

# THE RISE OF ISLAM ACCORDING TO DIONYSIUS OF TELL-MAHRĒ: TENTATIVE RECONSTRUCTION THROUGH THREE DEPENDENT TEXTS\*

## 1. *Introduction*

Among the most prominent Syriac historiographical sources on the early Islamic period, the *Chronicle* of the West Syriac (Syriac Orthodox) Patriarch Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē (r. 818-845, henceforth DTM) ranks high<sup>1</sup>. Though now lost apart from a few excerpts<sup>2</sup>, large parts of it can be recovered with recourse to the *Chronicle* of Patriarch Michael Rabō (r. 1166-99) and the anonymous *Chronicle up to the Year 1234*, both of which seemingly independently from one another substantially drew on DTM's work for the years 582 to 842, the period covered by the latter. Material stemming from this period that meets the criterion of double (independent) attestation can quite securely be attributed to DTM. It is much more difficult, however, to make a judgement in cases where one chronicler has material of this period which is absent or different from the other. The consensus that has emerged in recent scholarship is that, although both West Syriac chroniclers reworked and adapted the *Chronicle* to their own purposes, the Anonymous Chronicler on the whole has preserved it more fully and faithfully than Michael did.

In his tentative reconstruction of the secular part of DTM's *Chronicle* for the years 582-718, Andrew Palmer laid the cornerstone for this view. Assuming that *Chron. 1234* preserves DTM's text better than Michael who often omits, Palmer offered translations of nearly all the material *Chron. 1234* provides for this period, referring information only given by Michael, which the Anonymous Chronicler presumably omitted, to the

\* This article emerged out of my current PhD project, funded by the FWO, on the sources of Dionysius bar Šalībī's *Disputation against the Muslims*. Part of this article was presented during the 9<sup>th</sup> World Syriac Conference at SEERI, Kottayam, India. I thank the other participants for their inspiring comments. I am also indebted to Herman Teule, Andy Hilken, and Sam Noble for helpful remarks on an earlier draft of this article. All remaining shortcomings are, needless to say, my own. I also wish to thank Sam Noble for corrections to my English.

<sup>1</sup> For the significance of this work, see TEULE, *Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē*.

<sup>2</sup> For two such excerpts, see ABRAMOWSKI, *Dionysius von Tellmahre*, p. 130-144. Marianna Mazzola from Ghent University is currently preparing an edition, translation, and commentary of all extant excerpts known today in the context of the FWO project *Re-assembling the past. Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, early Syriac historiography, and its Byzantine and Arab context (582-842)*.

notes as supplements<sup>3</sup>. Also Robert Hoyland prefers *Chron. 1234* over Michael in his attempt to retrieve the (lost) *Chronicle* of Theophilus of Edessa (d. 780's), a major source of DTM for circa the period 590-755. This preference is evident from the lengthier pericopes said to represent DTM's text where Hoyland, like Palmer before him, only provides translations of *Chron. 1234*, while drawing attention in his notes to discrepancies with Michael's text. Yet Hoyland also had some criticism for Palmer's high confidence in *Chron. 1234*'s fidelity to DTM and pointed out that material only attested in it which is absent from Michael's text cannot always directly be attributed to DTM, as Palmer tended to do, since the Anonymous Chronicler added entire sections on the Arab conquests and first civil war which he borrowed from a Muslim history<sup>4</sup>. In his recent comprehensive study of the sources of *Chron. 1234*, Andy Hilkins thus summarizes the state of the art:

A comparison with material from Michael's *Chronicle* shows that, though Michael often also preserves material that is not extant in the *Chronicle* of 1234, the latter tends to preserve more complete versions of longer narratives from Dionysius. However, it is often difficult to distinguish between material from Dionysius' *History* and from supplemental sources, most notably the unidentified Islamic Arabic history that the Anonymous Chronicler used<sup>5</sup>.

The present article seeks to add further nuance to the value of *Chron. 1234* as the more privileged gateway to DTM's lost *Chronicle*. Rather than pointing out additions, as Hoyland did, our inquiry will lead to what is missing. More specifically, by entering a new dependant into the debate, light will be shed on a hitherto unknown case where the Anonymous Chronicler did *not* preserve the more complete version of a longer narrative, but rather drastically reduced and reworked it. The passage where this occurred – it will be argued – is DTM's account of the rise of Islam, which both Michael and the Anonymous Chronicler included at the head of their narratives on the Islamic period<sup>6</sup>. For the sake of analysis, this account can

<sup>3</sup> PALMER, *The Seventh Century*, p. 102: "In what follows I assume that the *Chronicle of AD 1234* preserves Dionysius faithfully, barring omissions and scribal corruptions. In the notes are translated those passages of the Syriac *Chronicle* of Michael (late twelfth century) which supplement the account of the *Chronicle of AD 1234*".

<sup>4</sup> HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*, p. 13, nr. 43; and previously in HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, p. 418-9, nr. 105.

<sup>5</sup> HILKENS, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, p. 328.

<sup>6</sup> For Michael's account, see CHABOT, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 4, p. 404-8 (Syr.), vol. 2, p. 403-405 (Fr.); IBRAHIM, *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex*, p. 407-411. The Anonymous Chronicler's version is found in CHABOT, *Anonymi auctoris chronicon*, p. 227-230 (Syr.), p. 178-180 (Lat.); see also the English translations by PALMER, *The Seventh Century*, p. 129-132; HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle*, p. 88-90 (partial translation).

be divided into twenty-nine paragraphs divided over three parts (see appendix). The first part deals with Muḥammad's Arab background, his discovery of monotheism, and his early followers (§ 2-6). The second part narrates how sustained Arab incursions into Palestine and neighboring regions resulted in the establishment of a vast empire (§ 7-12). Having characterized Muḥammad's motivations as a mix of religious and worldly aspirations, DTM finally gives a description of the doctrines and practices which Muḥammad taught his followers (§ 13-29).

Although both chroniclers agree on the main lines of the narrative, each version, but mostly that of Michael, includes material not extant in the other often touching upon significant historical and theological points. For example, whereas we are quite sure that Muḥammad was said to have been initiated into monotheism during trade expeditions in Palestine, as both chroniclers have preserved, it is less clear whether DTM also claimed that this initiation involved Jewish informants, as only Michael reports (§ 4). Likewise, whereas it is quite certain that DTM described the establishment of a powerful Islamic empire, it is less sure whether this was said to be a divine chastisement for Christian sin, as only the Anonymous Chronicler asserts (§ 12). Conform the general preference for *Chron. 1234*, most scholars opted to lend more credence to the latter's account rather than to the slightly longer version of Michael<sup>7</sup>. A more specific reason in this particular case is provided by Hoyland: Michael "makes a few emendations of a polemical nature, more likely added than omitted [by the Anonymous Chronicler]"<sup>8</sup>. As convincing as this argument may seem at first, it has its limits. Principally, it underestimates the real possibility that the Anonymous Chronicler simply was less concerned with Islam as a rival religious system than DTM and Michael were. In other words: there are no solid intrinsic reasons for elevating one version above the other; a critical judgment leads to a stalemate<sup>9</sup>.

Lest a manuscript of DTM's *Chronicle* be discovered, there are few reliable ways out of such an impasse. One way, however, is for a new dependent text to be identified<sup>10</sup>. Interestingly, it is not in the genre of

<sup>7</sup> See the references collected by PENN, *Envisioning Islam*, p. 220-221, nr. 168. Penn's personal view (p. 90-91), which will also prove to be inadequate, is that "the pattern of word-for-word agreement between the *Chronicle ad 1234* and the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian indicates that both must have substantially edited Dionysius's [*sic*] discussion".

<sup>8</sup> HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* p. 90, nr. 149; and previously in HOYLAND, *The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad*, p. 280, nr. 16.

<sup>9</sup> See in this respect also the criticism by VAN GINKEL, *Making History*, p. 357-358; VAN GINKEL, *Michael the Syrian*, p. 55-58.

<sup>10</sup> On DTM's known dependants, see ABRAMOWSKI, *Dionysius von Tellmahre*, p. 14-29.

historiography that such a text is to be found, but in apologetic literature in response to Islam. Although historical and doctrinal descriptions of Islam are rare in Syriac (and Christian Arabic) apologies, which usually only bring up such information as it serves the argumentative purposes at hand, such an account is found in the opening chapter of the *Disputation against the Muslims*, a comprehensive refutation of Islam composed in Melitene in or shortly before the year 1165 by the West Syriac bishop, Dionysius bar Šalībī (d. 1171)<sup>11</sup>. As it turns out, this account is highly similar to that of the Anonymous Chronicler and even more so to that of Michael. Provided that it can be shown that Bar Šalībī's account was taken directly from DTM's *Chronicle*, an unique opportunity arises to have at our disposal not a two- but a three-dimensional basis for reconstructing the lost original and evaluating individual dependants.

## 2. *Dionysius bar Šalībī as New Dependiant*

Already some time ago, Sidney Griffith pointed out the significance of the information on early Islamic history provided in the opening chapter of Bar Šalībī's *Disputation*<sup>12</sup>. It was his student Joseph Amar, the modern editor of the treatise, who first attempted to identify the sources used here by Bar Šalībī. Noting the close parallels with Michael's *Chronicle*, which he indicated in brackets in his translation, Amar concluded: "The direction of the borrowing is almost certainly from Michael to Bar Šalībī"<sup>13</sup>. Without any further comment, Amar in the same footnote also referred to reports on Islam in the seventh century *Chronicle of Khuzistan* and the *Chronography* of Gregory Bar 'Ebrōyō (d. 1286), which, as is well-known, depends on Michael's *Chronicle*. The lack of reference to DTM's *Chronicle* as also preserved in *Chron. 1234* is unexpected and suggests that Amar overlooked the possibility that the high resemblance between the accounts of Bar Šalībī and Michael may have been due to an analogous use of a *common* source. This undermines his bold assertion that Bar Šalībī relied on Michael "almost certainly".

<sup>11</sup> AMAR, *A Response to the Arabs*, p. 2-4 (Syr.), p. 2-4 (Eng.). General surveys of this work are provided in JACOBS, *Preliminary Considerations*, p. 106-109, and the sources referenced there. *Against the Muslims* was composed shortly before *Against the Jews*, which was written "sometime between 1165 and 1168 AD", see EBIED – MALKI – WICKHAM, *Against the Jews*, p. 12. Also the description of Islam in the list of heresies included in the Christological part of Jacob bar Šakkō's (d. 1241) *Book of Treasures* reads as a brief summary of DTM's account, but appears to depend on an intermediary source, perhaps Bar Šalībī's *Disputation*. For a translation of this passage, see TEULE, *Jacob bar Šakko*, p. 147-148.

<sup>12</sup> GRIFFITH, *Disputes with Muslims*, p. 269; GRIFFITH, *Syriac Writers on Muslims*, p. 23-24.

<sup>13</sup> AMAR, *A Response to the Arabs*, p. 1, nr. 1 (Eng.).

Herman Teule was more careful in characterising Bar Ṣalībī's narrative and abstained from drawing definite conclusions as to its origin, observing only that it is "comparable to the account given by Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē"<sup>14</sup>. Basing her position on Teule's view, Barbara Roggema went a step further and argued that Bar Ṣalībī's description "se fonde sur une section bien connue de la *Chronique* de Denys de Tell-Mahrē (m. 845), que Michel le Syrien (m. 1199) a lui aussi incluse dans sa *Chronique*"<sup>15</sup>. In fact, Roggema took yet another step further by suggesting that certain details only given by Bar Ṣalībī, such as the mention of the Muslim practice of dry ablution, are Bar Ṣalībī's personal additions, rather than omissions by Michael and the Anonymous Chronicler (the latter writer is not mentioned by Roggema). Though such a reading of Bar Ṣalībī's 'extra' material is disputable, Roggema's core intuition is pertinent. Not providing any justification for her claims, however, her argument lacks cogency.

What is required, therefore, is to set up a stemma determining the textual relations between our three accounts and DTM's original. For the sake of argument, it is commendable to be as inclusive as possible and consider also the (slight) possibility that Michael and/or the Anonymous Chronicle indirectly borrowed from DTM's account. However, in order not to overcomplicate matters needlessly, a few options are to be discarded from the outset. First, it is quite implausible that Michael and/or Bar Ṣalībī made use of the Anonymous Chronicler's account, for the latter's text was composed after Bar Ṣalībī and Michael had written their narratives<sup>16</sup>. This impossibility is confirmed on a textual basis: Of the three possible pair combinations, Michael and Bar Ṣalībī have the most common material proper to them alone. Second, it is also unlikely that the (lost) *Chronicle* by Ignatius III of Melitene (d. 1094), which also draws on DTM, may have mediated for one or more of the three accounts. Although it is known that at least Michel and the Anonymous Chronicler used Ignatius' *Chronicle*, the chances are negligible that they relied on it for the passage under consideration. As difficult as it may be to determine what pre-842 material of Michael and the Anonymous Chronicler comes from Ignatius, if any, Hilkens' comparison of post-842 material has brought to light Ignatius' marginal interest in events related to the Islamic empire<sup>17</sup>. One might expect therefore, that *if* Ignatius incorporated the account of Islam into his

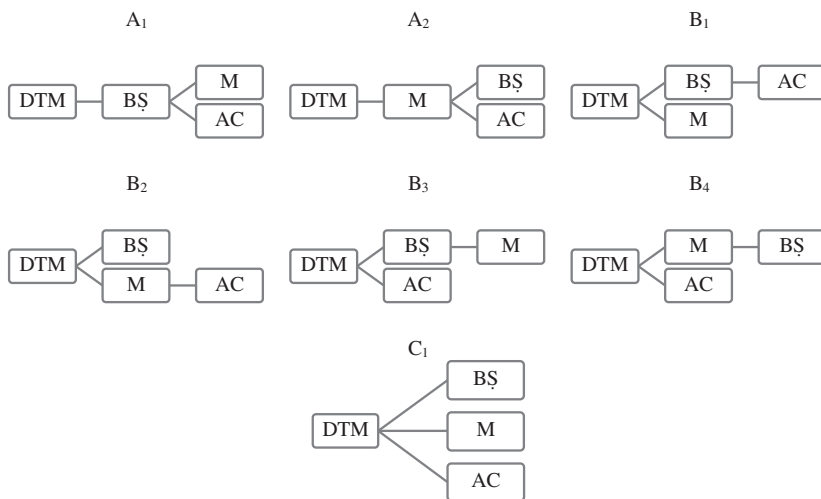
<sup>14</sup> TEULE, *Dionysius bar Ṣalibi*, p. 667.

<sup>15</sup> ROGGEMA, *Pour une lecture*, p. 284.

<sup>16</sup> On the dating of both chronicles, see WELTECKE, *Die "Beschreibung der Zeiten"*, p. 131-133; HILKENS, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, p. 17-23.

<sup>17</sup> HILKENS, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, p. 293-303.

work, it would have been in a sharply reduced form unlike the lengthy narratives provided by our three extant sources. These eliminations considered, seven possible genealogies remain:



*DTM: Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē | BŞ: Dionysius bar Šalībī*  
*M: Michael Rabō | AC: Anonymous Chronicler*

A close reading of the three accounts reveals that both the pair M-AC and the pair BŞ-AC have material in common which is unattested in the unpaired text. As for the first pair, both Michael and the Anonymous Chronicler, but not Bar Šalībī, relate the beginning of the Islamic empire to Muḥammad’s claim to prophecy (§ 2), mention that Muḥammad threatened his followers (§ 7), preserve a fuller description of the raids into Palestine (§ 8-9), and refer to the imposition of the poll tax (§ 11). Both chroniclers also mention that Muḥammad established divine “laws” in the plural (§ 13), share the identical expression “the divinity is unique in person and in hypostasis” (*alōhutō ḥdōnōyat faršūfō wa-ḥdōnōyat qumō*) in depicting Muḥammad’s doctrine of God (§ 14), state that Christ is considered a “just man” (*barnōšō zadīqō*) born “without sexual intercourse” (*d-lō zuwōgō*) who was directly created by God just as Adam was directly created from earth (M: *men ‘afrō*; AC: *men ar’ō*) (§ 16), refer to the Jews and the casting of Christ’s image on someone else at the time of his crucifixion (§ 19), provide a fuller description of the Islamic conception of Paradise (§ 20), specify that Muslims fast for thirty days (§ 25), and state that Muslims circumcise males *and* females (§ 27). These agreements rule

out the possibility that Michael and/or the Anonymous Chronicler made use of Bar Ṣalībī's text (A<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>3</sub>). Although in several respects Michael can be considered Bar Ṣalībī's successor, he does not appear to have used the latter's work<sup>18</sup>.

Although they do not have the amount of common material like the other two pairs have, Bar Ṣalībī and the Anonymous Chronicler do share some specific wordings and details not found in Michael's version. First, whereas Bar Ṣalībī and the Anonymous Chronicler narrate how Muḥammad promised his followers "a (good) land flowing with milk and honey" (cf. Ex 3:8), Michael abbreviates "a good land" (§ 7). Second, whereas the former two writers use *ŠBY* and *BZZ* in describing Muḥammad's raids, Michael only uses the former verb (§ 8). Third, whereas Bar Ṣalībī and the Anonymous Chronicler make use of *ŠRTH* in describing the Arabs' accumulation of spoils, it is substituted with the synonymous verb *ʿWTR* by Michael (§ 9). Fourth, whereas the former writers make use of *ŠʿBD* in describing the submission of various regions to the burgeoning Islamic empire, a term of this root is not used by Michael (§ 11). Though it cannot be excluded that some of these discrepancies may be copyist mistakes, the cumulative weight of these minor agreements rules out that Bar Ṣalībī and/or the Anonymous Chronicler made use of Michael's account (A<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>4</sub>). Moreover, from a chronological perspective there is little reason to believe that Bar Ṣalībī could have made use of the work of his former student. At the time Dionysius was composing his *Disputation*, Michael's *Chronicle* was far from being completed, if already commenced at all to begin with<sup>19</sup>.

Since our three authors all include material that was omitted by the others, they could not have been borrowing from each other. Hence, it can safely be assumed that also Bar Ṣalībī, just as Michael and the Anonymous Chronicler, made independent use of DTM's *Chronicle* (C<sub>1</sub>). That also Bar Ṣalībī depends on this work should not really surprise us. It was, after all, the most authoritative West Syrian historical source available on the early Islamic period.

There is one final piece of evidence for Bar Ṣalībī's dependence on DTM. In describing how the Arabs established a consolidated empire, only Bar Ṣalībī specifies that it was ruled in succession by "twenty-five kings" (*malkē ʿesrīn w-ḥamšō*) (§ 12):

<sup>18</sup> On their teacher-student relation, see WELTECKE, *Die "Beschreibung der Zeiten"*, p. 249-255; RABO, *Dionysius Jakob Bar Ṣalibi*, p. 23-24.

<sup>19</sup> See nr. 16.



Bar Ṣalībī, <i>Disputation</i>	Michael, <i>Chronicle</i>	<i>Chron. 1234</i>
They established a consolidated empire in which <i>twenty-five kings</i> came to power, one after another.	They established a consolidated empire, and by the succession from man to man of those that came to power in it, it became exceedingly strong.	Therefore their hegemony gave rise to a consolidated empire, and by the succession of one man after another of those rulers that came to power in it, it became exceedingly strong, so that it pleased the judgments of God who wishes to chastise us for our sins.

The specification “twenty-five” comes rather unexpectedly, since about twice that amount of caliphs had come to power by the time of Bar Ṣalībī. This chronological discrepancy may be the reason why Michael and the Anonymous Chronicle seem to paraphrase their way around it. However, this note sits remarkably well with the years 842 to 845, the time when DTM wrote his *Chronicle* and the caliphate was ruled by al-Muṭaṣim (r. 833-842) and al-Wāthiq (r. 842-847). Given the many historical and chronological ambiguities in extant Syriac caliph lists, it is not easy to pinpoint who the twenty-fifth caliph is considered to be in Syriac sources<sup>20</sup>. However, if we extrapolate from the list in the *Account up to the Year 775*, which mentions al-Mahdī (r. 775-85) as the eighteenth caliph, the twenty-fifth caliph would indeed be al-Wāthiq, provided that al-Hādī (r. 785-6), who ruled only transiently, is not reckoned<sup>21</sup>. Though it is odd for Bar Ṣalībī to retain such an anachronism, especially in light of his efforts elsewhere to bring DTM’s narrative up to date (see 3.2.), we may thank him for it, since it provides us with conclusive evidence as to the nature of his *Vorlage*.

In light of Hilken’s suggestion that Ignatius of Melitene, Michael Rabō, and the Anonymous Chronicler all made use of the manuscript of DTM’s *Chronicle* kept at the monastery of Bar Ṣawmō in Melitene, one may wonder whether Bar Ṣalībī did not do so likewise<sup>22</sup>. If this is true, Bar Ṣalībī

<sup>20</sup> See HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, p. 393-399.

<sup>21</sup> BROOKS, *Expositio*, p. 337-49 (Syr.), p. 267-75 (Lat.); translated in English in PALMER, *The Seventh Century*, p. 51-52; HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, p. 397-398. On the basis of an analogous reasoning, the reference to “twenty-four Ishmaelite kings” is believed to situate the composition of the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* in the early ninth century, see ROGGEMA, *Some Remarks*, p. 119-120.

<sup>22</sup> HILKENS, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, p. 267.



would have been working with this manuscript before the Anonymous Chronicler and possibly even Michael had come to use it.

### 3. *Redaction Criticism*

Reconstructing DTM's original version and assessing the dependants' redaction work are two sides of the same coin. They require a criterionology to distinguish primary from secondary readings. The principal criterion adopted here to make such a distinction is that of multiple (independent) attestation. There can be little doubt that material attested by all three dependants is derived from DTM. To a lesser degree, this is also true for cases of double attestation, as it remains unlikely that an identical interpolation could twice originate from independent authors. Of course, this argument applies only to *positive* attestation, for one cannot infer an absence in DTM's text from a double silence, especially not given the tendency of our three writers to abridge. Although much more certainty about DTM's text can be acquired by using three rather than two dependent sources, the problem of single attestation remains inevitable, and with it, uncertainty about the attribution of such material. Setting up the overall redactory profile of our three dependants can, however, provide a basis for a careful appraisal in such ambiguous places. Before any attempt at reconstruction can be undertaken, it is appropriate therefore to first adopt a redaction-critical perspective.

#### 3.1. *The Anonymous Chronicler*

Large parts of DTM's narrative preserved by both Michael and Bar Ṣalībī are drastically reduced in *Chron. 1234*. In the first part of the narrative, various elements disappeared from the Anonymous Chronicler's paraphrases, namely the various names of the Arabs (§ 3), Muḥammad's Jewish informants (§ 4), the idolatry of the pagan Arabs (§ 5), and Muḥammad's demand of personal obedience (§ 6). Also the geographical description of Arabia was shortened (§ 3). Only the rubric and chronological notice (§ 1-2) appear preserved more intact. In the third part on Muḥammad's laws, two items were entirely omitted, i.e. the notice on the Arabs' beliefs about the virgin Mary (§ 18) and determinism (§ 19). Of the Islamic teachings that were retained, a large number was abbreviated. The description of Muḥammad's Christology (§ 16-17) is summarized, omitting the mention that Christ is called "Word and Spirit of God" in a purely creaturely sense, an allusion to Q 4:171 (§ 17). Of the description of Islamic purification

rituals (§ 26) only the brief statement survived that “it is necessary to be washed before prayer”, which was appended to the notice on prayer (§ 23). Also the report on the Arabs’ belief in the resurrection and final judgment (§ 24) was relocated and appended to a description of Paradise (§ 19). Finally, several minor elements likewise did not make the cut (if not scribal mistakes): the statement that Muḥammad’s doctrine of God neither accepts “a son or companion” (§ 14), that Muḥammad accepted “the book [...] of the prophets” (§ 15), that Christ’s image was cast on “one of his disciples” at the time of crucifixion (§ 19), and that the Arabs perform “four prostrations” every time they pray (§ 23).

The narration of at least three of Muḥammad’s teachings has been rewritten by the Anonymous Chronicler. First, the reference to Muḥammad’s partial acceptance of the Gospel is interpreted as referring to Muḥammad’s rejection of Christ’s crucifixion (§ 15), an issue addressed in § 19. Second, whereas Bar Ṣalībī and Michael report that Muslims marry up to four free women and as many concubines as they want, the Anonymous Chronicler inverts it as though the acceptable amount of wives were unlimited and that of concubines limited. Likewise, rather than preserving DTM’s reference to the practice rooted in Q 2:230 that the revocation of a divorce by repudiation requires marriage to another man, the Anonymous Chronicler compares the procedure to the Mosaic repudiation letter (*ktōbō d-dulōlō*), undoubtedly to point out the outdated, ‘Jewish’ character of this practice (§ 22). Finally, rather than retaining that the Islamic *qibla* is towards the Ka’ba, as Bar Ṣalībī and Michael did, the Anonymous Chronicler states that they worship “toward the south” (§ 27), which indeed would be the Muslim direction of prayer in the region of Edessa, the city with which the Anonymous Chronicler was closely associated<sup>23</sup>. Since these reformulations tend to render the original account somewhat less accurate, it would seem that the Anonymous Chronicler’s knowledge of Islam was less refined than that of DTM. His overall disdain for detail in describing Islamic doctrines and practices likewise points in that direction.

It is interesting to note that in the case of a few items from part three, *Chron. 1234* provides a slightly longer version than that preserved by Michael and/or Bar Salibi. This extra material consists of minor supplemental details, such as the fact that Muḥammad brought laws “and commandments” (§ 13) and that the Islamic month of fasting is called

<sup>23</sup> On the Anonymous Chronicler’s connection to Edessa, see HILKENS, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, p. 17-23. Strikingly, whereas Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) centuries earlier took the effort of correcting his local coreligionists that Muslims *not* pray toward the south, but to the Ka’ba, the Anonymous Chronicler’s paraphrase reinvigorates the latter inaccuracy, see HOYLAND, *Jacob of Edessa on Islam*, p. 157.

Ramadan (§ 25), but also includes additional phrases with a distinct eschatological flavor. Only the Anonymous Chronicler writes that Christ was raised alive by God to “the fourth heaven”, where he will “remain until the end of times when he will come again to the earth to judge man on the day of resurrection by the command of God” (§ 19). Though some resonance is notable with the recurrent Islamic view that Christ was raised alive to heaven (usually the second or third heaven, if specified), will return to die a natural death and be resurrected on the day of judgment to testify against the unbelievers, the Anonymous Chronicler’s statement seems more representative of Christian eschatology than it is of Islamic teachings. The subsequent section on the Islamic concept of Paradise also provides additional eschatological material: “They also believe that there will be an end to torment. Everyone will be tormented commensurate with the sins he has committed, and then comes forward from there to Paradise” (§ 20). Though Islam acknowledges a concept known as *barzakh* (‘obstacle’, ‘separation’), i.e. an intermediary space between this world and the hereafter or a time between death and the resurrection, there is little convergence with the idea of universal salvation preceded by a purgatory phase that the Anonymous Chronicler seems to be describing here<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, there is one extra notice on the Qur’ān, though a rather opaque one, that is neither attested by Michael or Bar Ṣalībī: “Also a book was composed which Muhammad said was poured out into his mind by God through an angel, and he made it comprehensible to human hearing through his tongue. They call it the divine book” (§ 28). Though it is impossible to determine securely whether these three extra passages go back to DTM or were added by the Anonymous Chronicler, this materials’ rather diffuse correspondence to actual Islamic beliefs seems more in favor of the latter view. What does emerge clearly from this extra material, especially § 19-20, is that eschatology apparently was of special interest to the Anonymous Chronicler.

It is undoubtedly the most revealing of the Anonymous Chronicler’s purposes that he only preserved more fully and truthfully the part on the establishment of the Islamic empire (§ 7-12), even slightly expanding it. The only notable omission (if not a scribal inaccuracy) in this section is the brief mention that Muḥammad “would threaten” his followers (§ 7). Apparently, the political and military aspects of the rise of Islam are especially important to the Anonymous Chronicler. Key in this regard is the theological judgment about the rise of the Islamic empire which only he provides: “it became exceedingly strong, so that it pleased the judgments

<sup>24</sup> See LANGE, *Barzakh*; ARCHER, *The Qur’ānic Barzakh*.

of God who wishes to chastise us for our sins” (§ 12). In all likelihood, this is an interpolation, for it is unlikely that both Michael and Bar Ṣalībī would have opposed and omitted such a reading of divine providence if it were included in DTM’s *Chronicle*<sup>25</sup>. Interpreting the rise of the Islamic empire as a consequence for Christian sins, the Anonymous Chronicler is particularly keen on stressing the violence that came along with it. This is suggested by the fuller narration of how Muḥammad’s raiding parties in Palestine were “pillaging, enslaving, and stealing” (§ 8), and later also in other regions they were “killing openly, enslaving, ravaging, and plundering” (§ 11). However, the Anonymous Chronicler is keen to stress that such violence was mostly directed at non-Arabs, as only he writes that, because of their love for property, all Arabs in the end submitted to Muḥammad’s rule “without compulsion” (§ 9).

To sum up, in contrast to his overall approach to DTM’s longer narratives, the Anonymous Chronicler has heavily reduced the account of the rise of Islam. Omissions, abbreviations, or paraphrases abound in parts one and three (§ 2-6; 13-29), though the latter part also includes some reinterpretations as well as longer descriptions, including additional eschatological material. Only part two, on the establishment of the Islamic empire (§ 7-12), is preserved more fully and faithfully, though some interpolations are notable here as well. The Anonymous Chronicler’s sweeping adaptations suggest that his attitude toward Islam differed from that of DTM in the sense that the former had more apocalyptic leanings and was above all concerned with Islam as a hostile political-military power.

### 3.2. *Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī*

In order to integrate DTM’s historiographical narrative into his *Disputation*, Bar Ṣalībī first had to apply some structural modifications: the rubric (§ 1) is omitted and the chronological notice on the Islamic empire’s emergence in 622 AD (§ 2) is displaced to the section on Muḥammad’s discovery of Jewish monotheism (§ 4). On the level of content, he also made several notable changes to adapt the narrative to the genre of anti-Islamic apologetics. Characterizing his work as part of “an inquiry and examination [...] in response to doctrines which exert influence in our time – and which, from their point of view, presume to possess the truth”<sup>26</sup>, Bar Ṣalībī’s

<sup>25</sup> Both writers vehemently defended that disasters such as the double Zengid destruction of Edessa (1144 and 1146), without a doubt among the most shocking events of their time, were a consequence of Christian sin, see WELTECKE, *Die “Beschreibung der Zeiten”*, p. 232-255. Also van Ginkel pointed out that this statement “does not fit Dionysius’ overall picture at all”, see VAN GINKEL, *The Perception and Presentation*, p. 181.

<sup>26</sup> AMAR, *A Response to the Arabs*, p. 1 (Syr.), p. 1-2 (Eng.).

prime concern lies with Islam as a competing religious system, rather than in the historical aspects of its emergence. This explains his paraphrasing reports on the Arab raids, which omit that Muḥammad's initial raids targeted Palestine, that these expeditions were intended to confirm his promise of material gains to his followers, and that such raids became a habit because of the Arabs' love for property (§ 8). For the same reason, he neither mentions that the Arabs submitted to Muḥammad's command for material gains (§ 9), that the Arabs were killing during their raids (§ 10-11), and that they raised the poll-tax (§ 11).

Several abbreviations do, however, occur in part three on Muḥammad's doctrines and practices. These concern slight details (if not copyists' mistakes), such as the fact that Muslims consider the virgin Mary to be the sister of Aaron "and Moses" (§ 18), that they fast "thirty days" a year (§ 24), and circumcise "males and females" (§ 27), as well as descriptions of Muḥammad's Christology (§ 16) and his perception of Paradise (§ 20). These abbreviations do not contradict Bar Salibi's overall interest in Islam as a rival religion, since he takes up all these topics, apart from fasting, more comprehensively later in the *Disputation*.

Of the more positive indications of Bar Ṣalībī's theological concerns are first of all two paragraphs which are seemingly better preserved by him than by Michael. Only Bar Ṣalībī mentions by name two of the idols the Arabs used to worship before accepting Islam, i.e. the idol Akbar and the star ʿUzzā, who is identified with Aphrodite (§ 5). In contrast, Michael's statement that the Arabs "were worshipping the stone [of the Kaʿba?], pieces of wood and all (sorts of) creatures" reads like a paraphrase. This interpretation seems more plausible than assuming that Michael's version is the more faithful one and that Bar Ṣalībī added the names of the pagan deities. Whereas it seems less relevant to Michael's purposes to include such specific information, it is of high importance to Bar Ṣalībī to preserve such information, since he later will argue that the idolaters (*muṣrikūn*) criticized in the Qurʾān are not the Christians but the pagan Arabs<sup>27</sup>. The notice on Islamic purity rituals also seems better preserved by Bar Ṣalībī (§ 26). Whereas Michael only mentions the partial and full ablution, the so-called *wuḍūʿ* and *ghusl*, Bar Ṣalībī completes the purity system as prescribed in Q 4:43 and 5:6 by referring as well to the practice of *tay-ammum*, dry ablution. Rather than considering the latter reference an addition by Bar Ṣalībī, it seems more likely that the fuller description goes back to DTM.

<sup>27</sup> AMAR, *A Response to the Arabs*, p. 103-4 (Syr.), p. 95 (Eng.).

A further indication of Bar Ṣalībī's theological interests are several terminological specifications. Emending the statement that Muḥammad got acquainted with monotheism through familiarity with Palestinian Jews (§ 4), Bar Ṣalībī specifies that this occurred through contacts with “the scattered Jews” (*Yudōyē mbadrē*) and that he learned from them “the belief in one God and one hypostasis” (*tawditō d-ḥad Alōhō wa-qumō ḥad*). The italicized words appear to be interpolations. By specifying what is problematic about Muḥammad's ‘Jewish’ monotheism, Bar Ṣalībī stresses from the start that Christians and Muslims do not differ on whether there is one God, but on whether God exists in three hypotheses. Third, only Bar Ṣalībī specifies that the laws were given to Muḥammad by God “through Gabriel, that is, the angel Gabriel” (§ 13). Fourth, whereas DTM rather nebulously wrote, as both Michael and *Chron 1234* attest, that Muḥammad propagated belief in a “divinity who is unique in person and in hypostasis”, Bar Ṣalībī rephrases it more pointedly: “he said that God is one hypostasis” (§ 14). Likewise, the end of this passage was possibly modified for Trinitarian reasons. Whereas DTM probably originally wrote, as Michael states, that God is said to have “no son, companion or associate”, Bar Ṣalībī has “no son, companions or associates”. Finally, there is also a notable reformulation in the report on Muḥammad's Christology. Bar Ṣalībī rephrases it to say that Christ is said to be an “ordinary man (*barnōšō šḥimō*)”, stressing Christ's purely human character in Islam.

Finally, Bar Ṣalībī provides two interpolations. Having sketched the geographical extent of Arabia, the Arabs' dwelling place, Bar Ṣalībī adds that “today they have taken abode in every region and city” (§ 3). This addition updates DTM's description of the Arabs' location and testifies to the perceived proximity of Islam. Secondly, rather than copying DTM's reference to the Arab conquest of the Byzantine and Persian Empires, Bar Ṣalībī omits the mention of the Byzantines and shifts the focus to the conversion to Islam by the Persians, Turks, Kurds, and others:

They brought the kingdom of the Persians into their servitude, and after a while they converted the Persians to the belief in one God. They converted them because the Persians were worshipping the sun and fire. They also introduced the Turks, the Kurds, and other peoples to the belief in one God (§ 12).

In short, Bar Ṣalībī's redaction can be considered as the counterpart of that of the Anonymous Chronicler. Whereas the latter was mostly interested in explaining the rise of a dominant Islamic power and less so in the religious aspects of Muḥammad's career and preaching, the exact opposite is true for Bar Ṣalībī, who on the whole preserved DTM's narrative

more fully and faithfully, except for the part on the Arab raids and the foundation of the empire. The fact that he preserved fuller descriptions concerning religious aspects of Islam, made terminological adjustments for theological clarity, and interpolated considerations about the spread of Islam, all support this theological agenda. However, rather than suggesting a difference in outlook from DTM, Bar Ṣalībī's adaptations seem most of all determined by the fact that he was accommodating DTM's historiographical account to the apologetic genre.

### 3.3. *Michael Rabō*

A loss of information is rarely notable in Michael's version. The only notable minor omissions concern, as already mentioned, the names of the two pagan Arab idols (§ 5), the territorial promise of a land "flowing with milk and honey" (§ 7), and the practice of dry ablution (§ 26). Additionally, on a more structural level, he seems to break up the rubric (§ 1) by relocating the mention of "the beginning of the empire of the Ṭayyites" to § 2.

Of greater importance for understanding Michael's outlook are the extra materials which either he alone found important enough to preserve or supplemented himself. First, having arrived at the stage when the number of Muhammad's troops had grown substantially, only Michael writes: "Those that did not accept the teaching of his belief he no longer subdued by persuasion but by the sword, killing those that resisted" (§ 10). Though it apparently was of importance to Michael to point out Muḥammad's coercion by the sword, there is reason to attribute at least the core of this statement to Dionysius, given that the Anonymous Chronicler also reports that at that stage the Arabs were "killing openly" (§ 11). The next extra sentence, on the other hand, does more look like an addition by Michael. Having stated that Christ is called "Word and Spirit of God" in the sense of a created being, Michael interrupts the narrative to provide a brief apologetic excursus, arguing that the Muslims (mis)understand the title 'Son of God' in a biological manner and thus wrongly rebuke Christians for confessing it (§ 17). Such a direct critique of Muslim beliefs does not sit well with DTM's style.

Third, only Michael specifies that Jesus was crucified "by the Jews". Fourth, having stated (as all three dependants do) that Muslims believe in the resurrection and final judgment, Michael continues: "They are possessed by love of the world and carnal pleasures, eating, drinking, clothing, and polygamy with free women and concubines. They are not hindered if someone repudiates his wife and takes another" (§ 24). This again



appears to be a polemical interpolation by Michael, though it is also possible that Bar Ṣalībī and the Anonymous Chronicler omitted this material as redundant, since it rehashes the earlier materials on the Arabs' "love for property" (§ 8) and Muḥammad's teachings on Paradise (§ 20) and family law (§ 22).

Finally, Michael also qualifies that, although the Arabs circumcise males and females, "they do not keep the rule of Moses which prescribes that circumcision should take place on the eighth day, but they circumcise at any age" (§ 27). Here too, any judgment on this statement's attribution remains inconclusive, though the fact that the Anonymous Chronicler, who just earlier stressed the resemblance between Islamic and Jewish repudiation, does not report it (§ 22), may suggest that such comparison with Jewish customs was interpolated by Michael.

In sum, Michael provides the largest amount of multi-attested materials, thus preserving DTM's account most fully and faithfully of all three dependants, followed by Bar Ṣalībī. Nevertheless, as Hoyland already suspected, some of his extra material appears to include interpolations of a polemic nature. This suggests that Michael's attitude towards Islam was somewhat more combative than that of DTM.

#### 4. *Tentative Reconstruction*

The present reconstruction differs considerably from those by Palmer and Hoyland. For each of the twenty-nine paragraphs into which the account has been divided, it is decided individually which version contains the most multi-attested material and hence best approximates DTM's original account. The version judged most favorable is adopted as the point of departure. In cases where this base-text includes information without equivalent in the other two texts, this material will be marked between curly brackets without footnote. Material in the base-text identified above as probably interpolated is omitted from the text, but included in the notes. Conversely, in case where the non-base texts include extra material which may go back to DTM, this will be added to the base-text between brackets with the proper reference. The net result of these operations is that a layered text emerges in which the normal text is covered by the criterion of multiple attestation while the bracketed text remains inconclusive as to its attribution. The provided subtitles are my own. Finally, the *tentative* character of this reconstruction should be stressed, which can never do full justice to the lost original.

- 1 ON THE BEGINNING OF THE EMPIRE OF THE ṬAYYITES (I.E. THE ARABS/ MUSLIMS) AND ON MUḤAMMAD {THEIR LEADER, WHO THEY CALL PROPHET AND MESSENGER OF GOD}. AC

A. Muḥammad’s Arab Background and Early Preaching

- 2 In the year 933 of the Greeks, (year) 12 of Heraclius, and (year) 33 of Kosraw, a man by the name of Muḥammad from the tribe {and people}<sup>28</sup> of the Quraysh came forth in the land of Yathrib, who claimed to be a prophet. AC
- 3 They are called Ṭayyites {after the name Ṭayy, one of their ancestors}<sup>29</sup>, and they are called Ishmaelites and Hagarites from Hagar and Ishmael, and (they are called) Saracens from Sarah, and Midianites, {the sons of Keturah}<sup>30</sup>. But even if they are divided into these appellations and tribes, they all have the collective name ‘Arabians’. They name themselves with this appellation after the name of ‘Arabia the Fertile’, which is the region of their dwelling. It extends from north to south, from the [south of the]<sup>31</sup> river Euphrates to the Southern sea, {that is the Red (Sea)}<sup>32</sup>, and from west to east, from the Red Sea to the Gulf of the Persian Sea. M
- 4 Now, this Muḥammad son of ‘Abdallāh used to go up from his city Yathrib to Palestine for the business of buying and selling. When he conversed with the Jews, he learned from them the belief in one God. M
- 5 When he saw his people worshipping the idol {Akbar as well as the star ‘Uzzā, that is, Aphrodite}, he taught them the belief in one God. BŞ
- 6 When some of them listened to him {and began to prosper}, he immediately began to forcefully command them to submit to him. BŞ

<sup>28</sup> BŞ: ܠܗܘܢܐܪܐܒܐ

<sup>29</sup> BŞ: ܠܗܘܢܐܒܐܝܢܐܝܠܝܡܐܠܝܬܐܝܢ

<sup>30</sup> Whereas Michael refers the term Midianites ethnically to the descendants of Midian, one of the sons of Abraham and his second wife Keturah (cf. Gn 25:1–2; 1 Chr 1:32–33), Bar Ṣalībī links it geographically to the inhabitants of “the region of Midian”, which according to most classical and Arab geographers was situated in the northwestern Arabian Peninsula. It is difficult to determine who has maintained Dionysius’ original etymology and who has shifted its emphasis, assuming that only one of the two has preserved the original. Moreover, one cannot even exclude that Dionysius’ account had both the ethnic and geographical referent, and that Bar Ṣalībī and Michael each adopted a different portion of this statement. However, one has at least some reason to assume that Dionysius’ etymology had the ethnic component, as provided by Michael, since both Michael and the Anonymous Chronicler state their names are derived from their former tribes.

<sup>31</sup> BŞ: ܐܘܩܪܘܨܐ

<sup>32</sup> BŞ: ܠܗܘܢܐܒܐܝܢܐܝܠܝܡܐܠܝܬܐܝܢ

## B. From Raids to a Consolidated Empire

- 7 Sometimes he would threaten and {at other (times) he would take revenge}. Sometimes he would praise the land of Palestine, saying: “Because of the belief in one God it was given to the Jews”. And he would say to his people: “If you obey me, God will bequeath you a land flowing with milk and honey” (cf. Ex 3:8). BŞ
- 8 Seeking to confirm this word, he himself led a band of those who were obedient to him, and began to go up to the land of Palestine, pillaging, enslaving, and stealing. He returned unharmed, laden (with booty) and (thus) had not fallen short of his promise to them. Since love for property made the act a habit, they began going back and forth to raid. AC
- 9 When those who until then had not followed him saw that those submitted to him abounded in many goods, they were drawn to his servitude {without compulsion}. AC
- 10 When many were subdued to him, he himself no longer went up at the head of those who went up to raid; rather, he sent others at the head of his troops, while he sat in honor in his city. {Those who did not accept the teaching of his belief he no longer subdued by persuasion but by the sword, killing those that resisted.} M
- 11 After a while his troops began to enter and raid many regions, {killing openly, stealing, ravaging, and plundering}<sup>33</sup>. As this hegemony increased and expanded, he made many regions pay tribute to him. M
- 12 They established a consolidated empire {in which twenty-five kings came to power, one after the other}<sup>34</sup>, (by whom) it became exceedingly strong. He subdued many regions of the Romans and the entire kingdom of the Persians fell into their hands. M

## C. The Laws of Muḥammad

- 13 He established laws for them which he said were given to him by God in order to establish them. M
- 14 He taught them to confess one God, the Creator of all, though he did not call him Father, Son and Holy Spirit; rather, he said that the divinity is unique in person and in hypostasis, and is neither begotten nor begets, and has no son or companion or associate (cf. Q 112:1-4). M

<sup>33</sup> AC: حد فلولي الجلبسة المغصه منقوبه ذراوب

<sup>34</sup> BŞ: موصه حد فلولي الجلبسة المغصه منقوبه ذراوب

- 15 He accepts the book of Moses and of the prophets, and also a certain portion of the Gospel, while he rejected most of it and adhered to little. M
- 16 Concerning Christ, he thinks and says that it was he whom the prophets foretold would come, but he was a righteous man and a prophet like one of the prophets, and not God or the Son of God {as we Christians confess}. {Nonetheless, he is greater than the other prophets given that} he was not born from the seed of man and sexual intercourse (cf. Q 19:19-21; 21:91), but was created by the word of God by the breath of the Spirit, just as he commanded and created Adam from soil by his breath: {the Holy Spirit blew in him and he came into existence} (cf. Q 3:59). M
- 17 Because of this they sometimes name him “Word of God and His Spirit” (cf. Q 4:171), as one who is the work and creature of the word of God<sup>35</sup>. M
- 18 They say about the holy virgin Mary that she was the sister of Aaron {and Moses} (cf. Q 19:28; 66:12). M
- 19 Not all confess that Christ was crucified {by the Jews}; rather, (some say that) one of his disciples was crucified and died, on whom he cast his image. Christ, being hidden, was carried off and taken away to the Garden by God (cf. Q 4:157; 3:55). M
- 20 About the Garden, that is, Paradise, they think very grossly, saying that in it there is physical food and drink, sexual intercourse with concubines, beds of gold to lie upon with mattresses of coral (?) and topaz(?), rivers of milk and honey, and desirable trees full of fruits (cf. Q 47:15; 52:19-24). M
- 21 They are preoccupied with predestination, fate and the things to come. M/BS
- 22 They take up to four free women and as many concubines as they wish. If someone repudiates his wife by oaths, he cannot retake her or repudiate his oaths until he gives her to another man. Then he is released from his oaths and can retake her (cf. Q 2:230). M
- 23 They pray five times a day and (perform) four prostrations with every prayer. M/BS
- 24 They believe in the resurrection of the dead and that there will be a {judgment and} recompense for everyone according to his deeds. {They are possessed by love of the world, by carnal pleasures, and by eating, drinking, clothing, and polygamy with free women and concubines. They are not hindered if someone repudiates his wife and takes another.} M

<sup>35</sup> M hereafter turns to apologetics: “Thus the one that we call the Son of God because he was born from Him without passion or separation, as the word from the mind, they consider it carnally and with unbelief as a woman begetting a son, blaming us that we confess (it)”.



- GRIFFITH, *Syriac Writers on Muslims* = S.H. GRIFFITH, *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam (Mōrān ʿEthō, 7)*, Kottayam, 1995.
- HILKENS, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle* = A. HILKENS, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle up to the Year 1234 and its Sources (Bibliothèque de Byzantion, 18; Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 272)*, Leuven, 2018.
- HOYLAND, *Jacob of Edessa on Islam* = R.G. HOYLAND, *Jacob of Edessa on Islam, in After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 89)*, ed. G.J. REININK and A.C. KLUGKIST, Leuven, 1999, p. 149-160.
- HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam* = R.G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton, NJ, 1997.
- HOYLAND, *The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad* = R.G. HOYLAND, *The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: an appraisal*, in H. MOTZKI (ed.), *The Biography of Muḥammad. The Issue of the Sources*, Leiden – Boston – Köln, 2000, p. 276-297.
- HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* = R.G. HOYLAND, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam (Translated Texts for Historians, 57)*, Liverpool, 2011.
- IBRAHIM, *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex* = G.Y. IBRAHIM, *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex of the Chronicle of Michael the Great: A Publication of St. George Parish and Edessan Community in Aleppo (Texts and Translations of the Chronicle of Michael the Great, 1)*, Piscataway, NJ, 2009.
- JACOBS, *Preliminary Considerations* = B. JACOBS, *Preliminary Considerations on Dionysius bar Ṣalībī's Islamic Sources*, in *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 21/2 (2018), p. 105-137.
- LANGE, *Barzakh* = Ch. LANGE, *Barzakh*, in *EF<sup>3</sup>*, s.v.
- PALMER, *The Seventh Century* = A. PALMER, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles (Translated Texts for Historians, 15)*, Liverpool, 1993.
- PENN, *Envisioning Islam* = M.P. PENN, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World*, Philadelphia, PA, 2015.
- RABO, *Dionysius Jakob Bar Ṣalibi* = G. RABO, *Dionysius Jakob Bar Ṣalibi. Syrischer Kommentar zum Römerbrief. Einleitung, Edition und Übersetzung mit einem Verzeichnis der syrische Handschriften zu seinen sämtlichen Werken (Göttinger Orientforschungen. Syriaca, 56)*, Wiesbaden, 2019.
- ROGGEMA, *Pour une lecture* = B. ROGGEMA, *Pour une lecture des dialogues islamo-chrétiens en syriaque à la lumière des controverses internes à l'islam*, in *Les controverses religieuses en syriaque (Études syriaques, 13)*, ed. F. RUANI, Paris, 2016, p. 261-294.
- ROGGEMA, *Some Remarks* = B. ROGGEMA, *The Legend of Sergius-Bahīrā: Some Remarks on its Origin in the East and its Traces in the West*, in *East and West in the Crusader States: Context – Contacts – Confrontations II (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 92)*, ed. K. CIGGAAR and H. TEULE, Leuven, 1999, p. 107-123.
- TEULE, *Dionysius bar Ṣalibi* = H. TEULE, *Dionysius bar Ṣalibi*, in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 3, Leiden, 2011, p. 665-670.
- TEULE, *Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē* = H. TEULE, *Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē*, in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1, Leiden, 2009, p. 622-626.

- TEULE, *Jacob bar Šakko* = H. TEULE, *Jacob bar Šakko, the Book of Treasures and the Syrian Renaissance*, in *Eastern Crossroads: Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy (Gorgias Eastern Christianity Studies, 1)*, ed. J.P. MONFERRER-SALA, Piscataway, NJ, 2007, p. 143-154.
- VAN GINKEL, *Making History* = J. VAN GINKEL, *Making History: Michael the Syrian and His Sixth-Century Sources*, in *Symposium Syriacum VII (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 256)*, ed. R. LAVENANT, Rome, 1998, p. 351-358.
- VAN GINKEL, *Michael the Syrian* = J. VAN GINKEL, *Michael the Syrian and his Sources: Reflections on the Methodology of Michael the Great as a Historiographer and its Implications for Modern Historians*, in *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*, 6 (2006), p. 53-60.
- VAN GINKEL, *The Perception and Presentation* = J. VAN GINKEL, *The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest in Syriac Historiography: How Did the Changing Social Position of the Syrian Orthodox Community Influence the Account of Their Historiographers?*, in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations, 5)*, ed. E. GRYPEOU, M. SWANSON, and D. THOMAS, Leiden, 2006, p. 171-184.
- WELTECKE, *Die "Beschreibung der Zeiten"* = D. WELTECKE, *Die "Beschreibung der Zeiten" von Mōr Michael dem Grossen (1126-1199). Eine Studie zu ihrem historischen und historiographieggeschichtlichen Kontext (CSCO, 594; Subsidia, 110)*, Leuven, 2003.

## APPENDIX

## SYNOPSIS OF THE THREE DEPENDENT TEXTS

§	Bar Šalībī, <i>Disputation</i> (ed. AMAR, p. 2-3)	Michael, <i>Chronicle</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 404-408)	<i>Chron. 1234</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 227-228)
1 /		CHAPTER ON THE BEGINNING OF THE COMING FORTH OF MUḤAMMAD [...].	ON THE BEGINNING OF THE EMPIRE OF THE ṬAYYITES AND ON MUḤAMMAD THEIR LEADER, WHO THEY CALL PROPHET AND MESSENGER OF GOD.
2 [see end § 3]		In the year 933 of the Greeks, (year) 12 of Heraclius, and (year) 33 of Kosraw, the empire of the Ṭayyites began when a man by the name of MuḤammad from the tribe of the Quraysh came forth in the region of Yathrib, who claimed to be a prophet.	In the year 933 of the Greeks, (year) 12 of Heraclius, and (year) 33 of Kosraw, a man by the name of MuḤammad from the tribe of the Quraysh came forth in the land of Yathrib, who claimed to be a prophet.
3	They (i.e. the people of the Arabians) are so called after the name of Arabia, that is, the region of their abode, which spans from the south of the Euphrates to the southern sea,	They are called Ṭayyites, and they are called Ishmaelites and Hagarites from Hagar and Ishmael, and Saracens from Sarah, and Midianites, the sons of Keturah. But even if they are	It is proper to know that the collective name of all Ṭayyites is 'Arabians', after the common name 'Arabia the Fertile', which is the land of their dwelling. It extends from north



§	Bar Ṣalībī, <i>Disputation</i> (ed. AMAR, p. 2-3)	Michael, <i>Chronicle</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 404-408)	<i>Chron. 1234</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 227-228)
	that is the Red (Sea); and from west to east, from the aforementioned Red Sea to the Gulf of the Persian Sea, but today they have taken abode in every region and city. They are called Ishmaelites after the name of Ishmael; and Hagarites from Hagar; and Saracens from Sarah; and Midianites after the name of the region of Midian; and Ṭayyites after the name Ṭayy, one of their ancestors.	divided into these appellations and tribes, they all have the collective name 'Arabians'. They name themselves with this appellation after the name of 'Arabia the Fertile', which is the region of their dwelling. It extends from north to south, from the river Euphrates to the southern sea, and from west to east, from the Red Sea to the Gulf of the Persian Sea.	to south and west to east from the Red Sea to the Gulf of the Persian Sea. They are named by many appellations after their former tribes.
4	Now, it is said of this Muḥammad, son of 'Abdallāh, that he went up from his city Yathrib to Palestine on trading expeditions. When he engaged in conversation with the scattered Jews, he learned from them the belief in one God and one hypostasis. The time of his coming to power was in the year 933 of the Greeks, in the days of emperor Heraclius. He was of the tribe and people of the Quraysh.	Now, this Muḥammad son of 'Abdallāh used to go up from his city Yathrib to Palestine for the business of buying and selling. When he conversed with the Jews, he learned from them the belief in one God.	At any rate, this Muḥammad of whom we spoke, in age and stature of youth, began to go up and down from his city Yathrib to Palestine for the business of buying and selling. When he was busy with it in the region, he saw the belief in one God and it was pleasing in his eyes.
5	When he saw his people worshipping the idol Akbar as well as the star 'Uzzā, that is, Aphrodite, he taught them the belief in one God.	When he saw his people worshipping the stone [of the Ka'ba?], pieces of wood and all (sorts of) creatures, he adhered to the belief of the Jews, which pleased him. When he returned to his own region, he presented this belief before his compatriots and convinced some of them.	When he went down to his tribesmen, he presented this belief before them.
6	When some of them listened to him and began to prosper, he immediately began to forcefully command them to submit to him.	After many followed him, he immediately and forcefully commanded them to submit to him.	When he convinced some, they followed him.
7	Sometimes he would threaten and at other (times) he would take revenge. Sometimes he would praise the land of Palestine, saying: "Because of the belief in one God it was given to the Jews". And he would say to his people: "If you obey me, God will bequeath you a land flowing with milk and honey".	Sometimes he would threaten and sometimes he would praise the land of Palestine, saying: "Because of the belief in one God they have this good land". And he would also say to them: "If you obey me, abandon these vain gods and confess one god, God will give to you (too) a good land".	Additionally, he would praise before them the grandeur of the land of Palestine, saying: "Because of the belief in one God this good and fertile land was given to them". And he would add: "If you obey me, God will give to you too a good land flowing with milk and honey".

§	Bar Ṣalībī, <i>Disputation</i> (ed. AMAR, p. 2-3)	Michael, <i>Chronicle</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 404-408)	<i>Chron. 1234</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 227-228)
8	When he convinced many of them, he immediately assumed leadership over them, and began going up with a great force. Wherever he went, he plundered and stole, making his people rich.	When he thus seduced many, he began to forge himself a band to go up and set up ambushes in the land of Palestine, so that when he would deliver them something from there, he would persuade them to believe him and to adhere to him. When he had gone down and up many times unharmed, and plundered and left laden (with booty), the matter was confirmed to them. By love for property, the act became a fixed habit, because they went up to be provided.	Seeking to confirm this word, he himself led a band of those that were obedient to him, and began to go up to the land of Palestine, pillaging, enslaving, and stealing. He returned unharmed laden (with booty) and (thus) had not fallen short of his promise to them. Since love for property made the act a habit, they began going back and forth to raid.
9	For this reason, they became deeply devoted to him and became abounding in wealth.	When those who until then had not submitted to him saw that those who followed him abounded in possessions, they too followed him.	When those who until then had not followed him saw that those who submitted to him abounded in many goods, they were drawn to his servitude without compulsion.
10	And when he persuaded all the Ṭayyites to convert to the belief in one God, he himself no longer went up with them to fight; rather, he sent his generals to many regions raiding and stealing, while he sat in his city as a king in splendor.	When many were subdued to him, he himself no longer went up at the head of those who went up to raid; rather, he sent others at the head of his troops, while he sat in honor in his city. Those that did not accept the teaching of his belief he no longer subdued by persuasion but by the sword, killing those that resisted.	Thereafter, when his followers became many men and a great power, he no longer joined them to raid, but sat in honor in Yathrib, his city.
11	When their hegemony increased and expanded, many regions were subdued to them.	After a while his troops began to enter and raid many regions. As this hegemony increased and expanded, he made many regions pay tribute to him.	Once dispatched, it did not suffice them to frequent Palestine alone, but also those (regions) distant and wide, killing openly, enslaving, ravaging, and plundering. Even this did not suffice them, but they would make them pay tribute, making them subservient.
12	They established a consolidated empire in which twenty-five kings came to power, one after the other. They brought the kingdom of the Persians into their servitude, and after a while they converted the Persians to the belief in one God. They	They established a consolidated empire, and by the succession from man to man of those that came to power in it, it became exceedingly strong. He subdued many regions of the Romans and the entire kingdom of the Persians fell into their hands.	Thus, gradually, they became strong, spread abroad and became powerful, so that almost all the land of the Romans as well as the kingdom of the Persians fell into their hands. Therefore, their hegemony established a consolidated empire and

§	Bar Ṣalībī, <i>Disputation</i> (ed. AMAR, p. 2-3)	Michael, <i>Chronicle</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 404-408)	<i>Chron. 1234</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 227-228)
	converted them because the Persians were worshipping the sun and fire. They also introduced the Turks, the Kurds, and other peoples to the belief in one God.		by the succession of one man after another of those rulers that came to power in it, it became exceedingly strong, so that it pleased the judgments of God who wishes to chastise us for our sins.
13	Now Muḥammad established a law for his people which he said was given to him by God through Gabriel, that is, the angel Gabriel.	He established laws for them which he said were given to him by God in order to establish them.	Concerning their belief and laws. As we thus have discussed the reason, beginning, and movement of Muḥammad, the first king of the Arabs, we will now also speak about the laws and commandments which he said were given to him by God in order to establish them.
14	He taught them to confess one God, the Creator of all, though he did not call him Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; rather, he said that God is one hypostasis, who is neither begotten nor begets, and has no son or companions or associates.	He taught them to confess one God, the Creator of all, though he did not call him Father, Son and Holy Spirit; rather, he said that the divinity is unique in person and in hypostasis, and is neither begotten nor begets, and has no son or companion or associate.	He taught them to confess one God, the Creator of all, though he did not call him Father, Son and Spirit; rather, the divinity is unique in person and in hypostasis, and is neither begotten nor begets, and has no associate.
15	He accepted the book of Moses and of the prophets, and parts of the Gospel.	He accepts the book of Moses and of the prophets, and also a certain portion of the Gospel, while he rejected most of it and adhered to little.	He accepts Moses and his book, and he accepts the Gospel with the exception that he does not believe that Christ was crucified.
16	About Christ, he thinks that it was he whom the prophets foretold, but he was a mere man like one of the prophets, and not God or the Son of God. He said that (Christ) was not born from the seed of man, but that he was created by the word and command of God from Mary by the breath of the Spirit, just as God created Adam by the breath (of the Spirit).	Concerning Christ, he thinks and says that it was he whom the prophets foretold would come, but he was a righteous man and a prophet like one of the prophets, and not God or the Son of God as we Christians confess. Nonetheless, he is greater than the other prophets, given that he was not born from the seed of man and sexual intercourse, but was created by the word of God by the breath of the Spirit, just as he commanded and created Adam from earth by his breath; the Holy Spirit blew in him and he came into existence.	Concerning Christ, he thinks that he was a just and honored man among the prophets, born from a virgin without sexual intercourse, just as Adam, who was created by the word of God from earth.

§	Bar Ṣalībī, <i>Disputation</i> (ed. AMAR, p. 2-3)	Michael, <i>Chronicle</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 404-408)	<i>Chron. 1234</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 227-228)
17	Sometimes he called Christ 'Word of God and His Spirit', but (as) a creature and the work of the word of God.	Because of this they sometimes / name him 'Word of God and His Spirit', as one who is the work and creature of the word of God. Thus  the one that we call the Son of God because he was born from Him without passion nor separation, as the word from the mind, they consider it carnally and with unbelief as a woman begetting a son, rebuking us for confessing (it).	
18	He says that the Virgin (Mary) was the sister of Aaron.	They say about the holy Virgin / Mary that she was the sister of Aaron and Moses.	
19	And (he says) that when he (Jesus) approached the cross, he cast his shadow on one of his disciples who was crucified, while he departed to heaven.	Not all confess that Christ was crucified by the Jews; rather, (some say that) one of his disciples was crucified and died, on whom he cast his image. Christ, being hidden, was carried off and taken away to the Garden by God.	He does not accept that he was crucified, but (accepts) that he did miracles and raised the dead. When the Jews stretched their hands on him, someone else was made similar to his image and they crucified him, but Christ was raised up alive, to the fourth heaven. There he will remain until the end of times, when he will come again to the earth to judge man on the day of resurrection by the command of God. They also believe in the resurrection and recompense for (good) deeds.
20	They think carnally about Paradise, (as a place where there is) eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, milk, honey, and fruits.	About the Garden, that is, Paradise, they think very grossly, saying that in it there is physical food and drink, sexual intercourse with concubines, beds of gold to lie upon with mattresses of coral (?)and topaz(?), rivers of milk and honey, and desirable trees full of fruits.	He confesses a sensual and very gross Paradise, (as a place where there is) eating and drinking, sexual intercourse with concubines pleasing of appearance, beds of gold to lie upon with mattresses of coral (?)and topaz(?), and rivers of milk and honey. They also believe that there will be an end to torment. Everyone will be tormented commensurate with the sins he has committed, and (then) will proceed from there to Paradise.
21	They are preoccupied with predestination, fate, and the things to come.	They are preoccupied with predestination, fate, and the things to come. /	

§	Bar Ṣalībī, <i>Disputation</i> (ed. AMAR, p. 2-3)	Michael, <i>Chronicle</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 404-408)	<i>Chron. 1234</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 227-228)
22	They take four free women and as many concubines as they wish. If one of them repudiates his wife by oaths, he cannot retake her until she marries another man. Then she is declared free.	They take up to four free women and as many concubines as they wish. If someone repudiates his wife by oaths, he cannot retake her or repudiate his oaths until he gives her to another man. Then he is released from his oaths and can retake her.	He also allowed that a man can lawfully marry as many free wives as he wishes, and as many maidens as permitted to him. In order for someone to repudiate his wife, he should give a letter of repudiation just as in the Law of Moses.
23	They pray five times a day and (perform) four prostrations each time.	They pray five times a day and (perform) four prostrations with every prayer.	He also taught to pray five times a day, but it is necessary to be washed before prayer.
24	They believe in the resurrection of the dead and that there will be recompense for everyone according to his deeds.	They believe in the resurrection of the dead and that there will be a judgment and reward for everyone according to his deeds. They are possessed by love of the world, by carnal pleasures, and by eating, drinking, clothing, and polygamy with free women and concubines. They are not hindered if someone repudiates his wife and takes another.	[see end § 18]
25	They have a daytime fast, but eat all night until dawn.	They have a daytime fast (for) thirty days, that is, one lunar month per year, but eat all night until dawn.	They fast thirty days per year, (during) a certain month called Ramadan. They fast during the day but during all night it is permitted for them to eat.
26	They perform ablutions before praying, even (cleansing) the body's orifices. When they experience a wet dream, they bathe. If they cannot find water, they use soil instead of water.	They perform ablutions with water before praying, even (cleansing) the body's orifices. When they approach a woman or experience a wet dream, they bathe their entire body and then they pray.	[see end § 22]
27	They circumcise and they worship towards the Ka'ba.	Their worship is towards the Ka'ba; they worship towards it in every place where they find themselves. They perform the circumcision of males and females, although they do not observe the rule of Moses which prescribes that circumcision should take place on the eighth day, but they circumcise at any age.	They perform the circumcision of males and of the females with them. Their worship at the time of prayers is towards the south.

§	Bar Ṣalībī, <i>Disputation</i> (ed. AMAR, p. 2-3)	Michael, <i>Chronicle</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 404-408)	<i>Chron. 1234</i> (ed. CHABOT, p. 227-228)
28 /	/	/	A book was also composed, which Muhammad said was poured out into his mind by God through an angel, and he made it comprehensible to human hearing through his tongue. They call it the divine book.
29 /		End of the discourse on the appearance of Muḥammad, head of the Muslims.	/

LOCEOC

Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies

KU Leuven

Sint-Michielsstraat 6 - box 3101

3000 Leuven

Belgium

bert.jacobs@kuleuven.be

Bert JACOBS

PhD Fellow FWO

*Abstract* — It is commonly believed that of the two West Syriac chronicles that have preserved large parts of the now lost *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē (d. 845), the account of the rise of Islam is better preserved in the anonymous *Chronicle up to the Year 1234* than it is in the *Chronicle* of Michael Rabō (d. 1199). In addition to the overall preference for *Chron. 1234* over Michael's *Chronicle* that has emerged in recent scholarship, this view is based on the assumption that the polemical elements found only in Michael's version are more likely his own additions than omissions by the Anonymous Chronicler. On the basis of a new dependant, Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (d. 1171), this article argues that Michael, followed by Bar Ṣalībī, rather than the Anonymous Chronicler, have more fully and faithfully preserved the original account on the rise of Islam. This argument is developed in three steps. First, evidence is presented that Bar Ṣalībī borrowed his account of the rise of Islam as narrated in the opening chapter of his *Disputation against the Muslims* directly from Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē. Secondly, the redactions by the three dependants are assessed. Having sifted the dependants' adaptations from what is most likely original, finally a tentative reconstruction of Dionysius' account in English translation is provided. A synopsis of the three dependent texts in English translation is appended.