MŌRĀN 'ETHŌ

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SIDNEY H. GRIFFITH

Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam

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St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI)
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By
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Although Islam was born, and became a world religion largely within the ambience of the Syriac-speaking communities of the patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, little study has in fact been focused on the significance of Syriac culture in the early formation of Islam, or on the shaping influence of the academic and literary institutions of the Syriac-speaking churches on the early efflorescence of Islamic culture, particularly in Syria and Iraq. It is almost as if the scholarly world has accepted the apologetic claims of Muslim writers in the eighth and ninth centuries that in the somewhat remote world of the Hijaz in the prophet Muḥammad's day there was only ignorance (*al-jahiliyyah*) and the worship of idols until the fateful moment when the angel Gabriel brought the first lines of the *Qur'ān* down from heaven to an ecstatic Muhammad.[1] Of course both the *Qur'ān* itself, and modern

1. See John E. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (London Oriental Series, v. 32; Oxford; New York, 1978).

Islamicists, admit the presence of Jews and Christians in the world in which Islam was born.[2] And there have been a few venturesome studies into what one writer called "the foreign vocabulary of the *Qur'ān*,"[3] along with several more quixotic proposals about the Christian or the Jewish origins of early Islam.[4] But for the most part there has been a scholarly silence in modern times about the broader religio-cultural matrix from which Muhammad and Islam emerged, and especially about that part of it which involves the Aramean heritage of the Syriac-speaking people.[5] The limitations of modern scholars may be largely responsible for this state of affairs, rather than any disinclination to study Islam from the point of view of the methods of the

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2. See, e.g. among more recent studies, the works of M. J. Kister, J. Spencer Trimingham, Irfan Shahid, Gordon Newby, where bibliographies of earlier scholarship are readily available. See too the essays collected in a special issue of *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 61 (1991) entitled *L'Arabie antique de Karib'il à Mahomet : Nouvelles données sur l'histoire des arabes grâce aux inscriptions.*

3. See A. Jeffrey, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda, 1938). See also J. Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin, 1926).

4. On the supposed Christian origins see Gunther Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad: eine Kritik am "christlichen" Abendland* (Erlangen, 1981). On the supposed Jewish and Samaritan origins see P. Crone and m. Cook, *Hagarism; the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977). On Manichaeism and early islam see Moshe Gil, "The Creed of Abū ᶜĀmir," *Israel Oriental Studies* 12 (1992), pp. 9-47.

5. A notable exception to this neglect was the work of Tor Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam et le christianisme* (Trans. J. Roche; Paris, 1955). Andrae originally wrote this study in German in 1923-1925, and published it in the journal, *Kyrkohistorisk Arsskrift*, which is not available to me. Two early works of Dom Edmund Beck, O.S.B. also are relevant: E. Beck. "Das christliche Mönchtum im Koran," *Studia Orientalia* 13 (1946), 29 pp. *idem*, "Eine christliche Parallele zu den Paradiesesjungfrauen des Korans?" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 14 (1948), pp. 398-405.

Religionsgeschichte school. Few are the Islamicists who have any skill in Syriac, let alone any sure grasp of the religious history and culture of the speakers of Aramaic. And few too are the Syriac scholars whose command of Arabic and knowledge of early Islam is adequate to the requirements of comparative study in this area. But this was not the case with the Syriac-speaking writers of the oriental churches from the eighth through the thirteenth centuries, who lived in the world of Islam. They have left behind not only accounts of its origins, but a number of fascinating works which had it as their purpose to defend the Christian faith in the face of religious challenges coming from Muslims, and to attempt to stem the tide of conversions to Islam. It is the purpose of the present communication to give a hurried overview of this literature, and then to concentrate on two little-known but intriguing works which afford the modern reader a rare glimpse into how the Syriac-speaking Christians met the challenge of Islam in the early Islamic period.

I

Aside from the occasional allusion,[6] notice of the rise and challenge of Islam does not for the most part appear in Christian texts, be they Greek, Syriac, or Arabic, much before the early years of the eighth century. By this time, of course, the Arab conquest was long over and the first surge of creative energy was having its effect in the establishment of the world of Islam. The reign of the Umayyad caliph ᶜAbd al-Malik (685-705) signifies the inception of the new order. Indeed one Syriac chronicler of later times cites the reign of this caliph as the time of the beginning of the Egyptian servitude of his people. He says of ᶜAbd al-Malik:

> He published a severe edict ordering each man to go to his own country, to his village of origin, to inscribe there in a register his name, that of his father his vineyards, olive trees, goods, children and all that he

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6. For example, Jacob of Edessa (633-708), refers to the Muslims in a letter on the genealogy of the Virgin Mary. See F.Nau, "Traduction des lettres XII et XIII de Jacques d'Édesse," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 10 (1905), pp.197-208, 258-282. Isho ᶜyaw the Great (580-659) speaks briefly of the Muslims in a letter. See H. Suermann, "Orientalische Christen und der Islam; christliche Texte aus der Zeit von 632 - 750, "*Zeitschrift für Missionswiss- enschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 67 (1983), pp. 128-131; idem, "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien (huitiéme partie). Auteurs chrétiens de langue syriaque: Une controverse de Jôhannàn de Lîtârb," *Islamochristiana* 15 (1989), pp. 169-174.

possessed. Such was the origin of the tribute of capitation and of all the evils that spread over the Christians. Until then the kings took tribute from land but not from men. Since then the children of Hagar began to impose Egyptian servitude on the sons of Aram.[7]

The dramatic building programs set underway at this time with the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus make the point dramatically. Both monuments symbolize not only the Islamic appropriation of the conquered territories, but they embody the religious challenge to Jews and Christians as well, since both buildings were literally founded on the sites of earlier religious structures and both loudly proclaimed the *shahadah* in the land.[8] As Umayyad power gave way to the brash, new Abbasid dynasty in the mid-eighth century the conditions were already well in place for the full force of what one modern writer has called *la*

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7. J.B. Chabot, *Incerti Auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum Vulgo Dictum* (part II, CSCO, vol.104; Louvain, 1933, reprint 1952), p. 154. The English translation is that of D.C. Dennett, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge, mass., 1950), pp. 45-46, as quoted in W. Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahrê*; a Study in the history of Historiography (Uppsala, 1987), p. 45.

8. See S. H. Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons: a Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times," in P. Canivet & J.-p. Rey-Coquais (eds.), *La Syrie de Byzance a l'Islam VII^e-VIII^e siècles: Actes du Colloque international Lyon-Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen Paris- Institut du Monde Arabe 11-15 septembre 1990* (Dam as, 1992), pp. 121-138.

dhimmitude [9] to be felt in the subject Christian communities. For the socially upwardly mobile elements in these communities the pressure to convert to Islam thereafter became overwhelming and by the ninth century the rush of conversions was in full spate.[10] An anonymous Syriac chronicler from Ṭūr ᶜAbdīn. who completed his history somewhere around the year 775, offers this comment on the behavior of some of his contemporaries. He says,

> The gates were opened to them to (enter) Islam. ....Without blows or tortures they slipped towards apostasy in great precipitancy; they formed groups of ten or twenty or thirty or a hundred or two hundred or three hundred without any sort of compulsion..., going down to Harran and becoming Moslems in the presence of (government) officials. A great crowd did so... from the districts of Edessa and of Harran and of Tella and of Resaina.[11]

These were the conditions which elicited a response from the Syriac writers of the early Islamic period. Historians chronicled the conquests and military occupation

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9. See Bat Ye'or (Gisèle Littman, née Orebi), *Les Chrétientés d' Orient entre jihâd et dhimmitude; VIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris, 1991). She borrows the term from the assassinated president of Lebanon, Bashir Gemayel, who was killed on 14 September 1982.

10. See Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: an Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); *idem, Islam; the view from the Edge* (New York, 1994).

11. Translation of J. B. Segal, *Edessa 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford, 1970), p. 206, from J.-B. Chabot, *Incerti Auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo Dictum* (CSCO, vol. 104; Louvain, 1952), pp. 381-385.

of the Arabs, and gave some accounts of the origins and basic tenets of Islam. Preachers, epistolographers and Bible commentators took such notice of the teachings of Islam as their own topics seemed to require. Some writers composed apocalyptic treatises that tried to make sense of the hegemony of Islam from the perspective of the traditional Christian readings of the prophecies of Daniel. And some controversialists wrote apologetic and polemical tracts in Syriac that addressed themselves to arguments about religion between Christians and Muslims.

The historians/ chroniclers were the ones who gave brief accounts of the rise of Islam and who occasionally furnished a thumb-nail portrait of Muhammad. But for the most part their narratives concentrated on recording current events as they impacted on the Christian communities. And in this connection they seldom failed to mention the disabilities and hardships inflicted on the subject populations by the Muslim masters, all the while taking note of the peculiarities of their rule. It is clear that for the most part the historians considered the coming of Islamic rule as a punishment which God allowed to fall upon his people for their sins. In no way can one find in their chronicles any evidence for the thesis sometimes advanced by modern scholars that the Syriac-speaking Christians welcomed the Arab invasion and the Islamic conquest as a liberation from the oppressive fiscal and theological policies of Byzantine rule. It is true that large segments of the population were considered to be Monophysite or Nestorian heretics by the Byzantine government. But in texts emanating from the Syrian Orthodox or Nestorian communities

themselves one finds hostility not to Byzantine rule as such, nor to the idea of the desirability of ecclesiastical communion among all the patriarchates. Rather, the concern is with the perceived heresy and malfeasance in office of the actual Byzantine rulers, both civil and ecclesiastical.[12]

Syriac writers of the early Islamic period customarily referred to the Muslims under a number of names, almost all of which have a pejorative ring to them. Perhaps the least overtly polemical one among them is the term *Ṭayyāyê*, which was in common use in Syriac since early times to designate Arab nomads, being at root the name of the Arab tribe of *aṭ-Ṭayy*. After the rise of Islam Syriac writers often used this term to mean simply 'Muslims'.[13] More frequently, however, they chose the word *ḥanpê* to refer to Muslims. This was, of course, the classical Syriac word for 'pagan'. And Nonnus of Nisibis (fl.856-862), for one, was fond of calling them "the new

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12. See C. Cahen, "Fiscalité, propriété, antagonismes sociaux en Haute-Mesopotamie au temps des premiers ᶜAbbasides d'après Denys de Tell-Mahré," Arabica 1 (1954), pp. 136-152; J. B. Segal, "Syriac Chronicles as Source Material for the History of Islamic Peoples," in B.Lewis & P. M. Holt (eds.), *Historians of the Middle East* (London, 1962), pp. 246-258; M. Benedicte Landron, "Les relations originelles entre Chrétiens de l'est (Nestoriens) et Musulmans," *Parole de l'Orient* 10 (1981-1982), pp. 191-222; J.Moorhead, "The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions," Byzantion 51 (1981), pp. 579-591; S.P.Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam," in G.H.A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale, Ill., 1982), pp. 87-97; S. P. Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century; Book XV of John bar Penkayê's Ris Melle," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987), pp.51-75.

13. See J.S. Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, 1979), p. 312.

ḥanpê (ḥadtê ḥanpê).[14] But in the Islamic context there was also an element of *double entendre* about the word *ḥanpâ* (pl, ḥanpê). It is the Syriac cognate noun for the Arabic word *ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafā'*), which in the *Qur'ān* is used on a par with the adjective *muslim*, to mean a devotee of the one God of the patriarch Abraham (*Al ᶜImrān,* III: 67). So it is not improbable that Syriac writers used this word to designate Muslims with a full appreciation of the somewhat contradictory senses in which it might be taken.[15]

The name of Abraham's concubine, Hagar, also appears involved in a number of Syriac terms used to designate Muslims, as well as a Syriac calque on the Arabic term *muhājirûn*, which means those earlier followers of Muḥammad, along with their descendants, who accompanied him on his flight (*hijrah*) from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D. As the Syriac writers used these terms their etymological senses seem to have become entwined, so here we may consider them together. The most common such Syriac word for Muslims which involves these etymologies is *mhaggrāyê*.

That the term *mhaggrāyê* is somehow connected with the name Hagar in Syriac usage seems clear from

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14. A. Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe, traité apologétique, étude, texte et traduction* (Bibliothèque du Muséon, vol. 21; Louvain, 1948), p. 12*. See also S.H. Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis," ARAM 3 (1991), pp. 115-138.

15. Moshe Gil has recently suggested that the term may even have been used specifically to mean 'Manichee' in immediately pre-Islamic times. See Gil, "The Creed of Abū ᶜĀmir," pp. 9-13, 15.

a sentence which appears in what is left of a colophon that once stood on the last leaf of a Syriac new Testament copied in the year 682 A.D. It reads: "This book of the New Testament was completed in the year 993 of the Greeks, which is the year 63 according to the *Mhaggrāyê*, the sons of Ishmael, the son of Hagar, the son of Abraham."[16] The Greek term *hoi hagarenoi*, built of Hagar's name as far as Christian writers were concerned, had long been used to mean simply 'Arabs', and after the Islamic conquest it was often used to designate 'Muslims'. Syriac speakers had a similar usage for their term *Hagrāyê*. The religious message inherent in these terms for readers of the Old and New Testaments was simply that the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Hagar, are excluded from God's promise to Abraham because the sons of Isaac were the bearers of the promise, as one may read in such passages as *Genesis* 21:9-21 and *Galatians* 4:21-31. As applied to Muslims, therefore, these terms in Greek and Syriac which are understood in reference to the name of Abraham's concubine, Hagar, have not only a demeaning but a polemical intent. They say, in effect, that Islam is not the true religion, and that in the Christian view Muslims, are rightful heirs not of promise but of bondage.[17]

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16. W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (3 vols.; London, 1870-1872), vol. I, p. 92.

17. See the fuller discussion in 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, *Vie du prophète Mahomet (Colloque de Strasbourg, 1980)* (Paris, 1983), pp. 99-146, esp. p. 122-124. While the term Hagarenoi/Agarenoi may have once had a simple geographic reference as the name of an Arab tribe, as stated in

This, of course, following St. Paul's lead, is theologically to assimilate the Muslims to the Jews, a move which the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (727-823) made explicitly when in a letter to his friend Sergius, a future Metropolitan of Elam (794/95), he referred to the Muslims as "the new Jews among us."[18]

The Syriac words *mhaggrāyê* and *mahgrâ*, along with the finite verbal form *ahgar*, meaning to be or to become a Muslim, are very common in later Syriac writers.[19] Is one to think that they mean something on the order of to be or to become a Hagarene? This has been the assumption of the traditional lexicographers, who have consistently derived the terms from Hagar's name.[20] Some recent scholars, however, have gone in search of another etymology, and they have hit upon the Arabic term *muhājirûn*, as a plausible calque for the seemingly cognate Syriac words.

J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic times,* p. 313, it is clear that by the fourth Christians century, homology with the Biblical name Hagar had long since invested the term with a religious significance for Christians that was only enhanced by the appearance of Islam. See Irfan Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs* (Washington, D.C., 1984), p. 104-106.

18. Thomas R. Hurst, "Letter 40 of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (727-823): an Edition and Translation," (MA Thesis; The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 1981), p. 48. The letter is published in Hanna Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu de Timothée I (728-823) à Serge* (Rome, 1983). See also S. H. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Nineth Century," *Jewish History* 3 (1988), pp.65-94.

19. See, e.g., P. Bedjan (ed.), *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum,* Paris, 1890, p. 115 *et passim*.

20. See, e.g., J.P. Smith (ed.), *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, Oxford, 1903, pp. 99-100.

The argument goes that Syriac-speaking peoples would have heard some first generation Muslim troops occupying their homeland referring to themselves by the Arabic name *muhājirûn*, so the Syriac speakers simply adopted the name into their own language to designate all Muslims.[21] As a matter of fact there were settlements of converted Muslim beduin in the heart of the Syriac-speaking lands in the time of Umar I, near al-Madā' in and al-Kufa, who were called *muhājirûn* in some Arabic sources.[22] However, there is a controversy over the meaning of the word in this context. Fred McGraw Donner has proposed that in such contexts the Arabic word *muhājirûn* means simply 'settled nomads'.[23] But in a review of Donner's work, Ella Landau-Tasseron has strenuously disputed the idea that the Arabic terms *hijrah / muhājirûn* have anything strictly to do with the settlement of nomads. Rather, she argues that in the traditions "the terms do not seem to mean settling as such vs. nomadism, but rather to reflect the superiority of the status of the *muhājirûn* to that of the others, because the *muhājir* (whether or not he settled in Medina) was more closely linked to the state."[24] In other words,

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21 See, e.g., P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism, the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 8-9, 160-161. A similar suggestion has been made for the derivation of the Greek Word 'Magaritai', which is also used to designate Muslims. See H. and Renée Kahane, " Die Magariten, in *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 76 (1960), pp. 185-204.

22. See F. McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981), p. 227.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 79-80.

24. Ella Landau- Tasseron, Review of F.McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests, in Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985), pp. 501-502.

al-muhājir was an honorific title among Muslims, the frequent use of which must once have even gotten out of hand, since, as Landau - Tasseron reminds us, there is the prophetic tradition preserved by Abu ᶜUbayd which says, "There is no *hijra* after the conquest (of Mecca)."[25] But the fact remains that in Iraq there were early Muslims who were called *muhājirûn*.

If the Syriac verbal forms *ahgar, mhaggrāyâ/ mahgrâ* are to be explained at all by reference to the Arabic words *hajara, hijrah, muhājir,* and not only in reference to the Biblical name Hagar, perhaps one should think of the *Hijrah* itself, and not simply the honorific title *al-muhājir*. One might speculate that *ahgar* in Syriac means 'to become a Muslim' because Syriac-speaking people understood the cognate Arabic words in their Islamic sense, having to do first of all with Muḥammad's *Hijrah*, and secondarily with someone's abandonment of his own ancestral tribe or family, and their religion, to join Muḥammad's company. Furthermore, it will not have escaped the notice of Syriac-speaking people that Muslims numbered their lunar years by counting from the year in which Muḥammad undertook his *Hijrah* from Mecca to Medina. The so far earliest known appearance of the word *mhaggrāyê* is in the colophon to the Syriac New Testament quoted above, where the author is referring to the Hijri date when the book was copied, "the year 63 according to *Mhaggrāyê*."[26] If the term truly was

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25. Landau-Tasseron, p. 502.

26. Wright, *Catalogue*, vol. I, p. 92.

not used in pre-Islamic Syriac texts, together with such expressions as *bnay Hagar*, or *Hagrāyê*, perhaps *mhaggrāyâ* did owe its currency in Islamic times to the *double entendre* the word allows the Syriac speaker to hear. On the one hand it surely summons up the memory of Hagar, with all the attendant theological judgment which the use of her name implies for Christians. On the other hand, the obvious linguistic parallel between *mhaggrāyâ* and *muhājir* invites one to wonder if the Syriac word could not also catch the Islamic sense of one who has joined Muḥammad's *Hijrah*, or at least one who counts off the years by reference to that event.

Finally, one must mention among the names which Syriac writers used for the Muslims the Biblical phrase 'sons of Ishmael", or "Ishmaelites". Theologically this appelation has the same sense in Syriac texts as the expression "sons of Hagar", or "Hagarenes", and it too had long been used by both Greek and Syriac writers to refer to Arab nomads before the rise of Islam. There is some speculation among modern scholars that just prior to the rise of Islam some Arab groups had adopted a non-Jewish, non-Christian form of monotheism, and called themselves 'Ishmaelites'. But this suggestion has not yet received general scholarly support.[27]

Perhaps the earliest Syriac writers to take account of the Islamic hegemony in religious language were

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27. See, .g., I. Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs* (Washington, 1984), pp. 123-141; *idem*, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, 1984), pp. 277-283.

those who sought to make sense of the conquest and occupation of the Arabs in terms of the prophecies of the book of Daniel. They wrote in the apocalyptic vein one would expect of anyone who took his cue from Daniel. The most well-known such work is the *Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius*, which was first composed in Syriac, and which was subsequently translated into Greek and Latin, and a number of other European languages. According to its most recent editor, G.J. Reinink, the text was first composed during the reign of the caliph ᶜAbd al-Malik, around the years 691/692. On the basis of his close analysis of the text, Reinink further proposes that the work was composed in a Syrian Jacobite milieu, in the border area between Byzantium and Persia around the city of Sinjār, probably in reaction to certain acute, political and social developments in the area at that time. The author of this apocalypse is now completely unknown, but over the course of time the work has come to be attributed to a certain Methodius of Patara (a town in Lycia, in Asia Minor), who is said to have been both a bishop and a martyr. In fact, the Syrian author relies heavily on earlier works in Syriac such as the *Cave of Treasures,* the Alexander legend, and the Julian romance. His thesis is that in due course, after this time of troubles, God will set the world's affairs aright and at the end of time the emperor of the Romans will restore the Christian religion, and its symbol, the cross, in Jerusalem, and he will hand the converted world over to Christ at his second coming. To explain how this event will come about the author weaves a somewhat complicated scenario which invokes the apocalyptic vision of history set forth in the book of

Daniel, involving the fate of the four kingdoms of the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans, adjusted now to take account of the rule of the Arabs.[28]

Other Syriac writers also used the apocalyptic option to account for the rule of the Arabs over the Christians and to project what they foresaw would be the outcome of it all. While they all agreed that the sinfulness of the community, and particularly doctrinal infidelity, was the root cause of their troubles, not all writers were as optimistic of the eventual outcome as was the author of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. A case in point is another apocalypse from the time of ᶜAbd al-Malik called the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*. The author of this work seems much more pessimistic, as if he thought that the scourge of Arab rule was a permanent punishment inflicted upon the Christians for their sins.[29]

The apocalyptic genre persisted in Syriac, and in later times was even combined with other types of apologetical/polemical writing, as in the instance of the Syriac account of the renegade monk Sargis Baḥîrâ, a curious text which we will consider in some detail

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28. See now G. J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius* (CSCO, vols. 540 & 541; Louvain, 1993). This publication includes a full bibliography of the numerous studies devoted to this text prior to 1993.

29. See H. J. W. Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: a Syriac Apocalypse from the Early Islamic Period," in A.Cameron & L. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I; Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, I; Princeton, 1992), pp. 189-213.

below.[30] In the meantime it is worth noting that in addition to the apocalyptic reaction to the challenge of Islam, which found its roots in the patristic traditions of the exegesis of the biblical book of Daniel, such as had been in vogue in the Syriac-speaking world at least since the time of St. Ephraem,[31] the pressure of Islam also forced Christian writers to systematize and to present in a more concise and useable form their traditional exegesis of the scriptures more generally. A notable case in point is a remarkable work of the Nestorian scholar of the late eighth century, Theodore bar Kônî (fl. c. 792). He wrote a summary presentation of Nestorian doctrine in the form of an extended commentary on the whole Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament. He called it simply *Scholion* because it is in the form of *scholia*, or commentaries, on what are taken to be difficult passages in the several biblical books. In fact it also includes numerous definitions of philosophical terms which are important for the proper understanding of church doctrines and creedal statements. There are eleven chapters in the book, the first nine of them follow the order of the biblical books, presenting doctrine in the catechetical style of questions posed by a student and answered by a master. The same literary style appears in chapter 10, which is a Christian respo-

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30 See Richard Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898), pp. 189-242; 14 (1899), pp. 203-268; 15 (1900), pp. 56-102; 17 (1903), pp.125-166.

31. See S.H. Griffith, "Ephraem the Syrian's Hymns 'Against Julian,' Meditations on History and Imperial Power", *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987), pp. 238-266.

nse to objections to Christian doctrines and practices customarily posed by Muslims. Chapter 11 is an appendix to the *Scholion*, being a list of heresies and heresiarchs, along with brief statements of their teachings.[32] It is chapter 10 which is of special interest in the present context. In the preface Bar Kônî states the purpose of the chapter, and in a single sentence he rather pithily states the pastoral problem the Christians faced in the Islamic milieu of his day. He says he is writing "against those who while professing to accept the Old Testament, and acknowledging the coming of Christ our Lord, are far removed from both of them, and they demand from us an apology for our faith, not from all of the scriptures, but from those which they acknow- ledge."[33]

One notes in this sentence Theodere Bar Kônî's statement about the Muslims, whom he calls *ḥanpê,* that "they demand from us an apology (*mappaqbrûḥâ*) for our faith." And this is precisely what he supplies in chapter 10 of the *Scholion*, a reasoned reply to the challenge of Islam, in the question and answer format of a stylized dialogue between a master and his disciple. The style fits well the esentially controversial character

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32. Text: A. Scher, *Theodorus bar Kônî Liber Scholiorum* (CSCO, vols. 55 & 69; Paris, 1910 & 1912). Versions: R. Hespel & R. Draguet, *Théodore Bar Koni, Livre des Scolies* (2 vols., CSCO vols. 431 & 432; Louvain, 1981 & 1982). For the *Scholion* in another text tradition see R. Hespel, *Théodore Bar Koni, Livre des Scolies* (CSCO, vols. 447 & 448; Louvain, 1983). See also S. H. Griffith, "Theodore bar Kônî's *Scholion*: a Nestorian *Summa Contra Gentiles* from the First Abbasid Century," in N.Garsoïan et al. (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington, 1982), pp. 53-72.

33. Scher, *Liber Scholiorum*, CSCO, vol. 69, p. 231.

of the theological enterprise in the world of Islam, in which the profile of the Christian self-definition necessarily follows the outline of the questions posed by Muslims. The topics discussed in the dialogue are: the Scriptures and Christ, Baptism, the Eucharistic mystery, the veneration of the Cross, sacramental practice, the Son of God, and, of course, interwoven with all of them, the all-embracing doctrine of the Trinity.[34] These same issues, *mutatis mutandis*, are the ones which appear in the topical outlines of almost all of the tracts of Christian theology written under the challenge of Islam. what is striking about the list of them is the obvious intermingling of questions of faith and practice in such a way that it is clear that the shape of theology itself is determined in this milieu by the apologetical imperative to justify religious beliefs in virtue of the public practices they entail. This became the agenda of almost all the theological treatises written by Syriac-speaking Christians from the eighth century onward, and especially of the "dispute texts", that is to say, texts written with the primary purpose of engaging in apologetics/polemics with Muslims.[35]

The earliest dispute text may well be the report from the early eighth century which purports to be an

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34. See the discussion in S. H. Griffith, " Chapter Ten of the *Scholion* : Theodore Bar Kônî's Apology for Christianity," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47 (1981), pp. 158-188.

35. For a survey of these texts see S.H. Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: from Patriarch John (d.648) to Bar Hebraeus (d.1286)," in F. Niewohner (ed.), *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter* (Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien, 4; Wiesbaden, 1992), pp. 251-273.

account of the interrogation of Patriarch John III (631-648) of Antioch by the Muslim emir ᶜUmayr ibn Saᶜd al-Anṣarī on Sunday, 9 May 644.[36] But the most well-known such text is undoubtedly the one which contains patriarch Timothy I's (780-823) account of the replies he says he gave to the questions the caliph al-Mahdi (775-785) put to him on the occasion of two consecutive audiences the patriarch had with the caliph. The questions all had to do with the standard topics of conversation between Muslims and Christians on religious matters. The caliph raises the standard Islamic objections to Christian doctrines and practices, and the patriarch provides suitably apologetic replies. In its literary form, the account of this dialogue enjoyed a considerable popularity in the Christian community; it circulated in its original Syriac in a fuller and in an abbreviated form, and it was soon translated into Arabic, in which language the account of the dialogue has enjoyed a long popularity.[37] Literarily the dialogue is in the form of a

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36. See F. Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens," *Journal Asiatique* 11th series 5 (1915), pp. 225-279; Kh. Samir, "Qui est l'interlocuteur musulman du patriarche syrien Jean III (631-648)?" in H.J.W. Drijvers *et al.* (eds.), *IV Symposium Syriacum—1984* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 229; Rome, 1987), pp. 387-400; G. J. Reinink, "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993), pp.164-187.

37. A. Mingana, *Woodbrook Studies; Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshuni, Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus* (vol.II; Cambridge, 1928), pp. 1-162. For a general study of Timothy and this dialogue, along with an edition, translation, and commentary on the Arabic translation, see Hans Putnam, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I (780-823)* (Beyrouth, 1975). See also A. Van Roey, "Une apologie syriaque attribuée à Elie de Nisibe," *Le Muséon* 59 (1946), pp. 381-397.

letter from Timothy to an unnamed correspondent.[38] And while it undoubtedly does emanate from an occasion when the caliph really did query the patriarch about the tenets and practices of the Christian faith, it is clear that the report of the dialogue had a literary life of its own. it is a dialogue only in a very stylized form; the writer relegates the caliph to the role of posing concise leading questions in the style of a disciple, while the patriarch answers them with a master's discursive reply. In other words, the literary genre of the dialogue has a life and a purpose of its own, independent of the report of Timothy's moment in al-Mahdi's *majlis*. The dialogue within the compass of a letter-treatise is an apologetical catechism for the use of Christians living in the world of Islam.

The mention of the letter-treatise reminds one that this was in fact Patriarch Timothy's preferred literary genre. He wrote many letters on theological and even philosophical themes. While they have received some modern scholarly attention, few have recognized how much Islam and the intellectual pre-occupations of Muslims affected the patriarch's thought and gave shape to his presentation of traditional Christian teaching.[39]

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38. The letter-treatise was Timothy's preferred literary form. See O. Braun, *Timothei Patriarchea I Epistulae* (CSCO, vols. 74 & 75; Paris, 1914); R. Bidawid, *Les letters du patriarche nestorien Timothée I* (Studi e Testi, 187; Cittâ del Vaticano, 1956); Mar Thoma Darmo, *Letters of Patriarch Timothy I (778-820 A.D.)* (Kerala, 1982). The dialogue with al-Mahdi is not published in these collections, although it is generally reckoned as letter no. 59.

39. See now Thomas R. Hurst, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I (727-823): a Study in Christian-Muslim controversy," (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America; Washington, D.C., 1986).

A typical Christian thinker who wrote in Syriac and whose apologetical method was very much on the order of that of the contemporary Muslim *mutakallimûn* was Nonnus of Nisibis (d.c.870). He was a bilingual writer, with works in both Syriac and Arabic to his credit. He wrote in the service of the Syrian Orthodox community, whose characteristic teachings he energetically defended not only against Muslims, but against Melkites and Nestorians as well. The work in which he addressed himself to the intellectual challenge of Islam is a Syriac treatise that its modern editor calls simply, "Le traité apologétique."[40] On internal, literary critical grounds one must date the composition to a point between 850 and 870. It is an apologetical essay on the themes of monotheism, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the doctrine of the Incarnation. What strikes the reader almost immediately is the fact that while Nonnus writes in Syriac, and therefore for Christian eyes alone, he expresses his thinking very much in the idiom of the Muslim *mutakallimûn* of his day. His work clearly shows how by the second half of the ninth century Christian theology in the world of Islam, even in Syriac, had become thoroughly acculturated to the intellectual milieu of the Muslim.[41]

By far the longest and the fullest text in Syriac to do with disputation with Muslims is the one written by

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40. See A. Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe; traité apologétique* (Bibliothèque du Muséon, 21; Louvain, 1948).

41. See S. H. Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis," *ARAM* 3 (1991), pp. 115-138.

Dionysius bar ṣalībī (d.1171), the scholarly Syrian Orthodox bishop of Amida who was one of the bright lights in the world of late Syriac letters. Dionysius included a long tract "Against the *Ṭayyāyê*", as we may call it, in what appears to have been a comprehensive treatise *Adversus Haereses*. It is composed of thirty chapters, included in three major sections of the work. The three major sections may in fact have originally been separate works, now put together to compose a single tract. In the first section Dionysius gives an account of the rise, the spread, and the divisions of the Muslims, together with an account of the objections they customarily pose for Christians, and the appropriate answers one might give them. The second section consists of more detailed replies to the challenges Muslims customarily voiced against Christianity, along with a Christian evaluation of Islamic teaching. The third section contains quotations from the *Qur'ān* in Syriac translation, together with comments and refutations from Bar Ṣalībī. What makes Dionysius bar Ṣalībī's tract "Against the Ṭayyāyê" distinctive, apart from its length and comprehensiveness, is the amount of information about Muslims it contains, about their history, about the Qur'ān, and about the various schools of Islamic thought. This feature of the work makes it unique not only among Syriac dispute texts, but among Christian works on Islam in general

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42. See S. H. Griffith, "Dionysius bar Ṣalībī on the Muslims," in Drijvers *et al., IV Symposium Syriacum—1984,* pp. 353-365. Prof. Joseph P. Amar of the University of Notre Dame is currently working on a critical edition and English translation of this important text.

from the medieval period.[42]

Bar Ṣalībī's selection of quotations from the *Qur'ān* in Syriac translation provided the opportunity earlier in this century for Alphonse Mingana to advance a theory about an early Syriac translation of the *Qur'ān*. Mingana reasoned that since there are numerous variants from the standard Arabic text in Bar Ṣalībī's version, he must not himself have made the translation from a text of his own day because since the tenth century the standard recension of the *Qur'ān* was the one in circulation among Muslims. Therefore, he proposed that Bar Ṣalībī included an already existing Syriac translation in the third section of his work "Against the *Ṭayyāyê*," and that this earlier translation must have come from prior to the tenth century, and perhaps from as early as the time of the caliph ᶜAbd al-Malik (785-805), when there had been a concerted campaign under the direction of the caliph's despised minister in Iraq, Ḥajjāj (d.714), to do away with the variant recensions of the *Qur'ān*.[43] Here is not the place to discuss Mingana's proposal in any detail. Suffice it to say that while it is not impossible that Bar Salibi found a pre-existing Syriac translation of the *Qur'ān* to hand, and that it dated from Umayyad times, it is not at all probable that this was the case. For one thing, nothing we have in Syriac from the turn of the seventh and the eighth centuries suggests such a level of

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43. See A. Mingana, " An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kur'ān Exhibiting New Verses and Variants," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9 (1925), pp. 188-235.

knowledge of Islam as the translation would require at such an early date in the Syriac-speaking community. It would not be for at least two more decades, as we shall see below, that we find Syriac writers referring knowledgeably to the *Qur'ān* at all, and then in a rudimentary and somewhat confused way. Furthermore, the quotations from the Qur'ān which one finds in the works of Christian writers in Syriac and Arabic from the eighth and ninth centuries onward are seldom exact. It is often as if they have been drawn from memory, and sometimes as if they have been intermingled with phrases from the *ḥadīth*. And when they do contain known variants, the more likely explanation is that the Christian writer has heard them that way on the tongues of Muslims than that he had access to early recensions of the text. Finally, Bar Ṣalībī includes in his work only translations of selected, albeit numerous verses. The most reasonable provisional hypothesis would seem to be that he made the translations to suit his own apologetical/polemical purposes, and that the variants are to be explained as distortions rather than as evidence of "an ancient Syriac translation." But the fact of the matter is also that a study of the *Qur'ān* as it appears in texts written by Christians in the early Islamic period is a scholarly *desideratum*, and one that the present writer has had in hand for a long time now.

II

There are two Syriac texts from the early Islamic period which it will be useful to review more fully in the present context, the one because it is unpublished, and so there is no other access to it for most interested readers, and the other because one can to this day find the ideas it expresses current in Syriac-speaking Christian communities.

A - The Monk of Bēt Ḥāle and an Arab Notable -

Scholars have long known of an account of a "Disputation against the Arabs" featuring a monk named Abraham of the monastery of Bēt Ḥālê answering the questions and objections of a Muslim Arab about Christian doctrines and practices.[44] Soon a scientific edition, translation and commentary on the text will appear under the direction of Prof. Han J.W. Drijvers of Groningen University, the Netherlands.[45]

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44. See the notice of ᶜAbdîshôᶜ bar Brîkâ in J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (vol.III, pt. 1; Rome, 1735), p. 205. Diyarbekir Syriac MS 95, a MS of the early 18th century containing a copy of the 'disputation' is described in A. Scher, "Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés à l'archevêche chaldéen de Diarbekir," *Journal Asiatique* 10th series 10 (1907), pp. 395-398. The "Disputation" is no. 35 of 43 entries, p. 398.

45. See P. Jager, "Intended Edition of a Disputation between a Monk of the Monastery of Bet Hale and One of the Tayoye, " in Drijvers, *IV Symposium Syriacum — 1984*, pp. 401-402. Through the kindness of Prof. Drijvers I have been able to read a copy of the text of the "Disputation" from Diyarbekir MS 95.

There are two uncertainties about the encounter the text reports, assuming the authenticity and the integrity of the text in the rather late manuscript copy of it that is available: the location of Bēt Ḥālê, and the date of the encounter. The present writer is inclined to the view that the most likely location is the site known as Dayr Mār ᶜAbdâ near Kufa and Ḥira in Iraq.[46] For in the preface, the monk says that his Muslim dialogue partner was an Arab notable in the entourage of the emir Maslama. One thinks immediately of Maslama ibn ᶜAbd al-Malik, who was governor for a brief time in Iraq in the early 720's, a circumstance that suggests both a place and a date for the encounter, both of which are plausible.[47]

The circumstances of the dialogue that the author mentions in the preface are instructive. The Muslim notable was in the monastery for ten days because of sickness. He was a man interested in religion, "learned in our scriptures as well as in their *Qur'ān*," the author says. At first he spoke with the monks only through an interpreter, as was proper because of his high position in government. And the monk reports that for his part, in discussions about religion with such people, his own custom was to prefer silence to forthrightness. But in this discussion, honesty and love for the truth were to prevail, the author says, and the dialogue went forward without the services of the interpreter. One supposes

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46. See J.M. Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne* (vol.III; Beyrouth, 1968), p. 223.

47. See H. Lammens, "Maslama ibn ᶜAbdalmalik," IE[1], vol. III, pp. 447-448.

the conversation was in Arabic, although the account of it is in Syriac.

The text is Christian apologetics pure and simple. In the preface the author says that he is responding to the request of a certain Father Jacob for an account of:

> our investigation into the apostolic faith at the instance of a son of Ishmaᶜel. And since it seems to me it would be profitable to you to bring it to the attention of your brethren, and because I know it will be useful to you, I am going to set it down in 'Question' and 'Answer' format.[48]

The Arab notable then poses the questions, and the monk answers with long explanations of Christian beliefs and practices. At the end, the Arab says, "I testify that were it not for the fear of the government and of shame before men, many would become Christians."[49]

The questioning begins when "the Arab", as the text calls the Muslim interlocutor, who is said to be knowledgeable in both the Bible and the *Qur'ān*, complains that although the monks are very astute in prayer, he says "your creed does not allow your prayer to be acceptable."[50] The monk replies to this challenge by inviting the Muslim to pose whatever questions he wants,

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48. All the quotations from the preface are from Diyarbekir MS 95, private typescript, pp. 1-2.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

and he proposes to give an answer "either from the scriptures, or from the speculation of reason."[51] The Muslim then avers that Islam is the best religion because, as he says,

> We are careful with the commandments of Muhammad, and with the sacrifices of Abraham ..... We do not ascribe a son to God, who is visible and passible like us. And there are other things: we do not worship the cross, nor the bones of martyrs, nor images like you [do]. ...But here is the sign that God loves us and is pleased with our religion (*tawdîtan*): He has given us authority over all religious and all peoples; they are slaves subject to us.[52]

With this statement the Muslim sets the agenda for the whole dialogue. But before he gets into the discussion of the religious issues as such, the monk reminds the Muslim that when one puts the rule of Islam in the perspective of world history, "You Ishmaelites are holding the smallest portion of the earth. All of creation is not subject to your authority."[53]

The first question has to do with Abraham. The Muslim wants to know, "why you do not acknowledge Abraham and his commandments."[54] The monk's reply is a recitation of the scheme of salvation history in which

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51. *Ibi*d., p. 2.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

he explains that Abraham's life and exploits are the type for Christ's life and accomplishments; in particular the story of the sacrifice of Isaac is the type for the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. So the Muslim asks about Christ at his crucifixion, "How is it possible for divinity to be with him on the cross and in the grave, as you say, neither suffering nor being harmed?"[55] The monk then explains that divinity was with Christ, but that "there was neither a mixture, nor an intermingling, nor a confusion, as the heretics say, but it was by way of the will (*sebyānâ'ît*), in such a way as not to be harmed or to suffer."[56] As for the sacrifice itself, the monk explains, it is continued every day in the Eucharist, which he briefly explains.

The Arab proclaims himself to be satisfied with the monk's explanations, and he turns to the question of Christ as the Son of God, and to the Christian faith in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The monk replies with the statement that God " is one; He is known in three *qnômê*."[57] And he cites a number of passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament to illustrate the point. Then he queries the Muslim on the issue of sonship. He asks, "Tell me, son of Ishmael, whose son do you make him, the one called ᶜ Isā, son of Maryam by you, and Jesus the Messiah by us?" [58] The Arab answers with a quotation from the *Qur'ān*, "the Word of

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55. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

God and his Spirit" (an-Nisā, IV:171). The monk then argues that with this affirmation Muḥammad in effect endorsed the teaching of the Gospel of Luke in t he pericope of the Annunciation (Lk.1:30). So he challenges the Muslim, "either you estrange the Word of God and His Spirit from Him, or you proclaim him to be the Son of God straight forwardly."[59] At this point the Muslim opts for silence, and he asks the monk what he thinks of Muḥammad.

The monk gives it as his opinion that Muḥammad "was a wise man and a God-fearer, who freed you (i.e., the Arabs) from the worship of demons and made you recognize the true God is one."[60] If that is the case, the Arab wants to know why Muḥammad did not teach his followers about the doctrine of the Trinity. The monk's reply is that the Arabs were as yet in a child-like state in the matter of the knowledge of God, and not yet ready for the mature teaching of the Trinity. So Muḥammad preached only "the doctrine he received from Sargis Baḥîrâ."[61] As we shall see below, this is the name of the monk who in both Islamic and Christian tradition is said to have tutored the youthful Muḥammad in religion and who recognized his future prophethood.

The monk says that one reason why Muḥammad did not teach the Arabs about the doctrine of the

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59. *Ibid.*, pp. 9/10.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 10

Trinity was the fear that in their immaturity they would take it as a pretext for idolatry. And this concern reminds the Arab of his objection to Christian behavior, and particularly "that you worship images, crosses and the bones of martyrs."[62] In answer to this objection the monk cites numerous instances from the Old Testament in which the texts tell of occasions when, in the economy of salvation, and by way of typology, the fathers and prophets made prostration to material things, intending thereby to show honor to God. And he says in regard to Christ, the Son of God,

> ...we make prostration and we pay honor to his image because he has impressed it with his countenance (*parsûpâ*) and has given it to us. Everytime we look at his icon (*yuqnâ*) we see him. We pay honor to the image of the king, because of the King."[63]

In this connection the Arab says he knows of the icon which Christ "had made of himself and sent it to Abgar, the king of Edessa."[64] And, as if this explained the matter sufficiently for him, he moves on to ask why Christians venerate the cross when there is no command to do so in the Gospel.

It is in conjunction with his apology for the veneration of the cross that the monk brings up a matter

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62. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 1. See Averil Cameron, "The History of the Image of Edessa: the Telling of a Story," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), pp. 80-94.

that has been of interest to historians of early Islam ever since this Syriac text became known to scholars. He says to the Arab, "I think that even in your case, Muḥammad did not teach all your laws and commandments in the *Qur'ān,* but you learned some of them from the *Qur'ān*; some of them are in *surat al-Baqarah*, and in *G-y-g-y*, and in *T-w-r-h*."[65] On the face of it the remark makes a distinction between the *Qur'ān* and the second surah. And it may well be the case that the next two terms also refer to surahs, viz., the "Spider," *al-ᶜAnkabût* (XXIX), and "Repentance," *at-Tawbah* (IX), depending on how one reads the consonants. But at least one modern scholar is of the opinion that one should understand them to refer to the Gospel (*al-injīl*) and the Torah (*at-tawrat*) respectively.[66] In either case, there remains the reference to the *Qur'ān* and to at least one of its parts as being two different sources of Islamic law. The question is, does this reference supply evidence from the early eighth century about the "collection" of the *Qur'ān*, which might be used to challenge the customary or "orthodox" view of the time and manner of the coming-to-be of the *Qur'ān*? Before one concludes too hastily on this matter he should recall that in some other Christian texts of the early Islamic period, which the author of the dialogue would be more likely to have consulted than Islamic sources, there are references to "the Cow" (*al-Bakarah*), i.e.,

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65. Diyarbekir MS 95, private typescript, p. 11.

66. The opinion expressed by Prof. H.J.W. Drijvers at the Oxford Patristic Conference of 1991.

surah II, as if it were a separate work in its own right.[67]

Following what may seem like an interruption in his discussion of the veneration of the cross, the author returns to the subject with the explanation that although there is no explicit warrant for the practice in the Gospel, Christians have found many symbolic allusions to the cross in nature, and he even cites the victory of Constantine as evidence of its power. He concludes,

> Anyone who is a Christian, but does not worship the Cross, like one who will not look upon Christ, truly he is lost from life. When we worship the cross, we are not worshipping it as wood, or iron, or brass, or gold, or silver. Rather, we are worshipping our Lord Christ, God the Word , who dwells in the temple from us, and in this banner of victory.[68]

Next the Arab inquires about the veneration which Christians show to the bones of the martyrs. The monk explains that "we worship the one who dwells in them and works prodigies and signs by means of their bones."[69] And he likens the martyrs to the counsellors and friends of an earthly king, through whom people are accustomed to seek the favor of the king.

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67. See, e.g., John of Damascus in chap. 100/101 of his *De Haeresibus*, PG, XCIV, col. 772D.

68. Diyarbekir MS 95, private typescript, p. 12.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Changing the subject, the Arab then wants to know why Christians face toward the east when they pray. In answer the monk says,

> Our Lord Christ used to pray to the east. The holy apostles received from him the practice of worshipping to the east, and so they handed it on to us. The true proof that they received it from our Lord is the fact that all of the churches on earth worship to the east.[70]

Impressed with the monk's arguments, the Arab says, "Truly you are in possession of the truth and not error , as men think. Even Muḥammad our prophet said about the inhabitants of the monasteries and the mountain dwellers that they will enjoy the kingdom."[71] This remark is intriguing because it does echo the positive things said about Christians, and particularly monks, in both the *Qur'ān* and the *hadith*, Islamic tradition which Muslim scholars trace back to Muḥammad himself.[72]

Finally the Arab comes to the question which most puzzles him and which no doubt would also puzzle the Christian readers of the dialogue. He puts it this way:

> While I know your religion is right, and your way of thinking is even preferable to ours, what is the reason

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70. Ibid., p. 14.

71. Ibid., p. 15.

72. See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians; an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, 1991), esp. pp. 260-284.

> why God handed you over into our hands and you are driven by us like sheep to the slaughter, and your bishops and your priests are killed, and the rest are subjugated and enslaved with the king's impositions night and day, more bitter than death?[73]

Calling to mind the biblical precedents, the monk answers this question as follows. He says, "As for you, sons of Ishmael, God did not give you authority over us because of your righteousness, but because of our sins."[74] In the end, the Arab wants to know only one thing. He asks, "Are the sons of Hagar going to enter the kingdom or not?"[75] The monk answers with the verse from the Gospel according to John, "Whoever is not born of water and the Spirit will not enter the kingdom of God" (Jn.3:5). But he immediately adds,

> If there is a man who has good deeds, he will live in grace, in abodes far removed from torment. However, he will think of himself as a hired man and not as a son.[76]

The dialogue ends on this note, plus the Arab's final testimony:

> I testify that were it not for the fear of the government and of shame before men, many would become Christians. But you are blessed of God

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73. Diyarbekir MS 95, private typescript, p. 15.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

to have given me satisfaction by your conversation with me.[77]

Clearly this literary dialogue was intended to communicate the idea that Christians have answers for the religious challenges of Islam, and that even Muslims themselves would admit it if they dared. It is highly unlikely that the writer had any particular conversation between a monk and a Muslim in mind whe he composed the piece. But on a day-to-day basis there must have been numerous instances of conversations, and even arguments about religion between Christians and Muslims in the early Islamic period which provided the *fundamentum in re*, the basis in fact, for literary compositions such as the *Dialogue of the Monk of Bēt Ḥālê with a Muslim*. It is one of the earliest examples of a literary genre which would become increasingly popular in the Syriac and Arabic-speaking Christian communities in the world of Islam. The present writer calls the genre that of "the monk in the emir's majlis." Here is not the place to study it in detail. Suffice it to say for now that it exercised a powerful influence on the imaginations of apologists and their readers alike for centuries after the rise of Islam.

B - *Muḥammad and the Monk Baḥîrâ* -

In syriac-speaking communities, from sometime in the ninth century until virtually the present day, a

77. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

story has circulated according to which the prophet muḥammad received his early religious instruction from an errant Christian monk of the east. The narrative is apologetical, even polemical, in its character. It artfully explains from a Christian perspective how the monk whom Islamic tradition says Muḥammad encountered in his youth and who recognized the signs of his future prophethood, taught him genuine Christian doctrines, which others in Muḥammad's entourage later falsified or misunderstood. The text has been published since the years 1898-1903, but few scholars have paid much attention to it as an exercise in Christian literary apologetics.[78] Rather, the work has mostly attracted the attention of historians bent on investigating the many reports, Muslim as well as Christian, of Muḥammad's encounter with the monk Sargis/Baḥîrâ, whose principal claim to fame in Islamic apologetical literature is to have recognized the signs of prophethood in connection with the person of the youthful Muḥammad.[79]

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78. See Richard Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898), pp. 189-242; 14 (1899), pp. 203-268; 15 (1900), pp. 56-102; 17 (1903), pp. 125-166. Gottheil read a paper on the Bahîrâ legend before the members of the American Oriental Society in May 1887. See Richard J.H. Gottheil, "A Syriac Bahîrâ Legend," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 13 (1889), pp. clxxvii - clxxxi. In the course of the lecture he announced that the text of the legend would be published in the Society's journal. Instead, it appeared in the *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie.*

79. See the most recently stephen Gero, "The Lenged of the Monk Bahira; the Cult of the Cross and Iconoclasm," in P.Canivet & J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam* (Damas, 1992), pp. 47-57. Gero's article contains copious reference to earlier scholarship.

The Text

The Christian Baḥîrâ story has survived in both Syriac and Arabic versions. The Syriac manuscripts known to contain it are all of a relatively recent vintage, and they emanate from both West Syrian (Jacobite) and East Syrian (Nestorian) milieux.[80] While they all agree on the essential outline of the story, there are so many variations in the telling that in his edition of the text Richard Gottheil opted to publish the West Syrian and East Syrian recensions side by side, rather than to attempt to reconstitute the common original from which, in his judgment, they may be presumed to descend.[81] The variations in fact testify not only to the composite origins of the story, but to its timely topicality in the communities in which it continues to circulate. Each hand which has copied it seems to have contributed refinements of its own to the telling, thereby signifying the story's continuing interest.

The Arabic version of the Christian Baḥîrâ story survives in at least nine known manuscripts dating from

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80. One knows of a copy made as recently as 1971 for the use of the current Syrian orthodox Archbishop of the Americas. The three Syriac manuscripts used by Gottheil all date from the nineteenth century. See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend,: 13 (1898), pp. 199-200.

81. See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 13 (1898), p. 200. A truly critical edition of the Syriac text, based on all the available manuscripts, is in the planning stages, under the direction of Prof. G.J. Reinink of the Dutch Rijksuniversiteit at Groningen.

the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries.[82] While there are shorter and longer recensions among them, Gottheil based his edition on three manuscripts from the fifteenth, the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries respectively, which all represent the same, fuller recension of the text. He cites an occasional reading from other manuscripts, but otherwise made no attempt to produce a critical edition. This state of affairs allows one to conclude only that the work was popular among Arab Christian readers without providing enough evidence to chart its history in any more concrete way. Clearly, a critical edition of the text is a scholarly *desideratum*.

The story-line is the same in both the Syriac and Arabic versions, and the outline is simple. There is a frame-story in which a monk-narrator (Ishôyahb in Syriac, Murhib in Arabic [83]) tells of his encounter with the fugitive monk Baḥîrâ (called Sargis-Baḥîrâ in

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82. See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend,"13 (1898), pp. 200-201. See also Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (vol. II, Studi e Testi, no. 133; Vatican City, 1947), p. 149.

83. The voweling of the Arabic name is uncertain. 'Murhib' is Gottheil's choice; 'Murhab' is another possibility, but neither of them are known Arabic names. One scholar has made the ingenious suggestion that the text be emended to read 'Mawhib', that is to say 'Gift', a reading which would correspond somewhat with the meaning of the Syriac name, i.e., 'Jesus has given'. He notes that the letters 'r' and 'w' can resemble one another in some Arabic hands. See J. Bignami-Odier & M.G. Levi Della Vida, "Une version latine de l'apocalypse syro-arabe de Serge-Bahira," *Mélanges d'Archeologie et d'Histoire* 62 (1950), p. 129, n. 4. Alternatively, Stephen Gero prefers the vocalization 'Marhab', and he suggests that it represents an elision of the monk's full title and name, viz., Mar Ishoᶜyahb. See Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira," p. 52, n. 36.

Syriac). The narrator recounts the story of Bahîrâ's adventures, tells of his experience of apocalyptic visions, of his encounters with Muḥammad, and of the monk's prophetic vision of the hardships to come with life under the Muslims. Within the text bounded by the frame-work story there are three major divisions of material in the narrative: an apocalyptic vision of the coming rule of the Arab 'Ishmaelites,' the 'sons of Hagar,' as the text calls the Muslims;[84] an account of the catechizing of Muḥammad by Baḥîrâ; and the prediction, or prophecy *ex eventu*, of the course of Islamic history from the time of Muḥammad to the projected coming of the Mahdî, and the end-time when, according to the text, once again the Christian emperor of the Romans will, by God's grace and dispensation, set the world aright once again.

It is clear from the outline of the story that a Christian writer has chosen as his leitmotif the well known episode in the biography of the prophet Muḥammad, in which a monk, called only by the epithet *baḥîrâ* recognizes the signs of Muḥammad's prophethood. As in Islamic sources, so in this story, Baḥîrâ lives in a hut by a well, where nomad Arabs come for

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84. These are standard epithets for Muslims in Christian texts in Syriac and Arabic. They are theologically suggestive terms, with polemical overtones. See 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 prophéte; colloque de Strasbourg-1980* (Paris, 1983), pp. 122-123. See also the remarks in S.H. Griffith, "Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: Moshe bar Kepha against the Teachings of the Muslims," *Le Muséon* 100 (1987), pp. 151-154.

water. On one such occasion the monk unexpectedly singles out the teen-aged Muḥammad among his visitors, recognizes and foretells his prophetic career. For all practical purposes, the details aside, this is all there is to the Islamic story. But in the Christian writer's hands Baḥîrâ acquires a story of his own. He is an errant monk with a troubled past. And into his story the Christian author grafts examples of two genres of writing which were common in the Syriac and Arabic-speaking communities of Christians in the early Islamic period: apocalypse and apologetics. There does not seem to be any reason to suppose that there were independent memories of Baḥîrâ in the Christian communities. The best hypothesis is that the Christian story is a clever fiction, not lacking in verisimilitude, which builds on well-known Islamic lore, to serve as a literary vehicle for a Christian response to the civil and religious pressure of Islam. It provides the Christian reader not only with a way religiously to account for the rise of Islam and the course of its history, but it also suggests that Islam is actually a misunderstood form of Christianity. And it provides the Christian reader with apologetic strategies for rebutting Islamic objections to Christian doctrines.

The frame story tells the tale of Sargis-Baḥîrâ in different ways in the Syriac and Arabic versons. The differences have been meticulously detailed by earlier commentators.[85] Suffice it to say here that the monk is called by the double name Sargis-Baḥîrâ in Syriac, while in Arabic, as in the Islamic story, he is called

85. See Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira."

simply Baḥîrâ.[86] And in Syriac there is a much fuller account of Sargis-Baḥîrâ's ecclesiastical affiliation with Nestorian hierarchs, while in Arabic he is said simply to be "of the people of Antioch."[87] In Arabic the narrator-monk, Murhib ar-râhib, meets Baḥîrâ in a desert monastery, the location of which is not specified, but it is in the desert "near the Ishmaelites."[88] In Syriac, the narrator-monk Ishôyahb, after having toured the famous sites of desert monasticism, meets Sargis-Baḥîrâ in "the desert of Yathrib."[89] In both versions Sargis-Baḥîrâ is himself an ecclesiastical fugitive who has ought refuge in the remote desert because of the irregularity of his view that in Christian churches there should be only one wooden cross to receive the veneration of the worshippers-- no more than one, and no cross of precious metals, nor any ornamented with gems. He had worn out his welcome in Christian communities by vandalizing crosses which did not meet his approval.

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86. See A. Abel, "Bahîrâ," *EI* 2nd ed., vol.I, pp. 922-923. The name Sargis/Sergius for the monk was not unknown to Muslims. Al-Masûdi says that Bahîrâ is called by this name in Christian writings. See C. Pellat (ed.), *Masûdi; les prairies d'or* (vol.I; Beirut, 1966), p. 83. The name Sargis/Sergius was common among Syriac and Arabic- speaking Christians. The popularity of the cult of St.Sergius is evident also in the number of churches and sanctuaries dedicated to him. See R.B. Serjeant, "Saint Sergius," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22 (1959), pp. 574-575. His main shrine and *martyrion* was at Rusafah/Sergiopolis in Syria. See M.Mackensen, *Resafa I: eine befestigte spätantike Anlage vor den Stadtmauern von Resafa* (Mainz am Rhein, 1984); T. Ulbert, *Resafa II; die Basilika des heiligen Kreuzes in Resafa-Sergiopolis* (Mainz am Rhein, 1986).

87. Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 14 (1899), p. 254.

88. Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 14 (1899), p. 260.

89. Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 13 (1898), p. 203.

In the Syria versions of the story of Sargis-Baḥîrâ the apocalyptic sections are the most important features, and they occupy by far the most space in the texts. This prominence of the apocalyptic is not surprising, given the fact that in the Syriac-speaking communities apocalypses were the most important literary reactions to the challenge of Islam, from the time of the caliph ᶜAbd al-Malik (685-705) until the Abbasid revolution. In the Baḥîrâ story the apocalyptic sections have two foci. The first part, which details Sargis-Baḥîrâ's vision at Sinai about the coming rule of the 'Ishmaelites', is an apocalypse in the vintage Danielesque style, which owes a lot to the earlier apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius. In fact, in the Arabic version, the text refers explicitly to Methodius twice.[90] Both the Arabic and the Syriac versions then say that Sargis-Baḥîrâ brought the warning of his vision to the Byzantine emperor Maurice and the Persian emperor Chosroes, to no avail.

The second apocalyptic section of the Baḥîrâ story comes after the report of the monk's encounter with Muḥammad in both versions. In this section the accent is on the *exeventu* prophecy of the conditions of life for Christians under Islam until the projected coming of the Mahdî and the inception of the events of the end-time. There are references not only to the many disabilities suffered by Christians, but pointed references to numerous Christians who will have become Ishmaelites. Here and throughout the apocalyptic sect-

90. See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 14 (1899), p. 262 and 15 (1900), p. 71.

ions of the work there are a number of allusions to Islamic history and lore which have given scholars some points of reference for their efforts to date the text, as we shall see below.

In the Arabic version of the Baḥîrâ story, in sharp contrast to the Syriac versions, the monk's encounter with Muḥammad is the longest and obviously the most important part of the narrative. Here, in both versions, the *Qur'ān* is the focus of attention; the text claims that effectively Baḥîrâ is the author of the scripture. In the Syriac versions of the report of the encounter, the narrator-monk, Ishôyahb, has the story not from Sargis-Baḥîrâ himself but from a disciple named Ḥâkim, whom Ishôyahb met only after Baḥîrâ's death. He is said to have reported the gist of the conversations between Muḥammad and the monk, and he also tells the tale according to which Baḥîrâ contrived to have the scripture destined to become the *Qur'ān* arrive, seemingly miraculously, in the midst of a gathering of Muḥammad and his followers. In its original form, as the story goes, the *Qur'ān* contained Christian truth told in a form suitable for Arab ears. But in the Syriac telling, in the end the text that was to become the *Qur'ān* first came into the possession of Jews and was distorted into the familiar form of it we now have, at the hands of a scribe variously called Kaᶜb, Kalef, and Kaleb, names which seem to refer to none other than the early Jewish convert to Islam known from Islamic sources, Kab al-Aḥbar.[91] There are also a number of other anti-Jewish remarks in both versions.

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91. M. Schmitz, "Kaᶜb al-Ahbar," *EI* 24 (1978), pp. 316-317.

In the Arabic version of the Baḥîrâ story the author has expanded the section reporting Muḥammad's encounter with the monk to become the major part of the text. It includes numerous quotations from the *Qur'ān*, supplying in each instance the Christian understanding of the passage which the author says Baḥîrâ actually intended to communicate to the Arabs. In fact, throughout the section Baḥîrâ speaks in the first person, as reported by the monk Murhib.

Clearly, the text of the Christian Baḥîrâ story in both its Syriac and Arabic versions is an artfully conceived exercise in apocalypse and apologetic, carefully plotted and well articulated. It depends not only on earlier Syriac apocalypses, and Islamic traditions about the monk Baḥîrâ, but on Christian modes of apologetics in Arabic and Syriac as well. It is in fact a hybrid of Christian modes of discourse in Syriac and Arabic in the early Islamic period.

Stephen Gero, the most recent scholar to give a close scrutiny tothe text of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend, concludes that in its present form it is a composite work. He says,

> The oldest layer of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend is in fact the first part, the apocalypse proper in the context of the autobiographical narrative... this section, as the Latin version demonstrates, had at some point an independent literary existence, perhaps already in the ninth century; the other sections, with the echoes of the Muslim tradition proper about Muḥammad and the citations of the Qur'anic material, were added piecemeal later.[92]

92. Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira," p. 55.

Gero's mention of the "Latin version" refers to the translation of the first part of the Baḥîrâ legend which was done into Latin by the early years of the fourteenth century.[93] On the basis of certain syntactic and stylistic features of the version, the editors of the Latin text have suggested that the translation was made from an Arabic exemplar. Since this Latin version contains only the first part of the story as we have it in the published Syriac and Arabic texts, including only the account of the monk's vision at Sinai and his settlement in the territory of the Ishmaelites, these same scholars have concluded that the Latin version preserves an earlier form of the story, perhaps even the original Christian Baḥîrâ legend, before it was embellished with the additional features one now finds in the available Syriac and Arabic texts. On this account, the Arabic text from which the Latin version was made is presumed to have been itself a translation from the Syriac original of the Baḥîrâ legend.[94]

There remains the question of the denomination in which the text was first composed. The role of the monk and his own ecclesiastical profile is the best indicator.[95] Here one consideration is primary: Baḥîrâ is a fugitive;

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93. See Bignami-Odier & M.G. Levi Della Vida, "Une version latine."

94. See Bignami-Odier & M.G. Levi Della Vida, "Une version latine," p.133.

95. Gottheil mistakenly thought that the references to the 'Romans' in the apocalyptic portions of the legend referred to the Crusaders, rather than to the Byzantine rulers, and he therefore not only dated the text much later than current scholars do, but he supposed on this basis that the text came from a Chalcedonian Orthodox milieu. See Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," 13 (1898), p. 192.

he is *persona non grata* in his own community. What he has taught Muḥammad and what he provided in the *Qur'ān*, according to the story, independently of any alleged distortions at the hands of Jews or others, is not acceptable to Christians. In spite of the monk's good intentions, what he taught Muḥammad is presented as both doctrinaly and morally objectionable to Christians. As for monk's ecclesiastical profile, the author seems clearly to portray him as a refuge from the Nestorian community. As Stephen Gero has noted, the reported episodes in Sargis-Baḥîrâ's life "are put into a church-historical context of unambiguously 'Nestorian, East Syrian character."[96] The ecclesiastical events and personages in his story all confirm this assessment. However, this fact does not mean that the work is simply a product of the Nestorian community, as some scholars have assumed. Rather, the best assumption seems to be that the author has cast the story in a 'Nestorian' mode for polemical purposes. That is to say, the Nestorian church, through one of its errant monks, is seen to be responsible for the rise of Islam. To a Melkite or Jacobite author and audience such an innuendo would be plausible, and for them Sargis-Baḥîrâ's Nestorian ecclesiastical identity would serve as a theological label as well as an historical claim about Islam. In fact it seems that the Syrian Jacobite milieu was the more likely provenance of most of the apocalyptic sources from which the author of the Sargis-Baḥîrâ story drew his material.

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96. Gero, "The Legend of the Monk Bahira," p. 55.

In the present state of research one must be content to say that the author of the Christian Baḥîrâ legend in its full syriac form was a West Syrian, perhaps a Jacobite, but widely knowledgeable about ecclesiastical affairs generally in ninth century Syria. He drew on pre-existing materials in terms of the apocalyptic sources he used, and on the Islamic and Christian stories about the monk whom Muḥammad is said to have encountered; he highlighted doctrinal issues which were in dispute between Muslims and Christians in the ninth century. Subsequently, but perhaps still within the ninth century, the story was re-told in Arabic, with a considerable enhan- cement of .the section dealing with the catechesis of Muḥammad, in line with the heightened interest in debate and apologetic among Arabophone Christians in the early Islamic period. Throughout the work in both languages there is a perceptible interest on the author's part to suggest that Islam was inspired in its origins from within the Nestorian community, albeit at the hands of a monk whom the Nestorians themselves had repudiated. The work achieved a wide popularity in all the Christian denominations in the Middle East, surviving in a number of manuscripts which show how later copyists occasionally adjusted the details of the story, the better to make it accord with the copyist's own confessional requirements. It is particularly noticeable at the end of the Arabic version of the story that presumably later hands have enhanced the monk's sense of contrition for the instructions he gave to Muḥammad, and have added a number of lines in which he abjectly confesses his sinfulness-- this in contradistinction to his earlier, more confident tones.

III

Modern commentators who are concerned with the religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims in today's world often have a very negative view of the texts written by Christians in Syriac and Arabic in the early Islamic period. They consider them to be polemical in intent, ill-informed, and best left in the obscurity from which they have hardly been rescued in this century. One influential interpreter of Islam to Christians in fact accuses the Oriental Christians who live in the world of Islam of a failure to "think Christianity into Islam", as he likes to put it. Rather, they wrongly, in his view, cling to the polemical categories of the past, enshrined in the old texts of the sort we have been reviewing here.[97] The question now is, what do these texts have to teach us?

In the first place, it is from texts such as these that we learn about how Syriac-speaking Christians reacted to the challenge of Islam and the conversion of large numbers of their own to the new religion. It is unlikely that any of these texts report anything like the actual course of events in any historical dialogue. But

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97. Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian; A History in the Middle East* (Louisville, KY, 1991). See the review by S.H. Griffith, "Kenneth Cragg on Christians and the Call to Islam," *Religious Studies Review* 20 (1994), pp. 29-35.

the course of events must nevertheless have provided numerous instances of encounters between Muslims and Christians which furnished the experience on the basis of which apologists composed the texts of the sort we have reviewed here. It is true that for the most part they adopted a stance of opposition to Islam and concentrated on highlighting the errors and shortcomings of Muslims, as well as on the defense of the traditional doctrines of Christianity. Little effort was expended in searching for a common understanding between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, such as would characterize a modern, ecumenical effort. But one must remember that these Christians lived in an increasingly oppressive social milieu, in which disabling legislation and repressive policies made their lives ever more difficult, and escalated the pressure to convert.[98]

An important positive contribution which the apologetic and polemical texts in Syriac and Arabic can make to the modern dialogue between religions is the identification of the major points at issue between the communities, which must be discussed at length if any mutual understanding is to be achieved. What is more, they offer valuable instances of efforts to formulate Christian doctrinal and moral concerns precisely in the idiom of Islam. In this matter these texts reveal the grounds for that doctrinal development for which any intellectual culture may offer Christians an o pportunity

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98. J.M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbasides surtout à Bagdad (749-1258)* (CSCO, vol. 420; Louvain, 1980).

to explore new dimensions in the proclamation of the Gospel. From this perspective one might reasonably claim that in the ensemble the texts in Syriac of the sort reviewed here, and even more the more numerous Arabic texts of the same kind, constitute the patristic tradition in the light of which a modern Christian theology in the idiom of the intellectual culture of Islam might be elaborated, on the basis of the lived experience of Christians in the world of Islam. Surely this is a more valid perspective from which to begin a Christian "thin- king into Islam" than what might a priori seem best to a western theologian whose life among Muslims has been under the protection of colonialist or imperialistic power, and not under the less enfranchising protection (adh-dhimmah) of the shari^{c}ah, the heart of the truly Islamic government.

Sidney H. Griffith
Institute of Christian Oriental Research
The Catholic University of America
Washington, D.C. 20064 U.S.A.

Paul S. Russell

St. Ephraem The Syrian and St. Gregory the Theologian Confront the Arians

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This study examines the knowledge of these fathers of what the Arians taught and how they attempted to counter these arguments. Points discussed include :

Use of Scriptural texts
Methods of argument
image used in argument
Christological teaching.

St. Ephraem's christological teaching is examined as an element in the Nicene Church's defence of its beliefs.

This study makes clear that both the Greek and Syrian languages communities were involved in the great theological controversies of the day in ways that illustrate their individual characters and their common faith. St. Ephraem's teaching is shown to share many elements with the well known greek orations of St. Gregory.