



# When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam

By Michæl Philip Penn

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The first Christians to meet Muslims were not Latin-speaking Christians from the western Mediterranean or Greek-speaking Christians from Constantinople but rather Christians from northern Mesopotamia who spoke the Aramaic dialect of Syriac. Living under Muslim rule from the seventh century to the present, Syriac Christians wrote the first and most extensive accounts of Islam, describing a complicated set of religious and cultural exchanges not reducible to the solely antagonistic.

Through its critical introductions and new translations of this invaluable historical material, *When Christians First Met Muslims* allows scholars, students, and the general public to explore the earliest interactions between what eventually became the world's two largest religions, shedding new light on Islamic history and Christian-Muslim relations.

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### Editorial Review

#### From the Inside Flap

"Michael Philip Penn's *When Christians First Met Muslims* is an extremely important text. The sources Penn collated in Syriac are among some of the earliest reports we have about the emerging community there. Scholars of the latest of 'late antiquity,' of early Byzantium, and of the early community of believers around Muhammad will benefit from having these sources in English. Penn's scholarship is truly superior." —Ellen Muehlberger, author of *Angels in Late Ancient Christianity*

"Syriac sources preserve our earliest historical information for Christian-Muslim encounters, written by Christian contemporaries who experienced firsthand the massive changes brought by the Arab conquests of the seventh century and thereafter in the Middle East. This volume offers a new collection of vivid and lucid translations that open to the reader new vistas on how religions interact, adapt, and flourish, even under circumstances of inexorable change. Michael Penn is a religion scholar of rare dexterity in handling primary sources, secondary scholarship, and cutting-edge critical theory, all with equal command. Here is a volume for scholars and students of religion, history, and culture. It will matter enormously for all who share an interest in Christianity or Islam." —Susan Harvey, Willard Prescott and Annie McClelland Smith Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University

"As a source for the early Islamic period and for the earliest responses of Christians to the new historical conditions of the post-conquest period this collection is a useful tool for both scholarly research and classroom teaching. Even those few of us who work on Syriac sources do not commonly have an immediate grasp of the range of texts covered in *When Christians First Met Muslims*. This handy book will contribute to a further appreciation for the unique variety of perspectives Syriac Christians had on early Islam." —Adam H. Becker, Associate Professor of Classics and Religious Studies at New York University

#### About the Author

**Michael Philip Penn** is William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Religion at Mount Holyoke College and the author of *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians in the Early Muslim World* and *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church*.

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**Harriet White:**

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