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Lakum Dīnukum wa-li-Dīnī. Remarks on the Prehistory of Inter-Communal Antagonism in Dār al-Islām

Summary

Judaism and Christianity have always constituted the natural environment of Islam, which came into being and developed in their immediate neighborhood. No matter how much it borrowed from the two much more ancient religions, at some point Islam had to mark out the boundary between itself and "them" – if only to stress its separateness and superiority, and to assert its identity. Thus Jews and Christians became a different and inferior category of human beings. Then Muslims seized their domains. Nevertheless, the clash was not as brutal as could have been expected. The present paper involves a discussion of some of the forces which contributed to shaping the history of inter-faith relations in the early post-conquest Near East.

Keywords: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, ahl aḏ-ḏimma, inter-faith relations, the Other

Judaism and Christianity, both much more ancient than Islam, have always constituted its natural environment. They were the inspiration behind its rise in the seventh century and subsequently influenced its formation.[1] And they watched how it developed and grew strong in their neighbourhood. So close to the religious Other, the young Muslim community was pressed by a natural imperative to mark out and strengthen the boundary between what was "our own" and what was "theirs"; consequently, there appeared the idea that Jews and Christians were not only a different, but also an inferior category of human beings. A clash was inevitable. When it came, non-Muslim domains fell prey, one by one, to Islam's territorial claims. As far as Syro-Palestine and Egypt are concerned,

[1] See for example Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, New Amsterdam Books, Chicago 2000, pp. 5–33; Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, CUP, Cambridge 1977.

during the first centuries after the Islamic conquest[2] the Muslim community constituted "an island in the sea of non-Muslims" there, or rather in a sea of Christianity, for the number of Jews was much lower than that of Christians. At some point (ca. the fourteenth century) the situation changed partly due to the slow but ongoing Islamization; however, it is impossible to pinpoint the time when Christians and Jews became minorities within the Islamic domains.[3]

The issue of relations between the Islamic and non-Islamic communities in the broadly defined Middle Ages[4] has been a topic of countless studies over last decades. In the present paper, I do not aim to disclose any new historical data or reveal an unknown source. I have merely sought to set forth my impressions regarding some of the forces which contributed to shaping the history of inter-faith relations in the early post-conquest Near East.

The present study involves an analysis of inter-communal relations from the perspective of social psychology and cultural history. As such, it was based on the principle that the way in which an individual or a group interacts with the outer world is determined by, very generally speaking, two groups of factors: 1) features resulting from the psychobiological similarities of all humans on the one hand, and 2) the so-called culture patterns on the other.

The human *universum*[5] results from the fact that societies, communities, cultures and individuals we deal with, although so distant in time and space, shared with the rest of humanity a variety of psychological traits, mechanisms, behaviour techniques and other outcomes of the evolution. In practical terms, this means, for example, that inclinations

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[2] The conquest of Syro-Palestine and Egypt lasted from the mid-630-ties until the early 640-ties; for details of the campaigns see for example: Robert G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*, OUP, Oxford 2014; Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, PUP, Princeton 1981; Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In*, Da Capo Press, Philadelphia 2008; Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800*, CUP, Cambridge 2003, pp. 70–75.

[3] The conquerors, who ruled and lived using the services and skills of Christians and Jews, did not seem to have intended an Islamization of the non-Muslim majority. The non-Muslims were too numerous and too useful: the relatively high tax they paid provided the Muslim treasury with a significant income. In the case of Egypt, the ratio of Muslims to non-Muslims slowly grew, mostly due, however, to continued Arab-Muslim settlement, intermarriage, and Coptic demographic decline rather than to conversions; see, for example, Shaun O'Sullivan, *Coptic Conversion and the Islamization of Egypt*, "Mamlūk Studies Review" 2006, 10/2, pp. 65–79; Gary Leiser, *The Madrasa and the Islamization of the Middle East. The Case of Egypt*, "Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt" 1985, 22, pp. 29–47; Tamer el-Leithy, *Coptic Culture and Conversion in Medieval Cairo: 1293–1524 A.D.*, Diss.-Princeton (N.J.), 2005, Ann Arbor (Mich.): UMI, impr. 2006.

[4] The ever-convenient adjective "medieval," when employed to cover the specific period of an Islamic city's history, is also rather inaccurate and vague. In order to avoid a misunderstanding here, it should be explained that the term is applied to the time frame which basically corresponds to the European understanding of the Middle Ages. More precisely, it refers to the period which lasted from the fifth century to the Ottoman occupation of the city in the early sixteenth century.

[5] Human (also called cultural or anthropological) universals consist of those features of culture, society, language, behavior, and mind that are that are common to all humans worldwide, the culture notwithstanding; for detailed discussion see Donald Brown, *Human Universals*, McGraw Hill, New York 1991.

towards categorizing, stereotype, prejudice, discrimination, xenophobia, ethnocentrism or racism are all transmitted by our genes as biological information. The same is valid for our receptivity to manipulation, vulnerability to pressure or temptation to accord with crowd behaviour. A clever propaganda can make us adhere to abstract ideas and follow them blindly against our own reason. We readily submit to authorities, even if what they expect from us involves an action which we would otherwise condemn, such as unnecessarily harming someone.[6] As humans, and like many other species, we all have aggression and intolerance files "saved" in ourselves. The drive towards reproductive success can explain many of the psychological traits in humans as well as general mechanisms behind in-group and out-group relations.

But our selfish genes and all these techniques, mechanisms and traits which are quite often smarter and faster than our reason are not entirely responsible for everything, if only because a significant part of clues regarding the use of our inborn traits we receive in the process of education and socialization, when we are bombarded with patterns of culture, norms, ideas, symbols or practices. Consequently, the human universals as mentioned above are hidden under a thick layer of culturally determined differences which generate culturally determined reactions.[7] In other words, it takes both our genes and our memes to form our perception of, and attitude and behaviour towards, other groups and other individuals.[8]

When used to analyse the relations between Arab Muslims and non-Muslims living in the early post-conquest Near East, this double, psychobiological-cultural set of guidelines for human behaviour proves a convenient tool, if only because it allows us to observe two-track regularities within this area of research. On the one hand, the attitudes of early Muslims and their ways of behaviour fit various social-psychological concepts and general definitions referring to intergroup relations. On the other, however, their attitudes and ways include elements that are not too commonly observed in the history of relations between groups, especially such as relations between the conquerors and the conquered. In other words, such a twofold approach allows us to observe, in the context of the psychobiological similarity of humans, some features which distinguished the Arabs from many other ethnic groups.

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[6] This feature is particularly terrifying as it is one of the factors behind what Philip Zimbardo called the Lucifer Effect, or a transformation of human character which turns ordinary people evil and makes them commit unspeakable acts; see Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, Random House, New York 2007.

[7] See Ralph Linton, *The Cultural Background of Personality*, Greenwood Press, Westport 1981.

[8] As genes transmit biological information, memes act as units transmitting ideas, behaviours or styles that spread from person to person within a culture. While self-replicating through imitation, they modify human behaviours and contribute to spreading a given culture pattern. See, above all, Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, OUP, Oxford 1989.

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As a newly emerged, energetic group with political aspirations, the Muslims had to work out a key to coexistence with the Christian and Jewish communities which were their immediate neighbours.[9] The task was a complex one: on the one hand, the Muslims sought their goods and territories; on the other, they needed the cultural and physical potential of the Christians and the Jews. And, at the same time, they had to make their behaviour conform to the rapidly changing circumstances. In fact, making this first divide was as inevitable as it was practical.

Separating oneself from somebody else's otherness and defining the Other was necessary both to identify the enemy and to define and identify oneself; it was also necessary to stress that others were worse than "we" simply because this made "us" better than others.[10] Obviously enough, this first categorization and in fact separation was also triggered by fundamental self-interest, that is by competition for scarce and valued resources.[11] It was a matter of survival and well-being. After all, non-Muslims had goods which the young Muslim community so desperately needed and which its members desired. Not surprisingly, those who were not Muslims (such as pagans, Jews and Christians) were soon marked out not only as different and inferior, but also as rivals and a threat. Interestingly, the nature of the original division into a handful of "Muslims" and "the others" who lived in the neighbourhood was, in a way, unbiased.

The Qur'ānic maxim: "To you your religion, and to me mine" (*lakum dīnukum wa-li-dīnī*)[12] only partly reflects the character of that first division: you go your way, and I go mine and let each of us do things in his own way. However, the verse, often interpreted as a manifestation of "Islamic tolerance," also underlines the division and marks the difference. Some more specific manifestations of the Muslims' attitude towards the religious Other are reflected in a number of other Qur'ānic verses, which also show

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[9] We should keep in mind that the sources we use to examine the formative stage of Islamic history (i.e. the time of Muḥammad and the early conquests) were written almost two centuries after the events they described and, as such, cannot be considered a trustworthy source of information on seventh-century (i.e. first AH) details. Another problem for historians dealing with this period is the uncertain chronology of individual Qur'ānic revelations.

[10] In fact, many of the mechanisms referring to categorizing humans seem to be activated unintentionally; see, for example, Walter G. Stephan and Cookie W. Stephan, *Intergroup Relations*, Boulder, Colorado, 1996, pp. 8–11, 16–17, 52; cf. also the realistic group conflict theory as discussed in this book, pp. 39–40. For interesting remarks regarding the roots of human prejudice, see P.L. Van den Berghe, *Racism, Ethnocentrism and Xenophobia: in Our Genes or in Our Memes?*, in: Kristian Thienpont and Robert Cliquet, *In-group/Out-group Behaviour in Modern Societies: An Evolutionary Perspective*, NIDI/CBGS, Brussels 1999, pp. 21–33. For a brief discussion of Islamic identity, see Berkey, *Formation*, pp. 113–123.

[11] In 1954 Muzafer Sherif and his wife Carolyn organized a boys' summer camp in Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma in order to study prejudice and discrimination in social groups. The research they conducted – known as Robbers Cave Experiment – resulted in forming one of the earliest social psychological theories regarding prejudice and discrimination. The theory, called the "realistic conflict theory," proposes that intergroup conflicts arise between groups as they compete over the same limited resources. This is a possible cause of prejudice and discrimination development within a society.

[12] Sura 109:6.

how this attitude evolved and how an inter-communal antagonism was being born. If we consider these verses to be a textual expression of the cultural climate and social mood of the epoch, they gain a documentary value and, as such, prove meaningful. Thus one verse warned Muslims against making friends with Christians and Jews because they were "friends of each other" who would never approve of anyone who was not from among themselves.[13] Another verse warned Muslims against making friends with unspecified "others" simply because the other meant an enemy who would "spare nothing to ruin you; they yearn for you to suffer..."[14], while a verse in the sura "Al-Baqara" commanded: "And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion".[15]

Thus the non-Muslims, as is usually the case with the Others, were presented to Muslims as alien, different, worse, suspect and hostile. In fact, the message these phrases carried was very basic: beware of those who are not from among yourselves, and who apparently may tempt you; they are your enemies. Do your best to have an upper hand over them, so that in the end you gain.[16] In other words, protect your group's cohesion, its safety and its resources so that you survive.

Interestingly enough, before the tension between the two parties grew really grave, the very first idea of the Muslim leader was that they formed one group together, or the *umma*, the ideological and ethnic differences notwithstanding. The motive behind the concept might have been the hope that the Jewish tribes of Medina that were offered such a proposition, would be relatively soon absorbed by the neighbouring Muslim group and assimilate in the long run. However, the idea of a joint Muslim-Jewish community/ *umma* proved to be short-lived, if only because the Medinian Jews were not interested in sharing religious or social ideas of their Arab Muslim neighbours, nor were they eager to feel or demonstrate understanding.[17]

The problem was that the Jews possessed goods which the Muslims desperately needed and wanted. Quite probably, it was for these reasons that the Muslims' stance towards the Jews toughened. This change had grave consequences for their fate: two Jewish tribes were reportedly banished from Medina while the males of the third one were exterminated. Their goods were seized and helped the Muslims to survive. However, some Jews, such as the agriculturalists from the Ḫaybar oasis, which fell to the Muslims in 628 AD, could not be banished or exterminated, if only because the Muslims were not interested in cultivating the vast date palm groves of Ḫaybar and needed the Jews to do the job. Consequently,

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[13] Sura 5:51: "O believers! take not Jews and Christians as friends: they are friends of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friend is one of them. God guides not the people of the evildoers."

[14] Sura 3:118: "O believers, do not take for your intimates outside yourselves; such men spare nothing to ruin you; they yearn for you to suffer..."

[15] Sura 2:120.

[16] Cf. also sura 60:1: "O you who have believed, do not take my enemies and your enemies as allies, extending to them affection while they have disbelieved."

[17] On the *umma* of Medina see for example: Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's First Legal Document*, Princeton 2004; Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800*, CUP, Cambridge 2003, pp. 61–69; F.E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, SUNY, Albany 1994, pp. 191–210.

the position of the Jews, previously marked as a threat, had to be modified so as to make them contribute to the well-being of the Muslim community. An agreement was reached that they remain in the oasis provided they deliver half their crops to the conquerors.

The position of the Christians was similar though slightly different. Despite the Prophet's efforts to convince them to follow his religious leadership, the Christian communities from Tabūk in northeast Arabia as well those from Najrān in the south were hardly eager to change their identities. Nevertheless, they were relatively friendly disposed towards Muḥammad. At the same time, Muḥammad and his followers had just accelerated their territorial expansion and Christians stood right in the marching Muslims' way. As such, they had to be dealt with somehow. Again, agreements were reached that they remain on their lands provided they consent to a money payment.[18]

In other words, non-Muslims were different, worse, suspect and hostile, but they could prove useful to Muslims. The need to settle the issue of mutual relations in general terms was becoming more and more urgent. But forming clear legal definitions was not easy in those days as the Arab Muslims lacked political, legal and administrative experience. So it took some time before they finally decided who was who and why he was what he was. Inspired, most probably, by the Byzantine and/or Persian regulations,[19] they found a solution in the end.

To cut the long story short, the early Arab Muslims finally put Jews and Christians into the same basket and categorized them as an enemy who, however, might yield profits. As such, *ahl al-kitāb*, or Jews and Christians, became the so-called *ahl aḏ-ḏimma*, or people whose life was to be spared and "protected" because they paid (and as long as they paid) protection money.[20] The respective verse obliged the Muslims, in a rather unclear way, to impose *ǧizya*, or an obligation to pay protection money, upon non-Muslims who were to be subdued (*wa-hum ṣaġīrūn*).[21]

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[18] According to the treaty made by Muḥammad with the Christians of Najrān, the latter were also obliged to aid Muḥammad, in the case of war, with weapons and beasts; see Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford 1956, pp. 127–128; cf. C.E. Bosworth, *The Concept of* Dhimma *in Early Islam*, in: Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society*, Holmes & Meir Publishers Inc., New York 1982, vol. I, *The Central Lands*, p. 42.

[19] For the discussion of Byzantine and Sassanid influences on early Islamic regulations concerning the "non-believers" see Bosworth, *Concept of* Dhimma, pp. 38–39; and, above all, Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, CUP, Cambridge 2011, pp. 113–163.

[20] Throughout the Middle Ages, the status of Christians, who were the larger of the two communities, was much more problematic than that of Jews. The reasons were manifold and ranged from the doctrine of the Trinity, to the prominence of crucifixes and icons, to the use of wine in Christian liturgy, all of which raised suspicion among Muslims and irritated them. What was even more important, Christians, unlike Jews, had always had some foreign power behind them. As this power usually aimed at destroying the Islamic state, the Near Eastern Christians were naturally suspected of being in league with the enemy, quite often not without reason. Traditionally perceived by Muslims as pro-Byzantine and then as pro-Frankish, at some point they also came to be considered pro-Mongol schemers. Obviously enough, the Near Eastern Jews had nothing to do with all these political-military tensions, except that they shared the status of the Other with Christians.

[21] See sura 9:29: "Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People

But no matter how controversial the much discussed verse about making non-Muslims humbled,[22] or subdued, may sound, one may risk a careful hypothesis that it did not involve prejudice. Nor did it assume repression, humiliation, discrimination or persecution as a means of dealing with the rival group. True, during the first decades of the community's history Muḥammad apparently used repressive measures against the neighbouring Jewish tribes of Medina. But it is also true that moves such as forcing out hundreds of Jews from their dwellings in Medina, and a partial extermination of one of the Jewish tribes (the circumstances of the event are extremely vague), were not triggered by prejudice, bigotry or racism. Nor did they involve dehumanisation. The motives behind Muḥammad's anti-Jewish repressive operations in Medina were, above all, of economic nature, although Muḥammad's feeling of resentment must have mattered, too. They were a part (incidental, in a way) of his fight for survival and domination that, interestingly enough, never became an obligatory pattern to follow.

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The patterns of fighting for survival and domination provide an interesting material for studying differences between the Arabs and other ethnic groups. For while most humans would struggle for resources, territory and identity, their fighting style and their attitude towards their rivals would differ depending on the cultural matrix according to which a given group was shaped. The possibilities are many: from mingling with the defeated group to its absolute extermination in the case of victory, and from voluntary cooperation with the winner to honorary suicide in the case (or in view of) defeat.

If we are to believe much later sources, in the course of the great Islamic conquests in Syro-Palestine and Egypt, but also in the wars which they had waged before, Arab Muslims generally preferred to communicate and negotiate with their enemies and come to an agreement with them rather than to physically annihilate the rival group. In this respect, the Arab conquerors were quite unlike other nomadic or sedentary peoples who simply annihilated or destroyed the world they invaded. This difference is important, as in practical terms it translated into the fate of the populations the Arabs conquered; after all, it was the reason why those populations avoided the fate of the Aleppans slaughtered by the Mongols of Hulagu Khan in the thirteenth century or that of the Tasmanian Aborigines who were exterminated by the colonizing British army in the early nineteenth century.

The commanders of the early conquests, and the first generations of Arab Muslims in general, did not enjoy constructing piles of heads cut off from the bodies of those whom

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of the Book, until they pay the *Ǧizya* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."

[22] For a discussion of the *ǧizya* see, for example, Meir M Bravman, *The Ancient Arab Background of the Qur`ānic Concept Al-Ǧizyatu 'an Yadin*, "Arabica" 1996, 13, pp. 307–314; M.J. Kister, *«'An Yadin» (Qur`ān, ix/29): An Attempt at Interpretation*, "Arabica" 1964, 11, pp. 272–278; idem., *Do Not Assimilate Yourselves…: Lā tashabbahū, with an Appendix by Menahem Kister*, "Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam" 1989, 12, pp. 321–371; also Cl. Cahen, *D̲jizya*," in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn., E.J. Brill, Leiden 1960–2004, II, p. 559; and Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, pp. 42–43.

they had defeated. They never came to the idea of persecuting or mass murdering the defeated non-Muslims, be it to intimidate them, be it to exterminate. Apparently, it was not the way of the Arabs. Rather, they signed bilateral agreements with them (i.e. with those who preferred to do so) and, moreover, took care to observe these agreements. It is hardly possible to deny that the attitude of the Arab conquerors, as manifested in the early bilateral agreements (*ṣulḥ*), such as were signed with the towns of Christian Syro-Palestine and with Egypt (636–641 AD), was indeed relatively open-minded, unbiased and lenient towards the defeated party.[23]

Details of particular documents aside,[24] in these agreements the weaker, conquered, non-Muslim (mostly Christian) majority generally agrees to pay a tribute, to guide Muslims in areas unknown to them, to repair roads and bridges for them, to accommodate them for three days, refrain from insulting or hurting Muslims and from misleading them. The non-Muslims also agree not to ally with an enemy against the Muslims. In return for this, the Muslim conquerors commit themselves to protecting the non-Muslims and their property; they guarantee that no church or synagogue is destroyed, and no house is occupied. In some cases they assure that Christians will not be prevented from sounding the *nāqūs*–bell or from parading their crosses on their holidays.[25]

From the contemporary perspective, the early Muslim agreements signed with the defeated Christians seem to be a manifestation of relative openness, of an unbiased attitude, and, in fact, of a certain permissiveness towards the defeated party. Considering the fact that the motives of the conquest were economic, that competition over scarce resources was the agenda of the day and that the new ideology provided theoretical motives for, and justification of, atrocious deeds, Muslims might have treated Christians and Jews in a much harsher way. But the *ṣulḥ* agreements apparently were not meant to oppress or humiliate the non-Muslim majority, but rather to secure favourable conditions of co-existence for the dominating Muslim minority.

In fact, these agreements reflected the traditional Arab understanding of intergroup and interpersonal relations, according to which it was obvious that they were going to benefit from this kind of policy in the long run. In other words, their simple profit and loss account was based on the good old rules of reciprocity which had shaped their existence from the times immemorial. A statement recorded over a century later is a good illustration of this kind of approach: "When *ahl adh-dhimma* see that we (...) treat them well, they become hostile towards our enemy and helpful to us."[26]

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[23] Milka Levy-Rubin goes so far as to call these agreements "extremely tolerant"; indeed, such an adjective is perfectly relevant even though the notion of tolerance is a relatively recent invention; for a fascinating discussion of the *ṣulḥ* agreements see Milka Levy-Rubin, *Shurūṭ 'Umar and its Alternatives: the Legal Debate on the Status of the Dhimmīs*, "Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam" 2005, 30, pp. 181–191; eadem, *Non-Muslims*, p. 69.

[24] For a detailed discussion on the authenticity and roots of these documents Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, pp. 8–57.

[25] Levy-Rubin, *Shurūṭ* 'Umar, p. 186; eadem, *Non-Muslims*, pp. 42–56.

[26] Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-ḫarāǧ*, Dār al-Ma'rifa, Bayrūt 1979, p. 139; Engl. transl. in: Levy-Rubin, *Shurūṭ 'Umar*, p. 187; Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, p. 74.

Rather, the Arabs would manifest a certain openness and receptivity pictured so beautifully by aṭ-Ṭabarī in his account of the events following the conquest of Egypt. According to this account (dated 21/642), when ʿAmr Ibn al-ʿĀṣ founded the camp of al-Fusṭāṭ, he invited the local Copts for a meal. Several camels were slaughtered and cooked in water and salt. After the army commanders and their troops had assembled, "ʿAmr sat down and beckoned to the people of Egypt to join him. Then the meat and the broth were served." "Muslims, dressed in their woollen cloaks, began to eat (…) tearing at the meat with their teeth and slurping the broth. After a while, the Egyptians dispersed," apparently unable to hide their scorn. Having seriously considered the whole situation, the next day ʿAmr issued appropriate orders to his army commanders. Then the Egyptians were invited for a meal again. This time even the most critical of them must have been satisfied: not only did "the Arab servants serve them dishes of Egypt," but also the Arabs were dressed in Egyptian clothes and footwear, "ate the food of the Egyptians, and behaved in an Egyptian manner."[27]

Considering the limited reliability of the source, this account may not be a record of a real event; but it is meaningful in any case. If the account was fabricated or "improved", it still means that the appreciation for the otherness and novelty as well as unbiased attitude towards the religious Other could be positively perceived in the time of aṭ-Ṭabarī. If the account is "true", it means that the Arabs would appreciate the otherness and novelty and that their attitude towards the Copts, if not towards Christians in general, was free of prejudice, the competition over scarce resources notwithstanding.[28] It also seems to confirm that the commandments regarding the religious Other as included in the Qur'ān did not express prejudice, nor were they supposed to be guidelines for repression, humiliation or discrimination of the rival groups.

Apparently, in the deserts of Arabia, unlike in many other places, looking after one's interests did not involve persecution of others. Instead, the harsh and extremely unfriendly Arabian environment encouraged and favoured other ways of intergroup and interpersonal behaviour. For instance, one tended to avoid bloodshed so as to avoid blood revenge. One preferred to discuss an agreement for one's own good instead of fighting to destroy one another. And, which is particularly meaningful, one took care to keep a covenant. A word given by a group was part of the public law. It was cornerstone of any alliance. *Wafā'*, or keeping a covenant, was a matter of honour for the Arabs.[29]

Needless to say, the pre-Islamic Arabs made honour a sophisticated issue, a philosophy of life and the principal element of all aspects of social relations. In the Arab environment there was a simple but strong motivation behind this kind of approach, namely, public

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[27] Aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḫ ar-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, Bayrūt 1407 AH, II, p. 515.

[28] In fact, the same Aṭ-Ṭabarī quotes a tradition according to which the Prophet instructed Muslim Arabs to treat the Copts well because, as he suggested, they were "cousins" [through Hagar] ("Allah will open Egypt to you after my death. So take good care of the Copts in that country, for they are your kinsmen and under your protection"); see Aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḫ*, III, p. 107; see also Moshe Perlmann, *Notes on Anti-Christian Propaganda in the Mamlūk Empire*, BSOAS 1941, 10/4, pp. 848–849 and the references therein.

[29] See, e.g., Bichr Farès, *L'Honneur chez les Arabes*, Paris 1932, pp. 61–62; 103–117.

opinion. A concern with how one appeared to others counted above all other considerations. Reputation was not only a value in itself. It also set the rules of reciprocity and made it possible to expect from others what one knew one deserved. In the desert environment it was a precondition of survival.

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Although the first symptoms of change occurred as early as during the caliphate of ‘Umar Ibn al-Ḫaṭṭāb (634–644),[30] it was not until the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century that rules and regulations concerning Christians and Jews became a subject of debate among the Muslim jurists.[31] During the debate various points of view emerged. While some were open and “liberal,” others opted for breaking the *ṣulḥ* agreements, destroying non-Muslim prayer houses, and expelling non-Muslims.[32]

One of the products of the law-making efforts of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century was the so-called code of ‘Umar, *šurūṭ* ‘Umar. As an attempt to solve the problem of the *ḏimmīs*’ presence among the Muslims, the code of ‘Umar was more uncompromising than any other proposition of this kind.[33] Unilateral, discriminatory, and having so little in common with the original spirit of the early Arab-Muslim approach, the code of ‘Umar at some points bears a striking resemblance to Byzantine regulations regarding the Jews and heretics.[34] The humiliating restrictions and discomforts it prescribed for non-Muslims referred to dress, transport, religious practices, architecture (both sacred and secular) and social behaviour.

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[30] Some Arab sources credit caliph ‘Umar with expelling Jews from the Ḫaybar oasis and Christians from Naǧrān (cf. the caliph’s recalling of Muḥammad’s statement that “Two religions will not remain in the land of the Arabs”). However, the historicity of these events is not absolutely reliably established; see, for example, Goddard, *History*, pp. 42–43. Be it as it may, the politics of religious resettlements, as advocated by caliph ‘Umar, seemed to have been limited to the Hijaz area.

[31] This was probably a result of the changing circumstances or, more precisely, of a changing ratio of Muslims to non-Muslims, which, in turn, made the *ḏimmī* presence an important social and religious issue, cf. Levy-Rubin, *Shurūṭ ‘Umar*, p. 172; for a detailed analysis of this issue see eadem, *Non-Muslims*, pp. 58–87.

[32] See Levy-Rubin, *Shurūṭ ‘Umar*, p. 179; eadem, *Non-Muslims*, pp. 58–87.

[33] The code of ‘Umar was discussed more or less thoroughly in a number of studies and is not the subject of the present paper. However, it should be stressed that A.S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and Their Non-Muslim Subjects. A Critical Study of the Covenant of ‘Umar*, Humphrey Milford Oxford University Press, London 1930 and, above all, Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims* are absolutely crucial in any discussion of this document.

[34] See, for example, Cecile Morrison, *Świat Bizancjum Tom 1. Cesarstwo wschodniorzymskie 330–641*, Warszawa: WAM 2007, pp. 70–71 (Polish translation of: *Le monde byzantin. 1: L’empire romain d’Orient: 330–641*, Paris 2004); Amon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, Jerusalem 1987; Michael G. Morony, *Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq*, “Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient” 1974, 17/2, pp. 113–135. See also Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims*, pp. 116–118 and the references therein.

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For some reasons, it was the code of ‘Umar which finally came forth and acquired priority, gradually pushing aside other, more liberal propositions. Ultimately, it attained exclusivity. This, however, did not happen immediately. For many years, the division into “us” and those who were “not of us,” amounted, above all, to collecting the protection money from those non-Muslims who “chose” to live within the framework of Islamic society. From time to time one Muslim ruler or another declared the implementation of discriminatory laws, but such attempts were generally ineffective. This ineffectiveness is meaningful as it indicates that a code of laws and occasional efforts of a number of rulers were not enough to encourage Muslims to unanimously discriminate and oppress non-Muslims just because of their non-Muslim status.

The process of the rise and intensification of inter-communal violence in the Near East of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did not differ much from the universal patterns typical for such situations. At the same time, however, proportions, intensity and character of the discriminative and oppressive actions taken by Muslims against non-Muslims differed from these kinds of behaviour as practiced at and about that time by other cultures. For example, in comparison to what was done to the Jewish communities or to the so-called heretics in medieval Christian Europe, the levels of aggression, ruthlessness, and brutality in Egypt and Syria were in fact low, and acts of violence individual and rare. Interestingly enough, suspicion, conspiracy theories, fear and accusations against Christians and Jews never evolved into a mass psychosis there, nor did the Islamic judicial system turn into an inquisition tribunal. There were no ghettos, no mass scale mob rule, no mass scale burning stakes or murdering orgies.

Apparently, in the medieval Near East neither the cultural climate, nor the social mood favoured the idea of total destruction or annihilation. No matter how similar on the psychobiological level, as far as culture patterns were concerned, Europe and the Near East were very much different. The question about the sources of these culturally determined differences and reactions is extremely intriguing. However, at this point it is probably better to agree with William Sumner, according to whom we never can hope to see the original source of a custom, usage or practice, “we never can find or see the first member of the series.”[35]

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[35] William G. Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morale*, Cosimo Classics, New York 2007, p. 8.