I

THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD HIS SCRIPTURE AND HIS MESSAGE ACCORDING TO THE CHRISTIAN APOLOGIES IN ARABIC AND SYRIAC FROM THE FIRST ABBASID CENTURY

The first Abbasid century was the period of time during which the first Christian apologies in Syriac and Arabic appeared, in response to the religious claims of Islam. The profile of Islam, and the Christian appraisal of Islamic teachings that the writers of this period proposed, effectively set the agenda for the future development of Christian apologetics within *dar al-islām*. The prophet Muḥammad himself, and the *Qur'ān*, were important topics of consideration in many of the treatises.

The purpose of the present investigation is to sketch the portrait of Muḥammad, and the estimation of the *Qur'ān*, that may be drawn from these works of Christian apology. The proper appreciation of the portrait requires one first of all to gain a knowledge of the scope of the works in question. Accordingly, the first part of the paper designates the apologists and the treatises that are available in modern published editions. The second part discusses Islam, Muḥammad, and the *Qur'ān* as they appear in these works.

I. — The Apologists and Their Works

The earliest Syriac apology, actually pre-dating the first Abbasid century by some forty years, is the brief report of a conversation between the Jacobite Patriarch John I (d. 648) and a Muslim official named 'Amr. The report is actually a letter from the patriarch that recounts the questions about Christianity which the Muslim official posed, along with an

account of John's replies. The topics under discussion are the Gospel, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and the laws and statutes that govern Christian life.[1] The letter is in fact a miniature catechism of Christian beliefs, designed to furnish the reader with ready answers to the customary questions raised by Muslims. It offers no detailed arguments in favor of the Christian doctrines. Yet, one may recognize in this brief letter the outline of the topics of controversy that would become the standard table of contents for the later Syriac and Arabic apologetic treatises.

The first Syriac treatise that presents a more detailed apology for Christianity, against the standard Muslim objections to Christian doctrines, is chapter ten of Theodore bar Kônî's *Scholion*. This work, put forward by its author as an introductory and summary commentary on the Bible, based on the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, is actually a manual of Nestorian theology, produced for use in the Nestorian school system. Chapter ten is a new feature of the second edition of the book. It is a dialogue between a master and his disciple, in which the disciple poses questions that reflect a Muslim point of view, and the master answers the questions with a defense of the Christian doctrines and religious practices which Muslims find objectionable.[2] Theodore completed his *Scholion* in the last decade of the eighth century. He was, therefore, a contemporary of the writer of the most well known Syriac, anti-Muslim apology, the Nestorian patriarch, Timothy I (d. 823).

Timothy's apology for Christianity is actually a letter from the patriarch, describing two interviews he had with the caliph al-Mahdī, in which the caliph asked questions about Christian doctrines, and the patriarch answered in defense of the doctrines. The letter became so popular that it circulated in the Christian community in a longer Syriac recension, and in an abridged

1. M. F. Nau, Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716, *Journal asiatique*, 11th series, *5* (1915), pp. 225–79. Cf. also H. Lammens, A propos d'un colloque entre le patriarche jacobite Jean Ier et 'Amr ibn al-'Âṣ, *Journal asiatique*, 11th series, *13* (1919), pp. 97–110.

2. Cf. Addai Scher, *Theodorus bar Kônî Liber Scholiorum* (*CSCO*, vols. 55 and 69; Paris, 1910 and 1912). Chapter ten is in vol. 69, pp. 231–84. Cf. also Sidney H. Griffith, Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore bar Kônî's Anti-Muslim Apology for Christianity, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, *47* (1981), pp. 158–188, to appear; and Theodore bar Kônî's *Scholion*, a Nestorian *Summa Contra Gentiles* from the First Abbasid Century, *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period; Dumbarton Oaks Symposium*, May 9–11, 1980, forthcoming publication.

one, as well as in several Arabic versions.[1] The popularity of this letter-treatise was probably due as much to its simple, straightforward style, as to the fame of its author. The patriarch's answers to the caliph's questions are clearly intended to serve as ready replies that any Christian may use in response to the queries of curious Muslims.

Patriarch Timothy dealt more philosophically with the intellectual challenge of Islam in his as yet unpublished letter no. 40, which he addressed to Sergius, priest and doctor, sometime in the year 781. The letter recounts a discussion between the patriarch and an 'Aristotelian philosopher' at the caliph's court. The topics of the discussion are the oneness of God, the divine Trinity, and the doctrine of the Incarnation.[2] It is quite evident in this letter that Timothy is fully conversant with the current debates among the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. For example, he takes advantage of their concern with the divine attributes, to suggest that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity furnishes the only adequate approach to the description of God. In this, and in other respects, Timothy foreshadows the apologetic methodology of the Arabic Christian writers.

The Jacobite writer, Nonnus of Nisibis, composed an apologetical treatise in Syriac at the very end of the first Abbasid century. As in the instance of several other Christian writers in his time and place, Nonnus structured his treatise as a guide for someone who would be searching for the true religion among the several options available to him in the ninth century, in Iraq; but it is quite clear that the pressure of Islam is his primary concern. The unity of God, the divine Trinity, and the Incarnation are his major topics, along with a discussion of the motives of credibility that he believes should support one's allegiance to Christianity alone among the contemporary religions.[3]

For all practical purposes, during the first Abbasid century

1. A. Mingana, Timothy's Apology for Christianity, *Woodbrooke Studies, 2* (1928), pp. 1–162. Cf. the shorter Syriac rendition *in* A. Van Roey, Une apologie syriaque attribuée à Elie de Nisibe, *Le Muséon, 59* (1946), pp. 381–97. For the Arabic versions, cf. Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I* (Beyrouth, 1975); Robert Caspar, Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le Catholicos Timothée I et le calife al-Mahdî, *Islamochristiana, 3* (1977), pp. 107–75.

2. Cf. Raphael Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothée I* (Studi e Testi, 187: Città del Vaticano, 1956), pp. 32–3, 63. An English translation of Timothy's letter no. 40, from MS Vat. Siriaco 605, ff. 216v–244v, is the master's thesis of Thomas Hurst at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 1981.

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

the most important apologists for Christianity who wrote in Arabic were three. As it happens, they represent the three major faith communities then composing the Christian population within *dār al-Islām*. Theodore Abū Qurrah (d. c. 820) was a Melkite; Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah (d. after 828) was a Jacobite; and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (d. c. 850) was a Nestorian.

Theodore Abū Qurrah was the most prolific of the Christian Arabic writers of the first Abbasid century. His published works include a long treatise in defense of the Christian practice of venerating images, some dozen theological treatises on topics such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the nature and structure of church government. His general apology for Christianity is called simply, 'On the Existence of the Creator and the Orthodox Religion.' For the rest, his surviving works include some few short Arabic essays, and forty-three treatises and *opuscula* preserved in Greek.[1]

The popularity of the apologetic works of Theodore Abū Qurrah among Arabic speaking Christians is attested to by the considerable number of manuscripts that have survived, containing the transcript of an alleged conference between Abū Qurrah and a Muslim official, usually designated as the caliph, al-Ma'mūn. The texts contain questions from the caliph, and replies from Abū Qurrah in justification of Christian beliefs and practices. None of the twenty some known manuscripts that present such reports have been edited in modern times, although in 1925 Alfred Guillaume published a *résumé* of the contents of

1. I. Arendzen, *Theodori Abu Kurra de cultu imaginum libellus e codice arabico nunc primum editus latine versus illustratus* (Bonn, 1877); Constantin Bacha, *Les œuvres arabes de Théodore Aboucara évêque d'Haran* (Beyrouth, 1904); Id., *Un traité des œuvres arabes de Théodore Abou-Kurra, évêque de Haran* (Tripoli de Syrie and Rome, 1905); Georg Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodore Abû Qurra, Bischofs von Ḥarrân (ca. 740–820)* (Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur-und Dogmengeschichte, X. Band. 3/4 Heft; Paderborn, 1910); Louis Cheikho, Mīmar li-Tadurus Abī Qurrah fī Wuǧūd al-Ḫāliq wa-d-Dīn al-Qawīm, *al-Machriq, 15* (1912), pp. 757–74; 825–42; Georg Graf, *Des Theodor Abû Kurra Traktat über den Schöpfer und die wahre Religion* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters. Texte und Untersuchungen, Band XIV, Heft. 1; Munster i.W., 1913); Ignace Dick, Deux écrits inédits de Theodore Abuqurra, *Le Muséon, 72* (1959), pp. 53–67; Sidney H. Griffith, Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah, *Le Muséon, 92* (1979), pp. 29–35. For Abū Qurrah's works preserved only in Greek cf. J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* (161 vols. *in* 166; Paris, 1857–87), vol. 97, cols. 1461–610. For a recent general study on Abū Qurrah cf. Ignace Dick, Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène: Théodore Abuqurra, évêque melkite de Harran, *Proche-Orient chrétien, 12* (1962), pp. 209–23, 319–32; *13* (1963), pp. 114–29.

the text preserved in Paris Arabic MS 70.[1] Following the judgment of Georg Graf, most modern scholars doubt the authenticity of these widely differing reports, concluding that later Christians in the Muslim *milieu* produced them, elaborating on Abū Qurrah's well known retorts to particular Muslim allegations about Christian beliefs or practices.[2]

Abū Qurrah's Jacobite rival, Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, was also a prominent Christian apologist of the first Abbasid century. His general apology for Christianity, called simply an epistle (*risālah*) 'on the substantiation of the Christian religion and the holy Trinity', is unfinished in the form in which it has come down to us. In addition to his apology, we have in a modern edition his treatises on the Trinity, the doctrine of the Incarnation, the refutation of the Melkites, the Jacobite addition to the *Trishagion*, and several smaller essays and reports.[3] A noticeable feature of Abū Rā'iṭah's works, especially in his discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, is his knowledge of the current debates among the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, and his use of the Arabic idiom of these controversies to commend the Christian doctrines.[4] It is quite clear that in Iraq there was at this time a certain dialogue, or at least a dialectical relationship, between Christian and Muslim scholars about the implications of describing (*waṣf*) God in the Arabic language. Abū Rā'iṭah, like 'Ammār al-Baṣrī and other, later Christian apologists, followed these discussions with interest, and exploited them for their own apologetic purposes.

The Nestorian school system in Iraq was the context in which 'Ammār al-Baṣrī composed his Christian apologies in Arabic. His general apology for Christianity is entitled simply, *Kitāb al-burhān*, or 'proof-text', in an obvious reference to the *Qur'ān*'s injunction, repeated several times on occasions when the prophet Muḥammad met members of other religious communities, 'Produce your proof (*burhān*), if you speak truly', e.g., in *al-Baqarah* (2): 111). In addition to this general apology, 'Ammār also wrote a more detailed Arabic treatise, entitled

1. Alfred Guillaume, Theodore Abū Qurra as Apologist, *Moslem World, 15* (1925), pp. 42–51.

2. Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (vol. 2, Studi e Testi, 133; Città del Vaticano, 1947), pp. 21–3.

3. Cf. Georg Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḫidma Abū Rā'iṭa* (*CSCO*, vols. 130 and 131; Louvain, 1951).

4. Cf. Sidney H. Griffith, Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, A Christian *Mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century, *Oriens Christianus, 64* (1980), pp. 161–201.

Kitāb al-masā'il wa l-aǧwibah, or 'book of questions and answers', in which he discusses the topics of controversy between Christians and Muslims with more refinement.[1] 'Ammār is thoroughly acquainted with the world of the Muslim *'ilm al-kalām*, and he exercises a considerable ingenuity in fashioning his arguments in favor of Christian doctrines, in terms which take advantage of the issues that interested the Muslim scholars.

There are two published Christian Arabic documents from the early ninth century that are incomplete in the form in which we presently have them. The first of them is an anonymous treatise on the Trinity, entitled *fī taṯlīṯ Allāh al-wāḥid*, which can be only approximately translated into English as 'on confessing the threeness of the one God'.[2] Only a portion of it has survived. It quotes passages from the Old and New Testaments, and from the *Qur'ān*, in favor of the doctrine of the Trinity. The other document is the account of a debate, allegedly held in Jerusalem in c. 815 A.D., between a monk named Abraham of Tiberias, and a Muslim official named 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ. Unfortunately, the text of this account is published only in a German translation, and so its usefulness is limited.[3]

Just over the boundary of the first Abbasid century is the apologetic treatise of Ḥunayn Ibn Isḥāq (d. 873). The occasion for the composition of his treatise affords the modern reader a rare glimpse into the relationship between Christians and Muslims in mid-ninth century Baghdad. According to the story that has come down to us, Ḥunayn and his Muslim friend, Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Yaḥyā al-Munaǧǧim (d. 888), the son of al-Ma'mūn's court astronomer who had converted to Islam at the caliph's request, were present together in Baghdad at a *maǧlis* hosted by Abū l-Ḥasan 'Abd Allāh ibn Yaḥyā al-Barmakī, somewhere around the years 861-862. The Muslim friend heard Ḥunayn claim that it is inexcusable for a man not to accept an obvious truth, or for him summarily to dismiss out of hand an

1. Michel Hayek (ed.), *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, Apologie et Controverses*, Beyrouth, 1977). The French introduction and summary of the treatises also appears in *Islamochristiana, 2* (1976), pp. 69–113.

2. Cf. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles;... with a Treatise on the Triune Nature of God* (Studia Sinaitica, 7; London, 1899), pp. 75–107. Cf. also J. Rend el Harris, A Tract on the Triune Nature of God, *American Journal of Theology*, 5 (1901), pp. 75–86.

3. K. Vollers, Das Religionsgespräch von Jerusalem (um 800 D); aus dem Arabischen übersetzt, *Zeitschrift fur Kirchengeschiste*, 29 (1908), pp. 29–71, 197–221; and Graf, 1947, pp. 28–30.

argument which he knows will validate a position to which he is opposed. Thereupon, Ibn al-Munaǧǧim sent Ḥunayn a note, arguing that he should accept Islam. Ḥunayn ignored the note. So Ibn al-Munaǧǧim sent a formal *risālah*, entitled *al-burhān*, not only to Ḥunayn, but to his fellow Christian scholar. Qusṭā ibn Lūqā (d. 912). In his *risālah*, Ibn al-Munaǧǧim argued that any open minded person should accept Islam because of Muḥammad's legitimate claim to prophecy. Ḥunayn and Qustā replied with the apologies that have survived under the names.[1] While to date, only a portion of Ḥunayn's apology has been published, the whole correspondence will shortly appear in *Patrologia Orientalis*.[2]

It remains only to consider the famous apology that circulates under the name of 'Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥaq al-Kindī, perhaps the most well known of all the early apologies for Christianity. The apology is in the form of a letter from 'Abd al-Masīḥ, in reply to an earlier letter from a Muslim character named 'Abd Allāh ibn Ismā'il al-Hāšimī, in which 'Abd Allāh summons his correspondent to the profession of Islam. 'Abd Allāh's letter is a very summary statement of the Muslim *šahādah* and the five pillars of Islam. 'Abd al-Masīḥ's reply on the other hand is a long defense of the standard Christian doctrines and practices, according to the customary outline of topics in the more popular apologies for Christianity, along with a vigorous polemic against the *Qur'ān*' the prophet Muḥammad, and the teachings and practices that are characteristic of Islam. The two letters circulated as units of a single work, and the correspondents are presented as members of the court of the caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833). There are a number of manuscripts of the correspondence, and considerable variation in the reported names of the correspondents. Unfortunately, there is not yet a satisfactory modern, critical edition of the Arabic text. The only published recension of the correspondence is one brought out by Christian missionaries at the end of the nineteenth century, using two unidentified manuscripts.[3] The work also played a role in western

1. Cf. Rachid Haddad, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq Apologiste chrétien, *Arabica, 21* (1974), pp. 292–302; Paul Nwiya, Un dialogue islamo-chrétien au IX^e^ siècle, *Axes, 9* (1976–77), pp. 7–21.

2. For Ḥunayn's apology, cf. Louis Cheikho, *Vingt traités théologiques* (Beyrouth, 1920), pp. 143–46; and Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IX^e^ au XIV^e^ siècle* (Cairo, 1929), pp. 181–5. For the whole correspondence, cf. Samir Khalil and Paul Nwiya, *Patrologia Orientalis, 40*, no. 183, to appear.

3. Cf. Anton Tien (ed.), *Risālat 'Abd Allāh b. Ismā 'īl al-Hāšimī ilā 'Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Isḥaq al-Kindī yad'ūhu bihā ilāl-Islām wa-Risālat 'Abd*

medieval, anti-Islamic polemic, due to the availability of a Latin version in Spain already in the time of Peter the Venerable (d. 1156).[1]

There has been a considerable amount of scholarly controversy about the date of composition of the correspondence, and also about the doctrinal persuasion of the Christian author. Regarding the date of composition, there are two points of reference that provide an upper and a lower limit for the period of time within which the work could have been written. On the one hand, it had to have been in existence by the beginning of the eleventh century, for al-Bīrūnī (d.c. 1050) refers to it in his *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*.[2] On the other hand, it cannot have antedated the circulation of Abū Rā'iṭah's treatise in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, since the author of the correspondence quotes extensively from Abū Rā'iṭah's treatise.[3] Some have suggested that the borrowing may have been the other way about, i.e., that Abū Rā'iṭah may have quoted from the apology of al-Kindī. However, this suggestion is implausible since the tenor and tone of al-Kindī's letter is completely comparable to what one expects to find in popular tracts of apologetics and polemics, and it is not at all like the reasoned intellectual and theological arguments of the kind elaborated by Abū Rā'iṭah. In other words, the quoted passages in the al-Kindī *risālah* are somewhat out of their compatible context there, while they are perfectly tailored to the specifications of Abū Rā'iṭah's treatise.

Within the limits provided by the two points of reference that exist for the work, some scholars have opted for a date of composition within the tenth century, citing various historical allusions in the text and the level of the author's awareness of developments within the contemporary Muslim schools of religious

al-Masīḥ ilā al-Hāšimī yaruddu bihā 'alayhi wa-yad'ūhu ilā n-Naṣrāniyyah (London, 1885); GRAF, 1947, pp. 135–45; G. TROUPEAU, al-Kindī, 'Abd al-Masīḥ b.Isḥāḳ, *EI²*, vol. V., pp. 120–1. Summaries of the correspondence are available *in* William MUIR, *The Apology of Al Kindy; written at the court of al-Mamun (c. A. H. 215; A. D. 830), in defense of Christianity against Islam* (London, 1887); Armand ABEL, L'apologie d'al-Kindi et sa place dans la polémique islamo-chrétienne, *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 361* (1963), pp. 501–23; Georges C. ANAWATI, Polémique, apologie et dialogues islamo-chrétiens. Positions classiques, médiévales et positions contemporaines, *Euntes Docete, 22* (1969), pp. 380–92. A forthcoming new edition of the text is announced by Pasteur G. Tartar of the Union des Croyants Monothéistes, Combs-La-Ville, France.

1. Jose Muñoz SENDINO, Al-Kindi, Apologia del Cristianismo, *Miscelanea Comillas, 11* and *12* (1949), pp. 339–460; James KRITZECK, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 101–7.
2. Cf. MUIR, *op. cit.*, pp. 13 ff.
3. Cf. GRAF, *op. cit.*, 1951, vol. 131, pp. 32–6.

scholarship.[1] However, some scholars see no necessity in these arguments.[2] And, indeed, there really is no compelling reason to doubt the work's own testimony that its author took his inspiration from events he witnessed at the caliphal court of al-Ma'mūn (813–833). This caliph was famous for sponsoring just such exchanges as this correspondence records.[3] The contents of the correspondence are not such as should preclude their appearance in the first Abbasid century. Consequently, the author's testimony should be accepted, and the work dated to the second half of this century.

The author of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence is completely anonymous. In all likelihood, he was a Nestorian, a fact that would in no way prevent him from borrowing the Trinitarian arguments of the Jacobite, Abū Rā'iṭah. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that the names of the persons affixed to the

1. So, e.g., L. Massignon, Al-Kindī, 'Abd al-Masīḥ b. Isḥāḳ, *EI*[1], vol. II, p. 1080; P. Krauss, Beiträge zur islamischen Ketzergeschichte, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali, 14* (1933), pp. 335–79. Kraus alleges a dependence of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence on the *Kitāb az-zumurrudh* of Ibn ar-Rawāndī (d. c. 910), a Mu'tazilite, who later became a *zindīq* and wrote a polemic against the prophethood of Muḥammad, and the authenticity of the *Qur'ān* as a book of divine revelation. Kraus' evidence consists of several topical parallels between the arguments employed in the al-Kindī letter and Ibn ar-Rawāndī's work. He suspects that the parellels may support the conclusion that the Christian author was dependent on the work of Ibn ar-Rāwandī. Kraus' views have been cited with apparent approval by G. Graf, *GCAL*, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 143; G. Troupeau, al-Kindi, 'Abd al-Masīḥ b. Isḥāḳ, *EI*[2], vol. V, p. 120; and Robert Caspar *et al.*, Bibliographie du Dialogue islamo-chrétien, *Islamo-christiana, I* (1975), p. 143.

A fresh reading of Kraus' arguments has persuaded the present writer that they are not convincing. In the first place, as Kraus is at some pains to point out, the parallels are merely topical. There is no question of direct quotation. And Kraus himself points out the many dissimilarities in the midst of the similarities that are to be found in the accounts of the two writers. Kraus' suggestion of dependence is based on his idea that before the time of Ibn ar-Rāwandī, there would have been no *Christian* context within which the work of the author of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence could have been at home. The evidence presented in this paper counters this suggestion. In fact, if there is to be an issue of dependence between these two authors, given the state of the development of Christian Arabic apologetics in the first Abbasid century, it seems more reasonable to suppose that Ibn ar-Rawāndī was influenced by the Christians. His arguments certainly have about them the ring of the Christian, anti-Muslim polemical pamphlets. Moreover, there is no known Muslim antecedent for such arguments. And Ibn ar-Rawāndī is known to have been under the influence of Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq, a man who was certainly conversant with Christian works p. 112, n. 4 below. The conclusion should be that Ibn ar-Rawāndī was in debt to the Christian apologists, and not the other way about. Cf. P. Kraus (G. Vajda), Ibn al-Rawāndī, *EI*[2], vol. III, pp. 905–6.

2. Cf. Sendino, art. cit., pp. 346–7; Hadad, art. cit., p. 302, n. 1.

3. Cf. e.g., the account of al-Ma'mūn given in William Muir, *The Caliphate, Its Rise, Decline, and Fall; From Original Sources* (Edinburgh, 1915), pp. 506–8.

letters are authentic names of genuine persons. All three elements of each name amount to a neat statement of the two faiths, Christianity and Islam. While all of the elements of each name are quite commonly found among the names of contemporaries, their neat symmetry in the present instance suggests that they designate merely literary *personae*. Furthermore, it is hardly credible that any Muslim intellectual, even in the court of al-Ma'mūn, would be party to the summary portrait of Islam that is found here, a mere preface to al-Kindī's rebuttal; or who would be in any way associated with a work that so negatively depicts Islam, the *Qur'ān*, and the prophet Muḥammad. A distinguishing feature of the al-Kindī apology for Christianity, which makes it unique among the Syriac or Arabic apologies of the first Abbasid century, is the bluntness with which it dismisses the religious claims of Islam, in an impudent tone of voice that disparages the *Qur'ān* and the prophet in a way that is reminiscent of the Greek anti-Islamic polemical treatises.[1] For this reason, Armand Abel styled the author of this correspondence, 'le Nicétas du monde arabe.'[2]

Closely related to the apologetic treatises of the first Abbasid century is the Christian Syriac and Arabic apocalyptic tradition that first appeared at roughly the same time, in the form of the Christian legend of Baḥīrā. Baḥīrā is a name of the Christian monk who, according to Islamic tradition, recognized Muḥammad's prophethood when as a young teenager the future prophet visited Syria with a Meccan caravan.[3] And among Muslim polemicists of the first Abbasid century, Baḥīrā was put forward as the sort of Christian person who was commended to Muslims in the *Qur'ān* (*al-Mā'idah* (5):82), in contrast to the Christians represented by the current Nestorians, Jacobites, or Melkites, who were engaged in anti-Islamic polemics.[4] Accordingly, it is not surprising that Christian apologetic writers of the period, including the author of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence, argued that this monk was a heretic, and that he influenced Muḥammad only in terms of his heterodox religious notions. In the second half of the first Abbasid century, probably during the reign of al-Ma'mūn in the judgment of some modern scholars,

1. Cf. Adel-Théodore Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'islam; textes et auteurs (VIII^e-XIII^e siècle)* (Louvain et Paris, 1969); Id., *Polémique byzantine contre l'islam (VIII^e-XIII^e siècle)* (Leiden, 1972).
2. Abel, art. cit., p. 523.
3. For pertinent bibliography cf. A. Abel, Baḥīrā, *EI²*, vol. I, pp. 922–3.
4. Cf. the remarks of al-Ǧāḥiz in his refutation of the Christians, J. Finkel *Three Essays of Abu 'Othman 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jaḥiz* (Cairo, 1926), p. 14.

this monk's story was woven into the Christian legend of a Danielesque, apocalyptic, even eschatological vision that interprets the rule of the Muslims as a phase of human history that should pass away in a future time when God will bring victory and peace to his own proper people[1]. Such an apocalyptic interpretation of the events of Islamic rule was also current in the Jewish community in the first Abbasid century, a fact which corroborates the dating of the Christian Baḥīrā legend to this same time.[2]

The Christian apologetic literature in Syriac and Arabic that appeared during the first Abbasid century has a unique importance. While many of the more renowned Christian religious thinkers who wrote in Arabic came from later times, e.g., writers such as Yaḥya ibn ʿAdī (d. 974), Eutychius of Alexandria (d. 940), Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), Elias of Nisibis (d.c. 1049), or Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d.c. 1000), it was the achievement of the controversialists, both Christian and Muslim, of the first Abbasid century to determine the manner in which the standard topics of Christian/Muslim dialectic were to be proposed in Arabic, and to choose the style in which they would be discussed.

It is interesting to note that the first appearance of Christian theology in Arabic, which came about largely during the second half of the first Abbasid century, and principally in Mesopotamia and Iraq, corresponds to the period of time when, according to all accessible indications, large numbers of hitherto Christian people were becoming Muslims. There are a number of witnesses to the prevalence of this conversion phenomenon. The most

1. The Syriac and Arabic texts of this legend are published with an English translation *in* R. Gottheil, A Christian Bahira Legend, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie, 13* (1898), pp. 189–242; *14* (1899), pp. 203–68; *15* (1900), pp. 56–102; *17* (1903), pp. 125–66. For commentary, and arguments for dating the composition of the legend to the time of al-Ma'mūn, cf. A. Abel, L'Apocalypse de Baḥîra et la notion islamique de Mahdî, *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire orientales, 3* (1935), pp. 1–12; id., Changements politiques et littérature eschatologique dans le monde musulman, *Studia Islamica, 2* (1954), pp. 23–43. For an argument in favor of a later date, cf. Graf, *op. cit.*, 1947, pp. 145–9. In the 14th century the legend found its way into Latin. Cf. J. Bignami-Odier, and M. G. Levi della Vida, Une version latine de l'Apocalypse syro-arabe de Serge-Bahira, *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire, 62* (1950), pp. 125–48.

2. For pertinent discussion and bibliography, cf. Bernard Lewis, An Apolcayptic Vision of Islamic History, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 13* (1950), pp. 308–38. For a broader survey of this genre of literature, but favoring a much later date, cf. M. Steinschneider, Apolocalypsen mit polemischer Tendenz, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 28* (1874), pp. 627–57; *29* (1876), pp. 162–6.

unambiguous of them is a passage quoted by J. B. Segal from an anonymous Syriac chronicle of the late eighth century. The chronicler complains:

> The gates were opened to them to [enter] Islam. The wanton and the dissolute slipped towards the pit and the abyss of perdition, and lost their souls as well as their bodies—all, that is, that we possess . . . 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.[1]

Of course, the Christian community viewed the converts with contempt. They considered the conversions to be merely for the sake of personal power and social advancement. The author of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence, for example, puts this view into the mouth of al-Ma'mūn, when the caliph was confronted with the charge that the converts at his court were insincere. Al-Ma'mūn replies:

> I certainly know that so and so, and so and so, were Christians. They became Muslims reluctantly. They are really neither Muslims nor Christians, but deceivers. What should I do? How should I act? God's curse be on them all.[2]

Further evidence of fairly widespread conversion to Islam from the Christian community during the first Abbasid century is available by inference from other sorts of information. Richard W. Bulliet, for example, on the basis of his statistical analysis of the rates of conversion to Islam in the medieval period, maintains that the second half of the century is the beginning of the first great wave of conversions in Iraq, Syria, and even in Egypt. According to his terminology, the years 791–888 comprise the period of the 'early majority', when up to thirty-four percent of the population may be estimated to have converted to Islam, in what he calls a 'bandwagon process.'[3]

Certainly these would be circumstances sufficient to encourage the Christian community to produce an apologetic literature

1. J. B. Segal, *Edessa, 'the Blessed City'* (Oxford, 1970), p. 206. Cf. also the threat of punishment against the 'renegades' in the Christian Baḥīrā Legend, Gottheil, art. cit., *13* (1898), p. 237, *14* (1899), pp. 229–30.
2. Tien, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
3. Cf. Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period; an Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

that argues against the religious claims of Islam. And although these apologies may be, on the surface at least, adressed to Muslims, one must surmise that the Christian community itself is their primarily intended audience. Their purpose would be to stem the tide of conversion to Islam by arguing that Christianity and its doctrines are the only ones that are logically worthy of credence.

Conversely, the Christian apologetical efforts, once they began in earnest, drew the counter-fire of the Muslim intellectuals. In broad strokes, this reaction is visible in the growth and development, during the first half of the first Abbasid century, of the social disabilities that were theoretically to be imposed on the *ahl adh-dhimmah*, according to the terms of the so called 'Covenant of 'Umar.' By the year 800 or so this document had come through the process of elaboration by which the juridical scholars brought it to the form in which it became traditional.[1] And by the end of the first Abbasid century, the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–861) was trying to make the provisions of this covenant the effective law of the land, in what was to be one of the few overt, anti-Christian, official government policies in the history of Islam.[2]

Some measure of the Muslim annoyance at the arguments of the Christian apologists of the first Abbasid century is recorded in the essay that al-Ǧāḥiẓ wrote against the Christians sometime prior to 847, and which found a role in al-Mutawakkil's anti-Christian campaign.[3] In the essay al-Ǧāḥiẓ asserts:

> This community has not been as sorely tried at the hands of the Jews, the Mağūs, or the Sabaeans, as it has been tried with the Christians. The fact is that they ferret out the contradictory from our traditions, our reports with a weak chain of transmitters (*isnād*), and the ambiguous verses of our scripture. Then they busy themselves with the pusillanimous among us. They question our common people about these things, with whatever they happen to know of the questions of the renegades and

1. Cf. A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects, A Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar* (London, 1930); Antoine Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d'islam* (Beyrouth, 1958).

2. Cf. Dominique Sorudel, *Le Vizirat 'Abbāside de 749 à 936* (2 vols.; Damas, 1959), vol. I, pp. 271–86; id., The 'Abbasid Caliphate, *in* P. M. Holt *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Islam* (2 vols.; Cambridge, 1970), pp. 126–7; F. E. Peters, *Allah's Commonwealth; a history of Islam in the Near East 600–1100 A. D.* (New York, 1973), pp. 450–3; M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History; a New Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 72–80.

3. Cf. Ch. Pellat, Ǧāḥiẓ à Bagdad et à Sāmarrā *Rivista degli Studi Orientali, 27* (1952), pp. 57–8; id., Ǧāḥiẓana III; essai d'inventaire de l'œuvre ǧāḥiẓienne, *Arabica, 3* (1956), p. 170.

the damned *zanādiqah*, even to the point that with this they often acquit themselves well, even toward our scholars and people of rank. They provide controversy among the powerful. They dupe the weak. A trying factor also is that every Muslim thinks that he is a *mutakallim* and that no one else is more adept at arguing against these deviants.[1]

Several of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* of the first Abbasid century even went so far as to write treatises against particular Christian apologists. According to reports preserved in Ibn an-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, 'Īsā b. Ṣubayḥ al-Murdār (d. 840) wrote an attack against Abū Qurrah while Abū l-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d. 841/2) wrote a treatise against 'Ammār al-Baṣrī.[2] And from the same source we learn that the early Mu'tazilite, Ḍirār b. 'Amr (fl. 786–809), wrote a refutation of Christians in general, as did Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Warrāq (d. 861), in three different recensions.[3] Thanks to the refutations of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, some of the work of al-Warrāq has survived. In his refutations, Yaḥyā quoted from it and rebutted it paragraph by paragraph, thereby allowing a portion of al-Warrāq's writing to be recovered for modern scholarship.[4]

Another noteable Muslim reaction to the apologetic efforts of the Christian writers was the refutation of Christians composed by the Zaydite *imām*, al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 860).[5] The refutation is a product of al-Qāsim's stay in Egypt during the years 815–26, where he frequented the discussions of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, in the company of a Copt named Salmūn.[6] And, of course, there is also the well known work of 'Alī ibn Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabarī, a Nestorian who converted to Islam as an elderly man, at some point between 838 and 848. His rebuttal of the Christian claim to be the only true religion includes a treatise against the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation, preserved only in an incomplete copy, and a work entitled *Kitāb ad-dīn*

1. J. Finkel (ed.), *Three Essays of Abu 'Othman 'Amr Ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ* (Cairo, 1926), pp. 19–20.

2. Cf. J. W. Fück, Some Hitherto Unpublished Texts on the Mu'tazilite Movement from Ibn-al-Nadīm's *Kitāb-al-Fihrist*, *in* S. M. Abdullah (ed.), *Professor Muḥammad Shafi' Presentation Volume* (Lahore, 1955), pp. 57–8, 62.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 69 and 72. Cf. also B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm* (2 vols.; New York, 1970), vol. 1, pp. 388, 394, 415, 419.

4. Cf. the mimeo edition of Armand Abel, *Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad B. Harran al Warraq; le livre pour la réfutation des trois sectes chrétiennes, texte arabe traduit et présenté* (Bruxelles, 1949).

5. Cf. Ignazio Di Matteo, Confutazione contro i Cristiani dello Zaydita al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, *9* (1921–3), pp. 301–64.

6. Cf. Wilfred Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 88–90.

wa d-dawlah, which is a scriptural argument in favor of the legitimacy of Muḥammad's claim to prophecy.[1] While there have been serious objections brought against the authenticity of the latter book it is nevertheless quite clear that in his writing 'Alī ibn Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabarī intended to counter the influence of the Christian apologists who were attempting to stem the tide of conversions to Islam, and at the same time he intended to give them a dose of their own medicine. In the introduction to his treatise against the Christian doctrines he says,

> No Muslim will examine my book without becoming happier with Islam. Nor will any Christian read it without being put into a difficult dilemma; either to leave his religion and trouble his conscience, or to be ashamed on account of his position and have doubts about it for as long as his life may last, because of the reasonable argument and the veracity of the account that will become clear to him.[2]

Finally, among the published Muslim, anti-Christian treatises of the ninth century, we may mention an anonymous pamphlet, of uncertain date, but which was copied in the late ninth century, or the early tenth, and which may, therefore, have been composed much earlier.[3] It is a popular apology for Islam, obviously written to equip the reader with ready responses to the common Christian allegations about Islam, and to furnish him with arguments against the Christian doctrines that Muslims find objectionable.

We have mentioned here only the published Christian and Muslim apologetic works which have a claim to date from the first Abbasid century. These works are, of course, the only ones available to us for the purpose of investigating the image of the prophet and of Islam in the Christian imagination of this early Islamic era. But we know of other writers and other works that have yet to come to light in modern times, except by way of being listed in manuscript catalogs.[4] The knowledge that

1. Cf. A. Khalifé et W. Kutsch, Ar-Radd 'Ala-n-Naṣārā de 'Alī aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Mélanges de l'Université de Saint-Joseph, 36* (1959), pp. 115–48; A. Mingana (ed.), *Kitāb ad-dīn wa d-dawlah* (Cairo, 1923); id. (trans.), *The Book of Religion and Empire; a semi-official defense and exposition of Islam written by order at the court and with the assistance of the caliph Mutawakkil* (A. D. 847–61) (Manchester, 1922). Regarding the authenticity of the second work cf. Maurice Bouyges, Nos informations sur 'Aliy . . . aṭ-Ṭabariy, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph, 28* (1949–50), pp. 67–114.

2. Khalifé et Kutsch, art. cit., p. 120.

3. Cf. Dominique Sourdel, Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d'époque abbāside contre les chrétiens, *Revue des Études islamiques, 34* (1966), pp. 1-34.

4. Cf. the pertinent Muslim and Christian writers, *in* Robert Caspar *et al.*, Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien; auteurs et œuvres du VII^e^ au X^e^ siècle, *Islamo-christiana, I* (1975), pp. 131–81; *2* (1976), pp. 188–95.

these other works existed, however, even without the availability of their texts, reinforces the depiction of the first Abbasid century as an era of major importance for understanding the growth of the Muslim/Christian religious controversies in Arabic.

II. — Islam, Muḥammad, and the 'Qur'ān'

One of the provisions, customarily found among the conditions (*šurūṭ*) of the covenant that by the middle of the first Abbasid century theoretically governed the lives of the protected people (*ahl adh-dhimmah*) within the realm of Islam, stipulates, 'If any of you says of the Prophet, of God's book or his religion what is unfitting, he is debarred from the protection of God, the Commander of the Faithful, and all Muslims.'[1] One suspects that this stipulation arose from the exigencies of everyday life in the religiously pluralistic world of Islam in the eighth Christian century. As time went on after the first Arab conquest, one supposes, and as more people from the subject populations converted to Islam, the social circumstances conceivably would have favored the evolution of ever more specific regulations concerning the low social profile that the *Qur'ān* requires of the non-Muslim scripture people (*al-Tawbah* (9):29). Some such gradual development, at any rate, is suggested by the so-far meagre number of studies dealing with the *ḥadīth* reports that relate to the subject religious groups.[2] And, indeed, in *al-Ğāḥiẓ*' polemical essay against the Christian community, there is some support for the supposition that such regulations came about gradually. He complains that the Christians in his time hardly ever abided by the conditions in fulfillment of which they would have a right to Muslim protection. In fact, he charges, such conditions as the one we have quoted above had no place in the earlier recensions of the covenant of protection because to have committed such a provision to writing would itself have been a manifestation of weakness and an inducement to the subject populations to test their limits. In his own time, however, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that al-Ğāḥiẓ alleged that Christians would defame the prophet's mother, and accuse her of immorality, and then claim that they had not

1. Tritton, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
2. Cf. e.g., Georges Vajda, Juifs et musulmans selon le ḥadīṯ, *Journal asiatique, 229* (1937), pp. 57–127; R. Marston Speight, Attitudes Toward Christians as Revealed in the *Musnad* of al-Ṭayālisī, *Muslim World, 63* (1973), pp. 249–68.

thereby breached the covenant because the prophet's mother had not been a Muslim.[1]

Such a public defamation of the prophet as the one al-Ğāḥiẓ alleges here is foreign to the tone of the Christian apologetic literature that is preserved in Syriac or in Arabic, from the first Abbasid century. On the other hand, his allegations are an accurate description of the temper of the Greek polemical writings against Muḥammad and Islam that began to appear at roughly the same time.[2] It may be that undercurrents of this hostile posture circulated in the Arabic speaking world as well as among the Greek, and later the Latin writers, who attempted to discredit the religious claims of Islam. Traces of such an attitude appear in the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence. But for the most part, in the Arabic treatises there is an interest in religious dialogue. None of the writers expressed this conciliatory attitude more forthrightly than did Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah. In his treatise on the Trinity, for example, he writes of his hopes for the dialogue, and he advises his readers to invite Muslims to the conversation on the Trinity with the following words of encouragement.

> The hope is that you will treat us fairly in the discussion and that you will bargain with us as brothers who share in the goods they inherit from their father. All of them share in them. Nothing belongs to one rather than to another. So we and you should be on a par in the discussion.[3]

One should not assume that such words as these were meant, in any modern sense, to encourage an ecumenical search for some sort of religious unity. It is quite clear that Abū Rā'iṭah hopes to press the claims of his own Christian faith as vigorously as he can. But his words remind us that his chosen forum in which to conduct his apology for Christianity, whether by literary artifice only, or in actual practice, is the scholarly *maǧlis*, in which the assembled *mutakallimūn* are expected to press their individual claims according to the conventions of the *'ilm al-kalām*. This undertaking, of course, is a far cry from the rude calumnies of which al-Ğāḥiẓ complains, and it is also the very antithesis to the belligerent posture assumed by the writers of many of the Greek polemical tracts.

1. Cf. Finkel, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 and 19.
2. For precisely this attack against the prophet's mother, cf. Khoury, *op. cit.*, 1972, pp. 64–5.
3. Graf, *op. cit.*, 1951, vol. 130, pp. 3 and 4.

All of the apologetical literature that has survived from the first Abbasid century, be it Muslim or Christian, in Syriac or Arabic, is dialogical in form. This is true not only of the reports of staged debates, such as those involving the patriarch Timothy and the caliph al-Mahdī, or the exchange of correspondence between Ibn al-Munaǧǧim and Ḥunayn ibn al-Isḥāq, it is an equally accurate description of Theodore bar Kônî's 'Questions and Answers', and 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's very closely reasoned treatises. All of them, by convention, are addressed to an inquirer, either by name or merely in rhetorical style, in the introduction to the treatise. And the arguments are unfailingly carried forward with an eye to rebutting the thesis, i.e., in Arabic, *al-qawl*, the thesis statement, of 'those who disagree with us (*muḫālifūnā*)'. As Theodore Abū Qurrah reminds the reader in his Greek *opusculum* 34, this dialogical style, which has persuasion as its dominant note, represents a rhetorical choice on the part of the writer, who, according to Greek academic usages, may choose to argue either διαλεκτικῶς or ἀποδεικτικῶς.[1] But there is more to be said about such a style in an Arabic, Islamic milieu, than merely to cite these categorical designations recognized by Greek rhetoricians.

The Arabic *'ilm al-kalām* became a highly sophisticated expository technique among Muslim religious scholars. It is in all probability, the forerunner of the western medieval scholastic method.[2] In the first Abbasid century, this dialectical technique was the standard academic methodology for discussing religious questions in Arabic, be they completely Muslim questions, or questions involving the relationship of Islam to other religious communities. While there is much current scholarly debate about the origins of this technique in the Islamic milieu,[3] the

1. *PG*, 97, col. 1585.

2. Cf. George Makdisi, The Scholastic Method in Medieval Education: an Inquiry into its Origins in Law and Theology, *Speculum*, *49* (1974), pp. 640–61.

3. Cf. particularly the work of Josef Van Ess, The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology, *in* G. E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture* (Wiesbaden, 1970), pp. 21–50; id., The Beginnings of Islamic Theology, *in* J. Murdoch and E. Sylla (eds.), *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning* (Boston, 1975), pp. 89–111; id., Disputationspraxis in der islamischen Theologie, eine vorläufige Skizze, *Revue des Etudes islamiques*, *44* (1976), pp. 23–60. Cf. also Friedrich Niewöhner, Die Diskussion um den Kalām und die Mutakallimun in der europäischen Philosophergeschichtsschreibung, *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, *18* (1974), pp. 7–34. And here is the place to record the writer's inkling that the *kalām* style and practice owes more to the usages of the Syriac academies in Mesopotamia and Iraq than it does to the conventions of Greek theological writers. Cf. M. A. Cook,

point to be made in the present context is that the Christian apologists of the first Abbasid century, who wrote in Syriac and Arabic, were actual participants in formal scholarly conversations with Muslim intellectuals. They were not, as were the Greek polemicists, writing in isolation from Islam, without any appreciation for the intellectual acuity of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, or any respect for their intellectual objections to Christian doctrines. The works of the Christian and Muslim scholars that have been cited in the first section of this study are themselves the evidence for the participation of these scholars in the written *kalām*. For example, no other interpretation can be put on such facts as that Abū Hudhayl wrote a treatise explicitly addressed to the views of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, while the latter scholar directed his apology for the Trinity expressly against positions espoused by the former.[1] As for the participation of Christian scholars in the oral debates of the *maǧālis* of Muslim academicians, there are numerous remarks in both Muslim and Christian sources to substantiate the conclusion that such meetings occurred. First among them, of course, are the introductions to such works as Timothy's letters, the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence, the report of Abraham of Tiberias' debate in Jerusalem, and the other reports of a similar nature that are listed above.[2] But in addition to these testimonies to the occurrence of scholarly discussions about religion between Christians and Muslims, which someone may consider to be of doubtful value as documentary evidence, since they often are said to be literary contrivances, there are remarks in other sources to the same effect.[3] Antonius Rhetor (d.c. 840–850), for example, in one of his letters alludes to the courteous discussions about religion that took place in Baghdad between Christians and Muslims in the time of al-Manṣūr (754–775).[4] We have already seen that in Egypt a Copt named Salmūn used to accompany al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm to the *maǧlis* of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*.[5] And as a final

The Origins of Kalām, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 43* (1980), pp. 32–43.

1. Cf. above, n. 36, and Sidney H. Griffith, *The Concept of al-uqnūm* in *'Ammār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity*, a paper read at the First Congress for Christian Arabic, Goslar, Sept. 11–3, 1980, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* (1983), pp. 151-173.

2. Cf. above, nn. 3, 4, 13, 16.

3. Some scholars make a distinction between the *maǧālis* that may be literary inventions, and those that may be considered to have actually taken place. Cf., e.g., Joseph Nasrallah, Naẓīf ibn Yumn; médecin, traducteur et théologien melchite du x^e^ siècle, *Arabica, 21* (1974), pp. 309–10.

4. Cf. the reference *in* J. M. Fiey, Tagrit, *L'Orient syrien, 8* (1963), p. 317.

5. Cf. above, p. 112, n. 6.

attestation to this practice we may cite the story preserved in Ibn an-Nadīm's *Fihrist* about Ibn Kullāb's talks with the Nestorian, Pethion, as recounted by a later Muslim, Abū al-'Abbās al-Baghawī, who also frequented the company of Christian scholars.[1]

The discussion of the *'ilm al-kalām* and its ideal *maǧlis* setting is not a digression from the present paper's main purpose. Rather, keeping in mind this *Sitz im Leben*, and its associated literary genres, one gains an insight into the purposes of the Christian apologists as they attempted to reflect the facts of Islam in an idiom that is intelligible to Christians. Within the parameters of their own theological system, the writers hope to give their readers enough information to gain a debating advantage in their encounters with the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. So, from this perspective, we move on to sketch the portraits of the Islamic community, the prophet Muḥammad, and the *Qur'ān*, as we find them in the literature that is here under review.

A) *The Muslim Community*

There are considerable differences in the designations used for the Islamic community in Syriac on the one hand, and in Arabic on the other. Accordingly, in this section of the present inquiry the Syriac and the Arabic treatises will be considered separately.

1. *The Syriac Treatises.*—Undoubtedly, the most frequent designation for the Muslims in the Syriac apologetical treatises of the first Abbasid century is the term *ḥanpâ* (pl. *ḥanpê*), a Syriac word that in general may be said to mean 'pagan', or 'heathen'. Prior to the appearance of Islam in the Syriac speaking area, such a *ḥanpâ* seems most often to have been what the Greek fathers called a 'Hellene', i.e., a follower of the old 'pagan' religion who had not become Christian with the empire. Nonnus of Nisibis qualifies the term when he uses it to designate Muslims, calling them 'present-day (*dᵉhāšâ*) *ḥanpê* or 'recent (*ḥadtê*) *ḥanpê*'.[2] Of course, in these contexts, the term does not mean simply 'pagans. It is used to designate Muslims by the Syriac writers, at least in part, because they would have been well aware of the fact that the Syriac word is cognate to the Arabic term *ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafā'*), which is used in the *Qur'ān*

1. Cf. Dodge, *op. cit.*, pp. 448–9.
2. Van Roey, *op. cit.*, pp. 9* and 12*.

some dozen times to describe a non-Christian, non-Jewish person who yet follows the true monotheistic religion. Most importantly, in *Āl ʿImrān* (3:67), the term *ḥanīf* is used in tandem with the adjective *muslim* to describe the religious posture of Abraham. Accordingly, in Arabic, on the face of it, the term seems to have a meaning that is the polar opposite to the sense of its Syriac cognate. But the matter is not quite so simple. Even in Arabic the term *ḥanīf* was used by medieval writers in a sense akin to the significance of the word *ḥanpâ* as the Syriac writers usually employed it. For example, the Sabaeans, the denizens of Ḥarrān, a city closely connected with Abraham in the scriptural traditions, were considered to be *ḥanpê*, or Hellenes, by the Syrian Christians, and later Muslim writers followed suit by calling them *ḥunafā'* in Arabic.[1] So one must wonder if even in the *Qur'an*, a scripture in which the Arabic diction often resembles Syriac usages, the primary sense of the term *ḥanīf* is not 'non-Christian', or 'non-Jew', with the important qualification that such a person is a monotheist (e.g. *al-Baqarah* 2:135), and, indeed, a monotheist who recognizes the truth of Muḥammad's preaching.[2] There is the story of Waraqah ibn Nawfal, for example, whom the Islamic traditions remember as one of the *ḥunafā'*, who was said to be thoroughly familiar with the Old and New Testaments. He apparently did become a Christian, according to the story, but he lived to recognize the legitimacy of Muḥammad's claim to prophecy.[3]

1. Cf. the discussion and bibliography, *in* Ḥ. A. Faris and H. W. Gldden, The Development of the Meaning of Koranic *Ḥanīf*, *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society, 19* (1939–40), pp. 1–13; S. M. Stern, 'Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion Was Falsified By the Adoption of Roman Customs, *The Journal of Theological Studies, 19* (1968), pp. 159–64.

2. Some scholars, e.g., R. Bell and J. Horovitz, have insisted that the term *ḥanīf* has its own independent life in Arabic, related only etymologically to Syriac *ḥanpâ*, without a similarity of meanings, at least in the *Qur'ān* and other writings of that same age or earlier, where, says Horovitz, it means 'pious'. Cf. R. Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London, 1926), pp. 57–9; J. Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1926), pp. 56–9. Noting the unlikelihood of such opposite meanings for two obviously related words, K. Ahrens surmised that maybe a Christian of the *Qur'ān*'s time could use the terms *ḥanpâ*/*ḥanīf*, without censorious intent, to designate an unbaptized monotheist. Cf. K. Ahrens, Christliches im Qoran, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 84* (1930), pp. 27–8. Such a usage as this, however, implies only that *ḥanpâ* simply means 'non-Christian' to the Christian ear. While for a Christian such a sense of the term is hardly laudatory, it is not unthinkable that Muḥammad would have found it to be a quite agreeable sense for what he had in mind. Cf. Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda, 1938), pp. 112–5.

3. Waraqah's story appears in many Muslim accounts. Here we may mention only these few: Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hišām, *Sīrat an-nabī*

Perhaps because of the correlation between the adjectives *ḥanīf* and *muslim* in *Āl 'Imrān* (3:67), Muslims apparently fairly commonly called themselves *ḥunafā'*, and Islam *ḥanīfiyyah*, at least in the early years of the Islamic era. A testimony to this usage would be the occurrence of the term *al-ḥanīfiyyah* instead of *al-islām* in Ibn Mas'ūd's (d. 653) *Qur'ān*, at *Āl-'Imrān* (3):19 (viz., 'religion with God is *al-islām*').[1]

One must then conclude that the Syriac apologists of the first Abbasid century employed the term *ḥanpê* to designate the Muslims, first of all because of the simple fact that the term means 'non-Christians'. It does not mean, of itself, 'polytheists', or 'idolators', as these writers well understood, although the term may also be applied to these non-Christians. Secondly, knowing of the Muslim sense of the cognate Arabic term *ḥunafā'*, one might argue that the Syriac apologists wanted to call Muslims by one of their own names for themselves. But one's suspicion must be that these writers were pleased with the *double entendre* inherent in the meanings of the words in the two languages, and that they exploited the nuisance potential inherent in the mutually exclusive senses of the two nouns. Such was certainly the intent in several passages to be found in the Arabic Christian apologies. The author of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence, for example, has al-Kindī make the following declaration to his Muslim debate partner.

> Along with his fathers and grandfathers, and the people of his country, Abraham used to worship the idol, i.e., the one named al-'Uzzā in Ḥarrān, as a *ḥanīf*, as you agree, O you *ḥanīf*. . . . He abandoned *al-ḥanīfiyyah*, which is the worship of idols, and became a monotheist, a believer, because we find *al-ḥanīfiyyah* in God's revealed scriptures as a name for the worship of idols.[2]

The author who described the debate in Jerusalem between the monk, Abraham of Tiberias and the Muslim official, also brings the two senses of the term *ḥanīf* into the argument. His point, of course, is to suggest that the Muslims are unaware of the true meaning of this term, which, in his view, they naively use

(4 vols.; Cairo, 1356), vol. I, p. 256; Abū l-Faraǧ al-Isbahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī* (20 vols.; Cairo, 1285), vol. III, p. 14; Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Buḫārī, *Kitāb al-ǧāmi'aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* (M. Ludolf Krehl, ed., 4 vols.; Leiden, 1862), vol. III, pp. 380–1, vol. IV, pp. 347–8.

1. Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Qur'ān; the Old Codices* (Leiden, 1937), p. 32. Cf. also the range of meanings to include Muslims *in* W. E. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (7 vols.; London, 1863–93), vol. II, p. 658.

2. Tien, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

in a positive sense.[1] Montgomery Watt has suggested that such a polemical Christian reaction to the Arabic use of *ḥanīf*, as a term suitable even to describe a Muslim, may have been responsible for the early diminution of the term's popularity in Islamic Arabic as a synonym for *muslim*.[2] However this may be, it is clear that the Syriac apologists did not think of the new *ḥanpê* as idolators, or as polytheists, or even as pagans. In fact within the limits imposed by their own task to commend the superiority of Christianity, these writers often went to some trouble to underline what they considered to be points in Islam's favor, by comparison with other religious systems.

Nonnus of Nisibis says that in what they believe about Christ, by comparison with the Jews or the Magians, 'the recent *ḥanpê* are more right minded than the others.'[3] And the patriarch, Timothy, echoes the same theme, when he speaks of the response to Muḥammad on the part of the Muslims, whom he calls 'Ishmaelites.' Their reaction is in stark contrast, he alleges, to the inimical response of the Jews to the prophets of the Old Testament. Timothy writes:

> The Jews are, therefore, despised today and rejected by all, but the contrary is the case with the [Ishmaelites], who are today held in great honour and esteem by God and men, because they forsook idolatry and polytheism, and worshipped and honoured one God; in this they deserve the love and praise of all.[4]

Theodore bar Kônî portrays the Muslims as a people who are in receipt of a peculiar 'tradition' (*mašl*ʿ*emānûṯâ*) or 'teaching' (*malpānûṯâ*) about the Law and the Prophets, which their teacher, coming more than six hundred years after Christ, has handed over (*'ašlem*) to them.[5] They accept the Old Testament, and the fact that the Messiah has come, says Theodore, but they reject the genuine teachings of the scriptures. Theodore puts his theological judgment of Islam into the teacher's remark to the student toward the end of the dialogue. 'As I see it,' he says,

1. Cf. Vollers, art. cit., pp. 40 and 45. Note the author's mistaken idea that it is Christ, and not Abraham, who is mentioned in *Āl ʿImrān* (3), 67.
2. Cf. W. Montgomery Watt, Two Interesting Christian-Arabic Usages, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, *2* (1957), 360–5; Id., Ḥanīf, *EI*², vol. III, pp. 165–6.
3. Van Roey, *op. cit.*, p. 12*.
4. Mingana, art. cit., p. 59. Mingana translated the Syriac term *'išmaʿlāyê* in the text (cf. p. 131), by means of the word 'Arabs'. I have substituted Ishmaelites for his choice.
5. Cf. Scher, *op. cit.*, vol. 69, pp. 235, 246, 283.

'You are believing as a Jew.'[1] This judgment accords well with that of patriarch Timothy, who calls the Muslims, 'the new Jews' in his as yet unpublished letter no. 40.[2]

For the rest, the Syriac apologists refer to the Muslims with a selection of traditional epithets for Arabs and desert nomads that carry with them nuances of religious judgment. As mentioned above, a common one of them is 'Ishmaelites.' For the Muslims, of course, *Ismā'īl* is Abraham's son of blessing and promise, who, they say, had a hand in the building of the *Ka'bah*, and who even ranks ahead of Isaac in one place in the *Qur'ān* (i.e., *Ibrāhīm* (14):39).[3] But for the Christian writers, the texts of Genesis 21:9–21 and Galatians 4:21–31 are clearly what would be uppermost in their minds at the mention of the name of Hagar's son. As St. Paul puts it, 'The slave-woman's son was born in the course of nature. . . . She and her children are in slavery' (Gal. 5:23, 25). As for the Muslim accounts of Ismā'īl's exploits, the apologists, such as the author of the account of the debate of Abraham of Tiberias, simply denied their accuracy.[4]

Hagar's name too appears in these same treatises. In the Syriac *Baḥīrā* legends, for example, Muḥammad's people are often called both 'Ishmaelites,' and 'Sons of Hagar.'[5] In the text that reports the Jacobite patriarch John's meeting with the Muslim official, the Muslims are called *Mahgᵉrāye*/*Mᵉhaggᵉrāye*, a term that was to be widely used in later Syriac writers.[6] The most obvious meaning of this term, observing the use of Hagar's name in a finite verbal form in later Syriac writings to mean 'he became a Muslim,' is 'devotees of Hagar,' or 'followers of the way of Hagar.'[7] This understanding of the term is spelled out quite clearly in what remains of a colophon, on what was probably the last leaf of a Syriac New Testament, from the year 682. 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 *Mahgᵉrāye*, the sons of Ishmael, the son of Hagar, the son of

1 *Ibid.*, p. 235.
2. MS Vat. Siriaco 605, f. 216v. Cf. Bidawid, *op. cit.*, pp. 32 and 33.
3. The place of Ismā'īl in *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* is fairly complicated to describe, and to examine critically. Cf. R. Paret, 'Ismā'īl' *EI*², vol. IV, pp. 184–5; Michel Hayek, *Le mystère d'Ismaël* (Paris, 1964).
4. Cf. Vollers, art. cit., p. 50.
5. Cf. Gottheil, art. cit., *13* (1898), p. 203, *et passim*.
6. Cf. Nau, art. cit., p. 248.
7. The verbal form is *ahgar*. Cf. its abundant appearance in later texts, e.g. '*in* Bar Hebraeus' chronicle, Paul Bedjan (ed.) *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum* (Paris, 1890), p. 115 *et passim*.

Abraham.'[1] In the Islamic milieu, this comment reflects a religious judgment on the part of the Christian writers, of course, and not merely an ethnic or historical allusion. It parallels, and perhaps it even owes its inspiration to the Greek adjective οἱ Ἀγαρήνοι. This term, which was used already in the fourth century and earlier to mean simply 'Arabs,' came later to designate 'Muslims.'[2] It seems completely gratuitous, therefore, for a modern observer to notice a mere graphic, or etymological similarity between the Christian Syriac word *mahgᵉrāye* and the Muslim Arabic word *muhāğirūn*, and then, lacking any mutually acceptable context of meaning in which such a proposal might find a place, to suggest that Christian Syriac writers borrowed the Muslim Arabic word, and then used it in a completely different sense from the one intended by Muslims.[3] Meanwhile, contrariwise, there is abundant evidence indicating that Syriac writers commonly followed Greek Christian usages, and even borrowed Greek words, increasingly so after the seventh century. Clearly then, in Christian apologies, the Muslims are called οἱ Ἀγαρήνοι and *mahgᵉrāye*, with the intention of communicating all that these terms suggest about the Christian evaluation of the religious

1. W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (3 vols.; London, 1870–2), vol. I, p. 92.

2. Cf. E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (2 vols.; New York, 1887), vol. I, p. 63. Epiphanius, e.g., refers to Hagar and Ishmael as the ancestors of the tribes of the Agarenes, Ishmaelites, and Saracens. Cf. K. Hall, *Epiphanius (Ancoratus und Panarion)* (*GCS*, vol. 25; Leipzig, 1915), p. 180.

3. Cf. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism, the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 8–9, 160–1. There is some merit to the suggestion that the Greek term 'Magaritai' may be derived from the Arabic term *muhāğirūn*. Cf. Henry and Renée Kahane, Die Magariten, *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie, 76* (1960), pp. 185–204. As for the verbal form *ahgar*, *mahgar* in Syriac, if it is to be related to the Muslim Arabic *hağara*, *hiğrah*, and not to the biblical Hagar, one suspects that the relationship should not be to Muḥammad's Meccan *muhāğirūn* and their descendants. Rather, the reference should be to the *hiğrah* itself. On this hypothesis, the verb *ahgar* in Syriac would mean 'to become a Muslim,' because the subject of the verb would be said to be joining the *hiğrah*, i.e., leaving his own ancestral religion to join Muḥammad's company. Perhaps the Syrians would have utilized the Muslim Arabic expression in this fashion, having taken note of the Muslim habit of numbering the years by the *hiğrah* of the prophet. That such a habit obtained already in the seventh century is attested to by the colophon to the Syriac. New Testament quoted above, which speaks of the 'year 63 according to the *Mahgᵉrāyê*.' Cf. n. 1 above. Such an understanding would also make better sense of the expression, *namôsâ dᵉmahgrâ*, that appears in the letter describing patriarch John's interview with the *emir*. Cf. Nau, art. cit., p. 252. The phrase, which is awkward in the singular, would then mean not 'the law of the Hagarene,' but 'the law of the *Hiğrah*,' or of 'one who follows or joins the *hiğrah*'. The problem with this suggestion, of course, is that it is speculative, and it lacks documentary evidence, whereas the parallel, *mahgᵉrāyê* ὁι ἀγαρήνοι, is well attested.

significance of Islam. John Damascene, for one, was very explicit about his intentions, in chapter 101 of his *De heresibus*. Having explained to his own satisfaction, why the Arabs are called Ishmaelites and Hagarenes, from an etymological point of view, he goes on to declare that it is to these people that Muḥammad gave as their religion, a 'heresy,' of his own making, after having come into contact with the Old and New Testaments, presumably as expounded by an Arian monk, according to John's theological judgment. Accordingly, in the Damascene's view, Islam is what he calls the 'currently prevailing, deceptive superstition of the Ishmaelites, the precursor of the Antichrist.'[1] This judgment is already compatible with his use of such epithets as 'sons of Ishmael', or 'sons of Hagar' to designate Muslims. For, as one learns from Nicetas Byzantinos, the point to insist upon with the Muslims is that already in the scriptures, Ishmael and Hagar are excluded from God's promise to Abraham.[2]

Finally, one may note that in the Syriac apologies the Muslims sometimes are called *Ṭayyāyê*, or even *sarqāyê*.[3] The former is an adjective derived from the name of a tribe of Arab nomads who had become friendly to Christianity even before the time of Islam. In its adjectival form, their name is a frequent term for Arab nomads in Syriac texts.[4] The term *sarqāyê*, on the other hand, seems to be related to the enigmatic Greek word for 'Arabs', viz. οἱ σαρακήνοι.[5]

There are very few doctrinal descriptions of Islam in the Syriac apologetic treatises from the first Abbasid century. Nonnus of Nisibis, as mentioned above, contents himself with some references to statements about Christ in the *Qur'ān*. But he quotes them out of context, and presents them as evidences of how closely Islam comes to what he regards as the truth about Christ. In fact, he says that the Muslims honor Christ so much that they will not accept it that he could have died by crucifixion.[6]

One may glean a very rudimentary description of some of the basic tenets of Islam from chapter ten of Theodore bar Kônî's

1. *PG*, vol. 94, cols. 764–5. Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 68–74.
2. *PG*, vol. 105, cols. 788–92. Cf. Khoury, *Les Théologiens byzantins*, *op. cit.*, pp. 159–60.
3. Cf., e.g., Gottheil, art. cit., *13*, (1898), p. 202.
4. Cf. Nau, art. cit., p. 251, and J. S. Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, 1979), p. 213.
5. Cf. Trimingham, *op. cit.*, pp. 213–4.
6. Van Roey, *op. cit.*, p. 12*.

Scholion. In the dialogue between the student and his master that Theodore presents there, the student repeats the objections of Muslims to those Christian doctrines and practices that were the standard topics of controversy between the two communities. Basically, of course, they amount to the charges that the doctrine of the Trinity compromises monotheism, and the doctrine of the Incarnation, both obscures the truth about Jesus, son of Mary, and attributes creaturely attributes to God. Theodore, on the other hand, suggests to his readers that Islam, the tradition (*mašl^{e}mānûtâ*) that Muslims have inherited from their teacher, is essentially a mistaken doctrine (*malpanûtâ*) about the proper interpretation of the Torah and the Prophets.[1] This characterization of Islam is in contrast, of course, to Theodore's own presentation of Christianity and its four canonical Gospels, as the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament.

2. *The Arabic Treatises.*—Many of the Christian apologetic treatises in Arabic refer to the Islamic community very straightforwardly as *al-muslimūn.* 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, for example, does so regularly. Indeed, in the introduction to the *Kitāb al-masā'il wa l-aǧwibah* he dedicates his work to the *amīr al-mu'minīn*, whom, he says, God has empowered to investigate the allegations of those who disseminate erroneous religious opinions.[2] Unfortunately, however, the portion of 'Ammār's *Kitāb al-burhān* in which he may have ventured to give a brief sketch of the teachings of Islam, is missing from the manuscript in which his work is preserved.[3]

Theodore Abū Qurrah uses the terms *islām*, *muslimīn*, and the name Muḥammad, in only one place in all of his published Arabic works. They occur in the short paragraph in his general apology for Christianity, in which he described what he calls *dīn al-islām*, i.e., the Islamic religion. His description of the tenets of Islam is very summary. God has sent it, says Abū Qurrah, at the hands of his prophet, Muḥammad, who summons people to worship God alone and to associate nothing with him. Moreover, Abū Qurrah reports that Muḥammad encouraged good works and forbade what should be forbidden. The delights of heaven, the reward for doers of good works, are described with a tissue of quotations from the *Qur'ān*, depicting the

1. Cf. GRIFFITH, Chapter Ten of the Scholion . . ., art. cit.
2. Cf. HAYEK, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–5.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

physical aspects of happiness there.[1] For the rest, however, Abū Qurrah's references to Islam are fairly oblique, except in those instances in which he quotes from the *Qur'ān*, or cites doctrinal formulations that are recognizably Islamic.

Among Abū Qurrah's circumlocutions for designating the Muslims are the following. He occasionally calls them 'people of faith' (*ahl al-'īmān*), or 'those who claim faith' (*man yadda'ī l-'īmān*).[2] One suspects that these expressions come from the *Qur'ān*'s description of Muslims as *al-mu'minūn*, a name also widely used in the early Muslim community.[3] Other expressions that Abū Qurrah employs to designate the Muslims, which also demonstrate his familiarity with the phraseology of the *Qur'ān*, are: 'those who claim to have a book sent down from God (*man yadda'ī 'anna biyadihi kitāban munzalan min Allāh*)', and, 'those who claim inspiration and communication from God (*man idda'ā al-waḥyā wa-r-risālata min Allāh*)'.[4] While these phrases reveal Abū Qurrah's familiarity with Muslim expressions, in their rhetorical context in his treatises they put the emphasis on the Muslim claim, and they do not suggest that Abū Qurrah thinks that the claim is legitimate.

Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'iṭah several times refers to the Muslims as 'southerners' (i.e. *ahl al-tayman*).[5] With Abū Qurrah's usage in mind, one is initially tempted to amend Abū Rā'iṭah's text to read *ahl al-'īmān*. However, the reference actually seems to be to the *qiblah*, i.e., the direction to which Muslims turn when they pray, toward the *Ka'bah* in Mecca. There is some support for this suggestion in a latter west Syrian chronicle from the region of Edessa. It says that at their times of prayer, the Muslims perform their worship facing south.[6] Abū Rā'iṭah's location in Takrīt, in present day Iraq, would have put him in a position to observe the same phenomenon as did the author of the Syrian chronicle, i.e., Muslims facing south in prayer. In one of his letters, Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) explained this same matter, i.e., south as the direction of the *qiblah*.[7] So, in all

1. Cheikho, art. cit., *al-Machriq*, *12* (1912), p. 770.
2. Cf. Bacha, 1904, *op. cit.*, p. 182; Arendzen, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
3. Cf. W. Montgomery Watt, The Conception of *īmān* in Islamic Theology, *Der Islam*, *43* (1967), pp. 1–10; Frederick M. Denny, Some Religio-Communal Terms and Concepts in the *Qur'ān*, *Numen*, *24* (1977), pp. 26–59.
4. Arendzen, *op. cit.*, p. 1, and Bacha, 1904, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
5. Graf, 1951, *op. cit.*, vol. 130, p. 1.
6. Cf. I.-B. Chabot (ed.), *Anonymi Auctoris Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens* (*CSCO*, vol. 81; Paris, 1920), p. 230.
7. Cf. the passage quoted *in* Wm. Wright's, *Catalogue of the Syriac MSS*, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 604.

likelihood, Abū Rā'iṭah's designation of Muslims as 'southerners' is simply a reference to their *qiblah*.

There is some play with the word *muslim* in several of the Arabic apologies. The author of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence, for example, attempts to find a contradiction in the *Qur'ān* by pointing to the text in *Āl 'Imrān* (3):67, where Abraham is said to be 'a *ḥanīf*, a *muslim*', and relating it to the passage in *al-An'ām* (6:14), where Muḥammad is commanded to say, 'I shall be the first of those who have submitted.' Therefore, says the apologist, Abraham can have no part with the Muslims, since, by his own admission, Muḥammad is the first of them.[1] Taking another tack, the author of the Abraham of Tiberias debate capitalizes on the distinction between 'submission' (*islām*) and 'belief' (*'īmān*). Citing *Āl 'Imrān* (3:83), according to which 'whoever is in heaven or earth, willingly or unwillingly has submitted (*aslama*)', he argues that therefore all creatures, good and bad, are *muslims*, according to the *Qur'ān*, and men and angels have no edge over devils or beasts on that account. Moreover, says this Christian apologist, the text in *al-Ḥuǧarāt* (49):14 clearly distinguishes *islām* from *īmān*, in that even Bediun Arabs may be said to have the former without the latter. Subsequently, the Muslim in the debate claims that *islām* and *īmān* are the same, while the Christian monk counters with another quotation from the *Qur'ān* to the contrary, viz., *Āl 'Imrān* (3:102), where, he mistakenly says, believers are encouraged to fear God without becoming Muslims.[2]

The Arabic version of the Christian Baḥīrā legend adds yet another twist to this theme. Here the author speaks of *muslim* as an abbreviated religious name which the prophet's tutor-monk gave to him for his people, by which the monk meant, our author says, *muslim al-masīḥī*, or 'Christ's Muslim'. And a few pages later he explains what he means by this expression, in connection with a comment on *al-Ḥuǧurāt* (49:14): 'The Arabs say, 'We believe.' Say: 'You do not believe'; rather say, 'We submit'; for belief has not entered your hearts.' About this passage from the *Qur'ān*, the tutor-monk is presented in the legend as explaining to Muḥammad: 'By this I meant that the genuine faith is faith in Christ, and *islām* (i.e., submission) is the *islām* of one of his disciples.'[3] In the whole work, of course, God's command to Muḥammad as recorded in the *Qur'ān*, e.g.,

1. Cf. Tien, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–7.
2. Cf. Vollers, art. cit., pp. 46 and 70.
3. Gottheil, art. cit., *15* (1900), pp. 74 and 79.

'say', as in this verse from *al-Ḥuǧurāt*, is presented as the command of the tutor-monk. Submission consequently, comes to be seen as the only option within the power of the 'Sons of Ishmael', in contradistinction to the faith potential of the Christians.

Of all of the Christian Arabic apologies that have survived from the first Abbasid century, the longest description of Islam is in the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence. It is the principal subject matter of the comparatively brief, first letter in the exchange, presented as the work of the Muslim correspondent.[1] However, as we shall see, it is quite clear that only a Nestorian Christian could have written this letter. Basically, in its essential outline, it is akin to the account of Islam that Abū Qurrah presented in his general apology for Christianity, with the difference that the author of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence provides a broad array of descriptive material, including liberal quotations from the *Qur'ān*, of the sort that play directly into the hands of the Christian apologists and polemicists. In fact, the al-Hāšimī letter is virtually a mere table of contents for the refutations that are the subject matter of the much longer al-Kindī letter. The author of the al-Hāšimī letter shows no interest at all in the topics that concern the authors of the few authentic Muslim apologies that we have from the first Abbasid century. It is undoubtedly, then, the work of the Christian author of the whole correspondence, and an integral part of his apology for Christianity.

There are three main sections in the al-Hāšimī letter. In the first of them, after the invocations and introductory remarks, the supposedly Muslim writer first of all situates Muḥammad in the sequence of prophets: Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad. This is in fact a standard Muslim proposition in the controversies of the first Abbasid century, which is found in a number of the treatises of the time that have survived.[2] In the present instance, the allegedly Muslim author moves quickly from this basic statement to a detailed account of his own knowledge of christianity, its scriptures and its usages, and he says that he learned much of it in debate (*munāẓarah*) with Timothy, the patriarch.[3] The Nestorians in general, he says, as opposed to Melkites and Jacobites, are the most respectable and intellectually acceptable of all the Christians. The Jacobites are the worst, according to

1. Cf. Tien, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–37.
2. Cf., e.g., the proposals of the caliph in his dialogue with Timothy, the patriarch, *in* Mingana, *op. cit.*, pp. 35 ff.
3. Tien, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

this writer's opinion.[1] Moreover, he goes on to argue at some length, that the Nestorians are the sort of Christians whose monks evangelized Muḥammad, and who even protected him from the Jews and the polytheists of the Quraysh, once the prophet's own revelations began to come down. For this reason, the writer alleges, Muḥammad offered the Christians the covenant of protection. All of this reminds the reader of no known Muslim account of the prophet's early experiences. And it is important to realize, as we shall see in more detail later, that the writer of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence was well acquainted with Muslim records of the life of the prophet and of the collection of the *Qur'ān*. The account in the al-Hāšimī letter does, however, bear a striking resemblance to the basic suggestions of the Christian Baḥīrā legend, according to which Muḥammad owed all of his acceptable religious insights to the care of a Christian monk.[2] Having made this point, the writer of the letter gives a fuller account of his knowledge of Christian usages, especially their liturgical calendar and daily *horarium* of prayer. Finally, in preparation for the main body of his letter, he sets forth some very equable and friendly rules for Christian/Muslim dialogue.

The main body of the al-Hāšimī letter is concerned with an exposition of the Muslim *šahādah* and the five pillars of Islam, with a concentration on *ǧihād*, and a statement of the basic Muslim objections to Christianity. By far the longest portion of this main body of the letter, however, amounting to almost half of the number of pages devoted to the whole letter in the 1885 Tien edition,[3] is taken up with a concrete description of the physical delights and appointments of paradise, and the agonies of Gehenna, along with the licenses enjoyed by true Muslims in this world—all composed in a *catena* of apt phrases and verses quoted from the *Qur'ān*.[4] Such an exposition plays straight into the hands of the Christian polemicists, who were in the habit of making much of precisely this aspect of the

1. *Ibid.*, p. 7: 'The Jacobites are the most unbelieving people, the most wicked in speech, and the worst in creed. They are the farthest from the truth, repeating the formulae of Cyril of Alexandria, Jacob Baradaeus, and Severus, the holder of the see of Antioch.' If authentic, this would certainly be a unique statement for a Muslim. The writer is clearly a Nestorian, as recognized by G. Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 143.

2. Cf. Gottheil, art. cit., and below, the discussion of the portrait of Muḥammad in the Christian apologies.

3. Tien, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–33.

4. Abū Qurrah weaves together a similar, but brief tissue of quotations from the *Qur'ān* to depict his idea of the Muslim paradise. Cf. Cheikho, art. cit., p. 770.

Islamic revelation, arguing that such a materialistic scenario is incompatible with true spiritual advancement, and inconceivable as an ingredient in a genuine, divine communication to men.[1] Moreover, such an exposition is never to be found in any known, contemporary Muslim commendation of Islam to Christians. Rather, these Muslim apologies, in addition to defending the legitimacy of Muḥammad's claim to prophethood, all concentrate on exposing what their authors consider to be the scriptural and conceptual inadequacies of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, subjects which are only summarily and almost mutely dealt with in the al-Hāšimī letter, in two pages of the 1885 Tien edition, and then only with several well known quotations from the *Qur'ān*.[2] Clearly, therefore, this letter is the work of the Christian author of the whole correspondence. In fact, it merely offers the texts which this author exploits in the al-Kindī letter as prime exhibits of the insufficiency of Islam.

The third section of the al-Hāšimī letter contains a short, final recommendation of Islam, and a renewed assurance of the freedom within which Christian/Muslim dialogue might be conducted. With the contents of the al-Kindī letter in mind, one recognizes a certain wistfulness in the words of the author in the closing remarks of the al-Hāšimī *persona* to his Christian correspondent. He says:

> Argue then, God give you health, with whatever you wish, and speak however, you wish, say what you want. Expatiate on everything that in your opinion will bring you to a stronger argument. You are in the most abundant safety. But you owe it to us, God prosper you, since we have given you maximum freedom, and we have accorded your tongue a wide range, that you set up between you and us a just arbiter, that does no wrong, and that does not deal unjustly in verdict or decision, and that will not incline to anything other than the truth, whenever a change of the wind blows. Indeed, it is reason *(al-'aql)*, to which God himself adheres, be He respected and praised, and which he bestows.[3]

Such pleading is completely out of step with the confident tone of the Muslim, anti-Christian polemicists, such as 'Alī ibn

1. Cf. Vollers, art. cit., pp. 46–7, and also the Greek polemicists as described in Khoury, *op. cit.*, 1972, pp. 300–14. At least one Muslim apologist countered this charge by pointing to a similar materialism in Gospel accounts of the kingdom. Cf. Sourdel, art. cit., p. 31.
2. Tien, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–4.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 36–7.

Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabarī, with his 'silencing questions', al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm, with his sure footed demonstrations, and the sharp tongued self-assurance of al-Ğāḥiẓ.

B) *The Portrait of Muḥammad*

As one should expect, the portrait of Muḥammad that is transmitted in the Christian apologetic literature of the first Abbasid century is very sketchy. Details of his biography are mentioned only to the extent that they serve some purpose in the author's overall intention to discredit the religious claims of Islam, where these claims are in opposition to the teachings of Christianity. The Christian authors of apologetic treatises in Syriac and Arabic were forthright in their rejection of Muslim claims that Muḥammad was in receipt of a revelation from God, that he was the Paraclete announced in the Gospel, or even that he should be considered a genuine prophet. That they were so open and clear in their disavowal of these Muslim tenets should not cause surprise. Muslims were well aware of the fact that Christians did not accept these things. It is true that the debate setting of some of the treatises, such as that of Abraham of Tiberias, or the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence, fostered a certain aggressiveness in diction that Muslims must find offensive. Indeed, it may have been precisely such tracts as these, and such debates and discussions which were their occasions, or at least their inspirations, that elicited the stinging rebuke of al-Ğāḥiẓ, to which we referred above, and that eventually led to the oppressive measures inaugurated at the end of the first Abbasid century by the caliph, al-Mutawakkil.

There was personal contact between Muslims and Christians within *dār al-Islām*. Christians were familiar with the *Qūr'an*, and with Muslim traditions. While they were the adversaries of the Muslims in the religious controversies, there was none of the personal isolation, at least in the first Abbasid century, of the sort that must have been a factor in provoking so many of the hostile fantasies that are found in the polemical works of Christians in other lands, who wrote in Greek or Latin, often depicting Muḥammad as demon possessed, an agent of the anti-Christ, or as personally morally depraved.[1] In the Syriac and

1. Cf. the works of Khoury cited above, and Norman DANIEL, *Islam and the West, the Making of an Image* (Edinburgh, 1960); ID., *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe* (London, 1975); R. W. SOUTHERN, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962).

Arabic treatises, Muḥammad himself is a subject of discussion only to the degree that the authors refer to the facts of his life in an attempt to discredit the religious beliefs about him that the Muslims propound.

1. *Biographical Details.* — The Christian apologists mention the biographical details of Muḥammad's life in order to argue that he is not a prophet in the biblical sense of the term. In the first place they mention the facts of his early career so as to be able to argue that his religious vocation was part of a broader attempt on his part to gain power and preeminence among his own people. Secondly, they cite his encounter with a Christian monk in order to suggest that even his religious message is not original with himself, and that it does not come from God. Rather, they claim, Muḥammad owed what the apologists considered to be his errant religious views to the personal influence of a Christian monk.

Not all of the apologists explicitly mention any details of Muḥammad's biography. They are found only in the more popular, and more polemic, works, such as the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī correspondence, and in the account of Abraham of Tiberias' debate before the Muslim emir in Jerusalem, and, in the instance of Muḥammad's encounter with the Christian monk, in the Christian Baḥīrā legends. For the rest, the more theologically inclined apologists concentrate on a discussion of the motives of credibility that should inform a person's acceptance of anyone who claims to have a revelation from God. In this way, it is quite clear, they intend to reject Muḥammad's claims to prophecy.

Abraham of Tiberias brings up Muḥammad's family history as an argument against the Muslim claim that Muḥammad is the Paraclete whose coming Jesus foretold in John's Gospel. His human genealogy, Abraham contends, precludes the possibility that he could be the heavenly paraclete that is described in the Gospel as the spirit of God. Muḥammad, Abraham says, 'is the son of 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and his mother is Amīnah, the daughter of Wahb ibn 'Abd Manāf. He was born six hundred years after Christ and his ascension to Heaven'.[1]

Abraham's report is a straight forward statement of Muḥammad's family connections. Matters are not quite so simple in the much longer accounts of the author of the al-Hāšimī/al-Kindī

1. Vollers, art. cit., p. 66.

correspondence. Right from the beginning this author's controversial intentions are clear. He writes about the life of Muḥammad, and of the events in which the prophet was involved, with the avowed intention of demonstrating that his very biography is a testimony against the legitimacy of his claim to prophethood. From passages in the *Qur'ān*, and reports that can actually be found in the Muslim traditions and biographies of Muḥammad, the author of the al-Kindī letter takes the information to provide a personality profile of the prophet that, in the Christian apologetic context, negates his prophetic claims. Of all the Christian apologies in Syriac and Arabic this one comes closest to the disdainful spirit of the Greek and Latin polemical treatises. In this respect, it is unique among the treatises composed within *dār al-islām*, and a far cry from the respectful tones of such writers as Ḥabīb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, from whom the writer of the al-Kindī letter has actually quoted at length, as mentioned above.

The al-Kindī character frequently refers to Muḥammad in his letter to al-Hāšimī as 'your master (*ṣāḥibuka*)', and he never calls him by any title of a positive religious significance. His manner of dealing with the biography of the prophet may be made evident most quickly by quoting a rather long passage, in which his characteristic style is plain. He has his bare facts in order, but his interpretation of them paints a portrait of Muḥammad that is far from flattering.

> This man was an orphan in the care of his paternal uncle, 'Abd Manāf, known as Abū Ṭālib, who had taken over his support at the death of his father. He used to provide for him and protect him. And he used to worship the idols, Allāt and al-'Uzzā, along with his uncle's people, and the people of his family in Mecca. . . . Then he grew up in that situation until he came into the service of the caravan that belonged to Ḥadīğah bint Ḫuwaylid. He worked for his wages at it, going back and forth to Syria, etc., up until what came about of his affairs and Ḥadīğah's, and his marriage to her for reasons that you will recognise. Then, when she had emboldened him with her wealth, his soul challenged him to lay claim to dominion and headship over his own clan and the people of his country. . . . And when he despaired of that to which his soul enticed him, he claimed prophethood, and that he was a messenger sent from the Lord of the worlds. . . . This was due to the instruction of the man who dictated to him, whose name and history we shall mention in another place in our book. . . . Then he took as his companions idle people, raider comrades, who used to attack the highway, according to the custom of the country and the practice of its people that is current among them even until now. This sort rallied to him. . . . He came

with his companions to al-Madīnah. It was then a ruinous waste, in which there were only weak people, most of them Jews, in whom there was no liveliness. The first thing relating to justice, or the exhibiting of the legitimacy of prophethood and its signs, that his rule initiated there, was that he took over the drying floor that belonged to two orphan youths of the Banū n-Naǧǧār, and made it into a mosque.[1]

Much has been left out in this translation of al-Kindī's account of Muḥammad's early life and prophetic call. But enough is quoted to enable the reader to catch the drift of the apologist's polemical tone. From this point, he goes on to contrast Muḥammad's militarily unsuccessful early campaigns against the Meccan caravans, with the successful battles of biblical characters such as Joshua bar Nūn. Along the way he manages to paint Muḥammad in the colors of a brigand. Then the writer turns to Muḥammad's personal life. He makes his point quite bluntly.

We say in regard to this master of yours, that his actions are contrary to your statement that he has been sent to all humankind with mercy and compassion. Indeed, he was a man who had no care or concern except for a beautiful woman with whom he might be paired, or for a people whose blood he was zealous to shed, to take their wealth, and to marry their women.[2]

From here the writer goes on to speak with disapproval of Muḥammad's marriages, and of his wives, lingering over the account of ʿĀ'išah's misadventure with Ṣafwān ibn al-Muʿaṭṭal as-Sulamī. Always the issue is that in the view of the writer, Muḥammad's conduct is unworthy of a genuine prophet.

Another incident in Muḥammad's biography that attracts several of the Christian apologists is the story of his encounter with the Christian monk, whose name is Baḥīrā in Muslim sources, and Sergius or Nestorius in Christian sources. According to the Muslim story, while on a trip to Syria with his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, Muḥammad met the monk at Buṣrā. Relying on the description of the future prophet which he found in his sacred books, the monk is said to have recognized 'the seal of prophethood between his shoulders in the very place described in

1. TIEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 68–71. Muir thought that the report of the orphans' plot of land was simply an error on the author's part. Cf. MUIR, *The Apology of al-Kindi, op. cit.*, p. 44, n. 1. But the author knew his Ibn Isḥāq. Cf. GUILLAUME, *op. cit., in* n. 1, p. 134 below, p. 228.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

his book'.[1] With an account such as this, as Armand Abel has explained, ,both at the end of the 2nd/8th century and in the first part of the 3rd/9th century, the tradition, as it then stood, concurred in recognizing in the monk Baḥīrā, the witness, chosen at the heart of the most important scriptural religion, of the authenticity of the Prophet's mission'.[2] An important element in this tradition, that was not lost on the Christian apologists, as we shall see, is the advice the monk gives to Abū Ṭālib. According to Ibn Isḥāq, the monk said, 'Take your nephew back to his country and guard him carefully against the Jews, for by Allāh! if they see him and know about him what I know, they will do him evil.'[3]

The author of the al-Kindī letter presents a version of the story of Muḥammad's meeting with a Christian monk that has as its purpose the rejection of the idea that Muḥammad received revelations from God.[4] In this version the monk's name is given as Sergius. He is said to have met Muḥammad in Mecca, after having been banished from his own Christian people for some unspecified innovation; probably of a doctrinal nature. He repented of his error, however, as the story goes, and when he met Muḥammad he is said to have introduced himself to the future prophet under the name Nestorius, for purposes of affirming Nestorius' doctrinal point of view. We have already noticed above the author's intention to commend the Nestorians to the Muslims, in that the al-Hāšimī character finds the Nestorians to be the most acceptable Christians, approved already in the *Qur'ān*. The reference, of course, is to the passage in *al-Mā'idah* (5):82, according to which the friendliest people to the Muslims are those who call themselves Christians, 'among whom there are elders and monks'. The al-Kindī letter says that Muḥammad's meeting with Sergius/Nestorius is responsible for this verse, and for much else that is in the *Qur'ān* that accords with Christianity. Before, Muḥammad himself could actually become a Nestorian, however, according to the author of the al-Kindī letter, the monk died and his teaching was distorted by two learned Jews, 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām and Ka'b al-Aḥbar. Their influence, al-Kindī says, led ultimately to the errors one

1. A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad; a Translation of Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford, 1955), p. 80; F. Wüstenfeld, *Das Leben Muḥammad's nach Muḥammad Ibn Isḥâk* (2 vols.; Göttingen, 1858), vol. I, pt. 1, pp. 115–7.
2. Armand Abel, Baḥīrā, *EI*², vol. I, p. 922.
3. Guillaume, *op. cit.*, p. 81; Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pt. 1, pp. 116–7.
4. Tien, *op. cit.*, pp. 128–9.

currently finds in the *Qur'ān*. According to Ibn Isḥaq's report, 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām, is remembered in Islamic traditions as a learned Jew of Medina who early on converted to Islam.[1] Ka'b, on the other hand, was a Yementie Jew who actually converted to Islam only after the death of Muḥammad.[2]

The story of Muḥammad's encounter with the monk also appears in the Christian apocalypses in Syriac and Arabic that first appeared in the first Abbasid century.[3] As they have come down to us, there are two Syriac versions of the apocalypse, and one in Arabic. While the major outlines of these versions are similar, they differ considerably in detail. Ironically, it is in the Syriac versions that the monk's story retains the most resemblance to the Muslim traditions about Baḥīrā. In all of the versions, however, the story is told by a traveling monk who is said to have met Baḥīrā in the latter's old age, as he is on the point of death. He recounts his apocalyptic vision of Muslim history to the visitor, including the story of his encounter with Muḥammad, and the young prophet's acceptance of his teaching. The account of the vision, apart from the elements of the Baḥīrā story, is in the apocalyptic tradition common to Christians and Jews at the time.[4] But it is the Baḥīrā story itself that is pertinent here.

In the Syriac versions (A&B) the monk's name is Sargīs (i.e., Sergius). But the writers know his Muslim name, and at one point in version A the author says, 'by the Hagar[enes] he was called *Bᵉḥîrâ* and a prophet'.[5] And thereafter in his narrative he often refers to the monk by both names, i.e., *Sargīs Bᵉḥîrâ*. The monk spent many years in the Ishmaelite territory, the texts say, because he was exiled from Bêt Armāyê on account of his opposition to the veneration of more than one simple cross in a church at any given time. The narrator of the story

1. Cf. Guillaume, *op. cit.*, pp. 240–1; Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, vol. I pt. 1, pp. 353–4.

2. Cf. M. Schmitz, Ka'b al-Aḥbār, *EI*², vol. IV, pp. 316–7. Since Ka'b al-Aḥbār became a Muslim only after the death of Muḥammad, one is tempted here to think of Ubay b. Ka'b, one of the Anṣār, who was the prophet's secretary in Medina. Cf. Jeffrery, *Materials* . . ., p. 114.

3. For the text cf. Gottheil, art. cit. Regarding the dating, cf. the articles of Abel cited in p. 109, n. 1 above, and Graf's reservations in *GCAL*, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 145–9. Graf is swayed by comparisons between the al-Kindi letter and the text in Gottheil. However now that we know of the extensive Christian scholarship in the first Abbasid century, it is not necessary to postulate the dependence of one work on another. There is no reason why one should not conclude that different writers dealt differently with similar themes, even within the same period.

4. Cf. p. 109, n. 2 above.

5. Gottheil, art. cit., *13* (1898), p. 203.

in version A, a monk named Išo'yahb, says that he himself learned of Sargīs Beḥîrâ's first encounter with Muḥammad, from one of his early disciples, a man named Ḥakīm. Then the story picks up elements that are central to the Muslim version, as recounted by Ibn Isḥāq.[1] For Sargīs Beḥîrâ is said to have lived by a well where Arabs often stopped on their travels. One day, the story goes, he saw some Arabs coming in the distance, '—also Mohammed the youth who was coming with them. As soon as Sargis saw the youth Mohammed, he understood that the youth would become a great man; because he saw a vision above his head, the likeness of a cloud'.[2] The narrator goes on to say that since the Arabs left Muḥammad outside when they went in to visit the monk, 'then Sargis said to the Saracens (*sarqāyê*), a great man has come with you; let him enter! They answered, we have with us a boy, an orphan; he is silent and uncouth'.[3] Thereupon, of course, Muḥammad enters and the monk predicts his coming power, making no reference to prophethood, as should be expected in this Christian text. Following this incident in both Syriac versions, the accounts go on to describe Muḥammad's series of interviews with the monk, in which he learns the religious opinions of Sargis and accepts them. The purpose of these narratives, of course, is to designate Sargis, and not God, as the source of Muḥammad's preaching, and the real author of the *Qur'ān*. The writer of version A is quite explicit on this point. He says of Sargis Beḥîrâ: 'He taught the Ishmaelites and became a chief for them, because he prophesied to them the things they liked, he wrote and handed over (*'ašlem*) to them this scripture that they call *Qur'ān*.'[4]

It is in connection with the *Qur'ān* that the Syriac versions bring up the Jewish scribe (*sāprâ*), who, says the author of version B, 'confused and distorted everything that Sargīs said'.[5] This scribe is variously called 'Kaleb', 'Ka'f', 'Ka'b', 'Kālef', and 'Kāteb'. In all probability he is the same Ka'b al-Aḥbār mentioned by the author of the al-Kindī letter, to whom we referred above. Perhaps the Christian writer was aware of the accusation voiced by some Muslims, that Ka'b had introduced Jewish elements into Islam.[6] Whatever may be the truth of

1. Cf. Guillaume, *op. cit.*, pp. 79–81; Wüstenfeld, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pt. 1, pp. 115–7.
2. Gottheil, art. cit., *13* (1898), pp. 216 and 14 (1899), p. 216.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 216 and p. 217.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 212 and 214.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 240 and 250.
6. Cf. Schmitz, art. cit., p. 317.

this suggestion, it is clear that the point of the story for the Syriac writers is that Islam, religiously speaking, amounts to Judaism. The Christian Baḥīrā legend in Syriac closes on this note. The author says of the Muslims: 'Everything to which they adhere is from the doctrine of Ka'b. Sargīs handed over to them the New Testament, and Ka'b the Old Testament.'[1]

The Christian Baḥīrā legend in Arabic is a long confession of guilt on the part of the monk, who is called Baḥīrā here and not Sergius. He makes his confession to a young monk, Murhib, who comes to visit him when he is close to death.[2] The apocalyptic vision is recounted, as is the story of Muḥammad's meeting Baḥīrā. But none of the elements of Ibn Isḥāq's account of the meeting is to be found in the Christian Arabic version of the story, unless it would be the monk's obvious antipathy to the Jews. Rather, in the Christian Arabic version, Muḥammad appears in princely style at Baḥīrā's cell. He is the leader of his band of Arabs. He comes back many times to learn the monk's doctrines. The monk ultimately takes the responsibility for the very wording of many passages in the *Qur'ān*, explaining at each step the real Christian meanings that he intended to communicate, as it were subliminally, under the obvious sense of the text. He places an emphasis on what he considers to be the intellectual and moral disabilities of the Arabs, Muḥammad included. It is clearly the apologetic and polemic intent of the author, not only to prove that Muḥammad is not a prophet, but to suggest that Islam comes from a disgraced Christian monk, to whom the Muslims themselves refer in their traditions of the prophet.

2. *Muḥammad the Paraclete.*—The Syriac versions of the Christian Baḥīrā legends maintain that one of the changes introduced into the *Qur'ān* by Ka'b, the Jewish scribe, after the death of Sargīs Beḥīrā, is the notion that Muḥammad is the paraclete whom Jesus promised to send after going to hisf ather. The author of the Syriac version A puts the charge against Ka'b as follows:

> He changed whatever Sargīs wrote or taught, and he said to them that what he [i.e., Sargīs] had said to them about Christ, the son of Mary, viz., 'I shall go and I shall send to you the Paraclete', this one is Muḥammad.[3]

1. Gottheil, art. cit., *13* (1898), pp. 241–2; *14* (1899), p. 251.
2. Gottheil, art. cit., *15* (1900), pp. 56–102; *17* (1903), pp. 125–66.
3. Gottheil, art. cit., *13* (1898), p. 213; *14* (1899), p. 214.

The reference here is to St. John's Gospel, probably, more specifically, to John 16:7. And, from the Muslim side, in Ibn Isḥāq's biography of the prophet, there is a long quotation from John 15:23–16:2 to the same effect.[1] That is to say, Ibn Isḥāq claims that these verses refer to Muḥammad. The Gospel version from which Ibn Isḥāq's Arabic translation was made was undoubtedly the one that is represented in the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary. The evidence for this conclusion is, among other things, that Ibn Isḥāq's Arabic simply transliterates the Syriac term, *m^{e}naḥḥ^{e}mānâ*, which is a unique rendering among Syriac Gospel versions for the original Greek term, ὁ παράκλητος.[2] Ibn Isḥāq goes on to explain: 'The *Munaḥḥemanâ* (God bless and preserve him!) in Syriac is Muḥammad; in Greek he is the paraclete.'[3]

At this remove, it is difficult to understand how the term 'paraclete' came to be identified with Muḥammad. There is of course the passage in the *Qur'ān* to the effect that Jesus, son of Mary, spoke to the Israelites announcing 'a messenger who will come from me, whose name is Aḥmad' (*aṣ-Ṣaff* (61:6)). And so, on the strength of this statement, Muslims would have been searching the Gospels to find the announcement. Some modern interpreters have suggested that on the basis of the meaning of the name, Aḥmad, taken as a *Beiform* for Muḥammad, a connection with ὁ παράκλητος was made via a confusion with the Greek word ὁ περικλυτός, 'highly-esteemed'. This, however, seems to be an unlikely solution, since the term *aḥmad* was probably not a proper name at the time of the *Qur'ān*.[4] Rather, the *Qur'ān* phrase, in all likelihood, originally meant, 'whose name is praiseworthy', understanding *aḥmad* as an elative adjective. Later, of course, when the adjective was definitely used as a personal name, the *Qur'ān* phrase was understood accordingly.[5] But only a Muslim with a very good knowledge of Greek could have made the identification of Paraclete with Muḥammad on the basis of a confusion of Greek words. Taking his clue from

1. Cf. GUILLAUME, *op. cit.*, pp. 103–4; WÜSTENFELD, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pt. 1, pp. 149–50.

2. Cf. Anton BAUMSTARK, Eine altarabische Evangelienübersetzung aus dem Christlich-Palastinenischen, *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete, 8* (1932), pp. 201–9; A. GUILLAUME, The Version of the Gospels Used in Medina c. A. D. 700, *Al-Andalus, 15* (1950), pp. 289–96.

3. GUILLAUME, *op. cit.*, p. 105; WÜSTENFELD, *op. cit.*, vol. I., pt. 1, p. 50.

4. Cf. W. MONTGOMERY WATT, His Name is Aḥmad, *Muslim World, 34* (1953), pp. 110–7.

5. Cf. Rudi PARET, *Der Koran, Kommentar und Konkordanz* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart, 1977), p. 476.

the passage we have quoted from Ibn Isḥāq, Joseph Schacht suggested that the identification was based simply on the assonance between the Palestinian Syriac word, *m^{e}naḥḥ^{e}mānâ* and the Arabic name, Muḥammad.[1] But this suggestion does not seem very convincing either. Perhaps the straightforward explanation is the best one. The *Qur'ān* says that Jesus foretold the coming of a messenger (cf. also *al-A'rāf* (7):157). The only person whose coming Jesus foretells in the Gospel is the Paraclete. Therefore, the paraclete must be Muḥammad.

Naturally, the Christian apologists of the first Abbasid century simply denied that the Paraclete could be Muḥammad, or that there is any other mention of Muḥammad in either the Gospels, or the Torah, or the books of the prophets. This was already a topic in the Muslim/Christian controversies in the time of Patriarch Timothy. In the report of his debate before the caliph al-Mahdī, the patriarch goes so far as to say:

> To tell the truth, if I had found in the Gospel a prophecy concerning the coming of Muḥammad, I would have left the Gospel for the Ḳur'ān, as I have left the Torah and the Prophets for the Gospel.[2]

Regarding the identity of the Paraclete, Timothy argues that it is the spirit of God, even God himself, and therefore, it can in no way be identified with Muḥammad. To this argument the caliph answers with the charge that the Christians are guilty of the alteration (*al-taḥrīf*) of the text of the scriptures, not only the Gospel, but also the Old Testament passages which Muslims take to refer to Muḥammad, e.g., Isaiah's vision of 'men mounted on donkeys, and men mounted on camels' (Isaiah 21:7). The caliph contends, 'The rider on the ass is Jesus and the rider on the camel is Muḥammad.' But Timothy won't allow any such interpretation, on the grounds that only the Medes and the Elamites are explicitly mentioned in the text.[3]

As for the Paraclete, and the Christian contention that the name can in no way refer to Muḥammad, the Muslim who debated with Abraham of Tiberias retorts that, 'After Christ's ascension into heaven, John and his associates revised the Gospel, as they wished, and they set down what is in your possession. So has our prophet handed it down.'[4] Here the

1. Cf. J. Schacht, Aḥmad, *EI*^{2}, vol. I, p. 267.
2. Mingana, art. cit., p. 36. Cf. also the Arabic version *in* Putman, *op. cit.*, p. 26 of the Arabic text.
3. Mingana, art. cit., pp. 32–9; Putman, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–31.
4. Vollers, art. cit., p. 62.

speaker is referring to the charge in the *Qur'ān*, which actually concerns the Jews, that 'they have perverted the words from their meanings' (*an-Nisā'* 4:46). Other works of the first Abbasid century also testify that Muslim scholars of the period pressed the charge of *al-taḥrīf* against the Christian apologists. In Theodore bar Kônî's anti-Muslim tract, for example, the student/Muslim has the following to say, transferring the charge from Jews to Christians, and citing the authority of his teacher, i.e., Muḥammad. He says.

> I adhere to all that is in the books of the Old Testament because I know that there is no addition or deletion in them, according to the saying of the one who has delivered this teaching to us. But in regard to what is written in the New Testament, I do not adhere to all of it, because there are many things in it that are falsified. He (i.e., Christ) did not bring them. Others have introduced and intermingled them for the purpose of deception.[1]

Other Christian apologists of the period also devote portions of their works to refuting the charge of *al-taḥrīf*.[2] The importance of bringing the matter up in the present connection is the evidence it brings to our attention of how much the Muslim/Christian controversies of the first Abbasid century were centered on the scriptures—in the works of both parties. For example, in regard to the Paraclete/Muḥammad identification, the Muslim apologist, 'Alī ibn Rabbān aṭ-Ṭabarī, argues at some length in favor of the Muslim interpretation of the Johannine passages in question, in the process refuting the usual Christian objections to the identification, and in particular Timothy's claim that the Paraclete is God's consubstantial Spirit. Aṭ-Ṭabarī, on the basis of further scriptural and *Qur'ānic* references, goes on to interpret the Spirit of God/Paraclete identification in a manner acceptable to Muslims.[3]

3. *Muḥammad and Miracles.*—Running like a refrain through all of the Christian apologies of the first Abbasid century is the contention that miraculous signs, worked by the prophets in the name of God, or by Jesus in his own name, are the only sufficiently reasonable warranty for accepting Christianity, or,

1. Scher, *op. cit.*, vol. 69, p. 235.
2. *Cf.*, e.g., the arguments of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, in his *Kitāb al-burhān*, Hayek, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–6.
3. *Cf.* Mingana, *The Book of Religion and Empire* (Manchester, 1923), pp. 118–24 (Arabic text).

indeed, any scripture, anyone claiming divine inspiration, or any body of religious doctrine. The reason for this insistence is the notable lack of personal miracles ascribed to Muḥammad, along with the *Qur'ān*'s rejection of miracles as a criterion for religious credibility. 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, for example, cites *al-An'ām* (6:109) to this effect. The verse says:

> They have sworn by God the most earnest oaths if a sign comes to them they will believe in it. Say: 'Signs are only with God.' What will make you realize that, when it comes, they will not believe? (Arberry).

'Ammār, claiming to be following an interpretation of 'Abd Allāh ibn al-'Abbās, says that the rejection of miraculous signs recorded in this verse, came down to Muḥammad on the occasion of an oath sworn by Christians, Jews and polytheists, that if they should see such a sign worked at the hands of Muḥammad they would put their faith in him.[1] 'Ammār's point is that even on an occasion such as this, Muḥammad rejects the very notion of miraculous signs. Therefore, in 'Ammār's view, in principle, Islam and Muḥammad have no reasonable claim to credibility.

The Christians and Jews are not in fact explicitly mentioned in the passage that 'Ammār quotes from *al-An'ām*, nor can I find any such interpretation of the verse attributed to Ibn al-'Abbās in a Muslim source. Nevertheless, it is clear that 'Ammār is aware of the *Qur'ān*'s negative view of personal evidentiary miracles in Muḥammad's instance.

The author of the al-Kindī letter also knew of the *Qur'ān*'s rejection of personal evidentiary miracles. He cites *al-Isrā'* (17):59 to this effect, a verse to which 'Amāmr al-Baṣrī also refers, in the passage of his *Kitāb al-burhān* cited above.[2] But in the al-Kindī letter the author goes on to enumerate a number of miracles, which, he says, later Muslim traditions have attributed to Muḥammad. People have alleged, he maintains, against Muḥammad's wishes, that these extraordinary incidents attest to the genuineness of his prophetic role. In fact, the writer concludes, Muḥammad's claims were accepted only by force of arms.[3]

1. Cf. Hayek, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–32.
2. Cf. Tien, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
3. Cf. Tien, pp. 103–9. At one point the author of the al-Kindī letter cites one, Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq az-Zuhrī as the source of his information about one of Muḥammad's miracles. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 108. It is the miracle in which the prophet puts his hand into an empty water vessel, and enough water flowed out for men and beasts to drink. In the first place, it looks as if the Christian author has given the author of the *sīrah* the *nisbah* of the traditionist, Muḥammad b. Muslim b. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Šihāb az-Zuhrī, from

It is clear that most Christian apologists of the first Abbasid century believed that people accepted Islam, and Muḥammad's status as a prophet, not because of evidentiary miracles, but because of a number of other motives that the apologists consider to be unworthy. Theodore Abū Qurrah, Ḥabîb ibn Ḫidmah Abū Rā'iṭah, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, and Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq all have lists of such motives, which they explain in greater or less detail. While no two of the lists are exactly the same, they are very similar. 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, for example, gives the following list in one place in his *Kitāb al-burhān*: 'tribal collusion' (*at-tawāṭu'*), 'the sword', 'wealth, dominion and power', 'ethnic bigotry' (*al-'aṣabiyyah*), 'personal preference', 'licentious laws', and 'sorcery'.[1] The method then is to argue that all religions other than Christianity are accepted for one or more of these unworthy reasons. Whereas Christianity, the arguments go, especially *vis à vis* Islam, is accepted only because of the divine testimony of the miracles of Christ, and of the apostles, in the name of Christ.

C. *The Estimation of the* Qur'ān

Doubtless because of the polemic pressure exerted by the Christian apologists, Muslim scholars late in the first Abbasid century, and thereafter, elaborated the argument that the *Qur'ān* is Islam's evidentiary miracle. The inspiration for this doctrine is, of course, already to be found in the *Qur'ān*, e.g., in *al-Isrā'* (17:88), *al-Baqarah* (2:23), and *al-Ḥašr* (59:21). The author of the al-Kindī letter cites these verses as what the Muslim apologists bring forward in support of their contention that the *Qur'ān* itself is their most compelling argument (*al-ḥuǧǧah al-bāligḥah*, cf. *al-An'ām* (6:149), in favor of the claim that Muḥammad was in receipt of divine revelations, the same as were Moses, the prophets, and Jesus Christ. By comparison with the earlier divine messengers, the author of the al-Kindī letter contends, 'Your master was an *ummī* man, who had no

whom Ibn Isḥāq actually quotes fairly often. Secondly, Ibn Isḥāq's version of the al-Ḥuḍaybiyah miracle, which is presumably the one at issue here, involves digging in a dry well with one of Muḥammad's arrows. Cf. GUILLAUME, *op. cit.*, pp. 500–1; WÜSTENFELD, vol. I, pt. 2, p. 742. There were several versions of this miracle in Islamic tradition. Cf. the references *in* A. J. WENSINCK, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (Leiden, 1927), p. 102.

1. Cf. HAYEK, *op. cit.*, p. 33. For a discussion of these lists, and their role in apologetic argument, cf. Sidney H. GRIFFITH, Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians, *Proceedings of the PMR Conference, 4* (1979), pp. 63-87.

learning, and no knowledge of these reports. And had it not been communicated to him by inspiration, and prophesied to him, from where would he have learned it, to the point of setting it down and bringing it forth?'[1] He answers his own question. He claims that the Christian monk, Sergius, i.e., Sargis Baḥīrā, taught Muḥammad the *Qur'ān*, which was subsequently distorted, according to al-Kindī, by the two Jews, 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām and Ka'b al-Aḥbār.

From this point, the author of the al-Kindī letter launches himself into a long discussion of the history of the putting together, or the collection (*al-ǧam'*), of the text of the *Qur'ān* into the form in which it presently exists. He mentions the details of the recensions of Abū Bakr and 'Uthman, and cites Muslim disagreements over particular verses, words, and phrases. All of this, in his view, is evidence that the *Qur'ān* cannot be considered a book of divine revelation. At the end he comes back to the Arabic language of the *Qur'ān*, i.e., the claim that no one can imitate it. He attacks its Arabic style, and argues that not only is it not an evidence of divine revelation, but it is not worthy of the best Arab poets.[2]

There is no space here to analyze the al-Kindī letter's account of the collection of the *Qur'ān*. Unfortunately, thus far little scholarly attention has been paid to this valuable ninth century discussion of such an important issue. Perhaps the polemical character of the text makes it suspect as an historical document. But the fact remains that it is one of the earliest testimonies to the process of the *Qur'ān*'s canonization.

An interesting phrase in the al-Kindī letter's discussion of the *Qur'ān* is the characterization of Muḥammad as a *raǧulun ummiyyun*. The adjective *ummī* occurs also in the *Qur'ān* as a description of the prophet, in *al-A'rāf* (7):157 and 158. There has been an enormous amount of discussion about its precise meaning.[3] It is quite clear in the passage quoted above that for the Christian apologist it means that Muḥammad was untutored and had no knowledge of the Jewish and Christian scripture narratives. There is no explicit suggestion that illiteracy is implied in the meaning of the term, as later Muslim usage would have it. But neither is the sense of the word excluded by what the al-Kindī character has to say. And it is clear from other

1. Tien, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
2. Cf. Tien, *op. cit.*, pp. 126–48.
3. Cf. Paret, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–2.

sources that the meaning of the adjective had a role to play in the growth of the doctrine of the *Qur'ān* as Islam's evidentiary miracle. A recent study suggests that in Muslim commentaries on the *Qur'ān*, the idea that the adjective primarily means illiteracy came into prominence only in the first Abbasid century.[1] This development would not be surprising, given the fact that this is also the period in which the Christian apologetic pressure began to build within *dār al-islām*. Furthermore, it is now clear that the elaboration of the formal doctrine of *i'ǧāz al-qur'ān*, i.e., the miraculous inimitability of the language of the *Qur'ān*, owes something to the pressures exerted within the community by Christian polemics. While it may not have come into full flower among the Muslim *mutakallimūn* until the tenth century, the doctrine clearly has its roots in the works of the very Muslim scholars who were in controversy with the Christian apologists, with their insistence on evidentiary miracles, already in the first Abbasid century.[2] The nature of the Christian pressure is evident in the following exchange between the caliph al-Mahdī and patriarch Timothy:

> And our King said to me: 'Do you not believe that Our Book was given by God?'—And I replied to him: ?It is not my business to decide whether it is from God or not. But I will say something of which your majesty is well aware, and that is all the words of God found in the Torah and in the Prophets, and those of them found in the Gospel and in the writings of the Apostles, have been confirmed by signs and miracles; as to the words of your Book they have not been corroborated by a single sign or miracle. . . . Since signs and miracles are proofs of the will of God, the conclusion drawn from their absence in your Book is well known to your Majesty.'[3]

For the rest, the Christian apologists of the first Abbasid century quoted the *Qur'ān* abundantly in their arguments, and not always negatively. It is quite clear, that whether or not they refer to it by some such expression as, 'your scripture', they mean to use its words and phrases because they are immediately familiar to Muslims, and the apologists hope thereby to purchase

1. Cf. I. Goldfeld, The Illiterate Prophet *(Nabī Ummī)*, an inquiry into the development of a dogma in Islamic tradition, *Der Islam, 57* (1980), pp. 58–67.
2. Cf. Richard C. Martin, The Role of the Basrah Mu'tazilah in Formulating the Doctrine of the Apologetic Miracle, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies, 39* (1980), pp. 175–89.
3. Mingana, art. cit., pp. 36–7.

some persuasiveness for their arguments. The anonymous Arabic treatise on the Trinity from Mt. Sinai, for example, quotes the *Qur'ān* by name, albeit not always exactly, right along with the other testimonies of the divine plural from scripture, in support of the doctrine of the Trinity![1] It is no wonder, then, that the Muslim jurist aš-Šāfi'ī (d. 820) held that a copy of the *Qur'ān* may not be sold to a Christian, and that a will should be void which bequeaths a *Qur'ān* or a collection of traditions to a Christian.[2]

1. Cf. GIBSON, *op. cit.*, p. 77 (Arabic text).
2. Cf. TRITTON, *op. cit.*, p. 101; FATTAL, *op. cit.*, pp. 148–9.