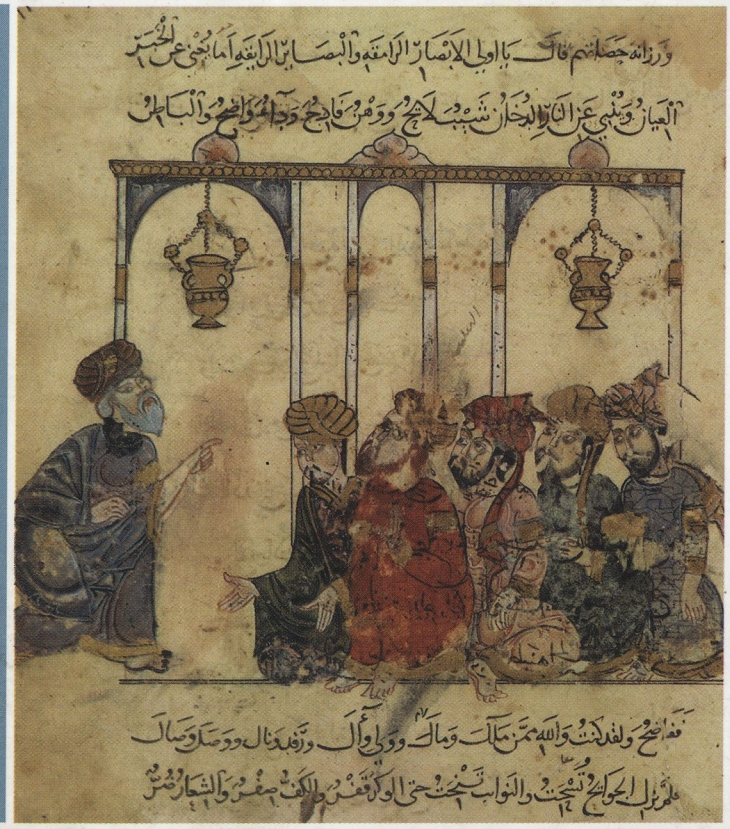
Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages

edited by Martin Tamcke



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Since the early Islamic times, Christian theologians and thinkers discussed with Muslim rulers and thinkers the burning issues of the two encountering theologies from different perspectives, in different contexts and in different times. The leading researchers in this field discussed the theological dialogue between the Christians and the Muslims mainly in the first centuries of their coexistence. The contributions give a deep insight on the argumentations, the issues, the mentalities of these texts, known to us in the Syriac and Arabic tradition, and discusses at the present level of research questions related to the dating of the different texts, apologetical structures and philosophical backgrounds.

Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages

Christlich-muslimische Gespräche im Mittelalter

BEIRUTER TEXTE UND STUDIEN

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Vom Dialog, interreligiös und intrareligiös: zwei syrische Lieder zur Konversion

Martin Tamcke
(Göttingen)

Man trennt mich von Bekannten,
Rednern und Zuhörern.
Und man zählt mich zu den Frevlern
wegen meiner schlechten Taten. Wehe mir!

Mein Wille hat mich von meinen Erben fortgetrieben,
und mein Hochmut zerstörte mein Priestertum.
Ich wurde einem Tier gleich
wegen meiner schlechten Taten. Wehe mir!

Mit weinender Stimme schreie ich,
rufe und bitte ich.
Meinen Gott rufe ich an:
vergib mir meine Schuld durch deine Gnade.

Deine Gnade werde mir eine Festung,
Zufluchtsort und Stütze.
Lass mich deines wahren Lichtes würdig sein
und lass es mir unter deinen Heiligen wohl ergehen.

Vollende an mir das lebendige Wort,
das aus deinem gepriesenen Mund hervorgegangen ist.
Mach mich würdig, in den Garten zu treten,
Und lass es mir unter deinen Heiligen wohl ergehen.

Dank sei dir, Barmherziger,
o Herr und Gnädiger.
Mein Herr, rette mich aus der Hölle,
Und lass mich stehen zu deiner Rechten.[1]

Nach syrisch-orthodoxer Tradition ist das sich hier aussprechende Subjekt ein Mann, dessen größtes Vergehen es war, vorübergehend zum Islam konvertiert zu sein, weil seinen Wünschen von seiner syrischen Kirche nicht entsprochen wurde. Zugleich ist das repräsentierte Subjekt, das hier als ein historisch verifizierbarer Mensch benannt wird, deutlich mehr als nur ein einzelnes Subjekt. Zwar bereut hier einer, aber hunderte und tausende von Menschen besangen mit diesem lyrischen Ich etwas für ihre Identität Konstitutives. So weitet sich das vermeintliche Individuum und erweist sich als kollektive Größe. In dem Fall des einen, der zum Islam konvertierte, bildete sich ab, worum die vielen zu ringen hatten: um die Bewahrung des christlichen Glaubens und der Geschlossenheit des christlichen Kollektivs. Indem die Vielen in die Reue des Einen einstimmen, imaginieren sie, was wäre, wenn sie diesen Schritt um der Erlangung äußerer Vorteile willen getan hätten und reuevoll zurück gewollt hätten in das vertraute Kollektiv, in das sie hineingeboren wurden. Mit dem Schritt hinüber aber zerfällt auch das kollektive Gefäß des bis dahin gültigen sozialen Zusammenhanges: gebrandmarkt und ausgestoßen aus der bisherigen Gemeinschaft. Zurückgeworfen mit dem lyrischen Ich auf sich erlebt der Singende, dass die soziale Isolation ihn in die Reue und die Erkenntnis des eigenen Fehlens treibt. Die Rettung und das Verzeihen erwartet er nun reuevoll von Gott. Damit wird dem später mit diesen Worten Singenden deutlich: nicht Menschen sind da anzugehen, sondern Gott selbst muss diesen Fehltritt verzeihend heilen. Das Ganze scheint ein Monolog zu sein, alles andere als ein Dialog. Hier reden nicht zwei, sondern einer, und dessen fiktive Selbsterfahrung

[1] Das Lied gibt sich den Anschein, als sei es vom Katholikos Ignatius Markus Bar Qiqi verfasst worden. Dieses Lied über die Reue und Besinnung umfasst 22 Strophen. Der Hymnus lässt nirgends erkennen, dass es sich um eine Konversion zum Islam handelte. Dies ist ein Rückschluss aus den Schilderungen zu Bar Qiqi bei Michael Syrus und Barhebräus. Bar Qiqi habe die Forderung der Gläubigen von Tagrit abgelehnt, eine Frau aus seinem Lebenskreis zu entlassen, suchte Unterstützung beim Kalifen, konvertierte 1016 zum Islam, blieb daraufhin verstoßen und isoliert im materiellen Niedergang und rekonvertierte schließlich.

wird experimentelle Vorwegnahme des Ungeheuerlichen durch die Vielen: der Verleugnung des eigenen Glaubens. Insofern sind die Voraussetzungen dieses Monologs dann doch dialogische Bezüge: hier die Versuchung durch das muslimische Gegenüber, dort die Schrecken des Ausschlusses aus der angestammten christlichen Gemeinschaft. Dem Lied liegen also innere und äußere Prozesse zugrunde, die durchaus dialogischen Charakter haben, ganz abgesehen vom Dialog der Singenden mit Gott, zu dem offenbar ein dialogisches Verhältnis besteht, weil ein Wort zumindest den Erfahrungen vorausläuft, auf dessen Vollendung noch gewartet wird.

Ist Dialog nur dort, wo einer mit einem anderen spricht? Oder ist Dialog auch dort, wo in der Koexistenz zweier die Wirklichkeiten der einen wie der anderen aufeinander einwirken? Im christlich-orientalischen Diskurs hat sich eingebürgert, schon das Beieinander als Dialog zu verstehen. Was qualifiziert den Dialog als Dialog? Ist schon die innere Reaktion und die innere Auseinandersetzung mit dem Anderen, der neben mir ist, Dialog? Dann wären auch in diesem westsyrischen Lied Spuren des Dialogs zu entdecken. Aber wer steht dabei mit wem im Dialog? Offenbar nicht der Christ mit dem Muslim, sondern der Christ mit dem, der im historischen Fall Muslim wurde, und damit zugleich mit dem, der diese Worte singt, um sich darin als Christ gegenüber den Muslimen seines Christseins zu vergewissern.

Die fiktive Situation geht von der Zeit nach der Konversion aus, lässt also an einem Erfahrungswissen teilhaben, das den Übertritt zum Islam nicht nur bereits vollzogen, sondern auch schon wieder überboten hat als hinter sich liegend.

Syrische Literatur am Grenzrain zum Dialogischen ist dies, auch wenn es der muslimischen Seite keinen Raum lässt, sich zur Sprache zu bringen. Sie kommt nur als Versuchung und Verirrung zu Wort, als das Ungeheuerliche und Andere, das den Verrat am Eigenen ermöglicht, der zum Zerfall mit sich und zur tragischen Isolation führt.

Ein ostsyrisches Lied erkühnt sich zu weitergehendem Realismus. Tatsächlich war Umkehr zurück ins Christentum in den verschiedenen Phasen der Islamisierung nahezu unmöglich, wenn man die dadurch erworbenen Vorteile nicht wieder verlieren und sein Leben aufs Spiel setzen wollte.

Das ostsyrische Lied gibt bereits vor der Angabe der Melodie an, worum es sich im Kern handelt: der Diakon Abraham aus dem Bezirk Arbela war abgefallen, und ein anderes Gemeindeglied – traditionell gilt Giwargis Warda als Verfasser

der von ihm verlassenen Gemeinde – habe daraufhin dieses Lied gedichtet.[2]

Wenn man so will, handelt es sich hier also auf den ersten Blick um ein Gespräch mit einem Muslim, und noch präziser: um ein Gespräch zwischen einem ostsyrischen Christen und einem zum Islam konvertierten Ostsyrer. Die Erschütterung, die sein Schritt bei den Zurückgebliebenen auslöst, wird in der direkten Anrede an den Konvertiten umgelenkt in eine aufrüttelnde Anrede an ihn.

Wache auf, du Schläfer, aus deinem Schlaf
und aus deinem schweren Rausch
Und siehe, wie schlimm deine Sünde ist
Und wie groß dein Frevel![3]

Unterstellt wird dem Übertretenden also, dass er diesen Schritt quasi in Unwissenheit getan habe, schlafend, nicht wachend, im Rausch, also seiner Sinne nicht Herr, nicht nüchtern abwägend. Der Sündhaftigkeit des Übertrittes nimmt diese eingeschränkte Zurechnungsfähigkeit nichts. Sie bleibt schlimm. Er wird aufgefordert, reuevoll zu weinen über seinen Schritt, und diese Aufforderung wird eingebunden in

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[2] Übersetzung bei H. Hilgenfeld, *Ausgewählte Gesänge des Giwargis Warda von Arbel*, Leipzig 1904. Der Name des Diakons ergibt sich aus den Anfangsbuchstaben der 2. bis 6. Strophe. Das diese Anfangsbuchstaben zusammengesetzt den Namen des Besungenen ergeben, merkt der Verfasser in der Einleitungsstrophe an:

"O, wie traurig ist diese Nachricht!
O wie schrecklich ist diese Geschichte!
Schrecklich und empörend,
Grauenhaft und entsetzlich,
Schmerzlich und niederschlagend,
Betrübend und erschütternd ist,
Was mit diesem Diakonus geschah,
Den ich mit den Buchstaben seines Namens nennen will. Hilgenfeld, S. 60. Der Gesangstitel in der Übersetzung von Hilgenfeld: "Ferner ein Gesang auf einen Diakonus, welcher abfiel, d.h. sein Bekenntnis aufgab, aus dem Dorf Meschkaleg in dem Bezirk von Arbel; verfasst von einem Genossen seiner Gemeinde."

[3] Hilgenfeld, S. 60, Strophe 2. Ähnlich auch im Kontext der Weherufe in den späteren Strophen: "Was ist dir, du Träumer, was ist dir, // Dass du nicht merkst, was mit dir geschehen ist? "Hilgenfeld, S. 61, Strophe 7b. Die Erschütterung der Verlassenen, bzw. Zurückgebliebenen wird zunächst nur expressiv erfasst in Auflistung der Emotionen: Trauer, Schrecken, Empörung, Grauen, Entsetzen, Schmerz und Niedergeschlagenheit, Betrübnis und Erschütterung werden aufgeführt, um das emotionale Szenario der Reaktion zu illustrieren. Strophe 1, Hilgenfeld, S. 60. Die Trauer macht sich dabei gerade an den Stätten des Glaubens fest: "Siehe, in den Kirchen weint man um dich, // Siehe, in den Klöstern trauert man um dich", Hilgenfeld, S. 61, Strophe 7a.

die Trauer der Verlassenen, die er als die Anderen mit ihm weinen lassen solle.

Die Koexistenz der ostsyrischen Christen mit den Muslimen wird konfrontativ gesehen, der Übertritt des Diakons zum Islam deshalb eingebunden in das Schema des Überganges von den Freunden zu den Feinden.[4] Der Liederdichter also hält an der ehemaligen Zugehörigkeit des Konvertiten fest, indem er von den Christen als den Brüdern und Freunden spricht, den Muslimen hingegen nichts als die Bezeichnung "Feinde" übrig lässt. Der Ton liegt ganz auf dem, was der angesehene Konvertit verloren hat.

Deine schönen Gegenstrophen
Und deine zahlreichen Wechsellieder
Und deine langen Gesänge:
Wem hast du dieses als Erbteil hinterlassen?[5]

In unablässiger Wiederholung wird ihm nun der Wert dessen vor Augen gestellt, was er da durch seinen Übertritt verschmähte, indem zunächst gefragt wird, wer denn an seine Stelle treten werde in der Liturgie.[6] Ostern und Weihnachten, Karfreitag, Himmelfahrt und Pfingsten werden als Trauernde aufgeboten, die ihn und seinen Gesang vermissen, aber auch die verschiedenen liturgischen Feiern, die Sakramente, ja die ganze Kirche mit ihren Gebräuchen, die Musik und die Lieder.[7] Auch Giwargis nimmt Bezug auf das durch den Übertritt zerrissene Sozialgeflecht und konkretisiert es zunächst anhand der engsten Familieangehörigen.[8] Dem greisen Vater sei er "wie ein Feind geworden". Christsein steht dabei dafür, dass man ein guter Mensch sei, das Konvertitendasein qualifiziert zum "Bösewicht". Seine vier Brüder gingen nun seinetwegen gebeugt, anstatt aufrecht:

Ihr Herz hast du krank gemacht,
Und ihre Krankheit ist schlimmer als jede Krankheit.

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4 "Groß war dein Name unter deinen Brüdern
Und dein Ansehen unter deinen Genossen;
Warum hast du deinen Freunden Trauer bereitet
Und Freude deinen Feinden?" Hilgenfeld, S. 60, Strophe 4.

5 Hilgenfeld, S. 60, Strophe 5.

6 Hilgenfeld, S. 61, Strophe 6.

7 Hilgenfeld, S. 61f, Strophen 10-14.

8 Hilgenfeld, S. 63-64, Strophen 21-25.

Konversion betrifft also das Herz, aber nicht einfach nur das eigene, ebenso das der anderen. Schwestern, Onkel und Lehrer werden als Weinende aufgeboten. Scheinbar war Abraham allein übergetreten, ohne seine Töchter mit in die neue Religion zu überführen. Jedenfalls gehören seine Töchter mit in die Aufreihung der Trauernden. Sie seien "wie Waisenkinder" zurückgeblieben. Über die Familie hinaus treten auch die Nachbarschaft und die Leute seines Dorfes in die Reihe der Betrübten ein.

Der Übertritt wird gesehen als Tod vor dem Tod und gerade diese Art des Todes mache den Tag des Todes zum Tag des Todes im Tode, lasse ihn also der Hoffnung auf die Auferstehung verlustig gehen und damit auch all dessen, was Kirche und Priester zu bieten haben als Begleitung nach dem Tode.[9]

Dem Konvertiten droht ungeschützt das Feuer des Gerichts.

Wenn Höhe und Tiefe beben
Und Menschen und Engel zittern
Und Berge und Hügel zergehen:
Was werden dann die Verleugner Christi tun?[10]

Wie könne denn der Vater lieben, den der Sohn hasst, weil er – hier geht Giwargis Warda bewusst von Matthäus 10,32 und Lukas 12,8 aus und einen Schritt weiter – verleugnen werde, wer ihn verleugnete.[11]

Das Lied macht keinen Hehl daraus, dass es sich erhofft, der Konvertit möge sich angesichts des Vorgeführten selbst zum Richter werden und dem Endgericht somit zuvorkommen und bereuen. Das Lied sieht sich dabei im Kontext der Suche nach dem verlorenen Schaf, für den immerhin im Falle der Reue Wiederaufnahme erbeten wird. "Wer sich dir wieder zuwendet, den nimm auf."[12]

Das alles, was Giwargis Warda hier aufzubieten hat, scheint nicht gerade ein Element des Dialogs zwischen Christentum und Islam zu sein. Muslime erscheinen nur schemenhaft als "Feinde", "Verleugner Christi". Lediglich in der Strophe zum Kreuzfest wird einmal inhaltlich etwas deutlich, wenn das Kreuz zur

9 Hilgenfeld, S. 64, Strophen 26-29.

10 Hilgenfeld, S. 64, Strophe 31.

11 Hilgenfeld, S. 65, Strophe 32-34.

12 Hilgenfeld, S. 65.

scheidenden Wegmarke wird zwischen Christen und Muslimen.

Weinen wird das Fest des Kreuzes
Um den Diakonus, den Sohn des Kreuzes,
Der verließ die Verehrer des Kreuzes
Und lieb gewann die Verleugner des Kreuzes.[13]

War der Übertritt also nicht irgendwelcher Vorteile wegen erfolgt, sondern tatsächlich religiös motiviert, wie aus dieser Strophe zu schließen möglich wäre? Anders als der westsyrische Hymnus, enthält dieser Hymnus des Giwargis Warda sich der Unterstellung, der Übertritt sei finanzieller oder anderer Vorteile wegen erfolgt. Gerade im Aufgebot des gesamten Kollektivs und all dessen, was die Kirche zu bieten hat, erweist sich die Argumentationsebene vorrangig als eine religiöse.

R. Panikkar sieht die Konversion als unausweichlichen Bestandteil interreligiösen Gesprächs. Das Praxis-Moment allen Verstehens, das Überzeugt werden, gehöre notwendigerweise zur Beschäftigung mit der Religion des anderen, weil Verstehen des anderen letztlich ein Überzeugtwerden von der Wahrheit seiner Aussagen beinhaltet und somit Bekehrung mit sich bringe. Kurzum: Panikkar behauptet, "dass man die Ansichten eines anderen nicht wirklich verstehen kann, wenn man sie nicht teilt."[14] Freilich spricht auch er – sozusagen auf dem Weg zu dem, was er als Dialog zwischen den Religionen verstanden wissen möchte – vom "Schock der Begegnung" beim Zusammentreffen zweier unterschiedlicher Realitäten.[15] Was als Erschrecken in beiden Liedern der syrischen Literatur erkennbar wird, ist der in der modernen Religionswissenschaft hinlänglich bekannte und untersuchte Zusammenhang der nebeneinander existierenden religiösen Systeme, die zugleich nebeneinander existierende Systeme von Selbstverständlichkeiten sind. Das Erschrecken entsteht im Moment der aktiven Begegnung. Als das Beängstigende an der Begegnung mit einer anderen religiösen Existenzweise trete nicht das Neuheitserlebnis in

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[13] Hilgenfeld, S. 62, Strophe 14.

[14] R. Panikkar, "Verstehen als Überzeugtsein", in: H.-G. Gadamer und P. Vogler, *Philosophische Anthropologie* 7 (Neue Anthropologie), Stuttgart 1975, S. 134.

[15] R. Pannikar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, revised edition New York 1981 (deutsche Übersetzung Luzern 1965), S. 12.

den Blick, "sondern die Tatsache, dass die damit eingeleitete Akkulturation meist auch persönliche und gesellschaftliche Anomie, Wertunsicherheit und Orienti erungsschwierigkeiten mit sich bringt" und löse einen Gewissenskonflikt aus zwischen den "nicht mehr annehmbaren Verhaltensmodellen und den noch nicht verifizierten neuen Alternativen. Die sozio-psychologischen Verhaltensweisen im Kulturwandel oder in der Religionsbegegnung werden dann nicht objektiv analysiert und ausgetragen, sondern wegen ihrer Hast, Nervosität und Hilflosigkeit verweigert oder verketzert. Deshalb ist die Begegnung zwischen Kulturen spannungsgeladen, und die Abwehrmechanismen reißen Bruchstellen auf. Die so befreite Aggressivität ist insofern zu erwarten, als sie oft zum Selbstschutz dient.[16]

Selbst wenn diese Aussage relativiert werden müsste im Blick auf die beiden syrischen Lieder, weil zu diskutieren wäre, ob orientalische Christen und Muslime nicht doch auch einem gemeinsamen Kulturraum angehören, so bleibt doch der beschriebene Sachverhalt auch für die Konversionsproblematik in beiden Texten zutreffend. Gegenüber der Verunsicherung gibt es die Möglichkeit des Zurückspringens in die eigene Herkunft, die sich dann mit apologetischer Abwehr des neu Erfahrenen verbindet, oder den Übersprung in das Neue, der womöglich einhergeht mit der kategorischen Verneinung alles dessen, was zuvor religiöse Selbstverständlichkeit im bis dahin eigenen System war. Der Ort dazwischen, die Bewegung zwischen den Orten, scheint keine dauerhafte Möglichkeit zu sein, ist aber dennoch der Raum, aus dem das erwächst, was in der modernen Religionswissenschaft diatopische Hermeneutik genannt wird. Durch die Bewegung zwischen beiden Topoi werden sie überhaupt erst fragwürdig, wird sich der Gläubige erst seines eigenen Mythos bewusst und kann er durch die Begegnung mit dem Fremden die eigene religiöse Welt in Frage stellen und kritisieren.

Dieser Vorgang, der sich im einzelnen Gläubigen vollzieht, wird von Panikkar der "intra-religiöse Dialog" genannt. "Die wahre religiöse oder theologische Aufgabe beginnt, wenn die zwei Ansichten in mir selber formal zusammenstoßen, wenn der Dialog echtes religiöses Nachdenken und sogar eine religiöse Krise in der Tiefe des menschlichen Herzens hervorruft; wenn sich der zwischenmenschliche

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[16] R. Friedli, *Fremdheit als Heimat*, Freiburg 1974, S. 45.

[17] R. Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, New York 1978, S. 40-41.

(inter-personal) Dialog zum innermenschlichen (intra-personal) Selbstgespräch verwandelt."[17] Im intra-religiösen Dialog werden Gewohnheiten, Gebräuche, Begriffe und Denkweisen der eigenen Tradition dann gerade nicht mehr als allgemeingültig angenommen. "Mein intrareligiöses Selbstgespräch wird meine frühere Glaubensüberzeugung mit der später erworbenen zu verbinden haben, welches beide Religionen, oder zumindest eine von ihnen, anerkennen und annehmen kann."[18] Durch das innere Gespräch zwischen beiden Religionen entstehe eine tiefere Durchdringung und ein tieferes Verstehen. Er könne sich nur von einem Typus des Christentums befreien, wenn er ein besserer Christ werde.[19]

Über die Vorgänge in den beiden Konvertiten, denen die syrischen Texte äußerlich gelten, wissen wir nicht genug, um diesen inneren Vorgang hinlänglich auszuleuchten. Sollte der Hinweis bei Giwargis auf Verehrung bzw. Leugnung des Kreuzes als historische Tatsache zu nehmen sein, dann hätte zumindest Abraham sich an einer Zentralaussage des christlichen Glaubens gerieben, die ihm zuvor selbstverständlich war. Aber "Verehrer des Kreuzes" ist hier zugleich die kollektive Bezeichnung für die syrischen Christen und "Verleugner des Kreuzes" die für die Muslime. Er käme in seiner Überzeugung dabei jeweils nur als ein zu einem Kollektiv gehörender Mensch in den Blick und wäre damit zugleich in den Gewissensnöten und im inneren Gespräch des einzelnen Individuums durch den jeweiligen kollektiven Vollzug entlastet. Entlastung meint hier dann auch: es bleibt fraglich, ob solche Folgen wie Vertiefung des religiösen Wissens damit überhaupt vorhanden waren im Sinne einer individuellen Klärung eines religiösen Sachverhalts. Im Sinne des größeren Wissens bleibt dem Konvertiten Abraham aber unbenommen, dass er sowohl das Wissen um seine frühere christliche Religion in sich trägt, als auch das um seine neue muslimische und dadurch eben die Voraussetzungen erfüllt, die Panikkar für das intra-religiöse Gespräch vorgibt.

Doch auch ohne Hypothesen zur Person der beiden Konvertiten erweisen sich die beiden Texte als Zeugen des intra-religiösen Selbstgespräches. Wenn Panikkar davon spricht, dass in solch einem Gespräch herkömmliche und neue Glaubensüberzeugung zu verbinden seien auf die Weise, dass zumindest eine

[18] Panikkar, *Dialogue*, S. 14.

[19] Panikkar, *Unknown*, S. X.

Religion dieses Neue, was da aus dem inneren Gespräch zwischen beiden erwächst, annehmen oder anerkennen kann, dann erfüllen auch die beiden syrischen Lieder diese Voraussetzung. Zweifelsohne konnten beide syrischen Konfessionen die Texte annehmen, die hier im Blick auf die Konvertiten vorlagen. Sonst wären beide nicht zu beliebten Liedern in ihrer jeweiligen liturgischen Tradition geworden. Und zweifelsohne teilen beide Kirchen mit den Sängern die schmerzliche Nähe zu den Konvertiten. "Schmerz scheint das Eigenste zu sein, dessen das Selbst fähig ist", meint der Philosoph W. Schmid in seiner Philosophie der Lebenskunst.[20] Der Schmerz sorge geradezu für die größte Intimität des Selbst mit sich selbst. In diesem Sinne bewirkt der in beiden Liedern ausgedrückte Schmerz auch eine größere Intimität des jeweiligen syrischen Kollektivs mit sich und führt auf das Eigenste, dessen die beiden Kirchen fähig waren und das sich besonders in der Liturgie manifestierte. Selbst die klare Benennung der Muslime als Feinde ist dann keine Verneinung des Dialogs mehr, sondern gerade ein Ausdruck desselben, aber in Gestalt des inneren Dialogs. "Selbst die Feindschaft" könne noch, so meint Schmid, "als Bestandteil der Kohärenz des Selbst, und die Fähigkeit, sich Feinde zu machen, als Element einer reflektierten Lebenskunst betrachtet werden, denn das Selbst erfährt in hohem Maße sich selbst in der Auseinandersetzung mit seinen Feinden" sofern es, um die konstruktiven Konsequenzen der Feindschaft nicht zu gefährden, deren destruktive Auswirkungen für Andere wie für sich selbst auf kluge Weise im Maß zu halten versteht."[21]

So erweist sich, dass sich die religiöse Selbstvergewisserung der syrischen Christen angesichts der Herausforderung durch die muslimische Umwelt durchaus dem Dialog verdankt, selbst wenn der religiösen Lehre und Praxis der Christen nicht in adäquater Weise die religiöse Lehre und Praxis der Muslime gegenübersteht und es offen bleiben muss, ob das aufgrund des Wissensstandes der hier schreibenden christlichen Autoren überhaupt möglich gewesen wäre. Zudem müsste noch nachgefragt werden, inwieweit die hier vorgeführten christlichen Selbstverständigungen und Selbstvergewisserungen nicht auch in ihrer Konnotation dann womöglich an muslimisches Selbstverständnis anknüpften. Hier aber sollte nur gezeigt werden: Dialog findet nicht nur dort statt, wo zwei Gesprächspartner mit je eigenem Gesprächsbeitrag vertreten sind.

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[20] W. Schmid, *Philosophie der Lebenskunst*, Frankfurt 1998, S. 341.

[21] Schmid, *Lebenskunst*, S. 264.

I

Dialogue in Syrian Literature

Dialog in der Syrischen Literatur

The debate between Patriarch John and an Emir of the Mhaggrāyē: a reconsideration of the earliest Christian-Muslim debate

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Because we know that you are anxious and fearful on our account, due to the matter for which we have been called in this region, with our holy father the Patriarch, we inform your Grace that on the ninth of this month of May, the day of the Holy Sunday, we went to the famous general, the emir, and this holy father of all was questioned by him...

This is how an anonymous West-Syrian author begins a letter, in which he gives a report of a debate that allegedly took place between Patriarch John (Yoḥannan) and an emir of the 'Mhaggrāyē'.[1] The letter is written in Syriac and is generally believed to be the oldest surviving example of a religious disputation between a Christian and a Muslim. It survives in a unique manuscript that was completed in the year 874 CE.[2]

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[1] The name of the Patriarch is only to be found in the heading. The term Mhaggrāyē clearly refers to the Muslims, but what it means precisely is still subject of debate. It could be 'Hagarenes', or *muhārijūn*, 'emigrants'. In light of the evidence collected by Crone on the meaning of *muhājir* in the first century of Islam, when it referred to those who moved as soldiers into new territory (not migrants from Mecca to Medina) it could well be the latter: P. Crone, "The First-Century Concept of Hiğra", *Arabica* 61 (1994), 352-387.

[2] MS BL Add. 17193, written in Serto, on 99 folios, containing 125 different texts. The 88th text on fol. 73a-75b contains the *Debate*. The text has been edited and published with a French translation by François Nau in: "Un colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l'Émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716 d'après le MS. du British Museum *add* 17193, avec un appendice sur le patriarche Jean le Ier, sur un colloque d'un patriarche avec le chef des Mages et sur un diplôme qui aurait été donné par Omar à l'Évêque du Tour 'Abdin", JA ser. 11, 5 (1915), 225-279. An English translation from the French (with the same minor errors) is available in: N.A. Newman, *The Early Muslim-Christian Dialogue: a Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries*, Hatfield: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute 1993, 24-28. For a German translation see: Suermann, "Orientalische Christen und der Islam. Christliche Texte aus der Zeit von 632-750", *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 67 (1983), 120-36, 122-125.

Little imagination is needed to realize how such an early Christian-Muslim debate could potentially be groundbreaking for our understanding of the evolution of Islam and of the development of the attitudes of Muslims and Christians toward each other. If this text is indeed from the 640s, as several scholars have argued, then the emir would have been in all likelihood a companion of Muḥammad and the questions that he posed to the Patriarch would have given us an insight into the thought world of Muslims at the very inception of Islam. We could compare its significance with a discovery of a papyrus from the year 45, in which one of the apostles of Jesus discusses his faith with a rabbi. Its importance would be enhanced even further if the apostle asked questions which do not reflect Christian doctrine of later times. Anyone would immediately recognize that if such a text were to be unearthed, it would have the potential to revolutionize our understanding of the evolution of Christianity. It would be a snapshot of a budding movement whose origins are largely obscured through the teleological perspective and de-historicizing normative character of later writings.

During the ninety years following its publication by François Nau, the *Debate between Patriarch John and an emir of the Mhaggrāyē* (henceforth: *Debate*) has indeed drawn the attention of a number of scholars, who have analyzed the text in the light of its potential reflection of a pre-classical form of Islam and of the roots of Christian-Muslim debate. Most famously, Crone and Cook discussed it in their provocative study *Hagarism*, in which they tried to reconstruct the ideological agenda behind the Arab conquests on the basis of contemporary writings of outsiders. One particular question in the *Debate*, where the emir is portrayed as accepting the Torah as the only authoritative Scripture, was used by the authors as evidence that the movement that became known as Islam was in origin closely related to the religion of the Samaritans.[3] Not only was this suggestion in itself rejected on the ground that the evidence for a Samaritan influence on early Islam is minimal,[4] there have also been scholars who claimed that the *Debate* cannot

[3] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977, 14-15.

[4] See Wansbrough's review of Hagarism in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41 (1978), 155-156.

have been written in the 640s to begin with.[5] In other words, the sensational idea that we have a very early Christian-Muslim debate at our disposal loses its force with the sober realization that this is in fact a later text. A survey of the different readings of the text will quickly reveal that, together with the critical question of its dating, there exists a range of ideas regarding its life setting, its integrity and the purpose of its author.

The aim of this paper is to re-evaluate the *Debate* in the hope that some new leads and new angles may be found that can help us to better contextualize it. For this purpose I have analyzed the ways in which the exchanges of words between the Patriarch and the emir are phrased, while comparing them to other relatively early Christian-Muslim debates. I will also discuss a number of studies devoted to the *Debate*, in order to understand what causes the modern interpretations to be so diverse. In this paper I will present the result of these overlapping segments of my investigation by discussing the questions and answers presented in the text, with a special focus on the final question, which as yet has not received the attention it needs. This will lead to a reconsideration of the dating of the text.

The most crucial discovery, which is still at the centre of research on the text today, is a passage in the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian which describes an encounter between Patriarch John and an emir. It was François Nau who drew attention to this passage in his publication of the *Debate*:

> "This emir Ibn Sa'd hated the Christians and it may be that he wanted to stop them calling Christ God; but whatever his motives may have been, he summoned by letter the patriarch John. The interview was a strange one; but the patriarch, helped by God's Grace, answered all the emir's devious questions. When the emir heard his spirited and fearless defence he said: 'Put that Gospel of yours into Arabic speech for me and do not change

[5] An early eighth century date is proposed in: G.J. Reinink, "The beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam", *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993), 165-187, 171-185; S.H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad, his Scripture and his Message according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the first Abbasid century", in: T. Fahd, ed. *La vie du Prophète Mahomet, Colloque de Strasbourg (octobre 1980)*, Paris: Press universitaires de France 1983, 99-146, 99; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it. A survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin Press 1997, 464 and cf. Y. D. Nevo and J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam. The origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*, Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 2003, p. 226, n. 63.

> anything except the word GOD, where it is applied to Christ, the word BAPTISM and the word CROSS. These words you are to omit.' The Spirit strengthened John to answer bravely: 'May Christ, my God, forbid that I should take away one jot or one title from my Gospel, even if I must be pierced by all the lances in your armoury. I would rather not write it at all.' Impressed by this spirited protest and by John's manly character, the emir told him to go and write as he wished. Then the patriarch sent for pious people of the Banū Tanūkh and from Aqūlō and selected those most fluent in both Arabic and Syriac and who knew how to translate words elegantly from one language into another. When they had, with great difficulty, interpreted the Gospel at his command and collated it repeatedly, they produced immediately a final version in elevated calligraphic style free from technical blemishes and most skilfully illuminated with (gold and silver) leaf. This they presented to the governor ʿAmr b. Saʿd."[6]

This glorious end to an encounter that began on a hostile note has occasionally been adduced to by modern scholars as proof of the first translation into Arabic of the Bible, but, more often than not, it is taken with a grain of salt, since nothing else is known about this Bible translation. The passage reads more like a defence against the Muslim accusation of *taḥrīf*, than as a reliable report on a joint translation project in early Islam. Especially the remark about omitting the words that are disliked by Muslims reminds us of the Emperor Leo III who, as a defence against the claim of Caliph Umar II, asserts that it is not the Christians who have corrupted the Scriptures, but rather the Muslims themselves: "whenever, for example, you come across the word Father, you replace it by Lord, or sometimes by God. If you are making your researches in the interests of truth, you ought to respect the Scriptures before citing them".[7] This allegation alludes to the Qur'anic verse in which Jesus says: "Lo, God is my

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[6] Andrew Palmer and Robert Hoyland, *The seventh century in the West-Syrian chronicles including two seventh-century Syriac apocalyptic texts*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 1993, 170, translated from: J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166-99)*, vol. 4, Paris: Leroux 1910, 421-422.

[7] Arthur Jeffery, "Ghevond's text of the Correspondance between ʿUmar II and Leo III", *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), 269-332, 299. This epistolary exchange, in its present form, cannot be from the pen of these two rulers. It probably represents a mixture of eighth and ninth century polemic. See Robert Hoyland, "The Correspondence of Leo III (717-41) and ʿUmar II (717-20)", *Aram* 6 (1994), 165-177.

Lord and your Lord" (Q 43:65), rather than "my Father and your Father, to my God and your God", as it is found in John 20:17.[8]

In the *Debate* there is no mention of a Bible translation – in fact there is only a superficial agreement between that text and Michael the Syrian's account. Both texts mention that the Patriarch was interrogated after the emir had summoned him by letter, and both texts mention that there were Christian Arabs present. These are the only points that the texts have in common. Because of the way in which Michael the Syrian describes the translated Bible as both faithful and beautiful, and the Patriarch as steadfast and heroic, it is difficult to believe that the author of the *Debate* found inspiration with this particular account for his own much more sober composition that constitutes the *Debate*.[9] It is possible, on the other hand, that the author of this section in Michael the Syrian's chronicle knew the *Debate* and used it as an occasion to tell his tale about the trustworthiness of the Arabic Bible. This we do not know; it is equally well possible that both texts go back to yet another description of the encounter, or a mere reference to an encounter in an older source. It is even possible that the *Debate* is a contemporary report while the passage in Michael the Syrian goes back to another, later, account. These different possibilities are worth drawing attention to, because, as Reinink has already argued, it could be that the author of the account in Michael the Syrian knew the *Debate*, identified the unnamed emir with ʿAmr, of whom he knew that he prohibited the display of the cross, and then inserted the story about the encounter after that story about the cross.[10] In that case, the question comes down to whether the author of Michael the Syrian's source was right; and we may ask ourselves whether there could not have been an encounter between Patriarch John and another emir. Obviously, one could also conclude that no encounter took place whatsoever, and that the *Debate* has no historical background. What is nevertheless almost certain is that the author of the *Debate* had Patriarch John Sedra in mind when he wrote the text. This can be determined on the basis of the members of the

[8] See David Thomas, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 29-38, 31 and 36 for Muslim translations of Gospel verses and the Lord's Prayer which contain such minor, but crucial, changes.

[9] Of course the author of the *Debate* could not have known it directly from Michael the Syrian's Chronicle; however, the section in question is believed to go back to the lost chronicle of Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē (d. 845) or an even older source.

[10] Reinink, "Beginnings", 174.

Patriarch's delegation, whose names are mentioned at the end.[11]

Patriarch John Sedra, who owes his name to the many liturgical poems (*sedrē*) that he wrote, was Patriarch of Antioch from the year 630 or 631 until his death in December 648[12]. The fact that the date of the event described in the *Debate* is given as Sunday the ninth of May was taken by Nau as a clue to the date of the text, since there were only three years during John Sedra's career as Patriarch when the ninth of May fell on a Sunday. For several reasons the year 644 is considered the most likely date, which could mean that the emir was ʿUmayr b Saʾd al-Anṣārī, who was governor of the district of Homs, until late 644, when with the accession of ʿUthmān, Muʿāwiya became governor of the whole of Syria.[13]

The *Debate* consists of only five scriptural and theological questions, followed by three demands from the emir and a final question about the laws of the Christians. The first question of the emir is whether the Gospel is one and the same with all Christians. The Patriarch mentions the many Christian nations that are spread all around the world but have the same holy book. The answer is reminiscent of the usual one given in Eastern Christian apologetic texts to the Muslim charge of Biblical falsification, *taḥrīf*. That charge can be said to be implicit in the question of the emir, but this and also some of the other questions are formulated in a rather neutral and succinct way, and, as we shall see further below, the interpretation of it depends on the way one reads the rest of the text.

The second question of the emir is why Christians differ in their faith if there is only one and the same Gospel. The answer is that this situation is comparable to situation of the Jews, Mhaggrāyē, Samaritans and Christians, who all believe in the Torah and yet have different faiths. Although this question alludes to Christian dividedness, the emir's question does not entail a critique to that intent. The third question contains the standard Muslim critique of Christianity. The emir asks whether Christ is God or not. The answer resembles the Nicean creed, which to the average Muslim polemicist has no value whatsoever, since it is not part of

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[11] See the references in *ibid.*, 172, n. 44.

[12] For his life and works, see Jouko Martikainen, *Johannes I. Sedra. Einleitung, syrische Texte, Übersetzung und vollständiges Wörterverzeichnis*, Wiesbaden; Harrassowitz 1991, 1-38.

[13] See: S.K. Samir, "Qui est l'interlocuteur musulman du patriarche syrien Jean III (631-48)?", in: *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984, Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen -- Oosterhesselen 10-12 September)*, H.J.W. Drijvers et al (eds.), Rome, 1987, 387-400.

revelation. Again, other apologetic texts would try to furnish the reader with a different set of arguments that may be used in debate with Muslims, but there is no further detail in our text.

The fourth question is who ruled the world when Christ was in the womb. This is a question that is also found in other Christian apologies vis-à-vis Islam and probably echoes a critical question with which Muslims indeed confronted Christians. The answer of the Patriarch comes in the form of an analogy with God coming down to Mount Sinai and speaking to Moses. The Patriarch says this is probably acceptable to the emir, because he accepts the Torah (or literally: 'Moses and his books'). In later Christian apologetic texts vis-à-vis Islam, such questions were answered with help of the Qur'an. Elias of Nisibis (d. 1049) for example, lists the different physical aspects and movements of God mentioned in the Qur'an as a defence against the accusation that he believes in a God who is constrained in one place.[14] In the *Debate* such argumentation is absent, because the whole notion of the existence of the Qur'an is absent.

What follows is a question about the faith of Abraham and Moses: 'how was their belief and their religion?' According to the Patriarch they were all Christians who packaged their message in such a way as to not confuse their simple-minded, idolatry-prone audience. They only referred to the mystery of the Trinity in a veiled manner, to make sure that they would not see the Trinity as multiple Gods. This answer is well-known as a central theme in Christian apologetics vis-à-vis the Jews.[15] From the Syriac dialogue of the Monk of Bet Ḥale, which was in all likelihood written in the early eighth century, we know that it was one of the themes of pre-Islamic Christian apologetics that was reapplied in Christian-Muslim debate early on.[16] There it remained popular as a means to justify Christian hermeneutics of the Old Testament. And as we can see for example with Patriarch Timothy in his debate with al-Mahdī, the same argumentation was employed to find references to the Trinity in the Qur'an. According to Patriarch Timothy, in the Qur'an, too, God spoke of the Trinity through veiled references, so as to prevent

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[14] E-K. Delly, *La Théologie d'Elie bar-Šénaya*. Etude et traduction de ses entretiens, Rome: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana de Propaganda Fide 1957, 75. Similar Qur'anic allusions can be found in Dionysius bar Ṣalībī's refutation of Islam, see: J. P. Amar, *Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī: A Response to the Arabs*, 2 vols, Louvain: Peeters, 2005: vol. 1, p. 36 (Syriac); vol. 2, pp. 34-35 (translation).

[15] C. Saldanha, *Divine pedagogy: a patristic view of non-Christian religions*, Rome: LAS 1984.

[16] MS Diyarbakir 95, fol. 5a. For this text, see Reinink's contribution to this volume.

the idolatrous Arabs from taking these as proof of the existence of multiple Gods.[17] It is at this point that the *Debate* betrays some signs of belonging to the literary genre of Christian-Muslim debate as we know it from many other examples. Not only do we have a rehearsal here of a very common way of defending Christianity by means of the concept of Divine pedagogy, we also have the emir's question being phrased in such a way as to suit the agenda of the author, who takes the opportunity to give the Christian view of salvation history in a nutshell. That this question reflects a historical connection between the movement of Islam and a messianic movement that closely identified itself with Abraham and Moses seems highly unlikely.

The emir then asks for real proof of the Divine nature of Christ. He wants to know them from reason and from the Torah. The answer given in our text is remarkable for two reasons: first of all, the proofs from reason are not given; second of all, the supposed proofs from the Torah are not spelled out in the text. Rather than having the Patriarch actually enumerate them, all that is said is that he gave numerous scriptural proofs. This is quite striking, because in most Christian-Muslim debates such answers are given in more detail, in order to provide the reader with ready-made answers to critical questions. By contrast, the reader of the *Debate* would not have been able to learn anything from this particular answer. When the emir then requests a prooftext specifically from the Torah, the Patriarch quotes Genesis 19:24 and shows the physical presence of these words in the Syriac Bible and in the Greek Bible. Again, little is explained here and one needs to go back to the work of Severus of Antioch in order to see the apologetic value of the verse, which reads: "Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven".[18] Severus presents it as proof of the fact that the One Divine essence has different persons. The verse mentions two Lords, but the point is not to prove that there are two Lords. Severus' point is that those two Lords are necessarily the One God, since no one else can be called Lord.[19] The quote is part of a larger discourse containing more Scriptural proofs.

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[17] A. Mingana, "The apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph al-Mahdi", *Woodbrooke Studies 2*, Cambridge: Heffer 1928, 1-162, 139-140 (Syriac), pp. 67-68 (translation). For this particular theme, see also the contribution of Heimgartner to this volume.

[18] François Nau already drew attention to the fact that this verse was quoted in the 70th Homily of Severus of Antioch: Nau, "Un colloque", 260, n. 2.

[19] Another case where this verse in used in a Christian-Muslim Debate is in correspondence between the Emperor Leo III and the Caliph 'Umar II (see above, n. 7), but there it is presented together with a clear explanation: Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 300.

In the *Debate*, however, the emir's question remains more or less unanswered; all we hear is that he could see the passage with his own eyes and that he called in a Jew to verify it. The latter – stereotypically – does not know precisely whether it is right; in other words, he is presented as living proof of the earlier claim that the Jews are too immature to appreciate the proofs of Christ's divinity in the Old Testament.

The last question takes a more practical turn. It is a question "concerning the Laws of the Christians which and how they are; whether they are in the Gospel or not". The question is followed by an indication that the emir wants to come to an arrangement with the Patriarch, for he asks: "show me either that your laws are written in the Gospel and that you act according to them, or that you submit to the 'Law of the Mhaggrā'[20]".

There is one dissonant element in this part of the *Debate*. The emir brings up one practical example in his question about the laws of the Christians:

> 'When a man dies, and leaves sons or daughters, and a wife and a mother and a sister and a paternal first cousin; how does one properly divide his property amongst them?' The Patriarch then answers that 'the divine Gospel instructs and imposes heavenly doctrine and the life-giving regulations, that it curses all sins and wickedness, that it teaches excellence and righteousness' [...] and that 'we Christians have laws, which are just and straight, which agree with the teaching and the commandments of the Gospel and the canons of the Apostles, and the laws of the Church'.[21]

At this point the meeting is dismissed. That is why the discussion seems strangely open-ended. This is why Hoyland called the text "in many ways untraditional", since there is no triumph for the Christians at the end. One could argue that the text is therefore not an example of Christian-Muslim disputation that is formulated with the aim of teaching Christians how to answer Islamic challenges to their faith.

Hoyland also repeats the assertion made by Crone and Cook that the example of the division of an inheritance is probably given because the Qur'an is quite

[20] The term is given in singular here: The 'law of the Muhājir/Hagarene'; this was noted by Crone and Cook, who thought it could be a sign that this passage is a later addition: Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 168, n. 20.

[21] Nau, "Un colloque", 251-252.

elaborate in its commandments regarding this issue.[22] In other words, they do not think that the topic was randomly chosen. The idea that the contents of the Qur'an play a role in the *Debate* would then obviously affect our view of the possible date of the text, since it is untenable that Christians in the Near East had extensive knowledge of the text of the Qur'an in the 640s. Crone and Cook saw this final topic as "uncharacteristically dislocated" and thus rescued the rest of the text as a seventh-century document.[23]

Although doubts have been voiced about the date of the text, there is no disagreement among scholars who have worked on the *Debate* that this final question is in fact an allusion to the Qur'an, because the Qur'an sets out these regulations in clearer terms than the Bible or Christian law books. It needs to be stressed, however, that the great detail with which a number of Qur'anic verses set out the regulations for inheritance is rather deceptive. A quick glance at Q 4:12 can give the impression that this verse is detailed enough to be applied as a law. As it turns out, this is far from the truth. Inheritance law in Islam is remarkably complicated and notoriously problematic.[24] Its genesis and the causes behind its complexities have as yet not been fully elucidated. Before discussing further what the function of the particular question in the *Debate* could be, it is vital to summarize what the issues surrounding inheritance law in Islam are.

There are several verses in different chapters of the Qur'an which deal with bequests and inheritance. As is the case with most legal issues about which the Qur'an contains conflicting verses, it has been a challenging task for specialists in Islamic law – i.e. both Muslim scholars throughout history and modern historians of Islam – to determine which verses make part of the early phase

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[22] Reinink, similarly, believes this topic may have been chosen because it is contained in the Qur'an, in other words: in the One Holy Book. This then gives the Patriarch the occasion to make once again the point that all Christian laws can be traced back to the Gospel: Reinink, "Beginnings", 180-181.

[23] Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 168, n. 20, and see above, n. 20. Cook again refers to the text as a "dialogue of 644" in his "The Origins of *Kalām*", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1981), 32-43, 61. Harald Suermann, who stresses that the text resembles the content and tenor of seventh-century interreligious texts, also presumes that this question could be a later addition: Suermann, "The Old Testament and the Jews in the dialogue between the Jacobite Patriarch John I and ʿUmayr ibn Saʾd al-Anṣārī", *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 3 (forthcoming).

[24] Not only its rules are complicated, but also its calculations. It is interesting to note that one of the most famous mathematicians of all times, al-Khwārizmī, who worked under the early Abbasids, devoted much of his time to the question of how to calculate the shares of inheritances. Half of his book on algebra deals with this. See: J.L. Berggren, *Episodes in the Mathematics of Medieval Islam*, New York etc: Springer, 2003, 6-8, 63-65.

of Muḥammad's mission and which came later.[25] According to the traditional Muslim understanding of the order of revelation, the first verses concerning inheritance were those which balanced off the interests of family members with the community of emigrants in Medina, whose ties with their relatives in Mecca had been cut off and who were therefore dependent on the 'helpers'. These verses were Q 8:75 and Q 33:6. In a subsequent phase in Medina, the verses Q 2:180-182 summoned the believers – in rather general terms – to make bequests for parents and relatives, not to change them, and not to fight over them. These were followed by similarly unspecific verses, Q 2:240 and Q 5:106-107, which deal with provisions for widows and the importance of inviting witnesses when one makes one's will. None of these verses set a standard for the precise division of property. More specific guidelines to that intent, which can be found in chapter 4 of the Qur'an (*sūrat al-nisāʾ*), came in a later phase. After it was determined in Q 4:7 that men and women are both entitled to inherit, Q 4:11-12 specified what their portions should be: "to the male a portion equal to that of two females: if only daughters, two or more, their share is two-thirds of the inheritance, if only one, her share is half. For parents, a sixth share of the inheritance to each, if the deceased left children; if no children..." and so on. To this list of injunctions, yet another verse was added: Q 4:176. This verse contradicts Q 4:12. Whereas in the latter it is stated that in case a man or woman left only one or more brothers and sisters, these brothers and sisters would inherit one third of the estate in total, Q 4:176 stipulated that brothers and sisters could inherit as much as one half or even the whole estate. The resulting conflict was solved by the Qur'an commentators who claimed there was a difference here between on the one hand uterine and on the other hand consanguine and/or germane siblings, and that Q 4:176 had priority over Q 4:12 because it was revealed later.

The system, at this point, was not complete. Two crucial regulations were added in the form of sayings of the Prophet. First of all, in a well-known prophetic dictum "no bequest beyond one third", it was determined that one cannot make a bequest that exceeds one third of one's property. Moreover, it was stipulated that one cannot include in one's will those family members who automatically receive a share on the basis of the various verses from Q 4. "No bequest to an

[25] There is a wealth of literature on the topic. The summary in this paper is based on D.S. Powers, art. "Inheritance", in: J.D. McAuliffe, ed. *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, 6 vols, Leiden: Brill, 2001-2006, vol. 2, 518-526.

heir" became another crucial saying of the Prophet.

In the first century of Islam the first legal scholars began to work out this system in detail. One of the central questions was what to do if the shares determined by the inheritance verses of Q 4 did not cover the entire property. In those verses the shares of the daughters, parents, spouse and siblings are established. Scholars determined that the remaining part goes to the nearest male relative (exclusively those who are related through the male blood-line, i.e. the agnates, or so-called *ʿaṣaba*). At the same time, it could also happen that if one added up all the shares of the family members according to the verses of Q 4, one would arrive at a total that exceeded one hundred percent. This had to be solved by reducing all the shares proportionally. The solution is attributed to the Caliph ʿUmar, or alternatively Zayd ibn Thābit or ʿAlī. It was not accepted by all Muslim scholars, however, since "although this procedure, known as *ʿawl* or proportional reduction solved a mathematical problem, it created a hermeneutic problem, for the result of reducing the share of each heir on a proportional basis is that no heir receives the exact fractional share specified in the Qur'ān".[26]

In other words, although serious efforts were made by the legal theorists of Islam to harmonize the rules that originated in different periods of early Islam, there was no uniform solution that could find unanimous approval. The objection to *ʿawl* was on pious grounds. There were also serious objections on practical grounds to the system of inheritance of 'sharers' and 'agnates'. Any inheritance arranged in this way meant that property almost always became fragmented. For this reason, Muslim legal scholars decided to allow people to decide on other arrangements during their lifetime, for example by creating family endowments, declaring fictional debts to family members that could be subtracted from the estate at the time of death, or simply by making donations.

This is only a brief summary of what in Islam is called 'half of all knowledge', and it is only summarizing the traditional Muslim understanding of its evolution, which traces back these regulations to specific events in the Prophet's life. Modern scholars doubt the historicity of these specific 'occasions of revelation', but they do not doubt that Islamic came into being over a long period of time. In fact, they argue that the evolution of Islamic law was much slower and that the solutions to legal problems in eighth and ninth century Muslim society were often

[26] Powers, "Inheritance", p. 523.

projected back onto the life and times of the founder of Islam.[27] Nevertheless, this view on the genesis of the Sharī'a also works on the presumption that the laws on inheritance evolved gradually in response to changing situations. If this were not the case, then it cannot be explained why the Qur'anic verses and the relevant *ḥadīths* are so different in content.

There are some striking aspects of inheritance law in Islam that could be relevant for our understanding of the *Debate*. First of all, it should be clear that the system was anything but watertight; the Qur'an needed to be supplemented with other authoritative sources (notably *ḥadīth*) and hermeneutical *tours-de-force* (such as the system of *'awl*) in order to make it manageable. It also turns out that it was a system that Muslims were often dissatisfied with, as can be noticed in cases where the rules are circumvented in order not to let one's assets become fragmented.

Despite these complexities and the internal Muslim discussions, Syriac-speaking Christians have consistently turned to Islamic inheritance law. They translated the laws into Syriac and inserted them into their own law books.[28] This phenomenon is undoubtedly the clearest case of Eastern Christian adoption of Islamic civilization. If it were not for the fact that some of the Syriac authors expressly identified these regulations as Islamic in their works, one would perhaps be more tempted to assume that the process of borrowing was the other way round. But for example the *Synodicon Orientale*, which includes several chapters on Muslim inheritance law, marks these rules specifically as those of the 'Ṭayyāyē'.[29] This interesting detail in the text proves that these laws were not fully integrated into the legal system of the Syriac-speaking communities; it remained a set of regulations besides existing laws.

It need not surprise us that the modern scholars who have noted this presence of Muslim laws among Christians in the Near-East have tried to understand the reasons for this partial adoption. Kaufhold, who has worked extensively on Syriac

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[27] Most famously: Joseph Schacht, *On the Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950.

[28] The most important study is Kaufhold, *Syrische Texte zum islamischen Recht. Das dem nestorianischen Katholikos Johannes V. bar Abgārē zugeschriebene Rechtsbuch*, München, 1971, and the further studies by the same author: "Islamisches Erbrecht in christlicher-syrischer Überlieferung", *Oriens Christianus 59* (1975), 19-35; "Über die Entstehung der syrischen Texte zum islamischen Recht", *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985), 54-72.

[29] Arthur Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, 2 vols, Louvain: Peeters, 1976, vol. 1, 64-81, 86-91 (Syriac), vol. 2, 68-86, 92-97.

texts containing Islamic laws of inheritance, has addressed the question with prudence. He drew attention to the simple explanation given in the East-Syrian Arabic encyclopaedic work *Kitāb al-Majdal*, in reference to a synod organized by Johannan bar Abgārē, Catholicos between the years 900-905. The Catholicos set down rules about inheritance that resembled those of the Muslims. The reason for this was "because we live under them and out of fear for them".[30] This is not much of explanation, as Kaufhold already noted, since in principle Christians, and other *dhimmīs*, living under Muslim rule had judicial autonomy, as long as their legal cases did not involve Muslims. He draws attention to the fact that some Caliphs did not respect this autonomy, but he does not go as far as concluding that this was a major factor in the decision of Christians to borrow the Muslim laws. Was it perhaps because the Christians had a variety of law books and needed more uniformity? This is not convincing either, Kaufhold asserts, because the Church leaders could just as well have designated one of their own sources of law as authoritative.[31] He also asks the most obvious question: is it possible that it was to prevent Christians from going to Muslim courts? After all, when family members had a conflict about a legacy, they would not get a benefit from going to a Muslim court, if the same laws were to be applied in their own community. Kaufhold is not convinced that there would have been many Christians bringing their cases to Muslim courts. Before being able to do that, all family members would have to agree on that step. This he finds very improbable, since at least one party would always be worse off by switching to the Islamic system.[32] However, to my mind, this theory is pointing in the right direction. One did not need to convince all of one's family members to make that switch. Instead, one could provoke it by converting to Islam. In a brief but valuable presentation of the issue in his famous study of *dhimmah* regulations, Fattal demonstrates that this is not purely hypothetical.[33] First of all, the principle that was held by the four Muslim schools of law that a Muslim could not inherit from a non-Muslim (and vice-versa) was challenged by a number of Sunnī scholars. Moreover, Shi'īs decided that when

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[30] Kaufhold, "Syrische Texte", p. 33; on p. 34 the author notes that the passage in question does not show whether this is an explanation of the Catholicos or of the twelfth century author describing the events.

[31] Kaufhold, "Syrische Texte", p. 35.

[32] Kaufhold, "Syrische Texte", p. 34.

[33] Antoine Fattal, *Le Statut légal des non-Musulmans en Pays d'Islam*, Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique 1958, 137-142.

a non-Muslim dies, who has only one Muslim among his family members, the Muslim will be the one who inherits everything.[34] Whereas the consequences of the latter extreme position would not be solved by applying Muslim law amongst Christians (because the rest of the family in any case would still miss out on their shares), in times and places where the rule that Muslims could not inherit from non-Muslims was not enforced, the decision of the Church to adopt Muslim law makes perfect sense. That is because a person could convert, in order to receive a larger share as a result. One can think, for example, of the Qur'anic rule: "to the male, a portion equal to that of two females". A Christian could also go and inquire with Muslim jurists what one's share would be after conversion and use this to put pressure on one's family. The fact that the Islamic legal manuals discuss whether *dhimmīs* can receive an inheritance from a Muslim if they convert to Islam after this Muslim dies, tells us clearly that conversions for financial gain did occur.[35] Although the latter problem cannot be solved by applying Muslim regulations in the Church, in the case of the attempts to get a larger share, the application of Muslim laws by Christians is indeed a solution. It takes away the advantage of making the step to Islam.

The question is how the two issues discussed above – the complex development of Islamic inheritance law and the use of it among Syriac-speaking Christians – tie in with the *Debate*. There are two questions that we need to address. *If* there is a connection between these points and the inclusion of the last question of the emir in the *Debate*, then we may ask what the purpose of the emir's question is and what this means for our dating and understanding of the text. First of all, I would like to draw attention to two possible covert apologetic twists to the reply of the Patriarch. In answering the emir's question of how Christians divide an inheritance, the Patriarch stresses that the Holy Gospel "teaches and imposes heavenly teachings and life-giving commandments" and that "it rejects sins and evils and teaches by itself virtue and righteousness" and that "the Christians have laws that are just and right and in agreement with the teachings and commandments of the Gospel and the Canons of the Apostles and the Laws of the Church". Reinink's interpretation of this passage focuses on the fact that the agreement of the Christian Laws with the Gospel is being emphasized: even though they may not be contained in one Scripture, their source and their spirit

[34] Fattal, *Le statut légal*, p. 138.

[35] Fattal, *Le statut légal*, p. 137.

is the same. This is certainly a dominant element in the Patriarch's answer. The answer is meant as a parallel then, according to Reinink, to the laws of Islam which are not equal to, but in any case are rooted in the Torah.[36] I doubt whether this is the precise point made here, since the Muslim laws of inheritance do not resemble the 'Old Law', and therefore the example would not have been very convincing. In that case one would rather expect the typical examples of the *lex talionis* or circumcision. It is more likely that the author has wanted to show the superiority of the Christian laws by drawing attention to Muslim laws that, as we have seen above, are remarkably complicated and of which, moreover, some crucial principles are not to be found in the Qur'an but only in the sayings of the Prophet and the early Caliphs.[37] Especially the way in which the question of the emir is phrased, seems to allude to this. Rather than simply asking what the inheritance rules are among the Christians, he gives a list of hypothetical family members: "When a man dies, and leaves sons or daughters, and a wife and a mother and a sister and a (paternal first) cousin; how does one properly divide his property amongst them?". The fact of the matter is that the cousin is not one of the 'sharers' mentioned in Q 4:12, but rather a relative in the category of *ʿaṣaba*. This means that in order to solve the emir's puzzle, one has to seek recourse to principles that are extra-Qur'anic. We may also note the Patriarch's description of his Laws as *trīṣīn*, which means 'right' in the sense of 'upright' and 'orthodox' but also 'straight' and 'straightforward'; the latter two connotations reveal the contrast with Muslims laws on inheritance, which no one could realistically call 'straightforward'.

This brings us to the second, even more dominant, aspect of the Patriarch's answer, i.e. the *justice* of the laws of the Christians, which teach *virtue* and *righteousness*. Obviously, what is perceived as unjust or unethical often stands out in religious polemics as an important ground on which to reject another religion. For example, in early Christian anti-Muslim polemic polygamy and divorce are frequently criticized 'unethical' aspects of Islam. In the case of the *Debate*, it is less obvious why a question about inheritance should provoke a description of Christian laws as *just*. One possibility is that it has to do with the inequality of the shares between men and women. This would probably seem a modern feminist reading of the *Debate*, if it were not for the presence of this point of criticism in

[36] Reinink, "Beginnings", p. 181.

[37] For example, the regulations that limit bequests and the principle of *ʿawl*, mentioned above.

another Eastern Christian text dealing with Islam. The Arabic *Apocalypse of Peter*, also known as the *Book of the Rolls*, is a voluminous text that, at least from the late ninth century onwards, circulated in different recensions among Miaphysite Christians. In one recension the theme of inheritance appears in the middle of a venomous piece of anti-Muslim polemic, which Christ allegedly proclaimed to the apostle Peter:

> "Know, O Peter, that the one-eyed Son of Perdition will depart from the straight path and command frequent marriages and make female and male slaves lawful [to marry] and allow men to marry the wives of their brother [...] and *he will treat the children unjustly with his law and let the males inherit more than the females* and he will agree the marriage between sisters and most of the followers of the one-eyed will depart from the straight path and deny their children."[38]

By means of this passage we can determine that at least one specific element of Islamic inheritance law was considered unjust by the Christians who were familiar with it: the unequal share of men and women. With this example in mind, the end of the *Debate* seems to make more sense: the readers who would have known about these peculiarities of Islamic law would have understood why the Patriarch's answer, which focused on Christian justice, was a logical reply to the emir's question – a question that was undoubtedly framed by the author precisely to make this point.

It is in all likelihood the last question of the emir in particular which made several scholars conclude that the text truly reflects the first phase of negotiations between the conquerors and the conquered. Fritsch already suggested that the primary goal of the emir would have been the forging of political alliances.[39] Similarly, Hoyland, although he does not assign the text as a whole to the seventh century, believes that the question whether Christians can govern themselves is the implicit agenda of the emir.[40] Nevo and Koren also focused on the political

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[38] Translated from MS Par. Ar. 76, fol. 68b; in slightly different wording it is also to be found in A. Mingana, "The Apocalypse of Peter", in: Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni, edited and translated with a critical apparatus*, Cambridge: Heffer, 1927-1934, vol. 3, pp. 93-449, p. 322 [facsimile of a Karshuni manuscript] Mingana's translation on p. 253 is very imprecise.

[39] Erdmann Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter. Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache*, Breslau: Müller & Seiffert, 1930, 1.

[40] Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 462.

dimension of the text and claimed that the fact that legal procedures are being negotiated, with an emphasis on the autonomy of the Christians, fits "within a few years of the establishment of a central authority over al-Šām – within the first few years of Muʿāwiya's taking control with the official title of governor."[41] They interpret the statements regarding Christian unity and solidarity as something that suits both the new rulers and the Christian communities; the former on practical grounds, the latter in order to prevent creating the impression that the Christians were too divided to enjoy some sort of judicial autonomy.[42] Even though they make part of a wider discourse that is founded on a rather dubious positivistic methodology, the comments of Nevo and Koren in themselves make sense. Such an exchange of words – a negotiation more than a religious disputation – fits in the period immediately after the collapse of Byzantine rule. The fact that it is the Patriarch of Antioch who is being approached by the new rulers and that he gets a chance to speak on behalf of all Christians, does not need to be a fiction either, considering the fact that this would have taken place just after the collapse of Byzantine rule in Syria. Even the fact that the Chalcedonians are portrayed as praying for the Patriarch could well be part of an attempt of the Miaphysites to attract more followers and increase their sphere of influence after the collapse of state support for the Chalcedonians. The fact that the text contains these propagandistic and apologetic elements does not mean that it cannot be contemporary to the events.

However, the subtle polemical points in the final question of the *Debate*, which I have discussed above, are hard to overlook. They form a compelling reason not to date the text to the seventh century. It is unimaginable that this issue, which came up among the Syriac-speaking Christians in the late ninth century when they felt pressured by Islamic culture and domination to adapt their own laws, would have been of any relevance in the year 644.[43] Moreover, it is not even possible that the Qur'anic inheritance system was so distinctive in 644 that the difference between Christian laws and the Muslim system was conspicuous to the

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[41] Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 226-227.

[42] Reinink also believes that there is a strong emphasis on the need for Christian unity in the text, but to him this means that the text was written at a later date when the permanent challenge of Islam had become clear: Reinink, "Beginning", 181-185.

[43] In his search for the earliest sign of Christians borrowing these laws, Kaufhold considers Yoḥannan bar Abgare the first clear case, but there could be some echoes in earlier works. See Kaufhold, *Syrische Texte*, p. 33.

extent that it needed to be brought up in a contemporary debate. Of course we are incapable of determining precisely what the regulations among the Muslims would have been at the time. There is no scholarly consensus on the state of Islamic law at the time; some will describe it as a derivative of Talmudic law, others as midway between Near Eastern offshoots of Roman law and Arabian tribal Law, and again, some others as a mixture of Qur'anic law and Arabian tribal law. One could of course claim that, even if Islamic law evolved from a variety of different systems, this does not mean that there were no clear guidelines in the nascent Muslim community as to how divide an estate. However, if this were the case, it is inexplicable why so many difficulties developed later, which meant that Muslim scholars needed more than a century and a half to formulate a more or less full-blown system that had consistent answers to all intricate family situations.

At this point it should be clear that I cannot subscribe to the scholars who have assigned the text to the seventh century. At least the final question is closer in time to the production of the manuscript, the year 874, than to the lifetime of Patriarch John Sedra. Crone and Cook, as I indicated above, assumed that the final question did not originally belong to the text. The question is what there is left, if one puts that question in parentheses. The rest of the text, as we have seen, is hard to characterize. It hints at *dhimmah* negotiations and contains Christian, and also specifically West-Syrian, apologetics in a rather primitive form. The text does not show clearly how one can answer the critical questions of Muslims. Most of the issues that appear in Muslim-Christian debates of the eighth and ninth centuries are lacking. There is no hint at 'God's Word and His Spirit', the Qur'anic quasi-quote that played such a prominent role in Christian-Muslim debates. There is no mention of the direction of prayer, veneration of icons and of the cross, circumcision, abrogation, Muḥammad's prophethood, polygamy and divorce, or the miracles of Christ and Muḥammad. In this respect the *Debate* is distinct from the many literary Muslim-Christian debates that have come down to us from the eighth century onwards, which do bring up all these burning issues and teach its readers how to respond to critical questions. If larger part of the *Debate* were composed in the 640s, or at some later point in the seventh century, then that fact could explain the difference between our text and the famous Christian-Muslim debates that do treat all these topics. Be this as it may, the question on inheritance makes it highly unlikely that the text as a whole was written in the aftermath of the Islamic conquest of Syria.

Die Disputatio des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos (780-823) mit dem Kalifen al-Mahdī

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Einleitung

Vom reichen literarischen Schaffen des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos sind ein Rechtsbuch und 59 Briefe erhalten. Ediert liegen das Rechtsbuch[1] und 45 Briefe[2] vor. Erstaunlicherweise war bislang einer der interessantesten Briefe, nämlich Brief 59, die so genannte *Disputatio* oder *Apologie* syrisch nicht eigentlich ediert. Bei diesem Text handelt es sich um ein Religionsgespräch, das Timotheos im Jahre 782/83 in Bagdad mit dem Kalifen al-Mahdī (775–785) in arabischer Sprache geführt und anschließend in einem Brief an seinen

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[1] *Syrische Rechtsbücher. Zweiter Band: Richterliche Urteile des Patriarchen Chenânîschô. Gesetzbuch des Patriarchen Timotheos. Gesetzbuch des Patriarchen Jesubarnun. Aus der römischen Handschrift herausgegeben und übersetzt von Eduard Sachau*, Berlin: G. Reimer 1908, 53-117. Zu Auszügen, Referaten oder Erwähnungen anderer Briefe bei Timotheos selbst sowie bei verschiedenen späteren Autoren vgl. Raphaël J. Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothée I. Étude critique avec en appendice La lettre de Timothée I aux moines du Couvent de Mār Mārōn (traduction latine et texte chaldéen)*, (StT 187) Città del Vaticano: Bibl. Apost. Vaticana 1956, 44 50.

[2] Briefe 1-39: *Timothei Patriarchae I Epistulae I.* Edidit Oscar Braun, (Scriptores Syri, Textus, 2, 67) Paris: J. Gabalda 1914. *Timothei Patriarchae I Epistulae I. Interpretatus est Oscar Braun*, (Scriptores Syri, Versio, 2,67), Roma: de Luigi/Paris: J. Gabalda 1915 (nachgedruckt als CSCO 74, Scriptores Syri 30, 1953). Brief 40: Hanna P. J. Cheikho, *Dialectique de la langage sur dieu. Lettre de Timothée I (728 823) à Serge. Étude, traduction et édition critique*, Roma: Pontificia Universitas S. Thomae De Urbe 1983. Brief 41: Bidawid, *Lettres*, א–ס (syr. Text) und 91–125 (lat. Übersetzung). Brief 43: Oskar Braun, "Briefe des Katholikos Timotheos I", *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), 1 32, ebenso Henri Pognon, *Une version syriaque des Aphorismes d'Hippocrate*, Leipzig: Hinrichs 1903, XVI-VIII/ XVIII-X. Brief 47: Oskar Braun, "Ein Brief des Katholikos Timotheos I über biblische Studien des 9. Jahrhunderts", *Oriens Christianus* 1 (1901), 299-313. Brief 48: Pognon, "Version XXI-XII/XXII-XV. Brief 50: Oskar Braun, "Zwei Synoden des Katholikos Timotheos I", *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), 283-311.

Freund Sergios in syrischer Sprache in Form eines Gedächtnisprotokolls[3] wiedergegeben hat. Wer etwa den vierten Band von Herders *Geschichte* des Christentums konsultiert,[4] wird auf die Editionen von Putman und Caspar verwiesen,[5] und in der Tat verspricht Putmans Edition im Untertitel, eine nouvelle édition et traduction du dialogue entre Timothée et Al-Mahdi zu enthalten. Dabei handelt es sich aber nur um spätere, stark bearbeitende arabische Rezensionen der *Disputatio*. Hier werden arabische Kurzrezensionen irrtümlich zum Normtext.

Der ursprüngliche, syrische Text war bisher allerdings nicht unbekannt. Alphonse Mingana publizierte ihn 1928,[6] aber nur als Faksimile einer kurz vor 1900 entstandenen Handschrift, die heute in Birmingham aufbewahrt wird.[7] Das hat den Nachteil, dass unleserliche oder unverständliche Stellen nicht diskutiert werden. In Minganas englischer Übersetzung sind Problemstellen öfter ohne weitere Kennzeichnung einfach ausgelassen, einmal fehlt eine halbe Spalte des Manuskripts.[8]

In meiner Habilitationsschrift, eingereicht im Januar 2006 in Halle, habe ich den syrischen Text kritisch ediert, eine deutsche Übersetzung mit Anmerkungen sowie eine Einleitung beigefügt.[9] Ich habe zuerst mit der Birminghamer

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3 Den Ausdruck "Gedächtnisprotokoll" verwendet auch Josef van Ess (*Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 Bände, Berlin: De Gruyter 1991-1997) für die Disputation (Bd. 3,22).

4 Gérard Troupeau, "Kirchen und Christen im muslimischen Orient", in: Gilbert Dagon, Pierre Riché, André Vauchuz (Hrsg.), *Bischöfe, Mönche und Kaiser (642 1054). Deutsche Ausgabe bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Egon Boshof* (Die Geschichte des Christentums 4), Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder 1994, 391-472, 467 Anm. 127.

5 Hans Putman, *L Église et l'Islam sous Timothée I (780-823). Étude sur l'Église nestorienne au temps des premiers 'Abbāsides avec nouvelle édition et traduction du dialogue entre Timothée et Al-Mahdi*, (RILOB B 3) Beirut: Dar El-Machreq 1975. Robert Caspar, "Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le Catholicos Timothée I et le Calife Al-Mahdî (II^{e}/VIII^{e} siècle) 'Mohammed a suivi la voie des prophètes'", *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977) 107–175.

6 Alphonse Mingana, *Woodbroke Studies. Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni, Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus by A. Mingana, with two introductions by Rendel Harris. Volume 2: 1. Timothy's Apology for Christianity, 2. The Lament of the Virgin, 3. The Martyrdom of Pilate. Reprinted from the "Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Volume 12, 1928*, Cambridge: W. Heffer 1928.

7 Nämlich Mingana 17, vgl. dazu Alphonse Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts now in the Possession of the Woodbroke Settlement, Selly Oak, Birmingham. Vol. I: Syriac and Garshūni Manuscripts*, Cambridge: W. Heffer 1933, 53.

8 Die Lücke entspricht *Codex Mingana* 17, 121a Zeilen 2–11.

9 Martin Heimgartner, *Die Disputation des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos (780–823) mit dem Kalifen al-Mahdī. Einleitung, Textedition, Übersetzung und Anmerkungen, eingereicht als Habilitationsschrift an der Theologischen Fakultät der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg* [noch ungedruckt]. Ich zitiere in diesem Aufsatz meine Übersetzung mit meiner eigenen Paragrapheneinteilung und füge jeweils die betreffende Spalte der Handschrift Mingana 17 (in Mingana, *Apology*) bei.

Handschrift gearbeitet. Sie ist im großen Ganzen sehr gut lesbar. Mingana hat sie 1925 auf einer Reise in den Nordirak erworben[10] und dabei die Abschrift, wie er versichert, nochmals mit deren Vorlage verglichen und korrigiert.[11] Bei dieser Vorlage der Birminghamer Handschrift wie auch anderer Abschriften im Westen handelt es sich um eine Papierhandschrift wohl des 13. oder 14. Jahrhunderts, die sich damals im Kloster Deir-as-Sayyida nordöstlich von Alqosh befand[12] und heute in der Bibliothek des Chaldäischen Klosters in Bagdad liegt.[13] Martin Aeschbacher, dem jetzigen Chef des Schweizerischen Verbindungsbüros in Bagdad, habe ich es zu verdanken, dass ich Fotos der Bagdader Handschrift erhielt, die seine Gattin, Elisabeth Horem, gemacht hat.[14] Der Gewinn dieser Handschrift ist als beträchtlich einzustufen. Es zeigt sich, dass dem Schreiber der Birminghamer Abschrift immer wieder einzelne Wörter, manchmal auch ganze Zeilen entgangen sind. Sätze, bei denen ich bisher zu Konjekturen greifen musste, lassen sich nun übersetzen. Wenn Mingana schreibt: "*The reader has therefore every reason to rely on the accuracy of the text,*"[15] so ist das ein wenig übertrieben.

Bei der *Disputatio* handelt es sich um einen theologischen Traktat in Dialogform, der durch einen Rahmen als Brief eingekleidet ist.[16] Sie dürfte kein

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[10] The majority of the MSS. were collected in the autumn of 1925 in the course of a journey that I was able to undertake in Kurdistan and Upper Mesopotamia, through the generosity of Mr. Edward Cadbury. (Mingana, *Catalogue*, v)

[11] Mingana, *Apology*, 15.

[12] Nummer 169 nach dem Katalog von Jacques-Marie Vosté ("Catalogue de la bibliothèque syro-chaldéenne du couvent de Notre-Dame des Semences près d'Alqoš (Iraq), *Angelicum* 5 (1928), 3-36; 161-194; 325-358;481-498, dort 187-190), zuvor Nr. 90 nach dem Katalog von Addai Scher ("Notice sur les manuscrits conservés dans la bibliothèque du couvent des Chaldéens de Notre-Dame-des-Semences", *Journal asiatique* 10/7 (1906), 479-512 und 10/8 (1906), 55-82, dort 55 -58). "L écriture paraît être antérieure au XIVe siècle". (Scher, "Notice", 58) Der jüngste darin enthaltene Text scheint vom Jahr 1238 zu sein (Bidawid, *Lettres*, 13).

[13] Unter der Nummer 509, vgl. dazu P. Haddad und J. Isaac, *Syriac and Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the Chaldean Monastery Baghdad* (syrischer und arabischer Paralleltitel), Vol. I, Baghdad 1988, 224-229.

[14] Sie berichtet darüber in ihrem Buch: Elisabeth Horem, *Shrapnels. En marge de Bagdad*, Orbe (Suisse): Bernard Campiche Editeur 2005, 80f.

[15] Mingana, *Apology*, 15.

[16] Thomas R. Hurst spricht von "epistle-treatise" im Titel seines Aufsatzes: "The Epistle-Treatise: an Apologetic Vehicle. Letter 34 of Timothy I", in: Han J. W. Drijvers et al. (Hrsg.), "IV Symposium Syriacum 1984. Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen Osterhesselen 10-12 September)", (OCA 229) Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium 1987, 367-382, dort 367.

Gelegenheitsbrief sein; vielmehr ist sie wohl bereits bei ihrer Abfassung für einen größeren Adressatenkreis gedacht.[17] Die drei wichtigsten kontroversen Themen in der *Disputatio* des Timotheos sind die Trinität und die Gottessohnschaft sowie die Bedeutung Mohammeds und die Frage nach der heilsgeschichtlichen Kontinuität zwischen Christentum und Islam. Daneben sind kleinere Exkurse zu Themen eingefügt wie etwa der Beschneidung oder der Gebetsrichtung. Ich wende mich zuerst der Frage nach der heilsgeschichtlichen Kontinuität zwischen Christentum und Islam zu. Dann betrachten wir, wie sich kreuzweise Timotheos als Koranexeget und Kalif al-Mahdī als Bibelexeget betätigen. Schließlich wenden wir uns der Frage zu, ob es sich bei der *Disputatio* um eine literarische Fiktion handle oder ob das geschilderte Gespräch tatsächlich stattgefunden hat.

1. Timotheos und die Frage nach der heilsgeschichtlichen Kontinuität zwischen Christentum und Islam

Religionsgeschichtliche Voraussetzung für jegliche Auseinandersetzung zwischen Christentum und Islam ist, dass der Islam in einer ähnlichen historischen Stellung zum Christentum steht wie das Christentum seinerseits zum Judentum. Mohammed war davon überzeugt, dass er als Prophet den Arabern nichts anderes verkünde, als was durch die vorangegangenen Propheten der jüdisch-christlichen Tradition in anderen Sprachen an Juden und Christen verkündet worden war, nämlich die Botschaft vom einen, einzigen Gott. Mohammed anerkennt dementsprechend auch die vorangegangenen Propheten bis zu Jesus Christus, auf den nun er selbst als letzter folgt. Judentum, Christentum und Islam stehen also in einer heilsgeschichtlichen Kontinuität. Es war daher eine gewaltige Enttäuschung für Mohammed, dass sowohl Juden als auch Christen in Arabien seine Botschaft nicht anerkannten, sondern viel stärker die Differenzen betonten und sich von ihm distanzierten.

Die Christen, die diese Weiterentwicklung zum Islam nicht akzeptieren konnten, mussten also begründen, dass eine solche heilsgeschichtliche Kontinuität zwar vom Alten zum Neuen Testament bestehe, nicht aber vom Neuen Testament zum Koran. Zu den ersten Autoren, die sich von christlicher

[17] Darauf könnte die Erwähnung der "ganzen orthodoxen Kirche" in *disp.* 1,11 (Mingana 91b) hinweisen.

Seite dazu äußern, gehört Johannes von Damaskus im frühen 8. Jahrhundert.[18] Er stützt sich auf das Geflecht von Weissagung und Erfüllung. Mohammed sei kein Prophet, weil er, anders als Christus, in der Schrift nicht vorausgesagt worden sei. Dementsprechend betrachtet Johannes den Islam als eine Häresie.

Bei aller Plakativität trifft Johannes von Damaskus dennoch ein – wenn wir so sagen wollen – gewisses Strukturproblem, das aus christlicher Perspektive der Grundkonzeption des Islams eigen ist: Der Islam postuliert seine inhaltliche Kohärenz mit den vorangegangenen Offenbarungsreligionen resp. -schriften, im Koran selbst wird dies aber nicht systematisch ausgebaut, etwa mit einem Schema von Weissagung und Erfüllung, wie wir es im Neuen Testament zentral bei Matthäus finden. Der Islam hat sich anders als das Christentum nicht zu einer Zwei- oder gar Drei-Buch-Religion entwickelt, sodass also die vorangegangenen heiligen Schriften zwar anerkannt worden wären, aber in einem kritischen Dialog mit der neuen und maßgebenden Offenbarungsschrift neu interpretiert. Die eingehende Diskussion um diese Kontinuität mit den vorausgegangenen Offenbarungsschriften findet erst außerhalb des Korans statt. Die *Disputatio* des Timotheos gibt zusammen mit islamischen Schriften seiner Zeit einen der frühesten Einblicke in ebendiese Diskussion.

Timotheos löst dieses Problem der Kontinuität auf andere Weise. Er versteht den Islam nicht als eine Weiterentwicklung aus dem Christentum, sondern als eine Zwischenstufe oder noch besser gesagt Nebenstufe der Entwicklung vom Judentum hin zum Christentum. Damit verbindet Timotheos die Hoffnung, den Kalifen und die Muslime für das Christentum gewinnen zu können.[19] Timotheos hielt zu seiner Zeit eine solche Wende offenbar noch für realistisch. Mit diesem Konzept spricht Timotheos dem Koran und dem Islam einen Offenbarungscharakter ab, gesteht ihnen aber gleichwohl ein relatives Recht zu. Dies zeigt sich sehr deutlich an drei

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[18] *De haeresibus* 100 (Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos, herausgegeben vom Byzantinischen Institut der Abtei Scheyern. Band IV: Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica. Besorgt von P. Bonifatius Kotter*, (PTS 22) Berlin: De Gruyter 1981, 60-67. Deutsche Übersetzung: Reinhold Glei und Adel Theodor Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, Schriften zum Islam. Kommentierte griechisch-deutsche Textausgabe*, (Corpus Islamo-Christianum Series Graeca 3) Würzburg/Altenberge: Cis-Verlag 1995, 75–83).

[19] So ganz deutlich in *disp.* 21,12 (Mingana 161b–162a): "Und unser siegreicher König sagte: 'Wir glauben bei Gott, dass wir die Besitzer dieser Perle sind und sie in unseren Händen haben.' Wir aber antworteten: 'Amen, o König, gebe Gott, dass es so ist, dass auch wir mit euch ihrer teilhaftig sind und das Strahlen und Scheinen dieser Perle genießen! Denn vor uns alle hat Gott die Perle des Glaubens an ihn gelegt wie helle Strahlen der Sonne, und jeder, der will, kann sie besitzen, [so] wie jeder, der will, das Licht der Sonne genießen kann.'"

entscheidenden Elementen, die das ausgewogene und erstaunlich differenzierte Mohammedbild von Timotheos prägen.

1. Mohammed ist kein Prophet, denn er hat keine Wunder gewirkt. Er ist somit nicht befähigt und nicht berechtigt, Neues zu lehren und zu verkünden, wie es etwa beim Übergang vom Alten zum Neuen Bund geschah. Ein solcher Wechsel müsste laut Timotheos durch Wunder beglaubigt sein.[20] Anders als Johannes Damaszenus stützt sich Timotheos also in der Frage nach der Kontinuität nicht nur auf das Geflecht von Verheißung und Erfüllung ab.

2. Timotheos erkennt Mohammed dennoch als einen Lehrer an, der in völliger Übereinstimmung mit dem Christentum die Araber lehrt, was von Altem und Neuem Testament als Wahrheitsbotschaft vorgegeben ist.[21] Mohammed – so die berühmte Formulierung – wandelte auf dem Pfad der Propheten, d.h. er ahmte die Propheten in seinem Lebenswandel und seiner Lehre in ausgezeichnetester Weise nach. Mohammed ist also nach Timotheos sozusagen der 'Kirchenlehrer', der 'Kirchenvater' der Araber.

3. Mohammed ist für Timotheos eine Figur der Heilsgeschichte: Gott hat das Rhomäer- und das Perserreich als Strafe für deren Sünden (nämlich Theopaschitismus bzw. Verehrung von Geschöpfen) verworfen und die Herrschaft Mohammed und den Arabern übergeben.[22] Damit wird das Christentum ins Kalifenreich implantiert, gleichzeitig aber auch der Islam als Vorstufe des Christentums interpretiert. Bei dieser eschatologischen Deutung greift Timotheos auf Johannes Bar Penkāyē zurück.[23]

Timotheos entwickelt also für seinen Umgang mit dem Islam ein integratives Modell: Anders als Johannes von Damaskus versteht er den Islam nicht als eine

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[20] *Disp.* 8,16 22 (Mingana 110a-b).

[21] *Disp.* 15,1 12 (Mingana 133a-134a).

[22] *Disp.* 15,13f (Mingana 134a-b).

[23] Die Anhängigkeit zeigt sich am deutlichsten in *disp.* 20,9 (Mingana 160a), wo Timotheos im Zusammenhang mit dem Theopaschitismus sagt: "In diesem Punkt habt ihr im Unterschied zu jenen die richtige Meinung. Denn wer sollte es wagen zu sagen, dass Gott starb? Ich meine nämlich, dass nicht einmal die Dämonen dies sagen." Bei Bar Penkaye (um 686) 15 heißt es: "...Christian kings who wanted us to ascribe suffering to that Nature which is above suffering something that perhaps not even demons had ever dared to do." (Übersetzung Sebastian Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the late Seventh Century. Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē's Rīš Mellē", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987), 51–75, wieder abgedruckt in: Sebastian Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity: history, literature and theology* (Collected studies series 357), Hampshire: Variorum 1992, das Zitat 59).

fehlerhafte Weiterentwicklung, als eine Häresie, sondern eine Nebenstufe der Entwicklung vom Judentum hin zum Christentum. Wenn wir danach fragen, wer dieses Modell in die christliche Apologetik eingeführt hat, so gibt es, meine ich, nur eine Antwort: Es ist das Modell des Apologeten Justin, das Timotheos hier auf den Islam uminterpretiert. Hatte Justin die griechische Philosophie als eine zweite Vorstufe zum Christentum neben dem Judentum gedeutet, macht Timotheos hier mit dem Islam dasselbe. Anders als Justin aber schafft Timotheos die Verknüpfung nicht mit der Lehre vom *logos spermatikos*, sondern mit der Deutung Mohammeds als prophetenähnlicher Gestalt. Mir scheint, dass wir noch weiter gehen dürfen: Ich vermute, dass Justins Dialog mit dem Juden Tryphon das literarische Modell unserer *Disputatio* ist. Beide Texte sind Religionsgespräche in Briefform, gegliedert in zwei Disputationstage. Beide Texte sind unerbittlich in der Argumentation,[24] aber voll Respekt dem Gesprächspartner gegenüber. Beide Texte enden, ohne dass der Gesprächspartner für die eigene Position gewonnen worden wäre, aber formulieren einen Bekehrungswunsch (Just *dial.* 142,2f), ja in beiden Texten wird die Gemeinsamkeit des einen Glaubens erhofft. Wie Timotheos sagt, "*gebe Gott, dass es so ist, dass auch wir mit euch ihrer [d. h. der Perle des Glaubens] teilhaftig sind und das Strahlen und Scheinen dieser Perle genießen*" (*disp.* 21,12), so wünscht auch Justin, dass "*auch ihr gänzlich dasselbe tut wie wir [und bekennt], dass Gottes Christus unser ist!*" (Just *dial.* 142,3) Und bei beiden Texten fehlt ein eigentlicher Briefschluss. Dass Timotheos Justin kennt, wissen wir aus Brief 41, wo er Justin erwähnt,[25] ohne aber dabei zu sagen, welche seiner Schriften ihm bekannt sind. Dies ist umso bedeutender, als wir von Justin in der alten Kirche nur ganz wenige Notizen haben.[26]

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[24] Justin ist dabei noch härter als Timotheos.

[25] "Justinianus, ich meine den Philosophen und Märtyrer" (Bidawid, *Lettres*, כה Z. 20, Übersetzung 121). Dabei ist ܝܘܣ ܛ ܝܘܣ als Verschreibung für "Justin" zu deuten, was schon Bidawid, *Lettres*, 121, stillschweigend tut.

[26] Nach Euseb, der in seiner Kirchengeschichte aus der *Apologie* und dem *Dialog* zitiert (die Stellen bei Adolf Harnack, *Die Überlieferung der griechischen Apologeten des 2. Jahrhunderts in der alten Kirche und im Mittelalter*, (TU 1/1 2), Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs 1882, nachgedruckt Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1991, 135 Anm. 87), ist das Zitat in den *Hiera* des Johannes von Damaskus (Karl Holl, *Fragmente vornicänischer Kirchenväter aus den Sacra Parallela herausgegeben*, (TU N. F. 5/2) Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung 1899, 34, Fragment 102) die bis heute einzige bekannte Nachricht von Justins *Dialog* vor dem Pariser Manuskript, das 1363, wohl in Mistra, entstanden ist (zu den übrigen Belegen siehe Adolf Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius. Zweiter Theil: Die Chronologie. Erster Band: Die Chronologie der Litteratur bis Irenäus*, Leipzig 1893 (2. erweiterte Auflage mit einem Vorwort von Kurt Aland, Leipzig 1958), 104-113 und Harnack, *Apologeten*, 146-171; zum Entstehungsort Mistra vgl. Christoph Riedweg, *Ps.-Justin (Markell von Ankyra?), Ad Graecos de vera religione (bisher Cohortatio ad Graecos). Einleitung und Kommentar, Teil I: Einleitung* (SBA 25) Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag 1994, 184.

Timotheos der Justin der Araber? Es hätte theoretisch sein können, dass Timotheos mit zu einer ähnlichen Synthese der arabisch-islamischen Welt mit dem Christentum beigetragen hätte, wie Justin zu einer Synthese der griechisch-römischen Welt mit dem Christentum. So hat Timtotheos es sich erhofft. Al-Mahdī hatte die Tore zum Hellenismus weit geöffnet; und im späten 8. Jahrhundert war der Ausgang dieser Entwicklung noch nicht abzuschätzen.

Wir heute wissen, dass es anders gekommen ist. Das hat verschiedene Gründe: Zum einen verschärft sich vom 9. Jahrhundert an die Situation der Christen im muslimischen Großreich nach und nach. Zum anderen gibt es aber auch philosophie- und theologiegeschichtliche Gründe: Das frühe Christentum hatte das unendliche Glück, dass sich Joh 1,1, eine neutestamentliche Schlüsselstelle, mit einem Zentralbegriff der griechischen Philosophie und Geisteswelt kombinieren ließ. Jesus Christus, der Logos, ließ sich so zugleich als Rede Gottes und als Weltvernunft verstehen. Der Logosbegriff war eine tragfähige Basis für ein theologisches System, für eine in der griechischen Spätantike unübertroffen stimmige Synthese. Auf dem Hintergrund der arabischen Denkkategorien überzeugte diese Synthese nicht mehr, weil die Prämissen der Araber andere waren. Vielmehr geschah es, dass in der lebendigen Auseinandersetzung mit der Theologie des griechisch geprägten Christentums eine rationale islamische Theologie und bald darauf eine eigentliche islamische Philosophie entsteht, bei der direkt die Grundsysteme der griechischen Philosophie für die islamische Theologie fruchtbar gemacht werden.

2. Timotheos als Koranexeget

Mit der differenziert positiven Würdigung Mohammeds geht bei Timotheos auch eine differenziert positive Wertung des Korans einher. Wenn auch der Koran nicht durch 'Zeichen und Wunder' Mohammeds bestätigt worden ist,[27] so bedeutet dies aber keineswegs, dass Timotheos daher den Koran gänzlich verwerfen würde. Wenn der Koran auch nicht Offenbarungsschrift ist, so vermag er dennoch die christliche Wahrheit zu unterstützen. Der Koran ist die Schrift des großen Lehrers Mohammed, der die Araber auf das Christentum hinführt. Der Koran hat damit gewissermaßen den Rang einer Kirchenvaterschrift, oder

[27] *Disp.* 8,17 (Mingana 110a).

vielleicht noch treffender: einer alttestamentlichen Apokryphe, die – um frei nach Luther zu formulieren – "*nicht der heiligen Schrift gleichgehalten*", aber für die Araber "*doch nützlich und gut zu lesen*" ist.

Auf dieser Basis zieht Timotheos in der Argumentation gegenüber al-Mahdī immer wieder auch den Koran bei. Es ist für Timotheos ein Höhepunkt der Beweisführung, wenn er einen Sachverhalt "*aus der Tora und den Propheten, aus dem Evangelium und aus dem Koran*"[28] beweisen kann. Damit findet er mit dem Kalifen den methodischen Konsens, dass die theologische Beweisführung auf zwei Prämissen beruht: Natur und Schrift,[29] ein Konsens, der natürlich sogleich wieder durch die verschiedenen Schriftverständnisse aufgelöst wird.

Im konkreten Fall zieht Timotheos den Koran dort – und nur dort – bei, wo er seine Aussage unterstützt. Seine Koraninterpretation ist also sehr eklektisch und aus muslimischer Perspektive natürlich höchst problematisch. Dennoch sind die Beispiele nicht uninteressant. So macht Timotheos Mohammed zum Trinitätstheologen: Die rätselhaften drei Buchstaben, die über manchen Koransuren stehen,[30] werden als Andeutungen der Trinität verstanden.[31] Dass es Suren gibt, über denen es zwei, vier oder gar fünf geheimnisvolle Buchstaben gibt,[32] blendet Timotheos aus.

Auch Stellen, wo Gott im Koran im Plural spricht, deutet Timotheos auf die Trinität,[33] ganz im Stile der *vestigia trinitatis* im Alten Testament. Geradezu ein *locus classicus* koranischer Trinitätslehre ist für Timotheos Sure 4,171: "*Christus Jesus, der Sohn der Maria, ist der Gesandte Gottes und sein Wort, das er zu Maria entbot, und Geist von ihm.*"[34] Dieser Text wirkt auf Timotheos so sehr zurück, dass er neben der Trinitätsformel "*Vater, Sohn und heiliger Geist*" eine zweite

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[28] *Disp.* 17,24 (Mingana 145a).

[29] *Disp.* 19,7 (Mingana 154a), 19,9 (Mingana 154b), 2,9 12 (Mingana 93a-b).

[30] So A-L-R (Sure 10,1; 11,1; 12,1; 14,1; 15,1), Ṭ–S–M (Sure 26,1 und 28,1) und A-L-M (Sure 2,1; 29,1; 30,1; 31,1; 32,1).

[31] *Disp.* 16,87 (Mingana 139b–140a).

[32] Vier Buchstaben: A-L-M-Ṣ (Sure 7,1) und A-L-M-R (Sure 13,1). Fünf Buchstaben: Ḥ-M-ʿ-S-Q (Sure 42,1f), K-H-Y-ʿ-Ṣ (Sure 19,1). Zwei Buchstaben: Ṭ-H (Sure 20,1), Ṭ-S (Sure 27,1), Y-S (Sure 36,1) Ḥ-M (Sure 40,1; 41,1; 43,1; 44,1; 45,1; 46,1); ein Buchstabe: Ṣ (Sure 38,1), Q (Sure 50,1), N (Sure 68,1).

[33] *Disp.* 16,90 (Mingana 140a).

[34] Am deutlichsten *disp.* 16,90 (Mingana 140a), 19,20 (Mingana 156a).

verwendet, die von ebendieser Koranstelle beeinflusst ist: "*Gott, sein Wort und sein Geist.*"[35]

Man mag das Verständnis des Islams und damit des Korans als Vorstufe zum Christentum als vereinnahmend bezeichnen, man mag Timotheos Koraninterpretation im Einzelnen problematisch finden, man mag auf mitschwingendes politisches Kalkül verweisen. In jedem Fall aber ist er einem Johannes von Damaskus weit überlegen, der den Koran einfach als ein Buch mit lächerlichen Lehrsätzen aus der Feder eines falschen Propheten versteht,[36] oder einem Theodor Abu Qurra, der den Koran als Lügenerzählungen des Lügenpropheten der Hagarener bezeichnet.[37] Timotheos Würdigung Mohammeds und des Korans ist für die damalige Zeit überraschend differenziert. Nicht zufällig ist es von der Perlenparabel am Schluss der *Disputatio* nur noch ein kleiner Schritt zu Lessings Ringen.

3. Kalif al-Mahdī als Bibelexeget

Wenn ein Muslim eine Kontinuität von der christlichen Bibel zum Koran nachweisen wollte, so boten sich ihm zwei Möglichkeiten, die der Kalif in unserer *Disputatio* auch beide nutzt: Zum einen konnte er den Vorwurf der Schriftverfälschung im Koran aufgreifen und behaupten, die Christen hätten die Mohammed-Prophezeiungen – etwa das koranische Jesuszitat (Sure 61,6) – aus der Bibel herausgestrichen. Dieser Vorwurf bewährte sich überhaupt nicht, sondern stieß bei den Christen nur auf höchstes Unverständnis: Timotheos etwa fordert Belege für diese Behauptung und bittet um eine Erklärung, wie denn dies hätte vonstatten gehen sollen, wenn doch christliche und jüdische Handschriften

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[35] In 19,5 (Mingana 153b 154a) verwendet er beide Formulierungen nebeneinander: "...beim Vater, beim Sohn und beim heiligen Geist oder-wenn man es anders sagen will-bei Gott, bei seiner Rede und bei seinem Geist..."

[36] *De haeresibus* 100 (Kotter, PTS 22, 60 67; Glei und Khoury, Johannes Damaskenos, 75-83): ψευδοπροφήτης (Kotter, PTS 22, 60,11), γέλωτος ἄξια (61,16.32; 67,152), γελοιῶδες (62,48).

[37] Opusculum 20.

des Alten Testamentes denselben Text aufweisen.[38]

So schlugen Muslime bald einen anderen Weg ein: Sie begannen, Bibeltexte auf Mohammed hin auszulegen. Es ist faszinierend zu sehen, wie sich in unserer *Disputatio* muslimische Bibelauslegung und christliche Koranauslegung kreuzen. Natürlich müssen wir uns bewusst machen, dass der Kalif al-Mahdī uns hier zuallererst als literarische Gestalt des Timotheos erscheint. Inwiefern wir aus dem Text tatsächlich auf das theologische Profil des historischen al-Mahdī schließen dürfen,[39] bleibt offen. Bedauerlicherweise haben wir keine islamischen Quellen, die hier als Korrektiv verwendet werden könnten. Was aber die Bibelexegese al-Mahdīs betrifft, zeigen uns zwei muslimische Schriften, die beide ebenfalls in dieser Zeit am Kalifenhof in Bagdad entstanden sind, dass die Darstellung der Argumentation in der *Disputatio* durchaus realistisch ist und sich im damals üblichen Rahmen bewegt. Die eine Schrift ist die kanonisch gewordene Mohammedbiografie, die Ibn Isḥāq zwanzig Jahre zuvor am Hofe von al-Mahdīs Vater, dem Kalifen al-Manṣūr (im Amt 754-775), verfasste. Sie wird nach ihrem arabischen Titel *sīrat rasūl allāh* ("Leben des Gesandten Gottes") meist *Sira* genannt. Die andere Schrift ist ein Brief von al-Mahdīs Sohn und späteren Kalifen Hārūn-al-Rāshid, den dieser in den 790er Jahren[40] an Kaiser

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[38] Auffällig ist, dass Timotheos kein Wort über einzelne Textprobleme verwendet. Zumindest wusste er später von solchen: In dem wohl Mitte der 790er Jahre verfassten Brief 47 vermerkt er zur Hexapla Folgendes: "Sie unterscheidet sich aber unendlich von dem (Text), den wir festhalten. Ich glaube, dass der, welcher diese in unserer Hand (befindlichen) Rezensionen übersetzte, nach dem des Theodotion, Aquila und Symmachus übersetzte. Denn meist gleicht er jenen mehr als den LXX." (ep. 47 [Braun, "Brief", 304/305]; zum ganzen Abschnitt sehr ausführlich Pierre Petitmengin und Bernard Flusin, "Le livre antique et la dictée", in: E. Lucchesi und H. D. Saffrey (Hrsgg.), *Antiquité païenne et chrétienne. Mémorial André Festugière*, (COr 10) Genève 1984, 247–262, besonders 255–262.) Im selben Brief 47 erzählt er von einer erstaunlichen Begebenheit: Juden, die soeben als christliche Katechumenen unterrichtet würden, hätten ihm erzählt, dass vor zehn Jahren in der Nähe von Jericho in einer Höhle Handschriften gefunden worden seien (ep. 47 [Braun, "Brief", 304/305]). Seinem Gewährsmann zufolge würden sich in diesen Schriften auch solche Bibelstellen finden, die im NT angeblich aus dem AT zitiert werden, sich dort aber nicht finden (ep. 47 [*ibid.*, 306/307]). Timotheos hat daraufhin sogleich den Metropoliten Shūbḥālmāran von Damaskus und Gabriel brieflich beauftragt, der Sache nachzugehen und eine Reihe von Bibelstellen zu prüfen (ep. 47 [*ibid.*, 306/307]). "Wenn diese Stellen sich in den genannten Büchern finden, so ist klar, dass sie verlässlicher sind als die bei den Hebräern und bei uns (benutzten)." Timotheos hat aber auf seine Anfrage hin keine Antwort erhalten. Jedenfalls hat ihn die Sache sehr beschäftigt: "Das ist in meinem Herzen wie Feuer, das in meinen Knochen brennt und glüht." (ep. 47 [*ibid.*, 308/309])

[39] "Eigenes theologisches Profil gewinnt al-Mahdī noch am ehesten in den Berichten, die wir von christlicher Seite über ein Religionsgespräch erhalten, das er i. J. 165/781 oder kurz darauf mit dem nestorianischen Patriarchen Timotheos I. führte." (van Ess, *Theologie*, Bd. 3, 22)

[40] Zwischen 174/790 und 181/797.

Konstantin IV. schrieb.[41]

Es ist kein Zufall, dass die wichtigste Stelle die Parakletverheißung im Johannesevangelium ist. Schon bei Montanus und Mani diente sie dazu, die Prophetenschaft zu legitimieren. In Sure 61,6 heißt es, Jesus habe einen kommenden Propheten mit Namen Aḥmad angekündet – derselbe Wortstamm wie Mohammed (Muḥammad). Wenn auch der Text sich so nicht in der Bibel findet, so scheint doch irgendwie eine undeutliche Erinnerung an die Parakletverheißungen des Johannesevangeliums im Hintergrund zu stehen. Die *Sira* schafft diesen Bezug nun erstmals *expressis verbis*. Sie zitiert – zwar ziemlich frei – das Johannesevangelium und fügt die Erklärung bei, dass Mohammed (Muḥammmad) die arabische Übersetzung des griechischen Wortes Paraklet sei. Als Brücke für diese abenteuerliche Auslegung dient das syrische Verbalnomen ܦܪܩܠܛܐ ('Auferwecker').[42] Die Deutung der Parakletstellen auf Mohammed findet sich genauso in al-Mahdīs Worten in unserer *Disputatio* und ebenfalls im Brief des Kalifen Hārūn an Kaiser Konstantin.[43]

Weitere Zitate, die der Kalif in unserer Schrift auf Mohammed hin auslegt, sind Dtn 18,18: "*Der Herr wird euch einen Propheten wie mich aus euren Brüdern erstehen lassen.*"[44] sowie Jes 21,6 9,[45] wo er den Eselsreiter als Jesus und den Kamelreiter als Mohammed deutet.[46]

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[41] Darüber hinaus finden wir auch Parallelstellen bei muslimischen Autoren, die nur sekundär in Zitaten bei späteren Autoren erhalten sind.

[42] "Wie man mir berichtet hat, hatte sich Isa b. Mariam, in dem von Gott geoffenbarten Evangelium, nach der Abschrift, welche der Jünger Johannes zur Lebzeit Isa's vom Evangelium gemacht hatte, in folgender Weise in Bezug auf die Beschreibung Mohammed's ausgesprochen: 'wer mich hasst, der hasst den Herrn, hätte ich nicht vor ihren Augen Werke geübt, wie keiner vor mir, so wären sie nicht schuldig, aber von wurden sie undankbar und glaubten, sie müssten mich wie den Herrn verehren, aber das Wort, das im Gesetzbuche geschrieben ist, muss erfüllt werden, dass sie mich nämlich ohne Grund gehasst haben, wäre Manhamanna (d. h. im syrischen Mohammed und im griechischen Paraklet), den euch Allah vom Herrn und dem Geiste der Gerechtigkeit senden wird, schon hervorgetreten, so würde er Zeugniss ablegen für mich und ihr würdet es auch thun, denn ihr waret früher nicht mit mir. Diess sage ich euch, damit ihr nicht zweiflet.'" (Übersetzung unter Beibehaltung der Orthographie von Gustav Weil, *Das Leben Mohammed's nach Mohammed Ibn Ishak bearbeitet von Abd el-Malik Ibn Hischam. Aus dem Arabischen übersetzt. Erster Band. Von Mohammed's Geburt bis zum Feldzug gegen die Benu Suleim.* Stuttgart 1864, 112)

[43] Vgl. van Ess, *Theologie*, Bd. 3, 24f.

[44] *Disp.* 10,44 (Mingana 123b).

[45] *Disp.* 8,23–43 (Mingana 110b–112a).

[46] *Disp.* 8,39 (Mingana 11b). Auch die Auslegung von Jes 21,6–9 auf Mohammed hat eine Vorgeschichte im unmittelbaren Umfeld al-Mahdīs, nämlich bei dem von ihm begünstigten Muqātil b. Sulaimān und anderen Zeitgenossen (dazu van Ess, *Theologie*, Bd. 4, 634), und auch sie findet sich im Brief des Kalifen Hārūn an Kaiser Konstantin IV. wieder (vgl. van Ess, *Theologie*, Bd. 3, 24f).

Die genannten Texte stehen am Anfang einer langen muslimischen Tradition, Bibeltexte auf Mohammed hin auszulegen. Besonders üppig fließen die Beispiele im *Kibāb al-dīn wa-daula* des ʿAlī Ibn Rabban vom Jahre 855. Manchmal haben jedoch die islamischen Interpreten die Beispiele relativ wahllos und vom Kontext völlig isoliert beigezogen, wie ein verunglücktes Beispiel aus Texten des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts zeigt: Dort wird der 'Fürst dieser Welt' auf Mohammed gedeutet.[47] Die muslimischen Ausleger scheinen sich mitnichten bewusst zu sein, dass das Johannesevangelium damit den Teufel bezeichnet.

Die Paralleltexte zeigen, dass die von al-Mahdī vorgetragene Bibelexegese ganz im damaligen Rahmen steht. Darüber hinaus ist an manchen Einzelheiten der Darstellung des Kalifen auch die gestalterische Hand des Timotheos zu erkennen, etwa, wenn der Kalif plötzlich aus dem Nizänum zitiert (in 3,2):[48] Gott aus Gott . Ebenso fällt auf, wie stark Timotheos den Kalifen als aristotelisch und platonisch geprägten Philosophen darstellt.[49] Höchst bemerkenswert ist, dass der Kalif die Vorstellung von Gott als Geist wiederholt gelten lässt oder selbst vorbringt.[50] Diese Denkvoraussetzung ist griechisch-christlich (vgl. Joh 4,24) und, wie van Ess zu Recht betont, dem Islam fremd.[51]

4. Die Disputatio - eine literarische Fiktion?

Kaum hatte Mingana Faksimile und Übersetzung unseres Textes publiziert, bestritt einer der ersten Rezensenten, François Nau, heftig, dass es sich bei der *Disputatio* um die Wiedergabe eines tatsächlich gehaltenen Gespräches handle.[52] Dieser Meinung haben sich auch andere angeschlossen.[53]

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47 Qarāfī († 1285) und Ibn Taymīya († 1328), die Stellen bei Erdmann Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum in Mittelalter. Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache*, (Breslauer Studien zur historischen Theologie 17) Breslau: Müller & Seiffert 1930, 92.

48 Die christologische Formel kommt in der *Disputation* einzig an dieser Stelle vor und erschwert den Zusammenhang unnötig.

49 In der Tat bezeichnet er ihn in ep. 40,313 auch tatsächlich als "großen Philosophen".

50 In *disp.* 3,31 (Mingana 96b) unvermittelt und ohne weitere Erklärung. In 4,61 (Mingana 101b) redet der Kalif sogar vom "heiligen Geist". Auch in 18,2 (Mingana 145b) stimmt er Timotheos ausdrücklich zu, als dieser Gott als einfachen und unbegrenzten Geist definiert.

51 Van Ess, *Theologie*, Bd. 4, 534.

52 François Nau, "[Rezension zu] Woodbroke Studies. – Vol. II.", *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 100 (1929), 241–246. Nau hält den Text für eine Schreibtischarbeit, die wohl ums Jahr 799 unter dem Kalifat von Hārūn al-Rashīd entstanden sei (*ibid.*, 244).

Es ergibt sich hier eine gewisse Pattsituation: Die Argumente von Nau, die ich hier nicht detailliert vortragen kann, sind nicht stichhaltig. Auf der anderen Seite kann ebenfalls nicht bewiesen werden, dass das Gespräch tatsächlich stattgefunden hat. Dennoch gibt es etliche Gründe, die dafür sprechen, dass der *Disputatio* ein echtes Gespräch zugrunde liegt. Es geht in unserem Text nicht um ein bloßes Frage-Antwort-Spiel. Es kann nicht im entferntesten die Rede davon sein, dass der Kalif die Rolle des Schülers einnehmen würde, der Timotheos als einen Lehrer befragt.[54] In dem Punkt unterscheidet sich die *Disputatio* zentral vom zehnten *Memrā* des Theodor bar Konai.[55] Die *Disputatio* ist nicht als ein Handbuch konzipiert, das in Form eines fiktiven Gespräches Antwort auf alle "frequently asked questions" der christlich-islamischen Kontroverse gäbe. Der ganze Text lässt einen echten Respekt des Timotheos gegenüber dem Kalifen spüren, der nicht nur als politisches Kalkül gedeutet werden kann. Immer wieder wird der Kalif positiver dargestellt als Timotheos,[56] der Kalif hinterfragt und karikiert die Ausführungen des Timotheos.[57] Am Ende wird sichtbar, dass Timotheos den Kalifen nicht überzeugen konnte. Timotheos berichtet in seinen Briefen auch sonst immer wieder von Audienzen beim Kalifen,[58] und gleichzeitig belegen uns

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[53] Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur. Zweiter Band: Die Schriftsteller bis zur Mitte des 15. Jahrhunderts*, (StT 133) Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1947, 115f; Putman, *Église*, 184f.

[54] Gegen Sidney H. Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The case of the Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and a Muslim Emir", *Hugoye Journal of Syriac Studies* 3/1 (2000) (http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol3No1/HV3N1Griffith.html), § 13.

[55] *Théodore bar Koni. Livre des Scolies (recension de Séert) II. Mimrè VI–XI. traduit par Robert Hespel et René Draguet*, (CSCO 432 = Syr 188) Louvain: E. Peeters 1982, *Memrā* 10 (231–284/172–211).

[56] Eine solche Glanzstelle ist die scharfsinnige Bemerkung des Kalifen in 19,7 (Mingana 154a): "'Deiner Zunge', sagt der König, 'o Katholikos, fällt es ganz besonders leicht, zum einen zu zeigen, dass jemand Herr und Gott sei – obwohl er es gar nicht ist – und jemand anderer Diener und Bediensteter sei – obwohl er es der Natur nach gar nicht ist –, und zum anderen sich an irgendeiner Stelle von Schlussfolgerungen zu enthalten und sie anderswo zu ziehen. Stattdessen folgen doch nun einmal Gedanken und Willen der sprach- und denkbegabten [Wesen] nicht deiner Vernunft, [welche] Schlussfolgerungen [auch immer] du [ziehst], sondern [sie folgen] gehorsam der Natur der Dinge und den Schriften.'"

[57] *Disp.* 17,1 (Mingana 142a): "Meinst du, Gottes Natur sei aus diesen zusammengesetzt, wie die menschliche Natur daraus zusammengesetzt ist, dass sie lebendig, sprach- und denkbegabt sowie sterblich ist, [wie] die Sonne aus Licht, Wärme und Kugel [zusammengesetzt ist], [wie] die Seele aus Rede und Gedanken und das Gold aus Länge, Breite und Höhe [zusammengesetzt ist]?"

[58] So setzte sich Timotheos gemäß ep. 50 (Braun, "Synoden", 298/299) zu Beginn seiner Amtszeit sechsmal beim Kalifen für den Wiederaufbau der Kirchen ein, die im Gefolge der Niederlage gegen die Rhomäer 161 H. (778 n. Chr.) zerstört worden waren. Mitte der 790er Jahre (zur Datierung Bidawid, *Lettres*, 68f) erhielt Timotheos in drei Audienzen an aufeinander folgenden Tagen 84 000 *Zūzē* für das Kloster des Mār Pēṭiōn (ep 8 [Braun, *Epistulae*, Textus, 90, *Versio*, 58]).

islamische Quellen, wie von al-Mahdī an die Tradition des – allerdings in der Regel innerislamischen – Streitgesprächs bei den Kalifen einen hohen Stellenwert erhielt. Al-Maʿmūn im frühen 9. Jh. etwa veranstaltete jeden Dienstag Debatten, die auch ein Essen umfassten.[59] Diese Kultur des Streitgesprächs hatte eine politische Absicht. Sie diente dem Ausgleich mit den Šīʿiten, mit deren Unterstützung die Dynastie der Abbasiden 750 an die Macht gelangt war. "*Man hatte die Revolution zum Erfolg geführt, indem man sich von den Ambitionen und Träumen der Šīʿiten hatte tragen lassen; konsolidieren konnte man sie nur, indem man die Sunniten gewann.*"[60] Dafür lieferte vor allem die 762 neugegründete Hauptstadt Bagdad die soziokulturellen Voraussetzungen. Die Stadt entwickelte sich sogleich zur Metropole und zog Gelehrte aller Richtungen an, was zu einem nivellierenden Ausgleich zwischen den Schulrichtungen führte. "*Das Gute an Baġdād ist*", berichtet Ibn al-Faqīh, "*dass die Obrigkeit davor sicher sein kann, dass irgendein Schulhaupt dort die Oberhand gewönne, so wie die Aliden häufig mit der Šīʿa über die Kūfier Macht gewinnen. In Baġdād leben nämlich Gegner der Šīʿa mit der Šīʿa zusammen, Gegner der Muʿtazila mit der Muʿtazila und Gegner der Ḫāriğiten mit den Ḫāriğiten; jede Partei hält die andere in Schach und hindert sie daran, sich zum Herrscher aufzuwerfen.*"[61] Diese Kultur des Streitgesprächs diente letztlich dem religiösen Frieden. Timotheos hat dem auf seine Weise Ausdruck verliehen in der Perlenparabel am Schluss des Textes. Er, der von der Wahrheit des Christentums völlig überzeugt war, lässt hier für einen Moment alle irdische Gotteserkenntnis nur als relative, vorletzte Wahrheit gelten:

> "In dieser Welt, o unser siegreicher König, sind wir alle wie in einem dunkeln Haus und wie in der Nacht. Es ist, wie wenn Menschen in der Nacht in einem dunklen Haus sind: Wenn es geschieht, dass eine kostbare Perle zwischen ihnen [zu Boden] fällt, und sie alle diese Perle bemerken, dann fallen alle Menschen nieder, um die Perle zu erhaschen. Diese Perle aber fällt nicht ihnen allen in die Hand, sondern nur einem von ihnen. Dieser hat die Perle ergriffen, ein anderer aber ein Glasstück, wieder ein anderer irgendeinen Stein oder ein Erdklümpchen, und ein

[59] Van Ess, *Theologie*, Bd. 3, 199.

[60] Van Ess, *Theologie*, Bd. 3, 10.

[61] Deutsche Übersetzung van Ess, *Theologie*, Bd. 3, 9.

jeder ist stolz und begeistert wie derjenige, der die Perle besitzt. Sobald aber die Nacht und die Finsternis sich auflöst und das Licht und der Tag anbricht, dann reckt und streckt ein jeder von denjenigen Menschen, die meinten, die Perle gefunden zu haben, seine Hand zum Licht aus, und das Licht zeigt einem jeden, was er [in der Hand] hält. Und derjenige, der die Perle hat, freut sich, frohlockt und jubelt über sie, diejenigen aber, die Glasstücke und gewöhnliche Steine [in der Hand] halten, weinen, sind traurig, empfinden Bedauern und vergießen Tränen. Genauso ist es auch mit uns Menschen: In dieser Welt der Sterblichkeit sind wir wie in der Dunkelheit, und die Perle des wahren Glaubens ist mitten unter uns alle gefallen. Einer von uns hat sie in jedem Fall in der Hand, während ein jeder von uns meint, das kostbare Juwel in seiner Hand zu haben. In jener anderen Welt aber vergeht die Dunkelheit der Sterblichkeit und löst sich die Finsternis der Unwissenheit auf, das heißt, das klare und wahre Licht [bricht an], dem die Dunkelheit der Unwissenheit gänzlich fern ist. Dann werden die Besitzer der Perle sich freuen, frohlocken und jubeln, die Besitzer von gewöhnlichen Steinen aber werden weinen, jammern und seufzen, wie wir in unseren vorhergehenden Worten gesagt haben."[62]

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[62] *Disp.* 21, 1–5 (Mingana 160a–b). Sebastian P. Brock ("Syriac Views of Emergent Islam", in: G. H. A. Juynboll, ed. *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, (Papers on Islamic History. 5) Carbondale/Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press 1982, 9-21) hat auf eine Parallele hingewiesen, die bei Barhebraeus überliefert ist: "Als die Armeen der Araber Heraklios überwältigte und die verschiedenen Länder besetzte, versammelte er alle Bischöfe, die Oberpriester und die übriggebliebenen Satrapen und befragte sie über die Angelegenheit mit folgenden Worten: 'Was sind das für Leute und wer sind sie?' Und jeder von ihnen antwortete ihm, soweit sein Sinn die Angelegenheit verstand, bis die ganze Sache auf die Länge vor ihm dargelegt worden war. Und er antwortete: 'Ich sehe, diese Leute sind mit ihren Taten, Verhaltensweisen und [ihrem] Glauben wie eine frühe, wolkige Dämmerung, in der es keine völlige Dunkelheit gibt, und doch das vollkommene klare Licht fehlt.' Und sie baten ihn um eine Erklärung seiner Rede. Da sagte er: 'Nun, in der Tat sind sie von der Finsternis entfernt, insofern sie die Verehrung der Götzen verworfen haben und einen [einzigen] Gott verehren. Aber es fehlt ihnen das klare Licht, insofern ihnen die völlige Erleuchtung fehlt, weil sie unseren Glauben und das rechtgläubige Bekenntnis nur unvollkommen kennen.'" (Barhebraeus, "Chronicon syriacum", Paulus Bedjan, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum e codd. mss. emendatum ac punctis vocalibus adnotationibusque locupletatum*, Paris 1890, 96f; für eine englische Übersetzung vgl. Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Chronography of Gregory Abû'l Faraj the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician, commonly known as Bar Hebraeus, being the First Part of his Political History of the World. Translated from the Syriac by Ernest A. Wallis Budge, Volume I, English Translation*, Oxford: Univ. Press, London: Milford 1932, 90).

Bible and Qur'an
in early Syriac Christian-Islamic disputation

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In his introductory words, the author of the disputation (*drāšā*)[1] which an Arab notable had with a monk in the monastery of Bēt Ḥālē (hereafter quoted as *Disputation*)[2] gives a precise definition of the generic character of his work. The author intends to use the *Question-and-Answer* format, in order to frame an appropriate and useful "report of our investigation into the apostolic faith through a son of Ishmael".[3] Certainly, the author wants us to believe that the disputation in the monastery actually took place. We should not doubt the historicity of the visit of the emir Maslama's notable to the monastery, where the Arab stayed for ten days to recover from some illness.[4] We are also to believe that during his stay the Arab notable came to be on familiar terms with the monks and engaged with them in many disputes concerning the Scriptures of the Christians

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1 For the genre of the *drāšā* in the East Syrian tradition and its role in the instruction and in the public debate, see now J.T. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: The University of California Press 2006, 164-205.

2 Three manuscripts of this still unpublished work are known to exist or to have existed: Siirt 112 (15th century?), Diyarbakir 95 (early 18th century), Mardin 82 (1890). For details, see G.J. Reinink, "Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and an Arab Notable", in: *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 5)*, E. Grypeou, M. Swanson, and D. Thomas, eds., Leiden-Boston: Brill 2006, 153-169, 158. Only Diyarbakir 95 is accessible to me, which I quote according to the folios of the manuscript (Diyarbakir 95, item 35, ff. 1r-8v). I have divided the *Disputation* in 12 sections.

3 *Disputation*, section 1, Diyarbakir 95, f. 1r.

4 *Disputation*, section 2, Diyarbakir 95, f. 1r. For monasteries as places of rest and recreation in Islamic tradition, see S.H. Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Ḥālê and a Muslim Emir", *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3, 1 (2000), 1-19, 11 and n. 68.

and his own holy Scripture, the Qur'ān.[5] The modern reader of the *Disputation*, however, needs to be on the alert. The report of the discussions here cast in the *Question-and-Answer* format is not primarily focused on the representation of historical exactitude; rather, it aims at edifying purposes.[6] The report is meant to instruct the readers about the principal differences between "the apostolic faith" of the author's religious community and the *tawdītā* (confession) of the "sons of Ishmael".[7] At the same time the report is so constructed as to provide the readers with arguments with which they might refute and combat Muslim criticisms of their religion. At a deeper level, the report suggests a historical context wherein the possibility of Christian apostasy to Islam was considered by the Christian

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[5] *Disputation*, section 2, Diyarbakir 95, f. 1r.

[6] In the East Syrian tradition the genre of *Erotapokriseis* was closely connected with the teaching practice in the schools; cf. C. Molenberg, The Interpreter Interpreted. *Išoʿ bar Nun's Selected Questions on the Old Testament*, Diss. Groningen 1990, 78-79. Another example of the genre of the *Erotapokriseis* in connection with the *drāšā* (also a scholastic genre) and with Christian-Muslim controversy is Theodore bar Koni's Scholion, book 10, written about 791/2; ed. A. Scher and transl. R. Hespel and R. Draguet, *Theodorus bar Kōnī. Liber Scholiorum II*, CSCO, 69, Script. Syri 26 (text), 432, script. Syri 188 (transl.), Louvain: Peeters 1960, 1982, 232/172. For this treatise, see S.H. Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore bar Kônî's Apology for Christianity", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47 (1981), 158-188; idem, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: from Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)", in: *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter (Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 4)*, B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner, eds., Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1992, 251-273, 261-262. For a survey of the Syriac literature of *Erotapokriseis*, see B. ter Haar Romeny, "Question-and-Answer Collections in Syriac Literature", in: *Erotapokriseis. Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context*, A. Volgers and C. Zamagni, eds., Leuven-Paris-Dudley, MA: Peeters 2004, 145-163.

[7] The author of the *Disputation* uses the noun *tawdītā* seven times. It is only the Arab who distinguishes his *tawdītā* from the *tawdītā* of the monk (four times) and from all *tawdyātā* (confessions) on earth (once). The monk once uses the noun in connection with the name Abraham, when he asks the Arab which *tawdītā* of Abraham he requires from the Christians. At one point the monk speaks of the seventy-two different Christian *tawdyātā* on earth (apparently based on the number of seventy-two nations on earth and the sending of the apostles in Luke 10). One is under the impression that the author is reluctant to make the monk call the belief of the Arab as such a *tawdītā* - and this may be for entirely apologetic reasons, for it is abundantly clear that the author knew about the contemporary claim of the Arab authorities that Islam is the confession which is superior to all religions (for further discussion, see Reinink, "Political Power"). It is interesting to note that Jacob of Edessa (see also below, n. 27) knows about the *tawdītā hāgāraytā* (the Muslim confession) which is embroidered on cloth; cf. R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 13)*, Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press 1997, 161, n. 164: "Jacob of Edessa... may well, then be right that it was ʿAbd al-Malik who first had Muslim slogans printed on cloth as well as on coins and documents."

clergy an increasing problem.[8]

The *Disputation* is the earliest known Syriac source in which the name Qur'ān emerges (three times), and this very fact evokes several questions. What explicit information about the Qur'ān and its contents is given by the author of the *Disputation*? How did he acquire this knowledge, directly or indirectly? How does he explain or respond to these Qur'ānic materials? These are the issues that I discuss in the first part of this paper. In the second part, I offer some further comments on the author's use of the Bible and on his non-biblical arguments in his refutation of Muslim criticisms of Christian tenets and practices.

The first mention of the Qur'ān is in the introduction of the *Disputation* (section 2).[9] The Arab who visits the monastery is presented as the initiator of the discussions on "our Scriptures and their Qur'ān". In fact, however, the Arab's first question does not concern the Bible and the Qur'ān, but rather raises the issue of the effectiveness of the monks' daily prayers, since the latter do not adhere to the right *tawdītā* (confession) (section 3).[10] Thus, the main issue of the *Disputation* is this: which religion represents the right *tawdītā*, Islam or Christianity? This issue is not defined or sustained by the Arab by means of quotations from the Qur'ān. The Arab defines the superiority of Islam over "all confessions on earth" by listing the outstanding qualities of his confession: "...we carefully keep the commandments of Muḥammad and the sacrifices of Abraham...we do not ascribe a son to God, who is visible and passible like us...we do not worship the cross, nor the bones of the martyrs...". In addition, the Arab accuses the Christians of deceiving pagan people through the promise of the remission of sins through baptism. The list of differences, which, in fact, concentrates on Christianity alone, is concluded by the Arab's statement that the conclusive proof of the Arabs' religious superiority is furnished by the actual situation of their political superiority (section 4).[11] The latter item takes, indeed, a very special place in the *Disputation*.[12]

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[8] Cf. Reinink, "Political Power", 166-167; idem, "Following the Doctrine of the Demons. Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam", in: *Cultures of Conversion (Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 18)*, J.N. Bremmer, W.J. van Bekkum, and A.L. Molendijk, eds., Leuven-Paris-Dudley MA: Peeters 2006, 127-138, esp. 135-137.

[9] Diyarbakir 95, f. 1r.

[10] Diyarbakir 95, f. 1r-v.

[11] Diyarbakir 95, ff. 1v-2r.

[12] For a full discussion of this topic, see my "Political Power".

The second and the third mention of the Qur'ān occur in section 8, and the name of the Muslims' holy writ is now put forward by the Christian interlocutor of the *Disputation*. The Arab asks why the Christians venerate the cross, although Christ in his Gospel did not order them to do so. In his response to this question, the monk draws a parallel between Muḥammad and Christ. Even Muḥammad, the monk says, did not teach all laws and commandments in the Qur'ān: "some of them you learned from the Qur'ān, some [are] in the *sūrat al-baqara*, and in *gygy* and in *tawrāh*".[13] Likewise, the monk continues, while our Lord taught us some of the commandments (i.e. in the Gospel), some others are taught through the inspired Apostles, and some through the teachers (of the Church).[14] As for the latter part of the monk's words, it is interesting to note that we find the same tripartite scheme in the West-Syrian apologetic work known as the *Interrogation of Patriarch John by a Muslim Emir*. Here the patriarch, responding to the emir's demand that the Christians should comply with the Muslim Law, if their laws are not explicitly written in the Gospel, argues that the Christian laws have three sources: the commandments of the Gospel, the rules of the Apostles and the laws of the Church.[15] The first part of the monk's remark raises some questions. Is the author of the *Disputation* here making a distinction between the Qur'ān and its second *sūra* as independent sources of Islamic commandments?[16] And what exactly is meant by *gygy*? As to the latter question, I am inclined to accept the solution already suggested by some scholars, that *gygy* is probably a corruption of *inǰīl* (Gospel), and that the linked terms *inǰīl* and *tawrāh* refer to the same Arabic pair which appear nine times in the Qur'ān, though they appear there together in

[13] Diyarbakir 95, f. 6r.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Edition with French translation by F. Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716", *Journal Asiatique* 11/5 (1915), 225-279, 251-252/261-262. I agree with those scholars who consider this letter in its present form as a literary apology which was written not before the end of the seventh century, cf. G.J. Reinink, "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam", *Oriens Christianus* 77(1993), 165-187 (repr. in: idem, *Syriac Christianity under Late Sasanian and Early Islamic Rule*, Aldershot, Variorum, Ashgate Publishing Limited 2005: XIII). See also below, n. 48.

[16] Griffith and Hoyland are inclined to answer this question in the affirmative: Griffith, "Disputes", 9; Hoyland, Seeing Islam, 471. Cf. also P. Crone and M. Cook, Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World, Cambridge-New York-New Rochelle-Melbourne-Sydney: Cambridge University Press 1977, 17: "...the monk of Bet Ḥale distinguishes pointedly between the Koran and the Sūrat al-baqara as sources of the law..".

the reverse order.[17] Anyhow, it is possible that the author of the *Disputation* has a similar tripartite scheme in mind when drawing a parallel between the Christian and the Muslim tradition. If we assume that in his listing he is distinguishing the Qur'ān from the *sūrat al-baqara*, then we have to take the pair *injīl* and *tawrāh* together as a separate third category. If, on the other hand, he considers *sūrat al-baqara* as part of the Qur'ān – only specifying this *sūra*, since it was well-known and contains many important Qur'ānic laws and commandments[18] – then the tripartite scheme may include: (1) Qur'ān, (2) Gospel, and (3) Torah, following a chronological order which begins with the most recent and ends with the oldest writing. In this second case, the author may have been aware of some presentations of the three writings in the Qur'ān. According to the Qur'ān the Torah was given by God to Moses, the Gospel to Jesus and the Qur'ān to the Prophet.[19] The Torah and the Gospel preceded the Qur'ān, giving the right guidance to the people, and this was confirmed by the Qur'ān (Qur'ān 3: 3/2). According to Qur'ān 9: 111/112, God promised Paradise to the believers according to the promises in the Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'ān. The conspicuous role attributed to the Torah and the Gospel in the Qur'ān in these and other places may have brought the author of the *Disputation* to the supposition that, in addition to the Qur'ān, the Torah and the Gospel also served as sources for the laws and commandments of the Muslims.

The three mentions of the Qur'ān in the *Disputation*, then, are not connected with direct quotations from the Muslims' holy book, but consist of no more than references to names or possibly to some elements in its contents. The situation, however, looks different in those places, where pronouncements of Muḥammad are presented. This happens in two places (section 6 and section 11).

Section 6 deals with the Muslim rejection of the Christian concepts of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ. After having demonstrated through Old Testament and New Testament *testimonia* and through examples based on nature why Christians rightly believe in a trinitarian God, the monk, via the following counterquestion, returns to the Arab's question, as to why the Christians proclaim a son to God:

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[17] Griffith, "Disputes", 9; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 471-472. Qur'ān 3:3/2, 48/43, 65/58; 5:46/50, 66, 68/72, 110; 9:111/112.

[18] In the Christian Bēḥīrā legend (see below, n. 38) the *sūrat al-baqara* appears as the name of the whole book; R. Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898), 189-242; 14 (1899), 203-268, 228/222 and 243.

[19] Cf. *inter alia* Qur'ān 46:12/11; 57:27; 35:31/28.

> "And this, that you said: 'Why do you make a son to Him (i.e. God)?', tell me, son of Ishmael, whose son do you make him who is called by you 'Īsā son of Maryam' and by us 'Jesus Christ'?" The Arab answers: "After our Muḥammad we also testify to what he said: 'Word of God and His Spirit'.[20] For more than one reason this passage is very interesting. The author of the *Disputation* not only knew the Arab Qur'ānic name of Jesus, but he was in all probability also well informed about the Qur'ānic doctrine concerning Mary's virginal conception of Jesus: "tell me, son of Ishmael, *whose son do you make him...?*"[21] The author of the *Disputation* makes the Arab answer by quoting Qur'ān 4: 171/169: "Īsā son of Maryam...is His (i.e. God's) Word...and a Spirit from Him."

Qur'ān 4: 171/169 provides the author of the *Disputation* with an excellent opportunity to argue that Muḥammad, in fact, proclaimed the correct, i.e. Christian, definition of Christ. Without regard to the anti-Christian context of this passage in the Qur'ān, where, on the contrary, the Christian "misconceptions" related to the Godhead of Christ and the Trinity are challenged,[22] the Syriac author is quick to approve the Qur'ānic definition, arguing that Muḥammad, the crypto-Christian,[23] took his definition of Jesus' Sonship from the pericope of the Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1: 26-38):[24]

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[20] Diyarbakir 95, f. 4v.

[21] Qur'ān 3:47/42; 19:20; for a discussion of these passages, see H. Busse, *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: Theological and Historical Affiliations*, Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers 1998, 115-125.

[22] For the discussion of the meaning of "Word" and "Spirit" in Qur'ān 4: 171/169, see H. Räisänen, *Das Koranische Jesusbild. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Korans (Schriften der finnischen Gesellschaft für Missiologie und Ökumenik 20)*, Helsinki: Finnische Gesellschaft für Missiologie und Ökumenik 1971, 30-37; T. O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 139, Roma: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum 1953, 57-64; idem, *Word of God in the Qur'ān (Biblica et Orientalia 11a)*, Roma: Biblical Institute Press 1984, 34-41.

[23] In *Disputation*, section 7, Diyarbakir 95, f. 5r, the author represents Muḥammad as a crypto-Christian who was very well instructed in the Christian doctrine, but who kept it back from the Arabs, since he feared that they were not yet ripe for the mystery of the Trinity, would misunderstand it, and would lapse back into their former polytheism. The topic is a known one in the Syriac tradition (for example in Jakob of Sarug's works), where it is used to demonstrate that the Hebrews in their days were not yet ripe for receiving the doctrine of the triune God, for which reason this doctrine was concealed in Old Testament types and symbols.

[24] Diyarbakir 95, ff. 4v-5r.

> "And rightly you say [so]; Muḥammad received this word namely from the Gospel of Luke, as the angel Gabriel proclaimed and announced to the blessed Mary: "Peace be to you, full of grace; and our Lord is with you, blessed among women [Luke 1: 28]; for the Holy Spirit shall come, and the power of the Most High shall rest upon you;[25] therefore the one to be born from you is holy, and he shall be called Son of the Most High [Luke 1: 35]". Now, give heed to your word and understand what you heard from Muḥammad. Because you testify that he proclaimed him as the "Word of God and His Spirit", I ask from you now one thing of two: either you remove the "Word of God and His Spirit" from him, or you proclaim him straightforwardly [to be] the Son of God."

Qur'ān 4: 171/169 is not overtly referring to the Annunciation story, but other Qur'ānic passages, in fact, do (cf. Qur'ān 3: 42/37, 47/42; 19: 20/20). Did the author of the *Disputation* have any knowledge of these passages? We cannot be sure. Anyhow, Qur'ān 4: 171/169 belonged to the publicly known anti-Christian Qur'ānic texts, which in the nineties of the seventh century were propagated by the Umayyad authorities.[26] But Christian sources also testify that since that time they have been informed about the definition in Qur'ān 4: 171/169. Jacob of Edessa, in a letter to John the Stylite (written at the beginning of the eighth century), testifies to his knowledge of the Muslims' rejection of the Divinity of Christ and their definition of Jesus as the "Word of God" and the "Spirit of God". The first part of this definition, Jacob says, is, indeed, consistent with the Holy Scriptures. However, in adding the element of the "Spirit of God", the Muslims show their ignorance, since they are not able to distinguish between "Word" and "Spirit".[27] By the end of the eighth century the

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[25] The verb *naggen*, which I translate with "shall rest", is that of the Pešiṭta of Luke 1:35. For the background of this term in the Syriac tradition, see, in particular, S.P. Brock, "The Lost Old Syriac at Luke 1: 35 and the Earliest Syriac Terms for the Incarnation", in: *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century. Origins, Recensions, Text and Transmission (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 3)*, W.L. Petersen, ed., Notre Dame-London: University of Notre Dame Press 1989, 117-131.

[26] For Qur'ān 4: 171/169 in the inscription inside the Dome of the Rock built by ʿAbd al-Malik in 691/2 AD, see C. Kessler, "ʿAbd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock: a Reconsideration", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, new series, 1970, 2-14, p. 11; S.S. Blair, "What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?", in: *Bayt al-Maqdis. ʿAbd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, part I, J. Raby and J. Johns, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992, 59-87, 86-87; O. Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy. Early Islamic Jerusalem*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1996, 60, 63; Reinink, "Political Power", 153-154.

[27] Syriac text and French transl. by F. Nau, "Lettre de Jacques d'Edesse sur la généalogie de la sainte Vierge", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 6 (1901), 517-522/522-531, 518-519/523-524; English transl. by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 166.

Catholicos Timothy I refers to Qur'ān 4: 171/169 in his *Apology*. In the context of the discussion of the name "servant" in connection with Christ, the Catholicos adduces Qur'ān 4: 171/169 as evidence for Christ's Lordship and His (divine) Sonship:[28]

> "Thus, also in the Qur'ān, as I have heard, Christ is called the Word and the Spirit of God, and not a servant. And if Christ is the Word and the Spirit of God, then Christ is not a servant. So then, as appears from the Qur'ān, He is not a servant, but a Lord."

Jacob and Timothy – we may also add John of Damascus[29] – do not connect Qur'ān 4: 171/169 with the Annunciation story in Luke. The author of the Greek *Dispute between a Saracen and a Christian* (presumably written not before the end of the eighth century),[30] however, also connects Qur'ān 4: 171/169 with Luke 1:35:[31]

> "And if the Saracen say to you: "How did God descend into the womb?", answer then to him: "Let us invoke your Scripture and my Scripture. Your Scripture says, that God purged the Virgin Mary first more than all other women [cf. Qur'ān 3: 42/37] and that the Spirit of God and the Word descended upon her [cf. Qur'ān 4: 171/169]; and my Gospel says: 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you [Luke 1: 35].' See, then, that both texts [speak with] *one* voice and [express] *one* thought."

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[28] A. Mingana, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi", ed. and English transl., *Woodbrooke Studies* 2 (1928), 1-162, 156/83. Timothy is well aware of the polemical context of Qur'ān 4: 171/169, since a little later he quotes Qur'ān 4: 172/170: "The Messiah is not ashamed of being a servant of God" (pp. 157/85). The English translation is mine.

[29] John of Damascus, *De haeresibus* 100/101, referring twice to Qur'ān 4: 171/169, uses this passage to respond to the Muslim charge, that the Christians are "associators", people who ascribe a partner to God: "How, when you say that Christ is the Word and Spirit of God, do you revile us as associators? For the Word and the Spirit are inseparable... So we call you mutilators of God" (transl. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 486). For a general view of John of Damascus and Islam, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 480-489, and the bibliographical references there, and A. Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, 76-83.

[30] For the date and author of this text, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 489; R. Glei and A.T. Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra: Schriften zum Islam (Corpus Islamo-Christianum, Series Graeca 3)*, Würzburg-Altenberge: Echer Verlag-Oros Verlag 1995, 59-63.

[31] Ed. and German transl. by Glei and Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos*, 178/179.

The *Dispute between a Saracen and a Christian* not only connects Qur'ān 4: 171/169 with Luke 1: 35, but it seems also, like our *Disputation*, to interpret the gospel's words "the power of the Most High" as referring to the Word, the Divine Son, the second person of the Trinity.

As to the *Disputation*, this is a remarkable fact, since its author is not following here the exegesis of Luke 1: 35 given by Theodore of Mopsuestia, the interpreter *par excellence* of the East Syrian tradition, but rather the explanation of Ephrem Syrus. It seems that Theodore interpreted "the power of the Most High" as referring to the power of the working of the Spirit. Pointing to Acts 10: 38: *God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power*, Theodore argues that the Holy Scripture, when it mentions the name "Spirit", usually does so in connection with the name "power". In fact, the Evangelist says this in Luke 1: 35:[32]

> "The working of the Spirit, whose power is exalted and strong, shall be upon you, since He deems you worthy to be aided by Him, so that you will be able to receive the greatness of this gift."

On the other hand, Ephrem at several places, as Sebastian Brock states, "in common with much of the later Syriac tradition (and with several earlier Greek writers) differentiates the Power from the Holy Spirit, identifying the Power as the Word".[33] Here, as in other instances, the author of the *Disputation* shows himself a faithful heir of Ephrem's realm of thought, and he implicitly assumes that his audience knows about this interpretation of Luke 1: 35.[34]

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[32] Theodore's Commentary on Luke as a whole is lost. Theodore's exegesis of Luke 1: 35, however, is preserved in the Anonymous Commentary of the New Testament, which is preserved in the East Syrian manuscript (*olim*) Diyarbakir 22, f. 283v, lines 1-15. This exegesis is taken from the Theodore-source of the author of the Anonymous Commentary and it reflects in every detail Theodore's train of thought and style; cf. G.J. Reinink, *Studien zur Quellen- und Traditionsgeschichte des Evangelienkommentars der Gannat Bussame*, CSCO, 414, Subs. 57, Louvain: Peeters 1979, 218-222; idem, "Die Exegese des Theodor von Mopsuestia in einem Anonymen nestorianischen Kommentar zum Neuen Testament", in: *Studia Patristica* XIX, E.A. Livingstone, ed., Leuven: Peeters 1989, 381-391.

[33] Brock, "The Lost Old Syriac", p. 120.

[34] See below, p. 68. Brock, "The Lost Old Syriac", p. 120, n. 10, rightly observes, that "in later Syriac exegesis most West Syrian writers identify the Power as the Word, while East Syrian writers often equate the Power with the Spirit". The latter tradition in East Syrian exegesis was, as we observed above, inspired by Theodore of Mopsuestia.

In section 11 Muḥammad's words are quoted for the second time. After having admitted that the Christians possess religious truth and not a false confession, as some believed, the Arab adduces Muḥammad's positive view of the Christian monks: "Muḥammad, our prophet, also said about the inhabitants of monasteries and the mountain dwellers that they will enjoy the Kingdom."[35] As already appears from the name "Kingdom", this alleged pronouncement of Muḥammad is not a *verbatim* quotation from the Qur'ān. There are, however, two places in the Qur'ān, which could be interpreted as positive pronouncements concerning the monks (Qur'ān 5: 82/85; 57: 27/27), and there are also some *ḥadīth*s which reflect positive views of Christian monasticism.[36] Besides, the author of the *Disputation* knows about the tradition of Muḥammad being instructed by Sargīs Bĕḥīrā,[37] whom early Islamic tradition knows as the monk who was the teacher of the young Muḥammad and who recognized the latter's future prophethood.[38] It is also important to note that already by the end of the 680s eastern Christians were under the impression that Muḥammad, at the commandment of God and from the very beginning of the Arab conquests, gave orders to hold the Christians,

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[35] Diyarbakir 95, f. 8r.

[36] Cf. Griffith, "Disputing", p. 10. For a discussion of these Qur'ānic passages, the *ḥadīth* and Muslim exegetical traditions concerning the topic of monasticism, see S. Sviri, "*WA-RAHBĀN. ATAN IBTADAʿŪHĀ*: An Analysis of Traditions Concerning the Origin and Evaluation of Christian Monasticism", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), 195-208; J.D. McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, Cambridge-New York-Port Chester-Melbourne-Sydney: Cambridge University Press 1991, 260-284.

[37] Disputation, section 7, Diyarbakir 95, f. 5r: "So Muḥammad also...taught you first one true God, a doctrine that he had received from Sargīs Bĕḥīrā."

[38] For this topic in Islamic sources since the eighth century, see, in particular, B. Roggema, "The Legend of Sergius- Baḥīrā: Some Remarks on Its Origin in the East and its Traces in the West" in: *East and West in the Crusader States. Context– Contacts– Confrontations, II*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 92, K. Ciggaar and H. Teule, eds., Leuven-Paris-Dudley MA: Peeters & Departement Oosterse Studies 1999,107. For the ninth-century Christian Bĕḥīrā legend, see S.H. Griffith, "Muḥammad and the Monk Baḥīrā: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from the Early Abbasid Times", *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995), 146-174; S. Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Baḥīrā, the Cult of the Cross, and Iconoclasm", in: *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, VIIe – VIIIe siècles, P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais, eds., Damas: Institut français de Damas 1992, 47-58; Roggema, "The Legend of Sergius- Baḥīrā", 107-123; eadem, "A Christian Reading of the Qur'ān: The Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā and Its Use of Qur'ān and Sīra", in: *Syrian Christians under Islam. The First Thousand Years*, D. Thomas, ed., Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill 2001, 56-73.

and in particular the monks, in honour.[39] John bar Penkaye, our witness for this tradition, does not reveal any knowledge of the Qurʾān or of any Qurʾānic statements about Jesus. His knowledge of early Islam is restricted, and seems merely to reflect some general views which were circulating in his time and in his milieu.[40]

It is likely also that the author of the *Disputation*, in quoting Muḥammad's words in section 11, is referring to a tradition that was commonly known in Christian circles. This brings us to the conclusion that there is not much evidence for the assumption that the author of the *Disputation* had any direct knowledge of the Qurʾān. It seems rather that his information about Qurʾānic traditions was based upon reports which were becoming commonly known in society at the time; these would have included the increasing Muslim criticisms of Christianity, which were being vigorously promoted by the Muslim authorities during and following the 690s.[41] It is perhaps not by chance that the Arab interlocutor in the *Disputation* is presented as somebody who possessed a high position at the court of Maslama, the governor of both Iraqs in 720-721, who was a son of the Arabization and Islamization caliph ʿAbd al-Malik.[42]

Still, if we compare the *Disputation* with the Christian sources from the seventh century, we can discover in the *Disputation* a remarkable development in Christian

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[39] Ed. and French transl. by A. Mingana, *Sources Syriaques I: Mšiḥa-Zkha, Bar Penkayé*, Mossoul: Imprimerie des Pères Dominicains 1908, 141*, 146*/175*; English transl. by S.P. Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century. Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē's *Rīš Mellē*", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987), 51-74, 57, 61 (repr. in: S.P. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, Aldershot: Variorum, Ashgate Publishing Limited 1992: II). For recent studies on John's work, see P. Bruns, "Von Adam und Eva bis Mohammed – Beobachtungen zur syrischen Chronik des Johannes bar Penkaye", *Oriens Christianus* 87 (2003), 47-64; H. Kaufhold, "Anmerkungen zur Textüberlieferung der Chronik des Johannes bar Penkāyē", Oriens Christianus 87 (2003), 65-79; G.J. Reinink, "East Syrian Historiography in Response to the Rise of Islam: The Case of John bar Penkaye's *Ktābā d-rēš mellē*", in: *Redefining Christian Identity. Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 134, J.J. van Ginkel, H.L. Murre-Van den Berg, and T.M. van Lint, eds., Leuven-Paris-Dudley, MA: Peeters & Departement Oosterse Studies 2005, 77-89.

[40] Reinink, "The Beginnings", 167-177.

[41] Cf. Reinink, "Political Power", 153-154.

[42] For Maslama, cf. G. Rotter, "Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān", in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 7, Leiden: Brill 1991, 740. For ʿAbd al-Malik's Arabization and Islamization politics, see H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, London-New York: Longman, 99; G.R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam. The Umayad Caliphate AD 661-750*, London-Sydney: Croom Helm, 63-66; A. Rippin, *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices*, London-New York: Routledge, 2005, 68-71; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 16, 48-49, 553-554.

knowledge of early Islam. The confession of the new rulers is considered now to be more than only a continuation of Old Testament Abrahamic monotheism and its practices.[43] It manifests itself not only as a separate *tawdītā* (confession) with its own holy book written by its own Prophet,[44] but also as a *tawdītā* which claims to be superior to all confessions on earth.

By way of conclusion, I offer some preliminary comments on the author's use of biblical and non-biblical arguments against the criticisms of Christian tenets and practices, as these are put forward by the Arab of the *Disputation*.

It strikes one, first of all, that the author of the *Disputation* usually advances quotations from the Bible as part of Tradition. We have already seen that his use of Luke 1: 35 implies a certain exegesis of this passage. In earlier publications I have pointed out that some of the *Disputation*'s quotations from the Bible or biblical references were borrowed from intermediary sources, for example from a biblical commentary and an apocalyptic text.[45] It seems very likely that many of the biblical *testimonia* adduced against the Muslims' rejection of the Trinity, the veneration of the Cross and the practice of worshipping towards the East, stem from traditional lore.[46] We encounter several parallels for these

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[43] See G.J. Reinink, "The Lamb on the Tree: Syriac Exegesis and Anti-Islamic Apologetics", in: *The Sacrifice of Isaac. The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations (Themes in Biblical Narrative 4)*, E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar, eds., Leiden-Boston- Köln: Brill, 2002, 109-124, esp. 123-124 (repr. in: idem, *Syriac Christianity*: XV).

[44] The Arab calls Muḥammad "our prophet", *Disputation*, section 7, Diyarbakir 95, f. 5r. This is one of the oldest witnesses of Syriac Christian knowledge about Muḥammad's prophethood. For the polemics against the Muslims calling their 'warrior' a prophet in the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, which was probably written in the 690s, see my forthcoming article "From Apocalyptics to Apologetics: Early Syriac Reactions to Islam". It is typical of the apologetic character of the Disputation that its author does not enter into the discussion of Muḥammad's prophethood. For other early witnesses, see R.G. Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: An Appraisal", in: *The Biography of Muḥammad. The Issue of the Sources (Islamic History and Civilisation* 32), H. Motzki, ed., Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill 2000, 276-297, esp. 285-286.

[45] For the typological exegesis of Gen. 22 in the *Disputation* and the commentary source used here, see Reinink, "The Lamb", 114-115. For the biblical references taken from the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, see Reinink, "Political Power", p. 166.

[46] *Disputation*, section 6, Diyarbakir 95, f. 4r (Trinity); section 8, Diyarbakir 95, f. 5v (Cross); section 10, Diyarbakir 95, f. 7v-8r (Worship towards the East).

testimonia in anti-Jewish polemical sources.[47] Furthermore, one finds the same phenomenon in the *Interrogation of Patriarch John by a Muslim Emir*.[48] This is, of course, not at all astonishing, since the refutation of these Muslim anti-Christian topics had precedents in the tradition of Christian-Jewish polemic-religious discourse.[49]

The *Disputation*'s non-biblical arguments are, moreover, firmly rooted in the author's cultural tradition. He very consciously applies non-biblical arguments whenever these are required. When, at the beginning of the *Disputation*, the Arab states that he loves the truth, but does not accept all Christian Scriptures, the monk answers that he will reply either by adducing arguments from the Scriptures, or on the basis of what he calls the *tē'ōrīya d-re'yānā*, the "intellectual contemplation" (section 3).[50] What the author, in fact, means with this expression are the arguments based on human reason and the examples taken from nature. The Arab is presented as someone who accepts this category of arguments, since his "intellect" (*re'yānā*) agrees with the "natural" examples adduced by the monk (section 5).[51]

In these "natural" examples the author of the *Disputation* is still far removed from the programmatic use of nature and reason as the principal common ground

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[47] For the Trinity, see below n. 49. For the Old Testament *testimonia* of the veneration of the works of hands (comparison of the brazen serpent in Num. 21: 8-9 with the Cross), and of the worshipping towards the East (Paradise situated in the East; Gen. 2:8), the eastern gate of the tabernacle, David (Ps. 68: 33), cf., for example, the anti-Jewish disputation known as the *Trophies of Damascus* (mid to late seventh century), ed. G. Bardy, *Les Trophées de Damas*, PO 15,2, Turnhout: Brepols 1973: III,6 (veneration of images); III, 7 (direction of prayer), 245-250, 250-254. Cf. A. Külzer, *Disputationes Graecae contra Iudaeos. Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen antijüdischen Dialogliteratur und ihrem Judenbild (Byzantinisches Archiv* 18), Stuttgart-Leipzig: Teubner 1999, 155-158; Hoyland, Seeing Islam, 78-87. For Num. 21: 8-9, cf. also M.C. Albl, *"And Scripture Cannot Be Broken". The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections*, Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill 1999, 129.

[48] In the discussion of the Trinity and Divinity of Christ, ed. Nau, "Un colloque", 249-251/259-261. In particular Homily LXX of Severus of Antioch's *Cathedral Homilies* may have been the *Interrogation's* source here, since it has some striking parallels with Severus's work; see Reinink, "The Beginnings", 177 and n. 71.

[49] For example, as Old Testament testimonia for the Trinity the *Disputation* adduces successively Gen. 1:26, Gen. 11:7 and Is. 6:3 (section 6, Diyarbakir 95, f. 4r). We find the same proof-texts, in the same order in, for example, Jacob of Serugh's *Homilies against the Jews*, I: 131-142, ed. and French transl. by M. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélies contre les Juifs, PO* 38, Turnhout: Brepols 1976, 52-53. For Gen. 1: 26, cf. also Albl, *Testimonia Collections*, 122.

[50] Diyarbakir 95, f. 1v.

[51] Diyarbakir 95, f. 3v.

for interreligious Christian-Muslim discourse, as this appears in, for example, Job of Edessa's apologetics against Islam.[52] The examples in the *Disputation* remount to much older Syriac theological and polemical traditions. One of the *Disputation*'s traceable sources is again the work of Ephrem Syrus. In the discussion of the triune God, the author adduces the well-known comparison between the sun, which is one sphere, out of which brightness and heat are radiated, and the one God who is known in three hypostases, which differ in their properties.[53] Defending the Christian veneration of the Cross, the author of the *Disputation* falls back on Ephrem's symbolism of the Cross,[54] in which the latter is compared with the four quarters of the earth,[55] the flying bird,[56] and the human body.[57] In another example the omnipresence and unlimitedness of God is compared with water, in which the fishes have their permanent element, wherever they may go.[58] At a certain moment the Arab is worried about the Theopaschite problem: "How is it possible, when the Divinity was with Him on the cross and in the tomb, as you say, that it did not suffer and was not harmed?" The monk first of all reproves the opinion of the heretics who say that the Divinity was with Christ "in a mixture, mingling and confusion", proclaiming the approved, East Syrian opinion of the union

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[52] G.J. Reinink, "The 'Book of Nature' and Syriac Apologetics against Islam. The Case of Job of Edessa's *Book of Treasures*", in: *The Book of Nature in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Groningen Studies in Cultural Change* 16), A. Vanderjagt and K. van Berkel, eds., Leuven-Paris-Dudley, MA: Peeters 2005, 71-84, 82-83.

[53] E. Beck, *Ephräms Trinitätslehre im Bild von Sonne/Feuer, Licht und Wärme*, CSCO 425, Subs. 62, Louvain: Peeters 1981, esp.119: "Und nun zum Bilde selber bei Ephräm und bei den Griechen. Hier liegt wohl sicher die eigne Leistung Ephräms vor allem darin, daß er für den Geist durchgängig und konsequent die Wärme als dessen Symbol herausgestellt und durchgeführt hat."

[54] *Disputation*, section 8, Diyarbakir 95, f. 6v. For Ephrem's symbolism of the Cross, see P. Yousif, "St. Ephrem on Symbols in Nature: Faith, the Trinity, and the Cross (Hymns on Faith, no. 18)", *Eastern Churches Review* 10 (1978), 52-60; C.A. Karim, *Symbols of the Cross in the Writings of the Early Syriac Fathers*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2004, esp. 89-104.

[55] Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 18: 3, ed. E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, CSCO, 154, Script. Syr. 73 (text), 155, Script. Syr. 74 (transl.), Louvain: Peeters 1955, 70/54.

[56] *Hymns on Faith*, 18: 2, 6, ed. Beck, 69-70/54.

[57] *Hymns on Faith*, 18: 12, ed. Beck, 71/55. The image concerns a man extending his arms to put on his tunic.

[58] *Disputation*, section 9, Diyarbakir 95, f. 7r.

through the will.[59] He then adduces two examples from nature, which show that this union left the Divinity unharmed:[60]

> "Listen to two examples, which are very trustworthy for the friends of God. Just as when the sun stands on a wall, and you take an axe and ruin the wall, the sun is not harmed and does not suffer, so the body, that [is] from us, died and was buried and rose, whereas the Divinity did not suffer. And just as iron that one leaves in the fire, if one does not throw it into the water, how long it may be, when one want it [so], increases its working, so the eternal Son, who sojourned in the temple which [is] from us, was with him on the cross and in the tomb and in His resurrection and showed His working."[61]

It is likely that these examples already belonged to a tradition of anti-Theopaschite polemics, to which the author gave a new place in the *Disputation* with the purpose of instructing his East Syrian coreligionists in the rightness of their "apostolic faith" as opposed to the Christian (Monophysite) heretics and the Muslim rejection of the Divinity of Christ.

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[59] *Disputation*, section 5, Diyarbakir 95, f. 3r-v. The anti-Theopaschite wording – whereby the Divinity was with the Humanity of Christ without "mixture" (*muzzāgā*), "mingling" (*ḥulṭānā*) or "confusion" (*bulbālā*) – concurs with the confession of faith of the East Syrian Synod of 486; English translation by S. Brock, "The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials", in: *Aksum-Thyateira: a Festschrift for Archbishop Methodios*, G. Dragas, ed., London: Thyateira House 1985, 125-142, 133 (repr. in: idem, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*: XII). For the union "through the will" (*ṣebyānā'īt*), cf. a.o. Michael Malpana's treatise against the Monophysites, ed. and transl. by L. Abramowski and A.E. Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts*, vol. I (Syriac Text), vol. II (Introduction, Translation and Indexes), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1972, 109, 23/63, 37; for the background in Theodore of Mopsuestia's Christology, cf. R.A. Greer, *The Captain of our Salvation (Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese* 15), Tübingen: Mohr 1973, 213-220.

[60] Disputation, section 5, Diayarbakir 95, f. 3v.

[61] The second example may be difficult to understand. The author apparently argues that as longer as one wants to leave iron in the fire, the more its working power increases. Thus also the working of the Divinity was not affected (diminished) by the cross etc., but was rather manifesting its increasing strength.

Conclusion

In his important article on Christian apologetics in the world of Islam, in which he *inter alia* discusses the different genres of Christian apology, Sidney Griffith notes:[62]

> "The characters in the narratives of the popular genres of apologetics and polemics are types; they are usually not recognizable personally, but they suggest readily recognizable *personae* in the society; their names are most often symbolic, even when they are the names of real persons. In the narratives they are playing a role, not representing themselves in any real way. And the role is most often that of a Christian who cannot be bested in an argument about religion by a Muslim."

The profile of this type of literary apologetics, as sketched by Griffith, applies perfectly to our *Disputation*. The main characters, the monk and the Arab notable, are no more than instruments in the author's hands, and through these *personae* the author is able to touch on the current Muslim objections against the Christian confession and the most adequate Christian counterarguments – all of this with the purpose of instructing and edifying his coreligionists. Although this circumstance makes the *Disputation* a highly sophisticated and in a sense artificial work, it does not at all mean that it is deficient in historical relevance.[63] However, the *Disputation* first of all reveals us what Christians at that time knew of the tenets and practices of the religion of the rulers, how they looked at their politico-religious claims, and how they tried to maintain and reinforce their own religious identity in new, challenging and increasingly difficult historical circumstances.

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[62] S.H. Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam", in: *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 134, Van Ginkel, Murre-van den Berg, and Van Lint, eds., Leuven-Paris-Dudley, MA, Peeters: 2005, 91-126, 120.

[63] It is for several reasons likely that we may accept the suggestion of the author that the *Disputation* was composed in the 720s, in the post-ʿAbd al-Malik era, when the Christian clergy was faced with Arab authorities who openly and officially claimed that Islam, the religion of the State, was superior to all religions of the world, and to Christianity in the first place (Reinink, "Political Power").

II

Theology in Dialogue with Islam

Theologie im Gespräch mit dem Islam

From Patriarch Timothy I to Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq: philosophy and Christian apology in Abbasid times; reason, ethics and public policy

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I

So far as we know, the earliest Christian intellectual with a regular entrée to the highest levels of the Abbasid court was Patriarch Timothy I (727-823), who for forty-three years (780-823) served as the major hierarch of the so-called 'Nestorian' Church of the East,[1] first in Seleucia-Ctesiphon and then in Baghdad.[2] While he no doubt spoke Arabic, the patriarch wrote in Syriac. And among the many works ascribed to him, most of which have not survived to modern times, some fifty-nine letters are still extant, of the approximately two-hundred he is known to have written. While they are addressed to friends, mostly church officials, they are more than personal correspondence, being on the order of public letters, or letter-treatises, perhaps best thought of as essays. In them the patriarch discusses a number of liturgical, canonical and theological topics, and several of them have to do with issues of Muslim/Christian interest, including letters in which Timothy describes in some detail the responses he has given to questions put to him by

[1] Sebastian P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester* 78 (1996), 23-35.

[2] Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I (780-823): Étude sur l'église nestorienne au temps des premiers ʿAbbāsides, avec nouvelle édition et traduction du dialogue entre Timothée et al-Mahdī*, Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs, 1975; Harald Suermann, "Timotheos I, +823," in: Wassilios Klein, ed., *Syrische Kirchenväter*, Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2004, 152-167.

Muslims or inspired by Muslim concerns.[3] By far the most well-known of these is the patriarch's account of his debate with the caliph al-Mahdī (775-785) on the beliefs and practices of the Christians.[4]

Patriarch Timothy's account of his defense of Christian doctrine and practice in the *majlis* of the caliph al-Mahdī, sometimes listed among his works as Letter LIX, was destined to become one of the classics among the Christian apologies of the early Islamic period. It circulated in its original Syriac in a fuller and in an abbreviated form,[5] and it was soon translated into Arabic,[6] in which language the account of Timothy's days in the caliph's court has enjoyed a long popularity, extending well into modern times. But it is not the only one of the patriarch's letters which takes up what we might call Islamic issues. Several others discuss questions which were obviously posed with Muslim challenges in mind. One might mention in this connection, Letter XXXIV, on the proper understanding of the title 'Servant of God' as an epithet for Christ,[7] Letter XXXV, in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, and Letter XXXVI, against the opinions of those who demean the majesty of Christ.[8]

Letter XL, which the patriarch addressed to his former academic colleague Sergius, director of the school of Bashosh and soon to be the bishop of Elam,[9] presents a somewhat detailed account of Patriarch Timothy's colloquy with an interlocutor whom he met one day at the caliph's court; Timothy says the man was a

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[3] Thomas R. Hurst, *The Syriac Letters of Timothy I (727-823): A Study in Christian Muslim Controversy*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1986 – University Microfilms International, #8613464; Harald Suermann, "Der nestorianische Patriarch Timotheos I. und seine theologischen Briefe im Kontext des Islam," in: Martin Tamcke and Andreas Heinz, eds. *Zu Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen*, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte, vol. 9; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2000, 217-230.

[4] Alphonse Mingana, "Timothy's Apology for Christianity," in: *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshuni; Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus*, vol. II, Cambridge: Heffer, 1928, 1-162; *idem*, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph al-Mahdī," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester* 12 (1928), 137-226.

[5] Albert van Roey, "Un apologie syriaque attribuée à Elie de Nisibe," *Le Muséon* 59 (1946), 381-397.

[6] Putman, *L'église et l'islam*.

[7] Thomas R. Hurst, "The Epistle Treatise: An Apologetic Vehicle: Letter 34 of Timothy I," in: H.J.W. Drijvers *et al.*, eds. *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 229; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987, 367-382.

[8] For brief descriptions of these letters see Hurst, *The Syriac Letters of Timothy I*, esp. 43-68.

[9] Harald Suermann, "Timothy and his Concern for the School of Basos," *The Harp* 10 (1997), 51-58.

devotee of the philosophy of Aristotle.[10] But the course of the conversation which the patriarch reports on the ways to know the one God, on the three persons of the one God and the doctrine of the Incarnation, and on the significance of various Christian religious practices sounds more like the account of a conversation with a Muslim *mutakallim*, rather than a discussion with a philosopher.[11] In a recent study, the present writer has shown how the course of the patriarch's report of his conversation with the Muslim scholar, who wanted to talk with him about God, fairly well replicates what in all probability was the topical outline customarily to be found in the typical Muʿtazilī *Kitāb at-tawḥīd* of the period.[12] As for the Muslim's Aristotelian interests, Patriarch Timothy specifies that the unnamed man "had special training in the thinking (*hawnâ*) of Aristotle. [13] But in the letter, as the patriarch proceeds to disprove his debate partner's positions with flawless logic, it appears that the Muslim was only a *soi disant* Aristotelian. Reading between the lines, it seems that Patriarch Timothy presented his Muslim adversary to Sergius as one who cultivated a fashionable affectation in the matter of the philosophy of Aristotle, at the time when the translation movement was first catching the fancy of the caliphal court. But in fact, both the adversary's idiom and the concerns he voiced were those of the *mutakallimūn*.

The mention of Aristotle and of philosophy calls to mind the fact that Patriarch Timothy was himself called upon by Muslim patrons to provide Arabic translations of Greek logical and scientific texts, often from intermediary translations into Syriac. For example, no less a personage than the caliph himself called upon the patriarch to arrange for a translation of Aristotle's *Topica* into Arabic, and Timothy discussed the undertaking in two very interesting letters which have survived,[14] in which the reader gains a lively sense of the multifaceted processes involved in the enterprise. In this connection, and in connection with the beginnings of Christian involvement in the Abbasid translation project, what John Watt has recently written about Patriarch Timothy's translation is noteworthy. He says,

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[10] Hanna P. J. Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu: Lettre de Timothée I (728-823) à Serge; étude, traduction et édition critique*, Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1983.

[11] Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols.; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991-1997, vol. III, 23.

[12] Sidney H. Griffith, "Patriarch Timothy I and an Aristotelian at the Caliph's Court," in press.

[13] Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu*, at MS Vat. Syr 605, f. 216v.

[14] Sebastian P. Brock, "Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9 (1999), 233-246.

> "The earliest unambiguous evidence of interest in Aristotelian philosophy in the upper levels of Abbasid Muslim society is the commission of al-Mahdī to the East Syrian Catholicos Timothy I for a translation of Aristotle's *Topics* from Syriac into Arabic."[15]

This interest on the part of the Abbasid elite in Arabic translations of the logical works of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, and in Greek mathematical, scientific and medical texts by other writers, such as Galen (129-c.210), ushered in a whole new era for Christian intellectual life in Baghdad. And since the Abbasid caliph's capital was located in the historical heartland of the Assyrian Church of the East, it is no surprise that so-called 'Nestorian' Christians, including Patriarch Timothy himself, found their way in Baghdad to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new intellectual movement. Some were physicians, some were philosophers, and some were logicians, mathematicians, copyists or translators.[16] All of them contributed something to the newly flowering culture of the early days of the burgeoning classical period of Islamic civilization. But in no society-wide enterprise did these 'Nestorian' Christians take a more prominent role than they did in the famed translation movement. For, as Dimitri Gutas has noted, the vast majority of the translators of Greek and Syriac texts into Arabic were Christians;[17] their names and their undertakings have long been known.[18]

Interest in Greek learning and philosophy, particularly Aristotle's logic, had been widespread in the Syriac-speaking communities already from the sixth century onward,[19] including the 'Nestorian' school system in centers such as

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[15] John W. Watt, "Syriac Translators and Greek Philosophy in Early Abbasid Iraq," *The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies Journal* 4 (2004), 15-26, 17.

[16] Raymond Le Coz, *Les médecins nestoriens au moyen âge: Les maîtres des arabes*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004.

[17] Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, London and New York: Routledge 1998, 136.

[18] Bénédicte Landron, "Les chrétiens arabes et les disciplines philosophiques," Proche Orient Chrétien 36 (1986), 23-45; Ephraem-Isa Yousif, *Les philosophes et traducteurs syriaques; d'Athènes à Bagdad*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997; Mirella Cassarino, *Traduzioni e Traduttori Arabi dall' VIII all' XI Secolo*, Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1998.

[19] John Watt, "Grammar, Rhetoric, and the Enkyklios Paideia in Syriac," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 143 (1993), 45-71; Javier Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque: Paul le Perse, logicien du Vie siècle*, Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2003; Henri Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque: Études sur la transmission des textes de l'Organon et leur interprétation philosophique*, Textes et Traditions, 9; Paris: Librairie Philosophique Vrin, 2004.

Nisibis,[20] al-Ḥīra, the monastery of Dayr Qunnā[21] and Jundīsābūr.[22] In the sixth century, Paul the Persian (fl.531-578), who had ties to the ancient school of Alexandria, was already cultivating Aristotelianism among the east Syrians, albeit that in the end he seems to have become a convert to Zoroastrianism in Persia, at the court of Anūshirwān (531-579).[23] By the mid-eighth century, 'Nestorian' scholars such as the well-known members of the Bukhtīshūʿ family, with their connections to Jundīsābūr, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (808-873), who hailed from the 'Nestorian' capital of the Lakhmids, al-Ḥīra, and Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d.940), from the flourishing monastery of Dayr Qunnā, not far from Baghdad, who became "the founder of the Aristotelian school in Baghdad early in the tenth century, all soon came to be among the dominant Christian scholars in the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in early Abbasid times. In the ninth century, one of them in particular stands out as an early representative of the new breed of Christian intellectuals in Baghdad in the heyday of the translation movement: Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq.

II

Unlike Patriarch Timothy and the other Arabic-speaking, Christian apologists in earlier Abbasid times, who for all their accomplishments as controversialists, or even as translators, were primarily churchmen engaged in ecclesiastical affairs, men like Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq in the ninth century, and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (c.893-974) in the tenth century, were professional scholars who circulated at the highest levels of Baghdad's learned elite. While they remained dedicated to the task of the systematic defense of the veracity of Christian doctrine and practice, and

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[20] G.J. Reinink, "'Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth': The School of Nisibis at the Transition of the Sixth-Seventh Century," in: J.W. Drijvers and A.A. MacDonald, eds. *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, Studies in Intellectual History, 61; Leiden: Brill, 1995, 77-89.

[21] Louis Massignon, "La politique islamo-chrétienne des scribes nestoriens de Deir Qunna à la cour de Bagdad au IXe siècle de notre ère," *Vivre et Penser* 2 (1942), 7-14, reprinted in: L. Massignon, *Opera Minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac, 3 vols.; Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1963, vol. I, 250-257.

[22] Heinz Herbert Schöffler, *Die Akademie von Gondischapur: Aristoteles auf dem Wege in den Orient*, 2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1980.

[23] Dimitri Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Bagdad," *Der Islam* 60 (1983), 231-267.

made major contributions to Christian apologetic literature in Arabic, as we shall see, these scholars also engaged wholeheartedly in the scientific, medical, and philosophical interests of contemporary Muslim intellectuals. Some of them even participated in the debates which roiled the Islamic religious establishment of the time over the proper rôle, if any, of the 'foreign sciences', such as Aristotelian logic, in Islamic religious discourse. What is more, intellectuals such as Ḥunayn and Yaḥyā vigorously cultivated a new line of Christian thinking in this milieu. They were prompted both by their interest in the Neo-Platonic Aristotelianism of sixth century Alexandria which, with the translation movement, had attained a new life in Baghdad, at the same time as they were also inspired by the works of early Muslim philosophers such as Ya'qūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī (c.800-c.867) and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (c.870-950). This new line of Christian thinking in Arabic sought to promote a reason-based, social ethic for the world in which the Arabic-speaking Christians and Muslims lived. It would be open both to the claims of the Christian and the Islamic scriptures, and which would also foster the acquisition of personal and public virtues on the part of the leaders of society, whose charge it would be to work for the common good of everyone in the body politic, especially the scholars, ascetics and religious teachers of both the church and the mosque.[24]

The most prominent and earliest of these new Christian intellectuals was Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq.[25] He is well known to historians as the founder and central figure in a ninth-century, Baghdadī school of translators of Greek medical and scientific texts.[26] In his day, he was also celebrated for the doggedness with which he studied Greek and pursued manuscripts from city to city, and perhaps even beyond the borders of the caliphate into the territory of the Romans. As a noted physician, Ḥunayn was a familiar presence in the intellectual circles of

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[24] See, e.g., the program proposed in the tenth century by Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, *The Reformation of Morals*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir, trans. Sidney H. Griffith; Provo, UT: The Brigham Young University Press, 2002.

[25] On Ḥunayn's life and works, see G.C. Anawati, "Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq al-'Ibādī, Abū Zayd," in: Charles Coulton Gillispie, ed. *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 15, supplement, I; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980, 230-234, and Albert Z. Iskandar, "Ḥunayn the Translator," and "Ḥunayn the Physician," in: Gillispie, *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, 234-249; Bénédicte Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak: Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'islam*, Études Chrétiennes Arabes; Paris: Cariscript, 1994, 66-71.

[26] Myriam Salama-Carr, *La traduction à l'époque abbaside: l'école de Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq et son importance pour la tradition*, Paris: Didier, 1990.

the caliphal court from the time of al-Ma'mūn (813-833) to that of al-Mu'tamid (869-892), enjoying a particularly high-profile career during the days of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861), whose sometime personal physician he was. Unlike earlier and contemporary Christian intellectuals such as Patriarch Timothy or the 'Melkite' Theodore Abū Qurrah (c.755-c.830), both of whom had done some translation work for Muslim patrons, Ḥunayn was one of the first Christians whose stories are widely told in the Arabic annals of Muslim learning in Abbasid times, by both medieval and modern authors.[27] In his day, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq was a public intellectual of record.

Modern scholarship on Ḥunayn and his works has largely focused its attention on his professional activity, his translations of logical, philosophical, medical and scientific texts, and on some of his more colorful, personal exploits, the knowledge of some of which reportedly comes from his own pen.[28] Relatively little attention has been paid to Ḥunayn's own ideas, either in the realm of philosophy or of theology. And yet there is ample evidence that these were of the greatest importance to him. Like his somewhat older, Muslim contemporary, the philosopher al-Kindī (c.800-c.867), of whom Gerhard Endress has said that for al-Kindī "philosophy was to vindicate the pursuit of rational activity as an activity in the service of Islam,"[29] so one might say of Ḥunayn that for him the cultivation of science and philosophy was to promote the claims of reason in service of both religion and public life.

Compared to other contemporary Christian intellectuals, Ḥunayn did not write so much on religious topics that has survived, but what he did write spoke to the major topics of the day, both Christian and Islamic. It is notable that, unlike other Christian writers of his own time and later, he did not engage in the church-dividing, inter-confessional, Christian controversies then currently flourishing. He did not, for example, so far as we know, write polemical tracts

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[27] A case in point is the recent book published by a Muslim scholar in Saudi Arabia: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh Dubyān, *Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq: Dirāsah tarīkhiyyah walughawiyyah*, Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Wataniyyah, 1993.

[28] For an English translation of portions of Ḥunayn's 'autobiography' see Dwight F. Reynolds et *al.* eds. *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 212ff.

[29] Gerhard Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindī: Early Arabic Translations from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy," in Gerhard Endress and Remke Kruk, eds. The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism: Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences, Leiden: Research School CNWS, School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies, 1997, 50.

against the doctrinal views of the 'Melkites' or the 'Jacobites', or in support of the Christological teaching of his own, so-called 'Nestorian' church. Rather, in works which we know for the most part only by title, Ḥunayn addressed himself to issues such as why God created man in a state of need (*muḥtājan*), how one grasps the truths of religion, how to understand God's fore-ordainment of the affairs of the world (*al-qadar*) in the light of the profession of monotheism (*at-tawḥīd*), and what are the criteria according to which the true religion might be discerned. The latter was a particularly important topic for both Muslims and Christians in Ḥunayn's lifetime, as we shall see. In addition, in some sources Ḥunayn is said to have composed a history of the world from Adam to the time of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (d.861), including the kings of Israel, the Roman and Persian kings up to the time of Muḥammad, and the Muslim caliphs up to his own time. Unfortunately, this book has not survived. However, one should not underestimate the apologetic and even the polemic agenda of such books of history in the 'Sectarian Milieu' of the time, when Muslim authors from Ibn Isḥāq (d.c.767) and Ibn Hishām (d.834) to al-Yaʿqūbī (d.897) were presenting Muḥammad and his prophetic claims in terms of just such a biblio-historical narrative.[30] Ḥunayn's may well have been the first Christian effort in this vein in the Islamic milieu, a work which would not be taken up again by a Christian writer until the time of the 'Melkite' Eutychios of Alexandria/Saʿīd ibn Baṭrīq (877-940).[31] Later still, Elias of Nisibis (975-1046), like Ḥunayn a member of the so-called 'Nestorian' Church of the East, carried on the historical tradition in his *Chronography* (*Kitāb al-Azminah*).[32]

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[30] Already in the Syriac-speaking tradition, in the context of the doctrinal controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries, historians and chronographers were producing texts in this vein, a development which may well have inspired Muslim authors to buttress their religious claims in the same manner. See, e.g., the studies of Witold Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē: A Study in the History of Historiography*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Semitica Upsaliensia, 9; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987; Jan J. van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus: A Monophysite Historian in Sixth-Century Byzantium*, Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1995. This tradition continued among Syriac-speaking Christians well into the Middle Ages, with such works as the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian, the *Chronicon ad annum 1234*, and the Chronicle of Bar Hebraeus.

[31] Sidney H. Griffith, "Apologetics and Historiography in the Annals of Eutychios of Alexandria: Christian Self-Definition in the World of Islam," in: Rifaat Ebied and Herman Teule, eds. *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage: In Honor of Father Prof. Dr. Samir Khalil Samir*, Eastern Christian Studies, 5; Leuven: Peeters, 2004, 65-89.

[32] Samir Khalil Samir, "Élie de Nisibe (Iliyyā al-Naṣībī) (975-1046)," Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien," *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977), 283-284.

Luckily, one of Ḥunayn's principal contributions to Christian apologetics in the Islamic milieu, his discussion of the reasons (*al-asbāb*) why people accept either what is true or what is false in religion, has survived in at least two forms, with some variation between them.[33] In one form, the text was preserved by the medieval Coptic scholar al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl (*fl.* 1230-1260), who included it in his magisterial *Summary of the Principles of Religion*, together with a commentary on it by the twelfth century Coptic writer Yuḥannā ibn Mīnā, who, according to Ibn al-ʿAssāl, gathered his material "from the books of the scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) of the Christian *sharīʿah*."[34] The other form of the text is included in Ḥunayn's contribution to the correspondence between himself and his Muslim friend at the caliph's court, Abū ʿĪsā ibn al-Munajjim (d.888), who had summoned him and their younger 'Melkite' colleague Qusṭā ibn Lūqā (d.c.912), to Islam.[35] It seems to have been the case that contemporary and later Christian apologists made much use of Ḥunayn's discussion of these matters in their own further and rather original elaborations of what they presented as the negative criteria, the absence of which in Christianity, they claimed, is indicative of its unique status as the true religion. These apologists argued that the true religion is that one of the contemporary options which would not be accepted for any or all of the six or seven, unworthy and therefore negative reasons, for which, according to Ḥunayn and the others, people might accept a religion.[36]

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[33] See the discussions of this text in Rachid Haddad, "Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq apologiste Chrétien," and Paul Nwyia, "Actualité du concept de religion chez Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq," in: *Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq: Collection d'articles publiée à l'occasion du onzième centenaire de sa mort*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975, 292-302 & 313-317. See also the chapter on Ḥunayn in Dominique Urvoy, *Les penseurs libres dans l'islam classique*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1996, 67-92. It is interesting to note in passing that Ḥunayn's list of reasons why people adopt a particular religion is comparable in many ways to the reasons presented in the work of the Iranian physician Burzoy, which the Muslim free-thinker Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ translated into Arabic and published as the preface to his celebrated *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*. See Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque*, 31.

[34] Paul Sbath, ed. *Vingt traits philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IXe au XIVe siècle*, Cairo: H. Friedrich et Co., 1929, 186. Ḥunayn's text is republished in a modern, critical edition by Samir Khalil Samir, "Maqālah Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq fī kayfiyyat idrāk ḥaqīqat ad-diyānah," *al-Machriq* 71 (1997), 340-363.

[35] Khalil Samir and Paul Nwyia, eds. and trans. *Une correspondance islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munaǧǧim, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq et Qusṭā ibn Lūqā*, Patrologia Orientalis, tome 40, fasc., 4, no. 185; Turnhout: Brepols, 1981, 686-701.

[36] Sidney H. Griffith, "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians," *Proceedings of the PMR Conference: Annual Publication of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Conference*, 4 (1979), 63-87.

But perhaps the most significant of Ḥunayn's works from the point of view of highlighting the new element in the intellectual culture of the Christian scholars of Baghdad from the ninth to the eleventh centuries is one which is in fact seldom discussed. The new element was the systematic championship of logical reasoning in the discernment of both religious truth and right social behavior in the body politic. And the seldom studied work is Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, or *Nawādir al-falāsifah*, as it is sometimes also called, a composite work in the form in which we have it, transmitted in the abbreviated composition which has survived by a Muslim scholar of the late twelfth century, the otherwise unknown Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī, whose name appears as the scribe in the two extant manuscripts of the single recension of the integral text that has come down to us.[37] Most commentators on this work have characterized it as belonging to a well-known and popular genre of the time, the collection of gnomological, aphoristic sayings attributed to the ancient philosophers and wise men, including the likes of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Galen, and the Persian Luqmān. This characterization is certainly true as far as it goes; Ḥunayn's text is one of a number of Greek and Arabic compilations of wisdom sayings attributed to the ancient sages.[38] The individual aphorisms, which in the ensemble have been the focus of most scholarly attention so far, can indeed be traced from one compilation to another and the contents of the several collections can be compared with one another to show a continuing tradition in the collection of gnomological sayings. But each compilation can also be studied in its own right, with attention paid to each compiler's particular interests and concerns. Often the aphorisms are quoted within the context of an overarching narrative framework which expresses the principal concern of the compiler of each individual work. In Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, the narrative speaks of the founding of philosophy and its social significance, of its various branches, of the coming to be of 'houses of wisdom' among various peoples at the instigation of kings, not only among the ancient Greeks, but also among Jews, Christians and Muslims. It speaks of the sages who transmitted what Ḥunayn consistently calls 'knowledge' (*ʿilm*) or 'wisdom' (*ḥikmah*), and 'disciplinary practice' (*adab*). For him, the

[37] Abdurrahman Badawi, ed. *Hunain ibn Ishâq: Âdâb al-Falâsifa (Sentences des Philosophes)*, Safat, Koweit: Éditions de l'Institut des Manuscrits Arabes, 1985.

[38] Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia*, American Oriental Series, vol. 60; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1975.

pursuit of *'ilm* and *adab* constitutes the philosophical way of life; its practice promises happiness and harmony for both individuals and society as a whole.[39]

In the context of the burgeoning Christian intellectual life in Arabic in the ninth century, Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah* gave voice to a new line of thinking for Christians living in the caliphate, which would be developed even further by Christian intellectuals in the next generations. In addition to the customary apologetic concerns of Patriarch Timothy and others, the new turn in Christian thought in Arabic involved the appropriation of the Late Antique ideal of the philosophical way of life, as commended by the Neoplatonic Aristotelians of Athens and Alexandria in the sixth Christian century, as part and parcel of the Christian intellectual agenda in Islamic society. Of course, Syriac-speaking Christians in previous centuries, beginning with Paul the Persian in the sixth century,[40] had adumbrated this development. But now Christian thinkers writing in Arabic would be taking part in a conversation with contemporary Muslim intellectuals who, in addition to heightening the role of reason in religious discourse, were, like their Christian counterparts, developing an interest not only in the improving literature of the old 'mirror for princes' tradition, but in moral development, the acquisition of virtues, and the beginnings of a political philosophy,[41] which would eventually bear fruit in the Islamic instance, in the philosopher al-Fārābī's *Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*,[42] and in the growth in the tenth and eleventh centuries of what modern commentators have come to call Islamic humanism.[43]

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[39] Jean Jolivet, "L'idée de la sagesse et sa function dans la philosophie des 4e et 5e siècles," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 1 (1991), 31-65, esp. 45-47.

[40] Dimitri Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy"; Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque.*

[41] Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam; Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 148-196.

[42] Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001. On the intriguing suggestion that the ninth-century, Christian intellectual Anton of Tagrit could have paved the way for al-Fārābī's work, see John W. Watt, "From Themistius to al-Farabi: Platonic Political Philosophy and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the East," *Rhetorica* 13 (1995), 17-41.

[43] Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age*, Leiden: Brill, 1986; Lenn E. Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

III

But for the moment, let us linger with Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*. It is somewhat startling to realize that to date only one substantive study of the work has appeared, the doctoral dissertation of Karl Merkle, submitted to the University of Munich in 1921.[44] Merkle says that he had already prepared an edition of the Arabic text,[45] but it has never appeared. This, in spite of the fact that the thirteenth century, Andalusian, Hebrew translation of the *Ādāb al-falāsifah* was published in 1896,[46] and scholars have gone on to study it and the work's translation into Latin and other European languages in some detail.[47] It was not until 1985 that Abdurraḥmān Badawī published the original Arabic text.[48] Surprisingly, no study of the work has appeared since then.

Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī's presentation of Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah* is simple in outline; it seems to be a compilation of material from an originally much longer philosophy, its branches and the names by which the several schools of thought are called, including the rationale behind the choice of name for each group. Each report begins with some variation of the notice that Abū Zayd Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq has spoken as follows. While much of this material is clearly legendary, and sometimes inscrutable, a very interesting part of it, as we shall see, is Ḥunayn's account of how philosophy came to be among the Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The bulk of the work is the collection of sayings of the sages and philosophers which Ḥunayn transmitted from both ancient and seemingly contemporary, gnomological sources.[49] The series begins with sayings attributed to Socrates, who for Ḥunayn is clearly the dominant figure, followed by the sayings of

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[44] Karl Merkle, *Die Sittensprüche der Philosophen "Kitâb Âdâb al-falâsifa" von Ḥonein ibn Isḥâq in der Überarbeitung des Muḥammad ibn ʿAlî al-Anṣârî*, Diss. München; Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1921; republished in: Fuat Sezgin, ed. *Islamic Philosophy*, vol. 17; Frankfurt: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1999.

[45] Merkle, *Die Sittensprüche der Philosophen*, 4.

[46] Albert Loewenthal, *Honein ibn Isḥâq, Sinnsprüche der Philosophen. Nach der hebräischen Übersetzung Charisi's ins Deutsche übertragen und erläutert*, Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1896, reprinted in Sezgin, *Islamic Philosophy*.

[47] Manuel Alonso Alonso, "Ḥunayn traducido al latín por Ibn Dāwūd Gundisalvo," *al-Andalus* 16 (1951), 37-47; John K. Walsh, "Versiones Peninsulares del "Kitāb Ādāb al-falāsifa" de Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq," *al-Andalus* 41 (1978), 355-384.

[48] Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Isḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*.

[49] Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation*.

Plato and Aristotle, the latter's famous 'Letter to Alexander' being included at the end of the section. There follows at this point a long dossier of Alexander material, including the famous letter of Alexander to his mother, her own speech following Alexander's death and Aristotle's letter to Alexander's mother. References to this material appear frequently in contemporary and later, Muslim and Christian literature, especially in texts on the art of dispelling sorrow.[50] Following the Alexander dossier in the *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, the collection of sayings continues under the names of the ancient wise men, including Diogenes, Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Galen, Ptolomey, Luqmān, Hermes, Homer, Solon and several more obscure individuals. At the end there are several interesting selections of material, including one entitled, 'The Questions and Answers of the Philosophers', one on the 'Correspondence of the Sages,', and then finally two mini-collections called respectively, '*Ādāb* of the Philosopher Mahādharjīs or Hādharjīs, the Teacher',[51] and the '*Ādāb* of the Philosophers of the Jinn and What They Uttered in the Presence of Solomon, son of David'. While all of this material is intriguing in its own right, the last two mini-collections are particularly fascinating; unfortunately there is neither time nor space to discuss them further here. The Muslim Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī's presentation of Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah* ends abruptly at this point; he mentions that he finished writing it in the month of *Dhū l-Qaʿdah*, in the year 594, or 1198 A.D. He asks that God's prayer be upon the prophet Muḥammad.

Questions have arisen about the authenticity of this work as we have it. Merkle, after reviewing the several opinions advanced up to the beginning of the twentieth century, argued in behalf of the authenticity of the whole collection as a compilation of aphorisms put together originally by Ḥunayn, save for the Alexander dossier, which seems to him to have been a later addition.[52] There has been no subsequent text critical study of this work, save for Badawi's preface to

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[50] Sidney H. Griffith, "The Muslim Philosopher al-Kindī and his Christian Readers: Three Arab Christian Texts on 'The Dissipation of Sorrows'," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78 (1996), 111-127.

[51] There has been much speculation about the identity of this otherwise unknown figure, including the speculation that it refers to Ḥunayn himself. Merkle offered the rather unconvincing suggestion that in the course of transmission the letters have become garbled and that originally the text read המתרגים, i.e., 'the translator', which was subsequently mistaken for a proper name. See Merkle, *Die Sittensprüche der Philosophen*, 10.

[52] Merkle, *Die Sittensprüche der Philosophen*, 7-11.

his edition of the text, where he accepts the traditional attribution. For now, given the medieval bibliographical testimony, especially that of Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿah, that Ḥunayn did in fact compose a book of this title, in the present writer's opinion circumstances favor a cautious acceptance of the work's basic authenticity, albeit that over the course of transmission numerous additions and alterations may well have attended the text.

From the point of view of the present inquiry there are two points of particular interest in Ḥunayn's *Kitāb ādāb al-falāsifah*: his remarks about Jews, Christians and Muslims, and their participation in philosophy, in the opening collection of reports, in the context of his account of the beginnings of philosophy and its several schools; and the general character and intellectual tenor of the numerous aphorisms attributed to the ancient sages and philosophers, which are transmitted in the body of the work.

A - Jews, Christians and Muslims in the History of Philosophy

At the beginning of the reports about the origins of philosophy and its several branches, Ḥunayn classifies the various schools under general headings, according to the significance of the names by which they are known. In the case of the Stoics, he lists them among those who got their names from the name of the place where they taught. He says, "They are the ones who are known as 'the members of the porch and portico' (*aṣḥāb al-miẓallah wa l-riwāq*), which was in the city of Elea."[53] He goes on to describe how the portico was made of tarpaulins of canvas stretched over four poles, with side flaps, which, he says, the Arabs would call an 'awning' (*aẓ-ẓulal*). It is at this point that Ḥunayn mentions the Jews, Christians and Muslims, presumably because of the distinctive places where their teachers study and transmit their knowledge.

Ḥunayn says that the Jewish philosophers (*falāsifah al-Yahūd*) imitated the Stoics. They too, he says, occupied a porch/veranda (*al-miẓallah*) made of trees and vine cuttings, where their sages used to gather every year, as on a feast, during a week appointed for consultations and disputations. Ḥunayn says that they used to decorate the place with various kinds of fruit and there their scholars (*ʿulamāʾuhum*) would confer about 'knowledge' (*ʿilm*) and study the prescribed

[53] Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Iṣḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*, 40.

books of their ancestors.[54] According to Ḥunayn, the meaning of their hanging the fruit in the place was that "these were the original maxims/wise sayings (*al-ḥikam*), the situation (*maqām*) of which was the situation of the fruit, with which souls are pleased and which hearts love."[55]

Ḥunayn goes on to speak of how the Stoics conferred with one another about knowledge and studied their philosophy in their porticoes, all the while going in and out, so as to stir their minds and their ardor by the bodily movement. Similarly, he says,

> "Jews and Christians occupied porticoes in gathering places (*al-kanā'is*); they would gather in them to study the books they had, and to teach the young how to intone the chants and recite them; they would be moving around, both standing and sitting, to enkindle their ardor. The Jews do this to the present day."[56]

Ḥunayn then says that "the source (*aṣl*) of the chants of the Jews and the Christians is 'Music' (*al-mūsīqā*), from which they took the chants."[57] He mentions David and the Psalms and says that to this day the Christians intone the Psalms in the chants of David. Both the Jews and the Christians, he says, build sanctuaries and put pillars in front of them, and so it is that "the Muslims install pillars and porticos in mosques, where the teachers teach the Qur'ān to the youngsters. They recite it in a sing-song way and in chants. "All this," Ḥunayn says, "was taken from Music."[58]

Finally, Ḥunayn offers a description of the church almost as if it were a philosophical academy and its priests and ministers were philosophers and their disciples and their liturgies were conferences of sages. He says,

> "The Christians arrange the seats of the sanctuary (*al-haykal*) one rank above another. The seat of the major, spiritual master, the teacher, is in the center of the sanctuary, while the philosophers are in the highest rank, the

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[54] Ḥunayn seems to be alluding to some of the rites and practices of the Jewish feast of 'Succoth', a term which is usually translated into English as 'booths' or 'huts'.

[55] Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Isḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*, 40.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Ibid.*, 41.

> lowest of them being the disciples, whose station in rank is according to their level in science and philosophy (*al-ʿilm wa l-falsafah*)."[59]

Having come to the end of his listing of the ancient philosophers, arranged according to the names of their schools, Ḥunayn tells how in antiquity kings provided 'houses of gold' for philosophers and sages as places for them to gather and confer about the sciences in their various languages. He tells how originally philosophy was an oral discipline, which the disciples of the old masters subsequently recorded; a development which, according to Ḥunayn, allowed the teachings to come down to his own time. He then offered an insight into his conception of his own vocation as a transmitter and translator of philosophy. He says,

> "Then God, mighty and exalted be He, conferred a blessing on us and taught us Arabic, so that we might bring it out of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac into the clear, Arabic language."[60]

In a subsequent report, Ḥunayn tells of his intention in the book that he is writing to transmit reports of the Greek poets and sages and of the philosophers of the 'Romans' (*ar-Rūm*), i.e., the Byzantines, their 'choice sayings' (*nawādir*), their 'disciplines' (*ādāb*), and their 'politics' (*siyāsah*).[61] He says this is what he has set down in this "book of questions and answers."[62] He wants, he says, the book to be an *imām* for philosophers and researchers, and a teacher for anyone who comes after his time who wants to learn wisdom and philosophy, which he characterizes as "the knowledge of a heavenly, greater kingdom, ..., the abode of paradise, along with the ever-living spiritual masters."[63] This is presumably the book from which Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī excerpted the text we have before us.

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[59] *Ibid.*

[60] *Ibid.*, 43.

[61] It is worth noting in connection with these terms that at the beginning of the text Ḥunayn says of his work, "These are the 'choice sayings' (*nawādir*) of the words (*al-alfāẓ*) of the wise philosophers and the 'disciplines' (*ādāb*) of the ancient teachers." Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Isḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*, 37.

[62] Clearly the text which al-Anṣārī presents is not in the form of questions and answers, which was nevertheless a popular literary form among the apologists, both Christian and Muslim, in Ḥunayn's day.

[63] Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Isḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*, 43.

Clearly, for Ḥunayn philosophy was a realm of discourse in which Jews, Christians and Muslims could all share; he portrays each community as participating, each in its own way, in what he consistently calls the pursuit of wisdom, or knowledge, and the disciplines of the ancient sages. As we shall see, his thought is that dedication to these goals would promote both the good of the individual and the good of society at large.

B - The Aphorisms of the Philosophers

The main body of Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah* as it has come down to us consists of the collection of sayings attributed to the ancient philosophers and sages, which is the only part of the book which scholars usually mention. The list begins with Socrates, the list of whose aphorisms is notably longer than that of any other figure, highlighting the fact that he was considered by both Muslims and Christians of the period as the philosopher and wise man *par excellence*. It is notable that almost all of the sayings which Ḥunayn transmits, including the material in the Alexander dossier, are moral in character. This fact reminds the reader that while the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom is the heart of the matter, for Ḥunayn the cultivation of the appropriate *ādāb*, or 'disciplines', is the principal means of attaining the goal, both personal and societal. In this connection the sense of the polyvalent term *adab* would be more along the line of a suggested attitudinal adjustment and disciplinary practice than it would be simply to designate a gnomological saying, as it has often been interpreted in connection with Ḥunayn's work.[64] In other words, in the ensemble the sayings of the philosophers and sages which Ḥunayn collected from the ancient sources and presented anew in Arabic translation were meant to commend a philosophical way of contemporary life in Abbasid times, characterized by the manners and disciplines which the ancient philosophers had put forward as pertinent spiritual exercises for the promotion of a humane way of life.[65]

In the next generation, Muslim and Christian intellectuals in Baghdad would characterize the enterprise commended by Ḥunayn as the cultivation of a life of

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[64] See, e.g., Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation, passim.*

[65] In this connection one follows the insights of Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy As a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995; *idem, What Is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase; Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2002.

virtue and the suppression of vice, a program designed to promote that 'humaneness' (*al-insāniyyah*) in society of which Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī spoke so engagingly in his *Reformation of Morals*, as did the Muslim Amad ibn Muḥammad Miskawayh (932-1030) in his work of the same title.[66] For both Ḥunayn and Yaḥyā, and for other Christian intellectuals in later generations, such as ʿĪsā ibn Zurʿa (943-1008) and Elias of Nisibis (975-1046), this presentation of Christianity and Islam and their institutions in philosophical dress, so striking in Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, seems to have been a bid on the part of the Christian intellectual elite in Abbasid Baghdad to find a shared moral discourse between Christians and Muslims which would leave their mutually incompatible, religious differences safely enshrined within a commonly accepted ethical framework which could then allow them to discuss these same doctrinal differences in philosophical terms which would have the potential to convey clarity of thought if not a shared religious confession. It was, of course, in the end an apologetic undertaking which in its perceived foreignness would eventually alienate both the Muslim and seemingly even the Christian communities at large.

IV

A generation after the time of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, the Christian logician and translator of the works of Aristotle and his commentators, Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d.940), a fellow 'Nestorian' from the monastery of Dayr Qunnā, became one of al-Fārābī's two Christian teachers of logic, the other one being Yuḥannā ibn Ḥaylān (d.910). Abū Bishr was also the teacher of one of al-Fārābī's own star pupils, the 'Jacobite' Christian, Yaḥyā bin ʿAdī (893-974). Modern scholars claim Abū Bishr as the real "founder of the Aristotelian school in Baghdad early in the tenth century."[67] As such he is often remembered as the defender of philosophy and of the universal validity of Aristotelian logic against the counter claims of contemporary Muslim *mutakallimūn* in a debate with their spokesperson Abū

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[66] Mohammed Arkoun, trans. *Miskawayh (320/1-420, traité d'éthique*, 2nd ed.; Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1988; *idem, L'humanisme arabe au IVe/Xe siècle: Miskawayg, philosophe et historien*, 2nd rev. ed.; Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1982.

[67] Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 14. See also G. Endress, "Mattā b. Yūnus (Yūnān) al-Ḳunnāʾī, Abū Bishr," in: EI, new ed., vol. VI, 844-846.

Sa'īd as-Sīrāfī in the *majlis* of the caliph's vizier in the year 937/8.[68] In the tenth century, Abū Bishr's student, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, became for a time Baghdad's most notable Christian intellectual and, like Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq in the previous century, Yaḥyā was one of the major proponents of the philosophical way of life as a guarantor of interreligious harmony and of logic and philosophy as the most important tools for the Christian theologian and apologist in the Islamic milieu. Many of the same ideas can be found in the works of the churchman Elias of Nisibis in the eleventh century.[69] Altogether these Christian writers may be taken as representative of the new Christian intellectuals of Abbasid times, who for a season cultivated a new Christian intellectual culture in the Islamic milieu from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, based on the cultivation of philosophy, particularly in its Aristotelian dress.

V

The new Christian intellectuals of Baghdad in early Abbasid times, like Ḥunayn and the others, who came to prominence in the heyday of the translation movement, made an unprecedented bid to participate in the intellectual life of the larger Islamic society of their day. It was the translation movement itself which provided them with the opportunity. Heretofore, modern scholars have certainly recognized the fact that the opportunity was one which allowed Christians like Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq and his associates to hire out their translation services to Muslim patrons who bought their contributions to Islamic scientific and philosophical interests.[70] But historians have been slower to recognize that these same Christian translators were also scholars in their own right, building on earlier traditions in their own communities. They used their skills not only to translate, but also to employ philosophical and logical thought in support of their faith commitments and to commend the philosophical life itself as a fruitful development which might provide the social possibility for harmony between Christians and Muslims in the caliphate.

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[68] Gerhard Endress, "Grammatik und Logik: Arabische Philologie und griechischer Philosophie in Widerstreit," in: Burkard Mojsisch, ed. *Sprachphilosophie in Antike und Mittelalter*, Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie, 3; Amsterdam: Gruner, 1986, 163-299.

[69] Samir Khalil Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak: Elie de Nisibe et l'Islam*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, 544; Aldershot, Hamps.: Ashgate Publishing, 1996.

[70] Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, esp. 136-141.

According to Gerhard Endress, "The undisputed master of philosophy for the Christian schools of late Hellenism as well as for the Muslim transmitters of this tradition, was Aristotle: founder of the paradigms of rational discourse, and of a coherent system of the world. [71] This was certainly a point of view shared by a medieval Syriac-speaking chronicler from the 'Jacobite' community about the role of Aristotle among his fellow 'Jacobites' long before Islamic times. At the point in the anonymous Syriac *Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens* at which the chronicler comes to the discussion of what he calls the 'era of the Greeks', by which he means the time of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) and his Seleucid successors in the Syriac-speaking frontier lands between the Roman and Persian empires, he has this to say about Aristotle and the importance of his works for the Christians:

> "At this time, Aristotle, 'the Philosopher', collected all the scattered kinds of philosophical doctrines and he made of them one great body, thick with powerful opinions and doctrines, since he separated the truth from falsehood. Without the reading of the book of logic [*mlîlūthâ*] that he made it is not possible to understand the knowledge of books, the meaning of doctrines, and the sense of the Holy Scriptures, on which depends the hope of the Christians, unless one is a man to whom, because of the excellence of his [religious] practice, the grace of the Holy Spirit is given directly, the One who makes all wise."[72]

In Abbasid times there were more Christian thinkers interested in the philosophies and sciences of the Greeks than just those Aristotelians among the Jacobites and the 'Nestorians' who took their texts and commentaries from the Alexandrian tradition. And there were more Muslims whose philosophical and scientific interests reached well beyond a single-minded devotion to Aristotle. Nevertheless these were the Christian and Muslim philosophers who shaped the intellectual milieu in which Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and Elias of Nisibis, to name just the most well-known of them, pursued their careers. And just as the

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[71] Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindī," in: Endress and Kruk, *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, 52.

[72] I.–B. Chabot, ed. *Anonymi Auctoris Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens*, CSCO, vols. 82 and 109; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1920 & Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1952, vol. 81, 104-105 (Syriac), vol. 109, 82 (Latin).

Muslims among this generation of philosophers wanted "to vindicate the pursuit of rational activity as an activity in the service of Islam," so did Ḥunayn, Yaḥyā and Elias and their associates intend to vindicate with the same philosophy the doctrines and practices of the Christians and the Christology of the 'Nestorians' and the 'Jacobites' respectively.[73]

What one notices as different in the works of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, and Elias of Nisibis, by comparison with the works of earlier and contemporary Christian apologists and theologians who wrote in Arabic, is their venture beyond the range of the logical works of Aristotle. The *Organon* and Porphyry's *Eisagoge* had long been used by Christians in the explication of the terms of their various doctrinal formulae and the systematic defense of their several theologies. Ḥunayn, Yaḥyā and the others moved beyond the *Organon* into a larger Aristotelian, philosophical frame of reference which put a premium on the philosophical life itself, on the primacy of reason and the pursuit of happiness not only personally and individually but socially and politically as well. This was a new philosophical horizon for Christians in the east, which seems to have opened up in the Baghdadi intellectual milieu with the importation of Neoplatonic thought into the world of Syriac and Arabic Aristotelianism. Perhaps its most eloquent marker is the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, a paraphrase of portions of Plotinus' *Enneads*, which also included some commentary and a collection of wisdom sayings.[74] Its likely origins in its Arabic dress are probably to be sought in the circle of the philosopher al-Kindī and his Syrian Christian translators and associates. But the scholar whose person and works most readily embodied the new intellectual profile was undoubtedly the 'Second Master' (after Aristotle himself), the Muslim, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (c.870-950).[75] Among Christian intellectuals, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī inherited al-Fārābī's mantle.

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[73] John W. Watt, "The Strategy of the Baghdad Philosophers: The Aristotelian Tradition as a Common Motif in Christian and Islamic Thought," in: J. J. van Ginkel et *al.*, eds., *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 134; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2005, 151-166.

[74] F. W. Zimmermann, "The Origins of the So-Called *Theology of Aristotle*," in: J. Kraye et al., eds. Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, XI, Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages; London: Warburg Institute, 1986, 110-240; E.K. Rowson, "The *Theology of Aristotle* and Some Other Pseudo-Aristotelian Texts Reconsidered," Journal of the American Oriental Society 112 (1992), 478-484; Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle*, London: Duckworth, 2002.

[75] I.R. Netton, *Al-Farabi and His School*, Arabic Thought and Culture Series; London & New York: Routledge, 1992.

The Muslim religious establishment came ultimately to distrust the philosophers. In the time frame of our considerations, this distrust was expressed most notably in Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's (1058-1111) *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*,[76] where his contempt for what he perceived to be the arrogant rationalism of the Muslim philosophers in matters of religious belief and practice is abundantly clear.[77] But among Christians as well, not everyone was happy with the new direction in Christian intellectual culture which the Baghdad scholars introduced into their world. Evidence for this displeasure is recorded in a work of the late Muʿtazilī scholar, ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamdhānī (d.1025). In the course of his remarks against the influence of the philosophers in Islamic religious discourse, he mentioned by name the Christians Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, along with the names of several other prominent Christian translators of originally Greek texts into Arabic. He accused them of helping to subvert the faith of the Muslims by the introduction of the books of Plato, Aristotle and others into Islam. He says these Christian translators were few in number and he further says that "they hide under the cover of Christianity, while the Christians themselves do not approve of them."[78] What is more, ʿAbd al-Jabbār names a Christian source for this observation, the otherwise unknown Yuḥānna al-Qass, a lecturer on Euclid and a student of the *Almagest*, who, according to ʿAbd al-Jabbār, offered this criticism of the Christian translators:

> "Those who transmitted these books left out much of their error, and the worst of their coarseness, out of a sense of solidarity with them, and to spare them. They gave them, as it were on loan, Islamic meanings and interpretations which they did not have."[79]

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[76] al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. Michael E. Marmura; Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1997.

[77] Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005, esp. 172-176, 200-208.

[78] ʿAbd al-Jabbār ibn Amad al-Hamdhānī, *Tathbīt dalāʾil an-nubuwwah*, 2 vols., ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm ʿUthmān; Beirut: Dār al-ʿArabiyyah, 1966, vol. I, 76; see also 75-76 and 192-193. For more on ʿAbd al-Jabbār's observations in this vein, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins*, Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts, vol. 56; Leiden: Brill, 2004.

[79] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalāʾil an-nubuwwah*, vol. I, 76.

Obviously, Yuḥānna al-Qass did not approve of the solidarity which the Christian philosophers associated with the translation movement felt for Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. How widely this feeling was shared among other Christians of the time is impossible to know at this remove. What we do know is that some modern commentators on the works of the likes of Ḥunayn, Yaḥyā and their colleagues have thought that they simply surrendered their Christian theology to Greek philosophy. For example, Joel Kraemer has written of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī that he was "first and foremost a philosopher." And he goes on to say,

> "In consistency Alfarabi's philosophy of religion, according to which religious motifs are symbols of philosophical truths, Ibn ʿAdī treated theological notions as embodiments of philosophical concepts... He interprets the persons of the Trinity as symbolic representations of Aristotelian ideas: the Father symbolizes the intellect, the Son symbolizes the intellectually cognizing subject, and the Spirit Symbolizes the intellectually cognized object."[80]

Observations such as this one seem to ignore the fact that Yaḥyā, like Ḥunayn in the previous century, were thinking and writing within a tradition that had long since learned to present the claims of their religious convictions in the Greek idiom of Aristotelian logic, even when translated into Syriac or Arabic. What is more, the doctrinal positions that Yaḥyā and other Christians defended in Syriac or Arabic were themselves initially formulated in Greek philosophical and logical terms, as all parties were well aware at the time. They were being defended by a constant appeal to the logical requirements of the proper definitions of these same originally Greek terms, even in their Syriac and Arabic versions. This agenda was still the operative one in the ninth and tenth centuries, in response to the religious claims of Islam, when the challenge for Christians was to develop an appropriately logical and philosophical, not to say theological, vocabulary in Arabic.

But the real question here is the deeper one of the real source of religious truth; is it reason or revelation, or what is the relationship between reason and revelation? In the Muslim community in the ninth and tenth centuries, unlike philosophers such as al-Kindī or al-Fārābī, the *mutakallimūn* and others, like the followers of the jurist Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (780-855), rejected the 'foreign sciences',

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[80] Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986, 107.

while nevertheless being influenced by them in many ways. They adopted the view that divine revelation via prophecy was in the end the fundamental source and criterion of religious truth, and that one should certainly not interpret the Qur'ān in accordance with the rules of Greek speech.[81] In the Syriac-speaking, Christian community, on the other hand, under the influence of Aristotelian Platonism, this issue had already arisen in the sixth century, when Paul the Persian seems to have opted for the primacy of reason over revelation.[82] And in the eleventh century, Yaḥyā's 'Nestorian' student, Abū l-Faraj ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib (d.ca.1055) similarly proposed that a logical demonstration was superior to the evidence of the miracles recorded in the Gospels in affirming the divinity of Christ.[83] But Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī himself, albeit that he was a student of al-Fārābī, clearly rejected this line of thinking. Yaḥyā taught that the Gospel miracles were the primary warrant for the spread of the Christian faith, and he has been quoted as having espoused the view that "ce n'est pas Aristote qui me guide quand il s'agit du christianisme."[84]

As for Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, while he does not say as much, it seems that he was perhaps the first Arabic-speaking Christians to espouse the view that philosophy provides an intellectual space in which Christians and Muslims could enter a realm of common discourse about reason, ethics and public policy.

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[81] On these issues, see the in-depth studies of Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991-1997.

[82] Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque*, esp. 34-41.

[83] Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak*, 108-112.

[84] Emilio Platti, *Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, théologien chrétien et philosophe arabe: Sa théologie de l'Incarnation*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 14; Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuvan, Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1983, 78-79.

Christianity in the renaissance of Islam. Abū Bishr Mattā, al-Fārābī, and Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī

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Inter-religious dialogue is clearly a matter of profound significance in the world today, but it is also important to observe that membership of a religious community need not be the exclusive basis of personal identity. Individuals belonging to a religious community may have multiple identities, and a single categorization of such individuals can create an image which obscures a multi-faceted reality.[1] What applies today also applies to the past. The period conventionally designated the 'Renaissance of Islam'[2] was characterized by a remarkable group of thinkers who were both members of a religious community and philosophers. This paper attempts to analyze the way these two overlapping identities contributed to discourse between some Christians and Muslims in that period.

We may begin with al-Fārābī, the greatest Muslim philosopher of the age. In the section of his otherwise lost *Appearance of Philosophy* cited by Ibn Abī Uṣaibiʿa,[3] he asserted that Christian bishops (or at any rate some of them in the past) saw

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1 This point is finely argued in the recent work of Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*, New York: Norton 2006.

2 The tenth century A.D., the fourth century A.H. The term comes from Adam Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams*, Heidelberg: C. Winter 1922. The reference is to 'a classical revival and cultural flowering within the soil of Islamic civilization, not to a renaissance, or resurgence, of Islam itself' (Joel L. Kraemer, in the preface to the book cited at n. 28 below).

3 Ibn Abī Uṣaibiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ*, ed. August Müller, Cairo-Königsberg: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Wahbīya 1882-1884, II, 134.30-135.24; cf. al-Masʿūdī, *K. at-tanbīh wa-l-išrāf*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje, Leiden: Brill 1894, 121.16-122.14. English translations in Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, London and New York: Routledge 1975, 50-51; Samuel Miklos Stern, "Al- Masʿūdī and the philosopher al-Fārābī", in: S. Maqbul Ahmad and A. Rahman, eds. *Al-Masʿūdī Millenary Commemoration Volume*, Aligarh: Indian Society for the History of Science and the Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University 1960, 39-41.

philosophy principally as a threat, although in limited form also as a useful ally. This is his famous (or perhaps notorious) assertion that the bishops forbade the teaching of Aristotle's *Organon* beyond the *Prior Analytics* I.17 because they considered the study of the hypothetical syllogisms and the remainder of the logic 'curriculum' to be dangerous to Christianity. Yet it is well known that in the same work al-Fārābī attributed the emergence of philosophy teaching at Baghdad to four Christian scholars, and indicated that with one of them, Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān, he studied the *Organon* to the end of the *Posterior Analytics*.[4] It is now widely recognized that the story of philosophy 'From Alexandria to Baghdad' presented in this work cannot be taken at face value as a 'neutral' record of 'what actually happened', but contains both factual inconsistencies and ideological overtones. There can be no doubt that the presentation of the full *Organon* in Arabic and the foundation of a philosophy curriculum based on it was the work of Christians, presumably the four mentioned by al-Fārābī along with their pupil, the East Syrian Abū Bishr Mattā, who, both using the existing translations from the school of Ḥunayn and complementing them by their own translations from available Syriac versions, claimed to restore at Baghdad the teaching of the ancient School of Philosophy of Alexandria. Two credible explanations have been offered as to why al-Fārābī, a Muslim pupil in this predominantly Christian school of philosophy, introduced this criticism of Christianity into the account. One is that, in the endeavour to recommend philosophy to his co-religionists, he wished to avoid associating it too closely with Christianity.[5] The other is that he adopted an existing ʿAbbāsid motif from the reign of al-Maʾmūn, namely the superior enlightenment and pro-Hellenism of the ʿAbbāsids over against the supposedly unenlightened and anti-Hellenic Byzantines.[6]

In his programmatic treatise on *The Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, al-Fārābī gave another account of the history of philosophy. This one is free of criticism of Christianity, and indeed does not mention it explicitly, but the treatise is explicit

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[4] Long before Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān the *Posterior Analytics* had been translated into Syriac by Athanasius of Balad (d. 687). His translation is lost, but was known to the East Syrian Catholicos Timothy I; cf. Sebastian P. Brock, "Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9 (1999), 238-239 and 245-246.

[5] Cf. Fritz W. Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's* De Interpretatione, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1981, xcix-cxii.

[6] Cf. Dimitri Gutas, Greek Thought, *Arabic Culture*, London and New York: Routledge 1998, 90-95.

on the role of the Syrians in the transmission of philosophy to the Arabs:

> "It is said that this science [the science which is the supreme happiness and the final perfection to be achieved by man] existed anciently among the Chaldeans, who are the people of al-Iraq, subsequently reaching the people of Egypt, from there transmitted to the Greeks, where it remained until it was transmitted to the Syrians and then to the Arabs. Everything comprised by this science was expounded in the Greek language, later in Syriac, and finally in Arabic."[7]

With the mention of Chaldeans and Egyptians we are again in the realm of 'ideological overtones', but when we come to the exposition in 'the Greek language, later in Syriac and finally in Arabic' of 'this science' and 'the scientific state of mind which the Greeks call philosophy', we are not only on firm historical ground, but also firmly within al-Fārābī's own experience. He personally knew some of those who transmitted the science from Syriac to Arabic, and he knew that the Syriac texts from which the Arabic were derived were translations from Greek. His teacher, the East Syrian Mattā, and his pupil, the West Syrian Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, were among those who transmitted it from Syriac to Arabic. This treatise, while making no mention of Christianity or Islam, does, however, have a great deal to say about 'religion' (*milla*). According to al-Fārābī, if someone has knowledge of the ultimate principles of beings through his intellect and assents to them as a result of certain demonstration, then the science of that cognition is philosophy; but if he knows them through their imaging by similitudes that imitate them and assents to them as a result of persuasive methods, then the science of that cognition is religion. Therefore,

> "according to the ancients, religion is an imitation (*muḥākiyyah*) of philosophy. Both comprise the same subjects ... (and) supply knowledge about the First Principle and Cause of beings, and both give an account of the ultimate end for the sake of which man is made – that is, supreme happiness – and the ultimate end of every one of the other beings ... Philosophy gives

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[7] *The Attainment of Happiness*, §53, tr. Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi: Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1969, 43; ed. Jaʿfar al-Yāsin, *K. taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, Beirut: Dār al-Andalus 1981, 38.13-17.

> an account of the ultimate principles ... as they are perceived by the intellect. Religion sets forth their images by means of similitudes (*mithālāt*) of them taken from corporeal principles and imitates them by their likenesses among political principles."[8]

Thus while philosophy employs demonstration (*apodeixis*), religion employs rhetoric (persuasion) and poetics (imaging and imitation). True philosophy 'was handed down ... by the Greeks from Plato and Aristotle only',[9] and after Aristotle had canvassed the certain science (in the *Categories* to the *Prior Analytics)*, given an account of the way to it (*Posterior Analytics)*, and intercepted what stands in its way (*Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*), he gave an account of the art of persuasion of the non-philosophical multitude (*Rhetoric*) and the art of imaging and imitation (*Poetics*). All these arts belonged to the logical faculty, that is, were presented in the full eight-volume *Organon.*[10] However,

> "these things are imitated for each nation and for the people of each city by the similitudes (*mithālāt*) which are best known to them. But what is best known often varies among nations, either most of it or part of it. Hence these things are imitated for each nation by things other than those by which they are imitated for another nation. Therefore it is possible that excellent nations and excellent cities exist whose religions differ, although they all have as their goal one and the same felicity and the very same aims."[11]

Religions, therefore, like languages, differ from nation to nation. Some similitudes are more remote from the realities than others, and grounds for objection may be found in these similitudes, in some more and in others less, but when the realities are known through strict demonstrations, no ground for disagreement by argument can be found in them.[12]

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[8] *Ibid.*, §55, tr. Mahdi, 44-45, ed. al-Yāsin, 40.13-41.2.

[9] *Ibid.*, §63, tr. Mahdi, 49, ed. al-Yāsin, 47.3-4.

[10] *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, §§ 4-16, tr. Mahdi, 81-93, in particular 92-93, ed. Mahdi, *Falsafat Arisṭūṭālis*, Beirut: Dār Majallat Shi'r 1961, 71-85, in particular 84-85. If preceded by Porphyry's *Eisagōgē, the Organon* is of course nine volumes in the Syro-Arabic tradition.

[11] *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīnat al-fāḍila*, 17:2, ed. and tr. by Richard Walzer, *Al-Farabi On the Perfect State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985, 280/281 (translated with slight modifications).

[12] *Ibid.*, 17: 2-3, ed. and tr. Walzer, 278-281.

The Muslim al-Fārābī knew, or could have known about, Christians, Jews, Manicheans, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and pagans. But there can hardly be any doubt that among all these groups or 'nations' it was the Christians whom he would have had principally in mind when thinking about the diversity of religions in relation to the universality of philosophy. It was, after all, the Syrians who had transmitted to the Arabs the 'science which is the supreme happiness and the final perfection to be achieved by man', and it was under Syriac teachers (Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān and Abu Bishr Mattā) that al-Fārābī had studied the 'logical faculty', the *Organon*. It would be going too far to say that his philosophy had no impact among contemporary Muslims, but it does appear that its impact among them was quite modest, while among the Christian Peripatetic philosophers in Baghdad, especially Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and his circle, his thought was greatly admired.[13] Yaḥyā was both a fellow-pupil of Mattā and a pupil of al-Fārābī himself, as was his brother Ibrāhīm. Yaḥyā copied some of al-Fārābī's books,[14] and the oldest and best manuscript of al-Fārābī's *Principles of the Views of the Citizens of the Best State* was copied and annotated by a pupil of Yaḥyā's pupil Ibn Zurʿa, the West Syrian theologian Yaḥyā ibn Jarīr.[15]

Throughout the *Best State* al-Fārābī interpreted Muslim religious words as similitudes of universally valid philosophical terms; for example, 'Allah' was a similitude of the First (Cause), the 'Spirit of Holiness' a similitude of the Active Intellect. His discussion of the First Cause at the outset of the work shows his deep indebtedness to Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition:

> "The First is actual intellect. The First is also intelligible through its substance (*jawhar*) ... As a result of its intelligizing its own essence, it becomes actually intelligizing and intellect, and, as a result of its essence intelligizing it, it becomes actually intelligized ... Thus it is intellect and intelligized and intelligizing, all this being one essence and one indivisible substance."[16]

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[13] Cf. Dimitri Gutas, art. "Fārābī I. Biography", in: Encyclopaedia Iranica, vol. 9, New York: Bibliotheca Persica 1999, 212.

[14] Cf. Gerhard Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyāibn ʿAdī*, Wiesbaden: Reichert 1977, 5-7.

[15] Cf. Walzer, *Al-Farabi On the Perfect State*, 22-25.

[16] *Ārāʾ* 1:6, ed./tr. Walzer 70/71 (translated with slight modification).

As the First is different in its existence from everything else, the First is unique and one.[17] It may well be that the arguments here are meant to refute Christian 'tritheism' and possibly also Manichean dualism,[18] but it is precisely the argument of these early sections of the *Best State* which Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī takes up in his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity.[19] According to Yaḥyā, Christians too make use of 'corporeal' words and designate by the name of Father the substance (*jawhar*) which they call the Creator considered as pure intellect, by the name of Son the Creator intelligizing himself, and by Holy Spirit the Creator intelligized for himself.[20] Thus for Yaḥyā as for al-Fārābī it seems to be the case that the 'religious' doctrine of God is an imitation by means of familiar and 'corporeal' similitudes of the reality, apprehended by the intellect in Aristotelian philosophy, that the First Cause is pure Mind which engages in ceaseless self-thinking.[21] The Muslim reader of al-Fārābī could easily relate his exposition to the confession of the Oneness of Allah (*tawḥīd*), the Christian reader of Yaḥyā to the doctrine of the Trinity. The one substance of the Creator does not, however, according to Yaḥyā, exclude a multiplicity of attributes, of which three are constitutive of his essence: goodness, wisdom, and power. The names given by Christians to these three attributes are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each of them, since they are not accidents, must be separate substances. These three substances can be attributes of the unique substance of the Creator because the latter is a compound substance.[22] Here too we can detect a link with al-Fārābī, who, while rejecting with the Muʿtazilites that God has any distinct attributes additional to his unitary essence, nevertheless like them is willing to characterize the First Cause with some

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[17] *Ibid.*, 1:2, ed./tr. Walzer 58-63. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Δ 6 and Ι 1-6.

[18] Cf. Walzer, *Al-Farabi On the Perfect State*, 338-340.

[19] Cf. Emilio Platti, *Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī: Théologien chrétien et philosophe arabe*, Leuven: Peeters 1983, 113-114.

[20] *Refutation of Abū ʿIsā al-Warrāq on the Trinity*, text and translation in Augustin Périer, *Yaḥyā ben ʿAdī. Un philosophe arabe chrétien du X^e siècle*, Paris: Gabalda and Geuthner 1920, 164; cf. idem, *Petits traités apologétiques de Yaḥyā ben ʿAdī. Texte arabe ... et traduit en français*, Paris: Gabalda and Geuthner 1920, 18-23, 24-26. Cf. Platti, Yaḥyā, 109; Endress, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, 101-103.

[21] *Metaphysics*, Λ 9. *Lambda* was translated into Syriac by Ḥunayn, *Alpha Elattōn* to Mu into Arabic by Isḥāq. Abū Bishr Mattā translated *Lambda* into Arabic, together with the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius; cf. Francis E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus*, Leiden: Brill 1968, 49-52.

[22] Cf. Platti, *Yaḥyā*, 107-109, 122-123.

positive qualities (knowing, wise, real, true, living, beautiful, loving),[23] always provided that the words do not mean the very same as those applied to man.

The other fundamental philosophical issue for Yaḥyā was a formulation for the doctrine of the incarnation, and there too he could find assistance in the Peripatetic tradition and al-Fārābī. If the Father is the Creator considered as pure intellect, and the Holy Spirit the Creator as intelligized by pure intellection, only the Son, the Creator as the act of intelligizing by pure intellection, could actively unite himself with man, for man can neither be pure intellect nor intelligized by pure intellection, but only an intelligizer. While man has both matter and form, the Creator has no matter, but the Creator as the act of intelligizing, i.e. the Son, can unite with the form *(ṣura)* of a man, which is his intellect. In this way the union of God and man is both rationally possible and indeed necessary if man is to be (in)formed in the form of the Creator and God to be (in)formed in the form of man.[24] This mutual (in)formation (*taṣawwur*) of the divine Intellect with the intellect of man is also the basis of the knowledge of God on the part of prophets and wise men, but was perfectly achieved only in Christ, in whom 'there was a degree of union never attained elsewhere'.[25] With Yaḥyā's interpretation of the incarnation we may compare al-Fārābī's exposition of the perfect man. For al-Fārābī this is 'the man on whom the Active Intellect has descended', and 'it is this man who receives Divine Revelation'. This is possible, said al-Fārābī, using terms which evidently had a history within the Peripatetic tradition, when a man's 'potential (passive) intellect' has become one with his natural disposition 'in the way the compound of matter and form is one', the potential intellect as a result the matter of the 'acquired intellect', and the 'acquired intellect' the matter of the Active Intellect.[26]

This profound indebtedness on the part of Yaḥyā to the Peripatetic tradition of philosophy did not, however, imply that he was bound to follow Aristotle himself in every matter. He dissented from him on the question of the eternity

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[23] *Ārā'* 1: 7-15, ed. and tr. Walzer, 72-89. Cf. Platti, *Yaḥyā*, 110-112.

[24] Cf. *Refutation of Abū ʿ-sā al-Warrāq on the Union and the Incarnation*, I, §8, ed./tr. Emilio Platti, *Abū ʿ-sā al-Warrāq, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī: De L'Incarnation*, Leuven: Peeters 1987, 11-12/9; Périer, *Petits traités*, 24-26, 74-83. Cf. Endress, *Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī*, 102-103, 106-107; Platti, *Yaḥyā*, 65, 128-131.

[25] Périer, *Petits traités*, 83-85; Platti, *Yaḥyā*, 133.

[26] *Ārā'* 15: 8-10, ed. and tr. Walzer, 240-245. Cf. Walzer's commentary, *ibid.*, 408-410 and 439-443.

of the world,[27] but this of course does not necessarily imply dissent from the view that religion is a symbolic form of philosophy; a Peripatetic philosopher (John Philoponus) could produce philosophical arguments against the eternity of the world. Nor did his indebtedness to al-Fārābī imply acceptance of the more markedly Neoplatonic aspects of al-Fārābī's thought, namely, the emanation of the cosmos from the First Cause as a necessary outcome of the very existence of that First, and the multiplicity and hierarchy of intellects which are produced in this way. But there can be no doubt that he was an enthusiastic philosopher, just as there is no doubt concerning the sincerity and importance to him of his Christianity. The circle of scholars of which he was the recognized master included (at least in the early stages) both Christians and Muslims.[28] The friendly dialogue between those thinkers of different religious affiliations was surely made possible not only by the general cultural efflorescence that Baghdad enjoyed in their day under the enlightened rule of the Buyids, but also by the view propounded by al-Fārābī that 'excellent nations and excellent cities exist whose religions differ, although they all have as their goal one and the same felicity and the very same aims'.[29]

The interpretation of different religions as diverse 'national' imitations and images of a universal philosophical truth thus enabled Christians and Muslims such as Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and al-Fārābī to engage in dialogue with one another. To indicate that it served this 'communal' purpose is in no sense to say that the interpretation was not deeply and sincerely held on intellectual grounds. It should also be noted that it allowed for the view that one religion could be a more adequate imitation than another; as al-Fārābī wrote,

> "Some of those who know (the realities) through similitudes which imitate them know them through similitudes which are near to them, and some through similitudes slightly more remote, and some through similitudes which are even more remote than these, and some through similitudes which are very remote indeed."[30]

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[27] Cf. Platti, *Yaḥyā*, 106-107. Shlomo Pines, "A Tenth Century Philosophical Correspondence", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 24 (1955), 118, 133 n. 103, suggests, however, that Yaḥyā was in fact, and made clear to those 'in the know' (i.e. philosophers), in favour of the doctrine of the eternity of the world a *parte ante*.

[28] Cf. Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, Leiden: Brill 1986, 103-165.

[29] *Ārāʾ* 17:2, ed./tr. Walzer, 280/281.

[30] *Ibid.*, 17:2, ed./tr. Walzer, 278-281 (translated with slight modification).

We shall hardly go far wrong if we assume that for al-Fārābī the Muslim similitudes were near to the realities and the Christian slightly more remote, while the reverse applied in the case of Yaḥyā. But let us return to what we may call the 'communal' or 'instrumental' aspect, and consider whether al-Fārābī is likely to have been the first outside the Greek-speaking or classical world to make this issue so central – or to apply it to the situation of Muslims and Christians. The interpretation may have been a useful means by which al-Fārābī could recommend to those of his Muslim co-religionists who admired the Greek sciences the work of the predominantly Christian school of philosophers with which he was associated. On the other hand, it could also have been a means by which he himself sought to overcome any potential reluctance on the part of these Christian philosophers to accept him as one of their members. But there is another possibility: the interpretation may not have originated with al-Fārābī, but may have been current among some Christian members in the school, as a means of commending their work to the pro-Hellenic strand of thought within Islamic society without abandoning their own confessional allegiance. In this connection it may also be suggested that, although al-Fārābī was writing prior to Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, attempts such as those we have noted in Yaḥyā to present the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation in terms of Peripatetic philosophy may have been under discussion prior to Yaḥyā in the Baghdad school and influenced al-Fārābī's philosophical interpretation of Muslim *tawḥīd* and prophecy. Pertinent here is the suggestion of Joel Kraemer that in the naturalizing of a pagan philosophical tradition within a monotheistic religion, al-Fārābī was following a path already staked out by his Christian teachers in Baghdad.[31]

That religious myths are to be understood as symbolic representations of metaphysical truths, and are also of political importance in serving the limited understanding and moral edification of non-philosophical minds, is an idea quite

[31] Cf. Joel L. Kraemer, "Alfarabi's *Opinions of the Virtuous City* and Maimonides' *Foundations of the Law*", in: *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D. H. Baneth Dedicata*, J. Blau et al., eds., Jerusalem: The Magnes Press of the Hebrew University 1979, 107-124. Cf. also idem, *Humanism*, 118 n. 41. Cf. also my article "The Strategy of the Baghdad Philosophers. The Aristotelian Tradition as a Common Motif in Christian and Islamic Thought", in: *Redefining Christian Identity. Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Jan.J. van Ginkel, H.L. Murre-van den Berg, and Theo Maarten van Lint, eds., Leuven: Peeters 2005, 151-165.

familiar to Greek philosophers.[32] However, al-Fārābī brings something new to it, namely, that in religious language truths concerning the First Cause and cause of beings, known directly to the philosopher, are imitated for the multitude by their similitudes,[33] and that after Aristotle in the *Organon* had dealt with the certain science and intercepted what stands in its way, he gave an account of the art of persuasion of the multitude (i.e. in the *Rhetoric*), and then the art of the imaging and imitation for the multitude (i.e. in the *Poetics*) of the things that had become evident in the certain demonstrations (i.e. in the *Posterior Analytics*).[34] 'Religion' was thus for al-Fārābī a product of the art of imitation (*mimēsis*, representation) taught by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, an imitation, that is, of the knowledge of the ultimate principles of being achieved by the certain demonstrations of the *Posterior Analytics*. Al-Fārābī therefore did not just take over a general idea espoused by many Greek philosophers, but presented a quite specific theory founded on the full Alexandrian *Organon* and a particular, philosophical interpretation of its final volume, the *Poetics*.

The 'resurrection' in Baghdad of the full Alexandrian *Organon* and its appearance in Arabic was not, however, due to al-Fārābī, but to his teacher Abū Bishr Mattā. Al-Fārābī was only able to read the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Poetics* because Mattā had translated them from Syriac into Arabic. One cannot therefore but wonder if al-Fārābī's interpretation of these works was not that of Mattā.[35] In the case of the *Posterior Analytics* there is no doubt that it was so: for all the Baghdad Aristotelians the *Posterior Analytics* was the centrepiece of the *Organon* and taught the method of certain demonstration based on entirely true

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[32] Cf. Walzer, *Al-Farabi On the Perfect State*, 471-480; Dominic J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 2003, 116-131, 194; Dimitri Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Bagdad", *Der Islam* 60 (1983), 247-248 n. 38.

[33] Cf., e.g., *Ārā'* 17:2. Cf. also the citation above, n. 8: Religion sets forth their images by means of similitudes of them taken from corporeal principles and imitates them by their likenesses among political principles.

[34] Cf. above, n. 10.

[35] Certainly his terminology for the *Poetics* was derived from Mattā's translation. The Syriac version of the Poetics rendered *mimēsis* by *metdammyānūtā*, which Mattā rendered in Arabic *tashbīh* (or *tashabbuh*) *wa-muḥākāh* (or *ḥikāyah*). From the latter term of the Arabic hendiadys is derived al-Fārābī's use of terms from the root ḥ-k-y. Cf. Wolfhart Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung und griechische Poetik*, Beirut: In Kommission bei F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden 1969, 115-118, 121-123.

premises. No doubt for Mattā as for the Alexandrian commentators the *Poetics* dealt with syllogisms which consisted of entirely false premises, as the *Rhetoric* dealt with those which were equally true or false. Al-Fārābī also understood these books in this way, but he also believed that they had a positive function, namely, the instruction of the multitude through religious similitudes imitating universal truths, and the inculcation in the multitude of virtue by persuasive methods. It is of course possible that Mattā translated the *Poetics* into Arabic solely to 'protect' the philosopher from syllogisms based on entirely false premises,[36] or to complete the Alexandrian *Organon* in the hope that, despite the puzzling content of its last volume, its enigmas might be unraveled at some future time.[37] Since, however, he was a significant thinker in his own right, it seems more likely that he had a view as to what was its meaning; and if that is the case, it would be surprising if his pupil al-Fārābī came up with an entirely different interpretation.

Behind Mattā was a long tradition of Syriac engagement with the logic of Aristotle. It can hardly be an accident that among the various groups in Baghdad which admired ancient Greek culture in its diverse aspects, it was one of Syriac origin which focused particularly on logic and Aristotle and endeavoured (with, as it emerged, considerable success in the Arabic-speaking world) to make this the basis of all the sciences. However, unlike the earlier Syriac scholars devoted to Aristotelian logic, Mattā lived in an environment in which the number and influence of Muslims interested in Greek culture was beginning to outstrip the Christian, and in which, therefore, he did not have the 'luxury' of easily assuming that his own Christian religion was compatible with philosophy in a way that could not be said of others. Is it not likely that he would have pondered the relation between the logic he was offering to all as a universal test of truth and the diversity of Christian and Muslim belief? The interpretation of religious expressions as imitations of those of philosophy may have been his way of reaching out to Hellenophile Muslims and co-opting them to his 'school' of Aristotelian philosophy. If that is so, he evidently succeeded with al-Fārābī.

The problem, of course, in advancing proposals about Mattā's thinking is the loss of almost all his writings (except for translations). However, in addition to

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[36] This was the function of the *Poetics* in the Alexandrian scheme of *Organon* interpretation. Cf. Gutas, "Paul the Persian", 234, 242.

[37] This is the suggestion of Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung*, 119-120.

the evidence of his special interest in Book *Lambda* of the *Metaphysics*,[38] we also learn from the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* of Pseudo-Majrīṭī that he wrote a commentary on *Alpha Elattōn*, from which is preserved the following important passage on *Metaphysics* 995ª2-5 (in the Arabic version of Isḥāq):

> "The extent and magnitude of the force of habit are made clear by (considering) the laws ... We are habituated from our childhood to parables (*amthāl*) and tales (*khurāfāt*) ... The enigmas (occurring) in the laws are, if considered from the point of view of demonstration, similar to tales. For not they, but what is opposite to them (*naqīḍuhā*) can be demonstrated. If, however, they are considered from the point of view of the purpose of their promulgators, they will be found to be noble and of great utility. For supposing that they were abolished, what a fight of beasts of prey would come about – for ('beasts of prey') constitute the majority of the people in the world, or rather all of them but for some rare exceptions – and in consequence 'civil life' (literally 'ploughing and procreation') would perish."[39]

According to Yaḥyā's commentary on the same passage, the 'matters resembling tales', referred to by Aristotle, are 'similar (*tashbīh*) to the rites or modes of worship used in the (religious) legislations'.[40] For Yaḥyā, therefore, and presumably for Mattā, the text has to do with popular religion. In Mattā's

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[38] Cf. above, n. 21.

[39] The Arabic is edited in Hellmut Ritter, *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (Das *Ziel des Weisen*), Berlin: Teubner 1933, 283.14-20, and translated into German by Hellmut Ritter and Martin Plessner, *"Picatrix". Das Ziel des Weisen von Pseudo-Maǧrīṭī*, London: Warburg Institute 1962, 292-293. The English translation cited here is by Pines in Shlomo Pines and Michael Schwarz, *"Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's Refutation of the Doctrine of Acquisition (iktisāb)"*, in: *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D. H. Baneth Dedicata*, 54-56. In the same article (49-56) these authors drew attention to Yaḥyā's commentary on this book of the *Metaphysics* (the significance of which appears immediately below). Ritter and Plessner (292 n. 7) and Pines (54-55 n. 25, 56) pointed to Alexander of Aphrodisias as the likely catalyst for Mattā's digression here contrasting truth and utility; cf. *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis In Aristotelis Metaphysica commentaria*, ed. Michael Hayduck, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. 1, Berlin: Reimer 1891, 167.15-22. Pines had already drawn attention to the importance of the excerpt from Mattā in "A Tenth Century Philosophical Correspondence", 119-120 n. 71, where he noted that certain tendencies of Mattā may have been shared by the Christian philosophers who were his pupils. Yaḥyā was clearly an admirer of Mattā, his teacher (cf. ibid. 119, 121). Platti, *Yaḥyā*, 114 observes that Yaḥyā's closeness to al-Fārābī does not exclude the possibility of influence from Yaḥyā's Christian predecessors.

[40] Pines and Schwarz, "Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's Refutation", 54.

exposition, the connection between these 'enigmas, parables, and tales' and civic virtue is made clear, for they are 'noble and of great utility' and without them the behaviour of the multitude, excluding the 'rare exceptions' of the philosophers, would descend into chaos. Yet they are the opposite (*naqīḍ*) to what can be proved by demonstration, i.e. they belong to the sphere not of the *Posterior Analytics*, but are 'opposite' to it, which in terms of the *Organon* implies that they belong to the *Poetics*. In this text of Mattā, therefore, we may have an indication that he considered that when (in the *Poetics*, argument from entirely false premises) Aristotle addressed matters which were the 'opposite' to what could be demonstrated (in the *Posterior Analytics*, argument from entirely true premises), but which were noble and conducive to virtue for the multitude, it was religious tales and legislations that he had predominantly in mind.

It would not be surprising, if it were indeed Mattā who first proposed that religion is a 'simulation and imitation' (*tashbīh wa-muḥākāh*)[41] of philosophy, that he would run into the opposition of religious conservatives, just as he could also find support from both Christians and Muslims who approached their religious affiliation from a philosophical perspective. Mattā did in fact encounter opposition from the anti-Hellenic Muslim establishment, in the famous public disputation of 932, and subsequently did implicitly receive written support in works from both al-Fārābī and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī. The ostensible subject of the debate was the respective merits of logic and Arabic grammar, but behind that can be seen the issue of the relation between 'universalistic' philosophy and 'national' religion. Over against Mattā, the leading representative of the claim of philosophy to universal truth above linguistic expressions and the 'similitudes' of individual religions, stood the grammarian al-Sīrāfī backed by a host of Muslim politicians, jurists, and theologians who saw in Arabic grammar the foundation

[41] The other prong of al-Fārābī's poetics alongside 'imitation' (*muḥākiyyah*) was 'imaging' (*takhyīl*), corresponding to the Greek *phantasia*, which already in Greek antiquity had been linked with poetry. On this question, cf. Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Die antike Verknüpfung von phantasia und Dichtung bei den Arabern", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 128 (1978), 252-298. Both *mimēsis* (from Aristotle) and *phantasia* (by the *voie diffuse*) could have been known to Graeco-Syrians as artistic principles, and in this way reached the Syro-Arabic Aristotelians of Baghdad. On the evidence of Bar Hebraeus, the Syriac terminology for *phantasia* was the loanword *panṭasiya* and forms of the root h-g-g, corresponding to the forms of the Arabic root kh-y-l; cf. John W. Watt, *Aristotelian Rhetoric in Syriac*, Leiden: Brill 2005, 44-45. For *d-m-ʾ* and *ḥ-k-y* as the Syriac and Arabic roots rendering *mimēsis*, cf. above, n. 35.

of the Islamic disciplines and truth revealed in the very words of the Qurʾān.[42] Mattā was definitely 'playing an away game', even if he was not so intimidated by the hostile audience and unable to rise to the occasion as the (rather suspicious) report of the encounter (by al-Tawḥīdī) suggests. The division, however, ran not between Christian and Muslim, but between 'pro-Hellenic' Christians and Muslims on one side and their 'anti-Hellenic' opponents on the other. Al-Kindī too received short shrift from al-Sīrāfī,[43] while al-Fārābī and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī both followed Mattā in arguing for the superiority of logic over grammar.[44] What brought the Christian and Muslim philosophers together, and divided them from their opponents, was their belief in reason. It is perfectly illustrated in the version of the 'Aristotelian dream' due to Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī. To the question, 'What is the Good?', Aristotle replies first, 'Whatever is good according to reason', second, 'Whatever is good according to religious law', and third, 'Whatever is good in the opinion of the multitude'.[45] Reason is paramount, and this enables Christians, Muslims, and Jews[46] easily to engage in discourse with one another. It is therefore highly appropriate that, as we meet in this famous German foundation from the period of the European Enlightenment, we remember that the *salons* of eighteenth century Germany, where Kant, Lessing, and Mendelssohn discoursed with one another, had Middle Eastern predecessors many years earlier in the *majālis* of tenth century Baghdad.[47]

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[42] Cf. David Samuel Margoliouth, "The Discussion between Abu Bishr Matta and Abu Saʿid al-Sirafi on the Merits of Logic and Grammar", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1905), 79-129; Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary*, cxxii-cxxxix; Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal, *Logique aristotélicienne et grammaire arabe*, Paris: Vrin 1983, 61-71, 149-163; Gerhard Endress, "Grammatik und Logik", in: *Sprachphilosophie in Antike und Mittelalter*, Burkhard Mojsisch, ed., Amsterdam: Grüner 1986, 194-200, 235-270.

[43] Margoliouth, "The Discussion", 108-109 (Arabic), 127-128 (English); Elamrani-Jamal, *Logique*, 162-163; Endress, "Grammatik", 267. Note also al-Sīrāfī's scathing reference to a logical demonstration of Mattā's (Christian) belief that 'God is the third of three, and that one is more than one, and that what is more than one is one ...' (Margoliouth, 107 (Arabic), 126 (English); Elamrani-Jamal, 161; Endress, 264).

[44] Elamrani-Jamal, 77-105, 187-223; Endress, 204-224, 272-296.

[45] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Gustav Flügel, Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel 1871-1872, 243.5-7. See the illuminating analysis of this text, against its rival version, by Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 97-104.

[46] Cf. the correspondence between Yaḥyā and the Jewish scholars of Mosul (ʿIrs ibn ʿUthmān and Ibn Abī Saʿīd) studied by Pines, "A Tenth Century Correspondence", 103-136.

[47] Cf. Kraemer, *Humanism*, 52-60; Sidney H. Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam", in: *Redefining Christian Identity*, 120-123.

Apologetics, catechesis, and the question of audience in "On the Triune Nature of God" (Sinai Arabic 154) and three treatises of Theodore Abū Qurrah

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Introduction

With the rapid Arab conquest of the Eastern Byzantine provinces and the Sassanid Persian Empire in the decades following the death of the prophet Muḥammad in AD 632, as well as the collection of the Qur'an and the development of a specific Islamic identity over the course of the first Islamic century, Christians within the region gradually became aware that core Christian doctrines were being challenged in fundamental ways. The Muslims, while acknowledging al-Masīḥ, ʿĪsā b. Maryam (Jesus the Son of Mary) as a great prophet and apostle sent by God, called a central cluster of Christian convictions into question: namely, that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God who died the death of crucifixion "for our sake and for our salvation." Over against this, the Qur'an repeatedly responds to any suggestion that God have a Son with *subḥān Allāh* (or *subḥānaka* or *subḥānahu*), the Qur'an's typical response to any suggestion of unworthy notions about God.[1] The saying that "God is the Messiah, Son of Mary"[2] is explicitly

[1] See D. Gimaret, "Subḥān", in: The *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 9, Leiden: Brill 1996, 742-743.

[2] *al-Mā'idah* (5):17, 72. English renderings of the Qur'an are from A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, London: George Allen & Unwin 1955.

repudiated; "the Messiah, son of Mary, was only an Apostle."[3] Still, the apostolic status of the Messiah, Son of Mary is such that it is impossible that God, who is *khayr al-mākirīn*, "the best of devisers,"[4] should allow his enemies to succeed in the plots they had devised against him: "they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them."[5]

As Christian communities within the "New World Order" of *Dār al-Islām* came to adopt the Arabic language in the course of the eighth Christian century, it became a matter of urgency for Christian leaders to find ways of teaching and defending traditional christological teachings in a manner suitable to the new linguistic and religious environment. In the present essay I shall discuss two early Arabic-language presentations of the cluster of christological and soteriological convictions just mentioned. The first is the anonymous Melkite apology found in *Sinai Arabic 154*[6] and entitled by Margaret Dunlop Gibson, in her edition and translation of 1899, *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* or *On the Triune Nature of God.*[7]

Chapter	Folios in *Sinai* Ar. 154	Pages in Gibson's ed.	Comments
Introduction	99r	74	Opening prayer profoundly influenced by the language of the Qur'an .
I. Trinity and Incarnation	99r-111v	74-87	

[3] *al-Mā'idah* (5):75.

[4] For the use of this phrase with respect to God's protection of Jesus, see *Āl ʿImrān* (3):54-55. Compare 8:30 (with respect to Muḥammad), as well as related expressions in 27:50 (Ṣāliḥ), 86:15-16 (Muḥammad), and 21:70 or 37:98 (Abraham).

[5] *al-Nisā'* (4):157. On this whole matter, see Willem A. Bijlefeld, "A Prophet and More Than a Prophet?" *The Muslim World* 59 (1969), 1-28.

[6] For a description of this manuscript, see Aziz S. Atiya, *Catalogue Raisonné of the Mount Sinai Arabic Manuscripts: Complete Analytical Listing of the Arabic Collection Preserved in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai*, vol. 1, translated into Arabic by Joseph N. Youssef, Alexandria, Egypt: Al Maaref Establishment 1970, 296-298.

[7] Margaret Dunlop Gibson, ed. *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles from an Eighth or Ninth Century MS. in the Convent of St Catherine on Mount Sinai, with a Treatise On the Triune Nature of God*, Studia Sinaitica 7 [1899], reprint ed. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2003. It should be noted that Gibson's edition is incomplete: of a text that occupies ff. 99r-139v in the manuscript, ff. 106r, 107r, 110v, 111v, and 133v-139v have been omitted.

A. The Trinity	99r-102v	74-78	Arguments from scripture (Bible and Qur'an), simple analogies from nature.
B. Christ	102v-111v	78-87	
1. The story of redemption, from Adam to Christ	102v-108r	78-84	Biblical and Qur'anic material interwoven in the stories of the prophets/apostles.
2. Christ's divinity	108r-111v	84-87	Biblical material predominates.
II. Testimonies	111v-139v	87-107	
A. The Life of Christ	111v-128v	87-103	23 Old Testament *testimonia.*
B. Baptism	128v-137r	103-107	8 Old Testament *testimonia.*
C. The Cross (incomplete)	137r-139v (text breaks off)	missing	3 Old Testament *testimonia.*

These titles are in fact misleading: a chapter on the Trinity merely serves as an introduction to what is, for the most part, a soteriological and christological text, as may be seen from the list of contents below.

Gibson's edition and translation of the text immediately attracted the attention of her friend J. Rendel Harris, who wrote an important review in *The American Journal of Theology* in 1901, which was reprinted in 1916.[8] After that the text received relatively little attention until Fr. Samir Khalil Samir, who has prepared a new edition of it, called attention to it in presentations at Louvain-la-Neuve in 1988 and Birmingham in 1990.[9] A few years later, Sr. Maria Gallo made an Italian

[8] J. Rendel Harris, "A Tract on the Triune Nature of God", *The American Journal of Theology 5* (1901), 75-86; reprinted in idem, *Testimonies*, Part I, London 1916, 39-51 [= Chapter 5, "Testimonies against the Mohammedans"].

[9] These presentations were published as Samir Khalil Samir, "Une apologie arabe du christianisme d'époque umayyade?", *Parole de l'Orient* 16 (1990-1991), 85-106; and idem, "The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750)", in: *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen, eds., Studies in the History of Religions 63, Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill 1994, 57-114.

translation of the text.[10]

On the Triune Nature of God appears to be the oldest substantial piece of Arabic Christian theological writing in our possession. It was Samir who discovered a date in the text: 746 years since the Christian religion had been established.[11] The interpretation of this date poses its own problems, the major question being whether Christianity's "establishment" is to be measured from the Incarnation or from the Crucifixion; the best candidates for the date after conversion are AD 755 or AD 788 respectively – either of which falls in the second half of the eighth Christian century.[12]

After *On the Triune Nature of God*, one of the earliest Arabic-language treatises on soteriological and christological matters is a set of three linked treatises by Theodore Abū Qurrah, to which I give the titles *On the Necessity of Redemption*, *On the Possibility of the Incarnation* and *On the Divine Son*. For convenience, I will refer to the full set simply as the *Three Treatises*. All three were published by Constantin Bacha in 1904,[13] and translated into German by Georg Graf in 1910.[14] The first of the three attracted the attention of the great French Catholic student of the doctrine of redemption, Jean Rivière, in an article of 1914.[15] But like *On the Triune Nature of God*, these Abū Qurrah treatises were then largely neglected until relatively recent times, when Fr. Sidney Griffith studied them in his dissertation of 1976.[16] Very recently, they have been translated into English

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[10] Palestinese anonimo, *Omelia arabo-cristiana dell'VIII secolo*, Maria Gallo, trans., Collana di Testi Patristici 116, Rome: Città Nuova 1994.

[11] Samir, "Apologie arabe", 89-92.

[12] I have argued for the later date: Mark N. Swanson, "Some Considerations for the Dating of *Fī taṭlīṭ Allāh al-wāḥid* (Sinai Ar. 154) and *al-Ǧāmiʿ wuǧūh al-īmān* (London, British Library or. 4950)", *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993), 115-141. Griffith has argued for the earlier: Sidney H. Griffith, "The View of Islam from the Monasteries of Palestine in the Early ʿAbbāsid Period: Theodore Abū Qurrah and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 11, note 20.

[13] Constantin Bacha, *Mayāmir Thawudūrus Abū Qurrah usquf Ḥarrān, aqdam taʾlīf ʿarabī naṣranī*, Beirut: Maṭbaʿat al-Fawāʾid 1904, 83-91, 180-186 and 91-104 respectively.

[14] Georg Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abû Qurra, Bischofs von Ḥarrân*, Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur- und Dogmengeschichte X,3-4, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 1910, 169-198.

[15] Jean Rivière, "Un précurseur de Saint Anselme: La théologie rédemptrice de Théodore Abû Qurra", *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique*, Sixième Série, 6 (1914), 339-360.

[16] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abu Qurrah (c.750-c.820 A.D.): A Methodological, Comparative Study in Christian Arabic Literature* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1978).

in a major volume of Abū Qurrah translations by John Lamoreaux; there, unlike the Bacha publication, the three linked treatises are gathered together as a single work in three parts.[17] The work contains no date and may have been written anytime during Abū Qurrah's active career, at the end of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth.

In this essay I return to and reflect upon two earlier studies. In 1998 I published an article in *The Muslim World* that focused on the use of the *Qur'an* in early Arabic Christian literature,[18] while at the Fifth Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium on Arab Christianity and Islam in 2005, I delivered a paper on the use of the *Bible* in the same literature.[19] The results of the two studies are in some tension, and here I would like to face that tension. In what follows, I shall first make some brief observations about what we might call the apologetic dimension of these texts, that is, the ways in which they reflect awareness of the Islamic environment, and, in particular, in which they draw upon the Muslims holy scripture, the Qur'an. Next, I shall comment on the traditional Christian dimensions of these texts: how they fit into the patristic tradition of soteriological and christological discourse, with special attention to their use of Old Testament *testimonia.* Then it will be possible to comment on the presumed audience of these texts and their literary genre, and to offer some additional observations about their apologetic character.

The Texts and the Islamic Environment

Both of the works under consideration here are, of course, written in Arabic *On the Triune Nature of God* in a very simple but in its own way eloquent style, and Abū Qurrah's *Three Treatises* in the sophisticated Arabic of a *mutakallim.* Both put us on notice from their opening paragraphs that their Christian authors have no embarrassment at or hesitation in using the language of the Muslims' sacred

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[17] John Lamoreaux, trans., *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, Library of the Christian East, 1 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), Chapter 11, "On Our Salvation," pp. 119-34. Graf had also put the treatises into their correct order.

[18] Mark N. Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'ān in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies", *The Muslim World 88* (1998), 297-319.

[19] Mark N. Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting (2): The Use of the Bible in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies", to appear in: *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, David Thomas, ed., The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 6, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2006 or 2007.

scripture.[20] *On the Triune Nature of God* begins with a magnificent prayer[21] that echoes Qur'anic language from its opening *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi*, "Praise be to God," to its concluding

> *Lā ilāha qablaka,*
> *wa-lā ilāha baʿdaka.*
> *Ilayka l-maṣīr,*
> *wa-anta ʿalā kulli shayʾin qadīr–*
> There is no god before Thee,
> and no god after Thee.
> To Thee is the homecoming,
> and Thou art powerful over everything.

In between, the author again and again incorporates Qur'anic vocabulary into his petitions. He prays, for example, that we might be found to be among those "who give praise using Thy most beautiful names" (*bi-asmāʾika l-ḥusnā*),[22] and "who speak using Thy most sublime similitudes" (*bi-amthālika l-ʿulyā*).[23] In my earlier study on this opening prayer I devoted 22 footnotes to identifying Qur'anic vocabulary and phrases within it.[24]

As for the *Three Treatises*, Abū Qurrah dives directly into his theme with *inna -llāha anzala l-nāmūsa ʿalā Mūsā bi-Ṭūri Sīnā*, "God sent down the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai"; in choosing the verb *anzala*, "he sent down", Theodore is using the specifically Qur'anic vocabulary of revelation.[25]

As one continues to read the two works, one discovers that it is *On the Triune Nature of God* in which the Qur'an is quoted most explicitly. In its Part One, Chapter One, on the Trinity, the author shows that in the Qur'an, as in the Bible, God sometimes speaks in the first person plural; examples of this are introduced with: *wa-tajidūnahu fi l-Qurʾan*, "You'll find it in the Qur'an!"[26] Similar references

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[20] The paragraphs that follow revisit Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'ān".

[21] *Sinai Arabic 154*, f. 99r; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 74.

[22] Cf. *al-Aʿrāf* (7):180, *al-Isrāʾ* (17):110, *Ṭā Hā* (20):8, *al-Ḥashr* (59):23-24.

[23] The Qur'an frequently mentions that God coins similitudes, e.g. *al-Raʿd* (13):17.

[24] Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'ān", 305-308.

[25] *Ibid.*, 312.

[26] *Sinai Arabic* 154, ff. 101v-102r; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 77. The author quotes *al-ʿĀdiyāt* (90):4, *al-Qamar* (54):11 and *al-Anʿām* (6):94 as examples of God's use of the first person plural, and *al-Naḥl* (16):102 is paraphrased in order to show that the Qur'an speaks of God's Word and God's Spirit.

to "the Qur'an" or "your Book" are found periodically throughout the work.[27]

The author of *On the Triune Nature of God* uses the Qur'an to greater effect, I believe, in Part One, Chapter Two, the author's presentation of salvation history.[28] The author briefly tells the stories of Adam and Eve and the Fall; of Noah, Abraham, Lot and Moses; and, finally, of Mary and Jesus. In each paragraph, Qur'anic vocabulary and verse-fragments are woven together with biblical material. In the story of Creation and Fall,[29] for example, God breathed into Adam, *nafakha fīhi*,[30] and made him to dwell in the Garden, *askanahu l-jannata*.[31] But Iblīs made disobedience fair to Adam and his spouse, *zayyana lahumā*,[32] and as a result, "their shameful parts were revealed to them", *badat lahumā saw'ātuhumā*. This last is an exact quotation from *Sūrat al-A'rāf* (7), which has supplied some of the other vocabulary of the passage.[33]

The paragraphs on Noah and Abraham/Lot likewise have some Qur'anic coloring, which is then intensified in the story of Moses.[34] There we hear that Pharaoh wished to destroy the children of Israel and "made himself a god", *ja'ala nafsahu ilāhan*.[35] After Moses had fled Egypt and had reached Mount Sinai, "God spoke to him directly", *kallamahu -llāhu taklīman*,[36] "from the right side of the Mount", *min jānibi l-Ṭūri l-ayman*.[37] Later on in the narrative, we are told that God chose Mary "above all the women of the worlds", *iṣṭafāha -llāhu 'alā nisā'i l-'ālamīn*;[38] and when the archangel Gabriel had announced that she would bear the Messiah, the savior of Israel, she responded: "How shall I have a child,

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[27] "You find it in the Qur'an": *Sinai Arabic* 154, f. 101v, 102r, 108r and 112r; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 77 (twice), 84 and 88. "It is written in the Qur'an": *Sinai Arabic* 154, f. 129v; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 104. "You find all this ... in your Book": *Sinai Arabic* 154, f. 108r; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 84.

[28] See the table of contents above. For what follows, see Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'ān," 308-11.

[29] *Sinai Arabic* 154, ff. 102v-103r; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 78-79.

[30] *al-Sajdah* (32):9.

[31] Cf. *al-Baqarah* (2):35, *al-A'rāf* (7):19.

[32] Cf. *al-Ḥijr* (15):39.

[33] *al-A'rāf* (7):22.

[34] *Sinai Arabic 154*, ff. 103v-105r; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 80-81.

[35] Cf. *al-Shu'arā'* (26):29, *al-Qaṣaṣ* (28):38, or *al-Nāzi'āt* (79):24.

[36] Cf. *al-Nisā'* (4):164.

[37] *Maryam* (19):52.

[38] *Sinai Arabic 154*, f. 106v; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 83. Cf. *Āl 'Imrān* (3):42.

whom no mortal has touched?" *annā yakūnu lī waladun wa-lam yamsasnī bashar*?[39] In none of these cases does the author interrupt the flow of his narrative to say, "This is from the Qur'an!" Rather, he deftly weaves the Qur'anic material together with Biblical material into his summary of the story of humanity's fall and redemption.

Examples of this sort do not exhaust the description of the author's engagement with the Qur'an. Not only has he woven the *vocabulary* of the Qur'an into his narrative of human salvation, he has, in a sense, laid claim to an entire *genre* of Qur'anic material: the sequences of anecdotes about the apostles of God – Montgomery Watt called them "punishment stories"[40] – that are a feature of several Qur'anic *sūrahs*. In *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* (7), for example, we find passages about Adam and his spouse, and later Noah, Lot and Moses – in the same order in which we find them in *On the Triune Nature of God*. The Christian author is happy to make allusion to these Qur'anic anecdotes – but he shapes the material in a specifically Christian way. In the first place, he *historicizes* material that, in the Qur'an, has only the vaguest of historical referents. The Christian author, however, introduces a *chronology*: in brief transitional statements between paragraphs, he informs us that there were 2270 years between Adam and Noah, 1200 years between Noah and Abraham, and 430 years between Abraham and Moses.[41] The chronological interludes drop out at this point (after a total of 3900 years), but one may well believe that the author had planned to include – or that the text has lost – at least one more passage setting forth an additional 1600 years between Moses and Christ, for the traditional total of 5500. In the second place, these historicized anecdotes are shaped as a coherent *narrative* with a clear *plot*: human beings have sold themselves under Satan, and not even the prophets and apostles of God are able to save them from Satan's tyranny. Thus the stage is set for God's own radical intervention in human history ... through the Incarnation of the Word.

Turning to Theodore Abū Qurrah in the *Three Treatises*, we notice that he does *not* mention the Qur'an explicitly or use phrases such as "your Book"; the closest he comes to that is in the second treatise, *On the Possibility of the Incarnation*,

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[39] *Sinai Arabic 154*, f. 107v (and absent from Gibson, *Arabic Version*). Cf. *Maryam* (19):20.

[40] W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, Islamic Surveys 8, Edinburgh: University Press 1973, 127-135.

[41] *Sinai Arabic 154*, f. 103r-v; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 79-80.

in which he argues from the biblical affirmation that God has a Throne to the possibility in general of God's self-localization in a place of God's own choosing. While Theodore knows full well that the Qur'an makes frequent mention of the throne of God[42] – that is, in fact, the reason for his shaping the treatise the way he does – he alludes to this Qur'anic material only indirectly, saying, at one point:

> "[A]ll the prophets agree upon His being seated upon the Throne, and I do not suppose that anyone among the People of Faith will contradict them in this."[43]

And again,

> "[W]hy do those who contradict us deny to God [the possibility of] self-localization in the body taken from the Virgin Mary, the Purified One, while they themselves say that God has seated himself upon the Throne in Heaven?"[44]

Theodore is a master of indirection, allowing Muslims to find themselves or to be found within the terms "the People of Faith" (*ahl al-īmān*) and "those who contradict us" (*al-mukhālifīna lanā*).

Theodore is likewise a master of Qur'anic *allusion*; his use of the Qur'an does not consist in quotations, but rather in skillfully chosen words that, for those who know the Qur'an well, set off echoes of entire verses and passages.[45] Theodore's first treatise, *On the Necessity of Redemption*, is a fine case study in this. In one densely worded passage, Theodore wants to argue that human beings have transgressed God's Law in the past and are therefore liable to punishment, and that even were they able to repent and henceforth render God perfect obedience,

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[42] The Qur'an states seven times that God "sat Himself upon the Throne" (7:54, 10:3, 13:2, 20:5, 25:59, 32:4, 57:4), and nine times gives God the title "Lord of the Throne" (9:129, 21:22, 23:86 and 116, 27:26,43:82) or "Possessor of the Throne" (40:15, 81:20, 85:15). Angels throng about (39:75, 40:7) or bear (40:7, 69:17) the Throne, singing praise.

[43] Bacha, *Mayāmir*, 182.

[44] *Ibid.*, 183.

[45] For what follows, see Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'ān", 312-314, as well as Mark N. Swanson, "A Frivolous God? (*a-fa-ḥasibtum annamā khalaqnākum ʿabathan*)", in: *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg*, David Thomas with Clare Amos, eds., London: Melisende 2003, 166-183, here 168-174.

their *past* disobedience would still doom them to Hell. Here is how Theodore puts it:

> "Even were you to arrive at the utmost degree of this [obedience], despite the habit of sin that has taken root in you, to which you voluntarily subjected yourself because you were pleased with its delight ... but you are far from this, and I do not suppose that you have reached this degree [of obedience] at all! However, even if you *have* reached it, there is no way for you to blot out any of your former sin, not even an atom's measure! Thus it is inevitable that the punishment which overtakes you because of "what your hands have forwarded" will be fixed upon you. You will not be able to remove it at by any means!"[46]

There are two expressions here that might seize the attention of a Qur'anically competent listener. First, the expression "not even an atom's measure", *wa-law miqdāra dharratin*, echoes *Sūrat al-Zilzāl* (99):8, which states that on the Day of Judgment, "who has done an atom's weight of evil", *mithqāla dharratin sharran*, "shall see it." Then, with the Qur'anic threat of judgment already resonating in the background of the argument, Theodore uses the expression "because of what your hands have forwarded", *bi-mā qaddamat yadāka*. This and similar expressions are common in Qur'anic judgment formulae. In *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* (3):181-182, for example, God says to the damned: "Taste the chastisement of the burning – that, for what your hands have forwarded."[47] With a few words, Theodore has brought terrifying Qur'anic threats into the background of his argument – for those with ears to hear them.

Theodore goes on to pose the plight of disobedient humanity as a dilemma: *either* God will "forgive us our sins freely, in his mercy dropping the punishment for them"; *or* God will insist "that punishment be carried out, and we end up in eternal destruction".[48] This second possibility is clearly intolerable, but, Theodore argues, so is the first. To claim that God, in a sense, says "Never mind" with respect to God's own Law is impossible: the person making that claim "has made God's

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[46] Bacha, *Mayāmir*, 84.

[47] *al-Ḥajj* (22):9-10 provides an exact parallel to Abū Qurrah's formula. See also *al-Anfāl* (8):50-51, al-Naba'(78):40.

[48] Bacha, *Mayāmir*, 84.

Law *bāṭilan*, vain, and God himself *ʿabathan*, frivolous".[49] The consequences of this antinomian position for human morality would be disastrous: everyone "would become reckless in following his natural inclinations with respect to his sensual appetites, making his religion his caprice", *yajʿalu dīnahu hawāhu*.[50] Again, Qurʾanic passages echo in the background, insisting that God has not created and indeed does not do anything *bāṭilan*[51] or *ʿabathan*,[52] and reminding listeners that a profound aspect of human idolatry is the tendency to make one's caprice (*hawā*, plural *ahwāʾ*) into a god.[53]

Summing up so far: both the author of *On the Triune Nature of God* and Theodore Abū Qurrah knew the Qurʾan well. While the author of *On the Triune Nature of God* occasionally sought "proof-texts" for Christian doctrines in the Qurʾan, as when he claimed God's use of the first-person plural in several Qurʾanic texts as a witness to the reality of the Trinity, he was also able to allude to the Qurʾan in ways that were not heavy-handed or forced. As for Theodore Abū Qurrah, many of his Qurʾanic allusions are so light that they may have been missed by all but the most competent readers. This allusive lightness of touch may well have been calculated:[54] it allowed Theodore to bring the Qurʾan into the argument without explicitly claiming it as an authority (and thus opening the door to awkward questions about Christian recognition of the Qurʾan). But at the same time that Theodore's allusive use of the Qurʾan neatly sidesteps the issue of the Qurʾan's authority, it also allows the Qurʾan to speak with its own voice. This fact alone is sufficient, I believe, to make Theodore a significant figure in the history of Christian-Muslim conversation.

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[49] *Ibid.*, 84-85.

[50] *Ibid.*, 85.

[51] *Āl ʿImrān* (3):191, *Ṣād* (38):27.

[52] *al-Muʾminūn* (23):115.

[53] E.g., *al-Furqān* (25):43, *al-Jāthiyah* (45):23.

[54] It is also possible that Theodore made these allusions without thinking twice (or even once!) about them. While the question as to whether Theodore *intended* to allude to the Qurʾan is an intriguing one, in the end it is probably both unanswerable and unimportant. The allusions are *there*, whether or not Theodore was designing them for maximum effect, or even conscious of making them at all.

The Texts and Old Testament *Testimonia*

While the works under consideration here do reflect their Islamic environment in various ways, it is also important to realize the great extent to which they stand in continuity with specifically Christian tradition and exegetical practice. The narratives of redemption that we find in each work have deep roots in Christian soteriological discourse. The second chapter of *On the Triune Nature of God* narrates the salvation of humankind as the incarnation of the Word of God in order fittingly to overthrow Satan, who had overthrown humanity. But now, this particular redemptive narrative has a rich history including the writings of St. Irenaeus of Lyons and the *Catechetical Orations* of St. Gregory of Nyssa.[55] Theodore Abū Qurrah's *On the Necessity of Redemption* may plow some new ground in identifying the plight of fallen humanity as its *liability to punishment* as a result of imperfect obedience to God's Law. The overall structure of his argument, however, is remarkably similar to what we find in the opening chapters of *De Incarnatione* (1-10) by St. Athanasius, which describes the plight of fallen humanity as its *plunge into corruption and death* as a result of its turn away from the Word and disobedience to God's commandment. Both Theodore and Athanasius reject the idea that repentance is sufficient to heal humanity's plight. Both of them set up a dilemma with the equally intolerable alternatives of God's Law or commandment becoming void on the one hand, or God's creature perishing on the other. For both of them, the incarnation and death of the Son/Word of God is the only way out of what seems to be an exclusive disjunction.[56]

In addition to standing squarely in old soteriological tradition, both the author of *On the Triune Nature of God* and Theodore Abū Qurrah rely heavily on another ancient Christian tradition, one that goes back at least to the second century and perhaps to the very earliest Christian communities: collections of *testimonia*, that is, of Old Testament witnesses to or "prophesies" of the life of Christ and of Christian doctrines and practices.[57]

On the Triune Nature of God is particularly rich in *testimonia*. Already as part of the narrative of redemption in Chapter Two of Part I, the author presents the

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[55] E.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *Or. Catech.* 24,4.

[56] See Mark N. Swanson, *Folly to the Ḥunafā': The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.*, extract from dissertation, Cairo 1995, 74-85.

[57] The paragraphs that follow revisit Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting (2): The Use of the Bible."

prophets pleas to God for salvation from Satan's ongoing tyranny, in the form of a paragraph consisting in seven Old Testament quotations[58] which Rendel Harris already in 1901 recognized as belonging to ancient Christian tradition.[59] But this paragraph is merely an appetizer for what follows. The entirety of *On the Triune Nature of God*, Part II consists in *testimonia* with commentary: 23 Old Testament testimonies to the life of Christ, eight to Baptism, and three to the Cross – at which point the text breaks off. These are listed in the table below.[60]

On The Triune Nature of God, Part II

II.A. Life of Christ	**II.B. Baptism**	**II.C. Cross**
Sinai Arabic 154, ff. 111v-139v Gibson, 87-103	*Sinai Arabic 154*, ff. 128v-137r Gibson, 103-107	*Sinai Arabic 154*, ff. 137r-139v Missing in Gibson
1. Psalm 110:3	1. Psalm 29:3	1. Deuteronomy 28:66
2. Psalm 2:7-9	2. Psalm 74:13b-14a	2. Numbers 21:6-9
3. Psalm 110:1	3. Ezekiel 36:25	3. Zechariah 12:10b
4. Isaiah 59:20	4. Isaiah 1:16	(text breaks off)
5. Isaiah 11:10	5. Psalm 51:2	
6. Isaiah 63:9	6. Isaiah 12:3-4	
7. Isaiah 7:14	7. Micah 7:18-19	
8. Isaiah 9:6	8. Isaiah 49:10b	
9. Isaiah 2:3		
10. Psalm 47:8, 87:6, 22:27		
11. Micah 5:2		
12. Psalm 72:6-12, 17, 5		

[58] See *Sinai Arabic 154*, f. 105r-v (or Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 82), where we find the following collection of quotations: Psalm 144:5 (with influence of Psalm 18:9); Psalm 80:1b-2; Isaiah 63:9; Psalm 107:20; Habakkuk 2:3; Psalm 118:26a and 25a; and Psalm 50:3. For more on this list, with parallels from other collections of *testimonia*, see Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting (2): The Use of the Bible".

[59] Harris saw in the *testimonia of On the Triune Nature of God "the disjecta membra* of Justin and Ariston, of Irenaeus, Tertullian and Cyprian, and a number of other writers between whom there is a nexus, as regards both the matter and the manner of their arguments"; Harris, "A Tract", 75 = *Testimonies* 1:40.

[60] A more detailed table giving parallels from other *testimonia*-collections (like the tables for the testimonies in On the *Necessity of Redemption* and *On the Divine Son* below) may be found in Swanson, "Beyond Prooftexting (2): The Use of the Bible".

13. Isaiah 19:1		
14. Job 9:8		
15. Psalm 33:6		
16. Job 33:4		
17. Daniel 9:24		
18. Isaiah 35:3-6a		
19. Genesis 49:9-10		
20. Baruch 3:35-37		
21. Habakkuk 3:3		
22. Daniel 2:34-35		
23. Zechariah 9:9		

It is worth noting that there is considerable complexity in the way in which these *testimonia* are presumed to bear witness to Christian realities. One of the testimonies found in *On the Triune Nature of God* (II.A, #21 in the above chart) is Habakkuk 3:3: "God shall come from Teman, and the Holy One from a dark shaded mountain." The author informs us that Teman refers to Bethlehem and that the "shaded mountain" is the Virgin Mary – who, according to Luke 1:35, was *overshadowed* by the power of the Most High when she conceived Jesus.[61] And thus Habakkuk has prophesied the birth of God Incarnate from the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem! Both identifications, that of Teman with Bethlehem and of the shaded mountain with the Virgin Mary may be found in Greek patristic works,[62] confirming that we are dealing with a centuries-old tradition of typological interpretation one in which Christians took delight.

This is not to say that the Islamic context is entirely forgotten in Part II of *On the Triune Nature of God.* The Qurʾan is quoted twice: *Āl ʿImrān* (3):55 in support of Psalm 110:3 (on Christ's ascension and session at the right hand of the Father with his enemies under his feet),[63] and later, in the chapter on Baptism, *Āl ʿImrān* (3):38-39 in the midst of a discussion about John the Baptist.[64] Occasional

[61] Sinai Arabic 154, f. 124r-v; Gibson, Arabic Version, 100-101.

[62] E.g., the identification Teman = Bethlehem may be found in Irenaeus, Contra haereses 3.20.4, ANF 1:451; while the identification of the "shaded mountain" with the Virgin Mary may be found in pseudo-Methodius, De Simeone et Anna, ANF 6:393.

[63] Sinai Arabic 154, f. 112r-v; Gibson, Arabic Version, 88.

[64] Sinai Arabic 154, ff. 129v-130r; Gibson, Arabic Version, 104-5.

turns of phrase suggest that the writer has not forgotten his Islamic environment.[65] For the most part, though, the chapter could be simply an Arabic rendering of a traditional Christian *testimonia*-list.

When we turn to the *Three Treatises* of Theodore Abū Qurrah, we find that here as well *testimonia*-lists are an important part of the presentation. In the first treatise, *On the Necessity of Redemption*, Theodore's redemption narrative is immediately followed, without introduction, by testimonies:[66]

Testimonies in Theodore Abū Qurrah, *On the Necessity of Redemption*

Testimonies in *On the Necessity of Redemption* (Bacha, 86-88)	***Burhan* Book 2 "Types" (ed. Cachia)**	***Burhan* Book 3 "Son of God" (ed. Cachia)**	***Burhan* Book 4 "Career of Christ" (ed. Cachia)**	***Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*, Quaestio CXXXVII, *PG* 28, cols 683-700**
1. Isaiah 50:5-6			626	9. (693A)
2. Isaiah 53:2-7			623, 626	6. (689B), 8. (692C)
3. Psalm 22:16-18			627	10. (696A)
4. Zechariah 12:10			627	10. (696D)
(5. Leviticus 4)				

[65] See, for example, the way Deuteronomy 28:66 is introduced in the chapter on the Cross; Mark N. Swanson, "Folly to the *Ḥunafāʾ*: The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy," in: *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson and David Thomas, eds., The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 5, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2006, 237-256, here 243-247.

[66] Bacha, *Mayāmir*, 86-87, 88. In this and the table for *On the Divine Son*, parallels are given, first with the three *testimonia*-collections preserved in the ninth-century Melkite compilation by Peter of Bayt Ra's known as *al-Burhān*: Pierre Cachia, ed., and W. Montgomery Watt, trans., *Eutychius of Alexandria: The Book of the Demonstration (Kitāb al-Burhān)*, I-II, CSCO 192-193, 209-210 = ar. 20-23, Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO 1960-61; the references in the table are to paragraph numbers. The three collections are of different sorts, the first concentrating on Old Testament *types* of various aspects of the life of Christ; the second on testimonies to *Christ's divinity* (arranged roughly in Old Testament order); and the third on testimonies to the *career* of Christ (in narrative order). "Book 4" of *al-Burhān* is closely related to an earlier Greek work, Question 137 of the pseudo-Athanasian *Questions to Antiochus the Dux* (*PG* 28, cols. 683-700).

Theodore's second treatise, *On the Possibility of the Incarnation*, is dominated by biblical passages. These are used first in support of the assertion that God has a Throne, which Theodore takes as a commonly accepted religious idea; he argues, however, that this idea implies God's capacity and readiness to self-localize for the sake of creatures.[67] In response to the objection that God's self-localization could not take place in an unclean human body, Theodore quotes Hebrews 4:15 ("He resembled us in everything except sin") along with several Old Testament testimonies to Christ's sinlessness and righteousness.[68] And finally, Abū Qurrah presents a variety of traditional Old Testament examples of God's self-localization: the burning bush, the pillar of cloud, the mercy-seat, and the tabernacle.[69]

Old Testament Quotations in Theodore Abū Qurrah,
On the Possibility of Incarnation

That God has a throne (Bacha, 180-182)
1. 1 Kings 22:19-22
2. Isaiah 6:1-3
3. Daniel 7:9-10
4. Daniel 3:54-55 (= Song of the Three Young Men 32-33)
5. Psalm 103:19
On Christ's sinlessness and righteousness (Bacha, 183-184)
1. Isaiah 53:8-9
2. Isaiah 53:11-12
3. Isaiah 11:1-2
4. Isaiah 11:4-5
5. Malachi 4:2
On God's self-localization (Bacha, 185-186)
1. Exodus 3:1-6 (burning bush)
2. Exodus 33:7-11 (pillar of cloud)
3. Exodus 25:17-22; Leviticus 16:2 (mercy-seat)
4. Numbers 7:1, 89 (tabernacle)

[67] Bacha, *Mayāmir*, 180-182.

[68] *Ibid.*, 183-184.

[69] *Ibid.*, 185-186.

Theodore's third treatise, *On the Divine Son*, begins with a *kalām*-argument in which he demonstrates to his own satisfaction, at least, that God possesses the attribute of headship (*ri'āsah*) over one who is God's equal by nature – i.e., the divine Son.[70] (This is a topic to which I shall return.) When Theodore has completed his *kalām*-argument and has responded to objections, he goes on to say:

> "Know that the [existence of the] Son is also established by means other than that which we have just established for you – even if that should have been sufficient, were you possessed of intellect and a desire for eternal life. In addition to [what we have presented] and *even better*: the Prophets have prophesied concerning him, and their books are in the hands of both the Christians and the Jews. They have related his eternal birth from the Father and his second birth from the Virgin Mary; his pains, crucifixion, burial, and the entire course of his life – apart from what the Holy Gospel makes plain about these things."[71]

A set of sixteen testimonies follows:[72]

Testimonies in Theodore Abū Qurrah, *On the Divine Son*

Testimonies in *On the Divine Son* (Bacha, 98-103)	***Burhan* Book 2 "Types" (ed. Cachia)**	***Burhan* Book 3 "Son of God" (ed. Cachia)**	***Burhan* Book 4 "Career of Christ" (ed. Cachia)**	***Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*, Quaestio CXXXVII, *PG* 28, cols 683-700**
1. Psalm 110:3	468	604	616	4. (688A)
2. Psalm 45:6-7		594		
3. Psalm 84:7			619	
4. Proverbs 8:22-30		588		4. (688A)
5. Isaiah 48:12-16		577		

[70] *Ibid.*, 91-94 (presentation of the argument), 94-98 (responses to objections).

[71] *Ibid.*, 98. Emphasis added.

[72] *Ibid.*, 98-103.

6. Isaiah 7:14		572	618	5. (688C)
7. Isaiah 9:6		573	618	5. (688C)
8. Baruch 3:35-37		584		1. (684D)
9. Psalm 84:8			619	
10. Micah 1:2-3, 5		560		
11. Hosea 1:6-7		556		
12. Genesis 1:26	465	505		
13. Psalm 33:6		606		
14. Genesis 31:3, 11, 13		515		
15. Genesis 3:22	465, 480		616	4. (688AB)
16. Genesis 11: 5,7		509		

As we observed in the case of *On the Triune Nature of God*, the *testimonia* in the *Three Treatises* sometimes rely on rather complex typologies. For example, it may not be obvious to the uninitiated that one can find the Cross in Leviticus 4, where the priest anoints the four horns of the altar with blood; or in Malachi 4:2, where the prophet says, "I will send you the sun of righteousness, and your healing is upon *his wings*." But in both cases, Theodore provides an explanation. It is the sign of the *cross* that the priests trace in blood.[73] And by "his wings", the Prophet Malachi means "his *cross*".[74]

Audience and Genre

We are now perhaps in a position to sense the difficulty of giving a clear response to questions such as: For whom were these texts written? What was their intended function? On the one hand, both *On the Triune Nature of God* and the *Three Treatises* provide textbook examples of subtle uses of the Qur'an, ones that

[73] *Ibid.*, 88.

[74] *Ibid.*, 184.

presuppose readers with considerable *Qur'anic* competence. On the other hand, the two works also provide textbook examples of Christian Arabic *testimonia*-lists, with many examples of traditional and highly imaginative exegeses of the Old Testament, ones that seem to presuppose readers with a very high degree of *Biblical* competence. Looking at the use of the Qur'an in these texts, it seems natural to label them "apologetic". But looking at the *testimonia*-lists, however, the label "apologetic does not seem to fit quite so well. Although the patristic *testimonia*-collections have conventionally been understood as apologetic tools for conversations with Jews, in a recent monograph Martin C. Albl calls this conventional wisdom into question. After a thorough survey of the literature, he concludes:

> "This patristic survey has uncovered no indisputable evidence that the *testimonia* were used in actual debates with Jews. Already in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, the form of the dialogue between a Jew and a Christian seems to be a literary fiction; the aim was to instruct Christians or persuade a pagan audience. The overwhelming evidence points towards the development of these *testimonia*-collections in a catechetical life-setting."[75]

So how are our texts best described? As apologetic, or as catechetical?

The picture does not become immediately clearer if we take each work in turn. Taking the text of *On the Triune Nature of God* at face value, we find that it is addressed to Muslims. As mentioned earlier, the expression "You (will) find (it) in the Qur'an" is found several times.[76] The Qur'an is referred to as "your Book".[77] The author can say to his audience, "Christ is a Word of God and his Spirit, as you bear witness. So why do you fault us when we believe in Christ, god from God? [78] The assumed reader, it seems, is a Muslim – but apparently one who has a considerable appreciation for complex typological exegesis of the Old Testament!

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[75] Martin C. Albl, *'And Scripture Cannot Be Broken': The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 96, Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill 1999, 158. For Albl's discussion of the *First Apology and the Dialogue with Trypho* of Justin Martyr, see 101-106.

[76] See note 27 above.

[77] See note 27 above.

[78] *Sinai Arabic 154*, f. 118r; Gibson, *Arabic Version*, 95.

As for the *Three Treatises*, they are, taken at face value, addressed to Christians. The first treatise ends with a prayer that we "live up to the covenant of our baptism" and that we not "eat [Christ's] flesh and drink his blood without worthiness of them".[79] Here the assumed reader, it seems, is a Christian – but apparently one with extremely sensitive ears for Qur'anic allusions!

We cannot, of course, simply take the texts at face value. Sr. Maria Gallo has already pointed this out in the introduction to her Italian translation of *On the Triune Nature of God*, where she wrote: "In my opinion, the analysis of the text leads us to conclude that the author is speaking to Christians and that the Muslim-directed discourse is simply a literary device meant to give greater liveliness and concreteness to his words."[80] She does allow that the text may have served the purpose of equipping its Christian audience for their encounters with Muslims. Perhaps, then, we should think of *On the Triune Nature of God* as primarily a work of catechesis – but catechesis with an apologetic dimension, catechesis for Christians living in the sectarian *milieu*.[81]

The same may probably be said for Theodore Abū Qurrah: he writes for a Christian audience – but always seems to imagine Muslims reading over their shoulders or listening in the background. Nor should we forget another possible target audience: Christians who were wavering in their faith, and who perhaps were indeed gaining competence in Qur'anic discourse. For them, the treatises we are dealing with here may have served as emergency catechesis, as tools for the re-evangelization of the baptized.

The principal point to be made here is this: as we read these texts it is important not to *exaggerate* the extent to which they were intended for and actually read by Muslims, and also not to *underestimate* the extent to which they served homiletic, catechetical and morale-raising purposes within the Christian community. What we encounter here is theology for Christians who are familiar with the imaginative world of the Bible as elaborated in the Christian tradition, a world that is, as we see from the *testimonia*, diverse and yet typologically knit together into what many Christians would consider a beautiful unity. This world,

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[79] Bacha, *Mayāmir*, 90.

[80] Gallo, *Omelia arabo-cristiana*, 18.

[81] The phrase is that of John E. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, London Oriental Series 34, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 1978, and has been used to excellent effect by Sidney H. Griffith.

however, is not untouched by and immune to developments in the world of human history; rather, it is capable of absorbing and incorporating elements of that world, with the result that *testimonia*-lists may be recited in Arabic, and the story of human redemption told with allusions to the Qur'an .

The Apologetic Dimension

This language of "absorption" or "incorporation" may be helpful in thinking about the "apologetic dimension" of the texts we are studying. There are, in fact, a *variety* of apologetic "moves" to be found in the literature discussed in this volume. One kind of apologetic consists in a program of seeking out truth commonly accessible to *reason*, followed by demonstrating the "fit" of specifically religious symbols to that truth. John Watt's chapter in this volume gives us splendid examples from the tenth-century *falāsifah*.[82]

In the works that I have presented here, the closest example to this sort of apologetic comes in Theodore Abū Qurrah's *On the Divine Son.* Here Theodore, using a dialectical tool typical of the *kalām*, works through a set of exclusive disjunctions in order to demonstrate that (a) God possesses the attribute of "headship" (*ri'āsah*), (b) which is *not* merely over creatures, (c) but must be over what is *equal* to God (and not what is beneath God or above God) ... (d) *by nature* (and not by coercion or good pleasure). But the one over whom God has headship but who is equal to God by nature is, in biblical terms, the divine Son.[83]

Theodore's *kalām*-argument in itself is quite impressive, but its premise is questionable. Does God indeed possess the attribute of "headship"? Theodore did not find this attribute, *ri'āsah* in the Qur'an ; perhaps it has migrated here from one of Theodore's more curious apologetic arguments, in which he attempted to make an argument for the Trinity by analogy with Adam, created in the image of God, who exercised the attribute of *ri'āsah* over the first human family.[84] It appears to me that the attribute of "headship" simply *presupposes* plurality: a community of which one is made leader or a "body" over which one is the

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[82] See pp. 99.

[83] Bacha, *Mayāmir*, 91-94.

[84] Ignace Dick, ed. *Theodore Abuqurra: Traité de l'existence du Créateur et de la vraie religion*, Patrimoine arabe chrétien 3, Jounieh: Librairie Saint-Paul 1982, 219-228.

"head". Theodore's *kalām*-argument is therefore merely analytic. Perhaps it is the very weakness of the premise of his argument that Theodore attempts to cover with intimidating bluster: "I do not presume that you will treat God with such contempt that you say he has no 'headship'."[85] But this is precisely the point where the interlocutor must, in fact, challenge the premise, in order to avoid falling into Theodore's trap.

Very different from the kind of apologetic that matches particular Christian symbols to rationally-demonstrated truth – whether "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" to *al-ʿaql wa-l-ʿāqil wa-l-maʿqūl*;[86] or "the Son of God" to "the one equal to God over whom God has headship by nature" – is a discourse in which the Bible and Christian tradition are the primary matter of reflection, but in which outside elements – Qur'anic vocabulary and narrative, for example – are "incorporated" or "absorbed" into the discourse by a capable narrator. The result is an apologetic that is not systematic but rather "ad hoc" in character.

In *On the Triune Nature of God* and the *Three Treatises*, we see numerous examples of such "ad hoc" apologetics:[87] the use of Qur'anic vocabulary in praise of God in the introduction to *On the Triune Nature of God*; the same text's drawing on the Qur'anic anecdotes about the prophets and apostles of God, tying them into its narrative of redemption; Theodore's skillful allusions that allow the Qur'an to whisper its witness about the reality of judgment or about the purposefulness of God; or his suggestion that verses about God's Throne imply the possibility of God's self-localization out of mercy towards creatures. Here, the authors' "catechesis for life in the sectarian *milieu*" offers linguistic and conceptual bridges between the world of the Bible and that of the Qur'an. Just so, they suggest some places where actual conversations between Christians and Muslims might be possible.

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[85] Bacha, *Mayāmir*, 91.

[86] See J. Watt's and S. Griffith's articles in this volume.

[87] See William Werpehowski, "Ad Hoc Apologetics", *The Journal of Religion* 66 (1986), 282-301.

III

Seperations

Abgrenzungen

ʿAlī ibn Rabban Al-Ṭabarī: A convert's assessment of his former faith

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In the first half of the ninth century Muslim analyses of Christianity and theological responses to it attained a level of sophistication that has rarely, if ever, been rivalled since. More or less every theological expert of note who was active when ʿAbbasid power was at its height wrote about or against Christianity, and while the great majority of these works have been lost through time, the few that have survived exhibit qualities that justify the highest estimate of the level of Muslim approaches to the elder faith as regards both the knowledge displayed and the forms of argument.

A major feature of anti-Christian works from this period is the widespread knowledge they show about doctrinal, organisational and sometimes spiritual features of church life. Authors such as the Zaydī theologian al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (d. 860) and the independent Shīʿī thinker Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq (fl. 860) were so fully conversant with the teachings of the three main Christian denominations represented in the Islamic empire that one is prompted to wonder whether they made special studies that became almost ends in themselves, irrespective of the polemical use to which they were put. Indeed, al-Warrāq and the later Baghdad Muʿtazilī theologian Abū al-ʿAbbās ʿAbdallāh al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar (d. 906) possessed extensive knowledge of a host of subsidiary Christian sects as well, so much that one could easily infer that they had some sort of antiquarian interest in collecting beliefs as curios to be enjoyed and maybe shown to friends.

It should also be added that the argumentative approaches shown in the works of these masters stand out for their attempted objectivity and logical appeal. In an atmosphere where the influence of the Qurʾan prevailed, even though Muʿtazilī rationalism was in the ascendant, they fashioned arguments

that Christians would find it hard to ignore because they were founded upon bases that Christians themselves acknowledged. Thus, for example, al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm argues that Jesus was no more than human on the grounds that witnesses recorded in the Gospels themselves, angels, Mary, the disciples, Jesus himself and God, affirm this, while al-Warrāq, in anticipation of al-Ghazālī's refutation of the philosophers according to their own arguments, restricts himself to the doctrinal formulations provided by the Melkites, Nestorians and Jacobites (the names he and other Muslims habitually used), and demonstrates by referring to these alone that Christian doctrines are incoherent. The Qur'an hardly enters into such approaches, at least not explicitly, as Muslim experts intimate unambiguously that they recognise the importance of arguing in terms of their own revelation which their counterparts could challenge or ignore.

Among these scholars of Christianity the figure of ʿAlī Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī stands out for his pervasive knowledge of the faith, and his ingenious methods in refuting it. Of course, since he was a convert from Christianity to Islam it is not surprising that he knew vast amounts about his former faith. But the kind of arguments he uses against it are maybe surprising, because they show a curious indifference towards the beliefs of Christians and the meanings they attached to their scripture and doctrines. And they suggest someone who either turned his back entirely when he converted or had possessed little sympathy for his native beliefs even when he subscribed to them.

ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī had an unusually exciting life.[1] He was born in Ṭabaristān in northern Persia near the Caspian Sea sometime in the late eighth century, maybe in about 780. His family was Christian, and he himself suggests that his uncle was a Christian scholar and teacher.[2] His father bore the title *rabban*, which, though it has been understood as a Jewish title, is more likely the normal Syriac term for a Christian religious scholar. Thus, ʿAlī would presumably have been given a thorough education and grounding in his ancestral faith. Following the pattern of many educated Christians of the time, he entered the service of the ʿAbbasid

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1 The main sources are listed in A. Mingana, trans., *The Book of Religion and Empire*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1922, x-xvi; and see also in D. Thomas, art. "al-Ṭabarī, ʿAlī ibn Rabban", in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. 9, Leiden: Brill 1998, 17-18.

2 A. Mingana, ed., *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1923, 129; Mingana, *Religion and Empire*, 152. Further references will be given in the form *Dīn wa-dawla*, with the page number of the Arabic edition followed by that of the English translation.

governor of Ṭabaristān, Mazyār Ibn Qārin, and remained with him as secretary until he was executed in 840 when his uprising against the power of the caliph failed.

Soon after this, ʿAlī was taken into the service of the caliph, and he moved to the capital Sāmarrāʾ. He appears to have served under al-Muʿtaṣim, al-Wāthiq and al-Mutawakkil, and he was made a table companion by the last of these, all the time being known as a Christian. He had extensive knowledge of medicine, and it was maybe this in addition to his secretarial skills that attracted him to the rulers and gave him security of position. In many ways, he typifies the Christians whom his contemporary Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ criticizes for exploiting their positions with the rulers to flout all the regulations that govern them as *dhimmīs* and regard themselves as equal to their masters.[3]

Then, at some stage, ʿAlī abandoned the faith of his father and family and converted to Islam. The tenth century bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm says that this took place under al-Muʿtaṣim, the caliph who first brought ʿAlī from Ṭabaristān, and thus before 842 when he died. But this appears to be guesswork, because Alī himself links al-Mutawakkil closely in his conversion in such words as suggest that this caliph was instrumental in his change of religion.[4]

ʿAlī himself says that he converted at the age of seventy.[5] This would probably have been in about 850 or afterwards. The reason for this is that while in the *K. al-dīn wa-l-dawla* he lavishly praises al-Mutawakkil for all he has done for him, in the *Firdaws al-ḥikma*, which he says he completed in 850, he refers to the caliph without any of the effusiveness he shows in the later work.[6] This being the case, it is unlikely that ʿAlī lived much beyond 860, when he would have been eighty or even older.

In a life of attachment to leading political figures at the centre of imperial

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3 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, ed. J. Finkel in *Thalāth rasāʾil li-Abī ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ*, Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya 1926,18; trans. J. Finkel, "A Risāla of al-Jāḥiẓ", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 47 (1927), [311-334] 328-329.

4 *Dīn wa-dawla*, 144/169.

5 ʿAli al-Ṭabarī, *Al-radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, ed. I.-A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, "Ar-Radd ʿalā-n-Naṣārā de ʿAlī aṭ-Ṭabarī", *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 36 (1959) [115-148] 119; trans. J.-M. Gaudeul, *Riposte aux Chrétiens par ʿAlī al- Ṭabarī*, Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica 1995, 1. Further references will be given in the form *Radd*, with the page number of the Arabic edition followed by that of the French translation.

6 *Firdaws al-ḥikma*, Berlin: Matbaʿ Afitab 1928, 2.

power, it is maybe surprising that ʿAlī remained a Christian so long. But it is maybe even more surprising that he converted to Islam at such an advanced age, and then wrote works that oppose Christianity with vehemence and impatience. One understands the zeal of the convert fuelling his attitudes, but his rejection of the sentiments of his former faith and the forms used to explain it is not so easy to comprehend.

As an author, ʿAlī was mainly known among Muslims in classical times for his medical works. The titles of ten of these are known, and one survives, the *Firdaws al-ḥikma*, dating as we have said from 850. This exerted wide influence in later times, and Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī, the great historian and exegete, is supposed to have made his own copy from ʿAlī's dictation. Since he was born in 839, he would have been able to do this as a teenager or young adult.

Two other works are associated with ʿAlī, and these are of primary importance for understanding the early history of Christian-Muslim relations and the social and intellectual context within which followers of the two faiths constructed their views of one another. The first of these chronologically is known as the *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, which ʿAlī wrote soon after converting as a virtual statement of his reasons for leaving a faith that contained so many inconsistencies, and the second is the much longer *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla*, which is an elaborate defence of the prophethood of Muḥammad based upon a mixture of logical arguments, stories from early Islamic history, and above all prophecies which ʿAlī detects in the Old and New Testaments.

There is no good reason to dispute the authorship of these two works. But while the *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā* has been accepted since it was rediscovered in 1934, and is in fact quoted by the tenth century convert al-Ḥasan Ibn Ayyūb in his refutation of Christianity,[7] and is refuted by the thirteenth century Coptic theologian al-Ṣafī Ibn al-ʿAssāl[8], the *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* was questioned from the time of its first publication in 1922, and has never since been fully accepted as an authentic work. The reason why doubts were expressed are probably ultimately bound up with the reputation of its first editor, Alphonse Mingana, and his relationships with other scholars of his time. But none of the arguments against the work stand

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[7] Cf. F. Sepmeijer, *Een Weerlegging van het Christendom uit de 10e Eeuw: de brief van al-Ḥasan b. Ayyūb aan zijn broer ʿAlī*, Kampen: W. van den Berg 1985, 4-9.

[8] S.K. Samir, "La réponse d'al-Ṣafī Ibn al-ʿAssāl à la réfutation des Chrétiens de ʿAlī al- Ṭabarī", *Parole de l'Orient* 11 (1983), 281-328.

up to detached scrutiny, and it should be stated categorically that the work is undoubtedly ancient, both because the unique manuscript in which it is preserved is undeniably old and because there is an overwhelmingly strong likelihood that it was known and employed by the al-Ḥasan Ibn Ayyūb who quoted from the *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā* and also in the tenth century by Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad al-ʿĀmirī (d. 992)[9]. That it is ʿAlī's composition should also not be doubted, not least because he twice refers in it to his *Radd*, calling this work once *Reply to the Denominations of the Christians*, and once *Reply to the Christians*,[10] and referring in his first mention to an argument about the terms 'God' and 'Lord' as titles for human beings that is to be found in the *Radd*.[11] The attribution of the *Kitāb al-dīn wa-l-dawla* to ʿAlī cannot seriously be doubted in the light of the evidence to support it, but that having been said, the work is undeniably singular in character and does not immediately yield the force of its arguments. These are copious, and for the most part quite original, though maybe too original because little use was made of them by Muslim authors in the centuries immediately following, possibly because they did not grasp their meaning.

Coming to the actual contents of the two works, it is quite clear from both that ʿAlī sees his step from Christianity to Islam as a passage from what is misguided and wrong to what is right. At the beginning of the *Radd* he says that God has called him out of the ignorant unbelief that results from the failure to use reason,[12] and a little later that his intention in the work is not to attack Christ or his true disciples but the Christian groups who are opposed to Christ and the Gospels and alter their contents.[13] He makes it clear that his former faith is contrary to both reason and the original teachings of Christ. In the *Dīn wa-dawla* he is even more forthright, asserting that Islam alone is the brilliant light and the guiding faith,[14] and on a personal note testifying that his conversion is a recovery from the drunkenness of deviation, an awakening from the sleep of confusion, and

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[9] D. Thomas, "Ṭabarī's *Book of Religion and Empire*", Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of Manchester 69 (1986), 1-7; Sepmeijer, *Een Weerlegging van het Christendom*, 8-9.

[10] *Dīn wa-dawla*, 86/100 and 93/107.

[11] *Radd*, 147-8/59-62.

[12] *Radd*, 119/1.

[13] *Ibid.*, 120/2.

[14] *Dīn wa-dawla*, 144/169.

an escape from the enticement of custom.[15] In all this he portrays Christianity as unthinking laziness and Islam as reason embodied. But his change of faith involves even more than this. It seems to be an espousal of the whole framework of Islamic ideology that enables him to analyse Christianity from outside with the detachment of someone coming to it for the first time and none of the insights that former conviction might bring. He has undergone a complete sea-change that makes his two refutations virtually the works of a different person from the one who had called himself a Christian and presumably stood by his words for so many years.

Turning first to the *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, this is a series of demonstrations that Christianity is both rationally untenable and internally inconsistent. In intention it is not unlike the refutations of ʿAlī's contemporaries al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm and Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq. But in execution it differs entirely, thanks to its author's intimate knowledge of the scripture and teachings of his former faith. It has not survived in its original entirety in the unique manuscript that contains it, and the task of reconstructing its conclusion from quotations and references in the later authors who employ it remains to be done.

ʿAlī's intention in this work is to show that Christians have misinterpreted their own scriptures and so contradicted the original teachings of Christ, the result being rational chaos. He begins with seven questions which he considers are unanswerable and will render his opponents unable to defend their faith. Convinced that they will have this effect, he calls the questions 'the Silencers', *al-muskitāt*. In each he presents a proposition and then traces the consequences entailed if the Christians accept it, which means they abandon their own teachings, or reject it, which leads them into impossible claims about the being of God. An examination of the fifth Silencer exemplifies his approach and the presuppositions from which he begins.

His question concerns Christ: 'Is he the eternal Creator as in the stipulation of their faith, *sharīʿat īmānihim*; or was he a chosen human as in the stipulation of our faith; or was he divine and human as groups of them say?'[16] Here he establishes a dilemma between the Creed of the church, Muslim teaching, and Christian denominational doctrines. And he appears to present relatively

[15] *Ibid.*, 51/57.

[16] *Radd*, 124/10.

straightforward alternatives between Christ as completely divine, completely human, and both human and divine. However, it is not this simple because, as ʿAlī must have known, the great creeds of the fifth and sixth centuries were attempts to formulate the relationship between the divine and human in Christ. It is curious that he chooses to overlook this, and maybe an indication of how completely he had departed from Christianity that he only recalls the articles that refer to the divinity of Christ.

ʿAlī goes on to give two possible answers that the Christians might make. If they say that Jesus was a created human they agree with Muslims, after which no further debate is needed. And if they say Jesus was God and eternal Creator they contradict and deny the teachings of the Gospels and other scriptures, which sets them at odds with their foundations. To prove this point, ʿAlī quotes from the Gospel of Matthew:

> "For Matthew says in Chapter 8 in his Gospel, citing Isaiah on the prophethood of Christ (peace be upon him), for he says from God, great and mighty, 'This is my servant whom I have chosen, and my beloved with whom I myself am satisfied. Behold, I place my spirit upon him, and he will call the nations to the truth.' This is clear, and it is no evidence because Isaiah is a prophet."[17]

And he drives his point home with the assertion that a servant cannot be God, nor God a servant, and then a series of quotations from the Gospels that show Jesus spoke to God as a being distinct from himself, was corporeal and saw himself as a servant.

He concludes this question with the observation that everyone who affirms that Christ was subordinate to God and that he bore human traits agrees with the teachings of Christ himself and his disciples, and everyone who does not disagrees with them. However, if they agree with the Creed, they have to say that Christ was part eternal and part created. But since Christ ate and drank, this would mean that these created elements became part of the Creator and that the Creator was constituted of these elements. Hence these created elements would in part be their own Creator. Lastly and most seriously, if the human part of Christ

[17] *Ibid.*

created the world but did not come into being until it itself was created, then the Creator of the world would not have come into existence until the world was created, and hence the Creator was non-existent and the world came into being without a Creator.[18]

This form of detailed argument, which gradually draws out from the initial proposition increasingly extreme consequences, is reminiscent of Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq and even more of the philosopher Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī, whom ʿAlī must at least have met when the latter worked as tutor to the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim's son. And it shows how thoroughly imbued in this tightly logical method ʿAlī was. Whether he had adopted it since converting, or whether his familiarity with it led him to see the unviability of Christian doctrine is a matter for speculation. But what is quite clear is that as he applies it with forensic detachment he shows no sympathy for the teachings of his former co-religionists, and more strikingly appears to show no patience for the painstaking attempts of the Christian denominations to safeguard against the exact consequences he exposes in the Christological models they proposed and mutually contested. He stands removed from all that and bases himself on the two principles of the teachings of the Gospels and straightforward rational basics.

If one begins to wonder how ʿAlī could so fully distance himself from the Nestorian and other sectarian formulations of the divine and human natures of Christ that he must have known more or less all his life as to see them as nothing more than confusions of mutually exclusive categories, one also begins to see that he has not lost respect for Christian scripture, which he quotes as authority in the name of God. This is a significant feature of the arguments in the *Radd*, and even more so in the *Dīn wa-dawla*. And it distinguishes ʿAlī from most other Muslim anti-Christian polemicists.

These first seven 'Silencer' questions in the *Radd* all attempt to expose the contradiction inherent in the claim that Jesus was more than a created human. Following on from them, ʿAlī lists twelve principle points that he asserts all religious communities will accept,[19] and shows that both the Old Testament and the Gospels confirm them, and even Christian prayers agree with them.[20] Each

[18] *Ibid.*, 124-6/10-13.

[19] *Ibid.*, 128-9/18-19.

[20] *Ibid.*, 129-30/20-2.

of them affirms that God is the exact opposite to all that is created and material, and ʿAlī is able to use them to show from references in the Gospels to Christ's humanity that he cannot have been divine.[21] At one point he reveals his medical background when he recalls that the human physicality of Christ was evidenced in his being circumcised, and having nails driven into his hands and his side pierced,[22] raising the possibility that it was just such considerations, playing on his mind in an environment where the distinction between the human and divine was categorically maintained by Muʿtazilī thinkers and all who were influenced by them, that drove him away from Christianity to what he found the more logically satisfying faith of his old age.

ʿAlī's disagreement with Christianity reaches its most extreme point when he briefly discusses the belief in redemption. Christ, he says, is supposed to have descended from heaven to liberate humankind from the fetters of sin, *iṣr al-khaṭīʿa*; he was taken prisoner and called upon God to help him against Satan, although Satan was able to seize him and kill him.[23] He expresses his disgust with this idea in uncompromising terms:

> "This is the most amazing thing; the eternal Creator was forced to send down his eternal Son from heaven, and then he sent him to Satan through the agency of the eternal, triumphant Spirit, for Satan to test him and humiliate him. Who was it who compelled him to this, and what was the gain for him or the gain for his creation in it?"[24]

This corresponds to similar accounts of the atonement myth in al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm and other Muslim authors. What is noteworthy here is its use by a former Christian, who one assumes must at one stage have had an appreciation of its spiritual significance. ʿAlī's severely externalised treatment of this central moment of Christian belief causes one to question how deeply he ever knew his ancestral faith, or how readily he could leave it behind and recast it in mock-heroic terms that subjugate God to the forces of the world and appear to subordinate all the actors in this cosmic drama to the dictates of necessity. More than anything, ʿAlī's

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[21] *Ibid.*, 130-6/22-32.

[22] *Ibid.*, 130/22.

[23] *Ibid.*, 133/27.

[24] *Ibid.*

analysis of every element of Christianity according to the criterion of *tawḥīd*, in full accordance with Muslim orthodoxy, emerges as the single most significant element of his refutation. He shows all the signs of the zealous convert.

Next in the *Radd* ʿAlī criticises the Nicene Creed, listing seven contradictions contained within it.[25] The character of these predictably concerns the relationship between the one God that is affirmed in the opening article and Jesus Christ as another divinity, Creator and so on. ʿAlī takes the words at face value, and so finds it easy to identify difficulties, as in the sixth contradiction where he contrasts the article that says Jesus was begotten, *wulida*, from his Father before the worlds and not made, with the inevitable consequence that the Father must have begotten a being that was already existent or was not existent. But, he continues, if the Son existed eternally, the Father did not beget anything, and here the Creed is in error, and if the Father begot something that came into being the Son must be contingent.[26] This type of argument is pure polemic, and again one wonders at ʿAlī's apparent indifference to the careful attempts of Christians to explain the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, and his readiness to take the Creed on its verbal surface without any reference to the beliefs it represents and all the meanings attached to it by Christians. He gives every appearance of coming to it afresh, like any of his Muslim colleagues who would probably be unaware of the vexed debates about the internal relations within the Godhead that this formula sums up.

ʿAlī adds to this criticism of Christian dogma further criticisms of the false relationship between theology and scripture, and the doctrines of the various denominations, particularly the Jacobites.[27] And then he proceeds to show that four instances in the Gospels that might suggest that Jesus was divine and so support the Creed do not in fact do so,[28] and that the text of the Gospels contains a number of perplexing difficulties that suggest they do not attest to the divinity of Jesus in the way Christians assume.[29] Throughout these detailed arguments he is concerned to show that Christian doctrines cannot be founded on scripture but

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[25] *Ibid.*, 136-8/33-8.

[26] *Ibid.*, 137/27.

[27] *Ibid.*, 138-9/38-41.

[28] *Ibid.*, 139-41/42-7.

[29] *Ibid.*, 141-3/47-51.

generally contradict the main thrust of what the Gospels and other authoritative texts contain.

He continues the *Radd* with a long refutation of the reasons suggested by Christians for divinising Jesus, including the first surviving instance of a motif that Muslim polemicists favoured for centuries, namely the comparison between the miracles of Jesus and other prophets.[30] He argues that Jesus' miracles cannot be taken to justify his divinity because they do not differ in manner from the miracles of prophets for whom Christians make no claims of divinity.[31] And the surviving part concludes with an analysis of the terms 'father' and 'son' to show that Christians misuse them when referring to God.[32] The point he repeatedly makes is that there is no scriptural or rational justification for making Jesus divine, and confusion and contradiction in every doctrinal articulation of his divinity.

For all its brevity and the cursoriness of its arguments, the *Radd* is an impressive attack on what ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī sees as the deviation of Christianity from its historic roots. And it certainly contains original arguments that show the ingenuity of someone who knew Christian teachings intimately (or maybe knew about them) and could turn it against itself. But, as we have remarked a number of times, it surprises by the external character of its author's approach. A born Muslim might be expected to take what Christians say at face value, as for example Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq does with the various formulations of major denominations. But this former Christian appears to show no awareness at all of the beliefs that underlie the doctrinal formulas he scrutinises, and rather treats them as uncontextualised propositions that stand or fall by their own logical coherence. He appears to have surrendered all sympathy and insight when he abandoned Christianity, and instead stands by the characteristic Islamic, and maybe Muʿtazilī, criterion of *tawḥīd*, which denies any similarity between God and the created order and therefore posits a necessary contradiction between what qualifies the one and the other. This enables him to say that because Jesus showed human traits he could not have been divine, totally ignoring the attempts in the Christologies to overcome this.

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[30] Cf. D. Thomas, "The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemic", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 39 (1994) 221-43.

[31] *Radd*, 143-7/51-8.

[32] *Ibid.*, 147-8/59-62.

Thus, ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's dialogue with his former self, as one might call it, is one between two people who think along entirely different lines and fail to see the purpose of each other's statements of belief. But one major feature of his argumentation in the *Radd* does seem to exhibit continuity between his old and new selves. This is his approach to Christian scripture. While ʿAlī's contemporary Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ could reject the Gospels as fabrications of Christian groups that had lost the original revealed words of Jesus, and later Muslims could follow suit in insisting that the text of Christian scripture is corrupt, ʿAlī himself never levels such an accusation, but rather uses the text as evidence in support of his own arguments.

ʿAlī's use of the Bible is evident throughout the *Radd*, and he uses it as simple proof of what God has said and done, as support for rational arguments about the humanity of Jesus, and as proof against the inconsistencies of the Creed and Christian doctrines. Of course, many Muslim polemicists make use of verses from Christian scripture against Christians without themselves necessarily subscribing to its divine inspiration. But ʿAlī leaves little doubt that he has no reservations about the authenticity of the Bible. When, for example, he comments on Jesus' self-abasing prayer in John 17:3, that this is pure monotheism, *tawḥīd*, and a clear indication that Jesus had been sent as a human messenger, he adds 'this is the faith of Christ and all the prophets',[33] in an assertion that these words of the Gospel are reliable and true.

The *Radd* is replete with indications that ʿAlī accepted the text of the Bible as authentic. For him, the problem of the corruption of scripture by Christians was not of the actual text itself, but of its interpretation. At one point he complains about this with some feeling:

> "I made a thorough examination of the Gospel and the writings of Paul (read *Bawlus* for *Yawnis*) and others, and turned the whole thing inside out, and I found on this almost twenty thousand verses, each of them making known and expressing the humanity of Christ and that he was subordinate and sent, and that God raised him from the dead and distinguished him by wonderful acts. There only remained about ten ambiguous statements. But the people of every Christian group interpret these according to their fancy. I discovered that the 318 priests who had gathered together from every

[33] *Ibid.*, 122/6.

> distant direction to conclude the Creed discarded the abundant [?] verses[34] and preferred the few ambiguous ones."[35]

And he goes on to describe how they employed dubious exegetical methods probably taken from Greek philosophers and others, concluding:

> "If they had aimed for the truth they would have found it bright and clear, and they would have referred the strange, ambiguous ones to the clear ones, because the many are the principle ones and the few strange ones are the subsidiary ones."[36]

In this complaint he appears confident that the true teaching about Christ is to be found in the text of Christian scripture, and it is a matter of interpreting it according to its majority meaning.

ʿAlī is among the minority of Muslim polemicists in trusting the text of the Bible against its interpretation. His acceptance of it may be linked to some words at the very beginning of the *Radd*, where he makes the point that his concern in this work is not to attack Christ or his true people, *ahl ḥaqqih*, but those among the Christian groups who oppose Christ and the Gospels, *al-Anājīl*, and alter statements, *ḥarrafa al-kalimāt*.[37] He carefully draws a distinction between Christ and those who remain true to him on the one hand and what appear to be the sectarian groups who came later on the other. It is the teachings of the latter that have introduced distortions, and the original revelation is intact and there may even be those who adhere to it. It is noteworthy that he refers to Gospels in the plural here, rather than the single *Injīl* that the Qurʾan says was revealed to Jesus, a strong indication that at some level he continues to accept the scripture he has known all his life.

It is possible to derive from these comments some idea of the conceptual framework within which ʿAlī understood his journey to Islam. He realised that contemporary Christian doctrines were at variance with both reason and Christian

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[34] The text here reads: *al-ayāt al-jamma al-manqāsa*, which Gaudeul translates as 'ces versets-là si nombreux et si clairs'.

[35] *Ibid.*, 138/39-40.

[36] *Ibid.*, 139/40.

[37] *Ibid.*, 120/2.

scripture, in which were to be found the teachings of Christ, and he saw that Islam was a continuation of these teachings. Thus, as a true follower of Christ he became a Muslim, remaining loyal to the full meaning of the Gospels and moving into a position in which he could continue to uphold them against the sectarians who distorted them. This is why he can talk of his conversion in terms of moving from the misuse of reason, and of recovering from the drunkenness of deviation, awaking from the sleep of confusion, and escaping from the enticements of unquestioning acceptance. It is not that he is abandoning true Christianity, but that he is separating himself from lazy thinking and associating himself with those who have taken the truths given by Christ to new heights. This is the apparent commitment behind the *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, and it also informs the much longer *K. al-dīn wa-l-dawla.*

This book, which must post-date the *Radd* since it refers to it twice, and so must be a writing of ʿAlī's extreme old age when he was over seventy and maybe towards seventy-five, is a defence of the prophethood of Muḥammad, and thus an early example of the genre of *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* works. Like the *Radd*, it has survived in a single manuscript, and its discernible influence on later authors was small, though, given the form of much of its contents, this is maybe not surprising. It could well be that later Muslims did not always know what ʿAlī was trying to do.

The *Dīn wa-dawla* considerably differs in tone from the *Radd.* Whereas that work attempts to show the lack of logic in Christian doctrine, and is aimed explicitly at Christians, this employs accounts from early Islamic history and from Muslim and Christian scripture, and is aimed at a less specific audience, probably both Muslim and Christian. ʿAlī refers with affection and respect to the caliph al-Mutawakkil in a number of places, and suggests in his comments at both the beginning and the end that he has written in compliance with the caliph's wish[38], though whether it was the semi-official defence of Islam that Alphonse Mingana entitles it in his translation is not clear.

As in the *Radd*, ʿAlī's faithfulness to Islam and his full acceptance of its teachings and ways of explaining the world are vividly evident here. He makes it clear at the very outset, when in traditional manner he portrays Muḥammad as a messenger from God 'who did not set aside any truth that the prophets had

[38] *Dīn wa-dawla*, 7-8/4, 20-1, 19 and 143/168.

brought forth before him, but confirmed and corroborated it, and ordered belief in them and praises in favour of the first and last of them'.[39] But this hardly prepares the reader for what is to come, as ʿAlī accumulates arguments from both Islamic history and Christian textual tradition to prove this point about Muḥammad as an authentic messenger from God.

The contents of the book can be easily divided in two, the first part dealing with the early history of Islam, and the second with predictions from the Bible. In the first part ʿAlī seeks to show from verifiable stories about the life of the Prophet that his miraculous ability to know and act must designate him as a prophet, and also from stories about his first followers that their piety must point to his unique status and message.

After an introductory methodological disquisition on the verification of stories handed down from the past, ʿAlī shows that the teachings of Muḥammad contained in the Qurʾan accord with those of the Old Testament prophets, and then goes on to describe his miracles, knowledge of unseen and future events, and his victories as marks of authentic prophethood. His almost credulous loyalty to Islamic beliefs is shown at its clearest here, where, for example, he recounts a story of Muḥammad knowing from a bird's twittering that its young had been taken from their nest[40] and other trivial events, though maybe his comment following the story of a wolf that spoke to shepherds about Muḥammad that the descendants of the shepherd are still called in his own time *Banū mukallam al-dhāʾib*, 'the family of the man to whom the wolf spoke',[41] betrays slight unease with these tales that for the most part have to be accepted as Islamic lore without verification apart from the stature of their transmitters.

ʿAlī accepts these stories without demur, and he accepts them from within a Muslim context of interpretation, as when he recounts the traditional miracles by which the Prophet's Night Journey from Makka to Jerusalem (as referred to in Qurʾan 17:1) was corroborated, or the brutal story of Gabriel causing physical suffering and death to five polytheists who made fun of Muḥammad.[42] One misses here the rational acumen that ʿAlī might require in the *Radd* of Christians

[39] *Ibid.*, 5-6/2.

[40] *Ibid.*, 31/33.

[41] *Ibid.*, 32/34.

[42] *Ibid.*, 29-30/30-2.

claiming such corroborating accounts, or the concern even for enemies that he would have known from the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels.

If his unflinching loyalty to Islamic tradition is made evident in the stories about the Prophet which he amasses in the first chapters of the *Dīn wa-dawla*, it is underlined emphatically in the later chapters where he marries it to the continuing loyalty to the text of the Bible that informs his argument throughout the *Radd*. But here he subordinates citations to his apologetic purpose in an individualistic and even eccentric way that must have caused both Christians and Muslims to wonder, and may have made his book of little use in ongoing debates.

ʿAlī sets himself systematically to list references from the Old Testament prophets and the sayings of Jesus that he sees pointing to the coming of Muḥammad and Islam. And in doing so he gives them meanings that he must know depart dramatically from those accepted by his family and other Christians, and shows even more clearly than in the *Radd* that the true meaning of the Bible only becomes apparent when it is read from the perspective of true monotheism and the expectation that it conforms to the Qurʾan in referring to Muḥammad. A few examples will show how he proceeds.

From the outset ʿAlī focuses on the persons of Hagar and Ishmael, showing that they are singled out in Genesis to bear God's promise. In doing this he follows biblical possibilities, though it quickly emerges that he combines the teachings given about these figures in the Bible with teachings from the Islamic tradition. Thus, with respect to the statement given in Deuteronomy 33:2-3, 'The Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir, and appeared from Mount Paran', he justifiably links this with Ishmael on the basis that according to Genesis 21:20 Ishmael learned archery in the desert of Paran. But then he continues, 'All people know that Ishmael dwelt in Makka', and he goes on to explain that 'lord', as in the original quotation, can mean a man, and he concludes that Genesis 33:2-3 predicts Muḥammad, the descendant of Ishmael, appearing to the world.[43] The link between Ishmael and Makka is distinctly Islamic, of course, though ʿAlī does not consider he has to explain or justify it.

The Islamic hermeneutic becomes distinctly pronounced when ʿAlī reaches the prophetic books. Here his exegeses are unprecedented, and they must have been virtually impossible for more than a handful of readers to follow in detail.

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[43] *Ibid.*, 74-5/86-7.

The reason is that he contrives to identify every occurrence of derivatives of the triliteral root *ḥmd* as a prediction of Muḥammad, sometimes with consequences that are too far-fetched to be plausible. His first identification in Psalm 48 is just about comprehensible:

> "Great is our Lord and he is greatly *Maḥmūd*; and in the city of our God and in his mountain there is holy one and a *Muḥammad*; and the joy has come to the whole earth."[44]

This just about makes sense, though ʿAlī maybe wisely refrains from attempting any explanations of places or people. But even his second identification strains credulity; from Psalm 50:

> "God has chosen from Zion a *Maḥmūd* crown. God then shall come and shall not be idle."

He goes on to explain that '"a *Maḥmūd* crown" means that he is a *Muḥammad* and a *maḥmūd* head and leader. The meaning of "*Muḥammad*", "*Maḥmūd*" and "*Ḥāmid*" is linguistically identical. The example of "crown" is given to mean lordship and leadership.'[45] Even with this, it is difficult to find any acceptable meaning in the verse as ʿAlī construes it. It is clear that his exegesis is dictated by the appearance of word forms he hopes to see, and comprehensibility comes after this.

Such exegetical convolutions make it clear that ʿAlī is more concerned to find a meaning in these verses that will give them an Islamic flavour than to preserve their syntactic structure. He accepts the integrity of the text, but subordinates its contents entirely to the Islamic requirement of finding in it foretellings of Muḥammad and his community.

All through these chapters ʿAlī returns repeatedly to predictions of Hagar and Ishmael. And so, in addition to syntactical violations in the interest of finding occurrences of the name Muḥammad and its cognates, he offers interpretations that differ radically from the tradition he must have known most of his life. A single example will illustrate this, from Isaiah in whose prophecies ʿAlī finds more connections with Islam than anywhere else. He quotes at length Isaiah 49:16-21,

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[44] *Ibid.*, 75-6/88.

[45] *Ibid.*, 76/89.

which talks of restoration in terms of a woman receiving back her children:

> "Lift up your eyes and behold: [your children] shall come to you, and to the last of them they shall gather together to you. As I live, says God swearing by his name, you shall surely put them on as a garment, and you shall be adorned with crowns as a bride. And your deserts, your waste places, and the land to which they banished you and in which they pressed you shall be too narrow for you by reason of the great number of their inhabitants and of those who wish to dwell there."[46]

ʿAlī applies this easily to Makka, 'which is adorned every year with the finest silk brocades and diadems, and to which the finest pearls and votive objects are brought from the house of the caliphate and from all the countries of the empire'.[47]

As in the *Radd*, it is clear from such exegeses that while ʿAlī accepts Christian and Jewish scripture, he insists that its proper meaning can only be brought out by reading it within the Islamic tradition of understanding and with an eye to meanings that accord with Islamic beliefs. Again, his criticism would presumably be that just as Christians employ the wrong hermeneutical technique when they use the few New Testament verses that speak ambiguously about Jesus' divinity to explain the huge number that do not instead of the opposite, so they fail to see the plain meaning of prophecy because they are blunted to the truth.

We see, then, in this figure of the Muslim ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī signs of continuity with his former Christian self, but also clear signs of disjunction. He continues to accept the roots of Christianity in the teachings of Jesus and the Gospels as authentic, and appears to have few qualms about the text of Christian scripture itself. As his constant introductory clauses to quotations in the *Dīn wa-dawla* indicate, he considered the prophets and prophetic figures of old to have articulated God's own words – *qāla ʿan Allāh taʿālā*. But he disagrees entirely with the way that Christians have used this text, distorting it in their doctrinal formulations about the nature of Christ and failing to appreciate its full meaning in missing predictions of Islam in the Old Testament prophets.

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[46] *Ibid.*, 98/113.

[47] *Ibid.*, 99/114.

So, in his own way ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī gives an assessment of Christianity that stands alongside those of al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq and other major polemicists of the time. For just as they see the logical flaws in the Christian construction of doctrine and a departure from the perennial truth of faith, so he sees a similar blindness and failure that have caused Christians to depart from truth and hence missed its fulfilment in Islam. One is left with a nagging question about his own self-understanding, as to whether he saw himself abandoning one faith when he accepted the other, or preserving the truth of the one faith as he entered the other. Had he become a Muslim and left his past behind, or did he remain a Christian and took his past into a fuller and final future? One rather suspects the latter.

Išoʿyahb bar Malkon's treatise on the veneration of the holy icons

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1. General Introduction

The theme of the present paper is a discussion of the East Syrian ('Nestorian') Bishop Išoʿyahb bar Malkon's attitude towards the veneration of icons (*ṣuwar*) and the holy cross, as found in an Arabic treatise addressed to Jews and Muslims.[1] The text was published by Paul Sbath.[2] His 'edition' is based on a sole manuscript from his personal collection, which, without argumentation, he dates to the 14th century.[3]

Išoʿyahb is a rather unknown figure whose works have not yet been studied in depth. I would like to begin with a few general introductory remarks, focusing on his attitude to his Muslim environment in general.

He was born in Dunaysir, the Ottoman city of Koç Hisar and today renamed Kızıltepe, situated not far from Mardin, twenty kilometres south-east on the road to Nisibis. By the end of the 12th century, the period in which Išoʿyahb was born, it was the place of residence of the Ayyubid governor of the Diarbakr and Jezira

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1 *Images* is probably a better translation than icons (the term suggested by B. Landron, see infra note 8), which suggest specific forms of Christian art. In the case of the East Syrians, very little is known about what these icons must have looked like. No traditional icons have been preserved, we only have brief descriptions. The Arabic term *iqūnāt*, used by contemporary East Syrian writers such as the priest Yuḥannā bar Ṣalibā al-Mawṣilī (beginning of the 14th cent.), is not a direct borrowing from the Greek or Byzantine world, but a translation of the traditional Syriac term *iuqnē*, already used in early texts. It has the same vague general meaning as *ṣuwar*.

2 Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IXe au XIVe siècle*, Le Caire, 1929, 158-165.

3 MS. 1578, see P. Sbath, *Al Fihris* (Catalogue de manuscrits arabes), I, Le Caire, 1938, 32-33.

region, Malik al-Ašraf, and a relatively important local Muslim intellectual centre with several mosques and some *medreses*.[4] According to a note in manuscript Mardin 69, a grammatical compendium by various authors, he became Bishop of Mardin under the name of Joseph, and later Metropolitan of Nisibis, when he changed his name into Išoʿyahb.[5] In this quality he participated in the election of Catholicos Sabrišoʿ IV in 1222. We find this information in the historical part of the theological encyclopaedia, *Asfār al-Asrār*, composed by the priest Saliba b. Yuḥannā al-Mawṣilī in the 13th century, which is one of the main sources for a better understanding of the life and thoughts of Išoʿyahb.[6] According to the colophon of MS. *Charfeh* arabe 2/1 he must have died before the year 1232 or 1234.[7]

Išoʿyahb was a relatively prolific author, who, as can be expected from an East-Syrian bishop and scholar of this period, wrote both in Syriac and Arabic[8]. His interest in bridging the gap between the Syriac and Arabic cultural worlds appears from the fact that he composed a bilingual (Syriac-Arabic) grammar of the Syriac language (preserved in three copies, manuscripts Seert 99, 100 and 101), which, according to A. Scher, follows the grammatical system of the Arabic grammarians.[9] Moreover, he is the author of a dictionary of Syriac ambiguous

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4 Cf. D. Sourdel, art. Dunaysir in *EI*², II, s.v.; cf. P. Bedjan, ed. *Gregory Barhebraeus, Chronicon civile*, Paris, 1890, 439; transl. E. Budge, *The Chronography of Gregory Abû'l-Faraj Barhebraeus* I, London, 1932, 377.

5 Cf. A. Scher, *Notices sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque de l'évêché chaldéen de Mardin*, Paris, 1908, 25. For a general introduction, see J.-M. Fiey, *Nisibe, métropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origines à nos jours*, CSCO 388, Louvain, 1977, 105-107

6 For the historical part of the *Asfār al-asrār*, see H. Gismondi, *Maris Amri et Slibae De patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria*. Pars altera. *Amri et Slibae textus*, Rome, 1996; *Amri et Slibae versio*, Rome, 1899; the passage on Išoʿyahb, 116 (67 in transl.).

7 For a more elaborate biography, a discussion of the date of his death and Išoʿyahb's writings, see H. Teule, "A theological Treatise of the East Syrian Bishop Išoʿyahb bar Malkon (13th cent.), preserved in the theological compilation Asfār al-Asrār", *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 58 (2006), 3-4, Louvain, (in press).

8 A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Bonn, 1922, 309-10; G. Graf, "Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur" [= GCAL], II, *Studi e Testi* 133, Vatican, 1947, 208-210; B. Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak: Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'islam*, Paris, 1994, 135-36; J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, III,1, Rome, 1725, reprint: Gorgias Press, 1992, 295-303 (with important extracts).

9 A. Scher, *Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et arabes conserves dans la bibliothèque épiscopale de Séert (Kurdistan)*, Mossoul, 1905, 72-3. According to Scher, MS. 99 can be dated to the 13th century, which is the period of the author.

words, for which he gives an Arabic explanation.[10] His familiarity with Arabic and Muslim culture appears from his use of *saj'*, rhymed prose, in some of his Arabic liturgical compositions, i.e. in two homilies[11] and in the introductions to his Arabic translation of the Gospels, which he arranged according to the lectionary system of the Upper Monastery, which was normative in the East Syrian Church.[12]

Išo'yahb was also well trained in Muslim philosophy: in his *risālat al-Bayān* (Treatise of Demonstration), a refutation of the Christological position of the Coptic theologian Severios b. al-Muqaffa' (10th cent.), he defends the traditional East Syrian wording of the Christological dogma and his Church's rejection of the title 'Mother of God' for Mary with the help of reflections on the correct use of language, developed by Ibn Sina in the logical introduction to his *kitāb al-tanbīhāt wa-l-išārāt* and in some passages of the *Šifā'*.[13] According to our author, 'metaphorical' or ambiguous language is less appropriate for expressing theological concepts than a clear, unequivocal terminology which 'says what it means' (اللفظ عبارة عن المعاني).[14]

Let us now turn to those of his writings directly addressed to Muslims. These consist of two short treatises on the truth of the Gospel, which he tries to prove with nine *barāhin* and nine *adilla*, nine proofs and demonstrations, respectively. They are preserved in only one manuscript from the collection of Paul Sbath, who

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[10] As an appendix to his grammar (see A. Scher, *Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et arabes*, 73) and, separately, probably in MS. Vat. Syr. 150, 13 (*šu''ālē* – i.e. grammatical questions – d-Mar Išo'yahb, only 5 folios), see St. and J.S. Assemani, *Bibliothecae apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus* III, Rome, 1769, 281.

[11] CGAL II, 209: on Maundy Thursday and on Mar Awgin.

[12] See Khalil Samir, "Les prologues de l'évangéliaire rimé de 'Abdishu' de Nisibe", *Proche-Orient Chrétien* XXXI (1981), 42-70, esp. 45-48.

[13] See H. Teule, *A theological Treatise* (note 7 supra).

[14] Though this discussion on 'Mary, Mother of God' takes place in an internal Christian context – between East-Syrians and Copts – and is a traditional theme in internal Christian East Syrian apologetics, the subject of the use of metaphorical or direct language occupies an important place in the discussions between East- Syrians (or Christians in general) and Muslims, cf. the position of Išo'yahb's predecessor Iliyya of Nisibis (d.1046), who, in his *majālis* with the Muslim vizier al-Maġribī, defends the position that in the Scriptures and in theological language the interpretation according to the first or apparent meaning amounts to kufr, cf. S. Kh. Samir, "Entretien d'Elie de Nisibe avec le vizir Ibn 'Alī al-Maġribī, sur l'unité et la trinité", *Islamochristiana* 5 (1979), Rome, 31-117, esp. 104-105 [reprint in S. Kh. Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak au XIe siècle*, Collected Studies Series, Aldershot, 1996]. There should be room for metaphorical expressions. Concerning the term Mother of God, however, such an approach is not acceptable to the East-Syrians; see the 2nd *majlis* (cf. transl. E.K. Delly, *La théologie d'Elie bar-Šênaya. Etude et traduction de ses entretiens*, Rome, 1957, 88).

edited the text.[15] In both treatises, Išoʿyahb does not explicitly mention Islam, only Judaism, the *Majūs* and Sabeism, but the theme – the truth of the Gospel –, and especially the elaboration of the proofs suggests that he had the Islam in mind, especially in his emphasis on the indiscriminate love which characterizes Christianity and the universality of the Christian message. Some arguments remind the readers of the so-called 'compelling reasons for accepting Christianity' as formulated by Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq in his letter to Ibn al-Munajjim about four centuries earlier,[16] but, of course, several other authors, such as ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, have developed a comparable argumentation.[17]

His third treatise addressed to the Muslims is his *risāla,* which has the title "Refutation of Jews and Muslims who accuse the Christians of adoring idols, on account of their worship of the cross and their veneration of the images of Christ, Our Lady and the Saints .[18]

2. The treatise on the Veneration of the Cross and of Images of Christ, Mary and the Saints

2.1. Introduction.

Before analyzing the text, a few preliminary remarks can be helpful.

Firstly, it is interesting to see that Išoʿyahb addresses here the members of two different religions, the Jews and the Muslims. There are not very many Christian texts addressing members of both communities and when it is the case, the Jews are often no more than a pretext for refuting the Muslims indirectly. A famous example is the letter of the Chalcedonian Bishop of Sidon (end of the 11th cent.), Paul of Antioch, who is the author of a letter addressed to the Nations and the Jews,

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[15] P. Sbath, *Vingt traités*, 152 (*Barāhin ʿalā ṣiḥḥat al-Injīl*) and 155 (*Adilla ʿalā ṣiḥḥat al-Injīl*).

[16] See P. Nwyia / Kh. Samir, "Une correspondance islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munağğim, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq et Qusṭā ibn Lūqā", *Patrologia Orientalis* XL, 4 (1981), Turnhout, 695ff.

[17] Cf. his Kitāb al Burhān, see M. Hayek, 'Ammār al-Basri, *Apologies et controverses*, Beyrouth, 1977.

[18] In Sbath's manuscript, this treatise is followed by a brief text on the general resurrection of the bodies. Although eschatological themes were discussed by Muslims and Christians, it is not clear whether this very brief text (edited by Sbath, 166-7) reflects such a discussion with Muslim scholars.

the Nations obviously being the Muslims, who can be refuted without explicitly mentioning them. The argumentation against the Jews is, however, only – at least partially – understandable if one bears in mind that the true interlocutor is not so much the Jew, but the Muslim.[19]

In this respect, Išoʿyahb's letter, written in later times, is different: he is not afraid of mentioning Islam directly by name and the arguments addressed to the Jews are not necessarily indirectly meant for the Muslims. One should bear in mind that, in the second half of the 12th century, there was still an important Jewish community in Nisibis, which was able to worship in no less than three synagogues.[20]

A second introductory remark concerns the theme itself, the veneration of the holy icons. It is not *a priori* a subject which one would expect in a Christian-Muslim discussion, conducted by someone belonging to the East Syrian community, which is known for a certain soberness in its attitude to the veneration of holy icons. For example, Elias of Nisibis, in his influential treatise *Kitāb al-Burhān* – an apologetic treatise, also addressed to both Muslims and Jews, as well as to the Jacobites and the Melkites –, writes that he rejects the practice of the veneration of icons by the Melkites or Chalcedonians:

> "In their churches, they have images in great numbers and hold the opinion that all of them are to be venerated equally. Moreover, they despise the images of Christ and of the Virgin. They put them in their bathhouses in the most despicable and dirty places where they show their nakedness. Is it not foolish to maintain – incorrectly – that the Virgin is the Mother of God and yet to leave her image in the most squalid places?"[21]

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[19] H. Teule, "Paul of Antioch's Attitude towards the Jews and the Muslims" in: B. Roggema e.a., eds. *The Three Rings. Textual Studies in the historical trialogue of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Louvain, 2005, 91-110. See also Theodore Abū Qurrāh's *Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, discussing the attitude towards this subject of both Jews and Muslims; the latter are, however, not mentioned explicitly but indicated as "those who lay claim to faith", whereas one may assume that Theodore's main concern was with the Muslims more than with the Jews, cf. S. Griffith, "Theodore Abū Qurrah, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons", in: Eastern Christian texts in Translation*, Louvain, 1977.

[20] Cf. art. "Nisibis", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, XII (1971), col. 1178.

[21] The Arabic text of this treatise is unedited (apart from a few sections in J.S. Assemani's *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, III, 1, 303 ff., where, however, this work is incorrectly ascribed to Išoʿyahb b. Malkon. German translation by L. Horst, *Des Metropoliten Elias von Nisibis Buch vom Beweis der Wahrheit des Glaubens*, Colmar, 1886. For the fragment under discussion, see p. 102.

Of course, in the context of the *K. al-Burhān,* one has to take into consideration that the author tries to show a Muslim readership that the East-Syrian tradition is somehow closer, or at least more understandable, to the Muslims, than the beliefs of his fellow Christians, the Chalcedonians, the West-Syrians and the Copts, which puts his remark on his coreligionists into a certain perspective. In this respect, the position of Išoʿyahb's predecessor is not characteristic of the general attitude of the 'Church of the East' towards the veneration of holy icons. It also practiced this devotion, at least up to the period under discussion, as is evidenced by many references in theological, liturgical, mystical and historiographical texts.[22] To mention two more or less contemporary examples: Patriarch Denḥā I (1265-81) is credited with the construction of a beautiful church in Irbil, ornamented with images representing the Economy of our Lord for the instruction of youngsters.[23] The priest Salibā from Mosul, living in Cyprus in 1332, defends his Church against the accusation by the Latins that the East-Syrians would not venerate 'icons' of the Virgin Mary.[24]

On the other hand, the text under discussion also deals extensively with the veneration of the holy cross, which is, of course, what one would expect from a member of the East-Syrian Church, known for its devotion to the holy cross, and which is much less prominent in comparable treatises by Chalcedonians.

As a matter of fact, the theme of the veneration of the holy cross figures in several East-Syrian polemical and apologetic texts addressed to the world of Islam. It suffices to mention al-Kindī, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī or, in later times, ʿAbdišoʿ b. Brikhā, Išoʿyahb's successor to the throne of Nisibis.[25]

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[22] For an overview, see H. Teule, *"Les Assyro-chaldéens"*, Fils d'Abraham, the chapter *Art sacré* (in press).

[23] See J.-B. Chabot, "Eloge du patriarche nestorien Mar Denḥa Ier par le moine Jean", Journal asiatique, 9e série, V, 10-141, esp. 117 and 132.

[24] See the first part of the East-Syrian theological compilation *Asfār al-Asrār* addressed to the western Christians, ed./transl. G. Giannazza, "Traité de la démonstration et de la direction. Kitāb al-Burhān wa-l-iršād de Ṣalibā ibn Yuḥannā al-Mawṣilī. Edition critique et traduction", *Parole de l'Orient* 22 (1987), 562-629, esp. 614-15.

[25] See B. Landron, *Attitudes nestoriennes,* 236-8.

2.2. Text.[26]

The first issue is the veneration of the cross itself:

> "We honour the cross since (through it) we represent to ourselves the Redeemer; in this form, he took our passions upon him."[27]

Against those who disapprove of it, the author answers with two classical arguments, found in comparable treatises. Firstly, if we accept paying honour to an earthly king by kissing his hand or prostrating ourselves in front of him, Christians should not be blamed for doing the same with the body of Christ. Secondly, just as in the case of a human king,

> "we kiss the carpet of the King out of reverence for the King and not for the carpet, in the same way we exalt this figure which Christ has taken on, for it is the image of Christ's *jihād* in God. There is no question of exalting the wood or copper, rather the meaning which is expressed by both (materials)."

Next, the author moves on to a justification of the veneration of the cross from the tradition and the Bible.

As far as the tradition is concerned, he mentions several authorities. Firstly, the apostle Peter who "made the sign of the cross over Sīmūn (سيمون) the Sorcerer who fell from a height, was injured and died". Išoʿyahb refers here to a passage found in the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, which tells the long story of the miracle contest between Peter and Simon Magus, who challenged Peter by flying over Rome

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[26] A full translation of the text is only useful after a new examination of the manuscript used by Sbath. Translation of one brief fragment in Landron, *Attitudes nestoriennes*, pp. 296-7.

[27] It is not clear whether this idea of representing Christ implies that the cross had a corpus, which was normally not the case in the East-Syrian tradition. Some passages in the work of Isaac the Syrian, who has written important paragraphs on the spiritual meaning of the veneration of the cross, suggest that the crosses may have had a corpus, cf. "whenever the (believers)...gaze on the (cross), it is as though they were contemplating the face/person (parṣopā) of Christ"; cf. S. Brock, *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian), 'The second Part', Chapters IV-XLI*, CSCO 554-5, Louvain, 1995, 48/58.

[28] Cf. L. Vouaux, *Les Actes de Pierre*, Paris, 1922. For the passage on Simon's death, see p. 412-13. The acts of Peter circulated in Syriac and Arabic versions; the story of Simon Magus was known to East Syrian historiographers, such as the author of the so-called *Muḫtaṣār al-Aḫbār al-biʿiyya* (ed. B. Haddad, Baghdad, 2000), possibly the first lacking part of the Chronicle of Siʿirt (written after 1036), see pp. 49-54, esp. 54.

as a proof that God's power was with him.[28] Peter is also credited with having introduced the veneration of the cross in the churches of Rome and Antioch. Next, he reminds the reader that the veneration of icons had been introduced by Mar Mari and by Christ himself when leaving an off print of his face on the *Mandil* sent to Edessa. In both cases, these are classical references, not only found in the *Acts of Mār Māri*,[29] but also in more contemporary writings such as the *Muḫtaṣar Aḫbār al-Biʾyya*, which seems to be a text that in a general way helps us to understand a number of historical allusions found in theological treatises of this period,[30] or the patriarchal chronicle preserved in the *kitāb al-Majdal*, a theological encyclopaedia composed by ʿAmr b. Mattā (early 11th cent.).[31]

From the Old Testament, the author adduces the classical passages of Moses, Joshua and David who worshipped in front of the Ark in order to praise God, not the wood. More original is his example of Jacob, 'the Father of the Tribes :

> "he did the same, when they brought him the blood-stained tunic of Joseph. He pressed it against himself and consoled himself with it. And, thanks to the tunic, his eyes were opened and he supported the pains of grief. Likewise, we exalt the wood on which was shed the blood of Christ, and comparable matters, and we console ourselves with them and support the difficulties of this world until Christ returns at his second coming as king over the world and the Kingdom and makes us share in His heavenly kingdom, in the same way as Jacob saw Joseph as King over Egypt, making (Jacob) sharing in his kingship and his bliss."

Next, Išoʿyahb addresses the Muslims directly, comparing the veneration of the cross to the Muslim veneration of the Kaʿba:

> "Our kissing the cross or prostrating in front of it is nothing more than kissing the Stone in Mecca or prostrating towards the Abode on all sides. And just as Muslims, who, when kissing the stone or prostrating towards the Abode

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[29] Cf. Ch et Fl. Julien, *Les actes de Mār Māri*, CSCO 602-3, Louvain, 2003, 15 (20 in transl.; cf. "The Acts of Mār Mārī the Apostle. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Amir Harrak", *Writings from the Greco-Roman World* 11 (2005), Atlanta, 6-7).

[30] *Ibid*, p. 114.

[31] See H. Gismondi, *Maris Amri et Slibae De patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria*. Pars prior. *Maris textus Arabicus*, 4; *Maris versio Latina*, Rome, 1899, 4. Text also published by Harrak, *Writings*, 84.

> should not adore it instead of God, in the same way, Christians, when kissing the Cross for what it means and not for itself, should not adore it."

According to Išoʿyahb, Muslims fail to understand devotional acts, such as the East-Syrian practice of *Ḥnānā* – without using this term – "taking some dust and mud from the graves of the martyrs and saints", kissing the hands of the priest before receiving Holy Communion, services conducted in front of icons of Christ, Mary and the saints, burning incense in front of the relics of martyrs and the oil taken from the candles. These have a spiritual meaning and purport to bring the believer in contact with a deeper truth or exhort him to imitate the way of life of the person, whose image he venerates. Those acts are no different from the way in which

> "Muslims and Jews venerate the revealed Scriptures as well as any material on which the name of God is written. Their veneration does not apply to the material on which it is written, be it paper or parchment, or the pigments and the ink, but to the meaning which is indicated by it, which is the recollection (*ḏikr*) of God, the Prophets and the Saints."

In another passage, the author emphasizes that images function as a kind of *biblia pauperum*:[32]

> "Images in the churches take the place of writing for those who do not know how to write or read such as the common and illiterate people. When they see the images, there is no need for them to ask for information from the experts."

Here the author seems to think of the calligraphic texts found in mosques, which are not accessible to all the faithful.

Then follows the core of the argument, i.e. that the veneration of the cross and icons by Christians is to be distinguished from the adoration of idols by the pagans, the Greeks, the Sabeans and the first philosophers, who, like the Christians, insist on having images of the persons they hold in esteem. In their case, however, the veneration is directed to idols without any reference to God, whereas, for the Christians, the icons represent persons who adored God, who

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[32] See *supra* the reason why patriarch Denḥā ornamented the church of Irbil with icons.

gave their lives for the sake of the Truth and the *sunna* and the Law of the Christians. They are venerated exactly on account of their being devoted to God. This makes all the difference veneration without God or on account of God. The first is *kufr*, the second faith and *ʿibāda*, and this is what Jews and Muslims have in common with Christians: their sacrifices, such as the offering by Abraham, or what is slaughtered by the Muslims "on their Feast", are not to be rejected on account of their similarity with pagan practices, for they make sacrifices to God himself. The logical conclusion is that Christians, too, are not to be blamed, since outwardly there may be some similarity between veneration of icons and idols, but basically, only the first mean veneration of God.

Išoʿyahb's *risāla* ends with a beautiful text on the 'real presence' of the Saints, represented by their icons:

> "But the images of the friends of God take the place of their persons and kissing them resembles greeting them and liturgy for them and their altars and the remembrance of their virtues are as if we are speaking and conversing with them and the offerings to their names are like eating with them the incense in front of them and in front of their holy relics is accepting the *sunna* of their good deeds and their praised morals; and taking remnants from their graves and oil from the candles in order to receive a blessing from it resembles their prayer and their gifts; and the meetings of crowds near them and in the houses of worship during their feasts of recollection are like seeing them and like the presence of their friends and their invitations."

2.3. Commentary.

In the previous section we have already indicated that the passage on Simon Magus was probably derived from some later historiographical sources. In a recent study, Fr. Gianmaria Giannazza draws the attention to the similarity of Išoʿyahb's treatise with some passages in the *kitāb uṣūl al-dīn*, composed by the East-Syrian patriarch Elias II (d.1131).[33] Firstly, this work gives the basic tenets of

[33] G. Giannazza, "Elie II (†1131). Kitāb uṣūl al-Dīn. Introduction, étude & édition critique", 2 parties, *Patrimoine arabe chrétien* 17-18, Beyrouth, éd. du CEDRAC, Jounieh, Libr. St. Paul, 2005; see especially the introduction, vol. 1, 102-106.

the East-Syrian creed, presented in an apologetic way; it is addressed to Jews and Muslims, as well as to the Chalcedonians and the Miaphysites. Secondly, it gives a presentation of the rituals of the Church of the East. In the sections directed against the Muslims (without necessarily mentioning them), one can distinguish four themes: that of the falsification (*taḥrīf watabdīl*) of the Holy Scripture, the felicity of the just in the world to come, the way of performing prayer (with emphasis on ablutions, etc.) and finally, the subject of this paper, the veneration of the holy icons and especially the cross.[34] Comparing both treatises, one finds instances of literal agreement, as Giannazza also remarked, but also important differences; sometimes Išoʿyahb gives a more developed text, at other instances it is Elias who does it.

As far as the similarities are concerned, both texts deal with the problem of the veneration of the cross and of the images from the perspective of a discussion with both Muslims and Jews and refer to the practice of the veneration of the Ark of the Covenant and the Kaʿba. Both authors give partly the same 'historical' references to justify the veneration of the icons: the apostle Peter, his introduction of the cross into the churches of Rome (only Išoʿyahb) and Antioch and his contest with Simon Magus. Išoʿyahb remarks that it is not necessary to tell the well-known story (of the invention) of the cross under Constantine which, however, is elaborately done by Elias.

Both authors compare the veneration of the cross and of the icons with the prayer of Muslims in the direction of Mecca and with the pilgrimage to the Kaʿba. In this respect, Išoʿyahb, more than Elias, emphasizes that Muslims, too, do not venerate and kiss the Stone without God; he explicitly considers their worship positively as symbolic acts of adoration of God.

The idea of *biblia pauperum* is expressed in similar terms by both authors, as well as the allusion to the veneration by Muslims and Jews of any material on which the name of God is written and which applies to the meaning behind it and not to the material.

On account of the differences - the emphasis in Elias text is more on the veneration of the cross - it is difficult to maintain that Išoʿyahb consulted the *kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* directly. Both authors may have used a third common source or, more probably, drew on established traditions. The comparison of both

[34] See ch. 15: *Treatise on the Cross and the Finding of the Wood on which Christ our Redeemer was crucified*, vol. 2, 303-314.

texts demonstrates, however, that most of Išoʿyahb's arguments belong to the traditional theological lore of the Church of the East.

3. Concluding remarks

1. According to the title (by the author?), this treatise purports to be a refutation of the views of Muslims and Jews. It seems, however, that the intended audience is not in the first place the Muslims or the Jews themselves. We find too many allusions to the Christian tradition which are of relevance only to Christians and only understandable by them, thus this work seems to be meant for a Christian readership, who, in this period, apparently still had to defend themselves against attacks from their non-Christian environment and who had to be shown

a. that the veneration of the cross and of the icons was as old as the Church itself and started with the apostles Peter and Mār Māri.
b. that the veneration of the cross was no different from the practice of the Muslims when kissing the Kaʿba or paying homage to the copies of the Koran. The underlying question is: why do Muslims not understand that some practices – and *mutatis mutandis* some scriptural or theological expressions are to be understood in a metaphorical and not a literal way?
c. that the veneration was not due to the material but to the meaning.

2. Bénédicte Landron devotes some passages to the veneration of the icons in her thorough study of the Nestorian attitudes towards the Islam.[35] She highlights, however, the absence of this theme in Muslim-Nestorian discussions, an indication – for her – that the Nestorians, unlike the Christians of other confessions, did not receive complaints from Muslims in this matter. It seems to me that she somewhat underestimates the importance of icons or images in the liturgy of the Church of the East. Elias of Nisibis, dissociating himself from the veneration of the icons by the Chalcedonians is, as we have seen, more an exception than a real representative of the Church of the East in these matters. Išoʿyahb's treatise, as well the corresponding chapter of Patriarch Elias' *kitāb uṣūl al-dīn* prove that the veneration of icons also played a role in Muslim-East-Syrian discussions. I

[35] *Attitudes nestoriennes*, 238-9.

do not believe in her "répugnance sémitique devant l'utilisation des images, encore augmentée par le contact avec les musulmans", which she ascribes to the Nestorians. One could even go a step further and assert that it is mainly the 'Nestorians' who put this theme on the agenda, taking up the defence of the veneration of icons. It is, for instance, not discussed by contemporary West-Syrian authors such as Dionysius bar Ṣalibi, the author of an encompassing refutation of Islam,[36] Barhebraeus or Jacob bar Šakko, whose *Book of Treasures* contains several passages against the Muslims. The same seems true for the Chalcedonians of the Patriarchate of Antioch. It would be interesting to analyse whether the Arabic version of John of Damascus' treatises against the iconoclasts, made by the Higumen Antonios (end of the 10th century),[37] was made in the context of intensified Muslim remarks in this respect or only out of concern for a faithful and complete transmission of the ideas of his master.

3. Apart from its importance for Muslim-Christian relations, our text also gives additional information about the practice of the veneration of icons in the Church of the East, which, generally speaking, had no iconoclastic tendencies, as maintained by B. Landron.

4. Finally, Išoʿyahb's text should also be compared with the passages on the veneration of icons and of the cross composed by his successor on the throne of Nisibis, the famous ʿAbdišoʿ bar Brikhā (d.318). ʿAbdišoʿ is the author of a theological compendium also entitled *kitāb uṣūl al-dīn*, which contains an entire chapter (ch. 17) on the veneration of holy icons. Today, this work is accessible in only one manuscript, Beirouth 936, but unfortunately this very passage is lost.[38] His *ktābā d-marganitā*, the Book of the Pearl, a compendium of comparable content as the *k. uṣūl al-dīn*, but written in Syriac, only devotes a chapter to the veneration of the holy cross, which, however, is discussed, in the context of spirituality and piety, so from an inner Christian perspective, without any apologetic concern.[39]

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[36] See J. Amar, *Dionysius bar Salibi. A Response to the Arabs*, CSCO 614-5, Louvain, 2006.

[37] J. Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Eglise melchite du Ve au XXe siècle*, vol. III, 1 (969-1250), Louvain-Paris, 1983, 273-289, esp. 278-9.

[38] Landron, *Attitudes nestoriennes*, 137-9 and 239.

[39] A. Mai, ed. *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio* X, Rome, 1838, 317-66.

Prejudice and polarization towards Christians, Jews and Muslims: "The Polemical Treatises" of Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī[1]

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Introduction

Description, Background and Significance

Christians, Jews and Muslims have lived together for centuries, sometimes in concord, at other times in conflict. One of the most tense periods for these communities was in the twelfth century, following the impact of the Crusades which upset the delicate balance of communities in the Middle East. To date, we still only possess a partial knowledge of how Christians, Muslims and Jews in this medieval period encountered and perceived each other. Similarly we have little understanding of what actually happened between these groups and particularly of the manner of arguments that were employed by either side in their altercations and accusations against one another. This is largely because most of the relevant documents have remained inaccessible, on the whole remaining untranslated, and so rarely the subject of extended analysis by scholars in general and historians in particular.

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[1] An updated and expanded version of a short paper delivered at the IX Symposium Syriacum, Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, Beirut (September, 2004) and published in 2006. See Rifaat Ebied, "The Syriac Polemical Treatises of Dionysius Bar Salibi, Metropolitan of Amid (D. 1171 AD)", *Parole de l'Orient* 31 (2006), 1-5.

This project investigates the prejudices of Christians, Jews and Muslims towards each other, in *The Polemical Treatises* of Dionysius bar Ṣalībī. The author of these treatises, Dionysius bar Salībī (d. 1171 C.E.) was a distinguished hierarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church.[2] As well as being Metropolitan of Amid, he found time amidst his copious ecclesiastical activities and responsibilities to elaborate a vast literary corpus in Syriac. He was a major figure in the twelfth century renaissance of Syriac literature. Indeed, Gregory bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), one of the greatest Syriac historians, considered that he was "the eloquent doctor and star of his time and a friend of hard work". His many writings include biblical commentaries, polemical tracts, liturgical expositions and theological treatises, a compilation of ecclesiastical canons, commentaries on Greek Fathers, poetry, treatises on secular scholarship and numerous letters. Besides a prodigious output, Bar Salībī also had an encyclopaedic knowledge of Greek and Syriac patristic and secular literature. His works abound with allusions to and citations from such sources, some of which are not longer extant. Hence part of the value of his writings is that they distill the Syriac intellectual tradition of the first millennium.

The Polemical Treatises of Dionysius bar Ṣalībī have only been published in a partial and piecemeal fashion. To date, they have never been translated as an entirety nor have they received systematic comment.[3] This lacuna has meant that the full impact of bar Ṣalībī's perceptions have not been realised. For this reason alone, the project proposes to offer a full critical edition with an English translation, notes and commentary of *The Polemical Treatises*. In order to place Dionysius bar Ṣalībī in perspective, the project also proposes an accompanying analysis of their contents and comparison with polemical writers, Christian, Jewish and Muslim who wrote in the languages of the day (Syriac, Aramaic and Arabic). This aspect of the project will make available for historians some of the most germane writings hailing from the medieval Middle East, including the famous *Liber Scholiorum* of Theodore bar Koni, who was bishop at Wasit, now in southern Iraq. Writing in the eighth century, Theodore bar Koni provides a

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[2] See A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, Bonn, 1922, 296-297; P. van der Aalst, "Denis bar Salibi, polémiste" *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, 9 (1959), 10-23; William Wright, *A short History of Syriac Literature*, London, 1894, 246-250. For the latest discussion of the life and works of Bar Salibi, see G.G. Blum, "Dionysius bar Salibi (gest. 1171)", *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 9 (1982), 6-9. Cf. Ebied, "The Syriac Polemical Treatises of Dionysius Bar Salibi", 2.

[3] See detailed discussion below.

counterpoint, not only in terms of perceptions of non-Christian groups, but also in his role as a bishop of the Church of the East whose theological stance was inimical to that of the Monophysites to which Dionysius bar Ṣalībī belonged. This multi-disciplinary approach will create new dimensions in inter-religious studies, primarily aiding and supporting a reconstruction of prejudice and polarization in the medieval Middle East.

Bar Salībī wrote prodigiously and his *Polemical Treatises* offer rare and illuminating insight into Christian-Jewish-Muslim relations, not from the perspective of western Crusaders, but from 'within', from the frequently neglected viewpoint of the oriental orthodox tradition. Of particular interest is the fact that his *Treatise against the Muslims* constitutes a fresh source for assessing the relationship between Christians and Muslims of the Levant in the twelfth century, a period of intense religious animosity throughout the Middle East.[4] A hundred years after the arrival of the first wave of crusaders was sufficient time to allow attitudes and perceptions to be formulated and become entrenched. However, it should not be thought that Bar Ṣalībī reserved his comments and criticisms for the Muslims alone, since his pen equally pointed at the Armenians, Melchites, Maronites, Nestorians, Chalcedonians, Jews and pagans. In short, Bar Ṣalībī's treatises are comprehensive and controversial in their criticism of the religious groups of his day, with whom he had real contact.

The importance of Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue in the contemporary world is undisputed. Nor is it doubted that sound historical research is required in its support, if only to dispense with the misconceptions and stereotypes which have too often contributed to distrust and conflicts between adherents of these three global faiths.

With the above in mind, the project aims:

1. to provide for the first time a complete set of critical editions and translations of a collection of polemical treatises written by Dionysius bar Ṣalībī.
2. to use this fresh primary material to analyse the perceptions and prejudices of Dionysius bar Ṣalībī towards Muslims and Jews, as well as towards other Christian communities.
3. to compare the perceptions of Dionysius bar Ṣalībī with those of other writers from both within and outside the Christian tradition.

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[4] See below the detailed discussion of this work by Bar Ṣalībī, which is particularly relevant to the theme of this conference.

Critical Edition and Translation

The polemical treatises of Dionysius bar Ṣalībī have largely **not** been edited and/or translated. A critical edition, bringing together the numerous and disparate manuscripts of these treatises from which an authoritative translation can be made, is long overdue. This initial stage is a *desideratum* upon which the analytical and comparative stages depend.

Analysis of Bar Ṣalībī's Perceptions and Prejudices

Analysis of Bar Ṣalībī's treatises will provide a fresh source for assessing the relationships between Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Levant, during the twelfth century. It will enable a reconstruction of inter-religious attitudes as well as the plotting of the Crusaders' impact, a Western Christian presence, in the Levant.

Comparison of Bar Ṣalībī's Perceptions

Bar Ṣalībī's *Weltanschauung* (world view) is established by comparison of his writings with a wide range of Christian writers, including Theodore bar Koni who wrote in the late eighth century in Mesopotamia at the height of the Abbasid period.[5] Documents in Judaeo-Arabic from the Cairo Genizah, dating from the medieval period, will provide perspectives from a Jewish point of view, whilst Islamic attitudes can be determined from a range of writers who preceded Bar Ṣalībī in time, including Al-Qāsim Ibrāhīm (d. 246/860) and ʿAlī al-Tabarī (d.*ca.* 250/864) in their refutations of the Christians, *Al-Radd ʾalā al-Naṣārā* (Response to the Christians),[6] and Abū ʾIsā al-Warrāq (d. *ca.* 247/861) in his critical examination of the three branches of Christianity: Orthodox, Jacobite, Nestorian, *Al-Radd ʾalā*

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5 Cf. Erica Hunter, "Theodore bar Koni Liber *Scholiorum XI* Reconsidered", *Acta Orientalia Belgia*, 11 (1998) 143-154.

6 *ʿAr-Radd ʾalā-n-Nasārā de ʿAlī at-Tabarī*, eds. I.-A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 36 (1959), 128.19-129.2; trans. J.-M. Gaudel, *Riposte aux Chrêtiens par ʿAīi al-Tabarī*, Rome, 1995.

al-thlāth firaq min al-Naṣārā (Response to the Three Christian Sects).[7]

It is hoped that this project on *The Polemical Treatises* will make a significant and unique contribution to medieval Middle Eastern history, by its exposure of the prejudices and polarization which had arisen between various communities at a time when the effect of western Christian influence was also being felt. Besides their inherent historical and social merit, the treatises are *per se* a work of immense theological value. They pinpoint the beliefs of medieval communities and instruct us in the finer aspects of Christian theology and dogma, since Bar Ṣalībī's pen, as it has already been stated, was equally directed against the Armenians, Melchites, Maronites, Nestorians, Chalcedonians ('Orthodox'), Jews, Muslims and pagans. In short, Bar Ṣalībī's polemic shows his commensurate knowledge of the various sects and religions of his day against which he pointed his criticisms and with whom he had real contact.

Three major areas of innovation emerge from the project:

1. Linguistic perspectives

Bar Ṣalībī's treatises were written in the West Syriac dialect in the twelfth century. As the nature of polemical works requires, the treatises include quotations from the authors with whom they debate. Of particular importance are the quotations from the Qur'ān which Bar Ṣalībī utilised. In the opinion of Alphonse Mingana, who discussed excerpts of Bar Ṣalībī's treatise against the Muslims,[8] the Qur'ānic quotations, from an otherwise unknown Syriac translation, were based on a recension from the seventh or eighth centuries. They contain variant readings at odds with the 'standard' text of the Qur'ān. To date, no further work has been done on the Qur'ānic quotations of Bar Ṣalībī, an extraordinary situation given the scarcity of early Qur'ānic material and lack of knowledge about the transmission history of this holy book. For these reasons alone, a study of the language of Bar Ṣalībī is of singular importance and an urgent *desideratum*.

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[7] D. Thomas, ed. *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam, Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Trinity'*. Cambridge, 1992; idem, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity, Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Incarnation'*, Cambridge, 2002.

[8] A. Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kur'an Exhibiting new Verses and Variants", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 9 (1925), 188-235.

2. Doctrinal perspectives
   Bar Ṣalībī's polemical works offer a *terminus ad quem* for a study of medieval Monophysite theology. Although the Council of Chalcedon (451) technically formulated the separation of the Oriental Orthodox churches from the church of Byzantium, the next seven hundred years saw many developments in West Syriac theology, which were also accompanied by changes in perspective and attitudes. These manifested themselves in dogma and doctrinal matters which can be considered to act as 'badges of identity'. To date, the immense value of the polemical writings of Bar Ṣalībī in tracing the shift from Hellenized cultural values to a more indigenous perspective has never undergone scholarly evaluation. Bar Ṣalībī's comments thus cast light onto the Monophysite mentality as well as upon those of the religions and sects that he so vehemently criticised. Shortly after Bar Ṣalībī wrote, at the height of the renaissance of Syriac literature, the religious map of the Middle East was dramatically changed with the coming of the Mongols and ravages of the Islamic fanatic Timur Lang.

3. Historical perspectives
   Bar Ṣalībī wrote from within the West Syriac tradition, but his very name 'Dionysius' points to the percolation of Hellenism in the Middle East. His polemical treatises, whilst written in Syriac, were formulated in the traditions of Greek intellectual debate that resonated throughout Syria and Turkey, long after the coming of Islam. His writings provide priceless insight into the shift from western classical values to oriental ones; a process that was precipitated by the advent of the Crusades a century before as well as the immense changes that accompanied the transition from the Abbasid dynasty to the Turkic Seljuks. Bar Ṣalībī's polemical writings, in exposing the prejudices and polarization of medieval communities, create a unique 'snapshot' of Turco-Syrian society in the twelfth century. Besides their inherent value, *The Polemical Treatises* are complemented by comparison with contemporary Jewish and Muslim sources, as well as with the writings of Theodore bar Koni, who wrote from the perspective of the East Syriac tradition that was removed from Greek intellectualism.

The value of Bar Ṣalībī's *Polemical Treatises* for understanding polemic between different religious groups is no more urgent in today's vexed international

arena. I am embarking on this project since it would fill an area that has been long overlooked in recent scholarship. A handful of translations of Bar Ṣalībī's numerous polemical treatises were made in the early decades of the twentieth century, but there have been only sporadic treatments of specific groups, such as the Armenians and the Nestorians. In contrast to this piecemeal approach, the project offers, for the first time, a full treatment of the polemical treatises of Bar Ṣalībī. It adopts a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach in order to tackle inter-disciplinary issues. Its results will offer unprecedented insights into the pluralistic environment in which Bar Ṣalībī lived and about which he wrote. Moreover, the project is aided and supported by the fact that many new Syriac manuscripts of Bar Ṣalibi's polemical treatises have only come to light in the intervening years.

Approach

The project calls for a critical edition, with English translation, detailed commentary and analysis of the surviving polemical treatises of Bar Ṣalībī.

Treatises and Repositories:

(A) *The Treatise against the Muslims*

Seven manuscripts, whose dates range from 1325 to 1870, containing the text of this treatise have survived in collections in the U.S.A[9], England (Selly Oak Colleges, University of Birmingham)[10], Rome (the Vatican Library)[11] and Turkey[12]. This latter manuscript forms part of the Rahmani manuscripts now preserved in

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[9] Harvard Syr. MSS 53 (fols. 1r-31v) and 91 (fols. 11b-59b). Cf. Moshe H. Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library: A Catalogue* (Harvard Semitic Museum: Harvard Semitic Studies, Number 23), Ann Arbor, Michigan: Scholars Press 1979, 59, 74.

[10] Mingana MSS 89 (fols. 39a-84b), 215 (fols. 59a-101b), 424 [Extracts: fol. 97a-97b; fols. 98b-100b]. Cf. A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, vol. I: Syriac and Garshuni Manuscripts, Cambridge 1933, 223, 453, 755.

[11] Vat. Syr. 96 (fols. 68r-95v). Cf. S.E. and J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Apostolicae Codicum Manuscriptorum Catalogus*, vol. II, Rome 1758, 521.

[12] MS Mardin 82 (fols. 8v-57v). See Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, 296f; Van der Aalst, "Denis bar Salibi",11; cf. also Sidney Griffith, "Dionysius bar Salibi on the Muslims", IV Symposium Syriacum 1984 [*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 229] 1984, 353-365.

Charfeh, Beirut, Lebanon. It contains a collection entitled *Disputations of ibn Salibi.* The treatise comprises three discourses (*memrē*) divided into 30 chapters. Only chapters XXV-XXX which contain the quotations from the Qur'ān (the third *memrā*) were reproduced and translated by A. Mingana based on one manuscript [Sell Oak Mingana MS 89][13]. This treatise was also the subject of a study by Sidney Griffith[14] who stated in his article that "Members of the seminar on Syriac Patristic in the Institute of Christian Oriental Research at the Catholic University of America are at work on a critical edition of Bar Ṣalibi tract, with a translation into English, and a commentary."[15] This edition has been recently published by Joseph P. Amar in the Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium [C.S.C.O.] Series.[16]

As Mingana pointed out,[17] Bar Ṣalībī's aim in citing the Qur'ānic quotations in Syriac are threefold:

1. to confirm a given Christian doctrine by listing all the Qur'ānic verses dealing with Jesus, Mary, the disciples and the Holy Spirit;
2. to draw attention to certain apparent contradictions of the Qur'ān where he includes all the passages in which he puts side by side the apparently contradictory statements made by the Prophet Muhammad;
3. to present to his readers the story of some Biblical incidents as narrated in it. Under this item occur all the passages dealing with the Patriarchs Abraham, Noah, etc. whose story is often narrated in a different way from that given in the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments.

Confirmation of Mingana's hypothesis regarding the source of these Qur'ānic quotations in Syriac, containing "variant readings at odds with the 'standard' text of the Qur'ān"[18] will have to await a thorough investigation and scrutiny of the nature of these translations into Syriac.

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[13] Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kur'an".

[14] Griffith, "Dionysius bar Salibi on the Muslims", 353-365.

[15] Griffith, "Dionysius bar Salibi", 364f.

[16] Joseph P. Amar, *Dionysius Bar Salībī: A Response to the Arabs* [C.S.C.O., vols. 614, 615, *Scriptores Syri*, Tome 238 (Text); Tome 239 (Translation), Louvain: Peeters 2005.

[17] Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kur'an", 188f.

[18] See above, 6-7. Cf. Ebied, "The Syriac Polemical Treatises of Dionysius Bar Salibi", 4. These remarks were also echoed by Rendel Harris in his article, "The new text of the Kuran", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 10 (1926), 219f.

(B) *The Treatise against the Jews*

Five manuscripts containing the text of this treatise have survived in collections in the U.S.A[19], England (Selly Oak Colleges, University of Birmingham)[20] and Turkey[21]. Other manuscripts may be held in the monasteries of Tur ʾAbdin, Turkey, but I am awaiting confirmation. The text of Harvard Syr. 91 formed the basis of the edition by J. De Zwaan in 1906.[22] **No** translation accompanied the edition of the text. A brief study has been produced by Behnam Keryo, *Dionysius bar Salib's (sic) Treaty (sic) against the Jews.*[23]

(C) *The Treatise against the Nestorians*

Eight manuscripts containing the text of this treatise have survived in collections in the U.S.A[24], England (Selly Oak Colleges, University of Birmingham)[25], France (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)[26] and Turkey[27]; extracts of the work are preserved in a manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.[28] The sole analysis of the contents of this treatise, based on one manuscript, Paris MS. Syr. 209, was given by F. Nau in 1909.[29] No edition or translation of the text of this treatise has been undertaken so far.

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[19] Harvard Syr. MS 91 (fols. 60a-76a). Cf. Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts*, 74.

[20] Mingana MSS 89 (fols. 29a-38b), 215 (fols. 101b-116a), 424 [Extract: fols. 97b-98b]. Cf. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, 223, 453, 755.

[21] MS Mardin 82 (fols. 56r-73v).

[22] J. De Zwaan, *The Treatise of Dionysius bar Salibi Against the Jews.* Part I. The Syriac Text, edited from a Mesopotamian MS. (Cod. Syr. Harris. 83). Leiden 1906.

[23] Published in *The Harp*: A Review of Syriac and Oriental Ecumenical Studies, XIII, 2000, 141-146.

[24] Harvard Syr. MSS 53 (fols. 32a-55b) and 91 (fols. 76b-94a). Cf. Gottstein, Syriac Manuscripts, 59, 74.

[25] Mingana MSS 89 (fols. 85a-92b), 215 (fols. 116a-185b), 295 (fols. 53a-59b), 549 [Extract: fol. 27a-27b]. Cf. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, 224, 453, 568, 1019.

[26] Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Syr. 209 (fols. 181-385). See H. Zotenberg, *Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et sabéens (mandaites) de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris 1874, 160-161; Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, 297.

[27] MS Mardin 82 (fols. 73v-142v).

[28] Or. MS 467 (fols. 169-170). See R. Payne Smith, *Catalogi Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae, Pars Sexta: Codices Syriacos*, Oxford, 1864,561. Cf. Baumstark, Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur, 297.

[29] F. Nau, "Analyse du Traité écrit par Denys bar Salibi contre les Nestoriens", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien, Deuxième série*, 14, 1909, 298-320.

(D) *The Treatise against the Armenians*

Three manuscripts containing the text of this treatise have survived in collections in the U.S.A[30], England (Selly Oak Colleges, University of Birmingham)[31] and Turkey[32]. A facsimile reproduction of the text was published by A. Mingana in the *Woodbrooke Studies* Series in 1931.[33] A brief consideration of the contents was also given by P. van der Aalst in 1959.[34] As is the case with the previous treatises, **no** critical edition of the text has hitherto appeared.

(E) *The Treatise against the Armenian Patriarch Kewark*

Two manuscripts containing the text of this treatise have survived in the Mingana Collection,[35] and one manuscript in Turkey[36]. This treatise has not received any attention from scholars and no edition or translation of the text has hitherto been made.

(F) *The Treatise against the Chalcedonians (Melchites)*

Five manuscripts containing the text of this treatise have survived in collections in the U.S.A.[37], England (Selly Oak Colleges, University of Birmingham)[38] and Turkey[39]. A facsimile edition of the text, based on one MS only, viz. Mingana Syr. 4, was published with an English translation by A. Mingana in the *Woodbrooke Studies* Series in 1927.[40] A brief consideration of the contents was also given by

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30 Harvard Syr, MS 91 (fols. 297a-318a). Cf. Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts*, 74.

31 Mingana MSS 215 (fols. 305b-329b), 347 (fols. 1a-32a). Cf. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, 455, 644.

32 MS Mardin 82 (fols. 294-321r). See note 12 above.

33 A. Mingana, *The Work of Dionysius bar Salibi against the Armenians*, Woodbrooke Studies, IV, Fasc. 9, Cambridge, 1931, 1-111 [reprinted from the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 15 (No. 2), 1931].

34 Van der Aalst, "Denis bar Salibi", 17-21.

35 Mingana MSS 215 (fols. 329b-359a), 347 (fols. 42a-99a). Cf. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, 455, 645.

36 MS Mardin 82 (fols. 330r-355r).

37 Harvard Syr. MS 91 (fols. 155b-292b). Cf. Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts*, 59, 74.

38 Mingana MSS 4 (fols. 126a-140a), 215 (fols. 185a-302b), 295 (fols. 1a-52a). Cf. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts*, 18, 454, 567.

39 MS Mardin 82 (fols. 152v-289r).

40 A. Mingana, "A Treatise on Barsalibi against the Melchites", *Woodbrooke Studies*, I, Fasc. I, Cambridge, 1927, 2-95 [reprinted from the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 11, 1927].

P. van der Aalst in 1959.[41] As is the case with the previous treatises, **no** critical edition of the text has hitherto appeared.

(G) *The Treatise against the Idolaters*
The text of this treatise, which has not been edited or translated, has apparently survived in a unique manuscript (Mardin 82) which forms part of the Rahmani manuscripts (MSS 106 and 282) now preserved in Charfeh (Beirut, Lebanon). This manuscript contains a collection entitled *Disputations of ibn Salibi.*[42]

The authoritative critical edition and English translation of Bar Ṣalībī's *Polemical Treatises*, augmented by the commentaries, will offer an inter-disciplinary approach that will enable historians and scholars of religions to explore the pressures and tensions of a medieval society in a way which has never been possible before. Through its comparative studies, using selected polemical writers from Christianity, Islam and Judaism, this project will challenge the prevailing methodology in historical-religious studies. It is hoped that it will provide fresh perspectives on disciplinary theory, especially as they pertain to the ethnography of medieval Syriac and Arabic writers. The opening of this avenue is very important, not only in redirecting scholarly trends, but also for understanding the Christian, Jewish and Islamic groups from the Middle East who have now settled abroad. Many of these groups are the subject of *The Polemical Treatises*, and the doctrinal matters which so concerned Bar Ṣalībī are still debated and discussed by these communities. Apart from its major contribution to medieval studies, by its exploration of the dimensions of Muslim-Jewish-Christian relations, the project will hopefully promote understanding and enhance the diverse, pluralistic environment of such modern countries as Australia, Canada and the USA.

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[41] Van der Aalst, "Denis bar Salibi",11-17.

[42] Cf. Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, 296f; Van der Aalst, "*Denis bar Salibi*", 11.

Communication of Results

Publication of results (hardback and electronic forms)

The completed work comprising the text, translation and commentaries of *The Polemical Treatises* will be published in hardback by the prestigious international publishers Peeters, Louvain (Belgium) as part of the series, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* [C.S.C.O.]. Hardback publication is, of course, the final stage in a very long process of scholarship and is fitting for the production of an authoritative translation of a collection of seminal treatises. Interim hardback publications of the project will be submitted to *The Bulletin of Middle East Medievalists* (The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, U.S.A.).

Electronic fascicule publication on the WWW will supplement the hardback publication in the C.S.C.O. series. The domain name Dionysius bar Salibi has been purchased in anticipation of creating a web-site (www.barSalibi.com). Progress reports detailing the completed stages of the research will be posted annually. The benefits of the web-site are mutual, not only alerting scholars internationally to the contribution of the project, but also acting as a form for scholarly criticism and discussion.

Conference papers

IX Symposium Syriacum (Kaslik University, Lebanon; September 2004), the most prestigious international conference in the field of Syriac studies, was a good opportunity for a short paper on Dionysius bar Ṣalībī's Syriac *Polemical Treatises*.[43] Apart from interest in the Charfeh collection which is in Beirut, the presentation of this paper solicited valuable feedback from this academic forum which will be incorporated into the final stages of the project.

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[43] Cf. Ebied, "The Syriac Polemical Treatises on Dionysius bar Salibi".

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Seitenwege

John Bar Šayallāh and the Syrian Orthodox community under Aqquyunlu rule in the late fifteenth century

Andrew Palmer
(London)

The reign of Uzun Ḥasan, 'Ḥasan the Tall', is an important period in the history of the Turkish states. He was the ruler of the Aqquyunlu, the 'White Sheep' dynasty of Turkmens, from 1454 to 1478. From small beginnings at Āmīd in the upper Tigris region of what is now SE Turkey he expanded his empire by a series of conquests to the West and the North, so coming into conflict with the great conqueror-sultan of the Ottomans, Mehmet II, and entering an alliance with the last emperor of Trebizond, which was cemented by his marriage, in 1458, with the daughter of that emperor's predecessor and brother, Kalo-Ioannes. Henceforth, the Venetians, too, had to take Ḥasan the Tall into account and his role on the international stage was suddenly magnified by his victories in the East over his rival Jihanshāh of the Qara-Qoyunlu, the 'Black Sheep' dynasty, who had held all of Persia, and over Jihanshāh's ally Abū Saʿīd, the Timurid ruler of Khurasān. Thus between 1466 and 1469 Ḥasan the Tall became lord not only of Mesopotamia and Armenia, but also of the greater part of Persia. After these great successes, it became evident that he alone in Asia was strong enough to bear the Ottoman advance and the enemies of the latter, the rulers of Karaman and the Christians, particularly the Venetians, sought to exploit this new power.[1]

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[1] Vladimir Minorsky, "Uzun Ḥasan", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., vol. 4 (1932), 1153-57 = *Turkmenica* 1; idem, *La Perse au XVe siècle entre la Turquie et Venise.* Publications de la Société des études Iraniennes, 8 = *Turkmenica* 2, Paris, 1933; reprinted in: *The Turks, Iran and the Caucasus in the Middle Ages*, London, 1978.

The Turkish historians and all the Muslim sources entirely neglect the complex of international political interests connected with Trebizond and Georgia after the Fall of Constantinople. The earliest major Aqquyunlu internal narrative source, Abu Bakr Tihrani-Isfahani s *Kitāb-i Diyār-Bakriya*, which was composed between 1469 and 1478, is admirably complemented by the Trapezuntine, Georgian and Venetian documents, including the writings of Giosafat Barbaro, who went as an ambassador to Ḥasan the Tall and visited him in his original bases, Āmīd and Mardīn, reporting back to the Venetian Senate.[2] Before Barbaro, Quirini and Caterino Zeno had been sent to Persia by the Venetians (the latter was a nephew of Ḥasan's Trapezuntine wife) and brought back with them to Venice Ḥasan's own ambassadors.[3] The Vatican was also involved in this diplomacy, which extended to the provision of gunpowder arms and fusiliers to help Ḥasan against the Ottomans.

In spite of all this activity and these alliances, the Ottoman emperor Mehmet II and his generals drove the Turkmens out of Asia Minor in the early 1470s. Superior in firearms, the Ottomans inflicted a humiliating defeat on Ḥasan's army in a place north of Erzincan, but the Sultan did not pursue Ḥasan into his own territories, being advised that he would find such conquests difficult to defend. This defeat was followed by diplomatic activity more extensive than before, with Polish, Hungarian and Burgundian ambassadors travelling to Tabriz along with the Venetians. But the hopes of the Europeans were disappointed, for Ḥasan the Tall was kept busy by the rebellions of his sons in an empire so great that it took all his energies to preserve it. Ḥasan himself fell ill between Tiflis and Tabriz and died in the latter city on the night of January 5-6, 1478, at the age of 54. He was succeeded by his son, Ya'qub. Less than a year after his death, in December 1478, the Venetians signed a treaty of peace with the Ottomans.

So much for the History with the capital 'H'; and, indeed, what could be more exciting than these international intrigues and unpredictable battles in the

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[2] Giosafat Barbaro, "Viaggio di Iosafa Barbaro alla Tana e nella Persia", in: Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, ed. Marcia Milanesi, 6 vols., Turin, 1978-88, vol. 3 (1980), 481-576; translated by William Thomas in *Travels in Tana and Persia*, ed. Lord Stanley of Alderley, London, 1873, 1-103. Hakluyt Society Publications, vol. 49. See also idem., *Lettere al Senato Veneto*, ed. E. Cornet, Vienna, 1852.

[3] Some of the dispatches of Caterino Zeno are transcribed in Domenico Malipiero's *Annali Veneti dall' anno 1457 a 1500*, while others have been appended by Guglielmo Berchet to his *La Repubblica di Venezie e la Persia.*

Anatolian and Iranian highlands?[4] What more exotic than Turkmens arriving by ship in Saint Mark's squire, or suave Burgundians adventuring themselves in the streets of Mardīn and Tabriz? But what of the relations of the Turkmens with their Christian subjects? We have seen that Ḥasan the Tall was married to the niece of the last emperor of Trebizond; and her nephew Caterino Zeno tells us there were Georgians in the Aqquyunlu army. Ḥasan three times invaded Georgia, so that the Georgians may have been pressed into service rather than coming as allies. But we hear neither of Armenians nor of Aramaeans (the Eastern and Western branches of Syriac Christianity), who together formed the majority of the subject population of the White Sheep dynasty in what is now eastern Turkey and Iraq.[5] It was they who provided, willy-nilly, the taxes which financed this great age of expansion and international posturing. For that reason alone their relationship with their rulers is important; and if at this time the Turkmens gained a rather different perspective on the Christian world through their relations with Georgia, Trebizond and Venice, not to mention the Vatican and the other European states, it would be interesting to see if this had an effect on their attitude towards the local Christian population of the region from which they started out, a land-locked tribe with little conception of international affairs.

It is for this reason that the discovery in manuscript of two contemporary and independent accounts of the life of John bar Šayallāh is bound to excite us. John bar Šayallāh was a native of Mardīn, near Āmīd in Turkish Mesopotamia. He was still at school when Ḥasan's brother Jihangir was holed up in Mardīn and eventually defeated. But after he took the monastic habit at Dayr ez-Zaʿfarān, the Syrian Orthodox monastery 5 km East of Mardīn where their patriarch resided, his rise in the church organisation was meteoric. He enjoyed the same special favours and tuition as ʿAzīz, the nephew of the patriarch, and while the latter was appointed bishop of Jazīra and later Maphrian, that is, head of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the East, John was made bishop of Āmīd, a less exalted post, it is true, but one which gave him the advantage of being near the secular rulers and not far from Mardīn and Dayr ez-Zaʿfarān, where the affairs of the Syrian Orthodox Church were generally decided. It was thus that, when Ḫalaf,

[4] John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire*, revised and expanded ed., Salt Lake City, 1999, is now the starting-point for any investigation of Aqquyunlu political history; Appendix D (215-34) contains a survey of the sources.

the old patriarch, died in 1483, John bar Šayallāh was at hand to close his eyelids, and before the Maphrian arrived from the East, John's succession to the title of patriarch had been decided, largely through his own and his friends' influence with the Turkish governor of Mardīn.

One of these friends was the priest John bar Badrē, who had been John's teacher. He may well be the author of the manuscript account which was penned at Mardīn shortly after John's death in 1493 and is now bound into another volume at the Cambridge University Library. There is another account in a manuscript of Bar Hebraeus *Ecclesiastical History* at the Apostolic Library in the Vatican City.[6] Its author used the *Cambridge Obituary* (as I shall call the first for convenience), but added a number of details significantly omitted there and a good deal of malicious gossip into the bargain. For this reason I shall refer to him as the *Vatican Gossip*. The Vatican Gossip in turn was the model for another contemporary account, which became the official version of Syrian Orthodox Church History and forms the last section of the supplement to Gregory Barhebraeus.[7]

All these three have the limitations of ecclesiastical history in a biographical cast: secular events are ignored as far as possible and anything irrelevant to the

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[5] "The large number of Christians relative to Muslims in the urban centers of Arminiya and Diyar Bakr was noted by foreign observers throughout the fifteenth/ninth century." John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 246f., n. 156 on Chapter 2, with the references there. The Armenians accounted for the vast majority of the Christian commercial and administrative class, the Syrian Orthodox being a largely agricultural population, though with some merchants. See N. Göyünç, *XVI. Yüyılda Mardin sancağı* [The province of Mardīn in the sixteenth century, using Ottoman tax-registers which, according to John E. Woods,The *Aqquyunlu*, 216, preserve Uzun Ḥasan's fiscal regulations for Amid, [. . .] Mardin, Ruha, Siverek, and other administrative centers of Diyar Bakr and Arminya] (Istanbul, 1969). This in spite of the truth of what is written by Speros Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*. Publications of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, UCLA, 4, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1971, 446: "The continuing upheaval, conquest, tribal migrations, and conversions attained a climactic intensity in the two hundred years separating the mid-thirteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries." Yet as late as the nineteenth century there were more than 130,000 Christians as compared to about 10,000 other subjects of the Sunni state (including Shiites, Yezidis, Jews and Gypsies) in Diyār Bakr, which had a total population of over 470,000 souls. Statistics from V. Cuinet, *Turquie d'Asie. Géographie administrative. Statistique descriptive et raisonnée de l'Asie Mineure*, vols. I-IV, Paris, 1890-95, reprinted by Vryonis, *loc. cit.*

[6] Codice Vaticano Siriaco 166, Part 2.

[7] Joannes Baptista Abbeloos and Thomas Josephus Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum quod e Codice Musei Britannici* [Add. 7198] *descriptum conjuncta opera ediderunt, Latinitate donarunt, annotationibus theologicis, historicis, geographicis et archeologicis illustrarunt*, 3 vols., Louvain, 1872-7, vol. 3.

life of John bar Šayallāh is excluded. Another part of the official church history has a biography of John's rival, the Maphrian Basil ʿAzīz, but this has the same limitations. Fortunately, however, the priest Addai of Bēt Sʾbīrīna, a village in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn to the East of Mardīn, was an exact contemporary of John and wrote a secular history of that period, which is preserved in a manuscript in the Bodleian Library and has been edited and translated.[8] Barṣawm put forward the plausible theory that this Addai also composed the 'official' church history of the period.[9]

In his secular history, the priest Addai of Bēt Sʾbīrīna is chiefly concerned with wars and famines, of which a good number occurred around his village in the fifteenth century. The various tribes of Kurds, especially those of Boḫtān, were continually harassing the eastern half of the plateau of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn and at times they held the Castle of Haytham on the southern escarpment of that plateau. The northern part of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, where the schismatic patriarchate of Ṣālaḥ was based, belonged to the territories of Ḥisn-Kayf on the Tigris, so that we learn quite a lot about the fate of that fortress also. Bēt Sʾbīrīna was one of the most important villages in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn at this time, with its own representatives, more often than not, on the patriarchal throne at Ṣālaḥ and on the other episcopal sees. But the interests of this village, and therefore of the historian Addai, seldom extend beyond Ṭūr ʿAbdīn itself; even Mardīn seems a distant place in this very local narrative.

Yet Addai sometimes gives us better idea than we should otherwise have of the attitude of the Syrian Orthodox towards their rulers. The fatal disease of Ḥasan he attributes to his impious behaviour in sacking the churches and monasteries of the Georgians and taking the people captive in 1477; whereas his son Yaʿqūb by contrast is blessed by Addai, because "the Christians had great peace in his days."

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[8] P. J. Bruns, *Gregorii Abulpharagii sive Bar-Hebraei Chronicon Syriacum e codicibus Bodleianis descripsit, maximam partem vertit, notisque illustravit*, Leipzig, 1789. Facsimile of the Bodleian MS. Hunt[ingdon] no. 52 in Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *The Chronography of Gregory Abuʾl Faraj*, 2 vols., London, 1932, vol. 2.

[9] Mor Ignāṭiyos Afrēm I Barṣawm (translated into Syriac by Mor Filoksinos Yūḥannon Dolabānī from the Arabic published at Homs in 1943 and reprinted in Aleppo 1956, Baghdad 1976 and Glane/Damascus 1987), *berulē bʾdīrē d-ʿal mardūt yūlponē sūryoyē bʾdīrē (Histoire des Sciences et de la Littérature Syriaques)*, Qamishly, 1967; reprinted Glane, 1991, 485. Barṣawm possessed a copy of the Vatican Gossip which filled 18 openings: *Histoire des Sciences*, 481-2 (No. 277); he considered it a tasteless composition by one of John's disciples, though he praises the admonition which John bar Šayallāh himself addressed to his friend David of Phoenicia in seven-syllable verse.

That this good relationship survived Ya'qūb's death is confirmed by the respectful fashion in which Addai and his companions were treated by their official escort on the road to Jerusalem in 1492, when Ḫawāja Ḥasan of Mardīn was sent with them on his way to Egypt as an ambassador of Ya'qūb's successor Baysunkur. Addai's detailed account of his pilgrimage proves useful in filling out the meagre skeleton of our new documents, where they report John bar Šayallāh's several journeys to Jerusalem and Egypt.[10]

Another relevant insight we gain from Addai concerns building; for the renovation and construction of churches and monasteries was one of the chief activities of John bar Šayallāh. In 1473/4 the church of Mor Dodo in Bēt S'bīrīna collapsed; the villagers immediately sent two priests to Mardīn to fetch architects to rebuild it. The interest of this statement lies in the implication that there was no-one in Ṭūr 'Abdīn as capable of designing and directing such a construction as the architects from Mardīn. Yet even they seem to have been rather incompetent. Beginning in April, they finished putting up the roof on 22nd June. But there had been a disagreement between the architects and the villagers concerning the construction of the timber framework over which the vault was built, and as a result of the negligence of the architects in failing to place timber supports where they were needed, the roof fell down, killing eighteen people (and, incidentally, revealing some long-forgotten relics of saints hidden in the wall between sanctuary and the nave).

The significance of all this seems to be that the Syrian Orthodox, even in Mardīn, were somewhat out of practice when it came to building, perhaps because of the virtually incessant warfare of that century beginning with Tīmūr Leng and continuing with the Kurds and the rival emirates of the Ayyūbids of Ḥisn-Kayf and the White Sheep of Diyār Bakr. It was just after this disaster in Bēt S'bīrīna that John bar Šayallāh was made bishop of Āmīd – in 1474, as we deduce from the Cambridge Obituary, contradicting the date given in the 'official' church history

[10] Andrew Palmer, "The History of the Syrian Orthodox in Jerusalem [Part One]", *Oriens Christianus*, 75 (1991), 16-43; "The History of the Syrian Orthodox in Jerusalem, Part Two: Queen Melisende and the Jacobite estates", *Oriens Christianus*, 76 (1992), 74-94; Hubert Kaufhold, "Zur Bedeutung Jerusalems für die syrisch-orthodoxe Kirche", in: *L'idea di Gerusalemme nella spiritualità cristiana del Medioevo. Atti del Convegno internazionale in collaborazione con l'Istituto della Görres-Gesellschaft di Gerusalemme, 31 agosto-6 settembre 1999.* Atti e documenti del Pontificio Comitato di Scienze Storiche, 12, Vatican, 2003, 132-65.

(1470/71). Immediately he set about restoring all the churches and monasteries that had fallen into disrepair. Presumably he mustered enough builders to train a new generation, though their services must have been at a premium. But even after a decade or so, there was such a shortage of skilled labour that, when the operators of the lime-kilns went on strike during the building of a church near Mardīn, there was nothing for it but that John, now patriarch, should come himself and burn the lime to supply the masons with their mortar. This detail from the Cambridge Obituary gives something of the flavour of this intimate source, which I shall now consider in detail.

Folios 82 to 87 of Cambridge MS Dd. 3.8 stand out for the rest of the volume in which they are bound: they have been trimmed to size, so that at least one marginal annotation has been lost, and the colour of the paper and inks is different.[11] This quire of six leaves spent some time unbound; it was folded horizontally down the middle with the last page outside, and the writing on the fold on that page is not only cracked, as on the other pages, but considerably worn, as if from travelled unprotected as a sheaf of folded paper.

It is clear from the concluding passage of the text that the Obituary was originally bound in with a New Testament and a commentary on the same by the famous twelfth-century bishop of Āmīd, Dionysius bar Ṣalībī ('the son of the Crusader'). This book had been copied out by John bar Šayallāh himself and bequeathed to the Syrian Orthodox church of the Forty [Martyrs of Sebaste] at Mardīn. The Obituary, taken down by one person unnamed at the dictation of another, was finished on 3rd October, 1495. It ends with a detailed catalogue of the late patriarch's bequests including his pots and pans and the pestle and mortar with which he prepared the ingredients for the holy Chrism, and dire threats against any who should try to pervert his intentions.

That we have the autograph of the Obituary is evident from certain blanks, left where the person dictating it could not remember the name of a saint to whom a church in another region was dedicated, or the name of the scribe of a certain book, or some of the buildings constructed in a certain place by the patriarch. This was done in the hope that these details might later be obtained and entered; and in a couple of places such details have been supplied by another hand.

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[11] William Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Cambridge*, Cambridge, 1901, 979-85.

The Obituary is carefully written in the plain cursive script of the Western Syrians within borders of double red lines with two columns to a page. Each column has forty lines of writing. On the last page, five lines of the first column and the whole of the second column are left blank, so that it is clear the borders were drawn out in advance, without any certain knowledge of the length of the eventual text. It is surprising that the scribe did not fill out the remaining space with a final notice in the usual form, beginning with thanks to the Deity for the successful completion of the work, and going on, after lengthy protestations of unworthiness, to indulge in the publication of certain personal details, such as name, provenance and parentage of scribe and author. When we consider how common this practice was in the Syrian churches, we are almost forced to conclude that the persons concerned on this occasion actually were too modest to name themselves, or else had some other motive for their silence.

Can we find out who the author was? It must have been someone who's knew the patriarch very well. He was especially well-informed about John's education. His knowledge of John's later career as a monk, bishop and patriarch was somewhat less thorough, since he omitted several important details during dictation, of which someone reminded him in time for him to insert them at a later stage with an apology. In one case this occurred after the biography was brought to a resounding conclusion with a verse epitaph of which the author seems rather proud. It begins:

> Honoured Father, when you occupied the tomb,
> We did not forget, as child forgets the womb.
> Strong, for us, as hope in God your memory,
> Or but little less, if that be blasphemy.

This doggerel continues for twelve more stanzas, followed by a doxology. Then we read:

> "With apologies: He also built another church in the region of Maʿdan [space left blank for the dedication]. It had originally been built by their bishop Mor Denis, but the rotten Kurds made trouble with him and destroyed the church to its foundations. So [John] went up to the sovereign Yaʿqūb Beg [1478-1490; this was the son and heir of Ḥasan the Tall] five days' journey beyond Tabriz, and he paid out a great deal of money for it and brought back to the Church

> documents and a *firmān* from the sovereign himself, and so he built it, to the shame of the unblessed Kurds, very solidly with stones and mortar. This deed brought him more fame than anything else that he did."

Strange, in that case, that the details of it had so completely slipped his memory and had to be added as an afterthought. Yet when it comes to books, our author shows no such absent-mindedness. He gives a good deal of space to a catalogue, in Syriac and Arabic, the Arabic being written in Garšūnī, that is in Syriac letters, of all the philosophical library of the patriarch, including Porphyry's *Eisagōgē*, the Logical, Physical, Metaphysical works of Aristotle and his School, and Ibn Sīna (Avicenna)'s *Liber Indicationum*, a medical treatise on diagnosis in the tradition of Hippocrates. The philosophical corpus is referred to in Syriac as 'the Cream if Wisdom', a selection made by Bar Hebraeus. It seems our author had an interest in books, and particularly in philosophy, for this is borne out by his incredibly convoluted preface, which contains such phrases as this: "he identified *apophasis* and *kataphasis* completely with one another." There follows an untranslatable mind-twister, which is apparently supposed to justify saying that there is no difference between affirming the existence of a thing and denying it!

He had a pedantic mind: at one point in a marginal note he remarks: "Let it be known that scholars are not the same as learned men, but I do not have time to explain the difference." One might say that this man is neither a scholar, nor a learned man, but a man with too much schooling. His obsession with grammar is evidenced by some extraordinary constructions in his prose. Syriac allows two words to be joined together in a genitive relationship by shortening the first: our author rejoices in the acrobatics of a pyramid of six or seven words joined together in this way.

Both his outstanding knowledge of the early education of John bar Šayallāh and his limited, obsessive interests mark our author out as a schoolmaster, and one who in all probability had charge of John at an early age. Now he himself tells us that John's first teacher was Simeon of Āmīd, a priest at the Church of the Forty Martyrs, but that Simeon died and another priest, John of Mardīn, "a man without a rival in his age," took over his education in the Scriptures and in Grammar and Reading until the age of 18 years. His other teachers were David the son of Qašofo, who taught him astronomy, and an anonymous Constantinopolitan, who taught him the motions of the astrolabe. The language of instruction will have been Arabic, though the teacher was probably a Greek; his relatives had

been taken captive when the Turks took Constantinople in 1453 and he had come to Mardīn in his quest for them. Why he came to Mardīn we can only guess; perhaps he hoped that Ḥasan the Tall would have some influence with Mehmet the Conqueror, the Ottoman sovereign, by which he might effect his relatives' release? However that may be, there he was, in Mardīn, teaching John how to gaze at the stars and measure angles in the sky. After becoming a monk, John continued his philosophical studies with a Muslim Faqīh, or canon lawyer, at a debating school called the Muẓaffariya, "below the gate of Mardīn Castle".[12]

We can rule out the Muslim and the Greek as candidates for the authorship of the Cambridge Obituary. Of the remaining teachers, David the astronomer and John of Mardīn, the latter seems the better candidate, both because of his interests (he does not digress on the subject of astronomy) and because of the special praise attached to his name. For here, perhaps, is the motive for that unusual silence at the end of the Obituary concerning the identity of the author: if you have written a piece in which you have said something very complimentary about yourself, it is prudent to cover up the fact that you wrote it. Much better if people think someone else wrote that you were a man "without a rival in his age"! John bar Šayallāh died at 51, by which time John must have been in his seventies, thinking of those who would read about him after his death. Another reason for believing that John bar Badrē wrote the Cambridge Obituary is that it was written on the blank pages at the end of a New Testament in the Church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebastē at Mardīn and John was the priest-in-charge of that church.

The Vatican Gossip confirms this conclusion. There can be no doubt that this author, whose account of John bar Šayallāh's life is preserved on folios 351b to 353b of the Vatican MS. Siriaco 166, pt. 2, had the Cambridge Obituary before his eyes, since he echoes its wording on occasion. (Both authors find a place for the splendid long word *'Hermeṣṭrismegiṣṭos'*, which neither of them seems to understand.) But the Gossip is not interested in books, nor is he very interested in the long catalogue of John s building activities. What he is interested in is money, exact quantities paid and where it came from. While the Obituarist blithely states that John gave up all his worldly possessions on entering the monastery, the

[12] H. Dolapönü, *Tarihte Mardin*, Turkish translation by Cebrail Aydin of the Arabic original *'Aṭar al-nardīn fī ta'rīḫ Mardīn*, Istanbul, 1972, 132, assuming this debating school was part of the establishment around the mosque built by Muẓaffar Qara Arslan in 1264, which was a ruin at the time Dolapönü (the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop of Mardīn, Ḥanna Dolabānī, b. 1885) wrote.

Gossip informs us that he paid for a great deal of his improvements to the fabric of that monastery out of family savings.

He also explains some puzzling aspects of John's election to the patriarchate. After the death of patriarch Ḫalaf, the people of Mardīn were divided between those who favoured Ḫalaf's nephew, ʿAzīz, otherwise known as Maphrian Basil, for the succession, and those who urged the merits of John bar Šayallāh. Certain bishops offered large sums of money to Ibrāhīm Beg, the governor of Mardīn, in the hope of acquiring the office for themselves. But they were trumped by a delegation on behalf of John bar Šayallāh, consisting of Ḫawāja ʿIsā, the chief layman of the Mardīn Christians, and John bar Badrē, a priest who had once been John's teacher. The emir was apparently influenced by the fact that John bar Šayallāh was heavily in debt to him from his building activities as bishop of Diyār Bakr. He sent John a fine garment and his official seal of approval for the office.

Now the Cambridge Obituarist affects ignorance of all this. According to him, the bishops were having some difficulty (unspecified) in choosing alaf's successor, when, suddenly, "more quickly than the time it takes to blink an eyelid," the finger of God pointed manifestly at John bar Šayallāh, and they chose him. Not only a strict rationalist would find this difficult to swallow. But since the author has just indulged in some pious eyewash about the patriarchal office, saying "that it is not for the one who wants it, nor the one who runs towards it, but it is in the hands of the merciful God", he could hardly go on to say that the election had been cleverly fixed by John bar Šyallāh, with the help of his old teacher, the priest John bar Badrē and the lay head of the Syrian Orthodox in Mardīn, Isa, in a private interview with the Muslim governor of Mardīn, Ibrāhīm Beg.[13]

The other odd thing about Obituary's account is that it does not mention ʿAzīz, the nephew of Patriarch Ḫalaf, until much later, when he states, without further clarification, that the Maphrian had been on bad terms with the patriarch ever since his consecration. It is interesting therefore to find the priest John bar

[13] Dolapönü, *Tarihte Mardin*, 68: "In the year 1485 [lege 1483?], the learned Syrian Orthodox priest Yuḥanna Bedro, the head layman Isa and the metropolitan bishop of Ṣawro, Mor Yuḥanna bar Šayallāh went to see Ibrahim Bey and asked him to help them with the election of a new patriarch. In this election, which Ibrahim Bey followed with great interest, the bishop of Ṣawro, Mor Yuḥanna, was chosen for the patriarchate. Ibrahim Bey presented the new patriarch with a valuable suit of clothes made of embroidered velvet and an order of confirmation bearing his signature and seal." (Translated from the Turkish.)

Badrē playing a prominent part in first cheating the Maphrian of a succession which he had come to regard as his due, then going down with his protégé, the new patriarch, to see the Maphrian in a village near Mardīn, and endorsing a totally insincere proposal by the patriarch to swap places with the Maphrian. The suspect silence of the Cambridge Obituary would make good sense if the author was John bar Badrē himself, the John of Mardīn mentioned in the text. His irenic account is an attempt to make his pupil s glory shine, untarnished by the grubby politics raked up by the Vatican Gossip.

One is aware of the strength of such pedagogical attachments. He taught young John throughout his adolescence. When his pupil surpassed him he was not jealous, except of the teachers who were able to supervise him at a higher level; Rabbān Yešūʿ of Qartmīn, who taught both John and ʿAzīz as monks, as we learn from the biography of ʿAzīz, in the official history of the Maphrians, is not even mentioned in the Cambridge Obituary. Instead, he sought greatness at one remove, through the talents of his pupil, and used all his influence to promote him, while doing his best at the same time to ensure that all the credit would be given to the boy. That Bar Šayallāh remained very much his teacher's boy may be surmised, both from the fact that John bar Badrē was often found at the patriarch' right hand, and from the phrases used by the Cambridge Obituarist to describe his hero: man of desire, son of many blessings, grape-cluster of joys, to cite but a few.

This investigation of the blushing, but vicariously ambitious, author of the Cambridge Obituary has already disclosed an aspect of the life of the Christian community which is frequently encountered in the affairs of John bar Šayallāh, bishop and patriarch, namely the matter of influencing the Muslim authorities, in order to obtain their permission or their support. This had been a feature of Syrian Orthodox church life since the seventh century, when Patriarch Severus bar Mašqē tried to use his influence with the Arabs to silence certain rebel bishops of the East. In the mid-eighth century the rebels found themselves nearer to the secular rulers, because the caliphate moved from Damascus to Baghdad. Thereafter, Muslim governors were shamelessly manipulated by either side; but since nothing will induce those who live in glass houses to refrain from throwing stones, the accusation of having recourse to such secular influence was frequently made in a self-righteous way by the side that happened to be losing. Wealth, of course, was a powerful lever; but, while rhetoric and justice still counted for something with the caliph, proximity in place and frequent cultivation was still

the best way to his heart. Thus ambitious bishops would strive for transference to dioceses close to the caliphate, while patriarchs preferred to appoint them to a see in furthest Iran.

John bar Šayallāh had the advantage over his rival, ʿAzīz, because he was based in Mardīn and Āmīd, near the patriarch and near the seat of government; for even when Ḥasan the Tall transferred his headquarters to Tabriz, Āmīd and Mardīn retained their status in his Mesopotamian fief. ʿAzīz, meanwhile, first as bishop of Jazīrah, then as Maphrian in what is now northern Iraq, had been busy cultivating other local chiefs and overlords who counted for nothing at Mardīn. And, as we have seen, the patriarchate was effectively in the gift of the emir of Mardīn, just as the schismatic patriarchate of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn had been 'legitimated' by a *yarligh* from the Ayyubids at Ḥisn-Kayf. Rival fiefs, rival patriarchs. Just as in the days of old the Syrian church of Persia had asserted its political independence from the Roman empire by adopting a doctrinal standpoint considered heretical in the West, and so had found a better *modus vivendi* with its Sassanid overlords, so the Christians of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, being under the effective yoke of the Ayyubids, found a reason to make a break with the patriarch at Mardīn, who was hand-in-glove with the Aqquyunlu. Shortly after the two regions were politically reunited in 1462, by the Turkmen capture of Ḥisn-Kayf, the ecclesiastical history of the Syrians begins to speak of the desire of the hierarchy to reunite the communities and of reciprocal initiatives of reconciliation, which led to the temporary healing of the rift in 1495.

Unquestionably John bar Šayallāh enjoyed extraordinary influence with the Muslim authorities and among his own people. After his episcopal consecration he became Patriarch Ḫalaf's companion, adviser and confidant. This we learn from the 'official' history; the Obituary adds that John was in charge of all the patriarch's financial affairs. As such he was indispensable on the patriarch s pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Largely as a result of John s initiative and energy the Coptic patriarch and the Mamluk authorities (summed up as the governor of Egypt and the foremost Qadis and Faqihs of the Muslims) were persuaded to countenance the sale of a Coptic church in Jerusalem to the Syrian Orthodox there. These had been without a place of prayer on account of the seizure of the Church of St. Thomas and its conversion into a mosque. As on all subsequent occasions, John was careful to obtain proper legal titles with abundant signatories.

As bishop of Ṣawro and Āmīd he devoted himself to the care of his flock and the maintenance of churches and monasteries. He restored the monasteries

near the village of Qellet and bought back their lands from the Muslims who had taken them; he also helped to build an extension to the Church of the Forty in Mardīn. At this time also he ransomed eight of the Georgian captives, brought back probably in the year 1477, when Ḥasan the Tall had invaded Georgia, and sent them home with provisions and horses and legal titles of emancipation. As patriarch he built churches in the region of Ḫarput, Seʿert, Mardīn, Āmīd, Nisibis and Mosul. One of these churches, that of the Mother of God in Ḥarzam, was a completely new foundation. Permission for these has rarely been granted in any time or place by the Muslim authorities, but John managed to persuade the Qadi of Mardīn and his Faqihs to grant it.

A good example of his building activity and the concomitant dealings with the authorities is the story of how he built a church for the tiny Syrian Orthodox community in Nisibis. There were only three or four households there and the city, which had become a small town by this time, was mainly East Syrian, in as far as it was Christian. Eastern or Persian Syrian predominance there dated from the fifth century, when Nisibis lay in Persian territory. In the early eighth century a Syrian Orthodox church was built there by the enterprising bishop, Simeon of Ḥarrān, known, after the plantations near Nisibis which funded his investments, as Simeon of the Olive-Trees. This church was actually pulled down by the East Syrians, but Simeon just built it again more solidly. The importance of this achievement was underlined by the attendance of the patriarch at the consecration of the church.

Now again, in the fifteenth century, a Syrian Orthodox patriarch set out to build a church in East Syrian Nisibis. The obvious course was to restore the church of St. Jacob, of which large parts from the fourth and eighth centuries were still standing, though deep in rubble and earth. But after three days of excavation John bar Šayallāh abandoned the task as impossible, no doubt because of the size of the fallen blocks of the ancient church. He was shown an alternative site on the outskirts of the town which had been the church of Mor Dīmeṭ, restored by Simeon of the Olives. But this he rejected as being too far out. The whole point was to re-establish a Syrian Orthodox enclave in the heart of Nestorian Nisibis.

Then someone took him to a place where they said there had once been a church dedicated to a certain Mor Baṭlo. Not a stone of it could be seen above ground, but the site seemed ideal; when they succeeded in uncovering extensive foundation walls, they brought the Muslims to see. The Qadis and the Faqihs agreed that this was evidence that a church had formerly stood on the site and

granted official permission, signed and sealed, for a new building there. If they were bribed, the author naturally does not say so. Stone-cutters had to be brought from Mardīn and the stone itself from a considerable distance. The patriarch paid local labourers to collect it. Apart from the hewn stone with which the church was to be faced, he purchased about 54,000 rocks.

Meanwhile the East Syrians, furious at being out-manoeuvred in their own stronghold, organized a distinguished delegation to the emir of Mardīn, protesting against this project on the grounds that it was unheard-of in Muslim history for the Christians to build themselves brand new churches in Muslim territory. This was not strictly true, as we have seen, but as an emotive argument, it had force. The patriarch was summoned. He came with alacrity, covering the fifty miles or so between Nisibis and Mardīn during the space of a short summer's night and appearing before the governor early on the Monday morning. He outfaced his accusers with the evidence of the former foundations of the church and the legal permission of the local representatives of Islamic law at Nisibis; and he won his case.

Returning to Nisibis, he finished the church with three vaults, two sanctuary-chambers and a Bēt Qadīšē, that is a burial chamber for holy men. Presumably this burial chamber formed one of three rooms at the east end of the church, corresponding to the three vaults, which we may assume to have run from west to east; the other two were sanctuaries. According to the Vatican Gossip, the name of the Mother of God was added to that of Mor Baṭlo in the dedication.

The Maphrian, long since reconciled with the patriarch, was in Nisibis to cooperate with this venture, thus investing it with even more symbolic value. The two of them were staying in the church they had built, before its consecration, when John had a dream in which Mor Baṭlo appeared to him and reproached him for "building a church on nothing and leaving the saint outside." In the morning, he told the Maphrian about this dream and they both set off and began to dig in the place indicated by the vision. They found a splendid sarcophagus, which had been placed in an arched niche and walled up. It was not far from the new Bēt Qadīšē, so instead of trying to move it, they built a chapel over it and connected it by a passage-way with that building. The finishing touch was to surround the church with a courtyard 400 arm-lengths square, with gardens irrigated by a canal from the river (presumably the Djaghdjagh) and a new cistern.

Then he placed a bishop in the consecrated church to live there and welcome Syrian Orthodox travellers and pilgrims. It seems an odd function for a bishop: to

keep a guest house and minister to three or four families. It is true that there had already been for a century or more four bishoprics in Ṭūr ʿAbḍīn, which used to be only one diocese, and that by the end of the fifteenth century, in the sarcastic words of Patriarch Barṣawm, "no village or monastery was so small that it did not deserve its bishop." But this extreme state of affairs was the result of irregular machinations on the part of bishops with his yes-men.

The action of John bar Šayallāh in placing a bishop in Nisibis should be seen rather as symbolic. There had been in the past a long line of bishops of Nisibis, going back to Mor Jacob the contemporary of Constantine. Because of their reverence for Jacob the Syrian Orthodox treated him as one of them, even though he lived before the East-West schism of the Syrian Christians. It seemed to them therefore that by having a Syrian Orthodox bishop at Nisibis they were reclaiming a diocese that had in the past formed an important section of their community. The justification for the high rank of the minister and caretaker of the new church lay in their emotional sense of the value of this establishment, rooted in a peculiarly Syrian Orthodox view of history.

After this, according to his biographer, John had no more trouble from the 'Nestorians' (the Syrian Orthodox, misleadingly, generally refer to the East Syrians by this name).

Nevertheless, when the Maphrian died shortly afterwards (having foretold his own death by the stars, as the Vatican Gossip tells us), John's fear that the resulting vacuum would tempt the East Syrians to reprisals in the Mosul area was strong enough to make him go down himself and re-assert the Syrian Orthodox presence there by restoring the monastery of Mor Behnam. Clearly the Syrian Orthodox in those parts were not very numerous at this time and were vulnerable, should their buildings become deserted and decay, to East Syrian incursions.

Another aspect of John's skill in making secure and consolidating the property and the relative freedom of his community is seen in his handling of the problem of the orchard near the Saffron Monastery, which was the Patriarchal see. This orchard was what is popularly known as a *waqf*: a religious benefaction made in perpetuity and inalienable. But such an act of endowment the right of ownership passes to God and the legal documents always contain the phrase: "It must neither be sold, nor given away, nor bequeathed." Now for several generations successive patriarchs had sought a means of removing the nuisance caused by the Muslims who lived in this orchard; for they used to insult the monks whenever they stepped outside their monastery. In John's time the problem

became especially acute on account of a certain supposedly reformed harlot, whom the monks found provocative, as well as offensive. Probably the orchard was considered a good place to lodge the very poor or social misfits. At least, this is part of the function of the *waqf* institution today.

The way John solved the problem was by presenting the emir of Mardīn and his legal advisers with the following ultimatum: "If this state of affairs continues, every Christian in this province will get up and go and settle elsewhere." One can imagine the effect of this pronouncement. It was no idle threat; and the stability of the Turkmen economy depended heavily on the Christian population. The Ottomans would later pass legislation making it very difficult for Christians to move to another place. The emir of Mardīn would not have been popular with Yaʿqūb Beg, who was now the sovereign of the White Sheep empire, if he had so alienated the patriarch that he removed elsewhere. Apart from anything else, it was convenient to have the central authority of the Syrian church so near to Mardīn.

John's ultimatum had its effect. The emir offered to give up the orchard in exchange for an equivalent property elsewhere. John found a suitable orchard in the Bagnē valley near Mardīn, containing a wonderful *šarwayno* (a species of cypress), and bought it for a thousand imperial dinars. The exchange (which, we may surmise, was mutually beneficial) was confirmed by respectable citizens and the sealed deeds were signed by all the Qadis in the land. Even so, John was not happy until he had pulled down the wall of the orchard and cut down the trees and grown another orchard next to it, so transforming it that the exchange could not possibly be revoked by a later emir, who, for reasons of advantage, might stick to the strict letter of the law.

There is much more in these fascinating documents. The Vatican Gossip even ends with a dark hint that John did not die a natural death, but was poisoned by a bishop. It is true that John only lived to be 51. The evil rumour was either successfully suppressed, or, more, probably, met with general incredulity. It did not enter Addai of Bēt Sʾbīrīna's history of the church. The alleged criminal is identified as Hīšōʿ of Shūro. This may be a disguised version of Yešūʿ of Ṣawro. The Syriac manuscript numbered 226 in the collection of the French National Library contains a revealing record of this man. The scribe was himself a bishop: Severus, "son of the priest-monk John". (John must have become a monk after Severus's mother had died.) He copied the book out in the monastery of Mor Ābay in Qelleth in the region of Ṣawro. After this information we read a note which may be paraphrased as follows:

> "On Sunday 26 August, AD 1518, Yešūʿ, a monk of the monastery of Mor Ābay, who had previously resided there as bishop [of Ṣawro], was consecrated as patriarch with the name of Mor Ignatius in the monastery of Mor Ḥananyo which is called the Saffron Monastery (Dayr al-Zaʿfarān)."

It is intriguing to discover that the alleged murderer ended by becoming patriarch himself, though he had to wait twenty-three years after the death of his supposed victim, Patriarch John bar Šayallāh!

We have seen how financial and economic levers were used by the Christians to manipulate their overlords; bribes were often effective, but if you wanted to gain promotion it was more useful to have great debts with the authorities, who would hope by your success to be repaid with interest, even if usury was strictly unofficial. The Christians were conscious, too, of their vital role in the economy, and could threaten to withdraw their cooperation by leaving the area. We have seen, also, how important it was for the Christians to protect their position with legal deeds and titles bearing as many and as influential signatures as possible. Nor was it possible to attain anything without personal representations to those in power, even if this meant travelling as far as Azerbaijan or Cairo.

But some weight should also be given in all this to the accomplishments of the patriarch. Syrians had always enjoyed a reputation for learning. In classical Greece and Alexandria Syrian slaves were popular as accountants. When the Arabs conquered Mesopotamia and chased away the Greeks, the Syrian scribes were the only ones who knew how to administer the province and keep the books. Within a century the Greek language had been replaced by Arabic and the administrative machine assimilated to Islam. Yet many of the scribal class continued to be Syrians. In the seventh and following centuries caliphs would hire Syrian tutors for their sons. Al Maʾmūn, in the early ninth century, set Syrian scholars to work in translating Greek works of medicine and philosophy into Arabic.

This is the tradition to which John by his education belonged. He even studied with a Muslim legal expert in a debating school in Mardīn. According to Barṣawm, education in these centres in the fifteenth century owed a great deal to three generations of learned men, each of whom was known to history as 'al- Maridīnī' the greatest being Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Sibt al-Maridīnī (1423 - *ca.* 1497), a mathematician and astronomer who was muezzin at

the Azhar mosque in Cairo. Such accomplishments would therefore have been highly prized in Mardīn. By attaining them John not only acquired certain skills of logical thought, careful wording, accountancy and legal acumen, but also an intangible prestige and authority which was bound to give his words more weight with the Muslims than that of many of his potential opponents.

Turks today and the Kurdish neighbours of the Syrian Orthodox are overawed by their education and by the antiquity of their buildings and their traditions. They would like to despise Christianity, but when confronted with it, they find they have to respect it. The Syrian Orthodox are very conscious of their religion and their buildings having this effect and they know the symbolic value of their traditional learning, however irrelevant it may be to modern conditions. This element in the matrix by which delicate balance has been kept between Muslim overlord and Christian subject should not be underestimated. We learn from Addai of Bēt S'bīrīna that Ya'qūb Beg was favourable to the Christians. His father, Ḥasan the Tall, had not been softened in his attitudes to local Christians by his marriage to a Trapezuntine princess. But if Ya'qūb Beg (1478-90) showed a generally more benign face to the Syrian Orthodox at least, it may be partly because Patriarch John bar Šayallāh (1483-93) had favourably impressed him.

Inaugural Address

MARTIN TAMCKE
(Göttingen)

Dear colleagues and friends, dear members of the postgraduate programme, dear guests!

From two perspectives is our topic so close to the scientific fashionable concerns of our time, that I will hardly refer to them in introducing our conference on "Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages" (Göttingen, June 21st until 23rd 2006). The first perspective is that of the open debate over Islam in the sphere of fundamentalism and terrorism, the second perspective is that of the counterpoint in the rather utopian dialogue ideas of the inter-religious encounter.

I would like to approach our topic from another perspective.

It is no secret that, among other things, I hope to bring to an end by the next year my monograph about the so-called "Lutheran Nestorians". The very complicated 19th century, a time when it came to such phenomena in the context of the encounter between the western colonial powers and a more and more politically oppressed world of the last Islamic empires, provides the matrix for the nowadays still vivid confrontation; yet it has something which reminds of the history of cooperation between the Oriental Christians and the Oriental Muslims during the Middle Ages.

From the European point of view this very mental consonance between the Oriental Muslims and the Oriental Christians represents an alleged lack of dynamic belief on the side of the Oriental Christians, or a failure caused by their living condition as lower-class citizens.

This is how one of the leaders of the German Mission in Iran commented upon this situation:

> "The damages that we notice among the old Churches of the East and among their members are caused on the one hand by the Muhammadan rule under which the Oriental Christians live; – on the other hand, the situation of the churches there is an obstacle for the spreading of Christianity among the Muhammadans."

The mental and cultural closeness of the two Oriental religions became a problem for the representatives of a Europeanized Christianity. The accounts of the Europeans about the local Oriental Christians testify about it. On the one hand, the Christians were in danger to become the fifth column of the West and to aim at their independence as engine of modernisation, and on the other hand they were regarded as unreliable and their church as rigid in its rites.

In a rudimentary way it has been resonating until today what was once carried out – at a relatively high level – as a dialogue between the scholars of both religions. The Christianity got to know thereby traits which had nothing to do with Christianity itself, but much with the cultural and religious development of the western countries, as it is shown in the following short talk between a Syrian and a Muslim in Iran, whereby it is still arguable whether the discussion is not mere fiction, at least in what the answer of the Muslim is concerned.

> "A Syrian Christian asked a Muhammadan: 'You cry on the day when the founder of your religion died, we don't cry on the day when Christ died. How does it come?' The Muslim gave the following answer: 'Our caliphs are dead, but your Christ is alive'."[1]

The answer of the Muslim sounds like that of a Christian catechumen who learned his lesson. The ambivalent statement of the Christian regarding the Christians' lack of tears on Good Friday seems as contestable as the lack of religiosity itself. The paper in Germany, which recorded afterwards the report of the Oriental Christian, gave an argumentative deathblow to the Muslim objects of the Mission, claiming as grounds the presence of the Syrian Christianity in Orient. "Yes, the living Lord wants to raise the Syrian Church to a new life, to give a blow through it to the Islam in Persia and to deliver the hearts from the fear of death.[2] The

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[1] HMB 1907, p. 51.

[2] HMB 1907, 50.

Oriental Christians relations with the western world have left today irremediable and even tough traces in the Oriental Christianity. And indeed, there were circles within the Oriental Christianity which placed themselves at the disposal of the Mission among Muslims, precisely because, due to the common space and due to many common cultural codes, they considered themselves mentally closer to the Muslims, just as our last example clearly shows.

> "We can work quite easily among the Muslims as well. They call us, the ones who belong to the old Syrian-Chaldean Church, 'Nassara'. They have a greater respect for our church than for the other churches. For instance, when a Muhammadan talks on his way with a Syrian and learns during their conversation that the latter had left his old church and gone over to one of the new alien churches, his attitude and words turn immediately colder towards that Christian. But when they talk with one who is still 'Nassara', they treat him with honour and speak very friendly with him. While discussing about religious matters they give him right in many respects. And then they say: 'It is a pity for you, you confess and believe in the community with God, but you say that Christ is God.'"

One should learn from such encounters that the Muslims would accept the Christianity coming from the local Christians rather than from the Missions.[3] But today we know that those were treacherous illusions. Today the Roman-Orthodox metropolitan of Lebanon simply talks about the existence of the Oriental Christians within the dominating Islamic culture. But how was the situation during the first centuries? These days we are going to approach this very situation with special contributions and to exchange information about our research.

I am very glad that you all accepted my invitation and I hope that we will incite one another with our knowledge to make progress in our field of research.

I am grateful to the colleagues and to the leading-board of the postgraduate programme for their positive attitude towards my suggestion.

Michael Marten from London and I have just brought to an end the working on the volume about the Missions in Orient during the 19th century, a volume resulting from a symposium which we organized during the International

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[3] HMB 1908, 292-294.

Congress of Orientalists. We hope that a number of significant works dealing with the East-Syrian Christians' reaction towards the Muslim conquering will come out in the next years, now that we have already produced a series of smaller works on the topic. Our subproject within the postgraduate programme constitutes a firm institutional reference point for all these works. And we are grateful for that.

Yet the great resonance became a problem in the end, and we had to act with reserve when admitting the guest audience, but we are glad that colleagues like Jakob Thekeparampil from Kottayam, India, Salah Edris from Cairo, and Theresia Hainthaler from the Jesuits College in St. Georgen, Frankfurt, found this symposium so important, that they decided to take part in it. I also welcome warmly the colleagues from Göttingen, who represent other departments and who do not belong to the postgraduate programme, and the colleagues coming from other universities, who have interest in the topic and therefore have joined us.

المعهد الألماني للأبحاث الشرقية

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