

The *Shahada* and the creation of an Islamic identity

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This chapter examines the formation of the Islamic *Shahada* or profession of faith as indicative of practical and conceptual processes of Muslims' identity formation unfolding internally and vis-à-vis other groups in the course of the seventh century. The *Shahada* is often considered as the foundational utterance that affirms one's identity as Muslim or makes him/her a Muslim. It has also featured in the theological debates over whether it is enough on its own to make someone a Muslim or if being a Muslim requires both uttering the *Shahada* as a confession of faith and doing works as affirmation of the confession. For instance, the early pro-Sunni jurist/theologian Abu Hanifa (d. 767) considered the *Shahada* (his specific formulation of it will be discussed below) to be all that is need to make someone a believer, whereas Abu 'Ubayd (d. 838) argued that the *Shahada* (he had in mind the Sunni Dual-*Shahada*) is only one of several requirements.¹ Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), however, contended that the *Shahada* is enough to establish belief, but one who declares the *Shahada* and openly denies any of the other principles of religion is considered unbeliever.² The Twelver Shi'i theologian Ibn Babawayh (d. 991) reported a prophetic hadith that the Shi'i *Shahada* (see below) is a condition of faith alongside belief in all imams.³

The classical *Shahada* is encountered in two versions, one is Sunni and the other is Shi'i. The Sunni version reads *There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God*; I refer to this as the Dual-*Shahada* (in Arabic, *al-shahadatayn*), which is what Sunnis call it. The Shi'i version states *There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God, and 'Ali is the guardian⁴ of God*; I refer to this as the Triple-*Shahada* based on the way the Shi'is refer to its third component. This chapter will argue that modern studies on the development of the *Shahada* have focused squarely on the Sunni articulation and assumed that it was either the original *Shahada* or very much like it. As such, scholars have only studied the formation of the Sunni Dual-*Shahada*, leaving the question about how the *shahada*,⁵ and how many, developed in very early Islam (i.e. before 690) unanswered.

Early Muslims and their religious identity

The formation of an "Islamic" religious identity seems to have started during the time of Muhammad. Our scant evidence allows us to say that the Muhammad movement made some efforts to articulate an own identity vis-à-vis other monotheists and quasi-monotheists (be they actual groups with whom they came into contact, or past groups they compared themselves to). For instance, the Qur'an (3.199) states that

Among the People of the Book are those who believe in God, in what was revealed to you and what was revealed to them

This contrast between the plural *you* (supposedly a reference to the Muhammad movement) and *them* (meaning the People of the Book) is one of those indications that suggest awareness of the distinction between the two groups. Similarly, Qur'an 6.145-146 stipulates for the Muhammad movement their dietary restrictions as distinct and as based on a different revelation than those applicable to the Jews:

Say: "I do not find in what was revealed to me anything illicit about edible food except carrion, blood, or flesh of swine" As for the Jews, we forbade all animals with claws,⁶

Yet there are unambiguous examples in which the Muslims identified themselves as members of a community of believers that included other monotheists and reached back in time to much earlier periods. For instance, the Qur'an declares that the disciples of Jesus attested that they were "muslims" (Q. 3.52 and 5.111), and instructs (in Q. 3.20) supposedly Muhammad to

Say to those given the Book and those not given the Book: "Would you become muslims?" If they become muslims, then they are guided. If they turn away, your duty is only to deliver the message. God knows best his creatures.

I am intentionally here translating the Arabic *muslimun* as muslims⁷ even though its use in the Qur'an means submitters. This is actually relevant to the argument of this chapter in that the Qur'an does not use the word *muslim* (as a noun or verb) to refer exclusively to the members of the movement of Muhammad. At what time did this term become an exclusive identity marker is a very important question, but not the objective of this chapter. For our purposes, it can be argued that the members of the Muhammad movement identified themselves as muslims similar, in their minds, to other monotheists (preceding them or contemporary with them).⁸

This process of identity formation accelerated as the Muslims ventured into the world of late antique Near East, especially as they started to reflect on their identity in relationship to the communities they came to rule and the organized religions they encountered. This process was also very slow and the scant evidence does not allow us to fully see their articulation of a distinctive identity, especially vis-à-vis other monotheists.⁹ It is not my purpose to discuss the entirety of this process of religious identity formation in the formative period of Islam (roughly 610 to 700). I will only focus on the development of several *shahadas* as an important aspect of the Muslims' articulation of their religious identity, which ultimately led to the classical *Shahada* in its Sunni and Shi'i forms.

The problem of studying the early *Shahada*

Fred Donner—in *Muhammad and the Believers*—examined the fluidity of the “Islamic” identity in the formative period. Despite the criticism to certain aspects of his theory, some of which reflect legitimate concerns,¹⁰ on the particular issue of the *Shahada* as it relates to the dynamics of identity formation, Donner argued that it comprised two stages. In the first stage, we see a single *Shahada*: *There is no god but God, or There is no god but God, he alone with no associates*.¹¹ In the second stage, starting after 690, the single *Shahada* morphed into what he termed as the “double” *Shahada*: *There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God*. Donner contended that the single *Shahada* was an “indication of the ecumenical or non-confessional character of the early community of Believers,” which, in his view, included Muslims, Jews and Christians.¹² Donner also maintained that the adoption of the Dual-*Shahada* was necessitated as a result of the “increased emphasis on the significance to the believers of Muhammad and the Qur'an,” which unfolded toward the end of the seventh century.¹³

The broad view of the *Shahada* going through two stages of formation is rather widely shared.¹⁴ Jere Bacharach in particular is probably the one who did the most work on the origin of the Dual-*Shahada*, and whose examination of samples of numismatic and inscriptions is very illuminating and agrees with Donner's argument. M.J. Kister, however, contended that both versions of the *Shahada* (the one focusing on God having no associates, and the Dual-*Shahada*) were coined at a very early time in the career of Muhammad, and were intended for distinct purposes, neither of which was necessarily meant to ascertain a clear affiliation with Islam.¹⁵ Kister's position echoed a much earlier view by A.J. Wensinck, who argued that the full *Shahada* was original to Islam because we see it in the formula of the call for prayer, which all Muslims accept and which was fixed at the time of Muhammad or very shortly after.¹⁶ The essentialist views about Islam advocated by the scholars of Wensinck's generation, which informed (and often misinformed) many later scholars,

championed exclusively a specific form of Sunni Islam and its historical narrative and chronology (often referred to with the misnomer “orthodox” Islam) and was almost exclusively based on later written sources.

Irrespective of the variations between these views on the development of the *Shahada*, the way modern scholars have studied its formation is that they took the Dual-*Shahada* as it came to be defined in Sunnism as their starting point of inquiry and moved backward. In other words, they were not looking for what the early *shahada* looked like and if there were more than one. Rather, they assumed that it must have been all along a form of *There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God*. In this way, one can say that the emphasis has been on studying the evolution of the Sunni Dual-*Shahada* as a profession of faith. But what about the Shi'i Triple-*Shahada*? Isn't it a proof that the Muslims did/do not agree on one formulation of the *Shahada*? What about the evidence suggesting several other *shahadas* being in circulation in the period before 690? And if there were a few early *shahadas* in circulation, were they *Shahadas* or statements of identity (and what is the difference between the two)?

Thus, the question of the early *shahadas* remains unanswered in terms of both formulation and purpose. Were they expressed by the Muslims as affirmation of faith or identity (or both), and how did they articulate them? This is a much harder question than simply taking the Sunni Dual-*Shahada* and projecting it backward. It is a harder question because, on the one hand, we do not really know what exactly we are looking for. In other words, we should not assume that the early *shahada* was a slight variation of *There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God* unless we have uncontested and datable proof to that effect. Moreover, we should not simply eliminate other possible early articulations because they do not look similar to the Dual-*Shahada*. For all practical purposes, we might see a *shahada* but not know it is an early *shahada* because we do not know what the early *shahadas* looked like. On the other hand, we should not assume that there was a single early *shahada* in the sense that the later Dual-*Shahada* and Triple-*Shahada* likely comprised several components that the early Muslims used as distinct *shahadas* for different purposes. After all, this is precisely what we see in the classical Sunni Dual-*Shahada* with its two distinct components (affirmation of the belief in God and affirmation of the belief in the prophecy of Muhammad) and in the Shi'i Triple-*Shahada* with its three distinct components (affirmation of the belief in God, affirmation of the belief in the prophecy of Muhammad, and affirmation of the belief in the guardianship of 'Ali). It is no surprise then that the Sunnis often refer to their *Shahada* as *al-shahadatayn*, meaning the two *shahadas*,¹⁷ and the Shi'is refer to the one that involves 'Ali as *al-shahada al-thalitha*, meaning the third *shahada*.¹⁸ This is actually irrefutable proof that both the Sunni Dual-*Shahada* and the Shi'i Triple-*Shahada* were forged out of separate *shahadas*.

I should note here that in order to reach possible answers only datable sources will be examined; that is, evidence that we can certainly date to the seventh century. Other later sources will only be used to corroborate this early evidence in the sense that we can trace it in the Islamic tradition.

Shahadas in the Qur'an

Starting with the Qur'an, which was compiled as a codex around 650, neither the Dual-*Shahada* nor the Triple *Shahadas* is mentioned in the text. We can find some components scattered here and there, such as "He is God, there is no god but he" (Q. 59.22), "Say: 'He is God, one, ...'" (Q. 112.1), and "Muhammad is the messenger of God" (Q. 48.29). Also, early Shi'is believed that all references to 'Ali and his family were removed during the first process of codification of the Qur'an under caliph 'Uthman (r. 644-656).¹⁹ But this archaeological work makes little sense and definitely says nothing about the evolution of the early *shahada(s)*.

Interestingly, however, there are a few instances in the Qur'an where we come across the statement "testify that we are muslims (submitters)." It is used in relation to the disciples of Jesus who in one instance proclaimed to God to "testify (*wa-shhad*) that we are muslims" (Q. 5.111), and in another instance they call on Jesus to do the same (Q. 3.52). The expression is also encountered in Qur'an 3.64:

Say to the People of the Book: "Come to a common pronouncement between us and you that we worship only God and associate nothing with him, that we do not take each other as lords aside from God." If they refuse, say to them: "Testify (*ishhadu*) that we are muslims."

We also find it similarly articulated in Qur'an 29.46:

Do not dispute with the People of the Book Say: "We believe in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one, and to him we are muslims."

Hence, the believers testifying or asking (God or another person/group) to testify that they were muslims could have been an early *shahada*, although its use in the Qur'an is clearly not an exclusive identity marker as Muslims, but rather as submitters to God.

Moreover, Qur'an 65.2 pronounces: "proclaim the testimony (*al-shahada*) to God; this is the advice to whoever believes in God and the Last Day." Similarly, in Qur'an 24.6 and 24.8, believers are instructed to testify four times by God to prove they were telling the truth. Even though this *shahada* is not defined in terms of its specific articulation, it only

involves God, not God and his prophet. We find as well in Qur'an 3.18: "God testifies (*shahida*) that there is no god but he; likewise do the angels and the people of knowledge," which similarly points that a form of *There is no god but God* functioned as a standalone *shahada*. Indeed, Qur'an 6.19 defines faith on the basis of believing in God and not associating other deities with him:

Do you really testify (*tashhadun*) that with God are other gods? Say: "I do not testify (*la ashhad*)." Say: "He is but one God, and I am innocent of what you associate with him."

These examples strongly suggest that a second early *shahada* involved proclaiming God as an exclusive deity. There is actually a hadith quoted by the exegete al-Tha'labi (d. 1035) that a man came to inquire from the Prophet about his message. Muhammad replied that he was sent to summon people "to testify (*yashhadu*) that there is no god but God, pray and pay alms."²⁰ We also find in the collection of Abu Dawud (d. 889) a hadith that confirms this conclusion. It reads:

The Messenger of God heard a man say: "I testify (*ashhad*) that you are God, there is no god but you, unique and supreme, who is neither begetting nor begotten, and none is his equal." The messenger said: "You have asked God with the name that, if he is asked with it, he gives, and, if he is beseeched with it, he answers."²¹

Another hadith with similar import is attributed to the prophet Muhammad, who said:

Whoever says ten times "I testify (*shahada*) that there is no god but God, he alone with no associates, one god, unique and supreme, who did not take a consort or a child, and none is his equal," God writes it for him as forty million good deeds.²²

Aside from the fact that these two last hadiths instruct the believer to proclaim a *shahada* which revolves around God being one, they interestingly reproduce slightly variant texts of Qur'an 112, suggesting therefore that this specific sura could have been used by the Muslims as an early *shahada*. Indeed, as we will see next, the so-called reformed coinage of 'Abd al-Malik (see Figure 11.5 below) features part of Qur'an 112 on the reverse, lending support to the suggestion that this sura could have been one of the early *shahadas*.

Moreover, even though the authenticity of these hadiths might be questioned, I am including them here precisely to show that the corpus of Hadith literature—which was forming in the late eighth, ninth and tenth

centuries—does not reveal an agreement among the Muslims regarding the *Shahada* as alleged by Wensinck. If they demonstrate something, it is that even though by the eighth century we have two “official” *Shahadas*, the Muslims still believed one version of the early *shahada* centered around *There is no god but God*, with additional invocations to God and no one else.

Thus, there seem to be at least two, and possibly three, *shahadas* in early Islam. A *shahada* about being a muslim, that is submitter to God, a *shahada* about believing God is one and has no associates, and a *shahada* expressed by reciting sura 112. One can also argue that Qur’an 63.1 suggests a fourth *shahada*:

When the Hypocrites come to you, they would say: “We testify (*nashhad*) that you are the messenger of God.” But God knows that you are his messenger and God testifies (*yashhad*) that the Hypocrites are liars.

One might be compelled to think of this as a *shahada*, but it does not seem to have been the case since it presents uttering it as the practice of nonbelievers or those whose belief is questionable. Note that the hypocrites were the ones saying “we testify” and also God “testifying” that they were liars, but God does not “testify” that Muhammad is his messenger. There is no other indication in the Qur’an that the believers must pronounce a *shahada* to affirm their belief in the messengerhood of Muhammad. To be clear, the point made here is that even though the messengerhood of Muhammad is emphasized throughout the Qur’an, the text does not tie it to a *shahada*.

Shahadas in seventh-century material culture

Evidence from material culture dating to the seventh century shows that the Muslims used a number of statements to communicate identity. These statements could be identified as early *shahadas*. I repeat a point made earlier, namely that we cannot be sure that these were professions of faith as contrasted to statements of identity (or both). Here too, evidence from much later periods might not help because the earlier *shahada* pronouncements could have been edited to match the official formulations (Sunni or Shi’i). An example of such practices is a hadith about the Prophet hearing a man say “God is great, God is great ... I testify (*ashhad*) that there is no god but God.”²³ In a later version, the component “and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God” was added to the hadith.²⁴

Material culture shows that one of the earliest Islamic identity markers was the expression *In the name of God (b-ism Allah)*. It first appeared during the reign of caliph ‘Uthman on Arab-Sassanian dirhams (drachms)



Figures 11.1(a and b) Arab-Sassanian dirhams from 655 to 656 and ca. 673. The expression “In the name of God” (*b-ism Allah*) appears on the lower right edge. (Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society).²⁶

(Figures 11.1a and b). It should be noted that the dirhams the Muslims minted during this time copied the same base design that was adopted by their Sassanian predecessors²⁵: a figure of a Sassanian king (often that of king Khosraw II) and symbols of Zoroastrianism (e.g. the crescent and star, and the fire as symbolizing light surrounded by two priests).

Interestingly, the expression *In the name of God* is found on Arab-Sassanian dirhams and not on Arab-Byzantine dinars (solidi). What we find on dinars from that period are actually silent identity markers, namely the removal rather than addition of certain symbols, as in the case of the Umayyad dinars where the crosses were eliminated (Figures 11.2a and b).²⁷ Does this evidence suggest that the process of expressing an Islamic identity on coins started in relationship to the Zoroastrian religion and symbols? Does it also suggest that the Muslims did not yet see a need to attach an identity statement to Christian symbols? I will return to these two points a little later in this chapter.

We should not dismiss outright that *b-ism Allah* (In the name of God)—which might but does not necessarily need to be a short formula of *b-ism Allah al-rahman al-rahim*—could have been an early form or component of a *shahada*. If we dismiss such a possibility, then we are not actually listening to the evidence. We are ignoring the evidence and imposing (by projecting backward) the classical *Shahada* onto the formative period under discussion. *In the name of God* could have been at least part of an early version of a *shahada* because, as we will see later, coins from 665 to 695 used it alongside other additional components.

Indeed, we have a countless number of dirhams minted in several parts of the early Islamic empire (Iran, Iraq and Syria) between 660s and 690s that use a variety of statements featuring “In the name of God,”



Figures 11.2 (a and b) A Byzantine solidus from 637 to 638 (top), with three crosses on the obverse and one on the reverse. An Umayyad dinar from the period 680 to 692 (bottom), with the cross on the reverse removed. (Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society)²⁸

such as “In the name of God, my Lord” (*bism Allah rabbi*) (Figure 11.3b).²⁹ We also see “In the name of God, Lord of Rule” (*bism Allah rabb al-hukm*),³⁰ “In the name of God, the Ruler” (*bism Allah waliy al-amr*)³¹ and “In the name of God, Glory to God” (*bism Allah al-‘izza lillah*).³² Besides, there are as well a large number of minted coins featuring statements such as “Thanks to God” (*lillah al-hamd*)³³ and “My Lord is God” (*rabbi Allah*).³⁴ And finally, we have the famous Khariji pronouncement, which might have functioned as a *shahada* for the early Kharijis: “No rule other than God’s” (*la hukm illa lillah*),³⁵ which also appears on one dirham in the form of “In the name of God, no rule other than God’s” (Figure 11.3c).

Therefore, when the statement *In the name of God, Muhammad is the messenger of God* starts to appear on coins in the mid-680s, but more



Figures 11.3 (a, b and c) Dirhams from 693 to 694 (top left) with the expression “In the name of God, Muhammad is the messenger of God,” from 672 (top right) with the expression “In the Name of God, my Lord” and from 694 to 695 (bottom) with the expression “In the name of God, no rule other than God’s.” (Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society)³⁶

commonly in the early 690s (Figure 11.3a), it signals the Muslims’ eagerness to highlight Muhammad’s prophethood in their statements of identity/*shahadas*. More importantly, it has to be assessed and understood as one formula out of many other ones that were adopted by the Muslims to express religious identity, be that vis-à-vis external or internal groups. Interestingly, the evidence also shows that the same actors (such as the Umayyads) used several of these formulas on their coins, which points as well to a process that we might call experimentation (more on this below).

It is important at this point to return to an issue raised earlier about what constitutes a *shahada*. If *In the name of God, Muhammad is the messenger of God* is a *shahada*, then the other expressions preceded by *In the Name of God* should be treated as *shahadas* as well. If the latter ones are deemed statements of identity, then the former must be labeled too as a statement of identity. Moreover, should the verb “testify” (*Sh-h-d*)

be used in the statement to qualify it to be a *shahada*? If so, then all the evidence from material culture before 690 does not point to a single use of a *shahada* because none features the word “testify.” In other words, we only have statements of identity and not *shahadas*. My contention is that at this time we have a fluidity between the two: statements of identity and *shahadas* were not distinct. There does not seem to have been a clear articulation yet—as far as material culture is concerned—that a *shahada* must be preceded by the word “testify” for it to function as such.

Evidence that supports this argument comes from dirhams minted in Bishapur in 690, with the following text inscribed on the edge of the obverse: “In the name of God, there is no god but God, he alone” (*b-ism Allah la ilah illa Allah wahdah*). To the right of the face, we have: “Muhammad is the messenger of God.”³⁷ As a reminder, these are the two components of the Sunni Dual-*Shahada*, and the first two components of the Shi‘i Triple-*Shahada*. I should note that neither statement on the coin features the word “testify” and they are separate from each other.

Jere Bacharach argued that in this 690 dirham, we have the first complete version of the affirmation of the faith.³⁸ The problem with this view, also expressed by Lutz Ilisch,³⁹ is that if it is really the Dual-*Shahada*, why is the expression *Muhammad is the messenger of God* separated from the rest instead of it being inscribed right after *he alone*? What the evidence shows are actually two distinct statements that were intentionally kept separate by the minters: (1) *In the name of God, there is no god but God, he alone* and (2) *Muhammad is the messenger of God*. Had the two been understood by that time to form one statement, they would have been inscribed together, as we see on a dinar minted in Damascus in 693-694 (Figure 11.4), where



Figure 11.4 Umayyad dinar minted in 694-695 in Damascus. The text of “In the name of God, there is no god but God, he alone, Muhammad is the messenger of God” appears on the edge of the obverse, starting clockwise from top right. (Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society)⁴¹

the text on the obverse reads “In the name of God, there is no god but God, he alone, Muhammad is the messenger of God.”⁴⁰

That what we see in the 690 coin from Bishapur is not the *Shahada*, but rather two separate *shahadas* is confirmed by the fact that several coins from the same period feature the statement *Muhammad is the messenger of God* placed to the right of the face on the obverse, but on the edge, we do not find the expression *There is no god but God*. Instead, we see in one dirham from 691 to 692, *In the name of God*,⁴² and in another one from around the same time, we find a Pahlavi word while the expression *In the name of God* is minted on the reverse.⁴³ Therefore, it is safe to assume that the two statements in the 690 coin from Bishapur did not yet mean a single statement. They were distinct *shahadas*, and likely used on these coins as statements of identity as well, and were part of a large number of statements that the Muslims were experimenting with on coins.

Thus, following the evidence, we have within a short period of time a series of changes introduced to the way Islamic identity was expressed on coins. We have the introduction of distinct formulas intentionally kept separate, which were later joined together to form a longer formula as in the case of the 693-694 dinar (Figure 11.4). Indeed, the last decade of the seventh century reveals different processes of combining short *shahadas* to form what one might call a proto-Dual-*Shahada*, albeit its precise text was not yet finalized. Following Jeremy Johns, we can describe it as “a phase of intense experimentation.”⁴⁴ This experimentation with statements of identity/*shahadas* on coins is similar to the experimentation with imagery that the Umayyad administration adopted during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, which they dropped in favor of other imageries, until finally they settled on no images and only text⁴⁵; it should be noted, however, that Sassanian-style coins were still minted in some parts of the Islamic empire until the early ninth century.⁴⁶ These dynamics ultimately produced a proto-Dual-*Shahada* that through the course of the early eighth century morphed into a Sunni Dual-*Shahada* and Shi‘i Triple-*Shahada*. Before that, to take a cue from the subject matter, the *shahada* was not one.

The reason I am calling it the proto-Dual-*Shahada* is that the cases from 690 onward do not yet show a Dual-*Shahada* that says *There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God*. What we see are components being joined together. The most common components are (1) *In the name of God*, (2) *There is no god but God, he alone* or variants of it (as the variant in the Middle Persian text on the Zubayrid dirham discussed below) and (3) *Muhammad is the messenger of God*. We have coins that feature (1) and (2), coins that feature (1) and (3), coins that feature (2) and (3) and coins that feature (1), (2) and (3).

We should not, however, credit the Umayyads with the invention of these processes of using different *shahada* components on coin. Actually,

as far as our evidence suggests, their Muslim opponents first started experimenting with different formulas. Dirhams from Bishapur minted in 685-686 use the expression "In the name of God, Muhammad is the messenger of God." This is the first such case that we have of the inclusion of the name of Muhammad on coins.⁴⁷ There is also the case of a very rare Zubayrid dirham minted in 691-692 in Sijistan by the governor of caliph Ibn al-Zubayr (r. 684-692). It features on the reverse the following text written in Middle Persian: "No God but he, another god does not exist, Muhammad is the messenger of God." The margin on the obverse has "In the name of God, the all-powerful."⁴⁸ It is the earliest attestation of the use of the name of Muhammad alongside God in a formula that we might call proto-Dual-*Shahada*. Thus, it is indeed very likely that during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik, the Umayyads copied *shahada* formulas that were first used by their Muslim opponents, experimented with them and finally settled on the proto-Dual-*Shahada*.

I return here to a point made earlier. The Middle Persian text on the reverse of the 691-692 dirham from Sijistan might actually point us in the direction that the proto-Dual-*Shahada* with two components could have started to circulate as one formula in Iran in reaction to Zoroastrian belief in Ahura Mazda as deity and Zoroaster as his messenger.⁴⁹ One thing seems rather obvious, namely that the text on the reverse is meant to replace the Zoroastrian religious symbols of the two priests attending a fire with a clear Islamic identity statement. It is precisely the use of Middle Persian to communicate such a statement about Muslim identity that suggests the audience was both Muslims and non-Muslims, and that it was a way to assert Islamic identity vis-à-vis Zoroastrians. My argument is that this statement gradually forced itself as the main contender among the various articulations of the *shahada* in the first century. One needs to keep in mind that, as far as we can tell, all existing coins from that time were issued by proto-Sunni administrations or Khariji rulers. Hence, the argument that we do not possess evidence of the "third" Shi'i *Shahada* is mute.

The Umayyad experimentation with coin designs and formulations of the *shahada* can also be seen in the major overhaul under 'Abd al-Malik, which featured the gradual elimination of imagery. Scholars take it for granted that here the Umayyads settled on the Dual-*Shahada*.⁵⁰ But if we actually examine the dinar (Figure 11.5) that first came out in April 696, we still have separate *shahadas* and not the *Shahada*.

The *shahada* that appears on the obverse of this dinar reads: "There is no god but God, he alone with no associates." Around it, we have: "Muhammad is the messenger of God, he sent him with guidance and the religion of truth, to make it victorious over all other religions" (*Muhammad rasul Allah arsalah bi-l-huda wa-din al-haqq li-yuzhirah 'ala al-din kullih*). This surrounding text on the obverse must be read not as part of a *shahada* but rather as a slight variant of Qur'an 9.33/61.9 or Qur'an 48.28 (He it is who sent his



Figure 11.5 The reformed dinar of 'Abd al-Malik, 697-698. (Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society).⁵¹

messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to make it victorious over all other religions ...). Another quote from the Qur'an (a slight variant of 112.1-3) features in the center of the reverse: "God is one, God is Lord supreme. Neither begetting, nor begotten" (*Allah ahad Allah al-samad lam yalid wa-lam yulad*), which as noted earlier might have been an early *shahada* the Muslims used. It is surrounded by "In the Name of God, this dinar was struck in the year 78." Thus, even in this "reformed" dinar, the process of finalizing the Dual-*Shahada* is not yet a done deal.

The *Shahada* as an anti-Christian statement?

It is pertinent here to say that the emphasis in earlier *shahadas* on God having no associates is not to be exclusively seen as a tacit criticism of Christianity and the doctrine of the Trinity. The Christian canon and apocrypha use similar formulas that emphasize the oneness of God who has no associates, as in:

How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? (John 5.44)

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that no idol in the world really exists, and that there is no God but one. (1 Corinthians 8.4)

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. (Romans 3.29-30)

Let them know that you alone are the Lord God, glorious over the whole world. (Prayer of Azariah 1.22)

The emphasis on God as not having associates and on worshipping God alone is also attested in Christian inscriptions from the pre-Islamic Near East, with such expressions as “The one and only God” and “One God alone” found in house lintels and tombs of Christians.⁵² Moreover, Garth Fowden has identified a reference in John of Ephesus’s *Ecclesiastical History*, which records an Egyptian Monophysite creed that reads: “The true God is one and there is no other god but he.”⁵³ This evidence points to intra-Christian debates as well as to Christian identity markers vis-à-vis polytheists in the broader Near East.

Ancient Israelite religion and Judaism, as well, have similar formulations that emphasize the oneness and exclusivity of the monotheistic God, such as “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6.4), which became the first statement in the Jewish *Shema* prayer.

It is therefore possible, as argued above, that efforts to form a proto-Dual-*Shahada* by merging together the two components of the belief in God as one and belief in Muhammad as his messenger were introduced as identity markers not necessarily against some Christians, or not only against some Christians. It is likely that they were also used, if not first, in the process of the Muslims’ identity formation vis-à-vis Zoroastrians.

Shahadas on inscriptions

What we see on coins is similarly encountered in other forms of material culture. On several milestone markers, dating between 692 and 704 during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, we find “In the name of God, the compassionate the merciful, there is no god but God, he alone with no associates, Muhammad is the messenger of God” (*b-ism Allah al-rahman al-rahim, la ilah illa Allah wahdah la sharik lah, Muhammad rasul Allah*).⁵⁴ A similar text is found on a dedication inscription for road improvement done in May 692, also from the time of ‘Abd al-Malik.⁵⁵

The most compelling evidence that a proto-Dual-*Shahada* started to take form in the early 690s comes from a tombstone from Aswan, which belongs to the grave of a Muslim woman named ‘Abbasa bt. Jurayj, who died on 19 April 691 (14 Dhu al-Qa‘da 71). This particular version of the *Shahada* is very interesting because it is stated in the following manner: *She died on Monday 14 Dhu al-Qa‘da in the year 71, confesing that there is no god but God, he alone with no associates, and that Muhammad is his servant and messenger (... wa-hiya tashhadu alla ilah illa Allah, wahdah la sharik lah, wa-anna Muhammad ‘abduh wa-rasuluh*.⁵⁶ This is the very first datable evidence that this specific statement has been adopted as a profession of faith per se. In all other evidence from around the same time, it (or variants of it) was also used as a statement of identity, which further supports the

argument that *shahadas* and statements of identity meant the same thing. Nevertheless, what we see on the tombstone is a proto-Dual-*Shahada*. It includes *he alone with no associates*, which is not in the Dual-*Shahada*, and has the variation *Muhammad is his servant and messenger*. It is likely that this proto-Sunni *Shahada* was adopted in Egypt in 691⁵⁷ not necessarily as an anti-Christian statement (the component about the oneness of God accords well with what some Christians in Egypt used, as we see in the case identified by Fowden discussed above), but rather, given its emphasis on Muhammad’s messengerhood, as an affirmation of a Muslim identity.

The fluidity of the *shahada* statements at this specific time is best exhibited in the Dome of the Rock (constructed around 692). Three different versions are encountered in the façades of the octagonal arcade, which date to its time of original construction: (1) *There is no god but God, he alone with no associates* is repeated three times (once in the inner façade and twice in the outer façade), (2) *There is no god but God, he alone with no associates, Muhammad is the messenger of God* is repeated twice (in the outer façade) and (3) *There is no god but God, he alone* is stated once (in the outer façade). Thus, the experimentation on coins is similarly encountered with commemorative and functional inscriptions. At best, we can talk of a proto-Dual-*Shahada* and components of earlier *shahadas* used separately and together. Moreover, they need to be seen as expressions of identity too, reflecting a growing need from within as well as factors from without.

Conclusion

In *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, Abu Hanifa is quoted as having been asked by someone to describe belief (*al-iman*). He defined it in the following manner:

You should testify that there is no god but God, he alone with no associates. You should also testify to the reality of his angels, revelations, messengers, heaven and hell, day of resurrection, and good and bad. You should, as well, testify that he delegated nothing to anyone else and that humans shall receive that for which they were created and destined.⁵⁸

Even though the attribution of *al-Fiqh al-akbar* to Abu Hanifa is contested, the argument made in this quote shows that the wording of the *Shahada* in Islam was never fully settled precisely because there were many *shahadas* used by the Muslims before 700. Later scholars could always reach out to earlier formulations that in their opinion expressed what the profession of faith in Islam should look like.

The evidence discussed in this chapter indicates that a process of identity formation was taking shape throughout the seventh century. It gave rise to a variety of articulations that we might call early *shahadas*, which in the course of the 690s gave rise to a proto-Dual-*Shahada*. Some of

the early *shahadas* were used as professions of faith, as we saw in the examples from the Qur'an, especially the *shahada* about being a *muslim* (submitter) and the *shahada* that God has no associates, which could have been expressed by reciting sura 112. Over time, the Muslims started to articulate other *shahadas* including the one about the prophecy of Muhammad, which gradually morphed with the one about God having no associates to form the proto-Dual-*Shahada*. They also used them interchangeably as expressions of identity. The classical *Shahada*, however, was the result of the systematization of Islamic creed (be it in Sunnism or in Shi'ism), and this occurred during the course of the eighth century and after. As such, a simpler version of the proto-Dual-*Shahada* was appropriated to define both identity (including subidentity) and faith. The result were the Sunni Dual-*Shahada* (two *shahadas* merged into one), and the Shi'i Triple-*Shahada* (three *shahadas* structured as one).

One should also acknowledge, given the phase of experimentation during the reign of 'Abd al-Malik, that the Umayyads' hand in the promulgation of the proto-Dual-*Shahada* (on coins, building inscriptions, milestones, etc.) was key for its subsequent morphing into the Sunni and Shi'i *Shahadas*. Even though it could be said that the specific formulation adopted under 'Abd al-Malik was inspired by formulas likely first used by his Muslim opponents to convey religious identity vis-à-vis other groups (be they Muslims or non-Muslims), the proliferation of the proto-Dual-*Shahada* under him made it the only viable formula that could become the *Shahada*. This is a phenomenon comparable to the codex of 'Uthman becoming the only viable text of the Qur'an, even to groups who initially rejected it. Nevertheless, other early *shahadas* or the different *Shahada* components as distinct elements were not pushed out of circulation. They have remained in use, albeit not as the official *Shahada*, and have informed the theological presuppositions of many scholars, as we see in the case of Abu Hanifa and many others.

Notes

1. See Abu Hanifa (ascribed), *al-Fiqh al-akbar*, Muhammad al-Khamis, ed. (Dubai: Maktabat al-Furqan, 1999), 96-98; Abu 'Ubayd, *Kitab al-Iman*, Muhammad N. al-Albani, ed. (Riyad: Maktabat al-Ma'arif, 2000), 11-25.
2. See al-Ghazali, *al-Iqtisad fi al-'itiqad*, 'Abd Allah M. al-Khalili, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), 135-36.
3. Ibn Babawayh, *Kamal al-din wa-tamam al-ni'ma*, Husayn al-A'lami, ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami, 1991), 245-46.
4. I am translating the term *wali* as guardian. It is customarily rendered *friend*, but *wali* means more than a friend, especially in Shi'i discourse about 'Ali where the central issue is his God-given legitimacy to rule over the Muslims.
5. I am using *shahada* (lowercase) in order to distinguish it from the *Shahada* as a technical term signifying the classical profession of faith.

6. Qur'an 5.48 makes a similar point about the different laws applicable to different monotheists.
7. The distinction between *Muslim* and *muslim* is intentional. The former is an identity marker that explicitly means the believers who follow Islam, and the latter means submitters to God in the sense of being a monotheist.
8. For a more extensive discussion on this issue, see Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).
9. On this, see Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997); Jeremy Johns, "Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46.4 (2003): 411-36; and Donner, *Muhammad*.
10. See, for instance, the review by Tarif Khalidi in *Al-Abhath* 58-59 (2010-2011): 59-62. See also the review article by Amikam Elad, "Community of Believers of 'Holy Men' and 'Saints' or Community of Muslims?": The Rise and Development of Early Muslim Historiography," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 47.1 (2002): 241-308.
11. I am translating *la ilah illa Allah wahdah la sharik lah* as *There is no god but God, he alone with no associates*. I say *he alone* instead of *one* because the Arabic expression says *wahdah* not *wahid*.
12. Donner, *Muhammad*, 112.
13. Donner, *Muhammad*, 205.
14. Jere L. Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty: The *Shahada*, Qur'anic Verses, and the Coinage of 'Abd al-Malik," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 1-30; Jere L. Bacharach and Sherif Anwar, "Early Versions of the *Shahada*: A Tombstone from Aswan of 71 A.H., the Dome of the Rock, and Contemporary Coinage," *Der Islam* 89.2 (2012): 60-69; Marcus Milwright, *The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
15. M.J. Kister, "... *illa bi-haqqihi* ...: A Study of an Early Hadith," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984): 33-52.
16. A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 32-33.
17. See, for example, Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Iman*, Muhammad al-Albani, ed. (Amman: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1996), 260.
18. For a discussion of the third *Shahada*, see 'Ali al-Shahristani, "*Ashhadu anna 'Aliyyan waliyyu Allah' fi al-adhan bayn al-shar'iyya wa-l-ibtida'*" (Mashhad, Iran: Manshurat al-Ijtihad, 2009).
19. On this issue, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qur'an & the Speaking Qur'an: Scriptural Sources of Islam Between History and Fervor*, Eric Ormsby, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 44-73.
20. Al-Tha'labi, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayan 'an tafsir al-qur'an*, Abu Muhammad Ibn 'Ashur, ed. (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 2002), 4: 8.
21. Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, Muhammad 'Abd al-Hamid, ed. (Sayda, Lebanon: al-Maktaba al-'Asriyya, 1996), 2: 79.
22. Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Bashshar Ma'ruf, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1998), 5: 391.
23. Ibn Abi Shayba, *Musnad*, 'Adil al-'Azazi and Ahmad al-Mazidi, eds. (Riyad: Dar al-Watan, 1997), 1: 220; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut et al., eds. (Beirut: Dar al-Risala, 2001), 6: 408; al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, 3: 215.

24. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 36: 448.
25. Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty," 4.
26. <http://numismatics.org/collection/1971.31.14?lang=en> and <http://numismatics.org/collection/1917.215.3362?lang=en>, respectively (accessed 20 October 2018).
27. Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty," 4-5; Johns, "Archaeology," 423.
28. <http://numismatics.org/collection/1925.172.34?lang=en> and <http://numismatics.org/collection/1983.122.1?lang=en> (accessed 20 October 2018). For another example of an Umayyad dinar (possibly from the reign of Mu'awiya) that looks exactly like the Byzantine one above, but where the crosses were removed from both obverse and reverse, see Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty," 5, figure 4.
29. See also the example <http://numismatics.org/collection/1973.244.67?lang=en> from 698 to 699 (accessed 20 October 2018).
30. See for instance the example <http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.375?lang=en> from 675 to 676 (accessed 20 October 2018). Some of these additional expressions—such as *rabb al-hukm* or *al-'aziz*—were probably meant as "double entendre," given that the governors who issued the coins were called al-Hakam and 'Abd al-'Aziz. But other governors issued similar coins, which indicate that the expressions referred primarily to God. For additional examples, see John Walker, *A Catalogue of the Arab-Sassanian Coins* (London: the British Museum, 1941), 81-82.
31. See for instance, the example <http://numismatics.org/collection/1917.215.8?lang=en> from 691 to 692 (accessed 20 October 2018).
32. See for instance, the example <http://numismatics.org/collection/1993.40.6?lang=en> from 694 to 695 (accessed 20 October 2018).
33. See for instance the example <http://numismatics.org/collection/1917.215.2309?lang=en> from 687 to 688 (accessed 20 October 2018).
34. See for instance the example <http://numismatics.org/collection/1989.81.1?lang=en> from 668 to 669 (accessed 20 October 2018).
35. See for instance the example <http://numismatics.org/collection/1972.169.182?lang=en> from 695 to 696 and <http://hcr.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/HCR10180> from 694 to 695 (accessed 20 October 2018).
36. <http://numismatics.org/collection/1975.238.21?lang=en>, <http://numismatics.org/collection/1917.215.3351?lang=en> and <http://numismatics.org/collection/1973.3.1?lang=en>, respectively (accessed 20 October 2018).
37. For an image of this coin, see Lutz Ilisch, "The Muhammad-Drachms and Their Relation to Umayyad Syria and Northern Mesopotamia," *Supplement to the Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society* 193 (2007): 18, figure 5; Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty," 6, figure 6; Heidemann, "The Evolving Representation," 167, figure 15.
38. Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty," 6. Bacharach avoids using the expression *Shahada* in order to distinguish between the modern *Shahada* and very early versions that did not strictly adhere to the specific phrasing of the modern *Shahada*.
39. Ilisch, "The Muhammad-Drachms," 18.
40. The same is encountered as well on dirhams minted in Damascus in 693-694. See <http://numismatics.org/collection/1971.316.35?lang=en> (accessed 20 October 2018).
41. <http://numismatics.org/collection/1970.63.1?lang=en> (accessed 20 October 2018).
42. See Ilisch, "The Muhammad-Drachms," 17, figure 1; and Stefan Heidemann, "The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire and Its Religion on Coin Imagery," in *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai and M. Marx, eds. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 172, figure 18.
43. See Ilisch, "The Muhammad-Drachms," 18, figure 4.
44. Johns, "Archaeology," 431.
45. Johns, "Archaeology," 429 to 433.
46. For some examples (dating between 767 and 803) from Tabaristan, see the list at <http://hcr.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/?page=8> (accessed 20 October 2018).
47. Johns, "Archaeology," 426-7.
48. For an image of this coin, see Malek I. Mochiri, "A Pahlavi Forerunner of the Umayyad Reformed Coinage," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 113.2 (1981): 169, plate 1; Heidemann, "The Evolving Representation," 168, figure 16. As far as we can tell, this is the only specimen that has survived. For a discussion of this coin, see Mochiri, "A Pahlavi Forerunner."
49. I am thankful to Yishai Kiel for bringing this possibility to my attention.
50. For example, Donner, *Muhammad*, 205; and Bacharach and Sherif, "Early Versions."
51. <http://numismatics.org/collection/1917.216.878?lang=en> (accessed 20 October 2018).
52. See Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
53. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 116.
54. Two of these milestones are discussed in Moshe Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptio-num Arabicarum Palaestinae* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1997–present), 3: 95 and 104-5.
55. For this commemorative road-building inscription, see Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptio-num*, 1: 103-6. The stone is broken in the part that states the date, with only the digit number preserved. Given the name of the person in charge of the works—Yahya b. al-Hakam (d. ca. 699) who was 'Abd al-Malik's uncle—the decimal must be 70, when Yahya was governor in Palestine.
56. For an image and transcription of the text on the tombstone, see Bacharach and Sherif, "Early Versions," 62-63.
57. I am assuming the tomb marker was made shortly after the death of 'Abbasa bt. Jurayj.
58. Abu Hanifa (ascribed), *al-Fiqh al-akbar*, 96-98.

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First published 2019
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Tolan, John Victor, 1959- editor.

Title: *Geneses* : a comparative study of the historiographies of the rise of
Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism, and Islam / edited by John Tolan.

Description: First [edition]. | New York : Routledge, 2019. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018054390 (print) | LCCN 2019005460 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781351113311 (ebook) | ISBN 9781351113304 (web pdf) |

ISBN 9781351113281 (mobi/kindle) | ISBN 9781351113298 (epub) |

ISBN 9780815362074 (hardback: alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Abrahamic religions—Historiography. |

Christianity—Origin. | Islam—Origin. | Judaism—Origin.

Classification: LCC BL80.3 (ebook) | LCC BL80.3 .G465 2019 (print) |

DDC 200.72/2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018054390>

ISBN: 978-0-8153-6207-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-351-11331-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Source Sans Pro
by Cenveo® Publisher Services

Geneses

A Comparative Study of the Historiographies of the Rise of Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism, and Islam

Edited by
John Tolan