

## Zitierhinweis

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Glen W. Bowersock: *The Crucible of Islam*. Cambridge, MA, and London, England: Harvard University Press 2017. 220 p., 2 maps, 5 illustrations. \$ 25.00. ISBN: 978-0-674-05776-0.

As the third member of the former ‘Princeton Troika’ shaping the field of early Islamic history as we know it together with the late Patricia Crone and Oleg Grabar, Glen Bowersock’s presence in the ongoing debates about the emergence of Islam from Late Antiquity has long been acknowledged in a plethora of notes that attest to his interest and creativity in bringing his expertise in ancient, particularly late ancient, history into Islamic Studies. His latest monograph is well written, beautifully produced and promises – as evinced by its recent publication in a German translation<sup>1</sup> – to establish itself as one of the authoritative introductions to early Islamic history. Notwithstanding the necessity of painting in broad lines when sketching the cultural history of the Arabian Peninsula and its neighbors between the years 550 and 700 CE, Bowersock manages to retain an impressive amount of frequently innovative detail, but also includes a number of factual imprecisions and mistakes in the transliteration of Arabic terms and personal names in particular that should be eliminated in future editions. His conceptual framework also is in some contexts somewhat imbalanced, as will be argued below.

In his “Prologue” (1–13), Bowersock sets out to demonstrate the relevance of his topic, underlining the ongoing scholarly controversy regarding the cultural context surrounding the development of Islam. While his selection of recent monographs by Donner, Hoyland, and al-Azmeh<sup>2</sup> to illustrate different approaches to this period is well chosen, his framing of this timeframe as a “chaotic environment” (9) and “dark age” (12) is to the present reviewer misleading. While deployed by Bowersock to justify his entrance as a “classical scholar and ancient historian” (12) into the debates about the origin of Islam, there are arguably very few episodes in the cultural memory of mankind which are as constantly and vividly remembered

1 G. W. Bowersock: *Die Wiege des Islam. Mohammed, der Koran und die antiken Kulturen*. Aus dem Englischen von R. Seuß. München 2019.

2 Cf. F. M. Donner: *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge, MA/London 2010; R. Hoyland: *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*. Oxford 2015; A. al-Azmeh: *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People*. Cambridge 2014.

as the history of Muḥammad and his earliest community. Accordingly, Bowersock's framing of this period as "dark" or "chaotic" – perhaps inadvertently – sets the tone for his subsequent sidelining of the multiple causalities and interdependencies structuring the wealth of Arabic-Islamic historiography, which preserves the heritage of the contested remembrance of the origins of Islam within Muslim communities. Instead of situating this narrative heritage of Islamic origins within the 'sectarian milieu' of Muslim societies to understand its internal dependencies and rationales, Bowersock approaches these sources as a classical scholar mining an appendix to the non- and pre-Islamic cultures of the Greater Mediterranean.

Another blind spot of Bowersock's monograph surfaces in the first sentence of his prologue where he frames the early Islamic conquests as a taking possession of "Palestine, North Africa, and Syria" (1). While the separation of Palestine from (rather than subordination to and inclusion in [Greater]) Syria may notwithstanding its contrariness to the categories of pre-modern Muslim worldviews possibly be defensible as seen from the vantage point of Mediterranean Late Antiquity, any scholar of early Islamic history will be most puzzled by the complete omission of the Islamic east. Unfortunately, this neglect of Mesopotamia/Jazīra, Armenia, Iraq, Iran, and arguably also of Egypt continues throughout the book, marginalizing both the (very considerable) influence of Sasanian institutions and customs on the emerging distinctly Islamic social order and the subsequent developments that took place in the garrison towns of Kufa, Basra, and – for that matter and similarly sidelined by Bowersock – also in al-Fuṣṭāṭ and the 'inherited' garrison towns of Greater Syria. On a similar note of geographical framing, the present reviewer also wondered why Palestine is singled out as one of the "series of external influences" alongside Ethiopia, the Byzantine Empire, and Sasanian Persia (9), being as it was more or less firmly incorporated in the Byzantine or Sasanian Empire alongside regions such as Egypt, 'smaller' Syria from Damascus to Ḥamā, the Jazīra, or Iraq which arguably exerted equally distinct and characteristic influences within the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula.

A somewhat irritating continuity of factual imprecisions regarding very basic information from Islamic cultural memory also begins to surface in this prologue when Bowersock introduces Abū Bakr as "the Prophet's father-in-law" in implicit opposition to the following caliphs 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Alī (10). While it is certainly correct that Abū Bakr's daugh-

ter ‘Ā’isha is one of the most prominent wives and subsequently widows of Muḥammad, it is irritating to find Abū Bakr singled out as related to Muḥammad by marriage. According to all accounts, Muḥammad was also married to Ḥafṣa, a daughter of ‘Umar, and gave two of his daughters to ‘Uthmān and another one to ‘Alī in marriage.

On a final level, the image of a ‘crucible’ deployed by Bowersock to frame the formative influence of earlier and contemporary cultures on nascent Muslim religion and culture conveys notions of agency that to the present reviewer are misleading. A crucible, used consciously to melt and combine metals, is used by someone with a stated purpose, which is not at all apparent as underlying early Islamic history. Furthermore, the image of a crucible suggests that Islam somehow formed the purpose and focus of the political and cultural events and developments within and around the Arabian Peninsula from 550 until 700 CE, a focus of agency that would certainly have been startling to individuals living during the first and possibly also during the second part of this timeframe. Finally, the image of melting down and combining earlier things appears to perpetuate the understanding of early Islam as something best interpreted as an amalgam of earlier cultures and religions, a view Bowersock himself is rightly critical of. In this regard, the German “Wiege” (“cradle”) used in the title of the German translation does constitute an improvement, much as one may continue to hope for some less sensational and more Althusserian framing in terms of ‘configurations’.

The following chapter, entitled “The Arabian Kingdom of Abraha” (14–32) evocatively combines various narrative, epigraphic, and material sources to reconstruct the presence and relevance of an Ethiopian presence in the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula. This chapter draws on Bowersock’s work on the pre-Islamic relations between Arabia and Ethiopia presented in greater detail in his monograph entitled “The Throne of Adulis”<sup>3</sup> and undoubtedly constitutes one of the strongest chapters of the book. Nonetheless, a number of redundancies particularly with subsequent chapters should be straightened out. Methodologically questionable is Bowersock’s analytical framework that implicitly portrays religions and empires as monolithic and not internally differentiated (14–18). This is

3 G. W. Bowersock: *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam*. Oxford 2013 (Emblems of Antiquity).

particularly problematic in his assessment of Sasanian influence on the Arabian Peninsula, which is presented as maintained via Jewish communities (30). Even without explicit reference to Payne's "State of Mixture"<sup>4</sup>, the Lakhmid Christians of al-Ḥīra should at least have been mentioned in this otherwise quite a bit too tidy and linear depiction.

The next chapter is entitled "Arab Paganism in Late Antiquity" (33–47) and gives an overview over the religious landscape of the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula. Bowersock's unfortunate framing of religious configurations as monolithic and reified resurfaces in his statement that, for "reasons still unknown, the Ethiopians imported Christianity to Arabia [...] for only a few years in the late 490s" (33). This Ethiopian influence on the religious and political (as well as other?) levels should be described somewhat more nuanced. More problematic is the presentation of the *Kitāb al-Aṣṅām* or *Book of Idols* of Ibn al-Kalbī, one of the most read texts within the discipline of Islamic studies that was copiously studied and translated into English, French, German, and Russian, as well as possibly further languages, at least since the times of Julius Wellhausen and Aḥmad Zakī Pāshā during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, as "a text that only became accessible late in the last [i.e. 20th] century" with a reference to the (second!) English translation presented by the well-known Persian scholar of Arabic-Islamic framings of 'religion', Muḥammad Riḍā Jalālī Nā'īnī in 1970 (35, the reference stands on p. 169). As Ibn al-Kalbī died in or around 204 AH according to scholarly consensus, Bowersock's statement that "he was writing after the revelations to the Prophet Muḥammad" (35) is additionally misleading insofar as "after the revelations" would probably be understood by an impartial reader to suggest a somewhat shorter timespan than 150–200 lunar years. Furthermore, Ibn al-Kalbī and his father were two of the most influential figures in Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions and were accordingly widely quoted in a number of other works, so their opinion on the worship of idols was by no means marginal even before Wellhausen and Aḥmad Zakī Pāshā.

Coming from a specialist of classical antiquity, Bowersock's statement that "Greek polytheism regularly nourished Arab polytheism" (38) is surprising,

4 R. Payne: *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity*. Oakland, CA 2015 (*The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 56).

neglecting as it does the importance of Syrian, Palmyrene, and Nabataean religious configurations for cults both on the Arabian Peninsula and within the Graeco-Roman oikumene. The etymological argument for Arabic *mal'ak/malak* < *la'aka* (angel < 'to send') as a calque for Greek *angelos* (messenger) (38–39), is unconvincing on etymological grounds. 1) The Greek *angelos* is in all probability an Oriental loanword, possibly connected among the Semitic languages to Akkadian *agru* (cf. Arabic *ajara*), 'someone who is hired', with the Greek verb *angellein*, 'to send', being derived from the noun.<sup>5</sup> The meaning of divine messenger or angel represents a Greek calque of the Hebrew *mal'akh*, as subsequently acknowledged by Bowersock himself (46), which may or may not be influenced by the non-Greek origin of *angelos* as opposed to the etymologically Greek equivalent of *pompōs* and *pempein*. 2) Arabic *mal'ak/malak* represents a loanword from another Semitic language,<sup>6</sup> as the Arabic morpheme *maf'alun* forms nomina loci and nomina temporis, as well as impersonal verbal nouns.<sup>7</sup> The Arabic verb *la'aka* accordingly either represents a common Semitic root, a borrowing from another Semitic language, or is denominally derived from the noun rather than vice versa, as suggested by Bowersock.

The deity Allāt is introduced twice with subtle contradictions (38 and 39), this should be straightened out together with the incorrect claim that “no daughters of Allāh [are] mentioned in the Qur'ān” (39), cf. for instance Qur'ān 16,57: “And they attribute daughters to God”. In this context as elsewhere (e.g. 40), a possible distinction between the Qur'ān as a descriptive source for religious beliefs and practices in pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur'ān as a polemical text should briefly be discussed. Regarding the systems of belief propounded by other Arab 'prophets'/'pseudo-prophets' during Muḥammad's time, Musaylima's god Raḥmān should be connected with the pre-Islamic South Arabian attestation of this name for a divine being to temper Bowersock's description of Musaylima's Raḥmān as “his

5 H. Frisk: Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch. 2. ed. Heidelberg 1973, I,7–8.

6 H. I. Hebbo: Die Fremdwörter in der Arabischen Prophetenbiographie des Ibn Hischam (gest. 218/834). Diss. Heidelberg 1970; A. Jeffery: The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān. Leiden 2007 (Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān 3), and A. Schall: Der arabische Wortschatz. In: W. Fischer (ed.): Grundriß der arabischen Philologie. Wiesbaden 1982, I,147.

7 W. Fischer: Grammatik des klassischen Arabisch. 4. ed. Wiesbaden 2006 (Porta linguarum orientalium N.S. 11), 45–46 and 110–111.

own unique god” (41). This South Arabian attestation of *Rahmān* is incidentally mentioned by Bowersock himself (61–62). His discussion of *ṣābi*’ (misspelt by Bowersock consistently as *ṣabi*) in the Qur’ān (43) should be extended to include both its subsequent deployment to grant ‘Qur’ānic’ protection within an Islamically dominated political sphere to groups like the ‘Ṣabians’ of Harrān and the Mandaeans of Iraq and its possibly polemical usage by non-Muslim opponents of the first Muslims in Mecca to designate Muḥammad and his earliest followers.<sup>8</sup> Bowersock’s concluding statement that *rasul* and *malak/messenger* and *angel* were distinct in Qur’ānic usage is somewhat opaque, particularly in its omission to mention the angelic status of Jibrīl in Muslim tradition and possibly also in the Qur’ān. This passage should be restructured in light of Qur’ān 2,98: “If one is an enemy of God, His angels, His messengers, Jibrīl and Mīkāl [...]”, which the Tafsīr al-Jalālayn explains by arguing that Jibrīl and Mīkāl are mentioned apart from the angels as the particular that is differentiated from the general.

The following chapter, entitled “Late Antique Mecca” (48–63) reconstructs pre-Islamic Mecca based on non-Islamic and Qur’ānic sources, while curiously disregarding the plentiful Arabic-Islamic scholarly traditions on this subject, and then swings out to discuss the ‘*ridda*-prophet’ Maslama/Musaylima. The interpretation of Mecca’s location as having “at least the advantage of security that nature provided with a formidable chain of mountains” (48) appears somewhat peculiar, as Mecca’s security was on the contrary frequently threatened by inhabitants of the harsh mountains that surround it. Bowersock’s claim that “his [Muḥammad’s] assumption of the mantle of a prophet was not all that exceptional in a holy city such as Mecca, particularly in a part of central Arabia that conspicuously nourished prophecy that could be both inspiring and divisive at the same time” (57) should be deleted unless another example of Western Arabian prophecy before Muḥammad can be identified. The statement that Muḥammad and Musaylima “are said actually to have met in Medina” (60) should be specified with reference to Musaylima’s inclusion in a delegation of his ‘tribe’ to Muḥammad at this occasion, a narrative framing that clearly suggests the subordination to Muḥammad in the context of Arabic-Islamic historiographical tradition.

8 Cf. e.g. Ibn Sa’d: *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*. Ed. by Muḥammad ‘Abdalqādir ‘Aṭā. Beirut 2012, IV,166.

This chapter is also riddled with multiple misspellings of Arabic names and terms, e.g. “jibāl al-sirawāt (or al-sirat)” (48) for al-sarāt/al-sarawāt (cf. Yāqūt, Muʿjam al-Buldān and Grohmann/van Donzel in EI<sup>2</sup>), ‘al-‘Ulā for al-‘Ulā, Ukāz for ‘Ukāz, and Ṭāʿif for al-Ṭāʿif (all on p. 49), al-‘Uzza for al-‘Uzzā (50 and 51), Isāf for Īsāf and ‘Ukāz for ‘Ukāz (51), further instances of Ṭāʿif for al-Ṭāʿif (56 and 59, with the correct form al-Ṭāʿif appearing as well on p. 56), banū for Banū and ‘ansī for ‘Ansī (59), Aswad for al-Aswad (59 and 60), and bismillah for either basmala or bi-smi-llāh (62 and also elsewhere, e.g. 124). The frequent inconsistencies between correct and false forms also extend to the two maps at the beginning of the book and to the notes, e.g. in note 1 (p. 48), where the ancestor of Quraysh is once spelled Quṣayy and once Quṣāyy (171). Wellhausen’s “Reste arabischen Heidentums” is also misspelled as “erläutet” instead of “erläutert” (172).

The following chapter, entitled “Ethiopia in Arabia” (64–80) returns to the theme of Ethiopian influence in pre- and early Islamic Western Arabia, while containing numerous repetitions of aspects already discussed in earlier chapters. Besides a number of inconsistent and false spellings (Aizanas p. 65, Aezanas p. 67; al-Manāt for Manāt on p. 70; Aṣḥam for Aṣḥam and Muḥummud(!) for Muḥammad on p. 73; al-Hārith for al-Ḥārith and Kisra for Kisrā on p. 75; Ibn Iṣḥāq for Ibn Iṣḥāq on pp. 76–78, as well as in footnote 16 on p. 176; ḥanīfiyya for ḥanīfiyya on p. 77; ğ for ğ in notes 9 and 11 on p. 175), a number of problematic issues that have already been mentioned resurface in this chapter. The substantializing alignment of imperial and religious configurations underlays Bowersock’s claim that “Persia’s sympathy for the Jews [...] was naturally rooted in in [sic] the conflict with Christian Byzantium” (68). This passage should be rephrased in light of Payne’s work on the Sasanian empire<sup>9</sup> and the non-imperial Byzantine status of the Ethiopian church among others. The statement that the Ethiopian negus as “a Christian [...] had certainly not espoused the doctrines of nascent Islam” (71) appears to be founded exclusively on Bowersock’s supposition of clear boundaries between Islam and Christianity, which are questionable particularly during this early period not only according to the scholarly literature (Donner etc.), but also according to the depiction of the negus in the Arabic-Islamic historiographical traditions, e.g. in the treat-

9 Cf. above, note 4.

ment of the episode in Ibn Hishām’s *Life of the Prophet*.<sup>10</sup> Such a status of the early followers of Muḥammad as somehow ‘belonging’ to Christianity would incidentally bolster Bowersock’s suggestion that the “Persian alliance with the Jews” could have been a motivating factor behind the first *hijra* to Ethiopia (71–72).

The enigmatic ‘last’ coinage of the Ethiopian negus (72–73) should be discussed with reference to Treadwell’s work on the architectonic iconography underlying also the early Islamic design of the famous ‘mihrāb and ‘anaza’ coinage of ‘Abdalmalik.<sup>11</sup> The ‘return’ of Muḥammad to Mecca in 628 CE should from the point of view of Islamic historiography better be described as his treaty (known as the treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyya, which stipulated that Muḥammad should not enter Mecca in this year) with the inhabitants of this town (75). Here as elsewhere (e.g. pp. 105, 108, and 120) Bowersock’s designation of the Sasanian capital as Baghdad should be changed to al-Madā’in or Ktesiphon for the sake of clarity – although Baghdad was founded by the ‘Abbāsids in the vicinity of the urban agglomeration of al-Madā’in/Ktesiphon (and may have had a pre-Islamic history according to some Muslim traditionaries), the name Baghdad is usually exclusively applied to the ‘Abbāsīd and post-‘Abbāsīd metropolis. Although the discussion of the ‘conversion’ to Christianity of ‘Ubaydallāh b. Jaḥsh, one of the emigres to Ethiopia during the first *hijra*, is certainly interesting, Bowersock’s suggestion that “his acceptance by the Believers whom he left behind appear[s] to anticipate Muslim tolerance of both Jews and Christians as ‘People of the Book’ after the Islamic conquests” (78) should be complemented by a discussion of figures such as Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and Ukaydir of Dūmat al-Jandal, who arguably were much more paradigmatically deployed in later framings of how to accommodate Jews and Christians under Islamic rule. The formulation that “Abraha relinquished his kingdom to the Persians” (79) is somewhat unfortunate, given the fact that Abraha had according to the Arabic-Islamic sources already died before the Persian expeditionary force landed in Yemen, as correctly stated by Bowersock in an earlier chapter (28–29). Overall, this chapter should be

10 Ibn Hishām: *Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*. Ed. by Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī and ‘Abdalḥafīz Shalabī. Beirut 2001, 245–247.

11 L. Treadwell: “Mihrab and ‘Anaza” or “Sacrum and Spear”? A Reconsideration of an Early Marwanid Silver Drachm. In: *Muqarnas* 22, 2005, 1–28.

thoroughly revised, particularly in light of its multiple repetitions of episodes and thoughts discussed elsewhere in the book under review.

In “The Persians in Jerusalem” (81–100), Bowersock gives a fascinating overview over the cultural and religious situation in Palestine during the frequently overlooked period of the Persian occupation after 614 CE. Of particular interest to the present reviewer is his discussion of the epigraphic and archaeological material that demonstrates close ties between Palestine and Southern Arabia during the early seventh century CE, which could possibly have been augmented by an evaluation of the ‘travel reports’ of pre-Islamic Arabs to Palestine and Egypt contained in Arabic-Islamic traditions. While Bowersock’s analysis of this quite complex topic is to the present reviewer convincing, some smaller discrepancies remain between his framing of the “invasion” of the Sasanians as a “shattering jolt” to late antique Palestine (82) and his interpretation of the Sasanian occupation as a “systematic retention of local administrative structures” with violent acts being of “modest scope [...], usually in response to resistance”, following the work of Foss and Avni among others (96).<sup>12</sup> The blaming of the ‘circus factions’ of the Blues and the Greens for the Sasanian invasion by Strategios (87) has a curious parallel in the Coptic chronicle of John of Nikiu, where the Arab-Islamic invasion is similarly embedded in an overarching framework of civil strife between the Blues and the Greens. Following Payne,<sup>13</sup> the political interplay of various Christian denominations could also be presented in a more nuanced fashion. Bowersock’s assertion that “the Christians suffered grievously”, standing immediately next to his discussion of possible Persian support of the Miaphysites in Palestine (97), should be rephrased in a way that makes clear that an exclusive designation of Chalcedonians as ‘Christians’ in opposition to ‘non-Christian’ Miaphysites is not intended. It should also be noted that the Church of the East is not mentioned throughout the book notwithstanding its crucial role in the development of Sasanian integration of Christians in administrative structures as described by Payne (whom Bowersock quotes).

12 G. Avni: *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine: An Archaeological Approach*. Oxford 2014, and C. Foss: *The Persians in the Roman Near East (602–630 AD)*. In: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13,2, 2003, 149-170.

13 Cf. above, note 4.

The following chapter, entitled “Muḥammad and Medina” (101–119) integrates a very brief sketch of the Medinese career of Muḥammad with the surrounding religious and political context. Besides a number of repetitions of episodes already discussed in preceding chapters (e.g. the overview of the pre-Islamic presence of Jews on the Arabian Peninsula, 102–103), this chapter also contains a number of mistakes in the transliteration of Arabic names and terms (e. g. Naṣrids for Naṣrids on p. 104; Naḍīr and Qurayza for Banū Naḍīr and Banū Qurayza on p. 107; ‘umma for umma on the same page; anṣār for anṣār and al-Hīra for al-Ḥīra on p. 108; Ḥudaybiya for al-Ḥudaybiyya on p. 113, and Ṭā’if for al-Ṭā’if on p. 114). The designation of the Sasanians as “Zoroastrian Sassanians” (103) should be formulated a bit more nuanced to indicate the inclusion of non-Zoroastrians in the political and administrative elites of the late Sasanian empire. The eponymous trench that was dug around Medina to thwart the attempted occupation of the town by enemies of the early Islamic community is commonly designated with *khandaq* rather than *ukhdūd*, as suggested by Bowersock (113).

Bowersock’s framing of the rule of the ‘rightly guided’ caliphs of Islamic cultural memory as an “Interregnum of the Four Caliphs” (115–129) is provocative and thought-inspiring, even if Bowersock does not adduce any further arguments or sources to support his suggestion that the ‘rightly guided’ rather than the Umayyad caliphs were the accidental exception to a normatively underpinned pattern of ‘proper’ succession. Nonetheless, some reference to the work of Madelung<sup>14</sup> and Rotter<sup>15</sup> in particular would have improved this depiction of the events. The description of the early Islamic conquests as encompassing “Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, as well as Egypt and Libya” (116) should be revised to include Iran, Mesopotamia, and Armenia. The depiction of monolithic ‘Christians’ and ‘Muslims’ in their respective policies regarding Palestine (120–121) could be stronger if it adopted an actor-centered perspective, rather than substantializing both groups. During the discussion of the Syriac *mbagrayê*/Greek *magaritai* as deriving from the Arabic *muhājirūn*, people who made the *hijra* (124–125), the late professor Crone’s argument for a ‘long’ *hijra* that accompanied conversion to Islam and subordination to Islamic authorities should be

14 W. Madelung: *The Succession to Muḥammad. A Study of the Early Caliphate*. Cambridge 1997.

15 G. Rotter: *Die Umayyaden und der Zweite Bürgerkrieg (680–692)*. Wiesbaden 1982 (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 45,3).

mentioned as a possible explanation why Muslims were identified by this term some twenty years after the ‘second *hijra*’ of Muḥammad and his companions to Medina. Bowersock’s claim made during the discussion of ‘Uthmān’s possible role in the establishment of a stable Qur’ānic text that the existence of differences between the “texts in use for recitation or reading [...] seemed, and still seems today, unacceptable imprecision in divine utterances” (125) should be revised in light of the canonically established ‘readings’ of the Qur’ān that very clearly establish a permissible range of differences in the Qur’ānic text. The claim that ‘Alī “did not belong to the Quraysh, but to the Hāshim” (127) is clearly an error, as Hāshim was according to all accounts a subordinate genealogically formulated grouping within Quraysh. Bowersock’s statement that “the four caliphs [...] were designated in subsequent tradition as orthodox (*rāshidūn*)” (129) privileges a partisan *sunni* interpretation of early Islamic history and should therefore be reformulated. The argument for an archaeological confirmation of “the lack of any substantial impact of the Muslims on local populations” (129) may be correct for Palestine, but fails to account for the lasting shifts in settlement patterns that accompanied the foundation of the Arab-Islamic garrison towns in Iraq and Egypt, as well as conceivably in Syria. In this chapter, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān is misspelled ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (125) and Muḥammad’s widow ‘Ā’isha is consistently misspelled as ‘A’isha (128).

The penultimate chapter, “A New Dispensation” (130–139) briefly spans the transition from Mu‘āwiya to ‘Abdalmalik, again privileging a detailed discussion of Byzantine influences, while neglecting Sasanian impacts for instance on the administration and courtly culture of the Islamic realm. The claim that Muḥammad “had reconstructed the Ka’ba” (130) is somewhat misleading, as according to the normative narrative framework going back at least to Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad had taken part in an (implicitly pagan) reconstruction of the Ka’ba before the beginning of his revelations, while his taking possession of the *ḥaram* after the conquest of Mecca is narrated in terms of a cleansing of the holy precinct from pagan idols, rather than as an architectural reconstruction. The counter-caliphate of Ibn al-Zubayr is usually interpreted as a reaction to the succession of Mu‘āwiya II or Marwān rather than to the succession of ‘Abdalmalik, as Bowersock writes (130). Bowersock himself presents this course of events on pp. 134 and 135. His interpretation of “the imposition of Arabic as the language of empire” as representing “a decisive affirmation of the Islamic victory over

Byzantium in the caliphate” (138) should be revised to include some reference to the formerly Sasanian regions of the early Islamic empire. The “ibn” of Ibn al-Zubayr should be capitalized (e.g. pp. 135 and 139), shī‘a is misspelled shi‘a on p. 135 and ḥajj as hajj on p. 139.

The concluding chapter is entitled “The Dome of the Rock” (140–159) and situates this fascinating building in its historical context. Bowersock’s claim that the Dome of the Rock was “a great Umayyad mosque” (140) should be revised to indicate the debates concerning the use of this building in Umayyad times. Its “gleaming dome” owes its “golden glow” (140) to 20th-century restorations, which should be explicitly acknowledged in a work directed at a broader public to forestall puzzlement at how seventh-century craftspeople could have been technologically able to construct it “from wood covered with a gilded aluminum alloy” (140). According to Flavius Josephus, the Jewish temple was not “brought down” by Titus and Vespasian (143), who according to his – possibly apologetic – report attempted to quench the flames. Bowersock’s identification of the *orationis domus* of Arculf with a building that had stood in the spot where the Dome of the Rock was constructed shortly later (145–149), rather than with a predecessor of today’s Masjid al-Aqṣā, appears *prima facie* unconvincing. In any case, the reasons for not situating Arculf’s prayer house at the southern end of the Temple Mount should be given here together with a brief reference to alternative localizations of the *masjid al-aqṣā* in Arabic-Islamic historiographical writing. Misspellings of Arabic names and terms include al sharīf for al-sharīf (144 and 145) and al-aqṣā for al-aqṣā.

In conclusion, Bowersock’s monograph succeeds in covering the timeframe from ca. 550 until 700 CE in bold and provocative lines, particularly where the author draws on his experience in late antique cultural landscapes and the Red Sea region. By leaving out many of the tantalizing micro-concerns of Arabic-Islamic historiographical memories and the pertinent scholarly literature of this timeframe, Bowersock impressively develops his central argument against an exceptionalism of early Islamic events and for a processual understanding of the *longue durée* of Near Eastern cultural landscapes. It is very much to be hoped that a revised edition, taking into account the matters enumerated above, will be published any time soon.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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