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## Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims

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JOHN OF DAMASCUS (D.C. 749) IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE the earliest Christian writer to take any doctrinal notice of Islam, thereby becoming the first in a long line of Byzantine polemical writers to rebut the religious claims of Muhammad, the Qur'an, and the Islamic way of life.<sup>1</sup> It appears, however, that Anastasios of Sinai anticipated John of Damascus by about a half century, albeit in a very hasty and schematic fashion. He clearly refers to the ideas of the Muslims about Jesus, son of Mary, in his *Hodegos*, or *Viae Dux*, a critical edition of which has recently appeared.<sup>2</sup> A consideration of the relevant passages of this work is the principal concern of the present essay.

### *Anastasios and the Arab Milieu*

What little is known of Anastasios' biography is soon told. He

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<sup>1</sup>See Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam; the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden, 1972); Adel-Théodore Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'islam: textes et auteurs (viii<sup>e</sup>-xiii<sup>e</sup>S)* (Louvain & Paris, 1969); *idem*, *Polémique byzantine contre Islam (viii<sup>e</sup>-xiii<sup>e</sup>S)* (Leiden, 1972); *idem*, "Apologétique byzantine contre Islam (viii<sup>e</sup>-xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle)," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 29 (1979) 242-300; 30 (1980) 132-74; N. M. Vapouris (ed.), *Orthodox Christians and Muslims (The Greek Orthodox Theological Review)* 31 (1986).

<sup>2</sup>Karl-Heinz Uthemann, *Anastasi Sinaitae Viae Dux* (Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca, 8; Leuven, 1981). For the most recent discussion of the *Hodegos*, with bibliography, see Anna D. Kartsonis, *Anastasis; the Making of an Image* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 40-67.

was active at the turn of the eighth century, as one learns from a line in one of his homilies, according to which twenty years had elapsed since the end of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod, i.e., Constantinople 3 (680-81).<sup>3</sup> In the *Hodegos*, he testifies to his state in life with these words, "I, Anastasios, a monk of the holy mountain, Sinai, confess . . ." <sup>4</sup> A little earlier in the same work he notifies the reader that since he is situated in a desert, he does not have access to the books of the teachers and the Fathers, with which to check his references. Accordingly, he requests the responsible reader to emend any errors he may discover.<sup>5</sup> Anastasios was nevertheless a traveller; he journeyed in Syria and Egypt on a mission to refute Monophysitism in all its forms and branches. As we shall see, among other things, he held Monophysitism, and particularly its Severan expression, to be responsible for the new errors of the Arabs, which the reader easily recognizes to be the teachings of the Qur'an. He was, therefore, in addition to being a monk, an itinerant controversialist in the Chalcedonian cause. In this respect his career, which antedates that of John of Damascus by some fifty years, bears a remarkable resemblance to the career of Theodore Abu Qurrah (d.c. 825), a monk of Mar Sabas Monastery who, a hundred years later, undertook almost the same journeys in the same cause; but this time the arguments were presented in Arabic.<sup>6</sup> All three of these Melkite scholars who lived under the rule of Islam wrote extensively in support of the doctrines of their Church, almost as if the new political reality of Islamic government required a summary re-statement of the truth claims of Christianity.

In addition to the *Hodegos*, some dozen other works are attributed to Anastasios in the manuscript tradition.<sup>7</sup> Most important among them in the context of the present discussion is a collection of

<sup>3</sup>"Sermo 3 in creationem hominis secundum imaginem Dei," PG 89.1156D.

<sup>4</sup>PG 89.188A; Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup>PG 89.160C; Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, p. 158.

<sup>6</sup>See Ignace Dick, "Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène: Theodore Abuqurra, évêque melkite de Harran," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 12 (1962) 209-23, 319-32; 13 (1963) 114-29.

<sup>7</sup>See Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), pp. 442-46. Many of the Greek works ascribed to Anastasios are available in PG, vol. 89.

*Interrogationes et Responsiones*,<sup>8</sup> a commentary on Psalm 6,<sup>9</sup> and a Good Friday sermon, which has so far been published only in an Arabic version and a German translation.<sup>10</sup> Scholars have only recently begun the systematic examination of the works of Anastasios, notably in the studies of Richard and Uthemann. Nevertheless, the work done so far, while far from comprehensive, yet allows the present-day reader to gain some impression of Anastasios' awareness of the religious ideas of the newly triumphant Arabs. Before examining these ideas, however, it is important to take notice of one more report that pertains to Anastasios' biography.

In his *Annales*, or general history of the world down to his own times, which the Melkite patriarch Eutychios of Alexandria (877-940) wrote in Arabic for the benefit of Christians living under the rule of Islam, there is a brief notice about Anastasios of Sinai. Eutychios identifies him with the general Mahan/Βαανής who commanded the Emperor Heraklios' troops during the failed attempt to save Syria/Palestine from the invading Arabs. After the defeat, says Eutychios, Mahan fled to Mount Sinai, became a monk, and took the name, Anastasios. Here is Eutychios' report:

As for Mahan, he was afraid to return to the king, Heraklios; so he could kill him. So he fled to Mount Sinai, became a monk, and took for himself the name, Anastasios. He was the author of a treatise in which he commented on the sixth of

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<sup>8</sup>PG 89.311-824. The MS tradition for this work is complicated. See Marcel Richard, "Les véritables 'Questions et Réponses' d'Anastase le sinaïte," *Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes; Bulletin* 15 (1967-1968) 39-56. A critical edition of Anastasios' original work is to appear at the hands of J. Munitiz. See Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, p. ccxiii, n. 56.

<sup>9</sup>There are two recensions of the Greek commentary on Psalm 6 in PG 89.1077-1144. There is a Syriac version preserved in Vatican Syriac MS 369, ff. 104r.-183n. See Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1922), p. 262 and n. 14. An Arabic version is preserved in one of the earliest dated Christian Arabic MSS, viz., Vatican Arabic MS 71, written in the year 885. See Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (5 vols., Citta del Vaticano, 1944-1953), 1, p. 375. On this MS, see S. H. Griffith, "Anthony David of Baghdad, Scribe and Monk of Mar Sabas," to appear.

<sup>10</sup>L. Cheikho, "A Lost Treatise of St. Anastasios of Sinai" [Arabic], *al-Machriq* 15 (1912) 274-80; *idem*, "Eine verlorene Homilie des heiligen Anastasios von Sinai," *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 65 (1912) 780-95.

David's psalms.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear from his mention of the commentary on the sixth psalm that Eutybios intends to identify Mahan with the Anastasios of Sinai whom one knows as the author of the *Hodegos*. Among modern scholars, Jean Maspero, for one, found this identification of Mahan with Anastasios of Sinai to be "une invraisemblance grossière,"<sup>12</sup> citing to the contrary Michael the Syrian's report that Βαανής was killed along with forty thousand Byzantine troops at the battle of the Yarmuk.<sup>13</sup> However, there is also a report in the *Chronography* of Theophanes (d. 818) to the effect that not only was Βαανής not killed in that battle, but that his troops proclaimed him emperor, and foreswore their allegiance to Heraklios.<sup>14</sup> There could surely be no better reason than this one for Mahan/Βαανής to have fled in fear of his life to Mount Sinai, where the Muslims seem already to have been in power. As for the improbability of a disgraced general becoming a scholar-monk, one can at least say that it is not impossible. Here, of course, is not the place to pursue this issue in detail, beyond noting that Maspero may have been too hasty in immediately rejecting the credibility of the story.<sup>15</sup>

Anastasios' commentary on Psalm 6 was obviously popular among the Arabic speaking Christians of later times, as the early date of its translation into Arabic and its special mention by Eutybios prove. The reason for this popularity is not difficult to discover. The Psalm

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<sup>11</sup>L. Cheikho, *et al.*, *Eutybii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales* (CSCO, vols. 50 & 51; Paris, 1906 & 1909), 51, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup>Jean Maspero, *Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie depuis la Mort de l'Empereur Anastase jusqu'à la Reconciliation des Églises Jacobites* (Paris, 1923), p. 337.

<sup>13</sup>See J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien; patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)* (4 vols.; Paris, 1899-1910), 2, p. 421; 4, p. 416.

<sup>14</sup>C. De Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia* (2 vols.; Lipsiae, 1883 & 1885), 1, p. 338.

<sup>15</sup>The matter is indeed confusing in the sources. Bar Hebraeus, for example, says nothing about the death of Mahan at Yarmuk, but reports that he was the general of the army of the Romans when the Muslims defeated them at Hims, killing forty thousand men. See *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum* (Paris, 1890), p. 101. Muslim Arabic sources report that Khalid ibn Walid pursued Mahan after the battle at Yarmuk, and caught up with him at Hims, where he was killed. See Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981), p. 142.

itself is a prayer in a time of distress, which ends on the hopeful note that God will at length scatter the suppliant's oppressors. Anastasios' commentary is in fact a plea to his readers to convert and to do penance, and to ask forgiveness for their sins. He cites a number of instances of successful repentance from previous biblical and ecclesiastical history. Anastasios' conviction, as expressed in this Psalm commentary, seems to have been that the invasion of the Muslim Arabs was a punishment from God on account of the sinfulness of the people, and particularly for the sin of the Emperor Heraklios' espousal of what Anastasios regarded as the shameful heresy of Monotheletism.

In his Homily 3, Anastasios explicitly tied the Arab conquest to the exile of Pope Martin I (d. 655) at the hands of the Emperor, Constans II (641-48), because of the pope's resistance both to Heraklios' *Ecthesis* and to Constans' *Typos*, both of which effectively supported Monotheletism. Anastasios said,

When Heraklios died, Martin was exiled by Heraklios' grandson, and instantly the desert dweller, Amalek, rose up to strike us, Christ's people.<sup>16</sup>

Anastasios' Good Friday homily, which comments on the successive verses of Psalm 2, is in fact a strong indictment of the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus. This theme, while it had long been a staple item in Good Friday oratory, came into a period of renewed emphasis among Christians at the dawn of the seventh century, with a crescendo of anti-Jewish polemic, due in all likelihood to the new Jewish freedom to challenge Christian beliefs and practices, which came with the successful Persian invasions of Syria/Palestine and Egypt in the early years of the century, and which was sustained when the Muslims came into power, on the very heels of the Persians.<sup>17</sup> Outward signs

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<sup>16</sup>PG 89.1156C. Amalek was the name given in the Bible to tribes living in the Negev, south to Sinai, who were constant enemies of the Israelites to the time of David. The fact that Anastasios refers to the Muslims as "Amalekites" as opposed to "Ishmaelites," the designation for Muslims most commonly used in later Greek texts, is indicative of the early stage of Christian reflection on Islam. It is also indicative of the early conversion of the Arabs of Sinai to Islam. It is not likely that the name is a garbled Arab name, as Walter Kaegi suggested in his "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest," *Church History* 38 (1969) 142-43.

<sup>17</sup>See Sidney H. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century C.E.," to appear.

of Christian beliefs such as the cross and icons became particular targets of this Jewish polemic, which in turn elicited a spirited Christian defense. The *Adversus Judaeos* homily of Leontios of Neapolis (d.c. 650), a generation ahead of Anastasios, was perhaps the first to sound this new note of attack, pointing out that all Christians bow down to the cross as to the holiest of all memorials of Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> Under Muslim rule, this issue would come to the fore again as a major item of controversy between Jews, Muslims, and Christians.<sup>19</sup>

Although it is true to say that at the time of the Muslim conquest Anastasios was principally concerned with heresies and divisions within the Church, which divisions, as we have seen, he blamed for the conquest, he did nevertheless pay some scant attention to the religious beliefs of the invaders themselves. His observations are for the most part recorded in the *Hodegos*. However, one finds chance mention of them elsewhere in his works, and particularly in the *Interrogationes et Responsiones*. There is a striking instance in Question 126, a question which, according to Marcel Richard's manuscript studies, was part of the original work which one should unhesitatingly ascribe to Anastasios of Sinai.<sup>20</sup> The Question is: "Some want to say that Satan fell on account of not bowing down to the man (i.e., to Adam)." Anastasios answers, "Such as these are the myths of the Greeks and the Arabs,"<sup>21</sup> and he goes on to argue, on the basis of a reference to Ezekiel, that Satan fell before Adam was created. However, what

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<sup>18</sup>See PG 93.1600A. On this homily, see Norman H. Baynes, "The Icons Before Iconoclasm," *Harvard Theological Review* 44 (1951) 93-106. In the manuscript tradition a *Disputatio Adversus Judaeos* is also accredited to Anastasios of Sinai, in PG 89.1203-32. Here too the symbol of the cross is discussed. Anastasios asks why the Jew will accept only a coin with the figure of the cross on it (col. 1240)? Also the question of bowing down to crosses and images is raised (cols. 1233-35). However, modern scholars seriously doubt the authenticity of this work, dating it rather to the ninth century. See Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur*, p. 443 and n. 2.

<sup>19</sup>See Sidney H. Griffith, "Theodore Abu Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985) 53-73; Robert Schick, "The Fate of the Christians in Palestine During the Byzantine/Umayyad Transition, 600-750 A.D.," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, the University of Chicago, Chicago, 1987).

<sup>20</sup>See Richard, "Les veritables 'Questions,'" pp. 41 and 48.

<sup>21</sup>PG 89.776B,C.

instantly occurs to the modern reader is the Qur'an's teaching on the subject: "When we said to the angels, 'Bow down to Adam,' they bowed down, except Iblis. He refused and he behaved arrogantly, and came to be among the unbelievers" (*al-Baqarah* (2).34). Clearly Anastasios made a correct attribution of this notion to the Arabs, i.e., the Muslims, and by Greeks he probably means no more than "gentiles," or "pagans," a well-documented sense of the word "Hellenoi."<sup>22</sup> Together the terms could be taken to mean simply "pagan Arabs," an epithet that Christian writers would later commonly use to designate Muslims.<sup>23</sup>

Admittedly, the beliefs of the Arabs were not primary concerns for Anastasios. Even in the *Interrogationes*, when he mentions non-Christians in a context in which one might expect to find him speaking of Arabs or Muslims, he mentions only "unbelievers" (ἄπιστοι). For example, Question 79 asks if an unbeliever, Jew, or Samaritan does good deeds, will he enter the kingdom of heaven?<sup>24</sup> Question 110 asks, "If our rulers are Jews, unbelievers, or heretics, is it necessary to pray for them in church, or not?"<sup>25</sup> The ruling Arabs of Anastasios' lifetime, i.e., the Muslims, may well be the unbelievers to which the questions refer, but clearly the point cannot be pressed.

### *The Hodegos and the "False Notions" of the Arabs*

In what Anastasios has to say about the beliefs of the Arabs in his major work, the *Hodegos*, he gives evidence of his knowledge of Islamic doctrines. Before citing these passages, however, it is important to mention that the book's main purpose is to refute Monophysitism. Arabs and their beliefs are mentioned here only incidentally to this principal objective, and then only as part and parcel of the argument against the Monophysites. In the judgment of Karl-Heinz Uthemann, Anastasios put together his *Hodegos* in Sinai, somewhere between the years 643 and 686/89, but probably before 681, the year of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod. Between 686 and 689 he added the

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<sup>22</sup>See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), p. 451.

<sup>23</sup>See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad, his Scripture and his Message According to the Christian Apologies in Syriac and Arabic from the First Abbasid Century," in T. Fahd (ed.), *Vie du prophète Mahomet* (Colloque de Strasbourg, 1980; Paris, 1983), pp. 99-146.

<sup>24</sup>PG 89.708.

<sup>25</sup>PG 89.764.

*scholia* that are now found scattered throughout the earlier compilation.<sup>26</sup>

The first mention of Arabs comes in the very first section of the book, in the preface in which Anastasios sets forth the reasons why it is necessary for him to undertake the enterprise before him. Having listed already ten reasons, Anastasios gives the following reason for composing his rather extensive guidebook to the faith:

Because, prior to any discussion at all, we must condemn however many false notions about us the opponent entertains, as when we set out to converse with Arabs we have first to condemn anyone who says, "Two gods," or anyone who says, "God has carnally begotten a son," or anyone who makes prostration as to God, to any creature whatever, in heaven or on earth. Likewise, in regard to the rest of the heresies, it is necessary first to condemn however many false opinions about the faith they have. For, giving heed to these things, they accept the rest more eagerly.<sup>27</sup>

The first thing to notice in this passage is that controversy (*διαλέγεσθαι*) with Arabs, and its already customary procedure, is put forward as an example of the procedure that Anastasios is proposing in his *Hodegos* as useful in the struggle with Monophysitism. Further, it is clear that what should first be rebutted, in Anastasios' view, are the false notions the opponent already harbors about one. He gives three examples of such notions, from what his reader is expected easily to recognize as false Arab notions about what Christians believe. On examination it quickly appears that these notions about Christians can be found in the Qur'an, to express Muhammad's criticism of Christian beliefs.

Already in the context of *surat an-Nahl* (16), which contains a clear rejection of the polytheism of the pagan Arabs, one finds the explicit injunction: "God said, 'Do not accept two gods. There is but a single God. So, fear me (vs. 51).'" Then, in the later *surah, al-Ma'idah* (5), precisely this language is used again to reject what Muhammad perceived to be the upshot of Christian preaching about Jesus, son of Mary. In the context of verses 109 to 114, where the Qur'an presents a fairly comprehensive sketch of the Islamic view of Jesus and his

<sup>26</sup>Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, p. ccxviii.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.* p. 9.



mission, and a threat of eternal punishment to any one of Jesus' followers who would later disbelieve (vs. 115), there is the description of a scene in which Jesus stands in judgment before God: "God said, 'O Jesus, son of Mary, did you tell people, 'Take me and my mother for two gods instead of God?' " (vs. 116).

Surely the standard Christian proclamation that Jesus is God, the son of God, and Mary his mother, is the mother of God, would have been sufficient to elicit the Qur'an's adverse judgment. One need not postulate the presence in Arabia of any fringe Christian sect to explain the critical reaction on Muhammad's part to Mary's Christian epithet, "Mother of God," an appellation particularly dear to Monophysite preachers. Anastasios was, therefore, perfectly correct to mention the proposition that there are two gods as an example of a false notion which the Arabs entertain about the Christians. Whoever among the Arabs who invaded Syria/Palestine, who had heard the Qur'an proclaimed, would certainly have thought, on the basis of *al-Ma'idah* (5).116, that Jesus' disbelieving followers taught that he and his mother were two gods. Accordingly, Anastasios reminds his reader, this is a false notion about Christians which one must condemn before engaging in conversation with Arabs.

The false Arab notion that what Christians believe involves God in the carnal generation of a son, also has its roots in the Qur'an. A constant feature of Muhammad's reaction against Christian teaching is the phrase, "They say God has taken a son; praised be he. Nay, whatever is in the heavens or on the earth is his, all are subservient to him" (*al-Baqarah* (2).116; and cf. *an-Nisa'* (4).171). Anastasios' very wording of this false Arab notion once again ties the rejection of a Christian doctrine in with the Qur'an's earlier rejection of pagan ideas, as in *al-An'am* (6).101, where the assumption that God has offspring is explicitly associated with the unacceptable notion that such a proposal would involve God with a female consort: "The Creator of heaven and earth — how does he have offspring? He did not have a female consort. He created everything." Clearly, then, in the Qur'an's view, to say that God has a son, or that Jesus Christ is God's son, involves God in a twofold impossibility: it posits Mary as God's consort; and Jesus and Mary as two gods instead of God. These are precisely the false notions about what Christians teach that Anastasios says one must clearly anathematize before arguing with Arabs.

In the Qur'an's view, as is already clear from the passages quoted above, e.g., in *al-Baqarah* (2).116, to make a prostration to Jesus, son of

Mary, as to God, would automatically involve one in the pagan worship of creatures. The Qur'an's constant admonition is: "The Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, worship him, and be constant in worshipping him. Do you know of a namesake for him?" (*Maryam* (19).65. Accordingly, Anastasios notes that before arguing with Arabs, one must anathematize whoever worships any creature in heaven or on earth. It is a false notion of the Arabs, he proposes, that Christians are guilty of such misguided worship.

After the introduction to the *Hodegos*, where he states his reasons for composing the book, Anastasios next mentions the Arabs in chapter 7, a chapter in which his main business is to accuse the man whom he considers to have been the arch-heresiarch, the Monophysite Severos of Antioch (465-538), of having rejected the holy Fathers and of having set up teachers of no authority in their place. It is interesting to note that the Arabs figure in the list of those whose masters Anastasios accuses Severos of following. He says,

Severos has been a good pupil to the masters of the Jews, the Greeks, and the Arabs; in part accepting the holy scriptures, and in part rejecting them, just as the students of the Manichees also do.<sup>28</sup>

First of all, here the Arabs have joined the standard list of infidels in Anastasios' view, i.e., Jews, pagan Greeks, and Manichees. Heretofore, Arabs have appeared in Christian texts, not as the harbingers of an unacceptable and different system of thought, but merely as a geographical/cultural group of people who had a role to play in Christian history, deserving either praise or blame according to the writer's own position on the spectrum of Christian thought and life. Secondly, Anastasios accuses the Arabs of accepting the holy scriptures in part, and in part rejecting them.

In this connection one recalls the Qur'an's statement: "Say, we believe in God, and what has been sent down to us, and in what was sent down to Abraham, to Isma'il and Isaak and Jakob and the tribes; in what was brought to Moses, and Jesus, and what was brought to the prophets from their Lord. We do not make a distinction among any one of them" (*al-Baqarah* (2).136). In the general Christian view, of course, to accept all of these scriptures, but to reject the standard Christian doctrines about Jesus, son of Mary, however various and

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<sup>28</sup>Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, p. 113.

finely tuned the formulae of any one group of Christians may have been, was to reject the teaching of the scriptures. Anastasios thus becomes the earliest Christian writer to accuse the Muslims of accepting the scriptures only in part, like the Jews before them. This was to become a standard Christian response to Muslims in the following centuries.<sup>29</sup>

The third allusion to the teachings of the Muslims in Anastasios' *Hodegos* comes in chapter ten, in which the author is engaged in recounting a debate in which he participated in Alexandria, with some Monophysites of the Theodosian and Gaianite persuasion. He speaks of the followers of Severos of Antioch, and of their unwillingness to speak of two natures in Christ, and he says,

Whenever they hear "natures," they think they are shameful and outrageous things, the members which essentially go with the bodies of men and women. Thanks to this, they flee from such an expression, as if they were pupils of the Saracens. For these people, hearing the birth of God, or the generation of God, immediately thinking of marriage, blasphemously speak of insemination and carnal union.<sup>30</sup>

From what has already been said about the Islamic reaction to the Christian teaching about Jesus and Mary, one is prepared to recognize here Anastasios' awareness of the fact that Muslims have judged this teaching in very concrete terms. In a context rejecting any association of others with God, the Qur'an says: "Exalted is the glory of our Lord. He has not taken a female consort, nor any offspring" (*al-Jinn* (72).3). And *surat al-Ihlas* (112) states very pointedly about God: "He has not generated, and he has not been generated" (vs. 3). Of course, these statements were probably directed originally against polytheistic beliefs, but it was precisely in terms of his earlier judgments of Arabian polytheism that Muhammad evaluated and criticized the doctrines of Christians.

What is even more important to notice in the present quotation from the *Hodegos* is that Anastasios expressly states that the Saracens come to the very concrete terms of their judgment in this matter when they hear people speak of the generation and birth of God. His

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<sup>29</sup>See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad."

<sup>30</sup>Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, pp. 169-70.

statement, therefore, is a testimony in support of the hypothesis that what the Qur'an has to say about Christian doctrines expresses a judgment of them, or a misunderstanding as Anastasios would have it, and is not simply a report about what certain groups of Christians believe.

Scholars have long recognized that the three passages cited here from Anastasios' *Hodegos* refer to Muslims, and to Islamic ideas about Christians.<sup>31</sup> However, Anastasios himself speaks only of "Arabs" and "Saracens." He nowhere explicitly names the prophet, Muhammad, the Qur'an, or even Islam as a distinct religious entity. What makes it virtually certain that the Arabs whose views Anastasios cites were Muslims is the fact that their distinctive religious ideas, as quoted here, are seen to be identical with what the Qur'an actually teaches, often in much the same vocabulary as in the Qur'an.

In the early period of their conquest and occupation of Syria/Palestine and Egypt, the victorious Arabs seem to have preferred not to call themselves "Muslims," but simply to use the term "the Believers" (*al-mu'minun*) to refer to themselves, following the preferred diction in the Qur'an.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, even the Muslim military men of this early period seem to have thought of Islam simply as the religion of the Arabs.<sup>33</sup> And in this connection one will recall that in the Islamic view, the distinctive feature of the Qur'an as a book of revelation is precisely the fact that it is an Arabic Qur'an (e.g., *az-Zuhruf* (43).3). Anastasios' customary use of the term "Arabs," therefore, need not imply any doubt about the Islamic identity of the people to whom he refers. Once he uses the term "Saracens," in the passage quoted above from chapter ten of the *Hodegos*, but here again he is merely using a word for Arabs that was long popular with Greek writers, although its precise origins are not yet completely

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<sup>31</sup>See, e.g., M. Richard, "Anastase le sinaïte, l'*Hodegos* et le Monothélisme," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 15 (1957) 34-37. As Richard mentions, only Maspero, *Histoire des Patriarches*, p. 338, denied that Anastasios was discussing Muslims in these passages, and his objections have now been answered.

<sup>32</sup>The terms *islam*, *muslim*, *aslama* had been used in their technical sense since the second year of the *hijrah*. See R. Bell, *Introduction to the Quran* (Edinburgh, 1953), p. 108. However, the early community preferred to call themselves *al-mu'minun*. See W. M. Watt, "The Conception of *iman* in Islamic Theology," *Der Islam* 43 (1967) 1-10; F. M. Denny, "Some Religious-Communal Terms and Concepts in the Qur'an," *Numen* 24 (1977) 26-59.

<sup>33</sup>See C. Cahen, "Note sur l'accueil des chrétiens d'orient à l'islam," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 166 (1964) 51-58.

understood.<sup>34</sup>

There are other passages in the *Hodegos* in which Anastasios rejects ideas that one knows are espoused by Muslims. For example, in a *scholion* in chapter thirteen he denies that Jesus performed any miracles as an infant, arguing that there is scriptural support for the position that he performed his first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana.<sup>35</sup> The Qur'an, however, reports two miracles in Jesus' infancy, viz., his talking in the cradle as an infant (*Maryam* (19).29; *Al 'Imran* (3).46), and his breathing life into clay birds (*Al 'Imran* (3).49), as a young child at play. There is no trace of the first miracle in Christian tradition, but the second one is found in a number of apocryphal writings.<sup>36</sup> Since Anastasios does not ascribe a belief in these miracles to the Arabs nor to anyone in particular, one cannot really argue that this *scholion* attests to his knowledge of the Qur'an.

There is one feature of the Qur'an's "Christology" that is surprisingly not mentioned at all in the *Hodegos*. This is the seeming rejection of the historical reality of the crucifixion of Jesus, in *an-Nisa'* (4).157. What makes this omission particularly surprising is that in chapter twelve of the *Hodegos*, Anastasios goes to great lengths to press home the Melkite insistence that on the cross Jesus Christ truly died in his human nature. To this end, he even provided for an image of the cross, maybe the crucifix, to be inscribed in the text of the *Hodegos*.<sup>37</sup> In connection with this feature of the book, art historians have been able to date a significant change in the iconography of the crucified Christ to the time of Anastasios, and even to the monastery of Sinai, viz., the earliest presentation of Christ dead on the cross, with his eyes closed, and crowned with a crown of thorns.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>See J. S. Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, 1979), pp. 312-13; Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, 1984), pp. 279-81.

<sup>35</sup>PG 89.229; Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, p. 238.

<sup>36</sup>See the references in G. C. Anawati, "Isa," *EP*, vol. 4, p. 82.

<sup>37</sup>See Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, pp. 202-09.

<sup>38</sup>See H. Belting and C. Belting-Ihm, "Das Kreuzbild im 'Hodegos' des Anastasios Sinaites; ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der ältesten Darstellung des toten Crucifixus," in W. N. Schumacher (ed.), *Tortulae; Studien zu altchristlichen und byzantinischen Monumenten* (Rome, 1966), pp. 30-39. See also K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, The Icons* (vol. 1, From the Sixth to the Tenth Century; Princeton, 1976), pp. 61-64, plate xxv; and now Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, pp. 40-67.

Moreover, the cross itself, and the image of Christ crucified, were later to become particularly significant occasions for controversy between Muslims and Christians.<sup>39</sup> Yet Anastasios makes no mention of Arabs in his rather extensive discussion of Christ on the cross; he makes no reference to any Islamic denial of the crucifixion.

The fact of Anastasios of Sinai's silence about any Arab or Islamic denial of the crucifixion of Christ is especially significant in the present context because the wording of the Qur'an's denial of the event is what some modern scholars have seized upon as evidence of a Christian docetist influence upon Muhammad.<sup>40</sup> The Qur'an's phrase is: "They neither killed him, nor did they crucify him, but it seemed so to them" (*an-Nisa'* (4).157). The Jews, the people to whom Jesus was sent in the Islamic view, are the subject of the first two verbs in this phrase. In context, the Qur'an is upbraiding the Jews for their treatment of the prophets, and for their boast, "We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary" (vs. 157). In no way does the verse intend to report Christian views, nor to criticize Christian doctrines. What has led some scholars to find docetic influences in it is the enigma of the Arabic phrase, "walakin shubbiha lahum," which is translated above, "but it seemed so to them." The phrase can also be interpreted, "only a likeness of that was shown to them," and it is this possibility, along with the tendency among Muslim interpreters to propose that a proxy was crucified in Jesus' place, that has led scholars to compare this notion with various Christian docetic doctrines, in an effort to discover what could have prompted Muhammad and the

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<sup>39</sup>Among the earliest records of the particular antipathy of the "Saracens" to the cross is a report which comes from the pen of another monk named Anastasios, who presumably flourished a generation earlier than the author of the *Hodegos*, and who discussed the experiences of the monks of Sinai. See F. Nau, "Le texte grec des récits du moine Anastase sur les saints pères du Sinai," *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), 82. On this Anastasios, see Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur*, p. 464. For the later Christian/Muslim controversy, see Sidney H. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims," n. 17 above, and "Theodore Abu Qurrah's Arabic Tract," n. 19 above.

<sup>40</sup>See in particular H. Grégoire, "Mahomet et le Monophysisme," in *Mélanges Charles Diehl* (vol. 1; Paris, 1930), pp. 107-19; J. Jarry, "La Sourate IV et les soi-disant origines Julianistes de l'Islam," *Annales Islamologiques* 9 (1970) 1-7. See also J. Moorhead, "The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions," *Byzantion* 51 (1981) 579-91.

Qur'an to speak in this way.<sup>41</sup> Suffice it to say that certainly by the first Abbasid century, Muslims were claiming that Jesus was not in fact crucified, and this allegation became a constant topic in Christian/Muslim controversies.<sup>42</sup>

The fact that Anastasios is silent about any Arab claim that Jesus was not crucified does not necessarily mean that Muslims in the eighth century did not already interpret the Qur'an to this effect, nor does it mean that Anastasios did not know of their unique ideas on the subject. What his silence does mean is simply that Anastasios found no use for this topic in his polemic against the Monophysites.

#### *The Hodegos, the Muslims and the Qur'an*

The foregoing survey of the passages in the *Hodegos*, and in several other works in which Anastasios of Sinai refers to Arabs, to their customs and beliefs, furnishes all that can be found in his writings that might refer to Islam. It is not much, and it is clear that in no place does Anastasios intend to concentrate on the Arabs and their religion. Rather, he refers to them only in passing, to make an appeal to something familiar to his readers, for the purpose of advancing his own arguments in defense of Orthodoxy, against Monophysites and Monothelites. It is the modern reader, looking back over the works of Anastasios, with the Muslims and the teachings of the Qur'an in mind, who notices that references to them can be seen in what Anastasios says about the Arabs — a fact that makes him perhaps the earliest Christian writer in Greek to leave behind some description of the early Islamic community. That what Anastasios said about the beliefs of the Arabs reflects Islamic teaching is verified by the identity of these beliefs with ideas found in the Qur'an. The fact that Anastasios compiled his *Hodegos* for the purpose of refuting Monophysite teachings, and not in any way for the purpose of assessing or refuting Islamic ideas, simply means that his remarks about the Arabs are only incidental to his project. He mentioned the religious ideas of the Arabs in order to argue *ad verecundiam* against Monophysites. Accordingly, he presented these Islamic ideas as facts

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<sup>41</sup>For the Islamic point of view, see the survey in Anawati, "Isa," pp. 83-84; G. Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (London, 1965), pp. 105-21; K. Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim; an Exploration* (London, 1985); R. Arnaldez, *Jesus fils de Marie, prophète de l'Islam* (Paris, 1980).

<sup>42</sup>See n. 39 above.

presumed to be well known to his readers, and requiring no further elaboration on his part.

It is important to remember that in the introduction to the *Hodegos* Anastasios presents the Arab ideas that are to be rejected as false opinions about the Christian faith which the Arabs entertain. In chapter ten he says explicitly that the Arabs put forward these ideas when they hear the statement of Christian doctrines. Given the congruence of these Arab ideas with the criticisms of Christian doctrines found in the Qur'an, it makes most sense to conclude that Anastasios is in fact reflecting the teaching of the Qur'an when he mentions what the Arabs say about Christian doctrines. And it is pertinent that he mentions these Arab ideas in a work directed against the Monophysites, because the Qur'an's criticisms of Christianity make most sense as criticisms when one recalls the likelihood that they were initially directed against the Monophysite expression of the Christian creed.<sup>43</sup> This circumstance, of course, is what makes the Arab ideas worth mentioning in Anastasios' polemic against the Monophysites.

The perception of recognizable Islamic and Qur'anic teaching in the ideas Anastasios ascribes to the Arabs means that these ideas, and probably the Qur'an in which they were expressed, were well developed and widespread among the conquering Arabs by the second half of the seventh century. Anastasios' more or less off-hand references to Arabs, therefore, become valuable bits of evidence for the historian who wants to gain insight into the world of early Islam.

It has become fashionable recently, as an experiment in historiography, to present early Islam in the profile of it that emerges from reports appearing in non-Islamic, largely Christian sources. The procedure is based on a systematic doubt of the veracity of any Islamic document to do with the early period, an example of which in any event cannot be found from earlier than the late seventh century. Consequently, the researcher, having rejected the Islamic sources as biased, reflecting a later apologetic agenda, is freed to construe the fragmentary Christian reports about Islam into whatever shape one might find appealing, depending upon one's ideological moorings,

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<sup>43</sup>Cf., e.g., Bowman, *art. cit.*, n. 10 above; Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, pp. 163-70; 288-89. For further bibliography, cf. W. Hage, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1966), pp. 48-49. The literature discusses the many traces and hints of Muhammad's encounters with Christian groups, reported in later Islamic literature.



and the documentary fragments at hand. Following this procedure, Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, for example, have postulated the existence of a hitherto unknown "Judeo-Hagarism" to account for early "Islam," which they say flourished in the early seventh century.<sup>44</sup> This Hagarism seems to have been a hybrid Judaism, consisting of Samaritan, even "Kenite" elements, which, once postulated into being, can then be credited with scriptures of its own, and even prophets. These Hagarenes, according to their discoverers, owed a heavy debt to the Jewish Christians, many of whose earlier ideas (fourth century) about Jesus and the Gospel, bear a close resemblance to ideas that are expressed in the Qur'an and that were also voiced by later Islamic scholars such as 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 1025), the famous Mu'tazilite systematician, in his criticisms of Christian doctrines.<sup>45</sup> This coincidence of ideas about Jesus, between persons whose lives are separated by some centuries and who have some vocabulary in common, should not be surprising in that they both disclaimed any divinity in association with him, and then took this premise to its logical conclusion. Nevertheless, since it seems to be axiomatic in the "Hagarene" school of thought to deny that any Muslim, beginning with Muhammad, could have expressed an original religious idea which he did not copy from someone else, Patricia Crone, following Shlomo Pines, has now suggested that there was a surviving group of Jewish Christians in eleventh-century Persia who may be said to have tutored 'Abd al-Gabbar in Jewish Christian Christology.<sup>46</sup>

The question to be addressed now is what do Anastasios of Sinai's few remarks about the beliefs of the Arabs have to say about the shape of Islam and of the Qur'an in the second half of the seventh century? It seems evident that the notions which Anastasios attributes to the Arabs in his *Hodegos*, and once in his *Interrogationes et Responsiones*, are ideas that are in fact espoused in the Qur'an. It is also evident that Anastasios did not quote directly from the Qur'an, nor did he mention it. Rather, he mentions only the beliefs of the Arabs to

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<sup>44</sup>Cf. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism, the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977). Cf. Patricia Crone's defense of the methodology employed here in the introduction to her *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge, 1980).

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980) 59-95.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 3, 17-18. The authors make no mention of the reports of Anastasios of Sinai which are under discussion in the present essay.

do with what they took certain characteristic Christian doctrinal formulae to mean. However, since these Arab beliefs are in fact espoused in the Qur'an, it does not seem to strain credulity to propose that the Arabs of Anastasios' acquaintance learned their beliefs from the preaching of the Qur'an. This supposition does not necessarily entail the assumption that these Arabs had the Qur'an easily available in writing. It necessarily means only that they heard the Qur'an recited. And the fact that Anastasios' reports are accurate Islamic ideas in some detail means that they can be cited as evidence for the presence and influence of these Qur'anic ideas in Syria/Palestine before the year 681, the *terminus ante quem* for the compilation of the first edition of Anastasios' *Hodegos*. This dating puts Anastasios' reports somewhat earlier than the earliest surviving Islamic quotation from the Qur'an, viz., the inscriptions involved with the caliph 'Abd al-Malik's (685-705) Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> The most reasonably concrete construction to put upon this evidence is that by the time when Anastasios was writing his *Hodegos*, the Qur'an was already substantially in the form in which we presently have it, with the corollary that it must also have been in existence for some time previously for Anastasios to have been able to acquire such an adequate idea of some of its teachings and to put them forward as common knowledge about what the Arabs believe about Christian doctrines. The fact that Anastasios' reports about these Arabs appear in a work to which they are at best incidental and adventitious is itself a *suasio* in favor of their accuracy.

Cook and Crone did not mention Anastasios of Sinai's references to Arab beliefs in their survey of Christian reports about early Islam. It is the present writer's contention that Anastasios' references can best be construed as evidences of recognizably Islamic ideas. Consequently, they may also be considered as evidence of the prevalence of the Qur'an in the Arab world already in the second third of the seventh century. To put any other construction on the evidence would be to put a greater strain on credulity. Into the bargain, Anastasios of Sinai becomes the earliest Christian writer in Greek to take notice of the teachings of Islam, albeit that he saw them only as the peculiar religious ideas of the Arabs.

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<sup>47</sup>See Oleg Grabar, "The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem," *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959) 33-59, reprinted in the author's *Studies in Medieval Islamic Art* (London, 1976); C. Kessler, "'Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock: a Reconsideration," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1970) 2-14.



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