The Hidden Origins of Islam: New research into its early history

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The origins of any specific religion are replete with mysteries and mythologies, which are reinvented and reinterpreted by later generations. Regarding Islam, Hidden Origins critically challenges a rigid orthodoxy, claiming that an Islamic system only emerged in the 3rd century AH as an Arabized synthesis of multicultural religious elements.

Hidden Origins thus empirically generalizes Islam as an evolving process constructed within an mélange of multicultural elements. It thereby counters the narrative of a Divine revelation delivered through a single individual — Muhammed ibn Abdullah — claiming very little material evidence exists to support that self-referential Islamic narrative.

Karl-Heinz Ohlig concisely introduces the theme, and concludes Hidden Origins by analyzing a geopolitical ideological Syrio-Aramaic context, a theme further developed in Christoph Luxenburg’s interpretation of the earliest Islamic inscriptions. Combining geopolitical evidence with inscriptions, in Jerusalem’s Dome of the Rock, Luxenburg contends that a textual-linguistic corpus derives from Syro-Aramaic Christian elements. Concluding that these earliest Umayyad inscriptions interweave Syro-Arabic textual phrases that encode Christian symbolism and doctrine, he labels their content as Islam I, which he claims refer to Jesus as the “praised one” (a

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Muhammad Ibn Abdullah). Luxenburg associates the Arabian figure of Muhammed ibn Abdullah, with a later version (Islam II and Muhammed II), which he attributes to a power shift East from Damascus to Mesopotamia. In the Abbasid regime’s need to legitimate their takeover from the Umayyad, it constructed Islam II as a state building religion wrapped in a mobilizing myth linking their succession to a Meccan origin of Muhammed II. Veering radically from mainstream Islamic narratives, Hidden Origins claims that no critical opposition has appeared from comparable contextual and linguistic evidence to refute this theory.

Volker Popp’s numismatic research — Hidden Origins’s most detailed analysis of material evidence — integrates a political-ideological context within a historical geography of intercne quarrels among eastern and western Christian sects. Popp concludes that political and religious power shifts in allegiances among competing Christian formations are co-incidental with a lengthy transition to a blended construction of Islam.

Often labeled as revisionist Christian historians, Popp and Luxenburg use epigraphic and numismatic evidence to situate Islamic origins within Medieval Asia Minor’s Christian schismatic movements. However divergent, their work contributes to understanding the role of religion in Asia Minor’s Medieval geopolitical history.

Christian Gillot’s comparative analysis of historical texts examines the Origins of Informants of the Prophet, as sources for the narrative of Islam II and Muhammed II, and in relation to later recorded traditions (Hadith). Exploring cultural geopolitics and language, Gillot argues that a mélange of oral and written texts contextually influenced Mecca and Medina during Muhammed’s Qur’anic revelations. Skeptical of doctrinaire German scholarship working exclusively within a constructed Muslim orthodox frame of Qur’anic studies, Gillot contributes to an insightful, albeit controversial, revisionist history of Arabic Christianity as sources for Islamic oral and written doctrines.

Alfred-Louis de Premare compares historical, geopolitical, and paleographic Qur’anic elements as discussed during the regime of Abd Al-Malik b. Marwan (AH 65-86). Premare also references epigraphic and numismatic material as the only extant empirical available evidence.

The Umayyad period was a tempestuous mosaic of formative fusion and