also escaped Bar Penkāyē's attention. On the other hand, as an immediate witness, Bar Penkāyē reports details missing from the other Syriac accounts, particularly the battle on the Khazir River and the *šurṭē* movement.[113] Some of these details can be confirmed by external sources. Thus, we find the name of Abū Qārib, the rebellious chieftain of Nisibis, in Arabic historians,[114] while the later Syriac chronicles call him *bwryḏ* (Michael the Syrian and Bar ʿEbroyo) or *bwdyr* (the *Chronicle to 1234*), a name (or possibly a nickname) that is not found anywhere else.[115] An accurate description of *šurṭē* and their activities in the vicinity of Nisibis is striking. The account finds by and large confirmation in later Muslim sources (see the third part of the paper on the identification of *šurṭē* in Bar Penkāyē's *History*). At the same time, Bar Penkāyē's fifteenth chapter contains material that cannot be verified, such as the existence of a "Western" Umayyad emir Bar ʿUṯmān and an "Eastern" emir Bar Nīṭron.

Where did Bar Penkāyē hear the narratives that he recounts? Unfortunately, he does not reveal his sources. Scattered notes here and there in the *History* are of little help, as he commonly refers to the "holy books" (i. e., the Scripture) and "natural examples" (i. e., observations based on own experience) from which he composed the writing. At the beginning of the sixth chapter, after having listed canonical books, Bar Penkāyē notes that he saw them in Syriac and does not know whether there are others. This implies that he was not able to read any other language. We can assume that Bar Penkāyē gathered information for the fifteenth chapter from oral (or oral-like) reports that reached the monastery where he lived. There is no indication in the *History* that Bar Penkāyē traveled in order to obtain more information. A close parallel to this reconstruction can be found in the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, with the author, reporting on the local history of northern Mesopotamia

113 See the excursus about the *šurṭē* below.

114 See Dixon 1969, 152–153 with reference to Arabic sources; al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aġānī* (1905), 5, 155.

115 These individuals probably should not be equated at all if we believe the report, found in *Kitāb al-Aġānī*, that Abū Qārib was defeated already in 67–68/687–8, while this *bwryḏ* or *bwdyr* must have still been active close to the end of the Second Fitna.

in the eighth century, relying on oral accounts, witnesses of "old people," and his own memory.[116] The lack of knowledge of the contemporary political situation in the caliphate suggests that Bar Penkāyē did not have access to insider information, particularly at the caliphal court, unlike later Syriac chronicles, many of which probably drew on the *Chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa*, who was an astrological adviser at the court of the caliph al-Mahdī. It thus seems that Bar Penkāyē (or his sources) felt uncomfortable with the Arabic language and Arabic names since they seem to have adopted more familiar forms where possible. So, Yazīd I features in the *History* under the Persianized name Yazdīn.[117] Similarly, Ibrāhīm ibn al-ʾAštar appears under the well-known name Abrāhām. It should also be noted that, even if he rendered names in their correct Arabic forms, Bar Penkāyē was not especially accurate in transmitting them, frequently confusing important figures in the narrative. Thus, Ibn al-Zubayr bears the name of his father Zubayr, ʿUbayd ʾAllāh ibn Ziyād became his brother ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ziyād, and the enigmatic Bar Niṭrōn is possibly mistaken for ʿUbayd ʾAllāh ibn Ziyād in one instance (see above). Bar Penkāyē and/or his sources were likely not well versed in the niceties of the caliphate's political elite and perceived these figures as foreign and perhaps not particularly significant.

The civil war most likely had not yet received the name *fitna* when Bar Penkāyē finished his work. The word can be found in the Syriac sources either in its original form (e. g., in the *Zuqnin Chronicle*) or in translation (Syr. *šgušyā*, *bulbālā*, or *seḏqā rabbā*). The picture of al-Muḫtār as a liar, impostor, and false prophet in the later Syriac chronicles, apparently a product of later Muslim historiography, is naturally absent from Bar Penkāyē's account. Nevertheless, certain narratives that are known to us from the later Islamic tradition surface in his work. Bar Penkāyē says of Yazīd I that "he did not follow his father's path. He loved childish games and

116 *The Chronicle of Zuqnin* (2017), 29–32.

117 As far as published sources are concerned, Bar Penkāyē is the only Syriac author who refers to Muʿāwiya's son using a Persianized version of the name (or rather a Persian name sounding similar to the Arabic Yazīd). Other Syriac sources call him by his Arabic name. The name is vocalized as Yazdēn in the dictionary of Iranian names in Syriac sources (Gignoux, Jullien, and Jullien 2009, 143). It represents a diminutive form of the name Yazd "God." Yazīd can also be interpreted as an Iranian name, having changed from Yazd/Yazad to Yazid. Thus, a priest by the name of Yazid is mentioned at the church of Beth-Mar Abraham in 544. Other examples of the name come from after the Arab conquests, when those bearing the name are of Arabic provenance (ibid., 146–147). A compound name *yzydd* that the authors of the dictionary vocalize as Yazid-dād is, based on its second element, certainly an Iranian name. Yazid-dād was called a scribe of the school of Nisibis active in the 5th century under Barsawma. An Arabic etymology has also been proposed for the name, namely that it comes from the imperfect *yazīdu* (see, e. g., Roman, "Diptosis," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, 1, 643–645).

had pleasure in vain things." Abū Miḫnaf tells about the delegation of Medina's respected men who visited Yazīd in Damascus in 682 and upon their return gossiped that he played with hounds, drank wine, and enjoyed the worst society.[118] Bar Penkāyē's *History* says that Ibn al-Zubayr made his claims to the office of caliph because of his zeal for the House of God (Syr. *bēṯ ʾalāhā*), that is, the Kaʿba. He accused the Umayyads of having violated the law and settled down in a prayer house in the South. According to Islamic tradition, Ibn al-Zubayr, having moved to Mecca after the death of al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī at Karbalāʾ, gave himself the nickname "a fugitive in the sanctuary" (Ar. *al-ʿāʾiḏ bi-ʾal-bayt*).

All in all, the nature of information transmitted by Bar Penkāyē reminds us in a way of Chinese whispers. It is not inaccurate or false, but it lacks both background knowledge and profound understanding of causal links between events. This leads us to conclude that Bar Penkāyē's incomplete and to some extent one-sided account of the Second Fitna indicates that the author had limited access to sources, and that information reached him slowly due to his remote place of residence. However, he does not seem to have been selective in what he included and what he omitted.

And this brings us to the problem of dating Bar Penkāyē's *History*. The last date explicitly mentioned in the work is AH 67/687 CE. However, a later date of 692 CE has been proposed for the composition of the work. The assumption is based on the following passage:

> When this one [i. e., Yazīd I] passed away, one of them appeared who made his voice heard from afar. Zubayr [was] his name. He would manifest himself as if he had stepped forward with zeal to the House of God. He was threatening the Westerners as transgressors. He came to one place in the South, their prayer house, and settled down there. They got ready to go to war against him and overcame him. They even set fire to their own prayer house and shed a lot of blood there. From that time forward the kingdom of the Arabs has not been in good order. After that one died, they set his son over the emirate.

According to this interpretation, the one who died mentioned in the last sentence is understood as Ibn al-Zubayr, who was killed in 692 during the siege of the Kaʿba by al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ.[119] However, several arguments suggest that it is the siege of 683 that is alluded to here, in which case another person is being referred to.[120] First, if

118 Wellhausen 1902, 95.

119 Mingana and Suermann understood this passage as speaking about Zubayr (father or son?), without further comment (Mingana 1908, 183; Suermann 1987, 64). Brock supposes that Ibn Zubayr could be meant here (Brock 1987, 52, 64) and therefore proposes a later date of 693/4.

120 This could be Yazīd I. Sachau proposed the same interpretation (although with question marks) in his analysis of Bar Penkāyē's account (Sachau 1908, 2, ix). The passage can also be understood in other ways. The figures of Ibn Zubayr and his father Zubayr and the events related to them

indeed Ibn al-Zubayr is featured here, then we must assume that Bar Penkāyē witnessed the end of the civil war but chose to remain silent about ʿAbd al-Malik's territorial gains, especially his conquest of Nisibis in 71/691, before Ibn al-Zubayr's death. Most remarkable of all is that not a word is said about the battle of Maskin in 691, a battle that took place in the vicinity of the monastery where the Catholikos of the Church of the East resided! It seems highly unlikely that Bar Penkāyē would skip these important events in his account. Secondly, we know nothing about Ibn al-Zubayr's son, who succeeded him. The sentence "After that one died, they set his son over the emirate" could be referring to the death of Yazīd I and accession of his son Muʿāwiya II. Lastly, given the reference to it being set on fire, Bar Penkāyē could only be referring in this passage to the first siege of the Kaʿba in 683. During the second siege of the Kaʿba in 692, it was bombarded with stones.[121] Thus, 67/687 can be safely set as the *terminus post quem* for the dating of Bar Penkāyē's *History*.

Šurṭē

Describing the preparations of the Umayyads and their rival al-Muḫtār for the battle on the Khazir River in 686, Bar Penkāyē reports that the latter gathered an army of non-Arab prisoners of war who had become slaves of Kufans. They comprised 13,000 unequipped foot soldiers armed with a sword (Syr. *saypā*), a lance (Syr. *mūrānīṯā*), or a staff (Syr. *ḥuṭrā*). Bar Penkāyē characterizes them as weak, unfortunate men (Syr. *ḥallāšē*). In spite of this, they overcame the army of the Umayyads and gained control over Nisibis and all of Mesopotamia. In the *History*, these prisoners of war are called the *šurṭē*, a name that, as Bar Penkāyē writes, points to their zeal for justice (Syr. *ṭanānūṯhon da-ḥlāf kēnūṯā*). According to the author, the *šurṭē* would play a very special role in the end times since they would eliminate the Arab domination and become a trigger, an "awakener" for a people

might have become confused in Bar Penkāyē's sources. This would explain why Bar Penkāyē calls Ibn Zubayr after his father's name; at the same time, such an explanation would resolve the riddle of the last sentence, where the one who died would be Zubayr and "his son" would be Ibn Zubayr. Yet another interpretation was proposed by Hoyland, who mentions that Ibn al-Zubayr's brother Munḏir was indeed killed during the siege of the Kaʿba in 63/683 and suggests that this was the reason for Bar Penkāyē's confusion (Hoyland 1997, 199). At any rate, it is not clear what the word "his" means in the phrase "his son."

121 On the siege of the Kaaba in 64/683, the fire, and occasional confusion between this event and that of 692 in Muslim historiography, see Wellhausen 1902, 103–104. It is worth noting that later Syriac chronicles unanimously speak of catapults as the main weapon during the siege of 73/692 and do not mention any fire.

who would come from afar and set in motion the apocalypse. *Šurṭā* (pl. *šurṭē*) is a Syriac rendering[122] of Ar. *šurṭa*, which in late Arabic acquired the meaning of "police." In order to understand whom Bar Penkāyē could possibly mean by this name, we shall consider the evidence from Syriac and Arabic sources.

The Syriac source mentioning the *šurṭē* that is chronologically closest to Bar Penkāyē's *History* is the *Zuqnin Chronicle* (ca. 775). According to the author of the *Chronicle*, the *šurṭē* were a repressive power that assisted authorities to deal with the civilian population and to accomplish their tasks. Thus, in the entry on the years 766–767 and 772–773, the *šurṭē* are said to have taken an active part in the extraction of taxes and to have been used to intimidate taxpayers. They detained people in churches in order to make them pay taxes[123] or tricked insolvent subjects into using fraud to have others pay for them.[124] In his commentary on Mk 6:27, Išoʿdād of Merv (mid. 9th c.) explains *ʾespuqlaṭrā* (< Gr. σπεκουλάτωρ < Lat. *speculator* "guard") as a Latin loanword and glosses it with *qesṭonārā* "torturer, executioner" (which he believes to be a Greek loanword). Ultimately, he says that "they are like the *šurṭē*."[125] In a similar vein, an anonymous East Syrian commentary on Matthew elucidates a foreign word *ʾesṭraṭīūṭē* in Mt 8:9 through *šurṭē*.[126]

In Bar Bahlūl's time (mid. 10th c.), the word seems to have been widely used and self-explanatory as the lexicographer employs it in his Syriac-Arabic lexicon as a gloss for other lexical entries. Thus, one of the possible meanings of the Syriac *ʾsṭrṭyg*ʾ (< Gr. στρατηγός "commander, governor") is "the *šurṭē* who collect tribute (Syr. *maddaʾtā*)."[127] *ʾEsṭraṭīūṭē* (< Gr. στρατιώτης "soldier") is interpreted as "*parrāšē* 'horsemen guarding roads', lictors as well as the *šurṭē*."[128] *Daḥšē* "guards" is glossed as "*šurṭē*, *magīrsē* 'cooks', and *paygē* 'foot soldiers.'"[129] The last gloss *paygē* "foot soldiers" is itself equated with the *šurṭē* in the Lexicon.[130] Finally, for the word *qunnāgā* "night watchman" the following explanation is provided: "*sūrṭā* who surrounds the perimeter of a city, guard at night, and makes noises (alarms?)."[131] Along with the explanation in Syriac, Bar Bahlūl provides a translation into Arabic. *Šurṭē* is translated by Ar. *šuraṭ* in all the abovementioned entries. It is striking that

122 In Syriac, two spellings of the word are attested: a standard one *šwrṭ*ʾ and the less common *šrṭ*ʾ.
123 *Incerti auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum II* (1952), 279:8, 312:9.
124 Ibid., 310:12.
125 *The Commentaries of Isho'dad of Merv, Bishop of Ḥadatha (c. 850 A.D.) in Syriac and English. Vol. II. Matthew and Mark in Syriac* (1911), 220:7.
126 Hoffmann 1880, 142:13.
127 bar Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum* (1901), col. 225.
128 Ibid., col. 225.
129 Ibid., col. 552.
130 Ibid., col. 1540.
131 Ibid., col. 1737.

the lexicon completely ignores *šurṭā* as a vocabulary item which itself requires an interpretation. This may be due to the fact that Bar Bahlūl considered it to be a part of the Arabic lexicon rather than a Syriac word proper. *Šurṭā* is mentioned in the *Chronicle* of Elias of Nisibis (11th c.) in the sense of a certain state office. In the entry for the year AH 279, Elias writes about the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Muʿtaḍid who started reigning that same year and about his new appointments: a vizier and the head of the *šurṭā* office (*ʿḇāḏā d-šurṭā*).[132] The word is used in a similar context in the entry for the year AH 359.[133] In his commentary on the Gospels, the Syriac Orthodox scholar Dionysius bar Salibi (d. 1171) equates the expression *ʾsṭrṭywṭʾ d-ʾygmwnʾ* "governor's soldiers" (Mt 27:27) with the *šurṭē*.[134]

Judging from these sources, we can say that *šurṭā* was used in Syriac as the name for a certain government institution, as well as the designation of an individual performing the duties of this institution. This body was primarily executive in nature, maintaining order among the sedentary population and enforcing the law. It must have played an important role in the administrative structure of the caliphate since Elias of Nisibis mentions the appointment of the head of the *šurṭē* along with that of the vizier. At least toward the end of the eighth century, *šurṭā* becomes a part of the everyday life of the Christian population in Northern Mesopotamia, so that later on the word is found in commentaries and lexicons for the explanation of foreign or obscure terms.

Later Muslim Arabic sources first mention *šurṭa* in connection with the caliphs ʿUmar ibn al-Ḫaṭṭāb and ʿUthmān.[135] ʿAlī is said to have had *šurṭa* during his caliphate too.[136] There is no consensus among scholars as to the veracity of these reports. In any case, the establishment of the *šurṭa* as an institution can be traced back at least to the time of the first Umayyads. The *šurṭa* in early Islamic times were associated with the army and law enforcement. As scholars point out,[137] unlike the army, which usually fought non-Muslims on the frontiers, the *šurṭa* was used as a military force in intra-Muslim conflicts. Thus, it ensured law and order in the cities, suppressed uprisings, protected caliphs and governors, eliminated their political rivals, and took part in larger conflicts between rival parties. Thus, the Umayyads' *šurṭa* forces fought Ḫāriǧite rebels and Shīʿite opponents, as well as played an important role in the military conflicts of the Second Civil War. Although the majority of those who held the office of the head of *šurṭa*, *ṣāḥib al-šurṭa*, were Muslim Arabs/

132 *Eliae metropolitae Nisibeni opus chronologicum. Pars prior* (1910a), 192:6.
133 Ibid., 220:14.
134 *Dionysii Bar Salibi commentarii in Evangelia II (1)* (1953), 111:11.
135 Donner 1989, 248–249.
136 Ibid., 249–250.
137 Ibid., 256; Rashid 1983, 82.

Arab tribe members, evidence is lacking as to whether the *šurṭa* included *mawālī* or consisted exclusively of Arabs.[138] Sources mention different types of weapons that *šurṭa* warriors used during their duties. If they performed their tasks in the cities among the civil population, it was the lance (*rumḥ*), the sword (*sayf*), the slingshot (?) (*kāfir kūbāt*),[139] the pole (*ʿamūd*), or the whip (*sawṭ*). When it came to the battlefield, the *šurṭa* used weapons similar to those of soldiers: lances, swords, bows, and arrows. In formal processions, the *šurṭa* used to walk or ride in front of the governor holding a small spear (*ḥarbah*).[140] The *šurṭa* was closely tied to the person of a caliph or a governor rather than to a place. However, depending on political events and other factors (e. g., tribal conflicts), the *šurṭa* or *ṣāḥib al-šurṭa* could change their loyalty and support opposing parties.[141]

A couple of words should be said about the etymology of the word *šurṭa*, given its relevance for the discussion. Medieval Arab grammarians propose an Arabic provenance for this word, deriving it from the Arabic root *š-r-ṭ* "to make incisions" whose IV stem gives, among others, the following meanings: "to send forward an emissary" or "to commit himself to something." As some sources explain, the *šurṭa*'s duty as an elite combat unit that was sent to the front line and was not expected to come back alive unless victorious, these meanings allowed Arab grammarians to speculate about the Arabic etymology of the word. Some modern scholars consider it to be unconvincing and propose a Latin etymology < Lat. cohort or Lat. securitas.[142]

With this short reference in mind, we can examine the identification of the *šurṭē* in Bar Penkāyē's account. It is clear that Bar Penkāyē's *šurṭē* designate some-

138 Donner 1989, 258. Rashid reports that foreign guards might have been used by the Umayyad governors for personal protection or for suppressing revolts. Thus, ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād is said to have captured the people of the city of Buḥārā and settled them in Basra. Later, they helped the šurṭa of Basra to calm down unrests caused by the Ḫāriǧites. However, after the death of the caliph Yazīd I, when ʿUbayd Allāh experienced problems with the people of Baṣra who did not accept his authority, the Buḥāriyya refused to support him. The same Buḥāriyya, according to Balāḏurī, worked as prisoners of war in the garden of Saʿīd ibn ʿUṯmān, the governor of Ḫurāsān, in Medina and then killed him (Rashid 1983, 156–157).

139 Anthony identifies *kāfir kūbāt* with the wooden weapons of Ḫašabīyya (see below) and explains it as a cudgel-like weapon (Anthony 2012, 280).

140 Rashid 1983, 136–139; Ebstein 2010, 108–109.

141 Thus, al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays al-Fihrī was in Muʿāwiya's service and toward the end of the caliph's life became the head of his *šurṭa*. He supported his son Yazīd and then Yazīd's son Muʿāwiya. During the Second Fitna, he switched to Ibn al-Zubayr's party (Donner 1989, 259–260). Another example from the times of the Second Civil War comes from Baṣra. ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād ibn Abīhi, the governor of Baṣra, had to flee from his city in 683, having lost the support of the head of his *šurṭa* (Ebstein 2010, 107, fn. 8).

142 Schacht opted for *cohort* (Schacht 1948, 517. Jawwad, quoted by Rashid (Rashid 1983, 4), proposed *securitas*. See also ibid., 3–4, Ebstein 2010, 106).

thing more specific than the *šurṭa* known from other Arabic and Syriac sources; he uses it as a proper name rather than as the name of an institution. Unlike his younger Syriac-writing fellows, Bar Penkāyē supposedly did not know about *šurṭa* in its law enforcement role. Neither was he aware of the fact that there could be more than one military unit called *šurṭa*, and *šurṭas* could be formed by different persons to accomplish their goals, especially in times of military confrontation. Since Bar Penkāyē explains that the name *šurṭē* "points to their zeal for justice," a sense that cannot be derived from Syriac, Arabic, or even Latin, there must have been an additional semantic value to the name.

The term *šurṭa* occurs in relation to al-Muḫtār's followers in Muslim sources. For example, there are several appearances of this name in al-Ṭabarī's *History*, where it is mainly followed by the word *Allāh*; there is also an occurrence with reference to al-Muḫtār and another one related to the chair, which followers of al-Muḫtār allegedly venerated.[143] All instances in al-Ṭabarī's *History* where we see *šurṭat Allāh* are inserted in the direct speech of proponents of al-Muḫtār, suggesting that this was an original self-designation of his army or part of it, and was somehow connected to divine power.[144] It seems plausible that later the name may have contracted to just one word. Calling al-Muḫtār's soldiers *šurṭē*, Bar Penkāyē must have meant this army of al-Muḫtār, bearing the name *šurṭat Allāh*. Although the author of the *History* does not provide the full name, it can be inferred that he knew it or at least that he heard the interpretation associated with this name: "a name that points out to their zeal for justice."[145]

143 See *Annales auctore Abu Djafar Mohammed Ibn Djarir at-Tabari* (1883–1885), 276, 691, 710, 711, 713, 715, 716, 725 (*šurṭatihi*, i. e., al-Muḫtār), 704 (*šurṭat al-širk*, pejorative). This chair was reportedly associated with ʿAlī (see, e. g., Wellhausen 1901, 85, 91).

144 Note Crone's remark: "[I]n demanding vengeance for the Prophet's family and styling themselves *shurṭat allāh*, 'God's special troops' (at whose hands the vengeance was to be achieved), they cast the Prophet's family as fellow-victims of their Arab captors and present themselves as better Muslims than the latter …" (Crone 2000, 180).

145 It is, however, not clear how *šurṭat Allāh* "God's šurṭa" results in "zeal for justice." Did Bar Penkāyē imply religious or legal justice? We can speculate that he was somehow aware that al-Muḫtār's revolt was pro-Alid and religious in its background, and one of the purposes of this so-called *šurṭat Allāh* was to take vengeance on the guilty in al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī's death at Karbalāʾ. However, our observation that Bar Penkāyē was not well-briefed in the nuances of political movements in the caliphate makes this assumption unlikely. Of importance for this discussion is Yoḥannān's remark (which does not find confirmation in other sources, on which see Part I) that in Nisibis the *šurṭē* killed their emir, Ibrāhīm ibn al-ʾAštar's brother, because he was *ṭayyāyā*, installing one of their own in his place. The sentiment with which Bar Penkāyē writes about the Kufans regretting their decision to release their slaves after they heard that they had rebelled against them is also significant. This may point to social tension existing between the Arabs and their dependents. After all, "zeal for justice" could refer to the *šurṭē*'s own political agenda.

Al-Muḫtār's army, at least partially, consisted of slaves and freedmen who in Arabic historiography have the name Ḫašabiyya "men armed with clubs." Arabic tradition offers various interpretations as to why the slaves fighting on al-Muḫtār's side were armed with clubs. One of them is that they did not have better weapons.[146] Bar Penkāyē was also aware of the fact that the soldiers enlisted in al-Muḫtār's army were slaves and prisoners of war. It is, however, unlikely that he heard of the name *Ḫašabiyya* as this pejorative nickname must have been coined in later Muslim tradition. Whether he knew about their characteristic weapon remains unclear. He remarks that al-Muḫtār's warriors were "barefooted, without armour and equipment, horses, and tents. They marched out, holding either a sword, a lance, or a staff in their hands." This passage suggests that Bar Penkāyē had specific knowledge of such armies. However, it could also be a literary device that Bar Penkāyē uses to describe a seemingly inferior army guided by Divine Providence. Thus, at the end of the fourteenth chapter, the Arab troops are said to be "naked and riding unarmoured and unshielded" (Syr. *šlīḥīn wāw wa-rḵīḇīn dlā zaynā wa-dlā sakkrē*) during the conquests. The army of victorious Judah Maccabee is characterized as "of a small number and holding only spears (Syr. *rumḥē*).[147]" These two possibilities for interpreting Bar Penkāyē's remark on the *šurṭē* do not, however, exclude each other. Regardless of whether this fact was known to Bar Penkāyē or not, it must have been al-Muḫtār's army of slaves and prisoners of war, the *šurṭat Allāh*, whom he calls the *šurṭē.*[148]

146 VAN ARENDONK, "Khashabiyya," *EI*^{2}, 1086–1087; CRONE 2000, 174–176.

147 Bl. Or. 9385, P. ١٠٤/f. 32v:5–6.

148 To the best of our knowledge, the first who offered this interpretation was Eduard SACHAU. In the introduction to the second volume of *Syrische Rechtsbücher*, he discussed sources on the life of the East Syriac Catholicos Ḥnānīšoʿ, referring to Bar Penkāyē's account of the Second Fitna, accompanied by analysis (SACHAU 1908, x; see also MORONY 1984, 95 who cites SACHAU). CRONE (CRONE 2000, 176) and ANTHONY (ANTHONY 2012, 282) came (probably) independently to the same conclusion as the authors of the present paper. BROCK suggested that *šurāt* "vendors," i. e., those who have sold their soul for the cause of God, could be meant instead (cf. Q: 4.74). BROCK notes that Bar Penkāyē does not always accurately render Arabic emphatics (e. g., *zyṭ* for Ziyād), implying that this may also be the case. It looks, however, like the Syriac character *ṭ* may well be used to render the Arabic [*d*] that probably became devoiced in a post-vocalic position at the end of the word. Thus, *mḥmṭ* is one of the Syriac spellings (along with *mḥmd* and *mḥmwd*) of Muḥammad (PAYNE SMITH 1879, col. 2070–2071). Additionally, al-Šurāt was one of the names applied to the Ḫāriǧite movement (DELLA VIDA, "Khārid̲jites," *IE*^{2}), although they did not take part in this particular conflict. See also HOYLAND 1997, 198, fn. 86, 88; SHOEMAKER 2021, 201.

Conclusions

This paper proves once again that ancient sources are complex objects that should be treated with care and discretion. As Bar Penkāyē's account shows, many of his statements can be interpreted in at least two different ways (in the absence of arguments for opting for either alternative). Nevertheless, with all the complexity and problems that *The Book of the Main Points* in particular (and indeed every source of this kind) may have, the inclusion of such sources in the discussion of Muslim history, rather than creating a vicious circle made up of attempts to verify Christian accounts and Muslim sources with each other, enriches the overall picture and advances knowledge on the subject.

Thus, Bar Penkāyē's reference to the borders of the new Muslim state is worth noting. These reports mostly agree with modern scholarship, but the mention of Spain stands in high contrast to the current scholarly consensus. This is all the more interesting considering that reports in literary sources on the raiding of Spain in such an early period are usually regarded as mistaken and therefore not taken into consideration.[149] Bar Penkāyē's reference to the struggle between the "Easterners" and the "Westerners" is also intriguing. This naming of the parties during the First and Second Civil Wars raises the question of the origin of such labels. It is curious that there are no clear indications of the political powers behind these parties. Curious too is the fact that Bar Penkāyē does not speak of the grounds for the Second Civil War, whereas he speaks quite clearly of the reasons for the First Civil War. Again, the episode in which the two sides are arguing about who should control Nisibis requires further investigation; this could be understood as two states or at least two state-like formations with territorial claims that tried to come to an agreement based on a formal procedure, namely the old borders between Byzantium and the Sasanian Empire. If so, this is quite different, to the best of our knowledge, from what most modern scholars (largely reliant on Muslim sources) tell us about the Second Civil War.

The Book of the Main Points also provides otherwise unknown details about the region where it was written. Unfortunately, this information is not quite clear concerning the enigmatic persons of Bar Nīṭron and Bar ʿUṯmān, but it is more comprehensible regarding Abū Qārib (?), the head of the *šurṭē* in Nisibis, whose existence is affirmed by a very brief report in *Kitāb al-Aġānī*. *The History* is the first Syriac source (and probably the very first source overall) to mention the *šurṭē*. Placing these new masters of northern Mesopotamia in the center of the ongoing conflict, Bar Penkāyē ascribes to them an almost eschatological role in dissolving Arabic

149 See n. 34 above.

authority in the future. Although it runs contra Muslim sources, we can assume that the report of the death of Ibrāhīm al-Aštar's brother at the hand of his troops (who wanted to have a non-Arab commander) caused Bar Penkāyē to believe that they would soon triumph over the Arabs. Regardless of whether this actually happened or was an anti-Arab invention, it shows tension between the Arabs and *mawālī* in al-Muḫtār's army. And again, the perspective that our author adopts here concerns social and ethnic divisions rather than religious ones.

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